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Denunciation of the Krysia bunker no longer a mystery

Tajemnica donosu na bunkier „Krysia” odkryta

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Denunciation of the *Kryisia* Bunker No Longer a Mystery

Abstract

The author analyzes the documents of the underground counterintelligence of the Warsaw district of the Home Army, which reveal the name of the person who informed the German *Kriminalpolizei* about the hiding place of several dozen Jews (the *Kryisia* bunker, located at 81 Grójecka Street), among them the historian Emanuel Ringelblum. The identity of the informer remained unknown for decades. According to the report by an unidentified Polish agent in the German police, it was Marian Nowicki, a building contractor, who was rewarded for his deed with money and a promise to make him one of the paid informers. He was probably active in the Home Army, where he operated under the codename 'Budowlany'. He died during the Warsaw Uprising. The underground judiciary did not investigate his case, and that he went unpunished.

Keywords

Kryisia bunker, Emanuel Ringelblum, Mieczysław Wolski, Gestapo, Kripo, Blue Police, Warsaw, 81 Grójecka Street

On March 7, 1944 in Ochota district of Warsaw German Police scored a significant success – they uncovered possibly the largest Jewish hideout on the 'Aryan side' of occupied Warsaw – the *Kryisia* bunker, which sheltered a few dozen survivors. Much has been written about this hideout, and we recently celebrated the 80th anniversary of its demise. It is, therefore, superfluous to repeat all that we know about it. To give a brief summary of the most important facts: The shelter was built on the outskirts of Ochota on the plot of land belonging to the gardener Mieczysław Wolski at 81 Grójecka Street. Wolski lived there in a two-story house with his mother Małgorzata, his sisters Halina and Wanda, and his nephew Janusz Wysocki. The family supplied the Ghetto with vegetables and established many contacts there. In 1942 they took in Wiśka, a Jewish girl, who returned to the Ghetto after a while and spent a few days there. Later, together with Mieczysław Wolski, Wiśka returned to the Ghetto and brought back a plan

to build a hiding place for a group of escapees.¹ The bunker was dug under a greenhouse with the help of some Jews who had been brought to the 'Aryan Side'. Eventually there were about forty people hiding there, most of whom had financial means. A few of them were members of the intelligentsia; among them was Emanuel Ringelblum, a Polish-Jewish historian, who had created the underground archive of the Warsaw Ghetto. Ringelblum arrived at the shelter with his wife and son in August 1943.²

On March 7, 1944 the Germans, together with Polish members of the Kripo and the Blue Police, entered the premises, and made their way straight to the greenhouse and the shelter underneath it. Threatening to use poison gas they forced the resident to come out. The severely beaten Mieczysław Wolski supposedly managed to convince the Germans that his mother and sisters had not known about the shelter. The Germans brought captured Jews, Wolski, and Janusz Wysocki to the Pawiak prison; a few days later they were all shot in the ruins of the Ghetto. A Polish source inside the prison reported that forty people were brought from Grójecka Street to Pawiak.

This necessarily raises a question that has remained unanswered for eighty years: How did the Germans reach the bunker? Their behavior, their forces and their resources on the ground testify to a good reconnaissance of the area. Historians have proposed several hypotheses. Jan Grabowski stated that the action of the Germans were part of a broader operation aimed at targeting the Jews hiding on the 'Aryan side'.³ Others claimed that someone had reported the location of the shelter to the Germans, suggesting that the person responsible was Jan Łakiński, a known collaborator; however, this turned out to be false, as Łakiński had been killed by the underground executioner squad before Ringelblum's group shelter was discovered.⁴ American historian Samuel D. Kassow cited some recollections suggesting that it was Wolski's former girlfriend who reported the hiding place to the Germans.⁵ Some speculated that the Germans' success was due to a combination of the above hypotheses, which

¹ *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations: Rescuers of Jews During the Holocaust: Poland*, eds. Israel Gutman, Sara Bender, Shmuel Krakowski (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2004), vol. 2, Wolska, Malgorzata et al., pp. 804–805.

² Samuel D. Kassow, *Who will write our history? The Hidden Archive of Emanuel Ringelblum* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), pp. 362–363.

³ Jan Grabowski, "Hunting down Emanuel Ringelblum. The Participation of the Polish *Kriminalpolizei* in the 'Final Solution of the Jewish Question,'" *Holocaust Studies and Materials* (2017): 11–41. See also idem, *On Duty: The Role of the Polish Blue and Criminal Police in the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2024).

⁴ Dariusz Libionka, "Polska Podziemna wobec szantażystów i szmalcowników w Warszawie. Korekta obrazu [The Polish Underground State's Response to the Problem of Blackmailers and *Szmalcowniki* in Warsaw: A Revised Picture]," *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 14 (2018): 144–146.

⁵ Kassow, *Who will write our history?...*, p. 383.

are not mutually exclusive. Dariusz Libionka recently claimed that *Krysia* must have been discovered due to a report by an informant.⁶

During my research for the book *Muszkietierowie 1939–1942. Historia tajnej organizacji wywiadowczej* [The Musketeers 1939–1942: The History of a Secret Intelligence Organization]⁷ I came across a report by the Home Army counterintelligence service,⁸ that provides the most plausible explanation. A Polish source codename ‘Czarnota’ claimed that the person who pointed out the hideout to the German *Kriminalpolizei* was one Marian Nowicki, who lived in Warsaw at 65 Ogrodowa Street. According to ‘Czarnota’, Nowicki’s report was received by Kripo special unit (*Sondern Streifenkommando*)⁹ on March 7, 1944. Nowicki was reportedly rewarded with 38,000 złotych; in addition, *SS-Untersturmführer* and *Kriminalkommissar* Werner Balhause recommended Nowicki to the Gestapo as a permanent informer “with the right to arrest and follow politically minded Poles.” Balhause led the operation against the *Krysia* shelter. He also led the unit tasked with searching for Jewish hideouts (described by Jan Grabowski), and could count on the knowledge, assistance and the network of informers of the prewar Polish Police.

The headline of the report bears the *nom de guerre* ‘Lektor’; it was Lt. Bolesław Nanowski, then deputy chief of Department 2 of the Warsaw District of the Home Army. Nanowski was ordered by his immediate superior, Lt. Wincenty Kwieciński, ‘Lampart’, to confirm the identity of the German informer. ‘Czarnota’ wrote of the people arrested in the shelter: “the Gestapo and the Polish Crim[inial] Pol[ice] surrounded the above-ment[ioned] property and arrested 37 people of Jewish origin and 5 people of Aryan origin (Poles).” The number of victims is sad to have been much higher: “The bestially beaten Wolski and his family members, i.e. his niece and nephew, revealed a few more hiding places, one of them in Koło district. A total of 204 persons were executed in the Ghetto, including several dozen of Polish origin.”

Assuming that the report by Polish informer is correct, the date of Nowicki’s “report” – the 7th of March – means that the Germans reacted immediately and did not conduct any further reconnaissance. One of the participants in the operation, a Polish policeman, testified after the war that Balhause, sounded the alarm and, after a short briefing, the policemen got into their cars and drove to

⁶ <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kraj/zydzi-ukryci-w-bunkrze-tajemniczy-donos-do-niemcow/kd58gs1> (accessed: April 3, 2024).

⁷ Adrian Sandak, *Muszkietierowie 1939–1942. Historia tajnej organizacji wywiadowczej* [The Musketeers 1939–1942: The History of a Secret Intelligence Organization] (Warsaw: Libra, 2022).

⁸ Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej [Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance] (hereafter: AIPN), BU, 00/231/14, Współpraca z okupantem. Podejrzani o współpracę z Gestapo (Archiwum AK) [Collaboration with the occupying forces. Suspected of collaborating with the Gestapo (Home Army Archives)].

⁹ Special Patrol Unit. In the document written as *Sondern Streifkommando*.

Grójecka, where a dozen members of the Gestapo were already waiting. Together they surrounded the greenhouse.

Who was the informer? In the Warsaw telephone book of 1938–1939 we can find Marian Nowicki, a building contractor, who lived at 27 Ogrodowa St., while in the German telephone book for the Warsaw District of 1942 there is a Marian Nowicki, who lived at 65 Ogrodowa St. Both have the same telephone number 521 32, so we may safely assume that it is the same person.¹⁰ Many Jews had lived at 27 Ogrodowa St., it was also the address of a Male Jewish Philology Gymnasium run by the *Khinukh* Society and various many private businesses, including construction companies (Dom-Bet Ltd.). In November 1940 this part of Ogrodowa was included in the Ghetto; which most likely forced Nowicki to move to 65 Ogrodowa St., i.e. to the house owned by the famous prewar transport company of Władysław Węgiełek, where many of his employees lived. Węgiełek's granddaughter does not remember the name Nowicki. I was not able to uncover the identity of 'Czarnota'¹¹, the author of the report, but its contents suggest that it was a Home Army informer within the Blue Police or the Kripo.

The tardiness of Home Army counterintelligence is somewhat surprising. 'Czarnota's' report was received by the counterintelligence headquarter on March 18. Unfortunately, I could not decipher the comment or the signature of the person who forwarded the report. On March 30 it was sent (by Kwieciński) to Nanowski, but without specifying the person in question, without any comment emphasizing the gravity of the situation, and without the usual "Urgent" notation. A month later Nanowski reported that "a Marian Nowicki is not known to the Kripo [...] [as well as] on the Directorate's [of the Criminal Police] territory is not known." If Nowicki had an official ID, it would have been issued by *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Georg Richter – who headed one of the task forces within the Kripo, or by the Gestapo. That was probably the end of the matter, since the underground reports that mentioned the discovery of the Grójecka hideout made no mention of the informer. Even if Nowicki went into hiding or changed his name after his deed, Polish investigators knew his address and may have tried to find him through his social and professional networks.

The documents show that the information reported by 'Czarnota' reached the intended recipient. It is difficult to determine why the counterintelligence did not look for Nowicki, let alone punish him. In the case of informers the

¹⁰ According to the gravestone in Bródno cemetery, Marian (Hipolit Marian on the gravestone) Nowicki was active in the Home Army under the codename 'Budowlany'. He and his two sons, soldiers in the Home Army, were killed during the Warsaw Uprising. A third son, also in the Home Army, died in 1942 (<https://www.1944.pl/groby-powstancow/marian-nowicki,1763.html>; accessed: February 17, 2025). Next to Marian Nowicki's name is the military rank of 'Captain', but I have not been able to confirm such a high rank or military assignment anywhere.

¹¹ According to Dariusz Libionka's findings, it was probably Cpl. Mieczysław Bedełek 'Czarnota'.

counterintelligence usually prepared a dossier, which was then passed on either to the underground prosecutor at the special civil court, or, if the informer was a threat to the resistance itself, to a military court. The inaction of the underground counterintelligence may have been due to neglect, overcomplicated procedures, or simply to the sheer number of cases to be investigated. What's more important is that the identity of the informer who led the Germans to the *Krysia* hideout has been established.

Documents

'Lektor'¹²

Rep[ort] from the Police requested

March 30, [19]44, 'Lampart'¹³

On the 7th of the current month, a report was received at the Directorate of Criminal Pol[ice] (Special German Commissariat *Sondern Streifkommando*) submitted by Marian Nowicki, domiciled 65 Ogrodowa Street, that at 81 or 83 Grójecka Street on the property of a Wolski gardener's property houses a shelter with 40 persons of Jewish origin.

On the basis of this report, the Gestapo and Polish Crim[inial] Pol[ice] surrounded the abovement[ioned] property and arrested 37 people of Jewish and 5 people of Aryan origin (Poles). The bestially beaten Wolski and his family members, i.e. his niece and nephew, revealed a few more hideouts, one of them in Koło district. A total of 204 persons were executed in the Ghetto, including several dozen of Polish origin.

For his efforts Marian Nowicki received a reward of 38,000 (thirty-eight thousand zloty), the German Com[missioner] Balhausen¹⁴ recommended him in the Gestapo, which resulted in Nowicki being accepted as a permanent Gestapo informer with the right to arrest and follow politically minded Poles.

'Czarnota'

¹² Bolesław Wojciech Nanowski (1912–1975), 'Lektor', 'Mandaryn', 'Zador'.

¹³ Added with red pencil. Wincenty Kwieciński (1916–1924), 'Lampart', 'D-3', 'Proboszcz'. Since October 1942 he served as Deputy Chief of Counterintelligence of the Warsaw District of the Home Army, since January 1944, due to temporary suspension of Bolesław Kozubowski ('Mocarz', 'Pleban') in his duties, Kwieciński headed the district counterintelligence. He was formally nominated on June 1, 1944 (*Wywiad i kontrwywiad Armii Krajowej* [Intelligence and Counterintelligence of the Home Army], ed. Władysław Bułhak, [Warsaw: IPN, 2008], pp. 358–360).

¹⁴ Other versions of the family name found in the sources: Balhause, Ballhause.

Lektor

M. P.
 Proszę o listy z polskimi
 listami z b. m. i przesyłać za pośrednictwem
 do Dyrekcji Pol. Kryminalnej (Specjalny
 Komisarjat Miejski Soudersu Strefy Komando)

Złotous przez Mariona Nowickiego zam.
 ul. Ogrodowa 65., i przy ul. Grojeckiej
 № 81. ul. 83 i posesji Ogrodowa
 Holenderskiej ulicy i do schroniska, i którego
 i znajdują się około 40 osób
 pochodzenia Żydowskiego.
 Na skutek złotouszego meldunku
 Gestapo i Pol. Policji Krym.

Otoczony przez Niem. posiada: Arsen brzozy
 37 osób, pochodzenia Żydowskiego i
 5 osób pochodzenia Brytyjskiego (Polski)

Na skutek i przesłania Holenderskiego
 i jego rodziny t.j. Lisohuusa i di. st. niemiec
 przy pomocy wydali jeszcze kilka
 więcej schronienia, ~~nie~~ między innymi
 na Kalc. Ogotem zostało straconych
 i getto w lok. osoby, w tym
 kilkadziesiąt osób pochodzenia
 Polskiego
 Na zamian za adolana usługi
 Marian Nowicki (Polski)

Magradz h Lwów 25 38. 000 10
11
(Lwów: Tysięce księgi)
Oraz został przedstawiony przed
wicekonsulem Kom. Balhausem
h Gestapo i na skutek tego
został przyjęty h charakterze
starego konfidanta Gestapo
z prawem aresztowania i śledzenia
politycznie zaangażowanych
Polaków. Czarna
[illegible]
[illegible] do informacji [illegible]
16.3.44

Mr. Henryk¹⁵

For your information [illegible name or pseudonym]

18.3.[19]44

A Nowicki Marian is not known to the Kripo. If he has an ID card, it may have been issued by Richter or by Sipo abt. IV.¹⁶

1.5.[19]44

'Lektor'

15 11
N o w i c k i Marian nie jest znany w Kripo. Jeżeli posiada legitymację to wystawiona przez Richtera lub przez Sipo abt. IV.
1.5.44. Lektor.

Nowicki Marian, zam. przy ul. Ogrodowej na terenie Dyrekcji nie jest znany, jak również indagowane sąsiadki właściwe sąsiadki, którzy mogłyby dać informacje o jego pracy w Sekcji Specjalnej - również go nie znają.

¹⁵ Added. Identity has not been established.

¹⁶ Sicherheitspolizei, Abteilung IV. Security Police, Department IV (the Gestapo).

NOWICKI Marian, domiciled at Ogrodowa Street, on the Directorate's territory is not known; likewise the relevant agencies questioned, who could give information [regarding] his work in the Special Section – also do not know him.

Source: AIPN, BU, 00/231/14, Współpraca z okupantem. Podejrzani o współpracę z Gestapo [Collaboration with the occupying forces. Suspected of collaborating with the Gestapo]

Translated by Jan Szkudliński

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<https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kraj/zydzi-ukryci-w-bunkrze-tajemniczy-donos-do-niemcow/kd58gs1> (accessed: April 3, 2024)