

Anthony Dragan

VINNYTSIA:

A FORGOTTEN
HOLOCAUST



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THE FORGOTTEN HOLOCAUST

Ukrainians the world over, both in their native land and those settled in the countries of the Free World, are preparing to celebrate one of the most sacred dates in their history: the millennium of Christianity of Rus'-Ukraine. This anniversary will be commemorated with great ceremony in the West, especially by the large Ukrainian communities of the United States and Canada. It will be marked less ceremoniously, but all the more intensely, by Ukrainians living in the land where Christianity was officially proclaimed a thousand years ago, but where a Communist state now imposes an official religion of atheism.

As we approach 1988, the year of the millennium of Christianity in Rus'-Ukraine, we should not forget another, very different anniversary that falls at the same time. It will be 50 years ago that a great horror was perpetrated against the Ukrainian people, when representatives of a barbaric Communist occupational government murdered hundreds of thousands of innocent men and women. For many of these victims possession of a little cross, or a prayer book, or simply an open avowal of their faith was grounds for torture and death.

This horrible crime of genocide, this holocaust, was conducted by a foreign Communist regime in the town of Vinnytsia in the years 1937-39. It was discovered only five years later, during the occupation of Ukraine by another genocidal regime — this time, the German Nazis.

Since that time, much water has flowed under the bridges of the River Boh, on whose banks Vinnytsia lies. Since that time the world has learned of a vast, horrifying legacy of crimes perpetrated by the Soviet Communist regime. These excesses have been well-documented. Some of Stalin's genocidal acts were exposed by his very successors. But you would search in vain in Soviet sources for any mention of the crimes in Vinnytsia. On the contrary, much effort has been expended, all manner of lies and fabrications have been resorted to in an attempt to obliterate knowledge of the holocaust revealed in Vinnytsia almost 50 years

ago. And not in vain. Ask any of the recent emigres from Ukraine, ask any Soviet Ukrainian tourist, "Have you heard of Vinnytsia?" and almost invariably the answer will be, "What about Vinnytsia?"

Some information about the crimes in Vinnytsia has been published in the West, but even here they have not received nearly the attention they deserve.

Americans, who were among the first to open the gates of the unspeakably inhuman Nazi concentration camps at the end of World War II, are particularly sensitive to the horrors of attempted genocide. The wide-ranging and intense debate that ensued in this country on the 40th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe had one overwhelming conclusion: that crimes such as genocide must never be forgotten.

And yet, they are forgotten. Even in the West little is known about the genocidal holocaust at Vinnytsia. Therefore, the author, who was in Vinnytsia for several days as a correspondent in July of 1943 during the excavation of the mass graves, has compiled in this booklet some of his earlier published reportages, particularly the article "The earth opened up and we saw hell," printed in the 1972 UNA Almanac, and added to them some basic data found in official and unofficial publications concerning the genocidal events in Vinnytsia in 1937-39. He does so in the hope that a reminder of that horrible crime may encourage qualified persons or institutions to take steps to ensure that this holocaust, as well as all others, IS NEVER FORGOTTEN.

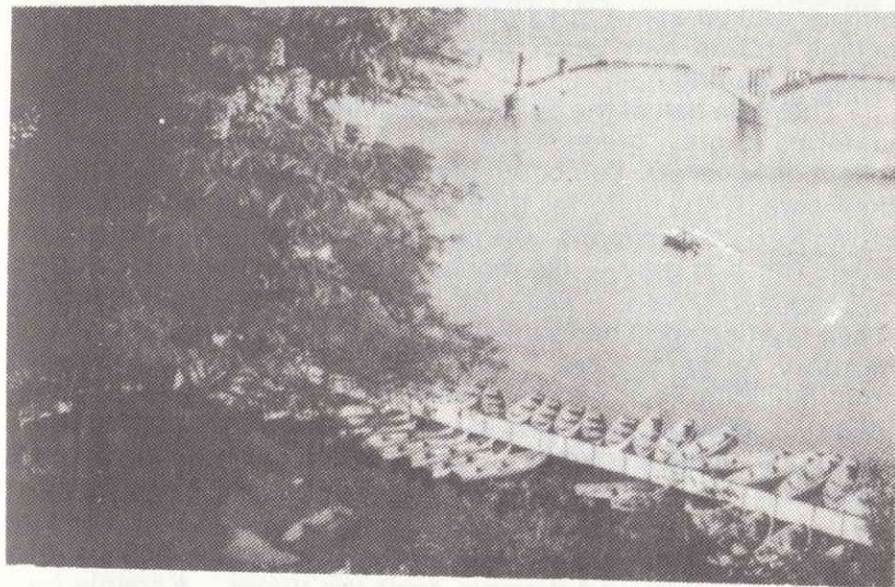
VINNYTSIA

The city of Vinnytsia, the administrative center of the oblast' by the same name, lies in a beautiful part of the Podillia region in a scenic valley on the Boh River (referred to in Soviet geography as the Southern Buh). The city and the surrounding area abound in orchards.

At the beginning of World War II, Vinnytsia, according to Soviet statistics, had a population of some 100,000 inhabitants, of which 41% were Ukrainians, 38% Jews, 14% Russians and 4% Poles.

Again according to Soviet statistics, the total population of Soviet Ukraine in 1929 numbered 31,194,976. Ten years later, in 1939, the population count for the same area was 28,070,404; that is to say, 3,124,572 fewer inhabitants. If one takes into consideration that the birth rate in Ukraine was quite high, ranging between 17.7 — 24.5 per 1,000 inhabitants, then in the decade prior to World War II, the population of Ukraine decreased by at least 10 million. How is this to be accounted for?

A large part of the explanation is to be found in the loss of population brought about as a result of the Moscow-engineered



The bridge over the Boh River in Vinnytsia as it appears today.

Great Famine of 1932-1933. But another, mostly overlooked aspect of the phenomenon is in the mass graves that were unearthed in Vinnytsia and a score of other cities throughout Ukraine during the war period.

The thousands upon thousands in these graves were found with their hands bound behind their backs, their bodies riddled with bullets. In Vinnytsia alone, the graves yielded close to 10' thousand victims. Vinnytsia stands as a symbol of the millions who were murdered.

IN THE VALLEY OF SORROW AND TEARS, RUIN AND DEATH

July 16, 1943. It was a beautiful morning. The sun was ablaze, shedding light and warmth on land that had been deprived of it for some time now. The beauty of nature was in strong contrast to the crowd of people clad in rags, haggard and hungry, who had gathered at the railway station in Koziatyn, holding on to their bundles. The majority were women and old men. From time to time, someone would take out a crust of bread, and with care akin to reverence, put a piece in his mouth. The children, meanwhile, rummaged in piles of garbage, looking for edible refuse. A railroad official walked about apathetically in the midst of the wretched beings around him. Such was the scene in one corner of the station's waiting hall.

The main hall of the building was filled with soldiers in various uniforms in gray, green, brown and black. These were the most recent conquerors. You could pretty much guess the type of men they were by the uniforms they wore. The ones in the SS and the brown Nazi party uniforms were paunchy, arrogant, self-assured, and cruel. Those in gray — the regular soldiers, commanded by those in black and brown, — were, for the most part, rather nondescript. Their fighting spirit had vanished once they had marched into this territory. As one of these "Fritzies" said, parodying a popular song and indicating their general woebegone state of mind: "Es geht Alles vorueber, es geht Alles vorbei; schon zwei Jahre in Russland und noch nichts 'ponymay'..." ("Everything passes; time goes by; I've spent two long years in Russia and I still don't 'understand'").

Armed militiamen milled around the soldiers in gray and the wretched civilians. At the first sound of an approaching train, they immediately stationed themselves at the doors. A freight train with boxcars pulled into the station. Armed guards were

positioned on the bumpers of the railway cars. This particular transport was destined for the modern version of serfdom — young Ukrainians were being taken to forced labor in the Reich. As the train entered the station, it slowed down but did not stop. It kept on going, and went right past, picking up speed as it left the station. The people huddled in the waiting room wiped away tears and crossed themselves.

Shortly, a second train pulled into the station and came to a halt. A machine gun, secured in position by sand bags, was set up in the open freight car that preceded the locomotive. The gun was there to ward off any guerilla attacks. Behind the locomotive, there were a number of freight cars, followed by two or three passenger cars. But the latter were not meant for ordinary people; the sign said that they were "nur fuer Deutsche" ("for Germans only"). Ordinary people could ride only in the two or three boxcars, that followed. It was said at the time, "What is fitting to transport swine is being used to transport people; where people should ride, there are now only swine..."

The train's destination was Vinnytsia. The people who had been waiting at the station helped one another to climb into the freight cars; they looked for a spot to stand, to lay down their bundles. Some sighed heavily; from time to time, one woman or another would be seen wiping away tears.

Having boarded the train, one would not help but notice the contrast between the beauty and richness of the land, and the wretchedness and misfortune of its inhabitants! The train continued on its journey at a slow pace, passing village after village. Along the route, as far as the eye could see, there were seemingly endless fields, interrupted, from time to time, by wooded areas. The villages abounded in orchards. Through the trees one could see the shacks of the people who inhabited this rich and beautiful land; there were no fences, no farming equipment, no cattle. If any livestock was left at all, it was in the hands of the Hungarian allies of the Germans. Every time the train passed through a village, it was met by tattered children who, with arms outstretched, ran alongside, crying, "Bread, please, a piece of bread!"

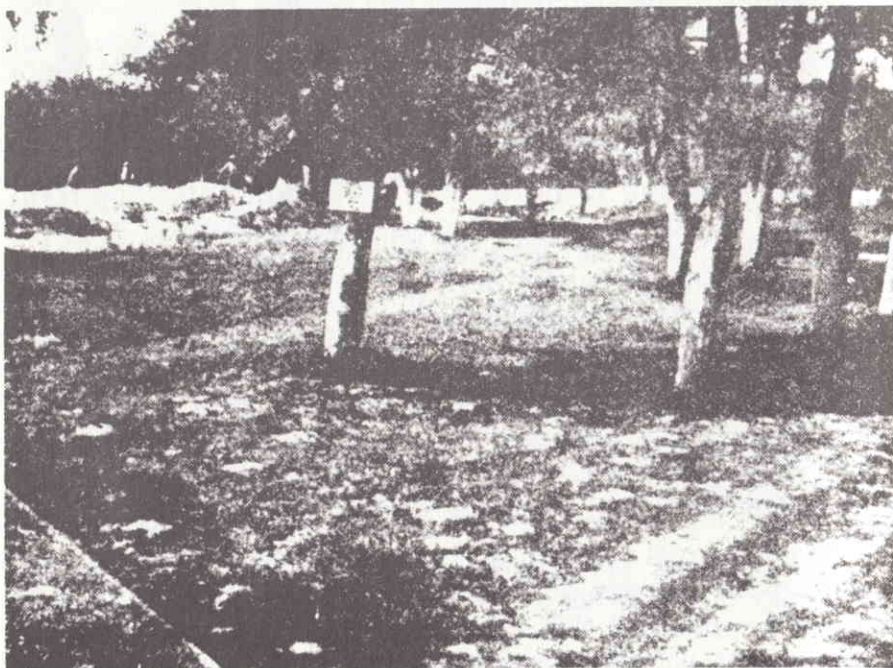
The Germans had ordered that, at a distance of some 100 meters along both sides of the tracks, the trees be cut down to serve as a preventive measure against guerilla attacks. At every turn of the track there were bunkers with armed soldiers ready to deal with acts of sabotage. Signs of war were apparent everywhere.

IN THE CITY OF HORROR AND DEATH

The train arrived in Vinnytsia before noon. People climbed out of the freight cars with their belongings and started down Kotsiubynskyi Boulevard, then across the heavily guarded wooden bridge which spanned the Boh, and then on to the wide street called the Ukrainian Prospect. They walked in silence, without looking left or right. From the Ukrainian Prospect, they headed towards Litynsky Street. It was a procession of shadows, not of human beings.

Mass graves had been unearthed at three sites along Litynsky Street: at the so-called "Park of Culture and Recreation," at the old cemetery, and, somewhat further on, in an orchard. Decomposed corpses, with hands still bound behind backs, and bullet-riddled skulls, were exhumed by the hundreds and thousands. Later, additional mass graves were uncovered. An awful stench permeated the whole city, — and along with it, all of Ukraine.

As the news of the uncovering of the mass graves spread, people came to Vinnytsia from all over Ukraine, but most of all



Orchard, in which NKVD men buried four thousand of their executed victims.

from the towns and villages of Podillia, — people whose family members or relatives had been arrested by the NKVD before the war, and were never heard from again. As they approached the mass graves, they gathered the wild grass that grew by the wayside, holding it close to their noses, breathing in its strong scent, to cover the other, awful smell. There were those who, not yet having reached the site, simply broke down and wept. Others sat down in the ditches along the road, uncertain as to whether to go on or turn back. It was a scene of wretchedness and abysmal despair.

Those who found the strength to come to the site of the mass graves approached with trembling hands and weak knees. After their long, tense, arduous journey, there it was, the dreaded spot. A group of people approached the heap of corpses. Suddenly, an elderly woman, separating herself from the group and tossing aside her bundle, shrieked and threw herself down on a nearby corpse. It disintegrated under her. They lifted the poor woman and laid her on the grass. When she regained consciousness, she told them that she was from the Chernihivshchyna region, that for three nights in a row she had dreamt of her son, who had been arrested in 1937. In these dreams, he bade her to go to Vinnytsia and seek him out. She had been traveling for a whole week. Now she was here at last. She had recognized her son's corpse by the clothing and by the amputated left arm.

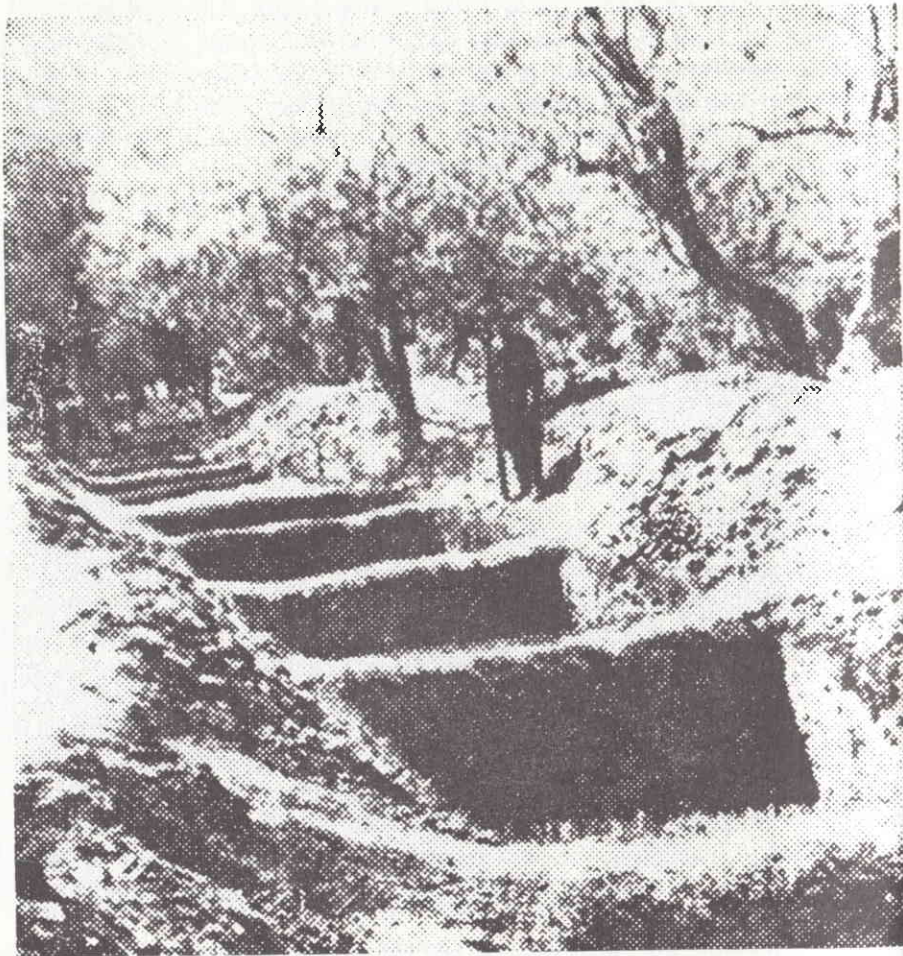
FROM THE HISTORICAL RECORD

Having arrived in Vinnytsia, I paid a visit to the offices of *Vinnyts'ki Visti* (The Vinnytsia News) where I was introduced to the editor, Apollon Trembovetskyi. (Many years later Mr. Trembovetsky and I were to meet again, in the States, in a different world.) It was in his company and that of two old friends, who acted as translators during the uncovering of the mass graves, that I spent a number of days visiting the sites, talking to people and listening to their sad accounts.

On the basis of the information gathered at the time and documents published later, the following facts are known. From June 24 — August 26, 1943, ninety-one mass graves were unearthed at three locations in Vinnytsia. The number of corpses exhumed stands at 9,432, out of which 169 were those of women. On the basis of such factors as identifying marks on the body, clothing, and personal documents, 679 corpses were identified. Out of this number, 490 were Ukrainian, 28 Polish; the nationality of 161 could not be established, but the number included Jews and

Russians. Among those identified, 225 were kolkhoz workers, 54 members of the kolkhoz, 119 industrial workers, 92 service employees, 183 so-called intellectual laborers. Of the corpses that could not be properly identified, many were, to judge by the clothing, either peasants or workers.

The exhumation was conducted under the auspices of a medical-judicial commission whose members, apart from Germans, included a Ukrainian, Dr. Doroshenko from Vinnytsia, and a Russian — Dr. Malinin, a professor at Krasnodar University. The local population helped in uncovering the graves, in the investigation and in identifying the corpses. The sites were



Unearthed mass graves in the Orchard.

inspected and a report drawn up by an international medical-judicial commission with members from countries under German control as well as from neutral ones. The actual exhumation of the corpses was done by inmates of the local prison.

RECOLLECTIONS OF THE RAMPAGE OF TERROR

The year 1933, the year of the Great Famine, was still fresh in the memory of millions of people in Ukraine. Vivid images of swollen bellies and skin drawn taut over a skeletal frame were not easily forgotten. That year gravediggers found it hard to keep up with the demand for their services. It was said that they would take along with them the badly swollen bodies of any members of the family who, although still alive, were clearly on the verge of succumbing to the ravages of hunger. One knew that once the body started to swell there simply was no hope. How could there be any hope for villagers who were already driven to eating bark off the trees?...

All this was indelibly etched in the memory of the Ukrainian people, when in the years 1936, 1937 and 1938, they suffered the onslaught of Soviet communist terror. People now lived in dread of the day when a "black raven" (as the NKVD car commonly referred to) would pull up their home and take someone away, never to be seen again. Millions of people disappeared in this way.

The "black raven" usually came at night; the NKVD agents would search the house, or sometimes, without even bothering to conduct a search, simply order the person they came for to get ready. This was the last that the family would see of him. All those arrests were made on grounds that those arrested were "enemies of the people". In Stalin's time, when "suspects" numbered in the tens of millions, a card from relatives, be it from Poland or some other country, or the possession of a crucifix or prayerbook, constituted sufficient incriminating evidence to warrant immediate arrest. In many cases, arrests were made solely on the basis of groundless and purely malicious reports by informers.

There was hardly a family left in Ukraine that was not affected by this terrible wave of arrests that lasted until the outbreak of World War II. Prisons were filled with people sentenced without trial, simply because a group of blood-thirsty tyrants in the Kremlin, with the depraved Stalin at their head, had, in effect, condemned the whole nation as "an enemy of the people."

Those who were arrested were not guilty of anything — nor, in fact, could they be guilty vis-à-vis such a barbaric regime. For the

most part, they were simple laborers whose concern and aim in life was simply to make a living, no matter how meager, and be able to raise their children. It was for this that they toiled like serfs in the kolkhozes and state factories.

Some of them were arrested for "sabotage" — perhaps the sow in the kolkhoz did not give birth to the number of piglets it should have according to the Stalin's five-year plan, or the kolkhoz horse died unexpectedly; but most were arrested without any legal pretext whatsoever.

After the mass arrests, relatives tried to secure some measure of "justice", but seeking "justice" in this system was in and of itself a crime. And so they did what they could — they kept vigil at the prison walls, went to the NKVD offices, and in their naiveté, even went so far as to write to Stalin himself, asking him to help them in finding and freeing their relatives. But in ninety nine out of a hundred cases, the response was that those arrested had been sentenced as "enemies of the people" and sent to far-off camps, "without the right to correspond". Some 10 thousand of these "enemies of the people," sent off to far-away camps, "without the right to correspond," were found, with their hands bound behind their backs and their skulls crushed, in the mass graves of Vinnytsia.

THE TESTIMONY OF RELATIVES

The most telling documentation of the tragedy that was perpetrated' by the Soviet occupying forces in the Vinnytsia oblast' in 1936-1939 (which constitutes but one instance of the continuous holocaust that the Soviet regime goes on perpetrating in various forms up to this day in Ukraine) is in the matter-of-fact depositions given by the relatives of those who had perished. These depositions were made before the committee that oversaw the uncovering of the mass graves in Vinnytsia. These are only a few:

OLEKSANDRA PRUSAK, from the village of Verkhivtsi, Bar district:

"My husband, Ivan Prusak, was born in 1898. In 1937 he was working at the Verkhivtsi kolkhoz. Up until 1929, he had worked the six morgens of land that were his; he also had three cows. In 1929, he had to give everything away to the kolkhoz. My husband was never charged with any infringement of the law. On April 6, 1937,

while working in the fields, he was arrested by the militia, and taken to the NKVD headquarters in Bar. I never found out the reason for his arrest. After having made inquiries in Kiev and Moscow, I was told to refer the matter to the NKVD in Vinnytsia. When I did this, I was notified that my husband had been sentenced to ten years' exile in Siberia and that he had been denied to right to correspond.

I do not know how long my husband was in Vinnytsia. Today on the former NKVD premises (in the orchard) I recognized my husband's coat. There can be no mistake. I recognized it by the patches, which I sewed on myself. That's why I think that his body is also buried in this zone. Together with my husband another 11



Exhumed common graves in the Old Cemetery in Vinnytsia.

people were arrested in our village, none of whom was ever heard from again." — Vinnytsia, June 29, 1943.

MARIA MADIY, from the village of Verkhivtsi, Bar district:

"My husband, Ivan Madiy, was an independent peasant who owned some two morgens of land. At the time of the collectivization we got additional land from the estate of a wealthy village landowner. Later, we had to give everything to the kolkhoz.

In April of 1937, the militia came to our house at night and arrested my husband. He was taken to Bar. I was given no explanation for his arrest. When my daughter and I went to Vinnytsia to inquire as to his whereabouts, we were told that he had been sentenced to ten years' exile. Today, I was at what were the former premises of the NKVD; there, I was able to identify my husband's coat." — Vinnytsia, June 29, 1943.

The testimony of widow AHAFIA USOVA of the village of Tefylivka, Chulyln region:

"On the evening of January 1st, 1938 my husband Mykola Usov was returning home from work when four NKVD agents accosted him on the street and arrested him, and sent him to (the town of) Chulylnka. At the same time seven other people were arrested and sent there. After my husband's arrest, NKVD agents entered our home and searched through everything. I think they were particularly interested in my husband's correspondence, but they were also looking for weapons. When I asked why my husband had been arrested, I was told that he was being charged with sabotage. The rest of my questions went unanswered. However, they did not fail to mention that I must surely be well aware of the impossibility of having my husband released. Six months later, the NKVD was back again, this time, to confiscate clothing and linen.

At first my husband was kept for a day in Chulylnka and then he was taken to Haisyn. I managed to find out that he had been there only to be thrown out and told that they knew nothing about the fate of my husband.

All this time, I believed that my husband was in Siberia. That was not the case. Going now to the former premises of the NKVD, I found some articles of clothing that had belonged to my husband: a velvet jacket, two undershirts, two shirts, a small bag he had for carrying bread. Now I know for certain that my husband is among those who were brutally murdered." — Vinnytsia, July 1, 1943.

MARIA ANTONIUK, from the village of Polovi-Berlynsi, Murovani-Kyrylivsti district:

"My husband, Stepan Antoniuk, worked in the kolkhoz. He was 46. On June 20, 1938, he was arrested by the NKVD and taken to Kopai-Horod, where he was kept for six days. I did not know where he was taken after this.

Another man, by the name of Statnyk, was arrested along with my husband. The NKVD told Statnyk's wife and me that our husbands were spies. Not having heard anything about the whereabouts of our husbands for six months, we wrote to Kalinin in Moscow. In a month, we were summoned to the NKVD office in Kopai-Horod, to the section dealing with enemies of the state. It seems that our husbands were in this category, and, as such, had been sentenced to ten years' exile in Siberia where they were to work in the lumberyards. We were given no further information. I am certain that both my husband and Statnyk were innocent; they were never engaged in politics of any sort.

Today, at the site of the graves on the former premises of the Vinnytsia NKVD, I was able to identify my husband's shirt, for I had sewn it myself. Now I know for certain that my husband was not sent to Siberia, but was executed here in Vinnytsia." — Vinnytsia, July 2, 1943.



Foreign forensic experts establish the manner of execution.

HALYNA HRUSHKIVSKA, from the village of Horodnytsia, Nemyriv district:

"My father, a 65-year-old kolkhoz worker, was arrested by the NKVD in October, 1937 in Bratzlav. My mother was told that he was an enemy of the state. I know for a fact that my father, who never had any formal education, was in no way involved in politics. He was held in Bratzlav for two weeks and then transferred to Vinnytsia. My mother went to the NKVD office in Blatzlav daily, until one day she was told that her husband was in Vinnytsia. We did not dare make any inquiries about him in Vinnytsia. From the time of his arrest, this is all we knew about him. Nor was anything known about the fate of the ten other men from our village who had been arrested the same day as my father.

I had read in the papers about the uncovering of the mass graves in Vinnytsia. A neighbor told me that she had found her husband's clothing at the site. That is the reason I decided to come here myself. Among the articles of clothing at the NKVD office, I found my father's cap. I readily recognized it because it had been too big for him and I had had to take it in so that it would fit properly.

Now it is clear to me that my father was murdered by the NKVD." — Vinnytsia, July 3, 1943.

NADIA HONCHAR, from the village of Stupievka, Murowani-Kyrylivtsi district.

"In December, 1937, two NKVD men conducted a search of our house, looking for firearms and any other incriminating evidence of sabotage. Not finding anything, they simply arrested my husband, Pavlo Honchar, and had him transported by truck to the NKVD office in Bar. My husband was 30 years old.

Neither I nor my husband were told the reason for the arrest. I was ill at the time and therefore was unable to make any direct inquiries as to the whereabouts of my husband. Two weeks after the arrest, I asked my father to go to Bar and inquire at the prison. There my father was told that my husband had been sent to the "New Lands" (Nova Zemlia); but when this had taken place, and where these "New Lands" were, he was never told.

From that time I never heard anything more about my husband. After a month had elapsed, I went to the Vinnytsia NKVD, but they only repeated what they had told my father. And so, all along I was under the impression, that since 1938, my husband was serving a ten-year sentence of exile in Siberia. Today, I have reason to believe that he has been executed along with the others. At the former NKVD office in Vinnytsia, I found some clothing that had belonged to my husband; among the articles, a worn jacket which I recognized because I myself had sewn on the patches. Now I am sure that my husband is among those who were murdered." — Vinnytsia, June 5, 1943.

HANNA HODOVANETS', from the village of Mykhailivka, Murowani-Kyrylivtsi district:

"My husband, Kasian Hodovanets', (born in 1886), was arrested while at work in the railway yard in Kopai-Horod by a member of the village council and a militiaman, who worked as a guard at the station. They took his passport and sent him to Mykhailivka, then on to Mohyliv, and then, on March 3, to Vinnytsia. I learned of his whereabouts from various acquaintances who happened to witness his arrest.

From my son Vasyl's conversation with a kolkhoz worker from Mykhailivka, we learned that this man had been summoned to appear before the Murowani-Kyrylivtsi district representative of the NKVD for questioning in regard to my husband. During the interrogation, the man was asked such questions as whether my husband prayed a lot and why there were so many icons in our home. It seems that these factors, in addition to the fact that my husband did not show up for work on a religious holiday, furnished the grounds for his arrest.

At the end of April, 1938, I was told by the NKVD in Vinnytsia, that my husband had been exiled to a far-off labor camp and that he had been denied the right to correspond with his family.

Upon having made inquiries at the office of the *oblast's* public prosecutor, I was given the exact same information. My next step



Members of the international forensic commission at the site of exhumed mass graves in Vinnytsia.

was to write to Stalin, asking for the release of my husband. On May 3, 1938, I received notification from the General Prosecutor of the USSR, Vyshynskiy, that my husband was being released.

But he never came back. On June 24, 1943, among the clothing that was unearthed at the former premises of the NKVD in Vinnytsia, I was able to identify the following articles of my husband's clothing: a shirt that I had made for him, a coat with blue pockets, and a boot with a calk on the sole that I had especially ordered at the shoemaker's in Kopai-Horod. These items I'd sent to my husband while he was in prison. I fear that my husband was never exiled, never released, but rather, executed in Vinnytsia." — Vinnytsia, July 8, 1943.

LAVDOKHA LAVNYCH, from the village of Voznivtsi, Stanislavchuk district:

"On January 6, 1937, my husband, Vasyl Ivanovych was arrested by an NKVD man, in the presence of two witnesses, after a search of the house that yielded nothing. My husband was forty at the time; he worked in the kolkhoz.

It was only later that I learned of the charges brought against him; namely, carrying on a correspondence with relatives in Galicia. My husband was from western Ukraine, from the village of Lysok, Zhydachiv district.

My husband was kept for a few days in Stanislavchuk, from where he was transferred to Vinnytsia. A month after his arrest, when I made inquiries at the local prison in Vinnytsia, I was told that my husband had been sentenced to ten years' exile, without rights of correspondence, and that he had already started to serve his sentence.

I then wrote to Stalin, Kaganovych, and other Soviet officials in Moscow. I received the same written reply from all of them that my husband had been sentenced to ten years of exile.

Today, July 20, 1943, I was able to identify, at the former offices of the NKVD, my husband's jacket by the buttons that were sewn on it. I believe that my husband had not been exiled; he is here among those who were executed." — Vinnytsia, July 20, 1943.

OLENA OLKHIVSKA, from Vinnytsia:

"In November of 1937, my husband, Petro Ol'khivs'kyi, was arrested at home by the NKVD. My husband was Ukrainian. He worked at the bakery. The day of his arrest, our house was searched and his personal documents were confiscated.

Afterwards, every time I went to the NKVD in Bar, I was turned away. After a week, I went to the local prison where heard that my

husband was being held temporarily, but again, I was not allowed even to enter the building. A month had gone by before I was permitted to send him a coat and a pair of woolen boots, but there was no question of my being able to visit him in person. Eventually, I was notified that my husband had been exiled to the Far North to serve a ten-year sentence, and that he had been deprived of the right to correspond.

My husband, who was never involved in politics, was charged with being an enemy of the people.

Perhaps, the Jewish woman with whom he had worked and on one occasion, got into an argument, had reported him to the authorities.

I was there every day when they started the excavation of the mass graves. I was there when they exhumed the bodies. At the former NKVD office I recognized by husband's black jacket, boots, two pairs of trousers, and a shirt. I was able to identify my husband's body by the malformed little finger on the right hand. I am sure that I am not mistaken." — Vinnytsia, July 1, 1943.



Searching for relatives among the exhumed bodies.

KATERYNA HORLEVSKA, from Zhmerynka:

"Among the articles salvaged during the excavation of the former NKVD premises, I was able to identify several articles of clothing that had belonged to my husband; among them, an embroidered shirt and jacket with a fur collar.

My husband, Dmytro Horlevskyi, was born in 1888. He was Ukrainian. He worked as a railroad machinist. He was arrested on **May 13, 1938** in Zhmerynka. He was summoned to appear before the NKVD; he went and was never seen again. The following day, the NKVD conducted a search of our home, but nothing was confiscated. The reason given for my husband's arrest was that he was an enemy of the people. My husband was never involved in politics. Three months prior to his arrest he was even given an award for the excellent maintenance of his locomotive.

After two weeks, my husband was transferred from Zhmerynka to Vinnytsia. I went to Vinnytsia every two weeks, with a bundle of food and clothing, but I was never allowed to see him. On one of these trips, I was told that my husband had been transferred to Kiev. So I went to Kiev. When I inquired about my husband, I was told that he had never been in Kiev, that, on the contrary, he had been exiled to Siberia and denied the right to correspond. Now I am convinced that my husband is among those who were executed on the former premises of the NKVD in Vinnytsia.

Just prior to May 1, 1937, sixty men, all of whom worked on the railroad, were arrested in Zhmerynka. They ranged in age from thirty-five to fifty. No one has heard anything about them since. — Vinnytsia, July 1, 1943.

A woman by the name of SOLOVIOV, from the village of Zhytkivtsi:

"My husband, a Ukrainian, had to leave his job as a teacher for health reasons; subsequently, he worked in the state bank in Zhytkivtsi. On April 17, 1938, he was arrested while at work. He was arrested at 12:30 p.m.; by 2:00 p.m., he was on the train to the NKVD jail in Vinnytsia. My husband was forty seven years old at the time of his arrest.

When I arrived in Vinnytsia three days after his arrest, I was told that he had been transferred to the local prison. I was unable to get any additional information at the local prison. I was not allowed to leave anything for him, nor was I permitted to see him. Eventually, I learned that he had been sentenced on May 5, 1938 to ten years of exile in the Far North, without the right to correspond. I had no further news of him.

Our home was searched immediately after the arrest, at which time the following items were confiscated: my husband's hunting rifle, some silver that I had saved up to be used for tooth fillings, and

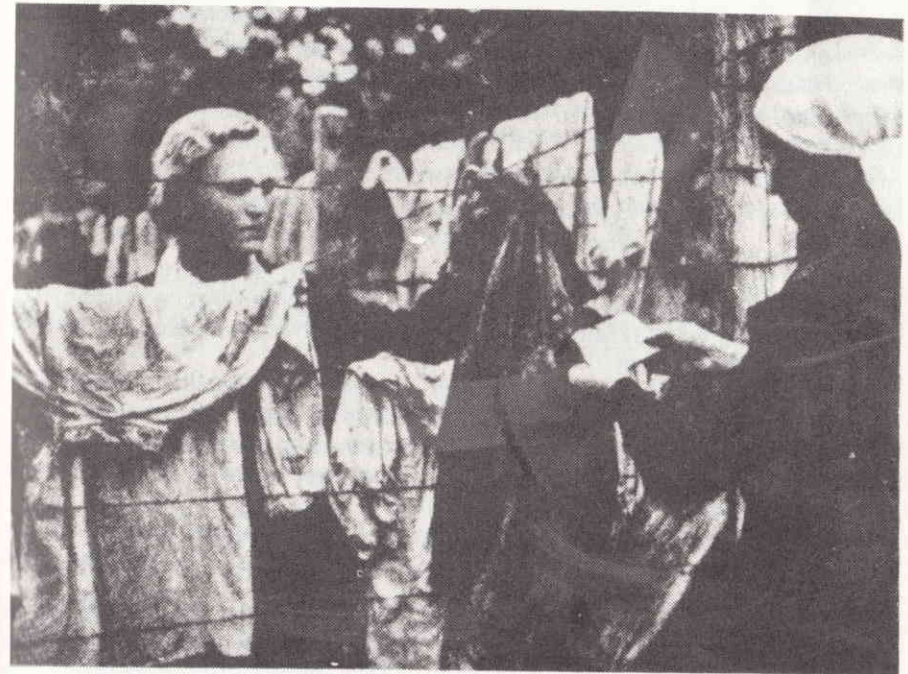
a cross pendant. Two years after the arrest, I was ordered by the NKVD to collect all of my husband's clothes and bring them to their office, because he was an enemy of the people.

My husband was never engaged in politics. Everyone in the village was taken aback when he was arrested. I think that the following incident may have led to his arrest. A public prosecutor, by the name of Feld, had moved into a building, which he wanted to buy. Some eight days before my husband's arrest, he applied for a loan from the bank in the sum of 2,000 *karbovantsi*, stating that he intended to use the money to set his wife up in a *dacha*, a country home. My husband could not approve the loan because it did not meet with the proper banking requirements. I think that this led to my husband's arrest.

In *Vinnytski visti*, I came across an article that incidentally mentioned a handkerchief monogrammed with the initials "A.C." This handkerchief belonged to my husband. My husband was never exiled; he lies here among the executed." — Vinnytsia, July 1, 1948.

ODARKA BIELETSKA, from the village of Shyrovske.

"My husband, Leonid Bieletskyi, was arrested on September 24, 1937. He was a priest. At the time of the arrest, he was 35 years



Identifying victims by clothes and other articles, found in mass graves.

old. The arrest was made at night; the house was searched; my husband's vestments, books, font, and documents were confiscated.

My husband completed his studies at the seminary in Volhynia; he worked as a parish priest in the village of Pelevo until 1935. That year the church in Pelevo was closed and we had to leave. We went to my native village, Hreblia, where my husband found work as a lumberjack.

When they came for him, they gave no explanation for his arrest. One NKVD man simply shouted at him — "Hey, you cur, you've managed to evade us long enough, wouldn't you say?!"

At first, my husband was in a cell in the former police prison in the village of Shyrovske; after two weeks, he was transferred to the NKVD prison in Vinnytsia. Of the things that I brought for him, I was only permitted to leave two handkerchiefs and a towel. I was not allowed to see him in either of the two prisons where he was being kept. Within a month, I came to Vinnytsia; I was told that my husband had been exiled. They would not give me any further information. I then wrote to Moscow, and after half a year had gone by, I received notification via the NKVD that my husband had been exiled to the Far North to serve a ten-year sentence, with no right to correspond.

Having read in the papers about the mass graves in Vinnytsia, I came here to see if I could identify my husband's clothing. I recognized my husband's brown suit which I had made myself; I still have remnants of the material at home. I assume that my husband was not exiled, but executed." — Vinnytsia, July 1, 1943.

A woman by the name of ANTONIA, from the village of Shurovska-Hreblia.

"My husband was arrested on March 26, 1938 while at work in the fields. He was incarcerated in the former police prison. My husband was Ukrainian. He worked as a machine-tractor operator at the local plant.

After the arrest, the house was searched and my husband's personal documents confiscated. When I asked about the reason for the arrest, I was told that my brothers, the Savytskys, who also live in our village, carried on a correspondence with people who lived abroad.

My brothers never corresponded with anyone abroad. They had been arrested and exiled in November of 1937. We received word from them from Mongolia.

My husband was kept for a month and a half in the village prison and was later transferred to the prison in Vinnytsia. When he was in the village prison, I was able to catch a glimpse of him through the fence, but I was not allowed to talk to him nor to give him anything.

When my husband was transferred to Vinnytsia and I went there to see how he was, I was told that he was no longer in prison, but had been exiled. At the time, I filled out an official form regarding his whereabouts; after two years had gone by, I received a reply, stating that he had been sentenced to ten years' exile in the Far North and deprived of the right to correspond.

I still do not know the real reason for his arrest. I know that he was not involved in politics.

I learned of the uncovering of the graves from the newspaper, and decided to come to Vinnytsia. I was able to identify my husband's shirt, which I had made, and later mended. I have every reason to believe that my husband is no longer among the living." — Vinnytsia, July 1, 1943.

"OFF-LIMITS"

Following the assassination of Kirov during the mass terror of 1937-1938, areas in the immediate vicinity of the local offices of the NKVD in many cities throughout Ukraine were cordoned off by a high fence into so-called "off-limit" zones, and were put under guard. People were not to come near these areas. No one knew exactly what was going on within these "off-limit" zones, yet there were endless rumours and speculation. There were those daring souls who would climb up a near-by tree at dusk in order to look over the fence. Some actually saw rows of deep ditches or small mounds, but no one knew what they were for.

There were not many people who could give an accurate account of what happened in Vinnytsia in the "off-limit" areas that the NKVD set up to cover what it did with its massacred victims. But there still were a number of people who remembered what had happened at three locations along Litynsky Street.

The first site was formerly an orchard, jointly owned by several people who had moved to the city in the '30s. The orchard was neglected until March of 1938, when the NKVD expressed an interest in it. The land was surveyed and a three-to-four meter high fence was put up. The area was guarded by the NKVD both day and night. From time to time, one would hear the growling of dogs. The local inhabitants were told that the orchard was being fenced in in order to keep children out, and that it would be used for military manoeuvres.

The following excerpt from the minutes of the Vinnytsia town council and eyewitness accounts refer to the existence of the "off-limit" zones in Vinnytsia.

Excerpt from the minutes (No. 1) of the meeting of the Town Council of Vinnytsia. 1/IV/1939.

Item: Communiqué issued by the National Commissariat for State Security regarding the designation of the land near the Slavians'ka Dairy Farm in Vinnytsia as being off-limits to the general public.

Resolved: To close off to the general public the land of the Slavians'ka Dairy Farm which belongs to the Vinnytsia Town Council, measuring 27 hectares and 9151 square meters, and reserve it for use by the National Commissariat for State Security.

It is unlawful to engage in any kind of construction on the site without the special permission of the National Commissariat for State Security.

The following are the perimeters constituting the area designated as being off-limits: on the north, the town forest and all the land of the village of Pyatychny; on the east, Building No. 646; on the south, Litynsky Street.

(Signed): Town Council Chairman, Fursa; Secretary, Slobodianiuk.

Eyewitness accounts serve as further elaboration on the resolution passed by the town council. They were later published as part of the government documents. Some of them are cited below:

H. HUHLEWYCH, a worker at the hydro-biological plant in Vinnytsia.

"In the spring of 1938, I went to Kiev where I stayed for three months. While I was away, my brother was arrested in Vinnytsia. Upon returning to Vinnytsia in the summer, I noticed that, opposite my place of work on Litynsky Street, a new wooden fence, about three meters high, had been put up. This was a solid double fence. My questions as to why the fence had been built and what was the meaning of all this, met with various responses. The usual answer was that the fence was being built by the NKVD. After a few days, however, it was rumored that those shot by the NKVD were being buried there. In fact, one day I smell the stench of decomposed bodies. So I decided to inspect the fence carefully. I detected a small knot-hole and looked through it. I saw a large mound of recently heaped-up earth, and, right next to the fence, a pile of corpses, which apparently there had not been enough time to bury.

Every time a truck passed by, I would follow it with my eyes until it disappeared through the gateway. I kept imagining that my brother's body was inside one of those trucks. When it got dark, I would see trucks pull in through the gate, practically daily; they would leave the following day with a load of earth, and head for Lityn'."

OPANAS SKREPKA, a guard at the market in Vinnytsia.

"From 1935 to 1941, I worked as a guard for the town's fruit plantations on Litynsky Street. In March 1938, one of the orchards that was adjacent to the plantation where I worked was being fenced in with a high wooden fence. In talking to the workmen who were putting it up, I was told that there were plans to build either a home for children or a sports field.

A month went by. One night I decided to take a look at what was going on inside, so I climbed a tree near the fence. There were several corpses in each ditch. Since there was still room for more corpses, the ditches had not been covered over with earth. For some time now, I had been aware that trucks were coming into the compound, where they were being unloaded. I could hear a thud on the ground, but I could not see what was going on inside the fenced in area. On a few occasions, early in the morning, just after the trucks had passed through the gate, I noticed traces of blood on the road along Litynsky Street. Later an NKVD guardsman, who lived in the guard house, would cover up the stains with sand. I never heard any shooting or any other noise at night, but sometimes during the day I would see commissars come in their cars, and then I heard shooting. Sometimes, the wind would carry the stench of decaying bodies. No one dared to go near the place because there were guards pacing back and forth along the enclosure, both inside and out.

In 1938 the NKVD had put in an order for some saplings from the plantation nursery. When I failed to comply, I was summoned to their offices. Some two hundred pine, maple and acacia trees were requisitioned to be planted on the area behind the fence. Only a few of them took root."

MARIA PONOMARCHUK, a resident of No. 44 Litynsky Street.

"I have been living in this house since 1927. It is only 300 meters from my house to the NKVD enclosure. I would often notice NKVD men in uniform standing guard by the fence, day and night. Nobody knew what they were building inside the enclosure, but then again, people simply knew that any NKVD undertaking could bode no good. No one believed the rumors that were being purposely circulated, to the effect that the NKVD was building a sports field for children. In 1938, I myself often saw two trucks, covered with canvass, enter the enclosure. People already suspected that the

NKVD was using the place to get rid of the bodies of people it had executed."

The foregoing account was confirmed by many other witnesses (see "Zlochyny Moskvu u Vinnytsi," (The Crimes of Moscow in Vinnytsia), published by the Ukrainian American Youth Association). Among these witnesses: Fedor Starnytsia, a builder; Vasyl Kozlovskiy, a worker; Petro Ziwak, a worker; Evhen Vinetski, a driver; Oleksa Kozlovskiy, a watchman; Trokhym Amosov, a brick-kiln operator, and his wife, Olena Amosov.

These people gave the following testimony: that once the enclosure had been put up in the spring of 1938 on the grounds of the former orchard, the stench of decomposing bodies could not be noticed; that loaded trucks were seen entering and leaving the compound both during the day and night; that up until the time of the German occupation in 1941, NKVD guards were posted along the length of the enclosure.

These statements clearly indicate that the NKVD had decided to use the tract of land as a burial ground for its victims. In order to ensure its cover, the NKVD declared the area "off limits," as is made clear in the minutes of the Vinnytsia town council, cited previously.

Having made sure that there would be no thought of any development of the off limits area, the NKVD believed that it prevented the possibility of having the mass graves discovered. The planting of the saplings was an additional measure to prevent detection.

The original enclosure, however, proved to be too small to contain the bodies of all the victims who were executed by the NKVD during the years 1937-1939. And so the NKVD started to use, in addition, the cemetery on Litynsky Street.

In his testimony, MR. HUHLEWYCH (cited previously) related also the following:

"In order to reach the center of town from the area where I lived, I would take a shortcut through the local cemetery. On my way to work, I often saw people digging numerous graves. I had no idea what purpose these graves would serve.

In the autumn of 1937 I happened to come upon a rubber boot, and I also noticed some blood stains on the ground on the main path through the cemetery. That is when I decided to keep my eyes open. One evening, as I was walking down the cemetery path, I noticed a truck pull up to the main gate. I quickly stepped off to the side and hid behind a tree. From there I could see that the truck was carrying a load covered with canvass. It pulled up next to the newly dug graves. I could hear the thud of the corpses as they were being dumped, and the swearing of the men. After covering the graves over with earth in a haphazard manner, and still swearing, the men got into the truck and drove off."

Sexton YURIY KLYMENKO, from the village of Vobliv.

"Since 1931, I was employed as a watchman at the Pirogov Hospital in Vinnytsia. The hospital was adjacent to the cemetery, with only a fence separating the two. I could see the whole cemetery from where I was stationed. In the autumn of 1937, I saw prisoners digging graves in the cemetery. Each grave was approximately two meters square. The prisoners were watched by guards as they worked. I found the whole situation somehow strange and decided to be on the look-out for what was going on in the cemetery at night. At about two o'clock in the morning, a truck drove into the cemetery. The headlights were left on, which enabled me to see two men unload the truck and dump something into the graves. I never mentioned this incident to anyone for fear that I would be arrested by the NKVD." — Submitted on June 29, 1943.

PETRO BOKKHAN, a bookkeeper:

"In 1937 I often visited my parents-in-law, who lived near the cemetery. On my way there, I usually took the path through the cemetery. I noticed that many graves were being dug in the section of the cemetery that was adjacent to the Pirogov Hospital. One time, on my way back at about eight o'clock in the evening, I saw that the men were still at work digging. The following morning, when I again walked through the cemetery, the graves had already been covered over with earth."

EVHENIA PROLINSKA, a nurse from Vinnytsia:

"In the autumn of 1937, I worked as a nurse at the Pirogov Hospital. I was often on night duty. On one occasion, a doctor from the NKVD prison came to our hospital. I knew him only by sight. Usually he was seen wearing the NKVD uniform, but on this particular night he was in civilian clothes. He came looking for the gravedigger, who lived in the hospital. He told the gravedigger to take along three or four spades, and follow him to the cemetery.

Because my husband had been arrested on December 20th, I was particularly wary of the doctor's night visit to the hospital. I changed from my white smock, and having put on a black coat, went to the cemetery. It was about two or three o'clock in the morning. I stopped when I heard someone talking. There must have been around ten of them. I could not make out what they were saying. They were standing near two trucks which were covered with canvass. I suddenly realized that these trucks could be carrying the bodies of those who had been shot in the NKVD prison, and that the corpses were to be unloaded here. Had the prisoners died a natural death, they would have been buried during the day, not at night, surreptitiously. As the men started to undo the canvass covering, I became afraid that I might be noticed, so I headed back for the hospital. Later, in the morning, I went back to the cemetery; there

was a guard posted at the site of last night's activity. I noticed that some three meters of ground were covered with freshly turned earth, levelled over. The following day, when I asked the guard what was going on at the cemetery that night, I was told to mind my own business.

Incidents of this type then were repeated quite frequently. The gravedigger was sought out not only by the NKVD doctor but by the commissars themselves.

The section of the cemetery where this particular incident took place was not normally used for burial."

"THE EARTH OPENED AND REVEALED HELL"

"The earth opened and we saw hell." This was the lament of a woman who witnessed the uncovering of the mass graves in Vinnytsia. The mass graves of these innocent victims of Soviet terror was indeed a vision of hell, a sight impossible to convey in all its horror...

Once the "valiant" Red Army had fled from Ukraine before the advancing Nazis, their comrades of not long ago, the people of Vinnytsia started to voice their suspicions regarding the "off-limit" areas. At first, it seemed futile to bring the matter to the attention of the German occupation forces; after all, everybody knew that the Nazis were no better than the Soviets. There was a saying, that the only difference between Moscow and Berlin was that the winters were colder in Moscow. The coming of the Germans only brought a change in the color of the uniform of the occupation forces; the methods remained the same. This could be seen in all spheres of life, from the complete arbitrariness of the police, all the way up to the top of the power structure. The names changed, but the content remained the same. During the Soviet occupation, the decisive power was in the hands of the NKVD; under the Germans, it was in the hands of the Gestapo. It is interesting to note that in Vinnytsia, as in many other cities throughout Ukraine, the Gestapo set up quarters in buildings that were formerly occupied by the NKVD. Little had changed: instead of the red flag with the hammer and sickle, there was now a red flag with a black swastika, that was all. In fact, many of those who had worked for the NKVD simply joined the Gestapo. At the time of the uncovering of the mass graves in Vinnytsia, the NKVD building was already occupied by the Gestapo, which was most likely digging mass graves of its own in

some other place. The regime changed, but the victims remained the same: they were always Ukrainians.

But how were the mass graves in Vinnytsia discovered, and what led to the uncovering of the sites?

There are various sources and numerous accounts regarding this matter. According to accounts by the local population, on May 24, 1943, a person whose identity has been withheld came upon a decaying corpse while digging in the local park. The man was, naturally, alarmed and reported the incident to the police.

The police undertook further investigation of the site, which led to the discovery of more bodies. The matter was then referred to the local civil authorities who authorized an official investigation, headed by two local physicians — Dr. Doroshenko, a forensic expert in Vinnytsia, and Dr. Malinin, a former professor at Krasnodar University, who resided in Vinnytsia.

The German authorities soon became interested in the matter. After two mass graves, which yielded more than two hundred corpses, had been uncovered, the Germans set up a special judicial-medical commission that was to oversee any further exhumations. An international committee, made up of members



A view of some of the exhumed bodies of the victims of Soviet genocide at Vinnytsia.

from neutral countries, was asked to review the matter, and foreign correspondents were given access to the sites. (The author of this booklet was among the journalists present).

News of what happened in Vinnytsia spread quickly throughout Ukraine. People from all over the country came to Vinnytsia in the hope of learning something about their missing relatives, who had been taken away by the "black raven" of the NKVD and sentenced to serve terms of exile "in far-away labor camps, without the right to correspond."

THE EXHUMATION AND THE BURIALS

As mentioned previously, the exhumation of the bodies was done by inmates of the local prison and was overseen by the specially-formed commission. Even today, forty years after the event, it is difficult to talk of this time without reliving the horror of the experience... Hundreds of decomposed corpses were exhumed from the ground, laid out in rows for purposes of identification and forensic examination, and then were given a Christian burial and laid to rest, again in mass graves.

Officiating at the funeral services of the Ukrainian victims of the holocaust at Vinnytsia was the Bishop Hryhoriy (who died in Chicago in 1985).

A short article, titled "The Bishop of Vinnytsia," by O. Kulenko, appeared in the July 11, 1985 issue of *Narodna Volia*, the Scranton, Pa. — based publication of the Ukrainian Fraternal Association. The following is an excerpt from this article:

Of all the titles and recognition that Metropolitan Hryhoriy was given during his lifetime, he will be most remembered for his work during the relatively short period of his life when he was the bishop of Vinnytsia during World War II.

It was his fate not only to help build anew the life that had been devastated by the Soviet occupation, under the difficult conditions of new and no less brutal occupying forces, but also to bear witness and officiate at the funeral of the countless victims of Stalin's terror, perpetrated under Yezhov between 1937-1938.

The uncovering of the mass graves, which began in the summer of 1943, revealed, in a short time, the extent of the genocide. Rows upon rows of corpses were found with hands tied behind their backs, their skulls riddled with bullets, and bearing various signs of torture. News of yet another Katyn' spread rapidly throughout the land. Thousands of Ukrainians started to converge on Vinnytsia despite the difficulties that this entailed in wartime, in the hope of

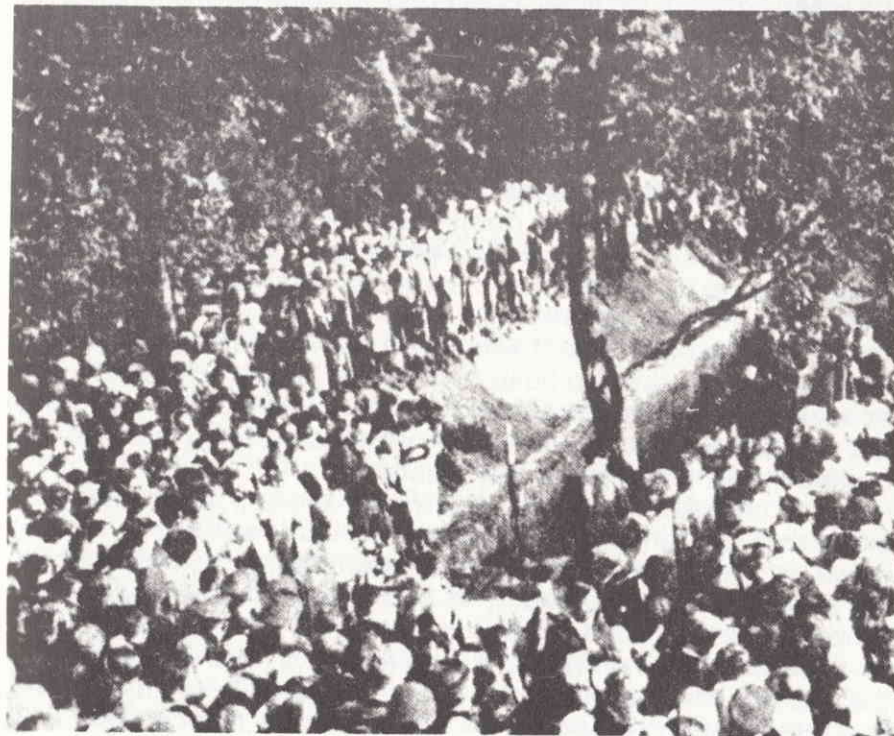
finally locating missing family members and relatives, by identifying the clothing and documents that had been unearthed along with the corpses.

Some 10,000 corpses were exhumed from the mass graves and given proper burial. Bishop Hryhoriy witnessed this great national tragedy. This is the eulogy which he delivered at the nineteenth funeral service for victims found in the mass graves:

'Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

We have come together for the nineteenth time at this site to pay our last respects and to pray for the souls of the sons and daughters of Ukraine who fell victim to a most brutal regime.

Before us are the earthly remains of nine hundred and sixty martyrs, awaiting burial. Just look at these mass graves! They have already become the final resting place for 8,479 sons and daughters of Ukraine, who were exhumed from the pits into which they were thrown, so that they might be given a Christian burial. It is dreadful to think how many of these mass graves are to be found on the steppes and in the forests of Siberia, Solovki and Kolyma!



Funeral of the NKVD victims in Vinnytsia.

...We had resolved to erect a monument on the site of these hallowed graves. Thanks to your generosity, the donations that have come in have already surpassed the amount needed to undertake such a project. Unfortunately, it is not to be. Nevertheless, we believe that there will come a time when there will be a fitting monument on this site in honor of these martyrs, and that prayers will be offered to God by visitors and passers-by for the repose of their righteous souls.'

The uncovering of the mass graves in Vinnytsia came to an end with the coming of winter and with the advance of the war front. To this day, there is no marker, cross or monument to mark the graves of the thousands of victims that lie buried there..."

Despite the disinfectants that were used, the stench of corpses permeated the site and the surrounding area.

During the exhumation of the bodies, the prisoners who performed this job would first remove the layer of decaying clothing that covered the corpses and hang the clothes on lines stretched between the trees. People would come up and try to identify articles of clothing that belonged to members of their family. Soon, however, the clothing that was still in fairly good condition started to disappear. (The first priority of the living is to think of how to go on living). The clothes were stolen at night; the underwear, shirts, trousers, etc. would be cleaned and then sold at the bazaar. To prevent such thefts, signs were posted, warning that such actions "were punishable by law" and that those prosecuted would be "severely penalized." This measure proved to be only partially effective; things still disappeared, but not in such quantities as before.

The exhumation itself was awful. The prisoners would lift a corpse from the tangled heap of corpses, pass it on from hand to hand, and lay it out on the grass. They would check the pockets of the clothing for documents or any other identifying material, but on the whole, this yielded few results.

The corpses that were underneath the top layer had to be extricated by using ropes. Two men would lower a rope into the grave, where other workers made it into a sling with which to lift the corpse to ground level. The bodies often came apart in the process of being hoisted up.

People walked around in a daze amid the rows of corpses and the clothing that was left to dry out in the open. From time to time, one would hear the lament of someone who had recognized a corpse or a piece of clothing. Those who had come here in the hope of finding members of their family could be seen bending

over each corpse, their faces anguished, as they tried to discern the face of a loved one in the remains of blackened skin stretched tight over the skull.

In this tragic scene, the most tragic sight was that of the female corpses. Most of them were nude; as a sign of respect, people would cover them with rags or someone would pick a wildflower and place it on the breast of one or another of these martyrs.

People gathered at the gravesites, praying quietly, wiping away tears; from time to time, someone, in anguish, would utter an awful curse. For truly, the earth had opened up and hell had shown its face!

RESULTS OF THE EXHUMATIONS AND THE INVESTIGATION

The uncovering of the graves and the general investigation in which both the local population and people from the outside took part, including numerous witnesses as well as forensic specialists, yielded details which provide a fairly accurate picture of the atrocity committed in Vinnytsia by the Soviet occupiers. The findings, which have been compiled and are available in several publications, speak for themselves. What follows is an overview, based on these findings and on first-person accounts.

THE SITES

As noted before, the mass graves were discovered at three locations: the orchard, the old cemetery, and in the so-called "park of culture and recreation."

The first mass graves were unearthed in the westernmost part of Vinnytsia, in the Dolynky orchard, some two miles from the center of town, on the north side of Litynsky Street.

The orchard measured 60 x 1,000 meters. The ground was uneven, overgrown with field grass; there were old fruit trees, and interspersed among them, young shrubs.

In the winter of 1937-1938, the orchard was taken over by the GPU — NKVD. A three-meter-high fence was erected which effectively hid the area from the view of passers-by. The public was told that the orchard would be used as grounds for military manoeuvres; to that end, the NKVD went so far as to build a bunker on the premises.

Excavations in the south section of the orchard led to the

discovery of a pit filled with quicklime. Later, in the winter of 1942-1943, the fence was taken down by the local authorities, revealing uneven areas in the terrain. A systematic excavation of the orchard was undertaken as a result of the chance discovery of a few corpses and in response to the rumors that were circulating among the people.

The excavation yielded thirty-four pits, from which 5,644 corpses were exhumed. Three of the pits were filled with documents, shoes, and clothing. Each pit measured anywhere from 2.5 x 3 to 2.8 x 5 meters. Out of the total number of mass graves, only seven graves had fewer than a hundred corpses; twenty graves had from one to two hundred corpses; the largest number of corpses found in any one grave was 284.

The bodies in the pits were covered over by some two meters of earth; with the exception of three of the graves, a layer of clothing was found on top of the corpses. All the graves were level with the ground.

As the thousands of corpses were being exhumed in the orchard, mass graves were also uncovered — on the basis of information provided by the local people — at two other locations, the old cemetery and the park.

The old cemetery was located on the south, or left, side of Litynsky Street; it was some 600 meters from the center of town. In 1937-1938, a fence had been constructed around the grounds by the NKVD. Inside, there were hedges the height of man and old graves, many of which had caved in.

Once the grounds had been cleared of the shrubbery, one could see square plots some 10-15 cm. lower than the level of the ground. The excavation of these areas to a depth of two meters yielded a layer of clothing, beneath which were found layers of corpses. Forty-two mass graves were discovered in the cemetery, and 2,405 corpses were exhumed. The number of corpses per grave ranged from 50 to 147; only three sites had less than fifty corpses. Twenty-six mass graves were discovered on sites where the earth had caved in; the rest were either level with the ground or effectively "camouflaged" by the old gravestones that stood over them. In one case, a mass grave was discovered beneath the grave of an NKVD commissar, buried some time ago with great pomp.

The mass graves in the old cemetery were smaller than those found in the orchard. They ranged from 1 x 2 meters to 2.5 x 4.5 meters in surface area. The graves were dug to a depth of 3-3.5 meters. They were not spaced out in an orderly fashion and, given to sandy consistency of the soil, were no longer level with the ground, as was the case in the orchard.

Soon after the uncovering of the mass graves in the old cemetery, digging began in the "park of culture and recreation," which lies across the street from the cemetery. Excavations were undertaken on the basis of information supplied by a former guard of the park.

There were many oak trees and various kinds of bushes in the park, and the earth was covered with grass. The northwest section of the park was adjacent to the NKVD prison. One could hardly notice any unevenness in the terrain here. This was attributed to the fact that once the area had been converted into a park, the grounds were maintained on a regular basis. During the war, vegetables had also been planted in one section of the park.

Thirteen mass graves were uncovered in the park and 1,383 corpses were unearthed. Each of the mass graves had from 33 to 144 corpses. A dance platform had been constructed over two of the mass graves, and a "house of laughter" over another. The criminal regime saw to it that there would be dancing and laughter over the dead bodies of fellow countrymen, of members of one's family.

The mass graves in the park were similar in their dimensions to those in the orchard; on the average, they measured 2.5 x 3 meters in surface area and 3 meters in depth. Similarly, as at the other sites, under the first 2 meters of earth, there was a layer of clothing on top of the corpses.

THE CONDITION OF THE CORPSES AND THE CLOTHING UNEARTHED AT THE VARIOUS SITES

As was already mentioned, the corpses and the clothing were simply dumped into the mass graves. Very little clothing was preserved; most of it had rotted away. In some cases, the clothes were burned; in other cases, they had caught fire as a result of matches or cigarette butts that were thrown into the graves by those who were covering them over. There was also the possibility of spontaneous combustion.

There were numerous complications in the process of exhuming the corpses. In many of the mass graves, especially those in the orchard, there was a layer of quicklime between the layer of clothing and the corpses. The corpses were probably covered with it in order to kill the stench of decomposing bodies. After a number of years, the lime had hardened, binding the topmost layers of the corpses into one calcified mass, from which it was hard to extricate individual bodies.

Mass graves where quicklime was not used presented different problems. The bodies had been thrown into the graves any which way. With the weight of bodies bearing down on other bodies, and the weight of the two meters of earth that covered them, the corpses often formed one seemingly indistinguishable mass. Great care had to be used to extricate them separately. There was only one mass grave where the corpses were laid out in orderly rows, and that was in a large grave in the orchard. It is hard to say why this was so; perhaps, such orderliness can be attributed to the fact that this was the first of the many mass graves; subsequently, a more haphazard "system" of disposing of the bodies was resorted to.

IDENTIFICATION OF THE CORPSES

As mentioned previously, all the male corpses had their hands bound behind their backs, sometimes, in two places; some had their feet bound as well. Their clothes were typical of the kind worn in those parts at the time. This included a shirt, pants, and a jacket, and sometimes, underwear, and a vest.

Out of the 169 female corpses that were exhumed, 49 were completely nude. According to the report of the medical commission, these were all women of young age, as were the majority of female corpses that were clad only in long shirts. This suggested, and was later borne out in testimony, that these women had been raped prior to being executed. Only the corpses of a few older women were found fully clothed. There were only a few cases where the female corpses were found with their hands bound.

Under the circumstances, normal identification proved to be impossible. Since identification could not be done on the basis of facial features, it was done on the basis of such factors as anatomical anomalies, especially signs of amputated extremities. Reports of these appeared in the local press, and in this way fifteen corpses were identified. Attention was also paid to teeth and false teeth, but this did not yield any significant results because at the time of the exhumation, none of the dentists who had practiced during the period in question were still living in Vinnytsia. It was also impossible to make any identification on the basis of hair because it had undergone various chemical transformations. Thus the majority of the corpses were identified by the clothing and the personal documents that were found on them.

Apart from the identification of corpses, the medical commission worked to determine the age of the victims — data which could then be used in the judicial and medical investigations. With the use of modern forensic methods, it was possible, with a few exceptions, to determine the age quite accurately. Apart from a general examination of the corpse, special attention was paid to the teeth, the ears, and the condition of the facial skin.

Investigation at the three sites where the corpses were uncovered yielded the following information regarding the age of the victims: 638 victims were between the age of twenty and thirty; 4,976 were between the age of thirty and forty; and 1,366 were over forty. The majority of the victims were males, ranging in age from thirty to forty years old.

THE CAUSES OF DEATH

All of the exhumed corpses showed signs of having been shot, most of them in the back of the head. The cause of death could not be determined only in those few cases where the corpse was damaged in the process of being exhumed. In most of the cases, bullets were found still embedded in the skulls. Many bore signs indicating that more than one bullet had been used: 6,360 victims were shot twice; 78 victims were shot three times; and two victims were shot four times; the remainder were either shot once, or the number of shots could not be determined. Some of the skulls were either bashed in or showed signs of having received severe blows, most likely, with a pistol. Some of the corpses had been shot in the forehead or in the temple. Others, apart from having been shot in the back of the head, had their mouths gagged; still others were found with a noose around their neck.

The medical commission was able to give quite an accurate report on the type of shots that were fired. Not all of the shots were fatal, especially those that by-passed the brain. Many of the shots were of the type that could cause complete paralysis but would not lead to a loss of consciousness, let alone death. It seems that the executioners were aware of this because in certain cases, they would administer severe blows to the head in order to finish the person off. There were 395 corpses that had had their skulls bashed in.

Further examination only substantiated the claim that a number of corpses had been buried alive. Earth was found in the throats and intestines of some of the victims, which must have been ingested after they were buried in the mass graves.

ANALYSIS OF THE BULLETS AND SHOTS FIRED

As is customary, forensic specialists studied the bullets that were found lodged in the skulls of the victims.

As we have seen, many corpses were found with bullets lodged in their skulls, and even though the bullets were deformed by the impact, the tabulation of the weight and the size of the bullet hole indicated that a small caliber automatic handgun was the type of weapon most frequently used.

All the bullets measured less than 6 mm. in diameter. Some of the bullets, either because of the low explosive force of the gun powder, or because of misfiring, became lodged in the neck under the skin, not even penetrating to the bone. These bullets were found intact; their weight corresponded to that of the deformed bullets. They measured 5.6 mm. in diameter, 1.2 cm. in length; they weighed 2.50 gm.

Cartridge cases were found only in some of the graves, among the clothing. Only in one case were the investigators able to make out the number "T33" on the bottom of the cartridge.

The small number of cartridges that were found at the sites indicated that, with but a few exceptions, the victims were not executed at the site where they were buried.

Another factor which was given due consideration was the distance from which the weapon had been fired. This entailed the examination of the mark left by the bullet as it penetrated the body. Obviously, the examination was complicated by factors such as the length of time the corpse had been under ground; nonetheless, in many cases, investigators were able to determine, on the basis of the burns on the skin and the burned out holes in the clothing, that the shots had been fired from close range. In some cases, it was possible to determine that the gun was held to the victim's head.

THE MANNER AND THE PLACE OF EXECUTION

Forensic examination indicated that the executions were carried out by "experts", and that the victims, with few exceptions, were not shot near or in the burial pits.

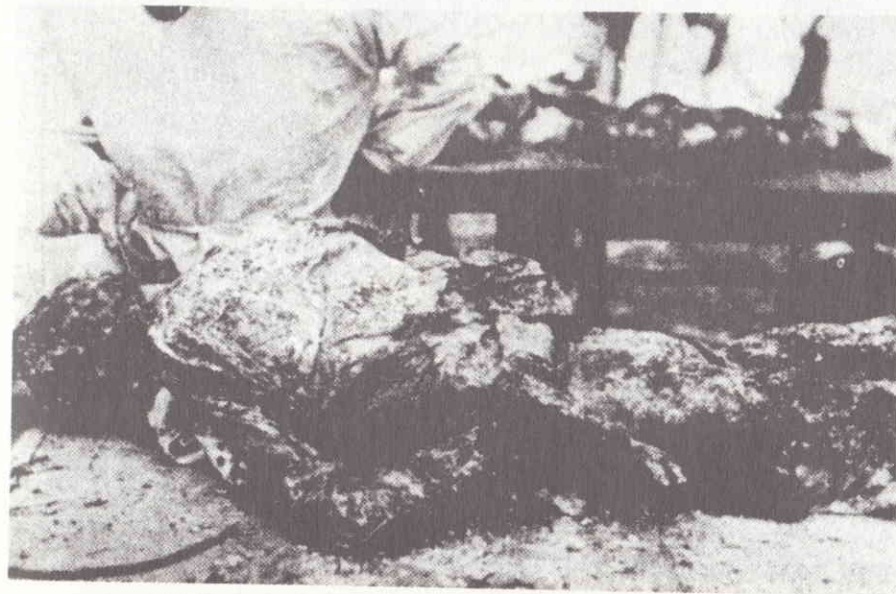
Generally speaking, there were two types of execution by firing. Either the bullet was fired at the back of the head at such an angle that it would penetrate the cerebellum, or, the victim was shot in the neck in the carotid artery. In both cases the executions

were done systematically. The method used probably depended on the firing capacity of the weapon used.

Further examination indicated that the victims were shot while in a standing position. Again, this was determined on the basis of the trajectory of the bullet. Variations in the angle at which the shot was fired were probably due to factors such as the victim's height and that of the executioner. Many of the victims were also shot in the temple, forehead, or orbital area. On the basis of these findings, the commission reported that the victims were often finished off either by being held down and shot, or shot as they were tottering from the first shots. In other cases, as mentioned earlier, the skull was given a blow with the handle of a gun.

As for the place of execution, the reports of the commission concurred with the accounts given by witnesses that, except for a very few, the victims were not executed at the site of the burial. This was confirmed by the absence of cartridges at the sites. The fact that few cartridges were found, and that only a few corpses were found on top of piles of clothing beneath which lay hundreds of corpses, indicates that only a few victims were executed directly at the burial spot.

These were probably the corpses of the men who were to bury the victims. There is speculation that the NKVD commissars



Forensic expert pointing to typical wound in the back of the neck.

executed them in order to get rid of any witnesses, and thus minimize the chances of having the crime discovered.

The accounts given by relatives and the results of the general investigation conducted by the commission give reason to believe that the executions were carried out in the yard of the NKVD building.

On the basis of the facts, the testimony of witnesses and its own conclusions, the commission was able to give a detailed report of a genocide unparalleled in history for having been perpetrated in peacetime.

Members of the international medical commission were: Dr. Zenon Hent, Belgium; Dr. Mychajlow, Sofia, Bulgaria; Dr. Pezonen, Helsinki, Finland; Dr. Duvuar, Paris, France; Dr. Kazaniga, Milan, Italy; Dr. Jurak, Zagreb, Croatia; Dr. den Poorten, Amsterdam, Holland; Dr. Birkle, Bucharest, Romania; Dr. Chequist, Stockholm, Sweden; Dr. Kresek, Bratislava, Slovakia; and Dr. Orsoz, Budapest, Hungary.

THE BINDING OF HANDS AND THE GAGGING OF THE PRISONERS

The sight of decomposed corpses was in itself something awful, but the fact that thousands of these corpses had their hands bound behind their backs and were gagged, was truly horrible. Only the female corpses, with a few exceptions, did not have their hands bound.

The hands were bound tightly at the wrists with a cord, as a result of which the wrist would sometimes become detached from the rest of the hand. There were signs that indicated that such binding must have been very painful. The cord used for binding the hands were made of linen; it was 6-8 mm. in diameter and 1.2-1.3 m. in length.

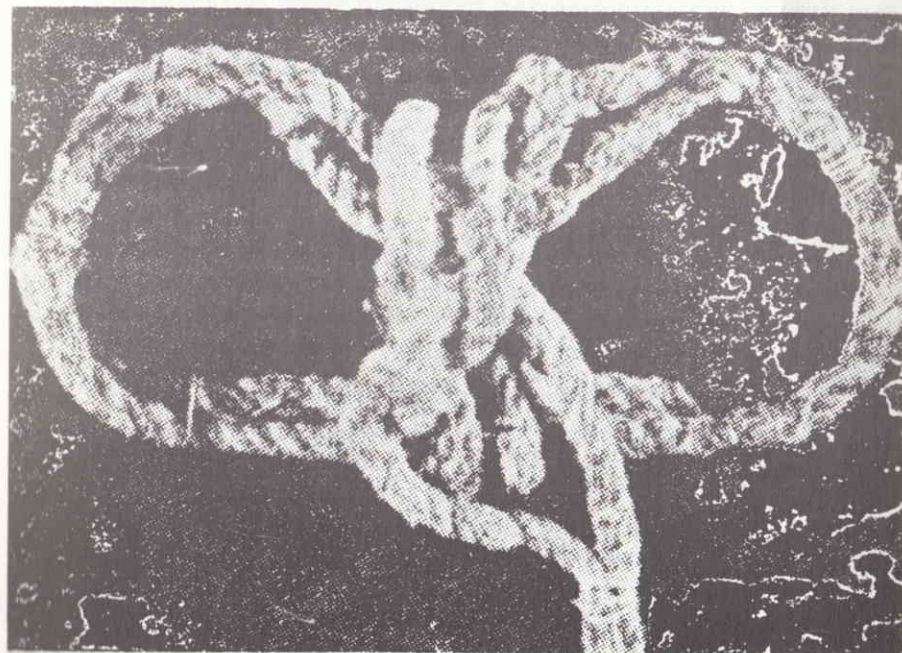
The hands of the victim were brought behind his back, tied together at the wrists by passing the cord around them twice; then the two ends of the cord were passed, one from above and one from below, between the wrists, and tightly drawn, so that each hand was separately secured in a cuff. It was impossible to loosen this knot. There were a few cases where the victims also had their hands bound at the elbows. The same kind of cord was used, except that it was longer. The commission was unable to establish the reason for such double binding.

Apart from having their hands bound, twenty four victims also had their feet bound together. The feet were tied above the ankles

in the same way as the hands and the elbows. The commission concluded that the feet must have been bound before the victims were taken out to be executed because the victims were able to move only by taking small steps. Only young men had their feet bound, suggesting that this was done to prevent their escape.

Some of the victims were found with a noose around their neck. The noose was drawn rather tightly, with one end of the cord hanging loose, but in these cases asphyxiation was not the cause of death; rather, there were signs indicating that the victims had been shot in the back of the head.

There were other victims who, apart from having been shot in the back of the head, had been gagged. One may justifiably suppose that they had been tortured before being executed and that they were gagged in order to muffle their cries.



With such bindings were tied the hands of the victims behind their backs.

TIME OF THE CRIME

Apart from the documents that were found during the unearthing of the mass graves and the testimony of the witnesses, which together furnished the basis for establishing the probable time of the mass murders, the forensic commission collected independent data on the basis of such factors as the condition of the corpses. The length of time the victims had been buried could also be determined by studying the shrubs that were planted on the sites of the mass graves. An examination of the roots and branches served to indicate whether they had been grown from seed or transplanted, and if the latter was the case, then when, and how long they been growing at the grave site.

Taken the various factors into consideration, the commission concluded that the major part of the genocide in Vinnytsia took place in 1938, although the executions could have already started in 1937.

On the basis of the hearings and the testimony of relatives and friends who were able to identify the corpses, it was determined that the victims were arrested by the NKVD in 1937 and 1938. The NKVD frequently would not notify the family until a few days after the arrest, asserting that the person in question had been arrested as an "enemy of the people," sentenced to ten years' exile in a distant labor camp, and deprived of the right to correspond.

The dates of the arrests could often be determined by reviewing available documents, especially the reports of the NKVD agents who conducted the house searches. At the time of the search, two copies of the report were made out; one was given to the person arrested, and the other copy was kept in government files. The information found in these reports concurred with the testimony of the witnesses.

Relatives saw members of their family for the last time at the time of the arrest; after that they had no news from them or about them, with the exception of the official notification issued by the NKVD that the person in question had been exiled to a distant camp; in effect, this meant that the person had been executed.

It was at this time, according to the testimony of witnesses, that the NKVD began to secretly transport the prisoners by night from its building to the so-called "off-limit" areas — areas where the mass graves were later discovered.

THE SITE OF THE EXECUTION AND OTHER DATA

As previously noted, the executions took place in the courtyard of the NKVD building, in the section near the garages. The area in front of one garage was used for washing cars; it also proved to be convenient for washing away blood.

The motors of the trucks that were to transport the corpses would be turned on during the execution in order to muffle the shots that were fired. Nevertheless, there were witnesses who heard the shooting.

The possibility that some of the executions were held in the building itself cannot be excluded. Witnesses testified that some of the prisoners were brutally tortured during the interrogations. Furthermore, the female corpses that were unearthed were found either nude or clad in long shirts. It was established that these women prisoners had been raped and then executed in the rooms of the NKVD.

A general picture of the final stages of the genocide can be based on the testimony of witnesses, as well as on the logical conclusions that can be drawn from the findings resulting from the uncovering of the mass graves.



The surrounded by garages courtyard of the NKVD prison in Vinnytsia, in which victims were executed.

The prisoners who were about to be executed were summoned from their cells and told that they were being transported to far-off camps. They were told to take along any belongings that they may have had. They left their cells, not knowing that they were being led to their death. Their hands were tied either in the corridors or in the rooms. Then they were led out into the courtyard, either individually or in small groups, where the transport trucks were waiting with their motors turned on. The prisoners were executed one by one. If one bullet did not do the job, a second or third was fired. If the prisoner collapsed, but still showed signs of life, he was given a heavy blow with the butt of a rifle or the handle of a pistol to finish him off.

The bloodied victims were thrown into the trucks; their extra clothing and other meager belongings were thrown in on top of them. They were taken to the "off-limit" areas, where they were dumped into the recently dug pits. The NKVD would then kill those who dug the mass graves and those who drove the transport trucks, and throw them into the pits along with the other victims. Only then were the pits covered over with earth.

The excavation of the three pits at the first site yielded nothing but clothing, footwear, and personal documents. These items belonged to the victims but were confiscated while they were in prison, and kept in the prison warehouse. These belongings had to be destroyed along with the murdered people in order not to evoke suspicion among the regular employees of the prison.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CRIME

All the documented facts, findings and testimony of witnesses point to the fact that it was the NKVD, the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs that perpetrated the genocide in Vinnytsia. To recapitulate, this is substantiated by the following facts:

1. Those found in the mass graves in Vinnytsia had been arrested by NKVD agents in 1937 and 1938.

2. Those arrested were taken to the NKVD prison in Vinnytsia or to the NKVD section of the local prison.

3. A few days after the arrest, the NKVD informed the family that the prisoner had been exiled "to a distant camp, without the right to correspond."

4. There were cases where the NKVD implied that the family would never again see the person who was arrested. (These cases were brought up during the hearings).

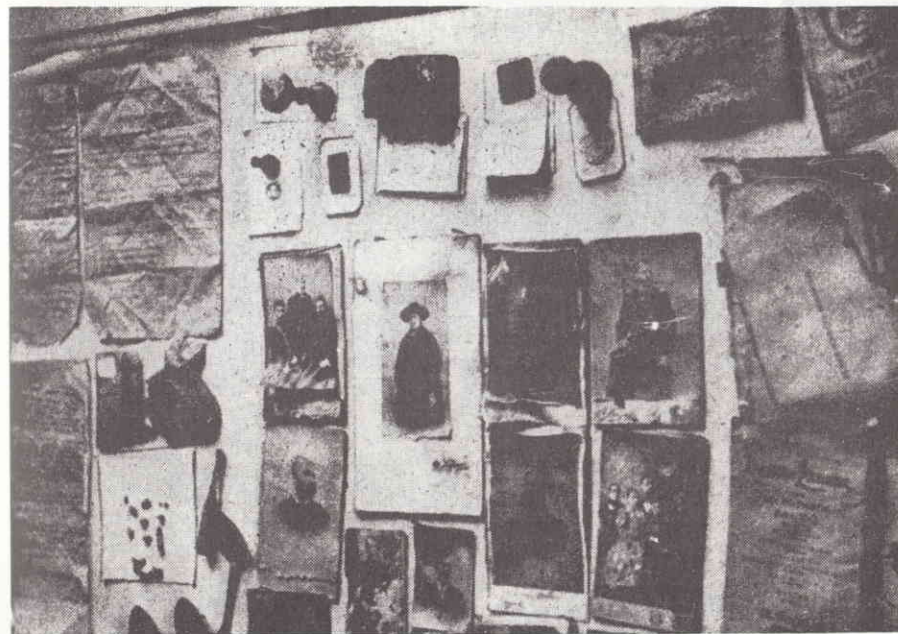
5. The "off-limit" areas, which were guarded by the NKVD, were established in Vinnytsia at the time of the mass arrests and of talk by the NKVD of having the prisoners exiled to "far-off camps."

6. Reports on the house searches that were conducted by the NKVD, found at the excavation sites and on the corpses, concur with the dates of the arrests.

MOTIVES FOR THE CRIME

What could possibly have been the motive for the holocaust in Vinnytsia? The investigation of the matter left no doubt that the victims were not guilty of any crimes, criminal or political. Their families were unable to comprehend the reason for their arrest and subsequent execution. The only explanation given by the NKVD at the time of the arrest was that the person was an "enemy of the people," but nobody ever bothered to specify what this meant and how it was manifested.

In most of the cases, there actually were no even vaguely plausible grounds for arrest; any charge would do, no matter how trivial, irrelevant or fabricated. From the reports, one learns that



"Incriminating evidence", on grounds of which victims were arrested and executed.

people were arrested for such things as being held responsible for the sickness of a horse in the kolkhoz, for having changed jobs without proper authorization, for selling rotten produce at the market, etc. In many cases, sufficient grounds for arrest were that a search turn up a postcard from relatives in Poland, America, or some other country. From the testimony of witnesses, it is clear that arrests were very often made on the basis of denunciations, frequently anonymous ones. This practice was quite common in the Soviet Union. The denunciator was often motivated by the hope of getting the apartment of the arrested individual.

Among the victims found in the mass graves of Vinnytsia there were many who came to this end because of their religious convictions. Records show that there were at least thirty priests among the victims, although only four were identified. In 1938, seventeen former priests, who were working as lumberjacks at the time, were arrested in the village of Kalynivka alone. One of the arrested priests was later found among the corpses in Vinnytsia, thus one can suspect that the other priests were also executed there.

The execution of a large number of priests and the arrest of people because of their religious convictions was also attested by the numerous religious articles — crosses, prayer books, and even



Searching among the exhumed bodies for relatives, arrested by the NKVD.

church vestments that were found in the mass graves. According to testimony, in the village of Losna alone, in the Ulianiv district, nineteen people were arrested for belonging to an underground parish. Some of them were later found in the mass graves in Vinnytsia.

The investigation and findings did not come up with a single case which, in any civilized country, would warrant arrest and interrogation by the police, let alone the death penalty. The fact that all the victims were secretly executed and buried is indication enough that the NKVD was unable to come up with charges which would have stood up in a court of law.

THE FURTHER PERPETRATION OF THE GENOCIDE

What became of the mass graves and the people of Vinnytsia with the return of the Bolsheviks at the beginning of 1944?

Time and circumstances did not allow for thorough research of this question. Obviously, it would be futile, not to mention impossible, to go and look for any signs of the genocide or its aftermath in Vinnytsia itself today. As to those who witnessed the uncovering of the mass graves in 1943, only a few are still alive. But further work in this area by future researchers is bound to come up with many additional documents which will help round out the picture of this terrible crime.

The July 12, 1950 issue of the Ukrainian-language daily newspaper *Svoboda*, published in Jersey City, carried an article about what happened to the mass graves and the people of Vinnytsia after the return of the Bolsheviks in 1944. The source for the article is not given, but at the time, *Svoboda* had a secret correspondent behind the Iron Curtain, and it is possible that he was the source of the information — which for obvious reasons could not be mentioned at the time. The following is an excerpt from the article, which was titled, "Mass graves in Vinnytsia are once again filled with Ukrainian victims of the Bolshevik genocide."

What became of the mass graves and the people of Vinnytsia with the return of the Bolsheviks? On the basis of authenticated and verifiable testimony given by eyewitnesses, it is clear that the mass graves that were unearthed in 1943 were once again filled with Ukrainian victims of a genocide perpetrated by the Bolsheviks.

On the basis of testimony by eyewitnesses, the following has been established: Vinnytsia was once again occupied by Soviet troops on March 20, 1944. Three days later, on March 23, an order was issued, summoning the people of Vinnytsia to come with their passports to the local park so that a special review

could be conducted by the authorities. A few thousand frightened people showed up. Many women were visibly perturbed, giving in to forebodings of yet another misfortune. Finally, a car with men in MVD uniforms pulled up. Then Commissar Rapaport, pointing at the ditches from which thousands of corpses victims of the executions of 1937-1938, had been exhumed in 1943, asked, "What happened here?" No one answered. Rapaport repeated his question, adding, "So you remain silent, you traitors of the fatherland! You had better speak up, you German lackeys; which of you found members of his family here?" These jeers met with no response; no one was willing to endanger his life by responding. The commissar then ordered the troops to encircle the throng; he himself drove off to town. The people were kept in this condition of unbearable tension for the rest of the day; many prayed, fearing the worst. Towards evening, the commissar returned with a long list of names. Most of the names that he called out were those of women. Some one hundred people stepped forward. These unfortunate people who had once come here in their search for family and relatives, now found themselves standing over the gravesites. The commissar had the firing squad called and gave it the following command: "These are the enemies of the revolution and traitors of the fatherland. Fire!" Bloodied bodies fell into the ditches that had become, for the second time now, graves for the innocent Ukrainian victims of Soviet Russian occupiers. The rest of the people were driven down Litynsky Street under the armed guard. In the words of the commissar, they were "being sent to the front to do penance for their sins against the fatherland." The majority of these men, sent into battle practically unarmed, were killed by German fire near the towns of Derzhany, Letychev, Meszybozha and Kamyanets' Podils'kyi.

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TIME

Fifty years have passed since the time of the holocaust, perpetrated by the Soviet regime against the Ukrainian people, when in Vinnytsia "the earth opened up and revealed hell."

Clearly, Vinnytsia is by no means the only symbol of that terrible epoch during which the two totalitarian-dictatorial systems, Soviet Communism and German Nazism, made their infamous mark of genocide. The Nazi crimes have been investigated and documented internationally for posterity by the Nuremberg Trials. Some of the countless crimes perpetrated by the Communist regime under Stalin's dictatorship were condemned by his own "advisers" and henchman after his death.

Why is it that Vinnytsia is never mentioned? Why is it that at present, many years after these awful crimes, UNESCO sponsors anniversary celebrations for Lenin, hailing him as a "great humanist," when actually he was the source of inspiration for these bloody crimes. How is it that representatives of the system which perpetrated and is responsible for the genocide of which Vinnytsia represents only a small part are today received as partners in international negotiations, even by the Vatican? In the words of Patriarch Josyf Slipyj at the synod of bishops held in

October, 1971, "Not only do these people choose to ignore the countless corpses and the rivers of blood that were shed," in sacrifice by the Ukrainian nation, but for the sake of "diplomacy," they prevent others from seeing the truth and speaking out.

Other nations have their reasons, be they more or less justifiable in their view, for acting as they do. But Ukrainians can never forget Vinnytsia, as they can never forget the Great Famine of 1932-1933, in which millions perished, and all the other genocidal crimes against the Ukrainian people. Vinnytsia must never be forgotten!

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