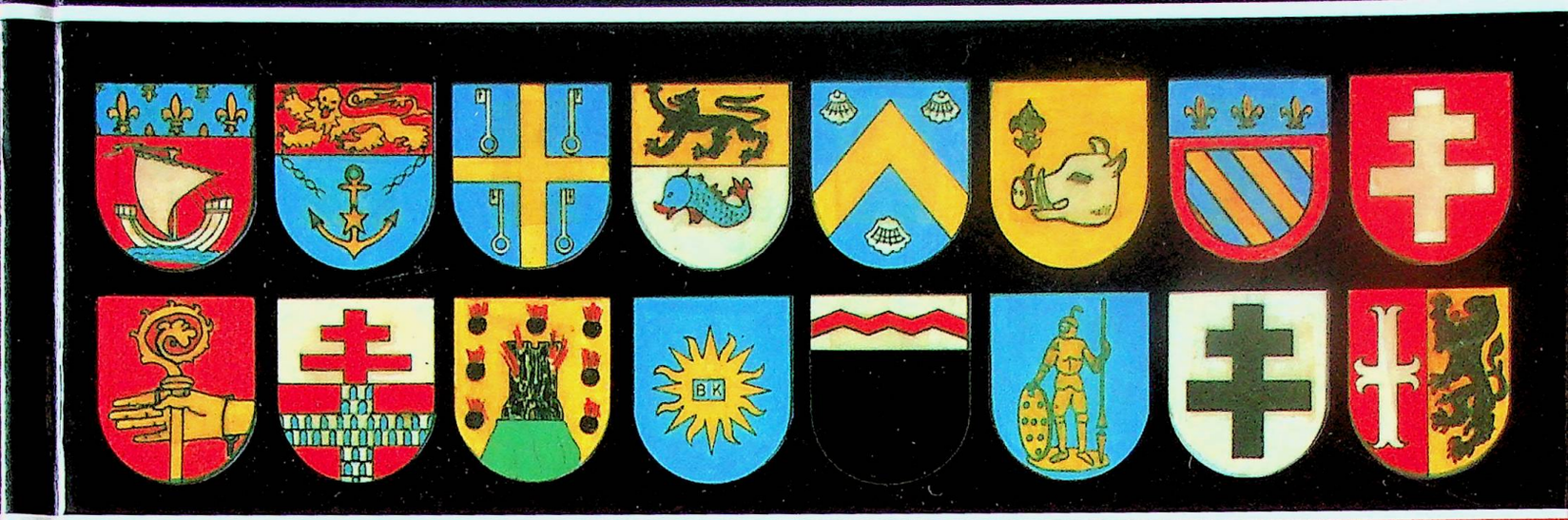
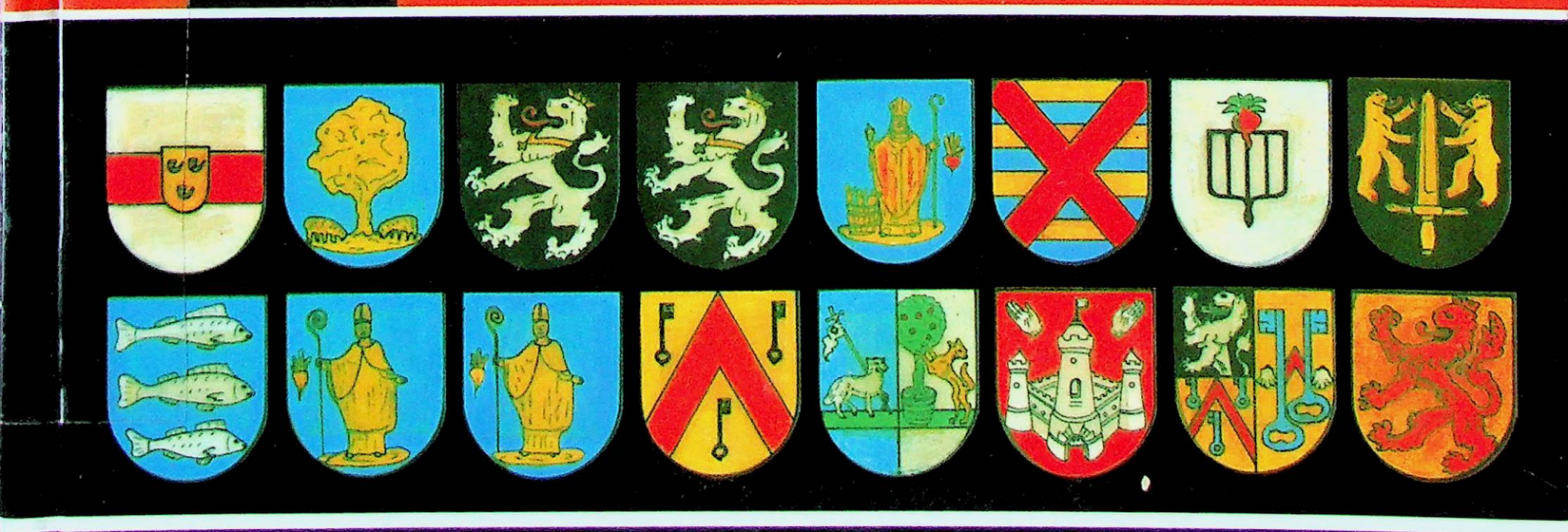


THE SOLDIERS OF GENERAL MACZEK IN WORLD WAR II



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First Polish Armoured Division

The Soldiers of General Maczek in World War II

Edited by
Zbigniew Mieczkowski

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FOREWORD

Sixty years have elapsed from the wartime exploits of the 1st Polish Armoured Division.

Fate denied her soldiers, who brought freedom to other nations, the privilege of liberating their own country. The memorial erected in Warsaw in 1995 thus became a poignant symbol of their return fifty years after the end of hostilities. It marked the end of their long march home from foreign lands.

Sadly, General Stanisław Maczek and many of his soldiers did not live to see the rebirth of a democratic Poland. Among those who did return to take part in the unveiling of the memorial, built in their honour, are the co-authors of this book who share here their wartime experiences and ordeals.

The aim of this book is to preserve their memories, to bear witness to their fortunes in the uncertain future and to acknowledge the gratitude and friendship manifested in so many ways by the towns and villages liberated by the Division in Western Europe.

Poland's decision to make a stand against Nazi Germany in 1939 changed the course of the Second World War. Had she accepted Hitler's proposals to protect Europe against the march of Communism, as she did alone in 1920, the initial German offensive against the West would have prejudiced the outcome of the conflict and reshaped the balance of political forces in post-war Europe.

That decision brought to Poland unforeseen consequences. Left without help in September 1939, in spite of promises and guarantees, and deserted by Western powers at the end of the war, she alone amongst the victors sustained complete defeat. Unmeasured destruction, annihilation of one-fifth of her population at German and Russian hands, deportations and territorial changes altered her historical role from that of a bastion of Western civilisation to a province of the Communist East.

Throughout a thousand years of history at the time of her power as a Republic of Nobility and also on the threshold of her decline by the end of the 18th century, Poland exercised a leading role in Central Europe in the development of the Parliamentary system of government, safeguarding the privilege of liberty for her citizens. After the victorious war with Russia in 1920, having driven back the invading Communist forces and regaining lands of the former Polish Kingdom inhabited by national minorities, she established religious tolerance and secured human rights for all her people. These human rights were forfeited during the later 50 years of Soviet imperialist rule.

In September 1939 Poland fell fighting simultaneously against the might of Germany's mechanised divisions and the Russian armies allied with Hitler. In the last days of peace, fulfilling her treaty agreement of mutual assistance, she equipped France and England with its most valuable weapon – the Enigma machine. This coding system, acquired by Polish

Intelligence, provided the key to Germany's war secrets and enabled the Allies to predict all enemy action, including its bombardment schedules, throughout the whole war.

Defeated in the military campaign, the Polish nation did not for a moment acknowledge full defeat. The Underground Army was born with the echo of the last shot fired in the defence of Warsaw and grew to comprise half a million volunteers within the next few years. In the West, forces a quarter of a million strong were formed in two phases. Immediately at the outbreak of war the Polish navy sailed to British ports to continue its activities. General Sikorski's call brought one hundred thousand men under the Colours in France. After Germany's assault on Russia thousands of Polish soldiers who were released from prisons and labour camps joined the 2nd Corps under General Anders. They were short, however, of officers, whose mass graves were eventually discovered in the Katyń Woods.

Polish soldiers, airmen and seamen fought the enemy on all war fronts: from Narvik to Tobruk, at Monte Cassino and Falaise. In the Battle of Britain every sixth German plane was shot down by a Polish pilot. The Polish airforce, together with the English and Americans, eventually laid waste to Berlin, Cologne and Bremen.

The battles of the 1st Polish Armoured Division have received much acclaim in literary works by Polish writers and other authors on military matters of the Second World War. Readers interested in this subject will find several references, not only in respect to the Division itself, but also historical books helpful in understanding Poland in between the wars, in the enclosed index of sources. This introduction, therefore, is intended only as a guide to the events during which the Division was born and then re-created on foreign soil, an explanation of its traditions and an insight into its most decisive war engagements.

From a peacetime strength of 40 infantry divisions and 10 cavalry brigades, Poland confronted Germany with one million men at the outbreak of the war. Well disciplined and patriotic, this Polish Army inflicted on the Germans who were twice their number and superior in equipment losses similar in casualties but greater in tanks and equipment than they sustained later when defeating the Anglo-French forces in 1940.

Amongst the Polish Cavalry Brigades, the 10th had already become mechanised before the war. Under the command of Colonel Stanisław Maczek, from its first encounters south of Cracow up until the defence of Lwów, she delayed in battles the advance of the enemy Armoured Corps, often fighting against the 2nd German Panzer Division. A few years later luck gave the 10th Cavalry Brigade their well deserved revenge by surprising the same Division at night in Normandy, dispersing its headquarters and spreading general confusion.

On 17th September 1939 Russian armies, allied with Germany, entered Poland and virtually ended large scale military operations except for various points of defence, including Warsaw, which fought gallantly up to the beginning of October. At that time, on the orders of the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Forces, the Brigade was withdrawn. Having experienced some losses, but nevertheless fully mobile and with Regimental Colours intact, she crossed the border into friendly Hungary. The intention to preserve these modern, well equipped units for further engagements, with unfulfilled hopes of an offensive from the West, enabled the eventual recreation of the Brigade composed of the same men and under the same commander in France.

The struggle for the freedom of one's own country whilst on foreign soil is not a common objective in the history of warfare. In the case of Poland, battles for her own independence fought abroad were immortalised by the words of the National Anthem, originating from the Napoleonic era: *Poland is not lost so long as we live. What foreign force has taken from us, We shall recover by sword.* These traditions and the awareness of the existence of the re-established legal Government in Paris spurred the immense efforts of many soldiers, undeterred by hardship and sacrifice, who strived to re-join the Colours alongside the Allies.

The 'Sikorski Tourists', as the Germans called these volunteers wishing to continue the fight, could be the subject of excellent scenarios and fascinating novels. Leaving

occupied Poland through Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia, Italy, Greece, Spain and Portugal, by sea to Africa or Scandinavia, crossing illegal frontiers, often via internment camps, they arrived in France and after her fall made their way to England.

By summer 1940, two divisions of infantry and the only partially armed 10th Mechanised Cavalry Brigade took part in the defence of France. The Brigade attacked the Germans with considerable success at Montbart in Burgundy, but after the collapse of the French front and with no petrol available, on the orders of General Maczek, it destroyed its vehicles and penetrated on foot into unoccupied regions of the country. Diminished in numbers by the loss of those who were killed or imprisoned, but undaunted in spirit, the soldiers gathered together again by various ways and means in Great Britain.

The defence of the British Isles against the expected invasion comprised the main duty of the Polish Forces stationed in Scotland. There, the 1st Polish Armoured Division was formed out of the 10th Cavalry Brigade and other veterans of the Polish, French and Norwegian campaigns. Many Scottish towns retain plaques and badges from the Polish armoured units, infantry, artillery and engineers given in recognition of their hospitality in this country's 'finest hour'.

The invasion of the Continent in 1944 was, for the Division, the beginning of its long awaited main task – to bring freedom to Poland. Within the Canadian Army, belonging to the 21st Army Group, it sustained considerable losses whilst engaged in decisive action in the Battle of Normandy.

On direct orders from Field Marshall Montgomery, the Division surprised the Germans by penetrating deep behind the front lines and closing the Falaise Gap by occupying the dominating hills of Montormel. For four days the Polish regiments fought alone against the 7th German Army whose main task was to withdraw to new positions and re-create further defences in Central Europe. They were attacked by forces ten times their strength now trapped in the pocket and from behind by two Panzer Divisions attempting to re-open lines of retreat. They fought alone as the Allied units could not break through to the Polish positions. Eventually the Americans reached Chambois and the Canadians got across from the east bringing supplies and ammunition. Thousands of captured prisoners, in strength several times greater than those resisting them at Montormel, were taken away. Uncountable numbers of killed Germans and destroyed vehicles remained on the 'Polish Battlefield' as it became known amongst the British Forces.

The entrance to the cemetery at Urville-Langannerie, which contains about 900 graves, is adorned with badges of all the regiments, arms and services of the Division. At the main gate, the sign of *Husaria*'s wings with a helmet against the background of a tank wheel points to the allegorical connection between the Polish horsemen-knights, wearing eagle wings on their shoulders, liberating Vienna 300 years earlier and the modern armoured troops bringing freedom to the nations of Western Europe [edit.: Poland for centuries protected Europe from the Ottoman Empire and finally defeated the Turks at Vienna in 1673]. This Divisional sign embroidered on all uniforms and marked on its vehicles repeats itself often as a main motif on various monuments and cemeteries and has also been retained on the back cover of this book. The front cover is based on a fragment of the memorial erected in Warsaw and the coats of arms of towns linked with the Division's history.

Amongst great towns like Abbeville, St Omer, Ypres and Ghent, Breda established particularly strong links with the soldiers of the Division and bestowed honorary citizenship on all of them. The Dutch have erected several monuments to express their gratitude for liberation achieved without great destruction of this ancient city.

From the moment of disembarkation in France to the surrender of the German naval port of Wilhelmshaven, the Division was in action for 283 days and accomplished a distance of 1 800 kilometres. Overall losses amounted to approximately one third killed and wounded. These losses were considerably higher in the first line combat units.

Entering Germany in 1945, the Division liberated thousands of prisoners of war captured during the September 1939 campaign – soldiers of the Home Army, people deported from Poland for forced labour purposes, survivors of concentration camps and many others. The most memorable day was the liberation of 1 728 women soldiers taken prisoner at the Warsaw Uprising.

In Germany the Polish Forces of occupation, comprising the Division and the Parachute Brigade, were commanded by General Klemens Rudnicki, one of the heroes of the defence of Warsaw in 1939 and the liberator of Bologna in 1945. Their main task was to give care and shelter to all those compatriots now left to an uncertain destiny in foreign lands.

For the soldiers of the Division this period was a time for making personal decisions concerning their own future. For officers, including the editor of this book, a return to Stalin's Poland would mean imprisonment or even more serious consequences. Conscious of their friendship and traditions, they formed the International Association of the 1st Polish Armoured Division to retain the close links of ex-combatants scattered all over the world.

The unveiling of the memorial in Warsaw was one of the proudest moments in the Association's history, marking as it did the Division's symbolic return home. The independence of Poland, regained after 50 years of Soviet rule, also made it possible for the Association to hand over the regimental traditions it had safeguarded to various units of the Polish Army.

Introduction

General Maczek's 1st Polish Armoured Division was a unique formation in the history of the Polish Army. For many reasons. The most important has to be its military achievements during the Second World War. But, significantly, the Division stands out amongst Allied units by retaining, sixty years after the liberation, the gratitude and respect of the many communities in France, Belgium and Holland through which the Division passed as it carved its epic journey across Northwest Europe from Normandy to the Baltic.

It was to express those warm feelings that the initiative for commemorating the Division's exploits was born and so, in 1993 the building of the memorial in the capital of Poland began.

The construction was generously supported financially by many people in Great Britain, France, Belgium and Holland and the memorial was eventually unveiled in 1995 on the 50th Anniversary of the Liberation of Europe. Many of those who had contributed to its construction had been but little children when the war ended but the memories and tales of General Maczek's 1st Polish Armoured Division had been passed on to them by their parents and grandparents.

While collecting material for the book in Spring 1997, we distributed a questionnaire to the authorities of cities in these countries asking for recollections of wartime events and of the image of the Division as it has been preserved in common memory. The response to our quest exceeded all expectations. We received several hundred responses, including many articles, brochures and essays which had been written by local historians. While, unfortunately, much that we received was shortened for publication we tried to ensure that the most colourful and interesting information and views were included. All the material sent to us has been preserved in the archives of the Foundation to Commemorate the 1st Polish Armoured Division in Warsaw.

Building the memorial to the 1st Polish Armoured Division was the inspiration for this book. The enthusiasm for the project of Western European cities and the veterans themselves contrasted with some opposition towards Maczek's soldiers in Poland lingered from the times of communism. The long process became yet another example of the complexity of Polish history. But, despite all that, for those of Maczek's soldiers who lived until September 1995, the unveiling of the memorial became a symbol of their return to the Motherland. A return 50 years too late.

As we have said, this book is intended to complement the Divisional Memorial, erected in Warsaw in 1995. We wanted to show the reader a concise picture of the Division's history and its achievements, while simultaneously offering a guide for later reading.

To make the picture of the Division as full as possible, we strove to go beyond the traditional framework of traditional military writing, devoting only one chapter to warfare.

The remaining parts of the work, of course, do contain military traits but these do not constitute their main theme. We also made an effort to present the history of the Division as remembered by the participants and witnesses of the events – and to avoid our own interpretations. In consequence, our studies were based mainly on two types of source: memories of the Division's soldiers, exclusively recorded for the purposes of this book, and selected excerpts of published memories of those who had already passed away.

The interviews which we managed to conduct and record with a dozen of the Division's soldiers form an important part of the effort preceding the publication of this book. As a result, we ended up with a rich seam of material containing over 400 pages of typescript. A historian is well aware that the memories of the events which took place over 50 years ago have only limited value. Many details get forgotten, others become confused over the years while yet more are pulled from books or the experiences of others. We were, of course, aware of this problem, but believed that, in a story about people, the personal quality of such reminiscences was crucial.

The selection of material, substantial by any measure for an historical work, also became a priority for us. From the large amount of printed and recorded memories we managed to publish here only a small part. We could include no more and our choice is bound to be subjective and imperfect. We can only regret that we were not able to publish more of the material which we would have liked to include in this book. Therefore, both for the authors, those whose memories and works we have been using and for the reader let this selection be only a sample of existing documents about the Division and no more than a guide for further reading.

We have tried throughout to limit the role of the editorial team, except for Chapter I and II compiled and translated by Jan and Teresa Suchcitz, and Chapters IV, V, and VI written by Zbigniew Mieczkowski. The introduction to the archives of the Sikorski's Institute was presented by Dr Andrzej Suchcitz. The editor provided the conceptual layout of the volume, gathered the material together and made selections. We have also prepared introductions to the chapters, and subchapters and to the paragraphs linking the extracts from the interviews, the quotes from publications and the material acquired from other European cities.

Publication of this book would have been impossible were it not for the goodwill and help we received from so many people and organisations. We would like to begin our list of acknowledgements with the soldiers of General Stanisław Maczek who were kind enough to give their recollections and anecdotes. They are, in alphabetical order (in brackets we give the date of interview and the name of interviewer with the following abbreviations: ZM. – Zbigniew Mieczkowski; J.J.M. – Jan J. Milewski): Capt. Lech Czernicki (26.04.1998, Z.M.), Capt. Witold Deimel (08.10.1997, J.J.M.), Capt. Ryszard Dembiński (09.10.1997, J.J.M.), Maj. Stanisław Grabowski (07.10.1997, J.J.M.), Gen. Michał Gutowski (Z.M.), Maj. Henryk Kątny (06.10.1997, J.J.M.), Capt. Janusz Kiwerski (20.04.1998, Z.M.), Col. Władysław Kohutnicki (29.01.2002, Z.M.), Maj. Zbigniew Kozak (October 1997, J.J.M.), Maj. Stanisław Martynoga (March 1998, Z.M.), Capt. Zbigniew Mieczkowski (11.09.1997, J.J.M.), Capt. Jan Suchcitz (09.10.1997, J.J.M.), Lt Col. Henryk Weber (08.10.1997 and 09.10.1997, J.J.M.), Maj. Tadeusz Wielgórski (7.10.1997, J.J.M.), Maj. Stanisław Ziółkowski (part one: January 1998, part two: 12.05.1999, Z.M.). Their knowledge and experience helped us to show many aspects important for the history of the Division. For help with the interviews, as well as for providing us with the necessary materials we are indebted to the General Sikorski Institute in London.

We are indebted for the financial help obtained from Polonia Aid Foundation Trust – Col. J. Zaleski, Polish Airforce Association Charitable Found – Col. Andrzej Jeziorski, Polish Ex-Combatant Association in Great Britain – Mrs Barbara Orłowska and other contributors to the book 'Żołnierze Generała Maczka'.

When translating this work in English we would like to acknowledge great help obtained from Mr and Mrs M. Chruściel, Mrs Maria Środoń, Mr John Hampson, Mrs Barbara Kuszell, Mr T. Neale, Mrs Anna Patrick-Wielogórska, Mrs Nicola Page, Mrs Teresa Skinder-Suchcitz, Lt Col. I.F. Watts and Major Ryszard Zatorski.

Finally a remark for the young reader, born and educated many years after the events described herein, and who is witnessing the unification of Europe and a new Poland taking its rightful place, once more, among the community. The material presented in this book date from a different time and show an entirely different world. Europe between 1939 and 1945, was in the midst of mortal combat. It had fallen beneath the boot of a ruthless tyrant. It was occupied by Nazi Germany. The views which have been expressed about Germany and the Germans by both Poles and those other Europeans quoted in this book refer to those times and would be completely different from contemporary ones. If this book can convince the young reader that the events we have described actually took place sixty years ago and that the people whose experiences are recalled were their forebears, many of whom are still alive and so part of this modern Europe, it will fulfil its role. Maybe it will make them ponder on the dramatic wounds and suffering from the recent past that are still present in the consciousness of 21st Century United Europe.

CHAPTER I

COMMANDING OFFICERS OF THE 1st POLISH ARMOURED DIVISION

GENERAL STANISŁAW MACZEK

1st Polish Armoured Division reflected the personality of its commanding officer, General Stanisław Maczek.

He was for his soldiers the highest authority both in human relations and in military matters.

It is odd and rather sad that there no biography has yet been written about this famous general. There is no book, even in Polish, about this most distinguished and successful of allied commanders of World War II. By contrast, every British and American commanding officer, beginning with Field Marshal Montgomery and Gen. Patton have been the subject of several books. Their biographical sketches fill many columns in English, American and French military encyclopaedias and dictionaries.

The Polish reader who wishes to widen his knowledge about Gen. Maczek can read his autobiography *From Horsecart to Tank* (*Od podwody do czołga*). It was first published in Edinburgh in 1961 and a second edition appeared 23 years later. His book has never been translated into English, and the French language edition is now practically unobtainable.

For anyone interested in the history of the campaign fought by the Polish Division, and especially in the phenomenon of its inception, Gen. Maczek's book is obligatory reading. Although the author never once uses the word 'phenomenon', his personality as it emerges in the course of the narrative, explains clearly how the unusual character of this formation came into being. *From Horsecart to Tank* covers only the period up to 8th May 1945, the day German capitulated.

Shortly afterwards, Gen. Maczek was promoted to Lieutenant General and took command of the Ist Polish Corps in Scotland, relinquishing 'his' division to Gen. Klemens Rudnicki. He was then at the peak of his career, barely 53 years old, having devoted 31 to military service. To his British, American and French contempories with similar rank and achievements, the end of the war brought honours, important positions and often led to political careers. For General Maczek these roads were closed. For this man, whose part in the defeat of Nazi Germany and of the restoration of peace in Europe was so significant, the second half of his life – and he lived to be a hundred and two – was the hard, humble life of an emigrant. These years do not form part of his book.

An additional source for the biography of Gen. Maczek is the album of photographs centered on his life, edited by J.L. Englert and K. Barbarski, published still during his lifetime,

in 1992. It includes a rich choice of photographs from the General's early childhood until his last years in Edinburgh. This visual material is supplemented by the inclusion of important documents not easily accessible elsewhere and by two biographic sketches written by Dr Andrzej Suchcitz and Col. Tadeusz Wysocki.

The present sub-chapter cannot compensate for the lack of a fully researched life of Gen. Maczek, which is still awaiting its author. The editors had two main aims when selecting the material. Firstly, to present those fragments of Gen. Maczek's book, which most clearly illustrate the development of his personality; secondly, by citing the reminiscences of his subordinates, to show how they remember him.

Stanisław Maczek was born in 1892 in Szczerzec near Lwów (Lemberg). This made him a near contempory of those Polish and Allied commanders who were to play a leading part in World War II. Among the Poles were Gen. Anders (1892) and on the allied side: O.M. Bradley (1893), Field Marshal Montgomery (1887), Gen. Patton (1885), Gen. Eisenhower (1887) and many others.

The future general was born to a well-educated middle class family. His father was a lawyer who on retirement as a judge, opened his own chambers in Drohobycz. With this family background in Galicia [edit.: Southern Poland], it was most natural for the young man to study the humanities.

His own words present most clearly the paths by which his character and personality developed:

> Maybe the least trivial detail in my reminiscences is the fact that I was born in South-Eastern Poland, in the district of Lwów. This fact coloured my wartime experiences in the years 1918 – 1920 and in 1939. My character, my mentality and to a certain extent my military profile, were moulded by the realities of pre-1914 life and then the war years up to 1920... We were brought up in the intensely harsh, patriotic atmosphere of the universities and colleges of Southern Poland. We were indelibly influenced by the novels first of Henryk Sienkiewicz, then by the works of the 'Young Poland' writers: Kasprowicz, Wyspiański, Żeromski and others. We identified with the leading characters and tried to emulate them.
>
> In order to present an even more confused picture of myself, as a student at the Jan Kazimierz University of Lwów I underwent the first military training in the Rifle Association [edit.: a pre-1914 secret society working towards the creation of a cadre of trained officers for the future struggle for Polish independence], and only the premature call up to the Austrian Army prevented me from joining Piłsudski's Legion [edit.: This was still the time of the partition of Poland by Russia, Prussia and Austria]. Thus I became a Tyrolean rifleman.
>
> For four years I studied philosophy at the University of Lwów under the skilled guidance of Prof. Twardowski and Polish literature under Professors Bruchnalski and Kallenbach. For my Polish language professors I studied the philosophy of the 17th century Sebastian Petrycy, who had copiously annotated his translations of Plato and Aristotle. His commentary, in spite of the all-pervasive influence of St. Thomas Aquinas, revealed much originality of thought of our Polish philosopher. But in order to reach his flashes of originality and for comparison's sake, it was necessary to cope with the Ancient Greek of Plato and Aristotle as well as the Latin of Thomas Aquinas. What magnitude of Benedictine labour! On submitting my work in the tutorial of Prof. Kallenbach, during the discussions which followed, when my arguments were contrary to the views expressed by Prof Stanisław Kot in the only published work on Sebastian Petrycy, I had two friends on my side. Firstly, the future Professor Wacław Komarnicki, who died after the war in London and secondly the future Dr. Włodzimierz Jampolski, my close friend, who later edited the 'Lwów Courier' and whom the Germans executed in Lwów in 1943.

During the years 1913 – 1914 I was mainly involved in the tutorials of Prof. Twardowski working in the field of the psychology of emotions: 'emotions as expressed in literature'.

A rather original training for a future officer who was to command various formations in the First and Second World War.

I spent the 1st World War rather sportingly and with a certain panache in the Alpine and Ski formation of the Tyrolean Regiment in which as the war progressed, there were fewer and fewer true Tyroleans whereas the number of Croatians, my distant blood relations, increased steadily. My grandfather came from Croatia. In my battalion I was the only Polish officer, this therefore did not permit me to be a weak one. The medal ribbons multiplied, but more importantly my experience of fighting in mountainous terrain grew apace.

To the end of my military career I was happiest when the map revealed a tangle of contour lines, that was when I was at my best. This experience served me well in the Podkarpacie region in 1918 – 1919 [edit.: the period of Polish-Russian war] and in the Podhale in 1939 and even around Falaise in 1944. (*From Horsecart to Tank*, p. 15 – 17).

The widening and deepening of his military experience as well as of his tactical conceptions are best expressed by the General himself in a passage which gave his book its title:

From cart to tank! – Yes!

From a cart drawn by strong horses which transported 6 – 8 stalwart chaps armed with rifles and hand grenades, and above all an eagerness to fight in the years 1918 – 1920. Through motor trucks and half trucks, each transporting more than a dozen no less stalwart lancers or mounted riflemen in the year 1939, but with the valuable addition of anti-tank guns and with a sprinkling of light tanks and artillery, through to a heavy, but fast and manoeuvrable armoured division, with its Cromwells and Shermans, tank destroyers and the Sextons of artillery.

So in the space of one quarter of a century, from 1919 to 1945, the war experiences of Polish soldiers in units which can be defined as 'mobile units', in which speed and manoeuvrability were the requisites and strength, the desired element was at last achieved with the armoured division *(op. cit.,* p. 15).

These short glimpses of Gen. Maczek's formative years, the experiences of the First World War and of the Bolshevik-Polish War of 1918 – 1920 throw some light on his philosophy of command. As an experienced colonel in command of a most valuable unit such as the 10th Motorised Cavalry Brigade in 1939 and in 1940 in France, he gained an even deeper insight into what is a successful commanding officer. His all embracing care for his soldiers, not only their welfare, but also for their honour, is best expressed in the following passage where he ponders on the outcome of the Battle of Falaise:

The splendours and miseries of the battle fought by the Polish Armoured Division in Normandy.

I shall start with the losses, for these in the first hours after the ending of the battle had the greatest significance and even influence on the morale of both officers and soldiers.

We were a formation with a growing history: the motorisation before September 1939, the campaign fought by the 10th Cavalry Brigade in Poland and in France in 1940, several years of selecting people with different temperaments, intensive training and living together at close quarters, sticking together in France and Great Britain made for a very special ethos and atmosphere. The commanding officer of

a regiment, squadron or platoon who was killed in this battle was no mere cipher. They were Matthew, or Władek – a friend, a comrade or a subordinate of long standing. The driver, or gunner of a tank, they too were no mere ciphers. They were Franek, or Stan known since the September campaign or from France. It was he who was so brave at the battle of Wysoka or Montbard, he with whom we had escaped together from Hungary or from France. Sometimes it was somebody's own son or cousin, for these relationships also existed in the Division.

For two weeks the Division was under constant fire. The last days and nights were a living nightmare. We emerged from this battle sadly depleted, with numbers shrinking before my very eyes. I was therefore assessing in my mind the possibility of withdrawing the Division for a few months to rest and to integrate the replacements, to play ourselves in. I was approached by officers worried about their units, and by friends. The British Liaison Officers assured me that they would gain the agreement of Allied commanders.

The vision of a still sunny France with September ahead of us, with wine and fruits of early autumn was very tempting... One basic fact overweighed and defeated this train of thought. The Division had fulfilled its difficult assignment in circumstances and conditions so exceptional that they should not be considered as typical for a military formation such as we were. And now, when there is a prospect of swift action, and of using an armoured division in pursuit, which is its true role, we are to be eliminated? The laurels and successes of the pursuit, an easy option in comparison with what we had achieved, will be gathered by the Canadian, British, or American soldiers – everyone except us Poles. And this at the very moment when Warsaw is bleeding, when we are unable to deliver direct help, except in this one way of fighting the Germans, although on a distant front, when can we join with those at home, at a time when it is so important that the whole world should be talking about the fighting spirit of the Polish soldier.

I wrote a short report to the commanding officer of the Canadian army, underlining that according to my judgement, the Division after a week's rest and incorporating replacements which were with us in France will be ready to continue fighting, even though the units might be under strength' (*op. cit.*, p. 179 – 180).

In this passage as well as in the following reminiscences of his subordinates, the influence of his university studies in philosophy and psychology can be easily discerned.

One of the best assessments of Gen. Maczek as a commanding officer is that of the then Maj. Michał Gutowski who commanded the 2nd squadron of the 10th Mounted Rifles Rgt during the battle of Normandy, then became its the second-in-command, and finally, towards the end of the war, commanded the 2nd Armoured Rgt:

General Maczek was one of the most genuine commanding officers that one could wish to meet. An infantry officer linked in 1920 to the cavalry during the operations against Budienny's Horse Army, Captain, then Major Stanisław Maczek commanded a 'flying' infantry formation. They were armed with machine guns and transported by horse drawn carts. His task was to provide support to a cavalry division fighting against Budienny's mounted formations. It was then that he acquired his knowledge of the cavalry spirit, and he appreciated it especially when the Division was being formed. He, an infantry officer, adopted the cavalry badges like miniature pennons, which provoked the indignation of the armoured branch as theirs were triangular. The General knew what he was doing. He based himself on the immemorial usage which traditionally and historically belonged to medieval times and especially to the splendid, unconquered 'husaria' regiments. With them originated our divisional insignia: the 'husaria' wing and helmet. The General had a pleasant, straightforward approach to both

officers and men. He knew how to maintain discipline, there were no silly familiarities. His care was grounded in the conviction that an officer should maintain a paternal attitude, such as is found in a good family, and not that of a soulless martinet only good at issuing orders. This spirit was accepted in the Division, and such a system should have been introduced into the whole army. In my eyes, those of a professional soldier, the relationship between officer and soldier in our Division reached near perfection.The soldier respected and liked the officer. And this, when Soviet deceitful propaganda claimed that in 1939 all the officers ran away and left their poor subordinates without protection.

General Maczek was a little bit of a philosopher. He began his studies at the University of Lwów and one could feel the wisdom in his relationships with different people. He was an educator and a psychologist who was able to look realistically at his subordinates and assess them.

We get a glimpse of the General, then Col. Maczek, during the September 1939 campaign from Lt Stanisław Ziółkowski of the 24th Lancers Rgt:

Two A-A guns were stationed in the market place in Wiśnicz. When I stopped next to one of them asking for their officer, the gunner shouted: 'Lieutenant, the German tanks are enfilading from a side street into the market place' and gave the order to fire. Those two A-A guns destroyed three German tanks and stopped the attack on Wiśnicz. After this brave action, I delivered the orders, whose subject I now do not remember, to the troop commander and returned to the HQ. There I recounted what I had witnessed to Col. Maczek. He immediately left the building, drove to the market place and hugged the gunners for the splendid effect of their fire.

Gen Maczek was a straightforward man with a direct way of behaving, and without an overdue regard for his dignity or safety as is recalled by Lt Stanisław Martynoga of the 9th Rifle Battalion:

We took up positions in front of Ypres as the German anti tank fire prevented us from entering the town. We saw a jeep speeding up the road towards us. It became clear that Gen. Maczek was in the jeep. I jumped out and shouted: 'General! What are you doing here? The shooting will start directly, please get into the ditch'. The jeep left the road, the General jumped out and at that instant a bullet whizzed past him. It was a very dramatic moment.

Gen. Maczek was a soldier through and through. As a commanding officer he considered it his duty to make sure that the soldiers were trained as well as possible to make them ready for action. He realised what lay ahead. As the Division went into action, he studied every order he received very carefully. He compared it with the current situation and always admonished his officers not to take precipitate action, to give the soldiers such orders as were possible to carry out with the minimum loss of life.

Another glimpse of the General with an impish sense of humour and a complete lack of self-importance is shown in this account by Maj. Henryk Kątny, of the A-A Regiment:

General Maczek, though a professional officer by choice, nevertheless remained a humanist in spirit. But these two traits complemented each other. At all times one would notice the humanitarian attitude in his approach to other people, be they civilian or soldier.

It happened during our stay near Falaise. I was then in command of a troop of A-A artillery. One day it was necessary to fetch a liaison officer, an Englishman, at a time when our cook decided to make potato pancakes. This was then a rare treat, and

today it might sound odd, but I asked my second-in-command, Lt Maciąg to take a jeep and collect this officer.

Driving along, he meets a Polish soldier, with his sleeves rolled up and without a collar. He asks: 'What are you doing here?' The answer is: 'I am taking a walk, just that, walking'. The next question: 'Do you know where the division's HQ is?' – 'Yes'. 'Well jump in'. They drive along and my friend gets the feeling that all is not well. They arrive at the HQ and all the officers salute, a little too ostentatiously. It was then that his passenger clapped Maciąg on the shoulder and said: 'Well Lieutenant, don't you recognise your divisional commanding officer?' Maciąg did not know what to do, one cannot after all stand up in a jeep and salute. It is easy to imagine my friend's agitation, he had not recognised his General, he had not got out of the jeep, saluted and reported; in other words, he will be put on his commanding officer's report. He could only stutter: 'I never had the pleasure'. The General answered: 'My name is Maczek'. The lieutenant in a small voice: 'And I am Maciąg'. A conversation developed. It happened that both had relatives in Lwów. This occurrance reveals a great deal about our commanding officer: his very human approach towards his subordinates did not prevent him from maintaining military discipline'.

Gen. Maczek also had a great sense of occasion and of what was due to a victorious general. This incident happened in Breda and is recounted by Lt Andrzej Maszkowski:

Soon after the liberation of Breda the Dutch liaison officers tried to get some information from several of our staff as to whether we knew when our General would pay a courtesy visit to the Queen's Consort, Prince Bernhard, who was stationed nearby with his staff and who was the Commander-in-Chief of the re-forming Dutch army. We passed on this information to the General, whose answer was: 'Tell the Dutch officers that I am willing to meet and become acquainted with Prince Bernhard, but let him visit me in my Polish headquartes in Breda'. Prince Bernhard understood the message and a few days later came on an official visit.

And a final glimpse from Lt Maszkowski of the attitudes of both Gen. Maczek and Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands:

Breda was liberated and we were well settled and organised for a lengthy stay. We heard that Queen Wilhelmina had returned from London and was staying in a small castle in the neighbourhood of Breda. One evening, the General came into our mess in exceedingly good humour, in full gala uniform with all his medals. He had received an invitation to visit the Queen and was obviously very pleased about it. We in the mess were rather envious of the royal dinner and fantasised about the menu. The ending was very different. The General returned with a very serious mien. Feeling exceedingly curious, we asked about the royal reception. Well, Queen Wilhelmina, a level headed and wise woman, in solidarity with her starving subjects had entertained the General to tea and biscuits.

Nowadays, several times a year, I visit the beautiful divisional cemetery in Breda, where according to his own wishes, General Maczek reposes in a modest grave, no different from those of his soldiers. And I am always deeply moved.

During the war, the regaining of freedom and throwing off the yoke of German occupation was a cherished dream for the people of Northern Europe. Nevertheless the process of the liberation was dangerous and burdensome for many. The Germans, as described earlier, had built up a very considerable force to oppose the expected Allied invasion. In many areas they fought hard and with great determination, launching counter attacks, thus renewing in this desperate struggle the hell of war for the local people caught up in the

fighting. The defeat and driving out of the German troops of itself brought freedom, but the size of civilian losses depended on the way in which the Allies accomplished their task.

Once again we return to Gen. Maczek's character and personality, which flowed out of his philosophy of war. He, out of all the Allied commanders, tried most consistently to lessen the casualties of the people to whom his Division was bringing freedom. This attitude was adopted by all his soldiers.

The following examples show how the then junior officers perceived this. Capt. Stanisław Grabowski commanded one of the squadrons of the 1st Armoured Regiment:

We advance towards a town, the German positions are situated in front of it. They are firing, some tanks are destroyed, there are some casualties among the infantry. This town can be taken in several different ways. It could be done by Field Marshal Montgomery's method: send a bevy of bombers and blitz the town, or lay on an artillery barage and then storm the town. But there was also a different way. If we encircle the town, then there is a chance that street fighting will be avoided. This was Gen. Maczek's way, and he thus gained renown among the civilian population.

This method of proceeding became a dogma for the soldiers of Gen. Maczek. The realisation of this method was always structured to meet the current situation as Lt Maszkowski recalls:

A few days after the liberation of Breda, whilst at breakfast in the mess, the General approaches and says: 'Leave this breakfast, get into a scoutcar and hurry to Willemstad. The Americans are preparing a large scale-bombing of this historical small town to which they are laying siege. Tell them we have received information that it is defended by a small group of elderly Wehrmacht soldiers and that the Americans can enter it without risk'. I went. The most difficult part was to get through the 'bureaucracy' to reach the officer in charge and give him my message. As we know their method was safety above all, which was to bomb everything and only then march in. Thus the beautiful historic Willemstad was saved.

Gen. Maczek's soldiers all agreed that the ideals grafted on to them by him should guide their conduct towards the population liberated from the German yoke. Capt. Tadeusz Wielogórski of the 2nd Armoured Rgt. put it like this:

Every soldier of the Division tried to cause the least damage to the countryside he traversed. Sometimes it cost us losses, but we had it in our Polish blood. Already in Poland during manoeuvres, the soldiers in their tanks tried not to destroy crops: arounding fields of potatoes or beet. Not to spoil the harvest, not to damage houses. This was fixed in the minds of armoured troops. Even here abroad I have never seen a Pole spoiling a field... and for this the local population valued us so much. We did not ruin towns. When we were investing Breda, all the regiments and all the tanks in three regiments could have fired. We would have caused complete devastation. It was because of this that Breda greeted us so warmly.

Finally 2nd Lt Jan Suchcitz of the 10th Mounted Rifles, the Division's reconnaissance regiment, summed up the attitude which emanated from the philosophy of its commanding officer:

The particular popularity of the soldiers of the 1st Division was the result of the observance of the principles then termed 'gentlemanly', and which to-day we would call 'observance of human rights'. Gen. Maczek, both in France and in Scotland, continued to educate his soldiers basing himself on the pre-war system. The Polish soldier was schooled in the spirit that he is the servant of his nation, he must serve it

and in case of necessity, as well to give it his protection. This principle was applied to the people he liberated, including the French, Belgian and Dutch.

The last fifty years of Gen. Maczek's life were lived in accordance with his principles. He sought no honours. As a firm believer that the army should be apolitical, he refused to take part in the politics of the Polish Government in Exile. Very modestly, he worked in Edinburgh to support his family. He received no pension either from the British or the Canadian government. It was only the appreciation and generosity of the Dutch people which made it possible to assure a safe future for his disabled daughter. He remained faithful to the memory of the Division he had commanded so well, attending reunions and commemorative occasions, interesting himself in the fate of all his soldiers, and always gladly welcoming visits from his subordinates.

Since regaining full independence from Communist rule in 1989, the Polish authorities, which once had deprived this great son of their nation of his Polish nationality, heaped honours on him. At that late time of his life he did not take advantage of this and although invited, never returned to his native land. He died at the great age of 102 years on 11th December 1994 and was buried with full military honours in the Polish cemetery in Breda. He remains alive in the memory of his old soldiers.

GENERAL KLEMENS RUDNICKI

In May 1945, Gen. Stanisław Maczek was nominated to command the I st Polish Corps in Scotland. In Germany he left his soldiers deeply devoted to him, the well-earned reputaton of the Division, and a spot on the map – a small town, which bore the name of 'Maczków'.

The I Corps came into being in Scotland in 1940. From the start it remained a skeleton formation as many men were transferred to fill the ranks of the 1st Armoured Division to bring it up to full strength for the campaign in Northern Europe. After 1944, the Polish Forces in the West were being reorganized in such a way as to be ready for the renewal of armed conflict, this time against the USSR. Although the Polish Government in Exile did not subscribe to this eventuality, Gen. Anders was convinced that such a conflict would shortly ensue. The 1st Armoured Division remained an integral part of the I st Corps, and therefore still under the overall command of Gen. Maczek.

Gen. Klemens Rudnicki was appointed on the 21st May 1945 to succeed Gen. Maczek in the command of the 1st Armoured Division, becoming its second and last commanding officer. His stewardship fell in peacetime, with the duty of Occupation of the territories of the erstwhile enemy.

In the light of what has been said so far about the unique character of the Divison, the change in commanding officer could be of crucial importance: would the soldiers under a different general still retain the values taught to them by Gen. Maczek? – his ways of proceeding, his style, his chivalrous approach to the defeated enemy?

In order to answer this question it is necessary to take a look at the personality of the new commanding officer. Like Gen. Maczek, he still awaits a definitive biography. The image of this important person in the history of the Division emerges only from reminiscences of his contemporaries.

Klemens Rudnicki was born in 1897 into a family of landed gentry in the Tarnopol District where his father held high office. After the peace of Riga (1921) the family estates remained beyond the eastern frontier of the Polish State. Rudnicki had joined the Scouts before the 1st World War and had attended a Jamboree in London, which he was fond of remembering. During the Russian-Polish War of 1919–1920 he served in the 2nd Light Horse Rgt as a subaltern and then as captain. He studied at the Military Academy and

became one of its lecturers in tactical studies. Before the war he lived in Warsaw with his family. In 1938 he was nominated to the command of the 9th Lancers Rgt stationed at Trembowla. His stay in the town remained for him an unforgettable experience, especially as it was also a return to his native Galicia. After the war he often mentioned that the 9th Regiment was like a second home for him.

At the beginning of the 1939 campaign, the 9th Lancers Rgt commanded by Lt Col. Rudnicki was transported by rail to Poznań and thence on horseback further west. The German attack did not come from that direction and the regiment fell back and fought on different sections of the permanently changing front line. Ultimately passing through the Laski region they reached the capital and took part in the defence of Warsaw. In the final stages, having avoided being scattered, the regiment was still fighting as a unit. At the capitulation of Warsaw it was disbanded by its commanding officer.

After the lost campaign, Gen. Rudnicki remained in Poland and joined the Underground Movement at its very inception. In January 1940, he was sent to Lwów by the then Head of the Home Army, Gen. Stefan Rowecki, to take up the position of deputy chief-of-staff. Unfortunately he never reached his destination as he was arrested by the NKWD (Soviet secret police). He gave an account of his time as a prisoner in the USSR in his autobiography published under the English title: *The Last of the War Horses* (Bachman & Turner, London 1974). In it he writes with great restraint about his time as prisoner in the various Soviet prisons. The story of how he, and many thousands of the future officers and men of the II Corps were finally extricated from the Soviet penal institutions is full of unusual incidents.

He served with distinction during the campaign in Italy. In the II Corps he held the position of second-in-command to Gen. Nikodem Sulik who commanded the 5th Kresowa (Eastern Poland) Infantry Division. At the battle of Monte Cassino this unit led the attack on the exposed 'Phantom Ridge' during which Gen. Sulik succumbed to illness and Col. Rudnicki, taking over command, led the division in the successful attacks on the 'Phantom Ridge' and 'St Angelo'.

His greatest military achievement was the capture of Bologna during which he commanded the battlegroup 'Rud', composed of two brigades of infantry supported by armoured units. He entered the town at the head of his troops to an enthousiastic welcome of the inhabitants. Bologna, the cradle of European learning, the Alma Mater of many Polish scholars of medieval and renaissance times, became one of the most important achievements in Rudnicki's military career.

General Rudnicki had all the attributes of an officer destined for the higher echelons of command. It is in their hands that the chiefs-of-staff leave the working out of the ultimate solutions to tactical problems, as well as arriving at the correct decisions. Gen. Rudnicki was such an officer: self-possessed, decisive in need, personally very brave. Lew Sapieha in his book *War from the Height of a Saddle* (PFK, London 1965) wrote that during the September 1939 campaign, the then Colonel was always to be found at the head of his troops, indifferent to the falling artillery and machine-gun shells.

General Rudnicki's period of command began at the time of the Occupation of Germany. A separate zone was assigned to the Division in the area of Meppen – Oldenburg. There Gen. Rudnicki was the highest authority, and the Polish Parachute Brigade stationed at Quackenbruk also came under his command. Some 20 000 Polish troops were thus incorporated into the Allied Forces in Germany.

There, the soldiers met great numbers of compatriots: Polish officers and men who had been prisoners of war, civilians who had been deported to Germany for forced labour, survivors of concentration camps, soldiers of the Home Army from the Warsaw Uprising. Gen. Rudnicki tried to extend humanitarian care to all those people. They were not so advantaged as the soldiers on Occupation duties, who were maintained by the Allies.

In order to look after this multitude lost in a hostile world, the General formed special departments of the General Staff under the overall command of the divisional Chief-of-Staff, Lt Col. Ludwik Stankiewicz, and later Maj. Adam Larysz Niedzielski. Col. A. Grudziński had special responsibility for the civilians and Col. Dr Szydłowski for those who had been prisoners of war. Other officers, like Maj. Adam Łebkowski and Lt J. Jarmulski, were recruited to the department to help with this vital work. The Divisional Chaplaincy provided spiritual and moral care while the Military Police looked after the safety aspects. All these units provided a wide umbrella of help to the masses of displaced persons. They gave financial aid to the Poles, secured housing, food and medical help, distributed clothing and also disseminated information about the possibility of remaining in Germany or emigrating to various countries of the free world. Return to communist Poland was then a difficult decision, especially so for those who had lost their homes which, as a result of the Yalta agreement, had been incorporated into the Soviet Union. The resources which UNRRA [edit.: Governments Agency representing victorious powers] was able to provide were in fact often impeded by the political agenda of this organization. This caused a conflict of interest, as their methods of persuading the displaced persons to agree to repatriation put undue pressure on people who had suffered so much during the war. The General and his staff were able to prevent this by timely intervention with the British and US commanders who were sympathetic to needs of the displaced persons.

It is thanks to Gen. Rudnicki that a comprehensive educational network was developed. During the war, many Polish teachers had been deported and imprisoned in Germany. And it was with their help that schools of all grades were organized. In the Polish schools in Maczków, for example, many young people received a good education and its matriculation certificate opened the doors of universities in Poland and abroad. Five hundred students were admitted to universities in Belgium and were maintained there for two years by the Division. It is also due to his persistent intervention with the British Authorities, that the women prisoners from Oberlangen were recruited to the Division, gaining the right to be evacuated to great Britain and join the Polish Resettlement Corps.

Gen. Rudnicki also assumed the task and methods of a historian. He tried to document the events taking place. Among his initiatives was an exposition where every unit of the Division had its stand.

The General received many delegations from towns and countries which came to thank the Poles for bringing them freedom. During the meetings with various delegates, standing in front of the Guard of Honour, he charmed the arriving French, Dutch, or Belgians by his dignified military bearing and courtliness. Some divisional units received their colours from grateful towns. Gen. Rudnicki always took part in all these ceremonies.

It would need a skilled writer to describe such a rich personality as General Klemens Rudnicki who died in London in August 1992.

In his autobiography, *The Last of the War Horses,* Gen. Rudnicki thus described his work as Commanding Officer of the 1st Armoured Division on Occupation in Germany:

> I saw the occupation by my Division of the sea-port Wilhelmshaven – the pride of the German Navy – where we accepted the surrender of the German forces. Later we were visited by our Acting Commander-in-Chief, General Anders, while the town was decorated with thousands of Polish flags on my orders. This obviously, was no small satisfaction for us, avenging September 1939 and the destruction of Warsaw.
>
> The 1st Armoured Division occupied the German territories of Friesland and Oldenburg. It was the first time in history that Polish forces had occupied a German territory. And there we witnessed the full impact of the Gehenna of the one-and-a-half million Poles dragged from their homeland by the Nazis, deported into concentration camps, prisoner-of-war camps and slave-labour camps in Germany.

Unfortunately a deep conflict developed between our Division and with the Higher Command of Occupation Allied Forces. As an Allied occupation division, we often received orders to follow policies that were contrary to Polish interests. The Allied Occupation Command, not being at all willing to organise the lives of thousands of the so-called 'displaced persons' from Poland, was deliberately trying to induce them to 'voluntary' repatriation. But we understood perfectly well the reasons why these Polish people, forced by the events of the war to be in Germany, were extremely reluctant to return now to Poland, and we felt that it was our duty to defend them and give them our help and support. So there was a conflict between our military loyalty, as an Allied Occupation Division and our natural obligations to our countrymen.

Thanks to the great discipline of our soldiers and our well established tradition, we were able to work out a solution to this conflict, establishing what almost amounted to a little sovereign state which provided a temporary shelter and allowed many of the Poles in Germany eventually to emigrate to countries of the Western world, rather than to return to their homeland under Soviet occupation. We received great help from many British commanders. The German town of Haren, now renamed 'Maczków' (edit. after the name of the first commanding officer of the Division), with many streets also given Polish names, became for two years, a centre for Polish schools which provided education for Polish youth. For that I should like to express my most sincere thanks to Lt. Gen. Sir Brian Horrocks.

The most important moment during our stay in Germany was the political crisis when, in July 1945, The Polish Government in Exile in London became no longer recognised by the Western Powers.

I shall never forget a conversation I had with Field Marshal Montgomery, Commander of the Army of the Rhine. It took place at his headquarters, at his request, just a few days before the Polish Government in London lost its recognition. During this conversation, the Corps Commander, Lt Gen. Thomas was present. Field-Marshal Montgomery in his cool and matter-of-fact way questioned me on this important issue.

'I believe you must already know that His Majesty's Government intends, in the next few days, to withdraw its recognition of the Polish Government in London and recognise the interim government in Warsaw. I would like to know – what are the reactions of your officers and men likely to be to this development?'

'I am going to be frank', I replied, 'there are three things in the minds of the soldiers of my Division. The first is a strong feeling of injustice. When they fought the Germans at Chambois and Falaise, under your command, with great losses, it was certainly not in order to see Poland traded away to Stalin... they feel betrayed'.

'But there will be free elections', interrupted the Field-Marshal.

'You should not have any doubts as to the outcome of these election', I replied.

'I understand', he said and from the gesture he made I gathered that the Field-Marshal shared my doubts about the 'free' elections. 'Now', he asked, 'what is your second thought?'

'It may, perhaps, sound funny', I continued, 'but the soldiers nevertheless still have faith in our Western Allies'.

'Why is that?', Montgomery inquired. 'Because they look upon their Western Allies as their friends and protectors – if only for the future', I replied. Montgomery remained silent.

'The third thought', I continued, 'is their feeling of brotherhood and comradeship with the British soldiers with whom they have very close ties as the result of many battles they have fought together, side by side'.

'Thank you General', he said, 'but what reaction do you expect from the Division after the formal announcement of the withdrawal of recognition of the Polish

Government in London? For you must understand that I am responsible for the behaviour of the occupation forces under my command in Germany'.

'With regard to political matters', I replied, 'we shall have to await instructions from our Polish Government in London. However you may rest assured that the Division will conscientiously fulfil all its assigned duties as an occupation force... We will not betray you'. 'I am satisfied'. Montgomery replied; and our conversation came to an end.

As a consequence of this conversation with Field-Marshal Montgomery, when, a few days later, Britain's recognition of our Government was formally withdrawn, I despatched an order (6th July, 1945) to all the soldiers of the 1st Division. I mentioned the injustice that had befallen us, the hopes destroyed and the bitter disappointment, but I went on to point to the responsibility of fulfilling our duties as soldiers and emphasised that our soldiers' conscience was clear, equally regarding our friends and our enemies. We had no reason to be ashamed. I spoke of our constancy in obedience to our Oath and our Colours, and declared that no injustice against us should break our determination to follow the path of righteousness. I concluded the order with the following words:

'Our duty as the Polish Occupation Division on German soil, under Allied command, will be accomplished with loyalty and honour.

We will one day return to Poland, but only with arms in our hands – to Poland whom we have dreamt about during the last five years of the war, Poland truly free and truly independent.

We will return to wipe the tears of our women and children, and to ensure that law and justice, and not foreign domination, will reign there.

We will never give up our struggle to free Poland and all the other enslaved nations, and we will truly live up to our motto, 'for your freedom and ours'. In this struggle we will not be alone. Polish Soldiers! This is our position, our will, and our decision'.

I had written a similar order once before, at the end of September 1939 in Warsaw, when I ordered the disbandment of my 9th Lancers Regiment. There too, I talked about faith, honour, and duty. Anything may happen to a soldier; political activities may make his sacrifices fruitless; but these three things cannot be taken away from him.

CHAPTER II

THE BATTLE TRAIL AND MILITARY ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE 1st POLISH ARMOURED DIVISION

In this chapter we deal with the history of the origins of the 1st Division and its achievements. The presentation follows the traditional pattern of military history.

One must clarify what is meant by the term 'military achievements'. Historians apply various concepts in this respect, none of which are wholly accurate. In this book, it is accepted that the measure of achievement can be taken as the proportion of battles won, and the successful fulfillment of other set tasks in relation to the whole of the objectives of the battlefront. In the chronological setting, this measure can be applied either to a single operation, a campaign or the whole war. So according to this scale, the 1st Division (and the earlier formations which gave rise to it), surpassed in its achievements all the Allied formations which fought in Europe during World War II.

From September 1939 to the end of April 1945, the Division fought some 50 battles and squirmishes on the following fronts: Poland 1939, France 1940 and again 1944, Belgium, Holland, and Germany. It did not suffer a single defeat and in the majority of cases it inflicted a crushing defeat. These successes were often gained at the cost of heavy losses, but this is another question.

This chapter is based on two books: *Pierwsza Dywizja w Walce* (The 1st Armoured Division in Battle) a collective authorship, and on Gen. Antoni Grudziński *Pierwsza Dywizja Pancerna* (1st Armoured Division) printed in the *Cavalry and Armoured Troops Review, 1964*. The Authors, Capt. Jan Suchcitz, a veteran of the 1st Division, and Teresa Skinder-Suchcitz found that the diary format, in which these works were set out, when taken out of its context, was not suited to general readership. So, while keeping close to the information and interpretation in the original books, the presentation has been altered in favour of a continuous narrative, enriched with additional material and quotations from Gen. Stanisław Maczek's book *From Horsecart to Tank*.

FOREWORD BY GENERAL STANISŁAW MACZEK ON THE TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BATTLE OF NORMANDY

Much has been written concerning the greatest armoured battle in the West, now known as the 'closing of the Falaise gap', which cut off the retreat routes of the German 5th and 7th Armoured Armies. Over the twenty years separating us from the events, memoirs of officers in high command and in lower positions, historical analyses and histories officially approved by British and Canadian defence ministries have multiplied.

How have the achievements of the soldiers of the Polish Armoured Division fared in this avalanche of written commentary?

After the initial spontaneous and unbiassed statements of officers in the Allied High Command on the leading role played by the Polish Division in routing the retreating German Panzer Corps, we Poles have gradually faded from the pages of history. With ever increasing frequency we are included in the general terms: 'the Allies', 'the British' or 'Canadian army or corps' in whose echelons our Division was incorporated.

It is difficult to suspect ill-will, or even a conscious effort to overlook our contribution and success. In the great mass of divisions and units which fought on the Western Front, it is easier for the historian to write in terms of armies, or at least corps. It is far simpler to say that the 21st British Army Group fought to link up with the 12th US Army in the area of Trun – Chambois, or that the Canadian army under Gen. Crerar together with Gen. Patton's 3rd US Army cut off the German retreat at Falaise, without stressing the role played by the Polish Division in this operation.

A classical example of this is the book entitled *N.W. European Campaign 1944 – 1945,* by Maj.-Gen. H. Essame CBE, DSO, MC & E.M.G. Belfield MA, published in 1962, where the Polish Division is mentioned only once: in the list of units comprising the Canadian Army, whilst the successes of some of the individual British divisions are suitably praised.

The only exception in this whole plethora of histories and memoirs is the official Canadian history of the war where the achievements of the Polish Armoured Division are widely and objectively assessed, sometimes even with enthusiasm for the 'gallant Poles'.

While with only rare exceptions history, as reduced to the published word, has almost obliterated the name of the Polish Division, an almost revolutionary commemorative revival of the Division is taking place along its battle trails.

Along the supposedly British, Canadian and US action trails, the key battle sites of Montormel, Chambois, Abbeville on the Somme, Ypres, Roulers, Ghent, Axel, Breda are bright with the colours of the Polish flag and memorials are being erected to the glory and bravery of the Polish soldier by the French, Belgian and Dutch communities.

I wish to draw attention to the importance of two of these monuments which this year will augment the already existing ones in France, Belgium and Holland. One is the memorial to the Canadian and Polish soldiers who lost their lives in the decisive battle near Falaise which finally closed the retreat routes to the withdrawing German armies. In so far as the memorial is a joint one to the Canadian and Polish soldiers and the flags of Britain, Canada, France, Poland and the US will fly over it, the site chosen for its erection is the tactically key position dominating the 'Falaise valley', hill 262 – Montormel. It is the place of the fiercest of Polish battles; we named it: 'Maczuga' – 'the Mace'. For a long time after its conclusion, surmounting the devastation of war and death, the British signpost proclaimed it: the 'Polish Battlefield'. Two tanks offered this year by the governments of France and the United States will form an integral part of the monument and will bear the names: one 'Maczuga', and the other 'Gen. Maczek', that of the Polish Commanding Officer.

The second memorial, this time solely to honour the fallen Polish soldiers, will be unveiled in September in St Nicolas in Belgium. It has been financed and erected entirely through the efforts of six towns: Poperinghe, Ypres, Roulers, Thielt, Lokeren and St Nicolas. It is to bear witness to the fact that the whole Flemish part of Belgium was liberated by the Poles.

It will be impossible for a future, dispationate historian to pass over these eloquent marks of history.

Lt Gen. S. Maczek
Edinburgh 1964

[ed.: *Steel Inferno* by Gen. Michael Reynolds, published in 1997, gives full due to the achievements of the 1st Polish Armoured Division and the role it played in the closing of the 'Falaise Gap'].

THE BEGINNINGS 1937 – 1939

It all began in the spring of 1937, not with the formation of a full armoured division, but with a brigade. The 10th Cavalry Brigade was then reorganised and motorized. The basic concept was that it should fulfill the role of a mobile defence unit. Between the years 1937 – 39 this concept underwent several modifications which influenced its organisation and 'ordre de bataille'. For a long time the Brigade was the only such unit in the Polish army and, as a result, was submitted to countless experiments. This had its advantages as it was included in all major and minor manoeuvres held in those years. It took part in the occupation of Zaolzie and Jaworzyna. As armed conflict with Germany became imminent, the Brigade was gradually put on a war footing.

This was accomplished in the following stages: The call-up of all reservists; the concentration of the whole Brigade in the region of Rzeszów on the 15th of August; and finally from August 25th, its concentration in the region of Kraków. At the same time, the Brigade was joined by units specially assigned to it in anticipation of war.

Colonel Trzaska-Durski was the first commanding officer after the Brigade was motorised. In October 1938 Colonel Stanisław Maczek took over its command.

In his book *From Horsecart to Tank*, the then Colonel sets out his first encounter with the thinking of the Polish General Staff:

> On taking command, I was treated by the General Staff to their first varied conceptions of the 10th Cavalry Brigade, a unit with which I became bound, for good and ill as in a marriage, till the end of my active military career.
>
> The 10th Cavalry Brigade was the first fully motorized unit in the whole of the Polish army. By tradition it was a cavalry brigade, in reality it was a motorized one.
>
> On my way to Warsaw I was spinning visions of a thoroughbred, offensive unit, something like a mini armoured division. Reality came like a cold shower. Here was a defensive formation with the speed of a fire brigade, sufficient to localise a fire here and there. In this conception the brigade was an experimental, defensive answer to the threat posed by the enemy's fast armoured divisions. The attitude of the higher echelons was to treat it as an experiment...
>
> Without adequate documentation, I cannot tell whether in the straightened circumstances of 1938 – 39 we could have afforded something bigger or better (*op. cit.*, p. 52).

The final composition of the Brigade as it entered the war:

Brigade Staff
Traffic Control platoon
Reconnaissance squadron
Anti-tank artillery (37 mm) unit
The 24th Lancers Rgt and the 10th Mounted Rifles Rgt – both motorised
Units attached during the concentration of 15th August 1939.
One Company of Vickers and one Company of TKS light tanks.
The 16th battery (normally had 3 troops) of Motorised Artillery
(16th battery: 1 troop of 75 mm guns and 1 troop of 100 mm)
A troop of anti-aircraft artillery (40 mm)
One battalion (2 companies) of Engineers
A transport company.

Gen. Maczek comments thus:

In the few weeks preceding September 1st (1939) it was a painful reality that the brigade was still without its tank battalion and without the third troop in its battery. Both these units were to join at the moment of mobilization, but in fact they never arrived, leaving the battery without a third troop. Eight gun barrels are rather inadequate in a brigade harbouring ambitions to engage in larger operations.

Instead of the battalion of tanks mk. 7TP, about which we had heard wonders, we had to do with one squadron of well used Vickers tanks (I think there were only nine of them) and one squadron of TKS ones, which we rightly considered to be mere machine gun carriers, not tanks.

Thus right from the start the brigade was deprived of one third of its artillery and two thirds of its tanks, that is to say one third of its strike force (*op. cit.*, p. 55).

THE SEPTEMBER 1939 CAMPAIGN

On reaching the region of Kraków, the Brigade was incorporated in the 'Army Kraków' under the command of Gen. A. Szylling. Although the Brigade was to be held in reserve, enemy movement forced it into action on the very first day of war. This was due to the threat posed to the southern flank and the rear of 'Army Kraków' by the enemy armoured group which crossed from Slovakia and proceeded through the Tatra passes in the general direction of Tarnów. Gen. Szylling was forced to direct the 10th Brigade to that area in the early hours of September 1st, with the task of defending the southern wing, on the axis: Jordanów – Myślenice and Rabka – Dobczyce. For this action, the 1st KOP (Frontier Defence Corps) Infantry Regiment was attached to the Brigade as it was already in contact with the enemy in the areas of Rabka – Skomielna – Jordanów.

Gen. Maczek's assessment of the situation was as follows:

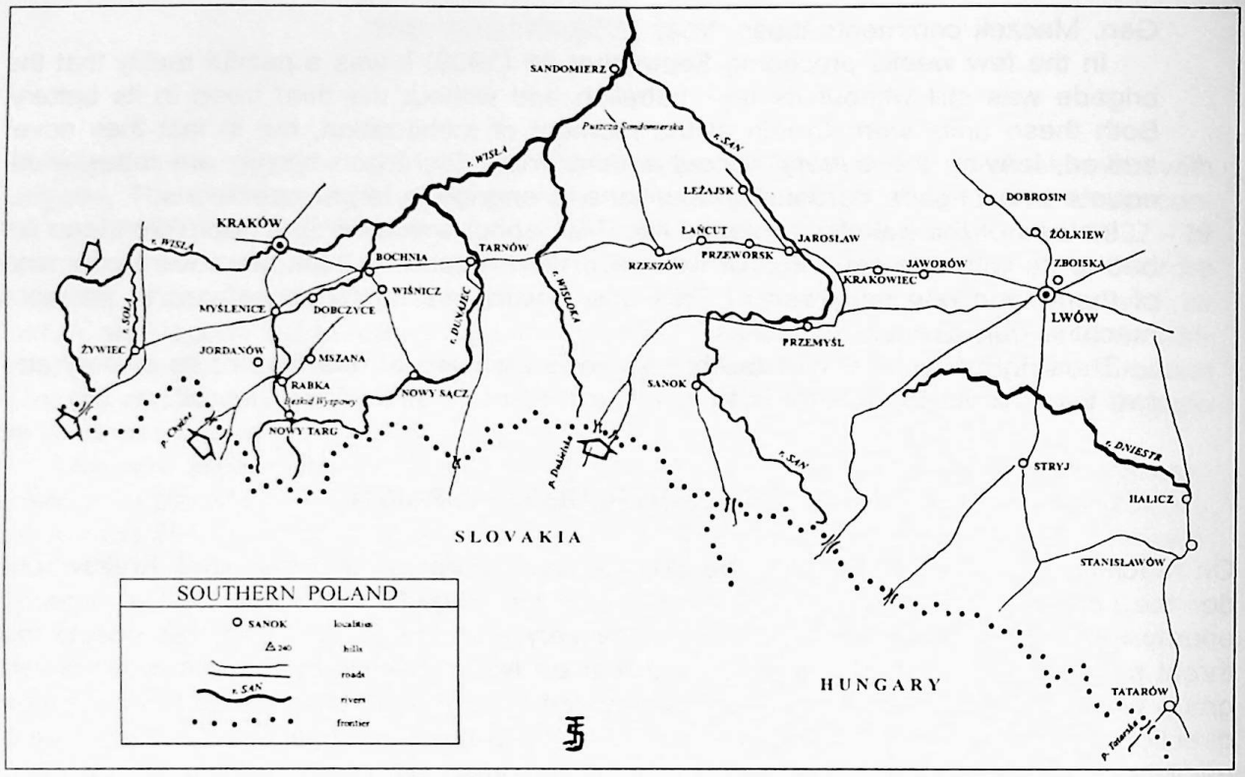
Already at the spring manoeuvres (1939) which took place to the south of Rzeszów, in the hilly area of Podkarpacie, a certain theory of delaying tactics was evolving for such a unit as our brigade when facing the accepted vast superiority of our enemy, both in tanks and artillery.

We could summarise it thus:

Right from the start we had to resign from long distance observations and fire, as in such circumstances the enemy will have excellent conditions to demonstrate his superiority in artillery fire and use of armour. It was better to accept battle in a terrain with limited horizons, drawing the enemy into gorges and defiles in which he will be unable to deploy his troops without long delays and in which he will fight us with individual fingers and not his whole fist. In order to achieve even longer delays, and to make him respect us, we should continuously seek occasions to 'bite back' with short sorties or counter attacks. This would force the enemy to be more careful, which will entail loss of time, or it will expose him to constant surprises. I fully realized that such methods make great demands on commanding officers at all levels, demands for strong characters, including that of sacrificing themselves.

We understood each other among staff officers, well matched and well played in; we also had an understanding with all commanding officers'.

The bare, and subject to long distance observation slopes of the Wysoka and Ludwik mountain, which dominated the whole terrain and were easily accessible to armour, were not according to the above doctrine an ideal position. But as always a tactical thesis has its opposite antithesis, so here too were reasons which forced me to accept my first battle in such circumstances (*op. cit.*, p. 60).



The participation of the Brigade in the September Campaign can be divided into the following stages:

1. Delaying manoeuvres in the Beskid Mountains guarding the Southern flank of 'Army Kraków'.

Faced by the German 2nd Armoured Division and the 4th Light Division, in the course of five days, the Brigade delayed these units in two areas: Jordanów – Skomielna and, Biała – Myślenice-Rabka – Krasina – Dobczyce. Contact with the enemy was established on the opening day and the first prisoners were taken. On the 3rd, 4th, 5th September, Col. Maczek, the Brigade C.O., concentrated on delaying tactics, while at the same time, moving the greater part of his troops during the night of the 2/3rd September in the direction of Dobczyce and there surprising the enemy by a counter-attack. During the night of 4/5th September he developed a second successful counter-attack from his wing in the direction of Myślenice.

In drawing up the balance sheet for the first phase of the campaign, it has to be stated that the powerful and mobile enemy operational group, though enjoying a great superiority in tanks, air support and even in sheer infantry numbers succeeded only in advancing at the mean rate of 5 km (3 miles) per day.

General Maczek comments on this part of the campaign:

> The brigade with its assigned units presented a curiosly mixed force facing a ten times larger armoured and motorized corps. During five days and nights of continuous fighting by all the brigade detachments, we ceded only 20–30 km, thus reducing the 'rapid' German advance to 4–5 km daily. We prevented any German incursion beyond the line of Myślenice – Dobczyce onto the rear or flank of Army Kraków until its last units had withdrawn.
>
> We used every different form of action, sorties and counter attacks. We repeatedly presented the same squadron of tanks and our modest two troops of artillery, simulating

a large armoured formation, thus deceiving the enemy as to our true strength and intentions.

Though in temporary crisis, I deeply believed that we continued to be a brigade capable of undertaking further operations.

We achieved a hundredfold more than an infantry formation could have done in similar circumstances and we performed much more than a cavalry unit could have achieved.

In the face of real war we passed with flying colours the test already foreshadowed in the manoeuvres of 1939.

The soldier, be he a lancer or rifleman, a motorised tank trooper, gunner or engineer and those from the KOP regiment attached to us, fought stubbornly and hard, each one with a deep belief of his superiority over the Germans (*op. cit.*, p. 73).

2. Bochnia – Dunajec

During the night of 5/6th Sept., on the southern flank of 'Army Kraków', the Brigade found itself in direct contact with the Group commanded by Gen. Boruta-Spiechowicz, whose task was to defend that flank. This was accomplished by the defence of Wiśnicz, followed by the tactical withdrawal in the direction of the river Dunajec.

3. Defensive fighting in Rzeszów – Lwów area as part of the 'Army Karpaty'

During the night of 7/8th September, following the battle on the banks of the Dunajec in which the Operational Group under Gen. Boruta-Spiechowicz was defeated and pushed back towards Leżajsk, the 10th Brigade crossed the Sandomierz forest near Rzeszów. It then came under the command of Gen. K. Fabrycy within the framework of the 'Army Karpaty', with orders to shield Lwów along the axis of the Rzeszów – Jarosław – Lwów road. In this period the Brigade's battle honours included: 8th September, the defence of Rzeszów; the battle for the control of Łańcut; then on the 10th, the temporary defence of the river San in the region of Jarosław. As the result of a German counter-attack from the direction of Przemyśl on September 11th, the Brigade had to retreat south to Krakowiec, which it defended, so holding up the enemy advance at Jaworów until the morning of the 13th September.

After crossing the San, the enemy columns outflanked the Brigade and struck at Lwów. (A German army crossed from east Slovakia through the Beskid mountains and attacked from the direction of Przemyśl). This manoeuvre forced the Brigade to transfer its units, during the night of 13/14th September to the area of Lwów with the task of defending the city from any attack from the north, initially from the Żółkiew region. That day marked the beginning of the final stages of the fighting.

4. Battle for the defence of Lwów

After a day of local skirmishing in the region of Żółkiew and Dobrosin on the 15th September, the Brigade attacked the German Mountain Division established on the hills near Zboiska, from where it directly threatened Lwów. Hill 324: Zboiska was the key enemy position. The attack on these positions lasted until September 17th. With heavy losses the hill was captured and the danger posed from that quarter was eliminated. However, coincidentally with this success came the news that Russian armies had crossed the eastern Polish frontier. Orders arrived for the Brigade to move to Halicz, and to put itself at the disposition of Marshal Śmigły-Rydz, the Supreme Commander, in anticipation of the defence of the river Dniestr.

During the night of the 17th September, by forced marches the Brigade slipped along the narrow corridor left between the German and the Russian armies and reached Halicz on the morning of the 18th. Instead of receiving orders for the defence along the river Dniestr, the Brigade was ordered to cross the Hungarian frontier. The units gathered near Tatarów

and on the 19th September, with losses amounting to a third of its strength, but in full battle order, with its arms fully operational, and under command, the Brigade crossed into Hungary through the Tatarska Pass.

The campaign was lost. The 10th Motorised Cavalry Brigade came out of the debacle with the feeling that it had faithfully fulfilled all its orders and with its honour untarnished. Its soldiers were definitely not resigning from continuing the struggle for the freedom of their country.

THE 1940 CAMPAIGN IN FRANCE

After crossing the Hungarian frontier and when the new situation had been fully assessed, every soldier's thoughts turned to France, the ally who would obviously now, without delay, undertake the continuation of the action of the defeated avantgarde – the Polish Army.

Throughout the winter of 1939–1940, the soldiers of the 10th Motorised Cavalry Brigade individually, in small groups and even in complete squadrons percolated through Europe to gather in France under the command of Col. Maczek who, in recognition of his successful leadership in the September Campaign, was promoted to the rank of major-general.

The preparation for the continued struggle for Poland passed through a number of stages: the time between October 1939 and February 1940 was taken up with gathering and organising the units in the camp and in the area of Coëtquidan in Brittany. The prevailing idea was to create a light mechanised division (French term for an armoured division), around the core of the old 10th Motorised Cavalry Brigade. Its numbers were swelled by cavalry personnel from other Polish brigades, soldiers from motorised and armoured units, artillerymen, signalmen, engineers and other specialists necessary in a light mechanised division. Most reached France through Hungary, Rumania, and even via the Middle East. Others were recruited from Polish emigrants in France.

In February 1940 the distinction between the re-forming infantry units and the Light Mechanised Division was accentuated by the transfer of the latter from Brittany to the region of Bollène – Orange near Avignon in the South of France. There, after several changes, the troops were organised into the following three formations:

1. Motorised Cavalry – the nucleus of the future 10thArmoured Cavalry Brigade;
2. Armoured units – to become the 16th Armoured Brigade;
3. Artillery units.

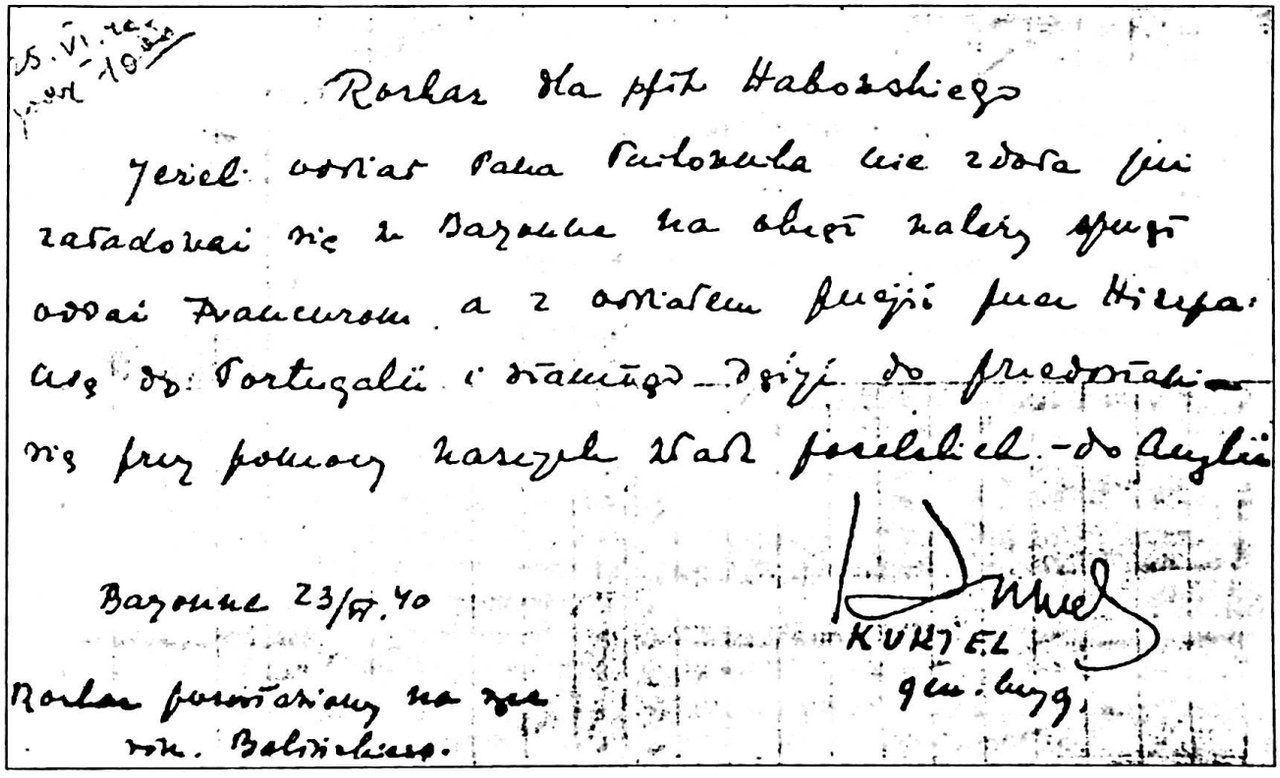
At that time, the French adopted a negative attitude to the formation of a Polish armoured division. During the winter months this was reflected in an unwillingness to define the final structure of the Division and in the assigning to it a minimum of equipment, often below the basic requirements for training purposes. This rendered the available training period almost useless. It was only their defeat in the Ardennes and Flanders and the direct threat posed by the German advance on Paris itself that galvanised the French in their approach to the Polish Division. At the end of May 1940, to the complete astonishment of the Polish H.Q., the Division was transferred to the outskirts of Paris, the area of the main ordnance depots, near Versailles and Arpajon where, surprisingly, masses of necessary equipment were quickly made available. At the same time the French High Command demanded that the Division be moved at once to the front line.

Realistically this was an impossible demand. Gen. Maczek suggested instead that a unit, to be called 'the 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade', should be immediately detached and sent to the front. The rest of the units were to join after the reorganisation and the take

over of the necessary equipment had been completed. This section was to be under the command of Col. Dworak and was to remain for the time being in their old encampment.

These units were not ready in time to take part in the fighting. On the orders of the French Military Authorities, dictated by events at the front, these sections of the Polish Division were moved further and further south-west towards the Atlantic coast. After the French armistice in mid June, came the embarkation and evacuation to Britain, where began a completely new period in the history of the Brigade.

The exception was 2nd Armoured Battalion which after the battles at the Loare river, unable to join the 10th Armd Cav. Brigade was evacuated on a cargo vessel, 'Baron Kaennard', to Great Britain.



Bayonne 23/VI.40

KUKIEL
gen. bryg.

(Message to Col. Chabowski, Battalion C.O., from Gen. M. Kukiel read: *If you are unable to embark at Bayonne, leave the vehicles to French authorities and try to get troops through Spain to Portugal. From there, with the help of the Polish consular service, try to reach England)*

On June 10th the detachment of the 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade, under the personal command of Gen. Maczek, proceeded from Arpajon – Versailles partly by motor transport, partly by rail, to the concentration point in Champagne, in the area of Avize.

The composition of this group, apart from the Brigade Staff, included:

1. One tank battalion, (the only one which by then had received its full quota of equipment);
2. A unit of motorised cavalry (composite unit made up of 1 squadron and 1 platoon of motorcyclists, each from: the 24th Lancer and the 10th Mounted Rifles Rgts);
3. The Group's artillery: a battery of anti-tank guns and a troop of anti-aircraft artillery (20 mm);
4. A Company of Engineers (equivalent to British R.E.) also Signals and a Traffic Control units.

General Maczek reflected on the way to the front:

Hours spent sitting passively in a car are a good opportunity for a slow assessment of the situation. The comparison presented itself with the initial setting out of the 10th Cavalry Brigade on September 1st 1939 towards the battles in the Podhale region. Nine months back we were short of one battalion of tanks which was due to join the brigade at mobilization and which until the end of our operations failed to arrive. At this moment, I have a battalion of tanks with good but slow equipment, but it is poorly balanced by anti-tank artillery and barely two squadrons of motorized cavalry. There is a comlete lack of artillery and auxiliary units. We are a typical short lived force for use on one single tactical operation, after which we shall be useless unless the rest of the brigade joins us. Even envisaging a quick juncture, how long a period of integration and playing in will be necessary to make us once more into a brigade capable of undertaking independent operations such as the 10th Motorised Cavalry Brigade had been in Poland.

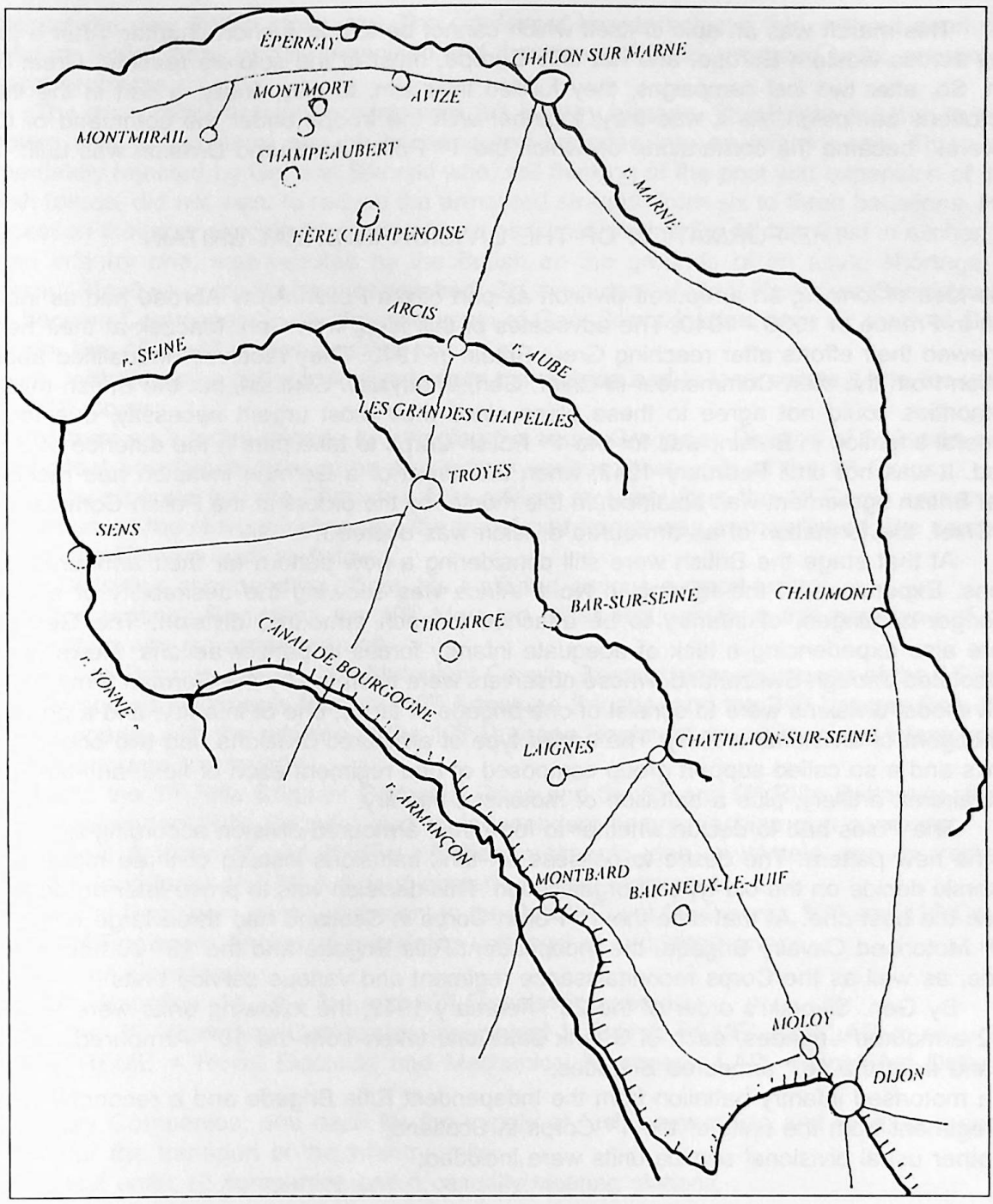
In reality the premature collapse of France cancelled out all our calculations. None of the units in the process of formation near Paris will join us now, not even the one single tank battalion sent as reinforcement will now reach us.

The assistance we can give in order to alleviate the critical situation at the French front will become on Poland's part a mere gentlemanly gesture to show that Poles give their all to succour France (*op. cit.*, p. 106).

The concentration was completed by the 12th of June and the Brigade was just in time to advance into the German enclosing ring in the region of Avize, which was under constant bombardment. There the Poles came under the orders of the VIIth French Corps under Gen. de la Porte du Theil. The Brigade's first objective on the 13th June was the defence of the French 20th Infantry Division's right flank. Later it was to close the gap between the French 20th and the 59th Infantry Divisions. In the execution of this assignment, the Polish Brigade fought its first battle on the western front, halting the enemy advance at the battle of Champeaubert – Montmirail and an armoured counter-attack at Montgivroux.

These two actions allowed the two French divisions to avoid encirclement and created conditions for their successful retreat.They were, however, to be the last two actions organised and commanded from above. From then on, the Brigade was caught up in the chaos of French units retreating in confused disorder and was subjected to hasty and improvised orders issued by various commanders of the French corps, retreating haphazadly and with hardly a fight towards the south-east. This odd line of retreat was dictated by the German encircling manoeuvre. After crossing the river Aube and then the Seine the Brigade, suffering heavy casualties from enemy air strikes, and in desperate need of fuel supplies, reached the forest of Chaource on June 15th. There, direct contact was established with the 42nd French Infantry Division, already in that location. A common plan of action was worked out to open the road to the Loire, after establishing a crossing over the Burgundy canal at Montbard. The town was to be taken by the Polish Brigade, thus opening the road of retreat to the French who had not yet finished concentrating all their forces. Due to lack of fuel, half of the tanks were destroyed in Chaource. Thus the Brigade undertook this action in much reduced strength. A further weakening occurred when a German attack cut off the rear of the Brigade's column. The battle for Montbard was fought by a company of 17 tanks, a whole squadron of motorised cavalry and a platoon of engineers. Some of the cut off survivors from the rear column managed to rejoin the main forces after the battle.

Montbard is a glorious episode in this short campaign: a night attack carried out by the tanks and units of motorised cavalry completely surprised the Germans and destroyed a battalion of their 33rd Motorised Infantry Regiment; the town was captured; prisoners and equipment were seized. Yet this bloody effort was in vain, as the Germans under the very



eyes of the weary troops blew up the bridge across the canal. It became necessary to retreat eastwards along the canal in search of another bridge. This took most of the 17th June and, by the evening, the area of Is-sur-Tille near Dijon was reached. There, the remains of the Brigade, with only three tanks of the armoured batallion intact, found themselves without fuel and fully enclosed within an enemy circle of 5 km radius.

In these circumstances, Gen. Maczek took the decision to destroy all motorised transport and to try to break out on foot, in small groups, in the direction of the river Loire. This decision was put into effect in the forest of Malte, near the village of Moloy. The remaining transport, equipment and baggage was destroyed. Before dawn the survivors of the Brigade, some 500 men, marched off on foot in a southerly direction.

This march was an epic in itself which cannot be told in a short chapter. After a journey across western Europe, and not only Europe, most of the soldiers reached Great Britain. So, after two lost campaigns, they fulfilled their aim: to play, finally, a part in the third, victorious campaign. As it was they, together with the troops under the command of Col. Dworak, became the cornerstone on which the 1st Polish Armoured Division was built.

THE FORMATION OF THE DIVISION IN GREAT BRITAIN

The idea of forming an armoured division as part of the Polish Army Abroad had its inception in France in 1939 – 1940. The advocates of this idea, with Gen. Maczek at their head, renewed their efforts after reaching Great Britain in 1940. They received unqualified approbation from the then Commander-in-Chief, Gen. Władysław Sikorski, but the British military authorities could not agree to these plans since their most urgent necessity, due to the general situation in Britain, was for the 1st Polish Corps to take part in the defence of Scotland. It was not until February 1942, when the threat of a German invasion had receded, that British agreement was obtained. In this month, by the orders of the Polish Commander-in-Chief, the formation of an armoured division was decreed.

At that stage the British were still considering a new pattern for their armoured divisions. Experience of the fighting in North Africa was showing the desirability of a much stronger contingent of infantry to be attached to each armoured division. The Germans were also experiencing a lack of adequate infantry forces in panzer actions. News of this percolated through Switzerland, whose observers were tolerated by the German army. These new model divisions were to consist of one brigade of tanks, one of infantry, and a powerful contingent of divisional artillery. The earlier type of armoured divisions had two brigades of tanks and a so called support group composed of one regiment each of field, anti-tank and anti-aircraft artillery, plus a battalion of motorised infantry.

The Poles had to decide whether to form their armoured division according to the old or the new pattern. The desire to possess six tank battalions instead of three made Gen. Sikorski decide on the old type of organisation. This decision was to prove later not to have been the best one. At that time the 1st Polish Corps in Scotland had three large units: the 10th Motorised Cavalry Brigade, the Independent Rifle Brigade and the 16th Armoured Brigade, as well as the Corps reconnaissance regiment and various service units.

By Gen. Sikorski's order of the 25th February 1942, the following units were formed:

1. 2 armoured brigades, each of 3 tank battalions taken from the 10th Armoured Cavalry and from the 16th armoured Brigades;
2. a motorised infantry battalion from the Independent Rifle Brigade and a reconnaissance regiment from the units of the 1st Corps in Scotland;
3. other usual divisional service units were included.

Thus the Division was formed and proceeded with training. During the summer of 1943 the Division took part in several manoeuvres in the region of Newmarket and demonstrated a high degree of competence.

At about this time the British armoured divisions had undergone the reorganisation to the new model which had definitely proved more efficient. Following a series of conferences with the Polish General Staff, the War Office declared that it would be impossible to make use of the Polish division in the coming invasion of the Continent if the old pattern of organisation was retained due to the huge logistic problems a non-standard unit would pose. The Poles were given a stark choice: either to adopt the new British structure, or the British would abandon making use of the Division on active service. The second possibility was immediately rejected by the Poles on political and moral grounds. The decision was thus reached

to accept the new British structures. The solution of how to achieve this, without depriving the future Polish Army of fully organised and therefore valuable armoured units, presented several problems.

The main difficulty lay in organising a full infantry brigade. The British solution to this problem was to transform one of the armoured brigades into an infantry one. This was immediately rejected by General Sikorski who, still thinking of the post war expansion of the Polish forces, did not want to reduce the armoured strength from six to three battalions. His suggestion that one armoured brigade should be transferred to the Middle East in exchange for an infantry one, was rejected by the British on the grounds of an acute shortage of shipping. Finally a compromise was reached. On the orders of Gen. Kazimierz Sosnkowski, who became Commander-in-Chief on the death of Gen. Sikorski, killed in an air crash at Gibraltar on July 4th 1943, it was decided to:

a. withdraw one armoured brigade from the division and to incorporate it into the units of the 1st Corps;

b. form an infantry brigade by stripping the cadre Grenadier Division of 600 men and the greatest possible number to be drawn from various other units of the 1st Corps;

c. incorporate into the Division a field artillery regiment from the 1st Corps ordnance.

When all the reorganisation and the transfer of troops was accomplished, the composition of the Division was as follows:

1. The Division's commanding officer, his staff and various support units;
2. Reconnaissance Regiment, the 10th Mounted Rifles Rgt, which in this new type of organisation was an armoured unit;
3. Armoured Brigade, the old 10th Motorised Cavalry Brigade, now composed of the 1st and 2nd Armoured Regiments from the 16th Armoured Brigade, and the 24th Lancers from the 10th Brigade, with the addition of the 10th Dragoon Regiment as mechanised infantry (on light armoured transport);
4. Infantry: the 3rd Rifle Brigade: Podhalan Rifles and the 8th and 9th Rifle Battalions, from the Independent Rifle Brigade; also an independent heavy machine gun company;
5. Divisional Artillery: 1st and 2nd Field Artillery regiments (one on wheels, one on tracks); 1st A-T (anti-tank) and 1st A-A (anti-aircraft) Artillery Regiments;
6. Divisional Engineers units (equivalent to the British Royal Engineers); 10th and 11th Company of Engineers (including a bridging unit, and an ordnance one);
7. Ordnance Company;
8. Signals Battalion: 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 10th Signals Companies;
9. 10th and 3rd Workshop Companies (equivalent to British REME) with LAD in all units [edit.: REME = Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers; LAD = Light Aid Detachment];
10. Supply Companies: one each for the supply of fuel, ammunition and food; one company for the transport of the infantry units.
11. Medical units: (2 companies and a casualty clearing station);
12. Ordnance depot;
13. Field Court-Martial unit;
14. Field Postal Services;
15. Squadron of reserve tanks with crews;
16. Divisional depot.

The Division was still short of some 900 men. This shortage mainly affected the various service units and the infantry brigade: one battalion of which was in skeletal form. The Commander-in-Chief had hoped that this deficit could be mainly made up through a transfer of troops from the Middle East. When, in the spring of 1944, it became evident that no great reliance could be placed on that source, Gen. Sosnkowski ordered in April that the

shortfall should be overcome by a further withdrawal of troops from the now wholly skeletal Grenadier Division, and from various 1st Corps service and administrative units.

The reorganisation of the Division was finally accomplished. Its total strength including the first reserves numbered 885 officers and 15210 other ranks. After its final manoeuvres held around Scarborough in the spring of 1944, the Division was ready to depart for the front.

The Division's material mobilisation

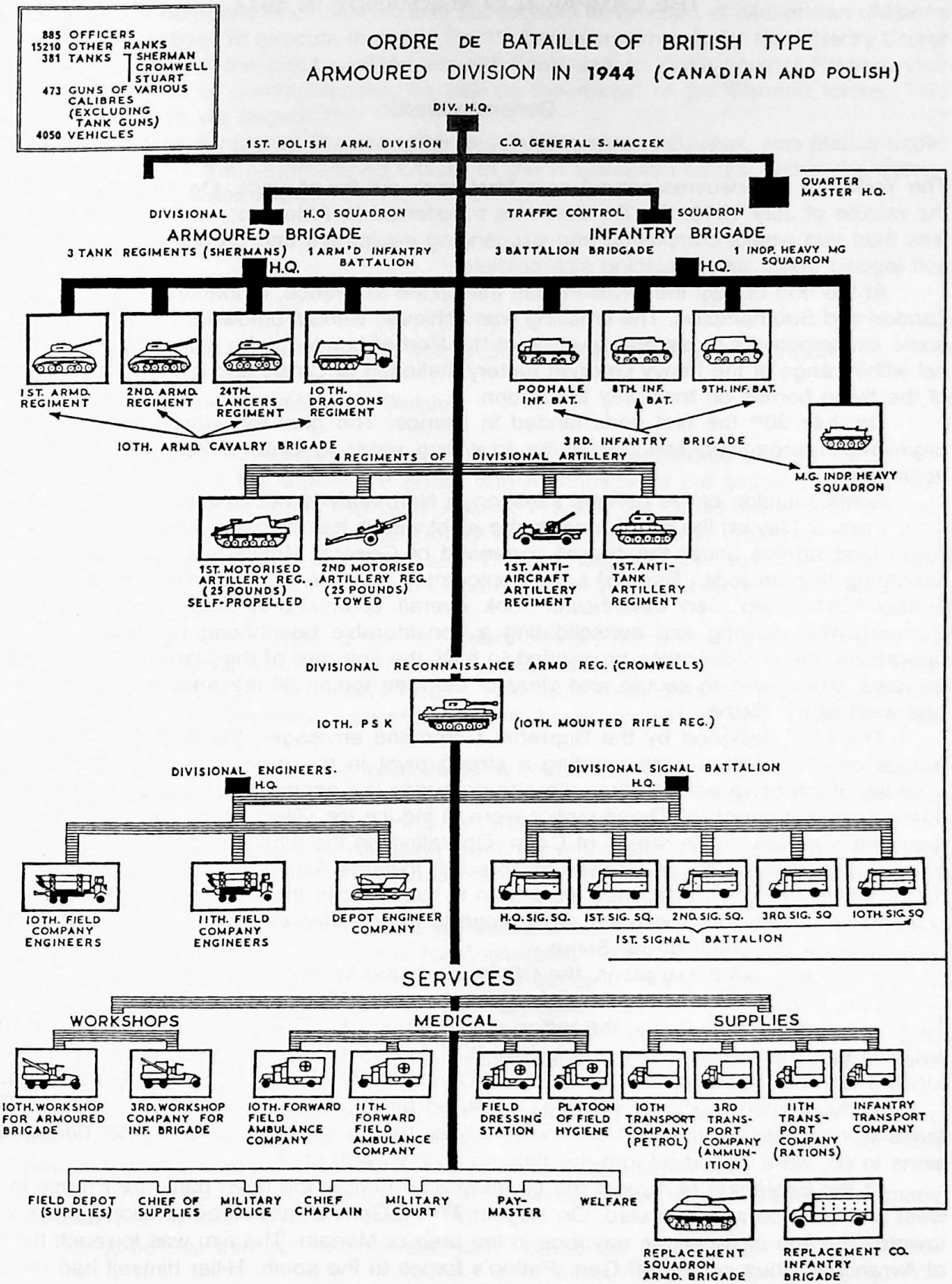
On the 19th of March the War Office sent out an urgent memorandum ordering total mobilisation under the overall control of the Scottish Command.

During the next 24 hours, the orders, translated into Polish, were despatched to all divisional units which, within the next 48 hours, were to submit their full requirements. Intensive work made possible the submission of the requirements without any delay whatsoever. In the following 48 hours the divisional supply and ordnance commands checked, sorted and presented the requirements, which in turn were checked by the British depot for final confirmation.

The second stage was the supply of the necessary material. The first transport arrived on April 2nd. By the 19th, 108 rail wagons were unloaded, sorted in divisional depots and despatched to the units. This work was performed around the clock. Independently, all motor equipment was exchanged for new. The training equipment was returned to British depots and simultaneously all motorised transport was standardised. To illustrate the size of the undertaking, and the sheer weight of numbers: 4 431 vehicles including 381 tanks arranged in one column using one route and spaced at 50 m intervals would stretch for 225 km. The divisional supply units were responsible for bringing the stores of ammunition and explosives up to their full quota, including those held by reserve units. The task was enormous, as the Division's guns numbered 473 of various calibres and including tank guns, came to a total of 654 barrels.

The deputy director of the mobilisation arrived from the War Office to survey and check the efficiency of the Division's work. In his report he wrote:

> The mobilisation was achieved in a highly commendable manner. In spite of certain language difficulties, it progressed more smoothly than in many freshly mobilised British divisions.


885 OFFICERS
15210 OTHER RANKS
381 TANKS — SHERMAN, CROMWELL, STUART
473 GUNS OF VARIOUS CALIBRES (EXCLUDING TANK GUNS)
4050 VEHICLES
ORDRE DE BATAILLE OF BRITISH TYPE
ARMOURED DIVISION IN 1944 (CANADIAN AND POLISH)
DIV. H.Q.
1ST. POLISH ARM. DIVISION
C.O. GENERAL S. MACZEK
QUARTER MASTER H.Q.
DIVISIONAL H.Q SQUADRON
TRAFFIC CONTROL SQUADRON
ARMOURED BRIGADE
3 TANK REGIMENTS (SHERMANS) 1 ARM'D INFANTRY BATTALION
H.Q.
INFANTRY BRIGADE
3 BATTALION BRIDGADE 1 INDP. HEAVY MG SQUADRON
H.Q.
1ST. ARMD. REGIMENT
2ND. ARMD. REGIMENT
24TH. LANCERS REGIMENT
10TH. DRAGOONS REGIMENT
PODHALE INF. BAT.
8TH. INF. BAT.
9TH. INF. BAT.
10TH. ARMD. CAVALRY BRIGADE
3RD. INFANTRY BRIGADE
M.G. INDP. HEAVY SQUADRON
4 REGIMENTS OF DIVISIONAL ARTILLERY
1ST. MOTORISED ARTILLERY REG. (25 POUNDS) SELF-PROPELLED
2ND MOTORISED ARTILLERY REG. (25 POUNDS) TOWED
1ST. ANTI-AIRCRAFT ARTILLERY REGIMENT
1ST. ANTI-TANK ARTILLERY REGIMENT
DIVISIONAL RECONNAISSANCE ARMD REG. (CROMWELLS)
10TH. P.S.K
(10TH. MOUNTED RIFLE REG.)
DIVISIONAL ENGINEERS. H.Q.
DIVISIONAL SIGNAL BATTALION H.Q.
10TH. FIELD COMPANY ENGINEERS
11TH. FIELD COMPANY ENGINEERS
DEPOT ENGINEER COMPANY
H.Q. SIG. SQ.
1ST. SIG. SQ.
2ND. SIG. SQ.
3RD. SIG. SQ
10TH. SIG. SQ
1ST. SIGNAL BATTALION
SERVICES
WORKSHOPS
MEDICAL
SUPPLIES
10TH. WORKSHOP FOR ARMOURED BRIGADE
3RD. WORKSHOP COMPANY FOR INF. BRIGADE
10TH. FORWARD FIELD AMBULANCE COMPANY
11TH. FORWARD FIELD AMBULANCE COMPANY
FIELD DRESSING STATION
PLATOON OF FIELD HYGIENE
10TH TRANSPORT COMPANY (PETROL)
3RD TRANSPORT COMPANY (AMMUNITION)
11TH TRANSPORT COMPANY (RATIONS)
INFANTRY TRANSPORT COMPANY
FIELD DEPOT (SUPPLIES)
CHIEF OF SUPPLIES
MILITARY POLICE
CHIEF CHAPLAIN
MILITARY COURT
PAY-MASTER
WELFARE
REPLACEMENT SQUADRON ARMD. BRIGADE
REPLACEMENT CO. INFANTRY BRIGADE

THE CAMPAIGN IN NORMANDY IN 1944

General situation

The Yorkshire manoeuvres served as a final work out for all units. On their completion in the middle of July 1944, the Division was transferred to Aldershot, where it remained for less than two weeks completing and exchanging equipment and grouping the transport to suit logistic tasks, also replacing sick soldiers.

At the end of July the Division was tranported to France, embarking from the Port of London and Southampton. The crossing was achieved without untoward incident, except for some excitement for those embarked from the Port of London, who sailed down the Channel within range of the heavy German battery stationed at Calais and crossed the trajectory of the flying bombs on their way to London.

On July 30th the first units landed in France. The goal for which the soldiers had organised, reorganised and trained for four long years in Great Britain had finally been achieved.

Some mention of the general situation in Normandy is necessary.

From D-Day on the 6th of June, some eight weeks had elapsed. The operations of the Allied land armies under the overall command of General Montgomery were progressing according to plan [edit.: Bernard Law Montgomery became Field Marshal on the 1st September 1944, when Gen. Eisenhower took overall command of land forces in Western Europe]. After seizing and consolidating a considerable beachhead in the first week of operations, the Allied Armies proceeded to fulfill the first part of the plan, calculated to last 90 days, which was to secure and clear of German forces all the area north of the Loire and west of the Seine.

The plan designed by the Supreme Command envisaged the British and Canadian armies on the eastern wing creating a strong pivot in the area of Caen. Then, through a series of offensive actions, they were to persuade the enemy that the main thrust was to come from that direction. These tactics were to induce the Germans to concentrate all their available reserves in the region of Caen. Operating on the west wing, the US forces, thus freed from undue pressure, were to strike south towards Avranches. Driving through to the region of Mayenne – Laval, they were then to turn east in the direction of Paris. This manoeuvre, if successfully executed, would lead to the encirlement and destruction of all German forces to the west of the Seine.

In carrying out these plans, the US forces in the second week after D-Day cut off the Cherbourg peninsula, entering Cherbourg itself on the 26th of June. In the early days of July the Americans concentrated in the region of Periers and St. Lô to begin their drive south. The action began on the 25th July and by the 30th Avranches was captured. Turning east, the forward US formations reached the line of Domfort – Mayenne – Laval by the 6th August.

In the eastern sector, Caen was captured on July 9th. The plan to deceive the Germans worked well. At the end of June nearly all their armoured reserves – six panzer divisions in all, were absorbed into the fighting in the Caen area.

At the beginning of August the German plan to fight the main battle for France to the west of the Seine was revealed. On August 7th six German armoured divisions struck west towards the line of American advance in the area of Mortain. The aim was to reach the sea at Avranches, thus cutting off Gen. Patton's forces to the south. Hitler himself had ordered this counter-offensive contrary to the wishes of his Commannder-in-Chief West, Gen. Hans Günther Kluge. The decision fitted in with Gen. Montgomery's planning. There appeared

a possibility of a complete encirclement and subsequent destruction of all German divisions involved in this action. To execute this aim, the 1st Canadian Army under Gen. Henry Crerar was to advance from the pivot position around Caen and to strike against Falaise, thus cutting off the lines of communication, as well as the retreat of the German forces. This action was to begin on August 7th.

The 1st Polish Armoured Division, after assembling around Bayeux, was placed under Gen. Guy Simonds, the Commanding Officer of the II Canadian Corps, within the framework of the 1st Canadian Army.

❖ ❖ ❖

Order of the Commanding Officer of the 1st Polish Armoured Division

Soldiers of the 1st Armoured Division,

Once again, after 4 years, we are in France. We disembarked on free French soil in order to fight at the side of the British and Americans for the cause of Polish freedom. When in June 1940, we were leaving France, our ranks were depleted, our future unknown, we were helpless. Today we begin our march towards Poland after four years of preparation on British soil. The first stage of the march is once again through France, but now in changed circumstances. We come here in pride and confident in our strength.

We are proud, because in the five years of war, not once did we break, or lay down our arms. On the contrary, through perseverance and arduous effort we have created – the first in our military history – an armoured division. This division now stands on the battleground against those who have proclaimed to the world that we have ceased to exist.

We are strong because we have the best equipment at the disposal of the Allies. We know the worth of this equipment and we well know how to use it. In this lies our physical strength. But we bring to this struggle something else, something which the Germans no longer possess: we bring immense moral strength; we bring the knowledge that we are fighting in a just cause, and that the first rays of victory are shining before us.

So, engaging in this first battle, we will demand a rendering of accounts for the five years of war: for Warsaw, for Kutno, for Westerplatte, and for the hundreds and thousands of helpless people who perished at the hands of the invader. We demand an account for every Polish life taken by the Germans.

This does not mean, nevertheless, that you should use barbaric methods in your battles. Fight as the Polish soldier has always fought throughout the ages: fight hard, but with chivalry.

We join our first battle at the side of the best Allied divisions. We know what we are worth; therefore, as your commanding officer I wish you this: Let the Germans pay dearly with their blood for the privilege of fighting against you.

And remember this one thing: the Polish soldier fights for the freedom of many nations, but he dies only for Poland.

We all believe that from our toil and pain Poland will rise to live.

Commanding Officer of the 1st Division,
Major-General Maczek.

The task allocated to the II Canadian Corps was the capture of Falaise and the area around it and then to join forces with the Americans who were advancing from the west towards Argentan. This manoeuvre would encircle the bulk of the German 7th Army, then still engaged around Mortain.

Gen. Simonds had three infantry divisions under his command: the 2nd and 3rd Canadian and the 51st Scottish Highland as well as the 4th Canadian and the 1st Polish armoured divisions. His operational plan was to break through the German defensive positions which were blocking the Caen pivot with infantry on the night of the 7/8th August and, on the 8th, to thrust his two armoured divisions into the breach thus created. They would act side by side straddling the Caen-Falaise road. Their objective was Falaise and the area around it. Two powerful airstrikes would precede the setting out of these formations.

At dawn on the 8th August, the Polish Division crossed through the ruins of Caen and reached the base line outside the southern suburbs of the town.

The Poles were to advance on the eastern side of the Caen-Falaise road, with the Canadians on their right, and to capture Falaise itself. On leaving the Caen pivot, they were to cross the positions of the 51st Highland Division after it had gained control of the line around Cramesnil – St. Aignan and the road east of it. Immediately before the action, Gen. Montgomery briefed the Division, and compared the enemy position to the south-east of Caen to a hinge of German defences. Your task, stated Montgomery, is to prise off this hinge and open the road to France.

South of Caen, initially the terrain was undulating, fairly thickly covered with trees, hedges and with roads in deep cuttings, somewhat similar to the bocage. Gradually it became more open, suitable for armoured action, with certain amount of woods and copses allowing the enemy to utilise the counter slopes for effective defense.

The opponents the II Corps was to meet were units of the powerful Panzer 'Gruppe West', composed of two SS corps with two panzer divisions as well as one battalion of heavy tanks belonging to the German High Command and made available for special duties. The enemy tactics were to use individual fighting groups made up of infantry, tanks (often dug in), A-T guns, heavy machine guns supported by artillery and a great number of multi-barrelled mortars. The groups varied in numbers according to their assignment and resources available.

Gen. Maczek, decided to execute the attack in two stages:

1. To capture the first objective ie. the area south of Éstrée-la-Campagne and hill 140, with the 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade (10th Brigade). Following in its tracks, the 3rd Rifle Brigade (the Rifle Brigade) was to take over the area of Cauvicourt and create a pivot there – a strong support for further action of the armoured brigade.
2. To relieve the 10th Brigade by the Rifle Brigade, which would then be free to strike against the second objective, after crossing the river Laison, to secure the area of hill 170 north of Falaise and then to exploit it against the town.

The whole of this action would be protected from the east by the reinforced Reconnaissance Regiment, and in the west, close contact was to be maintained with the Canadians.

The Division moved forward in this order: in the first wave: the 10th Brigade, supported by the 8th Rifle Battalion, the 22nd British Dragoon Regiment on special flail tanks, one anti-tank (A-T) and one anti-aircraft (A-A) battery and one company of Engineers. The 10th Mounted Rifles, the reconnaissance regiment, together with an A-T battery, was to secure the left wing. In the second wave was the Rifle Brigade less one battalion. The 1st Motorised Field Artillery Rgt was to support directly the 10th Brigade, the 2nd Motorised

Artillery Rgt the Rifle Brigade and the support of the Canadian medium artillery was assured.

The planned attack by the 10th Brigade began at 1.35 p.m. on the 8th of August. The delay was due to the planned in depth aerial attack on the lines of German defence, which was to precede the advance of the armoured divisions. Unfortunately, some of the aircraft dropped their bombs short, causing serious losses: in all there were 315 casualties, forty four of them Polish, among whom was the commanding officer of the A-A Artillery Rgt, Lt Col. Eminowicz.

Even before reaching the base line, the leading regiments, the 2nd Armoured and the 24th Lancers, each reinforced by a squadron of the 10th Dragoons, found themselves under intense fire from German tanks and A-T guns coming both from the front and from woods to the east of Robertmesnil. Heavy fighting lasted until the evening with considerable casualties. Total losses amounted to over 40 tanks, the 2nd Armoured Rgt suffering particularly badly with the loss of 26 of them. Hardly any advance was achieved that day. The Canadian Armoured Division suffered the same fate. During the night the Rifle Brigade cleared the woods south-east of Robertmesnil.

The planned advance of the II Canadian Corps broke down. The action expected to last two days, was in fact to last eleven.

In pursuit of its primary objective, the Division fought hard on the 9th and 10th of August; the 10th Brigade fighting in the van. The 10th Mounted Rifles reconnoitred the foreground in the direction of the day's operations reaching Cauvicourt, Renémesnil, then occupied the eastern side of hill 84, thus protecting from the east during the Division's main attack. Individual battalions of the Rifle Brigade secured the ground gained by the armoured regiments, clearing it of enemy troops. Thus on the 9th, during the general attack southwards, the 1st Armoured Rgt, with heavy losses, gained their primary objective: hill 111, 2 km south-east of Soignolles. The 24th Lancers took la Croix, but had to retreat under heavy mortar, artillery and A-T fire. Later that night La Croix was retaken by the 10th Dragoons. Meanwhile, the Podhalan Btn, in order to eliminate the constant threat on the eastern wing, stormed and occupied St. Silvain. After midnight the 51st Highland Division relieved the Podhalans. The 24th Lancers attacked Éstrée-la-Campagne.

On the 10th, the 9th Rifle Btn, the 10th Dragoons, and the 10th Mounted Rifles, finally established the front line at Soignolles – Éstrée-la-Campagne. During those two days the Divisional artillery and the Canadian 2nd AGRA (Army Group Royal Artillery) supported the operations and so did the Allied Air Force. In the evening, executing the orders of the Division's Commanding Officer. the 9th Rifle Btn together with the 10th Mounted Rifles, attacked and secured hill 111 and the Chemin-Heusses woods.

The next day, the 11th August, the situation remained unchanged. The order for an attack by the Division on Quesnay Wood was strongly contested by Gen. Maczek, whose arguments eventually prevailed. He was proved right, as a later attack by the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division was repelled with heavy losses. Quesnay Wood proved to be a mini fortress and a tank attack on it would have only resulted in unacceptable casualties both in men and equipment. That day, the 9th Rifles Btn supported by A-T fire repelled several German assaults on their positions. The right wing of the Division remained under threat of enemy counter-attack as the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division failed to achieve their objectives, remaining in the area of Grainville-Langannerie and Bretteville-le-Rabet.

During the night 11/12th August, the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division relieved the units of the Polish Division on the line Soignolles – Éstrée-la-Campagne. The Division passed into the reserve of the Corps and was concentrated around Cramesnil, St. Silvain and Cauvicourt. Only the 10th Mounted Rifle Rgt was in action that day, reconnoitring for the whole Corps and testing the defences of Bû-sur-Rouvres. This reconnaissance was to presage a change in the plans: a shift of the armour in a more easterly direction.

This was the end of the first phase of action for the Division, which lasted from the 8th to the 12th August.

This part of the operation, planned by Gen. Simonds, was not successful mainly for the following reasons:

a. The enemy defences were not, as planned, fully breached by the Canadian infantry divisions. The breach which was achieved was too shallow and on too narrow a sector. The armoured divisions met with strong opposition from elements of the 12th SS Panzer Division which was moved forward at the very start of the action. The Polish Division was unable to reach hill 140 as it was forced to mount a series of attacks on enemy strongholds more suitable to infantry capabilities. Also, all along the depth and breadth of the breach, the Division found itself under heavy flanking fire. The Canadian 4th Armoured Division encountered similar difficulties.

b. The Allied bombers laid on their carpet bombing too far forward, which taken together with the failure of the infantry to achieve all their objectives of the 7/8th August, left the enemy lines of defence practically untouched.

c. As a result of an error, the planned air strike by British and American aircraft which was to precede the opening action, by mistake bombed Canadian and Polish troops causing some confusion.

The German High Command fully realised that every kilometre ceded around Caen, would mean a retreat of hundreds of kilometres in case the 'prising open of the hinge' proved successful. In the light of this fact, it is easy to understand why the German defence was so consistently stubborn and their counter-attacks supported by tanks, conducted with such great determination.

This first phase of the fighting was characterised by a lack of experience on the part of the armoured troops, who fired nearly exclusively on well recognised targets, and by a general tendency for the tanks and infantry units to act independently of each other. The experiences of these first few days were fully utilised in developing trends to form mixed combat-groups and to profit from close artillery support.

As was his want Gen. Maczek assessed the first days of the fighting in this way. As always he was his own most severe critic:

> A balancing of accounts was necessary, for the first period of action was too costly and in effect produced too little immediate success.
>
> Were we and the Canadian division really so green, so inexperienced as to be unable to break through the German defences?
>
> True it was the first battle fought by the 1st Polish Armoured Division, so from the commanding officer to the lowest rifleman or lancer we had no experience of our own in the art of armoured warfare. This personal experience can only be gained on the battlefield, each man for himself. What experience we had gained in September 1939 in Poland and in June 1940 in France was now obsolete, so much had changed both in tactics and in the technical field. We knew of course about these changes and we eagerly absorbed all the battlefield experience of other armies, thus achieving the maximum proficiency of the division in training. Experience is not gained in a day, it grows with the passage of months and years.
>
> But surely we could not have been so green since a week later, in circumstances more suitable for operations by an armoured division, though cut off from the Allied army, we fought a five day exhausting battle in the face of overwhelming enemy strength both in armour and in men.
>
> This is my personal assessment: the Polish and Canadian armoured divisions did not break through the German defences because they could not do so.
>
> The depth of the German defence was much deeper than the 4 km broken through on the 7/8th August by the general attack of the Canadian corps. The best proof of

These are the fortifications at Soignolles, based on the Quesnay forest with its bunkers and shelters, located 8-10 km behind the front line, as well as the even deeper fortifications in the valley of the river Laison (op. cit., pp. 153-154).

On August 12, General Simonds unveiled his new plan to the division commanders. On the 14th, the infantry divisions would attack on the east side of the road to initially capture a crossing point over the River Laison and subsequently Falaise itself. This action would be supported by Bomber Command. The Polish division would relieve the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division of its positions north of Aisny and Fontaine-le-Pin west of the road and then attack in a southerly direction.

The Canadian infantry was relieved as planned. On August 13 and the following night, the Rifle Brigade, reinforced by the tanks of the 24th Lancers and the 10th Dragoons, relieved the Canadians. During that night, the Rifle Brigade captured Fontaine-le-Pin, Pottigny, and Hill 206.

Meanwhile, the planned attack by the infantry divisions did not begin until the afternoon of the 14th. It was significantly delayed by a repeated error by Allied bombers, some of which again dropped their payloads on Canadian and Polish units. The Allied heavy bombers were directed from England, and there was no means of communication between the aircraft and the ground troops. 77 bombers dropped their payloads too short, resulting in heavy losses: 397 Canadian soldiers killed or wounded and 93 Polish. Nevertheless, the planned action proceeded, but with little success, as it was halted by intense enemy fire.

During a briefing by General Simonds that same evening, General Maczek received new orders for the following day, August 15. The situation along the entire front was changing. As a result of the failure of their counterattack against the American troops around Mortain, the Germans were slowly retreating eastward: the task of the II Canadian Corps was to cut off the enemy's retreat routes as quickly as possible. The task for the infantry divisions remained unchanged, but the armored divisions were to advance to the Corps' eastern flank, where, by advancing southward, they would cut off all possible German lines of retreat and, by linking up with the Americans, close the 'pocket' in which the retreating German army found itself. To achieve this closure, the 1st Armoured Division was to capture Trun on August 15 by advancing across the fords over the River Dives in the Vendeuvre-Jort area. Meanwhile, the Canadian Armoured Division was to capture the hills north of Trun by controlling the fords in the Morteaux-Colibœuf area.

The terrain between the Laison and Dives rivers was flat, dotted with groves and dense bushes that were ideal for masking German defenses. To the east of the Dives, the land was hilly, sometimes with elevations of over 200 meters. Trun lay in a valley with a barrier of hills to the north. If these were secured, they would offer an excellent view of the city itself and of the road running from west to east. The Dives river was the only real obstacle to tank action.

The intelligence received indicated that the enemy appeared to be surprised by the operations carried out so far. It was to be expected that the Germans would put up a desperate resistance to prevent the encirclement, but they would not be able to offer strong resistance during the first phase of the planned action. As soon as the division found itself on the Germans' direct retreat route, it would have to withstand the full force of furious attacks by selected SS Panzer divisions. Although weakened by the fighting against the Americans and by air attacks, they would desperately try to escape the trap.

General Maczek immediately began studying the map in search of dominant, strong positions that needed to be manned.

During the hours of darkness on August 14/15, the new orders were issued. General Maczek strongly emphasized the need for swift action. The division departed in two columns. The western one in the direction of Rouvres, Sassy, and Jort; the other towards Bout-du-Haut.

and Vendeuvre. In the lead went the 10th Mounted Rifle Rgt, with a squadron of Dragoons and reinforced by an A-T battery. It was tasked with the reconnoitring and securing of crossings over the river Dives. The Rifle Brigade set out later as it had to wait to be relieved from the positions they were holding.

The efficiency with which the Division crossed from the western wing of the Corps to the eastern side should be underlined. In executing this manoeuvre, the Division traversed through all the remaining Corps units: three divisions, without causing any confusion. This can be taken as proof of the expertise gained, where the planning by various staffs and the execution by the units worked with efficiency.

By the evening of the 15th August, crossings over the river Dives had been secured. The 10th Mounted Rifles with a squadron of the 10th Dragoons, after heavy fighting, captured the southern part of the village of Vendeuvres (Pont de Jort) and, fording the Dives, took on the opposite bank Jort itself, thus gaining the site for a bridgehead. The 1st Armoured Rgt secured a crossing at the northern end of Vendeuvre. Divisional artillery together with AGRA co-operating with the 10th Mounted Rifles gave these actions their full support.

The Germans were surprised by the capture of the two crossings over the Dives, thus the main requirement for the success of the bold action of driving the Division to the rear of the retreating German forces was achieved. During the night the Rifle Brigade organised and manned the bridgehead. The Divisional Engineers rebuilt the bridges at Jort and Vendeuvre and cleared the land of mines; the artillery was brought forward to ensure the security of the bridgehead.

On August 16th, the Division's formation, arrayed in two columns advanced south fom the bridgehead in the direction of Barou. In the right column went the 24th Lancers and the 10th Dragoons; the left was composed of the 2nd Armoured Rgt and the 8th Rifle Btn; a battery of A-T guns accompanied each column. On the left wing, the 9th Rifle Btn reinforced by a squadron of tanks provided security for both columns, as well as reconnoitring in the direction of the Courcy road. By the evening, after a full day of fighting, Barou was captured and the Barou – Morteaux-Coliboeuf road was cut. Nevertheless, it became apparent that the area around Morteaux-Coliboeuf was still held by the enemy, as the Canadian 4th Armoured Division had not succeeded in crossing the Dives in this area. The threat of a counter-attack became a serious possibility. Fortunately the enemy movements were observed and, thanks to air strikes, the counter-attack did not materialize. During the three days 14/16th August, the German air force bombed the Polish units; the 1st A-A Artillery Rgt shot down 4 enemy aircraft.

The 17th August began with the 10th Mounted Rifles reconnoitring along the Falaise – Trun road and observing an increased amount of enemy movement. The Combat-Group: 10th Dragoons and 24th Lancers, exploited the reconnaissance taking over the area and clearing Les Moutiers-en-Auge, while the 10th Mounted Rifles passed hill 159 at noon, then hill 259 and by the evening they reached the vicinity of hill 107, 2 km north-west of Trun, where they engaged in fierce battle with German tanks and suffered severe losses. The 10th Brigade, together with the 8th Rifles, succeeded by 5 pm, after a day of hard fighting, in securing hills 159 and 259. The Rifle Brigade consolidated hill 159 in the morning and at night hill 259. The day's action drove a deep wedge of some 15 km into the German formations and, in consequence, all the divisional units were engaged in relentless fighting as the Germans tried to escape from the ever tightening pincers of the Allied armies.

An intercepted order of the Commanding Officer of the 7th German Army tells us how the adversary viewed these actions:

> The enemy [ie. the Allies] on the western section of the 7th Army is acting in a hesitant manner, he has on the other hand succeeded in the direction of Falaise and east of it.

In order to secure a successful withdrawal beyond the river Dives, it is essential to recapture the area around Morteaux-Colibœuf. This would form a wedge: the beginning of a new front.

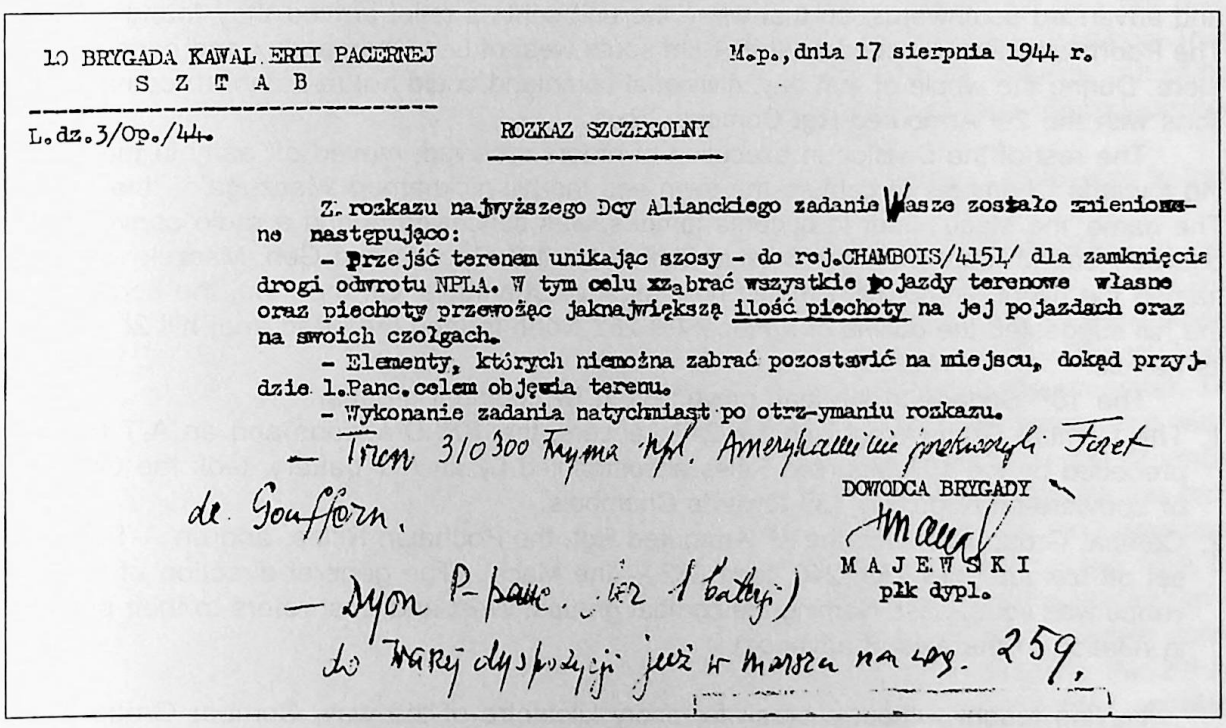
The SS Panzer Corps, at the disposal of Army Group, will attack in the night of 17/18th August from the direction of Vimoutiers and shall destroy the enemy advancing in the general direction of Trun. They will thus close the breach existing south-east of Morteaux-Colibœuf. The recovered territory will be taken over by the 1st SS Panzer Corps.

This area was indeed 'taken over', but by the 1st Polish Armoured Division which achieved a considerable advance, bringing the area around Trun within range of its artillery. The actual capture of the town itself seemed only a question of hours. In the meantime, the neighbouring 4th Canadian Armoured Division remained far to the rear.

Such was the situation when Gen. Simonds came to see Gen. Maczek. He expressed his own appreciation of the fighting done so far by the Division and delivered Gen. Montgomery's personal order to capture Chambois that very night. Simultaneously, the 4th Canadian Division was to capture Trun. Montgomery thus motivated his order:

In so far as the road Falaise-Trun is under artillery observation which means that the communications are practically cut along this highway, and as the US forces have reached Argentan, the only roads of retreat left to the Germans lead through the Gouffern Forest. The only exit to these roads open to the enemy is the intersection at Chambois. The capture of Chambois will cut the last line of retreat to the encircled German Army.

Gen. Maczek decided to execute this order immediately, despite the desperate weariness of his troops which, fighting alone, without the support of neighbouring units, had borne the brunt of engaging the enemy forces east of the Dives.



10 BRYGADA KAWALERII PACERNEJ
S Z T A B

M.p., dnia 17 sierpnia 1944 r.

L.dz.3/Op./44.

ROZKAZ SZCZEGOLNY

Z rozkazu najwyższego Dcy Alianckiego zadanie Wasze zostało zmienione następująco:

- Przejść terenem unikając szosy - do rej.CHAMBOIS/4151/ dla zamknięcia drogi odwrotu NPLA. W tym celu zabrać wszystkie pojazdy terenowe własne oraz piechoty przewożąc jaknajwiększą ilość piechoty na jej pojazdach oraz na swoich czołgach.
- Elementy, których niemożna zabrać pozostawić na miejscu, dokąd przyjdzie 1.Panc.celem objęcia terenu.
- Wykonanie zadania natychmiast po otrz-ymaniu rozkazu.

— Trun 310300 trzyma npl. Amerykanie nie przekroczyli Foret de Gouffern.

DOWODCA BRYGADY
MAJEWSKI
płk dypl.

— Dyon P-panc. (bez 1 baterji) do Waszej dyspozycji już w marszu na wsz. 259.

[*10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade, Headquaters* *17th August 1944*

Special Assignment Order: By request of the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces your assignment has been altered as follows:

– By crossing the country and avoiding roads size the area of Chambois (map refererence 4151) to block the enemy retreat. Infantry to be carried on your tanks and all other available vehicles.

– Leave unnecessary equipment behind. Your present position will be taken over by the 1st Armoured Regiment.

– This order to be carried out immediately on receipt.

– Trun (map ref. 310300) is in enemy hands. The Americans have taken Foret de Gouffron.

– Anti-tank artillery unit will be at your disposal, joining you en route on hill 259.

Brigade C.O. MAJEWSKI, Colonel]

The Combat Group composed of the 2nd Armoured Rgt, the 8th Rifle Btn, and an A-T battery was given the order at 7 p.m. to advance on Chambois. Nevertheless, their departure was delayed until 2 a.m. as they encountered great problems in resupplying vital fuel and ammunition which even then failed to arrive. It was a very dark night, the terrain was difficult and with few roads, the Combat Group lost its way and by dawn approached Les Champeaux. There it surprised a German column and it became involved in an engagement with infantry and A-T units in a terrain presenting difficulties to tank action. The German troops encountered at Les Champeaux were in fact the relief column which had set out from Vimoutiers. The encounter caused severe disruption in its ranks. It was discovered from entries in service books found on prisoners by the 2nd Armoured Rgt, elements of which had been part of the 10th Motorised Cavalry Brigade in Poland, that it was taking revenge on an old adversary from 1939.

When it became obvious that the Combat Group had lost its way and had found itself in a difficult situation, Gen. Maczek ordered Col. T. Majewski, the commanding officer of the 10th Brigade, to send them help. Meanwhile, the Group fought its way out of the difficulties and advanced southwards, so that when the unit sent as relief arrived they found no one. The Podhalan Rifles reached hill 258 1 km south-west of Les Champeaux and consolidated there. During the whole of that day, divisional command could not re-establish communications with the 2nd Armoured Rgt Combat Group.

The rest of the Division in execution of orders received, moved off early in the morning towards Chambois to capture the town and the hill nicknamed 'Maczuga' – 'the Mace'. The name 'the Mace', later to become famous, was conceived during a radio conversation between Col. M. Czarnecki, the Chief-of-Staff of the 10th Brigade and Gen. Maczek who thus named the hill of Montormel situated north-east of Chambois. On the map, the contours of the hill suggested the outline of a mace: hill 262 North formed the head and, hill 262 South its handle.

The 10th Brigade in the lead moved off in two combat groups:

1. The Combat Group West with the 24th Lancers, the 10th Dragoons and an A-T battery, preceded by the 10th Mounted Rifles accompanied by an A-T battery, took the direction of Louvière-en-Auge, hill 137 towards Chambois.
2. Combat Group East with the 1st Armoured Rgt, the Podhalan Rifles, and an A-T battery set off towards hills 259, 240, then 262 – 'the Mace'. (The general direction of the advance was south-east. Naming the combat groups: West and East refers to their position in relation to the axis of advance).

Having fought without a break for every kilometre of the way, Combat Group West reached hill 137 by late evening and the other group occupied hill 240: but one squadron of the 10th Mounted Rifles, reinforced by an A-T battery, had by late afternoon reached the outskirts of Chambois which was strongly defended and under aerial attack by the Allied Tactical Airforce. Meanwhile the 9th Rifles secured hill 259. The Divisional artillery, together with

the assigned 4th British Heavy Artillery Rgt, as well as supporting the advance of the divisional units, shelled the roads along which the enemy retreat flowed in its effort to escape from the 'Pocket'.

That evening the Division's C.O. planned the defensive positions of the area of Chambois and 'the Mace', which unfortunately were realised only after the crucial struggle for 'the Mace' was over. The plan as conceived was as follows:

a. The 10th Brigade: the 1st Armoured Rgt, the 24th Lancers, the 10th Dragoons, the Podhalan Rifles and an A-T battery would occupy and hold Chambois and hill 262 South – the handle of 'the Mace';

b. the Rifle Brigade: 8th and 9th Rifle Battalions, together with the 2nd Armoured Rgt and an A-T battery, would man and hold hill 262 North or the head of 'the Mace';

c. the 10th Mounted Rifles and two A-T batteries were to take up position 1 km north of Chambois and were at the disposition of the Division's C.O.;

d. the Divisional Artillery units were to hold themselves in readiness to reinforce to the limit of their capacity each of these three combat groups.

Had the plan been realised, it would have assured all units a strong position and complete domination both north and south of the roads around Chambois.

That very evening saw the development of the critical phase of the battle in which the Division would find itself the next day, the 19th, and which would last until its end on the 21st of August. The crisis was caused mainly by the limited force represented by only one armoured division, especially so when all its units were already fully extended. The flanking divisions were still too far to give any support: on the right, the 4th Canadian Armoured Division had not yet reached Trun, and on the left, the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division was engaged in the area of St. Pierre-sur-Dives, too far away to have any influence on events around Chambois and Montormel. To make matters worse, the difficulties encountered in delivering supplies of food, fuel and ammunition to the fighting units were constantly increasing due to lack of suitable roads, and above all because the terrain had not been cleared. In the meantime the enemy, seeing the tightening ring around Chambois-Trun, fought savagely in an attempt to get out of the noose. This endeavour to break out of the trap was soon to be supported from outside. Attacks from the north-east were to be launched to aid the encircled units of the 7th Army.

In this situation, from the morning of the 19th August, the Polish Division was to bear the main burden of this vital battle.

By 1 p.m. after intensive fighting in a terrain presenting severe difficulties to tank action, the Combat Group East reached the handle of 'the Mace', hill 262 North. It deployed controlling the road which crossed the slope of Montormel. German columns were fleeing along this road pell mell in utter confusion, cars, tanks, guns, various vehicles and even horse drawn carts. All the guns of the 1st Armoured Rgt opened fire and began the slaughter. The surprise was complete. The crowded column some 2 km in length, was annihilated within half an hour; the fires and explosions continuing until the evening. A heavy pall of smoke masked Montormel. Once the destruction was achieved, the Polish units despite the order of the Division's C.O., were not able to cross over to hill 262 South, as the road was completely blocked with the wreckage; heavy smoke exuding from the still burning fires hid everything from view making reconnaissance impossible. This thwarted the realisation of Gen. Maczek's plan to have all the defensive positions fully manned and a certain confusion arose in the commanding echelons of the Divisional Staff. In the evening, the 2nd Armoured Rgt reached 'the Mace' and manned the northern side of the hill, their positions facing north and east. (This may have proved important in repelling German attacks from the north-east). The 9th Rifle Btn manned Coudehard and the remaining units of the Rifle Brigade reinforced the defences on hill 262 North. The area was thus over-saturated with troops. Hill 262 South, however, remained unmanned.

By the evening Combat Group West, after being heavily engaged from early morning, captured Chambois. The town itself was taken by the 10th Dragoons, with fire support from the tanks of the 10th Mounted Rifles, and at 8.30 p.m. personal contact was established with a battalion of US infantry, (II/395 Infantry Rgt from the 90th Div.), which was simultaneously approching Chambois from the south. The defence of the town was jointly organised, supported by the 24th Lancer Rgt. A completely separate combat group was formed by the 10th Mounted Rifles and two A-T batteries, which held hill 113 one km north of Chambois, where they were to fight the whole of the 20th August.

The crisis reached its height on the 20th. The Germans, fully realising that their last road of retreat had been blocked, directed their attacks in concentrated fury born of desperation on each and every unit of the Division in order to force a breach in the defences and thus escape from the trap. The situation on 'the Mace' and around Chambois was made that much more difficult by the fact that the 4th Canadian Armoured Division, whose task was to safeguard the road from Trun to Chambois, had only reached the north-western outskirts of St Lambert-sur-Dives. A section of some 2 km of this vital road was not held and the Germans were quick to exploit this. They managed to penetrate into the area of hills 124 and 129, thus cutting off the road to Polish Supply Companies carrying essentials to the fighting troops and threatening the Polish positions from a hitherto secure direction.

An armoured German reconnaissance unit reached the positions occupied by the command post of the Brigades and of the Divisional artillery, but was thrown back by the fire of the 2nd Motorised Artillery Rgt and an A-A battery.

The units of the Division stretched out on a front of 7 km were engaged from all directions, as the German attacks came from the west and the south, in an attempt to get out of the encirclement, while other German units attacked from the east and the north to try to facilitate the escape of the 7th Army. In these attacks the enemy used infantry supported by tanks and by strong artillery and mortar fire.

The nature of the terrain meant that the Polish armour units had their freedom of movement restricted and had to fight without enough room to manoeuvre in very tight formations. It harked back to medieval times, when the defence on the battlefield consisted of a quadrilateral of closely placed supply waggons – reminiscent of the later laager defences. Hills thickly covered by trees and bushes were very difficult to patrol and it happened that German tanks approached unnoticed to the very edge of Polish positions. An excellent illustration of this was the wrecks of Panthers and Shermans standing facing each other, gun to gun, destroyed by nearly point blank fire.

Towards the evening a very strong German counter-attack was mounted against Chambois. The infantry, closely supported by tanks, managed to penetrate the first lines of defence, but was repulsed and completely shattered. At the same time, the units defending 'the Mace' were attacked from three directions at once. German tanks managed to close within yards of the defensive positions. German infantry attacks supported by tanks, A-T and mortar fire were mounted from the west by troops desperate to escape from the Pocket. At the same time, German units outside the 'Pocket' made every attempt to open the road of retreat to the encircled German army within. Nevertheless, after heavy fighting, the Germans were forced to withdraw with severe casualties. The defenders' losses, though not so great, were still grievous.

It must be stressed that in those days of all out fighting, both Chambois and 'the Mace' were practically cut off. Delivery of supplies to the fighting units became impossible. Several attempts by the supply companies proved fruitless among mounting own losses. The situation was to worsen further when an armoured vehicle supply column, organised with considerable effort, was mistakenly strafed and destroyed by Allied aircraft. Supplies by air drop, arranged from England, also proved a failure: only a minimal proportion of the drop reached its intended destination, and many aircraft were shot down by German anti-

aircraft artillery. Only the Americans managed to get a certain amount of supplies through to some of the fighting units, but soon they too were cut off from the rest of their forces, when the road Chambois – Le Bourg St. Leonard was captured by the retreating Germans.

Attempts to evacuate the wounded ended in failure. They were obliged to remain among the fighting troops, exposed to heavy mortar and artillery fire. The lack of water, food and ammunition became ever more serious. A special problem was posed by the prisoners who began to outnumber the defenders. There was no question of being able to send them to the rear, only a small number was handed over to the Americans, the rest had to be held inside the defensive positions. The 10th Mounted Rifles, repulsing a series of concentrated attacks, took Gen. W. Elfeldt, the commanding officer of the 84th Infantry Corps and 22 officers prisoner.

The only help reaching the beleaguered units was from Divisional artillery and AGRA. They responded quickly at all times to every demand for fire support, which was delivered promptly and with precision. It is worth emphasising that the artillery observers who were with the combat units directed the fire towards themselves and often were facing their own gun positions.

The battle on the Chambois and 'the Mace' fronts continued all night and into the morning of the 21st of August. The soldiers were using the last of their ammunition and the suffering of the wounded, among whom the mortality rate was quickly mounting, became more harrowing. Exhausted by lack of sleep and the long drawn out struggle lasting now more than 48 hours, the soldiers were at the end of their endurance: they had faught ceaselessly from the time of mastering the crossings over the Dives. The enemy still managed to renew their desperate onslaughts, but from the morning of the 21st they began to slacken and their attacks became increasingly unco-ordinated and chaotic. Around midday, after yet another attack on 'the Mace' from the east had been repulsed, German action began to abate and it could be felt that the battle was nearing its end. In the afternoon the Germans began to withdraw on the whole length of the line, surrendering in droves and leaving huge numbers of their wounded and dead.

The 4th Canadian Armoured Division, pushed hard by Gen. Simonds, arrived from the north-west to bring relief to the Polish units. They brought with them ammunition, fuel, food and help for the wounded.

The crisis was over.

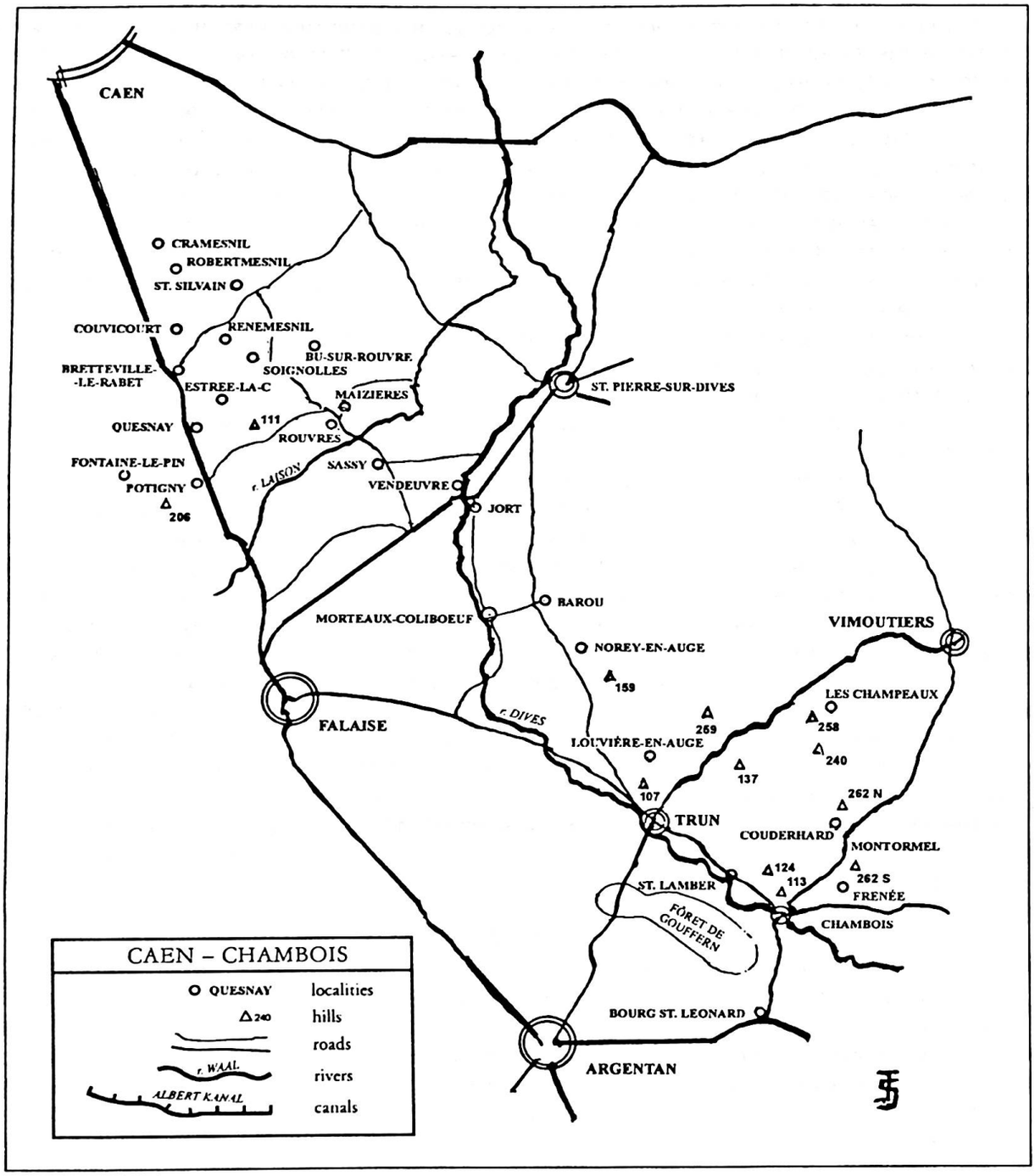
On the 22nd of August, units of the 10th Brigade consolidated hill 262 South without a fight, completing the plan worked out beforehand by Gen. Maczek. Patrols of all the units began to clear the terrain, taking large numbers of prisoners who surrendered without further fighting.

That evening, together with praise and commendation from the commanding officer of the 1st Canadian Army, Gen. Crerar, came orders for the relief of the Division. Next day it passed into the reserve of the Corps and was transferred to the area of Grandmesnil for a well earned rest.

Thus ended the second and final phase of the Falaise-Chambois operations.

Gen. Maczek summerised his assessment of the battle in this way:

> Despite the escape of 40% of the German army from the 'Pocket', the battle of Normandy, in any objective assessment, was a glorious Allied victory. The Canadians underline the absolute Allied superiority, not only in the air, but also on the ground. It was a paradox, therefore, that at the decisive point in the enemy's retreat the Polish Division fought against an absolute German superiority both in armour and in number of troops though without the advantage of airpower which at that point belonged to the Allies...
>
> It was characteristic that the price we paid not only for taking part in the battle, but also for playing the main role in it, was lower than that paid by the Canadian Infantry



and by its armoured divisions and surely, tenfold lower than the losses suffered by the Germans in our area of the battle. The German soldier was still very good and the desperate situation made him fight all the harder. In the last count, statistics are always convincing (*op. cit.*, p. 182).

The battle for Montormel – Chambois was the biggest and most famous battle fought by the Division during the whole of that campaign. A week of fighting of unusual ferocity especially in its closing stages, it was a battle with hardly a break. As a result of this, the troops which had fought during the day had to secure their positions for the night, only to

take up the struggle the following day. The soldiers, cut off for two days, without fresh supplies or an opportunity to evacuate the wounded, showed great hardiness of spirit by repulsing the furious attempts to break out of the encirclement by the best German divisions, amongst which were the élite 1st SS Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler and the 12th SS Hitlerjugend. Apart from this, it is the only battle in which every single unit of the Division was simultaneously engaged.

The battleground of Chambois and 'the Mace' became a sight-seeing attraction for Allied dignitaries. The roads and fields of that area were strewn with mounds of the slain and the equipment of the annihilated German columns.

The Division took 150 officers prisoner including one general, four colonels and 5 500 other ranks. About 70 tanks of various type were destroyed, 500 other vehicles, as well as 100 guns of various calibre – and this not counting minor equipment. The Division's own losses were 135 officers and 2 192 other ranks killed or wounded. In this period, the units used 508 tons of food, 4 210 tons of ammunition and 1 197 tons of fuel. Each truck in the Supply Companies travelled an average of 450 km. The Workshop Companies repaired 91 tanks, 199 other vehicles. The field dressing stations gave aid to 2 116 wounded and 164 sick.

Much later, Gen. Montgomery addressing the soldiers of the Ist Polish Armoured Division said:

The battle of Chambois was decisive. The Germans were trapped as if in a bottle; you were the cork in that bottle.

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Telegram from the C.O. of the 1st Canadian Army to the C.O. of the 1st Armoured Division

Gen. Crerar sent, through Gen. Simonds, the C.O. of the II Canadian Corps the following telegram:

Gen. Crerar has asked me to transmit to you his congratulations concerning the important and gallant part all under your command have played in the recent fighting. The First Canadian Army is very proud to count the Polish Armoured Division among its formations. If we all work as determinedly and well together in the future as we have in the recent past, our mutual celebration of final victory cannot be long delayed.

On forwarding the above telegram, Gen. Simonds added on his own behalf:

It gives me much satisfaction that the very good work of the Polish Division has received this commendation from the Army Commander.

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Poles Great Fight

The leading professional journal of the Royal Tank and Royal Armoured Corps, 'The Tank', printed, a description of the engage- ments of the Polish Armoured Division around Falaise and Chambois under the above title in their September 1944 issue:

Defeated Two SS Corps and Closed the Gap*

It were the Poles – the Armoured Division, in fact – under the command of General Maczek who, as it is only now officially disclosed, played the leading role in sealing

* This article is reprinted with the kind permission of: The Tank Museum, Bovington, Dorset, BH20 6JG, for which the editor of this book is very grateful.

the Allied victory in Normandy, closing on August 21st the gap which was the only remaining outlet for the battered German army east of Argentan. During six days of very heavy fighting, the Polish Division took upon itself all the fury of two German SS corps, taking 5 000 prisoners, including one general and 140 officers.

The Polish operations started on August 15th when General Maczek's tanks crossed the Dives at two points north-east of Falaise. The same day they cut off the first of the three remaining German roads of escape and in a brilliant manoeuvre stormed southwards towards the two others. On the night of the 16/17th, Polish artillery and tanks gained control of the second of these escape routes and the strategically vital village of Trun came under Polish shells and machine-gun fire.

The battle of annihilation reached its crucial phase on the following day. While Polish forces had to hold all the terrain gained, other Polish units, hammered without interruption by the enemy who only now began to realise that the end was approaching, rolled like a steamroller to Chambois and the last road left open to the Germans.

No other battlefield in Normandy gives such an impression of inferno, disaster and death as that to the north-east of Chambois, where following Hitler's express orders the two SS elite corps made attack after attack, desperately trying to break the iron ring which the Poles were closing around them. It was in this phase of the battle that the Polish Armoured Division – operating some five miles farther east than its Canadian and American neighbours – had to withstand the entire weight of the fanatical German onslaught.

The climax was reached on the night of 20/21st August, particularly on the sector of the Mounted Fusiliers [edit.: Mounted Rifles], whose commander, his tank twice previously hit – was killed while leading his men against a group of 'Tigers' in which a German General and officers of his staff vainly tried to break through.

Two Polish Armoured Regiments, blocking the gap, were on August 20th attacked by Panzers not only from the west, but at some stages of the battle literally from all directions. Although numerous units signalled that they were using up their last shells, the iron gate closing on the gap was relentlessly pushed to and closed. When evening came, the enemy's pressure began to weaken, and all but died away during the night. The Americans, with whom the Poles had established their first contact on the previous day, started to send up fuel and ammunition to General Maczek's troops. The wounded could at last be evacuated from the battlefield.

On August 21st the victory was consummated. At about 11 a.m. the Canadians drew level with the Poles on their left flank. The pocket, definitely closed, had now to be cleaned up. The battle of Normandy was virtually finished and the disaster of the German Armies throughout France commenced.

The General commanding the Canadian Corps, when he visited the battlefield north-east of Chambois, said he had never in his life seen such wholesale havoc.

THE PURSUIT ACROSS NORTHERN FRANCE AND BELGIUM

On 23rd August the Division transferred to the area of Vaudeloges near Falaise in order to make good the losses suffered in battle in both men and equipment.

During the 7 day period the greatest share of the work fell to the Workshop Companies which strove to ready the Division for forthcoming action. During the fighting, it was the Supply Companies which had borne the brunt of the effort to keep the fighting units supplied with all their requirements. During this week it was the quartermaster's department, at all levels, which worked in overdrive to replace all the lost equipment, thus enabling the Division to return to a war of rapid advance.

On the day the Division set off, the situation at the front was as follows:

Four Allied Armies were advancing east and north-east:

a. the 1st Canadian Army, in which the Polish Division served, was advancing towards Rouen and then it was to take the direction for the Pas de Calais and Northern Belgium;
b. the 2nd British Army was moving towards Brussels and, once the capital of Belgium was taken, was to turn north-east towards Antwerp, Turnhout, Tilburg and Arnheim;
c. the 1st US Army: its right wing driving towards the Duchy of Luxemburg; its left towards Mons and Liège;
d. the 3rd US Army, from the region of Paris, would aim for Nancy and Verdun.

Within the above framework, the Division was to operate on the left flank of the Canadian Army and its operations can be divided into two periods:

1. from the 30th of August, the day of departure from Vaudeloges, till September 8th, when Thielt in Belgium was taken;
2. the second period encompassed the fighting in the area of Ghent, Lokeren, St Nicolas, Sinay, Hulst-Axel. It was to end on 20th September when the mouth of the river Scheldt was reached.

Mobility and rapid manoeuvering characterised the first stage. The ground was dry and hard, the terrain undulating, with sparse tree cover and good visibility. It was eminently suitable for tank action and also to display the skills of the Engineers who were in great demand as canals and rivers, flowing across the course of advance, presented the main obstacles. These were strongly defended at the crossing points but, thanks to the efficient work of the Engineers who accompanied each armoured group, did not slow down the forward movement of troops. Not only did they build bridges of various kind, often at night and usually under enemy fire, but they also cleared minefields and disarmed explosive destruction charges. The best proof of this is that 400 km were covered in just 9 days, despite continually engaging the enemy.

The Germans, quite correctly evaluating their position in open country not suitably prepared for defence as hopeless, were attempting to save the bulk of their units from annihilation by the hotly pursuing Allied armour. During the day the Germans fought fiercely, even fanatically, defending until nightfall river crossings, road junctions or larger towns such as Abbeville, St Omer, Ypres, Roulers, Ruysselede, Hooglede and finally Thielt. After nightfall, when the armoured units were unable to keep up the pursuit and, for a few hours, became less of a threat, the enemy retreated under cover of darkness. Often, though, these tactics proved a failure. The leading elements of the Division, once the enemy's points of resistance were broken, encountered a vacuum and simply continued to advance destroying on their way the surprised, disorientated German columns in full retreat. If more serious opposition was encountered, the leading elements, so as to avoid slowing down, would

simply by-pass it, leaving the units on following to deal with the resistance.Thanks to these tactics the Germans, constantly surprised by the speed of advance, were unable to create a stable line of defence in their retreat.

The 1st Polish Division was in the van of the Canadian 1st Army for the whole period of this pursuit and drove a deep wedge into enemy forces, leaving neighbouring divisions behind.

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The Division set off for the front from Vaudeloges on the 29th August and advanced rapidly to Elbeuf on the Seine, crossing it by the 'Warsaw Bridge', a pontoon bridge built by Divisional Engineers and, two days later, reached the area of Letteguives, 15 km east of Rouen. From there, having been given priority clearance, the Division passed through all the other Allied units and started in pursuit of the enemy in the direction of Abbeville.

In the afternoon, the combat group composed of the 10th Mounted Rifles, a squadron of Dragoons, a battery of anti-tank guns and a platoon of engineers overcame German resistance at Blangy and seized a bridge on the Bresle. By evening, the group reached Béhan, 10 km south-west of Abbeville. The 10th Brigade, meanwhile, was in contact with the enemy and attained Fourcamont and the Rifle Brigade took Les Assarts Varimpe, where they passed the night, while Divisional Engineers concentrated on building a bridge for the benefit of the whole Corps.

The 10th Mounted Rifles group and the Combat Group comprising the 10th Dragoons, the 1st Armoured Rgt and an A-T battery reached the Somme in the morning of the 2nd September and halted in front of demolished bridges. The attack on Abbeville started that afternoon when the Rifle Brigade was ordered to force a crossing and then, the Podhalan Rifles were to take direct action against the town, whilst the 8th and 9th Rifle Btns, together with the 10th Dragoons and the 11th Company of Engineers, were to attack in the direction of Gouy, 2 km north-east of Abbeville. In the evening the whole Division reached the river and reconnoitred a possible crossing place. The divisional artillery gave support to the units striving to force a crossing the whole of that day.

By dawn the next day the 8th and 9th Rifles had secured a crossing over the Somme, cleared the adjacent area of enemy troops and organised a bridgehead in the region of Port-le-Grand, Flibeaucourt, Grand Laviers and Buigny-St Maclou. The Podhalans crossed the river and, by 10 a.m, had captured Abbeville.

The Engineers then began to build a bridge at Grand Laviers. In the afternoon, the 10th Mounted Rifles Combat Group crossed the Somme using the bridge in the 4th Canadian Division's sector and advanced towards Hesdin. In constant contact with the enemy, they reached La Boisle, found all bridges down and stopped for the night. Meanwhile that night, the 2nd Armoured Rgt and the 1st Motorised Artillery Rgt crossed the Somme by the newly completed bridge.

On the 4th September, the advance continued towards Hesdin, St Omer and Ypres. The Division moved on 2 axes with the 10th Brigade in the lead. At its head the 10th Mounted Rifles Combat Group secured crossings on the rivers Cauche and Ternoise and reached Crépy. The 24th Lancers, finding all the bridges destroyed in the direction of their advance, improvised a crossing of the Ternoise by using a bulldozer to push a brick building standing on its bank into the river, not very deep at this point, and the tanks crossed over the rubble. By evening, after the opposition from the defending A-T guns had been overcome, Ruisseville was captured.

The pursuit of the enemy followed the previous day's pattern. In the afternoon, the leading units advanced to the Neuf Fosse Canal. The 1st Armoured Rgt took Belle Croix and the 10th Dragoons, after a stiff encounter with the Germans near Wizernes, captured St Omer.

The Germans demolished the bridges and organised their defence on the opposite bank of the canal, but during the night the Rifle Brigade forced a crossing and by dawn had consolidated a bridgehead near Blaringhem, which allowed the Engineers to commence bridge building.

The Division, in a quick push, scattered small enemy detachments, crossed the Belgian frontier and reached Ypres.

> History watches us not only from the walls of this medieval town, from the arch of its gateway and the monument to the fallen of the 1914–1918 war, but especially from the hundreds of thousands crosses in the allied cemeteries, which we pass in our pursuit. Once every yard gained in an attack was a success paid for by the death of thousands. But today? The tactics of speed are triumphant (Maczek, *op. cit.*, p. 190).

The 2nd Armoured Rgt with the 10th Mounted Rifles, finding the town strongly defended, by-passed it on either side, sealing off the roads of German retreat. At 5 p.m. the Rifle Brigade with the 9th Battalion in the lead began the attack and took the town that same evening. The battle honours went to the 9th Rifle Battalion.

Before the Division moved off on the 7th September, the reinforced 10th Mounted Rifle Rgt carried out a reconnaissance and ascertained that the German defence off Roulers, Hooglade and Gits was very firm. The 2nd Armoured Rgt broke the opposition in Hooglede and the Rifle Brigade undertook the capture of Roulers. The 9th and the Podhalan Rifles finally took the town and by dawn had cleared it of German troops.

The Prince Regent of Belgium, in recognition of the valiant qualities shown since the fighting in Flanders had begun, bestowed on the 9th Rifle Battalion the title: 'The Flanders Rifle Battalion'.

During the fighting at Roulers, a special detachment was formed from the 24th Lancers; it included also one company of the 8th Rifles and one battery each of the A-T and of the Motorised Artillery. It was tasked with securing Thielt and so facilitating a quick advance for the whole Division.

The Special Detachment set off early in the morning of the 8th September, with the 10th Mounted Rifles operating on a parallel course south of Thielt. The terrain between the water courses was open and hard, ideal for tank deployment. Although the attackers took the German defence by surprise, heavy street fighting developed with the whole 8th Rifle Battalion reinforcing the attack before the town could be secured. The 2nd Armoured Rgt was directed to encircle the town from the east, caught the retreating German column and destroyed it. Together with the 1st Armoured Rgt, sent to extend the line of attack, they effected the difficult capture of Ruysselede where the Germans were conducting a desperate and costly defence. The 2nd Armoured and the 10th Dragoon Rgts then continued the action in the direction of the Ghent Canal near Aeltre to see if usable bridges could be captured. They met, however, with strong enemy opposition.

For the next two days the Polish units remained in contact with the enemy all along the line from Bruges to about 10 km east of Aeltre. The Rifle Brigade prepared to secure crossings over the Ghent Canal. The German defence was well organised in this sector and the attack by the Rifle Brigade supported by Divisional Artillery was repulsed.

The operations in the area of Ghent were to last from the 11th to the 14th September. The Rifle Brigade relieved the British 7th Armoured Division in that area; the northern part of the town was still in German hands and the whole of Ghent under heavy enemy artillery and mortar bombardment.

All of the next day the 8th and the 9th Rifles, with the support of Tactical Air Force and Artillery, fought in the northern area of Ghent. The 10th Brigade by-passed Ghent from the south, reached the area of Lokeren and St Nicolas and began patrolling to the north and

north-east. It was not until the 13th September that the Germans were finally driven out towards the river Lieve.

The 10th Mounted Rifles spent these two days patrolling north-east of Ghent along the bank of the canal.

The 10th Brigade, less the 24th Lancers, but reinforced by the Podhalan Rifles and supported by the whole of the Divisional Artillery, took Stekene on the 14th, the region of La Trompe was secured by the Dragoons and St Gillis-Waas by the 1st Armoured Rgt. The Rifle Brigade continued to operate north of Ghent.

The Division then regrouped ready for action against Axel and Hulst. The 24th Lancers' special detachment was to remain in defence of Ghent. The road of retreat eastwards had been closed to the enemy since Antwerp had been captured by the British 11th Amoured Division and by members of the local resistance movement. Northwards the way was blocked by the estuary of the river Scheldt. So the only possible retreat was evacuation by boat and barge across the river, a slow and laborious process.

The second stage of the Belgian campaign, from the operations around Ghent and ending at the mouth of the Scheldt, differed from the first stage because of the comparative slowing down of the rate of advance and a lack of manoeuvrability. It took place in a terrain, rarely suitable for armour. The plain was waterlogged, which made it often impossible for tanks to leave the roads. Numerous canals, both large and small, criss-crossed the path of advance. The roadways on high embankments or dykes allowed the enemy to open fire from long distances. Needless to say, the Germans reinforced the natural defensive character of the land by flooding polders, laying minefields and constructing vital, well camouflaged defensive points which dominated the more important landmarks: roads, canals and river crossings. The changes in the terrain necessitated different methods of operation. The main task of the Rifle Brigade was no longer to be the securing of areas taken over or by-passed by the quick advance of armoured troops, but to force numerous river and canal crossings, seize and consolidate bridgeheads, thus allowing the Divisional Engineers to build the bridges necessary for the forward movement of armoured units. Most often from now on, the Division operated in mixed combat groups, rather than in individual battalions or regiments. In these conditions, it was forced into fierce fighting, usually in the form of frontal attacks, first in the region of Ghent, then at St Nicolas and, in the three-day final battle of this period in forcing a crossing over the Hulst-Axel Canal.

A strong Rifle Brigade combat group, less the 8th Rifles but reinforced by the 10th Mounted Rifles, the 10th Dragoons, the 10th Engineer Company and the 11th Field Medical Unit with Divisional artillery support, began the planned attack in the direction of St Paul on the 16th September.

In the morning the leading units crossed the Dutch frontier near Koewacht. By evening the 10th Dragoons had gained a small bridgehead on the Axel-Hulst Canal north of Fort St Nicolas. Their attack was efficiently assisted by the fire of the Divisional Artillery centring on strong enemy defence points. The 9th Rifle Btn, reinforced by a squadron of the 10th Mounted Rifles, reached the Axel – Hulst Canal south of Axel. The Engineers, being under constant heavy fire, were unable to build a bridge of sufficient weight to support the crossing of armoured units.

Before dawn a strong German infantry counter-attack supported by armoured cars was directed at the flank of the bridgehead which was held exclusively by the infantry with as yet no A-T weapons. The Dragoons suffered very heavy casualties and were ordered to withdraw to the south bank of the Canal. This was achieved under protective fire from Divisional Artillery. The defence of the south bank was entrusted to the Podhalans with one squadron of the 10th Mounted Rifles. As a result of the loss of the bridgehead, the Rifle Brigade temporarily defended the canal bank, whilst the 8th Rifles attacked la Cligne and took it during the night.

The next afternoon the Podhalan Rifles, supported by the tanks of the 10th Mounted Rifle Rgt and by the Divisional artillery, captured a crossing over the canal near Kijkuit and organised a strong bridgehead. Starting that night the 10th Engineer Company, under intense artillery fire and suffering considerable casualties had nevertheless, by early morning, constructed a bridge.

The co-ordinated action of the Rifle Brigade and the 10th Mounted Rifles captured Axel and the area north of it using a flanking movement, while the Divisional Artillery, established to the north of the town, conducted a sustained fire on the retreat routes of the enemy and on the embarkation points on the Scheldt at Turneuzen. The 1st Armoured Rgt joined the group to protect its western flank.

The Germans, exhausted and broken by three days of ceaseless fighting, did not offer any organised resistance and were withdrawing in confusion north towards the mouth of the Scheldt. In the morning of September 20th, the 10th Mounted Rifles reached the south bank of the river on a 10 km front. They sank five large barges full of evacuating troops by gunfire and captured a German patrol boat.

The Rifle Brigade, in 3 combat groups, cleared German soldiers from the area between the port of Turneuzen and Walsoorden Haven and reached as far as the sea. That day the 10th Dragoons secured the town of Hulst.

From the 21st till the 27th September the Division remained near the Belgian-Dutch frontier in the region of Axel – Turneuzen – Hulst – St Nicolas – Lokeren, clearing the area of German troops and patrolling the southern banks of the Scheldt Estuary.

> The enthusiasm shown by the local inhabitants, especially those of Axel, was greatly appreciated by the soldiers. The sincerity and generosity of the Dutch were bright manifestations of war overshadowing its miseries. In spite of not knowing the language, and wide differences in character and habits, the Polish soldier was greeted with joy and an open heart which surpassed everything that he had experienced in France and even the welcome in Flanders. He suddenly felt as though he was in his own country, and repaid this goodwill with his true friendship and if necessary, even with self sacrifice (Maczek, *op. cit.*, p. 196).

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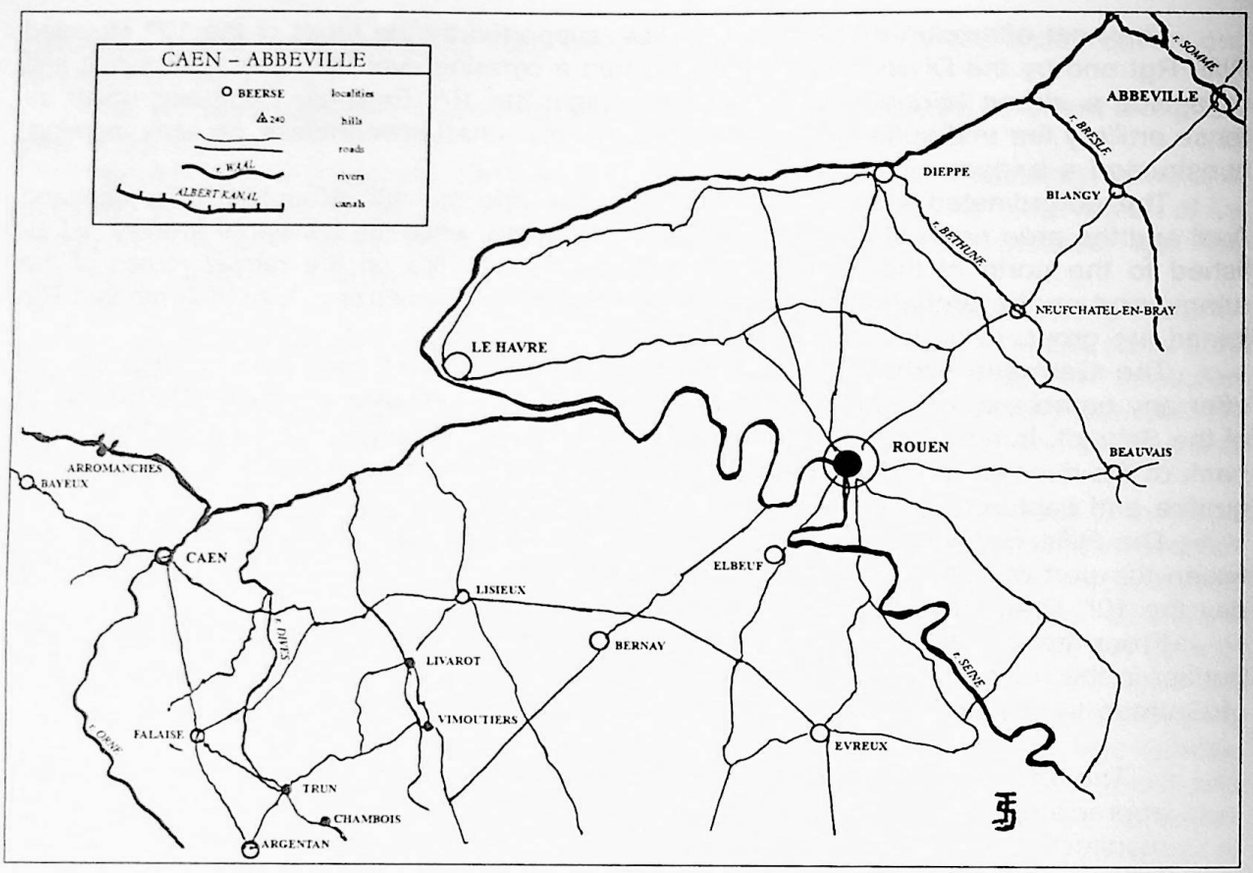
A quick look at the map gives an idea of the great distance traversed by the Division. The distance from Vaudeloges to the Scheldt estuary was no longer the only obstacle. Troops had not only to overcome German resistance, but to rebuild demolished bridges under fire, evacuate the wounded and the prisoners and finally, so as to be able to fight the following day, replenish ammunition, fill empty fuel tanks, and provide for equally empty stomachs. The thorough training undergone by all now paid vital dividends in achieving so much in such a short period of time with perfect co-operation and team work among all the divisional units.

The biggest difficulty of this period was to maintain adequate and continuous supplies on which the rapid advance depended. It has to be remembered that the moment had passed when the bridgehead in Normandy and the front line nearly merged: now the frontline kept moving forward while the supply base remained static. Each day the lines of communication lengthened, but the consumption of ammunition, fuel and food remained constant. When the frontline reached Belgium and Holland, the supplies of ammunition had to be trucked 350 km and those of fuel and food 250 km. Crisis point was reached when the fighting moved to the area of Ghent and beyond. The second line supply companies which delivered directly to the fighting units were running out of stocks. In order to overcome this shortage, Gen. Simonds drastically reduced the allocation of shells per gun. Despite these



difficulties, the Division, due to the selfless work of all drivers, never found itself obliged to discontinue its operations through lack of vital supplies.

The statistics for this period of fighting show that Divisional losses amounted to 32 officers and 462 other ranks; 63 officers and 4 849 other ranks were taken prisoner. The supply companies delivered: 834 tons of food, 2 047 tons of ammunition and 2 661 tons of fuel. Each supply truck travelled on average 2 300 km. The Workshop Companies repaired 196 tanks and 291 other vehicles. Medical assistance was rendered to 186 wounded and 316 sick soldiers.

'Polish Road' in Abbeville. French Town Adopts the Polish Division

Abbeville has not forgotten that it was liberated by the 1st Armoured Division. The Town Council conferred the distinction of Honorary Citizen on Gen. Maczek and also decided to adopt the 1st Polish Armoured Division.

A great ceremony in this town which had been martyred by the Germans in 1940 took place on the 26 – 27th of May 1947. The local population greeted the divisional delegation led by Gen. Maczek enthusiastically. Upon their arrival, French soldiers honoured the Polish flag flying in front of the Town Hall.

On the 27th May, on the street named: 'The Polish Road', a monument was unveiled to commemorate the entry of the Division into Abbeville along this very road.

The Belgian Regent Thanks the 1st Armoured Division

The 14th October was a day which underlined the close relationship between the people of Belgium and those of Poland.

When Gen. Maczek arrived at 12 noon to lay a wreath on the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the inhabitants of Brussels thronged around the statue of King Leopold I, manifested their warm appreciation of Poland, the Polish Division and its Commanding Officer.

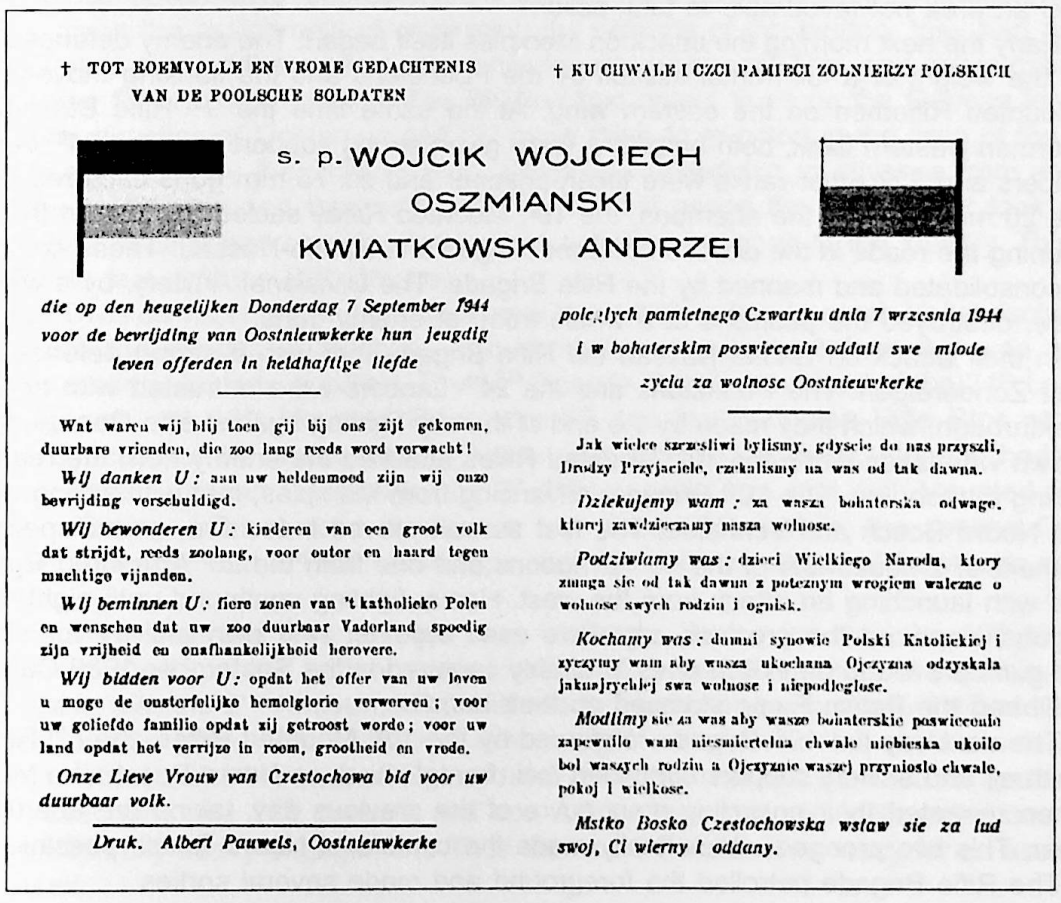
The ceremony was attended by the Mayor of Brussels, the Commanding Officer of the garrison along with various senior officers, seven high ranking British officers, the Polish Chargé d'Affaires, many notable Belgians and members of the Polish community.

At 2 p.m. The Division's Commanding Officer was received in a lengthy audience by Prince Charles, the Prince Regent of Belgium during which the Regent warmly thanked the Division for its heroic part in the fight for the Freedom of Belgium.

Leaflet in Honour of the Dead of the 1st Armoured Division Published by the Belgians

To the glorious memory of Polish soldiers [edit.: 2nd Armoured Rgt] killed on the memorable Thursday 7th September 1944, who gave their young lives for the freedom of Oosterniewkerke.

How happy were we, dear friends, when you came to us.
We, who had waited so long for you.
We admire you, Children of a Great Nation, struggling so long with a powerful foe
for the freedom of your kith and hearths.
We love you, proud sons of a catholic Poland.
We wish speedy independence and freedom to your beloved Fatherland.
We pray that through your heroic sacrifice, you may gain eternal glory in Heaven,
Your families find solace in their grief,
And for your country, peace and greatness.
Our Lady of Częstochowa, intercede for your faithful and devoted people.



† TOT ROEMVOLLE EN VROME GEDACHTENIS VAN DE POOLSCHE SOLDATEN

† KU CHWALE I CZCI PAMIECI ZOLNIERZY POLSKICH

s. p. WOJCIK WOJCIECH
OSZMIANSKI
KWIATKOWSKI ANDRZEI

die op den heugelijken Donderdag 7 September 1944 voor de bevrijding van Oostnieuwkerke hun jeugdig leven offerden in heldhaftige liefde

Wat waren wij blij toen gij bij ons zijt gekomen, duurbare vrienden, die zoo lang reeds word verwacht!

Wij danken U: aan uw heldenmoed zijn wij onze bevrijding verschuldigd.

Wij bewonderen U: kinderen van een groot volk dat strijdt, reeds zoolang, voor outer en haard tegen machtige vijanden.

Wij beminnen U: fiere zonen van 't katholieke Polen en wenschen dat uw zoo duurbaar Vaderland spoedig zijn vrijheid en onafhankelijkheid herovere.

Wij bidden voor U: opdat het offer van uw leven u moge de onsterfelijke hemelglorie verwerven; voor uw geliefde familie opdat zij getroost worde; voor uw land opdat het verrijze in roem, grootheid en vrede.

Onze Lieve Vrouw van Czestochowa bid voor uw duurbaar volk.

Druk. Albert Pauwels, Oostnieuwkerke

poleglych pamietnego Czwartku dnia 7 wrzesnia 1944 i w bohaterskim poswieceniu oddali swe mlode zycia za wolnosc Oostnieuwkerke

Jak wielce szczesliwi bylismy, gdyscie do nas przyszli, Drodzy Przyjaciele, czekalismy na was od tak dawna.

Dziekujemy wam: za wasza bohaterska odwage, ktorej zawdzieczamy nasza wolnosc.

Podziwiamy was: dzieci Wielkiego Narodu, ktory zmaga sie od tak dawna z potezngm wrogiem walecznie o wolnosc swych rodzin i ognisk.

Kochamy was: dumni synowie Polski Katolickiej i zyczymy wam aby wasza ukochana Ojczyzna odzyskala jaknajrychlej swa wolnosc i niepodleglosc.

Modlimy sie za was aby wasze bohaterskie poswiecenie zapewnilo wam niesmiertelna chwale niebieska ukoilo bol waszych rodzin a Ojczyznie waszej przyniosło chwale, pokoj i wielkosc.

Mstko Bosko Czestochowska wstaw sie za lud swoj, Ci wierny i oddany.

THE DUTCH CAMPAIGN

By the end of September, the Allied armies were advancing eastwards on a broad front and coming ever nearer to the river Rhine. The Germans, clearly recovering their equilibrium after the earlier disasters in Normandy, northern France and Belgium, managed to defeat the airborne assault on Arnheim and also to frustrate the American attacks on the Siegfried Line. It was obvious that heavy fighting would take place before the final assault on Germany itself could begin.

In view of the ever lengthening lines of communications – the base supply depot was still in Normandy – the prime conditions for the success of any future action was the clearance of the port and of the whole region around Antwerp and that before the onset of winter. This task was entrusted to the 1st Canadian Army. After a four day rest when replacements in men and equipment arrived, the Polish Division was assigned to the I British Corps under Gen. J.T. Crocker, which formed part of that Army.

On the 28th September 1944 the Division was transferred to its concentration area east of Antwerp, from where it set out on its new assignment: ie. to advance in the general direction of Tilburg, via Oostmalle, Merxplas and Baarle-Nassau.

The following day, the general advance on Tilburg began, preceded by a reconnaissance by the 10th Mounted Rifles. Divisional and the 49th Infantry Brigade Artillery were in support. In the first wave the Rifle Brigade together with the 24th Lancers advanced on Merxplas. After heavy fighting, the 9th Rifle Btn occupied the southern part of the factory 'Dépot de Mendicite' whilst the Podhalan Rifles occupied Wolsputten, south of Merxplas. The Rifle Battalions were given stalwart support by the 24th Lancer and the Mounted Rifle Rgts in an area not favourable to tank action.

Early the next morning the attack on Merxplas itself began. The enemy defences broke under the weight of a full frontal assault by the Podhalans and the flanking movement by the Mounted Riflemen on the eastern wing. At the same time the 9th Rifle Btn attacked the German western flank, both battalions were given strong support from the 24th Lancers. 17 officers and 227 other ranks were taken prisoner and six 75 mm guns captured as well as five 20 mm ones. In the afternoon, the 10th Mounted Rifles seized bridges on the canal so opening the roads in the direction of Zondereigen and Baarle-Nassau. These crossingss were consolidated and manned by the Rifle Brigade. The Divisional Artillery, by a well centred fire, destroyed the positions of a whole troop of enemy guns.

In their attack on Baarle Nassau the Rifle Brigade met with a strong defence in the area of Zondereigen. The Podhalans and the 24th Lancers were entrusted with achieving a breakthrough, which they made by the end of the day fighting against élite German troops. The town was taken when the 10th Mounted Rifles attacked the enemy from the rear in an encircling manoeuvre. The 10th Brigade, advancing from Merxplas, met with strong opposition at Noord Bosch and Venheide. The first assault proved indecisive, and a special detach- ment of 2 squadrons of the 10th Dragoons and one from the 2nd Armoured Rgt were tasked with launching an attack from the west. Heavy fighting continued until nightfall. Enemy guns, captured the previous day were used together with own artillery for support. These guns proved to be Polish ones, probably captured in the September 1939 Campaign and still had the Polish Eagle stamped on their barrels

The next day the 10th Brigade reinforced by the 10th Mounted Rifles, the 8th Rifle Btn and with air and artillery support, continued their frontal attack on Noord Bosch; the Mounted Riflemen repeated their encircling manoeuvre of the previous day, taking the enemy from the rear. This two pronged attack finally made the capture of Noord Bosch possible.

The Rifle Brigade patrolled the foreground and made several sorties.

The 10th Brigade continued its advance on the 3rd October with an attack on the eastern suburbs of Baarle-Nassau and was greeted with strong resistance. After intensive fighting, the Dragoons occupied Baarle-Hertog, at the same time two squdrons of the 2nd Armoured Rgt manoeuvring from the east, took de Ross and came on the enemy's left flank. The Rifle Brigade entered this final phase of the battle and Baarle-Nassau fell that same evening after fierce fighting by the 8th and 9th Rifle Btns with the co-operation of the 1st Armoured Rgt. Street fighting continued the whole of that night. During this action, the 10th Mounted Rifles gave protection from the west. Gen. Crocker, praised the action leading to the capture of Baarle-Nassau.

The advance continued; after an artillery softening of the enemy positions, the Rifle Brigade carried out offensive patrolling to the north and the north-west of Baarle-Nassau. By the evening, the 9th Rifles together with the 1st Armoured Rgt captured the woods north of the town. The Germans counter-attacked with armoured units from the north-east; they were halted on the Baarle-Nassau – Tilburg railway line. Units of the 10th Brigade reconnoitred the foreground and made contact with neigbouring Allied divisions. The 10th Mounted Rifles were on the west wing, while the Rifle Brigade secured the day's operations from the north and north-west.

At 11 a.m. of October 5th the attack on Alphen began. The 10th Brigade, reinforced by the 9th Rifles, finally took the town at 7 p.m. This was accomplished after a fierce struggle by the 2nd Armoured Rgt and the 9th Rifle Btn when, together, they drove a wedge into the enemy defences.The 24th Lancers took Terover and Houdseind. In the meanwhile, the 8th and the Podhalan Rifles together with the 10th Mounted Rifles began the assault on Baarle-Bosschoven. Attacking from the west that afternoon, they took the woods near Kwalburg, north of Alphen. Tactical Air Force units gave support to the day's operations.

In those seven days' operations, the Division had outstripped its neighbouring units and was given the assignment of organising the defence of the territory they had gained; individual units cleared the area of any remaining enemy troops. This, and active patrolling, left little time for rest or relaxation. The Division had orders to tie up the German forces in the general direction of Oosterhuit and not allow them to re-group in the area of the forthcoming main attack by the British Corps, which was scheduled to advance from approximately the south-west and the south-east. During this period the 1st A-T Rgt took its full share in participating and covering the various activities assigned to the infantry. This situation was to last until the 27th October.

The Division was then on the move once again with orders to reach Hollandsche Diep and capture the bridges at Moerdijk. Two combat groups set out from the area around Alphen in a north-westerly direction. The 10th Brigade Group composed of the 24th Lancers, 10th Dragoons, the 10th Mounted Rifles, the 8th and the Podhalan Rifle Btns attacked from the direction of the woods east of Alphen and took successively: Alphenschedijk (the Podhalan Rifles), Alphen Oosterwijk (the 8th Rifles), and Gilze (the 10th Mounted Rifles). The main Tilburg – Breda road was cut in two places. Meanwhile, the second Combat Group: 9th Rifles, 1st and 2nd Armoured Rgts, took the northern edges of the woods north of Alphen.

The main objective was now the town of Breda. During the day, the 10th Mounted Rifles together with an A-T battery, gained control of Bavel, which made it possible for the Rifle Brigade with the 2nd Armoured Rgt and two A-T batteries to dominate the base line for an attack on the town. The 9th Rifles, after a night action, took the eastern suburbs of Ginneken, whilst the 1st Armoured Rgt and the 8th Rifles reached the area of Ijpelaar and the 10th Dragoons, the 24th Lancers and one A-T battery captured Molenschot and Dorst after a particularly heavy engagement. Thus the whole Division was ready for an assault on Breda itself.

This started in the early morning of the 29th October. The Germans tried to divert some of the Polish troops by an infantry counter-attack on Dorst. This proved fruitless. The Rifle Brigade, with artillery support, advanced through Ginneken towards Prinsenhagen; the 10th Brigade attacked the north-eastern roads leading to Breda. During that action the north-west of Breda was secured, together with bridges in the area of Oranienboom. The 9th Rifles, together with an A-T battery, cleared the enemy troops from the centre of the town. The 1st Armoured Rgt, reconnoitring towards the railway station, occupied the north-eastern part of Breda.

The following day was spent in clearing the town of the remaining German troops. The inhabitants were grateful that this was achieved with the minimum of street fighting, though the German artillery caused some casualties. While on an offensive patrol, the 9th Rifles occupied Prinsenhagen. Meanwhile, the 10th Mounted Rifles, in reconnaissance towards Moerdijk, took Beek and in constant contact with the enemy reached a bridge across the Mark canal which however, proved to be destroyed. In the evening the 8th Rifle Btn joined the 10th Mounted Rifles and, during the night, the beginnings of a bridgehead were established. Fierce fighting took place there the next day. The 8th Rifles supported by the tanks of the 10th Mounted Rifles, later also by those of the 2nd Armoured and the 2nd Motorised Artillery Rgts, managed to maintain the bridgehead. The German infantry counter-attack, reinforced by tanks and artillery fire, was repulsed. The 11th Engineer Company, under constant heavy shelling, which was causing considerable casualties in their ranks, maintained communications between the two banks of the canal.

At dawn the 8th Rifles, together with a squadron of the 2nd Armoured Rgt, managed to cross the Mark Canal using the makeshift pontoon bridge constructed during the night. In the evening, three strong enemy counter-attacks were thrown back at the cost of rapidly mounting Polish losses. The gunners of the 2nd Motorised Artillery Rgt laid on an intensive and continuous barrage, but despite the sacrifices made, a withdrawal of troops from the bridgehead was ordered at 9 p.m. by Gen. Crocker. This was achieved under the cover of divisional artillery fire.

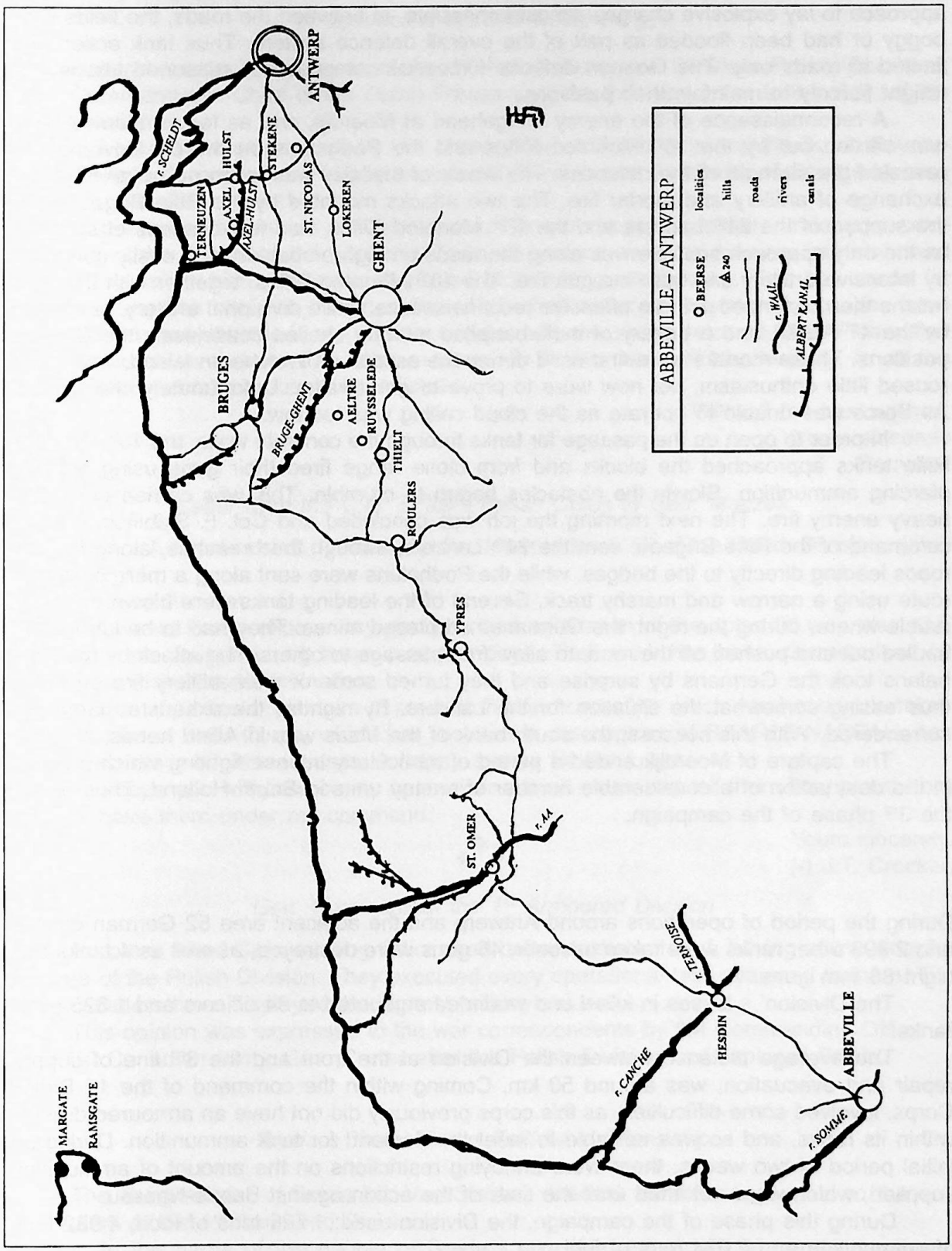
The next day, the 2nd November, the Division regrouped to gain a crossing over the Mark Canal in the area of Aalst and Vraggelen. The artillery and Tactical Air Group, in preparation for the coming action, softened up the enemy defences.The forcing of a crossing over the Mark Canal started before dawn in two places. It was preceded by an intensive artillery bombardment. With the aim of distracting German vigilence, the 1st Armoured Rgt put on a display of fire power at a spot not included in the attack plans. In the meantime, the 10th Brigade began the assault. The Podhalan Rifles, by a complete surprise attack, forced a crossing at Ter Aalst, while the 9th Rifles, after arduous combat, another one at Vraggelen. Before the close of the day, the Dragoons extended the bridgehead by capturing Den Hout. Meanwhile, the three squadrons of the 24th Lancers gave support wherever it was needed. The whole Division then crossed to the northern side of the Mark Canal.

After this, the only strongly held point south of the river Maas in the Polish sector of the front was the Moerdijk bridgehead: this was the ultimate objective.

The 10th Mounted Rifles carried out a reconnaissance, after which the units of the Division advanced in a northerly direction. All were soon involved in heavy fighting, but the 1st Armoured and the 10th Dragoon Rgts captured Haspel and Made; the 9th Rifles together with the 24th Lancers took Terheyden and Wagenberg; whilst the Podhalans secured Oude Kirke and Heikant.

The Rifle Brigade, with the 2nd Armoured Rgt and supported by a squadron of 'Crocodiles' (tanks adapted as flame throwers) and an A-T battery, working in heavily mined terrain, managed to gain control of the line of the road between Hooge Zwaluwe and Zevenbergschen Hoek.

The German defences at the mouth of the river Maas, called the Hollandsche Diep, were extremely strong. They formed part of the anti-invasion fortifications and consisted of


ABBEVILLE – ANTWERP
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LOKEREN
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r. SOMME
MARGATE
RAMSGATE

concrete bunkers and gun emplacements. The roads leading towards the important bridges at Moerdijk were cut by high concrete blocks with bunkers on either end which made any approach to lay explosive charges almost impossible. In between the roads, the fields were boggy or had been flooded as part of the overall defence system. Thus tank action was limited to roads only. The German defence force was composed of seasoned troops who fought fiercely to maintain their positions.

A reconnaissance of the enemy bridgehead at Moerdijk and as far as Blauwe-Sluiz, was carried out by the 10th Mounted Rifles and the Podhalans on the 6th November. It revealed the strength of the defences. The whole of that day was taken up by an intensive exchange of artillery and mortar fire. The two attacks mounted by the Rifle Brigade, with the support of the 24th Lancers and the 10th Mounted Rifles, had few chances of success, as the only approach possible was along the roads on high embankments, easily controlled by intensive artillery and machine gun fire. The 10th Mounted Rifles, together with the Podhalans then continued with an offensive reconnaissance, while divisional artillery, reinforced by the 4th AGRA and a battery of multi-barrelled mortars shelled ceaselessly the German positions. These mortars were first used during the assault on Walcheren Island, when they roused little enthusiasm, but now were to prove of great value. Unfortunately, the Tactical Air Force was unable to operate as the cloud ceiling was too low.

In order to open up the passage for tanks through the concrete walls, the 10th Mounted Rifle tanks approached the blocks and from close range fired their guns using armour-piercing ammunition. Slowly the obstacles began to crumble. This was carried out under heavy enemy fire. The next morning the job was concluded and Col. F. Skibiński, then in command of the Rifle Brigade, sent the 24th Lancers, through the breaches, along the two roads leading directly to the bridges, while the Podhalans were sent along a more circuitous route using a narrow and marshy track. Several of the leading tanks were blown up in the rubble where, during the night, the Germans had placed mines. They had to be laboriously hauled out and pushed off the road, to allow free passage to others. The attack by the Podhalans took the Germans by surprise and they turned some of their artillery fire on them, thus easing somewhat the situation for the Lancers. By nightfall the exhausted Germans surrendered. With this success, the south bank of the Maas was in Allied hands.

The capture of Moerdijk ended a period of particularly intense fighting which resulted in the destruction of a considerable number of enemy units in South Holland. Thus ended the 3rd phase of the campaign.

During the period of operations around Antwerp and the adjacent area 52 German officers and 2 893 other ranks were taken prisoner, 46 guns were destroyed, as well as 4 tanks and eight 88 mm guns.

The Division' s losses in killed and wounded amounted to 84 officers and 1 325 other ranks.

The average distance between the Division at the front and the 3rd line of supply, repair and evacuation, was around 50 km. Coming within the command of the 1st British Corps, involved some difficulties, as this corps previously did not have an armoured division within its ranks, and so was not able to meet the demand for tank ammunition. During an initial period of two weeks, there were annoying restrictions on the amount of ammunition supplied, which were not lifted until the time of the action against Baarle-Nassau.

During this phase of the campaign, the Division used: 1 766 tons of food, 4 982 tons of ammunition and 2 674 tons of fuel.

The Workshop Companies repaired 155 tanks and 733 other vehicles; Field Dressing Stations cared for 1 045 wounded and 1 047 sick soldiers.

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'A Connection We Will Never Forget'

Holland thanks the soldiers of the 1st Polish Armoured Division. Prince Bernhard, Commander-in-Chief of the Dutch Forces sent the following letter to the C.O. of the Division:

I have been empowered by Her Majesty Queen Wilhelmina and the Dutch Government to decorate the 1st Polish Armoured Division with the Order of Orange-Nassau with Swords.

Let me be allowed to use this occasion to express to the soldiers under your command the thanks of the people of Holland, and my own, for the very important and active role which you have all played in liberating our country. This has made for a strong link between our countries which shall never be forgotten by us. You have gained many friends in our country and you will always be welcome here. Please find an occasion to pass this letter – especially in the name of Her Majesty, to all the soldiers who have fought in Holland.

With all the best wishes,
Yours sincerely
Bernhard

Letter from the C.O. of the I British Corps to Gen. Maczek

Gen. J.T. Crocker sent this hand-written letter to the C.O. of the Polish Division, dated 3.10.44.

Dear General,

I would like to express my gratitude and admiration of the splendid way your division has fought during these past few days. Their work has been characterised by great skill and determination.

It is of particular pleasure to me that this first operation which you have undertaken as part of the I Corps, which has resulted in the capture of BAARLE-NASSAU, has been crowned with success. A happy augury for the future.

I hope you will pass on my appreciation to all ranks and tell them how proud I am to have them under my command.

Yours sincerely,
(-) J.T. Crocker.

Gen. Crerar about the 1st Armoured Division

No other Allied Commanding Officer had better soldiers than I, having at my side the soldiers of the Polish Division. They executed every operational task assigned to them. The Polish soldiers have displayed the highest military virtues.

This opinion was expressed to the war correspondents by the Commanding Officer of the First Canadian Army, Gen. Crerar after the Polish Division had captured Breda.

Breda a Town Always Faithful in Friendship

The Burgomaster of Breda Mr. Van Slobbe, directed the following words to the soldiers of the 1st Armoured Division:

In the name of the people of Breda I take this opportunity to send our sincere greetings to the soldiers of the 1st Polish Division who were not able to attend our celebrations through the Polish paper.

To show our gratitude for the liberation of our town, the citizens of Breda have offered new colours to the 8th Rifle Battalion, a unit in your Division, which a year ago entered our town.

In olden days, the colours were carried in front of the regiment in battle. They were a symbol of bravery, loyalty and of the meaning of the military profession. Every soldier was prepared to fight to the last in defence of his colours and would never abandon them.

Times have changed. No longer do we see the regimental colours waving on the battlefield. Other customs are now in force: iron monsters play the main role, but the colours have not changed their meaning – they are still the symbol of military virtue.

We are happy that in offering these colours, we were thus able to express our gratitude to the soldiers of the 1st Armoured Division, who with a sacrifice of their own blood have conquered Breda and spared its walls from destruction. Your comarades, who during the battle for our town have given their young lives, lie in our cemeteries. We never knew them, but we know that under each uniform beat an ardent heart.

We hope that, with these colours offered to you by Breda and with all your other regimental colours, you may return speedily to a free Poland, where they will for ever bear witness to the bravery of Polish soldiers.

Breda 29.X.1945.
Burgemeester of the Royal Town of Breda

WINTER ON THE MAAS RIVER

After a period of fighting characterised by mobility, and full of successes, but also losses, the Division remained part of the I British Corps under Gen. Crocker, which itself was part of the 1st Canadian Army under Gen. Crerar. The Division was halted and remained stationary on the left bank of the Maas with the operational task of patrolling a 25 mile sector. Its left hand neighbour was the 18th Canadian Armoured Car Rgt, on the right, its constant companion in action, the 4th Canadian Armoured Division. During this period the bulk of the 21st Army Group under the command of Field-Marshal Montgomery was preparing for the next stage of operations, aimed at the liquidation of all enemy forces between the river Maas and the Rhine.

Due to the static state of this part of the front line, and the urgent need to replace losses, to rest and to re-train, only troops considered essential were involved in patrolling the bank of the river. Their purpose was to prevent any German sortie, or infiltration, but the main emphasis was laid on the return of all units to full combat readiness.

Until mid December there was relative quiet, broken only by an exchange of artillery, mortar, or machine gun fire; but the intensification of the V1 and V2 campaign seriously worried Antwerp and its region.

This changed with the early success of Marshal von Rundstedt's offensive through the Ardennes in mid December, and the threat it posed to Antwerp and Brussels. The Division underwent several regroupings. In this fluid situation the Poles remained the one stable element in the defence of the Maas. Their sector expanded and shrank according to need and the availability of troops for this important task. To strengthen the defence, various British and Canadian units were assigned to the Division.

During the five months of stationary duties on the Maas, the Division lost in killed, wounded and missing 16 officers and 309 other ranks and took 51 Germans prisoner. The enemy units facing the Division were respectively: the 711th and the 712th Infantry, the 6th Parachute Divisions, finally the remains of the SS and Viking Divisions and miscellaneous naval and military police units.

Guarding and defending their sector of the Maas, the Divisional Service and Supply Companies were based at the Administrative Area with its headquarters at Breda – Ginneken. Their work was much less onerous than in the preceding phases of the campaign since August 1944. This was the result of short distances and of the stationary character of the fighting, which only livened up in January during the attacks on the Kapelsche Veer bridgehead. During this action, the ammunition Supply Company delivered a further 435 tons, ie. 2 500 shells to the front line.

On several occasions, the divisional Service Companies rendered assistance both to the I British Corps, and to the 1st Canadian Army, giving them 1000 truck-days. They also carried out repair work for certain Corps units.

From the quartermaster's point of view, this period was characterised by:

a. The nearness of the supply and the evacuation of the III line, which at times was pushed further forward than the II line;

b. The making good of losses in armaments and equipment and also ensuring the smooth running of all divisional services.

In the five months, the Division consumed: 44 tons of food; 2 860 tons of ammunition; 5 596 tons of fuel. Workshop Companies repaired 270 tanks and 1 496 vehicles; Field Dressing Stations looked after 2 933 sick and wounded, 1 100 of whom were evacuated to hospitals.

On the 9th November the Division took over the surveillance of a 25 km sector of the river Maas from Moerdijk to Raamsdonk.

The left sub-section was allocated to the 3rd Rifle Brigade, with one armoured regiment in rotation; the right one to the 10th Brigade. The Divisional and Brigade H.Q. was in Breda, while the units were quartered in the surrounding villages. The system of surveillance was based on patrols and observation in which, the Dutch Home Army was very helpful. Rest and training filled part of the time.

On November 11th the Polish Independence Day was celebrated in Breda, with the participation of British military representatives and the local population. The Burgomaster conferred on Gen. Maczek and all the soldiers of the 1st Polish Armoured Division, the honorary citizenship of the town in recognition of their part in its liberation and of the close ties beginning to develop between the Polish soldiers and the local people.

From November 12th until 18th December was a fairly quiet period; the Rifle Brigade used one battalion for surveillance duties on an eight-day rotation system. They were supported by one squadron of tanks and a platoon of Engineeers.

In the 10th Brigade sub-section, the main duties fell on the 10th Dragoon Rgt supported by 2 squadrons of tanks in rotation. In mid-November a battery of A-A guns was also assigned to these duties. The Divisional Engineers cleared the area of mines and repaired severed communications. The remaining units were taking on replacements both in men and equipment and were undergoing further training. Both field artillery regiments were in direct support of all units on active surveillance, shelling the enemy on the opposite bank of the Maas. The sporadic German artillery and mortar fire grew in intensity after mid-November, but relaxed again by the beginning of December.

A Twofold Decoration Ceremony

On the 25th November Field Mashal Montgomery took part in a twofold decoration ceremony. He was accompanied by the Commanding Officer of the 1st Canadian Army, Gen. Crerar and by his Corps Commanders.

In the presence of regimental colours and of delegations from every divisional Unit, Field Marshal Montgomery decorated Gen. Maczek, the Division's C.O., as well as officers and other ranks, with various British decorations.

Then Gen. Maczek, in the name of the President of the Polish Republic, decorated Field Marshal Montgomery with the silver cross of the Order of Virtuti Militari.

Addressing the soldiers, Marshal Montgomery expressed his satisfaction at the decorations of the soldiers of the Division, and especially of their Commanding Officer, with British military distinctions. He said that he felt proud to receive his high Polish decoration in the presence of so many soldiers of this Division. He underlined the fact that this formation never caused him any disappointments in action. The Poles, at the side of the Canadian Army, played a leading role in the most important closing stages of the Battle of Normandy. On visiting the Division's battlefields, he personnally realised that the Poles had been given the opportunity to settle some of their old scores. In their advance through Northern France within the framework of the 1st Canadian Army they had, by destroying the launching pads situated on the French coast, put an end to the threat posed to Britain by flying bombs.

The Division had also played an important part in clearing German troops from Belgium and southern Holland, operations culminating in the capture of Breda. Press accounts, continued Field Marshal Montgomery, can be inaccurate; but he himself had never had any doubts about the achievements of the Division. They were, he said, significant.

Expressing his pleasure that he was able to say all this to the soldiers of the Division, Marshal Montgomery charged all those present to repeat his words to those who were unable to attend the ceremony.

On the 29th November Gen. Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander of Allied Troops in Western Europe, inspected the Division.

Marshal von Rundstedt's counter-offensive through the Ardennes began on December 16th. Its rapid progress threatened Brussels and Antwerp. It also affected the Division. On December 19th extra vigilance was ordered and on the 21st December, as a result of re-grouping, the 4th Canadian Armoured Division passed into the reserve of the Corps, while their sector was taken over by the Poles whose sector of surveillance was thus extended to 50 km. The possibility of an airborne diversion developed as a result of the concentration on the Lower Maas of German troops belonging to the Gen. Student's Parachute Corps and a pincer attack on Antwerp was feared. Therefore the sector guarded by the Division took on new significance. The Infantry, the Anti-Tank and Anti-Aircraft Artillery Regiments, as well as part of the armoured units, manned the river bank. There was constant exchange of gun fire, as well as the need to repel frequent German offensive patrols. The bulk of the 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade was held in readiness to strike in a chosen area, suitable for tank action, should the enemy cross the river.

The Division was strengthened by a company of the 1315 RAF Rgt, the 19th Motorised Artillery Rgt and 3 troops of heavy artillery (all 3 British units), taking over the Canadian sector of the Maas, the Poles passed on their sector their neighbour on the left, the 18th Canadian Armoured Car Rgt. The Division's neighbour on the right was now the 7th Reconnaissance Rgt from the II Canadian Corps. The new 50 km long sector included the towns of Raamsdonk in the west and Lithoijen in the east. The left sub-section was assigned to the Rifle Brigade less the 9th Rifle Btn, but reinforced with the RAF Company, the 1st Armoured Rgt, and the 2nd Motorised Artillery Rgt. The right sub-section was tasked to the 10th Brigade, less the 24th Lancer and the 1st Armoured Rgts, but reinforced by the 9th Rifle Btn and the 1st A-A Artillery Rgt. The 10th Mounted Rifle and the 1st Motorised Artillery Rgts were held in reserve in Udenhout and Breda; the 24th Lancers, meanwhile, were at the disposition of Gen. Crocker. The Divisional H.Q. was at Heinkant, 3 km south of 's-Hertogenbosch.

Between the 22nd and the 26th December several re-groupings of Divisional forces took place, dictated by the exigencies of the successes of Marshall von Rundstedt's counter-offensive and also by the greatly increased activity of German patrols which penetrated the area manned by the units of the Division and, above all, the length of the sector now under surveillance. The 1315 RAF Company was withdrawn and replaced by the 47th Royal Marine (RM) Commando. The 10th Brigade, still without the 24th Lancers, but with 2 squadrons of the 10th Mounted Rifles, was withdrawn into the reserve so as to be ready to act against a possible enemy attack, either as a complete unit or in regimental groups strengthened by A-T batteries.

The surveillance sector was widened to the banks of the Wilhelmina Canal and was sub-divided into 3 sub-sections:

Western: 47 British RM Commandos;

Middle: The Rifle Brigade with a squadron of the 10th Mounted Rifles;

Eastern: 1st A-T Artillery Rgt and a battery of A-A guns.

The Divisional Engineers were busy laying down minefields south of the Maas and also preparing the bridges for possible destruction. Divisional H.Q. was at that time in Heuneind, 4 km south-east of Tilburg.

The period from the 27th to the 31st December was characterised by frequent exchanges of artillery, mortar and machine gun fire. Both sides carried out intensive patrol activity, especially in the left part of the sub-section guarded by the Rifle Brigade.

The Germans, in order to launch their offensive patrols and sorties, took full advantage of an island formed by the Maas and the wide Oude Maasje Canal running south of the river. The small port of Capelsche Veer was on that island. Twice divisional patrols sent to the island were repulsed. The flooded area near the river made movement across it difficult. The situation was not eased when heavy frosts set in. The Engineers were tasked with organising a crossing over the canal.

On the last day of the year, 2 companies of the 9th Rifle Btn supported by mortars, flame throwers and the fire of 3 artillery regiments, attempted to drive the Germans out of Capelsche Veer in an attack which was repulsed with heavy losses; this demonstrated the strength and the excellent organisation of the German defences. The protection of a high earth embankment afforded first rate protection to the defenders and dominated a flat, waterlogged terrain criss-crossed by canals which proved particularly hostile to the quick movement of attackers.

1945

The heavy exchange of fire continued, as did the sorties by both sides. The 24th Lancers Rgt was returned under the command of Gen. Maczek and took over the area manned by the 1st Armoured Rgt, which replaced the 10th Mounted Rifles who, in turn, were assigned to the Rifle Brigade at Kaatsheuvel.

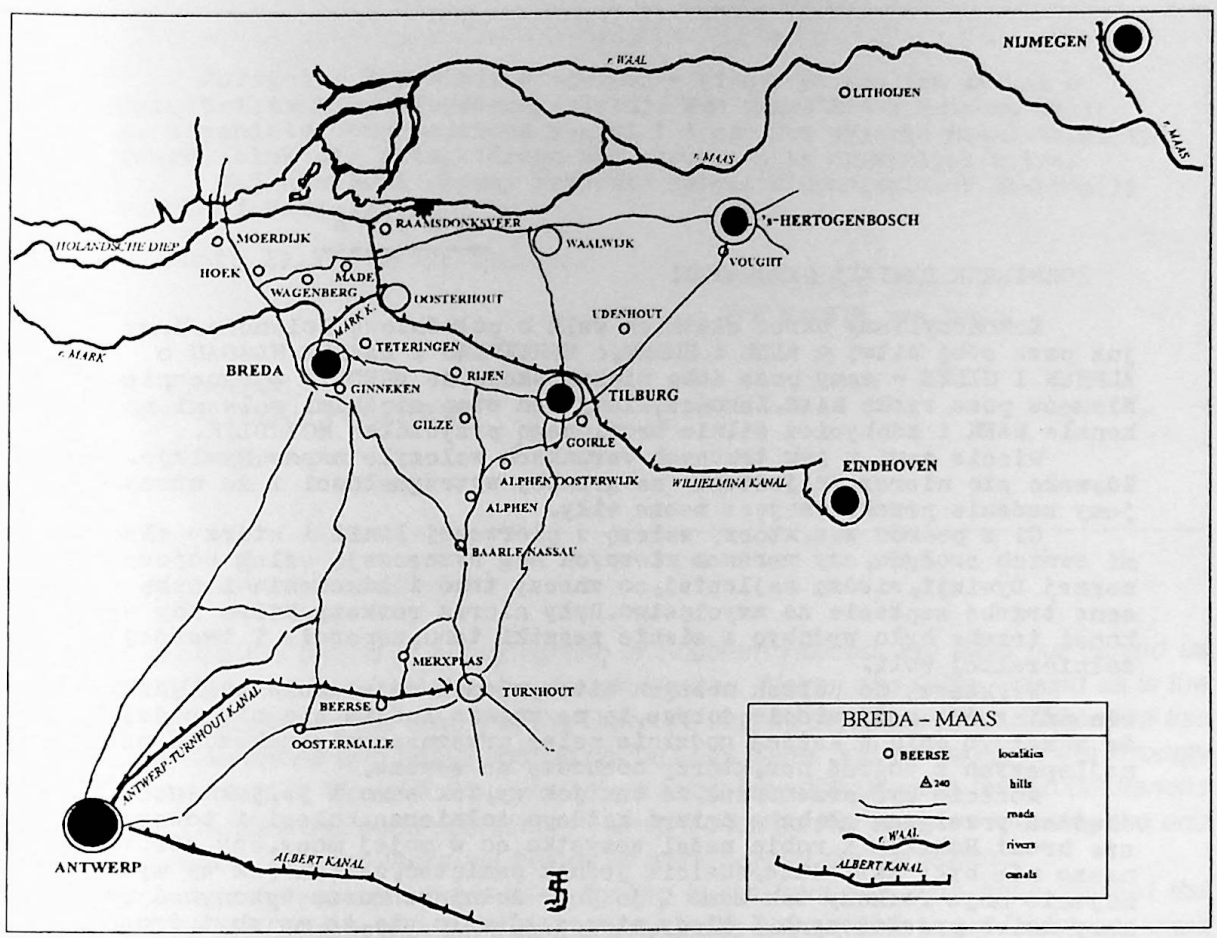
As Capelsche Veer was situated in the path of the most probable direction of an enemy offensive and formed in a sense a bridgehead, Gen. Crocker decided that it should be cleared of German troops. He ordered on the 4th January operation 'Trojan' to be carried out. Its aim was to discover the exact strength of the enemy defence and the sources of fire in the middle sub-section. There was to be a smoke-screen on a 13 km front, two officer patrols and support from both the divisional and corps artillery.

Operation 'Trojan' was set in motion on the following day. It proved a failure. The smoke-screen was dissipated by the wind and the patrols found themselves in full sight of close German gun emplacements. They were unable to cross the embankment on the north side of the river and retired with heavy losses. However, several machine and A-T gun emplacements were discovered. The German artillery on the whole remained silent.

During the next two days, after an hour's bombardment by two regiments of field artillery, 4 regiments of medium artillery and two troops of multi-barrelled rocket mortars, the assault by the 9th Rifle Btn set off before dawn. By sunrise it had been halted by heavy enemy fire and, by 18.00 hours the assault had been repulsed by the German troops manning Capelsche Veer.

A regrouping along the divisional sector was carried out. The 4th Canadian Armoured Division returned to its old sector and the Poles were left with a 15 km long sector whose defence was entrusted to the 10th Brigade reinforced by a Rifle Btn on an eight-day rotation system. The 1st Armoured Rgt and a squadron of Dragoons were assigned to the British 62nd Anti-Tank Artillery Rgt. Divisional H.Q. and the remaining units returned to Breda to take up their interrupted training schedules. All British units which had been assigned to the Division returned to their own regiments except for the 47 RM Commandos.

Until the end of January both sides continued their patrol activities and there were infrequent exchanges of artillery fire – the Germans predominently using mortars. The next assault on Capelsche Veer during the night of 13/14th January was carried out by the 47th RM Commandos, supported by the artillery of the Polish and Canadian divisions, as well as by that of the Corps. The crossing of the canal was organised by divisinal Engineers. The



assault was not successful, the Marines suffered heavy losses and were recalled to their own unit.

The next day two squadrons of Spitfires bombed Capelsche Veer. Finally, with news that units of the German Parachute Division were observed in the vicinity engendering real fears of a possible airborne attack, the 10th Mounted Rifle Rgt and one Rifle Btn were assigned to the disposition of the Corps Commander to meet this crisis.

On the 26th January the whole Infantry Brigade of the 4th Canadian Division mounted an attack on Capelsche Veer. It was supported by the both divisional and Corps artillery. On the last day of January, after a five day-battle, with the use of amphibian tanks and flame throwers, the German outpost on Capelsche Veer was finally annihilated, but at the cost of heavy Canadian casualties and with an enormous expenditure of artillery ammunition.

The operation to clear the left bank of the Rhine, planned by Field Marshal Montgomery for the autumn of 1944, got under way at the beginning of February 1945. In the second half of that month, the Division's companion, the 4th Canadian Armoured Division, was transferred once again. This time it was to take part in the action of breaking the German defences in the Reichswald. The Division regrouped to man their old 50 km sector and the 41 RM Commando was assigned to reinforce the Division. On the left wing there was a change in the neighbouring unit: the 11th Hussar Rgt relieved the 18th Canadian Armoured Car Rgt. Active patrolling by the 41st RM Commando and frequent exchanges of fire were the main features of the first half of the month of February 1945. On February 19th the Division was reinforced by three regiments of artillery and by a company of Engineers.

The situation remained without change, with only minor readjustments to the composition of the Rifle Brigade sub-sector where the 1st A-A Artillery Rgt relieved the 8th Canadian

O d p i s

ŻOŁNIERZE DYWIZJI PANCERNEJ!

Zakończyliśmy okres ciężkich walk o południową Holandię. Mamy już poza sobą bitwę o AXEL i HULST, o MERKXPLAS I BAARLE NASSAU o ALPHEN I GILZE - mamy poza sobą piękną akcję na BREDE i wyrzucenie Niemców poza rzekę MAAS. Zakończyliśmy ten etap ciężkimi walkami na kanale MARK i zdobyciem silnie bronionego przyczółka MOERDIJK.

Wiecie sami w jak trudnych warunkach walczyła nasza Dywizja. Zdawało się nieraz, że jesteśmy na granicy wytrzymałości i że otrzymujemy zadania przekraczające nasze siły.

Ci z pośród was, którzy walczą w pierwszej linii i którzy śladami swoich czołgów, czy marszem własnych nóg wyznaczają szlak bojowy naszej Dywizji, wiedzą najlepiej, co znaczy trud i zmęczenie i jaką cenę trzeba zapłacić za zwycięstwo. Były nieraz rozkazy, które aby wykonać trzeba było wydobyć z siebie resztki tchu, zaparcia i twardej żołnierskiej woli.

Wy, którzy na polach naszych bitew, niemal codziennie zaglądaliście śmierci w oczy, wiecie dobrze, że na wojnie ludzie się nie rodzą i że w każdym dniu w każdej godzinie palec przeznaczenia wskazuje na najlepszych z pośród nas, którzy odchodzą na zawsze.

Możecie być przekonani, że tak jak wy, tak samo i ja, jako wasz dowódca przeżywam głęboko śmierć każdego żołnierza, kolegi i towarzysza broni. Robiłem i robię nadal wszystko co w mojej mocy, aby straty nasze nie były zbyt duże. Musicie jednak pamiętać, że tak jak wy wykonujecie moje rozkazy tak samo i ja jako żołnierz muszę wykonywać rozkazy moich przełożonych. I kiedy nieraz zdawało się, że my zbyt drogo płacimy za zwycięstwo, to wiedzcie, że taką cenę zapłacić było trzeba. Wiele Dywizji, które walczyły razem z nami, płaciły o wiele więcej od nas.

Dzisiaj, patrząc wstecz na okres ubiegłych walk, możemy z dumą powiedzieć, że wykonaliśmy każde zadanie, które nam dano. Spełniliśmy swój obowiązek żołnierski bez reszty, nabierając sami jeszcze większego doświadczenia i zgrywając się jeszcze bardziej jako jedna bojowa rodzina, jako zespół wszystkich rodzajów broni i służb, który żyje, walczy i jak trzeba ginie razem.

Wspaniałe wyczyny naszych pułków pancernych, twarde, nieustępliwe zacięte walki naszej piechoty, ciężka i ofiarna praca saperów, doskonałe wsparcie artylerii - to są wszystko elementy, które złączone razem dają piękny, nowoczesny zespół bojowy - dywizję pancerną. My dzisiaj jesteśmy takim dobrym zespołem, który ma za sobą wspólnym trudem i znojem pisaną tradycję żołnierską i wspólną ofiarę krwi.

Jest to olbrzymi dorobek na naszą żołnierską przyszłość. Pójdźmy do przyszłych walk ramię przy ramieniu, niosąc każdy w sobie cząstkę tej dumy i sławy, że danym nam było w ciężkich chwilach dziejowych pisać nowe karty historii wojska polskiego i znaczyć szlakiem zwycięskich bitew drogę powrotną do Polski. Jesteśmy w okresie, w którym dzieją się rzeczy niesamowite, i w którym żaden z proroków nie jest w stanie przewidzieć co przyniesie świt dnia jutrzejszego. Jesteśmy w okresie, w którym czarne noce naszych nadziei i marzeń mogą być krótsze aniżeli to się dzisiaj wydaje - a wówczas niebo nad Polską zapłonie zorzą prawdziwej wolności.

My jako żołnierze dumnego i nieugiętego Narodu, mamy jeden obowiązek i jedno zadanie - wytrwać na polu bitwy, bo nasz Naród trwa w walce w Kraju.

Żołnierze 1.Dywizji Pancernej - pisząc do Was ten rozkaz w dniu Święta Niepodległości, dziękuje Wam wszystkim w Imieniu Służby za wspaniałe dotychczasowe wyniki i życze Wam abyście nadal tworzyli twardy blok granitu, którego nie skruszą pola przyszłych bitew.
Daj nam Boże abyśmy przyszłe Święto Niepodległości obchodzili w wolnej Warszawie.

Dnia 11.Listopada 1944.r.

DOWÓDCA DYWIZJI
/-/ MACZEK gen.bryg.

Za zgodność:
ADJUTANT 1.PUŁKU PANCERNEGO

[*Soldiers of the Armoured Division!*

We have ended the period of heavy fighting in Southern Holland. We have put behind us the battles of Axel and Hulst, Merxplas, Baarle Nassau, Alphen and Gilze. Behind us is the fine action for Breda and the driving of the Germans beyond the Maas River. We ended this stage of our operations with heavy fighting on the Mark Canal and the taking of the strongly fortified bridgehead of Moerdijk. You yourselves know how difficult were the circumstances in which our Division has been operating. At times it seemed that we were reaching the end of our endurance, that the tasks set before us were beyond our capabilities.

Those among you who have been fighting in the front line, who have marked the battle route of our Division with the tracks of your tanks or your own weary footsteps, know best the meaning of hardship and fatigue: you know the price of victory. At times we received orders which required us to resort to the limits of our endurance, hardiness and unyielding soldiers' will-power to be accomplished.

Having looked death in the face on the battlefield almost everyday, you know well that men are not born in war and that every day, every hour, the finger of destiny points to the best among us to be lost forever.

You can be sure that as your Commanding Officer I mourn the death of each soldier, friend and comrade in arms just as you do. I have always done my utmost to keep the losses as low as possible. Yet you must remember that, just as you carry out my orders, I too must carry out the orders of my superiors. And when you think that the price of victory was too high, realise that it had to be paid. Many divisions fighting alongside us had greater losses than ours.

Looking back to the past period of combat behind us, today, we can say with pride that we have fulfilled every task allotted to us. We have done our soldier's duty, gaining even greater experience and bonding still more closely into one great military family – a team of different kinds of arms and services which lives, fights, and when necessary dies together.

The outstanding achievements of our armoured regiments, the hard, unyielding and stubborn attacks of our infantry, the heavy and self-sacrificing labour of our engineers, the excellent support of our artillery – these are the elements which taken together form a worthwhile fighting unit – an armoured division. Today we are such a unit with a battle tradition gained through hardship, toil and the shedding of our blood.

This is a great heritage of a soldiery past. Lets proceed to future battles arm in arm, each harbouring a sense of pride and fame that as part of the Polish Army we were able to

make history, marking our return to our homeland with a string of victorious battles. We are now in a time in which amazing events are unfolding and no prophet is in the position to predict what tomorrow will bring. We are in a time in which the dark nights of our thwarted hopes and dreams may prove to be shorter than we today expect – the day Poland will again see the light of true freedom.

As soldiers of a proud and unyielding nation we still have one task to accomplish – to remain steadfast on the battle-front since our Nation back home is still at war.

Soldiers of the 1st Armoured Division, writing this order on the Polish Day of Independance, I thank you all for the excellent results to date, hoping that you continue to form a block hard as granite which should withstand all the assaults of future battles.

May God grant that we might be able to celebrate the next Independance Day back in Free Warsaw.
11th November 1944

Commanding Officer of the Division, General Maczek]

[edit.: This order of the Commanding Officer was issued at the moment when Poland, by the decision of the Great Powers at the Yalta Conference, had been left to be dominated by the Communist Soviet Union. For many soldiers, including General Maczek himself, their homes were no longer to be part of Poland owing to the introduction of new frontiers with the great cities of Lwów and Wilno (Lemberg and Vilnius) left to Russia. However, the General believed that this treaty would not last and Poland will regain its independance and sovereignty one day].

Regiment. This lasted until March 1st, when the 41st RM Commandos were returned to their main unit. The 116 British Commando gradually took over the original sector held by the Canadians.

March 1945 proved a quiet period. The Division returned to its previous 15 km sector after being relieved on its right wing by the British 116 RM Infantry Brigade which was reinforced by the 2nd Armoured, the 1st A-A Artillery Rgts and one squadron of the 2nd Motorised Artillery Rgt. The defence of the new sector was organised by the Col. Skibiński, now Commanding Officer of the 10th Brigade. An eight-day rota for the relief of the units on surveillance duties was adopted, this allowed each unit to continue with its training. All assigned British and Canadian units then rejoined their own divisions, except the 68th Heavy Artillery Rgt.

On the 25th March the deputy chief of the French General Staff, Gen. Charière, decorated Polish soldiers with French military medals. The 11th Hussar Rgt, the Division's left neighbour, was relieved by a regiment of the Household Cavalry.

On April 1st all units guarding the river Maas passed to the command of Major Gen. Galloway, who took over as the C.O. of the Netherlands Region after the withdrawal of the I British Corps.

On the 3rd April The Rifle Brigade took over the defence of the Maas from the 10th Brigade. A slight livening up then occurred along the divisional sector, with stronger and more frequent exchange of gun fire.

The Division had anxiously watched the crossing of the Rhine by the 21st Army Group. A change in command came on April 1st, after the withdrawal of the I British Corps, when Gen. Galloway took over the Netherlands District Command, while the Polish soldiers were impatiently awaiting orders which would send them once more into battle. Finally the orders assigning the Division to the II Canadian Corps of Gen. Simonds arrived. The Division was to transfer to the area of Hengelo for concentration and the troops' impatience was allayed. On April 6/7th the units moved to their assigned area.

Szef Gabinetu Wojsk.Prezydenta R.P.
/: Nadawca :/

L. dz. 341/44.

Dnia 13.listopada 194 4 r.

Zaszyfrowano i wysłano
dnia 15.XI godz.
za L.dz. 5775 /BS.
Kier.Biura Szyfrów.

DEPESZA SZYFR do Gen.Stanisław Maczek
Dowódca I Dywizji Pancernej.

Treść:

Panu Generałowi i żołnierzom I Dywizji Pancernej składam serdeczne wyrazy uznania za dzielność żołnierską okazaną w walkach w Belgii i Holandii.

Od chwili przekroczenia Sekwany, Dywizja znaczyła swój pochód nieprzerwanym szeregiem chlubnych zwycięstw poprzez St. Omèr, Ypres, Gandawę, Baarle-Nassau i Bredę do ostatnio zdobytego Moerdijk, okrywając swe sztandary zasłużoną sławą.

Zwycięstwa Wasze zostały okupione życiem wielu doskonałych żołnierzy. Straty te zwiększają liczbę ofiar ponoszonych przez Kraj w imię umiłowania wolności, podkreślając dobrze zasłużone i niezaprzeczalne prawo Polski do zajęcia należnego Jej miejsca wśród Narodów Swiata.'

/-/ Władysław Raczkiewicz.

[Director of the Military Cabinet
of the President of Polish Republic

13th November 1944

Telegram to Gen. Stanisław Maczek, C.O. the 1st Armoured Division

To you and all the soldiers of the 1st Armoured Division I convey greetings and great appreciation of your bravery in action when liberating Belgium and Holland.

From the moment of crossing the River Seine, the Division has marked its battle tracks with victories at St Omer, Ypres, Ghent, Baarle-Nassau and Breda and recently conquering Moerdijk, covering its Regimental Colours with well deserved glory.

Your victories cost the life of many a brave soldiers. These losses are added to those incurred back in Poland and are testimony to the sacrifice of our Nation, emphasising its right to take its proper place among the nations of the Free World.

Władysław Raczkiewicz]

CAMPAIGN IN GERMANY 1945

The area south-east of Hengelo, the initial concentration point, was reached by the evening of April 9th. From there the Division proceeded through the devastated German town of Goch, crossed the Rhine near Rees and after a march of some 250 km arrived at its designated base line. The assigned task was an advance towards Emden on the mouth of the river Ems in Northern Germany. The Division was reinforced by the 4th Canadian Armoured Artillery Rgt and a Belgian Parachute Rgt, which was already in contact with the enemy. On the left flank, the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division was advancing slowly, opening up the road to Groningen; to the right, the 4th Canadian Armoured Division was gradually pushing forward with Wilhelmshaven as its ultimate objective. These three divisions constituted the left wing of the 1st Canadian Army. It was only after a lapse of time that the I Canadian Corps managed to cut off eastern Holland between the Rhine and the Zuider See, thus protecting the operations of the II Corps. By April 14th The Polish Division was straddling the Dutch-German frontier. The 10th Brigade, on the German side, was preparing to force a crossing over the Küsten Canal, while the Rifle Brigade cleared the Dutch territory by pushing the remaining German forces towards the sea north of Winschoten. The German forces defending this area were made up of the remains of the 6th and 8th Parachute divisions, airfield defence units, as well as those of naval infantry, Wehrkreis and Hitlerjugend groups.

> No map or knowledge of the countryside was needed to show on which side of the border, often crossed and recrossed, we found ourselves. The difference was striking: the Dutch towns and villages, mainly spared from destruction, were filled with flowers and decorated with national flags; on the German side there was devastation everywhere. The only decoration, here and there, was a white flag on some habitation which had survived ruin. The joy and gladness on the faces of the Dutch crowds thronging the streets was in stark contrast to the emptiness, the shuttered windows, the closed gates and the few pale faced Germans sidling in the streets. Later the crowds of people from all over Europe who had been deported to Germany as forced labour were to gather in the roads and streets greeting us with joyful laughter mixed with tears. Later still, our battle track was to be filled with liberated concentration camps, with their appalling sight of those still remaining alive
>
> (Maczek, *op. cit.*, p. 227).

The last phase of fighting along the Dutch German border and then in north-western Germany took place in very difficult terrain, not encountered before even in the area north of Ghent. It was very rarely suitable for tank action. It is a low lying region, parts of which are below sea level, and a glance at the map shows that it is a network of marshes and fenland cut by the larger rivers: the Ems, Leda, Jumme, and their tributaries, by canals both large and small with the whole criss-crossed by a patchwork of sluices and drainage ditches. The roads were of necessity on embankments and it was impossible for the tanks and heavy equipment to leave them as their tracks or wheels immediately churned up the thin layer of turf and they sank in the boggy ground below, having to be laboriously hauled out, usually under enemy fire. The nature of the defence had also altered. No longer did the Germans have defined lines of defence and strong points. Most of this territory was bitterly contested and the enemy exploited the difficulties of the land to perfection. The tanks, confined to the roads, the major ones fairly good, the minor ones often deplorable, were limited to frontal attacks in the teeth of artillery and mortar fire. The terrain was full of well camouflaged ambushes, strewn with mines, anti-tank obstructions across roads which were full of

craters, some of them huge, caused by the explosion of aerial bombs used as land mines. This slowed the advance to a crawl, punctuated by attacks on the towns along the route. Hence any account of the fighting is perforce a recital of mixed battle or combat groups, whose composition was often changed to give a short respite to exhaused troops, attacking individual objectives, on the drive to the final goals of Emden, then Wilhelmshaven.

The achievemants of the Division in the last month of the war can, therefore, also be measured by the outstanding efforts of the Engineers who cleared minefields and hundreds of obstructions, built dozens of bridges and crossings, rebuilt damaged roads, filled craters in this environment so hostile to military manoeuvring.

Polish losses in this period amounted to 37 officers and 567 other ranks killed, while taking 5 000 prisoners, of whom 48 were officers.

The initial swift movement distancing the fighting units from corps and army depots and extending almost to breaking point the lines of commmunication dependent on the few seviceable bridges, created severe logistic problems especially concerning the supply of ammunition. During the winter of 1944 – 45 the Division had exchanged their old type Shermans for a new, improved model with a longer 76 mm gun barrel and was the only unit in the Corps so equipped. The British High Command, when ordering this exchange, had stressed that the Polish Division was the first to receive this new model Sherman tanks in recognition of its outstanding achievements in past actions. The inadequate stocks of ammunition for the new 76 mm guns in Corps depots forced the Division to be on a constant look out for fresh supplies and to be very frugal in its use. This was difficult to reconcile with tasks demanding constant hurry in its rapid advance.

The Division's move from Breda to Hengelo consumed 136 000 gallons of fuel, the largest amount used in a single movement. The efforts of the Fuel Tranport Platoons made this possible by working for 36 hours without a break, which allowed the Division to enter into combat with no delays.

During the last phase of fighting, several prisoner-of-war camps both of Polish and of other nationalities were liberated by the Division. This caused severe problems because of the urgent need to help not only prisoners of war, but also inmates of forced labour and concentration camps as well as displaced persons. At first this humanitarian action was of a chaotic nature, as higher command echalons had not been suitably prepared to meet this eventuality, which also affected the work of the medical field units trying to maintain the minimum standards of hygiene and of transport companies which had to cope with the much increased demands for food supplies. All this necessitated strict controls to be exercised.

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On April 6th the Division, once again part of the II Canadian Corps which at that time was fighting on the northern bank of the Rhine, made hasty preparations to hand over the sector of the Maas under surveillance to the neighbouring units.

Two special detachments were formed:

1. Battle Group 1, under Col. Grudziński, the Second-in-Command of the 10th Brigade, consisted of the 10th Dragoon Rgt, the 10th Mounted Rifle Rifle Rgt less one squadron, the 3rd squadron of the 1st A-T Artillery and 2 squadrons of the Motorised Artillery Rgts. The task assigned was to take over Coevorden from the Belgian Parachute Rgt (1st SAS) and then to make a reconnaissance towards Emmen.
2. Battle Group 2, Commanding Officer of the Podhalan Rifle Btn, Col. K. Complak in charge, was composed of that battalion, one squadron of the 10th Mounted Rifles, the 2nd battery of the Motorised Artillery Rgt, the 10th and 11th Companies of Engineers and a bridging platoon, was tasked with seizing a bridgehead on the canal at Goor.

The two battle groups followed the road through 's-Hertogenbosch and Beek, crossed the German frontier for the first time near Gennep, then the Rhine near Rees, where they returned to Holland. After passing through Anholt and Terberg they reached their destination.

The Division arrived at its base line on April 9th after a difficult 18 hour forced march. Battle Group 1 took over from the 1st SAS the crossroads at Coevorden and began reconnoitring possible canal crossings in the direction of Emmen. Battle Group 2, meanwhile, reached the area of Goor and began organising a bridgehead on the canal. At 7 p.m. the Rifle Brigade Group, composed of the Brigade less the 9th Rifle Btn, but strengthened by the 2nd Armoured Rgt, a squadron of the 10th Mounted Rifles, a battery of the 2nd Motorised Artillery and the 1st A-T Artillery Rgts, the 11th Medical Field Unit, and the 11th Engineer Company, began operations from the bridgehead and by late evening the Podhalan Rifles had secured the area of Nijverdal and the 8th Rifles that of Wierden. The nature of the terrain rendered the operations of the various battle groups very difficult, hence most actions were executed by mixed unit groupings, appropriate for the given task.

The following day the Rifle Brigade Group, after a difficult early morning march, reached the area of Hardenberg – Kloosterhaar – Marienberg, whilst that of the 10th Brigade had advanced by afternoon to the region north of Balderhaar. Late that day Battle Group 1 had gained control of the town and area of Emmen. Whilst in action in the direction of Westerbork, one squadron of the 10th Mounted Rifles, together with one squadron of Dragoons, made contact with the French Parachute Btn which had been dropped two days previously in order to secure crossings on the Oranje Canal.

The 10th Mounted Rifles reconnoitred towards Ter Apel, Odoorn and Borger early on the 11th April, meeting with strong opposition west of the town. The Rifle Brigade Group reached the area of Weerding, from where it carried out an aggressive reconnaissance of the roads leading north and north-west. In the evening the Podhalans secured Ter Apel and its road junction, which made possible an advance north along both banks of the Ems. Meanwhile, the 10th Company of Engineers, protected by a company of the 9th Rifles, were transferred along the west bank of the river Ems, crossed the area secured by units of the 4th Canadian Armoured Division and started to build a bridge near Haren.

On the 12th, the Rifle Brigade Group, together with the 1st SAS, continued with operations in a northerly direction. Two combat groups were formed, each consisting of one company of the 8th Rifles and a squadron of the 2nd Armoured Rgt, which were tasked with operating in the area between the river Ems and the Vereenigd Canal with the object of seizing crossings, if at all posssible, near Weener and Rhede. Both combat groups were halted south of Vlagwedde by the difficulties in terrain which had been littered with demolished bridges across the canal. The 1st SAS, advancing in the direction of Winschoten, reached Veele where it too was halted by the lack of bridges.

The civilian population of the area spoke of a Polish prisoner-of-war camp in nearby Oberlangen. Lt Col. Koszutski, the C.O. of the 2nd Armoured Rgt, decided to investigate with a small detachment. To their utter surprise and delight, they found that the prisoners were some 1 750 women, members of the Home Army and participants of the Warsaw Rising. The unexpected meeting grew very emotional when the Polish flag was raised and the Commandant of the camp, Lt Jadwiga Milewska, presented the official report. From this moment on, the women and children came under the care of the Division.

The Dragoon battle group gained in action the area of Borger and Buinen. In the afternoon the Rifle Brigade group crossed to the region of Ter Apel and both Battle Groups remained in action along the foreground. Meanwhile, the 10th Brigade Group (1st Armoured and 24th Lancers Rgts, the 9th Rifle Btn, the 1st Motorised Artillery Rgt an A-T battery and units of Engineers) remained waiting for a bridge to be completed near Haren so that they could continue their operations towards Papenburg and Leer on the eastern side of the river Ems in Germany itself.

The following day the 10th Dragoons combat group cleared the area of Borger, Gasselte and Gieten, while the 2nd squadron of the 10th Mounted Rifles reached and liberated Veendam. Battle Group 1 was regrouped and went into action towards Bourtange and Rhede. By the evening, having overcome many obstacles in the terrain and after a heavy engagement with a strong German force of one naval battalion supported by A-T guns, it gained control and cleared the south-west of Bourtange and the woods to the south-east. There was little evidence of a coordinated plan of defending this area. Individual local units, predominently of naval infantry, fought with grim determination. The destruction of eight 75 and 88 mm guns as well as two tanks in this encounter testified to this.

The reformed Battle Group 2 reached Weede at midday and in the evening, after a fierce engagement, was in control of the area around the Blijham, having by-passed the defences on the canal near Veele. Thus the road was opened for the advance of the 1st SAS. As the result of the day's actions, the leading elements of the Rifle Brigade group found themselves only 4 km short of Winschoten.

The 10th Brigade crossed the river Ems the next day on the newly completed bridge at Haren and came into contact with the enemy on the Küsten Canal. The attempt to force a quick crossing by the 9th Rifle Btn together with the 24th Lancers and the 10th Company of Engineers was not successful and involved considrable casualties. The defences proved to be too well established and a thorough reconnaisance as well as careful preparation of such an action proved necessary.

That morning Battle Group 1, still operating in a northerly direction, by-passed Rhede on the west, while Battle Group 2 reached the railway line north of Munterdam, where it was halted by a demolished bridge. In the evening the attack on Winschoten by the 1st SAS was stopped by German defences on the Hoogeddiep Canal. The 8th Rifles cleared the eastern bank of the Vereenigd Canal to the north-east of Vlagtwedde. An encircling attack by the Podhalan Rifles from the west and by the 1st SAS from the east led to the capture of the road junction at Winschoten on the 15th April. At 18.52 hours a patrol from the Rifle Brigade Group reached the shores of the North Sea in Dollart Bay, 4 km from the German frontier, while Battle Group 1 composed of the 2nd Armoured Rgt less one squadron, the reconnais- sance platoon and two companies of the 8th Rifle Btn was heavily engaged near Rhede. Thus the roads of retreat of the German forces fighting in the western part of northern Holland were closed.

The 10th Brigade Group tried twice and was twice frustrated in their attempts to force a crossing on the Küsten Canal. The canal was only some 20 metres wide, but deep and bordered by strong earthen embankments. The 9th Rifle Btn took the brunt of the fighting. Meanwhile the Dragoons, together with a squadron of the 10th Mounted Rifles, cleared the area between the Ems and the Dutch border north of Haren.

On April 16th orders arrived from the Corps Commanding Officer changing the ultimate destination of the Division's advance. Instead of Emden, their goal was to be Wilhelmshaven, the great German North Sea naval base.

The next day, the Rifle Brigade found itself in contact with the enemy in all directions. In the afternoon, Battle Group 1 captured Rhede after very heavy fighting in which a German naval infantry btn was completely annihilated. As of that evening the operations of the 10th Brigade towards Lathen – Papenburg involved the whole of the Division. The capture of Rhede ended the phase of cutting off German troops in Holland from Germany itself. This allowed the Division to concentrate wholly on operating on German territory on the eastern side of the river Ems.

The main operations on April 18/19th were concerned with the forcing of the Küsten Canal. Gen. Maczek delayed the action so as to concentrate enough fire power to make it a success without excessive casualties. By evening Battle Group 1, including the 10th Dragoons, had gained control of the area of Borsum. One squadron of the 10th Mounted Rifles

was employed to clear the area of Walchum – Heede of any German diversionary units. The 10th Brigade, meanwhile, regrouped in preparation for the attack on the Küsten Canal which proved to be one of the major operations of that phase of fighting. The attack started on the 19th April at 10.30 a.m. with a devastating artillery and air bombardment. The 10th Brigade (1st Armoured and 24th Lancers Rgts, the 9th and the Podhalan Rifle Btns, a squadron of machine-guns, the 10th Engineer Company, a platoon from the 11th Field Medical Company and a squadron of Crocodiles tanks), began their operations. The 9th Rifles, despite having had part of their attack-boats destroyed by enemy mortar and artillery fire, managed to cross the canal in the wake of the bombardment and a flame throwing attack by the Crocodiles. The Typhoons, much feared by German troops, using their rockets to good purpose, supported the crossing and suppresssed all enemy mortar and artillery fire which, the previous day, had been so effective in inflicting considerable losses both in men and equipment. The Riflemen, having reached the opposite bank, proceeded to organise a bridgehead. The 10th Engineer Company immediately began building a bridge which they completed in record time, allowing the armoured equipment to move across that same day. That evening a combat group made up from the 1st Armoured Rgt together with two companies of the Podhalan Rifles and a platoon of Crocodile tanks captured the exits from the woods which formed a base from which to launch an attack on Aschendorf the following day.

Following the successful battle for a crossing on the Küsten Canal, the Division continued with its advance northwards. The 1st Armoured Rgt combat group, after bitter fighting, captured Aschendorf in the afternoon of April 20th and cleared of enemy troops the towns of Nenndorf and Tunxdorf where a French prisoner of war camp was liberated. The 10th Brigade Group, led by Col. Majewski, the Division's Second-in-Command, reached the southern outskirts of Papenburg after the capture of a bridge which the Germans failed to destroy.

In the operational area of the Rifle Brigade to the west of Ems, several German counter attacks were launched at dawn at Siddeburen, Nieuwolda and Niewe Beerta. They gained initial success; nevertheless, they were thrown back and the status quo restored. That evening the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division began to relieve the Rifle Brigade.

The Podhalan Rifles, together with the 24th Lancers, as part of the 10th Brigade Group, secured Papenburg where the German naval infantry put up a desparate defence the following afternoon. Meanwhile, clearing operations were carried out by the 1st Armoured Rgt and the 9th Rifles at Vollener and Fehn, and by the 24th Lancers at Grosse Walderfelde. The 8th Rifles and the 10th Mounted Rifles cleared the enemy from the area between the Küsten, Splitting and Börgerwald canals in a whole day operation. An intact bridge across the latter was secured.

On the 22nd April, the units of the 10th Brigade Group gained control of Ihrhove and Irhen (1st Armoured Rgt and the 9th Rifle Btn) and of Kollinghorst-Bakemoor (24th Lancers with a company of the Podhalans). The Rifle Brigade Group (10th Dragoons and 2nd Armoured Rgt) concentrated in the area of Ter Apel in order to join up with the 10th Brigade the next day.

The task assigned to the 10th Brigade for the following day was to clear the enemy from the fork of the rivers Ems and Leda and to reconnoitre possible crossing points. The whole region of the Leda was an even more difficult area of operations The nearness to the sea made both the Leda and the Jumme tidal in this area, which multiplied the difficulties. The Engineers, under the command of Lt Col. Dorantt, were fully extended in making the advance possible, and the troops themselves showed great ingenuity in overcoming the obstacles, thus facilitating the advance of their units.

After a reorganisation during the night, the Rifle Brigade Group, which now consisted of the Podhalan Rifles, the 10th Dragoons, the 24th Lancers, a company of machine guns and the 10th Engineer Company, was in action for the approaches of Potshausen. The Dragoons,

together with a squadron of Lancers, forced crossings over two canals and their reconnaissance units reached the outskirts of the town. The Divisional artillery, supported by the Canadian Heavy Artillery Rgt, especially distinguished themselves by frustrating several German counter-attacks on the line of the Group's operations. Units of the 10th Brigade Group: 1st and 2nd Armoured Rgts, together with the 9th Rifles remained in contact with the enemy on the line of the Ems – Leda rivers.

As the Division approached ever nearer to Wilhelmshaven, the defence made up of formations of German naval battalions, SS troops and elements of the Parachute Rgts, hardened and became much more determined.

The following two days, the 25th and 26th April were a time of particularly heavy fighting, At the price of considerable casualties, under unrelenting enemy fire, the Engineers built a bridge on the Hault–Fehn Canal during the first night. Then the Dragoons, supported by the tanks of the Lancers, by the fire of the 2nd Motorised Artillery Rgt and by Typhoon rocket attacks, secured Potshausen and reconnoitred a possible crossing on the Leda. The 8th Rifle Group, together with a squadron of the 10th Mounted Rifles, operating eastwards in very difficult countryside, secured Strcklingen. Meanwhile, the Podhalan Rifles were engaged in clearing the area south of Potshausen and the following day the area between the Leda and the Hault–Fehn Canal, thus opening the road to Rhaudemoor and Bokelesch.

The Dragoons, supported by the 10th Engineer Company and the fire of the tanks of the 24th Lancers, the 2nd Motorised Artillery Rgt and of the 4th Canadian Heavy Artillery Rgt, and after the preparation of the way by the Typhoons, forced a crossing over the Leda and fought a heavy engagement with German defences north of Potshausen. Mounting a sudden dawn counter-attack, the Germans tried to dislodge the 10th Dragoons from the bridgehead they had secured the previous day. The counter-attack foundered and the Germans were pushed back northwards. The Podhalans then completely cleared the enemy from around Bokelsch. The 8th Rifles cleared the area about Bollingen and a German counter-attack mounted during the night of the 27/28th April was repulsed.

That afternoon there was a reorganisation of both Brigade Groups:

1. The Rifle Brigade Group now included the Podhalan and the 8th Rifles, the 10th Mounted Rifles and the 24th Lancers Rgts, two companies of Engineers and a battery of A-T guns with Divisional Artillery support and was to continue operating in the same general direction.
2. The 10th Brigade Group was tasked with operating across Leer in the direction of Wilhelmshaven.

In the following few days the Podhalans, together with the 24th Lancers extended the bridgehead across the Leda, securing Terheiden. This enabled the Engineers to rebuild and repair the bridges. The 8th Rifle Btn Group cleared the region of Heiselberg, Scharrel, Hollen and Ramsloh of enemy troops. Meanwhile, the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division gained crossings on the rivers Ems and Leda near Leer.

The next day the Rifle Brigade Group continued their operations towards Stickhausen, reconnoitring possible crossings over the river Jumme and the 8th Rifles made a reconnaissance towards Barsel.

By the evening of the last day of April, the 8th Rifles and a company of the Podhalans cleared the whole area from Bokelesch to the Elisabeth-Fehn Canal, while a large multi unit group, comprising the 10th Brigade and the 1st Armoured Rgt Group, in action across the Leer bridgehead, reached the towns of Loga and Loga-Birnum and, with the 2nd Armoured Rgt Group, the area of Brinkum and Brunn. The Rifle Brigade forced a crossing on the river Jumme and the Podhalan Rifles took the region of Stickhausen – Dettern. The Engineers were intensively engaged in reestablishing communications by building a 300 m bridge and filling in 450 metres of craters in the roads.

The 1st Armoured Rgt combat group reached Normoor and Filsum, establishing contact with the Podhalan Rifles, while the 2nd Armoured Rgt and its combat group took

possession of Hesel and of the Staadsforst woods. Mounting a bold raid on the rear of German forces the 10th Mounted Rifles, together with a company of the 8th Rifles, captured Remels and four bridges on the Georgsfehner Canal. The following day, this Group, supported by a squad- ron of the 2nd Armoured Rgt, after some exceedingly severe fighting, secured Grossander, but was stopped with considerable casualties 3 km west of Moorburg by German self-propelled guns, barricades and an impassable crater in the road. Meanwhile, the Podhalan Rifles, acting alone towards Apen, took Borkel and the 10th Brigade Group led by Col. Grudziński, in a flanking action on Moorburg, tried to open the Moorburg – Grossander road.

On the 3rd May, when the 11th Engineer Company had completed a bridge and had cleared the obstructions in the area, the Rifle Brigade Group advanced on Borkel, while the Podhalans reached Apen and opened contacts with the 4th Canadian Armoured Division. The 10th Brigade group secured Moorburg, the 2nd Armoured Rgt reached Westerstede, the 10th Dragoons – Felde, while the 1st Armoured Rgt took possession of Halsbeck and a 2 km area to the north of it.

The 4th of May was the last day of fighting in North Germany. During the course of it, the Rifle Brigade Group opened the road from Apen to Westerstede; the 10th Brigade Group met with strong German resistance north-west of Halsbeck which was within the defensive ring around Wilhelmshaven. At first an attempt was made to break through the defences with tanks, but the action was halted in order to bring up artillery units. The 10th Mounted Rifles together with a company of the 8th Rifle Btn, reconnoitered north of Halsbeck, but they were stopped near Astederfelde by strong enemy resistance amid the ruins.

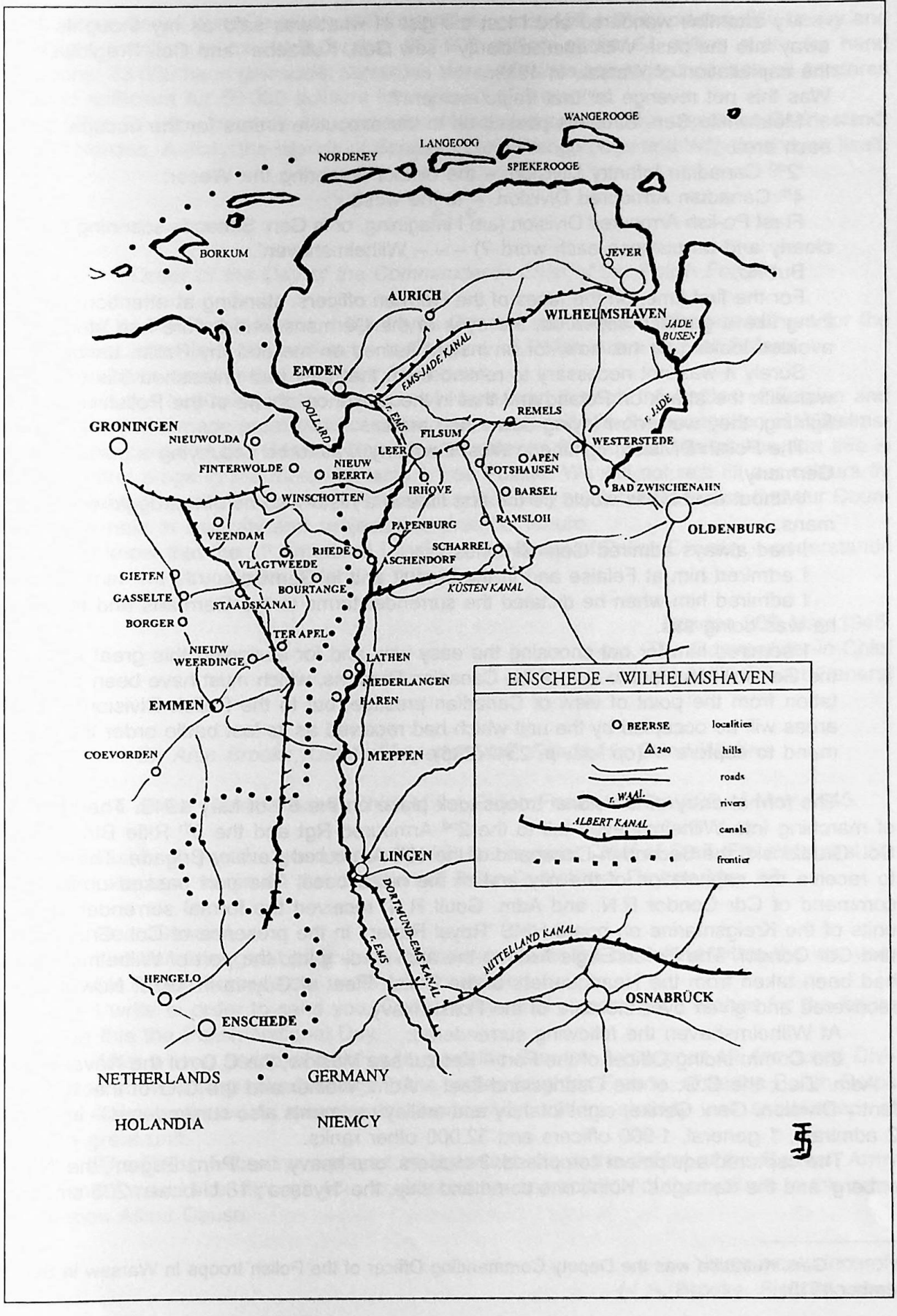
At 22.15 hours, the Division received the order to stop all offensive operations; gunfire was to cease at 08.00 hours the following day as German capitulation along the 21st Army Group frontline would then take place.

All that night heavy Divisional artillery fire was maintained, but at 07.59 hours the guns fell silent. All military operations stopped. The German defence line retreated to the Jade Canal. The Rifle Brigade advanced to the line Apen – Westerloy – Westerstede as Divisional reserve.

The surrender of the German forces in Ostfriesland took place at the II Canadian Corps Headquarters at Bad Zwischenahn.

Gen. Maczek thus described these proceedings:

> In a large room, Gen. Simonds, the Corps Commanding Officer, his Chief-of-Staff, and his divisional commanders took their places behind a long table. The absence of any other chair in this room gave warning that these proceedings would be devoid of any shadow of civility towards the Germans.
>
> I was sitting next to the Commanding Officer of the Corps.
>
> Six German officers entered. Gen. Erich von Straube, The C.O. of the army between the rivers Ems and Wese (...) accompanied by the Commanding Officer of the local units of the Kreigsmarine, his Chief-of-Staff, and three officers in command of sectors in Ostfriesland.
>
> They entered and stood in a line at attention, in front of the table.
>
> How different these were from those soldiers taken prisoner in the heat of battle, covered in dust from the fighting, with raw emotions engendered by the battle still showing on their face.
>
> Their faces were hard and stiff, masks which might conceal everything, or nothing.
>
> Gen. Straube began to speak.
>
> With an impatient gesture, Gen Simonds interrupted him.
>
> 'You have not come here to negotiate with us, you are here to listen to the terms of the unconditional surrender'.
>
> Point by point, in a hard, clear voice, he began to read the terms.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My attention wandered and I lost the gist of what was said as my thoughts flew away into the past. With intense clarity I saw Gen. Kutrzeba* and Col. Pragłowski at the capitulation of Warsaw in 1939.

Was this not revenge for that tragic moment?

Meanwhile Gen. Simonds passed on to the executive orders for the occupation of each area:

'2nd Canadian Infantry Division. – the district bordering the Weser;

4th Canadian Armoured Division. – to the west;

Fi-rst Po-lish Armoured Division (am I imagining, or is Gen. Simonds scanning slowly, clearly and on purpose each word ?) – – – Wilhelmshaven'.

But no.

For the first time, on the faces of the German officers, standing at attention, something like a grimace appeared, the eyes of the Germans who before had studiously avoided looking at me, now, for an instant, turned on me and my Polish uniform.

Surely it was not necessary to remind them that they had unleashed this dreadful war with the attack on Poland and that in the presence of one of the Polish units still fighting, they were now laying down their arms.

The Polish Division, fighting in West Germany, was to be occupying a part of West Germany.

Without doubt, this would be the first time in a history so rich in struggle with Germans.

I had always admired Gen. Simonds.

I admired him at Falaise and in the pursuit and in Germany.

I admired him when he dictated the surrender terms to the Germans and the way he was doing this.

I admired him for not choosing the easy way and for assigning this great base of the German Navy not to one of the Canadian Divisions, which must have been a temptation from the point of view of Canadian prestige, but to the Polish Division – 'The areas will be occupied by the unit which had received as its last battle order the command to capture it' (*op. cit.*, p. 234 – 235).

The formal entry of Divisional troops took place on the 6th of May 1945. The honour of marching into Wilhelmshaven fell to the 2nd Armoured Rgt and the 8th Rifle Btn led by Col. Grudziński, the Second-in-Command of the 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade. They were to receive the capitulation of the city and of the naval base. The port passed under the command of Cdr Condor R.N. and Adm. Goult R.N. received the formal surrender of the units of the Kreigsmarine on board HMS 'Royal Rupert' in the presence of Col. Grudziński and Cdr Condor. The Polish Eagle fixed to the arch leading into the port of Wilhelmshaven had been taken from the Headquarters of the Polish Fleet at Gdynia in 1939. Now it was recovered and given over the care of the Polish Navy.

At Wilhelmshaven the following surrendered:

the Commanding Officer of the Fort – Kpt zur see Müslow; the C.O. of the Naval base – Adm. Zieb; the C.O. of the Ostfriesland fleet – Adm. Weiher and the C.O of the 10th Infantry Division, Gen. Gerike; eight infantry and artilley regiments also surrendered – in total: 2 admirals, 1 general, 1 900 officers and 32 000 other ranks.

The captured equipment comprised: 3 cruisers: one heavy, the 'Prinz Eugen', the 'Nürenberg' and the damaged 'Köln'; one command ship, the 'Nyassa'; 18 U-boats; 205 smaller

* Gen. Kutrzeba was the Deputy Commanding Officer of the Polish troops in Warsaw in September 1939.

craft: some naval, some auxilliary; 18 fort artillery guns; 159 artillery pieces; 560 heavy and 370 light machine guns; 40 000 rifles; 280 000 artillery shells; 64 million shells for hand weapons; 23 000 hand grenades; numerous stores of mines and torpedoes, as well as stores of food sufficient for 50 000 soldiers for a period of 3 months.

The Division became the occupation force and secured the region of Ostfriesland: Jever, Norden, Aurich, the islands of Spiekerog and Wangerooge and Wilhelmshaven itself.

❖ ❖ ❖

Order of the Day of the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Forces

On Behalf of the Polish Nation, I thank you General and all your officers and men for the magnificent effort in battle performed to the glory of Polish Arms and for Poland.

You have deserved well of your Fatherland.

From the beginning of the invasion of Normandy, through the battles of Falaise and Breda, you have made great sacrifices which were crowned with the occupation of Wilhelmshaven, the cradle of the German Navy. It was revenge for Gdynia. We realise that this is only the first stage in the march towards a free Poland. We will not rest till our colours fly over Kraków, Poznań, Warszawa, Wilno and Lwów. Every soldier must realise that our Country is still held in captivity and subjected to dreadful torture.

We know that the 1st Armoured Division – the flower of Polish Chivalry – understands so well that the struggle for Poland is not yet over.

London 20th May 1945.
p.o. The Commander-in-Chief
/-/ ANDERS, Lt General

Sir Alan Brooke, Chief-of-Imperial Staff, Sends His Good Wishes

Order no. 4 of the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Forces on the 20th of May 1945.

I pass on to you the good wishes which the Imperial Chief-of-Staff, Field Marshal Sir Alan Brooke, sent to me on the occasion of Poland's National Day on May 3rd.

Dear General,

You can take great pride in the achievements on the battlefield within the last year of the Polish Forces now under your command.

I write in order to send you, General, my most sincere good wishes for the future on this the Polish National Day.

After a long period of training to meet the German Army, your 1st Armoured Division showed to great advantage in the battles fought in France, while the Polish Corps in Italy continued to maintain the wonderful tradition, already well established, of a great unit.

The Polish forces have played an important role in the defeat of the German Army and I would like, through you, to pass on my appreciation of their efforts in the common Allied Cause.

Yours most sincerely
/-/ A. Brooke, Field Marshal.

The Farewell letter of Gen. Crerar, the Commanding Officer of the 1st Canadian Army

Letter of Gen. Crerar to General Rudnicki, Commanding Officer of the 1st Armoured Division:

In the next few days, the 1st Polish Armoured Division will pass from under my command and the lengthy, happy and successful comaradeship-in-arms between the Polish and Canadian forces in this theatre of operations will be, technically, terminated.

I say 'technically' because I feel very strongly that the mutual regard and respect which the Canadian and Polish soldiers have developed for each other, based on dangers shared and great difficulties overcome, shall endure all things and shall always continue.

As the Canadian Army Commander, I wish to express to you, and through you to all ranks of the 1st Polish Armoured Division, my admiration and thanks for the magnificent achievements of your command in these past months of bitter and continuous fighting. The military record you have made is one of which you have every right to be proud.

G. d. G. Crerar

We Thank You for Your Loyal Cooperation

Gen. Horrocks G.O.C-in-C XXX British Corps bids good-bye to the Polish Armoured Division:

Dear General,

I take this opportunity to thank you in writing for all the help that you and your Division have given me from the time that you passed under my command.

As you well know, I have a high regard for the men of the Polish Armoured Division and for the Parachute Brigade, who have behaved with great dignity in the most difficult of circumstances. I would be very grateful if you would, in my name, bid farewell to all your officers, NCOs and other ranks and thank them for the loyal co-operation which they have given me.

I wish them all the very best for the future and hope that at some future date, I shall have the honour to command again the Polish Armoured Division.

Yours sincerely
B.S. Horrocks.

Field Marshall Montgomery Among the Soldiers of the Division

Field Marshall Montgomery visited the Division on the 24th November 1945 and decorated the soldiers with British medals. He then addressed the men in a short speech:

I am happy that I was able to see you and to be with you. I am sorry that I was not able to come more often, but I am very busy not only as the General Officer Commander-in-Chief of the British Army of the Rhine, but also as the Governor of the British Zone of Occupation of Germany. I am here with you for the first time, but I remember the Division from wartime as a first rate unit. From the moment that the Division entered the fighting before Falaise, it fought magnificently and killed many Germans. I am happy to be here and to give the soldiers the decorations bestowed on them by H.M. King George VI. Once more I wish to assure you that I am happy to see you again.

The battle for Chambois was decisive. The Germans were trapped as if in a bottle; you were the cork in that bottle.

THE OCCUPATION OF GERMANY 1945 – 1947

The Division was involved in the occupation of Germany from May 1945 until May 1947. The sector for which it was responsible stretched from the Dutch-German border, through the southern part of Oldenburg, to western Hanover, then additionally the town of Hannover and the region of Soltau, Münster and Walsrode.

During this two-year period of occupation the Division was part of the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR), within the framework of the British XXX Corps.

The various Divisional Headquarters were situated:

Divisional HQ – Meppen; 10th Aroured Cavalry Brigade – Loningen; 3rd Rifle Brigade – Latham; Divisinal Artillery – Lingen.

On the 20th May 1945 the Division bade farewell to its Commanding Officer, Gen. Maczek.

It was a sad parting, as the General had commanded many of the soldiers for the whole period of the war. He had commanded the 10th Motorised Cavalry Brigade in the September 1939 Campaign; the Detachment of the Motorised Cavalry Brigade in the short French Campaign of 1940; in Scotland he oversaw all the changes which occurred in the formation of the unit which finally became the 1st Armoured Division. He commanded them throughout the campaign in Northern Europe culminating in victory over Germany. Now he was promoted to Lt General and was to command the 1st Polish Corps in Scotland. His successor, Maj. Gen. Rudnicki, was transferred to the Division from the II Polish Corps in Italy.

Immediately on the ending of hostilities, the Division took over the responsibility and organised the care not only for all the Polish prisoners of war, but for all the forcibly displaced Poles and those who had been in labour and concentration camps. And this not only in their own area of occupation, but in the area of the whole XXX Corps. This required a great organisational effort. In order to cope with providing the care and the means for it, two departments were formed as part of Divisional Command: one with the responsibility for the welfare of the civilian population, headed by Col. Grudziński, and a second under Col. Szydłowski for the care of the ex-prisoners of war. As the responsibilities increased, a Special Staff was formed under Col. Stankiewicz. The number of persons cared for by the Division was at first 42 000, but this soon increased to some 60 000. They were settled within the Division's area of occupation in 4 military centres, 20 civilian camps and 1 mixed one. A township was created named 'Maczków'. This was the German town of Haren which had a wholly Polish population, and its own administration.

In the educational sphere, 2 secondary schools were opened, 16 primary and 14 nursery ones. There were 3 technical courses, 2 people's universities and 6 boarding schools. Apart from all this, 500 students were maintained in universities and colleges in Belgium, and some 300 at universities and polytechnics in Germany. In order to provide employment, 11 workshops were established, including a shipyard for the repair of river craft at Maczków itself.

The Division's manning was made up to its full quota from among the prisoners of war, and the reserves were also increased to their full numbers. Several battalions and companies of the so called 'Labour Companies' were created, they served in all the four Allied Occupation Zones. The women soldiers of the Polish Home Army from the Niederlangen prisoner of war camp, (where the women had been quickly transferred from the appalling living conditions of Oberlangen), were incorporated into the Women's Army Auxiliary Battalion.

The Demobilisation

Starting in April 1947, the Divisional units were gradually transferred from the British Army of the Rhine to the Polish Restlement Corps in Britain. Within this Corps, the Division became the 54th Brigade Group in Southern Command and was quartered in camps in region of Salisbury. Col. Grudziński became the Commanding Officer. The final demobilisation took place in February 1949.

CHAPTER III

COMBATANTS' MEMORIES

The present chapter concerns the training in the art of war and the experience acquired by the Division's troops over the years during various campaigns of WW2. It gives an account of ordeals en route to Polish Forces in the West and of the battles then fought. As in the other chapters, we endeavour to present these events in the form of memories of the participants.

THE 10th MOTORIZED CAVALRY BRIGADE

After Poland regained its independence in 1918, the urgent need for a military force capable of securing the country's sovereignty became a priority. Battles in the Western Ukraine in 1919, followed by war with Russia in 1920, alerted the population to the need to build a military force capable of defending the reborn State.

Military historians giving accounts of the building up of a modern army debated the diverse approaches. From the very beginning, however, debates about the structure of the Polish army reflected the view that the creation of an armoured force was indispensable. Alongside the air force, tank forces were deemed irreplaceable at the time, in consequence of WW 1 experience. They serve the arms of the future.

Capt. Zbigniew Mieczkowski depicts the development of modernised forces in Poland in the following terms:

The pioneering formation of armoured troops was General Józef Haller's Tank Regiment which reached Poland from France in 1918. Its first commanding officer was Colonel Jules Maré. French officers had Polish understudies. After the war with Russia the French went home. During the following two decades of independence, the force grew to twelve tank batallions. In the event of war, their task was to join individual tactical groupings. Unit designations at the time altered between batallions and regiments.

An Outline of the history of the Polish Armoured Forces from 1918 to 1947, written by Colonel Marian Żebrowski (White Eagle Press, London, 1971), lists the type and quantities of their equipment at the outset of of WW 2 in September 1939. The list included some six hundred TK and TKS reconnaisance tanks and a hundred plus 7TP (7 tonne) tanks. These were of Polish design, constructed in the Ursus plant which also produced armoured cars and motorcycles. Poland also built armoured railway trains. Equipment purchased abroad included 50 British light tanks 'Vickers' and about a hundred French tanks of various types.

In 1939 armoured troops comprised 1 500 officers, 8 900 NCOs and 18 000 soldiers.

It follows that armoured troops have a longer lineage than the Motorised Cavalry Brigade of General Maczek. However, the they were to operate with a different strategy: tanks would capture ground which would then be taken over by infantry. Individual units were not mixed in combat groups, but formed organisational and instructional entities. Tanks were sent in where and when the situation deemed it necessary.

During the September campaign, tanks provided a defensive support in countering German attacks. A rare exception was the attack of the 2nd Company of the 2nd Armoured Battalion, commanded by Captain Konstanty Hajdenko, at Wola Kszyszto-porska, near Piotrków. The operation was very successful; the attack penetrated deep into the German concentrations.

The organisational structure of the Polish Army was very largely modelled on the experience of the victorious war against the Soviet Union in 1920, a war generally passed over in silence and largely underrated by western European historians. Poland's victory in a lonely war against the Bolshevik armies restrained the march of communism for the next twenty years. Poland's military doctrine prior to 1938 did not envisage any armed conflict other than an attack by the Red Army. It was this doctrine that prompted the maintenance of 40 mounted cavalry regiments, potentially able to counter the Russian offensive in the marshy regions of Polesie and the Steppes along the eastern borders of the 2nd Republic. The peacetime strength of the Polish Army was 10 cavalry brigades and 40 infantry divisions. In the event of full mobilisation it could reach about 2 million soldiers. For the September 1939 campaign, however, only about one million was called up.

The formation over which the then Colonel Stanisław Maczek assumed command had been established, as regards its organizational structure, to undertake a thoroughly new type of warfare. Created in 1937, the 10th Motorized Cavalry Brigade was the only unit that could be classified as conforming with modern standards. Within the Polish armed forces, it served as a model for combined operations of armour and cavalry.

This fully mechanized formation included cavalry regiments which in reality constituted infantry transported in motor vehicles as well as self-propelled armour and artillery. It also comprised reconnaissance, engineer and signals units.

At the outbreak of war in 1939, the Polish army was forming another, quite similar unit – the Warsaw Armoured-Motorised Brigade. Its C.O. was General Stefan Grot-Rowecki, later killed when in command of the Polish Home Army. This brigade could not be adequately equipped and trained before war broke out, but nevertheless it fought with distinction against German armour near Tomaszów Lubelski on 17th and 20th September 1939 (edit).

At this point the question may be asked, to what extent the operational model of this first armoured formation was the creation Colonel Maczek himself, or alternatively how far did it reflect the experience of others.

We can assume that Maczek relied on manuals which by then already been published in the West. Armoured warfare was the subject matter of publications written by de Gaulle in France and Guderian in Germany as well as General Władysław Sikorski. He also presumably relied on his own experiences in the 1920 war. However, the operations proceeded now at a much higher speed. Blitzkrieg relied on surprise attack.

As armoured forces were being formed, it became necessary to develop training facilities for their officers and other ranks. The task was handed over to the Armoured Corps Officer Cadet School in Modlin, described by Lt Col. Stanisław Grabowski, its graduate and later, 1st Armoured Regiment Squadron Commander in the 1944 – 45 campaign:

In my opinion, the Modlin Officer Cadet School was the best in Europe at the time. Even the Germans did not have one. They visited Modlin and left 'much impressed'...

Training began with a brief, three-month, infantry course, then we took instruction in driving cars and motorcycles while attending lectures in engine mechanics and chassis construction. These were conducted by the staff of the Warsaw Polytechnic. Instruction in technical aspects was of such high quality that in 1939 the School's graduates were commonly regarded as having achieved a half-degree in mechanical engineering. Then field training followed in which we were grouped in companies and battalions. We received instruction in everything required from tank crews and from platoon commanders. We were then despatched to tank batallions to gain practical experience, and that placed us in a real army. The course lasted 3 years following which, the Modlin graduate possessed adequate technical and operational experience and training. He knew a lot. Nowadays, I think that perhaps he knew too much. Later, during the war, I found I have no use for all the knowledge of mechanics or engineering since none of us ever needed to repair tanks. Such is the case also today with motorcars – those who drive sometimes don't even know whether their vehicle has an engine in the front or in the back. They know very little about their cars and yet they drive.

After the Modlin Officer Cadet School, we knew it all. We dismantled engines to the last nut and then put them together again. We all knew how to make a screwdriver, we knew about metals and had experience in workshop skills. Our library included many diverse texts about German and French tanks.

Candidates for the Modlin Cadet course were subject to careful selection. When I applied, on 21st September, 1937, the field contained a few hundred applicants. Sixty were acepted. During its three-year existence, the School produced 245 Reserve Officer Cadets and 147 Active Service Cadets. Training of the last contingent was interrupted by the war but the trainees were promoted to the rank of Armoured Force Officer Cadets and later, in 1940, in France, to the French rank of Aspirants.

Mjr Tadeusz Wielogórski, another graduate of the Modlin School and later an officer of the Division, describes the Instutution and the courses it offered as follows:

The level of familiarity with armoured forces represented by us equalled that obtained in Germany or France. I myself completed the third year of the Modlin Officer Cadet School and received my commission. The third year course included instruction in tactics and strategy. In Scotland, in the forties, I learned nothing in regard of these two beyond what I practised already in 1938/9 in Modlin. What I learned in Poland served me well until the very end of the war.

Major Wielogórski's account is endorsed by another graduate of the Modlin Officer Cadet School, Major Zbigniew Kozak:

In my view, our training in Poland was of high quality. In 1943, when our Division joined British units experienced in tank warfare, it turned out that we already knew everything. We were taught in Poland that the essence of tank warfare lies in flushing-out the enemy, firing at him then going under cover. No different from the practice of any infantryman. In 1940 in France, however, we were to forget all that. The operational doctrine there dated back to 1918.

Officers and other ranks joining the tank units from other branches of the armed forces were an important component of the force being created before 1939. Captain Zbigniew Mieczkowski depicts this as follows:

Older officers – those who derived their experience from the 1920 war, came from other units. They were artillery, infantry and cavalry officers. Only after a period of technical instruction were they able to wear the black/orange colours of the armoured

force. The earliest of these were the members of General Haller's army. One should single out among them Tadeusz Majewski, subaltern, who commanded a platoon of tanks at the battle at Korosteń in 1920, and who in 1944, with the rank of colonel, commanded the 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade in Normandy. The C.O. of the 2nd Armoured Regiment, Colonel Stanisław Koszutski, came from the Horse Artillery. Having served with them, Koszutski had no difficulty in commanding a tank unit. In Scotland, he initiated the first courses for the cadres of cavalry regiments.

General Stanisław Maczek had served earlier as an infantry officer but, of course, a general commanding an armoured division does not need to be familiar with equipment maintenance. What he must have is operational skill in directing a modern armoured force.

The construction of a tank involved the interplay of three elements: armour, mobility and fire-power. Heavy armour limits the speed, light armour facilitates penetrability but allows higher speed. The weight of the heavy calibre gun reduces the travelling speed but enhances the gun's range and destructive power. All three factors interact and only the resultant outcome determines the application of the given tank in action.

An important aspect of the process of recruitment from other branches of armed forces, especially from cavalry, was noted by Mjr Stanisław Ziółkowski:

I can say the transition from a mounted unit to a motorised one in 1937 passed off relatively smoothly. We Lancers greatly regretted leaving our horses, but only two, perhaps three officers from our regiment applied for a transfer to other mounted regiments. To cheer us up, we were left some sporting mounts.

Our officer and NCO cadres were duly despatched to tank regiments to attend courses of various kinds.

Armies other than our own experienced problems when drafting cavalrymen, with their haloed traditions and ethos, into tank units. Lt Col. Stanisław Grabowski gives the following account:

In pre-war Poland, there was a certain resistance to the formation of tank units. The main opposition came from cavalry regiments. Cavalry was the rapid strike force of the 1920s. Cavalry officers served in many important staff positions and were very influential.

The Polish armaments industry did not manufacture heavier tanks and foreign manufacturers either would not or could not supply them to us. Production of the first prototypes in British and French plants began in 1935/6. The really modern tank appeared only after 1938. An example of the backwardness of the armaments industries of all countries other than that of Germany was the Sherman tank cobbled together from a railway undercarriage, an old aircraft motor and a WW 1 canon.

Major S. Ziółkowski commented on the training and instruction of officers and NCOs as follows:

The officers and NCOs had to be trained for the new type of operational conditions, dictated not by the speed of the horse but by that of a motor vehicle. Dismounting as infantry, preparing the vehicle for action, rapid night marches without lights, all such actions required concentrated attention and skill from drivers. Not everyone capable of driving a passenger car in daylight could be recruited as a driver. Of course we had large numbers of such in our regiment, but a three-tonne truck required a different type of care and responsibility for the platoon of soldiers carried inside it. Vehicles moved in columns. Both the driver and the commander needed to ensure that appropriate distance was maintained from the truck in front. The most time-consuming

problem was welding together an operational team, especially for night-time moves which demanded not only maintenance of proper distances but also map reading and orientation in unfamiliar terrain. Much was therefore demanded, particularly of the officer corps.The rate of travel, previously dictated by the horse, was now trebled or quadrupled.

POLAND INVADED BY GERMANY AND RUSSIA, 1939

Because of the lapse of about 60 years since the war, the interviews which we have conducted in the course of writing the present book preserve only certain fragments and individual impressions of events. In an interesting way, they supplement the accounts of the 10th Motorised Cavalry Brigade's September campaign preserved in published memoirs. At the time, the Brigade fought a different kind of war than the other formations.

The 10th Brigade comprised exclusively motorised units and was the only such formation in the Polish army; it included motorised infantry, motorised artillery and armour. Its total strength was about 3 000 troops. Everyone travelled in a motor vehicle. After a battle or skirmish, troops covered the distance to the next objective by car, truck or tank. They were not burdened with heavy packs but chucked them into their vehicles. According to one informer, infantry in 1939 did not really need the Germans to defeat them – marching long distances and bearing heavy loads on their backs while taking cover from German air assaults was enough to inflict defeat. They were permanently exhausted. One of the unhappy strategies of Marshall Śmigły-Rydz, the supreme commander of the Polish army in 1939, was the conduct of war on foot against a mobile enemy.

The memories of General Maczek's soldiers recall the type of war conducted in 1939. One such memory challenges the myth of the Polish cavalry attacking German tanks. In 1939 Polish cavalry formations did not fight with sabres and lances but in 90% of cases, dismounted and fought as infantry. Very occasionally, they charged on horseback in order to break out of encirclement.

Perhaps the most famous exception was that of the 18th Lancers charge near Krojanty in Pomerania. In the course of attacking German infantry, they unexpectedly encountered enemy tanks. What followed was a massacre – the regiment was virtually wiped out.

On the other hand, along the Bzura river, what had taken place was not charging but attempting to break out of encirclement. Thus the 14th Lancers in the Kampinos Forest, galloped through the German line. It is true that the Lancers had drawn their sabres. The episode was accidently filmed by an Italian film crew and served to trumpet the unparalleled heroism of Polish cavalry by some and 'typical' Polish senseless folly by others.

The military success of the 10th Brigade in September 1939 was achieved at the cost of heavy losses in lives and equipment. Engaged in defensive combat from Kraków to Lwów, about one half of the Brigade was lost in battles, yet it crossed the Polish border with the Regimental Colours intact, fully armed and equipped with motor vehicles. Alas, without their tanks, which crumbled away in difficult terrain conditions. Polish armour was not designed for travel over extremely long distances and petrol supplies at the time were completely disorganised. A company of the British Vickers' was decimated as early as half way through the campaign. The Brigade's remaining 7 TP tanks lasted as long as the action near Lwów.

The campaign ended for the Brigade on 17th September. Soviet armies, attacking Polish forces from the East virtually ended further resistance against the Germans, except for some battle groups fighting to the last on two fronts until the beginning of October. The Brigade, acting under orders of its commanders, left Poland to continue the fight alongside the Western Allies.

Captain Janusz Kiwerski recalls the special role of motor transport in the 10th Brigade as follows:

Motor vehicles were carefully distributed according to a plan, under cover but so that they could be easily reached. Interestingly, a kind of psychosis soon developed: 'Nothing but continuous retreat!'.

The Zboiski battle, near Lwów, where we achieved a notable victory, became to us a memorable event. The Germans were retreating in disorder; we took masses of prisoners and at last had the illusion of marching forward, completely altering our perception of the entire campaign. Soon, alas, came the order to withdraw from the positions gained and to drive in the direction of the Hungarian border.

Communications with fast-moving formations also created a new kind of problem for the 10th Brigade. Major S. Ziółkowski, liaison officer of the 24th Lancers regiment, remembers his experiences as follows:

I became the Regiment's Liaison Officer in 1939. It was a thankless duty. Liaison officers did not take active part in battle but merely waited to receive orders from the Chief of Staff. When Major Franciszek Skibiński gave me an order, I moved fast, sometimes not to the front but to the commanders of regiments located behind the line of fire.

The Regimental Commanding Officers were in radio contact with individual squadrons while liaison officers maintained links between regiments. As one such, I had a motorcycle with a sidecar, which enabled me to rest and sleep when my driver was in charge. Occasionally, when I had to dismount and move on foot to reach a commander in the field, I would allow the driver to sleep in the sidecar and in this way, we supported one another.

The experience of the September 1939 campaign constituted valuable capital that could be applied to the Brigade's further campaigns. Major Henryk Kątny from A-A Artillery saw it in the following way:

My own experience of the September 1939 campaign was limited to positional warfare. We fired at German aircraft.

The value of the overall experience acquired by Polish soldiers in September, however, was clearly evident in the French campaign, except that the French, who knew better, and were out to prove how successful they were going to be, didn't listen. They did not think they needed any advice. When it was too late, once the Germans had conquered France, the Polish experience stood out.

Major S. Ziółkowski remembers the crossing of the Hungarian border on 17th September 1939:

I breathed freely since we finally came to a stop. The last few days exhausted me and made me seek sleep wherever possible. I can honestly say that I did not sleep for 17 days and nights. I carried out my orders purely through strength of will. Whether I carried them out to 10 or 100%, I do not know.

Despite pressure from the Hungarians demanding that officers should be separated from other ranks, Colonel Kazimierz Dworak resisted and the Hungarian military authorities eventually agreed not to enforce the order. The regiment was put in barracks as a unit. Having been attached to the brigade HQ, I found myself in a separate camp in Mandok, in empty barracks cleaned out after a departed military police unit. Overnight, I lodged with a tutor of the children of a Hungarian countess whose name I do not recall. At the time, I did not even know what the date was. My host, with whom I communicated in German, said that I had slept for three days. Making up, of course, for the 17 sleepless nights as liaison officer.

JOINING THE POLISH COLOURS IN FRANCE

For the majority of the 10th Brigade soldiers, as for the Polish airmen and other units, the passage from Hungary to France provided the opportunity to resume the fight against the Germans. Major S. Ziółkowski remembers it as follows:

> I returned to Parkany, where the regiment was stationed while undergoing a virtual liquidation of its squadrons which escaped in groups to France, aided by the local population and by the Hungarian camp guards who looked away from what was going on.
>
> Civilian clothing? We used to hand over our blankets to the local tailors who recut them into winter parkas. Additional items were bought cheaply, paying in pengoes, which we received in exchange for our Polish zlotys. At first, the exchange rate was quite favourable, one pengo to four zlotys. Gradually the regiment melted away.
>
> When my turn came, we left for Budapest simulating a wedding party. We were expected. Groups were formed, each of about a 100 soldiers, commanded by officers. The plan was to cross the river Drava at Barycz into Yugoslavia. We failed twice and reached Yugoslavia only on the third night, sliding over a thin river ice on our bellies. Everything was obviously well organised ahead, since the Yugoslav patrol which stopped us knew quite well who we were and led us to a tavern for our overnight stay. The next day, we travelled to Zagreb where we waited for a time in the Polish embassy. From there, we were sent to Split and thence, aboard a Polish ship 'Patria' to Marseille where we were put up at the French army barracks.
>
> Soon, the collapse of France began and I travelled to the vicinity of Bordeaux in a group of evacuated officers. The train stopped in a thin grove and we asked the engine driver why he stopped. He replied that the station was under air attack and we had to wait. I walked to the edge of a highway and suddenly saw a column of moving troops. It was actually my regiment! The lancers recognised me and called out: 'Lieutenant Ziółkowski!' I soon collected my belongings from the train and rejoined my regiment. When I reported to Col. Kazimierz Dworak, he said: 'It's good to have you here. Marian Piwoński crashed his motorcycle and damaged his leg while his squadron was under orders to secure embarkation. I am appointing you to take over command in his place'. And so I quickly landed a job. Embarkation went on for several hours. We were not to take any heavy arms aboard. All that was allowed were rifles and pistols. Our lancers, however, showed initiative and disregarded the order, somehow smuggling aboard ship heavy machineguns, light and heavy mortars, as well as ammunition. The Master complained about excessive tonnage; the ship was so overloaded that there was no space to sit down and rest.

Thousands of Polish soldiers from other units were taken prisoner by the Russians. Colonel Władysław Kohutnicki described his capture, internment and further journey to join 'Gen. Sikorski's tourists' thus:

> On 17th September, we encountered the Soviet army in a place called Bursztyn, and were taken prisoner. Some NCOs appeared and looking me up and down said in Russian: 'You're wearing a black beret, so you must be a tankman. You're also a lance corporal so you know how to drive a tank or a motorcar. OK – get ready and let's go'.
>
> I was led to a small square filled with diverse Polish and Soviet motor vehicles. Someone pointed me towards a light truck – a Polish Fiat, as far as I remember, clearly already stolen in Poland – and I was unceremoniously thrust into the driving seat.
>
> A guard arrived, threw-in his bag and sat down beside me. He had some trouble with finding space for his rifle, which carried a long bayonet. The cabin could not

accommodate such a 'construct', a section of it therefore had to stick out of the window.

I judged my guarding angel to be 19 years of age. He was not a professional soldier. He was apparently well instructed for he did not want to engage in conversation. Presumably following his instructions, he cared well for me: he brought me meals and the obligatory 'kipiatok' (boiling water); we had plenty of bread in the cabin.

I drove my Fiat in a column, in the tracks of the car ahead of mine. I was in wholly unfamiliar country and without a map, but my guard did not show any interest. Only when passing some railway station did I realise that we were in Russia; I deduced that from place names written in Cyrillic and the wider gage of the rail track.

On the third day, I think, after such a 'detour' across Soviet territory, we returned to Poland and I asked the commander of the column: 'Comrade captain, I am young and I want to return to mother. Please let me go'. He thought a little, then said 'OK, go'.

'Spasiba', I replied, turned on my heels and fled. As fast as I could. I was afraid that someone might stop me, ask me where I'm going, ask for my papers, etc.

In Lwów, I was told that all the roads leading south to Hungary and Romania were watched by the Russians and escape along them was impossible. The Bolsheviks were catching officers and more prominent citizens. West of Lwów were the Germans and no one really knows what was going on in Warsaw. I decided to take the Northern route in my attempt to join General Sikorski's army in France.

The political situation was constantly changing. Wilno was made part of Lithuania, and Soviet as well as Lithuanian forces were stationed there. Travel to the West was very difficult and finally closed off completely when the Germans invaded Norway. All my attempts to move west proved too difficult or impossible. Via the underground, eventually, I contacted an organisation which recruited soldiers for the Finnish-Soviet war and signed up for military service in Finland. This way I was planning to get over to France.

Joining me in all these activities was my younger school friend, Zdzisław Kuran. We also volunteered for farming work in Estonia, which gave us a chance to travel legally to Tallin and stay there for a time.

In the evening, some three days later, an Estonian came to see us, took us to a fishing harbour and placed us aboard a fishing barque. Below the deck, we found we were not alone. Lights and smoking were forbidden and silence was obligatory. Towards midnight, we left the harbour for an unknown destination. Coming out on deck was also forbidden. About dawn, I think, the barque reached some island, we were made to disembark and spread out in different directions.

The next day, I think, we were moved by rail, this time under escort, again for an unknown destination. The trip was long, taking a day and night, with prolonged stops at various stations. When we finally reached some town, whose name I do not recall, we were led to a camp which apparently served as the collection point for the volunteers, and there we were to remain. It turned out, however, that owing to armistice, the Finns were no longer accepting volunteers and we had to leave. A guard took us to Helsinki and the next day we were sent to the Polish consulate.

In the consulate, we reported to the military attaché, Lt Col. Łoś, who greeted us cordially but said that he is obliged to send us to a camp which gathered together all volunteers for the Polish army abroad, and it was currently virtually impossible to leave Finland. We therefore travelled to the camp and remained there for a long time. In general, our 12–13 month stay in Finland was a waste of time, but was not unpleasant.

Eventually we reached Sweden on 24th July 1941. Once again, we were in a camp. We were allotted rooms in an old castle which had a separate kitchen run by the Swedes, a separate dining hall, bathroom, etc. As earlier in Finland, we received our

pay from the Polish consulate amounting to 4 crowns per day but this sum was immediately deducted to cover the cost of food and upkeep. We were able to work logging timber in the local forest. We sawed mainly beech trees into one metre lengths, which were then split and stacked. Payment was according to the number of cubic metres of wood felled. It was also permitted to look for work in the neighbouring districts so I went looking. In one direction, some 20 km distant, was the township of Nora, in another, about 16 km away, was Lindesberg. I rode often to both on my bicycle. Every Saturday, I went dancing. I also looked for work other than tree felling and eventually succeeded. A good-looking Swedish girl introduced me to her brother who offered me work in a timber mill. I accepted and went to live in Lindesberg. Before winter came, however, I changed my work place again, taking a job in a furniture factory. I had a single room in the 'Haga' guesthouse, ate well and earned good wages which even allowed some savings.

The Polish authorities informed us one day about our acceptance into the army. The priority was for airmen, then sailors and soldiers. My turn came in February when I was called by phone to present myself at the Polish consulate in Stockholm. A few days later, I was taken to an airport where an airplane was waiting at some distance from the departure hall.

The passengers included many foreigners – not Swedes but many Englishmen and at least two Poles. The plane took off about midday and by 6 p.m. I was in Scotland. We were then taken to London under guard, and there we were questioned and our papers were scrutinised. The British carried out the entire operation, but it was interesting to find that some of these Englishmen actually spoke Polish. When eventually released, I was taken to the Ministry of Defence where I reported to Lt Col. Antoni Korczyński, my old Commanding Officer. A real coincidence! I was surprisingly well received. My orders assigned me to the 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade.

Władysław Kohutnicki was not the only one who, after the September campaign, struggled across unfamiliar territory to join the Polish army in the West. The number of volunteers ran into many thousands, but only few have described their adventures in writing. Some, like Jan Winczakiewicz and Jerzy Henryk Szwajk, are included in the bibliography on the last pages of this book. The majority of 'General Sikorski's tourists', however, remain the unknown heroes of WW 2.

FRANCE 1940

It was to France that units of the 10th Brigade gravitated and where they met, retraced their COs and rejoined their ranks. In the eighth month after the attack on Poland, a Polish army was again in action against the aggressor.

Captain Zbigniew Mieczkowski recalls the rebirth of the formations of 'Maczek's soldiers' in France in the autumn of 1939:

Officers and other ranks struggled by various ways and means to get to France. 70% of the 2nd Armoured Batallion, for example, which reformed in France in 1940, consisted of soldiers who had served in it in Poland. The same applies to the 10th Mounted Rifles and the 24th Lancers which even managed to bring over their regimental colours. The Colours of the armoured units were burned before the Hungarian border was crossed. The exodus altered the character of these units; they became formations consisting exclusively of volunteers. Their officers and other ranks could, of course, have remained in Hungary or Rumania, or gone back to their families in Poland. Yet they pressed on to the West to resume their fight against the Germans. Called up in 1939, they continued to serve their country. They were joined by volunteers

from other formations and many other young men; University students and such like seeking revenge against the common enemy. Similar roads were taken by Polish Airforce personnel. Only the Navy sailed directly to British ports.

The structure of General Sikorski's Infantry in France was, however, quite different. Its cadres came from Poland but the majority of soldiers consisted of immigrants in France who were Polish subjects and were therefore conscripted into the army as a result of Sikorski's agreement with the French Government.

In 1940, after the fall of France, most of them returned home.

According to his memoirs, Col. Stanisław Maczek himself arrived in Paris on 22nd October 1939. The next day, he reported to the General Commanding Officer of the Polish forces, General Władysław Sikorski. Maczek relates in detail the process of recreating the Polish armoured formation in France, a process that encountered much French opposition, yet was so vital to the future destiny of the 1st Division. It wasn't long before the GOC promoted Col. Maczek to Brigadier and Commander of the Polish forces in the army camp, Coëtquidan, in Brittany.

General Maczek's account ran as follows:

Very soon, the camp consisting of a score or so of barracks became badly overcrowded and the concept of 'camp' in Coëtquidan was extended to include the poor Breton villages from the surrounding districts, that offered some primitive quarters in silos and attics for the winter. There was, however, 'willingness to bear misery' in abundance and the Polish soldier suffered the poor conditions with uncommon tolerance, dreaming of the frontline as the peak of luxury and comfort.

The principal objective, i.e. the recreation of the Polish Mechanised units, met with strong opposition of the French authorities who would only allow the formation of Polish infantry divisions. Maczek ascribed this opposition, with some bitterness, to:

[...] a number of factors, perhaps well justified from the French perspective, such as the time needed for training and a large number of French artillery units already available in the field. These, however, were not acceptable to the Polish side and eventually General Sikorski succeeded in obtaining French agreement for Polish artillery and other units to form an organic part of an infantry division.

Although saturated with excessive numbers of French administrators, the camp was staffed with instructors who would have done well in peacetime. They earnestly tried to teach us warfare – us, some of whom were already veterans, anxious to share their experience with our allies. Attributing incorrectly Poland's defeat to inadequate initial battle training of troops, the French the classical manoeuvres of fusilier and grenadier sections within the infantry platoon lifted to the heights of military philosophy. How hopeless it all was! What would such manoeuvres achieve in real life attacks against German armour at Wysoka or Kasina Wielka? Or even in the attack on Hill 324 near Lwów?

Soon, however, according to Maczek, more open heads began to realise the paradox. Maczek assigned the main role in the awakening to general Faury who had earlier served as director of the Warsaw War College and was Maczek's teacher during 1923/4. Recalling that period, Maczek raised the question: when did the idea of the Polish armoured division first occur to him? The future C.O. was unable, however, to answer the query and only alternated among a number of dates, as follows:

Was it as early as 1st September 1939 during the battle with the German 2nd Armoured Division at Wysoka? Or did the idea grow slowly during the September battles with overwhelming German tank forces? Or was it in Hungary when the relaxed

mind recorded the progress of the September campaign and there sprung a hope that General Sikorski would recreate the Polish army in France? [...] I am sure, I put forward the concept during my first conversation with General Sikorski in Paris and this may have swayed him to grant me first priority for the evacuation of the 10th Cavalry Brigade from Hungary, without, as yet, the GCOs complete accord to the formation of the Polish Armoured Division.

Discussions with the French on the subject 'eventually', as Maczek wrote, 'began to bear fruit'. A memorandum on the subject which the General wrote in cooperation with F. Skibiński and Stankiewicz finally elicited a reply in the spring of 1940. It read: [...] 'you will have your D*ivision légère mècanique* but only for your campaign on the way back to Poland, when mobile warfare will be required; we French have the Maginot line and have no need presently for the Polish Armoured Division'.

Finally, after further negotiations, the Polish authorities received the approval of [...] a *division légère mècanique* but with a very distant proposed formation date of spring 1941.

After handing the camp in Coëtquidan over and taking command of the newly established armoured troops centre, I took leave of the GCO in Paris.

General Sikorski bore a distinct grudge towards me for, as he used to say, 'prefering not to accept the command of the Infantry Division, which would much sooner become battle-ready, in favour of his beloved 10th Brigade'. In reality, however, he well understood the necessity of establishing an armoured division and my own, almost personal, attachment to the idea.

We were given a few old tanks – at least they made us mobile – and a tank firing range, several motorcars and motorcycles, more for administrative purposes than for motor training.

Beginning from 1st March 1940, we began to train our tank crews on these machines which were to form the cores of four tank battalions, whilst driving instruction courses trained reinforcements for Cavalry Regiments as well as reconnaisance and antitank squadrons.

The situation was much worse as regards battle training for troops other than tank crews. Neither the motorised cavalry units, nor the artillery or antitank units were able to obtain heavy machine guns, field guns or antitank guns. Among the already greening vinyards of Avignon and Chateaunoef-du-Pape, a thick wooden rod simulated a heavy machine gun and a thin one – a light one.

Did we waste much time? Undoubtedly so – 2 to 3 months in the case of mechanised units, where training without weapons was merely illusionary, a period which would soon turn out to have been irretrievably lost...

The German offensive in May 1940 shattered the Northern French front, bringing German armour to the Somme, but in the South, near Avignon, it spectacularly crushed the facade of French ignorance and antipathy towards the Polish Armoured Division. Progressively, the formation of the Division assumed the aura of a France-saving exercise and the despatch to the front on the Marne of even a small section of a totally unready armoured brigade became a 'to be or not to be' task for the Northern French front. Such was the attitude of the French, at least of General Denain, Chief of the Military Mission attached to the staff of the Polish GCO, and later also of General Weygand and Marshall Petain, in discussions with General Sikorski.

They wanted the Polish Armoured Division, and they wanted it now, immediately, in a hurry. As early as the second half of May came the order for its rapid establishment and we had to ardently resist another threatening concept of the French staff – the creation near Avignon of a training centre for several antitank companies, which would

be distributed to various French units country wide. In the end, only the initial project of the formation of an armoured division remained on the table.

General Maczek's soldiers assessed the quality of the French direction of their own armoured forces critically. Lt Col. H. Weber expressed the following opinion:

France possessed more tanks than Germany but they did not know how to employ them. While it is true that de Gaulle was the first French theoretician on the use of armour, those officers of highest rank, individual marshalls and military notables, thought they knew better. Were the French troops perhaps better led, they might have given the Germans a real fight.

In the wartime chaos which gripped France after the collapse of its armies, the Polish units encountered surprisingly hostile reactions from the civilian population. Captain Mieczkowski recollects the atmosphere of those days:

The French civilians often mistook us for Germans. It even happened occasionally that on entering a town, our troops would receive a friendly welcome by civilians who expected favours from the Germans. Suddenly, however, it appeared that it was the Poles who came armed and who attempted to set up some sort of defence. The French feared street fighting and fires. They protested and were unwilling to put up resistance. Entering townships, we sang: 'March, March Polonia, thou great nation...' Our unit was made up of highly disciplined young cadets of armoured forces. We were commanded by Maj. Mieczysław Poniatowski, nicknamed 'Pepi'. We behaved as if nothing unusual was going on. This produced a unique atmosphere. The French wondered what sort of army was it. Is it the Germans? They do not speak German. I saw elderly men cheering, raising their hats and calling out 'Vive la Pologne!' with tears in their eyes.

After several days during which we confronted German motorcycling units we arrived at St Jean de Luz and boarded the liner 'Sobieski' which was waiting for us, taking us to Plymouth.

The Polish Navy and commercial fleet, after the outbreak of the war, joined the British Naval Forces. It was a proud moment to arrive in Great Britain on board a Polish vessel, representing the still unconquered territory of Poland.

THE 'GENERAL SIKORSKI'S TOURISTS'

France's defeat failed to crack the eagerness of the Polish army to continue its fight for Poland. It was obvious, however, that its formations needed to find another base for their operations.

The methods employed by soldiers in achieving their goal of reaching the Polish army in Scotland could fill many a film script. Diverse experiences of individual units entered the history of the period. The Podhalańska (Highlands) Brigade, after its campaign in Norway was partially evacuated to the UK, but some of its units were returned to French ports to continue defending France. Two infantry divisions, after battles in Alsace and Lorraine, met with a different fate. Some units crossed into Switzerland, where they were interned for the rest of the war. Polish airmen also reached the UK after fighting in France. In all, about 25 000 Polish forces managed to be evacuated to Great Britain.

The 500 strong battle group of General Maczek's 10th Motorised Cavalry Brigade, after its campaign in Champagne and the successful battle at Montbard, north of Dijon, began its lone trek towards the unoccupied region of France, planning eventually to reach the UK.

Cpt Zygmunt Fudakowski described the battles at Montbard, where he was wounded, in his *Fragments of memories*, published in the 'Cavalry and Armoured Troops Review' (Przegląd Kawalerii i Broni Pancernej, No. 158, 1999):

On 16th June at 20.00 hrs, the Maczek's battle group reached the edge of Montbard. Mjr Władysław Zgorzelski led the attack. Both his squadrons, fighting as infantry, were given the task of attacking along both sides of the road leading into the town. The tanks were to drive on the road and the antiaircraft guns were to be used as ground artillery and fire in immediate support of the attack. Action began at 20.30 hrs. Władek Zgorzelski selected an intersection of two major roads as his command point – such, alas, was his practice – a complete disregard of danger. It was an almost crazy decision since it would be exactly the area where the enemy would concentrate its fire. And so, there he stood, in the middle of the intersection, cane under arm, like an instructor during peacetime exercises, seemingly unaware of the enemy's opening salvos. From one point of view, it was pure swagger – a swashbuckling act, one would say. From another, however, for harassed, tired troops it served as a genuine inspiration. They marched along the ditches on both sides of the road, executing the commander's plan, joyfully and spiritedly, resolved to kick the Germans out of Montbard.

My own task was to stay close to the CO, ready to transmit his orders and instructions. And so I stood, among the whizzes first of light, then heavy machinegun bullets, amid the noise of grenades exploding all around. I instinctively tried to stand sideways towards the enemy, under a false impression that my profile would reduce the size of the target.

To the left of the axis of our attack ran a high, almost vertical rock wall from which, very soon, hand grenades began to drop. These were clearly aimed at our command post. Just then, Cpt Eysymont, C.O. anti-aircraft artillery arrived, driven in a motorcycle sidecar, and at the same time, a runner from one of the attacking squadrons. We thus formed a group of five people, which in the centre of a road intersection constituted quite a sizeable target. And of course, a hand grenade suddenly landed in the middle of the group, exploding virtually at our feet, deafening us for a moment. When I looked around a second later, I saw Cpt Eysymont lying in a pool of blood and noted that my uniform was covered in blood, though I could not find its source. Eysymont's driver also caught it, but not too seriously since he stood with his motorbike on the edge of the road, some distance from us. Most of the granade's splinters obviously hit Cpt Eysymont while Mjr Zgorzelski and the runner escaped virtually unscathed, except for tattered uniforms. After some minutes, I eventually realised that my face was bleeding and felt a sharp pain in the leg, high, near the groin. My injuries could not, however, be very serious since I was able to assist the others in saving the unconscious Cpt Eysymont whom we lifted from the ground and carefully laid in a ditch. As it turned out, I had caught a tiny splinter in the soft flesh below my left eye, which produced heavy bleeding but was only a surface scratch that looked worse than it was. Another splinter had hit me in the groin and this one soon proved very troublesome. For a time, till dawn in fact, I was able to perform my duties. I must note here that when we were laying the badly wounded Cpt Eysymont in the ditch, he regained consciousness for a moment, long enough to tell me the name and address of his wife in Poland and to ask me to notify her of his fate which in due course I did. In the meantime, however, the battle was continuing and there was no time for anything else. About midnight, the Germans began to withdraw and we occupied the township. Great enthusiasm rose up in everyone, especially when we freed a group of about thirty French Prisoners of War (hence POWs), among them a world famous tennis champion, Artillery Captain Jean Borotra. We felt considerable pride at having carried out our duties, gaining the assigned objective and opening the path for the 42nd French

Division, which was about to arrive. Zgorzelski immediately sent out a messenger to report the capture to General Maczek in his HQ nearby, who in turn notified the 42nd Division.

Some hours later, when the sun stood high in the sky, the messenger returned bearing the dismal news that swiftly spread among the troops. He had not found the Division at the agreed location. It had gone elsewhere! Looking around us in the sunlight, seeing the dead, listening to the moans of the wounded receiving first aid, we just could not believe that our ally could have betrayed us so. We came here, we fought all night, suffering considerable losses, we succeeded and captured the assigned objective, yet the allied formation simply went somewhere else, failing even to notify us... These, however, were the facts. The enemy was now in front of us as well as on both flanks. And at the rear, too, as it soon turned out. Moreover, the enemy was fresh and well rested. We could be encircled at any moment. Our ammunition was spent, petrol tanks – empty. We could not expect to be re-supplied from any source whatever.

Tragic moments sometimes give rise to the hangman's humour and so when the staff officers discussed among themselves the shortage of fuel and our General proposed the destruction of our vehicles, our French liaison officer, Col. Duchon vehemently protested. He would not hear of it. Objecting passionately, he pulled out a batch of petrol coupons and insisted that there was enough there to allow the brigade to continue fighting for several weeks! To this, the chief of staff, Mjr Franciszek Skibiński, replied dryly and quite seriously: 'Mon Colonel, why don't you fill the tanks with these coupons and then we shall see how far they will take us'. Col. Duchon merely went red in the face and the coupons were never again mentioned.

Before leaving Montbard, we took the wounded Cpt Eysymont to a house at the edge of the town, in which we found an elderly French couple that very wisely refused to leave their home. We explained the situation, gave them some money and instructed them to try and ensure that the Captain was delivered to a field hospital as soon as the Germans returned to Montbard. We asked, however, that they register Eysymont as a French soldier; in any case, his papers and his uniform were burnt and he lay only in his underwear. We judged this ruse would improve his safety. Eventually, Cpt Eysymont survived and made his way to the UK. Some three years later, I could not believe my eyes when I spotted him entering General Sikorski's HQ in the Rubens Hotel, in London. I thought he was a phantom.

We reached a large field in a forest, next to a sizeable lake. We were some 30 km north of Dijon, in the heart of Burgundy. Our orders were to collect all vehicles and pack them tightly in the field. That included tanks, trucks, halftracks, motorcycles, command vehicles – the lot. The collection took about two hours and then the order came to sink them all in the lake. The order was carried out immediately although with obvious regret since we had become attached to our vehicles. The logic of the order was of course impeccable, since without fuel they were wholly useless to us yet almost certainly of use to the Germans. And so destruction ensued: each vehicle was driven to the edge of the lake, first gear was selected, the driver bailed out and the vehicle drove slowly into the lake and sunk below the surface. Looking at all this, I was experiencing mixed feelings: one phase of our combat was coming to an end. What future lay ahead? Col. Duchon was protesting no more but he did not hide the tears in his eyes.

The General called a general conference and addressed us all. He revealed that he had no information about the general situation and, in particular, didn't know whether the French had any intention of continuing fighting and organise a defence in the south of France. Had they planned to continue, they would presumably have chosen the Loare as a logical defence line, we should accordingly try to break through to the southwest, in the general direction of the Loare.

Later, Fudakowski experienced quite incredible adventures while trekking toward unoccupied France following the disbandment of the formation:

Since it was no longer possible to continue as an organised unit, the General ordered us to reform into small groups (no more than seven soldiers in each) and trek south. The Avignon – Bollène region, where we were stationed until recently, was set as the alternative meeting area since the troops were familiar with it. The Paymaster was ordered to divide the contents of the Brigade's safe among the soldiers and we each received a fraction of our monthly pay. The formation of groups began, allowing free choice of members and I found myself belonging to the group comprising:

Mjr Władysław Zgorzelski,
Lt Józef Michałowski,
Lt Kamil Czarnecki,
Lt Zbigniew Kopczyński,
Sgt Mjr Edward Bidoń,
and myself, 2nd Lt Zygmunt Fudakowski.

In view of the fact that we were about to share a common fate over several weeks, let me briefly sketch here the characteristics of my companions.

1. Major Władysław Zgorzelski, our C.O., 37 years old. A distinguished cavalryman and famous Olympic rider, later the coach of the Polish Olympic riding team. Taken prisoner during the September campaign, he escaped from the POW camp and managed to reach Hungary. Of small stature, thin and muscular, he spoke quietly, virtually never raising his voice. A very strong character, a true born and bred soldier. He spoke in short phrases and spared the words. Projected tight, dry humour. A man of great personal bravery, he never lost his head and evoked natural respect. A superb commander and faithful friend.

2. Lt Józef Michałowski, about 40. A grey crop of hair with a young face. A landowner from the Poznań region. He loved comfort but was quite adept at bearing the worst misery. A sharp observer, exhibited a high intelligence and great sense of humour. A loyal, good friend, generally liked and respected.

3. Lt Kamil Czarnecki, 26. The 'enfant terrible' of our group. A professional officer with a degree in engineering, highly gifted, extrovert, craving respect of others, asserting domination over every discussion and insisting on being the centre of attention. Highly confrontational by nature, he would put forward arguments often calling for the most vehement denial, which is exactly what he most enjoyed. I was frequently his opponent in such debates and occasionally Władek Zgorzelski had to pacify us. Under the skin of an intellectual goblin, however, there beat a great heart. Kamil turned out to be the best of friends and comrades, as well as a competent and inventive officer. He was a valued member of our fortuitous 'troop'.

4. Lt Zbyszek Kopczyński, 26 years old, a professional officer who served in the 10th Motorised Cavalry Brigade during the September campaign as Commanding Officer of a motorcycle platoon. Cheerful, well balanced and easy going, eager to help. A good mate and a very positive member of our group.

5. Sgt Edward Bidoń. A professional NCO, about 29, taciturn, highly disciplined, a true soldier. It was not easy to gain familiarity with him on a personal plane. He proved to be invaluable to the group.

Such were the five of my comrades with whom fate bound me irretrievably for several months, until after a long and difficult journey we all eventually reached Scotland.

There was not much time for farewells. We took all day to sink the equipment, set booby traps (to cause, for example, an explosion when the car doors were opened), divide the money and organise individual groups. The General added one more

instruction; we were to avoid marching down highways, especially in daytime and to utilise forest cover wherever possible.

The condition of my leg made walking very difficult; our leader, therefore, ordered a rest and postponed decisions about the plan of action till morning. We agreed on the overnight watch arrangements and when morning came, we gathered for a 'war council'. We carefully studied the local map and determined that we were now some 12 km from Pouilly-sur-Saône. The river Saône flows to Lyon, some 200 km distant, where it joins the Rhone. A thought immediately surfaced that it might be possible perhaps to find a boat and sail down river to Lyon. Finding a boat became therefore task number one.

We set off through the forest in the general direction of the river, consulting the map and reading the compass. We moved very slowly since everyone had to adjust to my incapacity. I bandaged the wound as best as I could, using torn underwear, however, bleeding continued and the pain grew. About midday, we reached the open country and saw the river about a kilometre away. We continued to walk and eventually spotted a group of women washing their laundry in the water. We approached with care and my group chose me as its spokesman in addressing the women. Some instinct, however, responding perhaps to the danger inherent in our situation, warned me not to trust young people. I was reacting, perhaps, to recent experiences, when I watched the disintegration of the French army and saw young soldiers throwing down their rifles into ditches, shouting 'La guerre est fini!'. Or, was it, perhaps, simply common sense? I don't know. I decided at that moment to trust only older French people.

I resolutely approached a middle-aged woman who seemed a bit sympathetic and asked to speak to her away from the others. With the rest of the women interrupting their washing and eyeing us suspiciously, I outlined our situation: we are Polish soldiers and our unit has been defeated near Dijon. We need to get out of here and reach our forces, which continue to fight the Germans. We'd like to acquire a boat and sail down the river to Lyon. Can you help us?

The woman gave me a long and careful look, then looked at the other women and said: 'I'd be happy to help you to continue fighting the Germans. You need to talk to Monsieur Javel who is the mayor of our township and a veteran of WW 1, a real hero. He lives in that big house on the hill – she pointed it out – on the town's edge. You can trust him completely and tell him everything. God be with you', She shook my hand and I went back to report to my friends.

Mr. Javel's house dominated the heights above the township and the surrounding area. When we approached it along a lane lined with tall trees, a stout, not very tall, middle aged man, well past fifty, came out on the terrace and waited, carefully scrutinising us. Coming quite close, we saw a friendly, open face and a penetrating look, asking as it were: who are you people?

I came forward and introduced each of us in turn, informing him openly of our intentions and our expectations. He listened carefully in silence, then motioned us to enter the house. Once inside, he addressed us as follows: 'Welcome to my house. I shall assist you. Let's draw up a plan of action together. But first you must have something to eat. Meanwhile, make yourself at home'.

He left the room, apparently to instruct the servants or domestics, then returned and smilingly ushered us into the dining room. When we took our seats around the table, a plump servant woman brought in a bowl of steaming hot soup. We ate with appetite and soon other courses followed. When we satisfied our hunger, the mayor addressed us briefly, and in a military manner: You were well advised to seek my help. I intend to do so and am well able to help you, better able perhaps than anyone else. I am myself an old soldier, a WW 1 officer. I fully approve of your plan to con-

tinue fighting the Boche until he is thrown out of France and our motherland is free again. You intend to sail down the Saône to Lyon. Actually, it's not a bad plan since it would give you a better chance of quitting the areas occupied by the Germans than would trekking along the highways or even across country. I shall lend you a boat. When you reach Lyon, I would like you to leave it with one of my friends. I shall reclaim the boat when the time comes. I must warn you, however, that it will not be an easy adventure. You will need to cross nine mechanically controlled locks, which are operated in peacetime by our invalid veterans. I do not currently know who these operators are; perhaps the Germans have already taken charge of them. You will need to discover that for yourselves. The locks operate between 07.30 and 18.00 hrs. You will have to approach each very slowly and decide on the spot what to do. You can sleep the night here and in the morning I'll take you to the boat. Do you know anyone in Lyon?

I answered quickly that yes, we know a Pole named Kalisz, an engineer specialising in water installations, resident in Lyon. We met him in the south of France, in Bollène, where we became friends. He said to us at the time that if any one of us happened to find himself in Lyon and needed help, he should look for one of four shops sporting a large 'Kalisz' billboard outside. These shops are owned by his brother. All you need to do is to go in and say you are looking for me and we will contact you.

At the time, I retained this information carefully in my memory, just in case. Now was the time to make use of it and as it turned out, it helped us to avoid a trap. I conveyed it all to Mr Javel who was glad to hear it and added a name and address of the person to whom the boat was to be delivered. The conference was at its end and Mr Javel took us to a bedroom where the beds were already made. We wished our host goodnight and soon slept with the sleep of the just.

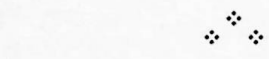
Early in the morning, after a solid breakfast, Mr Javel took us to a dock and showed us the boat. It was a large, solid rowing boat seating 10, almost ideal for the six of us. We were also given two fishing rods (minus the line) so as to give any Germans watching from the bank an impression that we were fishermen.

We did not tarry long at the jetty. Each of us said farewell to our host with a hearty handshake, then took his place aboard and we sailed away. Mr Javel turned round after a while and slowly walked home. We watched his stout figure for a time, moving purposefully up the hill, towards the house that welcomed us so graciously, a man who was a true ally, a French patriot, one who documented with an active deed his sadness at the disaster his country suffered through the German invasion.

When France was eventually liberated, the GCO of the Polish Forces, in response to a report lodged by Mjr Zgorzelski, decorated Mr Javel with the Golden Cross of Merit for the assistance rendered our group.

As was usual towards the end of June, the weather was beautiful. The day was sunny and windless. Władek immediately allotted us places and functions in the boat: our leader at the helm and the rest to alternate manning the oars on the river which was some 300 m wide here. German columns were passing along both banks. The Armistice had not yet been signed and Hitler's armies were obviously rushing to occupy maximum territory in minimum time. They were garnering France without the slightest resistance. The situation benefitted us in so far as the German units were so absorbed in the task of reaching their objectives that they showed no interest in taking prisoners or watching population movements. Nevertheless, we saw from time to time single soldiers pointing binoculars at us from decks of stationary vehicles, stuck in the traffic. When that happened, we swiftly grabbed our rods and simulated fishing. The Germans must have found the sight of six half naked men, fishing the river, as their columns drove along the banks intriguing.

The group successfully reached Lyon and helped by F's friend managed to close over to the unoccupied part of France and eventually to Scotland.



An interesting memoir describing action at Montbard and the ordeals of another group of 'Sikorski's tourists' was published by Sgt Stanisław Gudowski in the Polish Daily 'Dziennik Polski' in London, on 13th September 2003:

> The survivors of the tank units from the Polish campaign were stationed in southern France, in the village of St. Cecile, Dept. Vaucluse. We were treated like poor relations. The French would trumpet: we'll show you how to beat the Germans. To stave off boredom, they gave us ancient tanks. Beautiful weather, a summer holiday atmosphere. And suddenly – 10th May 1940, a German offensive along the entire front. General Guderian's armour cuts through the frontine and drives at high speed right up to the La Manche. The number of surrendered cities grew day by day virtually without resistance. General panic, neither the French nor the British managed to stem the German advance. Suddenly, someone remembered that in southern France there were Polish tank formations which had fought the Germans with some success in 1939. An order is issued: tank regiments are to be formed without delay. In execution of the order, regiments are moved by rail to Versailles and supplied with proper equipment and uniforms. No longer are we their poor relations. We receive proper pay and are able to afford better quality wine.
>
> On June 10th, we are sent to the front in eastern France. Our tank units move in tight formations, frequently under not very effective Luftwaffe attack. On June 18th, General Maczek gathers us together, i.e. 2nd Company led by Captain J. Iwanowski – 13 tanks in all – for a briefing. We find that we are completely encircled by the enemy and will have to fight our way to the south. The General notes that we are already battle-experienced and therefore will manage. The tanks will lead the way and the Uhlans and mounted riflemen will follow on foot. We move off, darkness falls; suddenly we are fired upon from all directions. We return their fire generously, fires ring us and it's bright as in daylight. My tank rushes ahead to the town's edge, managing to destroy an antitank gun on the way but then we come upon a powerful 88 mm gun. We damage it a little and see the Germans running away fast, many in their underwear. They obviously did not expect a tank attack by night. We continue our march in the morning but shortage of fuel is evident. I report it to the General who says: 'Leave your tank and shift to a truck'.
>
> In the evening, some 80 of us gathered for a briefing. Rain is falling. We are to trek, in groups of five, to southern France. My group comprises Captain S. Zelski, Corporal F. Kondratowicz, Corporal M. Kościukiewicz, Corporal J. Marcinkiewicz, some unknown reserve soldier and myself. We walk along a hedge next to a forest grove when suddenly a German motorcycle pulls alongside and it's : 'Hände hoch'. After disarming us, they lead us to a nearby church, which is already full of POWs. Being somewhat fluent in German, I strike up a conversation with our guard who says he belongs to the 60th Motorised Infantry Regiment from Stuttgart, part of General von Kleist's army group.
>
> In the morning, a long column is formed and we march east. At midday, we're ordered to sit down. Half an hour later the march resumes, without us, however, i.e. without F. Kondratowicz and myself. We have slipped into civilian clothes and are now civilians. But what now? We do not speak French and have no papers. We ask a woman passerby to assist and she takes us to a local Polish resident who, however, is unable to help. He advises us to go north where there are larger Polish communities which

are sure to help. He gives us a map, which shows that our destination is some 600 km away. A few days later, we walk through Montbard where a large contingent of German troops is camped. Some ask us: 'Are you soldiers?'. We pretend not to understand.

And that was the end of our battle of Montbard.

We now quote the account of these dramatic events as given by the General himself in his book *Od podwody do czołga* (*From Horsecart to Tank*):

I called a brief conference in the evening, in a forest along the main highway leading into Dijon which was packed full of German columns. With everyone's approval (since there was really no other way out), I ordered the formation to divide into small groups and trek across country in the southwesterly direction, under the command of officers or more energetic other ranks. We divided money and available stores, then my staff sat down to produce hundreds of drawings of roads and localities, copying sections of the only Michelin map in our possession. We devised search procedures in case parties get lost and designated meeting points for the time when the groups finally reach the unoccupied regions of France.

Each of us took a minimum of baggage so as to reduce the weight carried, but adding some small items of personal value. I myself took from my car a small statue of Our Lady of Lourdes, given to me by my wife, which remained with me long into the future.

There were five in my party: Lt Col. Skibiński, Cpt Stankiewicz, a French army officer, Lt Bonvalet and my driver, Sgt Kochański.

We crept to the edge of the wood.

Above us ran the *route nationale* leading into Dijon and we clearly heard the clatter of German armour flowing along it like a river. Surely, some armoured division?

Since the highway lay at a right angle to the direction of our planned march, we had to cross it. Now and then, there was a break in the slowly moving column of German vehicles but even before we managed to signal a move with our eyes, a new wave would appear.

We had to wait till the evening.

And when the long awaited moment arrived and a few cars stopped near us, the sound of spoken German spelled our bad luck.

We continued waiting.

Summer nights are brief and we must quickly come to a decision.

When the sign was finally given, I jumped up and amid calls of 'Leute – halt!' ran across the highway, watching at the edge of my vision a few of my people running alongside. I landed in a dense thicket of bushes and branches, which I crossed with great difficulty and quickly, distanced myself from the road.

I was alone.

It's nothing new, I thought to myself, that's exactly what happened 20 years earlier in June 1920 [edit.: Polish-Russian War] when I was fighting Budionny. Bright moonlight, penetrating the forest in light patches, amplified the memory.

I marched for a long time – perhaps for 3 hours – in a direction, which seemed to me to agree with the plan, but still quite alone.

Either I myself have become lost or the others went in a wrong direction. The lay of the land, however, falling away towards some valley, seemed to confirm that my course was correct.

When eventually I became quite resigned to the fact that I shall have to move alone among the Germans, I sat down to rest under a bush and dozed off. Suddenly, I woke up to the sound of stones falling down the slope and heard a distinctly Polish curse.

Then silence.

Who could it be groping among the rubble, if not the Poles?

I rose and shouted: 'Franek, Ludwik!'. And so we were together again.

We soon arranged, in a friendly way, that I would lead, especially at night, trusting my nose and that special sense of self-assurance in operating in darkness. Even though the oldest in the group, I was by no means the weakest physically. I was often forced to slow down the pace by shouts from behind, asking me to order a rest, urging 'overnighting' or 'end of shift', depending on whether we were marching by day or by night, Often in such cases, I would artfully add a few kilometres, suggesting that the new destination was preferable or more secure. I was driven not only by instinct but also by rational analysis that as long as we're marching in the midst of the mechanised and tank formations, everything is simple and easy. Their tracks and ours do not coincide. Things will turn for the worse when infantry divisions follow the armour and it will no longer be possible to separate their tracks from ours. This was sure eventually to happen since we moved at walking speed, mainly cross country, circling and overcoming local obstacles.

We walked like that for 18 days and nights and slept under a roof only 2 or 3 times. Already then, one of us, Stankiewicz, I think, predicted that real problems and woes would begin only when we reach the 'French' regions France.

What did we then know of that French France?

As we were beginning our march, we believed that somewhere on the Loare a new front will be constructed and we will succeed in reaching it. We expected to rejoin the rest of our brigade, which hopefully would have avoided being drawn into the chaos, allowing the reconstruction of the original formation. Soon, however, we heard the word 'armistice' and found that it was in fact signed. Much later, we discovered that there were now 'two Frances', one free and one under German occupation. Free? Well, perhaps not, but at least unoccupied.

We also heard the whispered news circulating among the French that the UK is continuing the war and even that some Polish forces have reached it.

Not all was lost as yet! (Maczek, *op. cit.*, p. 114–117, 119)

General Franciszek Skibiński, a member of the same party, described his adventures in his book *1st Armoured Division* (Warsaw, 1959) as follows:

The news that an armistice had apparently been signed did not alter our situation in any way. We were convinced that both the UK and Poland would remain in a state of war with Germany. It only encouraged us to speed up our march.

We farewelled Mrs de Serre and her daughter, thanking them for their friendship and courage. We had dinner, and then arranged for a guide, a chubby grandma, who would lead us across country to a ford at Labussière. She agreed to join our war and we formed ourselves into a battle group, led by a vanguard at whose head marched her 10-year-old grandson. Behind him came grandma armed with an enormous umbrella, disguising her combatant status with a basket swung from a shoulder.

Our well-rested and well-fed group of five marched behind this vanguard.

When we reached the edge of the forest without encountering the enemy, grandma hid us under cover and alone advanced on Labussière.

An hour later, she returned without having suffered losses but bringing a negative report, viz. that Labussière is occupied by the Germans, that there is a sentry post on the bridge and much traffic along the highway.

We had to try to find a river crossing. We sent our guide home, insisting that she accept payment for her efforts. She shed a tear in farewelling us and went back home. We now held a council of war to which we also invited a farmer working at a nearby vineyard.

Issuing an invitation to the farmer turned out to be an excellent idea. He was an ex-soldier who exhibited a great interest in our journey and us. He seriously considered our options and advised against attempting a bridge crossing but instead to use the locks which crossed the canal in numerous places and were not indicated on maps. He pointed out one lock in particular, near the village of Veuvey, with which he was familiar. He then treated us to afternoon tea and offered to guide us to the high-tension power line that was to lead us into Veuvey.

We naturally accepted the offer with gratitude and our farmer led us across difficult country, through a forest, along very steep paths. Quite late in the evening we reached the power line and farewelled the guide. We now marched alone.

After crossing the Loare, we finally lost the feeling that the enemy was pressing us from all directions. We felt very happy and began to behave as if nothing threatened us anymore. Even the landowner in St Georges could not succeed in changing our mood when he told us that there are also small numbers of Germans on this side of the river and that motorcycle patrols occasionally come into St Georges. We simply refused to believe such bad news. After all, there are limits!

We ate a fine dinner and some of us dared to mail telegrams from the local postoffice to relatives or friends, penning, 'I'm in good health. Meet up with you soon'. As a superstitious being, I wondered whether all this did not amount to 'leaping before you look'.

Driven by inner anxiety, we hired a one-horse cart so as to travel more quickly towards England and drove at about ten kilometres in an hour. Then, not giving up, we marched several hours until dusk, reaching the vicinity of Boën where we lodged with a farmer.

General Maczek's party then reached Clermont-Ferrand where it met with the top echelon of the French army:

Clermont-Ferrand gave the typical impression of a city visited by some catastrophe of historical dimensions. It was dirty, littered and full of quaint civilian and military characters, crowded with soldiers and refugees. People camping in the streets. The railway station changed into a vast dormitory filled to capacity.

Our group of five fitted into the general mood well. Hair uncropped, bodies unbathed for a month, dilapidated uniforms, dirty worn shoes, clearly showing traces of the many kilometres of crossed marshes and river fords, loaded up with beggar-like gear. The general and I, moreover, without berets which we lost long ago in some forest or other. An officer felt shame stepping out dressed like this and with his head uncovered.

Almost immediately after getting out of the car, we came across a group of acquaintances – French officers from Coëtquidan, members of the French-Polish Mission. We badgered them for news and felt happy that fate delivered them to us.

Our enthusiasm was in fact unfounded. The Mission had been disbanded several days earlier and its members demobilised. General Dénain remained voluntarily in his property under German occupation. General Faury was thought to be in Clermont. All Polish forces had long ago left France, having been evacuated to the UK at the end of June. We could not obtain any information about our battle-engaged forces: the 1st Grenadiers' Division, 2nd Rifle Division and the Podhalańska Brigade. Likewise, nothing was known about any Polish military or diplomatic missions left behind by the Polish government which was now in England.

Feeling highly disappointed, we said goodbye to the French and, not quite believing what we were told, decided to seek more trustworthy information in the city. In particular, we treated with contempt the notion that there was no longer any Polish representation on the French general staff. We considered this kind of thing totally

unlikely in view of the fact that all the Polish battle units – some three divisions in all – have remained on French territory.

And so we went, dirty, ragged, without headgear, but with pistols on our belts.

Half an hour later – just a trifle – we were on one of the main streets and noticed a building with a tricolour and a sign: *Etat Major* (Staff). We went in as the guard pondered for a while whether to admit us, then presented arms. We walked up a staircase covered with a red carpet. As we reached the mezzanine, we heard numerous footsteps and the ringing of spurs and saw a sizeable body of officers coming down and at its head – general Weygand!. The general stopped and when Maczek reported to him, he knew immediately who Maczek was and what formation he commanded. He than uttered a few pleasant words and retraced a few steps to address his chief of staff, asking him to take care of us. Through a window, we saw him get into a car, which flew the pennant of the supreme commander, and drive off with an escort of motorcyclists in black leather.

We presented our wishes to the chief of staff. Firstly, we wanted to know about the Polish diplomatic representatives and Polish frontline formations. Then, about the arrears of pay and assistance with the fastest possible passage to England.

The colonel reacted to our plans to travel to the UK with hostility. He observed that we must have failed to understand the existing realities. France is now in fact unofficially in a state of war with Great Britain, since the British Navy sunk two French battleships: the 'Dunkerque' and the 'Strassbourg' in Oran harbour. We quickly realised that one had to abandon the idea of obtaining any assistance from either the Polish authorities or the French, who were by then enemies of Great Britain.

Some time passed before we fully comprehended the internal divisions characterising the French public opinion.

We were now no longer in the forest and started to encounter real problems. Although general Faury of his own accord and through his friendship for us Poles assumed the mantle of a protector and did whatever he could for us, his help in fact did not amount to much.

The old man invited us to breakfast, then placed us in a camp opened especially for those French officers who lost contact with their units. The camp was located below the volcanic mountain Puy-de-Dôme and was given the poetic name of La Fontaine du Berger – sheppard's spring. Even though we were accepted there with full honours, given quarters in the management's house and fed in the staff mess, we soon saw that the entire camp, together with major Foucher, its C.O., was 100% pro-Petain and anti-British.

All our requests, repeated daily, to be officially transferred to Marseille remained unsatisfied. Day after day responses were postponed. All that proved possible was the establishment, with the help of general Faury, of an information bureau in Aurillac to which we sent the late-arrivals from among our Brigade survivors. The Aurillac facility was instructed to send our Brigade troops to consulates in Marseille and Toulouse which continued to function, albeit unoficially. Our plan was to eventually organise, with their assistance, passages for our soldiers to the UK.

The chalice of our disappointment spilled over with two tears. The first came in the form of a discrete suggestion that we should wear civilian clothes, since Polish uniforms upset both the Petain faction and the... German mission. All this, in the face of our efforts to proudly wear our uniforms in long marches behind the German lines and our pride at having achieved our intended objectives...

The second tear was even more painful. In a round about way, through his adjutant, major Foucher ordered us not to leave the camp and remain within one kilometre of the fence. We became very angry; are we being interned? We immediately said

a very cool goodbye to Major Foucher who did not dare to ask where we were going, but said goodbye to General Faury with great warmth.

BONNIE SCOTLAND

There are four reasons why the period between the summers of 1940 and 1944, when the Division was stationed in Scotland, proved very important for its subsequent history. Firstly, Scotland offered a shelter to troops that wanted to continue fighting the Germans after the defeat of France. Secondly, the division was restructured in Scotland in accordance with the best contemporary models and equipped with modern arms. Thirdly, the period of almost four years was used to carry out intensive training which further enhanced the already high qualifications of 'Maczek's soldiers'. Finally, Scotland offered the soldiers not only a temporary place of residence and a chance to prepare for future battles, but also a very special kind of home.

For each of the soldiers, the thorny path from the occupied France to Scotland comprised a bulky chapter of dangerous adventures. They travelled along many sea routes. One 'Maczek's tourist' remembers it as follows:

> We sailed on merchant ships or passenger liners and followed a very roundabout course because the German U-boats were not idle. Our ships sailed without escorts. We provided antiaircraft defence, using machineguns smuggled aboard when the French demanded their return before boarding. They were the only antiaircraft defence at our disposal, but their usefulness was probably marginal. Fortunately, German attacks did not occur.
>
> The SS 'Sobieski' reached Plymouth; other destination ports were also available in west England. We spent the first night in Hydock Park, a racecourse, near Liverpool, then went by train to Scotland. Three groupings of military camps were established south of Glasgow: one in Biggar, one in Crawford and one in Peebles, which included a military hospital.

Soldiers who succeeded in evacuating from the USSR also eventually reached Scotland, some of them having suffered unbelievable adventures. Captain Ryszard Dembiński remembers:

> I joined general Maczek's division late in 1942. We arrived from Russia. My recollections differed strongly from those of my colleagues who served in the division since 1940. The two Russian years were not very pleasant and taught us how to survive, even how to steal. In Scotland, everything was different. We met up with the 'lords' who were already well established, well dressed and well integrated while we were young and a little wild. Most of us were eighteen or nineteen, initially very curious of the Polish army, meeting at last! The army in which we served in Russia was miserably poor by comparison.
>
> The 1st Armoured division was a conglomerate: it included older people who crossed many frontiers to join Polish forces in the French campaign and us – the young ones from Russia who did not simply fly in by airliners! Those who were here for two years or more certainly bid us a hearty welcome. Friendliness was the hallmark of our relations. This was not a snotty army!
>
> Who were those troopers here, on the spot? Mainly members of the intelligentsia who had to cross a number of frontiers in escaping from Poland. We, however, were mainly young boys taken prisoner by the Russians or condemned to the gulags, sons of soldier-settlers, townfolk and peasants. Very few classifiable as intelligentsia. We arrived as the division was being formed. I myself joined in 1942 and was assigned to

the Armoured Reconnaissance regiment which included people who had never seen a motorcycle, let alone a motorcar. These boys from the distant Polesie who had never been outside their district were now subjected to accelerated transformation. They needed to learn radio communications and car driving. An armoured division soldier needed to possess considerable knowledge. When today I remember those days, I marvel at the Polish ability to adapt to a variety of conditions. In Russia, in order to survive, one had to prove to be able to steal, to act as a bandit, but here we were plugged into high technology, which, one would think, would frighten and paralise these youths. Our regiment had 800 soldiers, 500 of whom came from the USSR. As early as 1943, during the war games with the Canadians, it became evident that all these boys would give a good account of themselves.

One element contributed strongly to the moral strength and fighting ability of the division's soldiers, viz. the fact that they were all volunteers who were not pressured to enlist. Moreover, it took considerable ingenuity to gain assignment to one's preferred unit as explained by Captain Deimel:

As mentioned earlier, everyone in the division was a volunteer. No one was drafted or pressed-in. Alongside soldiers from Poland, the division included Polish volunteers from Argentina, Brazil, Canada and other countries, as well as the USA, before it joined the war.

The first contacts with the Scottish population went very well. Mjr Z. Kozak remembers:

We have to distinguish two periods. The first embraced the years when we were stationed in Scotland, the second – the liberation of Europe. We were very popular among the Scots. I remember that once, when I drove into a small town, boys and girls ran after me, wanting my autograph. *A Polish soldier* had come! That in itself obliged one to behave properly.

The manner in which Polish soldiers were accepted by the local community determined the mutual relations and atmosphere. The level of acceptance experienced by the division's soldiers differed significantly from that experienced by soldiers of other formations, as Captain Mieczkowski recalls:

The British treated us very differently from the French. Their attitude towards the war was diametrically different. They were calm, self-possessed, kind and cheerful. Ladies treated us to sandwiches, chocolates and cups of tea. The manner in which they cared for us was a delight and contrasted strongly with that of the messy, petrified French. The Scots were even more friendly and that friendship continues to this day. The relations with the civilian population were uncommonly friendly. A marvelous proof of this is the letter of thanks penned by the mayor of Bridlington which, in farewell bidding us, stressed our exceptional qualities and friendly behaviour. The Poles, who followed the Canadian, New Zealand and English troops stationed there earlier, charmed the population of that seaside resort. They especially captivated the English and Scottish women with their gallantry and their looks. Kissing ladies' hands – quite unknown in the west, was most appreciated by the opposite sex even by those who may have been disappointed later. There were not too many Polish – Scottish and Polish – English marriages, yet children were born here and there.

Life was particularly interesting in the small garrisons in Scotland. One would find there movie houses where, holding hands, soldiers would lead their beloveds and would go dancing every evening. Girls loved madly these sometimes over-groomed Poles, dressed in slightly broadened, quite irregular trousers. Communication succeeded

even if by gesture. After some time, they learned a little English and told exciting tales of their war adventures.

The Scots understood that the Polish forces have elected to adopt Scotland as their surogate fatherland. After all, we were cut off from home and families, always dreaming of returning to Poland. We were the only allied army to be stationed in Scotland. America had not yet entered the war; there were only a handful of French troops, while Great Britain acted as a redoubt, defending the freedom of all Europe. The Scots realised all this. We used to spend Christmases as guests of Scottish families. Firm friendships were born in those few years.

Daily existence ranged between extremes and its fair description calls for the pen of a great writer. Great Britain was fighting a war which imposed serious restrictions on its civilian population. Yet the war did not really reach Scotland and life in small Scottish towns and villages continued to give the appearance of 'normality'. At the same time, continuous intensive training was preparing us for future battles. Waiting for the very infrequent news from our homeland, which came by roundabout paths via Turkey or Portugal, formed yet another important aspect of our existence, as Lt Col. (then Officer Cadet) W. Kohutnicki recalls:

I was very busy all the time and certainly was never bored. When in need of recreation, I used to go to Duns. Once, I met two ladies who invited me for a cup of coffee. They shared a residence; their husbands were away, serving in the army. One was a captain. Both ladies had children. Both used to go out to visit friends for a game of cards while I baby-sat. As an occupation, baby-sitting was perhaps better than sitting in a Nissen hut or in a crowded canteen, drinking beer or playing poker. I preferred spending time with the Scots. As a reward, I would be served a cup of coffee or chocolate or something else. The ladies came home late, and then I would depart for my army hut.

On weekends, I used to go to Edinburgh every other week. We used to travel free in those days, having been given passes and travel warrants. Trips to Edinburgh were associated with some problems since one had to find overnight quarters; the return bus to Duns and the camp did not run till the next day, Sunday.

We remained in Duns from early 1943 until mid June, then moved to practice ranges in southern England, in the vicinity of Sudbury. Intensive training went on until September. We were very busy and leave was not granted.

Then we went back to Scotland, this time to Kelso where I was allowed, for the first time, to stay in private quarters, sharing them with 2nd Lt Roman Sikora. The quarters were very pleasant; the owner worked in a bank, was married and had two children. The atmosphere was very family-centred. For the first time also, now as a 2nd lieutenant, I was able to dine in the Officer's Mess (as an officer cadet, previously, I had no right of entry, except by special invitation).

While in Scotland, the division was reshaped into a genuine tank force. Because it now came under British command, it shared the British operational establishment. According to data published by Col. Tadeusz Wysocki, chief of staff of the 10th Motorised Cavalry Brigade in his book *1st Polish Armoured Division 1939–1947. Origins and History*, the fighting strength of the division was 15 000 troops, 300 tanks and 160 artillery pieces.

The quality of its armaments and the level of skill in their employment converted the division into a modern formation, as Lt Col. S. Grabowski recalls:

In Scotland, we were supplied with Mark 1 tanks, but soon heavy Churchill tanks, numbers 13, 14 and 15, were delivered. We were among the first to have them. At the time, the British did not have trained tank drivers or crews. Surprisingly, here was a group of arrivals from Poland, quite well trained, first at home, then in France. We

mastered all these machines very quickly and without difficulty: Mark 1s, Churchills and Valentines, and made ourselves into an armoured formation. The British eyed us with expectation akin to that with which they eyed our Paratroop brigade, which progressed swiftly towards battle readiness and promised to perform well in action.

The training of Polish troops in the UK after 1940 included a variety of combat systems. Gen. Michał Gutowski explains this as follows:

Until 1942, very little was happening in our service in Scotland. I myself attended two courses for secret agents preparing to drop into Poland. In both cases, alas, I ended up in hospital. The first time, a wound received in 1939 opened up; the second, I sprained both feet, virtually on the last day of training. We were taught to use all types of weapons and given instruction in commanding guerilla detachments. After my accidents, however, I was disqualified. After 1942, armoured training proceeded very intensively. Younger officers and NCOs were sent to attend courses at the British centres of Bovington and Lulworth. Older officers, squadron leaders of ranks higher than captain, took tactical training courses at Oxford lasting several weeks. In this way, we gained practical skills in operational use of the equipment currently supplied to the division. The vehicles, even though all were on tracks, were designed to serve different purposes. Tank regiments forming the 10th Cavalry Brigade, equipped with Sherman tanks, were subject to very different tactical use than my 10th Mounted Rifles regiment, equipped with Cromwell tanks. Here, we frequently made use of my 1939 campaign experiences when I was in command of a mounted cavalry squadron. My task then was reconnoitring the battlefield and supplying intelligence to higher command. An analogous task was now assigned to the 10th Mounted Rifles regiment serving as the division's reconnaisance formation, and its ex-cavalry officers, such as Cpt Jerzy Wasilewski and Cpt Herman Cieśliński.

On our arrival in 1940, we made tactical preparations for defence in the event of a German invasion of Scotland. The task was time consuming and in some cases, commanders ordered trees and groves to be cut in order to upgrade defence capacity. The locals wondered but executed their instructions with precision. For a very long time, I regarded Scotland as my second homeland.

Captain Deimel recollects the high standard of training:

The manpower make-up of the Division differed greatly from that of British, Canadian or American forces. It resembled that of other Polish units in France, the UK and the Middle East. The differences sprung from the fact that the soldiers of the division underwent two formational phases in its past: one in Poland, before September 1939 and one in France in 1940. They fought in two campaigns: a tough Polish campaign and another in France – its troops had scattered widely after both. In Scotland, the unit was forming for the third time and that is how it achieved its final structure, enabling it to contribute so well to the victorious campaigns of 1944/45.

The Division was a fascinating conglomerate. Each of us underwent a variety of experiences before joining, and to each of us our own experiences were paramount. We also had endured great hardships and now found ourselves to be members of an organisation where friendly relations prevailed. Our General shared experiences equally dramatic as those of every officer and trooper. All had participated in unusual adventures!

According to Captain Kiwerski, some volunteers from France, even though they were quite within their rights to return to their homes after France's defeat, offered to continue their service:

These 'Frenchmen' whose fathers were mostly Polish peasant-immigrants to France came voluntarily to serve in the division and stayed with it despite the fact that they no longer had any ties with Poland. They proved to be excellent soldiers and patriots. Many were killed.

Poles from other countries also found their way to the Division's units stationed in Scotland. Of course, the troops that originally came from Poland dominated the situation, but the others, too, played an important role, as Capt. Z. Mieczkowski explains:

One of them was Józef Maria Poniatowski, a descendant of a family related to king Stanisław August Poniatowski. His ancestor, Kazimierz Poniatowski, was brother of the king and settled in France after the partitioning of Poland. Prince Józef Maria Poniatowski served in the 1st Armoured regiment and was killed in Holland. A superb young officer.

Joining the division there were also Poles who resided permanently or temporarily outside Poland. Sometimes, they sailed in from very distant lands. Assisting in their arrival were the missions despatched by General Sikorski to the USA, Canada and other countries.

Forming the Division in the UK meant wearing British uniforms and using British equipment, but retaining strictly Polish manpower and structure with regimental traditions and insignia. Practical considerations involving language and organisation required close cooperation, hence the IV British Liaison Mission was attached to the division and given the task of maintaining contact with the British HQ. From the beginning, British Officers acted in Scotland as liaison officers.

Another British initiative aimed at crossing the language barrier, was the 'Sandhurst Connection' described by Major R. Zatorski thus:

In 1943, the British High Command decided to assist in the training of the officer cadres of the Polish Armoured Forces in the United Kingdom by admitting Polish Cadets to the RMC – the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. There are many prominent military and political figures among the graduates of that famous institution. The College trained mounted cavalry cadets until 1940, when it was reformed as the 'Royal Armoured Corps, Officer Cadet Training Unit (Sandhurst)' and converted into an establishment devoted to training a modern armoured officer corps.

Polish candidates were selected on the basis of their knowledge of English and I was lucky to be selected for the first course which lasted from 3rd May to 30th October, 1943 and also included Krzysztof Bauer-Czarnomski, Józef Cyganowski, Adam Kozłowski, Bronisław Marcinkowski (who left early but returned for a later course), Marian Nowakowski, Zbigniew Sztumpf and Jacek Zagórski. I was totally in awe of the high-class establishment, offering training with modern armour, access to gunnery ranges, sophisticated training aids and other facilities providing practical battle experience. Our instructors were all front-line officers and we greatly enjoyed our studies, rendered especially hard by the urgent need to master a highly specialized version of military English language.

Each course consisted of five core units, viz.: Initial Training (mainly infantry training and parade ground drill), Driving and Maintenance (expert tank driving and mechanical skills), Gunnery (tank artillery, machine gun and other weapons' training), Wireless (operating and servicing tank radio equipment) and Tactical Training (basic field tactics and troop command skills). Achieving top ratings in each of these categories was quite difficult. After a six-month course, the Polish contingent graduated with excellent results and each of the Polish seven achieved grades opening a path to commissioned rank. Of the 29 cadets in mixed British-Polish 73rd troop, all of us made

the top ten, with myself and Krzysztof Bauer-Czarnomski graduating respectively as numbers one and two. Since I topped the course, the College granted me the much coveted Belt of Honour.

At the conclusion of the traditional Passing-out Parade in the main square which saw me receive the Belt from the hands of general A.A. Adair, GCO of the Guards Division and the College's Adjutant gallantly rode his white horse up the staircase and into the vestibule of the Old Building, all of us Polish cadets were invited to the Main Office where one of three Polish officers delegated to attend the Sandhurst ceremony by the Polish Army HQ in London read the document nominating all seven of us second lieutenants in the 1st Armoured Division of the Polish Army in the UK. The commissioning document was signed by general Marian Kukiel, then acting as Minister of Defence of the Polish Government in Exile and came as a most welcome surprise to the entire contingent.

With our commission came silver stars to be pinned on the battle dress shoulder pads and the berets as well as regulation officer logbooks but, sadly, no financial allowance for junior officers' uniform, customarily offered to British officers. Second lieutenant's monthly pay at the time amounted to £16.10. Before the end of 1943, three of the October graduates: Jacek Zagórski, Zbigniew Sztumpf and myself were recalled to Sandhurst for a term to serve as course instructors in tank tactics. It's a pleasing thought that our wartime record mirrored our Sandhurst performance with 5 Silver Crosses of Virtuti Militari and 11 Crosses of Valour earned in the subsequent campaign on the Continent.

FRANCE, BELGIUM AND HOLLAND, 1944–45

Normandy 1944 – 'Friendly Fire'

Historians treat the difficulties attending effective co-operation among the various formations of allied forces either as non existent or simply marginal. A deeper study of all the wars fought on the continent of Europe, however, indicates that the coordination of operations even within a single army posed insoluble problems. Equally so – the operational coordination of units belonging to different national armies. The 1st Polish Armoured Division experienced such problems in full measure. From the first moment of landing in Normandy, its units formed part of the Allied Expeditionary Force and as such acted in strict coordination with other allied contingents: British, Canadian and American.

The difficulties in achieving successful coordination had a variety of origins such as language differences, shortage of good quality maps and lack of local terrain knowledge as well as failures of communication systems. English was the language used in the command structure and communications, but by July 1944 not all the division's soldiers were adequately fluent in it. Additional communicational problems arose from the different pronunciation and stress in colloquial speech of the British soldiers coming from the different parts of the Isles and of the Canadians and Americans speaking in their own dialects. Complaints about the inadequacy of maps feature prominently in the memories of the division's soldiers. Failures of radio systems, finally, affected negatively not only the links among the land forces: infantry, armour and artillery, but also those between the ground command and the airforce. We found a variety of accounts describing these problems.

Operational co-operation with the allied forces began even prior to the landing in Europe. Lt Col. Kohutnicki wrote:

> On 19th July 1944, we find ourselves in Aldershot. Here, we fetch the remaining items of equipment and await our marching orders. On 25th July, we leave Aldershot

and drive to ports in the London area. Here, we board various ships, each unit on its own, tracked vehicles, wheeled vehicles, soldiers, etc in separate modules and in this manner, we sail to Normandy. The whole operation is directed by the British until the actual landing in the artificial harbour. Command passes into Polish hands only on French soil, on the way to the assembly area. Radio silence is obligatory. We assemble as regiments and squadrons in the Courseulles-sur-Mer area, in an empty meadow – a few bushes perhaps – and await developments...

Following the landing in Normandy, the cooperative model developed earlier is implemented. Kohutnicki's account continues:

We are finally in Normandy. The Division is concentrated north east of Bayeux and the weather continues to be excellent. All day has passed in inspections, operational briefings and supply and intelligence conferences. Maps are handed out: large and small scale, sketches of enemy positions in different areas, the latter duplicated on all sorts of printing equipment and not always clearly readable. We were also given a plan showing the distribution of enemy forces in the field, together with detailed information about them. The date printed on it shows, however, that the data is two days old. I find it hard to fold these maps in such a way as to fit easily in my hand. Such was my first lesson in preparing for action. Attending a briefing with the regimental commander we were given detailed information about the operational plan, its proposed execution, re-supply situation, evacuation procedures, etc. Some of these were already known earlier. The plan was supposed to be simple and easy to carry out: we have been given detailed information about the enemy, (viz the maps with the data on them). As far as I can remember, only a few antitank guns were marked as located in our assault segment. The plan's execution, too, was clearly outlined: first, the airforce will fly in and bomb the enemy, then the AGRA, i.e. heavy artillery of the Canadian Corps will lay a barrage, detecting and attacking local points of enemy resistance.

Our turn is next: the 2nd Armoured Regiment and the 24th Lancers will move into the clouds of smoke raised by the artillery barrage to destroy the centres of enemy resistance. Operations will be directed by radio.

On 7th August, we drive through Caen to our starting position from which to engage the enemy. In accordance with the plan, about 1 p.m., bomber aircraft appeared. There were many of them and they flew very high, making much noise. It all looked very impressive. The first wave began to drop their bombs.

Surprise took our breath! The bombs were falling not on the German positions but on the AGRA emplacements, the very artillery that was scheduled to support our attack and that of our neighbours – the Canadians. Whether the Germans suffered any losses at all was questionable.

We then went into action, without air and artillery support, but worst of all, deprived of that smoke which was to conceal our moves. We drove in accordance with the plan: Lt Zbigniew Kozak's platoon and mine in the lead. Following us came the squadron's deputy C.O. Lt Roman Sikora. Suddenly, after some 300 metres, Sgt Kisielica's tank on my left came to a stop, the crew bailed out and smoke poured from its engine. My first thought was that the crew failed to prepare the tank properly for action and suffered some defect. Then I looked to the right and to my astonishment saw Sgt Jan Parol's tank stop and burst in flames, its crew, too, jumping out. Unsure about what I was witnessing, I stopped with my tank next to some large bush just as the radio issued reports about the enemy and his positions. My gunner's loud voice then shouted 'what is my target?' and I felt shame at not having seen any enemy at all. To better see what was going on, I stood up in the turret, and used a pair of binoculars, then, obliquely to the right, some 1 000 metres away, I saw two small flames: gunfire.

'Turret to the right!' I shouted but instead, a tremendous explosion blasted me out of the turret and I saw someone jumping out from the loader's hatch. Feeling dazed, I helped the gunner to reach the ground while others, already out of their tanks, gathered around us: some were wounded, others dazed... Making sure that no one was left behind, I began to march to the rear.

Now, enemy artillery sent one barrage after another: guns, mortars, and occasionally antitank guns. One hit a tank already on fire. I rose from the ground and, using a whistle, ordered the crews to move to the rear, indicating direction. We were in a field of tall wheat, unable to see clearly in any direction. Eventually, we reached our motor transport and the wounded were evacuated. I myself was not wounded – the blood on my overalls was someone else's. Standing before a car mirror, I saw a terrible image: no eyebrows, no eyelashes and, worst of all, no moustache. Walking was also difficult: a part of my boot was missing. Someone brought me some grease to use on my hands and face. My hands were already swollen. There was no one in attendance at the first-aid point – the doctor was away treating a badly wounded soldier. Reaching the ambulance, I said goodbye to the Commander of the 3rd platoon, Zbyszek Kozak, who had suffered a leg wound and to the commander of my third tank, the first to burst in flames, Sgt Kisielica.

Colonel Kohutnicki's memories of the first day of the division's operations near Caen in Normandy on 8th August 1944 are complemented by the material in Cpt Zbigniew Mieczkowski's book *Horizons of Memories*:

Of the 51 tanks, comprising the three line squadrons of the regiment, half were destroyed. The 30-tonne Sherman, mass-produced in the USA, had numerous design faults. Having a top speed of a little over 30 km/hr, it was not fit for actions calling for surprise attacks. The attack on 8th August began too early to make use of the smoke cloud raised by the air bombardment. Our 75 mm calibre guns could not penetrate the armour plate of the German Panther and Tiger tanks. Their shells, on the other hand, sliced through our armour as if through butter.

The absurdly soft armour of the Sherman tank did, however, have at least one advantage: when penetrated, it did not produce a shower of deadly splinters inside. Only a single crewman, directly in the path of the projectile, would be killed or wounded.

Once hit, on the other hand, the Sherman took only seconds to burn like a torch. A temperature of some 2000°C is generated when the armour is hit and penetrated, resulting in partial melting of the metal. When the gearbox is hit, oil explodes with a bright flame. What happens when the ammunition, grenades and petrol explode, when the paint bursts into flames, etc, requires no comment. The Sherman hid yet another trap: the covers of the driver's and forward gunner's hatches could not be opened if the barrel of the gun did not point directly forward. Else, the trooper fried alive.

Every turret gunner was instructed that on exiting the tank, the gun should be left in the forward position. Unfortunately, if the gunner was already dead or wounded or if perhaps he lost his nerve, this could not be done.

I saw such an event at Les Champeaux. As I instructed the driver of my tank to proceed along a depression in the ground, Sgt Kos received an order from the squadron leader to take up a firing position. At the time, every squadron included at least one tank with a 17-pounder gun, with greater penetrating capacity than our 75 mm guns; these were nicknamed 'słomki' (straws) in radio jargon. When Captain Władysław Jakubiec ordered: '*Słomki* to lead', Kos detoured around my tank which, as later turned out, stood in the Tiger's blind spot. Passing alongside, Kos drove along a slope, about 20 metres away from us and suddenly I felt a blast of air and saw a flash on his tank

– the shell must have flown over us. Sgt Kos, wounded, jumped out, behind him Corporal Oleksy, the turret gunner. The radio operator was killed. The gun barrel remained pointing towards the expected enemy and the hatches were blocked. Then Oleksy returned and rotated the turret, saving the lives of the driver and the forward gunner. I saw him again the next day among the wounded; he looked ghastly. His face was unrecognisable; he survived, however, and was decorated with the well-earned Virtuti Militari cross.

The losses in tanks suffered by our regiment on 8th August 1944 were the greatest in any of the Division's units in a single battle. Over the entire period of its operations in 1944/5, the Regiment lost 176% of its officer contingent – the highest percentage in the Division.

In platoons, each made up of three tanks, the commander always led and was often killed. The wounded returned after their convalescence and would be sent out to fight again. The Regiment's overall losses were lower than those of either the infantry battalions or the 10th Dragoons, yet in the France-Germany campaign which lasted nine months, out of some 700 soldiers, 277 were killed or wounded, 18 of them twice. Among the operational first line troops of the Regiment, therefore, every other soldier was killed or wounded.

Near Caen, we attacked alongside the 24th Lancers on our right flank. They were lucky to have encountered some enormous ground depression in their path – possibly an abandoned sand quarry, which they were unable to cross and were therefore forced to follow us. Even so, they lost six tanks.

Difficulties in coordinating the operations of certain units began as soon as we landed in Normandy. Col. H. Weber experienced them personally:

Anyone who saw air bombardment never forgets it. The world goes all black. Those above don't see the ground, those below see even less.

When under bombardment from our own airforce, we hid under our tanks, which shook up, down, and sideways; one had to pray that they would settle back in the same place. We suffered big losses in men in such air raids.

Many of the division's soldiers had similar experiences, Major Z. Kozak remembers:

According to the operational plan, the American strategic airforce was to bomb the area ahead of our foreground zone, which included both our own forces and the Canadian Corps. The air raid was to be followed by a barrage from our own artillery. Then we, the 2nd Armoured, were to attack, moving into clouds of smoke. As it happened, American bombers did arrive but they dropped their bombs on our artillery, which therefore failed to lay a barrage. Our artillery suffered great losses. Then, a tiny 'Kubuś' – as we called the artillery observer's single-engined plane, flew below the third echelon of bombers and began to wave its wings. The bombers got the message and flew on without dropping any bombs on the emeny. And so, we went in to attack without artillery support.

The victims of such poor coordination of the ground with the air force were not only our own soldiers, but British and Canadian units as well. Cpt W. Deimel witnessed one incident:

The attack against the Quesney forest was to have been preceded by an air raid by Flying Fortresses, two thousand in all, in groups of two hundred. Each group was led by an aircraft dropping smoke markers. The first eight groups performed according to the plan, the leaders of the two remaining groups dropped their markers in a wrong spot and the bombs of four hundred Fortresses fell on the allied units below.

I myself stood ready for battle with my mortars. The previous night, a Canadian captain came to ask for our target coordinates since he had orders to move into our positions once we were gone. After the bombing raid, a messenger from the Canadian battalion brought the news that the Canadians would not be able to take over from us since their unit was practically wiped out.

The 1st Anti-aircraft artillery regiment suffered the division's highest losses on that day. It was deployed precisely on the spot where the allied bombs fell.

Personally, I have not experienced the *'friendly fire'* but I know that it happened several times. The Americans were the principal executors of these hapless bombings. I think that the British pilots showed greater targetting precision.

Communication difficulties among the allied units did not only occur in radio traffic. They showed up even in personal contacts, as experienced by Captain Andrzej Maszkowski who served at the time as a liaison officer:

I was appointed liaison officer of the 10th Mounted Rifles regiment in July 1944, in the Bayeux region. The regimental CO, Major Jan Maciejowski ordered me as follows: 'You will determine along the general advance route the position of the rear echelon of the Canadian brigade which we are to follow and report it to me'. A clear, simple task, but then I had to face a devilishly black night, clouds of dust and a route permanently clattered with tank columns among which I moved fearfully in my scoutcar. Anyone of these heavy monsters could suddenly, on being passed, squash my tiny bug. And so, here I go, passing one column after another but unable to identify the one I wanted. Finally, I find a large contingent of military police and traffic controls along the track – surely they will be able to help. Immediately, I find myself queried by a few MPs who notice my foreign accent. Suspicion, checks of documents and a volley of prying questions. Eventually, I manage to extricate myself. Yet, this had been my first ever battle task... hell! With relief, I reach our assembly area near Caen and locate our arriving columns. This sight always inspired peace and confidence.

And then, those nights of driving around, discharging various duties during the Normandy battle. Contacting the Poles, Canadians, frontline units and other formations far away in the rear. Mainly at night, when the tanks 'slept'. In the morning, when they 'awoke', one had to be at hand and move alongside them. The *no man's land* at night was menacing: total darkness, dust, bumpy tracks traversed blind, shots nearby, mysterious noises and occasionally the terrible awareness that one was driving over dead bodies. My excellent driver, Cpl Wroński, not always fully convinced about the need for all those nightly excursions, looked darkly at me sometimes, saying: 'It looks like you're trying to finish me off, Sir...' God be with him – it is thanks to him that we both survived and somehow returned to base.

Maintaining radio communications would become more difficult when units lost contact with the head formation due to some technical failure or other cause. In his book *Horizons of memories*, Captain Zbigniew Mieczkowski notes that the range of tank radios was limited to some 20 kilometres:

The first weeks of the Normandy campaign were the hardest. First rate units of the 9th SS Panzer Hohenstauffen and the 12th SS Panzer Hitlerjugend divisions, made up of boys born in 1926, and therefore fanatical Hitler supporters, and the 21st Panzer division constituted some of the best formations we encountered. Hard battles were fought over the smallest piece of land. Classical armoured operations began only with the Division's swoop on Montormel and Chambois.

It opened with the move of the 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade, led by the 10th Mounted Rifles Regiment – the division's reconnaissance unit – aiming to capture the cross-

ings on the Dives River. The 2nd Armoured Rgt, acting as the leading unit on the right axis, with our 3rd squadron securing the right flank, began its advance on 15th August. The route led through Soignolles, Rouvres, Sassy and Jort. We drove at full speed, seemingly into a vacuum, without deploying outwards. Suddenly, my tank lurched and the driver stopped along the edge of the road. It turned out that the track-tensioning wheel was cracked. Repairs had to be done by the workshop company, which was a long way behind, in the rear of the column. For about 2 hours, squadrons of the 2nd Armoured Regiment, 24th Lancers, 10th Dragoons, infantry and artillery units detoured around us until, finally, there was complete silence.

We were alone, in no man's land, in absolute solitude! Just before sundown, the wait was finally broken by the arrival of a field hospital, which erected its tents in the vicinity. We began to feel a little more cheerful. The workshop company eventually arrived and after a swift replacement of the wheel, we were ready to resume our march. The remaining daylight of a long August day made it possible to follow the traces of tracks of the armoured columns that went ahead. Our radios did not have adequate range to contact our regiment and it was just before nighttime that we finally came across the HQ of the 10th Mounted Rifles regiment in Jort. I reported to the C.O., Major Jan Maciejowski and asked for directions on how to reach my own regiment. Maciejowski, a dashing superb officer, ordered us to spend the night with his regiment, placed us in the care of Lt Bolesław Ruppert who invited me to dinner. Courtesies of this kind towards guests from other units did not happen often in action and I was happy to sit next to Ruppert's armoured scoutcar; he commanded the regiment's reconnaissance platoon. I had known him since France in 1940, when he served as instructor in the Officer Cadet School. Stranger still, I also knew his driver who was cooking dinner, frying some murdered chicken. It was Jan Ciechanowski, a son of our ambassador in the USA. Johnny did not wish to be enrolled in the Officer Cadet School and served as a simple mounted rifleman. That dinner of ours was something extraordinary – under a starlit sky, against a glow of fires on distant horizons. Our chat was finally broken by a German air raid. At daybreak, I rejoined my regiment, which had already crossed to the other bank of the Dives River. Tragically, both my hosts: Major Jan Maciejowski and Lt Bolesław Ruppert were killed in action only a few days later.

The unique traits and principles on which the commanding officer built up the morale of his subordinates emerged most clearly in the way the Division performed in battle. They are the subject of numerous, detailed military histories of individual formations as well as a recurring theme in many published memoirs of the Division's soldiers. We relate below only a few aspects of these operations as reflected in the memories of those who responded to our requests for interviews.

Losses in personnel were an important aspect of the Division's battle operations. Local victories and campaigns benefitting the allies were very costly in human lives. The division lost about one third of its troops in battle: some 5 000 were killed or wounded out of a total of 16 000. Frontline units, of course, bore considerably greater losses than the supply detachments. Even these, however, so called rear echelons suffered losses through bombings and mortar and artillery fire while re-supplying the frontline forces. Many quartermaster branch officers and other ranks were killed during the Chambois battle, among them Cpt Jan Kurowski, the 10th Cavalry Brigade's Quartermaster. In front line units, every other soldier was killed or wounded.

Another aspect which calls for inclusion here is the extremely high level of determination exhibited by our troops when carrying out their duties. An extensive excerpt from Colonel Kohutnicki's memoirs illustrates how these attitudes manifested themselves in practice:

We were ordered to capture a hill dominating the surrounding terrain. With considerable difficulty, attacking German infantry and tanks, we first captured an intermediate target, viz a slightly lower hill. At the time, our 2nd Armoured regiment formed a battle group together with the 8th Infantry batallion. We encountered the enemy while advancing towards the target. As a lead platoon, I had under my command an infantry detachment, which dismounted in wooded country and searched right and left for the Germans.

At one stage, the infantry sent a message that a German tank was concealed behind a thicket. We approached the location but, seated as I was in my turret some 3 metres above ground, roughly level with tree crowns, I could see nothing. My gunner, on the other hand, saw an enemy tank about 100 m away. We approached a bit nearer and I gave an order to fire. Three or four shells found their mark. The infantry then joined us and as a group went to check on the results. I saw that yes, our armour-piercing shots did score hits – there were grooves in the tanks' armour – but the tanks were in fact undamaged. I climbed up and looked into the driver's compartment. Spying out a German pistol, I tried to seize it when someone grabbed me by the foot. I turned around and saw my squadron leader and heard him shout angrily: 'Forward, forward!'. The pistol stayed where it was.

During the subsequent advance, the regiment had been ordered to cut off the German escape route and link with the American formations in the vicinity of Chambois. We drove up some high rise without contacting the enemy and stood waiting for fuel and ammunition supplies, which, regrettably, failed to show up. Our current task had been given high priority by the command staff and demanded swift execution. Sometime around 23.00 hrs, new orders were issued and I attended the briefing. The regiment's C.O., Col. Stanisław Koszutski said: 'The 2nd Armoured Regiment, together with the 8th Rifle Batallion and a battery of antitank artillery, is to advance on Chambois. We shall move in a single column, infantry on tanks, without lights. 1st squadron in the lead, departure at midnight, following re-supply with petrol and ammunition'. Petrol, however, failed to arrive.

The distance to Chambois, our target, was about 12 km. Travelling in the dark and along country lanes, we had to find our way through enemy units. We knew we would be surrounded by their forces.

A few minutes after 02.00 hrs, we moved off. Ahead of me drove Lt Zygmunt Przyborowski with his platoon. German aircraft flew in and dropped flares but failed to spot us. We drove along a narrow country track, through a forest, through some thickets and narrow passes between hills, until we reached the road leading to Vimoutiers. There was much traffic in both directions on the road and the Germans were in full view. We followed the road for some 200 metres, in parallel with some German troops. They did not fire, probably taking us for their own troops; neither did we. Then we had to cut across their truck and motorcar columns and the German traffic control stopped their own traffic to allow us to cross. Later, when we were well on our way, a single German patrol realising who we were opened fire. We did not respond, so perhaps they felt ashamed and discontinued. We continued in a single column along the narrow track, between small hills and steep escarpments. We came across some farm buildings and in the yard, found German troops. It proved impossible to drive into the grounds, which were full of assorted vehicles. Nevertheless, we attempted to deploy in the orchard but movement was hampered by a dense grove of pear trees, apple trees and bushes. I noticed a German officer, without headgear, pistol in hand, leading a loose detachment of about 8 troopers, under fire by our men. The officer fired his pistol at my tank but collapsed, hit by our infantry bullets. 'Can one attack a tank with a pistol? In fact, that is just what my compatriots did in the defence of Warsaw in 1939...'.

In this unpleasant situation, airplanes suddenly arrived. There were about ten of them hurling down rockets. Miraculously, no tank was hit. Our infantry, alas, suffered losses in killed and wounded.

As dawn break, we continue advancing in a column. Unexpectedly, we come across some German headquarters. The squadron leader orders the column to deploy: infantry forward, tanks behind, along tracks and trails, but press ahead and fast!

When, finally, I emerged from the orchard and bushes, I had to stop to avoid driving over our own troops attacking the enemy. Zygmunt Przyborowski with his platoon had already passed behind the farm buildings. Panic ruled in the yard. The Germans were completely bewildered, trying to escape...

About midday, we ran out of fuel and had to camp in a meadow, partially camouflaged. We reached Les Champeaux, some 9 km from Trun. We were about 10 km short of our destination: Chambois.

News comes that petrol will be delivered in an hour's time. During filling up, I stood on the engine hatch and listened to distant gunfire, without paying much attention to it. Suddenly, someone yelled that German tanks are near. I scan the landscape with my binoculars but find nothing.

Our squadron leader deployed the only tank we had with a 17-pounder gun. He ordered it to move forward and open fire. As I noted earlier, firing at the German Tiger tanks was quite ineffective... Standing on the engine hatch, I suddenly saw one of the tanks on my side get hit and burst into flames. 'I will be next...' crossed my mind, and indeed, we were hit. I was dazed. The jerrican from which I was refilling the tank exploded in my hands and burning petrol spilled all over me. I jumped to the ground and rolled about to extinguish the fire. Someone came to my aid and when I realised that I was not on fire anymore, I jumped a fence, possibly breaking my lifetime record in the high jump. I found myself in some shell crater and contemplated my record jump, prompted as it was by fear. A moment later, I am joined in my hole by a wounded trooper, who lies down alongside me. Officers are not allowed to experience fear, so I took care of him. Cool, calm and collected, I bandaged his wound and returned to our tanks. The German Tiger, however, collected other victims: on return, I found that my great friend Lt Zygmunt Przyborowski had been killed, caught outside his tank. He lost half his face. I was greatly affected and cried a little.

An hour later, the march continued. Still in daylight, we reached hill 262, later nicknamed *Maczuga* (*the Mace*). We took our positions but later, towards the evening or at night, we had to move elsewhere. We fought there for two or three days, frequently changing firing positions and often diverted against alternative targets. In the course of the battle on 21st August, my platoon was ordered to defend the squadron's right flank; by then, we had already been encircled by the enemy for more than a day. My position offered good visibility: I saw below us an orchard and was able to closely observe enemy movement among the trees, Their infantry tried all kinds of tricks to reach us. We used our machineguns against them and none actually succeeded.

Suddenly, we were face to face with a Panther or a Tiger which settled in position and opened fire. Again, the tank alongside mine was hit. It did not burst in flames but had to scamper quickly so as to avoid a second hit. 'I'll be next...' I thought and of course, another shot came and we're aflame. No one wounded, except me. Feeling pain in my right shoulder, I jumped to one side and applied a dressing, asking someone to inject a shot of morphine supplied with it. The morphine was ineffective and I felt very low. I walked up to the C.O. and reported my wound. Obviously, with only one active arm, I could not climb in or out of the tank turret. What a difference: sitting and fighting from inside the tank as against battling on foot, as infantry. I felt it all keenly throughout the night – every single shot (and there were many): small callibre,

thin, thicker, whizzing, crying, howling, each aimed at us, the wounded ones. Heavy explosions caused the earth to dislodge and fall over us and we had to hug the ground even more tightly. Eventually, I walked over to the regimental HQ and found shelter under a disabled tank. Personally, what I feared most when inside my tank, were the armour-piercing shells, though fortunately, there were not too many of them. Now, however, any bullet, even pistol bullets represented a risk. 'Poor infantry...' I thought.

Next day, I was evacuated to a hospital.

Captain Zbigniew Mieczkowski gives the following account of the battle on the *Maczuga* (hill 262) in his book *Horizons of Memories*:

We formed defensive lines, taking firing positions along tops of hills with infantry distributed among the tanks, For three days, we blocked the Germans' way out, repelling their repeated attempts to break through or get around our positions. A group of over 5 000 German POWs, more than twice our own strength, assembled in a paddock and under guard of our tanks, gradually melted under a hail of their own mortar and artillery shells.

One gory episode which has remained in my memory concerns a moment when our squadron filed out to counter an expected assault of the German 2nd SS Panzer division – the same division whose headquarters we wiped out at Les Champeaux. Its aim was to open out an exit route for other formations. We were already under fire. To the right of my tanks, Major Andrzej Zawisza emplaced his antitank battery. Tall, calm, cane in hand, he strolled among his guns positions.

Our infantry was spread out in the foreground. Suddenly, one of the attacking German tanks was hit and burst in flames, but one of its tracks unfortunately pinned down one of our soldiers. The man's terrible screams and pitiful moans stayed in my ears for a long time.

After the battle, I went walking along the road passing below the slope of our hill. The massacre we had dealt out to German columns could hardly be described. Numerous dead men and horses and mountains of destroyed motor vehicles and equipment made a deep impression. A dreadful sweet smell of death spread over the entire scene; it stayed with us for weeks. Our bulldozers eventually cleared paths through that crushed 'army of supermen' and opened up our exit routes from the *Maczuga*. A week's break in operations allowed deeper reflection and well-deserved rest.

Closing of the Falaise couldron is generally reported as resulting from the meeting between the 10th Dragoon Regiment and American units at Chambois. Complete encirclement, however, occurred only when the Polish forces defending Montormel joined up with the Canadian forces. The feat was performed by Officer Cadet Jerzy Niewinowski, commander of the reconnaisance platoon of the 2nd Armoured Regiment. Lt Jerzy Niewinowski, decorated with the Virtuti Militari Cross and the Cross of Valour, elected after the war to return to the Polish Peoples' Republic, where, after extensive interrogation, he died very young. There, he wrote an account of his experiences, embracing the whole period of his wartime progress, beginning with the time when, as a student of the Lwów Polytechnic, he crossed frontiers to reach France in 1940. Here we record his story:

We waited for the Canadian armoured divisions to come to our aid. Unfortunately however, they were unable to break through the German defences. With us, on the other hand, in view of the shortage of ammunition and losses in men, every hour counted.

Nights terrified us since, over the unending roar of artillery, one heard the wounded and burnt troopers howling in pain; the first-aid station was nearby. Our situation was becoming more critical by the hour. Finally, the regiment's C.O., Lt Col. S. Koszutski called me:

'Jurek', he said, 'in our present situation I am not giving you an order but someone has to push through to meet the Canadian armour advancing towards us. You understand our plight and I trust you will do what is necessary'.

I am sure I winced a bit and hesitated for a second or two – the wish to accept the task equated in my mind with a wish to ask the crews of three reconnaisance tanks to commit suicide. In the end, however, the habit of military discipline prevailed.

Yes, colonel, I gave a stickler's reply and went off to talk to my crews and pass on this singular 'non-order'.

Walking away, my brain was intensely busy – we are, after all, completely encircled by German tanks and infantry, what route can we take to both accomplish the task and save our skins? I had to consult with my boys but neither they nor I felt happy. Living humans have a strong self-preservation instinct – one crewman cursed aloud, and then silence reigned for a time. My own crew, by the way, was well known for its outspokenness. The radio-operator/turret gunner Mikołaj Hulewicz was a quick-witted, intelligent soldier, always ready to offer a mass of critical comments. My driver, Zygmunt Kuszewski, was a highly perceptive judge of situations. The forward gunner, finally, Czesio Lenik was an undemonstrative, ever cold-blooded person.

My own crew was thus the 'soul' – the eyes and ears, of the whole reconnaisance section and its behaviour in action determined the success or otherwise of all our endeavours.

After a moment of expectant silence, the boys came alive and their brains began to tick – how should we do it? Eventually, we agreed on the method. We would drive next to the farmhouse where we hd earlier taken over a bunch of POWs. The route was overgrown with hedges, which would provide solid cover. German tanks would not find it easy to aim.

We checked our armaments and moved off. I adopted the following formation: my tank in the lead, the other two to provide cover from infantry fire – the tank immediately behind covering the area to the left of us, the end tank – the area to the right, each firing, when required, all of its three heavy machineguns in unison. I directed that as of now there was to be no firing except in emergency since success lay in creeping quietly without gunfire or noise.

The first hedge – silence. The second hedge – I saw behind it three German tanks on watch but said nothing to my crew. The distance to the German tanks was only 100 – 150 metres. I ordered the driver to turn left behind a hedge and to advance quietly. Not very far along, we discovered Canadian tanks just ahead, on top of a rise.

What now? Why shouldn't our own forces mow us down?

We reached the next hedge and waited. My head was spinning with speculations until, suddenly, I found the answer.

The Canadians approached a bit closer but we remained hidden behind the hedge. I jumped out and showed myself to them, madly waving two rescue pennants (which we would hoist when disabled). I really waved with all my strength! The allies ceased firing and turret hatches began to open up. And so, we were recognised as 'their own' – I was very happy.

A portly major, taller than I, jumped down from his tank, hugged me and gave me a hearty kiss. Polish and Canadian troops linked up!

I radioed the good news to the regimental CO and transmitted the map coordinates. In reply, he instructed me to ask the Canadians to send us supplies as quickly as possible: ammunition, fuel, medicines and food. I delivered this urgent request personally to the Canadian HQ which quickly put together a supply column and all of us together – the Canadian tank regiment, the supply transports and my platoon – drove back to the *Maczuga*.

In the meantime, the Canadians destroyed the three German tanks we encountered on the way. Passing by, on the way back, we found two bottles of Polish vodka in one of them. What joy!

The Falaise cauldron was slowly emptying out. German stragglers ended their siege of *Maczuga* and were taken care of by the Canadians who continued a remorseless pursuit of the remaining German divisions.

In the evening, a friendly French farmer came to visit and brought with him a barrel of some interesting beverage. I requested a full mess tin and could not understand why he looked at me in disbelief. Feeling very dehydrated, I drank the lot in one gulp, thinking it was wine. Then, I stiffened up. Instead of wine, I drank a solid volume of *calvados,* a spirit brewed from apples.

I was so weak that all I could do was spread the tarpaulin and lie down to sleep. In the morning, I woke thoroughly drenched. Rain fell all night on the tired, battle-weary crews yet, it must have been the rain that finally helped us to recover our strength. We rose refreshed, happy and rested.

The time came to leave the *Maczuga*, driving along roads littered with corpses and wrecked vehicles. We could now enjoy a few days of rest and recreation, but the heavy battle experiences on hill 262 remained in our minds forever.

The division's other regiments had fought on hill 113 and at Chambois and now, they too came to a rest area. Soon, we were hurrying again, across France while the Germans fought delaying actions. They set traps for us and occasionally posed strong defences. To counter such actions, we needed to exploit our pursuit to the full. All the sections of my platoon were fully engaged, but our reconnaisance work was not always completely effective. Sometimes, we had to endure difficult times; at other times French girls covered us with kisses. Leading the Division's advance, we were the first liberators and recipients of flowers and wine.

On 7th September, our platoon was ordered to explore the Belgian frontier zone. The task was to find out how far the Germans had retreated.

My tank was designated as spearhead; behind me came the platoon commander Lt Roman Wasilewski, then his second in command, 2nd Lt Jacek Zagórski. The rest of the 2nd Armoured Regiment followed suit.

The regiment's objective was to prevent the establishment of a solid defence line by the fleeing Germans at all cost.

I well understood the sense of our tactical plan and we drove forward at high speed. The road was empty of traffic for a while, but we lost some time in playing liberators, enjoying welcomes and kisses. Even so, the rest of the regiment could not keep up with us.

Soon enough, German detachments using horse-drawn transport appeared ahead of us, allowing a display of our fighting skills. We took prisoners, disarmed them, smashing their weapons against the tank's armour and sent them off to the rear. We had no time or manpower to do anything else. We placed the wounded members of the 'superior race' in ditches along the road; the regiment's medical officer would take care of them.

Maintaining high speed, we travelled several dozen kilometres, finally reaching the outskirts of Ypres, a town evoking strong memories of WW 1, since it was in Ypres that the Germans used mustard gas against the Allies for the first time.

Approaching the town, we came across a German military motorcar which looked suspiciously like a scout. I wanted to go over to investigate and question the crew but the platoon commander decided to leave it for our tanks to deal with.

At the entrance to the town proper, I stopped on a slope of a rise, partially under cover, showing the town only my turret. I carefully scanned the scene before me, using a pair of binoculars. The town seemed empty of life, nothing moved, no German

soldiers, no civilians. It looked highly suspicious to me and prompted the thought of an ambush. I radioed my thoughts to Lt Wasilewski who duly reported them to the regimental C.O. The response was orders to actively investigate by attacking. I was absolutely sure that we're falling into a trap but an order must be carried out, so we drove forward at full speed. As soon as we reached the first side street, the air filled with the swish of antitank shells. Zygmunt, alert as ever, started on a zigzagging, 'rabbit run' course. The first shell hit our rear left corner on an acute angle trajectory and ricochetted... Romek Wasilewski detoured around us and stopped several metres away. A moment later, the C.O.'s tank was hit. Romek managed to evacuate and hid in a nearby house – he apparently sat through the episode in a cellar. Another wounded crewman crawled next to my tank and hid behind the railway embankment. I never saw any of the others.

The town was strongly defended; apart from the anti-tank forces, it was full of enemy infantry. We were facing a serious situation.

When engaged in reconnaisance patrols, one is most fearful of the first antitank shell. One never knows where it will come from or when. Once it hits, one is too busy to allow oneself much reflection. This time, however, things were a bit different. The antitank guns on the town's perimeter made retreat from town impossible and yet remaining in one spot, offering a sitting target, was equally not an option. Movement at least offered a chance to hurl grenades and fire at the upper floors of nearby houses. I immediately radioed the regiment for assistance and soon tank squadrons arrived and were deployed for action. Eventually, the regiment suffered considerable losses and was forced to retreat. What was required was infantry and that, as always, was unavailable.

And so we remained in the town, all alone. Frequently shifting from place to place, we defended ourselves against the RPGs (antitank rocket propelled grenades). Trying to detect their source, I took a quick look out of the turret and a rifle bullet swished along my cranium. My beret was pierced exactly through its middle. I blacked out and at the same moment, a grenade exploded against the turret.

I lost consciousness and, bleeding, fell on the floor. The left side of my scull was stuffed with splinters. The crew was terrified and expected I was dead but after a while I regained consciousness for a moment and asked the regimental C.O. to lay a smoke cover. They replied that it'd be done without delay. Then the driver sprang to action and took us out of town at full speed. Tossing out grenades and firing in all directions, we finally drove into a thick smoke cloud. Half blinded by the smoke, the driver kept going along the original approach route, finally reaching the hill on the town's outskirts and returned to the regiment. We were saved! In view of the large number of casualties, several ambulances were available at the HQ. I attempted to walk up to one of them but lost consciousness and woke up only when I was being placed inside. Some Belgian civilian then administered a solid mouthful of cognac to 'aid my recovery' and I began to feel genuine improvement.

With me, in the four-stretcher ambulance, lay Lt Czarkowski-Golejewski, some unknown trooper, and a badly wounded German. Lt Czarkowski moaned constantly, choking with blood from a punctured lung – the others were silent.

We travelled fast since it was still possible to encounter German units in liberated areas.

We soon arrived at a military hospital, a field unit housed in tents. There, the medics examined my head, dressed the wound and sent me off, again by ambulance, to a hospital at Rouen. On the way, every hour or so, I kept losing consciousness and thought my condition was critical. Finally, we arrived at Rouen, in a proper hospital housed in numerous buildings surrounded by a beautiful park.

The wounded lay on stretchers on all of the park's lawns. They were organized into groups according to type of injury: head wounds had first priority, abdomen wounds – second, followed by lungs and the rest. Patients were taken from the lawns for examinations or surgery in that order of priority.

I continued in a state of semi-consciousness, alternately sinking and waking, and did not feel bored. I don't think I had long to wait for my operation. Surgery began as soon as the examination of my scull had concluded; naturally, it was performed without anaesthetic. Only the larger splinters were removed; to remove the remaining 18, the surgeon would have had to split my head wide open... Instead, he simply said: you can live with the small ones.

Then he added that had the rifle bullet penetrated 2 mm lower then it did, I would find myself among the angels. The x-ray examination, which preceded surgery, had shown that no splinter had penetrated into the brain. As the dressings were being wrapped around my head, I looked with horror at a side tub full of body parts: human feet and arms.

The assistant nurse's eyes, peering above the surgical mask, showed equal alarm. How much human suffering, I wondered, must this poor woman have witnessed...

Next, the ward sister, without ceremony, prepared my bath and put me in a 10-bed ward. On my left was an English sapper, unconscious, stuffed with penicillin drips – a forest of tubes, taps and rubber pipes. On my right was another English soldier with a bullet through his leg. His strange London cockney was unintelligible even for the other English.

Despite my serious condition, I was as happy as a child, enjoying a comfortable bed. At first, it even seemed as if I had been laid on a bed of silky down. From the very beginning of the campaign, there was nothing but hard ground and tarpaulin to sleep on, more rarely – mattresses and blankets in barracks, but now a real, delightful bed. The second source of my delight was peace and silence: no one was demanding anything of me. I emphatically did not feel a professional hero. Life without war or grand feats is much more pleasant!

Everything would have gone well, had I not kept losing consciousness several times a day. Worse yet, each time I did so, I was sure I was dying, an incredible feeling which I found depressing. Sudden falling into a void, then an alarming thought: this is the end! I feared greatly these losses of awareness, never certain whether I should wake up. Eventually, I adjusted to the situation and, looking at my fellow sufferers in neighbouring beds, accepted that my injury is minor compared with theirs.

After several days, I began to walk. I still experienced dizzy spells but was no longer surprised by them. The hospital lacked amenities and the convalescents soon began to feel bored. One day, a French 'chanteuse' came to entertain us and, helped by my fluency in French, I struck up a friendship with that charming girl and was invited to dinner at her home. I was going to take a risk leaving the hospital, a difficult feat at any time.

To get out, I first had to persuade the storeman to issue reasonably well-fitting underwear and uniform, in aid of which I employed all my diplomatic skills. With only a few francs in my pocket for a bus fare, I promised him a mountain of gold. He must have been highly amused by my performance but, in the end, delivered the garments.

And so, in the evening, boots in one hand, I glided quietly along the hospital hallways, happily without meeting any nurses. Then, with boots on, I nimbly hopped over the fence.

I introduced myself and confessed the story of my getaway. My hostess laughed gaily and spread the story all around. The main subject of table conversations, however, was the war and as we chatted in a friendly, open manner, I was the 'star of the

season'. Then, unable to keep my grudges hidden inside me, I began to tell everyone what I thought about France! How the French would complain in 1940 that they were obliged to fight in defence of Poland, a country far away from France. Now, however, it was the turn of us Poles to fight in defence of France and die on all the world's battlefields: in north Africa, in Italy, in Norway, in France, serving as airmen in the UK and alongside the Red Army.

I also reminded everyone about the chain of the graves of my friends who will never see their free homeland – graves of all those men of good will who did not hesitate to offer their lives in the defence of their fatherland on French soil (I was thinking of 1940 France).

I was feverish and said a good deal but afterwards, somehow, my resentment had dissolved. The gall finally coming into the open, I felt lighter and less embittered. My companions expressed their understanding of my attitude and apologised, sympathising with the ill-treated nations and articulating their sorrow over those who fell in action. We ended up in an atmosphere of comradeship and deep friendship between the Poles and the French.

The party and the good 'feed' were nearing its end. Joanna sang a few songs and on leaving, invited me to come back again. I thanked her and, as I was kissing her hand, my thoughts were back in the hospital, worrying about the consequences of my absence and planning how to get back into bed without being noticed.

I retraced my original route across the fence and through the park and, boots in hand, re-entered the hallway. Lights were on everywhere and the medics were inspecting the adjacent ward. I barely managed to chuck the boots under the bed and slid under the quilt. When the inspection group reached my ward, the sister in charge came straight to my bed.

'You are so hot, so flushed', she said. 'Are you feverish?' – 'Yes', I replied, 'I'm a little worse today'. She quite liked me and came near, stroked my hair and said warmly: 'Don't worry, we'll soon have you cured'.

During all this, I was afraid my neighbours would burst out laughing but they proved to be true gentlemen and simulated deep sleep. When the coast was clear, I undressed, stuffed the uniform under my pillow and went to sleep.

Soon, I was recovering quickly, my wounds healed and the splinters absorbed into the bone. I held on to the uniform and kept avoiding the storeman.

After all, I was now often in town and had to wear something...

Joanna's home was very congenial and friendly. Three cosy rooms and a kitchen, two bedrooms, one Joanna's and one her mother's. I felt really at home during my visits. Mothers are so skilled in creating a genuinely homely atmosphere!

One day, finally, the sad moment came when I visited Joanna for the last time. I was cured and on my way back to the regiment. Joanna gave me a piece of paper with her address and invited me to write often. Leaving the hospital, I returned the borrowed uniform and in one of its pockets, Joanna's brief note. The tumult of war often brings people together or separates them, making their paths cross and re-cross, joining together and dividing people from one another, then moves on.

'Winter in Holland' is an extract from Captain Zbigniew Mieczkowski's book *Horizons of Memories*. It refers to soldiers' feelings at the time of the Yalta Conference:

Winter in Holland

After action in Normandy and rapid pursuit of German Armies throughout North Western Europe, Holland greeted us with long muddy canals, broken dykes and early evenings marking the approach of winter.

After the liberation of Breda and other equally spectacular actions of our Armoured Cavalry Brigade, a front was established along the River Maas. Some islands were still held by the Germans and our reconnaissance squadron, with whom I was serving at the time, was often sent to patrol the 'nomansland' in between the outposts of various infantry units holding the front. The Regiment was moved to Osterhout to comfortable quarters. Just before Christmas we were suddenly rushed to new positions in small woods surrounding a place called Helvoirt. This unexpected move was the result of the offensive of Field Marshal von Rundstedt in Ardennes. The German Army penetrated the American positions deeply, threatening to cut off our supplies from Antwerp. It was an unpleasant surprise just before Christmas. Nothing much was happening during the days and on Christmas Eve I visited the beautiful Helvoirt Church. One could not help feeling nostalgic on this cold frosty evening, reminding me very much of home. Home, which I had not seen for over four years. Home, which was about to cease to exist. This because, on the other side, from the East the Communist Armies were just entering Central Poland. The tragic events which were taking place in our country could hardly be realised. The Communist mob was destroying everything while we, far away, had to wage war to bring Germany to unconditional surrender. According to the Yalta Agreement Poland was left behind the barrier of the civilized world. It meant for us, the soldiers of the First Polish Armoured Division, that with the end of war there was no home to go back to.

I was to learn in the future that at this time our Commanding Officer, General Maczek, was summoned to Field Marshal Montgomery for a friendly discussion about our feelings at this tragic time in Polish history:

'Well, General', said the Field Marshall. 'I understand that you are going to become a Russian General from now on'. Maczek blushed, but his quick riposte was even more destructive:

'It seems to me, Sir', he said, 'that you may have already become an American General'. Montgomery choked on a cup of tea which he was drinking. But even for him, the conversation became embarrassing. Maczek had assured Montgomery that the Division, obeying the instructions of the Polish Government in London, would continue to fight against Germany to the end.

The Rundstedt offensive was soon quashed, but we did not return to our old quarters and instead I was sent as Quarter Master Officer for the Regiment, with three sergeants, to a little place called Dongen. I found myself a beautiful billet at a house belonging to the owner a shoemaking factory. It was snowing heavily when we arrived, but after about three hours the tanks began to appear. When the cooks were preparing supper for the Squadron I was about to retire to my comfortable quarters. We were walking along with Lieutenant Jacek Zagórski, residing in the next house to mine. Suddenly, the door of my house opened and a beautiful Dutch girl came out and said 'Hello'. Jacek begged me 'Please, let's swap quarters, I must stay here!' We were both Second Lieutenants but he had an earlier promotion so I could not refuse. However, I had a lovely place and stayed with a family named van Loon. The whole of Dongen was a shoe-making town and all the shoemakers had houses in front of their factories.

For a few months we lived a Garrison type of life. The Officers Mess was established, with bridge parties, dances and so on. I was moved to the First Squadron, taking over a Platoon there and was often sent with my tanks to various villages on the river to support our Infantry Battalions. The conditions were similar to those in the WW 1, often in shelters dug into very high flood walls along the River Maas. Some villages were completely deserted or partly destroyed. One of the places I particularly remember was an artificial island called Capelsche Veer feared to be a bridgehead for

possible assault from the enemy. Two companies from a German Parachute Regiment held it for several weeks against constant attacks from our Infantry and the 45th British Commando which was attached to the Division. They sustained enormous losses. Eventually, the Germans were driven out, killed or surrendered. Three tanks were moved on to the island and sank immediately but they were regarded as pill boxes, helping the infantry to hold their positions on the wall. The only way to get there was by a small ferry frequently under mortar fire from the Germans who knew of the exact times the crews were changed at dawn.

Memories of these excursions haunt me even now. Leaving a warm bed at 4 o'clock in the morning to be delivered with other sleepy crews to a little bridge where the ferry was waiting was extremely uncomfortable. Being one of the youngest Officers in the Regiment I was sent there more often than the others with an assumption that it provided good training opportunities. We were sitting in tanks for twenty-four hours with a tremendously cold wind whistling around us and as the tank batteries had died long ago nothing was working. With the wind blowing in our direction the stink of the dead Germans on the other side of the wall, even during the Winter was overpowering. I have to admit that I was quite relieved to see our replacements arriving in the morning. The van Loons were a very hospitable family, with two young daughters trying to take care of me as well as they could, serving an excellent breakfast even though they were rationed and eager to learn the latest news from their young 'hero'.

Some time in February the First Squadron was moved to a nearby town called 's-Hertogenbosh. We were attached to a Canadian Infantry Brigade holding this part of the river. The Squadron was commanded by Roman Wasilewski. To Władek Kohutnicki, second in command, this was a romantic town as he fell in love with a beautiful Dutch girl, married her and eventually settled in Holland. He continued with his military career as an Officer of the Royal Dutch Army, ending up as full Colonel, commanding a Hussars Regiment. Amongst other colleagues, I remember well Jan Oses, who later lost his leg entering Germany, Tadeusz Dul, who was also wounded and Zbyszek Kozak – Squadron Technical Officer, who had already been wounded in Normandy and rejoined us for a second tour of service.

We were constantly on the move, with Platoons independently supporting various Canadian units holding positions along the river at Emden, Maren, Bokhoven and Orthen. All those places had completely different characteristics. At Orthen my tanks were used for night artillery fire on targets set up during the day. The tanks were in a forward position, just behind the blown up bridge on the outskirts of the town with a scout car wireless connected to my billet and I liaised with 41st Commando Unit Command Post. It was tiresome service, with constant headaches and anxiety as to whether we were firing on the right targets! The tank's instruments were not as precise as the artillery ones and some mistakes could easily have been made.

At a place called Maren the situation was quite idyllic. The village was evacuated as the pro-German Dutch were cutting our telephone wires. I was comfortably installed in the Burger Master's house with my tanks flanking Infantry positions from the south. At night, I kept a sentry on each tank, but there was no great activity on the part of the enemy and during the day we had a chance to shoot ducks instead of Germans on small ponds just behind the village.

Bokhoven was the worst. It was situated almost on the river wall. When I arrived and reported to a young Canadian Major, holding the position with his Battalion, I was rather distressed to see the local church burgled, Tabernaculum destroyed and the 'Hostia' blown all over the place. All the Saints were arranged in a fighting position as if situated to fight each other in a kind of duel. I summoned a local priest from another village who was grateful for this information so that he could put matters in order.

Constant fire from machine guns and mortars was quite annoying during the night and it was no good putting one's head over the wall. We were sleeping in a small dirty stable, again flanking the line of dug out trenches. The Command post of the Battalion was situated in a shattered old house trembling from explosions. We were there for one week and one sunny day I was asked to bring my tanks to destroy a bunker on the other side of the river, responsible for directing German fire on us. I had to arrange a precise military operation. From the Battalion's observation post on the roof of the house using the Canadian wireless frequency tuned to mine, I was to direct the fire. The tanks were only a very short distance in front of us and through binoculars on the roof I could observe the results of my shelling. The Canadians were very excited. After instructing my tank Commanders to hit the bunker by anti-tank penetrating shells and then by grenades, I ordered them to open fire. The results were instant, affecting us more than the enemy – with the penetrating echo ricocheting from the river wall, the roof of our house collapsed, destroying our Command Post. From then on I was left in peace.

Capt. Jan Potworowski recalls the tragic events he witnessed during the action at St Philipsland on the Maas:

In January 1945, after regrouping at the beginning of the Runsted offensive, The First Armoured Regiment came under the command of the First British Corps and moved from the Tilburg Breda region to an area close to the Maas Rhine Estuary. Looking at a map of Holland it is difficult to judge where it is the Rhine and where it is the Maas. The area is a delta of large rivers with many flat muddy islands. To avoid controversy, the Dutch called it Hollandischediep. Not far from the estuary there is a small narrow headland with an asphalt road leading to a small village called St Philipsland, with a picturesque windmill and tall water tower. When the First Armoured Regiment arrived, tank squadrons were positioned along the river. Two platoons of tanks were detailed to take up positions on the St Philipsland headland, together with a detachment of Dragoons and a unit from 62 A-A Regiment acting as infantry. Outposts were placed on the river and an artillery observation post was installed in the water tower. The duties of the defence were monotonous. Some wild mortar and machine gun fire was the only indication that the other side of the river was occupied and not empty as it appeared to the onlooker. So passed days and desperately long nights. Tank crews, when not on duty, spent time constructing heating appliances in empty houses they occupied to fight the only active enemy, the frost. Sometimes, English artillery joined in, directed by observers in the water tower. The only entertainment was to watch the flying bombs, which had been released somewhere in Holland, heading for the port of Antwerp. The only movement was the patrols of the Dragoons and the changing of the outposts by the English. The tank crews felt unwanted and superfluous. Boredom reigned. All talk was about cold, night duties and lack of leave. During the day, sometimes there would be some shooting at distant targets. During the night, protection of the tanks and themselves.

There was, however, one man who was not bored. A young 2nd-lieutenant, tall with blue eyes and blond hair. He was in charge of the two tank platoons which acquired a grandiose name 'armoured group'. He enjoyed the command and the whole day was busy inspecting tanks, checking lines of fire, conferring with artillery observers and visiting adjoining units. In the evenings he would sit in the house which he called his HQ, planning actions for the next day. When in a very good mood, he would take out his flute and give a concert, always starting with 'Sur le Pont d'Avignon'. There was something very strange in all this. Here is a young boy in the Polish army in

a forsaken Dutch village. He belonged to an old Polish family with great traditions but which had left Poland many years earlier. His grandfather, father and himself were French citizens and only he could speak Polish – with a heavy foreign accent. There was something in his heritage that made him, when France fell under German occupation, cross the Channel in a rowing boat to join the Polish Army in England.

The day of 22nd January was no different from any other but for the snow which had fallen a few days earlier, making the landscape more empty than before. Late that evening the 2nd-lieutenant went to Sector Command for a briefing. While he was there the defence was alerted by extremely heavy mortar and machine gun fire. A large German patrol had also landed on the south bank. As it came out later, the aim of the patrol was to blow up the water tower and to remove the artillery observer. The Germans divided into three groups, attacking the infantry outpost, the tower and came close to the tanks. The 2nd-lieutenant got into the scout car and soon afterwards, driving through heavy mortar fire, reached his tank. The crews were already in their tanks, but no action was possible. It was pitch black. Our own infantry was in front. He inspected his tanks and contacted the infantry on mounting his tank. The platoons were under heavy mortar and machine gun fire. There were already casualties, with one killed and one wounded. The 2nd-lieutenant was staring into the darkness, trying to see what was happening. Suddenly, he was wounded by a rifle bullet and dropped into the tank. Soon, a large explosion shook the air. The water tower had been blown up. The Germans had achieved their aim and withdrew quickly to the other side of the river. 2nd-lieutenant Prince Andrzej Maria Poniatowski died while his crew was carrying him to the distant aid post.

Some time later the Commander of the Division, Lieutenant General S. Maczek handed a silver cross – Virtuti Militari, the greatest Polish decoration for bravery – to the 2nd-Lieutenant's father. The same decoration was worn by Prince Józef Poniatowski, the great Polish military leader whose name is inscribed on the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.

Entering Germany

In his book *Narvik and Falaise*, published by the Polish Ministry of Defence (MON) in 1958, Col. Władysław Dec (C.O. 3rd Rifles Infantry Brigade), gives the following account of the capture of Musselkanaal Bridge (p. 377 – 9):

On 7th April 1945 we began our final march into Germany. The next day we crossed the Lower Rhine on a pontoon bridge somewhere near Emmerich and on the 10th we began a laborious march northwards through Goor and Coeveorden towards Emmen. While most of the division entered Germany proper and began its thrust along the eastern shore of the Ems river in the general direction of the Leer and the North Sea port of Emden, my troops, seconded by the 2nd Armoured Regiment, were to serve as a fast reconnaissance unit alongside a battle unit commanded by Col. W. Dec. The group's task was to secure the Division's left flank and generally assist the thrust to the North Sea which would seal off the German armies still occupying Holland in a pocket.

The Division was to reach Emden along the road running down the East bank of the river Ems. In order to reach that bank we first had to build a bridge at Haren, securing our flank from the direction of Winschoten and Ter Apel.

The task of securing the transfer of the Division's main force to the East bank of the Ems was given to the 3rd brigade minus the Flanders Riflemen Regiment, but reinforced by the addition of the 2nd Armoured Regiment. In order to successfully

secure the 10th Armoured Brigade's flank, it was necessary to capture Ter Apel and from that bridgehead to push northwards.

'The Ter Apel Canal – roadway triangle is to be captured by means of a dense network of strong patrols supported by armour, thrown simultaneously against the crossings of the Stads Compaseuum Canal East and West of the township', I wrote in the Battle Orders for 11th April 1945.

'I think you will be able to resolve this tangle and capture a bridge over the canal before nightfall. I want you to send out two strong independent units to Rhede and Weener very early in the morning on 12th April to capture the bridges over there,' Maczek had said to me at noon.

Ter Apel is a road junction leading out northwards in the direction of Emden which was then the home-port of the German U-boat fleet operating in the North Sea. As noted earlier, access to the junction was criss-crossed by navigable canals and narrow irrigation channels. Patrols sent out encountered blown-up bridges, small footbridges and stood unable to move. 2nd Lt Stojowski from Captain Tkacz's company, moving from Emden to Ter Apel, failed in the task. The Germans blew up the bridge in front of him and strongly defended all access to the canal bank. Lt Borys, the reconnaissance troops' leader from the Podhalański (Highlanders') Regiment also failed to capture any bridge. He encountered a booby-trapped barricade of felled trees covered by strong defensive fire. Bypassing it was impossible since even his Bren-gun carriers sank in the surrounding swamps. Similar negative reports came from a number of other patrols.

I was checkmated.

'We must capture some bridge,' I said to my chief of staff, Captain Stachowicz.

'It looks like something is hatching,' the chief of staff reported briefly, 'we have a report from the officer in command of the reconnaissance platoon from the 2nd Armoured Regiment, Lt Zatorski, that he has captured a small bridge in the village of Musselkanaal and is requesting a quick infantry reinforcement.'

'Marvellous! We'll send the 2nd Podhalański Company there while the rest of the battalion will clean up the garden-city overnight,' I decided.

'In the P.O.W. camp in Niederlangen,' Col. Koszutski then reported. He was unemployed on that day after having distributed his regiment's armour to the Podhalan (Highlander) rifle companies and to the 'Bloody Shirts' battalion and had taken his HQ unit on a private reconnaissance. 'There are over seventeen hundred Polish women, ex-Polish Home Army fighters from Warsaw. We must free them without delay.'

'To hell with women just now – what I need is a bridge! Report your discovery to the General.' I shouted somewhat un-gallantly. I forgot that the world is small and while a mountain might not meet up with another, people are in fact likely to meet again. Also, I didn't think that one day people would remember that I preferred a bridge to women.

But to return to the bridge problem, having 'ticked off' Col. Koszutski for his report about the women prisoners I jumped into a scout-car and raced to the canal. Along the way, jointly with Col. Complak, I drew up a plan to capture and secure Ter Apel.

According to the notice board on the span, the captured bridge was of the one-tonne class.

'He who risks nothing gains nothing,' I said, ordering a squadron of Sherman tanks to cross the bridge. And, wonder of wonders, a bridge designed for a one-tonne load survived the weight of twelve thirty-tonne tanks; it settled down in the canal only under the thirteenth tank which was commanded by the squadron leader.

And so we had our tanks across the canal and early next morning we were able to send two columns against the bridges at Rhede and Weener.

The story of the liberation of Oberlangen, 12th April 1945, has been recorded in Col. Stanisław Koszutski's book, *Memories from Various Battlefields*, edited in London in 1972:

The spring of 1945 found the Division at the Dutch-German border. At the beginning of April the 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade was fighting along the Kusten canal and the 3rd Infantry Brigade with detached 2nd Armoured Regiment was clearing the Dutch border, pushing the German units into the sea north of Winschoten. The marshlands of this part of Holland contained many blown-up bridges, making tank movements difficult.

On 12th April 1945 the war diary of the 2nd Armoured Regiment notes:

'Bright day with good visibility.'

At 2 p.m. an order from the 3rd Infantry Brigade was received: 'Hold Ter Apel and from that base make a reconnaissance towards the south, south-east and to the west. Hold the river crossing at Wener, map reference 750815 on the river Ems.' As a result of these instructions Lieutenant – Colonel Koszutski, the C.O. of the 2nd Armoured Regiment engaged his squadrons in several different directions. The headquarters of the Regiment remained on the North side of Ter Apel.

The war diary continues: 'At 4 p.m., the result of quick action, 1 726 Polish girls of the Home Army from the Warsaw Uprising were liberated. Twenty one Germans were captured by the patrol liberating the camp.'

News of the existence of the camp was reported to the Colonel by Lieutenant Henryk Papee as obtained from both German and Dutch civilians. The Colonel was spurred into immediate action. Not having any troops around him, he assembled an ad-hoc patrol comprising his own tank, two scout cars and at the very last moment a jeep driven by Lt Kozak, the Technical Officer of the 1st Squadron. This small patrol was the first ever to enter Germany: two lieutenant colonels, two lieutenants, one 2nd lieutenant, six soldiers and, by sheer luck, a war correspondent.

Lieutenant Barbarski's scout car drove at full speed on through deserted fields. A single scout car as front sentry – this had never happened before. A minute later the main force followed: a tank with a jeep and motorcyclist behind. We decided to fire our machine guns to make an impression on the possible enemy. At the edge of the forest another machine gun answered our salvos. When passing the village we found all the windows securely locked, each house forming some sort of a barricade against expected attack. It seemed, however, as if the whole place had been deserted and we passed through undisturbed. The scout car at the rear guard joined us after two minutes. After a few further kilometres we reached a cross-roads and caught sight of the barracks of the camp. A few rounds from our machine guns aimed at the turrets proved sufficient to make the Germans surrender.

We enter the square of barracks. 'What the hell, who is that?' A tiny creature runs across. She is a very attractive young girl, dressed in a long military coat and wearing a cap displaying the Polish eagle and the colours of the 7th Lancers.

'English, Francais, Americano, Canada sind Sie?' she shouts. 'Polish troops, Miss! 1st Polish Armoured Division, darling!' the motorcyclist, Witkowski, shouts back. 'Poles, my God, Poles! And we are here from the Home Army from the Warsaw insurrection! Poles! It's a miracle!' she shouts and runs back to camp. My tank pushes the gates down and we suddenly find ourselves on the parade ground. All at once the doors all open and we see women, like a hive of bees, running out wearing uniforms or rags of uniforms to surround us. Their commanding officer then calls the parade.

They quickly assemble into battle ranks. It transpires to be a well-disciplined unit, having fought on the Warsaw barricades, among ruins of their own homes and streets of their own capital. Armed with very few weapons against German tanks and aircraft, facing the overwhelming strength of the enemy, later not even to be recognised by the

Dziennik Żołnierza
1. Dywizji Pancernej

WYDANIE SPECJALNE Holandia, sobota dnia 14 kwietnia 1945 r. Nr 90 (239)

Dywizja oswobadza w Niemczech obóz Polek z Armii Krajowej

2. PUŁK PANCERNY PRZYWRACA WOLNOŚĆ 1.728 UCZESTNICZKOM WALK W WARSZAWIE

W czwartek o godzinie 5.50 scoutcary i czołgi uwolniły z obozu karnego Staleg VI C na terenie Niemiec 1.728 uczestniczek walk zeszłorocznego powstania w Warszawie, żołnierzy Armii Krajowej. W obozie zapanował niesłychany entuzjazm, gdy przekonano się, że wjeżdżającymi do obozu wozami, są wozy bojowe Wojsk Polskich. O godzinie 6 powiewał już na maszcie, w środku obozu, sztandar polski, uszyty potajemnie w obozie. Straż opanowana była w ciągu kilku minut. Wśród 19 ludzi wziętych do niewoli znajdował się komendant obozu, oraz dozorca z SS.

W ciągu ub. 24 godzin obóz widział sceny trudnej do opisania radości, gdy jeden z żołnierzy Dywizji odnalazł wśród uwolnionych swą córkę, inni swe siostry i dalsze krewne.

Obóz obejmuje ochotniczki Armii Krajowej, które brały udział w walkach oddziałów szturmowych w czasie powstania w Stolicy lub pełniły służbę w oddziałach łączności, sanitarnych, intendentury itd. Część kobiet nosi jeszcze mundury polskie, część jest w ubraniach, właściwie resztkach ubrania cywilnego, niektóre w mundurach amerykańskich, nadesłanych przed kilku miesiącami przez amerykańską Czerwony Krzyż. Wszystkie były deportowane do tego obozu karnego, po przejściu przez 3 do 5 obozów jenieckich.

Warunki mieszkaniowe i żywnościowe w obozie były fatalne. Wszystkie baraki są drewniane, pryczne najbardziej prymitywnego rodzaju, 2-lub 3-piętrowe, posłania z desek, często bez słomy. Brak kuchni, umywalni, łaźni. Rano jedynym pokarmem był wywar z niekreślonych ziół, na obiad zupa z obierkami kartoflanymi oraz dwa ziemniaki i buraki pastewne, wszystko bez soli, wieczorem namiastka kawy i chleb czarny, którego wydawano 300 gramów dziennie na osobę. Wydawano zasadniczo także łyżkę cukru i 25 gramów margaryny, wstrzymywanych często z okazji „karnych", a już z zasady we wtorki i piątki.

Niemcy umieścili w tym prymitywnym obozie kobiety w wieku do lat 60. Nie brak także dzieci 14-letnich, które były łączniczkami w czasie walk. W obozie jest w tej chwili 9 niemowląt, 6 chłopców i 3 dziewczynki, urodzone w obozie.

Mimo ciężkich warunków, nastrój duchowy utrzymał się w obozie przez cały czas znakomity: funkcjonowały kursy gimnazjalne i uniwersyteckie, mówiona gazetka obozowa.

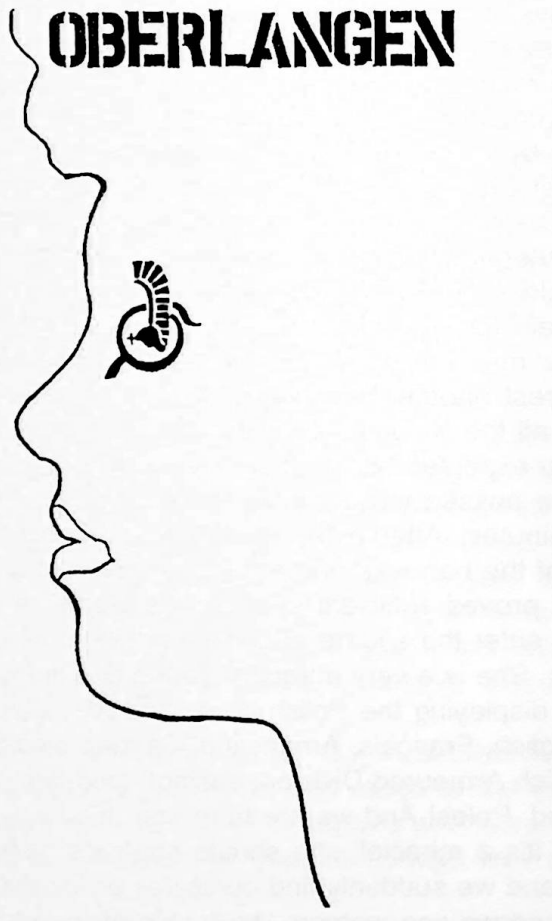
Z puszek po konserwach zrobiony jest obraz Matki Boskiej Częstochowskiej na ołtarzu obozowym, gdzie wczoraj z rana ksiądz włoski, jeniec wojenny przydzielony do obozu, odprawił nabożeństwo dziękczynne w obecności delegacji 2. Pułku Pancernego. Z blachy tych samych puszek są orzełki, często misternie wykonane, na czapkach ochotniczek — żołnierzy Armii Krajowej.

W ciągu wczorajszego dnia Dywizja, w miarę możności, zaspokoiła najpilniejsze potrzeby żywnościowe i sanitarne obozu. Niezależnie od tego wiele spośród oddziałów Dywizji dostarczyło dary żywnościowe do dyspozycji kwatermistrza obozu, por. Janiny Skoszkiewicz.

Głównym pragnieniem naszych rodaczek jest oczywiście wydostanie się poza obręb drutów kolczastych znienawidzonego obozu. Jest to jednak rzecz niemożliwa do zrealizowania przed objęciem obozu przez władze repatriacyjne naczelnej kwatery sojuszniczych sił ekspedycyjnych i zorganizowaniem odpowiednich obozów mieszkalnych poza obrębem operacji wojennych. Przy wielkiej ilości oswobodzonych obecnie codziennie przez wojska sojusznicze i potrzebach transportowych, jakie wymaga szybki postęp operacji, wymagać to będzie niewątpliwie okresu 2- do 3-tygodniowego co najmniej.

Dywizja miała od czasu wylądowania na kontynencie dnie trudne, dnie krwawe, dnie największej swej chwały bojowej. Wczoraj urzeczywistniła się po raz pierwszy łączność z Armią Krajową, której bohaterskie walki w obronie Warszawy śledziło mogliśmy w Normandii jedynie z bijącym sercem, niespokojni myślą.

Dzień 12 kwietnia, dzień w którym na terenie Niemiec po raz pierwszy przynieśliśmy wolność kobietom polskim, obrońcom bohaterskiej Warszawy, będzie do czasu powrotu naszego w granice Polski, Dywizji naszej, — dniem najpiękniejszym.



'The Soldier's Daily' – 14.04.1945, *Polish Girls Liberated from the Captivity in Germany*

Red Cross War Convention securing proper treatment of prisoners and the wounded. 'Report by barracks,' their C.O. gives orders.

One by one they came forward, standing to attention, saluting and reporting the strengths of their units.

'Battalion, attention!' 'Sir, Battalion of the defence of Warsaw on parade, 1 716 women soldiers, twenty in hospital, seven babies'.

I move forward. Never in my life had so many soldiers' eyes looked at me in this way and I had never inspected such ranks before. There was a lot to see. Eyes were mostly blue, very young, with tears running down their faces. My own eyes were misting over!

'Soldiers of the Home Army, Comrades in Arms, this is a historic moment of two units of the Polish forces meeting on German soil. This twelfth day of April will forever be remembered as the crowning of our victories. You are free, God save Poland!'

The girl adjutant takes a tiny piece of material out of her pocket and attaches it to the string of the mast. An Italian priest raises the flag. The white and red flag flies above us. A familiar tune begins to come from the ranks: 'March, March, Dąbrowski!'

What else could I add to the description of this touching moment. Possibly that the war was not yet over. Only two days later the 2nd Armoured Regiment, crossing the fortified border of the Reich, eliminated a battalion of German Marine Commandos of Naval Defence whose commanding officer, Major Peltz, committed suicide. Eighty six Germans were killed with hundreds taken prisoner. The war ends on 5th May.

Members of the liberating patrol:
Lt Col. Stanisław Koszutski
Lt Col. Emeryk Czapski
Lt Janusz Barbarski
Lt Zbigniew Kozak
Lt Dr W. Kulesza
2nd Lt Henryk Papee
Corporal Roland Szmeller
Corporal Jakub Zemlik
Lance-Corporal Leopold Witkowski
Lance-Corporal Kazimierz Więckowski
War Correspondent Marian Walentynowicz.

GERMANY AND ALLIED OCCUPATION 1945 – 1947

Appraisal of the Enemy

The evaluation of the quality of one's opponent forms an important aspect of each soldier's perception of the war in which he is participating. The available publications include many expressions of opinion by 'Maczek's soldiers' about the Germans *qua* soldiers but it would be impossible to quote them all here. Likewise, in the interviews we have conducted, the subject of the quality of the German soldier surfaced frequently. Here, we shall offer only a few selected opinions.

One aspect to which authors frequently return is the quality of German equipment in each successive campaign and here, 'Maczek's soldiers' are essentially in agreement: not just their tanks, but all the equipment the Germans used in WW 2 was first rate.

They also had a very high opinion about the fighting spirit of the German soldier. One can sample such a judgement in the memoirs of Lt Col. Władysław Kohutnicki referring to the period when the Division crossed the border of Germany proper:

A few days later, we fought for Bourtange, a strongly fortified outpost ringed around with trenches; it served as a defensive fort even in the middle ages. We took it after a two-day battle. For the second time, I saw there a German officer who, finding the line of his trench defenses breached, came out into the open and fired his pistol at us. He soon fell dead, hit by a series from a Stengun.

When fighting among buildings or hedges and thickets, i.e. where the targets were very close or appeared unexpectedly, the tank guns could not be used effectively and each one of us had a handy Stengun in the turret which could be fired at close range. With Bourtange captured, we advanced towards Rhede, the next town, already in Germany proper.

The fighting near Rhede proved very hard; we had to overcome a strong, determined resistance and suffered losses. Dogged German infantry attacked us with RPGs and a gory battle lasted several hours, forcing us to capture the houses one by one. It was late in the evening before the town was finally in our hands.

Major Martynoga recalls:

We took prisoners on the Kuesten canal and they were despatched to our security officer who in turn sent them off to 1st Division's HQ. Troops engaged in battle were not able to deal with POWs... The Germans were extremely depressed. They never imagined that they would be taken prisoner by us, Poles. They were very subdued, with no trace of the arrogance for which they were so notorious.

General Maczek includes several opinions concerning the German troops in battle in his book. The General, as always scrupulously objective and preserving a philosopher's distance, distinguished carefully between the military and the civil traits of the soldier's character. Here, we offer one brief account describing the Germans' attitude on the last day of war:

Early in the morning on 6th of May, German officers – guides, wearing white armbands stood in their allotted spaces. Their task was to guide our columns safely through the minefields and across the remnants of outer barricades. A column of Polish tanks and motorised formations drove past a long line of German soldiers assembling in gloomy silence. Along the route, artillery pieces stood abandoned, including the dreaded 88 mm antiaircraft guns, no longer a threat to the Polish armour entering the fortified perimeter of the naval base in Wilhelmshaven.

At the gate to the city, Col. Antoni Grudziński was received by the commander of the fortress, Naval Captain Müslow, the city's mayor and its chief of police.

Occupation of Germany 1945 – 1947

The occupation of the north western part of Germany between May 1945 and October 1947 constituted the final chapter of the 1st Division's brief history. It was simultaneously the period which revealed very clearly the 'phenomenon of the 1st Division', so often discussed on these pages, against the background of full control over the defeated enemy population. Accordingly, this period merits the special attention of all readers interested in the Division's accomplishments.

The Allied Military Government, lost among the masses of multinational refugees, frequently took incorrect decisions when attempting to solve organisational and supply problems. One example is shown in the letter sent by General Maczek to Field Marshal Montgomery concerning the proper treatment of Polish officers, former POWs, continuing to reside in a camp under the control of the British Army.

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7.

Major-General S. Maczek, CB, DSO,
GOC, 1 Polish Armd Division,
B.L.A.

10th May, 1945.

My dear Field-Marshal,

I have been informed by Polish officers formerly PW in Sandbostel Camp (S.9336) that, in spite of their being liberated by allied units some 12 days ago, their conditions of life have not altered. The only difference is that the guard has been changed.

They continue to sleep on the floor without paillasses, covered with lice and receiving the same starvation rations which they used to get from the Germans.

Should units of Second British Army, in whose sector this camp is situated, be unable to do anything, I would request that my Division might help, which it could easily do.

We Poles, who have fought under you, cannot remain passive where are brother officers are concerned, who have already suffered so much, and are entitled to expect immediate help from Armies who likewise include Polish units.

I enclose MO's report on conditions prevailing in this camp.

Yours sincerely,

Field-Marshal Sir Bernard L. Montgomery, KCB, DSO,
Commander-in-Chief,
21 Army Group.

The occupation of a section of the German state during 1945 – 1947 is a subject that has accumulated a mass of documentary sources and a number of historical studies. The most comprehensive of these is Jan Rydel's book, *Polish Occupation in Northwest Germany During 1945–1948*. Based on Polish, British and German sources, Rydel's study sheds light on the Division's role in creating post-war order in Germany from a number of viewpoints. It is an indispensable reference for readers interested in the Division's history.

We include below a few accounts of the period of occupation retained in the memories of the Division's soldiers. Simply in terms of human relations, the task was difficult. Entering on occupational duties, no soldier could erase from his memory the monstrous crimes of the Germans in Poland. Every soldier of the Division was able to construct from the news that reached him a picture of the crimes the Germans committed on the Polish civilian population. Each one, therefore, now faced the question of what should his reaction be when he gained direct or indirect control over the lives of those who earlier meted out suffering to his country and his family.

In the Division's zone of occupation, the population was treated with some contempt. Major Kozak described it as follows:

> When we entered Germany, an order was issued that the troops were not to fraternise with the German population. In my opinion, the population's behaviour was extremely docile. As long as operations continued, the Germans were nowhere to be seen and soldiers surrendered like sheep even though, earlier, we knew them as hard fighters. At any rate, they did not give us any trouble after the armistice.

> The attitude of the Division's troops towards the population in occupied lands evolved on the basis of principles laid down by General Maczek. We discussed these earlier. Even the German newspapers, which soon made their appearance in Wilhelmshaven, expressed positive opinions about the behaviour of Polish soldiers.
> This was the view recorded by Captain Deimel.

> Colonel Antoni Grudziński made a very clear statement on this subject during one of the capitulation ceremonies:
> General Maczek directed that each regiment was to delegate one person to take part in the capitulation ceremony at Wilhelmshaven. It was my luck to be nominated as the delegate of the 10th Dragoons.

Colonel Antoni Grudziński accepted the surrender of the Naval Base of German Kriegsmarine, Wilhelmshaven. Present at the ceremony was a delegation of the local civilian population which was clearly apprehensive about the impending arrival of Polish troops. Colonel Grudziński responded by saying: 'Have no fear; our soldiers will not replicate the behaviour of German troops in Poland or anywhere else. It is my wish that over the next 24 hours, each house should fly a Polish national flag...'. And that was the end of the matter.

For the Germans, the sudden end of hostilities and the fact that Colonel Grudziński, a Polish officer commanding the 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade, accepted the capitulation of Wilhelmshaven came as a considerable shock. Equally so, the fact that the occupying force was the 2nd Armoured Regiment stationed in the area. The German defeat was sudden and, despite some resistance along the frontiers, apparently unexpected. For us, the war certainly ended less brutally than it could have done. The surrender was total and, fully reflected the German national character. The local population greeted the new authority with obedience, even servility.

On the occasion of a visit to the occupying units of General Anders who served at the time as the Supreme Commander of Polish Forces Abroad, the town's population was ordered to fly the Polish national flag. It did so without murmur. The manner in which the POWs and the German police saluted each Allied officer bespoke the deep-seated national culture of obedience and conformity.

Early in the occupation, Friesland, where the Division's troops were stationed, was placed under strict surveillance, owing to a possible emergence there of partisan units modeled on the Polish Home Army.

In his book *Horizons of Memories* Captain Zbigniew Mieczkowski recalls:

> I often commanded night patrols, consisting of two scoutcars, a jeep and a light truck in which to transport the detained. We would approach houses from both flanks, with strong lights, searching them in the presence of German police for possible SS-men in hiding. I had a German translator in my troop, who was able to yell in German, better than any Kapos from the concentration camps. I never encountered any resistance. In a few cases, I ordered some aggressive-looking youths to be roughed-up before arrest. The German police were even more eager in carrying out these searches than we were!
>
> Subconsciously, one's thoughts turned to the situation our families faced only a few months earlier, yet one did not feel an urge to revenge oneself on these defenceless people. They were surprised and trembled when confronted by Polish troops. I did not allow any improper treatment!

The attitude towards the civilian population under occupation was a difficult test and an indication of the 'Division's spirit'. General Michał Gutowski noted that the instructions given to Polish commanders differed from those given to other Allies:

> Our troops behaved very well. Fraternisation was forbidden and if any at all, it was minimal. We kept ourselves in hand, maintained calm and engaged in no unrestrained behavior. Carrying out an order, I directed that a mast flying a Polish flag should be erected in front of the Regimental Headquarters and guarded by a sentry. Any German passing by was to take off his hat. Those who failed to do so were to be locked up.

Major H. Kątny saw his own and his divisional colleagues' attitude towards the civilian population in the following terms:

> It must be noted that this was the first time in history that the Polish troops had occupied German territory.
>
> The German occupation of Poland and our occupation of a part of Germany are two starkly contrasting phenomena. In Warsaw, there was terror, tyranny, prison, public executions. Such events were unthinkable in our zone. The occupation of Germany underwent a number of phases. When eventually civilian administration took over, the game was to make the occupation attractive to the Germans – at the time, Eastern Germany was not yet stabilised.
>
> What was it like, that Polish model of occupation? The word has an ominous ring but our practice of it was so soft, so humane, that perhaps it should be given a different name.
>
> I recall no incidents demanding the use of force. I don't think there were any. Our main task was to liquidate smuggling. After capture, smugglers would be handed over to the civilian authorities. What happened to them afterwards, we did not know. Most likely, authorities would treat them leniently. Our job, however, was done.

Sporadic clashes with the German population were something entirely different. Even with the best intentions on the part of the occupying forces, clashes were bound to occur, as Lt Col. S. Grabowski recalls:

Certain incidents did of course arise but cases of maltreatment or the beating of Germans would have been extremely rare. In my opinion, the Germans behaved badly. Their complaisance and servility simply invited contempt. Stationed with my squadron in a village, I had a German MP or a policeman keeping a daily vigil in front of my office, both eager to entertain me with the latest news about who in village did what, who stole and who was robbed. They were 100% loyal to me. The rest of the Germans feared the Poles but after a time, when they realised that we meant them no harm, relations improved considerably.

The period of occupation brought with it certain new duties but also allowed some rest after a period of heavy battles. Free of garrison duties, officers and other ranks engaged in sports, one of which was horse riding. The division reclaimed from a stud in Grabow, near Lubeck, about 2 000 Polish horses seized by the Germans. When the period of occupation came to an end, Gen. Klemens Rudnicki sent them back to Poland since they represented considerable bloodstock value. The consignment subsequently formed the nucleus of the National Stud in Janów Podlaski. During occupation, however, the horses were kept in regimental stables. The General, an old Cavalry Officer, liked riding and pursued the sport in the company of up and coming young riders. Showjumping competitions were held and some were opened by a mounted General Rudnicki.

Captain L. Czernicki remembers that period well:

Our 24th Lancers Regiment was stationed in Germany in Essen; here, the 2nd Squadron commanded by Captain Roman Bniński was billeted. We played some war games, but not too many of them. We also had time for trips to various clubs. Some time later, there was the possibility for Officers to keep horses in the Regiment and one would spend half a day riding. Once a week contests were held with other units and we were often invited to compete against British Regiments stationed in the vicinity.

Among the riding enthusiasts often competing together were Major Michał Gutowski, Captain Roman Bniński, Lieutenants Janusz Kiwerski, Mieczystaw Bielecki, Stefan Stankiewicz, Zbigniew Mieczkowski, Józef Mossakowski and other officers from the Brigade and Divisional Headquarters.

Some time later we were transferred to guard the German POW Camp at Munsterlager. We were billeted at Mese, in a beautiful Officers' Mess where dances were organised, attended by British and Canadian families.

Only when on duty The Regimental Duty Officer was allowed to enter the German Officers' camp. This gave me considerable satisfaction since only a few months earlier I had been on the receiving end. Then I had been obliged to salute every German officer. Now, in accordance with the Geneva Convention, things were reversed: when I entered the camp, every German, even a General, had to salute me.

1st Armoured Division as an Elite Formation

An interesting aspect of our account is the question of how the 1st Division's soldiers perceived the military competence of other allied formations. We are not interested here, of course, in making strict comparisons or delivering unambiguous judgments since criteria for such do not exist. Questions, however, about our battle performance against that of other allied formations were a constantly recurring feature and 'Maczek's soldiers' were fully

entitled to pose them. They fought against the same enemy over a longer period than any of the other allies – since September 1939. Even prior to the Normandy landings in 1944, they fought in two different campaigns – in Poland and in French. Their training in Scotland extended over a longer time and was more intensive than that of the American or Canadian forces. Finally, they were equipped with allied arms and this also suggested comparisons of skill with which these arms were employed in action.

The Polish trooper was of necessity a globetrotter. He had travelled through Rumania, Hungary and France. He had crossed many countries and frontiers. In Scotland, he became a European soldier. In comparison with a Canadian soldier who, as a rule, never travelled outside his own province, the Pole was a man of the world, able to impress with his knowledge and life's experiences.

The 1st Division was not a run-of-the-mill formation. It included veterans of three campaigns originating from a leading formation of the Polish army, a formation characterised by strong discipline and fine traditions. Its soldiers were born or educated in pre-war independent Poland. Polish ideals and what is sometimes called the Poland-as-great-power ideology were bred into their identities. Whether such indoctrination was appropriate is of course a moot point, nevertheless, at the time it was a common feature of the soldiers' subconscious.

'Maczek's soldiers' evaluated individual allies differently. We quote below a selection interesting observations, without attempting any generalised judgment.

Questions of the quality of training and the diverse battle experiences keep recurring in the memoirs of 'Maczek's soldiers'. They differentiated their own training very strongly from that of the French forces they saw in the winter of 1939/40 and of the American, British and Canadian forces.

Our interviewees voiced especially critical opinions of the battle training of the French armoured forces. Very little of this type of criticism found its way into available publications, not even into the published memoirs of general Maczek himself. We cite the relevant passage here again:

> Although saturated with excessive numbers of French administrators, the camp (in Coëtquidan) was staffed with instructors who would have done well in peacetime. They earnestly tried to teach us warfare – us, some of whom were already battle-scarred veterans, anxious to share their experience with our allies (*op. cit.*, p.101).

The expression used by Maczek: 'instructors who would have done well in peacetime' is highly suggestive of his assessment of the quality of French training. More cautious is Capt. Suchcitz's opinion:

> The 10th Motorised Cavalry Brigade was formed so quickly and in such a rush that any comparison with French formations of similar type could not be made. A balanced opinion on this subject could only be given by someone who spent more time in the French training centres for armoured troops and who had an opportunity to evaluate the battle performance of Polish and French units alike. The British, on the other hand, had a highly trained professional army and excellent training facilities.
>
> The 1st Division's troops had behind them four additional years of training in different operational structures: Polish, French and British which had an undoubted effect on their fighting quality. Allied troops were frequently moved around and transferred from one battlefield to another. The Poles remained in their units and in one place – Scotland, for long periods. Courses of various types were organised for them and acquainted them with equipment from different sources. The 1st Division trooper was taught every kind of skill needed on the battlefield. In our 10th Mounted Rifles regiment, a driver could take over command of the tank and vice versa, either could act as a gunner or radio operator.

An interesting concluding note on this subject is contributed by Capt. Deimel:

All armoured divisions under British command received essentially identical training – identical gunnery training, attack tactics and street fighting warfare. As far as these are concerned, there are no grounds for claiming that we were in any way better trained than the British.

It was often said that the American and Canadian divisions were 'green' and poorly trained. I have no opinion on the subject. When, say, our Division went into action in the centre, while Canadian divisions lingered behind on either side, the reason may have been that it was general Maczek's intense keenness to push forward that produced the better result. The C.O. Canadian 4th Armoured division, George Kitching, was relieved of his command after the first phase of fighting in Normandy. Canada did not have a standing army before the war, while in Poland officers were being successfully trained for war over the twenty-year period of the country's independence.

Although we did not see ourselves as the best and did not belittle soldiers of other formations, did not, however, regard ourselves as being on an equal level with them. The ancient *Husaria's* wing we carried on our shoulder sleeves implied a certain obligation. It inspired a great pride.

CHAPTER IV

SOLDIERS OF THE DIVISION AND THEIR FORTUNES AFTER THE WAR

DEMOBILISATION IN GREAT BRITAIN

Having entered Germany after 10 months of military action together with the British Liberation Army, with losses reaching one third of its ranks, the Division and the Polish Parachute Brigade remained there for the next two years as occupying forces under the command of General Klemens Rudnicki, bringing aid to thousands of their countrymen liberated from captivity. This Polish occupation zone with its HQ in Meppen stretched throughout South Frieseland with units stationed in various towns and villages.

In the spring of 1947, after Great Britain's withdrawal of recognition to the Polish Government in London, the future of the Polish Armed Forces in the West was decided. The instructions concerning the demobilisation of the Polish Forces under British Command was a document containing declarations to the contrary of the moral standards proclaimed so often by the English as exemplary in dealings in international politics.

The British Labour government made every effort to ensure the majority of the soldiers returned to Poland. It was an easy solution dispensing with further responsibilities and at the same time playing into the hands of the new communist authorities backed by Russia, the Lublin Committee recognized by Great Britain and acknowledged as the new rightful government of 'liberated' Poland. The betrayal of Britain's faithful ally at the Yalta Conference was behind this decision. The new eastern frontiers drawn up by the victorious Powers gave away one third of the Polish territories, including the historic towns of Wilno and Lwów, to Russia. For many soldiers of the Polish forces in the West their homes ceased to exist, now belonging to the Soviet Union.

No promises were made to the soldiers who refused to return to their country regarding their possible settlement in the United Kingdom or its Dominions, but for those returning to Poland the future was portrayed through rose-coloured spectacles despite the fact that their repatriation was based on the amnesty decree proclaimed by the Polish Communist Government in August 1945. This amnesty, given to soldiers whose only crime was that they obeyed orders of the Polish Government in London in its endeavours to Polish independence, was a travesty of basic democratic principles.

Message from the British Foreign Secretary
to all members of the Polish Forces under British Command

His Majesty's Government has many times made it clear that it is its policy to assist the greatest possible number of members of the Polish Armed Forces under British Command to return to Poland of their own free will and in conditions worthy of their great services to the Allied cause. In accordance with this policy it has in recent months been in negotiation with the Polish Provisional Government of National Unity, which the British Government, like other Governments, regard as the only authority entitled to speak on behalf of Poland, regarding the conditions upon which returning Polish soldiers, sailors and airmen will be received back in their own country. As a result of these negotiations the Provisional Government has furnished His Majesty's Government with a statement setting forth its policy on this question.

The British Government regards this statement as satisfactory. In the light of these assurances it has reviewed the position of the Polish Armed Forces under British Command. It considers it to be the duty of all members of those Forces who possibly can do so to return to their home country without further delay under the conditions now offered them in order that they may make their contribution to the restoration of the prosperity of liberated Poland. Only thus can they serve their country in a manner worthy of her great traditions.

Those who nevertheless feel compelled to remain abroad in full knowledge of the present situation will be treated as far as our resources permit with due recognition of their gallant service. In execution of the policy announced by Mr. Winston Churchill, the British Government will give, in collaboration with other Governments, such assistance as is in its power to enable those who fought with us throughout the war to start a new life outside Poland with their families and dependants. But the British Government, after the most careful examination of the whole problem, is bound to make it plain that it can promise no more than this. There is no question of the Polish Army, Navy or Air Forces at present under British Command being preserved by the British Government as independent armed forces abroad, and it is the intention of the British Government to disband as soon as practicable those men who decide not to return to Poland. Nor can the British Government offer to the members of the Polish Armed Forces under British command any guarantee that they will all be able to settle in British territory at home or overseas.

I appeal on behalf of the British Government to every individual member of the Polish Armed Forces to consider carefully the alternatives which are here set before him. I earnestly trust that the overwhelming majority will decide to avail themselves of this opportunity, especially as I am not in a position to guarantee that there will be a further opportunity for them to return to Poland.

Speaking on behalf of the British Government, I declare that it is in the best interest of Poland that you should return to her now, when she requires the help of all her sons in the arduous task of reconstructing the country and making good the devastation caused by the war.

Ernest Bevin

Stormy debates in the British Parliament and the resignation of some of the MPs as a mark of protest against the selling out of Poland to the Soviets became the reason for seeking a more friendly solution in this embarrassing situation. The official declaration of the British Government still encouraged Polish soldiers to return to their homeland but mentioned that those who would find this decision impossible would be given the opportunity to be demobilized and remain in Great Britain. In order to find a legal basis to demobilise a foreign

Do wszystkich członków Polskich Sił Zbrojnych.

Rząd Brytyjski podkreślił juz wielokrotnie, że w sprawie Polskich Sił Zbrojnych, będących obecnie pod dowództwem brytyjskim, jego polityka dąży do tego, aby członkowie tych Sił w największej ilości wracali do Polski z własnej woli i w warunkach godnych wielkiego wkładu, którym przyczynili się do zwycięstwa Zjednoczonych Narodów. Zgodnie z tą polityką Rząd Brytyjski w ostatnich miesiącach prowadził układy z Tymczasowym Polskim Rządem Jedności Narodowej, który jest uważany przez Rząd Brytyjski, jak również przez inne Rządy, za jedyny autorytet, mający prawo mówienia w imieniu Polski. Przedmiotem tych pertraktacji były warunki, w których na wypadek ich powrotu do Polski żołnierze, marynarze i lotnicy zostaną przyjęci w własnym kraju. Wskutek tych rokowań Tymczasowy Rząd Polski złozył Rządowi Brytyjskiemu oświadczenie wyłuszczające swoją politykę w danej kwestji. Tekst tego oświadczenia w załączeniu.

Rząd Brytyjski uważa tę deklarację za zadawalniającą. W świetle przyrzeczeń otrzymanych od Tymczasowego Rządu Polskiego Rząd Brytyjski po powtórzonemu zbadaniu całej tej sprawy, przyszedł do przekonania, ze wszyscy członkowie Polskich Sił Zbrojnych, którym powrót do Kraju jest możliwy, powinni wrócić jaknajprędzej, korzystając z obecnie przez Tymczasowy Rząd podanych im warunków, a to celem przyczyniania się do odbudowania uwolnionej Polski. Jedynie w ten sposób będą mogli służyć swojemu Krajowi zgodnie z jego wielką tradycją.

Jednakowoż ci żołnierze, którzy, zdając sobie sprawę z całokształtu obecnego stanu rzeczy, uważają swój powrót do Polski za niemożliwy, będą traktowani, w miarę naszych sił i środków, w sposób godny ich wielkich zasług. W wykonaniu polityki zawartej w orędziu p. Churchill'a Rząd Brytyjski, współpracujący z innymi Rządami, będzie przychodził ze wszelką jemu możliwą pomocą tym, którzy walczali obok nas podczas całej wojny, celem umożliwienia im rozpoczęcia nowego zycia poza Polską wraz z rodzinami i z osobami, będącymi od nich zależne. Ale po najdokładniejszemu zbadaniu całej sprawy Rząd Brytyjski poczuwa się zobowiązany stwierdzić, iż żadnych dalszych przyrzeczeń dać nie może. Nie idzie w rachunek, żeby Polskie Siły Zbrojne, czy to armja lądowa, czy marynarka, czy lotnictwo, będące obecnie pod dowództwem brytyjskim, zostały zachowane przez Rząd Brytyjski jako niezależne siły zbrojne, pozostające poza granicami Kraju. Rząd Brytyjski zamierza w możliwie bliskim czasie zwolnić od służby tych żołnierzy, którzy nie będą chcieli powracać do Polski. Co więcej, Rząd Brytyjski nie może dawać członkom Polskich Sił Zbrojnych żadnych gwarancji, iż oni wszyscy będą mogli osiedlać się na terenach brytyjskich, czy to w Wielkiej Brytanji, czy też za morzem.

W imieniu Rządu Brytyjskiego zwracam się do kazdego członka Polskich Sił Zbrojnych zosobna z usilną prośbą o sumienne zastanowienie się nad tymi alternatywami. Pozwalam sobie wierzyć, że ogromna większość będzie korzystała z tej okazji, która być może nie powtórzy się.

W imieniu Rządu Brytyjskiego oświadczam, że bliski Wasz powrót do Kraju leży w najlepszym interesie Polski, która w obecnej chwili potrzebuje pomocy każdego ze swych synów wobec mozolnego zadania odbudowy Kraju oraz zacierania śladów spowodowanych wojną spustoszeń.

Ernest Bevin.

army on British soil, all soldiers refusing to return to their own fatherland were enlisted for a period of two years into the Polish Resettlement Corps under the administration of the British Armed Forces. All officers were commissioned in the British Forces as 2nd lieutenants of His Majesty and other ranks were assured of training opportunities to acquire various skills to obtain employment in civilian life. To this end, numerous courses were organized for Polish soldiers intending to settle in Great Britain or in the British Commonwealth and Dominions. Eventually, some emigrated to Australia, Africa, Canada and as well as South America. The Polish Resettlement Corps provided intensive teaching in English language as well as a great many courses which included bakery, confectionery, hotel management, watch-making, book-keeping, radio-mechanics, carpentry, locksmith, car-mechanics, upholstery, nursing, advertising and others.

The 2nd Corps from Italy was moved over to Great Britain. The Polish Air Force and Navy were also included, with a total number of 160 000 ex-servicemen. Numerous families, forcibly deported to the Soviet Union after the partition of Poland in 1939 and having been evacuated to British Colonial Territories during the war, were moved to Great Britain, settling in former army camps. For many years to come, they formed the Polish émigré community in the British Isles. At first under the care of Officers of the Polish Army, including the editor of this book, later to be handed over to British social institutions.

GENERAL FRANCISZEK SKIBIŃSKI AND OTHERS ON THEIR RETURN TO POLAND

Poland, amongst the Allied Powers, won the war but lost the peace. What happened then to the soldiers of the Second Republic?

Their stories were most unusual. As a result of the propaganda of the left-wing circles of former allies charmed by the victories of the Soviet Army, they were forced to undertake unusual duties in a foreign world. The generals, like Stanisław Maczek, one of the ablest leaders of WW 2, sold beer, others cleaned silver in London hotels. Their age and pre-war qualifications made it harder to get a foothold amongst political ignoramuses of western society. For the soldiers of the Polish Armed Forces in the West, as a whole, demobilization became a challenge for further struggles, not just for survival in a new economic and social situation! 'General Sikorski's tourists', having settled in various countries, despite difficulties, continued to sow the seeds of truth, never ceasing to confront the worshippers of Stalin. They spread the truth about the Katyń Forest Massacre and the extermination of the Polish pre-war elite, of the fate of the academics, the clergy, and of the red terror comparable with Hitler's extermination and concentration camps.

Through the initiative of former soldiers, Polish historical institutions were started with the aim of collecting and preserving records of Soviet and Nazi crimes. The libraries and publishing houses promoted books by émigré writers on political and historical subjects.

You can destroy a nation, but you cannot destroy its literature. This Polish spirit penetrated the Iron Curtain. The publications of the Gen. W. Sikorski Institute, where the regimental colours of the Polish Armed Forces in the West were deposited, and of the Polish Cultural Foundation. The periodicals like the Parisian 'Kultura' (*Culture*), the Polish press spread in Europe and in the United States and enlightened not only those who settled in various countries outside Poland but equally penetrated her closed borders. That was the beginning, awakening the minds of politicians who had decided the fate of nations at Yalta!

The Cold War resulted in the creation of broadcasting programmes in radio-stations such as 'Radio Free Europe' and in television undermining faith in the happy life of the citizens of the Soviet 'paradise'. Higher educational institutions decided to invite lecturers recruited from the émigré communities in order to teach the students of free world the truth about Communism and its implication in post-war societies.

Whilst the American, Canadian and British soldiers returned in full glory to their family homes, for many Poles their homes had ceased to exist. Half of Poland was given to Soviet Russia, and the Communist Republic of Poland deprived General Maczek and other military leaders of their citizenship.

The conquerors of Monte Cassino and Bologne, the defenders of Tobruk and Great Britain – the Polish airmen, heroes of the Battle of Britain – were declared traitors of their nation. For those who were the first to oppose the German invaders, the Cold War began at the Victory Parade in 1945, to which they were not invited as a result of the interventions of Stalin.

The Polish losses from Hitler's attack and German occupation were immeasurable, but even greater losses were inflicted by the 50 years of Soviet rule. Hundreds of thousands of Polish patriots died in Communist prisons – the officers at Katyń, and the soldiers of the Armia Krajowa (Home Army) in the dungeons of the security forces. Millions were deported to Soviet labour camps. The enlightened strata of the nation were destroyed, the whole structure of society was demolished, replacing the pre-war elite with party nouveau riche drawn from within the new authorities.

In such conditions, only a small percentage of the Division's soldiers decided to return – about five per cent of officers and about 8% of other ranks. They were mostly older people and Silesians. In the last months of battle the Division had accepted into its ranks soldiers originating from parts of Poland annexed by Hitler to the Reich and therefore conscripted into the German army. Many of them had volunteered to be captured on the western front with the intention of joining the Polish Army. They now returned to their family regions to work in mining, not confronting any difficulties, though in some cases the authorities carried out investigations into whether enlistment in the German army did not tie in with the voluntary acceptance of citizenship of the Reich.

Among the returning officers, General Franciszek Skibiński was an outstanding figure, and later to become the author of many academic works on military matters. He was a cavalry officer from the 1920 campaign which won a victorious war against the Bolsheviks' invasion of Poland, Chief of Staff of the 10th Motorised Cavalry Brigade in 1939 and in 1940 in France and C.O. of the Brigade, and for some period, of the Infantry Brigade in battles in Holland and in Germany. He returned to Poland with the intention of staying in the army and found himself among people with whom he had nothing in common. At first he was given the Chair of Armoured Forces at the Staff Academy, but in April 1951 he was arrested for alleged spying and sentenced to death. In 1956, with the leniency of the new regime under Gomułka, he was given back his freedom, once more putting on his military uniform and ending his service in 1964 with the rank of Lt General of the People's Army of Poland. The experiences of General Skibiński were presented in detail in the book *Franciszek Skibiński, żołnierz, teoretyk, historyk wojskowy* – Publ. Stefan Czarniecki Officers' Staff School, Poznań (*Franciszek Skibiński, soldier, theoretician, military historian*) by Col. Franciszek Idkowiak.

On the 14th July 1947, the then Col. Skibiński sailed into Gdańsk. On the 7th September of the same year, he voluntarily placed himself at the disposal of Lieutenant-General Zygmunt Berling, C.O. Polish Forces and was given the Chair of the Armoured Forces at the Polish Staff Academy. F. Idkowiak writes thus about the atmosphere which was growing around Skibiński's personality:

> As a result of personnel changes in commanding positions of the Polish Army, the release of officers to the reserve and also the first arrests towards the end of 1949, a psychosis of uncertainty developed amongst the pre-war officers there as to their future. Col. Skibiński recalls this period thus: 'I worked at the ASG [edit.: Akademia Sztabu Generalnego – Polish Staff Academy] until April 1951 – the last few years in a state of nervous anxiety and fear. The pre-war officers around me were beginning to be arrested. It came to it that every ring of the 'phone on my desk was unnerving

to the highest degree: I expected to be arrested. The party political apparatus started to perceive pre-war officers as a group unconnected with the reborn Polish Army' (Idkowiak, *op. cit.*, p. 100).

The further course of events was gearing up towards the repressions that were being prepared:

Analysing the opinions about Col. F. Skibiński published since 25th April 1949 to 20th April 1951 one can draw the conclusion that they were written in order to prepare the ground to discharge him from military service. He was accused of not only a lack of interest in the socio-political situation, a foreign ideology, but also of shortcomings in his professional training. Thus his usefulness in his appointed position was questioned. His service record covering the period 1 May 1949 to 10th November 1950 was confirmed by Gen. W. Korczyc. Having accepted the opinions of those directly in command above him, of Maj.-Gen. Wiktor Galczeni and of the commanding officer AGS, signed in his absence by Maj.-Gen. Wiktor Jankowski, Korczyc wrote: 'To be changed at the first possible opportunity'. Such an opportunity arose at the end of March 1951, when the academic head of the Armoured Forces was dismissed from his position' (Idkowiak, *op. cit.*, p. 100).

Further moves resulted from the logic of 'fraternal' soviet activities and its security services in Poland.

On April 28th 1951 he was suddenly arrested in his home in Warsaw at No 2 Dantyszka Road. It looked like a thugs' raid. At about 22.00 hrs the front door-bell rang frantically. After the doors were opened a few individuals appeared with pistols at the ready. After conducting a search of his flat, Col. F. Skibiński was handcuffed and driven over to the building of the Headquarters of the Information Bureau of the Ministry of National Defence at Chalubinski Road. At first he was convinced that a tragic error had occurred and that after it was cleared up he would be apologised to and released from arrest. He was only released from captivity on 7th April 1956. The legal basis for detaining Col. F. Skibiński in arrest was the 'Decision on temporary arrests' of the 30th April 1951 signed by the Army Procurator-in-Chief Col. Stanisław Zarakowski. The temporary arrest was anticipated to last until the 30th October of the same year. However that period was systematically prolonged right up to the date of the trial on the 25th and 26th April 1952, the explanation being that the investigations had not finished due to complications (Idkowiak, *op. cit.*, p. 101, 102).

The research of F. Idkowiak confirmed the fact that the repressions directed towards those soldiers returning from the West were being prepared by the Security Services authorities long before their return. Thus their fears in the years 1945 – 47 were fully founded:

Col. F. Skibiński, like most Polish officers returning from the West, found himself in the sphere of interest of the agents of the Ministry of Public Security and of the Chief Directorate of Information of the Polish Army. In keeping with 'Wytyczne odnośnie rozpracowania wrogiego elementu rekrutującego się z oficerów' (Directives with regard to interrogating the enemy element being recruited from amongst the officers) issued on 22nd November 1946 and signed by the Chief of the GZI (The Chief Directorate of Information of the Polish Army), it is likely that a 'Teczka kontrolno-obserwacyjna (TKO)' (A controlling-observational file [COF]) was opened on Col. F. Skibiński. These directives were to include evidence from among others officers who had arrived in the country from the Polish Armed Forces in the West. Further instructions and directives systematically widened and segregated the index of suspects. A higher

stage of the work on an officer was the starting up of 'Akt rozpracowania pojedynczego (ARP)' (The act of an individual interrogation [AIWO]) (Idkowiak, *op. cit.,* p.102).

Repressions to which General Skibiński was subjected were part of the battle with 'the conspiracy in the army'. The beginnings of 1951 were a time of preparation of thousands of trials, including those of Generals Tatar, Kirchmayer and many others. General Skibiński became one of hundreds of victims picked on amongst officers who wanted to serve Poland. The cruelty of repression is difficult to relate, and even more difficult to understand.

After his arrest F. Skibiński was held under investigation in the Chief Directorate of Information. For the first ten days he did not admit to the offences he was accused of, even though the interrogations lasted 15–16 hours a day. This is illustrated by the appendix showing the hours of interrogation of Col. F. Skibiński. After ten days he was broken, however, and he gave a self-incriminating statement. This was caused, as he explained after leaving prison, by exhaustion, by long interrogations and lack of sleep, and also the persuasion of Col. Antoni Skulbaszewski – the deputy Chief of Investigations of the GZI Information HQ, who frequently suggested to him the possibility of arresting his wife if he did not admit to his crime. The mental and physical state of the arrested man after a cycle of intensive interrogations can be testified to by the words of Piotr Woźniak, a soldier of the AK (Home Army), a prisoner of the Military Intelligence: 'It was an unfailing method of obtaining statements from everybody, even the most hardened prisoner – without beatings [...]. The prisoner at that time found himself in such a situation that he could incriminate himself and others with whatever unlikely accusations were demanded of him. He was utterly helpless, set up – a tool in someone else's hands. Nothing concerned him. He did not fight for his life. He was prepared [...]. Those who did not live through this, will never be able to understand and believe it [...]' (Idkowiak, *op. cit.,* p. 103).

After a year of brutal interrogation, based on forcibly extracted statements from the accused and co-accused witnesses, an act of indictment was drawn up accusing Col. F. Skibiński of participating in an army counter-revolutionary conspiracy and spying carried out for the intelligence services of imperialistic states. In this indictment it was stated that amongst others Col. F. Skibiński entered the conspiracy in the autumn of 1946 in London (Idkowiak, *op. cit.,* p. 104).

Col. F. Skibiński and the others accused 'admitted' to the offences carried out. It was a result of not only forcible extraction of statements by way of interrogations lasting several hours and sleep deprivation, but also of 'gentle persuasion' at which Col. Skulbaszewski was particularly adept. The Investigating Officer, Mjr Ignacy Maciechowski, who led the case of Franciszek Skibiński in the initial stages, wrote on this topic in a note dated December 1955: 'After about a week of intensive work Skibiński, directly during a conversation carried out with him by Col. Skulbaszewski in my presence, stated that he took part in the organization and said he was ready to give a written explanation, which he did. The 'persuasion' which influenced Skibiński to give evidence, was dependant on the clear emphasis by Col. Skulbaszewski that his case was already decided in advance and that only admission will create circumstances in which it would be possible to guarantee him comparatively lenient consequences.' After the evidence was closed the prosecutor concluded that a fair penalty should be given to the 'enemy of the people' and that the death penalty be such a sentence. In his last words Col. F. Skibiński said: 'I fully approve the official statement of the prosecutor with regards to the types of offences I have committed.' This provides an

explanation of the fact that to the end Col. F. Skibiński was convinced that submissiveness towards the system would ameliorate the harshness of the sentence (Idkowiak, *op. cit.,* p. 104, 105).

The Supreme Military Court did not have any doubt as to the guilt of the accused and in the sentence announced on 28th April 1952 all the accused were found guilty of the crimes stated in Art. 86, par. 1 & 2 of the Penal Code of the Polish Army, and of Art. 7 in association with Art. 6 of the quoted decree. For the above crimes all the accused were sentenced to death in concurrance with the loss of public and citizens' honorary rights for ever and the loss of their material goods and property to the State Treasury. On the 29th April 1952 Col. Skibiński wrote to the Convent of the Judges of the Highest Military Court requesting the application of the law of leniency. He did not, however, withdraw his evidence. He regarded the death sentence as a stain on the life of his family. He cited his services in battles of WW 2 (Idkowiak, *op. cit.,* p. 105).

On the 30th April Col. F. Skibiński was driven from prison of GZI MON (the Chief Directorate of the Information of the Ministry of National Defence) to prison Warszawa 1 – Mokotów. He tried to commit suicide, but was prevented from doing so. To force him to give further evidence, the approach to his impending execution was re-enacted several times. It happened like this: he would be summoned out of his cell, taken to the so-called 'finishing-line' where the death-sentences were carried out and told to await his execution. After the passing of some time the Investigating Officer would turn up again and encourage him to give further evidence. After two weeks of awaiting the execution he was again driven across to the prison in Chałubiński Road where he was subjected to further interrogations. The investigating authorities had been given yet another means of pressure for the sentenced General in the form of persuasion, that if he would give evidence well, he could save himself from the sentence being carried out. For 21 months after the verdict sentencing him to death, Col. Skibiński lived under the threat of its execution. During that time he was taken advantage of to make false statements in other matters (Idkowiak, *op. cit.,* p. 106).

He stayed in the prison in Rawicz until 2nd March 1956. At that time he wrote his last request to the Political Bureau of the Central Committee PZPR, underlining his innocence and shedding light on the work methods of the investigating organizations. His last months in prison were spent in Wronki. He stayed there until April 1956 where on the strength of a decision of the 6th April 1956 of the Chief Army Military Procurator the penal process was frozen on the grounds of lack of evidence of guilt. However, he did not live long enough to be fully rehabilitated. The declaration that he did not commit the crimes of which he was accused was to be found only in the Decision dated 27th December 1995 of the Chief Military Prosecutor, a few years after his death.

The imprisonment [...] was without doubt the most tragic period in the life of Col. F. Skibiński. He fell victim of the system ruling Poland at that time. It is difficult today, sitting behind a desk and not having the opportunity of testing oneself in similarly extreme circumstances, to pass judgement on his moral stance. What is certain is that he badly wanted to live and that he fought to exist using methods which, in 'normal' circumstances, he would not accept (Idkowiak, *op. cit.,* p. 108, 109).

Franciszek Skibiński had already published several studies on military subjects during the war. But his greatest academic and literary contributions arose after he was released from prison. From 1956 he published 19 books and over one hundred academic articles, minor studies and reviews. They were dedicated to two subjects: the theory of war, and military history in the 20th century. In both fields his works shed the light of military science on problems avoided in Marxist-Leninist theories of war. It was characteristic that the greatest works of F. Skibiński, such as *Teoria sztuki wojennej* (*The Theory of the Art of War*) were

printed only in the so-called, at the time, 'mała poligrafia' (small publication) with an edition of ... 150 copies. They were not sold in bookshops, and were available in military libraries only to those who were authorised. Franciszek Skibiński published a series of studies on the battles in Normandy, Falaise, Ardennes, just to mention the more significant works. These books, as opposed to works about the art of war, were available in bookshops. The author made use of the most recent western literature, when and if he was able to obtain it. He opened new horizons, demonstrated unknown facts offering different interpretations to the reader. Although all these books of necessity went through censorship, he became the pioneer of detailed writings, free of propaganda, about the western front of the WW 2.

For the reader of his books the most important is the work *Pierwsza Pancerna* (*The First Armoured*) published in 1959. It has had six editions and was the first detailed monograph in Poland dedicated to the achievements of the 1st Armoured Division. In 1989, T.A. Wysocki's book *Pierwsza Dywizja Pancerna. Geneza i dzieje* (*First Armoured Division. Genesis and Achievements*) appeared in Poland, thus for thirty years, Skibiński's was the only book about the 1st Division.

> In introduction to *Pierwsza Pancerna* (*The First Armoured*) the author wrote thus about his book:
>
> I do not treat this book as a history of the First Armoured Division, and I do not think that anyone should treat it as such. I have written down only my personal memories when taking part in WW 2, and, as I had the good fortune of fighting through three campaigns as an officer of the 1st Armoured Division, whose embryo was the 10th Cavalry Brigade, I wrote correspondingly a great deal about the Division. I realise that here and there some inaccuracies could have crept in, equally from the lack of detailed information, or also as the result, above all, of my emotional engagement with regiments of my own Division.
>
> That is why the historical material contained in *Pierwsza Pancerna* needs to be confronted with sources when used for academic and historical purposes. I wrote about three war campaigns, as I saw them, from my private point of view, and this I wish to stress, yet again, practically exclusively on the basis of my own notes which were written on the spot during war activities – (during the third campaign I carried a typewriter in my tank) (Skibiński, *op. cit.,* p. 5, 6).

It was not only in Poland that *Pierwsza Pancerna* was a pioneering historical study based on personal recollections. Let us remember that it was published in Warsaw two years before the publication of General Maczek's book. The author in *Pierwsza Pancerna* demonstrates an unusual ability to get round the stupidity of communist censorship and ends his introduction:

> And yet a few words addressed to military readers: 'the military nomenclature used by me – particularly in the first part – is not always in accordance with that which is now in use. The change in vocabulary arose, you see, in a period during which I lost, temporarily, contact with the army' (Skibiński, *op. cit.,* p. 8).

The censor did not notice, or did not want to notice, that the period during which 'temporarily, contact with the army' was lost was the six years of torture of the author in a communist prison – a Polish hero of WW 2!

The author writes about getting round the censor and the official propaganda on almost every page of his book. Its true hero is General Stanisław Maczek, at the time still deprived of his Polish citizenship for betrayal of his country. The manner in which Franciszek Skibiński writes in *Pierwsza Pancerna* about Stanisław Maczek proves the author's mastery in dealing with the censor's absurd prohibitions.

General Skibiński was one of the soldiers of the 1st Division who went through the heaviest of tortures in Poland. But after leaving prison he managed to create a literary heritage as very few writers did. That speaks volumes about the strength of spirit of the soldiers of the 1st Armoured Division.

The fortunes of those soldiers whose life on return to Poland unfolded in different ways are so varied, that they demand a separate study. In October 1956 the authorities tried to curtail repression against them and to get away from damning the combatants of the Armia Krajowa (Home Army) and of those who had come from the West. Thousands of those innocently murdered in prisons were rehabilitated, which in itself was, tragically, an absurdity. Following those changes came permission to start up combatants' organizations under the control of the authorities. Scattered in Poland, soldiers of the 1st Armoured Division began to form their own associations throughout the country. The documentation gathered by them may be a relevant source for the post-war history of the Division's combatants in Poland. Sources of information for the post-war history relating to what happened to those who returned home from abroad show that the treatment by the authorities varied in accordance with their adaptability and usefulness, measured by new values of the communist doctrines governing Poland for the next fifty years.

Not all were treated like General Skibiński who was black-listed as an enemy of the people.

A different future awaited Col. Władysław Dec, the last C.O. of the 3rd Rifles Brigade. A regular officer of the Infantry serving in the September campaign as Staff Major, after joining the Polish Forces under General Sikorski in France, he took over a battalion of Highlanders commanding them in the battle of Narvik in Norway. After the collapse of France he reached England and, with the Armoured Division, took part in the action on the Continent. He became the author of his wartime adventures in a book *Narwik i Falaise* – MON, Warsaw 1958 (*Narvik and Falaise*). This book had three editions and was promoted by the Ministry of Education as obligatory reading in the army and in high school libraries.

Amongst the senior officers who had decided to return was also Col. Aleksander Nowaczyński, C.O. of the 8th Rifles (Bloody Shirts) Battalion. He did manual labour and was called nearly every day for interviews at the Head of Militia Offices for the first few years. Only after the accession to power of Władysław Gomułka in 1956 did the persecution of those soldiers of the Polish Armed Forces who had returned to Poland from the West cease. Those who had entered ZBOWID (The Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy), an ex-combatant organization enjoying the trust of the communist authorities, even began to perform some functions in the community and the economic life of the People's Republic.

The return to communist Poland of young officers of the Division had, in many cases, tragic consequences, such as the experiences of Lt Jerzy Niewinowski. After settling in his home town of Łódź, his life was 'pleasantly' enhanced in Stalinist fashion. This brought depression and other nervous disorders and death at an early age.

Even more risky was the decision to return by sons of wealthy landed gentry. Przemysław Kwilecki, after the death of his father, who had been exiled to Russia in 1941, the last squire of Kwilcz, is a good example. As a cadet officer, he served in a reconnaissance platoon of the 2nd Armoured Regiment, and after being promoted to an officer, was detached to take care of Polish studs, looted by Germans. Accompanying them when returning these well-bred horses to Poland, which eventually recreated the famous stud farms, Lt Kwilecki, for family reasons, stayed in Poznań. His ability to take care of horses was deemed inadequate and he was allocated to physical work, labouring in the 'Stomil' factory manufacturing car tyres. For several years as a workman he took part in building a 'better' Poland.

Only after Gomułka's takeover of power did he manage to move to the humble job of a bank clerk. Like Niewinowski, after unending interrogations, he ended up with nervous ailments, happily though, he did not share the fate of other landed gentry murdered by their compatriots in the prisons of the UB (Security Services).

There were eight serving officers of landed gentry origins in the 2nd Armoured Rergiment: The Commanding Officers Col. Stanisław Koszutski and Major Michał Gutowski, Captains Henryk Bolechowski and Cyryl Czarkowski-Golejewski and Lieutenants Andrzej Jezierski, Przemysław Kwilecki, Zbigniew Mieczkowski and Stanisław Schwarzburg-Gunther. Kwilecki and Bolechowski decided to return. The latter, after sharing similar experiences to the others, died a few years after settling on the outskirts of Warsaw.

Major Edward Uściński, 2nd in command of the regiment, after moving to Włocławek, the home town of his wife, despite the fact that they did not get back their family chemist's shop, adapted themselves very well and, after accepting Communist Party membership, worked in a newly built industrial conglomerate. Those with higher education, like Captain Jerzy Nowakowski or Lt Jan Żarski, after adapting to the requirements of the new political authorities, found positions in the developing industries. Some, like Lt Jacek Stwora, with artistic abilities, after bad experiences of the Stalinist era helped in the development of the Kraków radio programme. For most of the soldiers life in People's Poland was difficult and after many problems some like Lt Ryszard Zatorski and Cpl Andrzej Szempliński took the limited opportunities to turn back and choose freedom in the West.

Ryszard Zatorski was one of 'General Sikorski's tourists' with the most interesting life history. An unsettled spirit until his later years, at the age of 16 he defended Warsaw in 1939, then, as a volunteer, crossed over the Slovakian mountains to Hungary and through Yugoslavia reached France. In England he completed the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst receiving the Sword of Honour for his year, later to be decorated with the Virtuti Militari and the Cross of Valour while serving in the 2nd Armoured Regiment. With his newly-wed wife, liberated from a prisoner-of-war camp after the Warsaw Uprising, he returned to Poland. After a 2-year period of persecution he participated in a sea escape in a folding dinghy and was happily rescued on the Baltic coast of the German Federal Republic. After numerous experiences, developing various interests, he settled in Australia and committed himself to work on the linguistics of Noam Chomsky, teaching his theories of cybernetics, logic and philosophy. Towards the end of his academic career he decided to take up sailing on his ocean-sailing yacht 'Polarity', often sailing alone on the seas surrounding Tasmania. At 70 years of age he went solo in a glider and kept flying for the next five years with a C class certificate.

Zatorski is a fine example of the youth that grew up during the 20 inter-war years of Poland's independence. 'What foreign powers have seized from Poland, we shall take back, swords in hand...' – sung whole generations of fathers of those young people. Here one should seek out the reasons for their successes in nearly every field of civilian life. They were the flower of the Polish knighthood of the WW 2. With their unbending characters, they formed the 1st Armoured Division.

The majority of these young people were not, however, forced, as was Zatorski, to back-breaking escapes from under communist terror in order to find themselves in the free world again. The greater majority, after taking off their uniforms, did not return to communist Poland, continuing their fight, in word and deed, against the teachings of Stalinist doctrines which fooled the communities of the western democracies.

An unusually interesting description of the return to People's Poland in the autumn of 1947 and the welcome prepared for soldiers by the Communist authorities, are narrated in his excellent book *Przepustka do życia* (*A Passport to Life*) by Andrzej Szempliński, one of the Division's youngest soldiers. The author, after being liberated from captivity, enlisted in the 2nd Armoured Regiment. In 1947 he decided to return to his mother and fiancée who

had been left behind in the burning capital. With great literary talent, the author paints a vivid picture of his dramatic adventures and great disappointment when confronted with Polish reality under communism.

Szemplinski, after completing his university education, emigrated to the USA where he developed his career. In retirement he devoted much of his time to reminiscing about the pre-war times and the period of occupation ending with the Warsaw Uprising and his impressions from service in the Division on German territory.

VETERANS SCATTERED ALL OVER THE WORLD

Diametrically differing experiences were associated with demobilization in the British Isles. Although they were not associated with political persecution, nonetheless taking off one's uniform and settling down was particularly difficult for elderly regular officers. The problem confronting them all was to find a place to work and live in an unfamiliar society.

The majority remained in Great Britain. They knew England, and particularly Scotland, quite well. In the industrial towns of the North and the Midlands, in Manchester, Birmingham and in many others, Polish communities came into being self-governing and separated from the local population.

For 45 years these very patriotic émigré centres supported the Polish Government-in-Exile, promoted Polish culture, sponsored the General Władysław Sikorski Museum and other Polish institutions. The Poles established their own independent hierarchy separated from the local authorities and being loyal to its own political leaders. They drifted apart from British society but in time the contacts were re-established. The mayors and other official representatives of municipalities began to attend the more important Polish events arriving at the conclusion that the existence of those well-organised communities would enrich the folklore and social life of Great Britain. Furthermore, with passing years they became aware of the harm done to a faithful ally by the unfortunate political decisions of the Great Powers.

The military past of those who settled in the British Isles was reflected by various organisations such as the Polish Ex-Combatants Association, the Polish Air Force and Naval Associations and many regimental Old Boys' circles. In London, The White Eagle Club (*Orzeł Biały*), the Polish Hearth Club (*Ognisko Polskie*), Polish Air Force Club (*Klub Lotników Polskich*) and others were the centres of social life. In the provinces, next to erected churches, parish halls were established. Polish social centres were founded often in the vicinity of churches.

The Poles opened secondary schools in Great Britain. At Fawley Court there was a secondary boarding school for boys run by the Polish Marian Fathers according to the syllabus recognised by the British Ministry of Education and enabling entry to UK universities. Many sons of soldiers were educated there. Among them Andrzej Suchcitz, later custodian at the General Sikorski Museum and Colonel Ciągliński, a British army officer serving for several years as Attaché Militaire in the British Embassy in Warsaw. At Pitsford, a secondary boarding school for girls was also established, run by Polish nuns, the Sisters of Nazareth, being a continuation of the wartime girls' school in Dunalastair House in Scotland.

The Polish Scout Movement, which had played an important role in the Underground Resistance under German occupation, was very popular among the young generations conscious of the tragic history of their Country.

Polish language and history was preserved by Saturday schools for children. Higher education was made possible by attending lectures at the Polish University College later to be incorporated into the Battersea College and then the University of Surrey. Courses in higher education were also run by PUNO (the Polish University Abroad) which continued the traditions of the pre-war Stefan Batory University in Wilno. Established at the Polish

Socio-Cultural Centre in London (POSK), next to the purpose-built Polish Library housing the collection of more than 120 thousand titles and extensive war period archives. For half a century educational and cultural institutions together with the General Sikorski Institute and Museum were the bastions of Polish heritage preserving the truth and acting against Communist propaganda infiltrating Great Britain and other European countries.

The press, headed by the 'Polish Soldiers' Daily', numerous periodicals and several publishing houses complemented the activities of this Polish state-in-exile at whose helm stood the President of the Republic. The Ministers of the Polish Government were responsible to the National Council (Rada Narodowa), which assembled different political parties. General Stanisław Maczek set politics aside. However, General Władysław Anders took over the leadership of military organisations united in the ex-Combatant Associations and other regimental groupings.

This 'state-in-exile', with the passing of decades, slowly began to weaken but it did last almost half a century, to the moment of the re-instatement of Poland's independence and the handing over of the State Insignia by the last President of the Republic, Ryszard Kaczorowski, to President Lech Wałęsa on 23rd December 1990.

During this long post-war period, the attitude of the English and the Scots to the Poles changed radically. Adam Zamoyski, in his book on Polish airmen, dramatically shows this change, which could be felt with every step of daily life.

A few English acquaintances remained real friends. The majority succumbed to the press propaganda announcing that Poles should go home. The press torpedoed Polish declarations which stated that Poland was again under occupation, this time under Soviet occupation; that the Soviet paradise does not exist; and communism turns citizens into slaves. Nobody listened! Russia was worshipped! Naïve Brits imagined the Soviet Union to be a powerful democracy and the Poles were portrayed as relics of fascism and feudal class-ridden society.

English public opinion had had enough of the Poles and their problems. The town of Peebles, where in 1997 a memorial was erected to commemorate the stay of Polish soldiers fifty years earlier, sent a petition to the local Scottish authorities begging them not to station any more Polish units there.

Whilst the war lasted, Scotland was interested in the battles fought by the First Polish Armoured Division. Articles appeared in the press praising the bravery of the Poles and recording their marriages to Scottish girls. Things changed later. The Press presented Communist Poland as a free democratic country and raised disturbing questions: For what purpose should the Poles stay with us? To gain employment? To obtain a higher standard of living? or maybe for political reasons! If so, this means they are not democrats!

This picture of Poles in the eyes of the British changed once Communism showed its true face and Soviet Russia ceased to be a great friend. After 40 years of the Cold War, English Society understood that Poles had serious reasons for not returning home. At Duns, in 1981, a memorial was erected to honour the 140 soldiers of the 1st and 2nd Armoured Regiments killed in action who had been stationed there in 1942 – 1944.

The election of John Paul II in 1978 determined the religious and political life of the whole world for the next 25 years. He proved that history can be changed without recourse to armoured divisions. For Poland this was the beginning of the end of communist rule.

Taking off uniforms and settling down in a foreign country was a particularly difficult period for regular officers of advanced years. General Stanisław Maczek belonged to these.

The future of General Stanisław Maczek after the cessation of hostilities was very different from those of corresponding ranks in the Allied Forces, until recently his comrades-in-arms.

History once more showed that victorious leaders of vanquished nations do not reap the fruits of their successes. After the war American, British, French or Canadian senior officers had an open road to further advancement in the army and in civilian life. Political

careers, or chairmanships of large businesses and banks awaited them. Those who decided to retire left with honours and large pensions.

When the war ended, General Maczek was 57 years old. In considering his further life it is worth remembering his age. He was two years younger than Generals Ch. de Gaulle and D. Eisenhower. At the age of 57 Stanisław Maczek was a man in excellent physical condition, he had a brilliant mind, a thorough education both in the humanities and in the military sciences, leadership qualities and rare war experience. He had the great ability to manage people with intelligence and wisdom.

The future showed that in 1945, discounting the years before coming-of-age, General Maczek still had more than half his adult life – 45 years – ahead of him. To the end, at the age of 102 years, he was fully capable both physically and mentally.

To name the post-war careers of outstanding Allied Commanders would require a special study but let us recall, as an example, a few of them. Two generals older than Maczek were to become Presidents of their countries: D. Eisenhower and Ch. de Gaulle. Gen. D. MacArthur reached the peak of his army career 8 years after the end of WW 2 as the Commander of the United Nations Army in the Korean War. General G.C. Marshall became an outstanding politician and the creator of the successful programme for the rebuilding of Europe – the Marshall Plan. One could write without end about the careers of hundreds of lesser known Allied generals.

In contrast to his Allied equivalents, for General Maczek there were to be no opportunities after the war to take advantage of his unusual qualifications. One of the most outstanding leaders WW 2, having reached the end of hostilities in good health, had no future ahead of him.

For political reasons he could not return to his country to continue in military service for which he had the highest qualifications. The servile politics of Great Britain and the United States towards the Soviet Union excluded commissioning him in the British or American Forces, even if he had sought such a position. As far as is known, he did not receive from governments or from private Western corporations any proposals worthy of his capabilities.

In 1947, General Maczek finally left the service. He was 59 years old then, 33 years of which he had spent in uniform and collected an insignificant pension from the British government, not enabling him to support his family. Scotland became for him an adopted country, where he spent more than half his life and where he undertook the humble work of a barman, continuing with it into a late age while his strength lasted. To the end he was surrounded by love and respect. A sad symbol of this was the fact that when soldiers of his Division stepped into his bar, they always stood to attention in front of him. All who knew and met him, admired to the end the dignity with which he bore his fate.

But it was not only the Allies who treated General Maczek so badly. He was one of the most outstanding leaders of WW 2 not yet to have had a biography written by a professional historian. An album about General Maczek containing many exceedingly interesting photographs was published in London in 1994 depicting the hero's whole life, but the biographical part includes only the period of his life to 1945.

More information can be found in the General's memoirs *Od podwody do czołga* (*From Horsecart to Tank*), which have been translated into French. For the careful reader, they are an indispensable source for getting to know this remarkable personality. His book, dedicated to his soldiers, was written in the fifties and first published in 1961. Its subject is his war experiences and analyses, and covers the period to May 1945. The reader does not discover anything about the post-war experiences of the General; the whole rich sphere of his personal, family, and intellectual life and the General's views on non-military matters are presented only very briefly.

The period 1945 – 1992 is covered by materials based on sources from archives and the émigré press and, perhaps, by many unpublished memoirs remaining in the drawers of

those who were in contact with the General till the end. But these sources, known and unknown, await a future biographer.

A biography of General Stanisław Maczek should include the way in which he was treated by the Polish Communist authorities. In September 1945 he was, together with 5 Generals and 75 senior Officers of the Polish Armed Forces in the West, stripped of his citizenship. The decree issued by the Council of Ministers dated 26.09.1946 declared that:

> The following soldiers of the former Polish Armed Forces in Great Britain have lost on the 6th day of September 1946 citizenship of the Polish state by enlisting, without agreement of the appropriate Polish authorities, to serve in the armed forces of a foreign state, by enlisting into the Polish Resettlement Corps which is a paramilitary organization, being a part of the British Army administratively and by undertaking there administrative and recruiting activities in relation to other Polish soldiers with the intent of delaying their return to the Country contrary to the interests of the Polish Nation and State:
>
> Generals:
>
> 1. Kopański Stanisław
> 2. Chruściel Antoni
> 3. Maczek Stanisław Władysław
> 4. Malinowski Tadeusz
> 5. Masny Karol.

Demobilization for the senior officers was often linked to employment they were not prepared for professionally or mentally. The beginning was the most difficult, as Colonel Stanisław Koszutski describes in his book *Wspomnienia z różnych pobojowisk* (*Memoirs from Various Battlefields*):

> The furnace fan is humming. I raise myself from my corner behind the laundry-boiler and look at the temperature control gauge. The pressure falls! With the iron doors of the stove open, the heat of the fire wraps around me.
>
> One, two, three spades of coal – I chuck them into the depths of the furnace. And then two, and again another two shovels, nearer the opening. I turn the air intake and look at the manometer. Little by little the indicator begins to move to the right. The automatic fan switches off. The contented boiler settles down.
>
> Ahead of me seven minutes of boredom... No longer do I count either the windows or the chimneys, which are within my field of vision. I know them by heart! 12 chimneys and 29 windows of the old people's hospital.
>
> If I go five steps beyond the door of the boiler-house I see a stretch of road. If I go further, up to the pile of coal, I will see the distant hills of Dartmoor.
>
> 'Lovely view you have from here,' the manager of the laundry once told me. As though this lovely view were to reward me for the sight of the gloomy and stuffy boiler room.
>
> Who are those persuading me to change my nationality? Do they not understand that as a Polish gentleman I can bear throwing coal into the furnace for 9 hours a day because my thoughts and sentiments are elsewhere, because I can yearn and lament, curse, and have hope, and think that there is some meaning in this absurdity. Sense in nonsense! Everything that has been, would end for me forever, if I 'become an Englishman'. By accepting the present there would be absolutely nothing left.
>
> I am asked who I was and what have I done in the past. A lance-corporal in the army and a salesman in civilian life, I say. I do not want their questions creeping into

my privacy. I am hopeless at cleaning lavatories and scrubbing the garage. What does all this have in common with my past?

Time drags slowly. The hours go one by one. Nothing ever happens.

How odd it is that one was not afraid of death at war, yet one is frightened of such a life.

Maks Tuski defiant Captain of the 17th Lancers murdered in Katyń, Emil Sikorski dashing horse artilleryman killed at Gazala in the Libyan Desert, Gużkowski and Sobański killed in action at Mińsk Mazowiecki, Captain Sokołowski Tadeusz in the Gestapo dungeons, Colonel Levittoux in Normandy, Captain Kownas at Barle-Nassau in Holland, Zbyszek Kiedacz at Sandro in Italy, Majors: Maciejowski at Falaise, Kański at Jort.

Friends and colleagues! How happy was your fate! Some of you fell in uniform with the emblems and colours of your arms and regiments, in the thunder of gunfire at the head of your units. Others, though disarmed, fulfilled the destiny maybe even more honourably in the great traditions of our Nation.

When my hour comes, how will you greet me – a labourer from an English laundry?

What noise there will be and what laughter! Unless, maybe, if I tell you about how I came to be in that laundry, riding over the mountains and sailing over the seas. How I crossed the Somme and the Meuse, and the Rhine. How the tracks of our tanks were drowned in flowers, when we drove through Ghent. How we liberated the Polish girls in Oberlangen and burned German towns. How Wilhelmshaven capitulated. How memorial plaques in our honour were mounted on the walls of Ypres and Breda. How the guard-of-honour squadron paraded under the Arc de Triomphe in Paris!

...'Paul, Paul!' yells a sixteen-year old kid. – 'You've forgotten to wash the cups – be quick – everybody will be drinking tea in a minute.' – I take away dirty dishes breaking something again. Someone will be cross!

The furnace is roaring. My colleagues from the laundry are talking football while having tea. In a while I am alone again with two sparrows which came for crumbs. Once again the curtain rises: – I hear sounds of command and soldiers marching on the road. General Anders is reviewing the armoured squadron at Lauder in Scotland with tears in his eyes.

...Heavy guy, Anders, even two of us could hardly drag him injured all night long in the mountains! And all around us, like wolves, the gangs of armed Ukrainians. That was September 1939.

Captain Czapliński of the 9th Horse Artillery reports that he has fired the last rounds. Stepping without haste, the battery leaves the position under fire of the Bolshevik tanks. They will be bragging later that their three squadrons broke up the whole division.

Taking up their assigned positions, the 12th Regiment of the Podolian Lancers gallops through the German tanks on the first day of war – The legend goes to the whole world that the Polish Cavalry charged the German tanks on horseback.

Suchowola – there lies the Tomb of the Polish Cavalry. Only the Nowogródek and Wilno Brigades are fighting on. In the woods at Krasnobród these brigades parade in front of General Anders. This is a bigger ceremony than on all pre-war National Days. 'Eyes! Right!' on parade. Bolt upright the lancers decimated in battles! Every so often a horse falls on its knees as though to pray and black-red blood blasts out from its nostrils. To the last, the faithful companion stiffens, draws his last breath and dies. The lancer loosens the saddle-girth and moves along to the footmen ranks. The march-past continues on in an orderly manner.

Hundreds and hundreds of these horses mark the route of the last days! Yet a further three battles with the Germans and on the 27th of September, the column of

regiments rides into the red Soviet sea. Destiny is fulfilled. – The Horse Artillery fired the last rounds.

'Whether it be that it comes to us to die in battle – or in the Siberian taigas to rot. From our labours and toils Poland will rise again' [edit: This song echoes memories from the struggles against Tsarist oppressions].

After difficult beginnings Col. Stanisław Koszutski emigrated to Brazil, where he became a director of his own factory manufacturing spares for the motor industry.

And here is how General Michał Gutowski recalls his start in civilian life:

I had been awarded a high American decoration, The Legion of Merit, and was entitled to settle in the USA. But my wife said: 'We have two sons, maybe they will have to serve in the American Army and take part in some other war'. So we decided therefore to go to Canada where I had been promised a job. Unfortunately, when we finally arrived there in November, the job had gone. Due to a shortage of money, I went to wash cars for 75 cents an hour. Some time later I organised and directed a riding club for two years. On three occasions I coached the Canadian equestrian team, but when I truthfully told them that they didn't stand a chance at the Olympics, I lost that job. I was asked again, at a future date, to coach the team but I only accepted this work temporarily until my successor could be found.

I imported quite cheap horses and, after training them, sold them for a good profit. I was able to sell one of my horses for a large sum of money and bought some land which in 15 years tripled in value. As a result we bought our own house in Canada with money honestly earned. We were tremendously lucky.

Army service during war forges bonds amongst old comrade-in-arms for the rest of their lives. These bonds include remembering those who died in battle and those who survived the war. This principle works in all armies. This bond always has its emotional aspect, but often takes on an organisational form. It could not be otherwise with the veterans of the 1st Division:

Here we present only a selection of reminiscences of soldiers, scattered all over the world and crossing over into civilian life, of all units of the Division organised in their associations.

General Gutowski recollects:

On American soil two organisations were active. I have the impression that there were also other organisations, such as the French or the Canadian, which Polish veterans joined. These gave certain prerogatives. I did not belong to them. However, there was a cavalry organisation and a horse artillery organisation as well as a divisional one. The cavalry organisation died out – literally; I remained the only pre-war cavalryman. As regards the divisional organisation, not only did it continue, but it flourished. The first Chairman was Major Proszek of the 1st Armoured Regiment, then Captain Giera of the 10th Dragoons Regiment. The Association elected me Honorary Chairman. We adopted a sort of uniform and carried a combatants' standard at various festivities. We organised get-togethers and parties. The 19th of October was recognised as our Divisional Day.

Lt Colonel Stanisław Grabowski recollects:

Our Regimental Association of the 1st Armoured Regiment exists to this day. It was formed in June 1947 and in 1997 we celebrated the 50th Anniversary of its formation. Through all those years we met every month on August 19th, our Regimental Day and

the anniversary of the trashing we gave the Germans from the hill of Montormel. We discussed everything and kept up each other's spirits and that is how it is to this day.

The Association had a disabled fund formed from our subscriptions. We helped invalids and widows. We sent small sums to our colleagues in Poland and whoever found themselves in a difficult position. The invalids' situation improved when they were at last accepted in the British Invalids' Association.

Major Tadeusz Wielogórski recollects the formation of the Second Armoured Regiment Association:

We formed the Regimental Association on the 20th May 1948 together with Captain Zbigniew Mieczkowski, the last adjutant of the Regiment at Keevil Camp, where the largest group of our soldiers found itself at that time.

Our meetings with colleagues were always meetings of friends. The aim was not some sort of financial support or help in obtaining accommodation. When I used to come to London, I always stayed with my regimental colleague who had a tiny room. There were occasions when five of us slept in the one bed!

Our annual subscription to the Association was eight shillings and sixpence. But if someone applied with a particular need, we helped. My former driver had cancer of the throat. The operation and the insertion of the appropriate apparatus were very expensive. He turned to the Association and we helped him.

The following world-wide organisation structures, linking the soldiers of the Division over a 40-year period, makes interesting reading.

1st ARMOURED DIVISION WORLD ASSOCIATION

Chart of the organisation drawn up in 1958

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Chairman:	Lt-Gen. St. Maczek – Edinburgh, Scotland
Vice-Chairmen:	Maj.-Gen. K. Rudnicki – London
	Maj.-Gen. A. Grudziński – London
Secretary:	Lt W.A. Deimel – Reading, England

Maj. Oskar Grzeczkowski and Capt. Zbigniew Kierstan also served as Secretaries of the Executive Committee in other periods.

Treasurer:	Capt. B. Weber – London
Chair. Internal Audit Cttee:	Maj.-Gen. B. Noel – London
Chair. Arbitration Tribunal:	Col. K. Halicki – London

BRANCHES

10th Mounted Rifles Regiment	Chairman:	Lt-Col. J. Wasilewski – London
	Sec:	Lt A. Położynski
1st Armoured Regiment	Chairman:	Maj. St. Grabowski – London
	Sec:	Sgt J. Wosiek
2nd Armoured Regiment	Chairmen:	Capt. T. Wielogórski
	(Acting)	and Lt Z. Kozak – London
	Sec:	Lt St. Trębacz
24th Lancers Regiment	Chairman:	Col. K. Halicki – London
	Sec:	Capt. R. Bniński
10th Dragoons Regiment	Chairman:	Capt. Z. Kintzi – London
	Sec:	Lt Z. Makowiecki
1st Motorised Artillery Regiment	Chairman:	Maj. W. Pawłowski – London
	Sec:	Capt. St. Taras
2nd Motorised Artillery Regiment	Chairman:	Col. K. Maresch – London
	Sec:	Sgt W. Januszewski
1st Anti-Aircraft Artillery Regiment	Chairman:	Lt E. Bagiński – London
	Sec:	Capt. W. Dudek
1st Armoured Division	Chairman:	W.O.II E.C. Kondracki
(Manchester branch)	Sec:	Lt H.A. Majewski
1st Armoured Division	Chairman:	W.O.I J. Wierzbicki
(Yorkshire branch)	Sec:	J. Długosz
1st Armoured Division	Chairman:	Lt J. Hetman
(Wales branch)	Sec:	W. Olszowy
1st Armoured Division	Chairman:	Sgt St. Kucharczyk
(Bristol branch)	Sec:	S/Sgt A. Półtorzycki
1st Armoured Division – USA	Chairman:	Lt C. Zieliński
	Sec:	M. Kwaczeniuk
1st Armoured Division – Canada	Dep.Chair:	Maj. M. Wolnik

1st and 2nd Armoured Regiments – USA and Canada	Chairman:	Maj. R. Proszek
	Sec:	St. Zieliński
1st Armoured Division – Belgium	Chairman:	Sgt R. Łuczak
	Sec:	Capt. St. Merlo
1st Armoured Division – Australia	Chairman:	Lt W. Suwiński
	Sec:	Lt J. Kotlarz

DELEGATES OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Col. M. Czarnecki – France, Capt. R. Andruszkiewicz – Belgium, Lt J. Kowalski – Holland, Maj. K. Makuch – USA, S/Sgt K. Suska – deputy delegate for East USA, Lt-Col. E.L. Fryzendorf – deputy delegate for West USA, Lt J. Pawełkiewicz – Brazil.

The Association's activities included organising international reunions and commemorative events and attending anniversary events in the towns liberated by the Division. After the fall of communism in 1989, the Association was joined by former soldiers living in Poland.

Chart of the organisation drawn up in 1998

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Chairman:	Witold Deimel – Reading, England
Secretary:	Henryk Weber – Malvern, England

BRANCHES

10th Mounted Rifles Regiment	Chairman: J. Suchcitz – London Sec: T. Suchcitz
1st Armoured Regiment	Chairman: St. Grabowski – London Sec: St. Gudowski
2nd Armoured Regiment	Chairman: Z.J. Kozak – London Sec: Z. Kierstan, C. Lenik
24th Lancers Regiment	Chairman: K. Dergiman-Kownacki – London
10th Dragoons Regiment	Chairman: W.A. Deimel – London Sec: Z. Makowiecki
1st Motorised Artillery Regiment	Chairman: St. Aniserewicz – London Sec: W. Nagórski
2nd Motorised Artillery Regiment	Chairman: R. Ruda – London Sec: M. Tworkowska
1st Anti-Aircraft Artillery Regiment	Chairman: H. Kątny – London
9th Flanders Rifles Battalion	Chairman: A.M. Bobula – London
Sappers of 1st Armoured Division	Chairman: St. Gola – London

REGIONAL BRANCHES OF GREAT BRITAIN

Wales	Chairman: J. Hetman
Manchester	Chairman: K. Dubowski (Acting)
Yorkshire	Chairman: B. Astachnowicz Sec: J. Długosz

Bristol	Chairman: J. Piróg
	Sec: H. Świderska
Swindon	Chairman:
	Sec: S.M. Kołecki
Trowbridge	Chairman: F. Ciężak
	Sec: B. Ryzop
Huddersfield	Chairman: Z. Waga
	Sec: C. Pukacz
Cheltenham	Chairman: M. Wartalski
	Sec: T. Gąsiorowski
Midlands	Chairman: E. Błaszkiewicz
	Sec: J. Wroński
London	Chairman: M. Rymaszewska
	Sec: W. Gwardys
Edinburgh	Chairman: T. Apfel-Czaszka
Kircaldy	St. Sołtysiak
Glasgow	R. Wróblewski
Perth	J. Jarmulski
Dundee	J. Pelc
Duns	J. Wojtowicz
Galashiels	St. Osuchowski
St. Andrews	W. Moroński

NATIONAL AND REGIONAL BRANCHES

Australia	Chairman: T. Peszek
Brazil	Waclaw Kowalczuk
Canada	Chairman: A. Kreutzer
	Sec: M. Gałusza
Buffalo, USA	Chairman: W. Czyż
	Sec: St. Biernacik
Chicago, USA	Chairman: W. Lis
	Sec: M. Długosz
Detroit, USA	Chairman: E. Borowicz
	Sec: K. Suska
Benelux	Chairman: R. Łuczak
	Sec: Cz. Kajpus
France	Chairman: B. Korab-Brzozowski
Assoc. Nationale du Souvenir de la 1 DB Polonaise	
	Chairman: J. Hutin-Sroka
	Sec: St. Briere

DELEGATES OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE – POLAND

Lt-Gen. Adam Rębacz, Col. Andrzej Frankowski, Col. Lech Pietrzak

REGIONAL BRANCHES

Gdańsk	Chairman: Z.E. Haas
	Sec: K. Lewandowski
Beskidzkie	Chairman: C. Czubaj

Toruń	Chairman: E. Semrau
Warsaw	Chairmen: J. Frąckiewicz and E. Jaroszenko
	Sec: J. Gołuchowski
Katowice	Chairman: J. Zwierzyński
	Sec: H. Kondzielnik

MUSEUMS

The General Sikorski Polish Institute and Museum – 1st Armoured Division Room – Great Britain
General Maczek Museum – Breda, Holland
Foundation and Museum of the 1st Polish Armoured Division Association at Orchard Lake Schools – USA

It is difficult to recreate in this book, after so many years, the stories of all the soldiers after demobilisation. As a result of insufficient information, we will present to the reader those with rather more spectacular achievements in civilian life. University professors or company directors are easier to spot from those who melted into the local community despite preserving friendly ties with their units.

An additional factor in making a fair assessment of the histories of all soldiers is the fact that best known are those who served in the 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade. Brigade Regimental Associations for many years maintained active contact with members scattered throughout the whole world. This was not the rule amongst the other units. The annual newsletters of the Association gave information about family events and life changes in the new living conditions.

General Maczek at first worked as a barman in a hotel established by one of his sergeants. General Klemens Rudnicki started out in picture restoration, but great competition in this interesting and relatively light work forced him to change his occupation. For many years he led excursions of American tourists over the whole of Europe on behalf of a large travel company.

General Antoni Grudziński, the last C.O. of the 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade, settled in London and together with his English wife ensured himself a humble income letting rooms belonging to his wife's family. Buying houses and then paying off the mortgages from the rent obtained from tenants was a solution often applied by older people to provide the minimum requirements of existence for themselves and a roof over their heads.

Many senior officers with General Bronisław Noel at the fore, C.O. of the Divisional artillery, worked in firms that sent out parcels to Poland. Those with knowledge of foreign languages, such as Col. Zygmunt Chamski, after difficult beginnings were employed by translation teams increasing the output of information broadcasts for countries behind the 'iron curtain'.

Older officers who decided to emigrate to America or Canada met with many difficulties in arranging their civilian lives. To these belonged Col. Tadeusz Majewski, 2nd in Command of the Division, who learned watch making and Col. Aleksander Stefanowicz, C.O. of the 1st Armoured Regiment, who worked in a department store. Only Col. Dr Szydłowski returned to his pre-war profession, teaching chemistry in Canada.

The opportunities for younger officers, especially those who had already started in higher education at the beginning of the war, presented themselves in a totally different way. Many of them achieved senior academic or administrative posts in various fields.

We will try now to present the diversity in the professions and careers of the soldiers settled all over the world, but maintaining the strong links of regimental friendships which have been preserved forever.

We start with the RECCY (Reconnaissance) Regiment of the division of the 10th Mounted Rifles presenting the history of its soldiers who shared similar experiences with other units.

A difficult area, to which many veterans dedicated themselves at first, was agriculture. The CO and his friends from the 10th Mounted Rifles, Majors Jerzy Wasilewski, Adam Larysz-Niedzielski and Tadeusz Wysocki formed a company, buying a farm in Great Britain. Despite hard work and some successes at the beginning, this undertaking fell through, forcing them to undertake other occupations. Jerzy Wasilewski established a building firm, Adam Larysz-Niedzielski was involved in the export of parcels to Poland and Tadeusz Wysocki became a representative of a company manufacturing agricultural machines.

Not all farmers, however, were defeated. Konstanty Bzikot with Wincenty Zienkiewicz continued to prosper on a large holding in England, and Jan and Franciszek Rozwadowski managed a large fruit concern in South Africa. Tadeusz Makomaski, for a change, gave up farming in Australia, going over to the mechanical production of domestic washing machines in which he made a fortune.

Even more dramatic experiences awaited Major Emil Słatyński, starting his career as a workman in an electric power generating station in faraway Terra del Fuego and finishing by achieving a high administrative post in Argentina.

Lieutenant Julian Godlewski, an old friend of Baron Thyssen-Bornemisza, became a director of the Thyssen conglomerate. An international financier, he established a foundation bearing the name of his mother Anna Godlewska. The foundation granted literary prizes and donated funds to save Polish works of art, stolen by the Germans and Russians during the war, which had passed into foreign hands.

A high academic position was attained by Professor Dr Edward Rożek who, after graduating from Harvard University, received a Diploma in Sovietology, becoming from 1950 an Extraordinary Professor and in 1964 Director of the Institute of Economic and Political Studies at the University of Colorado. Professor Rożek has published a series of academic works listed in the bibliography.

Academic successes were also shared by Professor Ludwik Teclaff, a law graduate, previously a diplomat, who after the war became a professor at the University of Buffalo.

Captain Jan Suchcitz, together with his wife Teresa and son Andrzej, are co-authors of part of this publication. For many years they have been committed to research on the history of the Polish Army. Andrzej Suchcitz, Head of Archives of the General Sikorski Institute and Museum in London, is the author of many academic publications. Jan and Teresa Skinder-Suchcitz edited the 'War Diary' included in this book. In his civilian career Jan Suchcitz reached a high position in English and German industrial plants, Hoechst being one such firm.

Despite their variety of interests, the former soldiers of the Division scattered all over the world continued to preserve close bonds of friendship which conquered even the longest geographical distances dividing them.

Lieutenant Adolf Barycz worked after the war in the Colonial Service in Africa.

Dr Aleksander Domar-Domaradzki opened a medical practice in Wolverhampton, England, in the neighbourhood of Dr Marian Gorzeński – Head of the divisional field hospital during the war.

Captain Andrzej Maszkowski settled in Holland, working in a travel agency.

Lieutenant Tytus Parczewski managed a Polish house for the elderly in France in Lally en Val.

Lieutenant Jan Położynski imported food from Poland and other countries of Europe, employing regimental colleagues.

Staff sergeant Jan Szpytma opened a meat-processing firm in London, and Jan Puzia became an excellent tailor. A similar occupation was also taken up by Col. Bronisław Nitka, decorated with the Virtuti Militari, a company commander of the 8th Rifles Battalion. Col. Nitka was employed by a tailoring firm in London's famous Saville Row.

Among the officers who joined the Polish SAS units and were parachuted as special messengers into Poland was retired Col. Stefan Bałuk, later the author of an excellent photographic album covering the involvement of the Polish Armed Forces throughout the Second World War. Col. Bałuk was elected to be a member of the Chancery of the Order of Virtuti Militari.

Staff sergeant Konstanty Bieniasz returned to the regimental garrison in Łańcut setting up a room of remembrance.

Equestrian traditions were carried on in civilian life by Col. Michał Gutowski as a trainer for the Canadian Olympic equestrian team and the owner of riding school stables. Equally, Major Jerzy Iwanowski started up a riding school in South Africa, modelled on the Spanish Riding Academy of Vienna.

Presenting the veterans sample of one regiment as an example of the versatile initiative and interests of soldiers creates a picture of this group dispersed in various parts of the world. This is how the Polish Diaspora arose, playing a fundamental role in preserving the historical traditions of Poland and, in time, establishing close ties with the 'Old Country'.

The 1st Armoured Regiment leads the field in the number of graduates employed either in academic positions or in industry.

The highest academic position among its former soldiers was achieved by Capt. Leon Kowalczyk, a PhD in chemistry and Dean of the University in Detroit. Following him are lieutenants Wiesław Beczkowicz – Dr of Chemistry; Dr Jerzy Szaniawski – a clinical psychotherapist; Jacek Bartel – M.Eng.; Konrad Bohdanowicz – MLLb, Director of Trading Co., USA; Edward Podhorecki – a chemical scientist, production director at Kodak Ltd in New York; Marian Sawicki-Chisholm – MLLb, a member of Lincoln's Inn, London; L. Ślizowski – Masters degree in law, an Edinburgh Municipal Officer; Edward Janiszewski – MSc, an official statistician in the Belgian Congo; Julian Kurtz – M.Eng., director of a construction firm in the USA; Adam Ostromęcki – M.Eng., an industrialist settled in Buenos Aires; Janusz Popiel – MLLb – director of a building firm in London.

Lieutenant-Colonel Stanisław Grabowski, educated at the Cadet Corps in Lwów and Armoured Officers School at Modlin, commander of a squadron in the French-German campaign, after graduating in architecture from Cambridge, became director of a company bearing his surname, responsible for various architectural projects in Great Britain.

Among industrialists Zbigniew Bachurzewski was, for many years, a director of projects at Albright and Wilson, a large British heavy industry concern. After the fall of communism he returned to Poland. Made a colonel by President Wałęsa, he became elected a member of the Chancery of the Order of Virtuti Militari.

Captain Bogdan Korab-Brzozowski, after the end of the war, enlisted in the French army. He settled in France with his wife Teresa Chabrier. Her sister Agnes, engaged to Captain Roman Sikora who fell on the 8th August 1944, became the author of a moving novel *La Vie des Morts* (*The Life of the Dead*). The book described the life of Poles during the German occupation of Warsaw and was based on stories she had heard from her friends, never having lived in Poland herself. Bogdan Brzozowski, Chairman of the Divisional Association of Veterans in France established the French Association of Friends of the Division under the Chairmanship of Col. Jean Hutin-Sroka.

Sgt Stanisław Gudowski, in civilian life a London building entrepreneur, was the long-standing secretary of the Regimental Association. One of the youngest soldiers, he was educated in the cadet school for non-commissioned officers. These young boys, enlisting into the Polish Army at the age of 16, formed excellent ranks of young commanders of the Polish Army.

Sergeant Marian Słowiński, who also trained at the same school, returned to Poland after the war to become an employee of the Canadian Embassy in Warsaw.

C.O. of the 2nd Armoured Regiment, Stanisław Koszutski, after difficult beginnings outlined in this book, emigrated to Brazil. There he established a factory manufacturing components for the car industry where he employed many of those who had served under his command. In his will he left considerable bequests to Polish cultural institutions in London.

The successor of Colonel Koszutski as C.O. of the 2nd Armoured Regiment, Major Michał Gutowski, was made a General by Poland's President A. Kwaśniewski in 2002. At the age of 90 he trained a cavalry squadron in Warsaw which took part as the traditional Horse Guard detachment on parades.

Colonel Władysław Kohutnicki, an officer in the Dutch army, the C.O. of the Hussars Regiment, was one of those soldiers who remained in army uniform to the end of their lives.

Among successful academics, the commander of the 1st Squadron, Captain Roman Wasilewski, PhD, MA (Cantab.) stands out. As a chemist-metallurgist, he represented the Du Pont organisation in Eastern European markets.

A similarly high post was occupied by Captain Marian Nowakowski, MA (Cantab.). Educated at the same alma mater (Fitzwilliam College) he worked in the English colonial service in Sudan for the Canadian chemical company, Fisons.

Captain Erwin Mazurkiewicz, after difficult beginnings, became President of Firestone Steel Products of Canada, manufacturers of car tyres. The company employed 1 400 workers with an annual production budget reaching the not insignificant sum of 200 million dollars.

Captain Ryszard Rydygier, having attained a responsible engineering position in Canadian industry, simultaneously associated himself with social works at the Polish Veterans' Centre.

In USA Captain Kenneth Wiesław Pres become freelance independent photojournalist. He commemorated important events by editing albums on such occasions as the unveiling of the Monument in Warsaw.

Among those involved in international politics all their lives was Colonel Bohdan Wendorff, a Minister in the émigré government and previously adjutant to the Polish President-in-Exile, Władysław Raczkiewicz. Before the war he held the post of Lord Mayor of Nowogródek.

Major Tadeusz Wielogórski, commander of the 2nd Squadron, decorated with the Virtuti Militari, was a graduate of the Armoured Corps Officer Cadet School in Modlin. Together with Stanisław Grabowski they produced a brochure listing all those on various courses who attended the school eventually forming the officer cadre of the Division. One of the founder members of the Association, he was an avid correspondent maintaining regular contact with colleagues world-wide right up to his death in 2001. A regular contributor to 'Przegląd Kawalerii i Broni Pancernej' (*Cavalry and Armoured Troops Review*) he provided many articles about the actions of his squadron in the 1944 – 45 campaign. As a historian of the armoured troops of Poland, he outlined their organisation at the outbreak of war in 1939.

Among those highly placed in industry was Captain Jacek Zagórski, head of projects of Massey-Ferguson in Australia and the author of two books listed in the bibliography.

In Great Britain, Captain Julian Karp became a director of Pershke, producers of printing machines.

Financial success was accomplished by Captain Jan Oses, a war invalid who was wounded when entering Germany and lost a leg. After the war he became a self-employed van driver, delivering food to Polish centres in Great Britain. In time he acquired a huge fortune and settled among the millionaires on the island of Guernsey. The most generous among individual donors to the divisional memorial in Warsaw, he donated one thousand pounds for the costs involved in its erection.

A comfortable position was achieved by Captain Zbigniew Mieczkowski, director of an international agency for manufacturers of plant and machinery, the editor of this book and the author of his own memoirs listed in the bibliography.

Managerial positions in the hotel industry were gained by Major Zbigniew Kozak. In the field of food production at Lyons in Great Britain, an executive position was achieved by Zbigniew Dubrawski, who later established his own catering firm.

The ability to adapt to the new conditions was displayed, among others, by Sergeant Czesław Lenik, a tank driver in the reconnaissance platoon who took part in the whole France – Germany campaign. After settling in London he started work at the Dorchester Hotel and by the time he retired was Chef in charge of a team of cooks.

As we have already recalled, a whole group of soldiers of the Regiment emigrated to Argentina. Sergeant Władysław Smoleń, head of the repair patrol, together with Marian Goździewicz and Bolesław Repak, old friends from the 1939 campaign, opened their own car repair workshop.

In Swindon, England, the former chief of the regimental repair workshop, Warrant Officer Wincenty Kapica, prospered for many years managing a firm importing food.

In Belgium, in Beveren Waas, where many soldiers of the Regiment settled, Sergeant Józef Stołek and Corporal Józef Synowiec achieved managerial positions in transport.

Various initiatives were undertaken by the 24th Lancers Regiment whose last C.O. Lieutenant-Colonel Tadeusz Wysocki became the representative of an agricultural machinery manufacturer in Great Britain. Wysocki began his service in the Division as the Staff intelligence officer and then Chief of Staff of the 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade. He was the author of *1 Dywizja Pancerna 1939 – 1947. Geneza i dzieje* (*The 1st Armoured Division 1939 – 1947. Genesis and History*) published in London in 1989 and in Poland in 1994.

Captain Zbigniew Rosiński played an important role in the field of shipping and land transport. After finishing the Antwerp Higher School of Commerce, he became a company director and an honorary judge of that town's Commercial Tribunal.

A completely different direction was chosen by Captain Jerzy Matulanis, who started up a clothing manufacturing business in Ghent. After several years he moved to Canada, employing scores of people in his factory.

In the fur trade, an export-import firm was established in Brussels by Corporal of the Regimental reconnaissance platoon, Henryk Soroka, decorated with the Virtuti Militari Cross.

Major Dipl. Kazimierz Dergiman-Kownacki became a director of one of the Grand Metropolitan Hotels. In this position he often hosted General Maczek during the General's visits to London. Maj. Kownacki was very involved in setting up a museum of the 24th Lancers' Regiment in Kraśnik, their garrison before the war.

Captain Adam Romer devoted himself to the hotel industry, starting his career as an ordinary employee in a large city hotel and ending up as the owner of a group of hotels in London.

A high post in local government personnel administration was achieved by Captain Adam Dzierżek, commander of the Regimental reconnaissance platoon, decorated with the Virtuti Militari. After the September campaign he escaped from captivity and travelled in the bunkers of coal ships, reaching the army in France.

Horticulture and the growing of flowers delivered to London hotels was what Captain Tadeusz Łoś occupied himself with, leasing a horticultural farm in the neighbourhood of the horse-racing course at Ascot.

The Association of the 24th Lancers' Regiment attached a great importance to preserving the traditions of the Regiment not only amongst the living. A separate quarter of one London cemetery is marked by their Regimental emblem where Major Stanisław Ziółkowski, Captain Władysław Daniewski, Captain Adam Romer and others are laid to eternal rest.

Very close friendship bonds characterised the Association of the 10th Dragoons' Regiment. Its C.O. Colonel Władysław Zgorzelski, a famous rider representing Poland before the war in international horse trials, he continued to be involved in riding, training the equestrian teams of various American and European countries. Col. Zgorzelski, decorated with the Golden Cross of the Virtuti Militari, imposed on his Regiment great attachment to the traditions and bravery expressed in the regimental song 'Dragoni Naprzód' (*Forward, Dragoons!*).

Captain Stanisław J. Kowalski, living in the USA, should be included in the list of authors of articles in Polish and foreign periodicals. His poems, full of romanticism and battle epics, were often quoted in the Dragoons' newsletters by their editor of many years, Major Zbigniew Makowiecki.

From the Dragoons came the Chairman of the World Association of the 1st Armoured Division, Captain Witold Deimel. After demobilisation he graduated in law from Oxford University and then for many years worked as a translator for BBC and Radio Free Europe programmes.

A high post in the world of finance was obtained by Major Jan Karcz, adviser to the Federal Reserve Bank, USA, and also author of many articles describing his experiences in the battles of Normandy and in Holland.

We were unable to gather much information about the soldiers of the 3rd Rifles Brigade. The huge losses that were borne by them were perhaps the reason why the Rifle Brigade was interested to a lesser degree with the fate of those who, after injury and convalescence, were often transferred to other units, losing contact with the association.

Major Stanisław Martynoga, decorated with the Virtuti Militari and the Cross of Valour, was one of the oldest soldiers of the Podhalan Rifles Battalion. A Lieutenant in the September '39 campaign, he took part in the Norwegian expedition and was wounded several times in the French-German campaign. He managed to get away from occupied France to the Polish Army in Scotland together with Maj. Stanisław Snarski. As mariners without sailing experience they were shipwrecked on the Spanish coast and spent many months in the Miranda camp. After demobilisation, Maj. Martynoga worked in a plastic goods manufacturing factory as Production Controller.

At the Church of St Andrzej Bobola in London, thanks to the efforts of Colonel Bronisław Nitka and Captain Zygmunt Skibiński, their is a memorial plaque funded by officers of the 8th Riflemen's Battalion, known as the 'Bloody Shirts'. The plaque praises the battles of the battalion whose colours were received from the community of Breda in recognition of the liberation of their town.

Col. Nitka is a typical example of a 'General Sikorski tourist'. He took part in the September campaign as a young officer of the 48th Infantry Regiment of the Carpathian Riflemen, then crossed over to France in 1940, to serve in an independent company of anti-tank defence. Travelling through Spain and Portugal he reached Great Britain and took command of the 1st Company of the 8th Rifles Battalion, taking part in action on the continent until he was wounded.

Another unusual example of entrepreuneurship was shown by a young officer of the 9th Battalion of the Flanders Rifles, Lieutenant Tadeusz Walczak who reached the Division via Russia and Africa. Those adventures he described in his book *Życie nie tylko własne* (*Not only my life*) published by the Polska Fund. Kulturalna/Polish Cultural Foundation 1996. In civilian life Lt Walczak occupied a high position in the émigré community in London as Chairman of POSK, the Polish Socio-Cultural Centre. In professional life he developed his own business, importing glassware.

Among the artillerymen, an outstanding civilian career was achieved by Colonel Kazimierz Makuch, a graduate of the geodesics department of Warsaw Polytechnic in 1939. C.O. of the Motorised Artillery Units, he emigrated to the United States after the war, working

as a civil engineer on highways and airports and always remained in close contact with the Divisional Association.

One of the longest serving soldiers of the 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade was Colonel Józef Henryk Weber, a longstanding secretary of the Divisional Association. In civilian life he worked in the pharmaceutical industry, and carried out translations in several languages, becoming a member of the British Institute of Linguists.

Major Stanisław Taras, officer of the famous Battery of Death, started his service in the 10th Motorised Cavalry Brigade in the September campaign. From his observation post at Myślenice, from a distance of 100 metres, he attacked the advancing enemy with a barrage of shells. Maj. Taras had a fluent pen and wrote many interesting articles about the Division in the London émigré press.

Captain Władysław Stankiewicz became an academic of international fame and is the author of many books including *Holding One's Time in Thought. The Political Philosophy of W.J. Stankiewicz* (Ronsdale Press 1977). After finishing his studies at the Scottish University of St Andrew, he emigrated to Canada and, for 30 years, lectured in political studies at the University of British Columbia.

Captain Leszek Talko, after completing studies in political science in Brussels and graduating in the faculty of law at Oxford, became Chairman of the Historical-Literary Society in Paris and for many years took care of the famous Polish Library established there in 1830.

Captain Roman Maryniak, injured in the September campaign, after reaching the British Isles joined the 1st Motorised Artillery Regiment. In civilian life he was a project engineer involved in large industrial concerns and he took an active interest in the Józef Piłsudski Institute in London. Many mementoes of the great Marshal are preserved there as well as huge archives with documentation pertaining to the 1920 campaign and also to the period of Poland's independence.

Major Zbigniew Kowalski of the 3rd Rifles Brigade was for many years a Vice-President of the same Institute and Chairman of the committee responsible for its archives.

Lieutenant-Colonel Jerzy Zaleski served as a young officer in the 2nd Motorised Artillery Regiment. His lifelong interest in politics was rewarded by a ministerial position in the Government of the Republic of Poland in exile and Chairmanship of the Polonia Aid Foundation Trust.

Major Henryk Kątny, C.O. of a battery in the Regiment of the Anti-Aircraft Artillery and later Chairman of the Regimental Association, became a watchmaker in civilian life. For many years an archivist for the General Sikorski Institute and Museum in London, he became custodian of the 1st Armoured Division section.

In the anti-aircraft artillery, Lance-Corporal Piotr Guzy, injured in action, after the war obtained an MSc in economics from Poznań University and, returning to England, worked for the Polish section of Radio Free Europe. He published a book *Krótki żywot bohatera poczciwego* (*A Short Biography of an Honest Hero*) in the Literary Institute in Paris.

Captain Wacław Iwaniuk took part in the battles of the Podhalan Brigade at Narvik, and then with the Anti-Aircraft Artillery Regiment on the continent of Europe. After demobilisation he settled permanently in Canada and became a poet, essayist and translator of contemporary American poetry. His published works include *Dzień apokaliptyczny* (*Apocalyptic Day*), *Czas Don Kichota* (*The Time of Don Quixote*), *Nemezis idzie pustymi drogami* (*Nemesis Travels Along Empty Roads*), *Nocne rozmowy* (*Talks in the Night*).

Servicemen seldom continued careers related to their wartime training. Among the exceptions was C.O. of Sappers Company, Lieutenant-Colonel Stefan Bergander. As a civil engineer he was busy for many years constructing roads and bridges in Africa and, after retirement, settled in London taking an active part in the ex-combatants activities.

Technical and maintenance services, however, provided people with initiative the opportunity of doing business in fields close to their wartime experience. Captain Henryk

Kochański started up workshops giving a nickel finish to car parts. After difficult beginnings his factory in London grew, employing several dozen workers.

Signals officers were represented by several important positions in civilian life. One of them was Tomasz Potworowski whose father Gustaw, prior to 1939, was the Polish Ambassador in Sweden. He joined the Division in 1942, and took part in the action in France, Belgium and Holland. After graduating from London University, he pursued his army specialisation in civilian life in the communications industry, occupying high positions in companies in England, USA and Sweden. An author of a brochure summing up his life experiences on the family estates in pre-war Poland, his army days and post-war business career.

Major Antoni Rogoziński edited the USA Quarterly 'Pancerniak' for many years. With great accuracy, he detailed the lives of ex-soldiers of the Division and their wives, many of them liberated at Oberlangen in 1945. At his own expense, he edited a book about the Signals Units in the 1st Polish Armoured Division.

Another Signals officer, Captain Ryszard Dembiński, was deported to Russia. He joined the Division just before action and served as an independent radio operator at communication headquarters. For many years he was involved in editing the Quarterly 'Cavalry and Armoured Corps Troops Review'. After demobilisation he devoted his whole life to the General Sikorski Institute and Museum. As a long serving Chairman of the Executive Board, he took part in all military ceremonies held there, often greeting divisional colleagues gathering to pay homage to the Regimental Colours displayed at the Institute.

CHAPTER V

THE 1st ARMOURED DIVISION IN LIVING MEMORY

The appraisal of people's memories of the 1st Armoured Division, as applied to all aspects of its history presented in this book, is no small task. Part of the picture is reflected in the bibliography, as well as by the monuments and cemeteries scattered along the Division's battle track. More is needed, however, to do justice to the human feelings evoked by the presence of Polish soldiers fighting in the common cause far from their homeland, and then constrained by the force of political circumstances to settle outside their own country.

We have divided this chapter into four parts, giving the characteristics of the relations established with the inhabitants of Great Britain, France, Belgium and Holland. We have excluded Poland since the book as a whole throws light on this vexed and complicated question when political realities obscured the true picture of events. Only in the last decade have they been presented in their true light. Instead, we include the events leading up to the memorial erected in Warsaw fifty years after the war.

In order to facilitate true appreciation of each period, we have included relevant documents at the end of each section. From amongst the great mass of archival material we have chosen only the most important official statements, as well as those illustrating the then current mood represented through newspaper articles and private correspondence.

GREAT BRITAIN

The arrival of Polish troops immediately after the fall of France in 1940 in Scotland, for its defence against expected invasion resulted in bonds of friendship lasting to the present day.

The fortified eastern coastline was patrolled in 1941–1942 by Polish troops of the 1st Corps under the command of Gen. Marian Kukiel. Included in his command were Gen. Maczek's 10th Motorised Cavalry Brigade, and the 16th Armoured Brigade under Col. Tadeusz Majewski. These two brigades provided the core of the Division which was formed in 1942.

The defence plans against an attack from Norway included keeping reserve forces to mount a counter offensive should the beach defences be breached. These troops were stationed around the towns of Perth and Dundee. Many neighbouring castles were taken over for use as command headquarters and hospitals. The Corps headquarters were based in Moncreiffe House, Bridge of Earn, and the military hospital No. 1 in Taymouth Castle. The whereabouts of Polish troops, due to the need to preserve secrecy, was designated by the general title 'somewhere in Scotland', followed by a number referring to the particular unit. Polish and British commanders, politicians and heads of State visited Scotland. Among them

was the President, Władysław Raczkiewicz, General Władysław Sikorski and Anthony Eden, the British Foreig Secretary. The most important event was the visit of His Majesty King George VI accompanied by Queen Elizabeth. A splendid parade by Polish troops took place in Forfar on March 7th 1941 followed by a gala reception in Their Majesties' honour in the mess of the 24th Lancers Regiment.

Cultural, social and political Polish-Scottish relations flourished. A Polish newspaper, 'The Soldiers' Daily' was printed; there were Polish publishing houses and bookshops eg. M.I. Kolin in Edinburgh. Theatre groups visited Scotland, among them 'Lwowska Fala' (Radio Lwów's [Lemberg] light entertainment group). A special triumph was achieved by the Polish Officers' Choir whose soloist, the famous bass, Marian Nowakowski later sang for many years in the opera houses of London and the USA.

Scotland opened the doors of its universities to Polish youth, and to soldiers seconded to higher education. A Polish medical school was established as part of the University of Edinburgh. Many doctors gained their medical skills there, later to participate in the fighting of the 1st Armoured Division as well as other units of the Polish army. Poles studied not only at Edinburgh: the bust of General Sikorski was unveiled after his death in the courtyard of the equally famous university of St Andrews. Both universities honoured General Sikorski with a Honoris Causa doctorate. Glasgow University had a faculty of Polish Studies.

While writing about Scottish universities it is necessary to mention other seats of higher learning in the British Isles open to Polish students both during and after the war. At Liverpool University there was a Polish architecture faculty, at Oxford a Polish Law School. A list of its students was published: 'Iuridica Polonorum Oxford – Universitas Oxoniensis', which includes the names of several hundred graduates. Poles also studied at Cambridge and other colleges. In London was founded the 'Polish University College' part of London University. Its work was continued under its original title 'Polish University in Exile', though it has ceased to be part of the University London.

In the time in which Polish troops were stationed in Scotland, memorial plaques were installed in sev- eral large towns such as Perth and Dundee, as well as in several smaller ones: Blairgowrie, Coupar Angus, Duns, Forfar, Kelso, Lanark and Peebles. The Polish cemetries of those who died of their wounds after evacuation from continental battlefields in Edinburgh and Perth will forever remind historians of this time of hope and glory.

Dundee continues to remember a Polish officer, the inventor of the Polish Mine Detector (mk.1.), which was used throughout the war by the British as well as Allied armies. This invention saved the lives of many soldiers on various battlefields. Even after the war, it was used for many years in the clearing of mined beaches and in detecting unexploded shells.

The Poles made many good friends among the Scottish aristocratic families as well as with people from all walks of life, who showed particular sympathy to the soldiers. Among them were also municipal representatives, The Lord Provost of Glasgow, Sir Patrick Dollan, and the Provost of Perth, Lord Nimmo, as well as many other high-ranking officials. During the Division's victorious progress on the Continent, Gen. Maczek received the following letter from Lord Elgin, the High Sheriff of Fife and Chairman of the Polish-Scottish Society:

> Dear General,
>
> The General Council of the Scottish-Polish Society met today in Edinburgh to honour Poland and Warsaw, whose sacrifice and unparalleled devotion to the cause of freedom will never be forgotten.
>
> When I began to read this letter addressed to you, General, and to your soldiers, many of whom are members of our Society, all present spontaneously rose to their feet.
>
> We wish that you should know how proud we felt when we heard the Division, with steadfast courage and heroic self-sacrifice, took part in the critical battles of the closing of the Falaise Gap, as well as in its triumphant pursuit of the enemy to Abbeville and in later actions.

We count it as an honour and privilege that bonds of friendship link us with such brave soldiers. We wish to assure you that these bonds, forged both here in Scotland and on the battlefield, will grow in strength and meaning. We believe that the rebirth of freedom and justice will come with victory.

Long live Poland.

Yours sincerely,
Elgin
Chairman of the Scottish-Polish Society

Later on, before the crossing of the German frontier by Polish troops, Lady Airlie, the President of the English branch of the Polish-Scottish Society, sent the following letter to the Division's Commanding Officer:

The Members of our Society asked me at the yearly General Meeting to convey to you their appreciation both of the Commanding Officer and the soldiers of the 1st Armoured Division.

Our branch of the Society greeted with enthusiasm the feats of the Division at Caen, Falaise and also in Northern France, Belgium and Holland. They await with impatience the details of the fighting. Several wounded soldiers from the Division spent their convalescence with friends in Angus, where every one of them has his 'second home'.

The members of the Society realize that further hard struggle lies ahead. They grieve at the losses sustained by the Division so far, but they believe that the Polish Armed Forces will play their part in the final stages of the war, which will lead them to victory and to their return to their own country with distinction.

We can assure all the soldiers of the Division that the Scottish-Polish Society will strive to render all possible aid to the Polish soldiers, women and children remaining in Angus.

After the war, for many years, the chairmanship of the Polish-Scottish Society was in the hands of Dame Maxwell Scott, the granddaughter of the famous novelist Sir Walter Scott; she was ably aided by the Honorary Secretary, Mrs J. Thornton.

Edinburgh Castle became the home of an exhibition about the Polish army in Scotland. It was organised by the curator of the National Museums of Scotland, Mr. Allan J. Carsell.

Sir Alec Home of the Hirsel, the Prime Minister of Great Britain 1963–64, secretary to Neville Chamberlain, and also Foreign Secretary spoke frequently on Polish matters for many years. He also used his influence to throw light on Polish affairs. His letter, written to the author of this chapter and quoted at the end of this section bears witness to his awareness of the valuable role played by Poland in her solitary resistance against the might of German aggression in 1939 and what an important contribution was made by her at the conference of the Great Powers in 1990.

The friendship of Scots and Poles has lasted for over half a century. Forty years after the end of the war, at Duns in 1981, a monument was raised in memory of the armoured regiments stationed there before being sent into action. Both Gen. Maczek and Gen. Klemens Rudnicki took part in the unveiling ceremony, as did Sir Alec Home.

In Peebles [edit.: the Polish Staff College was stationed in a neighbourhood country residence, Black Barony] a memorial was erected in front of the hospital which cared for many of the wounded Polish soldiers. In 1997 the 'Polish Day' was widely written about in the local press and in the 'Peebleshire News'. Mr Michael Fane, the reporter and chief organiser of the event, brought together a large gathering of the local inhabitants headed by the mayor, Mr Drew Tulley. Inside the memorial a capsule was placed containing documents relating to the arrival of Poles in Scotland, their contribution to the ultimate victory,

the reasons for which they remained in exile, as well as the social and economic role they played in their new homeland. This capsule is to be opened a hundred years hence to remind the people living at that time of these happenings. Among many of Poland's friends one should mention Major Adam Lothian, one of the organisers of the above event as well as the one at Duns in 1981. The press published photographs of President Władysław Raczkiewicz, General Władysław Sikorski and of Sir Patric Dollan, the Lord Provost of Glasgow. The Polish veteran's organisation and the British legion were present with their colours. Many people attended. The day ended with a display of country dancing in national costumes.

The Poles were popular with the Scottish ladies. The officers were full of gallantry, and the other ranks, clad in their well-fitted tailored uniforms, gained many hearts at the local dances. Unable to return to their own country, many settled in Scotland and started families.

Before the USA joined in the war, Poland was Britain's sole ally in the continuing conflict. In the opening years of the war the USSR remained in alliance with Germany, and only in 1941, when attacked by Hitler, found herself at war with the common enemy. The airmen as well as the other Polish troops gained many friends throughout the British Isles. A testimony to those friendly relations worthy to be remembered is a letter from the civic authorities of Bridlington bidding farewell to the troops of the 1st Armoured Division leaving for the front in 1944.

Throughout the long post war years, despite the complete abandonment of Poland by Great Britain as soon as the conflict was over, good Anglo-Polish relations flourished but only on more personal levels. Successive British governments accepted the division of Europe. Nevertheless, after the building of the Berlin wall, the average Briton understood the ex-soldier's predicament and considered it right for their erstwhile allies to remain in the free world.

Among many people engaged in charity work among the Polish community, it is necessary to honour Lady Ryder of Warsaw. She founded several homes for the disabled and those suffering the after-effects of war behind the 'iron curtain'. Another charitable lady, the Marchioness of Salisbury, was also a great friend of Poland. She crossed the 'iron curtain' personally many times, driving transports containing medicines, clothing and food which were then distributed to those in need through the churches.

It was otherwise with British politicians; few among them sympathised with the idea of an independent Poland. The majority agreed with the new division of Europe seeing it as right, and with the fall of communism they continued to support the Yalta agreement both in parliamentary debates and in the media. Leading politicians writing in the Times even expressed the view that it was highly undesirable for Poland to join NATO. In general, the media mirepresented and diminished the involvement of the Polish forces in WW 2. The September campaign was hardly ever mentioned and the closing of the Falaise gap attributed simply to the Canadian Corps to which the Division belonged. The Warsaw Uprising was often confused with the liquidation of the Jewish Ghetto by Germans.

Jewish-Polish relations have on many occasions been the subject of TV programmes, articles in the press or special publications, attempting to influence public opinion.

[Edit.: Before the Holocaust and other German attrocities Poland was inhabited by 3.3 million Jews. Many, being entirely polonised, for centuries had played an important role in the country's industrial and cultural development. The majority, however, mostly small traders living in the suburbian communities, settled in the vicinity of numerous synagogues, often emigrated to the USA and Great Britain voicing criticism of their old country. The Institute for Polish-Jewish Studies at Oxford in its yearly edition of 'Polin', a publication devoted to Polish-Jewish relations, methodically gave accounts of crimes commited on Jews during the Polish-Soviet war of 1920. It never referred, however, to the cooperation of Jewish inhabitants of Poland with Communist aggressors. The same applied to the analgous

situations in 1939 and 1946. A great many KGB officers torturing and sentencing to death Polish patriots and members of the Home Army were of Jewish origin. This is how living memory of complex historical events was still affecting human relations involving even General Maczek's veterans of WW 2, although the Polish Armoured Division, within its ranks, had some brave soldiers of Jewish origin].

The wartime achievements of the faithful ally were easily erased from memory, despite complimentary speeches on such occasions as the death of General Maczek.

Many friends were to be found, however, among the British Military Mission attached to the Division during the war. We include a moving farewell letter written in Polish by Corporal John Atwell. After his return to Britain he maintained close contact with his Polish comrades:

> I shall be shortly leaving your Division in order to pass into civilian life, but before I do so I would like through the medium of 'The Soldier's Daily, as an Englishman, to express my gratitude for the brotherhood in arms which linked me with the soldiers of your Division.
>
> A lot has been written and heard both for and against Poles. To my mind no detraction can change my opinion and my friendship for you. I saw you in training; I was with you during battle; now though still in uniform, I observe you in times of peace. My trust is a great admiration.
>
> I volunteered to be assigned to your Division and I had the opportunity, through the friends, I have made to get to know, your customs, character and lastly your language. As to your language, though I have not achieved all that could be done, I must thank my friends for their patience with my inability to grasp your tongue.
>
> Your curtesy and good manners gave me a lot of pleasure and your readiness to share with others, even though at times you yourselves did not have enough, awoke my wonder and appreciation.
>
> I am proud to wear your Divisional badge which has such lovely historical origins.
>
> My ambition is to visit Poland, about which I have heard so much, some time, but unfortunatly Poland is not yet free. When the time comes, and Poland is free, I hope to meet many of you in your own country.
>
> In ending my letter, I express again how much I admire you and to thank all Poles, brothers in arms, who gave so much so that Britain could remain free.

Another example of sympathy towards the Poles is the letter written by Mr Epko Vleck, a Dutchman living in England. It is full of appreciation of the warlike spirit shown by Polish soldiers. Epko Vleck reminisces about the liberation of Breda where he lived as a small boy. He writes: 'It is good that Poland has joined NATO. We shall sleep more safely in our beds'.

Not all Dutchmen were so favourably inclined towards Poland. The Dutch Foreign Minister of many years, Dr Luns, as Secretary General of NATO, declared in 1980 that he was in favour of granting the USSR a free hand should they wish to invade Poland. Many people protested against this declaration, among them Count Edward Raczyński, the last ambassador of independant Poland to the Court of St James. Many letters were written to the press by British people protesting the minimising of Poland's role in the last war.

The 50th anniversary of D-day was solemnly celebrated both in Great Britain and on the beaches of Normandy in the presence of Queen Elizabeth II, Ronald Reagan, the President of the USA and François Mitterand, the French President. The participation of the 1st Armoured Division, the navy and the airforce was symbolised by the Polish flag flying among those of all the Allies. This was the first breach in the accepted British policy, which in 1946, under Soviet pressure, refused to invite the Polish army to take part in the Victory Parade in London.

The British and American media commented widely on these ceremonies, but failed to mention Poland as an ally in the defeat of the Third Reich. An exception to this were the comments of the late Alistair Cooke, a war correspondent, in his weekly programme 'Letter from America'. Not untill the celebrations of the 60th anniversary, when Poland was a member of the EU and NATO, have matters changed.

In Warsaw the building of a monument to the 1st Armoured Division was funded partly by towns in which Polish troops had been stationed. Generous contributions were made by Edinburgh, Dundee, Perth, Bridlington and Duns. Their coats of arms are engraved on the monument to remind the inhabitants of Warsaw about the bonds of friendship which have lasted well beyond the half century. The Lady Provost of Perth and Kinross, Mrs Jean McCormack with her husband, as well as the Chairman of Berwickshire District Council of Duns, Capt. James Evans with his wife came to the unveiling ceremony from distant Scotland.

Considerable support of the British Ambassador in Poland Sir Michael Llewellyn-Smith resulted in £ 1 000 donation from the UK Foreign Office.

Among Poland's British friends, the old soldiers are the most aware of the contribution made by the Polish forces during the war. One must count Gen. Ret. Mike Reynolds CB and our comrade from the battlefields of Caen, Dr Ken Tout, OBE. Both have written excellent books whose titles are to be found in the bibliography. We include their letters, written especially for this edition, with great pleasure.

An important event marking a change in the attitude of the British Government to Polish veterans and the émigrée community representing the old values was the unveiling by H.R.H the Duke of Kent of the statue of General Sikorski on the 24th September 2000. General Sir Charles Guthrie GCB LVO OBE, the Chief of the Defence Staff, launched an appeal for funds to build the statue. This venture, bringing back war memories and reminiscent of the crucial role played by Polish forces in obtainning ultimate victory, was initiated by the British-Polish Council established in 1995. The Council has received official recognition from both British and Polish Ministers of Foreign Affairs. Its programme of activities was to facilitate Polish preparations for membership of NATO and the EU.

The Council was founded by a group of former British Ambassadors together with prominent members of the Polish comunity who formed the Executive Committee. Mr Norman Reddaway, CBE (H.M. Ambassador to Poland 1974–78) was the first President, and in 1998, due to his deteriorating health, the Presidency passed to Sir Kenneth James, K.C.M.G. (H.M. Ambassador to Poland 1981–83). Other members of the Executive Committee included Sir Steven Barrett, K.C.M.G., Mr Jan Ciechanowski, Mr Zbigniew Mieczkowski, Mr Andrzej Morawicz and Sir Keith Morris, K.B.E., C.M.G. Council membership was then extended to high ranking politicians, scientists and business men from both countries.

The ceremony of the unveiling of the statue erected in front of the Polish Embassy was attended by hundreds of veterans and representatives of the Allied Powers. A message from H.M. the Queen Mother was read by the Duke of Kent.

Town Hall,
Bridlington,
June, 1944.

His Worship the Mayor of Bridlington (Alderman T. D. Fenby, J.P.) to our Polish friends in Bridlington.

Many branches of the Services and different nationalities have been guests of our Borough since September, 1939, a welcome and the hand of friendship has been extended to each and all. Outstanding during this last few months has been the presence of our Polish comrades; what measures of devastation, family and personal loss, they carry beneath a courteous and smiling countenance, none but they themselves can know.

Their outstanding characteristics of courtesy and good conduct, a spirit of comradeship amongst themselves and the spirit of real helpfulness to the men, women and children of our Borough has been noted by many and often remarked upon.

May the day soon come, God willing, when they return home to rebuild again, for many years of peaceful occupation and usefulness among the brotherhood of Nations, the land they have served and are only too anxious to have the opportunity of serving again.

(Signed) THOMAS D. FENBY,
Mayor of the Borough.

TO
THE POLISH TROOPS IN BRIDLINGTON, YORKSHIRE, ENGLAND, JUNE, 1944.

GREETINGS!

As I write to you this friendly word of welcome I do so, I feel sure, in the name of the citizens of this Yorkshire town. We are proud to have you in our midst. We hope that while you are with us you will receive nothing but kindness and hospitality.

What is written here is, however, more than a greeting from Bridlington to you who belong to Poland. It is, I hope, something for you to treasure when you leave us; a precious reminder of your sojourn with us, a keepsake to be read by you in the days and years ahead when once again, God willing, you are back in your own country, your dear and native soil beneath your feet, and your brave people enjoying the freedom for which you, and your gallant forefathers, have fought with such magnificent courage.

I should like to think that reading this message in some brighter to-morrow you will look back to these days with gladness. Perhaps you will remember our little town by the North Sea, and recall the bay, blue beneath a summer sky, the white cliffs of Flamborough Head, the harbour with its little ships, the Priory Church where folk have worshipped for hundreds of years, and the fields about our town, all gay with the flowers you love.

This town is in the spacious county of Yorkshire, a county in some respects rather like your own beloved Poland, for it has mighty plains, many trees, and great natural and mineral wealth; and, again like your own land, it is the home of a people of independent spirit, lovers of liberty, fighters in years gone by for freedom.

You came among us in day of anguish—though I write these words on June 6, the day of the Allied invasion of Hitler's Europe, and therefore the day which may well mark the beginning of the end. I want to assure you that we, the citizens of this town, are honoured by your presence. We are glad and proud to have you with us. We have seen the marks of suffering on your faces, but we have caught a glimpse of laughter in your eyes. We have watched you on manœuvres, sternly doing your duty as soldiers in a worthy cause, and we have found you gathering wild flowers and playing with our little children. We know you are exiles longing for the day of liberation, and we know that many of you are lonely even to the breaking of your hearts, but we have been deeply stirred to see you shaping in enduring material a huge map of Poland in the garden of one of your billets, and we cannot tell you how proud we are that your Poland should rest on Yorkshire soil. We have seen you march past our Cenotaph, and we have saluted you there. We have heard your choir of 40 voices singing in one of the canteens in this town—singing as only you Poles know how, singing your undying National Anthem and our hymns, singing the stirring music Chopin created and Paderewski loved, singing far from your native land the songs that are the spirit of your people. We have listened to one of your company playing a violin 200 years old, an instrument brought from a blasted Poland to a sympathetic Yorkshire: and if here, hundreds of miles from home, this instrument can throb so sweetly and so bravely, with what rapture will it sound aloud the songs of freedom and victory when the great day comes!

You, heroes and exiles from Poland, are in many ways different from us who belong to Yorkshire. You have survived tribulations greater than any we have endured. Most of you are Roman Catholics, most of us are Protestant. Many of your ideals and ideas are unlike ours, and much of your tradition is unknown to us.

But we are brothers in arms. Your hearts and ours beat high. We love liberty. We delight in music and song, in beauty, in literature; and we are bound together as comrades upon a mighty crusade. We hate a common foe; we look to God to bring us out of all our distresses. We of this town know something of the hardships and horrors of war. Hitler has rained death and fire upon us. Our women have had to say good-bye to their dearest; many of our sons have already fallen in the fight. Therefore you have come among a people who can understand your sufferings, can sympathize, cheer, and encourage.

It may be that soon you will go your ways, to what fortune or misfortune, who can tell? But I should like to think that in future days you will look back to the weeks you spent in Bridlington with the conviction that here we are friends—men and women wishing you well, enduring in a common cause, striving for a great end, wishful above all else to earn your affection and to see your nation strong and happy.

What the peace will bring us we cannot even guess; but if in war you have come to understand us better and we have come to love you more, the future is bright with the promise of mutual respect—the foundation of lasting peace.

May the day soon come when you will return to your own land, to walk in its woods, enjoy home-life, hear again the laughter of children, dance your traditional dances, play your great music, work in fair fields, rebuild your villages and towns, and enter upon a period of prosperity such as you have never known as yet. This is our prayer for you.

Yet I do not forget that here in this town of Bridlington sleeps one of your company, a Polish soldier buried in Yorkshire soil. I saw you stand about his grave. I shared with you your sorrow and bereavement. His bones should rest in Poland; but be assured that he sleeps well in our land, and that we will honour him as long as we remember our own dead.

I believe that in your country it has long been the custom to build mounds of earth as memorials to some great event or as a tribute to some worthy man. We had much the same custom in this land many centuries ago. I should like to think that if, when this grim struggle is over and your national liberty secured, you should raise in Poland a memorial in the form of a Hill of Liberty and Remembrance, there might be therein a few handfuls of Yorkshire soil, so that in Poland a bit of our dear earth might be mingled with your own to raise up fair flowers, a reminder of your sojourn with us, a people whose hearts beat for freedom as fervently as yours.

H. L. GEE.

Our shame still lies in the Katyn forest

KEVIN MYERS

Today Poles all over the world will commemorate the 60th anniversary of the discovery of the war crime which didn't occur. And the non-existence of this atrocity constituted democracy's most sordid exercise in realpolitik of the entire 20th century. The Soviet Union captured 180,000 Polish soldiers during its invasion of Poland in 1939. Most were herded off to slave-camps in Siberia, but 22,000 officers were not. In April 1940, on Stalin's orders, each was bound with barbed wire and executed with a single shot to the head.

This was a colossal undertaking: the death toll was greater than that on the most calamitous day in British military history – the Somme, July 1, 1916. More importantly, the massacres occurred before the German invasions of France and the Low Countries. And although hundreds of Jews in Poland had been murdered, these were improvised butcheries, essentially unrelated to The Final Solution, which had not yet begun.

So the first *systematic* mass murder of defenceless innocents in the Second World War was not by the Nazis, but by the Soviet Union, just over a year before the USSR became Britain's official best friend. This shouldn't surprise us: after all, it had been the Soviets, and not the Nazis, who invented industrialised murder. From the revolution on, they freely used the word "exterminate" of their enemies. Hitler listened; and Hitler learned, as dictators do. Moreover, the careful murder of so many officers from a single narrow stratum of Polish society was truly proto-genocide: its intent was to eliminate Polish identity by the extermination of all its perceived guardians.

In 1943, via two sources – through a population census within the exiled Polish community living in the USSR, and from the Germans, who had discovered the site of one of the massacres, in the woods of Katyn, outside Smolensk – the British discovered the fate of the Polish officers. A devastating report from the British ambassador to the Polish government-in-exile, Owen O'Malley, left no doubt about the matter.

The British Government's public response was to dismiss the Nazi discoveries as propaganda and tell the Polish government-in-exile to forget Katyn and to proceed with beating the real enemy, Germany.

War is war, and in peace it is impossible to replicate the fevers and the terrors it induces. So no useful moral judgment can be made about those who decided in 1943 publicly to accept lies as fact, and to conceal the truth as regrettable but necessary strategy. But it was statecraft at its most pusillanimous to allow those lies to become a cornerstone of the relationship between the Western allies and the Soviet Union.

That is what happened when the three leaders – Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin – met at Teheran in November 1943. Far from berating the Soviet Leader for the massacres, the two democratic leaders propitiated him, awarding him the Polish land he had stolen even as he seized his future murder victims. And when Stalin jested that they should settle the German problem once and for all by killing 50,000 German officers, Churchill merely protested sulkily, and Roosevelt light-heartedly suggested killing only 49,000.

But nobody mentioned Katyn. How was this possible? For the massacre of the Poles was surely the secret subtext to this grisly exchange, and one by which Stalin was taking the measure of his two confreres. All three knew of the murders, and the bodyguard of lies around them: and silently, all three – two of them abjectly, the third triumphantly – assented to those lies.

Teheran was the true nadir of international diplomacy, morally far more ignoble and strategically far more catastrophic than either Munich five years before or Yalta a year later. And the key to Teheran was Katyn: once Stalin had got away with that, he realised he could get away with almost anything.

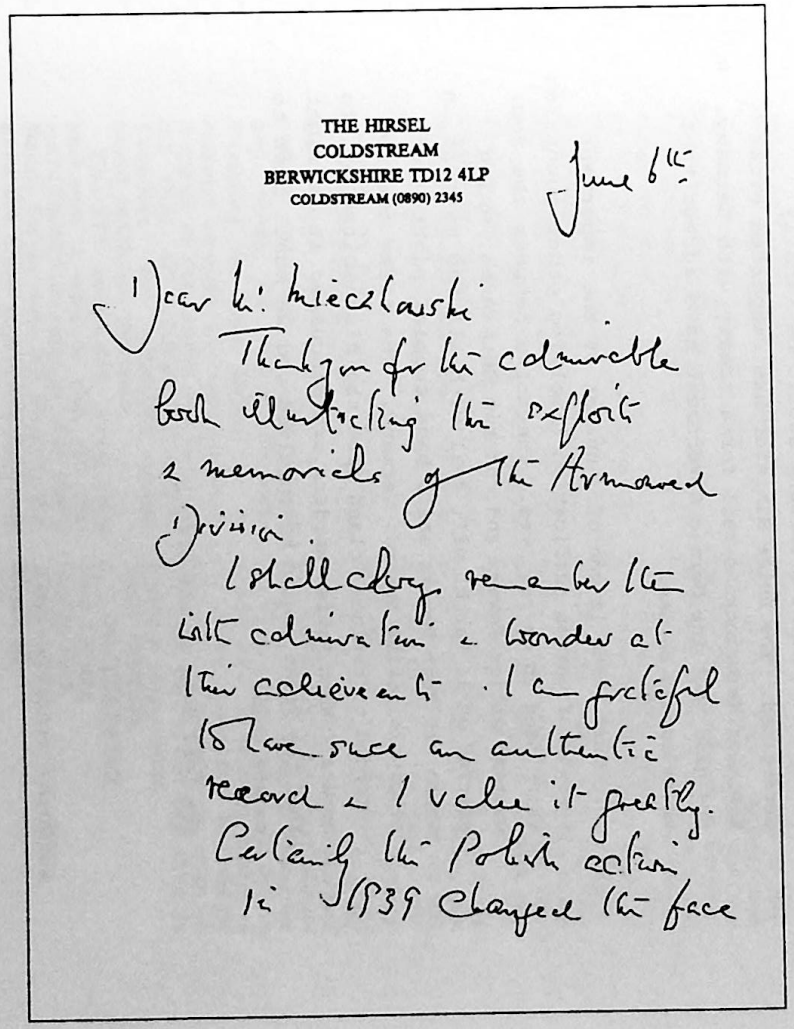
Moreover, the fiction of Katyn took root within the Foreign Office. There, nourished on complicit cowardice and malformed in the darkness of pathological guilt, the temporary tactic of 1943 was in time to turn into the diseased plant of enduring policy. It even caused the Callaghan Government in the 1970s vehemently to oppose the erection of a memorial in London to the victims of Katyn.

Denial, in its purest psychiatric sense, of Katyn also infused much consideration of the 20th century: how else could Roy Jenkins have written a life of Churchill without once referring to Katyn, the Great Lie of which the prime minister was prime mover? How else could so many historians – Norman Davies aside – simply ignore the extraordinary Western collusion in covering up communist atrocities, and the profound impact this must have had on Kremlin thinking?

On Thursday the FCO publishes a report, *British reactions to the Katyn Massacre*, in a belated attempt at expiation for Britain's repeated cover-ups of this terrible affair. But it cannot undo the evil of the extermination of the Polish officer corps which, far from being the subject of a war-crimes trial, was embraced and rewarded at Teheran; and from that city, the communism of Katyn was soon to march forth and conquer half the world.

> Each officer was bound with barbed wire and executed with a single shot to the head. The death toll was greater than that of the most calamitous day in British military history – the Somme, July 1, 1916

'Sunday Telegraph', 27 April 2003.



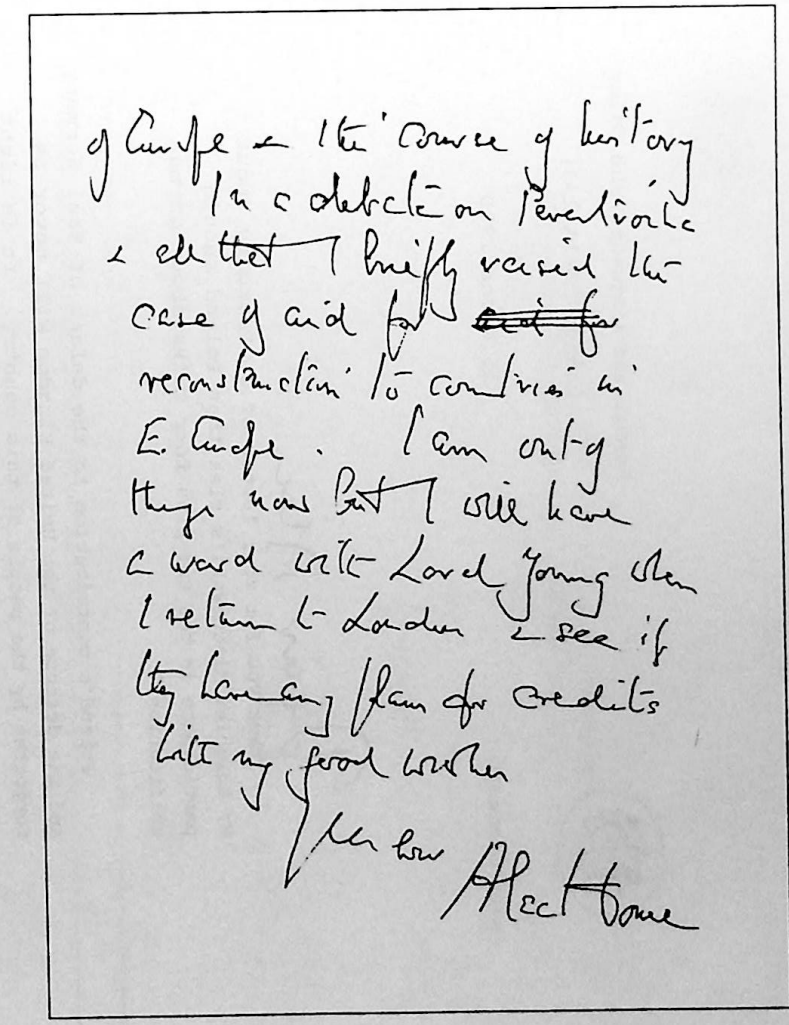
THE HIRSEL
COLDSTREAM
BERWICKSHIRE TD12 4LP
COLDSTREAM (0890) 2345

June 6th

Dear Mr Mieczkowski

Thank you for the admirable book illustrating the exploits & memorials of the Armoured Division.

I shall always remember them with admiration & wonder at their achievements. I am grateful to have since an authentic record & I value it greatly. Certainly the Polish action in 1939 changed the face of Europe & the course of history.



In a debate on Peretroika & all that I briefly raised the case of aid for ~~aid for~~ reconstruction to countries in E. Europe. I am out of things now but I will have a word with Lord Young when I return to London & see if they have any plans for credits with my good wishes

Yours ever
Alec Home

Letter from Sir Alec Home of the Hirsel, former Prime Minister of Great Britain to Zbigniew Mieczkowski

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

From the Secretary of State

15 March 1990

Dear Alec,

Thank you for your letter of 26 February about Mr Zbigniew Mieczowski's plea that Poland should participate in the two plus four talks about German unification.

Poland's contribution to the defeat of Nazi Germany and the defence of the United Kingdom will never be forgotten by the people of this country. It is right that, as German unification comes closer, the question of Poland's border with Germany should be finally determined. The Prime Minister has supported Prime Minister Mazowiecki's call for a treaty with Germany. We are glad that the German Government have agreed that there should be one.

This issue is one of a number of the important aspects of German unification involving other countries which need to be resolved. The talks between the four wartime Allied Powers and the two Germanies, which started on 14 March, will deal with all the matters in which the Four Powers still have special rights and responsibilities towards Germany. The talks are not intended to exclude Poland from the discussions of its border. When Polish borders are discussed it is right that the Poles should be involved and we shall seek to secure this.

The Lord Home of the Hirsel

Jack Donaldson has also been approached by Zbigniew Mieczkowski and I am sending him a similar letter.

Yours,

Douglas.

DOUGLAS HURD

The Times, 19.3.1974:

Polish forces at Falaise

From Mr Z. L. Mieczkowski

Sir, I was very disappointed that the ITV programme "World at War" made no mention at all of the role of the Polish Forces in closing the Falaise Gap. Even Field Marshal Montgomery, on whose direct orders our Polish Armoured Division surprised the Germans by penetrating deeply behind the front lines and closed the gap from the dominating hills of Mont-Ormel near Chambois, gave us the full credit for this action. For three days we were surrounded, fighting on one side with the German 70,000 strong army now physically closed in the Falaise pocket, and on the other with the Second and Ninth SS Panzer Divisions attacking us from behind in an attempt to open the road for those trapped in the pocket. We were cut off from all supplies and neither Canadian nor American troops could reach our positions.

The ITV programme never even bothered to mention that the German/Polish Campaign in 1939, where Polish forces were left alone to die, gave the West a precious half year of peace, nor that the quarter million strong Polish underground army fighting throughout the war was keeping thousands of Germans in Poland at bay at the time of the offensives in the West and Russia. In August 1944, when our 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade broke at night through the German Panzers to close the Falaise Gap, the Warsaw uprising launched by the Polish Home Army engaged 20,000 Germans in an attempt to help the Russians in their offensive.

It is sad that after 30 years, the conspiracy of silence regarding the Polish achievements during the last war still persists. One could understand this when politicians, blushing over the case of Poland left to its own fate by her western allies for a glimmer of hope of co-existence with Communist Russia, were diminishing the share given by Poland for the final victory. After all, this is history now. In teaching history to the young generation, one should take care to preserve the truth, in the hope that it will help them to create a better world.

Yours faithfully,

Z. L. MIECZKOWSKI,
Rose Cottage,
Henley Park,
Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire.
March 12.

LETTER FROM AMERICA

This is a verbatim transcript of the first section of "A Letter From America" by Alstair Cooke. This Letter was broadcast by the BBC on 6th June 1994, the 50th anniversary of the D-Day landing in Normandy.

Alistair Cooke was a renown war correspondent during WW II.

" " Good morning.

As this weekend came on, with all the pride and sadness of commemorating D-Day, I could not help wondering if there has been a similar to-do three weeks ago, on the 12th of May; if there were ceremonies in Poland, Morocco, New Zealand and South Africa. May the 12 1944 is likely to be in those nations, as memorable a day as the following 6 of June. It was the beginning of the Italian offensive that pitched Gen Alexander against Field Marshall Kesselring. That in mentioning it here I was noticing the part played by those Poles, Canadians,...Moroccans, Indians, South Africans and New Zealanders in the two armies under Alexander's command.

By the way, it strikes me once again, how little notice is ever taken in European and American histories of the wars of this century of New Zealand which has been there, usually the "firstest with it's mostest"; in the First World War and the Second, in Korea, Malaysia and Vietnam. This idea about the 12th of May occurred to me when watching the parade of television programs celebrating the famous 6th of June. I did so this time with certain anxiety, which was not pacified, after recalling the television celebrations ten years ago, of the fortieth anniversary of D-Day. I happened then, to see two or three American programs, one French and to be in England for the British commemoration. In all three countries the impression left, was not hammered home, but it was quietly, perhaps even unconsciously fastened to our senses, that the invasion of Normandy was touch and go in the beginning, but its success was guaranteed by the incomparable bravery of the French army, on French television, of the British on British television, and the Americans on American television. I hasten to dampen the rising chorus of protests by saying that it was not quite as gross, as downright as that, and I hope I am not showing my blood strain when I say that nothing I saw anywhere, then or now, approached for fairness and dramatic interest the late Hugh Weldon's account of the planning of the D-Day, in which, more than in any programme I heard or saw, he took into account the coordination of the five armies, British, American, Canadian, French and Polish that landed to meet the defending sixth, the Germans.

All I have seen this time, was exclusively American programs, I have a feeling that there have been dozens, but the four networks, the three commercial and the public television sevice, have I'd say acquitted themselves pretty well, except for giving the impression that everything happened on Omaha beach. Elsewhere, due credit was given to British, some to Canadians, less, if any, to Free French. Nowhere did I see or hear any mention of the Poles. Maybe the local public television stations

in Pittsburgh or parts of New Jersey tried to raise that in their own shows; I doubt it. This gap struck me most forcibly at our end of Long Island, the North Fork where, way back at the turn of the century, Polish immigrants saw a stretch of potato country that reminded them of home and settled in there and more less bought out the farms and lands of the old original Yankees. The parish priest who represented the USA at the installation of the present Pope, was the priest in our village from the church of the Polish saint, "Our Lady of Ostra Brama". It spoils my story rather, when I tell you that his name was the Rev Patrick O'Rielly, but he spoke Polish.

Well, I wish somebody had asked me to do a D-Day programme. It would have been mainly about the Polish contribution to the Normandy invasion.

Just think, in the first week of September in 1939, the Polish army had been destroyed and the human remnants of it, scattered and mostly interned in four or five central European countries.As late as 1942, the Polish prisoners that the Russian held, a petty feeble, ill fed lot, were released and went into Persia, Iran. Somehow they found their way into the desert war and fought at El Alamain an then in Italy.

But there had been in winter 1939 a huge stream of over 100 000 Polish refugees padding through the Balkans and thereon into France. There were enough soldiers amongst them of several specialties, that unbeknown to most of us, onlookers an warriers alike, added to the reserves of the French Air Force, they also formed a Mountain Brigade and boosted the French Army with three divisions of infantry. But they became, like the rest of us, victims of the Nazi blitzkrieg that advanced through the Low Countries and on into France. Less than 20,000 of them got across the Channel to take refuge in Britain. Some grizzled old listeners will undoubtedly remember the Poles in their dashing uniforms, their panache on social occasions, their hair-raisin indifference to blood and danger in war-like situations. Well it was heartening to have them around in the early 1940s. This helped British morale and all that. Provided a high spirited buffer to the incoming hordes of sassy Americans, but not much was to expected from them. They salvaged pitifully little equipment. The contrast between their fighting demeanour and their obvious lack of arms was, of course, an embarrassment to the British Army and the Poles were given a few weapons that Britain could spare and posted off to protecting the coast in farthest Scotland. The American and British command in London certainly admired the spirit of the Poles, but assumed that, once more weapons were available, they could become a factor as a sort of supplementary infantry. Not what ***they*** had in mind

To cut the story dramatically, but truly short, their commander, Gen Sikorski announced to anybody who'd listen, that he was going to form a Polish Armoured Division. The German radio heard about this absurdity and wondered every night, how "Gen Sikorski's tourists" were coming along. But Sikorski did it, and that Armoured Division performed superbly. ....." "

The rest of the tape deals with other topics.

THE TIMES MONDAY DECEMBER 9 1996

DANGEROUS EXPANSION

Why early enlargement could fatally weaken the Nato alliance

The second Clinton Administration's most awkward and important strategic task will be the construction of a stable and durable post-Cold War settlement in Europe. This will require a hard fresh American look at the policy of extending Nato into Central Europe, for which the alliance's foreign ministers are expected to set a negotiating timetable when they meet tomorrow.

When they embarked on this path, Western governments may sincerely have believed that Nato enlargement would be a force for European stability. There is barely a politician, let alone a senior military commander, who believes that now. Instead they refer to Nato's "obligation to accept the new democracies"; or talk about guarding against a new security vacuum; or privately, say simply that for the West to back off now would send "the wrong message to Russia".

The first two arguments are disingenuous, since the West intends to leave democratic states in the Baltics and Balkans — precisely those most vulnerable to a security vacuum — on the other side of Europe's new dividing line. The third cannot conceivably justify heading into a foreseeable confrontation with Russia that would jeopardise arms control agreements and bolster revanchist anti-Western nationalism. That could prove to be the last great geostrategic blunder of this dreadful century.

If the West is genuinely to enhance European security, three historical precedents provide guidance — the peace settlements of 1815 and 1919; and the handling of Germany after 1945. The lesson they teach is that when, as with France after 1815 and Germany after 1945, vanquished but potentially formidable aggressors are folded into new political structures, the reward is durable peace. The penal strictures of the Treaty of Versailles, by contrast, fed resentments that assisted the rise of Nazi dictatorship. With the most honourable and indeed peaceful of intentions, the West is busy breeding in contemporary Russia much the same sense of outraged national pride and insecurity that warped German politics in the interwar years.

If enlargement also lowers Nato's credibility as a military alliance, it will have created the worst of all worlds. That is likely, for two reasons. The first is that if Nato meets its goal of admitting new members by its 50th anniversary in 1999, or does so soon after, their armed forces will not be adequately trained or equipped to participate reliably in Nato's integrated military structure. For some years, they will be second-class members, and seen to be such since Nato plans to station no alliance forces on the territory of the new members.

The second could be called the "no war for Maribor" problem. Nato parliaments must ratify any enlargement treaty. When Nato was founded, the US Senate was persuaded only with great difficulty to underwrite the core Article 5 guarantee that an attack on one member is an attack on all. Now the US Senate may well refuse to accept the major new security commitment of extending Article 5 protection from Western Europe to countries such as Slovakia or Slovenia.

If that happened, the whole of Nato would be gravely weakened. Yet so conscious are Western European governments of their debts of honour, particularly to Poland and the Czech Republic, that none of them is prepared to apply the brakes. America alone could do so — by insisting that Nato enlargement should be an outgrowth of the expansion of the European Union. That would buy time to work out ways of meeting Mr Clinton's pledge to include Russia in "a security circle for all of Europe". It would force the Europeans to face the double standards they have applied with respect to the continent's new democracies.

The start of a new term gives Mr Clinton his window of opportunity. He may not yet be persuaded of the geopolitical risks of enlargement; but this most political of Presidents is not the man to court the risk of an historic defeat at the hands of the US Senate. That should concentrate his mind.

Nato enlargement

From Sir Brian Barder

Sir, Sir Bryan Cartledge (letter, February 26) argues persuasively for Nato enlargement to embrace Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic as a means of redeeming the debt of honour incurred by the West at Munich and at Yalta [other letters, February 12, 17, March 3]. It is useful to be reminded of past promises that we in the West, or our parents and grandparents, failed to keep.

When I served as a diplomat in Poland in the 1980s, before the Wall came down, I sometimes had to remind visiting parliamentarians and others that nostalgic reminiscences about Britain's declaration of war in September 1939 in the cause of Polish independence cut little ice with Poles who had expected Britain and France to come to their aid at that time but had been cruelly disappointed. Our pre-war defence guarantees to Australia proved similarly impossible to fulfil.

Certainly it would help to right the Polish wrong if we were to extend the protection of the Nato guarantee now to Poland — and prepared genuinely to honour it if and when necessary. But to give yet another well-meant guarantee to the Poles (and the Hungarians and the Czechs, and later perhaps others too) and then find that in the event we either could not, or would not, honour it, would compound rather than redeem the debt. How credible would our Nato guarantee really be?

Would the United States, Britain, France and Germany really be prepared to risk war with a nuclear power in defence of Poland in a conflict with say, Belarus or Ukraine, or even Russia itself, over a border dispute which had escalated into military action? And are the evident risks to political stability and moderation in Russia of moving Nato's boundaries right up to those of the former Soviet Union really justified by such a questionable enterprise?

Creative diplomacy should be able to come up with a more convincing approach to mutual security in Europe, one that takes account of the situation of the late 1990s rather than that of 1949 for which Nato was designed.

Yours sincerely,
BRIAN BARDER
(British Ambassador to Poland, 1986-88; High Commissioner to Australia, 1991-94),

'The Times', 6 March 1997

Mr. Zbigniew Mieczkowski
Rose Cottage
Henley Park
Henley on Thames

Wargrave, 27th. October 1997

Dear Mr. Mieczkowski,

I was very interested to see the photograph of you and your son in last Friday's Henley Standard, and indeed it was the cause of some nostalgy for me as well, particularly as this coming Wednesday it will be 53 years ago that your Polish 1st. Armoured division liberated Breda, where I was living as a 9 year old boy.

I will never forget that time and the enormous debt that I and my family will always bear towards people like yourself and All the heroic soldiers of the 1st. Armoured Division under General Stanislaw Maczek, who liberated us from the Germans and gave us back our freedom.

You must be the Lieutenant Mieczkowski referred to in the 1992 biography of general Maczek, and when three years ago, accompanied by my daughter, I went to Breda to join the tributes to the Polish soldiers on the 50th. anniversary of the Liberation I did not know that one of the Polish officers, wearing the famous beret, lived just down the road from me here in England.

I understand your pride in your son, now in the British army, but also with an armoured unit, on manoevers in Poland and like everybody in Breda and the many other people in France, Belgium and the Netherlands who were liberated by the Polish Army, I welcome Poland's membership of NATO. We shall sleep more soundly as a consequence!

Yours sincerely,

Epko Vleck

Epko Vleck

Cowleys
Henley Road
Wargrave

A Morality Tale

Anyone nostalgic for the Cold War should have been in Brussels last week. At NATO headquarters Russian Defense Minster Igor Rodionov warned that expanding the alliance would "upset the strategic balance on the continent and restore a Cold War situation in Europe that would force Russia to take countermeasures."

This kind of blustering has a lot of analysts jumping under their covers, asking why the West is even considering the expansion of NATO to include the likes of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary. A decision is likely in the first half of the new year. And newspapers and academic journals are already filling up with questions: Should NATO expand? How far? What about the Baltics? How can the Russians be placated? What is NATO's purpose anyway? But there is one issue that has so far been ignored. NATO, we believe, is morally obligated to expand.

Of course altruism, as international relations students are taught in the first day of class, is only one component of foreign policy. National interest is, for good reason, the overriding element. Successful foreign policies are invariably based on a national self-interest that is recognized and supported by the public.

But altruism—the belief that something ought to be done—does move nations. Witness the U.S.'s intervention to feed starving Somalis in 1993, an action that only went awry after President Bill Clinton began to think he could mold warring tribes into a nation. The decision by the Allies whether or not to expand NATO must be founded upon their national self-interest otherwise the commitment by these countries to risk war to protect Central Europe will mean little. But nations have moral obligations too and that can be easily dismissed in circumstances such as these.

NAT insiders report that the Germans feel some obligation to push for enlargement because it was their historical aggressiveness that was largely responsible for the chain of events that divided Europe. No country suffered as much at the hands of the Germans or is as deserving of a place in the Alliance as Poland. It contributed more than any other NATO hopeful to the peace that laid the foundation for the Alliance, only to find itself imprisoned by the Soviet Union for the next 54 years.

In fact, after battling the initial invasion for nearly as long as the French did, and finally succumbing to the armies of both Germany and the U.S.S.R., Poles in large numbers went abroad to carry on the fight. In the Allied effort, after the U.S., Russia and Britain, Poland produced the fourth-largest fighting force in the war. Though few today know of their contribution, Polish soldiers engaged the Axis powers throughout Europe and in Africa. The Poles fought in Tobruk in 1941 and were critical in a battle in the Italian mountains at Monte Cassino, which finally opened the not-so-soft-underbelly of Europe in 1944.

They were there in Normandy, Arnhem and in the final push to Berlin. And it was the Poles that helped the Allies understand Nazi communications by delivering a German military decoding machine, "the Enigma," to British intelligence.

Poles also played a critical role in the 1940 Battle of Britain, where a Polish squadron shot down three times the average Royal Air Force score. "Our shortage of trained pilots," wrote British Secretary of State for the Air Force Sir Archibald Sinclair, "would have made it impossible to man the squadrons which were required to defeat the German air force and so win the Battle of Britain, if the gallant airmen of Poland had not leapt into the breach."

Despite this contribution to the victory that gave rise to NATO, Poland found itself destroyed and left behind. Warsaw—unlike other capitals that did not offer resistance—was flattened, millions of Poles were killed and many of its finest officers were executed by the Soviets at Katyn. The Allies consigned Poland to Stalin's tender mercies at the Tehran and Yalta conferences.

So if any Allies are lifting their noses and asking what the Poles could possibly contribute to NATO, they should remember that the Poles paid their entry fee over 50 years ago and they've been paying every year since.

And if Poland is allowed in its only fitting that at least two other democracies, the Czech Republic and Hungary, that were also left behind be let in as well. Whatever their World War II records, both countries endured Soviet occupation. Few can forget wishing that the West could do something during the Czech resistance of 1968 or the pathos in 1956 when those desperate radio calls came from Hungarian freedom fighters for help against the Soviets who were quashing their uprising.

Given the current momentum behind NATO enlargement it appears that the Western nations will overcome their timidity and welcome these three countries, and possibly Slovenia as well, into NATO. When they find out how easy it is, they should move to consideration of membership for the Baltic states as well. They too have paid their dues. If the West for some reason refuses, it will be turning its back on the very principles that gave meaning to its Cold War struggle. Those principles are freedom and democracy—both of which are meaningless without honor.

'The Wall Street Journal', 24 December 1996

BRITISH POLISH COUNCIL

APPEAL
GENERAL SIKORSKI STATUE

PATRON OF THE APPEAL
GENERAL SIR CHARLES GUTHRIE GCB LVO OBE ADC Gen
CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE STAFF

A MESSAGE FROM GENERAL SIR CHARLES GUTHRIE

A statue to commemorate General Wladyslaw Sikorski, the Polish wartime C-in-C and Prime Minister is to be erected in Portland Place facing the Polish Embassy, early in the year 2000. General Sikorski was killed in an aeroplane crash off Gibraltar on 4th July 1943 on his way back to England after visiting Polish troops in the Middle East.

His Majesty King George VI honoured him with a State funeral.

The statue of General Sikorski will also serve to commemorate our gallant Polish allies and the magnificent courage they showed in the war. Poland was a staunch ally of the United Kingdom. During the Battle of Britain Polish pilots won renown. Polish fighter and bomber squadrons served throughout as part of the RAF. Ships of the Polish Navy and Merchant Marine served under British command in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean.Units of the Polish Army served with the British in the African, Italian and European campaigns. Men and women of the Polish Resistance, the Polish Home Army, are also remembered with pride.

Poland has now joined NATO. It is fitting that General Sikorski should be commemorated at this time.

A public appeal for the General Sikorski Statue is being launched. Any funds remaining over from the appeal will go to the Polish Institute and General Sikorski Museum in London.

Donations which will be acknowledged, should be sent to : British-Polish Council, 55 Prince's Gate.Exhibition Road , London SW7 2PN. Cheques should be made out to " General Sikorski Monument ".

General Sir Charles Guthrie

Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

London SW1A 2AH

From The Secretary of State

108596 8 July 1999

Dear Sir Kenneth,

Thank you for your letter of 25 May about the appeal to erect a statue of General Sikorski in London.

I am well aware of the contribution which our Polish allies made to our victory in World War II, and of General Sikorski's key role in this. I am delighted to tell you that we will contribute £5,000 to the fund for the erection of a statue of him in London.

Yours sincerely

ROBIN COOK

Sir Kenneth James KCMG

CLARENCE HOUSE
SW1A 1BA

I regret not being able to be present with you today at the unveiling ceremony of the General Sikorski Statue.

The King and I held the General in high esteem for he personified the spirit of a fighting Poland. I recall the esprit de corps of the Polish Units which we visited, and their magnificent fighting qualities, so notably demonstrated by the Polish pilots in the Battle of Britain.

I am so pleased that this statue will also commemorate the soldiers, seamen and airmen of the Polish Armed Forces and the Resistance Movement 1939-1945, whose courage and fortitude will always be remembered.

ELIZABETH R
Queen Mother

The Duke of Kent at the unveiling yesterday of the statue of General Sikorski

General Sikorski statue is unveiled in London

BY RICHARD EDEN

A BRONZE statue of General Wladyslaw Sikorski, the prime minster of Poland's goverment-in-exile in Britain during the Second World War, was unveiled by the Duke of Kent yesterday.

Hundreds of war veterans and members of the Polish community in Britain attended the ceremony opposite the Polish Embassy in Portland Place, London.

The Duke read out a message from the Queen Mother, in which she said the cast bronze statue would "commemorate the soldiers, seamen and airmen of the Polish armed forces and the resistance movement, whose courage and fortitude will always be remembered". She recalled the *esprit de corps* of the Polish units she visited during the war, and their "magnificent fighting qualities, so notably demonstrated by the Polish pilots in the Battle of Britain".

Gen Sikorski personified Polish defiance against Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia after his country was partitioned in October 1939. His death in a plane crash off Gibraltar four years later deprived Poland of a unifying leader.

At the ceremony, Keith Vaz, minister for Europe, read out a statement from the Prime Minister, in which Mr Blair said the most lasting tribute to Gen Sikorski would be for Poland to join the European Union, negotiations for which were at an "advanced" stage.

Zbigniew Mieczkowski, a Polish war veteran who served under Gen Sikorski, said the statue symbolised his country's new-found freedom. "This is a great day for us," he said. "It is only now after the fall of Communism that we feel Poland has truly gained its freedom again."

Last week, Prince Andrew visited Poland where he presented the prime minister, Jerzy Buzek, with an Enigma encoding machine, captured from a Nazi submarine, as a "symbol of Britain's thanks" for the role Polish mathematicians played in cracking the secret code.

'Daily Telegraph',
25 September 2000

Normandy - August 1944. By Major General (Retd) Mike Reynolds CB (British Army)

In 1960 I was a student at the British Army Command and Staff College in Camberley. That summer we were taken on a fairly extensive battlefield tour of Normandy and I returned home thinking I understood what had happened there in 1944. In fact we had been told little about the actions of the Canadians and nothing about those of the Poles or Americans.

It is not surprising therefore that when I decided to write a book about the Normandy Campaign, I discovered wide and important gaps in my knowledge. I also discovered that many of the books written about fighting, some by well known historians, were very biased and did not tell the whole story.

One of the problems in writing a serious military history so long after an event is that few Divisions or Regiments (in any army) admit, in their War Diaries, After Action Reports or Regimental Histories, to making mistakes; and inevitably, personal memories fade or are prone to embellishment with the passage of time. As one famous American fighter pilot said a couple of years ago, "The older I get, the braver I was!" It was always therefore with some trepidation that I interviewed veterans when researching my book. None more so than veterans of the 1st Polish Armoured Division. Why? Well, in the first place I had never spoken to a Pole before and secondly, I knew that many Poles felt that Great Britain had let their country down in 1939 and that over five million Poles had died in the Second World War.

Before attempting to talk to veterans of the 1st Polish Armoured Division, I studied carefully the British and Canadian Official Histories and then the War Diaries of the formations, Divisions etc which were connected with the Poles. That gave me a framework and a basic knowledge from which I could, hopefully, ask some intelligent questions. I was lucky. The first three former officers I met, Zbigniew Mieczkowski, Stanislaw Grabowski and John Suchcitz, could not have been more friendly or helpful. They also seemed anxious that I should present the story of their Division, not as oddity requiring special mention, but as a normal and powerful component of the 21st Army Group. This was extremely helpful and meant that I did not feel obliged to exaggerate the achievements of their Division and could, if necessary, mention the inevitable mistakes that every unit makes during the course of a campaign. I was also impressed by the willingness of the staff of the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum to make available any records or photographs I wished to study or use.

I have written only two military history books and in each case I have spent a lot of time on the ground where the fighting I am attempting to describe took place. I believe this is essential if one is to understand why certain decisions were made and why certain actions took place. I had therefore already been to St Aignan, St Sylvain, Cauvicourt, Jort, Point 259, Les Champeaux, Coudehard, Mont Ormel and so on, a number of times before I had the great honour to be invited to join the veterans of the Division in their annual commemorative visit to Normandy in 1996. This gave me a unique opportunity to discuss with some of them their actions on the actual ground where they had taken place. I spent an unforgettable three days in the company of modest men who, whilst anxious that their wartime efforts to defeat the evil regime which had desecrated their homeland should be fully recognised, did not wish to boast or exaggerate.

I hope that my book, "Steel Inferno - I SS Panzer Corps in Normandy", does justice to the efforts and achievements of the 1st Polish Armoured Division in Normandy. For me it has been a fascinating experience and a great honour to meet some of its veterans and to come to understand a little the sufferings of the people of the country which really did "stand alone" in 1939 and of the men who were denied the chance to return to their Homeland in the moment of victory.

For "Europe's Tribute to Warsaw"

From: Dr Ken Tout,OBE, of 1st Northamptonshire Yeomanry,
136 Church End Lane, Runwell, Wickford, Essex SS11 7DP

On 7th August 1944, just before midnight, Sherman tanks of the 1st Northamptonshire Yeomanry ('1NY') rolled forward into the darkness up the infamous Bourguebus Ridge. Just three weeks previously three British Armoured Divisions had lost 400 tanks in a failed effort to scale the ridge and open the way to Falaise. Now '1NY' with another British and three Canadian armoured regiments, would drive through the apparently impregnable German defences, cross rough open country on a compass bearing during the night, and set up armed camps two miles behind the enemy lines.

Almost miraculously the attack succeeded. My impressions,as a Sherman gunner looking out through my gun sight, were of darkness, smoke, confusion around us, but raging fires to our left where the RAF had bombed the forest. Next day, around the village of Saint-Aignan de Cramesnil, the Germans counter-attacked with the finest troops they had available – the 101st heavy tanks (Tigers) and the Hitlerjugend SS. Although it was calculated that the massive Germans tanks could destroy anything from three to five Shermans for every Tiger destroyed by us, the '1NY' score in the counter-attack was 20 German armoured vehicles for 20 of ours, we having hidden in orchards.

At that point the Polish tanks were due to come through 1NY and continue the attack. Unfortunately an American Air Force attack was not due for several hours. It could neither be accelerated nor cancelled, due to command procedures. So, the Poles behind us, had to sit and wait – whilst the Germans reinforced their lines. When the American planes eventually arrived they bombed the Poles, the Canadians and the British, partly due to bad visibility caused by battle smoke and summer mists.

Rather shaken, but very bravely, the Polish tanks went forward but the heavy German guns had been given time to get into covered positions from which they could shoot the advancing Shermans, with their relatively thin armour and light guns, at almost point blank range. We, who survived of 1NY, could only watch, admire the Poles' bravery and be deeply saddened by the losses of our gallant allies. Later, British and Polish medical officers and orderlies tended each other's wounded and a Polish padre discovered and helped bury a number of 1NY bodies. We shall not forget !

OBITUARIES

GENERAL STANISLAW MACZEK

General Stanislaw Maczek, CB, DSO, Commander of the 1st Polish Armoured Division during the Second World War, died in Scotland on December 11 aged 102. He was born in south-eastern Poland on March 31, 1892.

THE last surviving senior Allied commander of the Second World War, Stanislaw Maczek had a long and distinguished career in the Polish Army. He commanded the 1st Polish Armoured Division which played a leading role, as part of the invading Allied forces in 1944-45, in sealing the victory in Normandy, when it closed the Falaise Gap. He is thought to be the only Allied general who commanded his own exiled countrymen from the beginning to the end of the war, fighting in three campaigns in five countries of Europe.

Stanislaw Maczek studied philosophy and Polish philology at the Lwow University, and received his first military training as a member of the Patriotic Rifle Association.

Mobilised into the Austrian Army, he served in the select Kaiser Yeager Regiment and saw action on the Italian front. After the collapse of Austria he joined, in 1918, the newly-formed Polish Army, and later fought against the Russians until the victory in 1920.

From the beginning of his army career he was a proponent of heavily armed, fast mobile units. In 1918, as a lieutenant, he formed and commanded an assault company; and later, as a captain, led an assault battalion in the 1st Cavalry Division.

Between the wars he was recognised as an officer of high promise and, on graduation from the the Polish staff college, commanded an infantry regiment and went on to become second-in-command of the 7th Infantry Division. In 1938, as a colonel, he was appointed commanding officer of the first Polish motorised unit — the 10th Motorised Cavalry Brigade.

From the beginning of the German invasion in September 1939 his brigade distinguished itself in the gallant but hopeless struggle against the XII German Panzer Corps in southern Poland.

After the Russian intervention, on the orders of the Polish general staff, his brigade fully armed, with regimental colours, crossed the Hungarian frontier, where it was interned.

Maczek's internment did not last long. In October 1939 he reported in France to General Sikorski, GOC Polish Forces. In recognition of his role in the September 1939 campaign he was promoted major-general and awarded the Gold Cross of the highest Polish military decoration — Virtuti Militari.

He was put in charge of Polish units at the Coetquidan Camp. With the bulk of his brigade and other Polish armoured units gradually repatriated from Hungary and Romania, he began forming and training a Polish armoured division. However, with a critical situation developing in France Maczek took command of a part of the division — 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade — and fought, with some success in what became another disastrous campaign.

After the fall of France Maczek made his way through Algeria, Morocco and Portugal to Britain, determined to rebuild his brigade for the second time, as the nucleus of an armoured division. He finally achieved his lifelong ambition, when in 1942 General Sikorski appointed him commanding officer of the 1st Polish Armoured Division.

After a period of training and several large-scale exercises with British units, in May 1944 his division was ready for action. It landed on the Continent on July 31, was put under the command of the Second Canadian Corps and went into action in the offensive south of Caen.

The 1st Polish Armoured Division under Maczek played a leading role in the Falaise-Chambois battle, closing on August 21 the gap which was the only remaining outlet for the battered German Army east of Argentan. During six days of very heavy fighting the Polish Division took upon itself all the fury of two German SS Corps, capturing about 5,000 prisoners, including one general and 140 officers. Later, Field Marshal Montgomery told Maczek: "The battle of Chambois was an engagement of decisive significance. Your division was like a cork of a bottle in which the Germans were trapped."

After the Normandy victory the division liberated Abbeville and then moved to Belgium taking Ypres, Passchendaele, Roulers and Thielt. In mid-September it crossed into Holland, liberating several major towns including Breda and, when the Allied offensive was resumed, for the first time entered Germany.

On May 5, 1945, at the HQ of the 2nd Canadian Corps, Maczek participated in the act of dictating unconditional surrender to German commanders and on May 6 his division entered the famous German naval base of Wilhelmshaven, over which the Polish flag was hoisted.

In May 1945 Maczek was appointed Commander of the 1st Polish Army Corps in Scotland, and promoted lieutenant-general. Deprived of his Polish citizenship when the Communists took control in Warsaw in 1946, Maczek settled in Edinburgh and never returned to his homeland. His memoirs were published in 1961. After the collapse of the Communist regime in Poland, Maczek was promoted full general and in March President Lech Walesa sent a minister to Scotland to present him with the Order of the White Eagle, Poland's highest award, usually given only to heads of state.

In addition Maczek was made Companion of the Order of the Bath, Commander Legion d'Honneur, and Grand Officier de l'Ordre de la Couronne avec Palme. He was also awarded the DSO, Croix de Guerre avec Palme and Oede van Oranje Nassau.

He is survived by his wife Zofia, whom he married in 1928, a son and two daughters.

'The Times', 13 December 1994

FRANCE

The defeat of France in June 1940 was for her army too painful an experience for any commemorations to be instituted. For many Frenchmen it was General de Gaulle who became the embodiment of patriotism. For those of his countrymen who decided to continue fighting the enemy he became the recognised leader. De Gaulle remembered the bravery of the Poles with whom he came into contact when, as a young captain, he was a member of the French military mission to Poland serving as an infantry instructor in Rembertów in 1920.

After the fall of France in 1940, whilst consolidating his position as head of the 'France Libre' movement, he met with General Sikorski. In 1920, during the Polish-Russian War, Sikorski commanded the 5th Army subsequently becoming Minister of War, so his contact with one of the many young French officers was probably minimal, but he valued de Gaulle as an able officer.

France found herself in a difficult position in the Allied camp after 1940. De Gaulle was engaged in a political struggle, but he opposed the Yalta settlement. After the war he remained in contact with General Anders, Gen. Maczek and other officers of the 1st Armoured Division.

On the 10th June 1975 in the Place de Varsovie in Paris, the French President, Valery Giscard d'Estaing, unveiled a monument in memory of the Polish contribution to the defence of France in 1940 and in the campaign for her liberation in 1944. At the military camp in Coëtquidan a tablet was placed in memory of the Polish soldiers who gathered there in large numbers for a time under the overall command of General Maczek, forming part of a 80 000 strong Polish Army reconstructed abroad.

The landing of the Polish Division on the beaches of Courseulles sur Mer in August 1944, was soon commemorated with the name of a nearby street: 'Quai des Polonais'.

Subsequently at Dunkerque, Abeville and St Omer, monuments, street names and plaques erected by the grateful citizens of the liberated towns marked the whole battle route of the Division. In many a museum – in Arromanches, Caen, Bayeux, Coudehard, Montormel, Falaise – references to the Polish forces can be found among the exhibits of uniforms, weapons, vehicles and other militaria.

The most prominent memorial dedicated to the Division is the monument built at Montormel. The local communities of Normandy started the construction of a memorial out of gratitude for their liberation on this hill immediately after the war. It consists of a platform with flag-posts of the various nations who fought in the Battle of Normandy and a futuristic ironwork design adorned with the emblems of all the units engaged. To complete the scene there is a Sherman tank named after General Maczek in front of the altar and an armoured vehicle of the free French Leclerc Division behind. General Leclerc's division was not actually engaged in this battle, but it took part in the liberation of Paris. From the memorial there extends an enormous panoramic view which includes the small village of Chambois two kilometres away where the Polish 10th Dragoons met the Americans. Another monument commemorates the actual closing of the Gap at this place. A specially illuminated relief map, clearly demonstrating the course of the fighting and including commentaries in several languages, is displayed in the museum hewn into the hillside of Montormel.

A plethora of diverse guides and brochures published by various local tourist authorities can be found in Normandy. Most of them have a picture of Gen. Maczek and mention the role played by the Polish Division in the 'Bataille de Normandie'. One booklet published in French by the departement of Orne, entitled 'La 1ere Division Blindée Polonaise 1942 – 1947' has many photographs whose originals are to be found in the General Sikorski Museum in London.

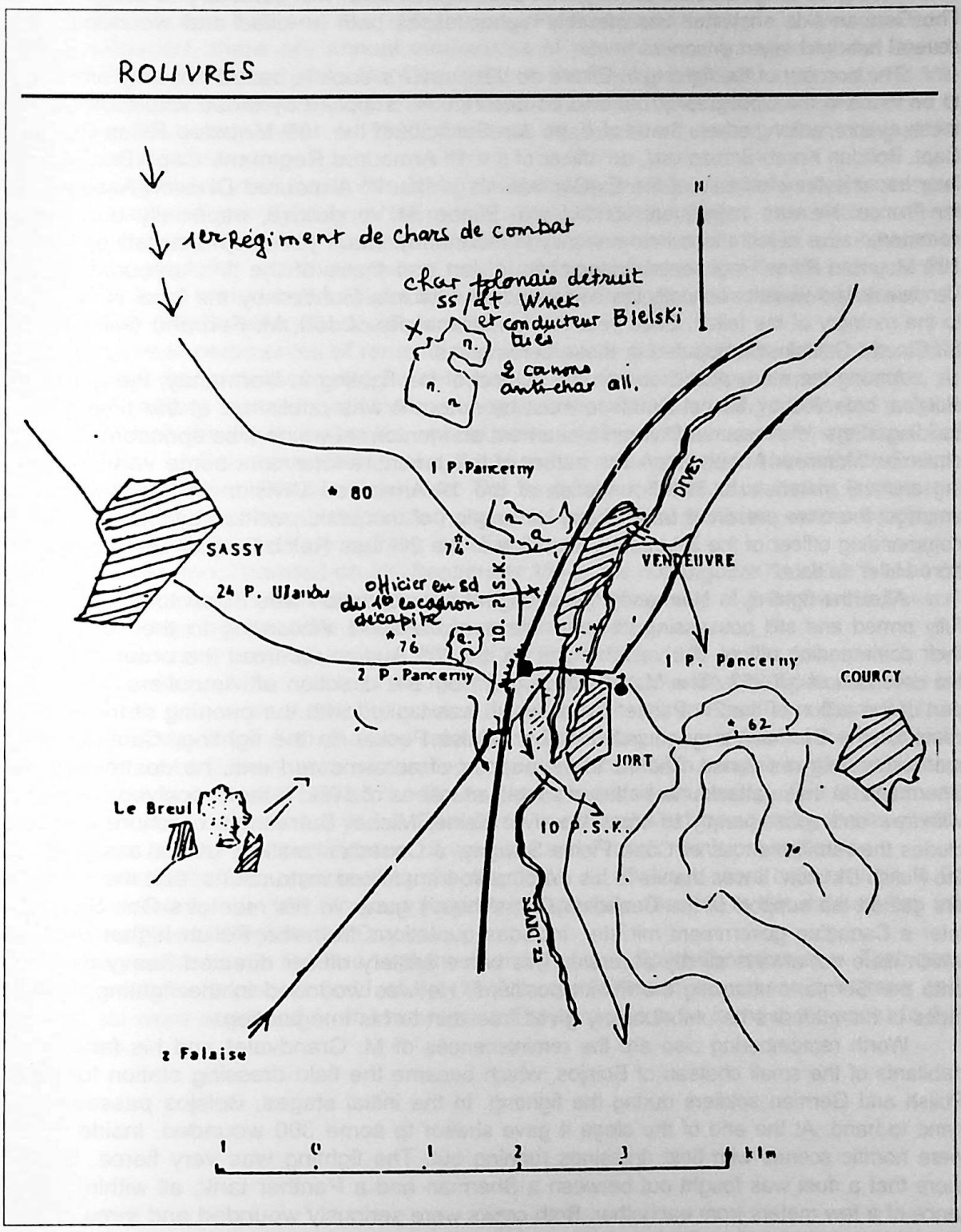
Among the many French memoirs and histories of the Polish Division, a special mention is due to 'Vendeuvre – Morières 1940 – 1945'. The author, Eliane de Vendeuvre,

describes the period of the German occupation of these localities and also the history of the chateau belonging to her family which had suffered several grievous losses: her grandfather, an officer in the French army in the WW 1 was killed at the front in 1914 and her father Jacques de Vendeuvre, a captain in the French Air Force was killed in April 1940. We quote a shortened description of the fighting, which brought freedom to her home and its surrounding countryside:

> The battle which was fought around Jort and Vendeuvre was part of Operation Tractable whose aim was to cut off the roads of retreat to parts of the German 7th and 5th Armies by closing the eastern side of the so called 'Falaise Pocket'. General Guy Simonds, the commanding officer of the II Canadian Corps, part of this operation entrusted to the Polish 1st and to the Canadian 5th Armoured Divisions. The map illustrates the course of the battle.
>
> Jort and Vendeuvre lie on the banks of the river Dives. This small river is not wide, but it forks around the two villages and becomes muddy and therefore difficult to cross. The task of the Polish Division was to capture both these localities and establish a bridgehead on the eastern bank of the Dives. An added difficulty was presented by a railway line running on a high embankment parallel to the river. The fighting around Vendeuvre was supported by the divisional artillery and that of the Canadian AGRA (Army Group Royal Artillery). The whole of the area remained under constant enemy fire and hill 62 on the eastern bank of the Dives was fortified and held by German infantry units.
>
> The 10th Polish Mounted Rifles Regiment forced its way across the embankment, and captured Jort after a short fight. The bridge had been partly destroyed, but German prisoners indicated where the marshy ground could be crossed and the river forded. Crossing the Dives under heavy enemy fire, the 1st squadron of the Mounted Rifles lost two tanks but, after overcoming German opposition, a bridgehead was established on the eastern side of the river.
>
> At the same time, the 1st Armoured Regiment captured Vendeuvre, crossed the river and reached hill 62, thus widening the bridgehead. The other units of the Division entered Jort, Vendeuvre and Convey.
>
> This bridgehead played a decisive role in 'Operation Tractable'. The closing of the 'Falaise Pocket' was thus made possible. This battle was described in 1980 in the Jort's No. 4 Municipal Bulletin. At the end of the article, General Maczek's address to his soldiers during his visit to the battlefield is quoted: 'You fought splendidly. You do not realise what a decisive role you have played in this operation. Our Division was the only large unit of the Allied Armies on the eastern side of the river Dives. This was essential if the enemy were to be stopped.

The battle for Jort and Vendeuvre was also tersely described by Hubert Meyer, the Chief of Staff of the 12th SS Hitlerjugend Panzer Division:

> On the 14th of August, the 5th Army and its Panzer Division were tasked with the holding of the battlefront between Sassy and Noron. However, by the evening this front began to break under the pressure of the Polish and Canadian Divisions. The 10th Mounted Rifles Regiment of the Polish division attacked in the direction of Jort and Vendeuvre overwhelming a company of the German 85th Infantry Division.
>
> The two localities were defended by three units of this division. Nevertheless, during the night of the 15th–16th August, the Germans were expelled and a bridgehead on the eastern bank of the Dives was established. Despite attacks by the Luftwaffe, the Poles built a pontoon bridge and their Division established itself strongly on the bridgehead.



This map, in accord with the one in T. Wysocki's book, (*The 1st Armoured Division 1939 – 1947. Genesis and History*) Capt. Korab-Brzozowski supplied the hand written explanations

The fighting at Jort and Vendeuvre entailed some casualties. The Poles lost two officers, three NCOs and five soldiers. They are buried in the Polish war cemetery at Langannerie. The German side sustained considerably higher losses both in killed and wounded, with several hundred taken prisoner.

The account of the fighting in Eliane de Vendeuvre's book is based not only on books to be found in the bibliography, but also on descriptions supplied by those who took part in these events, among others those of Capt. Jan Suchcitz of the 10th Mounted Rifles Rgt and Capt. Bohdan Korab-Brzozowski, an officer of the 1st Armoured Regiment. Capt. Brzozowski later became the chairman of the Ex-Combatants of the 1st Armoured Division Association for France. He was in frequent contact with Eliane de Vendeuvre, especially during the commemorative celebrations held annually in Normandy. Each year, representatives of the 10th Mounted Rifles Regimental Association in Jort and those of the 1st Armoured Rgt in Vendeuvre laid wreaths beneath the commemorative tablets founded by the local inhabitants to the memory of the fallen. Each year the former mayors of Jort, M. Fernand Guillain and M. Claude Guillain, participated in these ceremonies.

Among the many publication on the subject of the fighting in Normandy, the brochure *Boisjos, cote 262* by Michel Dufresne must be noted. It was published at the time of the building of the 1st Armoured Division Monument on Montormel which was sponsored by the chairman Monsieur A. Lehucher. The author of this brochure later sent some very interesting archival materials to The Foundation of the 1st Armoured Division in Warsaw. From amongst them we present a fragmentary description of this action written by Capt. Werner, commanding officer of the 3rd Infantry Battalion of the 2nd Das Reich Panzer Division which bore Hitler' initials.

After the fighting in Normandy the strength of the battalion was down to 250 soldiers fully armed and still possessing its own means of transport. According to the account of their commanding officer, this valuable unit on the 20th August received the order to attack the defences of hill 262, 'The Mace' (*Maczuga*), from the direction of Vimoutiers. This was part of the action of the 2nd Panzer Corps which was tasked with the opening of the retreat route for the German Army encircled in the Falaise Pocket. In the fighting, Capt. Werner met with strong resistance. Thanks to the support of an armoured unit, he destroyed four Shermans. In these attacks his battalion sustained losses of 10%. It then received orders to withdraw and subsequently to cross the river Seine. Michel Dufresne's brochure also includes the reminiscences of Capt. Pierre Savigny, a Canadian artillery officer assigned to the Polish Division. It was thanks to his exact radio transmitted instructions, that the defenders gained the support of the Canadian Corps' heavy guns. In his memoirs Col. Savigny, later a Canadian government minister, includes quotations from the Polish higher officers which were not always strictly accurate. This brave artillery officer directed heavy barrage onto the Germans attacking the Polish positions. He was wounded in the fighting, but at times in his memoirs he unfortunately gives free rein to his imagination.

Worth remembering also are the reminiscences of M. Grandvalet and his family, inhabitants of the small chateau of Boisjos, which became the field dressing station for both Polish and German soldiers during the fighting. In the initial stages, Boisjos passed from hand to hand. At the end of the siege it gave shelter to some 300 wounded. Inside there were horrific scenes with field dressings running out. The fighting was very fierce. It was there that a duel was fought out between a Sherman and a Panther tank, all within a distance of a few meters from eachother. Both crews were seriously wounded and three of the Germans were killed. The Grandvalet family hid themselves among the Polish soldiers and the German prisoners who became difficult to control as their numbers exceeded those of the defenders. The French family remembers with gratitude the care the Polish soldiers gave them and especially to Mme Grandvalet who was heavily pregnant, during this time of fighting. All happily survived.

The experiences of the participants in these events are reflected in the literature of this period and are included in the bibliography. At Montormel and in neighbouring Chambois, where the junction between the 10th Dragoon Regiment and units of the American army was established, there are annual ceremonies of remembrance arranged by the Department of Orne. For many years Mr. Gérard Burel, the President of the Department, and Mlle Annique Chopard, a devoted friend of the Polish veterans, have been the prime movers in organizing this yearly event. In 1995, they both attended the ceremony of unveiling of the monument in Warsaw.

Among those inhabitants of this region who were are especially interested in preserving the history of the fighting in Normandy, were M. Gérard Roger, the chairman of the Historical Society, M. Eddy Florentin, a historian, several of whose books are included in the bibliography, and also the author of many articles published in the French press, as well as another local historian, M. Pépin, who was also a member of l'Association Nationale du Souvenir de 1ere Division Blindée Polonaise.

Each year ceremonies of remembrance would take place along the battle route of the Division with the participation of Polish veterans and Polish diplomatic representatives. At the Polish military cemetery at Urville – Langannerie, with its imposing monument and the emblems of all the Divisional units, annual services of remembrance were organized and conducted by Lt Col. Jean Hutin-Sroka, the chairman of L'Association Nationale du Souvenir de la 1ere Division Blindée Polonaise. The Association, active in promoting the remembrance and history of the Division, also organized exhibitions, published various brochures and translated Polish military authors into French.

Abbeville too, liberated on 2nd September 1944, has not forgotten to whom it owes its freedom. The town Council has granted the honorary citizenship of their town to General Maczek and has adopted the Division by special resolution.

A great ceremony took place on the 26th–27th May 1945 in this town, which had suffered so much at the hands of the Germans in 1940. A divisional delegation headed by Gen. Maczek was enthusiastically greeted by the inhabitants and the Town Council. Upon arrival, the units of the French army saluted the Polish flag flying in front of the Town Hall. On the 27th, a monument commemorating the entry of the Polish troops into Abbeville along the road which was later named 'La Route des Polonais' was unveiled. This tradition was sustained during subsequent years. Friendship was manifested by adorning the town with Polish flags and by the participation of veterans and French municipal authorities.

Similar festivities, organized by the mayor, M. J.J. Delvaux, were held annually in St Omer, liberated by the 10th Dragoon Regiment, especially attached to this date as they fall on their traditional Regimental Day.

Many other towns likewise kept the memory of their Polish liberators alive. Their generous donations helped to build of the 1st Armoured Division monument in Warsaw and their crests were engraved on the monument. They are also to be found in the annex to this publication.

BELGIUM

Following the victory in Normandy, the allied forces set out in pursuit of the retreating enemy. After a week of rest during which replacements both in men and material were received, the Division was transferred by forced marches to the banks of the river Seine. Placards giving priority of passage to the Polish forces marked out their route. This sign was often to accompany the Division in the following weeks.

Units of the Division crossed the Belgian frontier at Popperinge. That spot is marked by a plaque to the memory of this happy event. Ypres was liberated on the 6th September. The fighting brought some losses to the 2nd Armoured Regiment. In a letter thanking their commanding officer, the Mayor wrote that the blood spent on the battlefield will transform itself into bonds of an eternal friendship between the two nations.

The 9th Rifle Battalion played an important part in the capture of Ypres and in recognition of their contribution to the liberation of Belgium it received the name: 'The Flanders Rifles'.

Ypres, famous for the battles of the First World War, is surrounded by military cemeteries where thousands of the fallen have been laid to rest. This time, the town was liberated with comparitively small losses. Every night, the sounds of the Lastcoming Post from the sombre Menin gateway erected in memory of all the fallen in the battles fought around Ypres and who have no known grave fill the evening air. A plaque in memory of the liberation of the town by the Polish Division, whose veterans were often guests at the celebrations held in honour of that happy day, can be found in the Town Hall.

Col. Franciszek Skibiński led the 3rd Rifle Brigade into Ghent. His headquaters were established in the Post Hotel and two tanks at the entrance marked the command centre of the Brigade. Troops of the Polish Division took over from the British troops holding the front line in the North of the town.

A Belgian officer who served in the Resistance, Lt J. Vuyust thus remembers these days:

> We met Polish soldiers who were astonished when we greeted them 'Dzień dobry' (good day) or 'Dobranoc' (good night). They are pleasant boys who talk Polish among themselves, but many of them also know French or English.

After a few days of hard fighting, all activities were suspended on the 14th September. The Germans had retreated. The casualties in the fighting around Ghent amounted to 75 Polish soldiers killed, 197 wounded and 63 considered missing.

Immediately after the liberation, about 200 soldiers took part in the ceremonies of the Jewish Day of Atonement on 27th September. Among the honoured guests Mr Carlier, the president of the Jewish Council, and also Col. Kazimierz Dworak, the second in command of the Division, the mayor of Ghent, Mr Edward Anselee, Rabbi Klepfisch and the Divisional Chaplain, Lt Col. Franciszek Tomczak sat at the high table.

On December 17th, 1944, a plaque was placed on the wall of the Town Hall in remembrance of the liberation of the town by Polish troops, bearing the words: 'For your Freedom and Ours'.

In 1945, on the first anniversary of its liberation, a parade was held in Ghent during which the Polish troops marched with their colours bearing the image of Our Lady of Częstochowa. Ghent has never forgotten her liberators. In 1977, Col. Franciszek Skibiński, as well as the representatives of the 1st Armoured Division Veterans Association from London were warmly received by the municipal authorities.

One of the most memorable occasions was the 20th anniversary of the liberation attended by Gen. Maczek with a delegation of officers of the Division who were entertained to a splendid lunch.

Gen. Maczek died on the 11th December 1994 and a street in the vicinity of the church Maria Kerke, where the Poles gained a significant victory against the Germans, was named in his honour.

Ghent was enthusiastic about the erection of a monument to the 1st Armoured Division in Warsaw. The mayor, Mr G. Temmerman, not only personally influenced the decision to support the project, but also wrote an appeal for funds to other Belgian towns. His successor, Mr Ernest van der Haegan, took part in the unveiling ceremonies.

On the 7th September 1944, the 10th Mounted Rifles Rgt met with anti tank guns on approaching Roulers. It was decided to encircle the town. Taking prisoners, they destroyed the barricades which guarded the suburbs with gun fire. The 9th Flanders Rifle Battalion liberated the town itself. At that time other localities around Roulers commemorated this event by publishing, both in Flemish and in Polish, a prayer containing the names of the fallen soldiers.

Many years after the war, Popperinge, Ypres, Rosselare. Tielt, Lokeren and St Nicolas founded a plaque in bronze as tribute of the Flemish towns to their Polish liberators.

Among memorials on Belgian soil it is also necessary to mention various plaques and streets, which were named after Gen. Maczek and the 1st Armoured Division. They can be found in Hooglede, Ruiselede, Roeselare, Tielt, Lommel, Drongen, Groendijk, Westouter, Kemmel, Zonnebeke, Passchendale Aalter, Adegem, Eksaarde, Stekene, St Niklaas, Beerse, Beveren, St Gillis-Waas, de Klinge and Willebroek. In Antwerp, there is a commemorative plaque which gives mention both to the British and Polish Forces.

Ville d'Ypres.

La libération de la ville d'Ypres a eu lieu le 6 septembre 1918 par le 2e régiment blindée de l'armée polonaise.

Ce jour là a 1½ h. de l'après-midi les avant-gardes de l'armée polonaise arrivèrent devant la ville. Comme il y avait une légère résistance des allemands, la ville fut contournée et pour 9 h. du soir tous combats avaient cessés.

Les yprois sont particulièrement reconnaissants à leurs libérateurs polonais de ce qu'ils ont réussi à libérer leur chère ville pour ainsi dire sans dégats et sans pertes de vie humaine.

Une dizaine de soldats polonais trouvèrent une mort héroique pour la délivrance d'Ypres. Ils reposent aujourd'hui, à coté de leurs alliés anglais, dans le cimetière anglais, chaussée de Poperinghe à Ypres.

La population yproise tout entière a tenu à montrer sa gratitude aux glorieux fils de la Pologne mort sur le sol de la ville en assistant en grand nombre au service

célébré en la Cathédrale St. Martin,
7 jours après la libération, à la mémoire
des soldats polonais morts pour leur liberté

Ces liens de sang, resteront pour nos
deux peuples, des liens d'une longue et
fructueuse amitié

Ypres le 7 décembre 1944
Le bourgmestre

STADDIEPER-WEST-VLAANDEREN-GEMEENTEBESTUUR

COMMUNE d' H O O G L E D E.

La libération de la commune d'HOOGLEDE en date du 7. Septembre 1944.

Le 7 Septembre à l'aube les allemands en retraite venant de la direction de Ypres-Westroozebeke s'arrêtent dans la commune et procèdent au rassemblement de leurs effectifs. Ceux-ci sont d'environ 400.
Ils ont une mine anxieuse ,occupent toutes les routes donnant acces à la commune et posent des sentinelles aux coins des rues. Les troupes se divisent par petits groupes et prennent position dans les bas de la commune laquelle située sur une position de défense propice à enrayer l'avance des armées alliées. Au fur et à mesure que les premières heures de la journée s'écoulent les allemands les mettent à profit pour mettre en place des nids de mitrailleuses et quelques pièces antitanks.
Il est 10 heures ...
Il faisait brouillard en du mauvais temps.
Des officiers allemands font le tour de la commune et leur nervosité fait prévoir que les libérateurs approchent d'Hooglede.
Vers 10,30 heures tout à coup on attend au loin le ronflement des tanks qui approchent, et peu de minutes après les canons tonnent et les mitrailleuses claquent , tirant dans la direction de Westroozebeke.
La bataille va s'engager pour la prise d'Hooglede.
Le ronflement des tanks se fait entendre de plus en plus et voilà que les premiers tanks sont signalés à Sleyhage - hameau à 2 Km. de la commune.
Maintenant les canons antitanks donnent à fond et toutes les mitrailleuses estimées à une vingtaime tirent.
Les tanks , qui déjà se sont engagés sur la route Sleyhage-Hooglede ,répondent hardiment le tir des allemands. La bataille s'amplifie. Mais les Alliés usent de prudence pour s'approcher de la commune et ne dirigent leur tir que sur des objectifs précis pour épargner les plus possible des vies humaines parmi la population civile.
Au fur et à mesure que les tanks approchent le tir des mitrailleuses s'entensifie , ainsi que celui des pièces antitanks.
Il est environ 11,3o heures ...
Le tir des mitrailleuses pièces antitanks et des tanks même est devenu intermittant. Les rues de la commune sont désertes et la population civiles est dans les maisons , le plus part dans les caves , attendant anxieusement leur délivrance.
Vers midi le tir des allemands étant devenu si nourri ; les alliés renoncent à attaquer la commune , de front après avoir vu leur premier tank hors de combat. Ils se décident à contourner la commune par la direction Ouest et de ce fait arrivent au " Vosseberg " situé à 1 Km. à l'Ouest du centre d' Hooglede. Ici les allemands se voyant pris au piège décident de battre en retraite et on attend à tout moment l'entrée des alliés dans la commune.
Il est 12,30 heures, ... on attend sur les pavés de la route de Bruges , le claquement des bottes de soldats allemands qui veulent s'enfuir , mais des officiers surgissent et ramènent leurs soldats face à l'Ouest de la commune.
Une nouvelle lutte s'engage mais cette fois les alliés veulent en finir.Ils envoyent aussi des tanks dans la direction Nord et ainsi de trois côtés le centre de la commune est attaqué.
C'est un bruit infernal du tir de toutes les armes.
Mais on attend que déjà le tir des tanks domine.
Vers 15 heures ... les premièrs tanks arrivent sur la place , venant de l'Ouest et du Nord et se dirigent vers les rues d'Ypres , Bruges et Roulers. Ils dirigent un tir nourri dans ces 3 directions , empêchant ainsi les allemands de faire irruption dans ces trois rues.
Lentement mais surement als avancent évitant de tirer sur les immeubles pour épargner la population civile.
A 15,3o heures ... la commune est liberée et les civils se ruent sur les armées alliés pour les acclamer tandis-que les soldats recupèrent les prisonniers , qui bientôt sont rassemblés.
La commune se pavoise et la population en délire pour leur dilivrance acclame les libérateurs qui sont une division POLONAISE DE TANKS.

LES POLONAIS sont accueillés avec empressement et des cris de remerciments s'élèvent de la foulle qui pleure de joie por leur libération après 4 années de souffrance et d'oppression.
La population offre à boire et à manger à leurs libérateurs et fait tout ce qui est en son pouvoir pour les remercier.

Ainsi se termina la libération d'Hooglede , qui conta à la population 4 blessés et l'armée Polnaise 3 tués...

Les libérateurs ont fait preuve d'une vaillance et d'un mordant sans précédent et il est incompréhensible qu'ils aient conquis HOOGLEDE avec des pertes aussi minimes.

La population d'Hooglede n'oubliera jamais la vaillante armée Polonaise et le peuple martyre de la Pologne qui par sa religion ressemble de près notre pays.

Le conseil communal se réunit et décida au nom des populations d'Hooglede d'envoyer au commandant des forces polonaises les remerciments de la commune et de faire célèbrer un service en l'honneur des HEROS TOMBES.

Le 18 Septembre 1944 fut célèbré à l'église à 10 heures le service solennel pour les 3 braves tombés pour notre libération.
Ce furent les nommés : 1- Andrzey Zylber
2- Jan Wibart
3- Szymon Maksymiec

Une foule immense assista à la cérémonie. Le curé et le bourgmestre dans une allocution exhaltèrent le courgge de ce brave peuple polonais avec ses soldats d'élite , dont la tenacité et le bravoure font d'admiration du monde entier.

°.°.°

Toute la population de la commune d'Hooglede forme le vœux que la Pologne renaisse et revive dans la liberté et la paix.
Vive la Pologne et
Vive la glorieuse armée Polonaise.

Au nom des habitants d'Hooglede.

BOURGMESTRE. Secrétaire Communal.

PROVINCIE
WEST-VLAANDEREN

GEMEENTE

RUISELEDE

RUISELEDE, den

VERSLAG OVER DE BEVRYDING VAN ONZE GEMEENTE
DOOR DE POOLSCHE LEGERS .

Op 8 September 1944.

Nr

BIJLAGE:

Postcheckrekening N°

Dagen lang zagen wy een onophoudend achteruittrekken van het verslagen Duitsche leger ...

7 September ... Gansch den dag wagens met kanonnen, machiengeweren, draagbare antitankwapens en allerlei ander oorlogstuig reden den weg op naar Aalter

8 September... de kom van de gemeente was bezet met Duitsche kanonnen allerhande . Daartusschen liepen verschillende SS mannen van kop tot teen gewapend. Rond 8 u.30' hoorden wy reeds het varen van machiengeweren. De duitschers zonden patrouilles uit gewapend met mitrailletten, draagbare anti-tank wapens enz. Het mitrailleeren werd heviger en kwam naderby... Onze bevryders waren in aantocht... Zware anti-tankkanonnen werden op de kruispunten buiten den kom der gemeente opgesteld. Ondertusschen waren de Poolsche tanks uit twee richtingen op het grondgebied onzer gemeente aangekomen. Ze waren met blomen getooid... Drie lichte gevechtswagen verschenen te 9 uur op den grintweg naar Schuifferscappelle. Ze werden rond II uur door zware Poolsche tanks opgevolgd. Aan de Klapmille waren de Poolsche gevechtswagens reeds te 9 u.2/4 verschenen. Onze bevryders waren dus op dat oogenblik nog slechts een drietal kilometers van het centrum verwyderd. Ze gevoelden dat er een weerstand was. De blomen werden van de tanks verwyderd, er zou moeten gevochten worden, daar de duitschers beslist waren stand te houden. Door velden en waterloopenvoer den de onversaagde geallieerde tanks een omsingelende beweging uit. Ieder boerenbedryf werd zorgvuldig beloerd en doorzocht. Rond II uur was reeds geschut te hooren door anti-tankkanonnen. De Duitschers werden woedend. Ze gevoelden dat ze ingesloten waren. De steenweg naar Aalter werd het meeste bedreigd, omdat de Poolsche tanks zich verhaastten om den weg van den aftocht te bezetten. Zoo werden door de Duitschers mannen en vrouwen en zelfs onmondige kinderen de straat opgejaagd in de richting van Aalter, om de duitsche troepen te beschermen. De Duitschers vierden hun woede bot door plunderen en vernielen en neerschieten van onschuldigen. Ondertusschen waren de tanks zoo dicht genaderd dat zy de opgejaagde burgers zagen die zelf tusschen de Duitsche kanonnen en mitrailleuzen moesten plaats nemen. Maar zoo menschlievend waren onze bevryders dat zy zelfs kostelyken tyd en eigen mannen offerden om de burgers te sparen . In den Slag van de Aaletrstraat werden verschillende Duitschers gedood en gekwetst, doch geen enkel burgerlyk slachtoffer was daar te betreuren. De weg van Tielt naar Aalters tend nog ganschbezet met ryen Duitsche wagens. Nadat alle mogelyke observatieposten door Poolsche kanonnen werd beschoten, plaatsten de duitschers hun zwaar antitankgeschut in de onmiddellyke nabyheid van de Marktplaats. Ondertusschen hadden er steeds duels plaats met mitrailleuzen en kanonnen.

GEMEENTEBESTUUR VAN RUISELEDE - Provincie West-Vl.

Schelderoek, Nazareth.

2e blad .

PROVINCIE
WEST-VLAANDEREN

GEMEENTE

RUISELEDE

N°

BIJLAGE :

Postcheckrekening N° 196.40

RUISELEDE, den

Een Poolsche tank werd zelfs buiten gevecht gesteld. In de Aaletrstraat werd ondertusschen hevig gevochten. De SS mannen huilden en vloekten en deden de soldaten trouw zweren aan den Führer.... Rond I5 ure verschenen in de Bruggestraat een 6 tal Duitschers met een witte vlag... het antitankkanon in de Bruggestraat werd opgebroken. Alles scheen erop te wyzen dat de Duitschers zich zouden overgeven. Te I5 u.40' hoorden wy een tank aanrollen. De vlaggen werden gehaschen, bloemen werden bygehaald, maar heel terughoudend reeds de zware tank tot op een zeer korten afstand van de duitsche kolom. Er werd halt gehouden de luiken van den koepel werden geopend en een lid der bemanning stond recht teeken doende aan de verschrikte soldaten om zich over tegeven. Niemand kwam naderby . De tank reeds dan tot vlak voor de wagens. Een soldaat - waarschynlyk een gegradueerde - kwam vooruit en wierp zeer verraderlyk een granaat in de geopende koepel van den gevechtswagen. Ruiten rinkelden, de verschrikte menschen sprongen terug binnen. De tank brandde, een gekwetst lid van de bemanning is eruit gesprongen en heeft zich vlug verborgen, twee andere waren zeer doodelyk gekwetst... en de tank reed terug in een snel tempo. Geen schot werd gelost... Nu verwachtte iedereen een verschrikkelyke ontknooping. Maar onze bevyders waren zoo edelmoedig dat ze deze laffe daad niet straften met een onmiddellyke beschieting en vernieling van onze gemeente.

Rond I8 uur hoorden wy geronk van vliegtuigen. Drie opeenvolgende golven Thyphoons bestookten de Duitsche kolommen en weer standsnesten met duizenden raketkogels. De eerste golf werd onthaald op hevig afweervuur maar de volgende malen was er byna niets meer te hooren. De vernieling was verschrikkelyk. Soldaten huilden en kermden, anderen lagen dood, paarden en wagens alles werd dooreengeslingerd. Munitiewagens brandden. De straat was één groot slagveld geworden vol dood en vernieling. De Duitsche weerstand was gebroken....

Rond 20 uur kwam de gemotoriseerde Poolsche kolonnen binnen gereden. Ze werden geestdriftig en uitbundig door de bevolking onthaald en toegejuicht... maar de infanteristen hadden nog geen tyd om te rasten? Zy rukten langs alle kanten op om nog verscholen Duitschers uit te halen .
De vlaggen wapperden nu overal en de appere helden werden met bloemen overladen door de overgelukkige bevolking van Ruiselede .
Het bilan van den slag was als volgt :

41 Duitschers gesneuvelden hier begraven.
verschillende tientallen gekwetsten.
verscheidene kanonnen buit gemaakt.
honderden krygsgevangen opgeleid.
een aanzienlyken oorlogsbuit werd veroverd.

Er waren ongelukkig ook drie Poolsche slachtoffers te betreuren. een ervan schynt in de Aaletrsteaat het slachtoffer te zyn geweest van een beestachtig vermoorden door de Duitschers. Zyn lichaam vertoonde groote brandwonden en was ontheofd.

GEMEENTEBESTUUR VAN RUISELEDE - Provincie West-Vl.

Schaubroeck, Nazareth.

PROVINCIE
WEST-VLAANDEREN

GEMEENTE

RUISELEDE

N°

BIJLAGE :

Postcheckrekening N° 195.40

RUISELEDE, den 3e. blad.

de twee andere waren slachtoffers van een laffen tankoverval. Zy rusten nu alle drie naast elkaar op het kerkhof waar hunne graven immer in eere zullen gehouden worden als dankbaarheid voor onze zoo menschlievende bevryding en verlossing van het juk der drukkende Duitsche bezetting van 25 Mei 1940 tot 6 September 1944.

Leve Polen en zyn dappere soldaten .

Echt verklaard,
Ruiselede, den 7 December 1944.

De Secretaris, DE BURGEMEESTER,

GEMEENTEBESTUUR VAN RUISELEDE - Provincie West-Vl. -

Antoine Verstraete Julien Billiet.

STAD
SINT-NIKLAAS
(WAAS)

St-Niklaas (Waas) den 6 September 1946.

To Lieutenant-Colonel A.STEFANOWICZ,
P-100,
Polish Forces,
B. A. O. R.

1e BUREEL

REF Nr 1/CA/100/RB.

AANTAL BIJLAGEN :

ONDERWERP:

Dear Colonel,

The Board of Aldermen of the Town of St-Nicholas express to you their gratitude for the grand and successful reception, which you and your regiment have reserved to the representatives of the Administration of the Town, at the occasion of the Regimental Ceremonies in Germany.

This reception, and the loyalty that was expressed thereby, have deeply moved all of us, and have left a lasting impression.

At every moment, we could feel how well-meant your sympathy was towards the Town of St-Nicholas.

This loyalty has made it a fact, that the bonds of friendship, which existed between both you and your Regiment, and the Administration of the Town of St-Nicholas, are unbreakable.

We beg you, Dear Colonel, to include in our thanks, all those who have contributed to the success of these festivities, and to make our sojourn in Germany so agreeable.

In connection herewith, we want to mention especially, Lieutenant Bogdanowicz, who has been a real friend to us.

We also beg you to be our mouthpiece in remitting our thanks to General Rudnicki, for the treat, he has reserved to us, and the sociable hours we have spent in his presence.

With our renewed thanks, we wish you all the very best for the future, for both you and your gallant soldiers.

Long live the 1st Polish Armoured Division !

tern podobnych do nas Flandryjczyków - nie szczędził nam ani serca ani gościnności w tej krótkiej między jedną a drugą bitwą przerwie.

LA POLOGNE CHEZ NOUS.

I4 Septembre I944

Cette date qui ne dit rien dans l'histoire des peuples en fait autant plus dans l'histoire de notre village.
En effet c'est ce jour là qu'après quatre années de dur esclavage ont put fêtu chez nous l'arrivée des Polognes.
Au paravant malgré que nous avions été délivré par des avant-garles Anglaises, on avait en durant 5 jours des exarmouches avec les allemands à Calloo, à cinq kilomètres environ de notre commune C'est avec l'arrivée des Polonais que disparurent les dernières arrières-gardes de léennemis.
Les nouveau-venus en effet passaient vigoureusement à l'attaque et en un clin d'oeuil ils en firent beau jeu.
C'etait la délivrance totale et définitive. Plus de boches, rien que nos alliés!! Parmi ceux-ci les Polonais occupaient une place avantageuse par leur consentiment, leur courage, leur politesse et leur réligion.
Dimanche le I7 Septembre il y eut une réception à la maison communale Il y avait la Sainte Messe, les coups de clairons qui font tressaillir le coeur des braves et puis il y avait la cortège.
Les Polonais en tête et puis..... il n'y a qu'un mot.....tout le village. Alors sur les marches délivrées de notre vielle maison oummunale le Colonel des Polonais, homme charmant, prit la parole. Après lui c'était notre bourgmestre non moins sympathique qui faisait une oration bien acclamée. Puis retentirent les sons de l'hymne Polonaise très solemnelle et de notre Brabançonne renaissante.
Le soir il y avait ce bal où bon gré malgré tout le monde voulait assister. Une joie infinie. Vous nous souvenez que le bal dût toujours être prolongé et que personne aimait de rentrer.
Dimanche après:match de football. Nous avons perdu avec joie et reconnu que les Polonais sont de réels "sportmen". Dimanche après nous nous sommes revengé et les hommes de Nawrot ont été battus avec le sourire. Le soir toujours il y avait le bal indispensable.
Et chaque jour on devint de plus en plus des amis, on viendra de frères. N'est-ce-pas jeune fille "que les Polonais vous les aimez tant..oh il ne faut pas rougir...vous n'avez pas commis un crime quand même. N'est ce pas vieille-mère, petit enfant, surtout, que vous aimez les Polonais. Tous on les aimait tant, ils était tellement sympathique. Et puis tout à coup selon la loi dure de la guerre, ils sont partis pour le front. Ils allèrent sans se plaindre de leur allure héroique. Trois semaines ont suffi... Ils ont laissé dans le coeur cet amour croissant qui ne périra jamais.
Et après ça jeune fille, il ne faut pas pleurer quand même; puisque deux fois déjà ils sont revenus en congé et autant qu'il y a de permixxixxx soldats il y aura de permission..... Ils reviendront encore!!!!!

Beveren-waas le 6 Decembre I944.

6 December 1944.

DORS O MA POLOGNE!

IO Mai I940. Bien préparé le géant a passé à l'attaque d'un peuple innocent, industriel, sans-souci. Après la Pologne la Belgique. Des Messerschmitts, des Stukas semant la terreur partout: l'entrée des Barbares!! Après quelques semaines le crime a été accompli: Nous perdâmes notre liberté, nous perdâmesla " joie de vivre"; Nous perdâmes la bataille des Flandres! Mais une chose nous restait! Car malgré l'oppression, malgré toute peine ce que jamais nous n'avons perdu c'est l'ESPERANCE! Elle était silencieuse. Elle était enterrée profondément au fond de notre coeur, mais toujours elle existait, la seule chose que mul boche, nul traître ne pût nous arracher. Dieu sait comment on a eu besoin durant ces longues années d'un esclavage réel comme l'histoire n'en a jamais connu, esclavage pire que la mort! Mais tout passe, et même les 4 années insupportablement longues, elles passèrent. Et juste au moment que notre sens de liberté menaçait de nous étouffer: voilà la fin des oppresseurs.

9 Septembre I944. Nous sommes libres! Le boche est chassé Voilà le village morne revécu parmi les fleurs, parmi les visages rajeunis, parmi les drapeaux....

Mais toujours il y restait le piétinement sourd des barbares en retraite, toujours il y avait des petites excursions des Allemands dans la contrée, semants la terreur et la mort.

c'Est alors que sont venus les Polonais,...et une semaine plus tard il n'y avait plus d'excursions de patrouilles,..il n'y avait plus d'Allemands!!... Ils avaient été chassés par ceux-ci qu'ils avaient frappé le premier et le plus fort cinq ans auparavant. C'était-là une revanche sublime d'un peuple humilié, mais courageux, battu mais jamais perdu.

Est-ce pour cette délivrance qu'on les aimait tant? Est-ce parce qu'ils ont la même religion et les mêmes sentiments dans leurs coeurs de vrais héros? Est-ce-qux parce qu'ils com-

prenaient si vivement les détresses et la joie de la petite nation qui est la nôtre? Je ne sais pas. Ce que je sais c'est qu'ils sont restés chez nous pendant trois semaines et dans ce temps qui n'est qu'un souffle dans le vent de la vie on est devenu des amis pour toujours, ô non: plus que cela parce que nous sommes devenus des frères.

Soldats Polonais, trois semaines! Il y a eu ce match de football il y a eu votre bal " pour tout le monde" il y a eu l'oration de votre colonel et de notre chèr bourgemestre. Il y a eu la plus grande des amitiés!!

Vaillants soldats, vous irez au front de combat: restez dignes, restez héroiques ".

Soldats Polonais, quand avec l'aide de notre Dieu vous serez rentrés dans votre plus chère patrie, souvenez vous du petit village dont le peuple vous a donné tout ce qu'il a pu n'a pas hésité de donner son coeur.

Frères Polonais, si une fois quelconque malheur vous adviendrait pensez à nous. Si vous seriez dans la détresse, frères, ... pensez à nous et criez au secours! Le jour même que votre voix pénétra dans le coeur de notre patrie, nous serons prêts! A chaque instant prêts de servir!

Frères Polonais souvenez vous de nous.

La population de Beveren-waas.

GEMEENTEBESTUUR VAN BEVEREN-WAAS — PROVINTIE OOST-VLAANDEREN

Heden vier en twintigsten Maart negentienhonderd zes en veertig, heeft de Gemeenteraad van Exaarde, wier mandataris-sen hieronder hun naam hebben geplaatst, de eer en het genoegen te bevestigen: Dat zij vereerd zijn te hebben kunnen medewerken tot het schenken en overhandigen van het kunstvol vaandel aan het Eerste Luchtafweerregiment der Poolsche strijdkrachten; Dat het ook met volle toestemming is dat het wapen onzer gemeente prijkt op dit vaandel, daar het voornoemd regiment is welk bijna uitsluitend heeft bijgedragen tot de bevrijding van onze gemeente.
Zij zijn ook fier te bevestigen, dat tusschen dit regiment en onze bevolking een broederbund is gesmeed welke niets of niemand, ook niet de tijd, zal kunnen verzwakken of uitwisschen. Het regimentsteeken, aan de leden van het komiteit overhandigd, zal immer met fierheid prijken op de schoonste plaats van ons huis, neevens de bekomene Belgische eereteekens, waar wij dragers van zijn.
Het zou niet enkel voor ons vereerend maar ook een zeerste aangenaam zijn, indien het schild der gemeente als kenteeken zou prijken op de uniformen der leden van het regiment

Dit document is plechtig overhandigd op 16 Juli 1946, ten gemeentehuize aan de gedelegeerden van hooger voornoemd regiment.

Vanwege den Raad: Burgemeester en Schepenen,
De Gemeentesecretaris,

De Raadsleden:

En date du vingt-quatre mars dix neuf cent quarante six, le Conseil Communal d'Exaerde, après ses mandataires soussignés de Vous exprimer l'honneur et la satisfaction qu'ils éprouvent en certifiant: Qu'ils sont heureux d'avoir pu contribuer au don et à la remise d'un fanion artistiqueau 1er Regiment de Defence Aerienne des Aymees Polonaises; Que c'est avec leur plein consentement que ce fanion porte les Armoiries de notre Commune, puisque le Regiment précité a contribué pour la plus large part à la Libération de celle ci; Nous sommes également fiers de constater qu'un indissoluble lien de fraternité unit ce Régiment à notre population, lien que ni le temps ni les circonstances ne pourront jamais affaiblir ni effacer; L'insigne du Regiment remis aux membres du Comité aura rang d'honneur dans nos maisons a côté de nos decorations belges;
Si, les Armoiries de notre Commune ornaient l'uniforme des membres de ce Regiment, ce serait pour nous non seulement un grand honneur mais également un gage de profonde amitié.

Ce document est remis solennellement aux délégués du Régiment précité en notre Maison Communale, le 16 juillet 1946.

Le Collège Bourgmestre et Echevins.
Le Secrétaire Communal:

Les Conseillers,

The town of Axel has the honour to send you this album, containing some photographs of the Polish monument, the Polish Cross and the Municipal Cemetry at Axel, where are re-burried the Polish Service-men, who gave their life for the freedom of Axel.

May these memorials show our lasting gratitude towards your troops.

They always will remind us the brave Polish Army!

Axel, the 4th January 1949.

The Burgomaster of Axel,

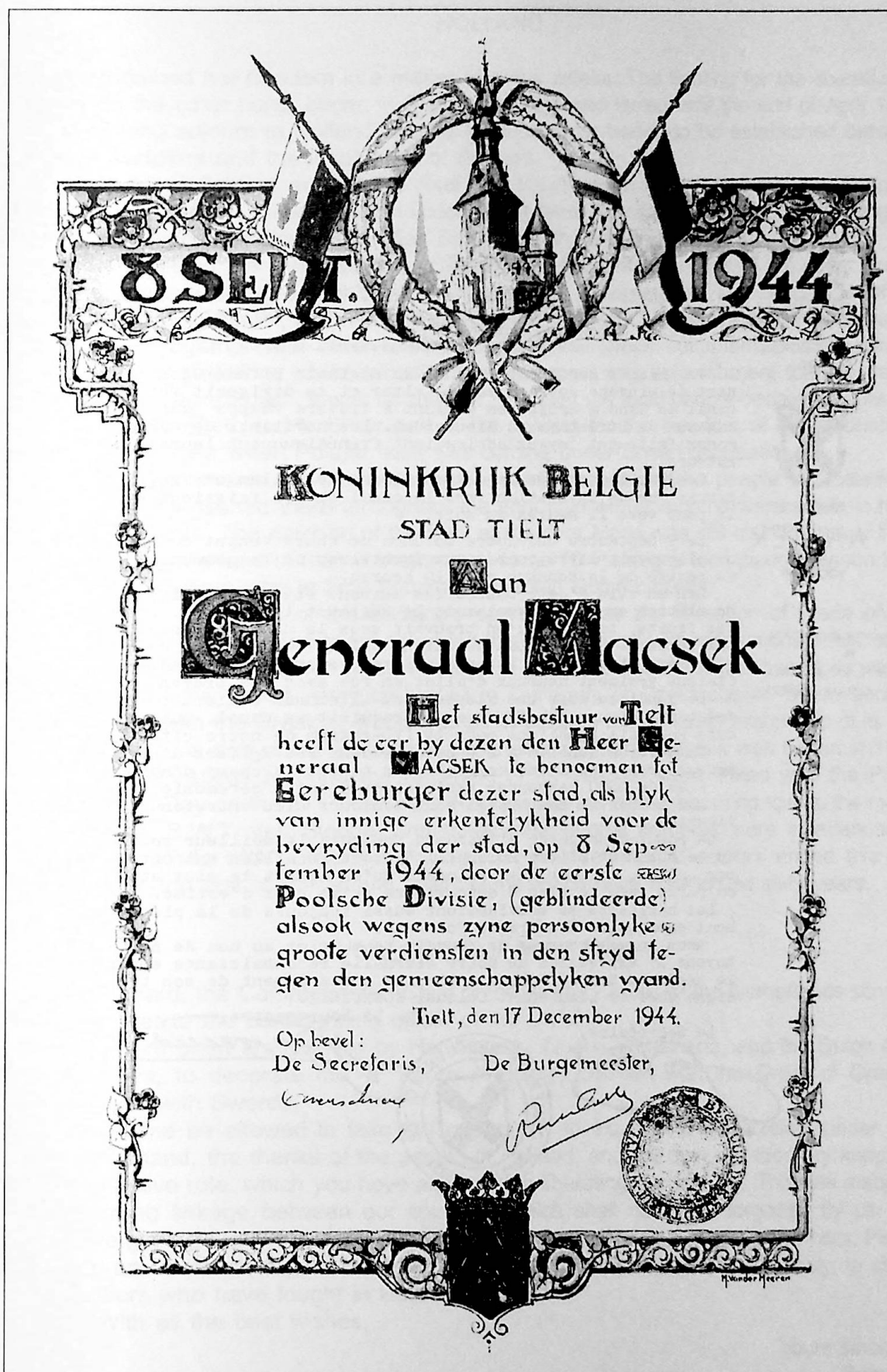
Ph.D. van Beveren

The Town-Secretary,

M. Aril.

GEMEENTE BESTUUR VAN AXEL (PROV. ZEELAND)

To Col. Dr Z. M. Szydlowski
D.S.O.


8 SEPT. 1944
KONINKRIJK BELGIE
STAD TIELT
Aan
Generaal Macsek
Het stadsbestuur van Tielt heeft de eer by dezen den Heer Generaal MACSEK te benoemen tot Ereburger dezer stad, als blyk van innige erkentelykheid voor de bevryding der stad, op 8 September 1944, door de eerste Poolsche Divisie, (geblindeerde) alsook wegens zyne persoonlyke groote verdiensten in den stryd tegen den gemeenschappelyken vyand.
Tielt, den 17 December 1944.
Op bevel:
De Secretaris,
De Burgemeester,

PROVINCIE
OOST - VLAANDEREN

ARRONDISSEMENT
GENT

GEMEENTE
AALTER

VOORWERP :

Nr

GETAL BIJLAGEN:

La Libération de la Commune d'AALTER, Flandre Orientale, Belgique par le 2e Régiment blindé Polonais sous le Commandement du Lieutenant Colonel KOSZUTSKI.

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Vendredi 8 Septembre 1944 le 2e Régiment Blindé Polonais, venant de Wingene entra à Maria-Aalter et se dirigeait vers le canal de Gand à Bruges en passant à travers champs dans les hameaux de Straathem et Nieuwendam. Les habitants de ces hameaux follement joyeux acclamaient frénétiquement leurs libérateurs.

Pendant l' arrivée de cette colonne les Allemands fuyaient par la rue de la Station vers le canal où ils faisaient sauter le pont vers II heures du soir.

Le 9 Septembre une autre colonne de Chars venant de Ruiseled où elle avait livré combat aux frontières de la commune arrivai au centre de la commune vers IO heures.

En un clin d'oeil toutes les maisons étaient pavoisées, la population en délire acclamait le Régiment libérateur. Des fleurs des fruits, tout ce qu'on trouvait sous la main étaient offerts aux soldats. Les habitants étaient jaloux de recevoir chez eux officiers et soldats. Les enfants recevaient des friandises et étaient vraiment heureux d'aller en rue avec ces braves Polonais.

Le lundi au soir une alerte, les Allemands avaient tirés sur des tanks et une échaffourée se produisit au Canal. Quinze soldats Polonais tombaient pour la libération de notre citée.

Un service funèbre a été celébré dans les Eglises d'Aalter pour le repos de l'âme des Polonais tombés au champ d'honneur.

Plus de 2000 personnes assistaient à cette cérémonie.

Les tombes de ces braves sont toujours bien entretenues et fleuries .

La population garde et gardera toujours le meilleur souvenir du 2e Régiment Blindé Polonais. De tous les Alliés qui ont passe par Aalter, ce sont les Polonais qu'on aimait le plus et dont on parle avec le plus d'entousiasme et le plus d'estime.

Les habitants se souviendront aussi toujours de la piété vraiment exemplaire des braves Polonais.

Nous sommes heureux de pouvoir renouveler au nom de nos concitoyens l' expression de notre éternelle reconnaissance envers le 2e Régiment Blindé Polonais sous le commandement de son très digne Chef le Lieutenant Colonel KOSZUTSKI.

Le Bourgmestre,

Le Secrétaire,

GEMEENTE BESTUUR AALTER - OOST-VLAANDEREN -

HOLLAND

Belgium regained her freedom in a matter of a few weeks. The fighting for the liberation of Holland, on the other hand, began in September 1944 and lasted until the end of April 1945.

This long sojourn in Holland caused even stronger bonds to be established between the Polish soldiers and the inhabitants of Brabant.

After fierce fighting around the Axel and Hulst canal area where the 10th Dragoon Rgt. sustained heavy losses, the first Dutch towns were liberated. Hulst expressed its gratitude by presenting the Podhalan Rifles Battalion with their colours.

After crossing the Dutch border in September, the Division reached the coast wreaking havoc among the retreating Germans at the port of Terneusen. The description of the events by the then mayor, Dr J. Wessling, was sent to the Foundation in 1975 by Mayor Dr R.C.E. Barbé together with other relevant documents. These documents contain various references to the feelings of the inhabitants. Uppermost was astonishment that the troops liberating them were Polish. It was for the first time ever the local people became acquainted with the history of Poland and her part in the fighting for the freedom of other countries, especially at a time when Poland itself was coming under Soviet occupation.

Similar sentiments are expressed in the reminiscences of the people of Oosterhout. Polish troops garrisoned there throughout the very cold winter months were active in helping the inhabitants. The defence of the front at the river Maas was still claiming many lives. The Dutch became fond of their liberators and some 70 marriages took place between local girls and the soldiers who in time became respected Dutch citizens.

The most important of the Division's operations was the liberation of Breda on the 29th October 1944. The town commemorated this happy event with many monumnets, street names, sculptures and stained glass windows in churches and roadside chapels as well as by a chapel of the Polish Army dedicated to Our Lady of Częstochowa. Breda became bound forever with the Division, granting to all its soldiers the honorary citizenship of its city. There in Breda, in one of the Polish war cemeteries, General Maczek was buried in 1994.

The celebrations marking the regaining of its freedom were linked with the Polish Independence Day on the 11th November. Representatives of neighbouring towns, the mayor of Breda, Mr. B.W.T. van Slobbe, and many international notables were in attendance. A splendid parade with soldiers marching with their regimental colours ended this momentous day, the first of the annual celebrations which have now lasted sixty years.

A Bond We Shall Never Forget

Prince Bernhard, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Netherlands sent the following letter to the commanding officer of the Division:

> I have been empowered by Her Majesty, Queen Wilhelmina, and the Dutch Government, to decorate the 1st Polish Armoured Division with the Order of Orange-Nassau with Swords.
>
> Let me be allowed to take this opportunity to express to the soldiers under your com- mand, the thanks of the people of Holland, and my own, for the very important and active role, which you have all played in liberating our country. This has made for a strong linkage between our countries which shall never be forgotten by us. You have gained many friends in our country and you will always be welcome here. Please find an occasion to pass this letter – especially in the name of Her Majesty, to all the soldiers who have fought in Holland.
>
> With all the best wishes,
>
> Yours sincerely,
> Bernhard

Among the many friends of Poland in Breda, a special recognition is due to the historian and director of the General Maczek Museum, Mr Jos van Alphen, the author of the book 'Breda Liberated' and also, together with Mr Harry Venema, of the list of Polish soldiers killed in the campaign of 1944 – 1945. Mr Venema, as a young boy, lived through the liberation of his town, Vendaam, and has shown his apprciation by looking after Polish graves in the borderland region between North Brabant and Germany. Jos van Alphen has also written a brochure about the building and the unveiling of the monument in Warsaw, under the title *Monument voor 1e Pantser Divisie Warszau*. The brochure reflects accurately these events and includes illustrations of the coats of arms of all the towns which contributed to the cost involved.

After the end of hostilities, several dozen veterans settled in Breda forming an association very actively engaged throughout the years in various remembrance celebrations. The funeral of General Maczek was attended in December 1994 by a great many of his soldiers. With passing time, the presidency of the association wass taken over by the next generation in the person of the son of one of the veterans, Mr Adrian Stopa, and his wife Krystyna.

Foremost among the friends of the Division was Mr Thom Peeters, the author of several works, which are included in the bibliography. Born in 1930, he was an eye-witness of the liberation of his town. After the war he maintained friendly relations with the veterans of the Division, giving them every help in their start of a new life. The translation of some extracts from his book was made by Mrs Bożena van Mierlo-Dulińska, who has lived in Holland for many years and is herself the author of recollections about one of Gen. Maczek's soldiers.

Breda is Free

The liberation of Breda, one of the larger towns of the Dutch province of Brabant, began on Sunday 29th October 1944, the feast day of Christ the King. It soon became clear that it was to be a unique kind of liberation. We were totally unaware that there were Polish units serving with the Allied armies. Then unexpectedly, there were Polish soldiers on our streets equipped with the latest weapons. Some curious person ventured out to take a closer look and then, astonished, informed us that he saw 'Poland' on the soldiers' shoulder flashes.

The festivities of Christ The King were abandoned, but soon thanksgiving mass was said in many of Breda's churches and many Polish soldiers attended.

There could be four main reasons why the Poles and Brabanters immediately liked each other. Firstly, both were Roman Catholic; secondly, we sympathised with the Polish nation caught in Russo-German pincers; thirdly, we had tremendous respect for Gen. Maczek whose strategy left our town with little destruction; then lastly, in this terrible winter of 1944 – 45, Breda became the haven for Polish soldiers who had been away from home for such a long time. For whatever reason, friendship flourished between us and it often had its beginnings around the kitchen stove of a hospitable Brabant family. Now, after fifty years, one can say with confidence that it was a life-long friendship.

A token of this is the poem below:

To the Poles who liberated Breda:
Because through the centuries your people
Have been no strangers to suffering;
Because your sons, hard and tough,
Are accustomed to battle;

(...)

because you fought on our side
and brought us freedom
so long awaited and greeted with joy,
after many a hellish night;

because, sighing under the burden,
you still offered to help us;
because your sons hard and tough
are now united with the Netherlands;

because you are of Polish blood,
of your own Christian tribe,
a brother people, one with us in faith
who came to our rescue;

for this all Breda honours you,
brave soldiers from the front
as heroes – but in a better way
than a Jerry would understand;

simple, humane, easygoing and pious,
Poles we greet you joyfully;
we bring you thanks from every heart,
and may God preserve you.

[Hub. Kunst, Breda, 3th November 1944]

Polish soldiers, we thank you

'Dziękujemy Wam Polacy'. These were the first words in Polish we learnt in Breda. They were printed on posters which were displayed in our windows and in other conspicuous places. It must have been a moving sight for the liberators who were so far from their dearest.

On the 30th October 1944, quite spontaneously, but wholly officially, all the soldiers of the Division received the honorary citizenship of Breda.

On the 11th November 1944, I was one of the thousands of schoolchildren who sang the Polish national anthem in honour of General Maczek and his soldiers at the top of their voices. For us it was an extraordinary experience, since we sang the words of the mazurka in phonetic transcription. The lively melody of the national anthem immediately became a hit with us.

On the 15th February 1945, the Polish commanding officer received in his Breda headquarters an album with 1 800 signatures and the following letter:

'As inhabitants of Breda, a town with a glorious past and a secure place in the history of the Netherlands, we wish to express our deep gratitude to the heroes of the 1st Polish Armoured Division for freeing us from the yoke of German occupation under which we have suffered for four and a half long years. Thanks to the determined Polish attack, our town emerged with little damage from the fighting of the 29th October 1944 and with all of its historic buildings untouched. With deep honour we remember those soldiers who, themselves so far from home, have sacrificed their lives for freedom while investing the town and in the later fighting in the direction of Moerdijk.

We express our fully declared wishes that Poland, as it was in the past, should with God's help become a free and glorious nation. It was for such a nation that her sons fought heroically in a century long struggle, which always earned the admiration of the whole world'.

For half a year, the Division – some 16 000 men strong, was stationed in Breda and in the neighbouring villages. Very quickly, the soldiers were welcomed as adopted children in the homes of the local people. We, too, had Edward, our Polish soldier, who regularly visited us for a chat and often for an evening of music around the piano. He was only 19 years old and very much in need of my father's advice about his post-war future: whether to return to Poland or remain in the West. They held long discussions on the subject. When his duties called him, he listened to my mother's fearful admonitions to look after himself. She wound a warm scarf around his neck and then impatiently awaited his return. Edward called her 'mummy'. When he had a pass, he was taken in his gala uniform on visits to our aunts or for a walk through the streets of Breda. I must add, that it was not only my parents who paraded the streets in the company of a Polish soldier. Once, when Edward was in deep conversation, we in turn tried his uniform, we were so proud to have such a brave 'brother', but we were also somewhat jealous of the attention paid him by our parents. Overcome by longing for his own country, he returned to Poland in 1947 and both he and his family remained our dearest friends until his death in 1990.

Return to Breda

We were not forgotten when in April 1945 the Polish Division set out in pursuit of the retreating Germans. Up to 1947, its soldiers would return to Breda on every possible leave. We knew how worried they were by decisions taken by the Allies as to Poland's political future. After demobilisation, some 400 Polish soldiers came to Breda. As reward for their decision to remain in the West, they were deprived by the Polish communist government of their citizenship. They also had to face humiliating visits to the Office of Registration of Foreigners. Some 250 veterans settled in our town for good. Sergeant Józef Sobieraj was one of them. It is curious to ponder whether then, in 1947, he could imagine that he would start a printing business in Breda. It is difficult to believe, but so it was: a Pole earning his living by printing books in Dutch.

Szymon Kawaler can serve as another example of how a former Polish soldiers coped with life among us. His life story was written as an essay by a ten year old boy, Sam Beesems in November 1996. He found the necessary material in the General Maczek Museum and in the War Museum, both situated in Breda and both regularly visited by schoolchildren gathering assorted information.

This is what Sam wrote: 'This chapter is about a badly wounded man. For two years he remained in a British military hospital. He had 78% invalidity and his left arm was amputated at the shoulder. Nevertheless, he got a job in a factory making weighing machines. This work was difficult for him as he had but one hand. The Dutch language was also difficult to master. Szymon met a girl whom he came to love. He told her: 'We should not continue seeing each other as I am disabled'. The young lady replied: 'No way! From today we do everything together', and so it was for the next forty years. Both worked very hard in their watch mending workshop. Szymon's wife would hold the watch whilst he repaired it with his one hand. Szymon Kawaler died in 1996 at the age of 75. His 11 children and 23 grandchildren remain very proud of their father and grandfather'.

Hard to Believe!

On liberation day some exploding grenades damaged several stalls in the Great Church, just as some iconoclasts had done in 1566. On this occasion this did not cause indignation as the fighting brought us freedom. An anonymous sculptor then expressed his gratitude to his liberators by sculpting their likeness on these stalls. One relief carving shows a Polish soldier taking a German prisoner, another depicts a Pole on leave taking a lovely Breda girl for a ride on his motorbike. At first the parishioners were astounded – for no one had asked their permission to use a chisel on the historic stalls of their church. Besides, the likenesses were very true to life, and were far from depicting a religious theme. With time people came to like those carvings and now after 50 years they themselves have acquired historic value.

Melodies from the Great Tower

In 1979, Jacques Maassen, responsible for the chimes on the Great Tower, was asked by the Dutch-Polish Committee for a musical tribute for the day of liberation of Breda. Jacques did not disappoint the Committee when he set the chimes to play the following melodies for 6 months in every year:

On each full hour sound the strains of a sentimental Partisans' song: 'Tonight I cannot come to you'. I quote my favourite verse: 'When I fail to return, let my brother sow my field; the moss will cover my bones and make the soil fertile. Go out into the field one morning, put your hands around an ear of corn, kiss it as a lover. I shall live in the ears of corn'.

Each quarter sounds the refrain: 'Gonna take a sentimental journey', one of the most popular American songs after the liberation.

On the half hour the chimes play a fragment of the 'Prayer to God', whose melody was composed by Adam Kowalski during his internment in Rumania. This hymn was often sung by the soldiers during mass.

At the three quarters chimes the beginning of the Partisans' march: 'The weeping willows are soughing'.

What a moving musical medley to listen to each quarter hour!

The Soldier with a Trumpet

For nearly 40 years Joop van Ommeren, the adjutant, now deceased, took part in the commemoration of the anniversary of the liberation of Breda, always playing the Last Post on his trumpet for the fallen Polish soldiers. He became a symbol of Dutch solidarity with the Polish soldiers resting in Breda's earth. The annual ceremonies were enriched by his excellent military and musical style.

Each time having made his irreplaceable contribution, he would quietly slip away without giving anyone a chance to thank him for his selfless co-operation.

Music of the Second Generation

Polish surnames can be found not only in the Breda telephone directory, but also in the local press. Here we find the evidence of the activities of second generation Poles in different sectors of the veterans' lives. They, true countrymen of Chopin, are gifted

musicians who pass on their talents to their descendents. It is enough for two to meet for a choir to spring to life with a secular or church repertoire. Hubert Koniuszek is one of the talented young people. A son of a veteran and choir director, he wished to honour his father and other soldiers by organising a musical evening on the 23rd October 1994 in the packed church of St Anthony.

The music we shall perform today explained Mr Koniuszek at the start, expresses fear and sadness, then joy and gratitude – feelings, which were so prominent during the liberation. We honour the memory of the fallen by performing the *Agnus Dei* from Penderecki's *Requiem* and *Illuxit Sol* a motet for martyrs composed by Gorczycki. Many veterans had to start life from scratch. For those who are still among us, we shall sind two motets by Zieliński: *Domus Mea* (*My house is your safe haven*) and *O Gloriosa Domina*. Two other motets by Zieliński with which we shall begin our performance: *Vox in Roma* and *Monte Olivetti* mirror the fear and turmoil experienced by the soldiers during the combat for their freedom. Through Koszewski's *In Memoriam* and *Pax Hominibus* we glorify freedom, which we can enjoy thanks to the soldiers' courage and steadfastness'.

An Undying Respect and Gratitude

After the war the Polish community in Breda founded a variety of clubs, beginning with a theatre and a folk dancing group, right up to sports clubs, a men's choir, a Saturday school and a cultural centre. At first the membership was mainly composed of the veterans and their Dutch wives. With time the next generation took over the running of the social and cultural activities. The folk dancing groups like 'Mazur', 'Polonia' and then 'Karpacz' enjoyed great popularity, drawing attention to themselves by the colourful national costumes. These splendid dresses were created in 'artistic workshops' on simple sewing machines. The 'artistic workshops' were in fact kitchens and living rooms where industrious Dutch women laboured long into the night over the complicated patterns and ornamentations of the Polish folk costumes. Our Polish veterans must have been very proud of the achievement of their wives and later daughters.

Polish organisations still active in Breda include the Catholic Society, the ex-combatants club 'Kaszub', and sports club 'Polonia', as well as the Cultural and Social Centre of the younger generations and of the new immigrants. Mass is celebrated in Polish on the first Sunday of each month. The original men's choir has now become a mixed one and the veterans' Dutch wives sing in Polish as though it were their own language. All these activities, as well as the various initiatives organised by the Polish community with the aim of preserving old Polish customs, have given our town a new character and have enriched the Polish heritage in Breda. Thousands of children ride their bikes along Polish road, General Maczek street, alongside the chapel in which hangs the picture of Our Lady of Częstochowa, or past the German tank in Wilhelminapark and the Polish monument depicting the Polish eagle killing the German one.

Twice a year the fallen of the war are honoured. Around the 29th October the forty Polish soldiers killed while liberating Breda are remembered; and on the 4th of May, the Day of National Remembrance, all the victims of the war and especially the Polish heroes are honoured. It is thanks to these two annual commemorations that every child in Breda is made aware of the two war cemeteries. The burial on the 23rd December 1994 of General Maczek among his soldiers was thoroughly discussed in every school in Breda, which represents for me the vivid interest in and respect for the famous 1st Polish Armoured Division.

❖ ❖ ❖

Thanks to the kindness of the mayor of Breda, Mr C.G.J. Rutten, the Foundation has received a transcript of the declaration made at the time of the liberation of Breda, which today also encompasses Tetteringen, Prinsenbeek, and Niew Ginneken.

In the winter period of 1944 – 1945 the Division occupied many towns and villages in Northern Brabant. In the ancient city of 's-Hertogenbosch, the 1st squadron of the 2nd Armoured Regiment was stationed with the duty of patrolling various sectors of the front line. This stay ended very romantically, as was often the case, with the marriage of one of the officers, Lt Władysław Kohutnicki, to a beautiful girl of the town. After the war Władysław Kohutnicki served in the Dutch army and achieved the rank of Colonel, commanding officer of the motorized Hussars' battalion. After the war the Dutch did not forget their wartime friends. A delegation from the town composed of Jhr. En Mevrouw, R.A. van Rijckevorsel, Jonkheer en Mevrouw van Weede van Dijkveld, Charles J.M. Dony, De Heer en Mevrouw Comen van Laachoven visited the Regiment on occupation duties in Germany, bringing with them a book, the handiwork of the famous publishers of the monastery in Bois le Duc. Its parchment pages are illuminated with Polish eagles and the cross-like badge of the 2nd Armoured Regiment and bear a Latin inscription honouring the military achievements of Polish Arms:

> Whoever reads these pages let him remember that for the sons of Poland duty lasts forever: God and the Fatherland – with your brothers serve them with a whole heart.
>
> This golden book is the historic homage of your Netherland brothers, sons of the Madonna of Bois le Duc, grateful to the depths of their souls for their salvation bought at the price of your chivalrous blood and full of wonder at your heroism, O Poland!
>
> Spin on the thread of the tale of your heroic deeds... add your share to the common task, answer to the grace of Him who has created you, who has redeemed you. The Holy Mother, Queen of Poland will be your help in the task of liberation, in the labour of rebuilding of her fiefdom. This people the Lord will bless...
>
> Our wishes go with you.

The spring offensive into Germany at the beginning of April 1945 began with the liberation of the Dutch towns of Emmen and Alteveer. In Veendam, freed by the 2nd squadron of the 10th Mounted Rifles Regt, a street was named after its commanding officer, Capt. Jan Salwa, and throughout the rest of his life, the people of Veendam kept a discreet lookout over his welfare. In nearby Odoorn, where sergeant Bolesław Laskowski from the same regiment was killed on the 11th April, a street was named after him. The story of his life and death from a sniper's bullet was widely written about in the local press.

In the fighting along the German-Dutch border the Division liberated Winschoten, which many years later, under the leadership of the Lady mayor J.G. Vliestestra, twinned with the Polish town of Płońsk.

The 12th of April was made memorable by the freeing of the prisoner of war camp at Oberlangen, a camp for women soldiers of the Home Army in Germany accross the Dutch border near Ter Apel.

One of the last witnesses of the fighting in north-eastern Brabant was H. Buiskool, then 15 years old, who, as secretary of the municipal council of Niewwolda, sent us, in 1997 an account of the fighting in nearby Ter Apel. It is notable for its description of a moving scene when a Polish and a German soldier supported a wounded comrade to the dressing station.

'Fight hard, but in a chivalrous manner,' Gen. Maczek had commanded his men at the beginning of the campaign.

Commemorations in Holland have taken place for many years now. Nowadays, as the cruelties of the Second World War retreat into the past, they have taken a different

significance. The Dutch-German border has become a region of friendship for the veterans of the Division who were entertained there in 1995, in the area where half a century ago they had lived through very different circumstances. One of the war reporters of the newspaper 'The Soldiers' Daily', Edmund Goll, thus describes the celebrations, which took place in this borderland with Germany in 1995:

The Day of Polish Victory in the Netherlands

Europe is joyfully celebrating the 50th anniversary of the ending of the Second World War. I am a veteran, who was overtaken by the conflict on the 1st September 1939 in a field near a gun emplacement. I am also a witness to its ending in the West German village of Westerstede on the 5th May 1945, when the command 'cease fire' came over the radio. But between its beginning and its end, there was the French campaign of 1940, followed by an intensive period of training in Scotland, then in 1944 came the landing in Normandy and the march eastwards through France, Belgium and Holland.

Precisely the Netherlands sympathized the most deeply with our longings and homesickness. They showed us warm-hearted gratitude for bringing them freedom.

On the 3rd May we went to the area where we fought during the last two weeks of the war, where we waged our struggle for the crossing of the Küsten Canal. The Dutch border is some 12 km distant and to the unending sound of bells from Dörpen, the cavalcade stops in front of the church. A multitude of Dutch and Polish veterans surges to greet a multitude of Germans with their schoolchildren.

Holy Mass is celebrated by the Reverend Stefan Ochalski from Rotterdam. In his sermon Father Ochalski sketches the outline of the campaign fought by the 1st Armoured Division, stressing that the 3rd May is Poland's National Feast day, and that Polish soldiers, apart from fighting an inhuman regime, brought freedom to all nations, including Germany.

The cemetery in Dörpen has its military section. Here, on the left, lie 30 Poles and on the right 44 Germans. The choir sings anthems to the dead, the bell tolls ceaselessly, the trumpeter sounds the Last Post, the delegations and the children deposit flowers on the graves, the priest blesses all the graves. The German priest speaks from in front of the monument. I stand nearby, and though my German is rather rudimentary, I do understand that during the war he had been placed in a concentration camp in Poland near Tarnopol. He was rescued from there by a nun who hid him with a Polish family with whom he spent the whole of the period of German occupation. What he saw and heard surpasses all the news given out to the press and the radio: savagery and inhuman cruelty. 'How ashamed I felt of being a German! Your victory was a blessing for the German race. Now I humbly beg your pardon and ask for your forgiveness'.

In the Netherlands, among the larger cities, Breda has expressed its gratitude for liberation achieved without the destruction in funding several memorials, amongst them a beautiful Polish army chapel of Our Lady of Częstochowa made in mosaic. Many churches have incorporated frescos or stained glass windows to commemorate the liberation. The point of entry of the Division into Breda is marked by an impressive column featuring the Polish eagle killing the German eagle.

During the long winter of 1944–45 the Division held the front on the river Maas and occupied various locations along its banks. The local communities in their gratitude have also commemorated these war events in some of the locations. A small bell bearing the

inscription 'My sound and free Moerdijk seemed to be lost in battle, but those who want to listen to me will live in freedom', has been hung at Moerdijk.

Many other memorials and street names honouring Polish liberators could be found along the battle route of the Division at Axel, Hulst, Zaamslag, Gilze, Barle Nassau, Hooge Zvaluve, Alphen, Bavel, Ginneken, Dorst, Prinsenbeek, Ter Aalst, Heikant, Clinge, Oosterhout, Kaatsheuvel, Waalwijk, Emmen, Terheyden, Sprang-Capelle, Capelsche Veer, Ulvenhout, Veendam, Alteveer, Odoorn, Made an Drimmelen and Winschoten.

The erection of a monument to the 1st Armoured Division in Warsaw met with a warm response in Holland. Above all we owe a debt of gratitude to the Queen's High Commissioner for North Brabant, Mr F.J.M. Houben, who led the Dutch delegation to the unveiling ceremony in Warsaw which included:

Mrs A.T.J. Bax-Broeckaert – the Lady Mayor of Niewe Ginneken
Mr J.A. Rops – Councillor of Niewe Ginneken
Mr W.A. Letschert – the Mayor of Geertruidenberg
Mr J. Heesters – Councillor of the town of Geertruidenberg
Mr W.J. de Graaf – the Mayor of Axel, accompanied by:
Mr A. van Harm, Mr J.W. Harpe
Mr J. Dieleman, Mr P.T. Apers
Mr Th. Steenkamp – the Mayor of Hotenisse
Mr G.M. Kessen – The Mayor of Hulst
Mr Aarts – the Mayor of Gilze en Rijn
Mr Jan Elzinga – the Mayor of Made en Drimmelen.

On the occasion of the publication of this book Mr F.J.M. Houben, Her Majesty's High Commissioner for North Brabant, also sent a letter of support to the Foundation.

HET GEMEENTEBESTUUR VAN BREDA,

Overwegende, dat de stad Breda op Zondag 29 October 1944 door de Geallieerde Expeditie Troepen is bevrijd van het zware juk der Duitsche bezetting, hetwelk gedurende bijna 4½ jaar op haar heeft gerust;

Overwegende, dat deze bevrijding meer speciaal het werk is geweest van de 1e Poolsche Pantser-Divisie onder het bevel van Generaal-Majoor Stanislaw Maczek;

Overwegende, dat bedoelde divisie door deze haar van krijgshaftigheid en moed getuigende daad de onuitwischbare dank heeft verdiend van de bewoners van de stad Breda;

BESLUIT:

Aan de 1e Poolsche Pantser-Divisie van de Geallieerde Expeditie Troepen aan te bieden de eerepenning in zilver van de gemeente Breda en haar in te schrijven in het eereboek van de stad en daarmede het eere-burgerschap van de stad.

Aldus gedaan te Breda, den 30sten October 1944.

De Burgemeester van Breda,
w.g. B. W. T. VAN SLOBBE

De Secretaris,
w.g. PH. I. E. VAN WOENSEL

ZARZAD GMINY BREDA

Rozwazajac, ze w niedziele 29-go pazdziernika 1944r. Alianckie Wojska Expedycyjne oswobodzily miasto Brede z pod ciezkiego jarzma niemieckiej okupacji, ktora trwala prawie cztery i pol roku.

Rozwazajac, ze to oswobodzenie bylo specjalnym wysilkiem zolnierzy 1-szej Polskiej Dywizji Pancernej pod dowodztwem gen.bryg. Stanislawa Maczka.-

Rozwazajac, ze wymieniona dywizja zasluzyla za swa dzielnosc i mestwo na nieograniczona wdziecznosc mieszkancow miasta Bredy.-

POSTANOWIONO:

Ze, 1-sza Polska Dywizja Pancerna Alianckich Wojsk Expedycyjnych zostala odznaczona srebrnym medalem honorowym miasta Bredy, jak rownierz wpisana do honorowej ksiegi tego miasta, co oznacza, ze jej zolnierze tym samym sa honorowymi obywatelami miasta Bredy.-

Tak zostalo zatwierdzone w Bredzie dnia 30-go pazdziernika 1944r.

Burmistrz miasta Breda,
B. W. T. VAN SLOBBE

Sekratarz,
PH. I. E. VAN WOENSEL

THE TOWN-COUNCIL OF B R E D A;

Considering, that the city of Breda on Sunday the 29th of October 1944 by the Allied Expeditionary Forces has been liberated from the heavy joke of the German occupation, that lasted nearly four and a half years;

Considering, that this liberation has been effectuated more especially by the First Polish Armoured Division under the Command of Major-General Stanislaw Maczek;

Considering, that this Polish division by its military talent and bravery has deserved the indelible gratitude of the people of the city of Breda;

D E C I D E S:

to offer to the First Polish Armoured Division of the Allied Expeditionary Forces the medal of honor of the city of Breda in silver and to put its name in the book of honor of the town and with that the citizenship of honor of the town.

So done at Breda, the
30th of October 1944.

THE BURGOMASTER OF B R E D A,

THE SECRETARY,

RIJKSTELEGRAAF

VERKORTINGEN VOOR BETAALDE DIENSTAANWIJZINGEN

D	= Dringend	PC	= Kennisgeving Ontvangst	GP	= Poste Restante
RPx	= Antwoord betaald x (bedrag)			MP	= Eigenhandig
		TC	= Collationneering	LX	= Geluktelegram
XP	= Bode betaald	TR	= Telegraaf restant	RM	= Overneming

NOTA. HET RIJK VERGOEDT GEEN SCHADE, VEROORZAAKT DOOR HET IN HET ONGEREEDE RAKEN, DE VERMINKING OF DE VERTRAGING IN DE OVERKOMST VAN EEN TELEGRAM.

TELEGRAM

NAAM VAN HET KANTOOR VAN: (a) AFZENDING, (b) BESTEMMING	TELEGRAM NUMMER	AANTAL WOORDEN	TIJD VAN (a) AANNEMING, (b) ONTVANGST DATUM	TIJD	DIENST-BIJVOEGSELS	OPGENOMEN DOOR
TETERINGEN		62	a 6/10/1944 194	10		S
BREDA			b 194			

INHABITANTS OF TETERINGEN WISH TO EXPRESS DEEP GRATITUDE TO POLISH FORCES FOR LIBERATION OF VILLAGE SINCERELY HOPING THAT DAY WILL SOON ARRISE WHEN POLAND BE RESUSCITATED TO FORMER GLORY INHABITANTS PROPOSE TO ERECT A SYMBOL OF GRATITUDE A TOMB ON GRAVE OF ONE OF YOUR SOLDIERS WHO FELL IN THIS VILLAGE

COMMANDER C. D. TETERINGEN.

...D OF TOESTEL-
...MER:

Model T 17ª (Groot) L 701 - '44
Bedrijfsnummer: c/1902/0407 K 983
NADRUK IS VERBODEN

GEMEENTE OOSTERHOUT.

Aan den Commandant der Poolsche
Legergroep

Leijsenhoek

OOSTERHOUT.

No. 11291 OOSTERHOUT, 6 December 1944.

ONDERWERP: Bijl.

St.Nicolaastractatie
kinderen.

Het is mij een behoefte U namens de gemeente, in het bijzonder namens de kinderen en dezer ouders, hartelijk dank te betuigen voor de buitengewone verassing, die U aan de kinderen van Oosterhout bereid hebt ter gelegenheid van het St.Nicolaasfeest op 5 December j.l.

Ik was bij mijn bezoek aan dit feest waarlijk diep getroffen door de sympathieke en royale wijze waarop U onze kinderen hebt onthaald en ik kan U de verzekering geven, dat U en Uw soldaten zich een warme en blijvende plaats in de harten onzer burgerij hebben verworven.

Onze groote erkentelijkheid voor al hetgeen U reeds voor ons beproefde Vaderland hebt gedaan gelieve U bij dezen nogmaals te aanvaarden.

Ik verzoek U voorts beleefd mijnen dank over te brengen aan Uw ondergeschikten.

De Burgemeester,

As a homage to the Polish Army for the brilliant part played in the liberation of the Netherlands and as a token of gratitude to the Polish First Anti Aircraft Artill. Regiment for the important and highly successful defence of the Southern banks of the River Maas during the winter 1944-1945, thus saving a great part of the Province of North Brabant from a renewed German invasion and from certain destruction, the inhabitants of the town of 's-Hertogenbosch and of the municipalities of Vught, Rosmalen and Berlicum have presented this Regiment with a set of four trumpet-banners as a proof of lasting sympathy.

's-Hertogenbosch April 25 th 1946

The committee for the Presentation

Honorary President

President

Secretary

Members

·VIRI·DELECTI·ET·CIVES·CIVITATVM·

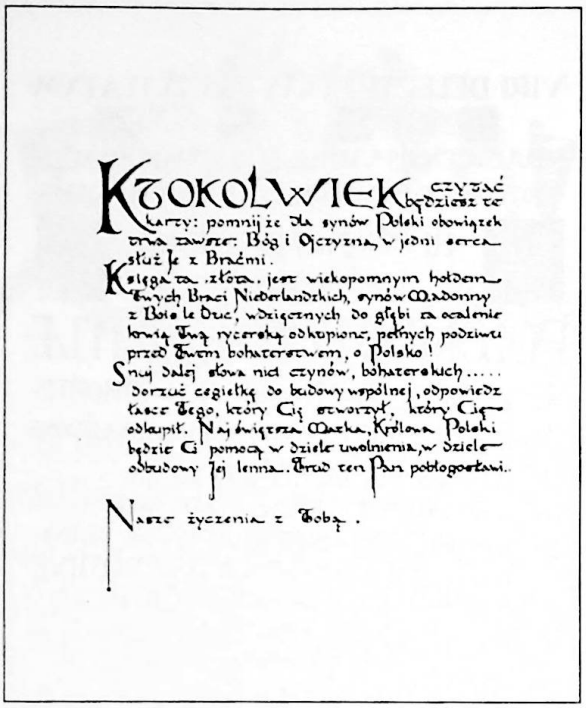
·SILVADVCENSIS·VVGHT·BERLICVM·ROSMALEN·
·PROVINCIÆ·BRABANTIÆ·SEPTENTRIONALIS·

·REGNI·NEERLANDICI·
·DICAVERVNT·

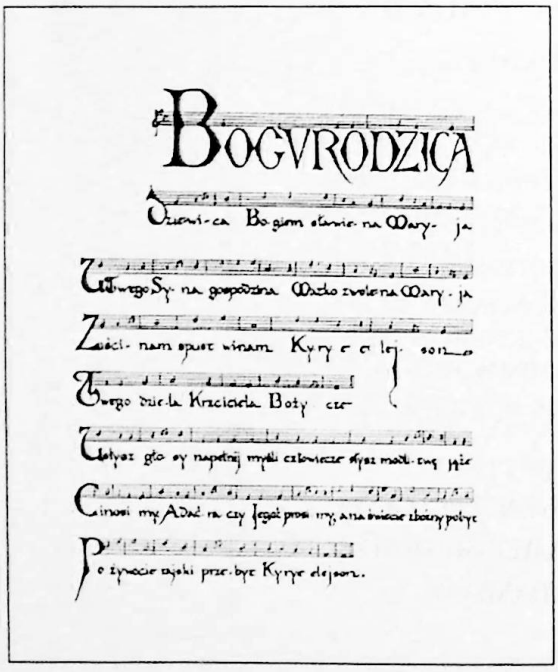
·POLONIÆ·FORTI·MILITIÆ·
·SECVNDÆ·POLONIÆ·LORICATÆ·COHORTIS·
·QVÆ·NVMERATVR·IN·Iª·POLONIÆ·LORICATA·LEGIONE·
·IN·CVRIA·SILVADVCENSI·
·ANTE·DIEM·SEPTIMVM·KALENDAS·MAIAS·
·ANNO·AB·INCARNATIONE·DOMINI·MCMXLVI·
·CIVIVM·NOMINE·

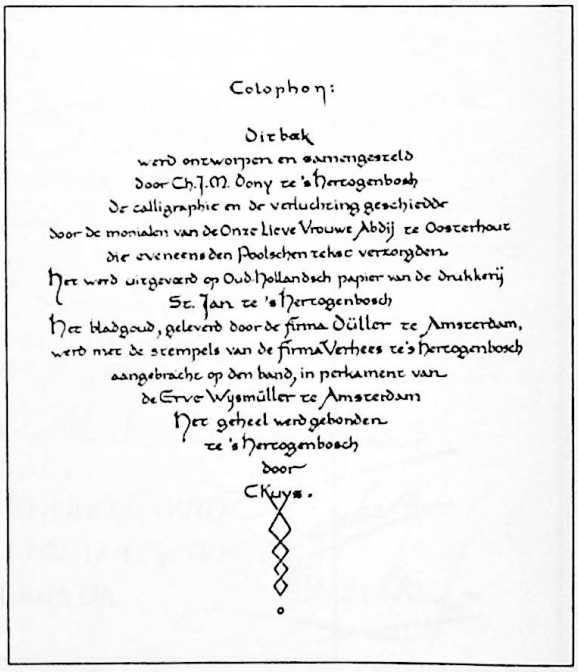
·VIRI·DELECTI·

·AVREVS·HIC·LIBER·
·IVSSV·VIRORVM·DELECTORVM·
·COMPOSITVS·AC·PERFECTVS·EST·
·IN·PERENNEM·GRATAM·
·MEMORIAM·
·PRÆCLARORVM·ARMORVM·GESTORVM·
·SECVNDÆ·POLONIÆ·LORICATÆ·COHORTIS·
·QVÆ·NVMERATVR·IN·Iª·POLONIÆ·LORICATA·LEGIONE·
·CVIVS·DEFENSIONE·FORTISSIMA·
·SVMMAQVE·AVDACIA·
·IMPEDITVS·EST·INCONDITVS·GERMANORVM·EXERCITVS·
·NE·ITERVM·CIVITATEM·ET·REGIONEM·CAPERET·
·MENSE·DECEMBRI·ANNO·DNI·MCMXLIV·
·LIBER·HIC·AVREVS·
·CVI·INSCRIBETIS·
·OMNIA·COHORTIS·VESTRÆ·FACTA·ET·GESTA·
·CONFERAT·AD·GLORIOSAM·EIVS·HISTORIAM·
·MEMORIÆ·MANDANDAM·


KTOKOLWIEK czytać będziesz te karty: pomnij że dla synów Polski obowiązek trwa zawsze: Bóg i Ojczyzna, w jedni serca służ je z Braćmi.
Księga ta złota, jest wiekopomnym hołdem Twych Braci Niderlandzkich, synów Madonny z Bois le Duc, wdzięcznych do głębi za ocalenie krwią Twą rycerską odkupioną, pełnych podziwu przed Twem bohaterstwem, o Polsko!
Snuj dalej słowa nici czynów, bohaterskich..... dorzuć cegiełkę do budowy wspólnej, odpowiedz łasce Tego, który Cię stworzył, który Cię odkupił. Najświętsza Matka, Królowa Polski będzie Ci pomocą w dziele uwolnienia, w dziele odbudowy Jej lenna. Ten lud Pan pobłogosławi..
Nasze życzenia z Tobą.

Whoever reads these pages let him remember that for the sons of Poland duty lasts forever. God and the Fatherland – with your brothers serve them with a whole heart.
This golden book is the historic homage of your Netherland brothers, sons of the Madonna of Bois le Duc, grateful to the depths of their souls for their salvation bought at the price of your chivalrous blood and full of wonder at your heroism, O Poland!
Spin on the thread of the tale of your heroic deeds... add your share to the common task, answer to the grace of Him who has created you, who has redeemed you. The Holy Mother, Queen of Poland will be your help in the task of liberation, in the labour of rebuilding of her fiefdom. This people the Lord will bless...
Our wishes go with you.


BOGVRODZICA


Colophon:

Dit boek
werd ontworpen en samengesteld
door Ch.J.M. Dony te 's Hertogenbosch
De calligraphie en de verluchting geschiedde
door de monialen van de Onze Lieve Vrouwe Abdij te Oosterhout
die eveneens den Poolschen tekst verzorgden
Het werd uitgevoerd op Oud Hollandsch papier van de drukkerij
St. Jan te 's Hertogenbosch
Het bladgoud, geleverd door de firma Düller te Amsterdam,
werd met de stempels van de firma Verhees te 's Hertogenbosch
aangebracht op den band, in perkament van
de Erve Wysmüller te Amsterdam
Het geheel werd gebonden
te 's Hertogenbosch
door
C Kuys.

POLAND

The monument of the Division in Warsaw

The contribution of the 1st Division's soldiers to the liberation of France, Belgium and Holland has been creditably commemorated by the citizens of these countries through a very large number of monuments and war memorials.

Despite this, for more than 45 years since the war's end, general Maczek's fallen soldiers received no lasting recognition of their sacrifice in their own homeland. Efforts made during the communist era to found a commemorative monument all ended in failure.

During the period preceding the fall of Communism, the Warsaw community of former soldiers of the 1st Armoured Division, repeatedly made further efforts to achieve this goal.

The idea of dedicating a Memorial in Warsaw to the 1st Armoured Division was revived after 1990. By a resolution of the General Meeting, in London, of the worldwide Association of the 1st Armoured Division on the 20th March 1993, the endeavours up to that time were suspended. The Meeting entrusted the chairmanship of the Memorial Committee to Capt. Retd Zbigniew Mieczkowski, the sponsor and publisher of the photographic album *Pomniki 1 Dywizji Pancernej – Monuments of the Polish Armoured Division*, published in 1989 by the Veritas Foundation in London, and also, formerly, the Chairman of the Committee of the Armoured Regiments' Memorial in Duns in Scotland.

Chairman Mieczkowski established a new committee formed of the representatives of all the branches of the Divisional Association and appointed a financial subcommittee on which Edward Rymaszewski, Stanisław Ziółkowski and Zbigniew Kozak were asked to serve as members. He invited architect Andrzej Kuszell to act as technical advisor.

To comply with Polish legislation, a formal investor was necessary to erect a memorial. Thus, on the 29.08.1994, as a result of a resolution tabled by the Chairman of the Memorial Committee, the Fundacja Upamiętnienia Pierwszej Polskiej Dywizji Pancernej (*Foundation to Commemorate the First Polish Armoured Division*) was founded from his founding contribution and was formally registered by a court decision of the 4th February 1995. The statute was drawn up by Maciej Bednarkiewicz, a distinguished lawyer, as voluntary work for the community. Prof. Jan J. Milewski, Capt. Zbigniew Mieczkowski and Mr Władysław Żakowski were appointed to The Board of Trustees of the Foundation. The Chair of the Foundation's Council was held by Dr Stanisław Wyganowski, President of Warsaw 1990 – 1994. Honorary membership of the Foundation's Council was accepted by the accredited Ambassadors in Warsaw of Great Britain, France, Belgium and Holland. Among others, the Council included Prof. Dr Stanisław Mossakowski, Ambassador Franciszek Morawski, Prof. Jan J. Milewski, Prof. Andrzej Kiciński, Władysław Żakowski, Chairman of the Divisional Association in Warsaw Jerzy Frąckiewicz, and a delegate of the Worldwide Divisional Association Gen. Adam Rębacz.

The Foundation was legally empowered to realise the construction of the monument and activities begun immediately upon registration. Brochures announcing the project were printed in Polish, French, Flemish and English and mailed to all the localities liberated by the Division as well as to those Scottish towns which hosted the Division's troops during the war. Chairman Mieczkowski paid official visits to the Mayors of larger cities, presenting each with a commemorative album *Monuments of the 1st Polish Armoured Division*. Gen. Maczek wrote to president Wałęsa inviting him to accept honorary patronage over the project. The President of the City of Warsaw, Dr Stanisław Wyganowski, wrote a letter to the Local Councils of the localities liberated by the division, notifying them of Warsaw's approval and co-involvement. Prof. Jan Milewski attended numerous conferences with Warsaw municipal authorities.

PREZYDENT
MIASTA STOŁECZNEGO WARSZAWY

Warsaw, May 31, 1994

MAYOR OF WARSAW
Warsaw
Pl. Bankowy 3/5

Dear Sir,

As the Mayor of Warsaw the Capital of Poland I feel obliged to inform You about the following:

In June 1993 the Authorities of Warsaw were asked by the Monument Committee of the 1st Polish Armoured Division under patronage of general Maczek for the permission to build a Monument commemorating the liberation of parts of France, Belgium and Holland by Polish Forces.

We understand that the name and possibly the coat of arms of your Towns could be engraved on the Monument and You were duly informed by the Committee responsible for the fundation of the Monument and the costs involved.

On 23rd of May, 1994 the Council of Warsaw took the final decision, approving the idea of building the Monument at the „Plac Inwalidów", donating a beautiful site as indicated on the enclosed map. The decision was voted unanimously.

The President of Poland Mr. Lech Walesa kindly accepted to give his patronage to the unveiling ceremony of the Monument at the reunion of the Representatives from the liberated Countries together with the Veterans of the Second World War in the Summer of 1995.

The City of Warsaw would be very happy to welcome You on this great occasion.

Dr. Stanisław WYGANOWSKI
Mayor of Warsaw

Distribution:
The Mayors of the Towns
and the Communities Liberated
by the 1st Polish Armoured Division
in 1944-45
Ambassadors of Poland in France,
Belgium and Holland
Chairman of the Committee in England

The project elicited a spontaneous wave of support from the citizens and the governing councils of towns and villages liberated by the Division in the years 1944–1945. Support also came from the Scottish towns and from the Division's own veterans. Work began on the artistic realisation of the monument, executed by the sculptor Jerzy Sikorski, graduate of the Warsaw Fine Arts Academy. The artistic conception combined the artist's own ideas with the suggestions of the overseeing committee, taking account of the national and the division's symbols. Masonry and casting were performed respectively by the stonemasons D. Selwon, Warsaw and T. Zwoliński's foundry in Iłża. Artistic and technical advice were also given by the artist, Anna Grocholska, the architect, Mrs J. Zienkiewiczowa, Mr S. Dziugieł and Prof. Jerzy Jan Jarnuszkiewicz.

The monument's immediate environment was designed by Andrzej Kiciński, professor of architecture at the Warsaw Polytechnic. Professor's Kiciński's design was approved by the Warsaw Mayor's office and the works were financed by the city's administration.

The erection of the monumnet itself was financed through the donations of towns in Western Europe as well as individual veterans and their assocations throughout the world:

GREAT BRITAIN: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Edinburgh, Dundee, Perth and Kinross, Bridington, Duns.

FRANCE: Abbeville Caen, Mont Ormel, Chambois, Vimoutires, Bayeux, St Omer, Criqubeuf, Jort.

BELGIUM: Ghent, Maldegem. Beveren-Waas, St Niklaas, Beerse, Ieper, Lokeren, Poperinge, Roeselare, Stekene, Willebroek, Tielt.

THE NETHERLANDS: Breda, Nieuw-Ginneken, Geertruidenberg, Alphen en Riel, Baarle Nassau, Gilze en Rijen, Teteringe, Zevenbergen-Zevenbergschenhoek, Hulst, Reiderland, Axel, Hontenisse-Yogelwarde, Terneuzen-Zaamslag, Treheijden, Made an Drimmelen, Veemdam, Vlagtwedde, Winschoten, Prisenbeek.

THE PROVINCE OF NORTH BRABANT generously contributed £ 40 000.

On 30th September 1995 the unveiling ceremony was preceeded by a mass celebrated by H.E. Bishop Władysław Miziołek who delivered a solemn homily. Over 700 veterans gathered for the World Reunion, attended the unveiling.

The monument was blessed by the primate of Poland, H.E. Cardinal Józef Glemp and unveiled by the last president of the Polish Republic in Exile, Mr Ryszard Kaczorowski, in the presence of minister Janusz Ziółkowski who represented president Wałęsa. The British, French, Belgian and Dutch ambassadors as well as numerous delegates from western European cities participated in this international event.

During the Mass, Bishop Władysław Miziołek, addressed the former soldiers of General Stanisław Maczek:

> Dear Brothers, soldiers of the 1st Armoured Division of General Maczek, and all those gathered!
>
> For the first time after 50 years since the end of the war you come, dear Soldiers, to your Homeland for the unveiling and blessing of a Memorial in your honour. Not all could come for this ceremony – many of you, one third of the Division, fell during the battles for the freedom of our Homeland, many died after the war. You come, nonetheless, in great number, and for the first time officially as representatives of the whole Division. It was not thus that you imagined your return to Poland during the war; it was not thus that the Nation imagined your return to the Homeland after victory over the enemy. We thought that you would come in glory, in battle formation; that the Homeland would welcome you with gratitude; that you would make a triumphal entry into the Capital of the Country. We know the reasons why this did not happen.

Today, fifty years since the end of the Second World War, Poland wants to honour the memory of your deeds and to thank you for your heroism, for your love of your Homeland, for giving or being prepared to give your lives for Her freedom...

After presenting the history of the formation of the 1st Division and of its battles, Bishop Miziołek continued:

Everywhere, where you passed, fame and the gratitude of the inhabitants of the liberated towns accompanied you. You strew the French, Belgian and Dutch soil with cemeteries, but equally, memorials were raised there in your honour; memorial plaques named after Stanisław Maczek and the soldiers of the 1st Division were placed on street corners. Everywhere the gratitude of the people for their liberation followed you. The Homeland, unfortunately, only now, after fifty years, pays homage to you and raises a memorial in your honour, though it be mostly from the donations of French, Belgian and Dutch towns liberated by you, from the donations of the hospitable Scots and from your own donations.

We apologise to you that only now do we do this, but it is not the Nation that is guilty. Let the shame, the ignominy and the judgement of history fall on those, who in their blindness and greed for power, carried out the orders of foreign authorities and were unable to acknowledge and assess the services of the best sons of the Homeland. Recollections of your deeds, dear Soldiers of the 1st Armoured Division, your example of manhood and love of the Homeland, are needed by Poland even today. The battle between good and evil, between love and hate, between imperialism and the peaceful co-existence of nations still continues in the world...

We put our hope in the moral and patriotic rebirth of the Nation by the intervention of Our Queen and Mother, Holy Mary. Let your example and sacrifices teach the whole Nation – love of the Homeland. Let Our Lady of Jasna Góra, who has always come to all the children of the Polish nation with aid in difficult moments, lead us to peace and happy future. Amen.

At the Memorial, the Primate of Poland, Cardinal Józef Glemp, addressed all those present:

Dear Soldiers,
Clergy,
Distinguished Guests,
and fellow Countrymen!

When people from the street glance at this Memorial, when they look awhile at the spread-winged eagle and at the *Husaria's* wings and helmets on its crown, the first emotion that overcomes them is respect. If, however, they look closer and get to know the essence of this Memorial, they will feel a deep bond with the Nation's past. And when they wait yet a moment, then pride will rise from their soul. Yes, and this joyous pride overcomes us as we stand in front of this Memorial today. What is more, we have a right to such pride, the more so as we wish to give expression to a memory which commits us in an external, artistic, permanent way. The time has come for that, which was once crossed out of our history-annals, to attain general acceptance in our country. Thus, ashes of Polish Heroes are returning; their memoirs are returning; and memorials are being raised to remind future generations, particularly younger generations, what our Homeland is, how our fathers served it and how real patriotism should be forged today.

This memorial is connected in a particular way with General Maczek. I belong to that small group of people who, having been raised in post-war Poland, were nevertheless able to shake hands with the General in person. He was then of an advanced

age, but his countenance always betrayed the mark of youthful patriotism. He gave witness how we must defend and fight for our Homeland. And we remember the famous saying which he repeated to his soldiers: 'The Polish soldier fights on all fronts in the name of freedom of various nations, but his life he gives only for his own Homeland'.

Yes, General Maczek is an exceptional figure among Polish commanders. I think that, in our history, no other had lived over a hundred years. He ranks among other noble heroes such as the Chodkiewicz's, the Sobieski's, the Koniecpolski's and others which history reveals to us. He was a man who, despite unusually difficult circumstances, was able to preserve fortitude, introduce modernity and demonstrate such trust in people and circumstances, that it creates an authenticity of faith in the Providence of God, which he, a man of faith, was steered by to the end.

Dear Combatants, Companions and Comrades-in-arms of the Commander of the 1st Armoured Division!

May this pride, which we assimilate unto ourselves, be, above all, your privilege. May you be confident that the Homeland, in every generation, will not forget the deeds and sacrifices of blood nor the heroism which the Polish soldier was capable of bearing witness to on all fronts.

God be with You!

The gathering was also addressed by the voivoide of the province of Mazovia Bogdan Jastrzębski and by the President of Warsaw Marcin Święcicki.

Mr F.J.M. Houben, the Queen's Commissar for North Brabant, then spoke on behalf of all Western European delegations:

A significant part of the Dutch province of North Brabant was liberated in 1944 by soldiers of the 1st Armoured Division. One cannot dismiss the contribution of Polish soldiers with a dry chronicler's statement, for how can one find words to express the unusual engagement and bravery of the Polish soldiers? None of the witnesses of those fierce combats will ever forget the highest sacrifice paid by the soldiers of the 1st Armoured Division in the struggle for the liberation of North Brabant.

After the liberation in 1945, a close relationship was established between Brabant and Poland. This relationship steps outside the official format, but links the people with bonds of true friendship. Here I think primarily of the Polish soldiers who found happiness here and settled in our region. I also wish to mention the many organisations and towns which work together with Polish institutions and towns. My thoughts also turn to the commanding officer of the Division, who at his own request, is buried among his soldiers in Breda, the capital of Brabant. He is the symbol of a strong bond of friendship – friendship in Peace, friendship in the common European home.

The unveiling of a monument commemorating the bravery of the soldiers of the 1st Armoured Division fills me with joy. This monument symbolises the determination and the devotion with which Polish soldiers fought for the liberation of Europe, hoping that peace and friendship will flourish among the nations.

Capt. Retd Zbigniew Mieczkowski, chairman of the Memorial Committee, addressed the gathering on behalf of the division's soldiers. Below is a fragment of his speech:

Welcoming this international gathering, born of ties of friendship with Poland, I cannot avoid referring briefly to the origins of that friendship. Its foundation was the Division's 'Crusade for your freedom and ours' – the memorable September 1939 campaign of the 10th Motorised Cavalry Brigade, the campaign in France in 1940, the defence of the British Isles threatened by the German invasion during 1940–1942 and finally the division's victorious progress from the French city of Caën to the principal German

naval base at Wilhelmshaven, where we recovered the carving of the Polish national eagle removed by the Germans from our Naval Headquarters in Gdynia.

It was that symbol of victory and pay-back for September 1939 which ended one cycle of our epic journey, denying us, alas, a homecoming to free Poland under our Divisional battle standards.

Today, 50 years after those events, we can attest with pride that the blood of our comrades had not been shed in vain, even though, regrettably, it was precisely that tragic conclusion that the Yalta agreements of 1945 engendered in our minds. Yet, even in the face of that tragedy, the Division's soldiers did not abandon the fight!

'Lord, return our fatherland to us' – we would intone during the following 45 years! The soldier, barred from beating his armour into a plowshare tilling the soil of his fathers, carried the fight on in other ways. He channelled into Poland, ruined by the war and by the mindless economic management of the communist dictatorship, a flood of aid of enormous value in medicins, food and clothing and, most importantly, in the printed word of the free world. With it came the conscious realisation of the duty to survive this dark era, which shrouded our country for half a century.

Hopefully, this crowned Polish eagle, soaring on its hussar's wings over the division's fields of glory, will remind the world of the contribution Poland made to a united Europe and, should it so happen that the days of renewed testing return once again, will shame the consciences of those who abandoned a faithful ally and handed him into the slavery of the soviet empire while mouthing the catchwords of liberation.

Let this monument become the symbol of the placement by us – soldiers of the Second Republic – of our ideology into the hands of the resurrected army of free Poland. Let this joint bequest from us, veterans scattered throughout the world, and from Western European cities, contribute to mutual accord and express our feelings for a renewed Poland.

Poland's national interest lies in its integration with Western Europe and our sacrifice has opened the doors wide to that outcome. The epic story of our Division's war record, which spread the glory of Polish arms, like Jan Sobieski's great victory at Vienna, is not yet complete. This monument will henceforth symbolise our ties with the nations which remain grateful for the blood shed by Poland's sons in our joint cause, and symbolise forever our peaceful cooperation.

Polish cemeteries in France, Belgium and Holland mark the Division's battlefields in Northern Europe. No monuments were erected, however, at the graves of soldiers of the Division at Rhaude, Ihrove, Oberlangen, Haselunne, Furstenau, Meppen, Dorpen, and Thuine in Germany which were left forever on the Division's fields of glory to be remembered.

In 1989 a photographic album with monuments of the Polish Armoured Division including English and Polish subtitles and a map marking their location was published by Veritas in London... The same map has been reproduced at the back of this present book.

The town coats of arms shown in this album are reproduced in full colour on the cover.

CHAPTER VI

BIBLIOGRAPHIC SURVEY

REVIEWS OF SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

The bibliography listed in our publication bears witness to the great interest in the history of the Division manifested by Polish, English, French, Belgian, Flemish, Dutch and German authors.

Polskie Siły Zbrojne w II Wojnie Światowej (The Polish Armed Forces in W.W. II), Various Authors, Published by the Polish Institute & General Sikorski Museum, London.
This monumental work, consisting of three volumes and several parts, was compiled by officers of the Polish General Staff and military historians and follows the setting up, organisation and history of the 10th Motorised Cavalry Brigade and the 1st Armoured Division during various periods of their existence. Out of a total strength of 250 000 Polish soldiers, sailors and airmen fighting on the various fronts in the West during WW 2, only 16 000 served in the ranks of the Division. Yet from the very beginning its unusual achievements have been enveloped by legend.

Opowieści wrześniowych Sztandarów (September Tales of the Regimental Colours), Col. Dr Kazimierz Satora, Pax, Warsaw 1990.
Among historical sources relating to this opening period of the War, the work of Col. Dr Kazimierz Satora gives accounts of the fortunes of the colours which led regiments of armoured cavalry out of Poland to resume battle in the West, and of the ones concealed or destroyed in 1939 in order that they should not fall into enemy hands.

1 Dywizja Pancerna w walce (The 1st Armoured Division in Battle), Various Authors, La Colonne, Brussels 1946.
This position comprises a War Diary covering the period 1939–1946 edited by Staff Officers of the Division, as well as selected memories of its soldiers. In the years 1945 – 1947, whilst still in Germany, many publications devoted to the exploits of individual regiments were produced. Some regiments received new colours from towns of Western Europe thankful for their liberation.

Od podwody do czołga (From Horsecart to Tank), Gen. Stanisław Maczek, Tomar, Edinburgh 1961.
This book, which was authored by the C.O. of the Division, General Stanisław Maczek, has been translated into French and discusses the battles fought in Poland, France and north-

western Europe. The commander of the horse-driven units in the Polish-Russian War of 1920 and of the 10th Motorised Cavalry Brigade in the 1939 and 1940 campaigns and the creator of the 1st Armoured Division recalls his 4-year philosophy studies at Lwów university. When instead of the academic gown he chose the black beret of the armoured forces everything rolled on smoothly. The book is dedicated to his soldiers and bears the motto later to be engraved on the Warsaw Memorial: 'The Polish soldier fights for the freedom of other nations, but dies only for Poland'.

Śladami gąsienic 1 Dywizji Pancernej (Following the Tracks of the Tanks of the 1st Armoured Division), Jamar, H.L. Smit, Hengelo, Holland 1946.
Here, under the pen name of 'Jamar', Maj. Jan Marowski and Capt. Oskar Jazdowski, as quartermasters' officers, presented many interesting facts relating to the logistics of the campaign in Europe and also give very many names of soldiers encountered in battle. The book has been translated into French and English.

Other chroniclers include:

Gen. Franciszek Skibiński, the author of *Pierwsza Pancerna (The First Armoured Division), Czytelnik, Warsaw 1970.* and
Col. Tadeusz Wysocki, the author of *Pierwsza Polska Dywizja Pancerna 1938–1947. Geneza i dzieje (The First Polish Armoured Division 1938–1947. Genesis and History), Polish Cultural Foundation, London 1989.*
Both Gen. Franciszek Skibiński and Col. Tadeusz Wysocki ought to be counted among the most important analysts and historians of the Division. Both, at various periods, held positions of Chiefs of Staff of the 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade and present with great accuracy the organisation as well as the history of the battles of the Brigade and the Division.

In addition, Gen. Antoni Grudziński edited the War Diary *Zarys historii 1 Dywizji Pancernej* published in the Cavalry and Armoured Troops Review: *Przegląd Kawalerii Broni Pancernej, Various Authors, London 1964.*

Over the years more Divisional literature appeared, often manifesting very good writing skills on the part of ex-combatants. Among the books, the following merit mention:

Narwik i Falaise (Narwik and Falaise), Col. Władysław Dec, MON, Warsaw 1972.
The C.O. of the 3rd Rifles Brigade, Col. Władysław Dec, presents the bloody battles of the infantry at various stages of the War. After the cessation of war activities the author returned to Warsaw. This book ran into several editions and even during the Communist period was recommended reading for schools and libraries.

Czarny Naramiennik (The Black Epaulette), Capt. Ludwik Ferenstein, MON, Warsaw 1985.
Capt. Ludwik Ferenstein, Staff Officer of the 10th Motorised Cavalry Brigade vividly describes the battle actions waged in September 1939 and in France in 1940. There, on the orders of Gen. S. Maczek, after disbanding, the remains of the Brigade move across the country to reach the unoccupied part of France. In his solitary journey Capt. Ferenstein gets captured, but unlike the French officers prisoners-of-war, is treated with respect by the Germans when they realise that he travelled from Poland to France to fight them again. He remained prisoner until the end of the War and then returned to Poland.

Z proporczykiem na antenie (With the Regimental Pennant on the Tank Aerial), Capt. Jerzy Nowakowski, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1986.
Equally interesting are the tales of Capt. Jerzy Nowakowski. Wounded in September 1939, he takes part in three campaigns serving in the 24th Lancers Regiment. After the period of occupation of Germany he returns to Poland. An officer of the reserve, with a degree in mechanical engineering, he finds work in the car industry.

Ostatni polscy rycerze (The Last Polish Knights), Paweł Starzeński, Polish Cultural Foundation, London 1986.
Paweł Starzeński, a diplomat with many acquaintances amongst the English establishment, then a trooper of the 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade and eventually editor of the 'Dziennik Żołnierza' ('The Soldier's Daily'), recollects the stay in Scotland. His book ends with a description of the Victory Parade in liberated Breda.

The Polish Invasion, Ksawery Pruszyński, translated by *Peter Gordon, Minerva Publishing, London 1941* and
Czarna Brygada (The Black Brigade), Ksawery Pruszyński, Warsaw 1947.
One of the very few works translated into English was *The Polish Invasion* written by war correspondent Ksawery Pruszyński who took part in the expedition to Norway and then was wounded when with the Division in Holland. The peaceful invasion of Scotland by Polish soldiers is described in the form of many humorous sketches. The author also published a book about the Black Brigade in 1947. Appointed the Ambassador of the Polish People's Republic in Holland after the war, he died in a car accident in unexplained circumstances.

Normandia – 1944 (Normandy – 1944), Władysław Stankiewicz, Stanisław Gliwa Officene, London 1977.
A most beautiful little essay was written by a professor of the Canadian University of Columbia, Władysław Stankiewicz. The author, a young lieutenant of the 1st Motorised Artillery Regiment, in this bibliophile edition illustrated by the drawings of Wacław Liszkowski, quotes the declaration of the German Field Marshall von Kluge: 'At Caen the front was broken through in an unheard of way'.

Siedem dni i siedem nocy w Normandii (Seven Days and Seven Nights in Normandy), Dr Ludwik Józef Szygowski, White Eagles Press Ltd, London 1974.
The memoirs of Dr Ludwik Józef Szygowski give perhaps the only written account by a doctor of the battle on Monormel. He recalls the suffering of the wounded Polish and German soldiers in the improvised dressing station named 'Zameczek' ('Little Castle'). After his medical supplies were exhausted, the doctor could only offer comforting words.

Z saperami Generała Maczka (With the Sappers of General Maczek), Lt Mieczysław Borcholski, MON, Warsaw 1990.
Little known and unappreciated difficult duties in the September Campaign and in France in 1944 are described by Lt Mieczysław Borcholski. In 1939, after the withdrawal of the 10th Motorised Cavalry Brigade, the author prepares to dynamite a pass at the cross-roads. Less than an hour previously a unit of light tanks had been sent out on reconnaissance. Borcholski, having dispensed with his main group of soldiers, with just two sappers, held up the attacking German infantry by throwing grenades from a hidden position. In this way he saved the returning Polish armoured unit, destroying the pass after their return. A few years later in France, while reconnoitring an area to build a bridge on the River Somme, Borcholski was badly wounded. He belongs to the few divisional authors presenting their experiences after being wounded. The convalescing soldiers who were parted from their units not only

had to overcome their physical condition but frequently also encountered psychological problems in the unfamiliar surroundings of a military hospital. After a long convalescence the author returns to Poland, where bitter disappointment awaits him in the post-war communist-controlled country.

Wojenko, wojenko (War, Dear War), Lt Jan Winczakiewicz, Ars Print Studio, Warsaw 1998.
Jan Winczakiewicz, an essayist, theatre critic and translator of Spanish poetry after the war, in 21 chapters, each beginning with a précis of the contents, recalls his unusual war fortunes begun with an escape from a German prisoner-of-war camp, Oberlangen, in 1940. In this same camp, 5 years later, two thousand women of the Armia Krajowa (Home Army) were imprisoned and then liberated by the Division. Lieutenant Winczakiewicz, after unbelievable experiences in Holland, Belgium, France and the Spanish Miranda concentration camp, reaches Scotland. Decorated in action on the Continent with the Virtuti Militari and the Cross of Valour, wounded in Holland, he dedicates his moving memoirs, himself a practising Catholic, to a good friend, Lieutenant Jacek Herman, a soldier of Jewish origin who later fell in battle at Moerdijk.

Zwiad w czołgu (Reconnaissance in a Tank), Lt Jerzy Niewinowski.
To the typewritten memoirs, we should add this tale written by Jerzy Niewinowski, a student of the Lwów Polytechnic who crossed the border after the fall of Poland and got through to the West. He was a reconnaissance section commander in the 2nd Armoured Regiment in Normandy when, with German forces surrounding the Mont-Ormel (Maczuga) battle field, he met up with the 4th Canadian division in order to obtain fuel and ammunition for the Polish defenders. Lt Jerzy Niewinowski, who was awarded the Virtuti Militari, returned to Poland after the war. After undergoing numerous lengthy interrogations by the communist secret police, he died still at a very young age.

Czasy mojego życia (My Life's Times), Maj. Jerzy Iwanowski, Alfa-Wero, Warsaw 2000.
In this work Maj. Jerzy Iwanowski presents the dramatic war experiences of the cavalry in 1939 and later in the battles on the Continent, and then shares his interesting reminiscences in the field of horse-breeding and equestrian feats. Wounded in the September Campaign, he dedicates his book to the memory of an unknown nurse who saved his arm from amputation. By a tragic twist of fate, she was later accused of spying and shot during the period of his convalescence. After the war he settles in South Africa, establishing a riding-school on the lines of the Spanish Academy of Vienna and taking part in many equestrian events.

Col. Stanisław Koszutski's 'Wspomnienia z różnych pobojowisk' (Memoirs from Various Battlefields), edited by *Col. K. Krzeczunowicz, White Eagle Press, London 1972.*
An absorbing work, stretching back to the period of 1920, in the form of separate colourful life-stories, was written by Col. Stanisław Koszutski. His gift of narrative and humour enables him to give a fluent account of these dramatic events.

Dziewczęta ze Stalagu VIC Oberlangen (The Girls of Stalag VIC Oberlangen), ed. *Felicja Bańkowska and Krystyna Kabzińska, Bellona, Warsaw 1998.*
One of the last publications is dedicated to the their commanding officer, Lt Maria Irena Milewska 'Jaga', to the C.O. of the 1st Armoured Division, General Maczek and to the C.O. of the 2nd Armoured Regiment, Col. Stanisław Koszutski. This is a collective work edited by Felicja Bańkowska and Krystyna Kabzińska. The book embraces a large amount of material relating to the Warsaw Uprising, the imprisonment, the liberation on the 12th April 1945 and

the experiences of the women soldiers who remained under the protection of the Polish Army of Occupation in Germany under the command of Gen. Klemens Rudnicki.

A wszystko po to, aby nie zginęła (Deeds and Toils, All to Save Poland), Jerzy Henryk Szwajk, Archdiocese of Warsaw, 1997.
Jerzy Henryk Szwajk, a soldier of the 8th Rifles Battalion, wrote about his adventures as a 'Sikorski tourist', when as a 17-year old he reached the Polish army in Scotland. He chose an unusual journey, volunteering to work in Germany and from there escaping to unoccupied France. During the Normandy battles he took command of the troop after his officer was killed, leading it until being wounded himself. After recovering he enters a Polish school in England in order to finish his studies.

Horyzonty wspomnień (Horizons of Memories), Zbigniew Mieczkowski, Matrix, Warsaw 2001.
Zbigniew Mieczkowski recollects the Division's actions in which he took part, assessing from the perspective of time the pro's and con's of Poland's decision to take a solitary stand against Hitler's aggression and the historical meaning of her loyalty to the Western Alliance. He brings back memories of country life in Independent Poland and the experience of putting down roots in a new Anglo-Polish environment.

White Eagle – Grey Kangaroo, Under the Southern Cross, Maj. Jacek Zagórski, Hilltop Park, Traralgon, Australia 1998.
Some fascinating memories were written in English in two volumes and published in Australia by Maj. Jacek Zagórski, a holder of the Virtuti Militari, who was a reconnaissance platoon commander in the 2nd Armoured Regiment. To use the author's own words, it is a true odyssey commencing in 1939, when he enlisted in the Polish Army in France at the age of 16. He was an officer cadet at the Military Academy, Sandhurst, and later a reconnaissance platoon commander wounded at Ypres. Jacek Zagórski, together with his wife, a participant in the Warsaw Uprising, emigrated to Australia. As Head of Construction Engineering Projects in Massey Ferguson and other large organisations, he established the family of Ostoja-Zagórski in the Southern Hemisphere.

Moja wojna (My War), Capt. Mieczysław Wartalski, Great Britain 2002.
The interesting memoirs of Capt. Wartalski were written in Polish and English in the form of a brochure. It tells the tragic story of a young man deported to Russia in 1940. When the Stalin-Hitler pact collapsed, Russia, being attacked by Germany, was forced to establish relations with the Polish Government. An army, under General Władysław Anders, was formed from Polish prisoners-of-war taken by Russia in 1939. Mieczysław Wartalski found himself in the contingent despatched to the Polish Armoured Division in Scotland. The author, after the war, became an active member of British Ex-Combatants organisations and Vice-President of the 1st Polish Armoured Division Association.

A summary of all the materials contained in the Division's bibliography would extend beyond the remits of this chapter. The same applies to the works of foreign authors and only the most important have been included in this review.

The Tank
The first time that the Division was mentioned in print in English was the article which appeared in September 1944 in the professional quarterly relating to armoured forces, 'The Tank'. The article bore the heading: *Magnificent fight of the Poles... defeated two armoured German SS Corps and closed the Falaise Gap*. In the following part of the article there is a description of cutting through the German lines and the annihilation of the German forces in the battles at Chambois and Montormel and the taking of thousands of Germans prisoner and the hundreds of German dead found on the site, which was named by the reporters The 'Polish Battlefield', after the fighting. These glowing reports were received with enthusiasm by the English and Scottish friends of the Polish soldiers. Many letters full of praise and congratulation were written – from Lord Elgin, President of the Scottish-Polish Society, from Members of Parliament, from various friends, and from Scottish sweethearts.

The German Campaign in Poland (1939), Robert M. Kennedy, Department of the Army, 1956.
Literature covering the September campaign in the English language, to be found listed in the bibliography, is dominated by the first book on this subject. The author, Robert M. Kennedy, prepared his work as though it was to become the official source of information in English for military lecturers and those individuals engaged in military studies. His lack of knowledge of the Polish language was the cause of many errors and inaccuracies. His work was based on German publications and does not represent great value. Being the first book to be published in the English language, it influenced other writers, giving much untrue information.

The Blitzkrieg Campaigns. Germany's Lightening War Strategy in Action, John Delaney, Arms and Armour, London 1996.
The September Campaign is described in a similar way by John Delaney. The author simplifies his conclusions and includes nearly all the Armoured Polish Forces in the 10th Mechanised Cavalry Brigade.

The Polish Campaign, S. Załoga and V. Madeja, Hippocrene Books, inc. New York 1985.
The book written by S. Załoga and V. Madeja, however, takes a more realistic view of the organisation of the Polish Armed Forces and points out that the losses sustained by the German Forces in 1939 were in fact heavier than during the battles against the French and British Forces in June 1940.

World War II in Europe. An Encyclopaedia, Col. David T. Zabłocki, Garland Publishing, New York, 1999.
Literature in the English language relating to the September 1939 Campaign is very limited. Amongst the publications mentioned, the exception is the work of Col. David T. Zabłocki. In this comprehensive work the passage relating to the September Campaign portrays a true picture of military action.

Normandy to the Baltic, Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery, The Arcadia Press, London 1947.
Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, the Commander of the British Forces (under whose command the Division served, forming part of the British Liberation Army), published his monumental work in 1947. Describing the closure of the Falaise Gap, he acknowledges the principle role of the Polish Division. When visiting the Division in Holland, he said: 'In Normandy the Germans were shut in a bottle and you became the cork'. During this visit General Maczek decorated the Field Marshal with the Cross of the Virtuti Militari. Montgomery

estimates that the losses of the German army, from the start of the invasion to the completion of military operations at Falaise, to have been two hundred thousand killed and wounded. The number taken prisoner was two hundred and ten thousand.

Corps Commander, Sir Brian Horrocks, Sidgwick & Jackson, London 1979.
Sir Brian Horrocks, the Commander of the 30th British Corps to which the Division was attached in various phases of the Normandy battles, gives credit to the Polish regiments and their fighting qualities at Montormel. He also recalls the dramatic liberation of the Polish women soldiers of the Home Army when the Division entered Germany.

Steel Inferno, Maj. General (Retd.) Michael Reynolds CB., Spellmont, Gt. Britain 1997.
Amongst English authors, one of the most interesting is General Michael Reynolds, whose views are presented from the enemy's perspective. Steel Inferno becomes especially relevant to our publication where the author praises the bravery of the Polish soldiers in Normandy. All his works concentrate on the operations of the 1st and 2nd Armoured Waffen SS Corps and includes encounters that took place between these elite German units and the Polish army.

A Fine Night for Tanks and Roads to Falaise, Dr Ken Tout OBE, Sutton Publications, 1998 and 2002.
A special testimonial helpful to our publication is to be found in these two books. The author witnessed the battles of the Division serving as a tank commander in the Northamptonshire Yeomanry, being one of the few authors to describe the tragic bombing by the allied air forces of their own troops near Caen, on the 8th August, 1944. On the first day, when the Division went into action, the first casualties unfortunately were caused by their Allies, which allowed the German defenders to withstand the attack of the armoured regiments. The author is full of admiration as to the determination of the Polish regiments comparing their bravery to The Charge of the Light Brigade at the battle of Balaclava during the Crimean war. Both the above mentioned authors include photographs of General Maczek and soldiers of his Division in their publications.

Decision in Normandy, Col. Carlo D'Este, Collins, London 1983.
American Army Colonel Carlo D'Este mainly concentrates on the actions of the American forces, and the controversial decisions of Field Marshall Montgomery. The division is mentioned, when it joined up at Chambois with the Americans.

The Killing Ground, James Lucas and James Baker, Elliott Brothers, London 1978.
Great honour and credit is given to Polish troops by James Lucas and James Baker. They describe the massacre of the German forces on the Polish battlefield at 'Maczuga' (Montormel).

100 Days of War for Peace, Dr Paul German, C. Corlet, France 1998.
An interesting book, published in French and translated into English by Peter Harrison, was written by Dr Paul German, mayor of the town of Falaise, twinned with Henley-on-Thames, where an exhibition of photographs presenting the battles in Normandy was held in 1984.

The Battle of Falaise Gap, Eddy Florentin, Elek Books, London 1965.
Dr Paul German is not an exception amongst French authors translated into other languages. The first place is probably due to Eddy Florentin, whose book Stalingrad en

Normandie – Presse de la Cite, Paris 1964, was published in English translation as *The Battle of Falaise Gap – Elek Books, London 1965*, and also in Polish as *Kocioł Falaise – MON*, Warsaw 1969. Eddy Florentin is a storyteller, sometimes digressing from the historical events for the sake of enlivening the tale.

Boisjos-Cote 262, M. Dufresne, 1964.
A well-illustrated brochure presenting a panorama of this battle of nations was published by M. Dufresne, himself a soldier of the French Division of General Leclerc. The title of this work relates to the location of a small castle, in which a first aid dressing station for Polish and German wounded soldiers was established.

Normandy 1944, Jean Pierre Benamou.
A guide to the battlefields, this book was published in the languages of all the participants of the fighting. It contains a series of maps illustrating the actions of the American, Canadian, English, French and Polish forces with great accuracy.

Brochure on the Occupation of France, Eliane de Vendeuvre.
A typewritten brochure relating to the whole period of the occupation of France by the German armies was written by Eliane de Vendeuvre. The daughter of a French pilot killed in action, owner of the family castle near Jort, the Chateau de Vendeuvre, liberated by the 1st Armoured Regiment, she described the family ordeals and those of the local inhabitants. Eliane de Vendeuvre joined the Divisional Association under the chairmanship of Capt. Bohdan Korab-Brzozowski, taking an active part in annual festivities.

Merksplas Oorlogs Boek, Marcblas, 1984.
A collective work of local historians in Belgium, this book was published under the pen name Marcblas and contains the history of the town during the war period, devoting many excerpts to the Division. The book mentions Lieutenant Andrzej Poniatowski, commander of a platoon in the 1st Armoured Regiment, decorated with the Virtuti Militari, temporarily buried at the cemetery of Merksplas, established in 1944, amongst other fallen soldiers. It mentions that Prince Andrzej Poniatowski was related to the Polish royal family – a branch of which had settled in France after the partitions of Poland in 1795. Andrzej Poniatowski managed to get through occupied France to enlist into the Polish Army in Scotland in 1942.

De Erste Poolse Pantzerdivisie in Nederland, Thom Peeters.
In Holland, Thom Peeters portrays not only the history of the Division, but also the complete organisation of the Polish Armed Forces at the beginning of September 1939. This book was translated into Polish and published in Poland as *Dziękujemy Wam Polacy (MON, Warsaw 1998,)* meaning 'Thank You Polish Soldiers' (for the Liberation), a phrase taken from the inscriptions displayed in shop-windows and on banners flown in Breda after its liberation.

Breda Bevrijd, Jos van Alphen, Gen. Maczek Muzeum, 1994.
Polegli na polu chwały (They Died on the Field of Glory), Jos van Alphen and Harry Venema.
Jos van Alphen, a historian, contributed greatly to the creation of the General Maczek Museum in Breda. He is also the author of several publications about the Division, of which the most notable is Breda Bevrijd (Breda Liberated). Jos van Alphen together with Harry Venema, jointly published a list of all fallen soldiers of the 1st Armoured Division on their battle route under the title: *Polegli na polu chwały (They Died on the Field of Glory).* This publication also contains the personal details of each soldier, their place of eternal rest and many photographs of war cemeteries.

1 Polska Dywizja Pancerna – Szlakiem Mogił (The 1st Polish Armoured Division – On the Trail of their Graves), Czesław Szewczyk, Offenbach Main, Germany 1999.
A determined researcher, Czesław Szewczyk, has pursued investigations to locate lost graves and compiled this book.
Well known in Holland, the author of several books included in the bibliography is Dr J. Buitkamp who writes about the military operations of the Division on the Maas. He was one of many Dutch historians, good friends of Poland, alongside the previously mentioned J. van Alphen, Harry Venema, Dr J.G. Onderwater, C.P. Coenders, Jack Diddem, Maarten Swarts.

Interesting comments referring to confrontations with Polish forces can also be found in books published by German authors. In many cases their opinions are more honest about the Polish war achievements and exploits than those given by the Canadian, French, and English writers:

Wspomnienia żołnierza (Memoirs of a Soldier), Gen. Heinz Guderian, MON, Warsaw 1958.
General Heinz Guderian, born in Chełm in the Pomorze (Pomerania) region, an expert on the operations of armoured forces, published his memoirs in post-war Poland. The author is full of appreciation for the brave adversary he encountered.

Panzer Battles, Gen. F.W. von Mellenthin.
Similar sentiments were expressed in the book by General F.W. von Mellenthin concerning the Polish counter-attack at Kutno. The author unfortunately succumbs to the German tales of the charges of Polish lancers on tanks often quoted in other books. In reality, the Polish cavalry fought after dismounting, but having the advantage of being carried into action on a horse and therefore less tired than an ordinary infantryman. The equestrian episodes were connected to the situations when, being encircled, the Cavalry Regiments were extricating themselves, sometimes galloping through lines of German armour.

Los Victories (The Victories), Marshall Erich von Manstein, Presidio, Novato, California 1982.
In his memoirs, Marshall Erich von Manstein reflects on the errors of the Polish high command and the possibility of prolonging the 1939 Campaign. As a staff officer, he analyses other operational solutions. He declares that, without the help of the West, the September campaign could have ended with only one outcome – German victory.

Panzertruppen, Thomas L. Jentz, Schiffer Military History, Atglen, Pennsylvania 1996.
In this two-volume work Thomas L. Jentz includes an accurate organisational chart of the German armoured forces and quotes the views of German soldiers on fighting in Poland. The book also summarises the opinions of the officers of the German Panzer units gleaned from their experience of the September Campaign.

Grenadiers, Kurt Meyer, Fedorowicz 1994.
Kurt Meyer accurately recounts the course of the battles near Caen and in the Falaise pocket. In his book he recalls bloody encounters with the 1st Polish Armoured Division, to whom he renders unreserved respect.

'Panzer Commander', Col. Hans von Luck, Preger, 1989.
Another German author, Col. Hans von Luck, included in his writings multiple commendations of Poles in battles in September 1939 and in Normandy. He commanded a battle group carrying his name comprising 3 battalions of Panzer Grenadiers at Falaise.Many years after the war, whilst giving lectures organised by the Sandhurst Military Academy about the

battles in Normandy, he meets Officer Cadet Stefan Mieczkowski who recalls the experiences of his father – an officer of the 1st Armoured Division. On the occasion Colonel von Luck stated: 'The Polish Armoured Division broke my battle group in half' – and then presented him the book with a signed dedication.
In Canada, the journalist J.J. Fedorowicz published a number of books translated into the English language describing the history of the German Waffen SS. Brigadenfuhrer Kurt Meyer – a later commanding officer of the Waffen SS Panzer Division in Normandy, who had been an officer of Hitler's guard regiment of the Das Reich Leibenstandarte, Adolf Hitler SS, in the September Campaign – describes the splendid resistance of Polish forces which inflicted huge losses on this elite unit at Pabianice and at Błonie. In this campaign his regiment incurred losses of 400 soldiers killed and wounded. Nearly all the later commanding officers of the panzer units of the Waffen SS came from the Liebenstandarte regiment, including the commander of the Panzer Corps, Sepp Dietrich. In most cases, they were participants of the battle at Falaise.

The selection of titles presented in this summary does not include, unfortunately, many other literary and artistic achievements relating to the period. An important source of information on these was *the Soldiers' Daily of the 1st Armoured Division*, first published in Scotland in 1940 and covering the whole Divisional history up to 1947. The editors of this newspaper were often themselves the authors of other publications listed in the bibliography: Władysław Rubel, Paweł Starzeński, Roland Węckowski, Ryszard Kiersnowski, Ksawery Pruszyński, Aleksander Janta Połczyński, Wojciech Wasiutyński, Konstanty Jeleński, Edmund Goll.

The famous cartoonist, Marian Walentynowicz, also later became the author of a book: *Wojna bez patosu (War Without Pathos) PAX, Warsaw, 1969.* His drawings illustrated many other works and are displayed at the Gen. Sikorski Museum in London.

Among poets we have to remember Jacek Stwora, Ryszard Kiersnowski, Wacław Liszkowski and Mieczysław Eizeman, 'OR-SI', the author of *Między jedną bitwą a drugą (Between One Battle and Another).*

The best known painter among the soldiers of the Division was Otto Maciąg. His picture 'Chrystus rozstrzelany na Montormel' (Christ wounded at Montormel) hangs in the reading room of the Polish library in London. The book *The Maciąg Brothers,* published in 1997 in Warsaw, contains many of his drawings presenting scenes of various battlefields.

Among the photographic documentation, an album entitled *2 Pułk Pancerny w walce (2nd Armoured Regiment in Action)* was published by Capt. Tadeusz Wiatrowski in Hanover 1946.
Leading photographic documentation of the whole period 1940–45 was accomplished by the film producer Capt. Jerzy Żegota-Januszajtis, taking shots under enemy fire himself. In his film *Idziemy (We Are Coming)* he presents the whole war history of the Division and ends with the Victory Parade in liberated Breda.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE ARCHIVES OF THE POLISH INSTITUTE AND GENERAL SIKORSKI MUSEUM IN LONDON

It is to be expected that the 1st Armoured Division should possess a rich and diverse literature. The interested person will find a plethora of books and even a greater number of articles ranging from dry studies to memoirs, beginning with those of Gen. Stanisław Maczek, the Division's commanding officer.

Col. Franciszek Skibiński, the Brigade Chief-of-Staff, later commanding the 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade has left several works on the theme of the Division's operations. In the journal, 'Przegląd Kawalerii i Broni Pancernej' (the Cavalry and Armoured Troops Review), which has been published in London from 1956 onwards, the reader will find numerous articles dealing with the organization, training and battles fought, as well as with its personalities. Nevertheless, this first truly armoured division in the Polish Army, with its inception in Rzeszów in 1937, is still waiting for a historian who would present a full English language history of one of the most interesting of Polish divisions in the WW 2.

Despite some assumptions, the archives of the Division are in no way complete, thus posing certain difficulties for an in depth study. The largest collection of documents dealing with the Division are held in the Archives of the Polish Institute and Gen. Sikorski Museum in London, where they had been deposited after the demobilization of the Polish Armed Forces in 1947–1948. They have since been enriched by bequests and various gifts – especially by legacies from its former soldiers and from individual regimental associations.

The person who desires to deal comprehensively with this subject cannot start with the formation of the Division in 1942. It is necessary to reach back to its roots in the motorization of the 10th Cavalry Brigade at the beginning of 1937. From the history of this unit arose the well-known legend of a brigade, which never lost a battle, which in the 1939 campaign in Poland and then in France in 1940, demonstrated what could be achieved on the battlefield. Of all the Polish formations of the WW 2 this brigade is the only one, which has an uninterrupted history. In 1942 the 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade became the core of the newly formed 1st Armoured Division. Many of its officers, NCOs and other ranks remained the same from the beginning of the war. From the autumn of 1938 to the end of the war in Europe, the officer commanding the Brigade, then the Division was Colonel and subsequently Lt General Stanisław Maczek. The history of the 1st Armoured Division was strongly influenced by these factors, which gave it special meaning.

The person wishing to write a fully documented history of the Division will have to conduct a long period of research through the documents in the Archive of the Polish Institute. Without this, there is little hope of success. The annals of the 10th Motorized/Armoured Brigade and of the 1st Armoured Division itself can be found in several different collections. It is definitely not enough to search only through the collection of the 1st Division. Briefly the archival indications for the above topic can be thus summarized:

A. Period 1937–1939, including the September 1939 Campaign:

1. Documents of the High Command for the year 1939 including individual orders and situation reports relating to the 10th Motorized Cavalry Brigade within the framework of Army 'Kraków'.

2. Written depositions of the 10th Motorized Cavalry Brigade and of the Command of Army 'Kraków' and of other units co-operating with the Brigade – among others reports those of Col. Stanisław Maczek, Maj. Franciszek Skibiński, Capt. Stanisław Maleszewski as well as those of officers and sometimes NCOs of the various units of the Brigade, most notably of the C.O. 24th Lancers Rgt Col. K. Dworak.

3. Daily orders which are fragmentary of the respective units of the Brigade and individual reports in the Typescripts and Manuscripts Section; in regimental chronicles, among others that of the 24th Lancers Rgt, 10th Mounted Rifles Rgt, the reconnaissance squadron and of the 2nd Armoured Rgt in which are incorporated the activities of the 2nd Armoured Battalion whose units were part of the 10th Motorized Brigade in Poland.

B. Period 1939–1940 including the French Campaign of 1940.

1. Fragmentary organizational papers in the documentation of the Council of Ministers [Cabinet] and of the General Staff.

2. Reports of the 10th Motorized Cavalry Brigade from the campaign of 1940, from the section which took part in the fighting, as well as the one which was still in the process of organization and training (look through the Section of Typescripts and Manuscripts); orders of the day and regimental and unit chronicles and war diaries.

C. Period 1940 – 1947 including the Campaign in Northern Europe 1944 – 1945.

1. Documents of the Council of Ministers [Cabinet] and General Staff concerning the struggle to form an armoured division and subsequently its organization.

2. Documents of the I Corps in Scotland to which the Division belonged from its inception to the end of its existence.

3. Documents of the 1st Armoured Division. This is the core of the documentation.

This collection contains over 20 subsections beginning with the Division's HQ, then passing to the armoured, infantry (Rifle) brigades, subsequently individual regiments, battalions, and service units, ending with the Division's Commercial High School in Germany in 1947. The basic source for its operational history are the 7 battle reports for the period beginning with the 7th August 1944 and ending on the 8th April 1945. They were the work of Divisional Staff and signed by Gen. Maczek. They form the spine from which it is necessary to branch out into combat operations of the Division. The divisional documents take in the period 1942–1947. In some instances, as with the 10th Mounted Rifles and the 24th Lancers Rgts they reach back to the pre-war period. other units go back to the 1940 French period. The divisional documentation is contained in 139 files. Nevertheless they vary a great deal. For example, the documents relating to the Division's HQ number 75 files, the rest is distributed among the brigades, regiments and smaller units. The smallest section contains but a single archival unit. The documentation relating to the infantry is scarce. Documents of the 3rd Rifle Brigade and individual battalions are generally missing.

Returning to the documents relating to the Division's HQ included there, apart from the commanding officer's battle reports, there are reports, instructions, orders of officers commanding particular branches of the services and auxiliary services, brigades, the reconnaissance regiment. ie. that of the 10th Mounted Rifles, orders, bulletins of the Allied higher commands; of formations to which the Division was subordinated, reports, bulletins of neighbouring formations, and of those which were assigned to the Division; training schedules, conferences and briefings; documents dealing with the Division's losses; historical material: reports and congratulatory letters; orders for the period of Occupation and the documents of the Divisional Liquidation Command in Germany.

One cannot dismiss here the first historical account written by the Division' second in command, Gen. Kazimierz Dworak. The regimental sub sections include squadron reports, records of losses and of decorations, roll calls and other squadron and regimental documentation.

1. Chronicles and war diaries, starting with those of the Division, which together with the battle reports of the divisional command form the fundamental basis of information about its operational history.

2. Chronicles and war diaries, battle reports, orders of the day of the divisional HQ, together with those of brigades, regiments, battalions, squadrons and service units, as well as the auxilliary and staging units form the essential sources for the detailed operational and combat history of the Division. The quality of both war diaries and chronicles varies, it depended on the writer, this is especially true of the latter. In some war diaries, eg. in those of the 3rd Rifle Brigade, one can find operational orders and sketched maps. In some there are illustrations photographs, fly-sheets, documents, letters etc. As with the divisional documents, they are not complete and subject to various gaps. Some war diaries and chronicles have been published in book form, eg. those of the 10th Mounted Rifles Rgt; those of the 2nd Armoured Rgt were published in the 'Cavalry and Armoured Forces Journal', vol. 5, 1964 – 1965, as were those of the 2nd Artillery Rgt and Supply Companies. In some formations, war diaries of subunits have survived eg. the squadron war diaries of the 10th Mounted Rifles Rgt.

3. Various complementary information can be found in the section of particular collections i.e. the legacies from individual members of the Division and of several regimental organizations. As an example, one can mention the collection of Gen. Stanisław Maczek, Gen. Tadeusz Majewski, Gen. Antoni Grudziński, Gen. Klemens Rudnicki who commanded the Division during the period of Occupation in Germany, Col. Bohdan Mincer, the 1st Armoured Division Association, the Association of the 1st A-A Artillery Rgt, The Association of the 24th Lancers Rgt, of the town of Maczków and others. The materials in these units vary a great deal, ranging from courtesy letters to reports and commentaries on the Division's operations. In many of the collections one can come upon very interesting materials eg. the collection of Lt Col. Jan Krubski contains his notebook with notes of the conferences which led to the formation of the Armoured Division.

4. In the archival grouping covering the polish Resettlement Corps are included papers of Scottish Command where the Division was finally demobilized.

The above can serve as a short guide to the archives relating to the 1st Armoured Division which are to be found in the London Polish Institute and Gen. W. Sikorski Museum.

It is assumed that the conscientious researcher will not be satisfied with these materials, but will go through the inventories/indices of all related and even not related collections. There is one incontrovertible truth linking all archives: one can never be sure what can be discovered in quite unexpected places. Only when all these researches have been exhausted, can one talk about a comprehensive and fully validated history of the 1st Armoured Division from its inception to the last days of its existence, with the proviso, that the interested researcher has searched the British National Archives (Public Record Office) in Kew, as well as the papers of the Canadian formations to which the Division was attached.

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ANNEX 1

MILITARY DECORATIONS
AWARDED TO THE SOLDIERS IN THE 1st ARMOURED DIVISION

THE ORDER OF VIRTUTI MILITARI

The Commander Cross	—	1
Gold Crossses	—	6
Silver Crosses	—	349

KRZYŻ WALECZNYCH (CROSS OF VALOUR)

3 072

KRZYŻ ZASŁUGI Z MIECZAMI (CROSS OF MERIT WITH SWORDS)

Gold Crosses	—	60
Silver Crosses	—	296
Bronze Crosses	—	2 031

MEDAL WOJSKA (ARMY MEDAL)

12 336

ALLIED DECORATIONS

BELGIAN

L' Ordre de la Couronne, Grand Officier	—	1
L' Ordre de la Couronne, Commandeur	—	2
L' Ordre de la Couronne, Officier	—	3
L' Ordre de la Couronne, Chevalier	—	7

L'Ordre de Léopold II, Commandeur	—	1
L'Ordre de Léopold II, Officier	—	2
L'Ordre de Léopold II, Chevalier	—	40
L'Ordre de Léopold, Officier	—	3
L'Ordre de Léopold, Chevalier	—	13
Croix de Guerre 1940 avec Palme	—	206
Décoration Militaire de 2e Classe avec Palme	—	50

The 9th Rifle Battalion was decorated with the Croix de Guerre 1940 avec Palme and received the name: 'The Flanders Rifle Battalion'.

BRITISH		
Order of the British Empire, Companion	—	1
Order of the British Empire, Commander	—	2
Order of the British Empire, Officer	—	7
Order of the British Empire, Member	—	7
Distinguished Service Order	—	16
Military Cross	—	21
British Empire Medal	—	3
Distinguished Conduct Medal	—	5
Military Medal	—	27
Campaign 1939 Star	—	14 301
France and Germany Star	—	18 724

FRENCH		
Légion d'Honneur, Commandeur	—	1
Légion d'Honneur, Officier	—	1
Légion d'Honneur, Chevalier	—	9
Croix de Guerre avec Palme	—	17
Croix de Guerre avec Palme, Ètoile d' Or	—	22
Croix de Guerre avec Palme, Etoile d'Argent	—	23

DUTCH		
Ordre van Oranie Nassau kl. III	—	2
Ordre van Oranie Nassau kl. IV	—	2
Ordre van Oranie Nassau kl. V	—	1
Kruis de Bronzen Leeuw	—	12
Het Bronzen Kruis	—	4
Kruis van Verdinsten Wegens de Pperheid	—	1

UNITED STATES		
The Legion of Merit, Degree of Legionnaire	—	1
Bronze Star Medal	—	5

ANNEX 2

DIVISIONAL COMMANDING OFFICERS

COMMANDING OFFICERS OF THE DIVISION

Lt Gen. Stanisław Maczek		until 20.05.1945
Maj. Gen. Klemens Rudnicki		until 10.06.1947

SECOND IN COMMAND OF THE DIVISION

Col. Kazimierz Dworak		until 06.04.1945
Col. Tadeusz Majewski	from 24.10.1945	until 01.02.1946
Col. Bronisław Noel		until 10.06.1947

CHIEF-OF-DIVISIONAL-STAFF

Col. Jerzy Levittoux	until 19.07.1944
Col. Ludwik Stankiewicz	until 27.09.1945
Col. Zbigniew Dudziński	until 01.07.1946
Col. Ludwik Stankiewicz	until 10.06.1947

QUARTERMASTER GENERAL OF THE DIVISION

Maj. Mieczysław Rutkowski	until 22.09.1944
Maj. Jan Marowski	until 10.06.1947

OFFICERS COMMANDING THE 10th ARMOURED CAVALRY BRIGADE

Col. Tadeusz Majewski	until 16.01.1945
Col. Franciszek Skibiński	until 16.07.1945
Col. Antoni Grudziński	until 10.06.1947

SECOND-IN-COMMAND OF THE BRIGADE

Col. Franciszek Skibiński		until 22.08.1944
Col. Antoni Grudziński	from 25.09.1944	until 16.07.1945

BRIGADE CHIEF-OF-STAFF

Maj. Marian Czarnecki	until 06.10.1944
Maj. Tadeusz Wysocki	10.02.1947
Maj. Stanisław Drzewiński	04.1947
Cpt Apolinary Grzeszczak	06.1947

COMMANDING OFFICERS OF THE 3rd RIFLE BRIGADE

Col. Marian Wieroński	until 24.08.1944
Col. Franciszek Skibiński	until 13.01.1945
Col. Władysław Dec	until 01.04.1947
Col. Zdzisław Szydłowski	until 10.06.1947

SECOND-IN-COMMAND OF THE BRIGADE

Col. Władysław Dec	until 13.01.1945
Col. Zdzisław Szydłowski	until 01.04.1947

BRIGADE CHIEF-OF-STAFF

Cpt Józef Nowara	until 24.08.1944
Cpt Włodzimierz Zelcer	
Maj. Hieronim Kurek	
Maj. Zygmunt Chojnowski	until 10.06.1947

OFFICERS COMMANDING THE DIVISIONAL ARTILLERY

Col. Bronisław Noel	until 01.02.1946
Col. Karol Maresch	until 10.07.1947

DIVISIONAL ARTILLERY CHIEF-OF-STAFF

Col. Aleksander Sulewski	until 01.11.1944
Cpt Robert Żarnowiecki	until 10.06.1947

SIGNALS

Col. Jan Grajkowski	until 18.05.1945
Col. Zygmunt Chamski	until 10.06.1947

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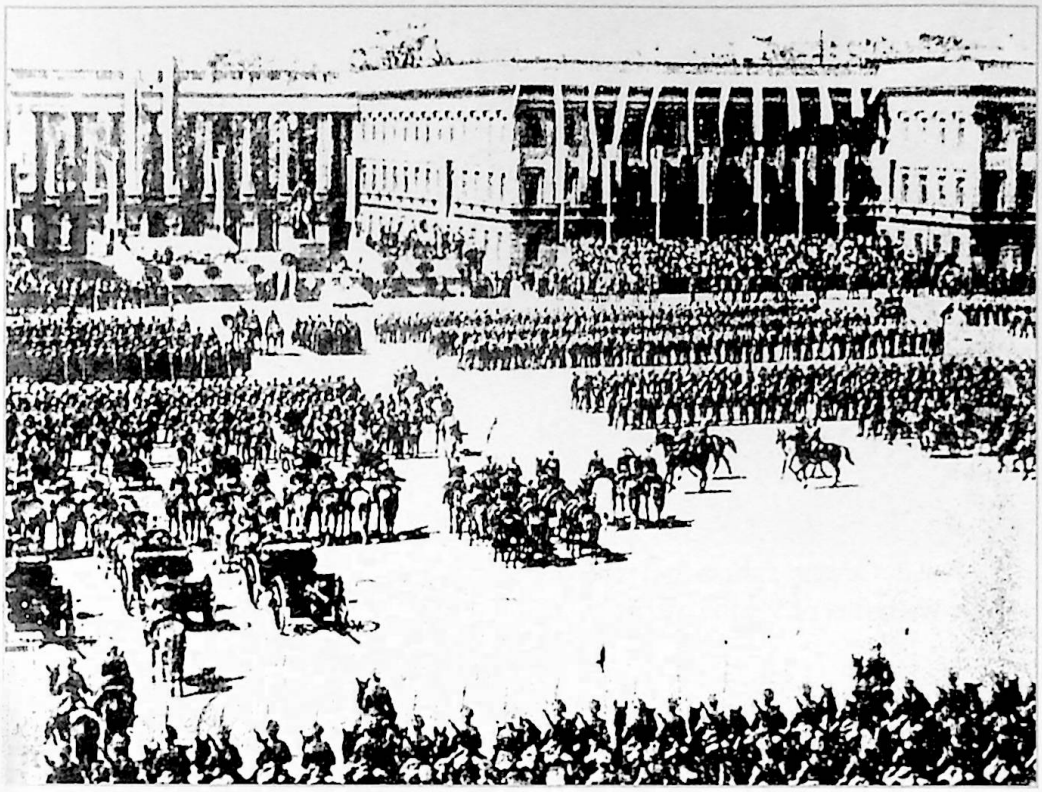
Photographic history of the 1st Armoured Division

Commander in Chief of the Polish Forces Marshall Józef Piłsudski with his ADC officers Colonels: Jan Karcz, Adam Korwin-Sokołowski and Zygmunt Wenda - Warsaw, 1930



A Military Review, Józef Piłsudski Place, Warsaw, 1930

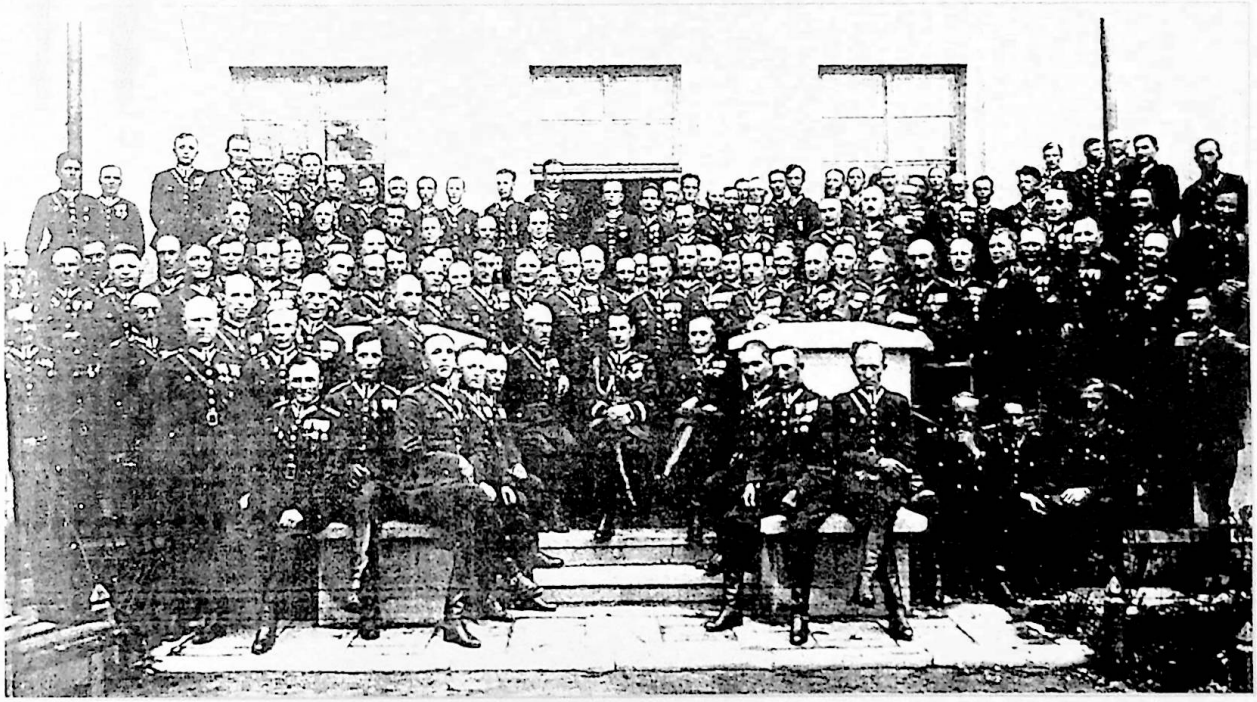
Cavalry at a trot

The Polish Cavalry Commanders' Reunion to mark the 250th anniversary of the liberation of Vienna by King John Sobieski - Kraków, 6th October 1933

Horse Artillery in gallop

Infantry marching, 3rd May National day celebration at Jan Długosz College 1938

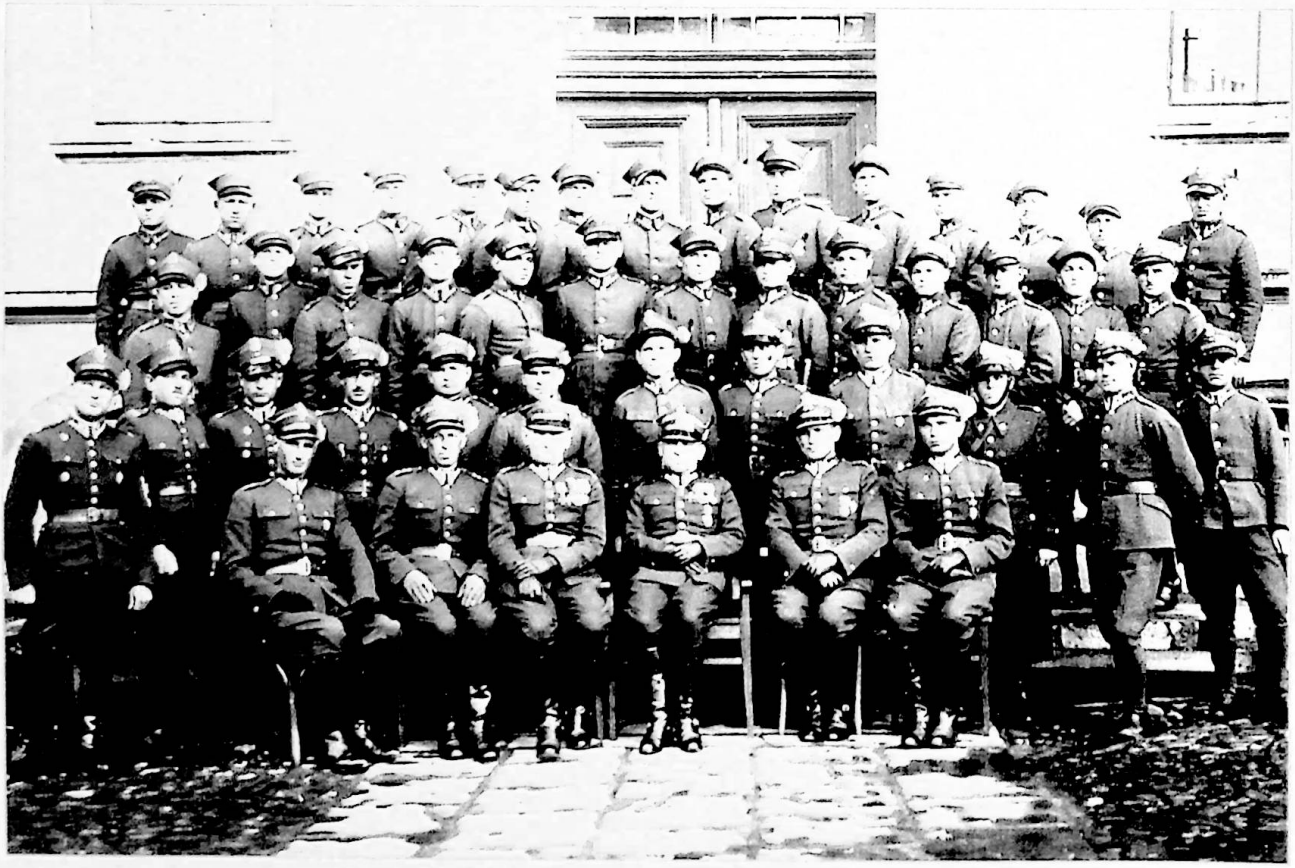
Marshall Piłsudski's military conference in Vilnius 10th November 1934
(Colonel Stanisław Maczek standing 3rd from the left)



Officer Corps of 7th Infantry Division - 1937
(Col. Stanisław Maczek sitting in the centre next to gen. W. Stachiewicz, Chief of General Staff)

Cavalry Cadet Officers Władysław Daniewski and Lech Czernicki of 24th Lancers - 1937 (Prisoners of war in 1939, rejoined the Regiment in 1945)

Armoured Forced Cadet Officer Janusz Barbarski - 1938 (Captain of the 2nd Armoured Regiment in 1944 - 1945 campaign)

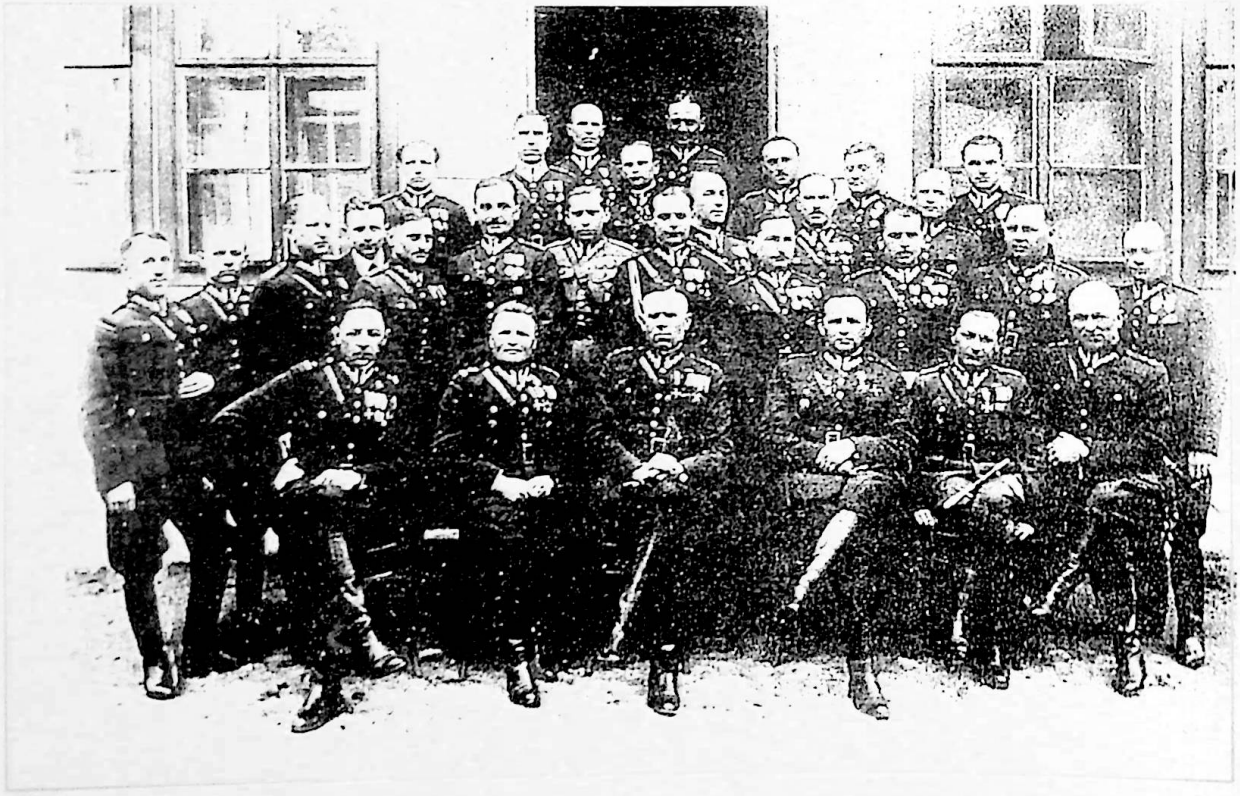


Gunnery Training Course at 48th Infantry Regiment - 1937 (sitting 1st from the left, 2nd Lt. Bronisław Nitka, the Company Commander of the 8th Rifles Batallion in 1944-45 campaign)

The 10th Mounted Rifles Trumpeters - 1936

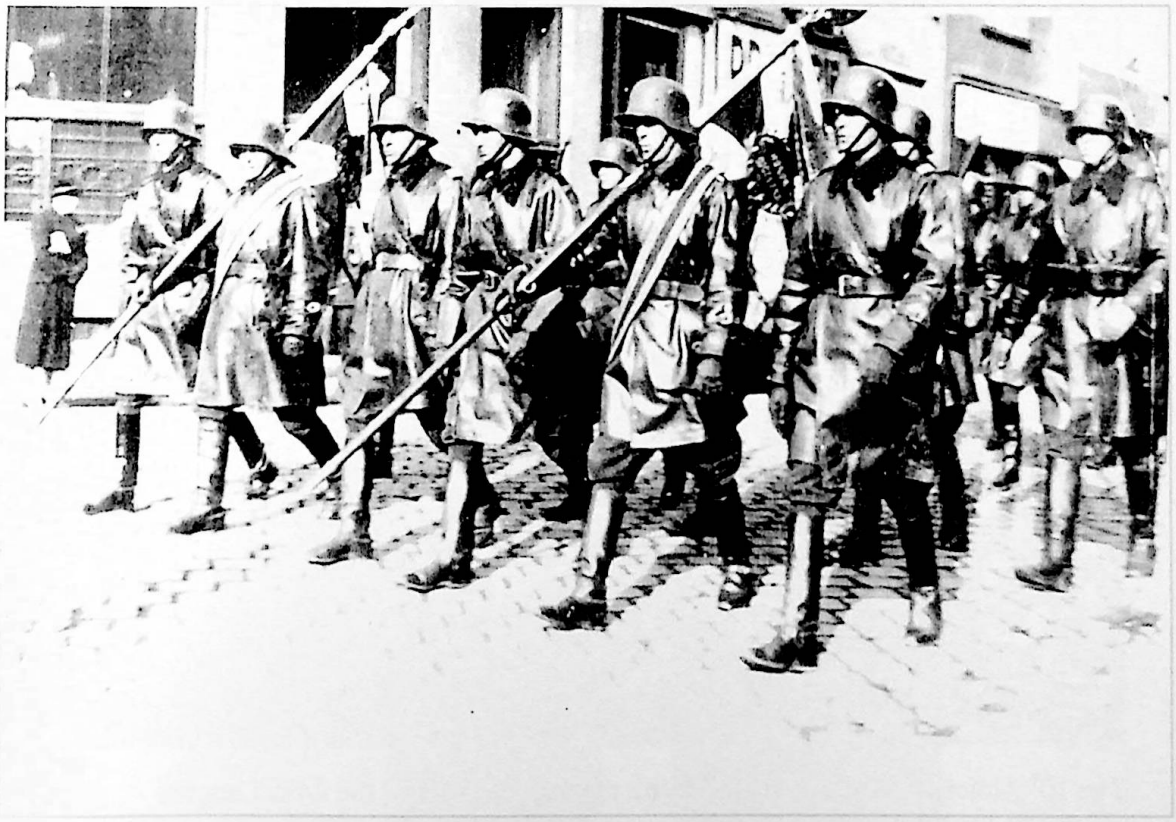
The 10th Mounted Rifles Officer Corps - 1936

The Colour of the 2nd Armoured Regiment mounted on the tank - 1938



The 2nd Armoured Regiment Officer Corps - 1934
(2nd right in the front row Major Tadeusz Majewski, C.O. 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade in1944)

The Colour Party of the 2nd Armoured Regiment - 1938



The Regimental Colours of the 10th Mounted Rifles and the 24th Lancers - 1938

Colonel Stanisław Maczek and officers of the 10th Motorized Cavalry Brigad
- 1939

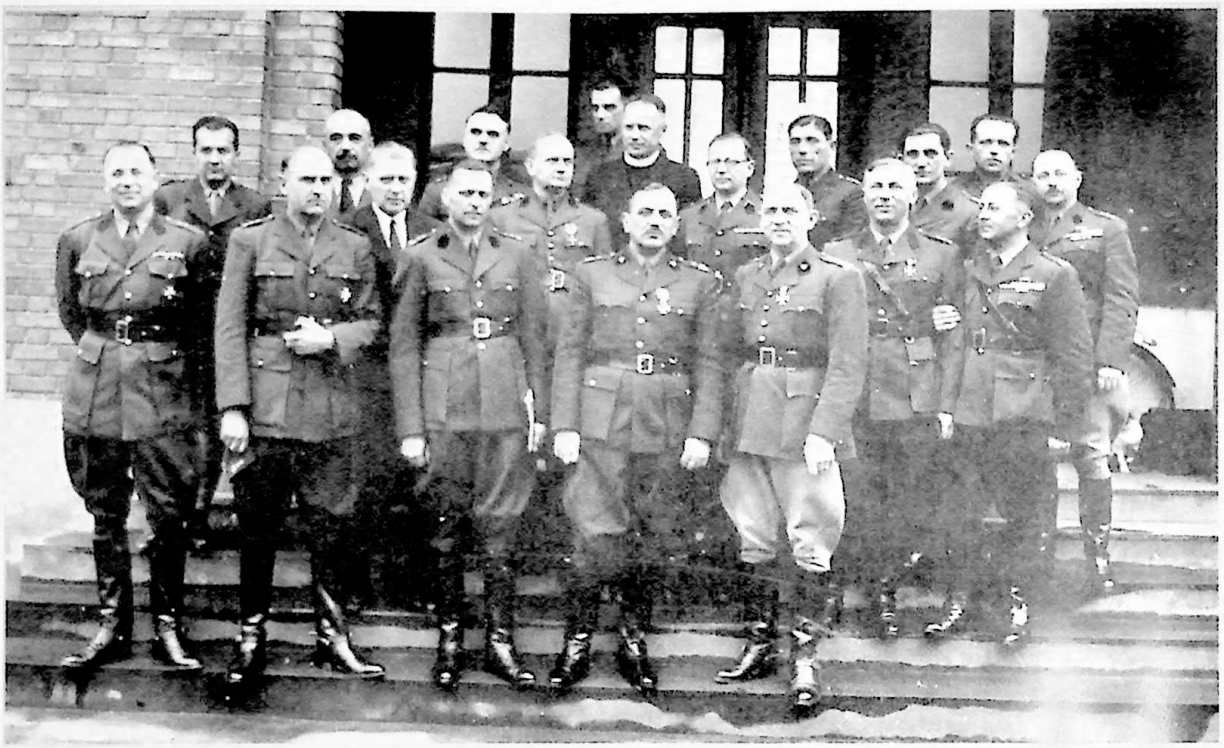
The 10th Motorized Cavalry Brigade with the Colour Party of the 24th Lancers

The end of the campaign in Poland.
(Colonel Stanisław Maczek with officers and the troops prior to crossing the border of Hungary, 19th Sept 1939)

Colonel Kazimierz Dworak,
C.O. 24th Lancers Regiment - 1939

Lt. Stanisław Ziółkowski
Liaison Officer of the 24th Lancers

Armoured Troops Corporals Marian Słowiński and Stanisław Gudowski



General J. Jatelicki and Col. Stanisław Miniewski with the Cadre of Casernes Bessiers, the rallying point for officers in Paris - 1940

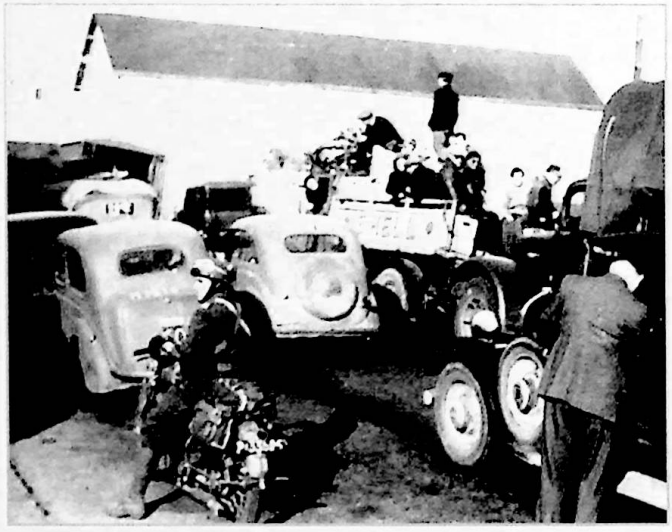
Volunteers to the Polish Army at Casernes Bessiers, Paris - 1940

General S. Maczek with Polish and French officers - Avignon, March 1940

Armoured training Coetquidan, 1940 (tanks dating back to the I World War)

The 10th Motorized Cavalry
at Montbard, June 1940

Observation post of the Brigade confronting
the Enemy - France, 1940

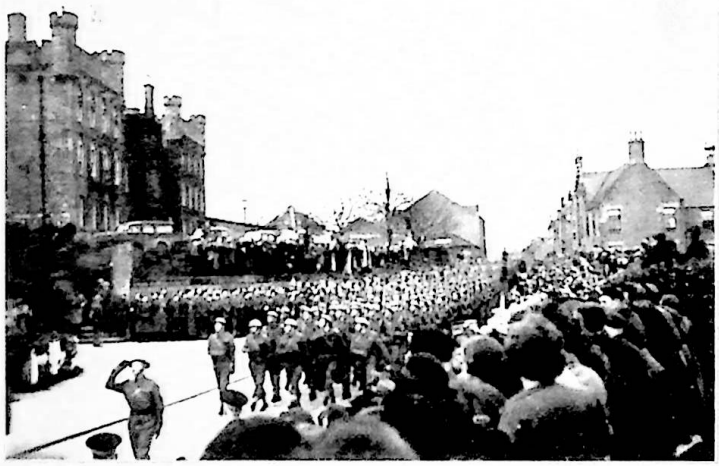


Roads packed with French refugees - June 1940

General Maczek with his companions during their cross-country march entertained by the locals, July 1940

Evacuation of troops to Great Britain
on the Polish Liner Sobieski

Polish troops marching past, Forfar, Scotland, 7th March 1941



H.M. Queen Elizabeth inspecting the Regimental Colour of the 10th Mounted Rifles brought over from Poland

General Sikorski with a mounted patrol in Scotland, 1941

The 24th Lancers marching past in front of the President of Poland Władysław Raczkiewicz

Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery visiting the1st Armoured Division in Scotland, 13th March 1944

General Maczek with his Chief of Staff, Col. Jerzy Levittoux (later killed in France in July 1944)

General Dwight Eisenhower in front of the Guard of Honour, Kelso, Scotland, 1944

General Dwight Eisenhower saluting the 2nd
Armoured Regiment marching past, Kelso, April 1944

Holy Mass before battle, 7th August 1944

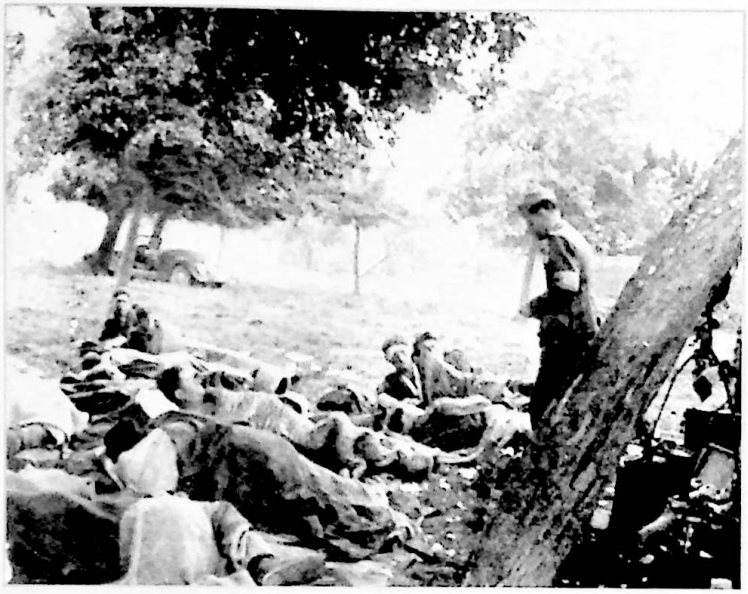
Lt. Zbigniew Kintzi with the troops of the 10th Dragoons, August 1944

Polish medical orderly attends to wounded German prisoners of war

The 2nd armoured Regiment in action, Caen, Normandy (Jerzy Pajączkowski fecit)

Lt. Zbigniew Kozak wounded, Caen, 8th Aug. 1944

German troops surrender, Normandy, 1944



Polish wounded soldiers attended by German medical doctor taken prisoner of war, Les Champeaux, 18th August 1944

Captain Jan Kurowski, the quatermaster of the 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade in conference

Two tanks in mortal combat - Montormel, 1944

Destroyed Sherman tank at Montormel
(The monument commemorating the Battle of Normandy was erected at this spot in 1964)

Camouflaged tanks on Montormel

Christ on the Cross after the battle at Montormel, 21st August 1944

The battlefied

Death harvest. The German escaping convoy destroyed by Polish tanks on the road between Chambois and Vimoutiers, 19th August 1944

German prisoners of war marching to captivity

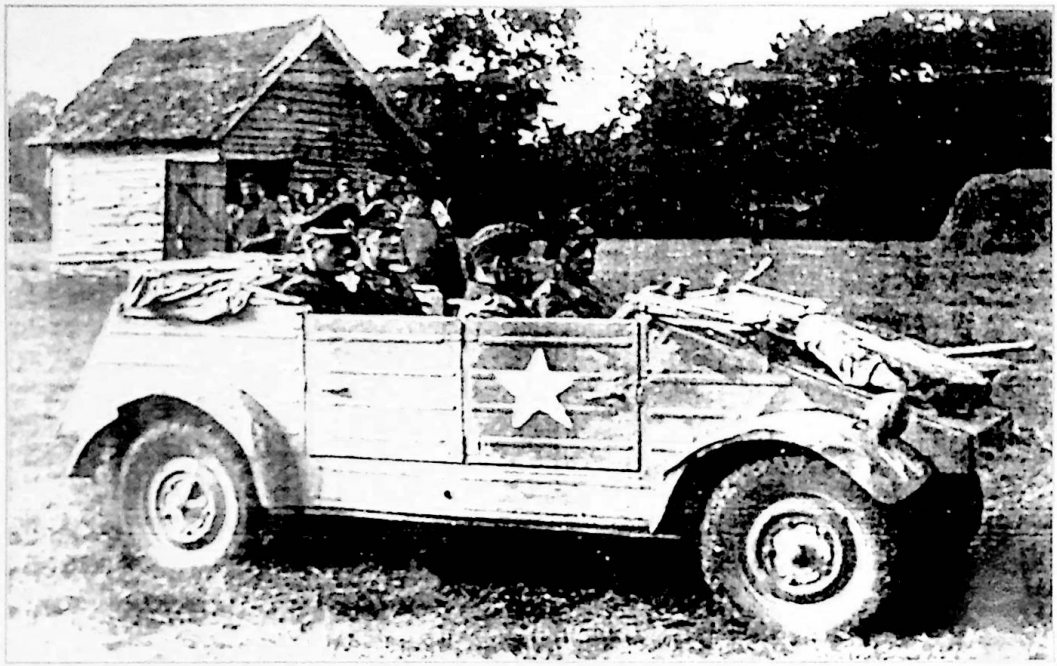
Germans surrendering to Polish tank crews

Waffen SS prisoners interrogoted by Polish soldiers

Officer cadet Zbigniew Mieczkowski with his tank-driver and radio operator after battle, 22nd August 1944

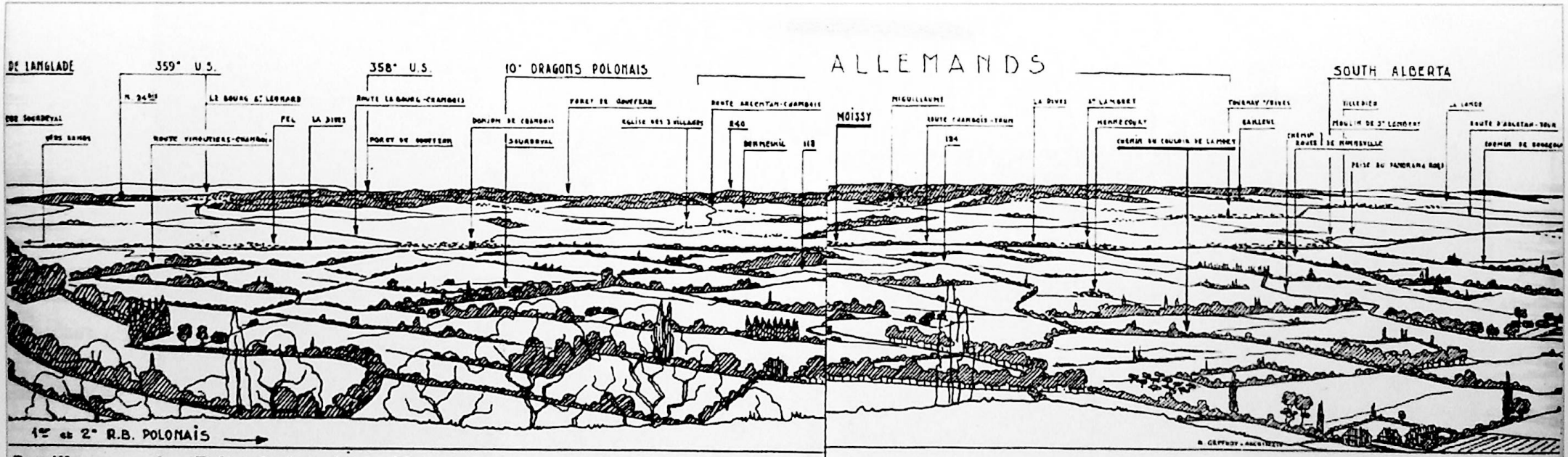
Sherman tank with 17 pounder gun

Meeting the Americans, Corporal Grabowski of the 10th Dragoons Regiment shaking hands with John Wellington of the USA Army



German Corps Commander general Elfeldt taken prisoner by the 10th Mounted Rifles Regiment

General Maczek at a press conference after battle



Bataille vu par les Polonais le soir du 19 Août 1944.

Croquis de R. GEFFROY - .

LA PREMIERE ARMEE CANADIENNE EST FIERE DE COMPTER

Télégramme du Général

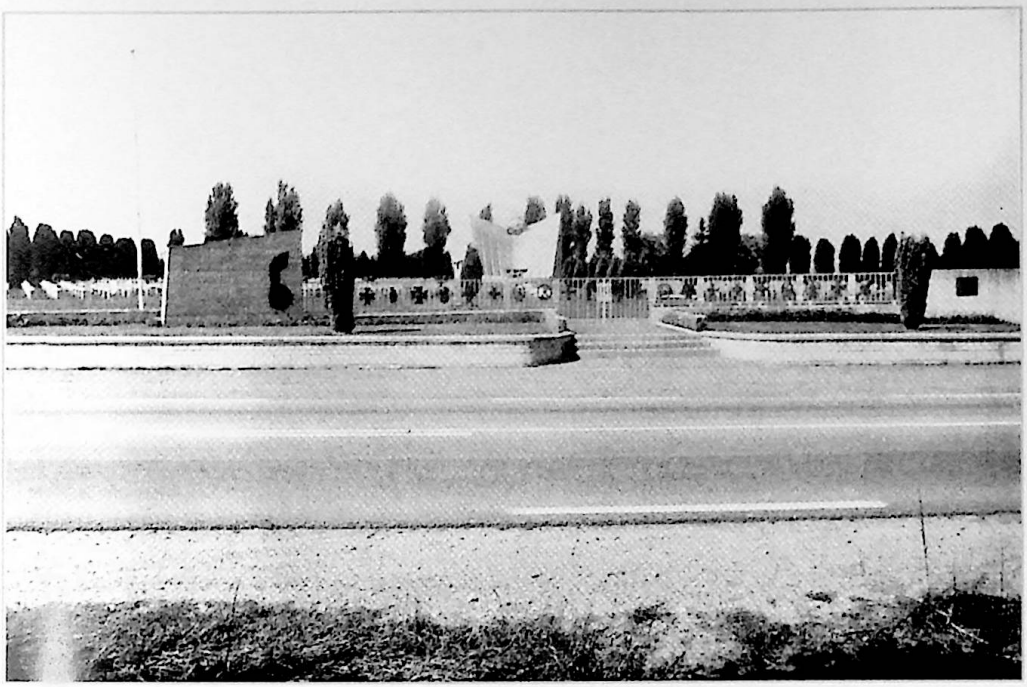
DANS SES RANGS LA PREMIERE DIVISION BLINDEE POLONAISE

Crérar (21 Août 1944)

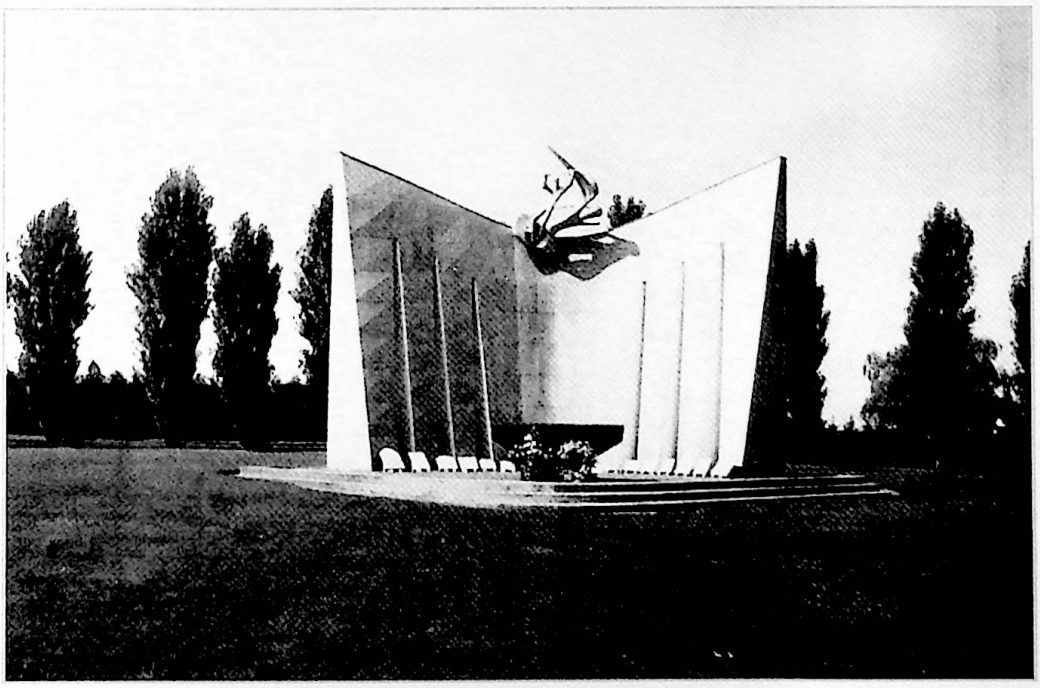
Panoramic view of the battle at Montormel 'Maczuga', 18¨-21¨ August 1944

General Stanisław Maczek

Memorial on Montormel



Polish cemetry in Normandy at Urville-Langannerie



The altar at the Urville-Langannerie cemetry

Crossing the Belgian border at Poperinge, 6th September 1944

Liberated inhabitants of a Belgian village

C.O. of the 10th Mounted Rifles Regiment,
maj. Jerzy Wasilewski on a Cromwell tank

'Polish Forces Priority' in pursuit of escaping German Army

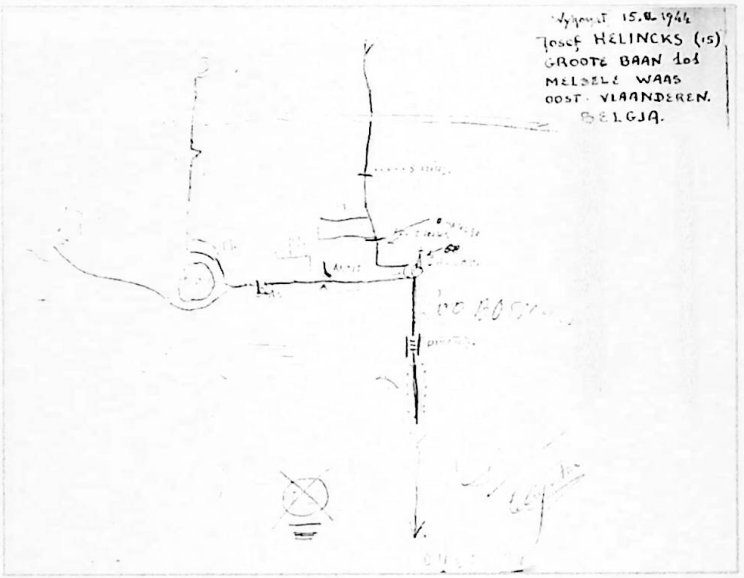
Lt. Cyril Czarkowski-Golejewski wounded at Ypres,
6th September 1944

German Tiger tank destroyed

Maintenance of Cromwell tank

Tanks in pursuit, September 1944

Belgian boy, Joseph Helincks decorated with Cross of Valour at Beveren-Waas for bringing information about German positions



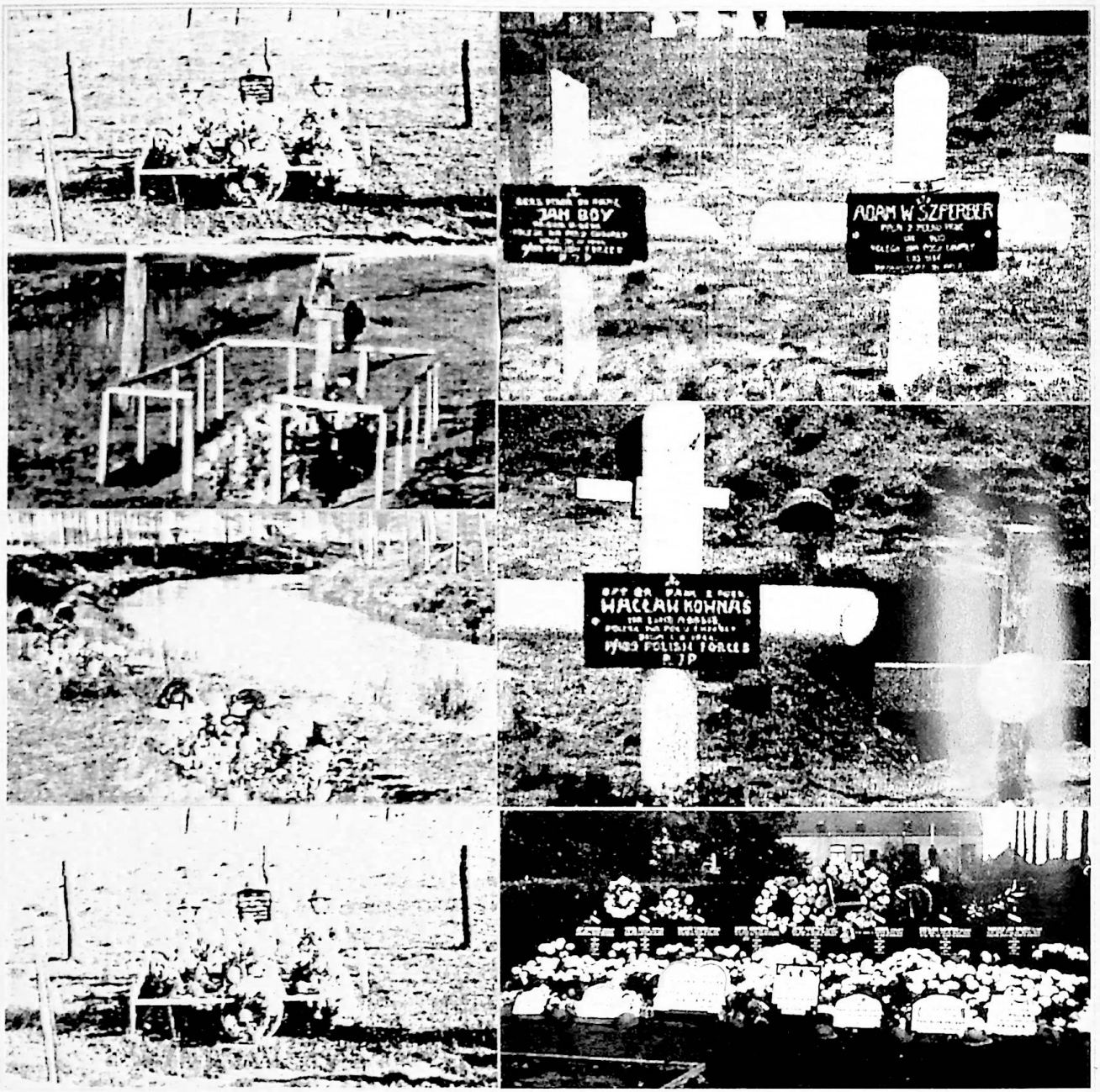
Sketch marking German defence positions by Joseph Helincks, handed over to the 2nd Armoured Regiment

After the battle at Ruiselade

Traffic control

Liberated girls signing their names and greetings on a tank

The joy of being liberated



Provisional burial ground at Merksplas

Those who fell liberating Roeselare

Civilians taking care of killed Polish soldier

The 2 Motorized Artillery Regiment in firing positions

Officer Cadet Andrzej Jezierski waiting for evacuation after having his tank destroyed

General Maczek in conversation with the mayor of Breda, Mr Van Slobbe, 11 November 1944

The 24 Lancers trumpeters, Breda,

The 10th Mounted Rifles march past.The celebration of the liberation of Breda on Poland's national day, 11th November

Holland 'Thank you Polish Soldiers'

'Thank you Polish Soldiers for liberating Breda'

The 8th Battalion march past at Breda during liberation festivities, 11th November 1944

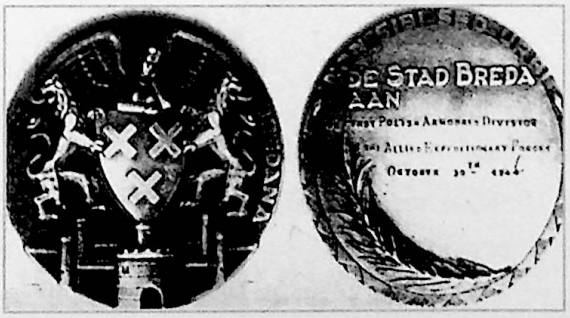
General Maczek decorating Field Marshal
Montgomery with the Silver Cross of Virtuti Militari

Field Marshall Montgomery decorating General Maczek
with the British Distinguished Service Order,
25 November 1944

General Maczek with Field Marshall Montgomery and General H. D. G. Crerar,
C.O. 1 Canadian Army

Captain Tkacz and Lt. Drozdowicz of the 3rd Rifles Infantry Brigade planning the next moves

Polish infantry holding the front in Holland



Medals struck to commemorate the liberation of Breda

Publishing by „DE VRIJE STEM". 9 Dec. 1944. Nr 110

Dziekujemy wam Polacy !

We saw the children come back
With radiating faces !
They were fulfilled : their finest dreams
Your gifts seemed gold to them.

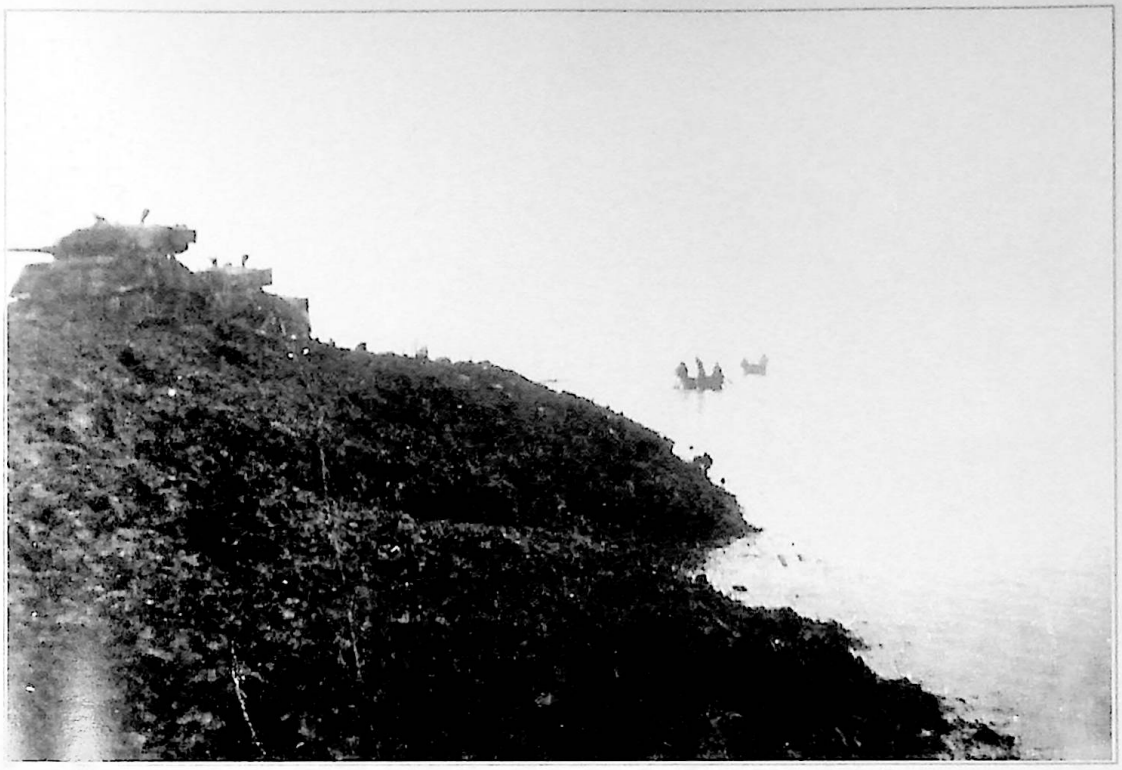
S. Nicolaus gave them again the good
The children got what they liked
This was already four years ago
You did, as if you were the black servants of the Saint.

So you gave with the risk of your own lifes
The ration of your sweets
What we can give in recompense,
Is little, but like bronze :

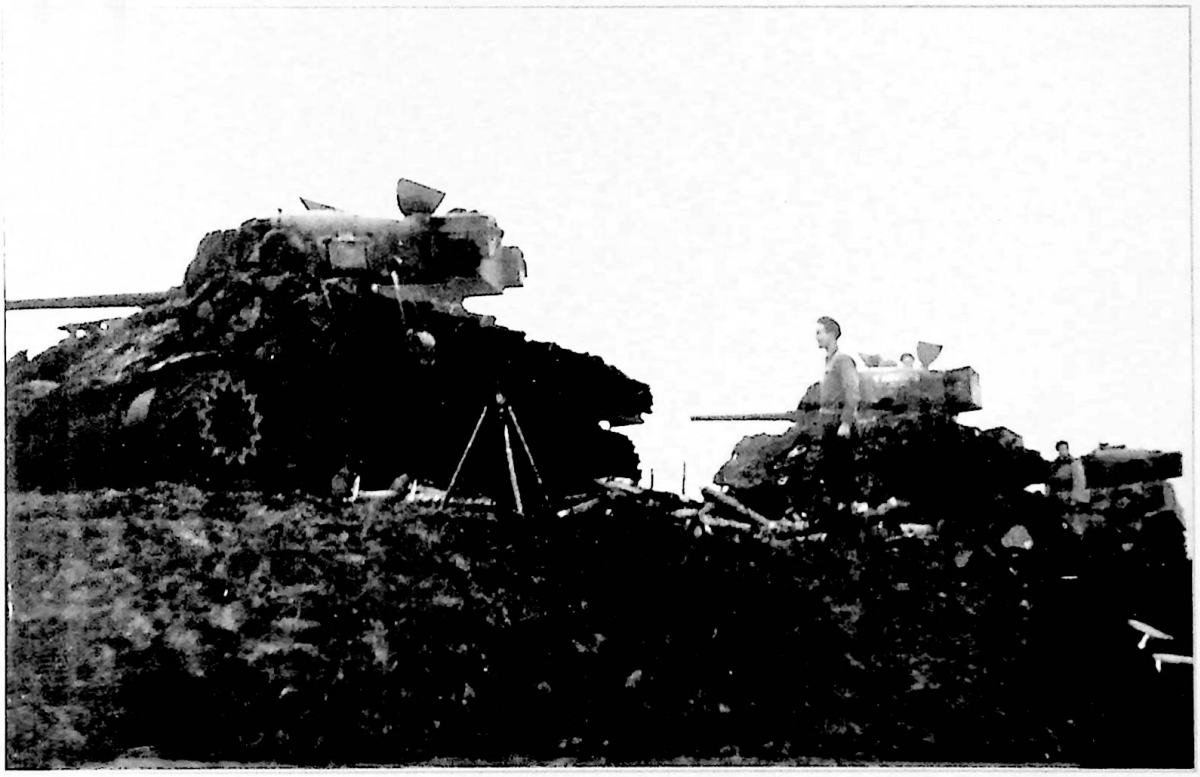
Ever will stay alife within us
Thanksgivings for what you brought to us
May God give you a future
Full of blessings for your nobility's splendour.

Thank you Poles for taking care of our children

Cromwell tanks of the 10th Mounted Rifles at Moerdijk, 7th October 1944



Changing tank crews at Capelsche Veer, Holland 1945



Immobilised tanks on Capelsche Veer island serving as pillboxes

Fortifications of Polish infantry at the Maas River banks, 1944

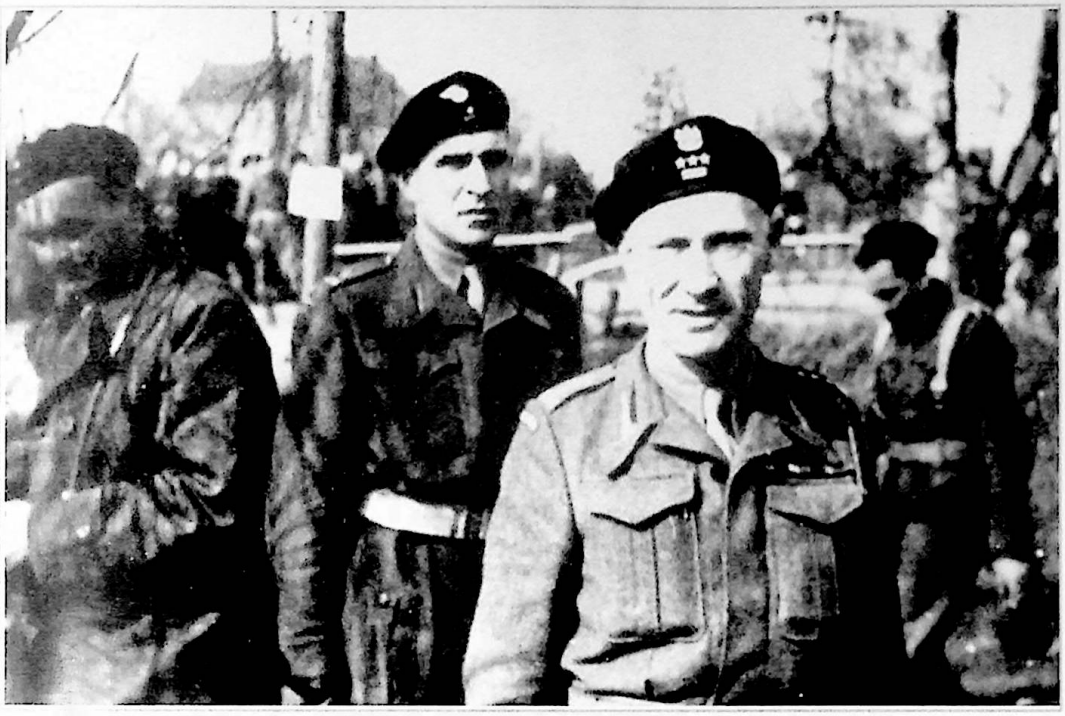
Polish soldiers walking past a Dutch windmill

Major Jerzy Wasilewski, C.O.10" Mounted Rifles with reelink officer Lt. Bronisław Sachse

General Dwight Eisenhower visiting the 1" Division in Holland.
November 1944

General Maczek, Col. Bronisław Noel, Major Jan Marowski, Major Michał G[illegible]wski, Lt. Jan Tarnowski, Lt. Zygmunt Fudakowski after being decorating

Squadron formed by soldiers representing all the regiments of the Division as Guard of Honour at the decoration of General Maczek and other officers with Legion d'Honneur - Paris, February 1945



Col. Władysław Dec, C.O. the 3rd Infantry Brigade

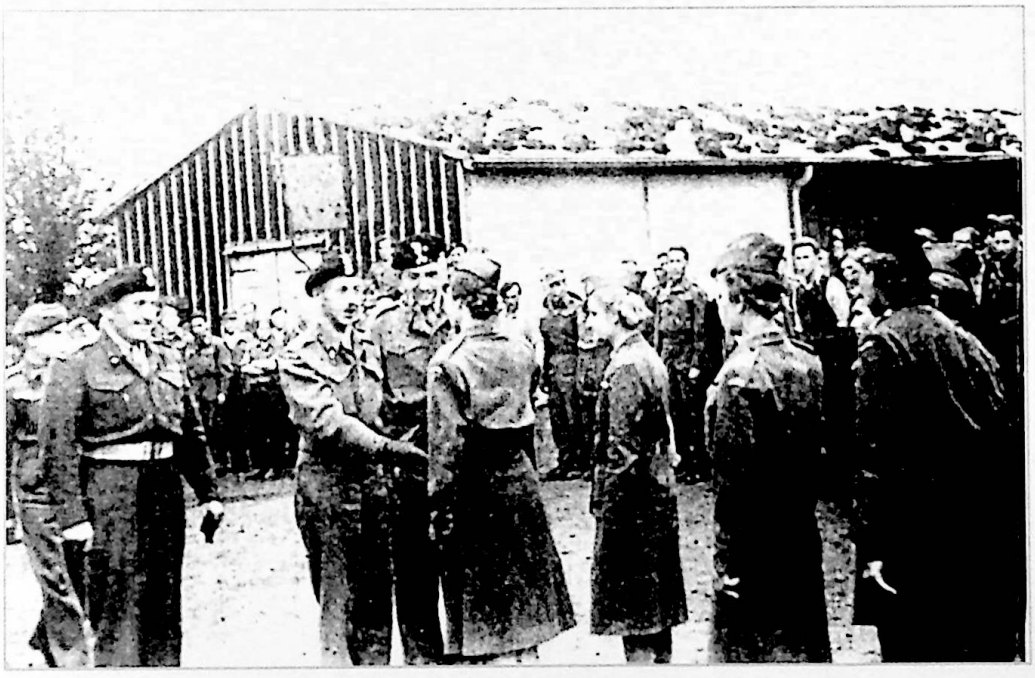
Lt. Zbigniew Mieczkowski with some of his troops

'Attention! You are entering Germany, Take Warning'

Oberlangen P.O.W camp for women soldiers of the Warsaw Uprising liberated by the 2nd Armoured Regiment, 12th April 1945

Col. Stanisław Koszutski inspecting a Battalion of Woman Soldiers after the liberation

Camp C.O. Lt. Maria Milewska reports the Battalion on parade



Generals Tadeusz Bór Komorowski, Stanisław Maczek and Klemens Rudnicki visiting Oberlangen

Reconnaisance in Germany, April 1945

Tanks of the 2nd Armoured Regiment approaching Willhemshaven, 1945

Aschendorf after battle, 18th April 1945

Tanks approaching Papenburg

Medal struck to commemorate the occupation of Germany by the Polish Forces between 1945 and 1947

Col. Antoni Grudziński receives the surrender of German forces and the capitulation of the Willhelmshaven, 6th May 1945 (in the fortified region of Willhelmshaven total surrender to the Polish Armoured Division amounted to 1900 officers and 32 000 German troops)

German officer reporting to Col. Grudziński

Col. Grudzinski and Maj. Gutowski, C.O. of the 2nd Armoured Regiment studying maps of the district

Lt. Janusz Barbarski receiving information on the location of minefields

Maj. Michał Gutowski and Captain Władysław Jakubiec inspecting a group of German prisoners of war

General S. Maczek's farewell to his troops relinquishing command of the 1st Armoured Division to General Klemens Rudnicki, Maj 1945

The Colour Party of the 24th Lancers Regiment on tanks

General Maczek on tank

General Władysław Anders, C.O. 2" Polish Corps visiting troops in Germany, May 1945
(Lt. Jerzy Niewinowski 1" right)

The Colour Party of the 2nd Armoured Regiment on a tank

Tanks of the 2nd Armoured Regiment, Herzlake, Germany, 1946

Embroidered image of Our Lady of Kodeń rescued from the Regimental Colour destroyed in the 1939 campain, later sown onto the colour of the 2nd Armoured Regiment received from the Belgian town of Bereven-Waas

Maj. Michał Gutowski with the colour in front of the Guard of Honour, 2nd March 1946

Maj. Michał Gutowski receives the colour from Gen. Klemens Rudnicki,

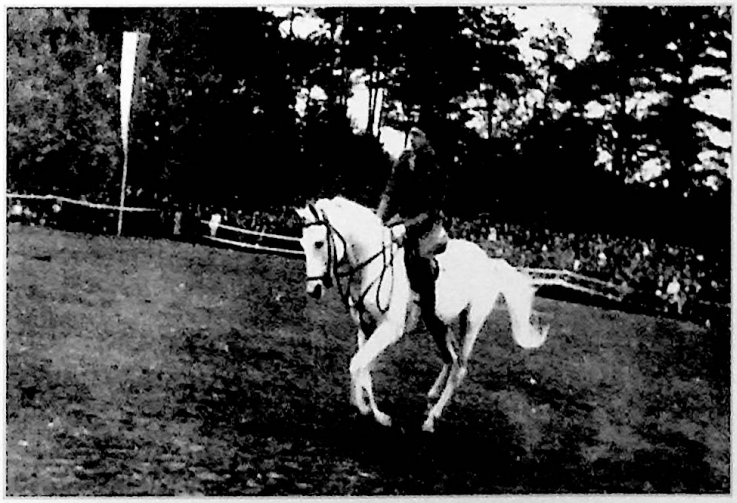
General Klemens Rudnicki, C.O.
1st Armoured Division, with troops,
Germany 1946

From left: Lt. Julian Karp,
Danuta Ołubiec-Wasilewska,
Lt. Zbigniew Mieczkowski, Herziake 1946

General B. Horrocks, C.O. 30th British Corps Commander
with General Klemens Rudnicki inspecting the guard at
Meppen Divisional Headquaters, 1946

The 10th Armourd Cavalry Brigade show-jumping competition; prizewinners from left: Maj. Michał Gutowski, Maj. Edward Uściński, Lt. Stefan Stankiewicz, Lt. Zbigniew Mieczkowski

Prizewinners at the show-jumping competition at the 2nd Armoured Regiment in Herzlake: Lt. Janusz Kiwerski, Captain Roman Bniński, Lt. Jan Bielecki, Lt. Zbigniew Mieczkowski, Lt. J. Mossakowski

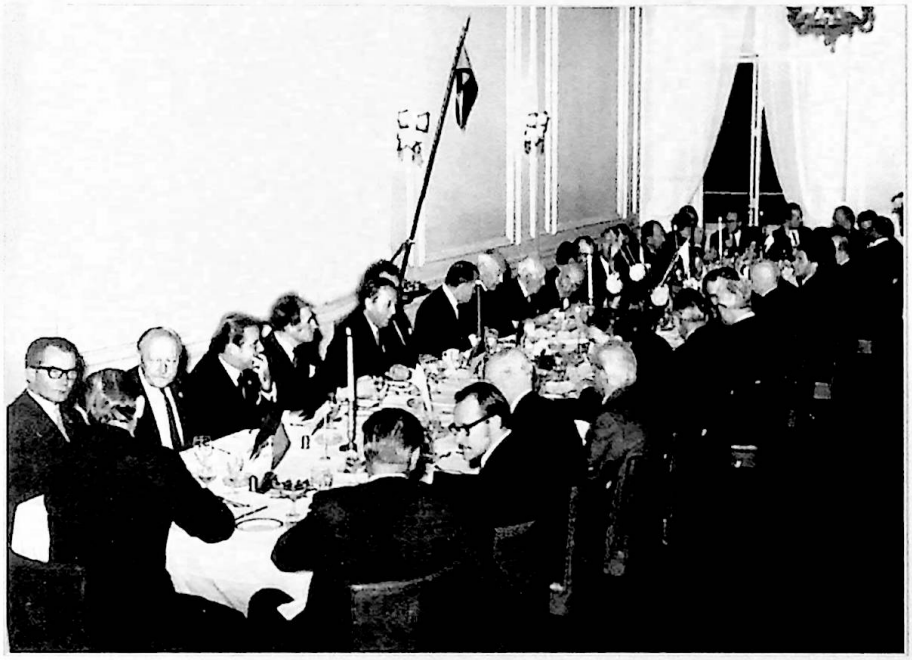


Show-jumping at Divisional competition in Meppen, Lt. Z. Mieczkowski on his stallion called Jedynak

20th anniversary of the liberation, gen. Maczek laying a wreath in Belgium

20th anniversary of the liberation, Captain Zbigniew Mieczkowski in conversation with H.E. Archbishop Szczepan Wesoły and the mayor of Henley on Thames at the Urville-Langannerie cemetry in France, 1964

Celebration of the 20th anniversary of the liberation, General Maczek surrounded by officers of the Division in London



Captain Zbigniew Mieczkowski raises the toast at the Falaise Dinner in London, 1964

Dinner in honour of monsieur Eddy Florentin, the author of 'Battle of Falaise-Gap', London 1965 (From left: J. Hetman, W. Magoński, A. Larysz- Niedzielski, Eddy Florentin, gen. A. Grudziński, Z. Makowiecki, J. Mossakowski, S. Schwarzburg-Gunther, Z. Mieczkowski, W. Lipczynski, M. Borzysławski, W. Deimel, K. Czarnecki, R. Dembiński)

Reception given by the Mayor and Madame Gerard Lesseliers for the soldiers and their wives who settled at Beveren-Waas, Belgium 1964

To honour the 25th Anniversary of the battles fought by the 1st Polish Armoured Division in 1944-45 in France, Belgium and the Netherlands

Major General A. Grudzinski and Officers of the 10th Polish Armoured Cavalry Brigade

request the pleasure of your company on

Thursday, 29th May, 1969

at the General Sikorski Historical Institute, 20 Princes Gate, London, S.W.7.

Cocktails 7.00 - 9.00 p.m. *R.S.V.P.*

A Polish Reception

A reception was held at the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum to honour the 25th Anniversary of the battles fought by the First Polish Armoured Division in 1944-45 in France, Belgium and the Netherlands.

Photographs by Barry Swaebe

Major General Zlemski, General Wladyslaw Anders, General Antoni Grudzinski, General Marian Kukiel and General Stanislaw Kopanski.

Mrs. Richard Tauber, formerly Miss Diana Napier, who was a 2nd Lt. in the First Polish Armoured Division and holder of the Polish Cross.

The Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Westminster, Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Pearl.

Baroness Bentinck, wife of the Dutch Ambassador in Paris, and Mr. Paul Getty.

Mr. and Mrs. Stanislaw de Schwarzburg-Gunther.

Mr. John de Laszlo, Mme Evelyn Cubisart de Greffe and Mrs. John de Laszlo.

Mr. and Mrs. Andrea de Moller.

The Hon. Mrs. Mieczkowska and Mr. Hugh Smyth.

The Hon. Mrs. Saunders and Miss Catherine Raczynska whose father was formerly Polish Ambassador in London.

Mr. Alfred Shaughnessy, Miss Anna Gutowska.

Mrs. Philip Booth with her son Mr. Robin Booth.

Sir Edward and Lady Hulton.

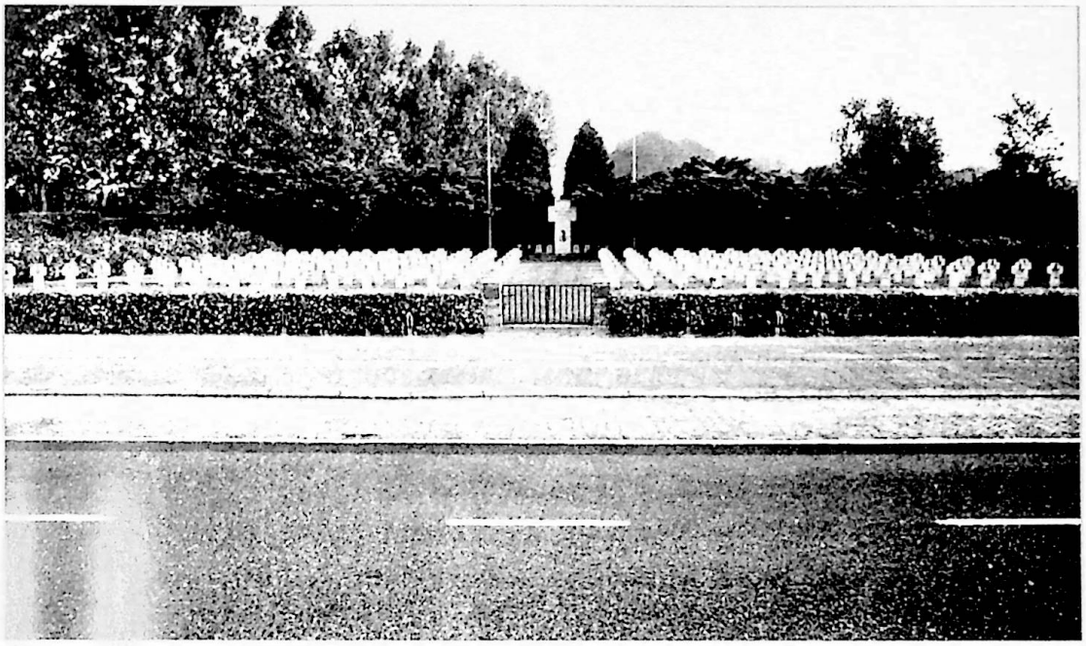
Sir Tufton and Lady Beamish.

Lord and Lady Grenfell.

Reception given by officers of the 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Falaise battle at the Sikorski Institute, press cutting from Tatlers

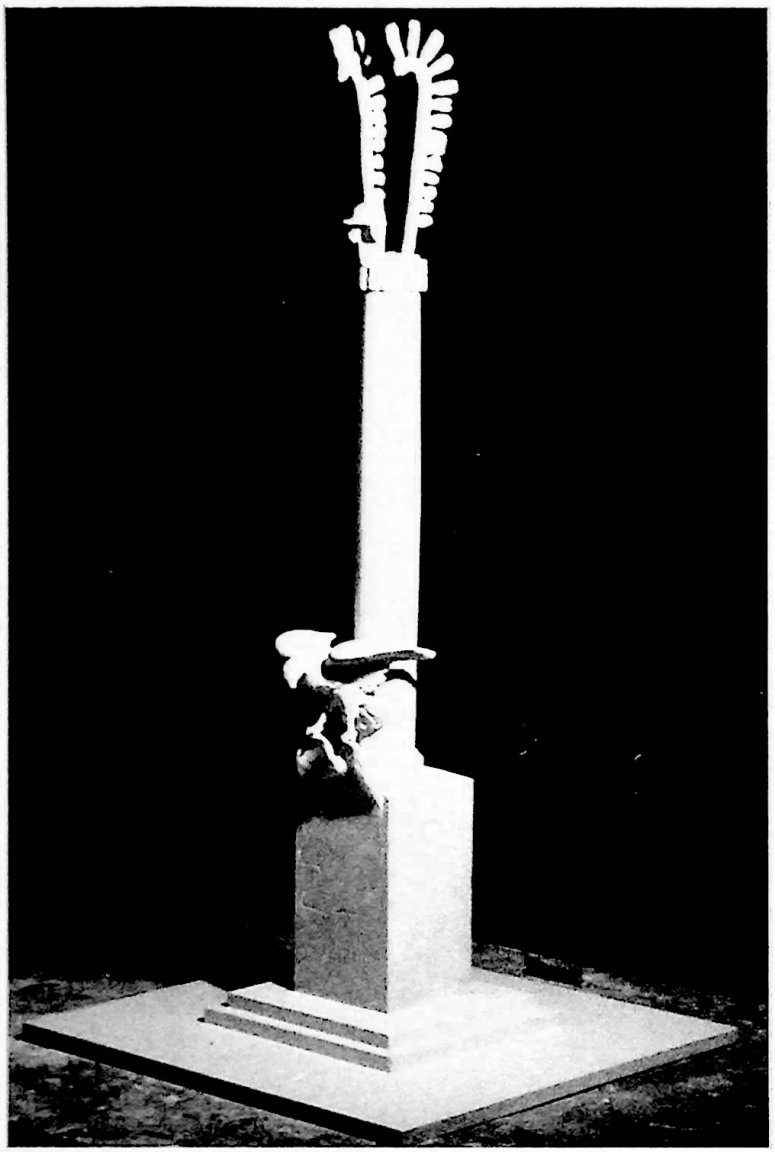
General Maczek 1892 - 1994

Funeral of General Maczek, Cathedral in Breda, Holland, 1994



Cemetry in Breda, burial place of General Maczek among his soldiers

The model of Monument in Warsaw



Eagle settles on Division monument built in Warsaw in 1995

Prof. Jan Milewski, Col Andrzej Frankowski, Władysław Żakowski M.A.,members of the Memorial Committee.

Artistic advisors and the sculptor
(From right: Stanisław Wyganowski, Mayor of Warsaw, A. Grocholska, J. Zienkiewiczowa, J. Sikorski (sculptor), S. Dziugiell, J. Jarnuszkiewicz)

Wojewoda Warszawski
Bogdan Jastrzębski

Prezydent Miasta Stołecznego Warszawy
Marcin Święcicki

oraz Prezes Komitetu Budowy Pomnika
Pierwszej Dywizji Pancernej Generała Stanisława Maczka
Zbigniew Mieczkowski

mają zaszczyt zaprosić

W. P.

na uroczystości odsłonięcia
Pomnika Pierwszej Dywizji Pancernej,
które odbędą się
pod Patronatem Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej
Lecha Wałęsy
w dniach 29–30 września 1995 roku.

RSVP
Fundacja Upamiętnienia Pierwszej Polskiej Dywizji Pancernej
Generała Stanisława Maczka

Invitation for the unveiling ceremony

President Lech Wałęsa holding the album of memorials of the division in Europe

Former president of the Polish Republic, Mr Ryszard Kaczorowski with the chairman of the Memorial Committee, Capt. Retd. Zbigniew Mieczkowski

Solemn Mass prior to the unveiling at the Military Cathedral attended by representatives of the liberated countries, 30th September 1995
(centre: Meester F.J.M. Houben, Queen's Commissioner for the province of North Brabant in the Netherlands)

General Gutowski with Capt. Retd. Zbigniew Mieczkowski in the cathedral

Unveiling of the memorial of the 1" Armoured Division in Warsaw, 30th September 1995

Celebrations at the cathedral, 30th September 1995

Veterans attending solemn mass at the cathedral,
30th September 1995

Speech at the unveiling ceremony delivered by Zbigniew Mieczkowski, chairman of the Memorial Committee

Former president, Mr Ryszard Kaczorowski and minister Jan Ziółkowski on behalf of President Lech Wałęsa unveiling the monument

His Eminence Cardinal Józef Glemp, Primate of Poland, blesses the memorial

Wreath-laying by the ambassadors of Great Britain, France, Belgium and the Netherlands

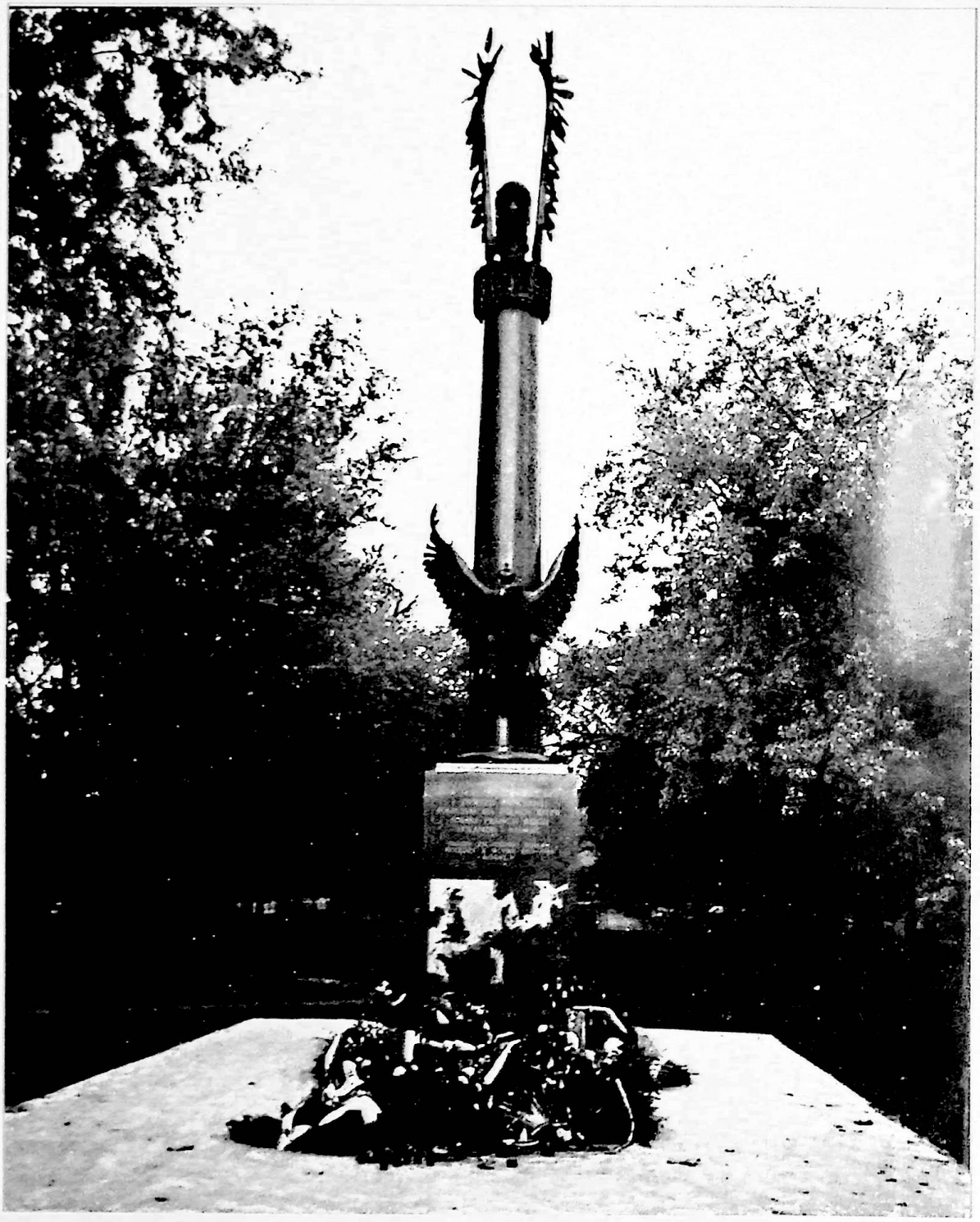
Wreath-laying by Mº F.J.M. Houben of North Braband

Wreath-laying by officers of the 1st Polish Armoured Division named after King Jan Sobieski, contemporary successors of the traditions of General Maczek's Division

The veterans marching on the Józef Piłsudski Square

Celebrations in front of the Polish Cenotaph, the Unknown Soldier's Memorial (from left: Witold Deimel, Gen. Adam Rębacz, Zbigniew Mieczkowski, Gen S. Ferenz, Gen S. Wudyka; back row: S. Grabowski, B. Korab-Brzozowski)

A Husaria Wing as emblem of the 1st Polish Armoured Division

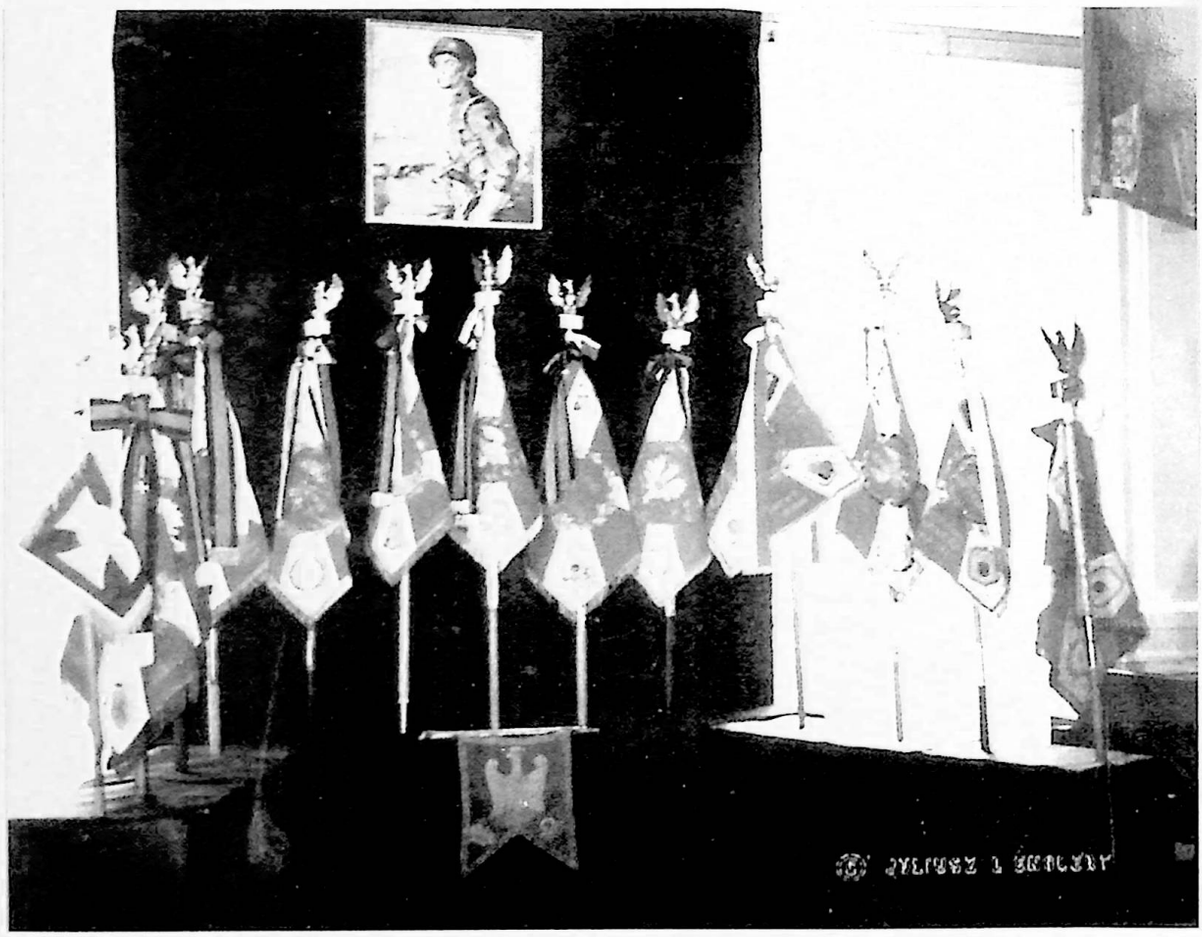


Memorial of the 1st Polish Armoured Division on the Invalids Square, Polish Army Avenue in Warsaw, 1995

Map of the Division's battle routes engraved on the monument base

Coats of Arms and the names of towns liberated by the Division which sponsored the memorial

Crowned Eagle from the Division Memorial in Warsaw



The Regimental Colours of the Division at the Polish Institute and General Sikorski Museum in London

H.R.H. the Duke of Kent unveiling General Sikorski's statue in front of the Polish Embassy in London, Portland Place, accompanied by the Ambassador of Poland, Stanisław Komorowski, 24.09.2000

The Soldiers of General Maczek

Tadeusz Majewski

Franciszek Skibiński

Antoni Grudziński

Bronisław Noel

Jerzy Levittoux

Zdzisław Szydłowski

Jan Kański

Witold Berendt

Karol Maresch

Jan Maciejowski

Władysław Zgorzelski

Jerzy Wasilewski

Michał Gutowski

Romuald Dowbór

Karol Complak

Adam Łubkowski

Zygmunt Chamski

Hieronim Kurek

Bogumił Szumski

Tadeusz Wysocki

Roman Bniński

Bronisław Nitka

Stanisław Martynoga

Leon Kowalczyk

Stanisław Grabowski

Jerzy Zagórski

Janusz Nowakowski

Jan Grajkowski

Jerzy Matulanis

Adam Dzierżek

Jacek Bielawski

Władysław Kohutnicki

Henryk Kątny

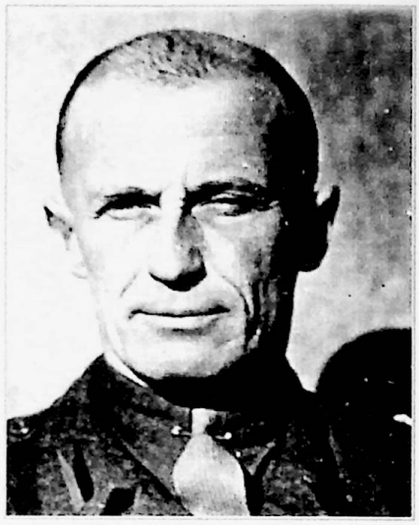
Stanisław Taras

Jacek Stwora

Ludwik Makiełło

Janusz Popiel

Apolinary Grzeszczak



Aleksander Stefanowicz

Jerzy Fawłowski

Kazimierz Kalinkiewicz

Jan Karcz

Janusz Barbarski

Janusz Kiwerski

Henryk Weber

Witold Deimel

Antoni Rogoziński

Julian Godlewski

Jerzy Zaleski

Jan Suchcitz

Kazimierz Kownacki

Roman Maryniak

Wiesław Beczkowicz

Lech Czernicki

Zbigniew Bachurzewski

Zbigniew Kierstan

Zbigniew Kozak

Zbigniew Rosiński

Andrzej Poniatowski

Jacek Zagórski

Zbigniew Dubrawski

Juliusz Karp

Zbigniew Mieczkowski

Tadeusz Wielogórski

Jan Oses

Ryszard Rydygier

Ryszard Zatorski

Henryk Kochański

Mieczysław Wartalski

Aleksander Domaradzki

Jan Potworowski

Ryszard Dembiński

Otto Maciąg

Przemysław Kwilecki

Andrzej Szempliński

Kazimierz Osiński

Stanisław Kwaśniewski

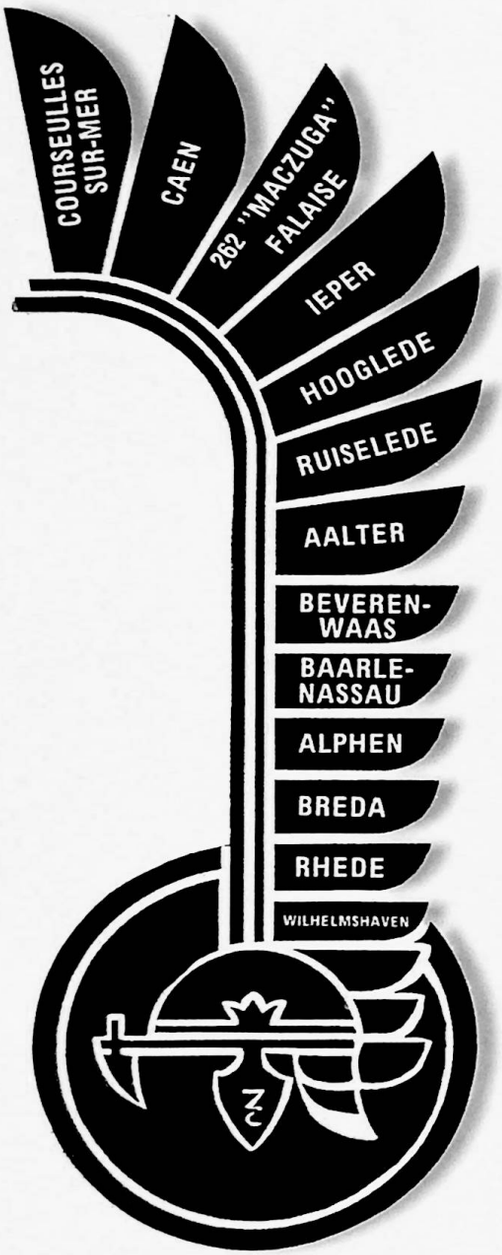
Adam Mackus

Zygmunt Ulm

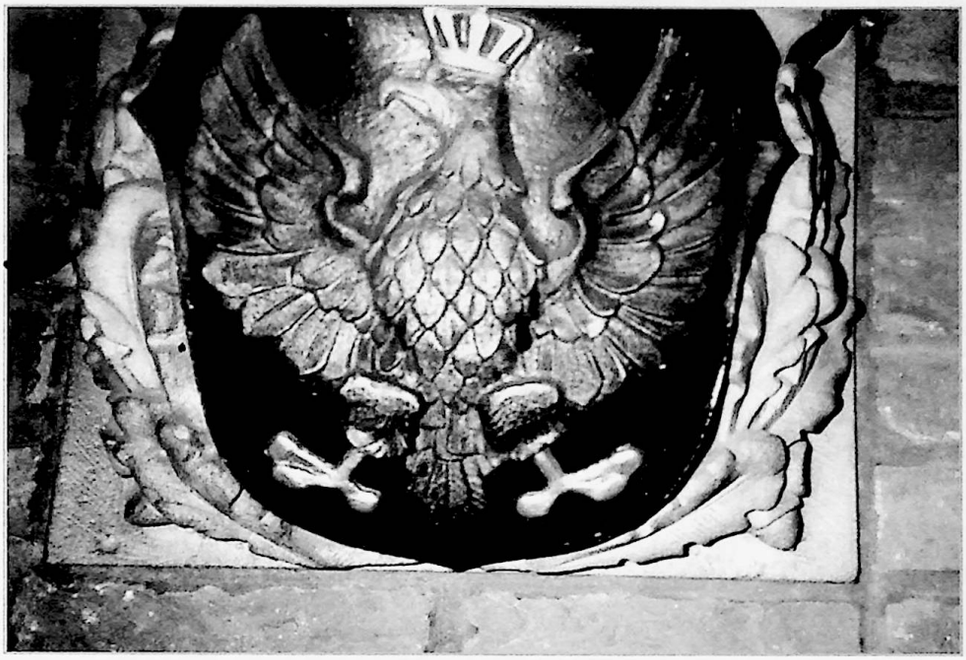
Alfred Whitehead

Stefan Bałuk

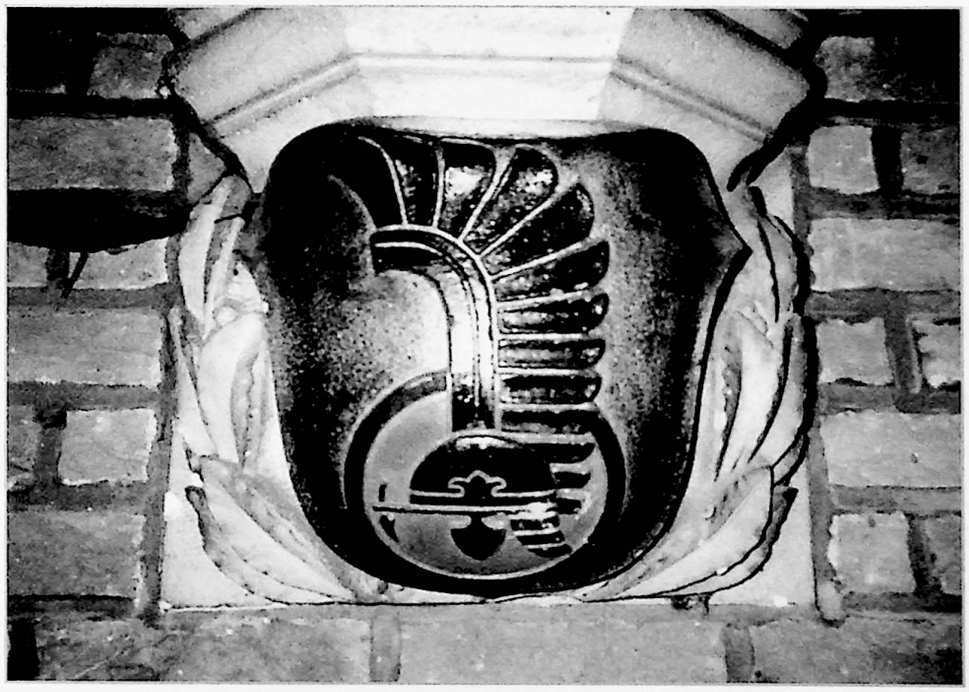
Standing at 24th Lancers Regiment Communal Grave: Lech Czernicki, Kazimierz Kownacki, Stanisław Ziółkowski i Adam Romer



A Husaria Wing as emblem of the 1¨ Polish Armoured Division with names of battles fought in Europe



The Polish Eagle engraved



A Husaria Wing engraved

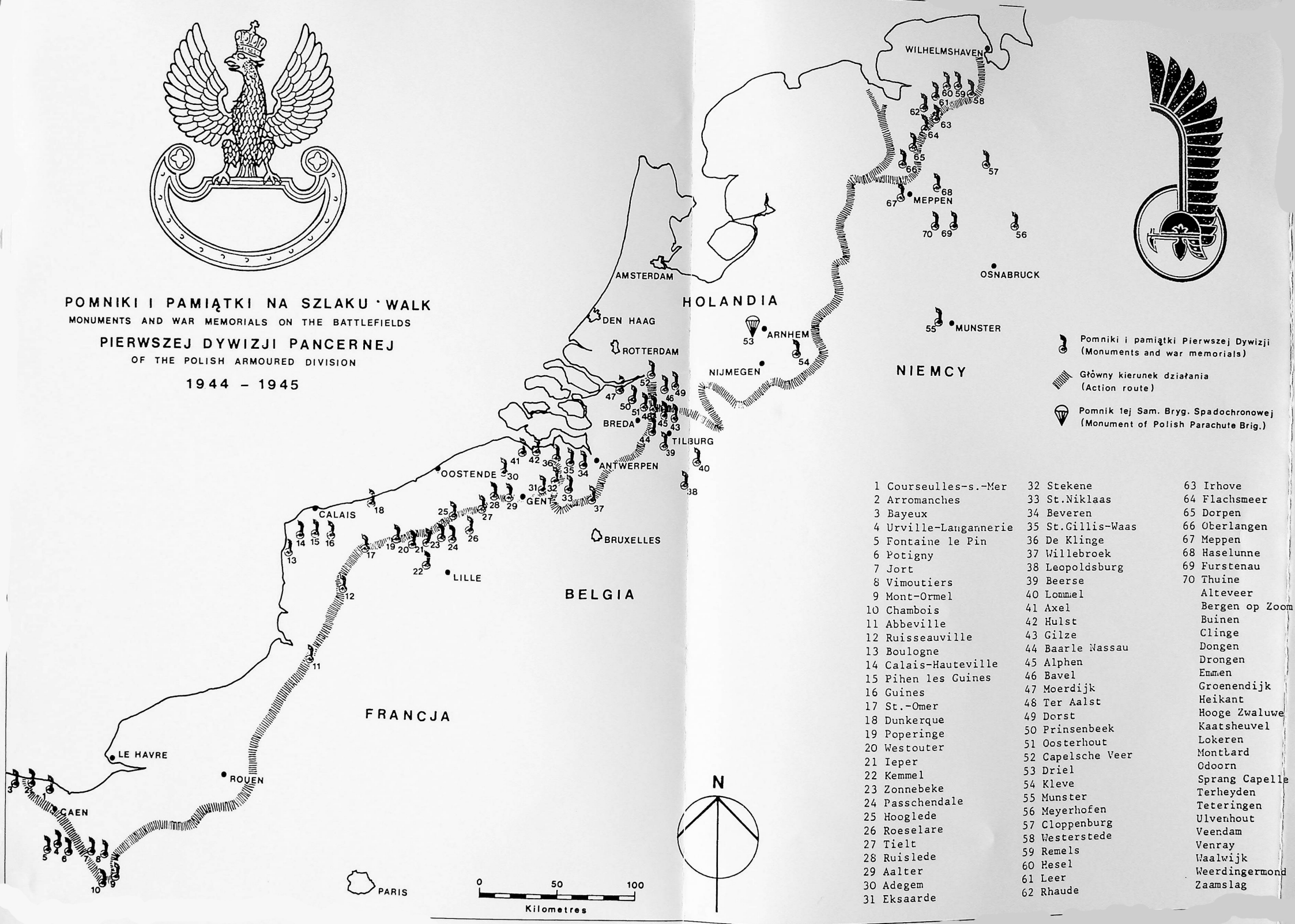
POMNIKI I PAMIĄTKI NA SZLAKU WALK

MONUMENTS AND WAR MEMORIALS ON THE BATTLEFIELDS

PIERWSZEJ DYWIZJI PANCERNEJ

OF THE POLISH ARMOURED DIVISION

1944 – 1945



Pomniki i pamiątki Pierwszej Dywizji
(Monuments and war memorials)

Główny kierunek działania
(Action route)

Pomnik 1ej Sam. Bryg. Spadochronowej
(Monument of Polish Parachute Brig.)

1 Courseulles-s.-Mer
2 Arromanches
3 Bayeux
4 Urville-Langannerie
5 Fontaine le Pin
6 Potigny
7 Jort
8 Vimoutiers
9 Mont-Ormel
10 Chambois
11 Abbeville
12 Ruisseauville
13 Boulogne
14 Calais-Hauteville
15 Pihen les Guines
16 Guines
17 St.-Omer
18 Dunkerque
19 Poperinge
20 Westouter
21 Ieper
22 Kemmel
23 Zonnebeke
24 Passchendale
25 Hooglede
26 Roeselare
27 Tielt
28 Ruislede
29 Aalter
30 Adegem
31 Eksaarde
32 Stekene
33 St.Niklaas
34 Beveren
35 St.Gillis-Waas
36 De Klinge
37 Willebroek
38 Leopoldsburg
39 Beerse
40 Lommel
41 Axel
42 Hulst
43 Gilze
44 Baarle Nassau
45 Alphen
46 Bavel
47 Moerdijk
48 Ter Aalst
49 Dorst
50 Prinsenbeek
51 Oosterhout
52 Capelsche Veer
53 Driel
54 Kleve
55 Munster
56 Meyerhofen
57 Cloppenburg
58 Westerstede
59 Remels
60 Hesel
61 Leer
62 Rhaude
63 Irhove
64 Flachsmeer
65 Dorpen
66 Oberlangen
67 Meppen
68 Haselunne
69 Furstenau
70 Thuine
Alteveer
Bergen op Zoom
Buinen
Clinge
Dongen
Drongen
Emmen
Groenendijk
Heikant
Hooge Zwaluwe
Kaatsheuvel
Lokeren
Montlard
Odoorn
Sprang Capelle
Terheyden
Teteringen
Ulvenhout
Veendam
Venray
Waalwijk
Weerdingermond
Zaamslag

Foundation for the Commemoration
of General Stanisław Maczek's First Polish Armoured Division

established by Zbigniew Mieczkowski (Captain retd.)
Chairman of the Warsaw Monument Committee

Adress: Al. Solidarności 105, 00-140 Warsaw, Poland
Tel./fax: [48-22] 628-27-08

Chairman of the Council:
Dr Stanisław Wyganowski

Director:
Professor Jan J. Milewski

Warsaw, August 2004

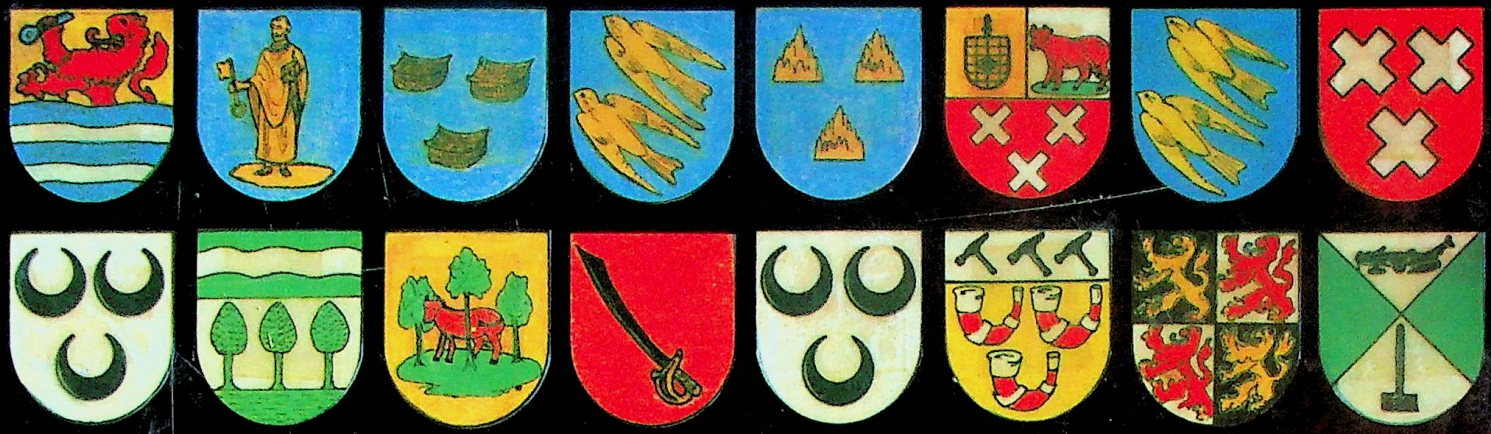
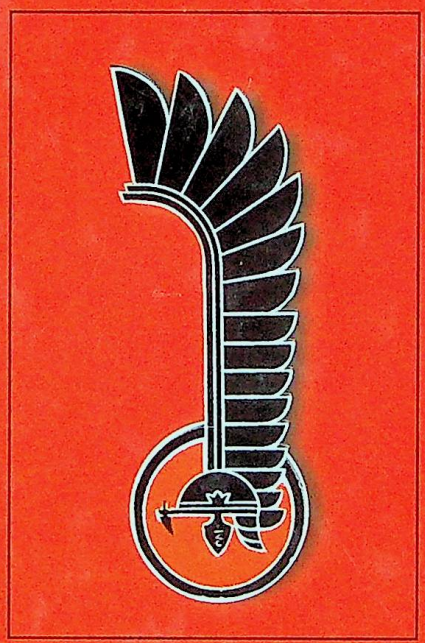
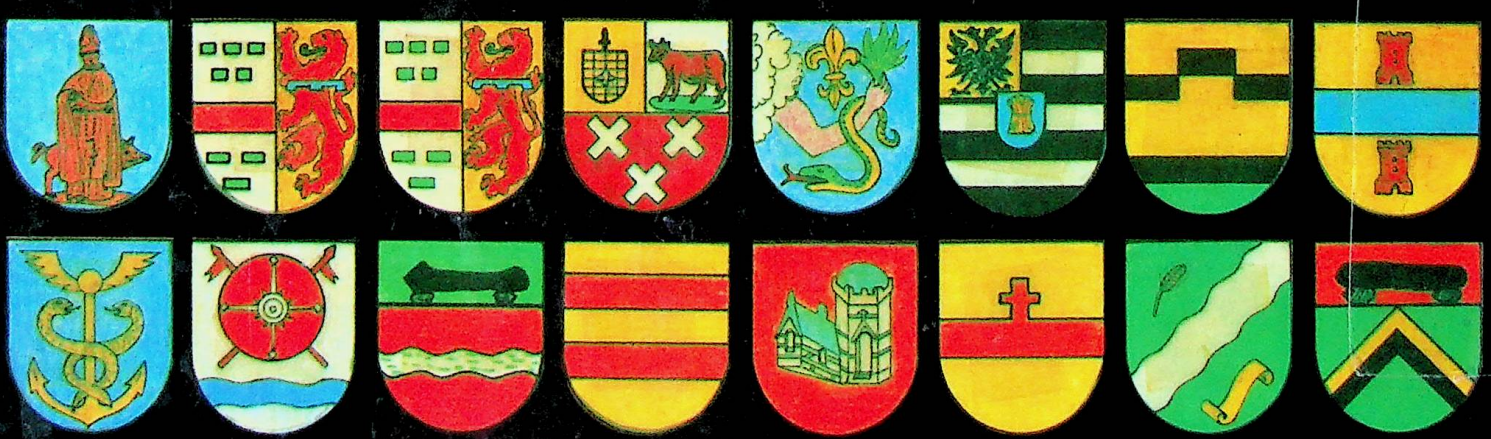
Dear Sir / Madam,

Please find enclosed a complimentary copy of the book "The Soldiers of General Maczek in World War II" in English published for the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation battles of the Division in Europe.

Would you like to order further copies, please contact the Foundation for the Commemoration of General Stanisław Maczek's First Polish Armoured Division. The cost is 60 Euro postage included.

Yours Sincerely,

Zbigniew Mieczkowski

Correspondence Address: Ul. Myśliwiecka 10 m 4, 00 459 Warszawa, Poland.
Tel. +48 - 22 - 628 27 08

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