

**Aldona Jaworska**

## **The Case of the Second Polish Army Corps and Its Veterans Who Made Calgary, Alberta, Canada Their Home after They Finished Farm Work Contracts in the Late 1940s – Part I<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Introduction**

This article examines aspects of World War II and postwar political and economic factors, as well as immigration policies, that influenced the situation of the Polish 2nd Army Corps and its Lieutenant-General Władysław Anders. It examines diplomatic documents and relations between the Soviet Union, the United States of America, Great Britain, Poland, and Canada. It also draws on press, biographical sources, and firsthand accounts from interviews with Polish war veterans in Calgary, conducted for my Master's degrees in Communication and Culture and Drama, and for my 2019 book, *Polish War Veterans in Alberta: Four Recent Stories*. At the core of this article are three issues: *Rewriting History in Poland after World War II to Conform to the Pro-Soviet Narrative and its Impact on the Second Polish Army Corps*. Part two, *Post-War Geopolitical Make-Up of Europe*, and the Anders Army and part three, *After the War: Starting a New Life in Canada*, which will be published in a future issue of this journal.

### **The Anders' Army Veterans' Perspective on the World Events**

The author endeavours to present the situation of Anders' Army veterans, utilising information available to those veterans during and immediately

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<sup>1</sup> The next parts of the article will be published in future issues of "Polonia Inter Gentes."

after the war, including newspapers, bulletins, brochures, and other internal and external channels of communication that influenced their decisions. In presenting the lives of these veterans, the author strives to avoid the contemporary perspective that dominated the years and decades that followed, focusing instead on their daily lives and struggles, as the contemporary worldview was not available to them.

## The Sources Used

The following article refers to primary source materials little known in Poland. One of the primary sources is *An Army in Exile: The Story of the Second Polish Corps*, written by Lt.-General Władysław Anders in English and published in London in 1949. Anders offers a first-person account of his involvement in WWII. The following article uses the name of the army General Anders was in charge of, as he refers to it in his book, namely the Second Polish Army Corps<sup>2</sup>.

This article also refers to the primary source material compiled and published by the *Department of State of the United States of America, Office of the Historian, Historical Documents, Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1941, General, The Soviet Union, Volume I*<sup>3</sup>. It also refers to information from the *Documents on Canadian external relations / Department of External Affairs: Vol. 12 (1946)*, which has proven to be of great value to understand better the issue of Polish Resettlement Corps in relation to Canada's immigration policies, economic and political aspects of bringing 4,527 Anders Army war veterans to Canada to work on farms for two years, replacing the German POWs who worked there during the war<sup>4</sup>.

Moreover, it uses the archived newspapers, such as *The Times* (1946) London, the United Kingdom, *The Lethbridge Herald* (1946), Alberta, Canada, *The Calgary Herald* (1940s) *The Edmonton Journal* (1940s) and the archival photographs from the *Galt Museum and Archives* in Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada, as well as the text of the Polish Resettlement Act<sup>5</sup>. It also uses sources from

<sup>2</sup> W. Anders, *An Army in Exile: The Story of the Second Polish Corps*. London 1949, pp. 157, 161, 163.

<sup>3</sup> Noble et al., *Historical Documents, Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1941, General, The Soviet Union, Volume I*. Washington: Department of State, 1959.

<sup>4</sup> Department of External Affairs. *Documents on Canadian External Relations*, vol. 12. Ottawa: Department of External Affairs, 1946.

<sup>5</sup> Polish Resettlement Act, 1947.io & ii GEO. 6. CH. 19. (1947). Printed by Sir Norman Gibe Scorgie, C.V.O., C.B.E., Controller of His Majesty's Stationery Office and King's Printer of Acts of Parliament. Retrieved from [http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1947/19/pdfs/ukpga\\_19470019\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1947/19/pdfs/ukpga_19470019_en.pdf)

the Poles Abroad Digital Library (*Polonijna Biblioteka Cyfrowa*), namely the Polish-language newspaper *Lud* (1920–1999).

These sources have proven valuable for my research, as they provide important historical information about the Second Polish Army Corps, the circumstances related to its creation and evacuation to the Middle East, and how the Canadian government handled the case of these veterans. These sources also allowed me to understand how the post-war, Soviet sourced propaganda in Poland seeped into the history schoolbooks that painted the Second Polish Army Corps as traitors. General Anders and the veterans of this army were depicted as taking advantage of the Soviet Union's government, which supplied them with necessities. They were portrayed as having escaped to the Middle East and as refusing to return to fight alongside the Red Army to liberate Poland and Europe. These accusations were part of the history lessons I took while attending primary school and the gymnasium in the 1970s.

## **Rewriting History in Poland after World War II to Conform to the Pro-Soviet Narrative and its Impact on the Second Polish Army Corps**

The 2010 Zbigniew Osiński's *Nauczanie Historii W Szkołach Podstawowych W Polsce W Latach 1944–1989. Uwarunkowania Organizacyjne Oraz Ideologiczno-Polityczne*, is a monograph examining "the place of history in the curriculum" in primary schools in Poland between 1944 and 1989<sup>6</sup>. Osiński highlights that after WWII, in the Polish People's Republic, the government used primary school education as a venue to promote Marxist-Leninist communist ideology<sup>7</sup>. History was taught using altered accounts of the past to promote friendship between Poland, which had become part of the Eastern Bloc, and the Soviet Union, which led it. The Polish government made every effort to erase information about the September 17, 1939, attacks of the USSR's Red Army on Poland's eastern territories after the German Army's invasion on September 1, 1939. The post-war Polish government depicted the country's defeat as the result of the pre-war government's anti-Soviet foreign policy. Moreover, Poland's liberation by the Red Army in 1945 was presented

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<sup>6</sup> Z. Osiński, *Nauczanie Historii w Szkołach Podstawowych w Polsce w Latach 1944–1989. Uwarunkowania Organizacyjne oraz Ideologiczno-Polityczne*, Warszawa 2010, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

from the perspective of Polish-Soviet brotherhood<sup>8</sup>. This version of historical events became the official, government-imposed history of Poland and was reflected in every aspect of education and culture. Such a manufactured history of WWII was taught in Polish schools until the fall of communism in the Soviet Union in 1990.

It wasn't until after several decades of moving to Canada that I learned many historical facts involving Soviet-Polish relations were erased from Poland's history. This realisation prompted me to search for factual information about the Red Army's attack on Poland on September 17, 1939, which contributed to the military exhaustion of the country, and which ultimately brought about the partition of Poland between Germany and the USSR. These events paved the way for the control of Poland by a Soviet-based, politically rooted totalitarianism. The post-war, pro-Soviet government of Poland erased this information from the country's history. Zbigniew Osiński states that for the first time, 1985–1986 history elementary school textbooks contained information on “the formation of General Anders' army in the USSR, the severing of Polish-Soviet relations, the emergence of pro-Soviet partisans in Poland, the activities of Polish communists in the USSR, the creation of a front in Italy and France, the Warsaw Uprising, the liberation of Polish lands, and the communist takeover of power in Poland”<sup>9</sup>. This change came too late for tens of thousands of Poles who left the country during the oppressive pro-Soviet government ruling Poland until 1990. Addressing misinformation and disinformation is vital to me, as I was educated in the post-war school system in Poland, which distorted the history of the formation of the Second Polish Army Corps and its role in the fight for freedom.

## **Growing up in Post-War Pro-Soviet Poland – Personal Experience**

As a teenager, I read many books and regularly visited the only municipal library in one of the major voivodeship cities in Poland after appointing myself the family's book-borrower, in charge of bringing home two books per person, as allowed. Each visit to the library was a celebration during which I strolled among the rows of tall bookshelves tightly packed with books. I touched the spines of every book on every shelf, read the title, and

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

skimmed the pages before making my choice. I repeated this ritual every two weeks. Many books described how Nazi Germany had invaded Poland, how they had killed millions of people in concentration camps, how the Red Army had defeated Hitler's army and liberated the world, and how Poland was rebuilt after the war with the help of the Soviet Union. Some books described the heroism of the Polish soldiers fighting alongside the Red Army to defeat the Nazi regime. The state-run television with only one channel showed WWII documentaries several times a week, bringing images of the battlefields home and highlighting the sacrifices made by the Red Army in liberating Poland.

With the new order in Europe, the pro-Soviet regime in power in Poland created a fabricated version of World War II history, reflecting Soviet guidelines. This history was to be taught to those born and living in postwar Poland, which was strictly isolated from the rest of the world.

Zbigniew Osiński emphasizes that in postwar Poland, "didactic and educational goals of an ideological nature were established, implemented throughout the school and in the teaching of individual subjects. History became the subject with the greatest number of such goals"<sup>10</sup>. He adds that many teachers in postwar Poland were "new educators" trained in the Soviet Union and from the so-called "socially advanced"<sup>11</sup>.

There were no books about the invasion of Poland by the Soviet Union that I later found out took place on September 17, 1939, or about the annexation of the eastern part of Poland by the USSR, and about the forced deportation of the Polish population to Siberia or Kazakhstan. While walking through that library, strolling among the bookcases, I never found any books or information about the II Polish Army Corps, the Battle of Monte Cassino, or General Władysław Anders. We were not taught at school about those soldiers or the events they were involved in. As a teenager, I only learned of the II Polish Army Corps when I overheard some whispering. None of this part of Poland's history was part of the school curriculum. Sharing any knowledge of Anders' soldiers was forbidden. If someone did talk about these soldiers, then that person risked being prosecuted for enticing anti-Communist propaganda, spreading false information, or treason against the country's political interests<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> A. Jaworska, *Polish War Veterans in Alberta: The Last Four Stories*, Edmonton 2019, pp. 139–140.

## Lieutenant-General Władysław Anders – Books

In post-war Poland, the government imposed silence on the contribution of General Anders and his troops in the fight for democracy and freedom in Poland. I learned decades later that books about General Anders and the Second Polish Army Corps did exist. However, these publications were not available in post-war Poland, where I was growing up. General Władysław Anders's 1949 book "*An Army in Exile - The Story of the Second Polish Corps*" was published in English in London, and, in the Polish language, in 1959, also in London. The Polish version was titled "*Bez Ostatniego Rozdziału. Wspomnienia z lat 1939–1945*" (Without the Final Chapter. Memories from 1939–1945). Not until 1989 was this book published in Poland. General Anders did not intend his book to be a memoir, but rather to tell the story of the Second Polish Corps.

Melchior Wańkowicz, War Correspondent of the Second Corps, chronicled the battles in which the Second Corps troops participated during the Italian Campaign. His work resulted in a three-volume Polish-language "*Bitwa o Monte Cassino*" (The Battle of Monte Cassino), featuring around a thousand photographs, hundreds of illustrations, and maps. The first volume of Wańkowicz's "*Bitwa o Monte Cassino*" was published in 1945 in Rome<sup>13</sup>. The second volume was published in 1946<sup>14</sup>. The final volume was published in 1947<sup>15</sup>. In 1957, this book was published in Poland in a single volume after extensive editing, with many chapters entirely excluded (Wańkowicz, 1957). The book's publisher, the Publishing House of the Ministry of National Defence (Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej), printed 30,000 copies. From around a thousand photographs and several hundred illustrations and maps in the original three volumes of Wańkowicz's book, only a fraction made it into this edited version. In my bi-weekly trips to the library, I have never come across books by Anders or Wańkowicz.

Even though the pro-Soviet Polish government treated General Anders and the Second Polish Army Corps as enemies, even traitors, for fighting for freedom and democracy in Poland, the fate of independent, free, and democratic Poland was of great importance to the Polish diaspora around the world. Starting in 1920, in Curitiba, Brazil, a weekly newspaper called

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<sup>13</sup> M. Wańkowicz, *Bitwa o Monte Cassino*, vol. 1. Rome, 1945.

<sup>14</sup> M. Wańkowicz, *Bitwa o Monte Cassino*, vol. 2. Rome, 1946.

<sup>15</sup> M. Wańkowicz, *Bitwa o Monte Cassino*, vol. 3. Rome, 1947.

“Lud” (People) was published to promote unity and patriotism among the Polish Diaspora, at a time when World War I was raging in Europe, and the Bolshevik aggressor invaded Poland<sup>16</sup>. At that time, Poland was also fighting for its independence, and Brazil was the first country to recognise Poland’s independence<sup>17</sup>. This newspaper was published in Curitiba until 1999, with the support of the Polish Diaspora in Brazil, which dated back to the 19th century.

On June 29, 1949, the “Lud” newspaper began printing weekly instalments of General Anders’ book *“Bez Ostatniego Rozdziału. Wspomnienia z lat 1939–1945”*<sup>18</sup>. Three years later, on July 23, 1952, “Lud” printed the last chapter of Anders’ book<sup>19</sup>. On December 24, 1952, a note in the “Lud” informed that Anders’ book had also been translated into Japanese, English, French, Spanish, Italian, Estonian, and Dutch, and was being prepared for publication in Latvian<sup>20</sup>. The books by Anders and Wańkowicz that I acquired for my research came from various antiquarians in Great Britain, Germany and the United States.

### Lieutenant-General Władysław Anders: An Overview

My research indicates that Lieutenant-General Władysław Anders participated in the 1939 Polish Defensive War and fought against two neighbouring belligerent aggressors, Germany and the Soviet Union. Hitler’s Army’s unprovoked and highly coordinated military attack on Poland’s northern, western and southern borders on September 1, 1939, was enabled by the August 23, 1939, Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of non-aggression between Germany and the Soviet Union. The German Army swiftly progressed to Warsaw and continued towards the country’s eastern border<sup>21</sup>. The German-Soviet secret agreement “had come as a great shock to us”, General Anders emphasised in his 1949 book *An Army in Exile – The Story of the Second Polish Corps*, published in London, where he stayed in exile<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> *Lud*, Curitiba, Brazil, 1920, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> W. Anders, *Bez ostatniego rozdziału...*, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> W. Anders, *Bez Ostatniego Rozdziału: Wspomnienia z Lat 1939–1945*. In W. Anders, *Bez Ostatniego Rozdziału: Wspomnienia z Lat 1939–1945*, 1952, p. 5, Curitiba: Lud. Retrieved from [https://pbc.uw.edu.pl/id/eprint/6412/1/Lud\\_1952\\_30.pdf](https://pbc.uw.edu.pl/id/eprint/6412/1/Lud_1952_30.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> *Lud*, Curitiba, Brazil, 1952, p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> W. Anders, *An Army in Exile...*, p. 3–6.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

General Anders pointed out that his book “relates a part only of the vast flood of events which I, as a commander of a major formation of the Polish Armed Forces, was able to witness; in which I played a part, and about which I have retained not only personal recollections but also documentary evidence”, drawing attention to the importance of his book as a firsthand account of historical events.

On September 10, 1939, General J. Rommel, who commanded the defence of Warsaw, tasked General Anders and his troops with defending the Vistula River south of Warsaw, the capital city of Poland<sup>23</sup>. On September 17, 1939, the Soviet Red Army invaded Poland’s eastern border, which General Anders describes as “violating the Polish-Soviet pact of non-aggression at the most critical moment,” and attacking “the defenceless rear of the fighting and bleeding Polish army”<sup>24</sup>. Anders describes the Soviet Army’s action as a heinous attack<sup>25</sup>. The military aggression Poland experienced from two neighbouring countries sealed the fate of the country. On September 28, 1939, Warsaw surrendered, no longer able to fight the German Army’s massive military attack. Germany and the Soviet Union partitioned Poland’s territory, demarcating the German-Soviet border along the Curzon Line. In the post-war education system in Poland, which I attended, information about the Soviet Army’s invasion and the partition of Poland was absent from history textbooks, distorting the history of World War II and erasing the Soviets’ imperialistic intentions to annexe Polish territory.

Harold Macmillan, a British statesman and Conservative politician who served as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1957 to 1963, wrote the introduction to Anders’ book. He stated that General Anders was not only a great commander but also a great patriot<sup>26</sup>. Macmillan saw the story of Anders and his troops through the lens of patriotism, perseverance, and struggles: “This Polish force, starting from the prison camps of Eastern Europe, traversed Asia, Africa, and Western Europe, only to find, at the end of so much heroism, disillusion and despair”. In 1949, Macmillan wrote, “The Polish army is still in exile”<sup>27</sup>. While reflecting on Poland’s independence, Macmillan saw it undermined and destroyed by a combination of

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> The Rt. M.P. Hon. Macmillan, H., Introduction. In W. Anders, *An Army in Exile: The story of the Second Polish Corps*, London 1949, p. XIII.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

Nazism and Communism<sup>28</sup>. However, despite those challenges, Macmillan believed that Poland would regain its freedom.

### Lieutenant-General Władysław Anders Arrest

On September 29, 1939, Lieutenant General Władysław Anders and his troops began evacuating to “Romania and Hungary, with which Poland had a treaty of alliance”, and once there, they were to “fight again for Poland, on the foreign soil, but on the Allied side”, Anders recalled<sup>29</sup>. However, their evacuation route had already been overtaken by the Soviet detachment, “specially detailed with the capture of the Polish troops”<sup>30</sup>. During the evacuation, General Anders was wounded twice in a military exchange with “a gang of soldiers and partisans”, which turned into “a shooting at point-blank range and ruthless hand-to-hand fighting”<sup>31</sup>. General Anders suffered debilitating wounds and was captured in the village of Jesionka Stasiowa by overwhelmingly large Soviet troops already on the territory of Poland<sup>32</sup>. Anders was taken to the headquarters of the Soviet Army in Stary Sambor<sup>33</sup>. There, one of the Soviet officers told General Anders the premise behind the Soviet attack on Poland, saying, “We are the good friends of the Germans, together we will fight international capitalism,” and that Poland, as an Ally of England, had to perish for that, concluding “There will never again be a Poland”<sup>34</sup>. The movements of the Polish troops trying to escape toward Hungary or Romania were being closely monitored to prevent such a plan<sup>35</sup>. The N.K.V.D. officers (The People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs) took General Anders a prisoner, and subjected him to extensive interrogations, starvation, and inhumane living conditions<sup>36</sup>. Later, Anders was moved to the Soviet Lubyanka prison, where he was under strict surveillance and not allowed to communicate with other prisoners as the identity of the prisoners was kept a secret<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. XIII-XIV.

<sup>29</sup> W. Anders, *An Army in Exile...*, p. 8–9.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 11

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>32</sup> W. Anders, *An Army in Exile...* p. 12–13.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 13, 24–26.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 25–37.

## **Lieutenant-General Władysław Anders' Appointment as the Commander of the Polish Army**

On August 4, 1941, a prison guard opened a cell in the Soviet Lubyanka prison, calling out those, “whose name here starts with the letter A? Quick, quick, come to be examined” in a manner of concealing the identities of the prisoners<sup>38</sup>. General Anders noticed that outside the cell, the assistant prison commander and the guards waited for him and even helped him walk up the stairs. Surprisingly, Anders noted, “nobody tripped me up or threw me down steps,” recalling the change in treatment<sup>39</sup>. The prison commander took General Anders to “a beautiful furnished study, full of carpets and soft armchairs.” There, Anders met Laurenti Beria, the Chief of the Soviet N.K.V.D., who informed him that a new Polish-Soviet agreement had been signed<sup>40</sup>. Under this agreement, “there would be an amnesty for all Poles, and a Polish army would be formed.” General Anders “had been appointed by the Polish authorities, with the consent of the Soviet Government, to be Commander of this army”, Beria added that he was “the most popular man amongst the Poles in Russia”. Under this Polish-Soviet agreement, Polish soldiers were subject to Polish law and military regulations, which could be seen as evidence of Poland’s self-governance. These changes in the relations between the USSR and Poland took place soon after the German Army had invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, and Joseph Stalin started looking for an ally who would help the Soviet Union to fight against the Germans. Thousands of Polish POWs taken prisoners in September 1939, and imprisoned in heavy labour camps and gulags in the remote location of the USSR, where they were working in inhumane conditions, were to be released with the intent to be drafted into the newly formed Polish army.

### **The Formation of the Polish Army on the Territory of the USSR**

The Second Polish Army Corps (August 1941 – 1947), also known as the Anders Army, was established on Soviet territory under the August 14, 1941, Polish-Russian Military Agreement. The Army took its name from the commanding Lieutenant General Władysław Anders. The newly formed

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 34–44.

Polish army comprised volunteers, most of them Polish POWs, captured during the invasion of Poland by the Soviet Red Army that started on September 17, 1939, following on the heels of the German Army's military aggression on September 1, 1939.

On August 22, 1941, General Anders was informed that the headquarters of the new Polish Army was set in Buzuluk, Orenburg Oblast, Russia; the 5th Division was stationed in Tatishchevo, Russia; and the 6th Division and the Reserve Regiment were established in Totskoye, Orenburg Oblast, Russia. The army was to be ready for battle as of October 1, 1941, just forty days after its establishment, a date General Anders saw as unlikely, given the realities. The Soviet authorities authorised an Enrollment Commission to be sent to three Polish POW camps to seek army recruits, especially Polish officers, for whom General Anders was seeking to fill upper-rank positions, as the majority of volunteers reporting to the army were lower-ranking soldiers<sup>41</sup>. General Anders stated that all new arrivals into the army were received at the Army's headquarters in Buzuluk<sup>42</sup>. When the newly released from the Soviet labour camps and prisons Polish POWs heard the news that a new Polish army was being formed to fight the Germans, thousands rushed to join. On September 14, 1941, General Anders arrived at the Totskoye camp, where the 6th Infantry Division was being formed, and he received 17,000 recruits who paraded his arrival<sup>43</sup>. General Anders saw that the Polish prisoners released from the Soviet detention camps were severely emaciated, suffered from illnesses, and had little clothing when they reported to the camps<sup>44</sup>. Yet they were eager to fight the enemy and regain Poland's freedom.

### **The Reconditioning of the Newly Formed Polish Troops**

Considering the challenges of reconditioning and arming the newly formed Polish Army Corps, the Secretary of State to the Ambassador in the Soviet Union, Steinhardt, in a telegram intended for Stalin, dated Washington, November 7, 1941, P.M., noted, "From Harriman for Mr Stalin. The problem of the most efficacious method of employing unarmed Polish troops now on Russian soil is one that has had deep attention and after consultation with the President and at his suggestion," stated the following,

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 60-70.

Our suggestion is that these Polish forces, not only with the agreement of but likewise with the assistance of the U. S. S. R. Government be assembled and withdrawn to a designated area in Iran. There, with American and British aid, these Polish nationals might be most quickly reconditioned, uniformed, and armed to the end that with the greatest possible expedition they become a part of the fighting forces in the expectation they be returned to the Soviet Russian front<sup>45</sup>.

The message clearly states the intentions of the governments of the United States and Great Britain in lending a helping hand to the newly formed Polish troops on Soviet territory. It needs to be noted that this telegram bore all hallmarks of the best intentions to follow through on them as it was approved "by the Under Secretary of State, Mr. Welles; the Lend-Lease Administrator, Edward R. Stettinius, Jr.; the Special Representative of the President, W. Averell Harriman; the Executive Officer, Division of Defense Aid Reports, Office for Emergency Management, Maj. Gen. James H. Burns, and by the British Embassy after cabling the text to Prime Minister Churchill"<sup>46</sup>.

When I was growing up in pro-Soviet Poland, a government-backed propagandist view claimed that General Anders intended to use funds provided by Stalin in the form of a loan to equip and move the army to the Middle East, but to never return to the Soviet Union. Thus, pointing out that General Anders and the Polish Government-in-Exile betrayed their previous military commitments, refusing to fight on the Soviet front to support the Red Army in the fight against the Nazis, and also refused to honour their financial commitments, not only leaving the post-war Polish government to pay off its debts but also putting the nation in hardship.

A November 17, 1941, Memorandum by the Polish Ambassador Ciechanowski, based on information from the Polish Ambassador in the Soviet Union, was sent to the Polish Foreign Office in London. The note outlined the challenges faced by those seeking to join the Polish army. Ciechanowski noted that thousands were still "held in prisons, concentration camps and camps of compulsory labour" although Stalin declared an amnesty on July 30, 1941<sup>47</sup>. Ambassador Ciechanowski informed that the Polish government

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<sup>45</sup> Steinhart (1941, November 7). 860C.20/90a: Telegram The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Steinhart). Retrieved from The Office of the Historian: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1941v01/d270>

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> A. Ciechanowski (1941, November 17). 760C.61/976 *Memorandum by the Polish Ambassador (Ciechanowski)*. Retrieved from <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1941v01/d275>

had no funds to finance the transportation of so many people, "who have been deported to Russia against their will by the Soviet Government," adding that "the Polish authorities suggested that an appropriate credit or loan to that effect be granted to the Polish Government by the Soviet Government." However, "So far, no answer has been received to this suggestion." Despite these challenges, the Polish people's will and resolve to join the army were strong. Ciechanowski added that "As a result of recent war developments in Russia, a new migration of Polish people is taking place southward. All these Poles are completely destitute, without any means of subsistence and receive no assistance from the Soviet authorities"<sup>48</sup>. The memorandum was sent to President Roosevelt as requested by the Polish Ambassador in the Soviet Union. Despite the hardships these men endured, they remained in good spirits and were willing to fight for the freedom of their homeland, General Anders noted. Over time, the Polish army grew to its highest number, with over 110,000 volunteers answering the call of Lieutenant General Władysław Anders to fight for Poland's freedom.

Having conducted personal research and interviews with soldiers of the Polish II Corps who joined Anders' Army, formed on the territory of the Soviet Union, and who later evacuated to the Middle East and took part in the Battle of Monte Cassino and the Italian Campaign, I do not doubt that these soldiers were motivated by fighting for the highest good of the country and regaining independence.

### **The Hardships of Winter 1941**

In December 1941, the temperature fell to minus 52 degrees centigrade<sup>49</sup>. The challenges of harsh winter conditions caused many Poles who joined the Anders Army stationed near Kuybyshev and Buzuluk to fall ill or die from cold, malnutrition, illnesses, and the lack of clothing, which caused many to freeze to death in their tents in the forest camps. General Anders reported to Commander-in-Chief Władysław Sikorski that the troops were "accommodated under very bad conditions, that food was inadequate and that the Soviets demanded that the army be reduced to 30,000". General Anders was concerned that Stalin's request to reduce the size of the army

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> W. Anders, *An Army in Exile...*, p. 94.

“would mean the death by starvation for the rest,” as they would not be eligible for the food rations<sup>50</sup>.

### **Request to Move the Polish Army to the Middle East for Recuperation**

Facing the growing challenges of creating an army that was expected to be ready for combat in a short time, General Anders suggested to General Władysław Sikorski, “moving the army and the masses of refugees to the Middle East”<sup>51</sup>. Despite initial objection to this idea, General Sikorski presented this proposal to Joseph Stalin during a meeting on December 3, 1941, in which General Anders also participated<sup>52</sup>. During the meeting, General Sikorski raised the issue of opening the second front and the challenges posed by the transfer of a large army across the channel<sup>53</sup>. Sikorski also brought forth the issue of the 4000 Polish officers still missing despite the amnesty and the release of Poles from the labour camps and prisons, and the need for increasing the supplies for the Polish army<sup>54</sup>. While discussing the issue of inadequate supplies for the army hinderring the efforts to prepare it for the military operations, General Anders recalled General Władysław Sikorski, saying to Stalin, “I propose that the whole Army and all men fit for service be moved, for example, to Persia, where the climate and the promised British assistance will make it possible for the men to recover in a comparatively short time. A strong army could be formed, which could then return to Russia to take up the Russian front”<sup>55</sup>.

Furthermore, General Sikorski affirmed to Stalin, “For my part, I wish to declare that the army would return to the Russian front and that some British divisions might even reinforce it” General Anders recalled him saying<sup>56</sup>. General Sikorski’s proposal to Stalin reflected an earlier correspondence between the Special Representative of the President of the United

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 83–87.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 84–88.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 86–87.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

States and the US Ambassador to the Soviet Union<sup>57</sup>. In his brief to Laurence A. Steinhardt, the Secretary of State to the Ambassador in the Soviet Union, Hull refers to a communique from Harriman that was to be passed to Mr. Stalin, addressing the challenges, suggesting,

that these Polish forces not only with the agreement of but likewise with the assistance of the USSR Government be assembled and withdrawn to a designated area in Iran. There, with American and British aid, these Polish nationals might be most quickly reconditioned, uniformed, and armed to the end that with the greatest possible expedition they become a part of the fighting forces in the expectation they be returned to the Soviet Russian front<sup>58</sup>.

This meeting resulted in the signing of the Stalin-Sikorski Declaration of December 04, 1941<sup>59</sup>. The Meeting's Declaration stated that

'German Hitlerite Imperialism' was the worst enemy of humanity, and both countries would fight until final victory; each country would give the other full military support and that the Polish armed forces in Soviet territory would fight side by side with the Soviet Army; that peace-time relations would be based on peaceful neighbourly co-operation and the observance of mutual obligations<sup>60</sup>.

Henderson, the Assistant Chief of the Division of European Affairs, noted in a memorandum to Washington that "The Polish Government for its part was doing everything which it honourably could do to improve its relations with the Soviet Union"<sup>61</sup>. Henderson also noted that the Polish government was concerned with Stalin's "endeavour to extract territorial and other concessions, some of which, if given, would probably be at the expense of Poland". The December 4, 1941, Declaration was published in the Soviet Union's *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* newspapers on December 5, as noted in

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<sup>57</sup> Hull. (1941, November 7). 860C.20/90a: *Telegram The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Steinhardt)*. Retrieved June 15, 2017, from Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1941, General, The Soviet Union, Volume I: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1941v01/d270>

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> W. Anders, *An Army in Exile...*, p. 90.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Henderson. (1941, December 29). 740.0011 *European War 1939/18567; Memorandum of Conversation, by the Assistant Chief of the Division of European Affairs (Henderson)*. Retrieved from The Office of the Historian: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1941v01/d283>

a telegram by the Chargé in the Soviet Union, Thurston, to the Secretary of State<sup>62</sup>.

## The Evacuation of the Polish Army to the Middle East

After long drawn negotiations, on July 8, 1942, General Anders received a letter from General Zubov stating, "The Government of the USSR agrees to the request of the Commander-in-Chief Polish Army in USSR, Lt.-Gen. Anders, concerning the evacuation of Polish units from USSR to the Middle East and does not intend to put any obstacles in the way of the immediate carrying out of that evacuation," General Anders cites an urgent message from Moscow Ref. 2651/1224 in his book<sup>63</sup>. Under this agreement, 70,000 Poles were to be evacuated from Russia to the Middle East. However, "the Russians wanted to exclude from those allowed to leave the Ukrainians, White Ruthenians, and, especially, the Jews in our ranks", Anders highlighted<sup>64</sup>. Though General Anders' intervention resulted in changing the decision of the Soviet government, allowing those Jewish families that had members in active service in the Polish Army to evacuate. As a result, "about 4000 Jews left Russia with the Polish army"<sup>65</sup>.

The evacuation of the Polish Army from the USSR to Persia, where they were to recuperate and undergo military training, was underway<sup>66</sup>. General Anders noted that about 115,000 left Russia for the Middle East; however, according to his estimates, those deported and detained by Russia at the beginning of the war amounted to about half a million, and he was concerned about the fate of those left behind. Anders considered that half of them died, and those who survived "survived by a miracle"<sup>67</sup>. General Anders saw the challenges the Soviet Union mounted against thousands of Poles who wanted to join the Polish army, where they were to be prepared for the front where they were to fight against the Germans, as expectations that "the for-

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<sup>62</sup> Thurston. (1941, December 6). 760C.61/977: *Telegram; The Chargé in the Soviet Union (Thurston) to the Secretary of State*. Retrieved from The Office of the Historian: [https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1941v01/pg\\_266](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1941v01/pg_266)

<sup>63</sup> W. Anders, *An Army in Exile...*, p. 112.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

mer inmates of concentration camps would lose their faith in God and in the resurrection of their country"<sup>68</sup>.

Listening firsthand to the accounts of Anders Army veterans, I witnessed their strong faith in God, which not only drove them to fight for Poland's freedom but also to continue supporting this cause while exiled in Canada<sup>69</sup>.

### **The Deterioration of the Relationship between the Soviet and Polish Governments**

September 1, 1942, proved to be the last transport of the Polish Army to the Middle East, leaving behind thousands of Poles stranded in the Soviet Union. The relationship between the Soviet and Polish governments continued to deteriorate when in October 1942, the Soviet Union sent a note to the Polish Government-in-Exile, Foreign Minister, Count E. Raczyński that they are "definitively refusing to allow any further enlistment in the Polish army of Poles remaining in the Soviet Union" accusing Poland of "having purposely and without reason refused to send Polish troops to the front, thus breaking the military agreement of August 14, 1941"<sup>70</sup>. On January 16, 1943, the Soviet government communicated to the Polish Government-in-Exile that "all Poles remaining in the Soviet Union and originating from the provinces under Soviet occupation would be considered Soviet subjects"<sup>71</sup>.

### **The Breaking of the Polish-Soviet Relationship over the Katyń Discovery**

On April 25, 1943, Joseph Stalin broke off diplomatic relations with the Polish Government-in-Exile over Poland's request that the Red Cross investigate mass graves of the Polish officers murdered in Katyń<sup>72</sup>. Stalin's decision was related to the Germans' claim of April 13, 1943, "that they'd found a mass grave with the bodies of thousands of Polish officers in Katyn (Katyń), near Smolensk, an area they'd occupied only from October 1941

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 117.

<sup>69</sup> A. Jaworska, op. cit., pp. 100, 116.

<sup>70</sup> W. Anders, *An Army in Exile...*, p. 134.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

until March 1943, and so did not want to take responsibility for such atrocities". Polish Government-in-Exile appealed for a Red Cross investigation, as according to General Anders, Poland had reasons to believe the information about the mass graves discovered by the Germans because Polish representatives in the Soviet Union had been unable to locate a large number of the high-ranking Polish officers captured during the Soviet invasion in September 1939<sup>73</sup>.

With no viable possibility to return to the Soviet Union, the II Polish Army Corps, under the command of General Władysław Anders, became a part of the Polish armed forces supporting the Allies in the West.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., pp. 140–149.

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