



ARTYKUŁ

## **The last one. Józef Franczak codename “Laluś” (1918- 1963)**

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On the calm, Monday afternoon of October 21st 1963, the farmers from the Majdan Kozic Górskich village were working in the fields as usual. In the air was the smell of burned potato roots. Suddenly, the silence was ruptured by machine gun fire: the final stand of Józef Franczak codename “Laluś” begun.

For a few dozen years after the Second World War, the work of the officers of the Security Office, and later the Security Service, did not bring the expected results - “Laluś” had been constantly escaping their grasp. For the Communist authorities, which were preparing for a grand celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of gaining

power in Poland, it was a stain on their honour. Not until the beginning of 1963, had the officers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> District Security Service Division of the Citizens' Militia in Lublin, found an individual, who as it later turned out, played a crucial role in the Communist operation aimed to capture or kill Franczak.

## Capture or kill

During the first meetings with aforementioned individual, the officers of the SB made him aware, that they know about his ties with their target. At first, he claimed that he only saw "Laluś" once, long time ago, in the summer of 1948. After seeing more and more evidence, he admitted of meeting Franczak on more occasions. In May 1963, lieutenant Kazimierz Mikołajczuk, an officer of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, could finally register a new secret collaborator, codename "Michał" or "Michael". He was Stanisław Mazur - a cousin of Danuta Mazur who was Franczak's fiancée. At the time, he was living in Lublin, but he came from the village of Wygnanowice, where "Lalek's" fiancée and people helping him were living.

The search for "Laluś", led by the Security Office and later the Security Service, was nicknamed "Pożar" or "Fire". The operative actions were also aimed at his closest family and friends. There were attempts to recruit them as secret collaborators, who were to observe and report on all Franczak's closest relatives and associates.

The officer handling the case, ordered Stanisław to pay frequent visits to his hometown. There, "Michał" met with "Lalek's" closest people, whom he knew for years and trusted them greatly. For the first few months, nothing pointed to the fact, that the secret collaborator would fulfil the Communists' hopes. In the protocols of the early meetings with his new superiors and the internal analyses of the Security Office, it was noted that the biggest issue was Mazur's fear of being compromised by "Laluś". That's why the Communists persisted in convincing him, that Franczak needed to be caught. They also promised "Michał" that he would be protected and made him feel very important. They even formed social relations with him: "In order to tie him closer to us, we created a friendly atmosphere with some supper and vodka" wrote the officers of the SB.

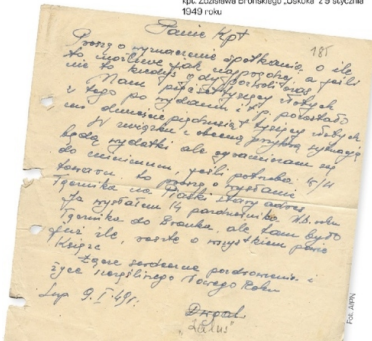
A breakthrough came in August 1963. That's when "Michał" managed to personally meet "Laluś". For the next

meetings between them, which took place in September and October, the Security Service equipped its collaborator with a "liliput" and "teleporter" – mobile wiretapping devices, which allowed for the officers of the SB to hear the recorded conversations from a few kilometres away, in a special car. When TW "Michał" set another date for a meeting with "Laluś", through Danuta Mazur, for October 20<sup>th</sup>, the officers of the Security Service started preparing for the final "operative actions". In early morning, the secret collaborator was taken by their car to Piaski, from where he walked to Wygnanowice.



↳ Lato 1947 roku, od lewej strony poprostu: Stanisław Kuchowicz „Wilkołaz”, Julian Kowalczyk „Cichy”, sierż. Józef Franczak „Julian” i st. sierż. Władysław Holubowski „Brosiś”

↳ List sierż. Józefa Franczaka „Laluś” do kpt. Zdzisława Bronińskiego „Upiórka” z 9 stycznia 1949 roku



The surveillance devices made it possible to listen to what was being said for an hour if the conversation took place outside, and for half an hour if it was inside. After the meeting had ended, the elimination team of 10 officers of the Security Service and 60 officers of ZOMO were to go in. The ZOMO officers were to surround the meeting place. However, at the last second, the wire recording device failed. The operation's command never received the signal pointing to the meeting place.

It seemed like another operation had failed. However, in the morning of October 21<sup>st</sup>, "Michał" called lieut. Mikołajczuk and asked to see him at "Weranda" pub. As it turned out, during the meeting with "Laluś" the day

before, the informer memorised the model and serial number of a Franczak's motorcycle. Everything happened quickly from that point on. At the Communications Division of the Presidium of the Regional National Council in Lublin, the officers of the Security Service managed to determine, that the motorcycle belonged to Wacław Beć from Majdan Kozic Górskich village. This time, two officers of the SB and 35 of ZOMO rode to Piaski in a truck. Around 3:45 pm. they surrounded Beć's farm. When "Lalek" saw the ZOMO officers, he tried to walk past them pretending to be the landlord. What happened next, was described by lieut. Ludwik Taracha, the officer of the Security Service from Lublin, who wrote the following:

"A unit's leader tried to stop Franczak, but he started running towards a stable. After two minutes, he ran outside from the other side of the stable and started shooting towards the commander. He backed up and Franczak began running towards the forest, shooting from a single handgun along the way. Then, when he saw the ZOMO officers surrounding the area and calling him to put his hands up, Franczak returned to the farm buildings, jumped into some bushes and after a few seconds came back. That's when I noticed he had a bag hanged on his neck and two pistols in his hands, from which he was shooting simultaneously. [...] he didn't stop, but ran to the home of Ludwik Misiura, went into a garden between lilacs and jasmines, where he kneeled and started shooting towards two officers of the Citizens' Militia running to him, who were shooting back - all over the bushes. At a certain point, when I stood around 15 metres from Franczak, I saw that he fell and was laying face down. We run over to him, grabbed him by his arms and faced him up. After around 2 minutes, he died."

### **Gendarme, conspirator, deserter**

Józef Franczak was born on March 17<sup>th</sup> 1918 in the Kozice Górne village, near the town of Piaski. His parents had a few hectare big farm, where they raised three daughters and two sons. After finishing high school, having no means for further education, he decided to join the army and went on to finish the Lower Officer Academy at the Gendarme Training Centre in Grudziądz. In 1939 he began his service as an officer cadet in the town of Równe at the Wołyń area; he fought against the Soviets at the Eastern Borderlands. He was captured by the Russians, although he did manage to escape during the march east. On his bare feet, he reached his home region. It's not entirely clear when and which underground organisation he joined at the beginning. In the end, he joined the Union of Armed Struggle, and then the Home Army. In the underground structures he rose up to the rank of sergeant. At first, he was a commander of a single unit, then of a whole platoon in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Lublin Sub-district of the Home Army.

Franczak's orders were to gather information about the armed operations, arrests, most active officers and secret collaborators of the Security Office, Internal Security Corps and Citizens' Militia, as well as the members of the Polish United Workers' Party. The patrol focused first and foremost on carrying out ambushes on small Citizens' Militia's patrols, confiscating goods essential for survival and delivering punishment in the form of flogging or shooting for the Communist activist and collaborators.

Details concerning his involvement in the operation "Burza" or "Tempest" remain a mystery. However, it is known that after the Red Army entered the region of Lubelszczyzna, in August of 1944, Franczak was enlisted in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Polish Army, created by the Communists. Among other places, he was stationed at Kąkolewnica in the Radzyń Podlaski district, where the court martial of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Polish Army was stationed as well. In a nearby Baran forest, Polish soldiers of the Home Army and the National Armed Forces, who were sentenced to death, were being shot by the Communists. "Laluś", suspecting a similar fate, deserted. It's difficult to pinpoint exactly when it happened. An annotation on the back of one of the few remaining photographs, points to the fact, that in March of 1945 he stayed in Zduńska Wola. From other documents, it can be gathered that Franczak also came to Łódź, and then to Wybrzeże. He probably came back to his hometown in the spring of 1946. After he had returned, he most likely renewed his old conspiracy contacts.

At that time, Lubelszczyzna was an uneasy region. Especially the "Freedom and Independence" underground organisation kept actively operating. In the forest partisan units, e.g. in groups led by Capt. Marian Bernaciak codename "Orlik" and Maj. Hieronim Dekutowski codename "Zapora", around a thousand soldiers were still fighting. There were frequent clashes between the Polish military and the operational groups of the Communist Security Office, Internal Security Corps and the NKVD, the partisans often targeted the Citizens' Militia's outposts. A dozen soldiers unit subordinate to "Zapora", led by "Laluś's" friend, Second Lieut. Antoni Kopaczewski codename "Lew", operated at his hometown region.

The everyday reality of that time, were the Communist operational groups made up of officers of the Security Office, Citizens' Militia, Internal Security Corps and often the NKVD, raiding towns and villages in search of the partisans and their weapon stashes. Just before the people's referendum set for June 30<sup>th</sup> 1946, the intensity of these actions had only been greater. On June 16<sup>th</sup>, officers of the Lublin Security Office arrested several

people at the Antoniówka village, and then moved to Kolonia Żuków. At dawn, they surrounded the farm of Franciszek Hołota. In the cowshed's attic they found Franczak and the landowner's son, Franciszek Hołota codename "Mały", both asleep. In total, seven to ten people were arrested that day.

Upon reaching the Chmiel village, the Communists locked the captured soldiers in a shed and went to a nearby wedding party. After midnight, on June 17<sup>th</sup> the truck with the arrested went towards Lublin. During a stop near the Dominów village, the prisoners took advantage of the Communists' lack of alertness and most probably their insobriety, freed themselves from the restraints and disarmed their reckless guardians. During the struggle that broke out, a few of the Communist officers died. All the prisoners managed to escape. Eugeniusz Mordoń codename "Gitarka" recalled, that right after they ran away, "Laluś" joined his unit led by Lieut. Jan Szaliłow codename "Renek" (Maj. "Zapora's" group). However, he did not stay there for long and what happened to him during the next few months is unknown.

### **Patrol commander**

Next mentions of "Laluś" could be dated at the beginning of 1947, when he was active in the unit of Freedom and Independence led by Capt. Zdzisław Broński codename "Uskok", which at the time consisted of around twenty partisans, operating at the borders of lubartowski, lubelski and chełmski districts.

In March and April of 1947, some of the Polish soldiers revealed themselves during the amnesty passed on February 22<sup>nd</sup>. "Laluś" didn't trust the Security Office to forget his actions, so he stayed in conspiracy. In the post-yaltan Poland, there still were over 120 armed units, counting between 1200-1800 partisans. In Lubelszczyzna, there were twenty groups consisting of 200-230 soldiers. The vast difference in the scale of both sides of the conflict forced the Polish patriots to take on a more defensive strategy. Chances of survival were raised by dividing units into small, few men patrols, which were constantly moving from one place to another. They were commanded by Sgt "Laluś", Sec. Lieut. Stanisław Kuchciewicz or Kuchcewicz codename "Wiktor" and Mas. Sgt Walenty Waśkiewicz codename "Strzała". The patrols' commanders operated separately, from time to time reporting to their leader, who since the Autumn of 1947 had mainly stayed in a bunker underneath the stables at the Lisowscy farm, at the Dąbrówka village, near Łęczna. Each patrol had a designated area of operation. "Laluś's" patrol was acting at the border of lubelski and krasnostawski regions. At the time, his squad consisted of: Walerian Goś „Walerek”, Franciszek Hołota „Mały”, Jerzy Marciniak „Sęk”, „Zygmunt” and Jan Osmoliński „Pomidorek”. Franczak's orders were to gather information about the armed operations, arrests, most active officers and secret collaborators of the Security Office, Internal Security Corps and Citizens' Militia, as well as the members of the Polish United Workers' Party. The patrol focused first and foremost on carrying out ambushes on small Citizens' Militia's patrols, confiscating goods essential for survival and delivering punishment in the form of flogging or shooting for the Communist activist and collaborators. For security reasons, they mainly travelled during the night, and rested during the day. In August, 1947 the patrol broke into the harvest festival party in Gardzienice and shot Tadeusz Bielsza, the chief of the Citizens' Militia in Rybczewice. In the shootout, an innocent villager got killed as well by accident,



a few others got wounded. Then in October, 1947 "Laluś's" patrol disarmed a local Citizens' Militia outpost in the Wysokie village, where they shot the regional chief of the Communist Volunteer Reserve Militia and the post warden, Aleksander Winiarski, as well as they confiscated goods from the local state-owned store.

In May, 1948 the 5 soldiers were driving in a cart for the debrief with Capt. "Uskok". Near the Kolonia Krzczonów Drugi, in the Lubelszczyzna region, they went into the ambush prepared by an officer of the Regional Public Security Office in Lublin and a few officers of the local Citizens' Militia. Under the heavy fire of machine guns, died both "Pomidorek" and "Walerek", while "Mały" and "Sęk" were wounded (the former died after 3 months, the latter received only a light wound). In the end, only "Laluś" escaped the ambush untouched.

The local community had been convinced for years, that the traitor was Waclaw Beć. The true culprit of "Laluś's" final moments lived until the end of his own life away from any suspicions. It was no sooner than in 2005, when the author of these words managed to uncover the secret of TW "Michał".

On Christmas Eve in 1948, "Laluś's" patrol visited Antoni Mazurek, a trusted associate who ran a general store in Wygnanowice. The partisans wanted to do some Christmas shopping. Officers of the Security Office, who arrested many people in Wygnanowice in 1948 suspecting them of aiding the "bandits", received information that Mazurek and his wife are helping "Laluś". They decided, that the Christmas Eve would be the perfect time to do a "review of bandit hideouts". Two officers of the Regional Public Security Office in Krasnystaw entered the store. A shootout broke out, in which one of the Communists got wounded. "Laluś" also suffered a shot to the stomach. Then, the Internal Security Corps began a thorough search in Wygnanowice. Wounded "Laluś" managed to reach another hideout, where he dressed up as a village woman and was taken out of the village premises. A trusted doctor tended to his wound, and after a few months' worth of rest, Franczak returned to full shape. "Zygmunt" also managed to stay alive this time, yet unfortunately not for long. A month later, on January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1949, he was surrounded in a hideout in Klimusin, near Fajslawice. Not wanting to surrender to the Communists, he tried to break through the Security Office's cordon and fell in combat. Thus, "Laluś's" patrol ceased to exist.

More and more soldiers under the command of Capt. "Uskok" were met with the Communist repressions. In the beginning of 1949, the commander of another patrol, codename "Strzała", was killed. On May 21<sup>st</sup> 1949,

officers of the Security Office located the bunker of "Uskok" himself, who, without an option to escape, committed suicide by blowing himself up with a grenade. The Communists found the bunker with the help of a former, revealed soldier - Franciszek Kasperek codename "Hardy".

"Laluś" no longer carried out his patrol missions. He began hiding on his own, although he did stay in touch with his new commander, Lieut. Col. "Wiktor" and took part in some operations, e.g. with two other partisans he shot on August 24<sup>th</sup> 1951 Franciszek Drygała "Jedynka" from the Passy village, suspected of collaborating with the Security Office. It was in his house, where the Communists arrested two partisans from "Strzała's" patrol.

On February 10<sup>th</sup> 1953. Franczak took part in his last, joint, armed action. Together with "Wiktor" and Zbigniew Pielak (Pielach) "Felek", he tried to confiscate money from the safe of the Municipal State-owned Store of Farmers' Self-help in Piaski. Two of them went inside, while "Laluś" stood guard at the gate of the local cemetery. The partisans terrorised the officials, but the cashier managed to turn on the alarm. They forced him to open the safe and took the money; however, upon leaving the office they ran into officers of the Citizens' Militia. Then, a violent shootout broke out, in which "Wiktor" got mortally wounded, and the chief of the local Communist militia outpost, Sgt Tadeusz Stojek died where he stood. "Laluś", who was standing guard, wounded one of the officers. He and "Felek" managed to fall back, but without the money.

### **On his own**

Following the unsuccessful operation in Piaski, Franczak no longer had any contacts with other partisans. He went into hiding for the next 10 years. It was possible, due to the network of trusted associates and kind helpers, which he organised himself (according to the Security Service's data, it counted more than two hundred people). For aiding "a dangerous bandit" one could be sentenced for several years in prison. During the 10 years of hiding, Franczak still conducted a few operations of confiscating goods. He also shot an officer of the Citizens' Militia in Lublin.

In April of 1956, the Communist authorities announced another amnesty. Around 35 thousand people were released from jails, almost 90 thousand revealed themselves as members of the underground. Józef Franczak consulted one of the Lublin lawyers; however - fearful of the possibility of many years of imprisonment - he decided not to reveal himself. It's worth stressing, that the Security Service tried to convince him via secret agents to use the amnesty.

The search for "Laluś", led by the Security Office and later the Security Service, was nicknamed "Pożar" or "Fire". The operative actions were also aimed at his closest family and friends. There were attempts to recruit them as secret collaborators, who were to observe and report on all Franczak's closest relatives and associates. In houses of some of them, surveillance devices were hidden.





↳ Torba z uzbrojeniem  
znaleziona przy zabitym  
„Laluś”



↳ Posesja Ludwika Misiury, miejsce śmierci  
„Lalusia”; funkcjonariusze SB naszkicowali  
sposób ułożenia zwłok zabitego

On the basis of SB's archives, it seems the officers who were searching for "Laluś" almost admired his conspiracy abilities. In March of 1962, it was noted in one of the reports, that for several years the Security Service hadn't received any information on "Laluś's" whereabouts whatsoever. The Communists knew, that his network of helpers informed him whenever they or the military showed up in a nearby area. What's more, they knew that to some extent "Laluś" saw through their methods. His network informed him who, when and where was talking to the Citizens' Militia. He would later confront those who were questioned, which allowed him to gather what information the Communists had on him. Additionally, some of the people that revealed this kind of information to Franczak, later became double agents in his service. If he wasn't sure he could trust his helper, he isolated himself from him or used him to lead sort of a spy game against the Security Service, feeding false information to the Communists.

One of the officers of the SB informed his superiors:

"[...] the assurances he takes and the myth the bandit and his closest associates create in the area of hiding, like Franczak would supposedly have friends in the ranks of the Citizens' Militia and the prosecution, who would inform him on anyone reporting to the authorities – give him arguments of fear. Because of that, the people we reach are afraid to provide us with information, and often refuse to help in any way, even if presented with evidence of their cooperation with the bandit."

"Laluś" was careful: he often changed his hideouts, he didn't inform his associates on where he would be next; what's more – he informed he was going the exact opposite way than the one he was truly going.

## **Epilogue**

To the site of the operation in Majdan Kozic Górnych came a prosecutor and a doctor, who examined the body. It was then transported to the dissecting-room of the Institute of Medical Jurisprudence in Lublin. During the autopsy, in accordance to the prosecutor's decision, Franczak's head was removed from the body. Then, the remains were buried in an unnamed grave in the communal cemetery at the Unicka Street. Thanks to the help of the worker of the cemetery, Franczak's sisters managed to move his remains in 1983 to a family tomb at the Piaski parish.

The local community had been convinced for years, that the traitor was Wacław Beć. The true culprit of "Laluś's" final moments lived until the end of his own life away from any suspicions. It was no sooner than in 2005, when the author of these words managed to uncover the secret of TW "Michał".

On March 17<sup>th</sup> 2008, Józef Franczak was awarded a post-mortem Order of Polonia Restituta (Order of the Rebirth of Poland) by the president of Poland.

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