

## Analysis of events of the night from 1946 to 1947 in Zelczyna, Malopolskie

AGNIESZKA PRZYBYŁOWSKA<sup>1</sup>, AGATA MAZUREK<sup>2</sup>, TOMASZ KOZIOŁ<sup>2</sup>,  
MICHALINA BERTRAM<sup>1</sup>, TOMASZ KONOPKA<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Forensic Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, Jagiellonian University Medical College,  
Kraków, Poland

<sup>2</sup> Department of Anatomy, Faculty of Medicine, Jagiellonian University Medical College,  
Kraków, Poland

**Corresponding author:** Agata Mazurek, M.D.

Department of Anatomy, Jagiellonian University Medical College  
ul. Kopernika 12, 31-034 Kraków, Poland

**Abstract:** Introduction: Some of the events concerning various killings in Polish history to this day remain unclear. Even though there were some historical studies done about the shootings we describe, there still remained the forensic side to verify. By doing so we have uncovered facts that change our view of that night established previously by various documents and historical articles, which all described deaths of the victims as executions. The aim of the study is to verify any circumstances of deaths that occurred during the shootings nearby Zelczyna in 1946/47.

Materials and Methods: 6 autopsy protocols and archival documents from 1947 were analyzed to compare with the official course of events with results of autopsies.

Results: Around midnight 31.12.1946/01.01.1947 a group of several armed men, later established to be anti-communist partisans, launched two attacks on local militia men (ORMO) in and around the village of Zelczyna, killing 6 people. Firearms used were not identified in the autopsy reports due to lack of cartridges in the bodies. Autopsy protocols show that the victims were shot in random places on the bodies, which indicates deaths in action, with the exception of one victim. Those reports also contained inaccuracies regarding names and number of the victims.

Conclusions: Autopsy results do not confirm previous description of events, with only one of the victims showing signs which could suggest execution. All the other victims, judging by their wounds were most likely killed in action.

**Keywords:** autopsy, Polish partisans, execution, shooting.

**Submitted:** 16-Mar-2025; **Accepted in the final form:** 20-Jun-2025; **Published:** 31-Jul-2025.



## Introduction

Shortly after the World War II, the still-active underground resistance in Poland did not recognize the new communist authorities, directing its actions against various organs of repression. Among these were the Volunteer Reserve of the Citizens' Militia (ORMO), the Citizens' Militia (MO), and the Security Office (UB) [1].

ORMO was originally intended to exist as a civic service helping maintain public order and counteracting crime. In fact, however it functioned as a political tool for totalitarian control of Polish society. It was created on February 22, 1946, by decree of the Minister of Public Security, Stanisław Radkiewicz. During different periods of the Polish State under Soviet occupation, the character of the organization changed significantly [1, 2].

In the initial period — 1946–1968 — the organization formally remained independent, with centralized leadership under the State Security Commission, but in reality it was highly subordinated to the MO. Despite this, ORMO was not well-liked by regular militiamen. In the 1950s its importance diminished, but it was later used to pacify student protests in March 1968 [2].

ORMO members had the right to caution and check the IDs of citizens suspected of breaching public order or committing crimes. They also controlled traffic safety on public roads. Their duties included bringing a suspect to the nearest Citizens' Militia officer or station. They were authorized to use direct coercion, such as physical force, batons, or gas. Some of them also applied for permits to carry firearms. Membership in ORMO did not come with a regular salary [1, 3].

The Department of Forensic Medicine at the Jagiellonian University was the first institution of its kind in Poland. It was founded in 1805 by decision of the Galician Governorate, and in 1923 it was headed by Jan Olbrycht, who was awarded a professorship the same year and remained in charge even after the war despite his traumatic imprisonment in the Auschwitz and Mauthausen camps. He spent three years there, including time in the infamous Block 11, known as the “death block.” As a doctor, he provided help to other prisoners and did not neglect his own education. He later became a permanent expert on the investigation of German crimes in Poland [4, 5].

On January 7, 1947, the bodies of six victims with gunshot wounds arrived at the Department, filed under case number 4/47 [6]. The autopsy reports were as follows:

Opyrchał Józef (son of Wojciech), age 23, ORMO member — autopsy by Dr. Marian Kusiak, with Dr. Maria Byrdy (later professor at the Medical Academy in Białystok) present.

Opyrchał Józef (son of Piotr), age 25, ORMO member — autopsy by Dr. Marian Pieczarkowski.

Liskiewicz Jan, age 23, ORMO member — autopsy by Dr. Marian Kusiak, Dr. Maria Byrdy present.

Kucharczyk Wojciech, age 34, ORMO member — autopsy by Dr. Marian Kusiak, Dr. Maria Byrdy present.

Lelek Franciszek, age 23, ORMO member — autopsy by Dr. Marian Pieczarkowski.

Stokłosa Wojciech, age 60, policeman — autopsy by Dr. Marian Pieczarkowski, Prof. Jan Olbrycht present.

In the Krakow area, a group led by Mieczysław Spuła (aliases “Felek,” “Feluś,” “Zbyszek”) was active. Born on October 7, 1926, in Woźniki, Spuła began his activities at age 17 in one of the underground cells of the Home Army — the National Military Organization. He took part in smuggling people (mainly Jews) across the border between the Third Reich and the General Government and in aiding escaped prisoners from KL Auschwitz. He participated in numerous operations in

Frydrychowice and Przybradz. In later years, he was part of various patrols of the National Military Union, including the partisan group "Burza," commanded by Lieutenant Mieczysław Wądołny. As a soldier of this unit, Spuła was promoted to the rank of platoon sergeant for his conduct and achievements in battle. On December 31, 1946, he set out on a mission to Ochodza, which involved the elimination of five ORMO officers and one MO officer who were then terrorizing residents of several villages near Krakow. The sentence was passed by the Polish independence movements [7, 8].

The aim of this study is to analyze archival notes of autopsies performed on victims of shooting in Zelczyna village with assessment whether gunshot wounds were done in execution or as a result of the fight.

## Materials and Methods

We analyzed through various digitized versions of journals and newspapers published in Cracow on the beginning of 1947 and simultaneously compared with the six relevant autopsy protocols from our Department of Forensic Medicine (section book 1-6/1947P) with other archival documents made available to us after request by IPN (signatures: IPN Kr 074/2, IPN Kr 075/45 vol. 1-4, IPN Kr 1/1337).

We've also prepared reconstruction of gunshot wounds based on the protocols in form of illustrations.

## Results

According to previous reports, the events in Zelczyna were recognized as executions described as follows [9-13]:

*During the night of December 31, 1946, to January 1, 1947, a New Year's Eve party was taking place in Zelczyna.*

*During their march, Spuła's group encountered three drunk men at an intersection leading from Zelczyna, firing shots into the air. They were ORMO officers who had left the party earlier. After checking their identities and disarming them, they were ordered to lie in a roadside ditch, where the sentence was carried out.*

*After a short march, "Feluś's" patrol reached Zelczyna and the house where the party was taking place. Mieczysław Spuła ordered the ORMO men to step forward and show their IDs. After verifying their identities, he ordered them to lie on the floor in the middle of the room. After informing everyone present who they were and why they were condemned to death, the commander carried out the sentence by firing a burst at the men lying on the ground.*

*However, the description from the report by County MO Commander Tadeusz Czyżowski, who led the investigation, presents the following sequence of events:*

*On the night of December 31, 1946, to January 1, 1947, around midnight, several armed men in Polish Army uniforms, unidentified in the report, forced Piotr Kuberski to knock on the door of Jan Lelek's house, claiming they were from the Security Office. He complied. The armed men entered Lelek's house and took him, ordering him to lead them to his brother-in-law, Jan Gibas, the ORMO commander. Lelek knocked, saying he was alone. Gibas's wife opened the door, whereupon three armed individuals forced their way in (shots were fired into the ceiling). They robbed the house of weapons, ammunition, and valuables, taking Gibas with Lelek and ordering them to lead them to Ochodza by the shortest route. They did not comply and instead led them on a detour through Zelczyna.*

Along the way, they encountered three loudly talking ORMO men returning from the dance party in Zelczyna (in another account, they were firing into the air). The attackers set an ambush, disarmed, beat, and ordered them to lie down, then executed them with revolvers and automatic weapons: Wojciech Stokłosa, Wojciech Kucharczyk, Jan Liskiewicz. Gibas and Lelek were ordered to hide behind buildings, during which they managed to escape. Shots were fired during the escape and Gibas was shot in the buttock.

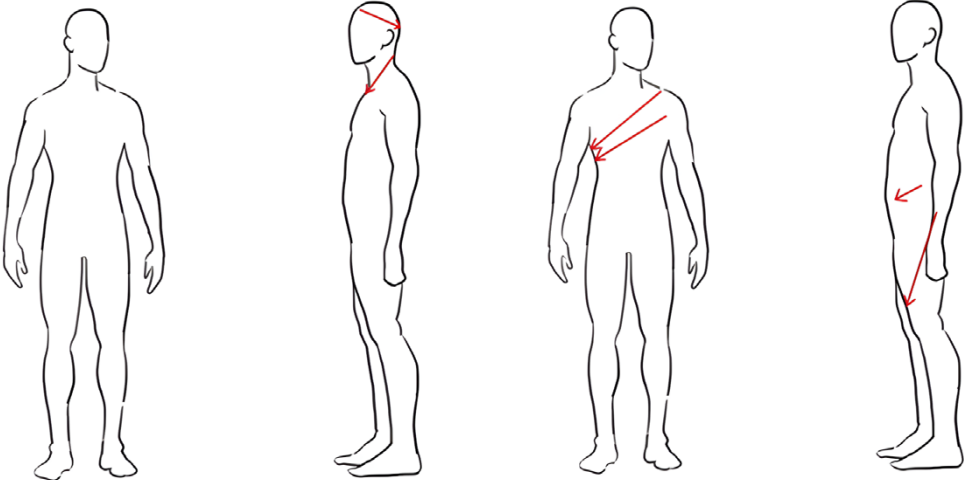
The attackers then headed for the New Year's Eve party at the Zelczyna school, where they burst in, firing into the ceiling. According to Stefan Zawila's testimony, they forced the guests to surrender the identified ORMO men: Józef Oprychał (executed), Franciszek Lelek (executed), Jan Światowiec (beaten, not executed, later arrested by the MO), Władysław Jankowicz (beaten, not executed). The attackers then returned to Ochodza and went to the Electoral District building, where they fired at it. Inside were two ORMO officers: Józef Lewicki and Piotr Badura. According to Czyżowski's report, they returned fire (other sources claim the attackers left after some time). The attackers then likely headed to Pozowice and Wadowice County.

Descriptions of the suspects given in the testimonies:

Short dark-haired man in a Polish Army uniform with a four-cornered cap, stocky, oval face, 22–23 years old, armed with automatics and a pistol (carried out the execution at the party in Zelczyna).  
Medium-height dark-haired man, round face, stocky, in Polish Army uniform, armed with automatic weapon, 23–25 years old.

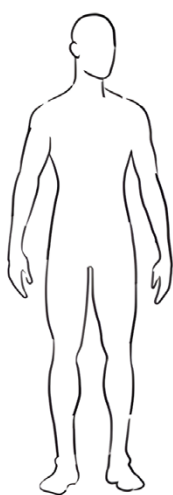
Blond, tall, slim, in a Polish Army uniform with platoon stripes, 22–23 years old (stood armed in the doorway of the party room).

The autopsy findings for the six victims are presented in the Tables 1–6 and Figures 1–6.



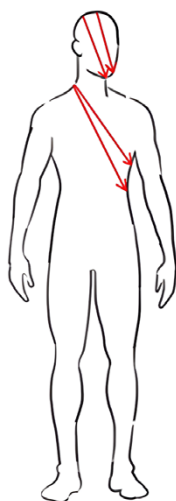
**Fig. 1.** Graphic presentation of entry and exit wounds and possible trajectories of the bullets according to the autopsy of the victim Józef Oprychał (son of Wojciech).

**Fig. 2.** Graphic presentation of entry and exit wounds and possible trajectories of the bullets according to the autopsy of the victim Józef Oprychał (son of Piotr).



**Fig. 3.** Graphic presentation of entry and exit wounds and possible trajectories of the bullets according to the autopsy of the victim Jan Liskiewicz.

**Fig. 4.** Graphic presentation of entry and exit wounds and possible trajectories of the bullets according to the autopsy of the victim Wojciech Kucharczyk.



**Fig. 5.** Graphic presentation of entry and exit wounds and possible trajectories of the bullets according to the autopsy of the victim Franciszek Lelek.

**Fig. 6.** Graphic presentation of entry and exit wounds and possible trajectories of the bullets according to the autopsy of the victim Wojciech Stoklosa.

**Table 1.** Autopsy findings of the victim Józef Opyrchał (son of Wojciech).

Age and Affiliation	Entry Wound Locations	Exit Wound Locations	Cause of death	Notes
23 years old; ORMO member	Forehead (left side, 10 cm above left eyebrow)	Left eye socket bone	Brain damage	Blood alcohol: 1.45‰ Impossible to determine order, distance of gunshots and caliber.
	Back of head (right side)	Not specified		
	Nape (neck skin, level of C3 vertebra)	Chest, near the sternum		

**Table 2.** Autopsy findings of the victim Józef Opyrchał (son of Piotr).

Age and Affiliation	Entry Wound Locations	Exit Wound Locations	Cause of death	Notes
26 years old; ORMO member	Left shoulder	Chest, near right armpit	Heart damage	Blood alcohol: 1.32‰ Impossible to determine order, distance of gunshots and caliber.
	Left upper arm (near shoulder)	Right armpit area		
	Left hip area	Left hip area (1.5 cm from entry)		
	Right buttock	Right knee		

**Table 3.** Autopsy findings of the victim Jan Liskiewicz.

Age and Affiliation	Entry Wound Locations	Exit Wound Locations	Cause of death	Notes
23 years old; ORMO member	Left ear, near jaw angle	Right side of neck	Massive blood loss	Blood alcohol: 0.54‰ Damage of the larynx, carotid arteries and the spinal cord Impossible to determine order, distance of gunshots and caliber.

**Table 4.** Autopsy findings of the victim Wojciech Kucharczyk.

Age and Affiliation	Entry Wound Locations	Exit Wound Locations	Cause of death	Notes
34 years old; ORMO member	Left side of neck (near left jaw angle & ear)	Back of neck, right side (near right ear & jaw angle)	Spinal cord injury	Blood alcohol: 0.43‰ Caliber undetermined

**Table 5.** Autopsy findings of the victim Franciszek Lelek.

Age and Affiliation	Entry Wound Locations	Exit Wound Locations	Cause of death	Notes
23 years old; ORMO member	Parietal part of the head	Left jaw area	Exsanguination due to heart damage	Blood alcohol: 0.46‰ Approx. caliber 8 mm, fired from automatic weapon. No signs of close-range shots.
	Parietal part of the head (right of previous)	Middle of jaw		
	Right shoulder	Chest, left side		
	Parietal part of the head	Left jaw area		

**Table 6.** Autopsy findings of the victim Wojciech Stokłosa.

Age and Affiliation	Entry Wound Locations	Exit Wound Locations	Cause of death	Notes
60 years old; Policeman (MO)	Chest, near nipple	Lower back (lumbar area)	Massive blood loss	Blood alcohol: 1.93‰ Damage: left lung, heart, liver, stomach, left kidney No signs of close-range shot. Caliber undetermined.

## Discussion

According to our analysis of the autopsy reports, the official description of the events and the injuries sustained during the executions does not match the gunshot wounds described in the autopsy reports of the six victims. Records from the Krakow Department of Forensic Medicine show that the shots were fired in a random manner, suggesting that the victims were moving — probably trying to escape or defend themselves — which contradicts the execution theory put forward by Commander Czyżowski (MO) but indicates death in action, with the possible exception of one victim. Although these victims' injuries might suggest death by execution, the method did not match Czyżowski's description. His report also contained some inconsistencies regarding the names and number of victims.

In executions, perpetrators aim for organs whose damage causes rapid death (usually the heart and brain). These shots are typically fired perpendicularly to the body's plane, with the victims immobilized, tied up, or otherwise restrained. Based on the historical sources cited, injuries of this type would be expected. However, the autopsy results do not confirm this — the bullets' trajectories were slanted and mostly not aimed directly at the brain or heart. The location of the entry wounds shows that the victims were changing position relative to the shooter instead of lying motionless face-down as described. This means the victim either tried to flee or fight, or were shot by surprise. Of the six victims, only one possibly died by execution (Franciszek Lelek — shots in the head and chest).

## Conclusions

Based on the available materials, we cannot verify the exact course of events, but we can say with high probability that executions of ORMO officers in the manner described in previous sources and studies did not take place exactly like was described in the previous reports. Most of bullet paths were angled or slanted and not perpendicular. Described injuries are consistent with moving targets not bound victims. Only wounds of the Franciszek Lelek might suggest an execution-style kill, nonetheless his injuries do not fully match the official story.

## References

1. *Pączek T.*: Ochotnicza Rezerwa Milicji Obywatelskiej w latach 1946–1989. Rozwój organizacyjny i rola w aparacie represji PRL [The Volunteer Reserve of the Citizens' Militia in the years 1946–1989. Organizational development and role in the apparatus of repression of the Polish People's Republic]. *Aparat Represji w Polsce Ludowej 1944–1989*. 2012; 10 (1): 85–130.
2. <https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/historia-z-ipn/179418,Krzysztof-Pawluczuk-Oni-Rowniez-Moga-Obic-Ochotnicza-Rezerwa-Milicji-Obywatelski.html>. Access: 2025-07-15.
3. <https://przystanekhistoria.pl/pa2/teksty/97546,ORMO-zbrojne-ramie-ludu.html>. Access: 2025-07-15.
4. *Marek Z.*: Jan Stanisław Olbrycht. In: Grochowski J. (ed.) *Złota księga Wydziału Lekarskiego*. Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka 2000; 455–463 (*Sześćsetlecie medycyny krakowskiej 2*. Kraków 1964; 332–338; *Archiwum Medycyny Sądowej*. 1968; 1: 5–9).
5. *Śródka A., Gryglewski R.W.*: Jan Olbrycht. In: Śródka A. (ed.) *Powiązania rodowe twórców polskich szkół naukowo-medycznych*. Kraków: Polihymnia 2012: 147–155.
6. Department of Forensic Medicine, section book 1-6/1947P, Krakow.
7. *Korkuć M., Ptak A.*: *Żołnierze porucznika Wądołnego: z dziejów niepodległościowego podziemia na ziemi wadowickiej 1945–1947* [Lieutenant Wądołny's soldiers: from the history of the independence underground in the Wadowice region 1945–1947]. Kraków: Fundacja Centrum Dokumentacji Czynu Niepodległościowego, Księgarnia Akademicka 2001; 15–112.
8. <https://krakow.ipn.gov.pl/pl4/nauka-i-edukacja/edukacja-1/przystanek-historia/157162,Nowy-Rok-1947-w-Ochodzy.html>. Access: 2025-07-15.
9. Archiwum IPN [Archives of Institute of National Remembrance], IPN Kr 074/1 vol. 1–3.
10. Archiwum IPN [Archives of Institute of National Remembrance], IPN Kr 074/2.
11. Archiwum IPN [Archives of Institute of National Remembrance], IPN Kr 075/45 vol. 1–4.
12. Archiwum IPN [Archives of Institute of National Remembrance], IPN Kr 1/1337.
13. *Bertram M., Kozioł T., Woźniacka A., Mazurek A., Konopka T.*: Analysis of events of the night from 1946 to 1947 in Zelczyna, Małopolskie. In: 30th edition of International Medical Students' Conference. June 1st–4th 2022. Book of abstracts. Kraków 2022; 41–42.