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# The Values of the Peasant Elite of the Anti-Communist Underground (in the Light of the Preserved Personal Accounts of Zdzisław Broński "Uskok" and Edmund Edward Taraszkiewicz "Żelazny")

*Wartości elity chłopskiej antykomunistycznego podziemia  
(w świetle zachowanych zapisek memuarystycznych Zdzisława Brońskiego  
„Uskoka” i Edmunda Edwarda Taraszkiewicza „Żelaznego”)*

## ABSTRACT

After 1947, the struggle against the communist authorities in Poland was predominantly conducted by peasant fighters, which is an exceptional occurrence in Polish history. This kind of situation had not previously occurred. In the Lublin Voivodeship, the underground struggle was led by Zdzisław Broński "Uskok" and Edmund Edward Taraszkiewicz "Żelazny". They fought from the end of the war until their deaths in 1949 and 1951, respectively. Their memoiristic writings, which were seized by the security organs and published by IPN (the Institute of National Remembrance), allow for the reconstruction of their value system which included elements such as: homeland and its

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freedom, faith in God, honor, and family. These values were strongly connected to the national history and fully aligned with the traditionally understood Polish patriotism. Additionally, instrumental values crucial for achieving the aforementioned priorities included: courage, heroism, care for subordinates and collaborators, uncompromising attitude, and dedication to the organization. Both commanders also revealed political and social values: anti-Sovietism, anti-communism, and acceptance of democracy as a social system. Given the value system they adopted and kept to and their resolute stance, they can be considered part of the elite fighting for Polish independence.

**Key words:** anti-communist underground, peasants, values, Zdzisław Broński „Uskok”, Edmund Edward Taraszkiewicz „Żelazny”

#### STRESZCZENIE

Po 1947 r. walkę z komunistycznymi władzami w Polsce prowadzili głównie żołnierze pochodzenia chłopskiego, co jest wyjątkowym zjawiskiem w historii Polski. Taka sytuacja nie miała wcześniej miejsca. W województwie lubelskim walkę podziemną prowadzili Zdzisław Broński „Uskok” i Edmund Edward Taraszkiewicz „Żelazny”. Walczyli od końca wojny aż do śmierci, odpowiednio w 1949 i 1951 r. Ich pamiętniki, przejęte przez organy bezpieczeństwa i opublikowane przez IPN (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej), pozwalają na rekonstrukcję ich systemu wartości, który obejmował takie elementy, jak: ojczyzna i jej wolność, wiara w Boga, honor i rodzina. Wartości te były silnie związane z historią narodową i w pełni zgodne z tradycyjnie rozumianym polskim patriotyzmem. Ponadto wartości instrumentalne, kluczowe dla osiągnięcia wyżej wymienionych priorytetów, obejmowały: odwagę, heroizm, troskę o podwładnych i współpracowników, bezkompromisową postawę i oddanie organizacji. Obaj dowódcy wykazywali również wartości polityczne i społeczne: antyradzieckość, antykomunizm i akceptację demokracji jako systemu społecznego. Biorąc pod uwagę system wartości, który przyjęli i którego przestrzegali, oraz ich zdecydowaną postawę, można ich uznać za część elity walczącej o niepodległość Polski.

**Słowa kluczowe:** antykomunistyczna konspiracja, chłopi, wartości, Zdzisław Broński „Uskok”, Edmund Edward Taraszkiewicz „Żelazny”

#### INTRODUCTION

A remarkable phenomenon occurred within the Polish independence underground who resisted the communist regime imposed on Poland. After the disbandment of the largest underground organizations, primarily Association Freedom and Independence (WiN), in 1947, the underground struggle was independently continued by lower-level commanders from these formations, distinguished by their peasant origin. Some of the fighters formally came from smaller towns, however, they operated in rural environments. Their subordinates and collaborators were peasants, and they were able to continue their struggle due to the help of the inhabitants of rural areas. This was the only instance in the history of Poland when peasants stood at the forefront of a desperate fight for its independence.

Both commanders mentioned in the title of the paper, "Uskok" and "Żelazny", belonged to peasant underground resistance groups. Understanding their motives seems crucial, as they must have been aware of the consequences of their choices. It can also help to understand the values they respected, since these usually guide human actions. It is difficult to identify the values on the basis of the existing documentation kept by the security organs combating the underground. The preserved records of the underground structures, which are only partially available, do not make it feasible either. The best sources offering an insight into this issue are the personal testimonies of the participants including personal records, letters, and various types of statements, in spite of the fact that their number is limited. Creating such materials in the underground environment required proficiency in the native language, a conviction of the need to produce them, and consistency, which was rare. Therefore, although these materials are scarce, their usefulness is immense. Each text produced by a participant in these events containing information about the fighters' actions deserves special attention.

Fortunately, the *pro memoria* written accounts and other texts of the two distinguished commanders who waged an uncompromising struggle against the communist system have been preserved. They were Captain Zdzisław Broński "Uskok" ("the Hobbler") and Second Lieutenant Edmund Edward Taraszkiewicz "Grot", "Żelazny" ("the Man of Iron"), who fought in the Lublin Voivodeship for a relatively long time. The former continued his activities until 1949, which actually was five years after the war. The latter fought until 1951, a year longer, as he started in 1945. The materials left by both partisans, seized after their deaths by the Office of Security (UB) officers, were fortunately preserved due to their source value and were published several years ago by the staff of IPN (eng. INR, the Institute of National Remembrance)<sup>1</sup>.

Making these sources available to a wide circle of interested readers has provided an opportunity to understand the mindset of the fighters and the values they held dear, something that had not been done before. Analyzing this issue in the present paper will allow for a better understanding of the motives behind their actions. The most intriguing question is what values were cherished by the two commanders. Additionally, there is a closely related problem of the priorities they pursued both in their struggle and everyday life.

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<sup>1</sup> Z. Broński „Uskok”, *Pamiętnik (1941–maj 1949)*, introduction, ed. and prep. S. Poleszak, text edition A. Filipek, M. Sobieraj, Warszawa 2004 (2nd edition Lublin–Warszawa 2015); E.E. Taraszkiewicz „Żelazny”, *Trzy pamiętniki*, introduction, eds. and prep. A.T. Filipek, B. Janocińska, Warszawa–Lublin 2008.

The literature on the subject is unfortunately limited, despite the fact that the issue of the values respected by the authors of both narrative sources, namely "Uskok" notes and the materials left by "Żelazny", has been mentioned in the introductions to their editions<sup>2</sup>. It is surprising that the axiological layer of these narrative texts has not attracted wider interest among historians. Only M. Mazur, in his monograph dedicated to describing the mental characteristics of post-war anti-communist armed underground fighters, used both of the texts but only highlighted some of the values respected by "Uskok", such as ideological commitment and suffering for the nation<sup>3</sup>. From "Żelazny's" notes, he extracted a single piece of information indicating the value of community among his soldiers<sup>4</sup>. His work has provided only a limited insight into the sphere of the values embraced by both commanders.

*Pamiętnik* (Daily accounts) of the former partisan also became the subject of an axiological-linguistic study aimed at analyzing the commander's language as a tool for assessing values<sup>5</sup>. The main finding of the analysis was the classification and description of a wide range of means used by "Uskok" in this task, including lexical, phraseological, grammatical, and phonetic means. The study highlighted the values respected by "Uskok", such as freedom, dignity, good interpersonal relationships, and religion<sup>6</sup>. "Uskok's" *Pamiętnik* also caught the attention of an educator, who emphasized the distinctive traits of this commander, such as his dedication to the idea of freedom, courage, nobility, and sensitivity in front of the death of his comrades-in-arms, which form the basis for recognizing him as a hero<sup>7</sup>.

## PEASANT FIGHTERS AND THEIR MEMOIR MATERIALS

### Zdzisław Broński "Uskok"

Born on December 24, 1912, in Radzic Górny, a village in the Lubartów County of the then Lublin Governorate, Zdzisław was a child of Franciszek

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<sup>2</sup> S. Poleszak, *Wstęp*, in: Z. Broński „Uskok”, *op. cit.*, pp. 22–24; A.T. Filipek, B. Janocińska, *Wstęp*, in: E.E. Taraszkiewicz „Żelazny”, *op. cit.*, pp. 7–22.

<sup>3</sup> M. Mazur, *Antykomunistycznego podziemia portret zbiorowy 1945–1956. Aspekty mentalno-psychologiczne*, Warszawa 2019, pp. 62, 120, 127, 184, 199.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 365.

<sup>5</sup> A. Dudziak, *Wartości i wartościowanie w procesie autoperswazji na podstawie wspomnień Zdzisława Brońskiego („Uskoka”)*, in: *Wartości i wartościowanie we współczesnej humanistyce*, vol. 2, *Perspektywa komunikologiczna*, Olsztyn 2017, pp. 85–100.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 98.

<sup>7</sup> K. Sabat, *Idea wolności w życiu „Uskoka”*, „Biografistyka Pedagogiczna” 2017, 2, 1, p. 417.

Broński and Apolonia née Warchulska. His parents made a living from working on a 12-hectare farm, which placed them among the wealthier farmers. After finishing primary school, Zdzisław continued his lower secondary education in Lublin, where he finished his courses but did not take the final examinations. In 1934, he was drafted into military service which he completed in the 23rd Infantry Regiment in Włodzimierz Wołyński. During his service, he graduated from non-commissioned officer school and achieved the rank of platoon leader. Upon returning from the army, he worked on his parents' farm and was involved in the Village Youth Union "Siew" (Związek Młodzieży Wiejskiej "Siew").

During the September campaign (1939), he fought as a platoon commander of heavy machine guns in the 50th Infantry Regiment of the Border Rifles. He was later captured by the Germans but escaped from captivity in October 1940. After returning to his home village, he had to stay in hiding as his address was known to the German authorities. In 1941, he joined the local structures of Union of Armed Struggle (ZWZ), and after it was reorganized into Home Army (AK), he became commander of the post in Radzic Stary, part of the 1st District of the Lubartów AK area. In 1943, following German arrests in the area, he organized a partisan formation, which in May 1944 was transformed into a mobile unit numbering around 40 partisans, known as the VI Mobile Unit of the 8th Infantry Regiment of the AK Legions.

During the Operation "Tempest", conducted in July 1944, Broński's unit was part of the 3rd Company of the 4th Battalion of this regiment and engaged in several skirmishes with German forces. When the Soviet army occupied the areas between the Bug and Vistula rivers, Z. Broński disbanded his unit and, threatened with arrest by Soviet security organs, had to go into hiding again. Seeing no other option, he decided to continue his underground activities and assumed the position of deputy commander of the 1st District of the Lubartów region. In the spring of 1945, he reconstituted his partisan unit, initially operating under DSZ (Delegation of the Armed Forces) and subsequently under WiN.

From June 1945, by order of the Lublin WiN inspector, all partisan units operating in the Lubartów region were subordinated to "Uskok". At that time, he reported directly to Major Hieronim Dekutowski "Zapora", who commanded the partisan units in that inspectorate. For two months (August – September), "Uskok" also served as the commander of the Lubartów district DSZ-WiN. During the first amnesty announced in August 1945, he did not reveal himself and continued his struggle, consistently expanding his unit. During this period, he conducted many operations against militia posts and administrative bodies. He also eliminated informants and collaborators of the security apparatus, as well as fought

against common criminals (thieves and bandits). His most famous operation was the takeover of Łączna on the night of October 31 to December 1, 1946, during which the MO post was destroyed, and 11 people were executed (members of PPR– the Polish Workers' Party, UB collaborators, and one militiaman)<sup>8</sup>.

After the declaration of amnesty in 1947, the Lublin district command of WiN revealed themselves, also many members of this organization left the underground, however "Uskok" continued to fight in his area. He reported only to "Zapora", who also did not reveal himself, but this situation lasted only until September 1947. Then his superior, along with his closest subordinates, decided to try to reach the American occupation zone in Germany. Unfortunately, the attempt failed, leading to their arrest. Before his departure, "Zapora" appointed "Uskok" as the commander of the partisan units operating north of Lublin. Due to the increasingly difficult conditions for the underground, "Uskok" divided his unit into three patrols. These were led by Walenty Waśkowicz "Strzała", Stanisław Kuchciewicz "Wiktor", and Józef Franczak "Laluś". The patrols operated independently but would join forces to conduct various armed actions when necessary.

The commander himself, fiercely hunted by UB officers, hid in a shelter built under the barn of Mieczysław Lisowski in the village of Dąbrówka (now Nowogród) near Łączna and rarely left it. However, following the arrest of "Uskok's" closest collaborator and his testimony obtained under torture, the Lublin WUBP (Voivodeship Office of Public Security) discovered "Uskok's" hiding place. With this crucial information, the Lublin WUBP quickly formed an operational group consisting of UB and MO officers and KBW (Internal Security Corps) soldiers to capture the sought-after fighter. On May 20, 1949, they stormed Lisowski's farm and surrounded the barn where the shelter was located. Despite the officers' calls, Z. Broński did not surrender and, seeing no chance of escape, committed suicide early on May 21 by blowing himself up with a grenade.

The memoiristic and daily notes of "Uskok" stored in the shelter in Dąbrówka (Nowogród) were seized by WUBP officers in Lublin after his death<sup>9</sup>. The author wrote them in 16-page school notebooks, numbered 1–5 and 10–11<sup>10</sup>. In notebooks 6–9, he recorded his accounts, information useful for learning English, materials useful for various trainings,

<sup>8</sup> G. Makus, *Kpt. Zdzisław Broński „Uskok”*, in: *„Zrzeszenie Wolność i Niezawisłość” 1945–1948*, eds. W. Frazik, F. Musiał, Warszawa 2020, p. 267.

<sup>9</sup> A.T. Filipek, *Nota edytorska*, in: Z. Broński *„Uskok”*, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 24–26.



as well as texts of various songs and poems<sup>11</sup>. Due to their value, the notes were used as evidence in cases against members of the underground. For easier reading, they were typed up and attached to the profile of "Uskok's" unit prepared by security officers. One copy of this set was sent to the MSW (Ministry of Internal Affairs) archive in Warsaw, and the other was kept in the KW MO (Voivodeship Command of the Citizens' Militia) archive in Lublin. However, the copies of "Uskok's" written accounts have not been found, which is of little consequence given the preservation of the originals.

### Edmund Edward Taraszkiewicz "Żelazny"

Edmund Edward Taraszkiewicz was born on January 22, 1921, in the town of Hamborn near Duisburg in North Rhine-Westphalia (now a district of Duisburg) to a family of Polish immigrants. His mother, Róża Klara née Sibila, was born in Germany in 1902 to a Polish family that had come from Greater Poland in search of work. His father, originally from Włodawa, was a carpenter by trade and had worked as a miner in Germany since 1914. In 1925, they returned to Poland and settled in Włodawa, where Władysław established a workshop that provided for the Taraszkiewicz family. They had four more children: three sons, Władysław (born July 9, 1923), Leon (born May 13, 1925), and Józef, the youngest one, (born July 19, 1940), and one daughter, Rozalia (born January 27, 1931).

After completing his education at a public school, Edmund Edward attended the State Coeducational School of Commerce in Chełm but did not graduate due to the outbreak of the war. In late 1939, the German gendarmerie found weapons at the Taraszkiewicz household that had been left by Polish soldiers in September 1939. Leon buried the weapons, convinced they might be useful in the future<sup>12</sup>. As a result, he was denounced and arrested along with his brother Władysław. Edmund was not at home at the time and thus remained free. Thanks to the efforts of their mother, who was fluent in German, the matter was resolved at the Włodawa magistrate with the help of a German official, and the boys were released<sup>13</sup>. However, to avoid further repercussions, Edmund Edward and his younger brother Władysław had to leave for Germany to do forced labor. Edmund returned to Poland only after the war ended.

<sup>11</sup> A.T. Filipek, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>12</sup> R. Taraszkiewicz-Otta, *Dwie prawdy. Na drodze życia. Wspomnienia*, ed. P. Poleszak, "Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość" 2007, 1 (110), p. 385.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 385–386.

Władysław was less fortunate, he was conscripted into the Wehrmacht and was killed in 1944 during the battles for Kovel<sup>14</sup>.

Leon's fate was more complex. Conscripted into the Todt Organization, he was assigned to railway work in Radom. He was arrested for assisting in the escape of prisoners from a train but managed to run away. Later, he was seized by the Germans, escaped from prison again, and eventually joined the AK partisan unit "Jarema". Caught by Soviet partisans and wanting to save his life, he joined their unit. After the Soviet forces took over Włodawa, he worked at the local slaughterhouse. However, in December 1944, he, his parents, and his 14-year-old sister Rozalia were arrested by UB on charges of belonging to the German nationality during the German occupation. They were temporarily imprisoned in the Lublin Castle and then in a camp in Krzesimów. In February 1945, Leon escaped from a transport of prisoners from the Castle to the NKVD camp in Błudek-Nowiny in Roztocze<sup>15</sup>.

Leon returned to Włodawa and went into hiding. After a few weeks, he joined the post-AK partisan unit commanded by Tadeusz Bychawski "Sęp" and took the pseudonym "Jastrząb". He participated in several actions against the Milicja Obywatelska (MO) posts. After "Sęp's" death, he took command of his partisans and achieved several significant successes in actions against the new government. About thirty partisans remained under his command at that time<sup>16</sup>. "Jastrząb's" unit became famous for many armed actions. Notably, on February 2, 1946, they captured Parczew, dismantled the local MO post, and shot three ORMÓ (Volunteer Reserve of the Citizens' Militia) members of Jewish origin, one of whom had been particularly troublesome for the town's residents. "Jastrząb's" unit also carried out requisitions in the cooperative warehouses and Jewish shops in retaliation for the support given to the communist authorities by the Jews living in Parczew<sup>17</sup>.

After returning from forced labor in Germany in June 1945, Edmund Edward joined the underground resistance. For three months, he served as an adjutant to the deputy commander of the Włodawa district

<sup>14</sup> A.T. Filipek, B. Janocińska, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> W. Pokora, „Tutaj morduje się Polaków!” Tajemniczy obóz zagłady w Błudku-Nowinach, „Kurier WNET” 2020, no. 69, <https://wnet.fm/tag/oboz-w-bludku-nowinach/> [access: 12.07.2024].

<sup>16</sup> A. Piekarz, *Ostatnia walka Edwarda Taraszkiewicza „Żelaznego” w świetle zeznań żołnierzy Korpusu Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego*, „Aparat Represji w Polsce Ludowej 1944–1989” 2012, 1 (10), p. 257.

<sup>17</sup> M. Bechta, *Pogrom czy odwet? Akcja zbrojna Zrzeszenia Wolność i Niezawisłość w Parczewie 5 lutego 1946 r.*, Poznań 2014, pp. 263, 271.



of AK-DSZ, Lieutenant Klemens Panasiuk "Orlis", adopting pseudonyms "Grot" and "Zawieja". He then joined his brother Leon's unit, serving as a chronicler, armorer, and deputy commander. Following Leon's death during an operation against a KBW unit on January 3, 1947, in Siemień, Edmund Edward took command of the unit, adopting a pseudonym "Żelazny". At that time, the unit consisted of six partisans and was organizationally subordinated to "Uskok", cooperating with his patrols.

"Żelazny" led numerous operations involving clashes with operational groups, the liquidation of active collaborators of the new government and agents of the security authorities, as well as requisition of money and goods. In 1947, he successfully engaged a PUBP (County Office of Public Security) group in Włodawa, inflicting significant losses. He also participated in the elimination of 21 collaborators with the new government in Puchaczów near Łęczna<sup>18</sup>. The government propaganda exploited this event to discredit the underground resistance, emphasizing the criminal nature of the action and not mentioning its actual causes. Among the expropriation actions carried out by "Żelazny", one of the most successful was the capture of a train at the Gródek station in September 1948, where 2.8 million zlotys were seized from a postal car<sup>19</sup>.

In the final phase of his activities, "Żelazny" had two or three partisans with him<sup>20</sup>. Despite their small number, the group continued to actively undermine the local authorities until the end. On May 29, 1951, on the road from Lublin to Włodawa, the partisans led by "Żelazny" stopped a car carrying members of the Construction Commission of the Voivodeship National Council in Lublin, including Ludwik Czugała, a PPR and PZPR activist and former chairman of WRN (Voivodeship National Council) from 1946 to 1950. After verifying his identity, "Żelazny" shot Czugała. The group then used the seized cars to raid and eliminate several individuals cooperating with the new government, including one informant, and next in Wola Wereszczyńska they whipped two female teachers for educating students in the communist spirit<sup>21</sup>.

"Żelazny's" armed activities posed a significant challenge to the security apparatus and prompted decisive action. Following intensified operations in which informants were employed, it was determined that "Żelazny" was hiding with Teodor Kaszczuk in the village of Zbereże, located near the Polish-Soviet border. In the early morning of October 6, 1951, two

<sup>18</sup> G. Makus, *Edward Taraszkiewicz „Grot”, „Tomasz” „Żelazny”*, in: *Ostatni komendanci ostatni żołnierze 1951–1963*, 2nd edition Warszawa 2016, p. 364.

<sup>19</sup> E.E. Taraszkiewicz *„Żelazny”*, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

<sup>20</sup> A.T. Filipek, B. Janocińska, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>21</sup> A. Piekarz, *Ostatnia*, p. 258.

battalions of KBW, reinforced by officers from the Lublin WUBP and PUBP in Włodawa, surrounded the host's farm and engaged in a confrontation whose outcome was predetermined. "Żelazny" was killed in the fight, along with one member of his group. Two other partisans, one of whom was wounded, were captured, including the host's son who had been cooperating with the partisans. Several UB officers and KBW soldiers also died, and there were civilian casualties among the victims of the clash<sup>22</sup>.

Memoiristic records of "Żelazny" reached the hands of security officials at various times following successive arrests of the individuals who had kept them. In 1946, PUBP in Włodawa seized "Pamiętnik ogólnych prac Bojówki Obwodowej" (General Work Records of the District Group)<sup>23</sup>. After "Uskok's" death on May 21, 1949, the most extensive portion of "Żelazny's" records, "Krótka chronologia dziejów oddziału "Jastrzębia" (A Brief Chronology of the "Jastrząb's" Unit History), was found in his bunker. The most substantial collection of the commander's records was acquired by the security authorities from Roman Dobrowolski's hideout following his arrest on October 7, 1951. Some material was also found with the deceased fighter<sup>24</sup>. The handwritten records that were obtained, were transcribed and, like "Uskok's" materials, used as evidence in investigations and court trials against arrested partisans.

## FUNDAMENTAL VALUES

In social sciences, the concept of value is one of the most frequently used ones, which resulted in the emergence of its numerous definitions. Because of that, some researchers arrived at a conclusion that due to its ambiguity, the concept has lost its usefulness in building integrative theories<sup>25</sup>. Such a pessimistic conclusion, resulting from an excess of definitions, and potentially discouraging further development, cannot be accepted, as it may lead to conceptual chaos, intensified semantic problems, and difficulties in understanding the conveyed content. Therefore, it is advisable to adopt one of the existing definitions<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> A. Piekarz, *Ostatnia*, p. 277.

<sup>23</sup> B. Janocińska, *Nota*, p. 23.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>25</sup> J. Mazur, T. Michalczyk, *Pojęcie wartości, systemu wartości oraz typy i rodzaje wartości (kwestie terminologiczno-teoretyczne)*, in: *Praca – więź – integracja*, vol. 2, *Wartości i więzi społeczne*, eds. U. Swadźba, B. Pactwa, M. Żak, Katowice 2015, pp. 15–16.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*.

According to a psychologist Czesław Matuszewicz, a value is an object of desire, a factor for selecting motives, and a criterion for choosing goals and means of achieving them<sup>27</sup>. The often-cited definition formulated by a sociologist Jan Szczepański describes a value as a material or ideal object, an idea or institution, either real or imagined, towards which an individual or group feels a compulsion to strive<sup>28</sup>. M. Ziółkowski, in turn, proposed that values can be classified into three types: value-objects (real or fictitious entities), value-norms (desired rules of human behavior—commands, prohibitions, postulates, recommendations), and value-goals (preferred states, such as love, happiness, and peace)<sup>29</sup>.

Given the divergence in approaches to defining values, it is rational to adopt one of the existing definitions<sup>30</sup>. Based on Ziółkowski's classification, the present paper adopts the view that values are essential goals for individuals that regulate their behavior and thus influence their activities. In social sciences, various classifications of values exist. One of them was introduced by an American researcher Milton Rokeach, who distinguished between terminal values and instrumental values<sup>31</sup>. He assigned 18 specific values to each category. Terminal values refer to the ultimate goals for which people strive, while instrumental values pertain to the ways of acting, behavior, and characteristics through which these goals can be achieved<sup>32</sup>. This fundamental distinction has been utilized in the present study, however, the term 'terminal values' was renamed to 'fundamental values' to better capture their essence and emphasize that they form the basis of a value system and hold greater importance than other values.

### Homeland and Its Independence

For "Uskok", the welfare of the homeland and regaining its independence were the most important aims of his actions. He wrote that 'if we fight and make sacrifices, it is because we want to live, but to live

<sup>27</sup> C. Matuszewicz, *Psychologia wartości*, Warszawa 1975, p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> J. Szczepański, *Elementarne pojęcia socjologii*, Warszawa 1972, pp. 97–98.

<sup>29</sup> M. Ziółkowski, *Wartości*, in: *Encyklopedia socjologii*, vol. 4, eds. W. Kwaśniewicz et al., Warszawa 2002, p. 292.

<sup>30</sup> A. Słaboń, *Konflikty wartości a konflikt społeczny. Mapy orientacji aksjonormatywnych*, in: *Style życia, wartości, obyczaje. Stare tematy, nowe spojrzenia*, eds. A. Jawłowska, W. Pawlik, B. Fatyga, Warszawa 2012, p. 88.

<sup>31</sup> J. Mazur, T. Michalczyk, *op. cit.*, pp. 25–28.

<sup>32</sup> M. Rokeach, *The Nature of Human Values*, New York 1973. Quoted after: M. Dubis, *Wartości i style życia młodzieży*, p. 38, [https://pl.search.yahoo.com/search?fr=mcafee&type=E210PL91105G0&p=Warto%C5%9Bci\\_i\\_style\\_%C5%BCycia\\_m%C5%82odzie%C5%BCy.pdf](https://pl.search.yahoo.com/search?fr=mcafee&type=E210PL91105G0&p=Warto%C5%9Bci_i_style_%C5%BCycia_m%C5%82odzie%C5%BCy.pdf) [access: 12.07.2024].

as free people in a free country'<sup>33</sup>. He believed that freedom was so crucial to a person that it was worth dedicating one's life to its regaining<sup>34</sup>. He lamented the necessity of engaging in fratricidal battles but considered them necessary because the communists used mass and brutal terror to maintain power. According to him, the post-war Poland, ruled by communists, was not a sovereign country but one subordinated to Stalin and the Soviet Union authorities. Independence could only be regained through armed actions, which had to entail sacrifices not only from the Soviet side or the communist authorities but also from the Poles<sup>35</sup>.

Although "Żelazny", focusing on describing partisan activities in his notes, did not explicitly state that the goal of his actions was to restore Poland's independence, but indirect evidence points to this point of view. In an unsent letter to his sister Rozalia written in 1951, he explained that the work he was engaged in was 'priceless' because he did it not for personal gain, and in the event of a war, it would be of very 'great significance'<sup>36</sup>. There is no doubt that he viewed his armed struggle as a necessary action for the good of the mother country, motivated not by personal material gain or a desire for publicity. Through his armed activities, he weakened the power structures of the communist regime in the Włodawa district and sought to prevent their consolidation. In his opinion, this could have been significant in the event of a war between Western powers and the USSR, contributing to the weakening of resistance to the advancing Allied forces.

In the introduction to his *Pamiętnik*, dated September 25, 1945, he wrote that he had written it to commemorate the armed struggle of his comrades after achieving victory in free Poland, so that his unit 'would have a tiny part in the glorious record of partisan and independence battles'<sup>37</sup>. His strong attachment to the fundamental value of the welfare of the homeland is also evidenced by the high demands he set for his future sweetheart. In the aforementioned letter, he explicitly stated that she should possess appropriate 'virtues towards the Homeland and God'<sup>38</sup>. This excluded other reasons for entering a relationship, such as the beauty of the woman of his choice. He also did not consider a marriage of convenience based on other advantages that the wife-to-be might have, such as wealth, family

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<sup>33</sup> Z. Broński „Uskok”, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>36</sup> E.E. Taraszkiewicz „Żelazny”, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 29.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 256.

connections, education, or personal qualities useful in marriage, e.g. her management skills.

### Faith in God

"Uskok's" faith in God is confirmed by certain passages in his writings. Describing the dispersal of a procession associated with the blessing of fields in Wólka Nowa by UB officers, he empathized with the persecuted residents of the village participating in the ceremony<sup>39</sup>. Reflecting on the death of Stanisław Ciołek "Lew", who fell in 1946 in a clash with a UB and KBW operational group in Radzic Stary, he emphasized his strong emotional bond with the partisan due to his 'crystal-clear character'. He wrote that Providence had 'severely tested him with this blow', which he considered the loss of "Lew"<sup>40</sup>. Evidence of "Uskok's" piety was also found in his accounts, where he regarded his successes in battle as the result of the intervention of divine providence<sup>41</sup>. He also believed that in dangerous situations, God allowed him to escape unharmed<sup>42</sup>. In October 1948, while describing the tough times during a security operation against his unit, he expressed hope that God would allow him and his comrades to survive the unfavorable period<sup>43</sup>.

Faith in God also occupied a prominent place among the values professed by "Żelazny". In the aforementioned letter written in 1951 to his sister Rozalia, he explained that in the tragic situation in which he found himself, daily Rosary prayers and requests for God's help in enduring difficult times had protected him from despair<sup>44</sup>. He also expressed the belief that the Creator had protected him from unworthy actions and causing harm<sup>45</sup>. He tried to attend Sunday Mass whenever possible. His subordinates sometimes did the same, when the opportunity arose, putting themselves in danger<sup>46</sup>.

In 1947, while recalling the fallen comrades, including those whom he did not personally know by name because they had died before he had the chance to get to know them better, he pointed to quiet prayer as the only proof of remembrance for them<sup>47</sup>. After the accidental

<sup>39</sup> Z. Broński „Uskok”, *op. cit.*, pp. 273–276.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 196.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 43, 180, 189, 250.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 298.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 291.

<sup>44</sup> E.E. Taraszkiewicz „Żelazny”, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 44.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 247.

death of "Barabas", who was shot during a clash between "Żelazny's" men and his comrades, he was quickly buried under the cover of night and a Mass was ordered in his intention<sup>48</sup>. Two weeks later, partisans covered his grave with turf, erected a large birch cross, and laid a wreath. The religiosity of "Żelazny" is also confirmed by the very frequent references to the burial places of the partisans in the above-mentioned *List of fallen members of armed units*. It can be assumed that their aim was the potential discovery of the fighters' graves, preserving the memory of their deeds, and praying for their souls.

"Żelazny's" religiosity is further confirmed by the information provided by a PUBP agent in Włodawa, Zofia Korzeniowska, pseudonym "Olga". In 1948, she testified that her mother had enrolled all members of "Żelazny's" group in the Knights of the Immaculata, a religious association run by Franciscan friars in Niepokalanów, which must have been approved by the commander. Consequently, medals and booklets were sent to the fighters and distributed to them by the local parish priest<sup>49</sup>. In February 1950, Korzeniowska also reported that "Żelazny" had instructed her to contact a priest working in her parish and ask him to go to the forest to hear the confessions of his subordinates. The priest fulfilled the request and, at the appointed time, allowed the partisans to make their confessions<sup>50</sup>.

### Honor

"Uskok" wrote very little about honor in his *Pamiętnik*, likely aware that invoking this value in the context of an uncompromising fight against the entire apparatus of power could be problematic<sup>51</sup>. However, at least once, he explicitly indicated the need to be guided by this value. He articulated this thought in relation to the controversial actions of the former commander of the Lublin district of ZWZ, Colonel Wilhelm Szczepankiewicz, pseudonym "Drugak". Szczepankiewicz revealed himself and, in a statement published by "Sztandar Ludu", the organ of the Voivodship Committee of the Polish Workers' Party in Lublin, called on underground

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 44.

<sup>49</sup> G. Makus, *Edward Taraszkiewicz „Grot” „Żelazny” 1921–1951*, Lublin 2019, p. 25.

<sup>50</sup> Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej, ref. no. Lu 08/213/12, p. 19 (a report of the prison agent with the pseudonym "Key" of February 3, 1950); ref. no. Lu 08/213/16, p. 101 (extract from the protocol of interrogation by officers of the Provincial Office of Public Security in Lublin, sent on February 10, 1950 to the 3rd Department of the Ministry of Public Security in Warsaw).

<sup>51</sup> '[...] Let us be careful that words such as: Poland, Pole, Honor, Freedom do not remain empty sounds [...]'. Z. Broński „Uskok”, *op. cit.*, p. 225.



fighters to accept the amnesty announced by the authorities and to abandon the ongoing struggle in order to stabilize life in the country. He also urged the residents of the province to express a negative attitude towards the members of the underground who did not heed that call. In essence, he encouraged them to stop providing any assistance to partisans fighting against the communist authorities<sup>52</sup>.

"Drugak's" declaration severely impacted his former subordinates who were unwilling to reveal themselves and intended to continue fighting for Poland's independence, thereby weakening civilian support for the communist authorities. According to "Uskok", such actions demeaned the former commander, especially since he received only a 'meager favo' from the then-authorities for his conduct. Broński was aware that in the ongoing struggle with a progressively strengthening power, one could be killed, but that should not be a reason to accept, as he put it bluntly, 'treacherously cast scraps of grace'<sup>53</sup>. Thus, it is hard to find a more striking example of prioritizing this value over personal safety.

However, in the accounts of "Żelazny", there are no direct references indicating that he regarded honor as a significant value, as they predominantly describe the conducted military operations. However, when writing about the burial of "Barabas", which was done at night for security reasons as mentioned earlier, he noted in his notes that the deceased comrade was given military honors in the form of a three-volley rifle salute<sup>54</sup>. This was undoubtedly a risky action, as the partisans' shots could have alerted the local residents and prompted informers, who were present in almost every village, to report it to UB officials. Thus, paying tribute to the fallen comrade in this manner was a matter of honor for E. E. Taraszkiewicz.

### Family

Respect for parents and other family members is extensively reflected in "Uskok's" *Pamiętnik*. This sentiment is also evident in the accounts of "Żelazny". Therefore, it is appropriate to state that family was considered an important value by both partisan leaders. The information in their texts often appeared in the specific context of security authorities' repressive actions against their family members, aimed at compelling both fighters to cease their struggle against the new regime. Naturally, this provoked a decisive reaction from them. In a note from 1948, "Uskok"

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 44.

wrote about the release of his nephew Stanisław from UB detention, after six weeks of imprisonment and pressure to betray his uncle. The fighter noted with satisfaction that avoiding contact with the family for the reason of their safety proved to be the right decision. The boy withstood the interrogations and pressures because he did not have any information about his uncle that would interest the UB officials<sup>55</sup>.

In another part of his notes, "Uskok" expressed his undeniable regret that his 'beloved family' was suffering due to his ongoing fight. He felt guilty about this, although he could not determine the extent of his guilt. Nonetheless, he experienced a sense of remorse<sup>56</sup>. In a subsequent passage, he sorrowfully wrote about the suffering of his family as a result of the retaliatory acts against him. He lamented that his sister Janina Siegiedowa suffered the most, as she was arrested for the fourth time, her husband had been in hiding for three years, and three of his brothers-in-law were still under surveillance by the security authorities. His parents were in an even worse situation, having been evicted from their home and completely dependent on family assistance. He regretted that he could not help them, as he himself needed support, and he found some comfort in knowing that his family did not blame him for the misfortunes that befell them because of their son's struggle<sup>57</sup>.

"Żelazny" made fewer references to his family, but there is no doubt that their plight deeply concerned him. In his texts, he expressed satisfaction with the help provided in 1945 by his younger brother "Jastrząb" to his minor siblings, sister Rozalia, and younger brother Józef, after their parents were arrested by security officials. The Taraszkiewicz family home and all its furnishings were confiscated at that time, and "Jastrząb", due to his active involvement in the underground movement, had limited capacity to counteract these reprisals. Nevertheless, he managed to get his sister out of prison and then provided her and his younger brother with clothing, underwear, and footwear<sup>58</sup>. "Jastrząb" also made three attempts to assassinate Lieutenant Bronisław Pajączkowski, the deputy commander of PUBP in Włodawa, whom he blamed for directing the reprisals against his family<sup>59</sup>.

"Żelazny" himself was only settling in after returning from Germany and starting his underground activities, which is probably why he could not assist his brother in these actions. However, there is no doubt that

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 253–254.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 265.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>58</sup> E.E. Taraszkiewicz „Żelazny”, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 36.

he felt grateful for "Jastrząb" and supported his actions taken for the benefit of their siblings. The lack of other references to family in his writings can be explained by their specific nature. Their purpose was to provide a detailed account of the activities of the partisan unit created and led by "Jastrząb"<sup>60</sup>, which he later commanded himself, and to commemorate the individual achievements of the distinguished partisans who served in it.

### INSTRUMENTAL VALUES RELATED TO THE ONGOING STRUGGLE

In contrast to fundamental values, instrumental values were not permanent but useful in specific circumstances. In other situations, however, they proved to be of little use. The described sources present a range of military virtues that were very useful in the post-war struggle conducted by armed underground organizations. These included: courage, heroism, concern for subordinates and collaborators, uncompromising attitude in battle, and dedication to the organization. The evidence of their recognition can be seen in respecting them during underground activities and using them to assess other people.

#### Courage

"Uskok" demonstrated this trait in many situations described in his *Pamiętnik*. A month and a half before his death, surrounded by UB officers and KBW soldiers on the evening of April 2, 1949, at the home of Władysław Zarzycki in the Łuszczów colony (Lublin district), he did not surrender. Instead, together with his subordinates Stanisław Kuchciewicz "Wiktor" and Edmund Edward Taraszkiewicz "Żelazny", he engaged in combat. Through brave and decisive action (including firing at UB officers and throwing grenades), he and his companions broke through the encirclement and escaped from the ambush. During the battle, he and his subordinates severely wounded two UB officers who later died from their injuries<sup>61</sup>. A high-ranking MBP (Ministry of Public Security) officer acknowledged in his report, based on the analysis of the clash, that eliminating 'Uskok's gang' was a primary goal for the security apparatus of the Lublin voivodeship, as it was considered the most dangerous in the area<sup>62</sup>.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 29.

<sup>61</sup> Report of Col. Jerzy Siedlecki, acting head of the Department for Officers of the Ministry of State Security of April 10, 1949, regarding the events in the Łuszczów colony on April 2–3 of that year, in: Z. Broński „Uskok”, *op. cit.*, p. 325.

<sup>62</sup> Z. Broński „Uskok”, *op. cit.*, p. 327.

The courage of "Żelazny" is confirmed by numerous facts. His most notable actions occurred during the final period of the existence of the unit that he led, which by then consisted of only three members. Besides the leader, the group included Stanisław Torbicz "Kazik", who joined after the death of "Tarzan", and Józef Domański "Paweł", "Łukasz", "Znicz", who had previously been a member of the "Ordon" unit<sup>63</sup>. Occasionally, individual members like Stanisław Marciniak "Niewinny" would join. Despite the small number of fighters under his command and the limited capacity to conduct operations, "Żelazny" had no intention of reducing his activity to avoid provoking the security organs. He aimed to remain in the field for as long as possible and to survive until better times, such as a new war in Europe between the Western powers and the Soviet Union.

An act of courage bordering on desperation was also the killing of Ludwik Czugała, the former chairman of WRN (Provincial National Council) in Lublin, in 1951, followed by further repressive actions<sup>64</sup>. Having conducted the operations, the partisans reached Makoszka in the Parczew Forests, abandoned the commandeered vehicles with their drivers, and proceeded on foot to Zagłębcze, where they took refuge with a friendly farmer<sup>65</sup>. Although their actions were risky, they ended in success. It is noteworthy that they were conducted during the final phase of the group's existence when it was small and the operating conditions were increasingly difficult.

### Heroism

S. Poleszak, a co-editor of "Uskok's" notes, rightly indicated this quality and the commander's fortitude<sup>66</sup>. Both fighters displayed great heroism, understood as the ability to perform exceptional deeds beyond the capabilities of ordinary people. However, the abovementioned partisans did not use this term in their accounts, maintaining a significant distance from their own personal qualities and accomplishments in the ongoing fight, furthermore, when describing their military actions, they did not consider them extraordinary but rather natural and necessary.

In "Uskok's" *Pamiętnik*, however, there are many direct indications of heroism of the author, manifested not only in armed combat but also in enduring the daily hardships associated with underground activities.

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<sup>63</sup> A.T. Filipek, B. Janocińska, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>64</sup> A. Piekarz, *Ostatnia*, p. 258.

<sup>65</sup> A.T. Filipek, B. Janocińska, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>66</sup> S. Poleszak, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

A compelling example is a passage dedicated to the conditions under which he recovered from a knee wound sustained during a clash with militiamen in Łuszczów (Lublin district) on January 12, 1947. The partisans succeeded, but the leader's injury immobilized him for an extended period of time. Thanks to the decisive actions of his subordinates, "Uskok" was quickly transported on a sled from the battle site to a secret hideout, where he survived the initial period of recovery. In this refuge, which resembled more of a burrow because it was too small to stand in, he had to lie on hard earthen floor covered with straw for a month. He endured daily discomforts including cold, fleas, mice, and rats<sup>67</sup>.

"Uskok's" fight was accompanied by a sense of mission which was a very strong motivator for him. He was older than "Żelazny", held increasingly senior positions within the structure of Zrzeszenie WiN, and was more reflective about the purpose of the continued struggle. After "Zapora" left, he became the commander of partisan units operating in the northern part of the voivodeship. He had previously negotiated several times with representatives of the new authorities regarding the cessation of underground activities and surrendering. In his *Pamiętnik*, he clearly wrote that 'a man of ideals despises life', and therefore, he should continue the struggle until the end, either achieving victory or dying, without considering the option of surrendering and exposing himself to torture<sup>68</sup>.

Similarly, "Żelazny" did not consider his struggle to be heroic, although it was undoubtedly courageous in reality. It required extraordinary dedication, and the conditions for continuing the struggle worsened for the conspirators with each passing year. On October 8, 1948 "Uskok" mentioned in his notes that "Żelazny" 'has very difficult living conditions, but he is holding on'<sup>69</sup>. In the previously cited letter to his younger sister Rozalia Taraszkiewicz, he wrote that it was becoming increasingly difficult for him to obtain help from civilians who usually refused to provide any assistance to conspirators for fear of the extensive network of informers and the brutal repressions from the authorities, which included shooting those who assisted partisans and burning their homes. He explained that to find temporary accommodation, he often had to travel 50 to 100 kilometers, as the number of hosts willing to shelter partisans had drastically decreased. Nevertheless, he was glad that still there were people ready to take them in despite the great danger involved<sup>70</sup>.

<sup>67</sup> Z. Broński „Uskok”, *op. cit.*, p. 221; M. Mazur, *op. cit.*, p. 434.

<sup>68</sup> Z. Broński „Uskok”, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 243.

<sup>70</sup> E.E. Taraszkiewicz „Żelazny”, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

## Concern for Subordinates and Collaborators

This quality of "Uskok" was rightly noted by S. Poleszak<sup>71</sup>, the co-editor of his *Pamiętniki*. In the texts of this partisan commander, there are several passages confirming this admirable feature. On December 7, 1948, he recorded that "Żelazny" had taken refuge in his hideout after being wounded in an ambush set for him by UB officers. With clear relief, he wrote that the wound was healing well<sup>72</sup>. A few pages later, under a subsequent date (January 20, 1949), he described with noticeable satisfaction the success of his subordinate Józef Franczak "Laluś". During the New Year, he was surrounded by UB officers at a home of a friendly host where he was temporarily staying. Instead of waiting to be arrested, he started fighting, managing to escape from the trap<sup>73</sup>. On All Souls' Day 1947, "Uskok" mentioned the names of eight fallen subordinates, lamenting that given the circumstances, it was not possible to honor their merits as heroes; instead, a silent prayer was all that could be offered for them<sup>74</sup>.

"Żelazny" also demonstrated great concern for his soldiers and those supporting them in their struggle against the new political order, as evidenced by numerous instances in his remaining texts. This is particularly evident in the previously mentioned *List of the Fallen* and the *List of Persons Proposed for Decoration*. He had no obligation to compile the lists, but he did so out of the need to honor the merits of the fallen partisans in the ongoing fight. It was a very risky action, as revealing many details about the activities of organization members could facilitate their identification by the security authorities and expose their network of collaborators.

In the *List of Fallen Members of the Underground Units and Their Personal Details*<sup>75</sup>, "Żelazny" thoughtfully and consistently characterized individual partisans, noting not only their names, pseudonyms, age, places of residence, and family details but also describing the achievements of the deceased, the causes of their death, and their burial locations. In the cases where betrayal contributed to the death of a commemorated partisan, he detailed the circumstances of the betrayal, provided the name of the traitor, and sometimes included details about their liquidation<sup>76</sup>. In some cases, he also listed the individuals who might provide more detailed information about the described member of the organization<sup>77</sup>.

<sup>71</sup> S. Poleszak, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>72</sup> Z. Broński „Uskok”, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 302.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 407.

<sup>75</sup> E.E. Taraszkiewicz „Żelazny”, *op. cit.*, pp. 183–199.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 185.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 183.



In the final section, he included characteristics of the distinguished fighters that reflected their personal traits, military virtues, and social attitudes.

The table below summarizes all the traits he observed in the conduct of the fallen comrades and listed the frequency of their occurrence in the provided descriptions. As a commander, he knew the fighters well and highly valued their achievements, which was undoubtedly the result of his subjective judgment. However, the set of the terms he used

Table 1. Personality Traits in the Characterizations of Fallen Members of the “Jastrząb” Unit

Item	Trait	No. of times used
1.	Heroism (Fortitude)	8
2.	Bravery	5
3.	Courage	14
4.	Combateness	3
5.	Self-control in battle	1
6.	Military Achievements	1
7.	Discipline (‘very good behavior’, ‘obedience’)	10
8.	Sacrifice (‘selflessness’)	4
9.	Dedication to the Underground Organization	1
10.	Military Professionalism (‘good soldier’, ‘good machine gunner’, ‘good courier’)	5
11.	Proper (‘diligent’) fulfillment of soldier duties	7
12.	Humility (‘quietness’)	1
13.	Nobility	1
14.	Honesty	1
15.	Kindness	2
16.	Diligence, Zeal (Selflessness)	1
17.	Patriotism (‘love of the homeland’, ‘love of freedom’, ‘Polish heart’, ‘Polish soul’, ‘dedication to the homeland’, ‘commitment to the good and glory of the homeland’)	11
18.	Dedication to the cause of Polish independence (‘love of freedom’)	2
19.	Obedience (of those cooperating with “Żelazny”)	4
20.	Writing Poetry	1
21.	Participation in Propaganda Work	1
22.	Very Good Behavior	5
23.	Sacrifice (‘commitment’) to the Underground Organization	6
24.	Cooperation with the Underground Organization and support for it (of civilians)	1

represents an objective fact and provides the evidence of the personal values that he respected. Additionally, it confirms his accepted axiology. The attached table also reveals the broad range of ideological principles that he adhered to, of which the mentioned personal traits are derivatives.

### Relentlessness in Combat

Relentlessness in combat distinguished “Uskok” which is hardly surprising given that it was shaped by years of fighting against a ruthless and brutal enemy—namely, security officers and communist authorities. The former not only tortured captured members of the underground but also employed the principle of collective responsibility, repressing villagers suspected of supporting partisans. They beat them, demolished and burned down their homes, and even killed innocent villagers who helped the underground. They also arrested those who helped underground soldiers, sentencing them in military district courts to long prison terms and confiscating their property.

“Uskok’s” family was particularly targeted. In 1945, his elderly parents had their farm in Radzic Stary, a village in the Lubartów district, plundered by PUBP officers from Lubartów. Afterwards they threw grenades and started a fire that destroyed all the buildings. As a result, the elderly couple had to leave the ruins of their farm at the end of their lives and move to their daughter and son-in-law’s home in the village of Karolin in the Lubartów district<sup>78</sup>. “Uskok’s” nephew, Stanisław Siegieda, was also arrested under the pretext of possessing a rifle. He did not actually possess it; it had been planted on him earlier by the officers. When no useful information about his uncle could be extracted from him, he was released from custody<sup>79</sup>.

“Uskok” was uncompromising not only toward his enemies but also toward his subordinates and fellow underground members. He demanded a great deal from them due to the gravity of the struggle. He noted that underground resistance needed ‘people with hard, iron-like characters’<sup>80</sup>. At the same time, he acknowledged the difficult reality, recognizing that it was hard to avoid ‘human trash’, referring to those underground soldiers who, when arrested or captured, broke down under torture and revealed crucial organizational secrets, including the names of fellow members and hosts who provided them shelter. To demonstrate that

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 146.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 253–254.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 264.

such a tough stance was possible, he listed the pseudonyms of the fighters who either died in battle or committed suicide after being wounded<sup>81</sup>.

In the struggle against the communist authorities, "Żelazny" was also uncompromising, at the same time trying to maintain a sense of rationality. He killed captured UB officers, party activists, and youth organization members because he believed that it weakened the apparatus of the new regime. However, he made exceptions to this rule. For example, in Hańsk, he ordered only flogging for an active secretary of the local PPR cell, who organized propaganda rallies. According to "Żelazny", this activist had promised to cease his activities, and he kept his word<sup>82</sup>. In contrast, he was more lenient toward captured soldiers and usually released them.

"Żelazny" also took no pity toward informers whom he eliminated without a shred of remorse. He knew well that showing mercy to those cooperating with security organs endangered him and other fighters, exposing them to further denunciations and causing losses to the organization that were increasingly difficult to replace. Although killing informers had serious consequences, it also served as a proof of the underground's effectiveness and as a warning to other collaborators with the new regime. It sent a strong message that harming partisans could have fatal repercussions. Family members and close relatives of the killed informers naturally viewed their elimination as an act of banditry. However, for other villagers guided by common sense and decency, removing informers was seen as an act of justice and a radical measure against the expanding informant network, which was a social plague for the partisans.

It must be acknowledged that after carrying out the elimination operations, "Żelazny" sometimes attempted to distribute leaflets to the public, clearly outlining the reasons for the executions. For example, in one of the leaflets, he tried to dissuade informers from their actions against the underground. He urged them to cease their treacherous activities while they still had the chance and warned them of the serious consequences of their collaboration with the security forces. By appealing to their imagination, he sought to make them understand that once an execution squad arrived, there would be no escape for them<sup>83</sup>.

"Żelazny" was equally principled toward his comrades who betrayed the organization. Not only did he condemn them for collaborating with UB, but he also showed no mercy and eliminated them as soon as he was convinced of their betrayal. This was the case with a former partisan, Władysław Fijewski, known as "Żuk". As a result

<sup>81</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 39–41.

<sup>83</sup> A.T. Filipek, B. Janocińska, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

of his informant activities, two of "Żelazny's" subordinates were killed. Following this tragedy, "Żelazny" tracked him down with his fighters in Macoszyn, in the Wola Wereszczyńska commune, and interrogated him in the presence of his men. Convinced of the evidence of his guilt, he eliminated the traitor without hesitation<sup>84</sup>, despite having known him since school days and having fought alongside him in the unit commanded by "Jastrząb". Thus, the traitor's past contributions to the fight against the communist authorities did not save him from death.

### Dedication to the Organization

Both commanders demonstrated dedication to the underground organization. This is evident from their active fight against banditry and theft that plagued rural areas. Departments of security and the militia were primarily focused on combating armed underground resistance and did not engage in pursuing common criminals. Consequently, the civilian population turned to the commanders of the units to tackle thieves and bandits who caused significant trouble. In such situations, the conspirators had no choice but to administer justice, which diverted them from their primary goal of fighting the new regime. They understood well that the prestige of the organization depended on effective resolution of this issue. In his notes, "Uskok" clearly stated that his unit participated in combating criminal activity and achieved successes in this field<sup>85</sup>.

"Uskok", guided by his responsibility for the organization and his subordinates, did not take advantage of the government offer of amnesty in 1945, believing it was essentially a propaganda tool aimed at dismantling the underground resistance, without providing personal safety for those who accepted it, who would face repression afterwards<sup>86</sup>. Regarding the bloody retaliatory action in Puchaczów carried out by "Wiktor", "Żelazny", and "Ordon" on July 3, 1947, despite the fact that his subordinate "Wiktor" had not coordinated the operation with him, "Uskok" deemed it necessary for the benefit of the organization. He did so knowing that it led to severe accusations against the underground and distorted its public image<sup>87</sup>.

Similarly, "Żelazny" proved that well-being of the organization, i.e. Zrzeszenie WiN, was more important to him than the interest of one of his commanders. This became evident in the account of the execution

<sup>84</sup> E.E. Taraszkiewicz „Żelazny”, *op. cit.*, pp. 177, 193.

<sup>85</sup> Z. Broński „Uskok”, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 163.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 240.

of the death sentence on "Dunaj", a comrade from the unit. The action was carried out on the orders of the deputy commander of the Włodawa district, "Orlis" who accused the partisan of theft and misbehavior. The author of the account had to participate in the execution of the sentence but admitted that he and his colleagues had been deceived and even participated in backdating testimonies in the case. He realized that "Dunaj" was innocent when, after being mortally wounded, he forgave them and wished them continued divine protection. "Żelazny" harshly judged "Orlis's" conduct and stated that this event greatly undermined the partisans' trust in him<sup>88</sup>.

"Żelazny" also devoted a significant amount of space to the financial troubles of the underground fighters. They could not engage in paid work, and some of them had families to support. They also did not receive a regular salary. They often had to pay for accommodation with farmers and food, or offer them the acquired products as compensation. When inquired in 1945 by his subordinates about the introduction of fixed salaries for partisans, the commander of the Włodawa district WiN, "Orlis" explained that the district's funds were empty because he had to assist the widows of fallen members of the organization, leaving him with no money. The allowances he provided usually ranged from 300 to 1500 zlotys. Subsequently, he irregularly distributed one-time advances to partisans ranging from 500 to 3000 zlotys<sup>89</sup>.

For comparison, in 1947, the lowest wage in Poland was 2500 zlotys<sup>90</sup>. Such data were not published in earlier years. To illustrate the purchasing power of these amounts, it should be noted that in Lublin in September 1946, a kilogram of rye bread (pytłowy) cost 19 zlotys<sup>91</sup>. The same amount of beef cost 140 zlotys, while pork fat was nearly twice as expensive, with a kilogram costing 290 zlotys. Other groceries were priced as follows: one kilogram of butter – 410 zlotys, the same amount of potatoes – 6.5 zlotys, a liter of milk – 20 zlotys, and one egg – 10 zlotys<sup>92</sup>.

<sup>88</sup> E.E. Taraszkiewicz „Żelazny”, *op. cit.*, pp. 177, 193.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 41.

<sup>90</sup> Zarządzenie Ministra Pracy i Opieki Społecznej z 20 XI 1947 r. o ustaleniu wysokości zarobku stanowiącego najniższą podstawę wymiaru świadczeń i składek ubezpieczeniowych, „Monitor Polski” 1947, no. 138, item 850.

<sup>91</sup> *Rocznik statystyczny 1948*, ed. P. Szulc, Warszawa 1948, p. 128.

<sup>92</sup> *Rocznik*, pp. 127–128.

## INSTRUMENTAL VALUES OF A POLITICAL AND SOCIAL NATURE

## Anti-Sovietism

This aspect of "Uskok's" views has already been noted by S. Poleszak<sup>93</sup>, and it is fully agreed upon. The most references reflecting the author's stance towards the Soviet Union are found in the first part of *Pamiętnik*, which covers events from 1939 to 1945. Later on, such references virtually disappear from his text, as Soviet forces were withdrawn from Poland and the issue no longer attracted the author's attention. At that time the domestic security organs of the new communist regime became the main enemy.

It is difficult to ascertain Z. Broński's stance on the Soviet Union before the war, as there is no information on this in his *Pamiętnik*. However, the negative attitude of the author towards the eastern neighbors was a consequence of their aggression against Poland in 1939, which he regarded as a betrayal of the Polish state. This animosity was further strengthened by the ruthless Soviet policy towards the inhabitants of the annexed eastern territories and the massacre of Polish officers captured by the Soviets in Katyn, which was revealed in 1943<sup>94</sup>. The distrust towards the USSR was very high, as evidenced by the treatment of PPR, formally established by Polish communists, nevertheless perceived as a Soviet agent executing the objectives set by their patrons<sup>95</sup>. For this reason, Z. Broński viewed the Soviet Union as Poland's number two enemy<sup>96</sup>.

"Uskok's" anti-Soviet sentiments were further intensified by negative experiences gained from interactions with the Soviets, about which he learned during conversations with Lieutenant "Jastrząb", commander of one of the battalions of 27th Volhynian Division of the Home Army<sup>97</sup>. "Uskok" also inadvertently came into contact with officers and soldiers of the Red Army and closely observed their behavior after their entry into Poland and during their several-month stay on Polish soil. Some of his impressions from the encounters were vividly and convincingly described in his *Pamiętnik*. He depicted the treachery of the Soviets, which he personally experienced immediately after their entry into the Lublin region, and the subsequent looting by their army<sup>98</sup>. He also negatively

<sup>93</sup> S. Poleszak, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>94</sup> Z. Broński „Uskok”, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 51.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 47.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 91.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 105–106.



assessed the disarmament of the 27th Volhynian Division of the Home Army by Soviet troops, which was carried out under false pretenses<sup>99</sup>. "Uskok" blamed the Soviets for their hostility towards AK, despite the fact that the Home Army leaders had instructed to treat them as allies at the same time maintaining a degree of independence, which was practically impossible to achieve.

The newcomers from the east imposed a communist regime on Poland and acted as its overseers. This situation left AK units with no viable options and forced them to disband. "Uskok" also held the Soviet authorities responsible for preventing former partisans from transitioning to civilian life, instead commencing mass arrests of AK members based on lists drawn up by the communists, and their subsequent deportation deep into the USSR<sup>100</sup>. Alongside this, there were thefts and rapes of women. The Soviets also assumed roles as local commanders, investigating judges, and officers in Polish uniforms. They fiercely combated the Polish underground and, after fighting with it, plundered the bodies of fallen Polish partisans. NKVD used elaborate torture methods on captured members of the underground. "Uskok" regarded Bolshevik rule as tyrannical<sup>101</sup>. In Poland, they imposed communist rule, destroyed AK, and 'forced the Polish people to accept Wasilewska's army'<sup>102</sup>.

"Uskok" displayed an extremely negative attitude towards Soviet foreign policy after World War II. He was deeply interested in the situation in Europe and the world, eagerly anticipating a shift in the balance of power favorable to Poland and hoping for a conflict among the great powers that would result in the defeat of the communist bloc. He derived most of his information from radio programs of European and American stations that broadcast in Polish. Observing Soviet policies towards Berlin in 1948, especially the blockade of the western occupation zones, he concluded that 'the Soviets are ruthless brutes, for whom the most effective argument is a solid punch in the face'<sup>103</sup>.

"Żelazny", on the other hand, had fewer opportunities to express his anti-Soviet sentiment as he began his notes in 1945, after the war had ended and most Soviet troops had been evacuated from Poland. However, there are fragments in his writings where he clearly expresses his dislike for the Soviets. He mentioned "Sęp", the first commander of the partisan unit where his brother "Jastrząb" served. During a Soviet raid on his own

<sup>99</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 106.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 73.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 141.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 107–108.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 280.

home, "Śęp" was robbed by the Soviets. In the next sentence, "Żelazny" added that 'it is common knowledge that Soviets and Jews, whenever they had the chance and pretext, looted everything they could during raids'<sup>104</sup>. In another place, he wrote that the officers of Powiatowy Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego in Włodawa (Włodawa District Public Security Office) was a tough opponent for the partisans because they 'could demand help from the Soviets at any moment' and stage an ambush on them<sup>105</sup>.

### Anti-Communism

The anti-communism of Z. Broński, also noted by S. Poleszak<sup>106</sup>, was not derived from theoretical premises but resulted from his negative experiences with communists. "Uskok's" understanding of communism came primarily from practical encounters rather than ideological study. His direct experiences with local leaders of Armia Ludowa and Soviet partisans profoundly shaped his views. In 1943, "Uskok" first engaged with Kazimierz Sidor, a member of PPR and one of the AL commanders in the Lubusz region. Through conversations with Sidor and careful observation of his activities, "Uskok" concluded that the PPR leadership acted as Soviet agents and did not consider Polish national interests. This perception was reinforced by the actions and strategies of the communists he encountered. "Uskok" observed that the communists, through their imprudent operations, not only failed to achieve significant military results but also exposed civilians to German repressions. Their push for a nationwide uprising against the German occupier, which could have led to a massacre given the strength of German forces in the General Government (GG), further disillusioned him. He saw this as evidence of their disregard for the actual circumstances and needs of the Polish people. Furthermore, the propaganda promoted by the communists, which called for the fight for an independent Poland, was in conflict with their actual political program. The real agenda of the communists, as "Uskok" perceived it, was to subordinate Poland to Soviet control<sup>107</sup>.

"Uskok" also accused the communists of incorporating criminal elements into their units, who committed robberies against civilians, using armed force against other underground organizations, including AK and BCH (Peasant Battalions), and employing terror against resistant

<sup>104</sup> E.E. Taraszkiewicz „Żelazny”, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>106</sup> S. Poleszak, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>107</sup> Z. Broński „Uskok”, *op. cit.*, pp. 49–33.

civilians<sup>108</sup>. He used derogatory terms for them such as ‘pepeeraki’ (a pejorative term for members of PPR–Polish Workers’ Party), ‘red plague’, and ‘the dirty ones’<sup>109</sup>. The author of *Pamiętnik* also employed another technique involving indirect criticism of the communist program. Specifically, he summarized the content of conversations with K. Sidor, thereby exposing the propagandistic lies of the political camp represented by his interlocutor. This communist activist unfoundedly accused the AK leadership and the London-based government-in-exile of betraying Polish interests and deliberately deceiving members of underground organizations. Communists also accused the London government of murdering General W. Sikorski due to his willingness to cooperate with the USSR. For this reason, he believed that all underground organizations in the country should subordinate themselves to Krajowa Rada Narodowa (the National Council of the Country), which was established by the communists and recognized by the Soviet Union, as it represented the only force expressing the will of the Polish nation, whereas the communist AL was considered the primary armed force<sup>110</sup>.

“Uskok” negatively assessed the involvement of Jews in creating the foundations of the new regime, not sparing them derogatory epithets. This was particularly evident in his description of an event that he well understood from accounts of witnesses. The event was the disruption of a field blessing procession in Wólka Nowa by UB officers who intimidated the local residents to prevent them from opposing the new regime and vandalized the home of one of the local farmers. In his depiction of the incident, he emphasized the leading role of a Jewish-origin officer who gave orders to Lieutenant Gol, who was formally in charge of the action<sup>111</sup>.

In his accounts “Żelazny” did not express any opinions about the prevailing communist regime, instead, he focused on describing the armed actions in which he was involved and did not address political issues. There is no doubt that the author held a negative view of the regime. The evidence supporting this claim is his use of derogatory terms for officials serving the new system. He referred to them as ‘Jewish-communist lackeys’<sup>112</sup>. In 1946, they unjustly arrested his parents and their thirteen-year-old sister as part of actions against his brother, “Jastrząb”. His youngest brother, a six-year-old Józef, whom they could not imprison due to his

<sup>108</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 49, 51.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 51, 52, 566, 61, 131, 209.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 53–54.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 273–276.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 36.

age, was handed over to UB officer Lt. Pajęczkowski, a former AK soldier who, due to siding with the new regime, was considered a traitor<sup>113</sup>.

A similar term was used by "Żelazny" in reference to a communist activist from Hańsk in the Włodawa district, whom the partisans detained while he was traveling in a cart in Dubeczno. This activist had previously antagonized them by participating in political rallies and speaking 'for the Jewish-communist demagogues'<sup>114</sup>. He was beaten and warned to cease his political activities, to which he promised compliance, and according to the author, he did stop them. This indicates that Taraszkiewicz, in expressing his negative attitude toward communism as a socio-political system, used the term 'Judeo-communism' to describe it. However, just like "Uskok", he did not uncritically replicate the thought patterns prevalent among the underground fighters of the time, but drew conclusions from observed events and the active involvement of individuals of Jewish origin in the activities of the communist party and the apparatus of repression<sup>115</sup>.

In another part of his *Pamiętnik*, "Żelazny" used the term 'suspicious company smelling of *democratism*' to describe a man he encountered while staying overnight at one of the farms in a colony near Krzesimów in 1949<sup>116</sup>. The experienced fighter's suspicions proved correct, as the suspect turned out to be a sergeant-cadet of MO from Lublin, who was found to have a pistol. "Żelazny" then shot him, probably fearing that the militia officer might inform UB officials about the partisans who had detained him. The euphemisms used in the term *democratism* were meant to express, mildly and ironically, the extreme negative attitude toward the regime of that time.

### Democracy and Social Reforms

Communist propaganda attempted to portray "Uskok" and his soldiers as fascists murdering democrats<sup>117</sup> in order to discredit them in the eyes of the society. This underground leader was also treated as a supporter of the old pre-war regime, which was a lie, as he declared

<sup>113</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 39.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 34. For example, in Parczew in December 1944, out of 29 members of the Polish Workers' Party (PPR), there were six Jews (20%). Similarly, 20% of Jews were engaged in service at the local Citizens' Militia (MO) station. And in January 1946, only 173 Jews lived in this town out of a total population of 5,947. Thus, they actually constituted 0.03% of this number. M. Bechta, *op. cit.*, pp. 176–177, 215, 241, 312–317.

<sup>116</sup> E.E. Taraszkiewicz „Żelazny”, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

<sup>117</sup> Z. Broński „Uskok”, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

himself to be a proponent of democracy<sup>118</sup>. Initially, he supported the land reform<sup>119</sup>; however, by the time of the referendum in June 1946, he changed his position. He then accepted the negative answers to all three questions that citizens had to answer in that vote. Thus, he no longer expressed support for the land reform. His view was therefore close to the position of the National camp, including NSZ (National Armed Forces), which called for a negative response to all questions. "Uskok" justified his view by the devious actions of the ruling camp, which, by including the question about the acceptance of this reform, aimed to induce voters to support it and its political program<sup>120</sup>.

In his notes, "Żelazny" did not address the issues related to the future political system of Poland or necessary socio-political reforms, due to their specific nature described above, the ongoing struggle that completely engaged him, another factor was probably his age. This clearly distinguishes him from "Uskok".

## CONCLUSIONS

1. In the existing scholarly literature, little attention has been given to the written accounts of Z. Broński ("Uskok") and Edmund Edward Taraszkiewicz ("Żelazny"). Although they were published several years ago and are among the most valuable personal testimonies of underground fighters, they have been somewhat utilized as sources in studies on various aspects of the independence underground operating after the war in the Lublin province. However, no analyses have been conducted on the mentality of both authors, including the values they respected. Therefore, the present paper attempts to fill this existing research gap.

2. The analysis of the texts written by the two partisan commanders, conducted from an axiological perspective, first allowed for the identification of the fundamental values they respected. These values were unchanging and can be considered the basis for the actions of both fighters, thus being significantly more important than others. They included priorities such as: homeland and its freedom, faith in God, honor, and family. They were decidedly connected to the nation's history and entirely fit within the framework of traditionally understood Polish patriotism.

3. In addition to the fundamental values, "Uskok" and "Żelazny" also respected instrumental values, which the prolonged struggle

<sup>118</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 159.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 188.

significantly influenced in terms of their perception of the hierarchy of military values. This led them to fully appreciate the qualities, such as courage, heroism, care for subordinates and collaborators, uncompromising stance, and dedication to the organization. They also strived to uphold these values in their own conduct, which highlights the integrity of their behavior.

4. In their memoiristic writings, both authors understandably focused on describing the military achievements of their units, and therefore, political values were less prominently highlighted. Nonetheless, among the values observed were: anti-Sovietism, anti-communism, and acceptance of democracy as a social system. Initially, "Uskok" also accepted the land reform carried out by PKWN, but during the 1946 referendum, he changed his mind and became an opponent of the reform. On the other hand, "Żelazny" did not address this issue.

5. Both commanders made efforts to respect the mentioned values in their lives, as evidenced by numerous references in their memoiristic texts and other sources, including those produced by the communist security apparatus. Based on this, "Uskok" and "Żelazny" can be classified among ideological individuals. They had the opportunity to reveal themselves to the communist authorities and maintain a chance of survival, even at the cost of subsequent surveillance, persecution, or imprisonment. They were well aware that continuing the struggle exposed them to death and permanent condemnation by the victorious power, which also worsened the situation for their relatives.

6. The strong connections of both commanders with the rural environment were of particular significance. "Uskok" directly came from that environment, while "Żelazny" was formally from a small town, but they both shared one fundamental circumstance: they both conducted their activities in rural areas. Therefore, these fighters should be considered representatives of the peasant class. They were able to conduct their activities thanks to extensive material support from the rural population, and their subordinates and collaborators were primarily peasants.

7. In the final phase of the armed struggle against the new political order (after 1947), a special situation occurred. Professional military commanders, who had previously led the underground fight against the two invaders, abandoned it, seeing no chance for any success. At that point, the continuation of the struggle fell to peasant commanders who were already operating independently, such as "Uskok" and "Żelazny". Their determination demonstrated in battle and the values they respected, which were in line with both chivalric



and patriotic-civic ideals, mean that they can be considered part of the elite fighting for Poland's independence.

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