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THE TESTIMONY OF ELŻBIETA KOWNER VEL WANDA  
BIEŃKOWSKA ON THE ACTIVITIES OF EMILIA DYNA  
AND ELŻBIETA GAJEWSKA – A SOURCE FOR THE HISTORY  
OF POLES WHO WERE SAVING JEWS

Many Poles have been recognised by the Yad Vashem Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Centre in Jerusalem as Righteous Among the Nations. It is the highest title the State of Israel awarded to non-Jews who got involved in a heroic activity, namely helping the Jewish population sentenced to death by the Germans during the Second World War.<sup>1</sup>

The available documentation is the basis for awarding the title of Righteous Among the Nations. There are still many unpublished materials kept in the archives that may shed new light on the issue of saving Jews and also enable more stories of the Righteous to be discovered, both those known and those whose actions will only now have a chance of being recognised.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Yad Vashem statistics, by 25 March 2020, 6,992 Poles had been awarded the title of Righteous Among the Nations. See: <https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous/statistics.html> (accessed 25 March 2020). This is the largest group among the citizens of 51 nations who have been honoured with this title.

<sup>2</sup> The commonly used term “righteous” should refer not only to the 6,992 Poles honoured by the state of Israel, but also in a broader sense – to all those who were not awarded the medal but were engaged in activities aimed at saving the Jewish population under German occupation.

The document presented here is about Emilia Dyna and Elżbieta Gajewska, who, together with Dyna's parents – Jan and Józefa née Obidowicz – were awarded the title Righteous Among the Nations. This is the transcript of the testimony given by Elżbieta Kowner,<sup>3</sup> a Jewish woman who was hidden during the German occupation by two officials from the Warsaw Kriminalpolizei branch<sup>4</sup> in Mińsk Mazowiecki<sup>5</sup> – Emilia Dyna and Elżbieta Gajewska. Many people were involved in hiding Elżbieta Kowner, as it clearly transpires from the source text, but two women from Mińsk Mazowiecki contributed the most to her rescue<sup>6</sup>

Elżbieta Kowner gave the quoted testimony in Katowice on 26 September 1945. The addressee of this document, signed by the testifying party, was the Public Security Municipal Office in Katowice, and ultimately certainly the Prosecutor's Office of the District Court in Warsaw, which, in 1945, on the basis of a decree from 31 August 1944,<sup>7</sup> was investigating Emilia Dyna accused by the communist authorities of collaborating with the Germans. The investigation ended with the case being dismissed.<sup>8</sup>

The testimony of Elżbieta Kowner makes it possible to learn about the situation of a person in hiding, in this case – an assimilated Jewish woman who was baptised in 1937.<sup>9</sup> The author describes in detail the conditions in which she lived, from the moment Emilia Dyna led her out of the Warsaw ghetto, then wandering around towns located in the Cracow District (Cracow and its surroundings), to hiding in places inhabited by various people.<sup>10</sup> Elżbieta Kowner devotes a lot of space to

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<sup>3</sup> Elżbieta Kowner also called herself Wanda Bienkowska. In this study, we use the first of these names.

<sup>4</sup> Kriminalpolizei – the German Criminal Police subordinate to the Sicherheitspolizei (Sipo). Its officers were responsible (along with the Gestapo) for numerous repressions against the people of Poland.

<sup>5</sup> S. Biernacki, *Okupant a polski ruch oporu. Władze hitlerowskie w walce z ruchem oporu w dąstryckie warszawskim 1939–1944* (Warsaw, 1989), p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej (Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw, hereinafter AIPN), GK 453/63, Wanda Bienkowska's testimony in the case of Emilia Dyna, submitted at the Public Security Municipal Office in Katowice, 26 September 1945, pp. 10–19.

<sup>7</sup> Decree of the Polish Committee of National Liberation of 31 August 1944 on the punishment for fascist-Nazi criminals guilty of murders and mistreatment of the civilian population and prisoners of war, and for traitors of the Polish Nation, *Journal of Laws*, No. 4 (1944), item 16.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> AIPN, GK 453/63, Wanda Bienkowska's testimony in the case of Emilia Dyna, given at the Public Security Municipal Office in Katowice, 26 September 1945, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

discussing the interpersonal relations in the home of Emilia Dyna and Elżbieta Gajewska – Kripo officials, working and living together in Mińsk Mazowiecki.<sup>11</sup> Generally speaking, Kowner talks about her life quite coherently and clearly, and her account seems credible. The only doubts are raised by the fragment about her stay in Grodno, in the house of feldsher Jakubianiec, related to Elżbieta Gajewska. The author of the testimony devoted only two sentences to this episode and did not specify when it happened.<sup>12</sup>

While living with the officials in Mińsk Mazowiecki, the author of the testimony was able to observe their involvement in underground activities. She was an important inhabitant in their home, and was privy to many current occupation matters. The women's guests who were involved in underground activities had the opportunity to meet Elżbieta Kowner, as she mentions in her testimony<sup>13</sup> Another very interesting occurrence, not often described in the literature on the subject, is the account of a person in hiding observing how the rescuers helped other Jews. Elżbieta Kowner was able to observe the activities of the Council to Aid Jews "Żegota," thanks to her meetings with Marian Gołajewski, an escapee from Auschwitz, who visited the officials quite often, and also thanks to conversations held in her presence between the two women about their involvement in helping other Jews.<sup>14</sup>

The post-war fate of Elżbieta Kowner is not known in detail. It is only known that she took a job in the Financial Department of the Voivodeship Headquarters of the Citizens' Militia in Lodz. Later, she probably left for the United States. She certainly corresponded with Emilia Dyna.<sup>15</sup>

We know little about Elżbieta Gajewska, born in Pułtusk on 15 February 1915, a Kripo official during the German occupation. In 1943, she was of interest to the Home Army counterintelligence "Mewa" (Seagull) – Mińsk Mazowiecki. Docu-

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11–16.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>13</sup> We do not know whether the people visiting the apartment knew about the woman's origin.

<sup>14</sup> AIPN, GK 453/63, Wanda Bieńkowska's testimony in the case of Emilia Dyna, given at the Public Security Municipal Office in Katowice, 26 September 1945, pp. 11–16.

<sup>15</sup> *Księga Sprawiedliwych wśród Narodów Świata. Ratujący Żydów podczas Holocaustu. Polska*, ed. by A. Kopciowski, S. Krakowski, and D. Libionka, vol. 1 (Cracow, 2009), pp. 148–149; "Sprawiedliwi Wśród Narodów Świata w powiecie mińskim," *Mińskie Zeszyty Muzealne* 2 (2013), pp. 2, 54.

ments prepared by the intelligence cell from Mińsk Mazowiecki indicate that Gajewska was the mistress of the head of the Kriminalpolizei in that town, Julius Schmidt. The Home Army documents state that both Gajewska and Dyna collaborated with the communists. An opinion about the attitude of both officials was expressed in a letter issued on 14 November 1943 by the counterintelligence office of the Home Army “Mewa” district:

They always treated those arrested in political matters very favourably. They were taking very large bribes. Gajewska was a leader in these matters. They held parties for Schmidt and other Germans, as well as for the reds [communists – note by D.S.]. They were capable of losing several thousand zlotys at cards in one evening. During the liquidation of the Jews, most of the things and gold looted by Schmidt were taken by Gajewska. With the elimination of Schmidt [head of the Mińsk Kripo, shot by Home Army soldiers in July 1943 – note by D.S.] they both lost their influence. For the last two months, they were very quiet. There were no disturbances in which Gajewska and Dynówna would take part together with the Gestapo in Mińsk. On the first of this month, Gajewska was transferred to Rembertów [to Kripo – note by D.S.] Please make sure she is taken proper care of. I would like to point out that she very often claims to be a member of an independence organisation, especially PZP (Polish Insurgents Union). Marek.<sup>16</sup>

Elżbieta Gajewska’s post-war fate remains unknown. We do not actually know whether she survived the war.<sup>17</sup>

We have much more information about Emilia Dyna, the second official involved in saving Elżbieta Kowner. Dyna was born in Cracow on 16 March 1914, as the daughter of Jan and Józefa née Obidowicz. From 1938 to the end of August 1939, she worked in a juvenile detention centre in Warsaw. After the outbreak of war on 1 September 1939, she became a nurse in the 81st Infantry Regiment. When the military operation ended, she returned to Warsaw and from 25 October 1939, she worked at the Polnische Polizei as a kitchen supervisor for detainees. On

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<sup>16</sup> AIPN, BU 0363/442, Letter by “Mark” to “Gorzelnia IIB”, Mewa IIB, 14 November 1943, p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

7 January 1941, she was transferred to the Kriminalpolizei in Mińsk Mazowiecki, where, until 22 July 1944, she worked as an official for sanitary and behavioural matters, running the office simultaneously. As an official of the Kripo, she came into contact with the commander of the Jewish security service (Ordnungsdienst) in the Mińsk ghetto, Izydor Lipczyński.<sup>18</sup> Emilia Dyna was providing him with money in the forest where he was hiding.<sup>19</sup> She probably left the service. She took part in the Warsaw Uprising, during which she ran a field kitchen for soldiers of the Baszta (*Bastion*) regiment.<sup>20</sup> After the capitulation of the uprising, she was sent to a camp in Pruszków. Senior officers of the Kriminalpolizei suggested that she move to Poznań to continue her work. However, she turned this proposal down and, by using a deception, she left for her family in Cracow. At the end of November 1944, she found herself in Włochy near Warsaw, where she was selling lingerie goods together with her friend Danuta Zabokrzycka.<sup>21</sup>

On 19 September 1945, she was arrested by the Ministry of Public Security's Municipal Branch in Katowice and then released nine days later. There are archival documents showing that she was registered by the Ministry of Public Security as secret collaborator (*Tajny Współpracownik*, TW) – Diana. However, her activities as an undercover informant are not yet known, and documents on her work in this area have most likely been destroyed or have not been disclosed.<sup>22</sup>

After the war, she lived in Otwock, and later in Warsaw. She was a member of the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy – the milieu of the soldiers of the Independent Operational Group Polesie commanded by general Franciszek Kleeberg – in Warsaw. She was also a member of the International Janusz Korczak Association.<sup>23</sup> Emilia Dyna died on 10 September 1994, and was buried at the Bieżanów cemetery in Cracow, next to Mała Góra Street.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Polacy–Żydzi 1939–1945*, ed. by S. Wroński and M. Zwolakowa (Warsaw, 1971), p. 319.

<sup>19</sup> D. Sitkiewicz, “Dyna Emilia,” in *Słownik biograficzny Południowego Podlasia i Wschodniego Mazowsza*, ed. E. Piłatowicz, K. Maksymiuk, and H. Świeszczakowska, vol. 5 (Siedlce, 2020), p. 58.

<sup>20</sup> AIPN, GK 453/63, Minutes of the interrogation of the suspect Emilia Dyna, Katowice, 27 September 1945, p. 20.

<sup>21</sup> Sitkiewicz, “Dyna Emilia,” p. 58.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> AIPN, BU 728/112008, unpaginated, Emilia Dyna's passport documents.

<sup>24</sup> Sitkiewicz, “Dyna Emilia,” p. 58.

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## SUMMARY

The study, which was based on the testimony given on 26 September 1945 in Katowice by Elżbieta Kowner, contains the published document and a commentary to it. The testimony was submitted to the Public Security Municipal Office in Katowice, ultimately to the Prosecutor's Office of the Regional Court in Warsaw, which in 1945, based on the decree of 31 August 1944, was conducting an investigation against Emilia Dyna, accused by the communist authorities of collaborating with the Germans. The investigation ended with the case being dismissed.

Elżbieta Kowner's testimony brings the world of a person in hiding, in this case an assimilated Jewish woman, to the world. She describes in detail the conditions in which she lived: from the moment Emilia Dyna led her out of the Warsaw Ghetto, through wandering around towns in the Cracow district (Cracow and its surroundings), to hiding in places inhabited by various people.

Elżbieta Kowner devotes a lot of space to discussing interpersonal relations in the home of Emilia Dyna and Elżbieta Gajewska – Kripo officials, working and living together in Mińsk Mazowiecki. She was an important inhabitant in their house, and in addition she was privy to many current occupation matters. She could observe their involvement in the activities of the underground and, thanks to meetings between both women and Marian Gołajewski, an escapee from Auschwitz, as well as through conversations about their participation in relief work, she could see their efforts aimed at helping other Jews.

#### KEYWORDS

Rescuers • Righteous Among the Nations • Jews' accounts • helping Jews



## Document

*29 September 1945, Katowice – Wanda Bieñkowska’s testimony in the case of Emilia Dyna, given at the Public Security Municipal Office of in Katowice*

To the Public Security Municipal Office  
in Katowice at 10 Bartosza Głowackiego Street  
in the case of Emilia Dyna

## Testimony

I, the undersigned Wanda Bieñkowska, an employee of the Voivodeship Headquarters of the Civic Militia – Financial Department in Lodz, father’s name – Aleksander, mother’s name – Anna née Razmuk, born in Warsaw on 14 January 1910, residing in Lodz at 6 Brzeźna Street, flat 7, being aware that I am liable to imprisonment for false testimony, do testify as follows: I met the citizen Emilia Dyna in the Warsaw ghetto, at 13 Twarda Street, flat 2, where from time to time she visited a Jewish family named Nuss. I met her in early 1942. My real pre-war first name and surname is Elżbieta Walentyna Kowner, daughter of Samson Kowner and Rozalia Kowner, born in Eišiszki, Lida county on 14 October 1907, baptised in the Roman Catholic parish of St. Cross in Lodz on 16 April 1937. I presented all my documents from the times of the occupation, current and pre-war certificates, during my testimony at the Public Security Municipal Office in Katowice on 26 September 1945. According to the Nazi Nuremberg Laws, regardless of my Roman Catholic faith, I was nevertheless Jewish and confined to the Jewish quarter in Warsaw. Before the war, I had worked for 11 years in a social insurance organisation in Lodz, where I had many Christian friends and colleagues, of course “Aryans,” who, being also displaced to the “Protectorate”,<sup>1</sup> found me in Warsaw and persuaded me to get out of the ghetto and live with them. I presented this case to citizen Emilia Dyna and her friend Elżbieta,<sup>2</sup> who also advised escape from the ghetto and promised (advised to seek) help. After they left, I asked Ms Nuss<sup>3</sup> whether she knows them

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<sup>1</sup> The author means the General Governorate.

<sup>2</sup> Elżbieta Gajewska.

<sup>3</sup> We do not know the first names of this family member.

well and whether, since they work in the police during the German times, it is possible that they will take me out of the Jewish quarter only to hand me over to the German gendarmes, to which I was told that their service in the police is only a fiction and a sham, that they are Polish patriots, upright and noble persons, finally she declared that she would entrust her own head and her own daughter to them with all calmness and trust, and that it's up to me what I will do. I asked whom it would be better to entrust some things and money that I wanted to take with me, and she replied that it didn't matter which one, because they are both absolutely reliable and incredibly honest beings. On 6 July 1942, citizen Emilia Dyna and her friend Elżbieta led me and the youngest Nuss daughter, Renia Nuss, out of the ghetto through the courthouse in Warsaw. Elżbieta accompanied Renia to Mińsk Mazowiecki while Emilia Dyna went with me to Limanowa railway station near Nowy Sącz, where she very warmly parted with me. On the way, I was to pretend to be her cousin. Out of gratitude for risking her own life for me, a person she hardly knew, I gave her a small globular gold watch, she held it for a while, then returned the watch to me with the words, "keep this memento of your mother. You will need it more." Therefore, after deducting travel costs and food expenses, and the cost of her return ticket, she took almost nothing from me in return for her sacrifice and exposure (death penalty for Poles hiding Jews).<sup>4</sup> From 8 July 1942 to 15 August 1942, I stayed with my friend Franciszek Suchy<sup>5</sup> in the village of Jodłownik,<sup>6</sup> pretending to be his cousin. I was tutoring his children at the time. At that time, I looked like I was starved to death, and this appearance plus my arrival from Warsaw to a remote village, and the sudden interruption of his correspondence with Warsaw aroused the suspicion of the inhabitants of Jodłownik; rumours began to spread that Suchy was hiding a Jewish woman. Then a German

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<sup>4</sup> The first legal act that imposed the death penalty for Poles who were rescuing Jews was the third regulation on residence restrictions in the General Governorate of 15 October 1941. According to the regulation, the death penalty was imposed on those Poles who "would knowingly provide a hiding place" to a Jew residing outside the ghetto without permission. The issues related to legislation concerning Jews are discussed in particular by B. Musiał, *Kto dopomoże Żydowi...* (Poznan, 2019); also J.A. Młynarczyk, S. Piątkowski, *Cena poświęcenia. Zbrodnie na Polakach za pomoc udzielaną Żydom w rejonie Ciepłowa*, (Cracow, 2007), p. 47.

<sup>5</sup> No further details of this person have been established.

<sup>6</sup> The village of Jodłownik was located in the Cracow District, some 20 kilometres west of Limanowa.

gendarmes unit arrived in Jodłownik and started searching the cottages, so one night I ran away. I had nowhere to go, so I put all my eggs in one basket and went straight to Mińsk Mazowiecki, to Emilia Dyna and her friend. They received me kindly. They placed me in Warsaw in the Praga district, at 14 Wrzesińska Street,<sup>7</sup> with Elżbieta's relatives – the Leończyk family.<sup>8</sup> In the meantime, they were to get me a Kennkarte. I brought with me a birth certificate from the Warsaw ghetto in the name of Wanda Bieńkowska. A month later, I returned to Mińsk Mazowiecki, to their place. I still had no support apart from them, whom I had known for just two months, and I was homeless. Emilia gave me a letter to her aunt, Maria Nakielska<sup>9</sup> – Cracow-Dębniaki, 28a Szwedzka Street, flat 5,<sup>10</sup> with whom I stayed for a month. Then I stayed with her other aunt, Kramarzowa,<sup>11</sup> in Biezanów on the outskirts of Cracow.<sup>12</sup> Then I returned to Aunt Nakielska. On 1 November 1942, Emilia came to Cracow and declared that she and Elżbieta had decided (they lived together) that I should live with them, and things will work out for us. So I lived with Emilia Dyna and her companion for a year. Neither her family, who knew what was going on, nor she, nor her companion, ever asked me for money, which I did not have anyway. I reciprocated with homework, and from them I received gifts, such as warm slippers, an artistic brooch, books, etc., which I still keep. I was to pretend to be Emilia Dyna's cousin, looked after the place and cooked dinners. While living in their home for a year, I learned a lot. In Biezanów, where Mila's [Emilia Dyna – note by D.S.] father resides, I learned that Mila is a peasant's child, that her drunkard and cruel father left his wife with four small children and moved in with another woman, that Mila's life was very hard, and that she moved heaven and earth to get her secondary education. While living with her in 1942 and 1943, I learned one thing for sure – that they both collaborated with the Polish underground organisation to the detriment of Germany.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, they did not let me know everything, which would be very useful

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<sup>7</sup> The brick house at 14 Wrzesińska Street has been preserved to this day.

<sup>8</sup> No further details of this family have been established.

<sup>9</sup> The identity of this person could not have been established.

<sup>10</sup> Szwedzka Street in Cracow's Dębniaki quarter still exists.

<sup>11</sup> An unidentified person.

<sup>12</sup> Currently, it is a Cracow District located 10 kilometres south-east of the city centre.

<sup>13</sup> We do not know exactly what organisation they collaborated with.

now, as I could share even more facts known to me. They kept their guard, not out of fear that I would betray them to the Germans, of course, but out of caution that if I was given up, the Nazis could beat me and then I would “sing out” the names, so it was about protecting the Poles from the organisation, who should better remain unknown to me. So I will tell you what is known to me, and I can vouch for every word I will say.

Many people from the organisation who had weapons with them hid at our place and stayed overnight. One of them, Jan Sarnecki,<sup>14</sup> a leftist (in Mińsk, they said he was a communist), was the head of a large terrorist organisation. He often dined and slept with us; I personally saw that he had a handgun. One time he dropped in on us in the evening, Emilia warned him that there was going to be a roundup at night and that the Germans may go to his parents’ place, so he stayed overnight, and in the morning they contacted his parents to find out if there had been Germans in the night, and they only let him go after receiving good news. There was also another Jan (a short surname, but I don’t remember, let Emilia recall it),

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<sup>14</sup> Jan Sarnecki, son of Marian and Zofia, born on 16 December 1919 in Cielechowizna, Mińsk County. In 1938, he graduated from the Secondary School in Mińsk Mazowiecki. He was fluent in German. During the first months of the war, he joined the Union of Armed Struggle, and soon after became a communist sympathiser. In September 1942, he joined the Association of Friends of the Soviet Union. After the founding of the Polish Workers’ Party (*Polska Partia Robotnicza*, PPR), he became a member and at the same time a member of its armed organisation – the People’s Guard (*Gwardia Ludowa*, GL). He took part in the first meeting of the District (County) Committee of the Polish Workers’ Party in Mińsk Mazowiecki, where he was accepted as a member of this body. He was also a member of the GL County Staff from the moment it was set up, and between 16 March and 13 August 1943 he was its commander. His comrades in arms considered him a capable commander and a brave soldier. Thanks to the fact that he spoke German, he made acquaintances with the officers of *Kriminalpolizei* and *gendarmerie*, as well as with the *Gestapo*; in this way, the PPR and GL had a much better knowledge about German officials and functionaries. He took part in many military actions as a partisan. He maintained contacts with the soldier Władysław Klimaszewski, the commander of the Home Army unit in Mińsk Mazowiecki. Jan Sarnecki perished on 13 August 1943 near the village of Rudzienko, a few kilometres from Kołbiel (Mińsk County). See: L. Bujan, “Zaopatrzenie w broń Gwardii Ludowej” in *Z lat wojny, okupacji i odbudowy*, ed. by M. Anusiewicz and L. Grot, vol. 6 (Warsaw, 1973), pp. 36, 40; S. Dąbrowski, “W trójkącie Mińsk–Siedlce–Dęblin,” in *Czas wielkiej próby. Wspomnienia bojowników o Ojczyznę Ludową 1939–1945*, ed. M. Borkiewicz (Warsaw, 1969), p. 279; B. Dymek, “Gwardia Ludowa i Armia Ludowa Okręgu Warszawa Prawa-Podmiejska,” in *Warszawa – Prawa Podmiejska 1942–1944. Z walk PPR, GL-AL*, ed. B. Dymek (Warsaw, 1973), pp. 67, 104; J. Kazimierski, “PPR, GL-AL w dzielnicy Mińsk Mazowiecki (1942–1944),” in *Warszawa – Prawa Podmiejska*, pp. 366, 368–370, 374–375; W. Kuźniarski, A. Stelmaszczyk, S. Laskowski, “Dzielnica Mińsk Mazowiecki w walce,” in *Warszawa – Prawa Podmiejska*, pp. 586, 593–598; F. Mówiński, *Szumcie wierzby* (Warsaw, 1972), pp. 34–35, 50, 61, 88–89, 94, 114, 132, 141; W. Ważniewski, *Na przedpolach stolicy 1939–1945* (Warsaw, 1974), pp. 190, 282, 283, 284.

a friend of Jan Sarnecki and his right-hand man, to whom he showed great respect and was blindly obedient; he lived in a village near Mińsk and also hid and slept with us several times, I didn't see him carrying any weapons, but all those who visited us, and there were a lot of them, mostly had guns. The third one who was hiding with us was Marian Gołajewski<sup>15</sup> – a leftist, a fugitive from Auschwitz; he came from Warsaw, Warecka Street. He spent many nights in our place. Every day people came to find out where searches and arrests were planned and who should be warned to get away. Once, while Emilia and Elżbieta were absent, an engineer, Jurek (I don't remember his surname, I think it was Wieczorek), married, I think he worked at the Land Office, but I don't know for sure. He told me that at night, in his flat, that the Germans had arrested his friend who came to him by chance from Warsaw, when he himself was not sleeping at home. From 1 pm on that day, he was calm, because he had obtained a strong poison and if he ran into danger, he would swallow it so as not to betray people from the organisation during the interrogation. Once Mila gave me a Polish book entitled *Military Training – Infantry*.<sup>16</sup> She told me to hide the book and pass it on to one gentleman, to whom I actually gave the book. I don't remember his name, he lived behind the Mariavite church, he had a blonde wife; she came back from the labour camps in Germany. Let Mila mention a few familiar names and I'll remember the right ones. He secretly trained the young cadres of the Polish Army.

Emilia and Elżbieta provided constant help to the Jews, many of whom certainly owe their lives to them. They led the entire Nuss family out of the Warsaw ghetto. Many Jews came in the dead of night to knock and ask for help. A Jewish

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<sup>15</sup> Marian Gołajewski was one of the activists of Żegota Council to Aid Jews, closely associated with the Democratic Party during the German occupation. In his home at 41 Nowy Świat Street in Warsaw, was an underground printing house that played an important role in the activities of the Żegota. It printed *Rok w Treblince* and *Z otchłani*, Żegota's leaflets and publications of the Alliance of Democrats. This facility was located in Marian Gołajewski's cookware storehouse, where he hid Jews. Marian Gołajewski was imprisoned in the Auschwitz concentration camp. In 1946, at the request of the Alliance of Democrats, the State National Council awarded him the Cross of Valour. See: M. Komar, *Władysław Bartoszewski. Środowisko naturalne. Korzenie* (Warsaw, 2010), p. 219; "Rada Pomocy Żydom w Polsce („Żegota”). Wspomnienia centralnych i terenowych RPŻ,” *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* 65–66 (1968), p. 195; "Resolution of the State National Council of 11 July 1946,” *Polish Monitor*, No. 34 (1947), item 286.

<sup>16</sup> The author probably had in mind the book by Mieczysław Fularski *Przysposobienie wojskowe w Polsce*, published in Warsaw in 1929.

woman – Lipczyński's niece from Mińsk Mazowiecki – spent a night next to me.<sup>17</sup> We shared the same bed due to lack of space. One evening a young Jewish woman came to ask for help. She was fed and given some money. A fugitive from Auschwitz, citizen Marian Gołajewski, who was present at the time, also gave her money, I gave her a sweater, a white scarf and 10 zlotys (as I mentioned, I had almost no money). All this was happening in very difficult conditions and in an extremely tense atmosphere because both comrades, although they worked in the police, were themselves under observation and knew about the bad attitude of the German boss Julius Schmidt towards them.<sup>18</sup> Six months after taking office he told them that they had been under observation for six months, that no guilt had been proven, but there was circumstantial evidence, and that they should be on their guard, because he would have to hand them over to the Gestapo in Warsaw as the accused. They denied it vehemently and categorically – no way, never! On this occasion, they found out who “gave them away” – namely an informant Vaishvili<sup>19</sup> (who in Polish times was a Pole, and in German times became a Russian), the greatest enemy of the Polish organisation. One Sunday, they both came home very agitated. Well, this Vaishvili, lodged as a subtenant a woman – apparently Polish, but a German informant – in the flat of a certain Pole from Siedlce suspected of communism. This informant quietly searched the flat and provided incriminating material, as a result of which the Pole was arrested, handcuffed, and driven to Mińsk (his eyes were blindfolded). He was led to the first floor of the police

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<sup>17</sup> Most likely, Elżbieta Kowner was thinking of Celina Lipczyńska, a niece of Izydor Lipczyński, the commander of the Jewish police in the Mińsk Ghetto. See: *Polacy–Żydzi 1939–1945*, ed. by S. Wroński and M. Zwolakowa (Warsaw, 1971), p. 319.

<sup>18</sup> Julius Schmidt, commander of the Criminal Police (Kripo) in Mińsk Mazowiecki, was shot by the Home Army soldiers on 23 July 1943, in front of the building of the Criminal Police. See: Archiwum Akt Nowych (Central Archives of Modern Records, hereinafter AAN), Delegatura Rządu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej na Kraj (Government Delegation for Poland 1940–1945, hereinafter DR), 202/II-23, Situation report on the organizational status and activities of subversive organizations of national minorities and the occupier for the period 1–31 July 1943, pp. 22–23.

<sup>19</sup> Wilhelm Vaishvili was erroneously described by Elżbieta Kowner as an informant. In fact, he was the Kripo officer in Mińsk Mazowiecki. Stanisław Szeweluk testified in the case of Kazimierz Sowiński, deputy head of Kripo in Mińsk Mazowiecki, “Vaishvili was the evil spirit of the criminal police.” According to Stanisław Szeweluk, Vaishvili did not consider himself to be of any particular nationality. See: Archiwum Państwowe w Warszawie (State Archives in Warsaw, hereinafter APW), Sąd Okręgowy w Warszawie, 5th Criminal Division (Regional Court in Warsaw, hereinafter SOW), 260, Minutes of the main hearing discontinued on 10 March 1947, 27 March 1947, pp. 83–84.

building on Warszawska Street and the beatings began, but he gritted his teeth and didn't say a word. Finally he decided to die. He asked that his hands be uncuffed, then he would tell everything; his hands were uncuffed, then he ran to the open window and jumped from the first floor, it seems that with an already broken leg he climbed the wooden fence, where a bullet of a policeman from the ground floor of the building ended his life. Well, this informant, unmasked in Siedlce, could not stay there any longer, so Vaishvili brought her to Mińsk and got her a job as a clerk in the Arbeitsamt. Well, in my presence – I swear! Mila and Elżbieta, in my presence, asked the boys from the organisation to inform the Poles working in the Arbeitsamt in Mińsk that this person was a German informant. I didn't know her name. Let Emilia Dyna give it if she remembers. One day, Emilia and Elżbieta were summoned by their German boss, Schmidt, and he showed them an anonymous denunciation (that day he himself was at the post office and received correspondence that some suspicious person in a green coat and hat was coming to them from Warsaw – Marian Gołajewski, a fugitive from Auschwitz) and that he maintains relations with Jews. They explained that this was certainly some kind of malice, that he had nothing to do with Jews, and that this gentleman was not a suspect, but simply their acquaintance, a merchant from Warsaw. You have to remember that at that time I, a fugitive from the Warsaw Ghetto, lived with them.

They had to pledge that the next time the “merchant from Warsaw” came to Mińsk, they would take him to the police chief – Schmidt. At the same time, they warned Marian Gołajewski not to show up in Mińsk. Elżbieta went alone “for a perm to Warsaw” and left a warning message for Gołajewski. From then on, they sneaked out on their own to the post office to pick up letters. They intercepted two more anonymous messages to Schmidt of the same content. I read the last of them myself and hid it under the floor in the kitchen until Emilia Dyna came from the office and then, after reading it, we burned that last anonymous denunciation. The unknown informant reported in that anonymous message that a suspicious individual in green (Gołajewski) was staying with us again and that we were hiding Jews. That if this third anonymous call is also ineffective, and if Elżbieta and Emilia are not arrested, the fourth and fifth anonymous calls will go directly to the Gestapo. Indeed, Marian Gołajewski from Auschwitz was with us again, but he had arrived late in the evening and left at 6 in the morning, and we thought

no one had seen him. It meant the spy and denouncer was living nearby, possibly a neighbour, but we had few neighbours, good Poles and friends. This was very disheartening for us. There was no one to suspect. And then there was a disaster. Emilia and Elżbieta made a few careless remarks about me, they patted me on the back in front of others for knowing foreign languages and for having studied at university. People began to wonder why, having a higher education, I was doing the dirty and hard work of a house cleaner while I didn't look like a maid, I was too well dressed. People began to mutter louder and louder about me: "Jew, Jew, hidden Jew." I asked my friends if I should leave because they were in danger. They replied, "Where do you want to go, you have no one. Don't be afraid, stay here for now. We'll help you when you'll have to get away." Knowing I had no one to go to, they continued to endanger themselves for me.

They created a double life for Jan Sarnecki, they prepared an alibi just in case, created his persona of a "worldly man" by introducing him to the suavest Polish social milieu, to the "elite and cream" of Mińsk, so that, in the event of his arrest, it could be said that it was a misunderstanding because Sarnecki belongs to of the working Polish intelligentsia, and he is no "polnische Banditen" with a gun. At that time we were visited by Engineer Słowikowski<sup>20</sup> with his wife Nina, citizen Manczarski<sup>21</sup> with his wife Paulina, Engineer Paślawski<sup>22</sup> with his family and

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<sup>20</sup> It has not been determined whom the author had in mind.

<sup>21</sup> Aleksander Stefan Manczarski (1896–1984) – he studied at General Paweł Chrzanowski Philological High School, from which he graduated after passing school-leaving exam, in 1915. In 1922, he graduated from the Faculty of Mathematics of the University of Warsaw. In September 1922, he became a high school teacher, but because it was extremely difficult to find a job, until 1926 he taught in various middle schools in Warsaw and Mińsk Mazowiecki. In 1926, he was appointed assistant at the Magnetic Observatory at Świder. Under the guidance of Prof. Stanisław Kalinowski, he studied the Earth's magnetism. In 1927–1939 he worked at the Free Polish University as an assistant to Professor Marian Grotowski. After the outbreak of the Second World War, he was involved in clandestine teaching. Several times he succeeded in avoiding arrest by the Germans. After the war, he settled at Przedbórz, where he taught and conducted social activities. He was the brother of Stefan (1899–1979), a Polish engineer, scientist and inventor. See: <https://psbprzedborz.pl/manczarski-aleksander-stefan/> (accessed 7 March 2020).

<sup>22</sup> Romuald Paślawski, an engineer residing in Mińsk. Before the war, he was a district engineer, he also worked in the Warsaw Voivodeship Office. He was also, until 1939, the head of the Road Department in Mińsk Mazowiecki. See: *Czasopismo Techniczne – Organ Ministerstwa Robót Publicznych i Polskiego Towarzystwa Politechnicznego*, 25 February 1929, p. 49; J. Kuligowski, *Życie polityczne, społeczno-gospodarcze i kulturalne powiatu mińskomazowieckiego w latach 1918–1939* (Mińsk Mazowiecki, 2013), pp. 68, 70; J. Orliński, "Budowa dróg w powiecie Mińskim w latach trzydziestych," *Rocznik Mińsko-Mazowiecki* 13 (2005), p. 13, 24; *Permanent International Association of Road Congress. Sixth International Road Congress. Washington, D.C., 1930*, (Washington, 1931), p. 308.



another engineer with his wife (I don't remember the name), the Wójciks, a surgeon whose name I don't remember, and of course Jan Sarnecki, and it was as if they had gathered to play bridge. All of them were impeccable Poles who adored Emilia and Elżbieta for their integrity, dedication, bravery, courage and devotion to the Polish cause. We were also visited by the owner of the printing house, an old pre-war socialist,<sup>23</sup> I don't know his name. The printing house was located at Piłsudskiego Street near the railway station. Unfortunately, he was captured during the roundup, probably taken to Pawiak. And sometimes we had uninvited guests, someone from the police to see who was staying with us. This was clear proof that we were under scrutiny, that the police did not have great confidence in Emilia D[yna] or Elżbieta.

One time, when I was serving dinner – in front of me – I swear!! – one of them, I think Elżbieta, was explaining to Jan Sarnecki how they should carry out the attack on the police building, where and what files are stored and where the keys are kept, she said that she would immediately fall flat on the floor and would not interfere, only that they would act quickly and efficiently, then Mila, together with Elżbieta, advised in what circumstances it would be best to shoot the boss, a German, Schmidt: 'so don't do it in the apartment, because there he has a seven-year-old son, whom he adores and would defend himself like a lion and kill everyone, nor in the police building, because there are too many blue policemen and German dogs, but only when he will be getting out of the car, this is the most convenient moment.' She told him at what time her boss usually arrives in the office. Several days had passed. On 21 July 1943, at 9 am the car with the chief of the Sicherheitspolizei in Mińsk, Julius Schmidt, a German, pulled up in front of the police building, and just as he was getting out of the car, an unknown individual jumped up, quickly hit and pushed aside the chauffeur – a Pole and fired three shots at Schmidt, who reached for the gun in his pocket, but did not manage to pull it out and just slumped onto the steering wheel. Emilia Dyna and her companion

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<sup>23</sup> Zenon Juliusz Lissowski (1890–1945), owner of the printing house at 70 Piłsudskiego Street in Mińsk Mazowiecki, activist of the Polish Socialist Party, arrested by the Germans in 1942, sent to Auschwitz, then to KL Neuengamme, where he perished on one of the ships with prisoners sunk by the Germans. See: M. Lissowski, "Zenon Juliusz Lissowski we wspomnieniach syna – Mirosława Lissowskiego," *Rocznik Mińsko-Mazowiecki* 22 (2014), pp. 223–228.

Elżbieta should, by rights, be awarded for contributing to the assassination of such a bloody executioner and merciless murderer of Poles and Jews as the German Schmidt proved to be. Two more weeks passed – in the evening, during an attack on a large farm – an act of sabotage – grain intended for the Germans was set on fire and Jan Sarnecki was shot. A machine gun and a can of gasoline were found next to him. It was widely rumoured in the town that the chief of the German police had been shot by the communist Jan Sarnecki, a close friend of Emilia Dyna and Elżbieta Gajewska. Friends no longer visited us, but were just coming to find out whether Emilia and Elżbieta had been arrested. Then they told me that I had to move out of Mińsk as soon as possible, because otherwise I would get sniffed out and make their own situation worse.

Unfortunately, my departure was out of the question at that time, because a new act of sabotage had cut off the connection with Warsaw. An electric train on that railway line, the only connection with Warsaw, had been burned. All three of us lived through terrible days and nights, constantly listening to hear whether they were coming for us. At that time, I wanted to bury myself in the ground, so as not to be the cause of their misfortune, but I had nowhere to hide. One day, Elżbieta and Mila gave me two fake ID cards, one for Emilia, the other for Elżbieta (in case they had to escape from Mińsk). I hid these ID cards in a cubbyhole loaded with wood, under bricks. I showed Emilia where they were, and the next morning I managed to go with a small hand-held suitcase as if to a dressmaker (to avoid suspicion I did not say goodbye to anyone) to Warsaw, and from there to further miserable wandering. Before that, I personally burned any documents that could have betrayed me, the high school leaving certificate, university diplomas, the pre-war ID card, employment certificate and other such documents. I wrote to Emilia and Elżbieta, signing the letter as Krystyna. When we were parting, Elżbieta and Mila lent me a few hundred zlotys and instructed me how to behave in the event of being arrested. I not only “ran away” from Vilnius from the Russians, my family was evacuated from Vilnius by the Russians, and I lived with a relative, a feldsher Jakubianiec in Grodno (in fact, the feldsher was a relative of Elżbieta),<sup>24</sup> then I reached Mińsk Mazowiecki, where I found an acquaintance at my relatives – Emilia Dyna, who

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<sup>24</sup> No further details of this person have been established.

continued to sacrifice her life for me, inviting me to live at her place. However, I decided not to take advantage of this sacrifice and was just to say that she was my pre-war acquaintance whose mother I had found in Cracow. On 1 November 1944, I was in fact arrested at the main railway station in Warsaw, and escorted by two policemen, taken to the Gestapo on Szucha Avenue. They beat me there, they checked my documents (I had very good, authentic documents), they phoned to Brwinów to check whether I really worked in a German home, I worked for some Volksdeutsche as a servant, finally they said “*nicht ähnlich*” – doesn’t look like a Jewish woman - and released me in Brwinów. Within a few days, I got rid of everything and, against the will of my boss, a Volksdeutsche who had my work card/book, I departed, leaving a false address. I had telephoned Emilia earlier that I wanted to see her before the departure.

She told me not to come to Mińsk, and that she can’t come to me, at most she could get to Rembertów, to Elżbieta, where she had been transferred as a punishment. Trembling with fear, I went to Rembertów. I told her everything I had experienced in the Gestapo and that I did not know where to go, and that I doubted that we would ever see each other again. Elżbieta stated that they were still under the threat of arrest at any moment (after their boss had been murdered) and that she had turned into a nervous wreck and was urging Emilia to flee with false, sham documents. Emilia was categorically opposed to it, claiming that their employers do not have any evidence of their culpability, only clues that can be denied, but that running away would be an admission of guilt and would cause greater risk of paying for it with their lives, because where were they supposed to run to? We parted and did not see each other until the end of the war. I left for Nowy Sącz, where I stayed until 12 February 1945 (there I suffered second degree burns). I had 25 luminal tablets sewn under my dress in case the Gestapo arrested me for a second time, so that I wouldn’t be the cause of Emilia Dyna or Elżbieta Gajewska being punished with death by the Germans.

I would like to add a few more words for general characterisation and a few facts known to me. Emilia Dyna and Elżbieta Gajewska restored freedom to many Poles and Jews. At great risk to themselves, they explained to their boss, a German, that the arrest of a given individual was a mistake, that he was an ordinary, hard-working man, with the opinion of a very decent person, that he was no “Polish Bandit” at

all. In many cases, the intervention was effective, unless the person was caught with a gun, then there was no help and sometimes you had to “grease” Vaishvili or others, but they never took bribes for themselves. On the other hand, the local peasants and the whole local population adored them, they were constantly being invited by Polish peasants for a Sunday. On their name days, the small house was showered with flowers. They were Polish patriots, brave and noble women. At the funeral of Jan Sarnowski,<sup>25</sup> the Polish sailor killed by a policeman, Emilia Dyna and Jan Sarnecki walked demonstratively behind his coffin at the head of the procession.

They were adored even by the prisoners, on their name day they brought home a gift from prisoners - huge red hollyhocks from the prison yard, these hollyhocks were put in the most honourable place. One day, Emilia pointed out to me an old woman in the street, supposedly Jewish, whom they had defended with great difficulty from Schmidt. Once a country woman came with a hen and milk – to express thanks for freeing her son – Emilia told her to take back the hen and then paid the woman for the milk. However, she warned the woman that her son should not stay at home because the village leader had given a very bad opinion about him to the Germans, and he could be taken again at any time. At the end of July 1943, the woman came crying that her son had been taken from her house that night by policemen. Emilia and Elżbieta got very agitated because they had endangered themselves in order to save the life of a Pole, and the stupid woman had lost her son because, despite the warning, she had let him stay at home. Unfortunately, he was shot.

In *Deutsches Haus* run by Schaeffer,<sup>26</sup> one of the waitresses was denounced as Jewish. Emilia was instructed to search the accused. She found in her clothing a card to a Polish friend with the following content: “save me, remember, do not regret anything, because it is not only about my head and life, do whatever you can.” The frightened girl began to beg Emilia not to expose her Polish friend and not to show the card to the Germans. Emilia calmed her down and gave the card

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<sup>25</sup> During the occupation, Jan Sarnowski was a county inspector of dairies in Mińsk County. He was shot by a German policeman on 29 May 1943. See: Mówiński, *Szumcie wierzby*, pp. 110–111.

<sup>26</sup> Henryk Szaefer, born in 1902 at Gostyń, as a Pole; he signed the Volksliste and became a German. The Germans handed over to him a restaurant exclusively for Germans and a buffet in the German officers’ mess on Dworcowa Street. He also owned two more restaurants, at Kałuszyn and Kołbiel. See: APW, SOW, 3408, Indictment against Henryk Szaefer, Warsaw, 4 May 1948, p. 6.

to her Polish companion. While she had the card with her, she gave it to me to read over dinner one time.

A country woman, after an argument with her husband, accused him of being Jewish. Indeed, he had been a Jew 50 years earlier, but was baptised as a baby and was now 60 years old. Then the terrified woman began to beg to save him from the death penalty. Emilia and Elżbieta found witnesses who confirmed that the peasant had never been a Jew.

A Russian officer named Maksudov<sup>27</sup> escaped from captivity and lived with some woman, who then informed on him to the Germans. Emilia and Elżbieta brought him food to the prison; they asked me if “be healthy” is “bud’ zdorov” in Russian, because they used this phrase, and he replied “spasiba.”

A girl from Mińsk helped a French prisoner escape from captivity. He was caught carrying cards from her and the girl was arrested. She was facing the death penalty. Elżbieta brought these cards home, we translated them from the French as benignly as possible. The boss was persuaded to have her released on bail, then Elżbieta told the girl to run away, which she immediately did.

I could give you thousands of such examples, I just don’t remember the names. Names can be given by Emilia, and all this can be verified.

Emilia Dyna ran the behavioural section, provided medical checks for sex workers, and Elżbieta Gajewska worked in the office.

When it was necessary to rescue Poles from detention or to help prisoners, they did everything they possibly could.

Their work in the police was only a cover, under which they worked to cause as much damage to Germany as they could, at great risk to themselves, so they deserve to be awarded, like every self-sacrificing Polish patriot. They had no enemies among cultured people – they were respected and liked by the citizens of Mińsk Mazowiecki. If there were individuals hostile to them, they were probably only among prostitutes, pimps, thieves and bandits.

And let me finish with another incident. Emilia and Elżbieta recalled with great indignation that a prostitute – Julia Chojnacka – had reported to them that a child, a seven-year-old boy, the illegitimate son of a Pole and a Jewish woman,

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<sup>27</sup> The identity of this person has not been determined.

was hiding out in Mińsk. She demanded that the child be shot. They replied, “Julka, you’re drunk, go to sleep, the police don’t deal with these matters.” But Chojnacka didn’t give up, she reported it to the police and so a blue policeman, Kaczmarek,<sup>28</sup> shot the seven-year-old child.

Emilia Dyna hated the Germans, she never said the word “German” at home, only “szkop” or “wicked szkop.” Certainly, no one believes that a Polish woman who hates Germans would bully Poles unnecessarily. All of the above I can confirm under oath.

Wanda Bieńkowska  
Katowice, 26 September 1945.

*Source: AIPN, GK 453/63, Testimony of Wanda Bieńkowska in the case of Emilia Dyna, submitted to the Municipal Office of Public Security in Katowice, 26 September 1945, pp. 10–19.*

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<sup>28</sup> Policeman Józef Kaczmarek, senior sergeant, district commander of Polnische Polizei, a German collaborator shot by soldiers of Kedyw AK on 16 October 1943. See AAN, DR, 202/II-23, *Sprawozdanie sytuacyjne ze stanu organizacyjnego i działalności organizacji wyrotowych, mniejszości narodowych oraz okupanta za czas od 1 do 31 października 1943 r.*, p. 79; D. Sitkiewicz, “Wobec dwóch wrogów. Raporty kontrwywiadowcze obwodu “Jamnik” – “Kamień” Armii Krajowej kwiecień–lipiec 1944 r.” *Rocznik Mińsko-Mazowiecki* 22 (2014), p. 119.