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**Historia sporu o pewien wynalazek. Jan Szczepanik, Kazimierz
Żegleń i kamizelka kuloodporna**

**The history of a dispute about an invention: Jan Szczepanik,
Kazimierz Żegleń and the bulletproof vest**

SUMMARY

The aim of the paper is to investigate the origins of the concept of a silk bulletproof vest, and above all to clarify the controversies surrounding the authorship of the concept.

The correspondence, obtained through an archival inquiry, of the true inventor of the silk armour, Kazimierz Żegleń (Casimir Zeglen), a Polish monk from Chicago, has made clear his relationship to Jan Szczepanik, a renowned inventor of the early 20th century, sometimes referred to as a “Polish Edison”. It is to Szczepanik that most contemporary authors attributed the invention. However, there are sources from the period confirming that it was Żegleń who first devised and made the first fully functional, flexible silk armour in 1897. Among these sources are reports in technical and daily press, including Polish dailies that appeared in Chicago. The primacy of Żegleń to claim authorship of the innovation is confirmed also by patent documentation. Żegleń obtained several patents for the invention in the world’s leading industrialised countries, and in spite of requests by Szczepanik, never agreed to cede his rights.

The current paper also explains the terms of the collaboration on improving the soft armour that the two Poles took up in 1898, and stresses the unquestionably important role played by Szczepanik in the process. On Żegleń’s commission he developed an industrial method of producing a bulletproof fabric, which not only made it possible to lower its price, but also improved the parameters of its endurance. The paper also makes an attempt to explain why the promising partnership was broken off, and presents the background for the subsequent disputes between Żegleń and Szczepanik, with the latter presenting himself as the sole inventor of the soft armour since ca. 1901.

In the face of the rapid development of modern ammunition, the idea of using silk for making soft armour had to be almost altogether abandoned in the 1910s. However, the techniques devised by Żegleń and Szczepanik were later successfully applied in other areas of technology, such as the tyre industry, carpet-making , in the manufacture of steel armoured plates, and finally also in the manufacture of bulletproof fabrics using modern synthetic materials.

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