

Defensive war 1939

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September 1939 - related Exhumations of the Office for Commemorating the Struggle and Martyrdom

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The Battlefields

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One of our greatest achievements was the exhumation of the soldiers fallen on 8 and 9 September at the battle of **Ilża**. We managed to locate the remains of over 150 of them, and, with the help of identification tags and Polish Red Cross documents discovered in the graves, return the names to 21. They were:

Pvt. Tadeusz Barylski of the 12th Infantry Division's 51st Infantry Regiment, born in 1917 in Tarnopol

Michał Buczyński

Hrynko Chamza of Brzeżany

Pvt. Jan Chruszcz of the 12th Infantry Division, born in 1907 in Tarnopol

Michał Diakowicz

Jan Dus, born in 1910

Sgt. Stanisław Gąsowski of the 3rd Legions Infantry Regiment, born on 15.11.1915 in Hrubieszów

Marian Iwaniuk, born in 1912 in Brzeżany

Józef Kosiński of Brzeżany

Józef Kozłowski of Brzeżany

Pvt. Józef Krupa, of the 12th Infantry Division, born in 1910

Ignacy Mihilewicz

Lance Cpl. Stanisław Moskwa of the 51st Infantry Regiment

Józef Moroziński

Pvt. Jan Osowski, born in 1913

Józef Psutka, born in 1914 in Złoczów

Leon Szymków of Brzeżany

Leon Szewc, born in 1917 in Brzeżany

Pvt. Leon Żorniak, born in 1914 in Jarosław

Pvt. Piotr Rygiel of the 8th Infantry Regiment

We examined a mass grave with remains of no less than 139 people in **Las Aleksandrowski** [Aleksandrowki Forest], as well as individual graves in **Zawały, Pastwiska, Stary Rzechów, Borsuki, Zębiec** and **Myszki**. The located Polish Army soldiers of various ethnic background and religious affiliation were buried in **Grabowiec** parish cemetery on 8 September 2018.

What is more, in **Piotrowe Pole** we discovered the remains of one Antoni Mazurek of the village of **Błaziny**, murdered on 28 July 1915 at the age of 53 by Austrian soldiers. His funeral took place on 25 September 2018 in **Koszary** parish cemetery.

In the aftermath of the battle of **Iłża**, the southern group of the Prusy Army units disintegrated. It consisted of 12th Infantry Division (and its 51st, 52nd and 54th Kresy Rifle Regiments and 12th Light Artillery Regiment), 3rd Legions Infantry Division (its 7th, 8th and 9th Legions Infantry Regiments and 3rd Legions Light Artillery Regiment). Its best-known officers included Gen. Gustaw Paszkowski, the commander of the 12th Division, Col. Emil Fieldorf, commander of the 51st Infantry Regiment, and the commander of the 7th Legions Infantry Regiment, Col. Władysław Muzyka.

Searching for soldiers of the Poznań and Pomorze armies fallen at the **Battle of Bzura**, we inspected three locations in the forests of the **Młodzieszyn** commune, and found incomplete remains of at least six people, probably killed by bombing or artillery fire, as well as several elements of military equipment. These servicemen will be interred in the Kamion cemetery on 7 September.

During the exhumation of the German occupation victims in the **3rd Fort in Pomiechówek**, we attempted to locate more graves of the soldiers of the 36th Infantry Regiment of the Academic Legion's 3rd Battalion, commanded by Cpt. Bernard Rytel, killed in battle while defending these fortifications in September 1939. The Fort, which surrendered to the Germans on 29 September, was the last point of defence of the Modlin Fortress. In the course of the fights over a dozen soldiers lost their lives and were buried on the site. Polish Red Cross documents indicate that in all, ten of them were exhumed there in 1946 and 1966, to be later buried in Pomiechowo parish cemetery. They included Stanisław Olszewski, Czesław Ćwik, and one Vitlałko, first name unknown. Our search of the Fort grounds, however, revealed no further graves.

Cemeteries

We also carry out our exhumation works in cemeteries, ensuring that fallen soldiers are interred in proper locations.

An example of this can be the disinternment of Maj. Feliks Kozubowski and two soldiers buried with him in a parish cemetery in **Sochaczew**. Major Kozubowski commanded the defence of Sochaczew in 1939; the losses suffered by his unit, 2nd Battalion of the 18th Infantry Regiment (of the Poznań Army's 26th Infantry Division), were as high as 80%. Military equipment was found near the remains, and the Major himself had been buried wearing his helmet. What is more, we managed to determine how two of them died – the officer was shot in the stomach, whereas one of the soldiers was killed by a bullet to the head. Their funeral ceremony is to be held on 8 September in Sochaczew.

Another of our big projects is the exhumation in the **Modlin Fortress**; it will not be the last one, I believe, as still many of its heroic defenders are waiting to be found. In the provisional cemetery – established in 1939 near the 1920 Sailors Memorial in the Navy river shipyard, and expanded in 1941 – we discovered the remains of 17 Polish Army soldiers and 14 Soviet POWs.

The following people buried there were identified on the basis of 1940s records:

Bdr. Jan Rymski, the 5th Battalion of the 2nd Division's 4th Heavy Artillery Regiment, killed on 26 September 1939

Henryk Kałębasiak (Kałęmbasiak), died on 26 September 1939

Icek- Berek Rozencewajg, the 5th Battalion of the 2nd Division's 4th Heavy Artillery Regiment

Wincenty Kuligowski (burned, interred in one casket with Zygmunt Pokrewnicki)

Zygmunt Pokrewnicki (burned, interred in one casket with Wincenty Kuligowski)

Józef Borwaśny of Zduńska Wola

Lance Sgt. Jan Dzięgielewski, born in 1910

Andrzej Lewandowski (a child)

We have managed to locate the families of Józef Borwaśny and Jan Dzięgielewski. Near the remains of these soldiers we found both typical military equipment and absolutely unique items, such as a photograph of Halina Konopacka or a bottle of red American nail polish. Their funeral ceremony will take place on 14 September. Soviet POWs were identified by their identification tags, and will be interred in the cemetery in Żwirko and Wigura Street in Warsaw.

Chojnice - here, in 2017 and 2018 we searched for the remains of soldiers fallen during the town's defence on 1 September 1939, and buried in a mass grave near the Catholic parish cemetery. We tried to find, among others, the servicemen of the "Czersk" Operational Group, and of the 18th Pomeranian Cavalry Regiment, killed during the charge at the village of Krojanty. So far we have not been successful, but we intend to keep searching.

When construction work on the regional road 654 in the town of **Małowica** near **Łomża** revealed human remains and elements of military equipment, the Office for Commemorating the Struggle and Martyrdom stepped in and took action that led to removing the recently laid asphalt surface. That allowed for the exhumation of human remains of 18th century civilians, Tsarist soldiers fallen in 1915, and, finally, Polish soldiers killed in 1920 and 1939.

They had all been buried under a wayside cross – at a spot that turned out to be a small burial plot, since at least 80 people had been interred there. As far as September 1939 victims are concerned, 35 soldiers fallen on 9 and 10 September were exhumed on 30 May 1950. 27 of them may have belonged to 42nd Jan Henryk Dąbrowski Infantry Regiment from Białystok, and 8 to 33rd Kurpie Riflemen Infantry Regiment from Łomża. The remains of the 35 were transferred to the cemetery in what today is Wyszyński Street in Łomża; the cemetery was demolished in 1980s during the construction of a church, but on 2 September we'll bury the discovered servicemen in the same place, so that they could rest together at the re-constructed memorial site. The Tsar's soldiers were already buried there on 17 May 2019. As for the Poles fallen in 1920, they were interred in a parish cemetery in Łomża on 14 August 2019.

Individual graves

In **Łomna** near **Warsaw** we discovered evidence of exceptional bravery. In a pit covered with rubbish were the remains of Cpl. Stanisław Pietruszka, born on 10 April 1910 in Międzyrzec Podlaski, soldier of the 83rd Infantry Regiment of the Łódź Army's 30th Infantry Division. Pietruszka is reported to have carried out a diversionary

raid during the Modlin Fortress defence, which resulted in the destruction of a number of enemy vehicles. Retreating, he fell wounded, and captured by German troops was allegedly buried alive. However, our inspection of the remains revealed that the corporal may have died from massive trauma to the face, possibly crushed with a rifle stock. Apart from fragments of a Polish Army uniform, a few fuses and a newspaper for lighting them were found with the remains, which corroborates the reports of the Corporal's heroic stance. The soldier, whose family we are now trying to locate, will be buried on 15 September in Łomna parish cemetery.

In a forest by the village of **Markowszyna** near **Białystok** we discovered the evidence of a particularly sad event. The remains we found belong to a serviceman who hanged himself on a uniform belt having learned that the Red Army had just invaded Poland. His comrades buried him in the forest, but not before his commanding officer slapped the dead man's face, saying, "What have you done, you fool? You could have killed some more Germans!" and took away all papers found on the body. The corpse was in full military gear, with only his rifle, boots (removed by local civilians) and the helmet missing. His remains are waiting to be identified by the IPN's Office of Search and Identification.

In a forest near the village of Koło in the Sulejów commune there is a roadside shrine where a cross used to stand. It is in this spot that the remains of a Łódź Army soldier who died of wounds during his unit's retreat were reportedly buried. However, our search was not successful – the only thing we found was a Reserve Officer Cadet School unit badge.

Near the gate of long-gone Tsar's army barracks, and later Polish Army Officer Cadet School in **Kaszewiec in the Różan commune**, we

opened a grave that was said to have contained a body of a soldier killed in the course of his unit's retreat from the area. Inside were the remains left after exhumation, the interwar period coins and elements of military equipment, a few types of buttons, and belts. The body remains were buried in a military grave in Różan parish cemetery.

A plaque on a symbolic grave in the **Biadoszek** Forest within Jastrzębie-Zdrój administrative limits identified it as the burial site of the remains of unknown Polish Army soldiers, fallen in September 1939. However, the inspection of the grave site did not confirm that.

In **Wólka Poturzyńska, Hrubieszów county**, we found typical elements of police uniforms, as well as the remains left after exhumation of a few policemen, one of them a senior constable, of the 3rd Police Precinct in Kielce. They were murdered by the invading Red Army – either while attempting to escape from a transport of POWs, or apprehended with bicycles that the Soviets badly needed – and buried at the crossroads under St. Anthony shrine. Today, the spot is fenced and marked with a cross, but the remains were transferred to the cemetery of the Haller Army in Dołhobyczów in the Hrubieszów county. The unveiling of their grave memorial took place on 12 April 2019.

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