

Institute of National Remembrance

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Whom do we define as Accursed Soldiers, who can be called Indomitable?

The term "Accursed Soldiers" reflects communist repression, namely the anathema of collective oblivion cast upon those who offered armed resistance against the "people's government". The phrase "Indomitable Soldiers" describes the attitude of these heroes and their approach towards the communist occupant they fought, both at home and in exile.



When organizing the 1st National Parade of Indomitable Soldiers in

Gdańsk in 2015, we faced the following dilemma: which of the Polish military formations operating during and after the war can we include in these ceremonies? Soldiers of the Home Army, Warsaw insurgents, members of the post-war anti-communist underground, perhaps units of the Polish Armed Forces in the West? What about regular Polish troops bravely resisting the Germans in September and early October 1939, a draft army made up of all men subject to compulsory military service? What about such formations as the Separate Unit of the Polish Army of Major General Henryk Dobrzański, "Hubal", or many scattered formations that after the September defeat remained in the Augustów Forest, the Red Swamp on the Biebrza River, the Naliboki or Tuchola Forests? Definitions are not clear, while examples like the ones given here numerous – and so are doubts and dilemmas.

"Nil", "Anoda" and others

A similar problem emerges in the case of the anti-communist activity in the post-war years. General August Emil Fieldorf "Nil" was the organizer and commander of "Kedyw", deputy commander of the Home Army, prisoner of Soviet labor camps – but also opponent of the postwar resistance. One cannot deny "Nil's" war services to the country, yet he came out in 1948, when hope for another armed conflict between East and West had faded, got arrested in 1950, and murdered in the prison at Rakowiecka Street in Warsaw in February 1953. What should we call him today, and in which category of heroes does he belong?

Can we call Jan Rodowicz "Anoda" an Accursed Soldier? He was one of the few heroes of the "Zośka" battalion who survived the occupation and the Uprising in Warsaw, where he orchestrated and carried out many daring operations. After the war, he was the force behind the exhumation and burial of his brothers-in-arms, and acted as the leader of the "Zośka" community. "Anoda" was killed in January 1949, in the course of an interrogation in the building of the Ministry of Public Security in Koszykowa street, in circumstances that remain unexplained (murdered, forced to commit suicide, tortured?) Although after the end of WWII he was not involved in armed struggle, he nevertheless retained an independent judgment of the political situation in the country. Had he not been arrested, he would not have died in such dramatic circumstances. For decades he was left out of the pantheon of heroes (one can even say that he was banned out of collective memory and history), and could not be openly commemorated until after 1989 – even though he is not the type of the accursed soldier that between 1945 and 1963 fought against the communist authorities in Poland.

The survivors from the legendary "Zośka" battalion started to gather and organize right after the end of the war – first, to give their fallen colleagues proper burial, and then, in 1945-1946, thinking of armed resistance against the Soviet invaders. Lieutenant Henryk Kozłowski, "Kmita", together with "Anoda" and several other battalion soldiers, planned an assassination of a Soviet general, but the plans came to nothing, and the weapons were hidden. They were young people in their twenties who wanted to study, start

families, and fight for Poland not on the battlefields, but in universities and workplaces. They were denied this right. Out of more than three hundred soldiers of the battalion who survived WWII, including medics and liaison officers, as many as 37 were imprisoned by the security services. The charges varied, but the result was usually the same: a long prison sentence. Even released, these people came under constant surveillance by the security service, and so did their families and children. They also were accursed and indomitable – although, in fact, they did not fight with weapons in their hands after the war.

Eastern Borderlands: a trap with no way out

A particularly dramatic fate befell the soldiers of the military formations in the Eastern Borderlands. Expelled from their hometowns, persecuted for fighting on the "wrong side," they had little choice.

The legendary commander of the 3rd platoon of the 5th Vilnius Brigade of the Home Army, Lieutenant Antoni Rymsza, "Maks", became famous for his many actions in defense of the Polish population against military formations of various aggressors: the Nazis, Soviet army and their Soviet partisans, Belorussian and Lithuanian units collaborating with the Germans, and formations of eastern nations incorporated into the SS. Along the way, his men retaliated against the Lithuanian population in Dubinki, responding to the pacification of the Polish village of Glinciszki by a unit of Lithuanian collaborators. After the war, "Maks" and the unit's medic,

Aldona Lenczewska, started a family and settled on the Polish coast. They were found in Gdańsk by the commander of the 5th Brigade, Major Zygmunt Szendzielarz "Łupaszka". Rymsza helped his superior on a couple of occasions, but he did not want to continue the armed struggle. Still, in July 1948, he was arrested and deported to the labour camps in the Soviet Union, from where he returned only after an eleven-year ordeal. He was an accursed soldier, an indomitable one.

Not long ago, at the Powązki Military Cemetery, we bid farewell to a hero of World War II and the post-war period, a friend of many of us, Lt. Col. Józef Bandzo "Jastrząb", a soldier of the 3rd and 5th Vilnius Brigades of the Home Army. In his memoirs, Bandzo evocatively described the moment when in 1946 he decided to leave "Łupaszka's" unit. It happened on the day he learned of the death of his friend, Second Lieutenant Zdzisław Badocha "Żelazny", killed in a fight with the Security Service functionaries in Czernin near Sztum.

"This sudden news shocked me, I didn't expect that I would react like this – something changed in me, I had a feeling that further partisan fighting had stopped making sense. The communist forces were in the offensive, and we only suffered losses with no possibility of calling for reinforcements."

"Jastrząb" left the unit, which certainly did not make his commander happy. However, it may have saved his life. He stopped being in hiding in February 1947, then went to university. Arrested in

October 1950, he spent several months in prison. Arrested again in 1958, and one more time in 1960, he was sentenced to life in prison for "financial crimes." Held captive successively in Sztum, Katowice, Lublin and Barczewo, he spent sixteen years in the prisons of the People's Republic of Poland and was finally released in 1976. One of the Accursed – yes, one of the Indomitable – yes, even though at one point in his struggle against the communist regime he said a firm "no" to his legendary commander.

"When a legion of brothers makes its return from England..."

It was a great desire of many millions of Poles for the words of the legendary song *Chłopcy silni jak stal* (*Boys tough as steel*) by Józef Szczepański "Ziutek" to come true. The war ends, and the victorious army of General Władysław Anders returns to the country where their sacrifice for Poland's independence receives appropriate praise. We know that this was not the case. Some soldiers and officers of the Polish Armed Forces in the West decided to return to Poland. They were fully aware that instead of tributes, they would be faced with a dull existence, being second-class citizens, and possibly repression, imprisonment or even death.

Representatives of all military formations, such as airmen, sailors, armoured personnel, were returning home. The People's Republic of Poland did not have enough human resources to fill all the gaps in the army or the civil service, so many returning officers found their way into the ranks of the communist Army. As early as in 1948,

however, repressions started. The ones deemed suspicious would be invigilated, and sometimes arrested. In June 1948, Lieutenant Władysław Śliwiński, who had fought in Great Britain as a member of No. 303 Squadron, was imprisoned in Warsaw and charged with espionage. Among those also arrested in the "Śliwinski case" were two aces of the Polish Air Force and outstanding commanders of the Polish Air Force fighter units: Tadeusz Nowierski and Stanisław Skalski. Śliwiński was executed on 15 February 1951. He had returned to Poland entrusted with the mission to fight against the communists. He would hand information over to British intelligence services. And although, from today's perspective, it is difficult to consider his activities detrimental to Poland, he was considered a spy by the communist authorities. The "Śliwiński case" became a pretext for the Military Information agency to arrest many airmen, and then to pass sentences. Today, when we pay tribute to General Ryszard Kukliński for his struggle for independence, the activities carried out three decades earlier by Lieutenant Władysław Śliwiński should also be glorified, and he himself ought to be considered a hero, one of the Indomitable, the Accursed, a Polish soldier in the pantheon of fame alongside "Anoda", "Nil", "Żelazny" and "Jastrząb".

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