



21 October 2013

Order Promoting Witold Pilecki to the Rank of Colonel Given to Pilecki family



Minister of Defense Tomasz Siemoniak presents promotion order to Pilecki's son and daughter in ceremony on October 21, 2013.

“We want Col. Witold Pilecki to influence the formation of Polish Army soldiers’ characters, soldiers who need the example of individuals who put Poland’s interests above all else,” said Polish Minister of Defense Tomasz Siemoniak during a ceremony where he presented an order of promotion to Witold Pilecki’s family.

Minister of Defense Tomasz Siemoniak met with Witold Pilecki’s closest living family on Monday, October 21, 2013. The Minister presented to Pilecki’s daughter, Zofia Pilecka-Optulowicz, and son, Andrzej Pilecki, an order promoting their father from Captain to Colonel. The order to posthumously promote Cpt. Pilecki was signed by Minister Siemoniak on Sept. 6, 2013.

“This is a very moving moment. Thank you for accepting Poland’s invitation to the headquarters of the Ministry of Defense to accept this symbolic promotion,” Minister Siemoniak told Pilecki’s family. “His memory is very much alive. We believe that such a decision is warranted this year, the jubilee year [of his escape from Auschwitz]. Many NGOs have requested this promotion [for Pilecki],” the Minister said.

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"Today's ceremony does not conclude the many ongoing projects dedicated to his memory. This wonderful individual is worthy of further action, and is needed by the army," the Minister said.

Zofia Pilecka-Optułowicz described her father as "a soldier who did not hesitate to sacrifice his strength, health or life." She added, "Those are important values that soldiers should know."

The Colonel's daughter underlined that Witold Pilecki is not forgotten. "Many schools are named after him—more than 25," she said. "New Columbuses will arise in Poland, and for them, the most important and noble party will be the homeland, Poland."

Col. Witold Pilecki was born May 13, 1901 in Ołonec. He fought in the [1919-1920] Polish-Soviet War as a teenager, and was twice awarded the Cross of Valor. He was mobilized in August 1939 as a reserve officer. After the September Campaign was lost, he began working in the Underground Resistance movement, first in the Secret Polish Army and later the Home Army.

In September 1940, Pilecki knowingly entered a roundup in Warsaw in order to be sent to Auschwitz. As prisoner no. 4859, he wrote the first reports of the genocide taking place at Auschwitz, which were smuggled out through the camp laundry to Warsaw and then into the West. He escaped from the camp the night of April 26, 1943. He fought in the Warsaw Uprising with the Chrobry II battalion. After the Uprising's fall, he was taken prisoner. Upon the war camp's liberation, he became a 2nd Polish Corps soldier.

In October 1945, Pilecki returned to Poland by order of Gen. Władysław Anders to continue his work for the 2nd Corps. He was arrested in May 1947 and sentenced to death. He was executed May 25, 1948 at a prison on Rakowiecka Street. President Bolesław Bierut did not exercise his right to pardon him.

Upon regaining independence, in 1990 Poland's Supreme Military Court acquitted Pilecki of all charges. In 2006, he received a posthumous Order of the White Eagle. On Sept. 6, 2013, he was posthumously promoted by the Minister of Defense to the rank of colonel.

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