

Was it Really a Blind Fate?

**Interwoven Lives of Witold Pilecki and Tomasz Serafiński
and
the Daring Efforts of Ludmiła Serafińska to Save Them Both
by
Elizabeth M. Zechenter, J.D., Ph.D.**

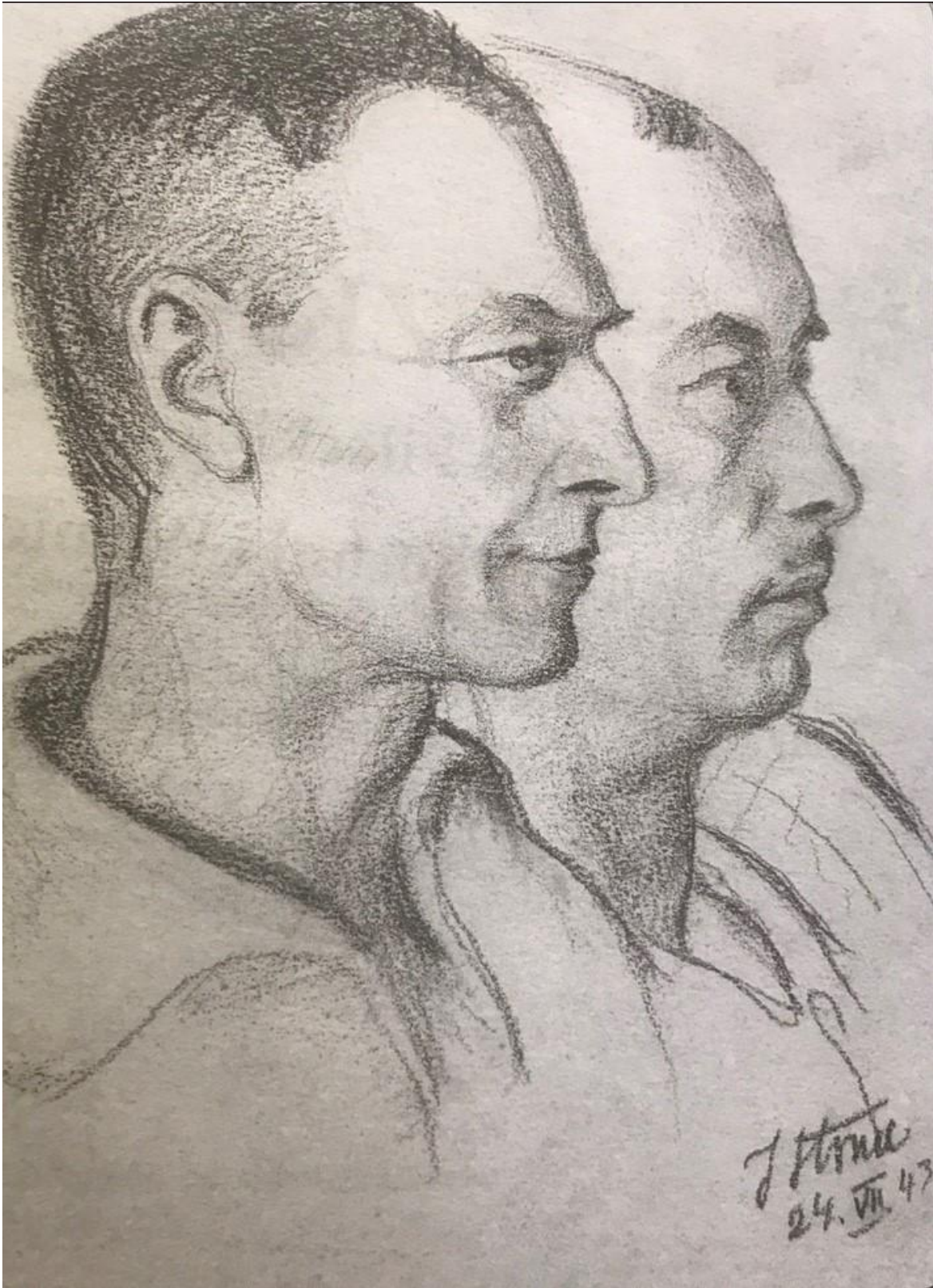
Published online

by

QUO VADIS

**Newsletter of the Kosciuszko Foundation Philadelphia Chapter, Special Edition, Issue
No. 20, October 2019.**

[https://mailchi.mp/1c27083fdc1f/the-kosciuszko-foundation-philadelphia-chapter-
newsletter-special-edition](https://mailchi.mp/1c27083fdc1f/the-kosciuszko-foundation-philadelphia-chapter-newsletter-special-edition)



Double portrait of Pilecki and Serafiński dated June 24, 1943 (Photo: Family archives)



Witold Pilecki and Tomasz Serafiński (Photo: Family archives)



Ludmiła Serafińska in front of Koryznówka, 1943 (Photo: Family archives)



Serafiński family – Tomasz and Ludmiła with daughters Maria and Beata before the war, in Koryznówka (Photo: Family archives)

I fondly remember my uncle Tomek or, in Polish, “wujciu Tomek” as I knew him, when he used to visit us in Krakow or when my parents took us to visit him at his country home, known as Koryznówka. I remember him as a gentle and soft-spoken man who told me and my siblings many fairytales about magical “krasnodudki” ¹ - stories I loved. I still remember that I used to sit on his lap and he would use his crutches to point out where various “krasnodudki” were hiding. My younger sister, however, was quite afraid of him. He was tall and slim, but he walked with difficulty using crutches. His hands were admittedly a bit scary – his long fingers were deformed and gnarly. My parents told us that our uncle had rheumatism; that is why he had trouble walking, that is why he used the crutches and that is why his hands were deformed. It was not until we were grown-up that we were told the truth about the man we knew as “uncle Tomek.” ²

My uncle Tomek was actually lieutenant Tomasz Serafiński (underground code name “Lis” and “Lisola”). During WWII he was active in the Polish underground and was the sub-commanding officer of the Nowy Wiśnicz region unit for the underground Polish Home Army (Armia Krajowa or AK) and the commanding officer of the outpost “Sum.” His wife Ludmiła (underground code name “Malwa”) was also active in the underground and was the commanding officer of the women medical aid platoon operating in the Nowy Wiśnicz area. Tomasz and Ludmiła Serafiński owned a small family estate called Koryznówka near the town of Nowy Wiśnicz, about an hour away from Krakow, comprising of a traditional Polish wooden manor home, horse and animal stables and barns, open fields, orchards, a lovely pond, tracts of old forest and a meandering stream.



Tomasz Serafiński, 1937 r.



Tomasz Serafiński before the war (Photos: Family archives)

Witold Pilecki was a Polish officer who is honored for his amazing action, namely agreeing to the Polish underground's order to allow himself to be captured by the Nazis in order to be sent to the Auschwitz concentration camp. The plan of the Polish underground was to assess and document the extent of the German atrocities committed in the concentration camps and use this evidence to alert Poland's Western Allies and spur them into action. All previous efforts by the Polish underground and the Polish government-in-exile to mobilize the Allies to provide aid fell on deaf ears. The Polish underground hoped that having solidly documented evidence of atrocities would be more persuasive to the Allies. The underground's idea was to place a Polish undercover officer in one of the German concentration camps, preferably in Auschwitz (known as "*KL Auschwitz*" or "*Konzentrationslager Auschwitz*"),³ by using the German mechanism of a "round-up." Since the fall of Poland in Autumn of 1939, German used to conduct random "round-ups" (*łapanka*) to capture unsuspected civilians from the streets of Warsaw and other Polish cities and villages. German lorries full of soldiers would close both ends of a selected street or village and Germans would capture all people on that street or area. Those captured civilians were sent either inside of the German Reich, to be used as slave labor in German factories, or were sent directly to the concentration camps. Pilecki agreed to undertake the mission of infiltrating concentration camp in Auschwitz, by allowing himself to be captured during one of these German round-ups of Polish civilians.

Like Tomasz Serafiński, Pilecki fought against the German invasion of Poland in September of 1939, and after the fall of Poland,⁴ became involved in the Polish underground. At some point in the Fall of 1939, Pilecki was living at the house of Dr. Helena Pawłowska, where previously my uncle, Tomasz Serafiński, was hiding after the fall of Warsaw. My uncle was wounded during the defense of Warsaw and after the fall of the city, stayed at Dr. Helena Pawłowska's house in Warsaw. When leaving Dr. Pawłowska's house, my uncle forgot some of his documents and Pilecki found them when he later arrived at Dr. Pawłowska's house. The evidence is unclear whether it was Pilecki's decision alone, or whether the Warsaw underground command confirmed that the documents belonging to Tomasz Serafiński can be used to create a false identity for Pilecki - because they all mistakenly assumed that true Tomasz Serafiński died in late September 1939 defending Warsaw. In any event, Pilecki, in need of a new underground identity and papers decided to take on the name and the identity of Tomasz Serafiński and obtained necessary identity documents in that name, including the so-called German *Kennkarte*. It was clearly a grave error to take on the identity of another living person and clearly an unintended mistake. That mistake and that decision had tragic and far-reaching consequences for many people later on.

Pilecki used the Serafiński name and identity when he allowed himself to be arrested and captured during the German "round-up" on the night of 21st of September 1940 in the part of Warsaw called Mokotów. He used that name when he was initially imprisoned by the Germans at the notorious Pawiak jail in Warsaw and when ultimately, he was sent by the Germans to the concentration camp in Auschwitz. He used that name during his entire time in Auschwitz and he used it even after his escape from Auschwitz in April 1943.

Once in Auschwitz, Witold Pilecki became prisoner No. 4859 and was registered in the camp as "Tomasz Serafiński" born in Bochnia in 1902, son of attorney Antoni Leonard Serafiński. He was known to all other prisoners as Tomasz Serafiński. Stanisław Gutkiewicz, another Auschwitz prisoner, made in 1942 a portrait of his fellow prisoner, whom he knew as Tomasz Serafiński. As one clearly can see, that portrait which is labeled, even today, as the portrait of Auschwitz prisoner "Tomasz Serafiński," actually portrays Witold Pilecki.⁵

While in Auschwitz, Pilecki devoted himself to documenting German atrocities and writing numerous reports for the Polish underground. The reports were smuggled out of the country and forwarded to the Allies in London⁶ and in the US. Pilecki co-organized an underground organization within the Auschwitz concentration camp.⁷ The idea was to organize trusted prisoners into "shelves" or "fives" - groups of five people who worked together, where the conspirators of each unit would only know the fellow prisoners in that unit. While such units were numerous, only a few key leaders, like Pilecki, knew of other units, all in order to avoid detection in the event of capture and torture of any single individual by the Germans. The units conducted many actions to help fellow prisoners, smuggling typhoid vaccines in and vaccinating prisoners, directing food meant for prisoners who already died to the living ones, destroying dangerous medical records that could send a prisoner to death, making injections that caused sudden fever and injecting them into prisoners who were scheduled to be transferred to other camps (and thus sending them to Auschwitz hospital instead), sabotaging German work plans, etc. Pilecki was very keen on developing plans to liberate the camp, or, at least, to liberate as many prisoners as possible. While the Polish underground was too weak to liberate the camp on its own - Auschwitz had its own military garrison and it was additionally surrounded by several large military German SS and Wehrmacht garrisons stationed in Krakow, Katowice, and Bielsko - Pilecki was hoping for Allied help. Sadly, the Allies ignored Polish appeals to provide weapons airdrops and air-support for the Polish underground. Pilecki grew more desperate and horrified when by mid-1942 and in early 1943, the "Final Solution to the Jewish Problem" - now fully embraced by the Nazis - resulted in the significant numbers of the transports of Polish Jews who were killed in the crematoria instantly upon arrival.⁸ Wanting to advocate more forcefully for an urgent military action to liberate Auschwitz, he and two other co-conspirators, hatched a detailed and careful escape plan, which was to take place on Easter night in April 1943. The plan worked, it was a rare example of a successful escape from Auschwitz.

After their escape from the Auschwitz concentration camp, Pilecki and his two co-conspirators Jan Redzej (Prisoner No. 5430, code name "Adam" using assumed name of Jan Retke) and Edward Ciesielski (Prisoner No. 12969, code name "Ewa"), decided to travel to city of Bochnia which is located only 110 km from Auschwitz (or, as they estimated, about 2-6 walking days while hiding and using forests and back roads) mainly because the co-conspirators⁹ had some family and underground contacts in Bochnia who could help to hide the escapees and connect them with the Warsaw headquarters of the Polish underground.¹⁰ Pilecki appeared to be still unaware of the fact that the real Tomasz Serafiński was alive, active in the underground and heading up the Nowy Wiśnicz unit of AK, only 7 km away from the town of Bochnia.

The escape from Auschwitz took place on the night of April 26/27, 1943 - it was Easter and the security was lessened due to the vacations of many guards. The three escapees slowly made their way to Bochnia, via Lipowiec, Alwernia, Tyniec, Poszyna, and Murowianka. Various heroic people along the way, risking their lives hid them, fed them, let them rest, and so forth. Once in Bochnia and safely hidden by Ed Zabawski's family - Mr. and Mrs. Obora - the escapees realized that they needed to make an urgent connection with the local AK commander and that is how Pilecki was set on his way to Koryznówka, to make a connection with the head of the local AK unit, namely with the real Tomasz Serafiński.

May 4th that year was a beautiful sunny day and Pilecki, led by Leon Wandasiewicz, from the local underground, was walking from Bochnia to Nowy Wiśnicz. The two other co-escapees remained hidden in Bochnia. Leon brought for Pilecki his own cleaned and ironed clothes. Pilecki felt relaxed and happy for the first time in a long time. The two men, avoiding public roads, were walking along the ancient long-forgotten dirt road (the so-called Hungarian tract dating to, at least, Roman times), now a barely visible dirt path winding over forests and hills connecting Bochnia to Nowy Wiśnicz. Leon was walking with his bike so he could ride back home as they were both assuming that Pilecki will from now be hidden in Nowy Wiśnicz.

In his 1945 Report, Pilecki described the situation as follows: ¹¹

“and then, out of curiosity, I asked Leon: and who is the commanding officer in Nowy Wiśnicz whom we are going to meet? Leon said just two words: Tomasz Serafiński. Name and surname. Two words. For others, probably normal words, but for me, these were enormously shocking words. What an amazing and astounding coincidence, a deeply strange coincidence. That commander had the name I took and used in Auschwitz. Under his name, I spent so many days in hell, and he did not know anything about it. And now this ancient road was taking me to the true owner of this name. Fate? Maybe. Blind fate? Even if it was fate, it was, for sure, not a blind fate.”

In the same report, Pilecki also described that while they were walking toward Koryznówka, Pilecki was reminiscing about his other strange connections to this region of the country. When he allowed himself to be captured during the German “round-up” in Warsaw in 1940, Pilecki only knew the name, birth date and the name of Tomasz Serafiński's father. He also knew that Tomasz Serafiński's father was an attorney and that he was elected and served as the mayor of the city Bochnia. But he did not have the name of Tomasz's mother - Kamila Zechenter - or any other family details, so he made them up.

In 1941, the Auschwitz Gestapo unit (Politische Abteilung) began to verify prisoners' records, to check if prisoners were indeed listed under their true names. To do so, they would send out a request for original birth records. Pilecki knew that once the local parish church in Bochnia receives such order, they would likely send the true baptismal record of the real Tomasz Serafiński, and, that he, Pilecki will be found out. So, through various underground contacts,

Zygmunt Ważyński, member of the Polish underground, traveled to Bochnia to see Father Dr. Władysław Kuc, rector (proboszcz) of the Bochnia parish. It was not an easy task to convince Father Kuc, who knew the real Tomasz Serafiński, that this was indeed a legitimate request being made by the Warsaw underground for valid reasons, and not some German provocation. In the end, altered birth records were indeed provided to Auschwitz with the name of true mother of the real Tomasz Serafiński - Kamila Zechenter - omitted. The original baptismal records of the real Tomasz Serafiński still exist, but the altered copies sent to Auschwitz appear to be lost. It was at that time when my uncle, the real Tomasz Serafiński had the first inkling that someone from the Polish underground, who was imprisoned at Auschwitz, may have been using his name and his identity, as Father Kuc contacted the real Tomasz Serafiński and informed him about the request he received with regards to baptismal records. But Tomasz Serafiński did not know who it was and why was this done.



Ludmiła Serafińska before the war



Ludmiła and Tomasz Serafińscy before the war

(Photos: Family archives)



Pilecki in front of Koryznówka, 1943 (Photo: Family archives)

Koryznówka lies outside of the main town of Nowy Wiśnicz and is surrounded by forests on one side. Pilecki and his guide, Leon Wandasiewicz, used the cover of the forest to make their way to the house and arrived at the back door to avoid detection. Ludmiła Serafińska, Tomasz's wife, also active in the underground, opened the door. She knew Leon Wandasiewicz, so she trusted that the man whom Leon brought was trustworthy too and let them in.

Pilecki introduced himself to my aunt in the following way: *"I am Witold Pilecki, an escapee from Auschwitz, where I used the name of Tomasz Serafiński for the last three years. I came to return to him his name, which, I hope, I did not belittle during my three years in the concentration camp."*

My uncle, the real Tomasz Serafiński, was at that time in another place, called Łapczyca, working with another AK unit in the region. When he arrived home, the two men met for the first time. After an initial exchange, they embraced, and with that strong hug, their friendship started. My uncle decided to hide Pilecki at Koryznówka. While surrounded by some trees and bushes even from the front, the main house itself was simply too visible and too many people

came by during the day, but there were various barns on the property. Pilecki was safely hidden away from the prying eyes in a large barn surrounded by an orchard and overlooking a small pond. Pilecki stayed in Koryznówka for over three and half months during which time the two men became very close. Two other escapees traveling with Pilecki were placed with other trusted families that Tomasz and Ludmiła knew.



Koryznówka today (Photo: author)



Barn at Koryznówka where Pilecki was hidden (Photo: author)

At the time, there was a lot of confusion as to whether Pilecki and his co-escapees were actually working for the Polish underground or whether they were German spies and provocateurs instead. My uncle believed Pilecki and in his story because the initial conversation revealed that both men fought during the 1939 campaign and defended Warsaw, that they both hid at Dr. Pawłowska's house where Pilecki found Serafiński's lost documents, and Pilecki was able to describe the actual documents lost by Serafiński, a detail that would have not been known to anyone else. My uncle was satisfied that Pilecki told the truth about his escape and about his Auschwitz mission.

Not all other local AK units were convinced, however, and Major Zygmunt Szydek (code name "Wiatr") believed that all three escapees were likely Nazi spies. Without warning my uncle, he alerted AK headquarters in Krakow as well as other local AK units with whom Tomasz Serafiński was in close collaboration. The AK headquarters in Krakow issued an order for Tomasz Serafiński to break all contacts with Pilecki and his two co-escapees, an order which Tomasz Serafiński refused to carry out.

Unable to count on his AK contacts after that refusal, Tomasz and Ludmiła Serafiński, used their personal connection to successfully hide Jan Redzej with their friends, while personally hiding Pilecki at their own home in Koryznówka. Edward Ciesielski remained hidden with the trusted Obora family in Bochnia. As a result of my uncle's refusal to obey Krakow's order, Tomasz Serafiński was in serious trouble with the AK headquarters, well after Pilecki reached Warsaw

and Warsaw's main command confirmed Pilecki's bona fides and confirmed the truth about his Auschwitz mission.

While at Koryznówka, Pilecki was cared for with loving attention and slowly regained his weight, his strength, and his health, while both men became deep friends. They had much in common. Both came from patriotic families where Polish traditions and culture were cherished and preserved during 123 years of Poland's partition. Both families had several family members who took part in various national uprisings, whose family members were exiled to Siberia and whose members carried on patriotic work over generations. Just to mention a few, Pilecki's grandfather - Józef Pilecki - took part in the January uprising of 1863 and so did Serafiński's grandfather - Teodor Zechenter.¹²

Both Witold and Tomasz fought for Polish independence not only during the German invasion of Poland in September 1939 but at the other wars for Polish independence as well. Both men served during the war against the Soviets in 1920, and, in addition, Pilecki served during the 1919 offensive while Serafiński fought at the III Silesian Uprising in 1921.¹³ Both men were decorated for their bravery several times. In fact, both of them volunteered to join the Polish army, before they even finished their high-schools, and both obtained their high-school graduation diplomas only after their return from these wars to win Poland's independence.



Young Tomasz Serafiński in military uniforms (Photos: Family archives)

To their surprise, they found out that they both used to be students at Poznań University (they both obtained agricultural engineering degrees), both were interested in Polish history and both loved music and art. Both men had military schooling: Pilecki graduated from Grudziądz Cavalry Officers School while Serafiński graduated from the Wołyń Officers School at Włodzimierz Wołyński. Both men were deeply committed to social work and improvement of the lives of the local people and that topic was yet another common subject for them.

Both loved books and Pilecki was delighted that after “having spent 947 days and nights in hell” - as Pilecki described his stay in Auschwitz, he finally had access to books as the library in Koryznówka was at his disposal. ¹⁴ Among others, Serafiński had a copy of “*Works of Ignacy Chodźko*” from 1894 which told the history of Polish gentry from Lithuania, Pilecki’s home, and thus a partial history of Pilecki’s family. Pilecki mentioned that he wished that his young son would be able to see that information one day. Tomasz Serafiński gifted that book to Pilecki at once, but it was not possible for Pilecki to take the book with him when he left Koryznówka. So, many years later, when Pilecki’s son Andrzej visited Koryznówka, that book was gifted to him by my aunt Maria Serafińska-Domańska.

Not far from Koryznówka stood a large wooden cross, where Stefan Giebułtowski, another Serafiński family member, took an oath before joining the 1863 uprising against Russia that was to return independence to Poland but failed. For Pilecki, this cross was deeply touching as it reminded him of a similar cross in Sukurcze, his family home estate, where Pilecki’s relatives took a similar oath before joining that very same uprising.

In short, the two men were connected in myriad ways.



Room in Koryznówka (Photo: Paweł Zechenter)

A narrow dirt road leads from Koryznówka through fields and forest to the home of painter Jan Stasiniewicz and his family. Serafiński and Stasiniewicz families were close and Pilecki was introduced to Jan Stasiniewicz, a known painter and art historian. Stasiniewicz, Serafiński, and Pilecki were all actively involved with the Polish underground war effort as well as being connected by the love of art. Pilecki, while recuperating, made a few sketches that he left behind in Koryznówka. In addition, Jan Stasiniewicz painted an oil portrait of Pilecki, and, on July 24, 1943, made a charcoal portrait of *"Two Serafińskis"* - the one from Koryznówka and another one from Auschwitz. The portrait was signed by the painter (in front) and, at the back, by both, Tomasz Serafiński as himself and by Witold Pilecki as "Witold Tomasz Serafiński." Recently, my aunt, Maria Serafińska-Domańska, who still lives in Koryznówka, donated that double portrait *"Two Serafińskis"* to the Museum in Auschwitz.¹⁵

While recovering, Pilecki, Redzej, and Ciesielski were busy writing reports to document the German atrocities. The first report was written in June and the second in August of 1943. Most importantly, Pilecki was trying to make contacts with other underground units to prepare the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp. Tomasz Serafiński was instrumental in bringing the heads of various other underground AK units as well as various Polish political organizations to meet Pilecki; several such meetings took place in Koryznówka during the three and half months of Pilecki's stay there.

For example, in early June, the underground chief of the Home Army's Diversion Division – Andrzej Możdżeń (code name "Sybirak") visited Koryznówka to discuss possible plans to attack Auschwitz and liberate prisoners. However, even if the Polish underground units would manage to successfully attack the concentration camp and gain the entrance (which Pilecki and several other AK commanders thought might be possible), the Polish underground did not have the ability to liberate thousands of exhausted and malnourished people, who had no strength to run for freedom. And how was the Polish underground to hide and protect these escapees, the majority of them Jewish, in a country where the death penalty was instituted by the Germans for anyone helping Jews?¹⁶ There was also fear of the magnitude of potential German reprisals and the fate of local population, for the Germans cynically terrorized the Polish population by exercising the "collective responsibility" doctrine whereby they would purposefully kill (or as the Germans called it, they "pacified") the inhabitants of entire villages or groups of random people as punishment for a single individual's actions against German rule. Allied air cover, weapons, and military support would be sorely needed for that liberation action to have a reasonable chance of success.

Meanwhile, Pilecki's co-escapee, Edward Ciesielski, joined the local underground unit and he swore his oath of allegiance right there in Koryznówka. For Ciesielski's swearing, Tomasz Serafiński used the cherished family cross imbued with special meaning – an old black metal cross used to swear-in other family members and other Polish freedom fighters, including those who joined the 1830 and 1863 uprisings.



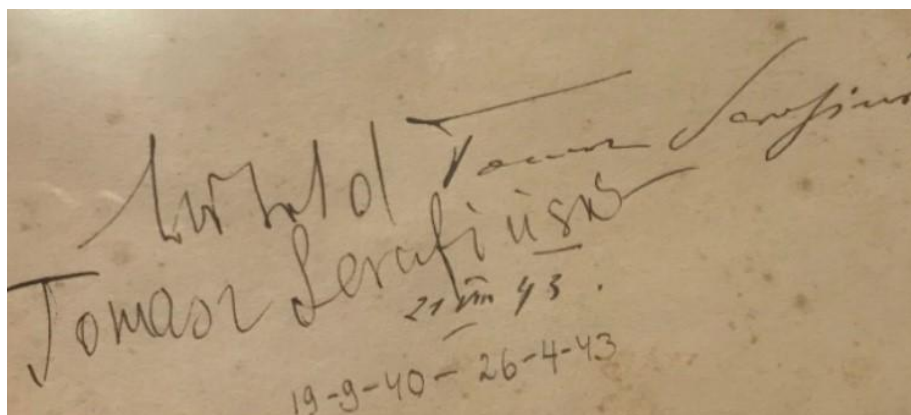
Antique cross used to swear-in Edward Ciesielski as a new member of the Polish Nowy Wiśnicz region underground organization (Photo: author)

During their stay in Koryznówka, once they recovered, all four men – Pilecki, Redzej, Ciesielski and Tomasz Serafiński took an active part in or provided support for various sabotage actions in the Nowy Wiśnicz-Bochnia area. For example, they organized actions in Rzezawa, Kłaj, Łętka Górna and Królówka, including the sabotage of a German weapon depot and German dairy factory. Ciesielski wrote and distributed underground AK bulletins. He also helped another Nowy Wiśnicz underground member, Adolf Roman (code name “Kosa”) - who worked under the command of the Tomasz Serafiński - to plan the successful and daring liberation of 120 political prisoners from Nowy Wiśnicz jail in July of 1944 (merely a day before they were to be transferred to Auschwitz).

In another related and tragic coincidence, Ludmiła’s brother, Józef Wojtyga was murdered by the Nazis that very summer. He was also imprisoned in Auschwitz, as prisoner No. 24740 and was an active member of the ZOW – an underground resistance organization in Auschwitz started by Pilecki. At the same time when Pilecki was being hidden and cared for by Ludmiła and her husband in Koryznówka, Ludmiła’s own brother was brutally hung in Auschwitz on an especially constructed gallows, on July 19, 1943.¹⁷ He was being made an example for other prisoners and was being murdered as punishment for German authorities’ discovery that Auschwitz prisoners were carrying out sabotage actions in the concentration camp, including smuggling of medicines to help to save sick prisoners. Ludmiła did not find out about this tragedy until after Pilecki left Koryznówka for Warsaw.



Charcoal double portrait of “Two Serafińskis” by Jan Stasiniewicz dated 24 June 1943



Back of the double portrait signed by Pilecki as “Witold Tomasz Serafiński” and by Tomasz Serafiński as himself. Dated 21 July 1943; below are written dates of Pilecki’s Auschwitz imprisonment from September 19, 1940 until April 26, 1943. (Photos: author)



Interior of a room in Koryznówka (Photo: author)



Interior of various rooms in Koryznówka (Photos: Paweł Zechenter)



Living room in Koryznówka (Photo: Katarzyna Zechenter).

Meanwhile, the Gestapo was actively searching for the escapees and sent out the arrest warrant for all three (list gończy). Once that arrest warrant arrived in Nowy Wiśnicz, a secret copy was made by the Polish underground to warn my uncle. While Tomasz Serafiński managed to save Witold Pilecki (who equipped with a new identity and new falsified documents was able to leave Koryznówka for Warsaw on the 23rd of August 1943), Tomasz Serafiński was ultimately captured by the Gestapo on Christmas Day in 1943 as the “escapee from Auschwitz.”¹⁸ He was tortured, both of his hands were broken repeatedly, he was severely beaten and lost his teeth, he repeatedly lost consciousness during the interrogation sessions so they placed him unconscious in an ice-cold cell with standing water. After several days of torture in a Bochnian jail, he was transferred to the Montelupi jail in Krakow for more interrogation and torture. He suspected that he would either be sent to Auschwitz or executed summarily.

Geheime Staatspolizei
Staatspolizeistelle Hohenfelz

116

antrag. 2.30.43

Aufgenommen Tag 31. 4. 43 1500 Monat 4. Jahr 43 Zeit 1500	Raum für Eingangsbescheid Sta. Pol. Stelle Hohenfelz 28. APR. 1943 3436/43	Beordert Tag 28. 4. 43 Monat 4. Jahr 43 Zeit 1500 an durch
Hohenfelz, Nr. 3134		Verzögerungsvermerk 65

Telegramm — Funkspruch — Fernschreiben — Fernspruch

+ KL AUSCHWITZ NR. 15214 27.4.43 1256 =KA=

AN ALLE OESTL. STAPU(LEIT).-KRIPU(LEIT) STELLEN U. GREKO,
BESONDERS WARSCHAU.- AN DAS RSHA, IV C 2, BERLIN.-
AN DAS WVHA, AMTSGRUPPE D, ORANIENBURG.---

BETRIFFT: 1. SCHUTZH. POLE S E R A F I N S K I THOMAS,
GEB. 18.3.02 IN BOCHNIA.- 2. SCHUTZH. POLE R E T K O
JOHANN, GEB. 1.5.04 IN MINSK LITWISKI.---

BEZUG: O H N E.---

DIE OBENGENANNTEN WURDEN AM 22.9.40 VOM KDR. SIPO U. SD
WARSCHAU IN DAS HIESIGE LAGER EINGELIEFERT UND SIND AM
27.4.43 IN DER NACHT VOM KOMMANDO "BAECKEREI LANDSMANN,
AUSCHWITZ" GEFLOHEN. DIE SOFORT EINGELEITETE SUCHAKTION
BLIEB BISHER OHNE ERFOLG. ES WIRD GEBETEN, VON DORT AUS
WEITERE FAHNDUNGSSCHRISSNAHMEN EINZULEITEN UND IM
ERGREIFUNGSFALLE DAS KL.- AUSCHWITZ SOFORT ZU
BENACHRICHTIGEN.--- ZUSATZ FUER KDR. WARSCHAU.: DIE
AUSCHREIBUNG DER OBENGENANNTEN IM SONDERFAHNDUNGSBUCH FUER
POLEN BITTE ICH VON DORT AUS ZU VERANLASSEN.---

ZUSATZ FUER WVHA: WEITERER BERICHT FOLGT.---

-- GEZ. HOESS SS- OESTUBAF. U. KOMMANDANT. +

Fahndungskartel.
Suchvermerk liegt nicht vor:
Keine Pers. Akte:
Hohenfelz, den 28. Apr. 1943

116

The German arrest warrant for the three Auschwitz escapees (seeking the arrest of Witold Pilecki listed under the name he was known in Auschwitz, i.e. Tomasz Serafiński) (Photo: public domain)

After Tomasz Serafiński was arrested, his wife, Ludmiła, organized a help campaign. She made a bold move and asked the German commandant of the jail in Nowy Wiśnicz for help. She asked him to write a letter attesting that Tomasz Serafiński was indeed living in Koryznówka during the last three years and that he was not an escapee from Auschwitz. The commandant Schroder knew Tomasz Serafiński by sight, as the German jail in Nowy Wiśnicz was located in the old baroque cloister on a hill above Koryznówka. The road from the main town of Nowy Wiśnicz to that jail leads pass Koryznówka, so the jail commandant saw Tomasz Serafiński occasionally while traveling to work. Ludmiła explained to him that her husband did not have a prisoner number tattooed on his forearm, as all other prisoners in Auschwitz did, and Schroder was able to confirm that. Ludmiła convinced him that it was indeed a case of mistaken identity. Commandant Schroder was satisfied and agreed to intervene with Gestapo. Ludmiła's plan worked. Tomasz

Serafiński was released in mid-January 1944 in a near-death condition. He would spend the next three months in a hospital in Krakow fighting for his life. From that point on, this once strong and imposing man could only walk with crutches and his hands, while they ultimately healed, were never the same. The most tragic part of the entire episode for Tomasz Serafiński was not his permanent injuries, but the fact that AK was forced to limit their contact with him since he was considered “burned” by the underground. Ludmiła’s post as the AK commander of the local underground medical unit was also suspended for the same reason, to her great dismay.

It was in Koryznówka where Pilecki wrote his initial reports documenting in detail Nazi atrocities committed in the concentration camps. The reports were quite detailed, with precise maps of the camp, location of crematoria, location of various sub-camps, torture methods, types of executions, names of prisoners and the Nazi executioners, detailed description of the mass gassing methods used in crematoria for Jewish and Roma transportees (the so-called Nazi’s Final Solution campaign), etc. The back-up copies of the reports were buried in the forest belonging to Koryznówka, and they survived the war and remained in the possession of the Serafiński family. The names listed in these reports were coded but the key to deciphering them was lost. The original reports were sent to Warsaw, translated into English, German, and French and forwarded to London to inform the Allies and to spur them into action. Subsequently, Pilecki wrote yet another report called Witold’s Report in 1943. Finally, Pilecki issued the final detailed report while fighting in Italy in 1945 with the Western Allies. He was trying to ensure that he had comprehensively documented the extent of the German atrocities that he had witnessed in Auschwitz. My aunt, curator Maria Serafińska-Domańska, donated original Pilecki’s reports that had been written (and buried for safekeeping) at Koryznówka to the AK Museum (Museum Armii Krajowej) in the 1990s.

Czerwiec 1943 roku Wiśnicz

Napisane dla upamiętnienia nazwisk, faktów po szczególnie uciążliwym a samowolnym wyjściu z obozu w Oświęcimiu.

W czasie od 15-20 IX 1939 na rozkaz gen. Piekarskiego przez majora Mandzenko zorganizowałem we Włodawie oddział konny 250 koni i pieszy ponad 150 ludzi. Na to przyjechał oficer tej samej co ja brygady, starszy stopniem i mój przyjaciel Włodarkiewicz, któremu ustąpiłem dowództwa nad oddziałem. Z oddziałem tym trwaliśmy konną i zbrojną "w różnych terminach" do dnia 17. paźdz. 1939 a historię tegoż uśmiętnili już moi koledzy. Oddział ten był zaczątkiem organizacji TAP, która założyliśmy w Warszawie w pierwszej połowie listopada 1939. W Warszawie pracowałem jako główny inspektor TAP nom de guerre Witold, co sprawdzić można dziś jeszcze u pułk. Kurtiusa i por. Bieleckiego. Dażyłem do wcielenia TAP do ZNZ. Podjąłem się pracy w Oświęcimiu, gdzie przyjechałem z kot. Trojnickim "Fred" warszawskim w nocy z dnia 21-22 września 1940r. Po paru tygodniach zorganizowałem pierwszy związek organizacji wojskowej w Warszawie przez warszawiaków i przeszedłem w październiku 40r. meldunek do Warszawy przez zwolnionego z lagru Wielopolskiego, pracującego w wywiadzie u Tęczyńskiego. Kierownictwo tej pierwszej "piątki górnej" powierzyłem pułk. Surmaczkiemu, którego znałem już przez lat kilkanaście już w początku 40r. wcielonym w Warszawę do pracy w TAP na stanowisko szefa sztabu. W listopadzie 1940r. zorganizowałem drugą piątkę górą wśród najstarszych trzech w/w numerów haftlingów. W maju 41r. wśród kolegów z IV i V transportu warszawskich trzecia "piątkę górą" a w październiku 41r. czwartą. Nigdy nie trzymałem się ślepo liczby 5-ciu. Każda z tych "piątek gór" nie wiedziała nic o piątkach innych, rozwijała się samodzielnie, raz zając się tak daleko jak ja sumą energii i zdolności jej członków/ do budowywanym/ naprzód wypychały. Praca polegała na ratowaniu życia kolegów przez zorganizowanie dożywiania, polecenie władzom bloków opieki na "krankenbau", organizowanie dostawy bielizny urzędniczej, lepszych posadach-stanowiskach, podtrzymywanie na duchu, kolportowanie wiadomości z zewnątrz, łączności z cywilną i dnością, przekazywanie mości obozowych na zewnątrz, powiązanie w jeden łańcuch energicznych jednostek dla skoordynowanej akcji opanowania obozu w chwili gdy nadejdzie z zewnątrz, bądź to w formie rozkazu bądź desantu. Tak w celu większego bezpieczeństwa powziąłem myśl by jedną piątkę z stających na świecznikach", którzy tu byli pod własnymi nazwiskami pułkownicy i słabo zakonspirowani robili już plany opanowania obozu. I tak w kwietniu 41r. koledzy coraz to częściej poczęli przynosić mości, że pułk. Stawasz i pułk. Kumuniecki przygotowują się do opanowania obozu/przy tym mniej więcej podawano terminy/ i pułk. Kumuniecki potym ze zdrowymi na Katowice a pułk. Stawasz z chorymi, kolportowani. Ze względu na rozgłos narazie trzymałem się od tego zdaleka. Organizacja/słowo to było zakazane i używane tylko w znaczeniu innym/ rozwijała się dość szybko. Wielki młyn lagru wyrzucał trupy. Wielu kolegów ginęło, których wciąż trzeba było zastępować. Wciąż trzeba było wszystko wiązać na nowo. Wysyłałiśmy już na wiadomości, które były podawane przez radia zagraniczne. Właściwie się. Daleko rozgałęzione już poszczególne piątki gór "wterenie" wzajemnie się domagały meldując o namacanej "in oragan". W listopadzie 41r. wysłałem do Warszawy przez zwolnionego kpt. Iłhaonu meldunek. Jednocześnie pisałem w listach do /okólna droga/ by mnie nie starano się z lagru wykupić, co zdarzyć, gdyż nie miałem żadnej sprawy a hazardowała mnie wana w przyszłości rozgrywka na miejscu. W grudniu 41r. przyszedł przez pułk. Deringa zwolnionego do Warszawy, którego jednymi dniami znowu w Warszawie aresztowano i po paru miesiącach w Pawisku w styczniu 42r. przez sierż. Woźniaka.

After returning to Warsaw, Pilecki took part in the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 ¹⁹ and, unlike Jan Redzej who also fought in it, survived it. He was taken prisoner by the Nazis and deported to a concentration camp in Germany, where he was subsequently liberated by the American army. He joined the Allied army and fought in Italy. He returned to Warsaw after WWII ended, and Poland was overrun by the Russian army who installed the Russian-backed Communist government. The Communist government began to arrest ex-AK officers and people otherwise connected to the Polish government-in-exile, many were summarily executed as “imperialist traitors.” ²⁰ In 1947, the Communist government arrested Witold Pilecki who was tortured and sentenced to death after a short sham trial. His very existence and his heroic mission were erased from history for almost 40 years.

Again, Ludmiła Serafińska, disregarding concerns for her own safety, tried to save Pilecki, like she saved her husband’s life before. Using her connections, she personally pleaded with the prime-minister, Józef Cyrankiewicz, an ex-Auschwitz prisoner himself, who knew about Pilecki. Cyrankiewicz, however, was unwilling to help. It may not be immediately obvious to an American reader, how truly dangerous it was, in the middle of the Stalinist terror, to plead for the life of someone designated as “imperialist traitor,” especially when Ludmiła herself, her now nearly paralyzed husband, and many other family members and close friends, were all members of the Polish underground, and at risk. It takes a special person to show nerves of steel, courage, and fortitude, and Ludmiła had all of these qualities.

Despite all efforts, Pilecki was executed on May 25, 1948, by a shot to the back of his head. It is unclear where the communist Secret Police buried Pilecki’s body (most likely he was buried at the “łączka” - an open field - near the Powązki Cemetery in Warsaw where the communists hid their crimes and buried many of the innocent Poles whom they had executed). It was only in 1991, after Poland regained its freedom from communist rule, that Pilecki was officially exonerated. His true story was now allowed to be told for the first time since WWII. In 1995, he was posthumously awarded the *Order of Polonia Restituta* by the Polish president Lech Wałęsa, and in 2006 he was also awarded the *Order of White Eagle*, the highest Polish decoration. ²¹ On September 6th, 2013, he was posthumously promoted to the rank of colonel.

Today, Koryznówka still remembers Pilecki. There is a memorial dedicated to Pilecki placed in the front garden and the photos of Pilecki and his co-escapees made in 1943 are still there. Pilecki’s original drawings, as well as an oil portrait of Pilecki painted by Jan Stasiniewicz, were donated by Ludmiła Serafińska to Captain Pilecki’s two children. One of the remaining photos shows Pilecki in front of Koryznówka, another shows all three escapees, Pilecki, Redzej, and Ciesielski, in white clean shirts standing in front of the Koryznówka on a sunny day. ²²

Until very recently, the double portrait of Tomasz Serafiński and Witold Pilecki (the so-called “Two Serafińskis” portrait) was also in the possession of my aunt and I saw it in Koryznówka when I last visited. It has recently been transferred to the Auschwitz Museum and now all who visit Auschwitz will be able to see it too. As the director of the Auschwitz Museum, Dr. Piotr Cywiński, remarked during the recent ceremony:

“this sketch is something more than only a document as it has great emotional value. On one page of the paper, you have a portrait of two people connected by fate, love of the country and patriotism. That is why I am deeply grateful to the family for their decision to transfer this portrait. It will be not only kept protected here but we will make it available for all to see. It is one of the very few mementos left after Captain Pilecki.” ²³



Maria Serafińska-Domańska and her husband Stanisław Domański during the transfer ceremony of the “Two Serafińskis” portrait, with the director of the Auschwitz Museum, Dr. Piotr Cywiński. Photo by Bartosz Bartyzel (<https://www.tvp.info/41112015/rysunek-przedstawiajacy-min-rotmistrza-pileckiego-trafil-do-muzeum-auschwitz>. Photo used with the permission of the Auschwitz Museum).

In a new tradition, the annual “Pilecki Memorial Cavalry Ride ²⁴” stops in Koryznówka where the cavalry units are received by my aunt, Maria Serafińska-Domańska ²⁵ and by her husband Stanisław Domański (a musician, composer, teacher, and pianist) who, among others, composed “Polonez Pileckiego” in Pilecki’s honor.



Pilecki Memorial Cavalry Ride (Photo: Family archives)



Cavalry at the Pilecki memorial in Koryznówka (Photo: Family archives)



Annual Cavalry Ride being received in Koryznówka (Photo: Family archives)



Pilecki's Memorial at Koryznówka (Photo: Family archives)

POLONEZ PILECKIEGO

HYMN SZKOŁY PODSTAWOWEJ IM. W. PILECKIEGO W JODŁÓWCE

sl. Bogdan Kasprowicz
muz. Stanisław Domański

Polonez

1. Dzi - siaj je - szcze mło - dzi, je - szcze pra - wie dzie - ci, za - ba-wie szcze - śli - wej
zło - te sło - Ńce świe - ci, w.ser - cach przy - jaźń, ra - dość, mi - łość i swo - bo - da,
w.gó - rze czy-ste nie-bo, ma - jo-wa po-go - da. Hej, hej Ro - tmi-strzu, do - brze o tym
Słyszysz Pó - lską ca - ła, sły - szy tron nie -
wie-my, któż to wszy-stko spra-wił, któż - to wszy-stko spra-wił pa - mię-tać bę - dzie-my!
bie - ski Przy - rze - ka - my szcze-rze przy - rze - ka - my szcze-rze
Ro - tmi-strzu Pi - le - cki!

2. Gdyby tak się stało, że wezwie Ojczyzna
Staniemy odważnie jak dzielny mężczyzna,
Dziewczynom przypomni hasło Inka z nieba
Każda się zachowa właśnie "tak jak trzeba".

Ref. Hej, hej Rotmistrzu w sercu miłość Boga,
Nie złamie nas siła, nie złamie nas siła,
Ani przemoc wroga!
Słyszysz Polska cała, słyszysz tron niebieski,
Przyrzekamy szczerze, przyrzekamy szczerze,
Rotmistrzu Pilecki!

3. Pilni i wytrwali w nauce i w pracy
A odważni w boju - Rotmistrza junacy.
Poprzednich pokoleń багаż w nas nie mały -
" Być Ojczyźnie wiernym, a w miłości stałym".

Ref. Polska to rzecz wielka, Polska to rzecz święta
Rotmistrzu Pilecki, Rotmistrzu Pilecki
Będziemy pamiętać!
Słyszysz Polska cała, słyszysz tron niebieski,
Przyrzekamy szczerze, przyrzekamy szczerze,
Rotmistrzu Pilecki!

Pilecki Polonez composed by Stanisław Domański for a primary school in Jodłówka, near Nowy Wiśnicz, that is named after Pilecki (Photo: Katarzyna Zechenter)

The original copy of the *Final Report* by Pilecki that was sent to London was found in London archives in the 1960s by professor Józef Garliński, AK officer and an ex-Auschwitz prisoner himself. Its original code was also missing but through comparative studies, using copies of Pilecki's other reports, most of the coded names and places in the reports are now deciphered. Copy of the Pilecki's *Final Report* was first published in 2014 by Dr. Adam Cyra in his book *"Captain Pilecki: Volunteer to Auschwitz."*²⁶

Lieutenant Tomasz Serafiński, who died in 1966, lies buried in the Serafiński family mausoleum at the Bochnia cemetery. Ludmiła who died in 1991 in Kraków, was buried in the Wojtyga-Orszulski family mausoleum at the Salvator cemetery in Kraków. Tomasz's memoirs titled *Report and Reminiscences* are stored in the Auschwitz Museum Archives as are Ludmiła Serafińska's *Memoirs*.²⁷

Koryznówka damaged during the war, managed to survive. What started as a summer house built by attorney Antoni Leonard Serafiński in the 1800s, has a special place in Polish history, not only because of Pilecki. The house was repeatedly visited by Jan Matejko, who vacationed and painted there and who even played the very same piano which is still there. Matejko, in fact, loved Koryznówka and the unique atmosphere it exuded. After WWII, Tomasz Serafiński collected various family memorabilia and his younger daughter, Maria Serafińska-Domańska, who managed to restore the house from the war inflicted damage, opened a few front rooms of the house to the public. Since 1981, she has run a small family museum devoted to Jan Matejko, to the Polish patriotic cultural traditions of the last two centuries, and increasingly so, to Witold Pilecki.²⁸



Sign in Nowy Wiśnicz leading to Koryznówka (Photo: author).

So, was it really merely blind fate that connected these two men? Maybe, but the myriad of circumstances that connected these two exceptional and brave men and one unflappable and courageous woman seem extraordinary. Yes, indeed it was all started by an accident when my uncle, the real Tomasz Serafiński, forgot his identity documents at Dr. Pawłowska's apartment, where Pilecki later found them. After Pilecki's escape from Auschwitz, Pilecki's initial choice of Ed Zabawski as his co-conspirator, and that fact that Zabawski had a family connection in Bochnia, led Pilecki to the region where the real Tomasz Serafiński was living. There were other AK units in the region, and yet, the fact that Leon Wandasiewicz chose to take Pilecki to Koryznówka proved to be momentous for both men and especially lucky for Pilecki.²⁹ My uncle believed Pilecki's story right from the start, and he refused to carry out an order from the underground headquarters in Krakow to cut all contacts with Pilecki, whereas some other AK commanders in the region obeyed that order. Had Pilecki asked them for help instead, it is not clear whether he would have been able to evade the Nazis and thereby recover and write his reports. Peaceful and secluded Koryznówka was an ideal place for Pilecki to recover his strength and to remain well hidden for almost four months until his new identity documents arrived.

It is tempting to see that fateful choice to seek refuge in Bochnia and to travel to Koryznówka that which led Pilecki back to the true Tomasz Serafiński as having been more than just mere coincidence. Once these two men met, they were instantly attracted to each other, for they had countless past connections. They had shared many family traditions, history and culture, along with common interests in music, art, horses, cavalry, even being alumni of the same university. They were both devoted to social work and deeply committed to improving of the lot of Polish farmers. They were equally and fiercely committed from the youngest age to the cause of Polish independence, and they became true soulmates, long-lost brothers, to the extent that such a thing was possible under such circumstances.

Tomasz Serafiński paid a heavy price and was never able to fully regain his health after being brutally tortured. But for the efforts of his brave wife Ludmiła, he surely would have died. He was partially paralyzed and unable to move, walk, and work for many years, leaving his family in a difficult financial situation. Ludmiła was left alone to care and provide for her two small daughters and for a gravely ill husband. To make matters worse, Koryznówka was badly damaged by the advancing Russian army's mortar fire when several shells hit the house. One mortar shell even injured Ludmiła. These were very difficult and painful years for the entire Serafiński family, and yet neither Tomasz nor Ludmiła harbored any regrets. Nor were they bitter, for they both felt that it had been simply their privilege and their duty to have served their country, Poland.

That is how I remember both of them, self-effacing, humble, and deeply honorable people, who acted bravely, even heroically, but never spoke about it. And that is how I remember my uncle, a soft-spoken and kind man who loved to tell beautiful fairy tales to us children.



Crippled Tomasz Serafiński after the war in front of a significantly damaged Koryznówka (Photo: Family archives)

Tragically, despite Ludmiła's brave and selfless efforts, Witold Pilecki was executed by the Communist government. Even more tragically, Pilecki's heroic efforts to document the German atrocities committed at the concentration camps and to spur the Allies to action remained ignored. Moreover, Pilecki's mission and his actions were hidden from the world, and he was effectively erased from history by the Polish Communist government until the collapse of communism in 1989. Only now is the larger world able to find out about "a man who volunteered" to join the inmates of Auschwitz, as Pilecki is sometimes called.

The extremely limited, if any, Allied response to the notifications concerning the daily atrocities occurring in the camps failed to save Polish Jews despite the efforts of various Polish people, including Pilecki and Jan Józef Karski.³⁰ Like Pilecki, Karski was a member of the Polish underground and repeatedly tried to warn the Allies and the world about the horrors of the German industrial-scale extermination methods perfected in Auschwitz. No help was given to the Polish underground by the Western Allies in order to liberate Auschwitz and other Nazi concentration and extermination camps. Russia stood silent as thousands of Poles fought and died during the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, and when the Germans murdered 200,000 civilians in cold-blood in retaliation. The Yalta Conference let Soviet Russia keep Poland and Eastern Europe under the Communist yoke for another 40 years.

Borrowing Pilecki's words, Pilecki's and Serafiński's connection seems like an amazing and deeply mysterious coincidence. Fate? Maybe. Blind fate? Pilecki, a deeply religious man, felt that it was not blind fate. He saw a deeper meaning in the myriad of coincidences that led him to meet the real Tomasz Serafiński. So did Tomasz Serafiński.

But if it was indeed fate, and if it was not blind fate, was it perhaps cruel fate? Or was it a cold-hearted callous fate that tested two brave men and one honorable and courageous woman, and watched them sacrifice and suffer greatly, granting them only meager successes while denying them the ultimate victory they fought so hard for, namely putting a stop to German Nazis atrocities in Auschwitz and true liberation of Poland. To borrow a phrase from Wisława Szymborska, a Polish Nobel prize-winning poet, maybe it was not so much fate but acts of *"some spiteful gods who mocked us so cruelly."* ³¹

If one were to see a Hollywood movie based on the Serafiński-Pilecki story, many would decry the movie as fanciful, for such people and such coincidences simply cannot be. And yet, this story, their story, is true, and it must be told.



Pond in Koryznówka in front of the barn where Pilecki was hidden. (Photo: Stanisław Domański)



Dr. Piotr Cywiński, director of the Auschwitz Museum visiting Koryznówka earlier this year. Maria Sarafińska-Domańska, daughter of Tomasz and Ludmiła, is seen holding the portrait of *"Two Serafińskis"* (Photo used with the permission of the Auschwitz Museum).

The historic table in the center of the photo is the very same table on which Jan Matejko drafted and painted when he was visiting Koryznówka and also the very table used by Pilecki to draw and write his reports.

When deciding to part with the double portrait of her father and Pilecki, Maria Sarafińska-Domańska said the following: *"I am parting with this rare document with enormous emotions, almost with tears. It has been with us for over 76 years. I am conscious, however, that its being at the Auschwitz Museum will give this document greater significance and exposure."*



Koryznówka today – stables (Photo: author)



Koryznówka today – view toward back fields (Photo: author)

ENDNOTES

¹ Krasnoludki are tiny-sized mythological creatures living in the cracks of the house. They mostly bring good luck but may also be quite mischievous. Closest English translation may be gnomes, dwarfs, leprechauns.

² During the Stalinist period (roughly 1945-1956), it was dangerous to mention or disclose connections with the Polish underground and the Home Army (AK). In 1945, the Russian army imposed a communist regime on Poland against the will of the Polish people. The period from 1945 until Stalin's death in 1956 was particularly brutal and many Polish people were imprisoned, persecuted, tortured and executed. Even when I was a small girl in the late 1960s, it was still too dangerous to mention true Polish history to one's children. See A. Zamoyski, *The Polish Way*. Hippocrene Books, New York, 1994.

³ See <http://auschwitz.org/en/history/kl-auschwitz-birkenau/>

⁴ Polish people were defending the country against the Nazi invasion which started on September 1, 1939, when, in accordance with the secret Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, the Soviets invaded Poland from the East on September 17, 1939, thus deciding the fate of Poland; the small and newly reborn country could not fight two invading armies on both fronts, defending both the Western border from the advancing Nazis and the Eastern border from the advancing Soviets. See A. Zamoyski, *The Polish Way*. Hippocrene Books, New York, 1994.

⁵ See <http://auschwitz.org/galeria/sztuka-oboazowa-i-pobozowa/> - portrait of Witold Pilecki titled "prisoner Tomasz Serafiński" made in 1942 by Stanisław Gutkiewicz, another Auschwitz prisoner.

⁶ The first batch of Pilecki's reports detailing the Nazi atrocities was delivered by the Polish underground and the Polish government-in-exile to both the UK and US governments, as early as in March of 1941. Pilecki wrote his last report in 1945, with a continuous stream of information and reports being provided to both US and UK governments during the entire period from 1941 until 1945. There were no Allied actions taken to stop the atrocities or to help the Polish underground to liberate the concentration camps.

⁷ Pilecki co-organized the so-called ZOW or Związek Organizacji Wojskowych (Military Organizations Union) in Auschwitz, which later became part of the Polish Home Army (AK).

⁸ In the early years of the concentration camps, Nazis primarily captured and imprisoned large numbers of Polish intelligencia – the plan was to use Poles as a source of physical labor for the German Reich and the Polish intelligencia had to be exterminated first to prevent effective Polish resistance. In early 1942, Nazis adopted plans to carry out massive extermination of the Jews – the so-called Final Solution to the Jewish Problem; as a result of that Nazi plan, 90% of

Polish Jews were killed between 1942-1945.

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-final-solution>

⁹ One of the prisoners in Auschwitz was Edmund Zabawski from Bochnia who was part of the camp's underground organization. He helped to plan the escape. Originally, he was to join the three other escapees, but for security reasons and for fears of potential reprisals against his family living in Bochnia, it was decided that he must stay in Auschwitz. Zabawski had family in Bochnia and the escapees planned to use that connection to hide there before moving on to Warsaw. Edmund Zabawski – *Dalsze Losy Bohaterow*. Maszynopis, Stowarzyszenie Bochniakow i Milosnikow Ziemi Bocheńskiej.

¹⁰ Edward Ciesielski – *Wspomnienia Oswiecimskie*, Krakow 1968.

¹¹ Witold Pilecki, *Report 1943*. Sees also *Report W: KL Auschwitz 1940-1943* by Witold Pilecki. Polish Political Prisoners' Association in Australia, 2017.

¹² See the exhibit "*Polish Fight for Independence 1914-1918 – Story of a Polish Family*" at the University College London, November 2018.
<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ssees/events/2018/nov/polish-fight-independence-1914-1918-story-polish-family>.

¹³ Tomasz Serafiński, born March 18, 1902, was only 15 years old when together with his brother Jan, he volunteered for the clandestine Polish Army Organization (Polska Organizacja Wojskowa) in 1917. He returned home with several medals for bravery only in 1921 after taking part in several wars for Polish independence, including the war against the Soviets in 1919/1920 and the Silesian Uprising in 1921. Thereafter, he finished his high school and went to study at Poznan University and at the Wołyń Officers School at Włodzimierz Wołyński. He died in 1966 in Krakow.

¹⁴ Dr. Adam Cyra, *Rotmistrz Pilecki. Ochotnik do Auschwitz (Captain Pilecki - Volunteer to Auschwitz)*, Warsaw, 2014.

¹⁵ Państwowe Museum of KL Auschwitz-Birkenau ("Auschwitz Museum").

¹⁶ Germans instituted the death penalty for any Pole helping or rescuing Jews. See, for example: Death penalty for any Pole helping or rescuing Jews during WWII.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rescue_of_Jews_by_Poles_during_the_Holocaust, or
<https://www.ushmm.org/learn/timeline-of-events/1942-1945/german-poster-announces-death-penalty-for-aiding-jews>.

¹⁷ Three members of ZOW were killed that day in Auschwitz, via hanging, on an especially built gallows: Edmund Sikorski (Prisoner No. 25419), Janusz Pognowski (Prisoner No. 253, known in the camp under the assumed name Janusz Skrzetuski) and Józef Wojtyga (Prisoner

No. 24740). Józef Wojtyga was Ludmiła's brother. See Dr. Adam Cyra, *Rotmistrz Pilecki. Ochotnik do Auschwitz (Captain Pilecki - Volunteer to Auschwitz)*, Warsaw, 2014.

¹⁸ It took some time for the Nazis to track down the real Tomasz Serafiński as he was registered as a resident of Pszczyna and not of Nowy Wiśnicz where Koryznówka is located. Also, Germans were not expecting for the escapees to be in the vicinity of Bochnia.

¹⁹ Warsaw Uprising took place in the late summer of 1944 and was organized by the Polish Underground Army (AK). The idea was to halt the Soviet Red Army advancing from the east and take control of Poland before the Russians do. Instead, the Soviet Red Army stopped advancing in order to let the German regroup and fight the Warsaw uprising instead. Warsaw fought for sixty-three (63) days during which 10,000 Polish soldiers died. German army killed 200,000 civilians in cold blood. There was no help from the Allies. Warsaw was carpet-bombed and the city was leveled. The Soviet army stood by and watched. See, for example, Norman Davies, *"Rising'44: The Battle for Warsaw"* London: Pan Books, 2004.

²⁰ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Poland_\(1945%E2%80%931989\)#Stalinist_era_\(1948–56\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Poland_(1945%E2%80%931989)#Stalinist_era_(1948–56))

²¹ The *Order of the White Eagle* is Poland's highest order awarded to both civilians and the military for their merits to the country. It was first instituted in 1705 by King Augustus II the Strong.

²² While it was dangerous to take photos, they needed to be taken for a good reason: they were needed to create forged identity documents for all three escapees. The most likely photographer of these photos was Stanisław Sasak, another member of the local underground (who also agreed to provide hiding for Jan Redzej). He was a teacher and a director of a local school, not a professional photographer, and the quality of many photos is relatively poor, they are out of focus, etc.

²³ „Na jednej kartce papieru sportretowane są dwie osoby, które w tak wyjątkowy sposób połączył los, patriotyzm i miłość do ojczyzny. Dlatego jestem głęboko wdzięczny rodzinie za decyzję o przekazaniu nam portretu. Tu będzie on nie tylko zabezpieczony, ale także dostępny dla wszystkich. To jedna z niewielu pamiątek, która pozostała po rotmistrzu” powiedział dyrektor of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Muzeum, Dr. Piotr Cywiński.
<https://www.tvp.info/41112015/rysunek-przedstawiajacy-min-rotmistrza-pileckiego-trafil-do-muzeum-auschwitz>

²⁴ Doroczny Rajd Ułanów *Na Szlaku Pileckiego*.

²⁵ Maria Serafińska-Domańska, *Kartki z Dziejów Wiśnicza* - Antologia. Wiśnicz, 2016; Maria Serafińska-Domańska, *Nowy Wiśnicz*, Wiśnicz, 1991.

²⁶ Dr. Adam Cyra, *Rotmistrz Pilecki. Ochotnik do Auschwitz (Captain Pilecki - Volunteer to Auschwitz)*, Warsaw, 2014. See also Dr. Adam Cyra, *Raport Witolda: Witold Pilecki-Tomasz Serafiński*. Warszawa, 1991.

²⁷ Tomasz Serafiński, *Relacja*, Archiwum Państwowego Museum KL Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Tomasz Serafiński, *Wspomnienia*. Stowarzyszenie Bochniaków i Miłośników Ziemi Bocheńskiej.

Ludmiła Serafińska, *Wspomnienia*, Archiwum Państwowego Museum KL Auschwitz-Birkenau, Zespół Materiały.

²⁸ Pilecki was not the only person who was hidden in Koryznówka. Tomasz and Ludmiła hid many other Polish escapees during WWII, including, among others, Jan Goląbek (code name "Miriam") the only successful escapee from the Gestapo jail in Krakow at Pomorska street.

²⁹ Pilecki wrote in his 1945 Report that Leon Wandasiewicz knew of two possible AK commanders he could connect Pilecki with the Warsaw underground. One commander was responsible for the region north of Bochnia and another commander was in the southern region of Bochnia in Nowy Wiśnicz (i.e. Tomasz Serafiński). Pilecki told Leon that either one of them would do; Wandasiewicz chose to take him to Koryznówka in Nowy Wiśnicz.

³⁰ Jan Józef Karski was another Polish underground member, who after the war emigrated to the US and became a professor at Georgetown University, where I had a great honor to meet him. Between 1940 and 1943, Karski made numerous reports to the Polish Government-in-exile in London and especially to the Poland's Western Allies about a) German Nazi's creation and later destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto and b) the atrocities committed in the German concentration camps located on Polish soil and the mass-murder of Polish Jews, ethnic Poles, Gypsies, and handicapped people committed there. See, for example, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jan_Karski, or see *Righteous Among the Nations. "The Envoy Jan Karski", Poland*.

³¹ *Jacyś Złotliwi Bogowie Zakpili z Nas Okrutnie: Korespondencja 1955-1966* by Wisława Szymborska and Zbigniew Herbert. Wydawnictwo a5. Warsaw, 2018.