

Project in Posterum

(Preserving the past for the future)

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The Dialectics of Pain:

The Interrogation Methods of the Communist Secret Police in Poland, 1944-1955. Glaukopis, vol. 2/3 (2004-2005).

Part III

In Łódź, the infamous security officer Major Adam Humer ordered his underlings to hold down the captured insurgent cryptographic expert, Second Lieutenant Maria Hattowska of the WiN. Then Humer stood on her chest and beat her on her crotch with a steel-tipped whip. Humer applied similar methods to another woman, the insurgent liaison Second Lieutenant Ruta Czaplińska of the NZW. Aside from torturing many suspects, he and his colleagues, including UB Second Lieutenant Tadeusz Szymański, beat to death at least one independentist, Tadeusz Łabędzki, whose “crime” was to have edited underground publications.[73]

Between December 27, 1945, and January 26, 1946, the secret police launched an anti-insurgent expedition in the area of Drohiczyń. “Thirty-six persons were arrested. In many villages people were beaten and tortured on the spot. The secret police demanded the surrender of weapons by persons who often had none.”[74]

From December 1945 through February 1946 the Communist counterintelligence officer Jerzy S. tortured Wincenty O., a Gulag survivor, in Koszalin. While serving under duress in Poland’s Communist military, Wincenty O. was denounced for spreading “enemy propaganda,” i.e. complaining about the system. Jerzy S. interrogated him at night, kicking his victim and beating him with a wooden club. The man confessed and was sentenced to 5 years in jail.[75]

On January 13, 1946, uniformed secret police troops of the Internal Security Corps (Korpus Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego – KBW) raided Mężenin near Siedlce and Drohiczyń. They seized insurgent post commander Edward Gregorczyk (“Bonawentura”) and two of his soldiers, all of them seasoned anti-Nazi and anti-Communist fighters. Gregorczyk “was subjected to incredibly cruel torture. After he was terribly beaten, with his face massacred and his bones broken, the UBP and the KBW drove him around the area to force him to denounce members of the underground to them. Gregorczyk refused to.... [and] he was killed by functionaries the Communist terror apparatus... near Mieżenin.”[76]

In February 1946, in the county of Kraśnik, the NKVD and UB arrested several hundred independentist sympathizers in a massive sweep. They were then brought to the UB headquarters in Kraśnik. According to an underground dispatch,

Everyone is accused of [illegal] possession of weapons. However, because they do not have any weapons, no one confesses to possessing any. The UB tries to force an inculpatory confession. Namely, the detainee is laid out on a bench. Two UB-men or bolsheviks [i.e., NKVD] sit on him. One sits on his head and the other on his back. The third beats him on the heels of his feet with a walking stick. On average one receives 1,000 blows on the heels. After such an interrogation, the prisoner is unable either to walk or to stand because his bones are shattered. Another way [to extract confessions] is to pour water into one’s nose. Apart from this they wave a gun before the prisoner’s eyes and threaten to shoot him. In one instance, while issuing such threats, a shot was fired and shattered the knee of the person under interrogation. [77]

In March 1946, following the assassination of a local Communist party apparatchik, the UB seized Albert Bil in Krzemień near Szczecin. Bil had been a Home Army soldier in the Wilno area but after mid-1945 he discontinued his insurgent activities and had nothing to do with the assassination. His arrest was an act of approximated terror, striking at a possible rather than actual culprit. Alfred Zimmerman supervised the interrogation of Bil. In the course of the interrogation of

March 23, 1946, the AK soldier had six of his teeth crushed with a pair of pliers, needles jammed under his fingernails, and a chair leg jammed into his rectum. Finally, Zimmerman ordered that Bil be locked into “the barrel of truth,” a closed container half-filled with feces. After a while, the man confessed and was sentenced to 10 years. [78]

On April 15, 1946, the secret police arrested Piotr Kosobudzki, an officer of the PAS NZW Łódź. He left the following account of his ordeal:

The leading interrogator in our case was the Jewish officer Frenkel. His assistant was a muscular ape named Bocheński. Frankel sat behind the desk and asked questions. To stress his own seriousness, he played with a pistol. Meanwhile, Bocheński, foaming at the mouth, kept hitting me with a stick [pała] on my head, repeating one word over and over again: “talk, talk” or “sign it, sign it”.... One time Bocheński broke a police baton on my head, and then a massive chair. Finally, he beat me with a chair leg....

One of my tormentors, a Jew named Zajdel, had a magnificent way of proving false confessions right. He made me lay my hands down on the table and he hit me with a rod [pręt] on my nails. If I withdrew my hand, that meant to him that I was not telling the truth.

During that interrogation they often changed their tactics abruptly. They offered me a cigarette allegedly to calm my nerves. When I took a drag on it once, they would box me on my jaw so hard that the cigarette either was crushed between my lips or fell down. They dubbed this procedure, in the secret police swaggering jargon, “to let him smoke.”[79]

Occasionally, Frenkel was capable of being perfidiously “kind.” While the tired executioner Bocheński rested on a chair, Frenkel “sympathized” with my plight: “Do you think it would be hard for us to announce that you died of blood infection?”[80]

On May 14, 1946, the UB men of Łomża arrested the grade school teacher Halina Sawicka née Komorowska (“Jerychonka”) in Cwaliny Duże. At seventeen, the woman joined the independentist underground during the first Soviet occupation in 1939. She continued her clandestine activities against the Nazis. During the second Soviet occupation in 1945 she served as a local liaison of the National Military Union and as a distributor of the underground press. The search of her household failed to yield any incriminating material. Nonetheless, Sawicka was taken to Łomża where UB Lieutenant Elias Trokenheim and his men beat her on the soles of her feet and repeatedly hit her face, breaking two of her teeth. Then, the woman was summarily sentenced to death in a mock trial at the UB headquarters that lasted less than three minutes. Together with six other victims, Sawicka was stood against a wall to be shot. Unexpectedly, she and another prisoner, Domuratówna, were reprieved. However, the five men suspected of independentist activities were shot right then and there in front of the petrified Sawicka. Still, the woman refused to confess.[81]

In May 1946, the Resistance Movement of the Home Army [ROAK] unit of Wiktor Zacheusz Nowowiejski (“Jeż”) freed one of its soldiers, Edmund Morawski (“Lipa”), from a prison ward at the hospital in Przasnysz.[82] The liberated insurgent was subsequently hidden at the farmstead of Kazimierz Chranowski. Morawski had his legs burned and smashed by the secret police and required urgent medical attention. His host recalled that the insurgent “had unhealed wounds on his feet and broken bones were protruding from his open wounds... Throughout his incarceration he was kept in a small cell. He was so exhausted by the interrogation that he was in a critical state both physically and psychologically.”[83]

In Poznań, the Military Counterintelligence (Informacja Wojskowa) officers routinely tortured their prisoners. For example, between April and July 1946 Kazimierz S. was kept in a basement filled with cold water. His interrogators beat him with rifle butts and rubber truncheons and crushed his fingers in the door crack. The military counterintelligence also shot their

prisoners summarily.[84]

On June 18, 1946, the secret police caught Henryk Jarząbek (“Tolek”) of the Conspiratorial Polish Army (Konspiracyjne Wojsko Polskie – KWP). While making the arrest, the policemen killed his brother, Kazimierz. Subsequently,

I was taken to Kościszew and there at the manor house the so-called interrogation commenced. Among other things, they inserted my hand in the door crack, closing the door gradually on it and crushing my fingers. Then they pushed a needle under my fingernails. Next, I was taken to Piotrków Trybunalski, where at the Military Intelligence headquarters I was interrogated and constantly beaten with a whip.[85]

In July 1946 in Gdańsk, the UB captured Danuta Siedzikówna (“Inka”). This seventeen-year-old girl served as a medic with the insurgent unit of Major Zygmunt Szendzielarz (“Łupaszko”). The UB men stripped her naked during the interrogation sessions. She was “beaten and abused.” The teenager stubbornly refused to confess. Later, “Inka” refused to beg for clemency. She was promptly sentenced to death and shot on August 28, 1946.[86]

Antoni Jędraszek (“Żuk”) of the KWP was arrested in August 1946 by the UB in Pabianice: The so-called investigation was conducted by several thugs, usually drunk, who bragged that they were ‘the Polish Gestapo.’ They were sadists without any conscience or consideration. They beat me all over my body... They beat me with their fists, a whip, and a stick. They kicked me. When I lost consciousness, they poured water over me. The fate of the victim depended on the mood of the UB men. Often they beat and tortured me for fun and pleasure, and to fulfill their bestial desires. One time during an interrogation session they beat me so much that I lost consciousness. I was dragged out on the corridor and doused with a bucket of cold water. After I regained my senses, wobbling on my feet, I attempted to get a drink of water. Then one of the torturers, called Obierzałek, kicked me and said: ‘for you, you fascist, there is no water in people’s Poland.’ They dragged me by my legs back to my cell.... As a result of such methods of total terror, a human being slowly became an inert mass of meat incapable of controlling his feelings and thoughts... Therefore the confessions, prepared by a secret policeman, were full of contradictions. This caused more interrogation sessions and torture and so on. Finally, one signed anything that one was given, without any reading, or making any corrections. Every correction or objection meant a new round of beating and torture. [87]

The superior officer of Jarząbek and Jędraszek, Lieutenant Jan Nowak (“Cis”) was arrested on September 14, 1946. Subjected to cruel torture, Nowak confessed on October 11, 1946, and was sentenced to death. This sentence was later commuted to 15 years.[88] In October 1946 the UB arrested 18-year old Tadeusz Sikorski and his sister Władysława Sikorska-Żorawska of Lipinki near Tuchola. Both had served in the Pomeranian Gryphon (Gryf Pomorski) and, later, the AK; Tadeusz had also survived torture by the Gestapo and imprisonment at the Stutthof concentration camp. After the war the siblings cooperated with the unit of Władysław Heliński (“Mały”) which was subordinated to the “Łupaszko” squadrons. One of the partisans was arrested by the secret police and broke down during the interrogation, implicating the Sikorski family. During an earlier raid of their farmstead on June 3, 1946, the UB shot their older brother Jan, who was an insurgent commander. Next, the secret police seized Tadeusz and Władysława. The UB “beat [us] more than the Gestapo.” Both siblings were tortured and sentenced to jail. He received eight years, and his sister nine.[89] Upon his arrest, Piotr Woźniak, an officer of the AK and NZW, was first forced to stand at attention non-stop for 24 hours. Next, he was interrogated continuously for 72 hours. According to his memoirs,

When on the second day various methods of psychological pressure failed, Capt. Gajda and his superior... attacked me. I was hit on the face..., and again. I briefly passed out and my legs buckled but I did not fall.

Then I received dozens of blows to my head, face, chest, and the entire upper portion of my torso. After a while I could not hear anything but buzz in my ears, pain in my head, and the room floated and fell with me. I think I was on the floor.... After a brief rest..., Gajda began to kick me with his jackboot on my shin, systematically from my foot up to my knee.... His face reflected either sadism or drug addiction. He was hitting me and smiled with a satanic grin as if deriving pleasure from the torture. After many blows, the skin on my legs was completely torn off. Gaping and bleeding wounds formed, and after a score of hours my legs swelled enormously. I could not stand up although they were forcing me with kicks to do just that.... When that did not work and I continued to refuse to confess, they turned to another, more effective type of torture. They used a metal rod covered with rubber to beat me on the soles of my feet... I felt at that time that my brain would explode under my skull.... I could not get up on my feet, so I was crawling on my hands and knees. And then the ubowcy [UB-men] kicked me anywhere they could as if I were an inanimate object.[90]

In August 1946, the UB apprehended Lieutenant Edward Bzymek-Strzałkowski (“Swoboda”), who led the intelligence arm of Freedom and Independence (WiN). He was tortured cruelly and, consequently, attempted suicide by plunging headlong from a third floor window at the police headquarters. Bzymek-Strzałkowski survived, albeit completely crippled. While delirious at the prison hospital in Cracow, he was drugged and his interrogators successfully forced him to confess his “crimes.”[91] His liaison, Stanisława Rachwał (“Zygmunt”), was seized in Warsaw on October 30, 1946, and tortured for eleven months before being sentenced to death.[92]

On October 23, 1946, after a fire fight, the KBW and UBP captured two wounded insurgents hiding at a farmstead near Tuchola, Pommerania. One of them, Bolesław Pałubicki (“Zawisza”) broke down under torture and provided his captors with the names of 35 civilian supporters who were promptly arrested.[93]

Between November 1946 and January 1947, in Krosno, the secret policeman Bronisław P. “in order to force the arrested Jan M., a former soldier of the AK and member of the WiN, to talk beat him many times during his interrogation, forced him to sit on the leg of a stool, inserted his fingers in a door crack and then he [the secret policeman] would slam the door.” In the case of the AK soldier Jan G., the security man “beat him with a cable until the man fainted, ...forced him to hop around while holding his ankles,” and forbade him “to use the toilet.” He also dragged his victim by the ankles down the stairs.[94]

On December 21, 1946, the UB arrested the peasant Aleksander Florczyk of Kolonia Kamieńczyk. He was tortured and confessed that for one night, on December 12, 1946, he sheltered and fed a 12-man strong insurgent detachment of Captain Władysław Łukasiuk (“Młot”) of the AK-WiN. On December 23, 1946, Florczyk was formally charged and shot the following day, Christmas Eve, following a “trial” that lasted an hour.[95]

Henryk Łoś (“Tur”) served in the AK-NOW -NZW units of Second Lieutenant Stanisław Pelczar (“Majka”) and Józef Zadziński (“Wołyński”). In January 1947,

I went into hiding. The militia and the NKVD observed my house and when I came by once they arrested me and took me to the [police] post in Krzeszów. They beat me there, mostly with an iron rod on the soles of my feet. I was only able to stand on my toes. They tied up my hands and legs and suspended me on a beam. They poured water into my nose and gagged my mouth.... The militiamen [Jan] Hasiak... and... [Jan] Tryka beat me the most.... I said to him [i.e. Tryka]: ‘I saved your life [by having freed him earlier from insurgent captivity], and you are beating me.’ It made no impression on him.[96]

The secret police subjected Mirosław Ostromięcki of the NSZ to sleep deprivation, starvation, psychological torture, and

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