

The Outstanding Contribution of Professor Aleksander Guterch to the Association of the Lovers of Old Arms and Uniforms

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ANDRZEJ NOVÁK-ZEMPLIŃSKI WRITES:

Many years ago, when I was in the studio of the brilliant graphic artist, Jan Maciej Kopecki (1945–2016), I saw fresh prints of a copperplate ex-libris, depicting an image of the map of the Kingdom of Poland of 1632 and, against its background, a 1917 Polish saber – this “victorious saber” of the Polish–Soviet War of 1920. It turned out that it was Aleksander Guterch’s ex-libris and its symbolism was an excellent expression of the Professor’s interests, as stated in the membership declaration of the Association of the Lovers of Old Arms and Uniforms, submitted on 1 June 1982. This area of the Professor’s special interests in the field of militaria concerned military cartography and Polish white arms (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Aleksander Guterch’s ex-libris made by Jan Marcin Kopecki (left) and hand-colored by Zygmunt Jagodziński (right).

His activity in our community was evident from the very beginning of his membership. He devoted a lot of attention to the history of Polish cartography in terms of its usefulness in warfare and, since he was an outstanding scientist in the field of geophysics, cartography was particularly close to his heart. He was also collecting old Polish maps. Alongside, he was passionate about white arms and other military items, which clearly explains the choice of symbolic motifs for the ex-libris described above.

At our monthly meetings of the Warsaw Branch of the Association of Lovers of Old Arms and Uniforms, the topic of military cartography and its practical application in various aspects of military operations and periods of our difficult history recurred many times. Overall, the Professor gave a dozen or so very interesting lectures on the use of cartography in military operations as well as its designing and remarkable Polish achievements in this field. He devoted his first speech (1984) to the military cartography of Polish lands from a historical perspective, presenting selected objects from his own collections. Subsequent speeches dealt with the times of the Napoleonic Wars and the November Uprising¹. Extremely interesting was a lecture on the cartographic service of the Home Army², delivered in 1988. The following year, he devoted attention to the early military cartography of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and, in 1991, to advances in mapmaking for military purposes in 1775–1795, i.e., the times of attempts to reform the army during the reign of the last king of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. In 1993, in connection with the 130th anniversary of the January Uprising, he delivered a paper on the role of military maps in the warfare of this uprising. In the following years, the topic of military cartography returned repeatedly and concerned museum and collector's cartographic collections as well as various episodes related to cartography in the history of the Duchy of Warsaw³ and the national uprisings. He devoted special attention (in 2001) to the phenomenon of creating a quartermaster map of the Kingdom of Poland, as an outstanding achievement of the era in the field of cartography. There were also topics devoted to these problems in World War II operations, and on the next anniversary (2013), the topic of military cartography of the January Uprising returned. The Professor also touched on other topics from the history of the Polish military, but cartography was always the leading subject. He also gave lectures on the above topics at the friendly Club of the Lovers of Old Polish Militaries in Warsaw and at other branches of the Association of the Lovers of Old Arms and Uniforms.

After five years of activity in our community, he became the President of the Executive Board of the Warsaw Branch and held this position for the next six terms, i.e., in the years 1987–2001. In 1998, he became a member of the Main Board of the Association of the Lovers of Old Arms and Uniforms [Stowarzyszenie Miłośników Dawnej Broni i Barwy (SMDBiB)]. In 2001, he was elected President of the Association's Main Board for the next five terms in the years 2001–2016. By virtue of his functions, he was the initiator and organizer of several nationwide scientific sessions devoted to the history of arms and uniforms:

- 1988: On the occasion of the 70th anniversary of Poland's regaining its independence, he organized the XIV session of the Association in the National Museum in Warsaw;
- 1990: On the 70th anniversary of the Polish–Soviet War, he convened the XVI session of the Association, also in the National Museum in Warsaw;

¹ For those who are not familiar with the Polish history: The main Polish rebellions against the Russian Empire: Kościuszko Uprising (1794), November Uprising (1830), and January Uprising (1863) (*added by the Editors*).

² The Home Army [Armia Krajowa] was the dominant resistance movement in German-occupied Poland during World War II (*added by the Editors*).

³ The Duchy of Warsaw [Księstwo Warszawskie] was an independent Polish state created by Napoleon (*added by the Editors*).

- 1994: To celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Kościuszko Uprising, he convened the XVIII session of the Association at the Museum of Independence in Warsaw;
- 2003: The 70th anniversary of establishing the Warsaw Society of the Friends of the Army Museum and the 45th anniversary of establishing the Association of the Lovers of Old Arms and Uniforms, as well as the 75th and 50th anniversaries of these Associations in 2007, were celebrated at the XXIII and XXV sessions of the Association.

The usually two-day meetings presented the research achievements of the Association members as well as invited guests, related to the anniversary topics; some of the talks were then published in “Studies in the History of Old Arms Uniforms”, issued by the National Museum in Kraków. There were also nationwide sessions organized in cooperation with the Club of the Lovers of Old Polish Military. Such a session took place in 2013 at the headquarters of the Polish Craft Association in Warsaw in connection with the 150th anniversary of the outbreak of the January Uprising. At that session, the Professor delivered a talk on insurrectional cartography. Another session, held in 2014 at the Museum of Independence, was devoted to the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of World War I. In 2017, a session was organized at the Warsaw Garrison Club in cooperation with the Polish Army Museum and the Office for War Veterans and Victims of Oppression on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the birth of Marshal Józef Piłsudski. In addition to the nationwide sessions, ceremonial meetings of the Warsaw Branch were also organized, related to important historical anniversaries. In all these events, the Professor, serving as the President of the Warsaw Branch and later as the President of the Main Board of the Association, made a very significant contribution, in terms of both, the scientific content and the organization.

In 1994, Aleksander Guterch was awarded the Association’s Golden Badge and, in 2016, the title of Honorary Member. In our community relations, the Professor behaved with an outstanding personal culture and the ability to maintain a proper distance in various aspects of organizational activities. He always kept an appropriate restraint in words and particular kindness, in both private contacts and official speeches. He will remain in our memory with an inseparable smile on his face. He passed away on 28 December 2023.

MAREK DUTKIEWICZ WRITES:

I met Prof. Aleksander Guterch in the late 1980s, during one of the annual General Meetings of the Association of the Lovers of Old Arms and Uniforms [Stowarzyszenie Miłośników Dawnej Broni i Barwy (SMDBiB)] which were held in Kraków. We represented, as delegates, the local branches of the Association. We talked mainly about the problems concerning activity and exchanged experiences and comments. Already then I noticed that the Professor talked little about himself and listened to others with great attention and kindness. In 1998, the Professor became a member of the Main Board, and in 2001, he was elected President of SMDBiB. He served in this position for five consecutive terms until 2016.

Since 1995, I have served as the Chairman of the Audit Commission, and for this reason, we met additionally at meetings of the Main Board. In 2013, when the Main Board of SMDBiB was being formed, the Professor approached me with a proposal to accept the position of Vice President. Thus, our contacts became very frequent. Then, in the following terms of 2016–2019 and 2019–2022, I was elected President and, in turn, I asked the Professor to become Vice President and support me with his experience and advice. In 2022, before the next election, he notified me that his health does not allow him to engage in more extensive activities. Nevertheless, until the end of his days, he kept in touch with me and took a keen interest in the Association’s activities. These many years of lively contacts and conversations were a great joy and satisfaction for me.

The Professor was an extremely cordial person with a nice smile, characterized by tremendous personal culture. Although he was a prominent scientist of international standing, he always behaved with modesty and politeness.

The Professor's interests were not limited to the professional sphere (he was a member of many domestic and foreign societies) but extended far into the area of broadly understood history. In addition to his activities in the Association of the Lovers of Old Arms and Uniforms, in 2014, he and his wife were accepted as members of the Józef Piłsudski Institute for Research in Modern History of Poland. The Institute is an association of people interested in the cultivation of the ideas of Marshal Józef Piłsudski and research in Polish history. The Professor actively participated in the meetings and activities of the Institute and, among other things, in 2017, he co-organized (together with SMDBiB and the Polish Army Museum) a scientific session dedicated to the 150th anniversary of the birth of Marshal Józef Piłsudski. With his attitude and activities, he fully implemented the Marshal's pro-state idea.

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