

Polish Legions, 1917-1918

Fond F-1787 Polish Legions; opis' 1- 9

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The State Archive of the Kiev Oblast (GAKO) contains a collection designated as **F-1787** and entitled "Polish Legions." The collection remained, until 1941, classified and kept in the GAKO's Polish collection section in a disordered state. The collection was evacuated to the city of Zlatoust in the Urals during the 1941-45 war. After the war it was returned to GAKO and was registered as an assorted documents weighing 246 kg. In 1960, the documents were sorted out and systematized. The collection has been sorted out into 195 files whose structural components have been described in 9 sectional catalogues. In January 1990, the collection was declassified and became generally available.

The collection contains information about the organization and stationing of Polish military units in Petrograd in 1917-1918, the 1st and 2nd congresses of the Union of Military Poles, correspondence between the Polish committees and military units including the staff of the Fourth Army regarding the formation of the Polish legions, their logistic support and provision with food supplies. The collection contains also correspondence with the Warsaw-based Regency Council, General Skoropadsky and the government of the Ukrainian National Republic; information about Ukrainian peasant revolts against Polish military units, the disarming of Polish legions in the vicinity of Uman' by German forces and their redeployment to Chernigov province; circulars of the Main Committee of the Union of Military Poles, alphabetically arranged rolls of the military personnel, lists of Polish officers up for decorations, orders and circulars of the Romanian front staff, minutes of the Congress of Military Poles of the Romanian front. There are several issues of the weekly newspaper of the Committee of Military Poles. There are assorted samples of various forms, imprints of seals and rubber stamps and other documents of the period.

The history of Polish legions should be viewed in the context of Poland's historical destiny. By the end of the 18th century, Poland was partitioned by Austria, Prussia and Russia thus losing its independence de facto. Many generations of Poles were dreaming about reviving their state, regaining independence and freedom. The Polish revolts of 1794, 1830-31, 1863-64 all failed. A realistic chance to reestablish the Polish state came during World War I. February 1917 saw the fall of the autocracy in Russia that touched off the disintegration of the tsar's army where 700,000 Poles served at that time ¹

and the idea of national revival was very much alive among them. We should note the role in promulgating this idea of the Polish Military Organization set up in Warsaw on Józef Pilsudski's instructions in Warsaw soon after WWI broke out. The Polish Military Organization launched extensive conspiratorial activities in Russia and Ukraine. Its Kiev-based branch was active beginning 1914.

The slogan of the 1917 February revolution regarding the right of nations to self-determination made it possible for the Polish military personnel to form unions. This process began as early as the spring of 1917 at all the fronts and in all rear-service units. The objectives of the Union, as was said in the appeal of the Union of Polish Servicemen of the 9th Army garrison stationed in the city of Patra, were:

- (1) to unite and organize the Poles for developing and upholding in them of national self-awareness and the idea of a United and Free Poland;
 - (2) to inform each other and exchange views on matters of the political situation in connection with the Polish question;
 - (3) to be constantly in touch with the Union of the Poles in other armies and Polish organizations inside Russia for sympathy strikes;
 - (4) to determine our political and economic views as citizens of a future United and Free Poland;
 - (5) to organize in Russia, on democratic principles, a Polish representative organ to express the will of Poles in Russia and represent the Polish people in Russia;
 - (6) to set up nuclei of the future organized force of the Polish people;
 - (7) to sort out daily matters of the Polish personnel in the 9th Army.^{2/}
- The Charter of Military Poles of the 9th Army comprised of 24 sections and a 13-point supplement proclaimed the desire "... to work for the implementation of the idea of an Independent, United and Democratic Poland with access to the sea."^{3/}

In June 1917, an all-Russia congress of Polish servicemen gathered in Petrograd to pass a decision to set up independent Polish armed forces on Russian territory. This decision coincided with the moves of Russia's Provisional Government to dampen the antiwar sentiment spreading among the army and prevent its disintegration. The formation of Polish corps was to be supervised by the Main Polish Military Committee set up by the congress. The 1st Polish Corps was being created mainly on Belorussian territory mostly out of soldiers and officers. For the most part it was being manned by the personnel of the Northern and Western fronts. By mid-December 1917, the

number of officers in the corps exceeded the prescribed level by 10 percent while it had slightly over a quarter of the prescribed number of men.

In July 1917, the organization of Polish armed forces began in Ukraine. Lt. Gen. E. Khenning-Mikhaelis, former commander of the 29th Corps of the Russian Army, was appointed chief inspector of the Polish armed forces in Ukraine. He said in his report of 7 September 1917 to the commander of the 9th Army: "I have been notified by telegram No.7843 from the Quartermaster General of the 9th Army that the War Ministry has no plans to organize further Polish forces in addition to the one already activated corps; inducted into it were officers only of some of the fronts and soldiers of only the Northern and Western fronts; thereby, soldiers of the three fronts are denied the right to serve in their national units.

"This became a matter of certain urgency, as early as this May, as a vast majority of the Poles in the Corps were urging for organizing special Polish units. News of organizing three Polish corps brought a measure of calm, the men were waiting patiently and desertion among them was minimal.

"But as time wore on, no favorable decision was forthcoming; beginning in August, first signs of impatience emerged, underground propaganda was disseminating among the soldiers Bolshevik ideas for putting an immediate end to the war and voluntary surrender.

"The Polish Union board is opposing this negative phenomenon, but now that there is no longer hope for organizing special units, the propaganda will inevitably grow in intensity and may cause undesirable phenomena. The board of the Union has confirmed in writing to all delegates of the units the need for combating disorganization, but it also thinks unfair to deny the soldiers of the three fronts the right to join the Polish troops." ^{4/}

Practical organization of Polish armed forces in Ukraine began after the 1917 October coup. On 14 December 1917, Ukraine's territory was divided into two regions: the Southern Region, where units of the 2nd Corps were to be organized and the Northern Region, where units of the 3rd Corps were to be organized. Most of the bases where the 2nd Corps was being organized were located near land estates and sugar refineries owned by Poles who provided substantial material support to newly organized military units.^{5/} Much attention was devoted to propaganda work. Roman Catholic priests were to be assigned to military units ^{6/} and the delivery of Polish newspapers of strictly democratic leanings.^{7/} was to be arranged for the soldiers: *Echo Polskie* (Moscow), *Dziennik Petrogradski* (Petrograd) and *Dziennik Kiewski* (Kiev).

In the wake of the October 1917 coup in Petrograd, Poles set up in Kiev a Committee to Combat Anarchy whose leaders were trying to use Polish military units to oppose the installation of Soviet government in Ukraine. Some of the Polish units joined the forces of the Central Rada (Council) formed in March 1917 in an attempt to prevent the capture of Kiev by Soviet troops. The 3rd Polish Corps was not manned solely out of the Southeastern front but also out of the Romanian front. Despite the fact that the number of Poles at the Romanian front was 160,000, the Romanian government permitted the induction into the Polish Corps of Poles captured by the Austro-Hungarian Army. According to a personnel report of the 3rd Polish Corps based in Vinnitsa, as of 18 April 1918, there were on the rolls 575 officers and 3,425 men (4,000 in all).^{8/}

The signing of the Brest-Litovsk treaty on January 27, 1918 between the Central Rada and the countries of the German-Austrian bloc also had an impact on the position of the Polish forces in Ukraine. After the 2nd Polish Legion crossed the frontline under the command of J. Galler, its numerical strength swelled. The active infiltration in Ukraine of Polish Military Organization emissaries sharply increased the influence of Pilsudski's supporters on the Polish troops.

Armed conflicts between Polish military units and Ukrainian peasants were on the rise. A letter to the command of the Polish Corps based in Vinnitsa from the commissar of the Podolie Province Dudich of 18 April 1918 said: "... Every day brings more complaints from members of the government and population about systematic harassment by the Polish legions stationed in Podolie, the imposition of levies and taxes, looting of military equipment, weapons and wheat, interference with the Ukrainian government, imposition of their own censorship in some localities (Ol'gopol'), the promulgation of edicts (Staraia-Syniava), etc. These abuses on the part of the Polish legions cause clashes between them and the local people, as a result, several villages have been destroyed. The populace is indignant over such behavior. The government of the Ukrainian Republic perceives it as the Polish legions disguised desire to avenge the Polish landowners, sow discord and weaken the stature of the Ukrainian government.

"... I must warn the Polish command that should abuses on the part of the Polish legions continue, armed population would be sent against them. The government of the Ukrainian Republic would not stop at full elimination of the Polish troops in Ukraine."^{9/}

The principal units of the 3rd Polish Corps were smashed in April 1918 in the vicinity of Nemirov. Lieutenant Colonel Lodzinski, chief of Vinnitsa district, said in his telegram to the Polish troops headquarters: "The Polish detachment at Nemirov is surrounded by armed peasants and faces a critical situation. There is a combat going on. I can dispatch no relief force." ^{10/} The survivors surrendered to the Austrian and Hungarian units and were interned. (N.B. German and Hungarian forces began to occupy Ukraine in March 1918.) Austrian and Hungarian troops disarmed the Polish military unit in Odessa on 20 April 1918 and seized equipment and supplies worth 20 million rubles. ^{11/}

The 2nd Polish Corps was pulled back to the Dnieper. The command had it linger on the Right Bank in hopes that the German command would let it link up with Dowbor-Musnicki's corps for joint actions. On 11 and 12 of May 1918, German troops encircled the Corps near Kanev. The Corps' command signed an act of surrender at Mironovka. It was disarmed and the Germans seized "... 38 field guns, 6 heavy and 3 light cannons, 80 machine guns, 2 armored vehicles and 5 cars, 6 airplanes, 2 motorcycles, 83 field kitchens; 5,845 horses, more than 100 wagons, an engineer unit, telephone and medical equipment and supplies, and considerable quartermaster reserves." ^{12/}

Following the disbandment of the Polish legions, some of their officers stayed on in Ukraine to protect the property of big Polish landowners and industrialists, some went back to Poland, while others left for the Don and Kuban' regions to continue fighting the Soviets as part of the Russian White Guard forces. Some of them might possibly fought in the 1920 Soviet-Polish war.

The future of the Polish legions was determined by the logic of events occurring at that time. In the wake of the 1917 October coup, they resisted the Bolsheviks' attempts to establish Soviet rule in Ukraine. Their plans for reviving the Polish state, which would incorporate considerable areas of lands in western Ukraine, were not liked by the Central Rada. German and Austrian had no use for them and would not tolerate well-armed and battle-hardened mononational troops in Ukraine.

For more than 70 years, the collection **F-1787** remained a closely guarded state secret. Despite the wealth of information it represented, its materials were hardly used for research. Furthermore, the documents in this collection are also unique because most of them are originals of high

reliability. They would enable researchers to fill in the numerous blanks not only in the history of the Polish legions but also in Poland's recent history as it was trying to regain its statehood. They would help discover new details of the highly intricate historical processes in Ukraine in 1917-18 and take a new look at what was happening during WWI and the Civil War on the territory of today's Ukraine. Since a great number of persons are mentioned in the documents, the collection would be appeal not only to historians doing research but also for a broad range of ordinary people taking interest not only in the history of their own countries but also in the history of their families, their ancestors. The collection is awaiting its researchers.

The documents are in Russian, Polish and Ukrainian.

1. GAKO, **fond 1787**, *opis' 3, delo 7, page 5; opis' 5, delo 6, pages 5, 107*
2. GAKO, F-1787, *opis' 5, delo 11, p. 60*
3. GAKO, F-1787, *opis' 5, delo 8, p. 75*
4. GAKO, F-1787, *op.5, d.14, pp.54, 54 (reverse side)*
5. GAKO, F-1787, *op.2, d.8, pp.2, 3*
6. GAKO, F-1787, *op.3, d.14, p.272*
7. GAKO, F-1787, *op.5, d.9, p.158*
8. GAKO, F-1787, *op.1, d.17, p.18*
9. GAKO, F-1787, *op.1, d.18, pp. 27,27 (reverse side)*
10. GAKO, F-1787, *op.1, d.19, p.30*
11. GAKO, F-1787, *op.1, d.18, pp.102, 102 27 (reverse side)*
12. GAKO, F-1787, *op.1, d.18, pp. 102, 102 (reverse side)*

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9	Draft law and a memorandum on appropriations for Polish schools in Ukraine	1918	9	25
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11	Statistics on Polish schools in Ukraine	1918	42	25
12	Information from technical schools about numbers of Polish students	June 1918-July 1918	58	25
13	Syllabus of teacher-training courses for out-of-school education, work schedule of the out-of-school education department	April 1918	25	25
14	Minutes of meetings of provisional Library Council attached to a section of the Culture and Art Department, draft laws on creation of the Ukrainian National Library, on sending in obligatory copies of all newly-published books literature, a memorandum of the library and archives section of the Education Ministry, on the transfer of archive materials from Moscow archives	April 1917-July 1918	25	25
15	Minutes of meetings held by the Art Council, a draft statute of the Council and other materials of the art section	23 March 1917- 9 July 1917	38	25
16	Minutes of the commission on returning museum valuables from the RSFSR and other materials on museum collections	26 April 1917 - 28 May 1918	32	25
17	Answers given by Polish schools to the department's questionnaire	July 1918 - August 1918	31	25
18	Answers given by Polish schools to the department's questionnaire	July 1918	44	25
19	Answers given by Polish schools to the department's questionnaire	July 1918	13	25
20	Answers given by Polish schools to the department's questionnaire	July 1918	29	25
21	File on the opening and work of the Kosciuszko classical school in Odessa	3 April 1918 - 8 July 1918	19	25
22	Ditto, pertaining to the Polish classical school in Sumy	16 May 1917 - 22 June 1918	14	25

23	File on organizing teacher courses and seminars	April 1918 - August 1918	61	25
24	File on opening Polish schools funded by zemstvo and municipal councils	April 1918 - July 1918	30	26
25	File on the opening and work of the Polish Kosciuszko classical school in Ekaterinoslav	15 June 1917- 5 July 1918	18	26
26	File on the opening of Polish non-classical schools in Kharkov	July 1918	22	26
27	Lists of Polish schools	January 1918-March 1918	125	26
28	Lists of Polish schools	May 1918	39	26
29	Lists of Polish schools in the Kharkov educational region	1918	6	26
30	Information on activities of the Polish secondary schools department	1918	3	26
31	Correspondence with the commissioner of the Odessa educational region, the inspector of Polish schools and other materials pertaining to the opening of a Polish classical school in Odessa	6 April 1917- 20 August 1918	62	26
32	Correspondence with the Education Ministry on granting the rights of educational establishments to Polish schools. Information on organization, composition and activities of Polish schools	June 1917- August 1917	66	26
33	Correspondence with education department servants about appointments and transfers	April 1917- August 1918	25	26
34	Teachers' applications for jobs	13 May 1917- 31 July 1918	18	26
35	Teachers' applications for jobs and their papers	April 1917- August 1918	83	26
36	Certificates and references of departmental officials	January 1917- October 1918	78	26
37	Lists of teachers and students who are Austro-Hungarian subjects	March 1917- April 1918	48	27
38	Statistics on the number of Polish students in educational establishments of Kiev	March 1918 - November 1918	55	27

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Film No.		Dates	Number of Pages	Film Number
Opis' 8				
1	Orders pertaining to the region	6 December 1917- 5 April 1918	71	27
2	Telegrams of Polish committees on organization of Polish legions	December 1917 April 1918	61	27
3	Correspondence with military units on forming Polish legions	30 May 1917 - 3 January 1918	46	27
4	Correspondence with escort commandants on medical services for Polish servicemen	8 December 1917 - 28 December 1918	7	27
5	Requests from Polish servicemen assignments to Polish legions, transfer to other units and other matters	December 1917 - February 1918	298	27
6	Requests from Polish servicemen for assignments to Polish legions, for removal from the lists and other matters	October 1917 - May 1918	45	27
7	Identity cards and certificates of Polish servicemen	December 1917 - March 1918	240	28
8	Identity cards and pay vouchers of officers	November 1917	6	28
9	Officer payrolls and pay vouchers	December 1917 - March 1918	177	28
10	Orders pertaining to Polish troops directorate in Vinnitsa	4 January 1917- 27 February 1918	65	28
11	Orders pertaining to the area of concentration of the Polish troops in Vinnitsa	January 1918 - February 1918	70	28
12	Orders pertaining to the area of concentration of the Polish troops in Vinnitsa	13 April 1917- 14 May 1918	57	29
13	Orders pertaining to the supply section of the directorate of the area of concentration Polish troops in Vinnitsa	12 March 1917- 16 May 1918	26	29
14	Orders pertaining to the region	4 January 1918 - 25 February 1918	66	29
15	Orders pertaining to the Polish garrison in Vinnitsa	12 March 1918 - 15 May 1918	75	29
16	Orders pertaining to the Polish escort battalion	1 January 1918 - 19 January 1918	46	29

17	Orders, applications, identity cards of Polish servicemen and other materials dealing with personnel	January 1918 - April 1918	430	29, 30
18	Correspondence with Polish committees on forming Polish legions	February 1918 - April 1918	47	30
19	Correspondence with military units and the Vinnitsa Council of Workers' Deputies on neutrality of the Polish units, the defection of a Polish brigade to the Russian army from the Austrian army	January 1918 - February 1918	24	30
20	1918 cash book	1918	15	30
21	Payrolls of Polish personnel in the noncombatant companies	January 1918	55	30
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Film No.		Dates	Number of Pages	Film Number
	Opis' 9			
1	Correspondence with Polish committees and military units on the outrages committed by Polish legions, the disbandment of Polish units, sending Poles back to their country, putting wounded Poles in the hospitals and other matters. Certificates and identity papers of the Polish personnel	January 1918 - April 1918	364	30