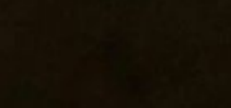


"I must have been inspired" Joseph Conrad

## New film to shed light on controversial WWII history of Tatra highlanders

CULTURE | HISTORY



STUART DOWELL, JANUARY 16, 2024

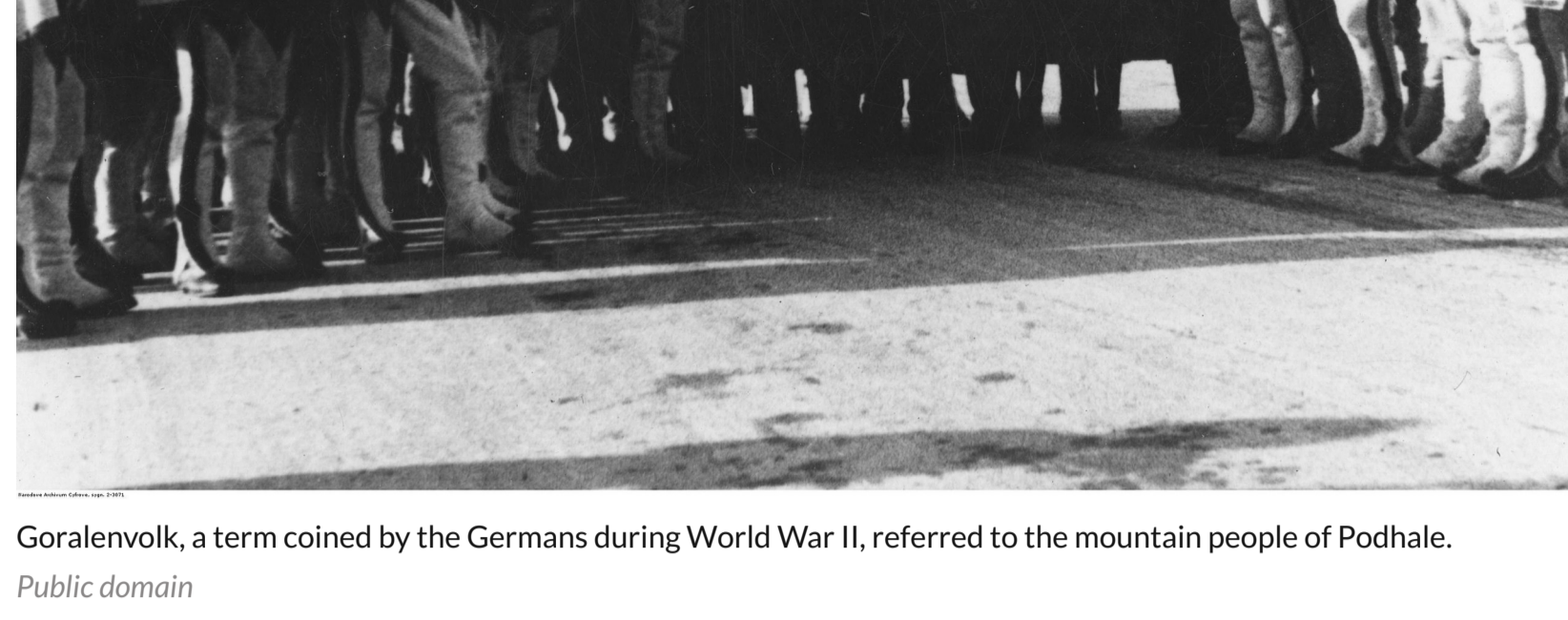


With a budget exceeding PLN 16 million, the film "Biała Odwaga" [White Courage] delves into the complex World War II history of highlanders from the Tatra mountains, who found themselves on opposing sides — the heroic Tatra couriers versus adherents of the German-conceived notion of Goralenwolk.

Press materials

The controversial role of Tatra highlanders during WWII is to be examined for the first time in the history of Polish cinema.

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Goralenwolk, a term coined by the Germans during World War II, referred to the mountain people of Podhale.

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Goralenwolk, a term coined by the Germans during World War II, referred to the mountain people of Podhale. This attempt by the Germans to isolate the Gorals from the broader Polish population was part of their strategy to assert an invented nationality upon them.

The Nazis, propagating the belief that Gorals were of German descent, sought to Germanize them, distinguishing them from other Poles, and pressuring them into collaboration with the SS.



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In a symbolic gesture in 1939, a delegation of highlanders, led by Waclaw Krzeptowski, paid homage to Nazi Governor-General Hans Frank.

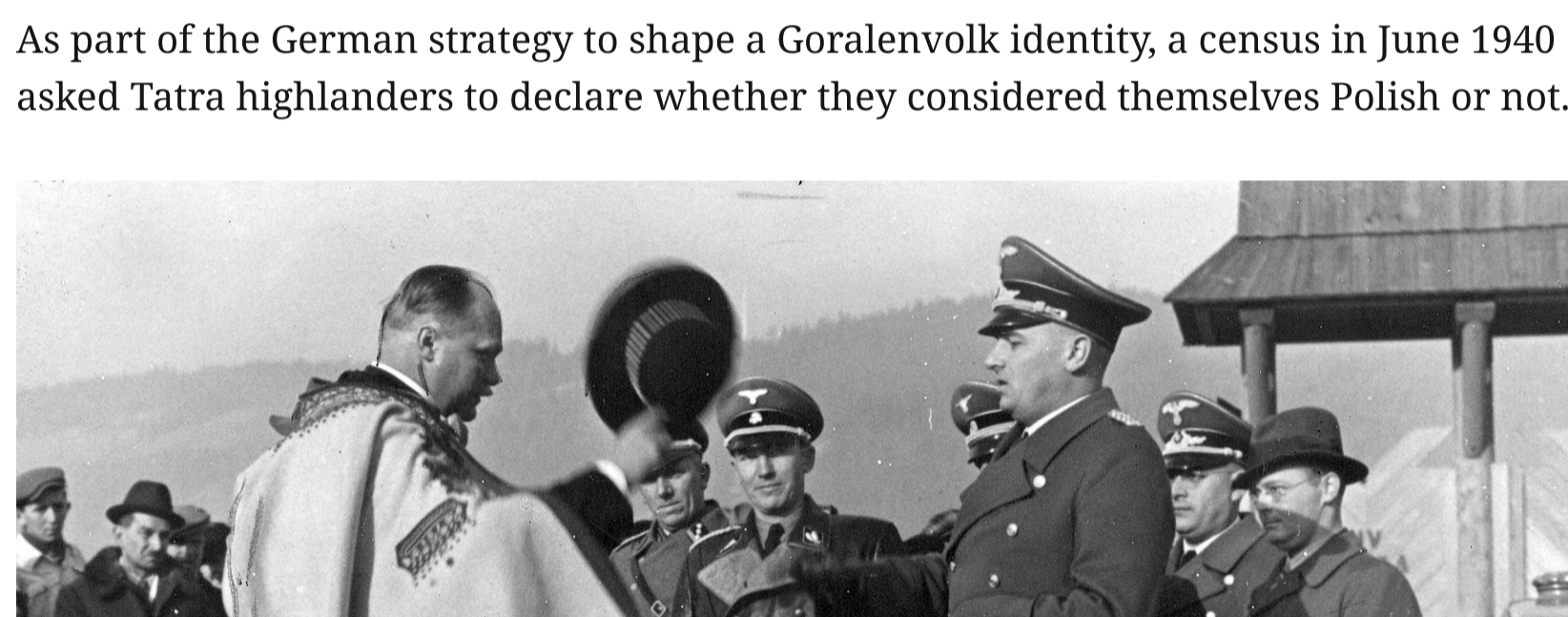


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Subsequently, representatives from influential Podhale families entered into collaboration.

As part of the German strategy to shape a Goralenwolk identity, a census in June 1940 asked Tatra highlanders to declare whether they considered themselves Polish or not.

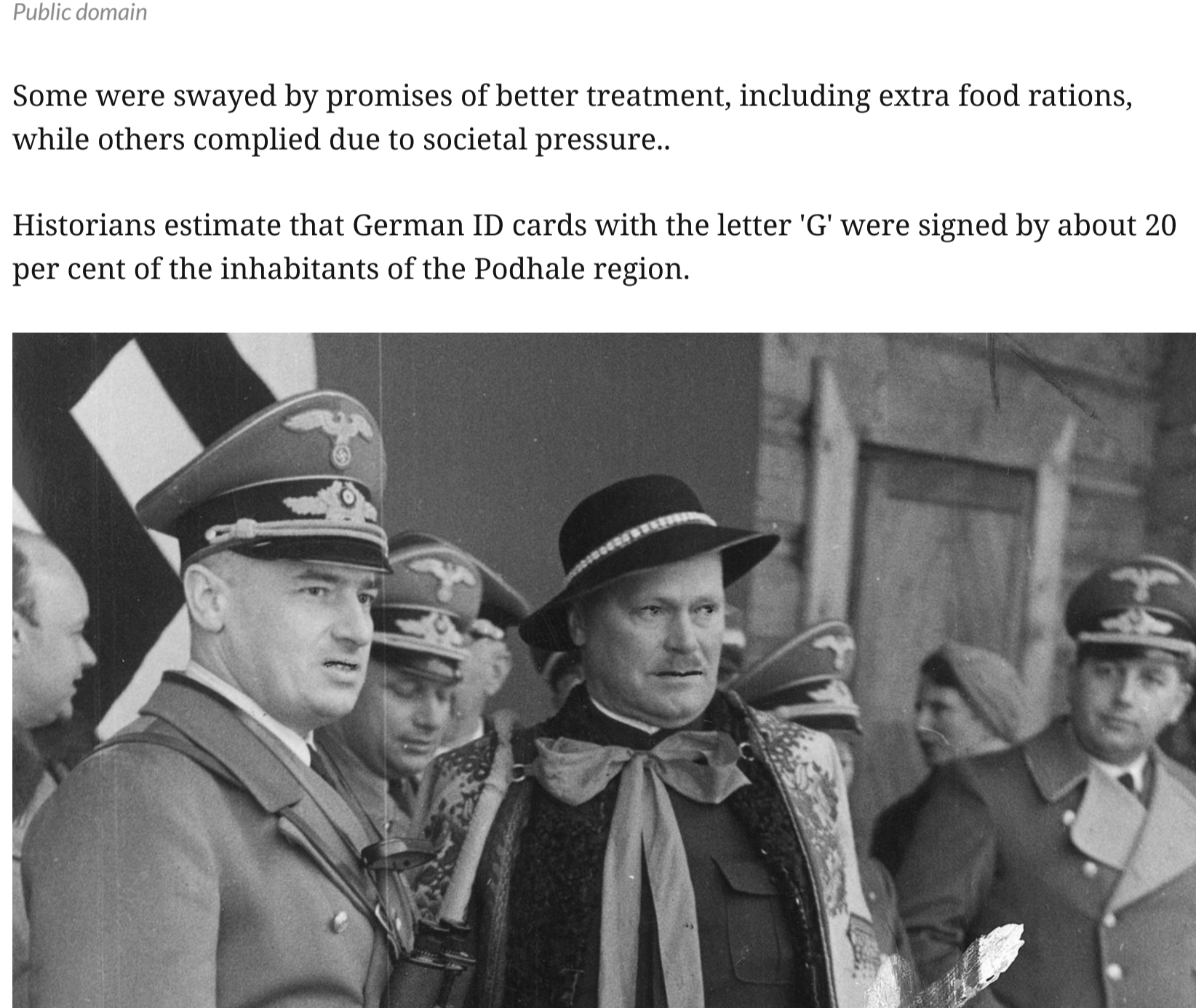


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Some were swayed by promises of better treatment, including extra food rations, while others complied due to societal pressure..

Historians estimate that German ID cards with the letter 'G' were signed by about 20 per cent of the inhabitants of the Podhale region.

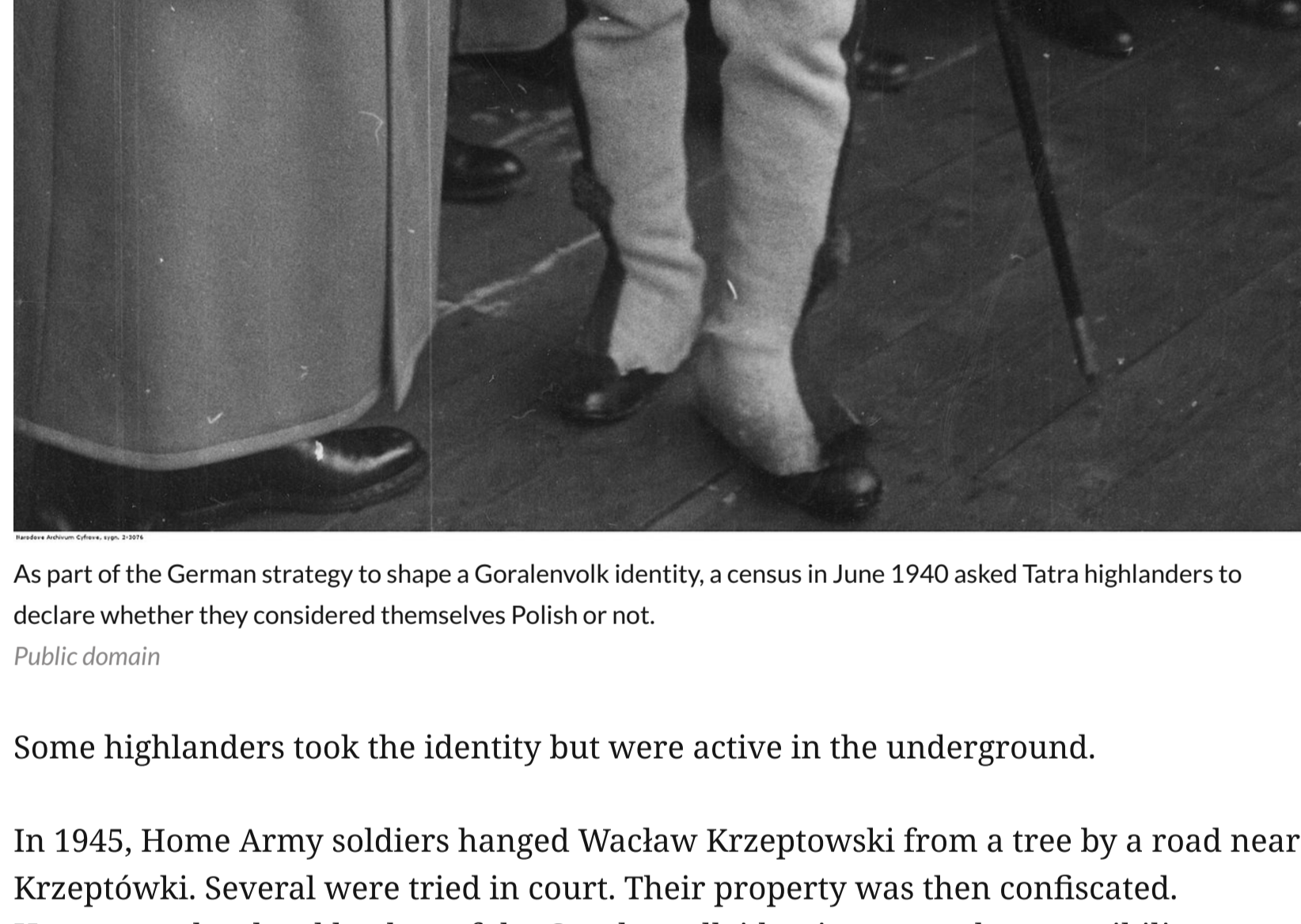


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Some highlanders took the identity but were active in the underground.

In 1945, Home Army soldiers hanged Waclaw Krzeptowski from a tree by a road near Krzeptówki. Several were tried in court. Their property was then confiscated. However, other local leaders of the Goralenwolk identity escaped responsibility.



The new film has been billed as one of 'love, betrayal and sacrifice in the story of two Podhale families put to the hardest test during the German occupation'.

Press materials

Although the majority of highlanders rejected Germanisation, the episode has cast a sinister shadow over the history of Podhale.

The film, directed by Marcin Koszalka, provocatively asks whether the lists of collaborators still exist, or whether they were destroyed by those for whom they were inconvenient.



The narrative revolves around two brothers entangled in a love triangle, navigating the challenges posed by the occupation on opposite sides of the barricade.

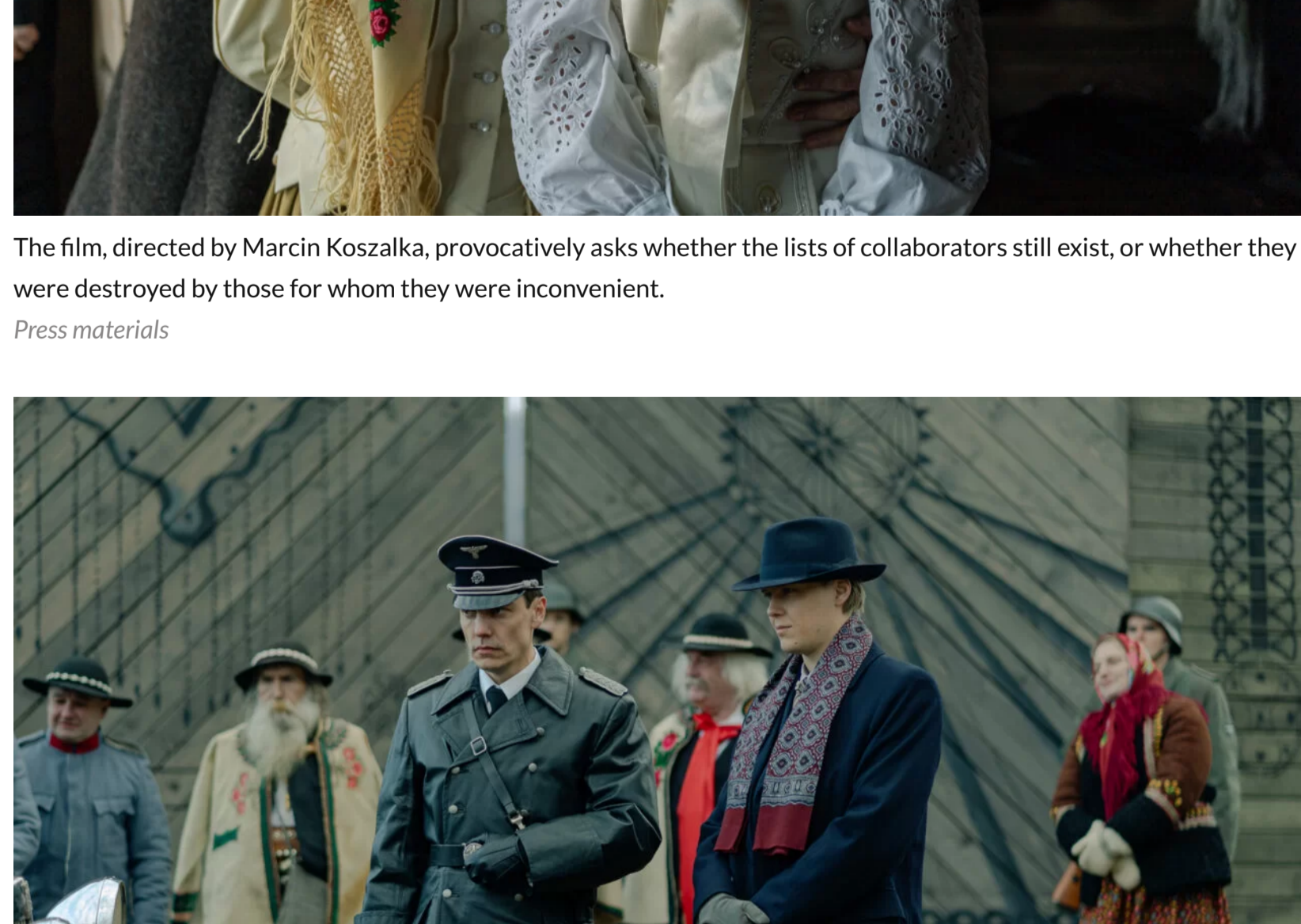
Co-scriptwriter Łukasz M. Maciejewski said: "This is not a legend. The letters the highlanders signed, declaring whether they felt Polish, really existed. There was not just one, there were many."

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Despite the favour of Governor-General Hans Frank, nothing came of the plans to create a highland state under the aegis of the Nazis in the Tatras.

The title 'White Courage' is a reference both to racial theories and to the courage of steel required by mountain people to maintain grip during climbing.

Scheduled for release in Polish cinemas on March 8, the film promises to shed light on a shadowy episode that has cast a sinister pall over the history of the Podhale region.

TAGS: POLAND, FILM, WWII, NAZIS, WORLD WAR II, CINEMA, TATRA, HANS FRANK, HIGHLANDER, BIALA ODWAGA, WHITE COURAGE, GWALLENWOLK, WACLAW KRZEPROWSKI

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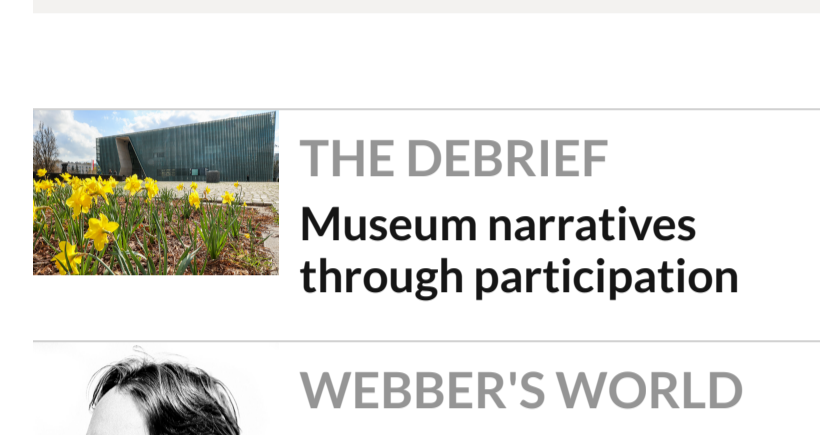
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