

7. The Girl and the Painter. Ostrowiec, 19 March 1945

The war was over and we had survived, but we now lived in fear of our Polish neighbours—not the same fear, perhaps, but fear all the same.
Rubin Katz, *Gone to Pichipoli*, 2012, p. 269¹

Krystyna Kersten's 1982 volume of essays *Polacy-Żydzi-komunizm* [Poles-Jews-Communism], included a bid to shed light on an article from Poland's post-war underground press. The piece that she queried had been published in the October 1946 edition of the clandestine paper *Honor i Ojczyzna* [Honour and Fatherland]:²

The public is in shock once again over a monstrous murder that has been committed against Poles by people in uniform. Let us be clear: by Jews against Poles, as a decidedly racial character marks this bestial murder, the victims of which were defenceless former members of the Home Army, including Kazimierz Markwart; one of the most talented painters of the young generation, whose own father was, as it happens, tortured by the Gestapo. The background to this affair is as follows: the Jews received permission from the authorities to carry out the 'execution' of well over a hundred Poles, as 'recompense' for Kielce [author's note – the Kielce Pogrom of 4th July 1946]. The crime was carried out in prison cells. People were hanged on meat hooks. Those who resisted were butchered in a hideous manner. This is all that we have been able to establish on the basis of scraps of information. But it is enough. (...) It is enough to be able to address the matter in straightforward terms: we flatly demand that the Radom issue [the crime was apparently committed in a Radom prison – Krystyna Kersten], and indeed other actions by Jews in Poland, be taken up by those who constitute the moral face of the community [Jewish? – Krystyna Kersten] in society. Let Jewish religious leaders take a stand, let scholars, artists and writers speak up, just as Poles did in relation to the Kielce affair. Let them speak, and let them dissociate themselves from the thugs and degenerates of Jewish nationality in UBP [author's note – Department of Public Security] uniforms. Otherwise, we will be forced to place responsibility for these crimes on all Jews in Poland, categorising them as an entire enemy group. We are not antisemites, but we place the interests of our nation above everything.³

¹ The present essay would not have seen the light day had it not been for the help of several people from Ostrowiec who reconstructed the history of their town: Rubin Katz, Wojciech Mazan, Monika Pastuszko and Jacek Podsiadło. I would like to express my warmest thanks to them for all the material and information that they shared with me, especially for Avi Borenstein, involved in the Jews of Ostrowiec Memorial Project, for his invaluable help in verification of all the data. I am also deeply indebted to all victims' families who answered my questions and provided me with photos and documents.

² Krystyna Kersten, *Polacy. Żydzi. Komunizm. Anatomia półprawd*, Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, Warsaw 1982, p. 132.

³ The journal *Honor i Ojczyzna*, like *Orzeł Biały* and *Niepodległość*, among others, was published by the Freedom and Independence Association (WiN), see Filip Musiał, 'Wierni testamentowi Polski niepodległej. Zrzeszenie "Wolność i Niezawisłość"', *Biuletyn IPN*, nos. 1–2 (84–85), January–February 2008, p.9.

When considering the WiN press in general, the level of disinformation in the October edition of *Honor i Ojczyzna* appears particularly extreme. The report about the ‘retaliatory’ execution of Markwart features alongside an article accusing Jan Jaworski, an ethnic Polish victim of the Kielce Pogrom, of taking part in a ritual murder that supposedly provoked the pogrom.⁴ It is hard to fathom the guiding principles of the publication in this regard. Perhaps these aims can be explained by the bitterness that had set in following the autumn arrests of members of the 2nd WiN Council, and the radicalisation of their successors,⁵ including Kazimierz Czarnocki, who is believed to have been the editor-in-chief of the newspaper at that time, and who was to play a decidedly notorious role in the further history of WiN.⁶ Nevertheless, what today’s readers find unacceptable might also be simply a reflection of public opinion in the Kielce region at that time. Indeed, the WiN press strove to be aligned with the prevailing attitudes among the public at large.

The current essay is based on documentation of the trial of Kazimierz Markwart that was found in Poland’s Institute of National Remembrance (IPN).⁷ The historical background – which the previously cited passage contains echoes of – will be reconstructed. The conclusion will attempt to focus on why there has been a persistent revival of the outlandish narrative of the events described in Ostrowiec.

⁴ See. J.Tokarska-Bakir, *Pod klątwą. Społeczny portret pogromu kieleckiego*, vol. 1, Czarna Owca, Warsaw 2018, pp. 236-237 and vol. 2, 1.19, pp. 102-103

⁵ In Janusz Kurtyka’s opinion, a ‘left-wing’ programme dominated the policies of the 1st WiN Council, while the 2nd Council was guided by the principles of ‘Piłsudski’s followers’, the 3rd was ‘national’, and the 4th was ‘socialist and for the masses’, *Biuletyn IPN*, nos. 1–2 (84–85), January–February 2008, p. 25.

⁶ *Honor i Ojczyzna* was a journal with a print run of 1000–2000 copies, issued by the Central Administration of WiN in 1946–1947, edited by Kazimierz Czarnocki, see: *Dokumenty do dziejów PRL. Aparat Bezpieczeństwa 1944–1956, Taktyka, strategia, metody*, pt. 1: Lata 1945–1947, ed. Andrzej Paczkowski, Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, Warsaw 1994, p. 67, footnote 3. Kazimierz Czarnocki (1912-1983), cryptonym ‘Arski’, ‘Błękien’, ‘Turski’, ‘Captain’, ‘Kazik’, ‘H-2’, ‘V’, biographical info in: *"Dardanele". Delegatura WiNu (1946-1949)*, ed. Stanisław Jan Rostworowski, Wrocław 1999, pp. 447-448. Tomasz Łabuszewski believes that it was indeed Czarnocki, who until January 1947 was the deputy director of WiN’s political and educational department, and simultaneously an agent of the UB (Undercover Agent Zieliński). While active in the 3rd Main Council of the WiN Association, he tracked down Witold Pilecki, one of the UB’s most wanted men, see Tomasz Łabuszewski, ‘Kulą w płot. Kto podważa legendę rotmistrza Pileckiego?’, *Polityka*, no. 22, 27/5/2013, <http://www.polityka.pl/historia/1543689,1,polemika-z-tekstem-andrzeja-romanowskiego-o-witoldzie-pileckim.read>

⁷ AIPN Ki 8/28.



Jewish survivors from Ostrowiec, 1945 (courtesy of Avi Borenstein and Sonia Kramer)

The murder on ul. Radomska 34

Prior to the war, about 16,000-18,000 Jews lived in Ostrowiec.⁸ Of these, little more than 200 survived the Holocaust: '15 elderly, 13 children, 66 women, 119 men'.⁹ Jews returning to the deserted town from concentration camps met with enmity from their fellow inhabitants: they discovered that their flats had been occupied, and their belongings looted. In spite of the fact that the Germans had gone, 'officials said that German regulations still applied to Jews', and the Municipal National Council demanded that the Jewish Committee send their people to work in mines.¹⁰ Assaults took place, which the local Citizens' Militia (the equivalent of the police force, established by the communist Polish Committee of National Liberation in 1944) commented on as follows: 'you can beat them up, I won't see anything.'¹¹ Wartime murders came to light, such as the killing of the Sztajn family on 9th January 1945, just prior to the arrival of the Red Army.¹² The Jewish Committee advised its people against antagonising

⁸ See Sara Minc's account, AŻIH file ref. 301/3129

⁹ Jewish Committee in Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski, AŻIH file ref. 359/7

¹⁰ National Archives in Kielce, UWK, vol. 1524, p.9, see: Adam Penkalla, 'Władze o obecności Żydów na terenie Kielecczyzny w okresie od wkroczenia Armii Czerwonej do pogromu kieleckiego', *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów*, December 2003, no. 4 (208), pp. 562-563.

¹¹ Adam Penkalla, 'Poles and Jews in the Kielce Region and Radom, April 1945-February 1946', *Polin*, vol.13: 2000, p. 245

¹² Helena Kawecka's account, AŻIH file ref. 301/4063a, was originally translated from Yiddish to Polish by Adam Bielecki, and it is translated into English here: 'Towards the end of winter in 1948, the murderer Wiktorowicz was tried at the District Court in Ostrowiec. During the trial, Wiktorowicz continued to claim that the murder had been carried out by the Home Army, and that he had been unable to tell the authorities, as he was scared of members of the Home Army. A personal statement submitted by SonJa Wulf was read out in court, which had been provided prior to her departure from Poland, and a witness was heard, an Ostrowiec Jew, who said that Wiktorowicz's old mother had declared to him that she would be unable to die peacefully without making a confession, and that she had to reveal that her

their Polish neighbours, so in this instance, the murderer was only arrested three years later, when the bodies of four Jews that he had hidden were discovered in a collapsed well in his yard. Leaflets declaring ‘death to the remaining Jews’ were circulated in the environs of Ostrowiec.¹³

One of the production facilities that was relaunched just after the liberation of Ostrowiec was the tar paper and pitch factory Smołopap, which was situated on what is today’s ulica Żabia (ul. H. Sawickiej during the communist era and ul. Ignacego Daszyńskiego before the war). Prior to the war, the factory had belonged to two brothers, Chaskiel and Jonasz Krongold,¹⁴ both of whom died in the Holocaust. During the war, the business came under German management, represented by a *treuhaender* (administrator), in this instance Ludwik Krzyński, who was a *volksdeutsch*.¹⁵

son had murdered Jews. The court was not swayed by the spirited defence of the perpetrator, made by Ostrowiec barrister Władysław Kostrzewski, and it sentenced Wiktorowicz to death.’ See also: <https://zydowskiostrowiec.blogspot.com/2016/12/rodzina-steinow.html>

¹³ A. Penkalla, ‘Poles and Jews in the Kielce Region and Radom, April 1945-February 1946’, *Polin*, vol.13: 2000, p. 245.

¹⁴ According to information provided by Norbert Zięba on Wojciech Mazan’s blog: ‘The Krongold brothers’ factory employed a dozen or so people and it specialised in the production of tar paper and pitch. After the Hitlerites took over the factory, supervision of production was transferred to Ludwik Krzyński, a *volksdeutsch* who had been resettled in Ostrowiec from Leszno at the beginning of 1940, and whose son, who bore the same name, was a member of the Ostrowiec wing of the Home Army. (...) Chaskiel Krongold [a policeman in the Ostrowiec Ghetto, according to an account held in the Jewish Historical Institute,] survived the liquidation of the ghetto in October 1942, and he was taken to a labour camp for Jews in the grasslands near Częstocice, but he was shot in the woods along with a group of other prisoners, while on the way to Radom. His wife Chaja died at the Treblinka death camp, and their sons Nachman and Baruch also ended up in concentration camps, where they died as victims of the Holocaust. The circumstances of death of the other owner of Smołopap are unknown’, <http://zydowskiostrowiec.blogspot.com/2019/01/> (accessed 7/8/2020).

¹⁵ The circumstances in which Poles from Poznań took over Jewish property in Ostrowiec are described by Szlam Gutwilen, in an account in the Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute (AŻIH), file ref. 301/3054, in which the *volksdeutsch* Ludwik Krzyński (senior) is also mentioned. In Helena Kawecka’s account (AŻIH 201/4062), one finds the following information: ‘Poles from Poznań also came to Ostrowiec. Many from this last group were very oppressive to the Jews. First of all, they took over Jewish shops, they got rich here. Poles from Poznań expelled Jews from their flats, taking them over for themselves.’ The situation whereby displaced people from Poznań relentlessly took advantage of Jews is mentioned in many wartime sources, AŻIH 302/277, p. 30.



War time correspondence of the SMOLOPAP tar factory
(courtesy of <http://zydowskiostrowiec.blogspot.com>)

Nevertheless, Chaskiel Krongold's daughter Fajga survived the Holocaust. As Wojciech Mazan writes, she 'hid first with a Polish family, using forged documents under the name of Felicja Kwiatkowska, she then went to Warsaw and began operating in the anti-Nazi underground. After the Germans were forced out of Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski, Fajga Krongold returned to her hometown and took up residence in Zoberman's house at ulica Sienkiewicza 34 (during the occupation and in its immediate aftermath it was ulica Radomska).¹⁶ Taking her father's place, she became the manager of the now nationalised Smolopap factory.

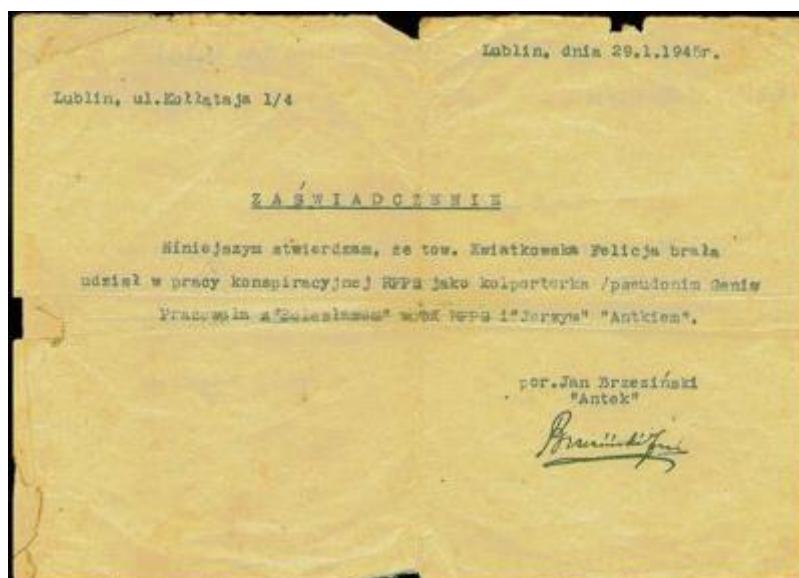


Krongolds' villa in Ostrowiec after the war (<http://zydowskiostrowiec.blogspot.com>)

¹⁶ If we go even further back in time, it was called ulica Starokunowska.
<http://zydowskiostrowiec.blogspot.com/2019/01/> (accessed 7/8/2020)



Wartime rationed food cards for Fajga Krongold aka Felicja Kwiatkowska (courtesy of the Krongold family)



A certification that Fajga Krongold aka Felicja Kwiatkowska was a wartime distributor of the underground press of the RPPS (the Revolutionary Socialist Party) in Warsaw (courtesy of the Krongold Family)

On 19 March 1945, the house where she was living at Sienkiewicza/Radomska 34 was raided. Apart from Fajga, ten other people were there when the attack began. They were robbed and

terrorised. Four people were shot dead: Fajga Krongold (aged 27)¹⁷, Chaja Szpigiel (28)¹⁸, Otylia Szrajer (23)¹⁹ and Izrael Lejb Lustig (16)²⁰, while several others were injured: Lejzor Leon Szpilmana (32)²¹, Mania Szpilman (25)²², Fajga Alkichen (46)²³ and Jankiel Lustig (52).²⁴ As resulted from the provided documentation, Chawa Adler, also known as Janina

¹⁷ Fajga Krongold, daughter of Chaskiel, Frajman after her husband (AIPN Ki 8/28, p. 131), completed the curriculum at the Stanisław Staszic Secondary School in Ostrowiec (diploma). The official record of the examination of Fajga Krongold's body, age 27, height 160 cm. Ostrowiec, 20/3/1945, AIPN Ki 8/28, pp. 150-156

¹⁸ Official record of the examination of Chaja Szpigiel's body, age 28, height 158, Ostrowiec, 20/3/1945, AIPN Ki 8/28, pp. 157-163. According to the record book of the Citizens' Militia in Ostrowiec (*Ostrowiec. A Monument on the Ruins of an Annihilated Jewish Community*, ed. G. Silberberg, M. S. Geshuri, Tel Aviv 1971), Chaja Szajndel Szpigiel was the daughter of Naftali Szpigiel, see: Adam Kopciowski, 'Przemoc antyżydowska w powojennej Polsce w świetle ksiąg pamięci', *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały*, 2019, no. 14: 2019, p. 223

¹⁹ Official record of the examination of Otylia Szrajer's body, age 23, height 167 cm. Ostrowiec, 20/3/1945, AIPN Ki 8/28, pp. 145-9.

²⁰ Official record of the examination of Izrael Lejb Lustig's body, age 16, height 160 cm, Ostrowiec, 20/3/1945, AIPN Ki 8/28, pp. 164-170. The record book of the Citizens' Militia in Ostrowiec records that Izrael Lustig was the grandson of Ruben Szpilman. Adam Kopciowski ('Przemoc antyżydowska w powojennej Polsce w świetle ksiąg pamięci', *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały*, 2019, vol. 14, p. 223) mentions a photograph that featured in the Ostrowiec record book, taken after Izrael's funeral, showing a cousin as well as the father of the murdered boy, L. Milsztejn, 'Di likwidacje fun ostrowcer getto', [in:] *Ostrowce; a denkmol ojf di churwes fun a farnichtete jidisze kehile*, ed. M.Sz. Geszuri, G. Zilberberg, [Tel Aviv 1971], pp. 292-293

²¹ Lejzor Leon Szpilman, son of Rywan and Chai (née Rozen), profession: musician, resident in Ostrowiec, ul. Radomska 34; for more on the composer, see https://pl.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Leon_Szpilman&oldid=59122946

²² Mania Szpilman, daughter of Chil and Łai (née Alkichen), resident in Ostrowiec, ul. Radomska 34.

²³ Fajga Alkichen, daughter of Chil and Sura (née Cukierman), resident in Ostrowiec, ul. Radomska 34.

²⁴ Jankiel Lustig (Lustyk), son of Urysz and Małka (née Willner), profession: musician, resident in Ostrowiec, ul. Radomska 34.

Kędzińska (26)²⁵, Hersz Zylberg (19)²⁶ and Fajwel Gryner (31)²⁷ did not suffer any injuries in the attack (for corrections see the next paragraph, a *Postscript* at the end of this paper and footnote 26). They all provided extensive testimonies.



Two bullets and one revolver cartridge, found beneath Otylia Szrajer's shirt during the forensic examination of her body on 20/3/1945, AIPN Ki 8/28, p. 176

The survivors' version

According to the medical certificate issued on 25th May 1946 by Dr Kwiatkowski, director of the hospital in Ostrowiec, Maria and Lejzor Leon Szpilman were in-patients there from 19th-29th March, both with gunshot wounds in the right shoulder.²⁸

²⁵ Chawa Adler alias Janina Kędzińska, daughter of Hersz and Gitla (née Nussbaum), resident in Ostrowiec, ul. Radomska 34.

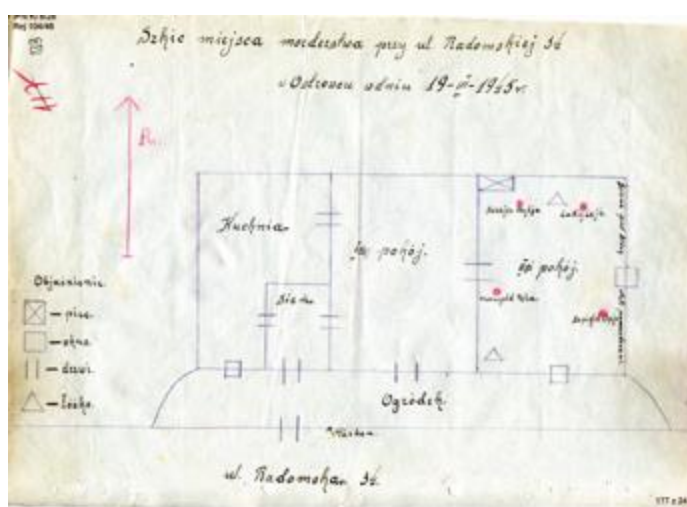
²⁶ Hersz Joel Zylberg, son of Moszek Icek and Hudel-Cerla (née Fisz), profession: wood sorter, resident in Ostrowiec, ul. Radomska 34. In the book *Gone to Pitzipoli: A Boy's Desperate Fight for Survival in Wartime* (Academic Studies Press, 2012, p. 263) Rubin Katz writes that 'Herszel Zylberg (...) who had helped build the hide-out in the ghetto below the hen-house,' lived in Australia after the war. 'As a key witness, he had to be moved from the local hospital to Kraków in case those responsible came back to kill him,' footnote 12 on p. 236. On Herszl Zylberg aka Henry Silberberg see also testimony of Henia Kudłowicz (later Sylman, Yad Vashem testimony, courtesy of Avi Borenstein): " I met the sister of my friend [she met Chaya Spiegel sister of her friend Malka Spiegel]...among the wounded was a young man...an ambulance came..the next day was the funeral...there was concern that the young man may die from infection of the wound...there wasn't someone that could operate on him...we told a Russian general of the situation.....that day, they caught a Polish doctor from Poznan that was looking for property leftover from the Germans...and said that if you succeed to operate on the young man, we will let you go....The operation went well.. I helped cook for him and stayed with him...later it was important for him to leave the hospital...later he left Poland, met a girl and her mother and moved to Australia".

²⁷ Fajwel Gryner, son of Lejbus and Dwojra (née Wólfman), resident in Ostrowiec, profession: painter, Rynek 9. He and sixteen other Jews were saved by a peasant named Tadeusz Pastuszka, in the village of Chmielów, and he described the context of this rescue in an account held by the Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute, AŻIH file ref. 301/3787. Pastuszka built them a bunker with bunkbeds, and from 1943 to the end of the occupation, seventeen people hid there. After the war, due to harassment from his neighbours, he moved to Ostrowiec, where he lived at ulica Głogowski 8. He features as number 3052 (added in 1984) on the list of Polish Righteous, recorded as Tadeusz and Marianna Pastuszka.

²⁸ AIPN Ki 8/28, p. 105.

When questioned the day after the attack, Maria Szpilman said that three people had entered her flat at 7 pm. When she asked ‘who they had come to see and what about’, she heard the comment: ‘what a pretty hostess’.

The tallest person told me ‘we’re robbers’ and ordered me to go back into the room and stand facing the wall. Right away, they turned to Miss Krongold, who was at my home, and asked ‘where is your fur coat?’. Miss Krongold replied that she had never had a fur coat and that there wasn’t one to give. A long conversation with Miss Krongold preceded that, but I don’t know what they discussed, as they spoke between themselves in the room. They were intelligent people, they looked exactly as my husband described them [see Leon Szpilman’s account]. It was clear that they were educated, they were well-dressed. Once they had robbed us of our valuables, they asked everyone present to give their names, and as the names were being said they started to shoot.²⁹



Sketch of the crime scene, AIPN Ki 8/28, p. 177

Leon Szpilman’s testimony provides a more in-depth description of the attackers, as well as details of the conversations.

At 7 pm on 19th March, I came home from town [he had just given a music lesson, which was how he earned his living] and found three people in the house who I didn’t know. One of them was small, and he was wearing a grey overcoat, a grey hat, and light-coloured knickerbockers, he was short, with blond hair combed upwards in a parting, he had blue eyes, a normal face, he was about 27. He turned to me politely and asked me to come into the room and hand over all my valuables. The second person was wearing a grey overcoat, a navy blue hat [with a turned up rim and a navy blue ribbon – adds Fajga Alkichen, who also remembered that his coat had a fur collar³⁰], he was average height, with a round face, hazel brown eyes, dark hair that was combed upwards, thin, and about 27 years old. The third was dressed in a long grey [or dark blue, according to Jankiel Lustig’s testimony] overcoat, and he was wearing a brown hat, he was tall, thin, with a long face, black hair swept back smoothly, and he had dark eyes. [Szpilman added that the tall person had long sideburns, Fajga Alkichen noted that

²⁹ AIPN Ki 8/28, pp. 108-9

³⁰ AIPN KI 8/28, p. 124.

he had ruddy cheeks, Jankiel Lustig said he was wearing a red scarf, and Chawa Adler recalled that he was wearing a newsboy cap, which Lustig described as a *maciejówka*, a Polish type of cloth cap with a short peak. Lustig also remembered that one of the culprits had a pale face³¹].

All three were armed with Vis pistols [this is how they are defined in the text], which were in good condition, as they still had their sheen. The tall person focused on stealing our belongings, while the small one spoke a lot, in an intelligent manner, so as maintain a sense of calm, as he was going to shoot.

Having stolen everything he could lay his hands on, the tall person told each of us to give our name, one after the other. Everyone did so. Miss Krongold, who had a *kennkarte* [author's note – compulsory ID issued during the German occupation] in the name of Kwiatkowska, provided her adopted name. The short blond man said: 'What, Kwiatkowska? This woman is Krongold, the manager of the Smołopap factory. Mrs Szpigiel also gave an adopted name. The short blond man said: 'That's Mrs Szpigiel, and she's trying to find a place to live. [Otylia Szrajer], the wife of a doctor from Warsaw who had come to stay the night, said she was a Pole, and he laughed and she got the first bullet, and she died on the spot. After the first person had been killed, they shouted: 'about turn', and they started to shoot everybody. When everyone had been knocked to the ground, they gathered all the looted things, and the tall one said: 'It's done, let's go.' This tall man was very much the commander. The entire thing lasted 30 minutes. (...) After they had robbed everybody, they went off in the direction of ulica Nowa.³²

³¹ AIPN KI 8/28, p. 117

³² AIPN KI 8/28, pp. 106-107

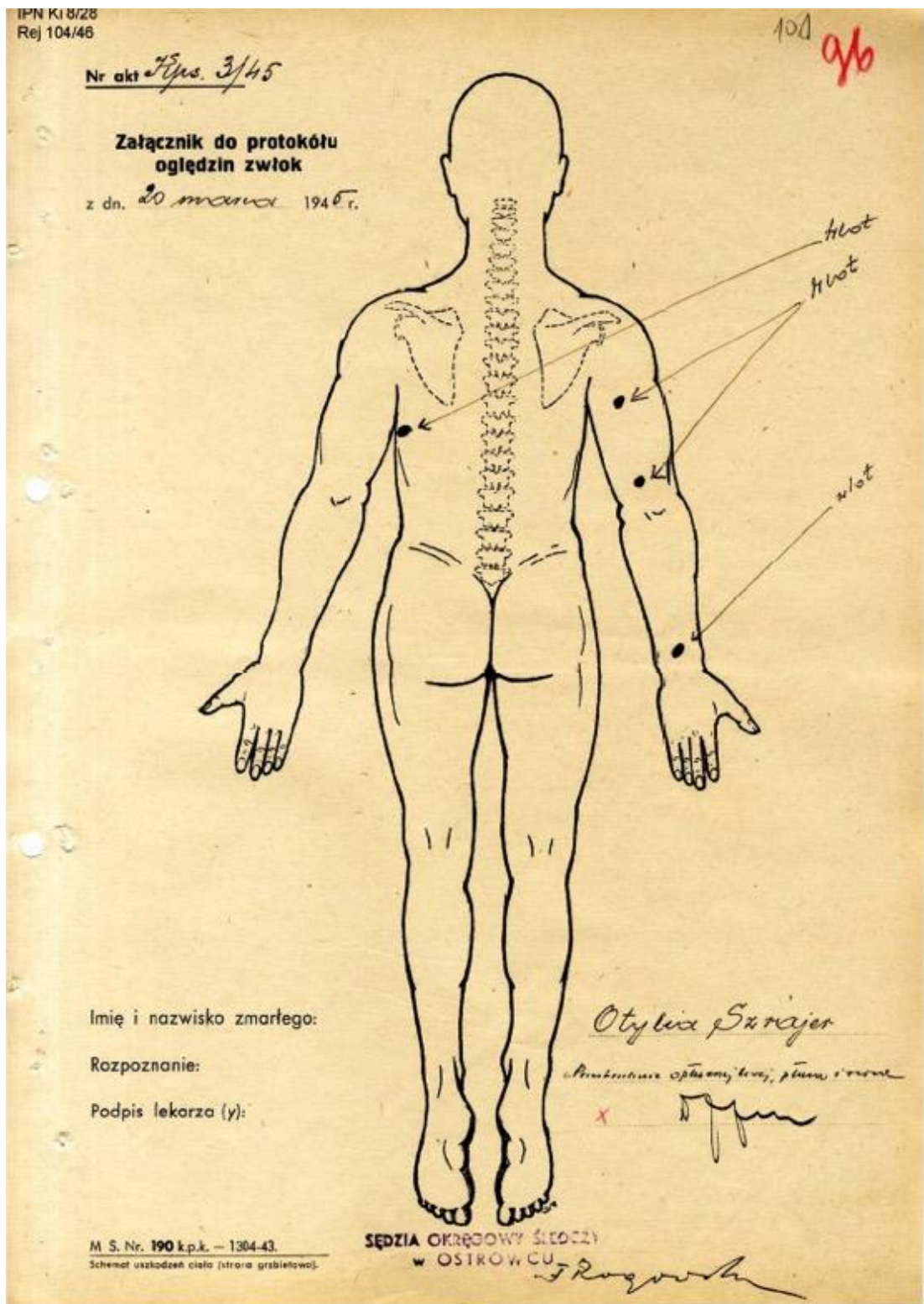


Diagram attached to the official record of the examination of Otylia Szrajer's body, 'the apparent cause of death was a gunshot wound through the left pleurae, lung and heart', age 23, height 167 cm. Ostrowiec, 20/3/1945, AIPN Ki 8/28, pp. 145-9.

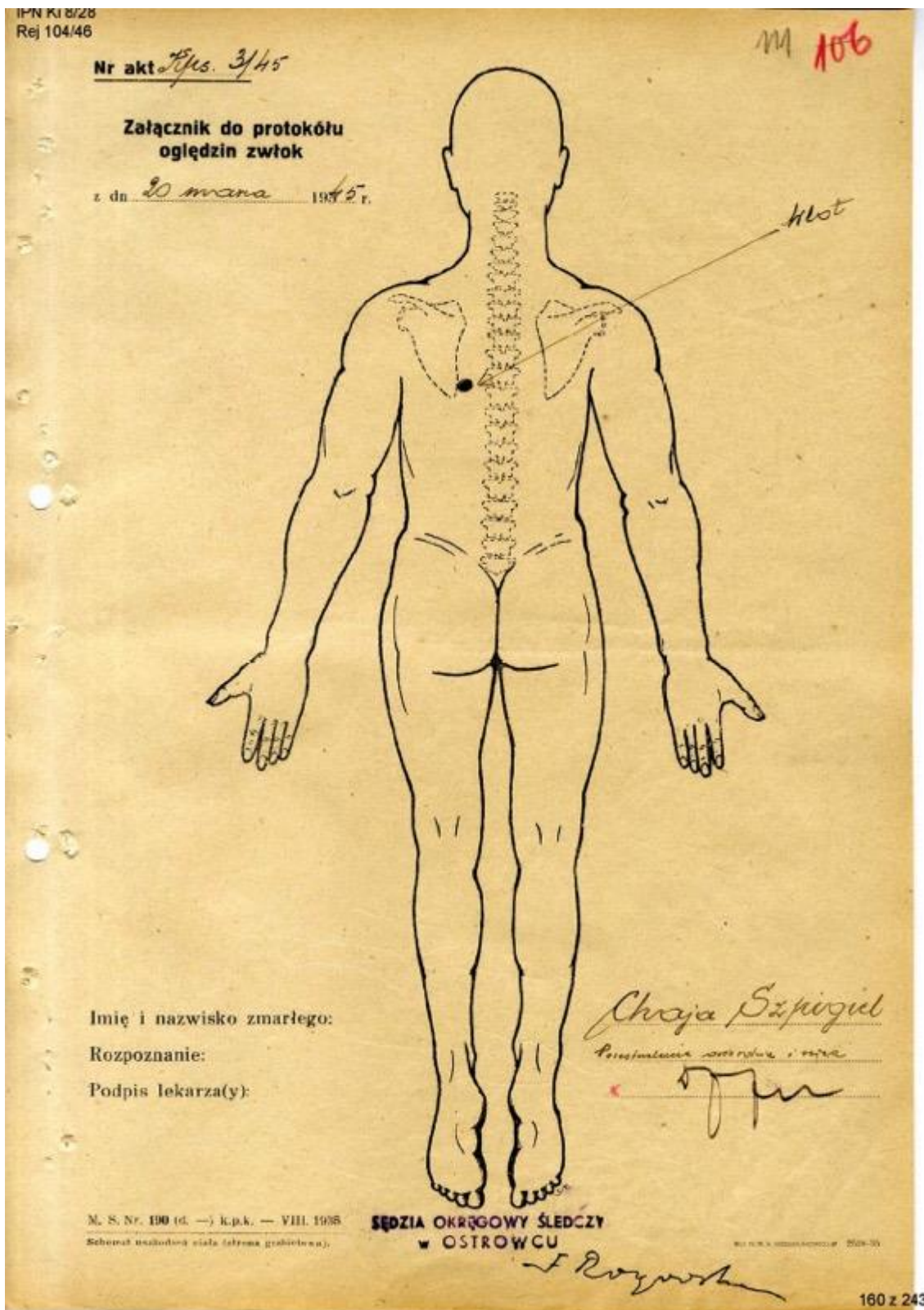


Diagram attached to the official record of the examination of Chaja Szpigiel's body, 'the apparent cause of death was a piercing of the pericardium and the heart', age 28, height 158, Ostrowiec, 20/3/1945, AIPN Ki 8/28, pp. 157-163

A passage from the transcript of Chawa Adler's interview with the militia³³ contains further information that while calling on them to hand over their valuables, 'the tall, thin one with a gun' told them that 'you will all get by, but we need them for the party [author's note – their political organisation].' The attackers must have gone off in the direction of the Market Square, because the next day, Adler found a spool there from a dozen rolls of thread that had been stolen from her.

The file covering the investigation by the Citizens' Militia (MO) runs to just thirty pages. It contains official records of the receipt of oral notifications of the crime, all dated to 9.30 pm on 20th March. The first came from Chawa Adler, otherwise known as Janina Kędzierska. She provides further details, noting that a few moments after the attackers disappeared, Leon Szpilman and Hersz Zylberberg got up and ran off to inform the MO. Shortly afterwards, a doctor appeared at the scene, and he confirmed the deaths of four people. Fajga Krongold died just before the ambulance arrived.

Leon Szpilman's testimony concerning the crime includes the information that he tried to appease the attackers, saying: "What do you want gentlemen? After all, these people have only just returned from Oświęcim [Auschwitz], they are poor, and I have just got back from giving a lesson, which is how I earn a living." The strangers said to keep quiet and hand over any watches, jewellery and cash. (...) Before that they asked Lustig Lejb where he had been, and when he replied that he had been in Oświęcim [Auschwitz], they asked what it was like there, and Lustig said that it was very good.'³⁴ Szpilman stated that 'the assailants shot everyone with large bore pistols'. It was he who informed the MO, who duly sent a patrol over to ul. Radomska.³⁵ The injured man then ran to fetch Dr Wagner, returning with him to the scene of the crime, which he reached before the militia, who only arrived after a one-hour delay. He said in his testimony that the person who 'talked the most, waving his pistol', was short and had 'a squeaky voice like a child's' and that he repeatedly referred to his weapon, saying: 'You see that? Nice toy, isn't it?'

Szpilman's wife Mania said in her testimony that when she was shot, she shouted to her husband: "Leon, I've been hit by a bullet!" Then one of the attackers, looking at me, said, "that's enough, let's go", even though he knew that I was alive.'³⁶

Fajga Alkichen claims that only the tall assailant opened fire, while the others were busy rolling up their loot in blankets. The victims remember that the attackers introduced themselves as robbers.

³³ This is a puzzling copy of the record of the witness's account – it lacks the correct letterhead and the surname of the person conducting the interview, as well as information clarifying who created the record and why, AIPN Ki 8/28, p. 110.

³⁴ AIPN KI 8/28, p. 120. This is at odds with the version in the Ostrowiec record book, that 'Lejb Lustig, who had survived a concentration camp in Gliwice (...) begged for his life, showing the murderers the inmate's number that had been tattooed on his arm', see Adam Kopciowski, 'Powojenna przemoc antyżydowska w powojennej Polsce w świetle ksiąg pamięci', *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały*, 2019, no. 14, p. 223.

³⁵ Confirmed in the testimony of Jan Lenardt of the Citizens' Militia, p. 139.

³⁶ AIPN KI 8/28, p. 123.

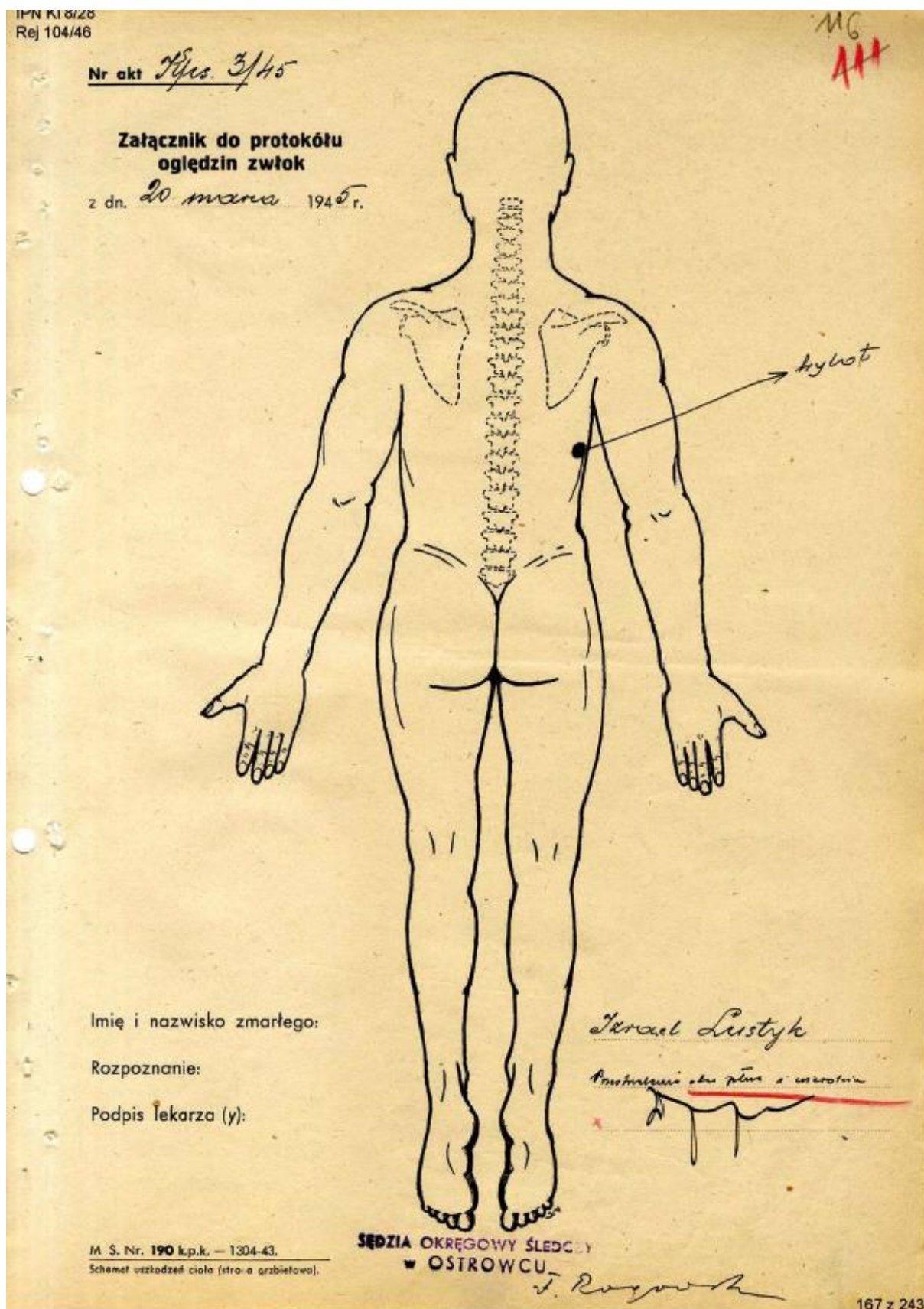


Diagram attached to the official record of the examination of Izrael Lustig's body, 'the apparent cause of death was a gunshot wound that went through the lungs and the pericardium', age 16, height 160 cm, Ostrowiec, 20/3/1945, AIPN Ki 8/28, pp. 164-170

The accounts of the witnesses

Besides the victims, several other people went to the Citizens' Militia (MO) station in Ostrowiec, in order to notify that a crime had taken place. Antoni Małek, the deputy manager of Ostrowiec's Tar Paper Factory (Fabryka Papy Dachowej - this was the postwar name of the Smołopap factory), stated that Fajga Krongold, the manager who was killed by the robbers, had been keeping some company money at her home, including 5495 zł in cash, and two receipts for the sum of 8000 zł, 'which I had withdrawn for the costs of a business trip to Radom, along with Władysław Koziół, head of the Factory Board.'³⁷

It remains unclear why the file also contains a testimony by Zygmunt Jankowski, a forty-year-old butcher from Ostrowiec, who on 19 March, which was 'a Monday market day', was having a festive lunch at the nearby Seklanowski restaurant on ul. Radomska. The revelry finished in the early afternoon, and the butcher was taken home by his acquaintances to Sienkiewicza 17. 'I only found out about the murder of the Jews on ul. Radomska the next day, from people who went to see what had happened,' we are told.³⁸

Meanwhile, the report of Antoni Sierant, who headed the four-man MO patrol that was sent to the scene of the crime (another report claims that there were 11 members of the patrol³⁹), explains why they were delayed in reaching ul. Radomska. Sierant claimed that he left the station and approached the Market Square from the north (in another report it is stated that 'the soldiers went in line formation from ul. Sienkiewicza to ul. Radomska). They apparently reached ul. Hżecka, but at the beginning of ul. Radomska they encountered an unfamiliar, drunken major from the Polish Army, 'who caused us problems'⁴⁰ (in the report he is described as a lieutenant who tried to disarm the commander of the patrol, as is also confirmed by militiaman Tadeusz Zugaj⁴¹). The rest of the report comprises a description of the pursuit of the suspects through ruined buildings and bunkers, accompanied by gunshots and the firing of flares ('I don't know who fired').⁴²

As it turns out, a red flare was fired by militiaman Marian Sałek, who caught sight of three people carrying packages while emerging from the entrance-hall of a house on the left side of the Market Square. Pursued by the militiamen, the suspects fled in the direction of ulica Młyńska. At that moment the lieutenant appeared, shouting 'don't shoot', while trying to disperse the crowd that had gathered near the restaurant. Heading towards ul. Radomska a moment later, the patrol encountered no one, apart from a patrol from the District Department of Public Security (PUBP), which had arrived belatedly.⁴³

As it emerges from the initial report of Sergeant Jan Wójtowicz from the MO station in Ostrowiec, the militia tried to disregard the political dimension of the murder,⁴⁴ routinely focusing on the fact that the victims had been robbed. This was noted by Leon Szpilman, who ended his account with the following statement: 'I suspect that the murder was political, not

³⁷ AIPN KI 8/28, p.132.

³⁸ AIPN KI 8/28, p. 132.

³⁹ AIPN KI 8/28, p. 111.

⁴⁰ More on the major can be found in the report on **p. 111**.

⁴¹ AIPN KI 8/28, p.136.

⁴² AIPN KI 8/28, p. 133

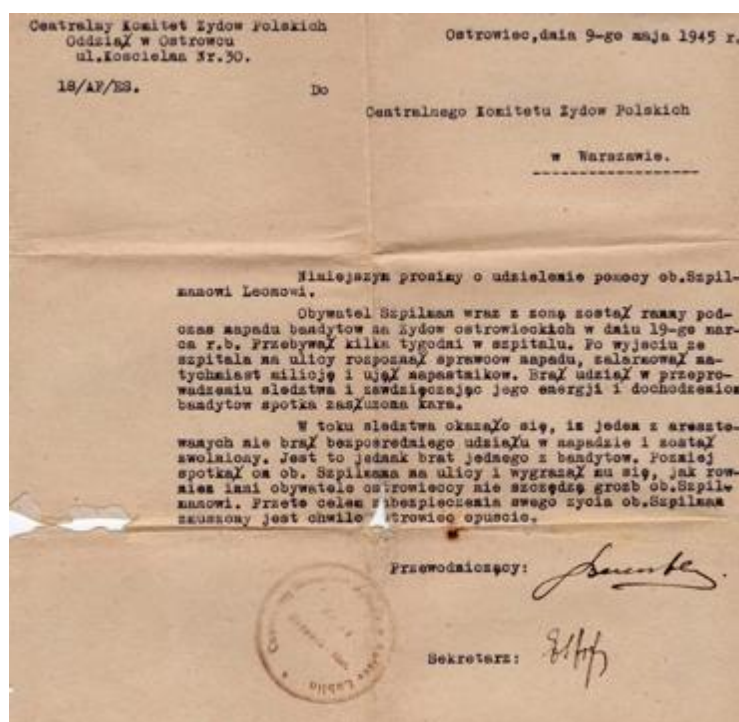
⁴³ AIPN KI 8/28, p. 135.

⁴⁴ AIPN KI 8/28, p. 181

criminal'.⁴⁵ This did not lead to much, for as early as 7 April, 'owing to the culprits not being found', an order was issued by an unknown 'regional prosecutor' to discontinue the investigation.

The case of the murder on ul. Radomska would have remained, like many others, unsolved, had it not been for the fact that in mid-April, Leon Szpilman recognised one of the assailants in the street. We learn about this from a letter written by the Ostrowiec branch of the Central Committee of Polish Jews (CKŻP), whose office in the town was located at ul. Kościelna 30. The letter is dated 9th May 1945.

Citizen Szpilman and his wife were injured in an attack by bandits on Ostrowiec Jews on 19 March this year [1945]. He spent several weeks in hospital. After leaving the hospital, he recognised those who had carried out the attack, and immediately alarmed the militia, and the assailants were caught. He participated in the investigation and thanks to his energy and findings, the bandits will receive the punishment they deserve. During the investigation, it turned out that one of the arrested suspects did not play any direct role in the attack, and he was released. He is the brother of one of the bandits.⁴⁶ He subsequently met Citizen Szpilman on the street, and threatened him, as did other inhabitants of Ostrowiec, who have not spared Citizen Szpilman. In order to protect himself, Citizen Szpilman has been temporarily forced to leave Ostrowiec.⁴⁷



⁴⁵ AIPN KI 8/28, p. 122.

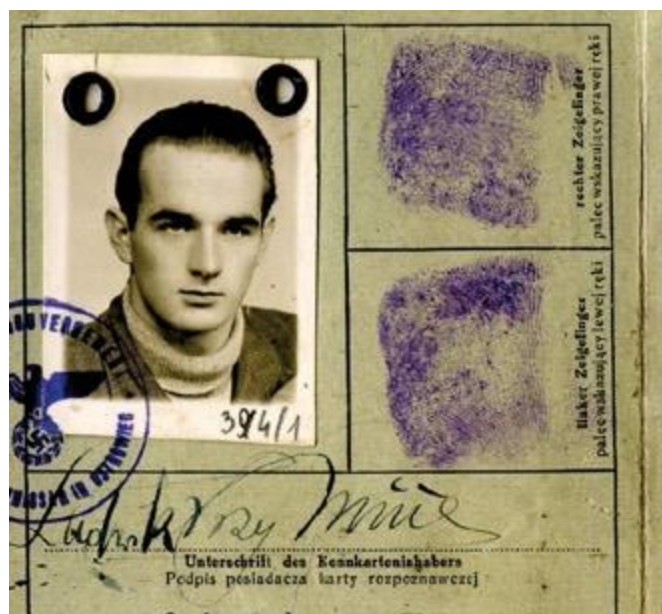
⁴⁶ Perhaps this pertains to the eighteen-year-old brother of Kazimierz Markwart, Zygmunt, see Wojciech M. Starzyński, *Kryptonim 'Kazik'*, Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski 2011, 20. I would like to thank Wojciech Mazan for providing me with this text which, on the request of the family of the author, I cite only paraphrasing.

⁴⁷ See also Berel Blum, interview no. 466, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation. <http://sfi.usc.edu>

Fascimile of the document, courtesy of David Hoffert and Wojciech Mazan. The original letter is in the AŻIH, Komitet Żydowski w Ostrowcu Świętokrzyskim (Jewish Committee in Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski], file ref. 359.

The testimonies of the perpetrators: Ludwik Krzymiński and Kazimierz Markwart

We do not know either who exactly Szpilman recognised, or how the arrests panned out. Documents pertaining to the investigation reveal only that first of all, a search was carried out at the residence of a 19-year-old member of the Home Army, Ludwik Krzymiński, cryptonym Iguana]⁴⁸.



Photograph from the *kennkarte* of Ludwik Krzymiński, from 1942, AIPN Ki 8/28, p. 59

Krzymiński came from Leszno in the Poznań region, whence he was resettled by the Germans in December 1939. Once in Ostrowiec, he attended a primary school, and his father, the *Volksdeutsch* mentioned earlier in the essay, became the *treuhaender* (administrator) of the Smołopap factory, which had belonged to the Krongold brothers before the war⁴⁹. When the

⁴⁸ Ludwik Krzymiński, son of Ludwik and Bronisława (née Dzięgielewska), born 2/5/1926 in Leszno, Poznań Voivodeship, resident in Ostrowiec, ul. Legionów 16. Previously, from 1941, he had lived at ul. Szeroka 3. status: pupil at the commercial school, diploma. Military rank: private, 2nd Department (intelligence). In the book *Wojna, wojna, wojenka* Stanisław Kosicki writes the following about the young Krzymiński: ‘...he was considered to be a heartbreaker. He could pull off anything, even madcap deeds. He was content with anything and was not a complainer, he was not bothered where he slept, or what he ate, but in service he was bankable like no one else’, Stanisław Kosicki, *Wojna, wojna, wojenka*, Olsztyn 1988 – 1993.

⁴⁹ After the war, Ludwik Krzymiński Senior returned to the Poznań region (Wielkopolska voivodeship), and became manager of the brickworks in Chocicza, Jarocin district. He joined the Polish Worker’s Party (PPR), later the Polish United Workers Party (PZPR – the country’s official communist party), even heading the Borough National Council in Nowe Miasto nad Wartą. The Department of Security (UB) discovered that he resided in Germany for some time after the war (AIPN, Po 04/1132, p. 224). It was subsequently determined that during the war, Krzymiński had lived in Ostrowiec, where according to a letter by the Head of Section I of the Department of Public Security in Poznań, ‘he was a member of the partisan National Armed Forces, and he participated in the arrests and shootings of Jews,’ *ibid.*, p. 271.

younger Krzysiński was searched, a wallet containing photographs was found, as well as his ID, 5 condoms, a key, a belt and 'one 9mm bullet'. This bullet was applicable to a Llama 9 mm calibre pistol, and indeed, just such a pistol was duly found in the possession of his companion Kazimierz Markwart, along with a Smith and Wesson of the same calibre, a Mauser pistol, an automatic MP no. 1473 with a magazine ('the cartridge already inserted into the barrel, and the weapon itself removed from its case, ready for use at any moment') and five hand grenades. This entire arsenal was transferred to a PUBP platoon in Ostrowiec, who were authorised to use it in the field, and it transpires from a note on pages 9 and 12 of the file, that by the time the case went to court, these items had been lost.⁵⁰

Krzysiński's first interrogation took place on 15 April 1945. It was conducted by Kazimierz Olech, an officer from the Kielce branch of WUBP, who a year later investigated participants in the Kielce Pogrom.⁵¹ 'I was a member of the Home Army from 1943,' Krzysiński stated. 'In September I joined a unit based in the woods under Lieutenant Potok, of the Peasants' Battalions, and I remained there until 7 October 1944'.⁵² He claimed that the order to execute Miss Krongold, 'part of the fight against the Jews', was given by the chief of the Home Army's intelligence, Władysław Banaszak, cryptonym Turner,⁵³ who lived in Ostrowiec at ul.

⁵⁰ AIPN Ki, 8/28, p. 9, 12.

⁵¹ See. Tokarska-Bakir, *Pod klątwą*, vol. 2, p. 248, p. 595, p. 597, p. 603.

⁵² The unit of the Home Army under Lieutenant Waclaw Tomasik cryptonym Stream has been accused of murdering Jews. These crimes were committed in September 1944 in the woods near the villages of Lipie and Jasieniec, and between the villages of Borsuki and Grabowiec, Starachowice, see. AIPN SAK 233, i.e. GK 217/233. Tomasik's trial, which began in 1950, was described Alina Skibińska in the essay "'Dostał 10 lat, ale za co?'. Analiza motywacji sprawców zbrodni na Żydach na wsi kieleckiej...', in: *Zarys krajobrazu*, pp. 401-402.

⁵³ Lieutenant Władysław Banaszak, son of Antoni and Franciszka Ludwiczak, b. 26.10.1908, cr. Krzysztof Arciszewski, Turner, Józef Mieloszczyk, lawyer and economist, Head of the 2nd Department of the Home Army, Opatów District, July 1944-January 1945 (Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance's Poznań Department [hereinafter AIPN Po], 04/1132, p. 5). The same file mentions Banaszak was supposed to be the co-owner of the tar paper factory in Ostrowiec, named 'Krzysiński i Ska' (Krzysiński and Co.), and it also contains information provided by the head of the PUBP in Jarocin, dated 11.9.1946, that 'Banaszak Władysław, PPR member, is manager of the Tar Paper Factory in Jarocin', and also that 'he is very socially active in the Party' (p.10). In the questionnaire he filled out for members and prospective members of the PPR, it is written that until 15th January 1945, he was the manager of the Office for Writing Applications in Ostrowiec, and that he subsequently returned 'home amid the wave of displaced people' (p.34). He describes this return in great detail in his potted biography, referring, among other matters, to a visit to a representative of the Economic Committee of the Council of Ministers in Katowice on 1st March 1945, and to the Military Court Corps in Częstochowa. He left the latter town on 5th March 1945, along with his wife and child, and headed towards Poznań (p.37). See Władysław Banaszak, son of Antoni, b. 1918 (elsewhere 1908) Brzostów, Opatów District, d. 2001, Poznań. District Radom-Kielce of the Home Army, Ostrowiec, Member of the World Association of Home Army Soldiers, Home Army Region 'Wielkopolska' – 'Fir' circle, Poznań, see: <http://www.wbc.poznan.pl/Content/242086/index.pdf> (dostęp 5/8/2020). See also the files of the investigation relating to cooperation during the German occupation with the 2nd Division

Kościelna, and that the instructions were conveyed to him on 15 March by a messenger girl of the Home Army, Miss Sławiak.⁵⁴ The execution was supposed to be carried out no later than 20th March. He added that shortly after this date, he received a letter from his father, warning against following any orders from 'Turner', as they were supposedly of a purely personal nature.

Between August 1944 and January 1945, Lieutenant Banaszak, cryptonym Turner, was indeed the chief of the Home Army's department in the Opatów Region, and Urszula Sławiak was his messenger girl, but these are the only details that have been verified from Krzymiński's testimony. As it was, the attack on Fajga Krongold took place two months after the Home Army had been disbanded, therefore at a time when 'Turner' no longer held the previously specified post. None of the other participants in the attack saw either him or Miss Sławiak. The least credible element is the information supposedly communicated by Krzymiński's father: given that he had been the *treuhander* of the Smołopap factory until Fajga Krongold's return to Ostrowiec, then the personal motivation behind the crime would rather pertain to him, and not to Banaszak. It is also unclear how Krzymiński Senior, a *Volksdeutsch*, would know anything about the intentions of a former chief of the Home Army's intelligence department.

of the General Staff of the Polish Army, and likewise cooperation with British intelligence. From August, Banaszak held the position of the head of the intelligence department and remained in this position until January 1945, see: <http://www.akokregkielce.pl/inspektoraty/articles/inspektorat-sandomierski.html> (accessed 5/8/2020). While examining Banaszak's file, I found an intelligence report from 1948, signed by an agent with the cryptonym Zet. The author of the report describes a visit to Józef Mularski, cryptonym Zeal, on 28th November 1948, at his flat in Ostrowiec on ul. Sikorskiego 7: 'during the conversation about Banaszak, he [Mularski], said that he had heard from his Poznań acquaintances who had been in Ostrowiec during the occupation that Banaszek had certainly been a member of WiN in 1945, and that he had directed WiN operations in Poznań. (...) Apart from this, he mentioned that Banaszak had been known as an *endek* [a supporter of the pre-war right-wing Endecja National Democracy Movement] in Home Army circles in the Ostrowiec area, and he was quite strongly connected with the Germans, via his intermediary Ula Sławiak. (...) Mularski said that in February 1945, that is after the arrival of the Soviet army, a combat unit of the Home Army shot Jews on the terrain of Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski, on the orders of Banaszak,' 'Zet', intelligence report, AIPN, Po 04/1132, p. 266. In a report submitted on 9th November 1948, the same informant added that Mularski assured him that he knew that 'Home Army fighters subordinate to Turner, acting on Turner's orders, liquidated a dozen or so Jews who were living in Ostrowiec, or rather who were hiding there,' *ibid*, p. 225. Mularski's claim was corroborated in Urszula Sławiak's testimony. She said that 'on Banaszak's orders, four Jews from Ostrowiec, who had been hiding in Ludwik Krzymiński's factory, were liquidated. Filip Godlewski [cr. Poker], carried out the sentence on these Jews', see report on ad hoc liquidation, signed by the Manager of Section VI of the Military Information Bureau, addressed to the Ministry of Public Security (MBP), Department I, Section VI, *ibid.*, pp. 259-260.

⁵⁴ The investigation files pertaining to Banaszak and Sławiak reveal that she was Urszula Kochanowska (née Sławiak, daughter of Michał and Wiktoria (née Adamska), b. 11 X 1921 in Poznań, AIPN Po, 04/1132.

Krzymiński's subsequent testimonies reveal that although he planned the attack on his own, he instructed three other people to carry it out: 19-year-old Kazimierz Markwart, who he recruited as part of the team with the aim of 'shooting Jews', and also two school friends of Markwart's, Janusz Winiarski and Bogdan Krawczyk. As far as these two are concerned (they do not appear in the investigation documents), we only know that they had been members of the Home Army 'serving under the Staff [the 2nd Legions Infantry Division] of Colonel 'Rope' [Aleksander Żółkiewski]'. Janusz Winiarski used the cryptonym Nettle [Pokrzywa] and resided in Ostrowiec at ul. Traugutta, while Bogdan Krawczyk, cryptonym Borski, lived at ul. Bródno.⁵⁵ Krzymiński does not explain why he did not take part in the execution himself.

'I gave the first order to carry out the sentence on Krongold on 19th March 1945, sending Bogdan Krawczyk, Janusz Winiarski and Kazimierz Markwart, arming them with two 9 calibre Llama pistols and one 9 calibre Smith.'

'[Question asked by the interrogator:] What was your aim in ordering Krongold's death?'

'I didn't have any aim, I was just carrying out the order given to me by "Turner", who had stressed to me in a letter: prepare for a fight against the Jews.'

'When was this fight supposed to take place?'

'It was supposed to take place when "Turner" gave the order.'

'What did you tell these people when you sent them to carry out the task?'

'That they should go and carry out the sentence, and if any other people are there, that they should shoot them all, so that they don't inform on us.'

'What did you do with the things that you stole from ul. Radomska?'

'I got 150 *czerwieńcy*⁵⁶, which I gave to Bogdan Krawczyk, and 200 złote [banknotes] from the National Bank, which I also gave to Krawczyk. I didn't take anything else home.'

⁵⁵ Wojciech Starzyński (*Kryptonim 'Kazik'*, op. cit, pp. 24-27) muddles up the surname Krawczyk, describing him as Wiesław Kasprzyk cryptonym Wildcat, and of Winiarski he writes that after the war he began studying medicine in Łódź. Having completed his fourth year of medical studies, for fear of being arrested he was compelled to save himself by fleeing the country. He ultimately emigrated to the USA, where he died in 1994 in the American Częstochowa. This story is not corroborated by a description of 'a gang of terrorist robbers [...] under the command of Ludwik Krzymiński cr. Iguana,' where one finds information that Bogdan Krawczyk and Janusz Winiarski escaped, after being detained by the PUBP in Ostrowiec. On 22nd February 1950, the Regional Military Prosecutor's Office issued an arrest warrant for Bogdan Krawczyk and Janusz Winiarski. On 24th December 1951, Winiarski was arrested in Ostrowiec, and the case against him was resumed. According to a verdict of the Regional Military Court in Kielce delivered on 22nd May 1954, pertaining to the possession of weapons, participation in an armed organisation and participation in an attack on Ostrowiec Jews, the proceedings were discontinued, owing to an amnesty. In spite of this development, on 25 August 1954 the Assembly of Judges of the Supreme Court upheld the verdict of the Regional Military Court. Winiarski fled abroad, first to West Berlin, then to France (AIPN Ki, 022/21, pp. 7-9). According to information within the same file, Bogdan Krawczyk was also detained on 27th September 1952, and his case was discontinued in accordance with a decision by the Regional Military Prosecutor's Office in Kielce (ibid., p. 9).

⁵⁶ *Czerwieńcy* (ros. *червонец*) – the name of a type of coin or banknote in high denominations, still in circulation in Russia and the USSR during and after World War II (valid until 1947).

‘What did you say to your people after they had carried out the sentence at Radomska?’
 ‘I waited for them at Markwart’s, and they arrived at 7.50 pm. They told me that the order had been carried out, and that all the Jews had been killed. Bogdan Krawczyk said that I had to go, otherwise it could give the game away, but I didn’t agree, as it was already 8 pm [there was a curfew at the time].’

‘What did you say to your people the next day?’

‘I asked them what they had taken from the Jews, I didn’t say anything else.’

‘(...) Whose proposal was it to carry out more significant work, and where was it supposed to take place?’

‘I was supposed to organise people to take up the fight against the Jews, and when the order came from [“Turner” – the word was crossed out] ‘Tom’,⁵⁷ all the Jews in Ostrowiec were to be shot.’

‘What was the purpose of shooting the Jews?’

‘I don’t know what the purpose was, I was just supposed to carry out ‘Turner’s’ orders, then I was meant to serve under ‘Dudek’ Sajkiewicz⁵⁸, and he was supposed to put me in contact with Captain ‘Tom’, and give subsequent orders.’⁵⁹

During the next interrogation, Krzysiński explained that he had no choice but to execute ‘Turner’s’ orders, as he had been sworn into the underground. He provided some further details of the operation: the combat unit left Markwart’s flat at 6.30 pm, having been instructed ‘to kill everyone there as a precaution, and to take any jewellery if it appeared that there was something to live on’. The refrain about the theft covering the costs of ‘the hideout crops up again and again in his statements. Watches, white linen, ‘and some money – I don’t know how much’, were stolen on the spot.⁶⁰

Kazimierz Markwart, the young artist who loved drawing battle scenes that were full of violence and a spirit of romance, was interrogated on 15th and 25th April. He said that from July to mid-October, he had served in various Home Army units in the woods, for example amongst the concentration of forces in the Świętokrzyskie Mountains, among others with ‘the Staff [the 2nd Legions Infantry Division] of Colonel Lin, in the rank of a private.’ On his return to Ostrowiec, he enrolled in a commercial school. In February, Krzysiński approached him and told him that he was reestablishing the Home Army, and its goal would be ‘to destroy Ukrainians and Jews’. Markwart’s subsequent statement does not entirely make sense: ‘I refused to enlist, then Krzysiński threatened me that even if I didn’t enlist, I would still have to finish the Jews. Having been threatened and intimidated by Krzysiński, I agreed to enlist in the organisation.’

⁵⁷No data available.

⁵⁸ Mirosław Sajkiewicz or Adam Krotowski, cr. ‘Dudek’, son of Łukasz and Stanisława, b. 5.7.1927 in Zawichost, secondary school pupil, AIPN Ki 022/21, p. 18.

⁵⁹ Interrogation of Ludwik Krzysiński, Ostrowiec, 15/4/1945, AIPN Ki 8/28, AIPN Ki 8/28, p. 13.

⁶⁰ Interrogation of Ludwik Krzysiński, Ostrowiec, 27/4/1945, AIPN Ki 8/28, p. 18.



Photograph from Kazimierz Markwart's kennkarte, 1942, AIPN Ki 8/28, p. 56

On the day of the attack, Krzysiński went over to Markwart's flat, where the latter was doing his Latin homework with his friends, Janusz Winiarski and Bogdan Krawczyk. Krzysiński said that 'the job has to be carried out today, that's the order,' and gave them weapons: two pistols, two Llamas and a Smith and Wesson. He clarified that a Jewess, Felicja Kwiatkowska-Krongold, was living at ul. Radomska 34. 'The sentence against her has to be carried out, and as a precaution, everyone in that flat has to be killed, steal what you can, just in case people get found out, and money is needed to cover the costs of the hide-out'. There were not supposed to be many people in Miss Krongold's flat that day.

They set off for the attack as a foursome, but Krzysiński left them on the way, saying: 'lads, just don't lose your nerve, do the job properly'. Krawczyk was the first to enter the flat, followed by Markwart, and then Winiarski. They asked, 'does Mrs Krongold live here?' They found as many as 11 people inside, both men and women. 'When we saw so many people, we hesitated over what to do next. Then Krawczyk said: "We have to carry out the order"'. Following our instructions, Krzysiński said we were robbers, and Krawczyk shouted: "hands up and march into the next room." Markwart watched over the captives. Meanwhile, Winiarski and Krawczyk searched the premises. Among other things, they stole a gold ladies' watch and a men's watch, a few rings, a silver powder case, and a georgette dress.⁶¹ When Winiarski left the house with the loot, the Jews were lined up against the wall.

⁶¹ AIPN KI 8/28, P. 83. Leon Szpilman describes in detail the items that were stolen from his wife, Mania: 'Of the things that were looted, the most important were: a burgundy bag made of crocodile skin with a brown suede lining, elliptic in shape, large and with a strap, with metal fittings. A round ladies' watch, gold, petite, its glass is missing, it has a black strap, the watch is broken. A men's pocket watch in a gold case, Tawan-Watch brand [the name of the brand may have been written incorrectly], its glass is missing, the hands are rusty, it has a gold chain, this watch was well-preserved in a bag. Several ladies' rings with gems, blue, red, green and sapphire. A silver powder case with a cracked mirror. A georgette dress, pleated with black stripes, with shiny flowers in various colours,' p. 107. The crocodile skin bag also contained a small book dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary (p.122). Leon Szpilman's phenomenal memory is evidenced in the detailed description that the militia required in connection with reporting the theft: 'They robbed me personally of the following: a Rio

[Question from the interrogator:] ‘Who gave the order to shoot, and who was the first to start doing this?’

[Markwart’s reply:] ‘We identified a couple of people, including Kwiatkowska, whose birth name was Krongold. The first shot was fired, and only then did I start to shoot, and I fired five shots, not singling out anyone in particular’.⁶²



Fajga Krongold (courtesy of Krongold family)

The victims, who were standing against the wall with their hands in the air, were shot in the back.⁶³ At one point, Markwart’s pistol gave up on him. He went to the next-door room to fix

wristwatch, (...) broken and without precious stones, square but with rounded corners, with a leather strap in several pieces, a tin buckle, with the pin intact, three thousand in cash, an olive-coloured gabardine coat, the inside pocket has a label with the inscription ‘Fisch 113’, a brown overcoat with zigzags and checks, it has a flap at the back and a satin lining, down to the waist at the back, and on the sides to the bottom. A light-coloured jacket made from houndstooth check, with a sporting cut, with a flap at the back, with folds on both sides from the shoulders to the flap, at the back of the neck on the jacket the name of the brand ‘Kryształ’ Radom is sewn in gold thread, machine-made, a waistcoat sewn with the fabric crosswise, not lengthwise, and various other small things which I don’t remember at the moment,’ AIPN Ki 8/28, p. 121.

⁶² AIPN KI 8/28, P. 39

⁶³ The record confirming that an oral report of a crime had been submitted by Janina Kędzierską (Chawa Adler) 20/3/1945, AIPN Ki 8/28, p. 116. The fact that the shots were fired into the victims’ backs was confirmed in all the examinations of the bodies. Compare with

it, while Krawczyk continued shooting. Shortly afterwards, Krawczyk ran out of the room and Markwart joined him. They knew that they had not killed everyone (we know from Mania Szpilman's testimony that one of the assailants, who had referred to her as a 'pretty hostess', apparently deliberately spared her). They reached the Market Square via ul. Sienkiewicza and then went down ulica Młyńska.⁶⁴ They didn't find Krzymiński at his home, so they returned to Markwart's, where they found their commander downstairs. When he heard that not everyone had been 'wiped out', he proposed that they 'go back and correct the matter', but they refused.

The next day, at Mrs Różalska's flat at ul. Kuźnia 14, where they were supposed to be lying low, they handed over their weapons to Sajkiewicz, cryptonym Hoopoe, in the presence of Krzymiński. They were apparently told that 'there has been a positive reaction in Ostrowiec to the whole incident, people are pleased that the Jews have been murdered'.⁶⁵ Supposedly, it was not the last action that Krzymiński was planning. 'He proposed us a job that involved an attack on ul. Młyńska, where some Jews were living,⁶⁶ and on ul. Polna, but he didn't say who the target was,'⁶⁷ – thus ends Markwart's testimony. He would later discount it, saying it was forced out of him by the UB.

Markwart and Krzymiński's versions of events, as given during the trial

The principal documentation of investigation case no. 154-156, concerning Ludwik Krzymiński and Kazimierz Markwart, is just 30 pages long. It begins on 23 April 1945 and closes a week later, formulating a straightforward indictment (pp. 49-52). The two interrogated parties confessed to all the allegations against them, and there is no mention of the other culprits.

Ostrowiec's Citizens' Militia (MO) must have had a great deal of work to contend with in the spring of 1945,⁶⁸ given that the murder of Fajga Krongold and her friends was so swiftly forgotten about. In a statement made by a representative of the Jewish community on 14th May 1945, cited years later by the historian Adam Penkalla, we hear – probably about Krzymiński and Markwart – that 'the murderers who killed 4 people have in fact been arrested, but they are to be freed'.⁶⁹ Over eight months went by before the first attempt was made to bring the case to court. On 23 January 1946, the Military Garrison Court in Kielce made a provisional review of the findings of the investigation of Krzymiński and Markwart, and proposed that the file be supplemented with the death certificates of the victims, and

Starzyński, *Kryptonim 'Kazik'*, 31, where the author claims that AK soldiers always carried the execution face to face.

⁶⁴ Wojciech Mazan commented as follows: 'It is strange that they ran to Młyńska through the square. They would have gotten there a lot quicker, and without encountering any witnesses, if they had run along the bank near the ponds.'

⁶⁵ AIPN Ki 8/28, p. 35.

⁶⁶ A tobacco seller, Chaim Gringlas, lived at ul. Młyńska 1, see: Tokarska-Bakir, *Pod kłatwą*, vol. 2, p. 674

⁶⁷ AIPN KI 8/28, p. 40

⁶⁸ One of the cases that was being investigated as of January was the much-publicised murder of Jan Foremniak, see Tokarska-Bakir, *Pod kłatwą*, vol. 1, p. 331, p. 549.

⁶⁹ A. Penkalla, 'Poles and Jews in the Kielce Region and Radom, April 1945-February 1946', *Polin*, vol.13: 2000, p. 245.

likewise certificates concerning the state of health of the injured.⁷⁰ First of all, the personal details of those who had been murdered were clarified, thanks to help from the Ostrowiec branch of the Central Committee of Polish Jews (CKŻP). It emerges from correspondence with the PUBP in Ostrowiec that autopsies of the victims were not carried out, ‘because martial law was still in place’ (p. 69)⁷¹. Likewise, no one seemed to be able to clarify the whereabouts of the other victims, who had long since fled Ostrowiec.

Another five months passed. Then a letter was written by Major Michał Kowalski, head of the Regional Military Court in Kielce (which had its headquarters in Radom). We learn from this document about the questioning of Janina Kędzierska (Chawa Adler) by an official from the PUBP in Ostrowiec, who signed with the initials KW.⁷² The head of the Regional Military Court in Kielce wanted to summon Kędzierska as a witness, and ultimately any other witnesses (everyone had left Ostrowiec long ago). In addition, he wanted to establish the personal data of the doctor who had drawn up the official record pertaining to the examination of the bodies (he had left town),⁷³ and also the details of the previously mentioned partisan Sajkiewicz, cryptonym Hoopoe (he was no longer alive).⁷⁴ The matter was pressing, as the suspects had already been held in custody for a year, and the indictments were solely based on the fact that they had pleaded guilty.



Jankiel Lustig, the father of Izrael Lejb who was murdered on March 19, 1945. Heartbroken after his son's death, he died in Germany in 1946. This photo was discovered by Wojciech Mazan in the archive of prewar Ostrowiec photographer, Jan Grześkiewicz (courtesy of Wojciech Mazan).

⁷⁰ Shortly afterwards, the previously mentioned medical records were found of Lejzor Szpilman, Maria Szpilman, Chawa Adler, Fajga Alkierman and Jankiel Lustig, who were treated at the Ostrowiec hospital in March 1945.

⁷¹ On page 6 of 106 AIPN KI 8/28, one finds the following note: ‘The forensic record of the examinations of the bodies of citizens of Jewish nationality were sent to the deputy prosecutor of the III Regional District Court in Radom, under Code No. 3/45 on 21 March 1945, by the Examining Magistrate in Ostrowiec, Mr Rogowski.’

⁷² This record was found, and I quoted from it at the beginning of the essay.

⁷³ According to p. 106 of AIPN KI 8/28, this was Dr Jan Jurek, resident in Ostrowiec, Al. Legionów 16, who in 1946 was already a doctor of the WUBP in Katowice.

⁷⁴ A document from the PUBP in Ostrowiec records that Sajkiewicz was killed in an attack on Citizens’ Militia station in Częstocice, Opatów district, May 1945, AIPN Ki 8/28, p. 106.

On 15 May 1946, the Regional Military Court in Kielce (headquarters in Radom), finally held a hearing. During this, Krzywiński denied that he had issued an order that the Jews should be attacked. Markwart stuck to the original testimony he had provided during the investigation, and added that during the war he had worked as a warehouseman at the Smołopap factory, which was being run at the time by Krzywiński's father.

In February, the accused Krzywiński came alone to my flat, and informed me that he had received an order from 'Turner' to make contact with people representing the staff of the division of Colonel Lin, and he told me that 'Turner' had given him an order to create a combat unit with the aim of dealing with informants of the NKVD and the Office of Public Security. On the basis of this order, I was supposed to withdraw two people serving under the Staff of the Division and put them into Krzywiński's unit. The order was in writing and Krzywiński read it to me.⁷⁵

Markwart said that Krzywiński's instruction to carry out an execution at Radomska 35 surprised he and his colleagues. The mention of the reading of 'Turner's' order looks like an attempt to strengthen Krzywiński's line of defence – it is a little hard to believe that this type of instruction would be communicated in a letter. While planning the attack, the conspirators decided that only Krawczyk would speak, and it was certainly he who was the 'tall, thin [person] with a gun', who was remembered as saying that 'you will all get by, but we need them [the valuables] for the party [organization].'

Markwart (who appears to have been the shortest and most talkative of the group), and Winiarski (of average height) were supposed to take the victims to the next-door room and put them up against the wall, check their documents, and confiscate 'valuable things'. They were meant to shoot everyone. However, the operation panned out differently. They knocked, and someone opened the door. The flat was in semi-darkness, with just one candle burning. Krawczyk entered first and shouted 'hands up'. There were three people in the first room. They were ordered to move to the adjacent room, 'and then one Jewess took the candle and stood up against the wall like everyone else. They all stood facing us, at a distance of about three metres. Then, when Krawczyk and Winiarski went to the next-door room, I stood in the doorway of the first (...) Nobody cried.'

They checked the documents and Krawczyk read out the names. Markwart was only able to recall the names of Felicja Kwiatkowska-Krongold and Lustig. 'All the Jews there started to look for their jewellery and then they laid it out on the table: there were *czterwińcy* [Soviet banknotes], some sort of linen, some Polish money, there was no gold, and there was a watch from one of the Jewish men. I don't remember seeing anything else, because I was standing at the back.'⁷⁶ Winiarski packed everything up, gave his gun to Krawczyk (who already had two pistols) and left the flat. He was supposed to check the situation on the street, and if everything was safe, knock on the window (the flat was on the ground floor). In the meantime, the Jews conversed with Krawczyk, although Markwart, who was standing in the next-door room, claimed that he didn't hear what they were saying. When the knock came at the window, Markwart immediately heard shots from Krawczyk's pistol. 'I was disorientated when I heard the shots ring out, I didn't know what to do. I pulled myself together and took out the Llama. I saw Krawczyk when I entered the room. The shots had made the candle go out and it was dark in the flat, although there was a little light from the moon. I could see

⁷⁵ AIPN KI 8/28, p.86.

⁷⁶ AIPN KI 8/28, p. 89

Krawczyk, he shot with a Llama first, he fired 9 shots, and then six shots with the Smith. I fired five shots in the direction of where the Jews had been standing. After the fifth (...) my pistol malfunctioned.’ Krawczyk kept firing until he ran out of ammunition.

They found out the following day that four people had been killed. They used the stolen money to cover the costs of their hide-out at ul. Kuźnia 14, so that they could stay there until 24 March, and no longer. Then ‘I had to return home because of my studies,’ explained Markwart, who after all was still a student. A month later, Szpilman recognised one of them on the street in Ostrowiec.⁷⁷

On being asked by the prosecutor why Felicja Kwiatkowska had to be killed, the accused was unable to provide an answer. He explained that he fired blindly at the wall. At that moment, he was standing to the left of Krawczyk. He saw the shots go off from Krawczyk’s gun and aimed in the same direction. ‘I had sworn an oath, so I had to carry out the order. The order was to kill everyone in the flat.’ When questioned again, he replied: ‘I had known Krongold, who was killed, as Felicja Kwiatkowska, but when I entered the flat I knew that they were Jews, I know that only Jews were killed.’⁷⁸

Asked about the inconsistencies between the confession made during the investigation and his testimony in court, he said that he had been beaten during the interrogation at the premises of the PUBP in Ostrowiec. He refuted the notion that Krzywiński forced him to join the Home Army and had threatened him. ‘He was a sworn member, and as such, he had to comply with orders.’ He rejected the statement that ‘the Home Army organisation, which he had once belonged to, aimed to kill Jews and Ukrainians’, and he likewise denied that Krzywiński has instructed them to introduce themselves to the victims as robbers. After thinking it over, he withdrew the statement that he had only started to shoot after Krawczyk. He also said that he had never testified about a prospective attack planned by Krzywiński on Jews who were resident on ul. Młyńska.

In reply to a question from barrister Bogucki, he said: ‘I carried out my commander’s order, and debating the matter was out of the question, as I was a soldier. I was under no obligation to query what the intelligence section had decided.’⁷⁹ At the end of his testimony (perhaps bearing in mind the circumstances of receiving the order, as otherwise it would contradict what he had said previously during the trial), he said: ‘I did not know that Kwiatkowska was a Jewess, and that the other people there were of Jewish background. Also, Krzywiński did not tell me that Kwiatkowska was a Jewess.’

The court then let Krzywiński speak, which caused some confusion in the room, as according to the plan, the accused parties were supposed to testify without hearing each other.

Krzywiński repeated the story about the commander of the second division, ‘Turner’, who he took an oath before in 1945. ‘In February 1945, I received an order to contact members serving under the Staff of the Division, with the aim of forming a combat unit that would fight against the informants of the NKVD and the UBP,’ he said. He then made contact with

⁷⁷ Markwart claimed that he was given up to PUBP functionaries by Sajkiewicz, cryptonym Dudek, who was released the next day (Markwart, who was supposedly watching through a window, allegedly saw Sajkiewicz as functionaries let him out through the gatehouse).

⁷⁸ AIPN KI 8/28, p. 91

⁷⁹ AIPN KI 8/28, p. 94

Markwart, who duly brought in the two remaining participants, who Krzysiński himself did not know. 'I gave ['Turner's'] order to Markwart, which included the instruction to liquidate Felicja Kwiatkowska. As an extra precaution, they were to liquidate everyone they found there (...) I had seen Felicja Kwiatkowska twice before in my life. My father left in November 1945, and I don't know where he went. He was a *treuhander* and held this post until the end of 1943.⁸⁰ He was the director of the tar paper and pitch factory.'

On being asked by the court to clarify why he had organised an attack on the daughter of the owner of the factory where his own father had once served as director, Krzysiński was unable to answer. He was also unable to explain how his father knew about an eventual order from 'Turner' that he supposedly advised his son not to carry out.

Markwart was duly not able to decide whether or not he knew whether Miss Krongold was Jewish: 'That I don't remember. I knew that they were Jews, and Jewesses, I found that out when I was at their house, but I didn't notice that the words "alias Krongold" had been written in the order.' The hearing was concluded with a request for supplementary documentation in connection with testimonies from the victims, and records relating to their medical treatment.



Fajga Alkichen ID in Germany before her leaving for Canada in 1948 (courtesy of Altkichen family)

⁸⁰ During a hearing on 18/7/1946 he corrected himself, saying he held this post until October 1944, adding that he was hunted by the Gestapo as a Home Army operative working in the intelligence sphere, AIPN KI 8/28, p. 188.

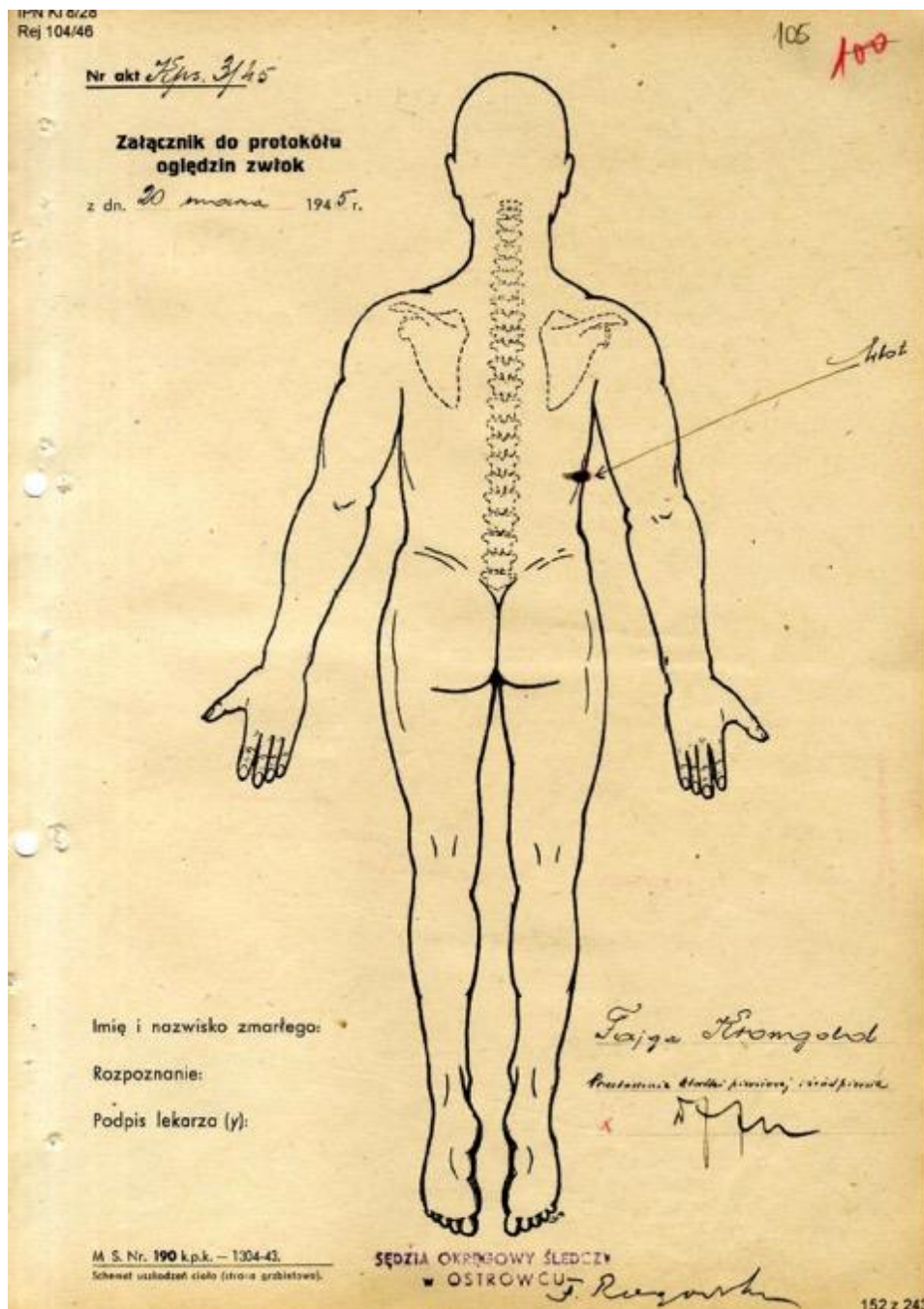


Diagram attached to the official record of the examination of the body of Fajga Krongold, ‘the apparent cause of death was a gunshot wound through the rib cage and the mediastinum’, age 27, height 160 cm. Ostrowiec, 20/3/1945, AIPN Ki 8/28, pp. 150-156

The final hearing and verdict

The criminal case against Markwart and Krzysiński concluded just a week after nine death sentences were handed down in the trial of the perpetrators of the Kielce Pogrom.

On 18 July 1946, the Regional Military Court in Kielce held a session in Radom. Once again, both of the accused admitted that they had taken part in the attack. Markwart was clearly covering for Winiarski during the hearing, stating that ‘beyond any shadow of a doubt’, the latter was not in the room when the first shot was fired. He repeated that Krawczyk fired, his

own gun jammed, and the inconsistencies in his testimonies were due to his being beaten by the UB. Krzysiński stuck to his explanation about the order given by ‘Turner’, whose role in the crime had still not been verified by anyone other than Krzysiński himself. In their final words, the accused asked the court to be lenient. The court was presented with a reference concerning Kazimierz Markwart’s ‘expertise and artistic talents’,⁸¹ and it was noted that like many artists, he was suffering from tuberculosis.

On the following morning, the Court read out the death sentence for both defendants, depriving them of their civil rights once and for all, and likewise imposing forfeiture of property. Part of the justification was as follows: ‘The Court has arrived at the conclusion that the most complete removal of Krzysiński Ludwik and Markwart Kazimierz from society, in the form of depriving them of their lives, is dictated (*ultima ratio*) by the indispensable, ineluctable and inevitable necessity of protecting society as whole, on account of the defendants exceptionally anti-social qualities (characters bordering on bestial), and no condition, provided for by humanitarian legislation, which does not provide for crematoria, is able to remove these qualities by deprivation of liberty, and thus it is beyond doubt that no alternative punishment of the accused Krzysiński and Markwart will change them mentally, and indeed no other punishment will protect society against them.’⁸²

The same panel of judges formulated the opinion that neither of the condemned men deserved to be pardoned. On 6 August 1946, the Supreme Military Court in Warsaw upheld the verdict. Relatives of the condemned submitted requests for clemency. Ludwik Krzysiński’s mother wrote a plea which included the following passage: ‘I deeply lament what has happened, and as a mother I feel sympathy for the orphaned relatives [of the deceased] and understand their pain. One can only condemn the deed, but taking the life of my son will not bring back the unfortunate dead.’⁸³

President of the State National Council (KRN) Bolesław Bierut did not avail himself of his right to pardon the condemned.⁸⁴ Thereafter, the documentation of the case has only two official records, bearing the information that the death sentence was carried out at the prison in Radom on 3 September 1946.⁸⁵

⁸¹ The reference was provided by ‘artist/painter’ Wanda Telakowska (see https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wanda_Telakowska, accessed 10/8/2020). She stated that: ‘On the basis of the works by Kazimierz Markwart that were sent to me for assessment (...) I can say that the artist has outstanding talent, both in drawing and painting. If Kazimierz Markwart attends an appropriate art school, he could be destined for exceptional achievements in the field of fine art,’ AIPN Ki 8/28, p. 204.

⁸² AIPN Ki 8/28, p. 198.

⁸³ AIPN Ki 8/28, p. 219.

⁸⁴ AIPN Ki 8/28, p. 221, 223, decision from 19/8/1946.

⁸⁵ AIPN Ki, 8/28, pp. 230–231. Starzyński’s text (*Kryptonim ‘Kazik’*) includes a story about a supposed pardon that Zygmunt Markwart fought for and obtained on behalf of his brother Kazimierz, allegedly on the basis of Bierut being moved by the condemned man’s powerful artistic talent. However, a letter from Aleksander Michniewicz, President of the Supreme Military Court, dated 17th September 1946, presents the matter of the pardon as follows: ‘On 26th August 1946, I sent you the case file for Ludwik Krzysiński and Kazimierz Markwart, who have been condemned to death, in relation to which the President of the State National Council did not exercise his right to issue a pardon. Subsequently, the President of the State



Krongold family before the war. The parents, Chaya and Chaskiel, are sitting, their children are standing behind them
(courtesy of the Krongold family)

Counternarrative

When considering the files of postwar cases, one rarely finds such detailed and complete information as in the proceedings pertaining to the murders at Radomska 34. In spite of the efforts of the Citizens' Militia in Ostrowiec, which tried to stall the case, a great deal of material has survived, including the death certificates of the victims, detailed testimonies of the survivors, and also the confessions of the perpetrators. The course of the attack is also corroborated by the record book of the Ostrowiec Citizens' Militia, accounts from the archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (ŻIH), and international collections of oral history.

Nevertheless, the Ostrowiec Pogrom⁸⁶ is still treated in certain quarters as an ensnarement by 'NKVD-UB apparatchiks', who in March 1945, set a trap for gifted Home Army soldiers at

National Council stalled the carrying out of the sentence. Today, the Director of the Presidential Office of the State National Council informed me that the president of the State National Council has not changed his decision in relation to either of the condemned, due to which I recommend that the order be given to carry out the sentence without further delay,' AIPN Ki/8/28, p. 232. According to the official records of the executions of the condemned men, the sentences were carried out on 3rd September 1946, at 22.00 and 22.15 respectively (ibid., p. 230 and 231, and AIPN, Ki 013/3974, vol.2, p. 70 and 37). Kazimierz Markwart was buried – at the cost of the prison – at the Catholic cemetery in Radom (4th September 1946, see the letter of Director of the Prison in Radom to the Board of the Roman Catholic Cemetery, AIPN, Ki 013/3974, p. 38).

⁸⁶ I use the term 'pogrom' in a colloquial sense here, as according to classifications pertaining to collective violence, the event that took place on 19/3/1945 should rather be referred to as an act of vigilantism, see J.Tokarska-Bakir, 'Terror w Przedborzu', in: eadem, *Bracia miesiqce. Szkice z antropologii historycznej Polski 1939-1946* (in preparation).

Radomska 34. There was a claim that it was just an entrapment, a furtive operation by the security services and the young soldiers just returned hostile fire that resulted in casualties.⁸⁷

As late as 2011, the author of these words, a scoutmaster from Ostrowiec named Wojciech M. Starzyński, was convinced of Markwart's innocence, and vowed that he would not rest until evidence has been unearthed that the death penalty for Markwart was a crime, rooted in a communist plot to wreak vengeance⁸⁸ for the murder of Jan Foremniak.⁸⁹ This prompts the question as to whether evidence amounts to anything in the face of such outspoken assumptions.

The reference to Foremniak represents a clumsy attempt to distract attention from evidence that already exists. A similar ploy was used by another author, with the claim that Felicja Kwiatkowska-Krongold was an informant of the NKVD. It is lamentable that a state institution of the rank of the Institute of National Remembrance is involved in the defamation of the victim, as the author of this slander is one of its employees.⁹⁰ The upshot is that one finds echoes of this theory in every study that examines the Ostrowiec Pogrom. Even as reliable an author as Regina Renz was affected: 'Rumours had circulated that [Fajga Krongold] had (...) a list of Poles who had contributed to the deaths of Ostrowiec Jews. Two young people, former soldiers of the Home Army, went to the flat of Felicja Kwiatkowska (aka F. Krongold), with the aim of taking this list...'.⁹¹

However, there is no evidence that such a list ever existed – at least in the sense in which the word evidence is used in the academic world. However, a review of the documentation reveals that such a justification for murder, previously motivated by the commonly understood slogan of 'the destruction of the Jews', had only just started to take root. The earliest mention of this version of the motivation in relation to the Ostrowiec murders can be

⁸⁷ That version was disseminated by a renown Ostrowiec citizen, Wojciech M. Starzyński in his manuscript, *Kryptonim 'Kazik'*, that circulated Ostrowiec in early 2000. On the request of his son I avoid quoting this text limiting myself to paraphrase it. Unfortunately it will be much more difficult to erase this text from the Ostrowiec inhabitants' memory.

⁸⁸ Starzyński, *Kryptonim 'Kazik'*.

⁸⁹ See footnote on Foremniak.

⁹⁰ 'The case files reveal that it was supposed to be an action aimed at liquidating a supposed informant, carried out by an unspecified underground organisation,' Ryszard Śmietanka-Kruszelnicki, 'Podziemie antykomunistyczne wobec Żydów po 1945 roku - wstęp do problematyki (na przykładzie województwa kieleckiego)', in: *Z przeszłości Żydów polskich. Polityka - gospodarka - kultura - społeczeństwo*, ed. Jacek Wijaczka, Grzegorz Miernik, IPN, Kraków 2005, pp. 253-254.

⁹¹ Regina Renz, 'Żydzi w okresie okupacji i w pierwszych latach po wyzwoleniu', in: Waldemar R. Brociek, Adam Penkalla, Regina Renz *Żydzi ostrowieccy. Zarys dziejów*, The Historical-Archaeological Museum in Ostrowiec 1996, 117. We may add: even if such a list existed, the question arises, 'whether Polish citizens, the victims of collaboration and the rightful owners of seized property, could call on the then authorities to return this property and punish the perpetrators, and whether similar situations can be called "collaboration with the NKVD"'. J. Tokarska-Bakir, 'Następstwa Holokaustu w relacjach żydowskich i w pamięci polskiej prowincji w świetle badań etnograficznych', in: eadem, *Okrzyki pogromowe. Szkice z antropologii historycznej Polski 1939-1946*, Wydawnictwo Czarne, Wołowiec 2012, p. 92.

found in the *Dziennik Powszechny* newspaper, in July 1946,⁹² and it began to serve as a justification for a rising number of attacks, the context of which involved settlement of ownership questions and anxiety over being compelled to move out of properties that had been occupied in the absence of Jewish owners.⁹³ ‘The list of murderers of Jews’, which imperceptibly morphed into ‘the list of informants of the NKVD’, effectively drew attention away from the former group.

Rubin Katz writes:

The Poles claimed to have come looking for a list of local Poles who had participated in the killing of Jews during the war, which they said the Jews had put together to perhaps inform the authorities. No doubt some had scores to settle, but there never was such a list; the demand was a pretext to come and rob the refugees, and the planned robbery ended in a killing spree. To have struggled to survive a long and terrible war only to die a violent death at the hands of your neighbours was perverse beyond imagination. Even after the horrors of the Holocaust, Poles still couldn’t find it in their hearts to tolerate a handful of returning Jews.⁹⁴



The Ostrowiec survivors, 1945 (courtesy of Avi Borenstein)

Other stories

It seems that a similarly impervious conscience as that of a scoutmaster Starzyński generated the reports in the WiN journal *Honor i Oczyzna* in 1946. A legend arose about a murder carried out by the courts, comparing Markwart to the fabled 19th-century patriotic painter Jan Matejko. The notion of the martyrdom of this ‘young Matejko’ was undoubtedly fuelled by

⁹² ‘A rumour was circulating in town, that she had a list of Poles who in various ways, had contributed to the deaths of Ostrowiec Jews during the occupation’, *Dziennik Powszechny*, no. 197, 20/7/1946, p. 4, copy in AŻIH, file ref. 303-XIII-37

⁹³ In this context, see the comment of one of the perpetrators of the Ostrowiec Pogrom about Chaja Szpigiel, who ‘is trying to find a place to live’ (AIPN Ki 8/28, p. 106-107).

⁹⁴ Katz, *Gone to Pichipoli*, p.263.

the classified nature of the proceedings of the Regional Military Court and the lack of access to the files following the collapse of communism, coupled with the delusions of historical politics.

However, there is also a legal aspect that is conducive to the resurgence of the Ostrowiec counternarrative. Several years ago, Alina Skibińska and Dariusz Libionka described a situation involving the murder of a group of Jews in Ostrowiec under the pretext of their being admitted into the Home Army in December 1942 and January 1943.⁹⁵ The initiator of the murder was likewise a member of the Poznan intelligentsia, a graduate of a teaching college, chief of Section II of the Home Army, named Józef Mularski, cryptonym Zeal.⁹⁶ Some Jewish volunteers who had escaped from the Ostrowiec Ghetto, bearing hopes of joining Polish partisan units, were first denuded of their financial resources, then sworn into the organisation, and ultimately shot (two survived).⁹⁷ During the subsequent investigation in 1949, Mularski explained his actions in the following manner:

Because I was not able to bring these Jews into the fold of any underground organisation of the kind that they so desperately wanted to join, and because I also could not deceive and mislead them any longer, and likewise because I could no longer benefit from them materially, in the form of the money that they had been passing on to me, and textiles (for suits), hard leather for soles and other things, the Jews started to rebel against me, and they began trying to get hold of firearms on their own, and they started looking for contacts with members of the ZWZ-AK organisation [Union of Armed Struggle-Home Army] and others, so as to get to units based in the woods. I was not prepared to allow for such developments, and in order to intimidate them, I made these Jews, who were based in a dugout, swear an oath, which read as follows: 'We will be faithful and carry out the orders of our superiors and fight for the freedom and independence of Poland, against her enemy.' This was a pretext to make these Jews completely dependent on me, and convince them that they were members of some kind of underground organisation, and that they were directly subordinate to me. When this

⁹⁵ Alina Skibińska and Dariusz Libionka, "Przysięgam walczyć o wolną i potężną Polskę, wykonywać rozkazy przełożonych, tak mi dopomóż Bóg", *Żydzi w AK. Epizod z Ostrowca Świętokrzyskiego, Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały*, Warsaw 2008, no. 4; also 'Dziennik Hindy i Chaniny Malachi', ed. Jan Grabowski, Lea Balint, *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały*, Warsaw 2007, no. 3, pp. 251-252.

⁹⁶ AIPN Ki 261/750, The personal file of a member of the World Association of Home Soldiers concerning Józef Mularski, cryptonym 'Zygan', 'Zeal', father's name: Ignacy, b. 29/1/1908, chief of the Ist Organisational Section of the Home Army, member of Kedyw (Directorate of Diversion), <http://www.dws-xip.pl/PW/formacje/pw206a.html> (accessed 5/8/2020). See also the Voivodeship Court in Kielce, Pr. 2293, Files in the criminal case against Józef Mularski (for murdering 12 people of Jewish nationality), Rotuli of the Voivodeship Court in Kielce [1949].

⁹⁷ The archives of the Jewish Historical Institute (AŻIH) contain accounts which pertain to this case, the first given by Mendel Welman, AŻIH file ref. 301/3055, A second account, in which both Mularski and Leon Nowak are mentioned (the address of the latter is given as: Ostrowiec, Traugutta 6 or 8), was provided by Szlama Icek Cwajgman, one of the two surviving Jews, who emigrated to the USA after the war, AŻIH 301/4427. A third, submitted by Lejbus Rozenblatt, mentions Edward Perzyński, file ref. AŻIH 301/4428.

did not work out, and the Jews continued to look for other contacts with underground organisations, I decided to liquidate the Jews, by removing them from that location, taking them to another area, or by shooting them.⁹⁸

When asked if he knew what kind of action he was taking part in, one of the murderers, Edward Perzyński, justified his behaviour in the same way that Krzywiński and Markwart had done:

Yes, I was conscious of what I was doing, but I was only operating as a soldier of that underground combat unit, following the instructions that were given to me by the commander of that unit, Józef Mularski, cryptonym Zeal, as he was my superior. I should state that it was a sacred thing to me. If I did not carry it out, my actions would be regarded as treasonous towards the organisation, and I would have faced the death penalty for not carrying out an order, as Mularski himself told us.

As it transpired, Mularski was sentenced to death in 1949, but the following year, President Bierut intervened, and the punishment was commuted to a life sentence. In 1957, as a result of an extraordinary appeal, the Supreme Court referred the case for review – due to coercive measures that were applied in the investigation, which Mularski had protested about. The Regional Court duly acquitted the defendant. On 23 February 1991, an act was passed which declared that judgements against people who were repressed for activities dedicated to the independence of the Polish State were invalid. On the basis of this, in 2000, Mularski obtained considerable compensation for himself.

After 1991, Polish courts gave many verdicts pertaining to people who had swindled, robbed or killed Polish citizens of Jewish descent, and these people belatedly came to be regarded as fighters for national independence. In fact, Markwart and Krzywiński were not rehabilitated, but were the statements of the IPN employees not a form of justification for their crimes? Together, these developments set the terms whereby myths could be spread about the murder in Ostrowiec. Society will have to pay for them for many decades, with a legacy of flawed memory and the return of the repressed.

⁹⁸ Quoted in: Skibińska, Libionka, op. cit.



Malka Szpiegel standing next to her sister's matzevah built in Ostrowiec cemetery commemorating the murder of Chaja Szpiegel on March 19, 1945 (left photo). The same matzevah damaged several months later (right photo). Fragments of the decyphred caption: "...a mourning time ...killed by fascist murderers along with 2 young women and a young man....Chaya Shayndal daughter of R. Naftali Szpiegel . Nisan 5 , 5705-19.3.1945" (courtesy of the Szpiegel Family)

A Postscript: Henry Silberberg testimony

When this text was ready Avi Borenstein provided me with the testimony of Henry Silberberg who was one of the injured witnesses of the murder (see footnote 26). Below fragments of the transcript of his valuable deposition⁹⁹:

" On 12 March, just before the curfew came in, 2 Poles came into the house where we were living. We had potatoes dug and spades inside. These soldiers were in mufti but had machine guns. Apparently there was one outside also. They said, "Give us what you have got", and they used the words in Polish, (it didn't hit us at that time), "You won't be needing it." And then they started to ask "Who are you?" Spiegel gave her Aryan name, and he said in the familiar tense (rude), "No, you are Spiegel". The same with Krongold. They said, "Turn to the wall". I did not turn to the wall. I was standing close to the corner where there was a spade which we used for digging. I thought about it but I did not get the spade. And they started to shoot. The old lady said that they shot with blanks. She wasn't hurt. They shot to death Spiegel, Krongold, Lustig, and the young lady who only came a few minutes before and she was shot right next to me. I got the bullet here on the top of my leg and here is the bullet. It ricocheted from a pocketknife which I had in my pocket and apparently from what I notice now it got distorted and went into me. So I fell, I was still able to run to the doctor who lived near my uncle's place and I collapsed there. They took me to the hospital on a carriage with iron wheels and the trip probably caused further blood loss. They x-rayed me and they saw the bullet and the surgeon who operated on me couldn't find the bullet, it was black-and-white on the x-ray and he sewed me up again. This was in the Ostrowiec hospital. I had an anaesthetic, there were no antibiotics in those days, and it was just a case of sitting and waiting for death. I

⁹⁹ H Silberberg Part 2Testimony 1-11-1994.m4v (courtesy of Henry Silberberg's daughter and Avi Borenstein).

asked some friends to bring me some poison, I didn't want to be a cripple, leg cut-off and so on. I didn't want to live that way.

They also shot Spielman, he also survived the camp, he was a musician, and got shot in the elbow and it was a superficial wound and he left the hospital about 2 days later. He recognised the shooters in the street and they were arrested by the security. When they were interrogated they said they had an order from the AK, to murder the rest of the Jews, the survivors. I was in the hospital lying there, and there was no hope.

Then something happened again with dreams. Chava Adler [~~later Henia Kudlowicz?~~], one of the people who had survived on Aryan papers (and is now in Israel), came to visit me. She was a friend of my younger sister. She came to visit me and said to me, "Henry I was dreaming last night that I went to visit you, I met your mother and Hannah your younger sister and your mother said to me, where are you going and she said Heniek (Henry) is in the hospital, she said, yes we are going to take him out from there." When she said that, I burst out crying and I said "Well, I think I am going to live." We had one non Jewish surgeon called the Golden Hand who came initially from Poznan and he was at the Ostrowiec Hospital by chance¹⁰⁰. I remember it was a Friday. He sat down by my bed and took out the Xray and he said nonchalantly, "We're going to take out this bullet". Well, he took me on the operating table, I do remember that he took this bullet which I have just shown you, I was still after the anaesthetic and he put it on my forehead, "Here you are". And then I started to recover. As soon as I started to recover, I wanted to leave this hell. I was still able to get documents to take back the properties that my parents had, I put an administrator in, I still have those documents here, and I left.



Henry Silberberg (courtesy of the Silberberg family)

Translated by Nicholas Hodge

¹⁰⁰ See footnote 26.