

Tadeusz Orłowski and his Tatra trails*

Józef Nyka

Polish Alpinist Society, Warszawa, Poland

Professor Orłowski had already been there when we were only beginning our adventure with the Tatra Mountains. We were getting older, his trails were not. And new generations, filled with emotion and respect, reached places where he had set his foot long before them. For us, now in our 70s and 80s, he offered us spiritual support. Having seen that one could show such a good intellectual capability at the age of 90 (the Professor's physical condition was a bit worse) gives us hope that we may also reach the old age without Alzheimer's disease. Sadly, Professor Orłowski is gone and, as time goes by, we too are getting nearer the place where our dear Professor is now.

The obituary prepared by the Presidium of the Polish Academy of Sciences (Polska Akademia Nauk – PAN) said: *He was one of the most outstanding Polish doctors and scientists, the pioneer of transplantology and dialysis treatment in Poland. (...) The team that he supervised integrated dialyses and kidney transplants into the offered treatment, which saved the lives of many people.* Professor Orłowski's achievements earned him a great number of honors and distinctions both in Poland and abroad.

However, before his scientific career even began he had already been a devoted mountaineer. The annual issue of the *Taternik* magazine (1936–1937) mentioned his winter ascent of the Przełęcz nad Wrotami mountain pass and then another one of the Zadni Mnich peak. In the subsequent years, the winter season was no longer his element. On a sunny day of July 30, 1937 he climbed the western ridge of the Niżnie Rysy for the first time, and on August 1 he reached another ridge – Grań Apostołów. He passed his “mountaineering finals” during the expedition with Dawid Milechman, which resulted in Milechman's death on July 11, 1937, right at the entrance to the Dolinka za Mnichem valley. September 27, 1938 was the day when he climbed the famous Żleb Drege'a gorge, spotted by Wanda Hennisz-Kamińska and Zofia Radwańska-Kuleszyna (Paryska). The war was already in the wind, when on July 30 and August 3, 1939 he made an ascent

with Włodzimierz Gośławski through the Galeria Gankowa terrace. He became a member of the Polish Tatra Society Alpine Club (Klub Wysokogórski Polskiego Towarzystwa Tatrzańskiego – KW PTT) in January 1937 and a full member at the beginning of 1939. On March 12, 1939 he became the Club's Board member. His friends called him “Stolik”.

During the war his contact with the Tatra Mountains was hindered but, paradoxically, it was not weakened. He was still going to the mountains a few times a year. The *Taternik* magazine lists the trails he took during this period, as well as their variants. Wanda Hennisz-Kamińska recalls a month she spent with Stolik and a couple of friends in the mountain shelter Murowaniec on Hala Gąsienicowa, where they occupied the biggest room. They took a number of different trails then, most of which had been covered by Wiesław Stanisławski. Tadeusz Orłowski also managed to find time to pursue the underground medical studies and work in the conspiratorial Alpine Club, in which he shared the position of a chairman with Justyn Wojnisz. However, from the war period he is mostly remembered not as a climber, but predominately as a founder of the underground *Taternik* (the magazine devoted to mountaineering). Stanisław Siedlecki wrote the following in the 1948 issue of another mountaineering magazine, *Wierchy*: *One cannot overrate the importance of this endeavor, serving as editor of the Taternik under the occupation, and the significance it had for the Polish mountaineering. (...) Its nonpolitical approach, its editorial style (...), the range of interests (...) are the best proof that in those hard times, the life of Poland was not crushed.*

For his underground activities, Tadeusz Orłowski adopted the nom de guerre of “Spaga”. He was also called “Justyn” or “Dr. Justyn”. His name appears in the 5th volume of the “Great Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Warsaw Uprising”: *Orłowski Tadeusz aka “Dr. Justyn”, the son of Witold; born 1917; doctor; district Ochota-Kolonia Staszica; the “Odwet” battalion; Śródmieście,*

Józef Nyka, Polish Alpinist Society,
Warszawa, Poland
Received: February 18, 2009.
Accepted: February 18, 2009.
Pol Arch Med Wewn. 2009;
119 (5): 293-295
Translated by Inter & Trans,
Justyna Czackowska
Copyright by Medycyna Praktyczna,
Kraków 2009

* The full article entitled
“Tadeusz Orłowski” was published in
Polish in the *Głos Seniora* magazine,
July 2008.



"Golski", the 3rd armored battalion; patients' department (Gmach Architektury, subsequently Nowakowskiego 20). Helping the wounded was a traumatic experience for Orłowski, both personally and professionally. He left burning Warsaw together with Wawrzyniec Żuławski and an injured man whom they carried on a stretcher. They managed to avoid the camps and went to Cracow and from there to the Tatra Mountains and the Morskie Oko Lake where they stayed until the Russians entered Poland. On February 6, 1945, while the fight was still going on near the border, Tadeusz Orłowski was making a solitary ascent in the area of the Ciemnosmreczyńska Turnia peak, which was one of the first winter ascents.

In the summer of 1945, together with Danuta Schiele he went to the Zadni Gerlach peak. The climb, which began in the Dolina Batyżowicka valley, turned out to be yet another sad experience related to the war. On their way they found 27 corpses and a part of the plane, which crashed on an October night of 1944. The successive years brought new and memorable mountain expeditions. On August 29 and 31, 1946 Orłowski was exploring the ridge of Żabia Łalka. In 1945 he marked out a new trail on the west face of Łomnica, between the two climbing routes, Hokejka and Stanisławski. One of his most spectacular achievements was the ascent of the north side of his favorite mountain peak – Żabi Wyżni. On September 6, 1946, together with Wanda Hennisz-Kamińska he marked out a trail in the middle of the precipices and described it in the *Taternik* magazine as *extremely beautiful and one of the most astounding trails in the Tatra Mountains*. Until the present day, the "Orłowski's trails" around the Morskie Oko Lake enjoy great popularity. They lead to the Żabi Niżni peak (July 23,

1943), the side of the Zadni Mních peak (September 4, 1946), the Mních peak (August 10, 1948), the Pośredni Mięguszowiecki peak (August 27, 1948) and the pillar of Kopa Spadowa (July 9, 1949).

In 1945 he became a member of the Tatra Mountain Rescue Service (Tatrzańskie Ochotnicze Pogotowie Ratunkowe – TOPR) – he was sworn in on September 3 but left the TOPR in January 1946 followed by Zofia Paryska and Witold Paryski. Participation in five rescue operations have been recorded. By the end of December 1945, he joined the Polish Alpine Club located in the town of Zakopane only to leave it August 4, 1946 and go back to the PTT Alpine Club. He still actively participated in all organizational activities. He took part in general assemblies, worked on a Review Board and trained climbers. As a member of the Editorial Board and a friend of Zofia Paryska and Witold Paryski, he remained involved with the matters regarding the *Taternik* magazine. He was interested in program issues. On March 30, 1939 he led the discussion at the Warsaw Club concerning "the content of the Tatra Mountains guidebook". In the 2nd and 3rd issues of the *Taternik* magazine from 1947, he presented a widely commented "Alpine Club expedition plan", later developed by Jan K. Dorawski and considered "very up-to-date".

In 1947 he took part in the first post-war club expedition to the Alps. He gave an account of his experiences while traveling with the Mount Blanc group in the Bulletin of the PTT Warsaw branch. Together with Wawrzyniec Żuławski (aka Wawa) he climbed the east face of the Aiguille du Grépon (August 1) and the Mont Blanc du Tacul Boccalatti pillar (August 16). In the above-mentioned bulletin he wrote: *The expedition was surprisingly successful, it'll certainly encourage the Polish mountaineers to look confidently into the future and aim for the most difficult Alpine trails and the highest mountains in the world*. Ten years later, in the summer of 1956, Orłowski set off for the Alps again. Together with Wawrzyniec Żuławski he marked out a new trail along the 700 meter-high east face of Aiguille du Moine (August 13) and climbed the west face of Dent du Requin (August 16). In 1948 he worked as an instructor at a skiing camp organized by the Alpine Club and in 1949 he joined the Warsaw Club. He gave a number of lectures there, was in charge of the training department and sat on the Alpine Club's Board.

In the meantime, his scientific duties and business trips abroad hindered his contact with the mountains. He renewed his mountaineering contacts when he came back from his numerous trips and after Żuławski's death in the Alps, on August 18, 1957, he even became the chairman of the Club for a few months (until December 20, 1957). Wawa was one of Orłowski's closest and best companions. Tadeusz Orłowski bid him farewell in the article entitled "The late Jerzy Wawrzyniec Żuławski", which was published in a special issue of the *Taternik*. On July 1,

1960 he co-organized and went on an expedition to Hindu Kush. Unfortunately, professional duties called him back from Kabul to Poland as soon as 18 days after the beginning of the expedition.

It is said that he kept to the rules of the classic climbing, which resulted in a high standard of his trails. Following the example of Wincenty Birkenmeyer, he often camped by the fire or under the rocks. He left his traces in many rock shelters in the valleys of Kacza, Ciężka, Batyżowiecka, Kieżmarska and Czarna Jaworowa. The night before the tragic climb with Milechman he spent in a mountain hollow at the entrance to the Bańdzioch cave. Committed to his professional and scientific duties, in the Tatra Mountains he was only looking for peace and quiet, however he still actively participated in the organizational activities and remained an example to follow and inspiration for the young. Thus, when in March 1960 the Board of the Alpine Club established the Committee for Mountain Safety, it was Tadeusz Orłowski who was put in charge as chairman. The committee put forward a few radical proposals which, unfortunately, were never implemented. Professor Orłowski believed that: *One of the major causes of accidents in the mountains in the recent years is (...) the disproportion between technical skills and climbing experience of the young mountaineers. Excessive ambition inspired by the prospect of foreign trips, the desire to join the expedition and set new records (...) all these result in insufficient knowledge of the mountains and inadequate safety measures as well as other objective dangers.* Arno and Tonia Puškáš were his friends in Slovakia and often offered him shelter in the Kieżmarska Chata in the Tatra Mountains, and later in the town of Smokowiec. It was with Arno that he crossed his last mountain trails. In his letter dated November 12, 1980, Arno wrote: *Professor Tadeusz Orłowski visited me in August and stayed for two weeks. We were hiking and climbing in the Slovak Paradise and in the Tatra Mountains. We even marked out two new trails, one from the town of Młynica to the Solisko peak and the other one in Kopa Popradzka massif. I sent the descriptions and outlines to Witold H. Paryski to be used in his guidebook. Two elderly gentlemen, he – 63, I – 55, together 118 years old.*

In the interviews that Professor Orłowski gave in the subsequent years, he distanced himself from the spirit of sport in his mountaineering endeavors. He was being a bit coy about it, however, as what he had actually achieved proves something quite opposite. He always ventured upon very difficult climbs and often tested the limits to the man's potential. In the 1960s there was a popular saying: *better be the second in line while walking one of the Orłowski's trails.* In 1960 the Alpine Club General Assembly awarded him the status of an honorary member. What a pity he never wrote "Moje Góry" (My Mountains), he left only a small number of articles concerning the mountains, gave a few interviews, including the one for the *Turysta* magazine (interviewed

by Maria Skroczyńska) and the *Góry* magazine (interviewed by Wojciech Kurtyka). It was Barbara Morawska-Nowak who managed to obtain a longer remembrance article from him and published it in the 2003 *Pamiętnik Polskiego Towarzystwa Tatrzańskiego* (Memoirs of the Polish Tatra Society). Despite his age and a multitude of work he remained interested in the mountains and was a regular reader of a simple publication *Głos Seniora*. In the fall of 1994, Tadeusz Orłowski, accompanied by Wanda Henisz-Kamińska, attended a get-together event for seniors at the Morskie Oko Lake, where he enchanted his audience reminiscing about his past.

He died on July 30, 2008 in Warsaw and was buried at the Stare Powązki cemetery. In his last journey he was accompanied by the distinguished representatives of the medical world, chancellors and deans, his co-workers and colleagues and by... the highlanders.

In April 1961 he took some time off to relax by the Morskie Oko Lake, he spent that time with the writer Juliusz Żuławski, Wawa's brother. It was with disbelief and admiration that they watched two young and unknown climbers making the second winter ascent of the left face of the Kazalnica mountain. Orłowski compared the climbers' style with his own and Żuławski commented on how much had changed since their times. The two young men who undertook this incredible challenge were Maciej Popko and Zbigniew Jurkowski. It so happened that Orłowski was accompanied during his last expedition by one of them, Zbyszek Jurkowski, who although 20 years younger than Orłowski, passed away the same time.

They both rest at Powązki, lying in two different sections of the cemetery, but walking the same road up to the mountainous part of the Heaven. It must be there, otherwise it would be difficult to assure the mountaineers of the eternal bliss.

Farewell Professor, in the mountains and in science you left your indelible trace.