



TRENCHES OF HOPE

THE INFLUENCE AND EFFECT
OF THE POLISH LEGIONS ON
POST FIRST WORLD WAR





FRONT COVER: SOLDIERS FROM BIELORUSSIAN BRIGADE
INSIDE COVER: POLISH LEGIONNAIRES ON THE VOLHYN REGION

**THE JOZEF
PILSUDSKI
INSTITUTE**

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*THE INFLUENCE AND EFFECT OF
THE POLISH LEGIONS ON POST
FIRST WORLD WAR EUROPE*

EXHIBITION TRENCHES OF HOPE
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INTRODUCTION

Though not the largest of London's thousands of museums and archives, in fact definitely among the smallest, the Jozef Pilsudski Institute in London established in the aftermath of the Second World War in 1947, has and continues to play an important role not only amongst the Polish exiled and emigre community but the London community at large.

The Second World War ended tragically for Poland. Half of her territory had been annexed by the USSR with the agreement of the western democracies and a foreign dominated, unelected communist government under Soviet control was imposed with the Red Army occupying and terrorising the country.

For the Polish Government in Exile, resident since 1940 in London and for the nearly quarter million strong Polish Armed Forces which had fought so bravely from the 1st September 1939 right up to VE Day in 1945, it was a bitter pill to swallow. For the vast majority there was no possibility of returning to a Poland which to all intents and purposes was under a new foreign occupation. The struggle for independence and sovereignty was to continue for another 45 years. The Government-in-Exile continued to function in London, tens of thousands of demobbed Polish soldiers settled in the UK many in its capital city. It was here in the immediate post war years that the hub of a free Polish political, cultural and academic life was established. The rise of Polish cultural and historical institutions, schools, libraries, theatres, publishing houses, newspapers, parishes, professional and welfare organisations made London a unique centre for the Polish emigre community.

Among these organisations was the *Jozef Pilsudski Institute in London* which together with its elder sibling, the *Jozef Pilsudski Institute of America* set up in 1943, were a continuation of the pre war Jozef Pilsudski Institute for Research of Contemporary Polish History originally set up in 1923 and becoming the Jozef Pilsudski Institute for Research of Contemporary Polish History in 1936 .

Its patron Marshal Jozef Pilsudski (1867-1935) had been a tireless fighter for Polish independence in the period of the partitions prior to 1918, and then until 1922 as head of state of the newly (November 1918) re-established country. During the Polish-Bolshevik War of 1919-1920 he had also been Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army, which at the Battle of Warsaw in August 1920 successfully halted Moscow's plans of bringing the dubious benefits of communist revolution and occupation to the European continent. In May 1926 he returned to power through a coup d'état and remained the effective power in the land bringing a benign dictatorship, whilst maintaining all the structures of a parliamentary democracy whilst strengthening the

executive powers of the President. He himself declined to stand for the post and maintained his post as Inspector General of the Armed Forces and Minister of Military Affairs. He briefly held the office of Prime Minister twice. He was universally seen as the architect of Poland's independence, a statesman who brought badly needed political and economic stability to interwar Poland. For the vast majority of the population he was a national hero of the old school.

The London Institute aimed at continuing the work of its predecessor in promoting research into Poland's contemporary history, especially the struggle for independence up to 1918, the history of the Polish II Republic (1918-1939) and more specifically the person and role of Marshal Jozef Pilsudski in these various processes.



JOZEF PILSUDSKI

Established by some of the leading political and military figures of independent Poland, the Institute was first located on Upper Richmond Road and from 1972 at the Polish Cultural and Social Centre in Hammersmith initially on the ground floor, since 2014 on the second floor. It houses a unique collection of some 500 exhibits including old maps, medals, uniforms, paintings, artefacts devoted to Jozef Pilsudski and the period of his Legions during the 1 World War and the period of interwar independence as well as the Second World War. The latter include the famed Enigma encoding machine used by the Germans, whose cypher was originally cracked by Polish cryp-

tologists in the 1930s. There is also an archival collection of over 200 groupings, comprising documents, maps and photographs, all being valuable research material for students of Poland's 20th century history and its international relations. Both the museum and archive collections are open to the public and are visited by individuals, school parties and specialist groups. A measure of its role and importance can be seen by the many distinguished visitors it has received, including Lech Wałęsa the first freely elected President of Poland since before the Second World War.

The archives are widely used by researchers, both academics, students and amateur enthusiasts. The collections at present are in the process of being digitalised thus making access to them easier and more widespread. In latter years it has seen a steady rise in English speaking visitors, keen to take advantage of the more surprising collections to be found in London. Since its earliest days the Institute has also been a publishing house. Both books and academic journals as well as an annual bulletin form part of the rich heritage of this particular organisation, publications which are known and respected throughout the world of historical academia.

Until 1990 and the fall of the Soviet controlled communist government in Warsaw, the *Jozef Pilsudski Institute* along with the London based *Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum* devoted primarily to the role Poland played during World War 2 and the *Polish Underground Movement (1939-1945) Study Trust* devoted to the Resistance, played an instrumental role as the guardians of uncensored and unfettered Polish contemporary history which was being distorted, censored and falsified in the Polish Peoples Republic. Access to the Institute's archival holdings was available to all who were interested, regardless of their political persuasion. During those years it was Polish London which held the flame of freedom and democracy aloft. *The Jozef Pilsudski Institute* played a distinguished part in this struggle.

The Institute is an unique organisation and forms an integral part of not only the Polish community in London but also of the city and its inhabitants as well. A little gem in central London in the process of being discovered by its citizens of whatever background.

**ANDRZEJ
SUCHCITZ**

EXHIBITION

I. PARTITIONS

In 1618, the once powerful Kingdom of Poland spanned over 990,000 sq. km with territories reaching from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea but in the first half of the 18th Century its strength diminished and its political system was in disarray. Ongoing wars and a deepening economic crisis, inhibited Poland's development and left her crippled compared with other European countries. As a result, Poland was not a major player on the international arena and her fate was dependent on the plans and aims of her neighbours.

The turning point in her existence came with the third partitioning carried out by Austria, Russia and Prussia when in 1795, Poland disappeared from the European map for the next one hundred and twenty three years.



Despite the Poles several efforts in trying to regain independence both diplomatically and through armed uprising, the consequences were such that the Poles situation did not change and in fact deteriorated to such an extent that the occupying nations wished to suppress and wipe out any last vestiges of Polish patriotism.

II. WAITING IN HOPE

Following the failure of the January Uprising (1864), the Poles realised that only an armed conflict in Europe would give them the opportunity to gain independence. After the revolution of 1905, the Russo-Japanese war and the Balkan War, a new conflict seemed inevitable. Polish independence activists began analysing the various strategies open to them in the event of war. Two main radically different ideas were formed due to the circumstances of each partition. Roman Dmowski, an activist in the Russian partition, supported political realism. His preference and despite her oppressive regime was to cooperate with Russia mainly, since her existing allies France and England already supported the Poles' cause.



HENRYK GORECKI,
JANUARY UPRISING
FIGHTER

The multicultural Austro-Hungarian Empire allowed substantial autonomy for the Polish territory known as Galicia.



ZAKOPANE 1913.
RIFLEMEN IN TRAINING

Since complete independence was out of the question, Joseph Pilsudski officially favoured the concept known as trialism – which added a third element to the Austro-Hungarian Federation in the form of Poland.

Unofficially, Pilsudski worked to train cadres for the battle for independence. Polish paramilitary organisations began to operate, training future soldiers. Among them were groups called- "Związki and Towarzystwa Strzeleckie" and "Drużyny Bartoszowe". Under his command an estimated thirteen to nineteen thousand young men were trained prior to the outbreak of the First World War.

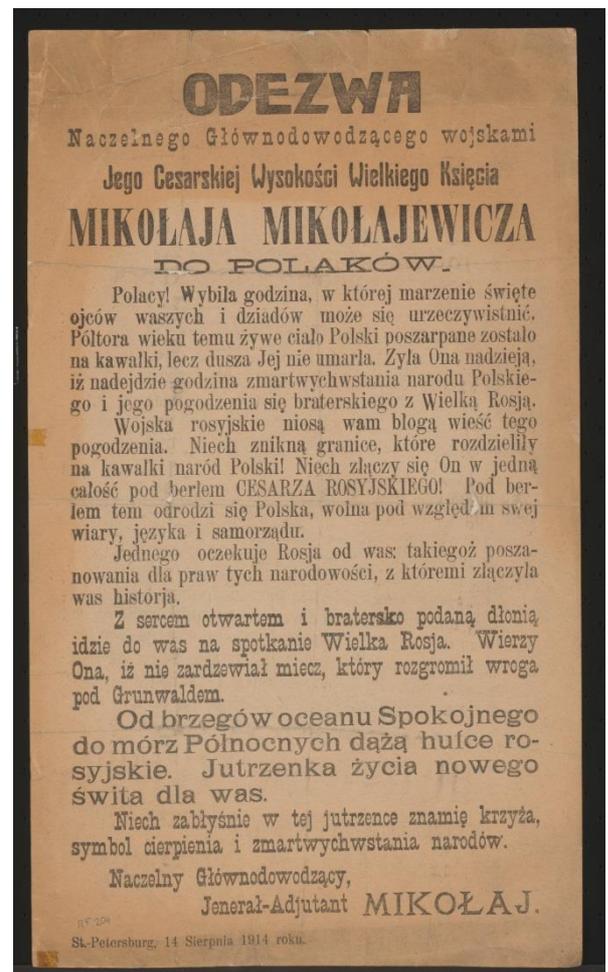
III. WAR

The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, by the Serb Gavrilo Princip on the 28th June 1914 was the tipping point in the delicate and tense situation in Europe and sparked the outbreak of the First World War. Russia declared war on Austro-Hungary and Germany declared war on Russia.

The territories of the former Republic of Poland became battle grounds for the conflicts between its occupiers - Prussia and Austro-Hungary of The Triple Alliance against Russia of The Triple Entente.

The declaration of war by Austro-Hungary on Serbia was exactly the type of event that generations of Poles had been waiting for. The countries occupying Poland were now at war for the first time in over a century.

The Poles were forced to fight in the respective ruling countries' armies. Consequently, relatives and neighbours backed those countries which they're family members had joined. Austro-Hungary was supported in the Galicia area and Russia in the Krolestwo Polskie area.



PROCLAMATION BY GRAND DUKE NICHOLAS



PONIKIEWSKI
BROTHERS

On the beginning of the war, Russia celebrated many victories at the battlefields resulting in the military and Tsar's court viewing the creation of the Polish Legions as relatively insignificant to the main scheme of events. In consequence, material resources were inadequately provided for Polish soldiers leaving them without proper uniforms or weapons. In spite of being ill-equipped and in a state of unreadiness, in the spring of 1915 the Polish Legions moved to the battlefields. Fighting with the Germans at Paskosławie, Nurzyce and Czeremcha they suffered heavy losses. Only two hundred of the one thousand soldiers of the Pulawski Legion were able to continue fighting and the Lubelski Legion ceased to exist all together. In March 1915, from the remaining soldiers it was intended to form the Polish Infantry Brigade.

THE PRUSSIAN PARTITION

The Germans were the only occupying nation who did not express any interest in the creation of a Polish army. In the beginning of the war they destroyed Kalisz, one year later they captured Warsaw.



REPLICA OF THE PRUSSIAN
UNIFORM FROM 1914



REPLICA OF POLISH LEGIONAIRE
UNIFORM FROM 1915

THE AUSTRO-HUNGARY PARTITION

Two days after Austria-Hungary the declared war on Serbia, Jozef Pilsudski asked the government to agree to mobilise his rifleman squad for reconnaissance and sabotage in the Russian occupied territories. This idea of the Poles creating unrest by an uprising, appealed to the Austrians and they granted permission.

On 3 August 1914 Jozef Pilsudski addressed the soldiers of the 1st Cadre Company at Oleandry Park in Krakow: *„From now on, the division into Riflemen and Rifle Squads is no more. You are all Polish soldiers [...] Soldiers! It is your great honour to be the first ones to go to the Kingdom and cross the border with the Russian controlled territory.”*

On the night of 5th and 6th August, the 1st Cadre Company moved out from Oleandry towards Kielce and made its way through Michalowice where they removed the Russian boundary posts. The soldiers expectations of being enthusiastically welcomed as liberators met with disappointment. The reality did not correspond to the plan. People living in the Russian ruled Kingdom of Poland were mainly indifferent if not hostile. The reason behind this was the news earlier received by the people of Kielce that the Germans forces, allies to the Austro-Hungarians, had burned the Polish city of Kalisz to the ground. This was a consistent reaction with the conscription by occupying country forces, where citizens of Kielce were fighting in the opposing Russian army.

Without the support of the people of Kielce, the 1st Cadre Brigade couldn't create an uprising and even hold their position against the Russian troops and they were forced to retreat back to Krakow. The disappointed Austrian's decided that it was futile to keep a separate autonomous Polish force and disbanded the brigade which was absorbed into the already existing 60,000 Poles in the Austrian army. It seemed that the dream to have an autonomous Polish army had failed and instead of fighting for her own country, the Poles had to fight for Emperor Franz Jozef.

Despite apparently failing in creating her own army, the Poles operated an influential lobby group within the Viennese Parliament which succeeded in gaining approval to organise an army of polish legionnaires based on the rifleman squads model alongside the Austrian army.

They formed the Western Legion based in Krakow and the Eastern Legion based in Lwow. There was no shortage of volunteers and the numbers soon counted in excess of ten thousand which formed three brigades. The 1st Brigade was commanded by Jozef Pilsudski and included experienced war veterans from the rifleman squads. The remaining were conscripted to the 2nd and 3rd Brigades.

During the first year of fighting, the 1st Brigade was engaged in the battle of Lowczowek. The 2nd Brigade protected the front line at Bukovina, defended the Rafajlowa Pass and fought in areas of Carlibaba and Rokitna. The 3rd Brigade was on active campaign in the Lublin and Volhyn regions.



THE RIFLEMAN'S EAGLE
BADGE

V. CHANGES

Until mid 1915, the Poles, not having any influence or choice with whom they fought, continued to battle on various Russo-Austro-Hungarian fronts. There were occasions where members of the same family found themselves facing each other across the battlefields. It was not uncommon that Polish songs sung in the trenches on one side were picked up and joined in by Polish soldiers from the other side. Nobody knows how many died from bullets fired by their compatriots. Only fifteen thousand Polish legionnaires were identifiable by the Polish eagle emblem on their army caps. The remaining several thousand Poles who could not be identified as Polish, since they were fighting in uniforms from the occupying armies.

During the course of the four year conflict nearly three million Poles were conscripted and fought in the occupying countries armies, where one in six, perished or returned home injured.

Poles fought and died but the aim of regaining independence for Poland seemed as impossible and distant as during the first days of war. Mid-1916, Pilsudski concluded that further support of the Austro-Hungarian armies was senseless and the process of further recruitment of legionnaires was halted.

Disillusioned by the lack of clear declaration by the Central Powers coalition considering Poland's future independence, Pilsudski resigned his position as commander of the 1st Brigade. Following his example, his legionnaires also began leaving.

HARD BARGAINING

The devastating battles of Marna (1914), of Verdun (1916) and of the Somme (1916), increased the need for new recruits into the armies on both sides of the conflict. Since it was illegal under international law for occupying countries to conscript citizens of the occupied territory into their own armies, Prussia, Russia and Austria simultaneously, in a bid to tempt Poles into their armies, made promises offering to create an independent Polish state.



When the balance of the war appeared to be favoring Russia, Germany coerced the Polish Legionnaires to swear allegiance to the German Emperor but they refused. The consequences were internment in camps of Szczypiorno and Benjaminow. Jozef Pilsudski was imprisoned in the Fortress of Magdeburg.

POLISH LEGIONNAIRES
INTERNED IN SZCZYPIORNO
CAMP

The remaining Legionnaires who were Austro-Hungarian citizens were conscripted into the Austrian army and sent to the Italian front.

SET BACKS

As the war dragged on, the economic situation deteriorated and the high death toll on both sides led to an eruption of social unrest. Revolution fuelled by political ideologies, nationalism and economic problems ultimately resulted in the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II (March 1917), the collapse of the German Empire (the November Revolution 1918) and the resignation of the Austrian Emperor Charles II from government (November 1918).

The new provisional Russian Government agreed to Władysław Raczkiewicz initiative to form an autonomous army without limitations under the Russian command. Three corps were formed: The first on Belorussia, the second on Bessarabia and the third on the Ukraine.

The Polish position in the east, deteriorated rapidly after peace negotiations in November 1917 between the Bolshevik government in Russia and the Central Powers. The consequences left the Poles on ice. The Polish Corps wanted to continue fighting so they aligned themselves with the Entente.

A Polish puppet government was created by the Germans in Warsaw giving Poles false hope by the impression of the formation of an independent government. The remnants of the Polish army formations in the east pledged allegiance to the "so called" Polish Government, making their difficult situation even more complicated since formally, they were already allies of the Entente!

During the same period, the German armies advanced and reached Belorussia in the East. The 1st Polish Brigade operating in Belorussia faced a difficult no win situation. They had to decide whether to fight against or cooperate with the German army.

A subsequent peace treaty on 9 February 1918, concluded between the Central Powers and the Ukrainian Peoples Republic, stipulated that the former Polish territories of Chelm and Podlasie regions, be annexed by the Ukraine. The Poles took this very badly and was perceived as perfidious disloyalty and the Legionnaires of the 2nd Polish Brigade under Gen. Haller rebelled against the Austrian army. Their aim was then to join forces with the Polish Corps in Russia and they broke through the Austrian front, battling their armies near Rarancea.

Soon after on 3 March 1918, the Poles were further discontented due to the signing of a peace treaty in Brest between Germany and Austria-Hungary on the one side and Russia on the other. Due to these agreements, Polish soldiers in the occupying armies became a political burden for all sides.

WHAT NEXT?

Germany and Austro-Hungarian authorities asked all three Polish corps to surrender. The 1st and 3rd Polish Corps capitulated and the soldiers were allowed to return to their former homes. The 2nd Polish Corps continued an unequal fight with the German army and having used up all their ammunition, they were forced to surrender. Some of them were interned in Hungarian camps. General Haller with the remaining two thousand soldiers managed to force his way into Russia and after a long odyssey via Moscow and Murmansk reached France.

In Russia there remained tens of thousands of Poles from the Russian Emperor's army, refugees and deportees. These Polish nationals were threatened by the Bolshevik regime. So as not to leave these people to their fate in Russia, Lucian Zeligowski became one of the organisers of the Polish army in the former Russian Empire. The 4th and 5th Polish Rifleman's divisions were formed. They operated with Aleksander Kołczak's "white" army. Some of the soldiers were captured by the Bolsheviks and deported to Siberia. Remaining soldiers managed to escape to Dairen harbour (now in China) and on British ships they eventually reached the port of Danzig. With no breathing time, upon landing at the port in July 1920, they were sent to the front to fight the Red Army in defence of Poland's eastern front.

BLUE ARMY

Immediately after the outbreak of the 1st World War, the possibility of forming a Polish Legion in France became feasible. Recruitment centres were opened which were flooded by volunteers wanting to sign up. Training camps were opened near Bayonne. Unfortunately, the Russian Embassy in France strongly protested against the formation of the independent Polish Legion. Due to France being an ally of Russia, France was forced to comply. The recruitment stopped and the soldiers who had already signed up were absorbed in the French Foreign Legion. The Poles opportunity to form their own Legion did not arise until the change in Russian attitudes caused by the proletariat revolution. The Polish Blue Army was formed in late 1917 and composed of Polish volunteers from USA, Canada, Brazil as well as previously interned soldiers and prisoners of war. The "Blue" came from the colour of the military uniforms worn by the soldiers. Before the end of the war, they took part in battles in the Champagne region in France and in Hungary. Jozef Haller's army from Russia joined with the Polish Blue Army of which he was appointed as Commander in Chief. In July 1919, Haller's troops were transferred to Poland and took part in the Polish- Bolshevik war.



WARSAW, 1919. RETURN OF
THE BLUE ARMY

Meanwhile the 1st World War was coming to an end. A peace treaties were signed: In Brest between Germany, Austro- Hungary and Russia on 9 February 1918 and the most significant in Compiègne between Germany and the countries of the Entente on 11 November 1918.

VI. REAL PEACE?

The collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Bolshevik revolution in Russia and social unrest in Germany provided Poland with a realistic opportunity for political and military independence. After his release from Magdeburg, Joseph Pilsudski arrived in Warsaw and sent a declaration which confirmed the recreation of an independent Polish State on the international arena. This official letter sent by Joseph Pilsudski on the 16th November 1918 to the United States of America, Great Britain, France, Italy, Japan and Germany stated:



TYTUS FILIPOWICZ BUST.
SIGNATORY OF THE POLAND INDEPENDENCE NOTIFICATION
11th of NOVEMBER 1918

"I wish to notify all states and nations, both those at war and those that remain neutral, of the existence of an independent Polish State, encompassing all of the reunited Polish territories".



Following lengthy negotiations, the terms establishing peace and ending the First World War were agreed and on the 28th June 1919 in Versailles outside Paris. Germany, the states of the Triple Entente and allies signed the peace treaty. The Treaty of Versailles formalised the new territorial and political order in Europe and in so doing, confirmed the creation of the Polish state.

Unfortunately, the newly established Polish State had no defined borders and it was forced into a further three years of conflict over regions in Ukraine, Czechoslovakia and Germany and the territories formally under the Prussian Partition. A further threat came from Soviet Russia and its desire to conquer European States and turn them into Soviet Republics. Additional difficulties which Poland faced, was in creating a unified administration system, merging the three former systems which were operated under partitioning.

JOZEF PILSUDSKI
BY STANISLAW OSTROWSKI

VII. THE POLISH-BOLSHEVIK WAR OF 1920

Poland's domestic situation in 1920 was unenviable and challenging.

The demands of the four year war had taken their toll on the economy. At the dawn of Poland's independence, there was a lack of economic unity and any general uniformity between the territories.

SILESIA UPRISING HEADQUARTERS



Newly unified territories which had been under partition for over one hundred years still used three different monetary, weights and measures and legal systems. The young state had to standardise and consolidate its operations of administration, finance as well as develop its educational, economic, communication, transportation systems to improve its industry.

Disputes surrounding the new borders led to the Silesian and Wielkopolska region uprisings. The threat of invasion increased due to the Soviets aggrandizement policy and with the planned Communist revolutions in Europe, as illustrated by Lenin's speech: "somewhere near Warsaw lies the [...] centre of the whole imperialistic system, current circumstances will allow us to uproot this system and lead politics not only in Poland but into Germany and England". The Polish Legionnaires once again defended their independence. Initially the Red Army faced one defeat after the next but in the spring of 1920 the Russian Army advanced as far as Warsaw.



Despite the Red Army's successful advances which brought a real threat of Soviet expansion into the whole of Europe, Poland did not receive any form of assistance from any European country to protect it against this onslaught. The atmosphere in Europe at this time was one of pacifism and appeasement. The extent of the military support offered by the Allies in July and August 1920 was limited to sending a reconnaissance diplomatic team to Poland led by Maxime Weygand (France) and Henry Radcliffe (Great Britain) and supported by only one United States Air force squadron.

On the 15th August 1920, the Polish army, led by Joseph Pilsudski, made a tactical maneuver in the defense of Warsaw which not only resulted in winning the battle but halting the whole Soviets advancing campaign which forced the Bolshevik Army into an unconditional retreat. At the time, Edgar Vincent, the First Viscount D'Abernon, a

British politician, diplomat and writer rated the Battle of Warsaw as the eighteenth most important deciding battle in the history of the world. The Polish Soviet War ended on the 18th March 1921 with the signing of the peace treaty in Riga.



PILOTS FROM UNITED STATES AIR FORCE SQUADRON SUPPORTING POLES DURING THE POLISH-BOLSHEVIC WAR

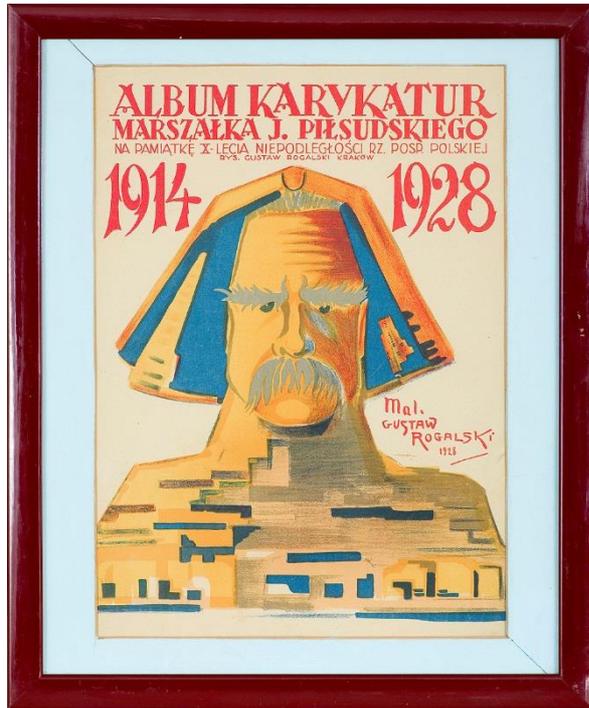
VIII. THE SECOND POLISH REPUBLIC

At the end of 1921 the borders of the Republic of Poland covered 388,600 km sq. The main problem after gaining independence was creating a unified economy and ensuring its growth. The constitution outlining the principles on which the state was to be run were agreed and the rebuilding of the economy began with the introduction of a standardised monetary and tax system as well as a common education and healthcare system.

MAP OF THE POLAND II REPUBLIC



Alongside achievements such as the construction of the new port in Gdynia and the Central Industrial region, there were also developments in cultural activities. Theatres and concert halls were built. The radio became an influential source of information. Among the press agencies, the Polish Telegraphic Agency took the lead in reporting domestic and international events. Nearly 2700 newspapers and magazines were published in the 1930s. Literary and artistic creativity flourished. Poland celebrated novelist Władysław Reymont was awarded the Nobel prize in 1924 for his book *"The Peasants"*. The dramatic recent social changes, inspired artistic creativity, particularly in political satirical caricatures. Polish athletes achieved success in the 1932 Olympic games.



CARICATURE ALBUM



JOZEF PILSUDSKI
ON HIS FAVOURITE HORSE – KASZTANKA
BY: WOJCIECH KOSSAK

Key government positions were offered to the former Legionnaires in 1926. Internationally, Poland entered into a military alliance with Britain and France. Signing non-aggression pacts with Russia in 1932 and 1934 and with Germany in 1934 did not take away the threat of aggression to Poland's borders. As a result great importance was placed on military service and the expansion of the army. Submarines "Blyskawica" and "Grom" were brought into service. These two submarines later fought under the British Navy during the second world war. Intelligence services were developed. Already in 1932 Polish cryptographers Marian Rajewski, Henryk Zygałski and Jerzy Różycki began deciphering the German coding machine Enigma, later providing an immeasurable contribution to Bletchley Park's code breaking.

CIPHER MACHINE „ENIGMA”



IX. WAR AGAIN

The developments of the Polish Second Republic were brought to an abrupt halt by German aggression on the 1st September 1939. The reaction, despite signed treaties of mutual military assistance was for the allies to declare a state of war and regrettably the only action taken was to drop leaflets from the air urging peaceful settlement.



Poland once again faced their aggressors alone. The battle worn Legionnaires stood to defend their homeland once more. The Commander in Chief of the Polish forces was the ex-Legionnaire Marshal Edward Smigly Rydz. The sheer military superiority of the enemy as well as the sudden and unexpected attack from Soviet Russia in the Eastern territories forced the government to evacuate to Paris and then later to London.

MARSHAL EDWARD SMIGLY RYDZ
BY: DANUTA MÜNNICH

The Poles once again found themselves fighting on all fronts in the Second World War. In their invaded homeland, the Poles created the Polish Underground State which fought the occupiers. In France, Poles fought in the "1 Brygada Grenadierow", in Norway in the "Samodzielna Brygada Strzelców Podhalańskich". On the seas Poland's fleet protected the allies Atlantic military and merchant convoys.

After the Russian invasion in 1939, more than 1m Poles were deported to the Siberian gulags. In 1941, following changes in the war alliances, the agreement between Poland and Russia was signed liberating the Polish deportees who formed the Second Polish Corps, soon after fighting alongside the British at Tobruk and Monte Cassino. Created in Scotland, the Polish 1st Armoured Division participated in liberating Normandy, Belgium and Holland.



Poland also played a crucial role in The Battle of Britain. It was the Polish pilots from No. 303 Polish Fighter Squadron, Winston Churchill referred to in his famous speech: "never was so much owed by so many to so few".

MEDALS AND BADGES
FROM THE 2nd WORLD WAR

Despite the huge losses Poland suffered fighting on all the fronts in the Second World War, the disastrous Warsaw Uprising and the Yalta Agreements of 1944 crushed all hopes of regaining their independence. Post war Poland was 312,000 km sq. and was

smaller than she had been before the war. Poland was forced into forty years under communist Russian control. The Poles who had fought alongside the British and Allies had no home to return to. Many of them stayed in England where they located their Polish Government in Exile. The Poles formed historical institutions (amongst them the Jozef Pilsudski Institute of Research), parishes, schools, clubs and societies. They published daily newspapers and magazines as well as books. For many years London became the centre of life for Poles in exile.

STANISLAW OSTROWSKI
POLISH PRESIDENT IN EXILE
(1972-1979)



In 1989 the Poles liberated themselves from the Communist regime. By joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1999 and the European Union in 2004, the Poles had gained a new opportunity to rebuild their state. Finally free, independent and democratic.



Embassy
of the Republic of Poland
in London



LOTTERY FUNDED

Ministerstwo
Kultury
i Dziedzictwa
Narodowego.



