

Institute of National Remembrance

<https://ipn.gov.pl/en/news/4559,The-Siege-of-Warsaw-in-Julien-Bryan039s-photographs.html>

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The Siege of Warsaw in Julien Bryan's photographs

Julien Bryan (1899–1974), an American documentary filmmaker and photographer was accredited as the only foreign correspondent in Warsaw at that time. He arrived in the capital on 7 September 1939 just as all foreigners, diplomats and government officials were fleeing from Warsaw. He entered Poland through the border with Romania and soon witnessed the first bombings. He reached Warsaw after a few days of traveling by train. He was convinced that the war would be slow and that it would take many days for the German army to reach the Vistula. Surprised by the city blockade, he was forced to stay in the bombed Polish capital for two weeks. During this period, he decided to continue his job as a press photographer, often putting his own life at risk. Day after day, his admiration for the courage of the Polish population, mercilessly bombarded by German air force, increased. He contacted the Mayor of Warsaw, Stefan Starzyński, who provided him with a car, a guide and an interpreter so that he would be able to travel across Warsaw and document German methods of total war and the bombing of the city by the Luftwaffe. In the two weeks between 7-21 September, he managed to take hundreds of photographs documenting the siege of Warsaw and to shoot a few hours of film material of bombings, collapsing houses and hospitals, human bodies lying in the streets, the building of barricades, the tragedy of civilians, the German strength and arrogance. Stefan Starzyński granted him special permission to photograph everything that was happening in the capital under attack. Thanks to this, he was able to move freely around the city. He took photos of the city centre, the Wola district, and above all the poor neighbourhoods of Praga.

Bryan's photos from this period became legendary, and with the help of the American press they were seen all over the world. On 21 September 1939, he left Warsaw, taking with him rich material documenting the lives of civilians and the brutality of German soldiers. The film tapes were then used to produce the film "Siege", depicting the heroic struggle of Warsaw's

inhabitants. The film was screened in American cinemas in the spring of 1940. It received the American Film Academy Oscar nomination in 1941 in the 'best short documentary' film category. Interestingly, during his stay in Warsaw, Bryan used, among others, Kodak's color films, which he took with him to test this innovative solution. The pictures taken by Julien Bryan are the only color photographs that show the siege of Warsaw in September 1939 from the point of view of a benevolent observer, showing the despair of Varsovians, the rubble, the wounded and the homeless. Other well-known color photographs depicting these events were taken by the German propaganda units. They, however, show a completely different story - instead of rubble and despair, they portray German dominance and military strength.

After the war, Bryan returned to Poland several times: in 1946, 1958, 1959 and 1974. He managed to find many of the people he photographed in 1939. The story of this search was included in the book "Warsaw. 1939 Siege. 1959 Warsaw Revisited ". He died in New York on 20 October 1974, shortly after returning from Poland.

Thanks to an agreement concluded in 2010 with the son of the photographer Sam Bryan, the Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance is in possession of digital copies of Julien Bryan's photos.



US Embassy in
Warsaw,
September 1939
(AIPN, Julien Bryan
Collection in
Warsaw)



Ten-year-old
Zygmunt
Aksienow with the
canary in the
cage, corner of
Wójtowska and
Przyrynek Streets
in Warsaw's New
Town, September
1939 (AIPN, Julien
Bryan Collection
in Warsaw)



Building of
fortifications in
the Praga district,

7 September 1939
(AIPN, Julien Bryan
Collection in
Warsaw)



12-year-old
Kazimiera
Kostewicz (Mika)
over the body of
her sister killed in
an air raid, 9
September 1939
(AIPN/Julien Bryan
collection in
Warsaw)



A group of
passengers
travelling on the
same train as
Julien Bryan,
reading "Lwowski
Ilustrowany
Express
Wieczorny", near
Lviv, 5 September
1939. (AIPN /
Julien Bryan
Collection in
Warsaw)



Julien Bryan (with
a camera) and
German prisoners
of war held in
Pawiak prison in
Warsaw in
September 1939.
(AIPN / Julien
Bryan Collection

in Warsaw.)



Julien Bryan and
his associates
stopped by a
policeman. (AIPN /
Julien Bryan
Collection in
Warsaw.)



The victims of a
bombing near a
residential house
at 99 Żelazna
Street, September
8, 1939 (AIPN /
Julien Bryan
Collection in
Warsaw)



US Embassy staff
placing their flag
on the roof of a
building,
September 1939.
(AIPN / Julien
Bryan Collection
in Warsaw)



The remains of
the German
Heinkel He 111
bomber which had
crashed near
Dynasy Street in
Warsaw,
September 11,
1939 (AIPN / Julien
Bryan Collection
in Warsaw)



The remains of
the German
Heinkel He 111
bomber which
crashed near
Dynasy Street in
Warsaw,
September 11,
1939. (AIPN /
Julien Bryan
Collection in
Warsaw)



The interior of a
bombed hospital
in Warsaw's Praga
district,
September 8,
1939. (AIPN /

Julien Bryan
Collection in
Warsaw)



Mothers with their
newborn babies in
the Gynecology
and Obstetrics
Hospital of St.
Zofia at 90
Żelazna Street, on
the corner of
Nowolipie in
Warsaw,
September 9,
1939 (AIPN / Julien
Bryan Collection
in Warsaw)



The inhabitants of

the Praga district
of Warsaw amid
the destruction in
September 1939,
Przyrynek Street .
(AIPN / Julien
Bryan Collection
in Warsaw)



The inhabitants of
Warsaw in
September 1939.
(AIPN / Julien
Bryan Collection
in Warsaw)



The construction
of fortifications
and street traffic
in Warsaw's Praga

district near
Zygmuntowska
Street (today a
part of
Solidarności
Avenue) and
Weteranów 1863
Square. (AIPN /
Julien Bryan
Collection in
Warsaw)



The construction
of fortifications
and street traffic
in Warsaw's Praga
district near
Zygmuntowska
Street (today a
part of
Solidarności
Avenue) and
Weteranów 1863

Square. (AIPN /
Julien Bryan
Collection in
Warsaw)



Julien Bryan with
crying Kazimiera
Kostewicz, sister
of Anna Kostewicz
killed in an air
attack on a field
near the
intersection of
Ostroroga and
Wawrzyszewska
Streets,

September 9,
1939 (AIPN / Julien
Bryan Collection
AIPN)



Julien Bryan
meeting
Kazimiera Mika
(née Kostewicz) in
Warsaw in 1958.
(AIPN / Julien
Bryan Collection
in Warsaw)



Posters, orders of
the Warsaw
Defense
Commander and
court verdicts
stuck to the pillars
of the Grand
Theater, Teatralny
Square in Warsaw
around September
15. (AIPN / Julien
Bryan's collection
in Warsaw)



A barricade on
Nowogrodzka

Street, at the
intersection with
Marszałkowska.
(AIPN / Julien
Bryan's collection
in Warsaw)



People hiding
under the arcade
of the Grand
Theater building
in Warsaw in
September 1939.
(AIPN / Julien
Bryan's collection
in Warsaw)



Patients and
medical staff at
the Gynecology

and Obstetrics
Hospital of St.
Zofia on the
corner of
Nowolipie and 90
Żelazna Street in
Warsaw. (AIPN /
Julien Bryan's
collection in
Warsaw)



The inhabitants of
the Praga district
of Warsaw amid
the devastation in
September 1939.
(AIPN / Julien
Bryan's collection
in Warsaw)



Anti-aircraft
ditches in
Narutowicz
Square in Warsaw,
September 1939.
(AIPN / Julien
Bryan's collection
in Warsaw)

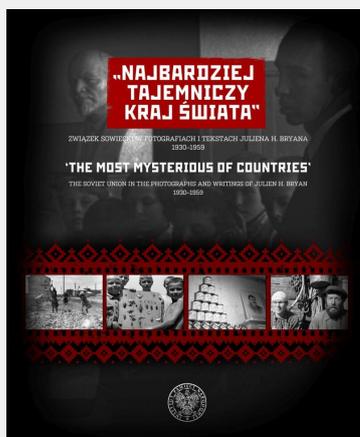


A Polish soldier
behind the
fortifications in
Warsaw in
September 1939.
(AIPN / Julien
Bryan's collection
in Warsaw)

The IPN has published the "Siege of Warsaw in the photographs of Julien Bryan" and "The Colors of War" albums as well as an exhibition entitled "An American in Warsaw. The capital through the lens of Julien Bryan 1936-1974" (in cooperation with Dom Spotkań z Historią). The "Colors of War" album contains color and colored photographs from Warsaw from September

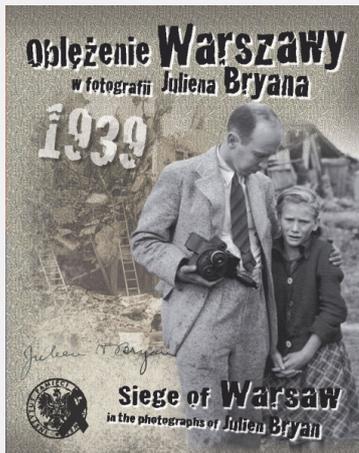
1939. The dyeing of black and white plates took place shortly after Bryan's return to the United States in 1939 and was clearly made under the watchful eye of the photographer, because the colors are rendered amazingly faithfully. The second part of the album tells the later stories of some of the protagonists of the photographs with whom Bryan managed to reunite during his visit to Warsaw in 1958. The photographs are complemented by Julien Bryan's commentaries on the events immortalized in the pictures.

In 2020, the Institute of National Remembrance published an album presenting Bryan's photographs from the Soviet Union from the years 1930-1959 " The Most Mysterious of Countries. The Soviet Union in the Photographs and Writings of Julien H. Bryan 1930 -1959", edited by Tomasz Stempowski.

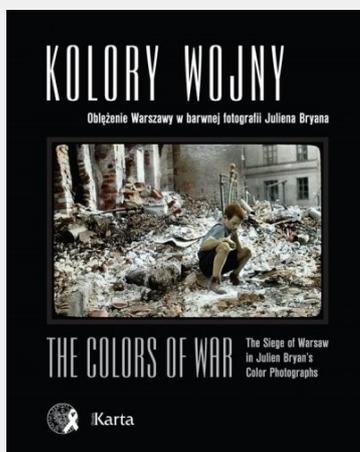


The Most
Mysterious of
Countries. The
Soviet Union in
the Photographs
and Writings of
Julien H. Bryan
1930-1959 " book

cover



The "Siege of Warsaw in the Photography of Julien Bryan" book cover



The Colors of War" book cover



"An American in

Warsaw. The
capital through
the lens of Julien
Bryan 1936-1974
" exhibition poster

On 3 September 2019, the Institute of National Remembrance organized the opening of the "Siege of Warsaw 1939. Photographs by Julien Bryan" exhibition and the screening of "The Last Correspondent - the Siege of Warsaw 1939" by Eugeniusz Starky at the IPN's Educational Center in Warsaw. The event was attended by the son of Julien Bryan - Sam Bryan, Eugeniusz Starky - the author of the film and, most importantly, the two children featured in the photographs dating back 80 years : **Kazimiera Mika** (a girl, mourning the death of her elder sister who was killed in a field during a German air raid) and **Zygmunt Aksienow** (the boy with the canary).



Kazimiera Mika - a
girl from a
photograph by
Julien Bryan



Zygmunt

Aksienow - a boy
with the canary
from a photograph
by Julien Bryan



Sam Bryan with
the people
photographed by
his father 80
years before



"As we drove by a small field at the edge of town we were just a few minutes too late to witness a tragic event, the most incredible of all. Seven women had been digging potatoes in a field. There was no flour in their district, and they were desperate for food. Suddenly two German planes appeared from nowhere and dropped two bombs only two hundred yards away on a small home. Two women in the house were killed. The potato diggers dropped flat upon the ground, hoping to be unnoticed. After the bombers had gone, the women returned to their work. They had to have food. But the Nazi fliers were not satisfied with their work. In a few minutes they came back and swooped down to within two hundred feet of the ground, this time raking the field with machine-gun fire. Two of the seven women were killed. The other five escaped somehow. While I was photographing the bodies, a little ten-year old girl came running up and stood transfixed by one of the dead. The woman was her older sister. The child had never before seen death and couldn't understand why her sister would not speak to her... The child looked at us in bewilderment. I threw my arm about her and held her tightly, trying to comfort her. She cried. So did I and the two Polish officers who were with me..." [Source: Bryan, Julien. "Warsaw: 1939 Siege; 1959 Warsaw Revisited."]

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