

**“Without Lwów and Wilno There is No Poland”
The Cause of Kresy in Exiled Polish Army Press and Propaganda in
Italy, 1944-1946**

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Abstract

This thesis looks at the role of press and propaganda of the Polish army in Italy during the Second World War aimed at securing Poland's continued hold over its historically contested eastern borderlands, or Kresy, into the postwar period. More than approaching this goal as a political or military wartime objective of the exiled Polish state, the "Kresy cause" of exile Polish military elites developed into a multi-dimensional social, cultural, and ideological project succeeding prewar struggles over the eastern frontier's vast and heterogeneous territories. This Kresowian project was perhaps most visibly apparent in the Polish II Corps' 5th Kresy Infantry Division, which bore the name of the territories in question and acted as its symbolic reminder within Polish military exile in Italy. Through interconnected modes of propagation, Kresy Division officers sought to cultivate in their subordinates a sense of collective mentality and duty towards the borderlands by constructing a hierarchy of collective imaginations towards those aims. To deconstruct the dynamics "Kresy cause," the case of the 5th Kresy Infantry Division and its journal *On the Kresowian Trail* acts as the nucleus of this investigation, along with supplemental primary and secondary sources for a broader contextualization which is required to understand its place within the Second World War, Poland history and memory, and broader theoretical questions related to the origins of community and identity.

¹ Pronounced *Kreh-so-vian*

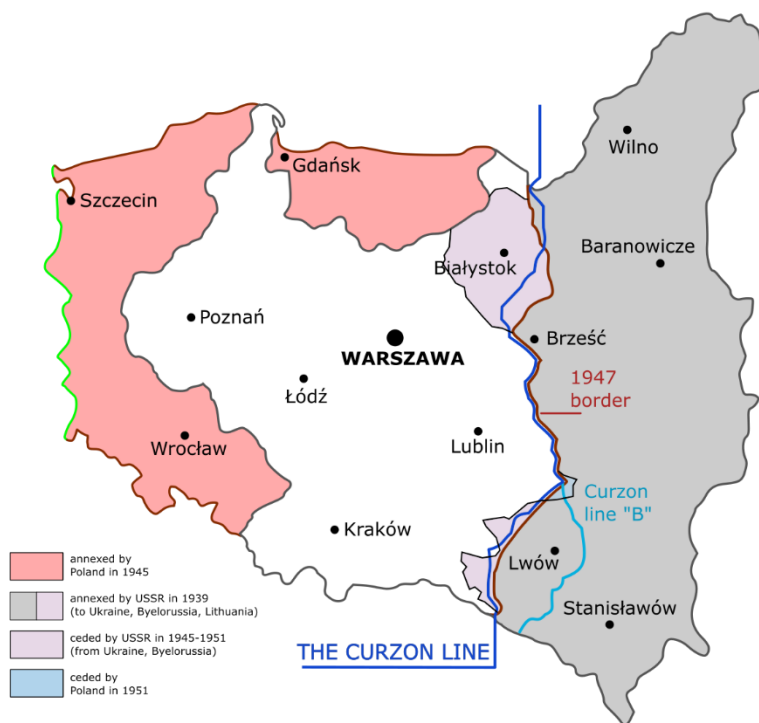


Figure 1. Territorial changes of Poland after the Second World War. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Curzon_line_en.svg



Figure 2. Legitimation booklet of the Polish II Corps' 5th Kresy Infantry Division presented to soldiers with the divisional badge (illustrated on the obverse). On the reverse, the outline of pre-1939 Poland with the words, "Without Wilno and Lwów There is No Poland," 1945. Source: *Private collection*.

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Introduction

Theoretical Framework

The current study investigates community-building attempts of Polish military exiles during the Second World War centered around Polish claims over the disputed eastern territories, or *Kresy*, by focusing on the divisional press and propaganda of the 5th Kresy “Borderlands” Infantry Division of the Polish II Corps² in Italy. Although a majority of soldiers in the exiled Polish army’s “Borderlands” division were indeed originally from the contested eastern regions of the Polish Second Republic and reflected its prewar multiethnic and multilingual character to some degree, they served at a time when hundreds of years of Polish rule over those territories were coming to an end when decisions made by the Great Powers in Tehran (1943) and Yalta (1945) shifted Poland’s borders significantly westward along more ethnolinguistic lines. Despite Polish exile’s overall weak position in geopolitical affairs, the inviolability of Poland’s eastern borderlands constituted a core tenant of Polish wartime ideology and was especially strong in the culture of Polish military exile which had evacuated from the USSR, traveled through the Middle East, and fought in Italy.

The 5th Kresy Infantry Division and what their commander General Nikodem Sulik called the “Kresy cause” offers the researcher an interesting historical case of the dynamic nature of identity-building projects. Although thousands of miles away from Polish Kresy, the peasant soldiers of the Kresy Division were expected to, borrowing the words of E. Weber³, become “Kresowians.” Much more than a demonym identifying a given soldier of the 5th Division, becoming Kresowian was propagated as an ideological act of vital personal, national, and even

² Also referred to as “Anders Army”

³ Weber, Eugen. *Peasants into Frenchmen: the modernization of rural France, 1870-1914*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976).

civilizational importance. Among the Kresy cause's numerous rallying cries, "Without Lwów and Wilno, there is no Republic of Poland" echoed this assertion, and often repeated which occasional addition of, "and without the Republic of Poland, there is no Free Europe."

By the time of the outbreak of the Second World War, Poland was still what Rogers Brubaker calls a "nationalizing state," which was still working out the contours of a nation that had recently regained statehood. This required national integration and assimilation which meant not only infrastructural integration but the institutional and cultural shaping of communal mentalities towards the Polish "imagined community."⁴ Although, the contours of "Polishness" during the interwar period was generally contested between civic and ethnoreligious understandings of the nation, assimilation of ethnolinguistic minorities was seen as crucial to state prosperity and survival. In either case, the eastern borderlands posed the largest challenge to the fledgling state as its vast territories bordering the Soviet Union constituted the most diverse non-Polish populations of the Republic whose assimilation was a matter of state security. This resulted in "Kresy politics," as called by Polish leader Joseph Piłsudski, which aimed to "bring stability and peace to the multi-ethnic region through state assimilation."⁵ However, "Kresy politics" would evolve to not only promote state assimilation (*asymilacja państwowa*) but eventually more forcefully push national-ethnic assimilation (*asymilacja narodowa*) through linguistic, cultural, and religious Polonization.⁶

As will be made clear throughout the study, so-called "Kresy politics" continued into Polish exile and manifested itself within the press and propaganda of Poland's army in exile,

⁴ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*, (New York, NY: Verso, 1995).

⁵ Linkiewicz, Olga. "Bearers of Local Stories," in *Imaginations and Configurations of Polish Society*, ed. Katarzyna Chmielewska (Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung, 2020), 119-120.

⁶ Amar, Tarik Cyril. *The paradox of Ukrainian Lviv: A borderland city between Stalinists, Nazis, and Nationalists*, (Cornell University Press, 2015), 40.

especially that of the Kresy Division which served as its discursive-symbolic core. Despite continuities with prewar policies, conditions of displacement and global war forced “Kresy politics” to evolve under somewhat strained conditions. However, at the same time, the concentration of “Kresowians” under the auspices of a single state institution upon whom they were totally reliant (i.e. the exiled army) streamlined the process in some ways in that alternatives were limited. Moreover, the world war offered an extraordinary and liminal situation conducive to re-narrating the past, creating or reinterpreting existing mythologies and symbolism, and reshaping collective imaginations; not least of which on the national level, as competing actors vied for alternate futures,⁷ each acting as its own “island of memory.”⁸ With shared collective memories of forced deportation from eastern Poland, Soviet incarceration, evacuation to Persia, and several other common joint experiences that had been subsequently shared, naturally occurring reminiscence entangled with deep emotions offered yet another potentially transformative base for propagating shared mentalities.⁹

Warfare too has historically been a powerful transformational force in the shaping of communal consciousness, especially at a national level. In *Nationalism and War*, John Hutchinson argues just that, claiming that nationalism and national projects are not merely a cause of war, but simultaneously the product of warfare, when rival myths and competing

⁷ Wydra. *Politics and the Sacred*, (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

⁸ Judt, Tony. "The past is another country: Myth and memory in postwar Europe." *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory* 87 (1996): 100.

⁹ Building off the work of Maurice Halbwachs, Jan Assmann theorizes that “collective memory” can be deconstructed into a reflexive interaction of “communicative” and “cultural” memories. Whereas the first is a type of remembrance mediated through social communication within a group, the later has “fixed points” unaffected by the passing of time. These points, “are fateful events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formations (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional observation (recitation, practice, observance).” As will be shown in subsequent chapters, both dimensions played a role in the propagation of the Kresy cause. See Assmann, Jan, and John Czaplicka. "Collective memory and cultural identity." *New German critique* 65 (1995), p 125-133.

national visions compete for communal redefinition.¹⁰ Even in times of peace, military structures and nationalist ideologies tend to be codependent, with standing armies and conscription serving as centers of collective indoctrination that synthesizes unit cohesion within national-ideological doctrines.¹¹ This serves both short and long term aims. On a more immediate level, the state is guaranteed disciplined fighting force to serve executive or military purposes when needed, especially crucial in times of instability or war. Long term, it secures national cohesiveness by cultivating loyalty and patriotism in the barracks and on the battlefield, which would theoretically continue in peacetime after demobilization. Moreover, the military is a place where members from disparate regional or cultural backgrounds can come together to tie localized communal consciousness together into a national whole and represent the nation as fully integrated, albeit in a smaller institutionalized form. After returning home, they would bring national ideas and traditions cultivated during their time in service with them.

In light of the current study, though the exiled Polish army during WWII did reflect dynamics of state attempts at shaping communal consciousness via the institution of the military, the fact that both the state and the army had been exiled in foreign lands (and in the case of Anders Army thousands of miles away from both the Polish homeland and the exiled state in London) gave the exiled Polish army a uniquely localized and diasporic character. Moreover, shared experiences under extraordinary global circumstances had amassed a distinct collective of the dispersed citizenry from the former eastern borderlands looking to return home. Such conditions offered potentially fertile ground for the cultivation of what Anthony D. Smith

¹⁰ Hutchinson, John. *Nationalism and War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

¹¹ Frevert, Ute. *A Nation in Barracks Modern Germany, Military Conscription and Civil Society*. (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2004).

identifies as *diaspora nationalism*¹² under the direction of the Polish army authorities. This presented the officers of the Polish II Corp a uniquely strong position in guiding natural social processes of community building towards desired ends. This is not to say that communal or national identity formation is totally top-down, but rather those in authority attempting to shape collective national consciousness are, in the words of Smith, “social and political archaeologists whose activities consist in the rediscovery and reinterpretation of the ethnic past and through it the regeneration of their national community.¹³” In other words, communities, even national communities, must appealingly reconfigure pre-existing communal markers and affiliations in ways that stabilize contemporary communal realities considering short-term aims and/or an imagined national future.

This process can extend far beyond traditional ethnic territories, as individual carriers of memory transplant old markers to new social realities, opening them up for rediscovery or reconfiguration. One important study in the Polish case which comes to mind is Florian Znaniecki and William I. Thomas’ classic sociological work *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* which documented the ethnogenesis of peasant immigrants from Polish territories to urban areas in the US into a “Polish-American” diaspora at the turn of the 20th c.¹⁴ Even when tracing the diasporic movements back to parts of the Polish “homeland,” similar processes of ethnogenesis were happening contemporaneously in rural Galicia as investigated in *The Nation in*

¹² According to Smith diaspora nationalism is defined as “ideological movement to secure for a self-defined ethnocultural population collective autonomy, unity and identity by restoring its members to their historic homeland. See “Diasporas and Homelands in History: The Case of the Classic Diasporas,” in *The Call of the Homeland: Diaspora Nationalisms Past and Present*, (eds.) Allon Gal, Athena S. Leoussi, and Anthony D. Smith. Leiden (Brill, 2010): p 4.

¹³ Smith, Anthony D. “Gastronomy or Geology? The role of nationalism in the reconstruction of nations.” *Nations and Nationalism* 1/1, (1995): p 3.

¹⁴ Znaniecki, Florian and William I. Thomas, (eds) Eli Zaretski. *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America: A Classic Work in Immigration History* (University of Illinois Press, 1996).

the Village: The Genesis of Peasant National Identity in Austrian Poland, 1848–1914 by Keely Stauter Halsted.¹⁵ Michał Łuczewski follows this process to the end of the 20th century by tracing the generational reconstruction of communal ideologies of a former Galician village in *Odwieczny naród: Polak i katolik w Żmiącej*.¹⁶

Part of the dynamic process of shaping communal consciousness or ideologies involves the development of propaganda, neutrally defined as “means to disseminate or promote particular ideas.” Propaganda can take on multiple forms including education, press or print media, verbal communications, and visual symbols. Such were the key propagandic modes of promoting the “Kresy cause” within the exiled Polish army, which sought to guide natural processes of self-definition, symbolic cultivation, territorialization, and the creation and dissemination of public culture and a sense of shared values.¹⁷ Despite pejorative or totalitarian connotations that are generally attached to the word “propaganda,” it must be noted that the persuasiveness of propaganda rests on the relationship between the propagandist and their audience. According to Jo Fox, the propagandist -as-persuader must be sensitive to audiences’ pre-existing beliefs and concerns, responding appropriately to them and current realities while guiding them towards desired ideas or actions.¹⁸ If propaganda is too abrasive, unsympathetic, or simply out-of-touch

¹⁵ Stauter-Halsted, Keely. *The Nation in the Village: The Genesis of Peasant National Identity in Austrian Poland, 1848–1914* (Cornell University Press, 2004).

¹⁶ Łuczewski, Michał. *Odwieczny naród: Polak i katolik w Żmiącej* (Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2012).

¹⁷ Smith, Anthony D. “Diasporas and Homelands in History,” p 5.

¹⁸ Fox, J. “The propaganda war.” In *The Cambridge History of the Second World War*, (eds.) R. Bosworth & J. Maiolo, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p 91-116.

The observation that ‘public opinion and propaganda mutually limit and influence each other’ captures both the power of persuasion and the power of the public to accept or reject it.2 As such, propaganda becomes a reciprocal transaction, an ‘ongoing process involving both persuader and persuadee’, responding individual practical, spiritual or philosophical needs and contributing to the process of community formation. It is a dynamic and responsive process. This, in part, explains why it is most successful when crystallizing or sharpening pre-existing beliefs, when it is credible (but not necessarily truthful) or when it responds to a critical popular need, such as hope, or to an emotional response, such as fear.

with those it is trying to persuade, its influence is marginalized. With Divisional officers being largely the products of the prewar borderlands themselves (although representing the regionally privileged and hegemonic Polish elites), Polish army propagandists possessed an adequate repertoire of knowledge sensitive to frontier mentalities which could be used to guide collective mentalities towards a common Kresowian homeland.

Research Aims and Sources

This thesis aims to investigate the propagation of the so-called “Kresy cause” as an ideological project cultivated within Polish military exile during the Second World War. This will be done by first historicizing it as a product of prewar Polish struggle for securing, integrating, and assimilating the contested eastern borderlands of Poland and this process’ intersection with extraordinary social and political developments had that fragmented populations in the wake of the invasion of Poland in September 1939. It will then deconstruct and evaluate multileveled dimensions of the Kresy cause articulated within Polish II Corps propagandic discourse. Greatest attention will be paid to that of the 5th Kresy Infantry Division, whose commander’s words semantically delineated the concept of a special Kresy cause nested within the larger cause of Polish exile during World War II.

The thesis’ use of primary sources largely relies on publications of the Referat Kultury i Prasy of the 5th Kresy Infantry Division, initially called the Referat Propagandy i Kultury, which circulated material among Polish military exile in Italy from 1944 to 1946. This included the Division’s monthly journal *Na Szlaku Kresowej* (On the Kresowian Trail) edited by Witold Zahorski, weekly paper *Wiadomosci Kresowej* (Kresowian News), as well as several books including *Kresowa Walczy w Italii* (Kresy Fights in Italy) edited by Lucjan Paff and published in

Rome in 1945. Unfortunately, due to a lack of access to the issues of *Kresowian News*, there is a valuable omission in potential primary sources that should be noted. However, considering the richness of *On the Kresowian Trail* as a primary source alone, in conjunction with supplementary sources that will be subsequently listed, I believe the omission does not detract from the overall contribution of the work, which offers a fresh perspective and lays the foundations for future research.

Additional primary resources include selected documents from the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London, which has a sizeable online database of archival materials related to the Polish Government in Exile and Polish Armed Forces in the West. Published collections of primary sources likewise contribute a valuable resource for the current study, which includes a 2009 publication by the University of Warsaw of General Władysław Anders' selected writings and orders.¹⁹ Other crucial primary sources were found in annexes of other published scholarly works or archival publications.

¹⁹ Anders, Władysław, and Bogusław Polak. *General broni Władysław Anders: wybór pism i rozkazów*. (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2009).

Chapter 1.

Origins of the Polish Problem and Kresy Cause during WWII

1.1 From the Lands of Italy to Poland?

By summer 1945, over 80,000 soldiers of the Polish II Corps found themselves stationed on the Apennine peninsula after fighting with the Allied forces during the Italian campaign. Although the war had officially ended that May, the country was still buzzing with activity. Between performing various military guard duties as an Allied occupation force, many Polish soldiers took the opportunity to take up some sightseeing across the sunny country during the long-awaited interval of relative peace. Ancient Roman ruins, Renaissance villas, and mountainous vineyards, the Mediterranean landscapes were a world away from their own homes in the cities, towns, and villages in Eastern Europe. However, the war had taken a visible toll on the Italian landscape, adding contemporary ruins to lands with ones more ancient, along with wooden crosses and headstones dotting the span of the entire countryside. In the year and a half of war on its soil, 536,000 Axis soldiers, 313,500 Allied, and over a million civilians had perished in Italy.²⁰ The soldiers of the Polish Corps saw the destructive reality of modern warfare among its very ranks; over 2,000 of their comrades lay dead with more than 8,000 wounded at the end of the campaign. Seeing the devastation in Italy, one could only imagine how it had affected their own homes thousands of kilometers away. Since September 1939, Poland had been in a state of war and under occupation. Every soldier knew about the heavy fighting that took place on Polish soil as the Red Army advanced towards Berlin. Every soldier knew the fate of Warsaw and the bloody struggle of their underground Home Army comrades against Germans and their

²⁰ Holland, James. *Italy's sorrow: a year of war, 1944-1945*. (St. Martin's Press, 2008), p. 530.

betrayal at the hands of the Soviets. What was unknown was the fate of their own homes, families, and friends, many of whom had found themselves outside the newly drawn borders of Poland and in Soviet socialist republics.

Still, thoughts of home or the homeland gave soldiers a form of temporary escape, a source of hope, and even artistic inspiration. Jerzy Woszczynin took to poetry to reflect thoughts of his home in faraway Polesia where, just like in Italy, the seasons would continue to change; a universal constant even during a time of global uncertainty:

*Tak dobrze jest pomyśleć, że gdy świat się wali,
Gdy ludzie godzą w siebie z dreszczem nienawiści ...
Tak samo wstaje słońce z porannych oparów
I oświeca pokrzywy porośłe na zgliszczach.
Tak samo na poleskich górkach cienistych.²¹*

Others, like Witold Czerny who penned a poem at the beginning of that year, escaped into fantasy to see themselves returning to the homeland as heroes, marching through the streets of the capitol shoulder to shoulder with the men their divisions, battalions, and the entire Polish Corps:

*A nad trybunami w złotym słońcu sztandary, proporce i orły,
flagi biało-czerwone w perspektywach ulici wybuch, wybuch krzyku: „Niechaj żyje Sulik !
Niech żyje Ryś Najstarszy! Niech żyje bojowa, wileńska, nadniemeńska Dywizja
Kresowa!”²²*

Although such a homecoming reward was still a fantasy, the Polish Army did what it could to award their soldiers for their efforts and enduring the hardships of bloody campaigning. Honorary parades marched through Italian cities and towns with crowned eagles on their hats and red and white banners in hand. Ceremonies were held for various divisions and battalions, which were often attended by the supreme commander, General Władysław Anders. Medals were presented.

²¹ Woszczynin, Jerzy. “Polesie,” in *Na Szlaku Kresowej*, Nr 5 (23) (June 1945), p.23.

²² Czerny, Witold. „Rok 1945.” in *Na Szlaku Kresowej (Numer Świąteczny)* (25 XII 1944 – 1 I 1945), p. 60-61.

Holy mass was said for the dead. All who participated in the campaign's deadliest battle were to be awarded the Monte Cassino Cross. Every soldier of the Corps was to receive a metal badge representing their unit, which was to be worn as marks of pride. When the insignia for the 5th Kresy Borderlands Division arrived, they were accompanied by a small authentication booklet, numbered, stamped, and signed by their commander. Though these tokens were awards for a job well done so far, they acted also as reminders that their battle was not over. Each certificate bore an outline of the defunct prewar borders of Polish Second Republic with the words, "Without Wilno and Lwów There is No Poland" (*Bez Wilna i Lwowa nie ma Polski*).²³

Other Allied forces saw themselves in similar positions, caught between duties and celebrations while waiting to demobilize and return home. However, a return home was not so certain for the soldiers of the exiled Polish army, especially those whose homes were drawn out of Poland's postwar borders and who were condemned as fascists and traitors by the newly established Polish communist government. For the Poles fighting under Anders, the hardships of war were supplemented by constant anxiety over far-away developments on the Polish homeland and in London where their exiled government steered its way as a small nation through the unforgiving waters of Great Power politics. Although an initial boost in Polish morale followed the II Corps first taste of combat against the Germans at Monte Cassino- a confrontation they had been waiting for as an act of revenge for 1939- subsequent reports from home and political fronts had quickly poisoned moods. While Anders Army continued fighting up the Apennine peninsular in the name of Free Poland under Allied command, the Red Army had crossed into former Polish territories with their very own army of Poles - the Kościuszko Division. Stalin's so-called Union

²³ „Legitymacja Nr ... upoważniająca do noszenia Odznaki Pamiątkowej 5 KDP,” DŹS IA 7 Cim. (Warsaw: Biblioteka Narodowa, Magazyn Druków Ulotnych). URL: <https://polona.pl/item/5-kresowa-dywizja-piechoty,NzU3ODYxNTA/0/#info:metadata>

of Polish Patriots were close behind, ready to join with the Polish communist underground and lay the foundations of a Marxist-Leninist Polish state under Soviet tutelage. What's more, they openly began targeting their "allies" in the Polish underground Home Army (AK) who, like Anders army, remained loyal to the Polish Government in Exile. Despite appeals by the Polish Armed Forces and Government in Exile towards British and American allies to keep Soviet political meddling at bay, it was becoming obvious that they lacked the leverage to change what was happening to their country. During the final phase of the war when the Churchill and Roosevelt were looking for full Soviet cooperation in jointly dealing a final death blow to Hitler (and in the case of the United States, against Japan), the protests of Polish exiles were hardly a deterrent in forcefully bringing an end to the long and bloody conflict. The whole issue was perceived as a nuisance more than anything, particularly in the eyes of the British, whose Prime Minister Winston Churchill referred to as the "Polish Problem." "The Polish Problem," Churchill told the House of Commons in February 1945, "has been divided into two main issues — the frontiers of Poland and the freedom of Poland."

Though the Prime Minister's succinct assessment was correct, it was Churchill's answer that posed the real problem for the exiled Polish army. He continued, "The Poles will have their future in their own hands, with the single limitation that they must honestly follow, in harmony with their Allies, a policy friendly to Russia. The procedure which the three Great Powers have unitedly adopted to achieve this vital aim is set forth in unmistakable terms in the Crimea Declaration."²⁴ For the exiled government in London, such terms were totally unacceptable, and

²⁴ Parliamentary Debates. House of Commons-Official report. Tenth session of the Thirty-Seventh Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. 8 George VI. Dir. of publ. Hansard. 1944-45, No 408; fifth series. (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office. "Crimea Conference"), p. 1274-1284.

Yalta amounted to a “Western Betrayal,” a “fifth partition of Poland” which was carried out not by Poland’s enemies, but by her own allies.²⁵ With Britain and the United States backing the communist-led Polish Provisional Government of National Unity (TRJN), the Polish government in Exile was essentially reduced to a conditional accessory of the future Polish state, not as its legitimate base - a position which was usurped by the Soviets through political maneuvering and Red Army boots on the ground. To General Anders and many soldiers of the exiled army, the Yalta Agreement felt like a stab in the back of every soldier who had fought and died under Allied command. Just like Polish exile representatives in London, General Anders was quick to condemn the decisions at Yalta and disseminate the news among his troops. In his official statement addressed to exiled President Tomasz Arciszewski, Anders made clear that neither he nor Poland can “recognize the unilateral decision giving up Poland and the people of Poland to the spoils to the Bolsheviks” and that the exiled army remained loyal to President Arciszewski and the Polish exile government.²⁶

With a bulk of his forces originating out of the gulags of the USSR following incarceration after the joint Nazi-Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939, most had no interest in friendship with their former jailers or to allow communists any leverage within a future Polish government. According to their oath, they were loyal to the Polish exile government in London, to whom the commanders saw as the legitimate heirs of the Polish Second Republic in line with the Constitution of 1935. The exiled government in London, they believed, was the true representative Polish state and of the people, and as an army loyal to it, they constituted its executive arm. Individuals from the London government who left to cooperate with the Soviet-

²⁵ „Oswiadczenie Rządu Polskiego.” In *Na Szlaku Kresowej*, Nr.1 (19) (February 1943), p. 33.

²⁶ Quoted Telegram from General Anders to President Arciszewski, in *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 1 (19) (February 1945), p33.

led provisional government - such as former exile Prime Minister Stanisław Mikołajczyk - were looked upon by Anders and his subordinates with disdain, if not outrightly condemned as traitors.

The question of the frontiers was an equally incendiary topic for Anders and his army, as many came from territories outside the proposed postwar borders of the Soviets, especially the eastern territories from which they and their families were forcibly expelled at the beginning of the war. The Yalta agreements stripped Poland of its territories east of a modified Curzon line and incorporated them into the Lithuanian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republics. Among this vast territory, it deprived Poland of the coveted cities of Wilno (Vilnius/Vilna) and Lwów (Lviv/Lvov). These two cities of the eastern borderlands, or *Kresy*, as it was referred to, held a special place within the Polish national imagination and collective memory dating back before the times of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and saw a resurgence after Polish independence.

The time between Allied derecognition of the Polish exile government and the complete demobilization of Polish forces in exile in 1947 was a time of political limbo with potentially volatile consequences. Although Polish forces in Italy were still supported as a unit within the British Army, they were not recognized as an official army of the Provisional Polish state established in Warsaw, with whom the British had established diplomatic relations over that of the exiled government. On multiple occasions, the Warsaw government called for the repatriation of the forces stationed in Italy, and although a good number did return, a majority refused. This was especially true of the survivors of the initial cohort who evacuated from the USSR with General Anders after release from Soviet gulags. All the while, Anders had disregarded Allied instructions on recruitment quotas in postwar Italy, raising his army's strength to its peak at over

107,000 by the beginning of 1946.²⁷ Anti-Anders propaganda proliferated from Moscow and Warsaw, portraying Anders, his men, and the exile government as fascist radicals and traitors to the Polish people. Keith Sword summarized their predicament quite well when he said, “the majority of Poles who remained outside the borders of their homeland after 1945 experienced the irony of being on the winning side militarily and yet - in political terms – also defeated.”²⁸ Indeed, as Poles and the Allies celebrated victory in Italy, performances of the Polish anthem with the chorus of “March, march, [General] Dąbrowski – from the lands of Italy to Poland, Under your command We shall rejoin the nation²⁹” must have made them question whether they would ever themselves return.

1.2 Kresy: Introducing an ideological-territorial concept

Before setting the historical framework for the questions that will be explored in this work, an introduction to the Polish term “Kresy” is fundamental. Territories historically or contemporarily considered part of Kresy have been painted in varying ways and metaphorical descriptions including a “part of what Poland is³⁰,” “bloodlands³¹,” a “kaleidoscope³²,” the

²⁷ Smoliński, Józef. *Polskie władze państwowe i wojskowe na uchodźstwie*. (Oficyna Wydawnicza RYTM, 1999), p 224.

²⁸ Sword, Keith R. "'Their Prospects will not be Bright': British Responses to the Problem of the Polish 'Recalcitrants' 1946-49." *Journal of Contemporary History* 21.3 (1986), p 367.

²⁹ Translated to English from the Polish anthem *Mazurek Dąbrowskiego* (Dąbrowski's Mazurek) written in 1797 by Józef Wybicki which references General Jan Henryk Dąbrowski's Polish Legions who fought under Napoleon in the Italian campaigns of the French Revolutionary Wars. The Legionnaires fought for revolutionary France with the aim of overthrowing foreign imperial occupation and restoring the Polish state.

³⁰ Kolbuszewski, Jacek. *Kresy*. (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 2006).

³¹ Snyder, Timothy. *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*. (Random House, 2011).

³² Mędrzecki, Włodzimierz. *Kresowy kalejdoskop: wędrówki przez ziemie wschodnie Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej 1918-1939*. (Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2018).

“bastard child of progress³³,” a “myth between history and memory³⁴,” a “Polish ideology of Eastness³⁵,” or even Central Europe’s Kosovo³⁶. Deriving from the Polish word *kres* meaning “end” or “limit” and first coined by a Polish geographer-poet,³⁷ to speak of Kresy or something *na Kresach* (locative plural) today, one generally denotes the historic eastern borderlands (*Kresy Wschodnie*) of Poland which are no longer within the borders of the current Polish state.

However, although the word has a fundamental territorial dimension, delineating its physical boundaries are not so simple, and to speak of the frontier as a territorial unit as-such belies a complex history of vast regions with complex and eclectic communities. During the peak of expansion by the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the early XVII c, its eastern frontier ran from Courland in the north on the Baltic, past Smolensk, and including large swaths of land southeastward past Kiev, almost down to the Black Sea. However, as the Commonwealth’s influence waned over the next centuries, this border would recede until Poland was completely wiped off the map after a triad of partitions, ending with the last in 1795.

When a Polish state was re-established under the Polish II Republic in 1918, it took several years and a series of bloody border conflicts until the eastern border was set, designating the eastern voivodeships bordering Soviet Russia as the eastern *kres* i.e. Kresy. By the time of the II Republic, Kresy’s semantic boundaries had shifted to include Eastern Galicia, which had until then been known as “South Lesser Poland” (a territory that was seen throughout Polish history as

³³ Brown, Kate. *A biography of no place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland*. (Harvard University Press, 2009), p 1.

³⁴ Beauvois, D. “Mit kresów wschodnich czyli jak mu położyć kres,” in *Polskie mity polityczne XIX i XX wieku*, (eds.) W. Wrzesiński, (Wrocław, 1994).

³⁵ Zarycki, Tomasz. *Ideologies of eastness in Central and Eastern Europe*. (Routledge, 2014), p 115.

³⁶ Böhler, Jochen. *Civil War in Central Europe, 1918-1921: The Reconstruction of Poland. Greater War*, (Oxford University Press, 2019), p 191.

³⁷ The term “kresy” was introduced to the Polish language quite recently, as it was coined by geographer-poet Wincenty Pol in his 1854 work *Mohort* to paint a picture of a romanticized eastern frontier. See Kroh, Antoni. „Co pozostało z kresów” in Purchla, Jacek (ed), *Dziedzictwo kresów – nasze wspólne dziedzictwo? [materiały międzynarodowej Konferencji Dziedzictwo Kresów -Nasze Wspólne Dziedzictwo?]* (Kraków 2006), p 293-300.

more-centrally located), while simultaneously including “lost” territories as far east as Kiev in the Polish imagination. It was during this time that the eastern voivodeships of Eastern Kresy (*Kresy Wschodnie*) were subject to Polish assimilationist projects. During the Second World war, and particularly after the Tehran and Yalta agreements, Kresy symbolized those territories lost through the so-called Western Betrayal of Poland, which sealed its eastern boundaries depriving it of Wilno (Vilnius) and Lwów (Lviv). Under the People’s Republic of Poland (PRL), topics concerning the memory of the lost Eastern territories were censored yet kept alive outside the country through collective memories of Polish emigres in the Western diaspora. After 1989, the concept of Kresy had made a resurgence in Poland’s public space. When PRL censorship of issues concerning the Soviet past and the postwar eastern border were lifted, its memory proliferated throughout various publications and sites of remembrance as democratic Poland sought wartime heroes uncontaminated by Sovietized narratives.

Modern and historical uses of the term are often symbolically loaded and can be read as being associated with national chauvinism or irredentist tones. Since territories known in Polish as Kresy are found outside the borders of the modern Polish state in neighboring states, even banal appeals to its memory can be perceived as threatening to the territorial legitimacy of those areas controlled by Poland’s eastern neighbors, namely Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine. Moreover, with the Giedroyc Doctrine acting as the post-Solidarity foreign policy model, tensions surrounding Polish relationships to Poland’s former territories vis-à-vis historical realities have opened the memory of Kresy and its legacy to scrutiny and reevaluation within academic circles. One particularly critical reevaluation of the “Myth of Eastern Kresy,” as he calls it, comes from Daniel Beauvois, whose work denounces Polish infatuations with Kresy as a one-sided “Polish expression of narcissism, abusive neighbors, that is an old beautiful colorful

fairy tale, ignoring the most important social, ethnic and religious issues.³⁸ Conversely, some attempts have been made to reformulate the concept of Kresy as a comparative tool, such as Tomasz Kamusella's work comparing it to the Russian term *Okrainy* (Окраины)³⁹, or Marek Koter's typology which seeks to compare Poland's Kresy to worldwide *kresys* or frontiers.⁴⁰

Despite the boom in Kresy and borderland studies in the last few decades, focus on the historical development of Kresy discourses and myths during the Second World War, I would argue, is one that is largely underrepresented in related scholarship. Although it's generally noted that wartime occupation and subsequent censorship of the topic under the PRL regime forced Kresy to be conceptually suspended in exile by the Western diaspora until 1989, inadequate focus has been placed on its continued development within Polish military exile *during* the war. This is evident in the way that the history of the Polish II Corps Anders Army has been largely divorced from the wider Kresy scholarship, even though Kresy-oriented themes were saturated throughout Polish military exile.

This scholarly split between Kresy and Polish military exile research leads not only to a crucial omission in borderland histories and memory studies but often results in inadequate contextual descriptions of the Polish II Corps within histories of the Second World War which often fall back upon prewar borderland mythologies identified by Beauvois. For instance, Norman Davies' 2015 publication⁴¹ *Trail of Hope: The Anders Army, An Odyssey Across Three Continents*, though overall an excellent resource on the topic, engages with multinational

³⁸ Beauvois, D. "Mit kresów," (1994)

³⁹ Kamusella, Tomasz. "The Russian Okrainy (Окраины) and the Polish Kresy: objectivity and historiography," in *Global Intellectual History* 4.4 (2019), p 347-368.

⁴⁰ Koter, Marek. "Kresy» as a Specific Type of Borderland—It's Origin and Characteristics." *Geographica Slovenica* 34.1 (2001), p 131-148.

⁴¹ Davies, Norman. *Trail of Hope: The Anders Army, an Odyssey Across Three Continents*. (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016).

character of the II Corps rather uncritically in relation to Poland's prewar and wartime struggles over the Kresy borderlands. Rather, inter-ethnic relations within the Corps are presented in terms of the official state narratives that all citizens of the Republic, even in exile, were equals.

Although such rhetoric may have been promoted in principle, in practice, it saw its limits. As will be made clear in the current work, attempts at assimilating the eastern borderlands did not end in September 1939 but continued as within military exile in form of the Kresy cause, most visibly championed by the 5th Kresy Infantry Division of the Polish II Corps. Even when it became increasingly clear that Kresy had become a lost cause at the end of hostilities, it was General Nikodem Sulik and his 5th Kresy Division which kept pushing to the very end, even after their commander General Władysław Anders conceded defeat by announcing demobilization of the Polish Army from Italy.

1.3 The Kresy Question, 1918-1939

Even before the First World War, different paths were promoted by national elites towards the aims of Polish independence and generally personified as the rivalry between Joseph Piłsudski and Roman Dmowski. This division persisted into WWI, with Piłsudski taking a more direct militaristic approach via his Legions in the Austro-Hungarian Army, and Dmowski's attempts at building rapport with the Entente powers to guarantee Poland a favorable position at the eventual peace talks. Although Piłsudski's legionary experiment was cut short by Central power authorities in 1917, he would be released in the waning days of the war and return to Warsaw to declare Poland independent on 11 November 1918. As Dmowski and maestro-politician Ignacy Jan Paderewski continued negotiations in Paris, Piłsudski used his position on the ground to secure the historic eastern territories, which he saw threatened by the Bolsheviks and rival nationalist movements. In addition to securing territory militarily, Piłsudski had used

campaigning as an opportunity to spread his vision of a federation in the spirit of Rzeczpospolita to local elites and peasant masses. This resulted in multiple charismatic speeches where he appealed to his personal connection to the eastern territories and how they all likewise shared a common origin in the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

However, Piłsudski's federalist aspirations were ultimately crushed when fierce border conflicts made it obvious that his plans were not as appealing to his eastern brethren as he had hoped, with particularly strong opposition coming from Lithuanian and Ukrainian competitors seeking their own sovereign states - not to mention the Bolshevik challenge of the Soviet Union - each of which the Polish army sought to subdue. Furthermore, the arrival of the Polish army was seen by many local peasants as just one of several armies crossing back and forth across their regions, one that represented the Polish lords of pre-WWI epochs. The Bolsheviks used this sentiment in their propaganda to present the advancing Polish armies as bourgeois occupiers, referring to them as the "legions of Lord Piłsudski" (*legiony pana Piłsudskiego*).⁴² To quote J. Böhler, "The first to bring a colonial attitude to the *Kresy* following [Polish] independence were not civil institutions, but the ideologized armies."⁴³ Indeed, this could be said not only of the Polish army but of several competing armies battling over the rural countryside where local populaces waited for an end of hostilities to continue their day to day life without constant harassment. Ultimately, the eastern border of Poland would be determined at the Peace of Riga marking the end of the Polish-Bolshevik War in 1921, along with the controversial Żeligowski "mutiny" and the subsequent annexation of Wilno territory to Poland in 1922.⁴⁴

⁴² Handelsman, Marcei. "Two Months of the Lithuanian-Byelorussian Offensive with the Legions' Fifth Regiment (fragments)," prefaced by Maciej Górny. *Acta Poloniae Historica* (2016), p 325.

⁴³ Böhler, Jochen. *Civil War in Central Europe* (2019), p 191.

⁴⁴ Lucjan Żeligowski was a Polish general who led the 1st Lithuanian-Belarusian Division during the Polish Bolshevik War of 1920-21. At the end of the conflict when the Bolsheviks were beaten back, the fate of the city of

In the eyes of nationally minded Lithuanians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians, Riga meant nothing more than a partition of their national territories between the hands of the Poles and Soviets. The Lithuanian government established in Kaunas would remain in a state of cold war with Poland throughout most of the interwar period, officially closing the border to Poland and suspending diplomatic relations. In the eyes of many Ukrainian nationalists, Piłsudski had betrayed his Ukrainian ally against the Soviets, Symon Petliura, when the Polish-Bolshevik Treaty of Riga violated Poland's agreement with the People's Republic of Ukraine. Though some Ukrainian nationalists did continue to work on behalf of Ukrainian issues through representations in the Polish Sejm (Belarusians were also represented by the Hramada⁴⁵),⁴⁶ others took a more radical approach, such as the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) who believed in attaining independence through the use of force. The Ukrainian SSR, as a republic of the Soviet Union, was also at odds with the Polish state and tried to win sympathies of Ukrainians on Polish territories by presenting them with a Soviet Ukrainian alternative on the other side of the border, which was replicated on the northern territories by through a Soviet Belarusian republic.⁴⁷

Wilno/Vilnius was hotly contested between Poles who claimed it as a historic Polish city of the former Commonwealth and Lithuanians who argued it was their ancient capital. Fearing the Entente would back Lithuanian claims to the city, Piłsudski secretly ordered General Żeligowski to orchestrate a "mutiny" from the Polish Army and to take control of the city himself. The action resulted in the short-lived puppet state of the Republic of Central Lithuania which Piłsudski denied culpability in creating by framing it as the product of a mutinous general. Following official Polish annexation a few years later, the truth was revealed that Piłsudski had put the plot into motion and Żeligowski was acting upon his orders.

⁴⁵ For more information about the Hramada, or Belarusian national movements generally, see Per Anders Rudling *The Rise and Fall of Belarusian Nationalism, 1906-1931*. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015).

⁴⁶ Mironowicz, Eugeniusz. *Białorusini i Ukraińcy w polityce obozu piłsudczyńskiego*. (Wydawnictwo Uniwersyteckie Trans Humana, 2007).

⁴⁷ For more on *Korenizatsiia*, or „nativization” policies of the Soviet Union's non-Russian republics in the 1920s and early 1930s, see Terry Dean Martin, *The affirmative action empire: Nations and nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Cornell University Press, 2001).

Internally, the inclusion of the eastern territories, or Kresy, within the Second Republic posed several issues for political actors trying to consolidate a new state. Although both Piłsudski and Dmowski camps seemed to have agreed on the inclusion of the cities of Wilno and Lwów within Poland's new borders, National Democrats were skeptical of including vast eastern territories which were demographically non-Polish, as it would weaken the state and the national organism. "If Poland moved much further to the East, to the lands that are linguistically non-Polish, rather than embracing the native Polish lands with its borders in the West," Dmowski wrote in 1925, "it would cease to be a national state, and given the political evolution of Europe it would soon cease to be a state at all."⁴⁸ Once these territories were fixed within the borders, his position was that of a more forceful Polonization of Slavic minorities, with simultaneously removal of German and Jewish elements from the country. Piłsudski, drawing on his romanticized memories of a multi-ethnic *Rzeczpospolita*, publicly advocated for the civil integration of non-Polish minorities, to foster a Polish civic identity through a positive relationship with the state.

Other political parties formulated variations of their policies off these two general proposals. However, according to historian Peter Stachura, "Whatever proposals were adduced, it is undeniable that the Second Republic did not face any greater challenge than that of devising a policy towards the minorities that would bring harmony and peaceful coexistence rather than bitterness, confrontation and strife."⁴⁹ The position of Jews within the Second Polish Republic constituted an especially sore point of contestation, which saw strong criticism from National Democrats and their sympathizers who saw them as foreign bodies stunting the natural growth of

⁴⁸ Translated from Polish: Dmowski, Roman. *Pisma Tom V. Polityka Polska i Odbudowanie Państwa I* (Częstochowa: Antoni Gmachowski I S-KA, Spółka Wydawnicza, 1937), p 28.

⁴⁹ Stachura, Peter D. *Poland 1918-1945 An Interpretative and Documentary History of the Second Republic* (Routledge: 2004), p 79-80.

the nation, associating them with Anglo-Jewish elites who had violated Poland's sovereignty by forcing them to sign the Minorities Treaty of 1919, so-called Jew-Communists (*Żydokomunna*), and later the Sanacja regime, which had allowed some Jews in prominent positions within the government and army.

Following the shaky period of establishing stability under the Small Constitution of 1919 which appointed Piłsudski the Chief of State, the first constitution of independent Poland was ratified in 1921, establishing Poland as a democratic Republic. The March Constitution, as it would be known, was considered democratic and guaranteeing minority rights against institutionalized forms of discrimination. Though ethnolinguistic and religious minorities were equal under the law, Polish Roman Catholics were widely privileged in the eyes of the state. The March Constitution greatly limited the power of the executive branch, rather placing power in the hands of the Sejm, a dynamic pushed by the National Democrats who feared a Piłsudski dictatorship. Piłsudski, who saw himself as the founder of the new state, saw the limiting of his influence as a personal insult, which would lead him into a retreat from public life for a short time. As the "Sejmocracy" would struggle the next few years trying to consolidate an impoverished and divided state under a revolving door of government cabinets, recurrent economic crises and partisan infighting paralyzed the state apparatus. Sectarian violence had set the tone of the Polish Sejmocracy early on when in 1922 the Piłsudski backed president was assassinated in a Warsaw gallery in broad daylight by a far-right assassin who claimed he had won only by the votes of Jews and non-Polish minorities. The instability of Poland internally in the face of growing Germany and the Soviet Union triggered Piłsudski to mobilize his army and march on Warsaw, overthrowing the standing Wojciechowski/Witos government in the coup d'état of May 1926.

What followed would be Piłsudski's "Sanacja" or sanation regime, an authoritarian attempt at "sanitizing" the nation from what he perceived as the destructive policies of the Sejmocracy and 123 years of imperial partition. While Piłsudski himself did not hold the position of President and acted as PM for only a brief episode, his government was manned at all levels by those loyal to him, particularly those who had served with him or under him in his Legions during the First World War. As for post-coup constitutional statutes, the March constitution was amended to give the executive branch wide-reaching power, but eventually resulted in the ratification of the April Constitution of 1935, officially solidifying strong executive control as law.

For national minorities in the East, at least those taking a more conciliatory approach concerning their interests vis-à-vis the state, the May coup offered some optimism as Piłsudski was perceived as being more conciliatory and sympathetic towards minorities than the National Democrats and supporters of their ideologies. Minority politicians appealed to the Marshal concerning their respective minority communities' requests and were supplemented institutionally by organizations such as the Institute for Nationality Research (Instytut Badań Spraw Narodowościowych, IBSN) which attempted to create informal contacts between minority elites and the government appealing to Piłsudski's style of governing through men of trust. However, there were points with which Piłsudski refused to compromise, particularly the primacy of Polish language within the state and its use by all government administrations, courts, local governmental institutions, and taught in all schools across Polish territories. To that end, institutions such as the IBSN were becoming increasingly utilized by the government as state organs for collecting data on minority communities as they formulated policies on how best to

spread Polish culture in the eastern territories, as opposed to a serving as a neutral platform for state/minority dialogue.⁵⁰

Even by the state's own account which would have benefitted by showing a higher level of internal homogeneity, the censuses of 1921 and 1931 show a country deeply divided along ethnic, religious, and linguistic lines.⁵¹ The results from the eastern territories (the voivodeships of Lwów, Nowogródek, Polesie, Stanisławów, Tarnopol, Wilno, and Wołyń) would have attracted a considerable amount of attention by national elites in Warsaw when seeing the general disparity between Polish speakers and non-Polish speakers, especially the Polesia voivodship, when in 1931 the census showed over half of the inhabitants spoke "tutejsi" or "local" language. Such realizations prompted educational reforms aimed at establishing schools in the East, which would promote the Polish language and combat illiteracy; theoretically bolstering the consolidation of the national consciousness. Likewise, propagating regional consciousness served as a way in which the state attempted to bring the borderland inhabitants closer to the center. For instance, in 1936, the Union of Mountain Lands (*Związek Ziem Górskich*) was established in an

⁵⁰ For more information on the case of the IBSN, see Stephan Stach's "The Institute for Nationality Research (1921–1939): A Think Tank for Minority Politics in Poland?" in *Religion in the Mirror of Law Eastern European Perspectives from the Early Modern Period to 1939*, (eds.) Yvonne Kleinmann, Stephan Stach, and Tracie Wilson. (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2016) p 149-79. More detailed information can be found in Olgierd Grott's monograph *Instytut Badań Spraw Narodowościowych i Komisja Naukowych Badań Ziem Wschodnich w planowaniu polityki II Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej na Kresach Wschodnich*. (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2013). For a more general overview on state minority research after the May Coup, see Linkiewicz, Olga. "Scientific Ideals and Political Engagement: Polish Ethnology and the 'Ethnic Question' Between the Wars." *Acta Poloniae Historica* 114 (2016), p 5-27.

⁵¹ "The 1931 census figures reveal that out of the total population of Poland of 31,915,900, there were: 22,102,723 Poles, 4,441,000 Ukrainians, 2,822,501 Jews, 989,900 Belorussians, 741,000 Germans and 707,100 'locals'.* Of these the Poles, Jews and Germans were spread out among all the Polish voivodeships. The Ukrainians were dominant in Kresy, particularly in the Wołyń, Stanisławów and Lwów voivodeships; the Belorussians were concentrated in Nowogródek; and the 'locals' in Polesie. The national minorities had their own religions, which encouraged them to feel separate from strongly Roman Catholic Poland. The Germans were predominantly Protestant; the Ukrainians were split between the Uniate Church, which used the Eastern Catholic rite, and the Russian Orthodox Church, to which most Belorussians also belonged. Then of course there were the Jews, whose Judaism ranged from the ultra-orthodox Hasidic rite, which promoted the separateness of Jews, to more moderate forms that allowed for a degree of assimilation." Quoted from Halik Kochanski. *The eagle unbowed: Poland and the Poles in the Second World War*. (Harvard University Press, 2012), xvii.

attempt to foster a regional Polish highlander identity among Boykos, Huculs, and Lemkos of the Carpathian regions.⁵² As early as 1919, local-level brokers such as the Borderland Guard (*Straż Granicy*) were attempting the same by acting as intermediaries between the state and the peripheral East, propagating Kresy's "fundamental Polishness" (*polskość*) among borderland inhabitants and mainland Poles alike.⁵³ Similar governmental and semi-governmental institutions of these kinds were functioning between the restoration of the Polish state in 1918 and its fall in 1939.⁵⁴

The Polish military too played a vital role in cultural projects aimed at the Eastern borders during the interwar period, most notably the efforts of the Border Protection Corps (*Korpus Ochronny Pogranicza*, KOP) which was established in 1924 and was active until the collapse of the II Republic in 1939. Far more than standing post at the border markers, officers and soldiers of KOP were to act as the spearhead of Polish cultural and moral renewal of the borderlands and their integration to the rest of the country's citizenry.⁵⁵ Soldiers of KOP were actively involved in the borderland communities, areas often perceived as backwards and uneducated, and in more isolated regions acted the only local representatives of the state. To that aim, KOP had several functions including the promotion of education through schools and libraries, of culture through cinema, publications, theatre, celebrating national holidays and organizing events, as well as projects to develop borderland infrastructure. The demographic makeup of KOP was intended to

⁵² Grott, Olgierd. "Związek Ziem Górskich—sanacyjna próba budowania regionalizmu karpackiego jako funkcja podniesienia bezpieczeństwa na Kresach Południowo-Wschodnich." *Wokół regionalizmu* (2015), p 73.

⁵³ Ciancia, Kathryn. "The Local Boundaries of the Nation: Borderland Guard Activists in Polish-Occupied Volhynia, 1919–1920." *Slavic Review* 78, no. 3 (2019), p 671-693.

⁵⁴ For more information related to educational and cultural institutions functioning in Kresy at this time, refer to Paprocka, Wanda. "Instytucje i organizacje polskie na Kresach Wschodnich 1920-1939." *Emografia Polska* 45, no. 1-2 (2001).

⁵⁵ Łach, H. „Praca społeczna jako obowiązek służbowy żołnierzy w garnizonach Korpusu Ochrony Pogranicza.” *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis Folia Historica* 102, (2018), p 89-102.

roughly reflect those of the country's population, which resulted in around 20% ethnic and religious minorities among the ranks. However, Roman Catholics made up the majority of KOP members and all were Polish speaking, the latter reflecting the organization's intended cultural mission. Recruitment practices even allowed for a small number of illiterate recruits, who would be educated according to the existing Polish school system and taught other useful trade skills.⁵⁶

Although KOP was to give the local arm of the state's executive authority a human face, it was ultimately a specialized military unit dedicated to the protection of the borderlands, simultaneously engaged in actions such as intelligence gathering, propaganda campaigns, sabotage and counter-sabotage. In addition to Soviet provocateurs crossing the borders, the activities of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) were a major concern for KOP and for state security. Founded in 1929, the radical Ukrainian nationalist movement had similar, yet competing aims of nationalizing the territories, especially in the southern voivodeships of Kresy. Their radical tactics included acts of terror towards state authorities, which in 1934 manifested itself with the assassination of the Polish Minister of the Interior Bronisław Piarecki in Warsaw. In response, the government intensified pacification (*pacyfikacja*) campaigns in eastern Lesserpoland and eastern Galicia to crack down on OUN members or those otherwise suspected as threats, which would have disproportionately targeted those considered Ukrainian, Ruthenian, or otherwise Greek Catholic or Eastern Orthodox. Those responsible for the assassination were put on show trial and sentenced to death or imprisonment. However, according to the OUN assassins on trial, they had achieved a small victory in that the Polish press was forced to engage with the previously censored concept of "Ukrainian," which offered a

⁵⁶ For more on the Polish Border Protection Corps (KOP), see Jabłonowski, M. *Formacja specjalna: Korpus Ochrony Pogranicza, 1924-1939*, (Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR, 2002); Ochał, A. "Tarcza II Rzeczypospolitej Korpus Ochrony Pogranicza 1924–1939" (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2018).

national alternative to those living on the eastern territories. Faced with existential threats from Soviet Russia and radical Ukrainian nationalists, KOP's military mission was at the core of all its actions, ultimately towards the aim of national security.

Serving within these dual roles - cultural and military- soldiers of KOP made them one of the most distinctly "Polish" elements throughout the borderlands, making them stand out when compared to the peasant masses. Furthermore, KOP soldiers did not generally originate from the area they were deployed, creating a sense of otherness between themselves and the local communities. This divide was further supplemented by the arrival of military settlers (*osadnicy*), ex-soldiers that were granted land settlements by the state as payment for their services during the Polish/Bolshevik War. By 1932, the settlers themselves numbered 9,000 with an additional 50,000 family members.⁵⁷ Polish military settlers were often the primary beneficiaries of state land reforms intended at rejuvenating the borderland economies, more so than those originating from those areas. Given their more trusted position as veterans, they could more easily get loans than poor local peasants. Moreover, their social status was associated with the standing army, or KOP, only reinforcing the historic division of local poor peasant's and well-off Polish "lords" (*pany*). However, the relocation of those who proved themselves loyal to the state was not necessarily enough to win the cultural battle, as one KOP officer wrote in his report from the Łuzki gmina on the far northwestern border of the II Republic, "The military settlers are assimilating. Their surroundings influence them, not the other way around⁵⁸." He continued by describing active duty soldiers living in the town as having "a great impact on the environment in terms of Polishness and citizenship, compared to local Belarusians who were noted as being

⁵⁷ Milewski, Jan Jerzy. "Osadnicy wojskowi na Kresach." *Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej* 12 (2004), 44-50.

⁵⁸ Widacki, Jan (eds.) *Kresy w oczach oficerów KOP* (Katowice: Wydawnictwa UNIA, 2005).

“poor and lazy.” Although the later report would have fallen in line with expectations of those in Warsaw, the regressive cultural portrayal of the military settlers must have been received as a shock, as their social position as Polish veterans and local leaders was intended to nationalize rural communities, not ruralize former soldiers of the Polish army, those who were venerated role models of the nation.

1.4 National Implosion and Fragmentation, September 1939

Joseph Piłsudski's final years of life saw him largely out of the spotlight (physically, not in effigy) as politics turned more autocratic. The controversial 1930 elections solidified Sanacja's power leading to a more intense crackdown on political opponents. For instance, leaders of the oppositional Polish Socialist⁵⁹ and Polish People's Party⁶⁰ were incarcerated following the “Brest trials” and members of more dangerous political groupings, particularly Communists and Ukrainian Nationalists, were held in the infamous Bereza Kartuska detention camp.⁶¹ By the time of Piłsudski's death in 1935, the state's approach towards Kresy and minorities had evolved. Whereas initially, Piłsudski tried to maintain the status quo, he increasingly implemented more authoritarian methods of propagating Polish language and culture. When it became obvious that integration was happening too slowly and fragmentized, there was a stronger push towards settlement from mainland Poland.⁶² More radical forms of Polonization was continued under Piłsudski's colonels who succeeded him after death, including Marshal Edward Rydz-Śmigły, who's Camp of National Unity program (*Obóz Zje dnoczenia Narodowego*, OZN) saw the

⁵⁹ *Polska Partia Socjalistyczna*, PPS

⁶⁰ *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe*, PSL

⁶¹ Śleszyński, Wojciech. „Utworzenie i funkcjonowanie obozu odosobnienia w Berezie Kartuskiej (1934–1939),” *Dzieje Najnowsze* (2003), p 35-53.

⁶² Grott, Olgierd. “Związek Ziemi Górskich” (2015).

Sanacja's marked turn toward adopting tenants of Endecja thought which promoted vital role of Roman Catholicism within the Polish nation and identified Jews as harmful foreign elements. Waves of liquidating Eastern Orthodox Churches through conversion or demolition became more widespread, as the Eastern Orthodox Church was perceived as a foreign Russian institution.⁶³ Incarcerations of anti-government figures or elements otherwise deemed subversive to national security escalated at the end of Piłsudski's life and intensified after his death. Regarding foreign policy, Poland's tactics became much more forceful towards its smaller neighbors⁶⁴ while seeking rapprochement with Germany under the foreign policy of Minister Josef Beck.

Post-Piłsudski Sanacja policies further divided an already divided nation, not only along political, religious, and ethnic lines but even within the regime itself. Whereas Piłsudski's subordinates were once unified by their commander, his absence and lack of any clear political program to follow after his death caused the Sanacja regime to fragment between left, centrist, and right wings.⁶⁵ This period would be known as the "Colonels' regime." High-profile fragmentation over Sanacja's succession notwithstanding, the cult of image of Piłsudski continued to be the foundation upon which the state's legitimacy was built, which found its nucleus and largest support within the military. Considering the Sanacja movement during Piłsudski's life was intentionally vague in its platform to create a broad façade of national unity, the reliance on his image in light of serious challenges to his legacy suggests that its primary

⁶³ Mironowicz, Antoni. *Cerkiew prawosławna w II Rzeczypospolitej*, (Agencja Wydawnicza EkoPress, 2018).

⁶⁴ Marshall Rydz-Śmigły issued ultimatums to both Lithuania and Czechoslovakia in 1938, the later resulting in Polish annexation of Czechoslovak territory.

⁶⁵ See Wynot, Edward D. *Polish politics in transition: The camp of national unity and the struggle for power, 1935-1939* (University of Georgia Press, 1974).

concern at that point was maintaining power through utilizing the symbolic order that was developed by Piłsudski himself.⁶⁶

Anti-Sanacja opposition which lived on throughout the period was emboldened by the possibilities the death of Piłsudski offered to them. However, the crackdown on anti-Sanacja elements within the country led several opposition leaders to work in exile, most notably, the Front Morges which was an oppositional right and center grouping established in Switzerland by Ignacy Jan Paderewski and Władysław Sikorski in 1936. The oppositional front included other prominent politicians such as Wincenty Witos and Wojciech Korfanty, and oppositional military figures including General Joseph Haller who commanded the Polish Army in France during WWI. Despite the inclusion of high-profile leaders, the Front Morges had only limited success and was not as politically far-reaching as he had hoped.

Sikorski, once the Polish Minister of Military Affairs in the mid-1920s, had since fallen out of favor with Piłsudski and his colonels. Although he would continue working for the ministry, he remained without assignment, essentially being marginalized by the regime while still serving within the army. Sikorski used his time on the periphery to consolidate the anti-Sanacja coalition, strengthen contacts with French and Czechoslovak representatives, and cultivate his views on the proper political path for Poland. Regarding foreign policy, he was convicted of the need for Poland's strong alignment with France, and the need to replicate her parliamentary form of democracy. And though he opposed both fascism and communism as being totalitarian and "religiously bankrupt"⁶⁷, he saw the utility of limited cooperation with the

⁶⁶ To quote Eva Plach, „Without Piłsudski, the symbol and heart of the sanacja, the very idea of moral renaissance could not but fade away: Piłsudski had been the strongest unifying element of the sanacja. After his death, and with the power struggles that developed in the ruling camp afterward, the sanacja became simply another authoritarian regime. It became increasingly obvious that the sanacja was about maintaining political power.” From *The clash of moral nations: cultural politics in Piłsudski's Poland, 1926-1935*. Vol. 44 (Ohio University Press, 2006), p. 161.

⁶⁷ Sword, Keith. *Sikorski: Soldier and Statesman : a Collection of Essays*. (London: Orbis Books, 1990), p. 66.

Soviet Union if war were to break out with Germany, writing in his diary, "To base our future on the old antagonism between G[ermany] and R[ussia] or on our declaration of neutrality in the case of conflict between these powers would be the policy of an ostrich and would have suicidal."⁶⁸ Unlike Minister Beck and the late Sanacja colonels who saw the greater threat to Poland in Russia, Sikorski concluded that Nazi Germany was the greater threat, a conclusion that may have forever changed the course of Polish history years later. The anti-Sanacja opposition's biggest opportunity to take power occurred in September 1939, albeit at a time when the nation faced its most desperate situation since perhaps the partition of 1795.

On 1 September 1939, thousands of German troops poured over the Western and Northern border into Poland in the lightning Blitzkrieg attack which overwhelming Polish defenses. Two weeks later, on 17 September, Soviet troops crossed the border into Poland from the east, much to the surprise and confusion of the Polish authorities who were unaware of the secret agreement reached by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union a month before. Whereas some local Polish borderland authorities (already largely cut off from central command which was increasingly falling into disarray) initially thought the Soviets were moving to aid Poland against their Nazi invaders, it soon became clear that their intentions were not to aid the Poles. Announcing the commencement of military actions later that morning, Soviet foreign commissar Vyacheslav Molotov stated that the USSR had decided to move into Poland to protect its own "blood relatives," the Belarusian and Ukrainian minorities of eastern Poland.⁶⁹ As Soviet armies

⁶⁸ Ibid, p 69.

⁶⁹ Molotov said that the USSR "[...] cannot be expected to take an indifferent attitude to the fate of its blood relatives, Ukrainians and Belarusians residing in Poland who previously found themselves in the position of nations without rights and have now been completely abandoned to the vagaries of fate. The Soviet government regards it as a sacred obligation to extend a helping hand to its brethren Ukrainians and brethren Belarusians residing in Poland [...] The Soviet government has directed the General Staff of the Red Army to order its troops to cross the border and take the lives and property of the population of Western Ukraine and Western Belarus under its protection." Quote from Plokhyy, Serhii. "The call of blood. Government propaganda and public response to the Soviet entry into

advanced westward, this message was disseminated among the local inhabitants of Poland's eastern borderlands via leaflets and posters, propagating a brotherhood between the disenfranchised Belarusian and Ukrainian peasantry and soldiers of the Red army. They called for direct action from the local populace. Looking to spread the revolution abroad, some urged Polish soldiers to turn against their bourgeois officers, while others called for the local peasantry to take an active part in their emancipation by attacking the local Polish "lords" (*Polskie pany*) and kulaks with scythes, axes, and pitchforks.⁷⁰

As Poland was being swallowed up on two fronts, Polish high command realized that hopes of putting up a viable defense was impossible, and the only way to preserve the continuity of the Polish state was for its leaders to flee the country. The decision was made to retreat southward into Rumania and Hungary, where they planned to escape and to establish a government in exile. President Mościcki, Marshall Rydz-Śmigły, and other high ranking Sanacja officials managed to escape across the southern border, along with about 150 thousand Polish soldiers who managed to escape into Rumania, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia collectively.⁷¹ However, representatives of the Polish Sanacja government had been interned and separated upon their arrival into foreign territories, putting the future of the state in great jeopardy. With Hitler's pressure on Rumania to hold Sanacja leaders at bay, and Britain and France's reluctance to push for their release, President Mościcki was forced to make a desperate decision to rescue the fragile continuity of the state legitimacy by transferring his position on to someone else, an act that the constitution allowed for in a time of crisis. Initial candidates were

World War II." *Cahiers du monde russe. Russie-Empire russe-Union soviétique et États indépendants* 52, no. 52/2-3 (2011), p 303-304.

⁷⁰ Gross, Jan Tomasz. *Revolution from abroad: The Soviet conquest of Poland's western Ukraine and western Belorussia*. (Princeton University Press, 2002), p 35.

⁷¹ Szczurowski, Maciej. *Politics and the Armed Forces: The Poles in the Second World War*. (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2016), p 16.

rejected by the British and French, who were against working with a government headed by die-hard Piłsudskiites; pressures that early on in the war demonstrated the weak position of Polish political leaders vis-a-vis their more powerful allies.

Ultimately, the presidency was passed on to Władysław Raczkiewicz who was seen as a more neutral candidate between the Sanacja and its opposition. However, due to political pressures, Raczkiewicz was pushed to offer the position of Prime Minister to Władysław Sikorski, who had recently taken command of the Polish Armed Forces in France. Upon the president's request, Sikorski accepted on September 30, and subsequently took on the positions of Commander in Chief and General Inspector of the Armed Forces as well as the Polish Minister of Military Affairs, giving him total control of exiled military affairs an unparalleled position politically. As Poland's exiled Prime Minister, Sikorski appointed a coalition cabinet which neutered the influence of the former Sanacja figures, even going so far as to imprisoning high ranking Sanacja officials who escaped to France and Britain⁷² and attempting to purge any remnants of the cult of Piłsudski or traditions associated with him or the Sanacja regime within the government and the army.⁷³

With the fall of France in summer of 1940, the exiled government and Polish forces there moved to the United Kingdom, an incredibly trying move logistically and politically, with Sanacja representatives attempting to reposition themselves as the dominant faction during the turbulent transition. Sikorski however, managed to secure the position back in the anti-Sanacja

⁷² Dymarski, Mirosław. "Polskie obozy odosobnienia we Francji i w Wielkiej Brytanii w latach 1939-1942". *Dzieje Najnowsze : Kwartalnik Poświęcony Historii XX Wieku* (1997), p 113-127.

⁷³ Biskupski, M.B. Independence Day 2012), p 111.

Sikorski told the French that he wanted to preserve a "tactful silence" (taktowne milczenie) about Piłsudski. His name was omitted from patriotic declarations, his picture was removed from government offices, and even the songs celebrating the exploits of his legions were frowned upon; singing "My, Pierwsza Brygada" was banned, or at least strongly discouraged.

opposition's favor, doubling down on executive actions against his political rivals and personally securing himself a strong position in exile decision-making both militarily and politically. The 1940 "July crisis" deepened internal division and infighting within the exiled government, which would continue to haunt the exiled government at all levels throughout the war.⁷⁴ Although Poland's government would declare itself a Government of National Unity, the state's representatives in exile and in the underground consisted primarily of a coalition of four prewar parties,⁷⁵ which excluded the pro-Sanacja Right, Communists, and left-wing Socialists.⁷⁶ Moreover, the Polish Government in Exile lacked representation of its non-Polish citizens, ethnic Germans, Jews, Ukrainians, and Belarusians, making its claims of "national unity" in light of Poland's prewar population questionable.⁷⁷

As the infighting Polish state and a portion of the Polish armed forces continued functioning in exile, Polish society was being torn apart under the dual Nazi-Soviet occupation. By the end of the September campaign, around 65 thousand Polish soldiers laid dead, with 420 thousand captured by the Germans and 250 thousand by the Soviets⁷⁸ – the later including 22,000 officers who would be murdered in Katyń by the NKVD. The civilian population was also deeply affected, with between 150 thousand and 200 thousand non-combatants dead⁷⁹ and millions more

⁷⁴ According to Arkadiusz Adamczyk, „The so-called July crisis of 1940 when there took place a clash between Sikorski and Piłsudski adherents which resulted in debilitating both sides of this conflict made it necessary for Sikorski – whose power rested on a poor powerbase – to rely for the exercise of power on cooperation with traditional parties.” See Adamczyk, Arkadiusz. "General Władysław Sikorski as Prime Minister of Polish Government in Exile: Honest Democrat or Heir to Authoritarianism?" *Humanities and Social Sciences* 21, no. 23 (2) (2016), p 29.

⁷⁵ The National Party (*Stronnictwo Narodowe*, SN), Labor Party (*Stronnictwo Pracy*, SP), People's Party (*Stronnictwo Ludowe*, SL), and Polish Socialist Party (*Polska Partia Socjalistyczna*, PPS)

⁷⁶ Terry, Sarah Meiklejohn. *Poland's place in Europe: General Sikorski and the origin of the Oder-Neisse line, 1939-1943*. (Princeton University Press, 2014), p 175.

⁷⁷ Stola, Dariusz. "The Polish Government-in-exile: National Unity and Weakness." *Holocaust Studies* 18, no. 2-3 (2012), p 102.

⁷⁸ Szczurowski, Maciej. *Politics and the Armed Forces* (2016), p 16.

⁷⁹ Piotrowski, Tadeusz. *Poland's holocaust: ethnic strife, collaboration with occupying forces and genocide in the Second Republic, 1918-1947*. (McFarland, 2007), p 310.

killed or driven away from their homes during subsequent occupation. In Poland's eastern borderlands, incorporated into the Belarussian SSR, Ukrainian SSR, and Lithuania⁸⁰, the NKVD began the first of multiple waves of deportations of Polish citizens to gulags and labor camps across the USSR. Coordinated waves of forced deportations occurred between November 1940 and September 1941, resulting in some 330 thousand Polish citizens being displaced across the Soviet Union.⁸¹ With the disappearance of Polish state representatives and a standing army in the country, underground resistance movements quickly formed, usually along political lines. However, as the Government in Exile solidified contacts in the country, most underground networks would join under what would eventually become the Home Army (Armia Krajowa, AK) of the Polish Underground State, the exiled London government's representative in the occupied territories.

The exiled Polish government in London monitored the situation in the occupied country, aimed at strengthening their relationship with their allied British hosts and clarifying Poland's war aims to guide their actions and propagate the exiled Polish cause. Early on, countering international doubts as to the question raised by the Soviets of the "Polishness" of the former eastern territories was identified as a major objective of exiled government's counter-propaganda campaigns.⁸² Despite deep internal political divisions⁸³, this point in was widely accepted by

⁸⁰ See "Chapter V. The Recovery of the Capitol: 1939-1940" in Mačiulis, Dangiras, and Darius Staliūnas. *Lithuanian Nationalism and the Vilnius Question, 1883-1940* (Marburg: Herder-Institut, 2015).

⁸¹ Eberhardt, Piotr. "Political migrations on Polish territories (1939-1950)." *Monografie-Polska Akademia Nauk. Instytut Geografii i Przestrzennego Zagospodarowania im. Stanisława Leszczyńskiego* (2011), p 61.

⁸² Habielski, Rafał. "Polityka informacyjna i propagandowa Rządu RP na emigracji 1939-1945." *Dzieje Najnowsze kwartalnik poświęcony historii XX wieku* 19, no. 4 (1987), p 55.

⁸³ Although the struggle between the exiled coalition under Sikorski and pro-Sanacja factions take up the lion's share of this thesis' focus on inter-Polish political conflicts, they represented but two points (albeit important ones especially in the context of the current study) on the spectrum of existing trends of political thought in Polish exile. Citing the work of Kazimierz Przybysz, the study of Juchnowski and Sielezin present 10 main ideological divisions which reflected existing trends: The Government of the Republic of Poland in exile and the National Council of the RP; institutions and organizations of the Polish Underground State; the national camp; the peasant movement; the

governmental factions in exile as a prerequisite to the wider aim of restoring Poland's territories and the Republic's sovereignty. Furthermore, the idea of committing Polish soldiers to fight alongside Allied forces, wherever the front may be drawn, was accepted as a necessary step towards reaching those aims. The mantra of "all routes lead to Poland" was a guiding doctrine, one that had been established even before the exile government retreated to Britain.⁸⁴ The Polish Armed Forces in France, drawing from historical examples of Poles fighting under foreign armies with the aim of restoring independence, set the precedent to be mimicked throughout the war, as it would go on to become the Polish Armed Forces in the West which fought on multiple fronts. However, it would take some time to ready Polish troops for more offensive action, as their British hosts were essentially the only power struggling to stand up against Nazi Germany while hosting an array of exiled allied states in London.⁸⁵

Beginning in September 1939 and continuing throughout 1940, Poland had been shattered along prewar antagonisms after being hit hard by her two powerful neighbors. Large segments of the population were displaced across various parts of the world and even more found themselves under foreign occupation. Civil and military officials of the prewar state splintered away and attempted to regroup in foreign lands while trying to secure their positions vis-à-vis Polish exile. With the legitimacy of the Polish state under existential threat, the prewar regime conceded to the former opposition, which recreated a state in exile from the bottom up. However, national fragments of the Polish military largely out of reach of exiled authorities in Paris and later London would emerge and play a critical role in the exile struggle for the borderlands. It is this

socialist movement; the democratic camp; the syndicalists; the Sanation (*Sanacja*) organizations; and the communist strand. Jerzy Juchnowski and Jan Ryszard Sielezin. *The Concept of State and Nation in Polish Political Thought in the Period of War and Occupation (1939-1945) Volume II* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek 2016), p 26-27.

⁸⁴ Prazmowska, Anita. *Civil War in Poland 1942-1948*. (Springer, 2004), p 15.

⁸⁵ See Jakubec, Pavol. "Together and Alone in Allied London: Czechoslovak, Norwegian and Polish Governments-in-Exile, 1940–1945." *The International History Review* 42, no. 3 (2020), p 465-484.

fragment, the army of General Anders, which would position itself as a key player in the exiled struggle for the Polish eastern borderlands that this study will turn to next.



Figure 3 Border Protection Corps (KOP) soldiers on the Polish-Soviet border during a meeting with a Soviet patrol before WWII. Source: Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe.

Chapter 2.

General Anders and his army: a “Little Poland” in exile

2.1 On the peripheries of the exiled Polish State

Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 fundamentally altered the dynamics of the war. With the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in tatters, the Soviet Union's relation to the Allied powers was reopened for discussion. It must be remembered that unlike Poland, Britain and France were not at a state of war with the Soviet Union, declaring war only on Nazi Germany after the events of September 1939. However, when the Anglo-Soviet Agreement was signed in July 1941, Poland's situation became further complicated. Polish political exiles hotly debated what stance Poland should take as Britain pushed Polish exile to reach an agreement with Stalin to strengthen the anti-Hitlerian coalition. Although the exiles generally agreed that any agreement required prerequisites to guarantee Poland's postwar territorial, political, and social integrity, several un-compromising anti-Soviets voices criticized Sikorski's willingness to make even minor concessions to their former occupiers. Nevertheless, acting as the exiled Prime Minister, Sikorski began speaking to Moscow's ambassador to London, Ivan Mayski. Negotiations over reestablishing relations between Poland and the Soviet Union clashed over several details, with two of the most contentious being those regarding the annexed eastern territories and the thousands of Polish civilians held captive in the USSR. However, though concrete decisions regarding the former were postponed via a vaguely worded clause and Sikorski's suggestion there may be room for discussion later on,⁸⁶ it was agreed that an “amnesty” would be granted for Polish citizens imprisoned in the Soviet Union and that they

⁸⁶ Cienciala, Anna M. "General Sikorski and the Conclusion of the Polish-Soviet Agreement of July 30, 1941: A Reassessment." *The Polish Review* 41, no. 4 (1996), p 417.

would be used to form a Polish Army which would fight alongside the Red Army against Nazi forces.⁸⁷ Sikorski's acquiescence in signing an agreement with the USSR void of territorial assurances enraged those more staunchly anti-communist within the government, widening the divide between the anti-Soviet exile factions and Sikorski who was willing to be more conciliatory.

Meanwhile, as negotiations were still ongoing in London and before an agreement was reached, Lt. Gen. Wladyslaw Anders was lying in a cell in Lubyanka prison in Moscow. Wounded twice during the September campaign and captured near Lwów, Anders had been transferred to the Soviet capital where he endured interrogation and torture by his NKVD captors. Between beatings, they urged him to join the Red Army, a request he continually refused. After some time, treatment by his captors suddenly changed and Anders was fed, cleaned, and given prison luxuries like tea and cigarettes. Finally, he was brought before Soviet Commissars Beria and Merkulov and fully briefed on what had happened; Hitler had invaded the Soviet Union and Poles and Russian would fight together against the Hitlerian threat.

He was informed of Stalin's "amnesty" towards the Poles and the joint decision of the Polish exile government and Soviet authorities that Anders would form and command Polish forces in the USSR. Suddenly finding himself in a position to negotiate, Anders requested that a Colonel Sulik, a man he had met in prison who was being treated especially harshly by the jailors and sentenced to death, to be released along with him. Giving their word, Anders left the prison in a limousine to a private flat which was prepared for him by the NKVD. He recounted in his postwar memoirs, "After twenty months in prison, seven in solitary confinement, I had recovered

⁸⁷ See "Polish-Soviet Military Agreement: Moscow, 14 August 1941 and Declaration of Mutual Friendship and Mutual Assistance: Moscow, 4 December 1941," in Polonsky, Antony. *The great powers and the Polish question, 1941-45: a documentary study in Cold War origins* (Orbis Books, 1976), p 86, 94.

my freedom by a miracle. A few hours before I was a simple prisoner in Lublianka. Now I was not only free but was to take command of a Polish army which I was to organize in the Soviet Union and I could continue to fight for Poland!”⁸⁸

At the time, the decision to choose Anders for such a role seemed like a logical choice for all parties involved. Fluent in both Polish and Russian and well respected by Polish POWs, Stalin saw him as a useful mediator between what he envisioned would be a subordinate Polish unit under the command of the Red Army. As for Sikorski and the Government in Exile, the fact that Anders was perceived as an apolitical figure may have reassured them that the general would not side with the strong Sanacja sympathizers still widespread in the army, and that he would follow Sikorski’s orders and respect the Polish-Soviet agreement. However, as would become increasingly clear in coming months, Anders was a difficult man to subordinate and was not afraid of standing up to Sikorski, Stalin, or anyone else who got in the way of what he saw was best for his men, their families, and the Polish nation as a whole. It was a trait shared by the colonel he had met in prison, who was finally released upon Anders’ request, a man who would come to play a vital role of propagating Kresy’s cause within Anders’ forming army.

A Polish military mission to Moscow met with Soviet diplomats looking to further discuss the details of what would become the Polish Armed Forces in the USSR. Meeting on multiple occasions, Władysław Sikorski, Władysław Anders, and Joseph Stalin, along with other Polish and Soviet authorities laid out the terms of military cooperation and guidelines for forming a Polish army on Soviet soil. Although talks were largely amicable, the conversations were not without tense moments, especially over issues relating to Poland’s former eastern territories which were annexed by the Soviet Union in 1939 and the missing 20,000 Polish officers – the

⁸⁸ Anders, Władysław. *An Army in Exile: The Story of the Second Polish Corps*. (Macmillan, 1949), p 46.

later becoming increasingly obvious as the ranks of the Polish army were being formed. Stalin, knowing full well what had happened to the Polish officer corps as he was personally involved in planning their liquidation, lied, telling Sikorski and Anders that they were reported to have escaped into Manchuria.⁸⁹ As for territorial questions, Stalin refused to discuss the issue, with Sikorski tentatively obliging as an act of tactical patience in anticipation of stronger leverage later in the war, where he could secure both the Eastern Borderlands and western territories to the Oder-Neisse line for Poland.⁹⁰ However, the formation of two Polish infantry divisions was mutually approved, with a Polish headquarters to be set up in Buzuluk, a 5th Infantry Division based in Tatishchevo and a 6th Infantry Division based in Totskoe.

The recruitment process of Polish forces proved incredibly difficult and was marred by continuous infighting by all parties involved. Already complicated due to the shortage of viable officers, Sikorski's orders to exclude men who were tied to the old Sanacja regime was not received well and completely ignored by Anders.⁹¹ Anders would continue to deviate from Sikorski's instructions, disregarding quotas negotiated between the Polish government in exile and the Soviets, issues concerning the taking in of Polish civilians under army protection, and the censorship of anti-Soviet sentiments among the Polish forces.

Regarding Polish-Soviet relations, one particularly contentious issue was the question of non-Polish minorities within the forming army. According to Soviet authorities, Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Jews of Western Belarus and Ukraine (former eastern territories of Poland) were

⁸⁹ "Minute of the conversation held in the Kremlin between General Sikorski and M. Stalin on the outstanding problems of Polish-Soviet relations. Present also: Ambassador Kot, Commissar Molotov, Lt. Gen. Anders." In *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations, 1939-1945. Vol. 1. Vol. 1.* (London: Heinemann, 1961), p 231.

⁹⁰ Terry, Sarah Meiklejohn. *Poland's Place in Europe* (2016).

⁹¹ Kochanski, Halik. *The eagle unbowed* (2012), p 171; When one of Sikorski's diplomats Stanisław Kot demanded that Anders "purge" Piłsudskiite from his army's officer corps, Anders even confessed his own admiration for Piłsudski and would not even discuss such an idea. See Mieczysław B. Biskupski. *Independence Day: Myth, Symbolism, and the Creation of Modern Poland.* (Oxford University Press, 2012), p 118.

citizens of the Soviet Union and subject to recruitment to the Red Army. In principle, this was unacceptable for both Sikorski and Anders, who protested they were still citizens of the Polish Republic which they represented in exile. However, in practice, it seems the ethnic makeup of the army was a cause of concern, with Polish recruits preferred over minorities, especially Jews, who both Anders and Sikorski wanted to be represented no more than according to the prewar ratios allowed within the military.⁹² Moreover, recruitment decisions were largely dependent on more localized actors at the recruitment centers, which were susceptible to prejudiced recruitment on the part of Polish army recruiters and interference by Soviet authorities.⁹³

Convinced that Nazi Germany could not win the war, Sikorski envisioned the Polish Army in the USSR would act as the representative spearhead of the exile government when the Red Army would eventually lead a counterattack and push back Hitler's forces toward Berlin in coordination with a British, French, and he hoped American, push from the West. When the Red Army and Polish Army in the USSR would reach Polish territories, it was to join the underground Home Army and together secure the re-establishment of the Polish state and end state exile.⁹⁴ Another variation of the plan was to commit Polish forces recruited from in USSR to the Balkans, fighting the Axis forces there and fighting its way back to Poland from the south.⁹⁵ In either case, Sikorski expected Polish forces to work in tandem with the Soviet army, if only as a safeguard for the eventual repatriation of the exiled state.

General Anders would develop a very different approach. Seeing the poor physical conditions that released Polish citizens were in when they arrived to the Polish camps, and the

⁹² Ibid, p 178.

⁹³ For more detailed accounts of general problems regarding the recruitment of minorities in the Polish Army in the USSR, see Chapter 2 of Harvey Sarnier's *General Anders and the Soldiers of the Second Polish Corps*. (Brunswick Press, 1997).

⁹⁴ Prazmowska, Anita. *Civil War in Poland* (2004), p 21.

⁹⁵ Ibid, p 22.

Soviet's general disregard for securing adequate supplies or maintaining Polish exile's wellbeing while pushing them to quickly reach combat readiness to fight on the front, he did not trust the Red Army to treat the Poles anything more than cannon fodder. The distrust felt by Anders towards the Soviets was widespread among recruits, who just like him were recently released from NKVD captivity. For added measure, contacts with Soviet officials were discouraged, with the commander of the 5th Infantry Division even ordering his men not to engage in political talks with Soviet soldiers or political officers during joint trainings.⁹⁶ Although Anders publicly retained the façade of good diplomatic relations with the Soviets as his army grew to strength in southern Russia, he was searching for ways to leave the USSR and take as many freed Poles with him as he possibly could out of Soviet territories. This included not only fighting men, but also women and children, whom he feared were at not only in mortal danger but faced the moral risk of the Sovietization of Polish nationals unless he acted decisively. After initially seeking to deploy in the Balkans, Anders disregarded Sikorski's strategy and pushed for the evacuation of Polish forces in the USSR to British controlled Persia, which culminated in tense negotiations between the infighting Poles, Soviets, and British authorities. The British, needing reinforcement in the Middle East to protect recently acquired oil refineries gained during the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Persia, were in favor of the idea of a limited evacuation of Polish forces. As the newly restored relations between the Soviet Union and the exiled Polish state quickly deteriorated, Stalin would eventually allow General Anders to leave with three divisions, ridding the Soviets of the troublesome Polish general. Anders jumped on the opportunity, and against the directives of his superiors, evacuated as many people as he possibly could. Evacuating in two

⁹⁶ Wawer, Zbigniew, and Andrzej Suchcitz. *5 Kresowa Dywizja Piechoty 1941-1947: zarys dziejów* (London: Fundusz Pomocy Wdowom, Sierotom i Inwalidom 5 Kresowej Dywizji Piechoty, 2012), p 18.

waves which completed in September 1942, a total of 115,742 people were evacuated to Persia, which included over 37,000 civilians.⁹⁷

The partially-evacuated Polish Army in the USSR would join forces with existing Polish military formations in the Middle East made up of soldiers who had managed to escape Poland in 1939. Together, they were reorganized into the Polish Army in the East, which eventually became the Polish II Corps in early 1943. Colloquially called “Anders’ Army” after their defiant commander who managed to hold his position despite insubordination to Sikorski, the soldiers of the Corps continued their training in Persia and Palestine while they prepared themselves to be sent to the front in Italy. With Commander in Chief Wladyslaw Sikorski’s military strategy in tatters, it had become obvious that he had, in the words of Halik Kochanski, “unleashed a powerful challenger to his authority” in Anders.⁹⁸

Moreover, Anders’ strong anti-Soviet stance and developing ties to oppositional political opponents within the London government also put Sikorski’s larger political strategy in jeopardy. Disregarding political tiptoeing the exiled government was engaged in around its fragile alliance with the USSR and the fate of the former eastern territories of Poland, Anders spoke plainly to his men after they had evacuated saying, “We are now to become a modern military again as soon as possible, to take part with arms in the fight against our eternal enemy [...] Soldiers! Warsaw, Poznan, Krakow, Wilno and Lwów await our arrival!”⁹⁹ Although here, Anders’ “eternal enemy” is not explicitly named, the implication was clear that Poland’s eternal enemies were more than merely Nazi Germany. However, more explicit condemnations of the Soviet Union were soon to follow and continued throughout the Corps’ existence, with Anders and his

⁹⁷ Szczurowski, Maciej. *Politics and the Armed Forces* (2016), p 157.

⁹⁸ Kochanski, Halik. *The eagle unbowed* (2012), p 170.

⁹⁹ Anders, Władysław, and Bogusław Polak. *Generał broni Władysław Anders: wybór pism i rozkazów* (2009), p 78.

army's uncensored anti-Soviet rhetoric acting as a thorn in the side of inter-Allied cooperation. This was not only true for the exiled Polish state's relation to the USSR, but other allies as "the intensely political nature of the Corps unsettled the British from the very beginning."¹⁰⁰

Even before the evacuation of Polish citizens from the USSR, Soviet authorities had begun a propaganda campaign against Anders. First labeling him and his troops as cowards for refusing to commit to the German-Soviet front, the propaganda war quickly escalated after the Polish evacuation. The real breaking point came in April 1943 when German soldiers made the grisly discovery of mass graves of Polish officers outside of Smolensk, the victims of the Katyń massacre. The mystery of the missing Polish officers which Stalin claimed to have "fled to Manchuria" had been revealed, albeit by the Poles and Soviet's common enemy. The Soviets on their part doubled down on its criticism of General Anders and the Polish exile government and army, portraying them as crypto-fascists propagating Nazi lies. The tense diplomatic back and forth between the two governments finally let to the Soviet Union breaking off diplomatic relations with the exiled Poles on April 25.

The discovery of Katyń and its consequences posed a massive problem for the whole Allied alliance. Knowing that the defeat of Nazi Germany would require close cooperation with the Soviet Union, Churchill pushed for censorship of the discoveries, least not to threaten the fragile anti-Nazi coalition.¹⁰¹ This included British pressure on Sikorski to keep the exiled Poles quiet and not to pursue the issue. It was a tall order to ask, especially considering the vocal anti-Soviet factions within Polish exile who were already openly critical of Sikorski's conciliatory stance towards the Soviets up until that point. This was particularly true within exiled military

¹⁰⁰ Sarner, Harvey. *General Anders and the Soldiers of The Second Polish Corps* (1997), p 202.

¹⁰¹ Bell, P. M. H. "Censorship, propaganda and public opinion: The case of the Katyn Graves, 1943." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 39 (1989), p 63-83.

circles and especially the Polish II Corps, which was characterized by its vocal anti-Soviet stance and criticism of the “civilian” political exiles in London. In an attempt to cool the outrage over Katyń within the II Corps, Sikorski personally visited the Polish forces in the Middle East to encourage the exiled army to continue training for eventual deployment and continue the struggle in Italy. Unfortunately for him, General Sikorski died en route on his return to London off the coast of Gibraltar when his plane crashed shortly after takeoff – an incident still shrouded in much mystery.¹⁰²

The sudden death of Wladyslaw Sikorski on July 4, 1943, would further solidify the gap that existed between the Polish political exile and the military, as his dual positions of Prime Minister and Commander and Chief were split along factional lines. The position of Prime Minister fell upon Stanisław Mikołajczyk, and command of the armed forces to General Kazimierz Sosnkowski. Already well acquainted with one another as perhaps two of the most recognizable figures of the anti-Soviet faction of Polish exile, Anders was in support of General Sosnkowski and openly critical of Mikołajczyk. Just like his predecessor, Prime Minister Mikołajczyk sought negotiation with the USSR and was open to making compromises when needed. General Sosnkowski, a man of Pilsudskiite pedigree from before the war, continued in the military’s tradition of no-compromise. Even when the USSR had the upper hand in dictating the future of Poland when the Red Army moved across Polish territories towards Berlin, his refusal to negotiate and his open criticism of the Soviet Union and the Allies as a whole

¹⁰² There is still much speculation and mystery surrounding the death of General Wladyslaw Sikorski. Whereas official reports claim it was an accident, critics say that it was a planned assassination by either the British, Soviets, Nazis, or even oppositional Poles. These claims were opportunistically reproduced within Nazi propaganda, politicizing and confusing realities at the time even further. See Garliński, Josef. *Poland in the Second World War* (Springer, 1985), p 215.

eventually cost him his job when the British pushed for the exile government to sack him over comments made following the Warsaw Uprising in 1944.¹⁰³

Throughout its existence, negative opinions of Russo-conciliatory figures in the exiled government in London were widespread throughout the ranks of the Polish II Corps. Whereas Sikorski and especially Mikołajczyk were castigated within the military press, Anders and Sosnkowski were lionized as true patriotic leaders. Having witnessed what communism could entail via their own experiences in Soviet gulags and the fact that many had homes in the annexed eastern territories, seeing Poland's military commanders' unwavering position on the political and territorial matters regarding postwar Poland greatly appealed to the soldiers of the II Corps. According to Paweł Grotowiecki, "In the ranks of the II Corps, they did not want to talk in terms of diplomatic nuances, suggesting the presence of some *modus vivendi* from the USSR."¹⁰⁴

As will be detailed later, military press and propaganda further inculcated the idea that the Polish army in exile played a truly exceptional national role, not only militarily, but politically, culturally, and morally despite developments in London, Moscow, or anyone elsewhere that were working against them. Although officially under the authority of the Polish government in Exile,

¹⁰³ During the Warsaw Uprising, General Sosnkowski strongly pushed for direct Allied assistance and support for the underground Home Army as they battled Nazi forces for control of the Polish capital, an action that Britain and America saw as holding too little tactical or political benefit to devote the manpower or resources for. Considering the Red Army were sitting at the outskirts of Warsaw, a fact that prompted the resistance action in order to prevent them from placing the Soviet-backed Polish Committee of National Liberation, only token forms of support were given leading to the defeat of the Home Army and destruction of the city prior to the German retreat and Soviet "liberation." Enraged, Sosnkowski publicly castigated the British and American Allies saying "If the population of the capital must die in the rubble of their homes for lack of assistance, if through passivity, indifference or calculation mass murder is committed, the conscience of the world will be burdened with the sin of a crime unheard of in history." He went on to summarize the ordeal by quoting Polish romantic poet Wyśpiński who wrote, "vileness, lies/I know them, I know them too well." Schwonek, Matthew R. "Kazimierz Sosnkowski as Commander in Chief: The Government-in-Exile and Polish Strategy, 1943-1944." *The Journal of Military History* 70.3 (2006), p 743-780.

¹⁰⁴ Gotowiecki, P. "Działalność żołnierzy II Korpusu Polskiego w Związках Ziem Wschodnich i innych środowiskach kresowych na emigracji" in *II Korpus Polski w kampanii włoskiej i losy jego żołnierzy po wojnie*, (eds.) J. Smoliński, K. Piwowarska, (Warszawa, 2008), p 77.

the Polish II Corps functioned with a great degree of autonomy and on the periphery of the exiled state as it moved from Persia, through the Middle East, and eventually to Italy. This was not only due to its distant position on the globe from the homeland and the exiled state in London, but also the political alignment of the army's commander General Anders with the smaller oppositional faction of the government characterized by its staunch anti-communism and political inflexibility. With armed diaspora largely holding similar beliefs that were reflexively reinforced by II Corps institutions, Anders' Army as a "little Poland" would become a serious contender in competing wartime projects working out the details of the contours of postwar Poland.

2.2 Nomadic center of Polish culture and civilization

Seeing it as a piece of the Polish nation on the move free from incarceration, occupation, or foreign influence, Anders and the commanders of the wandering Polish diaspora in exile made education and cultural development a top priority, even amid combat training for the front. This was not only true for the 37,000 civilians, mainly families of soldiers, who were with them, but also the thousands of soldiers themselves who were to be the model citizenry in the postwar Poland to which they envisioned a return.

Even before the evacuations from the USSR, the groundwork for subsequent educational and cultural development had been laid. An initial concern were the exiled children, a good number of which were orphaned since the outbreak of war, who collectively represented the next generation of Poles and thus a vital asset of the nation's future. However, according to Keith Sword, that future was at risk because "children had often forgotten their Polish or spoke in a mixed jargon of Polish, Russian and whatever local dialect or language prevailed. Illiteracy was a

common problem. Religious and cultural knowledge had to be fostered.¹⁰⁵ With little materials or outside assistance, Polish exiles did what they could to educate these children and made efforts to support their education and national cultivation.¹⁰⁶ As smaller military units formed within the wider infantry divisions, it was often the case that the soldiers within the unit and their families would collectively organize some sort of schooling for their battalion's children.¹⁰⁷

Concerning adults in the USSR, opportunities for more structured schooling outside of military-related training were limited. Still lacking much-needed resources, the situation would improve slightly after evacuation in the Middle East but didn't improve significantly until the forces reached Italy, especially after the end of hostilities. However, in the early stages of the army's development, priority was given to the most undereducated soldiers lacking basic primary education and who were in some cases illiterate, an obstacle in the way of military cohesiveness that needed to be mended.¹⁰⁸ The entanglement between education and military matters was even visible among the exiled youth, as General Anders' cadet force which formed in the USSR would become a cadet school in Palestine for boys between the ages of 14-17 and were expected to eventually join the regular ranks when coming of age.¹⁰⁹

With more traditional forms of schooling proving difficult given the circumstances, educational responsibilities would largely fall on the shoulders on military institutions such as specialized departments dealing with culture, press, propaganda, and networks through the officer corps, who served as the gatekeepers of information their subordinates and their families. This

¹⁰⁵ Sword, Keith. *Deportation and Exile: Poles in the Soviet Union, 1939-48*. (St. Martin's Press, 1994), p 105.

¹⁰⁶ Gross, Magdalena H. "Reclaiming the Nation: Polish Schooling in Exile During the Second World War." *History of Education Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (2013), p 233-254

¹⁰⁷ Wawer, Zbigniew, and Andrzej Suchcitz. *5 Kresowa Dywizja Piechoty* (2012), p 659.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Kochanski, Halik. *The eagle unbowed* (2012), p 195.

happened on multiple levels along the chain of command, all the way from the government authorities in London down to the Corps, divisional, and even battalion level which sometimes had their own press and propaganda outlets. For instance, seeing the need for more localized institutions upon the establishment of the Polish Army in the USSR, General Sikorski ordered the creation of the Bureau of Propaganda and Education (*Biuro i Propagandy Oswiaty*) which published the newspaper White Eagle (*Orzeł Biały*), one of the main publications of the II Corps. When the army evacuated to the Middle East, their comrades of the Carpathian Division who were already there also had their own Department of Propaganda. After the forces joined to become the Polish Army in the East and then the Polish II Corps, various departments coalesced into the Polish II Corps Field Section of Propaganda and Culture (*Sekcja Polowa Propagandy i Kultury*) which continued functioning largely on the divisional levels of the 3rd Carpathian Infantry Division and 5th Kresowa Infantry Division.¹¹⁰ In either case, educational activities within the II Corps were used as a means to supplement the boost of soldiers' discipline and morale, counter enemy propaganda, maintain faith in the re-establishment of an independent Poland with its pre-1939 borders and a fighting spirit towards that aim, confidence-building in the Western allies, and to stimulate a sense of national patriotism.¹¹¹ Education and propaganda served to prepare each soldier to be, in the words of General Anders, an "ambassador of the Polish cause."¹¹²

Just as Prime Minister Sikorski had feared and tried to preemptively eliminate early on, education and propaganda outlets within Anders wandering military exile included prewar

¹¹⁰ Wyszczelski, Lech. „Działalność oświatowo-wychowawcza i propaganda w II Korpusim w latach 1944-1945” in *II Korpus Polski w kampanii włoskiej i losy jego żołnierzy po wojnie*, (eds.) J. Smoliński, K. Piwowarska, (Warszawa, 2008), p 21.

¹¹¹ Ibid, p 22.

¹¹² Anders, Władysław, and Bogusław Polak. „1945 wrzesień 11, Ankona – Rozkaz oficera nr 10 gen. Władysława Andersa” in *General broni Władysław Anders: wybór pism i rozkazów* (2009), p 211.

Piłsudskiite/Sanacja elements which were still embedded within the army. This ran the risk of running a parallel “Polish cause” politically at odds with the ruling political exile’s visions of the national future. Even before the army evacuated to the Middle East from the USSR, political conflicts between supporters of Sikorski, former Endeks, and Piłsudskiites were being waged in Palestine over Polish media and propaganda outlets by Polish foreign service diplomats and military exiles who had escaped there from Rumania.¹¹³ This largely manifested itself in struggles over local exile press but also in symbolic ways such as strong protests by Piłsudskiites that occurred after a portrait of the late Marshall Piłsudski was taken down from a common space used by Polish evacuees in Tel Aviv.¹¹⁴ When Anders and his army arrived in the area, political and symbolic dynamics shifted in the favor of the marginalized Piłsudskiites, who made it a priority to forge good relations with Anders, his generals, and especially the Corps’ junior officers to secure Piłsudski’s military legacy be transferred on to the army’s next generation.¹¹⁵ Despite being what historian M.B. Biskupski calls a “dubious” Piłsudskiite due to his earlier opposition of Piłsudski’s 1926 Coup d’état¹¹⁶, Anders allowed Piłsudski hero-worship within his army and wasn’t afraid to appeal to the memory of the late Marshall in his addresses to the troops, counter to London’s instructions of “tactful silence.”

Religion played a major role within the patriotic education of Anders army and military chaplains played the dynamic role of both spiritual mentors for the faithful as well as de facto educational and political officers and anti-communist spokespersons. Religious rituals and

¹¹³ Pietrzak, Jacek. „Rozdział III: Mozaika Polityczna Piłsudczycy i środowiska zbliżone” in *Polscy uchodźcy na Bliskim Wschodzie w latach drugiej wojny światowej: ośrodki, instytucje, organizacje* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2012), p 232-261.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p 329.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p 330-331, 338

¹¹⁶ Mieczysław B. Biskupski. *Independence Day* (2012), p 118.

holidays were often indiscernible from patriotic demonstrations as national and religious practices, discourses, and symbolisms were deeply intertwined.¹¹⁷ Due to the dominant Roman Catholic demographic within the Corps, the Polish army's Catholic ministry was the largest and most developed. However, the Corps also made sure to service the religious needs of non-Roman Catholic soldiers and their families, with Eastern Orthodox, Protestant, Greek Catholic ministers, Jewish rabbis, and a Muslim Tatar imam – most of whom served in the 5th Kresy Infantry Division.¹¹⁸ Despite personally being baptized into the Protestant Polish Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, General Anders regularly involved himself in patriotic showings of solidarity by partaking in Roman Catholic masses, even publically converting to Catholicism in June 1942 in Jangi-Jul in Soviet Uzbekistan.¹¹⁹ Such acts of treating Roman Catholic sacraments as a patriotic exercise seems to support the thesis of Genevieve Zubrzycki, who argues, “Because of Poland’s peculiar political history, it was not political institutions and symbols that were sacralized and became the object of religious devotion (following the French revolutionary model), but religious symbols that were first secularized and then *resacralized as national*¹²⁰” [Zubrzycki’s emphasis].

Regarding press and propaganda, focused educational actions among soldiers of the Polish II Corps would become most developed in Italy, when the Culture and Press Department (*Oddział Kultury i Prasy*) was established in May 1944. Though the reorganization built off of the old structure by maintaining divisional cells (Carpathian and Kresowian) it expanded the

¹¹⁷ Wyszczelski, Lech. „Działalność oświatowo-wychowawcza i propaganda w II Korpusie...” (2008), p 24.

¹¹⁸ Werra, Zbigniew. *Działalność duszpasterska w 2. Korpusie Polskich Sił Zbrojnych na Zachodzie gen. Władysława Andersa 1941-1947*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2009, p 203.

¹¹⁹ „75. lat temu konwersja gen. Andersa na katolicyzm.” Wspólnota Andersa, 27 June 2017. URL <http://anders.org.pl/index.php/2017/06/27/75-lat-temu-konwersja-gen-andersa-na-katolicyzm/>

¹²⁰ Zubrzycki, Geneviève. *The Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p 220.

action at the Corps level, adding a full-time cultural staff and offering more educational and cultural activities for soldiers such as mobile libraries, radio programs, concerts, theatre, cinema and expanded publishing of newspapers and journals. However, though resources in Italy were less scarce than in the Middle East and respective departments expanded, conducting any kind of systematic cultural or education work for soldiers on the front war nearly impossible. Instead. Educational officers were to perform impromptu talks with soldiers and encouraged junior officers to do the same with their subordinates.¹²¹ In the 5th Division, General Sulik ordered his officers to develop friendly groups and networks within the division to disseminate information and informally raise the overall level of education. He stressed, “I appeal to commanders and officers at all levels of command, to make them feel for this order and proceeded to continue their educational work in their departments with proper understanding of its need and importance.”¹²² When hostilities ceased, the possibility for engaging in more structured education throughout the entire II Corps became more widespread. Those soldiers who had been continuing their primary and secondary education were encouraged to do so and more educated soldiers had the opportunity to attend Italian universities to master trades or advance academic skills.¹²³ Soldier-artists sponsored by Anders cultivated artistic life within the Corps and were published in military and foreign civilian press throughout their wandering and were exhibited.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Wyszczelski, Lech. *Oświata, propaganda, culture w Wojsku Polskim w latach 1918-1945* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2004), p 262-263.

¹²² Suchcitz, Andrzej. *5 Kresowa Dywizja Piechoty* (2012), p 659.

¹²³ See Żak, Jakub. „Rozdział 3.2 Szkolenia, kursy specjalistyczne, ćwiczenia” in *Nie walczyli dla siebie: powojenna odyseja 2. Korpusu Polskiego* (Warszawa : Oficyna Wydawnicza RYTM, 2014, p. 156-183.

¹²⁴ For more information on “Anders’ artists,” refer to the works of Jan Wiktor Sienkiewicz, including "Artyści Andersa. Z sowieckich łagrow, przez Monte Cassino, do Rzymu i Londynu" in *Za naszą i waszą wolność. Bitwa o Monte Cassino z perspektywy polskiej i włoskiej. Per la nostra e la vostra libertà. La battaglia di Montecassino vista da una prospettiva polacca e italiana* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2017), p 89-111.

Recalling the definition of propaganda presented in the thesis' introduction, it becomes clear that education, religion, and visual arts were crucial dimensions in Polish authorities' attempts at propagating desired mentalities. These themes were often interconnected and transcendent throughout the army's institutional publications and was a staple of the wandering military community wherever it went. When the army arrived in Italy there were more readily available resources resulting in a "communications explosion" of exiled Polish-language publications between 1944 and 1946¹²⁵ which meant a wider array of more-focused publications. According to Oscar Stanisław Czarnik's comprehensive study on Polish military publications in exile, the major directions of publishing activity were divided into the following: information and propaganda, military and civilian education, literature, religious texts, scholarly texts, special publications, and histories.¹²⁶ This a boom in more readily accessible print media created a platform for limited public debate, especially after hostilities ceased and energies could be put into reflections and thoughtful writings on topics such as philosophy, politics, culture, and civilization. Be that as it may, publications were generally at the initiative of press or educational officers and published in Polish, reflecting the discourses of soldiers of higher rank and positions of authority.

For the sake of this thesis, two contextual points must be stressed before continuing onto the narrower scope of the Kresy Infantry Division. First, it must be remembered that educational and cultural activities within the II Corps were greatly autonomous from the exile government in London. As already illustrated, just as Anders made military decisions with much disregard for

¹²⁵ Czarnik, Oskar Stanisław. *W drodze do utraconej Itaki: prasa, książki i czytelnictwo na szlaku Samodzielnej Brygady Strzelców Karpackich (1940-1942) oraz Armii Polskiej na Wschodzie i 2. Korpusu (1941-1946)*. (Warszawa: Biblioteka Narodowa, 2012), p 104.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

political strategies that didn't suit the aims of the Corps' commanders, so too were decisions regarding education, culture, press, and propaganda highly autonomous to the Corps itself, reflected to some degree at the divisional level as well. That is not to say that the overall aims of military spheres in exile and political spheres in London didn't greatly overlap. Both served the fundamental wartime objective of ending the occupation of Poland by repatriating the exiled state and restoring the Republic's borders. However, whereas the military exile made it clear they were uninterested in altering the prewar borders or allow communist influence of any kind, some in the so-called civilian political exile were willing to make some concessions. Secondly, it was precisely around these points of difference that exiled military education and culture would root themselves, linking its non-negotiable message to all aspects of a soldier's life and shaping mentalities of their past, present, and future. As will be elaborated in the next chapter, this continued within the II Corps even after the war's end, even when Poland's borders and its postwar Soviet-backed government had been forged by the great Powers and tacitly accepted by the international community over the Polish exile government and its army in Italy.

2.3 The Borderland Division and the Kresy Cause

Within the Polish exiled armies, unanswered questions surrounding the territorial demarcation of Poland's eastern borderlands and the future of Poland in relation to the Soviet Union weighed especially heavy on the minds of those who had been evacuated from the USSR. With a majority of its members coming from territories east of the Molotov-Ribbentrop line which had been annexed by the Soviets in 1939, the fate of the borderlands would directly affect them, as they had been separated from their homes and in many cases family members who were left behind. Upon its arrival to the Middle East, the 5th Infantry Division founded in Tatishchevo would be reorganized along with other evacuated units and christened the 5th Kresowian Infantry

Division (5 *Kresowa Dywizja Piechota*). Initially they, together with the 3rd Carpathian Division, represented the Polish II Corps, Anders' "little Poland."

Due to several factors, differences between the men of the 5th Kresy Infantry Division and the Carpathian Division were immediately visible in the Middle East as they came together as a single fighting force. Aside from Anders' evacuees visibly deteriorated physically and mentally from their time in Soviet gulags and work camps before the amnesty, social cleavages stemming in the Polish II Republic crossed over into the exiled military formation. According to Maciej Szczurowski the Carpathians were "a kind of elite kind of unit, consisting of highly educated soldiers, mainly university students and former students of secondary schools, conscious of the goals of their fighting" whereas the "forces arrived from Russia was mainly consisted of dwellers of pre-war eastern borderland[s] of Poland, having often problems with reading, writing, of a specific mentality."¹²⁷ Looking to overcome the apparent social divide between the units of his exiled army while seeing its culture-building potential, Anders announced a general order to his men in June 1942 saying "We must cement ourselves into one big mass [...] we must create our own traditions, and those traditions must be faith in Divine Providence and our deep love of country and nation. These are the signposts of our day-to-day work."¹²⁸ In an address to the Carpathian Division the following month, he reminded them that their comrades from the eastern borderlands "are one blood [...] there are no differences." Together, he continued, they would return to Poland, which cannot truly exist without all its territories including Lwów, Wilno, Gdansk, and Gdynia.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Szczurowski, Maciej. *Politics and the Armed Forces* (2016), p174.

¹²⁸ Anders, Władysław, and Bogusław Polak. „1942 czerwiec 20, m.p. – Rozkaz gen. Władysława Andersa do żołnierzy Armii Polskiej na Wschodzie” in *General broni Władysław Anders: wybór pism i rozkazów* (2009), p 78.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, p 91.

Reflecting on Szczurowski's quote, it may be tempting to ascribe an innate collective "borderland mentality" or identity because of the evacuees' origins. Although illiteracy rates were indeed highest in the prewar eastern territories, it mustn't be forgotten that the eastern borderlands from which they originated represented a vast territory characterized by kaleidoscopic experiences and realities. The eastern borderlands consisted of both rural and urban areas, with the cities of Wilno and Lwów acting as regional centers of their voivodeships. Historically, both cities had been territorial centers of Polish culture under Russian and Austrian partition respectively, giving each city distinct characteristics persisting into the interwar period. At the same time, though Poles constituted the hegemonic demographic of the urban populations, they included large non-Polish minority communities, and in the surrounding rural areas, non-Poles were generally dominant over the number of Polish inhabitants and local Polish authorities.¹³⁰ Considering that the 5th Division took recruits from a pool of deportees east of the Molotov-Ribbentrop line, it's no wonder that the army's "Kresowians" constituted the most ethnically and religiously diverse formation within the Polish II Corps including a sizeable minority of Ukrainians, Belarusians, Jews.¹³¹

¹³⁰ According to the 1931 Polish census which counted nationality by "mother tongue," Wilno's largest demographic groups were Poles (65.9%), Jews (28%), and Russians (3.8%) with other groups making up less than 1% each. The voivodeship as a whole, including the surrounding rural areas, recorded the largest demographic groups being Poles (59.7%), Belarussians (22.7%), Jews (8.5%), and Lithuanians (5.2%). In the city of Lwów numbers approximately showed the following: Poles (63.4%), Jews (21.6%), Ukrainians (7.7%), Ruthenians (3.4%), and on the voivodeship level showing Poles (46.5%), Ukrainians (41.8%), and Jews (10.9%).

¹³¹ Determining exact numbers of minorities within the 5 Kresy Division or within the II Corps generally is not an easy task, as the Polish army's own reports seem to be contradictory. According to Wydział Politycznego Biura Ministra Obrony Narodowej, the evacuees from the USSR included 714 Ukrainians, 132 Ruthenians (Rusyns), 1397 Belarusians, and 4226 Jews. In another report 31 December 1942, the numbers were 594 Ukrainians (2 officers), 794 Belarusians, 5 Georgians, 9 Russians, and 3545 Jews. In September 1943, the report read 685 Ukrainians, 125 Rusyns, 1377 Belarusians, and 3572 Jews. These numbers are cited from a formative article on the issue by Paweł Gotowiecki and Jakub Żak, who elaborate on these disparities as well as conflicting accounts between Polish and Ukrainian historians particularly. Although fluctuating numbers in the negative could be explained by desertions, men deserting the Corps were generally noted by religion and not ethnicity, perhaps offering some indication of ethnicity but by no means conclusive. However, what is clear is that the 5th Kresy Infantry Division did represent the most diverse unit within the II Corps, despite differing claims as to exact numbers. Looking at the Kresowa Division

However, at the same time, those who were evacuated had been to some degree accepted as proving their Polishness or otherwise being Polish enough to represent the exiled government, the nation, and the Polishness of the Kresy borderlands while in exile. Given the enlistment vetting process in the USSR before the evacuation, it would be safe to assume that priority would have been given to those who proved their national credentials by being former soldiers, from military settler families, or otherwise connected to Polish state apparatuses in the unconsolidated eastern territories of the II Republic. Another consideration could be that recruits who were considered nationally underdeveloped were thought to still harbor the potential of becoming good Poles. If one reflects on prewar nation-building mentalities, Ukrainians, but especially Belarusians and nationally ambiguous *tutejsi* were candidates for civil and cultural Polonization, as they were perceived as being historically and spiritually tied to the Polish nation. Thus, as spiritual sons of former Rzeczpospolita, were able to answer the call to aid in Poland's messianic and civilizational role in the region and the world. Additionally, would-be recruits could have simply hidden their ethnicity by Polonizing their surnames or claiming to be Roman Catholics to assure recruitment, such as the case of many Orthodox Belarusians who identified themselves with the dominant Polish Catholics.¹³²

Internal diversity notwithstanding, looking at the evacuees who formed the Kresy Division as a collective unit, they did share fundamental wartime experiences of forced deportation, incarceration, and evacuation which constituted an origin story of the Division upon

specifically, Gotowiecki and Żak note a study by B. Heydenkorn which states as of 1 December 1943 it comprised of: 13,049 Poles (783 officers), 264 Ukrainians, 460 Belarusians, 144 Jews (12 officers), 19 Lithuanians, 3 Rusyns, 11 Russians, and 4 Tatars. For more on this "unresolved question" see P. Gotowiecki, and J. Żak. "Nierozwiązany problem. Kwestia udziału Ukraińców w walkach 2. korpusu polskiego we włoszech." *Україна-Європа-Світ. Міжнародний збірник наукових праць. Серія:: Історія, міжнародні відносини* 17 (2016), p 172-185.

¹³² Grzybowski, Jerzy, et al. „Białorusini wśród uchodźców polskich na Środkowym Wschodzie iw Afryce Wschodniej w latach II wojny światowej.” *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość. Pismo naukowe poświęcone historii najnowszej* 8.2 (2005), p 329-345.

which its traditions and self-narrative could develop. These experiences were shared by officers which may have encouraged some feeling of social leveling between recruits and officers, even with their chief commander General Anders who similarly endured incarceration and torture at the hands of the NKWD. At the same time, many evacuees must have felt personally indebted to Anders for evacuating civilian family members amidst great hardships and orders from London to leave civilians behind in the USSR, which was conducive for the development of a Weberian charismatic authority around which the collective could unite.¹³³ Considering this, it's no wonder that the Polish II Corps is often characterized as being both strongly anti-Soviet and highly loyal to their commanders, and particularly Anders, which would have been especially strong among those who had been with him since the very beginning in the USSR. This was evident within the Kresy Division after the war when those of the division wanting to leave the Corps after hostilities ceased and repatriate to communist Poland were generally newer recruits who had been captured Poles pressed into the service of the Wehrmacht and not those who were of the original cohort of evacuees.¹³⁴

Although at the time of its naming in 1943, the newly christened “Kresowians” of the 5th Infantry Division may not have identified themselves as-such or their home territory as a singular territorial unit imagined as “Kresy,” their commander was a strong proponent of Polish ideologies of the eastern borderlands and strove to instill it in the hearts and minds of his comrades and subordinates. Since August 1943, colonel-turned-general Nikodem Sulik had commanded the 5th Infantry Division, continued when it was christened the “Kresy” Division of the II Corps, and remained at its head until its eventual dissolution in 1946. Given Sulik’s

¹³³ Weber, Max. *On charisma and institution building* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

¹³⁴ Żak, Jakub. *Nie walczyli dla siebie...* (2014), p 201.

personal and professional background steeped in Poland's struggles for the eastern borderlands, his recommended by General Sosnkowski who had known him from before the war,¹³⁵ and acquaintance with Anders in Lublianka prison under NKVD captivity, Sulik must have seemed like the perfect man for the job in the eyes of the overwhelmingly anti-Soviet exiled military leadership.

Nikodem Sulik was born in the Russian partition of Poland in a small town near the city of Grodno. Like many Polish military men of the region at the time, he started his career in the Russian imperial army but joined organizing Polish forces after Piłsudski's announcement of independence in 1918. However, due to the contested nature of the eastern borderlands and the continued ambiguity of Poland's eastern demarcation, various Polish volunteer groups emerged intending to secure the territories for the new Polish Republic. Sulik served with the Polish forces of the Self-Defense of Lithuania and Belarus which became the Lithuanian–Belarusian Division of the Polish regular army and fought in several border conflicts including the Polish-Bolshevik War (1919-1920) and the 1920 Żeligowski "Mutiny." After the eastern borders were secured, he joined the Polish Border Protection Corps (KOP) where he served until September 1939. With the fall of the II Republic, Sulik led an armed resistance movement in Wilno with the underground ZWZ¹³⁶ until his arrest by NKVD forces in April 1941.¹³⁷

Continuing in the Border Protection Corps (KOP) tradition of using the Polish armed forces as a tool for cultivating national loyalty through education and service, Sulik saw the 5th Kresy Infantry Division as the successor to Poland's multigenerational struggles over the eastern

¹³⁵ Sulik, Nikodem and Krzysztof Filipow. *Okruchy wspomnień*. (Białystok: Muzeum Wojska, 1993), p 87.

¹³⁶ Związek Walki Zbrojnej (Union of Armed Struggle, abbreviated ZWZ)

¹³⁷ Sulik, Nikodem, and Krzysztof Filipow. *Okruchy wspomnień* (1993); Roman, Wanda K. *Za Polskę do celi śmierci: śledztwo i proces Nikodema Sulika* (Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2002).

borderlands – militarily, politically, and culturally. Though inseparable from the Polish national whole, he stressed the idea that Kresy was a unifying denominator among his exiled troops, and that they as Kresowians played an exceptional role within the Polish cause. Looking at General Sulik’s orders and speeches to his men throughout his command, this becomes clear:

*The Polish nation, and with it the Kresowian Division as one of its particles, is living through exceptional hardships and in a difficult battle with evil [...] the Kresy Division is our common cause, that we all have the duty to take care of its honor, its glory, its good name, both in the Polish army, among our own and among the allies, as well as among the civilian population of all countries through which we will still wander.*¹³⁸

Just as General Anders urged every man of the II Corps to be an ambassador of the Polish cause, so too did General Sulik expect his men to be ambassadors of Kresy, to be the symbolic torchbearers of the borderlands and the vanguards of its cause within the exiled army. Seeing as the soldiers crossed through numerous territories during their “trail” encountered various local communities and mobilized allied armies from as far away as the US, India, and New Zealand, their duty towards the Division’s reputation was held in high regard.

To that end and the overall spread of his cause, Sulik stressed the importance of the Divisional Press which was to serve on the front lines in the battle of hearts and minds. Emphasizing the critical role of the divisional journal *On the Kresowian Trail* in the lives of soldiers, Sulik wrote in forward to the February 1945 issue entitled “Journal – A brave, wise, and faithful friend,”

*The editors wanted to articulate the role of the journal in soldier life. It seems to me that the title of this article gives a thicker answer. The publication is meant to be a soldier’s friend— brave, wise and faithful, in one word, a true friend [...] We live in a time when there is terrible hypocrisy around the world, when perhaps many honest people stopped to orient themselves – what is true and what is a lie. That’s why service to TRUTH is perhaps the highest duty of our publication.*¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Sulik, Nikodem. „Pismo-przyjaciel odważny, mądry i wierny” in *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 1 (19) (February 1945), p 3.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

The general personified his journal as being much more than merely a tool of guiding discourse, or worse, a piece of propaganda in a sea of other exile publications, but as a genuine friend which always told the truth and the soldiers could rely on. Just as a friend would, Sulik continued, the journal would be sympathetic to the soldier and be a source of comfort or even entertainment when required, but never at the expense of the truth no matter how unsavory reports may be.¹⁴⁰ However, even when reporting terrible news at the onset, there was still an attempt to somehow ease the pain through entertainment or humor. It was a tactic which Anders even admitted was a necessary approach, saying during an interview on a Polish military radio program in 1944 that “sadness will do nothing” [...] “the soldier wants to laugh. He needs to be helped.”¹⁴¹



Figure 4. Front and Back covers of July 1945 issue of *On the Kresowian Trail* (Na Szlaku Kresowej). (Obverse) an illustration of Bernardine Church of St. Andrew in Lwów (Lviv) with the words “There is No Poland Without Lwów – There is No Lwów Without Poland.” (Reverse) Divisional Bison with initials KDP, for Kresy Infantry Division (*Kresowa Dywizja Piechoty*). Source: <http://mbc.cyfrowemazowsze.pl/dlibra/docmetadata?id=58717&from=publication>

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Anders, Władysław, and Bogusław Polak. „1944 wrzesień 26, m.p. – Wywiad udzielony przez gen. Władysława Andersa L.R. Izyskiemu z Polskiego Radia.” *General broni Władysław Anders: wybór pism i rozkazów* (2009), p 150.

The press wing of the Kresy cause was entrusted to *On the Kresowian Trail*'s chief editor Witold Zahorski, who like the division's commander, held the qualifications of a prewar ideological Kresowian. Born into a Polish family in Wilno in 1912, Zahorski pursued a career in education and journalism which led him to publish for several Polish language newspapers in Wilno and eventually become a press officer at the Main Directorate Fundacja Pracowania in Warsaw. At the outbreak of the war, he returned to his native Wilno where he joined the Polish underground and was involved in secret educational projects. When his activities were discovered by Soviet authorities he was arrested and held by the NKVD, where he endured interrogation and torture until Stalin's amnesty of Poles. After release, he joined Anders forming army in the USSR, where he found a place in the 5th Divisions Press and Propaganda wing where he was active throughout the war.¹⁴²

During its 3-year run in Italy, *On the Kresowian Trail* included articles on a wide array of topics, reflecting the major directions of publishing activities previously mentioned in Czarnik's work. It attracted authors not only from or associated with the Division which had its own divisional literary figures such as Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, but several notable names of Polish exile at the time including Marian Hemar, Gustaw Morcink, Melachior Wańkowicz, Ignacy Matuszewski, Tymon Terlecki, Walerian Meysztowicz, Władysław Broniecki, and Beata Obertyńska.¹⁴³ Each issue of the journal was richly illustrated, with original drawings, reproductions of famous works of art, or sketches and photographs of Poland, military life, or

¹⁴² Sowinski, Pawel. „Ziemi Włoskiej do Polski” in *Wolność i Solidarność: Studia z dziejów opozycji wobec komunizmu i dyktatury* Nr.7 (nd), p 58.

¹⁴³ Lewandowska, Stanisława. *Prasa polskiej emigracji wojennej 1939-1945* (Warszawa: Instytut Historii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1993), p 151.

important historical events or figures who regularly donned the pages of *On the Kresowian Trail*. Following final notes from the editors which listed journal-related notices, Kresy Division events, or letters from readers, lists of publications newly available in the divisional library were listed including contemporary publications as well as Polish classics like the works of Adam Mickiewicz or Henryk Sienkiewicz. Czarnik notes that despite its initial target audience being the soldiers of the Kresy Division themselves, *On the Kresowian Trail* developed into a publication with a more universal target audience and was popular throughout the II Corps and civilian exile,¹⁴⁴ even reserving 200 copies of each issue to be sent to Polish diplomatic missions, exile centers, and editorial offices of other periodicals and magazines.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Czarnik, Oskar Stanisław. *W drodze do utraconej Itaki* (2012), p 155.

¹⁴⁵ Suchcitz, Andrzej. *5 Kresowa Dywizja Piechoty* (2012), p 694.

Chapter 3.

The cause of Kresy in exiled Polish army press and propaganda in Italy

3.1 Kresowians continue the fight for Poland

With the clarity of hindsight, it may seem clear that Kresy was a lost cause. However, the war and immediate postwar period were ones filled with much uncertainty, and there was no guarantee at the time that order created by the World Powers would be maintained. Even as their situation worsened on the international stage, soldiers of the exiled Polish army who refused to willingly return to a communist Poland were still hopeful they could do so in the future with rifles in their hands to restore Poland's former borders. General Anders openly spoke of the outbreak of an even grander conflict, one that would settle the score between the free nations of the world and the Bolshevik threat. Only then, the troops were told, would they march to Poland and restore their homelands, and rid the world of communist tyranny once and for all.

Considering the circulation of such radical discourse among Polish exile, it's no wonder the presence of tens of thousands of armed and disgruntled foreign soldiers in Italy after the war was a cause of concern, especially for those whose authority was directly challenged by the Polish II Corps defiance and continued existence - namely Britain, Soviet Russia, and communist Poland.

Even when in 1946 General Anders finally submitted to British pressures to begin a gradual demobilization, it was General Sulik and the officers of the Kresy Division who were prepared to resist the British authorities. "We instilled in the soldiers a sense that we would always march to free Poland," Colonel Wacław Jacyna appealed to his fellow officers of the 5th Kresy Infantry Division in protest, "to Wilno and Lwów. Today, when this de facto march ends,

we cannot act passively, for we will lose the faith and respect of soldiers, who will judge our conduct as a transgression of the previous ideology.¹⁴⁶ Some proposed refusing to board ships to Britain and commandeering Roman radio stations to denounce the injustice forced upon them and assert their cause.¹⁴⁷ Others wanted to break away and lead a return mission to the homeland to rally Polish forces to aid the fighting remnants of the Home Army - a mutinous action given direct orders to demobilize. Attempting to reason with the would-be mutineers, Anders rushed to meet the angered officers of the Division and proclaimed such efforts were suicidal and not even logistically possible since the British would never finance such a mission and the exiled army barely had enough fuel to cross the Austrian Alps.¹⁴⁸

Concerning high profile and forceful protest in Italy against the British, though Anders may have personally sympathized with their feelings of betrayal, he warned that it would ultimately hurt their cause by alienating what sympathy may have been left for them in the eyes of the international community. Britain, he claimed, was merely a political satellite of the United States, and the real civilizational struggle was between the US and USSR, which he believed would inevitably go to war. Moreover, he reminded the Kresy division of their oath and cautioned them,

*Everyone has rights and responsibilities; everyone is a soldier and it is not his place to break away. The Polish cause is still alive. Now is not the time to make gestures the world doesn't understand.*¹⁴⁹

Out of respect for his commander, the integrity of Polish military exile, and his oath, General Sulik called off more radical plans of protest planned by the Kresy Division despite criticism

¹⁴⁶ Żak, Jakub. *Nie walczyli dla siebie* (2014), p. 306.

¹⁴⁷ Kondracki, Tadeusz. "Nie jest czas, żeby robić gesty, których świat nie rozumie"(dowódca II Korpusu Polskiego gen. Władysław Anders wobec tzw. buntu Sulika-protestu 5 Kresowej Dywizji Piechoty)." *Dzieje Najnowsze kwartalnik poświęcony historii XX wieku* 36, no. 1 (2004).

¹⁴⁸ Sarner, Harvey. *General Anders and the Soldiers of the Second Polish Corps* (1997), p. 248.

¹⁴⁹ Kondracki, T. "Nie jest czas, żeby robić gesty, których świat nie rozumie" (2004), p 193.

from his officers. Instead, an official memorial protest was submitted by General Sulik to Anders on behalf of the Kresy Division which was subsequently circulated in II Corps publications under the title, “An Appeal to the Nations of the World.”¹⁵⁰ In it, Sulik wrote:

[...] the Polish army outside the borders of the country was a source of hope and a source of faith in the Western world and for the Western allies. The nation of Poland is deeply hurt by the new act of abandonment. It sacrifices himself once again a true ally and friend not in favor of greedy, possessive imperialism. This new act of capitulation to Moscow will not lend it to real coexistence with the world of Western culture. Against this new act of harm done to the Polish people — we Soldiers of the Polish Armed Forces in exile solemnly protest.”¹⁵¹

The soldiers of the Kresy division and others in the Corps who had been unwilling to repatriate to a communist Poland continued in their defiant and caused a massive headache for the British authorities who dubbed them “recalcitrants.”¹⁵² Although Anders did put down the so-called “Sulik rebellion” which might have led to an international crisis, it was a move that was tactical more than anything. According to Anders, it was a matter of waiting for the inevitable outbreak of a Third World War which would offer them a chance to right what was wronged. In the meantime, they were to prepare themselves for the inevitable outbreak of the next round of global conflagration and remain together as the Polish Resettlement Corp which was to be sent to Britain for gradual demobilization. Sacrificing a considerable portion of men for a Kresowian suicide mission would be detrimental to free Poland. Instead, they were to peruse their own personal and social development on behalf of the nation. Witold Zahorski, chief editor of *On the Kresowian Trail* made this point clearly when he wrote, “I think there are only two right paths to Poland. One with a rifle in his hand and the other with a journal and a book.”¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Żak, Jakub. *Nie walczyli dla siebie* (2014), p. 308.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 380.

¹⁵² Sword, K. R. 'Their Prospects will not be Bright': British Responses to the Problem of the Polish 'Recalcitrants' 1946-49. *Journal of Contemporary History* 21(3) (1986), p 367-390.

¹⁵³ SZKOŁA MŁODSZYCH OCHOTNICZEK* Książka – broń” in *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 7 (25) (August 1945), p72.

For the Kresy Borderland's Division, whose mantra was "Without Wilno and Lwów There is No Poland," prolonging the wait while their homes were absorbed into Soviet republics was a bitter pill to swallow. Since the very creation of the Polish Army in the East and transformation into the Polish II Corps, through its subsequent wanderings from Persia to Italy, the troops were encouraged to continue the fight until they finally made it home as liberators, no matter the cost. General Sulik told his men that Italy was merely a stop on their long odyssey home, a journey which they must continue "even if all the devils from the West and from the East pave the way."¹⁵⁴

Struggle without any compromise or settling for less than the main objectives - Wilno, Lwów, and all of Kresy - was constantly reinforced throughout their journeys and placed a heavy burden on their shoulders. Not only were they expected to act as the guardians of the Kresy borderlands and the last free and legitimate representatives of the Polish nation, but they were also told that their struggles and perseverance were tied to the fate of Western Civilization which was being threatened by the Soviet menace. For some, the pressure would prove too much after the news of Yalta as their "trail of hope," to borrow British historian Norman Davies' term,¹⁵⁵ had come to screeching and debilitating halt. Ever since news out of Crimea broke concerning the political and territorial fate of Poland, maintaining morale and discipline had become a reoccurring issue within the ranks of the II Corps as many soldiers must have felt that everything had been lost and their suffering had been in vain. Looking at internal quarterly reports, the immediate period following the Crimean conference saw a spike in crime, desertion, injury and death resulting from intoxication, venereal disease, and suicide throughout the II Corps.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Sulik, Nikodem. "Na Włoskim przystanku" in *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr.11 (15 September 1944), p 2.

¹⁵⁵ Davies, Norman. *Trail of Hope* (2016).

¹⁵⁶ Żak, Jakub. *Nie walczyli dla siebie* (2014), p. 220.

At a time when they were fighting and dying in the Italian campaign amid propaganda attacks from both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, the Anglo-American agreement with Stalin had taken the wind out of the sails of Polish fighting forces. This happened at a time when morale was quite high, spurred on by their collective return to the European continent and their opportunity to take revenge against the German army. Somewhat ironically, Rudolf Böhmler, a German soldier who faced the Poles at Cassino in May 1944, noted the peculiar timing of Yalta and the Allied position on Poland in his postwar memoir saying, “How fortunate it was that the Polish soldiers knew nothing of all these evil matters! If they had, they would certainly have advanced with much less enthusiasm to the attack on Cassino.”¹⁵⁷ During the battle itself, the Nazis were aware of the Polish Corps’ strong dislike of the Soviets, attempting to irritate their feelings of homesickness and distrust towards Allied dealings with Stalin to their advantage. At the battle of Monte Cassino, the Germans berated the Poles by radio and leaflet drops. One such leaflet depicting a skeletal personification of death leading Poles to Cassino had written on the obverse, “[...] Some years ago, Stalin sent a group of murderers to liquidate your colleagues at Katyn. The English are smarter. You are going to die at Cassino as great heroes...”¹⁵⁸ Leaflet drops were supplemented by softer appeals from Polish-speaking “Wanda” via the radio waves. “Wanda,” or Maria Kałamacka, was sympathetic to the Polish soldiers, to Anders and the government in exile. The SS run propaganda station played Polish compositions and patriotic songs - the broadcast always began with a rendition of the Pilsudski Legion anthem, *My, Pierwsza Brygada* - and called for the Poles to quit fighting on behalf of British imperialism and

¹⁵⁷ Böhmler, Rudolf. *Monte Cassino: A German View*. (Pen and Sword, 2015), p 262.

¹⁵⁸ Bytwerk, Randall L. *Paper War: Nazi Propaganda in One Battle, on a Single Day Cassino, Italy, May 11, 1944*. (West New York, NJ: Mark Batty, 2005), p 33.

Soviet oppression to the detriment of their nation, their families, and their personal wellbeing.¹⁵⁹

Although Nazi propaganda efforts didn't entice Anders' men to become turncoats, its anti-Soviet and Anglo-skeptical messaging must have amplified anxieties which occupied the back of their minds.

When the decisions made at Tehran and Yalta were finally announced, the Polish army in Italy faced an existential crisis. With its chief wartime aims undermined by Poland's allies, what was the point of continuing fighting alongside the British army whose government had betrayed them?

Ultimately, the decision was made by General Anders not to pull Polish troops from the front but continue the struggle as Allied forces continued fighting up the Italian peninsula. By this point, General Anders had become a well-known personality, not only in Italy but across Europe, especially after his victory at Cassino. Already well beloved by his men and their families rescued from the USSR, his cult-like status among anti-Soviet factions of Polish exile made him an increasingly influential political figure and opponent to Polish exiles willing to negotiate with the Soviets. This shift in internal exile political affairs, according to some historians, influenced Anders' decision making during the Italian campaign. "He was not a general-politician," writes Szczurkowski, "but he was a political leader," and was not afraid to defy voices of the exiled government in London or the leaders of the Great Powers when they got in the way of what he saw were the interests of the Polish nation. Many exiled generals and officers, such as Nikodem Sulik, saw eye to eye with Anders on this point, supported his

¹⁵⁹ Korol-Chudy, Aleksandra. "'Czy chcecie, by was nadal wodzono za nos?'" Propaganda niemiecka wobec żołnierzy 2. Korpusu Polskiego we Włoszech. Cele—środki—motywy" in *Za naszą i waszą wolność. Bitwa o Monte Cassino z perspektywy polskiej i włoskiej. Per la nostra e la vostra libertà. La battaglia di Montecassino vista da una prospettiva polacca e italiana* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2017), pp. 113-137.

decisions, and continued reinforcing the Polish fighting forces *esprit de corps* in Italy by various means and publicizing their victorious exploits, despite the hopeless situation. Though their military exploits wouldn't directly change the situation in Poland, the symbolic value of a Polish force fighting for the legitimate Polish government in exile that openly spoke out against the Soviet Union and Polish communists forced the Polish question to remain unresolved.

The February 1945 edition of *On the Kresowian Trail* strongly condemned the Yalta agreements, and maintained the necessity to continue fighting, not only for Kresy, but for all of Poland, a fight that only *they* were able to continue. After quoting excerpts of exiled President Arciszewski's dissolution of the underground Home Army in the country, Jarosław Żaba reminds the journal's readers stationed in Italy:

*The situation of the Polish army abroad is different. Just as the situation of Polish citizens outside the reach of the NKVD authority is different and the requirements from us are different. Not only that no one exempted us from the soldier's oath, but on the contrary, after the dissolution of the Home Army, we are the only army of the Polish state, and the only armed branch of the Polish nation.*¹⁶⁰

According to Żaba, with the battle against communism lost on the home front, the responsibility for the future of the nation's freedom and Poland's legitimate exiled government fell on the shoulders of the military exile. This duty pushed them to continue the fight, not only on behalf of self-interest to return home, but for the whole imagined national community. Considering that the officers of the 5th Division were on the verge of mutiny to uphold this oath, it seems to suggest the seriousness of their ideological project, one they had been trying to cultivate among the men of the 5th Division by codifying natural homesickness into a grander cause for Polish Kresy.

¹⁶⁰ Żaba, Jarosław. „Odezwa Rządu R.P. do Polskich Sił Zbrojnych.” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 1 (19) (February 1945), p 34-36.

3.2 A Little Poland of Free Kresowians, Varsovians, and Silesians

The Polish II Corps was commonly referred to by Anders and his commanders as a “family” and as “Little Poland,” and although they were legally under the authority of the Polish government in exile, it had a high degree of autonomy to develop itself and choose its political alignments with relation to the exiled governments more anti-Soviet faction. Looking at structural dynamics of the II Corp, it seems that the relationship between the common soldier/citizen and the exiled state was distant at best. The Polish Corps had its very own wandering institutions, which independently paralleled those in the London exile government. British Secretary Ernest Bevin even went so far to compare the II Corps to a “small state,” incomparable with any other corps with the British Army, and the British War Office commented in reports that General Anders had become “the uncrowned king of Polish exile,” looked upon by many exiles as a “Messiah.”¹⁶¹ Daily personal and institutional contacts were primarily with their comrades-in-arms and officers with whom they had been serving and had generally endured the same hardships since September 1939. The officer corps too, and indeed the whole II Corp itself, would have been the only visible assemblage of the state and would have represented governmental authority in the localized context of exiled wanderings. With the Katyń massacre depriving the Polish forces in the East a viable pool of officers even before its inception, junior officers were largely trained up from within the Corps itself.

Moreover, outside those who were lucky enough to have been evacuated with their families, the men and women of the army provided the only option of community on a communicative (language), cultural, and social level in foreign places like Persia, the Middle

¹⁶¹ Thornton, Martin. “The Second Polish Corps, 1943–46: Were they a functional mixture of soldiers, refugees and social workers?.” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 10.2 (1997), p 132, 127.

East, and N. Africa as they made their way to Italy. Feelings of fraternity would have undoubtedly intensified in combat and other life-and-death situations experienced collectively. However, although the structure of the army allowed for a sphere in which cultural development could be fostered, not least of which a political culture, it was the senior officers who had the most access to intelligence and direct contact with the governmental authorities in London. Therefore, it were the army elites, not the distant Government-in-Exile, who held the strongest position in shaping the culture of the army and disseminate information among the troops. In other words, the officers acted as gatekeepers to information- and according to General Sulik, to truth itself – and were active agents in the cultivation of collective consciousness.

Despite its dependence on British uniforms and equipment, Anders Army maintained itself as a distinctly Polish formation, even when it joined the British 8th Army as an autonomous unit. Wearing iconic British “Brodie” helmets and battledress and armed with Lee Enfield rifles and American Thompson submachine guns, the exiled Polish forces maintained prewar traditions of the Polish military, wearing crowned Polish eagles on their hats and helmets and patches reading “POLAND” (in English) on each shoulder. In an article found within *Kresowa Walczy w Italii*, Tadeusz Pniewski wanted to make clear that the Polish II Corps was not “a mercenary army fighting for money [...] nor are we, Soldiers of Great Adventure. We are fighting only - and again *only* - for our own freedom, combining it with the freedom of others.”¹⁶² The importance of maintaining continuities with prewar Polish traditions while in exile, as well as building off it in a way to reflect their present realities and war aims, placed symbolism and ritual as a central concern of the army throughout the entirety of the war. A characteristic which became more fully

¹⁶² Pniewski, Tadeusz. „Śladami Legionów Dąbrowskiego.” In *Kresowa walczy w Italii*, (eds.) Lucjan Paff (Kraków: Cracovia, 1992), p 13.

developed by the time Anders and his army landed in Italy, an American colonel of the Allied Chief of Staff who was a liaison to the II Corps noted, "Possibly [in] no other army, even including the British Army, does the tradition of Regiments, past glories, colors, battle honors and achievements play so great a part as in the Polish Army."¹⁶³

Contributing to a larger sense of national patriotism, the tradition of regiments or smaller units within the military structure were developed to reflect characteristics that may have been particular to a given unit. With this in mind, it is no wonder that the units formed in the USSR from Polish prisoners in gulags were consolidated and dubbed the "Kresy" Division after evacuating. Just as the men of the Carpathian Brigade were called "Carpathians" tying them to the mountain range along Poland's southern border, so were the men of the Kresy division referred to as the "Kresowians," identifying them as from the eastern borderlands. The practice of naming or creating symbolism for military units based on territorial origins or places important to the respective unit was not unique to the II Corps. It drew from military traditions established during the Second Republic, where units often represented cities, towns, or territories from where the unit had hailed, with the Polish Army collectively representing the entirety of the Republic. This would become visible during national holidays or other manifestations when many units came together for parades or military reviews, representing the unity of various parts of the nation's territories.¹⁶⁴ Unit regionalism, and other aspects of prewar Polish military traditions, constituted one of the main pillars of the II Corps' continued patriotic education.

Although at first sight, the naming of the 5th Infantry Division as the "Kresy" Division seems insignificant, it was a symbolically defiant act on General Anders' part. After the Soviet

¹⁶³ Thornton, Martin. "The second polish corps..." (1997): 127.

¹⁶⁴ Ptak, Jan. "Inscriptions on Military Flags in Poland: An Attempt at Forming a Typology." *Roczniki Humanistyczne* 67, no. 2SP (2019), p 133-171.

Union and Polish Government in Exile restored diplomatic relations following the German invasion of the USSR which broke the Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement, questions concerning territories annexed by the Soviets in September 1939 (i.e. the Kresy borderlands) were hotly contested. The vague terms set up by the Sikorski-Maysky agreements were interpreted differently by both sides, however, it seems that the dual Prime Minister and Commander in Chief Wladyslaw Sikorski decided not to push the issue, leaving it open for further discussion at a more opportune time in the future. With the additional pressure coming from the side of the British, Sikorski avoided making even symbolic gestures that could highlight Polish-Soviet tensions. For example, when the British were transferring a cruiser to the Polish navy, initial plans to name it the ORP *Lwów* were abandoned in favor of the more Soviet-friendly ORP *Gdansk*.¹⁶⁵

The suspension of the eastern question, however, deeply affected General Anders and his forming army, as the question of citizenship and enlistment of those hailing from east of the Molotov-Ribbentrop line into the Polish army came into dispute. In the eyes of the representatives of the Polish army, all people from those territories were citizens of the Polish republic, regardless of ethnicity or religion. Conversely, the Soviets, seeing themselves as liberators of the oppressed minorities from Polish landlords and kulaks, were reluctant to allow Belarusians and Ukrainians into the exiled Polish army, preferring they be enlisted into the Soviet army. In any case, despite much friction regarding Polish minorities from both sides – particularly Jews which seemed to be unwanted by either the Polish army or the Soviets – many minorities eventually joined Anders Polish army and evacuated as part of Polish forces to Persia, most of which were assigned to the 5th Kresy Borderlands Division. With a force representing

¹⁶⁵ Cohen, Yohanan. *Small nations in times of crisis and confrontation* (SUNY Press, 2012), p 13.

Polish Kresy speaking out against the Soviet Union including not only ethnic Poles, but Belarusians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and Jews in its ranks, it put into doubt Stalin's claims of "liberation." Through Anders' Kresy Division, the Polish eastern borderlands were alive and, on the march, despite Stalin's objections or Sikorski's attempts at internal censorship.

Representations of the Polish eastern territories were pervasive throughout names and symbols cultivated within the Kresy Division and its smaller brigades and battalions. Its two initial brigades were the 5th Wilno Infantry Brigade and the 6th Lwów Infantry Brigade, representing the two largest and most important cities of the eastern borderlands. Just as the Division self-consciously represented itself as the army of the contested Kresy territories more generally, so did its battalions tie themselves to the cities of Wilno (Vilnius) and Lwów (Lviv) which were simultaneously claimed by the Soviet Union as well as Lithuanian and Ukrainian national actors respectively. To offer a contemporaneous example of a fighting force competing for symbolic-territorial legitimacy, the 14th SS-Volunteer "Galicia" Division made up of Ukrainian volunteers, also named themselves after one of the territories in question, adopting a stylized symbol of the Lviv lion as their divisional emblem – a symbol associated with the city since the 14th c. The Polish exile forces who bore the name of Lwów also used the lion as their symbol situated under the wings of the "Jagiellonian eagle," tying it to the Polish Jagiellonian monarchy and the legacy of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.¹⁶⁶ While they and all other soldiers of the 5th Division were addressed as "Kresowians," on the brigade level, soldiers in the Lwów units were called "Lwowians."

¹⁶⁶ *STATUT I REGULAMIN Odznaki Pamiątkowej 6 Dywizji Lwów* (Tel-Aviv: Drukarnia Azriel Raanan 22, 1943), Warsaw: Biblioteka Narodowa, URL <https://polona.pl/item/statut-i-regulamin-odznaki-pamiatkowej-6-dywizji-lwow,MTAxNTIwNjI4/0/#info:metadata>

The origins of the Polish military units were constantly reiterated through discourse and military insignia. The theme of Kresy saturated every type of writing within the 5th Division press and was represented the eastern borderlands and territories via photographs, illustrations, and symbols. Early issues of *On the Kresowian Trail* were illustrated with an ornate cover including symbols of the bison, coat of arms of the cities of Wilno and Lwów, a stylized Polish eagle, and three waving banners. The later format adopted was more simplistic, bearing a single image that changed issue to issue. However, images were related to the eastern borderlands in some way, the Corps, or Poland generally. For example, looking at selected cover art from the second half of 1945: the June edition depicted a stylized Wilno coat of arms including the Cathedral Basilica of St. Stanislaus¹⁶⁷; July had an illustration of the Dominican Church in Lwów with the inscription “Without Lwów there is no Poland – Without Poland there is no Lwów”¹⁶⁸; August depicted a man and woman of the Home Army in Warsaw under Zygmunt’s Column holding a banner saying “Freedom, Independence, and Justice”¹⁶⁹; September-October edition showed two II Corps soldiers in British battledress¹⁷⁰, and the November edition simply displaying the “Kotwica” anchor symbol of the underground Home Army.¹⁷¹

Just like the centerpiece of the older format, each copy of the newer formats reverse bore a small illustrated bison with the abbreviation 5 K.D.P.¹⁷² The European bison, a species unique to the Białowieża Forest in the Polish eastern borderlands, also tied the Kresy Division to the territory, with soldiers sometimes even being referred to as “Bison” (*Żubry*). The bison was the mascot of the Kresy Borderlands Division, which each soldier wore on his uniform as a cloth

¹⁶⁷ *Na Szkalu Kresowej* NR 5 (23) (June 1945)

¹⁶⁸ *Na Szkalu Kresowej* NR 6 (24) (July 1945)

¹⁶⁹ *Na Szkalu Kresowej* NR 7 (25) (August 1945)

¹⁷⁰ *Na Szkalu Kresowej* NR 8-9 (26-27) (September/October 1945)

¹⁷¹ *Na Szkalu Kresowej* NR 10 (28) (November 1945)

¹⁷² 5th Kresy Infantry Division (*5 Kresowa Dywizja Piechoty*)

patch and later metallic badge, identifying them with the unit and the Polish borderlands. Along with the badge of the II Corps, a sword-bearing mermaid – the symbol of Warsaw – along with their respective smaller units, whether Lwów, Wilno, or other, military symbols reinforced the idea of “little Poland” among the troops through symbolic reconstruction and circulation.

8



Figure 5: Selected badges from the Polish II Corps reflecting the symbolic reconstruction of all territories of prewar Poland in exile.

As the Kresy Division and the entire II Corps grew, so were territories added into the naming of units and the corps entire symbolic matrix. For example, when the 5th Division expanded in 1944, a new Volhynian Brigade was established, taking on the name of the former eastern voivodship and adapting its coat of arms as a military symbol. It can be conjectured that Volhynia was self-consciously added to underline Poland’s Kresy is more than its urban centers but included the rural countryside’s which were of equal importance. During the war, territories of Volhynia were also being claimed by Ukrainian nationalists while under German occupation and was the site of massacres of Polish minorities at the hands of the Ukrainian People’s Army

(UPA) between 1943-45.¹⁷³ On the international stage, rumors coming from London that some in the Polish government were ready to cede “less valuable” regions to the Soviet Union in exchange for territories in the West, may have also led to Polish military exile’s creation of a Volhynian Brigade. Responding to Churchill’s comments on the “wretched marshes of Pripjat” while speaking about the territorial reorganization of postwar Poland, Michał Ciołek wrote in *On the Borderland Trail*,

*“We are not nomads, whose "homeland on wheels" can be freely rolled here and there. So we do not consider this piece of land, even the most "wretched", to be the object of trade [...] the eastern half of the Polish Republic is not only the "marshes of Pripjat", but also Volhynia and Podole, Lwów and Wilno, Boryslaw and Nowogródek, Białowieża Forest and Krzemieniec forest...”*¹⁷⁴

The listing out of regions, towns, cities, voivodeships, or other territorial demarcations proclaimed as being essential to the future of Poland was a reoccurring practice within exile military discourse. Although lesser referenced areas were highlighted in situations where more focused reference felt required, like countering Churchill’s comments on the “wretched marshes of Pripjat,” they almost always included Lwów and Wilno as being representative of the entirety of Eastern Kresy as a singular territorial unit. Later, this included the references to “Western Kresy” being represented by the cities of Poznan and Gdansk or the regions of Silesia and Pomerania.

While the eastern borderlands were particularly stressed in what this thesis refers to as the Kresy cause, the strive towards securing the borderlands’ fundamental Polishness and its relation to the rest of the nation constitutes a larger framework within which the cause should not be

¹⁷³ Although the Volhynian Massacres were contemporaneous with the events surrounding the Polish II Corps and its propagation of the “Kresy cause,” the Kresy Division press doesn’t seem to ever refer to it or any other third parties vying for those territories apart from the Nazis or Soviets. On one hand, it’s possible that news out of Volhynia and Eastern Galicia didn’t reach Polish exile to be reported on. On the other hand, even if it did, perhaps the fact that there were Ukrainians were fighting *against* Poles posed serious challenges to propagandic narratives of Polish-Ukrainian fraternity [see section 3.3] that were being promoted and simply self-censored.

¹⁷⁴ Ciołek, Michał. „Naszcześnie bagna Prypeci.” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 2-3 (20-21) (March-April 1945), p. 16-24.

overlooked. As addressed in a previous chapter, prewar Poland had been actively attempting to consolidate its nation-state after regaining independence in 1918. By September 1939, Poland was still nationally fragmented, which played out politically throughout the war since the very beginning with the controversial way the government-in-exile was formed. By the time of the war's outbreak, the Polish Republic's Kresy question had not been adequately answered and the heterogeneous border region had not been fully consolidated into the national whole. In this sense, the Polish II Corps and the Kresy Division was a continuation of this process, albeit to a demographic fragment of the territories' former population. Those identified with Poland or Polishness took precedence over those allowed to enlist and evacuate the USSR, although several minority groups were represented in the evacuating army including Jews, Ukrainians, and Belarusians.

To foster a sense of Polish civil-military identity, the smoothing over of regional particularities and social divisions of the prewar period to strengthen group cohesiveness was key. This included changing prewar perceptions that inhabitants from the Eastern Borderlands were generally uneducated and backward, or in a Szczurowski's more gentle wording being of "special mentality." The persistence of such prejudices threatened devaluation of the worth of the Division within the Corps and in turn possibly perceptions of the importance of Poland's Eastern Borderlands themselves. As a "little Poland" proclaiming the inviolability of all territories and the equality of all its citizens, not to mention the obvious short-term need to foster inter-army trust needed for success in combat, national egalitarianism was of utmost importance. Moreover, portrayals of their Division as being made of lowly undereducated peasants were detrimental to Kresy Division morale and the cause of their officers which culturally glorified and romanticized the ruralness of frontier life on the borderlands.

That being said, the peasant background of the 5th Kresy Infantry Division was not portrayed as inferiority or weakness, but conversely hailed as one of its strengths and a historically vital characteristic of the national ethos. Writing about the peoples of Kresy, Walerian Charkiewicz writes in *On the Kresowian Trail*,

The frontiers in Poland, they play special and very special an important role. Due to its location [...] so usually the strongest blows of a neighbor when there is an armed conflict, they are most persistent, they bleed the most [...] The borderlands: the privilege of increased duty. The cultural life of these lands, again and again rebuilt in the postwar ruins, has the character of a struggle, - armed struggle usually takes place under the motto of the defense of the highest cultural values. This creates a distinct lifestyle and creates a different type of citizen of the "kresowian" type.¹⁷⁵

According to Charkiewicz, citizens of the “kresowian” type are characterized by strong resilience, a sense of duty, and will to fight for what is right. Acting as the first defenders not only of the nation politically but culturally, its place within the Polish nation is portrayed as something exceptional and respectable as they are “willing to bleed the most.” This was reiterated after the Battle of Monte Cassino, as the 5th Kresy Division saw the highest casualties out of all divisions of the II Corps. Addressing his Kresowians after the battle, Anders told the 5th Division, “Thank you on behalf of Poland [...] I wish you the best of luck in the march to Poland.¹⁷⁶” Just as Kresy fought for Poland, Poland was expected to fight for Kresy.

The peasant background of the “Kresowians” also supported the Kresy cause in that it was stressed that they had a particularly strong attachment to the soil of the land itself, showing it was legitimately theirs not only through bloody defenses in times of war but the sweat poured over their lands in times of peace. Weekly courses in agricultural and farming techniques even became an option for further education in Italy after the end of hostilities, which served the dual

¹⁷⁵ Charkiewicz, Walerian. “Kresy czy szczyły?” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 5 (23) (Czerwiec 1945), p17-22.

¹⁷⁶ Anders, Władysław, and Bogusław Polak. „1944 czerwiec 14, m.p. – Przemówienie gen. Władysława Andersa do żołnierzy 5 Kresowej Dywizji Piechoty” in *General broni Władysław Anders: wybór pism i rozkazów* (2009), p 128.

political aim of “convincing the soldiers that that in the conditions of the re-occupation of the country [by the Soviets], dreams of ownership own farm cannot be realized.¹⁷⁷” Returning to the article of Michał Ciołek, the interconnectedness of the rural peasant and the soldier patriot was perfectly embodied by Poleszuku, inhabitants of the Polesia region of the eastern borderlands, which was perhaps the most underdeveloped territory in the entire II Polish Republic. Citing their ruggedness and ability to survive and thrive while providing for their families during great hardships, Ciołek writes “the Poleszuk is usually an almost perfect soldier.” He continues that although the Poleszuk is “rarely a nationalist” he “remembers that the period of Russian partition was a time of extreme neglect” and “is under no illusions about relations in the new [Soviet] “paradise.” This leads the Poleszuk, Ciołek claims, to be naturally loyal to the Polish state as the defender of freedom against tyranny. Giving a more recent example of the Poleszuk’s traditional loyalty he references the Independent Operational Group Polesia¹⁷⁸ which fought under Polish General Kleeberg against the Soviets in September 1939.¹⁷⁹

Within the II Corps, soldiers of the Kresy Division were often compared to Polish soldiers who had historically fought and died on the borderlands, being portrayed as their direct successors with whom they were bound through the shedding of blood. Examples included not only the more recent event of September 1939, but historicized their lineage back to soldiers who fought in the Polish-Bolshevik War in 1920, Borderland Wars following Polish independence, Polish Legions in WWI, Polish insurgents of the 18th and 19th centuries, and even to King Bolesław I's intervention against the Kievan Rus in the 11th century. The cities of Lwów and

¹⁷⁷ Suchcitz, Andrzej. *5 Kresowa Dywizja Piechoty*, (2012), p 673.

¹⁷⁸ Samodzielna Grupa Operacyjna Polesie, SGO Polesie

¹⁷⁹ Ciołek, Michał. „Naszcześnie bagna Prypeci” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 2-3 (20-21) (March-April 1945), p. 16-24.

Wilno often played a significant role in these histories, serving as the setting or aim of heroic combat and sacrifice.

This theme was visible in the November 1944 issue of *On the Kresowian Trail* which coincided with the celebration of “Zaduszki,” or All Souls’ Day, traditionally celebrated by visiting the graves of deceased loved ones and ancestors to leave candles and pray for their souls. Far away from their hometowns and villages, All Souls Day rituals were directed towards their comrades who died in battle. However, the Kresy Division journal reminded its readers of their military ancestors who laid in the borderlands, buried in the famous Cemetery of the Defenders of Lwów and Rossa Cemetery in Wilno. The Defenders of Lwów, the Lwów „Eaglets,” had resisted Ukrainian attempts to take the city at the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a central struggle during the Polish-Ukrainian War (1918-1919). Directing the Kresy Division’s thoughts to Lwów, A. Mudyan wrote, “Free Poland’s youth, all today hold you in the deepest composition. Do you hear that? He says that Poland, that Lwów will always defend as they have defended - to the last...”¹⁸⁰ Reminiscing about Rossa Cemetery in Wilno, Tadeusz Słodyk reminded readers of their common bodily sacrifices with Wilno’s historic defenders with those who filled the streets with the “heroic blood of her best sons” during the first (1920) and second (1939) Bolshevik invasions. He goes on to stress the significance of Rossa as being the final resting place of the heart of Piłsudski at the foot of his mother’s grave which in life “beat for all Poland and so loved Vilnius.”¹⁸¹

The late Marshal Joseph Piłsudski and his cult of image played an important reoccurring role in personifying Kresy and the cause within the 5th Division press. Often quoted and

¹⁸⁰ Mudyan A, and Tadeusz Słodyk. „Cmentarze-Symbole.” *Na Szlaku Kresowej*. Nr.14 (1 November 1944), p 10-11.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

illustrated within the issues of *On the Kresowian Trail* and referred to in numerous orders and speeches, he was portrayed as a model Kresowian and an extraordinary Pole – morally upright, uncompromising, and willing to sacrifice himself for the borderlands and the entire Polish nation. His image held a foundational place in the Polish Army of the Second Republic portrayed as successors to his Legions in WWI - a tradition that lived on within the exiled army. A self-proclaimed “Kresowian” during his own life, the legacy of Piłsudski and his image was a staple of the traditions and culture of the 5th Kresy Infantry Division during the Second World War. Even Piłsudski’s unique title of *Naczelny Wódz* (Supreme Commander) which would eventually be passed on to General Sosnkowski (and later Anders for a short time), was said to attest to the Marshalls’ eternal legacy which should guide their present strategies of no-compromise with the Soviets and patience. “Sosnkowski,” wrote Witold Zahorski, “came out of the same hard school of Joseph Piłsudski [...] Piłsudski always believed that out of great cataclysms great changes arise, a new future is created [...] This faith was also the faith of Kazimierz Sosnkowski.”¹⁸²

In the 5th Division press, analogous veneration was paid to other “Kresowian” leaders in Poland’s pantheon of revolutionary leaders fighting against huge odds for great changes in the world. In Ciołek’s article on Polesia, he underlined to his readers, “It is worth remembering that Polesia gave Poland not only privates but also Chiefs: [Tadeusz] Kościuszko and [Romauld] Traugutt.” Retroactively likening them to Piłsudski who came after them, Kosciuszko was the Supreme Commander of the Polish National Armed Forces during the Kosciuszko Uprising of 1794, and Traugutt was military dictator of the National Government of the January Insurrection of 1863. Although both efforts were ultimately unsuccessful, their examples inspired later Polish

¹⁸² Zahorski, Witold. “Człowiek-symbol.” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* NR 2-3 (20-21) (March-April 1945), p 5-6: “Kazimierz Sosnkowski came out of the hard school of Jozef Pilsudski.”

revolutionary leaders, like Piłsudski who was ultimately successful in freeing Poland. In this way, the strategy zero-compromise and persistent armed rebellion were portrayed as sound leadership, whether in the case of Traugutt, Piłsudski, or in line with their own realities, Sosnkowski and Anders.

While developing a regionalized “Kresowian” past and collective imagination was one dimension of the borderland cause, it was also necessary to frame it as part of the broader imagined Polish national community. Kresowians were to see themselves as historic brothers to the Carpathians, Varsovians, Silesians, and all those in the Polish homeland and the Polish diaspora worldwide.¹⁸³ The same was true of the inverse, the Kresowians expected to be perceived as equal members of the national community. Just as Anders told the Carpathian Division after they met their eastern comrades who had just evacuated from the USSR, “we are one blood [...] there are no differences.”¹⁸⁴ General historical education played a role in this process, familiarizing all members of the II Corps of a common Polish history and homeland. Aside from historical articles and books available for reading, they sometimes included national timelines that traced events of the Polish past from the X c. to their own current time. Historical materials of all types were also accompanied by images of important figures or past events.

Cartography too became a staple of illustrations accompanying articles, whether presenting a focused map of Polesia¹⁸⁵, the imagined Intermarium Federation of Free States,¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Though not as often as Poles in the occupied country or Polish POWs or deportees, American Polonia is consistently referenced within *On the Borderland Trail* as being of the same national community as those in the II Corps and the Kresy Division. This is made explicit in a letter from the Polish American Congress in the February 1945 issue entitled “We are One Blood.” Zajączkowski, Tadeusz. „Jestesmy jednej krwi (Kongres Polonii Anerykanskiej)” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* NR 1 (19) (February 1945), p 9-13.

¹⁸⁴ Anders, Władysław, and Bogusław Polak. *General broni Władysław Anders: wybór pism i rozkazów* (2009), p 91.

¹⁸⁵ Ciołek, Michał. „Naszcześnie bagna Prypeci” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 2-3 (20-21) (March-April 1945), p. 16-24.

¹⁸⁶ Zahorski, Witold. “Bogactwo mineralne Międzymorze.” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* NR 1 (19) (February 1945), p 26, 28.

borders of proposed Intermarium member states¹⁸⁷, or maps aiding in the report of current events.¹⁸⁸ Persuasive cartography¹⁸⁹ was even inserted into artistic works, such as an illustration of Piłsudski standing over a map of Poland with his fists clenched next to the marked cities of Wilno and Lwów¹⁹⁰ or into public spectacles, such as lighting large bonfires in the shape of the borders of the Second Republic on the side of a mountain during military celebrations.¹⁹¹

Reporting on tragedies that occurred within different territories in occupied Poland served the dual role of inciting outrage against the enemy, spurring soldiers' wills to fight and consolidating senses of unity as the nation fought against a threatening Other. When battles raged in Warsaw between the Polish underground Home Army and the Nazis during the Warsaw Uprising in August 1944, Polish II Corps radio operators in Italy made contact with the fighting underground, reporting on the battle and eventually breaking the news to the exile army that "There is no Warsaw! All that's left is smoky debris, ruins."¹⁹² The report goes on to disavow Stalin's so-called liberation, rejecting it as another form of slavery just as the city had once been enslaved by the Nazis. Lamenting that the nation's capital trading one occupier for another, the author writes "There is no Warsaw - but there's us – the Warsaw drama's continuation."¹⁹³ Although it's highly probable that many soldiers of the Kresy Division had never even visited the city of Warsaw, as soldiers of Poland and ambassadors of the nation, were expected to fight for it just as other Poles were expected to struggle for Wilno and Lwów. During the Kresy Division's

¹⁸⁷ Słowniec. „W KRAJACH MIĘDZYMORZA U braci nad Adriatykiem.” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* NR 6 (24) (July 1945), p 23-27.

¹⁸⁸ J.Ż. „Linia podziału (Miesięczny przegląd wydarzeń).” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 4 (22) (May 1945), p 32-39.

¹⁸⁹ Tyner, Judith A. "Persuasive cartography." *Journal of Geography* 81.4 (1982), p 140: „All maps are to some degree persuasive because they coax the reader into believing that they are true representations of a given situation; however, some are designed for the sole purpose of influencing the reader. This is persuasive cartography.”

¹⁹⁰ „Wieczne prawdy Piłsudskiego.” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr. 10 (1 November 1944), p 4.

¹⁹¹ Kubalski, Tadeusz. „Święto Lwowskiej Brygady.” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 10 (28) (November 1945), p 56-59.

¹⁹² Grobicki, Alexander. „Nie ma Warszawy.” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 13 (15 October 1944), p 3-4.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

feast day in September 1945, General Sulik stressed this to his men saying, “Our thoughts run to the country today, the ruins of Warsaw, Wilno and Lwów. Always our only thought as a Polish soldier is Poland.”¹⁹⁴

The same kind of national comradeship was not only expected of Kresowians with the country’s center but also the opposite peripheries - the Western Borderlands (*Kresy Zachodnie*). Integration of soldiers from the western borderlands became a more pertinent issue by the end of the war in Italy when Poles who had been pressed into service by the Wehrmacht were allowed to enlist in the ranks of the Polish II Corps; with several forming new units within the expanding 5th Kresy Division. Although the inclusion of Silesia and Pomerania were recurrently proclaimed as essential parts of the nation, the incoming wave of Polish ex-Wehrmacht from those territories had the potential of destabilizing the Corp’s cohesion, tradition, and image. General Sulik looked to overcome potential obstacles the newcomers might pose to the Kresy Division by portraying them too as “Kresowians,” but of a slightly different variety. Addressing the Division in September 1945,

*Here on Italian soil, not only did the division succeed, but it took under its banner our brothers from the western borders. Today, The Division is not only a division of our eastern borders, but is also a division of our western borders, not only Wilno and Lwów, but also Silesia and Poznan, sit in its ranks, and the devotion to Our Lady of Ostrobramska as to Our Lady of Piekarska. The division from Kresy made its banner because we understand and know that without both Kresys there is no great Poland, we know that there is no Poland both without the Eastern borders just as without the Western borders.*¹⁹⁵

The inclusion of “Western Kresowians” into the ranks of the 5th Division was even reinforced within the divisional journal through what seems to be fictionalized short stories of soldiers from Poland’s western and eastern borderlands uniting in Italy where they rediscover their national

¹⁹⁴ “ŚWIĘTO KRESOWEJ Święto żołnierza-obywatela” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 8-9 (26-27) (September/October 1945), p 16-20.

¹⁹⁵ Sulik, Nikodem. „Rozkaz na dzień Święta Dywisji 15 września 1945 r.” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 8-9 (26-27) (September/October), p 13.

fraternity. One particularly interesting work appears in the February 1945 edition of *On the Borderland Trail* entitled “Adam and the Silesian.” In the story, Adam, a soldier from Wilno fighting in Italy, found himself alone in combat action against a small group of German Wehrmacht troops. He skillfully subdues them with his machine gun and as he is about to finish off the final enemy, the man screams, “Jezu drogi!” Hearing his wounded opponent cry out to Jesus in his native tongue, Adam asks him, “You are Polish?” to which the wounded man responded, “Yes, from Silesia.” The two men embrace and kiss, and Adam agrees to take the Silesian back to the Polish camp to mend his wounds and join the Polish army. Along the way, Adam asks him if he knows any news or details from his occupied Wilno, to which his new friend responds, “I am Silesian. Wilno doesn’t concern me.” The Silesian heals quickly in the camp hospital and reunites with his friend Adam. Curious about something his Wilnian friend had told him when they first met, the Silesian asks him, “Brother, when you carried me, and the bullets swelled, it was impossible to say much. Tell me now, do you think it is more important for us to defend western Poland than to fight for Wilno and Lwów?” Adam’s response is long and calculated, systematically going through a list of talking points and themes that were being propagated within the Kresy Division and the II Corps. He begins,

Indeed. Silesia, Poznań and Pomerania are very important to Poland and we have been fighting for these lands since the first moments of the war, but with the same might, we are fighting for our Lwów and Wilno. Mine are not only Wilno and Lwów and yours is not just Silesia, All Poland is ours and we fight for it as one. Remember how we fought, you in German uniform, I in Polish, and how one Polish word revealed to us that we were brothers?

Adam continued by speaking about the common importance of the borderlands for all Poles – both eastern *and* western. The arguments presented are multidimensional, justifying Polish claims over both borderlands historically, culturally, linguistically, legally, morally, and economically. Won over by his comrades’ sound reasoning, the Silesian responds, “God bless me, my friend.

You are absolutely right, we will fight until we regain All Poland, including Wilno and Lwów." They then shake hands as good Poles and the story ends.¹⁹⁶

Although from the looks of this story, the absorption of former Wehrmacht soldiers into the Polish army seems to be a non-issue, externally, this expansion drew serious criticism. Knowing Anders propensity to disobey orders and his political distancing from the Polish Government in Exile, the British were not keen on allowing Anders to expand and sought to limit the recruitment drives of the Polish force in Italy. For Soviet propagandists who were already condemning Anders and his army as being Nazi sympathizers, the recruitment of former Wehrmacht soldiers was used as evidence to back their claims. In May 1945, the Associated Press reported quotations from a Soviet newspaper which claimed that the "Piłsudski generals" [Anders and Sosnkowski] loyal to the "Polish fascists in Britain" were "working out plans for intervention against democratic Poland and other European countries, and covering their preparations for their new adventures with such slogans as: "Rescue Poland and the whole of Europe from the Bolshevik danger."¹⁹⁷ Although by this time, the Allies still recognized the Polish Government in exile, the Soviet-backed Provisional Government of Poland was essentially being de-facto recognized by Britain and the USA and finally officially in July of that year, complicating the continued existence of the Polish Army in Exile.

Ever before the Red Army had entered Polish territories and established a provisional government or Anders had landed with his army in Italy, the Soviet Union had been cultivating its own competing Polish national project, one that was subordinate to the USSR and served as the base for a postwar communist government. The Union of Polish Patriots was established in

¹⁹⁶ Sęk, M. "Adam i Ślęzak." *Na Szlaku Kresowej* NR 1 (19) (February 1945), p 37-38.

¹⁹⁷ The Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum (London) Archives Reference No: PRM.172/1, p 10.

direct collaboration with Stalin in 1943. They would go on to form the 1st Tadeusz Kościuszko Infantry Division made up from those men didn't evacuate with Anders, either by chance or by choice.¹⁹⁸ In any case, Stalin's Polish army was used to directly challenge the Polish Government in Exile and its armies as it portrayed itself as the true democratic representatives of the Polish people vis-à-vis the "Polish fascists" in Britain and Italy.

As will be further elaborated later, communism was the political cleavage where Anders exile army drew a hard line to delineate the imagined boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Ideological communists and those willing to collaborate or negotiate with them, though perhaps ethnically or culturally Polish, were rejected as outside the acceptable boundaries of the nation for their political decisions. The Kresy Division's chief editor Witold Zahorski made these boundaries clearly in an article condemning Prime Minister Stanisław Mikołajczyk for sending a memorandum to Moscow offering concessions to the Soviet Union,

*Mikołajczyk, in his memorandum, calls for the will of the country. Unfortunately, there have already been incidents in the history of our government in London of falsifying the will of the country [...] Here [in military exile] is the real, not false, attitude of the officials and society of the country. We believe that it is like this. It cannot be any other way. There is fighting. There is no living comfortably like...in London. This is the will of Poland.*¹⁹⁹

The article continues in its condemnation by focusing on General Zygmund Berling, somewhat ironically a former Piłsudski legionnaire and chief of staff of the 5th Division when it was in the USSR, who refused to evacuate with Anders and the army to become the commander of the Red Army's Polish Kościuszko Infantry Division,

*Mr. Berling in one of his most recent speeches declared that his army "a component of the Red Army," cannot allow civil war in Poland. We know what this means... And we know what the division of the Polish society into fascists and non-Fascists would look like, a division which Mikołajczyk, following the example of the masters of the Kremlin exhibition, is carrying out.*²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ See Babiracki, Patryk. *Soviet Soft Power in Poland: Culture and the Making of Stalin's New Empire, 1943-1957*. (UNC Press Books, 2015).

¹⁹⁹ Zahorski, Witold. "Memorandum Mikołajczyka." *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr.11 (15 September 1944), p 3-4.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

Criticism of Prime Minister Mikołajczyk sharply intensified following his resignation as the Prime Minister of the Polish Government in Exile to become a deputy PM for the Soviet backed Provisional Government of National Unity in June 1945. General Anders was not shy in vocalizing his views on the exile government authorities or officers who defected to the Soviet-backed provisional government, saying, “I regard as traitors all those officers who were suddenly dyed red, broke their oath and spit on everything sacred and honest, going into the country thinking they would make a career under the Bolshevik whip.²⁰¹” Anders message was clear, those who were “dyed red” were national traitors. In other words, they were excluded from the imagined national community and not true Poles.

3.3 The Eagle, the Knight, and the Archangel: Kresy’s answer to the minority question?

Up until this point, regional and national dimensions of the Kresy cause propagated within the Polish II Corps have been historicized, contextualized, and explored. However, before continued elaboration on supranational and civilizational aspects of the Cause’s underlying ideology, the question of non-Polish minorities within the press and propaganda of the II Corps and its 5th Kresy Infantry Division must be addressed. As presented in the first chapter, the eastern borderlands of the Polish Second Republic, or Kresy, was a collection of voivodeships which was home to the bulk of the country’s non-Polish population. Comprising of roughly 1/3 of the entire population of interwar Poland, non-Polish minorities included Lithuanians, Jews, Ukrainians/Ruthenians, Belarusians, Tatars, and nationally ambiguous *tutejsi*. Between regaining

²⁰¹ Żak, Jakub. *Nie walczyli dla siebie...* (2014), p 208.

independence in 1918 and the Polish government's into exile in 1939, the minorities question had not been adequately solved by the state authorities looking to consolidate the heterogeneous nation-state. In the years before the war's outbreak, measures against the country's non-Polish minorities had become increasingly repressive. Seeing more gradual approaches towards national integration in the face of rival radical nationalisms and Bolshevism as threatening to national security, the Polonization of the borderlands became more forceful and the territories highly militarized. In the second chapter, it was argued that the war had fragmented the Polish nation territorially, politically, and demographically which persisted into the wartime occupation and exile occupation; this included military exile which, as reflected in the previous section, also needed to reconsolidate a national community abroad as a fighting force to restore the Polish state and her prewar borders.

As the legal successor to the government of the Polish II Republic, the official policy of the Polish Government in Exile regarding non-Polish minorities was *ipso facto* a continuation of prewar state policies.²⁰² The Charter of the [Exiled] Polish Government of February 1942 made this clear when it proclaimed it would guarantee the rights and liberties of all citizens "loyal to the republic" and of national minorities "fulfilling their civic duties towards the State."²⁰³ Officially, this meant the recognition of minority rights and the recognition of non-Poles as equal citizens without distinction. However, just as it was before the war, this was not exercised in practice as minority leaders were unrepresented in the exile government in London, unfavored during military recruitment, and limited in opportunities for advancement within the exiled military.

²⁰² Kozinski, Bartosz. *Determinants of the Ethnic Policy of the Polish Government in Exile in the Years 1939-1947* (Wydawnictwo Naukowe UKSW, 2016), p 67.

²⁰³ Yapou, Eliezer. *Governments in exile, 1939-1945: leadership from London and resistance at home* (2005), p 5.

Looking at General Anders and the development of what became the Polish II Corps, its early stages in the USSR and the Middle East constituted the most turbulent period for the army in terms of its minority relations. After decentralized recruitment practices and Soviet intervention had led to the widespread favoring of non-minority Polish citizens into Anders army, a new challenge emerged shortly after its evacuation from the USSR. Reports of anti-Jewish incidents within the army began to surface and Jewish desertion became commonplace, especially when the Polish army passed through Palestine. Whereas some researchers claim the widespread desertions were largely the result of Jews escaping rampant Polish anti-Semitism of their commanders and soldier comrades,²⁰⁴ others argue reasons for desertion were multifaceted and more complex, reflecting not only internal Polish politics but also include factors of British colonialism and concepts of Jewish self-determination.²⁰⁵ In his work reflecting the later opinion, Harvey Sarner does chronicle anti-Semitic incidents marring Polish-Jewish relations within the Corps and offers it as one of several reasons for desertion, but suggests anti-Jewish incidents were more localized and not institutionally widespread. However, it's worth noting that he reports that anti-Semitic incidents in the Carpathian Brigade were minimal²⁰⁶ which implicitly

²⁰⁴ Gutman, Yisrael. "Jews in general Anders' army in the Soviet Union." *Yad Vashem Studies* 12 (1977), p 231-333:

It is clear that anti-Semitism was a general feature of the Polish Armed Forces; it had its roots in traditions of the past and in the ideology and political conceptions of Poland in the period between the wars [...] In the Soviet Union during the Second World War, Jews and Poles came into contact to a much greater extent than in Poland proper where the Jews had been separated from the local population by the walls of the ghetto; in the immigration centers such as London, there was only a handful of Jews and relations there were generally based upon formal attempts at communication, lacking in the elements of spontaneity and frankness.

²⁰⁵ Sarner, Harvey. *General Anders and the Soldiers of the Second Polish Corps* (Brunswick Press, 1997) , p 138-139, 144:

We know the British were very upset about the number of deserters and about Anders' refusal to prosecute them. Anders refused to budge on this issue in spite of British pressure [...] The attitude of the Polish Corps' officers towards Jewish desertions reflected that of their commander, General Anders. A number of them felt that if Jews regarded Palestine instead of Poland as their homeland then it was reasonable to expect them to stay there [...] According to other testimony, however, reaction to Jewish desertions among Polish soldiers was mixed--some felt that Jews found their homeland, others that the Jews didn't want to fight.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 142.

suggests that such incidents were more common among those who evacuated from the USSR, meaning those who formed the Kresy Division.

In any case, what is clear is that about 3,000 Jews deserted from Anders Army as it moved through the Middle East, however, around 1,000 remained in its ranks and continued fighting throughout the end of the war. General Anders ordered that Jewish deserters not be perused to face military trial and continued maintaining that *all* citizens in his exiled Polish army were treated as equals. Addressing the lingering minorities question in Ancona even after the end of hostilities in September 1945, he stated,

*We rejected everything that divides us and took everything that unites us, and we share the love of the homeland and its belief in the Resurrection [...] There are no problems among our so-called "minorities." All the soldiers of different nationalities and faith are treated equally and fairly. They equally shed their blood and further progress with faith in the rightness of our cause.*²⁰⁷

Given the military and political importance of maintaining a consolidated force, it seems sensible that the general did not want to reopen old wounds that could reignite internal frictions.

Moreover, Anders' aversion to publicly addressing specifics regarding the minority situation and its relation to the exiled Polish cause by simply ignoring them also indirectly supported Polish claims to the contested borderlands. If there were no problems between minorities within Anders "little Poland" still serving within the Kresy Division, perhaps one might conclude that a parallel reality existed in the heterogeneous prewar eastern borderlands and the harmonious order of Polish rule should continue.

In other cases, wrongs committed against Poland's prewar minorities were mentioned in passing or downplayed as isolated incidents. In his memoirs immediately following the war, General Nikodem Sulik conceded although "there may have been abuses of power here and there" within

²⁰⁷ Anders, Władysław, and Bogusław Polak. „1945 wrzesień 11, Ankona – Rozkaz oficcerski nr 10 gen. Władysława Andersa.” *General broni Władysław Anders: wybór pism i rozkazów* (2009), p 211.

the Polish Second Republic, its citizens enjoyed a wide degree of freedom. He continued, “The notorious Bereza, however ugly a blemish on our political life because it affected a very limited number of people, did not reach deep into the life of the nation.”²⁰⁸ Although Bereza Kartuska served as a detention prison for a range of political opponents to the Sanacja regime between the prison camp’s creation in 1934 and 1939, much of its infamy derived from it being known as detention center for Ukrainian nationalists, especially members of more radical groups fighting against what they saw was Polish occupation such as the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN). The existence of competing militarized ideologies like the OUN vying for the eastern territories was no doubt known to the exiled Polish military commanders. For Sulik, who had many Ukrainians within the 5th Division, official public statements concerning the prewar state and minorities surely must have come with a large degree of calculation, lest not to overly criticize the prewar regime too strongly, which would hurt his cause and offer propagandic ammunition to its enemies.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, aside from Jews, Ukrainians/Ruthenians and Belarusians constituted the largest number of non-Polish minorities within the Polish II Corps and primarily served within General Sulik’s Division. Despite their status as Polish citizen-soldiers, authorities kept a watchful eye on minority recruits, particularly Ukrainians who were suspected of harboring anti-Polish sentiments and possibly veiling infiltrated agents of the OUN or Ukrainian Liberation Army. According to a report from the exiled Polish Government’s Ministry of Internal Affairs in August 1943, feelings of distrust were also visible between ethnically Polish and Ukrainian recruits who had evacuated from the USSR,

²⁰⁸ Sulik, Nikodem and Krzysztof Filipow. *Okruchy wspomnień* (1993), p 59.

*The attitude of Poles, especially among the lower ranks, towards Ukrainians is usually reluctant, especially against the pro-German attitude of the [Ukrainian] element. In contrast, relations between Poles and Belarusians are completely proper.*²⁰⁹

Seeing as Belarusian national movements were less developed and not radicalized against the Polish state in the same way that some Ukrainian organizations had been, interethnic suspicions that existed could be viewed as a transplant of prewar borderland relations. Moreover, a vocally pro-Polish Belarusian Committee was founded in Iran in 1942 by Orthodox Belarusian evacuees headed by reverend Michał Bożerianow who publically declared Belarussian loyalty to the Polish state.²¹⁰ Although a large number of this Belarusian cohort would be transferred to DP camps in Africa, there were numerous Belarusian who followed Anders to Italy where they fought and died for the Polish cause.²¹¹

Whatever the source of inter-ethnic or religious suspicions, it was in the best interest of the exiled Polish army and ultimately the state to promote unity under the Polish banner. To advance the Kresy Cause promoted by the Division's General Nikodem Sulik, his officers, and the editors of the divisional press and propaganda, the minorities question needed to be addressed in a way that would legitimate the eastern borderlands territorial inclusion into the postwar Polish state while also not jeopardizing marginalization of non-Polish citizens and soldiers. As evidenced by articles published in *On the Kresowian Trail* and speeches given by army and division commanders, this was attempted by stressing historical and cultural ties of minorities to the Polish nation, delegitimizing or ignoring oppositional national or territorial claims, and

²⁰⁹ „Pismo Działu Politycznego M.S. Wewn. o przebiegu konferencji o mniejszościach narodowych w dniu 6.VIII.43.” Archives Reference No: PRM.114. (London Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum Archives).

²¹⁰ Mironowicz, Antoni. "Białorusini na Bliskim Wschodzie wobec spraw polskich w latach 1941-1945 w świetle pism ks. Michała Bożerianowa." *Humanities and Social Sciences* 20.22 (2) (2015), p 63-86.

²¹¹ For a contemporary Belarusian account on Belarusians who fought at the Battle of Monte Cassino, see Грыбоўскі, Ю. *Афіцэр-беларус з-пад Монтэ-Касіна // Беларусы ў бітве за Монтэ-Касіна: артыкулы, дакумэнты* (eds.) Ю. Грыбоўскі; прадм. Х. Кажаневіча (Мн.: Кнігазбор, 2006).

painting peaceful shared future that could be secured through defeating a common enemy to the East.

Narratives of inter-ethnic and inter-religious harmony throughout different periods of Polish history, or rather portraying historical relations as such, was a common theme in the publications of the Kresy Division. Outlining the history of the “Cherven lands” during the reign of King John Casimir in the 17th c. which coincided with the southern regions of the interwar Polish borderlands (Lwów, Tarnopol and Stanisławów voivodeships), one article of *On the Borderland Trail* claimed,

*All inhabitants of this land - Poles, Ruthenians, Germans, Armenians, Jews - grew into one whole, securely connected to the fatherland, take over Polish customs, dress, language, but above all the Polish spirit.*²¹²

Just as Anders encouraged his army to become “one mass,” so did the author frame the historically diverse territories as “one whole” by a romanticized “Polish spirit.” Interestingly enough, the short history omitted any mention of the great unrest which plagued those territories during King Casimir’s reign, namely, the bloody Khmelnytsky Uprising which deepened social, political, and religious divisions of the diverse territories. Again, we see historic relations were painted at idyllic, disregarding events that may have suggested otherwise.

Historicizing the soldiers of the Kresy Division as spiritual successors of a multigenerational cause, official discourses and imagery heavily referenced the history of Polish insurrections during the period of Partitions (1795-1918) with special emphasis placed on the Insurrection of 1863. In January of that year, attempts to quell demonstrations led by Polish activists by conscripting them into the Russian imperial army triggered a full-blown rebellion which aimed at overthrowing Russian rule and reestablishing the former Commonwealth by

²¹² “Polskie Kresy Ziemia Czerwińska” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr. 10 (1 November 1944), p 21.

force. Despite being largely made up of landed gentry, the January Insurrectionists stressed peasant emancipation as a core tenant in line with Western enlightenment ideals, as well as the multinational character of their movement. To that end, the underground government of the uprising adopted the united Polish White Eagle, Lithuanian Knight, and Ruthenian Archangel as its revolutionary symbol and envisioned a Republic of Three Nations, or, the Polish-Lithuanian-Ruthenian Commonwealth, restoring the spiritual ties of the three nations of former Rzeczpospolita. Although the uprising was unsuccessful and led to brutal repercussions, the January Uprising's memory and legacy lived among subsequent generations of Polish revolutionaries counter to patriotic movements which shifted to modes of "organic work," an ideology that emerged as a rejection of what many saw as the unnecessary bloodshed and national degradation that comes with armed insurrections.

The revolutionary tradition of 1863 continued with Piłsudski who was fascinated with studying the uprising and drawing from its examples militarily and politically. His concepts of "spiritual brotherhood" drew directly from romantic conceptions of the former Polish Commonwealth and visions of restoring it through modern projects, such as an Intermarium federation and so-called Promethean movement. Elements of such traditions and political cultures continued into the Second World War, and according to the commanders and press officers of the 5th Infantry Division, it was part of their special duty and mission as Kresowians to implement and see them through. Propagating such dimensions as fundamental parts of the Kresy cause included regular commentaries on the January uprising and the revolutionary tradition within the divisional press, often overtly paralleling their plight to that of the multinational insurrectionists of 1863. In an article simply entitled "1863-1945," Colonel Klemens Rudnicki of the Lwów Infantry Brigade wrote,

*We are just a continuation of those of January 1863 and their experiences, they are a signpost for us, to see how ours will be for generations to come. The circle connecting us to history is closed. There is nothing new under the sun.*²¹³

It goes on to suggest that Poland's minority issues could be solved by returning to the example and spirit of the revolutionary forefathers. Quoting the manifesto of the insurrectionary government of 1863 which stated "To arms, nations of Poland, Lithuania, and Ruthenia, to arms, for the hour of common liberation has struck, our old sword recovered, the standard of the Eagle, Knight, and Archangel unfurled," Rudnicki continues with the following commentary,

Free with free, equal with equal. For our freedom and yours. In the manifesto, the National Government hurls the slogan of freedom and liberation of the people living on the whole territories of former Rzeczpospolita under Tsarist tyranny. Coexistence of nations after liberation in a free and equal relationship. What an analogy with recent events! And our healthy instincts in our similar position guided us. It's just that we do not yet dare to solve constructively so great programs. We are talking, so far, about the desire to maintain the 1939 borders of Poland, but that is also the problem of Wilno and many, many other problems of so-called minority politics. But it will pass! We return to the manifest of 22 January 1863. Piłsudski showed us this already.

Looking at both the title and contents of the article, it's clear that Rudnicki saw the Kresy cause of the Polish army in exile as the continuation of a historical chain linking the January Insurrectionists to their own realities via Piłsudski's mediation. Though somewhat vague, the author admits the existence of more modern "problems" in Poland in relation to minorities in the eastern borderlands. However, it is through a rhetorical return to 1863, through fraternal liberation against a common oppressor under a single standard, that such problems could be overcome, and true freedom would prevail over all citizens. Only then, once the "minorities question" of the eastern borderlands was solved, that "greater programs" could be accomplished. Suggesting that the cause of Kresy was instinctually led by the same tenants, the Kresy Division was on the right path of restoring national harmony and living up to the call of their predecessors.

²¹³ Rudnicki, Klemens. „1863-1945.” *Na Szlaku Kresowej*. NR 1 (19) (February 1945), p 4-6.

Similarly paralleling their situation to 1863, Soviet tyranny was portrayed as merely a continuation of Tsarist tyranny which stripped all inhabitants of liberties that existed under the former Rzeczpospolita. A discourse repurposed during the Borderland Wars in several speeches including Piłsudski's famous Proclamation to the Inhabitants of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania²¹⁴, modern national identities were presented as a product the spiritual lineage they shared with the historic multinational Rzeczpospolita and its eternal struggle against Asiatic barbarism of Russia. According to this ideology, it was Russia who was the eternal oppressor of the nations, not freedom-loving Poland who fought for the freedom of all. "Revolutionary [Soviet] Russia, too, does not intend to tolerate the brotherhood of the Eagle, the Knight, and the Archangel," writes Rudnicki, "Against this background, revolutionary Russia was fully aligned with the czar." Directly countering Soviet commissar Molotov's appeals of the Russian emancipation of its Belarusian and Ukrainian "brethren" in 1939, Poland's struggle "For our freedom and yours" implied that true fraternity rested in the brotherhood of Poles, Lithuanians, and Ruthenians as the bulwark of civilization against the barbaric East.

The multi-national spirit of 1863 was regularly reinforced throughout the 5th Kresy Division discursively and symbolically. Addressing the Kresy Division to break the news of the end of hostilities in Italy, General Sulik commented on the journey that was still ahead of them and the future of Poland they were fighting for:

We are the sons of a great nation; we are representatives of the Polish abroad. We are a military arm of the Commonwealth, we are brothers of other Nations [...] His attitude should make the world realize the problems of Polish and other fraternal Nations, we must break the hypocrisy. Poland will

²¹⁴ See Piłsudski, Joseph. Odezwa Naczelnego Wodza J. Piłsudskiego do mieszkańców byłego Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego (1919) [https://pl.wikisource.org/wiki/Odezwa_Naczelnego_Wodza_J. Pi%C5%82sudskiego_do_mieszka%C5%84c%C3%B3w_by%C5%82ego_Wielkiego_Ksi%C4%99stwa_Litewskiego_\(1919\)](https://pl.wikisource.org/wiki/Odezwa_Naczelnego_Wodza_J._Pi%C5%82sudskiego_do_mieszka%C5%84c%C3%B3w_by%C5%82ego_Wielkiego_Ksi%C4%99stwa_Litewskiego_(1919)). Accessed 10 June, 2020.

be free and will be even better. The new Poland will be based on social justice to all its citizens and will make sure this itself.

The general's speech ended with the proclamation, "Long live freedom and Justice! Long Live Poland! Long live all fraternal nations!"²¹⁵ Just as Joseph Piłsudski had done in Wilno in 1919, Sulik appealed to historical examples of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as being a bastion of freedom for all her inhabitants and the model for a future Polish state based on civil equality. Moreover, as the Commonwealth's military arm, Sulik claimed, they held a special duty to see this through by laying the foundations of a national brotherhood based on the common struggle against tyranny through a reawakening of the spiritual ancestry of Rzeczpospolita.



Figure 6 Header of the 5th Kresy Infantry Division's newspaper *Kresowian News (Wiadomości Kresowej)*, 2 September 1945. (Right) Kresy's Divisional Bison; (Left) historic emblem of the 1863 January Uprising depicting the Polish Eagle, Lithuanian Knight, and Ruthenian Knight. Source Biblioteka Cyfrowa Uniwersytetu Przyrodniczo-Humanistycznego w Siedlach.

Semiotic reminders of a Polish-Lithuanian-Ruthenian brotherhood were reproduced through the symbolism of the 5th Kresy Division. Each issue of the weekly newspaper *Kresy News* published by Kresy divisional department of culture and press bore not only the symbol of the divisional bison but in later editions also the crest of the Eagle, Knight, and Archangel.²¹⁶ The crest was a common symbol of several regimental standards within the Kresy Division, taking the

²¹⁵ Sulik, Nikodem. "Order on the end of hostilities in Italy." *Na Szlaku Kresowej* NR 5 (23) (June 1945), p 4-6.

²¹⁶ Example: „Wiadomości Kresowej” Nr 32-33. Polskie Siły Zbrojne na Zachodzie - 5 Kresowa Dywizja Piechoty Referat Kultury i Prasy (2 September 1946). Biblioteka Cyfrowa Uniwersytetu Przyrodniczo-Humanistycznego w Siedlach. URL: https://bc.uph.edu.pl/bitstream/handle/20.500.12003/1633/Wiadomosci_Kresowej.Nr%2032-33.1946.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

directions of the 1863 Manifesto on unfurling the standard of the Eagle, Knight, and Archangel quite literally.²¹⁷ The symbol took up a prominent space on the divisional monumental cross that was erected on Hill 575 at Monte Cassino cemetery after the battle, situated above the city coat of arms of Wilno and Lwów and the 5th Division's Bison. Among these plaques, an inscription read in Latin and Polish,

*In the name of Divine and Human rights
For your freedom and ours
In the fulfillment of the will of the ancestors
In performing the duty of the living
As a signpost for future generations
For Wilno and Lwów — symbols of the power of the Republic of Poland
They Fought, They Died, They Won²¹⁸*

Reflecting on the monument's construction and features while covering the battle's 1-year anniversary ceremony, one contributor to *On the Kresowian Trail* called these words the Kresy Division's "holy gospel." Commenting on the symbols adorning the monument, he describes them as "symbols of the struggle for a free Pole, a free Lithuanian, a free Ukrainian. None of them are free today, and all of them pay slavery for mistakes and mutual guilt." The author noted how Polish and Belarusian priests prayed over the monument for the souls of the lost, holy martyrs who shed blood and gave their lives for the cause of the Kresy Division "gospel." Multifaith displays of brotherhood and unity were a staple of Kresy Division traditions and rituals, especially apparent during divisional "feast days." In an article reviewing the events of one such day celebrated in fall 1945, a divisional editor's article noted, "the celebration of 5th Kresy Infantry Division has become a political and ideological act of paramount importance."²¹⁹

²¹⁷ One example was the standard of the Kresy Division's 15th Wilno "Wolves" Battalion. Maintaining the red and white cross template of prewar military standards, the center bore a depiction of the Virgin Mary of the Golden Dawn, the patron of the city of Wilno. Around her are the symbols of the Kresy Bison, the II Corps Mermaid, and double coat of arms of the Eagle, Knight, and Archangel. See Wawer, Zbigniew, and Andrzej Suchcitz. *5 Kresowa Dywizja Piechoty* (2012), p 1039.

²¹⁸ J.Z. "Na 575." *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 5 (23) (June 1945), p 13.

²¹⁹ "ŚWIĘTO KRESOWEJ Święto żołnierza-obywatela." *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 8-9 (26-27) (September 1945), p 16-20.

Indeed, if articulations of the Kresy cause were constituted a “holy gospel” supplementing the multiple existing faiths within the Division, then its ceremonies and commemorations acted as the Kresowian holy communion in the name of the Holy Spirit and spirit of former Rzeczpospolita.

In addition to appeals to a historical mission or civil national “gospel,” religious culture constituted a foundational dimension of overcoming minority tension within the Kresy Division and promoting its cause. However, this was primarily stressed when dealing with Kresowians of Christian faiths in the division, that is, Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Greek Catholics, and to a lesser extent Protestants, who were said to share an “All-Christian spirit.”

Generally speaking, Ukrainians would have been of Greek Catholic or Eastern Orthodox faith, whereas

Belarusians were Roman Catholic or Eastern

Orthodox. Although these denominations of

Christianity were historically and doctrinally divided

and often fell along ethnic or social lines, the Poles,

Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Lithuanians common

faith in Christ and Christian traditions was portrayed as a great unifying factor, especially against the atheist threat of Soviet Russia. This was reiterated by military chaplains who regularly politicized faith or wed doctrine to non-religious discourses to serve the long term aims of the



Figure 7. “In prayer for Wilno and Lwów.” Three soldiers of the Kresy Division kneel at the foot of the division’s monumental cross on Hill 575 at Monte Cassino. Note the urns marked “Wilno” and “Lwów” bearing the cities’ respective coat of arms and encapsulating soil from the two locations. Below, a plaque of the Eagle, Knight and Archangel, an inscription of Kresy’s “holy gospel” and the 5th Division Bison. Source: *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 5-23 (June 1943), p 12.

Corps. This was especially amplified during Christian holidays when Christians of all stripes were engaging in similar religious practices marked by regional particularities. Addressing the men of the Kresy Division in December 1944, the Corps Orthodox chaplain's words were published in the divisional journal,

*We are all connected by the great figures of the Polish nation, names which are known and praised by the whole cultural world — Copernicus, Chopin, Mickiewicz, Sienkiewicz, Prus, Żeromski—we are connected by our history, bloodshed in Grunwald, Vienna, Warsaw, Monte Cassino, but we are also connected by Old Customs and traditions [...] What is beautiful lives through the ages, upsets us, educates us. Catholics and Orthodox, such as Poles, Belarusians and Ukrainians, form one large family during the celebration of Christmas and maintain the same order of celebration: Christmas Eve supper, carols, and night services.*²²⁰

Although the chaplain does ultimately lead all fraternal nations back to their shared Christian heritage and historical wartime comradery as points of commonality, he seems to imply that Polish national culture is historically superior and ought to be aspired to by Belarusians, and Ukrainians who were lower on the cultural hierarchy. In another Christmas address, Catholic chaplain M. Wojciechowski takes Polish claims to superiority to the next level, elevating Poland itself to the pinnacle of religiosity, just authority, and Western civilization for the entire region,

We understood the Supreme thought of God, which became the spirit and inspiration of Poland. In our understanding of the highest values of God, we have formed our spiritual face and become one of the fundamental pillars of Christian culture. We became more Latin — than Italy and more Western — than France or England. We loved freedom more than life and we did not rape others. Our history is unfamiliar with imperialist wars. If we were expanding, if we were conquering others, it was the Spirit [...] We defended moral values because they are supreme, we stood up for others because in them we saw the greatness of human dignity. That was our mission of history. In us, they saw other peoples of the intermarriage of their defenders and shared their fate with us. Our growth was their growth, and our decline was their failure.” He goes on to compare the current war with Poland's historic mission: “In these words there is not only recognition, but there is also a strong defense of moral authority”²²¹

Looking at these two Corps chaplain's addresses side by side with more civil or historically oriented attempts at framing Polish-minority relations in mind, it becomes clear that despite explicit calls for equality, implicit hierarchies of the prewar era persisted which viewed

²²⁰ “1944 lata temu” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 17-18 Numer Świąteczny (25 XII 1944 – 1 I 1945), p 5.

²²¹ “Na Boże Narodzenia” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 17-18 Numer Świąteczny (25 XII 1944 – 1 I 1945), p 4.

“Polishness” as something exceptionally superior. As citizen-soldiers of the Polish exile government, minorities were constitutionally equal to their ethnically Polish comrades. At the same time, they were expected to adapt themselves to cultures promoted by the Polish authorities, which in their case was the institution of the exiled army itself claiming to act as the higher national, religious, and civilizational authority. Unlike General Sulik and Colonel Rudnicki of the Kresy Division who admitted to mistakes in prewar minority relations which could be reformed, Father Wojciechowski’s comments make no such minor concessions, instead, arguing that Poland’s ownership of the eastern territories was justified as a holy crusade - Poland’s “historic mission.”

Tensions between Polish exceptionalism and the brotherhood of nations symbolized by the Eagle, the Knight, and the Archangel permeates throughout Kresy Division propagandistic discourse. It becomes increasingly strained when one reflects upon the sources to realize what information is missing or simply ignored. For instance, looking at articles of *On the Kresowian Trail* between 1944-1946, mentions of Jews was largely absent from commentaries related to Kresy or the cause. The same could be said for modern Muslim Tatars, though their numbers were negligible compared to Jewish elements in the 5th Division and Polish Corps. Mentions of Jews or Tatars were largely brief and/or historically framed²²², especially compared to the attention given to Belarusians and Ruthenians/Ukrainians. Notwithstanding, historical narratives regarding the later were framed in ways that underplayed ethnic, social, and political tensions during the periods in

²²² In the monthly issues of *On the Kresowian Trail*, Tatars were generally mentioned in a historical sense in relation to Tatar and Mongol invasions of Poland in its early history and the borderland’s special setting as a bulwark of Christianity. Jews were identified as historically present, yet not portrayed as playing a fundamental role within the Polish nation.

question, whether the 17th c. Khmelnytsky Uprising or more contemporaneous events like prewar pacifications of Ukrainians in Eastern Galicia which were not specifically addressed.

The portrayal of Lithuania within in Kresy cause is similarly striking, as it plays quite an important role in its symbolic and semiotic landscapes via constant mentions of the historic Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the spirit of the Lithuanian Knight, and the city of Wilno (Vilnius), yet offered little commentary on contemporary Lithuanian affairs. The few mentions of modern Lithuanians were even at times condescending. Chief editor of the Kresy Division press Witold Zahorski commented in the divisional journal in December 1944, “On our lands, our two neighbors went on a rampage, empowered by foolish Lithuanians.” As a native-born Wilnian, Zahorski’s words probably serve as a good reflection of moods regarding Polish-Lithuanian relations within the division, at least by those the officer corps overseeing the construction of official discourses. However, the fact that modern Lithuanians were underrepresented in Kresy divisional publications was probably largely due to the inconsequential number of Lithuanians within the unit, which according to a study by B. Heydencorn only amounted to 19 soldiers by December 1943.²²³ Although there’s evidence to show that more Lithuanians managed to join the ranks of the Polish II Corps in late 1944 in Italy, theirs was just a tiny enclave when compared to other non-Polish minorities.²²⁴

²²³ Gotowiecki, P., and J. Żak. “Nierozwiązany problem...” (2016): 172-185.

²²⁴ An interesting episode of Lithuanian recruitment can be found in Harvey Sarner’s study on Anders Army, showing evidence that suggests an entire company of Lithuanian SS defected to the II Corps in Italy and was subsequently inducted into the Polish Army. Although the Corps’ official policy did not allow POWs from SS units to join, only Poles who were in pressed into the service the Wehrmacht, Anders purportedly told a Protestant chaplain that “the soldiers were very young and didn’t appreciate that the SS was something other than an elite group.” However, the Lithuanian defectors were not assigned to the Kresy Division, but a specialized Commando Unit. See Sarner, Harvey. *General Anders and the Soldiers of the Second Polish Corps* (1997), 211-212.

3.4 For Your Freedom and Ours: Kresy and Polish Grand Narratives

“For your Freedom and Ours” was not only an ideological slogan propagated in the context of Polish-minority relations but to promote grand narratives of Poland’s exceptional place in relation to all nations of the world and its unique historical mission. This was not only true of its earlier uses throughout the 19th century, but also during the Second World War as occupied and exiled Poland portrayed itself again like Mickiewicz’s romanticized “Christ of Nations,” suffering on behalf of Europe at the hands of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia as they selflessly fought for a freer world. Historically, Poland’s eastern territories had played an important role in these narratives of messianism as it was at the front lines of “defending the West against the Russian barbarians and spreading the light of Latin civilization in the Slavonic East.”²²⁵ These mentalities persisted within military exile and deeply injected into the mythos of the Kresy Division’s cause, which portrayed it as not only a restorative Kresowian or Polish mission over the eastern borderlands, but one that would ultimately redeem the entire free world.

Up to this point, this work has dealt with propagated discourses attempting to shape divisional, regional, and national imaginations within the 5th Kresy Infantry Division of the exiled Polish II Corps. The entanglement of these dimensional levels with each other and with larger supranational and/or civilizational themes are clearly visible within the cited literature thus far and will act as the focus of this last section of the final chapter. To that end, it will look at additional examples of the promotion of a Central European Federation (Intermarium) and direct appeals to the Kresy Division’s special role in the II Corps’ messianic mission.

²²⁵ Walicki, Andrzej. "Polish Romantic Messianism in Comparative Perspective." *Slavic Studies* 22 (1978): 1-15.

Recalling the words of General Nikodem Sulik to the 5th Kresy Division in 1945, “We are eager to keep the tradition of Kresowa, its fight for Polish Wilno and Lwów, sacred to the blood of our fallen. For us, the holy truth is that without Wilno and Lwów there is no Republic of Poland, and without the Republic of Poland — there is no free Europe.”²²⁶ In the general’s quote, the chain between Kresy, Poland, and a European civilization marked by freedom and Christianity are explicitly stated and act as the cornerstones of the division’s Kresy cause. The fraternity of Kresowians and their willingness to sacrifice themselves did not end at the imagined communal boundaries of the Polish nation but extended to all freedom-loving peoples of Europe and the world. In the eyes of Sulik, his officers, and the editors of the divisional journal, this meant those who fought against Nazi Germany as well as Soviet Russia, the latter becoming increasingly threatening as the Red Army moved westward across Central Eastern Europe.

Once more returning to examples of Poland’s ideological forefathers, the so-called Intermarium was regularly promoted within Kresy Division press and propaganda to cultivate the concept of a federation of Central European states from the Baltic to Black Seas. Piłsudski’s vision of a grand federation between Russia and Germany with Poland at its head lived on in exile, even at a time when the exiled Polish state was its weakest internationally following Yalta and international derecognition. Though during the Sikorski regime, propositions were made with the exiled Czechoslovak government to create a Polish-Czechoslovak Federation, the plan never made it further than discussions.²²⁷ Intermarium was far more ambitious. According to the

²²⁶ “Wchadząc trzeci rok...” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* ROK III Nr 1(30) (JANUARY 1946), p. 4-5.

²²⁷ Kaminski, Marek Kazimierz. "Edvard Beneš kontra gen. Władysław Sikorski. Polityka władz czechosłowackich na emigracji wobec rządu polskiego na uchodźstwie 1939-1943" in *Dzieje Najnowsze Kwartalnik Poświęcony Historii XX Wieku* 37 no. 3, (eds.) Tadeusz Kisielewski, and Marek Kazimierz Kamiński (Warszawa: 2005), p 228-234.

Federal Club of Central Europe²²⁸ whose articles were regularly published in *On the Borderland Trail*, the Intermarium federation would include Albanians, Belarusians, Bulgarians, Croatians, Czechs, Estonians, Greeks, Lithuanians, Latvians, Poles, Romanians, Serbs, Slovaks Slovenes, Ukrainians, and Hungarians.²²⁹ Pitching their vision to the soldiers of the Kresy Division in October 1945, the Federal Club wrote,

*The course of history, and especially the events of the Second World War, show clearly how far these nations are bound by their fate. The peoples of Intermarium, destroyed by totalitarianisms - the national socialist, fascist, and Soviet - face the need to defend their independence together.*²³⁰

To familiarize the soldiers of the Division with these brother nations and present them as comrades in an anti-Soviet front, a regular section was included in the divisional journal entitled “In the Intermarium Countries” (*W krajach Międzymorza*) which focused on various aspects of a given nation including history, culture, and reports on their struggles against Bolshevik terror. This was to establish the “true” narrative concerning happenings in Europe which, as the soldiers of the Corps had seen firsthand due to constant propaganda attacks directed towards them, was marred with conflicting reports and uncertainty. “The history of many nations of Intermarium in the Second World War is not simple,” wrote one contributor to the Kresowian journal, “They developed in parallel: ownership, independence and the will of foreign violence, who does not have any unscrupulous methods, using physical force as equal moral decay. Nothing will be able to quickly historian of these heavy years of strictly separated truth from falsehood.”²³¹ To help soldiers understand the complex histories and happenings of Intermarium states, articles were

²²⁸ For more on Polish federalist movements in exile, see Lane, Thomas, and Marian Wolanski. *Poland and European Integration: The Ideas and Movements of Polish Exiles in the West, 1939–91* (Springer, 2009).

²²⁹ Srodkowo Europejski Klub Federalny. “Po ustaniu działań wojennych.” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 8-9 (26-27) (September/October 1945), p 5-6.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Sokolovic, S. „W KRAJACH MIĘDZYMORZA Naród Serbski w Drugiej Wojnie Światowej.” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 2-3 (31-32) (February March 1946), p 18.

written by contributors merely named by demonym as Slovene, Serb, Moravian, or other Intermarium members giving their own national take on the anti-communist struggle.

The plights of Intermarium nations were portrayed as inextricably linked with Poland and her cause and often portrayed as reliant on Polish victory. In an article on Czechoslovakia penned by “Moravian,” the author writes it is certain that there is “no free Czechoslovakia without a free Poland,” a statement followed by criticism of Masaryk and Beneš whom the author criticized for not establish closer Polish-Czechoslovak cooperation when needed.²³² The Moravian went on to write about the destruction of Czech national culture at the hands of the Soviets, a cautionary tale for any nation unlucky enough to fall under its sphere of influence. If the author’s words are considered within the ideological logic of the Kresy cause, the implicit claim is not only that there is no free Czechoslovakia without a free Poland, but, if Poland is deprived of Kresy, it is not truly free. Therefore, Czechoslovakia cannot be free unless Kresy is Polish. Moreover, Polish exile served as an example for all freedom-loving peoples, and just like Beneš and Masaryk had done, not following her lead will ultimately lead to Soviet takeover and thus national destruction.

This is reiterated in an “In the Intermarium Countries” article on the Serbian people who, although admitted as being historical “Russophiles,” were claimed to be capable of becoming “Polonophiles” if Poland assisted in the liberation the Serbs from communist tyranny.²³³ In other words, it meant supporting anti-Tito forces who were fighting for control of Yugoslavia at the time. In some ways, Serbia is portrayed quite similarly to Poland’s position in the imagined Commonwealth of three nations, where Serbs played the role of the most important brother in the unity of fraternal nations. Serbian contributor to the Kresy journal wrote that “The Serbs, a brave

²³² Moravianin. „W KRAJACH MIĘDZYMORZA Prawda o ‘wyzwoleniu’ Czechów i Słowaków.” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 8-9 (26-27) (September/October 1945), p 5-6.

²³³ Serb. „W KRAJACH MIĘDZYMORZA Polacy i Serbowie.” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 7 (25) (August 1945), p 47.

and statesmanlike nation, felt deeply in the widest layers the importance of their national liberation and Unification. They considered the liberation and unification of all South Slavs as their historical mission. Therefore, they lay with great care and envy to make Yugoslavia a reality.²³⁴

In addition to the press, the brotherhood of Intermarium nations was propagated during military speeches and orders of the Kresy Division and II Corps and a central theme of events and manifestations in Italy either symbolically via displaying flags of the Intermarium nations²³⁵ or by fraternizing with representative members themselves.²³⁶ At a Yugoslav celebration attended by Polish soldiers held in Rome late 1945, Yugoslavia's position of free exile vs communist occupation was portrayed as part of the same struggle being fought by Anders' Poles. Just as Poland had been fighting a kind of civil war between the Polish Government in Exile and the Provisional Government of National Unity, so was Yugoslavia fighting a war between exiled King Peter II and communist Tito. "At its core," an author reporting the event wrote, "lie the questions: democracy in the way of Western democracies, or disorder, dictatorship, communist totalitarianism. In short, west or east, Europe or Asia, Christianity or bolshevism [...] the king

²³⁴ Sokolovic, S. „W KRAJACH MIĘDZYMORZA Naród Serbski w Drugiej Wojnie Światowej” NR 2-3 (31-32) FEBRUARY- MARCH 1946 NSK, p 18.

²³⁵ Reporting on the celebrations of the 5th Kresy Division feast day in fall 1945, "The bonfire struck a chord, probably the first of its kind in the history of the Polish army. Against the national flags of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, the peoples of Yugoslavia, Albania and Greece, the soldier-performer told the soldier-listener that not only must the Republic of Poland be truly free and independent, but that it must be formed and consolidated in the Union of the free peoples of Intermarium into a single Confederation, which must sooner or later take the place of the Soviet in the Intermarium of bondage, remove all hostile imperialisms from it and give the Peoples a better deal." "ŚWIĘTO KRESOWEJ Święto żołnierza-obywatela." Nr 8-9 (26-27) (September/October 1945), p 16-20.

²³⁶ "Yugoslav emigrants, officers and soldiers who had been interned in Italy or returned from concentration camps from Germany, as well as civilian refugees from the Tito occupation, wanted to celebrate their king's birthday as solemnly as possible. Solemn masses were celebrated in all camps of Yugoslav soldiers and refugees. [...] In the hearts of us, Yugoslavs, aroused a great joy, because we feel that we are not alone, that fraternal nation of heroic Poles compassion for us in our fate, that they understand our struggle and step our king, which is important also for the new order the entire Central Europe." Quoted from Słoweniec. "Jugosłowiańska uroczystość w Rzymie." *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 8-9 (26-27) (SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1945), p 65.

has become a symbol of freedom, of the New Order, of the New Yugoslavia, which they believe will regain freedom and strengthen it in the union of free states, Intermarium of Central Europe.²³⁷”

The promotion of an anti-communist federation from the Baltic to Black seas was no doubt a concern of the Soviet Union and other forces aiming at establishing communist nations of their own, whether in Yugoslavia, Poland, or elsewhere. Soviet propaganda condemned it as merely a Polish imperialist plot to subjugate Central Europe under its own fascistic control. Continued talks of Intermarium by the defiant exiled Polish army and its informal alliances with subversive forces like the anti-communist Chetniks also put Britain and America on edge, as it challenged the official postwar order set by the Big Three and the secret “Percentages agreement” Churchill made to Stalin about spheres of influence in postwar Europe.²³⁸ Despite this, Anders continued in his own expectations of a coming Third World War, which would result liberation of Poland, Europe, and the establishment of a federation of Intermarium states. It was a movement led by Poland, military exile claimed, upon which all the freedom-loving peoples of the world under communist subjugation looked to for salvation²³⁹, not a Polish imperial plot as framed by the USSR.

The Polish II Corps’ staunchly anti-communist stance additionally posed domestic problems for postwar Italy, as the Italian Communist Party was the third-largest party at the time and represented opposition within the Italian coalition government after 1946. Moreover,

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Resis, Albert. 1978. “The Churchill-Stalin Secret “Percentages” Agreement on the Balkans, Moscow, October 1944”. *The American Historical Review* 83, no. 2, p 368-387.

²³⁹ Rudnicki, Klemens. “Wielkosc Cassina (W pierwsza rocznicę bitwy).” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 4 (22) (May 1945), p 4: “[...] the whole world pushed down on Poland looks with hope and admiration, as it, almost itself today, holds the banner firmly, and the word “Poland” is inscribed on it not only, but also “for our and your freedom.” You can its [the banner] flutter in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. It can be heard in Hungary and Romania. Serbs and Croats look in its direction and the flutter seems to hit Belarus and Ukraine.”

following the Allied Power's lead, the Italian government had derecognized the Polish government in exile on 6 July 1945 and were seeking the restoration of Polish-Italian trade with the communist government in Warsaw and the return of Italian POWs. Just like in the Soviet press, Anders army was constantly berated as fascists by the Italian socialist and communist publications and sensationalized incidents of violence perpetrated against Italian communists and their property by exiled Poles.²⁴⁰ Such incidents of violence did exist, and was a thorn in the side of relations between Warsaw and Rome. In one instance, soldiers of the II Corps beat up Italian-based staff members of Stanisław Kot, former Deputy PM of the exile government who like Mikołajczyk had turned over to the Polish Provisional Government of National Unity. However, the Kresy Division press responded in kind with their own condemnation of national traitors and Italian "Red fascists," claiming that,

*The [Italian] Communist Party seeks to intimidate Italian society through the press and acts of rape against political opponents in a number of localities. Intimidation, while not likely to popularize the communists, and their authority in the material sense reinforces the party's importance.*²⁴¹

Considering that official discourses within the Corps for years portrayed itself as an anti-Communist crusade, and were amplified by feelings of desperation and memories of Soviet captivity, it's no wonder that some soldiers took out their frustrations on "Red" Italians whom they saw as enemies in a global struggle. Approached from the perspective of "For Our Freedom and Yours," such subversive actions didn't amount to interference in Italian domestic affairs – as often the critique of the Soviet Union - but an articulation of their special restorative mission.

Just as Italy had seemingly fallen into communist degradation and needed saving by the exiled Poles, similar self-flattering portrayals of the selfless defensive actions by Polish military

²⁴⁰ Pasztor, Maria M. "2 Korpus Polski a stosunki polsko-włoskie w latach 1945-1946." *Przegląd Historyczno-Wojskowy* 16 nr. 3 (Warszawa ; 2000), p 85-106.

²⁴¹ Mora, Sylwester. „Czerwony faszyzm w Italii.” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 5 (23) (Czerwiec 1945), p 52-55.

exile went far beyond just Italy or communist-occupied nations of the Intermarium but included all of Western Europe and the entire civilized world. “Poland is a gauge on which changes in cultural pressures can be read,” wrote H. Jachowicz in an article of the Kresy Division journal, “What type of culture will be in Poland, one that — sooner or later — must prevail throughout the world.”²⁴² This outlook was often compared and contrasted to portrayals of the so-called Anglo-Saxon West²⁴³, formerly looked on as the guarantees of Western freedom and democracy in the Wilsonian tradition, unfortunately, had likewise fallen for the Soviet Union’s “masquerades” in accepting falsified “democratic” elections in countries under Soviet sphere of influence.²⁴⁴ Despite sharp criticism of the Western betrayal of Poland and democratic backsliding of the Anglo-Saxon powers, Anders, Sulik, and Polish exile which refused to repatriate still promoted a belief in Western European civilization and Poland’s messianic role within it.

Building off prewar “ideologies of Eastness,” a special weight fell on the shoulders of the 5th Division as the heirs of Kresy, vanguards of the defense of the West against the backward East. General Anders addressed the Lwów Brigade during the celebration of the May 3 holiday in 1946 saying,

Every Pole understands that there is no Poland without Lwów, and without Poland free and whole — there is no peace in the world. We, who have been through so many hard years, realize that The Lion [city of Lwów] is behind the Iron Curtain. Little Polish or even Ukrainian speech can be heard there today — only Kazakh pogvars and Kalmykia words can be heard on the streets of the beloved city [...] The whole nation of Poland is looking at you today and believes that as long as the soldier of Poland

²⁴² Jachowicz, Hieronim. „Problemy: O kulturę zachodnią.” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 6 (24) (June 1945), p 17-18.

²⁴³ Used in the Kresy Division press to mean Great Britain and the United States

²⁴⁴ Prezydium Klubu Federalnego Środkowo Europejskiego Rzym. “Wybory” jako narzędzie sowieckiego ucisku.” *Na Szlaku Kresowej*. ROK III Nr1(30) (January 1946), p 11-15.

*is under Polish flags — there is a connection with the West, and only from there can come freedom, real freedom!*²⁴⁵

In an address placing the exiled “Lwowians” at the heart of this clash of civilizations, cultural degeneration that came with Soviet occupation was evidenced by Anders through pointing at the presence of Asiatic Kazakh and Kalmyk soldiers of the Red Army who were occupying their city – paralleling it as a modern reiteration of Tatar invasions of the XIII c.

Conversely, wherever Polish exile wandered, they were portrayed as bringing civilization to the area, presented as fundamentally consisting of not only Poland’s historic love of democracy but equally Latin Christianity.²⁴⁶ In these ways, the final liberation of Kresy was portrayed not merely the 5th Division’s cause or Poland’s national war aim, but a necessary final step in a civilizational crusade against the encroachment of moral backwardness into Europe. Throughout the war, Kresy division press and propaganda portrayed the war as a clash of civilizations and crusade against the evils of Nazi totalitarianism (and in the Polish case also “Red totalitarianism”) which was being waged on multiple fronts by a coalition of historically freedom-loving nations. During the Italian campaign, Poles fought alongside American, French, and British soldiers, as well as other units from India, New Zealand, and Italian anti-fascists. However, Poland was propagated as playing the leading role, as the nation “first to fight,” who had suffered the most, and willing to risk everything “For Your Freedom and Ours.” Propaganda efforts to promote this message to outsiders led one contributor to *On the Kresowian Trail* to appeal to Polish exile publishers to include more multilingual or captioned publications to

²⁴⁵ Anders, Władysław, and Bogusław Polak. „1946 maj 3,m.p. – Uroczystosci 3 Maja w 6. Lwowskiej Brygadzie Piechoty.” *General broni Władysław Anders: wybór pism i rozkazów* (2009), p 253.

²⁴⁶ Referring to the Polish exile army’s presence in Soviet Central Asia before evacuating from the USSR, Tadeusz Zajączkowski wrote about “the most beautiful missionary work of the Polish soldier” among the local populace. “It was also a unique missionary activity which, for the first time in history, carried the beauty and power of the Catholic church into the depths of the Asian steppes.” Zajączkowski, Tadeusz. “Naszymi drogami.” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 17-18 Numer Świąteczny (25 XII 1944 – 1 I 1945), p 7-10.

“penetrate the consciousness of non – Polish foreigners” in Italy, offering an example of a photograph of Polish soldiers which was overlaid with the tri-lingual message “W Walce o Wolność - In Fight For Freedom – In Lotta Per La Liberta.²⁴⁷”

Despite being far from their end goal and in a seemingly desperate situation, the Polish II Corps’ global odyssey from the USSR to Italy was marked by several events which were sacralized to reinforce its crusader mythos and messianic mission. Within the II Corps, this was perhaps strongest within the traditions developed within the 5th Kresowa Division, as their journeys had been one of the longest and most arduous after their symbolic resurrection out of the graves of Soviet gulag system. Their wartime journeys took them through what many considered the holiest places on earth – Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Rome – reinforcing assertions that their army had a divinely-inspired mission. Recalling Christmas midnight mass attended by General Anders and other Allied representatives in the town of Christ’s birth, one Kresy Division soldier was reminded of medieval English and French Crusaders.²⁴⁸ He pridefully noted that Polish soldiers were most numerous, led there by General Anders who “guided them like the star of Bethlehem,” comparing the Polish military exile to the Biblical story of the Magi.²⁴⁹ Moreover, the Kresy Division orchestra and choir were given the honor of performing Polish carols on that holy day at the “cradle of the Word’s incarnation,” which was broadcasted via radio across Polish exile.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁷ Pen. „RECENZJA „W walce o wolność.” *Na Szlaku Kresowej*. Nr 7 (25) (August 1945), p 83-85.

²⁴⁸ Azymut. “Przybieżeli do Betlejem żołnierze.” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 17-18 (25 XII 1944 – 1 I 1945), p 37:
The blue uniforms of the R.A.F. and the traditional kepi of the Fighting France, whose evocative symbol — the Cross of Lorraine — imposes on the imagination a reminder of the Crusaders [...]

²⁴⁹ Book of Matthew Chapter 2

²⁵⁰ Azymut. “Przybieżeli do Betlejem żołnierze.” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 17-18 (25 XII 1944 – 1 I 1945), p 37.



Figure 8 General Władysław Anders presents General Nikodem Sulik with the standard of the Kresy Division, Jerusalem, 1943. Source: Davies (2015), p 238.

In Jerusalem, the message of the exiled Kresowians being global crusaders was further reinforced through the spectacle of the presentation of the divisional standard. General Sulik dropped to his knees at the feet of General Anders to accept the Kresy Division's colors, kissing the emblem of the Jerusalem "Crusader" Cross prominently displayed on each corner and the Polish crowned eagle with the words "Honor and Fatherland" (*Honor i Ojczyzna*). Moreover, Anders reminded Sulik and the men of the holy site of the presentation of their standard, reminding them, "This banner is only being presented here today. It is the only banner

dedicated at the Tomb of Christ the Lord.²⁵¹" Carrying their blessed standard to Italy, the Kresy Division was victorious at Monte Cassino and despite heavy casualties and "gave the way to the cradle of civilization — Rome."²⁵² A further victory proclaimed by Kresy on behalf of Western Civilization occurred when the Lwów brigade liberated Predappio, the birthplace of Mussolini which was presented as Kresy's triumph over the "Mecca of Fascism."²⁵³

Tallying up a list of victories and the seemingly exceptional feats throughout a global war of proportions the world hadn't before seen, the Kresowian's cause, their crusade, and holy gospel, must have felt to some as if it truly was a divine mission - just as they had been

²⁵¹ Anders, Władysław, and Bogusław Polak. „1943 listopad 14, m.p. – Przemówienie gen. Andersa z okazji poświęcenia Sztandaru Kresowej Dywizji Piechoty.” *General broni Władysław Anders: wybór pism i rozkazów* (2009), p 109.

²⁵² Zahorski, Witold. „Spełnienie Sułkowskiego” in *Kresowa walczy w Italii* (eds) Lucjan Paff, (Kraków: Cracovia, 1992), p 102.

²⁵³ Azymut. „Dywizja Kresowa w Preppadio Nuova.” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 6 (24) (July 1945) NA SZLAKU, p 55-58.

incessantly reminded by their officers and divisional journal. “It’s not by accident that the Kresy Division will go back [home],” General Sulik had told his men, “God will give it, it’s her [the Division’s] destiny and her purpose.” However, the soldier needed to do his part too, because without his own persistence and struggle, the end objective would not be achieved. In other words, miracles aren’t freely given by the divine, but would require what Sulik called “faith in our own strength.”²⁵⁴ The cooperative role between God and the Polish military was romantically presented in a poem by Jerzy Woszczyński, where an exiled soldier encounters a transfigured Christ. Falling to his face and weeping, the soldier cries, “Jesus, we, the Wanderers [...] the Cross is too heavy for our shoulders. Where is the resurrection promised in your mercy?” Christ responds, “It will not come as a gift given by man, nor by the strength of God. Today the resurrection comes from yourselves. The resurrection must be without assistance.”²⁵⁵ Heeding the words of the son of God, the soldier rises up, brushes the sand from his rifle, and goes on to continue Poland’s divinely-inspired struggle to usher in the resurrection.

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²⁵⁴ Zahorski, Witold. „Do Wilna i Lwowa.” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr. 15-16 (15 November – 1 December 1944), p 2-5.

²⁵⁵ Woszczyński, Jerzy. “Chrystus żołnierzy.” *Na Szlaku Kresowej* Nr 17-18 Numer Świąteczny (25 XII 1944 – 1 I 1945), p 29.

Conclusion

Despite this work's focus on the years 1944-46, it has chronicled roughly 30 years of subsequent developments and cited historic episodes of the last few centuries which had played a role in the coalescence of the "Kresy cause" as an ideology within Polish military exile during the Second World War. Similarly, although propagandistic shaping of collective imaginations towards Kresy as a territorial unit-idea could be considered the thesis' subject of focus, throughout the various chapters its scope has ebbed and flowed between the regional, national, continental, civilizational, global, and even into the metaphysical, as it deconstructed the press and propaganda activities of the 5th Kresy Infantry Division of the Polish II Corps. Though as first sight it may seem the research encroached on its intended scope, I would suggest the results of this investigation rather attest to the truly dynamic nature of human imagination throughout history in shaping the boundaries of homeland and community and the innovation of those who dedicated themselves to guarantee certain contours were instilled in others, even in desperate and even fatalistic circumstances of exile and global war. This required a self-conscious reconstruction of the relationship between past, present, and future, which was used in guiding towards expected outcomes.

In the case of the Kresy cause during WWII, community-building actions through persuasive propaganda were ultimately aimed at securing what military elites in exile envisioned Poland should be in the postwar world, socially, politically, and territorially. The cause was promoted via several modes of dissemination which included not only shaping discourse within the exiled military press and educational materials but was paralleled with visual and audial reiterations

through the development of a supportive matrix of visual symbols, sacred traditions and rituals, and slogans, which were internally referenced in military speeches and orders.

Based on the findings this study, the claimed outcomes of the Kresy cause by its propagators within polish military exile can be listed as follows: 1) The Polish Army in Exile would return to the homeland as liberators to free it through armed resistance and subsequently reestablish the legitimate Government in Exile; 2) Territorial boundaries of the national homeland would include continued state control over the eastern borderlands (*Kresy Wschodnie*) as well as the Western Borderlands (*Kresy Zachodnie*); 3) Postwar Poland would be established upon ideologies ridding it of problems of the prewar period, namely, by eradicating communist elements and the peaceful cohabitation of minorities; 4) Poland's place in the world as a regional and European power would be secured through the establishment of a multi-national Intermarium federation with Poland as its head; 5) Aforementioned outcomes would ultimately lead to a global revival and regeneration.

Mental mappings of a hierarchy of collective consciousness served both short and long term aims of the Kresy cause as its advocates sought to create Kresowians out of the men of the 5th Division. As a military formation, the promotion of a Kresowian identity and cause was used to cultivate inter-divisional comradery, necessary for the cohesion of any fighting force which required mutual trust in life and death combat situations.

Regionally, to be Kresowian meant an expansion of one's territorial identification to the eastern borderlands as a whole and to include non-Polish minorities within the national imagination. Still, the question of non-Polish minorities was ambiguously dealt with, with uncomfortable questions either answered by self-flattering romantic narrations of the past or simply ignored altogether.

Promoting a regional mentality ultimately fed into the larger promotion of Polish national consciousness, as Kresy was promoted as being fundamentally Polish and inseparable from the Polish nation its legitimate state. Just as Silesians and Varsovians were essential parts of the national whole, so were Kresowians woven into the national fabric of Polish regions.

Moreover, Kresowians were told they had a unique defensive duty in relation to the nation as it laid at the crossroads of Polish civilization and Russo-Bolshevik barbarism. Finally, through Poland, Kresowians not only secured themselves a place as brothers of civilized freedom-loving peoples of Europe but doubled in their defensive duties towards Poland by acting as the bulwark of Europe, Christianity, and thus, the entire civilized world. As Kresowians, it was their cross to bear, and they were expected to continue the struggle no matter what until the cause's goals were achieved.

Without making claims as to soldier's internalization of this hierarchical chain of identity by soldiers and large, it can be said that on a geopolitical level, the Kresy cause was ultimately a failure of the part of Polish military elites who propagated it. To quote Martin Thornton, "The SPC [Second Polish Corps] were influenced by, and a product of, international circumstances which made them dysfunctional situated in the international system."²⁵⁶ Indeed, this included the propagation of the Kresy cause within the ranks of the Corps, which seemed to fade into obscurity after the dissolution of Poland's exiled army. Subsequent political thought in Polish exile turned towards the Giedroyc doctrine, abandoning direct Polish claims over Kresy and formulating policy that acquiesced to the established postwar order. No longer would a zero-sum mentality guide Polish exile's struggle, but through recognition of Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine's territorial claims as legitimate and through rapprochement with their anti-communist

²⁵⁶ Thornton, Martin. "The second polish corps..." (1997), p 130.

dissidents, would Poland and the peoples of East-Central Europe secure greater freedoms. For later postwar Polish emigres, even without Wilno and Lwów, Poland could indeed still exist. Although national remembrance of Kresy would live on in exile and re-emerge Poland's realms of memory after 1989, unfortunately for them, General Sulik, his Kresowians, and their cause have become little more than a footnote in Polish military history, far short of the earthshaking outcomes they had romanticized about throughout the war.



Figure 9. Soldiers of the 5th Kresy Infantry Division of the 2nd Polish Corps standing on St. Peter's Square at the Vatican in front of a 13th c. Egyptian obelisk with an added inscription which reads in Latin - "Here's the cross of the Lord, flee enemies, the Lion of the tribe of Judah." August 1944. Source: <https://rzeszow.ipn.gov.pl/pl8/aktualnosci/94119,Co-kryje-Oddzialowe-Archiwum-IPN-w-Rzeszowie-Kapitan-Edward-Czwaczka.html>

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