



INSTITUTE OF
NATIONAL
REMEMBRANCE

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WARSAW UPRISING 1944

BATTLE FOR POLAND

The Prudential building hit with a shell fired from the German heavy mortar "Karl", 28 August 1944.

Photograph: Sylwester Braun/Warsaw Rising Museum collection;
colorization: Mikołaj Kaczmarek



BETRAYAL

Anti-axis coalition leaders: From the left: The Soviet Union - Joseph Stalin, the United States Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Great Britain - Winston Churchill. Teheran Conference: 21 November 1943 - 1 December 1943; Photograph: Public domain; colorization: Mikołaj Kaczmarek

From September 1939, thousands of Polish soldiers, sailors and airmen fought against Nazi Germany on all the fronts of World War II. Poland suffered enormous human and material losses, which are hardly comparable with those of other European countries. Meanwhile, in the autumn of 1943, the leaders of the Big Three, the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union, keeping it a secret from the Poles, they took decisions that proved critical for Poland's post-war fate.

1. The new Polish-Soviet border was delineated on the Curzon line. That meant that territories east of the Bug River, including Vilnius and Lviv would remain outside Poland.
2. Europe was divided into allied occupation zones. Poland was included in the operational zone of the Red Army.
3. It was agreed that Germany would be divided into occupation zones. The Soviet zone was that adjacent to Poland, with the sphere's communication lines running across Poland, which determined its fate.

This further meant that the fate of the Polish Republic was left in Soviet hands, and that was tantamount to another captivity. That is why the Warsaw Uprising, which was an attempt at stopping the planned division of Europe, never received any substantial help from the allies of Poland. The Soviets halted their advance, which could have liberated Warsaw from the Germans.



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OPERATION "TEMPEST"



In view of the Red Army's crossing the pre-war Polish-Soviet border in January 1944, as part of its advance to the West the Home Army launched Operation "Tempest".

Its objective was to carry out sabotage in the rear of German troops, and - whenever possible - to liberate Polish territory by the Home Army so that the arriving Soviets would be met by free Poles - the hosts of their own country, who recognized the authority of the Polish Government in Exile, the only Polish authority dating back to 1939. Another objective was to protect the Polish population from the barbarity of the retreating German troops and their allies.

Until October 1944, in the immediate rear of the moving frontline over 100,00 Home Army soldiers were engaged in fighting with German forces, and liberated a number of Polish towns. In the process, they were arrested by the Soviets, killed, deported to camps in Siberia or forcibly inducted into the communist army.



Soldiers of the 27th Home Army Infantry Division
Photograph: Public domain; colorization: Mikołaj Kaczmarek

Soldiers of the 27th Home Army Infantry Division enter the liberated Ostrów Lubelski. July 1944.
Photograph: KSI;
colorization: Mikołaj Kaczmarek



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By order of the Government of the Republic of Poland, I stand here as a representative of Polish administration (as military commander) in order to propose Agreement to cooperate with the Soviet armed forces that enter Polish territory in military operations against the common enemy.

(From the resolution of the Government of the Republic of Poland: text of statement to be delivered by local Home Army commanders upon encountering regular Soviet troops as part of Operation "Tempest".

Wola, concentration of the "Fist" Battalion at the Evangelical cemetery before the "W" hour.
Photograph: Stefan Baluk/Warsaw Uprising Museum collection;
colorization: Mikołaj Kaczmarek

On 31 July 1944, news came in that the Soviet troops had broken through the German defenses on the eastern outskirts of Warsaw.

Thus, the Commander of the Home Army Gen. Tadeusz Komorowski, "Bór" gave the order to start Operation "Tempest" in Warsaw, at W hour, on 1 August 1944, at 17.00.

The Home Army was charged with liberating and holding Warsaw for a few Days, before the Soviets arrived. The Government Delegate's Office that represented the legal Polish authorities could then cover Warsaw with civilian administration. The Uprising leaders saw it as the last chance for Poland to regain independence in the last months of the war.



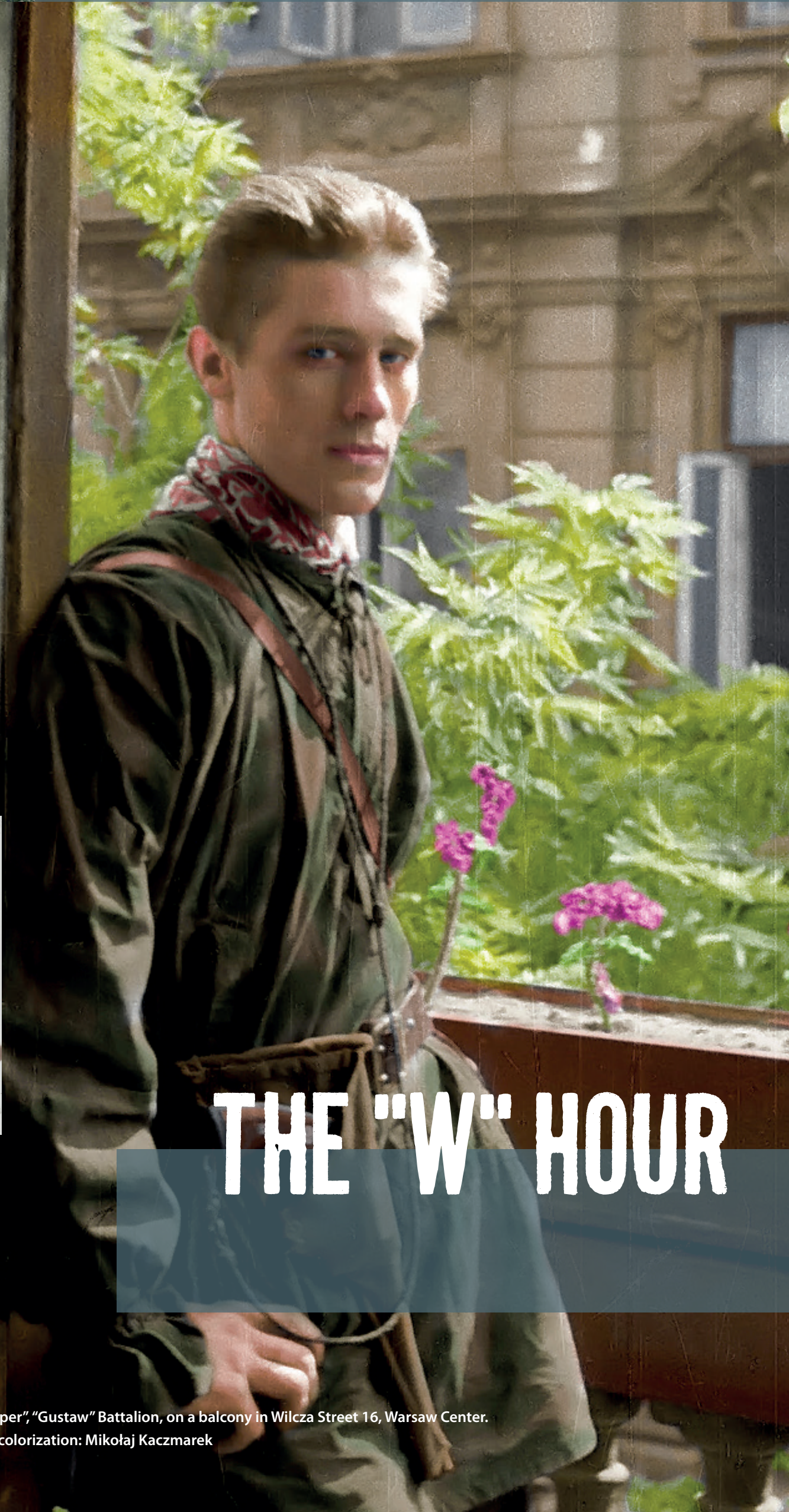
Warsaw children joined the fighting. They were runners, guides in the sewers, destroyed German tanks with Molotov cocktails, and fought on the barricades, arm-in-hand.
Photograph: Warsaw Rising Museum collection;
colorization: Mikołaj Kaczmarek



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Cf. Wiesław Chrzanowski, "Saper", "Gustaw" Battalion, on a balcony in Wilcza Street 16, Warsaw Center.
Photograph: Public domain; colorization: Mikołaj Kaczmarek

THE "W" HOUR



SUCCESSSES OF THE UPRISING



Soldiers of "Anna" Company, "Gustaw" Battalion in the ruins on Królewska Street in Northern Center. Aiming submachine gun "Lightning" is Corporal Tadeusz Przybylowski pseudonym "Roma", holding the Polish pistol VIS, 2nd Lt. Henryk Ozarek pseudonym "Henio", kneeling. Photograph: Wiesław Chrzanowski/Warsaw Uprising Museum collection; colorization: Mikołaj Kaczmarek

In the early days of the fighting, the Insurgents succeeded in seizing most of the Center, built-up parts of Wola and Żoliborz, as well as small enclaves in Ochota and Mokotów.

Among others, they captured the Prudential building (the tallest building in Poland at that time, and second in Europe) in Napoleon Square (Now called the Warsaw Uprising Square). They also captured the power station in Powiśle, large German storage depots full of food and uniforms in Stawki St., and on 20 August - the building of the Polish Telephone Joint-stock Company, PAST.

The city was under Polish civilian administration, primarily the Government Delegate's Office that represented that represented the legal Polish government in exile in London.



An insurgent armed with the "Lightning" submachine gun takes captive a German soldier in a tenement yard on Zielna Street 34 in Northern Center. In the background: POWs from the PAST crew. Photograph: Eugeniusz Lokajski/Warsaw Rising Museum collection; colorization: Mikołaj Kaczmarek

POLACY!

Walka zbrojna o wyzwolenie stolicy rozpoczęła Delegat na Kraj – Wicepremier Rządu Rzeczypospolitej i Przewodniczący Rady Jedności Narodowej w porozumieniu z Dowódcą Armii Krajowej zdecydowali wystąpienie zbrojne w dniu 1.VIII r. b. Trzy dni walki z okupantem przyniosły nam wielkie sukcesy taktyczne i moralne.

Oddziały Armii Krajowej opanowały, łamiąc opór okupanta, większą część stolicy, wyzwalając jednocześnie w duszach Polaków entuzjazm dla walki i ufność w jej powodzenie.

Cale społeczeństwo polskie, a przede wszystkim lud Warszawy, śpieszy ofiarować z pomocą walczącym; wszyscy podporządkowali się kierownictwu powstania, oddając do jego dyspozycji swe siły, wykazując dyscyplinę moralną i wysoką ofiarną w działaniu.

Nie jedną przeszkodę napotkamy jeszcze na drodze do zupełnego wyzwolenia. Ale zespolone siły całego Narodu Polskiego, podporządkowane Rządowi Polskiemu w Londynie, Krajowej Radzie Ministrów i Dowódcy Armii Krajowej przezwyciężą je jak, jak łamią dziś opór okupanta na ulicach Warszawy.

Masy ludu pracującego – chłopów, robotników i inteligencji walczą o POLSKĘ Demokratyczną, POLSKĘ sprawiedliwą społeczną, POLSKĘ ludzi pracy!

NIECH ŻYJE POLSKA NIEPODLEGŁA

Delegat na Kraj Wicepremier Rządu Pol. Przewodniczący Rady Jedności Narodowej Dowódca Armii Krajowej

Warszawa, dnia 3 sierpnia 1944 r.

Proclamation of the Uprising authorities of 3 August 1944.



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LIBERATION OF "GESIÓWKA"

In July 1943, in the ruins of the Warsaw ghetto the Germans set up a concentration camp - Konzentrationslager Warschau. Citizens of Warsaw colloquially called "Gesiówka" (from Gesia Street, along which the camp walls ran). The Germans killed there around 10,000 Poles, and some 10,000 Jews.

On 5 August 1944, soldiers of the scouting "Zoska" Battalion of the Home Army liberated the camp, using the captured German "Panther" tank, which they branded "Magda".

348 Jews were freed, with some joining the ranks of the fighters. After capturing Warsaw in 1945, the Soviets detained in "Gesiówka", in horrific conditions, and murdered members of the pro-independence underground, including Home Army soldiers.

"Zoska" Battalion soldiers on 5 August 1944 in the liberated the "Gesiówka" concentration camp. Standing from the right: Tadeusz Milewski - "Cwik", Juliusz Bogdan Deczkowski - "Laudański", and Wojciech Omyła - "Wojtek". "Cwik" died the same day, "Wojtek" - three days later. "Laudanski", though wounded survived the Uprising.

Photograph: public domain;
colorization: Mikołaj Kaczmarek



"Gesiówka" inmates with their liberators.
Photograph: Juliusz B. Deczkowski/public domain;
colorization: Mikołaj Kaczmarek



"Magda" tank captured by the fighters, one of the chief protagonists of "Gesiówka" liberation. Together with another tank, Marked "WP" was used by the autonomous "Wacek" armored platoon, an element of the "Zoska" Home Army Battalion.
Photograph: Juliusz B. Deczkowski/public domain;
colorization: Mikołaj Kaczmarek





Enormous 124-ton German "Karl" mortar 600 mm, firing on Warsaw, shells that weighed 2.2 tons. The shell crater was 5 meters deep and 15 meters in diameter.

Photograph: Public domain; colorization: Mikołaj Kaczmarek



One of the most ruthless criminal German formations in Warsaw was the SS brigade commanded by Oskar Dirlewanger, made up of murderers, thieves and other criminals. In the picture: Dirlewanger's bandits in Focha Street, Warsaw.

Photograph: Public domain; colorization: Mikołaj Kaczmarek

GERMAN CRIMES

*Every inhabitant is to be killed, take no prisoners.
Warsaw is to be levelled [...]*

(Adolf Hitler upon hearing the Uprising began)

To suppress the Uprising Hitler deployed around 50,000 troops, with armor, heavy artillery, and aviation. The troops included German allies: Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians and Azerbaijanis. Throughout the Uprising the Nazis treated the citizens of

Warsaw ruthlessly and with utmost cruelty. They murdered defenseless civilians as well. On 5–7 August 1944, in Wola and Ochota, the Germans and their allies committed acts of mass genocide, murdering around 50,000 inhabitants.



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Victims of German atrocities in Marszałkowska Street 111.
Photograph: public domain; colorization: Mikołaj Kaczmarek

With each step the water got deeper, the air more suffocating, And our human load – heavier. Suddenly, I stumbled upon something soft. I realized in terror that it was a human corpse.

I tried to lift it up, and drag it, but later... there was one more, a third... still alive and moving. What shall I do? We found it hard to breathe ourselves: gas, lack of oxygen, we were losing strength

[...]. The next one hundred meters was endless hell: we climbed on slippery human bodies, some were clutching at our legs or clothes. Eventually, we reached the first barricade. We were almost up to our heads in the water, but we made it.

(Sergeant Cadet Jerzy Zapadko pseudonym "Mirski", "Parasol" Home Army Battalion)



27 September 1944, a fighter leaving the sewers on Dwor-kowa Street in Mokotów, straight into German hands. That Day, in two executions, the Germans murdered around 140 captured Home Army soldiers who were getting out of the sewers. Photograph: Bundesarchiv CC-BY-3.0; colorization: Mikołaj Kaczmarek

THE SEWERS

The sewers came to symbolize the Warsaw Uprising. Initially, They were used by the fighters for communication between city districts separated by the Germans. In the second stage of the Uprising, they were the only evacuation route for soldiers and civilians. Wandering underground took place in horrific conditions: in the dark, stench and streams of sewage. Germans threw in grenades and poured burning gasoline. Many Warsaw dwellers died there. The survivors recall the sewers as the most traumatic episode of the Uprising.



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One of the sewers used during the Uprising ran under Karowa Street in the City Center. Contemporary photograph.
Photograph: Artur "Nietoperz" Gaca

AIR DROPS

The only real help for the fighters was the air drops in containers on parachutes by allied aircraft taking off from bases in southern Italy and Great Britain. The flights were extremely exhausting, difficult and dangerous for the airmen from Poland, the USA and from the British Empire. At least 220 lost their life. Nevertheless, during the Uprising, 306 allied aircraft dropped on the fighting city 159 tons of weaponry, medicines and provisions. It was a blood in the ocean, but any kind of help was precious for the Varsovians, and it also had an enormous moral importance. The Soviet air force also tried to supply Warsaw by air but the cases with weapons, without parachutes crashed on impact with the ground.



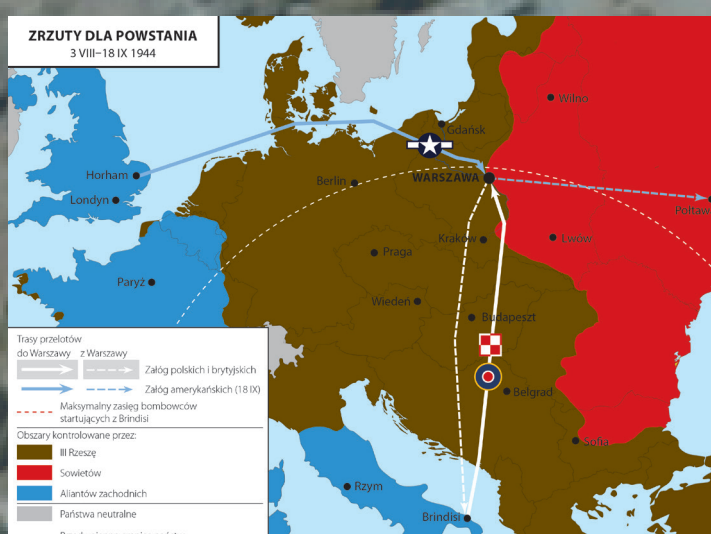
RAF airfield at Campo Casale near Brindisi in southern Italy. B-24 Liberator GR-S BZ965 bomber crew, Capt. Zbigniew Szostak (sitting) from the Polish 1586 Special Squadron, bringing help to the fighting Warsaw. On 15 August 1944, having dropped its delivery, the aircraft was shot down by the Germans near Bochnia. All the crew perished. A copy of this aircraft with certain original part installed is displayed in the Warsaw Rising Museum.

Photograph: Warsaw Rising Museum collection; colorization: Mikołaj Kaczmarek



Fighters with a British anti-tank weapon, PIAT, dropped by air into Warsaw.

Photograph: IPN Archives, colorization: Mikołaj Kaczmarek



Routes of the supply planes to Warsaw. by Tomasz Ginter, IPN

[The Uprising] is a story of utmost courage and sacrifice of our crews [...], of the immortal heroism of our underground [...] and of the dire betrayal by the Russians. By nature, I'm not a vengeful person; however I do hope that perhaps somewhere there is a particular rung of hell reserved for the Kremlin beasts who betrayed "Bór's" men and led to fruitless losses [among our airmen].

(Sir John Slessor, former allied air force commander in the Mediterranean, years later, about how the Soviets treated the Warsaw Uprising).



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2nd Lt. Józef Szczepański pseudonym "Ziutek".
Photograph: Public domain;
colorization: Mikołaj Kaczmarek

RED PLAGUE

*We're waiting for you, O scarlet plague
To save us all from the Black Death:
Waiting for a salvation
To be welcomed with disgust
By a country that's already been hanged and
quartered.*

*We await you – sweating herd
Of brutalized cattle ruled by the knout.
We await you, so that you may crush us under-
foot
With the torrent and clamour of your slogans.*

*We await you, our immemorial enemy
And blood-stained mass murderer of our broth-
ers.*

*We are waiting – not to pay you back
But to greet you with bread and salt at our ru-
ined threshold.*

*If only you knew – O hated saviour
How we wish you'd perish
How we shake your hand from impotence,
Seeking aid from a criminal.*

*If only you knew how much it hurts,
For us, the children of a free and sacred country
To fix the shackles of your cursed mercy
That reeks of the yoke of ancient slavery.*



*If only you knew, O hangman of our forebears
And grim legend of Siberian jails
How everyone here will curse your kindness –
And all of us Slavs, all your kin.*

*Your victorious scarlet army
Has stopped beneath Warsaw's fiery clouds
And like a vulture with a carcass sates itself
On a handful of madmen, who are dying on the
ruins.*

*We await you, not for us soldiers
Or for our thousands of wounded.*

*(Poem The Red Plague by 2nd Lt. Józef Szczepański, trans.
Norman Davies A Warsaw Uprising fighter, written on 29
August 1944, when the Soviets destroyed Home Army
units that marched to relieve Warsaw)*



SURRENDER AND EXPULSION

In view of the tragic situation of the civilian population and no hope for outside help, In the evening of 2 October, at Ozarów Mazowiecki, cessation of hostilities in Warsaw was signed. The Germans Agreed to recognize the combatant status Of Home Army soldiers, and refrain from applying collective responsibility on the civilian population. Warsaw inhabitants were to be resettled, entitled to take movable property, such as valuables The occupiers committed themselves to leave untouched the remaining public and private property, particularly that of high historical, cultural or spiritual value.

The Nazis deliberately broke the provisions of the document. They continued to carry out executions, and began to destroy the city on a systematic basis By mass-scale plunder, arson and blowing up buildings. With extreme prejudice the Germans destroyed palaces, churches, statutes, museums, archives, and libraries.

We were leaving Warsaw, already without weapons but with our head held high, in lockstep, in fours. We passed a group of German officers. They stared with interest at the insurgent army, which they were unable to beat for sixty-three days which destroyed plenty of their tanks and caused enormous losses, and now marched in lockstep proudly, as if they had won I heard one of them say aloud to his men: Stolze Polen (proud Poles).

(Andrzej Janicki pseudonym "Zulinski", platoon leader, "Warszawianka" Company Home Army "Chrobry II" Group).



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The fighters awaiting marching orders into captivity

4 October 1944, Sniadeckich Street, City Center

Photograph: Edward Wojciechowski
Warsaw Rising Museum collection;
Colorization: Mikołaj Kaczmarek



Flag with bullet holes on the roof of the Tourist Home on Starynkiewicza Square in the last days of the Uprising.

Photograph: Zygmunt Walkowski's collection;
colorization: Mikołaj Kaczmarek



After the inhabitants were driven out, the Germans methodically plundered, burned and blew up, apartment by apartment, house after house...

Photograph: Bundesarchiv. CC-BY-3.0;
colorization: Mikołaj Kaczmarek

MEMORY OF THE UPRISING

Under communist rule, cherishing the memory of the Warsaw Uprising was a form of social resistance against the regime installed by the Soviets. Underground publications were issued, postcards, leaflets, stamps, anniversaries of the heroic uprising of 1944 were celebrated. 36 years later, the ideals of the fighters were embraced by a new generation of Poles, who in August 1980 created the Solidarity movement, choosing non-violence in their fight for freedom.



Underground stamps of Solidarity Post
Photograph: KARTA



Pope John Paul II on Zwycięstwa Square
Warsaw, 2 June 1979.
Photograph: PAP



1 August 2005 on Powązkowski Cemetery, Warsaw.
Photograph: PAP

It is impossible to understand this city, Warsaw, the capital of Poland, that undertook in 1944 an unequal battle against the aggressor, a battle in which it was abandoned by the allied powers, a battle in which it was buried under its own ruins — if it is not remembered that under those same ruins there was also the statue of Christ the Savior with his cross that is in front of the church at Krakowskie Przedmieście. It is impossible to understand the history of Poland from Stanislaus in Skalka to Maximilian Kolbe at Oswiecim, unless we apply to them that same single fundamental criterion that is called Jesus Christ.

(Fragment homilii papieża Jana Pawła II wygłoszonej 2 czerwca 1979 r. w Warszawie, podczas jego pierwszej pielgrzymki do ojczyzny)



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BALANCE

THE POLISH SIDE

AROUND **18 000**
KILLED SOLDIERS

AROUND **150 000**
KILLED CIVILIANS

AROUND **600 000**
CIVILIANS EXPELLED FROM WARSAW

DESTRUCTION OF AROUND **55%**
OF BUILDINGS ON THE WESTERN BANK OF
THE VISTULA RIVER

The Warsaw Uprising of 1944 is one of the most important events in Polish history. In view of the human losses suffered by the Poles, the decision to start fighting remains a point of debate and heated polemic.

The Polish side The German side



Ruins of the Royal Castle in Warsaw blown up after the fall of the Uprising by the Germans. In the foreground: fragment of King Sigismund column
Photograph: Marcin Wolagiewicz/ public domain;
colorization: Mikołaj Kaczmarek

THE GERMAN SIDE

AROUND **16 000**
KILLED SOLDIERS



Warsaw 1946. Bottom right: the tallest building in pre-war Poland – Prudential.
Photograph: NAC/ public domain; colorization: Mikołaj Kaczmarek



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WE WANTED TO BE FREE AND TO OWE FREEDOM TO OURSELVES

(Jan Stanislaw Jankowski, Government Delegate)



Soldiers of Home Army "Zoska" Battalion after marching through the sewers from the Old Town to the City Center, Warecka Street. Center: Zofia Dabrowska pseudonym "Myszka" (killed in the Uprising), right Waldemar Papinski pseudonym "Pancerz" (with submachine gun "Blyskawica" – wounded three times, survived the Uprising).

Photograph: Jerzy Tomaszewski/ public domain; colorization: Mikołaj Kaczmarek



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Photographic montage. The Prudential building hit with a shell fired from the German heavy mortar "Karl", 28 August 1944.
Photographs used: Sylwester Braun/Sylwester Braun/Warsaw Rising Museum collection and a contemporary picture shot from the same place
Photograph: Marcin Dziedzic, montage: Marcin Dziedzic