

BATTLE OF WARSAW



INSTITUTE OF
NATIONAL
REMEMBRANCE

BATTLE OF WARSAW



“Battle of Warsaw” is a fast-paced wargame for two players, depicting the landmark events of August 1920 during the Polish-Bolshevik war. The Polish Army must face the Bolshevik armies attacking Warsaw. The Red Army player’s goal is to invade the capital. The Polish Army player’s goal is to block them and destroy the attacker’s armies.

Will Polish soldiers succeed? Can they defend Warsaw? If they fail, Bolshevik armies will continue west over “the corpse of white Poland”, and communism will spread across Europe...

Game components

- 1 Game board with a hexagonal grid
- 2 12 army unit tokens:
 - ◆ 6 pentagonal Red Army units
 - ◆ 6 round Polish Army units, including 1 “Obróńcy Warszawy” (Warsaw Defenders) unit

- 3 60 command cards:
 - ◆ 30 Red Army cards
 - ◆ 30 Polish Army cards
- 4 24 wooden command markers
- 5 6 two-sided attack markers
- 6 1 wooden time marker

	Good order unit	Dispersed unit
Units of the Red Army of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic		
Units of the Polish Armed Forces of the Second Polish Republic		



Units begin the game in good order, with their name in white letters face up. When a unit loses a combat, it becomes dispersed, and is turned to show its name in black letters.



If a dispersed unit loses a combat, it is eliminated and removed from the game. Dispersal and removal are both permanent.

A dispersed unit never becomes good order, and an eliminated unit never reenters play.

Warsaw Defenders

Both sides of this unit are the same. The Warsaw Defenders are a unique Polish unit which never moves or attacks. It represents hastily organized volunteer troops defending the capital.



The Warsaw Defenders are immediately eliminated and removed from play after losing a combat.



Order and attack markers are not limited by the physical supply; there should be enough, but in the rare case that they run out, players may improvise as needed with buttons, coins, toothpicks, etc.

Game preparation

- 1 Place the **board** in the center of the table. Choose which player will play which side. Orient the map with its west side near the Polish player and its east side near the Red player.
- 2 Place all **units** on the board in their starting positions. (Map spaces are marked to show the starting positions of units.)
- 3 Shuffle the two **command card decks** separately. Put the Polish deck on its designated place on the west side of the map, and the Red deck on its place on the east side.
 - ◆ The Polish player draws **7 cards** from the Polish deck.
 - ◆ The Red player draws **10 cards** from the Red deck.
 - ◆ **Note:** The cards in a player's hand (whether drawn during setup or during play) are called the player's **reserve**. Each player's reserve is concealed from their opponent.
- 4 Place **1 command marker** on each unit, except for the Warsaw Defenders. Place the remaining command markers near the board, where both players can easily reach them.
- 5 **The Red player takes 2 additional command markers** and places them on freely chosen Red units. One unit can receive both markers, or two different units can each receive one marker.
- 6 Put the **time marker** on the first day of the calendar (August 13).
- 7 Put the **Attack markers** near the board.

Goal of the game

Each player has a different goal in the game.

The Red player's goal is to invade Warsaw, which happens if any Red Army unit enters Warsaw (marked with a red border).

The Polish player's goal is to smash the attacker's units, forcing the Red troops to retreat before being reinforced by the Southwestern Front. To achieve

this, eliminate any 3 Red Army units, or disperse all Red Army units.

If neither player achieves their goal by the end of the fifth (final) round, then victory depends on whether a Red unit occupies Radzymin (northeast of Warsaw, marked with an orange border).

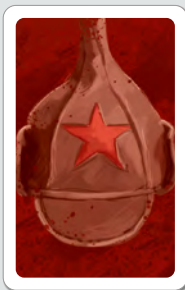
Command cards

Red Army cards

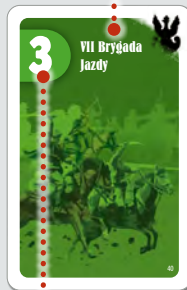
Polish Army cards



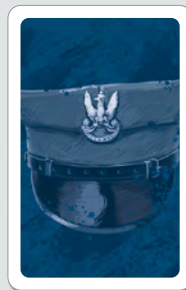
Front



Back



Front



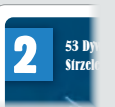
Back

Unit name

Combat strength (0, 1, 2, or 3)

Color and shape showing to which army the card belongs

A star or eagle means this card can be used to strengthen any of your units.



A card with **Akcja** (Action) has special rules, overriding the game's general rules.

Note: Only selected units appear in the game from among all those that took part in the battle. The units represented in the game were historically present, but players can create an alternate history, playing cards to assign their troops to formations other than happened in reality.

Sequence of play

The game lasts 5 rounds, each representing a day from August 13–17, 1920. The game continues until one player fulfills their goal, or until the end of the fifth round.

Each round has three phases, which happen in order:

1. **Operational phase**
2. **Combat phase**
3. **Cleanup phase** (which can be skipped in the fifth round)



Operational phase

Players alternate doing actions. Usually the Red player does the first action, then the Polish player. (Exceptions: see “Broken Cipher,” page 16, and “Warsaw Defenders,” page 23.)

Possible actions are:

- ◆ **Pillage** (Red player only)
- ◆ **Command a unit**
- ◆ **Play an **Akcja** (Action) card**

Pass

When a player is unable or unwilling to do an action, the player passes.

A player who passes can no longer do any more actions in this operational phase. The opponent can continue to do actions. When both players have passed, the operational phase ends.

Pillage

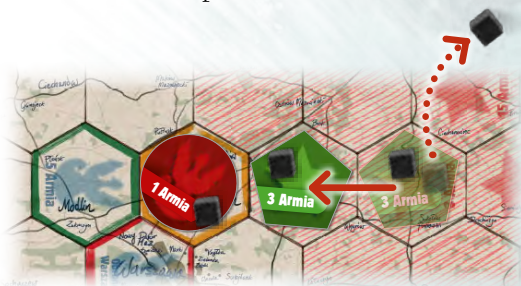
The Red player **discards 2 command markers from one Red unit and draws 1 card from the Red deck to his reserves.**

This action represents Bolsheviks plundering Polish territory.

Command a unit

The player selects one of their units that has at least one command marker and is not engaged in combat (i.e. it has no attack marker touching it). The unit can receive commands to march and attack:

- ◆ **March:** Discard 1 command token from the unit, then move it to an adjacent empty space. A unit cannot enter a space occupied by another unit.
- ◆ A unit can march more than once in a single action, discarding a command marker for each space it moves.



- ◆ **Attack:** Discard 1 command marker from the unit to attack an adjacent enemy unit. Put an attack marker between these two units to show that the active unit is attacking the other. Attacking ends a unit's actions for the round: it cannot march or attack again this round.



Marching and attacking can both happen in one action. Discard 1 command marker for each space marched, and then discard 1 more to attack an enemy adjacent to the unit's final position.

Any number of command markers may be discarded during one action, but from only one unit. Commanding a different unit is only possible during a different action.

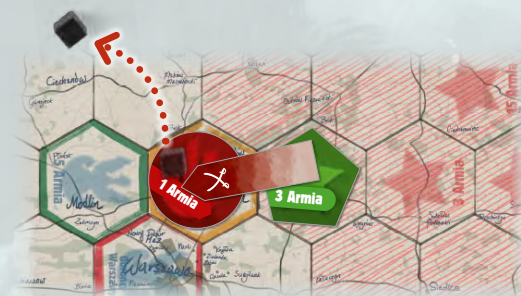
If a unit marches but does not attack, and still has command markers, then it may be activated again in a later action this round.

Attack markers

When one unit attacks another, place an attack marker between them.

The arrow must point from the attacker to the defender.

The unit being attacked immediately loses all its command markers.



Engaged units cannot be commanded this round. (They can only wait for their combat to be resolved in the Combat Phase.) But an engaged unit can be attacked by other enemy units.

When the Red player attacks, place the attack marker with the red side visible; when the Polish player attacks, show the blue side.

Play an Akcja (Action) card

1. The player plays an Akcja card from their hand, resolving its effect as described on the card.
2. Then the card is discarded next to the board.

Playing an Akcja card does not require Command markers.



A list of action cards appears on page 23.

Obrónci Warszawy

The Warsaw Defenders never receive command markers and so cannot be commanded. Their token has symbols reminding of this.

An example of the operational phase

During setup, the commander of the Red Army places 2 additional command markers: 1 marker on the 3rd Cavalry Corps (3 KawKor) ① and 1 marker on the 3rd Army ②.

The operational phase of the first round begins.

The Red player does the first action. He discards 2 command markers from the 3rd Army to command it to march 2 spaces toward Warsaw ③. The 3rd Army now has no command markers, so the action must end now, otherwise the 3rd Army could march further or attack.

Now the Polish player does the first Polish action. He discards 1 command marker from the 2nd Army to command it to attack the adjacent enemy 3rd Army ④. A blue attack marker is placed, pointing from the attacking Polish unit to the defending Red unit ⑤.



Now the Red player does a second action.

He discards 2 command markers from the 3 KawKor (Cavalry Corps to command it to march one space toward Radzymin (the orange space) and then attack the Polish 1st Army in Radzymin ⑥. A red attack marker is placed, pointing from the attacking Red unit to the defending Polish unit ⑦. The 1st Army had 1 command marker, but since it was attacked, it immediately loses its command marker ⑧.



Now the Polish player does a second action.

He discards the 5th Army's command marker to command it to march northeast ⑨.



Now the Red player does a third action. He plays an **Akcja** card from his reserves. The card is “Maneuver”. Following the card’s instructions, he places 2 command markers on the 16th Army 10, then immediately commands it to march west twice and then attack the Polish 1st Army 11. An attack marker is placed on both units, pointing from the attacking Red unit to the defending Polish unit. The Polish 1st Army now has two attacks against it.



Now the Polish player can do a third action. But the Polish player decides to pass, and thus will do no further actions this round.

The Red player may continue to do actions. He next discards one command marker to command the 4th Army to march southwest 12.



Since the Polish player has passed, the Red player can now do another action. But now the Red player decides to pass also. This completes the first round’s operational phase. Players proceed to the combat phase.

Combat phase

In the combat phase, all attacks are resolved.

Usually the Red player chooses which attack to resolve first. (Exceptions: see “Broken Cipher,” page 16, and “Warsaw Defenders,” page 23.) Any attack marker on the board (whether it is a Red attack or a Polish attack) can be selected to resolve.

After resolving an attack, remove its attack marker from the board.

Then the Polish player chooses the next attack to resolve (if any attack markers remain), then the Red player, and so on, alternating until there are no more attack markers on the board.

Attack resolution

1. **Select 4 cards:** Each player selects any 4 cards from their reserve. These cards are troops assigned to the player’s unit that is fighting in this attack.
 - ◆ **A player must select 4 cards.** If a player has fewer than 4 cards in their reserve, they must use all their cards.
 - ◆ **A player does NOT have to select cards that match the color of the fighting unit.** A player may select cards of a different color, e.g. to conserve matching cards for later use.

2. Both players hold their selected cards face down, spread in a fan.
3. **Draw 1 random card:** Each player draws one of the opponent’s face-down cards, but does not look at it. The drawn card goes back (unrevealed) into the opponent’s reserve. *This simulates the chaos of warfare: orders did not always reach troops in time.*



- ◆ The defender draws 1 of the attacker’s cards, and it returns to the attacker’s reserve.
- ◆ The attacker draws 1 of the defender’s cards, and it returns to the defender’s reserve.

4. **Reveal troops and remove mismatched troops:** Each player reveals his remaining troop cards.

- ◆ Each player removes their troops with a different color from their army and returns those non-matching cards to their reserve. It may happen that a player has no cards left fighting in this combat!
- ◆ White cards are special: they match every unit's color, and so they always remain when resolving combat. Players do not return white cards to their reserve.



- ◆ The Warsaw Defenders have no color - every card selected by the Polish player for the Warsaw Defenders fights to defend the capital.



5. **Compare combat strengths:** Add up each player's numbers from their remaining cards in the combat and compare the sums. (If a player has no cards, their sum is 0.) The unit with the highest total strength wins the combat.

- ◆ **Note: In addition to combat strength, some cards have additional rules that affect combat. Apply these cards' before adding up combat strengths.**
- ◆ The losing unit becomes dispersed: turn it over. If the losing unit was already dispersed, it is eliminated: remove it from the board.
- ◆ If the total strengths are equal, then both units become dispersed (or eliminated, if already dispersed).

- ◆ If the attacker wins, the defender retreats, and the attacker advances:
- ◆ Move the defending unit 1 space away from the attacker (so it is no longer adjacent to the attacker). If more than one destination is possible, the defending player chooses. **This retreating move does not cost a command token.** If there is no legal place to retreat (all surrounding places are occupied or past the edge of the board), then no retreat occurs: the defending unit stays where it is.
- ◆ If the defender did retreat, or it was eliminated, then the attacking unit immediately advances into the now-empty space where the defender was. **This**

advance is mandatory, but does not cost a command marker.

6. **Cleanup:**

- ◆ Discard all cards which fought in the battle. Each command card can be used only once during the game.
- ◆ Each player draws 1 card from their deck to their reserve. **Note: After a player's deck runs out, do NOT shuffle the discard pile. The player will not draw more cards.**

Note: When the defender wins, no retreat or advance occurs.

Remember that the Warsaw Defenders are immediately eliminated if they lose a combat.

Cleanup phase

1. Put 1 command marker onto every unit, except the Warsaw Defenders.
 - ◆ A unit can have any number of command markers. The more markers a unit has, the more actions it may do.
2. The Polish player draws 3 cards from their reserves.
3. The Red player draws 2 cards from their reserves.
4. Advance the **time marker** to the next day.

Note: After a player's deck runs out, do NOT shuffle their discard pile. The player will not draw more cards.

In the fifth round, skip the cleanup phase.



End of the game

The game ends immediately if one side fulfills its victory condition:

- ◆ **The Red player wins immediately if a Red unit enters Warsaw (marked with a red border).**



- ◆ The unit can be good order or dispersed.
- ◆ This can happen in the operational phase (as a result of the unit marching) or in the combat phase (after winning an attack against Warsaw and then advancing into Warsaw).
- ◆ Merely eliminating the Warsaw Defenders is not sufficient. A Red unit must still enter Warsaw.
- ◆ The Polish player wins immediately if **3 Red units are eliminated**, or if **all Red units on the map are dispersed**.

If neither of those immediate victories happens, then the game ends at the end of the 5th round. Now victory depends on whether a Red unit occupies **Radzymin** (marked with an orange border):



- ◆ If a Red unit is in Radzymin, the Red player wins.
- ◆ If a Polish unit is in Radzymin, or it is unoccupied, the Polish player wins.

Modlin (marked with a green border) is a set of fortifications guarding access to Warsaw from the north. It is not part of the victory conditions.

Eliminating the Warsaw Defenders

If the Warsaw Defenders become eliminated, but the Red player does not occupy Warsaw, then starting next round, the player order is changed! From now on, in the operational phase and in the combat phase, the **Polish** player acts first, then the Red player, alternating as usual.

Additional rules

During the first game, or if either player is inexperienced, you can play without the following rules.

Fortifications

Most terrain detail on the map (e.g. rivers and towns) do not affect the game.

But 3 specific spaces around Warsaw have a game effect: **Warsaw, Radzymin and Modlin** are all **fortified spaces**.



When a defending unit is in a fortified space, combat resolution is modified: after players select their 4 cards, the defender selects one of their 4 cards to reveal and set aside **1** before the attacker randomly draws 1 card from the remaining defending cards **2** (which returns to the defender's reserve as usual).

The revealed card cannot be selected by the opponent during the procedure of removing 1 card from the opponent's front units and putting it back into defender's reserve.



An example combat resolution with a fortified defending unit



The Red 16th Army attacks the Polish 1st Army, which is defending Radzymin. Both players select 4 cards from their reserves. The Polish player selects 2 red, 1 white and 1 yellow card to defend. Thanks to the Radzymin fortifications, the Polish player can reveal and set aside one of these four cards, to protect it from being drawn by the Red player. The Polish player reveals the strength 3 red card ①.



From the remaining three Polish cards, the Red player randomly draws one (it happens to be the red 2, but the Red player does not know this) and puts it back into the Polish reserve ②.



The Red player is luckier. Although he does not have the benefit of fortifications letting him protect one card, the Polish player randomly draws a blue card from the Red player's 4 cards. This blue card would not have helped the Reds anyway! The Polish player does not look at the drawn card, but puts it back into the Red reserve ③.



Players now reveal their remaining selected cards.

Polish strength: The yellow 2 card does not match the 1st Army's color, so it returns to the Polish reserve. The 1st Army's color is red, which matches the red 3 card and the white 1 card (since white matches everything). So the total Polish combat strength is $3 + 1 = 4$.



Red strength: One of the cards is "Doborowe oddziały" (Elite troops), which has a special combat effect to resolve first: each Red card with strength 1 is treated as 3! All three of the cards match the 16th Army's color (green), so they all remain and contribute their strength. The white Revolutionary Regiment has strength 1, but thanks to Elite Troops, its strength becomes 3! So the total Red combat strength is $3 + 2 + 3 = 8$.



Combat strength: $3 + 2 + 3 = 8$
* see: "Doborowe oddziały" (Elite troops)

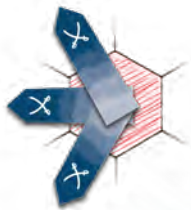
The Poles lose this combat. The Polish 1st Army becomes dispersed: it is flipped over. Since the attacker won, the defender must retreat away from the attacker, if possible. The only adjacent space which is empty is Modlin, so the 1st Army must retreat to Modlin ④. The attacking Red 16th Army advances into Radzymin ⑤.

All the cards used in the combat (the Polish 3 and 1, and the Red 3, 2, 1) go to the discard piles near the board. Then each player draws 1 new card from their deck to their reserve.



Flank attack

A **flank attack** is an attack on an unsecured wing of a unit. Some board spaces have red shading, and some do not; this red shading shows from where a given unit can make a flank attack. A given unit can make a flank attack only if it is on an appropriate space:



When a Polish unit **attacks from a space with red shading, and the direction of the attack is northwest, west, or southwest, the attack is a flank attack.**

When a Red unit **attacks from a space without red shading, and the direction of the attack is northeast, east, or southeast, the attack is a flank attack.**



When a unit makes a flank attack, combat resolution is modified: after players select their 4 cards, the attacker selects one of their 4 cards to reveal and set aside before the defender randomly draws 1 card from the remaining attacking cards (which returns to the attacker's reserve as usual).

Fortifications and flank attacks work similarly. Only a defender can use fortifications, and only an attacker can make a flank attack. In the case of a flank attack against a fortified defender, the defender reveals a card first.

Examples: Attack 1 is not a flank attack: it is a qualifying direction (southeast), but it is not made from a white space.



Attack 2 is a flank attack: the Polish unit is attacking to the west from a red space.

Attack 3 is also a flank attack: the Red unit is attacking to the southeast from a white space.

Attack 4 is a normal attack: the Red unit is attacking from a white space, but it is attacking to the west.

Attack 5 is also a normal attack: neither the color of the space nor the direction qualify.

Attack 6 is a flank attack: the Polish unit is attacking to the northwest from a red space.

Playing a match for points

After gaining experience with the basic game, players may enjoy playing a match for points. In this variant, **the players will play two games, switching sides, and the Red player scores points after each game. After the match of two games, the player with the most points wins.** There are no other rule changes.

After each game, regardless of who won and how, the Red player gains points as follows:

Red unit in Warsaw:	21 points
Red unit in Radzymin:	10 points
Red unit in Modlin:	7 points
Each Red unit in a space without red shading (other than Warsaw, Radzymin, Modlin):	4 points
Each Polish unit eliminated (including the Warsaw Defenders):	2 points

Moving attack markers

If one or both units in a declared attack move before their combat is resolved, then move and rotate their attack marker as needed to keep it touching both units, if they are still adjacent. This can happen from playing an “Assault” card, or due to a retreat when resolving a different attack against this defender.

If the two units are no longer adjacent, then remove the attack marker: their combat does not happen.

Example: Defending Radzymin, the Polish 1st Army is under attack by three different Red units. The Red player plays the “Szturm” (Assault) card as his action. This causes the defender to retreat one space, and an attacking unit advances into the defender’s space. The Reds decide to advance with their attacking 16th Army.



The only possible retreat space for the Polish 1st Army is to the northwest ①. So the Polish 1st Army moves there, and the Red 16th Army advances into Radzymin ②.



After the units are moved, the attack marker must be adjusted. The Red 16th Army is still adjacent to the Polish 1st Army, so that attack marker is shifted so it still touches them both. The Polish 1st Army’s new location is still adjacent to the attacking KawKor (3rd Cavalry Corps), so the cavalry’s attack marker is adjusted to touch them both.

But the Polish 1st Army is no longer adjacent to the Red 3rd Army, so the 3rd Army’s attack is canceled: that attack marker is removed ③.

Summary of cards

Action cards

These cards can be played during the operational phase to apply their effects.

13 Eskadra Myśliwska (13th Fighter Escadrille)

Akcja The Red player reveals 2 cards from their reserve, then discards 2 random cards from the remaining unexposed reserve cards.



Wsparcie artylerii (Artillery support)

Akcja Select a Red unit adjacent to a Polish unit. If the Red player does not discard from their reserve a card of the selected unit’s color (or white) with strength 2 or more, then the selected unit loses all its command markers and (if good order) becomes dispersed.



Zagłuszenie radiostacji (Radio jamming)

Akcja Move all command markers from one Red unit to another Red unit.



Złamany szyfr (Broken cipher)

Akcja Look at 4 random cards from the Red player’s reserve. In this round, you pick the first combat to resolve in the combat phase. In the next round, you go first in the operational phase.



Manewr (Maneuver)

Akcja Add 2 command markers to one of your units. You may immediately do actions (march, attack) with this unit.



Note: Armies are eliminated, if already dispersed!

★ Na Zachód! (Go west!)

Akcja Add 3 command markers to any combination of your units (e.g. 1 marker on each of three different units; or 2 on one unit and 1 on another; or 3 on one unit).



★ Szturm (Assault)

Akcja Select a Polish unit (not the Warsaw Defenders) currently marked by a Red attack marker. If possible, the Polish player must immediately retreat the Polish unit 1 space, and the attacking Red unit advances into its space. (If more than one red unit is attacking the Polish unit, choose one.)



Combat cards

These cards' effects happen when selected during combat resolution. The card's combat strength is also added as usual!

🐾 Grupa pościgowa (Pursuit group)

During an encircling maneuver, this card has combat strength 5.



🐾 Umocnienia polowe (Field fortifications)

Select one face-up card (of either player) in this battle. (You may choose "Field fortifications" itself.) Return the selected card to its owner's reserve.



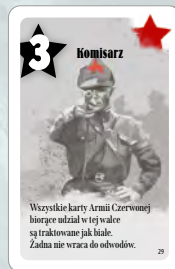
★ Doborowe oddziały (Elite troops)

In this battle, each Red card with combat strength 1 is treated as combat strength 3.



★ Komisarz (Commissar)

In this battle, all Red cards are treated as white: none return to the reserve.



★ Okruińska bitwa (Severe fighting)

First disperse each good order unit (of both players) in the battle, then resolve the battle as usual.

Note: Armies are eliminated, if already dispersed!



Marek Gałęzowski

A Great Debt

The Polish war with the Bolsheviks and the triumph near Warsaw

“The Republic, awakened to life, found itself in a seemingly overwhelming situation of human possibilities. While the whole world began to rest after the long storm, in the devastated Polish territory a new series of fires was igniting [...] in the still smoking embers, in the silenced factories and workshops, in the fields sown with grenades. One must fight for existence, fight for borders, remembering that, first of all, their progress will depend on us, that the diplomats’ pen likes to trace the lines drawn with the victorious bayonet.”

Thus was the apt assessment of Gen. Kazimierz Sosnkowski, one of the closest associates of Marshal Józef Piłsudski, and his companion from the beginning in the work to gain Independence. The longest and hardest war that the revived Polish state had to fight

for its borders was with Bolshevik Russia, which is for good reason now called the war for everything. It began in the first days of 1919, when the Bolshevik army occupied Vilnius, and it climaxed in the spring and summer of the following year.

For several months, Poland had been enjoying its independence, regained after 123 years, and the Bolshevik invasion threatened not only the loss of some territory or even a new subjugation, as when Poland was partitioned. If the Bolsheviks conquered Poland, it would mean the destruction of Polish culture and the extermination of Polish elites. Ruling Russia since autumn 1917, the Bolsheviks with Vladimir I. Lenin, did not hide their intentions, and in occupied territories they dealt ruthlessly with those whom they considered opponents of their power. Their victims included not only representatives of



From the collection of Sikorski family

The Cross of Valor was established on August 11, 1920, to reward acts of courage in battle. (This one's three additional bars across the ribbon show its holder received the award 4 times.)

the Polish intelligentsia, landowners, and Catholic clergy, but all those who expressed any attachment to Poland and its heritage. The Bolsheviks did not conceal that murder was a method of their policy. “They killed to break the will of the survivors,” wrote the great Russian historian Mikhail Heller. And Stefan Żeromski, describing the essence of Bolshevism and its attitude to Poland, said “You have broken the old yoke, but imposed one a thousand times worse and heavier on people.”

Thus, victory in the war with Soviet Russia saved more than Poland’s independent existence. The Holy Father John Paul II was born in the year of this triumph, on August 15, 1920, when the Polish Army began its victorious offensive from the Wieprz River; he knew the value of this victory and considered it part of the personal history of every Pole. During a pilgrimage to his fatherland in June 1999, at the cemetery of soldiers killed in Radzymin, he said:

“You know that I was born in 1920, in May, at the time when the Bolsheviks were advancing on Warsaw. And that is why I have a great debt from birth to those at that time who took up the fight against the invader and won, paying with their lives. Here, in this cemetery, their mortal remains rest. I come here with great gratitude, to repay the debt I owe them.”

I.

The first operations against Poland failed quickly for the Bolsheviks. In mid-April 1919, the Polish Army, under the personal command of the Chief of State Józef Piłsudski, launched an offensive which successfully regained Vilnius and displaced the Bolsheviks from the Vilnius and Novgorod regions. In August, Minsk and Babruysk were seized, and tanks were used in the conflict for the first time. Operations in Polesia and Volhynia were also successful. In the summer of 1919, Bolsheviks were driven back at the Daugava line, at the Sluch river, and at the Southern Bug River, and also at the Berezina River, famous for battles that Poles fought for independence in the autumn of 1812 alongside the French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte against the forces of Tsarist Russia. Gen. Stanisław Szeptycki, commander of the Lithuanian-Belarusian front, addressed his troops with heartfelt words of gratitude: “Soldiers! In the name of our country’s service, I thank you not only for the victories won, but above all for your endurance, more glorious and difficult than the victories, for your initiative and bold strikes, the best guarantee of victory.”

Pushing the Red Army back east brought a break in hostilities. But it did not last long. The Bolsheviks, using terror on a massive scale, annihilated all opposition in Russia during the Civil War, destroying the opposition (collectively called the Whites,



The National Digital Archives (NAC)

Commander-in-Chief Józef Piłsudski in conversation with General Edward Śmigły-Rydz.

spanning political groups from monarchists to leftist parties, as well as military units commanded by former tsarist army generals). The next goal of the communist authorities was to subordinate the peoples formerly subordinate to the tsarist empire, who had gained the opportunity after World War I to build states separate from Russia. In the longer term, the Bolsheviks hoped to conquer Europe, and eventually spread communist revolution to other continents. They did not hide these intentions.

Lenin and his party declared the right to self-determination for nations living within Russia; this was a lie typical of their political practice. In this case, they wanted to gain support, or at least neu-

Propaganda poster issued after the liberation of Płock. The Red Army attacked Płock on August 18, 1920. Civilians, including women and children, took part in the city's defense. Barricades were built in the streets. At night reinforcements arrived, and after many hours of heavy fighting, the Bolsheviks were forced to retreat.

BOLSZEWICY IDĄ!

Jak w dawnej Polsce okrzyk: „Tatarzy idą!” budził grozę i był hasłem do gromadnej obrony, tak dzisiaj najazd bolszewików wywołał potężny odruch narodowego gniewu. I jak ongi Tatarów, tak dzisiaj rozgromiliśmy bolszewickie hordy!

Z CZEM SZLI BOLSZEWICY?



Bolszewicy głoszą dla zwabienia właścicieli: „Wszystka ziemia chłopom”. Ale gdy chwycycia władzę, żyjącej pięścią w oczy: „Wszystkie plony sowietom, a toliś, chamie, pracować za fant suchara! Od wszelkiej zaś własności warał Ziemia jest własnością państwa!”



Bolszewicy głoszą: Wyrzucić „burżujów” z mieszkań, a dać je biedności! Ale z kolei pan komisarz wyrzuca biedną „swolocz” — i sama się rozsada w burżujkiem mieszkaniu.



Bolszewicy głoszą: „Fabryki robotnikom”, ale „upadstwowują” t.j. zagnorują! Nietylko fabryki, lecz wszelkie przemysła, amuzające robotników pod groźą śmierci do 12-to godzinnej złe płatnoji — pracy dla sowielców. Strajkować to bolszewicy nie wolno!



Bolszewicy głoszą niby: „Kobiectie należy się pełnia praw” — ale zarazem dekretują: Kobieta jest własnością sowdepil, i każdy komunista i bolszewik czerwony mają prawo do każdej kobiety!



Bolszewicy głoszą szumnie: „Swoboda masom” — a gdy je opanują, oddają je ppł bat czorowyzwyczaj z rozkazem: Karac śmiercią za najmniejszą próbę nieposłuszeństwa!



Bolszewicy obiecują solennie dobrobyt: ale gdy władza przejdzie w ręce sowielców, beznadziejna nadzieja — głód i rozpacz sprawia, że robotnicy popełniają masowe samobójstwa w położeniu bez wyjścia!

Nakł. Biura Propag. Wznow. przy Przerz. Rady Ministrów. 1920. W. 20. 10. 1920.

Znak. Graf. Kozłowski w Warszawie.

trality, from non-Russian nationalities during the Civil War. In reality, they respected no rules in their relations with non-Bolshevik states and groups, and they advanced their political plans using falsehood and deception. This continued after they won the Russian Civil War. They immediately conquered areas belonging to those nations, to whom they had recently promised the right to independent existence. As early as spring 1918, a few months after seizing power, a member of the Bolshevik government, Joseph Stalin, stated that “Soviet power recognizes autonomy only when it is under Moscow’s direction and control. Nations do not gain autonomy, but rather the working class and working peasantry, and only when they support the Soviet authorities.”

At the beginning of 1920, Poland also became a Bolshevik target. Lenin decided that it was necessary to destroy the Polish state, impose communist rulers on Poles, and then direct further expansion to southern and western Europe. Boris Shaposhnikov, the senior commander of the Red Army, developed a war plan, which aimed to attack Poland in April 1920, in the direction of today’s Belarus, continuing the offensive to the west, and completely conquering the Republic. He justified the aggression by the fact that the current military and political situation clearly placed Poland among the open enemies of the Bolshevik state. This belief was shared by other Bolshevik army commanders, and one of them crudely declared that before political talks with Poles began, “we should smack them in the face” The Red Army command accepted Shaposhnikov’s plan on March 10, 1920, and the Bolshevik leaders rejected peace talks proposed by Polish diplomats.



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A Bolshevik propaganda poster from 1920 with anti-Polish caption “A pig trained in Paris”. The pig’s hat is labeled “Lordly Poland”, and the pig’s hoof holds a paper mentioning the “Borders from 1772”. The man’s back is labeled “France”.



Polish Army Museum

Renault FT-17 tank equipped by the Polish army during the fighting in Ukraine in 1920.

The Polish Chief of State, Józef Piłsudski, was right that “no matter what its government may be, Russia is fiercely imperialist. This is even a fundamental trait of its political character. We had tsarist imperialism; today we see red imperialism.” In response to the Bolshevik threats, he stated that Poland would never make peace “under threat. Either true peace, accepted voluntarily, or war. I know that the Bolsheviks are concentrating strong forces on our front. They are mistaken, thinking that they can intimidate us this way and can make some kind of ultimatum. Our soldiers are ready. I trust them completely.”



Wikimedia Commons / Public domain

Symon Petliura

In his eastern policy, Piłsudski sought to ensure lasting security for the Polish state. To this end, he formulated a federal concept. It defined a separation of Poland from Russia, and gave the inhabitants of today’s Belarus and Ukraine the right to self-determination. “Poland goes everywhere with the slogan of freedom; Poland does not go with the desire to oppress under a brutal soldier’s boot, nor with the desire to deprive anyone of their rights,” Piłsudski said in Minsk after it was liberated from Bolshevik hands.

Irregular fighting with the Red Army resumed in early 1920. In the first days of January, Poles captured Daugavpils, then handed this city over to Latvia. A major success against the aggressive advances of Bolshevik Russia, which no longer concealed its significant concentration of military forces on the northeastern front, was the capture of Mazyr and Kalinkavichy on March 5, 1920. These were important transportation hubs: Mazyr had bridge connections, and Kalinkavichy had railway lines. Thus the Red Army was left unable to rapidly shift its forces, either north or south.

However, Piłsudski was aware of the temporary delaying nature of these successes, which could not halt the invasion. Therefore, he decided to provide military assistance to anti-Bolshevik fighters in Ukraine, and in April 1920 he signed an



CAW WBH

Bolshevik banners captured by Polish soldiers in Rechytsa, Belarus, on May 10, 1920.

agreement with the Ukrainian leader Symon Petliura. In words addressed to Ukrainians, Piłsudski expressed his faith “that the Ukrainian people will exert all efforts to fight together with the Polish Republic for freedom, and to ensure happiness and prosperity for their fertile fatherland, which they will enjoy after returning to work and peace.” That same month, the Polish army, supported by Petliura’s small forces, began an offensive in Ukraine and took Kiev on May 7.

This success caused widespread enthusiasm, even among opponents of Piłsudski and his eastern policy. Wojciech Trąpczyński, Marshal of the Sejm and a leader of the National Democracy movement, was not a supporter of the Chief of State, but congratulated him by telegram and thanked him for “the bloody and heroic effort that brings [Poland] closer to peace and lays new foundations for the power of the Polish state.” On May 18, 1920, Marshal Piłsudski returned from the Ukrainian front to Warsaw, and



Józef Piłsudski—conqueror of the Bolsheviks. Poster by Władysław Skoczylas published in 1920.

Trąpczyński gave a welcoming speech, comparing Piłsudski's deed to the triumph of Bolesław I the Brave in 1018 at Kiev. After the mass in St. Alexander's Church at Three Crosses Square and the singing of Te Deum, students of the University of Warsaw unhitched the carriage horses and themselves pulled the Chief of State to the Belvedere Palace.

II.

However, the Red Army was not defeated, and on May 26, 1920, it launched an offensive, and its momentum, caused primarily by Semyon Budyonny's Cavalry Army penetrating behind the Polish Army, surprised the Polish command. The Cavalry Army's first strike was stopped, but on June 5, 1920, it broke Polish positions near Samhorodok; two days later, after taking Zhytomyr and Berdychiv, it advanced. In this situation, the Polish troops left Kiev.

“Much more mobile than infantry, and able to easily concentrate, [the Cavalry Army] was able to smash the front in the most weakly manned locations, and then withdraw with impunity, destroying communication and transportation lines, disrupting staff operations, destroying smaller units, cutting off lines of retreat, and preventing the construction of a continuous defensive line. The Cavalry Army maneuvered efficiently due to its staff led by officers of the tsarist army. It was effectively out of the infantry's grasp, and due to its numbers too strong to be opposed by brigades or divisions of Polish cavalry.” (P. Wiczorkiewicz, “1920 – A Difficult Victory”, in *Niepodległość*, ed. M. Gałęzowski, J. Ruman, Warsaw 2010).

In the following weeks, the Polish Army made several attempts to halt and destroy the Cavalry Army.

The first was east of Novohrad-Volynskiy, where troops commanded by General Jan Romer fiercely struck the Cavalry Army. The general wanted to pursue them “for total destruction”, but he was ordered to stop the pursuit. *“Instead of perhaps destroying Budyonny, the ‘bane of Poland’, we only damaged him, chased him 28 kilometers, inflicted heavy losses, and forced them into a ‘fleeing panic’ towards Zhytomyr,”* wrote this excellent commander. Later, in the battles of Rivne and Brody, attempts were made to engage and destroy the Cavalry Army, but with only partial success. Budyonny's March, which paralyzed the Polish Army's rear, was marked by acts of exceptional cruelty on captured Polish soldiers and civilians.

Soon, the Bolsheviks also broke the Polish defense in the northeast. True, their first actions were halted, and on June 8, 1920, Poles took a line along the Auta and Berezina rivers. But less than a month later, on July 4, a powerful blow from the western front of the Red Army, commanded by Mikhail Tukhachevsky, forced Polish Army troops to withdraw to the Niemen River. In an order to Red Army soldiers, Tukhachevsky summarized the purpose of the march to the west:

„Red soldiers! The armies of the Red Banner and the decaying white eagle are engaged in a deadly clash. Fill your hearts with anger and ruthlessness. Drown the criminal government of Piłsudski in the blood of the defeated Polish army. [...] In the west, the fate of the world revolution is being decided. The path to worldwide fire leads through the corpse of white



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Bolsheviks. The banner reads “Death to the bourgeoisie and their helpers. Long live the Red Terror.” Mass terror was used since the beginning of the Bolshevik rule in Russia and consumed tens of thousands of victims in the first years of their rule.

Poland. On bayonets, we will bring happiness and peace to the working people.” (Quoted in translation from A. Nowak, *Ojczyzna ocalona. Wojna polsko-sowiecka 1919–1920*, Krakow 2010.)

The Bolsheviks did not intend to ask if anyone wanted their rule. They wanted to impose it by force, and they called it “liberation”. Depriving words of their original meaning became a typical feature of communism.

On the Polish side, probably only a few people knew that, as a child, Tukhachevsky was passionate



From the collection of Sikorski family

Soldiers of the 8th Legions' Infantry Regiment on the front, around 1919–1920.

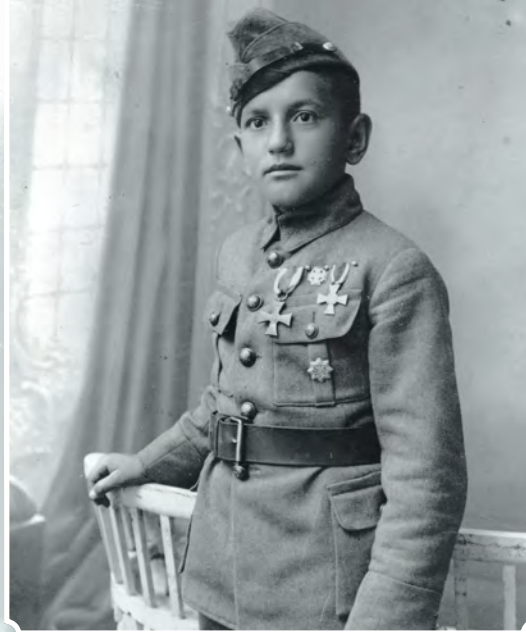
about Russia's nineteenth-century wars with Napoleon's France and Turkey, and that he followed the footsteps of his great-grandfather, tsarist colonel Alexander Tukhachevsky. Colonel Tukhachevsky participated in the suppression of the November Uprising, and on September 6, 1831, he led at the head of his regiment in Russian army's assault on Warsaw. It happened that he attacked a redoubt at Wola, led by Captain Konstanty Juliusz Ordon, made famous in Adam Mickiewicz's poem "Ordon's Redoubt". At the moment when Russians broke into the Polish-defended earthwork, an ammunition explosion buried most of the defenders and many attackers; Tukhachevsky himself was injured and died shortly thereafter. The next day, Warsaw was conquered, and the Polish uprising soon collapsed.

Alexander's great-grandson Mikhail was not a modest regiment commander like his ancestor, but rather the head of a powerful army, and he hoped to conquer Warsaw in a similar triumph.

The success of his offensive was mainly thanks to actions of the Cavalry Corps led by Hayk Bzhishk-yan, also known as Gaya Gai. He flanked Polish units and prevented them from stopping the advancing masses of Bolshevik infantry. On July 14, 1920, Gai's troops invaded Vilnius, and five days later, despite fierce Polish resistance, they captured Grodno. There, they murdered many prisoners of war and raped women of the Polish Red Cross, who were helping the wounded.

*"I am dutifully reporting', one reported to me, 'that from what the villagers say, our Polish officer should be lying here. He was badly hurt, they say. The Bolsheviks found him near a forest after a battle and the sons of bitches dragged him here; they dragged him by the legs, with his face to the ground, and buried the poor man alive. Only a hand from that other world beckoned to us ... A miserable fate, lieutenant!' ... I knelt down to get a better look. There was no doubt that the hand protruding from the ground was of a man buried alive. The mound of earth had been moved in a particular way. And in the frozen pose of the hand itself there was something chilling: an eloquent, though unlike death, story of the dying gesture of a living being buried alive." (E. Małaczewski, *Horse on the Hill* [in:] *Collected works: Poems, Poetic Translations, Dramas, Stories, Journalism, Studies. K. Polechoński, Łomianki 2008*).*

From the collection of Zbigniew Jezirowski—nephew of Tadeusz



Tadeusz Jezirowski, who distinguished himself during the defense of Plock. He was a scout, not yet 12 years old. He was the youngest recipient of the Cross of Valor in history.

The Bolsheviks were temporarily halted at the Bug, but the fall of the fortress in Brest on August 1 prevented launching an operation to stop the Red Army's progress. In the following days, the Bolsheviks occupied Białostoczczyzna (Białystok region), Podlachia, and northern Mazovia. The Polish Army did not give up without a fight. Panic was largely controlled, and a retreat took place in the course of fierce battles in several sectors near Łomża, Mława, and Pułtusk. These struggles, often victorious for the Polish soldiers, did not change the overall situation, which was constantly worsening.

III.

In view of the Bolshevik offensive that had reached central Poland, the government of the Republic of Poland sought aid from France and Great Britain, countries that had decisive influence on the post-war shape of Europe. The price for a promise of intervention was very high. On July 10, 1920, during a conference in Spa, Western powers demanded that Prime Minister Władysław Grabski recognize the so-called Curzon Line (named after the British Foreign Minister) beyond the eastern border of the Republic of Poland. It ran along the former western border of Russia from the time of the Third Partition of Poland, partly along the Bug River and had no national justification. In addition, they demanded handing over the Vilnius region to Lithuania, and canceling a plebiscite in Cieszyn Silesia, where the majority were Polish, just like in the Vilnius region. In return, they offered only to broker peace negotiations with the Bolsheviks, and if these failed, they promised to provide military equipment. Interestingly, in March 1919 at the Versailles conference, British Prime Minister Lloyd George spoke behind the scenes of a real threat of Russian communists taking over the world. However, he quickly abandoned these opinions and began contending that they were peaceful.

The attitude of the Western states resulted from their disregard of the Bolshevik danger. After the



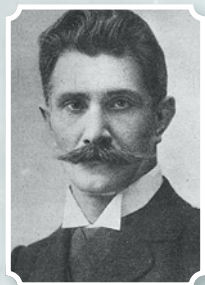
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Members of the British-French Interallied Mission to Poland, established in accordance with the provisions of the Spa conference. The mission arrived in Warsaw shortly before the Battle of Warsaw. Its unofficial goal was to change the government to make a truce with the Bolsheviks and to remove Piłsudski from power. Edgar Vincent D'Aberno and Maxime Weygand are in the first row.

defeat of the white troops, they sought good relations with Soviet Russia at all costs, disregarding the interests of the countries and peoples of Central and Eastern Europe. The clearest evidence of this policy were their attempts to force Poland to accept Bolshevik demands, resulting in the loss of independence. Piłsudski had no illusions about

these “friendly harassments,” as he ironically described them. After the Battle of Warsaw, he said: “Currently, our friends’ silence is helping the Bolsheviks, and their screaming is hindering our operations.”

The conditions imposed at Spa caused widespread indignation in Poland. Grabski resigned, and on July 24, 1920, the National Defense Government was appointed, headed by Wincenty Witos, leader of the Polish People’s Party. Socialist leader Ignacy Daszyński was named deputy minister. Earlier, on July 1, the Council of National Defense was formed, which included Marshal Józef Piłsudski as the Chief of State and representatives from all political groups in the Polish parliament, government and army. Its task was “to decide on all matters related to conducting and ending the war and achieving peace [and] to issue orders in these matters.”



Wikimedia Commons / Public domain

Ignacy Daszyński

Meanwhile, the promised diplomatic assistance had failed. On July 11, the British sent a letter to Lenin in which, contrary to their agreement with Prime Minister Grabski at Spa, they offered the Bolsheviks not only the border on the Curzon Line, but also all of Eastern



Wikimedia Commons / Public domain

Wincenty Witos

*Citizens of the Republic!
Fatherland in need!*

The enemies that surround us on all sides have gathered all their forces to destroy our hard-gained independence, for which we fought with the blood and struggle of the Polish soldier. Hosts of invaders, stretching all the way from deep in Asia, are trying to smash our heroic army to fall upon Poland, to lay waste to our fields, burn our villages and cities, and commence their terrible reign on Poland’s grave.

Like a solid unshakable wall, we must stand firm. The Bolshevik onslaught must shatter when it strikes the breast of the whole nation. May unity, harmony and hard work bring us together for a common cause.

A Polish soldier bleeding on the front must have confidence that the whole nation is behind him, ready to help him at any time.

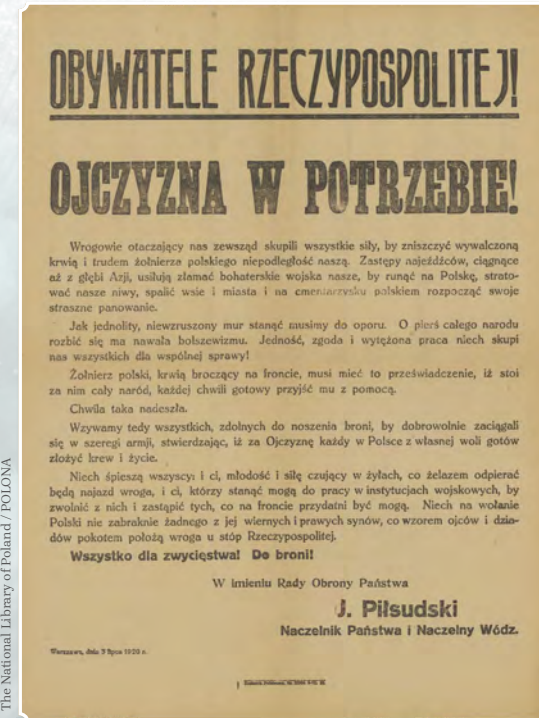
The moment has arrived.

We call on everyone capable of bearing arms to voluntarily join the ranks of the army, affirming that everyone in Poland is willing to give blood and life for his fatherland.

Let everyone hurry: those who feel youth and strength in their veins to repel the enemy’s raids, and those who can work in military institutions to substitute for those who can be useful on the front. Let Poland’s faithful and righteous sons answer Poland’s cry for help and, like their fathers and grandfathers, strike down the enemy to lie at Poland’s feet.

Everything for victory! To arms!

*On behalf of the Council of National Defense:
Chief of State and Commander-in-Chief
Józef Piłsudski
Warsaw, July 3, 1920.*



The National Library of Poland / POLONA

Appeal from the Council of National Defense for Polish citizens to oppose the Bolshevik invasion of Poland (translation on the left side).



CAW WPHH

In the summer of 1920, over 100,000 citizens—peasants, workers, students, landowners, townspeople—answered the call of the Council of National Defense and joined the army. The photo shows the farewell to a unit heading for the front from Warsaw.

Malopolska with Lviv. These had never belonged to Russia, nor were they inhabited by Russians. But the Bolshevik demands went much further—they demanded the liquidation of almost the entire Polish army and arms industry, and then the transfer of power to the communists. Lloyd George demanded that the Polish authorities accept these conditions, stating that they were very favorable. The modern historian Andrzej Nowak aptly de-

scribed the British efforts to make peace at any—Polish—price: “Poland could disappear, and London would swallow it, as long as Soviet Russia limited its appetites to the Vistula country.”

After a few days, the Bolsheviks rejected Great Britain’s mediation, because they did not intend to limit their conquering impulses to Poland. “[...] we must raise the anchor and move, while imperialism has not yet managed to repair its decaying cart,” said

From the collection of Association of the Old Polish Military Fans



Volunteer Army Cross. It did not have the status of a state decoration, but was worn by veterans from volunteer units fighting in 1920.

Lenin. And not only the promised diplomatic assistance failed. The few shipments of military materials sent were stopped by Czechoslovakia, Germany, the authorities of the Free City of Danzig, and even the Belgian government. Drawings appeared in the



KARTA / The Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum

Scythemen from Independent Workers’ Associations on Saski Square with armbands reading: “Join us”.

German press depicting the liberation of Germany from Polish captivity by the Red Army. The Commander of the German Reichswehr, General Hans von Seeckt, wrote: “[...] when it comes to saving Poland from Bolshevism, no German hand should be lifted to save this deadly enemy of the Reich, this creature and ally of France, this thief of German land, this destroyer of German culture, and if the Devil wanted to take Poland, we should help him in this.” (From a translation by Piotr Szlanta.) British leftists and trade unions were strongly against any aid to Poland, and Ernest Bevin, representing them, argued that Poland had invaded Russia as part of a conspiracy of dark forces.



The National Library of Poland / POLONA

Cardinal Aleksander Kakowski did not leave Warsaw, which was threatened by the Bolsheviks, but stayed and comforted Polish soldiers on the front line of defense at Radzymin.

Clergymen of all denominations called for the defense of the threatened independence, including the Polish episcopate (we should add that when the Red Army neared Warsaw, most foreign delegations fled Poland's capital; however, the papal nuncio Achilles Ratti, the future Pope Pius XI, remained), as well as representatives of Jewish and German minorities. In a pastoral letter to the nation, Polish bishops wrote that the Bolsheviks particularly hated Catholic Poland: "[...] because when some powers left their original way to make agreements with this enemy, oblivious to their own

danger, Poland resisted the sirens' call of this enemy, and stood like a wall to block their entry to Western Europe. That is why this enemy swore its destruction and revenge." Protestant clergy similarly assessed the Bolshevik intentions: "Our fatherland is in danger! Savage hordes of Eastern barbarians stand at the gates of Poland, ready to flood Poland and all Europe at any moment and to destroy the work of generations. As in the past, again in our eyes Poland is a bulwark of Christianity and civilization." Polish Jews, many of whom served in the Polish Army, called for defense. About one of them, Dawid Kelhoffer, we read in the application to award him the Virtuti Militari for valor in the battles of Kozin and Krupiec: "without losing his cool, he took a position under the strongest Bolshevik fire [...], dragging forward a cannon without horses, he opened a steady barrage at a distance of about 600 paces, caused such confusion in the ranks of the enemy, who didn't expect resistance at such a close distance, that despite their clear advantage, they retreated, and our own infantry, moving forward, maintained the defensive line." Subsequent operations saved the XXXV Infantry Brigade from destruction. "The general attitude of my fellow believers is summed up in the slogan: with Poland and for Poland," said deputy mayor of Lviv, Filip Schleicher, the Polish Jew.



The National Digital Archives (NAC)

Filip Schleicher

At Spa, British Marshal Henry Wilson had bluntly told Polish representatives not to count on Western intervention, and that the future of Poland, which the Bolsheviks were preparing to destroy, lied solely in the hands of Poles. From all social classes, Poles took up the life and death struggle for the Republic, showing great solidarity and setting aside their disagreements. "Fatherland in danger! Only a heart of stone, only a degenerate soul could not tremble at this cry and not feel the spontaneous need to sacrifice all forces to rescue their country, whose existence is at risk," wrote veterans of the January Uprising of 1863. All social groups took up this slogan.

After Marshal Piłsudski's appeal, thousands of men joined the Polish Army. They also began to form the Volunteer Army, led by General Józef Haller. Almost one hundred thousand signed up in less than a month, including numerous junior high school students and scouts. All political groups and professional circles joined the fight. They circulated pamphlets stigmatizing cowardice, evasion of military service, and unwillingness to materially help the war effort. "The time for hard action has come! Discipline and manly calm must be maintained! The capital cannot be surrendered to the enemy, and we will not surrender it! Today there is no choice: either a fight to the end, victory and freedom, or shameful slavery," we read in a proclamation from Prime Minister Witos.

IV.

In the first half of August 1920, Tukhachevsky's army threatened Warsaw. The main direction of attack assigned to them was north of the Polish capital; they were to cross the Vistula near Płock and Włocławek. The Red Army soldiers intended to flank the Polish army from the north, occupy their rear, and cut off communications between Warsaw and Gdańsk. Tukhachevsky's plan referred to operations of Field Marshal Ivan Paskevich, who in 1831 tried a similar way to capture Warsaw and suppress the November Uprising.

However, when the Bolsheviks approached the Vistula line in the north, their southern front remained far behind in Lviv, despite the order of the Red Army's commander in chief Sergey Kamenev to support Tukhachevsky's operations. This did not happen because Budyonny, whose cavalry was the backbone of the Bolshevik forces in the south, and his army's political commissar, Joseph Stalin, had other plans and ignored Kamenev's order.

They intended to capture Lviv, and then head to Czechoslovakia and Hungary, and did not want to split a victory with Tukhachevsky. He tried to force the southern front Red Army to obey, but it was too late to change the war.

Meanwhile, things were moving toward their conclusion. Now the Polish leadership decided to stop the Bolsheviks at the Vistula line. The bat-

the plan, developed primarily by the Polish Army's Chief of Staff, General Tadeusz Rozwadowski and by Commander-in-Chief Józef Piłsudski, was accepted by the latter



Gen. Tadeusz Rozwadowski

on August 6, 1920. Gen. Rozwadowski wrote to the Supreme Commander on August 15, 1920, that *"I consider [your] coordination of the 4th and 3rd Armies' operations to be very well thought-out. You have arranged the 4th and 1st Armies' operations excellently; please be assured that, staying in close contact, I will expedite everything so that from the morning of the seventeenth [of August], we shall be ready to cooperate."* The Marshal's biographer Włodzimierz Suleja similarly noted that General Rozwadowski *"on the eve of the decisive strike [...] treated the Supreme Commander as the sole author of the battle plan, as well as the primary implementer of the key part of the plan."*

Marshal Piłsudski decided above all to relocate units fighting on the Bug and concentrate them on the Wieprz River in a newly created operational group. This was not an easy task, because the Polish troops had been retreating for many weeks, which negatively affected their morale. Nonetheless,

On the Polish side were also allied Ukrainian troops of Symon Petliura and Gen. Mykhailo Omelianovych-Pavlenko (who just a year earlier had fought against Poles near Lviv), as well as Vadim Yakovlev's Cossack brigade, who had distinguished themselves in battles against the Cavalry Army. In the Polish air force, a group of twenty-one American volunteer pilots served in the 7th Air Escadrille (the Kościuszko Squadron). It was commanded by former cowboy Cedric Fauntleroy. The actual founder of the squadron was his deputy, Merian C. Cooper (later a Hollywood film producer; he co-directed King Kong). He wrote a letter to Marshal Piłsudski, in which he mentioned the participation of Tadeusz Kościuszko and Kazimierz Pułaski in the US Revolutionary War. An ancestor of Cooper had witnessed the death of Pułaski, who had served with him in the American cavalry. Now this American wanted to pay back a debt of gratitude, by defending Poland. The squadron participated in reconnaissance flights during the offensive in Ukraine, and later helped block the Cavalry Army, especially near Lviv. Three American pilots were awarded Virtuti Militari Crosses for valor.



Col. Cedric Fauntleroy.

King Kong). He wrote a letter to Marshal Piłsudski, in which he mentioned the participation of Tadeusz Kościuszko and Kazimierz Pułaski in the US Revolutionary War. An ancestor of Cooper had witnessed the death of Pułaski, who had served with him in the American cavalry. Now this American wanted to pay back a debt of gratitude, by defending Poland. The squadron participated in reconnaissance flights during the offensive in Ukraine, and later helped block the Cavalry Army, especially near Lviv. Three American pilots were awarded Virtuti Militari Crosses for valor.



Lt. Col. Merian C. Cooper.



KARTA / The Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum

Farewell to the demobilized American volunteer pilots from the 7th Air Escadrille at the Lewandówka airport in Lviv, September-October 1921. On the wings of the Ansaldo Balilla aircraft are standing: Capt. Władysław Konopka and Capt. Kenneth Murray. From left to right: Lieutenant Jerzy Weber, Capt. Antoni Poznański, Capt. Zbigniew Orzechowski, Capt. Edward Corsi, Capt. George "Buck" Crawford (the 7th's last US commander), Capt. John Speaks, 1st Lt. Elliot Chess, 1st Lt. Carl Evans, 1st Lt. John Mitland, 1st Lt. Aleksander Seńkowski, 1st Lt. Thomas Garlick.



The uniform badge of the 7th Air Escadrille, whose tradition was continued by the 111 Fighter Escadrille. In 1940, the newly formed 303 Squadron in Great Britain included pilots from 111 and used the same emblem.



CAW WBH

Polish heavy machine gun position at Stara Milosna, August 1920.

this action was successful, and unnoticed by the enemy. During this maneuver, Polish units in the north were to block the Bolshevik attack on the Vistula line between Modlin and Włocławek, but above all to repel a frontal attack on Warsaw. During these operations, the plan called for an assault by the Wieprz operational group, personally led by Piłsudski. He intended to attack the wing of the Bolshevik forces attacking Warsaw, move against their rear, and destroy them.

On the eve of the battle of Warsaw, which would decide the fate of Poland, troops of the Polish Army were divided into three fronts. The Northern Front, commanded by General Józef Haller, defended the line from Modlin to Dęblin. The main role in it was played by General Władysław Sikorski's 5th Army, deployed north of Warsaw, and General Franciszek Latinik's 1st Army, defending the capital. The Central Front, stretching from Deblin to Brody, was commanded by General Edward Śmigły-Rydz; the Southern Front, reaching the Polish-Romanian border, was led by General Waclaw Iwaszkiewicz.

In the offensive plan, a decisive role was to be played by the Commander-in-Chief's operational group striking from the Wieprz River. It included six infantry divisions and a cavalry brigade. The divisions of Piłsudski's operational group included General Daniel Konarzewski's 14th Infantry Division, General Andrzej Galica's 21st Infantry Division, most of whose soldiers came from Podhale, and—highlighting their legionary lineage and tradition—General Stefan Dąba-Biernacki's 1st Legions Infantry Division and General Leon Berbecki's 3rd Legions Infantry Division (except for Konarzewski, both the Supreme Commander and all the generals mentioned above were officers of the Polish Legions). The Soviet troops attacking Warsaw still had numerical superiority, but not as large as at the beginning of their offensive. On the other hand, on the section of the Wieprz River, where the decisive blow was to be made, there was a clear Polish advantage, of which the Bolshevik command was still ignorant.



The battle of Warsaw began on August 13. The battle included numerous smaller fights: a few kilometers east of the Polish capital, struggles in the areas of Radzymin and Ossów, Piłsudski's strike from the Wieprz, the defense of Płock, and fighting around Wkra, Ciechanów and Nasielsk. On the first day of the battle, the Soviets strongly assaulted the Poles at Radzymin; some Polish troops left their positions in panic. This serious crisis was averted by sending volunteer troops into the battle. Although poorly trained, they fought with great courage and determination, taking to heart General Rozwadowski's recent proclamation about the impending existential fight, during which they would smash the Bolshevik hordes, or else a new slavery would fall upon all Poles.

The fierce battle around Radzymin and Ossów continued for the next two days. The first town was captured and recaptured several times by the Poles and the Bolsheviks. On the evening of August 15, Polish soldiers again occupied Radzymin, which was threatened again the entire next day. Among the heroes of these fights was Lt. Stefan Pogonowski, whose battalion made one of the decisive strikes. General Lucjan Żeligowski considered this attack the most important in the fighting on the outskirts of Warsaw:



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Members of the Voluntary Legion of Women.

"The Russians saw their goal almost achieved. From their position, the fires and lights of Warsaw were visible. We defended our capital in despair. The battle was fought not only with cannons, rifles and bayonets, but also with the hearts and spirits of both armies. They were winning, and we were losing. The road to Warsaw was open. It seemed that the enemy could enter it unhindered. At this moment, a weak battalion, not waiting for the time of a general offensive, attacked at one o'clock in the morning, striking—as it turned out



From the collection of Zofia Jakubowicz

1st Lt. Stefan Pogonowski.



CAW WBH

Soldiers of the 15th Infantry Division of the Polish Army advance during a counteroffensive from Wiązowna, August 17, 1920.

later—the Russian army’s most vulnerable point, the center of the main artery of the enemy advance. We lost many officers who died heroically, but the death of Pogonowski, who was fatally wounded in this attack—was a historic moment. In my opinion, it was here that the war turned around, creating a psychological turning point in us and in the Russians. After that attack, three victorious and unstoppable [Russian] brigades began retreating, likewise the

21st Division retreated from Słupno, causing chaos and confusion. Pogonowski, guided by extraordinary instinct, led the victory of the 10th Division and the 1st Army at the Warsaw bridgehead. In this lies the great significance of his deed, and the honor of his soldierly death.”

Another hero of the battle was a young priest from Warsaw, Ignacy Skorupka, a chaplain in the 236th

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Father Ignacy Skorupka

Infantry Regiment of the Volunteer Army. On August 14, during a counterattack near Ossów, he was encouraging the young defenders of the city, until he was struck dead by a Bolshevik bullet in the head. He was posthumously decorated with the Virtuti Militari Cross, and a Warsaw street was named after him. After World War

II, the communists changed its name to Sadowa. Today, it again has the name of the heroic priest and defender of Warsaw.

Gen. Sikorski’s Army began advancing on the northern front on August 14 from the area of Modlin and Wkra. It was initially unsuccessful—the Bolshevik army outnumbered the Poles almost three to one. The next day, Ciechanów was recaptured, and Nasielsk on August 16, but the situation in this section was still perilous. Significant Bolshevik forces, primarily Gaya Gai’s cavalry corps, which had already taken an earlier toll on the Polish army, continued their attack to cross the Vistula near Płock and Włocławek, in accordance with Tukhachevsky’s orders.

Because of these operations and the still unresolved situation on the outskirts of Warsaw, Marshal Piłsudski accelerated the strike from the Wieprz River by one day. On the morning of August 16, Polish infantry divisions under his personal command launched an offensive, striking toward

CAW WBH



Renault FT-17 tanks supporting the 15th Infantry Division of the 1st Polish Army in the liberation of Mińsk Mazowiecki.

Mińsk Mazowiecki, Siedlce, Międzyrzec, all the way to Włodawa in the Lublin region. A further goal was to get behind the Bolshevik troops, encircle them, and destroy them. On that same day, the Mazyr Group was protecting Bolshevik troops near Warsaw. “The onslaught of the Commander-in-Chief’s army was so staggering, so unexpectedly violent, that the entire Bolshevik central force could not resist him for even an hour. Beaten without hesitation, pushed from every position, this entire force began to run in terror to Siedlce, Brest-Litovsk, and beyond.” (Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki.) On August 19, the Bolsheviks began to retreat east and north in panic. That day, Polish forces recaptured the Brest Fortress, the loss of which less than three weeks

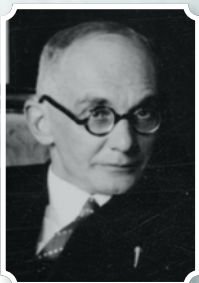
earlier had seemed decisive for the further course of the war. “The Bolshevik line of resistance was devastated, shattered into small pieces, cut to shreds [...]. Our victorious army drove the fleeing Soviet army, unsuccessfully defending itself against fast, strong, and decisive blows,” wrote Tadeusz Szmurło.



The National Digital Archives (NAC)

1st Lt. Jan Kowalewski

before the battle, Kowalewski and Stefan Mazurkiewicz, a math professor at the University of Warsaw, cracked another cipher called “Revolution”, which was used to encrypt the orders of Red Army troops attacking Warsaw. And when the attack from the Wieprz River was launched, the Bolsheviks’ radio communication was jammed for two days, as Polish radio intentionally broadcast a flood of Bible quotations.



The National Digital Archives (NAC)

Prof. Stefan Mazurkiewicz.

VI.

The victory at Warsaw strengthened Poland’s prestige in Europe. By stopping the Bolshevik march on the Vistula, Poles influenced not only the fate of their fatherland, but also that of Central Europe, which was thus defended against Soviet totalitarianism, and they perhaps also prevented the Red Army from marching further to the West. The Battle of Warsaw was considered the “eighteenth decisive battle of the world” by Edgar V. D’Abernon, a member of the British-French mission in Poland, who had earlier expressed his dislike for Poles. He had previously said, for example, that if Poles were not treated as “Egyptian fellahs and did not have ‘European’ overseers placed over them [...], they would never build a viable country.”

Three years after the victory in Warsaw, the Polish authorities decided that August 15 shall be Armed Forces Day. After World War II, it was nullified by the communists. They were ashamed of the triumph of free Poles over red captivity, and they strove to wipe out its memory. The Sejm of the Republic was restored on July 30, 1992, after the liquidation of the Polish People’s Republic, and a plaque with the names of the battles of the Polish Army against the Bolsheviks was again placed on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Warsaw.

In any case, after the victory in the Battle of Warsaw, the war was still unresolved. During the



CAW WBH

Massacred bodies of 73 Polish soldiers of the Siberian Infantry Brigade. The outnumbered regiment fought Bolshevik troops pushing east, and the captured soldiers were murdered especially cruelly.

fierce fighting near Warsaw, Budyonny’s Cavalry Army reached Lviv. Near the city, from Zadwórze, it encountered resistance from a volunteer battalion commanded by Capt. Bolesław Zajączkowski. After a fierce battle, almost all of his soldiers, consisting mainly of intelligentsia and youth from the faithful city, died or were killed by the Bolsheviks. In remembrance of their bravery, Zadwórze is called the Polish Thermopylae, referring to the heroism of the ancient Spartans, who became an eternal symbol of sacrifice in defense of the fatherland.

After this unsuccessful attack on Lviv, Budyonny’s cavalry headed to Zamość. They did not capture it, and they pulled back towards Komarów. There, in a great cavalry battle, probably the last in the history of the world, they were defeated by Polish cavalry. Once

again their opponent had turned out to be a difficult one. Although Budyonny’s forces were significantly weakened, they were not completely broken up, and in the course of fighting Poland suffered severe losses. Among others, the famous 4th Legions Infantry Regiment was smashed near Hrubieszów by Bolsheviks retreating from Komarów. Teresa Grodzińska, a nurse, was among those killed and murdered. She did not give her life freely—an extremely strong woman, she defended herself with an ax and killed two attackers, before others cut her down with sabers.



Teresa Grodzińska.

Public domain / Dzonowiczek, Issue 14, October 27, 1935



KARTA / The Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum

Destroyed bridge over the Niemen river in Grodno, October 8, 1920.

On the northeastern front, the Bolsheviks hoped for a favorable change in the fortunes of war. In the second half of September 1920, Tukhachevsky began to concentrate new forces there. In the last great offensive action of this war, the Polish Army destroyed them in the Battle of the Niemen River. As in the case of the Battle of Warsaw, several military episodes took place. On September 20, Gen. Śmigły-Rydz launched an assault on Grodno. Three days

later, the real offensive began, during which Poles broke the Niemen defense, conquered Grodno, and smashed the Bolsheviks in fights at several locations, including Lida. These were dramatic battles: the enemy defended firmly, and Polish troops suffered significant losses. However, through September and October, the beaten Bolsheviks were chased, ending with the Poles occupying Minsk. On October 18, 1920, a truce was signed.

VII.

The peace treaty between Poland and Bolshevik Russia was signed on March 8, 1921, in the Latvian capital Riga. The Polish border in the northeast was drawn along the Daugava River, and in the southeast along the Zbruch River. Poland gained territory, including around Grodno, Polesia, Volhynia, and the western part of Podolia. Both states gave up all territorial claims and each undertook not to interfere in the other's internal affairs and not to support activities directed against the other. The Bolshevik government was to pay Poland a high compensation, 30 million rubles, for the exploitation of Polish lands by tsarist Russia (this condition was not met) and to return stolen cultural goods.

The Treaty of Riga ignored the right of Belarusians and Ukrainians to independence, so the elites of these nationalities regarded it as a partitioning of their lands by Poland and Russia. The Riga arrangements also left at least several hundred thousand Poles on the Soviet side, around Minsk and Zhytomyr. Many had participated in the war against the Bolsheviks and had the right to count on the fact that the Republic will not *"abandon a land that for hundreds of years endured bad fortune without a murmur, that sometimes suffered because of its Polishness more than the beloved Motherland, and yet never renounced their Polishness,"* wrote Henryk Grabowski, great-grandson of Tadeusz Reytan, the Sejm member whose pro-



UKW

Peace negotiations in Riga. On the left side of the table sits the Russian delegation; on the right side sits the Polish delegation, headed by Jan Dąbski.

test at the Partition Sejm of 1773 was immortalized in the painting by Jan Matejko and became one of the most eloquent symbols of Polish history.

Victory in the war with the Bolsheviks saved not only Poland's independence, regained after 123

years of captivity, but also to at least some countries in Central Europe. It was also appropriate that the battle with the Russian Bolsheviks was called a war for everything, because the victory defended independence and thus enabled Poles to develop freely for nearly twenty years. Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki wrote: *“We came from the depths of defeat to the top, to the peak of triumph. They performed this miracle: the army, government and nation. May the most distant generations learn from this example what can be done when the whole nation joins in unity and dedication, and vows: I must win!”*

This is how the greatest Polish victory was won since the Battle of Vienna in 1683, in an extremely hard war, far from the jaunty mood of “żurawiejka” marching songs “Lances for the battle, sabres in hand, chase the Bolshevik, chase, chase.” But even more valuable were the words of the Commander-in-Chief Marshal Józef Piłsudski, who at the end of the war thanked his soldiers: *“For work and perseverance, for sacrifice and blood, for courage and boldness, thank you, soldiers, on behalf of the entire nation and our Fatherland.”*

Later...

The victories of the Polish Army near Warsaw, Wkra, Komarów and at the Niemen saved Poland's independence, stopping the destructive deadly onslaught from the east. International bodies did not guarantee Poland's borders and independent existence. This was not settled in Parisian offices, but in fierce, prolonged military struggles in the east. The Bolsheviks did not respect international agreements, neither then nor later. Leon Trotsky made no secret that the Bolshevik party aimed to overthrow the world, and Lenin held a similar view. It was not about this or that border, but about absorbing the Polish state and creating a Soviet republic in its place.

They failed to conquer Poland and other nations of the region in 1920, thanks to the valor of the Polish Army. Poland and its Chief of State Józef Piłsudski simply countered the aggressive and inhuman Bolshevism with the idea of freedom. Józef Czapki brilliantly conveyed this idea of freedom personified in Piłsudski: *“His idea, his stubborn fight for Poland, fatherland of united nationalities, not a single nationality... even his accent, strikingly Lithuanian, ... everything was for me a confirmation of an idea at once Polish and universal, potentially more universal and in a better way than Russia with its cruel revolution and totalitarianism.”*

A chance for retaliation for the 1920 defeat came nineteen years later. On August 23, 1939, the Soviet

Union signed the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact with the Third Reich. It enabled the Germans to initiate aggression against Poland on September 1, 1939. And the same Boris Shaposhnikov, who had developed plans for the invasion of Poland in 1920, was now the Chief of the General Staff of the Red Army, planning another invasion. It came on September 17, 1939. In its first days, many participants of the war with the Bolsheviks died, along with Tadeusz Reytan's great-grandson, Henryk Grabowski, who had protested against the Treaty of Riga with such conviction. But above all, after that date thousands of Polish officers, many of whom had fought the Red Army under the command of Marshal Jozef Piłsudski, were taken into Soviet captivity. In the spring of 1940, they were murdered in Katyń, Kharkov, Tver and Bykivnia.

Major Adam Sołtan was among the thousands murdered. Józef Czapki (mentioned earlier) described his heroic stance during the fight with Budyonny's Cavalry Army. On August 19, 1920, when a storm of artillery fire forced the squadrons of the 1st Uhlan Regiment to retreat from near Żółtance, the twenty-two-year-old cadet Sołtan's platoon stayed in the village, protecting his retreating colleagues with machine gun fire, for which he was awarded the Virtuti Militari Cross. And twenty years later, Czapki, a superb painter and the author of *The Inhuman Land*, in the Starobilsk POW camp met this same Major Sołtan, who in September 1939 had fought first against the Germans, then against the Soviets, as the chief of staff of Gen. Władysław Anders's Novgorod Cavalry Brigade. Czapki recalled talking with the major in the camp: *“He could not*



Katyń Museum

Bodies of Polish Army officers in the Katyń forest, exhumed by Germans in the spring of 1943.

imagine living outside of Poland [...]; once I told him about a friend who had left Poland and never returned. Adam Sołtan replied with disdain: ‘I don’t understand. If I could, I would return to Poland on my knees.’”

All these officers of the Polish Army who had, in the summer of 1920, successfully repelled the Red Army's invasion of the reborn Polish state *“now lay in the freshly dug earth of the forest near Smolensk, the corpse of ‘white Poland’ with an NKVD bullet in the head,”* in the words of Professor Andrzej Nowak. A grim epilogue to a great victory: death at the hands of criminal Bolshevism, which had been stopped twenty years earlier under the command of Marshal Józef Piłsudski, the creator of Independence. The victory that saved Poland and gave Poles twenty years of freedom. ■

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