

1 IX 1939

THE FIRST BATTLE OF WWII



Cap eagle, pattern 1919 - found in 2019 during excavation work at Westerplatte.

1924 The League of Nations grants Poland Westerplatte peninsula for storage and shipment by rail of imported materiel. The storage is named Military Transit Depot at Westerplatte. It is the Polish enclave surrounded by German-dominated Free City of Gdansk.

January 1926 the first Polish guard unit arrives at Westerplatte. The Depot is surrounded by a brick wall, new port infrastructure and warehouses are built. Regular service of Polish guard unit begins.

From 1933 construction of permanent fortifications: four guardhouses with concealed basements hiding heavy machine guns, fortified posts in the NCOs' mess and in the purpose-built, modern, bomb-proof Barracks.

1939 A network of field fortifications is built. The work is often done by night.

WESTERPLATTE



Cleverly designed defence lines
a network of field fortifications and foxholes surrounding the Barracks.

1 IX 1939
04:48 a.m

Schleswig-Holstein fires towards Westerplatte. WWII begins. German sappers blow up the Depot's gate and launch an attack into the Depot.

Poles inflict heavy losses on the attacking German units with deadly fire from Wał and Prom outposts and fire mortar shells from the Barracks. The attackers are decimated. Polish field cannon 76,2 mm destroys German machine gun posts in Nowy Port. Before noon the German attack breaks down. The Poles hold their positions owing to solid defence lines, well-trained soldiers, and unyielding attitude. No considerable losses in manpower or equipment are suffered.

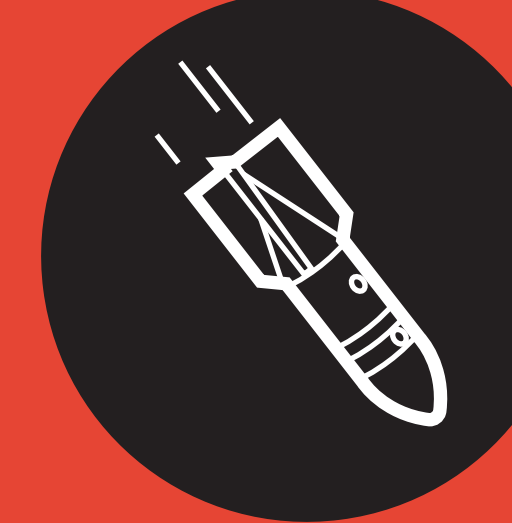
2 IX 1939

Bomb raid - ca. 60 dive bombers Stuka Ju-87.

Guardhouse no. 5 is hit and collapses - at least 6 Polish soldiers die.



Stuka JU-87



26 tonnes of bombs



Guardhouse no. 5



6 killed

WESTERPLATTE LIONS STILL RESIST!

3 IX 1939

The Rosslau-Dessau Sapper unit from Germany is flown into Gdansk to help conquer Westerplatte. The Depot is under constant German fire. The Polish Radio and the press broadcast communique of Westerplatte's heroic defence to bolster the fighting spirit of other Polish units across Poland.

4-6 IX 1939

4 IX 1939
Shelling of Westerplatte from the sea by torpedo boat T-196 nad Von der Groeben vessel.

5 IX 1939
The siege continues with constant fire towards Westerplatte and few German reconnaissance patrols.

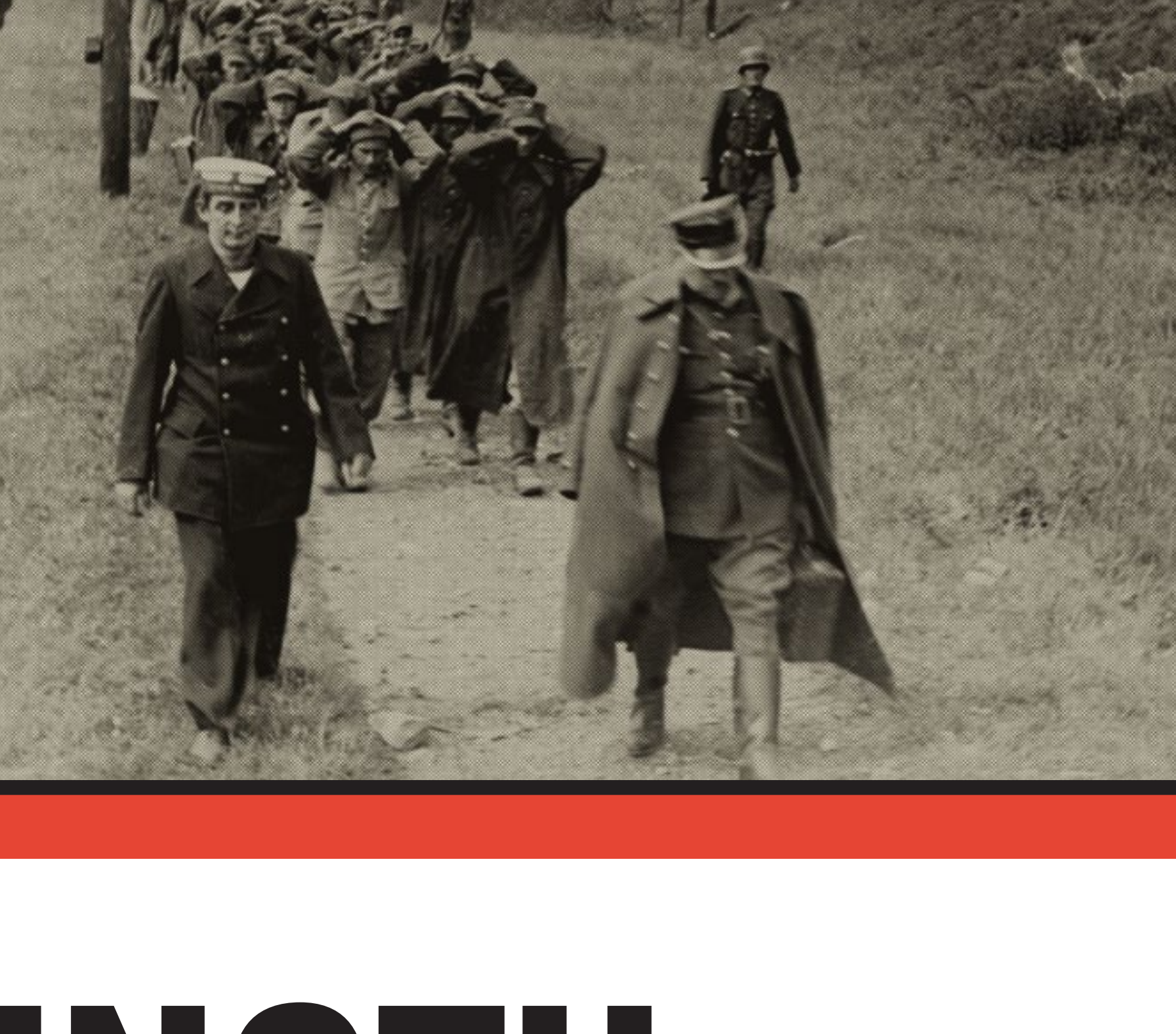
6 IX 1939
The Germans use rail tracks to set the Depot ablaze by rolling in tank cars filled with flammable liquid. The attempt fails. One car self-explodes, the others are destroyed with shots from Polish 37 mm Bofors anti-tank gun.

7 IX 1939

From 04:30 a.m
Germans begin preparatory bombardment of the Depot. Further German probe patrols are launched into the Depot. Guardhouse no. 2 is destroyed with a direct hit.

Around 10:00 a.m
the Depot surrenders on direct orders by Mjr. Henryk Sucharski.

SURRENDER



MILITARY STRENGTH BEFORE THE BATTLE

POLAND

- ca. 210 soldiers
- 1 field cannon + 2 anti-tank guns
- 43 heavy, light, hand machine guns
- 4 mortars

Major Henryk Sucharski
commander of Military Transit Depot

Cpt. Franciszek Dabrowski
deputy commander, commander of the guard unit

GERMANY

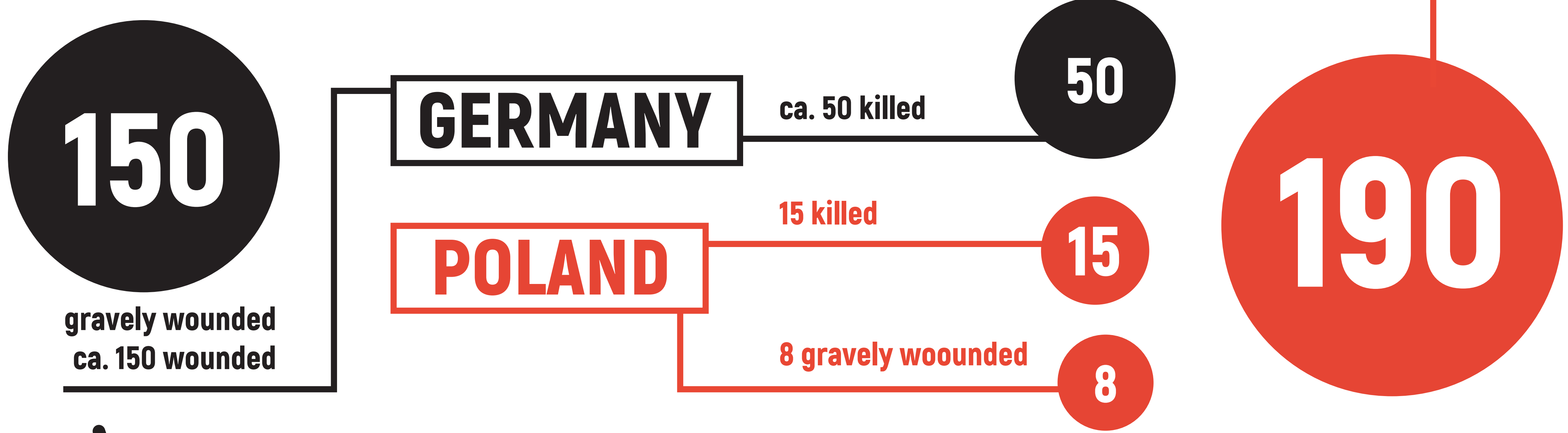
- ca. 2000 infantry, sailors, policemen
- Schleswig-Holstein vessel + 2 torpedo boats
- ca. 60 Stuka Ju-87 dive bombers
- Heavy artillery, FLAK guns, mortars, heavy machine guns

Gustav Kleikamp
captain of the ship "Schleswig-Holstein"

Lt. Wilhelm Henningsen
assault company commander; he was fatally wounded and died September 1/2, 1939

CASUALTIES

Polish soldiers and officers are sent to stalags as POWs



AFTER THE BATTLE



Photo: Polish prisoners are marched to work, Neufahrwasser buildings across the canal.

- On September 21, 1939 Adolf Hitler visited Westerplatte but refused to come onboard Schleswig-Holstein.
- Many of Depot's buildings survived the siege in a relatively good state.
- From 10th September Polish civilian prisoners are brought to Westerplatte to do forced labour. They clear the debris, dismantle what is left of the buildings (e.g. Officers' Villa) and bury the dead.
- Bricks, timber, and barbed wire are used for construction of future German concentration camp KL Stutthof.

HERITAGE



- 1945** Cpt. Franciszek Dąbrowski came up with the idea to build the first Westerplatte Cemetery as early as in 1945.
- 1 IX 1971** The ashes of Mjr. Sucharski, the Commander of the Depot, were brought to Poland from Italy, Naples and buried at Westerplatte on September 1, 1971.
- 22 VIII 2003** On 22 August, 2003 the battlefield on Westerplatte was declared a Historic Monument by the decree of the President of the Republic of Poland.
- 5 VIII 2012** The last of the Westerplatte Defenders, Major Ignacy Skowron, passed away in 2012.
- 2016-2020** Archeologists from Museum WWII/Westerplatte branch excavated around 50,000 artefacts. Remains of 9 Westerplatte soldiers discovered in 2019 in unmarked grave pits will undergo forensic identification and will be buried ceremonially at revitalized Westerplatte Defenders' Cemetery.

