

Institute of National Remembrance

<https://ipn.gov.pl/en/news/8479,quotTrails-of-Hope-The-Odyssey-of-Freedomquot-in-Italy.html>

09.04.2024, 15:36

28.07.2021

"Trails of Hope. The Odyssey of Freedom" in Italy

On Tuesday, 27 July, the President of the Institute of National Remembrance Karol Nawrocki is flying to Italy in relation with the "Trail of Hope" project – foreign promotion of the journey made by Polish civilians and soldiers of General Anders, as well as the combat trail of General Stanisław Maczek's 1st Armored Division.





CMENTARZ POLEGŁYCH
W BITWIE O MONTE CASSINO

GDY

PREZYDENTEM RZECZYPOSPOLITEJ POLSKIEJ BYŁ
WŁADYSŁAW RACZKIEWICZ

NACZELNYM WODZEM

GENERAŁ KAZIMIERZ SOSŃKOWSKI

DOWÓDCA 2 KORPUSU POLSKIEGO

GENERAŁ WŁADYSŁAW ANDERS

AMBASADOREM R. P. PRZY WATYKANIE

DR KAZIMIERZ PAPEŁ







The Italian soil, an important leg in the journey of Poles removed from the Soviet Union, and the scene of General Anders' 2nd Corps' greatest victories, will play equally prominent role in the project commemorating the said journey. The visit of the IPN's President is aimed at securing the support of the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Rome in the implementation of the Italian aspects of the enterprise, and persuading the Ambassador herself; backed by the general's daughter, the "Trail of Hope" would acquire a highly symbolic dimension.



On 28 July, Karol Nawrocki met Anna Maria Anders to give her the project's outline, and discuss those details of the long-term (planned for the years 2021-2025) enterprise that will require the Ambassador's particular assistance. Also discussed was the related scholarly activity, which includes the conference scheduled for November. After the meeting, the IPN's President and Ambassador Anna Maria Anders visited the Polish War Cemetery at Monte Cassino and the 2nd Corps Memorial Museum.



Karol Nawrocki said,

In 1944, in May, both General Anders and all his soldiers dreamed of free, independent Poland – Poland that we live in today – and with this symbolic gesture I wanted to thank our heroes for this free Poland.

On 29 July, President Nawrocki laid flowers at the Vatican grave of the Polish Pope, St. John Paul II.



The "Trail of Hope" project aims to convey the message of Polish will and commitment to free Europe from totalitarian regimes to the people in the countries on three continents that the Anders Army went through. Its educational side is to be reflected in the exhibitions and promoted publications, and the commemoration aspect will take the form of funding new and restoring existing plaques, monuments and tombstones.

The project will contain express references to individual locations the Polish soldiers visited on their way; customized exhibitions are to highlight the connection between the Anders Army and local communities in several countries, and in addition to them, strong emphasis will be placed on finding relevant archival sources and recording the accounts of people who remember the war years, or their

relatives.

Foreign promotion of all the aforementioned aspects and protagonists will be ensured by multilingual content – books, comics, exhibitions, articles or games – and the pool of target languages extends far beyond the mainstream group. Moreover, the project communication channels are to be reinforced by a special website presenting a wide range of multimedia and other resources, also available in several language versions.



The practical rationale for removing Polish troops from the Soviet territory in 1942 were food and weapons shortages, but there were also military reasons; combined, they justified immediate removal of these units to the Middle East in mid-1942.

In June 1940, while France was giving in to the Wehrmacht offensive, Britain, desperately looking for allies, went about reconciling two conflicted states: the USSR and Poland. Back in 1939, acting hand in hand with Germany, the former invaded the latter, annexed nearly half of its lands, and went on to repress the population. The British wanted Sikorski's cabinet to accept territorial losses in return for the Soviet permission to form the Poles deported East into military units that would fight the Germans. Since the Polish PM saw the price as too high, the project failed.

Meanwhile, Stalin had his own plans for Polish units in the Soviet Union. In October 1940, he trusted Colonel Zygmunt Berling and a group of officers with the task of forming Polish troops in competition to the ones subordinated to the London Government. What's more, 4 June 1940 Politburo resolution allowed for creating one rifle division out of Poles serving in the Red Army, which meant that prisoners were excluded from draft.

This attempt to have Polish military in the USSR also turned out premature, because it was prevented by the German attack on its former ally. Now it was the USSR, suffering devastating defeats, that desperately tried to secure international assistance. In July, it signed an agreement with the Polish Government-in-Exile that allowed forming Polish units to be used against the Germans under operational command of the Red Army, and backed it up with an amnesty for the Poles in the Soviet prisons and camps. One of the released, General Władysław Anders, was given the overall command of the new

formations. Servicemen and civilians flocked to the draft offices in the Volga region, and soon the ranks swelled to nearly 70,000 people and kept swelling. However, their further growth was impeded by major obstacles.

In March 1942, the Soviets reduced the number to 44,000, giving food shortages as the reason. At the same time, the Western Allies left the distribution of equipment supplies they delivered to the Russians, who were supposed to hand an appropriate portion to Anders' troops. They didn't, and what's more, weren't too generous in handing over their own armaments either. The Soviet promise to arm the second division never materialized.

By then, March 1942, the Poles had already left the Volga region and were stationed in the Soviet republics of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, which was next door to Iran. The supply problem of the Polish troops was solved in Anders' meeting with Stalin: the surplus volunteers who couldn't be fed in the USSR were to be evacuated. In just two weeks, 44,000 people, 11,000 of them civilians, were relocated across the Iranian border.

A few months later, Anders asked Stalin for permission to remove the remainder of the Polish troops, and the Soviet dictator demanded a detailed analysis of the military situation, with the outline of possible benefits.

The report that Anders drafted for Stalin in May was logically sound and showed foresight of a good strategist: even though Persia (Iran)

had been jointly captured by British and Soviet troops in the autumn of 1941, the forces deployed there were too weak to safeguard the oil fields, Soviet southern border and Allied supply routes there, or the rear of the British troops fighting in Libya. The Polish general managed to convince Stalin that the next move for Hitler would be to head for the Caucasus and capture the oil fields of Baku – which, according to him, was possible from either Ukraine or Libya and Egypt – and then proceed to Iran. Since the British were eager to arm the Poles themselves (they needed all reinforcements they could get), and German exploits in Libyan Tobruk or Egyptian Marsa Matruh of June 1942 made Anders' predictions plausible, Stalin agreed – and anyway, getting rid of the Poles he saw as obstacles to his plans for their country, suited his book.

In all, by late November 1942, over 115,000 Poles, a third of them civilians, were evacuated to Iran, which, no doubt, saved them. In early 1943, the world heard about the discovery in Katyn near Smolensk of the graves of Polish officers murdered by the Soviets. It meant that the fate of independent Polish troops in the USSR territory would have been uncertain at best, and tragic at worst.

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