

POLISH DEFENSIVE WAR of 1939

Reflections on the 80th Anniversary

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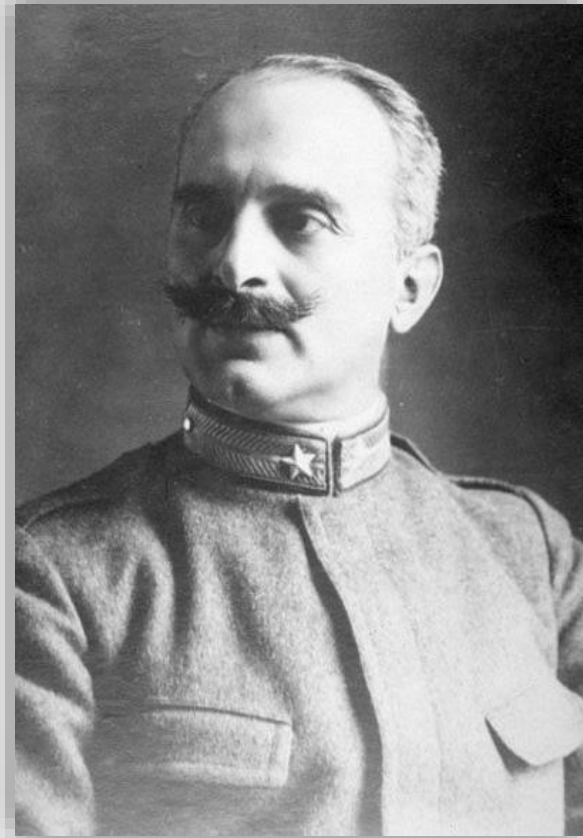
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Prologue

EUROPE AFTER VERSAILLES TREATY 1919



New Military Doctrines



General
Giulio Douhet (1869 – 1930)

Italian strategist and proponent of cooperation of all armed forces with leading factor of the air forces in the future modern wars
(Wikipedia)



British General-Major
John F. C. Fuller (1878 – 1966)

British strategist, a proponent of armoured forces in the modern warfare, British fascist and controversial figure
(Wikipedia)

German Plan – *Fall Weiss*



General

Günter Blumentritt (1892 – 1967)

German military strategist and the author of military plans of attacks on Poland and France. After war helped to build modern *Bundeswehr* and cooperated closely with Americans

(*Bundesarchive*, Berlin, Germany)



Field Marshall

Erich von Manstein (1887 – 1973)

From Prussian military family, during the 1939 campaign General and Chief of Staff of General Gerd von Rundstedt's Army Group South, worked together with Gen. Blumentritt on both plans. War criminal sentenced to 18 years in Hamburg but served reduced sentence to 4 years

(*Bundesarchive*, Berlin, Germany)

Polish Plan "Z"



Major General
Tadeusz Kutrzeba (1886 – 1947)

Polish General and military strategist, Commander of Polish General Staff Academy, Commander of Army "Poznań" and later of the Army Group of Warsaw during the September 1939 campaign. The P.O.W. in Germany, liberated by the British, died on exile in England

(Photo, Instytut Polski im. Gen. W. Sikorskiego, London, England)



Brigadier-General
Stanisław Lityński (1895 – 1958)

Polish Officer of General Staff of Polish Army, military strategist and lecturer in the Polish General Staff Academy, Chief of Staff of Army "Poznań" in the rank of Colonel Dipl., a close collaborator of Major-General Tadeusz Kutrzeba. The P.O.W. in Germany, liberated by the British, died on exile in London

(Photo from 1929 in Major's uniform) (Wikipedia)

Comparison of Plans

German Attack Plan – Fall Weiss

- Massive attacks with the use of armoured divisions and air force directed against armed forces and at the same time against civilian population
- Avoid frontal attacks and make fast advances with armoured (panzer) divisions surrounding opponent defense from the back and then destroy using pincers
- "Kill without mercy" following the Hitler's order to break opponent morale

Polish Plan – Defensive coalition war

- Fight wisely at the first line of defense at Silesian bridgehead and along Prussian border (fight also in the Polish corridor)
- Withdraw steadily and fight all the time to avoid to be encircled from the back
- Establish the second line of defense along Vistula, San and Narew rivers
- Defend supply lines with moving fast cavalry forces
- Sustain until the massive attack at the Western front (planned on Sept. 17, 1939)

Opponent Forces Commanders



Marshal
Edward Rydz-Śmigły (1886 – 1941)

Commander-in-Chief of Polish Armed Forces during the September 1939 campaign. Inspector-General of the Polish Armed Forces and close collaborator of Marshal Józef Piłsudski. Directed the Polish Defensive War until September 18, when he left Poland to Romania.

He escaped secretly via Hungary to Poland and died from a heart attack in Warsaw on December 2, 1941, buried under different name

(Photo Gazeta Polska, 1938)



Field Marshal
Walther von Brauchitsch (1881 – 1941)

Commander-in-Chief of the German Army during the Second World War. Born to Prussian aristocratic and military family. He led both Polish and French massive campaigns of 1939 and 1940. Supported harsh measures against the Polish population and followed strictly orders of Adolf Hitler. War criminal, died in the British military hospital in Hamburg before being prosecuted

(Photo E. Bieber, c. 1938, German Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv),

Bild 183-2004-0105-500)

POLAND'S STEPS IN 1939

- **Poland rejected three German demands from March 21, 1939:**
 1. Incorporation of Free City of Gdańsk (Danzig) to the Third Reich
 2. Construction of the highway (under German supervision connecting East Prussia with the rest of Germany)
 1. Poland will join anti-Komitern pact against Soviet Union
- **Marshal Edward Rydz-Śmigły, Commander-in-Chief ordered after rejection of German demands:**
 1. To organize the system of the war command of the Polish Army based on the Plan "Z"
 2. To strengthen the Polish divisions stationed at the Western border by the draft of one year of recruits
 3. To start the first quiet "card mobilization"
(author Col. Dipl. Józef Wiatr, Chief of the III Division of the Polish General Staff)

Overview of the Polish Defensive War of 1939

Opposing Forces



58 large tactical regiments (65 other sources)

(organized in Army Group North and South)

42 infantry divisions, 1 brigade of cavalry,

15 motorized armoured divisions,

2 SS smaller autonomous regiments

1,850 thousand soldiers

2,800 tanks and armored vehicles

10,000 artillery guns

~ 3,732 aircrafts (2 air fleets)

Navy force Ost



37 large tactical regiments including

26 infantry divisions, 10 brigades of cavalry

and 1 armoured brigade *(the second went to fight in the latter phase of the campaign)*

1,000 thousand soldiers *(on Sept. 1 and later*

approx. 1,150 thousand soldiers)

880 tanks *(including tankettes)*

~ 400 aircrafts

Small Navy evacuated almost entirely to England at the end of August 1939

Opposing Forces



INFANTRY	1.4	1
ARMoured UNITS	10	1
CAVALRY UNITS	1	8
ARTILLERY UNITS <i>(outside of divisions)</i>	3	1
AUTOMOBILE TRANSPORT <i>(despite most of German artillery units used horses)</i>	16	1
AIRCRAFTS	9	1

German Invasion of Poland

September 1, 1939 at 4:45 am



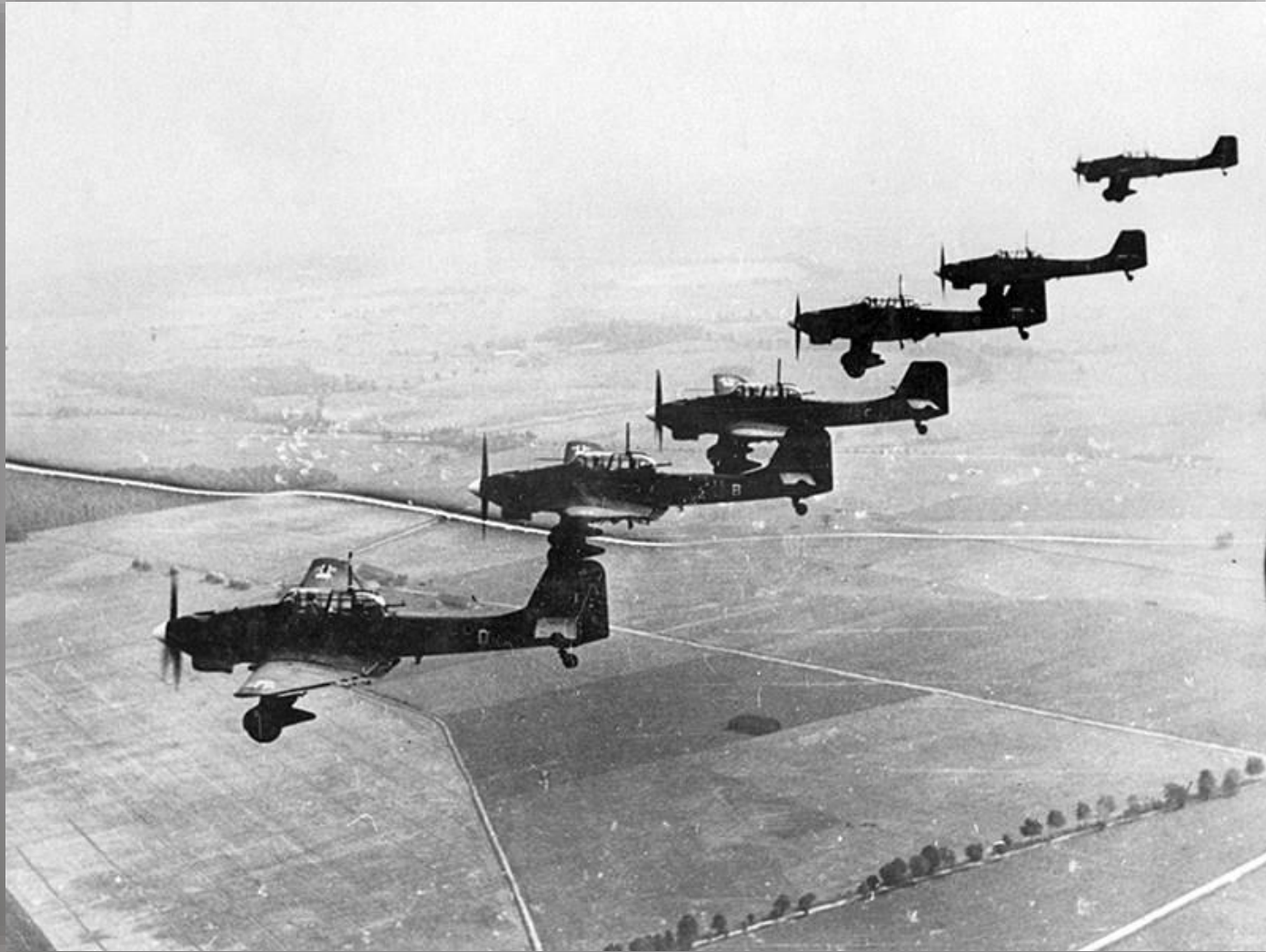
1. Sept. 1939 Uhr 4.45 Schulschiff „Schleswig-Holstein“
eröffnet das Feuer auf die von den Polen zur Festung
ausgebaute Westerplatte im Danziger Hafen

Foto-Sönnke
M 108

Reaction of the Canadian Press



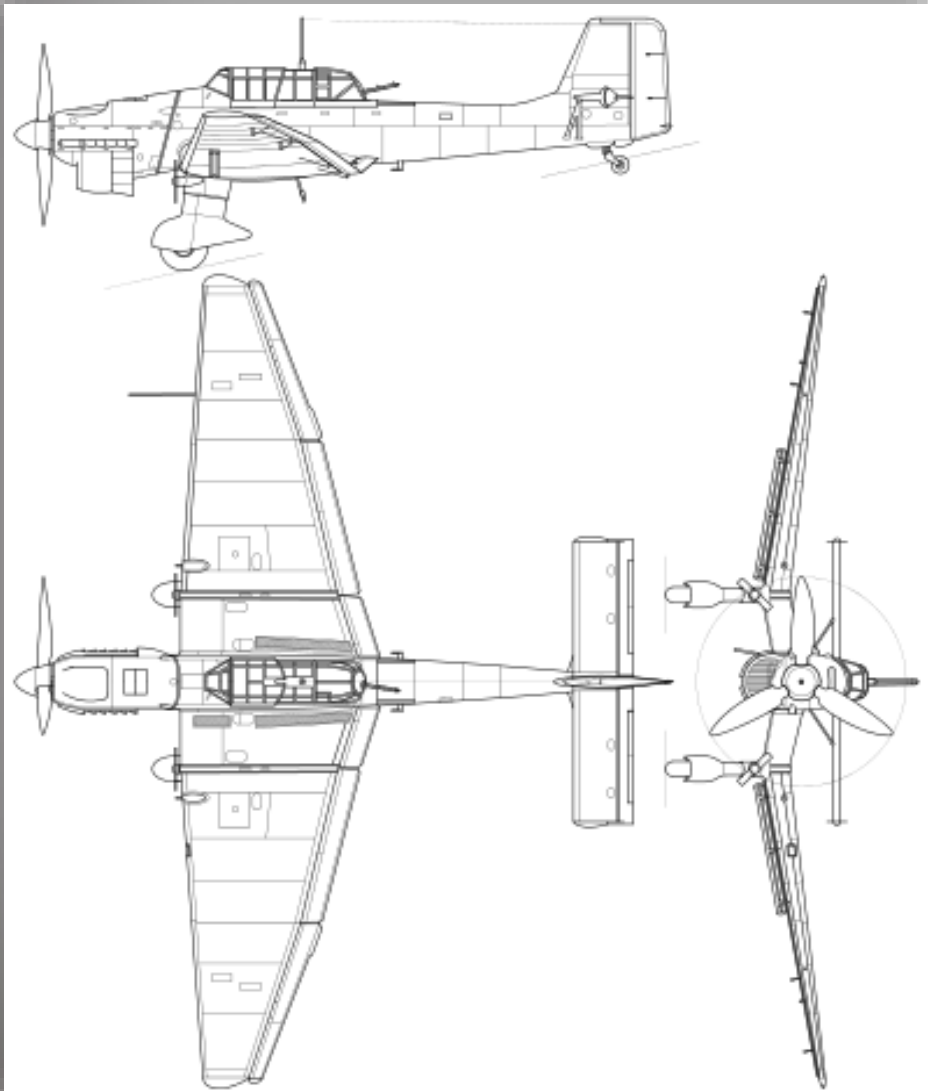
German Air Force



Luftwaffe Junkers **Ju 87B Stuka**
ground attack aircrafts over
Poland in September 1939

*(Bundesarchiv - Bild 183-1987-1210-502 -
Heinrich Hoffman)*

German Air Force



Junkers Ju 87B Stuka – diving light bomber

Crew: 2

Length: 11.10 m

Wingspan: 13.805 m

Height: 4.01 m

Empty weight: 2,712 kg (5,980 lb)

Max takeoff weight: 4,336 kg (6,090 lb)

Engine power: 820 kW (1,100 hp) at 1,500 m

2 propellers: 3-bladed Junkers constant-speed propeller

Max speed: 339.6 km/h at sea level

Cruise speed: 383 km/h

Range: 595.5 km with 500 kg of bombs

Rate of climb: 2.3 m/s

Time to altitude: 2,000 m in 4 minutes 18 seconds

Guns: 2 x 7.92 MG 17 machine gun forward and 1 MG 17 gun to rear

Bombs: 1 x 250 kg under the fuselage and 4 x 50 kg (under the wing)

Special sirens: attached to the landing gears

Polish Air Force



Polish PZL 37 Łoś medium bombers at a military airfield with a four-man crew (NAC – 1-W-1552-6 – Polish National Digital Archive)

PZL 37 Łoś - medium bomber

one of the best known design in the world at that time (*equivalent to Dornier 17 – lighter German bomber*)

PZL (Polish Aircraft Company) built over 120, and 85 were used during the German September 1939 invasion.

24 flew to Romania after Sept. 18, 1939

Crew: 4

Length: 12.92 m

Wingspan: 17.93 m

Gross weight: 8,865 kg

Powerplant: 2 x PZL Pegasus XX 9-cylinder engine, 123 kW (970 hp) each

Max. Speed: 412 km/h at 2,800 m with 2 tonnes of bombs

Range: 2,600 km

Combat range: 1,000 km

Service ceiling: 7,000 m

Rate of climb: 4.7 m/s

Guns: 37.92 mm machine guns (1 in the nose, 1 in the rear station, 1 in the underbelly station)

Bombs: up to 2,580 kg of bombs (*basic load of 20 x 110 kg bombs*)

Possible operation from unprepared fields



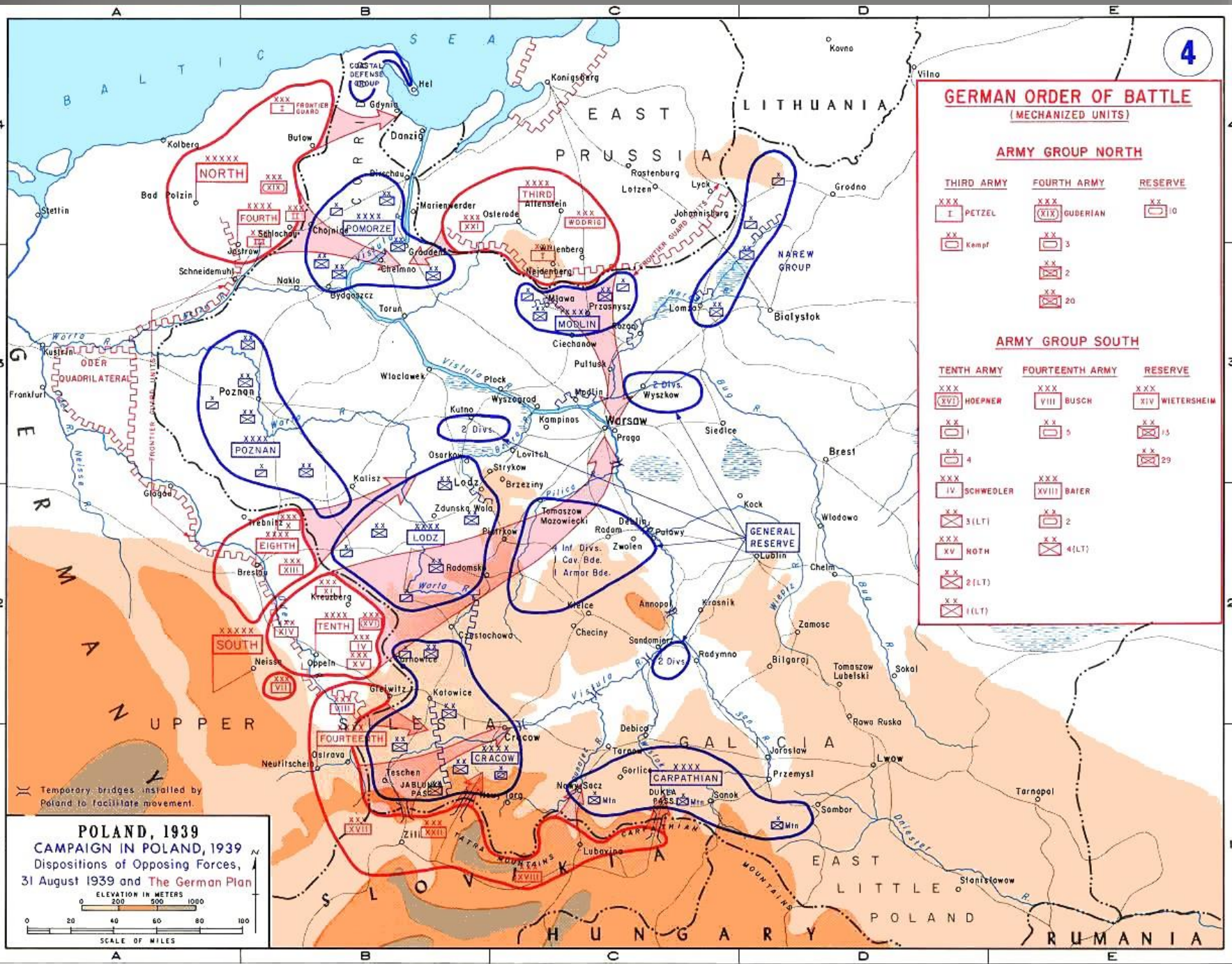
Panzer Forces



German light tank Panzer II (Panzerkampfwagen II – PzKpfw II)
Weight: 8.9 tonne; Armament: 2 cm KwK 30 L/55 auto-cannon (280 rounds per minute sustained from 10-round magazines -180 shells were carried), 1 x 7.92 mm machine gun, Armor: 14 mm sides and front; 6-cylinder Maybach HL62 TRM engine, 138 hp; Speed: 40 km/h; Obstacles: Not provided, Crew: 3. Germany had ~ **1500 Panzer II + 1000 Panzer I (smaller and slower tanks)**



Polish light tank 7TP (improved Polish design based on the British Vickers tank). Weight: 9.4 tonne, Armament: 1 x 37 mm anti-tank gun (Bofors licence), 1 x 7.9 mm heavy machine gun; Armor : 17 mm front and sides; Engine: 1 Saurer BDDL Diesel 6-cylinder engine with water coolant, 110 hp; Speed: 32 km/h; Obstacles: 1.70 m (*vertical*) Crew: 3. Poland had – **150 7TP + 30 French light-middle tanks R-35 and ~700 small tanketts (small armoured vehicles)**



Disposition of Opposing Forces in the September 1939 campaign

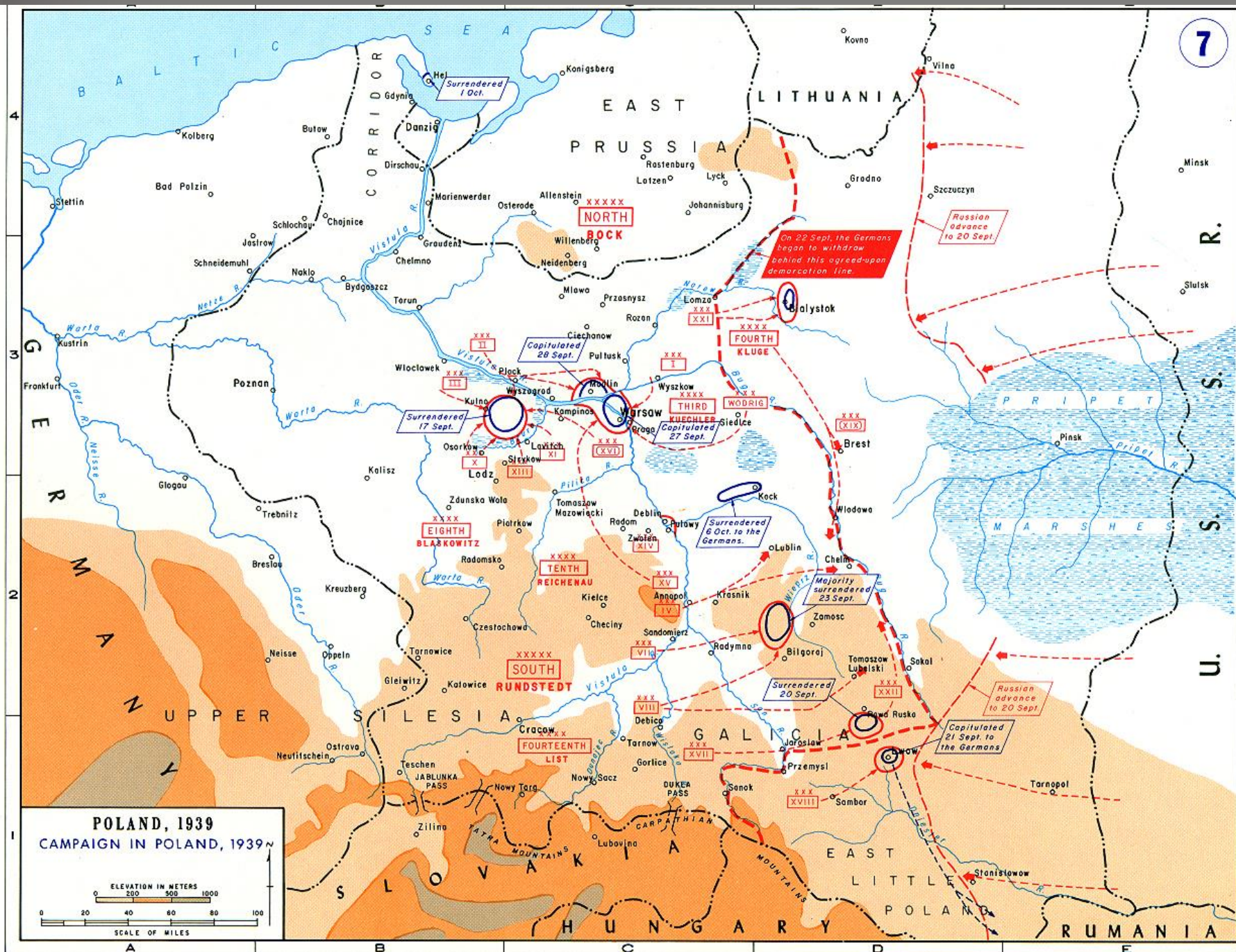
September 1, 1939

Blue - Polish 6 Armies + spare forces

Red - German two Army Groups: North and South

German attacking pincers

The Map, Department of History, United States Military Academy



Disposition of Opposing Forces in the September 1939 campaign

After the Soviet invasion on September 17, 1939

Blue - Polish defense

Red - German attacks

The Map, Department of History, United States Military Academy

Polish guns in 1939



The 37-mm Polish anti-tank guns, taking positions in defense of Warsaw in September 1939. Poland had 1,200 of these guns
(Wikipedia)



Polish anti-aircraft flak 75-mm gun (improved Model 1929 Bofors), taking positions in defense of Warsaw
(Wikipedia)

Battle of Bzura Sept. 9-19, 1939



Cavalry Brigade "Wielkopolska" enters the fight during Battle of Bzura
under command of Brigadier-General Roman Abraham (Sept. 10, 1939)

Wikipedia

Field of Honour and Glory in 1939



Brigadier-General

Mikołaj Bołtuć

(1893 – 1939)

Commander of the IV Polish Infantry Division in Army "Pomorze" led heavy fights near Modlin. Killed leading himself charging Polish infantry on September 22, 1939, near Łomianki



Brig.-General

Józef R. Kustron

(1892 – 1939)

Commander of the 21st Mountain Infantry Division from Nowy Sącz (the part of Army "Kraków"). Killed in the heavy fight in Ułazów, where his division tried to break German lines in the direction to Lwów on Sept. 16, 1939. Buried in the battlefield



Major-General

Stanisław Grzmot-Skotnicki

(1894 – 1939)

Commander of the Operational Group "Czersk" of Army "Pomorze". Polish Cavalry Officer. He fought in the Battle of Bzura. He died from heavy wounds during this battle commanding himself a small improvised infantry unit near Tułowice on Sept. 18, 1939



Brig.-Gen.

Franciszek Seweryn Wład

(1888 – 1939),

Commander of the XIV Polish Infantry Division in Army "Poznań". Killed in the heavy fight during the Battle of Bzura, near Sochaczew. The remnants of his division were attacked by the heavy German artillery fire. Heavily wounded, died in Otyń near the battlefield on Sept. 17, 1939

Soviet Invasion on September 17, 1939



German and Soviet troops shaking hands at the bridge over river Bug in Brześć (Brest in Belarus now) at the end of the 1939 campaign

Soviet Invasion on September 17, 1939

- Stalin ordered the invasion after a ceasefire with Japan on September 15, 1939, which did take effect next day
- Attack of 800 thousand soldiers in two waves: 620 thousand regular army and 180 thousand of Czecha security forces to take over Polish Government installations and sites in the Eastern Poland
- Small Polish resistance by the Border Protection Corps (KOP) under command of Brig.- General Wilhelm Orlik-Rueckemann (*Battles of Szack and Wytyczno*)
- Soviets troops later stopped on the demarcation line and then withdrew to the line established by Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia on September 28, 1939 in Moscow

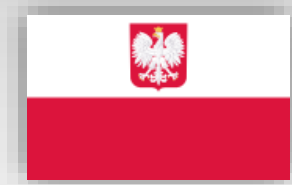


Brig.- General
Józef Konstanty Olszyna-Wilczyński
(1890 – 1939)

Commander of the Operational Group "Grodno". Around Sept. 17, 1939, General travelled from Pińsk to Grodno, and he saw Soviet small units and saboteurs. He decided to escape to Lithuania and during his travel he was surrounded by Soviet tanks in Sopoćkinie and brutally murdered together with his adjutant Major M. Strzemeski (in the presence of his wife)

Final Remarks

Losses during the Polish campaign 1939



Poland

Killed in action: 95,000 - 97,000 (including died of wounds and not accounted)

Wounded: 130,000.

Not accounted: Lack of information

German captivity: 587,300 (German sources claimed – 694,000)

In October and November 1939, Polish Jewish POW's, and Polish-German POW's were released,

17,420 POW's of Polish-Ukrainians and Polish-Belarusians were handed in to the Soviet Union by Germans

Soviet captivity: 452,500 Polish soldiers were captured by Soviets (out of this number about 200,000 were sent to Gulag and other camps)

In general, a number of interned soldiers (including officers) were in Romania about 30,000, in Hungary about 40,000, and in Lithuania and Latvia about 17,000 (about 12,000 of them was forced to be transferred to the Soviet Union).

Losses during the Polish campaign 1939



Germany

Killed in action	17, 106.
Wounded	36, 995.
Not accounted	486.



Soviet Union

Killed in action	1,600.
Wounded	2,600.
Not accounted	302.



Slovakia

Killed in action	18.
Wounded	50.

Main Reasons of Defeat

1. Geopolitical situation of Poland in 1939 and abandoning by coalition Allies (England and France)
2. Small industrial power of Poland vs. mega industrial power of Hitler's Germany
3. The German attack was organized as two monumental pincers from the Prussian Northern border and Silesian and Slovakian Southern borders
4. A slow pace of modernization of the Polish Armed Forces (too small number of modern aircrafts and tanks)
5. Lack of a good pre-planning of the formation of armies to counter German well-designed concept of *Blitzkrieg*

Positive conclusions

1. The determination of the whole Polish nation and its political leaders
2. The determination of the Polish Armed Forces and their commanders at every level
3. Well-performed elastic card mobilisation plan (~ 80% of the total force was mobilized by steps) with the pre-planned evacuation of the Air Force and the Polish Navy
4. A relatively good operational plan of the defensive campaign to counter German dominant forces in a very difficult strategic situation of Poland
5. The ability of the Polish High Command to improvise brave responses (on Bzura and Romanian bridgehead)
6. Heroism of the individual Polish soldiers and their commanders with contempt to death

Epilogue



Planned division of Central Europe according to Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact



- Soviet Union
- Germany
- Other countries and territories
- EP East Prussia

1939 ◀◀

- Soviet sphere of influence
- German sphere of influence
- National borders as of 1939
- Planned Borders
- Soviet republic borders as of 1939

1940 ▶▶

- Annexed by the Soviet Union
- Annexed by Germany
- Occupied by Germany
- National borders as of 1940
- National borders as of 1938
- Soviet republic borders as of 1940

Actual territorial changes 1939-1940



Lest we forget

Józef survived
WWI, 1919-1921 War and WWII



Olga & Józef - 1919

Władysław killed in Katyń in 1940



Helena & Władysław - 1922

Władysław killed in Auschwitz in 1942

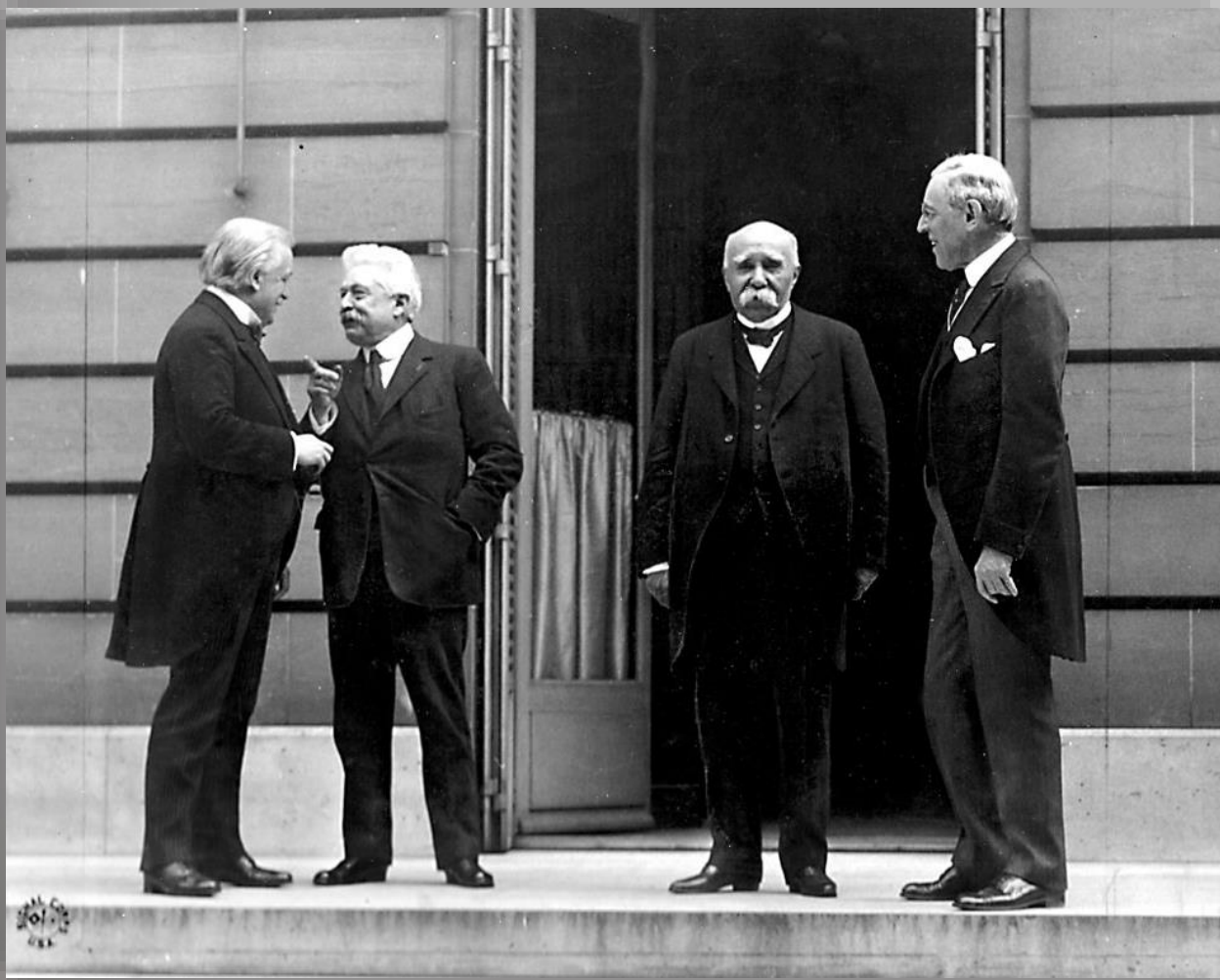


Kazimiera & Władysław - 1933

EUROPE BEFORE THE WORLD WAR I



Treaty of Versailles 1919



The “Big Four”

David Lloyd George	PM United Kingdom
Vittorio Orlando	PM Italy
Georges Clemenceau	PM France
Woodrow Wilson	President USA



THE POLISH QUIET CARD MOBILISATION PLAN "W"

Brigadier-General Józef Albin Wiatr
(1889 – 1977)

Before September 1939 campaign,
Colonel Dipl., Chief of the I Division of the Polish General Staff,
the author of the Polish mobilization plan "W",
in the September 1939 campaign,
Deputy Chief of the III Division of the Staff
of the Polish Commander-in-Chief.
A skillful Polish high ranked officer,
also in KOP (Border Defense Corps)

(Photo before 1934 in the Colonel KOP uniform - Wikipedia)

Heroic Polish Commanders of 1939



**Major- General
Antoni Szylling**
(1884 – 1971)

Commander of Army "Kraków".
Led fight in Silesia, Lesser
Poland, and Battle of
Tomaszów Lubelski. Used
a concept of fighting during
constant retreat. P.O.W.
liberated by Americans, later in
France and U.K., died and
buried in Canada



**Brig.- General
Stanisław Maczek**
(1892 – 1994)

Commander of 10th Motorized
Cavalry Brigade. Led fight against
German panzer divisions and
later interned in Hungary.
Fought in France and later as
Commander of the 1st Polish
Armoured Division after the
invasion of Normandy. Died in
Scotland



**Major- General
Franciszek Kleeberg**
(1888 – 1941)

Commander of the
Operational Group "Polesie",
fought the last battle of Kock
(Oct. 5, 1939). P.O.W. died in
the German captivity in
Dresden



**Brig.- General
Wilhelm Orlik-Rueckemann**
(1894 – 1986)

Last Commander of the
Border Protection Corps
(Korpus Ochrony Pogranicza)
fought Soviet invasion forces
in Szack and Wytyczno.
Escaped through Lithuania to
Sweden, died and buried in
Canada

Poland's Multinational/ Multifaith Population in 1939

35. 1 mln Polish citizen of various national background – territory – 389,600 km^2

24.58 mln	Poles	70.2%
4.89 mln	Ukrainians	13.9%
3.35 mln	Jews	9.5%
1.13 mln	Belarusians	3.2%
0.80 mln	Germans	2.3%
0.15 mln	Russians	0.4%
0.11 mln	Czechs	0.3%
0.09 mln	Others	0.2 – 0.3%

Source: *Mały Rocznik Statystyczny 1939*, Warszawa 1939 [cyt. z pracy zbiorowej *Polska 1939 – 1945, Straty osobowe i ofiary represji pod dwiema okupacjami*, red. Wojciech Materski i Tomasz Szarota, Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, IPN, Warszawa 2009] - *Small Statistical Annual Survey 1939, Warsaw 1939*