NUOVA ANTOLOGIA MILITARE
RIVISTA INTERDISCIPLINARE DELLA SOCIETÀ ITALIANA DI STORIA MILITARE

Fascicolo Speciale 2021

Intelligence militare, guerra clandestina e Operazioni Speciali

a cura di
GÉRALD ARBOIT

Società Italiana di Storia Militare

Nuova Antologia Militare
Rivista interdisciplinare della Società Italiana di Storia Militare
Periodico telematico open-access annuale (www.nam-sism.org)
Registrazione del Tribunale Ordinario di Roma n. 06 del 30 Gennaio 2020

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Gruppo Editoriale Tab Srl -Viale Manzoni 24/c - 00185 Roma
www.tabedizioni.it

ISSN: 2704-9795

ISBN Fascicolo Speciale 2021: ISBN: 978-88-9295-270-6

Pour notre et votre liberté / For Your Freedom and Ours

Polish refugees of war as soldiers and resistance fighters in Western Europe

By Beata Halicka *

Abstract. The Polish Underground State run by the Polish Government-in-Exile created, during the Second World War, a multilayered structure enveloping both military and civilian units. Its operations were linked with the building of a dense network of connections in Europe, not only among Poles but also members of the resistance movements of other countries. This article presents the structures of these connections and their various forms of cooperation. Concrete examples have been taken from the autobiographical recollections of two outstanding Polish underground soldiers, namely the Home Army courier Kazimierz Leski and its emissary, Jan Karski.

Keywords: Polish Underground State, resistance, German occupation, communist repressions, exile

The outbreak of the Second World War subjected Poland to being partitioned between two occupiers, namely the Nazis and the Soviets, along with new borders and regional divisions. First of all, however, Poles had to face an unimaginable dimension of military aggression, destruction and the unrestrained terror of the invaders. The Polish population responded to this with the formation of an extensive resistance organization network, both in Poland and abroad. The Polish underground movement was unique and different from that of every other movement of a similar nature in German-occupied countries. This paper shows what this uniqueness was all about and deals with a small part of its activity - the connections between the Underground State in Poland and Polish people fighting in Western Europe, as well as their cooperation with different national resistance movements in other countries. I will describe the

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NAM, Anno 2 – Fascicolo Speciale
DOI: 10.36158/97888929527069
Settembre 2021

new borders of the territory of occupied Poland and the forced migration of the population at that time. Subsequently, the specific nature of the Polish Government-in-Exile will be explained, as well as the formation of an extensive resistance organization network in Poland itself. I will discuss the organization of Polish Intelligence Service and its cooperation with different national resistance movements, as well as describe the routes across Europe used by Polish couriers and emissaries for passing important information to the Polish Government-in-Exile in London and to their Western Allies. As a main source to show this in detail, two autobiographical reports by members of the Polish resistance movement have been chosen for this paper. My special contribution lies in making a link between the underground movement during the Second World War and the creation of a worldwide Polish diaspora network after the end of the war, which was based on the experiences of the Polish underground state and kept fighting for an independent Poland during the rule of the communist regime.

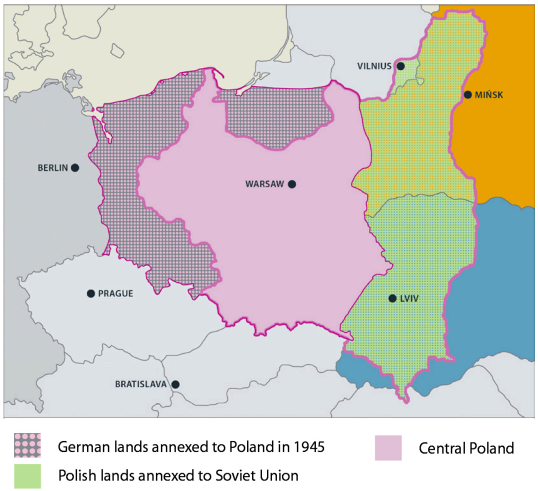
The title of my paper, namely "For your freedom and ours", goes back to the long Polish tradition of fighting for independence. After the partition of the First Polish Republic at the end of the 18th century, thousands of Poles went to exile. Examples include Tadeusz Kościuszko and Gen. Kazimierz Puławski in the United States or Polish legionnaires in the army of Napoleon Bonaparte. Many of them joined foreign armies or groups of insurgents fighting for freedom or independence of their country. Being unable to fight for their own country, they did it abroad. This tradition found a continuation during the Second World War.

With the outbreak of the Second World War and the formal division of Poland between German and Soviet conquerors in 1939, the old borders of the state vanished and were redrawn. The German military occupation zone was divided into two separate areas. The north-western part was annexed directly into the Third Reich, while the south-eastern part formed the General Government, headed by Hans Frank. The Polish September Campaign of 1939 was a case of a total war. About 350,000 Polish citizens fled to the east of Poland or abroad.[1] Polish forces suffered casualties comprising some 60,000 men killed and 140,000 wounded. Moreover, civilian losses among the Polish population amounted to about

1 Grzegorz Hryciuk, Witold Sienkiewicz, *Wysiedlenia, wypędzenia i ucieczki 1939-1959. Atlas ziem Polski [Displacements, Expulsions and Escapes 1939-1959. Atlas of the lands of Poland]*, Warsaw, 2008, p. 34.

150,000–200,000 people.[2]

The territories in the Soviet zone were divided into three areas: the Lithuanian, Belarussian and Ukrainian and incorporated into the Soviet Union. During the 21 months that Soviet troops occupied eastern Poland, they deported to Siberia between 309,000 and 330,000 Polish citizens of different ethnic groups, 63% of whom were Poles, 21.2% Jews, 7.6% Ukrainians and 6% Byelorussians.[3]



Map of Polish lands annexed to Soviet Union in 1939 and the shifting of Poland westwards in 1945

The territory of Poland was also the place where the Nazis carried out their plan for the so-called "Final solution of the Jewish question", the location of the Holocaust. Three million Polish citizens of Jewish decent and many hundred thousands of Jews from different countries were killed here. The Poles witnessed this terrible mass murder being perfectly organized by the Nazis in concentration camps, or carried out in the small towns, villages or open fields of Poland's eastern territories. Although thousands of Germans were involved in the Holocaust, unfortunately, they were also aided by Poles. Many obtained a financial benefit from the German confiscation of Jewish possessions and businesses.[4] At the same time, thousands of Poles helped the Jews – admittedly, for money, but also very often for free, for humanitarian reasons – thus, risking their own lives. Indeed, providing any kind of help for Jews in Poland, even giving a piece of bread, was punishable by death.[5]

2 Norman Davies, *God's Playground. A History of Poland*. Oxford 1981, p.439.

3 Aleksander Gurjanow, „Cztery deportacje 1940-41" [Four deportations 1940-41], in: *Karta*, no. 12 (1994), pp. 114-138; Piotr Eberhardt, *Polska granica wschodnia. 1939-1945 [Polish eastern border. 1939-1945]*, Warsaw, 1992, p. 73.

4 Tomasz szarota, *U progu Zagłady. Zajścia antyżydowskie i pogromy w okupowanej Europie [On the verge of the Holocaust. Anti-Jewish incidents and pogroms in occupied Europe]*. Wydawnictwo SIC, Warsaw, 2000, p.9.

5 Władysław Bartoszewski and Zofia Lewinówna, *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej. Polacy z*

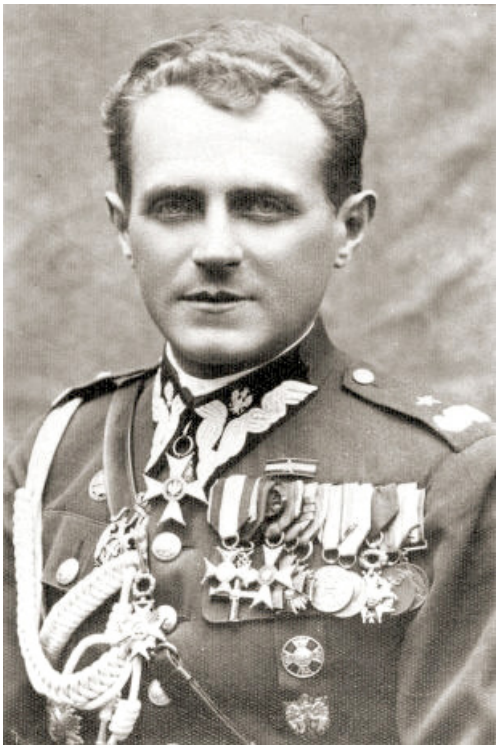
The Symbol of "Poland Fighting" used by Home Army

Not only were the Jews the subject of a brutal persecution by the Germans. One of the Nazi's aims was to gradually denationalize and destroy the Poles, who were described as 'inferior' and 'subhuman' in Nazi racial ideology.[6] In the best case scenario, the Poles were seen as slave workers needed to carry out Nazi plans for the "New World Order" and their vision of "modernity". Everyone who stood in their way in implementing this plan had to be eliminated. Because of this, the Germans undertook a systematic extermination of the Polish leadership, which was arrested, brought to the concentrations camps and very often killed. Among other professions, the greatest loss of life was among the members of Polish intelligentsia, clergy, political activists and students. The Nazi authorities closed Polish universities, schools (only elementary schools remained open), research institutes, theaters, archives, libraries, publishing houses and printing presses. Food was rationed and forced labor directives included all Polish citi-

pomocą Żydom 1939-45 [This one is from my homeland. Poles helping Jews 1939-45]. Wydawnictwo Znak. Krakow, 1966, document 8. Władysław Ważniewski, *Na przedpolach stolicy. 1939-1945 [On the outskirts of the capital. 1939-1945]*. Warsaw, 1974, p.128.

6 John Connelly, "Nazis and Slavs: From Racial Theory to Racist Practice", in: *Central European History*, 32(1999), 1-33.

zens.[7] Under such circumstances, the formation of an extensive resistance organization network in Poland was very difficult to achieve.



Michal Karaszewicz-Tokarzewski (1893-1864)

The formation of an organized resistance on the territory of occupied Poland

Comparing with other European countries occupied by Nazi Germany in the first years of the Second World War, Poland presented different conditions of existence, taking different forms due to the German terror and, in particular, different rules applied by the Germans to Poland in the course of the war. The Poles were placed beyond the protections of all law. They were not allowed to obtain any legal redress against a German, either in the sphere of criminal or civil law. They could not bring any charge against any German official regarding any sphere of national, provincial, local, economic or social activity. As early as 1939 Polish leaders realized that in this unique and unyielding situation the Polish people could not be left in a state of chaos and internal lawlessness. This was the root cause of the development of the life of the underground.

The formation of organized resistance in Poland had already been laid before the end of the September Campaign in 1939. On 27 September, a group of army officers under general Michał Karaszewicz-Tokarzewski formed the Polish Victory Service (*Służba Zwycięstwu Polski*) to keep fighting under cover. Somewhat later, in November 1939, the Union of Armed Struggle (*Związek Walki Zbrojnej*, ZWZ) was created joining many organizations fighting in

7 Anna D. JAROSZYŃSKA-KIRCHMANN, *The Exile Mission: The Polish Political Diaspora and Polish Americans, 1939-1956*. Ohio University Press, 2004, p. 18.

Banner of the Peasant's Battalions (Bataliony Chłopskie)

Poland. The ZWZ was transformed into the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*, AK) in 1942.[8] In cooperation with the Polish Government-in-Exile, a huge structure constituting the Polish Underground State was established, which was not only as an armed resistance organization, but also as a vehicle through which the Polish state continued to administer its occupied territories. Its structures included such institutions like the police, the courts and schools, as well as publishing houses and cultural institutions. It also provided a wide range of social services, including to the Jewish population (through the Council to Aid Jews, or *Żegota*). In early 1944, it employed about 15,000 people in its administration alone.[9] In the opinion of Norman Davies, the Home Army was the largest of the European resistance formations. Together with the Peasant's Battalions (*Bataliony Chłopskie*) it had 400,000 registered soldiers.[10]

8 Jan Karski, *Story of a Secret State*, Houghton Mifflin Co. Boston, 1944.

9 Grzegorz Ostasz, *The Polish Government-in-exile's Home Delegatures*. Online ar: polishresistance-ak.org/17%20Article.htm See also Grzegorz Ostasz, *Krakowska Okregowa Delegatura Rządu na Kraj 1941-1945*, Rzeszów, 1996.

10 Norman Davies, *op. cit.*, p.464 and 466. Paul Latawski, *Polska,* in: Cook P., Shepherd B.H. (eds.), *Ruch oporu w Europie 1939–1945*, trans. Tomasz Prochenka, Michał Wasilewski, Warszawa 2015, p. 249-279 (originally published as *European Resistance in the Second World War*, Barnsley, 2013).

The Polish Government-in-Exile and Polish soldiers and resistance fighters in Western Europe

The Nazi and the Soviet occupation caused tremendous population movement that resulted in masses of Poles remaining outside of the country, forming the bedrock of the Polish postwar diaspora.[11] As it was not willing to collaborate with either occupier, in October 1939, the Polish government left Poland and went into exile. The defeated Polish Army was evacuated. Not only soldiers but also many thousand civilians fled Poland through various channels. Most of them managed to leave their country through the so-called green border, that is, by illegally crossing into Romania and Hungary. Most of them followed the Polish government and went to France. Wherever a Polish exile community took shape, the refugees established some kind of organization that included cultural and political institutions, a press, book publishing and schools. Of the approximately 120,000 Polish citizens who fled to Romania and Hungary, about 50,000 reached Western Europe.[12]

It was in France where the Polish Government-in-Exile was established. Władysław Raczkiewicz became President of the Republic of Poland. He then appointed General Władysław Sikorski to be the Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces. First based in Paris, and later Angers, one of the main tasks of this government was to raise Polish armed forces in the West. A number of agreements were signed with the French and, subsequently, British governments, planning to create a Polish army of 100,000 soldiers in France. However, these plans were not fully implemented. By the spring of 1940, new units of Polish forces in the West had been formed, their number being estimated at 84,500 soldiers.[13] At the time Nazi Germany commenced its French campaign in May 1940, there were about 50,000 Polish soldiers in France. However, the German offensive was so swift and the resistance of the French Army so inef-

11 Anna D. Jaroszyńska-Kirchmann, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

12 Czesław Łuczak, „Przemieszczenia ludności z Polski podczas drugiej wojny światowej" [Population displacements from Poland during the Second World War], in: Andrzej Pilch (ed.), *Emigracja z ziem polskich w czasach nowożytnych i najnowszych [Emigration from Polish lands in modern and contemporary history]*. Warsaw 1984, p. 451-483, here p. 453.

13 Norman Davies, *Europa walczy 1939-1945. Nie takie proste zwycięstwo*. [Europe fights 1939-1945. Not that simple victory]. Wydawnictwo Znak Krakow 2008, s. 111.

fective that the inclusion of some Polish troops in the fighting became possible only in the second phase of the campaign.

The capitulation of France brought not only German occupation and the establishment of the Vichy state, but also the breaking of the military alliance with Great Britain and Polish Armed Forces in the West. In the face of this capitulation, the Prime Minister of the Polish government, General Sikorski, went to London for a conference with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, where they agreed about the evacuation of the Polish troops to Great Britain. The Vichy French government tried to prevent this and stop the Poles at all costs. Some of these Polish soldiers went to Switzerland, where they were interned. In total, around 27,000 soldiers and officers of the Polish Armed Forces in the West managed to evacuate themselves to Great Britain and Palestine.[14] Many Polish military and civilians made their way through Spain to Portugal, then to England or to the American continent. In the years 1940-1945, Portugal accepted over 6-7 thousand of Polish citizens as civilian refugees.[15] Subsequently, the Polish Army under British command participated in battles on several different fronts, namely in Britain in 1940, then in Belgium, France and Italy in 1944 and, finally, Germany in 1945.

The Polish war refugees who remained in France formed underground resistance structures there, together with the old Polish diaspora. Despite German repression, they participated in the strikes and armed campaigns of the French resistance movement. The Polish emissary Jan Karski described the situation as follows:

> Despite the defeat of France, Polish underground organizations operated on her territory: both civilian and military. The former was run by Poles who had long been living in France, while the latter was run by our officers who had not managed to flee France following the defeat of 1940 or who had received orders not to leave. Both organizations cooperated with the French Resistance.[16]

14 Halik Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed. Poland and the Poles in the Second World War*. Penguin Books London 2012, p. 218.

15 Jan S. Ciechanowski, *Thank You, Portugal! Polish civilian and military refugees at the western extremity of Europe in the years 1940–1945*, Warszawa 2015.

16 Jan Karski, *Tajne państwo. Opowieść o polskim podziemiu*. Warsaw 1999, p. 270.

It is difficult to estimate the exact number of Poles involved in the resistance in France. Some sources claim about 50,000 Poles fought in the French resistance, of whom about 5,000 died.[17] However, these numbers seem to be much too high. Others estimate that 25,000–30,000 Poles remained in France during the Second World War, not all of whom were active in the resistance.[18] Such numbers should be treated as indicative as I am aware that the issue of active participation in the resistance remains disputable. As Olivier Wieviorka argues in his book *The French Resistance*, the infinite variety of modes of engagement and lived experience makes any generalization misleading.[19]

It is important to recognize different forms of activities undertaken by Polish war refugees. Young men usually joined the Polish Armed Forces in the West. Many kept contacts with the Government-in-Exile which had its offices in many European states. Some Poles worked for the Allies and established very successful intelligence networks in France and in Spain (examples of this will be given below). Others took part in foreign resistance movements not only in France, but also in Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia, Albania and Spain.[20] For most migrants, the issue of primary importance was their survival, followed by the question of how to earn money to secure their basic living requirements. To achieve this, they accepted any available jobs, used family resources brought from Poland and called on friends and business connections in European countries. If possible, they tried to continue their professional occupation or created theater groups, published newspapers and literary journals, revived political parties, and taught Polish children and youth in networks of elementary and high schools.[21]

During the Second World War, approximately 2.8 million Polish citizens were held in Germans political prisons, concentrations camps or as slave laborers in the territory of Third Reich.[22] As they faced much hardship and oppression, some

17 Stowarzyszenie Byłych Żołnierzy 1 Armii Francuskiej „Ren i Dunaj". Online at: .renidunaj.pl/

18 Czesław Łuczak, *Przemieszczenia*, p. 481.

19 Olivier Wieviorka, *The French Resistance*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Mass., 2016, p.2.

20 Anna D. Jaroszyńska-Kirchmann, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

21 Zbigniew Żaroń, *Wojenne losy ludności polskiej na obczyźnie w latach 1939-1947*. Warsaw 1994, pp. 9-31.

22 Beata Halicka, 'From Slaves to Settlers in the Polish 'Wild West': the End of the Second World War from the Perspective of Forced Labourers', in: Henning Borggräfe (Hg.),

of them tried to escape. Those who were successful went mostly to Switzerland, where they applied for asylum or looked for help from representatives of the Polish Government-in-Exile based there. According to Czesław Łuczak, two thousand Poles remained in Switzerland during the war.[23]

Polish Intelligence Service and the cooperation with different national resistance movements

One of the major tasks of the Home Army was to organize an efficient intelligence gathering service, both for its own needs and that of the Allied war effort. It was built partially on the prewar structure of Polish intelligence networks and underwent various structural changes until it finally took permanent shape in 1942.[24] The Home Army intelligence network held sway not only in occupied Poland but also well into the Reich, the USSR and the countries south of Poland allied to Germany, thereby becoming the chief source of information for the Allies concerning the eastern front. It provided the Allies with such valuable information as concentration camp locations, German's secret weapons, namely the V1 and V2 rockets, and much else. As there was a formal agreement between the British and Polish intelligence services, a line of communications and procedures were established by which the British Intelligence Service could request specific information from their Polish allies in London. They, in turn, passed on such requests to the Intelligence Bureau of the Home Army in Warsaw. There, the intelligence service using its various networks, gathered the sought-after information, which was analyzed in its Studies Department before being sent back to London. In the opinion of Andrzej Suchcitz, throughout the war, the Home Army Intelligence Service supplied the Allies with over 25,000 reports.[25] The challenge was not only the gathering the information, but also passing it to

Freilegungen. Wege, Orte und Räume der NS-Verfolgung. Jahrbuch des International Tracing Service 2016/05, pp. 148-159 here p. 153. Czesław Łuczak, ‚Polnische Arbeiter im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland während des Zweiten Weltkrieges. Entwicklung und Aufgaben der polnischen Forschung', in: Ulrich Herbert (ed.), *Europa und der „Reichseinsatz". Ausländische Zivilarbeiter, Kriegsgefangene und KZ-Häftlinge in Deutschland 1938 – 1945*, Essen 1991, pp. 90-105, here p. 98.

23 Czesław Łuczak, *op. cit.,* p. 481.

24 Andrzej Suchcitz, *The Home Army Intelligence Service*. Online at: polishresistance-ak.org/3%20Article.htm

25 *Ibid*.

London. To make this possible, many different routes of communication were developed, mostly in cooperation with various national resistance movements in Europe.


Leski Kazimierz (1912-2000)

In order to show how this worked in detail, I would like to provide the example of the life story of two individuals. The choice was not easy, as there were hundreds of people involved in the Polish intelligence service, most of whom were very interesting, unique and sometimes controversial personalities, among them many women. Eventually, I chose Kazimierz Leski and Jan Karski. The former was one of the first to create the international network of intelligence concerned. In dealing with Leski's life story, I employed his memoirs published in book form, as well as the memoirs of his partners and the historical literature on the topic.[26] The latter, Jan Karski, was a resistance-movement soldier in Poland. From January 1940 he organized courier missions to deliver dispatches from the Polish underground to the Polish Government-in-Exile. As a courier, Karski made several secret trips between France, Britain and Poland.

Kazimierz Leski (1912—2000)**,** whose *nom-de-guerre* was *Bradl* , was a Polish engineer who, in the 1930s, had been the co-designer of the Polish submarines ORP "Sęp" and ORP "Orzeł". Shortly before the German invasion of Poland, he joined the Polish Air Force as a fighter pilot. His plane was shot down by the Soviets in September 1939 and Leski was badly injured. Being unable to fight as a soldier, he went to Warsaw and commenced his service as an officer in the Home Army's intelligence and counter-intelligence services. His first job was completing a list of German military units, their insignia, numbers, and dispositions on Polish territory. In addition, his cell prepared detailed reports on the logistics and transport of German units on their way to the Eastern Front.

In the first years of the war, intelligence information was passed to London

26 Kazimierz Leski, *Życie niewłaściwie urozmaicone: wspomnienia oficera wywiadu i kontrwywiadu AK* [A Checkered Life: Memoirs of a Home Army Intelligence and Counterintelligence Officer]. PWN Warsaw 1989.

by couriers and emissaries, who crossed the so-called green border to Slovakia, first going to Budapest and then on to London. Another possible way was through neutral Sweden. As these ways became too dangerous and risky, Kazimierz Leski and his unit were given the task of developing a communications network spanning German-occupied Europe from Poland to France and Spain and, finally, reaching the Polish Government-in-Exile in London.

Leski made his first trip as a courier to France in 1941, posing as a lieutenant of the German *Wehrmacht*. In April 1942, Stanisław Jankowski (*nom-de-guerre – Agaton*), one of the most famous Polish SOE agents (Special Operations Executive commando unit called *Cichociemni* [the Silent Unseen]), was parachuted from London into occupied Poland, where he became an expert document forger and worked very closely with Kazimierz Leski.[27] In Warsaw, they had a Spanish friend, Abdon Casellas, who helped them to build connections to Brussels, Paris and Spain. Because of his wounds, Leski avoided traveling in crowded, third-class railway cars and decided to "promote himself" to the rank of a German general. Under the cover name Gen. Julius von Halmann, he managed to cross Europe several times. His professionalism, fluent knowledge of several languages and his excellently forged documents allowed him to witness several events he did had not planned on seeing. Among them was his visit to the Atlantic Wall construction site, which was made possible because he convinced the Germans that his superiors may want to build a similar line of fortifications in the Ukraine.[28] He described his visit in Marseille in 1943 as wonderful, the French Riviera as a peaceful world, so much different from the terrible life in occupied Warsaw.[29]

By getting know the director of the Bank of Paris and the Netherlands (Bank de Paris et des Pays Bas), Mr. de Lipkowsky, he made contact with a French resistance fighter, the engineer Gilbert Védy, (*nom-de-guerre – Médéric*), who led the organization *Ceux de la Libération*.[30] He described their first meeting as follows:

27 Stanisław Jankowski, *Z fałszywym Ausweisem w prawdziwej Warszawie: Wspomnienia 1939-1946* [With a fake Ausweis in real Warsaw: Memoirs 1939-1946]. Warsaw 1980.

28 Kazimierz Leski, *op. cit.*, p. 219. ELEM: „Kazimierz Leski", in: *Gazeta Wyborcza* nr 255, 31.10.2000, p 12. Online at: archiwum.wyborcza.pl/Archiwum 1,0, 12578 93.html?kdl=-20001031GW&wyr=%2522Kazimierz%2B Leski% 2522% 2B% 2B%2B

29 Kazimierz Leski, *op. cit.*, p. 220f.

30 Gilbert Védy, (*nom-de-guerre – Médéric*), a French resistance fighter who was award-

Stanisław Jankowski (1911–2002)

«A trusted person sent to me by Mr. de Lipkowsky, a pretty young girl, took me to a small cafe on Isle Saint Louis. Accustomed to the methods and conditions of conspiracy in Poland, I thought I would be transferred there to another person who would lead me further. I was seated at a free table and the girl disappeared. Sitting there, I had the unpleasant feeling that I had become the object of the concentrated attention of the guests of the cafe. As soon as I took my seat, a good-looking man, about forty years old, rose from the next table and came to me. Extending his hand to me, he introduced himself freely as *Médéric*. I stood up and told him my *nom-de-guerre*, *Pierre*. During our conversation, *Médéric* spoke to his associates, who were sitting at neighboring tables and were responsible for the issues we discussed. I put on a brave face, in my opinion, maybe not so brave, regarding what was, in any case, not a very professional game. *Médéric* recognized my bad mood and explained that every guest present here, as well as the owner and staff of the café, were his people. He tried to convince me that nothing unexpected could happen here. Indeed, the cooperation I established with him was perfectly fine, but with me – accustomed to the extremely strict rigors of conspiracy in Poland, there remained, however, a certain shadow of doubt about the security of this kind of underground work.»[31]

Kazimierz Leski received support and much useful advice, both from his French and Spanish partners and managed to cross the French-Spanish border twice, once going to San Sebastian in the north, and the other further south reaching Barcelona. In his view, passing through the Pyrenees was very dangerous and recommended only for couriers with best physical skills. This route of communication was later used only by a few Polish couriers, for example by Jan

ed the *Ordre de la Libération*.

31 *Ibid*., p. 224.

Gralewski (*nom-de-guerre – Pankracy*), who reached Gibraltar this way and died shortly afterwards (or probably killed) in a plane crash, together with the Polish Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces, General Sikorski.

As passing through the Pyrenees had turned out not to be the best solution, Kazimierz Leski looked for other possibilities. In this regard, he noticed the importance of his contact with *Médéric* and his organization as follows:

Cooperation with French resistance was great. *Médéric* was a very direct person, devoid of any pretense, full of initiative and goodwill. He spoke about his troubles without false embarrassment (for example, he asked me to make some forms and seals for him in Poland). (...) When we needed something – and it was within his scope – he helped us. We were allowed to use his connections with French railwaymen who transported our couriers across the border between occupied France and the so-called *Zone Libre*. Later, *Médéric* enabled us to use the air bridge operated by English Lysander planes landing in France on secret airfields.[32]

As we can see from this example, not only the gathering of useful and strategic information was challenging, but also the passing the information to London proved to be very difficult. As already mentioned, the Polish Home Army Intelligence Service supplied the Allies with over 25,000 reports. Many of these, especially those with maps and complex descriptions, had to be brought by couriers and emissaries across many borders and zones of occupation. To make this possible, people such as Kazimierz Leski had developed many routes of communication, mostly in cooperation with different national resistance movements in Europe.

As another example, I would like to present the activities of Jan Karski, who as part of the Polish underground authorities conducted courier missions to the Polish Government-in-Exile in France in 1940.[33] Subsequently, he received instructions to acquire information regarding the extermination of the Jews being

32 *Ibid*., p. 226.

33 Jan Karski, born Jan Romauld Kozielewski (1914-2000), lawyer, diplomat, historian, prewar employee of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In September 1939, he was placed into Soviet captivity from which he managed to escape. Subsequently, he worked for the Office of Information and Propaganda at the General Staff of the Home Army. After the war, he settled in the United States where, among other things, he was a lecturer at Georgetown University in Washington.

Błyskawica and other insurgent weapons

conducted on Polish territory. With the aid of leaders of the Jewish underground, in 1942 he got into the Warsaw Ghetto on two occasions. Shortly afterwards, dressed as a Ukrainian guard, he managed to enter the site of a camp near Lublin from which the Germans were transporting Jews to the death camps.[34] Being a direct witness of the Holocaust, he was sent to Great Britain and the USA in order to inform the governments there, as well as public opinion, of the situation in occupied Poland and the tragedy of the Jews. Of extraordinary value are the reports compiled by Karski during the war,[35] as well as his book entitled *The Story of a Secret State*, written in the USA in 1944. Aimed at a Western audience, the latter contains a detailed description of the activities conducted by Jan Karski as part of his service in the structures of the Polish Underground State. Due to

34 Karski identified this location as the death camp at Bełżec – later it turned out that he had seen a transit camp at Izbica.

35 The best known of Karski reports became the basis of a publication prepared by the Ministry of Affairs of the Polish Government-in-Exile entitled *The Mass Extermination of Jews in German Occupied Poland. Note addressed to the Governments of the United Nations on December 1oth, 1942 and other documents*.

the fact that it had been published while the war was still ongoing, in most cases the author did not provide the names of those engaged in the European resistance movement. He describes his experience of working with the Poles in France (he had arrived in Paris in 1942), as well as the French and Spanish underground. At first he was near the Gare du Nord:

> The meeting place was a small confectionery shop near the station. An old lady whose presence I had expected, was seated behind the counter. I approached her. (…) She arranged to put me in touch with members of our own underground unit. (…) Three days after my arrival, a French physician supplied me with my identity papers, which stated that I was a French citizen of Polish origin. I could not be expected to speak French fluently because I had always lived in the Polish surroundings of the Pas de Calais district, where I had worked in the coal mines. He also provided me with a German work permit and a French driving license. He informed me that I was to leave Paris as soon as possible.
>
> About ten days later I took the train to Lyon with a French worker, who had been instructed to facilitate my crossing of the Spanish frontier. In the house to which he conducted me in Lyon, I was amazed to encounter a captain from the Polish officer' training school which I attended. (…) He had been in the Polish Army during the Battle of France, had been captured, escaped from interment and joined the French underground. Now he was in charge of our Polish section which was busy helping refugees cross the Spanish border.[36]

In a further section, Karski draws attention to the differences in conducting underground activities in occupied France and Poland. He focuses on the much greater freedom of movement which significantly helped the French run an underground organization. The punishments people faced were lighter while the infiltration of Gestapo agents was less. Karski states with satisfaction that there were no problems with communications with England or neutral countries, and he writes openly that he envies the French. In his view, in such circumstances as there were in France, the Polish underground could operate much more effectively. Another aim of his journey was to reach Perpignan in southern France where he was to make contact with a young Spanish married couple who had fled repression under General Franco and worked for the Resistance. They were

36 Jan Karski, *Story of a secret state. My report to the World*. Penguin Books London 2011. p. 392 ff. First published in English translation in the United States of America by Houghton Mifflin in 1944.

Catalans and were to organize Karski being smuggled to Barcelona. The matter turned out to be more difficult than expected. The crossing had been divided into several stages during which Karski was received by further guides. The last stage of the journey took place by train, on a coal locomotive in which several members of the French underground had also been concealed and who were trying to reaching the army of General de Gaulle. In Barcelona, Karski was to contact British agents who organized his being flown to London.

Following his arrival in Great Britain, Karski met numerous representatives of the Polish and British governments and informed them about the situation in Poland, especially about the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto and the Holocaust. He had also managed to smuggle microfilm from Poland with more information concerning the Polish Underground State, as well as evidence of the extermination of the European Jews in German-occupied Poland. In the late spring of 1943, Karski was sent to the USA where he met numerous figures from political, cultural and religious life, as well as being received by US president, Franklin Roosevelt, on 28 July 1943. As he was probably the first person on the American continent who gave testimony of the Warsaw Ghetto and mass exterminations in concentration camps, many people were not able to believe the tragedy occurring on the territory of Poland. Indeed, many of those with whom he

Monument to the Little Insurgent

spoke considered his account as Polish Government-in-Exile propaganda and dismissed it as incredible. Real shock did not occur until the appearance of accounts of Jews themselves who had arrived in Western Europe and the USA following the liberation of the camps. By then, it was too late to provide any aid.

Faithfully adhering to the mission with which he had been entrusted, Karski, along with representatives of the American *Polonia*, courted Hollywood regarding a film based on his account. Unfortunately, due to political concerns, this project proved impossible to carry out at that time. However, success was achieved with Karski's above-cited work entitled *The Story of a Secret State*, published in the USA at the end of 1944. After the war, Karski lived as an émigré, settling in Washington where, among other things, he lectured at Georgetown University. As a representative of the Polish Government-in-Exile, which following the Second World War, did not recognize the communist-dominated government in Poland, he had no possibility of returning to his homeland.[37]

For his work, Karski was awarded the American Presidential Medal of Freedom, was honored by Yad Vashem with the title of Righteous Among the Nations, as well as later being granted honorary citizenship of the State of Israel. Already during the war, he had been decorated with the Polish Cross of Valor and the War Order of Virtuti Militari while following the political transformation of 1989, he was awarded the Order of the White Eagle, the highest decoration of the Polish state.

However, the post-war life of Kazimierz Leski, the Polish underground courier referred to earlier, took a much more tragic course. As in summer 1944 the Americans had started liberating France, people in Poland were confronted with a second occupation by Soviet Union as the Red Army moved westwards while defeating the Germans. Kazimierz Leski was one of the 50,000 Polish soldiers who fought in the Warsaw Uprising.[38] He managed to escape from a column of prisoners after its capitulation and joined the underground structures now fighting against the Soviets. He subsequently became commander of the Home Army

37 E. Thomas Wood and Stanislaw M. Jankowski, *Karski: How One Man Tried to Stop the Holocaust*. John Wiley & Sons Inc. 1994.

38 Jerzy Kirchmayer, *Powstanie Warszawskie*. [The Warsaw Uprising]. Książka i Wiedza Warsaw, 1984, p. 153; Adam Borkiewicz, *Powstanie Warszawskie. Zarys działań natury wojskowej [The Warsaw Uprising. Outline of military activities]*. Instytut Wydawniczy PAX Warsaw, 1969, p. 549.

for the Western Area of Poland. After the end of the war, he gradually dismantled his underground network and moved to Gdansk under the false name of Leon Juchniewicz and became the first managing director of Gdansk shipyard. His true identity having been discovered, he was arrested by the communist secret police in August 1945. Charged with attempting to overthrow the regime, he was sentenced to 12 years in prison, a sentence which was later commuted to six years. However, in 1951 he was not released. Instead, he was charged with having collaborated with Germans and held in solitary confinement and brutally tortured. Although following the death of Stalin Leski was freed and soon rehabilitated, he could not find employment as Poland's communist authorities continued to view former Home Army soldiers with suspicion. As a result, he had to give up his profession as engineer and worked as a clerk at a publishing house. Subsequently, he managed to revive his scientific work, publishing seven books and over a hundred other publications. In addition, he was honored by Yad Vashem as one of the Righteous Among the Nations in 1995, as well as receiving many awards on behalf of a liberated Poland after 1989. He later died on 27 May 2000 in Warsaw.[39]

Two visions of fighting for an independent Poland after WWII

The fate of Kazimierz Leski was shared by many other Polish resistance fighters in communist Poland. Those who at the end of the Second World War had remained abroad had many doubts whether they should return to Poland at all. Having come to know how Soviet and Polish communists persecuted former Home Army soldiers, most of them chose to stay in exile. They constituted one part of a total of 1.6 million individuals born in Poland who, at the end of 1945, were still located in western and northern Europe.[40] Although the understanding of identity and national affiliation of most of these people remained strongly connected with Poland, they used the huge network of transnational connections they had established during the war to start a new life. In particular, Polish intellectuals in exile were exposed to the transnational transfer of knowledge and cul-

39 In recent years, many books about Leski have been published in Poland. Moreover, the Museum of the Warsaw Uprising in Warsaw produced a documentary entitled *Leski - Akcja 666*. Online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5PUkabF-2xk

40 Anna D. Jaroszyńska-Kirchmann, *op. cit.*, p. 250, footnote 11.

ture and posed questions regarding national identity in various ways in their social, political or cultural engagement. Later, two different attitudes will be presented as reactions of Polish diaspora circles to the situation in which Poland found itself following the Second World War.

Already in December 1944, following long negotiations, the Soviet authorities had managed to convince General de Gaulle that France should give its support to the new communist government in Poland.[41] This fact undoubtedly made it easier to exert pressure on the British and Americans whose representatives, namely Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt, had agreed at the Yalta Conference in February 1945 to the formation of a new government in Poland through the supplementation of the membership of a communist temporary government with 'Poles from home and abroad.' In this manner was the existence of the Polish Government-in-Exile completely passed over as a subject of international law. Despite protests from many Poles, the Yalta resolutions were put into practice with the establishment of a Temporary Government of National Unity on 28 June 1945. In this situation, it proved very difficult to persuade the Western Powers to continue to recognize the Polish Government-in-Exile. Already on 29 June 1945, France and Sweden were the first to revoke their recognition of the legal government of Poland based in London, thereby acknowledging the Temporary Government of National Unity. On 5 July, the USA and Great Britain took the same decision.

The Polish Government-in-Exile decided not to recognize the new government of Poland, taking the position that it could only transfer its constitutional powers to a government which had been appointed by free elections in Poland.[42] The principle was accepted of not embarking on any cooperation whatsoever with the communists in Poland and continuing the struggle for Polish independence. During the early post-war years, the Polish Government-in-Exile support-

41 Beata Halicka, *Życie na pograniczach. Zbigniew Anthony Kruszewski. Biografia*. Warsaw 2019, p. 126. English edition: *Borderlands Biography: Z. Anthony Kruszewski in Wartime Europe and Postwar America*. Brill Publisher, Leiden 2021.

42 This was only carried out following the Presidential elections in Poland in 1990 when Ryszard Kaczorowski, the last president of the Polish Government-in-Exile, handed over the presidential insignia of the Second Polish Republic to the new president of Poland, Lech Wałęsa. See Rafał Habierski, *Polski Londyn* [The Polish London]. Warsaw 2000, p. 113.

Covers of Volumes 2 and 3 of History of Polish Underground State

ed units of the Home Army operating on Polish territory and continuing an underground struggle while acknowledging the new government as an executive organ of Soviet occupation. From September 1945 to their final destruction in December 1952, they operated under the name the *Freedom and Independence Association* (*Zrzeszenie Wolność i Niezawisłość*, WiN), taking over the organizational structures, staff, property, as well as part of the partisan units operating during the war within the Polish Underground State.[43] Their numbers, strength and influence was, of course, much less in comparison with their position during the Second World War. In both fighting on as the underground in Poland and in the Polish diaspora, the Polish Government-in-Exile remained convinced for a very long time that, as a consequence of the polarization of the balance of power in Europe and the world, the outbreak of a Third World War was inevitable,

43 Jan Żaryn, *Taniec na linie, nad przepaścią. Organizacja Polska na wychodźstwie i jej łączność z krajem w latach 1945-1955* [Dancing on the rope, over the precipice. The Polish Organization in Exile and its liaison with the country in 1945-1955]. Warsaw 2011.

the result of which would be Poland securing the opportunity to regain independence in the territory which had lain within its pre-1939 borders.

A completely different position was represented by Polish intellectual milieu centered on the leading Polish émigré literary-political magazine, *Kultura*. This was published from 1947 to 2000 by *Instytut Literacki* (the Literary Institute), initially in Rome, then in Paris, and was edited and produced by Jerzy Giedroyc and his associates. In their view, the division of Europe into two blocks would be maintained for the foreseeable future and the task of Polish diaspora was to develop the ideological basis and strategies aimed at gradually weakening Soviet influence in Poland and facilitating fellow Poles to take over more and more areas of public life. This should be seen as a revolutionary view for its time (one developed mainly by Juliusz Mierosławski) in appealing for the acceptance of Poland's new borders in the east and recognizing the rights of Lithuanians, Byelorussians and Ukrainians to establish free and independent countries on territory which had previously belonged to Poland.[44] Their argument was based on the fact that only through cooperating with neighboring nations in the east could Poles manage to bring down the Soviet system. The discussion on this subject, which lasted many years in the pages of the monthly magazine *Kultura*, allowed a kind of *modus vivendi* on this issue to develop. The great achievement of the team at the Literary Institute was not only the publication of *Kultura*, *Zeszyty Historyczne* and hundreds of books written mainly by émigré authors but also the establishment of a network of strong connections among the most exceptional representatives of a broadly conceived culture being disseminated around the world following the Second World War. Numbering several hundred people, they included mostly Poles but also highly regarded intellectuals of other nationalities such as Albert Camus, T.S. Eliot, Emil Cioran and André Malraux, as well as Boris Pasternak, Anna Akhmatova and Alexander Solzhenitsyn.[45]

In contrast to the Polish Government-in-Exile, the members of the Parisian milieu centered on *Kultura* took the position that one needed to seek possibilities to cooperate with their countrymen in Poland, deliver publications to them being

44 Timothy Snyder, *Rekonstrukcja narodów. Polska, Ukraina, Litwa, Białoruś, 1569—1999*, Sejny 2009, pp. 247-262. English edition: *The Reconstruction of Nations. Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569 - 1999*, New Haven, Conn. *et al*., 2003.

45 See the biographical entries of those cooperating with the Literary Institute. Online at : https://kulturaparyska.com/en/people/list

Jan Karski (Jr.), who conducted courier missions to the Polish Government-in-Exile, and the chief editor Jerzy Giedroyc in the office of the magazine Kultura in Paris (Copyright Instytut Literacki)

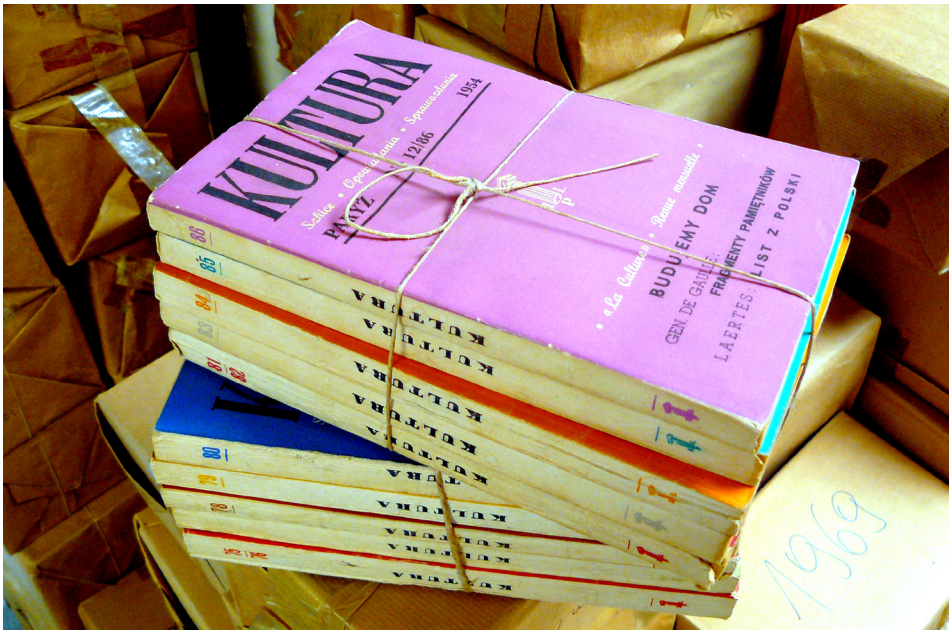
widely discussed in the Western world and, in this manner, influence the formation of democratic concepts within them, thereby supporting the development of a strategy leading to the change of Poland's political system. Beginning in the early 1950s, the office of the Literary Institute in Maisons-Laffitte became a political center conducting secret campaigns in communist countries. It was visited by very many opposition figures from the Soviet bloc, mainly from Poland, who brought information from home, in exchange for which they received publications from the institute. Among the important activities of the institute, one should also include the smuggling of *Kultura* and books for Poland published by the institute which were produced in a very small formats on special thin paper. During the 1970s and 1980s, when workers' strikes were arousing hopes of the liberation of Poland from the communist regime, *Kultura* increased its support for intellectuals at home while the strategy of recognizing the eastern border and the establishment of neighborly relations with Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine was accepted by the leading members of Solidarity and became the basis of the foreign policy of the Polish government after 1989.

Conclusions

As this article has shown, within the structures of the Polish Underground State a network of connections was established among Poles living abroad, especially those who had found themselves to be wartime refugees following September 1939. Throughout the war, the Polish Government-in-Exile had managed the activities of Polish military and civilian units operating in occupied

Polish territory, as well as abroad. It had also managed to build up a dense network of connections with members of resistance movements in other European countries. Just how this cooperation worked is shown by the example of expeditions to Western Europe of Home Army courier Kazimierz Leski and its emissary, Jan Karski. An analysis of the biographical documents of both soldiers, as well as the accounts of other witnesses and the subject literature, allows one to quite faithfully relate the specific nature and character of these exceptional and dangerous ventures. In depicting the fates of both men following the end of the war, they are presented as examples, one the one hand, of the repression which members of the Polish underground encountered from the communist authorities, and on the other, the circumstances in which those Poles who found themselves as émigrés had to live.

Moreover, the important message of this article is to point out the continued struggle for Polish independence following the end of the Second World War which was conducted both in Poland itself and in various circles of the diaspora abroad. The development during the war of a network of connections and the experience gained from working in the underground were both used in post-war operations. Insofar as the Polish underground's struggle with Polish and Soviet communists was continued during the early post-war years to a minor degree, later years took on a character focused on the building of the foundation of a political opposition. Exposed to persecution and political incarceration, Polish opposition figures maintained contact with Poles operating abroad. In outlining the various conceptions concerning the future of Poland among the diaspora, the activities of intellectuals centered around the Literary Institute in Paris deserve special attention. Taking advantage of their wartime underground experience with the aim of avoiding confrontation with Soviet security services, active in both the Soviet bloc and the West, they created the ideological and intellectual basis necessary for developing a strategy to change the political system in Poland. Thus, their polemics, critical articles and book publications were one of the main reasons why *Kultura* enjoyed an unwavering prestige not only for Poles but also for many people in Europe and worldwide.



Copies of the Kultura monthly, which was smuggled into Poland especially in the 1970s and 1980s (Copyright Instytut Literacki)

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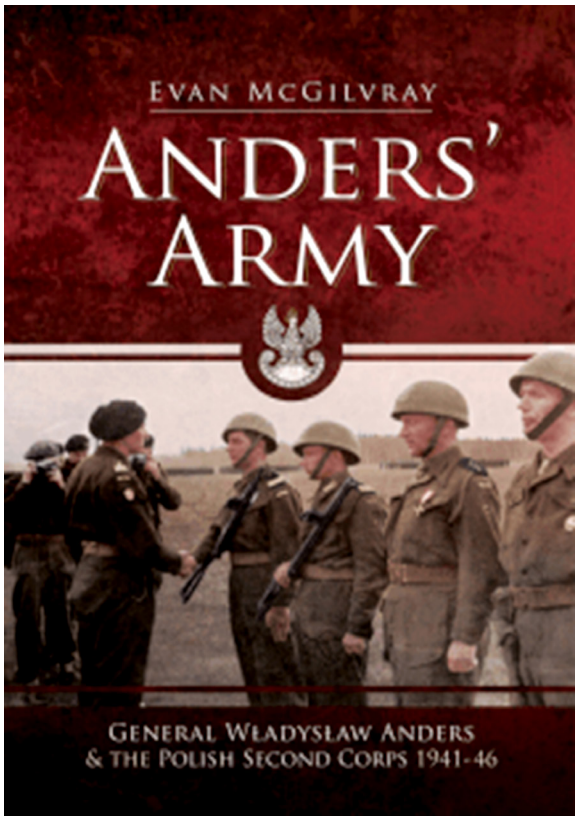

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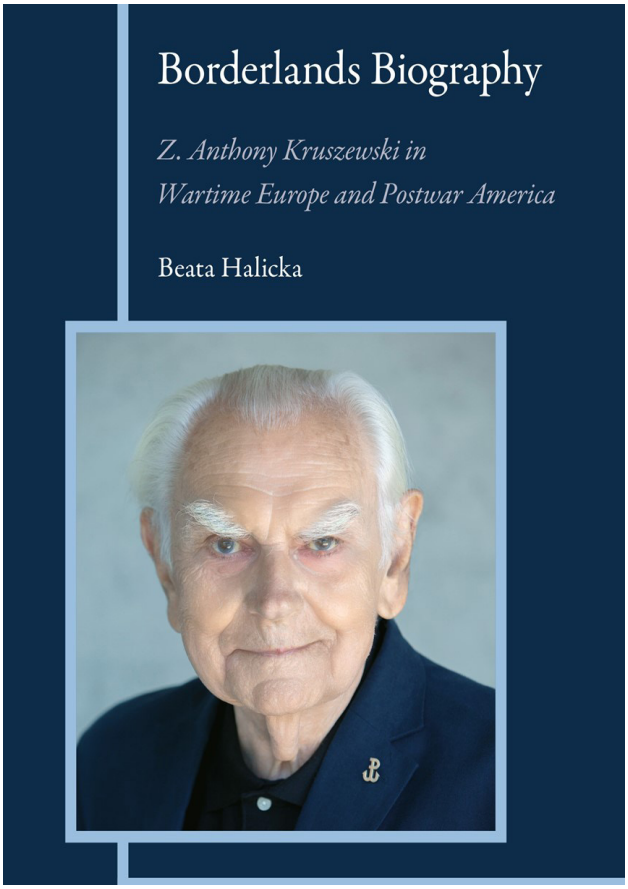

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