

## Cezary Chlebowski (1928-2013)

(Born on February 15, 1928, in Grodziec, died on May 9, 2013, in Warsaw), he was a Polish writer, journalist, historian, and Harcerz Rzeczypospolitej (*Scout of the Republic*). He was the author of books and historical essays dedicated to little-known events in the history of the Polish Underground State during World War II.

Between 1935 and 1939, he completed five grades of primary school. Following the outbreak of the war, he continued his education, pursuing the first-grade gymnasium program through underground education networks (*tajne komplety*). In November 1939, alongside his Scouting troop, he assisted his father in hiding the most valuable books from the library of Polska Macierz Szkolna to protect them from being burned by the Hitler Youth.

On July 22, 1942, he was displaced from Grodziec with his family and, along with 300 other intelligentsia families from the Zagłębie region, deported to Germany for forced labor. After escaping to the General Government, he settled in the Horbów forestry district near Biała Podlaska. For 15 months (August 1942 to November 1943), Chlebowski worked as a forestry laborer, after which he moved with his parents to Sichów, a Radziwiłł family estate near Rytwiany in the Kielce region, where his maternal uncle served as the forest manager. From the beginning of 1944 - after being sworn into the Armia Krajowa (AK) - he assisted his father and uncle in editing a news bulletin compiled from monitored radio broadcasts, and distributed a local underground newspaper. After crossing the front lines during the fighting to reach Stalowa Wola, he continued his education as a second-grade gymnasium student. He was also active in Scouting.

On February 6, 1945, immediately behind the moving front line, he returned to the Zagłębie region, where he continued his education at the gymnasium. He passed his secondary school exit exam (*matura*) in June 1946 in Sławięcice, and in 1947, he moved to Warsaw. Until 1950, he studied at the Faculty of Diplomacy and Consular Services and the Journalism Program at the Academy of Political Science in Warsaw, from which he was expelled for political reasons. The same year, he was also expelled from the Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego (ZHP) and had his scholarship at Bank Handlowy revoked.

In 1969, he earned a master's degree in journalism from the University of Warsaw. In 1980, he was awarded a doctoral degree by the Faculty of History at the University of Warsaw for his dissertation titled "Monografia Organizacji Dywersyjnej AK poza wschodnimi granicami Polski w okresie wrzesień 1941 – marzec 1943". The Fulbright Foundation in the US granted the author an award for this work in the form of a several-month research stay in the United States. The book *Wachlarz*, based on this doctoral thesis, reached a total print run of over 100,000 copies.

Between 1950 and 1970, he changed jobs 27 times, largely due to the hostile attitude of the authorities of the Polish People's Republic (PRL) towards him. He was a regular contributor to the television program *Rewizja Nadzwyczajna*, hosted by Dariusz Baliszewski. As a journalist, he focused on sports and veterans' affairs. Between 1965 and 2002, he delivered over 1,500 lectures and author meetings in Poland and abroad, predominantly among Polish diaspora communities.

His most notable initiatives include funding a replica of the banner of the "Ponury" partisan unit and presenting it to the ZHP organization in Starachowice, as well as naming Primary School No. 2 in Starachowice after the partisans of the "Ponury" unit (1969-1970). He also co-initiated the construction of the monument to Major Jan Piwnik "Ponury" in Wąchock (1984), helped bring the ashes of Jan Piwnik "Ponury" back to Poland and organized his ceremonial funeral (1969-1988) and co-founded the AK cemetery near Surkonty in the Vilnius region (1991).

He authored 17 books (including 36 editions): *Smak śniegu*, *Nocne szlaki*, *Gazda z Diabelnej*, *Zagłada IV Odcinka*, *Pozdrówcie Góry Świętokrzyskie*, *Odlamki granatu*, *Gdy las był domem*, *Trudne lato*, *Pokaż zęby*, *Cztery z tysiąca*, *Wachlarz: monografia wydzielonej organizacji dywersyjnej Armii Krajowej wrzesień 1941 – marzec 1943*, *Reportaż z tamtych dni*, *Ostatnia droga Komendanta*

*Ponurego, Bez pokory* (a two-volume autobiography), *W armii Państwa Podziemnego, Ponury – major Jan Piwnik 1912–1944*, and *Saga o bohaterach: “Wachlarz” IX 1941 – III 1943*.

His work blends historical thoroughness with narrative talent. His most popular historical books include *Pozdrówcie Góry Świętokrzyskie*, *Wachlarz*, and his autobiography *Bez pokory*. In total, his published books reached a combined print run of over 1 million copies. Additionally, Chlebowski's body of work includes more than 2,000 articles, primarily focusing on the Armia Krajowa, published across numerous journals and magazines.

#### Grants and Scholarships

- The Kosciuszko Foundation Grant, New York (1975)
- Fulbright Scholarship, New York (1988)
- The Countess Marion Dönhoff Foundation Scholarship, Munich (1988)
- The Polish Cultural Foundation Scholarship, London (1990)

#### Awards and Decorations

- Srebrny Krzyż Zasługi (*Silver Cross of Merit*) – July 22, 1959
- Medal Wojska (*Army Medal*) – London, September 25, 1969
- Krzyż Armii Krajowej (*Home Army Cross*) – London, October 10, 1969
- Krzyż Kawalerski Orderu Odrodzenia Polski (*Knight's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta*) – May 27, 1981
- Medal “Polska swemu Obrońcy” (“*Poland to Its Defender*” Medal) – 1992
- Srebrny Krzyż „Za Zasługi dla ZHP” (*Silver Cross of Merit for the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association – ZHP*) – 1996
- Krzyż Niezłomnych (*Cross of the Indomitable*) – May 3, 1998
- Medal “Pro Memoria” (“*Pro Memoria*” Medal) – 2005
- Krzyż Komandorski Orderu Odrodzenia Polski (*Commander's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta*) – November 11, 2006
- Odznaka honorowa “Zasłużony dla Kultury Polskiej” (*Honorary Badge for Meritorious Service to Polish Culture*) – 2008

On June 14, 2013, on the eve of the annual commemorations at Wykus, a plaque honoring Cezary Chlebowski and his life's work was dedicated at the local partisan shrine.

By Resolution No. IV/27/90 of the Końskie Town Council dated August 9, 1990, Cezary Chlebowski was granted honorary citizenship of the Końskie Municipality.

During its 40th session on June 25, 2014, the Końskie Town Council named the Public Library of the Town and Municipality of Końskie after Cezary Chlebowski. The ceremonial unveiling of the library's new signage took place on August 30, 2014, as part of the *Konecki Wrzesień* anniversary commemorations.

Cezary Chlebowski visited Końskie on numerous occasions in connection with the gatherings of former Armia Krajowa soldiers traditionally organized there every September. Following the political transition of 1989, he frequently participated in the *Konecki Wrzesień* events organized by the local government, including the Roll Call of the Fallen at the Końskie cemetery and evenings of remembrance held at the Końskie Public Library.

To mark the 10th anniversary of the writer's passing, the Public Library organized a seminar dedicated to the life and legacy of Cezary Chlebowski on December 5, 2023, accompanied by a photography exhibition titled "Cezary Chlebowski. Portret rodzinny" (*Cezary Chlebowski. A Family Portrait*).

Compiled by Dariusz Kowalczyk

Translation by Damian Szmidt