

# Girl scouts and pharmacists of the Kieleckie-Radomskie HA “Jodla” Region in conspiracy service

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**Summary:**

The time of occupation is a story of heroic struggle of PRC and Polish Scouting and Guiding Association (ZHP) to realize the ideas of humanitarianism. Service to the people constituted the basis of their existence. From the first days of functioning of the scout organization, i.e. since 1911, sanitary and Samaritan activity constituted the core of civic education of scouts. Sanitary service as a patriotic duty in the period of fighting for freedom and providing skillful aid were the subjects of constant training.

**Key words:** World War II, conspiracy, girl scouts, Polish Red Cross, pharmacists.

## Cooperation between girl scouts and the Polish Red Cross

Pharmacists constituted an integral part of underground health care services. They saved lives of the wounded and the ill where no doctors were present. Carrying loads of medicines, they traveled many kilometers to get to the wounded partisans. Pharmacies were often turned into conspirational points, hospitals, safe houses for the Jews and escaped Soviet prisoners. Under the guise of manufacturing medicines, pharmacies produced explosives and poisons. People resettled from the Western territories were provided with financial and material aid.

Pharmacists employed outstanding scholars in their pharmacies (unemployed due to closing of universities) and young people at risk of deportation and conscripting for forced labor.

Pharmacies were also used as distribution points for underground newspapers. They provided the forest squads with medicines, dressings and surgical instruments as well as clothing, money and explosive materials, so-called “solidowki”.

Girl and boy scouts provided sanitation services in the Polish Rifle Squads and the Legions as early as during World War I. Red Cross Society (RCS) established in January 1919, from early moments of its existence was an ally and aided in charity work. Its program encompassed nurse training, establishing treatment facilities for civilians, providing first aid and training of so-called paramedics. Nurse training was commenced in 1922. Cooperation between RCS and ZHP first became evident during war in 1920. Scouting War Emergency established in Kielce (particularly a team of girl scouts under the leadership of Anna Czarnecka and Maria Selek) actively supported the Red Cross Society in handling sanitary trains and performing auxiliary functions in hospitals. Programs of scouting actions included, beside other duties, emergency rescue and first aid training. In the following years, a lot of attention was paid to the youth and training in premedical care. Close cooperation between scouts from Kieleckie region with PRC allowed for raising future activ-

ists within both organizations. This cooperation tightened even more in the 30's, when people became aware of the necessity to prepare sanitation and emergency services in the event of warfare.

A group of scout instructors from Kielce, Suchedniow, Opatow, Sandomierz participated in the first training action conducted in 1930 for the Emergency Team Commanders of the PRC. Female Scout Emergency Services with particularly proficient sanitation service were formed in September 1938. Sanitation rescue teams of older girl scouts from Kielce, Opatow and Ostrowiec received rescue equipment from the PRC. It included gas masks, stretchers and sanitary equipment.

With the outbreak of war, scout teams together with sanitation services of the PRC participated in the rescue of people gathered in railway stations in Kielce, Ostrowiec, Starachowice, Skarzysko and Jdrzejow. Moreover, members of rescue teams provided emergency aid to the Polish Armed Forces defending Kielce, prisoners of war, civilians evacuated eastward and to the first youngest casualties of war. Maria Chodnikiewicz recalls:

*In the first days after Germans' entry to Kielce, the Red Cross was allowed to provide food to the captives. Wearing Red Cross armbands, we passed between groups of prisoners with baskets full of bread and distributed dressings, medicines and food. A hospital was organized in the building of the present seminary at the Swierczewski Street for Polish soldiers – prisoners of war suffering from dysentery. We gathered dried bread for them and, as PRC sisters, provided them with medicines and civilian clothing. Many of those captives left the hospital disguised as women with us, thereby avoiding prisoner camps. When nurses went to the front with the army, we were allocated to serve in a children's hospital on Langiewicza Street in Kielce, where we served as auxiliary help to sick children, occupying their time with writing and reading lessons, games and recreation. Many of these children had nowhere to go to. They came to the hospital from train stations and transports, wounded and orphaned [1].*

It should be added that scouts were also involved in sending and delivering letters to families of soldiers held in prisoner camps.

Scout sanitary emergency services played a special role in the period when the Germans ordered sudden evacuation of the sick and wounded soldiers and civilians from the hospitals located in

Kielce and Opatow. A former boy scout from Kieleckie region, Jacency Kolodziejski, reports this event in such manner:

*In the first days of war, dr. Jan Latala ordered me to immediately gather as many scouts as possible in St. Alexander's Hospital. At the hospital, we received Red Cross armbands and were put at the disposal of Mrs. Helena Witt. As wounded civilians and soldiers were carried in, it was our duty to distribute food on hospital floors and to roll bandages. After two or three days, Germans occupied the hospital and ordered evacuation of the wounded. Patients were transferred to a new hospital on Bandurski Street. We participated in providing our soldiers with civilian clothing. We carried these clothes hidden in baskets filled with linens or bread. After changing into civilian clothing and putting on a Red Cross armband, we walked out of the hospital together, carrying the basket. Gates were open and we were free to enter and leave while wearing a PRC armband [2].*

It is worth noting that the entire scouting equipment (particularly linens and blankets) was handed over to the hospital and was stored in PRC repositories.

Thanks to their female colleagues working as PRC paramedics, boy scouts from Kielce who fought in the forest squads, received aid in a form of medicines, dressings and treatments provided by trained personnel.

At the time of throttling of the Warsaw uprising, the Kieleckie region took in many of the deported. They were provided with medical aid in hospitals organized by scouts in cooperation with Polish Red Cross.

Girl Scouts from Ostrow region formed a sanitary aid point at a railway station. Under the leadership of Maria Rostocka, girls efficiently managed the wounded. Following the Warsaw uprising, they organized an infectious diseases hospital for the people evacuated from the capital.

In Opatow, as a result of Germans overtaking the local hospital, girl scouts from a sanitary team participated in evacuation of patients. They served the sick located in private quarters. They constituted auxiliary PRC personnel. These Samaritans, trained before the war, constituted sanitary air-defense patrols, aided in hospitals for the ill and wounded fugitives and

transported the wounded between the 1st and the 7th of September, 1939. When hospital personnel succumbed to panic and doctors and sisters of mercy left for Sandomierz, girl scouts took day and night shifts in the abandoned hospital. The scout troop commander, Wacława Lipińska-Forowicz, reminisces:

*When I arrived at the hospital in the morning on September 6th, I only found the severely ill patients lying in feces and blood, covered with glass pieces after a bombing. Girl scouts cleaned up the wards, managed the ill and cooked them food [3].*

In Sandomierz, girl scouts organized sanitary aid in a railway station for the arriving soldiers. They aided in moving patients from the Holy Spirit Hospital during a fire. They organized auxiliary hospitals and mini-hospitals in schools and private flats. Franciszka Sawińska, Janina Bien and Katarzyna Wos-Kolodziej particularly distinguished themselves in this work.

In Radom, sanitary service was provided by Maria Skalska and Janina Kaczorowska. They helped the abandoned children and trained paramedics.

Girl scouts from Częstochowa took over the service at a railway station from PRC. They worked as paramedics in the municipal hospital, where many of Polish Armed Forces soldiers were treated. Scout troop commander Jadwiga Sawczak, girl guide Krystyna Galecka-Roland, Maria Kostrzevska, Jadwiga Lewandowicz, Lucyna Kornet, Irena Kubiszał, Krystyna Pfranger showed particular selflessness [4]. Activity of PRC sisters grew very dynamically. Great challenges presented before these women. Lack of food, poverty, filth, scarcity of housing and fear led to catastrophic health conditions and deaths not only of families, but also of entire villages and settlements. In 1940, epidemics of typhus, dysentery, tuberculosis, diphtheria and trachoma as well as lice and scabies were spreading at a dreadful rate in the entire region of the General Government. The example of Poland showed that in these troubled times the Red Cross organization forms an uninterrupted chain of mutual aid. People affected by tragedy owed their health and lives to those brave, selfless women.

## Pharmacists in underground services

The time of war and German occupation established German legislation in the General

Government region. In 1940, the General Governor, Hans Frank, called into existence the Supreme Pharmaceutical Chamber (SPC) based in Cracow, together with four of its branches located in the following districts: Cracow, Lublin, Warsaw, Radom.

Dr. Weber (a German) was the head of SPC, while dr. L. Kietrzynski and M. Sieg M.S., who were Polish, served as his counselors. Two counselors and provincial delegates (there were 15 of them in Radom) were appointed in each district. At that time, pharmaceutical chambers did not form an actual pharmaceutical council. However, positions of some of the provincial delegates provided coverage for their underground activities and formation of this chamber significantly simplified their work for the resistance. Beginning with spring 1944 until the end of the war, activity of chambers was gradually abolished.

Kielce constituted an important and large center of resistance. The main organizational facility of the underground health care was situated in St. Alexander's Hospital. Pharmacy located in this hospital had limited means. Therefore, additional back up for providing medicines, dressings and physiological fluids was necessary. All pharmacists from the region were involved in this aid. Eugenia Boryczko (M.Sc.) and Maria Bujak (M.Sc.) worked in this pharmacy. Effectiveness of health care in the city and in the country was limited due to increasing shortage of medicines. Pharmacies only possessed the simplest drugs in minimal quantities. Therefore, people were treated with herbs and homemade treatments (cupping therapy, leeches, onion syrup). They searched for medical guides and recipes for gathering and preparing herbs. Due to lack of pre-made medications, pharmacists produced most drugs by themselves in their pharmacies from chemical substrates gathered before the war or acquired illegally, often risking their lives [5].

In Kielce, Maria Malikowa (M.Sc.) provided shelter to people persecuted by Gestapo on pharmacy premises. She employed young people at risk of being deported to Germany and conscripted for forced labor. She also supported financially and materially the people exiled from Poznan region. She passed medicines and dressing materials to forest troops. Within her pharmacy, she created a chemical laboratory for purposes of secret teaching- chemistry class was conducted there. It was

used for production of infusion fluids, poisons and explosives [6].

Janina Sikorska's (M.Sc.) pharmacy supplied medicines to partisan troops [7]. Helena Zerbe (M.Sc.), exiled from Poznan, took a job in the Social Insurance Company pharmacy in Ostrowiec Swietokrzyski and cooperated with the resistance movement from this region [8]. Urszula Ossowska (M.Sc.) was involved in conspiracy activities in the Koneckie municipality [9], Maria Rakowska in Wodzislaw [10], Anna Wasilewska-Bielnicka in Wislica [11] and Janina Niezabitowska in Daleszyce [12].

Sets of medicines and dressing materials were provided by the pharmacy of Helena Pietkowska (M.Sc.) of Ozarow [13]. The pharmacy managed by Maria Siwecka (M.Sc.) located in the Sandomierz Market Square was the center of underground activities in the Sandomierskie municipality. It provided great aid to the partisans. Maria Siwecka, warned by the intelligence of Home Army (HA) about a possible arrest by Gestapo, left for Warsaw but did not avoid persecution. She was held prisoner in Ravensbrück concentration camp [14].

Underground work of doctors and underground health care had very zealous and devoted allies among the owners of pharmacies in Radom. They selflessly supported the resistance movement, generously providing dressing materials, medicines, surgical instruments and money. Kamila Lagodzinska (M.Sc.), an owner of a pharmacy and a pharmaceutical depot on the Constitution Square, associated with the HA since 1940, deserves special distinction. Alongside her constant aid in the transfer of drugs, dressings and considerable cash donations, she also stored weapons, ammunition and underground press in her large cellars. The majority of pharmacy's personnel actively participated in the resistance movement, including paramedics: Stefania Berczowa, Irena Kozłowska and Zofia Sliwinska. They would send the surgical instruments necessary for field hospitals [15]. Halina Kasprzykowska (M.Sc.) paid with her life for her work in the resistance movement – she died in Oswiecim (Auschwitz) together with her son. Large pharmacy cellars were used for storing explosive materials and weapons. Pharmacy's resources were used to create a spare secret stor-

age of medicines and dressing materials in the building belonging to the School of Economics on Traugutta Street [16]. Resistance movement authorities also ordered the pharmacists to produce poisons and weapons necessary for fighting the enemy. This task was given mainly to a pharmacist Maria Zabicka (M.Sc.) [17].

Kazimiera Brusnicka (M.Sc.), Danuta Lotoczko (M.Sc.) and Teodozja Szarkowska (M.Sc.) were also active participants of the resistance movement in Radom [18]. They gave medicines, food and provided shelter to people persecuted by the Gestapo; they also financially and materially supported people exiled from their homes.

Jozefa Widawska (M.Sc.) was arrested by the Gestapo and deported to the concentration camp in Majdanek in 1943. In the face of a typhus epidemic she extorted camp's chief doctor's consent to organize a post, which included a hospital and hospital pharmacy. She produced various infusions there. In the spring of 1944 she was moved to the camp in Oswiecim and subsequently to Ravensbrück. She was freed by the Allies and returned to the country in 1945 [19]. Hospital pharmacist, Maria Ptaszynska (M.Sc.), paid for her conspiracy activities with imprisonment and serving time in a concentration camp in Oswiecim. She worked in the pharmacy of the Social Insurance Company [20]. When the Nazi occupation authorities imprisoned the Jewish population in a Radom ghetto, pharmacies hurried to help by providing medicines, dressing materials and food. During the Jews' uprising in Cracow, they also sent explosives.

Janina Skrzynska (M.Sc.), the owner of a pharmacy in Garbatka, corresponded in German between prisoners held in concentration camps in Oswiecim, Gross-Rosen, Buchenwald, Dachau and their families. She also sent packages and stored food. In her own words, she writes: *this occupation was to somehow soothe their severe misery. I think that the letters give them the power to survive and food packages allowed them to survive the hardships and give them will to live* [21].

In Kozienice, medicines and dressing materials were provided to the underground movement by Stanisława Wojciechowska's pharmacy [22].

In Pionki, Maria Dutkiewicz (M.Sc.) equipped a bunker-hospital in Kozienice with surgical instruments [23].

In the Zwolen region, Stanisława Jaglińska (M.Sc.) cooperated with the resistance. Aside from providing the partisans with medicines, she also supported financially and materially families of people imprisoned by the Gestapo [24]. Stanisława Nagrodkiwicz (M.Sc.) cooperated with the partisans from the Ilza region [25].

Moreover, all pharmacists and pharmacy owners willfully committed to employ the pharmacists exiled from Warsaw. A special section was formed in Częstochowa to manage funds obtained from voluntary collections and dues. This money was intended for pharmacists from Warsaw who settled in this area. Also, many pharmacists provided financial and material aid to their colleagues as their means allowed them. Beside pharmacy owners, their employees also participated in this action [26].

In Częstochowa, the pharmacy of Janina Stepkowska-Kozakiewicz (M.Sc.) cooperated with the resistance [27], while Alicja Biesiaga (M.Sc.) "Sroka" (Peasants' Battalions liaison) was involved in Radom [28]. Following the

Warsaw uprising, 150 pharmacists passed through Częstochowa only. Many of local pharmacists employed two or three persons in their pharmacies.

Warfare, terror inflicted by the occupant, severe fights and a large number of the wounded necessitated additional production of medicines and dressing materials, especially that the only production center in Warsaw was destroyed. In order to fill this gap, pharmacists from Częstochowa formed two factories for producing injectables. One of them worked to meet the needs of the pharmacy by which it was created and the other to supply all other pharmacies in the area. These factories contributed to maintaining drug supplies in pharmacies, which were indispensable for partisan troops (e.g. anti-tetanus injections) [29].

In this group, there were many women who paid for their conspirational activity with arrests, deportation to death camps, their own deaths and deaths of their families.

This selflessness and aid provided everywhere where needed despite constant threat is worth emphasizing and remembering.

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