

Małgorzata Wrześniak*

The Experience of War: A Turning Point in the Life of 'Tourist' 6252

Doświadczenie wojny – punkt zwrotny w biografii „Turysty” 6252

Abstract: This article analyses the war diary of Corporal Zygmunt Kucharz (soldier 6252) which was written when he was fighting in the 1st Motor Artillery Regiment under the command of General Stanisław Maczek. This handwritten war diary is the only known account by a private soldier in the literature on the subject. It describes how man and their world are destroyed by war atrocities and how a young boy, who was full of hope, was turned into an insignificant pawn, an identification number, whose existence was defined by a sense of defeat. He became a defeated and destroyed prisoner living in the here and now without expectations in his homeland occupied by the Soviet Union.

Keywords: diary, World War II, General Maczek, 1st Motor Artillery Regiment, Sikorski's Tourists.

* Małgorzata Wrześniak (ORCID: 0000-0001-7781-2179) – *Doctor habilitatus*, associate professor at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw (UKSW), director of the Institute of Cultural and Religious Studies, head of the Department of Cultural History and Museology; email: m.wrzesniak@uksw.edu.pl.

The statement that the experience of the conflagration of war, particularly of world war, radically affects human lives is obvious and no one needs to be convinced of it. War is certainly a dividing line between successive stages of life, the course of which it profoundly changes.¹ It is not surprising that the experience of omnipresent death, the trauma of loss and the drama of exile experienced every day for several years changes both the way man perceives reality and their role in it. A critical event² that overturns a human life³ is undoubtedly a biographical turning point⁴ and a war lasting several years can 'provide' more than enough traumatic moments to transform a human being. Many of them can certainly be distinguished and altogether they undoubtedly cause a change that is as profound as it is irreversible. This case study of the life story of Zygmunt Kucharz—the titular 'Tourist' 6252—(based on the methodology of Anselm Strauss) analyses his handwritten wartime memoir in the context of his life to show that the frontline experience changed the man and his world, significantly influencing his future fate.

All documents concerning soldier 6252 come from his family archive, remain the property of his son, Adam Kucharz, and have never been published.⁵

- 1 A. Skowrońska-Pućka, *Edukacyjny potencjał krytycznych wydarzeń życiowych w perspektywie biograficznego uczenia się*, „Kultura–Społeczeństwo–Edukacja”, 15 (2019) issue 1, pp. 85–86, DOI: 10.14746/kse.2019.15.6.
- 2 H. Sęk, *Procesy twórczego zmagania się z krytycznymi wydarzeniami żywotowymi a zdrowie psychiczne*, in: *Twórczość i kompetencje życiowe a zdrowie psychiczne*, ed. H. Sęk, Poznań 1991, p. 32.
- 3 M. Wrona, *Sytuacje graniczne w chaosie pojęciowym—próba syntezy znaczeń*, in: *Sytuacje graniczne w biegu ludzkiego życia*, ed. J. Wiśniewska, Radom 2015, pp. 9–23.
- 4 Biographical turning points have also been described by: A. L. Strauss, *Mirrors and Masks. The Search for Identity*, Londyn 1977; N. K. Denzin, *Interpretative Biography*, Newbury Park 1989; M. G. McDonald, *Epiphanies: An Existential, Philosophical and Psychological Inquiry*, Sidney 2005; T. Malec, *Biograficzne uczenie się osób z nabytym stygmatem*, Wrocław 2008; G. Gibbs, *Analizowanie danych jakościowych*, trans. M. Brzozowska-Brywczyńska, Warszawa 2011; A. Rokuszevska-Pawelek, *Chaos i przymus. Trajektorie wojenne Polaków: analiza biograficzna*, Łódź 2022; A. Giddens, *Nowoczesność i tożsamość „Ja” i społeczeństwo w epoce późniejszej nowoczesności*, trans. A. Szulżycka, Warszawa 2021; G. Riemann, F. Schütze, „Trajektorja” jako podstawowa koncepcja teoretyczna w analizach cierpienia i bezładnych procesów społecznych, „Kultura i Społeczeństwo”, 35 (1992) issue 2, pp. 89–109.
- 5 Adam Kucharz's Archive (hereinafter: A. K. Archive) includes the handwritten diary, photographs and other documents concerning his father from before the war (birth

Zygmunt Kucharz was born on 10 July 1914 in Żyrardów, the oldest child of Eugeniusz Kucharz and Leokadia née Grygel.⁶ In 1929, he graduated from the seven-grade Stanisław Staszic Elementary School in Żyrardów and continued his education at the Stefan Żeromski High School No. LXIII. As his family's financial situation deteriorated, he left school after six months because, as the oldest son, he had to learn a profession and find a job.⁷ On 28 June 1932, he completed a three-year course as a locksmith in the general department of the Public Vocational School in Żyrardów.⁸ He then worked for three years as an apprentice in the locksmith department of the Machine Tools and Tools Factory in Pruszków, which belonged to the Association of Polish Mechanics of America S. A. company in Warsaw. He was given a reference which described him as diligent and hard-working⁹ and, having passed his apprenticeship, on 14 July 1934, he was hired to work in the factory.

While still at vocational school, he joined the nationalist organization, the Camp of Great Poland, and then, after its dissolution on 28 March 1933, he found himself in the ranks of the National Radical Camp [Polish: *Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny*–ONR]. Noticed by Jan Mosdorf¹⁰—one of the leaders of the ONR—he became the head of this organization in Żyrardów.¹¹ After the ONR was delegalized on 10 June 1934, he remained faithful to nationalist

certificates, school reports, ID cards, certificates of completed courses and employment certificates), as well as during the war (diary, postcards, ID cards and other identity documents, e.g., a passport under a false name, and medals) and after its end (employment certificates and military service and veterans' book). To date, no documents concerning the history of soldier 6252 have been found in the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) Archive.

- 6 A. K. Archive, Świadectwo urodzenia i chrztu z ksiąg metrykalnych kościelnych z aktu zapisanego w 1914 r., No. 313, 24 July 1948 r.
- 7 Interview with Adam Kucharz, 20 April 2022, from the author's archive.
- 8 A. K. Archive, Certificate of completion of Public Vocational Training School No. 9, 28 June 1932.
- 9 'Mr. Kucharz Zygmunt was diligent, hard-working and fulfilled his duties to our complete satisfaction'; A. K. Archive, Certificate of 14 July 1934, the Association of Polish Mechanics of America S. A. in Warsaw, Machine Tools and Tools Factory in Pruszków.
- 10 M. Kotas, *Jan Mosdorf. Filozof, ideolog, polityk*, Krzeszowice 2007.
- 11 Interview with Adam Kucharz.

ideas. After the death of Minister Bronisław Wilhelm Pieracki (15 June 1934), he was among 600 arrested activists because the ONR was suspected of having organized the attack. The reason for his two-week arrest was his work with the already delegalized organization and his close acquaintance with Mosdorf.¹² After being released from custody in Grodzisk Mazowiecki, Kucharz lost his job at the Pruszków plant as he demonstratively wore Chrobry's jagged sword¹³ in his lapel. In November 1934, he completed an elementary anti-gas defence course, and then in December a general and anti-gas rescue course, thus being included in the 'Polish Red Cross Rescue Teams.'¹⁴ In October 1937, seven months after he had joined the 28th Light Artillery Regiment in Zajezerze, he received a locksmith's apprentice book.¹⁵ He stood out among the conscripts, the vast majority of whom were illiterate peasants from the Polesia region, and was transferred to the Main Armament Depot No. 2 in Dęblin-Stawy as a promising candidate for non-commissioned officer (NCO). There he underwent secret training in the use of a 7.92 mm model 35 anti-tank rifle (so-called Ur).¹⁶ Then, until 30 July 1938, he studied at the Armament School in Warsaw, where he completed the IV specialist course for stop-loss gunners¹⁷ at the rank of corporal (Figure 1). Having graduated, he was sent for training at the Armament Works in Stalowa Wola, where he familiarized himself with the production of the Bofors model 36 cannon, 40 mm calibre.¹⁸ On 16 September 1938, he was released to the reserves at the rank of corporal, specializing in gunnery.¹⁹ Thanks to the qualifications he obtained at the military school

12 Ibidem.

13 This symbol is used by Polish nationalists. It depicts the coronation sword of Polish kings, wrapped in a ribbon in Polish national colours.

14 A. K. Archive, Certificate issued by the president of the board of the Polish Red Cross, Żyrardów branch no. 105, 17 December 1934.

15 On 22 February 1937, he was conscripted into the 28th Light Artillery Regiment in Zajezerze; A. K. Archive, Military Booklet of Zygmunt Kucharz, published by the Ministry of National Defence on 16 January 1950, B 0066535 series.

16 Interview with Adam Kucharz.

17 A. K. Archive, Certificate from the Armament School of 30 July 1938.

18 Interview with Adam Kucharz.

19 A. K. Archive, Zygmunt Kucharz's military service book.

and the training at the Armament Works, Kucharz was re-employed in Pruszków as a qualified specialist in the production of model 36 cannons, 37 mm calibre. His passion for sports made him active in the 'Falcon' Polish Gymnastic Society, where he was the head of the men's section of the Żyrardów 'nest' (branch).²⁰ He received two state sports badges, third class, first degree (gold) No. 99 of 1932 and No. 1554 of 1938, from the Voivodeship Committee for Physical Education and Military Training.

Kucharz's wartime 'career' began on 1 September 1939, when he was called up for the Armament Supply Management in Warsaw, from where he was sent to the front to the 10th Mounted Rifle Regiment, part of Colonel Stanisław Maczek's 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade. He followed the regiment's September war path to Lviv. After Lviv surrendered to the Soviet Army, he found himself among a group of soldiers who made their way to Romania, where he was interned. Until December 1939, he was in the camp in Târgu Jiu and then until March 1940 in Turnu-Severin,²¹ from where, after several attempts, he managed to escape to the Romanian capital. On 30 March 1940, at the French consulate in Bucharest, he received a French passport under the name of Zygmunt Sułkowski (Figure 2). On 2 April, he obtained a French visa, which allowed him to travel to France for re-mobilization.²²

Having travelled through Yugoslavia and Greece, he reached France on 6 May 1940, where, passing through the assembly points in Bressuire and Coëtquidan,²³

20 Interview with Adam Kucharz. The 'Falcon' Polish Gymnastic Society (Polish: *Polskie Towarzystwo Gimnastyczne 'Sokół'*) was an all-age gymnastics organization based upon the principle of 'a strong mind in a sound body.' Through lectures, discussions and group outings, it provided physical, moral and intellectual training for the nation. This training extended to men of all ages and classes and eventually to women [translator's note].

21 Kucharz began to write his war diary having left the internment camp in Turnu Severin. Information about the dates of his stay in camps in Romania are known from the postcards he sent to his fiancée, Bronisława Przybylska on 27 December 1939 from Targu Jiu and 1 April 1940 from Turnu Severin.

22 A. K. Archive, French passport under the name of Zygmunt Sułkowski.

23 Z. Kucharz, 6252, [*Pamiętnik*, rkps b.p.], notatka z 25 maja 1940 r. The manuscript is being prepared for publication: M. Wrześniak, „*Turysta*” 6252 w Europie 1939–1946. *Pamiętnik żołnierza 1 Pułku Artylerii Motorowej*, Warszawa 2023.

as a corporal-cannoneer NCO of armoured weapons, he joined the 16th Motor Artillery Squadron of the Polish Army.²⁴

After the capitulation of Paris, on 23 June 1940, he escaped to Britain, where he joined the 1st Motor Artillery Regiment. In 1941, he completed many courses at the NCO school, including ones for operating various motor vehicles.²⁵ He served in the coastal defence in Scotland. In 1944, he took part in battles against the Germans in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany in the 1st Armoured Division of General Stanisław Maczek, in the 1st Motor Artillery Regiment under the command of Mieczysław Borzysławski. He followed the regiment's combat path 'from Caen to Wilhelmshafen,' from the Normandy landings to the occupation of Germany.²⁶ In 1945, after the liberation of Breda, he was promoted to sergeant and in 1947, just before returning to Poland from the British zone of occupied Germany, he was promoted to the rank of gunnery sergeant.²⁷

In 1947, based on the Supreme Command of the Polish Armed Forces order no. 0181 of 18 August 1945, Kucharz was demobilized.²⁸ Then, on 16 January 1950, he was transferred to the reserves by the order of the Minister of National Defence no. 184 of 7 December 1948.²⁹ For his participation in the battles against the Germans, he received British decorations: the War Medal 1939–1945, the 1939/45 Star³⁰

24 A. K. Archive, Zygmunt Kucharz's military service book.

25 Z. Kucharz 6252, [*Pamiętnik*, rkps b.p.], notes dated 31 January 1944 and 18 November 1941.

26 For more on the combat trail of the 1st Armoured Division of General Stanisław Maczek see: K. Jamar, *Śladami gąsienic Pierwszej Dywizji Pancernej*, Nederland 1946; S. Maczek, *Od podwoły do czołga: wspomnienia wojenne 1918–1945*, London 1984; J. Majka, *Brygada Motorowa płk. Maczka. 10 Brygada Kawalerii 1937–1939*, Rzeszów 2004; Z. Wawer et al., *1 Dywizja Pancerna*, Warszawa 2013.

27 A. K. Archive, Książeczka Wojskowa Zygmunta Kucharza.

28 Ibidem; A. K. Archive, Z Certificate No. K/451 issued by the Commandant of Demobilization Centre No. 2 in Quakenbrück.

29 A. K. Archive, Zygmunt Kucharz's military service book.

30 The War Medal 1939–1945 and 1939/45 STAR were British decorations for service in the British Armed Forces from September 1939 to September 1945; T. Jeziorowski, *Dziękujemy Wam Polacy! Odznaczenia państw alianckich dla żołnierzy polskich*, Poznań 1995, p. 12.

and the France and Germany Star.³¹ In 1947, after eight years of wartime wanderings, he returned to Poland³² (Figure 3).

Due to his pre-war involvement in the activities of nationalist organizations, as well as participation in combat under Allied Command, Kucharz was arrested and subjected to a court trial, as a result of which he was imprisoned in Grodzisk Mazowiecki at the turn of 1948/49.³³ Today, it is difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct information about the post-war fate of soldier 6252 because, as his son reports:

My father never wanted to talk about the war or what happened after it in the early Polish People's Republic. I know that he was on trial and the prosecutor demanded sixteen years in prison. Only once did I hear a story about my father being bought out for a bribe. The matter was said to have been 'arranged' by Marian Parol, Zygmunt's uncle—the husband of Eugeniusz Kucharz's sister, who served as the head of the municipal Security Office in Żyrardów in the 1940s.³⁴ My father eventually avoided a long prison sentence, but he did spend some time there. Certainly in 1949, when I was born. After returning to Poland, he faced various types of harassment, for example, he was not permitted to take his extramural high

- 31 The France and Germany Star was a British decoration for service in the British Armed Forces in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany from June 1944 to May 1945.
- 32 According to the note on Certificate No. 462743 issued by the State Repatriation Office, reception point II Stage in Szczecin: 'Citizen Kucharz Zygmunt reported his arrival from the territory of Germany at the local Citizens' Militia Commissariat in Żyrardów on 13 June 1947'; A. K. Archive, Certificate No. 462743 on arrival in Poland and registration on 10 March 1947 at the reception point in Szczecin, guaranteeing a one-time free ride by public transport to Żyrardów, together with notes from the Security Office and the Citizens' Militia Commissariat in Żyrardów.
- 33 Zygmunt Kucharz was not alone in his post-war experiences because 'research on the post-war fate of General Maczek's soldiers shows that almost all of those who returned to Poland had many problems in the communist Polish People's Republic from finding a job to imprisonment.' J. Pałka et al., *Żołnierze generała Maczka. Doświadczenie i pamięć wojny*, Gdańsk-Zakrzewo 2013, p. 19.
- 34 The signature of Mieczysław Parol—head of the Ministry of Public Security in Żyrardów, privately the uncle of Zygmunt Kucharz, is under the annotation of 17 June 1947 on Certificate No. 462743 on arrival in Poland.

school final exam. I remember that Public Security (UB) officers would come to our house. Perhaps that was why my father spoke about the war without details, focusing on anecdotes.³⁵

According to Adam Kucharz, his father never spoke about killing, probably because he was too sensitive or reluctant to admit this fact to himself and his family. This issue was closed once and for all by Zygmunt's mother, Leokadia, who, after he had returned to Poland, is said to have uttered the following: 'Zygmunt, a German is a German, but you probably didn't kill any?'³⁶

Having no chance of educational advancement after the war, Kucharz returned to his first profession as a locksmith. He never used the skills he had acquired in the army—his excellent knowledge of English and optics. He found employment at the Spirit Production Plant in Żyrardów and then returned to Pruszków, where he worked in the 1st May Plant until the 1970s.

He wrote his war diary from the moment he escaped from the Turnu-Severin internment camp in Romania until the end of the war. It ends in 1946 with a note about the occupation of Germany by the Allied Forces, just before his demobilization. The account had been undoubtedly written down on an ongoing basis, during the journey, as the author reported after returning to Poland. This can also be deduced from the changing colour of the ink, the thickness of the pen nib used, the font of the handwriting and the nature of the content, particularly in the layer of emotions conveyed—for six years (Figure 4). The notes were sometimes put down with a slight, several-day delay, as can be deduced from the description of his escape from the Turnu-Severin camp³⁷ or his evacuation from France to England in 1940³⁸ and comparison with the war calendar and the letters the author sent to Poland.

The war diary of soldier 6252 has a classic layout: his location is written under the date, which is followed by a shorter or longer, always factual, note about what was worth noting in the author's opinion. It was written as a chronicle

35 Interview with Adam Kucharz.

36 Ibidem.

37 Z. Kucharz 6252, [*Pamiętnik*, rkps b.p.], note of 22 March 1940.

38 Ibidem, note of 23 June 1940.

of events for his own use, memories of the wanderings he had experienced and intended—as one might assume—for those who remained in Poland, especially for Lunka, that is, Bronisława Przybylska, his fiancée.³⁹ The account of the 'journey around Europe' seems to be typical and its content does not differ significantly from the notes of Polish soldiers quoted in the work entitled *Od Caen do Wilhelmshafen szlakiem I P.A. MOT-u* [From Caen to Wilhelmshafen on the trail of the 1st Motor Artillery Regiment]. This was an occasional publication distributed to soldiers stationed in Germany, which Kucharz also received from Mieczysław Borzysławski, the commander of the 1st Motor Artillery Regiment, as the dedication says: 'in memory of the battles we experienced together.'⁴⁰ As it was not very enthusiastic, not very poetic, perhaps too specific and, at the same time, very personal in places, it was not suitable for publication in a commemorative volume. Kucharz would also certainly not have wanted to have it published because his behaviour towards those in command was almost always 'inappropriate.'⁴¹ As can be inferred from the course of punishments during his service, he often dared to criticize them.⁴² However, it is an important source, allowing insight into the thoughts of an ordinary soldier fighting under the command of General Maczek. This is worth noting as the literature has not reported this so far. The accounts preserved to this day were written by those in command and usually many years after the war. Meanwhile, the diary under study is a report of a corporal, straight from the trenches.

The 'tourist's' diary is written with correct language, sometimes fairly schematic, and contains repetitive phrases. This report from a journey was writ-

39 In his notes from 1944, he addresses Bronisława Przybylska directly, which sometimes makes his frontline report a letter from the trenches to his beloved.

40 A copy in the A. K. Archive.

41 Z. Kucharz 6252, [*Pamiętnik*, rkps b.p.], note of 6 February 1942.

42 Ibid., note of 30 June 1940. The penalty column in Zygmunt Kucharz's Record of Punishments and Distinctions, submitted at the demobilization point after returning to Poland in 1947, was full. According to his account, the receiving officer commented on it as follows: 'We've never had anything like this here before.' Although the penalties in the record were covered in black ink, the number was significant. Kucharz casually recalled years later that he had served many prison sentences for questioning his commanders' orders, particularly for 'inappropriate comments.' Interview with Adam Kucharz.

ten during free moments and only when 'something happened.' The intriguing sparseness of remarks when putting on his uniform again is probably not accidental, nor is it solely the result of the author's introverted nature. When writing about his wartime wanderings, Kucharz used many generalizations, probably to conceal events and locations (both tented camps in Britain and those he inhabited during the fighting in Normandy and Holland). The initial, quite detailed description of his stay in Athens, where he was sightseeing, gives way to brief accounts of the time when he 'reached his destination,' which was France, in 1940, where he received his uniform again. This necessity to remain in hiding seems to be the major reason why the diary lacks descriptions of places, the fighting and what took place. Even such significant dates as 22 June 1941 (the beginning of Operation Barbarossa—the German attack on the Soviet Union), 4 June 1944 (the Normandy landings), 1 August 1944 (the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising), and 11 February 1945 (the Yalta Conference) are carefully omitted even though the author had a lot to say about them at the time and after the end of the war (Figure 5). He also kept facts about himself a secret. As can be seen from the preserved correspondence, he used the name Sułkowski at least from February 1940. He adopted the new personal details, for which he was issued a passport at the French consulate in Bucharest on 31 March 1940, when he left the Turnu-Severin camp in Romania and until he reported to the assembly point in Coëtquidan, France.⁴³

- 43 The first postcard sent to his fiancée, Bronisława Przybylska on 27 December 1939, from the first camp he was in in Targu-Jiu, still bears the surname Kucharz. The next ones from April 1940 were sent by Z. Sułkowski. It is worth quoting the content of this 'encrypted' message informing about the change of personal details: 'My dear! As you know, I have changed my address and at the same time my suit. I met Mr. Sułkowski in Romania. He is going to Yugoslavia in a few days, he said that he would send you greetings from there. I really miss your letters, but it's hard, there's no way around it. I always think of you. I send you warm greetings. Greetings to your parents and mine.' 'Dear Madam! I am sending you greetings from Yugoslavia. While in Romania recently, I saw Mr. Z[ygmunt] K[ucharz] and I promised him that I would write to you, which I did. I am also sending greetings to Mrs. Z.'s parents.' Postcard sent from Belgrade on 8 April 1940 (A. K. Archive). Correspondence from a later period has not survived. 'Dear Madam! You will probably be surprised that I, who am so little known to you, write so often, because I am

The war diary of soldier 6252 is not a chronicle of the regiment, nor is it a detailed report of a journey intended for future generations. It can certainly be defined as a record of events and thoughts, or rather as a confidant of a person—as can be deduced from the notes—who was quite isolated from society. This, however, cannot be inferred from the photos kept in Kucharz's home archive. In the photo report from the years 1939–1946, one can see a young man, with a cocky look, always surrounded by beautiful smiling women. Meanwhile, the notes he left indicate constant anxiety about the fate of Poland and his loved ones who were suffering in the occupied homeland. He always referred everything he saw along the way to Poland and compared it with the country. Fragrant lilacs and autumn leaves reminded him of home because from the very beginning, soldier 6252 'went to the rescue' to return to his homeland, perceived his war wanderings as a march towards Poland, wanted to fight for it and had difficulty enduring the idle waiting in Scotland to 'take action.'

The corporal's diary shows a man waiting in constant, mentally exhausting tension until he could finally do something for his homeland. He was constantly irritated by inaction and the lack of knowledge about when he would finally 'take action,' seeing it as a loss for Poland. The major thread of the British part of the diary is impatience, reluctance and even resentment for not being on the front yet, for not getting any closer to home.⁴⁴ He was irritated with the joy and entertainment of soldierly wandering and those

partly fulfilling Mr. Zygmunt's wishes and partly... it seems to me that I am not walking alone in this city full of memorabilia, but with someone close with whom I could share my impressions. I am sending greetings, Z. Sułkowski.' Postcard sent from Athens on 19 April 1940. The letters sent via Portugal were in the family archive until the 1990s and were lost after Kucharz's death.

- 44 The will to fight for Poland and return home was typical among Polish soldiers. 'Sikorski's tourists,' as these wanderers of the first years of the war called themselves, lived first in internment camps and then in Britain, more or less with a sense of wasted time. Longing for home was the only driving force of the Polish soldier's actions at that time. As Marian Słowiński recalled years later: 'What mobilized us was the longing for our homeland, for our loved ones, for returning to the country as soon as possible. And we were of the good opinion that we would return on good equipment and would be welcomed warmly. We missed it all the time.' J. Pałka et al., *Żołnierze generała Maczka. Doświadczenie i pamięć wojny*, p. 144.

'dances,'⁴⁵ cabarets and romances with Scottish women who showed Poles extraordinary 'kindness.'⁴⁶ He must have been alone in this since his solitary wanderings became 'proverbial' among his colleagues. The conviction that the war would end very quickly, which he had demonstrated when he had said goodbye to his mother in September 1939 with the words: 'In two weeks we will be in Berlin and I will return home!'⁴⁷, slowly left him, giving way to a sense of inactive hopelessness.

Later on, there were the Normandy landings, trenches, battle fire and no time for notes... until 'Yalta came.'

According to the diary, 12 February 1945 was a breakthrough for Kucharz. In the eyes of the fighting artilleryman, who observed the battle trail strewn with 'wooden crosses,' slept in the field and the mud, remembered his 'past life' and above all, hoped to return home to a free Poland, the vision of the world finally collapsed, leaving no choice but a sense of loneliness, dashed hopes and betrayal:

So, the time has come when we must say clearly that there is no return to Poland. Five years of fighting, hundreds of thousands of dead and terrible persecution have been of no use. The war has lost its meaning and we, like no one else, had the right to expect justice, yet were rudely sold out by a gang of merchants. There is no one to stand up for us. Few Polish soldiers will voluntarily agree to return to Poland which is now under the influence of the Soviet Union. What will happen to the Polish army? Is it to end where it began to be created for the second time? That is, is it

45 'A man always had a woman there, there were those five-o'clock dances at five so we went there. There, women sat by one wall and boys on the other side. And he either nodded to her, if they knew each other, and they danced together, or if they didn't, she would come and ask to dance with her'—Józef Zwierzyński recalled (*Ibid.*, p. 149). Antoni Przybył: 'In the evening, we went dancing. We arranged with the girls, so we went to a meeting, a gathering. Just like soldiers, we were young after all. We went to five-o'clock dances twice a week, in uniforms. Scottish girls liked to dance with us because we were polite to them. They were sitting and an Englishman or a Scot approached and said "Come on" and they went dancing. Later he left her in the middle of the room and went left and she went right. And we, Poles, we kindly took her to her place. They liked that.' (*Ibidem*, p. 150).

46 Z. Kucharz 6252, [*Pamiętnik*, rkps b.p.], note of 22 October 1940.

47 Interviews with A. K.

to end in Scotland behind the barbed wire of an internment camp? Until the end of the war, and then? I guess, as I once wrote, I will stop being a 'tourist' and start being an emigrant. Only where to live and how to live? Besides, we are not very important in all this, but how will those who remained in Poland live? Will their life be a little easier? Will nothing really be able to save us? It seemed that when the war would end and I would be alive, nothing would stand in the way of my return, but in the meantime? It seems that for the first time in five years, we will start to wonder whether the path we took on 1 September 1939 was the best.⁴⁸ (Figure 6)

It is worth noting that what Kucharz wrote in his war diary differs significantly from the testimonies of commanders and accounts included in occasional works such as *Od Caen do Wilhelmshafen szlakiem I P.A. MOT-u*, published in Germany in June 1945.⁴⁹ One could risk saying that the latter do not fully reflect the true mood of the terror and discouragement of Polish soldiers after the Yalta Conference. As propaganda publications intended to raise morale, they naturally emphasized the joyful moments of war adventure and particularly the admiration for the hardship endured by Polish soldiers, deliberately omitting the negative aspect of regret and questions about the future, many of which can be found in Kucharz's war diary.

The accounts of Commander Maczek and Corporal Kucharz differ significantly, certainly because they observed the world from the perspective of the function they served. The commander, who wrote down his memories many years after the war, needed to justify the decisions that he or higher-ranking commanders made. The rhetoric of heroism and the honourable fulfilment of commitments by the Polish army was aimed at building the morale of privates in 1945. Years after, this became a kind of testimony of the heroism, for

48 Z. Kucharz 6252, [Pamiętnik, rkps b.p.], note of 12 February 1945.

49 Similar content and positive rhetoric can be found in: 1. *Pułk Pancerny w walce. Od Caen po Wilhelmshaven*, Bruges 1945; *Szlakiem 1-go Pułku Artylerii Motorowej*, Bruges 1945; 2. *Pułk Pancerny – w dniu Święta Pułkowego 8 sierpnia 1946*, Hannover 1946; 1 *Pułk Pancerny – W dniu Święta Pułkowego 19 sierpnia 1945*, Bruges 1945; 1 *Samodzielna Brygada Spadochronowa. Polskie Wojska Desantu Powietrznego w II Wojnie Światowej pod Arnhem – Driel. Lista uczestników*, ed. J. Lorys, series: Materiały. Dokumenty. Źródła. Archiwalia, vol. 3, London 1987.

which the commander felt obliged to thank those who died on the front line. It is worth recalling these accounts here.

General Stanisław Maczek wrote:

Yalta came to us. First, in whispers, snatches of conversations and rumours, until it revealed its menacing and tragic face to us. The impression was extremely depressing in the army. What next? It shook the certainty with which we marched through defeated Germany to Poland, in which we had previously believed devoutly. [...] But! I did not need to conduct a survey among my soldiers to seek their opinion—what next? Wasn't I one of them? Of course, we will continue to fight. Germany has not ceased to be enemy number 1. [...] No! We will continue to fight in the heart of Germany. Fate cannot deny us this highest soldierly satisfaction.⁵⁰

The descriptions of the unit commander Stanisław Koszutski are not that lofty. He reported that the overwhelming majority of soldiers were convinced that the Polish government would refuse to continue fighting alongside the British and that 'further fighting would be a disgrace that the nation could not forgive.'⁵¹ He wrote as follows:

Well, too bad—we thought—we will go behind the barbed wire, this time behind the English barbed wire and throw through it their medals, uniforms and pay in their faces. [...] We have to continue to fight... because honour... or something like that requires it... We feel strangely stupid and empty. Just like after being taken prisoner.⁵²

Then he described the drama of having to tell the soldiers the decision to continue fighting:

Shame on me as hell. [...] all night and even in the morning I didn't know HOW to explain IT to them. What should I, as the commander of the regi-

50 S. Maczek, *Od podwody do czołga*, p. 217.

51 S. Koszutski, *Wspomnienia różnych pobojuwisk*, London 1972, p. 229.

52 Ibidem, pp. 229–230.

ment, tell those people who believed me—how should I explain something that I consider unworthy of doing—and for what should those people die? What should I tell them?⁵³

While the commanders may have still seen the political justification for further actions, private soldiers were no longer sure of it, as one might conclude from the notes of Kucharz, who was not alone in his beliefs. Although he was aware of being 'cannon fodder' throughout the war, after Yalta it reached him—as it did his comrades in arms—with redoubled force, 'Most of us, soldiers, did not agree with our superiors' decision to continue fighting. The only justification for the decision, 'that our HONOUR' requires it, sounded strange, pathetic and false to us.'⁵⁴ Koszutski's words expressed what one of the soldiers wrote somewhere on a wall in Belgium:

Poland! You that was called the parrot of nations.
 Why do you not repeat the wise teachings of the world
 You only suffer too proudly and fight for so long
 For the expired freedom, your most severe addiction
 Why are you so stubborn and do not educate yourself on hypocrisy
 You will not lie to anyone, you will not pretend to do anything
 Although your sign is tainted, your loyalty is worthless
 And the crowd insults your crosses, and Judas in the crowd
 Why do you not suddenly shine in some treachery
 And will you not raise your head in proud baseness
 Who still lays wreaths on graves today?
 When every corpse cries to the sky for vengeance
 Frighten the eagle from your canvases like other birdwatchers
 And embroider a parrot's beak on new banners
 You will be immediately appreciated by noble Englishmen
 Just Muscovites and brotherly Frenchmen.
 What good is anger to you? Look around you, madman!
 And what good are ideals and mountains of bones?
 The crusade you started is long over,
 And freedom means the robbery of freedom.

53 Ibidem, p. 230.

54 Ibidem, p. 232.

Only when you take wings with a common custom
 And return to hypocrisy, which makes everyone fraternized,
 They will restore your honours and bestow a country on you.
 And such a world will bring you back to itself,
 And you will enter among peoples, they will applaud your fame,
 And in unison, they will cry over each of your stones
 And they will shout again about spirit, about blood, about Warsaw.
 Poland! You that was called the inspiration for nations!⁵⁵

What was happening in the mind and heart of the man who had lived for so long with hope that had been so brutally disappointed, is reflected in the words of soldier 6252—no longer a ‘tourist’ but a future emigrant—recorded on 28 June 1945:

Oh, how incredibly hard it is to come to terms with this thought. We lived with the thought of returning for six years and now... sometimes I think that it would be good to go to bed at night and not get up in the morning. There would be peace.⁵⁶

This internal transformation, the destructive war experience, pain and hopelessness left their mark not only on the heart but also on the face, which—as can be seen in the photos—aged at an alarming rate over several years (Figures 1 and 7).

Kucharz never found his place in the reality of communist Poland. The decision to return to the homeland occupied by the Soviet Union—which he regretted until his death—was influenced to a large extent by the desire to keep the promise of marriage made to Bronisława Przybylska before the war and, above all, by the news of his father’s serious and, as it turned out, terminal illness. When asked years later about his reasons for returning to Poland, he replied that he would not be able to live in exile. However, the dashed hopes for a free Poland, the tragic war experiences and devoting the best years of his youth to a fight that—in his opinion—ended in defeat, made him show no enthu-

55 A poem written on a wall in Belgium by a soldier from General Maczek’s Armoured Division. The text has been found thanks to Aleksandra Biniszewska from the Museum of Lviv and the Southeastern Borderlands.

56 Z. Kucharz 6252, [*Pamiętnik*, rkps b.p.], note of 28 June 1945.

siasm in any area of life. He became a man without expectations, accepting life as it was there and then. He travelled reluctantly, claiming that he had already been a 'tourist'⁵⁷ and had 'explored' Europe too well.

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57 In Zygmunt Kucharz's diary, the contemptuous epithet that German propaganda bestowed upon Polish soldiers wandering around Europe in the first years of the war–'Sikorski's tourists'–has an equally negative connotation. This term is used many times in the diary, particularly before the Normandy landings, during his time in Britain–during the senseless and idle–according to the author of the diary–wait to 'take action.' The author is full of resentment at being useless to Poland, who could do nothing for the homeland and 'wandered' around Europe instead of fighting. It is difficult to assess today what influenced his perception more: the enemy propaganda or his very critical attitude conditioned by his demanding nature. It seems that the latter had a fundamental impact on why he perceived a Polish soldier (in the first years of the war), including himself, as a resident of foreign territory, useless to Poland.

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Photo 1. Zygmunt Kucharz, 1937 (Adam Kucharz's Archive).



Photo 2. Zygmunt Kucharz's French passport under the name of Sułkowski, issued on 30 March 1940 at the French consulate in Bucharest (Adam Kucharz's Archive).

Consulat de France à Bucarest

DEMANDE DE VISA DE PASSEPORT
(A remplir très soigneusement en français)

N° _____

Nom: SUŁKOWSKI
(En lettres majuscules)

Prénoms: ZYGMUNT
(Écrire les initiales, indiquer le nom de jeune fille)

Né le 10.VII.1914. à Łódź.

Nationalité: polonaise.

Situation de famille: célibataire. enfants: nombre _____ âge _____

Domicile habituel à Łódź.

Résidant actuellement à Bucarest.

Profession: assureur.

Degré d'instruction: primaire. Diplômes: _____

Connaissez-vous la langue française: non.

Situation militaire: _____ pièces justificatives, si possible: _____

Avez-vous l'intention de vous établir en France? non. Je veux continuer à travailler en Pologne.

Dans l'affirmative.

Que comptez-vous y faire? _____

Y installer un commerce? _____

Une industrie? _____

Apportez-vous des connaissances ou des procédés nouveaux? _____

Disposerez-vous de capitaux? _____

Désirez-vous y exercer une autre activité? _____

Quelles sont vos références? _____

Si vous n'avez pas l'intention de vous fixer en France.

Date du séjour que vous comptez effectuer? _____

Êtes-vous étudiant? _____

Que comptez-vous faire? _____

Consulat de France
BUCAREST

Vais d'entrée valable
jusqu'au 31 Mars 1940.
pour le franchissement de la
Frontière par Merinde
Vladimir Modrov
et Marie
de Paris
Démarche Paris
Motif du voyage: _____
Fait le 02 AVRIL 1940
Sans _____

Photo 3. Certificate No. 462743 issued by the State Repatriation Office, reception point Stage II in Szczecin (Adam Kucharz's Archive).

RZECZPOSPOLITA POLSKA
Ministerstwo Administracji
Państwowy Urząd Repatriacyjny
Punkt Przyjęcia w Szczecinie

Wzrost Nr. 3
(dla mężczyzn w wieku od lat 16 do 50)

Zaświadczenie Nr. 462743

Zaswiadcza się niniejszym, że ob. Kucharz Zygmunt,
Zyrardów ps Błonie 10.7.1914r.
(nazwisko, imię, data urodzenia)
przyszedł do Polski z terytorium Niemiec
i dnia 10 czerwca 1947 r. zarejestrował się na Punkcie
Przyjęcia w Szczecinie
Obecnie udaje się do Zyrardów ps Błonie woj. łódzkiego
(adres)

Na podstawie zarządzenia Rady Ministrów z dnia 12.3.44
ob. Kucharz Zygmunt ma pierwszeństwo i prawo
jedenorazowego, bezpłatnego przejazdu wszelkimi środkami lokomocji do
Zyrardów

Władze Państwowe i Samorządowe są proszone o udzielenie jaknajdalej
płacci pomocy okazicielowi niniejszego

Obywatel niniejszego zaświadczenia obowiązany jest
zameldować się w Miejskiej Obywatelskiej w terminie
30 dni od daty wydania zaświadczenia
dot. po przybyciu na miejsce zamieszkania.
Po upływie terminu ważności, zaświadczenie winno
być wystrzeżone w miejscu stałego pobytu – na
ślad tożsamości.

Kierownik Punktu Przyjęcia
Wydano d. 10.6.47 r. w Szczecinie
Ważne do dnia 24.6.47 r.

300/010 - X. 51 - Druk. Min. Rep. Publ. w Łodzi

KSIĘGA INWENTARZOWA
Kolego wano
Strona _____ po _____
Data _____

Ob. Kucharz Zygmunt zameldował swoje przybycie
z terytorium Niemiec w tut. Komisariacie M.O. w Zyrardowie
w dniu 13.VI.47r.

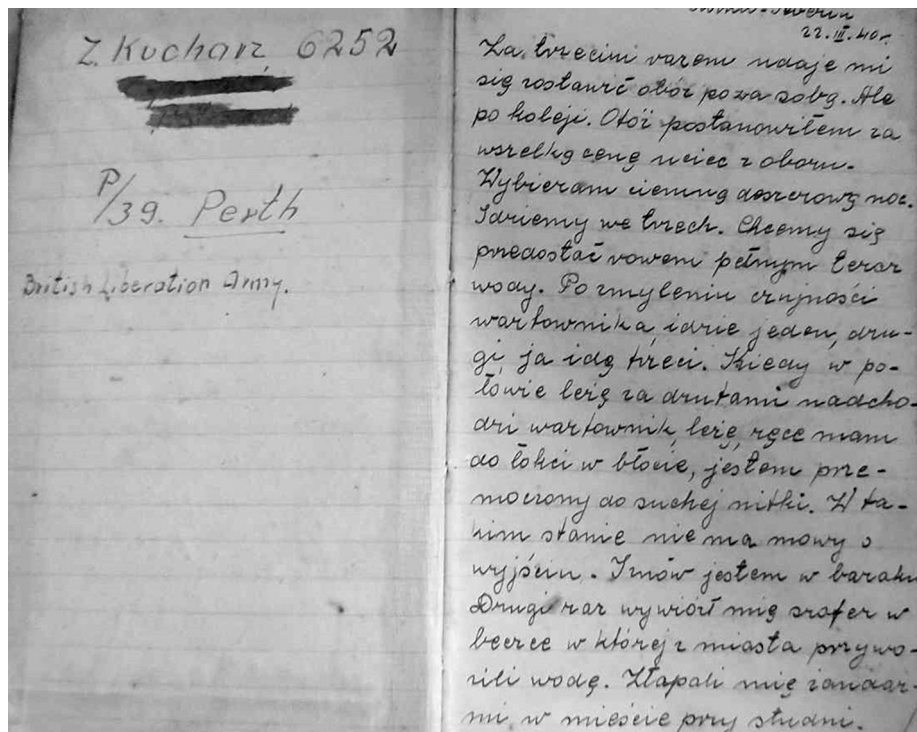
KOMISARIAT **Kierownik Komisariatu M.O.**
MILICJA OBYWATELSKA **w Zyrardowie**
W ZYRARDOWIE Kucharz

Zameldował dnia 17.6.47 r. w
Woj. łódzkiego
Miejscowość Zyrardów
Data urodzenia 10.7.1914 r.

Ob. Kucharz Zygmunt zameldował swoje przybycie
dnia 17.VI.47 r. w M. Przedzie "Bezpieczeństwa Publ.
w Zyrardowie. (przybył z terytorium Niemiec.)

Kierownik Placówki U.B.P.
w Zyrardowie:
M. Parol
1-/M. Parol.

Photo 4. Z. Kucharz 6252, [Diary], manuscript [no paginations], first page with the identification number from the military booklet (Adam Kucharz's Archive).



SOLDIER'S PAY BOOK (ACTIVE SERVICE)
ARMY BOOK 64 (PART II)

Army Number 6252

Surname (block letters) KUCCHARZ

Christian Names in full ZYGMUNT

Regiment or Corps.....

(TITLE OF UNIT MUST NOT BE ENTERED.)

Instructions to Soldier

1. You will produce this book whenever you require an advance of cash on account, or when instructed to do so.
2. You will give a receipt, on the acquittance roll of the Officer paying you, for all cash advances made to you. The Officer making the payment will sign the corresponding entry in this book on the page for cash payments.
3. You will make no entries in this book, except to sign your name and enter your Army number on pages 7, 9, 11 and 13.
4. Should you lose your book you will at once report the loss to your Commanding Officer, when a new book will be issued to you, but it must be understood that no pay can be issued in respect of the period before the date on which you report your loss, until your balance has been ascertained from the Paymaster.
5. You should read carefully the information on pages 1, 2 and 3.

Photo 5. Zygmunt Kucharz,
1942 (Adam Kucharz's
Archive).



Photo 6. Z. Kucharz 6252, [Diary], manuscript [no paginations], note from 12 February 1945 (Adam Kucharz's Archive).

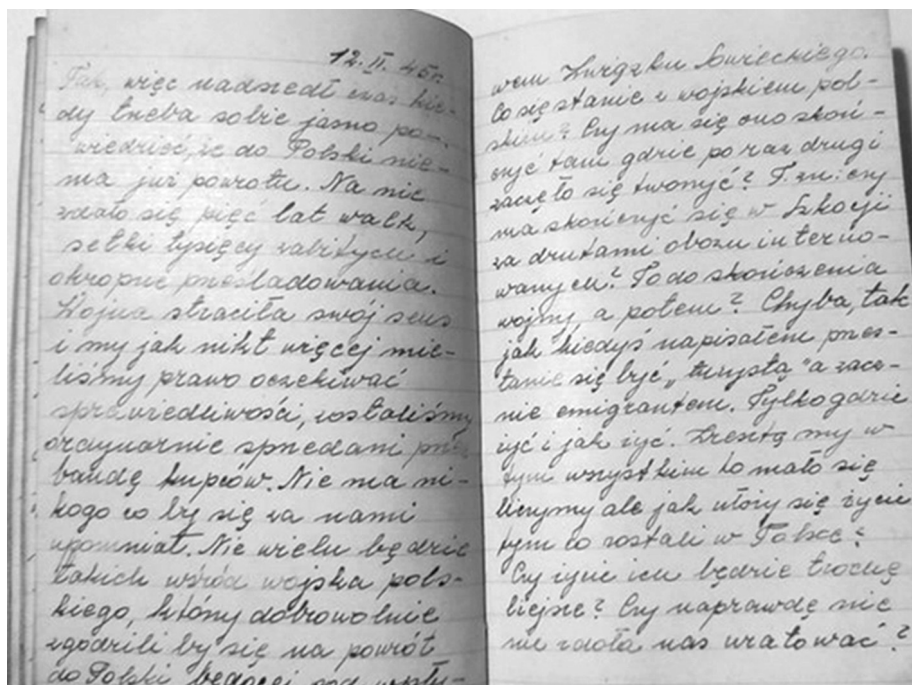


Photo 7. Zygmunt Kucharz, 1945 and 1947 (Adam Kucharz's Archive).

