

## Poles in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939): During the Conflict and After

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**Resumen.** Los ciudadanos polacos y las personas de ascendencia polaca desempeñaron un papel considerablemente importante en la Guerra Civil española. Lucharon en ambos lados del conflicto, aunque la gran mayoría de ellos en el Ejército Republicano (4.500-5.000 entre aproximadamente 35.000 soldados de las Brigadas Internacionales). El 75% de ellos eran inmigrantes, que habitaban principalmente en Francia, que eran predominantemente activistas o partidarios del Partido Comunista Francés. Se creía que solo 600-800, o según algunas fuentes 1200 individuos, la mayoría de los cuales eran comunistas (80% o más), procedían directamente de Polonia. El mayor número de voluntarios luchó dentro de las filas de la 13ª Brigada “Jarosław Dąbrowski”, que participó en las principales operaciones clave y sufrió enormes pérdidas que ascienden al 30-40%. Algunas decenas de polacos combatieron en el ejército franquista. La mayoría de ellos eran soldados profesionales de la Legión Extranjera Española, que se habían incorporado a ella antes de que estallara la guerra, por lo que su participación en la guerra no estuvo dictada por motivos ideológicos. El autor adopta un enfoque sintetizado para retratar a los soldados polacos que luchan por cada lado del conflicto, incluidos sus antecedentes y participación en las operaciones militares más importantes. El artículo presta atención a los destinos de los veteranos polacos de las Brigadas Internacionales a los que se hizo referencia como “Dąbrowszczacy” durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial y, a continuación, un intento de demostrar el papel específico y los cambios que estaban experimentando los “Dąbrowszczacy” dentro del sistema político de la República Popular de Polonia (PRL).

**Palabras clave:** Guerra civil Española; Polonia, Brigadas Internacionales, combatientes extranjeros.

### [es] Los polacos en la Guerra Civil española (1936-1939): durante el conflicto y después

**Abstract.** Polish citizens and people of Polish descent played a considerably significant role in the Spanish Civil War. They fought on both sides of the conflict, however, most of them in the Republican Army (4,500-5,000 among ca. 35,000 soldiers of the International Brigades). Approximately 75% of them comprised of immigrants, mainly from France, who were predominantly either activists or supporters of the French Communist Party. Only 600-800, or according to some sources 1200 individuals, the majority of whom were communists (80% or more), were believed to come directly from Poland. The highest number of volunteers fought within the ranks of 13th Brigade “Jarosław Dąbrowski”, which took part in the major key operations and suffered huge losses amounting to 30-40%. A few dozens of Poles fought in the Gen. F. Franco’s National Army. Most of them were professional soldiers of the Spanish Foreign Legion, who had joined it before the war broke out, so their participation in the war was not dictated by ideological reasons. The author adopts synthesizing approach to portray the Polish soldiers fighting for each side of the conflict, including their background and involvement in the

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most important military operations. The article pays an attention to the fates of Polish veterans of the International Brigades referred to as “Dąbrowszczacy” during the World War II and, following this, an attempt to demonstrate the specific role and changes “Dąbrowszczacy” were undergoing within the political system of the Polish People’s Republic (PRL).

**Keywords:** Spanish Civil War; Poland, International Brigades, foreign fighters.

**Sumario.** 1. Introduction. 2. Fighting for the Republic. 3. The “Dąbrowszczacy” after the Spanish War. 4. In the Rebel Army. 5. Conclusion. 6. Bibliography.

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## 1. Introduction

The participation of Polish citizens and people of Polish descent in the Spanish Civil War did not raise wide academic interest of historians in Poland after the political transformations at the turn of 1980s and 1990s. During the period of the Polish People’s Republic (PRL), many books and articles attached the topic of Poles in the International Brigades, but almost all of them followed the typical propaganda line of that period. The issue of Poles fighting in the Rebel Army was not mentioned, even as propaganda. The topic deserves a new thorough research and fresh interpretations. After the fall of communism appeared several interesting publications, however the area is still insufficiently researched. There can be noticed only a few examples of synthetizing outlines focusing on the question of Polish citizens fighting on both sides of the conflict<sup>2</sup>. A few interesting monographies appeared but with the focus on the attitude of the authorities of the Second Polish Republic towards the conflict as well as its records in Polish writings and public debate<sup>3</sup>. The post-war fates of Polish soldiers of the International Brigades as well as the role of their legend in the PRL’s propaganda and historical policy has been also researched<sup>4</sup>. This article presents a general outline of the problem and author’s attempt to portray Polish citizens fighting on both sides of the conflict, including their background and involvement in the main military operations. Because of the very limited participation of Poles

<sup>2</sup> Ciechanowski, Jan S.: „La participación de ciudadanos Polacos y de origen polaco en las Brigades Internacionales” in Matilde Eiroa, Manuel Requena (eds.): *Al Lado del Gobierno Republicano. Los brigadistas de Europa del Este en la guerra en la guerra de España*, Cuenca, Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 2009, pp. 93-132; idem: *Podwójna gra. Rzeczpospolita Polska wobec hiszpańskiej wojny domowej 1936-1939*, Warsaw, Fundacja Historia i Kultura, 2014, pp. 560-588; idem: „Polscy ochotnicy po stronie narodowej w czasie hiszpańskiej wojny domowej” (1936-1939) in Jan Kieniewicz (ed.): *Studia polsko-hiszpańskie. Wiek XX*, Warsaw, Uniwersytet Warszawski, 2004, pp. 117-151; Pietrzak, Jacek: „Polscy uczestnicy hiszpańskiej wojny domowej” in Dariusz Jeziorny (ed.): *Cudzoziemcy w wojnie domowej w Hiszpanii (1936-1939)*, *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis*, 97 (2016), pp. 65-86.

<sup>3</sup> Ciechanowski, Jan Stanisław: *Podwójna gra..., passim*; Majzner, Robert: *Wojna domowa w Hiszpanii 1936-1939 w obserwacjach i działaniach Oddziału II Sztabu Głównego Wojska Polskiego*, Radomsko, Taurus, 2012; Bednarczyk, Monika: *Obraz hiszpańskiej wojny domowej lat 1936-1939 w piśmiennictwie polskim*, Toruń, Wydawnictwo Adama Marszałek, 2008; Opiola, Wojciech: *Hiszpańska wojna domowa w polskich dyskursach politycznych. Analiza publicystyki 1936-2015*, Opole, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Zamojski Jan E.: „Interbrigadziści Republiki Hiszpańskiej - po klęsce... Losy Polaków” in Elda Evangelina González Martinez, Małgorzata Nalewajko (eds.): *Hiszpania-Polska: spotkania*, Warsaw, Neriton, Instytut Historii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2003, pp. 9-57; Różycki, Bartłomiej: „Dąbrowszczacy i pamięć o hiszpańskiej wojnie domowej w Polsce Ludowej”, *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość*, 1 (2013), pp. 167-212.

on the rebel side, the main focus is laid on the soldiers of the International Brigades, especially of the “Jarosław Dąbrowski” Brigade. An attention is also paid to the post-war fates of veterans, including their role during the World War II as well as in the political system of PRL.

## 2. Fighting for the Republic

Polish volunteers fighting on the side of the Spanish Republic played a significant role in terms of numbers. It was generally assumed the numbers approximated 4,000-5,000 and constituted a significant group, considering that International Brigades amounted to around 35,000. Polish volunteers must have been second after French in terms of numbers. However, it is noteworthy, the term “Polish volunteers” does not exclusively refer to the fighters who joined the side of the Republican Army coming directly from Poland, were of Polish nationality or even had Polish citizenship. According to PRL’s period historians’ estimations, Polish immigrants living in France amounted to 75% of volunteers, about 100 came from Belgium, while only 1200 individuals were believed to arrive directly from Poland and their actual number hesitated probably between 600-800<sup>5</sup>. The effects of the Great Depression combined with the influence of French Communist Party (the PCF) facilitated the recruitment from Polish working communities in France, while approximately 300 soldiers were recruited from Polish communities of both Americas, especially from South American countries, such as Argentina<sup>6</sup>. Taking into consideration the ethnicity, it can be estimated that 45% of Polish volunteers amounting to 2250 individuals, were of Jewish origin<sup>7</sup>. It should be noted that volunteers with Polish citizenship also comprised of the Ukrainians and Belarusians, whose numbers are hard to estimate<sup>8</sup>. Noteworthy, even in reliable historical works by western academics, bizarre facts about background of the volunteers can be presented<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Wyszczelski, Lech: „Walka zbrojna Polaków w obronie Republiki Hiszpańskiej” in Antoni Czubiński (eds.): *Wojna domowa w Hiszpanii 1936-1939 w polityce międzynarodowej*, Poznań, Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza, 1989, p. 282; Ajzner Seweryn: *Polska a wojna domowa w Hiszpanii 1936-1939*, Warsaw, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1968, p. 305; Różycki, Bartłomiej: „Dąbrowszczacy...”, pp. 167-169. Noteworthy individuals of Polish descent but with French citizenship were also classed as „Polish volunteers”. Cf. Ciechanowski, Jan S., *Podwójna gra...*, pp. 561-562.

<sup>6</sup> Ciechanowski, Jan S.: *Podwójna gra...*, p. 562.

<sup>7</sup> It was high percentage considering that in the International Brigades there were about 10,000 of soldiers of Jewish descent (amounting to over 25% of the total number). A high level of engagement of Jews, especially youth, in Polish communist movement, justified it. Clearly, a vast majority of volunteers with an *intelligentsia* background were Jews. Polish Jews fighting in Spain also happened to be both socialists and anarchists. Cf. The Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw: Magdalena Siek (ed.), Inventory of the file, *The Spanish Civil War 1941-1987*, no. 332, [www.jhi.pl/uploads/inventory/file/202/Wojna\\_domowa\\_w\\_Hiszpanii\\_pdf](http://www.jhi.pl/uploads/inventory/file/202/Wojna_domowa_w_Hiszpanii_pdf) (26.05.2020); Zaagsma, Gerben: *Jewish Volunteers, the International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War*, London-N. York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2017, *passim*.

<sup>8</sup> Toruńczyk, Romana: „O składzie osobowym polskich ochotników w Hiszpanii republikańskiej w latach 1936-1938”, *Z pola walki*, 8, 1 (1965), p. 184.

<sup>9</sup> For example, Antony Beevor justifies the reasons for first volunteers coming to Spain: „Poles in exile from their country’s military regime started to arrive in Paris [...]”. Cf. Beevor, Antony: *The Battle for Spain. The Spanish Civil War 1936-1939*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2006, p. 158. It misleadingly suggests „democratic” and „anti-Sanacja” („Sanacja” was the popular name for the authoritarian regime in Poland 1926-1939) motives as the ones dominating among Polish volunteers. Meanwhile most volunteers were recruited from economic immigrants living in France. The communists who came from the USSR, had been earlier based them in compliance with the directives of the Comintern.

The first engagement against General Franco's forces involved the Polish who happened to be in Spain at the outbreak of war and joined republican militia forces, mainly the participants of the People's Olympic Games hosted in Barcelona<sup>10</sup>. Initially, the key role of the volunteer's recruitment deployed to Spain, was primarily played by the PCF whose structures were very active in Polish immigrant communities. The first, low in numbers, voluntary groups recruited from immigrants, arrived in Spain in August 1936, while the Communist Party of Poland (the KPP) engaged in formal recruitment in October. The organization of deploys, involved cooperation of the Czechoslovak and French communist parties; however, some volunteers were arrested by the police forces of transit countries<sup>11</sup>.

The first volunteer parties "Group 9" and "Group 36" joined units of unofficial international "centuries" in the initial stage of conflict. Ultimately, they were the base to create a heavy machine gun subunit (officially a company, but actually platoon), choosing Jarosław Dąbrowski<sup>12</sup> as their patron. In September and October the platoon fought as a part of a republican column in Castilla la Nueva (near Talavera de la Reina), attempting to stop Franco's offensive towards Madrid<sup>13</sup>.

Stalin's decision on giving direct support to the Republicans and Comintern's (the Communist International's) activity focusing on recruiting foreigners to the International Brigades raised new organizational opportunities<sup>14</sup>. Polish "Jarosław Dąbrowski" Battalion was mustered in Albacete (Castilla-La Mancha) on October, 24th. His first commander was Stanisław Ulanowski ("Bolek" or "Bolesław")<sup>15</sup>, the former leader of the previously mentioned platoon. On the basis of the Soviet Army structure, the role of political commissar was assumed in the International Brigades and Stanisław Matuszczak<sup>16</sup> was nominated for such duty in the Polish battalion. On the forming of the battalion there were merely few volunteers coming from Poland,

<sup>10</sup> Wyszczelski, Lech: *Walka zbrojna...*, p. 267.

<sup>11</sup> Ajzner, Seweryn: *Polska...*, pp. 305-345; idem: „Rekrutacja ochotników polskich do hiszpańskiej armii republikańskiej w 1936-1937 r.”, *Wojskowy Przegląd Historyczny*, 4, 2 (1959), pp. 169-186; idem: „Pierwsi polscy uczestnicy wojny domowej w Hiszpanii”, *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 92, 4 (1985), pp. 815-833; Ciechanowski, Jan S.: *Podwójna gra...*, p. 563.

<sup>12</sup> Unlike a number of the patrons of the international units, Jarosław Dąbrowski (1836-1871) did not have communist connotations, but represented a 19th century fighter for Polish independence and international revolutionist (a military commander of the Paris Commune in 1871). It perfectly fit, however, originating from 19th century cliché, powerful propaganda tool addressing both the fight for „our freedom and yours” as well as social justice. The patron's surname was adapted to give a colloquial name for the soldiers, who was commonly called „Dąbrowszczacy”. The term is generally used to refer to all Polish volunteers fighting on the Republican side, even if they served in other units.

<sup>13</sup> Bron, Michał: „Udział Polaków w wojnie hiszpańskiej w latach 1936-1939” in Michał Bron (eds.): *Polacy w wojnie hiszpańskiej (1936-1939)*, Warsaw, Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej (MON), 1967, pp. 17-18; Ajzner, Seweryn, *Pierwsi polscy...*, pp. 833-844.

<sup>14</sup> Olszewski, Wiesław: „Brygady międzynarodowe w Hiszpanii w latach 1936-1939” in Antoni Czubiński (eds.): *Wojna domowa...*, pp. 235-244.

<sup>15</sup> Stanisław Ulanowski (1904-1944) was a miner who migrated to France in 1929, a member of the PCF, trained in the USSR. He was murdered in the German-Nazi concentration camp Gross-Rosen. Cf. Jan Kantyka, Andrzej Konieczny (eds.): *Gdzieś za Pirenejami. Ze wspomnień dąbrowszczaków*, Katowice, Wydawnictwo Śląsk, 1968, p. 363.

<sup>16</sup> Stanisław Matuszczak (1897-1955), a miner, was an immigrant in France since young age. During World War I he served in the Polish Army in France with whom he returned to Poland and took part in Poland's wars 1919-1920 (including Polish-Soviet War). He returned to France in 1921, being an active member of the PCF. During the Second World War, he engaged in the communist resistance movement in France. After the war he stayed in Poland, employed in trade unions. From 1948 to 1950 he was a military attaché in Prague. Cf. Maj, Kazimierz: „Matuszczak Stanisław” in *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, 20 (1975), pp. 218-219.

which indicates to the significant role of members of Polish diaspora, mainly from France, they played in the history of “Dąbrowszczacy”. The unit also comprised of small groups of the Spanish as well as Czech, Bulgarian and Yugoslavian volunteers<sup>17</sup>.

The battalion was incorporated into the 11<sup>th</sup> International Brigade, and at the end of November it was deployed to 12th Brigade and directed to the most significant at that time front line<sup>18</sup>. The battalion received their baptism of fire, participating in Battle of Madrid in November, 1936, suffering huge losses. At the turn of the 1936 and 1937 the battalion participated in offensive operations in the region of Guadalajara (Castilla la Nueva). In February, 1937 it fought another bloody Battle of Jarama attempting to stop the National Army offensive towards the capital. In March, “Dąbrowszczacy” fought in one of the most famous battles of the war, the Battle of Guadalajara, where surprisingly, Italian, forces trying to outflank Madrid, were defeated. In the mentioned battles the battalion was commanded by Antoni Kochanek<sup>19</sup>, Paweł Szkliniarz<sup>20</sup> and Józef Strzelczyk (“Jan Barwiński”)<sup>21</sup>, the first commander, who did not originate from Polish communities in France, but was an

<sup>17</sup> Ciechanowski Jan S.: *Podwójna gra...*, p. 564; Wyszczelski, Lech: „Walka...”, pp. 268-269.

<sup>18</sup> The organisation and military operations of „Dąbrowszczacy” has become a subject to a number of publications in PRL which can serve as a source of factual information regardless ideological and censorship distortions. Cf.: Michał Bron (ed.): *Polacy w wojnie..., passim*; Wyszczelski, Lech: *Bohaterowie stu bitew*, Warsaw, KAW, 1986; Sobczak, Kazimierz, Kozłowski, Eugeniusz, Wyszczelski, Lech: *Hiszpańska wojna narodoworewolucyjna 1936-1939 i udział w niej Polaków*, Warsaw, Czasopisma Wojskowe, 1986; Ajzner, Seweryn: „Z dziejów polskich oddziałów ochotniczych w Hiszpanii”, *Z pola walki*, 1, 3 (1958), pp. 3-28; Bron, Michał: „Udział Polaków w wojnie hiszpańskiej w latach 1936-1939”, *WPH*, 8, 1 (1963), pp. 97-131; Mroczkowski. Władysław: „Polscy ochotnicy w wojnie hiszpańskiej w latach 1936-1939 (w 40 rocznicę utworzenia Batalionu im. Jarosława Dąbrowskiego)”, *Z pola walki*, 20, 1 (1977), pp. 181-202; Kozłowski, Eugeniusz: „Hiszpańska epopeja dąbrowszczaków”, *WPH*, 21, 3 (1976), pp. 9-33. Examples of participants’ memories: Bron, Michał: *Pasaremos*, Warsaw, Iskry, 1958; Broniatowski, Mieczysław: *Zaczęło się za Pirenejami*, Warsaw, MON, 1986; Książczak, Franciszek: *Droga w ogniu*, Warsaw, MON, 1975; Rutkowski, Jan: *Czas walki, kłęski i zwycięstwa. Wspomnienia dąbrowszczaka*, Wrocław, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1980; Szleyen, Zofia, *Wiatraki i Messerschmitty*, Warsaw, Iskry, 1965; Wyka, Jan: *Zapiski na karteluszka (Z notatnika rewolucjonisty). Hiszpania po czterdziestu latach*, Warsaw, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1984; Kantyka, Jan, Konieczny Andrzej (eds.), *Gdzieś...; Szleyen, Zofia (ed.): Ochotnicy wolności. Księga wspomnień dąbrowszczaków*, Warsaw, Wiedza Powszechna, 1957.

<sup>19</sup> Antoni Kochanek (1906-1937) was a miner, migrant in France, worker for Renault company and the PCF activist. One of the very first volunteers in Spain („Group 36”), he was the commander of the battalion since November 20th, 1936. He fell in Almadrones at Guadalajara front. Cf. Maj, Kazimierz, „Kochanek Antoni” in Feliks Tych (ed.): *Słownik biograficzny działaczy polskiego ruchu robotniczego*, vol. 3, Warsaw, Muzeum Niepodległości, 1992, p. 224.

<sup>20</sup> Paweł Szkliniarz, later Paweł Kuźnicki and Wiktor Kuźnicki (1903-1947), was a veteran of the Polish-Soviet War (1919-1920). He migrated to Belgium in 1926 and to France in 1928 where he worked as a miner. Member of the PCF since 1929. He replaced Kochanek in January, 1937, but was wounded at Jarama battle in February, and then sent to the USSR. He might have been a Soviet agent in France and Romania then. In 1940 he was deployed to by the NKVD in German-occupied Poland. In 1942 he engaged in Polish communist underground movement. After the war he became district police chief. He was imprisoned after anti-Jewish Kielce pogrom of 1946 and died shortly after release. Cf. Gontarczyk, Piotr: „Szkliniarz Paweł” in *PSB*, 48 (2012), pp. 322-323.

<sup>21</sup> Józef Strzelczyk (1901-1941), a worker in a machine factory in Łódź, participated in Poland’s wars 1918-1920 as a volunteer soldier, but had disciplinary problems. He engaged the communist movement in 1923 and was a head of military section of the KPP. He was based in the USSR since 1931 and joined Bolshevik Party in 1932. He graduated from Julian Marchlewski University for National Minorities of the West. He fought in Spain since October 1936 and became Battalion commander in February, 1937, and then commander of the brigade in July. Called to the USSR in March 1938 he was eventually excluded from the WKP (b). In 1941 as a commander of the Soviet special service group he was parachuted into central Poland and missing in action. Cf. Kočański, Aleksander: „Strzelczyk Józef” in *PSB*, 44 (2007), pp. 599-600

experienced communist activist, formerly trained in the Soviet Union.

The “Jarosław Dąbrowski” Battalion was not the only unit consisting of Polish fighters. A Polish company fought on Madrid front line in the German-Austrian “Ernst Thälmann” Battalion of the 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade. Another Polish company was part of the 14<sup>th</sup> the Marseillaise “La Marsellesa” Brigade and fought among others in Córdoba province. In November, 1936 an “Adam Mickiewicz” company was formed and became a part of “Vasily Chapayev” Battalion of the 13<sup>th</sup> Brigade. It did not participate in the battles of Madrid, as it fought in the region of Teruel in Aragon, and later also in the provinces of Granada and Córdoba.

The process of reorganization and transformation of the “Dąbrowszczacy” into a larger unit started in April. The information on the process may not be explicit, but allegedly, an informal brigade was formed without the consent of the army’s headquarters. Fernando Gerassi, a Spanish painter born in Turkey into a Sephardic Jewish family, became unit’s commander. “Dąbrowszczacy” fought in offensive operations near Huesca (Aragon front) in June which resulted in Republican’s failure. Finally, on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, the headquarters of the Republican Army officially appointed 150<sup>th</sup> “Jarosław Dąbrowski” International Brigade, which became the 13<sup>th</sup> one in August, taking the numeric name over another brigade who was dissolved due to its catastrophic losses. Strzelczyk-Barwiński took the leadership over the brigade that significantly differed from the former battalion. In spite of the existing stereotypical perceptions, with 60% of the Spanish and new foreign volunteers, it was hardly recognized as Polish unit. The brigade comprised of two Polish-Spanish battalions, namely “Jarosław Dąbrowski” and newly formed “José Palafox”<sup>22</sup>, Hungarian-Spanish “Mátyás Rákosi” and French-Belgian “André Marty”. In “José Palafox” Battalion there existed national companies since the end of 1937, such as Ukrainian, named after Taras Shevchenko<sup>23</sup> and Jewish one named after Naftali Botwin<sup>24</sup>. Earlier mentioned “Adam Mickiewicz” company joined “José Palafox” Battalion in August. In October or November 1937, the company was transformed into the battalion under the name of existing patron. This subunit replaced “André Marty” Battalion that had been earlier excluded from the brigade. Temporarily, a Balkan “Georgi Dimitrov” Battalion was the part of the brigade.

Apart from their service in the Brigade, the Polish operated in the subunits of international artillery, where the Polish constituted the majority, namely in “Karl Liebknecht” battery (formed in December, 1936), as well as “Bartosz Głowacki”<sup>25</sup> battery (July, 1937) and “Walery Wróblewski”<sup>26</sup> battery (December, 1937). Polish volunteers joined other International Brigades as well as a few regular formations of the Republican Army too<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> José Palafox was quite extraordinary character chosen for a patron of the „red” and „Polish” unit as an aristocrat who fought against „progressive” French Empire as well as against Polish troops in Napoleon’s service.

<sup>23</sup> Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861), a leading Ukrainian poet in 19th century, known from his radical social views.

<sup>24</sup> Naftali Botwin (1905-1925) was a Polish communist activist of Jewish descent sentenced to the death penalty for assassinating a police agent. His death triggered waves of strong protests among the leftist circles in Europe. More on the company: Zaagsma, Gerben, *Jewish Volunteers... , passim*; Stein, Sygmunt: *Moja wojna w Hiszpanii. Brygady Międzynarodowe - koniec mitu*, Cracow, Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2015, pp. 254-281.

<sup>25</sup> Bartosz Głowacki was a peasant hero of Polish (Kościuszko) Uprising of 1794.

<sup>26</sup> Walery Wróblewski (1836-1908), a local commander during Polish January Uprising of 1863 and one of the commanders of the Paris Commune of 1871.

<sup>27</sup> E.g. Waclaw Komar was a commander of the 129th International Brigade (and earlier Dąbrowski Battalion). Cf. Kočański, Aleksander: „Komar Waclaw” in Feliks Tych (ed.): *Słownik biograficzny...*, vol. 3, pp. 250-

In July, 1937 the “Dąbrowski” brigade took part in the three-week Battle of Brunete (west of Madrid), where the republican forces heavily and primarily relied on the International Brigades, were defeated and suffered huge losses. Between August 1937 and January 1938 “Dąbrowszczacy” were fighting on Aragon front, especially in failed Saragossa (Zaragoza) offensive at the turn of August and September, 1937. The operations aimed to conquer the capital of Aragon and prevent Franco’s army from an offensive in the north. In October “Dąbrowszczacy” fought in another failed operation in Aragon (near Fuentes de Ebro) and in February 1938 the brigade took part in fights in Extremadura, which also did not benefit the Republicans. In March and beginning of April the brigade heavily engaged in defensive activity in Aragon, in response to the offensive of the National Army. In these fights the brigade was a part of the 35<sup>th</sup> division led by a well-known Soviet Army officer of Polish descent, Karol Świerczewski “Walter”<sup>28</sup>.

Soviet repressions targeting the activists of the KPP exerted a significant impact on the situation in the brigade. Józef Strzelczyk, who joined the ranks of “Dąbrowszczacy” in Autumn 1936, was deprived of leadership and called to USSR in March, during Aragon campaign. A Ukrainian Mikhail Khvatov (“Kharchenko”) became a new commander, who led the unit during the Ebro operations and in the end of August was replaced by Polish communist, Bolesław Mołojec<sup>29</sup>.

The brigade fought in the largest battle of the war, the Battle of the Ebro, since July 25<sup>th</sup>, 1938. The operations of the Republican Army aimed to stop the National Army offensive targeting Valencia, merging the republican forces, and in the wider

252. Juliusz Hibner was a political commissar in the 86th Brigade, then a staff officer in the 35th Division. Cf. Puchalska-Hibner, Bożena: *Życie niepokorne*, Warsaw, Towarzystwo Wydawnicze i Literackie, 2000. Antoni Chrost („Pépé”) was a legendary commander of sabotage unit, whose actions inspired the plots of a novel by Ernest Hemingway „For Whom the Bell Tolls”. Cf. Miller, Gilbert H.: *Hemingway and the Spanish Civil War: The Distant Sound of Battle*, N. York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp. 136-137; Hochschild, Adam: *Spain in Our Hearts. Americans in the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939*, London, Macmillan, 2016, pp. 252-254, 398.

<sup>28</sup> Karol Świerczewski (1897-1947) who participated in Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917, served in the Red Army since 1918. He was deployed to Spain in the end of 1936. He commanded 14th International Brigade, Division „A” and 35th International Division. He took part in operations around Segovia (May - June 1937), Brunete (July 1937), Saragossa (August - October 1937), Teruel (January - February 1938). He was considered quite able divisional commander. In May 1938 he was called to the USSR, but survived the Great Purge. Since 1943 he served in the Polish Army in the USSR. When he commanded the field army in Saxony campaign of 1945 it suffered terrible losses. Opinions about his short time field commands during WW II are highly critical. After the war he was Poland’s deputy minister of National Defense and was killed during the ambush of a Ukrainian guerilla group. „Walter” was a member of the group of Soviet military commanders participating in the Spanish Civil War. However, it is without question that he was the most famous individual of Polish descent who took part in the conflict. Cf. Szumiło, Mirosław: „Świerczewski Karol” in *PSB*, 51 (2017), pp. 322-325. Noteworthy, a character of General Golz from Hemingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is partly modelled on „Walter”. Cf. Krzyżanowski, Jerzy R.: „For Whom the Bell Tolls: The Origin of General Golz; *The Polish Review*, 7, 4 (1962), pp. 69-74; Vernon, Alex: *Hemingway’s Second War: Bearing Witness to the Spanish Civil War*, Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 2011, pp. 157-159 (this author expressed skeptical view about „Walter” as an exact model for Golz).

<sup>29</sup> Bolesław Mołojec (1909-1942), since 1927 was an active member of the communist movement. He underwent a political and military training in the USSR (1931-1934). He left for Spain without permission of the KPP authorities. He was considered outstanding soldier and commander. Since 1939 he was the head of Paris group of Polish communists. In 1940 sent to the USSR in the end of 1941 he was parachuted into Poland as a member of founding group of the communist party. He was one of the leaders of the underground Polish Workers’ Party (the PPR). He was assassinated in mysterious circumstances probably in the result of political and personal conflicts in the party. His role in the PPR and his own death are subject to controversy that has never earned a convincing explanation. Cf. Gontarczyk, Piotr: *Polska Partia Robotnicza. Droga do władzy 1941-1944*, Warsaw, Fronda, 2014, p. 44 and passim.

perspective, regaining the strategic initiative. This bloody battle is considered as a strategic defeat of the Republican Army. Above all subunits of the brigade "Adam Mickiewicz" Battalion, commanded by Franciszek Księżarczyk<sup>30</sup>, a miner living in France and a former member of the Polish Socialist Party, was exceptionally outstanding<sup>31</sup>. "Dąbrowszczacy" were not meant to fight to the very end of this famous battle on November, 16<sup>th</sup>. As a result of the Republican Government's decisions dictated by political motives, international volunteers were withdrawn from front line (September 23<sup>rd</sup>/24<sup>th</sup>).

Polish soldiers of the brigade and other republican troops were transferred to demobilizing dispersal camps while some, especially those living in France, returned there. Due to the National Army's offensive in Catalonia, the Republican Government allowed the international units already low in numbers, to be sent to the front-line in 1939. The leadership of the two incomplete battalions of the brigade overtook Henryk Toruńczyk<sup>32</sup>. On January, 24<sup>th</sup> the brigade set off to Catalan front as a part of the Group of the International Brigades (comprising mainly of Poles and Hungarians), whose leader became also Toruńczyk. In response to the fall of Barcelona the unit participated in defensive fights aiming to guard retreat of republican troops and pro-republican civilian refugees towards France.

The French border was crossed by soldiers of Toruńczyk's group on February, 9<sup>th</sup>, 1939. The number of "Dąbrowszczacy" amounted to around 2,000, the half of whom were interned in special camps, mainly in St. Cyprien and Argelès-sur-Mer, from where they were moved to Gurs and Vernet. The conditions in the camps were harsh<sup>33</sup>.

Looking at the engagement of Polish volunteers on the republican side, it was, from the military perspective, relatively significant, even though they were a minority in the "Polish" 13<sup>th</sup> Brigade itself. "Dąbrowszczacy" took part in the most important, heaviest and bloody war operations, including Battles of Madrid (November, 1936) and Guadalajara (March, 1937) or the Battle of the Ebro (July-September, 1938). Regardless the hagiographic approach typical of PRL's publications, courage and dedication of most volunteers as well as huge losses suffered during the conflict are beyond question<sup>34</sup>. The works published in communist Poland highly underestimated or omitted such unavoidable processes as physical and psychological exhaustion, a decrease in morale, discipline, fighting spirit and combat readiness. Noteworthy, most fighters lacked former army training. Some volunteers arriving from Poland have formerly served in the Polish Army as private soldiers, appointed to utmost

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Żerosławski, Czesław: „Księżarczyk Franciszek” in Feliks Tych (ed.): *Słownik biograficzny...*, vol. 3, pp. 499-501.

<sup>31</sup> Bron Michał: *Bitwa nad Ebro i udział w niej Polaków*, Warsaw, KiW, 1976.

<sup>32</sup> Henryk Toruńczyk (1909-1966) was a textile engineer educated in Belgium and activist of the KPp. He fought in Spain between 1937 and 1939 and he was the chief of staff in the 13th Brigade from April, 1938 to January, 1939. After the war he was interned in camps in France and Algeria and left to the USSR in 1943. He was an organizer and commander of the Special Forces unit in the Polish Army in the USSR. 1944-1945 he organized and commanded internal security military forces for suppressing anti-communist guerilla in Poland. Since 1945 he was employed in civilian administration, e.g. in the Ministry of Light Industry. Cf. Dąbrowski, Franciszek, Gontarczyk, Piotr, Tomasiak Paweł (eds.): *Marzec 1968 w dokumentach MSW*, vol. 2, part 1, Warsaw, Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2009, p. 369.

<sup>33</sup> Zamojski, Jan E.: „Interbrygadziści...”, pp. 16-23.

<sup>34</sup> According to PRL historians the losses amounted to even 3200 individuals, amounting to approximately 60%. However, more realistic numbers account for approx. 30-40% of the total. Cf. Wyszczelski, Lech: „Walka zbrojna...”, p. 283; Różycki, Bartłomiej: „Dąbrowszczacy...”, p. 170.



lower ranks of non-commissioned officers, except for the few graduates of Reserve Officer Cadet Schools<sup>35</sup>. Also, few volunteers happened to be the veterans fighting for a reborn Poland 1918-1920 (including the war against Bolshevik Russia), namely brigade commanders Strzelczyk and Szkliniarz and political commissar Matuszczak, and even the soldiers from the World War I, e.g. Jan Tkaczow, the commander of "José Palafox" Battalion. A few volunteers were sent to undergo warfare officer training. Typically, the formations of a "revolutionary" background revealed undoubted talents for leadership among the fighters either with or without the former army training.

Without doubt, the "Dąbrowszczacy" were predominantly communists. Some of whom had spent part of life and undergone training in the USSR. It can be estimated that even 80% of volunteers coming directly from Poland were communists<sup>36</sup>. It is hard to determine the political views of soldiers originating from diaspora communities, but commanders and political commissars were largely members of the PCF. Indeed, there were volunteers with no communist links, but accidentally joining for personal reasons as well as inveterate adventurers. At every level of a brigade a crucial role played by political officers, mainly highly experienced communist activists were of great consequence. The KPP members were not only in charge of recruitment and deploys of volunteers from Poland, but also offered a political patronage to "Dąbrowszczacy" in Spain<sup>37</sup>. In charge of that was Gustaw Reicher ("Rwal") the representative of the Central Committee of the KPP attached to the Communist Party of Spain (April-December, 1937). Upon being called to the USSR, he fell victim of Stalin's Great Purge<sup>38</sup>. It also claimed life of Kazimierz Cichowski, chief of the cadre section in the main headquarters of the International Brigades in Albacete, a long-term activist in the Bolshevik Party, the KPP and the Comintern<sup>39</sup>.

The repressions targeting the KPP led to dismissals of the Brigade commander Strzelczyk and its political commissar Stanisław Matuszczak as well as Tadeusz Ćwik, commissar of 45<sup>th</sup> division (former of 13<sup>th</sup> Brigade)<sup>40</sup>. The influence of Stalinist political repressions and the liquidation of the KPP in 1938 on the existing political climate and feelings it generated among "Dąbrowszczacy" poses a number of research questions that unequivocally deserve further academic investigation and consideration. Undoubtedly, the decision of the Comintern was not accepted by all, but the scale of the outcome would have been difficult to estimate<sup>41</sup>.

The authorities of the Second Polish Republic were clearly against the return

<sup>35</sup> Among them was Józef Mrozek, a journalist who before leaving for Spain had not been involved in the communist movement. Cf. Ajzner, Seweryn: „Mrozek Józef” in *PSB*, 22 (1977), pp. 198-199.

<sup>36</sup> Ciechanowski, Jan S.: *Podwójna gra...*, p. 561.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. „Korespondencja polskich działaczy komunistycznych w Hiszpanii z Biurem Politycznym KC KPP”, *Z pola walki*, vol. 9, 1 (1966), pp. 95-153. A different matter is the role played by the Communist Party of Spain (PCE). Many Poles in the International Brigades were also members of the PCE.

<sup>38</sup> Kochański, Antoni: „Reicher (Rajcher) Gustaw” in *PSB*, 31 (1988), pp. 11-13; Wyka, Jan: *Zapiski...*, p. 169.

<sup>39</sup> Cichowski was unusually interesting individual, descending from nobility, his brother was a Catholic priest and an eminent theologian. Cf. Tymieniecka, Aleksandra: „Cichowski Kazimierz” in Feliks Tych (ed.): *Słownik biograficzny...*, vol. 1, Warsaw, KiW, 1978, pp. 428-430.

<sup>40</sup> They generally avoided the worst consequences of the Great Purge. Strzelczyk was the only one to have been called to the USSR and excluded from VKP(b), the Soviet Communist Party, but not imprisoned. The removals of an experienced brigade commander and commissars were not received well among soldiers. Cf. Wyka, Jan: *Zapiski...*, p. 185. More about Ćwik, a former socialist: Raszowska, Zofia, „Ćwik Tadeusz” in Feliks Tych (ed.): *Słownik biograficzny...*, vol. 1, p. 497-499.

<sup>41</sup> Zamojski, Jan E.: „Interbrygadziści...”, pp. 14-15; Wyka, Jan: *Zapiski...*, pp. 173-174, 186-187.

of Polish volunteers fighting in the Republican Army to Poland. The institutions of the state were obliged to strict compliance with the existing law and consequently deprive ex-volunteers of Polish citizenship<sup>42</sup>. Such practices were clearly perceived as an important platform campaigning against communists and those spreading communist propaganda. The presence of the communists with rich military experience in the light of both national and international political climate was highly unwelcome<sup>43</sup>.

### 3. The “Dąbrowszczacy” after the Spanish War

An extremely interesting research subject can be the fates of Polish veterans of the International Brigades after leaving Spain<sup>44</sup>. Their activities during World War II were widely varied. Despite Comintern’s political line after Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact as well as a skeptical attitude of Polish authorities in exile, quite a high a number of “Dąbrowszczacy” joined the Polish Army formed in France (1939-1940)<sup>45</sup>. Their participation can be seen mainly in French and Norwegian campaigns in 1940 while their smaller part served later in the Polish Armed Forces in Great Britain<sup>46</sup>. The group of veterans imprisoned in the concentration camp in Miranda de Ebro, along with other Polish prisoners were transferred to Great Britain in 1943 and some of them joined the Polish army<sup>47</sup>. Some veterans, especially from immigrant communities played a significant role in the communist resistance in France, taking leadership in Polish sector<sup>48</sup>. Some went to resistance movements in of other countries, such as Belgium or Yugoslavia. An extraordinary case was the participation of a few

<sup>42</sup> The legal basis was an Act of 20th Jan., 1920 on Polish citizenship. On 31st March, 1938 Polish parliament passed a regulation on stripping of the citizenship status, which, as such, did not primarily and directly address the volunteers, but which was used against them. Relevant actions were clarified by the instructions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the main role in these matters was played by Wiktor Dymmer, the head of the Consular Service and Foreign Affairs Minister Józef Beck’s right-hand man.

<sup>43</sup> More: Ciechanowski, Jan S.: *Podwójna gra...*, pp. 566-586.

<sup>44</sup> The most comprehensive study: Zamojski, Jan E.: „Interbrygadziści...”, pp. 9-57.

<sup>45</sup> The Polish military authorities in France organized the recruitment in internment camps. It is estimated that approx. 120 individuals from the camps themselves have joined the army. Cf. Zamojski, Jan E.: „Interbrygadziści...”, pp. 22-25.

<sup>46</sup> There were a few eminent „Spaniards” in the Polish Armed Forces, e.g.: Waclaw Komar, who fought in Lorraine in 1940 (then became a POW and notorious escaper), Tadeusz Ćwik (later joined the Polish Socialist Party in Great Britain) and Jan Wyka, poet and former co-editor of „Dąbrowszczak” bulletin. Characters of Polish soldiers with Spanish experience appeared in short novels published by journalist and writer Ksawery Pruszyński (1907-1950). He was a press correspondent during the Civil War and sympathized with Republican cause despite his conservative background.

<sup>47</sup> Eiroa de San Francisco, Matilde: „Obóz koncentracyjny w kraju neutralnym. Polacy w Miranda de Ebro” in Jan Kieniewicz(ed.): *Studia polsko-hispańskie...*, pp. 158-160. The group of Polish prisoners of the Miranda camp mostly consisted of soldiers who tried to reach Britain after the fall of France.

<sup>48</sup> There could be mentioned here the following individuals: Jan Rutkowski, the chief of the staff of 13th Brigade (prisoner in German concentration camps), Bolesław Maślankiewicz, Bolesław Jeleń, Tadeusz Oppman, Antoni Chrost (leader of sabotage unit in Nord district), Józef Kutin, Zofia Szleyen (editor of „Dąbrowszczak”, later a translator of Spanish literature). Towards the end of the war Jeleń, Maślankiewicz and Chrost became commanders of Polish Infantry Group (constituted of communist partisans) attached to the 1st French Army. Among others Franciszek Książarczyk and Grzegorz Korczyński became well-known guerilla leaders in communist underground movement in Poland then. Cf.: Zamojski, Jan E.: *Polacy w ruchu oporu we Francji 1940-1945*, Wrocław, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1975, *passim*; idem, „Interbrygadziści...”, pp. 28-36.

doctors in the war against Japan serving in the medical service of the Chinese Army (some of them served later under American command in the Burma campaign)<sup>49</sup>.

„Dąbrowszczacy” also took part in Soviet special operations, deployed to occupied Poland, especially in the initial phase of the war on the eastern front<sup>50</sup>. „Dąbrowszczacy” who came from France to occupied Poland made a significant contribution to the history of communist underground movement (since 1942), mainly by influencing the organization and functioning of GL (People’s Guard) and AL (People’s Army). Their political views and actions triggered controversy and arguments in that environment, but their contribution was an exceptional among Polish communists’ wealth of combat experience<sup>51</sup>. „Dąbrowszczacy” also served in Polish Army organized in the USSR in 1943<sup>52</sup>. The little known fact, however, is that a few of veterans were fighters of the non-communists underground formations like the *Armia Krajowa* (the Home Army), subordinated to the Polish authorities in exile, also participating in Warsaw Uprising (1944)<sup>53</sup>.

The veterans from Spain suffered serious losses in World War II, especially with regards to the individuals fighting in occupied Poland. Noteworthy, the war claimed the lives of three former commanders of “Dąbrowski” unit, namely Józef Strzelczyk, Bolesław Mołojec and Stanisław Ulanowski, the first two of whom died in mysterious circumstances.

The fates of the survivors after the war were also interesting and complex<sup>54</sup>. It is beyond question that they actively and on many platforms participated in shaping and strengthening of communist rule in Poland. They significantly contributed to co-creating and implementing of the repression system in the first several years of communist Poland (1944-1956). Some of them were in hold of important roles in the infamous “public security” apparatus (political police), the army branches responsible for destruction of anti-communist guerilla movement as well as in intelligence and counterintelligence service<sup>55</sup>. However, they were also among the victims of re-

<sup>49</sup> Zamojski, Jan E.: „Interbrygadziści...”, pp. 42-44. E.g. Stanisław Flato, the head of the medical service in 13th Brigade and 35th International Division as well as chief of staff in 13th Brigade. Cf. Ajzner, Seweryn: „Flato Stanisław (Samuel) in Feliks Tych (ed.): *Słownik...*, vol. 2, Warsaw, KiW, 1987, pp. 115-116.

<sup>50</sup> The majority of them is believed to have been killed. Cf. Zamojski, Jan E.: „Interbrygadziści...”, pp. 38-39.

<sup>51</sup> More see: Gontarczyk, Piotr: *Polska Partia..., passim*; Zamojski, Jan E.: „Interbrygadziści...”, pp. 36-38; Wyszczelski, Lech: „Rola dąbrowszczaków w kształtowaniu lewicowego ruchu oporu w Polsce podczas II wojny światowej”, *Zeszyty Naukowe. Wojskowa Akademia Polityczna*, 102 (1980), pp. 71-80. Among killed in action or murdered were: Henryk Sternhel (surgeon of 13th Brigade), Jakub Aleksandrowicz, August Józef Dąbrowski, Antoni Grabowski, August Lange, Henryk Woźniak (killed during the Warsaw Rising of 1944). Among other important communist guerilla leaders were: Grzegorz Korczyński, Franciszek Książarczyk and Ignacy Borkowski. Many of these biographies can be found in: Tych, Feliks (ed.): *Słownik...*, vol. 1-3.

<sup>52</sup> Some of them stayed in the USSR after 1939, but majority came from Algeria where they were internees of Vichy regime. They were mainly employed in the political apparatus of the army and in Special Forces. Among them were: Mieczysław Mietkowski (head of communist party in 13th Brigade), Mieczysław Broniatowski, Eugeniusz Szyr, Henryk Toruńczyk, Leon Rubinsztein, Juliusz Hibner.

<sup>53</sup> Zamojski, Jan E.: „Interbrygadziści...”, p. 38.

<sup>54</sup> Cf.: Zamojski, Jan E.: „Interbrygadziści...”, pp. 45-54; Różycki, Bartłomiej: „Dąbrowszczacy...”, *passim*; Chodakiewicz, Marek J.: *Zagrabiona pamięć. Wojna w Hiszpanii 1936-1939*, Warsaw, Fronda, 2010, pp. 138-147.

<sup>55</sup> E.g.: Mieczysław Mietkowski and Grzegorz Korczyński (both deputy ministers of Public Security), Leon Rubinsztein, Józef Mrozek, Mieczysław Broniatowski (higher functionaries of Ministry of Public Security), Franciszek Książarczyk, Paweł Szkliniarz (Wiktor Kuźnicki), Ignacy Borkowski (higher police officers), Wacław Komar (head of both military and civilian intelligence), Jan Rutkowski (head of military counter-intelligence), Henryk Toruńczyk, Juliusz Hibner (commanders of military internal forces).

pressions targeting the part of ruling camp at Stalinism apogee, in times of spy-mania and the fight against the so-called “rightist-nationalist wing” in the communist party (Polish United Workers’ Party - the PZPR)<sup>56</sup>. After the political turn of 1956 some of them played a role in the Army and governmental service, which, however, did not result in distinguished careers<sup>57</sup>. Some were disappointed with the politics of the communist party under Władysław Gomułka rule (1956-1970)<sup>58</sup>. “Dąbrowszczacy” of Jewish descent were touched by anti-Semitic campaign at the end of the 1960s resulting in joining, by a number of them, the wave of Jewish migration from Poland<sup>59</sup>.

The “Dąbrowszczacy” were treated as an important propaganda tool exerting significant influence on raising new historical consciousness, especially under Władysław Gomułka’s rule (until the late 1960s). Yet, the legend of “Dąbrowszczacy” could not be paralleled with a kind of cult created around late Soviet commander of international units in the Spanish Civil War, General Karol Świerczewski “Walter” hailed as a “superhero” of communist Poland<sup>60</sup>. Gradually, however, the intensity and scale of taking propaganda advantage of the “Dąbrowszczacy” legend were dramatically weakening. Spanish experience was also present in the culture of PRL period both in film and literature but usually indirectly and episodically<sup>61</sup>.

#### 4. In the Rebel Army

The history of Poles fighting on the national side still deserves further research.<sup>62</sup> It may be assumed that the numbers that are hard to estimate may amount to a few dozens<sup>63</sup>. A relatively low level of engagement on the national side is hardly surprising in the light of a few factors. First of all, the participation of foreign volunteers in Franco’s Army was limited. There were neither significant recruitment actions nor interest in high participation of foreigners in the National Army, with the exception of Italian and German support. Support for the Francoist faction did not lack in Poland. It was strongly voiced by a right-wing nationalist camp and various Catholic and conservative groups that perceived the conflict as a significant clash of not only

<sup>56</sup> Among the imprisoned were: Waclaw Komar, his deputy Stanislaw Flato, Grzegorz Korczyński and Michał Bron (a former military attaché in Belgrade). However, this scale of repressions addressed to „Spaniards” was much smaller than, for example, in Czechoslovakia, Hungary or Bulgaria. Cf. Spałek, Robert: *Komuniści przeciwko komunistom. Poszukiwanie wroga wewnętrznego w kierownictwie partii komunistycznej w Polsce w latach 1948-1956*, Poznań-Warsaw, Zysk i S-ka, IPN, 2014, pp. 504-521, 832-849). See also memoirs of the imprisoned „Dąbrowszczak”: Bron, Michał: *We fraku i w więzieniu*, Warsaw, Iskry, 1990.

<sup>57</sup> The highest state positions were held by former political commissar of 13th Brigade Eugeniusz Szyr, who was in charge of economic ministries, a Deputy Prime Minister (1959-1972) and a member of the Political Bureau of the PZPR, yet gradually, he was losing his influential power. Cf. Sobór-Świdzka, Anna: „Szyr (Shir, Schir) Eugeniusz (former Gerszon Serson)” in *PSB*, 50 (2015), pp. 331-334. A few held high positions in the army, like Grzegorz Korczyński, deputy minister of defence (co-responsible for a massacre of worker’s protests in 1970).

<sup>58</sup> E.g. Juliusz Hibner, who was deputy minister of internal affairs (1956-1960), but withdrew from politics and became nuclear physicist, or writer Jan Wyka, who was removed from the PZPR in 1959.

<sup>59</sup> Zamojski, Jan E.: „Interbrygadziści...”, pp. 53-54; Różycki, Bartłomiej: „Dąbrowszczacy...”, p. 206.

<sup>60</sup> Różycki, Bartłomiej: „Dąbrowszczacy...”, pp. 189-191.

<sup>61</sup> Some reminiscences of the war appeared in underplots of film masterpieces by Andrzej Wajda: *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958) and *Man of Marble* (1977).

<sup>62</sup> Ciechanowski, Jan S.: „Polscy...”, pp. 117-151; idem: *Podwójna gra...*, pp. 588-590; Chodakiewicz, Marek J.: *Zagrabiona...*, pp. 132-135.

<sup>63</sup> According to J.S. Ciechanowski there can be mentioned 15 Poles and 4 individuals of putative Polish descent. Cf. Ciechanowski, Jan S.: *Podwójna gra...*, p. 588.

political nature, but also that of civilization and culture<sup>64</sup>. There was neither sufficient encouragement to actively involve in supporting national insurgents nor a center to be in charge of such recruitment, as in case of communists<sup>65</sup>. There was a huge gap to fill from the enthusiasm conveyed by the press to actual reaching Spain. The nationalist youth, who could potentially serve as volunteer resources, were much more preoccupied with internal socio-political situation in Poland, and increasing international threat. This included mistrust towards Germany, supporting the national side in Spain. Brought up in the spirit of legalism, especially with regards to the military duty, the young nationalists must have been discouraged by strict determination of Poland's authorities against recruitment to foreign armies, even if it mainly targeted volunteers for the International Brigades<sup>66</sup>.

Poles mainly served in the ranks of the Spanish Foreign Legion. The vast majority of them were migrants who had joined the Legion either for job or adventure before the war broke out. Only a small group of volunteers joined the Legion after the war had broken out in July, 1936<sup>67</sup>. It has to be emphasized, that the vast majority of Poles fighting on national side did not engage in the war for ideological reasons, as they happened to be professional soldiers in the foreign military formation, which after the war had broken out, became significant in Franco's forces.

A typical example of a Polish legionary seems to be Antoni Pardo. Born in 1907 into a poor peasant family unsuccessfully tried to improve quality of life in Uruguay, in coal-mines of Belgium and on merchant ships. Eventually, he joined the Spanish Foreign Legion participating in the civil war over its whole period and was awarded a higher rank of non-commissioned officer. He fought mainly in Aragon and Catalonia and was wounded on a few occasions<sup>68</sup>.

A soldier representing the opposite social class was Ludwik Karol Lubicz-Orłowski, 22-year old cavalry reserve officer in the Polish Army, originating from aristocratic family and a graduate of the Paris School of Political Science. Unlike the majority of Poles fighting on the Franco's side, he was an example of a genuine volunteer whose motivation for engagement must have been generated by ideas, even though an adolescence driven desire to experience a war adventure cannot be excluded. He joined General Franco's army at the end of 1936. Orłowski served in Carlist cavalry (*Requeté*), but irritated by the lack of competence of his commanders

<sup>64</sup> Opiola, Wojciech, *Hiszpańska wojna...*, pp. 127-158. Such point of view presents e.g. a book *Hiszpania bohaterska (Heroic Spain, 1937)*, written by nationalist activist and short time war correspondent in Spain, Jędrzej Giertych. Cf. Giertych, Jędrzej: *Hiszpania bohaterska*, (ed.) Michał Andrzejczak, Krzeszowice, Ostoja, 2013. See also: Kabaciński, Dawid: „Hiszpańska podróż Jędrzeja Giertycha”, *Studia nad Autorytaryzmem i Totalitaryzmem*, 39, 3 (2017), pp. 49-65.

<sup>65</sup> Colonel Romuald Wolikowski, Polish Army special envoy in Spain, suggested sending a group of volunteer military specialists to the national army. Due to family links he closely related to the cause of national camp in Spain. His wife Izabela Lutosławska, a writer and journalist and his mother in law, Sofia Pérez Eguía y Casanova, a Spanish writer, were both enthusiastic supporters of national cause, while Colonel's father in law, a philosopher, Wincenty Lutosłowski, was encouraging to form „Polish Legion” that would fight in Franco's army. Cf. Ciechanowski, Jan S.: „Polscy ochotnicy...”, pp. 149-150.

<sup>66</sup> Ciechanowski, Jan S.: „Polscy ochotnicy...”, pp. 150-151.

<sup>67</sup> According to Spanish sources 8 volunteers joined the Foreign Legion after the war had broken out. Cf. Ciechanowski, Jan S.: „Polscy ochotnicy...”, pp. 123-124.

<sup>68</sup> Pardo, Waclaw: *Polski legionista gen. Franco*, (ed.) Cezary Taracha, Radom, Polskie Wydawnictwo Encyklopedyczne, 2001. After the war finished Pardo remained in the Legion and in 1948 he received Spanish citizenship and officer rank. He finished his service in 1958 and died in 1962.

he left Spain no later than in February, 1937<sup>69</sup>. Tadeusz Ungar (“Kowalski”), a law student and an activist of nationalist youth organization, also probably fought in Spain, but his story lacks details and reliability<sup>70</sup>.

The question of participation of volunteers on the national side requires caution, especially if it has not been confirmed by reliable historical sources. Among alleged participants there were also mythomaniacs<sup>71</sup>.

A group of Polish aviators and aircraft mechanics were involved in delivering aviation equipment for the National Army, but they did not directly participate in the war.<sup>72</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

During recent years the Polish chapter of the Spanish Civil War became a matter of public debates<sup>73</sup>. During PRL times the story of the veterans of the International Brigades played the fairly significant role in creating the communist mythology in Poland. Not surprisingly, similar to other communism related traditions, it has inevitably triggered critical revision. In this, however, the problem became more complex in comparison with other communist myths. There are opinions voicing their arguments against “depreciation” of “Dąbrowszczacy” experience and treating them as mere faithful “Stalin’s soldiers”. The defenders of tradition of the “Dąbrowszczacy” emphasize that the volunteers fought against rebels supported by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy as well as they have a huge respect in democratic Spain and in many western circles. The critics emphasize the role of International Brigades as an instrument of Stalin’s policy, communist background of most of Polish volunteers and infamous part played by some veterans in implementing the communist regime in Poland. Apart from old “left-wing” myths, the new ones appear, formulated by

<sup>69</sup> Karol Orłowski (1914-1990), was a son of former Polish ambassador in Spain Ksawery Franciszek Orłowski. During the World War II he served in Polish Armed Forces and led a secret evacuation post in Madrid (1940-1941). Arrested and extradited from Spain, he worked for the Polish military intelligence in Lisbon and then in Buenos Aires. After the war he lived in Argentina and died there. Cf. Ciechanowski, Jan S. (ed.): *Polsko-brytyjska współpraca wywiadowcza podczas II wojny światowej/ Intelligence cooperation between Poland and Great Britain during World War II*, vol. 2, Warsaw, Naczelna Dyrekcja Archiwów Państwowych, 2005, pp. 176-177 (according to this biographical note he fought in Spain till 1938).

<sup>70</sup> Chodakiewicz, Marek J.: „Taki polski Kowalski. Wspomnienie o Tadeuszu Ungarze”, *Glaukopis*, 4 (2006), pp. 237-247; Ciechanowski, Jan S.: „Polscy ochotnicy...”, p. 142 (as the author indicates, the existing sources do not evidence Ungar’s participation in the war).

<sup>71</sup> Tadeusz Bujakowski must have been the most notorious figure, claiming to have been a pilot in the Franco’s army and bombarding civilians (his sensational stories were published by the press). In fact, not only did he fail to offer his service to the National Army, but also became a subject to Polish intelligence queries. Cf. Ciechanowski, Jan S.: „Polscy ochotnicy...”, pp. 125-136.

<sup>72</sup> Pilots participated in an unsuccessful operation organized by international network of weapon traders. This action claimed a life of Jan Kazimierz Lasocki, a former military pilot. His friend Kajetan Czarkowski-Golejewski, a landowner and a sport pilot was lucky to survive (after WW II he became an employee of the Polish Section of Radio Free Europe). A group of mechanics from the Polish Aviation Works went to Spain to assemble Polish planes purchased by Franco’s army. Cf. Ciechanowski, Jan S.: „Polscy ochotnicy...”, pp. 136-140; idem: *Podwójna gra...*, pp. 536-539; Pochodaj, Andrzej: „Udział polskich lotników i samolotów w wojnie domowej w Hiszpanii 1936-1939. Na marginesie książki R. Michulca *Elita Luftwaffe. Rzecz o niemieckich asach myśliwskich 1939-1945*”, *Grot. Zeszyty Historyczne*, 5, 20 (2004), pp. 145-150. Pochodaj, who supports his hypothesis with evidence of Spanish researchers, assumes that one aviator of Polish descent fought in the National Army, while 4 flyers with Polish connections could have fought in the Republican Army. *Ibidem*, pp. 145-147

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Opiola, Wojciech: *Hiszpańska wojna...*, pp. 238-245.

several right-wing journalists and historians<sup>74</sup>. In many aspects, the discourse can be characterized as schematic and superficial, influenced by journalistic and political passion<sup>75</sup>.

The story of Poles who experienced the first clash of totalitarian powers requires detailed and balanced research, free from opinions which are typical for political debates. However, it must be emphasized, that critical analysis of the engagement of Poles in one of the most crucial events of 20<sup>th</sup> century poses a significant challenge to researchers, who, to successfully face it, need to collect data searching Polish, Spanish, French and Russian archives<sup>76</sup>.

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<sup>74</sup> E.g. the myth of „Polish volunteers” on national side, although almost all among few Poles in Franco’s army were professional mercenary soldiers.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Ciechanowski, Jan S.: „Obca interwencja w konflikcie wewnętrznym. Meandry badań na hiszpańską wojnę domową z lat 1936-1939”, *Res Gestae. Czasopismo Historyczne*, 6 (2018), p. 252.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. ibidem, pp. 263-264.

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