

The last conscription, or the attitude of the professional staff of the Polish People's Army towards the alumni¹ of the Major Seminaries of the Clergy doing basic military service during the communist period in the late 1970s. Outline of issues

ABSTRACT

This article is an attempt to analyse the attitude of professional staff towards alumni doing basic military service during the communist period in the late 1970s. It describes the hardships of soldier's life, the application of military regulations, which in the case of seminarians were exceptionally strict. At the same time, it presents the methods that were used against the alumni in order to lead them to withdraw from the seminary. Above all, the author presents the massive propaganda conducted mainly by political officers of the Polish People's Army directed against the Catholic Church in Poland. At the same time, he presents the involvement in this process of the commanding staff, whose methods of dealing with the alumni may have led to a weakening of the authority of the army in society.

Keywords: People's Army of Poland, Church, officers, clerics

INTRODUCTION

Military service in the period of the People's Republic of Poland (PRL) was a common phenomenon, and was definitely part of the picture of the functioning of the Armed Forces of the People's Republic of Poland². The issues

¹ *Alumn* (Latin: *alumnus*) – a pupil or student at a seminary – secondary school level or higher education level. The name was introduced after the Council of Trent, which defined the way in which candidates for the priesthood were educated and brought up (encyclopaedia PWN <https://encyklopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/alumn;4007552.html> [accessed 5.06.2024]; A. Lesiński, *Służba wojskowa kleryków w PRL 1959-1980*, OBN, Olsztyn 2010, p. 48).

² The name Siły Zbrojne PRL (Armed Forces of the People's Republic of Poland) was the official name in force since July 1952. In documentation produced by the army of that time and in public space, the name People's Polish Army was used (the adjective "ludowe" mostly spelled with a capital letter, although in the initial period also with a small one). The communists tried

concerning the army of the time are very interesting from the perspective of researchers from various scientific fields. In spite of this, the subject matter in contemporary historiography is giving way to, for example, analyses of the repression apparatus in post-war Poland. Krzysztof Komorowski believes that there is still a lack – from a historian’s point of view – of perspective and distance, although at the same time, with the fall of communism, the Polish People’s Army (LWP) also ceased to function. Komorowski raises an extremely important issue, namely the approach to the issue itself, which shows different attitudes – from condemnatory to glorifying. This is due to the authors’ involvement and the variety of sources available. He also draws attention to the ‘ideological superstructure’ that is inevitable when studying the history of the LWP³.

The literature on the history of the LWP can be divided into those published before and after 1989. Recent years have brought greater, although still modest, interest in the LWP. The memory of it is still alive and arouses great emotion, as a significant part of the male population must have encountered it or successfully avoided this encounter. I would divide publications on the Armed Forces of the People’s Republic of Poland into memoirs and analytical ones on structures and selected mechanisms of functioning. The most popular books are those by General Józef Kuropieska, interesting from a historian’s point of view, as the author was also in professional military service during the Second Republic⁴. Recently, valuable publications have appeared by Jan Tomaszewski⁵, Jarosław Pałka⁶ and Tomasz Leszkowicz⁷. Additionally, it is worth noting the biography of one of the most important officers of the Polish

to emphasise the definitive break with pre-war tradition by stressing the social origins of the so-called reborn army. In this text I will use the name Polish People’s Army (LWP) interchangeably with the official nomenclature.

³ K. Komorowski, *Problemy badawcze Siły Zbrojnych RP-PRL*, [in:] *Wojsko w Polsce "Ludowej". Studies and materials of the IPN*, ed. R. Klementowski, J. Nowosielska-Sobel, P. Piotrowski, G. Strauchold, Wrocław 2014, p. 16.

⁴ J. Kuropieska, *Z powrotem w służbie*, Warsaw 1984; idem, *Nieprzewidziane przygody (Unforeseen Adventures)*, Kraków 1988; idem, *Od października do marca (From October to March)*, Warsaw 1994; idem, *Wspomnienia z lat 1956-1968, cz. 2: Od października do marca w siłach zbrojnych (From October to March in the Armed Forces)*, Warsaw 1994.

⁵ J. Tomaszewski, *Sowietyzacja Wojska Polskiego w latach 1943-1956 (Sovietisation of the Polish Army in 1943-1956)*, Wrocław 2012.

⁶ J. Pałka, *Polskie wojska operacyjne w Układzie Warszawskim*, Warsaw 2022.

⁷ T. Leszkowicz, *Spadkobiercy Mieszka, Kościuszko i Świerczewskiego. Ludowe Wojsko Polskie jako instytucja polityki pamięci historycznej*, Warsaw 2022.

People's Army, General Wojciech Jaruzelski, written by Lech Kowalski⁸. Moreover, the history of the Armed Forces of the People's Republic of Poland is covered in many academic journals in the country and in post-conference publications⁹. The specificity of the sources concerning the LWP requires the historian to be cautious in their interpretation, as they were mostly produced by the military¹⁰. The military service of the alumni of the Major Seminaries (WSD) has also been the subject of several studies, both academic¹¹, and those of a memoir nature, written by priests¹², who served it.

⁸ L. Kowalski, *Jaruzelski. Generał ze skazką. Biografia wojskowa generała armii Wojciecha Jaruzelskiego*, Poznań 2012.

⁹ See *Wojsko w Polsce "Ludowej"*. *Studia i materiały IPN*, ed. R. Klementowski, J. Nowosielska-Sobel, P. Piotrowski, G. Strauchold, Wrocław 2014; D. Jarosz, G. Miernik, *Conscription, conscription "Prussian discipline", desertions. Introduction to research on the social history of military service in Stalinist Poland (1950-1955)*, "Poland 1944/45-1989. Studies and Materials" 2018, XVI; J.M. Ruszar, *Red spiders. A diary of an LWP soldier*, ed. K. Dworaczek, J. Jędrzyak, Warsaw 2017; K. Kałuża, *Baczność kocio! Czyli o tym jak to w wojsku bywało*, Brzezia Łąka 2020; L. Kowalski, *Generałowie*, Warsaw 1992; K. Kazmierska, J. Pałka, *Żołnierze Ludowego Wojska Polskiego. Oral histories*, Łódź 2018; E. Stefaniak, *Byłem oficerem politycznym LWP*, Toruń 2007; J. Kajetanowicz, *Polskie wojska lądowe w latach 1945-1960. Skład bojowy, struktury organizacyjne, uzbrojenie*, Toruń 2005; D. Kozerański, *Wyższe szkolnictwo wojskowe w Polsce w latach 1947-1967*, Warsaw 2005; E.J. Nalepa, *Oficerowie armii radzieckiej w Wojsku Polskim 1943-1968*, Warsaw 1995; T. Pióro, *Armia ze skazką. In the Polish Army 1945-1968 (memoirs and reflections)*, Warsaw 1994.

¹⁰ "Undoubtedly, intuition will be important here, which, in the conditions of divergent assessments, sources of doubtful value or their absence for various reasons (e.g. destruction of the files of the Military Internal Service and part of the files of the Ministry of Justice, unavailability of Soviet archives) will make it possible to put forward research hypotheses for demonstration in the conjectural mode. The more we are able to gather and verify sources to justify the hypothesis put forward, the more value it acquires as a scientific theorem" (K. Komorowski, *Refleksja metodologiczna do studiów nad LWP*, "Przegląd Historyczno-Wojskowy" 2011, 12 (63)/1, p. 132).

¹¹ See A. Lesiński, *Służba wojskowa kleryków...*, op. cit.; A. Czwolęk, *Służba wojskowa alumnów w PRL (na przykładzie 54. Szkolnego Batalionu Ratownictwa Terenowego w Bartoszycach)*, „Klio” 2011, t. 18, no. 3; P. Larysz, *Służba wojskowa alumnów Śląskiego Seminarium Duchownego w latach 1959-1978*, Katowice 2009; J. Myszor, *Służba wojskowa alumnów Wyższego Śląskiego Seminarium Duchownego w Krakowie w latach 1959-1979*, [w:] *Wojskowa służba śląskich duchownych w latach 1918-1980*, ed. Z. Kapała, J. Myszor, Katowice 1999; *Mundur i sutanna*, ed. S. Pawłowski, Kraków 1998; P. Piotrowski, *Służba wojskowa kleryków na przykładzie 56. Batalionu Ratownictwa Terenowego w Brzegu (1966-1980)*, [in:] *Represje wobec Kościoła katolickiego na Dolnym Śląsku i Opolszczyźnie 1945-1989*, eds. S.A. Bogaczewicz, S. Krzyż. Bogaczewicz, S. Krzyżanowska, Wrocław 2004 (series „Studies and Materials”, vol. 4).

¹² See S. Gabański, *Well! Zapiski kleryka-żołnierza (1965-1967)*, introduction and ed. J. Marecki, Kraków 2013; A. Setlak, *Służba wojskowa w PRL i jej ocena w wypowiedziach alumnów i kapłanów rezerwistów. A historical and sociological study on the example of Bartoszyce*, Olsztyn 1995; J. Zając, *Mundur zamiast sutanny*, Kraków 2019; K. Brzyski, *Sutanna i mundur. Zapiski alumna wyrwanego z Seminarium Przemyskiego w latach 1967-1969*, Rzeszów 2023; M. Chorążki, S. Romański-Cebula, *Służba wojskowa kleryków – żołnierzy jednostki wojskowej 4446 w Brzegu w świetle relacji kapłanów z diecezji krakowskiej irocławskiej (analiza pamięci świadków –*

The conscription of seminarian alumni into military service was a breach of the agreement concluded between the government and the Polish Episcopate on 14 April 1950¹³. The agreement stipulated that young men preparing for the priesthood would not be called up for compulsory military service. Deferments of military service were to be applied to them. Upon graduation from the WSD, they were to be automatically transferred to the reserve¹⁴. Already in 1958, at a meeting of the Joint Commission, the government side indicated that the arrangements on the issue should be changed. A change in the procedures for issuing certificates for alumni called up for compulsory military service was suggested. The Office for Religious Affairs (UdsW) drafted a regulation in which the Provincial Offices for Religious Affairs (WUdsW) were to be responsible for issuing documents deferring clerics' military appointment. The Church was thus deprived of this prerogative. The Communists remained adamant on this issue, so in the spring of 1959, alumni were summoned to appear before medical commissions. This was due to the new law regulating compulsory military service, which made no mention of a concessionary tariff for WSD students. Thus, alumni were periodically called up for compulsory military service from 1959¹⁵. Every year, until 1980, seminarians were called up for compulsory military service to various military units throughout the country. Until 1964, they were called up separately to various units around the country, and then they were conscripted into so-called clerical units, which functioned from 1965 to 1980. The suspension of the conscription of WSD alumni was connected with the first pilgrimage of John Paul II to the country and social tensions connected with the economic crisis¹⁶. According to Fr Alfred Setlak's estimates, by the end of

wybrane aspekty), „Wrocławski Rocznik Historii Mówionej” 2020, r. 10; J. Janowski, *Alumni-żołnierze. Elements of seminary formation in the consciousness of alumni-soldiers based on the analysis of personal documents*, Świdnica 2007.

¹³ Dz.U. 1950, no. 6, item 46, Act of 4 February 1950 on Universal Military Obligation. This law did not provide for an exemption from compulsory military service for clerics, so the Episcopate had to reach an agreement with the communists. For more see A. Dudek, R. Gryz, *Komuniści i Kościół w Polsce (1945-1989)*, Kraków 2006.

¹⁴ A. Lesiński, *Wojskowa służba alumnów w PRL*, „Czasy Nowożytnie” 1999, vol. VI, pp. 323-324.

¹⁵ A. Czwołek, *Służba wojskowa alumnów w PRL...*, op. cit., p. 104, Dz.U. 1959, no. 14, item 75, Act of 30 January 1959 on Universal Military Obligation. The first conscription of 72 WSD alumni took place in 1955, which was a clear breach of the agreement between the communists and the Polish Episcopate. According to Fr Alfred Setlak, this was to probe the reaction of individual diocesan bishops and the faithful. As this was not met with much protest, it was decided to continue the process; see: M. Chorążki, S. Romański-Cebula, *Służba wojskowa kleryków...*, op. cit., p. 127; A. Setlak, *Służba alumnów WSD w PRL...*, op. cit., pp. 20-23.

¹⁶ M. Chorążki, S. Romanski-Cebula, *Służba wojskowa kleryków...*, op. cit., p. 127.

1979, 2726 WSD seminarians from various dioceses in the country had been called up¹⁷. The number of alumni called up for basic military service varied from diocese to diocese¹⁸. The largest number of alumni was conscripted in 1966-1969, including as many as 250 in the millennium year¹⁹.

Undoubtedly, this was a special period for young men on their way to the priesthood. As mentioned earlier, many memoirs have recently been published of mature priests whose theological studies were disrupted by compulsory military service. The last chord of this adventure was the awarding of officer's degrees by the President of the Republic of Poland to priests who had done their compulsory military service during the communist period²⁰. However, it is worth looking at this period through the prism of the professional cadres who had to live up to the task received from their superiors.

“POLITICAL AND EDUCATIONAL WORK”

As mentioned earlier, from 1965 alumni doing basic military service were sent to special military units²¹. As Fr Andrzej Lesinski rightly points out, these units did little in the way of national defence tasks, as the communists' intentions were clear. The two-year service of the alumni was to have a tangible effect in terms of their resignation from continuing their theological studies²². From the moment of conscription, the command made

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 127; A. Setlak, *The service of WSD alumni in the People's Republic of Poland...*, pp. 18-31.

¹⁸ “[...] In the first instance, the conscription of alumni was carried out in those seminaries to which the ecclesiastical and seminary authorities did not allow lay visitors, and in those dioceses in which the

Ordinaries were considered disloyal to the state authorities”; J. Marecki, *Katolicy polscy pod rządami komunistów*, [in:] S. Gabański, *Dobrze! Zapiski klero-żołnierza...*, op. cit., p. 30.

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 27.

²⁰ See MON website, <https://www.gov.pl/web/obrona-narodowa/patenty-oficerskie-dla-ksiezy-3> [accessed 5.06.2024].

²¹ “[...] They were established in Gdańsk, Opole and Szczecin-Podjuchy. A year later, the clerical company from Gdańsk was moved to Bartoszyce, and the company from Opole to Brzeg. From then on, by order of the Chief of the General Staff of the Polish Army, the clerics performed their military service exclusively in specially assigned subdivisions. These included three independent field rescue battalions: 54th School Field Rescue Battalion in Bartoszyce, 55th School Field Rescue Battalion in Szczecin-Podjuchy and 56th School Field Rescue Battalion in Brzeg. [...]” (quoted from: the website Przystanek historia <https://przystanekhistoria.pl/pa2/teksty/82063,Jerzy-Popieluszko-kleryk-i-zolnierz.html> [accessed 5.06.2024]; P. Piotrowski, *Służba wojskowa jako forma represji politycznej w Ludowym Wojsku Polskim*, [in:] *Inteligentna forma internowania. Exercises and Appointments to the People's Army of Poland as a Form of Repression after 13 December 1981*, ed. G. Majchrzak, Warsaw 2016, p. 37).

²² A. Lesinski, *Służba wojskowa kleryków...*, op. cit., pp. 79-80.

a characterisation of the alumni in terms of their social background and their motivation in entering the WSD. In the autumn of 1978, 19 seminarians from five different seminaries were conscripted into the 58th Field Rescue School Battalion. There is no doubt in the archival documents produced by the LWP that the alumni knew the hidden purpose of their appointment to do basic military service²³. It is interesting to note that they were surrounded by so-called ‘soldier activists’ who were tasked with informing the professional cadre about the behaviour of each of them. The main task of the ‘activist-informants’ was to persuade the clerics as effectively as possible to continue their studies in the seminary, which is why the young conscripts did not trust them. “[...] Distrust also applied to squad leaders, professional cadres and, in particular, to political officers, about whom it was expressed that they received a special bonus for every alumna who resigned from further studies at the seminaries”²⁴. After the first year of service, 9 alumni were disciplined, mainly for offences related to non-compliance with military regulations. At the same time, the same number of seminarians met the criteria for receiving the badge “Model Soldier”²⁵. Not without influence on the attitudes of the alumni in this period was the election of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła as Pope, about which they spoke loudly²⁶. After the first hard year of service, when it was clear that the main task, i.e. discouraging conscripts from further theological studies, had not been accomplished, relations with the professional cadre and the so-called “soldier asset” deteriorated²⁷.

²³ Central Military Archives – Military Historical Bureau (hereafter: CAW-WBH), Ministry of National Defence (hereafter: MON), Main Political Board of the Polish Army (hereafter: GZP WP), ref. 380/92/1994, Report on political and educational work with the soldier-alumni of the 54th School Terrain Rescue Battalion in the period 1978/79, k. 1.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ “[...] That a Pole became Pope is an unprecedented event in our history. His activity will bring many benefits to Poland. It is very good that the episcopate came to an agreement with the government and we were allowed to meet the Pope [...]”; (CAW-WBH, MON, GZP WP), sign. 380/92/1994, Report on political-educational work with the soldier-alumni of the 54th Field Rescue School Battalion in the period 1978/79, k. 4.

²⁷ CAW-WBH, MON, GZP WP, ref. 380/92/1994, Report on political and educational work with the alumni soldiers of the 56th School Field Rescue Battalion in the period 1978/79, k. 6. “[...] on 21 January, while watching the evening journal where silence is obligatory, an alumnus [...] was punched in the face by an activist soldier [...] allegedly disturbed by his conversation. Similar hostility towards the clerics is manifested by an activist soldier [...] from the same platoon and company. Anyway, the entire 3rd company is supposed to be clearly anti-clerical in character. [...]”; CAW-WBH, MON, GZP WP, sygn. 380/92/1994, Report on the meeting of chaplains Lt. Col. Emil Dybek and Maj. Stanisław Kaźmierczak with alumni-soldiers in Bartoszyce, Bydgoszcz 11 II 1980, k. 110.

Over a two-year period, documents were drawn up on 'political and educational' work. These contained detailed information on the service of the alumni. Let us therefore look at a sample report from a so-called clerical unit. In October 1977, 62 seminarians from 11 WSD²⁸ were enlisted in the 56th Field Rescue School Battalion. Five of them were dismissed due to health reasons, another three on the recommendation of their higher superiors, one of them resigned from his theological studies and joined the Higher Artillery Officer School in Toruń. One of the most important elements of the work of the political officers was the characterisation of the seminarians in terms of their social background, which was to provide a platform for further work to ultimately lead to their resignation from the seminary. 37 seminarians came from working-class families, 17 from peasant families, 8 from intelligentsia²⁹. The command considered as a positive trend the shifting of the centre of gravity towards a worker background³⁰. A characteristic method of working with newly conscripted soldiers was the interviews they had with their commanders – usually company commanders – in the first few days. In very many cases, the element of stress and the shock caused by the new reality caused openness and honesty on the part of the alumni³¹. On the basis of the interviews, the following motives for joining the WSD were indicated: 30 per cent took their parents' opinion into account, 20 per cent paid attention to the very good material conditions of the priests, the same number pointed to a vocation, about 20 per cent argued their decisions with the lack of opportunities to get into university. According to their superiors, all conscripted clerics had a negative attitude towards military service. This sentiment was compounded by the fact of selective conscription to the army³².

Reports compiled by political officers divide the clerical service period into two important stages. The first year of service, when the soldier-

²⁸ Ibidem, Report on two years of political and educational activities with the soldier-alumni of the 56th Field Rescue School Battalion, k. 10.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 11.

³⁰ Presumably, at the stage of the selection committees, efforts were made to qualify for service those alumni whose roots could help to form the 'right' attitudes.

³¹ "[...] seminarians are summoned for interviews by officers, which have the character of an interview. They are asked questions about life in the seminary, the role of superiors, professors, etc. [...]"; CAW-WBH, MON, GZP WP, sygn. 380/92/1994, Report on the meeting of chaplains Lt. Col. Emil Dybek and Maj. Stanisław Kaźmierczak with alumni-soldiers in Bartoszyce, Bydgoszcz 11 II 1980, k. 111.

³² CAW-WBH, MON, GZP WP, sign. 380/92/1994, Report on political and educational work with the soldiers-alumni of the 56th School Field Rescue Battalion in the period 1978/79, k. 11.

alumni were able to succumb to the command staff, and the second year, when there was a breakdown in discipline³³. “[...] In the second year of service, a significant reduction in their service and social commitment and discipline was observed. This is evidenced, inter alia, by an increase in the number of disciplinary punishment of soldier-alumni (from nine in the first year of service to 15 in the second year) and the acquisition of only 12 ‘WŻ’ [Model Soldier – P.O.] badges”³⁴. The report blamed this state of affairs on priests who met regularly with soldier alumni. Unusually, the form of visits by ‘clergy-supervisors’ was changing as it was decided to hold clerics accountable for their attitudes and activities in the military unit³⁵. The officer cadre associated this type of behaviour with John Paul II's pilgrimage to the country. At the time of their release to the reserves, the seminarians were taken to the railway station according to the train schedule in small groups and only at this point were the documents issued. For the most part, the seminarians returned to their parish for a thanksgiving service organised by local priests³⁶. The visit of the Polish Pope to the country was a watershed moment, as the alumni doubted that it could ever happen, while at the same time they pinned great hopes on it³⁷.

Another interesting issue is the activities of military chaplains who tried to influence clerics doing basic military service. They were not trusted because the creation of the General Deanery of the Polish Army was an attempt to preserve the Catholic military ministry, but – as it turned out – under the control of the communists³⁸. “[...] There was also an apparent lack of trust

³³ Analysing the reports from the various units in which seminarians served, the same mechanism can be observed. If there were resignations from the seminary, etc., they generally occurred during the first year of service.

³⁴ CAW-WBH, MON, GZP WP, sign. 380/92/1994, Report on political and educational work with the soldiers-alumni of the 56th School Field Rescue Battalion in the period 1978/79, k. 12.

³⁵ Ibidem.

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 13.

³⁷ Ibidem, p. 14. “[...] The course of the visit, and above all the attitude to the authorities of the church ceremonies associated with it, re-evaluated to a considerable extent the views of the soldier-alumni on the problems related to the religious policy of the state. It made them aware of the far-reaching religious tolerance in our country and of the consistent stance of the authorities on these issues”; CAW-WBH, MON, GZP WP, sign. 380/92/1994, Report on political and educational work with the soldier-alumni of the 56th Field Rescue School Battalion in the period 1978/79, k. 15.

³⁸ See more M. Ceglarek, *Generalny Dziekanat Wojska Polskiego (1945-1989) aspekt historyczno-prawny*, „Studia Sandomierskie” 2011, no. 2(18); P. Kaczmarek, *Generalny Dziekanat Wojska Polskiego w latach 1945-1964*, „Rocznik Archiwalno-Historyczny Centralnego Archiwum Wojskowego” 2010, no. 3; P. Piontek, M. Wesołowski, *Generalny Dziekanat Wojska Polskiego w latach 1945-1989*, Warsaw 2006.

in military chaplains, who, in conversations among themselves, were described by these soldiers as clergymen 'at the service of the communists' because they receive emoluments from them"³⁹. The antagonisms prevailing between civilian and military chaplains were decided to be exploited in further training practice, so in the proposals made to improve the quality of ideological influence, a demand was made for military chaplains to be more involved in direct work with the alumni⁴⁰.

As a separate matter, during basic service, in addition to activities resulting from the training programme directly related to communist agitation, indirect activities were organised in the form of 'work for the national economy and the Ministry of Defence'. Alumni soldiers were engaged in construction work on various facilities belonging to the Ministry of Defence. Traditionally, they participated in heavy harvest work, as well as in the production of concrete elements and all sorts of earthworks⁴¹. "Cultural and educational activities" concealed far more variety. Film screenings, going to theatre performances, excursions and competitions were organised. The excursions were mainly aimed at showing the economic and cultural achievements of the People's Republic of Poland. During their two years of military service, clerics usually took part in historical and sports competitions⁴². Meetings with veterans, political activists and journalists were also organised to prove the possibilities of freedom of speech and free expression⁴³.

The quintessential feature of the clerics' two-year stay in military units was the very strong communist indoctrination, which was based on a very large number of political classes. Alumni were reluctant to take part in them and complained about the excessive number of hours in this area⁴⁴. The commanders of the various military units in which clerics served had to indicate at least small successes in the ideological sphere in the reports and characteristics of individual soldier-alumni. Although it was stated that the attitude of all clerics towards the state and the authorities was negative, it was

³⁹ CAW-WBH, MON, GZP WP, sign. 380/92/1994, Report on political and educational work with the soldiers-alumni of the 56th School Field Rescue Battalion in the period 1978/79, k. 17.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 18.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, appendix 1, Settlement of work for the national economy and the Ministry of Defence, p. 19.

⁴² *Ibidem*, appendix 2, Summary of completed cultural and educational projects at the 56th Field Rescue Training Battalion for the period October 1977 to October 1979, k. 20.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 22.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, Characteristics of alumni soldiers serving [in] the 54th sbprt for 1979, k. 30.

noted that after a year of classes they were managing to correct these views somewhat⁴⁵. “[...] Soldier alumni take a keen interest in state policy towards the Church. While in the first period the main blame for the bad relations was placed on the state, after a year of military service these attitudes have changed to the extent that these soldiers also see the fault of the Church and some clerical leaders in the matter of regulating state-church relations...”⁴⁶. An internal classification of the most troublesome alumni was also carried out, taking into account the dioceses from which they came. In the period in question, the clerics of the Przemyśl WSD caused by far the most educational problems. They openly expressed their unwillingness to perform military service, claimed that they were forced into it, so they declared a minimum of effort on their part⁴⁷. Commanders saw the most unruly clerics as informal leaders who encouraged not only their fellow alumni, but also other soldiers to pray together. Individually, religious practices consisting of evening or morning prayer in the soldiers' hall were allowed, while joint celebrations were immediately discontinued. More attention was paid to outward signs of religiosity that could influence other conscripts. I am referring here to making the sign of the cross before meals in the canteen and attempts to pin miniature crosses to the lapels of the exit uniforms⁴⁸.

The soldier-alumni were not without external support. The effects of this support were noticeable by the superiors, because after meetings of the seminarians with, for example, the pastoralists, the command perceived a kind of ignorance of orders, as well as reluctance and sluggishness, especially in the matter of the so-called cultural and educational work⁴⁹. A significant number of seminarians from the Przemyśl WSD serving in the late 1970s were not without support from the diocese. Amongst others, Bishop Ignacy Tokarczuk, the rector and vice-rector of the Seminary, as well as colleagues from the older years, visited their alumni. The reports noted: “[...] It is significant that, despite the considerable distance, representatives from the Przemyśl WSD visited most often”⁵⁰. Political officers noted a strong

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 32.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 33.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 34.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 35. In the plans for developing the distribution of clerics to particular units, the principle of “[...] extraterritoriality in relation to the localities where they were studying in the seminaries and not to direct them to towns where there are larger clerical centres” was

emphasis on the part of the Church to consolidate the entire community of alumni doing military service. The informal directives that seminarians received before conscription included compulsory prayer and boycotting cultural and educational work offered by military superiors⁵¹. The characteristics of individual clerics were essentially a collective portrait of a particular WSD, as the conscripted clerics stuck together, especially during the initial period of military service. Using the example of the 54th School Battalion Terrain Rescue, we can observe that the group that caused the greatest disciplinary and educational problems were the alumni of the WSD in Przemyśl. "[...] [They] are the initiators of prayers. Their religiosity is close to fanaticism..."⁵².

The late 1970s saw the decline of the format of calling up alumni for basic military service. As I mentioned earlier, the nature of the military units to which they were called up gave a lot of flexibility to commanders in organising their time both during and after service. Analysing the reporting documents, it is clear that political officers were more involved in alumni activities than platoon commanders. This is probably due to the fact that one was held accountable for discipline, while the other was held accountable for political and educational activities, which, from the level of the military district command, were far more important.

PROFESSIONAL STAFF TO ALUMNI

From an analysis of documents produced by the WP GZP, it is clear that the professional cadres approached the soldier-alumni with varying degrees of commitment. At this point, it is worth looking at the structure of the Field Rescue Battalions and their staffing. It consisted of 25 officers, 1 ensign, 24 professional non-commissioned officers, 27 non-commissioned officers doing their basic military service and 348 privates. The actual state of affairs differed from the so-called statute, as there was a shortage of professional non-commissioned officers and the number of conscripted soldiers was changing. In addition to the command and staff, the battalion consisted of a political section, three companies and a transport and economic platoon.

adhered to; CAW-WBH, MON, GZP WP, sygn. 266/91/99, MON guidelines for OW commanders of 19 V 1962, k. 80-81.

⁵¹ CAW-WBH, MON, GZP WP, sign. 380/92/1994, Report on political and educational work with the soldiers-alumni of the 56th School Field Rescue Battalion in the period 1978/79, k. 36.

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 37.

Each company had five officers and about a hundred privates⁵³. Professional cadres were subjected to scrutiny along so-called military and political lines conducted by the WP GZP. As an example, I will use a note of an inspection of party-political work in the 54th sbrt in Bartoszyce, carried out at the end of 1979, thus summing up the period of two years of service of the alumni. The inspection was carried out by a team of senior officers from the GZP WP. The staff of the battalion consisted of eighteen officers, six of them political, five ensigns, one of them political, in addition to twelve professional non-commissioned officers, and 27 non-commissioned officers of basic military service. The total number of privates was 201, of which “activist soldiers” – 114, first-year alumni – 68 and second-year alumni – 19⁵⁴. In the initial part of the document, the inspecting officers did not notice any major negligence both in the economic and economic issues, as well as in the observance of the regulations and military order⁵⁵.

The characteristics of the problems with alumni are very similar in all the units to which alumni were sent. In the inspection documentation, there is repeated information about a phenomenon that was at work among the seminarians (it was not a “wave” that was actually gaining momentum especially in the late 1970s), namely the assumption of informal leadership by alumni who were senior in service⁵⁶. “[...] Soldiers-alumni in their second year of service seek to take informal leadership of the newly enlisted. They make attempts to establish close contacts with them, give them advice, help and instruction, inspire them to organise collective prayers...”⁵⁷. Of course, the audit could not end with praise alone. The section on the evaluation of the command staff in the training process is extremely interesting. Officers of the WP GZP accused company and platoon commanders of a schematic style of operation, a low level of demandingness towards clerics and other soldiers. Serious irregularities were also found in the activities of the battalion command, specifically the commander and his deputy for political affairs. These officers did not properly supervise their subordinates with regard to the organisation of training, and if they did, it was ad hoc. There was a kind of

⁵³ CAW-WBH, MON, GZP WP, ref. 380/92/1994, Extract from the etat of the 54th School Terrain Rescue Battalion, no. 7/023, k. 8.

⁵⁴ Ibidem, Note on a party-political inspection conducted at the 54th sbrt in Bartoszyce from 3-8 XI 1971, k. 39.

⁵⁵ Ibidem, p. 40.

⁵⁶ Ibidem, p. 41.

⁵⁷ Ibidem.

passivity in the battalion both in command and in “party-political work”⁵⁸. In the inspection note, we have a picture of professional staff showing signs of professional burnout, which resulted in poor quality of instruction. In 85 per cent of the instructions for political classes were not given by an officer, but by an instructor from the political section. Professional staff were not sufficiently involved in analysing and assessing alumni sentiment. In addition, all available tools, such as civilian youth organisations, were not used. The battalion command did not show any initiative to diversify the training, especially the one with a political tinge⁵⁹. Additional neglect was in the social sphere. Shortage of hot water and underheating of the rooms, in which the clerics were accommodated was a common problem. Furthermore, the commission found many irregularities in the functioning of the health service⁶⁰.

The inspection team's memo sheds a lot of light on the issue of command staff's approach to their duties. The unequivocal finding of poor performance of duties must have resulted in personnel changes. These were the recommendations made by the audit chairman. Most comments and accusations were directed towards the deputy battalion commander for political affairs, who was mainly accused of being routine. Perhaps this was due to the fact that he had been in his post for a very long time, in this case 13 years. In addition, he was accused of a lack of knowledge of basic normative acts, particularly the guidelines produced by the WP GZP. The indoctrination of alumni required a huge commitment from officers – especially political officers – often going beyond their official duties. The search for new methods of influencing young clerical soldiers was indispensable in a changing political reality, something the deputy battalion commander for political affairs was certainly not doing. Similar accusations were levelled at the battalion commander in charge of organising the training process, who had also spent 13 years in post. The inspectors highlighted the fact that he had no higher education, that his requirements for subordinates were too low and that his organisational skills were insufficient. An element of supervision was the appointment of a re-inspection after the remarks had been removed⁶¹. Service

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 42.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 43.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 44.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 45.

fatigue and routine are confirmed by reports of alcohol abuse by professional cadres in the course of their official tasks, including activities with alumni⁶².

One of the ways in which the professional staff interacted with the WSD alumni was by collecting additional information about their immediate family, with a particular focus on their parents. Common ground was sought on which an appropriate narrative could be built. Information was used particularly during the first period of military service, during basic training. In the first instance, the focus was on the party affiliation of the parents. This was mainly about the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), followed by the United People's Party (ZSL) and the Democratic Party (SD)⁶³. In the information collected by the political officers, the position of the parents regarding their sons' studies at the WSD is also noted. "[...] Father Eugeniusz, 51, a member of the PZPR for 10-12 years, a farmer of about 4 ha, [...] was unhappy about his son going to the seminary..."⁶⁴. There were also situations where they decided to turn their dissatisfaction, especially fathers, into action, influencing a change in the child's decision. An example of a note that was preserved in the inspection documentation. "[...] Father Stanislaw, aged 50 – farmer, member of the ZSL, 2 terms member of parliament. President of the provincial board of ZBOWiD, awarded the Knight's Cross of the Order of Rebirth of Poland. The son was conscripted at his father's request. The provincial authorities intervened through the WK to conscript the aforementioned into the unit in Bartoszyce..."⁶⁵.

The role of the General Dean of the Polish Army in dealing with alumni-soldiers, which was a balancing act between ecclesiastical and civil authority for military chaplains, was mentioned earlier. It is interesting to read the report of Rev. Col. Julian Humenski – the General Dean of the Polish Army – from a meeting with seminarians in Bartoszyce in December 1979.

⁶² "[...] the battalion chief of staff conducting the exercise [...] acting at the same time as the battalion commander, accompanied by Major [...] currently serving in the capital OT regiment (former company commander in the 54th sbrt), non-commissioned officer in charge of records and the head of the soldiers' club, Chor. [...] consumed alcohol in the latter's flat" (CAW-WBH, MON, GZP WP, ref. 380/92/1994, Report of the POW commander of 17 III 1980 to the head of the GZP WP, k. 83-86.

⁶³ Ibidem, Note on the party-political control carried out in the 54th sbrt in Bartoszyce from 3-8 XI 1971, k. 45. It should be noted that the GZP WP developed a concept of a system of individual conversations between cadre and alumni "consisting of four stages that complement each other" (CAW-WBH, MON, GZP WP, 91/. 380/92/1994, Concept of individual interviews in the 54th sbrt, k. 80-82).

⁶⁴ Ibidem, p. 49.

⁶⁵ Ibidem, p. 50.

Alumni presented their observations in connection with their basic military service. Most problems concerned the granting of leave, which was used discretionarily, participation in religious services, and the ban on praying together in the evening. Professional cadres discredited the roles of chaplains in the army, which was expected to further lower morale⁶⁶. In the run-up to Christmas, clerical attendance at the Shepherd's Mass was a topical issue. "[...] Much criticism of the army and chaplains was had by local parish priest Adolf Setlak..."⁶⁷. The chaplains were accused of not defending the interests of the alumni, pointing out that they were passive and that they too rarely spoke to the battalion command on their issues. The Olsztyn bishop Józef Glemp also attended the meeting⁶⁸. Fr J. Humeński sent a written query on the issues bothering the seminarians, but most of the answers were laced with points from the military regulations, which could be freely interpreted⁶⁹.

The Church did not leave its clerics completely without help, and efforts were made, with the approval of the command, to organise meetings with clerical fathers and lecturers from the WSD. All such visits were given operational 'care' by the Military Internal Service (WSW). Special notes were prepared from them, in which the attitude of the alumni towards the professional staff and the chaplains is clearly visible. Despite the limited trust, the diocesan priests encouraged the seminarians to seek help in various matters precisely from the chaplains, who had a great capacity to influence the command. It is evident in these meetings that there was a great deal of distrust on the part of the seminary representatives, as several questions were required to be answered in writing by the alumni⁷⁰. The documentation was archived in the personal files of the later chaplains.

The military service of the alumni came to an end with the decision of the Ministry of Defence on 2 April 1980⁷¹ on their early release. "[...] [P]revious mood, joyful faces, as they already knew from collateral sources of their

⁶⁶ Ibidem, Report on the meeting between the Dean General of the WP and alumni soldiers in Bartoszyce on 22 and 23 December 1979, k. 52.

⁶⁷ Ibidem, p. 53.

⁶⁸ Ibidem, p. 54.

⁶⁹ Ibidem, Replies to questions by Col Humenski, k. 55-58.

⁷⁰ Ibidem, Note from a meeting of the alumni of the Olsztyn WSD with the tutor of the first year of this seminary, Fr Marian Banibula, on 17 II 1980, k. 60-61.

⁷¹ Ibidem, Order of the Minister of Defence No. Pf-3 of the Ministry of Defence of 2 April 1980 on the early dismissal from the army of non-commissioned officers and privates serving their basic military service in the 54th Training Field Rescue Battalion, k. 131.

early release..."⁷². Thus ended an experiment that was directed against the Catholic Church in Poland.

COMPLETION

The last chord of the military service of the WSD alumni was very dynamic due to the changing political situation in the country and in the world. Throughout their two-year service, they were subjected to political indoctrination and harassment from professional cadres as well as activist soldiers. Restrictions on their freedom of religious practice were to lead to their breakdown and, ultimately, their withdrawal from the seminary. The church authorities were aware of the actions of the communists and, as far as possible, tried to support the soldier-alumni by various means. In the course of time, it became clear to the communists that calling seminarians to do basic military service would not bring satisfactory results. This is also noticeable in the commitment of the professional cadres, who often approached their duties in a different way than their superiors and the officers from the GZP WP expected. I mentioned earlier the ambiguous purpose of the field rescue battalions, which also translated into the morale of the professional cadre. Within the officer corps, service in such units was not considered prestigious. Recent conscription, since the election of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła as Pope, has only sealed the failure of this project. Alumni housed in barracks were given an additional motivation, which manifested itself in greater internal unification than before. In addition, the support they received from the diocesan bishops and, above all, from the clerical fathers or the rectors of the WSD was invaluable. Over the years, a kind of primer on how to survive compulsory military service was also developed in the seminaries.

Priests who have done their military service still keep in touch with each other, despite belonging to different dioceses. Later, the military episode became an additional asset for priests who did not betray their own vocation during the communist era. At the same time, the communists' project against the Church was a failure. The parish priests of the parishes where the so-called "clerical units" were stationed also played an important role, as they tried to keep the spirits up of the young people, for whom the encounter with the hardships of military life could have been a shock. It is difficult to answer

⁷² Ibidem, Note by Rev. Col. Jan Mrugacz of 9 April 1980 of a meeting with soldier alumni in Bartoszyce, k. 103-104.

unequivocally today the question of whether, had it not been for the pressure of John Paul II and Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, the communists would have continued the conscription of seminarians into the army. Nevertheless, the Church and the alumni emerged victorious from this attempt.

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