

Medical care in the unit of major Henryk Dobrzański aka „Hubal”

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Summary:

The fact that Major Dobrzański gave his unit military character, required it to live under permanent threat, in very difficult conditions, in strict discipline and subordination, as well as his wish to avoid unnecessary conflicts, made it impossible for women to join the unit.

The soldiers themselves (with some first-aid training) provided sanitary and medical care, assisted by the local population and doctors from the region. The wounded found shelter in forest cottages (dressing points) and at the Rectory in Ruski Bór, from where appointed persons moved them to the hospital in Opoczno. Wounded or sick soldiers were also treated, operated and looked after in the hospital in Tomaszów Mazowiecki. For a small unit operating in fairly good living conditions this could be considered sufficient medical care. Constant expansion of the unit, hunger, exhaustion, absence of permanent quarters and atmosphere of constant threat brought with itself the inability to maintain personal hygiene, disinfect clothing and get rid of insects effectively, as well as to treat diseases affecting the soldiers. Absence of a decision to enlist doctors in the unit may be considered negligence on Major Hubal's part.

Good fortune as well as the determination and commitment of two nurses arriving from Warsaw, Ludmiła Żero and Genowefa Ruban, resulted in regular supplies of uniforms, medicines and dressing materials, as well as professional medical care nearly till the last moments of Major Hubal's life.

Key words: 1939 Defensive War, Polish underground military units after September 1939, Kielce region, major Henryk Dobrzański aka “Hubal”, medical care.

A great deal has been written about „Hubal's” unit and about Henryk Dobrzański himself. The burial place of the “crazy major”, as the Germans called him, has been searched for. The subsequent fate of Hubal's soldiers was traced in detail. The importance of the Separate Polish Army Unit, which initiated the activities of the armed underground movement, was emphasized on numerous occasions.

The moral and political significance of its activities was also underlined, since it helped the Polish society in the first period of the War

to overcome the grief caused by the September defeat. Many pointed to the propaganda overtones of the fight taken up spontaneously by Major Dobrzański and his soldiers, which for foreign observers, was proof of the Poles' unyielding attitude towards the invader. However, the sources, of which the authoress may name several dozen, rarely mention such mundane matters as everyday life in the unit or sanitary and medical care provided to Major Hubal's troops. It is therefore worthwhile to devote some attention to this issue. The place to start is an overview of the unit's history.

To feel and love freedom ...major Dobrzański's War with the Germans

The Kielce District brought its own approach to the concept of continuing combat developed by the Home Army. The District was one of the initiators of guerilla warfare in Poland, and was one of the most active regions in this respect. It was here that the unit of Major Henryk Dobrzański, aka “Hubal”, later called the last soldier of the II Republic or the first guerilla of the Second World War, endured longest, fighting in the area between the Spała Forests and the Świętokrzyskie Mountains until late spring 1940.

In fact the latter definition is not quite appropriate, for the Major was not engaged in guerilla warfare, and called his unit a Separate Polish Army Unit. In military terminology this means a unit designated on an ad hoc basis for executing a specific task. It may be composed for instance of an infantry battalion supported by sections of other units, such as an infantry artillery platoon or an antitank company, all of which return to their parent units after the mission is accomplished. This unit was to execute a specific task, and then it would be disbanded or incorporated into military units which would be formed in the future [1]. The soldiers wore full uniform and were armed. After the end of the September Campaign they did not lay down arms, and together with a group of volunteers they continued fighting the Germans in the Kielce region.

Major Dobrzański, a born cavalryman, an outstanding soldier, a sportsman with numerous prizes won at equestrian events, member of the Polish Olympic team at the Amsterdam Olympics in 1928, turned out to be a rebellious man. Regardless of the order to ground arms he gathered a group of volunteers and commanded them to depart in the direction of still besieged Warsaw. He crossed the Vistula near Maciejowice at dawn on 1 October 1939 and found himself in the Radom area. He went on, towards the Świętokrzyskie Mountains, to reach the Spała Forests. He decided to stay in Poland and continue the fight until, in the spring as he thought, the victorious allied offensive would start.

He had a small group of eleven soldiers under this command, but the size of the unit was immaterial. He believed that the strength in terms of number

is not as important as the presence of soldiers among his countrymen, so brutally oppressed by the Germans. He knew that it was much more difficult for a bigger unit to operate on a territory besieged by the enemy. He therefore decided not to expand his special unit. It was to play more of a propaganda role, inspire the creation of a conspiracy network in the field [2].

The Major was in absolute command, and did not share his plans with anyone. In November and December he prepared a plan of creating the so called „Kielce” Combat District. The organizational chart of the District assumed that the fight for freedom will be continued on two fronts, the open and the underground front, and laid out the scope of activity of individual underground sections. His reason for creating the “Kielce” Combat District was the inflow of a large number of volunteers, the rising spirit to fight the invader, the wish to overcome the infamy of the September defeat, and opposition against the Germans’ endless transports of men, food and all material goods out of the country with impunity. One of the tasks set for the District, apart from direct military action, was to organize and prepare the society for a military strike. Hubal also developed the concept of the composition of the District command and staff, as well as the scope of responsibility for individual organizational units, including the quartermaster’s unit and heads of sanitary, armament, inventory and veterinary units. The District created by Major Dobrzański covered a relatively small territory and was not directly associated with any military or political organization in conspiracy [3].

Hubal understood the need to cooperate with the emerging underground movement and established contact with the commanders of the SZP [Służba Zwycięstwu Polski – Service to Polish Victory]. In November 1939 met with General Karaszewicz-Tokarzewski. He thus gained official support for his activity and received an offer to take up the position of deputy commander of the SZP district in Kielce. To this he agreed, although he never actually functioned in this capacity because he did not want to leave his unit. After the briefing with the General Commander of the SZP on 24 December Major Dobrzański returned to his unit and engaged in expanding it. Although Hubal received the orders of the General Command of the ZWZ

[Związek Walki Zbrojnej—Union of Armed Combat – successor to the SZP] to dismiss his unit, he never took off uniform. He let his men make their own decision. Some executed the order and went home. Several dozen men went to the addresses they knew in Warsaw, and several dozen others were incorporated into the ZWZ network in Łódź. In December 1939 about 30 men remained with the Major [4].

In time more and more volunteers joined the unit. The Major enlisted each one personally. He did not encourage anyone to join, he described the actual state of affairs, sometimes even exaggerating the difficulties the soldiers had to face. He did not promise an easy life, he talked about the dire living conditions, about the danger facing them each day, the severe discipline in the unit. He immediately sent home those who were too young or physically weak. The unit accepted people of different social stature, peasants, workers, intelligentsia (including secondary school graduates) and freelancers. According to the statements of Mr Zbigniew Wroniszewski, one of the few soldiers of the unit still alive, women found it most difficult to join.

Hubal believed that they are not physically strong enough, and that they may become a reason for conflicts which must be avoided. It was possible to maintain full discipline only among men. The only woman soldier in the unit, and promoted to the rank of senior uhlán, was Marianna Cel aka „Tereska”, who was accepted only because of the need to have a permanent liaison person, as well as a help in household chores such as clearing, cooking, washing, mending uniforms and dressing wounds [5]. The Major quickly created a strong military unit (of 300 men in March 1940), which, he hoped, would hit the Germans at the right time and inspire others to do the same. Although the Kielce underground authorities were still skeptical about his activities, the nearby towns of Tomaszów and Opoczno cooperated closely with the Major. Hubal's troops had outposts in Tomaszów, Opoczno, Radzice, and even in far away Radoszyce. Couriers came from Warsaw and maintain contacts between the unit and the Warsaw scouting organization as well as a group of persons involved in the pre-War organization Women's Military Training.

Surviving through the Next Day. The prose of everyday life under Nazi occupation

War is not only a time of great raptures of the heart, a time of heroism worthy of poetry or statues. It is most of all an effort to survive, to endure poverty, dirt, hunger, disease, lice and danger, a challenge to character, an opportunity to learn about one's own strengths and weakness as well as those of others. As the poet said, *“We know ourselves only to the extent we have been tested”*. It is interesting to look at the everyday life of Major Hubal's unit. It is worthwhile to recall the people for whom this time of trial was not a time of personal defeat, people risked their own life and offered help to Major Hubal's separated unit.

In every village in the administrative districts of Łowicz, Skierniewice and Rawa appropriate people were appointed to collect food, uniforms and arms for military needs [6]. Tomaszów Mazowiecki was mainly focused on providing food, underwear, medicines and blankets. This assistance provided by the citizens of Tomaszów was habitually called „Action Hubal”.

With the outbreak of the War all Polish youth organizations, especially older scouts, headed by the Fourth J.Kiliński Squad, started to work in support services, for instance in the battalions of the 4th artillery regiment, or provided water for Hubal's horses. Young people carried around baskets with bread and cold meats prepared for the soldiers by the Polish White Cross. Girls enrolled for hospital service or reported for duty in Polish Red Cross units [7]. Bursars from the underground organization, Hanna Dryńska („Wierzba”), Amelia Chleba, Z. Skorkowa-Adamowicz („Gwiazda”) and Halina Osińska, as well as other young leaders engaged in collecting warm clothing, military equipment, shoes, gloves and blankets for the troops.

Mieczysław Lange „Graf” (died in Auschwitz) used his own horses to transport uniforms, arms, medicines and food. Other people who provided support for Hubal's soldiers were Maria Mieczkowska, Helena Kotarska, Helena Bartczakowi, Helena Klimkiewicz and Irena Lange.

A Self-Help Committee was organized in Tomaszów, headed by Edward Byczewski,

a sanitary controller from the local medical center. The Committee's objective was to distribute received food coupons among the poor and to organize the collection of clothes, food and money for members of the ZWZ and Hubal's soldiers.

The population of all the villages in the Świętokrzyskie region received the unit with curiosity and sympathy, sharing their meager resources with it, providing the men with food, maps, compasses and dressing the wounded. The most important task was to feed the men and their horses. Hubal ordered that the village population be paid market prices for the food and feed given to the unit, so the peasants frequently volunteered to bring various food products for the soldiers.

The administrative district of Opoczno was a safe base which enabled the unit to organize garrison life. For lack of a field kitchen and canteen meals from the allocated products were prepared by housewives at individual quarters. In exchange the soldiers lent a hand on the farm. The unit's baker took care of baking bread, which meant that the soldiers had fresh bread every day. Flour was obtained from two sources, the first being donations and supplies organized by supply outposts, the second requisitions from compulsory deliveries of flour to flour mills and of wheat and rye from estates inhabited by Germans. Meat supplies were obtained by requisition of pigs and cattle from the *volksdeutsche*. Meat was also purchased from peasants, who frequently refused to accept money. Hunting in the Spała Forest was an additional source of meat supply, Hubal himself occasionally taking part.

One of the supply posts was Radzice. After the unit moved to Gałki it intensified its operations. The peasants from Radzice imposed a voluntary tax on themselves in order to supply the unit with wheat and rye, the women baked bread for the soldiers. Meat was obtained from the school farm. The Agricultural and Trading Cooperative in Opoczno provided financial and in kind assistance, gifts of money were also received from the public. Individuals, mainly representatives of freelance occupations, owners of forest estates and gamekeepers paid in specific sums for the unit (from one to three thousand Zloty). The unit's purse also received a cash injection the retrieved coffers of the regiment. Sugar, salt and spices were bought in shops. Potatoes and milk were

obtained from farmers. Thanks to the loyalty of the population and organizational skills of the supply patrols food supply was sufficient, bread was given out in unlimited amounts. The soldiers spent Christmas in forest cottages and received gifts from the local population in the form of gloves, warm scarves, socks and cigarettes [8].

Hubal was very strict on impeccable appearance. The soldiers had to be clean shaven every day, their uniforms clean. The Major's mother, Maria Dobrzańska, sent him parcels with clean clothing from Cracow [9]. The soldiers rested in the forest camping and making fires, only spending the nights in cottages or distant farmhouses. Colder days were spent in the hay in barns. During their stays in farmhouses the soldiers dried their uniforms and ate quickly cooked means.

In time their situation began to deteriorate. Occasionally the Major intentionally avoided combat in order to give the men and the horses some rest after difficult and frequently long, physically and mentally exhausting marches and skirmishes, to which cavalymen were not normally accustomed. Only the sick and wounded, and those sent on patrol, rode on horseback. All the supplies (sugar, spices and bread packed in sacks) were carried on the backs of all the soldiers of the unit in turn, only Major Dobrzański was excused from this duty [10].

A bucketful of potato soup was cooked for them in desolate farmhouses. All were hungry and exhausted. In the woods they set up camp, built shelters from poles, branches and moss. Wooden logs made up the floors to protect them from the humid earth. Cold and hunger ruled, the soldiers were infested with insects. Those who were unable to endure the tension, the desperation of nighttime marches, cold and hunger, simply fled. Only 10 officers and 12 non-commissioned officers remained with their commander [11].

***Terra incognita.* The body of knowledge about sanitary and medical support for major Hubal's soldiers**

As mentioned above, the issue of medical assistance provided to Hubal's men is still an unknown (a „terra incognita”), very little indeed has been revealed on the subject. It has never been

never the object of thorough investigation. The information collected below is the result of an arduous search among source text, which reveal the following data.

Major Dobrzański was wholly dedicated to combat and organizational work. In his own way he was also concerned with the hygiene of the men under this command, but the unit did not „employ” a doctor or nurses. The situation of sick soldiers was difficult. Absence of a doctor and basic medication meant that they had to resort to the rules of folk medicine. The universal remedy for colds was melted pig fat mixed with milk or a warm blanket and glass of moonshine with pepper. Maintaining personal hygiene was beyond the men's means, the inability to disinfect clothes resulted in widespread pediculosis which could not be overcome in these conditions. Various means and methods were used to get rid of the insects. At night clothes were hung on fences, the insects carefully shaken off in the morning and the clothes worn again. The soldiers mainly complained of ischias, leg lesions and wounds, pneumonia. On Hubal's decisions soldiers left the unit due to bad health. The wounded were sent away on leave, giving them time to rest and regain a respectable appearance. Hubal did not tolerate scruffiness.

The heavily wounded and very ill were sent, with the help of the local conspiracy organizations, to hospitals in Opoczno and Tomaszów [12]. Józef Ignacy, the cart driver from the hospital in Opoczno, and Ignacy Urban from the village of Huciska, used their own horses to transport the wounded men to hospitals [12].

In the municipal hospital in Opoczno the wounded and sick soldiers were looked after by doctors Kazimierz Ekielski, Piotr Rudnicki, Józef Pietrus, Leon Tomaszewski, Jeremi Loba, Lindmanowski, professor Tomaszewicz from Łódź, students of medicine Antoni Czerniejewski („Tosiek”) and Stanisław Szczygieł and a doctor from the health center Zbigniew Sobieszkański [14].

During the Nazi occupation the Sister Superior of the local hospital, Mamerta Sienkiewicz, along with nuns Ludwika, Anna, Donata Gniazdowska, risking their own life and the lives of the other sisters and hospital staff, cared for and hid Hubal's

wounded men, found clothes for them and then moved them to nearby houses [15].

In January 1940 the entire municipal hospital in Tomaszów Mazowiecki became involved in the conspiracy effort.

All the staff joined forces under the leadership of Doctor Augspachem, a German by descent. Work continued uninterruptedly till the end of the War. The untiring Doctor Alfred Augspach, with his meager staff, Dr Leonard Jaśkiewicz, Dr Zenon Szczech, student of medicine Tadeusz Bazylewicz („Tadek”), assisted by volunteers from outside the hospital, day and night performed dozens of complicated operations. The hospital was enlarged and took over the buildings at Św. Antoniego 41 and 57 street. Overall general it treated 350 wounded soldiers [16]. This is where wounded and sick soldiers, Marian Brajer and Tadeusz Berus, received help and care. It was from here that Antoni Sokorski, a hospital employee, supplied the unit with dressing materials and uniforms left over from the Polish soldiers who fought in the September Campaign.

A young doctor from the medical center in Tomaszów, Maurycy Mittelstaed, joined the medical support effort. His apartment served as a permanent contact point for ZWZ. Working at the same time in the Gestapo prison at Św. Antoniego 20 street he treated Hubal's soldiers who were imprisoned and tortured, and looked after them with the help of the nurse Janina Sierosławska. He passed messages from the prisoners to their families and the underground authorities. He was arrested on 6.08.1940 in the Tomaszów military barracks, where he was executing an order of the underground organization (his mission was to find Major Hubal's body). He was taken to the concentration camp in Ravensbrück and later freed by the approaching Red Army.

Among the people involved in supplying the guerillas with medicines and dressing materials were the employees of the Social Insurance Institution Marian Kotarski aka „Sarna” and Zdzisław Józefowski aka „Kierski” (both shot by the Gestapo). Together with the pharmacists Butkiewicz and Ambroziewicz they provided batches of medicines and dressings to Hubal's unit [17].

Others who engaged in the same activity were Antoni Świtalski, dentists Batkowska and Krauz-Tymianko who supplied medicines and dressings, and the Sikorski family, who supplied the soldiers with medicines from their own pharmacy [18]. Doctor Albin Urbanowski from Zagnańsk was another who looked after Hubal's men (he committed suicide by poisoning himself with sublimate during his arrest by the Gestapo in 1943)[19].

Some of the soldiers themselves, who had undergone first aid training, provided medical care for the unit; for instance Lieut. Marek Szymański aka „Sęp”, the last commander of Hubal's infantry and his last deputy, a quartermaster with nursing practice (he worked as an orderly in a military hospital in Lublin from September to October 1939). The local population was also helpful [20].

On Hubal's orders the wounded were left in the forest cottage in Rosochy or transported to the rectory in Ruski Bród, into the care of Father Ptaszyński. Dressing points were located in the forest cottages in Kapocin, Celiny, Michniów, Dęba, Bielawy, Rosochy and Radzice [21].

Support also arrived from Warsaw. With the help of Ludmiła Wróblewska from Dęba the unit contacted the Polish Red Cross. This contact was maintained by two courier-nurses, Genowefa Ruban („Gienia”) and Ludmiła Żero („Ludka”). Their contact with the unit was a result of a coincidence. Genowefa Ruban's cousins were searching for their only son who did not return from the War. The parents were looking for him to no avail. Meantime news came to Warsaw that a Polish Army unit was still fighting in the Świętokrzyskie Mountains. The parents decided to look for their son in the unit, accompanied by Genowefa Ruban. Unfortunately they did not reach the unit. „Gienia” went on another search expedition with a friend Ludmiła Żero. In order not to arrive to the unit empty handed they took with them some medicines received from Women's Military Training. They found the unit and after a discussion with the commander they undertook to supply it with medicines, dressings, warm clothing, uniforms and ammunition. Both were students, and shortly before the War they completed a Polish Red Cross nursing course. During the siege of

Warsaw and the first months of occupation they worked as nurses in the Holy Spirit hospital, which was full of wounded soldiers from the September Campaign. After the outbreak of the war Ruban got in touch with the members of the Women's Military Training organization and with scouts. She encouraged a school friend who also worked in the hospital, Ludmiła Żero, to join her. On their own they gathered clothing, medicines, food and ammunition for Hubal's troops in Warsaw. In the winter of 1940 they reached the combat unit and found the men infested with insects and disease. From then on regularly, once in two weeks (from February till the end of April) they supplied the troops with underwear sewn in conspiracy by Warsaw girl scouts, as well as uniforms, medicines and dressings obtained from the Ujazdowski Hospital which treated Polish soldiers. In exchange for civilian clothes supplied to convalescents they collected uniforms. They were also the ones who distributed the unit's last communication, about Hubal's death, in the administrative districts of Opoczno, Konin and Radomsko.

Later Genowefa Ruban worked in conspiracy as a liaison officer in ZWZ military intelligence. She was shot in the Białystok prison in 1942. After her death Ludmiła Żero did not engage in underground work. She continued her economy studies, and after the War went on to study music in the Warsaw Music Academy [22].

There are no victors in a war. about the (in)justice of history

If history is the teacher of life, it is certainly not a fair teacher. It allows nameless heroes or ordinary people, whose small victories that enable many people to survive but are not worthy of medals, to disappear without a trace. This is how history treated the doctors, pharmacists and nurses and countless inhabitants of villages and small towns who helped the soldiers in their strife against the unseen enemies: hunger, pain, disease, and everyday human fears.

This is why it is so important to recall the names of these courageous people. In the best way available to them they waged their own war against the occupier. In “times of propaganda” and “times of Apocalypse fulfilled” they gave the most beautiful proof of humanity. For this we salute them.

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