

Summary

Soldiers' paths to the Polish 1st Armoured Division of General Stanisław Maczek 1939-1947

The topic of this doctoral thesis is the problem of man-power sources for the Polish 1st Armoured Division, which had been called into being on 25 February 1942 by the Polish C-in-C General Sikorski. It shows the multitude of different roads and paths, journeys undertaken in very difficult and dangerous conditions by those who formed the Division. The main scientific aim of the thesis is to show the fate of individual soldiers as well as those civilians who were soon to be soldiers in their attempts to join the Division. Their complicated journeys are shown not only in the context of the history of the Polish Armed Forces but that of the whole of the Second World War.

The Soldiers' journeys to reach the Division, the largest Polish armoured formation of the Second World War (some 400 tanks) is presented through a chronological and thematic method. It begins with an introduction and ends with a summary.

The first chapter deals with the manpower sources for the Polish Army being created in France in 1939/1940 following the Polish 1939 Campaign. Attention is focused on the soldiers of the 10th Motorised Cavalry Brigade who were interned in Hungary and made their escape to join the Army in France. They formed the corps of the reformed 10th Brigade in France. The differing and difficult journeys of those interned in Romania, and the Baltic states making their way to France and the recreated Brigade are also shown. To show the entirety of the problem of manpower source for the Polish Army this chapter also concentrates on the mobilization of Polish citizens living and working in France since before the war. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the process of the formation of the 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade on French soil.

The second chapter shows the subsequent fate of the soldiers of the 10th Brigade, which following the French 1940 Campaign fell into two distinct groups. The first group was successfully evacuated by sea to the UK. The fate of the second group, which had been the operational part of the brigade under Gen. Maczek was very different. Following the end of the fighting, soldiers either in small groups or individually escaped to Vichy France and then across

the Pyrenees to Spain, Portugal from where via Gibraltar or from Lisbon reached the UK. Others reached North Africa by sea from the southern ports of France and by various means managed to reach the UK, where the Polish Army was being rebuilt yet again. The fate of those trapped in Finland for a longer period before reaching Britain is also discussed as well as those who before becoming a part of the 1st Armoured division had fought in Norway in 1940.

At the beginning of the third chapter the fate of those who fought in September/October 1939 and had been taken POW by the Germans is discussed. As a result of successful escapes from POW camps, 25 escapees later served in the Division. An interesting aside is the path of the Happy Lwów Wave Theatre Group which joined the Division. This chapter also discusses the voluntary enlistments carried out in Canada, the USA and South America, many of whom ended up serving under Gen. Maczek.

The fourth chapter discusses the reinforcements for the 1st Armoured Division which came from the released Polish soldiers and civilians who had been taken prisoner by the Soviets in 1939 and those deported to the depths of the USSR in 1940/1941. One of the routes shown is that via the Miranda internment camp in Spain. Also discussed are the journeys to the Division of those Poles who had been forcibly conscripted into the Wehrmacht and found themselves allied POWs. They formed the single largest manpower group which reinforced the Division. Other themes in this chapter include the re-organisation of the Division in late 1943, as well as the attitude of Polish-Jewish soldiers including the desertion of some of them in spring 1944. The chapter ends with the preparations made for transferring the Division to Normandy.

The beginning of the fifth chapter deals with the division's operations from Normandy to Germany. This is followed by an analysis of the three main groups of manpower supplies: Special Group, French Group and Swiss Group which were the main sources for reinforcements for the Polish Armed Forces at the time. For the Division the first two groups were especially important.

The sixth chapter shows the fate of Polish prisoners of war liberated at the end of the war and their attempts to join the 1st Armoured Division, especially the Home Army women soldiers from the Warsaw rising, who had been POWs in Oberlangen. Discussed is the issue of the growing difficulty of being accepted into the Division because of the British decision to halt any expansion of the Polish Forces.

The thesis presents the massive effort shown to enable the 1st Armoured Division to reach war establishment levels and make good its combat losses, showing the myriad methods and ways that they had undertaken to become a part of the Polish 1st Armoured Division.