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## Emotions around the Blue Police stem from the lack of knowledge about the war - M. Korkuć, Ph.D.

Emotions around the Blue Policemen stem from an increasing lack of knowledge about the war. People confuse the nationality of the officers with the core of the service. Policemen were evaluated in terms of their service to the Germans irrespective of their nationality – says Maciej Korkuć Ph.D., a historian from the Polish Institute of National Remembrance in Kraków, in an interview for the Polish National Press Agency PAP.



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**Polish National Press Agency: The Police force, popularly named blue or navy blue for the colour of their uniforms, for years has given rise to many emotions. What was this service like actually?**

**Maciej Korkuć Ph.D.:** The Blue Police, or the *polnische Polizei* – the Polish Police force of the General Government, was formally created by the leaders of the General Government in December of 1939 and formed a part of the structures of the German *Ordnungspolizei*, the regular police force. Hence, this service was created by the German Reich and was obliged to serve it. It had nothing in common with the Polish state – it was not a continuation of the State Police from before the war, but a new German service. The actual Polish police was reconstructed underground, as the National Security Corps, *Państwowy Korpus Bezpieczeństwa*.

In the General Government, Germans needed thousands of people to implement the regulations of the German administration. Selected to be sent there were 'racially German' police and *gendarmes* officers, but – to increase their effectiveness – services were also created made up of 'inferior race' members.

The core of the Blue Police consisted of Poles, but Ukrainians and *Volksdeutsche* also served with the force. Beside it, a separate Ukrainian Auxiliary Police was created, and the ghettos had a 'police' force made up of Jews, named the *Jüdischer Ordnungsdienst*, the Jewish security service. These were volunteer-based organisations.

The Germans wanted to make use of pre-war Polish police personnel; however, they were not trusted – hence, not even the most rudimentary structures across the GG or its districts were created using Poles. Just in case, they were only made members of the lowest ranks, tasked with pure execution of orders of the German *gendarmarie*, and – in larger cities – of the *Schutzpolizei* and the German district captains [*Kreishauptmann*]. The highest post in the Blue Police was the county or municipal commander, in actuality only able to organise the work, without any true decision-making power. The entirety of these structures was decentralised and subordinated to higher ranks that were ‘racially’ German.

Emotions surrounding the ‘Blues’ stem from ever-more limited knowledge about the war. People confuse the nationality of the officers with the core of the service. Policemen were evaluated in terms of service to the Germans – irrespective of whether they were Poles, *Volksdeutsche* or Ukrainians. Jews from the *Jüdischer Ordnungsdienst* were assessed for their service to the Germans. The nationality of officers inducted into the service does not change the original controlling state. If people from many nationalities were inducted into the *Wehrmacht*, these were still units of the German Reich, subordinate to the German order, to the given service and any other structure.

Even as the Germans used pre-war uniform materials – this does not change anything, and is sometimes the cause of illusions.

**PAP: Where did the blue police come from? What can we say**

## **about the motives that drove those entering this service?**

**Maciej Korkuć :**First of all, those who were policemen before the war were forced into the service. At the outset of the war, the Germans declared that every policeman is to report to the nearest local German authority office, under threat of the most severe punishment. Those who reported in did not know what the occupation would look like in the coming years. Some still remembered the German occupation from the First World War – which was entirely different. Everyone was obliged to declare that they abandon the oath made to the Polish state before the war.

The ‘Blue’ ranks were also joined by Ukrainians, and, as time went by, Poles as well, who never before served in any Police force, yet who volunteered. The latter were most commonly driven by base motives. They joined the ranks of the eager beavers who were very active in fulfilling German orders, also those aimed against the civilian population of various nationalities. The status of a *Volksdeutscher* was the key to advancement or a transfer to the German *gendarmerie*. For instance, the criminal Kazimierz Nowak was a *Volksdeutscher*; he commanded a *Jagdkommando* in German service, and murdered Jews, Poles and Roma. In the name of Poland, the Polish Home Army carried out his death sentence.

## **PAP: Did the tasks of this service change as the occupation progressed in later years?**

**Maciej Korkuć:** Just as the activities of the Reich and the occupation

policy changed, the tasks to be done changed as well. With time, Germans executed more and more actions against conspirators, underground units and the Polish and Jewish civilian population. They had their 'blue' servants to do this – I know this is a colloquialism, but it's a suitable one.

**PAP: Blue policemen also participated in exterminating Polish nationals, bringing people to do forced labour or bring in food quotas...**

**Maciej Korkuć:** Those who were eager were truly feared by the people. Many saw in the new circumstances many opportunities for bribery, extortions, and the confiscation of sought-after goods, including food. They were a part of all these pathologies and abuses that German *gendarmes* also participated in, who also revelled in their impunity and exhibited greed, etc. But they had the advantage that they knew Polish and the local customs.

**PAP: Blue police also participated in German actions against Jews...**

**Maciej Korkuć:** As the ghettos were closed down, the 'Blues' were generally used by Germans for auxiliary services, guarding ghetto walls, surrounding specific areas. Then Germans demanded that they independently capture Jews in hiding and those who perpetrated any illegal activity. Some did it with engagement and murdered those caught. This wasn't any sort of rare occasion; those were the orders and expectations of their German superiors.

Anybody who participated in the crimes, knew what they were doing. And they knew that the Reich would protect, praise or reward them, and that Poland would punish them. Many believed that the Reich would win the war, that it would protect and reward its eager officers.

### **PAP: What was the society's assessment of this service?**

**Maciej Korkuć:** The 'Blues' were in general hated, treated with contempt, as 'German servants'. Those who quickly became known as oppressors gave rise to fear.

Naturally, it all depended on the individual persons. There were policemen who, independently of German orders, tried to blunt the blade of repression, confiscation or arrest. They let it be known that they would tolerate certain things. We know this from communist times ourselves: there were mean officers, and there were gentler ones. But their service was that for an oppressive, evil power either way. The brutality was clear, sometimes for show, clear. Aid was secret, often hidden. The orders of the Reich would be sabotaged sometimes. It was easier to be much more human among those whom one knew, because there could always be a snitch hiding in a crowd we don't know. If somebody wanted to be honest in this service, they didn't have it easy. Hence, we already see in 1940 blue policemen who were arrested and taken straight to concentration camps.

Some were true artists: They pretended to be very strict alongside Germans or their eager colleagues, and behind their backs – they helped people. There were also those that cannot be evaluated in

moral terms offhand. How do you judge a policeman who would hide Jews at their home, and outside – they would pose as a strict officer participating in the killing of others? Who was he? A help – yes. A criminal – yes. These weren't normal times.

**PAP: Do we know how the Polish Underground State reacted to the work of the blue police?**

**Maciej Korkuć:** In announcements, the 'blues were branded outright as officers of the occupiers, with judgement for every crime and every perpetrator announced. They were thus looked at just like other German forces were perceived. Condemned were those who became traitors, worked for the enemy. Those particularly hazardous were killed by the underground, others were threatened with punishment for all crimes and abuses after independence is regained.

Poland showed its teeth to the traitors ever more strongly as the underground structures expanded. Throughout the entire General Government, blue policemen were the object of special actions. This is particularly important: Would a soldier of the Home Army shoot a blue policeman, this meant that a soldier of the Polish Army was shooting a German officer of the General Government. Whether the latter was a Pole, Ukrainian or *Volksdeutscher* – what did it matter? He died by order of the Republic of Poland. Significantly, the Germans counted the 'Blues' who were killed as their own losses.

Keep in mind: Many 'Blues' went against their official duties; they were part of the underground. They were, of course, a minority across the

entire force, but their role was significant. These were classic agents of Underground Poland within enemy ranks. They executed significant missions for Poland, posing as if in service of the General Government and Germans. Sometimes they used the privileges that they had as policemen, to 'guard' execution orders, even on their 'colleagues' from the blue police. They worked against the Reich. They extracted important information. They prepared assassinations of important Germans, e. g., the assassination of Krüger, and could find data that constituted closely-guarded secrets. The memory of those murdered by Germans is revered as soldiers of the Republic, not as the officers of Hans Frank that they posed as.

The plan was to dissolve the 'Blues' after the war and try every criminal individually.

### **PAP: What is hence the assessment of the blue police?**

**Maciej Korkuć:** As with every force created by occupying powers, we must naturally understand that a large portion of the policemen was inducted forcibly at the beginning of the occupation. The leaders of the underground understood this. They saw, however, that in the reality of the occupation, the 'Blues' were quickly engaged in terrorising society. Hence, the burden of proving morality was left – let us say – to the 'judged', who was earlier seen in the hated uniform. Those who remained decent had to prove that they were honest despite serving in the ranks of the occupier.

### **PAP: What historians still do not know about the blue police?**



**Maciej Korkuć:** Today it is rather a problem of re-evaluating that which was clear for decades. There are some authors who 'discover' that the blue police participated in the occupation policy of Germany and perpetrated killings. It is as if to 'discover' that there were Teutonic Knights at the Battle of Grunwald. They use the fact that knowledge about the reality of the war is continually deteriorating. It is also sometimes linked to an incorrect assessment of the 'Blues' as the police of the Polish state and the thesis - absurd to the core - that the police force of the General Government was a simple continuation of the pre-war police. Now, all that remains is to show that one 'discovers' the crimes of this force against Jews, that one omits the crimes by this force or even by the same people against Poles, and we have a new field for 'discovery' ready and waiting. A historian should show facts, not distortions.

**Interview by Anna Kruszyńska (PAP)**

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