

# War crime hell hits home



ONE of the skeletons found in the grave.



TWO skulls with bullet holes in the foreheads.



INVESTIGATORS examine one part of the grave.

THE Jews of Serniki lie in a mass grave in a wooded glade just outside their village in the Pripiet Marshes. This is rural Ukraine, freezing cold in winter, fiercely hot in summer, where a man with one cow is well off, the only hotel charges \$5 a night and the nearest running hot water is at the district capital of Rivno, 180 kilometres away.

It looks an idyllic place. The villagers still use horses and carts for transport, and the telephone is considered a modern invention whose use is unlikely to catch on.

None of the food shortages that plague Moscow trouble Serniki and, if it had not been for the World War II, hardly anyone in the Soviet Union, much less Australia, would ever have heard of the place.

But early in September 1942 (the exact date is in dispute), as Hitler's Final Solution for the Jews got under way all over German-occupied Ukraine, it became Serniki's turn.

An army engineering unit turned up in the village and, with German precision, dug a grave, exactly 37 metres long, three metres wide and three metres deep, and running exactly north and south.

Even the problem of getting the Jews to the bottom of this huge trench had been taken into consideration — the army unit built a gently sloping walkway which ran down one side.

Then the Jews were rounded up. There were not only the inhabitants

ONE of the most important murder cases in Australian history — our first European war crimes trial — will begin in an Adelaide magistrate's court tomorrow. Ivan Timofeyevich Polyukhovitch, 74, a Ukrainian who came to Australia after the war, stands charged with being "knowingly concerned" in the killing of about 850 Soviet Jews. PHILIP KNIGHTLEY, who has recently returned from Moscow, describes that terrible day in September 1942 "when hell came to the Serniki Ghetto".

of the Serniki Ghetto. Villagers remember trucks bringing other Jews from surrounding villages and it is possible that the grave contains far more bodies than the 850 which the forensic section of the Australian Special Investigations Unit counted earlier this month.

From the village, escorted by only seven guards, the Jews began walking to the bottom of the grave. The Soviet authorities refer to this "walk of death". They were predominantly women and children. There were fewer than 100 men, but more than 400 women and at least 90 children under 10, one a baby of only six months. The biggest single group consisted of 154 teenagers.

From the beginning they were apparently under no illusion as to what was about to happen to them — their hair recently combed and set, some times plaited, as if they wanted to face their Maker looking their best.

Those who cherished hope were soon disabused. There was a rabbi with them and, according to one account, he told them that death comes eventually to everyone and "today is as good a day as any to die".

So the Jews went down the



the child's skull with a rifle butt. As the day wore on, the Germans must have realised that they were slipping behind schedule and they ceased making their victims undress and then them fully clothed.

So when the grave was opened earlier this month by eight Red Army soldiers working under a captain, they found the pathetic remnants of

recently killed and into the bodies below.

The killers retreated up the walkway, still shooting and clubbing as they went. One of their last victims was a 13-year-old girl whose body, with its head smashed in, was found near the top of the walkway.

The sandy soil was then pushed back over the bodies, the area tidied up and, if it had not been for the work of the Australian Special Investigations Unit, history may well have forgotten the Jews of Serniki, just a handful of victims in a war that cost 20 million Soviet lives.

But as Richard Wright, the distinguished archaeologist, who was part of the Australian forensic team at Serniki, is fond of saying: "The only thing man cannot hide is a hole that he has dug."

Unearthed soil is divided into distinctive layers so that no matter how careful someone may fill in a hole, the soil in that hole will look different from the surrounding soil.

In this area, the Polyukhovitch case will mark another first: The original plan called for the taking of evidence from witnesses in the Soviet Union, Israel, the United States and Canada.

This blinged on Polyukhovitch, who has enjoyed no peace and who remains free on bail of \$20,000, appearing today. But just before Adelaide magistrate, Peter Kelly, was due to leave for the Ukraine, to begin hearing evidence, Polyukhovitch changed his mind and withdrew his consent to this arrangement.

His lawyer said Polyukhovitch

## Australians uncover the forgotten grave



THE GRAVE AT SERNIKI: Last resting place for at least 853 Jews murdered by the Nazis, it was dug with military precision.

THE trial of Ivan Timofeyevich Polyukhovitch, also known as Ian Poluchowicz, could take more than a year and cost more than \$5 million.

It is important in that it is not only the first prosecution of an Australian for an alleged war crime in Europe, but because it could well turn out to be the last war crimes trial in the world.

Britain is showing reluctance to pass the necessary legislation for the prosecution of possible war criminals there and, as time passes, more and more suspects are dying off. Judges have been critical of cases in the United States because prosecution have failed to produce a single Soviet witness in an American court.

Despite the difficulties this poses, prosecuting counsel agreed because "the eyes of the world will be on the conduct of this case".

One of the major difficulties was persuading the Soviet authorities to agree that Soviet citizens could, for the first time, travel abroad to give evidence.

This has now been successfully negotiated and a Soviet party, consisting of some 24 witnesses, several interpreters and representatives of the Procurator General's Office in Moscow, will arrive in Adelaide soon. Witnesses from other countries will follow.



IVAN POLYUKHOVITCH

Meanwhile, Polyukhovitch, who has also been charged with having committed 24 murders in Serniki and two other villages in the Rovno district, is living at a secret address in Adelaide.

After he appeared in court in January this year, dressed in casual trousers and a blue, open-necked shirt, he told reporters: "I not say nothing, I no understand."

His neighbours described him as "friendly and generous" and that he had the support of the entire neighbourhood.

More about Polyukhovitch will emerge during his trial. It is believed he came to Australia from Poland in 1948, worked as a farm labourer for a year and then for a Government department until retiring a few years ago.

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## Trial could last for two years

**THE AUSTRALIAN CREATIVE WATER PUMP**

\*\*\* AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT TESTED \*\*\*

POSSIBLY THE MOST INVENTIVE LOW PRICED BENCH TOP WATER PUMP EVER TO BE DEVELOPED TODAY

Features:

- No electricity
- No noise
- No vibration
- No smell
- No taste
- No colour
- No odour
- No bacteria
- No germs
- No viruses
- No fungi
- No parasites
- No insects
- No animals
- No plants
- No minerals
- No chemicals
- No drugs
- No poisons
- No toxins
- No carcinogens
- No mutagens
- No teratogens
- No allergens
- No irritants
- No sensitizers
- No corrosives
- No flammables
- No explosives
- No radioactive materials
- No hazardous materials
- No toxic materials
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- No self-maintaining materials
- No self-organizing materials
- No self-optimizing materials
- No self-improving materials
- No self-evolving materials
- No self-adapting materials
- No self-adjusting materials
- No self-regulating materials
- No self-controlling materials
- No self-monitoring materials
- No self-diagnosing materials
- No self-treating materials
- No self-curing materials
- No self-healing materials
- No self-repairing materials
- No self-maintaining materials
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