

Archaeologists uncover skeletons of WWII-era nuns murdered by Russian soldiers

The nuns were from the order of St. Catherine of Alexandria

By Julia Musto | Fox News

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Polish archaeologists have recently identified previously uncovered skeletons of three Catholic nuns who were killed by Russian soldiers at the end of World War II. The Russian army invaded Poland in 1944 after Germany's occupation, hoping to gain control by imprisoning, exiling and assassinating Polish soldiers, civilians and members of its religious community.

Historical records from 1945 -- the year of VE Day -- showed that the soldiers had murdered seven nuns from the order of St. Catherine of Alexandria. Researchers first searched a site in Gdańsk last summer, and Poland's Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) reported that they had found the remains of Sister Charytyna.

In October 2020, further excavation at a local parish cemetery in Orneta exposed the additional remains of who are thought to be Sister Generosa, Sister Krzysztofora and Sister Liberia, according to an IPN statement. The three nuns all served at the Marian Hospital in Olsztyn where they worked as nurses before their deaths in the winter of 1945.

Two areas were designated for archeological work after the team's documentation of burials including the former living quarters of the St. Catherine Sisters. However, the archaeologists would have to dig deeper and finding the nuns required a "temporary exhumation" of second burials.

In December, IPN announced that they had located the remains of who they believe are the last three nuns: Sister Rolanda, Sister Gunhilda and Sister Bona. During the exhumation, the crew found religious artifacts including "religious medals, crucifixes, elements of religious clothing and religious rosaries."

Pathologists at the Forensic Medicine Institute in Gdańsk will now examine the skeletons to confirm their identities and gain a better understanding of their lives and the devastating nature of their deaths. Some facts are already known by IPN, which reported Sister Generosa had been locked in the hospital's attic and "mistreated."

Sister Krzysztofora died at 42 after soldiers gouged out her eyes, cut out her tongue and stabbed her with bayonets 16 times. Sister Liberia was shot after leaving an air raid shelter. IPN notes that Catholic clergy in Poland are seeking beatification for the slain St. Catherine sisters.