
Book Review

Poland under the Hitler-Stalin Pact

by Nora Hamerman

The Unsettled Account, An Autobiography

by Eugenia Huntingdon

Severn House Publishers, London, 1988

225 pages hardbound, \$17.95 or £9.95.

This book is the personal memoir of the wife of a Polish officer, Henryk Duszynski. Her husband, "Nik," was captured by the Russians shortly after the signing of the Hitler-Stalin Pact on Aug. 23, 1939, shipped to a prison camp, and disappeared. On April 13, 1940, Eugenia was deported with her 10-year-old son to endure incredible hardships in exile in Kazakhstan. The title refers to the fact that the Russians have never admitted their crimes committed against the Poles.

The book was published last year in the full swing of *glasnost* and *perestroika*.

Eugenia Huntingdon was born in 1910 in Wilno, Poland, then under Russian rule. Use of the Polish language was banned in public and could only be taught secretly, and the Poles were severely persecuted for alleged anti-Russian activities. Her father was sent into so-called free exile to a suburb of Moscow as a suspected anti-Russian, and she spent her childhood and part of her adolescence in Lenin's Russia. She returned to Poland in 1924, and married in 1928.

The main thread of the story begins in August 1939 when "Nik" is called up to defend Poland from the impending Nazi invasion. The Nazis moved in with crushing force on Sept. 1, 1939. On Sept. 15, the German advance suddenly ceased. Two days later, on Sept. 17, the Soviet Army crossed Poland's eastern border, followed by the powerful apparatus of the civilian administration, composed chiefly of NKVD (secret police) officers. She relates:

"A heinous crime was perpetrated against the Polish, anti-Nazi guerrilla groups, whose members were in hiding. A message had been sent to them proposing a meeting between their representatives and high NKVD officers in order to discuss ways of fighting the Germans. At the meeting the representatives were promise safe conduct for all guerrilla fighters as well as the right to form their own fighting units,

on condition that they would reveal themselves. When, relying on such assurances, the guerrillas came into the open, they were surrounded by the Russian soldiers, forced to surrender their arms and put under arrest. All their leaders were executed."

Members of the Bund, a Jewish Socialist Workers' Party, which had officially existed in Poland since 1921, and the Polish Socialist Party, despite being Communist sympathizers, were deported to Siberian labor camps.

Eugenia's husband Nik was captured by the Russians and much of the book recounts her efforts to locate him. The account of their journey by box car to the U.S.S.R., and life in exile in Kazakhstan is bloodcurdling, as the conditions of their own lives—and also of the native Kazakhs in this cruel wilderness—were often below the level of beasts.

In Kazakhstan she tries to get a job, taking advantage of the clause in the Soviet constitution guarantees work for all who desire work. She signs up for a bookkeeping post in a tractor factory, but notices that all the white-collar workers, although pretending to be swamped with work, spend hours over the same sheet of paper. Yet they all claimed to be too busy to teach her. Finally she was fired. Her supervisor said, "We gave you a job in accordance with the Constitution which gives everyone a chance to work, but we cannot tolerate spongers and dunces in our factor, so do not come here anymore." Eugenia comments: "I understood how skillfully they had solved the problem I had created by my application. *With similar perfidious reasoning, Soviet diplomats had been winning essential issues for years in the international forum*" (emphasis added).

The Katyn massacre

In June 1941, German troops crossed the line which was supposed to divide the German zone of Poland from the Russian. Hitler had now broken the non-aggression pact. In mid-August 1941, Eugenia was summoned to the local NKVD and told that all the Polish deportees in the village were free.

In her journey out of Russia, she met with trains full of Polish prisoners of war being shipped back to Poland, "a collection of skeletons covered in rugs, their feet wrapped in newspaper or dirty cloth, kept in place with pieces of string, although many had nothing on their feet at all. . . . Their eyes were sunken and either completely lifeless or glowing feverishly." Germans advancing into Russia had found the mass graves of Polish POWs from Kozelsk massacred by the Russians in the Katyn forest. When the Polish Government in London demanded an independent inquiry into the murders, the Soviet government, in revenge broke off diplomatic relations and stopped all further evacuations of Polish people from Russia, and closed down Polish relief centers. At least 50,000 ill and starving children were left behind.

Eugenia's husband's body was found in the mass grave among thousands of other Katyn victims. The Soviets to this day continue to deny the crime.