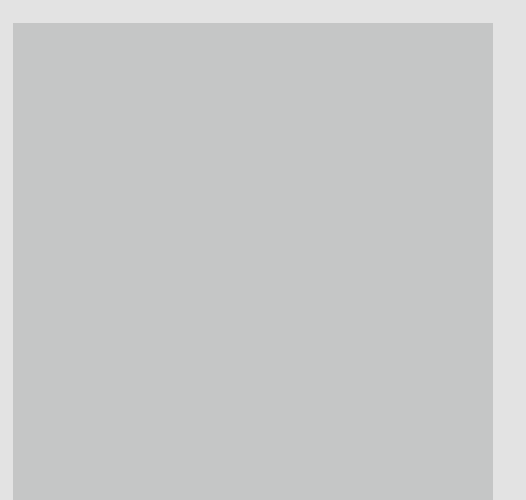
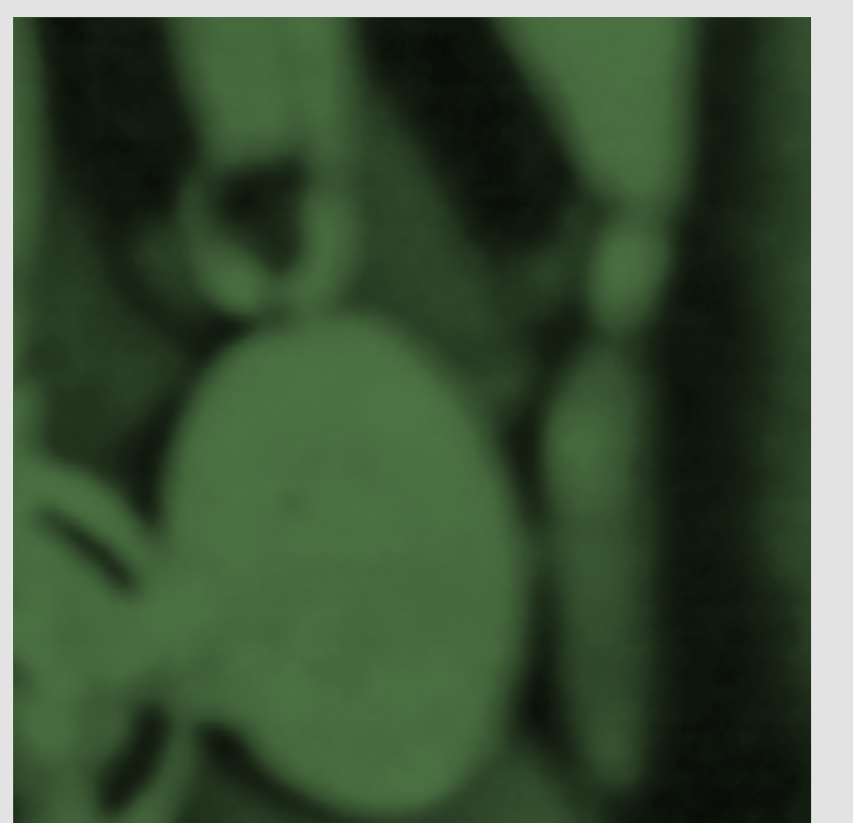


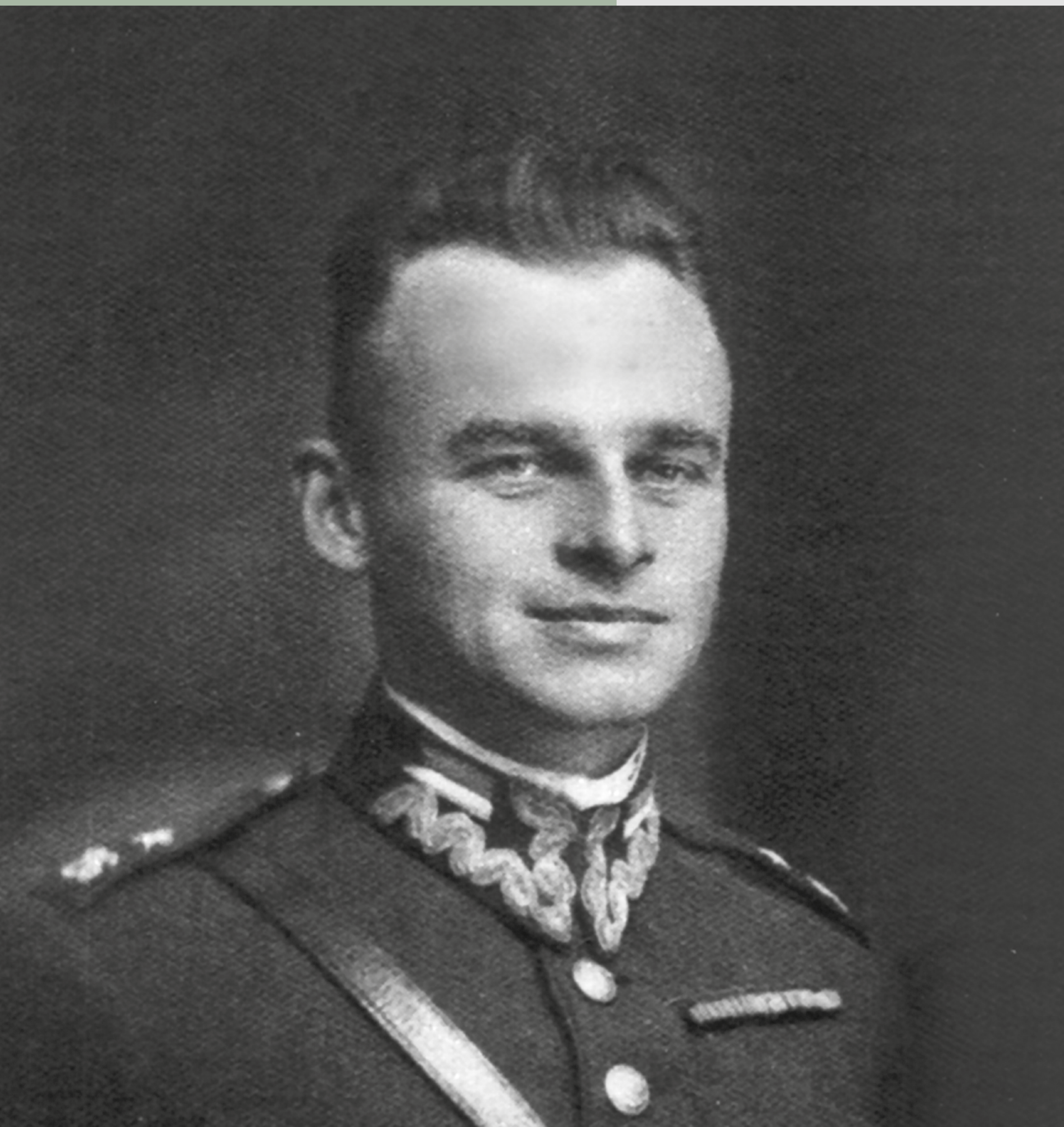
Witold Pilecki



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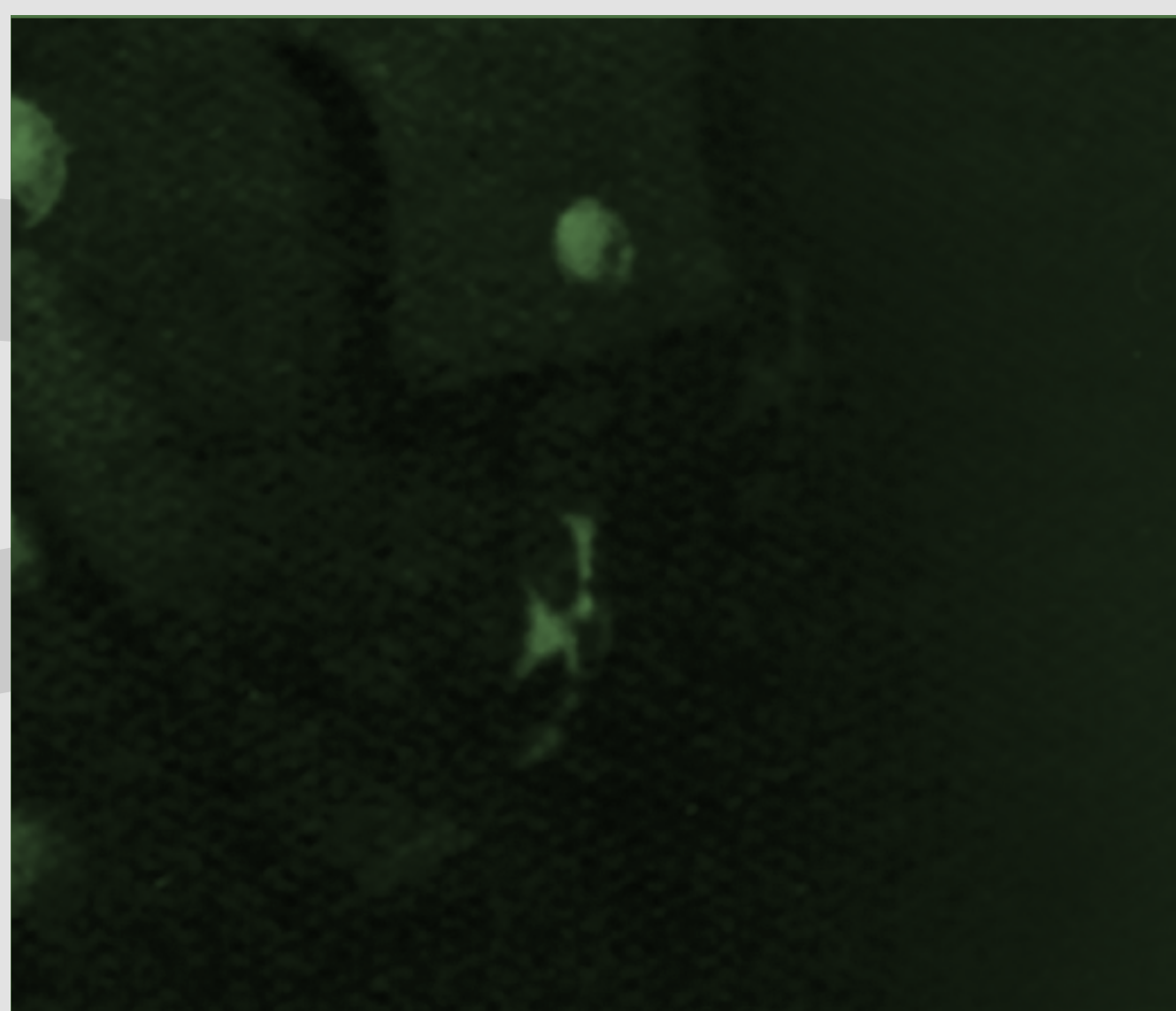
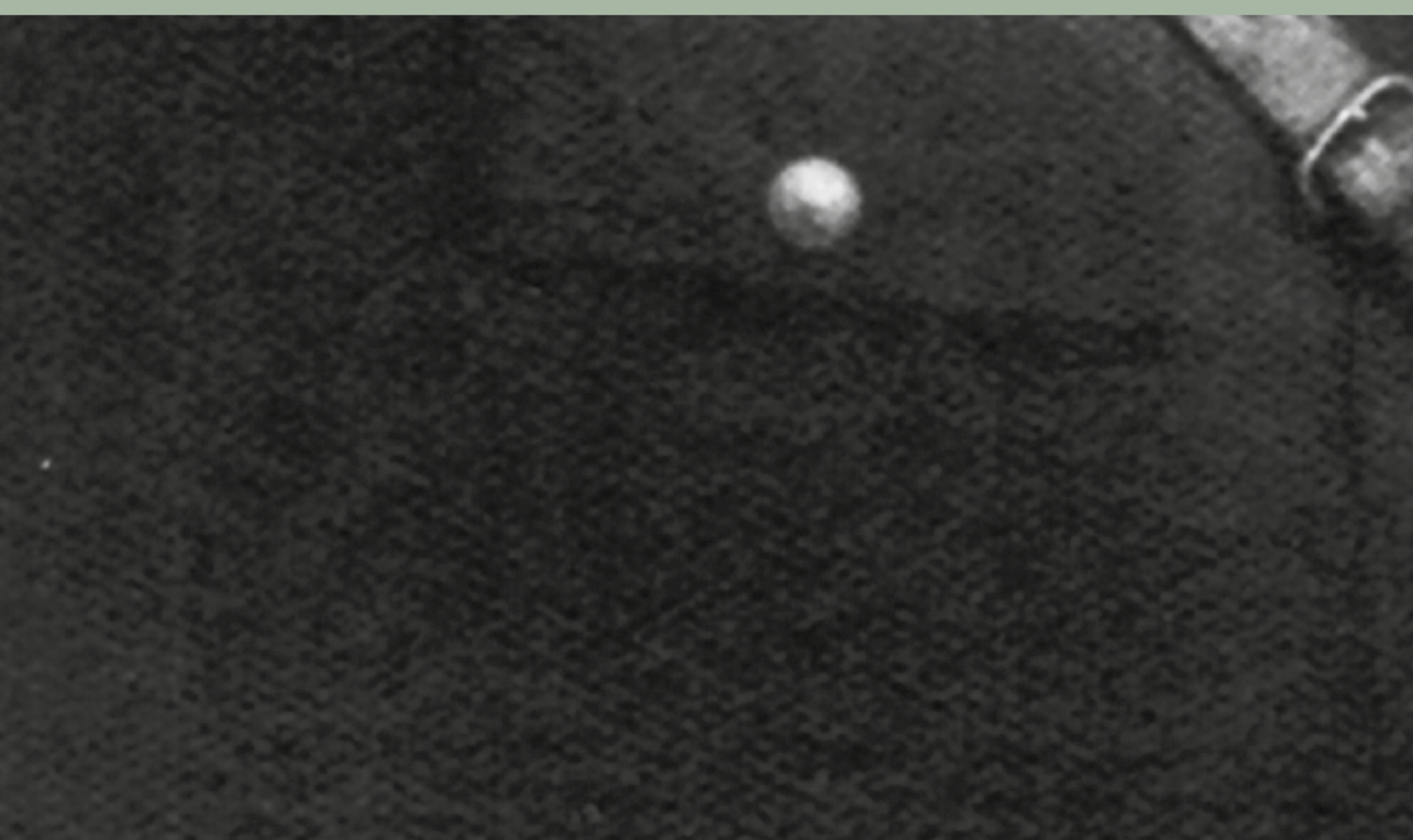
**BIOGRAFIE
WYSTAWY
ELEMENTARNE**

Cavalry Captain



Witold Pilecki is one of the bravest heroes of World War II. He came from a noble family of the Leliwa coat of arms. His grandfather, Józef Pilecki, was exiled to Siberia for taking part in the January Uprising, and the family property in the area of Novogradok (Nowogródek) was partially confiscated. Witold Pilecki was born on 13 May 1901 in Olonets (Ołonec), Russia, where his father, Julian, was a forester. In 1910, he moved to Vilnius (Wilno) with his mother and siblings.

- ← The portrait of Witold Pilecki wearing a uniform
- 📍 The collection of the Pilecki family



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1918

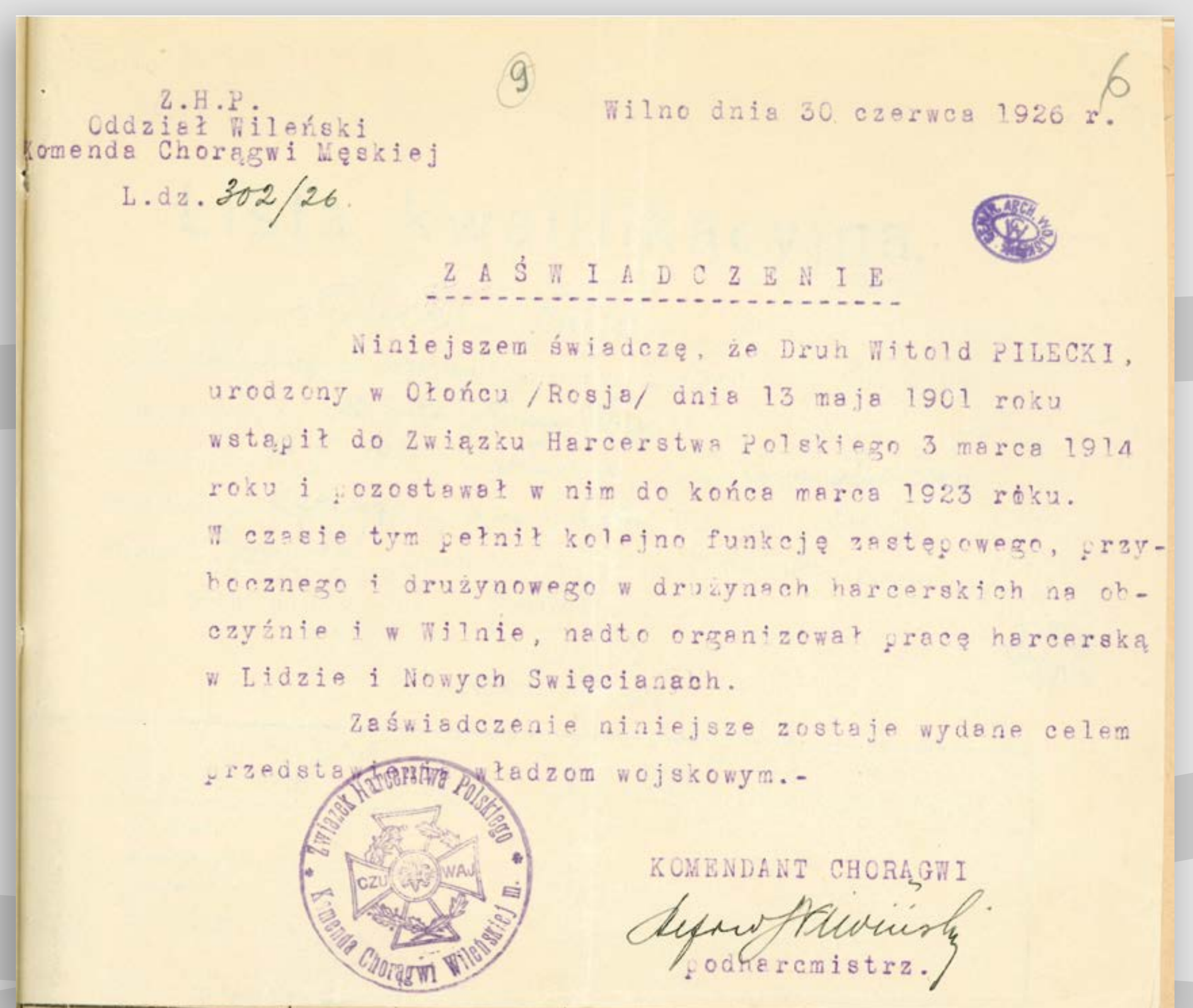
The scout from Vilnius

When he was young, Witold grew up in Vilnius, where, as a student at the Joachim Lelewel Gymnasium, he became involved in the Scout Movement. In 1914, he joined the underground Polish Scouting and Guiding Association. On 20 December 1918, together with a group of scouts, he joined the Self-Defence units in Vilnius, which took over the city on New Year's Eve 1918. He defended Vilnius against the Bolshevik army. In 1919, he established the 8th Vilnius Scout Troop. His adventure with scouting lasted until 1923.



↑ Scouting cross
from the collection of Tomasz Sikorski

↑ Witold Pilecki as a scout (first on the right), Oryol (Orzeł) town by the Oka River (Russia), 1917
The collection of the Pilecki family



↑ Certificate for scout activities of Witold Pilecki
CAW (Central Military Archives)



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The Borderlander



↑ Badge of 13th Ulan Regiment
 📄 Public domain

← The entry of Polish troops into Vilnius in April 1919
 📄 CAW

On the night of 5-6 January 1919, the Vilnius Self-Defense units were forced by the Bolshevik army to leave Vilnius. Young Pilecki joined the Vilnius Self-Defense cavalry detachment commanded by brothers Władysław and Jerzy (renowned as “Łupaszka”) Dąmbrowski. He fought with that unit, which was reorganised into the 13th Ulan Regiment later on, throughout 1919, and participated in almost all major battles - he fought in Brest (Brześć), Lida, Baranowicze and Minsk (Mińsk Litewski), inter alia. Demobilised in the autumn of 1919, he continued his education.



← Leaders of the partisan unit commanded by the Dąmbrowski brothers. Cavalry Captain Jerzy Dąmbrowski “Łupaszka” sits on the right
 📄 CAW

↑ Cavalry of the partisan unit commanded by the Dąmbrowski brothers, 1919
 📄 CAW



***I have found joy knowing that
I wanted to fight.***

↑ Pilecki - a student at the Joachim Lelewel
Gymnasium, 1919

📷 The collection of the Pilecki family



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1920

The Battle of Warsaw

In July 1920, being aware of the Bolshevik threat approaching from the east, Witold Pilecki re-joined the army. He went to Warsaw, where he met Captain Jerzy Dąmbrowski, and on 12 August 1920, he joined the 211th Niemen Uhlan Regiment. He fought in Płock, Mława, Chorzele, Druskininkai (Druskiniki), Stowbtsy (Stołpce) and Dzyarzhynsk (Kojdanów) inter alia.

In October 1920, together with his regiment, he participated in the Vilnius expedition commanded by General Lucjan Żeligowski. After the end of the Vilnius campaign, on 1 January 1921, the senior lancer Witold Pilecki was released from the army to continue his education.



↑ Granting orders to distinguished lancers, 1921
 📌 CAW

→ Silver Cross of Merit
 📌 Public domain

→ Commemorative Medal For the War 1918-1921
 📌 from the collection of Tomasz Sikorski

→ Army of Central Lithuania Cross of Merit
 📌 Museum of the Polish Army

↓ Cavalry troopers during a reconnaissance, 1920
 📌 CAW



↑ Cavalry marching out of Warsaw, 1920
 📌 CAW



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1921

The guardian of the Polish borderlands

In February 1921, Witold Pilecki joined the National Security Association (ZBK), where he attended a non-commissioned officer course and became the commandant-instructor of the ZBK unit in Švenčionėliai (Nowe Święciany).

He also began his studies at the Stefan Batory University, at the Faculty of Fine Arts. Due to the difficult financial situation of his family, he was forced to stop his education and, in September 1926, he became the owner of his family's estate in Sukurcze.

In 1926, was promoted to the rank of Second Lieutenant. Almost every year, he participated in the drills of the 26th Greater Poland Uhlan Regiment in Baranowicze, and from 1931, he took part in the drills in the Cavalry Training Centre in Grudziądz.



→ Witold Pilecki in front of the house in Sukurcze with his dog Neron
📷 The collection of the Pilecki family



↖ Pilecki wearing the uniform of the National Security Association
📷 The collection of the Pilecki family

↑ Youth Rally of the Lida District
📷 The collection of the Pilecki family



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Family

At the turn of 1929 and 1930, Witold Pilecki met his future wife, Maria Ostrowska from Ostrów Mazowiecka, a young primary school teacher in the nearby village of Krupa. On 7 April 1931, the young couple got married and settled down in Sukurcze, where, in 1932, their son Andrzej was born, and a year later their daughter Zofia.



↑ Wedding portrait of Maria and Witold Pilecki, 7 April 1931

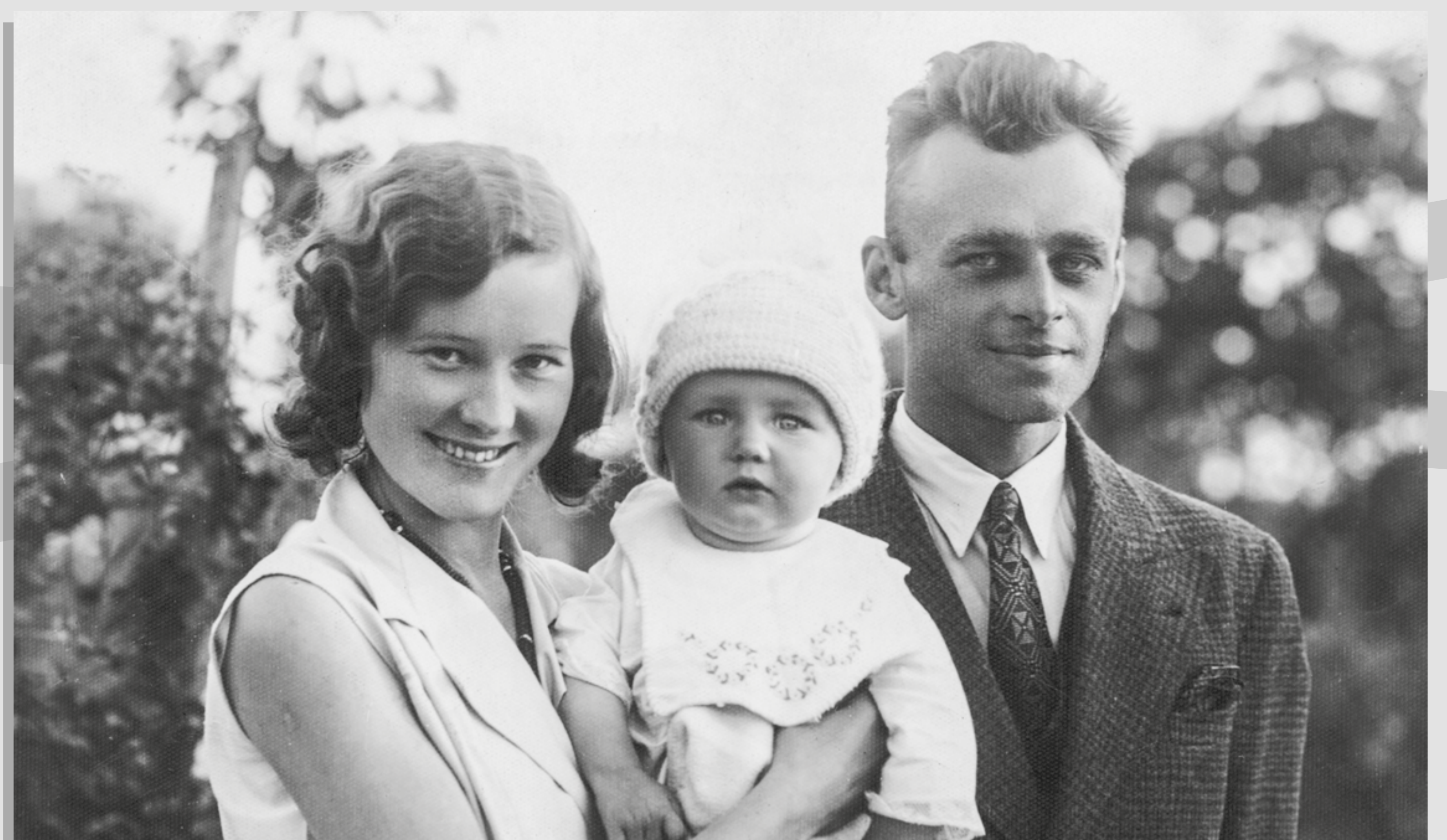
📷 The collection of the Pilecki family

➤ Maria and Witold Pilecki with their son Andrzej and daughter Zofia, Sukurcze, 1934

📷 The collection of the Pilecki family

➔ Maria and Witold Pilecki with their son Andrzej, 1932

📷 The collection of the Pilecki family



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1939

September



← Witold Pilecki 1939
📷 The collection of the Pilecki family

↓ Cavalry in action
📷 CAW

At the outbreak of World War II, Witold Pilecki fought in the cavalry squadron of the 19th Polish Infantry Division of “Prusy” Army in Piotrków and Tomaszów Mazowiecki, inter alia. After the destruction of the unit in the region of Wolbórz, he crossed the Vistula River and joined the 41st Infantry Division formed near Włodawa. He was appointed a divisional second-in-command of a unit under Jan Włodarkiewicz, the Division Cavalry Commander. After difficult battles, on 22 September 1939, the division was defeated. Witold Pilecki and his lancers, as a partisan unit, fought until 17 October 1939.



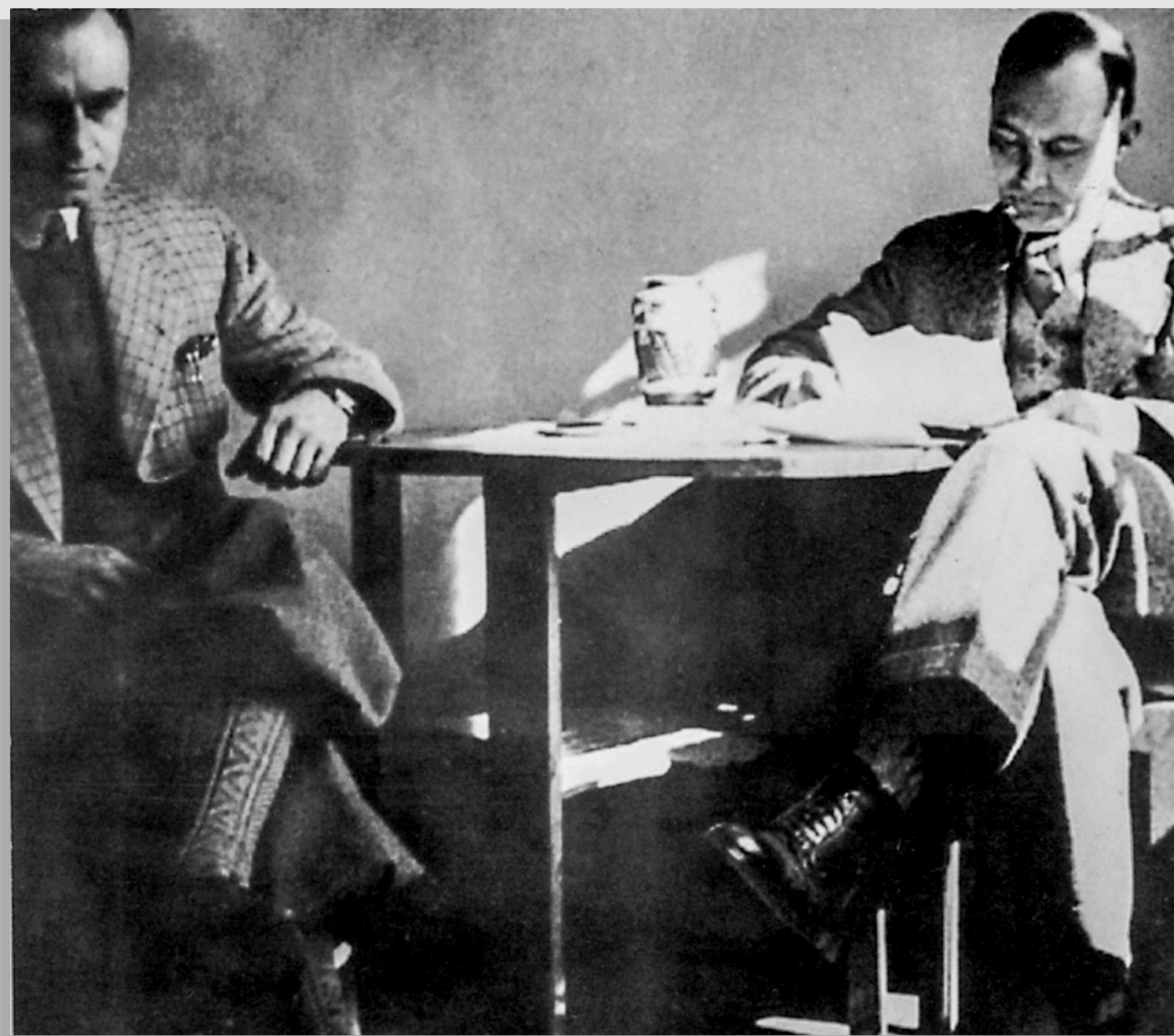
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1939

The Secret Polish Army

After reaching Warsaw, which was occupied by Germany, Second Lieutenant Witold Pilecki contacted Major Jan Włodarkiewicz to establish an underground organisation to continue the fight for independence. On 9 November 1939, during a meeting in the apartment of Eleonora Ostrowska, a sister-in-law of Second Lieutenant Pilecki, a decision was made to create a military underground organisation - the Secret Polish Army (TAP). The following day the conspirators took the organisational oath.

Major Jan Włodarkiewicz "Drawicz" became the commander of TAP, while Second Lieutenant Witold Pilecki "Witold" took the position of the inspector of the organisational unit and chief of staff. In Warsaw, Witold Pilecki was hiding under a nickname Tomasz Serafiński.



↑ Witold Pilecki with Major Włodarkiewicz
📷 The collection of the Pilecki family



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1940

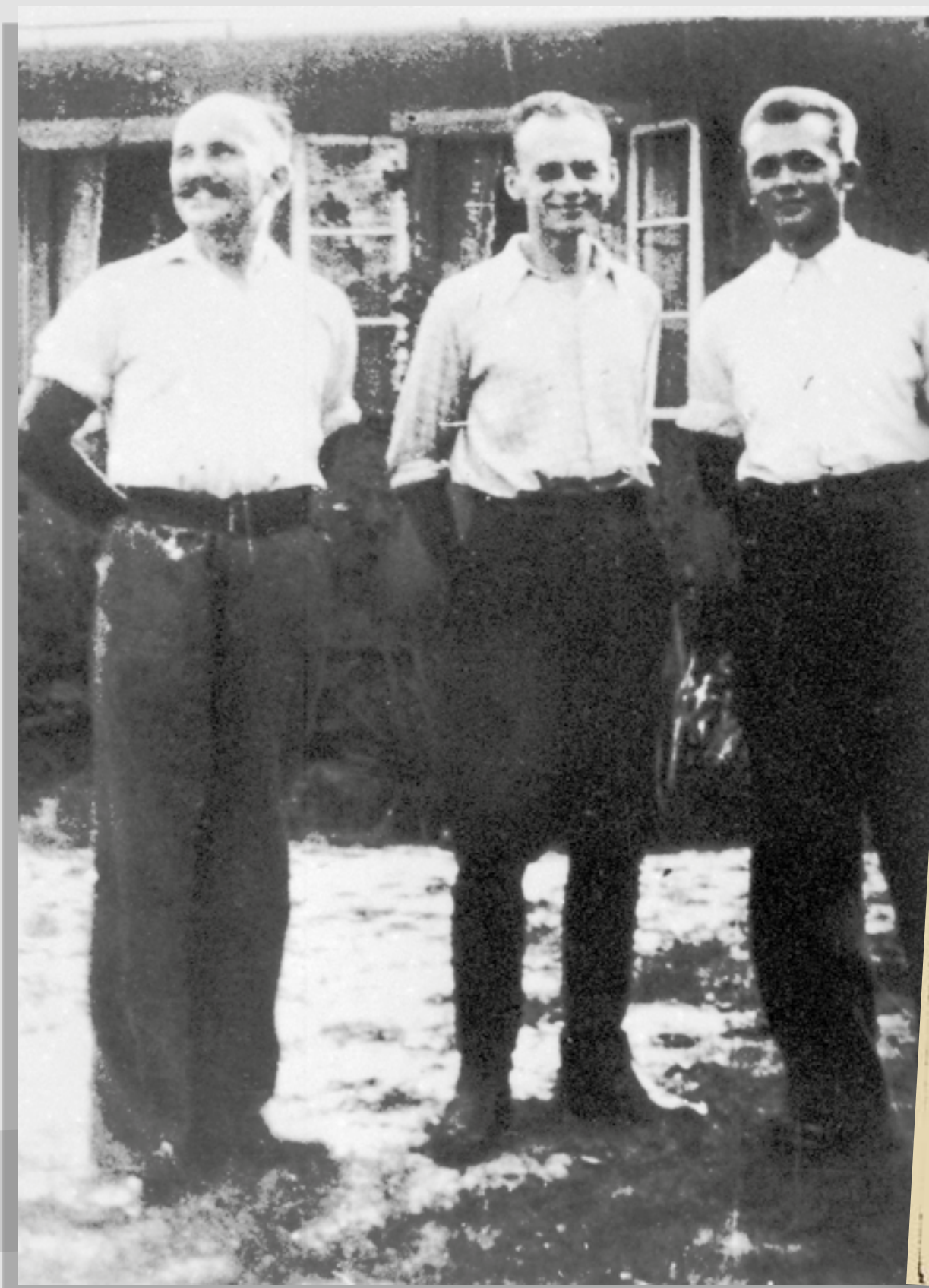
A volunteer to Auschwitz

Witold Pilecki allowed himself to be arrested during a round-up in Żoliborz in Warsaw. He was brought to Auschwitz in a transport on the night of 21 to 22 September 1940. He was assigned a camp number 4859. The first message from Auschwitz, describing the conditions in the camp, was sent by Pilecki to Warsaw in October 1940.

In the camp, in 1942, he organised an underground Military Organisation Union of over 500 people. He also submitted reports, on regular basis, to the headquarters of the Home Army. In spring of 1943, Witold Pilecki escaped the camp. For his heroic activity in the Auschwitz camp, Lieutenant Witold Pilecki was promoted to the rank of cavalry captain.



↑ Second Lieutenant Witold Pilecki as Tomasz Serafiński - the prisoner in the Auschwitz Concentration Camp no. 4859
 📍 The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum



↑ Escapees from Auschwitz: Jan Redzej, Lieutenant Witold Pilecki and Edward Ciesielski, Nowy Wiśnicz, summer 1943
 📍 The collection of the Pilecki family

KL: *Auschwitz* 22a

Matrik.-Nr.: **4859**

Häftlings-Personal-Karte

Fam.-Name: <i>Serafiński</i>	am: _____	an KL: _____	Personen-Beschreibung:
Vorname: <i>Witold</i>	am: _____	an KL: _____	Größe: _____ cm
Geb. am: <i>18.11.1902</i> in <i>Bochnia</i>	am: _____	an KL: _____	Gestalt: _____
Stand: <i>Offizier</i>	am: _____	an KL: _____	Gesicht: _____
Wohnort: <i>Warschau</i>	am: _____	an KL: _____	Augen: _____
Strasse: <i>Kelzimir-Str. 47</i>	am: _____	an KL: _____	Nase: _____
Religion: <i>r.-kat.</i> Staatsang. <i>an Teb</i>	am: _____	an KL: _____	Mund: _____
Wohnort d. Angehörigen: _____	am: _____	an KL: _____	Ohren: _____
Eingewiesen am: _____	am: _____	an KL: _____	Zähne: _____
durch: _____	am: _____	an KL: _____	Haare: _____
in KL: _____	am: _____	an KL: _____	Sprache: _____
Grund: _____	am: _____	an KL: _____	Bes. Kennzeichen: _____
Vorstrafen: _____	am: _____	an KL: _____	Charakt.-Eigenschaften: _____
	Entlassung:	durch KL: _____	Sicherheit b. Einsatz: _____
	mit Verfügung v: _____		Körperliche Verfassung: _____
Grund: _____	Strafen im Lager:	Bemerkung: <i>geflohener</i>	
	Art: _____	23.4.43	

↑ Prisoner registration card of Tomasz Serafiński - the prisoner in the Auschwitz Concentration Camp no. 4859. His real name was Witold Pilecki
 📍 The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum



↑ Entrance gate to the Auschwitz Concentration Camp
 📍 The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum



↑ Camp barracks in the Auschwitz Concentration Camp
 📍 The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum



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Many times, while staying in Auschwitz, (...) we said that if any of us got out of there alive it would be a miracle, and it would be difficult for that person to communicate with the people who lived normal life during that time.

1944

The Warsaw Uprising



← A flag on the Tourist House during the Warsaw Uprising

📍 The Warsaw Uprising Museum

↓ Post office

📍 The Warsaw Uprising Museum



↑ Post office during the Warsaw Uprising

📍 The Warsaw Uprising Museum

In 1944, the leaders of the Home Army started preparations for the creation of an underground organisation under a code-name “NIE”, the purpose of which was to continue the fight after the occupation of Polish territory by the Red Army. Captain Witold Pilecki was also directed to supervise the organisational works. Those activities were interrupted by the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising. Initially, Witold Pilecki fought as a common soldier of the “Chrobry II Battalion” but with time he revealed his rank and became the deputy, and then, the commander of the 2nd company of the 1st battalion. He fought in Wola in the area of Towarowa, Pańska, Żelazna streets and near Starynkiewicz Square. The region defended by Witold Pilecki became known as “Witold’s Redoubt” and was one of the longest defended insurgent strongholds, never taken over by the Germans.



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1944

In the Polish 2nd Corps

After the fall of the Uprising on 5 October 1944, Captain Witold Pilecki, together with the soldiers of the “Chrobry II Battalion”, was taken to the camp in Ożarów, from where he was transported to the Lamsdorf war camp (Łambinowice near Opole), and then to the Oflag Murnau war camp.

After the liberation of the camp by American troops on 28 April 1945, Captain Witold Pilecki stayed there for a few more weeks and prepared to join the Polish 2nd Corps in Italy. On 9 July 1945, together with a group of officers, he left Murnau and joined the army two days later.

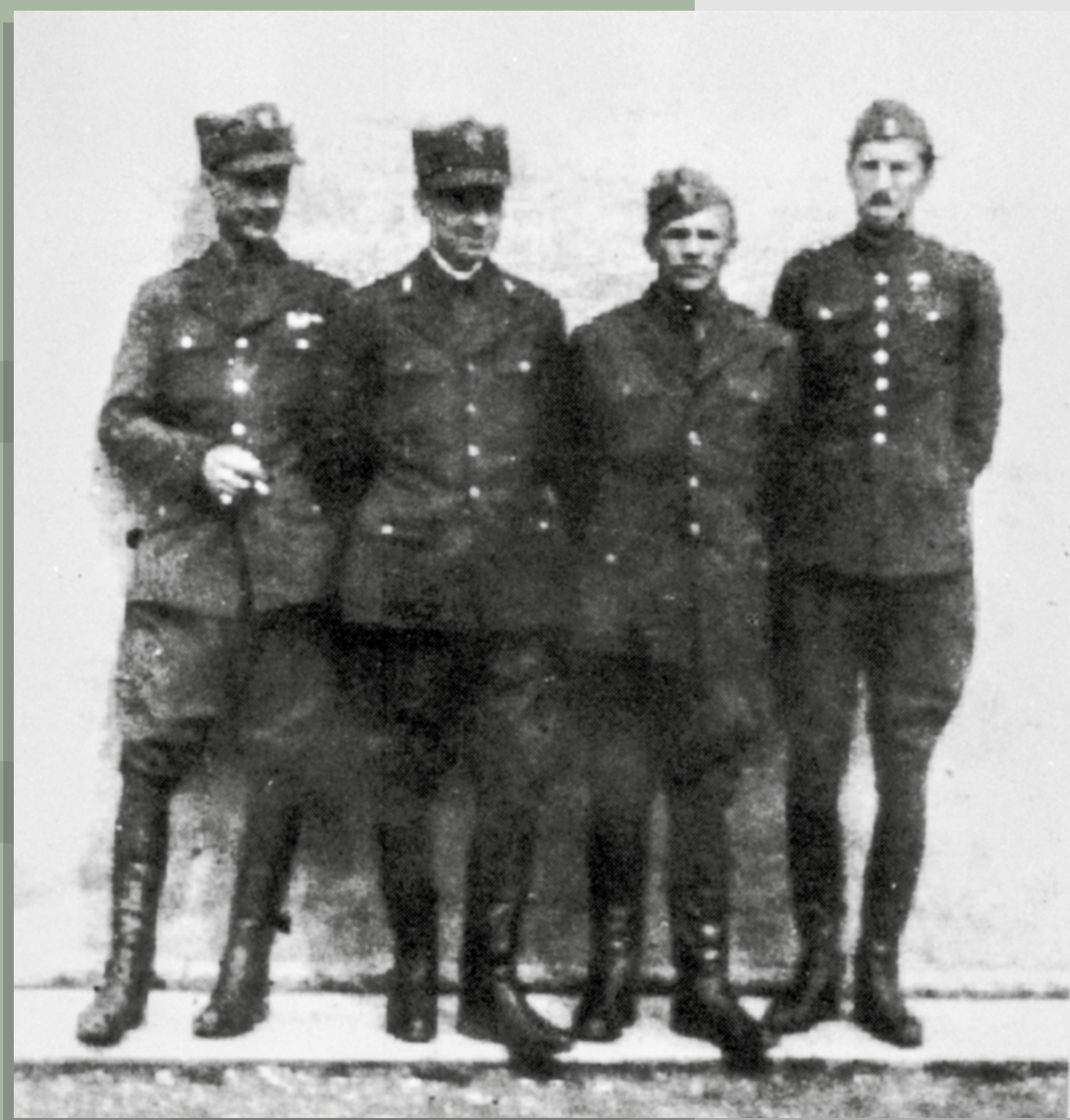


↑ Badge of the Polish 2nd Corps
📍 The Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance (AIPN)



↑ Witold Pilecki in Rome, 1945.
📍 The collection of the Pilecki family

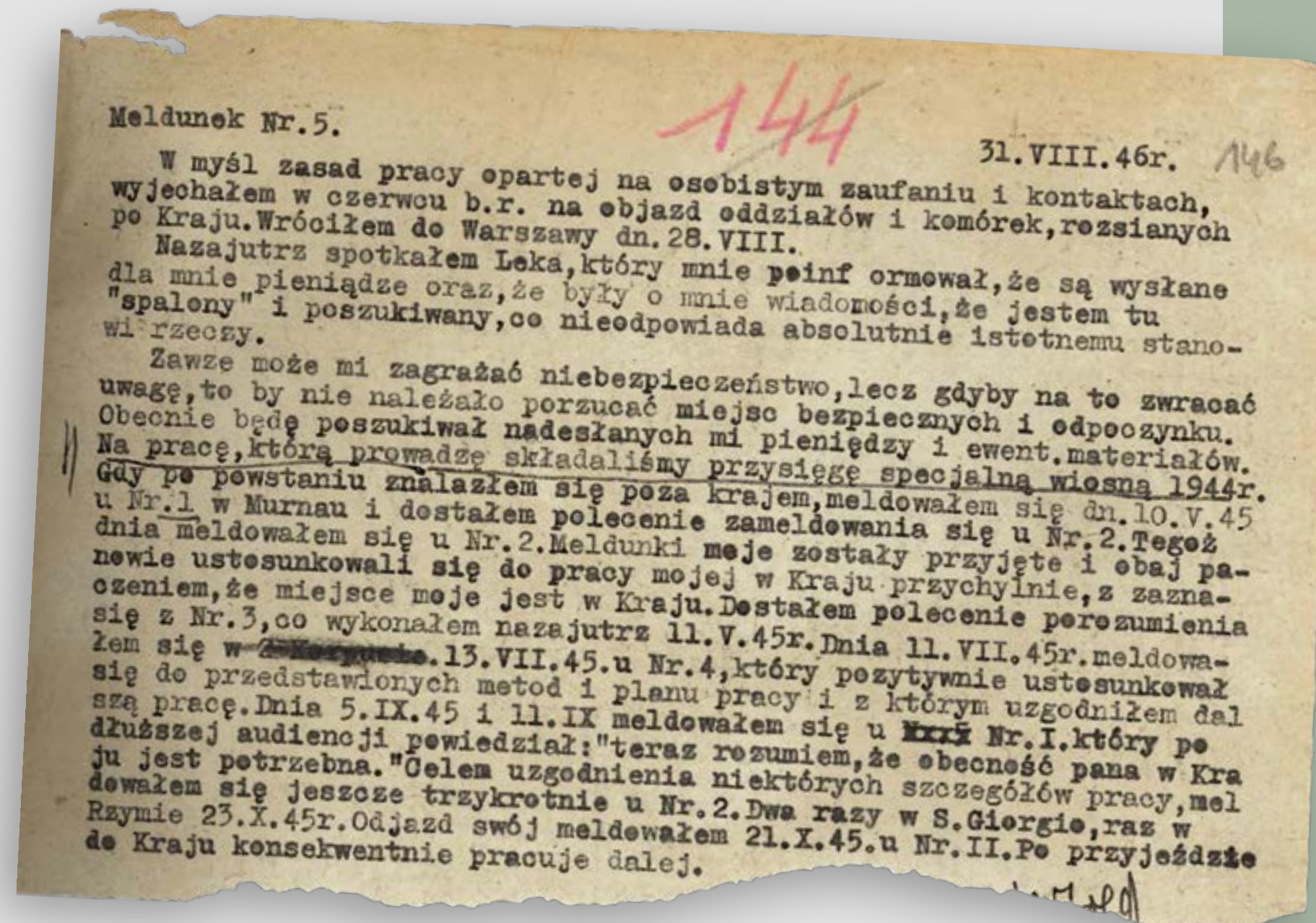
← Witold Pilecki after his liberation from Murnau
📍 The collection of the Pilecki family



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1945

Espionage for Anders



↑ Pilecki's report from Poland for the West, 1946

📄 AIPN

← Witold Pilecki after 1946

📄 The collection of the Pilecki family

In 1945, Witold Pilecki became the officer of the 2nd division of the Polish 2nd Corps and was preparing for a transfer to Poland. His task was to organise an intelligence network to collect any information about the situation in the country. On 22 October 1945, he went to Poland as "Roman Jezierski".

In Warsaw, he created his own network of associates and informants. He gathered secret information about the activities of the NKVD and the Security Office (UB), the growing terror, the activities of the armed independence underground, the election manipulation and the economic cooperation of Poland and Soviet Union. All reports were sent to the headquarters of the Polish 2nd Corps in Italy.



↑ General Berling's soldiers parade, Warsaw 1945

📄 National Digital Archives



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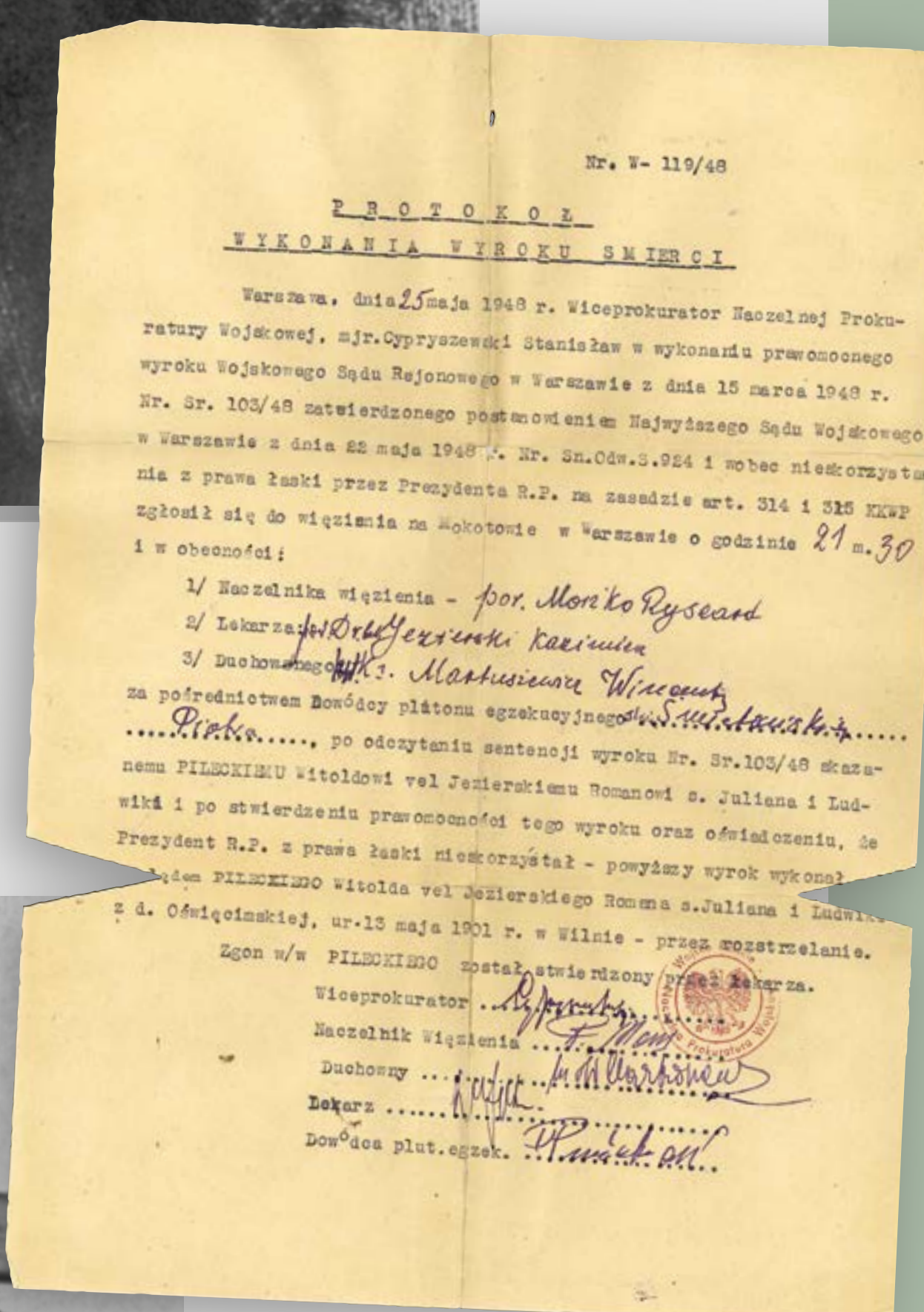
1947

Trial and death



↑ Captain Witold Pilecki as a prisoner in the Mokotów Prison in Warsaw, 1947

📄 AIPN



Captain Witold Pilecki was arrested by officers of the Security Office on 8 May 1947. He was immediately subjected to an extremely cruel investigation, which was personally supervised by Colonel Józef Różański.

The trial of Witold Pilecki and his companions, initiated on 3 March 1948, conducted by the Military Regional Court in Warsaw, lasted nearly two weeks. The communist court sentenced Pilecki to death. President Bolesław Bierut did not exercise his right of clemency.

Pilecki was executed on 25 May 1948 at 9.30 p.m. in the Mokotów Prison at ul Rakowiecka 37 in Warsaw - with a shot to the back of the head. The executioner was Sergeant Piotr Śmietański.

↖ Protocol of the execution of the death sentence on Captain Witold Pilecki of 25 May 1948

📄 AIPN



↑ Witold Pilecki's group in the dock

📄 National Digital Archives



→ View of the Mokotów Prison
📄 The collection of Jacek Pawłowicz



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***I tried to live my life in such a way
that at the hour of my death
I would rather rejoice than fear.***

↑ The dock, March 1948
📷 National Digital Archives



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Search and Commemoration

Only in 1990, after the fall of communism in Poland, the family of Witold Pilecki learned the truth about the circumstances of the death of the Captain. In 2012, Prof. Krzysztof Szwagrzyk and his team carried out the first exhumations of the victims of the Mokotów Prison who were secretly buried in the „Ł” section of the Powązki Military Cemetery.

Witold Pilecki was posthumously awarded the Auschwitz Cross in November 1988, and the Warsaw Uprising Cross - in September 1990. In January 1995, “the volunteer to Auschwitz” posthumously received the Commander’s Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta. In July 2006, President Lech Kaczyński, in recognition of his merits and devotion to the cause of the Fatherland, posthumously awarded Captain Witold Pilecki with the Order of the White Eagle.

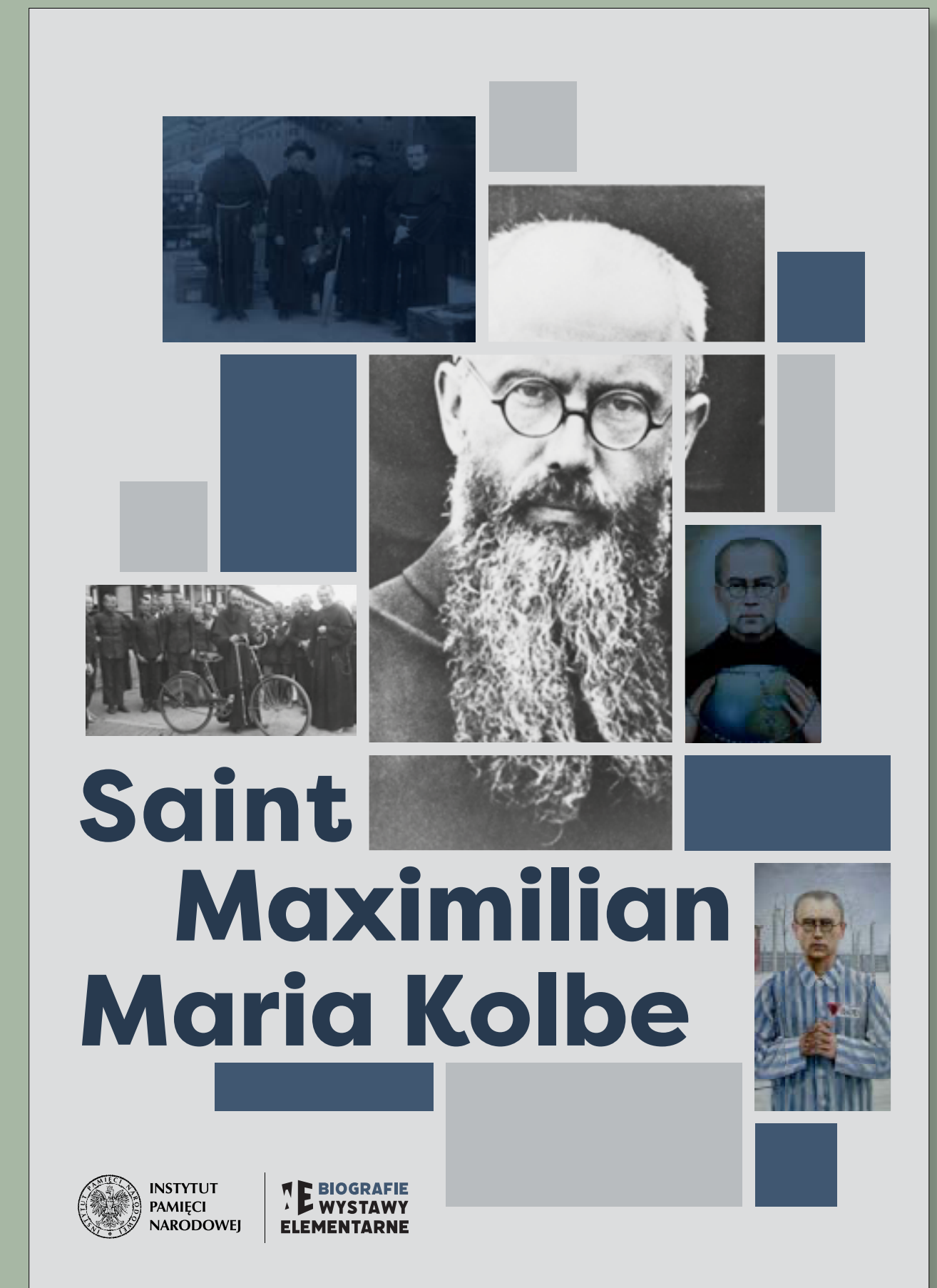
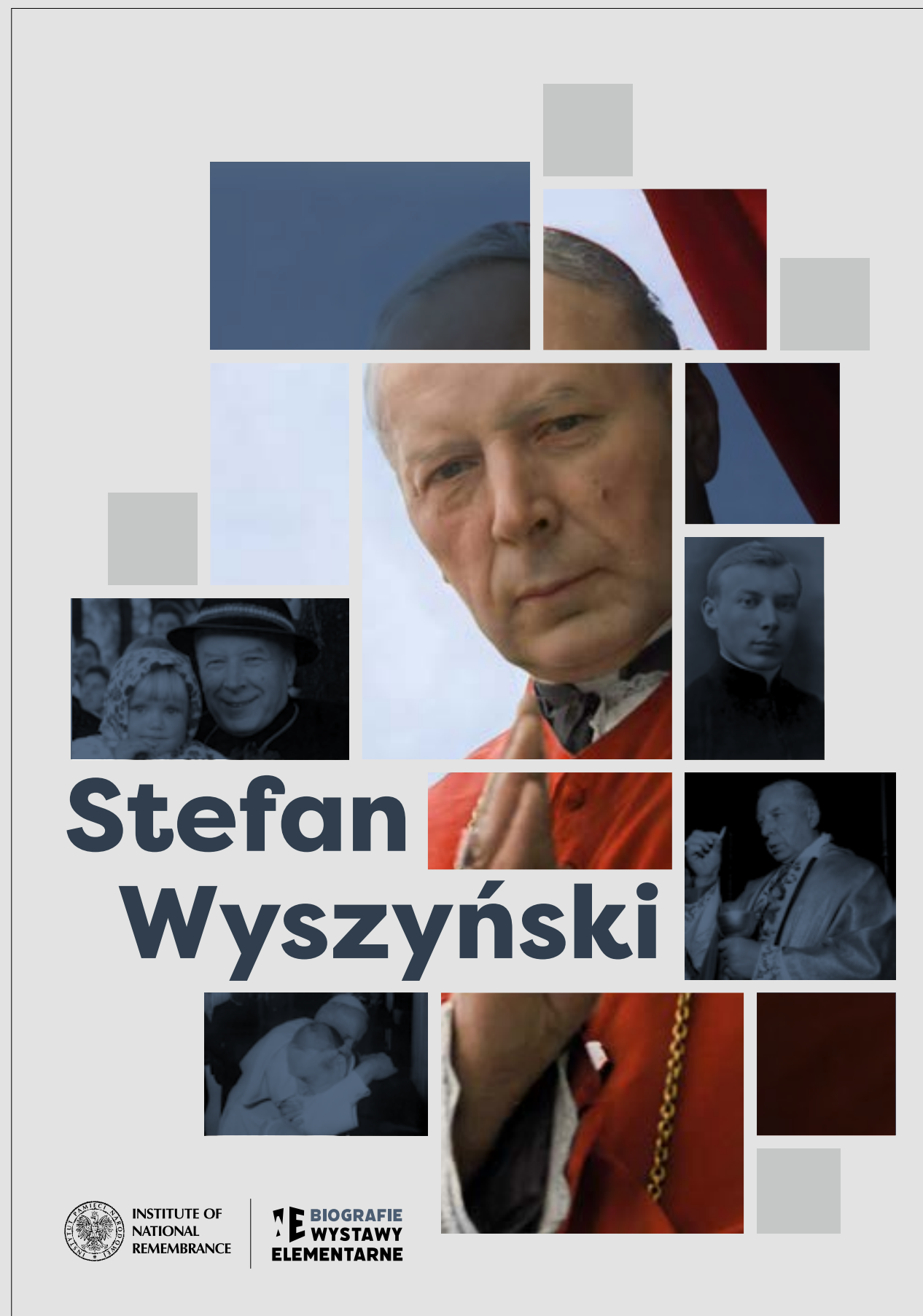


↑ Exhumations in the „Ł” section of the Powązki Military Cemetery
📍 Piotr Życieński

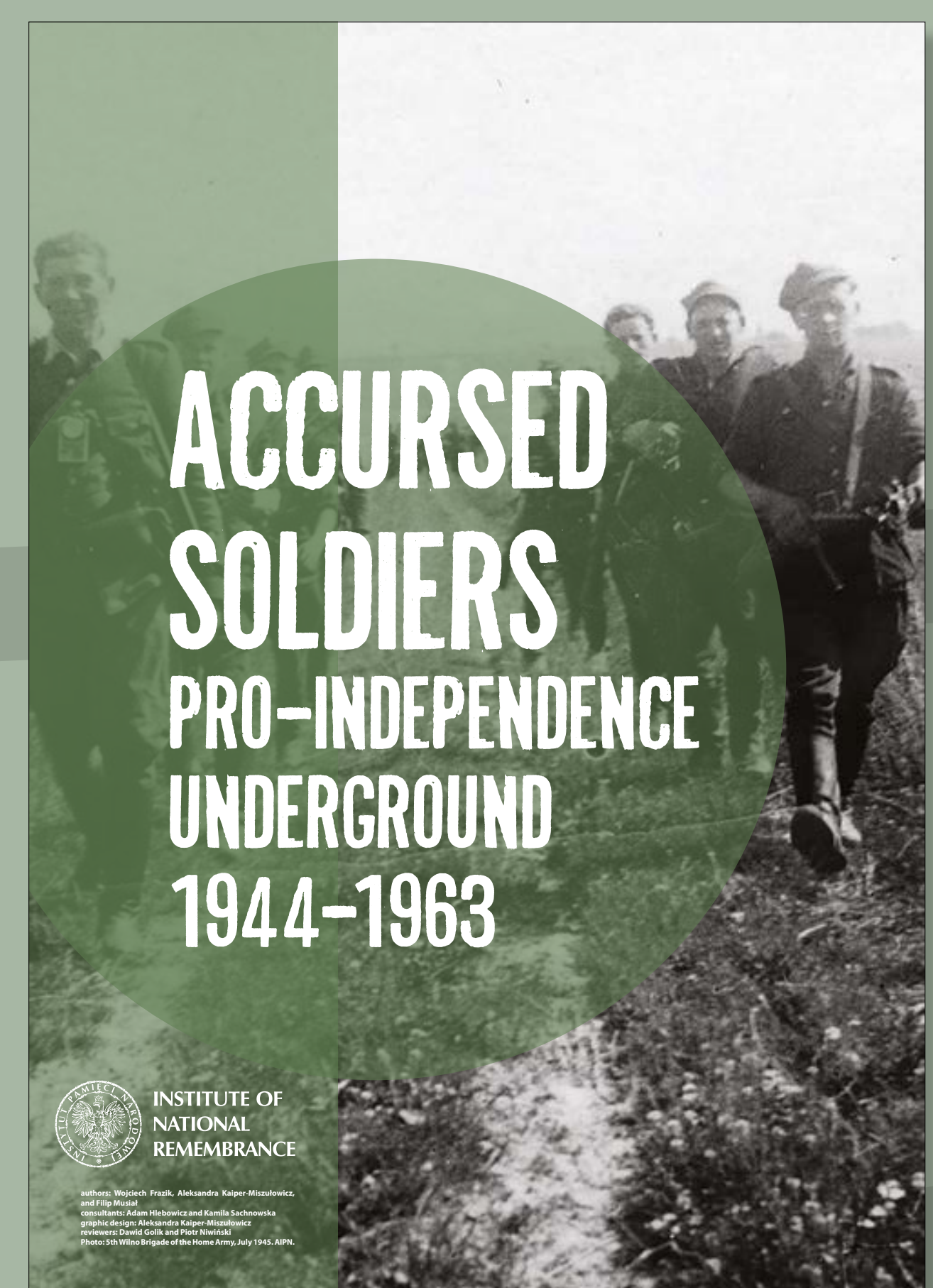


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