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“Our Sacred Duty”: Poland’s Diaspora Fights for Polish Independence, 1894–1921

Keywords: Bayonne Legion, Blue Army, Roman Dmowski, Józef Haller, Józef Piłsudski, Polish Army in France, Polish-Soviet War, Polish-Ukrainian War, World War

Słowa kluczowe: Legion Bajończyków, Błękitna Armia, Roman Dmowski, Józef Haller, Józef Piłsudski, Polska Armia we Francji, wojna polsko-rosyjska, wojna polsko-ukraińska, I wojna światowa

The dictionary defines “loyalty” as a strong feeling of support or allegiance. Through more than a century of occupation of their homeland by foreign powers, Polish people worked to regain their independence. When a series of failed revolutions and political suppressions sent waves of political exiles abroad, the diaspora remained loyal to the cause of Polish independence whether its members resided in Europe, South America, or anywhere else. In the United States, exiles formed the Democratic Society of Polish Exiles in America to communicate among themselves and with Polish revolutionary leaders in Europe. When the mass economic migration of Poles to America began in the 1870s, they also formed organizations based on their affinity for their native land and its various regions. In any immigrant community of any size, Poles organized commemorations of Polish national holidays and historical events, determined to preserve their heritage. They also began founding Polish language newspapers, one of the functions of which was to keep the diaspora community apprised of current events in Poland.

Along with maintaining a sense of Polishness (*Polskość*) and dissemination of news, Polish diasporic organizations also collected funds and in other ways loyally attempted to assist their fellow Poles in Europe. For example, on the centennial anniversary of the Constitution of the Third of May in 1894 *Dziennik Chicagoski* informed its readers that Poles must adopt the “principle of self-reliance” which included “the duty of making contributions toward the national cause” by donating to the Polish National Fund (*Skarb Narodowy*)¹.

¹ *Dziennik Chicagoski* (23 IV 1894). Unless otherwise noted, translations from the Polish language press are from the Chicago Foreign Language Press Survey, sponsored by the Depression-era Works Progress Administration.

Let everyone do whatever he can according to his ability. The strength of a nation can be compared to the strength of a chain—it depends on the individuals as the chain depends on the single links. Poland has no boundary lines of her own; she has only three enemies, and one aim— independence. In order to attain this goal, we must unite. Let us sow good seed so that we can have a good harvest. [...] Poles! From now on, let there be no differences among us, let us be brothers, sons of one fatherland. The past should inspire us with faith, hope, and love. [...] True Polish nationality should awaken in every one of you. Only those who are willing to die should fight. Let us die, if necessary, for truth, for freedom, for progress. We shall not die in vain, but in fulfilling the mission allotted to us by God. Let us stand by the testament of our fathers—the Constitution of the Third of May².

When news of the unrest in 1905 arrived, the Polish National Alliance immediately adopted a resolution of concern and support: “We, Polish men and women, born in the territories of the old Polish republic, Lithuania and Ruthenia, and sons and daughters of immigrants from those territories, born in or naturalized citizens of this country, deeply moved by the news coming from that land of tears and despair, a land with which we are linked by blood, common language, faith, culture and heart, unite spiritually with the fighting and suffering Polish nation in the territories of the Polish Kingdom and pay our highest respects to our compatriots”³.

Nor was it only the nationwide ethnic organizations that reacted. A miner’s union in the area around Shamokin, Pennsylvania, issued a resolution through the pages of *Ameryka-Echo* announcing a donation for Poland and calling on people to “follow in our example and bring help to our brothers who are fighting for the faith, the language and the existence of our fatherland”⁴. Soon after, “An Appeal to the Whole Community” appeared in the same newspaper calling on readers to actively demonstrate their continuing loyalty to Poland:

There, in our country, the blood of our people is pouring for almost a year, of people who decided at all costs to throw off the shameful fetters of slavery which have been suffocating us for over 110 years and which forced so many among us to take the wanderer’s bag to find a better existence in foreign lands, even beyond the ocean. However heroic and even unceasing in the face of Muscovite superior power is the struggle of our brothers, it still needs to be supported and strengthened from abroad. From this the obligations clearly flow which weigh upon us here. We must help our country if we do not want everyone to have the right to throw in our faces with contempt: you are slaves and you completely deserve it!⁵

² *Dziennik Chicagoski* (16 V 1891).

³ Quoted in Andrzej Brożek, *Polish Americans 1854–1939* (Warsaw: Interpress, 1985), 133.

⁴ *Letters from Readers in the Polish American Press, 1902–1969 A Corner for Everybody*, ed., transl. Anna D. Jaroszyńska-Kirchmann, transl. Theodore L. Zawistowski (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), 477; “Miners Union Resolution”, *Ameryka-Echo* (6 V 1905): 6.

⁵ Jaroszyńska-Kirchmann, *Letters from Readers*, 477–78; “An Appeal to the Whole Community”, *Ameryka-Echo* (19 VIII 1905): 5.

Similar expressions of loyalty appeared throughout the immigrant communities and continued into the following years. With the threat of a European war looming on the horizon, efforts to assist Poland took on a new urgency. In 1912, led by Teofil Starzyński, the Polish Falcons opened a military training program at St. John’s College in Philadelphia, a course it expanded two years later into an officer training curriculum housed at the Polish National Alliance college at Cambridge Springs, Pennsylvania. During its brief existence before American entry into World War I it produced 389 officer candidates despite the fact that enrolling in the program required considerable sacrifice. The program cost was underwritten by the PNA and the Falcons; however cadets were required to pay \$14 per month for room and board, to provide their own uniform, and to pay their own expenses to and from the college. The average expense for the three-month program could run to \$150, a significant amount of money in an era when an average worker earned 22¢ per hour and an annual wage of between \$200 and \$400⁶.

“We all expect a great deal from the Military School”, *Dziennik Związkowy* informed its readers.

We cherish the firm belief that with the continued generosity of our immigrants this school will fully answer its purpose by sending forth at proper intervals new corps of soldier-citizens who will love their country above all else, who will be ready to sacrifice their lives for it, and who will be loyal and determined champions of the Falcon ideal—the ideal of the physical and spiritual rebirth of the nation [Poland]. [...] The school [...] will repay our immigrants by training new groups of soldier citizens, real Polish knights capable of organizing millions of fearless champions, men who will know how to establish and keep in their entirety the boundaries of the future united and independent Poland free from all foreign protectorates⁷.

In 1913, a popular activity in many immigrant communities was observation of the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of the January Insurrection in 1863. The *Buffalo Sunday Morning News* reported that: “No celebration in local Polish circles has ever aroused the enthusiasm which today’s event has among them. In every section of the Polish settlement business blocks and dwellings are decorated with American flags and those of Poland. Old Glory and the red flag bearing a white eagle are waving gloriously in little Poland”⁸. In May of the same year, Poles gathered for their annual

⁶ Stanley R. Pliska, “The ‘Polish American Army’ 1917–1921”, *The Polish Review* X (Summer 1965): 50–51, 204; Stanley R. Pliska, *Polish Independence and the Polish Americans* (New York: Ed.D. Research Project, Columbia University, 1955), 210; Kathleen Urbanic, *Shoulder to Shoulder: Polish Americans in Rochester, NY 1809–1990* (Rochester, NY: Kathleen Urbanic, 1991), 64.

⁷ “Polish Falcons’ Officers Training School”, *Dziennik Związkowy* (19 III 1917); Paul S. Valasek, *Haller’s Polish Army in France*, vol. II (Opole: Wydawnictwo i Drukarnia Świętego Krzyża, 2019), 47.

⁸ Carl Bucki, “Response on the Home Front: How Buffalo’s Polish Community Supported the Allied Cause During World War I”, *Rocznik Przemyski* 55/3 (2019): 83–84; “Poles to Pay Tribute to Heroes Today”, *Buffalo Sunday Morning News* (9 II 1913): 42.

commemoration of the Constitution of the Third of May. The festivities were so well attended they had to be held in three separate locations. An editorial in the *Buffalo Enquirer* opined that: “In no hearts does the pulsation of patriotism beat with greater sincerity than in the hearts of those sons and daughters of Poland who yearly celebrate the anniversary of the adoption of their constitution”⁹.

An editorial in *Kuryer Polski* in January 1914 called for creation of a national political organization, reminding readers that “The Polish nation does not have an independent country, but it has freedom for political activity in the emigration” and because “the American emigration has the greatest freedom, it can therefore do the most”¹⁰. Within months, the outbreak of World War I, with its terrible consequences for Polish lands, made the organization of the Polish diaspora of critical importance if it were to assist the homeland. Throughout the United States, in large cities and small towns, Poles intensified their efforts to show their loyalty to their homeland. Typical was the village of Batavia, in western New York, where organizers collected donations for the people suffering in Poland, sponsored a parade to promote public awareness, and reserved Elliott Hall for an evening of speeches by Polish leaders and public officials from around the region. Some 156 miles to the east, a meeting convened in the small Utica suburb of New York Mills with the local Polish newspaper *Słowo Polskie* announcing “All, for whom the good of Poland touches the heart, should find themselves at the hall”. An estimated crowd of 500 overwhelmed the meeting place to hear speakers urge support for their native land. They formed a committee to raise funds and solicit donations of clothing, medical supplies, and other articles of support for war victims in Poland, and despite the meager wages earned in the local textile mills the community contributed thousands of dollars to Polish relief¹¹.

When the *New York Times* announced in August 1915 that German troops had occupied Warsaw, it informed readers that as many as 4.5 million people had been dislocated by advancing German and Austrian armies, commenting that “from the Vistula to the Bug [Rivers] stretch desolation and misery”¹². Once again, Polish diaspora communities demonstrated their loyalty to their homeland with rallies and fund raising events. Poles in Buffalo organized a major rally in the ironically named Teutonia Park. A local newspaper reported that “the object of this demonstration

⁹ Bucki, “Response on the Home Front”, 84; “Poles Celebrate Anniversary”, *Buffalo Enquirer* (5 V 1913): 6; “Buffalo’s Polish Celebration”, *Buffalo Enquirer* (5 V 1913): 4.

¹⁰ William J. Galush, *For More Than Bread: Community and Identity in American Polonia, 1880–1940* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 2006), 134.

¹¹ “Batavia Poles Heard Speakers. Relief Day Observed With Requiem Services, Parade And Program Plea For War Sufferers”, *Daily News* [Batavia, NY] (18 X 1915); Valasek, *Haller’s Polish Army*, vol. II, 44; *Słowo Polskie* (29 V 1913): 5; *ibidem* (26 VI 1913): 5; interview of Józef Piszcz by Eugene and Michael Dziedzic, 17 VIII 1981, in the author’s possession.

¹² “4,000 Killed Crossing Bug”, *New York Times* (17 VIII 1915): 2; Valasek, *Haller’s Polish Army*, vol. II, 84.

was to make protest against atrocities committed on Poles in Europe". Despite the short notice and inclement weather, some 25,000 people attended¹³.

Nor was it only sympathy they were prepared to offer. In Philadelphia, hundreds flocked to the military training programs established by the Falcons. The *Evening Ledger* explained: "Twelve hundred Polish Falcons, residents of Philadelphia, are undergoing grueling military drill twice every week and field maneuvers once each month, awaiting the moment when the national body may be called to arms to fight for the freedom of Poland. This is not the drilling of an 'awkward squad,' but the expert drilling of uniformed and armed soldiers, who are keeping strict military training, hoping that the freedom of their Fatherland may be accomplished peacefully, but determined to fight to the end if it cannot"¹⁴. One of the Falcons, P. Wąsowicz, explained that: "Every one of us is ready to return to fight; after that we stay as long as our country needs us—perhaps some stay after that and some return. Anyway, the life of every Falcon belongs to the Fatherland—that is all that matters, and if he dies, each one wants to die fighting for the freedom" of the homeland¹⁵.

However, before the North American diaspora could actively join the fight on Europe's battlefields, the diaspora communities spread about Western Europe were the first to answer their homeland's call.

The Bayonne Legion

On July 28, 1914, Europe went to war. Before it ended on November 11, 1918, over 9,911,000 combatants were dead along with some 7,700,000 civilians. Another 21,220,000 had been wounded or disabled, with untold thousands missing. For Poland, the tragedy was particularly heartbreaking. Partitioned as it was between three nations, two of which were at war with the other, Poles were conscripted into the armies of each belligerent only to end up fighting one another. "Look at my family", wrote Count Józef Potocki. "I am a Russian subject; my brother Roman is an Austrian subject; one of my brothers-in-law is a German subject; all of my cousins and nephews, because of circumstances of inheritance, are likewise divided among the three nations. In the bosom of the same race we are condemned to kill each other"¹⁶. Nor were civilians unaffected by the ravages of war. For nearly

¹³ "Big Demonstration for Relief of Poles", *The Buffalo Enquirer* (9 VIII 1915): 3; "25,000 Poles Honor Polish Army", *Dziennik Związkowy* (15 X 1917); Valasek, *Haller's Polish Army*, vol. II, 87.

¹⁴ "Polish Falcons Ready To Fight For Fatherland: Twelve Hundred in This City Drill Twice a Week, Forty Thousand in America Await Call to Battle", *Philadelphia Evening Ledger* (6 XI 1914); Valasek, *Haller's Polish Army*, vol. II, 39.

¹⁵ "Polish Falcons Ready to Fight for Fatherland", *Evening Ledger* [Philadelphia] (6 XI 1914); Valasek, *Haller's Polish Army*, vol. II, 42.

¹⁶ Quote in Arthur J. May, *The Passing of the Hapsburg Monarchy 1914-1918*, vol. I (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1966), 366. Polish estimates on the number of Poles in the

four long years fighting took place throughout Polish territory, destroying farms, burning crops, razing villages, and leaving death and disability in its wake. It was a tragedy beyond comprehension.

Despite the inferno enveloping Europe, some Poles saw in the chaos an opportunity to raise again the question of Polish independence. Gen. Józef Piłsudski, believing that only the defeat of Russia could lead to recreation of a sovereign Polish nation, formed his Polish Legions to fight under Austrian command. But, aside from Piłsudski's Legions or the hundreds of thousands of Poles drafted into the armies of the belligerents, there was a vast potential support for Poland among its loyal diaspora living abroad. Geoffrey Drage estimated the Poles living outside the Austrian, German, and Russian empires in 1910 to include about 100,000 in other European nations, 100,000 in South America, 3,100,000 in North America, and 30,000 residing elsewhere around the world. Together, these amounted to 3,330,000 people¹⁷. If they could be harnessed in support of their homeland, they would be a valuable resource.

In France, author Waclaw Gąsiorowski took the lead in organizing fellow émigrés loyal to their ancestral land. On August 21, 1914, less than a month after the beginning of the war, the French government agreed to enlist foreign volunteers into the French army. They would be maintained at French expense, wear French uniforms and be outfitted with French equipment, but be allowed to have their own colors and uniform insignia. With this official sanction, Gąsiorowski's efforts led to the enlistment of about 1,000 volunteers into a unit labeled the "Bayonne Legion" since it organized and trained in that area and the citizens of Bayonne provided it with Polish national colors. Polish-speaking officers from the French army transferred into the unit to provide experienced leadership. When formed, the Legion mustered into the French army as the 1st Regiment of the Foreign Legion and was assigned to the 1st Moroccan Division¹⁸.

The "Bajonczycy", as they came to be called by the Poles, went to the front with their division in late April 1915, assigned to the Arras sector where the high command anticipated a German offensive. On May 9, they participated in an assault on Vimy Ridge where they successfully captured four lines of German trenches in less than two hours but suffered heavy casualties in the process. In recognition

different partitions were: 17,702,200 in the Russian partition, 5,417,000 in the Austrian partition, and 4,751,000 in the German partition. However, these include people of Polish ethnicity living outside traditional Polish lands. See Paul S. Valasek, *Haller's Polish Army in France*, vol. I (Naples, FL: Whitehall Printing, 2006), 390–91.

¹⁷ Geoffrey Drage, "Pre-War Statistics of Poland and Lithuania", *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 81/2 (March 1918): 235.

¹⁸ David Thomas Ruskoski, "The Polish Army in France: Immigrants in America, World War I Volunteers in France, Defenders of the Recreated State in Poland", Ph.D. dissertation (Atlanta, GA: Georgia State University, 2006), 30; Stefan Wyczółkowski, "Outline of the Wartime History of the 43rd Regiment of the Eastern Frontier Riflemen", transl. in Valasek, *Haller's Polish Army*, vol. I, 154.

of its exceptional efforts, the French commended the Bayonne Legion in official reports and French President Raymond Poincaré personally decorated the Legion's colors with the *Croix de Guerre* with palm. Moved to the vicinity of Reims in Champagne, on June 16–17 the Legion fought a brutal battle near Nôtre-Dame de Lorette, again suffering very heavy casualties in an assault on the town of Souchez. By the time it was withdrawn from the front its total losses reached a crippling 75 percent. At the end of the war its colors were decorated with the *Virtuti Militari* in recognition of its loyalty and sacrifices in support of Poland¹⁹.

From Cambridge Springs to Camp Kościuszko

A sizeable portion of the Polish immigrants arriving in the United States between 1830 and 1870 left their homeland as political refugees from failed revolutions in 1830–1831, 1846–1848, and 1863–1864. Although often forced to move about for employment, they nevertheless organized themselves and loyally maintained contact with Polish exile groups in Europe in the hope of continuing to work for the cause of Poland. When the mass migration began in the 1870s, many immigrants who came to America for economic reasons still maintained an attachment to their native land. The organizations these groups formed, especially the Polish National Alliance (1880) and the Falcons (1887), had as a priority working for Polish independence. As early as 1905 the Falcons demonstrated their loyalty to Poland by initiating paramilitary training for its members, while other groups began collecting funds for the homeland and in other ways attempting to assist those left behind²⁰.

Less than a month after the war began, *Dziennik Związkowy* announced a resolution by the Polish National Alliance Board of Directors "To mobilize the P.N.A. in all the colonies and settlements in the United States and to call upon the members of the Alliance to begin active work for the cause of Poland's independence". To assist, it created a Department of Independence to coordinate and oversee the work of the P.N.A.'s local organizations²¹. The following month the same newspaper reported that the Polish Women's Alliance had adopted a resolution at its annual convention appealing for "Poland's best sons to take up action for freeing the homeland from the chains of subjection. [...] In the name of the most sacred cause of Poland's independence, dear to every Polish heart, we appeal to all Polish organizations in America and to all of our emigrants in general, to forget at once, all differences of opinion organizational rivalry, and partisanship; to offer

¹⁹ Wyczółkowski, "43rd Regiment", 154–56.

²⁰ Donald E. Pienkos, *One Hundred Years Young: A History of the Polish Falcons of America, 1887–1987* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1987), 91; Stanley R. Pliska, "The Polish American Community and the Rebirth of Poland", *Polish American Studies* 26/1 (Jan.–June 1969): 42, 47.

²¹ *Dziennik Związkowy* (24 VIII 1914).

each other a fraternal handclasp; and to unite to form a central national government and treasury among the emigrants for the purpose of beginning immediate, energetic action for the cause of Poland's independence"²².

Dziennik Związkowy also attempted to persuade its readers to use the power of the ballot box in support of the cause of Poland. "Here in free America our votes as citizens now are our weapons. At the present time we must increase in every possible way our influence and strength in Chicago, as well as in other localities. Therefore the greater the army of countrymen taking part in the elections in Chicago and other localities, the greater will Polish influence be in official circles. The greater the number of Poles voting with the citizenry here, the stronger the influence we shall exert, whether it be in matters concerning our brethren and our nation across the sea or whether it be in matters affecting public opinion here in America. Further, the more proof we offer that we are taking part in civic activities here and that we recognize the importance of participating in elections for the good of both the Country and the people, the greater the support which the cause of Polish independence and freedom will receive in the negotiations which will follow the present war and the greater will be our chance of success. The power and influence of the Poles in America depend in a great measure on the number and the active use of Polish votes"²³.

The Polish Falcons went even further. Teofil Starzyński, president of the Falcons, journeyed to Canada in an attempt to interest its government into creating a military unit from Polish American volunteers to fight with the Allies. The Canadians rejected the idea for fear of alienating the U.S. by violating American neutrality. Two years later Starzyński tried again, sending Andrzej Małkowski and Wincenty Skarzyński to propose forming a "Polish Legion in Canada". By this time the horrendous casualties on the Western Front convinced the Canadians to listen. William E. Price, a Québec businessman, used his political connections to gain the support of Canadian Minister of Militia and Defense Sam Hughes who, along with General Sir Willoughby Gwatkin, the Canadian Chief of Staff, approved the idea to admit a pilot group to an officer training program at York University (today the University of Toronto)²⁴.

Although approved by Canadian officials, the attempt to train men for a Polish army still had hurdles to overcome. One of these was Section 10 of the U.S. Penal Code that prohibited American citizens from serving in foreign armies. This meant that any Poles in the U.S. who had become citizens would jeopardize their citizenship by volunteering for training in Canada. Further, inasmuch as Great Britain and Canada were at war with Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the

²² *Dziennik Związkowy* (24 IX 1914).

²³ *Dziennik Związkowy* (10 X 1914).

²⁴ Donald E. Pienkos, *One Hundred Years Young: A History of the Polish Falcons of America, 1887–1987* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1987), 94.

Canadian government was unwilling to grant visas to Poles from the German or Austrian partitions since they were considered enemy aliens. These factors greatly reduced the number of potential recruits²⁵.

With American entry into the war in April 1917, fear of violating American neutrality evaporated. Throughout the United States, recruitment efforts for the Polish army proliferated. "To arms", commanded the editors of *Dziennik Związkowy*, "everyone who is physically able, everyone who is not bound by family responsibilities, everyone who has in his breast not a stone but a heart throbbing with Polish blood. To arms, young and old, for the struggle with our age-old enemy, for freedom, independence, and union. We who remained Poland's faithful sons in her blackest hours have been permitted to take up arms and break the chains that bind our motherland in slavery. Whoever is truly a Pole then, to arms, into the ranks of the Polish Army! This [is] our first and most sacred duty today"²⁶.

Nor was the appeal for loyalty to Poland only directed toward males of military age. *Dziennik Związkowy* advised "Mothers should see that their daughters, and a sister see that her sisters, contribute part of their efforts for the Polish Army's benefit. Let us organize our girls and bind them with the sacred vow that they will hold in contempt all Polish 'slackers.' Let us expel from our organizations all those who, having no dependents, want to enjoy life in America while others go to shed their blood for them. Every Pole who cannot enlist in the Polish Army should report to the recruiting station the name and address of every young man who, having no dependents, still does not enlist. He should bring in the name of every single man up to forty-five years of age who, while he could, does not enlist"²⁷.

In Chicago, 25,000 Poles attended an observation of the centennial of Tadeusz Kościuszko's death. *Dziennik Związkowy* reported that the community "presented the battle flags to the Polish National Army which, side by side with the armies of the Allied powers will fight for freedom and liberty, for the rights and equality of all nations". Speaking to the assembly, Rev. E. Kowalewski explained that "The banner is the symbol of our uniting together in a holy cause. Let us have faith that God will grant his blessing upon it and upon the Polish Army that will enter into mortal combat for Poland under its colors. For it is through union that an unbounded strength exists even in the weakest individuals. We, the 'fourth partition' of Poland, pledge ourselves to give you all possible aid within our means and, as today, so later, we shall encourage the Polish clergy to pray God that you may carry these Polish colors to victory"²⁸.

²⁵ Ruskoski, "Polish Army in France", 115; letter, Newton D. Baker, Secretary of War, to the Secretary of State, War Department files, 7 II 1919, sign. 860c.22/66.

²⁶ *Dziennik Związkowy* (26 X 1917).

²⁷ *Dziennik Związkowy* (16 IV 1918). The term "slacker" was used in the U.S. during World War I to refer to anyone capable of enlisting or otherwise supporting the war effort who did not do so.

²⁸ "25,000 Poles Honor Polish Army", *Dziennik Związkowy* (15 X 1917); Valasek, *Haller's Polish Army*, vol. II, 87–88.

All over the country, in cities and towns with Polish populations men began to enlist for service in the Polish army. In Chicago groups of volunteers were seen off with a Catholic Mass followed by a parade through the downtown Loop area to the railroad station. "Our brave boys departed", *Dziennik Związkowy* opined, "determined to teach the Kaiser a lesson and to avenge all the wrongs Germany has done Poland. They left with smiles on their faces, cheered by thousands of friends and relatives in the Polish neighborhoods and downtown"²⁹. A year later, 100,000 Poles gathered in Humboldt Park to support the Polish army. "To arms, then, Polish youth!" commanded *Dziennik Związkowy*. "Let there remain not one among us able to bear arms, for his place is with the Polish Army, his duty is to fight as others are fighting! Polish youth! Do not permit yourselves to be pointed out and called cowards! Such a term should never apply to Poles, and such a term should not even exist among us. No one should stay at home, thus to deserve the appellation, for Poles never were cowards, but have always and everywhere been ready to fight wherever freedom and right were at stake"³⁰. The newspaper pursued its plea by publishing a daily column title "Tchórze" (Cowards) in which it listed the names of men the editor believed were shirking their duty to enlist, attempting to shame them into doing so. This type of peer pressure, or in some cases outright coercion, was typical in communities with large Polish populations³¹.

Recruits for the Polish army met at a training facility soon named Camp Kościuszko that opened at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Canada, under the command of Canadian Col. Arthur D'Orr LePan. "One can quite readily conceive that the camp presented interesting international associations", Col. LePan later recalled. "It was no unusual sight to have gatherings of officers at which the countries of Poland, France, United States and Canada were represented and on each occasion was found officers who from their environment and education had different ideas and ideals, all cooperating with the one great ideal of making this new creation as big a factor as possible, not only in the creation of a national Poland, but as an agency for freeing the world from an oppression that not only Poles had heard of as we have on this continent, but also that they had felt in body and soul"³². The official flag raising at the camp attracted Bishop Paul Rhode, the first Catholic clergyman of Polish ancestry consecrated bishop in the United States, along with representatives of various Polish organizations and military delegates from the U.S., Canada, Great Britain, and France³³.

²⁹ *Dziennik Związkowy* (23 X 1917).

³⁰ "100,000 Poles in Manifestation in Humboldt Park. Chicago Polonia Honors Kosciuszko, Polish Army", *Dziennik Związkowy* (3 VI 1918); Valasek, *Haller's Polish Army*, vol. II, 126-27.

³¹ Pliska, "Polish Independence", 227.

³² Report of Col. Arthur LePan, 26 III 1919, in Jerzy Walter, ed., *Czyn zbrojny wychodźstwa polskiego w Ameryce: zbiór dokumentów i materiałów historycznych* (New York: The Polish Army Veterans' Association of America, 1957), 693 [hereafter LePan Report].

³³ "Flag Raising at the Polish Camp Sunday", *St. Catharines Standard* (2 XI 1917): 1.

Although there were divisions within American Polonia, these were based, much as in Europe, on which course of action would provide the best opportunity for Polish independence, the priority to which all were loyal. The Polish press in America and the communities it served enthusiastically supported forming a Polish army to fight for its ancestral homeland. Most of the American recruits headed to Niagara-on-the-Lake arrived via nearby Buffalo, New York, where the local Polish citizens committee invariably provided meals and public celebrations for each group passing through the city. The *Buffalo Evening News* described one such event as beginning with a Mass at St. Stanislaus Church attended by more than a thousand well-wishers followed by a parade and a dinner at the Broadway Auditorium, "the city's largest assembly hall". There, the Rev. Stanislaus C. Bubacz delivered an emotional speech, exhorting the recruits to remember that "It is to you men that Poland looks for freedom [...]. Go: fight to the finish for the ideals that we have learned to love so well in this great adopted land of ours"³⁴.

In November of 1917, following the organization of the trainees into military formations, the men received their colors in a celebration described by the *St. Catharine Standard*:

The colors for the first two battalions of Polish troops, who are shortly leaving for overseas, were presented at the camp Sunday afternoon with impressive ceremony, witnessed by thousands of people, who came here by train, street car and auto, some as far away as Chicago. Buffalo, which supplied a great bulk of the 3,500 Polish soldiers now here, sent a big contingent of visitors. Representatives of Polish organizations from different cities in the United States, together with Polish clergymen, were on the platform with Colonel LePan, camp commandant, Col. James Martin of the French army, who was sent over here by the French Government to inspect the Polish volunteers from all over the United States, who are going over to avenge the spoliation of their country, Prince Poniatowski of Poland, Camp Chaplain Captain Jaworski, and others, among them some Polish women. [...] After the colors were received by the Polish battalions, the massed band played "God Save the King" and the Polish "National Anthem", the soldiers all singing it with fervor. The whole strength then trooped the colors and marched past, the men showing fine marching ability³⁵.

During the course of its existence, 38,108 men from North America volunteered for the Polish army units forming at Camp Kościuszko. Of these, 22,395 were accepted with 20,721 eventually sent to France. Demographically, 221 recruits were from Canada and the balance from the United States. About 62 percent traced their origins to the Russian partition, 31.5 percent to Austrian occupied lands, and three percent to the area controlled by Germany. The remaining 3.5 percent were

³⁴ "Polish Citizens Honor Recruits for Big Army", *Buffalo Evening News* (30 XI 1917): 23; Bucki, "Response on the Home Front", 92.

³⁵ "Polish Soldiers Receive Colors", *St. Catharines Standard* (5 XI 1917): 1.

unknown or listed some other place of origin. The first Camp Kościuszko troops began arriving in Europe in the summer of 1917, all of them departing from New York City except for 1,573 who sailed aboard a ship from Halifax, Nova Scotia³⁶.

Diplomatic Recognition of an Independent Polish Army

While volunteers trained in Canada and boarded ships for France, political negotiations continued between the Allies and representatives of Poland regarding what would become of the men. France, which provided funding for the force, was desperate for manpower, so it wanted to incorporate Polish troops into existing French units. The Poles wanted specific, recognizable Polish units, even if they served within the French or Allied command structure. Negotiators finally resolved the issues on June 4, 1917, when President Poincaré signed an agreement to create an independent Polish military force. It was, the presidential proclamation declared, “the moral obligation of France to undertake the stirring and laudable mission of creating a future Polish army, arising from the kinship of the races and the Poles’ steadfast loyalty to the French nation”³⁷.

French Minister of War Paul Painlevé appointed Major General Louis Archinard to lead the “French-Polish Military Mission” created to implement the new agreement. Under its terms, Poles serving in the French army or residing in France or other countries could enlist, including prisoners held in France and even those who had served in the German army whose origins were in the provinces of Silesia (Śląsk) and Posen (Poznań). The Polish force would serve within the French command and observe French military regulations but under the Polish flag. The units were to wear the standard light blue French uniform, but with the traditional Polish four-cornered “rogatywka” and a Polish eagle on the shoulder straps, caps, helmet, and buttons. Officers were to wear a metal Polish eagle on their blouse over their left chest, where decorations normally were affixed³⁸.

With France officially supporting a Polish military organization, Great Britain threw its support behind the effort and encouraged the United States to do so as well.

³⁶ LePan Report, 693; Joseph Hapak, “Recruiting a Polish Army in the United States, 1917–1918” (Lawrence, KS: Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Kansas, 1985), 171; A.D. LePan, “Polish Army Camp”, reprinted in Valasek, *Haller’s Polish Army*, vol. I, 311; Ruskoski, “Polish Army in France”, 48. Another 41 recruits died in camp, mostly from the 1918 flu pandemic. The veterans’ newspaper *Weteran I* (October 1921): 6, reported that 65 percent of U.S. and Canadian enlistees were aliens, 20 percent were aliens who had filed first citizenship papers, and 15 percent were U.S. citizens either over or under draft age or physically unfit for US service.

³⁷ Wyczółkowski, “43rd Regiment”, 156; Pliska, “Polish American Army”, 216.

³⁸ Valasek, *Haller’s Polish Army*, vol. I, 108; Wyczółkowski, “43rd Regiment”, 156; Jerzy Dąbrowski, “Outline of the Wartime History of the 45th Infantry Regiment of Eastern Frontier Infantry Riflemen”, transl. in Valasek, *Haller’s Polish Army*, vol. I, 232.

On July 23, the British government sent a message to the U.S. State Department suggesting that "Poles living in countries of Allied Powers, whether German, Austrian or Prussian origin, should be granted open recognition as friends and potential allies". Secretary of State Robert Lansing replied on August 17: "The Department has been considering for several months means to support the Polish people in their efforts to obtain their Freedom and to restore Poland as an independent state. It has been suggested that a great stimulus might be given to the Polish cause and indirectly to the general cause against Germany by establishment in this country of a Polish provisional government to be recognized by the Government and the Allied Governments as the Government of Poland. Upon such recognition this Government could legally loan the government set-up funds for military purposes secured by Polish bonds underwritten by this country and the Allies. The further suggestion has been made that such government thereupon [begin] recruiting Polish residents in this country. The Army so recruited to be trained in Canadian Camps supplied by the English". Official approval came on October 6 when the War Department approved the recruitment of Poles in the United States provided those who were American citizens or otherwise subject to U.S. conscription laws would not be enrolled for the Polish army³⁹. With this, the United States took a major step toward recognizing not only the Polish army but Poland's right to national sovereignty.

The "Blue Army" in France

The Roman statesman and philosopher Cicero has been quoted as observing that "Nothing is more noble, nothing more venerable, than loyalty". As Stanley Pliska aptly observed, "It took much love of country to join this Polish Army. Privates received their uniform, three meals a day, a canvas cot, and five cents a day (twenty-five cents at the front). To this was added a French government overseas bonus of \$150 annually (always in arrears)"⁴⁰. This was not a major inducement to enlist. "Loyalty means nothing unless it has at its heart the absolute principle of self-sacrifice", noted President Woodrow Wilson in 1916⁴¹. It took a great deal of loyalty for an immigrant living safely in North America, an ocean away from the turmoil and death raging in his homeland, to enlist in a cause that would place him in the midst of the conflict.

North American recruits began to arrive in France in the summer of 1917 where French and Polish officers were busy establishing an organizational framework to receive them. This was no small feat because the recruits came from a variety

³⁹ Valasek, *Haller's Polish Army*, vol. I, 36-37; Pliska, "Polish American Army", 216.

⁴⁰ Pliska, "Polish American Army", 54; Pliska, "Polish Independence", 225.

⁴¹ Woodrow Wilson, *Address of President Wilson to the Citizenship Convention* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1916), 5.

of nations and in some cases did not even share a common language. Michael Fibich, an American army officer who volunteered for service with the 11th Polish Infantry Division, recalled: “At first I had eighteen officers. The majority of them had seen service in the former Austrian Army. Some had served in the Russian artillery, while one or two had been with German troops. A few of the officers spoke English; more spoke German, and almost all of them could speak French”. Eventually, 20,720 arrived from the North American diaspora. Added to these were some 35,000 Polish immigrants from France, Holland, and elsewhere in Europe; 30,000 transferred from enemy alien detention camps in France and Italy; 2,800 Poles captured in German uniforms; 300 volunteers from diaspora communities in Brazil and Argentina; and a contingent from the disbanded Russian Expeditionary Corps⁴². One of the soldiers, Wincenty Skarzyński, described the collection of recruits in these words:

Our First Regiment consisted of a dozen or more volunteers from Bayonne, of Polish Falcons from America, natives of Poznań, and later several hundred so-called “Dutch” were incorporated into the regiment—these were young Poles, mainly from Warsaw and Łódź, who had been forced to go work in Germany. When these “Dutch” learned of the existence of the Polish Army in France, at every opportunity that presented itself they fled through Holland to England, where they made their way to the offices of the French-Polish Military Mission and joined the ranks of the Polish Army in France. [...] Finally there were in the regiment Poles from former Russian formations in Thessaloniki, with their own commander Piekarski, later a colonel. Polish-Americans were the founding element and the magnet drawing all other groups and individuals to the Polish Army in France⁴³.

Initially, before sufficient manpower was available to fill regimental formations, Polish volunteers with military training were assigned as replacements in Gen. Henri Gourand’s Fourth French Army to gain combat experience, while others were organized into instructional camps. To train qualified individuals for commissions, an officer candidate school opened at Camp le Ruchard⁴⁴. Regardless of where they were initially assigned, once Polish formations came into existence the volunteers mustered into the new Polish army by reciting the following pledge: “I swear in the presence God and Holy Trinity that I will be faithful to my Homeland, the only one and indivisible Poland. I swear I am ready to sacrifice my life

⁴² Report on the Polish Forces in France, Lieutenant Robert Maverick, American Military Attache, 24 VI 1918, 2034–6, Record Group 165, National Archives/College Park, MD; Wyczółkowski, “43rd Regiment”, 157; LePan, “Polish Army Camp”, 309; Ruskoski, “Polish Army in France”, 61; Pliska, “Polish American Army”, 218; Michael J. Fibich, “On the Polish-Bolshevik Front in 1919 and 1920”, *Field Artillery Journal* 13 (1923): 276.

⁴³ Quote from Valasek, *Haller’s Polish Army*, vol. I, 134, 136.

⁴⁴ Pienkos, *One Hundred Years Young: A History of the Polish Falcons of America, 1887–1987* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1987), 100.

to contribute to the holy matter of regaining Her independence and unification. I swear I will always defend my banner, I will abide by discipline and obey orders of my military superiors and swear to guard the honor of the Polish soldier. God help me to keep my oath"⁴⁵.

The first distinctively Polish unit that would be part of the Blue Army, so named because of its horizon blue French uniforms, was organized as the 1st Polish Rifle Regiment (1. Pułk Strzelców Polskich) on December 17, 1917, under the command of Colonel Leon Jasinski who was transferred from his position in the French Army. Soon after, two additional regiments began forming at Sillé le Guillaume, each consisting of nine companies of riflemen and a machine gun company. The appearance of these formations, although yet to engage in combat as Polish units, had a very real political significance. Days before the official advent of the first Polish regiment, an article by Waclaw Gąsiorowski in *Dziennik Narodowy* proclaimed that "Today the army is Poland's foundation. The army will form the state, as the state cannot form the army"⁴⁶. In fact, the existence of Polish army units afforded *de facto* recognition of a Polish state regardless of whether it had been formally recognized as a sovereign nation by the Allied governments.

The diplomatic aspects of the Polish army's existence were not lost on the editors of *Dziennik Związkowy*: "The Polish Army has great political significance, for the greater that army becomes, the more will we show the world that we love freedom, that we want Poland to be Independent, that we want to perpetuate democracy throughout the whole world, and that we join with the Allies in crushing German militarism, which in itself will bring peace to the entire world. Thus, it is the sacred duty of every Pole to enlist in the ranks of the Polish Army, an autonomous army fighting under Polish command, under the White Eagle, in the defense of Poland. Although it is at present fighting in France, the Polish Army will move on into Poland after the Germans have been finally defeated, in order to be on hand, should the necessity arise, to protect Poland against the Prussian hordes. So, do not delay! Do not wait until tomorrow, but support this able army by enlisting now [...] as volunteers, as good, patriotic Poles"⁴⁷.

In the spring of 1918, recruitment and training progressed to the point where the French government formed the First Polish Infantry Division, initially numbering 227 officers and 9,965 other ranks organized into three infantry regiments, a company of engineers, and an artillery support brigade. In June President Poincaré arrived in person at Villers-Marmery in Champagne to present the division's units with their official colors, gifts of the French cities of Paris, Verdun, Belfort, and Nancy. Roman Dmowski, president of the Polish National

⁴⁵ "A Pole" June 21, 1918, *Czyn zbrojny*, XVI, 1–2.

⁴⁶ Joseph T. Hapak, "The Polish Military Commission, 1917–1919", *Polish American Studies* 38/2 (Autumn, 1981): 26.

⁴⁷ *Dziennik Związkowy* (6 VII 1918).

Committee, attended the ceremony, along with representatives of Great Britain, Italy, and the United States. In presenting the banners, Poincaré reinforced Gąsiorowski's linkage of the army with the Polish state. "The sons of Poland are coming in great numbers from America to fight henceforth under their own colors on the side of their allies in defense of national ideals. All the future of a nation is wrapped up in the folds of your flags. The White Eagle can once more unfold its wings. It will soon float in the light of a sky once more serene, and in the rays of victory"⁴⁸.

Before the month was out, Polish forces were engaged in major combat operations. On June 18–19 the German army launched an offensive that fell on the American 81st Infantry Division and the 1st Polish Rifle Regiment, most of which was recruited in the U.S., holding the Americans' flank. Frank Taylor, a correspondent for United Press, reported that "The Yankee troops were delighted to find most of those lively and optimistic fighters in blue uniforms and square topped caps spoke good American slang, and the Poles were open in their enthusiasm at being with doughboys"⁴⁹. Together, the two groups stood firm, blunting the German attack. A second German thrust on June 25 likewise failed to penetrate the Polish and American lines. In the following month the 1st Polish Rifle Regiment received orders to attack enemy positions near the town of Auberive. In an impressive assault under heavy fire it succeeded in capturing the German position. Five days later, in an advance into the Bois de Raquette, near Saint Hilaire le Grand that Gen. Archinard called a "splendid attack", the Poles destroyed an entire battalion of the German 66th Infantry Regiment, capturing over 100 prisoners. In recognition of its achievements, the regiment's colors were decorated with the French *Croix de Guerre* and Captain Piekarski received the French *Cross of the Legion of Honor* and the *Croix de Guerre* with palm⁵⁰.

On October 6, 1918, General Józef Haller officially took command of the Polish units in France. Educated at the Technical Military Academy in Vienna, he served in the Austrian army but assisted in the development of Polish paramilitary forces prior to World War I. In 1916, he was appointed commanding officer of a brigade in the Polish Legion organized by Józef Piłsudski, leading it against the Russians. Two years later, following the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk between the Bolsheviks and

⁴⁸ Ruskoski, "Polish Army in France", 63–64; Pienkos, *One Hundred Years Young*, 104; Charles Phillips, *Paderewski: The Story of a Modern Immortal* (New York: Macmillan, 1934), 355.

⁴⁹ Frank J. Taylor, "Polish Falcons in Great Review", *Free Poland* (16 XI 1918): 8; "General Haller Goes To Poland. He and His Army Return to Native Land to Fight Enemy", *Harrisburg Telegraph* (27 V 1919); Valasek, *Haller's Polish Army*, vol. II, 193. In World War I, Americans referred to their soldiers as "doughboys". The origin is uncertain but may have resulted from the fried flour cakes frequently fed to soldiers for breakfast.

⁵⁰ Lt. W. Piekarski "Military Actions of the First Regiment of Polish Riflemen on the Front in Champagne", *Czyn zbrojny*, XVI; Ruskoski, "Polish Army in France", 62, 65; Valasek, *Haller's Polish Army*, vol. I, 134.

the Central Powers, Haller fled to Moscow from where he made his way to France to continue the struggle for Polish independence. That goal appeared to grow closer the same month that Haller arrived when the British government officially recognized the Polish Army as “autonomous, allied, and co-belligerent”, followed soon thereafter by a similar declaration from the United States⁵¹.

By the time the ceasefire went into effect on November 11, 1918, Polish soldiers had fought in the Second Battle of the Marne, in Alsace, Lorraine, Rambervillers, Raon-l'Étape, Rheims, and the Vosges Mountains. Their casualties included 206 dead, 862 wounded, 15 permanently disabled, and 104 disabled from poison gas. Among the dead were 106 Polish Americans. Symbolically, the Polish Army marched under the Arc de Triomphe in the victory parade, and in the official ceremonies the French commanding general, Ferdinand Foch, recognized Haller along with the commanders of the other major Allied military forces. Yet, the importance of the Blue Army lay far beyond its military contributions or the ceremonial honors it received. No other subject people formed an army of over 100,000 men to fight on the Western Front in the hope of recreating an independent homeland. The very existence of the Polish Army in France had far-reaching diplomatic consequences. As its political leader, Roman Dmowski, in addressing the Blue Army veterans, later stated: “Your voluntary enlistment in the Polish Army in France made possible its creation, and thanks to its existence we were recognized as allies and admitted to participate in the peace conference”⁵².

Transfer to Poland

The end of World War I brought peace to Western Europe, but it also unleashed international debates about the future of the Blue Army. On one level there was the question of which of the competing political factions would control the new independent Polish government. The claimants included a socialist government led by Ignacy Daszyński in Lublin, the National Democracy under Roman Dmowski based in Paris, and Józef Piłsudski's faction. To this also had to be added the international support of Ignacy Paderewski, who soon returned to Warsaw from France. All of these groups had supporters in Poland as well as among the various Polish diasporas. After a brief provisional government headed by Daszyński, Piłsudski emerged as the head of the new Warsaw-based Polish government. Nevertheless, rivalry between Piłsudski and Dmowski continued and this had a direct influence on the future of the Blue Army. Since it had been sworn into service as a Polish

⁵¹ Ruskoski, “Polish Army in France”, 67; *New York Times* (17 X; 5 XI 1918).

⁵² Pienkos, *One Hundred Years Young*, 101, 105, 110; Ruskoski, “Polish Army in France”, 67; *Polish Military Mission* 16 (28 XII 1918): 29, Polish Roman Catholic Union Archives, Chicago. Francis Fronczak reported 269 killed, died of wounds, or missing and 1,100 wounded in *Sprawozdanie z działalności Wydziału Opieki Moralnej i Materjalnej* (Paris: Komitet Narodowy Polski, [1919]), 9.

army, the French wanted to send the Blue Army to Poland but were afraid that if they did a civil war might ensue between the Dmowski and Piłsudski supporters. The allies generally supported Dmowski because Piłsudski had fought for the Austrians against Russia. In the end, Paderewski used his prestige to influence a settlement between the two leaders that paved the way for the Blue Army to be transferred to Poland⁵³.

While the political issues were being sorted out, the Blue Army's soldiers awaited the decision on their future. "Preparations for the departure lasted for some time", wrote Capt. Stanisław Nastał. "The question of transit became a difficult and complicated problem"⁵⁴. Part of the delay resulted from international disagreements. France wanted to send the army by ship to Danzig (Gdańsk), a plan that would be relatively easy and allow the troops to land in the port city for easy transport into Poland. However, the Germans, and some allies, were afraid that armed Polish soldiers landing in Danzig in force might simply seize the city for Poland. Negotiators finally resolved the impasse with an agreement to transport the army across Germany by rail provided that the men were unarmed and their weapons stored in separate locked cars⁵⁵.

The army finally left France in April 1919 on four transport trains. "The trip across Germany to Poland after the Germans were defeated was quite a feat", recalled Jan Sumara. "[T]he Polish soldiers were called the Blue Devils by the German populace"⁵⁶. According to Major Stefan Wyczółkowski, the trip began at the Bayonne railroad station with the trains traveling via Mainz, Erfurt, Leipzig, and Kalisz before finally arriving in Warsaw. There, the regiments and divisions were integrated into the newly formed Polish Army. Most of the remaining recruits from North America had been in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Rifle Regiments. These were transferred into the reorganized Polish Army as follows: the 1st Rifle Regiment became the 43rd Bayonne Rifle Regiment (43. Pułk Strzelców Legionu Bojończyków), the 2nd Rifle Regiment became the 44th American Rifle Regiment (44. Pułk Strzelców Legii Amerykańskiej), and the 3rd Rifle Regiment became the 45th Kresowy Rifle Regiment (45. Pułk Piechoty Strzelców Kresowych). All three were organized into the 13th Kresowy Infantry Division (13. Kresowa Dywizja Piechoty)⁵⁷.

The arrival of Haller's men provided a much-needed boost to the new Polish Army. In April 1919, the army numbered about 170,000 on paper, but its combat

⁵³ Margaret Macmillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed The World* (New York: Random House, 2003), 213–14.

⁵⁴ Quote from Haller's Army website, www.hallersarmy.com/index.php.

⁵⁵ Ruskoski, "Polish Army in France", 73; Joseph V. Fuller, ed., *Minutes of the Council of Ten, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1942), vol. III, 670–71; vol. IV, 106–07, 125–26, 315–16, 424–31.

⁵⁶ Quote from Haller's Army website, www.hallersarmy.com/index.php.

⁵⁷ Ruskoski, "Polish Army in France", 97; Walter, *Czyn zbrojny*, Sections XXXVI and XXXVII.

strength was probably closer to 80,000 trained, experienced soldiers. The Blue Army brought to Poland some 1,240 officers and about 68,000 men, virtually all of them trained veterans. They also brought with them all of their arms and some very important heavy weapons. These included 18 British-built Bristol F.2 reconnaissance airplanes and Italian-made Ansaldo A.1 Balillas that provided excellent reconnaissance capabilities, as well as the ability to bomb and machine-gun enemy formations and emplacements. They also brought 123 French-made Renault FT-17 tanks that came in two forms: 75 armed with 37-millimeter cannons and 48 with 8-millimeter machine guns. The acquisition of these vehicles gave the Poles what was then the fourth largest armored force in the world⁵⁸.

The War in Galicia and Volhynia

In December 1918, armed Ukrainians seized the predominantly Polish city of Lwów and proclaimed the establishment of a Ukrainian National Republic. The Poles resisted, sparking a conflict that drew in Polish troops under Lt. Colonel Michał Tokarzewski-Karaszewicz who evicted the Ukrainian forces. The Ukrainians raised an army and fighting broke out in several places, although it was largely inconclusive with neither side gaining a permanent advantage. The Poles controlled Lwów and the railroad linking it to Przemyśl, while Ukrainians generally controlled Eastern Galicia east of the San River and were able to surround Lwów on three sides. The Poles threw back two Ukrainian attacks on Lwów, as well as an assault on Przemyśl, but Ukrainians were successful in repelling a Polish attempt to capture Sambir and continued to threaten both Lwów and Przemyśl. Over five months the fighting continued back and forth, with neither side gaining a clear advantage until May 1919⁵⁹.

When Haller’s army arrived in Warsaw its commander addressed his men:

We are finally on our own soil, our Polish soil: those who were born in foreign lands; those who left an oppressed and torn Poland for work or for fortune; those who, hidden in a foreign uniform, had to go fight in it on behalf of foreign enemies’

⁵⁸ Ruskoski, “Polish Army in France”, 91; Józef Piłsudski, *The Year 1920 and its Climax Battle of Warsaw During the Polish-Soviet War 1919–1920* (New York–London: Piłsudski Institute, 1972), 26–27; “Renault FT”, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renault_FT. Along with the army came French Major Charles de Gaulle who fought in the 5th Chasseurs Polonais of Haller’s army and was destined for future fame, and a soldier in the Blue Army named Ludwik Kaźmierczak who would become the paternal grandfather of the German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

⁵⁹ Anna M. Cienciala, “Poland and Soviet Russia: 1917–1921”, unpublished manuscript in the possession of the author; *The Cambridge History of Poland: From Augustus II to Piłsudski (1697–1935)*, ed. by William F. Reddaway et al. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 477. Some sources list Michał Tokarzewski-Karaszewicz as Karaszewicz-Tokarzewski, however his gravestone is engraved Tokarzewski-Karaszewicz so I am using that version here.

banners; Legionnaires concentrated after so much wandering in exile under the beloved standard, taken with blood; and finally those who are youngest, new recruits recently summoned to the ranks by the duty of a soldier and citizen of a Free Republic. Remember that today there are no differences, there is one Polish Soldier, whose precious blood traces the borders of the Nation. And although a different uniform may cover you, the spirit must be the same, because for us a comrade in arms or a colleague is every man belonging to the Polish Army and bearing the White Eagle as his emblem⁶⁰.

Faced with the crisis in Eastern Galicia, Polish authorities rushed Haller's men to the battle zone as quickly as possible. On May 13 the diaspora soldiers in the 13th Division advanced in three columns from Włodzimierz Wolyński driving the Ukrainians back across the Styr River. The 43rd Bayonne Rifle Regiment advanced through Poryck to the Styr, capturing 43 Ukrainian soldiers and seven machine guns. The Americans of the 44th Rifle Regiment successfully overcame the defenses of Łuck, capturing the city along with 3,000 Ukrainian prisoners and 12 artillery pieces. The remaining diaspora unit of the 13th Division, the 45th Kresowy Rifle Regiment, drove into Podolia and Volhynia, capturing the important railroad junction at Czarków-Radomyśl. It was also among the troops who met and threw back a major Ukrainian counteroffensive that penetrated within two days' march of Lwów⁶¹.

On April 21, 1920, Józef Piłsudski signed an agreement with the Ukrainian leader Symon Petlyura that ended Polish-Ukrainian hostilities and recognized Poland's authority over territory in East Galicia as far east as the Zbrucz River. It also made the two nations allies in resisting any westward movement by Bolshevik Russia. The success of Polish arms in the war with Ukraine was due in large part to the loyalty of the Blue Army's diaspora soldiers. At the time the most well-armed force in Poland, the Ukrainians had no answer to the Blue Army's aircraft and tanks, as well as its trained, experienced, motivated soldiers. There is no doubt that the diaspora volunteers in the army's 13th Division changed the balance of power in Galicia and Volhynia, leading to the Polish triumph. On March 14, 1923, the international community recognized East Galicia as Polish territory⁶².

⁶⁰ Stanisław Bobrowski, "Outline of the Wartime History of the 44th Regiment of Eastern Frontier Riflemen", transl. in Valasek, *Haller's Polish Army*, vol. I, 195.

⁶¹ Wyczółkowski, "43rd Regiment", 167; Bobrowski, "44th Regiment", 195–96; Dąbrowski, "45th Infantry Regiment", 239; Stanisław Nastał, "The Blue Division", transl. in Valasek, *Haller's Polish Army*, vol. I, 271; Haller Army website, www.hallersarmy.com/index.php.

⁶² Cienciala, "Poland and Soviet Russia". According to Cienciala, the treaty, dated April 22, 1920, provided for an independent Ukraine allied with Poland. Petlyura abandoned claims to East Galicia and each side guaranteed protection for the rights of the minority in lands that it controlled.

The Bolshevik Invasion

Vladimir Lenin viewed Poland as an obstacle to exporting communism into Central Europe; thus, the Bolshevik renunciation of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in November 1918 was an initial move to pave the way for spreading revolution abroad. First on his priority list was the re-conquest of Ukraine and Poland, both of which Lenin linked with the anti-Communist "White" forces he was fighting against in the Russian civil war. Once Poland and Ukraine were subdued, Lenin planned to continue the revolutionary march into Germany where he expected to join an anticipated communist revolution. "We must direct all our attention to preparing and strengthening the Western Front", he asserted. "A new slogan must be announced: 'Prepare for war against Poland'". To achieve this, Lenin embarked on an emergency plan to strengthen the Red Army. By 1920 he had amassed 402,000 men along the northern and central border with Poland and another 355,000 aimed at Galicia⁶³.

The Polish Army also launched a vigorous recruiting campaign that increased its force from a little over 500,000 in early 1920 to a reported 737,767 in August. On paper the two sides were relatively equal, although Piłsudski reported that only half his men were front-line troops. The army also suffered serious logistical difficulties since the troops wore an assortment of German, Austrian, French, and other uniforms, and more importantly were armed with a similar assortment of weapons that greatly complicated resupply. The best equipped, trained, and supplied units remained those of the Blue Army⁶⁴.

Most of the Blue Army units stayed in the southeast to defend Volhynia as part of the 6th Polish Army. There they were destined to face elements of the Bolshevik 12th and 14th Armies and Gen. Semyon Budyonny's famed "Konarmiya". Officially the 1st Cavalry Army, the horsemen were organized in four divisions and a brigade of Don Cossacks, but its real strength came from its equipment which included aircraft, hundreds of machineguns, and a large artillery force. The Bolshevik plan called for the 12th Army to cut off the 3rd Polish Army in the Kiev area and the 14th Army to defeat the 6th Polish Army. Units of Budyonny's cavalry were to support each thrust. On May 26 the Konarmiya launched a powerful attack on Koziatyn. Major Stefan Wyczółkowski recalled that "some 17,000 swords, 5 armored trains and numerous armored vehicles, struck ferociously at the 13th Infantry Division's sector, and particularly that of the 43rd Regiment of the Eastern Frontier Riflemen. Despite an extremely critical situation [...] the enemy was unable to break the regiment's front, which stood like a wall against Budyonny's hordes,

⁶³ Norman Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star: the Polish-Soviet War, 1919-20* (New York: Random House Inc., 2003), 142; Cienciala, "Poland and Soviet Russia". Other estimates for troop strength during the entire war suggest that Bolshevik strength included 950,000 combatants and some 5 million reserves while the Polish forces included 360,000 combatants and 738,000 reserves.

⁶⁴ Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star*, 41, 45-46, 85; Ruskoski, "Polish Army in France", 91-93; Cienciala, "Poland and Soviet Russia".

even though masses of cavalry surrounded the regiment's right flank, seriously endangering the rear. The regiment did not yield an inch of ground to the enemy, and every local success of the enemy was balanced by bravura counterattacks that inflicted heavy losses on him. [...] The battles were so fierce that they often came down to hand-to-hand combat"⁶⁵.

Stanisław Nastał, a captain on the staff of the 13th Division, provided the following description of the fighting:

The division, sufficiently fortified, gave Budionny's cavalry a suitable reception. It was a terrible clash. The Cossacks struck with their whole wave, and the fight raged in every sector. The enemy, having sensed the weak spot of our badly manned front, kept pushing at it with more and more new columns renewing the attack. The soldiers of the blue division fought day and night, hanging the wild riders on barbed wire ten paces in front of his own trench. The rabid mass attacks of the Cossacks had a demoralizing effect, frankly, but the soldier of the Steel Division did not lose heart—he met the gangs of Cossacks with a bullet, and when they advanced on the machine guns with swords, he waited calmly with a grenade in hand to receive them at the moment when, sure of their momentum, they rose in their saddles to cut him down. The 13th Division, formerly the 1st of Haller's Army, was called "Steel", and these were the lads from America. The gangs of the mounted army came flying at the Steel Division from everywhere. The situation changed so rapidly that counterattacks were conducted on carts to wipe out the Cossack units, which from all sides forced their way into the heart of our front. Ten times the Cossacks broke through the front and ten times the Steel Division repaired the front. Such places as Dziunków, Pohrebyszczce, Lipowiec, and Nowożytyów will be inscribed in honor, not only on the history of 13th Division, but also in the history of Polish warfare"⁶⁶.

The division received compliments by name in the orders of the day from the Supreme Command, with the 43rd Bayonne Regiment singled out for its heroic defense of Dziunków. The 44th American Rifle Regiment, along with some cavalry, defeated a follow-up attack by Budyonny's 4th Cavalry Division at Wołodarka on May 29–31. On the latter day some of the Bolshevik 6th Cavalry Division managed to break through the gap between the 43rd and 44th Regiments at Uman but were quickly evicted by a counterattack of the 45th Kresowy Regiment and the line held. Following the action, a published order read: "For 13th Infantry Division, which paralyzed the enemy's blows on an extended front so splendidly, the Commander in Chief expresses full recognition and praise. Announce this to all forces in Ukraine"⁶⁷.

⁶⁵ Wyczółkowski, "43rd Regiment", 169–71; Nastał, "Blue Division", 271; Valasek, *Haller's Polish Army*, vol. I, 211. Valasek indicates that the Bolsheviks referred to the 13th Division as the "American Division".

⁶⁶ Nastał, "Blue Division", 274.

⁶⁷ Ruskoski, "Polish Army in France", 100–01; Valasek, *Haller's Polish Army*, vol. I, 213–14; Nigel Thomas, *Armies of the Russo-Polish War 1919–21* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2014), 18.

Although the 13th Division held, other elements of Budyonny's force managed to outflank the position capturing Brody, entering eastern Galicia, and threatening Lwów and Zamość. Tarnopol fell to the Bolshevik 14th Army on August 6. Budyonny's 6th Cavalry Division, advancing toward Lwów, suffered a significant defeat at the hands of the 13th Division at Biłka Szlachecka where the Americans of the 44th Regiment met the Cossacks with withering rifle, machine gun, and artillery fire. Heaps of men and horses fell before the defenders' lines, Russian losses being so high that the cavalry division was withdrawn for reorganization following the fight. At the same time, another thrust by Budyonny's 11th Cavalry Division heading toward Kurowice suffered a similar reverse. Capt. Nastał noted with pride that because of these victories Budyonny's advance "toward Lwów for the purpose of taking the city was broken by the 13th Division. The city of Lwów was whole thanks to the 13th Division – the lads from America"⁶⁸.

While Budyonny attempted to take Lwów, Gen. Mikhail Tukhachevsky issued an order on July 2, 1920, that read in part: "To the West! Over the corpse of White Poland lies the road to world-wide conflagration. March on Vilno, Minsk, Warsaw! [...] onward to Berlin over the corpse of Poland!" With that, he led the advance of the Bolshevik armies toward Warsaw in what Lenin planned to be the culminating campaign of the war. Part of the Russian strategy called for Budyonny to turn northward after capturing Lwów to join the columns marching on Warsaw and outflank the city from the south. However, in early August Budyonny's progress had ground to a near halt as Polish resistance stiffened⁶⁹.

Budyonny turned north on August 25 in an attempt to smash the flank of the 3rd Polish Army, break through, and reach Lublin from where he could move on Warsaw from the south. To assist in the defense, the Polish command redeployed the 13th Kresowy Division northward to the Zamość area. On August 29, 1920, the division launched assaults on Budyonny's army at Łabunie and Komarów. On the following day, Nastał wrote, "The whole Mounted Army burst out of the woods in a frenzied dash. At an extended trot it flashed across a small clearing north of Wolica Śniatycka, headed for the Steel Division's 25th Brigade. [...] With broadswords flashing in the sun they tore forward to a little forest located east of the village of Bródek, where the 25th Brigade had occupied positions". The division's commander ordered the 45th Regiment to reinforce the front line as the attack developed. "The forward ranks of the Cossacks, encountering heavy fire from our machine guns, had turned to flee, breaking their own rear ranks. Our artillery continued to beat them, decimating the enemy's ranks.

⁶⁸ Valasek, *Haller's Polish Army*, vol. I, 218; Dąbrowski, "45th Infantry Regiment", 250–51; Nastał, "Blue Division", 281–82.

⁶⁹ G.J. Braun, "The Advance of the Russians Over the Bug River (Beginning of July – 6 August 1920)", *Review of Military Literature* XV/58 (September 1935): 40; Thomas, *Russo-Polish War*, 19–20.

The whole Cossack swarm turned to flee back toward the forest from which it had emerged to attack. The first attack was broken⁷⁰. Four more times the Cossacks regrouped to attack, each time to meet the same fate. Fighting alongside the 10th Division and two divisions of Polish cavalry, the 13th Division soundly defeated the Konarmiya in a critical battle at Komarów, inflicting heavy casualties and forcing Budyonny back across the Bug River. For their gallant conduct at Komarów, 18 soldiers of the 45th Regiment received the *Virtuti Militari*⁷¹.

While the Blue Army fought in the southeast, Piłsudski masterfully defeated Tukhachevsky's main thrust toward Warsaw. The Russian general called on Budyonny to move north and strike Piłsudski's flank, but by this time the Konarmiya was in no shape to respond. In fact, Budyonny was in full retreat himself. The 13th Kresowy Division occupied Łuck on September 16 and Równe two days later. As it pushed east, an armistice went into effect on October 18, 1920⁷². Signed on March 18, 1921, the Treaty of Riga ended the Polish-Soviet War, established a border favorable to Polish and Ukrainian interests, required the Soviets to return works of art and other national treasures taken from Poland, provided Russian financial compensation for Poland's contribution to the Russian Empire, and exempted Poland from any share in the debt of the Russian Empire⁷³.

The "Emigrants' Army"

"Loyalty means that you ought to be ready to sacrifice every interest that you have, and your life itself, if your country calls upon you to do so", asserted President Woodrow Wilson in July 1916⁷⁴. For Polish immigrants in the United States, the concept of national loyalty was often bilateral. Although loyal to their adopted nation, as demonstrated by the fact that Poles enlisted in the U. S. armed forces during World War I in a higher percentage than their proportion of the population, they were also intensely interested in the fate of their family, friends, and fellow Poles who remained in their homeland. When the opportunity arose, and despite the many obstacles to enlistment, over 30,000 Polish

⁷⁰ Valasek, *Haller's Polish Army*, vol. I, 219; Nastał, "Blue Division", 285–86.

⁷¹ Ruskoski, "Polish Army in France", 102; Valasek, *Haller's Polish Army*, vol. I, 220; Dąbrowski, "45th Infantry Regiment", 252; Nastał, "Blue Division", 286–88; Thomas, *Russo-Polish War*, 21.

⁷² Thomas, *Russo-Polish War*, 21; Walter, *Czyn zbrojny*, Sections XXXVI and XXXVII. Although some historians credit Gen. Maxime Weygand, a French advisor, for the Polish victory at Warsaw, in his memoirs Weygand clearly stated that "the victory was Polish, the plan was Polish, the army was Polish". For this see Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star*, 197–98.

⁷³ Stanisław Dąbrowski, "The Peace Treaty of Riga", *The Polish Review* 5/1 (1960): 3–34; Jerzy Borzęcki, "Riga, Treaty of", in *International Encyclopedia of the First World War* (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 2014), https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/riga_treaty_of.

⁷⁴ Woodrow Wilson, Address to the Citizenship Convention at Wilson Normal School, The American Presidency Project, www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/318158.

Americans agreed to risk their own lives in the cause of Polish independence. According to Jerzy Walter, during the course of their service 42 officers and 1,790 enlisted men lost their lives serving in France and Poland, while 83 officers and 1,928 men suffered wounds. Another two officers and 102 men suffered permanent disability from poison gas⁷⁵.

Operating first in France, the men of the Blue Army established a record of effective service that was only enhanced once they were transferred to Poland after the armistice on November 11, 1918. There, they furnished the critical offensive strength to defeat Ukrainian forces and save eastern Galicia for Poland⁷⁶. Then, they loyally fought against the Bolshevik invasion, materially assisting in the successful defense of Lwów and preventing Bolshevik forces in the south from moving north to participate in the attack on Warsaw. Further, its training and equipment, according to historian Marian Zgórniak, “significantly contributed to the rise and modernization of the military potential of the Second Republic”⁷⁷.

However, the Blue Army’s contribution to Polish independence was more than military. “Your voluntary enlistment in the Polish Army in France”, Roman Dmowski told the veterans, “made possible its [Poland’s] creation, and thanks to its existence we were recognized as allies and admitted to participate in the peace conference”⁷⁸. The existence of the Polish Army in France as an allied fighting force was a visible symbol that secured for Poland a seat at Versailles when the war ended. It also brought together men from all over the world into a single army, a *Polish* army representing in fact the rebirth of the nation itself. According to historian Anna Cienciała, the Polish victory over the Bolsheviks, aided by soldiers of the Blue Army, not only brought Polish independence, it preserved “the Baltic States, and perhaps the rest of Central Europe, as well from Soviet conquest thus allowing the development of independent states in this region”⁷⁹.

On their arrival back in the United States, Polish Americans recognized veterans of the Blue Army as heroes. “They are those who answered the first call to fall in line and fight for the freedom of our country”, praised *Dziennik Chicagowski*. “They are

⁷⁵ Pienkos, *One Hundred Years Young*, 110–11. When the veterans of the Blue Army were finally demobilized, neither the Polish authorities nor the American government took responsibility for their transport back to North America. Eventually, through pressure from Polonia, Congressman Jan Kleczka and Senator James Wadsworth co-sponsored a resolution permitting the use of U.S. ships to bring them home. It is estimated that about 14,500 Polish veterans returned to United States and Canada by February 1921, while somewhat over 4,000 remained in Poland. A large majority of the latter eventually returned to North America also. See Pliska, “Polish American Army”, 57.

⁷⁶ Ruskoski, “Polish Army in France”, 97; Walter, *Czyn zbrojny*, Sections XXXVI and XXXVII. In 1923 East Galicia was internationally recognized as part of Poland.

⁷⁷ Marian Zgórniak, “Polonia amerykańska wobec problemu niepodległości w czasie I wojny światowej”, in *Polonia amerykańska. Przeszłość i współczesność*, ed. by Hieronim Kubiak, Eugene Kusielewicz, Thaddeus Gromada (Wrocław–Warszawa: Ossolineum, 1988), 743.

⁷⁸ Pienkos, *One Hundred Years Young*, 110.

⁷⁹ Cienciała, “Poland and Soviet Russia”.

the soldiers who followed the bloody path, baring their breasts to open the way to free Poland; they are those who by the sacrifice of their blood put the question of Poland in the forefront among the political questions in Europe. The veterans were the armed representatives of the Poles in America and in Europe before the peace conference. They are the first regular army formations of independent Poland; they are those who by their labor created Poland, throwing her enemies out of her territory. The veterans are frequently the nameless 'border sharpshooters in blue,' the thorns in the flesh of the Bolsheviks; they are those who frequently strewed the fields of Champagne and of the eastern marches of Poland with their dead⁸⁰.

Looking back on his experience in the Blue Army twenty years later, 1st Lt. Jan Kostrubała, a 17-year-old Chicagoan who lied about his age to enlist, reflected on what it all meant: "This is the army that the Polish emigrants in the United States gave to Poland as it arose from slavery. For this army, after bloody battles on the various French fronts, after the armistice of the war on 11 November 1918, arrived in Poland in its entirety; and then with their own bodies, with blood spilled on all fronts, they drew the borders of the Republic. The presence of the volunteer Emigrants' Army in Poland soon after regaining independence gave that Polish government the chance to organize the national army and establish order within the country"⁸¹. He and the other thousands who fought with him could rightly be proud of their achievements. By volunteering to risk their lives in the service of their native land they demonstrated the highest form of loyalty.

James S. Pula

„Nasz święty obowiązek” – walka polskiej diaspory o niepodległość Polski w latach 1894–1921

Ponad 100 lat temu, w dziesięcioleciu poprzedzającym pierwszą wojnę światową, Wacław Kruszką pisał, że Polak w Ameryce jest kulturowo inny niż Polak w Polsce, ale mimo to odczuwa braterstwo duchowe i lojalność wobec bycia „Polakiem”. To przywiązanie do ojczyzny przodków przejawiało się już w diasporze poprzez starania o zachowanie polskiej kultury i wspieranie ruchów niepodległościowych. Niespełna dekadę po opublikowaniu tych uwag przez Kruszkę polska diaspora po raz kolejny udowodniła swoją lojalność, zbierając armię do walki na polach bitew Europy, aby osiągnąć, a następnie chronić tę niepodległość. Niniejszy artykuł niektóre z tych wysiłków, zwłaszcza stworzenie Błękitnej Armii, jej działania na polach bitew we Francji, a następnie jej rozmieszczenie w Polsce w celu przeciwstawienia się inwazji bolszewickiej w latach 1919–1921.

⁸⁰ *Dziennik Chicagowski* (7 II 1922).

⁸¹ Jan Kostrubała's reminiscence appeared in *Weteran* XVI/196 (1937) and is quoted here from the English version in Valasek, *Haller's Polish Army*, vol. II, 26.