

MINISTRY OF NATIONAL DEFENSE
REPUBLIC OF POLAND



November 11

National Independence Day

Nov. 11 1918

Wojciech
Kossak,
Uhlán on Horse.
National Digital Archives
(NAC)

FREE AGAIN

The armistice of November 11, 1918 on the Western front between Germany and the Allied Powers – most importantly France, Belgium, Great Britain and the USA – was a historic moment. The day, ending a horrible, four-year world war which bled out the Western nations, was solemnly celebrated in many European capitals until quite recently, when its veterans were still alive. Meanwhile, in the East the war ended over a year earlier, in the fall of 1917. The revolution in Russia, taking over power by the communists, and later the peace treaty signed between them and Germany and Austria-Hungary, not only excluded the new Russian state from the Triple Entente powers (“Entente Cordiale” – Cordial Agreement), but also resulted in

the transfer of the communist republic to the group of their enemies.

For Poland, all these events brought hope for regaining independence. The state, divided for over 100 years between Germany, Austria and Russia, became a bargaining chip between the partitioning states and the Western powers. Russia was weakened by the civil war and territorial concessions to Germany, which brought it back to the borders of Muscovy from the 16th century, the multinational Austro-Hungarian monarchy was on the verge of falling apart, and revolution was approaching in Germany. The day of November 11, 1918, as it later turned out, brought independence to Poland. However, that independence did not come easy. It had to be fought for and preserved, arms in hand, for another two years.

A soldier of the Polish Legions
National Digital Archives (NAC)



PHOTO: JAKUB SZYMCIUK



MARIUSZ BŁASZCZAK
DEPUTY MINISTER
POLISH MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENSE

WE DID NOT GET OUR INDEPENDENCE FOR FREE

In 1918, we did not get our independence for free. We should keep that in mind, thinking about the heroes of those events. Despite the passing time, the significance of their sacrifice has not faded. We still see quite clearly what people are capable of when they are driven by the love of their Fatherland and by the responsibility towards their state. When, despite obstacles and oppression, they do not give up on their own identity. When a solidary effort of politicians, citizens and soldiers is focused on one thing – strengthening sovereignty. We knew how to make use of this great, historic chance. It is worth remembering that in the perspective of Poland's great future, as anticipated by the fathers of our independence, our generation was also included. This awareness is our obligation today. We truly admire the effectiveness of a young state, which with so much energy was rising again. It was capable of being created anew, with the background of its tradition, history and heritage cherished for years. We must today be grateful for the energy of the Poles engaged in the formation of their army. They did understand that the army is one of the main pillars, on which their plan of a “new life” should be based. The Polish Army was combined of various formations, and became a powerful arm of the people, who would soon, in 1920, confirm its greatness. We did not get our independence for free. For that reason, we are to protect it and appreciate it. For that reason, also today, we stand with other free nations shoulder to shoulder in the name of the right cause. For that reason, we – Poland and Polish people – do not give our consent to the Russian barbarity and the Russians ruining our common security architecture. For that reason, we support the Ukrainian people who fight for their sovereignty, freedom and dignity. For that reason, we build the strong Polish Armed Forces, and we are now reminding all Poles about our great, common history, which unites us and forms us as a nation.

Honor and Glory to the Heroes!



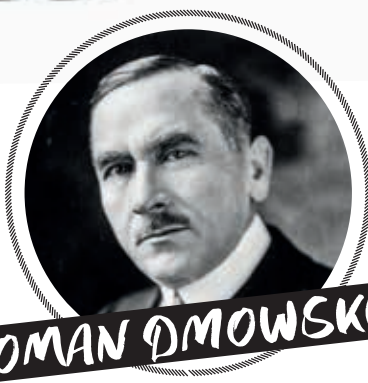


FATHERS OF POLAND

They had different lives, political views and visions of future Poland. Still, those prominent politicians and patriots – Józef Piłsudski, Roman Dmowski, Ignacy Jan Paderewski, Ignacy Daszyński, Wincenty Witos and Wojciech Korfanty – at a turning point in Polish history united around the idea of bringing the Second Republic of Poland to life.



JÓZEF PIŁSUDSKI



ROMAN DMOWSKI



IGNACY PADEREWSKI

Through Fight to Independence

There would be no Poland without **JÓZEF PIŁSUDSKI**, who considered Russia the main enemy of Polish freedom. Piłsudski formed a conspiratorial Polish Military Organization, and initiated the creation of the Union of Armed Struggle and the Riflemen's Association, the members of which were later part of the Polish Legions (formed in 1914) fighting with Austria-Hungary. After the collapse of tsarist Russia, in the summer of 1917, Piłsudski made the Polish Legions refuse the oath of "faithful brotherhood in arms with Germany and Austro-Hungary." With that, the legionaries ended their service with the Central Powers, and the Battle of Kaniv fought by the Polish II Corps commanded by General Józef Haller with Germany placed Poland on the side of the victorious countries of the Triple Entente. Piłsudski, for organizing the rebellion, was imprisoned at Magdeburg Fortress. He was released in November 1918, and came back to Poland, where he was appointed the Chief of State.

Diplomat in Action

A leader of National Democracy movement, **ROMAN DMOWSKI**, initially hoped that Russia's victory in World War I would unite our territories under the Russian rule, and as a result, Poland would regain independence. However, seeing the failures of the Russian forces, Dmowski left for the West and initiated diplomatic activities for Polish independence. He also initiated the formation in Lausanne of the Polish National Committee, which was considered by the Triple Entente the official representation of the Polish nation. Due to the Committee members' attempts, General Józef Haller's Polish Army was formed in France. After the war, together with Ignacy Paderewski, he represented Poland at the peace conference in Paris. The conference ended with signing the Treaty of Versailles on June 28, 1919, by virtue of which Poland regained Greater Poland and Gdańsk Pomerania, and plebiscites were to be organized in Silesia, Masuria and Warmia.

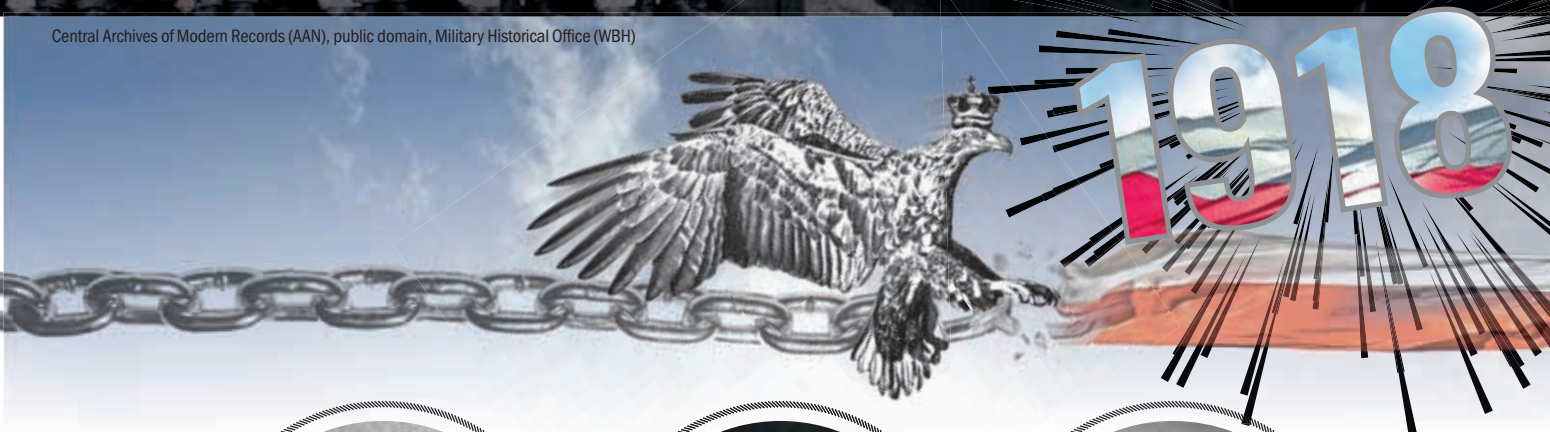
Pianist Who Won Poland

A world famous pianist and composer, **IGNACY JAN PADEREWSKI**, during the entire war was an ambassador for the Polish cause, mostly in the United States. While on tour in the USA, he would lobby among American politicians to support the idea of rebuilding Polish sovereignty. It is due to Paderewski's efforts that President Thomas W. Wilson, in his famous speech of January 8, 1918, mentioned the necessity to form an independent Polish state with access to the sea.

The arrival of the pianist in Poznań ignited the outbreak of the Greater Poland Uprising on December 27, 1918. In 1919, the composer became the prime minister and the minister for foreign affairs.



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IGNACY DASZYŃSKI

Socialist and Patriot

A politician fighting for independence and one of the main organizers of the socialist movement in Galicia, **IGNACY DASZYŃSKI**, closely cooperated with Józef Piłsudski, and supported the formation of the Polish Legions and Polish Military Organization. In October 1918, he co-authored the manifest to the Austrian Parliament, in which Polish MPs declared that they would consider themselves citizens of Poland from then onward. On the night of November 6/7, Ignacy Daszyński became a leader of the Provisional People's Government of the Republic of Poland in Lublin. Piłsudski wanted to make Daszyński the prime minister of the first government in independent Poland, but his candidature was blocked by the National-Democratic Party. In the following years, Daszyński was the deputy prime minister in the government of Wincenty Witos.



WINCENTY WITOS

Little Poland's Manager

WINCENTY WITOS fought both for the Polish peasants, and for the independence of Poland. Initially, he supported the concept of the Polish Legions, and since 1915, he co-operated with Dmowski's national democracy. On October 28, 1918, he was at the forefront of the Polish Liquidation Committee of Galicia and Cieszyn Silesia, which took over power in the western part of the Austrian Partition. In the following years, Witos was an activist for the "Piast" Polish People's Party and a three-time prime minister for the Polish government.



WOJCIECH KORFANTY

Silesian Hero

A leader of the Christian democratic party, **WOJCIECH KORFANTY**, played a crucial role in returning Silesia to Poland. Already during the war, as an MP in the Reichstag, Korfanty protested against the policy of germanization in Upper Silesia, and on October 25, 1918, in his famous speech, he requested the annexation to the future Polish state all territories of the Prussia Partition and Upper Silesia. In January 1920, he became the plebiscite commissioner responsible for the Polish campaign and agitation in Upper Silesia. After disadvantageous for Poland result of the plebiscite in 1920, he stood at the forefront of the Third Silesian Uprising as its dictator. The spurt of the Silesians and Korfanty's effective policy affected the change of a decision of the Western states in the matter of dividing the territory in question. Poland received the most industrialized territories of Upper Silesia, and Korfanty became a legend of the Silesian fight for freedom and right to be Polish.

Calendar of Independence

After 123 years of Prussian, Austrian and Russian occupation, Poland is reborn and regains its independence.

SEPTEMBER 28

The agreement between the Polish government (Polish National Committee in Paris) and the French government officially recognizes the Polish military units in France as an "autonomous allied army fighting under exclusive Polish command."

OCTOBER 4

GENERAL JÓZEF HALLER is appointed by the Polish National Committee to be in charge of "all Polish forces," thus becoming the commander-in-chief of the Polish Army in France and other military formations created outside the country.



"Out of nowhere, Poland will rise on the first" – jokingly sang Polish legionaries

The lyrics of this song never came true, but materialized in Polish didactics and even historiography. Here, independence starts on November 11, the day when Józef Piłsudski, who has just come to Warsaw from Berlin, takes his position as the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army.

The so-called Act of November 5, i.e. a declaration of German and Austro-Hungarian emperors of 1916, proclaimed the formation of Poland as an independent state with a hereditary monarchy and a constitution. The frontiers of the new state were to be defined in the future, and for the time being, it was to be located within the territory of the former Kingdom of Poland, divided into two general governorates

drawing: Piotr Korczyński



TWO SOUR FREE



1918

7

CES OF DOM



The formation of the Regency Council in Warsaw on October 27, 1917. The assistance of uhlans from the Polish Armed Force at Plac Zamkowy. Photo Collection of Andrzej Witkowski

– German and Austrian, with their general governors' seats in Warsaw and Lublin.

Monarchy in Poland

On December 6, the governors created an advisory and consultative Provisional Council of State with 25 members, which formed the first Polish government – the Executive Faculty, divided into departments – while the manager of this military department became brigadier Józef Piłsudski. During the next year, the Council outlined the project of constitution. From January 1917, the council was led by the Marshall of the Crown, Wacław Niemojowski. In relation to the so-called oath crisis, when Piłsudski with some of his followers was interned, excluded from the current political game in this critical period, there was also a crisis in the Council. After its members resigned, in August of the same year the Temporary Committee of the Provisional Council of State was created under the leadership of the Vice-Marshall of the Crown,

OCTOBER 7

In Warsaw, **THE REGENCY COUNCIL OF THE KINGDOM OF POLAND** declares the formation of an independent state in a manifesto "to the Polish Nation."



OCTOBER 23

A Polish government with Prime Minister Józef Świeżyński is established without seeking approval from the German occupation authorities.

OCTOBER 28

The Regency Council appoints the first Chief of the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces, **GENERAL TADEUSZ ROZWADOWSKI**, who organizes the foundation of the army in the three partitions.



Calendar of Independence

Calendar of Independence



Head of Polish government-in-exile in Paris (Polish National Committee) **ROMAN DMOWSKI**.

OCTOBER 31

The Polish Liquidation Committee of Galicia and Cieszyn Silesia takes over power in Kraków (Austrian Galicia).

NOVEMBER 1

The Polish-Ukrainian War for Lviv begins in Eastern Galicia.

NOVEMBER 3

Austria-Hungary signs an armistice and withdraws from the war.

NOVEMBER 7

In Lublin (Austrian Galicia), pro-independence left-wing parties proclaim the formation of the Provisional People's Government of the Republic of Poland, with Ignacy Daszyński as Prime Minister.

NOVEMBER 9

A general strike is announced in Berlin. Socialists form a government and force Wilhelm II to abdicate. The Emperor flees to the Netherlands.

Józef Mikułowski-

Pomorski, which presented to the occupational authorities the candidates to the three-member Regency Council, from then on replacing the monarch.

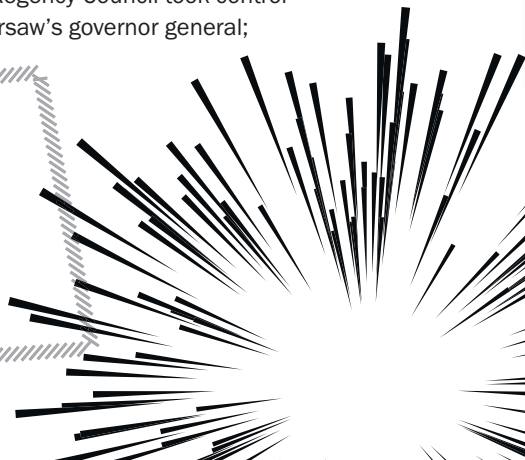
Archbishop of Warsaw Aleksander Kakowski, President of Warsaw Duke Zdzisław Lubomirski and Count Józef Ostrowski became the regents. The Regency Council, in force from October 27, had legislative and executive authorities and supremacy over the army of the Kingdom of Poland, which was the Polish Armed Force (Polska Siła Zbrojna), commanded by Warsaw Governor Hans von Beseler. During their incumbency, the regents formed five governments operating from December 17, 1917 to November 18, 1918, subsequently under the presidencies of Jan Kucharzewski, Antoni Ponikowski, Jan Kanty Steczkowski, Józef Świeżyński and Władysław Wróblewski. They completed the organization of Polish education, public administration and justice system within the borders of the Kingdom of Poland, and laid the foundations for the Polish diplomatic service, national army and legislature. In the protest against the conclusion of an agreement by Germany and Austro-Hungary with the Bolshevik Russia and the new Ukrainian state under their protectorate, on February 13, 1918, the Regency Council declared that it would exercise its right for supreme state authority based on the will of its people.

In their Manifesto to the Polish Nation of October 7, 1918, the regents with Prime Minister Jan Kucharzewski proclaimed the independence of Poland, announcing democratic Sejm elections in the future. They wrote:

"This great hour, long awaited by the entire Polish nation, is now chiming. Peace is approaching, and with it the fulfillment of the never expired strive of the Polish nation for complete independence. At this hour, the will of the Polish people is clear, firm and unanimous. We, who sense this will and ground this call on it, hereby recognize the general peace principles, as declared by the president of the United States and currently adopted by the entire world, as a foundation for the creation of new cooperation of nations. In relation to Poland, these principles lead to the creation of an independent state, covering all Polish territories, with access to the sea, with political and economic independence, as well as territorial integrity, which will be guaranteed by international treaties."

On October 12, the Regency Council took control over the army from Warsaw's governor general;

"This great hour, long awaited by the entire Polish nation, is now chiming. (...). At this hour, the will of the Polish people is clear, firm and unanimous."





on October 23, it independently appointed a new government, and on October 27, it appointed General Tadeusz Rozwadowski the Chief of the General Staff of the Polish Army. Finally, on November 11, the supreme command over the Polish army was assigned to Józef Piłsudski, who had just been released by the Germans from internment. Three days later, on November 14, the regents dissolved the Council and rendered their authority to Piłsudski, who was appointed Commander-in-Chief, with a request to pass the authority to the future "National Government."

Republic on Immigration

The Polish National Committee, formed in Lausanne on August 15, 1917, gathered the politicians of national and democratic, conservative and liberal ideals around the idea of rebuilding the Polish state based on the countries of the Western Entente battling with the Central Powers. Its members, under the leadership of Roman Dmowski, originated from the committee of the same name, operating in the years of 1914–1917 in Russia, on which they had based so far their hopes of regaining the broadest possible autonomy and uniting all three partitions.

The Committee, as the first Polish form of statehood since the time of the Duchy of Warsaw formed in 1807, which was over 100 years earlier, gained a diplomatic recognition on the international arena: on September 20, 1917, it was recognized by the government of France, on October 15 – by Great Britain, on October 30 – by Italy, on November 10 – by the United States of America. The Committee also took over from the French the Polish Army, formed by virtue of the decree of the president of the Republic of Poland on June 4 of the same year. The Polish-French agreement of September 28, 1918, recognized the army as an "autonomic allied army fighting under exclusive Polish command," while on October 4, General Józef Haller, who had just come from Russia, was appointed the first Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army, which included the military units fighting in France as well as those just being formed in the world, from Canada and Brazil to Siberia and Manchuria.

By virtue of the agreement with Józef Piłsudski, who on November 22, 1918 proclaimed himself the Provisional Chief of State, a leading activist of the Committee, Ignacy Jan Paderewski, became on January 16, 1919 the Prime Minister of the Polish government, while the Committee gained new members – Piłsudski's representatives. The Committee was recognized as the Polish representation abroad. It was dissolved on April 15, and its members constituted the Polish delegation

NOVEMBER 10

Józef Piłsudski, one of the commanders of the Polish Legions in the Austrian and German service between 1914–1917, released two days earlier by the Germans from prison in Magdeburg, arrives in Warsaw.

NOVEMBER 11

JÓZEF PIŁSUDSKI, ... one of the commanders of the Polish Legions in the Austrian and German service between 1914–1917, released two days earlier by the Germans from prison in Magdeburg, arrives in Warsaw. The Regency Council in Poland transfers its authority to Józef Piłsudski, who becomes the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces.

NOVEMBER 14

The Regents dissolve the Council, and transfer their power to Piłsudski as the Commander-in-Chief – with a mission to pass it on to the future "National Government."

NOVEMBER 22

Józef Piłsudski proclaims himself Provisional Chief of State.



Calendar of Independence

on the peace conference in Paris, which started on January 18 of the same year. The delegation's leader was, being its first authorized delegate, Roman Dmowski himself.

Jacek Żurek

The Beginnings of the Polish Army



**GRAB A GUN!
FIGHT! WIN!**

Before World War I, quite a phenomenon was the Polish rifle shooting movement, which developed mainly within the most liberal Austrian Partition. In the face of the upcoming armed conflict between the occupiers, young people – originating from various ideological movements – would eagerly join organizations training them for the service in the future Polish armed forces. In June 1914, Galician paramilitary organizations numbered in total about 30,000 members, who later fought in Polish formations during World War I.

SCOUTING

The Polish scout movement was partially of military nature. The decision on creating a Polish scout movement was taken by members of the largest youth organizations: "Sokół" Polish Gymnastic Society and "Zarzewie" Organization of Independent Youth. The followers of "Zarzewie" supported the idea of armed struggle against the occupiers. For that reason, taking advantage of their scouting education in military training, they formed Field Teams within the ranks of the scouts. Their members fought during World War I for Polish independence.

SOKÓŁ

In Galicia, voluntary paramilitary formations were also created within the "Sokół" Gymnastic Society. This physical education organization popularized a healthy lifestyle and spread national awareness. Captain Józef Haller, a member of "Sokół" leadership, was engaged in the creation of Sokół Field Teams. The teams would conduct military trainings for young people in drills, rifle shooting or fencing. On the eve of the war, the teams numbered about 7,000 members, who later fought, for example, in the ranks of the Polish Legions, mainly the Second Brigade commanded by General Haller.

Roch Wielanier 1901-1978

He was an older brother of Seweryn, and was in the ranks of Polish uhlans in Tarnów in 1920. The boys came from the village near Częstochowa, where the famous Catholic Madonna reigns on the miraculous icon. During World War I, they were both enchanted by the story of a local organist, who told them how he had liberated Brigadier Józef Piłsudski – a former leader of Polish socialists and a future dictator of Poland – from lice. He had advised Piłsudski to take his clothes off, place them under his horse's saddle, and rush the horse to make it sweat. Lice had all gone. Enchanted by the story, the boys ran away from their home to join the brigade of Józef Piłsudski battling with the Russians. Unfortunately, Roch got sick on the way and younger Seweryn carried him home on his own back. Still, Roch did not give up – after recovery, he joined the ranks of the Polish Legions, and in 1918, joined the Polish army and fought with the Russians in Ukraine.

*Brave soldier of the
Polish Legions*

**TWO
BROTHERS**



Young Guard of Poland's First Borders

Seweryn Wielanier 1903-1993

He was a boy rather frail in stature. In 1917, having assembled his own rifle, together with his father he became a guard of the border near Częstochowa, between the Kingdom of Poland and Germany. Up until the war, the nearby village of Herby was the place where partition borders intersected. The temporary occupation border ran along the Warta river, so during the war Częstochowa was located in the German zone, excluding Jasna Góra Monastery, managed by Austrian Catholics. Seweryn, 14-year-old at the time, during his border guard service in the Kingdom of Poland would identify himself with a photograph. On its reverse, there was a statement reading: "The holder of this photo is Seweryn Wielanier, born on January 2, 1902 in the city of Częstochowa, currently residing in the village of Konopiska in the Dźbów commune – 1917 – September 25, Head of the Dźbów Commune, J. Sączek." The date of birth stated on the document is in fact wrong – Seweryn was actually born in 1903 – the extra year was added to enable him to begin service, and the day in his birth certificate was changed to January 9, so the Russian authorities would not suspect the parents of moving his birth to the following year to avoid him being drafted to the army earlier.

Maria Polakowska



OF FREEDOM

Wanda Szczepańska 1898-1920

A reminiscence about the young volunteer nurse: "The young student's higher education experience lasts only several months. The resolution of the academic youth sparks in the girl's heart the urge to stand shoulder to shoulder with her fellows in the fight for freedom. Wanda Szczepańska becomes a nurse at the Military Hospital of the 2nd Lithuanian-Belarusian Division." She was born on November 29, 1898, in Inowłódz on the Pilica River. She attended the government middle school in Łódź, and from the sixth grade she continued her education in a private middle school in Moscow, where she moved with her parents in 1914. Simultaneously, she attended courses on Polish literature and history. In September 1916, she transferred to the eight-class School for Girls of the Polish Committee, from which she graduated with honors on May 12, 1918. In the same year, she returned to Poland. On November 12, she was admitted to the Medical Department of the Warsaw University. It was probably still October when she volunteered to join the reborn Polish Army. She served as a nurse at several field hospitals, including the Military Hospital of the 2nd Lithuanian-Belarusian Division in Baranowicze. After a two-month leave, in order to continue her studies, she returned to the unit and served at a hospital in Lithuanian Minsk. She died of pneumonia at the very same hospital on January 11, 1920. Her sickness was likely to have been a consequence of the Spanish flu epidemic. She was buried at a cemetery in Lithuanian Minsk.

... Student of the Medical Department of the Warsaw University

Identity card photo from university documentation (1918), Archive of the Warsaw University



STRZELEC

Two of the most famous overt paramilitary organizations in Galicia were the Riflemen's Association in Lviv and the Riflemen Society in Kraków. Their formation was initiated by the Union of Active Struggle, a clandestine military organization formed by Józef Piłsudski. The riflemen underwent intensive training; there were even officer schools, such as the one in Stróża village near Limanowa. They wore characteristic grey uniforms with a round 'maciejówka' cap. After the outbreak of World War I the riflemen, who numbered from 6,400 to 8,000, mostly reinforced the ranks of the Polish Legions and the First Cadre Company

BARTOSZOWE TEAMS

Rural youth in East Galicia concentrated around the overtly functioning Bartoszowe Teams created under the auspices of the National Democracy movement and "Zet" Polish Youth Association. Their actions aimed at regaining independence through patriotic and civil education and military training. In 1912, in the face of anticipated war, Bartoszowe Teams were transformed into a military organization and underwent intensified military training. After the outbreak of World War I, they became part of the Eastern Legion, and after it was disbanded, they joined the ranks of the First and Second Brigade of the Legions.



"The young student's higher education experience lasts only several months. The resolution of the academic youth sparks in the girl's heart the urge to stand shoulder to shoulder with her fellows in the fight for freedom. WANDA SZCZEPAŃSKA becomes a nurse at the Military Hospital of the 2nd Lithuanian-Belarusian Division."



The Beginnings of the Polish Army



POLISH MILITARY ORGANIZATION

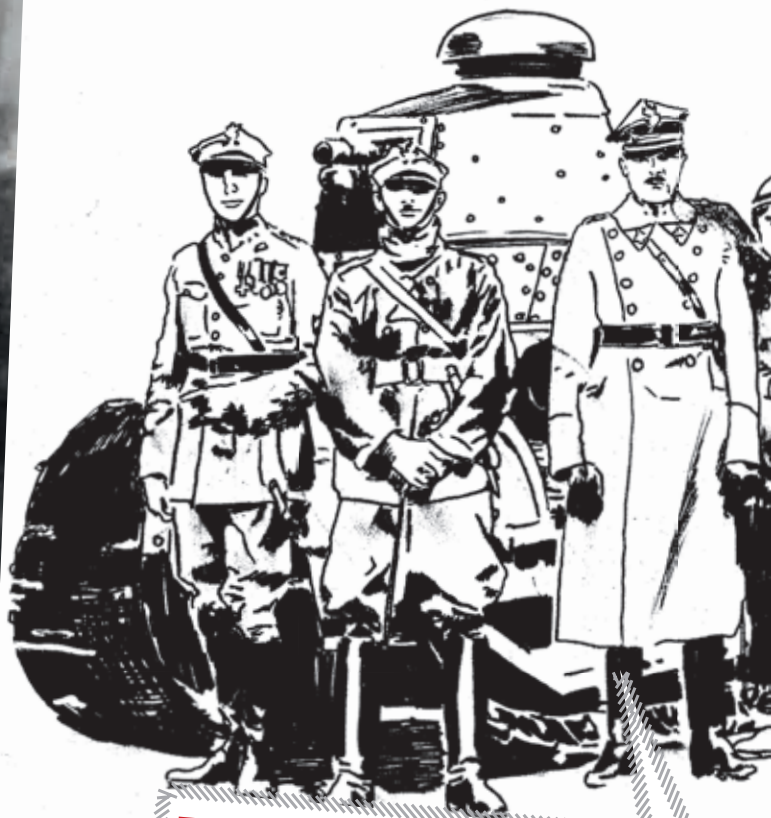
In the Kingdom of Poland, when World War I broke out, Józef Piłsudski – out of the members of the Union of Active Struggle and Polish Rifle Teams – formed a conspiratorial armed organization called the Polish Military Organization. Its goal was to fight for independence and train the officer staff for the future Polish army. The Polish Military Organization would conduct subversive and intelligence operations against Russia, and later also against Germany. In October and November 1918, its members participated in taking over the power on the Polish territories via such activities as disarming German forces. At the end of the year, the Polish Military Organization was disbanded, and its members joined the Polish army which was being formed at the time.

ZARZEWIE

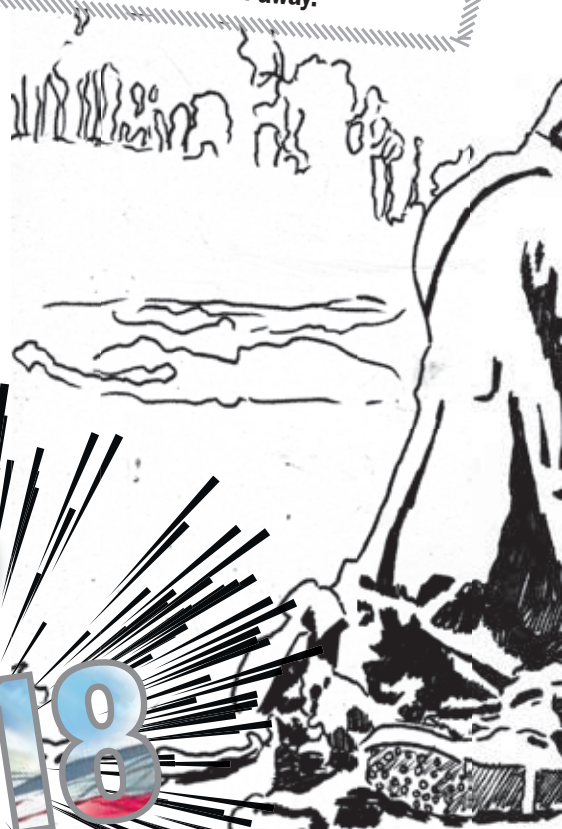
POLISH RIFLE TEAMS

Getting ready for the fight with tsarism, the national and independence environment – concentrated around “Zarzewie” – was forming in Lviv, and later in other Galician cities, the Polish Rifle Squads. They would organize military trainings with field maneuvers and rifle shooting practice. The structure, goals and methods of the Polish Rifle Squads were identical with those in the Riflemen’s Association. Before the First World War, the formation numbered over 6,000 members, who in August 1914 co-created, for example, the First Cadre Company.

Anna Dąbrowska



"In the Polish Army, reborn in 1918, a soldier sent to the front was assigned a personal supervisor – an experienced frontline soldier. He would teach a young recruit to recognize how far away a shell would fall, how to flee shelling, how to shoot, etc. He would teach him all the techniques, which an officer could not teach him, as he was too far away."



1918

drawing: Piotr Korczyński

"There is an opinion of one of the Red Army commanders about the Polish army: »What is a Polish soldier?

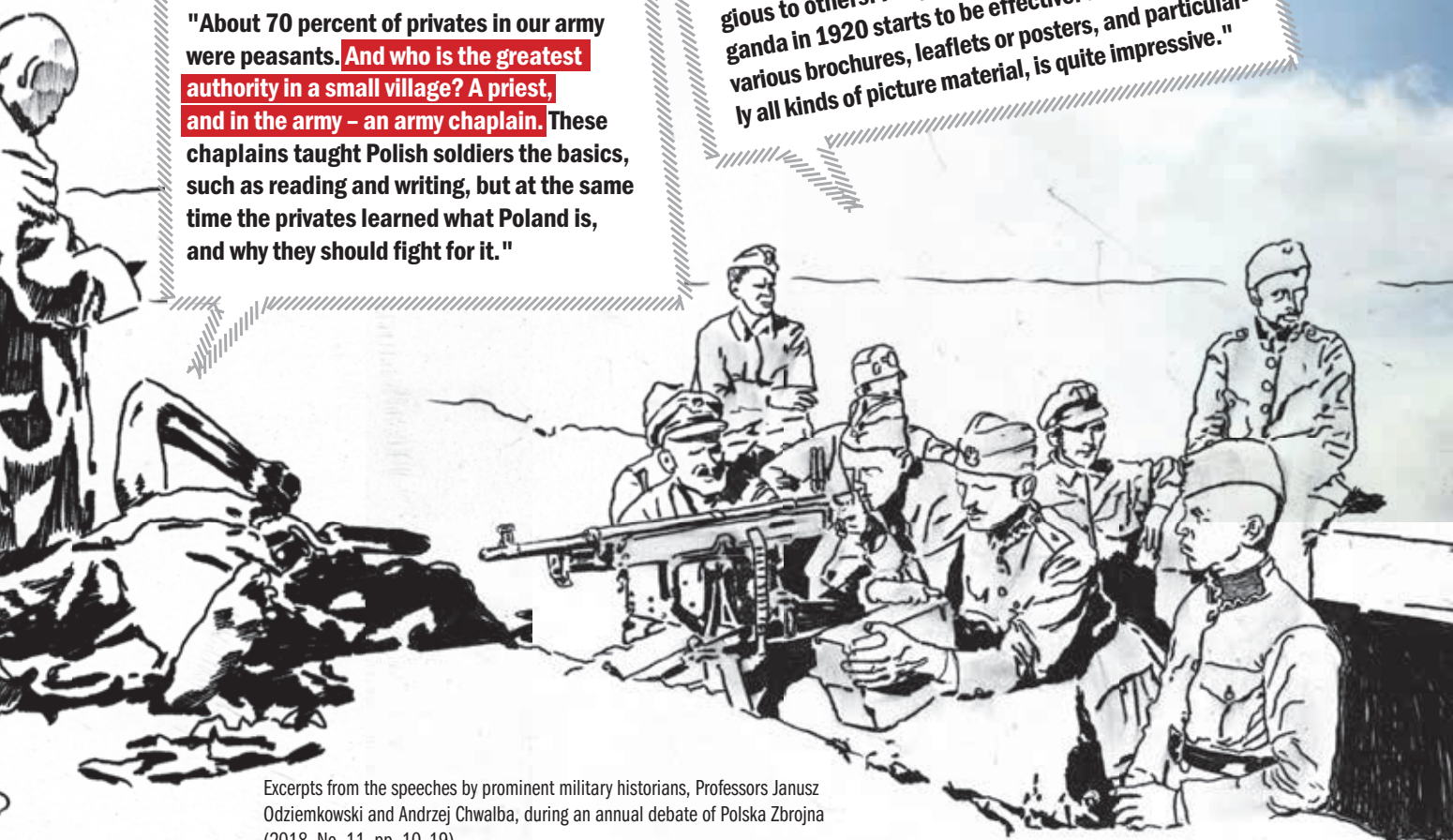
A Polish soldier fights fiercely, and rarely surrenders into captivity.

He needs to be mightily hit, so he finally absorbs the revolution propaganda.« This was said by a commander of the Red Army, a diehard communist, who was forced to admit that a Polish soldier was completely different from other enemy soldiers."



"Speaking of more common change of moods towards the Polish army, we have to keep in mind the appearance of a large group of volunteers. The youth of real ideals, whose enthusiasm is contagious to others. People see that. Also, Polish propaganda in 1920 starts to be effective. The number of various brochures, leaflets or posters, and particularly all kinds of picture material, is quite impressive."

"About 70 percent of privates in our army were peasants. And who is the greatest authority in a small village? A priest, and in the army – an army chaplain. These chaplains taught Polish soldiers the basics, such as reading and writing, but at the same time the privates learned what Poland is, and why they should fight for it."



Heroes of Two Worlds

One could say that in 1918 Poland had its independence served on a plate. After over 100 years of captivity, three occupational power states collapsed all at once: first Russia, then Germany and Austria. The real fight, however, was just starting: the fight for borders and the well-being of the new state. Foreigners – volunteers and our brothers in arms – also took part in the fight.

PRESIDENT SYMON PETLIURA 1879-1926

From his early youth, he fought for independent Ukraine. His dream started to come true after the collapse of tsarism. In the political and military turmoil at the end of World War I, the Ukrainian People's Republic was formed. Soon, Petliura became its leader, and decided to enter an alliance with Poland. The two young states had common enemies: both red and white Russians. In April 1920, Ukrainians and Poles signed in Warsaw an agreement on borders, initiated a military convention, and the soldiers of both armies participated in a victorious offensive on Kiev. They fought shoulder to shoulder during the Bolshevik counterattack, writing down a glorious page in history during the defense of Zamość under the command of General Marko Bezruchko, a merited commander of the 6th Sich Rifle Division. Ukrainians, however, were not allowed to join the Polish-Bolshevik peace talks. Soon after, the Ukrainian Republic ceased to exist. After its collapse, Petliura lived in Warsaw, then in Paris. He was killed by an assassin.

Łukasz Zalesiński

CAPTAIN MERIAN C. COOPER 1893-1973

The fighter pilots of the Great War were the last knights who observed the code of honor in fight. Undoubtedly, Merian Caldwell Cooper, an American, was such a knight. After the war ended, he arrived in the Fatherland of his American hero, General Kazimierz Pułaski, with whom his great-great grandfather, Colonel John Cooper, fought near Savannah. He gathered up a few folks, and in the autumn of 1919 all of them voluntarily joined the Polish 7th Air Escadrille (vel the Fighter Squadron, or the Kościuszko Squadron). The Americans and their fighters were a nuisance to Budyonny's Cavalry Army. On July 13, 1920, Cooper's fighter was shot down, and he himself was taken into captivity, which he escaped and got through to Poland. As a brigadier general of the US Air Force, he never forgot about his Polish episode.

Whenever he could, he would visit in England the aviators of the 303 Squadron, who wore the colors of the 7th Air Escadrille.

Piotr Korczyński



HOW THE UKRAINIANS FIGHT THE RED



Piłsudski and Petliura upon the arrival at the Winnica train station in Podole (May 16, 1920).
The Central Archives of Modern Records (AAN)

The year 1918 unleashed in Central and Eastern Europe suppressed national conflicts. One of them was the Polish-Ukrainian conflict for Eastern Little Poland (Małopolska, today Western Ukraine). However, in the face of Russian threat, the governments of both then forming countries concluded an agreement, and the Ukrainian army stood shoulder to shoulder with the Poles to fight.

In August of 1920, Semyon Budyonny and his soldiers of the 1st Cavalry Army (Konarmia) could only reminisce about their lightning combat successes.

Their "walk" across the Polish eastern borderland changed into a long streak of fierce fights, and the Poles, overcoming their initial surprise with the tactics of the red Konarmia, quickly learned how to counteract it. Their cavalry and aviation started to bite on the 1st Cavalry Army from all sides, and hinder its march to the West. Nevertheless, it was still a dangerous and

UKRAINIANS STOPPED DEVIL

menacing power, which on August 11 received an order to seize Polish Lviv.

After an entire day of fights which revealed that Lviv would not be an easy target, Budyonny received an unexpected order. The Red Army's Chief Commander, Sergey Kamenev, commanded the Konarmia to immediately stop the siege of Lviv, and relieve the forces of Mikhail Tukhachevsky fighting near Warsaw. Budyonny was unaware of the critical situation of the commander of the Western Front who was to capture the capital of Poland.

For Our and Your Freedom

Budyonny ignored this order, as well as the following one, which again told him to immediately march towards Warsaw. For the following several days, he unsuccessfully tried to seize Lviv. Finally, on August 20, he departed from the city and made his way in the requested direction. It was too late though, as Tukhachevsky's forces were already running away from Warsaw in growing panic, and the Polish command sent part of their forces to encounter Konarmia. Still, the Polish 3rd Army needed time to get the "red devils," as these demoralized by robberies Budyonny's soldiers were called, and their march could still bring more destruction and death. After aborting the siege of Lviv and going west, their greatest gain was Zamość, all the more so that this old fortress and architectonic pearl funded by Hetman Jan Zamoyski seemed to them almost defenseless and an easy catch.

In the city, apart from rapidly mobilized voluntary units, made up of residents of Zamość regardless of their religion – Jews and Christians alike – as well as several units of regular Polish Army, a part of the 6th Sich Rifle Division commanded by Colonel Marko Bezruchko was also stationed. It was the most elite division of the Ukrainian Army of Chief Otaman Symon Petliura. After signing an alliance between Petliura and Józef Piłsudski on April 21, 1920, the forces of the Ukrainian People's Republic changed from an enemy to a friend, and gained the opportunity to grow and develop on the territory of the Republic of Poland. First, the Ukrainian People's Army was joined by Ukrainian volunteers released from Polish POW and intern camps, then by other soldiers in Piłsudski's Kiev Offensive in May 1920. During the August fights, crucial for the Polish-Bolshevik conflict, the Ukrainian Army's total

GENERAL STANISŁAW BUŁAK-BAŁACHOWICZ 1883-1940

He was a troublemaker, a free spirit, a madly brave soldier and a fierce anti-communist. During the Polish-Bolshevik War, he and his people were operating in Polesie region. They would sneak up to the enemy's rear, spreading panic in their ranks. With his own forces only, he seized Pińsk. Earlier on, Bułak-Bałachowicz served in the Imperial Russian Army, for a brief period of time he supported the Bolsheviks, only to fight against them in Estonia later.



After signing the Estonian-Bolshevik agreement, leading some 800 soldiers in all kinds of uniforms: Russian, Belarusian, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish, he stormed the Russian lines. His units received the status of a Voluntary Allied Army, which recruited volunteers from among the prisoners and deserters of the Red Army. Bułak-Bałachowicz continued his fight against the Bolsheviks even after the Polish-Soviet armistice. He then proclaimed the formation of ephemeral Belarusian People's Republic.

Lukasz Zalesiński

CAPTAIN CHARLES DE GAULLE 1890-1970

Charles de Gaulle, the future general, leader of Free France and president of France, first came to Poland in May 1916 as a POW taken captive by the Germans near Verdun. He was then taken to the camp for disobedient prisoners in Bavaria after his unsuccessful attempt to escape. Soon after being released from captivity, de Gaulle joined the Chasseurs Polonais, i.e. the Polish 5th Rifle Regiment in Sillé-le-Guillaume in France. He came to Poland in May 1919, with General Józef Haller's Blue Army. Being a great war theoretician, he gave lectures to Polish officers. At the beginning of 1920, he returned to Paris where he was decorated with the Legion of Honor. The same year, he came back to Poland with General Maxim Weygand. He actively participated in the Polish-Bolshevik War as an intelligence officer. It was then that he experienced the bravery of Polish soldiers and the skill of Polish commanders.

Piotr Korczyński



Heroes of Two Worlds



Chief Otaman of the Ukrainian People's Republic Army and the President of Directorate Symon Petliura (standing second on the left) during the review of the Ukrainian units in Kiev (May 10, 1920). The Central Archives of Modern Records (AAN)



The meeting of Petliura with the commander of the Polish Third Army, General Edward Rydz-Śmigły, at the Kiev train station (May 10, 1920).

The Central Archives of Modern Records (AAN)

force was over 20,000 soldiers. It seemed that Piłsudski's plan to create independent Ukraine, which, along with Belarus and Lithuania would form a federation ultimately preventing Russia from rebuilding its empire (and as a result – move the Russian threat farther away from the Polish borders), seemed at the time quite probable to achieve.

Most of the Ukrainian Army's forces under the command of General Mykhailo Omelianovych-Pavlenko, received, together with the Polish 6th Army, the task to defend the southern part of the front, down to the border with Romania. On the other hand, the 6th Rifle Division fought within the Polish 3rd Army, and soon won the opinion of the best unit of all the

forces of the Ukrainian People's Republic. Its commander, Colonel Marko Bezruchko, who much contributed to this opinion, had already proved his great staff and organizational skills during the First World War, as an officer of the Tsar's army. In August 1920, he proved that he was not only a great staff officer, but also a daring commander.

Heróyam Sláva!

Again, just as it was in the case of Lviv, Budyonny had to recognize the fact his instincts had failed him, and his luck had left him. Those in the city who had questioned the value of the ally also had to admit they had been very wrong. Bezruchko and his soldiers wrote in Zamość another – after the Cossack Khotyn's defenders of Hetman Petro Konashevych-Sahaidachny in 1621 against the Turks – page of the Polish-Ukrainian brotherhood in arms. Budyonny's cavalymen would many times invade the Zamość fortress, and every time they had to retreat, decimated by the canons and guns of the Ukrainian battery.

Budyonny, perhaps in an attempt to keep the promises given to his soldiers that he would leave Zamość at their mercy, would not stop the siege of the city, just like he had done with Lviv, despite receiving multiple reports on the approaching Polish relief troops. On top of that, his army was



Budyonny's cavalymen would many times invade the Zamość fortress, and every time they were forced to retreat, decimated by the canons and guns of the Ukrainian battery.



Symon Petliura and the officers of the Ukrainian People's Republic Army leaving the Saint Sophia Cathedral. Kiev, May 23, 1920. Marko Bezruchko in the middle, in the foreground. Military Historical Office

Political animosities also arose, and among the peace negotiators there were some opponents to federal plans of Piłsudski – particularly those related to the Polish political movement of National Democracy (endecja). Consequently, the Polish-Russian truce, signed on October 12, 1920, obliged both parties not to support foreign military activities against the other party. The soldiers of the Ukrainian Army – including the 6th Sich Rifle Division of Marko Bezruchko, then already a general – faced the danger of being sent to prison again, and in case they returned to Ukraine – suffering repressions from the Bolsheviks. However, taking advantage of the fact that peace negotiations in Riga were still ongoing, and Poland and Bolshevik Russia were formally still at war, the Ukrainian Army command decided to continue their fight with the Red Army.

Unfortunately, after crossing the border, the Ukrainian Army, after fierce fights in mid-November 1920, was defeated by the overwhelming Red Army.

Some Ukrainian soldiers were able to cross the Zbrucz River again and come back to Poland. According to the Polish authorities, about 20,000 Ukrainians (soldiers and civilians) were in internment camps at the time. Among them was also General Marko Bezruchko. He reportedly said – upon hearing that Piłsudski, embittered with the unachieved victory, in May 1921 once again apologized to the Ukrainian allies – that he did not hold a grudge against the Marshal, since he had been fair and honorable towards the Ukrainians to the very end.

Piotr Korczyński

starting to disperse. During the attempt to capture Zamość, Budyonny's army counted barely two divisions, which was about 6,000 soldiers. When he finally realized that he would not break the fortress' defenders supported by the Ukrainians, he ordered retreat. It is worth mentioning that at that time the soldiers of the 6th Rifle Division were not the only defenders of Zamość, as the rear of Konarmia was being attacked by the Cossack Brigade of Vadim Yakovlev, made up of many former Budyonny's soldiers who went over to the Polish side.

For Eternal Memory

Unfortunately, the end of the war, although victorious, did not fulfill one of Józef Piłsudski's dreams – to form an independent Ukrainian state. Polish society was too weary of the war to further prolong it in the east.



THE POLISH ARMY YEARNING FOR FREEDOM IS IN OUR BLOOD

The transformation of Poland from mostly an agricultural country into an industrialized country was going extremely fast!



Pilot Józef Orłowski (1902-1976) getting off a plane, 1933. Major Orłowski was a test pilot and a parachute instructor. During the war, he fought in Poland and in the Polish Air Force in Great Britain. He died in London.
National Digital Archives (NAC)

GREAT



A bus manufactured by the British Leyland company on the new bus route from Kraków to Katowice, connecting Little Poland region with Upper Silesia.

National Digital Archives (NAC)

Over 100 years of captivity, five national uprisings, two social revolutions, four great wars on own territory, nine changes of state borders between Poland and its neighbouring occupants – this is a balance of the years of 1795–1918. Free Poland only survived the following 20 years: in 1939, with the outbreak of World War II, Polish people lost their independence again. However, how this country thrived in the interwar period is impressive! The process of unification of the former territories of three partitions, which meant three different state, legal, economic, social, and even cultural and religious systems, was very fast. The assimilation of multi-million national minorities, including Jews, Ukrainians and Belarusians, was gradual, against natural, great obstacles. The transformation of Poland from mostly an agricultural country into an industrialized country was going extremely fast. A port and a city, built from scratch in Kashubian Gdynia, the Central Industrial Region in the middle of the country, coal mines and iron and steel works in Upper Silesia, chemical companies in the Carpathian Foothills, oil refineries in Eastern Little Poland – all this was the new, resilient, flourishing Poland.

National Digital Archives (NAC)

An advanced Luxtorpeda motor wagon produced by Austro-Daimler-Puch company, at a railway station in Zakopane, the most famous mountain health resort in Poland. The picture was taken in 1936, the year when Luxtorpeda broke the speed record on the 142-kilometer-long route from Kraków to Zakopane, covering it in 2 hours and 18 minutes!

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National Digital Archives (NAC)

POLISH ENERGY

How this country thrived in the interwar period is impressive!

A mail collection service on Harley-Davidson motorcycles during the Polish General Exhibition (Powszechna Krajowa Wystawa) in Poznań, 1929

Museum of Post and Telecommunications in Wrocław

A famous Polish human-fly, Feliks Nazarewicz, performs his acrobatic tricks over the city of Kraków, 1928

National Digital Archives (NAC)

IN DEFENSE OF THE BORDERS OF THE SECOND POLISH REPUBLIC 1918-1939



From the collection of Miłosz Filipowiak



From the collection of Andrzej Olićwiruk



The day of November 11, 1918, the day of armistice for both parties fighting on the western front, was a symbolic date of regaining independence by Poland after over a 100 years of captivity. However, this independence had to be fought for in the war with our neighbours, former occupants of Poland, and then kept by means of defining the state borders anew and by defending them. The fights for borders and the efforts to permanently define them lasted the following three years. One of the first new formations of military nature formed in Poland in November 1918 was the Border Guard. A formal inclusion in the obligations of the Border Guard of the duty to defend the north-western and southern state border, mainly against the Germans, was confirmed with the presidential act in 1928. The eastern border was defended against the Russians by the Border Protection Corps.



From the collection of Miłosz Filipowiak

WE ARE THE PILLAR OF INDEPENDENT POLAND



FOT. KRZYSZTOF DUBIEL

Sebastian Chwałek
President of the Management Board
of PGZ S.A. Polish Armaments Group

**Poland was sacred to us!
Keep that in mind!**

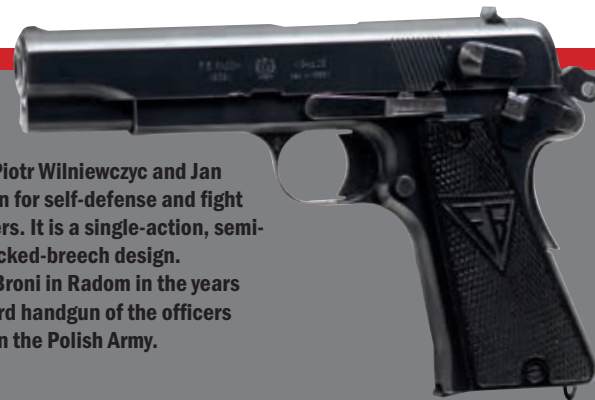
November 11 is the most important day in the history of Poland. On that day, in 1918, Poland regained its independence. It was not an easy comeback. Polish people knew back then as well as they know now, that freedom and independence cannot be obtained or maintained without enormous sacrifice. For every nation, however, independence is a value worth every price.

Today, over a century later, we truly have a reason to celebrate. However high the cost, however hard the decades that followed, we can now enjoy our freedom and life in an independent Homeland. A successful fight for that independence was also possible due to the emerging arms industry, which grew together with the Second Republic of Poland. In the structure of the Polish Armaments Group (Polska Grupa Zbrojeniowa – PGZ), we have companies such as Mesko, Fabryka Broni, Huta Stalowa Wola or PGZ Stocznia Wojenna (PGZ Naval Shipyard), which date back to the Second Republic of Poland. Their contribution in the development of

Poland's defense potential was as crucial between 1918–1939 as it is today. After over 100 years of activity, the Polish arms industry has its fair share in building advanced and modern Polish Armed Forces.

This year, we are celebrating the anniversary of regaining independence at a particularly special time. While we are enjoying our freedom, there is a war ongoing behind the eastern border, in which our Ukrainian friends are successfully fighting Russia to regain their homeland. They are not alone in this fight. Knowing well the price of freedom, we are providing significant support to them. The role of the Polish Armaments Group in this undertaking has been crucial. The situation behind our eastern border should encourage us to loudly and clearly express our contentment with the fact that we live in a free country, keeping in mind at all times, however, that freedom is never to be taken for granted. While celebrating the National Independence Day, let us not forget about our daily task to work towards maintaining and strengthening Poland's independence. It is our duty – both to our ancestors who fought for this freedom, and to the future generations that deserve to enjoy their independence as well.

PISTOL VIS WZ. 35 designed by Piotr Wilniewicz and Jan Skrzypiński is a personal handgun for self-defense and fight on short-distances up to 50 meters. It is a single-action, semi-automatic, hammer-fired and locked-breech design. It was manufactured in Fabryka Broni in Radom in the years of 1936-1939, and was a standard handgun of the officers and non-commissioned officers in the Polish Army.



PISTOL VIS 100 of 9x19-mm caliber is a personal semi-automatic handgun, designed for military and enforcement personnel. It is used in fight and self-defense on short distances up to 50 meters. It is an ergonomically shaped, reliable and fast-pointing pistol featuring high-contrast day-and-night sights and high-capacity magazine and is also fully ambidextrous. It is the product of Fabryka Broni "Łucznik" - Radom being a part of the Polish Armaments Group (PGZ) HSW S.A.

