

Institute of National Remembrance

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Wanda Bortkiewicz's 98th birthday. Wanda Bortkiewicz alias "Basia" was a soldier of the Polish Underground State, a nurse and a liaison. After the war she was imprisoned in Olsztyn by the communist authorities









On this very special occasion, the President of the Institute of National Remembrance, Karol Nawrocki, Ph.D. met with Wanda Bortkiewicz bringing her a bouquet of flowers and best wishes. He expressed praise and admiration for her dedicated service in the resistance movement and stressed the significance of Wanda Bortkiewicz's steadfast attitude, which may constitute a model for younger generations.



Wanda Bortkiewicz, née Czyżewska, alias "Basia", "Barbara Zakrzewska" was born on 26 August 1923 in a landed gentry family in the Vilnius region. Before the war, she was a member of the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary Society and the scouting movement, which, along with her family and school, shaped her patriotic attitude.

As the war broke out, she soon discovered that helping the sick and wounded was her vocation. She became a nurse of the first partisan unit established in the Vilnius Region under the command of Lieutenant Antoni Burzyński "Kmicic". She took part in the attack on Duniłowicze and underwent sanitary, medical and military training alongside with, among others, Lidia Lwow "Lala" and Janina Wasiłojć "Jachna". Burzyński's unit was defeated on 26 August 1943 after an ambush carried out by one of the leaders of the Soviet partisans, Fyodor Markov. As a result, "Kmicic" and almost 80 of his soldiers were killed at the hands of the Soviets.

"Basia" managed to get to Vilnius, where she was tasked with taking care of wounded soldiers in private apartments. Her patient was, among others, Major Stefan Świechowski "Sulima" who had been wounded in the lung. The tasks she performed were extremely difficult. In addition to taking care of wounded soldiers, she also had to follow the strict rules of conspiracy in order to prevent possible exposure or arrest. Thanks to the experience she had gained Wanda Bortkiewicz later worked as a nurse at the Red Cross Hospital in Vilnius under the supervision of doctor Zdzisław Kieturakis.

In Vilnius, she miraculously found her mother, with whom she had lost contact, and in the face of mounting Soviet terror, they decided to leave together. The Czyżewski family settled in Morąg, and soon Wanda began her studies at the nursing and obstetrics school in Gdańsk. Here she reestablished contact with her acquaintances who were Vilnius partisans - the soldiers of Lieutenant "Kmicic" and Maj. Zygmunt Szendzielarz "Łupaszka". She became a liaison, and in her parents' home in Morąg, she set up a contact point for soldiers of the 5th Vilnius Brigade of the Home Army, who did not lay down their arms and took up the fight against the new occupant.

Beginning from 8 July 1946, the security officers gathered near the Czyżewski family apartment in Morąg. Almost thirty people were arrested in three days. "Basia", in turn, was arrested and imprisoned in Olsztyn.

One of "Łupaszka's" most trusted people, his liaison officer, Regina Żylińska-Mordas alias "Regina" turned out to have collaborated with

the communist enemy. She was held responsible for the death of several dozen soldiers from "Łupaszka's" unit, including nurse Danuta Siedzikówna "Inka". "Basia" was accused of belonging "to an illegal organization of the Home Army" - Major Zygmunt Szendzielarz "Łupaszka's unit " and of "assaulting soldiers of the Red Army and the Polish People's Army". Despite brutal interrogations, she did not confess to the charges.

On 9 May 1947, after a week-long trial, "Basia" was acquitted by the verdict of the Military District Court in Olsztyn due to a lack of corroborative evidence of her guilt.

After leaving prison, she graduated from a nursing and obstetrics school in Białystok. In 1950, she married a doctor - Ludwik Bortkiewicz, with whom she had four children.

In 1985 Wanda Bortkiewicz once again established contacts with her friends - the soldiers of Lieutenant "Kmicic" and Maj. Zygmunt Szendzielarz "Łupaszka" and maintained them for many years.

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