

SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATION BY JÓZEF FORYTEK

“HOME-ARMY AND POST-HOME-ARMY DIVERSION FORMATIONS IN THE AREA OF COMMUNES IN THE VICINITY OF RZESZÓW – OUTPOSTS “ŚWIERK” AND “GRAB” (1944-1947)”

Several generations have passed since the end of the Second World War and the eventful period of 1944-1947 in the area of the so-called Little Homeland, the pre-war collective commune of Świlcza which was the area of operations of Home Army outposts codenamed “Świerk” [Spruce] (Trzciana–Świlcza) and “Grab” [Hornbeam] or “Grusza” [Pear Tree] (Głogów Małopolski). Despite that, the final history of the Home Army, in particular, the operations of armed underground forces and several smaller groups outside the formal structures of the Polish Underground State, especially in the period from the liberation of Rzeszów from under the German occupation, the ending of the summer offensive and setting the frontline along the Wisłoka River (August 1944) till the year 1947 (the amnesty), has not been fully told yet. As noted by Jan Łopuski, member of the General Headquarters of the Home Army District Rzeszów, this was not the time of clear-cut, black-and-white divisions into Poles fighting for independence and German invaders, which was characteristic of the preceding period of German occupation. The Polish underground soldiers of that time had to make morally challenging choices, considering, on the one hand, the loyalty pledged in the army oaths and, on the other hand, the yearning for normal life and participation in rebuilding the country from the destructions of war within the frames imposed by the “ally of our allies” in the system so foreign to Polish mentality.

Undoubtedly, those who refused to give up the resistance against the imposed government after the formal dissolution of the Home Army in January 1945, operating as part of the Second Conspiracy, exhibited extraordinary courage and risked their lives, in most cases, for patriotic reasons. This, however, was not true for everybody. The ultimate criterion for moral assessment of participants in those events will always be the actual motives of their actions. The motives originating in the love for the Homeland and the fight for independence are worthy of utmost praise of the generations to come. But, if some of those who held guns resorted to violence merely to promote their own (material and personal) interest, deriving benefits for themselves and their families, their actions cannot be regarded as done to advance the independence of Poland. This kind of actions must be plainly called banditry, and they sporadically occurred in the studied area.

One should bear in mind that it was a period of widespread demoralisation of society and devaluation of human life, when access to weapons was easy, whilst moral or state constraints were

virtually non-existent. It also was a time of revenge and retaliation for the times of occupation, as well as a time of fear of betrayal by friends, tortures during interrogation, prison and deportation to Siberia. One could have doubts whether the moral right was always on the side of those who held guns and whether the methods they used were adequate to the goals they wanted to achieve. Was there any real chance that they could accomplish their goals? Was the right balance kept between the goods to be sacrificed (oftentimes, human life) and the goals to be achieved (preventing the introduction of a new political regime and the onset of dependence from the Soviet Union)? Were all the Polish victims of this critical time necessary (children, spouses, bystanders)? Did everyone who was killed by the militant groups operating at that time deserve to die? Should the "betrayal" of Polish interest or the involvement in the emerging new state structures, without the intended harm to the fellow countrymen, have to be punished by death? What should we think about the entire Peasants' Movement and the activity of Stronnictwo Ludowe (People's Party) "Roch", if the widespread reconstruction of the party's organisational structure was undertaken at every level of territorial division, and Stanisław Mikołajczyk himself joined the communist government led by Edward Osóbka-Morawski? What should be our opinion of the members of Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (Polish Peasants' Party) who accepted positions in state-level and local government bodies, as well as in law enforcement authorities, which was consented to (and even ordered) by the party's establishment? A lot of these questions remain unanswered. The court rulings passed in recent years in the so-called rehabilitation cases based on the Act of 23 February 1991 on invalidating the judgments passed in the Stalin era (the so-called February Act) provide certain clues as to the legal assessment of these events and the persons involved in them, from the perspective of "free and democratic Poland," but not as regards their moral assessment which may be done by each reader in their own conscience. It is noteworthy that the judicature on the grounds of the "February Act" is, however, dissonant in similar cases, as is the public opinion in the evaluation of these events from the perspective of more than 70 years. However, one should apply no ethical or legal standards from our era to those times, which is emphasised by the authors of scientific publications on this subject. The fact is that we will never be able to fully understand the people who lived in those times and who were involved in military or political fight for independent Poland, opposing the new occupant from the East.

Beyond doubt, the myth of bandit origin of post-war underground formations is not true. As was proven in numerous studies, many participants of the so-called Second Conspiracy rightly deserved to be called Unyielding Soldiers (translator's note: the name only recently changed from Cursed Soldiers) as national heroes, who functioned in this exceedingly difficult time, only out of love for their Homeland.

Any conspiracy is, by the force of events, a sphere of social life that cannot be fully presented or properly described and assessed, as the specific nature of conspiracy requires keeping many things

in absolute secret from the outer world (including one's closest family) as well as from the members of the same organisation. Certain operations of the underground state, in particular intelligence and counterintelligence of the Home Army and judicial authorities, left no written records, therefore, in some cases, in the course of their reconstruction one can only rely on personal sources, i.e. accounts and statements of their participants, or the closest family members. These are, in most cases, the indication of highly subjective perception of reality, and quite often depart from the objective truth. The lapse of time alone causes that certain dates, names and course of events become blurred in human memory. The conspiracy used codenames and pseudonyms, often identical ones were used by various persons at various times, even within the same Home Army outpost. Besides, characteristically for rural areas, many persons had the same first name and surname, differing only in birthdates, parents' names or pseudonyms. The author tried to determine the actual surnames and the pseudonyms assigned to almost all members of the Home Army from the "Świerk" and "Grab" outposts, and, in many instances, the birthdates, based on various sources. Furthermore, wherever possible, the author also tried to show the events from many perspectives "through the eyes" of their participants, so that the readers could be granted the broadest possible perspective on these difficult and complicated times and draw the conclusions themselves. Many former soldiers of the anti-communist underground unfortunately took their priceless knowledge about the events they participated in to the grave. Only some of them left permanent records in written or oral form (audio recordings). In recent years, several publications were issued regarding the period of occupation in the commune of Świlcza, for example, the memoirs of Józef Frankiewicz and Bronisław Adamiec (both from the Home Army outpost "Świerk") or of Stanisław Leśko or Władysław Dynia. Certainly, they are not free from inconsistencies or highly subjective assessments. What is important, the authors of these memoirs, maybe with the exception of Bronisław Adamiec, draw a veil of silence over their participation in diversion (liquidation and requisition) actions performed by their militant groups, as well as their role in the underground judicature (special courts). They do not admit to passing any judgments or issuing orders, as a result of which people living in that area were killed.

In the present day literature there is no monographic study regarding the functioning of Home-Army and Post-Home-Army diversion groups in the area of Home Army District Rzeszów ("Rozbratel"), in particular in the collective commune of Świlcza. Sizeable portion of information on this subject can be found in the still scarce publications of the young generation of historians, such as Piotr Szopa, Artur Szary and Mariusz Maruszak. However, the unquestionable authority as regards knowledge about the operations of the Home Army and its soldiers and Zrzeszenie Wolność I Niezawisłość WiN (English: Freedom and Independence Association) in the Rzeszów Region is the author of several dozen publications in this subject, Grzegorz Ostasz. Books of great value are also penned by Franciszek Sagan, describing the activity and incomplete staffing of individual outposts and platoons from the Home

Army District Rzeszów, as well as by Zbigniew K. Wójcik, presenting the history of Rzeszów during the Second World War. Some light has been shed on the very controversial subject of executing the death sentences by the diversion troops in the years 1945–1946, that is after the formal dissolution of the Home Army and after the end of activity of underground judicial authorities (special courts), by recent publications of memoirs of members of militant groups operating in the Rzeszów Region, *Egzekutor* (The Executioner) by Stefan Dąbski (“Żbik I”) [born in the year 1925], a diversion soldier from the Home Army outpost in Hyżne, and *Wbrew losowi* (Against the Fate) by Mieczysław Marcinkowski (“Kamień”, “Kmicic”) [born in the year 1926] from the Home Army outpost in Niebylec. Interestingly, these authors did not return to Poland and settled as emigrants in the USA, as did other young executioners who managed to emigrate [e.g. Józef Gutkowski “Kania II” from Przybyszówka, or Kazimierz Dziekoński (“Bruno”)].

This dissertation is the result of research of archives carried out by the author in the years 2014–2017, including the analysis of numerous and varied sources gathered in the Institute of National Remembrance: statements by conspiracy soldiers deposited in connection with the amnesties in the years 1945 and 1947, the files of criminal cases against them (held by the officers of PUBP [Poviat Public Security Office] and WUBP [Voivodeship Public Security Office] and before the criminal courts), including depositions by the participants and direct witnesses of those events, as well as previously unknown memoirs. This pertains mainly to the plight of soldiers from the so-called diversion formations of the Home Army, who carried out sabotage and diversion operations and expropriation (the so-called exes) and who executed sentences of special conspiracy courts (including death sentences), during the German and later Soviet occupation. This is also about the fate of other groups operating in this area in the first years of the People’s Republic of Poland, and remaining outside the military structures of the Underground State. The author focused on the events that took place in the period just after the Second World War, primarily, in the area of pre-war collective commune of Świlcza. Therefore, whenever the activity of Home Army's outpost “Grab” is described, the focus was on the villages of pre-war Świlcza (e.g. Bratkowice, Dąbry, Mrowła, Rudna Wielka and Rudna Mała). Far less attention was paid to military operations outside this area. However, sometimes it was necessary to show the activity of individual military groups in a slightly broader context. This, in particular, refers to the controlled diversion troops of Home Army’s Inspectorate Rzeszów under the command of Wiktor Błazewski (“Orlik”) and Kazimierz Dziekoński (“Bruno”), or the functioning of primarily bandit organisations in the form of People’s Guard “Iskra” unit under the command of Józef Bielenda (“Wierny”), followed by Jan Paduch (“Janek”).

Another subject refers to the unexplained murders, which certainly is a very interesting subject and, at the same time, very difficult to describe objectively, and it constitutes a vital part of the dissertation. These killings have not yet been the subject of in-depth historical research, although the access to materials on this subject became much easier, since the time the archives of IPN opened their doors wider. The possible cause of this situation is the exceptional sensitivity of this subject and the fact that some participants of these events still lived a couple of years ago and some of them might still live today. Persons who are certainly alive are the members of their families, who know these traumatic events only from the subjective accounts of their relatives. Therefore, it is difficult to clearly determine the motives of the perpetrators and whether their intentions were entirely “beyond reproach” and entirely patriotic.

By no means is the purpose of this dissertation to assess the persons taking part in the events discussed, or to determine in detail all significant factual circumstances or actual doers of the executions and rather numerous killings at that time, because it is virtually impossible due to the lapse of time, lack of undisputable evidence, and inability to personally hear the versions of all, or at least most of, the witnesses. Without in-depth research and access to more detailed documents, particularly the files of criminal cases conducted before special courts in conspiracy and the evidence collected before passing of sentences and collected by the intelligence and counterintelligence of the Home Army and their prosecutors, it is easy to pass hasty and overly simplified judgments, which the author tried to avoid at all costs.

The dissertation draws one’s attention to the fact that the alleged perpetrators, as well as victims of many “liquidation operations” were mostly Poles (and not Red Army soldiers, NKVD officers or Ukrainian nationalists operating within UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army)). In many cases, the victims were acquaintances of the executioners, their neighbours, members of extended family, or officers of regime authorities, which, however, was an exception, as exemplified by the liquidation of the WUBP officer, second-lieutenant Ludwik Bojanowski, on 24 November 1945. The vast majority consisted of relatively young people (20 or 30 years old) who, were it not for the change of political system imposed by “the ally of our allies,” would have led happy family and professional life. But they were not so lucky to live in the times of peace. A question arises: was this large number of victims absolutely necessary? Certainly not. This doctoral dissertation endeavours to present, as faithfully as possible, the accounts of persons who described these events in the 1940s and 1950s and in the memoirs published after the war (often in typescripts), verifying, wherever possible, the information they provided through confrontation with other available sources. However, one should bear in mind that a significant portion of accounts of the participants are testimonies of persons accused of specific crimes or of witnesses deposited in the course of criminal proceedings. Such interrogation reports can hardly be regarded as fully reliable historical material, if some of the most important crowning evidence was, at that time,

self-accusation. Testimonies were extorted (also with torture, which was described in detail by Bronisław Adamiec), and handwritten biographies or statements from the prison cell were, in many cases, dictated by the investigators. For obvious reasons, the interrogation reports did not mention beating or torture, insults, threats of shooting, while such interrogation methods were common at that time. Therefore, it was so important to have comparative material in the form of other, more objective, historical sources, such as memoirs prepared in the conditions of full freedom of speech after the "Solidarity period" by former soldiers of the underground, documents of the Home Army, BCh (Peasants' Battalions) and WiN (Freedom and Independence) published or made available in the archives, including reports of intelligence and counterintelligence of the Home Army/ Freedom and Independence, confirming the circumstances described previously during the interrogations. The confirmation of facts was also sought after in the publications of historians dealing with these subjects, who reached the documents describing the events of interest, as well as the accounts of direct participants of the events described.

The investigations included in the dissertation have been presented in two main parts, preceded with foreword, where the first one is the subject-matter part and the other the supplementary part with the staffing of individual Home Army platoons in the two outposts of "Świerk" and "Grab" and other persons operating in the military formations outside the organisational structure of the Home Army, numerous lists, sizeable bibliography, list of tables, maps and photographs and a useful calendar, as well as index of surnames with more than 2000 entries and a useful index of pseudonyms with approx. 1000 entries. For the ease of reading the dissertation, there is a list of abbreviations before the foreword.

The foreword, preceded by the table of contents, is composed of 6 sub-chapters which describe the current status of research, including subject-matter publications, review of sources used in the dissertation, and present the scope, applied research method and purpose of the research.

The first part of the dissertation consists of eight chapters, the first of which contains very general information on the beginnings of military conspiracy in Rzeszów and in the wider area of the Home Army's Sub-District Rzeszów, with the author's maps of the operating areas of individual structures of ZWZ-AK (Union of Armed Struggle – Home Army), as well as the topographic maps of pre-war commune of Świlcza, as for the years 1944–1947, and the Home Army District Rzeszów. The last map in the introductory part of this chapter shows the schematic division of the commune between the two Home Army outposts of "Grab" in the north and "Świerk" in the south. This chapter is divided into two sub-chapters showing the brief outline of the establishment of these two Home Army outposts operating in the collective commune of Świlcza, with the list of staffing of their command. The sub-

chapter about the outpost of "Świerk" additionally includes the description of preparations for the "Burza" (Storm) operation and the participation of its soldiers in the 3rd Western Group of the 24th Infantry Division of the Home Army, and presents the so-far not fully explained stories of two of its commanders, that is Józef Frankiewicz ("Marcin") and the second-in-command Józef Koryl ("Piła", "507") who at a relatively young age was shot by still unknown perpetrators in front of his family house in Przybyszówka on Holy Saturday in the year 1945. One of the sub-chapters provides more detailed information about this forgotten non-commissioned officer of the pre-war State Police and merited soldier of intelligence and counterintelligence of the Home Army, as well as various hypotheses related to those who killed him.

The second chapter contains the information concerning mainly the period of German occupation. The following sub-chapters describe military troops of SL "Roch", including special troops of this formation, as well as the communist movement and its military formations, including short description of activities of the GL "Iskra" group. The next sub-chapters present the not entirely successful attempt at merging BCh with the Home Army, and, further on, the operation of branch departments of conspiracy special courts codenamed "Ważka", "Rejon" and "Rzemiosło". As a kind of introduction to the main part of the dissertation serves sub-chapter six with the discussion of retaliation and liquidation operations codenamed "C", "Wrzód", "Główka" and "Kośba" carried out as part of preparations for the "Burza" operation. It is supplemented with the sub-chapter focused on the functioning of BCh militant groups and Home Army diversion groups commanded by Tadeusz Dziedzic ("Grusza") and Józef Gutkowski ("Kania II") during the German occupation. It also describes the events in which the following persons were killed: Michał Marszał, Władysław Szczepanik, Władysław Mytych, Józef Ciebiera, Józef Bugajski, Franciszek Miś and Józefa Miś.

The principal part of the dissertation is included in the next three chapters, beginning with the description of the emergence of "self-defence" and "retaliation" structures as part of the so-called Second Conspiracy, which took place after the seizure of Rzeszów and the surrounding area by the Red Army in August 1944. The fourth chapter, after the presentation of controversy of passing and executing death sentences by the diversion and liquidation groups, focuses on showing the activity of legendary Rzeszów's sabotage and diversion troops commanded, in sequence, by Stanisław Panek ("Gil"), Wiktor Błazewski ("Orlik") and Kazimierz Dziekoński ("Bruno"), to which the Home Army soldiers residing in the commune of Świlcza belonged. At the same time, the main military operations in which they participated are described. The next sub-chapters present the military formations operating in the area of Świlcza and Głogów Małopolski communes under the Soviet occupation commanded, among others, by: Józef Gutkowski ("Kania II"), Wojciech Kocan ("Mak", "Czarny Sędzia"), Bronisław Mięgała ("Mauser"), as well as the forest group of Franciszek Rejman ("Bicz").

The fifth chapter of the dissertation has a substantive and chronological order and contains the description of numerous self-defence, retaliation and requisition operations. In the first five sub-chapters, it is attempted to describe, as accurately and faithfully as possible, more than 44 events in which the inhabitants of the commune of Świlcza or the surrounding areas died [including, for example, Zenon Kondraszczuk, Władysław Kornak, Władysław Stachowicz, Wiktor Tadeusz Błazewski (“Orlik”), Franciszek Feret, Franciszek Świder (“Morol”), Wojciech Kocan, Stanisław Woźniak, Edward Nowak, Marian Bieszczad, Janina Lis and many others]. In these operations participated members of various military formations, both from the Home Army structures and those outside them, and, in some cases, groups of bandits running rampant in the analysed area. The next sub-chapters present more than a hundred and a dozen or so “expropriation” operations, including those with many physical assaults of private persons and other “disciplining” measures, that took place in the surrounding villages from January 1945 to the end of 1947. The last sub-chapter presents the requisitions of property in public facilities, such as cooperatives, breweries, shops and Milicja Obywatelska (Citizens' Militia) station, from autumn of 1944 to the end of March 1947.

The next, fifth chapter presents the stories of members of militant groups, in particular at the stage of extinguishing their military operations before the people's referendum and after the increased operations of UB (Security Office), MO (Citizens' Militia) and KBW (Internal Security Corps) against them taking place before the Parliamentary election planned for 19 January 1947. Special attention is paid to the consequences of amnesty introduced in the year 1947, including the process of coming forward of persons benefiting from the amnesty.

The seventh chapter is devoted to investigations carried out by the communist security authorities and to court repressions against most of the members of militant groups who did not step forward and were covered by the 1947 amnesty only in part. The study presents 11 criminal court cases, including the description of 2 most publicised criminal cases in which the number of the accused reached 22 (the case of S. Świder and others) or 23 (the case of S. Piela, E. Porada and others).

The last eighth chapter discusses the practical implementation of the Act of 23 February 1991 “on invalidating the judgments passed against persons victimised for activities promoting the independence of the Polish State” (the so-called February Act), on the basis of which a large number of members of the military underground in the commune of Świlcza were rehabilitated. However, among those who applied for invalidating the judgments of the former Military District Court in Rzeszów were people who were denied rehabilitation, as it was found that their acts were unrelated to activities promoting the independence of the Polish state and the perpetrators most probably acted out of purely criminal motives. The courts of free Poland noted that, in many instances, the sacrificed good, that is human life, was disproportionate to the good to be achieved, that is getting rid of persons of different political orientation (e.g. in the case against Bronisław Adamiec).

The second part of the publication contains the author's annex, with the staffing of individual Home Army platoons in the outposts of "Świerk" and "Grab", as well as the list of persons who operated in various military formations in this area, but it has not been confirmed whether they were sworn Home Army soldiers, or whether they remained outside the formal structures of the Polish Underground State. This part also contains many useful tables, including: specification of requisition operations, disciplining operations and robberies; specification of judgments passed by communist courts sentencing members of various militant groups to long-term imprisonment or death penalties; list of some persons who came forward before the Amnesty Commissions from the years 1945 and 1947, as well as list of certain judgments passed by the courts of the Third Republic of Poland in the so-called rehabilitation cases. Moreover, the dissertation also contains extensive bibliography, list of tables, maps and photographs and a useful calendar, as well as the index of surnames with more than 2000 entries and the index of pseudonyms including approx. 1000 entries.

In the final part of the dissertation, there is a list of more than 130 biographical notes, many of which have been prepared and published for the first time, and referred to persons who were related to the commune of Świlcza in various respects. In most cases, they were Home Army soldiers or members of local BCh formations, social or party activists from the area, or persons born or living in this area.

In the remaining portion of the dissertation, several dozen more abbreviated biographical notes are included in numerous (1231) footnotes.

The dissertation ends with extensive bibliography, preceded with scans of archive documents obtained from the Rzeszów Branch of the Institute of National Remembrance, and, as mentioned above, a useful index of surnames and pseudonyms.