



P O L I S H

F A C T S

A N D

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GERMANS MEET POLES AGAIN

News that the Second Polish Corps has gone into front-line action against the Germans in Italy is more than a reminder that the Allied army moving on Europe is really an International Expeditionary Force, composed of elements from seventeen nations. This in itself puts into high relief the character of the war against the Nazis. It is easy to forget, especially in the great military crises when the accent is all on strength of arms, that the Allied army fighting Hitler is not merely a Russian, British and American army. It is an army of many nations, literally a people's army. And while this diversity creates some minor problems of liaison and replacement, it spells out the true meaning of this struggle in letters everybody can read. It is a popular rising against the mastery of the world, or any continental segment of it, by any one Power; and there will be no victory, and no peace, while the threat of domination persists.

The sight of Polish regiments fighting their way back to Poland on the battlefields of Italy makes the meaning even clearer. It is like a searchlight that lights up the long odyssey of the war and reveals the Pyrrhic quality of the German conquests. These Polish soldiers are commanded by the almost legendary General Anders, released by the Soviet Government to organize the Polish prisoners when Russia entered the war. Some of them fought at the gates of Warsaw. They stood on the Riga Line and the Curzon Line, unmindful which was which, concerned only to drive back the German invaders. Some come from Siberia, some have escaped from occupied Poland, others are Poles living abroad

who have gathered from the ends of the earth to redeem their country and avenge the fate of their people. Molded into a new army in Iran and Iraq, they are fighting the Germans again at the gates of Rome.

The Poles in Italy are fighting their way home. They have still a long way to go, but every man in the ranks is convinced that he is on the last lap of the road back. They cannot be expected to forget, and the world will remember, that Poland was the first nation that stood up to Hitler and put an end to his arrogant plan of bloodless conquest. For that act of reckless defiance, so stubbornly maintained that the Germans have never found a quisling in Poland, they have suffered longer and more bitterly than any other occupied country.

Now the Germans are meeting them again on the battlefield, the sign that from the fall of Warsaw to the siege of Rome they have really conquered nothing. But it is also a sign that a "strong and independent Poland" is a necessity of the peace. For what defeated Hitler in the first place was the resistance of the nations he tried to conquer and absorb. The Great Powers would be helpless against him if he had succeeded in aligning the small nations on his side. The concern of democratic peoples in the Russian-Polish dispute springs not only from their sense of obligation to restore the freedom of Poland but from a deep conviction that nations are undefeatable and indigestible, and that attempts to decide their fate without their consent imperils the future security of the world.

POLISH FACTS and FIGURES

will seek to acquaint the American public with Polish political and social problems, and to give a true presentation of the struggle that the Polish Nation has carried on for its integrity and independence since September 1, 1939



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POLISH ARMY IN THE EAST

On February 17, 1944, the Allied communiqué announced that Poland's Second Army Corps was fighting on the Italian front.

This is the fifth campaign in which Polish land forces have fought in this war against Germany, their deadly enemy. After the 1939 campaign in Poland, they fought in Norway where they took Narvik; they fought in France to the very last; they fought in Libya where they distinguished themselves in the defence of Tobruk and the taking of El Gazala, as part of the British Eighth Army. Now the Poles are fighting again in Italy. After an absence of four years they are back again on the continent of Europe.

By a strange coincidence it was in Italy that in 1797, after Poland as an independent State had been erased from the map of Europe and partitioned between Russia, Prussia and Austria, that Polish volunteers began to fight "For Our Freedom and For Yours," for the liberation of their country. The Dombrowski Legions, as they were called after their commanding general, added luster to Poland's long record of heroism and left an heirloom to their fellow countrymen in a deathless song that has become Poland's National Anthem. One of the stanzas of "Poland Is Not Yet Lost" reads:

"March, march Dombrowski,
From Italy's plain;
Our brethren shall meet us
In Poland again."

The headquarters of the Polish Command have now been established in the same village where General Dombrowski stayed after the battles of Campo Basso and Tenedoli.

Poland's Second Army Corps is the vanguard of the forces of the nation that was first to fight in 1939, that did not hesitate to resist the armed might of Germany and has ever since kept up its fight abroad and its resistance at home. Although crushed beneath the iron heel of the invader, Poland was able to form an army to fight side by side with American and British forces for her own freedom and that of the world.

POLISH SECOND CORPS IN ITALY

The first issue of *Dziennik Zolnierza*, a daily paper of the Polish Second Corps fighting in Italy, printed the following greeting:

"Once more we are on European soil, and proud of being in the ranks of the famous VIIIth Army. We offer our comradeship and will continue to fight for the common cause. We are glad to continue the struggle side by side with British, Canadian and Indian troops. We salute the American army fighting on the same front. We salute the French forces!

"Good luck to all of you!"

Polish Corps is Welcomed

Reports from Italy say the Second Polish Corps is composed of two infantry divisions, *Karpacka* (Carpathian) and *Kresowa* (Border) together with an armored brigade.

It is part of the Polish Army in the East.

The Second Corps has British arms and all the services and equipment of a great operational unit. The men wear a Crusader's Cross on their field caps along with the traditional Polish Eagle and Army Badge.

The Second Corps is attached to the British Eighth Army, with which the Carpathian Brigade, now a division, served at Tobruk and in Libya.

The President of the Polish Republic, Władysław Raczkiewicz, on February 19, 1944, sent the following message to these detachments:

"Soldiers! You whose weary feet have trodden northern snows and desert sands, above you flies the flag of Poland. Side by side with you, our Allies are fighting. Following the footsteps of our brave forefathers you will go from Italian lands to Poland. In the name of the Polish Republic, may you reach Poland victorious. With her name on your lips you enter the battle. May the points of your bayonets bring freedom to our bleeding country."

The Commander of the Eighth Army, Gen. Sir Oliver Leese, greeted the Polish troops with the following message:

"The fighting qualities of the Poles are known to every British soldier. On my recent visit to the Polish Corps I was struck by the efficiency and keenness of officers and men, and by the atmosphere of confidence and determination to get to grips with our common foe. Already, as I could see, these fine troops have begun to learn the technique of battle in this mountainous land.

"The Polish Corps includes men whose fighting qualities were known as far back as 1940-1942 at Tobruk and El Gazala. They must be among the oldest members of the Eighth Army.

"Already the Eighth Army has begun the invasion of Europe—we form one of the spearheads of attack on Hitler's fortress and are proud to welcome the Polish Corps to fight side by side with us in our drive towards Germany and victory."

Polish Commandos The Polish Second Corps arrived at the Italian front early in February, 1944, but Polish Commandos, attached to the Fifth and Eighth Armies had already been fighting there for two months. They had distinguished themselves in successful sorties in the valleys of the Sangro and the Garigliano.

During one of these patrols, Franciszek Bogucki, an American Pole from Pittsburgh, managed to work his way round German position and destroyed a machine-gun nest. During this action Bogucki was wounded. He was carried out by the officer leading the patrol through the most dangerous segment of no man's land but his life could not be saved. This heroic soldier bled to death.

In an engagement on the banks of the Sangro river another unit of Polish Commandos killed thirty Germans and took sixteen prisoners.

Because the Polish Commandos were attached to the Allied units, it is impossible at present to give a separate account of their exploits. Their blood was mingled with the blood of the Allies.



Polish troops on way to the front in Italy.

"Quiet on the Front" At first the Second Polish Corps occupied a sector on the banks of the Sangro river. When reading the oft repeated communiqué "All quiet on the Polish front" one must not think of a stabilized front with only patrol activity.

Before spring broke quiet on the Italian front was due only to bad weather, continual snow, mist and rain. Sometimes snow ploughs preceded patrols when even the jeep capitulated on steep mountain roads. It took 15 hours to travel 60 miles. In some sectors knee-deep mud made it impossible to move without long rubber boots. Elsewhere soldiers were wearing snow shoes. Some detachments quartered on mountain peaks were using skis. Despite these difficult conditions the Poles' morale was excellent. They stood the cold better than the Iranian heat, even though they often have to bail out water from their dug-outs.

"Sikorski's Tourists" H. S. Woodham, war correspondent of the *"Cardiff Western Mail,"* thus described his impressions after a winter visit to the Polish sector:

"Just before nightfall we reached our destination where amid snow and ice we came upon a happy, laughing army of Poles occupying that part of the front line. At the Carpathian Division Headquarters they are laughing over an old German jibe which their presence in Italy has revived—'Sikorski's tourists.'

"Tourists? Certainly. Almost every man in this division has been a prisoner sometime in this war, either of the Russians or of the Germans. Many travelled alone or in small groups across Europe into France, Norway and Britain. With the formation of the Polish independent brigade in the Middle East these soldiers flocked to resume their fight, some from distant Canada.

"'Certainly we are tourists,' said the Division Second in Command. 'That is what makes the Nazi sneer so funny. They make a joke but do not see the point of it—they do not see we are all marching back to Poland. That's why we are all so happy here. Our soldiers in the Italian front line are saying: 'Why, we can walk all the way home from here.' They have enlarged the jest among themselves. Those who came direct from England are nicknamed 'Poor Lords,' those from Egypt 'Ramses,' those direct from Russia 'Buzuluks.'

I spent a day going the rounds with the Brigade Commander who with his stout ash stick, with which he led the successful attack at El Gazala, might have been a country gentleman working on his estate. He waved his stock as he greeted each soldier by his Christian name. 'Morning Jan, snow's quite warm today.' Private Jan would grin happily replying: 'Tis that, Sir.'

"At the artillery report centre I met a second lieutenant, a young poet whose lyrics in the Polish army newspapers make the soldiers happier, and

in the Polish underground press itself inspires those carrying on the dangerous struggle at home. Glancing through the report book I saw an entry that enemy infantry had been observed. In the comment column the poet had written a couplet which interpreted meant 'Infantry mistaken for enemy was a cow.'

"If men ever felt deeply or had a reason for keenness to kill, it is these men. The divisional Second in Command escaped from a German prisoner camp, and stayed in Poland disguised as a civilian for several weeks before reaching France. He saw with his own eyes the Germans' bestial treatment of men, women and children. A colonel at Corps Headquarters lost all his fingers and toes from frost-bite while making a long escape trek. Others suffered likewise. For all this they are determined that the Germans shall pay in full measure.

"Nothing will keep these Poles from the Germans. Even conscripting them into the enemy's own army failed. Here's the story. I met two soldiers who fought on two opposite sides and yet managed to come together against the Germans. A shoemaker, aged 25, Piotr, was captured by the Russians in Poland. After a period in a concentration camp he was conscripted into the Red Army and fought against the Germans on the Eastern front.

"The other boy was 16 when the Germans snatched him from his home and put him in a labor camp for three years. Then they remarked his blond hair and blue eyes and told him he must consider himself a German. After two months of training he was sent to fight the British in Italy. He was one of a small rear-guard party cut off and captured by us, but soon a Polish officer questioned him so he found his way back."

**General Anders
about his Army**

When interviewed, in a small town, the main street of which was named Marszałkowska Street, after a famous thoroughfare in Warsaw, General Anders*, Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army in the East, said:



Polish observation post on Sangro river.

* For further details about General Anders see p. 19 of this issue of "Polish Facts & Figures."

"Our army is now starting a march to Poland. Poland never felt aggressive towards Soviet Russia, never wanted anything from them."

Anders said that 80% of the soldiers in his army came from those parts of Poland which the Russians want to take over. If an agreement is to be reached, there must be good will on both sides. It is not enough that there should be good intentions on one side only. As a final word Anders said:

"We are proud to be part of the famous Allied army, whose victories history will record."

Weapons come first The Commander of the Polish Second Corps, General Anders, frequently visits the front line. On one occasion he entered a small hut made of rocks and noticed that the young soldiers had not kept up a fire although there was an ample supply of wood. They explained that the cold did not bother them and they lit a fire only when cleaning their rifles.

"Our weapons come first, then comes our comfort."

One of these youths, when asked how he felt at the front, replied:

"This is like Poland. Snow and cold makes us feel as if we were back home."

First Blood to Poles Now that the army is at the front, its most difficult task still lies ahead, and the few engagements that have taken place belong to the preparatory phase. Yet any picture of the activities of the Polish corps in Italy would be incomplete without some mention of their daily patrol routine.

The following is by a British military eye-witness, Lt. Gen. H. G. Marmin:

"We talked to the platoon commander, who recently returned from a successful patrol which remained out for 24 hours, covering more than thirty miles in deep snow, crossing the Sangro gorge to penetrate right to the opposing crest. The patrol commander learned that a German foraging party was expected to visit a certain group of houses, so he laid an ambush, accordingly. Presently the German party appeared. He waiting till they were at point blank range, then demanded surrender. The Germans replied by opening fire. In the ensuing engagement four Germans were killed and three badly wounded at the cost of only one Polish soldier slightly wounded. First blood to Poles."

On May 9, 1944, Polish and British troops seized a considerable section of the important lateral motor supply road at the base of the Maiella Mountain range—"the roof of Italy"—where it runs through the towns of Palena and Lettopalena. Thus began the Allied offensive on the Italian front.

Maiella Plateau is a mountain range rising to 4,000 feet. Combat at this altitude combines the dangers of war with most exciting mountain climbing.

On May 16, the *N. Y. Times* gave the following report:

"Polish troops . . . again were thrown against their old-time enemies at the opening of the offensive against the Gustav Line . . . and have been in the thick of the fighting ever since.

"Theirs was one of the most difficult of all sectors of this difficult front.

"The Germans facing them were the toughest of all the Germans here—the First, or Green Devil, Parachute Division. And to make the task harder, the Germans were in the process of relieving units as the Poles attacked, which meant they encountered the enemy in double strength.

"The Polish attack came in the almost impossible mountain sector just north of Cassino and Monastery Hill, and they made their thrust westward toward the Liri Valley, the entrance of which is guarded by the stronghold of Cassino.

"In the spring months during which the Allies were making their gallant but fruitless frontal attacks on Cassino such a move never was undertaken because it was considered all but impossible.

"The Poles moved tanks up these slopes, so rough that not even a tank could travel without engineers to lay a path for it.

"They went into action against a superior German force, gained their first objectives and then were driven back by the most furious counter-attack the Germans have yet launched in this offensive.



The Army mule is at his best in mountain sectors of Italian front.

"Casualties were heavy on both sides, heavier than anywhere else on the Italian front. The Poles regrouped and went back into the attack, and the fight still is raging.

"It is a desperate one, with fanatical Nazi paratroopers on one side and revenge-thirsty Poles on the other."

Madame Wanda from Berlin As soon as they learned that a Polish corps was at the front, the Germans began intensive propaganda. Taking advantage of the existing differences between the Polish and Soviet Governments and knowing that most of the Polish soldiers in Italy came from Eastern Poland, the Germans tried to undermine the fighting spirit of the Polish Army by showing that the war aims of the Allies and the Poles were not the same.

Loud speakers were installed in the German front lines and every night broadcasts could be heard from a mysterious radio station called "Wanda," a popular Polish name. Then the Polish lines were showered with leaflets in Polish, with a drawing of a woman in Cracow national costume standing before a microphone. The leaflet had this to say:

"Fellow countrymen, soldiers on the Italian front—do you know English or French or German? If you don't, listen to broadcasts in Polish from the radio station 'Wanda.' 'Wanda' wants to get in touch with you."

No one was deceived by this naive German propaganda. Making fun of these broadcasts, the soldiers call the station "Wanda Frank," after the bloody German Governor-General in Cracow.

Commenting on this propaganda the Polish soldiers' paper "*Dziennik Zolnierza*" wrote:

"Over the air comes to us the voice of "Wanda," who under the mask of genuine patriotism attempts to convince us, Polish soldiers abroad, that there are no better friends of Poland than the Germans and that Hitler has created a veritable paradise in Poland.

"Madame Wanda of Berlin does not seem to know about the September 1939 attack, about millions of Polish victims of German terror, mass murders, mass arrests, executions, the destruction of Polish culture, the starvation of millions of Poles in Poland. Madame Wanda of Berlin apparently hasn't heard about the two million Poles deported to slave labor in Germany. She doesn't know about the well-known political declarations of Hitler and his hangmen, the Franks and Greisers, that Poland must disappear from the map of Europe once and for all and Poles must be serfs whose sole duty is to work for their German masters.

"Every day this disgusting comedy repeats itself: Wanda from Berlin is tempting, promising and does her best to beguile the simple minded. Polish history knows the legend of another Wanda who drowned herself in the Vistula rather than be wedded to a German. Our Wanda cannot be replaced by a 'Wanda' in the service of the Germans."

Finally, irritated by the broadcasts, the Poles one day made a sortie and returned with the captured German loudspeakers.

The difficult fighting conditions on the Italian front gave Polish sappers an opportunity to distinguish themselves. They took over certain sectors of the Italian front, used more than 180 tons of barbed wire and rebuilt 46 miles of roads, including nearly a thousand feet of bridges. They also cleared a two-mile tunnel, which was specially dangerous, as it was full of debris and mines.

American Boys Help

Among the auxiliary forces attached to the Polish Corps are six young American ambulance drivers. Not only do they receive no pay but they meet the cost of their own board. They have volunteered for a year's service, but that period may be extended. Some of these volunteers are of Polish descent.

One of those drivers, Lawrence Bigelow, was recently taking a seriously wounded Polish soldier through a snowstorm. When his car got stuck in the drift, he carried the wounded man into an empty house. After two days the food gave out and the weather did not change, Bigelow made a sledge, laid the wounded man on it and dragged him five miles to the nearest village, thus saving his life.



General K. Sosnkowski, Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces, during his visit to the Polish Second Corps on Italian front (radiophoto).

**Study Amidst
Roaring Guns** Besides patrol routine, special officers give courses for soldiers whose education was interrupted by the war. These courses begun in the Middle East were not completed when the Poles were sent to the front and the final examinations took place in a half-ruined Italian town, amidst the deafening roar of Polish and German artillery fire. The examinations conducted by a Polish Government Commission were very satisfactory and the majority of students passed.

At the end of March, General Kazimierz Sosnkowski, Polish Commander-in-Chief, visited the Second Corps. On that occasion Gen. Sosnkowski decorated soldiers who had distinguished themselves at the front. From among Polish Commandos two Jews, Benjamin Kagan and Henryk Jedwab, received the Cross of Valor, for their bravery during a sortie on the banks of the Garigliano river. After a two weeks' stay at the front, General Sosnkowski returned to London greatly satisfied with the inspection. He told the troops:

"In far away London where every day brings so many worries and cares, I longed with all my heart to be with you in the purely military atmosphere of front line troops. I desire to visit you with increasing frequency as your military activities shall develop."

General Sosnkowski was accompanied by Chief of Polish General Staff Gen. Stanislaw Kopanski, former Commander of the Carpathian Brigade, who met many of his old comrades from Tobruk and Libya.

**Hand in hand
with the Allies** The Poles in Italy have established most cordial relations with all other Allied armies.

The Polish Corps was greeted enthusiastically by the Commander of the Fighting French Forces, who said:

"Our troops, united by the same ardent desire to liberate our native lands, will carry on a common fight against the enemy. I am deeply convinced that soon our struggle will be crowned by new successes."

They were also warmly welcomed by the Americans, Canadians and the British comrades. As a greeting to the Polish Army the Canadian paper "*The Maple Leaf*" wrote:

"Not so long ago Polish Forces were making things very, very tough for the Canadians in large scale manoeuvres in Great Britain. Lads with bucket helmets and wide grins showed in no uncertain terms that war was a serious business to them, whether it is going through motions in exercise or for keeps.

"Now the Canadians find the Polish Corps fighting with them in the Eighth Army and you do not have to ask twice to discover they are happy about the whole thing.

"The Poles had a mighty rough way to go in the fall of 1939. Great Britain and France went to war about it, but they could not do much in the

way of actual help. Germany put her heavy boots to ill-equipped Poland and Russia moved in from the rear to take a large size territorial bite, but the Poles kept fighting the best way they could—many escaped and joined the Allied Forces.

“This time with modern fighting equipment and knowledge of new military rules they are ready for anything the Germans offer.

“Canadians welcome the Second Polish Corps.”

The Canadian paper's remarks are exact. The Poles are happy that they can again fight the Germans, just as they fought them in Poland, in France, in Norway, in Libya, in the skies over London and Berlin, on the seven seas, and everywhere a battle is being fought for justice and a better world.

The Poles are happy that they can again fight their enemy. Their blood shed “For Our Freedom and Yours” will ensure the rebirth of their enslaved motherland.

The Polish Second Corps, now fighting in Italy, is part of the Polish Army of the East.

This army is composed of effectives whose experiences in this war has been widely different:

- 1) Polish units formed in Russia from released Polish prisoners of war and from deported civilians, and
- 2) Polish units created in 1940 in the Middle East. The nucleus of these units was the Carpathian Brigade, which defended Tobruk and fought in Libya.

Because of the different story and service of these troops, we give below separate chronicles of their formation and military experiences.

POLISH ARMY IN RUSSIA

On August 4, 1941 Mr. Beria, Peoples Commissar for Internal Affairs (NKWD) entered a cell of the Lubyanka prison in Moscow to tell Gen. Wlady-slaw Anders that he was appointed Commander of the Polish Armed Forces in Soviet Russia.

Since Hitler's attack on Russia on June 22, 1941, Poland considered the Soviet Union as her natural ally and tried to reach an understanding with her on all controversial matters. This was all the more necessary as from the moment of the invasion of Eastern Poland by the Red Army on September 17, 1939, diplomatic relations between both Governments have been severed.

The release of General Anders followed the resumption of diplomatic relations and of the Polish-Soviet pact signed on July 30, 1941 by Gen. W. Sikorski, Polish Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief, and Mr. Maisky, Ambassador of the U.S.S.R. to the Court of St. James.

The pact said among others:

"(3) The two Governments mutually agree to render one another aid and support of all kind in the present war against Hitlerite Germany.

"(4) The Government of the U.S.S.R. expresses its consent to the formation on the territory of the U.S.S.R. of a Polish army under a commander appointed by the Polish Government, in agreement with the Soviet Government. The Polish army on the territory of the U.S.S.R. being subordinated—in an operational sense—to the Supreme Command of the U.S.S.R., on which the Polish army will be represented. All details as to command, organization and employment of this force will be settled in a subsequent Agreement."

Polish-Soviet Military Agreement

Pursuant to this political pact, a military agreement was concluded. Poland decided to take advantage of the fact that hundreds of thousands of her citizens were then in Russia and use them for increasing her forces to fight the Germans. She was anxious to have her citizens in Russia join her in war against the common enemy.

According to the Military Agreement of August 14, 1941, an independent Polish army was to be set up on Russian territory under its own flag, its own commanders and its own jurisdiction. This army's equipment and armament was to be supplied by the Soviet Government, and by the Governments of the United States and Great Britain under Lend-Lease. The Soviet Commissariat was to be responsible for feeding the army.

Only land units were to be formed to fight side by side with the armies of the U.S.S.R. and of other Allies. After the end of the war this army was to return to Poland. Trained sailors and fliers were to be immediately sent to England, where they were to supplement the Polish navy and air force.

The size of the Polish army in Russia was not defined in advance, nor could it be in view of the circumstances under which Poles found themselves on Russian territory.

Army of To understand this one must go back to the Soviet occupation of
Deportees Eastern Poland, which lasted from September 17, 1939 until June 22, 1941. During this period mass deportations of Polish citizens were carried out by Soviet authorities. Approximately 1,000,000 Polish citizens, without regard to nationality or creed, were deported from Eastern Poland. Some of them were placed in prisons, others in forced labor camps, but the majority was sent as settlers to the steppes of Kasakstan, to the wilderness of Northern Russia and to distant places in Siberia. Nobody knows exactly how many deportees there were not where they were sent. News received occasionally from the Russian shores of the Pacific, from the deserts around the Sea of Aral, or from the forests near Archangel, seemed to indicate that there was no spot in the vast Russian Empire where deported Poles could not be found. At any rate neither the number of deported Polish citizens, nor their distribution were known to Polish authorities and it was impossible to determine the size of the army to be formed.

Recruiting Recruiting for the new army began with the help of a few Polish
in Chaos officers brought from England and some hundreds of Polish officers released from the Griazovec prisoners' camp. Soviet authorities gave the recruiting assistance in their power. A circular sent by the People's Commissariat of the Interior (NKWD) to all settlements, prisons and labor camps brought to deported Poles the glad tidings of their release and of the formation in Russia of a Polish Army. But only a few of the Poles scattered all over the vast Empire, and a few local Soviet authorities knew where the army was being formed or what to do with the liberated Poles.

The fall of 1941 was one of the most dramatic periods in Russian history. The Germans were at the very threshold of Moscow. All the diplomatic corps and most of the People's Commissars and Soviet offices had been evacuated to the east. Railroad lines were crowded with munition plants being removed to the Urals, with tools of war and countless Russian refugees with their belongings. Into this stream of confusion fell the groups of Polish deportees. Without instructions, led often by instinct only, they made their way as best they could to the central part of European Russia. The Headquarters of the Polish Armed Forces in the U.S.S.R. was in Buzuluk, a small town on the railroad line from Kuibyshev to Tashkent (100 miles East of Kuibyshev), where Asia meets Europe.

The ranks of the Polish Army swelled with every passing day. Thousands of Poles volunteered to fight for the freedom of their country.

First Blow Then, in October 1941, news came that the High Command of the U.S.S.R. has restricted rations for the Polish Army to 30,000. Indeed, when this announcement was made 46,000 men had already been enrolled and the Polish authorities had figured their army might even reach the 200,000 mark. If the Soviet decision had been maintained it would have been necessary to turn out 16,000 enlisted men to shift for themselves or hire out as agricultural labor. Fortunately this restriction was later cancelled through the personal intervention of the Polish Ambassador with Premier Stalin.

Training in Icy Blizzards Living conditions in Buzuluk, an old Tzarist army summer camp, were hard beyond description. With temperatures reaching twenty below zero Fahrenheit, the men lived in canvas tents without stoves or wood for fuel. To save themselves from freezing, the soldiers dug the tents deep in the snow of the steppes, as protection from the icy blizzards.

Under these circumstances there could be no regular training. Drills and lectures often had to be abandoned for a 10-mile march into the woods to get fuel. Led by the highest ranking officers, all men took part in these expeditions. In a copy of a camp paper of the period there was printed a photograph of Gen. Boruta-Spiechowicz, Commander of the Fifth Infantry division, carrying a huge log on his shoulder to heat his quarters.



Polish Army camp in Russia.

Every morning soldiers reported to the sick bays with frostbitten noses or hands, though they slept fully dressed and used all the rags they could lay their hands on to cover themselves.

Measured by European standards, the rations were small and of poor quality, although the food situation in the army was much better than among the Soviet civilian population. The Poles were emaciated by two years of hardship in labor camps and prisons, and needed building up before they could be sent to the front.

Lack of food for men and fodder for horses was not the only problem. What worried the Polish command most was the complete absence of weapons, equipment and uniforms. The old Polish uniforms of the ex-prisoners of war were in rags, and the new battle dress sent from England had to make a long trip before it could reach the Polish army. It was an army in rags and 60% of the men had no boots or shoes. At roll-call they would appear in self-fabricated footwear made of cord slipped over feet wrapped in rags. It was more like a tragi-comic masquerade than an army parade.

**Visit in
Soldiers' Camp**

Here is how a *Pestka* (a member of the Polish Women's Auxiliary Service Corps) describes her visit to her husband's detachment during the Fall of 1941 (camp paper "Volunteer

Woman"):

"We enter the town of tents. I push aside an awning and enter the tent where my husband lives with others. On one side I see a heap of earth pounded into a bed, covered with dried stalks. At the head of the bed is a roll of blankets and knapsacks. In the center of the tent a home made



Types of the Polish Women's Auxiliary Service Corps in Soviet Russia.

stove—the pride of the tenants. Against the opposite wall, a table littered with papers—oh, I remember now, I'm in an office.

"No sooner have they caught my glance of pity for their poverty, than young Lieutenant S. puts me to shame:

'We are alright here, Madam, we're fine, after concentration camps and prisons.'

"And the young second lieutenant in dress uniform, the old fat sergeant in a wadded vest from which lumps of cotton fall sadly out and the corporal with lady's shoes on his big feet look at me cheerfully and with broad grins proceed to tell me about the 'service,' a word here on the same level as 'God' or 'Motherland.'

"I spent a long pleasant while in the tent. With them I ate their soldiers' dinner from the big kettle. Rations have been reduced—they tell me—but there are four times as many of us here as there are supposed to be—and everything is fine. Everything is fine—I repeat to myself.

"On my return I watched several groups in training. These are the same people I had met in police offices and in the woods, and in labor camps, on trains and on ships. They are still wearing their same old rags and no boots. The same men looking for the shortest way to the Polish army. But their eyes are changed. These are no more sad, hungry, listless, hopeless eyes—now they burn with the light of enthusiasm."

But worse than the climate was the spread of disease. Lack of hospitals, shortage of medical supplies, underwear, bedding and above all—soap, made any sort of cleanliness impossible. Contact with the primitive native population contributed to the spreading of typhoid fever. The former camps of the Polish divisions in the South of Russia are surrounded by fields of white crosses.

Letters sent by soldiers to the Army newspapers at the time throw light on the conditions existing. Here is one from "*Polska Walcza*" (Fighting Poland) of April 11, 1942:

"No water, no soap, inadequate bathing facilities, no disinfectants, not enough food and cold rooms, all this gives you a picture of the conditions in which we live and work.

"The work is getting on all right. We drill with sticks instead of rifles. We use wooden models for machine guns and anti-aircraft batteries. Our ingenuity in inventing substitutes for training equipment is boundless."

Fighting Spirit of the Poles

But this starved and ragged army never lost the spirit of the fight. An early issue of the army paper "*W Marszu*" (On the march) said:

"Our ranks are being formed under exceptional circumstances. The whole world is ablaze, fierce conflagration rages over the Western frontier. Our Government is following a firm policy, tending toward a free, inde-

pendent, just and democratic Poland, and our army in union with our powerful Allies is fighting a war to the death.

"Our strength lies in a firm international policy and the strength of our army. Policy is in the hands of our Government, but armed power—is in ours. This places a heavy responsibility upon our shoulders. We must never forget all our Government has done for us. Now it is up to us to do our duty as soldiers. This truth is as simple and straightforward as are our lives."

**General Anders,
C.-in-C. of the
Polish Army**

Gen. Wladyslaw Anders walked between the tents leaning on a stick, his eyes still bearing traces of his illness. But each day brought him new strength, each day he could boast of working ten minutes longer. Wounded eight times, he never fully recovered in prison. Only now his strong frame was responding gradually to the care of a doctor.

General Anders was well qualified to be commander of the Polish Armed Forces in Soviet Russia. He spoke Russian as well as Polish. He started his military career as a lieutenant in the Russian army, before the last war. He fought through all the Russian campaigns, including that of East Prussia against Hindenburg. In 1918, he returned to Poland and took an active part in disarming the Germans and freeing Polish territory.

An excellent horseman, he was a member of the Polish Olympic team at Amsterdam in 1928 and took part in many horse shows. Anders fully understood the necessity of modernizing cavalry as a war weapon and replacing horses by motorized means of communication—armed cars and tanks. General Anders's views on this subject were strikingly like those of General de Gaulle.

When war broke out on September 1, 1939, General Anders commanded a group operating above Warsaw, on the border of East Prussia. He opposed stubborn resistance to the German panzer divisions, and made a deep inroad into enemy territory. Pressed southward by overwhelming German forces, Gen. Anders's group fought to their last cartridge. At Sambor, the General was seriously wounded and while in a military hospital in Lwow he was made prisoner by the Russians who had invaded Poland from the East. His eldest son was killed in the campaign.

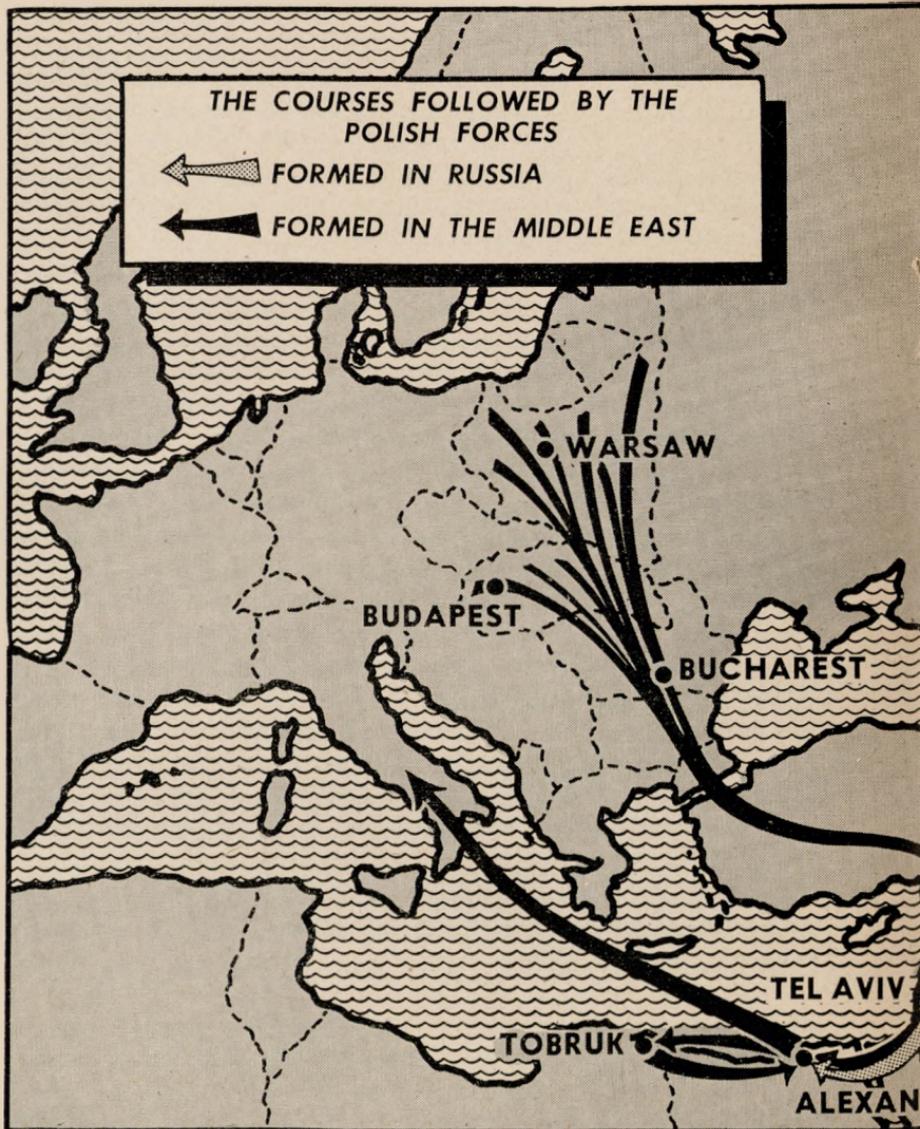
A soldier of courage and character, hard on himself and on his subordinates, Anders shared all the hardships of the soldiers' life in Russia, and was worshipped by his men.

**First Mass and
First Parade**

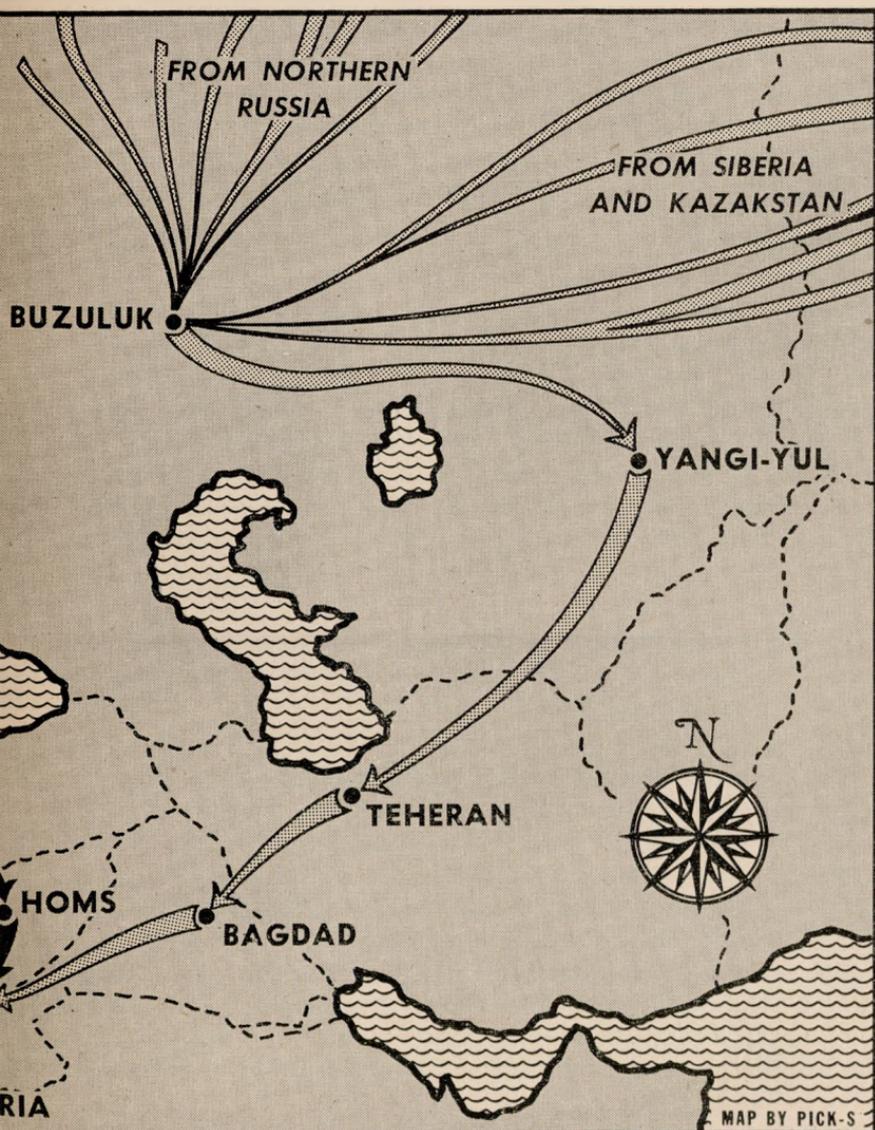
On a high hill beyond Buzuluk a cross was erected, the first symbol of Christianity risen of recent years on the vast Russian horizon. General Anders, a Protestant commanding an army composed mostly of Catholics, realized that the maintenance of a fighting spirit was possible only if inspired by faith and patriotism.

When field Mass was said on the hill for these men deprived for two years

WHERE THE POLISH CAME



FORCES IN ITALY FROM



of the comfort of religion, it was no ordinary Sunday rite but a source of inspiration that gave the army new hope of returning home to a better future. A parade followed, and as the General was wont to say:

"One in four had a shirt, one in ten—shoes, one in twenty—a coat. Yet they marched past like guardsmen."

Anxious About Their Families Not even the thought of their families scattered all over Russia and living in unendurable hardship could dampen the keen fighting spirit of this army of deportees. Their evenings, that soldiers usually spends in a canteen with a glass of beer, were filled by anxiety and longing for their absent wives, mothers and children.

Again we quote from the army paper "*W Marszu*" (On the March), No. 5, an open letter addressed by a soldier, Pvt. Jozef Zlotogorski, to his comrades:

"With all our hearts we long for our Free Country and our families, suffering cold and starvation in Germany and the East.

"Thanks to our Commanders' intervention we were freed from Soviet forced labor camps and called to arms; as soldiers we must not be pessimists; with stout hearts we must face the fight with our age-old enemy. We are a nation of believers. God is just and final victory will be on the side of justice. History repeats itself—there will be another Grunwald.

Meanwhile our families exiled to Russia's Eastern provinces suffer from cold and starvation. It is the duty of every Pole to bring immediate help to them. I am the first to offer 100 roubles for this purpose and appeal to all my comrades to follow my example."

Difficulties Multiply Late in the autumn of 1941 the previously perfect cooperation of the Soviet military authorities with the Polish Command began to deteriorate.

In a Note of the Embassy of the Polish Republic sent to the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs in October 1941, the Polish authorities pointed out that the formation of the Polish Army in the U.S.S.R. did not proceed in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the pact of July 30, 1941, or with the intentions of the two Governments concerned.

The Chief Command of the Polish Armed Forces in the U.S.S.R. has waited in vain for four weeks for a decision as to how and where the first Polish divisions are to be formed. As a result, Polish citizens who arrived daily in large numbers to enlist, had been placed in overcrowded camps with an inadequate number of tents, insufficient food and medical supplies. The situation thus created was harmful both to the army and to the common cause of the Allies.

Besides, local administrative officers frequently did not follow the orders issued in this connection by the Central Authorities, thus creating new difficulties. For instance, they refused to release all the Polish citizens, soldiers or reservists present in prisons and camps, keeping those in best physical condi-

tion, thus lowering the fighting value of the units already formed. In addition a great many Polish citizens drafted into the Red Army and incorporated in the so-called "Labor Battalions," had not as yet been transferred to the ranks of the Polish Army.

Lack of Instructors As far as training was concerned, the greatest handicap was the lack of officers. The Polish Staff based its plans on official statistics supplied by the Red Army authorities. According to these figures there were 10,000 Polish officers in Russian prisoner-of-war camps. However, only 400 presented themselves for service in the Polish Army. They all came from Griazowec, a small camp in the North of Russia. Not a single officer came from the remaining camps of Kozielsk, Starobielsk and Ostaszkw.

Asked as to the whereabouts of those officers, the Soviet Authorities answered that they had all been released. However, as time went by and the officers still failed to appear, the Polish Embassy intervened and started a search for them. So did General Anders. To all questions directed, the Russian authorities' answer remained the same: the officers had been released.

Then in April 1943, the German radio announced to the world that a mass cemetery of Polish officers had been discovered in the forests of Katyn near Smolensk by the Germans, who at the time occupied that part of Russia. In September 1943 when the Katyn district was retaken by the Red Army, the Soviet Government appointed a special commission to investigate the Katyn murders. The final report of this Commission stated that 11,000 Polish officers had been murdered in August 1941 by the Germans. Of course no one knew of the tragic lot of these war prisoners in the fall of 1941, when the Polish Army was being formed.

No Transportation for Polish Citizens On the other hand, lack of definite explanations about the fate of Polish officers, delayed the arrival of the Polish instructors from the Middle East and Great Britain. This naturally retarded the training of the new army for active service.

In November 1941, the Polish Embassy approached the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs with regard to obtaining transportation permits for Polish recruits.

In Russia it is possible to travel only upon receiving special permits from the military or administrative authorities. General Shcherbakov, the War Commissar of the Kasakstan Soviet Republic, issued an order under which all Polish citizens deported from the occupied Polish territories by the Soviet authorities and issued by them with passports stating they were of Ukrainian, White Ruthenian or Jewish nationality, were to be refused such transportation permits to the places where Polish military units were being formed. Gen. Shcherbakov also issued an order that such Polish citizens who complied with age and health requirements were to be drafted into the Red Army.

All these delays and difficulties in recruiting and training were blamed by the Polish authorities on war conditions, evacuation and the vast Russian distances

which interfered with communication between the highest Soviet authorities and their local branches. In their anxiety to establish harmonious cooperation with their new ally in their struggle against the Germans, the Poles tried to make every excuse for these shortcomings.

**Gen. Sikorski's
Visit in Moscow**

Gen. Wladyslaw Sikorski, Polish Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief, arrived in Moscow and Kuibyshev early in December 1941. His brief stay in Russia culminated in a declaration of friendship and cooperation signed on December 4, 1941, by General Sikorski and Premier Stalin.

The declaration fully confirmed the provisions of the military agreement and provided that both countries would give each other full military assistance in their action against the German invader.

Prime Minister Sikorski and General Anders had a long conference with Premier Stalin on the subject of military co-operation. General Sikorski's chief interest was to obtain tolerable living conditions and training for the Polish divisions in Russia. He emphasized the necessity of regular and adequate supplies of food, arms, uniforms, equipment and means of communication. He



Gen. W. Sikorski, late Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces, is greeted in Moscow in 1941 by: (from the left) People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Mr. V. Molotov, a Soviet General, Polish Ambassador Prof. S. Kot and Gen. W. Anders, Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army in Russia.

pointed out that lack of soap caused spread of typhoid fever, lack of vegetables caused diseases of vitamin deficiency. Premier Stalin was most sympathetic with the Polish viewpoint and rebuked General Panfilov, Assistant to the Soviet Chief of Staff, who promised to send out the necessary instructions.

"Why are not the Poles given sufficient rations?" asked Stalin, adding, "Are they to feed themselves on your instructions?"*

Thus the matter of supplies for the Polish Army was settled at least in the highest sphere. In addition, Premier Stalin, knowing how bad climatic conditions were in Central Russia, consented to transfer Polish Army headquarters to the South, near Tashkent.

But at the very time that General Sikorski had succeeded in settling this matter of material supplies, new difficulties arose of wider and more fundamental import.

Russia Claims Polish Citizens On December 1, 1941, a Note from the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs informed the Polish Embassy that in future Polish citizens of Jewish, Ukrainian, Lithuanian and White Ruthenian nationality deported to Russia, would be considered as citizens of the U.S.S.R.

This unilateral decision, contrary to all principles of international law and to the Polish-Soviet agreement of July 30, 1941, could not be accepted by the Polish Government. But there was no alternative for the Poles in the U.S.S.R. Soviet members of the draft boards composed of both Polish and Soviet representatives, refused to induct in the Polish Army any Polish citizens whose nationality, religion or origin excluded them from the Polish ethnographic group. Frequently a Pole of Jewish religion would declare his nationality as Polish, and yet be crossed off the list by the Soviet delegates. Neither pleadings nor tears could change the attitude of the Soviet members.

Transfer of Polish Army to South Meanwhile, Headquarters of the Polish Army on the territory of U.S.S.R. were transferred South to Yangi-Yul (approximately 20 miles south of Tashkent in the Soviet Republic of Uzbek). There the climate was much warmer, in summer even too warm. It was desperately hot during the day and penetratingly cold at night. The climate resembled that of the North Africa desert.

Around the camp at Yangi-Yul gathered not only soldiers, but also women, old men and children, usually relatives of the soldiers. They were going South, trying to escape the northern cold and living on the remnants of soldiers' meals.

May we quote here another letter in "*Polska Walczaca*" (Fighting Poland) of May 16, 1942:

* See *Russia and Postwar Europe* by David J. Dallin, p. 199.

"Of their own free will our soldiers have decided to give up their food rations once a week to help feed the civilian population. Saturday is the day when we draw no bread, kasha or sugar—all this goes to the old people, women and children, who have no other means of support. The army must save food for that day. When the army moves on without taking these people along—in a month or two or perhaps three, there will be many new crosses added behind the camp fence.

"It is terribly hard to buy anything. Though both officers and men received their pay, it does them no good. There's nothing to be bought for the money. On the open market a pound of meat costs only 300 roubles and a lieutenant's pay is 1,000 roubles monthly—at that meat is non-existent.

"The physical condition, especially of the soldiers, has greatly improved. As far as officers are concerned, the majority are still unfit for service. Just as an eloquent instance, out of 1,020 mostly reserve officers assembled in one of our camps, sixty-three died in the first month."

Goal: 123,000 Men in the Army During General Sikorski's stay in Moscow a matter of the utmost importance was settled. Both Commanders-in-Chief agreed definitely on the number of troops to be recruited in Russia for the Polish Army:

96,000 men (6 divisions plus replacements) to remain in Russia, including a certain number of units of the Polish Women's Auxiliary Corps.

25,000 men to be evacuated to the Middle East.

2,000 sailors and airmen for replacement of Polish units in England (to be transferred there).

Thus the first stage of recruiting in Russia was to include 123,000 Poles.

In spite of obstacles raised by the Soviet authorities as regards nationalities, recruiting to the Polish army went ahead. Spring was expected to make it easier for men to rejoin as the great distances in Russia sometimes took several months, and there was a prospect of a large flow of volunteers.

No Food for Polish Troops Then quite suddenly on March 18, 1942, General Anders was telegraphically summoned to Moscow by Premier Stalin. There he was informed by the Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet army that the Soviet authorities only had limited food supplies and had therefore decided to reduce the number of men in the Polish Army in the U.S.S.R. to 44,000 (3 divisions and 1 replacement regiment). It was suggested that the remainder of enlisted men (the Polish army had at that moment more than 70,000 men) were to be distributed in nearby *kolchoz* to work on farms.

General Anders opposed firmly this sudden decision. As, however, his argu-

ments failed to change Premier Stalin's attitude, a plan was evolved to save the men the Soviet Government was unable to feed—by evacuating them from Russia. The most suitable country was Iran, then already under Allied military command. It was the only way to secure these thousands of soldiers for the military effort of Poland and of the United Nations.

Premier Stalin's decision was a painful blow to Polish plans. The transfer of this number of soldiers meant not only breaking up a large military body coming into being in Russia, but automatically stopped any further recruiting there. But the Soviet authorities, despite their agreement with General Sikorski, would not budge from their stand of 44,000 rations for the Polish Army.

At the beginning of April 1942, 30,000 Polish soldiers were transferred to Iran where they were fed and cared for by their Western Allies.

The Polish Government's attitude was that this total war required the concentration of all efforts on assembling the largest possible number of soldiers. Consequently, the Polish Government took appropriate diplomatic steps and the Polish Army Command in its conversations sought to obtain the cooperation of the Soviet authorities in carrying out a complete mobilization of all Polish citizens living in Russia. They thought that the best solution was to leave the bulk of the Army in Russia and make it a strong, independent operational body.

The Polish Government went even so far as to offer to supply food for the soldiers over and above the 44,000 rations and proposed to place at the Soviet Government's disposal a million food rations stored in Teheran. All these efforts met with firm opposition from the Soviet Government, which stubbornly maintained that in view of the food shortage, all recruiting on Soviet territory must be discontinued as unnecessary and futile.

As the Soviet Government was not able to feed Polish Forces, they would have to be transferred under the protection of the Western Allies to some country where food and arms were available.

In July, 1942, the Soviet authorities closed the supply centers of the Polish Army and forbade further recruiting. In reply to this drastic move, the Polish Government was forced to declare in August of the same year that the decision reducing the ranks of the Polish army, the order to discontinue recruiting and the enlistment of volunteers, which had already been restricted by the fact that Polish citizens were forbidden to leave their temporary domiciles and were denied transportation permits, showed that the Government of the U.S.S.R. was willing neither to increase the Polish army cadres on the territory of the U.S.S.R., nor to increase the ranks of Polish soldiers fighting in the Middle East.

At the end of August the rest of the Polish Army (another 40,000) was transferred to Iran together with 36,000 civilians, most of them families of soldiers evacuated to the Middle East.

But most of the families of these soldiers are still in Russia and all efforts to obtain their release have been fruitless. Uncertainty as to the fate of those dear and near to them in Russia does not promote the peace of mind and mental balance in the Polish army now fighting on the Italian front.

***Why the Poles
Did Not Fight
at Stalingrad***

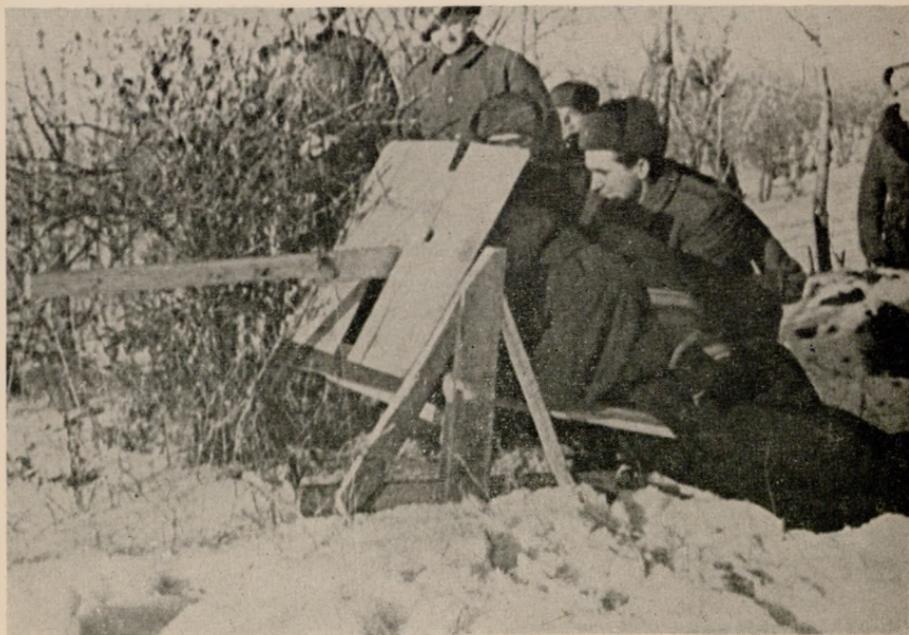
People unfamiliar with the story of the Polish Army in Russia frequently ask why no Polish soldiers took part in the battles on the Russo-German front, especially at Stalingrad. The answer is that the Polish army had neither arms nor equipment. Of the seven divisions being formed in the South of Russia only one, the Fifth Division was equipped with small arms. But even this division was lacking in things essential to modern warfare, namely heavy machine guns, anti-tank guns, anti-aircraft guns, light artillery and caissons, howitzers and heavy guns. It had received only 10% of its regular motor equipment, 56% of its kitchens, 60% of its one-horse carts, 80% of its two-horse carts, 85% of its horses and 45% of its ambulances.

Such was the condition of the best equipped division. Other divisions had received nothing or almost nothing, as they had only 200 rifles for guard duty, as armament for 13,000 men.

As equipment was so scarce, General Anders was compelled to distribute the equipment of the Fifth Division among all other divisions to speed up training.

***Persia, Iraq, Palestine
—Now Italian Front***

In September, 1942, General Sikorski changed the name of the "Polish Armed Forces in U.S.S.R." to "The Polish Army in the East." After a brief halt in Persia, part of this army was transferred to the Iraq-Persian border



For lack of arms, the training of the Polish Army in Russia was conducted with wooden models: aiming at an anti-tank gun.

and the rest, including the Carpathian Brigade that had already seen two years' service in the Middle East was placed in the vicinity of the oil wells and refineries in Mossul. Their presence in these parts had strategic significance as well as training uses, in view of Axis effort to sow confusion in Iraq and Iran.



Service for Jewish soldiers in the Middle East. First from left—Gen. Paszkiewicz, Commander of one of the Polish divisions.

It took almost one year to restore this human material to health and physical fitness and to train it to the use of British arms and modern motorized equipment. In the fall of 1943, the Polish Army in the Middle East was moved to Palestine and Syria.

This was their last station before their appearance on the Italian front.



THE POLISH ARMY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

If the Polish army formed in Russia was an army of men rescued from durance vile, the army of the Middle East that had grown up in 1940 was so to speak one of men who had made good their escape.

When what was left of the Polish army fighting in the southern Poland was caught in the German pincers, a number of Polish troops avoided being taken prisoners by crossing the frontiers of Poland's neutral neighbors.

In Internment Camps There they were not looking for safety only. The Polish troops realized that the Polish campaign was only the beginning of a great conflict and that the war would last for a long time, and they meant to take part in it to settle their score with the foe.

Some 30,000 men crossed the Rumanian border and about the same number managed to slip into Hungary. The local authorities placed them in internment camps guarded by troops, with officers acting as camp commandants.

These protective measures dictated by international law proved inadequate. The barbed-wire enclosures were not escape-proof, the gates were too easy to get through and the guards never alert enough. The internees vanished mysteriously from the camps. It was not long before an efficient evacuation organization was supplying Poland with a new army, then in process of formation in France. The first to escape were airmen, tank corps troops, engineers and other specialists, then came soldiers of the other services. A Polish army of 100,000 men was soon ready in France and was added to by Poles living in France, an army that fought to the very last in the French campaign of 1940.

Formation of Carpathian Brigade in Syria A smaller contingent of men, but exceedingly valuable from the physical point of view, had been directed to Syria, where under General Weygand an army was being organized to threaten the Germans from the south. On April 2, 1940, General Sikorski, Polish Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief ordered the formation of a Carpathian Rifle Brigade under General Stanislaw Kopanski. The name of the brigade symbolized the hopes of the Poles to return home over the Carpathian Mountains.

The Carpathian Rifle Brigade was garrisoned at Homs, a French Foreign Legion base, deep in the Syrian Desert. The arms, equipment and uniforms were French but the command was Polish. Attached to the Brigade was a French liaison mission.

Volunteers from Occupied Poland The soldiers evacuated from Hungary and Rumania were joined by many volunteers escaping from Poland. Up to the time in 1941, when war in the Balkans cut off all communication between Poland and the Mediterranean, the Polish Under-

ground smuggled its most active and physically fit men over the border, through secret channels to the Polish forces in Syria. The flow of recruits was never very large but it was nevertheless substantial. But any man resourceful enough to evade the Gestapo and frontier guards, to brave the hazards of escape and make his way across countries sharply guarded by the Axis had ingenuity and high morale. In all the fighting in which Polish troops have participated since the fall of Poland, those soldiers have proved the backbone and mainstay of the units in which they serve.

C. L. Sulzberger, the well known correspondent of *The New York Times* who visited the Polish forces in Italy, wrote of them as follows on April 1, 1944:

"The Polish Corps now fighting the Germans in Italy is perhaps the biggest jailbreakers' club in history. Almost every man has a tale, like a Hollywood fantasy, of his adventures in reaching a recruiting center in allied territory. . . .

The escape stories are all remarkable. A short, round-headed general sitting at a brigade mess said: 'In 1939, just like all Poles, I fought the Germans and later escaped to France, where I commanded a division of grenadiers. I got to France across Hungary and Yugoslavia after escaping from a prison camp disguised as a priest. It suited me, I must say. When France collapsed I pretended to be a gardener in a convent and even sold onions to the Germans before escaping across Spain to Berlin and Warsaw.'

At this point a lieutenant-colonel added: 'There are many men in my unit who managed to escape to Hungary and were then recaptured and sent back. Some got to Rumania and were sent back before they finally managed to reach the Allies. In one battalion there is a man who was taken as a prisoner to Germany and got to Czechoslovakia after escaping. He was retaken and brought back to the Reich, then again escaped and bicycled to Italy. He walked 123 days to Yugoslavia and escaped through Greece to the Middle East. He didn't have a penny when he started.

'I was wounded in the throat,' the stocky, hoarse, little professional officer added, 'and I was in a Rumanian hospital after our defeat. With about 35 cents in my pocket I travelled from Bucharest to Zagreb, to Venice, Turin, Milan and France, getting jobs as a railway worker.'

Outside another regimental mess a 17-year-old guard said that at the age of 13 he had left his father and wandered south to join the army. A second lieutenant, whose brother is in a German prison camp, rode a donkey in a circus as one of his odd jobs on the way to freedom."

Polish Brigade Takes a Decision

Late in May, 1940, General Weygand had been appointed Commander-in-Chief of the French army and General Mittelhauser succeeded him as commander in Syria.

After the collapse of France and the signing of the armistice, General Mittelhauser wavered for a short time and finally decided to place his troops and the

entire mandated territory of Syria and the Lebanon under Marshal Petain. From then on the Polish army had no reason to remain in Syria. The country's masters had made a pact with the Germans, whom the Poles wanted to fight to the last.

Pursuant to instructions received from General Sikorski, General Kopanski, Commander of the Polish forces in Syria, asked the French command to make it possible for the Carpathian Brigade to proceed to the territory of the nearest belligerent ally, namely to British-controlled Palestine. General Mittelhauser, while raising no objection to the departure of the soldiers, definitely refused to permit them to take along any of the arms or equipment furnished by France.

On June 28, 1940, a dramatic conference took place between General Kopanski and General Mittelhauser. General Kopanski maintained that under the Polish-French agreement the arms and the equipment were the property of the Polish forces and said that the soldiers of the Carpathian Brigade would not surrender to arms they had travelled half across Europe to secure. The Vichy-commander thereupon threatened General Kopanski with internment.

"My person is of no consequence whatever," General Kopanski quietly replied. "The brigade has been issued with ammunition and should there be any opposition, will fight its way through to Palestine. I am anxious, however, at all costs to avoid bloodshed between Polish and the French troops, united by bonds of friendship."

Colonel Larminat, General Mittelhauser's chief of staff, when relating the conversation frankly admitted that "only one of the participants in the conversation behaved like a gentleman and I regret to say that it was not the Frenchman."

The threat of internment failed to achieve its purpose. Three days later the Carpathian Brigade under its own commander entered Palestine.

Polish Reinforcements for Defense of Suez The arrival of several thousands Polish troops constituted a welcome surprise for the British. Italy was already at war with Great Britain and in Libya Marshal Graziani was assembling what by standards of colonial warfare constituted a huge army for the conquest of Egypt and the Suez Canal. Only three British regiments were available for protecting the canal. That force was faced with the prospect of a fight against overwhelming odds. Any help at all was immensely precious and the arrival of the Polish brigade, with arms, equipment and motorized trucks constituted an unexpected gift from heaven.

The Carpathian Brigade was no ordinary brigade of infantry. From its inception it had been planned as a tactical unit, including all auxiliary arms, and capable of independent action. In addition to three battalions of infantry it had a regiment of motorized cavalry, a regiment of artillery, anti-aircraft batteries, scout detachments on carriers, engineers, service troops, medical and first-aid units, auxiliary services, etc.

Small wonder therefore that after an intensive training period of three months in Palestine, the Carpathian Brigade was shifted to Egypt where it occupied a position protecting the approaches to Alexandria, Great Britain's largest naval base in the Mediterranean which lies on a narrow strip of land protected on one side by the sea and on the other by great Mariout lakes. The Poles took up their positions on that strip of land and built a deep line of defense dotted with pill-boxes and tank traps.

General Wavell's successful offensive put an end to any direct menace to Egypt.

The German invasion of the Balkans in April, 1940, afforded another opportunity to the Poles to cross swords with the Germans, and that opportunity was taken full advantage of. No sooner, however, had the Polish brigade been embarked on the transports, the British army command came to the conclusion that the campaign in Greece had been lost and countermanded the order to sail.

In May, 1941, the brigade garrisoned Mersa-Matruh in Egypt. It was one of the key defenses on the road between Alexandria and the Egyptian border. Almost daily air-raids of the then powerful Axis airforce gave the brigade a foretaste of modern warfare.



Polish observation post at the old fortress of Mechili in Libya.

To Besieged Tobruk In mid-August, 1941, soon after the anniversary of the victory of the Vistula in 1920, the Brigade was loaded aboard fast destroyers and sent to sea under sealed orders. Only from markings on cases of food and ammunition did the soldiers learn that their destination was the besieged fortress of Tobruk.

Tobruk's strategic importance lay in the fact that it commanded thirty miles of the only road connecting enemy arteries of communication. With the Italian-German forces in Sollum on the Egyptian border, an Allied army holding Tobruk threatened their rear. That Allied army came to Tobruk as the result of General Wavell's retreat. The main body of Wavell's army went in an easterly direction but an Australian division, exhausted by the heavy fighting, took possession of Tobruk and decided to defend it to the death. At first the British command had little hope of being able to hold that isolated post but as the attacks were successfully beaten off, the British General Staff decided that the unexpected situation at Tobruk offered new possibilities and that this blocking of the only road from Tripolitania to Egypt, might prove to be of great value to Allied strategy.

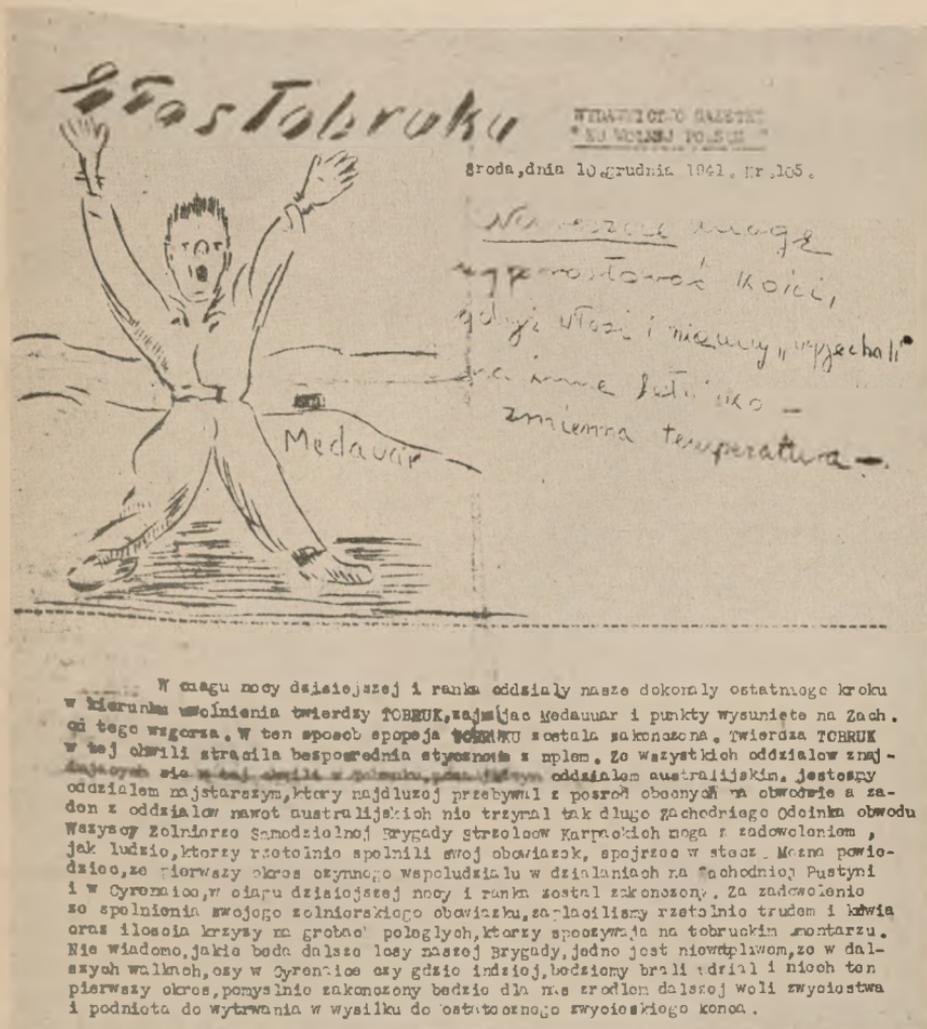
Eye-witness Account of Tobruk Defense A Polish soldier who took part in the defense of Tobruk describes the conditions there:

"The defenders were hard pressed as all supplies had to come in by sea under heavy fire of enemy artillery and dive bombers. Any day with less than five air raids was counted uneventful and any mile of the front on which 500 artillery shells did not fall in any twenty-four hours was considered a rest sector.

"Life in besieged Tobruk was an experience to remember. The soldiers had to creep all day long through shallow trenches over a layer of sand, there was almost complete lack of drinking water, a fierce heat and a state of constant alert in expectation of sudden attack. In some sectors the enemy was only 300 yards from our lines. In the evening Italian songs, mandolins and conversation would be plainly heard. The defenders of Tobruk knew that the trenches they were holding constituted their first and last line of defense, that from Tobruk was no retreat and in the event of a decisive engagement it was death or victory. The enemy besieging Tobruk was three to four times as numerous and his tank force nine times greater than ours.

"Matters were not improved when the steady diet of canned food caused an epidemic of jaundice.

"Small wonder then that the Australian commander of Tobruk, General Leslie Morshead, asked the British General Staff to replace his worn-out garrison with new troops. This operation, so difficult that it taxed the resources of the British Mediterranean fleet, was successfully carried out with the Carpathian Brigade. At Tobruk the Australians greeted the Poles as saviors."



Polish paper *Głos Tobruku* ("The Voice of Tobruk"), which was published throughout the siege. The inscription on the right of the drawing: "Finally I can stretch my bones after ousting the Germans and Italians." On this very day, December 10, 1941, Tobruk was relieved.

The comradeship between Poles and Australians dating from the time of the siege of Tobruk has been maintained. Witness the following greeting sent to the Poles by General L. Morsehead on May 3, 1944, the Polish National Holiday:

"Cordial greetings to all our comrades of Tobruk. We retain the happiest recollections of our close association with them and unbounded admiration for their fighting qualities. It was indeed a privilege to serve with them. We wish them all good luck and complete success."

*Sand-fleas Almost as
Bad as Air Raids*

To return to the Polish soldier's report from Tobruk:

"The Poles, however, felt in their own element at Tobruk. Steeled as they were by the experience of the Polish campaign they were not impressed by air-raids and looked forward eagerly to sorties and patrol work. Any grumbling they did was because of sand-fleas, salt tea and cold food, carried up to the advance posts only once a day.

"After a month's stay on the southern sector, the Carpathian Brigade was shifted to the dangerous western sector where the situation was precarious in the extreme because the last German attack had pushed the Australians out of their pill-boxes and forced them to withdraw to the shallow, make-shift trenches. Detachments in this sector were changed every two weeks because close proximity to the enemy, the exposed position and the ceaseless enemy fire wore out the men in a very short time. Polish forces defended this sector for seventy days, until the fortress was finally relieved.

"During that time the Poles made a number of offensive sorties, several of which won high praise from the commander of the fortress, and won mention in dispatches of the British Eighth Army. Among these exploits may be mentioned the setting on fire of an observation tower in the rear of the enemy's position. On another occasion a Polish infantry officer in disguise remained for 48 hours among enemy troops gathering valuable military intelligence."

*General Sikorski
in Tobruk*

In mid-November, 1941, General Sikorski, the Polish Commander-in-Chief, while en route from London to Moscow paid a visit to the besieged fortress of Tobruk. He inspected the front line and pinned "Crosses of Valor" on Polish soldiers who, while on patrol the day before, had taken seven prisoners.

When bestowing the decorations, General Sikorski spoke as follows:



Gen. Sikorski and Gen. S. Kopanski, Commander of the Carpathian Brigade, in Tobruk's second line trenches.

"The eyes of embattled democracy are now directed at Tobruk. It had gained for itself no mean renown and I am accordingly proud that for the last few weeks Polish soldiers have been fighting here, and that from the walls of this unconquered African fortress flies also the banner of the sovereign Republic."

Tobruk Free! Late in November, 1941, General Auchinleck launched the second Libyan offensive, one of the achievements of which was the relief of Tobruk.

After the battle of Sidi Rezegh in which the Polish anti-aircraft batteries covered themselves with glory, an attack by the British Eighth Army synchronized with a sortie of the Tobruk garrison, managed to pierce the ring of steel formed by three crack German divisions, and the siege of Tobruk was lifted on December 10, 1941.

Tobruk was the first fortress to withstand an enemy attack in this war.



Air raid in desert.



Tobruk cemetery. Here rest many Polish soldiers.

**Attack at
El Gazala**

The Carpathian Brigade's share in the Libyan campaign was not confined to its five months' defense of Tobruk. After the fortress was relieved, the Brigade was ordered to pursue the enemy and on December 15th and 16th dislodged the Axis forces from very strongly fortified positions at El Gazala, 25 miles west of Tobruk. Here Polish infantry charged the enemy across a flat terrain without cover against concentrated artillery, mortar and machine-gun fire. As the transport column carrying ammunition to the Polish artillery had lost its way in the trackless desert, the attack had to be made almost entirely without artillery support. Nevertheless it met with full success. The enemy's resistance was broken and the number of prisoners taken exceeded the number of the attacking forces. The Poles seized large stocks of German and Italian supplies. This Polish victory contributed considerably to making possible the offensive against Benghazi, the capital of Cyrenaica.

The Italian colonel commanding the sector in question, a veteran of the first World War, admitted that in all his military career he had never witnessed such a gallant and spirited attack.

A short rest period in Cyrenaica was interrupted by the retreat of the British Eighth Army from El Agheila. The Carpathian Brigade was again pressed into service as a rear guard. As soon as another front was set up at El Gazala in



Poles in Italian village in Libya.

March, 1942, the Carpathian Brigade was shifted to Palestine to be reorganized as a Division with troops evacuated from Russia.

**British Praise
Carpathian Brigade**

General Ritchie, commander of the British Eighth Army, in a letter addressed to General Kopanski wrote the following message of farewell to the Polish troops on their departure from Libya:

"Your tireless skillful and energetic work in holding the Tobruk perimeter was of inestimable value both during the siege and in the subsequent battle of El Hamed.

"Again in the role assigned to you in the Gazala action you achieved success by combining relentless pressure on the enemy and inflexible will to defeat him in battle. Since then you have shown the same thoroughness and professional skill in all that you have undertaken."



Poles launch the attack at El Gazala.

**Carpathian
Brigade's Record**

During the entire campaign the Germans took only 14 Polish prisoners, while the Carpathian Brigade took more than 1,800 German and Italian prisoners. This may serve to illustrate the stubbornness with which the Poles fought in Libya.

Thirty-two officers and soldiers received the "Virtuti Militari" (highest Polish military decoration), of these ten were awarded posthumously, and 730 "Crosses of Valor" were distributed.

On May 3, 1942, the Polish National Holiday, the Carpathian Rifle Brigade, became the Carpathian Division and was incorporated in the Polish Army in the East, whose fortunes it has since been sharing.

* * *

This short description of the Polish Army in the East seeks to give a true picture of the adventures of the men who are fighting side by side with American and British troops in Italy. In the operations against the common foe in which they may soon be engaged, may the best of luck attend them.

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POLAND FIGHTS ON

The Second Polish Corps, now in action in Italy, whose story is told in this issue of *Polish Facts and Figures*, is only a part of the Polish forces, fighting in the ranks of the United Nations.

It belongs to the Polish Army in the East, stationed "somewhere in the Levant."

Then, "somewhere in Great Britain" is another Polish Army, composed of an Army Corps (including an Armored Division) and waiting with the American and British forces for the signal to invade the Continent.

In Great Britain also is the bulk of the Polish Air Force, some 12,000 strong and composed of 14 squadrons. It is larger than the combined air forces of France, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Belgium and Greece. The Polish Air Force takes part daily in bombing raids over Germany and France, in pursuit combats, and in sea patrol duties with the Coastal Command.

In Italy the pick of the Polish fighter planes are assigned to the Fifth and Eighth Armies.

The Polish Navy cooperates with the navies of the United Nations. The Polish ensign flies in the ports of the Atlantic, the Arctic, the Pacific, the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean.

In Russia, Polish troops, organized by the Soviet Government from deported Poles, are fighting side by side with the Red Army.

Last but not least, in occupied but unconquered Poland itself, the Polish Underground Army carries on an incessant struggle, on the very land where in 1939 the World War began. Poland's Underground Army is divided into Operational and Regular units, which are constantly fighting behind the eastern front, and never cease their sabotage activities. The size of this Army cannot now be revealed, but it is many times larger than the Polish Armies abroad.

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