

‘FIRST TO FIGHT’ THE POLES ON THE FRONT LINES OF WORLD WAR II.

THE INSTITUTE
OF NATIONAL
REMEMBRANCE –
COMMISSION FOR
THE PROSECUTION
OF CRIMES AGAINST
THE POLISH NATION



INSTYTUT
PAMIĘCI
NARODOWEJ

ŁÓDŹ 2017 r.

Curator:

Artur Ossowski

Script:

Paweł Kowalski

Artur Ossowski

Paweł Spodenkiewicz

Prof. Janusz Wróbel

Magdalena Zapolska-Downar

Review of the script:

Maciej Korkuć PhD

Art design:

dr Milena Romanowska

Illustrations:

Jacek Wróblewski

Maps:

Sebastian Kokoszewski

Typesetting:

Master, Łódź

This exhibition consists of archival materials and photographs from the collections of:

Australian War Memorial (AWM)

Imperial War Museum (IWM)

Institute of National Remembrance
(*Instytut Pamięci Narodowej*, IPN)

Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London
(*Instytut Polski i Muzeum im. gen. Sikorskiego*, IPMS)

Museum of Polish Arms in Kołobrzeg
(*Muzeum Oręża Polskiego*, MOP)

Museum of Pro-Independence Traditions in Łódź
(*Muzeum Tradycji Niepodległościowych*, MTN)

Regional Museum in Piotrków Trybunalski

Polish Army Museum in Warsaw (*Muzeum Wojska Polskiego*, MWP)

National Digital Archive in Warsaw
(*Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe*)

KARTA Centre (*Ośrodek Karta*, OK)

Polish Press Agency (*Polska Agencja Prasowa*, PAP)

Front cover: No. 303 Squadron pilots in front of Hawker Hurricane, 24 October 1940.
From left to right: Second Lieutenant Mirosław Ferić (died on 14 February 1942),
Canadian Captain John A. Kent, Second Lieutenant Bogdan Grzeszczak (died on 28 August 1941), Second Lieutenant Jerzy Radomski, Second Lieutenant Jan Zumbach, Second Lieutenant Witold Łokuciewski, Second Lieutenant Bogusław Mierzwa (died on 16 April 1941), Lieutenant Zdzisław Henneberg (died on 12 April 1941), Sergeant Jan Rogowski, and Sergeant Eugeniusz Szapozhnikov. (Photo by Stanley Devon/IWM)

A MEMBER OF THE ANTI-GERMAN COALITION

World War II ended 70 years ago, but the memory of the conflict is still alive and stirs extreme emotions. This is best illustrated by the instance of the Soviet Union, which was an ally of the Third Reich and an aggressor turned Adolf Hitler's victim, and after the war enslaved Central and Eastern Europe. Poland, although it was in the victorious camp did not achieve its political objectives but suffered enormous human and territorial losses. Communism was imposed upon it, and it lasted for over 40 years. This does not change the fact that we were the first country to put up armed resistance against the Third Reich. The Poles fought against it until its fall, deploying its armed forces in naval, land, and air warfare in Europe and Africa. Polish soldiers fought in a number of the largest military operations of the war, hoping that their sacrifice would bring a free, strong, and democratic Poland. Alas, those dreams did not come true until 1989.

Today we recall Polish military efforts in World War II, without losing sight of the fact that Poland was one of the participants, and toward the end of the war, one of objects of the policy of the Big Three. We salute all Polish soldiers: those who fought in the Polish Armed Forces in the West alongside: the Americans, the Australians, the British, the French, the Canadians, the New Zealanders, the South Africans, as well as those who had to fight in the East in military formations under Soviet command.



▲ A joint parade of the Allies, from the left standard bearers of: France, Great Britain, Poland, and the USA, 28 March 1944. (IWM)

THE POLISH ARMY

For Poland World War II began in 1939, with the German invasion on 1 September, and with the Soviet invasion on 17 September. Polish soldiers were the first to fight against the overwhelming forces of both aggressors who were better armed, and the Poles paid an enormous price for their resistance. From October 1939 a total of around 90,000 soldiers of the Polish Army were killed in action or murdered, and another 145,000 were wounded. This, however, did deter the Polish Government's determination to continue fighting. The government, established in France was recognised by all the members of the anti-German coalition. This determination also manifested itself in the nascent underground movement at home and the reconstruction of the Polish Army in France, and subsequently in Great Britain by the Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief, General Władysław Sikorski. In the last months of the war, the Polish Armed Forces in the West consisted of around 194,000 soldiers, of whom 38 per cent had frontline experience. Those were fully mechanised units, with 5,000 armoured vehicles 2,000 artillery pieces and 32,000 trucks and tractors. To this we need add 350 aircraft and 15 warships, which meant that the forces subordinated to the Polish Government were fully mobile and professional. The losses of the Polish units during 1940–1945 can be estimated at around 8,000 killed and 45,000 wounded. Every third of them was killed or wounded on the Italian front, where they fought during 1944–1945 in the II Polish Corps.



Polish airman in the British uniform and the characteristic life jacket — Northolt, 16 September 1940. (IPN)

The development of the Polish Armed Forces was not interrupted by the end of the war, but was continued in the following months. In December 1945, the armed forces were 250,000 strong. It was only the gradual demobilisation by the British that began the reduction of the military personnel. It is estimated that around 130,000 military personnel of the Polish Armed Forces returned home, while the others chose emigration.

During its formative stage, the Home Army drew from the experience of the Polish Armed Forces in the West. Over 300 special force paratroopers joined the ranks of the former. A number of those non-commissioned officers and officers of various specialisations went on to command partisan detachments and made their mark during Operation Tempest. About a dozen of the paratroopers took part in Operation Gate of Dawn fighting against the Germans to capture Vilna in July 1944, while others participated in the Warsaw Uprising. The 63-day fight for the capital of Poland very quickly transformed into front line operations, during which the insurgent formations became regular units of the Polish Army. Allied aircraft flew to Warsaw to aid them, carrying supplies, and, more importantly, the hope of defeating the Germans. The total number of the Polish Underground State's soldiers who participated in Operation Tempest and the Warsaw Uprising is estimated at 80,000, 25 per cent of whom had combat experience. During combat, the AK detachments were organised into line units, which were to continue the traditions of the Polish Army from before September 1939.



◀ A Warsaw insurgent wearing a German camouflage jacket and armed with the PIAT, a British anti-tank weapon — Warsaw, 2 September 1944. (IPN)

A separate chapter is the Polish Army units' participation in the military efforts against the Germans on the eastern front line. Joseph Stalin had treated the Polish 1st Tadeusz Kościuszko Infantry Division instrumentally since its establishment in mid-1943 in the Soviet Union, regarding it as a convenient instrument for introducing political changes in Poland, which was dependent on the Soviets. Creating Polish military formations, he developed a policy of accomplished facts towards the legal government of the Republic of Poland. The Kościuszko Division he formed was an incubator for the cadres of the Polish security apparatus, developed under NKVD supervision and directed against the Polish Underground State's soldiers. The total number of soldiers in the ranks of the 1st and 2nd Polish Armies by May 1945 is estimated at 390,000, of whom about 13 per cent had combat experience. Another major problem was the shortage of officers, which the Red Army addressed by transferring its officers into the Polish units. It is estimated that Soviet officers constituted approx. 38 per cent of all officers in the 1st Polish Army, while in the 2nd Polish Army the ratio was even higher, nearing 60 per cent. The two Polish Armies had at their disposal approx. 400 armoured vehicles, 3,700 cannons, howitzers and mortars, 11,000 lorries and tractors, and over 23,000 horses, all supplied by the Red Army. Air support was provided by 590 aircraft, most of which were liaison, reconnaissance, and fighter planes, as there was a shortage of predominantly heavy bombers and large transport aircraft. The Polish Army's losses on the Eastern front line during 1943–1945 are estimated at 43,000 dead and missing and approx. 115,000 wounded.

Today, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Warsaw commemorates battles fought on both fronts, such as, the Battles of Monte Cassino, the Falaise Pocket, Chambois, Arnhem, Lenino, Kołobrzeg, and Berlin, as well as Operation Tempest and the Warsaw Uprising. Poles died during each of these operations, believing that they were fighting for their Homeland's independence.



An infantrywoman from the Emilia Plater 1st Independent Women's Battalion armed with a 1943 model PPS submachine gun — Selsky, 28 August 1943. (IPN)

REPORTERS IN UNIFORMS

The development of illustrated press and the appreciation of the role of photography by both sides of the conflict contributed to the growth of war photography. Robert Capa's photos of D-Day and Joe Rosenthal's of the seizure of Iwo Jima captured the imagination of millions of readers around the world. The Polish military efforts were also documented by numerous reporters. Wiktor Ostrowski and Tadeusz Szumański were among those associated with the II Polish Corps, Marian Walentynowicz (the illustrator of the popular children's book *Koziołek Matołek* [the imbecile billy-goat]) and Jerzy Januszajtis worked with the 1st Armoured Division, and Paweł Płonka with the Navy.

The activity of the reporters working on the Eastern front line was controversial due to their involvement in the pro-Soviet propaganda (one of the frequent topics was the 'Polish-Soviet brotherhood-in-arms'). Stanisław Dąbrowiecki and Jerzy Baranowski served as front line reporters in the ranks of the 1st and 2nd Polish Armies. Jan Mierzanowski was associated with the editorial staff of the communist periodical *Żołnierz Wolności* [soldier of freedom] and *Polska Zbrojna* [Armed Poland]. Rank-and-file soldiers and officers also took amateur photographs on their own initiative. Much of this material is still stored in the archives and museums of the states on whose side fought the Polish formations fought. Today we present only a fraction of these collections.

Lieutenant Jerzy Januszajtis, General Marian Januszajtis-Żegota's son, was a cameraman and reporter of the 1st Armoured Division commanded by General Stanisław Maczek. He documented not only combat, but also the everyday life of the Polish soldiers in Great Britain — Abbeville area, Normandy, 1 September 1944. (IWM) The "Poland" badge introduced in Great Britain in 1940 and in the Polish Army in the East (Iraq, Palestine, and Egypt) in 1943. (IPN)

Abbeville [2 September 1944] — so close. [...] [Tank platoon commander Lieutenant Edward] Rożek is just a few hundred metres away. He passes a destroyed half-track. Bodies of Poles are hanging out from it. [...] Moved to the side of the road, a tank is burning out. In the darkness one can clearly see the broken armour of its turret: it is red hot. [...] And it was with the arrival of other Polish tanks, that *Vive la Pologne!* was revived [...].

Lieutenant Ksawery Pruszyński — writer, war correspondent, and soldier of the 1st Armoured Division.



POLAND

FRANCE AND GREAT BRITAIN DECLARE WAR AGAINST GERMANY

Poland reacted enthusiastically when on 3 September 1939 Great Britain and France declared war against the Third Reich. It seemed that the Republic of Poland was no longer alone in its fight against the Germans, but it soon was apparent that our allies were only feigning military operations. Even though the French Army did seize a few villages and a small town in Saarland during 9–12 September, it retreated after 9 days without putting up a fight. After defeating Poland, the Wehrmacht conducted a counteroffensive and captured a small piece of French territory, losing approx. 200 soldiers. The military operations then ceased again. During that period the British limited themselves to a naval blockade of Germany. The period from 3 September 1939 to April–May 1940, that is, when the Third Reich attacked Denmark and Norway, and then France, Luxembourg, Belgium, and Holland, is called a 'Phoney War' (*dziwna wojna*) in Poland and Phoney War in Great Britain. The Germans joked that it was not a *Blitzkrieg* (lightning war) but *Sitzkrieg* (sitting war).

Everywhere — deep beyond the Maginot Line, on the Belgian border, in the Alps, at the seaside — the war now resembles a soldiers' play. Those who sought great adventure found only the squeeze in the barracks.

Hans Habe — Swiss volunteer in the French Army.



British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain greeting the crowd of Londoners cheering the news of the British declaration of war. Next to him his personal secretary John R. Colville — London, 3 September 1939. (IWM)

THE KEY TO ENIGMA

The Third Reich's military used a technologically advanced, electro-mechanical cypher machine called Enigma, which had great capacity for making different combinations of signs that replaced the original text. Until the very end of the war the German command remained convinced that its coded telegrams could not be deciphered. The Enigma codes were broken in the early 1930s by a group of talented mathematicians from the Polish Cypher Bureau of the General Staff of the Polish Army, particularly Marian Rejewski, Jerzy Różycki, and Henryk Zygalski, who constructed their own decoding machine, known as 'bombe'.

On the eve of World War II, the Poles shared their findings with their French and British allies, which enabled the British to construct the 'Turing bombe' — a perfected electro-mechanical machine to crack the codes generated by Enigmas with more rotors. Discovering the secret of the Enigma facilitated the Allied attacks on the Third Reich's troops and shortened the war.

No doubt practitioners of group theory should introduce this property of permutations [used by Marian Rejewski] as the 'theorem that won World War II'.

Cipher A. Deavours — mathematician
and cryptology historian



Enigma consisted of a keyboard, 3–5 rotors with a revolving mechanism, and a plug board used for altering the rotors' wiring. Pressing a key closed the electric circuit and lit a small lamp with a letter. The machine was perfected by adding more rotors, which increased the number of combinations. (Wikimedia Commons)

'SIKORSKI'S TOURISTS'

The newly-established Polish Government was initially based in Paris, then Angers, and after France's defeat it was evacuated to London. As the Polish authorities decided to continue fighting against the German invader, the most important issue became the recreation of the army. It was known that thousands of military men and scouts were risking their lives trying to leave the German- and Soviet-occupied country. To help them transfer centres were organised along with a network supplying them with documents and money. It was also estimated that there were approx. 100,000 Polish citizens in France fit for military service. Only 40 per cent of them were called up by June 1940. There were also hopes of enlisting the military men interned in Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, and Romania, but their influx was slow and the escapes from the camps were not always successful. In the end approx. 80,000 people served in the Polish Army in France, half of them pre-war immigrants. Unfortunately, the Third Reich's invasion of France found the Polish formations in the training and rearming phase. Only some of the troops were used. Approximately 1,300 Polish soldiers died in combat, 5,000 were wounded, and 15,000 were taken into German captivity.

[Lagarde, 17 June 1940] [...] *on the right we see armoured vehicles and lorries which are approaching us from the side. We throw grenades. Somebody screams that ours are on the other side of the hill. We run up to the hill and now we can see an armoured vehicle with a cross rolling ahead of us and that the German infantry is spilling out of a lorry. We throw grenades in the lorry's direction. The Fritzies collapse onto the ground. The armoured vehicle is on fire. Somebody shouts: 'Stab them with bayonets!'*

Account given by a soldier from the 1st Grenadier Division



Commander-in-Chief and Polish Prime Minister General Władysław Sikorski giving autographs to soldiers of the Polish Independent Highland Brigade. The unit was to sail from Brest to Narvik in three days — Saint-Renan, 21 April 1940. (IWM) Next to the photograph: the Military Order of Virtuti Militari, Silver Cross. (IPN)

A farewell ceremony for the officer company in Comblessac near Guer in Brittany. The painting of the Black Madonna donated by the departing Poles is still displayed in a local church. Photograph: a Polish Second Lieutenant and a French girl, with trainees in the background — Comblessac, 16 March 1940. (IWM)



NARVIK

The Polish submarine *Orzeł* sank the German transport ship *Rio de Janeiro* on 8 April 1940, killing almost 200 enemy soldiers who were preparing to invade Norway. The Germans allocated approx. 150,000 soldiers to that operation. With only a third of that force, the Norwegian Army was aided by the British, French, and Polish troops operating within the framework of the North-Western Expedition Force, approx. 40,000 strong. The aggressor quickly seized the southern and central parts of Norway, and in the north dispatched several thousand *Gebirgsjäger*. The objective of their attack was the port of Narvik, where the water does not freeze, and the railway leading to the iron ore mines in Kiruna, Sweden.

For several days we have been opposite these mercenaries fighting for the English. Mad with fury, they, the Poles, emanate an almost animal hatred towards us. [...] We are to persevere here until the last man. I shall persevere but I doubt whether I shall ever see you again.

Fragment of a letter from a Wehrmacht soldier fighting at Narvik.



Cargo ships, among them Polish trans-Atlantic Chrobry launched in 1938, also played an important role in the operations in the Norwegian Sea. Photograph: British soldiers aboard Chrobry waiting to enter the port of Harstad. Behind them are Polish artillerymen. The vessel sank on 16 May 1940 in the Bodö area after a Luftwaffe air raid. (IWM)

Two Polish destroyers — Grom and Błyskawica — were evacuated in August 1939 to Great Britain. During the Norwegian campaign, they successfully bombarded enemy positions and blocked entry to fiords. (IWM) Naval Medal of the Polish Merchant Navy.



BATTLE OF BRITAIN

Having defeated France in June 1940, the German command devised plans to land in Great Britain and made an attempt to take control of the British Isles' air space. The objective was to eliminate the enemy either by invading its territory or by showing the German advantage and imposing a peace treaty. On 17 September 1940 the effective resistance put up by the British Air Force forced Adolf Hitler to discontinue the preparations for the invasion. The air raids on military targets and cities continued though, in the vain hope of crushing the British people's spirit. The period of the British-German aerial combat from 10 July to 31 October 1940 is called the Battle of Britain, during which the British and their allies shot down 1,652 enemy aircraft, losing 1,087 of their own machines.

145 airmen from Poland took part in those military efforts, fighting in British units or Polish squadrons. No. 302 and 303 Polish Fighter Squadrons were the first to be formed — in July and August 1940. Formed in early September, No. 306, 307, and 308 Squadrons did not become combat ready before the end of October. The Poles shot down approx. 170 machines (10 per cent of all enemy aircraft destroyed during the Battle of Britain).

They were very calm, very well-mannered, and excellent pilots, really eager to learn our ways and methods. [...] They were some of the bravest people I have ever known.

David Moore Crook on Polish pilots in the RAF



◀ 'Never was so much owed by so many to so few,' said British Prime Minister Winston Churchill about the Royal Air Force, including Polish airmen in the House of Commons on 20 August 1940. (IWM) Next to the photograph: British Air Medal awarded to airmen. (IPN)

Fighter ace Lieutenant Colonel Stanisław Skalski, who shot down 4 Luftwaffe aircraft during the Battle of Britain. The picture was taken after Skalski had become the commander of No. 133 Polish Fighter Wing. (IWM) ▶ On the right the emblem of No. 315 Fighter Squadron of No. 133 Fighter Wing. (IPN)

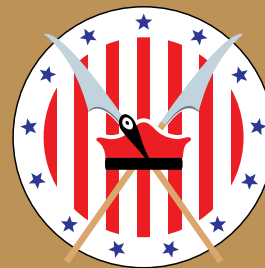


NO. 303 SQUADRON

A lot of the pilots of No. 303 Kościuszko Polish Fighter Squadron had served in the pre-war 111th Fighter Squadron, which had continued the tradition of the 7th Squadron from the period of the Polish-Soviet War. Initially treated warily by the British, they soon proved their efficiency, courage, and high level of training. During the Battle of Britain they shot down approx. 60 enemy aircraft and became favourites of the British press and public. During the later period the Squadron's airmen not only defended the British Isles, but also escorted bombers flying to France, Belgium, and Germany. They also trained American pilots. Initially using British Hawker Hurricane aircraft, they switched to the British Supermarine Spitfire in January 1941 only to start using American P-51 Mustang later in the war. No. 303 Squadron became one of the most successful units fighting hand in hand with the RAF — it shot down 203 aircraft, confirmed destroyed.

The 1st Polish Squadron (No. 303) [...], during the course of a month, shot down more Germans than any British unit in the same period.

Air Chief Marshall Sir Hugh Dowding



Merian C. Cooper, a former airman of the 7th Squadron, visiting pilots of No. 303 Squadron. From left to right: Lieutenant Miroslaw Ferić, Merian C. Cooper, and Lieutenant Jan Zumbach — RAF Northolt, 13 March 1941. Merian C. Cooper had an interesting biography — he set up the Pan American World Airways, wrote the script to King Kong, and produced a number of John Ford films. During World War II he served in the U.S. Air Force and was promoted to the rank of General. (IPMS/OK) Next to the photograph: the emblem of No. 303 Polish Squadron, adopted from the former 7th Kościuszko Fighter Squadron. During the Polish-Soviet War in the ranks of the former served about a dozen U.S. volunteer pilots. This is why aside the symbols of the Kościuszko Uprising there were also the stars and stripes from the American flag. (IPN)

No. 303 Squadron pilots in front of Hawker Hurricane, 24 October 1940. From left to right: Second Lieutenant Miroslaw Ferić (died on 14 February 1942), Canadian Captain John A. Kent, Second Lieutenant Bogdan Grzeszczak (died on 28 August 1941), Second Lieutenant Jerzy Radomski, Second Lieutenant Jan Zumbach, Second Lieutenant Witold Łokuciewski, Second Lieutenant Bogusław Mierzwa (died on 16 April 1941), Lieutenant Zdzisław Henneberg (died on 12 April 1941), Sergeant Jan Rogowski, and Sergeant Eugeniusz Szapoznikow. (Photo by Stanley Devon/IWM)



FIGHTER FLEET

There were 4 Polish fighter squadrons — No. 300, 301, 304, and 305 — fighting shoulder to shoulder with the British. The Poles attacked the barges the Germans had prepared for the invasion of the British Isles, mined enemy naval bases, supported convoys and army operations in France and Germany, and bombed industrial plants and towns and cities in Germany.

A proud chapter in the history of the Polish Air Force were the dangerous flights to the occupied Polish territories to drop special force paratroopers, Polish Underground State messengers, and weapons. That task was given to No. 1586 Polish Special Duties Squadron, established in 1943, which used the airfields in Tunisia and southern Italy. Its crews also dropped weapons and ammunition into insurgent Warsaw.

The Polish fighter airmen flew, for instance, Fairey Battle, Vickers Wellington, de Havilland Mosquito, and Avro Lancaster aircraft. Handley Page Halifax and B-24 Liberator were used for the drops on Polish territory.

Two popular successes of [No. 305 Fighter Squadron] from the period of using the Mosquito aircraft was the bombing of the sabotage school in Chateau Maulny on 2 August 1944 and the destruction of millions of litres of petrol in Nomeny near Nancy on 31 August 1944 — a feat that rendered motionless a number of German tanks and aircraft during the fighting in Normandy.

Jake Duda, editor of Polish émigré periodical *Sokół*



Between July 1940 and May 1945 the Polish bomber fleet dropped approx. 13,000 tons of bombs, mostly on German cities, such as, Bremen, Hamburg, Essen, Koblenz, and Cologne. Almost 40 per cent of the bombs were dropped in 1944. Photograph: Polish airmen (probably from No. 300 Squadron) with a bomb — RAF Hemswell, 15 August 1941. (IWM) Next to the photograph: a British bomb from the World War II period. (IPN)

No. 300 Fighter Squadron's Vickers Wellington aircraft at RAF Hemswell, Lincolnshire — 17 June 1943. (Photo by Walter Belamy/IWM) The emblem of the Polish Air Force painted on the bodies of the British aircraft, because the wings were decorated with the emblem of the Royal Air Force. Overleaf: heavy 4-engine bomber Avro Lancaster, which in March 1944 became the equipment of No. 300 Mazovia Bomber Squadron. Below: the most famous British fighter aircraft — Spitfire from No. 303 Kościuszko Fighter Squadron. (IPN)



THE DESERT RATS OF TOBRUK

The number of dead among the soldiers of the multinational Allied coalition who fought in Africa during 1940–1943 and the Italians and Germans who fought against them is estimated at 300,000. The fighting was predominantly along the Mediterranean coastline. The key to victory was Tobruk, for which both sides fought fiercely during 1941–1942 in different locations in the Libyan Desert. In late August 1941 approx. 5,000 Poles from the Polish Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade commanded by Colonel Stanisław Kopański were moved into Tobruk, which was besieged by the Italians and Germans. Established in the spring of 1940 in French Syria but refusing to recognise the Vichy government, the unit had defected to the British in Palestine. The Poles defended the western side of the city considered the most difficult one and they fought with determination against the Italians for the nearby hills. Tobruk was relieved in December 1941 by the British, New Zealand, and South African forces.

As the grey ship edged close to the staging we were surprised to see the troops peering over the edge and wiving to us for they were fully equipped, dressed in a uniform strange to us, and spoke a language that certainly wasn't British. And then we saw the identity patches just below the shoulders, bearing the word 'Poland.' It certainly gave us a thrill to welcome them. These men have all seen war before. They know what we are up against, for they are nearly all men who have escaped from prison camps [...].

The Port Macquarie News and Hastings River Advocate, 8 November 1941.



Polish riflemen on the outer perimeter, called the Red Line — Tobruk, 16 October 1941. (AWM) Below: emblem from the uniform jacket of the British 7th Armoured Division, which defended Tobruk in December 1941. The term Rats of Tobruk was first used by the German propaganda in a contemptuous text about the fortress' defenders. (IWM)

From left to right: a Pole from the Polish Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade, an Englishman from the 1st Regiment of the Royal Horse Artillery, an Indian from the 18th Regiment of Motorised Cavalry, an Australian from the 15th Infantry Battalion, and a Czech from the Czechoslovak 11th Infantry Battalion — Tobruk, 22 October 1941. (AWM)



FROM SCOTLAND TO NORMANDY

The French defeat shattered the hopes of a quick recreation of the Polish Army in Exile. Almost 15,000 soldiers were taken into German captivity and 13,000 were interned by the Swiss after the 2nd Rifle Division had crossed the Swiss border. Only approx. 27,000 military men were rescued, and they supplemented the Polish Navy and Air Force in the British Isles. A new attempt was made to recreate the army, trying to overcome the pessimism and to silence any political disputes. The measures taken did not always boost General Władysław Sikorski's popularity, even though the overall objective of his policy was to uphold Poland's importance in the international arena and reinstate her independence.

In the autumn of 1940 the Polish army was concentrated in Scotland. The lack of recruits posed a problem as the Polish community in the USA and Canada was reluctant to join the ranks of the Polish Army, though it lent political and financial support to the Polish cause. It was as late as in 1942, when the Polish Army left the Soviet Union, that the enlargement of the Polish Armed Forces in the West became a reality. In the spring of 1944 there were already as many as approx. 50,000 Polish soldiers stationed in Great Britain, representing all formations of the Polish Army. They soon left the hospitable British Isles and set out to the front line.

The core of the Polish forces was the 1st Armoured Division commanded by General Stanisław Maczek. In its ranks served a few hundred volunteers from Brazil and Argentina, but the veterans of the Polish, Norwegian, and French Campaigns were the most numerous. Photograph: Polish soldiers in the Valentine Mk. III tank welcomed by the local children — field training exercise in Perthshire, central Scotland, 16 May 1941. (IWM) Polish vehicles' emblem. (IPN)

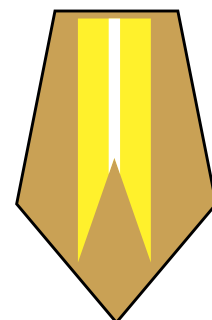
A few hundred Polish soldiers started their families in Great Britain. Photograph: Platoon Leader from the 1st Armoured Division with his Scottish wife and child, photographed by an American correspondent in July 1942. (IWM)

The period of our stay in Scotland before returning to the front line was also a time of intensified educational and cultural work. [...] It sounds pompous today, but back then it was natural. Some of us, fortunately only a small number, had already decided to settle in Scotland. The reasons were: good living conditions, friendly inhabitants, a high standard of living, and a hope for a peaceful, normalised life. [...] The inhabitants of the towns and cities bid a very fond farewell to our detachments, wishing us good luck. We left there a lot of dear friends, some wives, quite a lot of children, and definitely good memories.

Lieutenant (engineer) Mieczysław Borchólski,
commander of the 1st Platoon of the 10th Sapper
Company (stationed near Dunbar) of the 1st
Armoured Division



PL

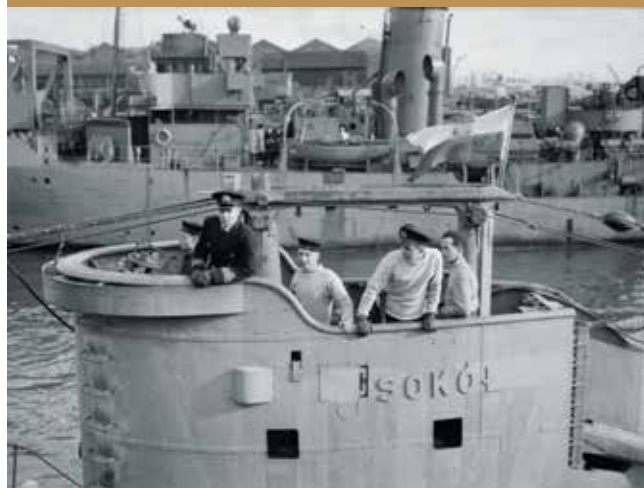
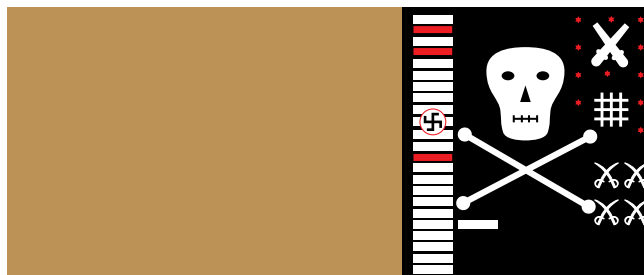


ON SEAS AND OCEANS

In 1939 the Polish civilian vessels received secret instructions from the Government. In case of war they were to immediately go to the Polish allies' harbours. Owing to that fact in September most of the Polish merchant navy and passenger vessels were outside the Baltic Sea. 3 destroyers of the Polish Navy were also sent to England. From then on for the next 6 years of the war the Poles served under the Admiralty's command. During the first days of the war the Polish Navy had only 3 destroyers, 2 submarines, and 3 training vessels. With time, the Royal Navy leased to the Poles, for instance, 2 cruisers, 6 destroyers, and 3 submarines, which escorted the Allied vessels, went on patrols, and fought against the German and Italian fleets in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. The Polish Navy participated in vital Allied military operations, such as, the defence of Norway, the evacuation of Dunkirk, and the landings in North Africa, Greece, Sicily, and Normandy. The Polish vessels escorted a total of 787 convoys and participated in 665 naval battles. The most difficult route was the Arctic one, which was used to deliver most of the British and American military equipment to the USSR. In May 1942 Polish vessel *Garland* suffered severe damage on that route, losing 25 crew members as a result of a German air raid.

The number of the seamen serving in the Polish Navy increased quickly — from approx. 8,000 people in the autumn of 1939 to approx. 4,000 in May 1945. The volunteers were recruited from among the Poles arriving from the homeland or the Polish community in the USA. Large Polish passenger liners, which could transport 800–1,000 people and which had been constructed for carrying Poles emigrants across the Atlantic Ocean, proved perfect for transporting troops

(370,000 Allied soldiers), combat equipment, and also civilians (150,000 people) and cargo, reaching North America, Africa, and Australia.



Upholding the British traditions, the Jolly Roger flag was raised when a vessel returned after eliminating an enemy unit. *Sokół's* crew received the flag on Malta on 4 November 1941 from General Władysław Sikorski. By 1945 new symbols were sewn onto it. The bars symbolize the torpedoed vessels, the crossed cannons — an artillery attack, the swords — naval boarding, and the white grid — the breaking of the anti-submarine net near the Italian fortress of Navarino. (IPN)

The sinking of Polish vessel *Orzeł* and the death of 51 Polish seamen was a blow to the Polish submarine fleet, particularly that it was only approx. 150 seamen strong. In the autumn of 1940 Poland leased a newly launched vessel from the British. Captain Borys Karnicki (second from the left) was transferred from Polish vessel *Wilk* to be *Sokół's* commander — Portsmouth, spring 1941. (IWM)

The routes of the Arctic convoys to the Soviet Union. (IPN)



A PACT WITH THE DEVIL

The Third Reich's invasion of the Soviet Union changed the international situation: the alliance between the two military superpowers, sealed with their invasion of Poland, was now broken. The USSR joined the anti-German coalition, which Great Britain welcomed with content as it had carried the main burden of the anti-German efforts since France's capitulation. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill proposed a military alliance to Joseph Stalin and General Władysław Sikorski's government also began negotiations with the Soviet government. The Polish side's priority was to force the Soviet Union to deem the provisions of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact null and void and release Polish citizens detained in the USSR.

The agreement signed on 30 July 1941 in London included a declaration of mutual assistance in fighting the Third Reich and the Soviets' consent to the formation of the Polish Army in the USSR, and it also invalidated the Soviet-German treaties of 1939. An additional protocol concerned granting 'amnesty' to Polish citizens detained in Soviet prisons and camps.

If Hitler invaded hell I would make at least a favourable reference to the devil in the House of Commons.

Winston Churchill



Signing of the Polish-Soviet alliance by Prime Minister of the Polish Government in Exile General Władysław Sikorski and Soviet Ambassador to Great Britain Ivan Mayski. Also sitting at the table are: British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and British Minister of Foreign Affairs Anthony Eden — London, 30 July 1941. (NAC)

General Władysław Anders, the commander of the Polish Armed Forces in the USSR, (on the right) with General Georgy Zhukov, the chief of Department IV of the 2nd Directorate of the NKGB and a NKVD liaison officer with the Polish command — Yangiyul, the Soviet Union, autumn 1941. In September 1939 General Władysław Anders commanded a cavalry brigade. Wounded during an attempt to cross to the Hungarian territory, he was taken captive by the Soviets. Detained in the NKVD Lubyanka prison, he avoided the fate of thousands of Polish officers killed as per Stalin's order of 1940. (IPMS/OK)



A PACT WITH THE DEVIL

Signed in Moscow on 14 August 1941, the Polish-Soviet military agreement provided foundations for the formation of the Polish Army in the USSR. It was a part of the Polish Armed Forces in the West and was subordinate to Commander-in-Chief General Władysław Sikorski. But in fact it was operationally subordinate to the Red Army and its commander was appointed by the Polish Government in consultation with the Soviets. The Commander-in-Chief entrusted that position to General Władysław Anders. Equipping and supporting the troops was Soviet responsibility. Buzuluk, Tatishchevo, and Totskoye were designated as the Polish troops' formation points. The health of the recruits, mostly arriving from the Stalinist labour camps and exile, would have normally disqualified them from service. In March 1942 there were over 70,000 soldiers in the Polish Army ranks.

I was told that I was unfit for service. I started crying and asked why. They said that I would not be able to lift my rifle, because I was just skin and bones, but they told me not to worry, because there were plenty of men like me.

Zygmunt Kornaś, a volunteer to Anders' Army



The Polish cemetery in Buzuluk, December 1942. The severe climate (in winter the temperature dropped to -50 degrees Celsius), malnutrition, and illnesses decimated the ranks of the Polish Army. In the winter of 1941/1942 the daily death toll in the Polish camps was up to 350 people. The transfer of the Polish military men and civilians to the south of the USSR (to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kirgizstan) did not improve the situation, as 10,000 Poles died there of a typhus epidemic. (IPMS/OK)

EVACUATION

Since its beginning, the cooperation with the Soviets had run into numerous obstacles. The Soviet authorities obstructed the intake of Polish citizens from different ethnic backgrounds and delayed provision of heavy equipment to the Polish units, at the same time demanding that individual divisions be sent to the front line, which was a violation of the Polish-Soviet agreements. Finally, in March 1942 Joseph Stalin announced a reduction of food rations for the Polish Army to 26,000.

General Władysław Sikorski attributed great importance to the Polish military presence on the eastern front line, which he regarded as a bargaining card in the border negotiations with the Soviets. Nevertheless, he had to accept the fact that the evacuation from the USSR was inevitable, at least of some of the Polish troops. The British Prime Minister was of the same opinion; due to the difficult military situation of the British in Africa Winston Churchill was keenly interested in the Polish presence in the Middle East.



◀ Cooking for Polish refugees in a transit camp, Bandar-e Pahlavi, 1942. The first ship with Polish troops and civilians reached that Iranian port on the Caspian Sea on 24 March 1942. Established by the British in Tehran, the staff for the evacuation of Poles effectively conducted the whole operation even though the number of the evacuated was much larger than expected. (IPMS/OK)

The centres of formation and stationing of the Polish Armed Forces and civilians in the USSR, Near East, and Middle East. Established in late 1942 in Palestine and Egypt, cadet schools and Junior Female Volunteers Schools were also subordinated to the Polish Army. ▶ The Army trained the total of approx. 5,000 minors of both sexes, approx. 1,200 of whom fought on the Apennine Peninsula after coming of age. (IPN)



Legenda:

- większe bazy wojskowe
- ośrodki formowania i stacjonowania PSZ
- szlaki ewakuowanych jednostek WP
- szlaki ewakuacji cywilów
- junackie ośrodki szkoleniowe
 1. Szkoła Młodszych Ochotniczek
 2. Junacka Szkoła Mechaniczna
 3. Junacka Szkoła Łączności
 4. Lotnicza Szkoła Mechaniczna dla Małoletnich

KATYN MASSACRE

In September 1939 the Soviets captured approx. 230,000 Polish soldiers, including approx. 12,000 officers. The POWs were detained in special camps in Kozelsk, Ostashkov, and Starobilsk. A small number of the POWs from those camps came to the recruitment centres when the formation of the Polish divisions began in the USSR. Based on their testimonies, a list of the 'missing' individuals was drafted and a search was launched. The Soviet authorities provided twisted explanations. Władysław Sikorski and Władysław Anders' personal intervention with Joseph Stalin did not help either. Everything became clear in April 1943 when the Germans informed the world about their macabre discovery in the Katyn Forest, which became a turning point in the Polish-Soviet relations. Stalin used it to cynically sever diplomatic relations with the Polish Government in Exile, accusing Poland of collaboration with the Third Reich.

In those fateful days nearing the end of the Second World War there unfortunately existed in high governmental and military circles a strange psychosis that military necessity required the sacrifice of loyal allies and our own principles in order to keep Soviet Russia from making a separate peace with the Nazis.

An excerpt from the final report of the Select Committee to Conduct an Investigation and Study of the Facts, Evidence, and Circumstances of the Katyn Forest Massacre, 1952.

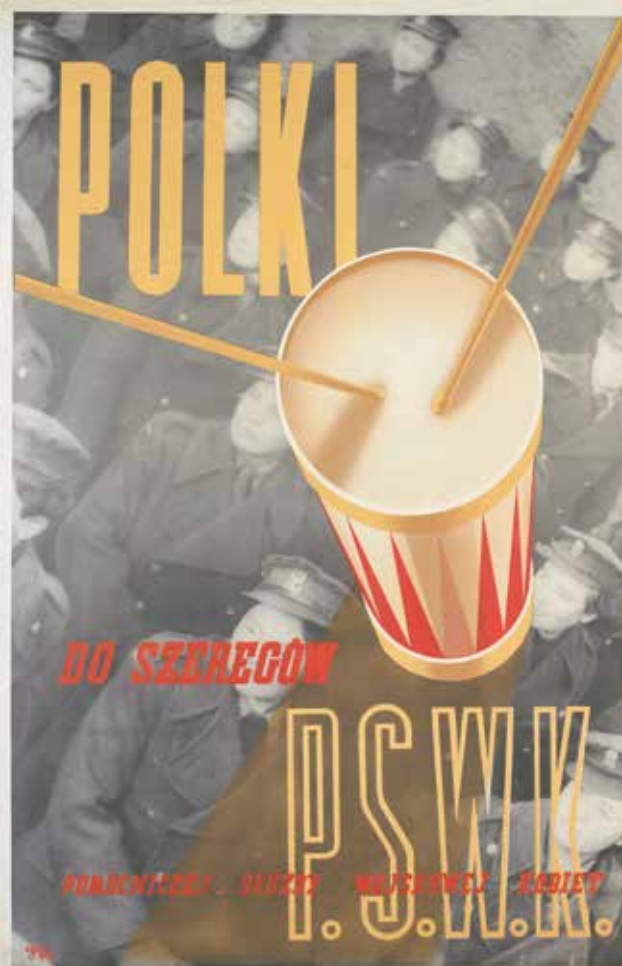


The Third Reich's Ministry of Propaganda publicised the discovery at Katyn in the hope that the revelation of the NKVD's crime would break the anti-German coalition. On 13 May 1943 the Germans brought to Katyn a group of Anglo-Saxon POWs, including Lieutenant Colonel John H. Van Vliet, who in May 1945 submitted a report on his visit to Katyn to the Pentagon. The document was classified. (PAP)

POLISH ARMY IN THE NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST

Approximately 70,000 Polish soldiers reached Iran. Though they were filled with combat zeal, they were still unprepared to fight. The individual formations were gradually integrated, with the equipment and the Polish cadre of officers and non-commissioned officers arriving from the British Isles. The Army underwent a reorganisation. As per Commander-in-Chief Władysław Sikorski's order of 12 September 1942 the Polish Armed Forces in the USSR and the Polish Army in the Middle East were merged into the Polish Army in the East, with General Władysław Anders as its commander. The Polish Army in the East also included the 3rd Carpathian Rifles Division of, formed on the base of the disbanded Polish Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade and the 5th Kresowa Infantry Division.

In May 1943 the Polish Army was transformed into the Polish II Corps, commanded by General Władysław Anders. It was stationed in Iraq and then in Palestine and Egypt, from where it set out to the Italian front line in December 1943. The remaining rear units were transformed into the Polish 3rd Corps.



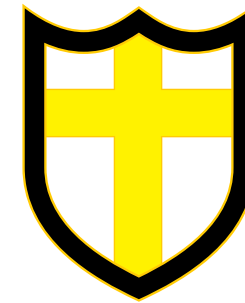
The Women's Auxiliary Service was established in late 1941 on General Władysław Anders' initiative. The Service's inspector was Bronisława Wysouchowa. It was a revival of the pre-war ideals of the Female Military Training. The female volunteers served in communications, staffs, transport units, and medical units. The Women's Auxiliary Military Service had operated in Great Britain since 1940, with Zofia Leśniowska, General Władysław Sikorski's daughter, as its supreme commander. After her death in the 1943 Gibraltar B-24 crash, the Service was commanded by Maria Leśniak. The Women's Auxiliary Service formations in the Near East and Italy were subordinate to the Women's Auxiliary Military Service. (IWM)

There were approx. 4,000 soldiers of Jewish origin in Anders' Army. Desertions began with its arrival in Palestine. It is estimated that half of the Jewish soldiers left the ranks of the Polish Army during that period. There were many reasons for that: engagement in the struggle for the independence of the Jewish state in Palestine, no prospects of living in post-war Poland, where all the relatives had died, or the intention to join the British Armed Forces, which offered better living conditions and promotion opportunities. General Władysław Anders not only allowed those desertions, but also forbade pursuing the deserters. Moreover, he refused to cooperate with the British in that respect, and the Polish Government in Exile continued paying benefits to the deserters' families. Most of the Polish soldiers did not show any hostility to their Jewish brothers-in-arms when they deserted. Photograph: soldiers on their way to training — Palestine, 1943. (NAC)



'IT'S A LONG WAY TO ROME'

Having defeated the Axis in North Africa, the Allies invaded Italy. The Allied troops landed in Sicily on 10 July 1943 and on 3 September invaded continental Italy. Having captured Naples, the United States 5th Army and the British 8th Army were ordered to capture Rome. To do that they had to cross the Apennine Mountains, which since antiquity had successfully discouraged enemy armies from launching a siege of the Eternal City from the south. Based on this natural barrier, the Germans created the Gustav Line, a system of fortifications manned with select units of the Wehrmacht. The only path across the mountains, the ancient Via Casilina (Route 6), went down the valley of the River Liri. The Benedictine Abbey of Monte Cassino, the vital German defence position, sat atop a hill towering over the valley. Capturing that bastion took a heavy toll on the Allied troops.



In January 1944 American aircraft dropped 'Stalingrad or Tunis' (destruction or honourable surrender) leaflets on the German positions. "It's a long way to Rome," mocked the Germans, calculating that the pace of the Allied troops' march was twice as slow as a snail's. German propaganda poster 'It's a long way to Rome.' (Wikimedia Commons) During the Italian campaign the Poles fought in the British 8th Army commanded by General Oliver Leese. Beside the photograph: the emblem of the British 8th Army. (IPN)

The Benedictine Abbey of Monte Cassino was built in the 6th century during the times of Benedict of Nursia, who established the monastery. It was besieged a number of times but rarely captured. Before the soldiers of the 3rd Carpathian Rifles Division raised the Polish flag atop Monte Cassino on 18 May 1944 approx. 100,000 soldiers of the anti-German coalition died during the 129 days of combat. The Abbey was destroyed in an Allied bombing on 15 February 1944. (OK)



THE BATTLE OF MONTE CASSINO

The Battle of Monte Cassino was the greatest battle fought by the Allies on the western front. It was also the bloodiest — it is estimated that during the 5 months of fighting approx. 100,000 soldiers were killed, wounded, or went missing (312,000 during the entire Italian campaign). The battle, in which the Polish II Corps distinguished itself was also fought by the Americans, British, French, Indians, Canadians, Maoris, Moroccans, New Zealanders, South Africans, and Italians. The first attempt to break the German Gustav Line of defence ended in a massacre of the attacking troops in the Rapido Valley. The American 34th and 36th Divisions, the British 46th Division, the Moroccan 2nd Division, and the Algerian 3rd Division were decimated. American war correspondents called the first battle of Monte Cassino “the most terrible catastrophe since Pearl Harbour.”



◀ Stanisław Westwalewicz's 1944 poster 'For your freedom and ours.' (IWM)

The fighting at the Gustav Line took place on extremely difficult terrain, which limited the possibility of using heavy equipment. Porters and mules proved the best means of transport. Photograph: Indian soldiers transporting a wounded soldier — February 1944. (IWM) The Italy Star, the British medal for the Italian Campaign. (IPN) ▶



THE BATTLE OF MONTE CASSINO

The fourth Battle of Monte Cassino (Operation Diadem) began at 11 p.m. on 11 May with a shelling of the German positions, after which the Polish II Corps entered combat. The first attack on the 'Phantom Hill' and the Massa Albaneta farm proved unsuccessful, with the 5th Carpathian Rifle Division losing 20 percent of its soldiers. The second attack was launched by the Polish troops on 16 May. The 16th Lvov Rifle Battalion captured and held the 'Phantom Hill'. At that time the British and French Corps successfully fought in the Liri valley. The enemy withdrew from Monte Cassino from fear of becoming surrounded. The next day, 18 May, the Polish white and red flag fluttered over the ruined abbey. The Union Jack was also raised by order of General Władysław Anders.

It is raining fire and iron. And rocks and dirt are flying up from the ground. There is smoke and dust all around. And screams can be heard through the explosions. 'Help! Help! Medic!' [...] Some screamed, others prayed, and others still sang. Hell was a rest home [in comparison]!

Chronicle of the 15th Battalion of the 1st
Carpathian Rifles Brigade, May 1944

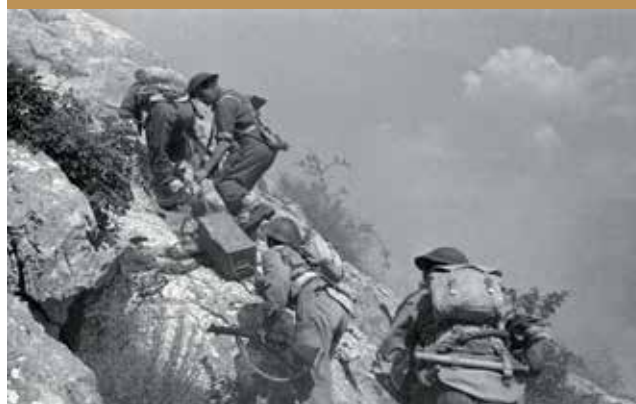
The bodies of the heroes — brave soldiers of Poland — lie the narrow tortuous goat track [...]. They lie in the rigid, ungainly attitudes of violent death, over the slopes up which they fought so gallantly. [...] What it must have meant to fight over such country.

Arthur Halliwell, *Daily Herald* correspondent,
19 May 1944.



Soldiers of the Polish II Corps on the Monte Cassino slopes — May 1944. The rocky terrain and the slippery slopes seemed impossible to capture. "Those who went ahead were blown up on [mine] traps and those who lay on the ground melted from the machine gun fire," reminisced Lieutenant Colonel Władysław Kamiński, battalion commander in the 5th Kresowa Infantry Division. (OK) The 5th Kresowa Infantry Division's badge worn on its uniforms since December 1942. (IPN)

Wounded soldiers of the Polish II Corps, May 1944. During the battles of Monte Cassino approx. 860 Polish soldiers died, approx. 2,800 sustained wounds, and almost 100 went missing. (OK) The 3rd Carpathian Rifles Division's badge worn on uniforms since December 1942. (IPN)





POLISH II CORPS' ITALIAN CAMPAIGN

Having captured Monte Cassino, the Polish soldiers took part in the efforts to break the Hitler Line. On 25 May 1944 they captured the small town of Piedimonte and Monte Cairo. In June 1944 the Polish II Corps was moved to the Adriatic coast, where it achieved new successes, winning the Battle of Loreto and capturing the port of Ancona. The offensive on Ancona was the only operation conducted independently by the Polish soldiers on the Allied side. The Corps then participated in the breaking of the Gothic Line. The culmination of Anders' Army's military efforts was its participation in the battle of Bologna in April 1945. The Polish II Corps ended its distinguished combat trail by capturing the city.

We met the soldiers from the Polish division for the first time when they stopped by our snow-covered post. [...] They were strange soldiers: clean, smart, and smelling of perfume. They smoked cigarettes in long cigarette-holders and took the trouble of mastering the Italian language. [...] Despite their apparent gentleness the Poles were audacious and determined.

Richard Eke, British sapper

The Polish II Corps' combat trail (1944–1945). (IPN) ►

Ceremony of decorating General Władysław Anders with the Most Honourable Order of the Bath, 25 May 1944. From left to right: commander of the Allied 15th Army Group in Italy General Harold Alexander, commander of the Polish II Corps General Władysław Anders, and Anders' adjutant Lieutenant Eugeniusz Lubomirski. The order has been awarded since the first half of the 8th century; its other knights include General Stanisław Maczek and General Stanisław Tatar. (IWM) ►





LIBERATORS FROM THE 'BLACK DIVISION'

The 1st Armoured Division commanded by General Stanisław Maczek, which cooperated with the Canadians and the British, was assigned important tasks in Operations Overlord and Flandria. The Allies fought the fiercest battle at Falaise (15–21 August 1944), where they crushed the Germans and forced their way from Normandy towards the Seine. The retreat of the German 7th Army from the Falaise region was blocked by Poles who occupied Mont Ormel (262-metre hill, which they nicknamed 'mace') and supported the American attack on Chambois. Supreme commander of the British forces Field Marshall Bernard Law Montgomery said: *Under Falaise we locked up the Germans as if they were in a bottle, and the Polish Armoured Division was the cork in this bottle.* That 'cork' endured fierce attacks for 3 days, which forced the enemy to capitulate. The Allies took several thousand enemy soldiers into captivity. Surrounded on Mount Ormel, the Poles were aided by the Canadian 4th Armoured Division, which also suffered severe losses.

The enemy sat in Breda and defended himself. It was impossible to capture the city at night by surprise. [...] There were frequent instances of combat with bayonets and knives. In the brigade there were many soldiers speaking German and they exploited that, giving commands in German, which confused the Germans. [...] Breda was freed by the evening. Its inhabitants danced in the streets with joy. In the morning in the windows of every house there were printed stickers saying: 'Thank you, Poles!' [...].

Lieutenant Colonel Władysław Dec, Narvik veteran and deputy commander of the 3rd Rifles Brigade.



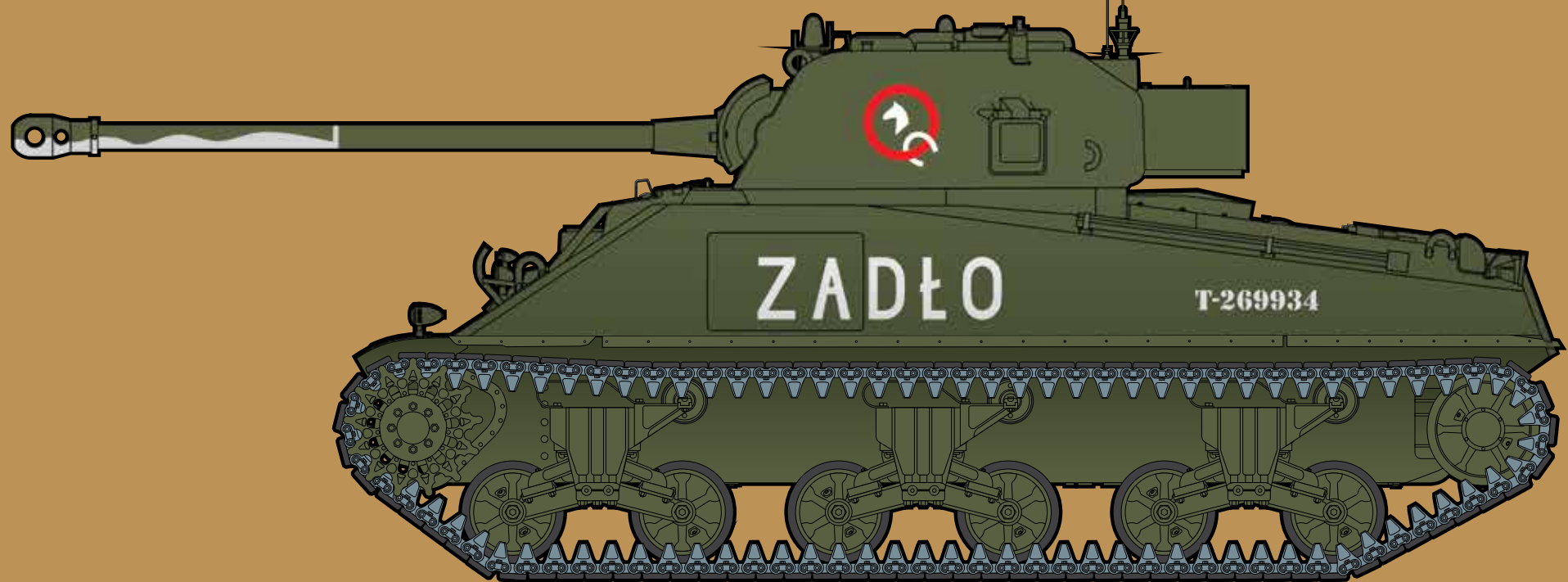
With the end of August 1944, after replacing its losses, the 1st Armoured Division re-entered combat, fighting in France, Belgium, and Holland. The unit ended its trail on 5 May 1945 in Germany accepting the surrender of the Wilhelmshaven port. Photograph: Polish motorcyclist with cheerful Dutchmen in Breda, which was liberated on 30 October 1944. The capture of the town by the Poles enabled the Allies to move towards the River Meuse and capture a beachhead in Moerdijk. After the war many subordinates of General Stanisław Maczek settled in Holland, while the commander was buried in 1994 in the cemetery in Breda with 150 fallen Polish soldiers. (IWM) The emblem painted on the 1st Armoured Division's vehicles. (IPN)

The 1st Armoured Division's 1944–1945 combat trail. For over 2 years after the end of the war Polish detachments were stationed in Haren, called Maczków during 1945–1948. The Germans were deported from the town, which became the concentration point of approx. 5,000 Polish civilians (including approx. 1,700 former Warsaw insurgents liberated by the 1st Armoured Division from the POW camp in Oberlangen). On the next page: Standing by the map are: Second Lieutenant Jan Witold Karcz from the 10th Dragoons Regiment and American Major Leonard Dull from the 359th Infantry Regiment — Chambois, 19 August 1944. (Wikimedia Commons)





Sherman Firefly VC — a British modification of the American tanks. The machine had reinforced armour, a new radio station, and 17-pounder 76.2 mm gun. The tank belonged to the 3rd (Zawisza, Zemsta II, Żądło, Żyrafa) Squadron of the 1st Regiment of Krechowce Uhlans of the 2nd Warsaw Armoured Division commanded by General Bronisław Rakowski. The last battle of the unit was that of Bologna fought on 21 April 1945. The Division used approx.. 40 vehicles of that type, while the 1st Armoured Division commanded by General Maczek, which fought in France, used twice as many.



POLISH UNDERGROUND STATE

The Polish Armed Forces in occupied Poland were being rebuilt simultaneously with the formation of the Polish Armed Forces in exile. The work on the formation of military and civilian underground structures in German- and Soviet-occupied Poland began almost immediately after the end of the military operations. That quickly led to the establishment of the Polish Underground State (the name was introduced in 1943) — a unique phenomenon in the history of World War II. The Polish Government's objective was to maintain the continuity of the functioning of the highest state institutions, including its central and regional civilian and military bodies. The underground administration was headed by the Office of the Delegate of the Government in Exile, which operated with authorization from the Polish Government. The Council of National Unity, a body representing political parties, was established in 1944 as a substitute Polish parliament.

The underground army originated from the Service for Poland's Victory, based on the Commander-in-Chief's authorization and commanded by General Michał Tokarzewski-Karaszewicz. In November 1939 Polish Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief General Władysław Sikorski formed the Ministers' Committee for Homeland Affairs and the Union of Armed Combat. The latter was a top secret military organization subordinate to the Polish Government, designed as an integral part of the Polish armed forces. The Union was commanded by General Kazimierz Sosnkowski, followed by General Stefan Rowecki 'Grot' on 30 June 1940. On 14 February 1942 the Union was renamed the Home Army. The objective was to merge all underground organizations in the country and subordinate them to the Polish government in London.



This popular act of sabotage — painting the 'Anchor', that is, the symbol of Fighting Poland — was commenced in the spring of 1942 by Warsaw by scouts from the 'Wawer' Petty Sabotage Organisation. (Wikimedia Commons)

The outline of the functioning of the Polish Underground State prepared for propaganda purposes, distributed in Polish and English. (Wikimedia Commons)



SOURCE: POLISH GOVERNMENT INFORMATION CENTER

GRAPHIC BY PICK-5

WARSAW UPRISING

The fiasco of Operation Tempest in the east, the Soviet repressions against the Home Army soldiers and representatives of the Polish Underground State, and Joseph Stalin's establishment of the Polish Committee of National Liberation, which was fully dependent on Moscow, made the Home Army launch military activity against the Germans in Warsaw. The liberation of the capital by the insurgent forces was to be the decisive argument to force the West to intervene with Moscow in defense of Poland's right to independence. At the same time it was to refute Soviet mendacious enunciations about the Polish State and the Home Army being an invention of the Polish propaganda.

The operation was launched on 1 August 1944 when the Red Army was quickly approaching the River Vistula. All available troops of the Warsaw Region of the Home Army were sent to fight. By 4 August 1944 the insurgents had seized, for instance, the city center, a part of the Wola quarter, the Old Town, and the Powiśle, Dolny Mokotów, and Żoliborz quarters. In the liberated city areas power was wielded by the state structures of the Republic of Poland.

The city's main arteries, however, remained in German hands, including the bridges on the River Vistula and 2 railway stations (Gdański and Główny), and also the airfield at Okęcie. Stalin altered the earlier plans to storm the city, giving the Germans time to suppress the uprising. Same as the Germans on their side, the Soviets began to liquidate Home Army detachments marching to help the insurgent Warsaw. Stalin made it impossible for the West to aid the insurgents more effectively by forbidding the Allied aircraft to use airfields on the Soviet side of the front line.

For 63 days the insurgents fought heroically in the individual quarters of the city. Most streets were blocked with barricades to stop German armor. In danger of being shelled by heavy artillery or bombed, the insurgents and civilians hid in cellars, converted into, for instance, hospitals, storerooms, or passages between buildings.

At the end of the Uprising, under the influence of a wave of outrage in world media, Stalin began to simulate help for the insurgents. Upon Soviet orders, detachments commanded by Zygmunt Berling conducted an operation to make strongholds on the left bank of the River Vistula. Despite the Polish soldier's sacrifice the operation proved a failure, taking a large death toll, increased by the commander's multiple mistakes.

It is estimated that approx. 50,000 people fought in the insurgent ranks, most of them Home Army soldiers. Approximately 16,000 of them died, with a similar number taken captive by the Germans. After the capitulation, the soldiers who remained in the city left the ruined metropolis together with the resettled civilian population. The Germans deported some of the insurgents to concentration camps or forced labor, while other insurgents managed to avoid repressions and renew their contacts with the Home Army underground. Irrespective of the military operations, the Germans conducted bestial massacres of the civilian population in the quarters they took control of, killing the total of approx. 150,000 people. The Germans also continued to systematically destroy the city until the end of 1944.



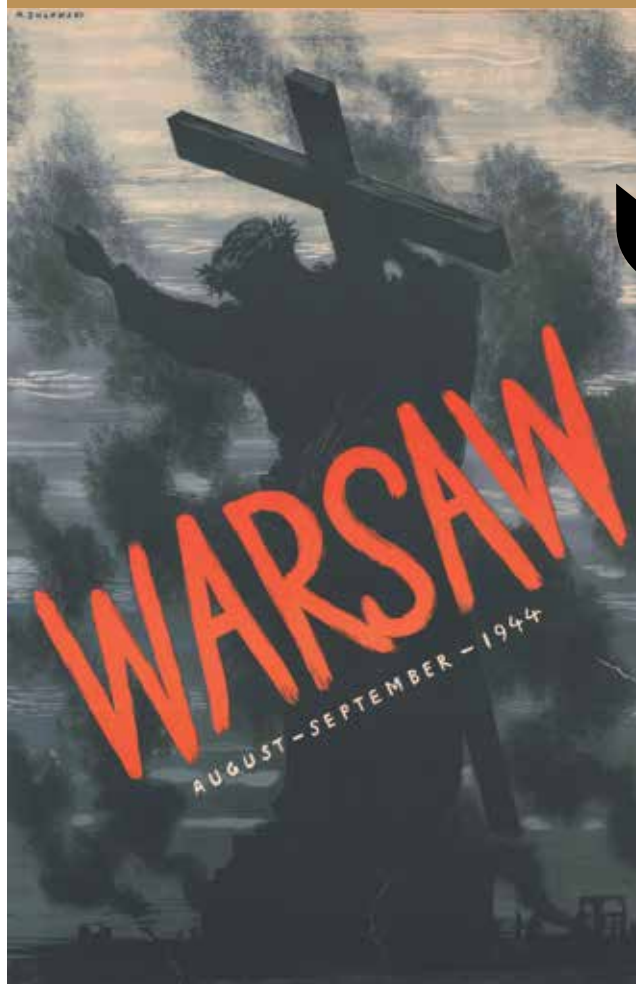
▲ Waiting for a drop. An observation post atop the roof of the tenement at Marszałkowska Street 56 — Warsaw, August/September 1944. (Photo by Waclaw Loth 'Kupiec'/MPW)

Soldiers from the 'Czata 49' Battalion presenting the PIAT anti-tank guns removed from the Allied capsules — Warsaw, August 1944. (Wikimedia Commons) ►



AID TO FIGHTING WARSAW

After the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising the Polish Government in Exile appealed to the Western Allies for weapons, ammunition, food, and medicaments. It was hoped that the 1st Independent Parachute Brigade would be able to land in the Kampinos Forest area and that the German military units and objects in Poland would be bombed. The first flight to Warsaw was organised as early as on 3 August 1944. Unfortunately, the scope of the operation was limited due to the distance (approx. 1,500 kilometres), the Allies' military situation, and particularly Joseph Stalin's extremely hostile attitude towards the Polish pro-independence efforts and the defence of the Poland's integrity. For a long time the Soviet dictator forbade Allied aircraft from landing on the Red Army's airfields after making the drops, which deprived the insurgents of effective help when they fought successfully during the first days of the Uprising, and later when they repelled the Germans attacks in the individual quarters of the city suffering serious losses. The Soviet Air Force also remained passive, letting the German aircraft bomb Warsaw and attack Allied aircraft. Consequently, the insurgents received only approx. 460 containers with weaponry, ammunition, and medicaments, which constituted approx. 25 percent of the supplies sent. The insurgents received half of the containers as late as on 18 September through the agency of the United States Air Force, but the aid was belated.



Marek Żuławski's poster 'Warsaw. August–September 1944' commemorating the Warsaw Uprising. The death toll among the approx. 2,500 Allied airmen engaged in the efforts to help the insurgent Warsaw was at about 10 percent. (IWM) On the left: the Fighting Poland logo symbolising Polish resistance during World War II. (IPN)

Consolidated B-24 Liberator aircraft from the Polish 1586th Special Duties Squadron piloted by 29-year-old Varsovian Captain Zbigniew Szostak (third from the left). The machine set out on its final flight on 14 September 1944 from the airfield in Brindisi. The entire 7-person crew died near Bochnia when it was returning to Italy after making a drop. The Polish aircraft was shot down by a German night fighter aircraft. Today a reconstructed full-scale Liberator is on display at the Warsaw Rising Museum. (IWM) Next to the photograph: the capsule used by the Allied air forces. Depending on the model, an aircraft could carry 7–12 waterproof capsules 2.5 metres by 1 metre weighing approx. 160 kilograms. The total number of the capsules dispatched to Warsaw by the Allied air forces is estimated at 1,840, approx. 460 of which reached the insurgents. (IPN)



A 6
P8967
B 9
C 7
D 8
E 10
H 3

“SURGE POLONIA”

The 1st Independent Parachute Brigade commanded by Colonel Stanisław Sosabowski was established in the autumn of 1941, based on the 4th Cadre Rifles Brigade. It was approx. 2,800 soldiers strong, of whom approx. 150 returned into the occupied homeland as special force paratroopers. All soldiers of the Brigade were volunteers trained in the British Parachute Training School at RAF Ringway near Manchester. In June 1944, after the Allied landings in Normandy, the unit became subordinated to the British command so that it could be used on the front line. The Polish hopes of dropping the entire Brigade into the occupied homeland proved vain. The Polish parachutists were used during Operation Market Garden — approx. 30,000 parachutists from the British 1st Airborne Division and American 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions were dropped in September 1944. Unfortunately, the Allies' plans were thwarted by bad weather, insufficient intelligence, and predominantly the Germans' fierce resistance, supported with armoured weaponry. The Poles were dropped as late as on 21 September 1944 near Driel during the final stage of the Operation, though 3 days earlier approx. 30 Polish parachutists entered combat with the British in Oosterbeek.

[...] When the time comes, you shall dive onto the enemy like victorious eagles and be the first to contribute to the liberation of our Homeland. From now on you shall be the 1st Parachute Brigade [...] I appeal to you to continue working hard as it shall bring freedom to Poland and to you the honour of returning to it as the first ones to do so.

General Władysław Sikorski, Polish Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief, 23 September 1941



The Allied forces' drop points during Operation Market Garden. Wishing to maintain the impetus of the invasion, in September 1944 the Allies decided to cross the Rhine, which was dangerous because on the other bank stretched the German-occupied Dutch territory. The burden of the struggle fell on the British, American, and Polish parachutists. The airborne troops' task was to capture 7 key crossings, with the bridge in Arnhem as the furthest one. Crossing the Rhine in that spot was to enable the Allies to circumvent the Siegfried Line and seize the Ruhr region. (IPN)

The ceremony of presenting the unit with a new standard, sewn in underground Warsaw. Amidst the symbols of the Brigade is the Latin maxim Surge Polonia (Rise Poland) — Cupar, 15 June 1944. (NAC)



THE 1ST TADEUSZ KOŚCIUSZKO INFANTRY DIVISION

Severing diplomatic relations with the Polish Government coincided with the beginning of Joseph Stalin's formation of the foundations of the future Polish Government, alternative to the one in London (on the basis of the especially established Union of Polish Patriots, which associated Polish communists) and the communist Polish Army (the 1st Tadeusz Kościuszko Infantry Division, later renamed the I Corps, and then transformed into the 1st Polish Army). From the beginning those Polish military units had been subordinate to Moscow in terms of organisation and cadres, and also militarily and politically. They were to support the Red Army in its struggle against Germany and also suggest the Polish national institutions did exist under the Soviet aegis. Moreover, Joseph Stalin intended to use 'his' Polish Army as an important argument in the negotiations with the Western Allies over the post-war fate of the Polish state.

The Division's formation place was to be the camp in Seltzy on the River Oka. It attracted those who were later described in literature as those who 'arrived too late to join Anders' Army,' that is, the Poles who had been deported into the interior of the USSR during 1939–1941 or released from prisons and labour camps as per the Sikorski-Mayski agreement. Colonel Zygmunt Berling was appointed the unit's commander. The Soviet commanders were delegated to the new Polish formation not only to facilitate control, but also due to the lack of Polish officers in the USSR, who were either murdered in Katyn or elsewhere or evacuated with Anders' Army. Following the Red Army's example, political officers appeared in the Polish military units. The 1st Armoured Division, which had not completed its military training, went through its baptism of

fire during the Battle of Lenino in Belarus. Sending over 12,000 Polish soldiers to the front line was of great political significance to Stalin, particularly on the eve of the Allied conference at Tehran, where he intended to use the military successes of the formation he created to discredit the Polish Government and the Polish Armed Forces subordinate to it.

Forced conscription of Poles into the 1st Polish Army began with the arrival of the Red Army on the Polish territory. Its ranks included, for instance, soldiers from disarmed detachments of the Home Army. In July 1944 Joseph Stalin established the Polish Committee of National Liberation, a puppet government on the Polish territories occupied by the Red Army composed of Polish communists. At the same time he ordered a merger of the 1st Polish Army in the USSR with the communist partisan People's Army, which operated in German-occupied Poland. The name of the new formation — the Polish Army — was to suggest the historical continuity of the Polish armed forces.



▲ Wanda Wasilewska, the organiser of the 1st Infantry Division on behalf of the Polish communists from the Union of Polish Patriots, Alfred Lampe, and Colonel Zygmunt Berling at Seltzy on the River Oka, 1943. (PAP)

The total number of women serving in the Polish Army in the USSR during 1943–1945 exceeded 8,000. Photograph: female soldiers from the 1st Independent Emilia Plater Women's Battalion at Seltzy on the River Oka, summer 1943. (MWP) ►



FIGHTING FOR THE POMERANIAN WALL

The Battle of the Pomeranian Wall (*Pomernschtellung*) was the largest independent military operation conducted by the Polish soldiers on the eastern front line. In early 1945 a gap appeared between the 1st and the 2nd Belorussian Fronts of the Red Army fighting in Greater Poland and Mazovia. From fear of becoming outflanked by the Wehrmacht from the direction of Western Pomerania, Marshal Georgy Zhukov ordered the 1st Polish Army to march across Kuyavia toward the Baltic coast. The Polish units' advance was blocked by the approx. 270-kilometre-long line of German fortifications, known as the Pomeranian Wall, stretching from Szczecinek to Wałcz, which could not be circumvented. The fight to breach the fortifications went on for over a week. Approximately 3,000 of the 70,000 Polish soldiers perished and almost 6,000 sustained wounds. Breaching the Wall opened the way to the Baltic ports. For propaganda reasons, the Polish units were tasked with capturing Kołobrzeg (*Kolberg*). Originally, Marshal Zhukov expected that the Polish 6th Infantry Division would capture the town within 24 hours. But the Battle of Kołobrzeg (4–18 March 1945) became one of the greatest urban battles with the participation of Polish soldiers. Some of the soldiers drafted into the 1st Polish Army were Home Army soldiers experienced in fighting in an urban setting, for instance, during the Warsaw Uprising. The total number of Polish soldiers who attacked Kołobrzeg is estimated at 29,000, of whom 1,000 perished and approx. 2,500 were wounded. 90 percent of the town was destroyed during the battle.



The Pomeranian Wall consisted of 45 reinforced concrete bunkers, a series of fortifications, wire entanglements, and mine fields. The enemy also took advantage of natural barriers, such as, swamps, lakes, and rivers. Photograph: Polish soldiers' attack on the Wałcz–Miroślawiec section, February 1945. (MWP) The Order of Glory, 1st Class, pinned onto the Polish Army soldiers' chests since the summer of 1944. It was awarded, for instance, to soldiers who were the first to storm into enemy bunkers or trenches and capture them. Worn next to the Cross of Valour, the Order of Glory had a characteristic ribbon modelled on the highest tsarist military decoration — the Order of St George. (IPN)



The Nazi propaganda compared the defence of Kołobrzeg to the efforts of the Prussian defenders of Festung Kolberg during the Napoleonic times. Photograph: fighting at Kołobrzeg, March 1945. (MMWP)



THE INTERNAL 'ENEMY'

When in the summer of 1944 the communists took power in the territory of 'Lublin Poland' liberated from German occupation, they based it on the Red Army and the Soviet apparatus of terror. Still a small organisation, the Polish Workers' Party gradually attracted new members, predominantly by reaching out to functionaries of the Public Security Office and Citizens' Militia. The Polish Army, with a number of Soviet officers and People's Army partisans in its ranks, became a target of particularly intensive indoctrination. Additionally, attempts were made to paralyse political opponents through arrests and ridiculing them using aggressive propaganda. The main objects of the attacks were Home Army soldiers and representatives of the Polish Underground State, who filled camps and prisons. The communist authorities did not stop the harassment and continued repressing former soldiers of the Home Army even after its dissolution on 19 January 1945. In March 1945 the Polish streets were decorated with Włodzimierz Zakrzewski's famous poster printed in Łódź, which called the Home Army a 'dirty reactionary midget.' The communists also insinuated that the Home Army had cooperated with the Third Reich, while any acts of resistance were classified as 'deeds of reactionary bands'. Beginning with mid-1944 regular army units were sent to fight against the pro-independence underground, but their effectiveness proved low as many of the soldiers deserted or surrendered to the partisans, refusing to fight them. That gave rise to an idea of detaching special units from the army, the Internal Security Troops (in the spring of 1945 renamed the Internal Security Corps) participated in the pacifications and supervised the detainment centres. The 'enemy' was also tracked in the army ranks, where the communists

apprehended mostly Home Army soldiers. The anti-communist underground responded with, for instance, attacks on prisons, camps, and convoys. The Home Army detachments conducted their first operations as early as on 19 August 1944, when they freed 12 detainees from the military prison in Hrubieszów. During the subsequent months the defence operations of the Polish pro-independence underground intensified and in the spring of 1945 assumed an organised form.

The Allies' rapid advancement on the western front line inspires unhealthy and dangerous moods among the soldiers of the 1st Polish Army. SMERSH immediately sprang into action and commenced mass arrests. [...] The intelligence structures of the 1st Polish Army detected and monitored [sic!] almost 2,000 former soldiers of the Home Army and those soldiers who had any relatives in Anders' Army.

NKVD Chief of the 1st Belorussian Front, General Ivan Sierov's 14 April 1945 report to Lavrentiy Beria.



▲ Włodzimierz Zakrzewski's poster 'Home Army. The giant and the dirty reactionary midget.' (MTN)

Soldiers of the 2nd Polish Army parading down Piotrkowska Street in Łódź, March 1945. In its ranks served a number of local former soldiers of the Home Army, who enlisted with enthusiasm. Many of them did not suspect that soon they would become victims of the Main Directorate of Information of the Polish Army and pay with their lives for their patriotism. (Museum in Piotrków Trybunalski)



“ON TO BERLIN!”

Commenced on 16 April 1945, the Battle of Berlin was fought with participation of the 1st and the 2nd Polish Armies (approx. 180,000 soldiers) in cooperation with the Red Army. The Polish units were tasked with covering the wings of the charging Soviet armies. Commanded by General Karol Świerczewski, the 2nd Polish Army suffered severe losses (27 percent of all losses suffered by the ‘people’s’ Polish Army from October 1943 to May 1945) during the several days of battle it fought against the German Army Group Centre at Bautzen (21–28 April 1945).

The 1st Polish Army suffered less severe losses as it conducted offensive operations in the northern section of the front line, reaching the River Elbe on 3 May 1945. Several selected Polish Army units fought in Berlin. The decision to engage the Poles in the attack on the Third Reich’s capital was made by Joseph Stalin upon the request put in by the ‘Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army’ General Michał Rola-Żymierski “on behalf of the Party and the Polish Government” through the agency of 1st Front Commander Marshal Georgy Zhukov. The communist government’s main objective was to ensure the 1st Tadeusz Kościuszko Infantry Division’s participation in that historic event. The military achievements of the Division, ‘the combat trail from Lenino to Berlin’ — were to be used by the propaganda to belittle the military importance of the Polish II Corps.

When the Polish Armies meet, most of the soldiers and officers will join Władysław Anders. We have suffered enough from the Soviet hands in Siberia. [...] And this how the 2nd Artillery Brigade Commander thought the situation might develop: They want to impose their ‘democracy’ on us. As soon as we meet Anders we shall say goodbye to our Provisional Government. The Government in Exile shall immediately take over the power in the country and Poland shall be the same as she was in 1939. England and the Americans shall help us get rid of the Russians.

SMERSH agent’s report



The 1st Infantry Division was tasked with supporting the Soviet 2nd Guards Tank Army. In the morning of 2 May, after fierce combat, the Polish soldiers managed to capture the Berlin-Tiergarten station. They raised the Polish white-and-red flags on the Victory Column in the nearby Tiergarten Park and then marched towards the Brandenburg Gate to support the Soviet infantry in combat. Photograph: Polish detachments driving through the Brandenburg Gate — Berlin, May 1945. (MWP) Commemorative badge of the 1st Warsaw Tadeusz Kościuszko Infantry Division. (IPN)

The Home Army’s operations during Operation Tempest and the Warsaw Uprising and also the 1945 combat trail of the 1st and 2nd Polish Armies. (IPN) On the left: Polish medal for capturing Berlin. (IPN) On the next page: T-34 from the 2nd Tank Regiment, with 76 mm gun mounted in a hexagonal turret with two hatches and the characteristic dome. (IPN)



THE YALTA CONFERENCE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Still during the war the Polish Government in Exile prepared plans of the post-war repatriation of Poles. A few hundred clerks and liaison officers underwent training. The Polish Armed Forces were to play an important role in that operation as the repatriation officers were to recruit from their ranks and army vehicles were to transport the civilians and former POWs. On 1 May 1945 the number of soldiers of the Polish Armed Forces in the West exceeded 194,000, only to expand to approx. 230,000 three months later due to an influx of former prisoners of war and forced labourers.

But those plans were thwarted by hard political reality. During the Yalta Conference in February 1945 the Big Three leaders (Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Joseph Stalin) ultimately decided that Poland would cede her territory east off the River Bug to the Soviet Union. Moreover, a new Polish communist-dominated government (Provisional Government of National Unity) was to be formed, with minor participation of those politicians in exile who would accept Soviet supervision. That meant that the Western superpowers intended to withdraw their support for the Polish Government in London. Citizens of the superpowers were the first to be repatriated. The Polish Armed Forces soldiers' dreams about their swift return to their independent homeland were crushed.

Poles' fate shall not be uniform. Some shall have to endure the cruel reality of the police state in the Homeland, whereas others shall remain in the free world to become mute mouths.

Tomasz Arciszewski, Polish Prime Minister in Exile



◀ The thought of return had accompanied the soldiers of the Polish Armed Forces in the West throughout the war. Photograph: a signpost in Scotland with names of Polish cities. (IPMS/OK)

The decision made in Yalta came as a shock to Poles in Poland and abroad. Photograph: Poles protesting in Palestine. (IPMS/OK) ▶



POLISH ex SOLDIERS
PROTEST
AGAINST THE NEW
PARTITION
OF **POLAND**

FOR FIVE YEARS OF
HEROIC STRUGGLE
THE POLES HAVE RECEIVED
THEIR REWARD: A TOTALITARIAN
RUSSIAN REPUBLIC

THE WAR
OF LIBERATION
HAS BEEN LOST

WHAT
WE
FIGHT FOR

AGAINST THE NEW
PARTITION
OF POLAND

LONDON
GOVERNMENT

REPATRIATION OR EMIGRATION?

The communist authorities called on Polish Armed Forces soldiers to swiftly return to Poland, promising them a warm welcome, flats, and a career in the military or elsewhere. The Chairman of the State National Council Bolesław Bierut, Prime Minister Edward Osóbka-Morawski, Commander-in-Chief of the 'people's' Polish Army Marshal Michał Rola-Żymierski all appealed to the soldiers to return. The émigrés were showered with propaganda brochures.

A heated debate ensued among the military men and civilians abroad about whether to return or not. The brochure written by Marek Romański (pseudonym Roman Dąbrowski) entitled "Why we do not return" gave 3 main reasons why civilians and military men should not return to the communist-ruled country. The émigré community shall not return because it does not accept the new partition of Poland, it does not recognise the Moscow-imposed government, and it is aware that Soviet-occupied Poland is not a free, independent, and democratic country. Other publicists warned that the returning soldiers were repressed and deported "far way, to places well known to most of us," which was a reminder about the Gehenna of the Soviet deportations during 1940–1941.

Not all émigrés shared that point of view. Professor Stanisław Grabski, the chairman of the National Council of Poland (the Polish Parliament in Exile), was of a different opinion (see the quotation below).

One should not be afraid of going to Poland. Those who still fear that Poland is bound only to suffer, should find an answer in their conscience as to whether it would be better to share woe with their nation, even if only woe, or lament it safe and sound abroad.

Stanisław Grabski

Commander of the Polish II Corps General Władysław Anders' statement, *Dziennik Żołnierza* 4 October 1946. General Władysław Anders clearly stated that in his opinion remaining abroad was a form of protest against the post-war situation of Poland. By contrast, émigré writer Zbigniew Grabowski argued: "the issue of return to Poland is a matter of conscience, both for those who return and those who remain. It is a choice."

OŚWIADCZENIE DOWÓDCY 2 KORPUSU GEN. WŁADYSŁAWA ANDERSA

Dowódca 2 Korpusu złożył
na nasze ręce następujące o-
świadczenie:

Tzw. tymczasowy rząd w War-
szawie ogłosił swoją uchwałę o
pozbawieniu mnie i szeregu innych
oficerów obywatelstwa polskiego.
Jak już wielokrotnie oświadcza-
łem, podkreślam jeszcze raz z na-
ciśkiem, że naród polski, a więc
i ja, nigdy nie uznawałem obecnego,
chwłowego rządu w Polsce. Na-
wet ci, którzy rząd ten uznali, jak
np. Stany Zjednoczone i W. Bryta-
nia jasno oświadczyły, iż akt ten
uwarunkowany jest przeprowadze-
niem szybkich, wolnych i nieskre-
powanych wyborów, z których ma
wyjść rząd, odpowiadający woli
społeczeństwa polskiego.

Przeprowadzenie wyborów mia-
ło być głównym zadaniem tzw.
rządu tymczasowego. Jednakże
rząd ten, pozostający u władzy
wbrew woli narodu polskiego, zda
je sobie sprawę z tego, że naród
nasz przy pierwszej okazji złoży
mu swoje votum nieufności. Długo
nie miał on odwagi przeprowa-
dzić wyborów i odracza ich termin
do chwili stworzenia „odpowied-
nych” dla siebie warunków, to zna-
czy zapewnienia sobie bezkarności
w sfalszowaniu woli narodu. Jeśli
wybory się odbędą, to jak o tym
świadczyć wszystkie dotychczasowe
posunięcia tzw. rządu tymczasowe-
go, przeprowadzone z ostentacją
na modłę sowiecką, a więc będzie

to komedia wyborcza. Tzw. rząd
tymczasowy przekroczył zakres
swych uprawnień i w oparciu o
terror przekształca strukturę Pol-
ski, prowadząc dzieło sowietywacji.
Fakty te potwierdzają zarówno zna-
ne nam zarządzenia władz warsza-
wskich, jak i wszystkie doniesie-
nia korespondentów zagranicznych.
Te akty prawne, jak i wszelkie in-
ne tzw. rządu tymczasowego są
siłą faktu nielegalne, gdyż rząd
ten nie jest rządem wybranym
przez naród polski, nie posiada Je-
go zaufania, lecz rządzi wyłącznie
z mocy obcych.

Nie chcę się wdawać w charak-
teryistykę tych wszystkich panów,
którzy zasiadają we władzach war-
szawskich. Nie jest chyba dla ni-
kogo wątpliwe, że nie potrafili wy-
legitymować się żadnymi zastuga-
mi dla Polski. Wielu z nich z p.
Bierutem na czele było obywatela-
mi sowieckimi i walczyli przykłada-
jąc swoje ręce dla zniszczenia na-
rodu polskiego. Śmieszne byłoby
wtedy, gdyby ci panowie mogli
mnie — urodzonego w samym ser-
cu Polski, pod Warszawą — pozb-
awiać obywatelstwa. Zdaje się, że
całe moje życie służyłem Polsce i
narodowi polskiemu. Jako żołnierz
spełniałem swój obowiązek oby-
watelski, walcząc. Wszędzie gdzie
walczyłem, a w walkach tych by-
łem ośmiokrotnie ranny, prowa-
dząc moich żołnierzy, czyniłem to
w imię Polski i dla Polski. W chwi-
lach tak ciężkich dla naszej sprawy,
jak w okresie ofensywy na
Monte Cassino, dałem wyraz swo-
jemu najgłębszemu przekonaniu w
rozkazie dziennym, gdy powiedziałem,
że walczymy tu o Polskę.
I tak było zawsze.

Czyż nie ten żołnierz, który wa-
lczył na Zachodzie i w podziemiach
Kraju, rozsławiał imię Władczy
Polski, nadając mu nowy, wspania-

ły blask? Czyż nie tych wszystkich
miał na myśli prezydent Roosevelt,
mówiąc, że Polska jest „natchnie-
niem świata”? Chwilowi rządcy
Polską zdają sobie doskonale spra-
wę, że dzięki krwawemu walczo-
wi żołnierza na Zachodzie imię Pol-
ski wiele zyskało na świecie. Prze-
cież właśnie ci panowie — popeł-
niając znowu bezprawie — usiłują
dyskontować na swoją rzecz Nar-
wik, kampanię we Francji, Tobruk,
Battle of Britain, działalność ma-
rynarki i lotnictwa, Monte Cassino,
Anconę, Bolonię, Falaise, Arnheim,
powstanie warszawskie, a więc to
wszystko, co imieniu Polski nada-
ło nowy, wspaniały i nieśmiertel-
ny blask.

Nasz pobyt za granicami Polski
nie jest niczym innym, jak prote-
stem wobec obecnego stanu rze-
czy w Kraju. Ja i moi żołnierze,
podobnie jak żołnierze innych for-
macji polskich oraz rzesze cywil-
nego ułohodztwa, pragniemy wrócić
do Polski i to jak najszybciej, ale
do takiej Polski, o jaką walczyli-
śmy, tj. do Polski wolnej i niez-
ależnej.

leżnej, do Polski, która rzadzić be-
dzie legalny rząd, wybrany przez
naród w drodze swobodnych wy-
borów, do Polski, w której nie bę-
dzie ani obcych bagnetów, ani ob-
cej policji politycznej. My, pozo-
stając za granicą, chcemy mieć
możliwość w dalszym ciągu walczyć
o sprawiedliwość dla Polski. Z ko-
niecności wiele przyjmujemy te
formy, które dają nam możliwość
przetrawienia, by doczekać tej szcze-
śliwej chwili, w której powrócimy
do wolnej Ojczyzny.

Chciałbym wskazać, że nawet
brytyjskie czynniki oficjalne wyra-
ziły pogląd, iż fakt odmowy po-
wrotu do Kraju tak wielkiej ilo-
ści Polaków, jest wynikiem polity-
ki, prowadzonej przez tzw. rząd
tymczasowy. Innymi słowy, nie
my nie chcemy wracać, ale obecny
stan rzeczy w Polsce uniemożliwia
nam powrót.

W końcu pragnę jeszcze raz pod-
kreślić, jak najbardziej kategorycz-
nie, że nie prowadziłem i nie pro-
wadzę żadnej akcji dwersyjno-
terrorystycznej w Polsce. Naród

polski wykrawał się tak bardzo,
że szkoda nam każdej kropli krwi
polskiej. Od chwili powstania oku-
pacji sowieckiej nie dostarczyliśmy
również do Kraju żadnej broni.
Jest tragedią narodu polskiego, że
do lasów chronić się musi mło-
dzież patriotyczna w obawie przed
śmiercią lub zsyłką. Nikt z uczci-
wie myślących Polaków nie pra-
gnie żadnych aktów rozpaczy w po-
staci powstania. Byłoby to najwięk-
szą tragedią dla naszego narodu.
I tak już strasznie wykrawawłene-
go, gdyby dał się sprowokować do
takiego czynu. Wszystkie oświad-
czenia Warszawy i Moskwy, tacz-
ące akcje terrorystyczne z moją o-
sobą, czy też z 2 Korpusem, są ja-
skrawym oszczerstwem.

Uchwały tzw. rządu tymczasowe-
go, a więc i uchwała o pozbawie-
niu mnie i moich kolegów obywa-
telstwa, nie mogą mieć oczywiście
żadnego wpływu na nasze postępo-
wanie, które pozostanie niezmiennie
i zmierzać zawsze będzie do za-
pewnienia Polsce wolności i niepo-
dległości.

(—) WE. ANDERS
gen. dyw.

Ancona, 1 X. 1946 r.

W przyszłym tygodniu obrady plenum

Po 57 głosowaniach komisja dla Włoch uchwaliła projekt statutu Wolnego Triestu

PARYŻ, 4 X (R) — Po nocnym
posiedzeniu, które trwało około 8
godzin, komisja dla spraw teryto-
rialnych i politycznych Włoch, po
57 głosowaniach, uchwaliła pro-
jekt statutu dla Wolnego Teryto-
rium Triestu, według wniosku
przedstawionego przez delegata
francuskiego dnia poprzedniego.

Klauzule projektu były uchwal-
ne stałe większością 14 głosów
przeciwko 6 (Białoruś, Ukraina,

Jugosławia, Czechosłowacja, Zwią-
zek sowiecki i administracja war-
szawska), tym samym projekt u-
chwalono większością dwóch trze-
ci, co jest konieczne, by decyzja
była uważana jako zaletczenie i mi-
nistrowi spraw zagranicznych wiel-
kich mocarstw.

Po przegłosowaniu ostatniego
paragrafu projektu francuskiego,
dodano na wniosek przedstawiele-
la administracji warszawskiej, Je-

sze jeden artykuł, który brzmiał
jak następuje: „Komisja poleca i
ministrom spraw zagranicznych, by
umożliwili przedstawicielowi Jugo-
sławii przedstawienie jego punktu
widzenia przed gronem ministrów
spraw zagranicznych, zanim powe-
żną oni ostateczną decyzję w spra-
wie statutu Wolnego Terytorium
Triestu”.

Delegacja amerykańska poparła
przez delegację francuską, wprowa-
dzenia, by dodano analogiczną kła-
zulę na korzyść Włoch. Obydwa
wnioski przyjęto jednomyślnie.

Podkreśla się, że już poprze-
dnie w ramach konferencji pariskiej

Export - Import Bank udzielił Warszawie pożyczki

WASZYNGTON, 4 X (Reuter) —
Po 4 miesiącach zwłoki, spowodowa-
nej przez trudności dyplomatyczne
między Waszyngtonem a War-
szawą, Bank Eksportowo - Import-
owy zgodził się na udzielenie ad-
ministracji warszawskiej pożyczki
40 milionów dolarów.

Odpowiedź na oświadczenie Stalina

THE COMMUNISTS' ATTEMPT TO TAKE OVER THE POLISH ARMED FORCES

During the Potsdam Conference Joseph Stalin demanded that Great Britain and the USA sever all relations with the Polish Government in Exile and subordinate the Polish Armed Forces to the communist-dominated Provisional Government of National Unity. Winston Churchill opposed Joseph Stalin's demands, stating that Great Britain's policy was to convince as many Poles as possible to return to Poland. At the same time he declared that he would keep his promise made in the British Parliament about making the Polish soldiers who preferred to remain eligible for British citizenship. The Representation of the Polish Army's Command was established in Warsaw, headed by General Karol Świerczewski. It was to go to Great Britain and take command of the whole of the Polish Armed Forces. The British ambassador stated that that mission would not win the trust of the Polish detachments stationed in the West and that the British side could not accept it. Contrary to the formal and solemn declarations the Warsaw Government's attitude to the Polish Armed Forces in the West had been hostile from the beginning. First, it tried to take command over the troops and when that proved impossible it demanded that the British dissolve the Polish detachments. On 14 February 1946 the Warsaw Government decided to take a radical step, communicating to the British that "the Polish land, naval, and air force units abroad could no longer be regarded units of the Polish Army."



▲ General Tadeusz Komorowski 'Bór', appointed acting Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces in the West on 28 May 1945. (NAC)

Polish President in Exile Władysław Raczkiewicz and General Władysław Anders — London, 26 February 1945. The former appointed the latter acting Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces in the West. (IMPS/OK) Polish II Corps' emblem. (IPN) ►



THE BRITISH DECIDE

It was the British who made the fundamental decisions regarding the post-war fate of the Polish Armed Forces in the West. Polish Armed Forces commanders were called to London on 15 March 1946 to a conference with British Prime Minister Clement Attlee and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ernest Bevin. The British leaders stated that the Polish Armed Forces would be disbanded. That bitter pill was administered with a sweetener; the British said that they were aware of the debt of gratitude they owed to the Poles. Minister Bevin emphasised that the British government felt obliged to take care of the Polish soldiers and that it certainly would not “throw them to the wolves,” which was a clear declaration that the Poles would not be forced to repatriate. The British formed the Resettlement Corps from the soldiers who remained in the British Isles. It was to enable the Poles to make a gradual transition to civilian life abroad.



The number of soldiers who returned to Poland after several years is estimated at 130,000, which constituted less than 52 percent of all soldiers of the Polish Armed Forces (in late 1945 their number was estimated at 250,000). Those remaining chose life abroad. Photograph: Polish Armed Forces soldiers speaking with a Polish Army soldier after return to Poland — Gdańsk, 3 August 1947. (NAC)

Repatriation and emigration of the Polish Armed Forces in the West (1945–1948). (IPN)



REPRESSIONS AT HOME

The post-war fate of Polish Armed Forces soldiers and particularly officers who returned to Poland was dramatic, and often even tragic. Although initially some officers of the Polish Armed Forces were taken into the ranks of the 'People's' Polish Army, they were not given responsible positions as commanders. From the beginning the communist security apparatus had treated Polish Armed Forces soldiers as a suspect element, thus breaking Bolesław Bierut's promises made in the summer of 1945 in Potsdam. Polish Armed Forces soldiers were registered and under surveillance by the Ministry of Public Security' special operational groups, which worked at border crossings. Large-scale repression began in the early 1950s. Prepared at the Warsaw seat of the Ministry of Public Security in 1950, the document "Rozpracowanie obiektów repatriantów" [surveillance of repatriates] introduced surveillance of all repatriates from the West without exceptions. Military repatriates, former soldiers of the Polish Armed Forces, were the first ones targeted by that malicious document. One did not have to wait long for the effects. Thousands of people were put under close surveillance, a number of Anders' and Maczek's soldiers were expelled from the Army and more prominent civilian positions, and many people were imprisoned. Approximately 120,000 soldiers of the Polish Armed Forces chose emigration, including many of the commanders and soldiers from Eastern Poland. They had a hard time finding their place in Great Britain and other Western countries, which gradually opened up more widely to Polish émigrés. For the decades to come that group was the strongest link of the Polish political émigré community, which called for Poland's independence.



The fate that befell Lieutenant Colonel S. Skalski, the best Polish fighter airman during World War II awarded with the Golden Cross of the War Order of Virtuti Militari and the British Distinguished Service Order, was dramatic. Even though he was offered British citizenship and attractive job opportunities in Great Britain he decided to return to Poland in 1947. He was taken into the Polish Army and made a flying technique inspector. But as soon as in June 1948 he was arrested by functionaries of the Ministry of Public Security under false charges of espionage. During the long investigation he was brutally tortured by higher rank Ministry functionaries, including Józef Różański and Adam Humer. On 7 April 1950 he was sentenced to death but the sentence was then changed to life in prison. He was released after 6 years. Photograph: General S. Skalski in his flat — Warsaw, 23 October 1990. (Photo Witold Rozmysłowicz/PAP)

Another tragic fate was that of Major Bolesław Kontrym 'Żmudzin', a participant of the Battle of Narvik, a special force paratrooper, a participant of the capture of the Polish Telephone Joint-stock Company's building during the Warsaw Uprising, a soldier of the 1st Armoured Division commanded by General Stanisław Maczek, and a Knight of the Silver Cross of the Military Order of Virtuti Militari. Similarly to Lieutenant Colonel S. Skalski, Kontrym returned to Poland in 1947. He initially worked in one of the central public offices in Warsaw but as soon as in October 1948 he was arrested on suspicion of espionage. Kontrym was brutally interrogated for almost 4 years. He did not plead guilty despite being subjected to sophisticated torture by, for instance, the Ministry of Public Security's investigating officer Edmund Kwasek. On 26 June 1952 he was sentenced to death. President Bolesław Bierut did not use his power of pardon despite Kontrym's mother's pleading. The sentence was carried out in January 1953. Kontrym's burial place was discovered in the 'Soldiers' Meadow' on the Powązki Cemetery in Warsaw on 24 May 2013. (OK)

The archaeological works on the Powązki Military Cemetery have been continuing since 2012. The victims of the communist terror apparatus were buried in the Ł Section, known as the Soldiers' Meadow. The identity of 41 of the 198 discovered remains has already been established owing to the engagement of the Institute of National Remembrance. The remains of Major Bolesław Kontrym were identified on 28 September 2014. (IPN)



LONDON VICTORY CELEBRATIONS WITHOUT POLES

Great Britain wished to celebrate the end of the war in June 1946. The British invited the armed forces of all Allies, even those which only symbolically contributed to the victory. It seemed obvious that Poles had to participate in the London parade as they were the first to first oppose Adolf Hitler and then they fought on all front lines until the final days of the war. The Polish soldiers' participation in the London parade became a serious political issue. Although the war was over and Poland had been free of the German occupation for over a year there still was not a Polish army under uniform command. The 'people's' Polish Army was stationed in Poland, while the Polish Armed Forces were still in the West, recognising the authority of the Polish Government in Exile. The same as during the war, most Poles regarded the Polish government in London as the only legal authority, while the Warsaw Government was thought a Soviet puppet. But in March 1946 the British invited a representative detachment of the Polish Army to take part in the parade, omitting the Polish Armed Forces. Initially, the Warsaw government expressed its intention to take part in the parade, but when Moscow decided that the Soviet Army representatives would not go to London, the vassal communist regime in Poland joined the boycott.

On the eve of the parade it occurred that no Polish soldier would take part in it. While the absence of the representatives of the 'People's' Polish Army did not really sadden anybody, the absence of the representatives of the Polish Armed Forces in the West was received as a real scandal and not only by Poles. Eminent British politician and future Prime Minister Harold Macmillan wrote in a letter to General Władysław Anders that on 8 June he would be thinking about the

soldiers of the Polish II Corps and that his joy and pride as a British citizen would be paired with sadness and even shame on account of the Poles' exclusion from the celebrations.

The fate of Poland seems to be unending tragedy, and we, who went to war, all ill-prepared on her behalf, watch with sorrow the strange outcome of our endeavours. I deeply regret that none of the Polish troops, and I must say this, who fought with us on a score of battlefields, who poured out their blood in the common cause, are to be allowed to march in the Victory Parade. They will be in our thoughts on that Day. We shall never forget their bravery and martial skill, associated with our own glories at Tobruk, at Cassino and at Arnhem.

Winston Churchill Winston Churchill



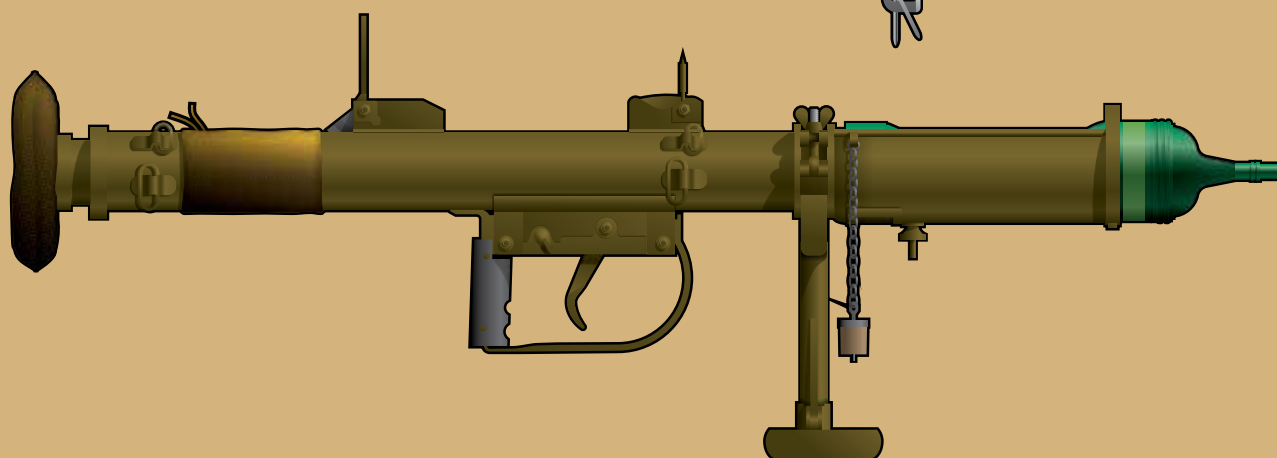
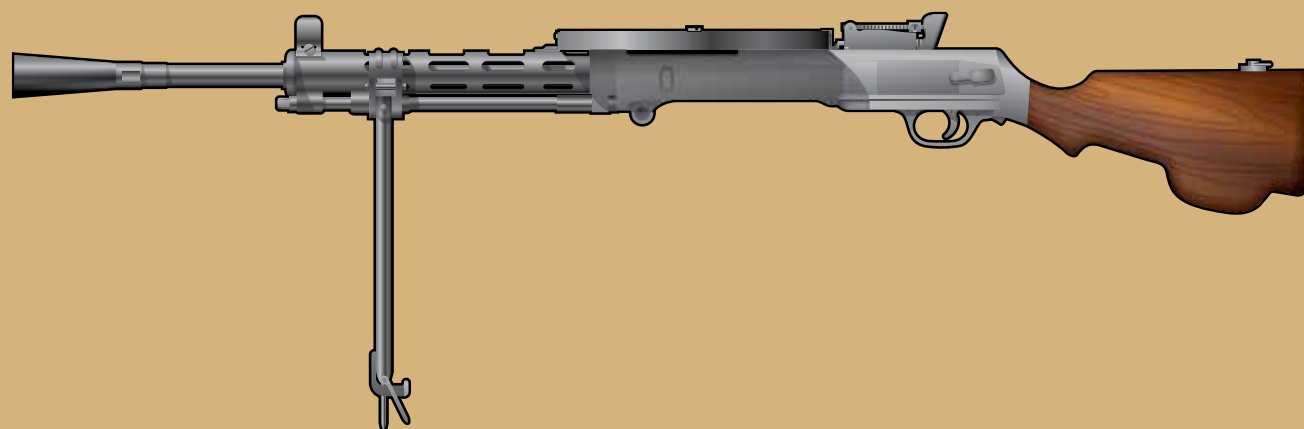
After the parade, soldiers from the Fiji contingent perform a farewell dance in a London park — June 1946. (IWM)

London Victory Celebrations on 8 June 1946. Canadians in the foreground, behind them Australians. (IWM)



CHRONOLOGY

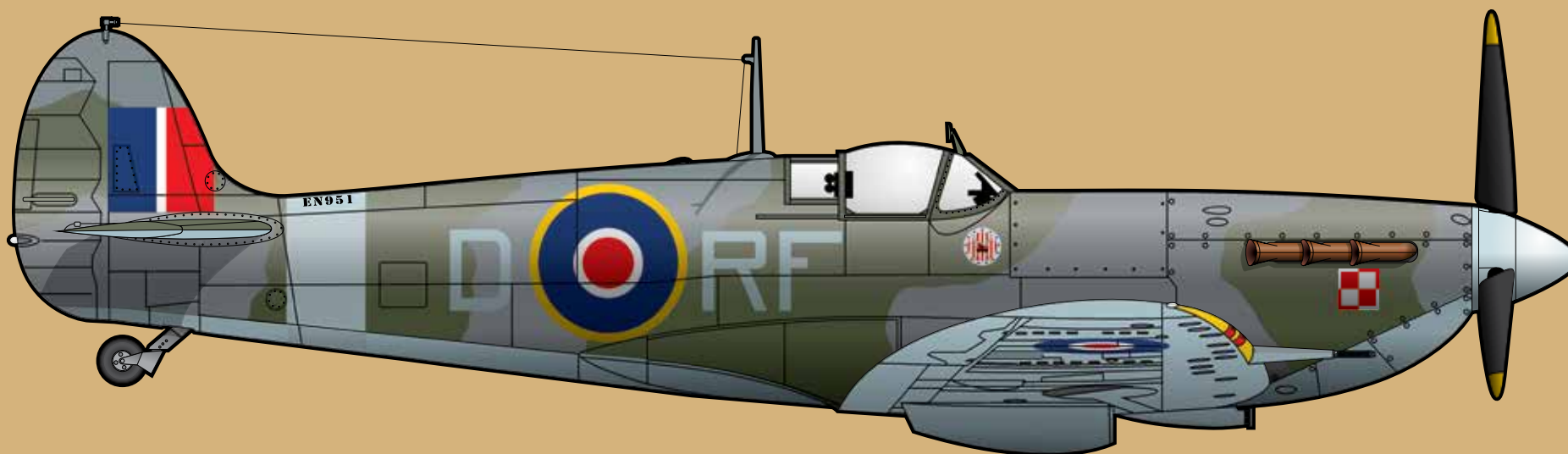
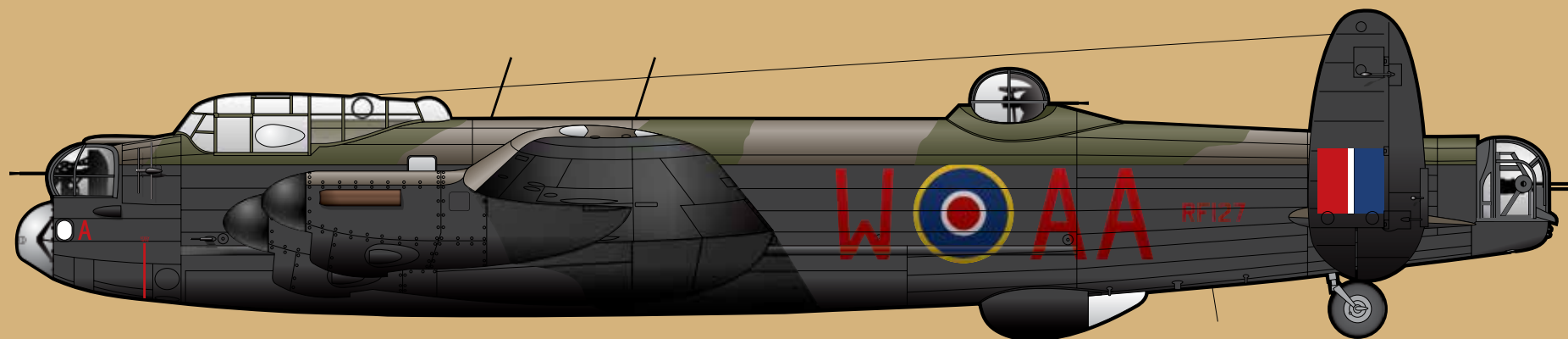
- 1929 at Okęcie airport the Polish intelligence service photographs the interior of the civilian Enigma cypher machine (simpler than the military one) sent to a branch of a German enterprise.
- 1931–1932 the French intelligence service obtains instructions for the military Enigma and transfers this information to its British and Polish allies.
- Autumn 1932 Marian Rejewski, Jerzy Różycki, and Henryk Zygalski begin their work on breaking the Enigma code at the Cypher Bureau of the General Staff of the Polish Army.
- 1938 Warsaw AVA factory manufactures six decoding machines called ‘bombes’ designed by M. Rejewski and his team.
- 24 October 1938 during a conversation with the Polish Ambassador to Germany, Józef Lipski, Joachim von Ribbentrop demands an ‘extra-territorial’ road to East Prussia and incorporation of Gdańsk into the Third Reich. Poland refuses. The Third Reich makes similar demands in January and March 1939.
- 31 March 1939 British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain declares in the House of Commons that Great Britain would immediately help Poland in case of an invasion.
- 28 April 1939 Germany breaks the non-aggression pact with Poland.
- 25–26 July 1939 at a meeting in Pyry near Warsaw the Polish cryptologists transfer their knowledge of the Enigma and the decoding machines they designed to their British and French allies.
- 23 August 1939 signing of the non-aggression pact between the Third Reich and the USSR known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Its secret protocol divided Central-Eastern Europe into 2 spheres of interest, with the Second Republic of Poland cut along the Rivers Narew, Vistula, and San.
- 25 August 1939 Poland signs an alliance with Great Britain.
- 1 September 1939 Germany invades Poland.
- 3 September 1939 Great Britain (along with Australia and New Zealand) and France join the war in defence of Poland.
- 6 September 1939 the Union of South Africa joins the anti-German coalition.
- 10 September 1939 Canada declares war against the Third Reich.
- 12 September 1939 during the Anglo-French Supreme War Council’s first meeting in Abbeville a decision is made against launching any major military operations.
- 17 September 1939 the Soviet Union fulfils its obligations towards the Third Reich and invades Poland.
- 17/18 September 1939 the Polish Government crosses the Romanian border in Kúty.
- 30 September 1939 interned in Romania, Polish President Ignacy Mościcki resigns and transfers his power to Władysław Raczkiewicz. The latter appoints General Władysław Sikorski, who enjoyed the support of the French Government, to be the new Prime Minister.
- 6 October 1939 the end of the Polish Campaign; the last regular unit of the Polish Army, Independent Polesie Operational Group, surrenders at Kock.
- 7 November 1939 General Władysław Sikorski is appointed the Commander-in-Chief.
- 18 November 1939 as per an agreement between Poland and Great Britain, the detachment of the Polish Navy is placed under the Admiralty’s command.



The most popular Soviet submachine gun PPSH-41 (Pistolet Pu-lyemet Shpagin) was a standard weapon for the Red Army. The Soviet DP-28 light machine gun with a 47-round pan magazine. The British anti-tank weapon PIAT. (IPN)

CHRONOLOGY

- 5 March 1940 the Soviet government follows NKVD Head Lavrentiy Beria's suggestion concerning the execution of 25,700 Polish citizens: prisoners of war from the camps in Kozelsk, Ostashkov, and Starobilsik and prisoners from prisons on the occupied Eastern Borderlands of the Second Republic of Poland.
- 5 April–22 May 1940 the NKVD follows the order of 5 March, conducting mass executions in, for instance, Kalinin, Katyn, Kharkov, and Smolensk.
- 9 April 1940 the German army captures Denmark and invades Norway.
- 12 April 1940 the families of the Katyn Massacre victims begin to be deported to Kazakhstan.
- 16–17 April 1940 British troops land in central Norway at Namsos and Andalsnes.
- 27–28 April 1940 the Allies capture Narvik and push the aggressor towards the Swedish border. The Polish Independent Highland Brigade distinguishes itself in combat by breaking the German resistance, losing 100 soldiers.
- 10 May 1940 the Third Reich invades Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France. The 1/146 Warsaw Fighter Squadron enters combat in the Lyon area; in the Gratangen fiord the Germans damage the Polish destroyer Burza, which was supporting the landing of French Alpine troops.
- May 1940 Polish vessels Błyskawica and Burza take part in the evacuation of the Allied troops from Dunkirk and Calais.
- 24 May 1940 the beginning of the evacuation of approx. 24,000 Allied troops from Narvik.
- 8 June 1940 the 2nd Rifle Division commanded by General Bronisław Prugar-Ketling conducts delaying operations in Alsace.
- 10 June 1940 Norway surrenders. Approx. 5,000 Polish Highlanders reach Brittany, soon to share the fate of the defeated French forces.
- 11 June 1940 the Allies confirm the sinking of Orzeł in the North Sea (3 of the 54 dead crew member were British seamen).
- 13 June 1940 the 10th Armoured Motorised Brigade commanded by General Stanisław Maczek starts on its combat trail in Champaubert in Champagne.
- 15 June 1940 a day after the German troops had captured Paris the 1st Grenadier Division commanded by General Bronisław Duch begins fighting in Lorraine.
- 22 June 1940 signing of the armistice, which comes into effect 2 days later on the German-French front line and then on the French-Italian line.
- 24–27 June 1940 main transports of the Polish airmen arrive in Great Britain transported by sea from France.
- 1 July 1940 establishment of the first Polish air unit in Great Britain
- 10 July 1940 the beginning of the Battle of Britain.
- 13 July 1940 establishment of No. 302 Polish Fighter Squadron.
- July 1940 Polish ocean liners Sobieski and Batory transport British gold, priceless antiques from the Wawel Castle in Cracow, and German prisoners of war to Canada.
- 2 August 1940 No. 303 Polish Fighter Squadron established in Great Britain.
- August 1940 Batory transports British children evacuated from bombed London to Australia.
- 22 August 1940 the Parliament of the United Kingdom passes the Allied Forces Act, giving the Polish troops the same rights as those of the Armed Forces of the member states of the British Commonwealth of Nations.



Heavy 4-engine bomber Avro Lancaster, which in March 1944 became the equipment of No. 300 Mazovia Bomber Squadron. Below: the most famous British fighter aircraft Spitfire from No. 303 Kościuszko Fighter Squadron. (IPN)

CHRONOLOGY

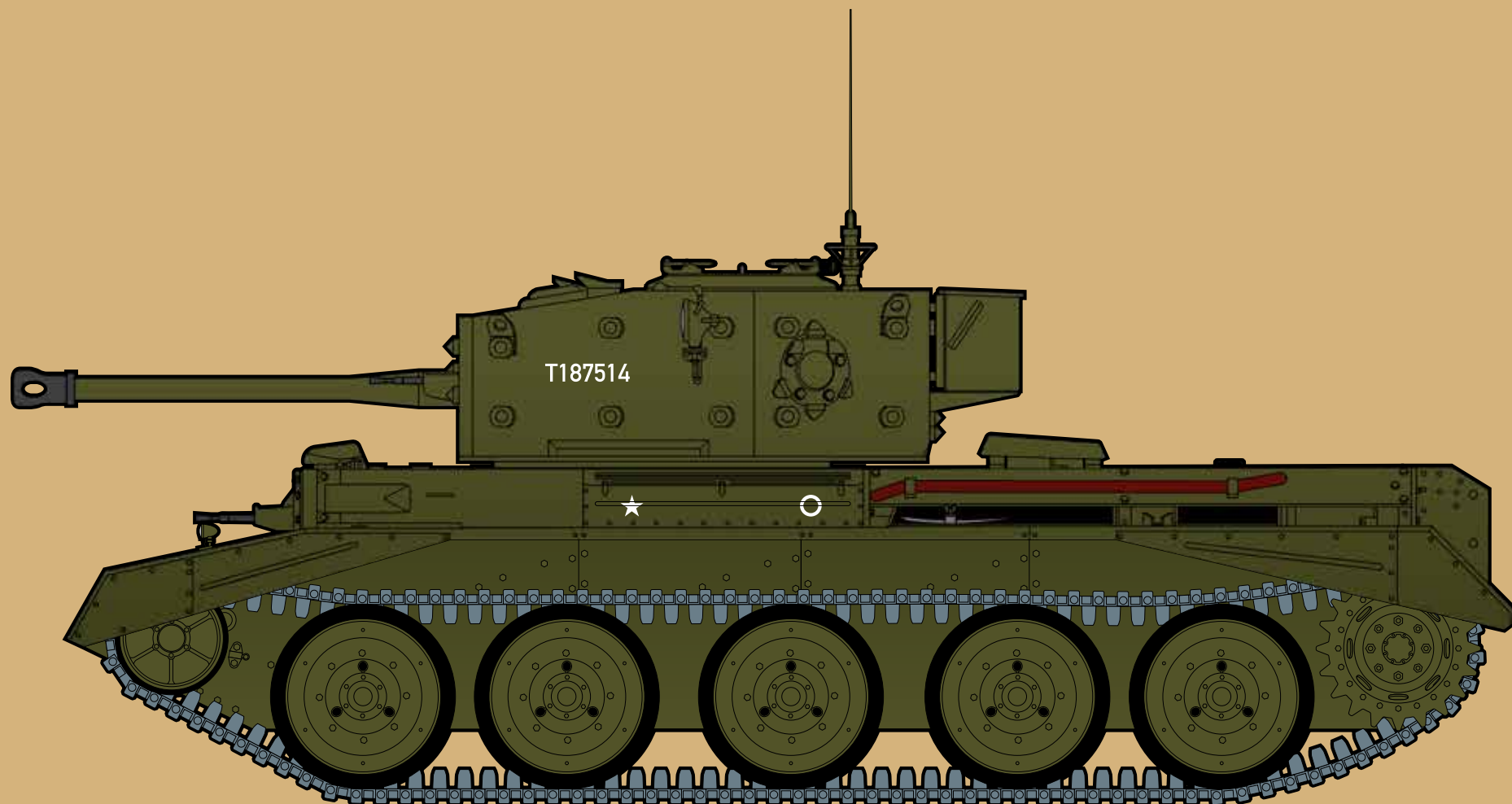
- 30 August 1940 the first victory of No. 303 Polish Fighter Squadron during the Battle of Britain
- 31 August–10 October 1940 No. 303 Squadron fights in the Battle of Britain.
- 7 September 1940 the Battle enters its final stage, with the Luftwaffe ordered to bomb English towns and cities. The Polish airmen fight in their defence.
- 13 September 1940 the Italians attack the British in North Africa.
- October–December 1940 a few hundred Polish military engineers, technicians, and specialists become employed in the British and Canadian arms industry.
- October 1940 approx. 900 Polish citizens drafted in Great Britain.
- November 1940 General Władysław Sikorski deports approx. 1,500 Polish officers deemed political enemies to the Rothesay camp on the Isle of Bute (known as 'Snake Island') on the western Scottish coastline. British public opinion is outraged, which leads to the liquidation of the camp in April 1942; approx. 270 Polish officers transferred to the British colonial units in West Africa.
- January 1941 No. 303 Fighter Squadron pilots switch from Hawker Hurricane to Supermarine Spitfire; Wilk, which in September 1939 managed to force its way through the German blockade in the Baltic Sea, is withdrawn from service for technical reasons.
- 21 January 1941 the Australians capture the Italian fortress in Tobruk.
- 26 May 1941 destroyer Piorun takes part in the operation of the sinking of Bismarck, the largest German battleship.
- 22 June 1941 Germany invades the USSR (Operation Barbarossa).
- 30 July 1941 the Sikorski-Mayski agreement is signed in London, reinstating diplomatic relations between Poland and the USSR.
- 14 August 1941 Poland and the USSR sign a military agreement in Moscow.
- 22–28 August 1941 detachments of the Polish Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade are moved from the Egyptian port of Alexandria into the Italian- and German-besieged Tobruk.
- September 1941 Women's Auxiliary Service established on General Władysław Anders' initiative.
- 12 September 1941 Poles defend the western side of the Tobruk fortress.
- October 1941–June 1942 No. 303 Fighter Squadron flies over France and Belgium.
- 9–10 October 1941 Polish riflemen force the Italians to retreat and capture the key hill of Madaura in Tobruk.
- 9 October 1941 the 1st Independent Parachute Brigade is established, with Colonel Stanisław Sosabowski as its commander; the beginning of the permanent operation of the autonomous Polish Training Section at RAF Ringway
- 26 October 1941 Sokół becomes assigned to the British 10th Submarine Flotilla, based in Malta.
- November 1941 a run-down American submarine enters military service. The Poles name it Jastrząb.



Soviet medium tank T-34 from the 2nd Tank Regiment, with 76 mm gun mounted in a hexagonal turret with two hatches and the characteristic dome. (IPN)

CHRONOLOGY

- | | | | |
|---------------------|--|-----------------------|--|
| 10 December 1941 | the first siege of Tobruk comes to an end; the Axis forces are pushed back and begin a retreat towards the fortifications stretching from the Mediterranean Sea to Bir Hakeim. | 8 July 1942 | the Soviet Government agrees to the evacuation from the USSR of the remaining units of Anders' Army. |
| 14–17 December 1941 | detachments of the Polish Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade fight at Ghazala. | 10 August 1942 | the beginning of the second stage of the evacuation |
| 2 January 1942 | Polish artillerymen help take the Italian fortress of Bardia. | 19 August 1942 | the Polish Navy and Air Force support the unsuccessful Allied Dieppe Raid in Upper Normandy. |
| March 1942 | General Stanisław Maczek's 1st Armoured Division formed in Perthshire, Scotland. | 1 September 1942 | more than 1,600 soldiers and civilians arrive by land from Ashgabat to Mashhad. The evacuation comes to an end. |
| 19 March 1942 | General Władysław Anders orders evacuation of some of the military units and civilians from the USSR to Iran. | 12 September 1942 | as per Commander-in-Chief Władysław Sikorski's order the Polish Armed Forces in the USSR and the Polish Army in the Middle East merge into the Polish Army in the East, commanded by General Władysław Anders. |
| 20 March 1942 | merchant vessel Tobruk becomes the first Polish vessel to depart with the Arctic convoy to Murmansk. | October–November 1942 | Błyskawica takes part in the Allied landing in North Africa (Operation Torch). |
| Spring 1942 | the Polish Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade is moved from Egypt to Quastina, Palestine. | February 1943 | Joseph Stalin and Colonel Zygmunt Berling talk about the establishment of a Polish military unit in the USSR. |
| 24 March 1942 | the beginning of the first stage of the evacuation of Anders' Army and the families of the military men (over 31,000 soldiers and 12,000 civilians). | March 1943 | Sokół is joined by a new submarine |
| 2 May 1942 | Polish vessel Jastrząb is attacked by a Norwegian/British vessel from the PQ-15 Arctic convoy headed for Murmansk. 3 Poles and 2 Britons die, with the submarine's commander, Captain Bolesław Romanowski and his 15 subordinates, sustaining wounds. The damaged vessel has to be sunk. | 13 April 1943 | a German radio station announces the discovery of the mass graves of the Polish officers murdered by the NKVD at Katyn. |
| 3 May 1942 | the establishment of the 3rd Carpathian Rifle Division commanded by General S. Kopąński. The Division's ranks unite veterans of the African Campaign and General Władysław Anders' subordinates who left the Soviet Union. | 23 April 1943 | the Soviet Union severs diplomatic relations with the Polish Government. |
| 27 May 1942 | destroyer Garland becomes severely damaged during a Luftwaffe air raid on the Allied convoy, which it was escorting. | 1 May 1943 | in his article published in Wolna Polska Colonel Zygmunt Berling accuses Anders' Army of not fighting with the USSR against the Third Reich. The text was an act of Soviet propaganda justifying the formation of the 1st Infantry Division under Moscow's auspices. |
| | | 13 May 1943 | the 1st Infantry Division begins to be organised in the training camp in Seltzy on the River Oka. |



British tank Cromwell VIII, used by the 10th Mounted Riflemen Regiment of the 1st Armoured Division commanded by General S. Maczek. (IPN)

CHRONOLOGY

- | | | | |
|------------------|--|------------------------|---|
| May 1943 | the Polish Army in the Middle East is transformed into the Polish II Corps, commanded by General Władysław Anders, while the rear units are transformed into Polish III Corps. | 12 January 1944 | the beginning of the Allied attack on the Gustav Line |
| 3 June 1943 | the establishment of the 1st Independent Emilia Plater Women's Battalion to be used in combat, commanded by Red Army officers. After some time the Battalion is deemed useful predominantly in auxiliary duties. | 19 January–21 May 1944 | formed from the partisan units which defended the Polish population from the Ukrainian nationalists, the 27th Home Army Volhynian Infantry Division follows the instructions given with regard to Operation Tempest and for several months cooperates with the Red Army. The Home Army soldiers fight over Volodymyr-Volynskyi and Kovel. |
| July 1943 | the 1st Tadeusz Kościuszko Infantry Division is 16,700 strong. | 22 January 1944 | the Allies take the Anzio beachhead in order to envelop the Gustav Line and capture Rome (Operation Shingle). |
| 10 July 1943 | the Allied landing in Sicily (Operation Husky). | 15–18 February 1944 | the second Battle of Monte Cassino; the Allied bombers destroy the Benedictine abbey. |
| 20 July 1943 | first death sentences carried out on the soldiers of the 1st Infantry Division in the camp in Seltzy on the River Oka. Most of the indictments had a political character. | 15–26 March 1944 | the third Battle of Monte Cassino; severe losses suffered by the New Zealand 2nd Infantry Division, Indian 4th Division, and British 78th Infantry Division. The Allies capture the small town of Cassino ruined by bombers on 15 March. |
| 10 August 1943 | the Soviet State Defence Committee decides to establish I Corps of the Polish Armed Forces in the USSR, commanded by General Zygmunt Berling. | April 1944 | units of the Polish II Corps commanded by General Władysław Anders operating within the framework of the British 8th Army in Italy are sent to the front line. |
| 3 September 1943 | the beginning of the Allied invasion of the Apennine Peninsula (Operation Avalanche). | May 1944 | Polish detachments moved to southern England as the second wave of invasion forces. |
| 8 September 1943 | the Italian government capitulates. Soon the Germans occupy northern and central Italy. | 12–18 May 1944 | the fourth Battle of Monte Cassino (Operation Diadem). |
| 12 October 1943 | the Battle of Lenino fought with participation of the 1st Infantry Division. | 12 May 1944 | the first unsuccessful Polish attack on the 'Phantom Hill' and Massa Albaneta. |
| October 1943 | the Polish Government in Exile prepares a plan of the post-war repatriation of the army and civilians within 100 days; Sokół and Dzik are moved to Beirut and they conduct military operations against the German fleet in the Aegean Sea. | 13 May 1944 | the French Expeditionary Corps breaks the Gustav Line. |
| 4 January 1944 | the Red Army crosses the border of the Second Republic of Poland in the vicinity of Rokitno, near Sarny. | 16–17 May 1944 | the second Polish attack and the capture of Hill 593 and Massa Albaneta. |

CHRONOLOGY

- 17 May 1944 the German command orders a retreat from Monte Cassino.
- 18 May 1944 the 6th Battalion of the 3rd Carpathian Rifles Division seizes Hill 593 and Massa Albaneta; a patrol from the 12th Podolian Uhlan Regiment commanded by Second Lieutenant Kazimierz Gurbiel raises the regiment's flag on the ruins of the Monte Cassino Abbey.
- May 1944 a military cemetery is created at the foot of Monte Cassino; 1,054 Polish soldiers are buried there by September 1945.
- 25 May 1944 soldiers of the Polish II Corps capture the town of Piedimonte and Monte Cairo.
- 6 June 1944 the opening of the second front line; the Allied troops land on 5 Normandy beaches; cruiser Dragon and destroyers Błyskawica, Piorun, Ślęzak, and Krakowiak support the Allied invasion fleet in Normandy. Dragon is sunk during the operation.
- 9/10 June 1944 bled out during the fighting against the Germans in Polesie, the 27th Home Army Volhynian Infantry Division crosses the River Bug and concentrates in the Lublin region.
- 1–7 July 1944 the Polish II Corps takes part in the Battle of Loreto in Italy.
- 7–13 July 1944 Home Army detachments take part in Operation Gate of Dawn aimed at liberating German-occupied Vilna. The Home Army units cooperate with the Red Army, supporting its armoured detachments.
- 15–18 July 1944 the 1st Armoured Division lands in Bayeux, Normandy, along with the 51st Scottish Infantry Division, which had trained with the Poles for almost 4 years.
- 16 July 1944 after the fighting over Vilna the Home Army detachments are disarmed and detained by the Soviets. The partisans trying to reach the Rudniki Forest are attacked by Soviet formations. The arrested rank-and-file soldiers and non-commissioned officers are detained in Medininkai, while the officers are taken to the camp in Ryazan. Many of them face the alternative: join the First Polish Army or the Red Army.
- 18 July 1944 General Władysław Anders's subordinates capture Ankona, which is an independent operation of the Polish II Corps in Italy. The capture of the post enables the Allies to shorten their supply route.
- 21 July 1944 the Polish Committee of National Liberation is established in Moscow upon Stalin's order.
- 22 July 1944 27th Home Army Volhynian Infantry Division units push the Germans forces out of Kock.
- 22–25 July 1944 Home Army detachments attack the German garrison in Lublin and fight for the city in cooperation with the Red Army.
- 25–26 July 1944 soldiers of the 27th Home Army Volhynian Infantry Division are disarmed by the Soviets and detained in the camp in Skrobów.
- 26 July 1944 the Soviets disarm the soldiers of the Lublin Region of the Home Army, detaining most of them in the former German concentration camp at Majdanek or at the Lublin Castle.
- 29–30 July 1944 Radio Moscow and the Tadeusz Kościuszko Radio Station, which broadcasted from the USSR's capital, appeal to Warsaw inhabitants to take up arms in support of the approaching Red Army.
- 31 July 1944 Polish II Corps fights at Pesaro. Beginning with the autumn of 1944 the fighting on the Italian front line resumes the form of trench warfare.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1 August 1944 the Warsaw Uprising begins at 5 p.m.
- 2 August 1944 Home Army Commander-in-Chief General Tadeusz Komorowski 'Bór' telegraphs the Polish air base in Brindisi for help.
- August 1944 soldiers accused of desertion and resisting 'people's regime' are court marshalled by the 2nd Polish Army in Kąkolewnica. Among the executed are a few dozen Home Army soldiers conscripted into the Army commanded by General Karol Świerczewski.
- 5 August 1944 the 1st Independent Parachute Brigade becomes incorporated into the British 1st Airborne Division.
- 7 August 1944 the Polish armoured division subordinate to the Canadian II Corps sets out towards Falaise.
- 9 August 1944 staying in Naples, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill sends a British and South African bomber squadron to Warsaw. He also pressures Joseph Stalin to aid the insurgents with weaponry and ammunition.
- 13 August 1944 Joseph Stalin refuses to provide help to the insurgents, cynically blaming the Polish Government for the outbreak of the uprising.
- 15 August 1944 Polish armoured units capture crossings on the River Dives, slowing down the retreat of the German troops.
- 18 August 1944 Poles reach Chambois and establish contact with two American battalions of the 19th Infantry Division, which had already stormed into the town.
- 19 August 1944 detachments of the 1st Armoured Division capture Mount Ormel and destroy the German mechanized columns at Falaise, which are trying to find a way out of encirclement.
- 20 August 1944 surrounded, the Germans launch new attacks on Mount Ormel and continue defending Chambois, from where the Americans and Poles are trying to push them out.
- 21 August 1944 after the Battle of Falaise approx. 450 soldiers from the Polish unit are buried on the cemetery in Longuennerie.
- 27 August 1944 U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt conditions his aid to Warsaw on the Soviet Union's consent.
- 4 September 1944 the British demand that Joseph Stalin provide substantial aid to the Poles fighting in Warsaw and unsuccessfully seek authorisation for Allied aircraft to land on the airfields in the Soviet operations zone.
- 13 September 1944 the Soviet Night Bombers Squadron and the Polish 2nd Cracow Night Fighters Regiment launch drops for Warsaw. The Red Army does not use capsules and the light U-2 2-man biplanes, known as kukuruzniks (Russian for 'maze duster'), drop the sacks without parachutes.
- 14 September 1944 the Soviet 47th Army and the 1st Polish Army capture the Warsaw quarter of Praga. The operations are not directed at the Uprising's success but at prolonging it.
- 16–23 September 1944 detachments of the 1st Polish Army (approx. 1,200 soldiers) fight on the front lines in the Czerniaków and Żoliborz quarters, supporting the insurgents. The unsuccessful attacks cost the lives of over 900 Polish Army soldiers. The lack of the Red Army's support dooms the Polish attacks to failure.
- 17 September 1944 the British land in Renkum and Arnhem, while the Americans land in Eindhoven and Nijmegen. The British XXX Armoured Corps forces its way to Eindhoven.

CHRONOLOGY

- 18 September 1944 the second British landing at Arnhem. The American defence of Nijmegen continues; 107 Boeings B-17 supported by 154 fighter aircraft fly to Warsaw. Having dropped approx. 1,300 containers, the Americans land in Poltava in Ukraine as pre-agreed with the Soviets.
- 19 September 1944 bad weather prevents the Poles from landing at Arnhem. Allied land units reach Nijmegen.
- 20 September 1944 some of the British parachutists retreat from Arnhem to Oosterbeek. The Allies cross the River Waal near Nijmegen, but their tanks are decimated by the German artillery on the dikes amidst the flooded Dutch polders.
- 21 September 1944 the landing in Driel on the western bank of the Rhine
- 22–25 September 1944 despite having no boats the Poles manage to move approx. 300 men across the River Rhine in order to support the British defence in Oosterbeek on the eastern bank of the river.
- 25/26 September 1944 the British suspend the operation and order a retreat onto the western bank of the Rhine. A number of Allied soldiers are taken captive, while the number of the killed American and British parachutists is estimated at 2,500. The Poles lose approx. 350 men, of whom 25 percent perished.
- 2 October 1944 Warsaw capitulates. 16,000 insurgents are taken into German captivity. The total death toll among civilians and insurgents exceeds 150,000. The Germans resettle the surviving population, deporting a number of Varsovians to concentration camps or forced labour.
- 12 October 1944 the 1st Independent Parachute Brigade is removed from the front line on the River Meuse to Great Britain and concentrated in the Edinburgh area.
- 30 October 1944 the 1st Armoured Division commanded by General Stanisław Maczek liberates Breda. The Poles' capture of the town enabled the Allies to move towards the River Meuse and capture the beachhead in Moerdijk.
- 27 December 1944 under pressure exerted by the British, the Polish authorities remove General Stanisław Sosabowski from the position of the Brigade's Commander and appoint Lieutenant Colonel Stanisław Jachnik instead. The Polish General was unjustly accused of being responsible for the fiasco of Operation Market Garden, even though he had opposed it from the beginning and pointed out the British mistakes.
- January 1945 in a memo to the leaders of Great Britain and the United States the Polish Government state that the supreme Polish authorities 'and Polish citizens staying outside Poland due to the war events' must return to Poland.
- 17 January 1945 1st Polish Army units liberate Warsaw.
- 19 January 1945 Commander-in-Chief of the Home Army, General Leopold Okulicki 'Niedźwiadek', orders dissolution of the Home Army.
- 29 January 1945 detachments of the 1st Polish Army cross the pre-September 1939 Polish-German border.
- 3 February 1945 the 1st Infantry Division captures Podgaje. In a burned barn the Poles discover remains of 32 Polish POWs taken captive by the Germans 4 days earlier.
- 4 February 1945 the First Polish Army launches an attack on the Pomeranian Wall.
- 4–11 February 1945 during the Yalta Conference the Big Three decide about the post-war repatriation

CHRONOLOGY

- 12 February 1945 German troops forced to retreat from Wałcz; the breaking of the Pomeranian Wall.
- 26 February 1945 Polish President Władysław Raczkiewicz appoints General Władysław Anders acting Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces in the West.
- 5 March 1945 post-Home Army detachments liberate the labour camp in Krzesin.
- 8 March 1945 a scouts' detachment from the 'Łoza' area takes control of the prison in Łowicz, freeing 84 prisoners.
- 9 March 1945 post-Home Army detachments free approx. 100 prisoners from the prison in Biała Podlaska.
- 10 March 1945 post-Home Army detachments free approx. 170 prisoners, including 30 women, from the prison in Sandomierz.
- 14 March 1945 the commander of the 1st Polish Army General Stanisław Popławski sends an ultimatum to Colonel Fritz Fullriede, the commander of the town's defence, who refuses to surrender.
- 18 March 1945 Kołobrzeg capitulates. Poland's symbolic wedding to the Baltic Sea.
- 16–20 March 1945 detachments of the 1st Polish Army cross the River Oder.
- 22 March 1945 a post-Home Army detachment destroys the Polish Army's Błudek camp for former Home Army soldiers, freeing approx. 200 people.
- 26 March 1945 the future of the Polish Armed Forces is debated by the British war cabinet. Expecting that a number of soldiers of the Polish Armed Forces would refuse to return to the communist-ruled homeland, Prime Minister Churchill motions for making the Poles, who choose emigration, eligible to settle in the British Empire. He mentions the debt of gratitude owed to the Polish soldiers.
- 27 March 1945 the final battle with the participation of the Polish Navy
- 27/28 March 1945 in Pruszków the Soviets insidiously arrest 16 representatives of the Polish Underground State, including the last Commander-in-Chief of the Home Army, General Leopold Okulicki 'Niedźwiadek', and the Delegate of the Government in Exile, Jan Stanisław Jankowski. The arrestees are fled to Moscow for interrogation. Their trial begins in June 1946.
- April 1945 No. 303 Fighter Squadron becomes equipped with P-51 Mustang aircraft.
- 12 April 1945 a detachment of the 1st Armoured Division commanded by General Stanisław Maczek liberates the POW camp in Oberlangen. Among the liberated prisoners are approx. 1,700 female participants of the Warsaw Uprising.
- 16–19 April 1945 the 2nd Polish Army crosses the River Lusatian Neisse.
- 21 April 1945 Polish II Corps liberates Bologna; it is the Polish unit's last major battle on the Italian front line.
- 21–28 April 1945 Commanded by General Karol Świerczewski, the 2nd Polish Army suffers severe losses during the Battle of Bautzen, which it fought against the German Army Group Centre.
- 24 April–2 May 1945 selected units of the 1st Polish Army, including the 1st Tadeusz Kościuszko Infantry Division, fight in Berlin.
- 25 April 1945 supporting the air raid on Adolf Hitler's bunker in Berchtesgaden.
- 28 April 1945 Polish sappers of the First Polish Army build a bridge on the River Spree in Berlin's Moabit quarter.

CHRONOLOGY

- 2 May 1945 after fierce combat, detachments of the 1st Polish Army capture the Berlin-Tiergarten station. They raise the Polish white-and-red flags on the Victory Column in the nearby Tiergarten Park and then go towards the Brandenburg Gate to support the Soviet infantry in combat. Berlin capitulates.
- 3 May 1945 the 1st Polish Army units reach the River Elbe and establish contact with American detachments.
- 5 May 1945 the 1st Armoured Division commanded by General Stanisław Maczek accepts the surrender of the Wilhelmshaven garrison.
- 8 May 1945 the Third Reich capitulates; the end of the war in Europe.
- May 1945 the 1st Independent Parachute Brigade becomes incorporated into the British occupation forces in Germany, joining the detachments of the 1st Armoured Division commanded by General Stanisław Maczek.
- 28 May 1945 General Tadeusz Komorowski 'Bór' appointed acting Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces in the West.
- 21 June 1945 during the Moscow Conference the superpowers' representatives declare that they would help the future Provisional Government of National Unity repatriate those Poles "who would want to return, including Polish Armed Forces soldiers."
- 28 June 1945 the establishment of the communist-dominated Provisional Government of National Unity.
- 5 July 1945 the British and American governments withdraw their support for the Polish Government in Exile.
- 2 September 1945 Japan surrenders; the end of World War II.
- 8 September 1945 the Provisional Government of National Unity informs Great Britain about its intention to send a military mission to London to take command over the Polish Armed Forces.
- 21 September 1945 the British authorities survey Polish Armed Forces soldiers about whether they wish to return to Poland. Only 17 per cent of the military men declare willingness to immediately leave for Poland.
- December 1945 10,661 rank-and-file soldiers, 1,612 non-commissioned officers, and 32 officers from the Polish II Corps return to Poland from Italy. Most soldiers of the Corps refuse to return to communist Poland.
- 5 January 1946 the first naval transport with the soldiers stationed on the British Isles leaves for Poland. Over 24,000 military men return in 17 transports by mid-April. Approximately 100,000 Polish soldiers remain on the British Isles, refusing to return.
- 2 March 1946 the British invite the Polish Army's delegation to participate in the London Victory Celebrations. The Polish government in Warsaw accepts.
- 15 March 1946 British Prime Minister Clement Attlee and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ernest Bevin decide to dissolve the Polish Armed Forces in the West.
- 5 June 1946 Daily Telegraph prints a letter from a group of British politicians criticising the invitation extended to the Polish Army's delegation, which they regard as an insult to the Poles in Great Britain.
- 7 June 1946 following the Kremlin's directions, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs announces to the British Ambassador to Poland that the Polish Army's delegation shall not participate in the celebrations.

CHRONOLOGY

- 8 June 1946 the victory parade marches long the streets of London without Polish participants. The Polish airmen invited to participate in the parade refused together with RAF airmen in a gesture of protest against the omission of the other detachments of the Polish Armed Forces.
- 26 September 1946 the Provisional Government of National Unity deprives commanders of the Polish Armed Forces (including Generals Władysław Anders and Stanisław Maczek) of Polish citizenship.