

EDWARD RYDZ-ŚMIGŁY

A Political and Military Biography

Ryszard Mirowicz

Translated and edited by

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The original Polish version of this book was written in the 1980s under communist rule, and remained dormant in a censor's office for over a year. The author was ordered to alter various references concerning the Teschen dispute in 1938 and the Soviet invasion of Poland in alliance with the Nazis in September, 1939. Although the author expressed satisfaction at the eventual compromise between mandated omissions and academic integrity just prior to publication, the translator has made an attempt to add a few footnotes to provide some balance to the narrative.

Regarding the customary problems with geographical locations in multiple languages, most locations described in First World War battles on the eastern front in which the Legions were involved and the post-war military operations in the Ukraine, Byelorussia, and Lithuania are in Polish. Otherwise, respective languages for whichever countries in which the geographic locations happened to be situated at the time are used. English names were used for those which possess them, such as "Warsaw," "Cracow," "Kaunas," etc.

Numbered footnotes are mostly identical to those in the original text and are listed at the end of each respective section. Footnotes with an asterisk at the bottom of the page are citations which the translator has added. Sometimes (rarely) the translator added commentary onto a numbered footnote.

The bibliography includes sources used by the translator for clarification in addition to those used by the original author.

This project was a labor of love produced by the translator in his spare time, a modest attempt driven by the desire to learn more about this prominent figure in twentieth century Polish political and military history in light of a paucity of information in English. It is sincerely hoped that this is a valuable contribution to the continuing study of interwar Poland by English readers.

My thanks go to Timothy Riley, Anna Cienciala, Steve Bernd, and to my mother for agreeing to read part of the text and graciously offering suggestions, even though the translator must assume all responsibility for any shortcomings. Mr. Riley's moral support was instrumental at a point where the translator had almost decided to abandon this effort. Thanks also go to Michael Biggins at the University of Washington for helping to

facilitate publication, assisting the translator in obtaining various sources and helping the translator track down the original author in Poland. Piotr Kamiński also assisted in contacting the author in Poland. An acknowledgement must also be recognized for the late Professor Daniel S. Lev, a mentor and friend whose personal encouragement provided so much of the incentive for the translator to engage in this project, unfortunately scarred by his not having lived long enough to witness its completion.

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

During the interwar period, Edward Rydz-Śmigły, honored warrior for Poland's freedom and independence, was exceedingly popular. His military record of service in the Polish Legions and during the Polish-Soviet War of 1920 was filled with success, and his popularity grew upon his appointment as Commander-in-Chief of the Polish armed forces following Józef Piłsudski's death. One of the highest positions in the country, it gave its occupant the ability to influence matters dealing with the defense of the country. It was significant that as Commander-in-Chief he automatically was the top military leader in time of war.

Initially Rydz-Śmigły did not surround himself with any organized political group, but over time he gave up the role of a disinterested observer of social life and began to step out publicly. His speeches increasingly took on a political hue. Having few political connections and taking advantage of the feuds within the ruling elite following Piłsudski's death, he gradually emerged at its pinnacle. Yet his tenure was characterized by grave domestic problems and a lack of much success in foreign policy. The ruling elite attempted to draw attention away from these problems by promoting Rydz-Śmigły as Piłsudski's heir and thus create a natural magnet for all of society in a wave of

propaganda and slogans, giving rise to the notion that his leadership would lead Poland from her adverse sociopolitical situation.

From 1937 on, the increasing threat from Hitler's Germany further strengthened Rydz's stature as the "first soldier of the Republic." As war threatened, political differences abated and the defense of the country became a national priority, and Rydz's prominence even eclipsed that of the president. Posters bearing his image adorned public buildings and bulletin boards, as his athletic pose, and gentle smile evoked confidence. His popularity reached its zenith just before the outbreak of hostilities, including adulatory songs, poetry, and almost daily revelations about his life in the press.

In September 1939 the entire "Rydz legend" burst like a bubble. The Polish defeat was such a shock that it was impossible to evaluate the marshal's legacy objectively, creating an historiographical paradox. Until now, his fate, so much tied to critical events, did not attain a reliable evaluation. Laudatory accounts written before the Second World War served ideological ends, well demonstrated by the way they were written.

In both underground and exile literature about Rydz, it is possible to discern two major points of view. One

presents him as a coward and even a betrayer who abandoned the Polish armed forces. The other defends the military and foreign policies of the Sanacja* leaders prior to the outbreak of hostilities. Post-Second World War Polish historiography lacks a broader perspective devoted entirely to the marshal, instead focusing on other problems or issues during the period from 1935 to 1939. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the appraisals in existing literature, as well as unwritten tradition to illustrate Rydz-Śmigły as a military and political leader.

* "The group of men who followed the marshal (Piłsudski) became known as the "Sanitation," or Sanacja, camp, because of their vows to cleanse the country of the evils that had prevailed during the five years from the enactment of the constitution in 1921." Edward D. Wynot, Jr., *Polish Politics in Transition: The Camp of National Unity and the Struggle for Power*, (Athens GA, 1974), pp. 22-3.

Part I

YOUTH, THE LEGIONS, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE

Childhood and School Years

Little is known of Edward Rydz-Śmigły's early life since few sources have survived. Hagiographical references and encyclopedia entries deal with his childhood only superficially, while interwar publications present differing accounts of his youth. Rumors circulated of his being the illegitimate child of the manager of an estate in Łapszyn near Brzeżany and then taking the name of his adoptive father.¹ Another version claimed he was descended from an impoverished Galician gentry family. Mention of his peasant origins appeared in the mid-1930s concurrently with the ruling elite's attempts to woo the peasantry for its cause. Resources in the Central Military Archives in Warsaw reveal materials for an unfinished biography which contain fragments of reliable information about his youth.²

It is notable that Rydz himself spoke very little about his youth, and never made any attempt to deal with the rumors. He once stated in an interview that a man should be judged by his deeds, not his pedigree.

Edward Rydz-Śmigły was born on March 11, 1886 in Brzeżany, a provincial, yet lively town in eastern Galicia. His father, Tomasz, was a platoon leader in the Austrian cavalry, who died when Rydz was two years old. His mother, born Maria Babiak, supported herself and her son by various menial work. Plagued with poor health, she turned over her son's upbringing to her parents when Edward was ten years old. The boy was brought up by his maternal grandparents in very modest circumstances. His grandfather, Jan Babiak, worked as a laborer in a slaughterhouse and supplemented his meager income with doing janitorial duties.

Edward, having been abandoned at such an early age, would have experienced an unfortunate fate had it not been for good people, the Uranowicz family, a doctor and his wife, taking the boy under their wing and treating him as an adopted son. Rydz later credited this good fortune to two factors.³ Dr. Uranowicz consulted with the director of Saint Anne's Gymnasium about a study companion to attend lessons with the director's son. Dr. Uranowicz had known Rydz's grandfather, having had great respect for his role in the revolution of 1848. Thus Edward found himself in a cultural and well-connected home. With his colleague, Edmund, who was later to become a district court judge in Brzeżany, Edward completed the gymnasium program. The

school Rydz attended was characterized by a high level of education and gave talented individuals an educational foundation.

By most accounts, Rydz was an average student, excelling primarily in history and the Polish language. His tendency to sit in the back of the classroom and his aversion to class discussions were consistent with his timid personality. However Rydz's diligence and conscientiousness gradually led him to the top of his class. He made friends easily thanks to an innate directness and readiness to help. Within a short time he became a favorite in some of the leading regional families, such as the Barzykowskis, Widmans, and the Schätzels. Connections with this cultural elite had a considerable influence on his intellectual development. Although he extensively read works of literature of the Romantic period, especially the works of Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki, he also enjoyed reading Wincenty Lutosławski and Bolesław Limanowski.⁴

But his greatest passion was painting, especially depictions of nature and the 1863 insurrection. His drawing of the Virgin Mary was even incorporated into the altar of the Armenian Church in Brzeżany.

As he approached the end of his education, he was already feeling increasingly frustrated with the limited artistic opportunities which Brzeżany had to offer. Although he continued to draw constantly, the more formal artistic rigidity he had learned gave way to painting featuring a more individual style in sketches and caricatures. He continued to participate enthusiastically in theatrical and literary activities, including playing the role of Konrad Wallenrod in a play by a fellow student, the poet Rajmund Szolc.

Brzeżany was an important center of patriotic organizations working for Polish independence. Rydz first became a member of a nationalist organization with a socialist orientation called Ray of Light (*Promień*), where he came under the ideological influence of Stanisław Barzykowski (who was later to become a colonel in quartermaster services and an athlete). Two years older than Rydz, Barzykowski enthusiastically directed the activities of clandestine groups. The students at the gymnasium who belonged to the Ray of Light frequently discussed social, philosophical, and religious issues.

In higher classes of the gymnasium, Rydz and other progressive boys belonged to Birth (*Odrodzenie*), another student organization advocating Polish independence through

armed struggle. It was the first such movement to engage in military exercises in the Brzeżany region. Rydz was an enthusiastic participant and a good marksman.

Rydz took his final exams in Brzeżany in 1905 (not in Cracow, as some of his biographers allege). He graduated with distinction, and this was his first significant honor.

Higher Education and Political Activities

Following graduation, Rydz moved to Cracow to commence university studies. This was made possible due to financial assistance from Stanisław Schätzel, a prominent attorney, member of parliament, and mayor of Brzeżany. Enrolling in the Academy of Fine Arts, he studied with Leon Wyczółkowski in his first year, and with Teodor Axentowicz in his second.* He adjusted quickly to the whirl of academic life, working hard on perfecting his painting skills, and learning the principles of modernism, an artistic trend at the time. In his colors, he was most influenced by Paul Cézanne and other exponents of the French school.

Opportunities for foreign travel had a profound influence on broadening his horizons. Sojourns in Munich,

* Leon Wyczółkowski (1852-1936) was one of the leading Realistic painters of the Young Poland movement. Teodor Axentowicz (1859-1938) was a painter mostly renowned for depicting the life of the Hutsels, Carpathian highlanders who spoke a Ukrainian dialect.

Nüremberg, and Vienna made him admire their architecture. He spent much time in art galleries admiring the old masters, and his stay abroad provided him the chance of taking a broader look at painting. His output at the time did not stray from national themes, featuring landscapes of the eastern borderlands, as well as depictions of the Polish insurrection of 1863 and the forced conscription of Poles into the tsar's army. He kept in touch with his classmates from Brzeżany, many of whom were active in the movement for the establishment of universal suffrage in Galicia. Traveling from village to village advocating their cause, one of Rydz's colleagues recalled that he tended to be averse to speaking at public gatherings, but performed very ably when forced to do so.

Living in Cracow provided Rydz with the opportunity to become familiar with the thinking of Józef Piłsudski. The main tenets of independence made a powerful impression upon him. This soon presented a personal dilemma as to whether to continue with his painting or to take on a greater role in the movement for Polish independence. In 1908, following a great deal of thought, he decided to join the Union of Active Struggle (*Związek Walki Czynnej*) or ZWC, a Piłsudskiite organization founded by Kazimierz Sosnkowski.⁵ His transfer that same year from the Academy of Fine Arts

to Jagiellonian University as a philosophy major reflected this important change in his life.⁶

At the time he joined, the ZWC was in its first year of existence, numbering several dozen people. Figures such as Walery Sławek, Aleksandr Prystor, Witold Jodko-Narkiewicz, and even Sosnkowski were his mentors due to their age and greater experience in the movement for independence.* Rydz's organizational and military skills quickly became apparent, as he shunned lengthy, drawn-out discussions and only took interest in definite, cut-and-dried matters. Such young and enthusiastic activists attracted the attention of Józef Piłsudski.

In 1910, Rydz interrupted his studies to serve one obligatory year in the Austro-Hungarian army, where he applied himself to his assigned tasks in an exemplary way. Foreseeing that the skills he acquired could serve him well in the struggle for independence, he had every reason to take advantage of such an opportunity, eventually acquiring

* Walery Sławek (1879-1939) was a Piłsudskiite active in the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) who later became prime minister of Poland. Aleksandr Prystor (1871-1941), also an early PPS activist, later served in several portfolios in several Polish governments. He died in Soviet captivity. Witold Jodko-Narkiewicz (1864-1924) was one of the founders of the PPS and later served in the Polish delegation at the Versailles peace conference. Kazimierz Sosnkowski (1885-1969) later served in the Polish Legions during the First World War and in various military posts in independent Poland and the Polish government-in-exile during the Second World War, eventually settling in Canada.

the rank of *fähnrich*.* Although offered a career in the Austro-Hungarian army, he chose not to pursue it.

During his military service, the ZWC underwent a reorganization, as its leaders tried to widen its popular base and gain official recognition by the Austro-Hungarian state. The Riflemen's Association (*Związek Strzelecki*) emerged at this time in Lvov, Cracow, and Brzeżany. Although the Galician authorities officially recognized the one branch of the Riflemen's Association with which they felt comfortable, its operation actually rested with personnel chosen annually by its supreme council, whose members made sure that ZWC stalwarts were well represented. Thus the reorganization and its official recognition by the Habsburg monarchy changed the character and work of the ZWC minimally. It now served as a nucleus for bringing together the most zealous from among the Riflemen's Association's many branches.

With the unification of the Riflemen came an increasing tendency toward its militarization, in which Rydz was an enthusiastic participant. During this period, Rydz adopted the pseudonym "Śmigły,"⁷ being referred to over

* Literally "ensign." An equivalent position in the US Army does not exist. The British Army uses the term "warrant officer." It is often referenced as "officer candidate," below second lieutenant.

time as "Citizen Śmigły" by his colleagues due to his passion for the cause. In 1912 he completed his military studies with high marks, and received a commission directly from Piłsudski and the distinctive title *parasol*.

His diploma gave him the privilege of a seat on the ZWC Supreme Council. Initially, Rydz was given command of the Brzeżany sector, but shortly afterward (1912-13) he served as an instructor in an officers' school in Cracow. Rydz then resumed his studies at the Academy of Fine Arts under the tutelage of Professor Józef Pankiewicz*, completing them the following year.⁸ By this time, Rydz had decided that art was a hobby which could not interfere with his work for the cause of Polish independence.

Rydz's organizational and leadership qualities did not go unnoticed by Piłsudski, who held Rydz in high esteem and frequently singled him out as a role model. In 1913, Piłsudski gave him command of the Riflemen in the Lvov sector, a post in which Rydz fully lived up to Piłsudski's expectations. Rydz's soldiers performed ably and he fulfilled all of his assigned responsibilities, appearing frequently out in the field giving specific instructions to his subordinates, personally supervising many of the

* Józef Pankiewicz (1866-1940) was a post-Impressionist painter and a proponent of Polish Colorism.

exercises, and conducting instructional briefings. His position also included the editorship of the Riflemen's literary organ, *Strzelec*, a monthly magazine which commenced publication in April 1914 and lasted for four issues, interrupted by the outbreak of the First World War. During his brief tenure, Rydz contributed three articles: "The Study of Marksmanship among the Riflemen," "On our Internal Discipline," and "Bayonet Warfare." He published the studies under the pseudonym "Śmigły," which was becoming by this time ensconced. His involvement in the work of the ZWC and his rapid rise from an ordinary soldier to an officer of considerable influence, made him a known quantity who had reached a high position in the Polish military hierarchy by the time of the outbreak of the First World War.

The First World War and the Legions

Upon the outbreak of the First World War, Rydz's status as an Austrian subject led to his conscription into the 55th Infantry Regiment of the Austro-Hungarian army in Brzeżany. Through Piłsudski's intervention, Rydz was recalled. Piłsudski summoned Rydz to Cracow, acknowledging his willingness to serve with the Riflemen's units at the front, even though these forces lacked legal combat status.⁹

The Legions had left for the front several days earlier, but Rydz caught up with them near Chęciny on August 14.* They were retreating along with Austro-Hungarian forces from Kielce, and Rydz assumed command of three companies which were fleeing the Russian onslaught in disarray.

Following several skirmishes along a frontline stretching from Brzezno through Brzegi up to Mosty along the Nida River, the Riflemen gathered near Bolmin and Chęciny, where they were reorganized into battalions.

Rydz's forces, together with the companies under Stanisław Tessara and Wacław Wieczorkiewicz[↓] were placed under Rydz's overall command and renamed the 3rd Battalion. Being only 28 years old, this marked the beginning of his military career. Although such a rapid promotion complied with military protocol, it was primarily the consequence of his proven leadership qualities.

His colleagues recall that Rydz always relied upon confident people who were certain of success in executing orders, and stood out as courageous role models. Rydz's

* The Riflemen were incorporated into the Legions that same month.

↓ Wacław Scewola-Wieczorkiewicz (1866-1969) later served in various command positions in interwar Poland and, briefly, in the Polish government-in-exile in France in 1940. He eventually settled in Switzerland.

frequent presence at the frontline often involved his being in the most dangerous situations: in the initial wave during attacks, and among the last soldiers to withdraw during retreats.

Five battalions under Piłsudski's overall command embarked from the Brzegi-Chęciny region on a flanking operation together with regular Austro-Hungarian forces through Pieszków-Tumlin, culminating in the capture of Kielce on August 18, where the advancing units paused to reorganize for the march ahead. Six battalions and a motorized unit were incorporated into the 1st Infantry Regiment under Piłsudski's command.¹⁰

Nevertheless Piłsudski's hopes for an influx of Polish volunteers or a general uprising in the former Congress Kingdom, fizzled. Poles in the Congress Kingdom feared a possible return of tsarist forces and the potential retribution which this could entail.¹¹ Faced with such a situation, the dissolution of Piłsudski's ill-equipped forces or incorporation into the Austro-Hungarian army became an increasing possibility. Only through the intervention of Polish politicians in Galicia was the Legions' separate status preserved, thus denoting a diminution of Piłsudski's political influence even though he retained his command.

Meanwhile, Rydz organized a reconnaissance unit within his regiment composed of both mounted and ambulatory scouts, operating within an area of roughly a dozen kilometers between enemy lines, and providing him with valuable intelligence concerning Russian strength. Upon receiving news of a potential offensive against the Russians, he prepared his forces in Kielce accordingly. But a change in orders on September 9 precipitated instead a withdrawal coordinated with regular Austro-Hungarian forces and the abandonment of Kielce. Rydz was assigned a portion of the Vistula River stretching from Bolesław to the mouth of the Dunajec River with the task of covering the Austro-Hungarian withdrawal from the vicinity of Lublin. Together with a battalion under the command of Mieczysław Norwid-Neugebauer,* Rydz crossed the river and occupied Nowy Korczyn, thereafter engaging in skirmishes near Busk, Uścisków, Stróżyska, Ksany and Czarkowa in a brilliantly executed operation. In recognition of his courage and leadership abilities, Rydz was promoted to the rank of major.¹²

* Mieczysław Norwid-Neugebauer (1884-1954) eventually served in various command positions in interwar Poland and also served as minister of public works (1930-1932). He was sent to Britain early in the September 1939 campaign to try and persuade the Western Allies to start an air offensive in support of Poland. He served in an administrative capacity in the Polish army-in-exile during the Second World War, and wrote a book about the September campaign. He died in Toronto, Canada.

After successful operations near Garbatka and Policzno, he further distinguished himself near Anielin on October 22. Encountering a Russian attempt to outflank the Austrians, Rydz fell back from the Austrian right while the Russian rear advanced through the forest. However Rydz was also able to exploit the cover which the forest provided, directing some smaller units to some threatened pockets. The encounter in the forest was reduced to a battle of bayonets, which exhausted both sides, but Rydz managed to hold out for several hours despite enemy superiority. It was not until the arrival of reinforcements from the 1st Legionary Infantry Battalion that Rydz was able to withdraw in good order. On the following day, Rydz received orders to vacate the front. Realizing that this would be a difficult task as his forces were constantly under artillery fire, Rydz nevertheless carried out these instructions, occupying the rear trenches and holding them for the next five days. Citing this encounter, one of Rydz's Legionary companions, Stefan Pomarański, recalled:

...In the many successful marches in which our regiment and battalion participated in the fall campaign in the Kielce-Radom region up to Laski, Citizen Śmigły shared in all our travails, repeatedly visiting the barn in which lay rows of our fatigued soldiers...¹³

Of the subsequent activities of the 1st Brigade of the Polish Legions, Rydz wrote:

...During the forced retreat, Piłsudski approached Krzywopłoty where some of his forces remained to fight a bloody battle, while the other portion executed a masterly sally on the Russian rear advancing through Uline Mała to Cracow. Later leading his troops through Podhale and Nowy Sącz, he fought a stubborn and glorious battle at Łowczówek in December 1914...¹⁴

During the three-day battle at Łowczówek, Rydz displayed valor, the mastery of which was reflected in the actions of his subordinates.

By the spring of 1915, Poland was riddled with an endless labyrinth of trenches in which stationary armies prepared for further combat. The 1st Brigade was assigned to a stretch of the Nida River opposite Pińczów, where a period of relative calm had set in. To pass the time and provide relief from the daily boredom of patrols, the Legionnaires engaged in various sports, the most popular being soccer. Teams were usually divided by regiment, and Rydz was an avid participant, reflecting a passion for the sport which was to continue into his later years, although only as a spectator.

A period of relative calm on the front ended at the beginning of May 1915, when the Germans and the Austro-Hungarians commenced an offensive and the 1st Brigade penetrated the Nida River on May 11, pursuing the

retreating Russian forces. After these initial setbacks, the Russians made an attempt within a few days to check the advancing enemy. By May 16, the Poles had reached the vicinity of Klimontów along the Pokrzywianka River, encountering fierce Russian resistance. A difficult, ten-day battle followed near the village of Konary. Rydz's forces distinguished themselves ably, demonstrating their thorough preparation, as Rydz himself commanded troops on the frontline and rallied his soldiers during their most arduous engagements. Piłsudski's recollections following the battle of Konary and the Kozieniecki Forest attest to Rydz's accomplishments:

...Among the many heroic deeds performed by individual soldiers in the course of this successful battle, I would like to note those who deserve recognition. Major Śmigły-Rydz, taking upon himself the most difficult tasks beyond the call of duty, not only distinguished himself in accordance with his rank, but also displayed unanticipated courage and tenacity against formidable odds during the battle in the Kozieniecki Forest. Above all, I credit the major with the 3rd Battalion's persistence in achieving its objective, considerably surpassing the moral obligations of an ordinary soldier...¹⁵

It should be noted that Piłsudski was unusually objective in appraising his subordinates. Despite Rydz's youth and lack of tactical experience, he fulfilled expectations in leading his regiment. For his courage and leadership qualities displayed at Konary, he was promoted

to the rank of lieutenant colonel on May 1, 1915 while retaining command of the 1st Legionary Infantry Regiment.

In late June 1915, the Russians were forced to abandon Lvov while falling back in the face of an offensive by the Central Powers. By June 23 the tsarist forces had evacuated the sector assigned to the 1st Brigade as the Poles pursued them to the Vistula. They engaged the retreating armies at Tarłów, Urzędów, and Jastków. On August 19 the Brigade crossed the Bug River, driving toward Podlasie and advancing next through Lubartów, Wysokie Litewskie, and Kowel, eventually embarking on the so-called Volhynian campaign which lasted from September 2, 1915 to October 18, 1916.

During this time, because of a general shift in the frontline, and political and organizational conflicts between Piłsudski and the Legionary High Command, the Polish leader was compelled together with the 4th and 5th Regiments to relocate to the Kopcze - Czeben region, while Rydz succeeded Sosnkowski as commander of the remaining forces of the 1st Brigade stationed between Trojanówka and Kostiuchnówka. Upon the separation of the 1st Brigade, Piłsudski made the following statement:

Soldiers! I will be leaving you shortly as other duties beckon me elsewhere. Under Rydz-Śmigły, I leave you in capable hands, confident that you will

grant him the same trust and affection which you have bestowed upon me.¹⁶

The forces under Rydz's command were involved in many battles and brushes with the enemy, the bloodiest taking place in Kołki, Jabłonka, Kulki and Kamieniucha. Despite enduring heavy casualties, they distinguished themselves militarily and maintained their morale, thus reflecting Rydz's influence and capabilities. By enduring the same hardships as the soldiers under his command, his authority consistently grew. After over a year of combat, the Legionnaires increasingly looked up to him as a good commander and educator with a strong personality.

At the time of the 1st Brigade's reconstitution, Piłsudski issued an order stressing the merits of Rydz's troops. He specifically thanked

...Lieutenant Colonel Rydz, who, under the most adverse conditions led the Brigade to the glory which graced us at Jabłonka and Kulki, guided by his strong will and endurance.¹⁷

From early December 1915 to the end of April 1916, little military action took place, and the Brigade was stationed away from the front, initially in the villages of Karasina and Leśniówka in Polesie. The Brigade was later transferred from its winter quarters to Legionowo, an outpost recently constructed by Russian prisoners-of-war in the winter of 1915-1916 for the Legionnary Command.

Following the arrival of the Brigade, new settlements cropped up around Legioniowo, such as "Rojowe," built by the 4th Regiment in the Zakopane style, and "Polski Lasek" and "Nowy Jastków," constructed respectively by the 5th and the 6th Regiments.

The 1st Regiment, which was under Rydz's command, erected an old Polish-style manor house with a veranda and all the customary surroundings. It was artistically furnished according to the projects of Rydz, Lieutenant Kazimierz Dąbrowa-Młodzianowski and Staff Sergeant Wojciech Jastrzębowski.* Rydz named this picturesque dwelling "Anielinem."

As the lull in the fighting persisted, cultural and educational life was organized in Legionowo. Rydz was one of its leading inspirers, contributing to a newly created publication entitled *The Peace Conference*, which distinguished itself by an especially high level of graphic art.¹⁸

* Kazimierz Dąbrowa-Młodzianowski (1880-1928) was also a graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow. Eventually achieving the rank of brigadier general, he went on to serve in various military and administrative posts in independent Poland, including a brief stint as minister of the interior from May to October 1926.

Wojciech Jastrzębowski (1884-1963), another Academy of Fine Arts graduate, had spent time in Italy and France before returning to Cracow in 1912 to design buildings. Following military service, he partook in the renovation of the interior of Wawel Cathedral in Cracow. Spending most of the interwar years teaching at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, he made his way to Britain during the Second World War, and returned to Poland in 1947 to resume his architectural activities.

In June 1916, the southern front witnessed a major offensive commanded by General Aleksei Brusilov, who, after concentrating substantial forces in Volhynia, attacked the 4th Austro-Hungarian Army under the command of Archduke Ferdinand, resulting in engagements near Łuck and Czartoryski. The Austrians threw all of their available reserves including the Legions into battle. On July 4 the Russians attacked the Legionary forces between Optowa and Kostiuchnówka, which were defended by detachments from the 1st and 3rd Brigades. After several days of military action near Kostiuchnówka a general retreat took place to a line near Stochód.

In his memoirs, Wacław Jędrzejewicz* assessed Rydz during this retreat as follows:

...I recall vividly his composure and restraint...Fate dictated that my machine gun platoon was in a forest near his location when we were both under heavy Russian fire. Rydz spoke calmly, showing no visible sign of distress despite the grave situation, as he awaited the evacuation of his remaining forces. At that time, he was really impressive...¹⁹

Following the retreat from Kostiuchnówka, all three brigades were transferred away from the front to

* Wacław Jędrzejewicz (1893-1993) served in the Riflemen's Association and was one of the founders of the *Polska Organizacja Wojskowa* (Polish Military Organization) during the First World War. Following Polish independence, he served in various military posts and ministries where he instituted various reforms in education. He emigrated to New York in 1941, and later was a professor at Wellesley College and Ripon College (Wisconsin).

Czeremoszyno to rest. The 1st Brigade regiments, after being held in reserve for the first three weeks, were being moved to even new sectors until finally occupying trenches from Jeziorna to Sitowicze. Here they remained until October 18, at which time all of the Legions were withdrawn from the front to Baranowicze. At Baranowicze, a political crisis within the Legions' ranks, which had been simmering since the previous summer now reached a climax. The Legionary High Command had been feuding with Piłsudski, who aimed to subordinate the High Command to himself.* Sensing an atmosphere of discontent among the Legions, especially its officers, he had decided to act accordingly. If he was unsuccessful, Piłsudski was prepared to have the Legions broken up. Inspired by Piłsudski, a so-called Council of Colonels emerged from the ranks of the Legions and submitted a proposal to the Austro-Hungarian authorities containing the following demands:

1. The Legions were to be a provisional force serving as a nucleus for a national Polish army.
2. The High Command must be Polonized
3. A provisional Polish government must be formed.
4. The Legions must be withdrawn from the front because of their complete exhaustion.

* The High Command was subordinate to higher-ranking Austro-Hungarian officers.

A concluding statement specifically demanded that if the above conditions were not met the Legions would not continue to exist.²⁰

The Austrians consented to certain ostensible concessions. The Legions were renamed the *Polski Korpus Posiłkowy* (Polish Auxiliary Corps). A change in standards and insignia was proposed, but a transfer to overall Polish command was not included. Seeing that the course of events was not going his way, Piłsudski decided that his presence in the Legions would not result in the fulfillment of his political objectives and he tendered his resignation. Exploiting the great influence he possessed on the 1st Brigade as well as Rydz himself, Piłsudski ordered all of the Legionnaires to hand in their resignations, affecting several hundred Legionnaires. Rydz's statement of resignation sent to the Austro-Hungarian High Command of the Legions was as follows:

...Józef Piłsudski's resignation is not and should not be treated as a personal matter. It is a political response to the ongoing question over the past two years of the Legions and Polish people. It is an answer of lasting consequence for the Legions and the Polish people. There can be no doubt that the call which roused Polish youth to serve and persevere for two years under immensely difficult conditions was the call for independence of the motherland. The call was frequently made in the orders of the Legionary Command. These calls indicated that the soldiers whom I was to lead, first as a battalion commander and, from December 18, 1914, as a regimental commander,

unhesitatingly and steadfastly gave their blood for the cause, believing that this was the true road to independence. Now that faith has been shattered! I cannot represent something which does not exist, or rally to a banner which they do not see. My honor as a Polish officer does not allow me to do that. Accordingly, I request that I be discharged from the Legions and, as an Austrian subject, be transferred into the Austrian army.

That same honor, the sole and irrefutable gain of the shedding of my soldiers' blood, demands the most immediate implementation of all the discharge applications of the officers and the enlisted men. This is demanded by the glory which the Legions have achieved and the memory which they are to leave for the nation...²¹

Rydz's resignation provoked a major crisis within the Legions. He aroused the ire of German military circles which wanted to exploit the Polish recruits. This also compelled the Central Powers to announce the establishment of a Polish state consisting of the lands of the former Congress Kingdom on November 5, 1916. This presented Piłsudski with new political opportunities, and previous resignations by the Legionnaires became invalid. That very day, Piłsudski sent Rydz a letter stating that "I believe that your resignations should be withdrawn, and at this moment the iron laws of military duty should be reaffirmed to the fullest extent." Piłsudski later addressed Rydz personally as follows:

My Dear Colonel, trusting profoundly in your tactfulness, for which I always held you in high esteem, I turn to you to serve as my spokesman among

the troops to express my feelings and my views on this matter...²²

But the German authorities who had taken over the Legions from the Austro-Hungarians did not agree to the establishment of a Polish army subject to Piłsudski and the Provisional State Council (*Tymczasowa Rada Stanu*)*. Instead the Germans created a Polish armed force subordinate to them called the *Polnische Wehrmacht* (*Polskie Siły Zbrojne*). Piłsudski and other Legionary officers, including Rydz-Śmigły, rejected this kind of army. On Piłsudski's orders, a majority of the Legionnaires refused to swear fidelity in arms with the German and Austrian forces. Rydz announced his opposition together with his 1st Regiment on July 12, 1917. Accordingly, the regiment was disarmed and the Legionnaires from Congress Poland were interned in camps located in Szczypiorno and Beniaminów. Those from Galicia were inducted into the Austro-Hungarian army.[↓]

On August 6, Rydz issued instructions pertaining to future behavior. Among other things, he recommended a general boycott of the officers who had sworn the oath to the Central Powers, ordered interned Poles to return the

* This was the government set up by the Central Powers for their proposed Polish state. Although it was composed of prominent Polish politicians and represented various Polish political parties, its functions were purely advisory.

↓ This event is often called the Oath Crisis.

German Iron Crosses bestowed upon them to General Hans von Beseler, and sent their addresses to Piłsudski's wife. He simultaneously issued a farewell order to his regiment. Recalling the previous three-year period of conflict, he stressed that the blood and sacrifices of Polish soldiers had not been in vain. He gave a lot of space to the question of military honor, thanking his subordinates both on Piłsudski's as well as his behalf for their loyal service, ending his order with the words: "You have performed good and loyal service. My happiness will be your belief that I did the same."²³ The political crisis over the loyalty oath had not only led to Rydz being relieved of his command, but also a proscription on his being in uniform.²⁴

A ceremonial farewell with his entire regiment took place on August 10, 1917. Following his inspection of the honorary company, he left for Cracow, having organized contact beforehand. He received a letter from a Legionary comrade named Zosik who recalled the affection Rydz's soldiers had for him:

...In my name and all of the attending officers as well as enlisted men present, I convey an emphatic 'Long live Śmigły, our leader and dearest comrade!' Let him know that the hearts of everyone worthy to call himself a Polish soldier are with him. The fondness he enjoys among the troops and perhaps the entire

nation will follow and accompany him for the rest of his life...²⁵

In concluding this account of Rydz's participation in Piłsudski's Legions, attention should be drawn to an article he penned entitled "The Legionary Oath of Allegiance Crisis of August 29, 1917," in which he discussed the whole idea behind the Legions and the idea of Polish independence.²⁶ He placed the blame for the crisis and the final liquidation of the Legions on the Austrian and German military leadership, as well as the Legionary High Command and the Provisional State Council. He felt that the Polish political representatives

...should not consider military necessities only in a regional context, but in an overall Polish dimension using all available means to maintain the Legions and restore them to health and the Polish soldier to dignity with creative values, giving them not to some new state council, but to a truly representative Polish government which will build a Polish state, its army, and will not be an institution of the occupants.

Following his resignation, Rydz most likely would have been transferred into the Austro-Hungarian army, but he became seriously ill, which prompted the Austro-Hungarian authorities to allow him to remain in Cracow. He later feigned illness in order to avoid being drafted.

***Supreme Commander of the
Polish Military Organization***

After the incarceration of Piłsudski and Sosnkowski in the fortress of Magdeburg, the leadership of the Polish Military Organization (*Polska Organizacja Wojskowa*) or POW, was taken over by one of Piłsudski's most trusted officers—Rydz-Śmigły. A clandestine, underground movement, the POW had been created by Piłsudski when the Legions were already active. He delegated to it officers whose loyalty to him was beyond question. Following Piłsudski's incarceration, the POW declared its submission to the dictates of the Provisional State Council. The Central Powers reacted with repression, arresting among others Walery Sławek, Adam Skwarczyński,* Wacław Jędrzejewicz, and nearly all of the military district commanders and their active units, enfeebling the POW substantially. Rydz later assessed the situation in his memoirs this way:

...The Commander (Piłsudski) was not only the military leader, but also served as the architect of (POW) political thought. His imprisonment had thus left a void and none of us could discern his thoughts about the next moves to make. None of us were knowledgeable enough to be familiar with the details of his political craft to be able to assume or continue it...²⁷

* Adam Skwarczyński (1886-1934), was a Piłsudskiite, ZWC activist and veteran of the 1st Brigade. Following Poland's independence, he was a journalist and for a time served as an adviser to President Mościcki.

The duties which Rydz assumed were not easy. Not having received any instructions from Piłsudski, Rydz had to act on his own initiative. Availing himself of his Austrian-sanctioned leave in Cracow, Rydz organized the POW High Command in the Wawel Castle in quarters made available through Professor Szyszko-Bohusz.* Bogusław Miedziński[↓] recalled these accommodations "were so well concealed in the castle's cellars that only a knowledgeable guide could ever successfully find them."²⁸ Rydz appointed Julian Stachiewicz (code named "Wicz") as chief of staff of the High Command of the POW.* The remaining staff members were Mieczysław Ścieżyński, Bolesław Wieniawa-Długoszowski, Władysław Bortnowski, Włodzimierz Bochenek, Witold Sokołowski, Adam Dobrodzicki, Borek Hersztal, Wacław Lipiński, and Franciszek Studziński.^{↑29} For the furtherance

* Estonian-born architect Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz (1883-1948) was in charge of a major renovation of the Wawel Castle at the time.

↓ Bogusław Miedziński (1891-1972) was a veteran of the 1st Brigade and supporter of Piłsudski who later served independent Poland as a member of parliament and government minister, emigrating to Britain after the Second World War.

* Julian Stachiewicz (1890-1934) served in the Riflemen's Association and headed the Military Bureau of History after Poland became independent.

↑ Władysław Bortnowski (1891-1966) was a veteran of the Riflemen, the ZWC, and the Legions. He later fought in the Polish-Soviet War, and held various military posts in the Polish army. Forces under his command occupied Teschen in 1938. In command of the Pomeranian Army (*Armia Pomorze*) during the September 1939 campaign, he performed ably despite many disadvantages. Wounded and captured by the Germans, he spent the duration of the war in captivity. He settled in Britain after the war, and moved to the United States in 1954.

(continued on next page)

of the cause of independence, a portfolio previously occupied by Piłsudski, a collegial body was created and labeled the Convent and Organization A, forming a surrogate of the government in which Rydz was in charge of military affairs while political matters were handled by Jędrzej Moraczewski.* Representatives of left-wing parties were also included: the Polish Socialist Party (*Polska Partia Socjalistyczna*) or PPS, the Peasant Party (*Stronnictwo Ludowe*) or SL, and the Polish Social Democratic Parties of Galicia and Silesia (*Polska Partia Socjalno-Demokratyczna Galicji i Śląska*) or PPSD.

Włodzimierz Bochenek (1879-1931) was of noble origin, and his status as a teacher gained him influence in the movement for Polish independence among educators and youth. His dedication to youth organizations continued following Polish independence.

Wacław Lipiński (1896-1949) had served with the Riflemen and the Legions. He later served in the Polish-Soviet War, and from 1927 in the Military Bureau of History. From 1932, he was employed by the Institute for Contemporary Studies of Polish History. During the September 1939 campaign his duties mostly involved propaganda. Following flight to Hungary, he returned to occupied Poland and was involved in the underground, Sanacja-oriented Convention for the Organization of Independence (*Konwent Organizacji Niepodległościowych*). He was imprisoned by the Germans for three months in 1944, and arrested by the communists in 1947. He died in prison.

Bolesław Wieniawa-Długoszowski (1881-1942) a physician, served in the Riflemen and the Legions. He remained close to Piłsudski, serving in various military positions in independent Poland, including stints as military attaché in Bucharest and Polish ambassador to Italy (1933-1940). He was named as a potential president-in-exile following the September 1939 campaign, but was unacceptable to the Western Allies. After being named Polish envoy to Cuba by the government-in-exile, he committed suicide en route in New York.

* Jędrzej Moraczewski (1870-1944) became active in politics as a student at Lvov Polytechnic, joining the PPSD in 1893, where he met Piłsudski. Elected to the Austro-Hungarian parliament in 1907, he served in the Legions during the First World War. After a brief stint as Polish prime minister following independence, he later was involved in the trade union movement. Moraczewski was killed in 1944 during the Warsaw Uprising.

Upon assuming his position as POW supreme commander, Rydz instituted essential changes in this organization, adjusting its activities to the new political situation. Rydz's guidelines also allowed the POW to expand its activities into Galicia.³⁰ The POW was divided into three major regional commands, the first being the lands comprising the former Congress Kingdom, Galicia the second, and the Ukraine and eastern borderlands the third. Having reorganized the POW, Rydz reduced the number of sub-units and made them directly answerable to the regional command. The division of regions and their numbers had not changed until October 1918. There were only fourteen active regions with an additional five in a "skeletal" state. Rydz assembled the entire effort clandestinely. He also ordered that the POW be divided into "active" and "reserve" forces, the latter operating more openly to divert the suspicion of the Central Powers.

The primary emphasis of the POW under Rydz's authority was the revival of a communications network which facilitated the dissemination of information and orders through reliable channels. In accordance with the establishment of Organization A, the POW was supposed to play a very crucial role in the future struggle in the areas occupied by Austria-Hungary. With this goal in mind,

Rydz formed a fourth regional command out of a portion of the first command in August 1918, thus changing the terrain over which the first command had operated.

Rydz divided the second regional command, which encompassed Galicia, into three sub-regions: Cracow, Lvov, and sub-Carpathian, with Władysław Bończa-Uzdowski as its commander and Mieczysław Więckowski its chief of staff.* The POW forces in this sector were not as numerous as those in the first region and were also hobbled by a less extensive communications network. Nevertheless its forces bore the heavy burden of infiltrating the Austro-Hungarian army. Orders were dispatched from Cracow to former Legionaries since inducted into the Austro-Hungarian army to coordinate mass desertions and smuggling of weapons and war materiel. Such activities eventually facilitated the beginnings of a Polish national army and the campaign to seize Lvov in early September 1918.

* Władysław Bończa-Uzdowski (1887-1957) was an officer active in the Riflemen's Association, the Legions, and the ZWC. Interned at Beniaminów during the so-called Oath Crisis, he later served in various military posts in independent Poland, distinguishing himself in the September 1939 campaign. He spent most of the Second World War in German captivity. Repatriated after the war, he was then active in the promotion of soccer as a sport.

Mieczysław Więckowski (1895-1926) served in the Legions and distinguished himself in several combat situations during the First World War and in Poland's subsequent war against the Ukrainians. Following Poland's independence, he attended a military academy and then served in various administrative posts in the Polish army. Conscience-stricken over loyalty during Piłsudski's coup d'etat in May 1926, Więckowski took his own life.

Rydz assigned a special responsibility to the third regional command based in Kiev. Its commander until March 27, 1918 was Józef Bromirski,* and after March 27, 1918 was Bogusław Miedziński. Rydz's close confidant and political adviser, who was later succeeded by Leopold Lis-Kula with Tadeusz Schätzel serving as chief of staff.↓ The primary accomplishments of third region's forces can be delineated as follows: reconnaissance and extension of lines of communication on Russian territory; efforts to expand Polish military personnel in Russia through political agitation; the establishment of relations with Allied representatives with the aim of breaking the monopoly of the National Democrats (Endeks) among Polish representatives.³¹

* Józef Bromirski (1865-1925) descended from a noble family which had settled in the Ukraine in the 18th century. His involvement in the cause of Polish independence dated from his student days at the University of Kiev, and he later was active in the PPS, ZWC, Riflemen's Association, and the POW. Bromirski left Kiev for the last time following the Polish retreat after the Bolshevik onslaught in 1920. He spent the rest of his life in the banking business in Warsaw.

↓ Leopold Lis-Kula (1896-1919) was an activist for Polish independence who served in the Legions during the First World War where he distinguished himself in combat at Krzywopłoty and Łowczówek. Following Polish independence he was killed fighting the Ukrainians. A statue of Lis-Kula stands in Rzeszów.

Tadeusz Schätzel (1891-1971) was a colonel in the Legions. Following Polish independence, he served in foreign diplomatic posts in Turkey and France, and later served as a deputy in the Polish parliament. During the September 1939 campaign, he fled to Romania and Turkey, and eventually settled in Great Britain.

Rydz was especially interested in the course of events in Russia. In order to take advantage of the situation, it was necessary to be apprised of conditions and how they could benefit Polish forces already active in that area. Rydz accordingly dispatched emissaries to Russia for the purpose of making contact with various political movements.³² He yearned for the development of a situation in which the POW could emerge as a prominent political and military force in the east with which to be reckoned. The renunciation of Józef Haller's 2nd Brigade's oath of allegiance to Austria-Hungary and subsequent defection over the Dniestr River epitomized Rydz's cause. Rydz sent Tadeusz Hańkowsko* to negotiate with the Soviet leaders, whose acquiescence was necessary for the transit of Haller's forces. Thanks to his efforts, Haller's brigade was granted permission for passage through territory occupied by the Red Army.

Thanks to his own intelligence reports, Rydz was well aware of the strategic situation facing Haller's soldiers,

* Tadeusz Hańkowsko (1889-1931) was a close collaborator of Piłsudski's in the POW and PPS. He served in the Daszyński government and, later, Piłsudski's Non-Party Bloc for Cooperation with the Government (BBWR). His proposals on how to deal with Poland's eastern neighbors were influential, which included provoking nationalities within Russia to weaken the Soviet regime, and subsequent acquiescence to Soviet occupation of portions of the Ukraine to check Ukrainian nationalism perceived as harmful to Polish interests. He was murdered by Ukrainian nationalists.

which was motivated by a desire to subordinate them to his command at any cost. Miedziński, commander of the 3rd regional command, received the following instructions from him to facilitate this:

Politically it is essential to seize control of the conditions and development of the Polish forces in the east, while creating conditions amenable to their continued presence there without having to be responsible for any commitments contrary to our political ambitions. It is necessary to come to an understanding of coexistence with the Bolsheviks. Haller must remain a weak figure whose influence must be checked since he lacks any political character and could thus compromise us and our position.³³

Sources clearly reveal that Rydz had supporters on Haller's staff through whom the POW commander's intentions were realized. In a letter to Miedziński, he wrote, "I dispatched Karasiewicz with a specific assignment. We must get him onto Haller's staff. I suspect that he will be quite adequate..."³⁴

Following the Germans' defeat of Haller's 2nd Corps, Rydz assumed the responsibility of rallying its remnants. He ordered that some personnel be transferred to the 1st Corps under Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki.* When this proved

* Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki (1867-1937) was educated in Russian military academies, advancing to the lieutenant colonel during service in the Russo-Japanese War. He was severely wounded during engagements with the Germans during the First World War, and was engaged in military operations against the Turks following his recovery. Promoted to lieutenant general in 1917 and given command of the 38th Corps, he allied with the Germans against the Bolsheviks following the October (continued on next page)

impossible, these soldiers were instead assigned subversive duties coordinated with POW forces in the Ukraine. The rest were to be organized into mobile combat detachments under Rydz's command whose function was to harass German and Austro-Hungarian forces.

Regarding Dowbor-Muśnicki's 1st Corps, third region's chief of staff received instructions from Rydz, in which he contemplated three possible resolutions to this dilemma: demobilization of the corps, military engagement with the Germans, or crossing over the Dnieper into Soviet territory. The first alternative was politically impossible. Rydz felt that the second would restore to some degree its military honor and could have some influence on the future political situation, but could also result in heavy sacrifices of Polish military power. Rydz contemplated the third alternative that would not affect the strength of the corps. He nevertheless perceived two problems with its execution: one external (the appearance of a lack of any discernable political reason for withdrawal), and the other internal (the accompanying drop in morale).³⁵ Uncertain of Dowbor-Muśnicki's loyalty, Rydz recommended at the same

Revolution. Following Poland's rebirth, he turned against the Germans, playing an influential role in the Greater Poland Uprising, organizing a Polish militia later incorporated into the national army. Dowbor-Muśnicki retired in 1920, and later voiced opposition to Piłsudski's coup d'état in May 1926.

time to use POW forces under his command to implement his plan of action on the terrain occupied by the 1st Corps. Captain Leopold Lis-Kula (operating under the pseudonym "Kortyny") clandestinely rallied support among the younger officers and military intelligence.³⁶ By late April 1918, the POW had revealed itself on the 1st Corps' terrain, leading to a conference between Dowbor-Muśnicki and the POW field commanders, Captains Lis-Kula and Matuszewski, on May 9.

Colonel Przemysław Bartel de Weydenthal* and Lis-Kula arrested Dowbor-Muśnicki on the evening of May 21, 1918 under Rydz's orders in an attempt by the latter to form a unified command against the Germans. But unity was elusive, as some of the officers were wary of this development. After the German disarmament of 1st Corps, Rydz immediately ordered that as many of its men and as much of its materiel be salvaged.³⁷

Meeting in late April and early May 1918, the POW general staff concluded that the war would soon end, predicting a cessation of hostilities either the following autumn or the spring of 1919. It adopted a resolution

* Przemysław Bartel de Weydenthal, also spelled "Barthel de Weydenthal" (1893-1919) fought in the Riflemen, the Legions, and the Austro-Hungarian army. Following the incident with Dowbor-Muśnicki, he went to the Kuban where he organized Polish military forces in the area. He was killed in action against the Red Army in Odessa.

regarding the assumption of its authority following the collapse of the Central Powers. Upon their defeat, the following course of action was mandated:

1. An increase in military harassment of the Germans,
2. Dispatch of a new group of POW representatives to Russia for the purpose of creating a new Polish army in the east in cooperation with Haller,
3. Establishment of relations with Allied forces operating in Russia.³⁸

The delegation to Russia consisted of Rydz, Michał Sokolnicki, Andrzej Strug, Bolesław Wieniawa-Długoszowski, and Józef Beck.^{39*} Before its departure, Rydz instructed Tadeusz Schätzel to prevent Haller from leaving Kiev under any circumstances until June 20. Although the Germans had defeated Haller at Kaniów (Kaniev) in May, the Polish field commander still had scattered forces at his disposal in the vicinity of Kiev, soldiers which Rydz and Piłsudski's followers wanted as a nucleus for an integrated Polish army in the east. In Ukraine and Byelorussia, this did not work

* Michał Sokolnicki (1880-1967) was active in the PPS since 1903, also serving in the Legions. He went on to a career in diplomatic service for interwar Poland, including posts in Finland, Estonia, and Denmark. From 1936 to 1946, he was Poland's ambassador to Turkey. He died in Ankara.

Andrzej Strug (1871-1937) was a left-wing PPS activist arrested and imprisoned by the Russians for nationalist activities on three occasions. Minister of propaganda in the Daszyński government, he later published writings critical of capitalism.

Józef Beck (1894-1944) served in the Legions during the First World War. He is best known for serving as Poland's foreign minister in the 1930s. Following the September 1939 campaign he fled to Romania, where he died.

out, as the Polish forces were in disarray. Nevertheless Rydz succeeded in forging an agreement between the POW and representatives of various rightist Polish military and civilian groups operating in Russia. In mid-June, a so-called "military commission" was formed, and an agreement was secured with Allied representatives. Rydz also secured a promise of Allied financial support for Polish forces.

The hastily adopted attempts to strengthen the POW's contacts with the Entente was designed to show that the POW and Piłsudski's followers were a formidable force with which to be reckoned not only in Poland itself, but among Poles scattered in Russia. This served as a counterweight to the Polish National Committee in Paris, which was dominated by Endeks.⁴⁰

Since the spring of 1918, Rydz had ordered the mobilization of all Polish military forces in order to take over following the ultimate collapse of the Central Powers. He gave many orders enabling the consolidation of the Piłsudski camp. Legionnaires interned in Łomża received the order to report to serve the Polnische Wehrmacht in order to strengthen and consolidate this apparent Polish power and merge it with the ideology of Piłsudski. The chief commander of the POW likewise appealed to the

interned Legionnaires in Beniaminów to unify the national forces. Among other things, he wrote:

The present situation...provides a new impetus for our struggle which requires us to zealously gather all of our strengths to form an army which reflects our national soul and our highest and most outstanding national attributes.⁴¹

Seeing the impending end of the war, Rydz strove to make sure Piłsudski and his followers assumed leadership in a new Polish state. For example, in a statement he made upon the first anniversary of Piłsudski's incarceration, he criticized the politics of the Central Powers toward the Legionnaires and the formation of the Polish National Army. In this order, Rydz appealed to the Polish people to close ranks against the Germans and the Austro-Hungarians.⁴² At this time, Rydz installed officers from the Legions in the ranks of the POW who had followed his orders and deserted from the Austro-Hungarian army. On his recommendation, combat units were formed to engage in partisan warfare.⁴³

The plan for Polish liberation unfurled by Rydz and the POW High Command stipulated that operations would commence in Galicia and in portions of the Congress Kingdom. The remainder of the Congress Kingdom, as well as Byelorussia and the Ukraine occupied by the Germans, were the domain of irregular forces concerned with destroying bridges and railroad stations, but also to attack German

garrisons. This was designed to create an atmosphere of confusion and disorganization among the Germans as a prelude to increased partisan activity in the near future.

The POW leaders proclaimed a massive recruiting drive among the Polish masses approaching universal conscription with the goal of undermining the German army and making it impossible for it to assist the Austro-Hungarians, who by this time the Poles presumably would have defeated. This plan never materialized because there was not enough time. The quick progression of events necessitated a great deal of dexterity from the structure of the POW. Lacking direction due to the departure of Rydz to Russia, the High Command unfortunately did not live up to such lofty goals. During his absence, the staff instead removed Rydz's proxy, Julian Stachiewicz, replacing him with Stanisław Burhardt-Bukacki, a Legionnaire from the 1st Brigade and former captive at Beniaminów.* Such a personnel change reflected general disorganization within the staff. Bukacki was unfamiliar with all of the central POW's operations, having

* Stanisław Burhardt-Bukacki (1890-1942) had served with the Riflemen and the Legions. Following Polish independence, he was engaged in combat in the Ukraine and served in various military staff positions. Born of Polish exiles in France, he was sent there following France's declaration of war on Germany on September 3, 1939 in a vain attempt to encourage France to fulfill her military obligations to Poland. He was later sent to Sweden to help organize Polish soldiers who had fled there, but eventually lost his command and settled in Edinburgh, where he passed away.

been in Warsaw instead of the POW's headquarters in Cracow at this time. Furthermore, not everyone was willing to cooperate with him.

Stachiewicz managed to make his way to Russia, successfully contact Rydz, and apprise him of these developments. Upon hearing of the personnel changes, Rydz decided to return to Cracow even though it required interrupting his mission to Russia. During his brief stay in Cracow, he reappointed Stachiewicz and quickly departed for Warsaw, as significant events there were rapidly unfolding. From this point on, Rydz's role in Polish politics would irrevocably increase.

NOTES FOR PART I

- ¹ Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe (hereafter cited as CAW)/Wojskowe Biuro Historyczne (hereafter cited as WBH, *Formacje Polskie*, t. 861, unpaginated.
- ² R. Zieliński, "Edward Rydz--marszałek Śmigły," pt. 1, *Więź*, 7-8(1971), 62.
- ³ CAW/WBH, *Formacje Polskie*, t. 861, appendix to Charles Hodges, *Poland's Man Behind the Guns*, dictated personally by Edward Rydz-Śmigły.
- ⁴ CAW, Edward Rydz portfolio, syg. 19782. Account by Colonel Stanisław Barzykowski, 22 April 1937, typewritten manuscript, k. 22., "W mieście Naczelnego Wodza. Godzina wspomnień z płk. Barzykowskim o Brzeżanach," *Naród i Wojsko*, 12(18 March 1937).
- ⁵ W. Lipiński, *Walka zbrojna o niepodległość Polski 1905-1918*, 2nd ed., (Warsaw, 1935), p. 17., Compare M. Kukiel, "Polskie organizacje wojskowe przed wojną," *Polska Zbrojna*, 214(6 August 1924).
- ⁶ E. Oppman, "Naczelnny wódz Edward Rydz-Śmigły," *Twórcy współczesnej Polski*, (Warsaw, 1938), p. 191.
- ⁷ Lipiński, *op.cit.*, p. 21.
- ⁸ Oppman, *op.cit.*, p. 191; CAW/WBH, *Formacje Polskie*, t. 861, typewritten manuscript by Hodges, *op.cit.*
- ⁹ K. Cepnik, *Edward Śmigły-Rydz, Generalny Inspektor Sił Zbrojnych*, (Warsaw, 1936), p. 23.
- ¹⁰ J. Pajewski, *Odbudowa państwa polskiego 1914-1918*, 2nd ed., (Warsaw, 1980), pp. 77-79; M. Sokolnicki, *Rok Czternasty*, (London, 1961), p. 199.
- ¹¹ L. Berbecki, *Pamiętniki*, (Katowice, 1959), pp. 88-90.
- ¹² "Nasz Nowy Wódz," *Polska Zbrojna*, 139(21 May 1935).
- ¹³ S. Pomarański, "Wspomnienia sprzed wielu lat," *Strzelec*, 11(1936).
- ¹⁴ E. Rydz-Śmigły, "Legiony 1914-1918," *Encyklopedia Świat i Życie*, III, (Warsaw, 1935), p. 262.
- ¹⁵ J. Piłsudski, *Pisma Zbiorowe*, (Warsaw, 1937), IV, pp. 27-28.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 41. The order was conveyed in Kowel on 19 November 1915.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

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- ¹⁸ R. Horoszkiewicz, "Jeszcze o legionistach-poetach," *Polska Zbrojna*, 48(18 February 1935).
- ¹⁹ J. Jędrzejewicz, *W służbie idei: Fragmenty pamiętnika i pism*, (London, 1972), p. 208.
- ²⁰ S. Migdał, *Piłsudczyzna w latach pierwszej wojny światowej: Zarys działalności i ideologii*, (Katowice, 1961), p. 131; Archiwum Akt Nowych (hereafter cited as AAN), Z. & J. Moraczewski files, t. 6, copy of typewritten letter from Bolesław Wieniawa-Długoszowski to Aniela Krzyżanowska in Cracow, p. 7.
- ²¹ Statement by Rydz-Śmigły to the Legionary High Command, in K. Zamorski, "Koniec epopei (Przysięga w I pułku Legionów)," *Za kratami więzień i drutami obozów (Wspomnienia i notatki więźniów ideowych z lat 1914-1921)*, 2nd ed., II, (Warsaw, 1931), p. 34.
- ²² *Strzelec*, 2(November/December 1916).
- ²³ Zamorski, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
- ²⁴ AAN, Z. & J. Moraczewski files, t. 5, k. 38, typewritten manuscript.
- ²⁵ Zamorski, *op.cit.*, p. 83.
- ²⁶ CAW/WBH, t. 862, E. Rydz, *O Kryzysie przysięgowym w Legionach 29 sierpnia 1917 r.*, typewritten, unpaginated copy.
- ²⁷ E. Rydz-Śmigły, "Schemat wspomnień z POW," J. Stachiewicz and W. Lipiński eds., *Polska Organizacja Wojskowa*, (Warsaw, 1930), pp. 13-14.
- ²⁸ B. Miedziński, "Wspomnienia," *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 37(1976), p. 73.
- ²⁹ W. Lipiński, "Zarys historyczny Polskiej Organizacji Wojskowej 'POW'," *Polska Organizacja Wojskowa*, p. 52.
- ³⁰ H. Radlińska, "L. Wasilewski w Krakowie," *Niepodległość*, 16(1937).
- ³¹ Miedziński, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
- ³² CAW/WBH, t. 862, copy of typewritten letter dated 6 May 1918 from Rydz to Miedziński.
- ³³ CAW/WBH, t. 862, copy of typewritten letter dated 28 April 1918 from Rydz to Miedziński.
- ³⁴ CAW/WBH, t. 862, copy of typewritten letter dated 7 July 1918 from Rydz to Miedziński.
- ³⁵ CAW/WBH, t. 862, copy of typewritten letter dated 25 May 1918 from Rydz to Schätzel.
- ³⁶ CAW/WBH, t. 862, copy of typewritten letter dated 28 April 1918 from Rydz to Lis-Kula.

³⁷ CAW/WBH, t. 862, copy of typewritten letter dated 30 May 1918 from Rydz to Schätzel.

³⁸ M. Downarowicz, "Przed rozbrojeniem okupantów," *Polska Organizacja Wojskowa*, p. 135.

³⁹ S. Migdał, *Piłsudczyzna w latach pierwszej wojny światowej*, p. 250. Compare W. Pobóg-Malinowski, *Najnowsza historia polityczna Polski 1864-1945*, 1st ed., I, (Paris, 1953), p. 344.

⁴⁰ M. Sokolnicki, "Podróż do Jass w jesieni 1918 r.," *Niepodległość*, 10(1976), p. 36., H. Jabłoński, *Polityka Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej w czasie wojny 1914-1918*, (Warsaw, 1958), pp. 470-471.

⁴¹ CAW/WBH, t. 862, copy of typewritten, undated letter from Rydz-Śmigły to officers interned in Beniaminów concerning the cessation of the boycott of their comrades who had sworn allegiance to the Central Powers and remained with the Legions.

⁴² CAW/WBH, t. 862, CAW/WBH, Vol. 862, copy of typewritten order dated 22 July 1918 from Rydz to Tarłowski and the POW submitted on the first anniversary of the incarceration of Piłsudski by the German government.

⁴³ A. Koc, "POW podczas pierwszej wojny światowej," *Polska Organizacja Wojskowa*, p. 29.

Part II

THE RESURRECTION AND CONSOLIDATION OF THE POLISH STATE

Rydz-Śmigły in the Maelstrom of Polish Politics

A Regency Council dominated by the Endeks and led by Józef Świerzyński* met in Warsaw on October 23, 1918. The war ministry was reserved for Piłsudski who was still incarcerated in Magdeburg. In his absence, Rydz was entrusted with military matters. The prospect of assuming command of the Polnische Wehrmacht was so tempting that he hastened to Warsaw to engage in negotiations for its transfer to Polish command.¹ Bogusław Miedziński recalled:

We prepared his lodgings in a boarding house at 4 Moniuszko Street where I was living at the time. Upon arriving at the train station to meet him, I failed to spot him among the alighting passengers. Suddenly someone whom I did not recognize was tugging at my sleeve and started talking to me. It was Śmigły, who had shaved his head prior to his trip to Kiev and was thus difficult to distinguish...²

Details of Rydz's role in the Świerzyński government are unknown. It is very likely that it would have welcomed a man of Rydz's stature into its ranks. He enjoyed the support of the major political parties, the Legionnaires, the POW, and Polish forces which had previously operated in Byelorussia under General Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki, all of which recognized

* Józef Świerzyński (1868-1948), also spelled "Świeżyński," was an Endek politician who had served as a deputy in all four Russian Dumas.

the POW commander as the chief military authority in the central command of the Polish armed forces now forming in Lublin.

Henryk Jabłoński* argued that the Świerzyński government's invitation to Rydz was an attempt to broaden its political base beyond the Endeks.³ Bogusław Miedziński, an adviser to Rydz at the time, offered a different interpretation of this development in his 1976 memoirs, recounting that

the political deliberations alternated between two paths: Świerzyński and his adherents under the banner of Roman Dmowski together with the left wing of the independence movement, and simultaneous, but secret negotiations between Rydz and the representatives of the Polish National Committee.⁴

Negotiations between Świerzyński and the independence left were inconclusive. The Endeks proposed to the representatives of the independence left that they assume positions as ministers without portfolio. The office of the undersecretary of the Ministry of War did not afford de facto power over the army—without the support of at least some of the ministers. According to Rydz, this could only be guaranteed by representatives of the leftist parties. Miedziński thought that Rydz demonstrated inadequate

* Historian Henryk Jabłoński (1909-2003) served as president of communist Poland (1972-1985).

comprehension of the political issues involved during his discussions with the Endeks. But since he had a military force at his disposal, the POW, he had the potential of emerging as an arbitrator between the parties, and not only of representing the executive of one of the above.

Rydz's status at this time seemed to reveal a dual meaning. Despite the lack of compromise between the Endeks and the left independents, he maintained contact with the Świerzyński government, but decidedly refused cooperation when it issued the decree of October 27, 1918 on military conscription. Rydz probably feared a potential decline in the influence of the POW within the army's ranks. As a counterweight, he announced the mobilization of the POW on November 1 in conjunction with the withdrawal of Austro-Hungarian forces, having received news of the impending collapse of the Habsburg monarchy.

The conflicts within the Świerzyński government compelled Rydz to foresee a different course of political events. Thinking that the independence left would break away and form its own government separate from the Regency Council, he feared that the Council would use the opportunity to use the military forces at its disposal to strengthen its position in the wake of the retreating Austro-Hungarians.

The representatives of the independence left and the POW met in the Warsaw home of Artur Śliwiński,* and the matters of discussion were revealed in the account of one of its participants, Gabriel Dubiel.↓ He recalled that the attendees were primarily "...people from the Congress Kingdom, independence advocates, Socialist Party (PPS) members, soldiers, and Rydz-Śmigły, who had recently been appointed by the Regency Council." Dubiel erred in recounting Rydz's status, as he still held the rank of colonel at the time. Farther along he recalled the following:

Rydz-Śmigły called the meeting to order, declaring the need for the creation of a provisional democratic-republican government in the face of the surrender and withdrawal of the occupational forces, and the necessity of maintaining order at this critical moment when the imminent threat of anarchy lurked, meanwhile appealing to the working class and peasant masses to back the nascent Polish state.⁵

Rydz then stipulated that the government be temporary, pending the arrival of Piłsudski from Magdeburg, with Lublin as its location since a Legionary regiment was reportedly to

* Artur Śliwiński (1877-1953) had presided over the National Central Committee (*Centralny Komitet Narodowy*), an umbrella organization of Polish political parties operating in the former Congress Kingdom advocating independence formed in Warsaw in 1915. Prior to dissolving two years later, the Committee was the primary force behind the creation of the Provisional State Council (*Tymczasowa Rada Stanu*). Śliwiński later briefly served as prime minister of Poland in 1922.

↓ Gabriel Dubiel (1880-1943) was a journalist, historian, and Peasant Party activist. He later served as minister of education in Daszyński's provisional government, and as a deputy in the Sejm (parliament) (1922-1927). Later apprehended by the Germans, he perished in the Auschwitz concentration camp.

be situated there as the Austro-Hungarians withdrew.

Although he dwelled on the necessity of forming an army and defending the new country's frontiers, Rydz remained silent about the socioeconomic goals of the new government, leaving this formidable task to others. Rydz's overall plan was then accepted without any objections.

The assembly of the government in Lublin and its proclamation of Polish independence, as recalled by POW and PPS adherent Marian Wojtek-Malinowski,* largely grew out of POW circles in September 1918. He was apprised of this by Adam Koc, the POW commander in the areas still occupied by the Germans.

Rydz arrived in Lublin on November 3, by which time the Austro-Hungarians had withdrawn. The governor general, Anton Lipscak, had transferred control to representatives of the Regency Council. The POW forces in Lublin were disorganized, compelling Rydz to order a general mobilization. All of the Legionaries and POW forces in the area were ordered to report for duty to specific points no later than 10 p.m. the following day with the goal of undermining the influence of the Regency Council in the vicinity as best as possible.⁶

* Marian Wojtek-Malinowski (1876-1948) Socialist Party member who had served several prison terms for nationalist activities. He later served as a deputy in the Sejm and the Senate, fleeing to Romania in September, 1939, where he was interned. He returned to Poland after the Second World War, living for a time under an assumed name.

Having been apprised of this scheme, the Council's plenipotentiary, Juliusz Zdanowski,* was determined to thwart it while attempting to bring Rydz over to his side. The two men came to an agreement in which Rydz assumed the leadership of Polish military forces, including POW adherents, on the lands formerly occupied by the Austro-Hungarians in exchange for swearing allegiance to the Regency Council and the Świerzyński government. After protracted negotiations an agreement was concluded on the condition that Rydz's appointment be subject to approval by the general staff in Warsaw.

Despite his action, Rydz had still not given up on his aim for a government composed of representatives of the independence left. His newly acquired status had provided him with even greater potential influence. His hopes to organize an army which could assist the POW in disarming the Germans were aborted on November 5 with the sudden appearance of General Tadeusz Rozwadowski,↓ the chief of the general

* Juliusz Zdanowski (1874-1937) was an Endek activist from a prominent landowning family. Serving as a senator following Polish independence, he largely withdrew from public life following Piłsudski's May, 1926 coup d'état.

↓ Tadeusz Rozwadowski (1866-1928) had a distinguished career in the Austro-Hungarian army following academy training. He later served in military operations against the Ukrainians in Lvov, and achieved special recognition as chief of staff for drawing up the plans for the Polish counterattack against the Red Army which decided the outcome of the Polish-Soviet War. During Piłsudski's May, 1926 coup d'état, he remained (continued on next page)

staff, who ordered some changes in personnel. General Bolesław Olszewski was appointed commander of the Lublin district and a meeting was summoned which included his chief of staff, Lieutenant Colonel Stefan Pasławski,* Rydz, Burhardt-Bukacki and Norwid-Neugebauer. Rydz was given the responsibility of creating a brigade composed of former POW forces in the Lublin area, and ordered to advance against the Ukrainians in Hrubieszów.

Rydz's sudden demotion was probably motivated by a lack of trust within the conservative representatives in the government, who would not condone military usurpation of the Regency Council's authority. This sudden reversal in fortune prompted Rydz to meet with representatives of the parties of the independence left that same day in order to express his desire for the immediate appointment of a popular government. He only requested that he be given two days to gather the POW forces scattered throughout the province.

loyal to President Wojciechowski. Having long since resigned from his position as chief of staff, he was nevertheless incarcerated, but released shortly before his death.

* Bolesław Olszewski (1858-1944) had served in the Russian army and with the Riflemen. He held a variety of military posts in the Polish army. Following his retirement from active duty in 1924, he served for one year as a provincial governor.

Stefan Pasławski (1885-1956) served in the Austro-Hungarian army and the Legions. Following Polish independence, he served in the Border Patrol Corps (*Korpus Ochrony Pogranicza*) or KOP, and as governor of both Białystok (1934-1936) and Stanisławów (1936-1939) provinces. During the September, 1939 campaign, he fled into exile, and died in Britain.

On November 6 and 7, the Provisional Government of the Polish People's Republic (*Tymczasowy Rząd Ludowy Republiki Polskiej*) led by Ignacy Daszyński* was proclaimed. This new government bestowed upon Rydz the rank of general and appointed him its minister of war and supreme commander of all Polish military forces pending Piłsudski's anticipated return.⁷

Following a secret session with Miedziński, Rydz placed POW detachments in a state of readiness, positioning them strategically throughout the city. A battalion sent by the Regency Council to oppose the new government was outmaneuvered and accordingly defected to Rydz. During the evening delegates and representatives of the Regency Council were arrested. By morning all of the military forces in the region were secured. A celebration was proclaimed whose participants included the municipal police force, militia forces affiliated with the political parties, and remnants of Dowbor-Muśnicki's army and the Polnische Wehrmacht. Workers also marched in formation singing revolutionary songs. Rydz

* Ignacy Daszyński (1866-1936) was a PPS member and longtime supporter of Piłsudski. Having served in the Austro-Hungarian parliament and Cracow's city council, he served in the Sejm both as vice marshal (1922-1928) and marshal (1928-1930), where he exploited his oratorical skills. He established a university designed specifically for students from a working class background in 1922. He retired from politics in 1931 due to ill health.

made a speech appealing to all Polish soldiers to mobilize, regardless of who their previous masters had been.⁸

Rydz wanted to create an army on the territory formerly occupied by the Austro-Hungarians as rapidly as possible. With this in mind, he ordered the dissolution of the POW and the subordination of its ranks to the war ministry. POW forces operating in western Galicia were thus incorporated directly into the army. However in eastern Galicia, the Ukraine, and lands occupied by the Germans in the Congress Kingdom the structure of the POW remained unchanged. Although made directly subordinate to the general staff of the Polish Army, a special POW bureau was created to deal with its affairs.

By disbanding the POW, Rydz deprived himself of the same important trump card which had determined his political stature. He most likely concluded that he wielded so much influence within the army that he had little fear of losing his position. Even though the Lublin government, now led by Janusz Pajewski, hardly exercised control beyond Lublin itself, Rydz was determined to subordinate the numerous provisional Polish institutions to Lublin's authority, especially the Polish Liquidation Commission (*Polska Komisja Likwidacyjna*) in Cracow. Accordingly Rydz dispatched a

letter to Brigadier General Bolesław Roja,^{*} commander of Polish military forces in Cracow, ordering him to recognize Pajewski's regime.

Roja defied the order, instead proclaiming his loyalty to Piłsudski.⁹ Thus the soldiers upon whom Rydz was depending suddenly were not at his disposal, frustrating his plans to occupy the territory under German control at the time. Nevertheless, in light of the revolution emerging in Germany, the ensuing rapid course of events hastened a decision concerning the disarmament of the remaining German military forces. Fate was to relieve Rydz of responsibility for this task with Piłsudski's unexpected release from Magdeburg on November 10. At about noon on that day, Miedziński received a telephone call from Warsaw apprising him of Piłsudski's impending arrival. Rydz immediately dispatched an emissary to Warsaw. At 1 p.m. on the following day, Miedziński submitted a statement from Rydz to Piłsudski. Much to the emissary's astonishment, Piłsudski received him coldly, even failing to shake his hand. In the course of the ensuing discussion, Piłsudski tersely queried: "Why have you

^{*} Bolesław Roja (1876-1940) had served in the Legions. After serving in various military posts following independence, he was later elected to the Sejm, where he became an opponent of Piłsudski and the Sanacja regime. Active in the Polish underground during the Second World War, he was apprehended by the Germans, and subsequently perished in Sachsenhausen concentration camp.

tied my hands by collaborating with this government in Lublin? You have deprived me of a strong position to negotiate just when I needed it most."¹⁰ He then proceeded to ask a string of questions which reflected suspicions of Rydz's loyalty. Miedziński reassured him that Rydz and the entire POW were ready to submit to Piłsudski's authority. Nevertheless Piłsudski ignored Miedziński's request for orders to convey to Rydz, instead ordering Miedziński to remain in Warsaw and summoning Rydz to the capital.

Piłsudski received Rydz on November 12 and a discussion ensued for over half an hour. Although Rydz limited his report to the mobilization of Polish military forces in territory formerly under Austro-Hungarian occupation, Piłsudski proceeded to assign him broader authority beyond this realm. Rydz left the meeting with the command of the entire Lublin region and orders to proceed there immediately. Miedziński then met with Sosnkowski, assuring him of Rydz's substantial role in maintaining Piłsudski's influence during the commander's internment in Magdeburg and adding that Rydz could have easily been offended being treated with such lack of trust.

Sosnkowski mollified Miedziński's apprehension with the following words:

Śmigły and ambition... There is no one for whom ambition could be so foreign. As for politics, they never seem to have interested him. If they have been imposed upon him recently, I am certain that he would breath a sigh of relief to take leave of them.¹¹

On November 11 Piłsudski presided over a meeting of the Provisional Government at 51 Mokotowski Street at which he demanded its dissolution. This met with fierce opposition from Daszyński and his supporters.¹² Piłsudski then proceeded to take advantage of the situation by asking Rydz where his loyalties lay. When Rydz proclaimed his allegiance to Piłsudski, Daszyński was deprived of support from the military and was forced to back down. The Provisional Government was then abolished and all of its decrees were simultaneously nullified.

Rydz departed for Lublin that same day. Although his participation in the Provisional Government had an influence on his later career, Piłsudski seems to have been impressed primarily with Rydz's military abilities, as Rydz was never given any political role until Piłsudski's death. Rydz's new assignment in Lublin hardly lowered his status within the military establishment. The Lublin region was strategically important during the crucial final months of 1918 in light of the emerging conflict with the Ukrainians over the eastern borderlands.

Upon his return to Lublin, Rydz displayed a semblance of composure although he actually was very ill at ease, having found himself in an awkward situation. The Provisional Government had assigned him the rank of general, a promotion which Piłsudski had never officially recognized. Thus Rydz wore a uniform without insignia and abstained from making reference to any rank when signing orders.¹³ To a military officer such a situation is exceedingly difficult and causes numerous frustrations. As minister of war in the Provisional Government, he had promoted a number of officers, whose status was now uncertain with the Government's demise. Piłsudski soon resolved this dilemma by recognizing Rydz's rank and all of the promotions.* Rydz then immersed himself in the arduous, stressful, and time-consuming task of reorganizing the forces under his command: restoring order, establishing his authority and assigning responsibilities to officers from staff to field level.¹⁴ By December 22, Piłsudski had promoted him commander of the Warsaw region,¹⁵ thus demonstrating not only his faith in Rydz's competence by investing him with the defense of the capital, but also

* Since Generals Roja and Haller had also made similar promotions which were also recognized at this time, Piłsudski's action can hardly be considered unique toward Rydz-Śmigły.

reflecting a restoration of trust following all of the skepticism only a few weeks before.

The Volhynian Campaign and the Struggle for Vilnius

Piłsudski surmised that the western frontier of the new Polish state would be a matter resolved by the victorious Allied powers at the conference in Paris. However, on the eastern frontier, he hoped to secure his political objectives by *fait accompli*, exploiting the political vacuum caused by revolutionary upheaval in Russia. He recognized the necessity of forming a political entity in central Europe capable of withstanding both the Germans and the Russians. The nucleus of such a federation would be Poland, and include the Ukraine, Byelorussia, Lithuania, and possibly other countries on the Baltic. The realization of such a plan encountered many obstacles from the beginning, being incompatible with the national aspirations of the Ukrainians and the Lithuanians. Although various tendencies were prevalent among these peoples, including pro-Soviet and pro-independence movements, pro-Polish inclinations were few and far between. The Byelorussian population had yet to demonstrate a distinct national character, while the widespread poverty which pervaded there encouraged an appeal for the rhetoric of the revolutionaries in Russia. Polish

aspirations, on the other hand, appeared to possess a domineering nature.

Piłsudski's ambitions also clashed with the new Soviet government now in power, which sought to broaden its ideological influence in the disputed lands, while Britain, France, and the United States envisioned them as part of the future Russian state following the victory of the White forces which they were sponsoring at the time.

Conflict had already resumed in the vicinity of Równy and Sarny in December 1918 with the army of Dnieper Ukraine, which had encroached upon Volhynia and Polesie and were advancing toward the Bug River by the end of the month.*

In late January and early February 1919, Rydz assumed command from General Stefan Majewski[↓] of the Polish operational group *Kowel* active in Volhynia and Polesie. Initially numbering 2000, this force soon expanded to 5000 soldiers. It was assigned a defensive line commencing at Hrubieszów through Włodzimierz Wołyński along the Stochód River as far as Maniewiczze.¹⁶ The forces under his command included eight infantry battalions, one artillery unit, and

* This military force was nominally loyal to the Ukrainian National Republic, also known as the Directory, which had established itself in Kiev upon the withdrawal of the German army.

↓ Stefan Majewski (1867-1944) was educated in the Military Technical Academy in Vienna. Following various command posts during the First World War, he served mostly as a staff officer and military educator during the early 1920s before retiring in 1926.

one air squadron. Halting the Ukrainian advance would be difficult, as the front was extensive in light of the available military forces. Rydz proved very much up to the task. Włodzimierz Wołyński and Kowel were occupied by early February, followed by a successful advance to the Stochód. Here he stopped, since additional soldiers and materiel could not be raised. Despite their numerical superiority, the Dnieper Ukrainians likewise were forced to limit their activities in the area since they were also engaged in combat with the Red Army.

Rydz remained in Volhynia until being transferred on Piłsudski's orders in April to a new command in the northeast, where an advance upon Vilnius was anticipated.¹⁷ Poland had been struggling with Lithuanian and Soviet forces since the beginning of 1919. With encouragement from Warsaw, irregular Polish forces had captured Vilnius on January 1, only to be driven out by the Red Army five days later, after which the Provisional Worker-Peasant Lithuanian Soviet Republic was proclaimed. On February 5, Poland concluded an agreement with Germany in Białystok stipulating terms for the withdrawal of German forces from the area followed by immediate Polish occupation, thus setting the stage for conflict between Poland and the Soviet Union.

An operational group under the command of General Stanisław Szeptycki strengthened by units from the army of General Listowski was chosen for the offensive on Vilnius.* The 1st and 2nd Legionary Infantry divisions were created and battalions from the 1st Cavalry Brigade were brought to the front. Mobilization was completed by April 15, and nine cavalry battalions and a mounted artillery platoon under the command of Colonel Władysław Belina-Prażmowski[↓] commenced the march toward Vilnius. Forces under the command of General Józef Lasocki[↑] compiled from troops formerly stationed along the Niemen River and detachments of the 2nd Legionary Infantry division attacked Lida. In Belina's rear, Rydz commanded three battalions, one infantry regiment and two

* Stanisław Szeptycki (1867-1950) attained the rank of colonel in the Austro-Hungarian army. Following service as a commander in the Legions, he assumed leadership of the German-sponsored Polnische Wehrmacht, later serving as Austro-Hungarian governor-general of Lublin, a position from which he later resigned in protest. After service in the Polish-Soviet War, he served as minister of military affairs in 1923. An Endek adversary of Piłsudski, he was dismissed from active service following the coup d'état of May 1926. He headed the Polish Red Cross from 1945 to 1950.

Antoni Listowski (1865-1927) had served in the Russian army and was a veteran of the Russo-Japanese War and the First World War. He left the Russian army in December 1917 and transferred his loyalties to independent Poland. Following service in the Polish-Soviet War, he retired in 1921.

[↓] Władysław Belina-Prażmowski (1888-1938) was a member of the ZWC and the Riflemen. During the First World War, he fought in the Legions, and later served in the Polish army following independence. Retiring from military service in 1929, he entered politics, serving as mayor of Cracow (1931-1933) and governor of Lvov (1933-1937).

[↑] Józef Lasocki (1861-1931) served as a cavalry officer in the Austro-Hungarian army on the eastern front during the First World War. Following service in the Polish-Soviet War, he retired in 1921.

artillery units. Rydz's forces advanced in support of Belina from the vicinity of Papiernia, bypassing Lida to the west and the north.

Within the first day of the operation, a whole host of problems had emerged. Stiff Soviet resistance prevented the seizure of Lida. In the meantime Rydz's infantry was effectively separated from Belina's cavalry. Torrential rains caused delays on muddy highways and supply columns could not keep up with the infantry. With the resulting exhaustion among the ranks, Rydz decided to order a halt on April 17 after his request to do so had been approved by Piłsudski.¹⁸ A dispatch from Piłsudski later that evening ordered Rydz to march instead toward Bastuny that same evening. Rydz decided to delay execution of these instructions, anticipating the hardships of a nighttime advance in addition to a shortage of supplies. On the following day he drew up plans for a longer march in the direction of Bieniakonie. By April 18 Belina's cavalry was approaching the outskirts of Vilnius in preparation for an assault on the city. But despite the many hardships Rydz's soldiers had encountered, they managed to reach the city by the night of April 20-21. Rydz recalled events as follows:

At the end of our strenuous march, night had already fallen as we approached the first house in Vilnius. The soldiers were collapsing from exhaustion. I sat down in

front of a house by the roadside and awaited an officer who was supposed to apprise me of Belina's whereabouts.¹⁹

Rydz was encouraged upon receiving further orders instructing him to attack at sunrise. On the morning of April 21 he led a general attack on the Soviet positions. By the afternoon the Red Army withdrew from the city, falling back toward Mejszagola. In conjunction with the operations on Lida and Vilnius, Polish troops captured Nowogródek and Baranowicze. The focal point of the Red Army's "western front" was gravely imperiled, and accordingly the Soviets were determined to re-occupy Vilnius upon receiving reinforcements. Forseeing the impending Red Army offensive, Piłsudski abandoned plans for a Polish attack. On April 25 command of the 1st Legionary Infantry division and Belina's cavalry was transferred to Rydz. Two days later, Piłsudski left Vilnius for Warsaw. Meanwhile Rydz, whose forces were now referred to as Army Group Vilnius, was put under the overall command of General Szeptycki, under whose tutelage the entire Lithuanian-Byelorussian front had fallen.

Rydz knew that the bulk of the Lithuanian division which had been defeated earlier in Vilnius was now to the north of Mejszagola, while other Lithuanian units previously stationed to the northwest of Vilnius were joining them by way of Jewje, bringing with them the division's general staff. Skirmishes

near Niemenczyn revealed a Lithuanian force numbering no more than 300 soldiers. A smattering of Soviet forces was reportedly to the south of Vilnius in Świątniki and Bujwidze, but substantial infantry and artillery units as well as the Soviet division's general staff reportedly were concentrated around Podbrodzie. For the entire eastern front, intelligence inferred that the main concentration of Soviet infantry and artillery was near Soły. Information in Rydz's possession implied that a Soviet offensive would ensue in the form of a convergence on Vilnius from three directions.

In his article "Battle for Vilnius," Adam Przybylski wrote that it was difficult to pinpoint Rydz's primary objective in his encounter with the Russians, as no relevant documents had survived and the written orders which were issued were either specific to an individual situation or simply given verbally at briefings.²⁰ But it is instructive to try and determine his overall aim by analyzing the organization of his forces in conjunction with these specific commands.

From April 25, Polish units facing the paths of the perceived Red Army onslaughts were pulled back and regrouped in the hope of slowing a Soviet attack. These detachments consisted of an infantry battalion facing Vilnius and Lida with attack potential, and half of an infantry battalion and

a cavalry unit facing the other two directions, where a potential enemy advance was considered less threatening. It is reasonable to assume that about half of Army Group Vilnius's numbers were in the city itself, and conceivably could be used in any direction at any time. If one adds the lack of any orders to fortify the city or withdraw, one can come to the conclusion that Rydz wanted to hold Vilnius by outmaneuvering the enemy. He was hoping to defeat each Soviet onslaught individually and prevent any coordination among the three enemy armies by using a combination of delaying and offensive tactics.

By April 23, the defensive units had already engaged the enemy in Niemenczyn. Red Army maneuvers in this sector indicated an imminent attack on Vilnius, and a counterattack was ordered. By the following day two infantry companies and one artillery unit under Captain Parczyński* had been dispatched and a battalion was diverted by rail to Bezdany on April 27. The combined force fell under the command of Stefan Dąb-Biernacki.↓ Rydz depended on this army to defeat

* Parczyński was later killed in action.

↓ Stefan Dąb-Biernacki (1890-1959) served in the POW and Legions. He was one of the officers interned during the Oath Crisis. Following the Polish-Soviet War, he served in military posts primarily in Vilnius. He fled to France following the outbreak of the Second World War, but was charged with abandoning his troops during the September 1939 campaign. Jailed by the Polish government-in-exile, he was released in 1943 and eventually settled in Britain.

the Soviets in the vicinity of Niemenczyn, then clear the southern bank of the Wilia River and secure this area from Sużany and Podbrodzie. A portion of Dąb-Biernacki's army was then to fall upon Vilnius. At first encountering little opposition, the Poles suddenly met stiffer resistance upon reaching Parczew on the night of April 28 as the Soviets were withdrawing northward. By the following day, intelligence had confirmed that the Red Army was nowhere to be found within a twenty mile radius of Podbrodzie, thus indicating that an attack from the northeast would not materialize.

However other Soviet forces were posing a threat from the east and southeast. Rydz had received word on April 26 and 27 that Soviet infantry and artillery units were organizing in Oszmiania and Kienia. The Red Army attacked on the afternoon of April 28, clearly intending to outflank Vilnius from the south, thus cutting the city's link to Lida. Furthermore, the Red Army group attacking from the northwest simultaneously took the offensive, dislodging Polish cavalry forces in Mejszagóla. Vilnius was clearly in danger, and Rydz counterattacked with eight infantry companies, two cavalry battalions, and 2½ artillery units.²¹ Committing any additional forces proved impossible, since the remainder was necessary for military operations within the city. The engagement of almost all available forces presented a

major risk, since it left their commander without any reserves at a time when the arrival of enemy forces upon Vilnius from Mejszagola was anticipated.

Following receipt of reports of Soviet movement from the east, Rydz ordered a transfer of Polish troops from the defensive units in the southeast on the evening of April 27. On the following evening, Dab-Biernacki was ordered to leave two companies behind in Niemenczyn and to advance with the rest of his forces to Vilnius. Rydz then approached the front commander, General Szeptycki, for assistance. Szeptycki obliged, making one battalion from the 3rd Legionary Infantry Regiment available to Rydz. At daybreak on April 29 still another battalion from the 6th Legionary Infantry Regiment was to advance from Lida and General Szeptycki ordered the dispatch of two companies and an artillery platoon from the vicinity of Ejszyszki to advance through Jaszuny toward Rudomino.

It will be remembered that the 1st Cavalry Regiment in Mejszagola had been defeated on April 28, and Soviet infantry and artillery were rapidly advancing on its coattails. By the following evening frontline Soviet troops had appeared several kilometers northwest of Vilnius. At the time Rydz had five infantry companies at his immediate disposition, a portion of which had been assigned guard duty, one cavalry

battalion and half of an artillery unit, while the bulk of his forces were in the eastern sector. Dąb-Biernacki's troops from Podbrodzie had yet to arrive. Faced with this situation, Rydz ordered his army to dig in within the city, thus allowing him to prepare forces which would be needed for a counterattack. These units had been weakened and were thus hardly a match for the approaching Red Army. During the night the Soviets penetrated Polish defenses, but, not being familiar with the city, they were forced to delay an attack until morning.

Rydz managed to organize some soldiers from the 2nd Battalion of the 6th Legionary Infantry Regiment, which had arrived during the night. Rydz also recalled some units from Niemenczyn, but limited transfers from the eastern sector to only three companies, revealing the importance with which he measured that area of operations.

The Soviet offensive in the early morning of April 30 encountered stiff resistance from the 2nd Battalion of the 6th Legionary Infantry Regiment. At 9:30, Rydz organized an attack force under the command of Captain Parczyński which engaged in a flanking operation from the eastern part of the city against the advancing enemy, while one company from the 2nd Battalion advanced together with four platoons from Nowosiółek.

By April 30, it was clear that the Soviet plan for recapturing Vilnius was failing. Enemy forces in Podbrodzie had been defeated two days earlier and were forced to withdraw to the vicinity of Święciany. The Soviet army in the north was retreating toward Mejszagola and Podbrodzie, while the eastern army remained stationary and inactive. Meanwhile, Rydz's Army Group Vilnius had increased in size by thirteen companies.

Rydz took the opportunity to reorganize his forces on May 1 and distribute them as follows:

- the eastern army: 12 companies, 1½ artillery units, 4 cavalry battalions on the flanks near Rudomino and Bezdany;

- the northeastern army: two companies in the Podbrodzie-Paśniki region;

- the northwestern army, divided into two groups: the right (four companies and an artillery platoon), and the left (four companies and an artillery unit, plus one cavalry battalion on the left flank);

- the western army: which retained its two infantry companies near Nowe Troki (Trakai) and one cavalry battalion in Jewje.

- two infantry companies customarily designated to defend lines of communication;

-a reserve force in Vilnius comprised of sixteen companies, two cavalry battalions, and 2½ artillery units.

Rydz divided up his forces in such a way in order to proceed on the offensive and defeat enemy forces in the northwest and east. On April 30 he ordered the creation of two separate groups to proceed toward Mejszagola, one of which fell under the command of Dąb-Biernacki and consisting of one company from the 5th Legionary Infantry Regiment and one artillery unit. While this force was assigned the capture of the city itself, the second group under Captain Włodzimierz Bochenek, consisting of the 2nd Battalion from the 6th Legionary Infantry Regiment and an artillery platoon, was dispatched toward Podberezie. After gnawing away at Soviet forces near Rzesza, Bochenek overran Pikiliszki on May 1. Dąb-Biernacki reached Mejszagola on the same day, but failed to take the city after some of his soldiers from the Poznań Battalion had panicked. Upon hearing of this reversal, Rydz sent an additional two companies from Vilnius which Dąb-Biernacki dispatched toward Korwie, while he himself rallied the Poznań battalion to march toward Mejszagola, which was finally occupied on the evening of May 2. Meanwhile Bochenek captured Podberezie on the same day, where he subsequently transferred an entire battalion.

Thus the Polish thrust toward the northwest successfully ended. Rydz recalled Dąb-Biernacki together with two of his infantry companies and one artillery platoon back to Vilnius. Units in the vicinity of Mejszagola and Podberezie were ordered to hold and not attempt to advance.

In the meantime the eastern army had remained in place until Rydz ordered a general advance toward a line encompassing Miedniki, Kiena, and Mickuny. The main thrust was to come on the right flank. The Polish forces were thus distributed as follows:

- four companies under the command of Captain Bortnowski
 - the Suwałki Infantry Regiment, which consisted of six companies backed by 2½ artillery units, charged with establishing a front between Miedniki and Kosina Wilka;
 - four companies and one artillery unit under Captain Zborowski which was to advance along the Vilnius-Werbuszki road and capture Kiena Station;
 - four companies and an artillery platoon under Captain Hozer assigned with seizing Skajstery and Mickuny.
- The attack force on the left flank was an irregular cavalry unit in Bezdany which was also providing reconnaissance about the situation to the east and northeast toward the Kowale-Słoboda area.

The Polish offensive commenced on the morning of May 3 under the immediate command of Major Mackiewicz with Rydz present at the front. In the course of the day, Captain Bortnowski and the Suwałki Regiment advanced to a line encompassing Zakieńce, Krzyżówka, and Oszmianka. Meanwhile Zborowski's forces reached a line stretching from Kosina and Kienia Station, while Hozer occupied Skajstery and Mickuny. On the next day, Bortnowski captured Miedniki and the Suwałki Regiment overran Wielka Kosina and Mała Kosina, while the 11th Uhlan Regiment reached the Słoboda-Miedniki area.

The Soviets were also threatened from the south by the 7th Uhlan Regiment operating with the Polish forces around Lida, and were forced to retreat to the vicinity of Soły. This proved fortuitous for the Poles, for it enabled them to transfer units to the northeast, where the Red Army had launched an offensive.

Rydz left only two infantry battalions, 1½ field artillery units, and a platoon of mounted artillery and two cavalry battalions on the eastern front, placing them under the command of Captain Zborowski. The Suwałki Regiment was recalled to Vilnius, and one battalion from the 5th Legionary Infantry Regiment together with one artillery platoon departed for Bezdany on May 5. Zborowski's troops overran

Solý on May 7 and established contact with the 7th Uhlan Regiment near Oszmiana.

Major Dąb-Bieracki's two companies, stationed in Podbrodzie since April 29, had encountered the Soviets on May 1, but were forced to withdraw toward Niemenczyn. By May 4, the Soviet attack was so formidable, that Dąb-Biernacki was forced to pull back to the southern bank of the Wilia River. On May 5, Rydz ordered a counterattack in this field of operations. By nightfall, Dąb-Biernacki's forces had concentrated near Bezdany. A portion of the 5th Legionary Infantry Regiment, previously withdrawn from the northwestern and eastern sectors, was placed under his command, bringing the total to five companies and an artillery platoon. This force was assigned the task of attacking the Soviets from the east on their left flank and rear in the area near Niemenczyn. On their left flank, the Poles used units from the northwestern sector, namely five companies from the 6th Legionary Infantry Regiment backed by artillery. Following some initial setbacks, Polish forces occupied Podbrodzie on May 7. This victory, combined with the retreat of Soviet forces operating in the northeastern sector toward Świąciany allowed Rydz at last to seize the initiative.

Rydz assessed the military situation in a letter dispatched to Piłsudski on May 9.

...The Soviet commanders perceived that the (Polish) attack from the southeast and the north, namely from Mejszagola-Podberezie, was the main Polish thrust converging in Vilnius. The final attack from Dyneberg was undertaken as a coup d'grace, employing the best Soviet forces available for the specific purpose of retaking Vilnius. On the whole the plan was faultless, but it failed in its execution due to its timing. Since the (Soviet) offensive in the north was delayed by one day, this allowed me to defeat each individual Soviet attack by quickly transferring soldiers between each area of operation. This was my deliverance, and I believe that it was the only way to bring about victory. Nevertheless, the disadvantages of this outcome are as follows:

1. the impossibility of taking advantage of this victory, because it was necessary to withdraw military forces so they could be used elsewhere;
2. fatigue among the soldiers caused by excessive marches and combat, and finally
3. the completely whimsical mixture of tactical units, which while not appearing so debilitating according to regulations, nevertheless presented many undesirable problems.

I could not use the cavalry at my disposal in combat due to its state of exhaustion, thus limiting its role to intelligence gathering and flank defense.²²

While Rydz's Army Group Vilnius was fighting over the city Lithuanians claimed as their capital, events elsewhere on the Lithuanian-Byelorussian front were really governed by the situation around this disputed municipality. Upon receiving word on May 8 of the situation around Vilnius, General Szyptecki assigned General Józef Lasocki responsibility for the defensive line encompassing Krewo, Milejków, Zamojdzie, and Słowińsk, while Rydz was allocated similar duties in Smorgoni. As it now stood, the entire Lithuanian-Byelorussian front, with the exception of the left

flank, was located upon a line of German trenches remaining from the First World War.

The Struggle for Dyneburg

Occupation of the old German trenches marked the end of the Polish offensive. The operational group under Rydz's command was the only Polish force to reach the line encompassing Lake Narocz, Hoduciszki, Ignalino, and Łyngmiany after several skirmishes extending to the middle of May. Yet the cessation of hostilities with the Germans on the Lithuanian-Byelorussian front instantly compelled the need to hold a line for a future offensive against the Red Army. Rydz's forces, backing up the 3rd Galician Infantry Division, attacked toward Połocka in mid-August, forcing a Soviet withdrawal across the Dźwina River. Reaching the river by the end of August, a battle ensued lasting four weeks.

After consolidating his forces from the 1st and 3rd Infantry Division and some cavalry units at his disposal, Rydz prepared for a final blow against the Soviets approaching the northern bank of the Dźwina in mid-September. By September 27, Rydz had forced the Red Army to withdraw across the river to a defensive line in the outskirts of [Dyneburg](#). The 3rd Infantry Division plus some reserve forces penetrated the [Dźwina](#) on a line reaching to [Druja](#). By

engaging these forces, Rydz was also covering his western flank, thus hopefully dissuading a Lithuanian claim to Vilnius.

A military accord was reached between Poland and Latvia on December 30 for the purpose of coordinating offensive action against the Red Army. The operation was given the name Winter (*Zima*), and Rydz was given full command over the joint operation. On January 3, 1920, two Polish divisions attacked Dyneburg from the south, while Latvian forces attacked from the north. Climactic conditions made for a difficult operation, with temperatures dropping to -25° C, but the thick ice which characterized the Dźwina riverbed served to alleviate the formidable hindrances presented by the terrain.²³

Rydz ordered that the city be attacked simultaneously from several directions. The initiative lay with the Poles, whose morale had remained high since the previous autumn. But Rydz noted in his later writings some of the problems Operation *Zima* involved with emphasis on the alliance with the Latvians. Recalling his own feelings when fighting on the side of the Central Powers, he felt that the operation may have dampened the sense of national purpose and national consciousness among his soldiers even though they were certain of eventual success.²⁴

The conquest of Dyneburg was a difficult task. The Soviet defenders were formidably equipped with machine guns and artillery. On the afternoon of January 3, the Poles had captured the citadel and the railroad station, after which the battle moved to the central portion of the city. The Soviets withdrew toward the northeast. Units from the 1st Infantry Division attacking in a northerly direction near Wyszki and defeating a Soviet relief force heading toward Dyneburg were the first to link up with the Latvians. Through the course of the month of January Rydz's offensive was marked with increasing success. The final stage of the campaign took place under immensely difficult conditions, with temperatures reaching -30° C and snow presenting a chronic hindrance. Nevertheless the offensive was an operational success. Latvian and Polish troops advanced and held a line encompassing Drissa, Lake Oświeja and the Świniucha River. Furthermore the front against the Soviets was shortened considerably. Poland had gained a territorial link with Latvia, and Lithuania was completely cut off from the Soviet Union. The operation in Dyneburg had thwarted the possibility of the Soviets establishing a Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic.

Piłsudski held Rydz in great esteem, lionizing his contribution to the success in Operation Winter, and awarding him the Virtuti Militari in Dyneburg at the end of January.²⁵

The Polish-Soviet War of 1920

In the southeast, a Polish offensive against the Soviet Union commenced on April 25, 1920. Three armies, the 2nd, 3rd, and the 6th, along with the 9th Infantry Division and the 4th Cavalry Brigade, advanced toward the Dnieper River. Two Ukrainian divisions were also employed, a total force of about 4000 soldiers. Rejecting Soviet peace overtures, Piłsudski had decided to seek a military solution to determine Poland's eastern frontier.

The offensive's objective was Kiev, and Piłsudski was to command personally the 3rd Army, which was to bear the heaviest burden in the operation. Rydz was given command of a unit made up of the 1st Legionary Infantry Division, the 7th Infantry Division, and the 3rd Cavalry Battalion. Rydz was ordered to advance toward Żytomierz (Zhitomir) and occupy the city. Piłsudski was confident of success. By the morning of April 26, the Red Army had withdrawn from Żytomierz, and was abandoning the surrounding terrain without a fight. Thus the first stage of the offensive turned out favorably for the Soviets' adversaries, as the Poles advanced into the void.

But this easy victory forced Piłsudski to come to a decision as to which direction to focus his main thrust: toward Kiev, or toward the south against the Soviet 14th Army. After intelligence indicated that the Red Army would defend Kiev, Piłsudski decided to concentrate on the capture of the city.

The attack on Kiev was to be led by Rydz, to whom Piłsudski thence transferred command of the 3rd Army. The 3rd Army was then reorganized as follows: An army group under the command of Colonel Józef Rybak* was assigned the left flank, while the 1st Infantry Division remained in the vicinity of Żytomierz. The 7th Infantry Division was transferred to the 2nd Army, replacing the 15th Infantry Division, which was moved to the vicinity of Chwastów. Meanwhile the 4th Infantry Division was detached from the 3rd Army, withdrawn, and put in reserve status for use at Piłsudski's discretion.

Rydz was ordered to advance on the Dnieper on a front extending from the mouths of the Prypeć and Krasna Rivers, seize Kiev, and secure the bridges over the Dnieper so the Poles could gain access to the eastern bank of the river.

* Józef Rybak (1882-1953) was a veteran of the Austro-Hungarian army and the Legions, serving on various fronts during the First World War. After serving in various combat and staff positions in the Polish army, he retired in 1930. He remained in occupied Poland during the Second World War, but did not partake in any partisan activities, despite being briefly jailed by the Nazis. After the war, he offered his services to the post-war Polish army, but was rejected due to his age.

Meanwhile the Soviets, exploiting this brief delay in the Polish advance, took the opportunity to evacuate the Ukrainian capital and withdraw across the Dnieper.

Rydz entered Kiev on May 7 and immediately occupied the city's eastern suburbs up to Browary. Except for some skirmishes near the bridges, he encountered little resistance. His soldiers and Ukrainian allies under Symon Petlyura hailed him during ostentatious celebrations designed for maximum propaganda on the following day. After Kiev was secured, Rydz's responsibilities increasingly involved matters affiliated with the city's occupation.

In the meantime, the Red Army concentrated on retrenchment after its disengagement from the Polish army. The defeated 12th Army was reorganized, and the 14th Army was restored to its former strength. Fresh from its victories against Anton Denikin's White forces, Semyon Budenny's 1st Cavalry Army was now transferred to the Polish front. The Soviets' primary goal was to smash Rydz's army, which faced eastward. After breaching the Dnieper at the mouth of the Tetrew River north of Kiev, the Soviet 12th Army was to attack Korosteń. Units from the Soviet 14th Army under Iona Yakir were to advance upon Chwastów and Białacerkiew from the south. But the primary Soviet attack upon the Polish 3rd

Army would come from Budenny's cavalry force, which numbered 38,000.

Budenny's attack commenced toward the end of May, partaking in a pincer movement in which his cavalry managed to advance to Rydz's rear, hampering Polish supply lines and causing the 3rd Army's position to become increasingly perilous. On June 8 and 9, Rydz, determined to defend Kiev, rallied his forces in a defensive "hedgehog" formation, making use of the Dnieper and two smaller rivers as a natural hindrance for the Soviet advance.

But Rydz's intentions were at odds with those of Piłsudski. On June 8, Rydz received a courier bringing orders for him to withdraw to the Tetrew River. He initially refused to carry out instructions while awaiting confirmation from Piłsudski. Piłsudski's courier had been delayed due to bad weather, but a radio transmission on June 10 confirmed his instructions for evacuation. Rydz complied immediately.²⁶ The retreat commenced in the north toward Korosteń, and the 3rd Army was forced to fight its way through an area occupied by the enemy. The Poles were finally able to burst through and hook up with other Polish forces near Borodzianka.

Rydz's withdrawal was executed masterfully. His forces were evacuated with minimal losses and maximal orderliness.

In addition, Budenny attacked the 3rd Army's flank in the vicinity of Koziatyn only after being assured of contact with other Soviet forces on the Ukrainian front, which made him appear indecisive.

Sources and memoirs regarding Rydz's retreat from Kiev paint an unclear picture of events. Piłsudski offers the following account in his work *The Year 1920*:

I had given General Rydz-Śmigły a formal order to abandon Kiev, the possession of which was useless to us in the existing circumstances, and to retire with the mass of his forces along the Kiev-Żytomierz road, so as to strike a blow at Budenny's main force in the vicinity of Żytomierz. At the time it was still conceivable for him to receive support from the left wing of the (Polish) 6th Army and from our cavalry near Koziatyn... Due to circumstances which I have never been able to explain, my message never reached General Rydz-Śmigły, and he proceeded to retreat in a northwesterly direction along the Kiev-Korosteń-Sarny railway through southern Polesie, as if he were deliberately seeking to avoid all contact with Budenny's cavalry.²⁷

This development exposes one of the most outstanding operational mysteries of the year 1920, as recalled in the deep analysis of Tadeusz Kutrzeba,* the 3rd Army's chief of staff, in his work *Wyprawa Kijowska*. After considering several possibilities, Kutrzeba came to the conclusion that

* Tadeusz Kutrzeba (1885-1947) was a veteran of the Austro-Hungarian army, having served on several fronts during the First World War. He went on to serve in various staff positions in the Polish army after Poland became independent. He served with distinction in the September 1939 campaign, was captured by the Germans and spent the duration of the Second World War in captivity. Liberated by American troops, he settled in Great Britain.

Piłsudski's orders never left his headquarters, and the orders which the 3rd Army did receive did not precisely reflect Piłsudski's intentions.²⁸

At the time of the evacuation, Rydz had assumed command of the entire southern front. It must be recognized that he obtained a more valuable defensive posture by retreating at a slower pace in contrast to the more catastrophic impression often presented by accounts of the withdrawal which tend to feature a chronicle of individual isolated military setbacks. His decisions undoubtedly were influenced by the information provided by the individual officers under his command.

In *The Year 1920*, Piłsudski cites the amount of territory forfeited to the enemy from July 8 through July 20. In the north the Poles retreated 295 to 395 kilometers, while in the south the withdrawal involved a distance of 80 to 130 kilometers. Even though the situation in the south did not appear as grave as that in the north, Budenny's army operated with marked tenacity throughout the entire region. Although the primary concentration of his cavalry harassed the rear of the Polish forces in the north, also threatening Polish concentrations along the Bug River, Budenny also managed to deploy substantial forces in the south against Rydz. This compelled Piłsudski to order Rydz to abandon territory on July 25.

At this time, the bulk of Budenny's cavalry was in the Beresteczko-Brody area with aspirations to seize the railway stretching from Lvov to Rawa Ruska. The 12th Army attacked Styr with limited success, while the 14th Army, managing to push back the Polish 6th Army from the vicinity of Zbrucz na Seret, advanced from the southeast toward Lvov. Reinforced with additional cavalry, Rydz counterattacked on July 29. Budenny resisted stubbornly, and a portion of the Polish forces were driven back from Styr na Sudylówka. But after being faced with pressure from his northern and southern flanks, Budenny was forced to abandon Radziwiłłow and Brody on August 2. The five-day battle ended in success for the Poles, but it was not followed up since Piłsudski abruptly aborted the advance because of a substantial situational change on the northern front.²⁹ Nevertheless the battle near Brody served to check Budenny's cavalry, thus diminishing the threat to Lvov. In addition operational contact was established between the 2nd and the 6th Armies, which allowed for the relief of the 18th Infantry Division thus facilitating its transfer to the northern front. Rydz's front had thus been stabilized.

On August 6, Piłsudski ordered a concentration of two armies on the lower Wieprz River for a northerly attack upon the rear of the Soviet forces advancing toward Warsaw.

Halting the Soviet advance was entirely dependent upon the success of this attack. This new area of operations was named the central front, and Piłsudski decided to transfer forces from the southern front to increase its manpower, while the central front's command was bestowed upon Rydz. The weakening of the southern front involved great hardship and posed very serious risks.³⁰

Budenny's cavalry, though also weakened, was nonetheless experienced at offensive operations, and the location of the Soviet southwestern front had raised the possibility of Mikhail Tukhachevsky's army advancing against the rear of the Polish central front.

The abandonment of Lvov was politically impossible. The transfer of troops still engaged in combat from the southern front to the central front also involved great hardship.

Rydz was ordered to transfer two elite units from the southern front to the Wieprz River: the 1st and 3rd Legionary Infantry Divisions. Piłsudski later recalled:

General Rydz-Śmigły carried out his mission in a most able manner. His operations and the maneuvers of his two divisions, the 1st and the 3rd, exhibited one of the most glorious pages in the history of the Polish army.³¹

Rydz withdrew the divisions quickly after obtaining and regaining freedom of movement. The units were thrust toward the north along the Wieprz.

Maneuvers across the Wieprz commenced on the morning of August 16. The 1st Legionary Infantry Division and the 4th

Army, both under Rydz's command, were ordered to reach the road linking Warsaw and Brest-Litovsk by the second day of operations with the assistance of cavalry units under Major Feliks Jaworski. By the first day the 1st Division had advanced 56 kilometers to a line encompassing Rudna, Komarówka, and Brzozowy Kąt. Jaworski's cavalry seized Radzyń, and the 3rd Division reached Zberezę.

By August 17, the combined forces of Rydz-Śmigły and Jaworski had occupied Biała and Międzyrzecze, while the 3rd Division rushed toward Brest-Litovsk. The day marked the turning point on the entire front, as the initiative fell upon the Poles. The Soviet 16th Army abandoned its left flank to the north of Kałuszyn and Siedlce, while the 3rd Army retreated from the Narew River and withdrew to Wyszaków. The Soviet 15th Army also found itself in full retreat toward Przasnysz and Maków. Only the Soviet 4th Army in conjunction with a cavalry corps continued to push westward, engaging some of its forces upon the rear of the Polish 5th Army.

On the following day, the 1st Legionary Infantry Division and Jaworski's cavalry crossed the Bug near Drohiczyn, while the 3rd Division occupied Sławotycze. Meanwhile the 21st Infantry Division overran Mokobody and the 14th Infantry Division took Kałuszyn and Stanisławów, shattering the Soviet 16th Army from its rear. Units of the

1st Army advanced to Jadów, while a division of the 5th Army advanced forward on its right flank after repulsing a Soviet attack.

With the main concentration of Soviet forces now on the opposite side of the Bug, Piłsudski sensed that the decisive battle of the war would occur farther east. He thus decided to reorganize his forces, hastening to Warsaw to convey pertinent instructions on August 18. Piłsudski hoped to pursue the Soviets by cutting off their escape along a line encompassing Brest-Litovsk, Białystok, and Osowiec, thus encircling and destroying them. To this end a new army, the 2nd, was created and placed under Rydz's command. It was composed of units culled from the 3rd Legionary Infantry Division, and the 21st Infantry Division, plus the 1st Lithuanian-Byelorussian Division from the 1st Army and the 41st Infantry Regiment from the 5th Army. Meanwhile the 4th Army was assigned the task of driving the Soviets back to the East Prussian frontier along a line stretching from Kałuszyn to Mazowieck.

On the northern front, Piłsudski assigned the 1st Army the task of moving in a northerly and southeasterly direction, advancing upon a line encompassing Warsaw, Ostrów, and Łomża.³² The 5th Army was to engage a Soviet cavalry corps

under the command of Gaj Dimitrievich Gaj,* as well as the Soviet 4th and 15th Armies. By far the most arduous task fell upon the Polish 2nd and 4th Armies, which Piłsudski had assigned the responsibility of encircling and destroying the enemy.

In a series of isolated skirmishes and battles, the 3rd Legionary Infantry Division occupied Brest-Litovsk on August 19, the 4th Brigade seized Wysokie Litewskie, and the 1st Legionary Infantry Division defeated the Soviets near Sytki. Rydz's forces then occupied Zambrów and Wysokie Mazowieckie, crossing the Narew to the south of Białystok. By August 22, the 1st Legionary Infantry Division had occupied Białystok after a five-hour battle, repelling the Soviet 4th and 15th Armies to the East Prussian frontier. Two days later the 1st Division captured Osowiec, and Grajewo on August 25. Rydz had executed his assignment flawlessly, and the Polish advance ended in success.

A new frontline had surfaced, which ran through Kuźnica to the west of Grodno, through Świsłocz, Białowież, Kamieniec, Litewski, Żabinka to the west of the Bug to Opalin extending to Tyszowce. Such a configuration put the Poles into a position advantageous to offensive action.

* Gaj Dimitrievich Gaj (1887-1937); also known as Gayk Bzhishkhan or Gaj-Khan. He was later executed in Stalin's purges.

On August 26, Piłsudski ordered a reorganization of the 2nd and 4th Armies which was to take place during the first ten days of September.³³ An envelopment was planned involving a rapid advance from the north onto the Soviet rear in the vicinity of Lida in a drive toward the Pripet Marshes. Rydz was entrusted with the main responsibility for the entire operation. An operational group was formed from a portion of the 2nd Army, the 1st Legionary Infantry Division, the 1st Lithuanian-Byelorussian Division, and the 2nd and 4th Cavalry Brigades. Its assignment was to attack Sejny (at that time occupied by the Lithuanians), cross the Niemen near Druskienniki and advanced toward Lida, thus encircling the Soviets who were spread out near the riverbank. The remaining forces from the 2nd Army were to tie down the main Soviet concentration along the existing front. The 4th Army was to advance toward Wołkowysk in order to deceive the enemy into expecting a Polish attack along the front.

After examining Piłsudski's plan, Rydz became convinced that the troops under his command would be the deciding factor of the entire war, not just the battle along the Niemen. In order to achieve the element of surprise which he considered essential to victory, he decided to authorize marches only after dark, increase patrols, and keep communications close to the front at an absolute minimum.

His instructions strongly suggested that the advance would first commence against Lithuania. The divisional and cavalry commanders were not informed that the 2nd Army's attack would be toward Lida instead of Kaunas until September 17.

Rydz released orders from his headquarters the following day. Weighing his options of a successful breach of the Niemen, Rydz came up with two scenarios: a crossing backed by an artillery barrage, or swift seizure of bridges one step in front of the enemy. Since the first option risked Soviet destruction of the bridges, he decided to pursue the second. Units were moved enough distance from the river so that they would not have to advance more than 25 kilometers on the first day of battle. By September 21, these forces were to feign passivity so the forces on the flanks could gain time and give the appearance that the previous day's activities were isolated maneuvers. This would hopefully fool the Soviets into transferring the bulk of their forces elsewhere to their disadvantage, thus allowing the Polish forces on the flanks to fulfill their objectives.

On September 20, the frontline group in the center occupied Nowy Dwór, establishing a line encompassing Bielany, Rogacze, Lipszczany, Kopczany, and Bohotery. After repelling the Soviet 17th Brigade and 6th Riflemen's Division, a Polish alpine division advanced to a line encompassing Staworowo,

Zalesie, Długosielce, and Mieleszkowice. Meanwhile the 3rd Legionary Infantry Division managed to advance to a line encompassing Brzostowica Mała, Brzostowica Wielka, and Gorbacze by the next morning despite stiff enemy resistance.

Re-supplied and ready for combat, the 1st Legionary Infantry Division attacked on the afternoon of September 22, occupying Sejny and breaking the resistance of its Lithuanian defenders, while the 1st Lithuanian-Byelorussian Division avoided confrontation with the Lithuanians by advancing out of Augustów along the road to Serski Las-Fracki, reaching the vicinity of Giby by nightfall. At the same time the 1st Division's 4th Cavalry Brigade advanced in two columns: one through Kodzie upon Kopciowo, and the other to Męciszki via Kalety. The 2nd Cavalry Brigade pushed forward from the vicinity of Czarny Bród and Sucharzeczką late that same afternoon and reached the environs of Kopciowo early the following morning.

Up to this time the northern army group destined for Lida had confined itself strictly to evasive maneuvers thus disguising its true objective.

According to the original plan, the central front was to ford the Niemen and occupy Grodno by September 23, but stubborn Soviet resistance resulted in an inconclusive, two-day battle just north of the city, preventing a Polish

volunteer division from crossing the river. The 21st Alpine Division suffered similar setbacks in its attempt to seize bridges leading into Grodno and cross the river in Komotowo. The 3rd Legionary Infantry Division also encountered heavy pressure throughout the day and was unable to advance. Soldiers on its southern flank were thus partially replaced with units from the 2nd Legionary Infantry Division from the 4th Army on Piłsudski's order. During the course of September 24, the Volunteer Division had failed to penetrate the Soviet fortifications outside of Grodno, as each of its attacks was successfully repelled. Only in the north was the Niemen crossed.

But the next day brought a change of fortune in the center, as Soviet forces along the Niemen defending Grodno started to pull out. While engaged in close combat with the enemy, the 3rd Legionary Infantry Division moved into Zaniemeńsko. By that evening a joint operation of the Volunteer Division and the 21st Alpine Division led to the capture of Grodno. On September 23 the army group on the northern flank was advancing toward Druskienniki, its infantry reaching the rail line connecting Grodno and Vilnius by the next day, while its cavalry approached Raduń. At this point the forces in the north were to pause and allow the central front to catch up.

Rydz's responsibility as commander of the 2nd Army was to determine the best place for fording the river in the least amount of time while incurring losses as minimal as possible. This was an immensely difficult task. It appeared that a division under Lieutenant Colonel Adam Koc,* one of whose infantry brigades had captured a destroyed bridge in Hoża, would be the first to cross the Niemen together with the 2nd Cavalry Brigade. But this force lacked the proper materiel and its artillery was considered ill-trained. Enemy resistance was most fierce where the Alpine Division was operating, but it was equipped with bridging and heavy artillery. By the afternoon of September 25, Rydz had decided that he would rely upon the Alpine Division to bridge the Niemen first. His orders nevertheless made it plain, that all of the divisions on the front take every possible precaution to ensure that the Soviets do not slip away under the cover of night.

After receipt of orders from Piłsudski to resume flanking operations on September 27, Rydz ordered an attack

* Adam Koc (1891-1969) was a POW veteran who had been severely wounded during the First World War. He served in various posts in the Polish army, and was later elected to the Sejm and served as president of the Bank of Poland. In 1937, he was by appointed by Rydz-Śmigły to head the Camp of National Unity (*Obóz Zjednoczenia Narodowego*). He survived an assassination attempt later that year. During the Second World War, he served as a minister in the Polish government-in-exile in London. He emigrated to the United States in 1940.

upon the retreating Soviet 3rd Army near Grodno, while the forces in the center finally crossed the Niemen. However, the bulk of the fighting now took place on the flanks, where the 1st Lithuanian-Byelorussian Division was the first force to engage in battle. The Soviet 3rd Army sustained heavy casualties reaching as high as 50% in some units as it retreated from Grodno. Owing to its numerical superiority, the Soviet 3rd Army had sealed its own fate, abandoning twelve cannons, fifteen machine guns, and other war materiel to the Poles. About 1000 Soviet soldiers were taken prisoner. On September 27 units of the 4th Cavalry Brigade and the 1st Legionary Infantry Division attacked the Soviet 3rd Army's northern flank near Raduń, cutting off its escape route west of Lida and throwing back the 21st Riflemen's Division.

Events had happened so rapidly, that Rydz had lost direct knowledge of the situation on the flanks. By nightfall he managed to contact the Alpine Division and ordered it to pursue the enemy as rapidly as possible toward Lida in conjunction with the 3rd Legionary Infantry Division. Rydz wanted to assemble four infantry divisions and two cavalry brigades in Lida by September 30. Meanwhile the 2nd Legionary Infantry Division would secure bridges and the rail junction while the bulk of this force would be put into reserve status.

Rydz anticipated the battle for Lida to commence on September 28, but only provided this information to his infantry and cavalry officers at the front, as success was dependent on their initiative. Complying with Rydz's earlier orders, the 1st Legionary Infantry Division, attacking from the northeast, entered Lida on September 28. It then turned westward, thus severing the Soviets' escape route from Lebioda to Mołodeczno. Fragments of the Soviet 3rd Army still attempted to fight their way through Lida, but the 1st Division managed to beat back three of these Soviet attacks within the course of the day.

On Piłsudski's instruction, Rydz ordered a pursuit of the Soviets on the afternoon of September 29 even though his soldiers were exhausted. The political and military cost of waiting was far too risky to stay put, since the potential of securing an eastern frontier favorable to Poland depended on swift military action.³⁴

We must be conscious that the fate of the entire war rests upon the speed of this operation, which will have a profound influence on the progress of peace negotiations in Riga.³⁵

Dąb-Biernacki's men in the 1st Legionary Infantry Division, the 2nd and 4th Cavalry Brigades, and 13th Uhlan Regiment were to join the advance toward Lida and Nowogródek assisted by the Alpine Division. Rydz depended on this force to destroy

the Soviet forces falling back upon a line encompassing Lida, Nowogródek, and Mir by severing the rail line connecting Baranowicze, Stołpce, and Mińsk. In addition, the 2nd Army was to seize Mołodeczno and dispatch one division northerly toward Świąciany. The entire operation was coordinated with General Lucjan Żeligowski's plan to capture Vilnius. The 2nd Army was to cover Żeligowski from the east.* On October 5, Rydz declared that the 2nd Army was to move into trenches abandoned by the Germans and the reorganization of reserves in preparation for a potential advance upon Mołodeczno. Yet this plan had to be modified when Piłsudski immediately ordered an advance upon Świąciany. Forced to comply, Rydz ordered the 3rd Legionary Infantry Division to attack between the Red Army and the Lithuanians. Świąciany fell on October 10, and Soviet access to Vilnius was aborted. That same day, the 2nd Army launched an offensive upon Mołodeczno, a vital communications hub. After two days of heavy fighting, the

* Piłsudski was determined to incorporate Vilnius, his native city, into Poland, even though this had the potential of complicating relations with the Entente. Żeligowski, also a native of Vilnius, seemed perfect for the task and his command of the military forces which were to seize the city had been carefully engineered by Piłsudski. For details, see Norman Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972) pp. 236-7. Lucjan Żeligowski (1865-1947) served in the Russian army, fighting in both the Russo-Japanese War and the First World War. He served as a Sejm deputy from 1935 to 1939, and managed to evade capture and go abroad during the September 1939 campaign. From London, he issued a public appeal shortly after the Second World War for Poles to return to their homeland.

city was finally secured, compelling the Soviets to agree to a preliminary peace agreement. A cease fire was to take place at midnight on October 18.

Rydz's forces had already been reorganized four days previously. One portion was relegated to peacetime status, while the other remained on alert in case of a breakdown in negotiations. Rydz accordingly issued a statement thanking the 2nd Army for its distinguished contribution to victory, singling out its field commanders for special merit. An era in Rydz's life as a military commander had ended, but not forever.

NOTES FOR PART II

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- ¹ A. Ajnenkiel, "Z Dziejów Tymczasowego Rządu Ludowego w Lublinie," *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 4(1958), p. 1064.
- ² B. Miedziński, *Wspomniena*, pp. 131-132.
- ³ H. Jabłonski, *Polityka polskiej partii socjalistycznej w czasie wojny 1914-1918*, (Warsaw, 1958), p. 484.
- ⁴ Miedziński, *op. cit.*, p. 132.
- ⁵ F. Honorowski, *Parlament i rząd w Polsce niepodległej. Rok 1918*, (Warsaw, 1938), pp. 535-543. Dubiel's recollection of this event was from 24 December 1936.
- ⁶ T. Nałęcz, *Polska Organizacja Wojskowa 1914-1918*, (Ossolineum, 1984), p. 214.
- ⁷ Centralne Archiwum Komitetu Centralnego Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej (hereafter CA KC PZPR), Instytucje Tymczasowego Rządu Ludowego w Lublinie 1918-1919, syg. 129/1, k. 1, copy of communication dated 7 November 1918.
- ⁸ CA KC PZPR, Instytucje Tymczasowego Rządu Ludowego w Lublinie 1918-1919, syg. 129/1, k. 18, leaflet.
- ⁹ R. Roja, *Legends i Fakty*, (Warsaw, 1932), p. 106.
- ¹⁰ Miedziński, *op. cit.*, p. 146.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 165.
- ¹² J. Piłsudski, "Poprawki historyczne: Uwagi do pamiętników Daszyńskiego," *Pisma zbiorowe*, IX, p. 312.
- ¹³ Miedziński, *op. cit.*, p. 174.
- ¹⁴ CA KC PZPR, Instytucje Tymczasowego Rządu Ludowego w Lublinie 1918-1919, syg. 129/3, k. 17, original typewritten document.
- ¹⁵ "Nasy nowy Wódz," *Polska Zbrojna*, 139(21 May 1935).
- ¹⁶ A. Przybylski, *Wojna polska 1918-1921*, (Warsaw, 1930), pp. 54-55.
- ¹⁷ CAW, Naczelne Dowództwo Wojska Polskiego, Oddz. 5, Rozkaz Sztabu Generalnego nr. 79, t. 32, pp. 122-129, 196. Rydz was to relay command of the operational group to General Babiński on 3 April 1919.
- ¹⁸ A. Przybylski, *Ofensywa na Wilno w kwietniu 1919 roku*, (Warsaw: Bellona, 1929), p. 98.
- ¹⁹ E. Rydz-Śmigły, "Wielkanoc 1919 roku," *Naród i Wojsko*, 8(10 April 1936).

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- ²⁰ A. Przybylski, *Bój obronny o Wilno*, (Warsaw, 1929), p. 6.
- ²¹ The Suwałki Regiment, composed of two battalions (five companies) arrived in Vilnius on April 27.
- ²² Cited in A. Przybylski, *Bój obronny o Wilno*, pp. 23-24.
- ²³ W. Pobóg-Malinowski, *Najnowsza historia polityczna Polski 1864-1945*, 1st ed., II, pt. 1, p. 277.
- ²⁴ E. Rydz-Śmigły, *Byście o sile nie zapomnieli: Rozkazy, artykuły, mowy, 1904-1936*, (Lvov, 1936), p. 96.
- ²⁵ W. Pobóg-Malinowski, *op.cit*, II, pt. 1, p. 228.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 262.
- ²⁷ J. Piłsudski, *Year 1920 and its Climax: Battle of Warsaw during the Polish-Soviet War, 1919-1920*, (New York: Piłsudski Institute of America, 1972), p. 82.
- ²⁸ T. Kutzeba, *Wyprawa Kijowska*, (Warsaw, 1937), pp. 283-286.
- ²⁹ The Red Army had seized Brest-Litovsk on August 1, and the Polish forces defending the city had retreated to the west bank of the Bug River. The Red Army then advanced to the vicinity of Łomża. Although Piłsudski came up with a plan to counterattack near Brest-Litovsk, it was never implemented.
- ³⁰ Piłsudski was unable to transfer any forces from the northern front, as they were necessary for the defense of Warsaw.
- ³¹ Piłsudski, *op. cit.*, p. 150.
- ³² The 1st Army had been reduced to two infantry divisions, the 8th and the 10th.
- ³³ T. Kutrzeba, *Bitwa nad Niemnem*, (Warsaw, 1926), p. 31.
- ³⁴ In the north Piłsudski sought to secure the rail line connecting Łuniniec, Baraowicze, Lida, and Vilnius, obtain a crossing on the upper Niemen approaching Mińsk so it could serve as a rallying point for the Red Army, and secure a corridor to Latvia.
- ³⁵ E. Rydz-Śmigły, *Byście o sile nie zapomnieli*, p. 115.

Part III

RYDZ-ŚMIGŁY, THE ARMY INSPECTOR 1921-1935

Commander of the 2nd Army

Upon the conclusion of the war with the Soviet Union and the signature of the Treaty of Riga on March 18, 1921, the demobilization of the Polish army commenced. The transition to a peacetime army involved the elimination of dated operational and tactical commands and the creation of new ones. In compliance with a decree by Piłsudski on September 1, 1920, the Frontal Command and the leadership of the 1st and 5th Armies were separated. Command of the remaining forces became directly subordinate to the Commander-in-Chief.¹ Demobilization proceeded very slowly for several reasons: a territorial dispute with Lithuania, instability in eastern Galicia, political tension in Upper Silesia, and the Third Silesian Insurrection.

The 2nd Army under the command of Lieutenant General Rydz-Śmigły was the last to be relieved of active status, finally reverting to the authority of the 1st Army Inspectorate on November 15, 1922.² The longevity of the 2nd Army's active status was governed by political considerations. Situated in the northeastern part of the country, it served as insurance against a potential

Lithuanian invasion in the vicinity of Vilnius and could also be used against the USSR in case the Soviets chose to take advantage of the ongoing Polish-Lithuanian border dispute. Piłsudski entrusted Lieutenant General Edward Rydz-Śmigły with the 2nd army not only because Rydz had commanded it in the war, but also because Piłsudski viewed Rydz as a trustworthy and faithful executor of his decisions. Rydz had distinguished himself in the war with the Soviet Union as a first class military leader capable of making spontaneous decisions under the most difficult circumstances. Such qualities compelled Piłsudski to entrust Rydz with the primary operational Polish army at the time. On April 21, 1921, Rydz received detailed orders spelling out what action to pursue in case negotiations between Poland and Lithuania ongoing in Brussels were to break down. The plan called for a "swift reaction to any potential Lithuanian movement with the goal of presenting the European powers with a fait accompli following a Polish victory." ³

As a result of the recent reorganization of Polish forces, Rydz's authority had widened considerably. Additional forces under General Lucjan Żeligowski were also clandestinely placed under Rydz's command. In an edict announced on August 5, Sosnkowski, now serving as minister

of defense, expanded Rydz's authority over the entire Białystok military district, thus giving Rydz wide latitude for the suppression of potential irredentism within Poland's borders.⁴

Cessation of hostilities with the Soviet Union brought many administrative and morale problems to light which Rydz was forced to confront. A report dated November 17 which he submitted to Sosnkowski detailed shortages of equipment and uniforms, as well as substandard living conditions in deteriorating barracks and peasant huts. Rydz warned of possible subversion within the ranks.⁵ In an appeal for an increase in provisions and better hygiene which he deemed vital for the upkeep of a large army numbering 1184 officers and 33,345 enlisted men, he emphasized that "the army is representative of the populace, and the soldier in the field is wary of how much worth the people place in its well-being."⁶ Rydz also brought attention to the insufficient numbers and provisioning of customs officers and border guards and resulting morale problems. Soldiers designated for customs enforcement were themselves often engaged in contraband. Rydz recommended the situation be remedied through increased salaries and educational opportunities, including political indoctrination. He felt

that the situation was grave enough to require Piłsudski's direct intervention.⁷

Unfortunately, Rydz's troops were stationed in areas inimical to such reforms. Tension between soldiers and the local population was ubiquitous, and difficulties in maintaining discipline created a situation in which effective training and execution of military exercises were problematic. Rydz tried to counter this by transferring some units to larger cities where living conditions were considerably better. By doing this he was able to muster his limited resources to provide training for the remaining troops at a level he found more acceptable, thus keeping them occupied and reducing complaints from the local populace of soldiers engaging in theft.⁸

The transfer of command from Grodno to Białystok required major organizational and administrative efforts on Rydz's part⁹, something for which the defense ministry was ill-prepared and thus provided little assistance. By the end of 1921, Rydz had gained supreme command of the entire 3rd Military District.¹⁰ This brought with it new responsibilities, including military readiness, supplies, training, and management of turnover within the ranks. The scope of Rydz's authority was enormous. Besides the 3rd Military District, his command extended over forces in

Bieniankonie, the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Infantry Divisions and the 2nd and 3rd Cavalry Brigades. Together with the responsibility of securing the area near Vilnius, he was ordered to oversee the demobilization of the 2nd Army. This was an immensely arduous task, demanding substantial discretion and major decisions for which he was ultimately accountable. The first order of business was the release of personnel essential for the good of the nation in civilian life such as teachers and technical specialists, as well as some of their students in an effort to revert the 2nd Army to peacetime status. This process was hardly definitive, and sometimes involved Rydz's personal requests to the defense ministry for the transfer of younger enlisted men from the interior of the country to maintain personnel quotas.¹¹ In fulfilling this task, Rydz distinguished himself outstandingly. Thanks to his military and organizational skills, the 2nd Army reverted to peacetime status in compliance with defense ministry directives.

Rydz-Śmigły's Work as Army Inspector

On November 15, 1922, the position of 2nd Army commander was re-designated as Army Inspectorate Number One, and Rydz assumed one of five such commands throughout

the country.¹² His authority as Army Inspector included the forces under his direct command as well as the 9th Military Region headquartered in Brest-Litovsk. The military decree of January 7, 1921 provided the regional Army Inspector blanket authority over all branches of the armed forces within his district regardless of specialty.¹³

Piłsudski's consideration of Rydz as one of his best generals dated from Legionary days and the war against the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the organizational efforts which Rydz demonstrated in his leadership of the 2nd Army after the cessation of hostilities compelled Piłsudski to entrust Rydz with one of the most important military functions. Accordingly, Piłsudski decided that Rydz's responsibilities should be restricted to the military, because this was the field in which Rydz excelled most capably. Rydz's merits as a soldier were traits Piłsudski could readily appreciate. When Piłsudski prepared the official guidelines for generals on active duty in December, 1922, he bestowed maximum recognition upon Rydz, emphasizing his

strong character as a soldier: astute, strong-willed, and self-composed. Because of this, he not once let me down. Any instructions which I conveyed to him as an army commander he energetically and resolutely executed, thus gaining the trust of those under his command, even when I was assigning him some of the most difficult tasks during times of conflict.

In regard to his character and will he stands highest among Polish generals. He is fair, self-composed and judicious, fastidiously seeking people for his staff who work well together. He applies a healthy dose of logic and persistent energy to fulfilling his duties. Bold plans fail to impede him, and he is not intimidated in the face of adversity. He rapidly pervades a deep moral influence upon those under his command, a prototypic soldier possessing strong self-discipline whose labors are strictly geared toward his objective. I heartily recommend his leadership skills as an example for every military commander. Although he is a contender for Inspector General (Commander-in-Chief), I have reservations about his ability to fulfill that position's duties because of two fallibilities: 1) Under present circumstances, I do not think that he could overcome the peevish and presumptuous ambitions of some of my generals, and 2) I am not convinced he possesses the abilities crucial to the Inspector General (Commander-in-Chief) for adequately assessing and countering corruption within the military, much less that of the entire country, as well as correctly judging the adverse motives of a potential enemy.¹⁴

Rydz received the highest assessment among ninety-five generals. To a certain extent, the appraisal of Rydz was better than those Piłsudski penned for Sosnkowski and Władysław Sikorski.*¹⁵ From the entire report one may surmise that Piłsudski took notice of the quality of the people who surrounded him. His appraisals, which he

* Władysław Sikorski (1881-1943) served in the Legions during the First World War, and later played a prominent role in reversing the Soviet onslaught near Warsaw in the Polish-Soviet War. He served as prime minister for five months from 1922 to 1923. He was assigned command of the 6th Military District in Lvov in 1925. At the time of Piłsudski's coup d'état, he remained neutral, but he increasingly became identified with opposition to the Sanacja, especially after being removed from his post in 1928. He served as prime minister of the Polish government-in-exile during the Second World War, and died in an air accident in 1943.

conveyed to the country's president or the armed forces' general staff, were to be beneficial for the promotion of capable people to high positions in the army, especially in times of war. It is significant that Rydz technically surpassed Sosnkowski within the military hierarchy following the war with the Soviet Union, even though Sosnkowski's stature from Legionary days gave him de facto second-in-command to Piłsudski.

Following the transition of the 2nd Army to peacetime status, Rydz was admitted into the Order of the Virtuti Militari, a prestigious club headed by Piłsudski. From the Legionnaires, only Rydz and Bolesław Roja had received this military medal awarded for courage in battle. The club was responsible for bestowing honors upon soldiers who performed heroic deeds during the struggle for Polish independence.

As an army inspector, Rydz was a member of the Supreme War Council (*Rada Wojenna*), which was chaired and vice chaired by the President of the Republic and defense minister, respectively. Except for the deputy defense minister, the remaining members of the council were military officers: a general who would serve as Commander-in-Chief in time of war, the chief of the general staff and two of his deputies, five generals who would command the

army in time of war and serve as inspectors during peacetime, or three generals specially appointed annually by the defense minister.¹⁶ The Council was to serve in an advisory capacity for the creation of a military code of justice, procurement of armaments and supplies, and organizational matters. A Special War Council (*Ścisła Rada Wojenna*) operated within the Supreme Council. Headed by the Commander-in-Chief, this body was composed of the chief of the general staff and his deputy (who lacked voting privileges), and the generals serving as army inspectors. This body was responsible for battle plans, armaments and supplies, and military organization. In matters of preparedness, the Special War Council was subordinate to the minister of war. Its functions also included designation of all officers down to the rank of colonel. Rydz's membership in this body elevated him to an exceptionally high standing within the Polish military.

Few documents have survived from the period during which Rydz served as 1st Army Inspector in the Vilnius region, and nothing has been written of his military activities immediately following the war against the Soviets. This is undoubtedly because this period was characterized by typical daily military routines. A report authored by Rydz from 1925 in the Central Military Archive

reveals that he was burdened with many responsibilities as an army inspector:

I must overlook combat preparation and training down to specifically defined levels. In the division of inspection duties, I believe that the responsibilities of an inspector need to be delineated between overseeing inspection of enlisted men, corps commanders, and divisional infantry leaders...¹⁷

Rydz felt that his responsibilities did not reach below the battalion level. He rationalized that this maximized his effectiveness, and that inspection duties related to materiel were of little value. His reports throughout the 1920s reveal varied responsibilities. He partook in training maneuvers, often commanding them personally, and oversaw exercises on a larger scale, including monitoring staff activities. The reports were reliable and straightforward, providing a valuable source for his military colleagues about the army's level of training and its deficiencies. His assessment of the army's leadership was decidedly pessimistic, compelling him to write that he "noticed a lack of realism and presence of costly delays in staff decision making."¹⁸

Rydz felt that levels of officer training needed to go beyond their designated ranks. He would often write assessments of specific commanders,¹⁹ such as the following concerning Władysław Bończa-Uzdowski dated May 30, 1931:

...He shows great eagerness for combat, but makes quick decisions without thinking them over...He can be relied upon in a limited, specific battlefield situation, but demonstrates little interest in his overall duties in guarding his rear and making sure his armies are supplied...

Rydz described General Antoni Szylling* as even-minded, rational and resolute yet uncompromising. In contrast, Bolesław Wieniawa-Długoszowski received high praise, as Rydz emphasized his "excellent military instinct. (He is) very enterprising and self-motivated, and very accurately assesses combat situations, thinking coherently and resolutely accomplishing his objectives." Colonel Emil Przedrzymirski[↓] was evaluated as a leader who works diligently to achieve his objectives, but in doing so reflects a tendency toward paying attention to far too much detail.

It should be emphasized that the characteristics of all of these officers, no matter how brief, are objective and reflect an accurate appraisal of their behavior during

* Antoni Szylling (1884-1971) was a veteran of the First World War and the Polish-Soviet War, later serving in various military posts in the Polish army. During the September 1939 campaign, he commanded Army Cracow in southwestern Poland and facilitated an orderly retreat. Captured, he spent the duration of the Second World War in German prisoner of war camps. He eventually settled in Canada.

[↓] Emil Karol Przedrzymirski de Krukowicz (1886-1957) served in the First World War and the Polish-Soviet War. He held a variety of military posts in Poland after independence and ably commanded Army Modlin during the September 1939 campaign. He spent the duration of the Second World War in German prisoner of war camps, and eventually settled in Canada.

training. Their deportment during the campaign of September 1939 confirmed the accuracy of Rydz's assessments.

After observing various large units in action, Rydz's appraisal of the officer corps was generally negative. He detected a lack of any sense of reality and initiative. "The officer corps has no backbone, a situation exacerbated by inadequate salaries, which cannot really be solved with additional training..."²⁰ Rydz called attention to second lieutenants starting their military service in debt. This in turn "discouraged enthusiasm, which is the fundamental basis of military service..."²¹

While inspecting various units, Rydz made valuable observations in the way their staffs functioned. His reports irrefutably indicated a lack of coordination and cooperation between commander, staff, and quartermaster. "...Staffs do not encourage efficiency and timely and realistic efforts to ameliorate military life. There is a great deal of wantonness, carelessness, and poor planning..."²² Their most outstanding fault was their tendency to concentrate exclusively on operational problems while they instead should have been coordinating all of the ingredients necessary for the well-being of the soldiers in the field in a potential combat situation. He realized

that staffs should have assumed a greater role in overseeing the quartermaster and logistical services, which required that they be treated equally. He also recommended that the quartermaster be assigned greater responsibilities, which would encourage better training for the officers assuming this position.

Rydz's reports relegated much attention to the rank and file. According to him, new recruits who annually swelled the army's numbers provided a valuable source for morale. They learned quickly and were eager to perform their duties. He brought attention to what he considered to be the occasionally reprehensible training which buck privates received. Officers often gave orders using complicated language and terminology which soldiers were unable to comprehend.²³ Rydz also noted that the entire educational system within the army was defective, feeling that instruction of buck privates entailed too little hands-on demonstration, and that lectures needed a greater emphasis on "...tying new information to concepts with which the trainees were already familiar..."²⁴

Rydz frequently apprised his superiors that the army's level of efficiency and potential competence in combat was disappointing. Upon inspecting the 17th Infantry Division on October 25 and 26, 1927 while in training, he observed

that its soldiers were unable to engage in proper defensive positions or any organized retreat, noting that they were characterized by

...nonsensical conceptions. It is evident that they are influenced by some kind of routine behavior completely lacking any sense of reality. Commanding officers' directions are filled with uncertainty and equivocation...²⁵

Insufficient training was hardly limited to the 17th Infantry Division. Barely a year earlier, Rydz conveyed a similar assessment of the 1st Legionary Infantry Division,²⁶ citing superficial analysis of prevailing conditions, nebulous orders and a general vacillation among the higher ranks in issuing them, and a lack of coordination and comprehension of tactical criteria.

Analysis of documents in the Central Military Archive strongly implies that Rydz was well suited for his position as inspector. Despite his occasionally negative appraisals, he always offered proposals for improvement of the army's combat readiness, leadership, training, and so on. In comparing Rydz with other inspectors, it is worth citing various passages from the 1928 report of the head of the Bureau of Inspection of the General Inspectorate of the

Armed Forces. Colonel Janusz Gąsiorowski* felt that inspectors too often dealt with everyday, routine military matters, thus encroaching upon the responsibilities of the defense ministry and individual corps commanders. Reports submitted to the General Inspectorate (*General Inspektorat Sił Zbrojnych* or GISZ) were more apt for receipt by unit, divisional, and corps commanders.²⁷ In light of this Rydz's accomplishments look superior. The head of the General Inspectorate singled out Rydz, Sosnkowski, and Romer for their valuable contributions toward improving military leadership and coordination of training between divisions. Rydz also stood out for his emphasis on combat situations and his input and advice for officers during training exercises.

By reliably fulfilling his duty as an army inspector from 1921 to 1935, Rydz revealed his high levels of military knowledge. He overcame many of his shortcomings in the art of warfare. Never having had any formal military education, he obtained a high level of experience in direction and leadership. At the cessation of

* Janusz Tadeusz Gąsiorowski (1889-1949) served in the Austro-Hungarian army and the POW during the First World War. He later served in the Polish-Soviet War and a variety of military posts thereafter. Taken prisoner within a few days of the German invasion in 1939, he spent the Second World War in German prisoner of war camps, and settled in France upon his release.

hostilities with the Soviet Union, Piłsudski had already determined that Rydz's capabilities as a leader were superior. Rydz's subsequent conscientious work as an army inspector significantly elevated his stature in Piłsudski's eyes. In military matters, Rydz stood out as an authority. In the army's hierarchy, he had even surpassed Sosnkowski, who fell out of favor following Piłsudski's coup d'etat in May 1926.

***Rydz-Śmigły's Conceptions
on National Defense***

Rydz-Śmigły never wrote any memoirs, nor did he keep a diary or author any other literature which clearly revealed his views on the issue of national defense. Unlike Generals Sikorski and Żeligowski or Colonel Kutrzeba, Rydz did not publish any scholarship concerning the war with the Soviet Union. Designed for observation by young members of the Riflemen's Association, his account of the Legionary period from 1918 to 1921 bears a propagandistic flavor devoid of much scholarly analysis. His most important writings were compiled and published by Lieutenant Colonel

Roman Umiastowski* under the title *Do Not Forget the Might* (*Byćcie o siłę nie zapomnieli*).²⁸

Commenting on the next military conflict, Rydz surmised that it would be total war "in which all citizens, whether they find themselves at the front, within the country, whether they wear a uniform and civilian clothing, will need to be involved in the war effort..."²⁹ It is worth emphasizing that this point of view in reference to a future war, heavily influenced by events during the First World War and the war against the Soviet Union as well as writings by German military tacticians, was already very evident in a 1921 letter which he wrote to the Riflemen's Association. According to Rydz, the level of organization of Polish society would be crucial in bringing about victory in such a conflict.³⁰ The role of the military would hardly be less important. Professional soldiers represented a core group, demonstrating ongoing service indispensable to the army's efficacy, providing a physical as well as a psychological example. He emphasized that the army was an example for the nation since it was composed of its citizens. The army's image was conditioned by the

* Military historian Roman Umiastowski (1893-1982) served in a variety of military posts, mostly administrative, in interwar Poland, and also served as a lecturer in a military academy. During the September 1939 campaign, he was on Rydz's staff as chief of propaganda. He died in London.

character of Polish society, whose numbers swelled its ranks in time of conflict.

His commentary on the integration of military duties is also valuable. In an article entitled "The Role and Obligations of the Army in Resurrected Poland" (*Rola i zasługi wojska w Polsce Odrodzonej*) he stressed that the army had "quickly shed the shackles of serving other countries, which, having lasted as long as it had, remained vivid. It was the first institution to commence the molding of a new type of Pole, even a new Polish school of thought..."³¹ He emphasized that the first sense of Polish consciousness commenced in the army. Even if certain politicians attempted to exploit the army for their own partisan interests, it still remained the focal point toward which the most nationalistic traits of society congregated. Towering over the nation, the army provided it with an aura of national identity and civic virtues. Yet the expression of the patriotic soul was not fulfilled through the propagation of militarism. According to Rydz, the very soul of the Polish military was heavily influenced by Piłsudski's Legions. During the First World War they "...captured the esteem of the Polish soldier, calling into being the fait accompli of an independent Polish state..."³² Rydz strongly accentuated the role of Piłsudski in the

formation of a national movement for independence throughout the article.

Rydz devoted a great deal of attention to the obligations of reserve officers. He came to the conclusion that Poland's frontiers were awkward in comparison to most European states, and its juxtaposition to two major powers exacerbated this defensive dilemma. In light of this, he felt the country should prepare for war by exploiting every means at her disposal. Any single component of national defense should not be set aside so that the most formidable army possible could be mobilized in case of conflict. According to Rydz, the most vital element of a fighting army was the pool of reserve officers, who made up a substantial portion of the officer corps and was capable of having a heavy influence on military morale and technical competence. Thus every possible effort needed to be undertaken to ensure that reserve officers were properly schooled. This was necessary, because methods of warfare were changing, as were their application, thus complicating military techniques. Military strength was becoming more of a determining factor of war. In light of this, training which for financial reasons seldom affected reserve officers was insufficient. Continual cooperation between the regular army and the reserve officers had to be

maintained. Rydz stipulated that participation of reserve officers be mandatory in all major training exercises to the point that they should be given leave from their customary duties, citing similar activity in the German army. Rydz wondered why Poles were seemingly unable to incite much enthusiasm for the cause of the defense of the nation. According to him, education of the reserve officers was indispensable for the army to function properly. After completing his training, he felt that a reserve officer should serve as a teacher where he customarily fulfills his duties. In this respect he could assist the regular army to prepare the entire nation for war. According to Rydz, the primary duties of a reserve officer were to gain technical abilities and to proliferate this military knowledge as best he could throughout Polish society, and to propagate ideas and needs for national defense and rally the nation behind them.

In preparing the country's defense he envisioned an important role for the Union of Polish Legionnaires (*Związek Legionistów*), an idea he propagated at its ninth convention held in Radom on August 10, 1930.³³ Rydz prodded the participating veterans now in civilian life to familiarize themselves with the duties of good citizenship and use their potential influence for the good of the

nation, stressing that the struggle over the transformation of Polish society was prevalent throughout the country which could only be resolved with its conversion to Piłsudski's thinking.

Rydz also became a voice in the matter of Polish operational doctrine.³⁴ Fulfilling a request from the publisher Bellona, Rydz published an article. According to him, doctrine customarily is tied to certain conditions and methods of conducting battles or war. It is the most difficult synthesis of activities for any leader (not necessarily formulated by him) or the result of accumulated experiences acquired during wartime. In determining outcomes of experiences during wartime or peacetime, Rydz maintained that doctrine is dependent upon certain strengths and conditions. It finds its meaning in compulsory rules, instructions, and principles of education. The state of necessity for increased military education with a practical and orderly foundation is governed by easing the overall workload, thus enabling mutual cooperation and understanding. Rydz also pointed out that defects in doctrine were influenced by faults in the thoughts and spirit of the populace. Getting accustomed to routine leads to indifference toward overcoming troubling times. As the years pass, thoughts

harden and resist new ideas, thus encouraging an ossification of doctrine. To guard against this, Rydz maintained that a system for the education of an officer appealed to his logical train of thought, stimulated elasticity of ideas, independence, and critical thinking concurrent alongside a large consciousness of reality.

Following these general ideas, Rydz made several suggestions on how Polish military doctrine should differ from the French. According to him Polish tactics and grand strategy should emphasize mobility, initiative, and flexibility geared toward offensive maneuvers against the enemy's flanks as opposed to France's dependence on fixed fortifications and direct frontal advances against the enemy's primary route of attack. In one of his longer articles (seven pages) entitled "The Cavalry in Defense" (*Kawaleria w osłonie*), he hypothesized that the use of cavalry for defensive purposes would allow the Commander-in-Chief to gain necessary time to coordinate mobilization and concentration of his forces during an enemy attack. Although the cavalry is less likely to provide successful resistance than infantry, it nevertheless could be advantageous because of its superior mobility. Cavalry used in a defensive capacity would require resistance at a level involving pinning down the enemy rather than

destroying it, in turn halting an enemy advance while exploiting a mounted force's superior knowledge of the terrain. This continual harassment would force the enemy into a defensive mode. The cavalry forces could be scattered deep behind the front line as opposed to being in formation. These forces should be stationed in places of most strategic value, while the cavalry could be used for reconnaissance purposes in areas of less importance before combat has even commenced.

Rydz also felt that mounted troops could be used for communications. In case of shortages or sabotage of telephone and telegraph wires, horsemen would be the next best alternative. They also were occasionally more effective at destruction of the enemy than sappers transported to the front, and the cavalry's speed put it at a greater advantage than the infantry in reaching certain objectives if the terrain was conducive. Following battle, horsemen could be strategically placed before the enemy, especially on its flanks for intelligence purposes and mobile communications. In conclusion, Rydz perceived that situations in which terrain was more conducive to mobility provided an opportunity for the use of cavalry for defensive purposes.

Rydz's analysis was heavily inspired by events in the 1920 war with the Soviet Union, and he foresaw such use of the cavalry in the event of another war with Poland's eastern neighbor. Nevertheless the scope of his essay was limited to contemporaneous ideas and a heavy reliance on events from 1918 to 1920, failing to suggest any institutional reform.

Rydz-Śmigły the Freemason

Largely on the initiative of General Władysław Sikorski, a secret military society, Honor and Homeland (*Honor i Ojczyzna*), was formed in the late autumn of 1921, adopting the *Virtuti Militari* as its emblem and the motto "the army in the service of justice." Its purpose was to distinguish a core of outstanding officers regardless of their political persuasions who would serve to improve the lot of the entire armed forces.³⁵ Organized with the approval of Piłsudski and Sosnkowski, its several hundred members were organized into cells [*strażniki*] structured similar to a military hierarchy with a supreme sentry (*strażnik*) headed by General Sikorski situated within the

highest ranks of the armed forces. Captain Marian Kukiel* was responsible for overseeing the other cells which stretched from military district to district. Although Kukiel's recollections of Honor and Homeland were the most detailed, they nevertheless raised many doubts about its effectiveness, prompting its detractors to call it "H₂O."³⁶ Except for Kukiel's revelation that Rydz presided over the sentry in Vilnius, little else can be said about his involvement in Honor and Homeland. Because of its "clandestine" orientation, it generated no documentation. One may contemplate the peculiarity of Rydz's membership in such an organization, which bore little *raison d'être* in a free society. Instead of uniting the country's officers, it actually served to divide them into good ones and bad ones, thus causing fissures within the army instead of stimulating its cohesion.³⁷ It is difficult to ascertain Rydz's motives for joining this organization. He most probably viewed it as a vehicle to prevent political squabbling within the army.³⁸ It should also be noted that Sikorski disbanded Honor and Homeland following an address

* Marian Kukiel (1885-1972) was one of the founders of the ZWC and figured prominently in the Riflemen's Association. After serving in the Legions, he held various military posts in independent Poland, followed by a career as a history professor at Jagellonian University and a museum curator. After serving in the Polish government-in-exile during the Second World War, he settled in London.

given by Piłsudski on July 3, 1923 in which he announced his reasons for leaving the military.

Several such clandestine military orders existed in the 1920s, including another to which Rydz belonged, Edelweiss (*Szarotka*), together with Sikorski, General Czesław Młot-Fijałkowski,* General Stefan Dąb-Biernacki, and General Janusz Gąsiorowski. After 1926, Piłsudski ordered that such organizations be disbanded, entrusting a confidant to oversee their dissolution. But Piłsudski took little personal interest in its enforcement. Their patrons simply ignored the blanket proscription and new clandestine organizations seemed to crop up as well. White Eagle (*Orzeł Biały*), created in 1929, whose membership was overwhelmingly non-commissioned officers, even declared its sole purpose was to defend the positions held by Piłsudski and Rydz-Śmigły, even going so far as to name Rydz as its leader, even though its de facto head was the mayor of Łódź, Tadeusz Waryński.³⁹ Upon hearing of the existence of White Eagle in 1931 and being apprised of Rydz's role,

* Czesław Młot-Fijałkowski (1892-1944) served in the Riflemen and the Legions during the First World War. Following incarceration at Beniaminów, he served in the Polnische Wehrmacht and the POW. After service in the Polish-Soviet War, he held a variety of military posts in independent Poland. As commander of the Narew Operational Group during the September 1939 campaign, forces under his command were the only Polish forces to cross into Germany, albeit briefly. After partaking in the last major battle of the campaign at Kock, he was taken prisoner by the Germans and died in captivity.

however titular, Piłsudski openly expressed his displeasure and the organization was formally dissolved. This was hardly the final political embarrassment which Rydz was forced to encounter.

Piłsudski's Protégé

The relationship between Piłsudski and Rydz-Śmigły was not as pronounced at this time as some observers may have suggested. The image of a mentor/apprentice-type association was largely the product of propaganda from the period 1935-1939. Although Piłsudski held Rydz's military capabilities in high esteem, Piłsudski never considered Rydz a political colleague. The core group who held Piłsudski's political confidence in the 1920s consisted of Bogusław Miedziński, Gustaw Orlicz-Dreszer, Bronisław Pieracki, Aleksander Prystor, Walery Sławek, Adam Koc, and Józef Beck.* Although Rydz did not assume a direct political role, his position in the military hierarchy made

* Gustaw Orlicz-Dreszer (1889-1936) served in the Legions during the First World War and was engaged in combat during the Polish-Soviet War. Following Polish independence, he served in a variety of military posts and supported Piłsudski during the May 1926 coup d'état. Orlicz-Dreszer died in a plane accident while flying over the Baltic Sea.

Bronisław Pieracki (1895-1934) served in the Legions and in military operations against the Ukrainians following Polish independence. A supporter of Piłsudski during the May 1926 coup d'état, he became a BBWR Sejm deputy, and served as minister of internal affairs from 1931 until he was murdered by a Ukrainian nationalist.

some kind of participation in political decisions important for the state unavoidable. Such a situation emerged during a conflict between Piłsudski and Sikorski concerning the organization of Poland's military leadership in late June and early July 1923. Rydz's support of Piłsudski was instrumental in aborting the plan proposed by Sikorski and his colleague, General Stanisław Szeptycki.

A proposal authored by Rydz relating to Szeptycki's proposed law concerning the top military hierarchy survives among documents from the Special War Council.⁴⁰ Rydz criticized the proposal to empower the Council of Ministers with appointments to various positions within the military, such as the inspector general of the army, army inspectors and inspectors of armaments. He went on to discuss the disregard of the institution of guaranteed continuous readiness of the army for war in the form of the inspector general of the army as a future Commander-in-Chief, and the Supreme War Council's composition of future army leaders. He reasoned that this arrangement deprived the inspector general of the authority to make appointments to such positions and could pose a destabilizing factor in preparation for war. Rydz felt that the Szeptycki proposal did not adequately specify the qualifications which a candidate for Commander-in-Chief should have. Rydz

simultaneously denied the proposition of the defense ministry's authority over the inspector general of the army. Rydz ends his critique of the new project to organize the top military hierarchy with the assertion that the existence of the inspector general's function as a future Commander-in-Chief or army inspectors as future leaders is necessary. It facilitates the preparation of these functionaries and their colleagues for future military conflict.

During this tense period of conflict between Piłsudski and Sikorski, Rydz consistently backed Piłsudski, and his speeches to various veterans' organizations such as the Riflemen's Association and the Union of Polish Legionnaires reflected this. When matters came to a head in May 1926, Rydz's loyalty to Piłsudski remained unabashed. When the Marshal of the Senate, Wojciech Trąpczyński, impugned Piłsudski's organizational skills and his competence as a leader in a report dated May 5, Rydz reacted with a letter to President Stanisław Wojciechowski.* Citing his sense of

* Wojciech Trąpczyński (1860-1953) was an attorney who had started his career in politics in the Prussian Reichstag. Before serving as Marshal of the Senate, he had served as Marshal of the Sejm from 1919 to 1922. Affiliated with the Endeks and disapproving of the May 1926 coup d'état, he continued to oppose Piłsudski, but managed to retain his position as Marshal of the Senate for another year. In 1928 he was again elected to the Sejm, but left in 1935, when he chose to boycott elections in protest of the April Constitution. Following the (continued on next page)

responsibility as a high-ranking officer, Rydz's criticized the findings of Trąpczyński's senate committee since it harmfully impaired "the indispensable moral value of the army, specifically its confidence in the victorious legacy of its leader (Piłsudski)."⁴¹ The letter concluded with a request to the president, as the highest authority in the state, to come to the defense of the army and its prominent moral and symbolic role in Polish society. Rydz's letter elicited support from the Legionnaires in the form of various petitions to the president.

Rydz did not play a direct role in Piłsudski's subsequent coup d'état, although he was informed of Piłsudski's designs. Upon receiving word of Piłsudski's march on Warsaw, Rydz proclaimed his loyalty to the regional civilian administration in Vilnius while simultaneously making his sympathies known in the districts of Grodno and Brest-Litovsk.⁴² These actions reflected his distance from Warsaw as well as his desire to maintain the security of the frontiers with the Soviet Union and Lithuania. He nevertheless dispatched the 1st and 5th

September 1939 campaign, he resided in occupied Poland, and died in Poznań.

Stanisław Wojciechowski (1869-1953) was one of the founders of the the PPS. He was elected to the Sejm as an SL deputy in 1922 and was chosen by his colleagues to assume the presidency of Poland shortly thereafter following the assassination of Gabriel Narutowicz. As Piłsudski's primary adversary during the May 1926 coup d'état, he resigned the presidency, and retired to private life.

Regiments from the 1st Legionary Division to assist Piłsudski following the initial success of forces loyal to Wojciechowski. The regiments had obviously been prepared in advance and were dispatched with lightning speed. Following Piłsudski's assumption of power, the coup leader reshuffled the top leadership of the armed forces. Piłsudski assumed the post of Commander-in-Chief and appointed Rydz as an army inspector in Warsaw, a position Rydz assumed the following November. Rydz spent the late 1920s and early 1930s generally divorced from political matters and occupied with increased military duties. In light of his days as P.O.W. commander, Rydz often participated in the activities of veterans organizations, making appearances at various related gatherings and ceremonies.⁴³ Occasionally Piłsudski would assign Rydz some political duties. For example, Rydz participated in a gathering of landowners from Pomerania and the Poznań region held on the estate of a certain Count Taczanowski near Inowrocław on December 25, 1927.⁴⁴ When an ominous nationwide situation arose in 1929 due to some injudicious politics on the part of the ruling cabinet of colonels, Rydz participated in a gathering of concerned generals in Druskienniki wishing to apprise Piłsudski of their

displeasure.* Unlike his treatment of a number of higher officers, Piłsudski did not spare Rydz of occasional criticism in the marshal's waning years. But as illness took its toll upon Piłsudski, he realized that of all of his followers Rydz had emerged as the most tenacious executor of the marshal's will.⁴⁵ It is significant that Rydz was summoned by Piłsudski the day before the marshal's death. Severely ailing, Piłsudski probably conveyed instructions to Rydz in the event of the marshal's impending passing. Since the meeting was private, its details are impossible to determine.

* The participants were Sosnkowski, Leon Berbecki, Tadeusz Piskor, and Aleksander Litwinowicz. Rydz-Śmigły's role in this conference remains enigmatic. For instance, in his biography of Piłsudski, Andrzej Garlicki argues that Piłsudski would have looked upon such a meeting with suspicion, and its participants would probably not have had the courage to reveal what was discussed. He reduces its significance to just one of the many scattered political conspiracies at the time, and even questions whether the meeting even took place. See Andrzej Garlicki, Józef Piłsudski 1867-1935, Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1990, p. 554n.

NOTES FOR PART III

¹ E. Krawczyk, *Demobilizacja i pokojowa organizacja Wojska Polskiego w latach 1920-1921*, (Warsaw, 1971), p. 181.

² CAW, Sztab Główny, kancelaria szefa sztabu, t. 143.

³ CAW, Biuro Ścisłej Rady Wojennej (hereafter BŚRWoj.), Rozkaz ŚRW nr. 61/IIIa, Warsaw, 15 April 1921, original confidential typewritten order to the commander of the 2nd Army (Rydz-Śmigły) in Lida.

⁴ CAW, BŚRWoj., t. 1, Rozkaz Ministerstwa Spraw Wojskowych, Oddz. I Sz.Gen., L. 10932/Mob., Warsaw, 19 August 1921.

⁵ CAW, BŚRWoj., t. 3, L. 4209/IV/tjn., Lida, 14 November 1921, original confidential typewritten letter from Rydz-Śmigły to the minister of defense.

⁶ CAW, BŚRWoj., t. 3, L. 8940/IB/21, status report from the commander of the 2nd Army (Rydz-Śmigły) to I Bureau of the general staff on personnel numbers.

⁷ CAW, BŚRWoj., t. 3, L.dz. 4209/tjn., Lida, 17 November 1921, original unpaginated typewritten request by Rydz-Śmigły to the Commander-in-Chief through the Supreme War Council.

⁸ CAW, BŚRWoj., t. 3, Dowództwo 2 armii, Oddz. III, 48/tjn./III, 1 July 1921, original unpaginated confidential typewritten report to III Bureau of the Supreme War Council.

⁹ CAW, BŚRWoj., t. 3, Dowództwo 2 armii, Oddz. III, 73/tjn./III, duplicate of confidential Order No. 108, 8 November 1921.

¹⁰ CAW, BŚRWoj., t. 3, MSWojsk., Oddz. I Sz.Gen. nr 6052/Org., Warsaw, 21 December 1921; copy of typewritten document.

¹¹ CAW, BŚRWoj., t. 3, Dowództwo 2 armii, Oddz. I nr 8400/I/sz/21, Lida, 21 November 1921; original unpaginated typewritten document.

¹² Army Inspectorate No. 1 (Vilnius): Lt. Gen. Edward Rydz-Śmigły; Army Inspectorate No. 2 (Warsaw): Gen. Tadeusz Rozwadowski; Army Inspectorate No. 3 (Toruń): Lt. Gen. Leonard Skierski; Army Inspectorate No. 4 (Cracow): Gen. Stanisław Szeptycki; Army Inspectorate No. 5 (Lvov): Lt. Gen. Stanisław Haller. See CAW, Sztab Główny, Oddz. V, t. 71, Wykaz Inspektorów Armii.

¹³ According to a decree issued 7 January 1921, effective 15 April, the individual general inspectorates for infantry, artillery, technology, and personnel were abolished. During the war, all had served on the staff of the Commander-in-Chief. E. Krawczyk, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

¹⁴ M. Ciepelewicz, "Generałowie polscy w opinii Piłsudskiego," *Wojskowy Przegląd Historyczny*, 1(1966), p. 327.

¹⁵ W. Korpalska, *Władysław Eugeniusz Sikorski: Biographia polityczna*, (Wrocław, 1981), p. 107.

¹⁶ *Dziennik Rozkazów Tajnych MŚWojsk.*, 3(10 February 1921).

¹⁷ CAW, BŚRWoj., t. 3, Inspektorat Armii nr 1, L. 862/25, Vilnius, 5 May 1925; original unpaginated typewritten document.

¹⁸ CAW, Generalny Inspektorat Sił Zbrojnych (hereafter GISZ), t. 302.4.997, Inspektor Armii gen. dyw. Śmigły-Rydz, L. 583/tjn., Warsaw, 18 April 1929; unpaginated confidential typewritten report on military exercises conducted 14-16 February 1929.

¹⁹ CAW, GISZ, t. 302.4.1011, L. dz. 1371/tjn., Warsaw, 30 May 1931; original unpaginated confidential typewritten report on military exercises conducted 24-28 March 1929.

²⁰ CAW, GISZ, t. 302.4.407, L. 2263, Warsaw, 14 October 1927; original unpaginated typewritten report on military education conducted in the fall of 1927.

²¹ CAW, GISZ, t. 302.4.407, Biuro Inspekcji (hereafter BI), L. dz. 2260, Warsaw, 20 November 1927; original unpaginated typewritten report on military inspections conducted 25 May to 15 November 1927.

²² CAW, GISZ, t. 302.4.1011; see footnote 19.

²³ CAW, BŚRWoj., t. 13, Inspektor Armii nr 1, L. 854/25, Vilnius, 2 May 1925; original unpaginated typewritten report on military exercises conducted 29 April 1925.

²⁴ CAW, GISZ, t. 302.4.444, L. 315/tjn., Warsaw, 7 February 1931; original confidential unpaginated typewritten report on military inspections conducted 27-30 January 1931.

²⁵ CAW, GISZ, t. 302.4.404, L. dz. 2483/BI, Warsaw, 3 November 1927; original confidential unpaginated typewritten report on military inspections of the 17th Infantry Division conducted 25-26 December 1927.

²⁶ CAW, GISZ, t. 302.4.451, Inspektor Armii gen. dyw. Śmigły-Rydz, nr 2237/tjn.33, Warsaw, 9 July 1933; original confidential unpaginated typewritten report on military exercises conducted 27-28 July 1933.

²⁷ CAW, GISZ, t. 302.4.421, duplicate unpaginated typewritten report dated 4 April 1929 summarizing military inspections conducted in 1928, signed by the commander of the GISZ inspection bureau, Col. J. Gąsiorowski.

²⁸ E. Rydz-Śmigły, *Byście o sile nie zapomnieli: Rozkazy, artykuły, mowy, 1904-1936*, (Lvov, 1936).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

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- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 182.
- ³² *Ibid.*, p. 169.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 185-191.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 174-153.
- ³⁵ M. Kukiel, letter to the editor, *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 4(1963).
- ³⁶ M. Kukiel, *Generał Sikorski, żołnierz i mąż stanu Polski Walczącej*, (London, 1970), p. 63., L. Chajn, *Wolnomularstwo w II Rzeczypospolitej*, (Warsaw, 1975), p. 184.
- ³⁷ A. Micewski, "Strażnica," *Życie Warszawy*, IV, 816(11-12 January 1970), p. 4.
- ³⁸ T. Katelbach, "Łoże," *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 3(1963). Compare with Kukiel, *Generał Sikorski*, p. 62.
- ³⁹ J. Jędrzejewicz, *W służbie idei*, p. 211. Tadeusz Waryński was the son of Ludwik Waryński, 19th century theoretician of the Polish socialist movement, who perished in a tsarist prison in 1889.
- ⁴⁰ CAW, BŚRWoj., t. 32; unpaginated typewritten copy of addendum to minutes of the meeting of the Supreme War Council on 2 July 1923., B. Woszyński, "O najwyższych władach wojskowych w świetle protokołów Rady Wojennej z 1923 r.," *Wojskowy Przegląd Historyczny*, 3/4(1964), p. 478.
- ⁴¹ E. Rydz-Śmigły, "Do p. Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej przez p. ministra spraw wojskowych," *Polska Zbrojna*, 128(11 May 1926), p. 128.
- ⁴² M. Pietrzak, "Jak Doszło do wojny domowej," *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 1(1959), p. 136., A. Ajnenkiel, *Od rządów ludowych do przewrotu majowego. Zarys dziejów politycznych Polski 1918-1926*, 4th ed., (Warsaw, 1978), p. 421.
- ⁴³ Archiwum Akt Nowych (hereafter AAN), t. 48, handwritten letter by Gen. Żeligowski dated 22 April 1927, in which he recounted the gathering in Vilnius of Piłsudski, Śmigły, Dreszer, Zaruski, Bylina, and Prystor upon the tenth anniversary of the Polish occupation of the city.
- ⁴⁴ A. Czubiński, *Centrolew. Kształtowanie się i rozwój demokratycznej opozycji antysanacyjnej w Polsce 1926-1930*, (Poznań, 1973), p. 36.
- ⁴⁵ J. Jędrzejewicz, *W służbie idei*, p. 211., T. Katelbach, "Piłsudski i Sosnkowski (Przyczynek do historii rodziewiczów)," *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 34(1975), p. 37.

Part IV

RYDZ-ŚMIGŁY, THE STATESMAN 1935-1939

Poland after Piłsudski

On May 12, 1935, an icon who had had a unique position in the Republic passed on. Officially Piłsudski had only held the positions of Commander-in-Chief and minister of defense. In effect his influence stretched much farther. The special, authoritative stature which he had held in the Polish government included a circle of Legionnaires who held the most prominent portfolios in the administration of the state as well as the armed forces. Having such loyal people at his disposal, Piłsudski could pursue his ambitions for the Polish nation both internally and in the realm of foreign policy. Following the coup of May 1926, many officers close to Piłsudski were given prominent positions in the administration of the country. Over time these individuals had formed a tight-knit, cohesive clique with a common legacy stretching back to the POW and the Legions and united around the cult of Piłsudski.¹ Its opponents labeled this group the "colonels' clique." Through these individuals, Piłsudski ruled the nation.

This is not to say that Piłsudski's sycophants spoke in one definitive voice, as its heterogeneity with respect

to its leader's directives and decisions was evident from the beginning. Clashes and divergence of opinion within the ranks were instead put to use for the maintenance of his unimpeded leadership. If that authority was threatened, his stature guaranteed that his circle of followers remained exceedingly disciplined. But the fragile nature of such a system was its reliance upon the person of Piłsudski, as opposed to his or any other portfolio,² a volatility which reared its head upon his death, as intense internal conflicts among the colonels' clique emerged openly. Even with the knowledge of his terminal illness for several months, the colonels' clique did not contemplate the political crisis which would unfold, even if it would have been in their best interests to suppress it as quickly as possible.

President Ignacy Mościcki summoned the cabinet on the evening of May 12, 1935 to facilitate filling various prominent administrative positions, and Rydz was appointed Commander-in-Chief (*naczelnny wódz*), thus reputedly fulfilling Piłsudski's will. The appointment gained the approval of the prime minister, Walery Sławek, one of Rydz's most trusted confidants. Kazimierz Sosnkowski, former chief of staff of the 1st Legionary Brigade, Magdeburg detainee, defense minister during the war with

the Soviet Union, and a close Piłsudski confidant before 1926, was appointed chief of the General Inspectorate. Six other Piłsudskiites were appointed as his subordinates. Sosnkowski's promotion won praise from France's ambassador to Poland, Leon Noël, who characterized the general as a "highly cultured and wonderful figure, showing deep interest in political matters...whose diplomatic successes in Paris and Geneva made him well-known in foreign circles..."³ But there can be no doubt that Sosnkowski had already ruined his chance for a more prominent role in Poland's political hierarchy following Piłsudski's coup d'état nine years earlier. Faced at the time with the onerous choice of loyalty to the government or adhering to Piłsudski, Sosnkowski had attempted suicide in a seemingly ostentatious way. The enigmatic motives behind his action profoundly disillusioned Piłsudski. Although Sosnkowski's advocates were hardly few in number at the May 12 cabinet meeting, support for him was muffled by an ominous shroud which hinted at Piłsudski's past reservations toward him.⁴

Evidence of a written or verbal political testament which Piłsudski may have dictated in the event of his death is lacking. Nevertheless it is certain that he considered Rydz as a capable and intelligent officer whose authority within the military was pronounced. Thus the will of the

late marshal was realized. It is important to note that Sławek's personal relationship with Sosnkowski was much more cordial than his relationship with Rydz, but this hardly was a deciding factor. One can strongly maintain that Rydz's divorce from Poland's political milieu and his past inclination to restrict himself strictly to military matters (with the exception of the occasional chance to exert political influence while involved with the Daszyński government) already placed him at a distinct advantage. Rydz was viewed more comfortably as a colleague by Mościcki and the ambitious Sławek, as opposed to Sosnkowski, whose reputation for his independent mind aroused suspicion. The leaders of the Sanacja were convinced that Rydz would limit himself to military matters and leave politics to them. Thus Rydz emerged as a compromise candidate best suited to lead the armed forces.

Factional fragmentation within the Sanacja commenced almost immediately following Piłsudski's demise. Initially these fissures were more personal in nature and political conflict became evident somewhat later. Analysis of Sanacja rule may be broken down into four periods:

- a transitional period in 1926 and 1927;

- the period of the Nonpartisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government (*Bezpartyjny Blok Współpracy z Rządem* or BBWR) under Sławek's tutelage;
- the period of "decomposition" in 1935 and 1936; and
- the Camp of National Unity (OZON) period.⁵

During the "decomposition" period, three outstanding political factions emerged among Piłsudski's successors:

- a. the so-called *Zamek** group around Mościcki;
- b. the colonels' clique affiliated with Sławek, Piłsudski's closest confidant;
- c. a group backing Rydz-Śmigły.

Since his assumption of the presidency, Ignacy Mościcki, a science professor holding various patents, had generally kept out of political affairs. His relegation to mostly ceremonial duties masked Piłsudski's dominant influence, which often proved awkward when the president met with foreign dignitaries. By 1930 and 1931, the decline in Piłsudski's health required increased responsibilities for his closest confidants, such as Mościcki. Piłsudski had engineered Mościcki's re-election to a seven-year term in 1933, but the marshal had considered this a temporary arrangement until the new constitution was promulgated,

* *zamek* is the Polish word for "castle."

after which Piłsudski had intended that Sławek assume the presidency.

However Piłsudski's death led to some changes to his intentions. Rydz assumed his position without a hitch. Sławek meanwhile retained his post as prime minister and began preparing for new elections. He engaged in this task with great enthusiasm, personally contacting provincial governors and other officials and giving them advice on how to win over the electorate. Despite these efforts, they did not bring about the desired results. Cooperation between the PPS and the Communist Party led to a proclamation advocating protests and strikes. Rural areas were also not as receptive toward the Sanacja as anticipated. 54% of the voters heeded the call for an electoral boycott. This was a serious blow to the Sanacja, especially to Sławek's prestige. Even some of his closest colleagues, such as Prystor and Miedziński, reproached him, accusing Sławek of bungling preparations for the election and neglect of various governmental duties, even going so far as to question his competence as prime minister. The decline of Sławek's influence corresponded with a rise in Mościcki's. Exploiting the expansion of presidential power which came with the promulgation of the April Constitution, he began to take a more active role in the emerging

political feuds, even exercising responsibilities in the prime minister's realm. He met personally with the other ministers in the government and partook in important decisions, particularly in economic policies, while making close contact with various interest groups. Consultations involving Rydz and representatives of various elements of the military received wide press publicity. Publications at the time such as *Monitor Polski* unequivocally confirmed the president's interest in military affairs. Although *Monitor Polski* also covered meetings between Sławek and Mościcki concerning governmental activities, it did so in a brief and laconic way.⁶ The press undoubtedly sought to swerve public opinion toward the president by emphasizing Mościcki's prominence in this relationship. An interview with Mościcki in the *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny* by journalist Konrad Wrzos published July 7, 1935 reflected this bias.⁷ It was no accident that the article commenced with a statement that the *Zamek* group had inherited Piłsudski's mantle in the eyes of Polish society. Mościcki adopted the customary rhetoric of Piłsudski's confidants in stressing that his close ties to the deceased leader had provided the president with unique knowledge of Piłsudski's political testament. Piłsudski had always "found a way" to relegate important decisions to the president, Mościcki

recalled, while emphasizing his own status as Piłsudski's colleague with the longest duration.

There was no doubt that such rhetoric was intended to skew public opinion into believing that Mościcki had the moral right to lead the Sanacja following Piłsudski's demise. When asked in conclusion whether he would relinquish his position to a representative of the people before the upcoming elections under the new constitution or continue to serve his 7-year term which had commenced under the old statutes, Mościcki answered evasively, stating that his decisions were governed "...exclusively by what is necessary for the good the state. I am able to comment on future developments only from this point of view..." This indicated that the president had no intention of stepping down, and that he was not bound to any hints on Piłsudski's part which may have suggested such action, providing the excuse that the deceased leader's wishes were conveyed in general form as opposed to any specific order. After consulting with various law professors in whose expertise he had faith, Mościcki concluded that the new constitution did not legally compel him to resign.

Consultations about major national policies between the president, the Commander-in-Chief, Sławek, and Beck began at this time in a way which lacked precedence. It

soon became evident that the *Zamek* group was determined to become the dominant voice in the ruling elite by eliminating the influence of Sławek and his followers. Many of the prime minister's actions revealed indecision and increasing helplessness. Accustomed to carry out Piłsudski's will steadfastly, Sławek seemed unable to make independent decisions which reflected the new political milieu since the Marshal's demise. Generally, he appeared to transform into a type of visionary by promoting a kind of "depoliticization" of public life for himself, instead relying upon broader popular support and calling for the creation of an organization to satisfy these ends. This enterprise was to encompass all of society based upon the principle of national solidarity, but the effort failed as Sławek became bogged down in the technical and ideological complexities of its formation. Andrzej Micewski suggested that such an enterprise would have led to "a breakup of a cohesive ruling elite by an organization mobilized behind the nebulous idea of mass popular representation."⁸ As a consequence this could have led to the aggrandizement of right-wing leaders and their potential seizure of power.

With the intention of advancing his program, Sławek officially announced the liquidation of the BBWR, stating that the Bloc had accomplished its purpose. Sławek

rationalized that the promulgation of the April Constitution mandated that the popular will needed to be built upon a new foundation. When the question of Piłsudski's replacement came up during the final BBWR caucus held on July 7, 1935, Sławek replied:

An attempt to seek another individual who could possess such greatness in moral leadership would produce no result. If we desire to apply such a role to anyone else, we would soon discover that no one could possibly fill it.⁹

It was quite evident that Sławek did not have a realistic or concrete plan to guide the ruling elite out of such a difficult situation. Despite having a strong contingent of supporters, such as Janusz Jędrzejewicz, Beck, Miedziński, and Prystor, he seemed unable to compel Mościcki to step down. Seeing that the discussions between the president and the prime minister following the 1935 elections had resulted in an impasse, Sławek's partisans were compelled to acquiesce to Mościcki's retention of the presidency. Mościcki then proposed the inclusion of Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski* as vice premier. Judging this as a preclusion to his ambitions, an incensed Sławek resigned on October 12. Sławek's intention to restrict Rydz strictly to

* Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski (1888-1974) had gained a reputation as minister of industry and trade. During the Second World War, he was interned in Romania, but returned to Poland in 1945, serving in several construction projects on the seacoast and as a member of the Sejm.

military matters had failed to impress the Commander-in-Chief, who clearly was interested in expanding his authority. Rydz's aversion toward Sławek was best demonstrated by the Commander-in-Chief's private consultations with Mościcki during the month of September.

Sławek's departure provoked a cabinet crisis. The public was falsely led to believe the official pronouncements that Sławek's entire cabinet had willingly resigned because it had completed its task of overseeing the introduction of the new constitution. Formation of a new cabinet was problematic. Out of respect for Sławek, none of the old Piłsudskiites would consent to becoming prime minister and lead a new government. After lengthy deliberations, Mościcki forced through the candidacy of Marian Zyndram-Kościałkowski,* generally regarded as representative of the liberal wing of the Sanacja. The new government was formed on October 13, and the position of vice premier and minister of finance went to one of the president's close confidants, Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski, who had overseen the construction of Gdynia and was later to be

* Marian Zyndram-Kościałkowski (1892-1946) was a veteran of the ZWC, the POW, and the Legions. An affiliate of Piłsudski, he served as provincial governor in Białystok (1930-34), minister of the interior (1934-35), and later as minister of labor and social welfare (1936-39). During the September 1939 campaign, he fled to Romania, and died in exile in Britain.

in charge of the Central Industrial Complex project.*

Kwiatkowski's reputation as a technocrat was well-known, but Piłsudski's past mistrust of him due to his affiliation with Peasant Party adherents had made the new vice premier very uneasy. Although the new cabinet was stacked with *Zamek* supporters, a *Sławek* holdover, Józef Beck, was retained as foreign minister. After initial disagreements, Beck decided to cooperate with Kościałkowski, who was firmly convinced that Beck was best equipped to deal with foreign affairs in accordance with Piłsudski's will. Initially Beck's position was not so secure. Resistance toward him was hardly limited to the government's opponents, since *Sławek*'s adherents expressed their uneasiness with him.

It was no secret that the Kościałkowski government was in fact directed by Mościcki and Kwiatkowski. Anxious to strengthen his uncertain position, the president did not inform Rydz of the new cabinet's makeup nor did he even seek the opinion of the Commander-in-Chief. Wojciech Stpiczyński especially resented this course of events and encouraged Rydz to assume a frigid attitude toward Kościałkowski, who accordingly did not receive the new head

* *Centralny Okręg Przemysłowy*. This was a plan to build an industrial complex in the Sandomierz region of southeastern Poland.

of government during his official visit in a way befitting a prime minister. However, Rydz refrained from taking any action against Kościałkowski, despite Stpiczyński's intense pressure.* The new government lacked popular support. Sławek's dismantling of the BBWR undermined the already tenuous position of the ruling colonels' clique by depriving it of the possibility of creating its own political party which could counter its opponents and provide some basis for broadening its acceptance within the populace. Kościałkowski's cabinet lasted only half way through May 1936. The previous December, Rydz had come to an agreement with Mościcki to create a new government composed of people more favorable to the Commander-in-Chief.¹⁰ This secret accord allowed for the maintenance of the Kościałkowski government only until the end of the budgetary session.

Rydz-Śmigły's Rising Influence

In attaining the position of Commander-in-Chief, Rydz became one of the most prominent figures in the nation and assumed some of the most important functions in Poland. To a large degree, this arose out of tradition, since the

* Wojciech Stpiczyński (1896-1936), a member of the Sejm, was the powerful editor of the daily newspaper *Kurjer Poranny*.

public had become accustomed to the nine-year reign of Piłsudski and generally regarded Rydz as his successor and the facilitator of the deceased marshal's legacy. *Czas*, a publication out of Cracow, provided an interesting analysis of political developments in November, 1935:

Many of Piłsudski's responsibilities were distributed. The minister of defense was relegated to its normal constitutional authority as just another portfolio within the cabinet, while the functions of the General Inspectorate remained unchanged. But eyes started to wander and even ideas against his (Piłsudski's) vision for the nation emerged as the ministers began to try and guess his thoughts, which resulted in varying interpretations.¹¹

Upon the death of Piłsudski, the government press began to try and shape public opinion toward a well-disposed view of Rydz as the late marshal's heir, jumping at any opportunity to make the new Commander-in-Chief stand out, particularly at funerary ceremonies. In its report on Piłsudski's funeral, *Polska Zbrojna* recalled that "...the pallbearers were Rydz-Śmigły, Sosnkowski, Fabrycy, Rómmel, Kasprzycki, Gąsiorowski, Ruppert."^{12*} Rydz accompanied

* Kazimierz Fabrycy (1888-1958) was a veteran of the Legions and the Polish-Soviet War. He served in various military posts following Polish independence, including vice minister of defense from 1926 to 1934. During the September 1939 campaign, Fabrycy was the commander of Army Carpathian. After evacuation to Romania, he served in the Middle East and emigrated to London after the Second World War.

Juliusz Rómmel (1881-1967) had fought in the Russian army during the First World War, but later served with great distinction in the Polish-Soviet War. He served in a variety of military posts following Polish independence, and commanded the Warsaw region during the September 1939 (continued on next page)

Piłsudski's widow, his daughters, the president, Sławek, Mrs. Mościcki, other close relatives of the deceased marshal, the marshal of the Sejm and the senate, and the president of the Supreme Audit Institution (*Najwyższa Izba Kontroli* or simply *kontrola państwowa*).^{*} The same newspaper later emphasized Rydz's personal role in the transport of the urn containing Piłsudski's heart to Vilnius. The press undoubtedly played an important role in the period preceding Rydz's nomination as Piłsudski's successor. Newspaper and magazine headlines trumpeted the slogan "Lead us" (*Prowadź nas*). A detailed biography was published stressing his career in the POW and the Legions as well as his role in the war against the Soviet Union, while omitting his parentage and upbringing. His role in the Daszyński government was also overlooked.¹³

By mid-1935, Rydz had expanded his political role, meeting with representatives from various interest groups. On June 24, he met with the president of the Polish Red Cross and entertained a delegation from the Organization

campaign. He spent the duration of the Second World War interned, and returned to Poland following his release.

Tadeusz Kasprzycki (1891-1978) had served in the Legions, the Polish army, and also served as minister of defense from 1935 to 1939. He was interned in Romania following the September 1939 campaign, and emigrated to Canada after the Second World War.

^{*} The Supreme Audit Institution was an independent agency which served as a watchdog for government fiscal matters.

for Invalids. Two days later he met with representatives of the Union of Polish Scouting (*Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego*) which included Michał Grażyński, the governor of Upper Silesia, the Catholic chancellor Father Mauersberger, and Antoni Olbromski, the Association's head.* Rydz also received Sosnkowski, who proceeded to apprise the new commander of the Scouts' activities and their preparations for a commemorative rally in Spale, for which Rydz accepted an invitation to partake in its planning. A number of cultural figures also met with Rydz, including the well-known graphic artist Stanisław Chrostowski on September 6, who requested the commander's patronage of an upcoming exhibit. On November 7, he entertained W. Szeroszewski and Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski from the Polish Literary Academy, whose governing body had voted Rydz an honorary executive position, which he accepted together with an award.↓ *Polska Zbrojna* reported on Rydz's presence at a number of

* Jan Mauersberger (1872-1942) first became involved in scouting in 1912. The Union of Polish Scouting was the amalgamation of four scouting associations under his tutelage. He also served as chaplain of the Polish air force. During the Nazi occupation, he continued to operate the clandestine movement, the "Gray Ranks" (*Szare Szeregi*).

Antoni Olbromski (1898-1958) also had a long history in the scouting movement, and was later active in the Gray Ranks and scouting in post-war Poland.

↓ Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski (1885-1944) was a journalist before partaking in the Legions. Following the First World War, he was affiliated with *Skamanander*, an organization of Polish poets. He remained in Nazi-occupied Poland during the Second World War, and died during the Warsaw Uprising.

ceremonies, including his attendance at an erection of a monument to heroes of an uprising in Upper Silesia, and the dedication of a memorial to revolutionary hero Jan Kiliński in Warsaw.*

For his first few months as Commander-in-Chief, Rydz tended to tread carefully, concentrating mostly on his military responsibilities. This included attendance at various ceremonies and at gatherings of various Piłsudskiite, paramilitary, and veterans organizations in addition to meetings with his staff. Piłsudski's assessment of his successor's lack of talents and intuition in politics during the Daszyński government continued to haunt him. Rydz nevertheless managed to gain popularity and recognition. He figured prominently at the opening of a Riflemen's Hall named after him in Grodno, where he spoke about the history of the city, concluding with the following statement:

...In dedicating the building to the work of the Riflemen, I express the hope that it will serve as a developer of character for the young and a gathering place for those who wish to devote their physical prowess and sincere hearts to the service of the nation.¹⁴

* Jan Kiliński (1760-1819) shoemaker, was a hero of the Kościuszko Uprising in 1794 against the Russians in Warsaw.

Rydz then proceeded to Cracow, where he attended the thirteenth gathering of the Union of Polish Legionnaires, whose president was Sławek. Rydz was accompanied by Miedziński and two military aides. Generals Tadeusz Kasprzycki, Bernard Mond, and Sosnkowski reported to their Commander-in-Chief, as did the commander of the 5th Military District in Cracow, General Aleksander Narbutt-Łuczyński, and his chief of staff, Colonel Tadeusz Tomaszewski.* During the succeeding military procession, Sławek's position on a rostrum in Rydz's shadow did not go unnoticed. In a long address, Rydz opened by recalling the recently-deceased Piłsudski, emphasizing the role which he played in creating a formidable army. He dwelled upon the need for diligent efforts for the good of the state.

* Bernard Mond (1887-1957) had served with distinction in the defense of Lvov in 1918. In the 1930s he held a command of a division in Army Cracow. Taken prisoner by the Germans during the September 1939 campaign, he spent the duration of the war incarcerated and returned to Poland after the Second World War.

Aleksander Narbutt-Łuczyński (1890-1977) was a lawyer and military officer who had served in the Legions and in the Polish-Soviet War. He held a variety of military posts following Polish independence, and held a command in Army Cracow during the September 1939 campaign. He managed to escape to France, and settled in the United States after the Second World War.

Tadeusz Tomaszewski (1894-1967) had served in the Legions and, following the Oath Crisis, in the Austro-Hungarian army. Involved in the defense of Lvov in November 1918, he remained in the Polish army holding a number of military posts, including chief of staff of Operational Group Warsaw during the September 1939 campaign. Taken prisoner, he spent the duration of the Second World War incarcerated, and settled in Britain following his release.

I am certain of the existence of good will within the nation. We must awaken and promote this optimism while enthusiastically suppressing pessimism... If someone is expecting one moment of weakness, then that individual is severely misguided.

He concluded his speech by addressing the countries which bordered Poland: "...We will not behave aggressively toward our neighbors, but we will also not give in. We will not shed our clothes...not even a button."¹⁵ This statement was directed toward Nazi Germany, which had violated the Versailles treaty less than five months earlier by reinstituting compulsory military service.

By the end of 1935, Rydz's behavior demonstrated an increasing affinity for making ostentatious public appearances and meeting with organizations showering him with honors. On November 24, he attended a general meeting of reserve officers. General Roman Górecki's words of greeting, expressed in the name of the entire group, are especially striking:

Our work is at your disposal with every passing day. If the nation finds itself in need, we will lay down our lives if you so command. We are overjoyed and flattered by your presence among us, feeling that much more confident in witnessing you as our leader.¹⁶

Thus it appeared that the leading circles of inactive officers from the Legions quite visibly viewed Rydz as

their leader.* On December 27, Rydz traveled to Poznań for the seventeenth anniversary of the uprising in Poznań (*Powstanie Wielkopolskie*). The mere appearance of an important Sanacja official was significant in that Piłsudski had never had much love for the city. Rydz made an address, in which he lionized the role which the uprising's participants played in the struggle for Polish independence. As usual, his speech devoted much attention to the role of the army in the nation's vitality:

National culture, wealth, and the most humanitarian institutions retain their worthiness and meaning as long as a strong army stands on our borders. Without it the most outstanding achievements growing out of the spirit of the people are reduced to an invader's plunder trampled into the mud.¹⁷

An interview with Colonel Kazimierz Glabisz, Rydz's immediate subordinate, appeared in *Polska Zbrojna* in January 1936, giving an account of Rydz's trip to Poznań. Glabisz asserted that

the appearance of the Inspector General in his first year in office during the Poznań commemoration sincerely flattered my compatriots who had participated in the uprising, as he chose them to make

* Roman Górecki (1889-1946), a veteran of the Legions was head of the Polish contingent of the *Fédération Internationale des Anciens Combattans* (*Międzynarodowa Federacja Byłych Kombatantów*) since 1929 and had been previously elected president of the international organization in a 1932 gathering in Portugal. At the time, he was also the minister of industry and trade in the the Kościłkowski government, having been involved in banking throughout the 1930s. During the September 1939 campaign, he managed to get to France, and eventually settled in Britain.

his second appearance as Commander-in-Chief after the Legionnaires' gathering. They felt that he made a personal tribute to the people who fought for the cradle of Polish independence.¹⁸

An appearance of similar propagandistic value was a commemoration of the Silesian Uprising (*Powstanie Śląskie*) on May 3, 1936, where he addressed the crowd:

Insurgents! Today, Poland does not request your guns, since we do not wish to wage war on anyone. We wish to live in peace while not forgetting that we must maintain enough strength to insure that a war with Poland would be costly and dangerous.¹⁹

Rydz then appealed for extensive efforts during peacetime to make up for the long preceding period of foreign rule, reminding the crowd that only a strong Poland would gain respect internationally.

By the beginning of 1936, it was becoming obvious that Rydz had finally transformed himself from the status of "passive observer," as his public statements increasingly evinced the character of political declarations. His prestige among the Piłsudskiites was growing, especially among those whose influence had waned recently and now looked to him for support. Some of the members of the colonels' clique began to forge closer ties with him as they quickly became aware of new political realities. Wojciech Stpiczyński tied the fate of his career with Rydz's, and his influence rose after being pushed aside

earlier by Sławek. Pobóg-Malinowski argues that Stpiczyński asserted the largest influence on the activities of the chief of staff of the General Inspectorate, while Andrzej Micewski openly labeled Stpiczyński as the "power behind the throne."²⁰ Of the most prominent figures in the colonels' clique, Miedziński was the first to reveal his loyalties.

Being unable to agree with his (Sławek's) ideas and believing it necessary that some kind of authority exist to allow Piłsudski's legacy to thrive, I viewed Rydz-Śmigły as that authority figure.²¹

The April Constitution had strengthened Rydz's position considerably. Article 3 stated that the military was one of the five essential organs of the state, below the cabinet and the two houses of the legislature, and above the judiciary and the Supreme Audit Institution. Unlike its standing under the constitution of 1921, the army had attained a more independent status and was not as subordinate to the executive, thus providing it with a special role in the political life of the country. The Commander-in-Chief was still answerable to Mościcki, since, according to Article 63, the president had the power to appoint or relieve him. But Article 17 even placed the president and the Commander-in-Chief at an equal level in some instances. A presidential decree issued on May 9,

1936 specifically defined responsibility over the armed forces and the organization of its leaders during peacetime.²² Carefully timed to coincide with the first anniversary of Pilsudski's death, it emphasized the special role of the Commander-in-Chief in the nation. Although the president legally remained the supreme authority over the armed forces, they were answerable to the president strictly through the Commander-in-Chief and the minister of defense. This undoubtedly curtailed the influence of the president over military matters, and the scope of his powers as stated in the constitution was subject to substantial limitations. In effect the president only maintained influence in personnel matters, such as the appointment of certain officers.

Since the April Constitution did not specifically include rules which governed the scope of the Commander-in-Chief's powers, the second portion of the decree was most important. Among his duties, he was responsible for the preparation of the armed forces in case of war and overall planning for defense of the country for the government. The latter bestowed substantial political power upon him, even placing him over the minister of defense, authority which

even Piłsudski had never formally held.* Not formally being a member of the government, the Commander-in-Chief was the de facto head of the armed forces. He thus was not answerable to the Sejm and he even lacked constitutional accountability. He was answerable only to a president who was not compelled to consult any of his ministers, including the prime minister and the minister of defense, concerning who was appointed to, or relieved from the position of Commander-in-Chief.

A Committee for the Defense of the Republic (*Komitet Obrony Rzeczypospolitej* or KOR) was created and composed of an officer from the General Inspectorate and led by the president. Unlike the council upon which it was modeled, the Committee for the Defense of the State (*Komitet Obrony Państwa* or KOP), which dated from October 1926, the military's presence on KOR was much more pronounced. KOP, whose nominal head had been the prime minister, had lacked the participation of the head of army administration, the chief of the general staff, and his second in command. The decree of May 1936 clearly strengthened the position of the

* In June 1926, Piłsudski had issued a decree shortly after his coup d'état which had stipulated the Commander-in-Chief's subordination to the minister of defense. Since he held both positions, this delineation was strictly a formality. The edict of May 1936 merely provided legal sanction to a situation which had already existed, and essentially granted Rydz-Śmigły the same authority which Piłsudski had previously held.

Commander-in-Chief by placing no limitations on his tenure. Within military circles, this was assumed to mean a lifelong position subject only formally to presidential scrutiny.

In compliance with the agreement reached between Mościcki and Rydz during their secret meeting the previous December, the Kościółkowski government resigned in May. Its replacement had been negotiated earlier, but disagreement had surfaced about individual ministries, the most controversial being the prime ministership. Rydz refused to consider Miedziński's candidate, Sosnkowski, much like he had earlier shunned Kwiatkowski. Stpiczyński was also not considered, as Rydz felt that he lacked political experience. A compromise candidate emerged, General Felicjan Sławoj-Składkowski, who agreed to serve on an interim basis.* Składkowski recalled: "On the morning of May 13, 1936...General Śmigły-Rydz instructed me to report at one o'clock to the president as a candidate for prime minister."²³ The new cabinet contained many ministers associated with Rydz, who were presumably appointed to keep a check on those affiliated with Mościcki.²⁴ Rydz was

* Felicjan Sławoj-Składkowski (1885-1962) was Poland's last interwar prime minister. A physician, he had served as a medical officer in the Legions, and served as chief of the army's medical corps from 1924 to 1926. Following the September 1939 campaign, he made his way to the Near East through Romania, and settled in Britain in 1947.

present at the first meeting of the cabinet, whose members awaited him in front of the Palace of Deputies. This was a blatant breach of constitutional powers on Rydz's part. His behavior was an outgrowth of the May 9 decree which outlined his duties. At the opening of the cabinet session, he immediately dominated the rostrum, assertively appealing for the intensification of efforts to prepare the country's defensive capabilities in the event of war. Rydz asserted that the international situation was descending into a dangerous abyss, and that conflict with Germany was inevitable.²⁵

In his dealings with veterans organizations, Rydz's actions denoted a desire to expand his influence among the Piłsudskiites. He oversaw the merger of the Colonels' Circle and the Union of Polish Legionnaires. Up to this time, he had headed the former enterprise, while Sławek had presided over the latter. By unifying the two organizations, Rydz sought to widen his political power base to include interests not directly tied to the armed forces. However, Rydz encountered some determined resistance at the next gathering of the Union of Polish Legionnaires held in Warsaw on May 24, 1936. According to Henryk Dzendżel, publisher of *Polska Agencja Prasowa* and

later cited by Wincenty Witos,* "...Rydz presented his proposals to the Legionnaires in a threatening way, since the vast majority was averse to him and his associates..."²⁶ He nevertheless was successful in pushing Sławek aside and replacing him with Adam Koc. Rydz's words seemed geared to the entire nation as opposed to the assembled Legionnaires as he made use of poetic metaphors:

Is it worth fighting about a strip of land when the entire field is in danger? Is there time today to dwell upon small fissures and minor flaws in the law when much more important gaps and more pressing issues than legal interpretation linger among us? We should instead be concentrating on broad, fresh, positive goals.²⁷

The first fragment of this quotation has been subject to varying interpretations. Some believe Rydz was referring to the threat posed by neighboring countries, while others suspect a reference to internal affairs within the Sanacja, which was disintegrating into squabbles and disorganization. Both of these assessments can be tied together. The members of the Sanacja were extremely apprehensive over alarming international events, such as the re-introduction of universal military conscription in

* Wincenty Witos (1874-1945) was the most prominent leader of the Polish peasant movement. Having served in the Galician Diet, the Austrian Reichsrat, and the Sejm, he served as prime minister for brief terms in the 1920s. He fled to Czechoslovakia in 1930 following Piłsudski's crackdown on political rivals. Despite being in exile at this time, he still held wide influence throughout the country.

Germany, the militarization of the Rhineland, and the Italian invasion of Abyssinia. Rydz was fully aware of the growing threat from Nazi Germany and intended to use it to his advantage as a trump card to increase his own power. "Make a quick comparison between us and what lies beyond our western and eastern frontiers...", his speech continued. Situated between two powerful neighbors, Poland's situation was truly unfortunate, and Rydz emphasized the necessity of concentrating on the army. National unity was to serve as the fundamental moral basis for the preparation of the Polish state against foreign aggression.

Rydz was keenly aware that Piłsudski's roundup of his political enemies at Brest-Litovsk had left lingering deep divisions within society which Piłsudski's death had failed to erase. The primary purpose of his speech was the announcement of the development of a national organization which would serve to widen the basis of his rule. In the opinion of Cat-Mackiewicz, its slogan of "national security" fell upon favorable circumstances.

...Piłsudski had never dealt with such a situation which Rydz was forced to face in 1936. Both the right as well as the socialists were willing to exclaim: Long live the army! Long live Rydz! His leadership was generally accepted...²⁸

Rydz nevertheless spoke in generalities as to what this organization would entail. Seeking adherents from as

broad a base as possible, Rydz was compelled to offer a visibly all-encompassing program in order to attract political parties and interest groups of various ideological hues.

The prevailing view in post-war historiography concerning Rydz's proposal reflects skepticism and its failure to reach beyond equivocations. He could not free himself from the ideological grip of the Sanacja and accordingly was unable to offer the nation a new political or social vision. This point of view is controversial, since he was heavily involved with socioeconomic and political interest groups. It would have been difficult for him to be dissuaded from being influenced by the forces which sought his elevation to the top of the governing hierarchy. Rydz was hardly a well-seasoned politician, but he had learned a great deal within the past year and come out from this trial period as one of the top managers of the state.

Rydz's May proclamation and the sudden elevation of his authority throughout the nation compelled Mościcki to summon the cabinet in mid-June 1936. The ministers were prodded about their universal obligation to observe meticulously the provisions of the constitution, and reminded of its status as the only authority above that of

the president. It was no secret that this meeting was called to mollify grumblings about the extraconstitutional influence of the Commander-in-Chief.

Mościcki's proclamation was received with widespread disapproval. Sensing the resulting apprehension, Mościcki attempted to backtrack by blaming a momentary loss of memory and train of thought. Using what he hoped to be an assiduous exit out of this situation, he embarked on a tangent alluding to the merits of Rydz's health and energy. But this seemingly trivial aberration was to have significant aftereffects. In order to preserve his influence among the Piłsudskiites, the president was compelled to concede some of his authority to the Commander-in-Chief. The president recognized Rydz as a de facto colleague in ruling the nation on July 13, and a circular announcing this development was drafted hastily by Składkowski. It read as follows:

In compliance with the will of the President of the Republic, Ignacy Mościcki, the following is hereby proclaimed: General Śmigły-Rydz, anointed by Marshal Józef Piłsudski as the Primary Defender of the Nation and colleague of the President of the Republic in the governing of the nation, is to be regarded and respected as the first person in Poland after the President of the Republic. All state functionaries, under the tutelage of the prime minister, are obligated to show him respect and obedience.²⁹

This proclamation, which officially enshrined Rydz as the second person in the nation literally was a blatant violation of the April Constitution. In one stroke, it had designated him as a future president. The majority of the public lacked the political consciousness to contemplate the consequences of this announcement, but it invited universal condemnation in publications affiliated with the left, and the chairman of the Sejm's Military Commission, General Lucjan Żeligowski, responded angrily with strong criticism.³⁰

In anticipation of opposition to his promotion and largely on the advice of Stpiczyński, Rydz had decided to try to strengthen his ties with peasant interests by participating in ceremonial celebrations sponsored by the Peasant Party in Nowosielce.³¹ Upon his arrival during the commencement of the festivities on June 29, Rydz was accompanied by Władysław Belina-Prażmowski, the governor of Lvov province, and the commander of the 10th Military District, General Wacław Wieczorkiewicz. Zmora, a local official, greeted the Commander-in-Chief as the "most dignified leader of the Polish Army." A triumphal arch was adorned with the Legionary eagles and the national colors, upon which a large sign read: "We welcome you, Commander-in-Chief." Rydz was transported from the arch to the field

altar in a horse-drawn carriage laden with flowers and accompanied by the oldest member of the community, 92-year old Adam Wasacz. The Commander-in-Chief did not speak, but he laid a wreath upon the grave of the peasant hero Michał Pyrz* and received the acknowledgement of attending peasants and military detachments. Unfortunately for Rydz, the rally transpired in a way he had never contemplated, as the peasant activists began vocally demanding the rehabilitation of Wincenty Witos. Rydz left the ceremonies before they concluded. Even Pobóg-Malinowski acknowledged that following the events in Nowosielce, "despite everything else, Rydz was haunted with a feeling of discomfort."³²

The international situation, which increasingly threatened the peace negotiated at Versailles, caused intense apprehension in Warsaw. Rydz clearly perceived the threat of aggression from Germany, in contrast to Beck, who, espousing his idea of keeping an equal distance from Moscow and Berlin, in reality could not discern the magnitude of the threat the Nazis posed in Europe. The Commander-in-Chief became convinced that these new developments compelled Poland to strengthen her ties with

* Michał Pyrz was a local, 17th century hero who had successfully defended a church in Nowosielce against a Tartaric horde.

France. There can be no doubt that Rydz was the primary instigator of close military and political cooperation between Paris and Warsaw, and the foreign ministry complied accordingly. Following the remilitarization of the Rhineland, France opposed Polish proposals, but the French military hierarchy proposed military consultations at the highest level and invited Rydz to visit France. Recollections of Polish and French politicians and diplomats at the time reflect a divergence of opinion. The diary of Jan Szembek, Józef Beck's immediate subordinate in the foreign ministry, revealed that the first French invitation was offered on January 18, 1936,³³ while the formal invitation was dated May 6.* Poland's ambassador to France, Juliusz Łukasiewicz,[↓] discussed this with Rydz toward the end of June, and the Commander-in-Chief "somehow attached great weight to resurrecting the alliance with France, believing his visit should be more than a mere exercise in diplomatic pomp." Concerning political

* Jan Szembek (1881-1945) was a diplomat and Piłsudskiite. He served in diplomatic posts in Lithuania, Hungary, Belgium, and Romania. He had served as undersecretary to Beck and was the de facto head of the foreign ministry at the time of the evacuation of the Polish government during the September 1939 campaign. He fled to Budapest, eventually making his way to Paris, and settling in Portugal in 1940.

↓ Juliusz Łukasiewicz (1892-1951) was a POW veteran who served independent Poland in a number of diplomatic posts, including Riga, Vienna, Moscow, and at the League of Nations. He fled to Britain following the fall of France in 1940, where he was an opponent of Władysław Sikorski. He moved to the United States in 1950, and took his own life the following year.

matters, Rydz felt the need to avoid any new commitments or possible extra burdens, arguing that Great Britain's passive attitude toward the Rhineland occupation had weakened France's commitments to her Polish ally.³⁴

Two unanticipated developments impeded an immediate response from Rydz. The French ambassador to Poland, Leon Noël, advised that Beck be replaced as foreign minister, since his dealings with the Germans and the Soviets were viewed with suspicion in some French circles. Noël hinted that such a change would be a condition for any loans Poland may seek. The French also seemed to look more favorably onto a Polish alliance with Czechoslovakia and a potential expansion of such a coalition throughout central Europe. Rydz's procrastination provoked a certain uneasiness among the French, who in turn decided to take the initiative by sending General Maurice Gamelin to Poland on August 12. Showered with honors at every step, the French chief of staff engaged in various consultations with Polish governmental and military leaders, also attending a number of army training exercises. The motive behind Gamelin's visit was to assess the possibility of a rapprochement between Poland and Czechoslovakia and Polish-Soviet cooperation in the event of an outbreak of war with Germany. Rydz resisted such measures, and instead aimed to

maintain the relationship between Poland and France on the basis of alliance between the two countries negotiated in 1921. He made this known in an address to the Sejm on August 14 in which he ruled out military cooperation between Poland and the Soviet Union and opposed allowing the Red Army to set foot on Polish, or even Lithuanian territory. The only collaboration he considered was between the two countries' air forces.

Rydz departed for France on August 28. Składkowski, Kwiatkowski, Beck, General Kasprzycki, the defense minister, and other generals and government officials appeared at the main train station in Warsaw to wish the Commander-in-Chief well. The next morning he arrived in Vienna, where he met with the Polish ambassador to Austria, Jan Gawroński, and spent several hours touring the city by automobile.* The trip through Vienna, and not via a shorter route through the Third Reich, was assessed by various foreign observers as a sign of cooler relations between Germany and Poland. According to the *Morning Post* and the *Manchester Guardian*, both Rydz's and Gamelin's

* Jan Gawroński (1892-1983) was in diplomatic service since 1919, which included assignments in Bern, Berlin, The Hague, and Ankara. From 1938 to 1943, he represented Polish interests in Italy, and then served in the Polish Second Corps. He settled in Rome after the Second World War.

passage through Austria illustrated "from which way the wind was blowing."³⁵

Rydz crossed the French frontier on the morning of August 30. Enthusiastic demonstrations celebrating his arrival had been prepared in two cities through which he passed, Mulhouse and Belfort. Rydz's train arrived in Paris's eastern depot by mid-afternoon, where General Gamelin and the French defense minister, Eduard Daladier, received him. During his visit, Rydz consulted with various French political and military leaders, from whom he sought reinforcement of the terms of the 1921 alliance, closer military cooperation between the two countries, as well as loans for up to two billion francs for sprucing up the Polish military. Rydz was treated like the commander of the Polish army, partaking in maneuvers near Suippes, where he witnessed the use of modern military hardware, especially the demonstration of a motorized battalion in support of infantry, and was later presented with a French military medal by France's president, Albert Lebrun.

Nevertheless discussions concerning the credits Rydz desired made very slow progress. Initially, the French were willing to provide some hardware, but no money. An agreement was finally reached at Rambouillet whose terms granted Poland two million francs, half of which was in

cash: 800 million francs for French military supplies, and 200 million francs for production of materiel in Poland. Although the 1921 alliance with its 1925 amendments was renewed, it nevertheless did not specify French military obligations relating to coordination between the armies of the two countries. During the discussions, Rydz skillfully avoided French pressure to relieve Beck, stressing that the foreign minister was needed on account of the necessity of maintaining good relations with Germany.³⁶

Rydz spent the final afternoon of his trip to Paris in the Louvre, whose relics were very familiar to him from previous visits. As usual, he was most enthralled by its extensive collection of paintings and sculptures. He was especially attracted to a statue of Nike, which he told a reporter he considered one of the most beautiful in the world. Encountering a rather flattering breach of protocol at the train station just before his departure from Paris, the city's police prefect appeared to bid Rydz farewell, an honor usually reserved for heads of state.

The Polish delegation returned via Venice, but *Polska Zbrojna* was eager to point out that this sojourn was strictly private.³⁷ Accompanied by his wife and the chief of the general staff, Wacław Stachiewicz, Rydz traveled by boat from the train station across the Canale Grande to the

Hotel Danieli. In light of the lack of any official notification, the Italian press failed to note a meeting with Italy's undersecretary of foreign affairs, Guiseppe Bastianini, who happened to be visiting relatives in the vicinity. Rydz did not dwell on politics in his discussions with the Italian statesman, instead choosing to talk about various Venetian artistic attractions. Despite Rydz's visit bearing the character of a private tourist orientation, Stanisław Sierpowski surmised that the Italians chose to treat it as an opportunity for political consultations. Commentary in the press tended to downplay the accomplishments of his trip to Paris.³⁸

Rydz's return to his homeland on September 10 was greeted with enthusiasm, as recounted in *Polska Zbrojna*:

The Commander-in-Chief returned to a huge celebration and outpouring of popular feeling reminiscent of a Roman triumph. The entire route from Zebrzydowice to Warsaw was adorned with flags, flowers, and greenery, and countless crowds appearing from the villages surrounding the rail line, including some who were honored for the opportunity just to glance at his train...³⁹

There is undoubtedly much truth in this assessment. The public was undoubtedly relieved with the results of Rydz's mission, seeing a strong alliance with France as a guarantee of Polish independence. Upon his arrival in Warsaw he was greeted by Prime Minister Składkowski,

representatives of the diplomatic corps, the army, the Catholic Church, as well as additional members of the government. A banner had been unfurled along the platform reading: "Long Live Our Leader." Rydz's route through the city was elaborately decorated. Varsovians and members of various Piłsudskiite organizations lined the streets. Every several dozen meters, orchestras were set up which played music as his motorcade passed by. The government press proceeded to lionize Rydz's accomplishments in an attempt to elevate him to the forefront of the political life of the country.

Mościcki and Vice Premier Kwiatkowski were keenly aware of Rydz's growing popularity. Within Piłsudskiite circles a tendency emerged to honor the Commander-in-Chief in a distinct way, using his image to rally the public behind the government and the army. On October 21, *Polska Zbrojna* announced that Rydz would be promoted to marshal on November 11, Independence Day.⁴⁰ Celebratory preparations for this event went on for weeks in anticipation of a ceremony full of pomp. On November 4, it was announced that *Do Not Forget the Might* (*Byćcie o siłę nie zapomnieli*) would be published within the next few days. On the day preceding his official receipt of the Marshal's sword, Mościcki abruptly elevated Rydz from two-star general to

the rank of three-star general. A complete agenda for Rydz's ceremonial promotion to marshal was published at the same time. The bestowal of the marshal's sword took place on the November 10, commencing with a morning mass celebrated in the chapel at the Royal Castle (*Zamek Królewski*). Attending were Mościcki, Składkowski, Kasprzycki and the general staff. A reception followed at the National Theater. Rydz then arrived at his residence on Klonowa Street accompanied by cavalry units and General Schally, Mościcki's military aide.* Legionnaires, POW veterans, retired officers and war invalids, civil servants and teachers assembled along the parade route stretching from Ujazdowski Avenue to Krakowski Przedmieście, while a military color guard and representatives of the government, clergy, and the army paid homage in the Royal Castle's courtyard. The festivities culminated in the mid-afternoon, when Mościcki bestowed the marshal's sword upon

* Kazimierz Schally (1895-1967) was a veteran of the Legions, reaching the rank of colonel by 1915. Following the 1917 Oath Crisis, he was drafted into the Austro-Hungarian army. While he was active in the POW in the Ukraine in 1918, he was apprehended by Soviet forces and sentenced to death. His life was spared thanks to the intervention of the Danish ambassador and the Danish delegation of the Red Cross. Returning to Poland, he enrolled in the army and served in a variety of military posts in the interwar period. Following the September 1939 campaign, he managed to get to France through Romania, and spent time during the Second World War in Britain, Sweden, and Canada, where he served as military attaché to the Polish ambassador. He settled in Sweden after the war. His son, Andrew Schally, won a Nobel prize in medicine in 1977, the first Pole to receive this honor.

Rydz. This was followed by a 20-gun salute and an overflight of airplanes. The president then proceeded to make a speech:

For me, today is a joyous day, and I am certain that it is exhilarating for all of Poland, standing out as a moment of great historical significance in the history of our resurrected nation. Today I am bestowing upon you, Commander-in-Chief, the marshal's sword, as a symbol of your indispensability to the nation. This sword, which I will be presenting to you momentarily, is the highest Polish military honor. Current developments demand the recognition of this festive occasion and its far-reaching significance. You now may lead Poland towards her highest magnificence in conjunction with the President of the Republic in line with his constitutional obligations. You have earned this right through your extensive and dedicated work over the years for the cause of Polish independence together with our Great Marshal. So let this festive occasion in your honor, stirring such joyous emotion throughout the Republic, serve to strengthen your spirit which strives for the good of the nation.⁴¹

After also receiving the Order of the White Eagle (*Biały Orzeł*), the newly appointed marshal briefly addressed the gathering with a prepared statement:

As I look at this moment over the story of my life, this day is not a page recounting my attributes, but instead is more apt in an account of my liabilities...which I have barely repaid. A difficult task has fallen upon me. This sword and the symbolic example which it provides are hardly diminished by the absence of its previous custodian, the First Marshal of Poland, whose brilliance, glory, and immeasurable dedication must now be bestowed upon the next generation which continues to labor in the service of the nation. When it is difficult to foresee the results of my decisions when they involve the nation's fate, I am in good hands. When it is impossible under such circumstances to guarantee anything, then I

believe one may be allowed one assurance: the certainty of good intentions and genuine efforts.⁴²

Rydz's promotion provoked widespread commentary in both the national and international press. The *London Times* reported that

...many considerations, internal as well as external, appear to have convinced the Government that Poland needs another "deciding factor," and the choice has naturally fallen on the Army Chief—because he is the Army Chief, but also because all of the leaders of the Army and the Government recognize in him the "deciding factor."

La République's Warsaw correspondent assessed that Rydz's nomination fulfilled Piłsudski's political legacy in becoming the "arbiter of the nation."⁴³

The year 1936 brought about a succession of uninterrupted successes for Rydz. Within hardly eighteen months, he had risen up to the most important person in the Second Republic, sharing power only with the president.⁴⁴ This undoubtedly combined many elements which to a large extent appeared to be beyond his control. Rydz nevertheless revealed his substantial political acumen and an intuition conducive to the prevailing situation. He was able to secure a wide range of devotees and enlist their help in the process which led him to the highest rank in the Second Republic's hierarchy.

The Camp of National Unity

At a gathering of the Union of Polish Legionnaires in Warsaw on May 24, 1936, Rydz revealed his desire to create a new organization supportive of the government centered around the army and the Commander-in-Chief. Colonel Adam Koc, former legionnaire, POW veteran and loyal Piłsudskiite, was entrusted with its organization. Following his Warsaw proclamation, Rydz officially appointed Koc as head of the organization. In accepting the appointment, Koc "...occupied himself with ponderous tasks, which was tantamount to almost complete ineffectiveness..." recounted Pobóg-Malinowski.⁴⁵

The choice of Koc was exceptionally unfortunate. Consultations with various interest groups and political parties were ineptly conducted and produced no tangible results. Koc was not even capable of formulating any kind of ideological proclamation which could serve as a basis for further discussion. Some of the Piłsudskiites, with Miedziński at their helm, had ably foreseen the need for a new organization serving as a popular base of support for the political elite which had succeeded the deceased marshal in light of the perceived gap left from the dissolution of the BBWR. Miedziński himself had even offered to compose its ideological treatise. Rydz found

this unacceptable and instead revealed to his closest confidants that he would write the proclamation himself. It was ready within a week. In a rare moment of consensus between the Piłsudskiites and the opposition, they concluded that Rydz's declaration was decidedly conservative and nationalistic.

Rydz's failure to mention any land reform in its text immediately alienated the left. Miedziński threatened to withdraw from political life. In an attempt to avert fissures among the Piłsudskiites, the declaration's most prominent detractors assembled for a two-day conference in Zakopane for the purpose of discussing its content. Despite the ensuing vitriol which dominated the meeting, Miedziński skillfully managed to pressure Rydz on the declaration's text, especially the issue of land reform. The government press laid the groundwork for the official declaration by perpetually reiterating Rydz's Warsaw speech. "Beyond a doubt the ranks of the people are increasingly unified—especially those who truly comprehend what the National Camp means," cited Colonel Adam Rudnicki.⁴⁶

It was not until February 21, 1937 that the declaration was ready for public dissemination. As head of the new Camp of National Unity (*Obóz Zjednoczenia*

Narodowego) or OZON, Koc read the organization's declaration over a nation-wide radio broadcast, and printed copies of the address blanketed the country within a short period of time. The most outstanding points may be summarized in a few sentences: The rebirth of Poland was the exclusive product of the labors of Piłsudski and the nation, whose interests are stated in the April Constitution. The army held immense importance in the life of the nation, and Rydz was Piłsudski's heir. The socioeconomic platform emphasized the state's role as arbiter between employee and employers, and the facilitator of improvement of rural culture, the reduction of landlessness, and the expansion of peasant landholdings, availability of credit and educational opportunities. Toleration of Jews and other national minorities was proclaimed together with mutual cultural and economic cooperation on a common plane. The OZON declaration nevertheless retained its conservative and nationalistic flavor, revealing a rightward ideological evolution of the *Sanacja*. Many of its expressions and slogans were borrowed from the *Endeks*.⁴⁷ Since it omitted any references to Poland's foreign relations, it lacked more substance than Rydz's speech to the Legionnaires several months before. The peasantry and the working class adopted an unfavorable

position toward the OZON declaration. OZON instead retained the support of the former followers of the BBWR, people affiliated with the Sanacja regime, veterans organizations, and government officials. It enjoyed strong support in business circles, among large landowners, and the clergy.

Mościcki's support for this new initiative was immensely important to Rydz. In a speech given on March 19, 1937, the president ascertained that Pilsudski's verbal bequest was to "...designate General Śmigły-Rydz as his successor as the leader of the armed forces, and that certain realities in our nation unquestionably necessitates that Poland in its entirety also acknowledge him as leader of the nation." Next Mościcki recalled Rydz's Warsaw speech and his decision to create OZON. The president made sure to mention that Rydz had consulted with him long before the announcement, and that it met Mościcki's wholehearted approval.⁴⁸ Mościcki's address suggested Rydz's substantial political ascendancy over the president himself.

The task of organizing OZON proceeded ponderously. Its staff, headed by Colonel Jan Kowalewski,* was organized along military lines into urban and rural sections. Following the creation of OZON, Rydz increasingly inclined politically toward the right, as the social reform which he had advocated in his youth seemed to fade away and consultations with various right-wing politicians became frequent. With this grew his impatience with dissent. On May 18, 1937, Rydz attended a reunion of the Endek-affiliated Polish academic fraternity Arkonia held in Warsaw in commemoration of its 58th anniversary, whose attendees included Władysław Anders and other Polish officers.↓ Aleksander Heinrich, a leader of the National Radical Camp (*Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny* or ONR) hosted the gathering.* Rydz made a speech in which he lionized the tradition of this old and venerated institution.

* Jan Kowalewski (1892-1965) had a long career in cryptology and intelligence which covered both world wars. He held a degree in chemistry and later served in the Russian army. His subsequent work in intelligence proved valuable to Poland's interests during the conflicts following the First World War. After serving in various intelligence capacities in the interwar period, he fled to Lisbon after the September 1939 campaign, where he oversaw a communications network with various underground organizations. He settled in Britain after the Second World War.

↓ Władysław Anders (1892-1970) was later to gain fame as the commander of the Polish Second Corps which seized the site of the Monte Cassino monastery in 1944.

* Aleksander Heinrich (1901-1942) identified himself with right-wing politics while studying law at the University of Warsaw in the early (continued on next page)

I believe that the Polish nation has a great future. If this is so, then there is much work to be done. Poland's intelligentsia must play a vital role in its success, and the young may make a great contribution with their mettle, enthusiasm and dynamism...⁴⁹

He then stated that his main reason for appearing was to demonstrate his faith in the "soul of Polish youth." Endek and Sanacja publications reported on the gathering with great enthusiasm. To close political observers, there was no doubt that Rydz intended to bring the Endeks into his idea of "national unity" and later actions on his part would confirm this.

Also active in the capital was the 11 November Club, composed mostly of younger Endeks mainly from the ONR. An elite group numbering about 30 or 40, the club sought to find common ideological ground between itself and the tradition of independence associated with the Piłsudskiites. While Witold Grabowski, a minister in Składkowski's government, was officially its leader,* Rydz had been one of the club's founders and he nurtured it

1920s. Born in the Caucasus to a building contractor, his initial affiliation with Roman Dmowski and the Endeks gave way to involvement in various right-wing student organizations. Remaining in Poland following the September campaign, his attempts to contact the underground led to his arrest by the Gestapo, and he subsequently perished in Auschwitz.

* Witold Grabowski (1898-1966) served as minister of justice from 1936 until the September 1939 campaign. A veteran of the Riflemen during the First World War, he had held a number of judicial posts in interwar Poland. After the outbreak of the Second World War, he made his way to the Middle East. Settling in Ethiopia after the war, he eventually relocated to London.

accordingly, even though he seldom appeared at its gatherings, usually sending an aide in his stead. During a rare appearance at one of the club's gatherings, Rydz made the usual references to the importance of the young generation, the lack of a common national idea which encouraged unity, and the role which the club could play to encourage national integration.⁵⁰ The press often covered Rydz's appearances at various youth-oriented festivities. Contacts with youth were undoubtedly motivated by Rydz's desire to encourage the young's participation in OZON, and he eventually decided to create the Union of Polish Youth [*Związek Młodej Polski*], commonly known as "Young OZON." In a radio address on June 22, 1937, Koc proclaimed the creation of Young OZON:

In compliance with Marshal Edward Śmigły-Rydz's call for the attainment of national unity, I am announcing the creation of the Union of Polish Youth. In light of the importance of its work, he will direct it personally and will designate Jerzy Rutkowski as his deputy.⁵¹

The appointment of Rutkowski, a prominent figure in the ONR-Falanga, was a gesture toward the right wing.* It simultaneously aroused opposition within working class

* Jerzy Rutkowski (1914-1989) was later to be very active in the Home Army during the Second World War. Following being apprehended by the Germans after the Warsaw Uprising, he returned to Poland after the Second World War, where his political activities paralleled those of the head of the ONR, Bolesław Piasecki, in the PAX organization which cooperated with the communists.

youth, and OZON's scope of influence still remained meager by mid-1937. Mościcki was secretly averse toward it, as were left wing elements within the Sanacja. Some historians tried to tie this dissent with the attempt on Koc's life just outside his country villa on July 18, 1937. A bomb placed at the gate of his home exploded prematurely and killed the would-be assassin. Documents found scattered around his remains pointed toward the unsuccessful assassin's affiliation with the Front Morges and the Peasant Party. These revelations, only too transparent, raised serious doubts regarding their authenticity. Generally it appeared that the attempted assassination was a provocation organized by Rydz's followers in order to defame the opposition. As a consequence, many Hallerites and affiliates of the Peasant Party were arrested, and the possibility of arresting Sikorski was even considered.⁵²

OZON in the form advocated by Rydz provoked substantial criticism in Sanacja-oriented circles. Rydz's resulting apprehension compelled him to be conciliatory in his address at the fourteenth gathering of the Union of Polish Legionnaires held in Cracow on August 8, 1937. He emphasized the necessity of overcoming political and popular crises for the cause of a strong and formidable

state, the road to success being composed of three ingredients: a strong army in order to ensure peace with Poland's neighbors; the vigilant preservation of internal order; and internal and external peace in order to achieve the unity of those who are prepared to work for raising the level of Polish life.⁵³ Rydz's speech did little to dispel doubts of the Piłsudskiite attendees. Even the official account of the gathering spoke of the formidable skepticism the Legionnaires expressed toward OZON.

Toward the end of 1937, rifts had developed between Rydz and the *Zamek* group, which had becoming increasingly critical of OZON's development. On October 7, at a meeting officially described as a "political conference of the government attended by the President of the Republic and Marshal Rydz-Śmigły with A. Koc the leader of OZON partaking," Koc bitterly accused Poland's provincial governors of sabotaging OZON's efforts to create a unified organization throughout the country. He stressed the necessity of linking all of the trade unions into one workers' association along fascist models in order to counteract opposition within society. Rydz strongly backed the OZON chief, openly declaring Koc to be "my man, the executor of my commands." The president's ministers, including Beck, who up to this point had maintained his

neutrality, reacted with strong opposition to Koc, thus indirectly attacking Rydz. The president declared that he had erred in gathering a council for the purpose of the implementation of the constitution with only one representative of the military when more should have been summoned. In a heated session held two days later, Rydz's supporters managed to force a vote on the reorganization of the cabinet. All of the ministers were relieved of their portfolios except for Grabowski and Beck. Koc was to be assigned the ministry of economics to begin implementing a corporatist-type system. Faced with an ultimatum demanding formation of a new government by October 19, Mościcki feigned illness in an attempt to extricate himself from the situation, at least temporarily.*

Tension between the Piłsudskiites became even more divisive following this meeting. Memoirs of contemporaries indicate that Rydz's followers sought to acquire sole political authority for themselves, causing rumors of a coup d'etat on the evening of St. Bartholemew's Day and the arrest of Sławek, Prystor, and other dissenting Piłsudskiites. Even Rydz himself organized a special

* It does not appear that Rydz was present at this meeting.

session on October 30 to discuss such a possibility. As Henryk Gruber recalled, Rydz was supposed to have said:

...among dissident Legionary circles, rumors are rampant of proscription lists and a so-called Saint Bartholomew's Night, to which the youth movement in the National Radical Camp is conspiring for the purpose of assassinating all of the leading figures aligned with us. Who of you, having commonly endured so many struggles, could possibly believe this? Evidently, quite a few people are trying to foment discord among us...⁵⁴

Accounts of this episode in Polish politics vary, but the deep fissures among the leaders of the nation which they reveal are beyond any doubt. Certain documents attest to the Front Morges spreading rumors of a possible attempt by Rydz to seize absolute power for himself in light of the Front's outright opposition to the Sanacja regime.

Following events in October, Rydz finally recognized that opposition to Koc was too strong, and the OZON chief was relieved in January 1938. His departure was followed by some changes along the following lines: the reorganization of OZON's youth movement, structural reform, and a modification of its political program. To OZON's leadership Rydz summoned a number of soldiers who were on active duty. Following futile attempts at accommodation with the country's political right, he became more conscious of the drop in his popularity throughout the country. The decline was even evident in Legionary and POW

circles, which were unable to secure any support from the Endeks. Accordingly Rydz was forced to limit his contacts with the National Democratic Party and reevaluate the entire OZON idea. The resulting political impasse created a chance for military-oriented interests to gain influence. Unable to attend a POW gathering in Vilnius on November 21, 1937, Rydz made a radio address in which he spoke of the "inclusion of society in the service of the Polish *raison d'etat*."⁵⁵ The medium was exploited for its greater propaganda value. Rydz's proclamations espousing the need to rally the populace behind the government and the army arose directly from the feeling of danger confronting the nation from the outside, as well as his admiration of countries ruled by dictatorial and authoritarian regimes. He was convinced that only a resilient nation under strong leadership could succeed in raising the level of preparedness and defensive capabilities.

With OZON's creation and its later reorganization, Rydz's devoted followers were consolidated, yet he still found himself in a precarious situation and remedied this with vacillatory statements and platitudes. OZON's ranks contained many Piłsudskiites in positions of leadership who were constantly making nostalgic references to the "First Marshal." Rydz was thus forced to build up his stature in

difficult circumstances. His primary trump card was the propagation of his being Piłsudski's handpicked heir, the marshal's most beloved protégé whom Piłsudski's testament had designated with the responsibility of continuing the marshal's legacy. The ardent Sanacja supporter Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski recounted:

Long ago everyone agreed, even before the restoration of Polish independence, that in the event of Piłsudski's absence, then Śmigły would take the helm. This was known even in the most remote places when Piłsudski was incarcerated and the dream for independence seemed almost hopeless. From where did the likemindedness of the soldiers, conspirators and their colleagues come? Like everyone, Śmigły, even if he was the most prominent of Piłsudski's followers, could not have labored and fought so resolutely in spite of the wide latitude of authority which had been bestowed upon him. He worked in Piłsudski's shadow. He considered it his greatest honor to be in the shadow of beloved grandeur and the epitome of modesty. Anyone who observed him closely was familiar with Śmigły's disposition. Everything he did was on behalf of the Leader, never giving himself any credit. Yet all of us already knew then, that Śmigły was a leader, and in the event of Piłsudski's absence, then Śmigły would take the helm.⁵⁶

The notion that this cult of Rydz-Śmigły which surfaced in some parts of the country had any fascist-oriented overtones should be discounted. Unlike Mussolini, Rydz never emphasized any supposed virtues as a great leader. He was only the first soldier in the republic, a symbol of the strength and integrity of the nation. His figure represented the pinnacle of the entire social hierarchy of

the nation. This lack of any laws delineating any specific political role for Rydz in the life of the nation demonstrated that his position was not as pronounced as that of a fascist leader. The embrace of the principles of nationalism without racist overtones revealed a clever tactic to appeal to important nationalistic elements within Polish politics and thus deprive the Endeks of their most potent ideological weapon.

OZON undoubtedly did not fulfill most of the hopes it had set for itself. However Rydz's initiative to a large degree was instrumental in the realization of the growing threat which Germany posed, and the need for national unity to counter it. Rydz bore the status of undisputed leader not only of the Sanacja, but also the societal masses, a national leader safeguarding independence and the state's destiny. Thus it can be ascertained that OZON's activities allowed the government to overcome the difficult situation which had endured following the dissolution of the BBWR. In the regime's feud with the opposition, OZON had turned out to be effective to a certain extent. It managed to succeed in attracting within its ranks various figures from opposition parties either motivated by opportunism or adulation for the organization's political slogans. Backed by the bureaucracy, OZON attempted to make headway against

the left and political forces under the influence of the Front Morges. Programmatic and personnel changes which took place in the beginning of 1938 to a large degree neutralized left-leaning sympathies within OZON. Its slogans for economic reform, such as reduction of unemployment, expansion of public works, and the development of education and culture, placated the PPS.

The Commander-in-Chief and Foreign Policy

Following the May coup d'etat the course of Polish foreign policy was exclusively Piłsudski's domain. After his death his legacy was carried on by Beck, who assumed the post of foreign minister in 1932 following the retirement of August Zaleski. Polish foreign policy had been based upon alliances with France and Romania. However as the 1930s progressed, the association with Paris increasingly tottered, as France began aspiring to lessening her obligations toward her ally in the east. Consequently Beck, attempting to balance relations between Berlin and Moscow on an even keel, negotiated an agreement with the Soviet Union in 1932 and a non-aggression pact with Germany two years later. On May 14, 1935, Hermann Goering informed Józef Lipski, the German ambassador to Poland, of a desire to meet with Rydz.⁵⁷ The proposed

meeting never materialized, even though Goering had led the German delegation at Piłsudski's funeral.

Relations with Czechoslovakia remained frosty over Teschen, and relations with Kaunas were even worse. The Lithuanians had never accepted the Polish incorporation of Vilnius, which the Lithuanians still considered their constitutional capital, tracing their claim back to their 14th century monarch Gediminas. With Piłsudski's death speculation arose within European diplomatic circles regarding the future of Polish foreign policy.

Upon Rydz's appointment as Commander-in-Chief, it appears that he did not have a clear idea of how to conduct or shape foreign policy. He had no experience in this field, and some historians believe that Beck and Rydz were prone to disagreements, despite the lack of evidence. Within the first few months of his political career, Rydz already found himself in a situation which demanded the formulation of a clearly defined policy. By the summer of 1935 relations with Poland's western neighbor had deteriorated over a currency dispute involving Danzig and the German failure to pay transit fees on commerce entering and exiting the free city through Polish Pomerania. In an effort to unify the populace behind him by taking a formidable stand, Rydz proclaimed that Poland remained

steadfast to the end in defending her independence at the thirteenth gathering of the Union of Polish Legionnaires on August 6. The rhetorical warning to Germany was purposely timed to be concurrent with an accommodation over Danzig successfully negotiated by Lipski, Hitler, and Goering which at least temporarily averted conflict. Berlin undoubtedly took note that Rydz would assume a more rigid position toward Germany in contrast to Beck's comparative flexibility. In light of his prominence in Poland's political life, Rydz assumed a position toward Germany which the political parties and the populace expected. He felt that it was in his interest to do his best to revitalize Poland's alliance with France at the same time. The December compromise between Mościcki and Rydz, which had alleviated misunderstandings within the cabinet, did not fundamentally influence Rydz's position toward Germany. Rydz's speech in Poznań on December 27 at the seventeenth anniversary celebration of the uprising in Poznania was purposely tinged with anti-German utterances, partly motivated by a desire to secure the support of the Endeks, especially its youth organization. Such rhetoric was greeted warmly in Paris and London at the time. The influence of Beck's predecessor, August Zaleski, in the ensuing diplomatic milieu was not to be discounted.

Although he did little to hide his animosity toward Beck, Zaleski's valuable connections in Britain and relation to Rydz through his second wife guaranteed his stature as the Commander-in-Chief's trusted advisor and confidant.

Rydz's desire for a closer relationship with France arose from a realization of the weakness of Poland's armed forces. The situation following Piłsudski's demise had become alarmingly disquieting as Germany and the Soviet Union had taken large steps toward equipping their respective armed forces with more modern weaponry and raising their combat proficiency. Rydz meticulously examined the reports generated by the general staff of the 2nd military district warning of the increasing danger from the west and the north. German violation of the Treaty of Versailles in March, 1935 and the remilitarization of the Rhineland the following year undoubtedly compelled Rydz to reexamine France's position on combat readiness. His government was soon convinced that Paris would not undertake any counteraction. Nevertheless Beck did not neglect to reassure Ambassador Noël that in case of an outbreak of hostilities, Poland would remain "...steadfast toward her obligations to her allies..." Yet when France accepted the Rhineland occupation without protest, Beck retracted his declaration.⁵⁸ Beck displayed greater insight

in regard to this matter than the Commander-in-Chief. In contrast to the earnest commitments to France in which Rydz and the chief of the general staff, General Wacław Stachiewicz, confided, Beck had no such delusions, instead believing that France would engage in nothing beyond diplomatic protests, and would undertake no measures to enhance her military preparedness.

For Poland's leaders, few alternatives were available besides trying to strengthen the French alliance. Although the Rhineland dilemma left much to contemplate, Rydz was consistent in his belief in closer military cooperation between the two countries. He met with Vice Minister Jan Szembek, whose diary entry for June 30, 1936 revealed that Rydz wholeheartedly insisted on coming to terms with Paris. The Commander-in-Chief was hoping that recent events would compel France to increase her willingness to provide credits for Poland's military forces. In addition Rydz asserted the need for the "politics of intercourse" with Germany, while remaining "on one's guard" while conducting relations, surmising that the Germans would attain full military preparedness within two to three years. When Szembek hypothesized that German behavior displayed a tendency for expansion toward the southeast instead of the traditional direction toward East Prussia, Rydz was

unreceptive of such a prediction, insisting that the East Prussian frontier remain heavily fortified. Rydz's supposition, later proved correct, was that similar defensive precautions were not necessary in Silesia, feeling that conditions there favored the Poles in case of a German attack. In conclusion Rydz stated his intention to pay increasing attention to the Danzig issue, feeling that this would be the *casus belli* for hostilities between the two states.⁵⁹

General Maurice Gamelin's visit to Poland and Rydz's subsequent visit to France restored cordiality between the two states. The primary purpose of the Warsaw deliberations was to come up with a defensive plan for Poland in the event of a war with Germany.⁶⁰ Rydz nevertheless never succeeded in bringing about cooperation between the respective general staffs of the two nations, which proved to be a gross oversight. In an attempt to mollify potential German apprehension over Franco-Polish diplomatic endeavors, Beck dispatched Szembek to Germany. Under the official cover of being in Berlin for the occasion of the Olympic Games from August 6 to August 17, Szembek met with Hitler, Ribbentrop, Goering, and Neurath,

in an attempt to assure them that Polish foreign policy had not fundamentally changed.*

One may assess that two distinct paths in Polish foreign policy emerged in 1936. The first, espoused by Beck, focused upon maintaining good relations with Germany, while the second, advocated by Rydz, emphasized the French connection. Both expressed a deep aversion toward the Soviet Union. It is instructive to note that Rydz's attitude toward Poland's eastern neighbor made him impervious toward news of Russo-French negotiations for the purpose of maintaining the status quo in Europe. He could not bring himself to adopt a more flexible approach and thus demonstrate a minimum of good judgment concerning this issue. Following the talks with the French, Szembek revealed this tendency in his account of a discussion he held with Rydz on September 30.

At present we will still pursue a policy of non-alignment and neutrality toward both sides. As events seem to illustrate that maintenance of this balance may soon be untenable, we cannot repeat the same fundamental mistakes of the period just before the partitions in which we chose to maintain isolation from a whole host of developments throughout Europe...If we are forced to favor one side over the other, Rydz stated that it certainly would not be with the Bolsheviks.⁶¹

* Konstantin von Neurath (1873-1956) was the foreign minister of Germany.

After Rydz's visit to France, Berlin was determined to be apprised of whether Poland had made any fundamental changes in her foreign policy. In meetings with Beck on November 18, and Rydz on November 25, the German ambassador to Poland, Hans von Moltke, was reassured that Poland would continue to abide by the terms of the 1934 non-aggression pact between the two nations. Rydz and von Moltke both acknowledged the necessity of maintaining Danzig as a free city, while Rydz expressed regret that the Danzig problem had caused a cooling of relations between the two states, assuring the ambassador that anti-German sentiments in the Polish press was merely a temporary phenomenon. When von Moltke called attention to the "Bolshevik danger," Rydz agreed, adding that the circumstances of Poland's lengthy eastern frontier governed his policies toward the Soviet Union.⁶² From Rydz's foreign policy statements, one may determine that he thought Germany a greater threat than did Beck, but the Commander-in-Chief failed to follow up on this notion with very many practical proposals on how to deal with it. He wanted to strengthen the Franco-Polish alliance, but, similar to other politicians within the Sanacja, refused to contemplate the idea of collective security which had been initiated by Paris and Moscow.

In late 1936 and early 1937, Germany made known her desire to include Poland in an alliance against the Soviet Union. In official consultations between the Nazis and the Sanacja, Germany unequivocally proposed Warsaw's inclusion in a bloc of anti-communist states for a collective crusade against the Soviet Union in an attempt to win over Rydz and major Sanacja figures to its designs. Goering arrived in Poland in February 1937 for consultations with Rydz. According to the recollections of Szembek, who was in attendance, Goering emphatically renounced German claims to the Polish Corridor and Upper Silesia, assuring Rydz that the Germans would not return to the policies governed by the 1922 Treaty of Rapallo. Rydz criticized the USSR heavily, citing the Soviets' failure to renounce their plans for unleashing world revolution, and the resulting need for mutual German-Polish understanding and cooperation, even at a military level. Goering replied by inviting Poland to enter an anti-Comintern pact. Rydz cordially reiterated what he had told von Moltke, emphasizing his desire to continue the policies initiated by Piłsudski. He spoke favorably of the status of German-Polish relations and the hope that it would continue indefinitely. In speaking of the Soviet Union, Rydz asserted that the Poles were averse to communist ideology,

but that it appeared to him that the Soviets were not behaving in an aggressive way. Concerning the Franco-Polish alliance, he emphasized its strictly defensive character. The matter of Polish adherence to an anti-Comintern pact was thus carefully avoided.⁶³

By March 1938, Germany had turned to a policy of outright aggression, occupying Vienna on March 12. Beck decided that gearing German expansion toward the southeast was the most advantageous policy direction for Poland, thus diverting the Nazis' attention away from Danzig and Pomerania. At the time of the German incursion into Austria, the Polish foreign minister was vacationing in Italy. Despite Składkowski's appeal to return to Poland, Beck decided to remain in Sorrento to avoid the possible implication that the Anschluss had alarmed Poland in any way. On March 12, a meeting of government officials including Rydz, Składkowski, and Szembek, was hastily convened, and a consensus was reached that any Polish statement in defense of Austria was not in the national interest. Rydz then pondered the possibility of using Poland's neutral stance as a bargaining chip for concessions from Germany in regard to Danzig, ascertaining that the officials in attendance had to reckon with "the expansion, aggression, and dynamism of Germany, who, after

dealing with Austria and Czechoslovakia, could in due course turn against Poland." Despite this danger, he nevertheless felt that the policy of détente with the Germans should continue, while "blindly trusting them is out of the question."⁶⁴ Rydz's words revealed that he was fully aware that continual German disdain for existing international agreements posed a threat to Poland. He was nevertheless unable to find a definitive way out of such a situation. Even the proposal to use Poland's neutrality toward the Anschluss to pressure Germany over Danzig was never pursued. Rydz, like other Polish politicians at the time, deluded himself in the hope for a conciliatory solution to the differences between Poland and Germany, basing all of his faith in the alliance with France, but failing to notice the increasing tendency toward appeasement on the part of Britain and France encouraging Hitler's expansionist aspirations.

Taking advantage of European attention toward the Austrian crisis, it was resolved to apply pressure on Lithuania to re-establish diplomatic relations. A recent border incident which involved the Lithuanian shooting of a Polish border guard, Stanisław Serafin, provided a convenient pretext. A communication was issued on March 13, 1938, stating that the incident was a result of broken

relations and a lack of agreement on the frontier between the two countries. Although the appeal put blame for the incident exclusively on Kaunas, the Poles suggested convening a joint commission to investigate the circumstances surrounding the shooting. The memorandum was published with Rydz's approval, who personally edited it.⁶⁵ This peculiar attempt to resolve the crisis was pushed by elements within the army tied to Rydz. Beck knew nothing of this sudden turn of events, and made no effort to alter his plans to return from Italy on March 16, despite requests from Rydz and Składkowski.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, upon the foreign minister's return, Beck energetically went to work to resolve the crisis. Estonia, who served as a mediator in the dispute, delivered a Polish statement bordering on an ultimatum, demanding a restoration of relations within forty-eight hours. OZON simultaneously organized mass demonstrations of anti-Lithuanian propaganda in support of Rydz under the slogan, "Leader, guide us to Kaunas!" Rydz appeared in Vilnius on March 18 in order to inspect Polish military exercises along the Lithuanian frontier. Within twenty-four hours, the Lithuanians accepted the terms of the Polish ultimatum. Upon receipt of Beck's telephone call telling him the news, Rydz beamed with delight. Both felt proud that the issue had been

dealt with unilaterally, thus demonstrating Poland's capability of pursuing her interests in central Europe without outside interference, even from friendly countries. As a consequence, diplomatic relations and telephone communications between the two countries were restored, and economic and military cooperation commenced.⁶⁷ Rydz's popularity rose, and carefully contrived propaganda credited him as the architect of this diplomatic "victory" and bolstered his image as leader of the nation. Nevertheless public opinion in Britain and France was reflected in London's and Paris's negative reaction toward the entire affair. Rydz's dispatch of the ultimatum and his apparent willingness to impose it militarily invited strong disdain from the two western powers as well as the Soviet Union, and the reaction of the press in other European states revealed little support for Poland's action.

When Germany began pressuring Czechoslovakia in 1938, France, which was allied with Prague, contemplated easing tensions in order to preserve peace. The Quai d'Orsay nevertheless was unaware of Polish intentions in case of a German attack upon Poland's Slavic neighbor to the south. On May 27, French Foreign Minister Georges Bonnet instructed Noël to secure an audience with Rydz. The

ambassador sought guarantees that Poland would not take up arms against Czechoslovakia, and that Poland would honor her treaty obligations to Paris in the event of an outbreak of hostilities between France and Germany. During discussions with Rydz held on June 3, Noël, citing a promise the marshal made to Gamelin in 1936, requested reiteration of the declaration made at the time, that a situation in which Poland and France found themselves on opposing sides could never materialize. Rydz replied that he would stand by his pledge, but remained ambiguous about his intentions toward Czechoslovakia. While declaring that Poland had no designs on Slovakia, he discounted any possibility that the Czechoslovak state could survive in its entirety. He also failed to foresee any reconciliation between Henlein and the Czechs, and stressed that Warsaw would require the freedom to react to every potential development.⁶⁸ France's attempt to convert Poland to an overt anti-German policy failed, and Rydz's refusal provided Bonnet with additional excuses to pursue a policy of appeasement. French attempts throughout the summer and fall to widen the rift between Germany and Poland failed to alter Poland's position. When Noël once again requested of Beck Polish cooperation in maintaining peace in Europe on September 7, Beck firmly refused the overture, repeating

his recommendation that the ambassador consult Rydz, who accordingly maintained his previous declaration limiting the alliance between the two countries strictly to a German attack on France.

In the beginning of September, Poland's plans for Czechoslovakia were finalized, as Rydz and Beck agreed on which course to pursue. It is difficult to comprehend why the leadership of the army consented for a move on Teschen, since it only served to strengthen Germany's aggression toward Czechoslovakia. Considering the military advantage over Poland which Germany enjoyed, Hitler profited the most. Yet a relatively easy occupation of Teschen would result in praise for Rydz, augmenting his stature as the "first soldier of the Republic" and build support for his regime. With upcoming parliamentary elections, the Sanacja sought a tool for propaganda against the opposition. In a meeting with his ministers on September 30 during which the idea of an ultimatum to Prague surfaced, Rydz pledged his wholehearted support. Even before the demand was issued, Rydz announced a recruiting drive for a so-called Teschen volunteer corps under the leadership of Major General Władysław Bortnowski which crossed the Olza River into

Czech Teschen on October 2.* Rydz simultaneously addressed Bortnowski's forces with the following radio address:

When I dispatched you over the Olza, I had my utmost trust in you. For the honor which has been bestowed upon you, you must place all of your heart and soul in your ongoing soldierly duty, so that my trust can be multiplied one hundred fold. While fulfilling your honorable mission, think of...those beyond the Olza who have awaited you and Poland. Onward!⁶⁹

Although Rydz and Beck definitely wanted to discourage any eruption of anti-Czech sentiments, the occupation of Teschen was ostentatiously celebrated. In an address to Poles beyond the Olza on October 3, Rydz publicly requested peace and order throughout the occupied terrain.

In the spirit of tranquil resolution of misunderstandings between Poland and Czechoslovakia, it is imperative that a final accommodation over our common frontier be negotiated peacefully and without any further bloodletting. In light of the noble chivalry so becoming of all Poles, I await the time when we are all masters of our own house. This applies to those already under Polish rule, as well as those inhabiting lands to be annexed in the future.⁷⁰

Government propaganda was filled with slogans boasting of Poland's "great power" status, reflected in Rydz's next radio address filled with references to national honor:

A country which wishes to distinguish herself honorably during such moments of historical significance must possess the necessary strength and must be ruled steadfastly and resolutely.⁷¹

* It should be noted that the Czechs, although under duress, consented to all Polish demands before the incursion began.

On October 12, Rydz traveled to Teschen, making an appearance carefully engineered for propaganda purposes. Banners, flags, and triumphal arches adorned the streets as he received the salutation of the soldiers and the public before speaking to the crowd.

...Besides being stronger now that you have returned to the fold, the Polish nation obtained yet another benefit from the events of the past few days. Now, like a soldier who goes into battle knowing that he will soon stand in the face of danger as he observes his rifle and checks to make sure it is properly loaded, the Polish nation beheld its moral vigilance, sensed how it must proceed, and became acutely aware of its feelings, its will, and its faith...⁷²

Rydz did not underestimate the mood of the populace following the occupation. Only the communists refused to be duped by the nationalist propaganda by unequivocally condemning the Polish regime. Various elements of the military also disapproved of Poland's participation in the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, realizing how much it strengthened the strategic position of Germany in central Europe.

Although Poland did not partake in the Munich deliberations, her behavior during the Czechoslovak crisis was a triumph for Hitler. Polish pretension over Teschen, although partially justified, did not justify exploitation of her southern neighbor's hour of weakness, and Poland's action provoked grave consequences concerning her relations

with France. Calls for revision and even renunciation of the Franco-Polish alliance emerged in French political circles and public opinion. Although discussion ensued in parliament and within the French government, the French ultimately decided to maintain the status quo, fearing that any severance could compel Poland to fall quickly into the German orbit.⁷³ Nevertheless relations between the general staffs of the two countries cooled following the Munich conference, reduced strictly to the exchange of military intelligence. Symptomatically, Rydz and Gamelin even failed to exchange greetings on New Years Day. The Czechoslovak crisis demonstrated that Polish foreign policy had yielded disappointing results. The Munich conference was limited to the four participating powers, thus undermining Beck's desire to distance Germany from Britain and France as much as possible. The rapid occupation of Teschen was supposed to serve as a protest against Poland's exclusion, and to reach a new level of understanding with Germany on a strictly bilateral basis.

The next problem requiring attention was Rydz's attitude toward a common border with Hungary. Throughout the interwar period, Poland had backed Hungarian aspirations to recover Ruthenia, which had been awarded to Czechoslovakia by the Treaty of Trianon. Beck felt that

the emergence of the common frontier and a détente between Hungary and Romania were important for improving Poland's strategic position. Rydz embraced this resolutely, feeling that the two countries could facilitate transit of supplies from Britain and France in case of a German attack. Unfortunately, these were erroneous suppositions. Above all, the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia had dangerously extended Poland's line of defense in the south. Besides, Hungary's assistance could never be expected, since German influence since the mid-1930s had drawn the Hungarian regime increasingly into Hitler's orbit. In addition, Poland's open support for Hungary's expansion had aroused the ire of Romania, who feared that Hungary would next pretentiously demand Transylvania. Attempts by the Poles to reconcile this dispute for the purpose of forming a united front against Germany failed, as the antagonism between Bucharest and Budapest proved impossible to overcome.

In the meantime the Danzig dispute intensified. By the beginning of 1939, Warsaw had acknowledged that discussions with Germany were futile as the Poles surmised that this would be the German *casus belli*. When Hitler dispatched a memorandum to the Poles on March 21 in which he repeatedly harped on the Danzig issue, it became clear

to the Poles that he clearly intended to go to war. Two days later Rydz ordered a partial mobilization and the formation of a corps composed of two divisions in case intervention in the free city became necessary. Following the German seizure of Memel, Poland's military leaders feared a possible German-sponsored coup d'etat in Danzig.

In reaction to the Memel occupation, a conference was held in Warsaw on March 23 concurrent with Hitler's personal appearance in the formerly Lithuanian city, with Mościcki, Rydz, Beck, and Składkowski in attendance. The discussion revealed differences between Rydz and Beck in interpreting German motives. Rydz was not in agreement with the foreign minister's prediction of the impossibility of an outbreak of hostilities, and the Commander-in-Chief instead ordered a clandestine mobilization of the 4th and 9th Military Districts headquartered in Łódź and Brest-Litovsk, respectively. Military planning against the Germans was reliant upon a rapid British and French offensive over Germany's western frontier and cooperation between the three countries' supreme commanders and general staffs. A major weakness of this idea was the complete lack of consideration of a potential reaction on the part of the Soviet Union, who it was generally assumed would remain neutral. Mobilization commenced at a feverish pace as

coordination of military plans dominated discussions between the allied general staffs.

Britain's guarantee to Poland was announced on March 31 and was followed by Beck's trip to London to sign the accompanying accord on April 6. Although the joint agreement was only a declaration bearing no firm British commitments to Poland's defense,⁷⁴ it provided psychological comfort to the Poles, who chose an expanded interpretation as a *de jure* military alliance and the satisfactory accomplishment of a major goal in Polish foreign policy at the time. The news was greeted in Warsaw with predictable enthusiasm. Szembek recalled in his diary that Rydz received the news with great relief.

He then began to discuss the international situation. Feeling that the Germans were as yet not adequately prepared for war, it would not be in their interests to resort to extremes. Nevertheless it would be foolish to rely completely on such suppositions, since the Germans are deluded by their recent success and surprises are always possible...⁷⁵

Rydz was firmly convinced that the Anglo-Polish agreement would serve as a deterrent to Germany's aggressive designs. It is difficult to assess to what degree Rydz influenced the impetus for the treaty. If Beck was in close contact with him, then he would have been obligated to pressure Beck to include guarantees of British military and financial aid in the negotiations. On the other hand, the

wider British goal of a peaceful resolution to the German-Polish dispute cannot be discounted.

With detailed proposals in hand, Poland's defense minister, General Kasprzycki, traveled to Paris on May 14 for consultations with General Gamelin. Kasprzycki pressured the French commander for immediate implementation of the Franco-Polish alliance upon the first confirmation of a German attack not only upon Poland, but upon Danzig as well. He predicted that the Germans would first strive to cripple quickly Poland's army to the point of incapacity, then throw their forces against Britain and France. His proposals may be summarized as follows: In case of German aggression, the French should engage in hostile action as quickly as possible to shorten the time Poland would be fighting alone; the French air force should immediately commence raids over Germany; the possibility of French naval action in the Baltic Sea should be considered to try and break communications between East Prussia and German proper; France should provide Poland with military aid, especially tanks and heavy artillery. The talks, which endured until May 21, concluded with a mutual agreement stating that German aggression upon Poland would result in immediate French intervention, initially with air attacks, limited ground attacks by the third day of hostilities, and

a wide, full-scale offensive on the western front by the fifteenth day. The first phase of the war would involve Poland engaging in defensive actions in full strength and, if possible, going on the offensive. If the main German attack were to go through Belgium or Switzerland, the Poles would make every effort to engage as many German forces as possible.⁷⁶ France in turn committed herself to supply military materiel. In spite of the contestable terms and specific obligations which the concordat entailed, it could not come into force. The French replied that such obligations on their part required a political accord between the governments of the two countries. This caused the French commitments stipulated in the agreement to be of little value. By the time the final accord was signed by Bonnet and Ambassador Łukasiewicz on September 4, the war was already underway. The lack of a political agreement between Poland and France was a major diplomatic blunder, whose primary blame undoubtedly lies with Beck, who possessed false confidence in the terms agreed upon between the two states the previous May. Kasprzycki could never secure a firmer commitment from France, which reflected negatively on Rydz, the individual who was ultimately responsible for Poland's defense.

Joint discussions involving the British and Polish general staffs took place from May 23 to 30, respectively led by Generals J.B. Clayton and Wacław Stachiewicz. The subject of the talks was limited to an exchange of organizational information about equipment and the potential capabilities of both armies. The topic of British assistance in the form of war materiel and loans in the event of a German attack was also broached. Ultimately Britain declined to commit firmly to such obligations, and the consultations ended with some verbal declarations of support from Clayton.⁷⁷ Rydz nevertheless felt that he had taken significant steps toward checking potential German aggression. Despite Hitler's clear indications that Poland would be the next victim of his rapacious plans, Poland's political leaders did little to enhance defensive preparations in the few months which preceded the outbreak of hostilities. To the end, Rydz was deluded by the belief that war would be averted, feeling that the Germans would think twice before risking war with Britain and France. He even surmised that Hitler's insistence on military action could provoke his overthrow.

On August 12, a joint British and French military mission reached Moscow to engage in discussions with the chiefs of staff of the Soviet army, navy, and air force.

While Britain and France treated the consultations as strictly "informational," the head of the Soviet delegation, General Kliment Voroshilov, proposed a strong coalition among the three states to check German expansion. Not sharing a border with Germany, the Soviet military leaders stated as a condition the right of passage through Polish territory on a corridor stretching from eastern Little Poland (*Małopolska*) to the Vilnius region. Despite their status in these talks as representatives of Polish interests, Britain and France did not officially pose this question to Warsaw. Being informed of ongoing developments in Moscow, Rydz, as recalled by Stachiewicz in his memoirs,

...was adamantly opposed to Voroshilov's request. He felt that such an incursion did not guarantee Soviet participation in the war, but instead only insured the certainty that the Soviets would permanently occupy whatever (Polish) terrain they overran, adding that the Soviets themselves were well aware of Poland's position on this issue.⁷⁸

It was thus clear that Rydz had little faith in any sincerity in Soviet intentions. Instead he was convinced that the Soviet Union would take advantage of the opportunity to unleash communist agitation in Poland's eastern territories. Faced with British and French vacillation and dilatoriness, as well as a lack of trust from the Poles, the Moscow negotiations produced no concrete results.

In light of this turn of events, the Soviet Union concluded a non-aggression pact with Germany on August 23. The Poles waited until after the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was concluded to take up the possibility of Soviet military assistance against Germany. By then it was too late. Despite obtaining German and French guarantees between March and September, Poland's political leaders were unable to protect the country from German aggression. Today it is known that bold decisions and unconventional solutions were necessary at the time. The blame thus must be borne by Beck as well as Rydz.

Preparation for Poland's Defense

Rydz inherited an army from Piłsudski plagued with an antiquated structure. If it was considered superior to the Germany army in 1923 and not granting concessions to the Soviets, despite the latter's numerical superiority, the tide had gravely turned to Poland's disadvantage by the mid-1930s. Piłsudski's promotion of military doctrines reflecting campaigns dating from 1914 to 1920 lived on, and accordingly resulted in an army incapable of fighting a modern war. Especially disconcerting were changes involving duplication of duties.⁷⁹

The period from 1926 to 1935 involved a lack of attention to organization and supplies. Except for certain accomplishments in the field of standardization of armaments and naval expansion, modernization of the military was minimal, and the effectiveness of the air force and armored units had even declined. Following Rydz's appointment as head of the General Inspectorate, he brought about many changes both in personnel and in organization. He transferred Major General Janusz Gąsiorowski to a field command, replacing him as chief of the general staff with another former Legionnaire, Major General Wacław Stachiewicz. A disciplined and conscientious officer, Stachiewicz had good credentials for staff duties, yet some military historians have pointed out his unwillingness to expand his military thinking.

Rydz brought about a division of authority between the general staff and the General Inspectorate. To a great degree, the latter institution was a throwback to the 1926-1935 period. It retained the responsibility of drawing plans for the modernization of the army and studying defense of the country against a German attack. Beyond this, the general staff was instructed to forward otherwise neglected problems to other institutions. Above all else, it became necessary to draw up a new plan for mobilization.

Such a plan, code-named "S", was not activated for many years and no longer possessed much military value, existing only on paper. The composition of the peacetime armed forces was such an anachronism, that a conversion to war status was not feasible. Thus the general staff started working on a new mobilization plan, code-named "W", which could be used in case of an outbreak of hostilities, consisting of two sub-plans designated "East" (*Wschód*) and "West" (*Zachód*) by the chief of the First Bureau of the General Staff (Organization and Mobilization), Colonel Józef Wiatr.*

Stachiewicz points out in his memoirs that Rydz and the General Inspectorate were technically separate from the general staff, and accordingly the marshal and the inspectors chose to follow protocol and not interfere. Following Piłsudski's coup, much of the defense minister's authority was transferred to the General Inspectorate. Piłsudski's assumption of the defense ministry and the position of Commander-in-Chief did not provoke greater friction between these two institutions. Yet after his death, the situation underwent change. While Rydz became

* Józef Wiatr (1889-1977) had served in the Austro-Hungarian army, the Legions, and the POW. Following Polish independence he served in variety of mostly staff-related posts. Following the September 1939 campaign, he made his way to the Near East, where he served in Polish armed forces in exile. He settled in Britain after the war.

Commander-in-Chief, the defense ministry went to Major General Tadeusz Kasprzycki, becoming a de facto cog in the military administration dependent upon Rydz despite formally being subject to the prime minister and answerable to the Sejm. The minister's duties were poorly coordinated with the functions of the general staff, often leading to feuds over who held proper authority to fulfill certain specific duties, a situation which Rydz failed to address completely.⁸⁰ It was evident that Rydz and his associates were thus incapable of forging the appropriate atmosphere of cooperation between the respective military institutions. This undoubtedly harmed the preparation of the country's defense. The General Inspectorate did not possess the wherewithal to coordinate the main components of the armed forces, lacking broader consultations and collective leadership. Such a situation was even incompatible with the whole cult of the Commander-in-Chief inherent in the regime's propaganda at the time.

Up to 1935 the primary technical concentration for the Polish armed forces involved standardization and improvement of basic armaments. At the time, armies throughout Europe were undergoing military improvements, particularly in armor and air capability, and expansion of manpower. As a result of poor planning and limited

financial resources, the process of the Polish armed forces' modernization began slowly and on a limited scale. It was not until Piłsudski's demise that a change in military leadership occurred, and Rydz diligently took it upon himself to pursue the introduction of more modern weaponry and the expansion of the armed forces. He and his military advisers realized that lacking a thorough overhaul and an increase in manpower, war with some of Poland's neighbors would most certainly end in defeat. In light of this, Rydz proceeded with the modernization and expansion of Poland's armed forces while continuing the standardization of armaments, as Stachiewicz clearly illustrated in his memoirs.

In response to Rydz's directives the general staff drew up operational and mobilization plans in 1936 and 1937 which were constantly plagued with various amendments. The plans were governed by the military potential of neighboring states, but they unequivocally demonstrated that the equipment and organization of Poland's armed forces rendered them in no condition for defensive much less offensive operations, and that the manpower numbers were inadequate even if new operational plans were finalized. Stachiewicz, who was held accountable for these studies and their implementation, wrote that the

fulfillment of these goals was unrealistic in light of the country's limited financial resources. Ultimately the decision about how to deal with these outstanding problems fell upon Rydz personally, and he decided to deal with them in the following way: The first phase involved organizational changes and better equipment and armaments, and an increase in the number of combat-ready divisions to forty, which served as the most realistic goal. The second phase involved further expansion of the army. Thus the specifics of the first phase included completion of the standardization of armaments, modernization of anti-tank and anti-aircraft munitions, investments in the air force, armored vehicles, communications, engineers, cavalry, the introduction of howitzers, partial motorization of supply transport, the creation of four motorized brigades, expansion of anti-aircraft and heavy artillery and reserve forces (initially requiring service of three months, then six months), and expansion of the armaments industry so it could cover peacetime needs, as well as adequate replenishment of supplies in case of hostilities. Expansion of the navy was also included in the plan.⁸¹ The project would be implemented in phases following the approval of the appropriate departments within the defense ministry and the general staff. Plans would then be

presented to a special, dedicated council, the Committee for Armaments and Materiel (*Komitet do Spraw Uzbrojenia i Sprzętu* or KSUS), which would then go to Rydz for final approval followed by implementation by the general staff.

The overlying problem with these ambitious goals was financial. It was estimated that the plan would take six years, with completion scheduled for 1942. This would require annual defense expenditures approaching 800 million złoty, while the appropriations actually available from the national budget hardly exceeded 550 million złoty. By Rydz's estimation this plan of military modernization constituted the fundamental ingredients for strengthening national defense, for which he had high hopes.

Developments for the next three years demonstrated that despite the many efforts of its architects, its effects proved insufficient. Stachiewicz recalled that all of the problems with a concurrent depressed economic situation resulted in serious financial shortfalls. Accordingly, it became necessary to alter the plan in order to take this into account. These deficiencies naturally led to many ideas originally planned being dropped. Expansion of the armaments industry was delayed and resulted in a decline in coordination and subsequent disruption of deliveries of raw materials and manufactured goods. The greatest lapse in

the plan's realization was the dispersal of dedicated funds associated with specific roles of the General Inspectorate, the defense ministry, and the general staff. A substantial percentage of the funds was wasted on local, low-level individual projects, such as construction of barracks, marches, record keeping, and training of minimal educational value. Even with the limited resources available, the amounts spent hardly justified the results, being particularly burdened with outlays for the creation of brand new units with better materiel. It seemed advantageous to refrain from cashiering older units, which had had more experience, but their upkeep drained resources spent on their maintenance. The prevailing doctrine of maintaining a "wide front" was instrumental in contributing to financial and organizational strains. In line with these maladies came a disregard for planned organizational reform. Although manpower increased, distribution among the various branches of the armed forces experienced little fundamental change. Personnel in the infantry and cavalry remained too numerous and allotment of weaponry for armored vehicles and the air force remained insufficient. This situation was exacerbated during mobilization in 1939 when the infantry was expanded even further.

Up through the mid-1930s, Polish military planning was focused toward the threat from the east. The emphasis placed upon the Soviet threat was simultaneous with a neglect of Poland's northern and western frontier. Under Piłsudski, the most important operational planning failed to consider an eventual war with Germany.⁸² Following his death, such thinking underwent substantial change. Germany's swift rearmament and her aggressive behavior on the international scene compelled Rydz to order his staff to concentrate also on the threat from the west. Nevertheless old Sanacja apprehensions toward the Soviet Union required that defensive planning for the east also be maintained. Such thinking prevailed up to the spring of 1939, at which time the chief of the general staff decided that the military plan to counter a potential Soviet attack had not been altered since 1935, and could thus be considered completed. Piłsudski's plan was to remain in place, and individual military inspectors were given the responsibility of making necessary minor alterations in concert with developments within the Red Army. By late 1937 and early 1938 the general staff accordingly decided to concentrate the country's defense in one central command, while inspectors were assigned responsibility over their individual armies' planning.

The long emphasis on the "East" idea rather than the "West" plan required new preparations for future military operations. Up until the spring of 1939 the majority of fortifications had been concentrated in the eastern part of the country. Work on plan "W" had commenced in the summer of 1935 and was to be completed in two years. Delays caused the plan to be finally realized on April 30, 1938, and its final form allowed for much elasticity. Its strategic emphasis on a two-front war overtly betrayed the influence of political considerations. In case of emergency, mobilization could proceed at local and presumably clandestine levels according to individual units as needed, or mobilization could be nation-wide depending on where a potential threat happened to lie. Use of reserves was also taken under consideration. Plans also considered Poland's ethnic heterogeneity, sometimes involving quota systems according to nationality. Only ethnic Poles could compose a majority of some specific units. The basis of operational plans on the western front was published by the general staff and entitled *A Study of the Germans (Studium Niemcy)*. It was an attempt to analyze how much time it would take the Germans, whose manpower was increasing at alarming rates, to undertake an offensive war on two fronts. It emphasized their technical and

industrial superiority, and predicted the Reich's ability to commence hostilities on two fronts sometime in 1940. The study included an assessment of how to counter a German attack with a strong implication of its eventuality. Based on the findings of this study, Rydz decided to initiate a preliminary plan of action in the west. He considered it provisional and only a guiding principle in case of a German attack subject to further analysis even in the initial stages of the war.

The primary elements of Rydz's plan were as follows: The largest and the most dangerous German attack would come out of western Pomerania toward Łódź and Skierniewice. This would be simultaneous with an attack from East Prussia toward Warsaw through Toruń and Włocławek. A presumably weaker thrust from Lower Silesia would head south of Poznań toward Łódź. The Germans would assume a position more defensive in character in Upper Silesia, eventually engaging in scattered attacks on the Polish coal mining region. The prevailing tactical thought of the Poles was to form a defensive line stretching from Pomerania to Łódź and Skierniewice, while offensive action would be taken against the attack from the north, and, if possible, followed by an incursion into East Prussia. Attacks from Upper Silesia could be halted and Lower Silesian skirmishes

could be contained. Thus the primary concentration of Polish forces would be in the north, consisting of forces from Army Poznań and Army Pomerania and a reserve army in a region encompassing Toruń, Bydgoszcz, Poznań and Kutno with the responsibility of countering enemy thrusts from western Pomerania and western East Prussia. These forces would hold their positions and eventually strike the enemy forces from East Prussia in the rear through Toruń and Włocławek, thus preventing its breakthrough to Warsaw. A portion of the reserve army could also be dispatched in a southwesterly direction. The army to the north of Warsaw was to engage the enemy invading from East Prussia and then attack in concert with allied forces from Toruń and Włocławek. If successful then the northern forces were to attack the enemy's flank and rear using the Narew and Biebrza Rivers for defensive cover. Units throughout the western and southwestern part of the country stretching from Łódź would defend the rear and the flanks of the forces in the north. Only defensive measures were perceived to be needed in Upper Silesia. Rydz himself never unequivocally expressed any thoughts on how far penetration of East Prussia would extend, perceiving that this would depend on the size of the enemy forces invading from this area as well as Pomerania.

Faced with so many unknowns, Rydz ordered the gathering of local intelligence on the strength and activities of enemy forces in East Prussia, leaving the depth of a possible incursion an open question.⁸³ In the event of a main enemy attack in the west, then Polish forces were to occupy East Prussia. It was characteristic of Rydz to never abandon his notion of Poland's potentiality in the event of armed conflict with the Germans.⁸⁴

Nazi occupation of Austria and the Sudetenland compelled Rydz to modify partially his operational plans, as he became increasingly convinced that the main German thrust would come from Silesia. This explained his order for reserve forces to withdraw to the Kutno-Tomaszów Mazowiecki-Warsaw area, thus increasing their availability for dispatch to either Pomerania or central Silesia. In late February 1939, Rydz implemented a specific operational plan which spelled out the initial distribution of forces as well as directions to individual armies. On March 4, the general staff set about formulating the "West" plan. German occupation of Czechoslovakia and Memel revealed the necessity of reshuffling units and the acceleration of the general staff's planning. As recalled by Colonel Stanisław

Kopański,* these international developments caused the "East" plan to be relegated to the archives. Within a few days Rydz was issuing orders to the army inspectors to prepare for conflict with Germany.⁸⁵ Even while "West" was still being drawn up, Rydz began issuing exclusive instructions to his top army commanders, anticipating that final broad directives would be developed and submitted later. In light of the threat he perceived on Poland's southern flank, Rydz decided to move his reserve army southeasterly toward Radom. Reserve units removed from Kutno were replaced with two infantry divisions converted to reserve status. He similarly wanted to station reserve forces at the confluence of the Bug and the Narew as well as the Tarnów region. In his memoirs, Stachiewicz recalled that military planning for conflict in the western part of the country proceeded at a rapid pace from March 1939, but the general staff was plagued with various obstacles resulting from certain alterations proposed by Rydz regarding fortifications, food supplies, transport,

* Stanisław Kopański (1889-1977) served in the Russian army during the First World War and later served in the Polish army in the Polish-Soviet War. He held a variety of positions following Polish independence and accompanied Rydz southeastward to Romania during the September 1939 campaign. After reaching Palestine, he compiled an army of Polish exiles composed mostly of Polish soldiers who had managed to flee via Hungary and Romania. He later served as chief of staff to the Commander-in-Chief of all Polish armies fighting on the western front. He settled in London after the war.

communications, and the use of air power. This modified plan was in place at the time of the outbreak of hostilities.

There is little doubt that Rydz was its primary architect. His addition of certain strategic ingredients is worthy of closer analysis. They were guided by the following premises: The element of surprise would be advantageous to the Germans. The brunt of the first attack would have to be borne by the Poles until Britain and France commenced offensive action within fifteen days of France's mobilization. Within three days of mobilization the western allies would conduct limited ground operations and massive air bombardment. Poland's remaining neighbors would remain neutral, which would enable throwing all of the nation's weight against the Germans. Communication with the western allies through Romania would remain unhindered. The possibility of delivery of war materiel through the Soviet Union was kept open, as Poland had signed a mutual trade agreement with her eastern neighbor.

Rydz surmised that Germany would use 70 to 80 divisions, including five armored divisions and four light divisions, while leaving approximately 20 divisions along her western frontier. The bulk of the Luftwaffe would be near the Polish border, but following commencement of the

British and French offensive the Germans would be forced to transfer a majority of their air and ground forces to their western front. The Poles thought that the Germans would either unleash a massive thrust designed to overrun all of Poland or limit their objectives initially to Danzig and eventually to Pomerania and even Great Poland (*Wielkopolska*).

Stachiewicz recalled that "the government and Rydz were determined to resist immediately every eventual German move implemented with strength."⁸⁶ The greatest fear was a potential German initiative seeking an accommodation with Britain and France, especially if the western allies failed to react. In order to avert such a danger, Rydz came up with the following course of action: Stop the Germans and commence an offensive designed to prevent territorial losses in the western portion of the country where a large concentration of industry and population was situated. The first phase of this plan involved a defensive line stretching from Bydgoszcz southeast of Łódź toward Silesia. The northern tier would run along the Vistula, Narew, and Biebrza Rivers, while the southern barrier would run the length of the Carpathian Mountains. Such a concentration of forces was in anticipation of a major initiative against the main German force heading from Silesia toward Warsaw.

The southern flank was to hold out the longest, eventually withdrawing beyond the Dunajec River, while the northern forces were to retreat in a southeasterly direction. The reserve army was concentrated in Little Poland (*Małopolska*), the pivot to where the frontier armies would withdraw. Rydz envisioned Polish forces holding out here until the British and French offensive in the west. If a retreat were still necessary, then the main objective would be a withdrawal to southeastern Poland to preserve the potential escape route to Romania.

The "West" plan was compiled extemporaneously, altered as the political and military situation changed, and was thus never documented. Its primary fault was its lack of feasibility. In crafting it, Rydz failed to take lack of military and financial resources into consideration, and was instead motivated by the political interests of Poland's civilian and military leaders. Hastily compiled, "West" lacked a great deal of detailed analysis and many of its fundamental elements relied upon unsubstantiated suppositions. Rydz attached great importance to an allied offensive in the west, yet did little to solidify the alliance with France with a political accommodation and a firm guarantee of French intervention on Poland's behalf. The supposition that Poland's neighbors would remain

passive was also found wanting of a more solid basis. The dispute over Vilnius had never been resolved, and Lithuania could have taken advantage of the situation and seized the city. As the Polish military attaché in Vilnius, Leon Mitkiewicz, recalled, tension and mistrust characterized Poland's relations with the Soviet Union, despite trade and non-aggression pacts, as well as some cultural exchanges.⁸⁷ Soviet aims of annexing western Byelorussia and Ukraine in the event of German military successes had to be contemplated. Too many hopes were placed on the Polish alliance with Romania being able to facilitate contact with the western allies and transit of military personnel and hardware, and little consideration was taken of Romania's drift into the German orbit which had weakened French and Polish influence in that nation by the mid-1930s.⁸⁸ Beck was well aware of the difficulties involved in obtaining Romania's assurances of unimpeded transit of Polish dignitaries.

The thin distribution of military forces along Poland's frontier, especially after the German occupation of Czechoslovakia, and the resulting lack of depth and a second line of defense proved to be one of Rydz's outstanding errors. There can be no doubt that his greatest error was the lack of an alternative plan in case

"West" failed. In March 1939, Stachiewicz had discussed with Rydz the possibility of organizing a network of partisans which could gather reconnaissance and harass the enemy from the rear, but the Commander-in-Chief had casually replied that such action would be taken up by the young, and Major Edmund Galinat would be designated with this responsibility.* This demonstrated that Rydz had not contemplated the defeat of the regular army and the possibility of underground activity.

When one takes into account the balance of forces between Germany and Poland, the Third Reich enjoyed an advantage in almost every way. Such a war required an unusual amount of organizational precision of staff and military planning considering many potential enemy maneuvers, and above all preparing the populace for reversals in the initial stage of the conflict. In this realm there is little doubt that not everything was accomplished.

* On Edmund Galinat, see below, p. 289n.

NOTES FOR PART IV

¹ After 1926, a new group of Piłsudski's followers known as the "fourth brigade" emerged in the hope of gaining political influence and privileges. Its name was in reference to the three Legionary brigades placed under Piłsudski's command at the outset of the First World War.

² J. Żarnowski, "Lewica sanacyjna w latach 1935-1939," *Przegląd Historyczny*, 49(1958), p. 735.

³ Leon Noël, *Agresja niemiecka na Polskę*, (Warsaw, 1966), p. 23.

⁴ This entire affair remains enigmatic to this day.

⁵ J. Żarnowski, "Struktura i podłoże społeczne obozu narodowego w Polsce w latach 1926-1939," *Najnowsze Dzieje Polski 1914-1939*, 10(1966).

⁶ *Monitor Polski*, 150(4 July 1935), 154(9 July 1935).

⁷ *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 217(7 July 1935).

⁸ A. Micewski, *Z geografii politycznej II Rzeczypospolitej*. Szkice, (Warsaw, 1966), p. 236.

⁹ *Czas*, 184(8 July 1935).

¹⁰ Jędruszcak, T. ed., *Historia Polski*, PAN[na prawach rękopisu], IV, (Warsaw, 1980), p.225., A. Ajnenkiel, *Polska po przewrocie majowym. Zarys dziejów politycznych Polski 1926-1939*, (Warsaw, 1968), p. 515.

¹¹ *Czas*, 302(5 November 1935).

¹² *Polska Zbrojna*, 135(17 May 1935).

¹³ *Polska Zbrojna*, 138(20 May 1935).

¹⁴ E. Rydz-Śmigły, *Byście o siłę nie zapomnieli*, p. 237.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 240-242.

¹⁶ *Czas*, 325(25 November 1935).

¹⁷ Rydz-Śmigły, *op. cit.*, p. 245., *Kurier Poznański*, 595(28 December 1935).

¹⁸ *Polska Zbrojna*, 357(14 January 1936).

¹⁹ Rydz-Śmigły, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

²⁰ A. Micewski, *Z geografii politycznej II Rzeczypospolitej*, p. 238.

²¹ B. Miedziński, "Fantastyczne 'tło'," *Kultura* (Paris), XII, 110(1956).

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- ²² *Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polski*, 38(12 May 1936), p. 286. Compare P. Stawecki, *Następcy komendanta. Wojsko a polityka wewnętrzna Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej w latach 1935-1939*, (Warsaw, 1969), pp. 58-61.
- ²³ F.S. Składkowski, "Prezydent Mościcki," *Kultura*, X, 108(1956), p. 107.
- ²⁴ These individuals were Składkowski, Kasprzycki, Juliusz Ulrych, and Witold Grabowski. Those considered affiliated with the president were Kwiatkowski, Juliusz Poniatowski, Wojciech Świątosławski, Emil Kaliński, and Marian Zyndram-Kościałkowski. Józef Beck and Antoni Roman were not associated with any faction, even though Składkowski erroneously considered them part of the *Zamek* group. Compare F. Sławoj-Składkowski, "Opowieść administracyjna, czyli pamiętnik niebuchalterski," *Kultura*, 7-8(1951), p. 176.
- ²⁵ R. Zieliński, "Edward Rydz--marszałek Śmigły," *Więź*, II, p. 109.
- ²⁶ W. Witos, *Moja Tułaczka*, (Warsaw, 1967), p. 303.
- ²⁷ Rydz-Śmigły, *op. cit.*, p. 257.
- ²⁸ St. Cat-Mackiewicz, *Historia Polski od 11 listopada 1918 roku do 17 września 1939 r.*, (London, 1941), p. 277.
- ²⁹ *Polska Zbrojna*, 193(16 July 1936).
- ³⁰ Pobóg-Malinowski, *op. cit.*, II, p. 599, n. 34.
- ³¹ On 9 July 1936, *Polska Zbrojna* publicized heavily Rydz's previous meeting with the individuals responsible for the construction of a monument to peasant hero Michał Pyrż.
- ³² Pobóg-Malinowski, *op. cit.*, p. 606, n. 45.
- ³³ J. Szembek, *Dariusz i teki Jana Szembeka (1939-1945)*, (London, 1965), II, p. 40.
- ³⁴ J. Łukasiewicz, "Okupacja Nadrenii i Rambouillet," *Wiadomości Polskie*, 21/115(24 May 1942).
- ³⁵ *Biuletyn Tygodniowy Wydziału Prasowego MSZ*, 7(1936), p. 174.
- ³⁶ Noël, *op. cit.*, p. 123.
- ³⁷ *Polska Zbrojna*, 247(9 November 1936).
- ³⁸ S. Sierpowski, *Stosunki polsko-włoskie w latach 1918-1940*, (Warsaw, 1975), pp. 471-475.
- ³⁹ *Polska Zbrojna*, 249(11 November 1936).
- ⁴⁰ *Polska Zbrojna*, 289(21 October 1936).
- ⁴¹ *Polska Zbrojna*, 310(11 November 1936).

⁴² *Polska Zbrojna*, 310 (11 November 1936).

⁴³ *London Times*, 10 November 1936, p. 15., *La République*, 12 November 1936, p. 442.

⁴⁴ In his diary, Szembek's entry for 17 May 1936 states that the nation is run by three individuals: Rydz-Śmigły runs internal and military affairs, Beck singlehandedly runs foreign affairs, and the president reserves fiscal and economic policy to himself. J. Szembek, *Dariusz i teki Jana Szembeka (1939-1945)*, (London, 1969), III, p. 193.

⁴⁵ Pobóg-Malinowski, *op. cit.*, p. 606.

⁴⁶ *Polska Zbrojna*, 1 (1 January 1937).

⁴⁷ T. Jędruszczak, "Stanowisko społeczeństwa i opozycji wobec powstania Obozu Zjednoczenia Narodowego," *Najnowsze Dzieje Polski*, 4 (1961), p. 145.

⁴⁸ *Naród i Państwo*, 12-13 (28 March 1937).

⁴⁹ *Polska Zbrojna*, 137 (20 May 1937).

⁵⁰ CAW, WBH, t. 862, speech delivered at meeting of 11 November Club, 7 June 1937, typewritten, unpaginated.

⁵¹ *Polska Zbrojna*, 171 (23 June 1937).

⁵² J. Rawicz, "Zamach na płk Adama Koca," *Literatura*, 12 (24 March 1977), pp. 6-7., A. Ajnenkiel, *Polska po przewrocie majowym*, pp. 570-571.

⁵³ *Polska Zbrojna*, 218 (9 July 1937).

⁵⁴ H. Gruber, *Wspomnienia i uwagi 1892-1942*, (London, c.1965), p. 373.

⁵⁵ *Polska Zbrojna*, 323 (22 November 1937).

⁵⁶ J. Kaden-Bandrowski, "Wtedy Śmigły," *Naród i Wojsko*, 6 (15 March 1939).

⁵⁷ M. Wojciechowski, *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie 1933-1938*, 2nd ed., (Poznań, 1980), p. 195.

⁵⁸ Acting on Beck's instructions, the quasi-official Information Agency publication *Iskra* issued a statement expressing a far-reaching understanding of the German actions.

⁵⁹ Szembek, *Dariusz i teki*, II, pp. 238-240.

⁶⁰ Gen. Tadeusz Kutrzeba had produced a study concerning this, entitled *Studium nad możliwościami wojennymi Niemiec i Polski*, which Rydz endorsed in June 1936.

⁶¹ Szembek, *Dariusz i teki*, II, pp. 293.

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- ⁶² AAN, Zespół akt ambasady Berlin, sygn. 2, kk. 2-10, 25 November 1965, pp. 250-253. Compare with J. Gawroński, *Moja misja w Wiedniu 1932-1938*, (Warsaw, 1965), pp.250-253.
- ⁶³ Szembek, *Dariusz i teki*, III, p. 27.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, IV, pp. 74-75.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, IV, p. 77.
- ⁶⁶ Sierpowski, *Stosunki polsko-włoskie*, p. 534.
- ⁶⁷ H. & T. Jędruszczyk, *Ostatnie lata II Rzeczypospolitej*, (Warsaw, 1970), p. 265.
- ⁶⁸ Wojciechowski, *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie*, p. 413.
- ⁶⁹ *Polska Zbrojna*, 273(3 October 1938).
- ⁷⁰ AAN, Zespół akt E. Rydza-Smigłego, t. 11, k. 15.
- ⁷¹ *Polska Zbrojna*, 278(8 October 1938).
- ⁷² *Polska Zbrojna*, 283(13 October 1938).
- ⁷³ J. Ciałowicz, *Polsko-francuski sojusz wojskowy 1921-1939*, (Warsaw, 1970), p. 251.
- ⁷⁴ E. Kozłowski (ed.), *Polski czyn zbrojny w II wojnie światowej. Wojna obronna Polski 1939*, IV, (Warsaw, 1979), p. 298.
- ⁷⁵ Szembek, *Dariusz i teki*, IV, p. 550.
- ⁷⁶ E. Kozłowski ed., *Wojna obronna Polski 1939. Wybór źródeł*, (Warsaw, 1968), Doc. 67, pp. 257-258.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, Doc. 70, 71, 72, 74, 75, pp. 264-284.
- ⁷⁸ W. Stachiewicz, "Konferencja aliantów w Moskwie (W przededniu wojny 1939 r.)," 30(1974), p. 50., "Pisma," I, "Przygotowania wojenne w Polsce 1935-1939," *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 40(1977), p. 40.
- ⁷⁹ The defense minister officially led the army in peacetime, while the Commander-in-Chief was in charge of its preparation for war.
- ⁸⁰ S. Kopański, *Wspomnienia wojenne 1939-1946*, (London, 1961), p. 24.
- ⁸¹ Kozłowski ed., *Polski czyn zbrojny w II wojnie światowej*, p. 179. The plan for naval expansion anticipated the construction of two destroyers, three submarines, one minelayer, several minesweepers, an air squadron armed with torpedoes, 152 mm. coastal batteries, fortification of the Hel Peninsula, and more ammunition reserves.
- ⁸² *Polskie Siły Zbrojne w drugiej wojnie Światowej* (hereafter *PSZ*), (London, 1959), I, pt. 1, pp. 112-113.

⁸³ Stachiewicz, "Pisma," I, p. 182.

⁸⁴ *PSZ*, I, pt. 1, pp. 115.

⁸⁵ Kopański, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁸⁶ Stachiewicz, *op. cit.*, pp. 224-225.

⁸⁷ L. Mitkiewicz, "Ze wspomnień kowieńskich 1938-1939," *Kultura*, XII, 146(1950), p. 99.

⁸⁸ Compare B. Koszel, "Polityka III Rzeszy wobec Jugosławii i Rumunii w latach 1933-1936," A. Czubiński (ed.), *Państwa bałkańskie w polityce imperializmu niemieckiego w latach 1871-1945*, (Poznań, 1982), p. 290., H. Batowski, *Europa zmierza ku przepaści*, (Poznań, 1977), pp. 246-252.

Part V

RYDZ-ŚMIGŁY, THE COMMANDER 1935-1939

Mobilization and Organization of the Armed Forces

From the time of the Nazi occupation of Prague, Rydz faced a major dilemma: to mobilize, and if so, to what degree. On March 23 the minister of war issued an order for partial mobilization following Rydz's instructions.¹ Compared to the Wehrmacht, whose units were in a constant state of alert in peacetime, the Polish armed forces were in a disadvantageous position. Rydz avoided ordering a war alert, fearing that the national economy could not bear such a substantial burden.² He anticipated fighting the war using six armies and holding out until a western allied offensive commenced. The "West" plan provided for the defense of the entire length of the Polish-German, Czech, and Slovak frontier. Upon outbreak of hostilities most of the Polish forces were to attack in their entirety and the eventual line of withdrawal was very superficial, since disengagement from the enemy did not guarantee an effective defense.³ Such a situation was exacerbated by a lack of reserves, a problem admittedly foreseen, but not completely remedied by September 1. The concentration of Polish forces resembled more of a cordon lacking depth. This was

influenced by Rydz's insistence that weaknesses on any operational front could not be tolerated, regardless of its significance. The error in such thinking seems particularly astonishing, since the 2nd Bureau of the General Staff (Intelligence) had credible information revealing the main routes of attack which the Germans would use. In deciphering this intelligence, Stachiewicz attempted to impress upon Rydz the need to resist German attacks from every direction. The chief of the general staff implied that Poland's political leaders feared that the Germans could conceivably cease their advance after annexing Danzig or Pomerania and then try to negotiate a separate peace with Britain and France.

Thus it is very evident that Rydz, as the individual responsible for preparing the nation for war, paid too little attention to coordinating his foreign and economic policies and the general organization of the state and its armed forces. The lack of integration of all of these elements reveals that Rydz did not measure up to the role of a statesman capable of running the country as well as managing the armed forces in a modern field of battle. His erroneous conceptions led to a situation in which the forces sent to counter the German onslaught consisted of half of the nation's infantry and artillery and seventy

percent of the country's tanks, which can only be interpreted as a lack of an effective overall plan by failing to take the possibility of passive resistance into account. The Germans organized their forces very differently, making use of eighty percent of their infantry and artillery and all of their tanks on their main routes of attack, yet these forces were concentrated on only one quarter of their area of operation. Rydz's inadequate placement of Polish forces led to the inevitable impossibility of any kind of effective defense, which weighed heavily in the disastrous course of events.

In contrast to German preparedness, Polish mobilization was delayed by one month. Beefing up Polish forces on the frontier with Germany had not begun until April. To this end, soldiers from the Frontier Defense Corps (*Korpus Obronny Pogranicza* or KOP) were transferred from the east to the Hel Peninsula, Augustów, and Podhale. When the Danzig crisis intensified in June, the 9th Infantry Division, which had been mobilized earlier, was transferred to Pomerania. The 26th Infantry Division was relocated to the vicinity of Żnin and Wągrowiec, and an operational command was created for the purpose of defense of the Carpathians. By mid-August two more divisions (the 13th and 27th) were transferred and incorporated into the

Interventionary Corps (*Korpus Interwencyjny*) in Pomerania.⁴ The Volhynian Cavalry Brigade was sent north of Częstochowa, and the 10th Motorized Cavalry Brigade was sent to serve as a reserve force for Army Cracow. On August 23 an immediate mobilization order for all armed forces in the sectors along the German border was issued. In a period of extreme tension with the Germans two days later, Rydz ordered the transfer from the Bydgoszcz area to Starogard of a portion of the Interventionary Corps (the 27th Infantry Division), whose transport was to be arranged the next day. Three fifths of the forces were to be transported by rail, while the rest were required to go on foot. At the time of the outbreak of hostilities, only a portion of the rail transport had been completed.

The ratio of forces was 1:1.4 to the Germans' advantage. From a theoretical point of view, such an imbalance did not make a potentially effective defense impossible, but the differences in quality of equipment demonstrated that Polish chances of successfully deterring the enemy were minimal. Even though the Germans enjoyed only a slight advantage in infantry, they possessed substantial superiority in armaments and technology, especially in their tanks and armor-piercing artillery.

After being placed in a state of alert, the Polish ground forces stood as follows: the Independent Operational Group (*Samodzielna Grupa Operacyjna* or SGO) Narew (two infantry divisions and two cavalry brigades), Army Modlin (two infantry divisions and two cavalry brigades), Independent Operational Group Wyszków (two infantry divisions), Army Pomerania (five infantry divisions and one cavalry brigade), Army Poznań (four infantry divisions and one cavalry brigade), Army Łódź (three infantry divisions and one cavalry brigade), Army Cracow (five infantry divisions, one motorized, one cavalry, and one mountain brigade), and Army Carpathian (two mountain brigades). This came to a total of twenty-three infantry divisions, eight cavalry brigades, three mountain brigades, one motorized brigade, and most of the National Guard (*Obrona Narodowa*) units, the Coast Guard, and KOP.⁵ The air force had operational thirty-six bombers, fifty-four fighters, and seventy-eight others, a total of 168 aircraft. The army possessed 105 fighters and 190 other planes, a total of 295 aircraft. Despite the numbers, air capacity remained diffuse and thus incapable of being very effective.⁶ The navy consisted of five submarines, twelve minesweepers, and one destroyer.⁷

The Outbreak of Hostilities

Poland's political leaders were at least partially surprised when the German invasion came, having believed that measures they had overtly taken in preparation could avoid a conflict. On the afternoon of September 1, Mościcki issued a proclamation in which he appealed to the nation to unite around the Commander-in-Chief and the army. From the moment of the outbreak of hostilities Rydz enjoyed the support of the entire population and all of the political parties, as reflected in Mościcki's address at the time.⁸ He nevertheless was unable to take advantage of this wide show of unity and put together some type of government of national salvation which enjoyed broader popular support, even though many politicians, even from the Sanacja, recommended such a course of action. As Sosnkowski and Beck recall, Rydz refused to act on these recommendations and instead retained the Składkowski government.⁹ This stood in contrast to Piłsudski's initiative in 1920 to form a government led by Wincenty Witos after consulting with Roman Dmowski. From the first moment of national danger this had enormous implications.

Mościcki declared Rydz the supreme commander,¹⁰ and, invoking Article 24 of the constitution, designated him as his successor as President of the Republic in case of a

vacancy if circumstances would so dictate.¹¹ That same day, Rydz submitted orders to his troops with the spirited cry, "Strong, united, and prepared!" (*Silni, zwarci, gotowi!*) The proclamation expressed assurances that victory would come to Poland and her allies.¹² Rydz immediately prepared to undertake his responsibilities as Commander-in-Chief. His ability to maintain his customary calm composure remained one of his most admirable and worthy attributes. In the midst of such a crisis this was admirable, and it to a great degree reflected on the staff with whose members he directly interacted.

Nevertheless Rydz and his entourage really had little conception of the grave political and military situation which Poland faced, since none of this was obvious at the time. The first communication which they issued bore an overly optimistic tone.¹³ Rydz was waiting for news of the reaction of Britain and France to the invasion. Alarming information of British and French procrastination made him especially apprehensive. He accordingly met with Beck, instructing him to apply overwhelming pressure upon Poland's western allies. The magnitude of the treacherous military situation which Poland faced if left to fight alone would not reveal itself until the following day.

The "Pivot" is Broken

Rydz's entire defense plan already became vividly impaired by September 2. On that afternoon, the commander of Army Cracow, General Antoni Szylling, reported that the frontline had been breached near Pszczyna, and requested approval to withdraw to a line abutting the Przemsza and Biała Rivers. Suspecting him of panicking, Rydz purposely delayed transmitting a response until that evening.

Stachiewicz recalled:

According to his plan the Commander-in-Chief surmised that in case of a southeasterly withdrawal, Army Cracow would serve as a pivot for the movement of the retreat while support from the Reserve Army of Army Łódź and Army Cracow would allow for a timely withdrawal of forces from the north.¹⁴

German penetration of the front near Częstochowa led to the abandonment of the Silesian fortifications without a fight. These entrenchments were the best-equipped in the country, and their loss resulted in serious reversals on the entire front. The enemy's armored units were on the verge of cutting communication between Army Łódź and Army Cracow, and the danger of outflanking German advances to the rear of the two armies as well as Army Poznań and Army Pomerania reared its ugly head. In light of such a situation Rydz was faced with the next two alternatives. He could engage the enemy with all of the forces at his

disposal and decide the war in the western part of the country, or he could give way and engage in inconclusive battles in anticipation of a suitable time to go on the offensive. The first scenario could not be considered for reasons influenced by politics as well as the military situation. Poland's treaty obligations with Britain and France obliged her to continue the war for as long as possible, thus giving her allies the breathing space to organize an offensive in the west. By default, Rydz was compelled to pursue the second alternative however difficult it was to implement. The unfortunate turn of events in the central portion of the southern front had forced a retreat beyond the Vistula much earlier and in much more difficult circumstances than Rydz had anticipated in his defensive plans.

A fundamental flaw in the "West" plan was the failure to contemplate the Germans breaking through the front. It is difficult to accept Tadeusz Jurga's argument that Rydz's worst error was a pre-war failure to set a main line of defense along the Vistula and San Rivers.¹⁵ The economic importance of Upper Silesia made its abandonment without a fight politically impossible. Rydz instead erred with his dominant belief in the Army Cracow pivot and his failure to consider an alternative course of action should the first

fail. Rydz found it very difficult to grapple with the decision to withdraw from Silesia. Documentary evidence suggests that Army Cracow considered every possible scenario to delay withdrawal. General Szylling's telegrams imply that he was anxious to hold Silesia at any price.¹⁶ On the evening of September 2 and morning of September 3, Rydz ordered Army Cracow to pull back to the Dunajec and Nida Rivers. Army Łódź was to hold its main line of defense, thus providing time for Army Poznań and Army Pomerania to retreat and link up at Army Łódź's northern flank. Following this, the combined forces were to fall back toward Warsaw and the Vistula.

In order to hold off the Germans, who were advancing quickly out of Częstochowa in an easterly and northeasterly direction, Rydz decided to use reserve forces from Army Prussia, even though they were not yet fully prepared for action.¹⁷ Unable to count upon all reserve forces being ready for combat, Rydz decided to form two groups and prepare them for action near Warsaw and Dęblin. Meanwhile, Army Prussia received orders to remain undivided but to refrain from any offensive action for the time being.

The bisection of the reserves resulted from mistaken deadlines and a scarcity of transport, all under the dubious competence of its commander, General Stefan Dąb-

Biernacki. Rydz also bore the responsibility for designating an officer of insufficient leadership qualities for such a task. Army Prussia, pressured on its southern flank by the German 10th Army as a result of Army Cracow's retreat, had difficulty rallying. Rydz ordered a withdrawal following pessimistic reports from General Szylling. Despite its ability to fight throughout September 3, Army Cracow's movement caused a frantic withdrawal from Silesia and the abandonment of state possessions and prominent politicians who were left as prey for the enemy.

The Germans exploited the shortcomings of the "West" plan, bringing them success in the south. Rydz had surmised that the rail network in Slovakia was not up to par, and Polish control of the rail junction in Teschen which had been seized earlier from the Czechs would prevent the enemy from posing a serious threat from the south.¹⁸ The attack from this direction entailed such grave consequences that it called into question not only the efficacy the Biebrza-Narew-Vistula-San defensive line, but could also cut off the escape route to Romania.

Defeat at the Tuchola Forest

The gathering of Rydz's staff on September 3 bore a much more relieved atmosphere than the meeting the previous day, yet this was hardly a result of good news from the front. Until the evening hours set in, the avalanche of bad news from September 2 was not as pronounced by comparison. In the late morning, only Army Pomerania reported a difficult situation. A telegraphic message received at 10 a.m. from General Bortnowski revealed that enemy armored forces and motorized infantry units in the vicinity of Kornowo could leave Bydgoszcz cut off. This had the potential of causing serious difficulties in transferring the 9th and 27th Infantry Divisions and Army Pomerania's cavalry brigade to the eastern bank of the Vistula.¹⁹ Even when faced with the imminent encirclement of forces making their way from the north toward Bydgoszcz, Rydz had still not given up hope. By 8 p.m., these delusions had dissipated. Rydz and his chief of staff received a communication via Hughes teletype* from General Bortnowski upon his arrival in Toruń informing them that all of the forces which had been cut off were considered

* Anglo-U.S. inventor David Edward Hughes introduced his type-printing telegraph instrument to Europe in 1857, where it came into widespread use. With the invention of radio, the teletype was fading into obsolescence by the 1930s.

lost, and in light of that he was placing himself at the marshal's disposal.²⁰ The 8th and 27th Infantry Divisions as well as the Operational Group Czersk were defeated due to lack of coordination before an attempt could be made to break out.²¹

Rydz's misconceptions had already led to the loss of one third of Army Pomerania, since the the Gdańsk Interventionary Group had been moved too far to the north and the bulk of Army Pomerania had been stretched too far northward for the purpose of defending the Interventionary Group itself. Following a mental breakdown on Bortnowski's part, Rydz retained him at his command instead of replacing him, which would lead to disastrous consequences.

Collapse of the Front in Northern Mazovia

Rydz was informed of increasing enemy pressure on Army Modlin on September 3, especially on its eastern flank. In the early morning of September 4, General Emil Przedrzymirski contacted Rydz's staff via Hughes teletype requesting air support to retard advancing enemy armored units. In a reply stating that all bombers were needed for operations in the south, his request was denied.²² Assessing his predicament in the third day of combat,

Przedrzymirski decided to fall back to a defensive line that evening with the intention of defending it throughout the following day (September 4). Operational Group Wyszaków under Przedrzymirski's command, was to counterattack across the Narew in a westerly or northwesterly direction, thus easing the Polish withdrawal.²³ Events on the front unfolding that evening and the following morning unknown to Przedrzymirski caused the orders for counterattack to be executed only partially. Army Modlin's disorganized communications caused the issuance of orders to individual units to experience substantial delays, causing withdrawal to take place just before sunrise. Units from the 8th and 20th Infantry Divisions came under German air attack, and the defensive line envisioned by Przedrzymirski failed to materialize, falling victim to the resulting panic, even though some scattered remnants managed to fall back to the Vistula. During the course of the day, the Army Modlin commander became acutely aware of the tragic situation, as both infantry divisions had been routed. Only two cavalry brigades, the Nowogródzka and Mazowiecka, remained at his disposal. The Germans were poised to fill the resulting vacuum left by the retreating Poles, and the enemy's penetration of the Vistula in the Modlin area enroute to Warsaw presented the worse case scenario at this point.

Rydz accordingly ordered an extemporaneous defensive line at the Vistula and preparation of the Operational Group *Wyszków* for counterattack.

Przedrzymirski and Rydz were equally to blame for the setbacks suffered in northern Mazovia. The Army Modlin commander failed to consider any exceptionally unfavorable open terrain between the Orzyc and Wkra Rivers, nor any distance between the primary positions and the secondary positions following withdrawal, which ultimately led to an imbalance in available forces. It was easier to create a defensive line using a heavy artillery barrage stretching from Mława to Rzęnowo against three German divisions than withdrawing nineteen battalions and 120 other units (in this case 24 of which were heavy) and sending them to the primary position without sufficient air cover. Przedrzymirski's failed to take into account the complexities of an organized withdrawal.

Nevertheless the main fault for the disaster in northern Mazovia on September 4 must lie with Rydz, who attempted to lead personally twelve operational groups on a lengthy front. The inadequate communications system caused such an endeavor to be extremely difficult. The situation may have appeared differently if an overall frontal commander would have been given such a responsibility.

Instead command was divided among three or four army group commanders. Rydz also had to deal with Independent Operational Group Narew's coverage of Army Modlin as well as the eventual fate of Army Group Wyszaków, not only from their main positions, but also in the general withdrawal.²⁴ Furthermore Rydz did not take into consideration the belated readiness of the 41st Infantry Division, which would not be completely prepared at its position near Różan until nine or ten days after general mobilization. Having replaced the 1st Infantry Division, which had been secretly mobilized since September 2, the 41st was the only force available with the wherewithal to relieve Army Modlin with a retreating maneuver which would be admittedly difficult to execute. Rydz could have also directed the Podlaska Cavalry Brigade to fill the gap between Army Modlin and SGO Narew in the vicinity of Stawiski, thus relieving the reserves from the 18th Infantry Division. Such actions would have served to bolster the main position while protecting the Polish rear.

Rydz's fear of a German thrust on Modlin and the resulting threat to Warsaw compelled him in the early evening of September 5 to order a counterattack. An outdated map found on the body of a dead German officer was treated as legitimate intelligence, even though Polish air

reconnaissance did not corroborate German intentions to attack Modlin. The disastrous result was the disorganization of the entire northern front. Army Modlin did not receive the order until very late that evening, and Operational Group Wyszaków was not informed until early the next day. Despite the order already being outdated, the commander of Operational Group Wyszaków, Major General Wincenty Kowalski, decided to carry it out.* A portion of SGO Narew would also take part.

Instead of Rydz's prediction of a German thrust on Modlin, the Wehrmacht's 3rd Army attacked along the Narew River advancing toward Różan, a huge surprise to the Poles. The commanders of Operational Group Wyszaków and Army Modlin possessed a paucity of intelligence concerning the Różan situation, and thus failed to detect the growing danger.²⁵ Intercepting German radio transmissions revealing their plans, Rydz ordered the commanders of SGO Narew and Army Modlin to prevent a German breakthrough on the Narew River at all costs. But such instructions were impossible and

* Wincenty Kowalski (1892-1984) was a veteran of the ZWC, Rifleman, and the Legions who was later interned at Bieniaminów. He served in the Polish-Soviet War and in a variety of military posts during the interwar period. His tenacity and heroism during the September 1939 campaign has been well noted. Taken prisoner by the Germans on September 23, he spent the duration of the Second World War in POW camps. After being liberated by United States forces, he settled in London, and, later, New York.

unrealistic, since German forces were advancing through the gap which had emerged between the two Polish units, enabling the Wehrmacht to encircle them.

Events on the northern front demonstrated that Rydz was unable to take the place of an overall frontal commander. Such frontal leadership would have prevented the eventual course of events, as Rydz's picture of the situation would have been much different. His order of September 5 instead should have been the responsibility of a subordinate frontal commander, and his actions even could be construed as a major break with customary chains of command in warfare. The disastrous result of Rydz's order perhaps could have been avoided and, despite setbacks, General Przedrzymirski conceivably could have consolidated the defensive line along the Narew River²⁶ and the fate of the northern front could have evolved differently.

Defeat of Army Łódź

With the failure of the Army Cracow "pivot," the burden of defense in the west fell upon Army Łódź on a line of defense paralleling the Warta and Widawka Rivers. Rydz ordered its commander, Lieutenant General Juliusz Rómmel, to hold this position for as long as possible. By not revealing his eventual plan of a general withdrawal to the Vistula, Rydz justified his instructions to Rómmel by

invoking the necessity of Army Łódź providing cover for Army Prussia. In a Hughes teletype communication with Rómmel on the afternoon of September 3, Rydz pleaded: "Your maintenance of this line is enormously important. I would like to emphasize this again. This line must be held for as long as possible."²⁷ He assured Rómmel of support from Army Prussia. This order is difficult to understand, as Lieutenant General Dąb-Biernacki received simultaneous orders to refrain from any offensive operations. In the meantime, the Germans breached the Warta in several places, breaking the Polish defenses on the northern and southern flanks. On the morning of September 5, Rómmel sent the following message to Rydz's staff:

I suspect that the main thrust of the enemy will be on both flanks. So far we are holding, but unless neighboring Polish units commence offensive action...the situation will become difficult.²⁸

Rómmel failed to inform Rydz that the Warta had been penetrated by three divisions of the German 8th Army, instead claiming that the Germans had been thrown back across the river beyond the bridgeheads in the vicinity of Bełeń.²⁹

Following this communication, Rydz contemplated commencing a counterattack upon both of Army Łódź's flanks, issuing orders to Army Poznań and Army Prussia to assist.

Army Prussia's commander, Dąb-Biernacki, had little idea of how to execute such a counterattack. Issuing conflicting and contradictory orders, his nonsensical leadership, which Marian Porwit labeled suicidal, rapidly led to indescribable chaos and the waste of an opportunity to engage his forces effectively, resulting in the impossibility of relieving Army Łódź.* That afternoon the Germans penetrated the northern flank and Army Łódź was defeated. Rydz's staff was informed at 3:05 p.m.³⁰ Another message arrived three hours later from Army Łódź's chief of staff informing Rydz of the abandonment of the Warta-Widawka line. As was customary after such a setback, Rydz personally engaged in an hour-long conversation with Rómmel via Hughes teletype discussing the developing situation.³¹ Rydz acknowledged that Army Łódź must now go into full scale retreat, as no other alternatives were available. In light of such an increasingly grave situation, Rydz impressed upon Rómmel to do everything he could to make sure the retreat was orderly. He simultaneously ordered

* Marian Porwit (1895-1988) was a veteran of the Legions and the Polish-Soviet War. He served in a variety of military posts and as a teacher in military academies during the interwar period. Soldiers under his command defended the western approaches to Warsaw during the September 1939 campaign until surrendering on September 28. Spending the duration of the Second World War in German POW camps, he briefly settled in London, and returned to Poland in 1946, where he published military history.

drawing up plans to organize defensive positions in the bow of the Vistula without delay.

The defensive strategy of Army Łódź along the Warta, especially between the watersheds of the Warta and Pilica, and the tardy instructions ordering coordination between Army Prussia and Army Poznań were entirely the brainchild of Rydz. This plan was already unrealistic on September 1 and events unfolding with each passing day deemed it ineffective.

Lacking a conception of waging war with the coordination of three armies on the western front, the "West" plan envisioned a German advance from the northwest along the southern bank of the Noteć through Inowrocław toward Warsaw. Thus the area of operation for Army Prussia focused in the Kielecczyzna region along a broad line stretching from the Radomsko region to Miechów. When it became clear by September 3 that the main German attack was north of the Noteć, Rydz should have ordered Army Poznań to counterattack in support of Army Łódź.³² Furthermore he also failed to envision that at least three infantry divisions and two cavalry brigades from Army Poznań could have acted as a new reserve force capable of hindering the German units attacking Army Łódź.

Rydz's biggest failure lay in his disposition of Army Prussia. In light of the catastrophic delay of supplying reinforcements to already mobilized units which led to the enemy threat in the direction of Radom and the lower Pilica, he should have come to a radical decision to delay the tragic course of events.³³ The 19th and 29th Divisions from the northern portion of Army Poznań were ready for battle and should have been released to the disposition of Army Łódź for the purpose of engaging enemy armored units and hopefully inflicting heavy losses. The execution of the war to the west of the Vistula with nine infantry divisions and four cavalry brigades would have served as a more potent and effective defense in contrast to a passive defense reliant upon constant withdrawal. This retreat never had a chance of success, due to the German superiority in mobility. Enemy movement could have been hindered solely by offensive action.

Reversals west of the Vistula

With the reversals on the western front by September 5, a withdrawal to the eastern bank of the Vistula became necessary. The weakness of Polish maneuvers demonstrated that replenishment with the proper distribution of reserves and the tactical mutual cooperation which this entailed

could be the only measures taken to build armies strong enough to prevent the Germans from penetrating the front and attempting encirclement of Polish forces. Rydz diminished Polish maneuverability by enhancing the reserve forces by fifteen divisions. He also erred by transferring an additional division to the reserves which had been fully mobilized before the outbreak of hostilities. Thus the fruits of the first mobilization were not fully exploited. The first wave of attack should have been strengthened as much as possible to delay the enemy advance, thus providing preparatory time for units not yet ready for combat.

Alteration of the "West" plan became necessary already by September 2, but its improvisation could not include elements which threatened the maneuverability of individual armies. Since once again he had neglected to relegate some of his authority to a frontal commander, Rydz formulated his orders on the basis of the situation on the battlefield upon being informed of its course. Accordingly the resulting delay generally caused his decisions to fail to reflect the current situation, thus leaving its recipients too little time for their realization. Rydz's only timely move was the decision to defend Warsaw and the closure of the Vistula crossings conveyed on September 3, while

ordering Lieutenant General Tadeusz Piskor to proceed to Lubelszczyzna the following day.³⁴

As a result of inadequate leadership and the enemy's technical superiority, the 6th, 7th, 9th, and 27th Infantry Divisions and Army Pomerania's cavalry brigade had either ceased to exist or was almost annihilated by the sixth day of the war. The 8th and 20th Infantry Divisions would not be prepared for action for several days, and mobilization of the 44th and 45th Infantry Divisions was still uncertain, while plans for heavy artillery support of forces already engaged were also in question.

Stachiewicz recalled in his memoirs that the entire situation in the bow of the Vistula was already determined: the enforced retreat of Army Łódź toward its namesake, defeat of the northern portion of the Reserve Army in the vicinity of Piotrków, and the rapid advance of enemy forces near Kielecczyzna. Breach of the Vistula in the south and an attack on Warsaw could be a reality by September 6 as enemy armor continued to advance rapidly.³⁵ Rydz and his staff realized that an organized withdrawal of Armies Prussia, Łódź, and Poznań to the eastern bank of the Vistula was already impossible, as doing so would have required breaking through a German encirclement. After assessing the overall situation on September 6, Rydz

decided upon a new defensive line concentrated on the central portion of the Vistula, stretching northerly along the Narew and the Biebrza and southerly along the Dunajec, and then the San. By the time the order was issued, German forces had already breached the Narew and could pursue a deep encirclement in the Polish rear at any time.

Stachiewicz recounted Rydz foreseeing that his army would be forced to engage the Germans in two decisive battles before any intervention by Britain and France in the west. The first would be near the Polish-German frontier, and the other would take place along the Narew, central Vistula, and the Dunajec. He also looked ahead in the distant future to a possible retreat into Romania.³⁶

In the first six days of the war, leadership at the highest level did not prove equal to the very formidable task of reorganizing or reinforcing available forces for a potential stand along the Narew, central Vistula, and the Dunajec, or the San for that matter. Rydz held the most blame for dividing Poland's defense in the first few days of the war into two separate but to some extent equivalent phases. His fault is two-fold, because it did not allow for the plan of action which the second phase embodied, which by and large was the reason for the breakdown in the outcome of his military operations.

Rydz intended to abandon defense of the border areas at the right moment and order forces to fall back to a new line. Yet in the worst case scenario, he had contemplated the necessity of relinquishing the border areas even earlier. His idea of the Narew-Vistula-Dunajec line was undoubtedly influenced by his experiences in the First World War and the subsequent war with the Soviet Union, but the very scope of the war in 1939 was far removed from his endeavors during his Legionary days and the first years of Polish independence. A general retreat in western Poland involved very difficult undertakings requiring carefully prepared plans applicable throughout the entire theater of operations. Of course Rydz could have predicted a situation in which the war was not limited to one battle of limited duration with a decisive outcome, but instead involved numerous encounters differing in location, longevity, and results. Rydz also needed to consider that the enemy would attack in various directions and that Polish forces would face German light and motorized armor while attempting to regroup in the rear.

The apparent incompatibility of the "West" plan at the most critical moment brought about a disastrous scenario in which it was impossible for Rydz and his staff to get a wider view of the theater of operations. Using the forces

which could have rallied up to September 4 in the most strategically important sectors, a stand could have been organized by the late morning of September 5, but it would have already been under decidedly worse conditions. By the following evening, modifications to a plan for withdrawal were the only options left.

At this juncture Rydz's chances of coordinating control under his own person were minimal. Realizing this, he proceeded to relegate the responsibility of the entire withdrawal process upon the shoulders of Army and Operational Group commanders.³⁷ Consequently these entities lost their ability to function cohesively and were in turn forced to fight independently through various enemy concentrations in their rear. The decision for a complete withdrawal to a new defensive perimeter deep inside the country thus became impossible to implement, reducing this new front to a mere line on a map. Reserves and equipment to garrison the banks of the Bug, Vistula, and San Rivers did not exist. They could only be defended by forces retreating from the west, which held few chances of keeping pace with rapidly advancing German divisions.

Plagued with the narrow view of the war beholden to him and his staff, Rydz breathed a misplaced sigh of relief when German pressure upon Army Pomerania seemed to weaken.

But he failed to recognize the reasons for this temporary lull and consider the enemy's ultimate objectives. His failure to recognize signs of concentration of enemy forces in East Prussia and western Slovakia was injudicious. Both of these forces, although inactive up to this point, could have been used at any time for a giant pincer movement upon the western half of the country.

Rydz and his staff abandoned Warsaw on the morning of September 7, relocating to Brest-Litovsk, and leaving Stachiewicz and a skeletal staff in the capital, from which they were instructed to coordinate defensive planning. The sudden transfer of General Headquarters proved to be a major mistake, leading to a complete disorganization of leadership, unity of command, and communications. Settling in an old citadel, Rydz and his staff faced a paucity of favorable conditions to lead a national army.³⁸ An available mobile radio station was not activated for fear of attracting German bombers, and thus was only used for reception. A shortwave communications system could not be exploited since the proper codes had been dispatched by rail and had not arrived. Rydz's move to Brest-Litovsk created a situation in which orders were dispatched from two different places causing a decline in central authority. Armies were not informed of the move in a

timely manner and a number of important matters, such as the defense of Warsaw, were not finalized.

The New "West" Plan

Upon his arrival in Brest-Litovsk, Rydz received word of the defeat of both Army Prussia and Army Łódź, as well as the impending German penetration of frontlines in the north and south. He thus decided to adopt a defensive strategy based upon retention of the southeastern part of the country, surmising that this would reduce the length of the front and preserve the land connection to Romania while awaiting relief from the promised British and French offensive upon western Germany. The pre-war "West" plan had become dormant and it became necessary to draw up a replacement as quickly as possible.³⁹ Having lost its operational latitude, the Polish army found itself in a situation which could lead to catastrophe with each passing moment. On the northern front, the twice-defeated Army Modlin could only put up a weak front along the lower Bug, Bug-Narew, and the Vistula downstream to the mouth of the Bzura. Furthermore, it was cut off from SGO Narew, which was attempting to hold its position along the Biebrza and central portion of the Narew River. Major units from three German armies were situated in the resulting gap in the

Polish lines. Any kind of front along the central Vistula literally did not exist. Except for the Warsaw Motorized Brigade, defense along the river consisted only of individual battalions and hastily organized units. These forces could probably hold out against a stronger enemy attack for no longer than a day. Heavily fragmented remnants of the Armies Prussia and Łódź could still be found west of the Vistula. Although Rydz had lost contact with them, he still anticipated their retreat across the Vistula. Farther to the west, forces with the most potential were located in eastern Great Poland (*Wielkopolska*) and in Kujavia: a weakened Army Pomerania, and Army Poznań, which had yet to engage in any hostilities. These forces were completely cut off from Warsaw and the Vistula.

The southern front had also been broken apart by enemy action. Army Małopolska had only existed in plans drawn up by staffs and never materialized as a unified operational force. Army Cracow, theoretically a part of Army Małopolska, had operated independently, but now was encircled on the left bank of the Vistula, and contact with Rydz had been broken. What remained of Army Małopolska, namely Army Carpathian, retreated toward the San, outflanked by German forces advancing out of Slovakia.

German forces operating in the south seemed on the verge of cutting off the Romanian escape route. Without Romania, contact with Britain and France would be impaired, and Rydz viewed a break in the Romanian connection as a political catastrophe. Throughout his instructions, the guiding principle was the concentration of forces in the southeast. "My primary goal is drawing the entire armed forces toward eastern Little Poland (*Małopolska*) and maintaining the connection with Romania."⁴⁰

Rydz's new plan did not specifically demarcate any specific frontline, since events on the battlefield were essentially beyond his control. He nevertheless foresaw several scenarios, including a potential first line of defense running from the Soviet border through the Pripet Marshes, Brest-Litovsk, the lower Wieprz, the central Vistula, and the San. The next line would be in support of flanks in Polesie and the Biłgorajski Forest with its center in Tomaszów Lubelski and Włodzimierz Wołyński. In case the line along the San could not be held, then a fallback to the northern and southern forks of the Dniestr would be in order.

The third potential line was far less specific, generally commencing in Turka and stretching through Borysław, Drohobycz, Lvov, Brody-Stojanów-Kamionka, and

through the northern Krzemieniecki Mountains. If all of these frontlines could not be held, then Rydz contemplated the defense of a so-called Romanian bridgehead bordered by the Dniestr and Stryj Rivers.

Defeat in the North

In his effort to create a bastion in the southeast, Rydz ordered the northern front abandoned on September 9, and moved it farther south.⁴¹ Accordingly he ordered SGO Narew to initiate an immediate withdrawal toward Ciechanowiec, Siemiatycze and Brest-Litovsk. Here SGO Narew was to link up with Przedrzymirski's forces retreating to the west bank of the Bug, and hopefully create a new northern front. Army Modlin was successfully defending the lower Bug, but in his desire to create a frontline farther to the south, Rydz decided to withdraw all of these forces, fearing a German move in the east which could outflank the Poles. That evening divisions along the Bug and Operational Group Wyszaków began to abandon their positions and fall back. Meanwhile Stachiewicz arrived in Brest-Litovsk that afternoon. Advocating a plan differing from Rydz's, he had dispatched orders from Warsaw which conflicted with those of the Commander-in-Chief.

Rydz's decision to abandon the northern front and arrange rapid reinforcement of a line in the south was apt in every respect by providing an opportunity to bolster and realign remaining forces against the German onslaught. The only major handicap was the conveyance of these orders, which disregarded the use of official channels. Rydz was relying upon Army Poznań under Lieutenant General Tadeusz Kutrzeba to attack toward Radom, thus keeping substantial German forces occupied and relieving pressure on Polish forces on the east side of the Vistula. Rydz also calculated that Kutrzeba's forces would have the strength to break through to the east side of the river and link up with the rest of the Polish forces heading southward.

Thus Rydz's overall plan was to establish the wherewithal for two separate battles independent of each other: one in central Poland, and the other in the southeast. The focal point would be in the south, where he was hoping to concentrate as many forces as possible despite the looming deficiencies which he faced.

Stachiewicz recalled his astonishment at Rydz's orders upon the chief of the general staff's arrival in Brest-Litovsk. Stachiewicz envisioned a counteroffensive involving an engagement with the enemy on the eastern bank of the Vistula followed by a regroupment there, thence in a

southerly or southeasterly direction. Stachiewicz reckoned that

following Kutrzeba's arrival on the eastern bank of the Vistula, forces east of Warsaw would number fourteen infantry divisions and five cavalry brigades. Even taking battle losses into account, such a quantity of forces could still prove effective, and their very presence could influence German activity near the Narew and Bug and indirectly relieve pressure from the north on Army Lublin.⁴²

It thus appears that Stachiewicz tied the defense of the Bug with a far-removed battle west of Warsaw. Following a long and tense meeting between Stachiewicz and Rydz, a kind of compromise solution was reached in which the right flank of Army Modlin received orders to hold the line along the Bug. If this would prove impossible, then a retreat would ensue to Biała Podlaska along a line stretching to Kałuszyn in an effort to defend Warsaw.

In partially adopting Stachiewicz's idea to allow SGO Narew to engage in counteroffensive action, Rydz made a fatal error. By hesitating to implement fully the general evacuation in the north, the collapse of the northern front in this part of the country was hastened. Marian Porwit felt that Rydz's plan of reliance upon the southeastern defense and the isolated Warsaw-Modlin region

...was the only sound decision which he was able to make after the misfortune and operational obstacles largely of his own making, including the neglect of his subordinates, and the failures of Army Prussia on the

central front and Army Małopolska on the most strategically vital frontline in the country largely caused by these armies' individual commanders.⁴³

Literature on the idea of shortening the concentration of the frontline in the southeast overwhelmingly credits General Sosnkowski. This probably has little relevance. Most importantly, Rydz adopted the best course of action available by affording resistance to the German onslaught in anticipation of a British and French offensive.

***A Ray of Hope:
Kutrzeba's Counteroffensive***

From the very beginning, Rydz's plans had relegated the forces under Kutrzeba's command to a type of auxiliary status. Yet a counteroffensive executed by Army Poznań and Army Pomerania now became necessary in order to tie down as many Germans as possible and thus gain time for the creation of the southeastern front. Rydz surmised that the designation of Radom as the counterattack's objective was compatible with the capability of the two armies before seriously exhausting their resources. Thus the counterattack took on a suicidal character meant to last until the armies' depletion.⁴⁴ More stunning was Kutrzeba's complete ignorance of the cynicism of Rydz's plan. For the time being, Kutrzeba's receipt of confusing and laconic orders compelled him to do little. Perhaps he feared

Rydz's wrath before the unraveling of the "West" plan was wholly evident. At one point, Rydz contemplated dispatching one of his staff officers by air for the purpose of explaining to Kutrzeba the orders which he had received.

Kutrzeba surmised that his forces would withdraw toward Warsaw following his counterattack, something to which Stachiewicz, now operating from Warsaw, had earlier agreed. But many outstanding problems prevented Stachiewicz's conception of the counterattack from unfolding. Numbering a total of about 250,000 men, Army Poznań and Army Pomerania would have been greatly strengthened with the inclusion of Army Łódź in the counteroffensive. Rydz's immediate fault for this oversight was minimal, since his location in Brest-Litovsk would have divorced him from the situation. Stachiewicz was determined to implement his plan for a counteroffensive, thus increasing his responsibility for the course of events. He made an attempt to contact the commander of Army Łódź, but failed to use every available channel. An order sent via one route to Major General Wiktor Thommée, Rómmel's immediate subordinate, never

arrived.* Stachiewicz's error led to Army Łódź's omission from the counterattack, thus weakening its impact.⁴⁵

It should be emphasized that Rydz's rationale for Kutrzeba's counterattack was fulfilled. The Germans were forced to withdraw their rapidly advancing units from the vicinity of Warsaw and the Vistula, and the German initiative slowed accordingly. This provided Rydz with the possibility of an orderly withdrawal toward the southeast and the organization of the Warsaw region.

The Organization of Warsaw's Defense

In his directives from March 1939 relating to the country's defense, Rydz only ordered preparation for the first phase of the war. Besides failing to familiarize his army inspectors with his comprehensive defense plan, "...he did not condone preparation for any subsequent phase of the war."⁴⁶

* Wiktor Thommée (1881-1962) was born in Lithuania and served in the Russian army during the Russo-Japanese War and the First World War. Following Polish independence, he served in the Polish-Soviet War, and later attended a military academy in France. After serving in a variety of military posts, he was in command of Operational Group Piotrków, a part of Army Łódź, during the September 1939. He was taken prisoner by the Germans spending the duration of the Second World War in captivity. Returning to Poland in 1947, he was initially denied a military pension and was forced for a time to work as a janitor. Following the thaw after Bolesław Bierut's death, he was finally granted a pension and died in Warsaw.

Warsaw's place in the defensive plan was not considered until the third phase of the war. As the capital city, it served as an important political, industrial and communications nerve center, but similar to other smaller points along Rydz's defense plan, Warsaw was ill-prepared. Rydz did not issue orders outlining some kind of defense of the city until the third day of the war when a German march on Warsaw seemed imminent. Rydz should have assigned the defense of Warsaw to a commander with impeccable military and authoritative credentials. Sosnkowski was such a figure, who initially expressed a willingness to take on this responsibility. Such an appointment would have guaranteed that the responsibility would not have been limited to the city itself. Rydz proceeded to exercise poor judgment by designating Rómmel with Warsaw's defense.⁴⁷ This was a most unfortunate move. Having lost communication and then abandoned Army Łódź, Rómmel had hastened to Warsaw. Accordingly his appointment to lead the city's defense had negative connotations for morale and propaganda. Upon assuming command, he displayed an ignorance of various operational skills.

Rydz erred by failing to adopt Stachiewicz's idea of creating an army group designated "Warsaw," consisting of Army Modlin, Army Łódź, the city's garrison, and defenders

along the Vistula to the south of the city. The organization of such a unified command in many respects seemed expedient, especially since Rydz contemplated the possibility of making Warsaw an isolated center of resistance. But he and his staff were too far away to facilitate such a coordinated defense of the Warsaw region west of the Vistula. Concentration of hostilities in the Warsaw region also increased the chances of General Kutrzeba and Army Łódź to break out. Failure to implement such a plan coupled with Rómmel's limited leadership qualities resulted in Kutrzeba suffering heavy losses, being unable to count on any assistance from Rómmel.

The Attempt to Create a Northern and Southern Front

Upon his arrival in Brest-Litovsk, Rydz showed an increasing inclination toward moving operations to eastern Little Poland. Stanisław Kopański recalled that

over a map the marshal impatiently made gestures with his hand from the Narew and Bug toward Little Poland and the Dniestr in the presence of Colonel (Józef) Jaklicz and myself. When I pointed out that such a journey of 400 to 500 kilometers could involve a march lasting a month, the marshal tersely replied that he was not in need of lessons in military maneuvers.^{48*}

* Józef Jaklicz (1894-1974) was a veteran of the Legions and served in the defense of Lvov following the First World War. After a stint at a military academy in France, he served in a variety of positions in the interwar Polish army. In a staff position during the September 1939 (continued on next page)

Kopański's memoirs, though far from exaggerated, do not fully illustrate Rydz's conception of the military situation at the time. Having analyzed the setbacks suffered in the first ten days of the war, Rydz intensely feared that his armed forces would be outmaneuvered and cut off from the Romanian border. Events had revealed that the Germans did not employ standard conventional maneuvers in reaction to Polish withdrawals such as pursuing or encircling a retreating army. They instead quickly penetrated deep into their enemy's rear. Such tactics always forced the breakup of Polish defenses, causing a simultaneous break in the entire front. A stand in eastern Little Poland and Polesie provided a chance for some kind of effective resistance until the anticipated British and French offensive in the west.

The commander of Army Prussia and his staff arrived in Brest-Litovsk on the morning of September 11, having been summoned the preceding night. A long conversation ensued whose content is unfortunately lost to history, but resulted in the assignment of Dąb-Biernacki as commander of

campaign, he made his way to France through Romania and was involved in the evacuation of Polish soldiers from Marseilles and Grenoble. He remained in France after her fall, engaging in underground activities. In 1944 he made his way to Britain, where he served in the Polish exile army, but returned to France after the war, where he remained until his death.

a new army group named the Northern Front. Dąb-Biernacki's appointment revealed Rydz's next serious error, and it is difficult to assess why he decided to make this move--whether it was their common roots in the Legions or camaraderie during the interwar period. The loss of Army Prussia had discredited Dąb-Biernacki as an effective military leader. Even some of the officers on Rydz's staff expressed surprise at his elevation to this command. The Northern Front in its reorganized form existed only on paper and its operational idea consisted strictly of lines and markings on a map. A line of defense was determined extemporaneously. Its western flank along the Wieprz was composed of units from Army Lublin which could only muster a weak defense of the riverbank. In contrast its eastern flank was composed of units from SGO Polesie ably organized by Major General Franciszek Kleeberg.* An unmanned vacuum persisted between the flanks stretching from Kłock to Pińsk. Dąb-Biernacki's task was to fill this gap, thus forming a defensive line, the so-called Northern Front. Such an undertaking bore little chance of realization,

* Franciszek Kleeberg (1888-1941) was a veteran of the Austro-Hungarian army and the Legions. He served in a variety of military posts in the Polish army during the interwar period. He reputedly never lost a battle during the September 1939 campaign, but was eventually forced to surrender after his forces ran out of ammunition. Taken prisoner by the Germans, he died in captivity.

since already defeated units needed to be gathered and resupplied before being sent to the front.

In the southeast Rydz envisioned a reconstitution of the southern front in an attempt to prevent the Germans from crossing the San. Coordination of the southern front was entrusted to Sosnkowski, but his extraordinarily energetic measures proved incapable of stopping the German juggernaut and the possibility of a stand along the San evaporated, which in turn compelled yet another change in the entire execution of the war.

The Romanian Bridgehead

The exceptionally disastrous course of events on all of the fronts forced Rydz to abandon all of the ideas set forth on September 11. Hence he decided upon an immediate retreat of all Polish forces toward the "Romanian bridgehead," limited anyway to a minimal scale. Stachiewicz recounted that Rydz's "sole aspiration following this decision on September 13 was to continue the struggle even on such a truncated portion of Polish soil and await the results of a French offensive..."⁴⁹ Rydz surmised that the anticipated allied offensive would diminish enemy air attacks and bring enough relief to the

Polish front that substantial forces could be gathered to make a stand in the southeastern corner of the country.

September 13 was an extraordinarily painstaking day for Rydz, weighed with being stigmatized with the responsibility for Poland's tragic fate and the failure of the Polish armed forces. Despite his intense disappointment and lassitude following the failure of the reconstituted defensive plan, he displayed little of this to his staff. That morning he consulted with the commander of Army Małopolska, Lieutenant General Kazimierz Fabrycy, in Włodzimierz Wołyński. Content of the discussion is only known from Fabrycy's writings. "The Commander-in-Chief did not conceal his discontent with the situation on the southern flank in the Sambor-Drohobycz region and the retreat of all three divisions under General Łukoski* to Lvov."⁵⁰ Besides this, Rydz was upset that Fabrycy had assigned too many forces to the defense of Lvov instead of withdrawing them southerly beyond the Dniestr, feeling that the only hope was to gather as many forces which could be

* Kazimierz Orlik-Łukoski (1890-1940) served in the Riflemen and the Legions during the First World War, and later served in the Polish army against the Soviets. After serving in a variety of military posts in the interwar period, he was in command of Operational Group Jasło within Army Carpathian. He fought with distinction in the defense of Lvov, and was responsible for negotiating its surrender to the Soviets. He was arrested and deported to Starobielsk, and became a victim of the Soviet massacre of Polish officers.

found east of the Vistula and steer them toward Romania. Nevertheless the next three days demonstrated that the situation was deteriorating rapidly and Rydz and his staff were hardly in any position to control it. Even so, Rydz decided to relocate General Headquarters from Włodzimierz Wołyński to Kołomyja.⁵¹

The Lost Campaign

Events on the battlefield between September 12 and 16 showed that the war, although still going on, was a defeat for Poland. Rydz's idea of defense based on the passage to Romania and various isolated pockets was unrealistic. The Germans effortlessly detected these plans and directed their forces from the north and the south toward a rapid rear action behind the Polish defenders. The purpose of these maneuvers was the destruction of Polish forces in the event of their withdrawal out of the first German encirclement. Up until September 16 all of the operational and tactical connections upon which the Commander-in-Chief relied for his plan of defense of the Romanian bridgehead were found in the center of the second external front of the encirclement, or within its reach. Surrounded by the enemy and lacking any possibility of coordination, the Polish army lost all of its operational capabilities

indispensable for the execution of Rydz's orders. In addition Rydz's orders concerning retreat toward Romania often reached their recipients too tardy, and some never arrived at all. This explained the inability of Przedrzymirski's army and SGO Narew to combine with Dąb-Biernacki into a formidable force. Similarly, the combination of Army Cracow and Sosnkowski's Army Małopolska in a coordinated defense also never materialized.⁵²

On September 16, a German armored corps under General Heinz Guderian operating south of Brest-Litovsk combined with four light divisions "in a giant pincer movement originally drawn up by the elder Helmuth von Moltke."⁵³ The Germans thus held the entire initiative and the possibility of defending even a sharply truncated pocket adjoining the Romanian border evaporated. The Poles may have had a chance if the forces assigned to this task had been in place much earlier. As it was, the withdrawal to the southeast required hasty, long marches preceded by defeat. A similar situation surfaced on the central Vistula, where forces were to regroup only after arduous encounters with the enemy. With all of these predicaments, Rydz's calculations for a new line of defense were impossible to implement. Despite his desperate appeals, Polish divisions were hardly in proper condition to create such a front.

Instead only scattered battalions under General Dębinski,* KOP forces, and rear echelon forces managed to make their way to the Romanian border. Besides this, the government, president, and most of the representatives of the ruling elite were also on this sliver of territory. Rydz and all members of the government now found themselves in the midst of a catastrophe rapidly unfolding before crushing German superiority and the complete idleness of Poland's western allies.

Seeing that the Germans were overrunning almost the entire country, Rydz issued instructions to Major Edmund Galinat reminiscent of the organization of the POW. Rydz expressed hope that such a movement be primarily composed of the young for the purpose of engaging in partisan activity. Galinat's mission foresaw a future objective after the German wave finally inundated the country.↓

* Stefan Dębinski (1887-1972) was a veteran of the Austro-Hungarian army and had fought in the First World War. After serving in a variety of military posts following Poland's independence, he had been designated commander of the Stryj Operational Group in charge of defending the Romanian bridgehead. After retreating into Hungary, he made his way to France, Sweden, and eventually to London, where he served in the government-in-exile.

↓ Galinat had headed Young OZON. Arriving in Warsaw on September 26, he was shunned by General Michał Tokarzewski-Karaszewicz, who had been designated by Rómmel to organize underground operations. Ultimately sent back to Romania, Galinat eventually served on the western front, and died in exile in 1971.

General Headquarters on September 17

In the early hours of September 17, Rydz's staff received a telephone call from the commander of the KOP detachment stationed in Czortków, informing it that Soviet forces had crossed the border and were heading westward. Rydz was awakened immediately and "with his customary reserved composure, assessed the new developments."⁵⁴ An avalanche of dispatches followed, seeking instructions on how to react toward invading Soviet units. Rydz was faced with an enormous dilemma which required a decision within a brief amount of time, a burden far too difficult to be shouldered by one individual. Nevertheless he was partially to blame for this course of events, as he and members of the Polish government had considered the possibility that the Soviet Union, in safeguarding her own interests, would not tolerate a political vacuum between the territory overrun by the Germans and Poland's eastern frontier.* Colonel Tadeusz Schätzel, longtime member of 2nd Bureau of the General Staff (Intelligence) and subsequent official in the ministry of foreign affairs, had already urged Rydz and Beck in Brest-Litovsk to plan for a possible

* It should be noted that Stalin and Hitler had already secretly agreed with Hitler to partition Poland among themselves before hostilities had commenced.

incursion of the Red Army on territory abandoned by the Poles.⁵⁵ Władysław Pobóg-Malinowski suggests that

(during the period the government was fleeing) from Krzeminec to Kutry, Mościcki and Rydz, in trying not to burden Beck with his heavy responsibilities of predicting future developments, showed no inclination to discuss this problem.⁵⁶

The Soviet decision to intervene caught Rydz and his staff by surprise. After a meeting in Kołomyja which included Składkowski and Beck, Rydz issued a policy statement which was conveyed to representatives of Poland's allies by Stachiewicz. War with the Germans was to continue. Kutrzeba's and Bortnowski's armies seemed able to fight their way to Warsaw, and the city and all armed pockets throughout the country would receive orders to resist until all ammunition was exhausted. Ground forces previously ordered to retreat southeasterly as well as those not actively engaged in combat were to make every attempt to fight their way to Romania or Hungary by the shortest possible route. The air force was to fly toward Romania and land there. Effective resistance against the Soviets could only be possible if their advance stalled, while disarming to the Soviets was forbidden. Polish forces active on territory certain of Soviet occupation in the southeastern part of the country were ordered to fight their way or flee to Romania. The statement released

Romania from her treaty obligations to assist Poland in case of a Soviet attack. Beck was to negotiate with Romanian authorities and French representatives for the transit of Polish forces to France to facilitate the formation of a Polish army on French soil in order to continue the war. Rydz and his staff were transferring to Kosów, while Stachiewicz and some of his officers were to remain in Kołomyja to maintain communications and issue further orders. All possible attempts would be made to contact Sosnkowski to inform him of Rydz's decision to cease resistance and head toward Romania or Hungary. Following the dispatch of these orders, Stachiewicz and his entourage were to join Rydz in Kosów.⁵⁷

Rydz's last order on Polish soil to the armed forces reflected a realistic estimate of the situation, enjoining them from resisting the Red Army and commanding them to fight their way to Romania or Hungary. Warsaw and Modlin were to fight to the bitter end.⁵⁸ The course of the meeting in Kołomyja was recalled in Beck's memoirs.

Marshal Śmigły vacillated as to what kind of orders to dispatch and how to deal with the Soviet incursion, yet leaned toward avoiding resistance...and also envisaged the possibility of departing to join the troops under General Sosnkowski.⁵⁹

In a subsequent meeting that afternoon with Mościcki, Składkowski, and Beck,⁶⁰ Rydz characterized the situation as

hopeless and declared his desire for the president and the government to leave the country.⁶¹ This rapid succession of decisions are known only from various, often contradictory accounts. All are in agreement that the president and the government were to leave the country and exercise negotiated rights of passage through Romania for eventual transit to France.

Accounts differ concerning the matter of Rydz's own fate. Engineer Karol Wędziagolski recalled that Rydz summoned him on the afternoon of September 17, entrusting him with the task of locating civilian clothes to enable the Commander-in-Chief to depart for Lvov at nightfall, defended at the time by General Sosnkowski. But by the time of the next governmental conference in Kutý, he had changed his mind and informed Wędziagolski that

Beck had declared at the meeting that the Romanian government, including King Carol himself, had agreed to the passage of all Polish troops heading toward the Romanian border...and were entitled to retain their weapons and make their way to Constanza, where vessels already chartered by our allies awaited them. (Rydz is said to have uttered:) 'We are going to form a new army... The war will continue.'⁶²

This assessment provoked a strong reaction in the Polish press in Paris. Jadwiga Beck, the foreign minister's wife, denied that Rydz's escape to Romania was agreed upon at the meeting in Kutý on September 17.

According to a letter to the editor which she submitted to *Kultura*, Rydz had telephoned her husband from Cernăuți at sunrise on September 18, and Beck was very perplexed with the marshal's decision.⁶³ Pobóg-Malinowski accepted this version, citing Beck's own recollection of events, as did W.T. Drymer, Maria Mościcki, and her son-in-law, Aleksandr Bobkowski, who maintained that the participants in the afternoon meeting in Kutry could not have fathomed a decision regarding Rydz's departure to Romania.⁶⁴ Furthermore, Pobóg-Malinowski, citing the 1907 Hague Convention regarding the transit of heads of state and governments through neutral nations, maintained that terms of the agreement with Romania relevant to the Hague protocol concerning the right of passage did not include any references to the question of the Commander-in-Chief and his staff entering the country. Accounts supporting the contention that Rydz had decided to remain in Poland at the Kutry conference are probably based on hearsay and are hardly convincing. Rydz would have had to obtain some kind of assurances from Beck of even the possibility of his entering Romania, and he hardly would have left such a decision to the last possible moment in the worst case scenario. In his memoirs, Bogusław Miedziński adds an interesting revelation. Having already fled to Romania, he

asked Beck for the grounds upon which Rydz could leave together with the government, to which Beck replied: "I warned the Commander-in-Chief that his presence in Romania could pose greater complications than the arrival of the Polish government." According to Miedziński, Beck hardly had told Rydz enough.⁶⁵ There can be little doubt that following the meeting in Kołomyja, Rydz and Składkowski hastened to Kosów where the Commander-in-Chief issued a statement to a staff officer, Colonel Jaklicz, informing the general staff to enter Romania only on his personal orders, expressing a desire to stay behind until the last possible moment. "Above all the civilian leaders needed to be evacuated first, while the members of the general staff should be the last to cross the Czeremosz River."⁶⁶

Upon Rydz's arrival in Kosów, General Władysław Sikorski worked arduously to contact the Commander-in-Chief through Colonel Jaklicz to offer his services to bring about the formation of a Polish army in France, citing the exemplary connections he had made with prominent French politicians throughout the past decade. But Rydz did not receive Sikorski, arguing that the present situation prevented him from doing so, instead suggesting a later rendezvous in Romania when the entire state of affairs could be discussed. In light of Sikorski's past

affiliation with political forces opposing the Sanacja, Rydz's aversion to a meeting with Sikorski probably stemmed from the Commander-in-Chief's suspicion that Sikorski intended to assume leadership of Poland's political interests in exile.⁶⁷

Colonel Jaklicz recalled Rydz's behavior when making the decision to flee to Romania with his staff. "...He was in his customary state of composure and outward stolidity. However I could detect he was enduring this tragic day with intense unease at the thought of leaving the country."⁶⁸ Rydz's apprehension was displayed that evening, when he once again summoned Colonel Jaklicz and declared, "I will remain in Poland. Select six armed officers to accompany me back to Stryj, where I can rejoin army units which are still resisting." Jaklicz attempted to persuade Rydz that the distance to Stryj was too great unless it could be quickly traveled. Furthermore the potential unfriendliness of the predominantly Ukrainian population in the area would make such a journey extremely risky and dangerous. Składkowski then interrupted the discussion, reporting that the Red Army had occupied Śniatyń. "From Śniatyń the road is wide open to Kosów, a distance of less than forty kilometers." Upon Składkowski's exit, Rydz slipped into a

long silence, undoubtedly contemplating a final decision.

His subsequent reply to Jaklicz is paraphrased as follows:

The inevitable hour has come. I tried to delay it as much as possible. I must fulfill my duties until the end. I will cross the border tonight. The staff must leave at once...I wish to cross the frontier with 3rd Bureau (of the General Staff-Training and Operations).⁶⁹

Rydz ordered Jaklicz to await him at the bridge over the Czeremosz together with 3rd Bureau in case the marshal was delayed. He also instructed Jaklicz to destroy the most important documents in his possession, including the military agreement with France, and minutes from the meeting with General Gamelin and General Clayton in Warsaw the preceding June, reputedly stating, "After all, all of these documents are in the possession of the French general staff in Paris."⁷⁰

Rydz crossed the Czeremosz into Romania in the early morning hours of September 18 accompanied by his closest confidants on his staff. His departure from Poland closed a major chapter in his life. An uncertain future on foreign soil awaited him.

NOTES FOR PART V

¹ This mobilization involved the 9th, 20th, 26th, and 30th Infantry Divisions and the Nowogród Cavalry Brigade, among others. *PSZ*, I, pt. 1, p. 298.

² W. Stachiewicz, "Pisma," II, *Zeszyty Historyczne*, II, 50 (1979), p. 20; in foreword by Bogdan Stachiewicz.

³ A. Horak, *Edward Rydz-Śmigły generalny inspektor sił zbrojnych i naczelny wódz przed i podczas kampanii wrześniowej*, (Łódź, 1945), p. 11.

⁴ The Interventionary Corps under the command of Mjr. Gen. Stanisław Skwarczyński was intended for use in case of a German-sponsored coup d'état in Danzig or Nazi attempts to incorporate the city into the Reich. The whole idea of the Interventionary Corps showed Rydz's lack of understanding of a potential war with Germany. The Corps was too feeble to prevent German occupation of the city, and hasty action on the part of the Poles would have provoked Germany to smash the Corps quickly in case of an outbreak of hostilities.

⁵ T. Jurga, "Analiza porównawcza sił polskich i niemieckich w kampanii wrześniowej 1939 r.," *Wojskowy Przegląd Historyczny* (hereafter *WPH*), 3 (1964), p. 146.

⁶ The air force was perceived for use in emergency situations, as opposed to direct tactical intervention to stymie enemy attacks. Compare with J. Kirchmayer, *Uwagi i polemiki na marginesie wspomnień dowódcy armii Łódź gen. Rómmla*, (Warsaw, 1959), p. 14.

⁷ Initially the Polish fleet included four destroyers, of which three were ordered by the naval commander to proceed to Great Britain before the outbreak of hostilities.

⁸ Kozłowski ed., *Wojna obronna Polski 1939*, Doc 126, p. 399.

⁹ J. Beck, "Komentarze do historii dyplomatycznej 1939 roku," *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 20 (1971), p. 93.

¹⁰ AAN, Prezydium Rady Ministrów, akta grupowe 1, t. 12. k. 1-2, typewritten.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Dekret Prezydenta RP, 1 September 1939., Kozłowski ed., *Wojna obronna Polski 1939*, Doc 130, pp. 402-406.

¹² CAW, II/1/5, k. 58; Rydz's order to all Polish soldiers on 1 September 1939.

¹³ Kozłowski ed., *Wojna obronna Polski 1939. Wybór źródeł*, Doc 128, p. 400-401, informational communication issued by Rydz's general staff.

¹⁴ Stachiewicz, *op. cit.*, II, p. 85.

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- ¹⁵ T. Jurga, *U kresu II Rzeczypospolitej*, (Warsaw, 1979), p. 184.
- ¹⁶ *PSZ*, I, 2, pp. 367-369.
- ¹⁷ Gen. Stefan Dąb-Biernacki was the commander of Army Prussia. Kopański described him as an officer possessing an unusual amount of courage and energy, yet lacking a great deal of operational knowledge and training for such a situation. He was a poor commander in such circumstances, failing to train subordinate officers adequately and underestimating the potentiality of armor at his disposal. Kopański, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
- ¹⁸ S. Herbst, *Potrzeba historii czyli o polskim stylu życia. Wybór pism*, (Warsaw, 1978), III, pp. 405-406.
- ¹⁹ *PSZ*, I, 2, pp. 380.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 105, 381-382.
- ²¹ A. Aleksandrowicz, *Relacje o działaniach Armii Pomorze*, CAW II/3/11, s. 383.
- ²² *PSZ*, I, 2, pp. 383.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49., W. Kowalski, "Relacja, Materiały i Dokumenty," *Wojskowego Instytutu Historycznego* (hereafter *WIH*), II, 2/228, pp. 1-2.
- ²⁴ M. Porwit, *Komentarze do historii polskich działań obronnych 1939 roku*, I, (Warsaw, 1969), p. 190.
- ²⁵ This was exacerbated by the respective commanders of Operational Group Wyszaków and Army Modlin changing their locations. *PSZ*, I, 2, p. 60., T. Jurga, "Armia Modlin w kampanii wrześniowej. Próby oceny działań, 1-8 September 1939" *WPH*, 3(1963), p. 175.
- ²⁶ On the evening of 5 September, the commander of Army Modlin had given a general operational directive ordering mobilization along the entire front. See *PSZ*, I, 2, p. 60.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 377.
- ²⁸ Message via Hughes teletype from Army Łódź, 5 September, sent 10 a.m. See *PSZ*, I, 2, p. 405.
- ²⁹ Discussion via Hughes teletype between Rydz-Śmigły and Rómmel, 5 September, 11:45 a.m. See *PSZ*, I, 2, pp. 401-402.
- ³⁰ Message via Hughes teletype from Army Łódź, 5 September, sent 1 p.m. See *PSZ*, I, 2, p. 405.
- ³¹ Message via Hughes teletype between Stachiewicz, Rómmel and Rydz, 5 September, c. 6:40 p.m. See *PSZ*, I, 2, pp. 406-407.
- ³² On 3 September, Gen. Kutrzeba suggested a counterattack upon the flank of the German force attacking the northern flank of Army Łódź. He perceived this attack as occurring 6 September.

³³ The transport of the 12th Infantry Division was delayed. The 3rd Infantry Division, especially its artillery, trickled in very slowly. It was unknown whether further reinforcements would arrive in time.

³⁴ Gen. Tadeusz Piskor was given command of the newly-formed Army Lublin, which was assigned the defense of the central Vistula.

³⁵ Stachiewicz, *op. cit.*, II, p. 113.

³⁶ Stachiewicz characterized the purpose of these maneuvers as follows. The objective of engaging the main reserve force was to halt the enemy advance on the southern front and thus relieve pressure farther north, followed by a later defensive battle abutting the Vistula. *PSZ*, I, 1, p. 297. Stachiewicz goes on, stating that the "Commander-in-Chief was counting on holding in the Vistula region to the time when an allied offensive would relieve pressure on the Polish front. If farther withdrawal were necessary, then it would proceed southward toward Romania in order to preserve a connection with the West." (*Ibid.*, p. 281)

³⁷ Rozkaz Naczelnego Wodza, L6/3/III. See *PSZ*, I, 2, pp. 447-448.

³⁸ Quarters for the Commander-in-Chief and his staff in Brest-Litovsk had been prepared, yet they were designed in case of an attack from the east. These facilities could not be utilized anyway, since an inadequate road prevented access.

³⁹ L. Moczulski, *Wojna Polska. Rozgrywka dyplomatyczna w przededniu wojny i działania obronne we wrześniu-październiku 1939*, (Poznań, 1972), p. 353.

⁴⁰ Rozkaz Naczelnego Wodza L. 11/15/III/Op., 11 September 1939. See *PSZ*, I, 3, pp. 614-616.

⁴¹ Rozkaz Naczelnego Wodza L. 9/1/III/Op., 9 September 1939, 1:30 a.m. See *PSZ*, I, 3, pp. 56-57.

⁴² Stachiewicz, *op. cit.*, II, p. 159.

⁴³ Porwit, *Komentarze*, II, (Warsaw, 1973), p. 146

⁴⁴ Moczulski, *op. cit.*, p. 378.

⁴⁵ Porwit, *op. cit.*, II, p. 270. The author surmises, that even engagement of Army Łódź in the Skierniewicki Forest could have been a deciding factor in the course of the operation, especially when the intuition of Gen. Thommée and the certainty that he would have striven to communicate with Gen. Kutrzeba are taken into account.

⁴⁶ W. Stachiewicz, "Naczelne władze wojskowe i Wyższa Szkoła Wojenna," *W pięćdziesięciolecie powstania Wyższej Szkoły Wojennej w Warszawie*, (London, 1969), p. 88.

⁴⁷ J. Rómmel, *Za honor i ojczyznę. Wspomnienia dowódcy armii Łódź i Warszawa*, (Warsaw, 1958), p. 149. Rómmel recounts that he received his appointment on 8 September upon arriving at Rydz's headquarters at 11:00 a.m. At this time, Rydz was already in Brest-Litovsk and unable to leave any instructions, a scenario Stachiewicz confirms. The letter appointing Rómmel was delivered to him by Major J. Wróbel on 10 September.

⁴⁸ Kopański, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

⁴⁹ Stachiewicz, *op. cit.*, II, p. 181.

⁵⁰ A portion of Gen. Fabrycy's account can be found in *PSZ*, I, 3, p. 629.

⁵¹ The decree announcing the relocation of General Headquarters was released around 7 p.m. Rydz and his entourage planned to move on the evening of 13 and 14 September to Młynowo after receiving information that they could encounter saboteurs.

⁵² For example, Rydz's order of 13 September did not reach Sosnkowski until September 17. See Kozłowski ed., *Wojna obronna Polski 1939*, p. 686, n. 192.

⁵³ This had originally been drawn up for war against tsarist Russia. Compare with Herbst, *Potrzeba historii*, p. 407.

⁵⁴ Stachiewicz, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 197-198.

⁵⁵ S. Zabiełło, *Na posterunku we Francji*, (Warsaw, 1967), p. 11.

⁵⁶ Pobóg-Malinowski, *op. cit.*, III, p. 59.

⁵⁷ J. Jaklicz, "17 września 1939 r. w Sztapie Naczelnego Wodza," *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 12(1967), pp. 146-147. Compare with F.S. Składkowski, "Prace i czynności Rządu RP we wrześniu 1939," *Kultura*, 5(1948).

⁵⁸ CAW, II/1/4, k. 245, copy of typewritten dispatch on 18 September by Rydz regarding resistance toward the Soviet Army., Kozłowski ed., *Wojna obronna Polski 1939. Wybór źródeł*, Doc 467, p. 888.

⁵⁹ Beck, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-106.

⁶⁰ Pobóg-Malinowski, *op. cit.*, III, p. 60.

⁶¹ Pobóg-Malinowski, "Ostatnie chwile Marszałka Śmigłego," *Kultura*, XII, 50(1951), p. 197.

⁶² K. Wędziagolski, letter to editor, *Kultura*, VII-VIII, 153-4(1960), p. 237.

⁶³ Jadwiga Beckowa, letter to editor, *Kultura*, IX, 155(1960), p. 197.

⁶⁴ W. Pobóg-Malinowski, letter to the editor in response to Karol Wędziagolski's letter to the editor, *Kultura*, IX, 155(1960), pp. 155-156., Pobóg-Malinowski, *Najnowsza historia polityczna polski*, III, p. 65, n. 22.

⁶⁵ B. Miedziński, *Wspomnienia, Zeszyty Historyczne*, 36(1976), p. 220.

⁶⁶ J. Jaklicz, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

⁶⁷ During his stay in Lvov 10-13 September, Sikorski had engaged in discussions with Generals J. Haller and M. Kukiel, K. Popiel, Z. Nowakowski, Prof. S. Kot, and political newcomer Prof. S. Stroński presumably about the formation of an exile government. Rydz made an attempt to recruit the Lvov provincial governor, Alfred Biłyk, as a mediator between the Commander-in-Chief and Sikorski's group. According to the account of Col. T. Münnich, Biłyk informed Rydz of the opposition's intent to dominate the exile government following a meeting with Nowakowski. Compare with W. Pobóg-Malinowski, "W niezgodzie w prawdę," *Kultura*, IV, 150(1960), pp. 129-130. For a more detailed account, see C. Leżenski, *Kwatera 139. Opowieść o Rydzu-Śmigłym*, (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Lubelskie, 1989), II, p. 55ff.

⁶⁸ Jaklicz, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

⁶⁹ Jaklicz, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

⁷⁰ Jaklicz never destroyed these documents. He instead concealed them in his coat pockets, carrying them through Romania to Paris, where he delivered them to Sikorski.

Part VI

DEFEAT

Crossing the Frontier and Internment

To Rydz-Śmigły, crossing the bridge into Romania could not have been more painful. He had barely reached the opposite bank of the Czeremosz River when Romanian border guards began disarming retreating Polish soldiers. Rydz protested vigorously, and the disarmament eventually ceased. Tired of the avalanche of bad news from the preceding day, he then rested in the automobile and requested that he not be disturbed. He then proceeded to Cernăuți, where he spent several hours at the mayor's palace. Here he was apprised of the upcoming fate of the exiled Polish leaders. Disheartened by the unfavorable turn of events and anticipating a whole host of problems with the Romanians, he revealed to Mościcki and Beck his resolve to return to Poland. Składkowski once again intervened, pleading that he instead make his way to France where his presence could prove indispensable. His closest confidants backed Składkowski, emphasizing that present conditions dictated that Rydz's idea of returning had no chance of success. Rydz finally caved in. Around noon, Beck received notice from the Romanian government of its

intention to arrange the transport of Mościcki to Biczaz in a specially chartered train, while the rest of the Polish government would be dispatched to Slanic. Rydz and his entourage were to board the same train, however their destination was not disclosed at the time.¹ The Romanians only stated that they would be separated from the president and his ministers.² This explained Rydz's assignment to the last rail car. The departing train was heavily guarded by the police, gendarmerie, and other Romanian officials.

After dinner, Rydz bid farewell to Mościcki and members of the government. Rydz's destination was eventually revealed by a certain Colonel Sturdza, commander of a hussar regiment, who introduced himself as Rydz's attendant assigned by the Romanian general staff. This seemingly courteous gesture on the part of the Romanians would be the first as well as the last. Accompanying Rydz was Major Jerzy Krzeczowski, who later suggested that the Romanians deliberately intended to separate the Commander-in-Chief from the president and the rest of the Polish government, much to Rydz's dismay. During the course of the trip, the Romanians trisected the train, sending Mościcki to Biczaz, the government to Slanic, and Rydz to Craiova.

Rydz and his entourage arrived in his place of exile, situated in the extreme southwestern part of the country, on September 19. It was obvious that the Romanians had been planning their disposition of the Poles far in advance. Rydz was housed in a palace named "Michail," a spacious unoccupied residence in the middle of the city. A pretentious, French-style mansion, it contained many rooms and abundant furniture, but lacked any domestic staff. The house was under constant heavy guard, and a commissar and a secret policeman remained in the building at all times. Although Rydz was told he could leave the interior of the building, permission from the commissar was required, citing the need for the police to organize protection against potential danger from Rydz's political enemies among Polish exiles. Upon being questioned whom he desired for his entourage, Rydz determined who was interested, and then requested Colonel Zygmunt Wenda, Krzeczowski, Wędziagolski, Henryk Kutnik to serve as his chauffeur, a cook, and two military and one civilian adjutant.* He also requested Colonel Tadeusz Münnich and Lieutenant Colonel Henryk Cianciara, who was to serve as his medical doctor.

* Zygmunt Wenda (1896-1941) started his military career in the Legions and the POW. After education in a military academy in the 1920s, he served briefly as Piłsudski's adjutant. Appointed chief of staff of OZON in 1938, he also served in the Sejm at that time. Following the September 1939 campaign, he escaped to Hungary.

Rydz was informed that all visitations had to be cleared with the Romanian interior minister, and that close surveillance was administered by a regional prefect answerable to the commander of the military district, General Bunescu.

During his stay in Craiova, Rydz strove to continue fulfilling his duties as Commander-in-Chief, drawing up a final order to the Polish armed forces.³ Reflecting the behavior of what anyone in a similar dilemma of having been defeated in battle would do, he placed primary responsibility for the failed September campaign on the Soviet incursion into western Byelorussia and Ukraine. He then justified his decision to leave the country so that he could salvage what was left of the armed forces for continuation of the war with British and French assistance. "Most important was the continued participation of the Polish soldier, and that the Polish army exist after final victory to insure the furtherance of Polish interests...", the highest national goal for which every soldier must sacrifice. After repeated appeals to duty, discipline, and military honor, the order concluded with the following words: "Grit your teeth and endure. The situation will change, and the war continues. Fight for Poland and return victorious to the motherland..."

Rydz simultaneously issued a statement to the Romanian government protesting the confiscation of arms and materiel, while maintaining a journal and correspondence with some of his colleagues. Particularly lively was his correspondence with Mościcki and the French general staff. He also attempted to maintain contact with Warsaw's defenders, and attempted to influence the formation of a Polish army in France. With this in mind, he appointed General Stanisław Burhardt-Bukacki as the new army commander, who had already been in France at the outbreak of hostilities. However nominations such as these remained strictly on paper, since the course of events was soon to follow a path he hardly had anticipated. His final order to the Polish armed forces and the dealings of his official emissary reflected an attempt to preserve his own image before the world. Rydz was aware of the stigmatization which he bore for the September defeat and was anxious to vindicate himself at least partially. In all likelihood, he also assumed that the specifics of his final order would be carried out by other politicians.⁴

Within the first ten days of Rydz's internment in Craiova, an event took place which would ultimately cause the Romanians to restrict further communications. In the late evening of September 26, two veteran Polish officers

arrived to confer with Rydz: Lieutenant Colonel Tadeusz Zakrzewski, a military attaché in Bucharest, and Colonel Jan Kowalewski. After insistent demands, the Romanian prefect consented to the meeting. Finally arriving at 4 a.m. the following day, the officers sought orders for Warsaw's defenders. General Rómmel had dispatched an air force lieutenant colonel, Maciej Iżycki,* by plane for this specific purpose.⁵ After being greeted by two of Rydz's adjutants, the two officers waited half an hour for the Commander-in-Chief to receive them. Dressed in his pajamas, he then requested Zakrzewski's assistance in drawing up the orders. The orders were written by hand on the stationery of the "Inspector General of the Armed Forces" bearing the date of September 26. The text was as follows:

To: Lieutenant General Rómmel, Commander of Warsaw's Defense. I would like to thank you and all of the officers and enlisted men under your command for your valiant defense of Warsaw. The city should continue

* Mateusz Iżycki (1898-1952) was a native of Odessa who had studied at an agricultural institute in Moscow before service in the Russian army during the First World War. After entering Polish service in 1917, he pursued flight training in Polish military academies. Besides his military duties, he was involved in various fliers' organizations and competed in air shows. Following his flight out of Poland, Iżycki made his way to France and, eventually, Britain. In 1940 he was sent to western Africa with the responsibility of arranging the transport of planes from the Gold Coast to Egypt. After serving as a fighter pilot in Tunisia, he became commander of the Polish air force in Great Britain in August 1943, a position he retained until it was demobilized after the war. He died in exile.

resisting until all of its provisions and ammunition are exhausted.”⁶

While Zakrzewski was waiting for the order, Colonels Wenda and Kowalewski were engaged in a private conversation in an adjoining room, in which the former informed the latter of Rydz's continuing intention of returning to Poland. In order to facilitate this, he was in need of papers bearing an assumed name. Wenda provided Kowalewski with a suitable photograph of the Commander-in-Chief dressed in civilian clothes and instructions to obtain such a document.⁷ Zakrzewski transmitted Rydz's orders via Paris, but it is impossible to determine whether they ever reached Warsaw due to contradictory accounts. While Rómmel claimed they never arrived, Warsaw Defense's chief of staff, Colonel Tadeusz Tomaszewski claimed otherwise in a subsequent revelation in a 1949 issue of *Dziennik Polski*.

Two days after the colonels' visit, the Romanians prohibited Rydz from any further contacts with Poles outside of his residence. Telephone communications were severed, and he was not allowed to communicate in Polish with his embassy and other officers in Bucharest, as interpreters were unavailable for his Romanian sentries. The stay of Rydz and his entourage was interrupted abruptly on October 14, when the Romanian police, after confiscating

all of the Poles' small arms, escorted them to the train station in Kimpolung (Cimpulung). Craiova had become a major transit point for Polish soldiers heading for France, and the Romanians feared that Rydz could make contact with exiles and arrange an escape.

Exile in Dragoslavele

Rydz and his entourage were transported to the Transylvanian Alps. Upon their arrival, they were greeted by a military honor guard, the local prefect, Colonel Wuldescu, the local police chief, Captain Trifu, and six other dignitaries. Following the ceremony, Rydz was transported to the villa of Christen Miron, a former Romanian patriarch. The villa was located along the Demovinara River near a village named Dragoslavele, and was surrounded with barbed wire entanglements and guards. The entire complex consisted of a small white, Romanian-style manor house, a larger French-style home, and a caretaker's dwelling. Rydz and Colonel Wenda occupied six rooms on one floor, one of which was designated for guests. Dr. Cianciara, Major Krzeczkowski and Wędziagolski occupied the ground floor, which also consisted of a dining room, kitchen, pantry, and servants' quarters.⁸ Rydz was allowed visitors, but only with special permission. A number of

personal friends took advantage of this accommodation. Rydz could leave the villa to exercise whenever he wanted, but only when accompanied by the commander of the police unit, Lieutenant Dziordziescu.

The period spent in Dragoslavele was extremely trying for Rydz. He surmised that while the exiled president and members of the government would soon be freed, it would be a long time before he was released. On the other hand, the corrupt inclinations of Romanian functionaries to submit to bribery could make a potential escape a relatively easy undertaking. Rydz received the French military liaison from the September campaign, an old acquaintance, General Louis Faury, who had ironically come to bid the marshal farewell. Toward the end of their conversation, Faury suggested that Rydz's departure from his place of internment was unacceptable in every respect. As long as the marshal was in Romania, Polish soldiers could proceed to France without any outstanding hindrances. Even the Italians endorsed this point of view. Rydz's escape could seriously complicate the fate of the Polish exiles.⁹ Besides, correspondence emanating from Polish exiles in Bucharest was filled with demands that Rydz desist from attempting any escape, citing the possibility of worsening the already difficult fate of Polish military and civilian

exiles within the country. These warnings, the product of political circles affiliated with General Sikorski, brought any possibility of Rydz's departure before the conclusion of the evacuation of Polish forces from Romania to a standstill. Rydz decided to stay put, so as not to hamper their transit.

The Commander-in-Chief Resigns

While still in Craiova, Rydz dispatched an engineer, Julian Piasecki, to Paris with instructions to deliver a letter for the newly-designated president of the exile government, Władysław Raczkiewicz, in which the Commander-in-Chief prodded the president to do his best to expedite the evacuation of Polish troops from Hungary and Romania.* Raczkiewicz gave Piasecki a hearing, then, sensing the mood prevalent in Paris circles, suggested diplomatically that Rydz submit his resignation as Commander-in-Chief, emphasizing that Rydz was unable to fulfill his designated functions due to his internment. Following the discussion,

* Julian Piasecki (1896-1944) started his military career in the POW. He later served as president of the Polish Automobile Club. Engaged in partisan activities during the Nazi occupation, he was killed in the Warsaw Uprising.

Władysław Raczkiewicz (1885-1947) served as president of the Polish government-in-exile throughout the Second World War. He was educated as an attorney, and had fought as a volunteer in the Polish-Soviet War. During the interwar period, he served in several provincial governorships.

Piasecki traveled back to Romania, returning to Paris ten days later. But the anticipated letter of resignation did not surface, provoking great displeasure in the political circles affiliated with Sikorski. Desiring to bring this thorny situation to an end as soon as possible, Raczekiewicz sent Rydz a letter dated October 29.

My dear Marshal! The matter about which I am writing you is so grave, that when the possibility of an understanding occurred two weeks ago when I met with your confidant, Vice Minister Piasecki, I availed myself to spell out the most obvious situation as I see it with the most candor in a desire to resolve it as quickly as possible...

Raczekiewicz then delicately continued:

Polish public opinion, especially here in exile and not excluding the Polonia in the United States, dictates that the Commander-in-Chief step down. In light of the similar situation which induced the resignation of President Mościcki and his government in which you find yourself, the prevailing sensibility is that your own resignation is a fait accompli. Faced with such sentiment, the present government is of the opinion that this cannot be delayed. In the present state of affairs, I wish the decision to relinquish office could somehow be governed strictly by your own free will. As it is, I feel that the submission of your resignation is necessary within the next few days...¹⁰

In conclusion, Raczekiewicz requested that Rydz submit his decision by telegraph as quickly as possible.

On October 23, Major Zygmunt Borkowski, a member of Sikorski's cabinet, was sent to Romania with the handwritten letter, arriving in Dragoslavele five days

later. Rydz received Borkowski at 1 p.m., and a discussion endured for the next forty-five minutes. The marshal was curious about the assignment of portfolios in the exile government, but Borkowski replied evasively, feigning a lack of knowledge of any details. At the end of the meeting, Rydz requested that Borkowski wait downstairs. Approximately one hour later, Rydz summoned the major, and handed him a sealed envelope. When Borkowski inquired if the marshal would submit a message via telegraph, Rydz replied, "...Major, you will return personally by the deadline..." The envelope contained two letters, the first reading as follows:

To the President of the Republic: Since I am interned and deprived of my freedom, I pass the functions of the Commander-in-Chief to your disposition—Rydz-Śmigły, Marshal of Poland, Dragoslavele, October 27, 1939.

The other letter bore a much more personal tone:

...My internment has left me helpless, something for which I take full responsibility. I am too far removed from pertinent current affairs to assess public opinion and its implications. The constitutional act of appointing a successor as Commander-in-Chief is not necessary at this time, especially since a new army has yet to be organized. Although it is dependent upon my decision, I do not wish to cause you additional problems. Thus I am enclosing this document. Mr. President, please do with it what your conscience directs...

Rackiewicz responded on November 7, expressing deep sympathy for the situation in which Rydz found himself,

recognizing his complete inability to defend himself in the face of criticism from various political circles due to his almost complete isolation. The letter concluded as follows:

I suspect, however, that your resignation, specifically your relinquishment of the functions of the Commander-in-Chief, is an act which on no account will prejudice or diminish justification for your decision due to your inability to fulfill its obligations due to your being interned.

An attached document dated November 7 relieved Rydz from his position on the basis of Article 13, Statute 2 of the 1935 constitution. The document was published bearing the date November 9, 1939 in the government publication *Monitor Polski* adjacent to another document appointing Lieutenant General Władysław Sikorski to Rydz's former position. Having been relieved earlier by Mościcki from his status as the president's successor on September 25, Rydz was now a private citizen.¹¹

Settling of Accounts with the Past

Following his resignation, Rydz had much time for contemplating the September defeat. Many personnel changes took place within his entourage. His cook returned to Poland and was replaced with a Hungarian sent by the owner of the neighboring villa, Mrs. Vasiliu. In January 1940,

Wędziagolski departed for Italy, who, being a civilian, encountered few difficulties arranging his own transit. The following April, Dr. Cianciara moved to a nearby camp in Kimpolung (Cimpulung), the site of an internment facility for Polish officers. As a physician, he felt he could be more useful there, although he visited Rydz every Sunday and still attended to the marshal's medical needs. Rydz fostered a closer relationship with two of the camp's internees, Colonel Romuald Nejsarek* and Father Antoni Zapala, a priest. During this period, he lived modestly, avoiding requests for funds from the Romanian government. Buying wine with his own money, he only served it to his most distinguished guests.

Now having a substantial amount of free time for the first time in over twenty years, Rydz turned once again to literature and art. His small output of poetry from this period revealed his core beliefs, a personal confession with a simultaneous reflection on the past.¹² This poetry, repetitious and filled with simple rhymes, bore little artistic expression. It instead reflected his personal feelings at the time: homesickness, and reproach toward those close to him and his internment. An interesting

* In some sources, his name is spelled "Najsarek."

perspective on Rydz-Śmigły the man was provided by Sława Wendowa, whose oral recollections were a product of her ability to use her connections to visit Rydz in Dragoslavele. Wendowa recalled Rydz being extremely despondent, yet still strong-willed. Following a particular discussion lasting well into the night, all of its participants stepped outside in front of the villa while Rydz proclaimed:

...I wish nothing more, than to cross that bridge and proceed in that direction. At that moment he pointed northward where only a few hundred kilometers away lay the oppressed fatherland...¹³

Escape from Romania

Rydz's contact from Kimpolung (Cimpulung), Colonel Józef Nejsarek, offered to organize an escape with the assistance of an acquaintance, a clever, Silesian industrialist named Antoni Dudziński, and Colonel Eugeniusz Kogut-Wyrwiński.* At the same time, Lieutenant Colonel Zakrzewski summoned Dr. Cianciara to Bucharest, asking his cooperation in accompanying Rydz on a proposed escape route southward through Bulgaria. Despite Zakrzewski's possession of one million leus for this purpose, the idea

* Eugeniusz Kogut-Wyrwiński (1895-1950s) had served in the Legions and the POW. Following Polish independence he served in a variety of military posts during the interwar period. After the Second World War, he emigrated to Caracas, Venezuela.

was dropped for fear of provoking Sikorski's political adherents.¹⁴ With a German entry into Romania increasingly likely, Nejsarek's idea of an escape appealed to Rydz, and planning for such an undertaking was accelerated. During the night of December 10, 1940, Rydz slipped out of the villa in Dragoslavele, making his way through an opening in the surrounding barbed wire which had been cut earlier in a place which was guarded minimally.¹⁵ The escape, although well prepared in advance, required a great deal of physical exertion for a 54-year-old man. After penetrating the fence, he had to descend the side of a hill, ford a frigid, rocky, and raging river, and then proceed by foot another 1½ kilometers to an automobile in which were waiting Kogut-Wyrwiński, Nejsarek, and Nejsarek's daughter, Bożena.¹⁶ After Rydz reached the car, Kogut sped to a predetermined location on the Hungarian border using a predetermined route. The frontier was crossed with the assistance of a conspirator who had been hired earlier. Dudziński was to arrange a party of escapees including Colonel Wenda, as well as Rydz's baggage via the same route. In Hungary Rydz and his entourage reported to a presbytery whose location Piasecki had provided. Meanwhile Krzeczkowski and Wenda appeared outside the villa in Dragoslavele, feigning that Rydz was failing to come outside due to illness. After two

days, Wenda and Nejsarek's wife, Adela, slipped out using the same route as Rydz. On this occasion, the driver of the car was Rydz's personal chauffeur, Henryk Kutnik. Rydz feared that harm could befall members of his entourage who were left behind, namely Major Krzeczowski, Dr. Cianciara and Father Zapała. Although all were arrested, they ultimately were freed.

Krzeczowski recalled that Rydz's breakout

was not, as expected, greeted with approval by the London exile government. All Polish outposts and contacts throughout the continent received orders to keep a vigilant guard on all possible escape routes. If Rydz were encountered, he was to be apprehended, and taken to a safe and secure place, such as Cyprus.¹⁷

In order to confuse German intelligence, Piasecki leaked disinformation through rumors that Rydz had fled to Turkey. A man resembling Rydz walked the main streets of Istanbul in front of the German embassy behaving as if beset by a great enigma. This same individual then departed for South Africa, where he disappeared. This attempt to fool the Polish exile government in London as well as the Germans was very successful. The Germans abandoned the search for Rydz, and the London Poles assumed that he had retired to private life upon arriving in Africa.

Few accounts of Rydz's tenure in Hungary have survived, although two of the best were authored by Bazyl

Rogowski and Wacław Felczak.¹⁸ Following his entry into Hungary, he obtained papers, for which he provided his actual date of birth but a false identity, traveling as "Stanisław Kwiatkowski, high school teacher from Lvov." After dining in Szeged, Rydz and his entourage hastened by express train to Budapest, where he spent his first night in an apartment on Molnar Street. Fearing being recognized, he insisted on changing his location frequently. Before Christmas, he was seen disguised as a Hungarian retiree limping slightly and carrying a Christmas tree in front of a modest house, where he later met with Sława Wendowa. He next was moved to a villa owned by Countess Karolyne Marenzi, where she lived alone with her domestic. An intelligent and well-read society woman, Countess Marenzi translated the Hungarian press to Rydz, commenting on the most important political developments. Through Countess Przeździecka-Sapara, he managed to secure papers bearing another pseudonym, "Stanisław Rogowski."

During his stay in Budapest, Rydz occupied himself by reading books obtained at second hand stores by Piasecki and Bazyl Rogowski, and also developed an affinity for playing chess. He hosted parties for everyone who visited, especially enjoying the company of Leon Gallas, former sheriff of Lvov and also an exile, with whom Rydz felt

comfortable socializing without being in disguise.

Gallas's exceptional abilities at chess served to make his company special to Rydz, who learned much from the former sheriff. Gallas was adept at creating situations in which Rydz did not lose too often. On the occasions when the marshal won or the game ended in a draw, it served to put him in a good disposition.

His stay at the Maranezi villa proved comfortable and temporarily safe, although he showed signs of restlessness being indoors and often slipped out for constitutionals. He nevertheless was wary of possible conspiracies and being under surveillance by spies. Furthermore a Polish exile could recognize him despite his civilian attire, his trimmed moustache, and longer hair. In light of this, Piasecki resolved that it was necessary for Rydz to move to the countryside. Bazyl Rogowski suggested a hotel called the Kupa-Vezir in Balatonföldvár which he had secured earlier through an acquaintance. Being the off-season, the hotel was mostly unoccupied, and Bazyl Rogowski introduced Rydz to the hotel's owner as his uncle who was in need of a place to convalesce while recovering from an infirmity. The journey to the hotel went smoothly. Rydz and Bazyl Rogowski occupied two clean and well-furnished rooms. The accommodations and the lavatory were located on the first

floor. Except for the owners and the staff, the hotel was empty and the atmosphere was peaceful. The dwelling was appealing to Rydz, and he soon occupied himself with painting watercolors of outdoor scenes. On colder or rainy days, he engaged in oil painting, generally portraits of his companions or regular visitors, including Piasecki and Gallas. He sometimes returned to writing poetry. His verse reflected many themes. One entitled "Christmas 1940" was dedicated to his wife, Marta, who at that time was living in Monte Carlo. During his stay at Lake Balaton, Rydz made peace with his past, becoming more hopeful and looking more toward the future. This too reflected in his poetic writings.

On April 8, 1941, Rydz was transported by ambulance to Budapest, mostly as a precautionary measure to keep him mobile and thus protect him from political enemies. He registered in a sanitorium, where Piasecki knew a physician, a certain Doctor Pajor. The Marshal even registered himself, since by this time his papers no longer aroused as much suspicion. Although apparently quite healthy, he submitted himself to several preventive medical tests.

At this time death overtook Colonel Wenda, whose companionship had provided Rydz with much encouragement.

With the marshal's hope of returning to the country with Wenda dashed, the colonel's death took such a toll, that he requested departing from Budapest immediately. He left with Piasecki on May 10 for an estate owned by Dr. Pajor's brother. The estate, located deep in the Hungarian wilderness, was not in the most ideal condition. Here, thanks to personal connections, Rydz had little trouble registering himself and securing passage. His new place of residence was not particularly to his liking, and he pined for Lake Balaton, where he had hoped to spend the summer months. Rogowski accordingly secured another place to live in a small town called Szantod.¹⁹ Rydz planned to take the opportunity to gain strength and improve his condition throughout the summer in preparation for his return to Poland.

A Return to Political Activity

The primary instigator of Rydz's return to politics was Piasecki. Having been a member of the marshal's staff before the war, his sojourn to Paris following Rydz's internment was an attempt to pave the way for Rydz's continued involvement in the Polish exile government. The emergence of Sikorski's government shattered his plans, so he returned to the Balkans with the goal of creating a

political organization based on the old Sanacja. Its affiliates in Hungary consisted of a former provincial governor, Stanisław Jarecki, Colonel Wacław Lipiński, Generals Stefan Hubicki and Kazimierz Sawicki, Wendowa, Rogowski, Gallas, and other lower-ranking individuals.* Piasecki had big plans for all of these potential participants. This organization was named the Camp of Fighting Poland (*Obóz Polski Walczącej*) or OPW, and it was to mirror the old POW from the First World War, as well as OZON, as Piasecki had served as OZON's last vice president.²⁰ His overriding goal was to transport Rydz back to Poland and move the organization there. Rydz had long resisted some of Piasecki's ambitions, as his plans and methods were often at odds with Rydz's ideas. Following discussions and subsequent agreement over the aims and ideology of OPW between the two men, return to Poland became the inalterable goal. As its emblem, OPW adopted a

* Stefan Hubicki (1877-1955) a physician and POW veteran, had a relationship with Rydz which stretched back to the Polish-Soviet War, in which he served as a physician under Rydz's command. He taught medicine in a military academy, and served as vice minister of labor in the Sławek government. He returned to Poland after the Second World War to practice medicine.

Kazimierz Sawicki (1888-1971) had organized the ZWC unit in Cracow in 1909. Later serving in the Legions and the POW, he was incarcerated at Beniaminów, and then rose through the ranks in the army of interwar Poland. After fleeing to Hungary following the September 1939 campaign, he returned to Poland in April 1941, where he remained active in the Home Army. Taken prisoner by the Germans after the Warsaw Uprising, he settled in London after the Second World War.

drawing of an open book (resembling the constitution) topped with an overlain sword, a symbol popularized by the underground press.

The next step was to attempt to rehabilitate the marshal after the September defeat. This responsibility was embraced by Colonel Lipiński in Budapest, who embarked upon delivering a series of lectures in Polish exile circles devoted to Rydz's strategy during the September campaign. Not formally a member of OPW because of his reservations over its OZON-type character, his desire to partake in this endeavor was motivated by personal sympathy for Rydz. Among his writings, Lipiński authored an interesting brochure entitled *The Polish-German War: The September Campaign in Poland in 1939 (Wojna polsko-niemiecka. Kampania wrześniowa w Polsce w r. 1939)*, in which he argued that Rydz could not bear sole responsibility for the defeat, citing German superiority in numbers and equipment, the failure of Poland's allies to fulfill their obligations, and the entrance of the Soviet army on September 17.²¹ Piasecki had Lipiński's works sent to Poland where they were distributed by the OPW press under the pseudonyms "Gwido" or "Lieutenant Colonels W. Gel and A. Szański." During his last week in Szantod, Rydz held discussions with Piasecki, Rogowski, Lipiński, and

Father Zapała. The matter of the OPW press figured prominently, and a decision was made to provide it with interesting and new literature which would provide its readers up-to-the-minute information and an orientation toward political issues. These ideas were diligently recorded by Piasecki and Lipiński. Rydz himself engaged in a great deal of writing at this time, especially during evenings which he spent alone. Making use of a typewriter provided by Mrs. Lipiński, he also penned poetry, some of which was even published in Polish journals in Hungary under the pseudonym "Ś.R."

The Decision to Return to Poland

After consulting with Piasecki, Rydz began intensive preparations to return to Poland that autumn. The primary concern was his physical dexterity, since it would require overcoming difficult mountain terrain. Preparation entailed daily walks spanning ten kilometers, after which Rydz often suffered stomach disorders and muscle cramps in his calves. After a medical examination, the pain in his calves was attributed to flat feet. Rydz was also complaining about his heart, yet according to his doctor his coronary muscle pains were not serious.²² During his stay in Szantod, Rydz and Rogowski led a regular lifestyle.

Rising at 7 a.m., they would go outside after breakfast.
In case of bad weather, they would stay inside and paint.
Sometimes the marshal would write poetry, a fragment of
which reflected anticipation of his future sojourn:

...O wanderer, pack up your meager possessions,
For you will have time to ponder,
Bring another memory for the future,
From a time which has since departed...²³

Rydz and Rogowski made their way to Budapest in early
September, seeking provisions necessary for their long
journey and to await word from Poland via courier.
Together with Piasecki, they all agreed that the OPW would
be moved to Poland instead of remaining in Hungary.
Planning was to be carried out by Hubicki and Rogowski.²⁴
After Rydz's return, Piasecki anticipated that Rydz would
obtain command of the Union for Armed Struggle (*Związek
Walki Zbrojne*) or ZWZ, and the Piłsudskiites, having gained
control of the underground armed forces, would undoubtedly
run the country following victory.* Meanwhile the London
exile government would be of minimal influence, a situation
similar to that which emerged after the First World War
with the Polish National Committee. Rydz was not fully in

* The Union for Armed Struggle (*Związek Walki Zbrojne*) replaced the original Polish umbrella underground organization, Service for Poland's Victory (*Służba Zwycięstwu Polski*) in December 1939 by decree of the Polish government-in-exile, then located in Angers, France. Sikorski renamed the ZWZ the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*) in February 1942.

agreement with Piasecki's plans, instead aspiring to lead a new political movement. His fundamental reason for returning to Poland was to establish himself as an active combatant against the Germans and thus bring about his rehabilitation in the eyes of the Polish people. In his association with Piasecki, he bound himself to the former vice minister's organizational abilities, thus revealing that former subordinates increasingly were gaining influence, something Rydz was forced to acknowledge.

As his guide to the Hungarian border, Rydz's associates found a young uplander from Chochółów, Staszek Fronczysty.* He was a ZWZ courier and he carried out his task convinced it was a way to strengthen the ZWZ through the "bigwigs from the Sanacja."²⁵ Departure was planned for October 25, 1941 via express train from Keleti to the border town of Rozsnyo. After illegally crossing the frontier, the journey through Slovakia by automobile was to take one day. Crossing into Poland could only be done surreptitiously by foot.

* In some sources, his name is spelled "Frączysty". Stanisław Fronczysty (1917-2009) was arrested by the Germans for partisan activities in February 1942 and was incarcerated in Auschwitz and Buchenwald. He returned to Poland after the Second World War. He was arrested by the communists in 1949 and jailed briefly on a charge of contact with a foreigner. He then returned to his family farm in Chochółów. Fronczysty died in February 2009, and was probably the last surviving acquaintance of Rydz's.

A meeting of individuals involved with Rydz's return was held on the afternoon of the day before his departure.²⁶ It was agreed that Rydz would arrive at the train station in the last minute, changing taxis on the way. He would board a railcar where a certain Dr. Józef Lebedowicz, using the pseudonym "Dr. Gall" would be standing holding a newspaper. Next he and Rogowski would proceed to a compartment where they were to await a young German-speaking Hungarian woman wearing a black hat, who was to guide Rydz and his entourage to the Hungarian border.

That evening Countess Marenzi prepared a magnificent farewell supper. As Rydz attempted to divert attention from the realization that this would be their last evening together, the conversation proved awkward. Following breakfast on the morning of October 25 and an emotional parting with Countess Marenzi, Rydz boarded the first of two taxis to the train station, having grown a beard and wearing a wig and dark glasses. Upon arrival at the station, everything went according to plan.

Shortly prior to the train's departure, an unexpected incident involving Fronczysty's superiors provoked temporary anxiety. Two ZWZ agents from Budapest, Piotr

Zalewski and Wacław Felczak*, having received word of Fronczysty's activities, attempted to arrest him on the charge of insubordination. Piasecki and Rogowski, suspecting that the London exile government had traced Rydz's whereabouts, fell into a panic. But they quickly concocted a scheme to outmaneuver the two ZWZ men. Following Felczak's instructions, Fronczysty, Piasecki and Rogowski detrained at the next station in Hatvan. The disguised Rydz so far had not been recognized. During the ten minute stop, Fronczysty managed to persuade Felczak of his indispensability in Poland and why his return was necessary. Felczak in the end agreed, and detrained at the next station, Selyp-Apc. Rogowski, unknown to Felczak, had managed to hop onto the train in Hatvan at the last minute.* The latter portion of the rail journey was uneventful. Fronczysty was the only individual from whom papers were requested.

* Wacław Felczak (1916-1993) was an historian who had mastered the Hungarian language and had spent time in Hungary in the 1930s in efforts to foster closer relations between Poland and Hungary. After service in the Polish underground as a courier, he made his way to London after the war, but clandestinely returned to Poland to try and organize anti-communist resistance. Arrested in Czechoslovakia in 1947, he served eight years in prison before being amnestied. Subsequently employed at Jagellonian University, where he suffered political persecution, he later again became active in Hungary in the 1980s in the movement to end communist rule.

* The implication here is that Piasecki detrained in Hatvan. Accounts vary as to whether Piasecki stayed behind at the train station in Budapest. See Rogowski, *op.cit.*, p. 100., Alfons Filar, *Śladami Tatrzzańskich Kurierów*, (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1995), p. 184.

A Slovak named Józef Hliwiak awaited the train's arrival in Rozsnyo, in order to chauffeur everyone to the border. Rogowski, who was only to accompany the marshal to the frontier, persuaded Rydz, after hesitating briefly, to allow him to return to Poland. As they were on their way, it was discovered that Rydz had left a package on the train containing \$10,000. The automobile turned around and Fronczysty was able to search the train, which fortunately was standing on a siding, and the package was retrieved. The car sped away from the station and a few minutes later arrived at a forest adjoining the frontier. Rydz, Rogowski, and Fronczysty all shook hands with the driver and the Hungarian woman, who was to return and inform Piasecki that Rydz had successfully reached the border. The three men then immediately jumped into a nearby thicket and began to climb the steep, overgrown mountainside. The dark and hazy evening provided them with favorable conditions. During their journey over the mountaintop, the party paused twice to rest. Prior to crossing the border, Rydz endured courageously, using a walking stick, and taking every possible precaution. His preparatory exercises at Lake Balaton served him well. His guide carried his suitcase. For the ill-prepared Rogowski, who stumbled frequently, the journey was much more difficult.

Following an arduous climb, the three men finally reached Slovakia at about 1 a.m. After crossing the frontier, the party moved toward a Slovak village, Poloma, where an automobile was to be waiting. As the journey became more difficult along the descending terrain, Rydz's party took pains to avoid the Slovak border patrol as the three men made their way through the brambles. Even Fronczysty, an uplander familiar with such terrain, often turned back to attempt a different route. The latter portion of the trek was also exhausting, since it required scaling several fences and walking along a considerable stretch of an old railroad. Yet another slope had to be climbed through a piercing wind in order to reach the waiting automobile. Fronczysty then left his two companions in a hollow under a large tree where they could hopefully experience some respite from the cold wind, and proceeded forward to see if the automobile had arrived. As their guide stepped away, Rydz whispered to Rogowski, "The day after tomorrow is Sunday! If everything goes according to plan, we will be in Poland!"²⁷

In the meantime, Fronczysty waited for the sight of the automobile for over an hour. As 3 a.m. neared, everyone felt a wave of anxiety. At last it arrived, and Fronczysty carefully emerged to make sure it was the

anticipated vehicle. Signaling the car with his flashlight, the automobile abruptly turned around. Rydz and Rogowski then entered the vehicle. The driver, a Slovak named Józef Hudec, then sped off toward Tvrdošín near the Polish border. Fronczysty then announced that in case of trouble from law enforcement, only Hudec was to speak.

By 10 a.m., they arrived at Hudec's home, where the tall, approximately 30-year-old driver invited them in for coffee and fresh buttered rolls, and then offered them bathing facilities. Rydz and Rogowski were presented with a comfortable room with two beds laid with clean sheets, while Fronczysty slept in the stable. The rest would only last until dusk. Hudec then drove the troika to an area near the border between the villages of Hladovka and Sucha Hora. The most arduous part of the journey was yet to come, requiring the transversal of a plowed field laden with snow. Fronczysty walked far ahead of his two companions, so that he could warn them in case he encountered a German patrol. If this were to happen, then Rydz and Rogowski were to return to the point where they disembarked from the car, as Hudec had been instructed to wait there for two hours.

Rydz, despite his 55 years of age, held up well during the entire ordeal, characterized by his usual self-control and complete trust in his guide. Still, the long distances through open fields took their toll on the travelers' energy. Upon reaching the Polish border, they all crouched near the ground, preparing for their next step. The crossing of the frontier occurred very quickly, and Rydz was overcome with emotion even though there was little time for such sentiment. The three men hastened to the bridge over the Black Dunajec, where they almost encountered a German patrol. They managed to duck in the last minute, and the white coats which they were wearing provided sufficient camouflage. The patrol passed, and they were able to cross the wobbly bridge which was near collapse. They successfully reached the road to Chochołów, where they would briefly rest at the Fronczysty family farm. Thence they would proceed to Szaflary, where they were to be received by Fronczysty's cousin, Karol Skorusa, who provided them with food and the opportunity to launder their clothes. In the meantime, Fronczysty mapped out the rest of the trip. He managed to secure a horse-drawn cart owned by a friend for the journey to Szaflary. In the event of an encounter with Germans, the driver was to tell them he was heading to Nowy Targ to see a veterinarian.

Fearing detection, Rydz, Rogowski, and Fronczysty decided to walk to the next village, Chice, where they were to board the cart. Rydz sat next to the driver on a bed of straw and wrapped himself in a blanket, while Rogowski walked along the side. Fronczysty walked ahead some distance, scouting for Germans. In case of an encounter, he was to signal the coach with his flashlight.

At about 7 a.m. on October 27, the cart reached the railroad station in Szaflary. Rogowski managed to buy two, third class tickets to Cracow without incident. Fronczysty would ride the same train, although in a different railcar. Upon reaching Cracow, Colonel Marcin Zalewski awaited them, and drove them by horse-drawn cab to a villa owned by a certain Dr. Żak, an acquaintance of Rogowski's, where Rydz stayed for the next two days. There he conferred with Zalewski and Father Zapala, who had managed to make his way to Poland.

Rydz departed for Warsaw on October 29 accompanied by Zalewski and Fronczysty. Upon his arrival he went into hiding at the home of one Sergeant Jasiński at 53 Marszałkowski Street, where the entrance to his room was barricaded with furniture.²⁸ From November 3, Rydz resided at the home of Jadwiga Maxymowicz-Raczyński, a general's widow, at 18 Sandomierski Street, Apartment 6, a spacious,

four-room modern apartment. He had a bedroom and the dining room to himself, ideal conditions for rest and work. He met daily with Zalewski, who for all practical purposes had become his aide, and with Piasecki, who had also managed to make his way to Poland illegally. The Raczyński apartment was not far from the Wehrmacht barracks on Rackowiecki Street, yet in a sense this provided him a feeling of security since he deduced that his very proximity to this installation would serve to arouse less suspicion.

During his entire stay there, Rydz never left the premises, fearing he would be recognized. Mrs. Raczyński recalled him upholding the utmost composure. Not wishing to be a burden, he requested little. He only had about 3000 złoty in cash, of which he sent 1000 to the mother of a friend who had been killed in the First World War, a certain Mrs. Żuliński, with instructions that the source not be revealed. He also sent funds to a friend of Mrs. Raczyński who was active in the ZWZ. His material needs were minimal, possessing one set of clothes, an overcoat he had previously used for hunting, two pairs of shoes, a few changes of underwear, bed clothes, and accessories for shaving. Piasecki managed all of his financial affairs. He enjoyed talking with Mrs. Raczyński, relaying stories of

his youth, his internment in Romania, and people who had ceased contact with him following Poland's defeat. He often mentioned his wife, who was living in Monte Carlo, and also conveyed apprehension of possibly having to live in poverty. Mrs. Raczyński recalled that Rydz wanted to contact the commander of the ZWZ, General Stefan "Grot" Rowecki, to discuss partisan activities against the Germans.* His recognition of Rowecki's position was steadfast, but he wanted to include the OPW in the struggle, feeling that the resurrection of past political and military squabbles would be counterproductive to Poland's cause. Unfortunately, Piasecki did not agree with this point of view, and a rift between the two men soon surfaced.

Whether a meeting between Rydz and Rowecki ever took place is difficult to determine. The need for secrecy during times of war results in a paucity of documentation. Those individuals knowledgeable of whether such a rendezvous occurred, assuming any survived, would have had

* Stefan Rowecki (1895-1944) was a veteran of the Austro-Hungarian army, the Legions, Polnischer Wehrmacht, and the Polish-Soviet War. He managed to remain in Poland after contributing to the defense of Warsaw in the September 1939 campaign, and was appointed by Sikorski as commander of the ZWZ, a position he retained after the its name was changed to the Home Army. Betrayed by undercover Gestapo agents who had infiltrated the Home Army, he was arrested in 1943 and executed the following year.

every reason to remain reticent. Nevertheless, some historians, such as Tomasz Szarota, believe that the two officers met. The author of a laudatory biography of Rowecki, Szarota, quoting a reliable account, maintained that Rydz and Rowecki met privately, but were unable to reach a compromise and parted accordingly, coming to a gentlemen's agreement to never reveal the meeting's existence. This version of events cannot be completely discounted. It is possible that a ZWZ staff officer, Emil "Nil" Fieldorf, may have accompanied Rowecki to the meeting, since Fieldorf was known to have contact with the OPW. Nevertheless this author could not unearth any documentation which substantiates this.* Rowecki was aware of Rydz's escape from internment, and was warned through correspondence with Sikorski of the possibility that the marshal had returned to Poland. In the event of a meeting between the two Polish leaders, the London government ordered Rowecki to instruct Rydz to leave Poland and make his way to Istanbul. From there he would be transported to South Africa as a guest of the British government. Rowecki

* See for example Wiesław Jan Wysocki, *August Emil Fieldorf*, (Warsaw: DiG, 2000), p. 23. "Much implies that Fieldorf met with Marshal Śmigły when the latter was in Warsaw toward the end of 1941", although this is left unexplained. Fieldorf had served under Rydz's command in the Legions during the First World War and in Army Vilnius against the Lithuanians. Later promoted to deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Home Army, Fieldorf was arrested by the NKVD and executed in 1953.

was to impress upon Rydz that his presence in Poland was harmful to national interests and would hamper the work of the exile government.²⁹ He could conceivably cause detrimental rifts within society and so hinder the struggle against Germany.³⁰ The entire Rydz-Śmigły dilemma was the subject of much lively exchange between London and Warsaw.³¹ Sikorski's staff compiled an entire dossier on the marshal whose contents for some reason have not survived.

A wider role for Rydz in the Polish underground soon eluded him as his health began to fail. On the evening of November 27, Mrs. Raczyński was awakened by Rydz's groans as she found him lying on the floor in his pajamas near the kitchen door. He looked pale and his forehead was laden with perspiration. With a weak voice, he said he was experiencing chest pains. She and her servant, Róża, carried him to the nearest room and lay him on couch. He began to vomit violently, and they then administered some medication for his heart, and placed a hot water bottle on his chest. With a curfew in place until 5 a.m., summoning a physician was impossible. That morning, Mrs. Raczyński telephoned Zalewski and requested his immediate presence using a pre-agreed code. Piasecki was also summoned. Rydz was examined by two physicians: Piasecki's brother Marian, and Jan Roguski. Dr. Piasecki feared a heart attack,

probably angina pectoris. Dr. Roguski was less certain, citing possible acid indigestion, since Rydz had earlier complained of stomach pains. The doctors prescribed him some medication, as well as caffeine and morphine. According to Mrs. Raczyński, Dr. Piasecki arrived two or three days later with another physician, Jan Trzebiński, who performed an electrocardiogram. Although the intense pain had gone into remission, Rydz's temperature had reached 100.4°F, and he lost any desire to eat or drink. Zalewski stayed with Rydz during the night, and Róża would tend to his needs during the daylight hours.

Two days into Rydz's illness, Rydz dispatched a courier, Lieutenant Czesław Szadkowski, from Warsaw to try and establish contact with Sikorski, relaying specific instructions for the courier through one of his confidants, an engineer named Stefan Witkowski. Although Julian Piasecki strongly objected to this attempt to establish a liaison between the two Polish officers, Rydz was adamant about its necessity, and Szadkowski was sent on his way.

On the fourth day, Rydz felt considerably better, as his appetite improved and he managed to read an underground publication and a Dickens novel. His temperature fell and he fell asleep around 9 p.m. The respite proved only temporary. After suffering severe pains, Rydz expired in

the early morning hours of December 2, 1941. Mrs. Raczyński recalled that Zalewski stepped out at 5 a.m. the next morning to arrange the obsequies and was expected to return that afternoon. By noon the next day, he had failed to return, and Julian Piasecki was nowhere to be found. In these circumstances, Mrs. Raczyński decided to take matters into her own hands, and reported at the local police station that an elderly friend of her mother's had died in her home while visiting, assigning Rydz the false name "Adam Zawisza." She then hastened to the office of the local Catholic church on Puławski Street, Saint Michael's, to arrange a funeral.

Piasecki finally appeared in the late afternoon of December 3 with a certain Dr. Edward Loth, who embalmed the body. Rydz's body was dressed in a new uniform, one he had never had a chance to wear. Piasecki then announced that a hearse would arrive at 5 p.m. on December 4 to transport the body to Powązki Cemetery. As a way of documenting that the body was actually that of Rydz-Śmigły, Mrs. Raczyński added some notations on his papers ascertaining his identity, retaining as a witness a neighbor from her apartment house, Colonel Zygmunt Polak. His papers were then wrapped in a piece of cloth and inserted in a pocket in his uniform.

At 5 p.m. the next day, a coffin arrived, as Rydz's confidants paid their last respects: Julian Piasecki, Colonel Marcin Zalewski, engineer Stefan Witkowski, and Father Antoni Zapala, who had traveled from Cracow. Two ornate wreaths and the ribbon of the Virtuti Militari were placed upon his casket. During its transportation for burial, no one unfamiliar was encountered. By this time night had fallen, and the remains were then inhumed at Powązki Cemetery.

A requiem mass was held in the cemetery church on December 6. The catafalque was adorned with flowers, and the coffin was lowered into a grave following the service. Several days later, Mrs. Raczyński and Żermina Trzeciakowa erected a cross on the site bearing the name "Adam Zawisza" followed by dates of birth and death. Today his grave features a new marker bearing his real name.

NOTES FOR PART VI

¹ J. Krzeczkowski, "Z marszałkiem Rydzem-Śmigłym w Rumunii," *Kultura*, IX, 35(1950), p. 127.

² Składkowski managed to reach Slanic by automobile. Beck also departed by car with his wife and secretaries.

³ S. Swiniewicz, "Wspomnienia Bronisława Młynarskiego," *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 37(1976), pp. 224-225., Rydz's order to the armed forces regarding crossing the frontier.

⁴ W. Biegański, "Władze rumuńskie wobec internowania i uchodźstwa polskiego w Rumunii (wrzesień 1939-luty 1941)," *Najnowsze Dzieje Polski 1939-1945*, 8(1964), p. 49.

⁵ Biegański (*op. cit.*, p. 70.) errs in recalling that Lt. Col. Iżycki arrived by plane in Budapest. The plane actually landed in the vicinity of Debrecen. Erka (Roman Królikowski), "Ostatni rozkaz Śmigłego," *Kultura*, V, 43(1951), pp. 129-132., J. Kowalewski, "Cykl rumuński," *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 6(1964), p. 131.

⁶ R. Królikowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-132.

⁷ J. Kowalewski, *op. cit.*, pp. 131-132. Kowalewski ultimately was unable to create false papers for Rydz, because an employee at the Polish consulate had recognized the marshal on the photograph.

⁸ B. Rogowski, "Wspomnienia o Marszałku Śmigłym," *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 2(1962), p. 70.

⁹ CA KC PZPR, Armia Krajowa, Oddz. IV W. G. G., Misja Francuska, sygn. 203/VII-28, k. 1, copy of typewritten document. Prior to his departure from Romania to Paris, Gen. Faury still sent Rydz a letter. In it he regretted having been unable to meet with Rydz personally, revealing that the Romanian authorities would not permit it. He also relayed a message from Gen. Gamelin conveying to Rydz "my steadfast friendship, my admiration of the Polish Army's courage, and my faith in final victory." Next Faury conveyed his warm and poignant wishes, expressing gratitude for the friendliness between the two men during such trying times. Faury concluded with the following: "...My heart remains with those who are suffering and whose shattered hopes due to Germany's military advantage I witnessed..."

¹⁰ W. Pobóg-Malinowski, "Ostatnie chwile Marszałka Śmigłego," pp. 108-110.

¹¹ Pobóg-Malinowski, *Najnowsza historia polityczna polski*, III, pp.77-81.

¹² Twenty-six poems are attributed to Rydz during his stay in Romania and Hungary, a portion of which can be found in *Kultura*, 8(1949).

¹³ W. Krzysztofowicz, "Edward Rydz-marszałek Śmigły," *Więź*, 1(1972), pp. 106-107.

¹⁴ This decision was probably influenced by the earlier attempt at escape by Beck, which was uncovered by the Romanian authorities and led to a more restrictive internment. Rydz and his entourage suspected that Beck's fate may have been tied to Sikorski's intervention.

¹⁵ P. Stawecki, "Edward Śmigły-Rydz. Politycy II Rzeczypospolitej," *Polityka*, 1(1970), p. 15.

¹⁶ S. Jellenta, letter to the editor in response to P. Stawecki, *op. cit.*, *Polityka*, 8(1970), p. 11.

¹⁷ J. Krzeczkowski, "Z marszałkiem Rydzem-Śmigłym w Rumunii," p. 134.

¹⁸ W. Felczak, "Powrót i Legenda. Rzecz o powrocie marszałka Śmigłego do Polski," *Więź*, 9(1966).

¹⁹ B. Rogowski, "Wspomnienia o Marszałku Śmigłym," p. 78.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 80., Felczak, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

²¹ W. Pobóg-Malinowski, "Wacław Socha-Lipiński," *Kultura*, III, 20(1949), p. 115.

²² Rogowski, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

²³ Poem No. 16. See n. 12.

²⁴ Rogowski, *op. cit.*, p. 86., Felczak, *op. cit.*, p. 198 states that Sława Wendowa was also involved in OPW planning.

²⁵ S. Fronczysty, "Byłem kurierem," *Życie literackie*, 9 July 1961.

²⁶ S. Fronczysty, "Z Edwardem Rydzem-Śmigłym przez Tatry," A. Filar, *Opowieści tatrzańskich kurierów*, 2nd ed., (Warsaw, 1970), pp. 262-264.

²⁷ Rogowski, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

²⁸ J. Maxymowicz-Raczyńska, "Edward Rydz-Śmigły w Warszawie," *Dzieji Najnowsze*, 1(February 1970), p. 186.

²⁹ J. Kuropieska, "Generał Sikorski w oczach swego sztabowca," *WPH*, 2(1969), p. 406.

³⁰ *Studium Polski Podziemnej. Armia Krajowa w dokumentach 1939-1945*, II, (London, 1973), pp. 512-513.

³¹ CA KC PZPR, Delegatura RP na Kraj. Departament Spraw Wewnętrznych, Raport sytuacyjny za okres od 15 VIII do 15 XI 1941, sygn. 202/II-6, t. 1, k. 112, 113, photocopy of original.

Part VII

ASSESSMENT AND APPRAISAL

He was a unique figure. Descending from a poor family and orphaned early, he had to face hardships on his own. His tenacity and desire to learn made his societal advance a reality. His gymnasium and college education betrayed a wide interest in the arts. His role in the movement for Polish independence reflected neither an adherence to nationalistic impulse nor acceptance of the status quo. He believed that this was the only path toward the restoration of national freedom. His Legionary days revealed his shining leadership qualities. Without much military training, he managed to implement unconventional military maneuvers with bravado, for which he received recognition from his superiors and steadfast confidence from his subordinates.

To this day, historiography from Poland and abroad generally judge Rydz-Śmigły as a capable military leader, while politics were definitely not his forte. Such an assessment is a gross oversimplification. His role in the Austrian Oath Crisis in the Legions revealed a certain level of political consciousness. One can argue that Piłsudski gained the ability to divorce himself from political forces advocating closer cooperation with the

Central Powers and simultaneously preserve his authority thanks to Rydz.

Following the incarceration of Piłsudski and Sosnkowski, leadership of the POW fell upon Rydz. He then shared leadership of the nationalistic movement with Jędrzej Moraczewski's Organization "A", the foundation of a Polish government. These two functions repeatedly required him to make immensely difficult important political and military decisions. As commander of the POW, he radically changed its tactics and organizational structure, thus protecting it from German repression. It is important to note that Rydz sought counsel from his advisors, and many decisions heavily impacting the fate of the Polish nation were determined collectively. When it became evident in 1918 that the First World War would end in a victory for the Entente, he engaged in efforts to expand contacts with Britain and France as the POW engaged in several acts of sabotage on Russian territory against the Germans in accordance with British and French instructions. Rydz wanted to demonstrate that the POW was the only leading political force in the region, thus providing a counterweight to the Endeks who dominated Polish interests in London and Paris. When revolutionary activities in late October and early November strained the nation, Rydz lent

his support to the Daszyński government in order to insure the influence of Piłsudski and his followers on the course of later events. He risked arousing Piłsudski's displeasure, since Piłsudski harbored different ideas on how to obtain power. After his release from Magdeburg, Piłsudski legally managed to wrest control of the Regency Council and callously push aside other political interests within this deliberative body. Piłsudski's erroneous decision to divorce Rydz from political decisions and assign him strictly military duties fanned his openly critical appraisals of Rydz's political capabilities, which quickly spread among the Piłsudskiites and beyond the ruling elite.

Thorough factual analysis contradicts Piłsudski's negative appraisal which was accepted almost unquestionably by subsequent historiography. Rydz intervened in the Daszyński government at a critical time in 1918 which guaranteed the influence of Piłsudski and his followers in political decisions made at the time. Rydz felt that the Daszyński government was the only vehicle by which wide popular support could be weaned in the struggle against the Germans. Such a connection was sagacious in light of the waning popular support for the Regency Council at the time, and the impossibility of this body to expand its political

base. If such a line of reasoning failed to coincide with Piłsudski's, Rydz had no way of knowing this. After all, Piłsudski's own ideas on how to obtain power were not necessarily shared by all of his followers. The notion that Rydz was a weak politician was one primarily spread by Piłsudski himself. Piłsudski's relegation of Rydz to strictly military duties could have reflected fear for his subordinate's potential as a political rival. But Piłsudski's decision would have puzzled no one, since Rydz's military capabilities were universally recognized. Rydz distinguished himself during the struggle over Poland's eastern frontier at several levels, and events specifically in 1920 revealed his outstanding abilities as a leader.

Rydz spent the following peacetime years busy with army inspections, training, and consultations, where his leadership qualities and competence revealed themselves. In his private life, he continued to engage in his passions from youth: painting, riding horses, hunting, and attending soccer games. Although his ties with Piłsudski became more distant, this hardly denoted that his ties with the Legionnaires were broken. On the contrary, during the conflict between Piłsudski, Sikorski, and the Sejm, Rydz steadfastly supported Piłsudski. While fulfilling the

function of army inspector, he failed to expand his military education or adopt many new ideas. He wrote little, and his military thinking reflected his experiences in the First World War and the war with the Soviet Union. His conceptions of the next war bore little originality and failed to keep up with changing conditions on the eastern borderlands.

Following Piłsudski's death on May 12, 1935, Rydz was selected by the cabinet in light of his military abilities, but he was essentially a compromise candidate answerable principally to President Mościcki and Premier Sławek. Initially occupying himself strictly with military matters, over time his presence in the ruling elite led to his inevitably increasing role in politics, resulting in formation of a clique within the Sanacja loyal to him. His position was unquestionably strengthened by the April constitution, which increased the authority of the Commander-in-Chief concurrent with the growing threat from Germany. In addition, a portion of the Sanacja viewed him as Piłsudski's genuine successor and the bearer of Piłsudski's legacy, a notion promoted with government propaganda promoting such an image of Rydz. The creation of OZON in order to broaden the popular base of the ruling elite marked his most substantial exercise in internal

politics. This organization and its administrative machinery failed to gain the confidence of the entire populace. He was undoubtedly more successful in enhancing popular backing for the army and himself personally.

In military matters his greatest contribution was raising the military to a level which made resistance to a German attack possible, even if he did not exhaust all of the alternatives available to him. Among other things, he failed to impress more aggressively upon Poland's allies the joint military agreements which had been negotiated. The campaign of September 1939 demonstrated that Rydz could not live up to the function to which he was entrusted. As a major figure in Poland's ruling elite, he must bear a great responsibility for Poland's defeat. The imbalance in military capability between Poland and Germany already put Poland at a disadvantage, and the lack of British and French intervention was also a foregone conclusion. If Rydz's mistakes had not been made, the campaign could have lasted longer and ended more honorably for Poland. His departure from the country on September 17 while his armies still continued to fight was dictated by the situation at the time. It also revealed Rydz's political naiveté in thinking that he could command a reconstituted Polish army in Romania or France.

Accordingly, internment in Romania was a big surprise to him, never having imagined that he could fall into such a situation with no conceivable exit. Only later did he acknowledge the situation which had befallen him, and then come to terms with himself and his past. Lonely, and bearing the many accusations befalling him for the campaign's failure, he tried to assess the situation and determine responsibility for the disaster. In the memoirs which he wrote at the time, Rydz relayed his thoughts about various problems which Poland had faced between the wars, including defensive preparations, and the course of the September campaign. During his stay in Szantod, Hungary on Lake Balaton, he authored an essay entitled *Could Poland Have Avoided War? (Czy Polska mogła uniknąć wojny?)*.^{*} The first portion dealt with Polish foreign policy under the Piast and Jagellonian kings. Rydz suggested that during that long period of time, Poland had never faced simultaneous threats on both her eastern and western frontiers. According to him, the nation began to weaken when faced with a Hohenzollern Prussia bent upon eastward expansion and tsar Peter the Great's simultaneous ambitions for territorial annexations to the west of Russia. In the

^{*}For a complete text, see *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 2(1962), pp. 125-40.

eighteenth century, Poland was not in a condition to withstand these threats from both sides and thus lost her independence. From this, Rydz came to the conclusion that Poland could freely develop only when one of these powers was weak. After the First World War, the reborn Polish state again found herself situated between two powers. The war had brought about many border revisions and changes in their internal politics, influenced to a large extent by their foreign policy. According to Rydz, the Rapallo agreement between Germany and the Soviet Union was a return to the traditional foreign policy espoused by Prussia and Bismarck. In such a situation, Poland was forced to rely upon France, and accordingly negotiate military alliances between the two countries. This served as an assurance that Germany, beset with her own internal problems, would not act against Poland after the First World War while Poland engaged in conflict against the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the Soviet Union, enmeshed in military conflict in the Far East, displayed few expansionary tendencies toward her western neighbors.

Rydz also offered his interpretation of the issue of relations between Poland and Germany. He felt that the Treaty of Versailles revealed a lack of political instinct on the part of Britain when she failed to restrain the

political and economic role of Germany after the war. Pacifist tendencies in British and French politics allowed the Third Reich to circumvent certain strict stipulations of the Versailles compact and propose territorial revisions. The Locarno Pact, which fixed Germany's western frontier, was an outstanding warning to Poland, especially since its first draft, authored by Benito Mussolini, opened the door for revision of Germany's eastern border. Paris's compliant disposition toward Berlin compelled Piłsudski to negotiate a non-aggression pact with Germany in 1934. This agreement was meant to enhance Poland's security by concurrently preserving the alliance with France.

Rydz claimed he had aimed to avoid conflict with the Third Reich for several years to the time that France and Britain had become so alarmed by German expansionist policies that their support of Poland would be emphatic. The non-aggression pact with Germany allowed Poland to stave off the problem of Hitler's claims and gear them in a different direction. Rydz recounted that in the years 1934 to 1936, the Germans strengthened their ties with Poland, desiring Polish cooperation to fulfill their eastern ambitions. Suggestions made by Goering during his visit to Poland, and Hitler in his consultations with Lipski betrayed a German ambition to gain allies for a collective

crusade against the Soviet Union. Poland could not consent to such a plan, because doing so would have relegated Poland to a mere pawn for German ambitions. Poland's foreign policy was governed by a balancing act between Germany and the Soviet Union. Rydz assessed that the Nazis' ostentatious declarations failed to sway very many Poles. Piłsudski, and, following his death, Beck, always treated these propositions with great reserve and never accepted them. The Polish ruling elite felt that once German forces occupied parts of Poland, they were unlikely to ever withdraw, especially from the westernmost territories. What would conceivably be left over had the potential of becoming a German dependency. Rydz clearly emphasized that the agreement with Germany was just a tactical maneuver to gain time and delay conflict.

Rydz's essay also offered many warnings about relations with the Soviet Union. He argued that the 1932 non-aggression treaty between the two countries had been advantageous for both. It allowed Poland to concentrate on the problem of her western neighbor, and in turn allowed the Soviet Union the leeway to concentrate on her problems in the Far East. Nevertheless throughout this entire period, relations between the two countries were scarred with animosity and mistrust. Rydz traced this to

historical traditions and various political and social implications. This is why he viewed propositions by French politician Louis Barthou with great skepticism. The creation of a system based on collective security with regard to the Soviet Union was, in Rydz's estimation, completely out of the question. The inclusion of the Soviet Union into the western European arena could have proved just as dangerous to all of Europe as it was to Poland, and would have negated the advantages which victory had bestowed in 1920. A collective security agreement, which to France would only be a formality on paper, could have provoked a situation, in which Poland would have been compelled to pay the highest price, and the Danzig issue and the problem of the German minority in Poland would have resurrected itself.

Rydz's work devoted much space to Poland's relations with Czechoslovakia. Starting with an historical outline, he listed all of the bones of contention between the two countries which had affected bilateral relations. He came to the conclusion that the primary reason Poland did not intervene on Czechoslovakia's behalf during the Sudeten crisis was the position taken by Britain and France. He claimed that Poland feared that the two western powers could have lured Poland into a war, while themselves not

being in a hurry to pursue an active role in Czechoslovakia's defense. Rydz felt that Poland could not count on Germany's defeat by dealing strictly with Czechoslovakia. Following the Anschluss, Hitler's forces were avoiding the fortifications in the Sudetenland, much like they avoided the Maginot Line in 1940 by attacking to the north. By 1938 an accommodation between Poland and Czechoslovakia was by Rydz's measure far too late. The Czechoslovak leaders were slow to make meaningful decisions and lacked any measure of political sagacity, considering Poland with her "corridor" was threatened to a much greater degree than the Sudetenland.

Rydz's essay then offered the following conclusions: In 1939, Poland found herself in such a maelstrom of events, that she had to pursue a war to defend her independence or otherwise sacrifice her honor. United opposition by the Polish people made the cession of land for an extraterritorial expressway across Pomerania to Danzig, as well as forfeiture of even a sliver of Polish territory without a fight impossible. The expressway would have served as a Trojan horse, and assent to its construction would have been worse, an even more reckless blunder than Konrad Mazowiecki's cession of the Dobrzyński lands to the Teutonic Knights in the 13th century. He still

felt that the only course of action left was alliance with Britain and France. Any success of Polish diplomacy was reliant upon cooperation with these two states. On the other hand, Rydz ascertained that the Soviet proposition for a conference in Moscow in the summer of 1939 held no strategic or political justification. According to Rydz, Poland was not left isolated in September 1939, since Britain and France declared war on Germany, even if Poland's allies failed to intervene on her behalf.

Following his return to Warsaw in 1941, Rydz continued to write prodigiously. Another essay he authored has survived, but does not bear a date. In it he discusses various political events in the period 1934 to 1939, dividing these issues into four categories: Germany, the Soviet Union, internal affairs, and Poland's military allies. Most of the problems presented were issues he had discussed before, but he concluded with the observations which follow. Poland did not provoke the war. She could not succumb to German demands. She made an enormous effort to prepare for her defense. She gained the respect of her allies as best she could as a state with economic and military potential.

Rydz's assessment and opinion about the September campaign were also recorded in an account by Melchior

Wańkowicz.* One of the few people who had managed to gain access to Rydz without permission during his internment in Romania, Wańkowicz proved to be a valuable source of information.¹ The two men met in December 1939 at the villa of Miron. In the course of the interview Rydz spoke with his usual smile, although Wańkowicz recalled the smile as being forced and lacking much verve. Rydz bitterly recounted the situation he had inherited upon Piłsudski's death characterized by every passing moment nearing impending catastrophe. The mobilization plan he received was reliant upon the fiction of forty-six available divisions, while even the availability of thirty was hardly possible. He inherited an army bearing no anti-aircraft or anti-tank units, with the exception of some unserviceable equipment left over from 1920. "...Even during my time in Lithuania," Rydz recalled, "it made my flesh creep."² Costs for even the most modest fortifications on the western

* Melchior Wańkowicz (1892-1974) was a veteran of the Riflemen and the Polish 1st Corps in Russia during the First World War. Following Polish independence, he worked in advertising, and also as a journalist and author. Fleeing to Romania following the September 1939 campaign, he became a war correspondent for the Polish armed forces fighting on the western front in 1943, later writing an exhaustive account of the battle at Monte Cassino. After living in the United States from 1949 to 1958, he returned to communist Poland, where his book was published in a heavily censored edition. A foe of communism, his subsequent works were prohibited from publication after he was arrested in 1964 for signing a statement protesting censorship. Although sentenced to three years imprisonment, he never served the sentence. He was posthumously rehabilitated in 1990.

frontier exceeded fifteen years worth of the entire annual Polish national budget. At least the eastern border was fortified. Plans to modernize the army came to nothing due to a lack of financial resources, which would have required about five billion złoty. Kwiatkowski, the finance minister, advised that this was impossible. The most he and his experts could provide was 180 million. "I refused to accept their submissions of resignation."

Next, Rydz began to speak in a more relaxed tone of the Polish people as impatient and unpersevering. He used as an example letters from soldiers written in the spring of 1939 to their families which were filled with indignation toward the regime. In conclusion, Rydz said that it was impossible to defend the nation adequately with the chronic lack of resources. "...After all, the Germans were fully aware of our predicament and were waiting for the moment when our own mobilization would consume us..." However the lack of adequate mobilization at the final hour reflected among other things the situation which is described in the memoirs of Stefan Rowecki's daughter.

On September 1 we awoke much earlier than usual to the wailing sirens of Warsaw's factories... We were preparing to eat breakfast together when we heard a giant explosion out in the street. My father, who was shaving in the lavatory, ran out onto the dining room balcony with his face lathered. It was a sunny day. He looked across Mokotów onto the houses in the center

of the city. After surveying the view he was stupefied and asked for me to bring him a pair of binoculars. I went to his study, retrieved them from a drawer, and brought them to him as he requested. He spied the aircraft circling over the city. He then entered the room, placed the binoculars on the table, and in a strange, quiet, articulate voice uttered: "These are not customary military exercises. An air battle is in progress against German planes. We are in a state of war!"³

Rowecki, commander of the Warsaw Mechanized Brigade, was caught completely unaware, and several other such instances undoubtedly took place during the September campaign.

Wańkiewicz later broached the subject of German armor. Rydz acknowledged that he had underestimated its potential, stating, "If this would have been 1920, we could have withstood it..." On the question of cooperation with the Soviet Union, he retorted that this would have been impossible, since he feared what he had stated before, that the Red Army would never withdraw from the eastern part of the country once it occupied those lands.⁴

In reference to the conduct of the war, Rydz maintained that the unfavorable geopolitical situation dictated that any adopted defensive plan for the country would have been difficult to implement. Polish society knew nothing of this, since the resulting aura of defeatism would have provided little incentive to fight.

A deeper analysis of why Rydz decided to leave the country is instructive. Rydz's own account as recalled by Wańkiewicz brings much light onto the subject, as do the memoirs of Józef Jaklicz. Rydz's writings recorded on December 24, 1939 recalled: "On September 17 I was in a situation in which any possible leadership was out of the question. The easiest course of action then was to die on my way from Kosów to the (Romanian) border..."⁵ Rydz felt that the most obvious course of action would have been to hasten to the nearest fighting units or make his way by air to Warsaw to join General Kutrzeba's forces.

Colonel Jaklicz recalled that Rydz left the country with a heavy heart plagued with anxiety as to whether he was pursuing the correct course, or whether he should die. Polish tradition dictated that a military leader remain with his soldiers to the bitter end and, if necessary, die in battle. The marshal believed in this tradition, and if pursued, it would have been difficult to accuse him of cowardice. Perhaps his sensibility as an artist influenced an inclination toward a romantic death, as opposed to flight from the country as a failed leader. Wańkiewicz recalled Rydz claiming he had the choice of committing suicide, returning to the battlefield, or leaving the country. Rydz decided that the first alternative

accomplished nothing except the confirmation of his defeat. Returning to a combat situation would have led to certain incarceration by the Germans and forced signature of an instrument of surrender. He decided to embrace the third alternative in the belief that he could resurrect the Polish army in France which would continue the struggle against Germany in concert with Poland's allies.

Rydz's decision was also influenced by information he had received revealing that certain political and military circles which had opposed his regime were anxious to assume power after Poland's defeat and settle old personal accounts. He felt that his government needed to continue the war to a victorious conclusion since it had signed the relevant military agreements with Britain and France. Rydz left the country at a time when the war with Germany was obviously lost, despite continued resistance. He entered Romania with the hope that as Commander-in-Chief he could reconstitute the Polish armed forces on French soil. The decision to abandon Poland while her forces were still fighting was an extreme personal hardship and he accepted it with intrinsic reluctance. The September campaign revealed an overwhelming German technical military superiority to the Poles. The awkward geopolitical situation which Poland faced was an additional misfortune

for her defense. Military planning included armed intervention by Britain and France. Though the plans were filled with shortcomings, their analysis leaves room for the assertion that Poland was capable of pursuing a war as an ally in a coalition despite the Third Reich's advantages.

Rydz's substantial contribution toward the modernization and rearmament of the Polish military from 1936 to 1939 is indisputable. It allowed the Poles to resist the Germans much longer than strict implementation of the outdated military plans. But in preparing the country for her defense and then leading its armed forces once hostilities broke out, Rydz made several mistakes. The most outstanding was the lack of coordination of military plans with Poland's allies on the diplomatic front, and the elusive reliance on British and French military action in the first stages of the war. Polish society and its armed forces were prepared for such a joint effort, but reality proved otherwise. Her allies did not come to Poland's aid militarily, even though they were supportive politically. The Germans were at a distinct advantage in strength and materiel, especially in armor and in the air, which enabled their military successes. The layout of Rydz's "West" plan contained many errors. The

absence of frontline commanders exacerbated organizational faults, and military forces were spread thinly. Rydz also failed to take into account the danger of the southern front along the Slovak border, which threatened Poland with deep encirclement and cutoff from Romania. During the course of the war, Rydz's orders were usually equivocal and tardy, and their realization often involved substantial difficulties. Consideration of defense against armor and passive air defense before the outbreak of hostilities would have been beneficial. The marshal's instructions on September 9 relating to defense against armor arrived too late. Orders regarding the organization of forces in the rear, the arrest of deserters, and the slowing of the disorganized evacuation of civilians were issued in Brest-Litovsk and similarly arrived late. Many shortcomings for which the Commander-in-Chief was ultimately responsible implicated Rydz for his lack of attention to matters concerning the organization of his staff, its abrupt evacuation, and lack of communication among its members.

The only valuable concept adopted in the September campaign was defense through maneuvers. Rydz contributed many ideas to this doctrine, which was implemented in the battlefield. This Polish idea earned respect throughout countries which suffered invasion throughout 1940. If Rydz

would have adopted a policy of fixed defense, Poland would have been defeated immediately. Hitler's calculations at the time did not include the possibility that a war with Poland would not be localized and would instead lead to an anti-German coalition.

The defeat in September 1939 was a personal catastrophe for Rydz-Śmigły. Being a person of high integrity, he assumed a large degree of culpability for what had happened. A greater tragedy lay in his inability to master the task which was bestowed upon him.

NOTES FOR PART VII

¹ M. Wańkowicz, "Droga do Urzędowa," *Kultura*, VI, 92(1955), p. 129.

² M. Wańkowicz, "Ostatnia rozmowa z Beckiem i Rydzem-Śmigłym," *Więź*, 7-8(1959), pp. 239-240.

³ Irena Rowecka-Mielczarska, *Ojciec. Wspomnienia córki gen. Grota-Roweckiego*, (Warsaw, 1985), p. 190.

⁴ M. Wańkowicz, "Droga do Urzędowa," p. 130. In "Ostatnia rozmowa z Beckiem i Rydzem-Śmigłym," the fragment containing references to the Soviet Union is omitted.

⁵ Rydz's account may be found at the Sikorski Institute in London. It was published in *Na Straży* 32(1947), and in W. Stachiewicz, "Pisma," II, *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 50(1979), pp. 210-212.

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