

## General Władysław Anders (1892-1970)



General Władysław Anders, before 1944.

Władysław Anders was born in 1892 in Błonie near Kutno. During World War I, he commanded a cavalry squadron in the Tsarist Russian army. For his battlefield bravery, he was awarded the highest Russian military decoration - the Cross of Saint George.

In the reborn Poland, he became chief of staff of the Greater Poland Army and fought in the Greater Poland Uprising (1918-1919). During the Polish-Bolshevik War (1919-1921), he was commander of the 15th Poznań Uhlan Regiment. His unit fought in the middle section of the front, taking, among others, Minsk in Byelorussia. For his bravery during the war with the Bolsheviks, he received the Order of Virtuti Militari from Marshal Józef Piłsudski.

After the war, Anders studied for two years at L'École supérieure de guerre in Paris. In France, he also served a stint in a combat unit. On his return to Poland in 1925, he became commander of the Warsaw garrison. During the May Coup of 1926, he opposed Piłsudski. In 1928, he was appointed commander of the Independent Cavalry Brigade in Brody. Six years later, he was promoted to the rank of Brigadier-General. In 1937, he took command of the Nowogródzka Cavalry Brigade.

During the 1939 Polish defensive war, together with the Nowogródek Cavalry Brigade, he guarded the border with East Prussia. He fought in the region of Płock and Warsaw. From mid-September, retreating towards the Romanian border, he took part in heavy fighting near Tomaszów Lubelski and Zamość. After the Soviet aggression, his unit fought against the Red Army units and the Ukrainian militia cooperating with them about 30 km from the Hungarian border. Anders was wounded and was taken prisoner by the Soviets on 29 September 1939. He was imprisoned in Lvov (today's Lviv) and later in Moscow at Lubianka prison. During his two-year imprisonment, despite prolonged interrogations, beatings and humiliation, NKVD investigators failed to force him to join the Red Army.



Mugshots of General Anders in the NKVD prison.

After the outbreak of the German-Soviet war and the signing of the Sikorski-Mayski Agreement on 30 July 1941, the Soviets granted a so-called amnesty to Polish citizens imprisoned in the Soviet Union. The Polish Armed Forces in the USSR were ALSO established, with General Władysław Anders, who had been released from Łubianka, as their commander.

First, The Polish Armed Forces were organised in four locations in the southern part of European Russia. Then in the early months of 1942, under a Polish-Soviet agreement, the entire army was moved to the Central Asian republics of the USSR. At that time, masses of civilians gathered around the army, hoping to be saved from death by starvation. The army's new accommodation, despite the area having mild climate, proved lethal health-wise. The typhoid epidemic alone resulted in the deaths of some 10,000 military personnel and civilians, including many children.

The Soviets were gradually reducing food rations for the Polish army, and Stalin was pushing to send still unprepared Polish units to the front. More people got ill as the conditions worsened. For these reasons, General Anders came up with a plan to move his army to Iran. In the first stage, more than 30,000 servicemen and around 11,000 civilians (including many children) were evacuated across the Caspian Sea; in the second, more than 44,000 and around 25,000 respectively. The last Polish soldiers and civilians left the USSR in the autumn of 1942. In total, more than 115,000 people were evacuated and were thus saved from death by starvation and disease.



Group photograph of Polish commanders. In the first row from the left: General Michał Karaszewicz-Tokarzewski, Commander of the Army, General Władysław Anders, General Mieczysław Boruta-Spiechowicz. In the second row from the left: General Zygmunt Bohusz-Szyszko, Colonel Leopold Okulicki. 1941-1943.

In Iran, Anders' army received British supplies and was soon relocated to Iraq. Its units merged with the Polish Army in the Middle East to form the Polish Army in the East and then the 2nd Polish Corps. All these groupings were commanded by General Władysław Anders. In late 1943 and early 1944, the 2nd Corps set off from Egypt across the Mediterranean to southern Italy, where it went



into combat. The greatest victory, and the corps' baptism of fire, was the capture in May 1944 of the fortress in the ruins of the Monte Cassino monastery, which was defending access to Rome and all of Italy. On 11 May 1944, General Anders wrote in an order addressed to his troops: "The task that has been entrusted to us will make the Polish soldier famous across the world". Seven days later, Polish soldiers hoisted the white and red banner on the ruins of the Monte Cassino monastery.



Polish soldiers advance at Monte Cassino, 1944.

The 2nd Polish Corps then fought at Ancona, and it finally captured Bologna in the spring of 1945. In the first half of 1945, General Anders replaced General Bór-Komorowski, who was in German captivity, as Commander-in-Chief. General Anders opposed the conciliatory policy towards the Soviets pursued by Prime Minister Stanisław Mikołajczyk and objected to an agreement with the USSR under which Poland would give up its eastern provinces. Anders' stance frustrated the British, who wanted to keep up good relations with Stalin, disregarding the interests of their Eastern European Allies. In 1946, when the Western Allies had already withdrawn their recognition of the legitimacy of the Polish government in exile, General Anders became Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces. The Communist authorities in Warsaw revoked his Polish citizenship.



General Anders briefing his commanders, Italy 1944.



General Anders sits on a gun of a Sherman M4 tank "Koziaty" after the liberation of Bologna, 1945.

After the war, Anders remained in London. He helped soldiers and other Poles remaining abroad to adjust to life in exile. In 1949, he published an autobiography *Without the Last Chapter*. In addition, he was actively involved in the political activities of the émigrés; from 1949, he served as chairman of the National Treasury, and in 1954 he became a member of the Council of Three (Polish: Rada Trzech, created by the Polish Government in Exile with prerogatives of the President of Poland).

Władysław Anders passed away on 12 May 1970, and was buried in Italy, at the Polish War Cemetery near Monte Cassino.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'W. Anders', written in a cursive style.

General Anders' signature

## Did you know that...?

- Władysław Anders' ancestors were of German origin. They probably settled in Poland during the Saxon era. He was brought up in the Protestant faith. He converted to Catholicism during World War II. Błonie, where he was born, is now part of Krośniewice in Kutno County. The general's family house called "Andersówka" has been preserved - today it houses the local library.
- Władysław Anders was an excellent horse rider. In 1932, he headed the Polish equestrian team that won the first four places at the Nations Cup in Nice. He also won in many other equestrian competitions. He had his own stables.
- After leaving Soviet captivity, General Anders walked with a cane. This was a result of the wounds sustained after 17 September 1939 and the deliberate failure of the Soviets to treat Anders when he was in captivity.
- General Anders was married twice. Both wives were named Irena. From his first relationship with Irena Jordan-Krakowska, he had two children - Anna and Jerzy. From his second

relationship, with the revue artist Iryna Yarosevych (stage name Renata Bogdańska), he had a daughter Anna Maria, from 2019 the Polish ambassador to Rome.

- After the war, General Anders settled with his second wife and daughter in London in a modest house which he bought with a mortgage. The family then moved to a house in the London Borough of Brondesbury Park. Mr and Mrs Anders lived a modest life. The General was one of four commanders of the Polish Armed Forces in the West to receive a British pension. Irena Anders performed in the cabaret of Radio Free Europe. She also recorded songs for the BBC.
- General Anders was depicted by the Communist authorities in Poland as an enemy of the people's power and the Soviet Union. As late as 1984, the Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Poland, General Wojciech Jaruzelski, during an official visit to the cemetery at Monte Cassino, demonstratively avoided the grave of General Władysław Anders.
- In 1951, General Anders, together with seven other senior officers from Central and Eastern European countries, made an initial declaration to General Dwight Eisenhower, Commander of the North Atlantic Alliance's Combined Armed Forces in Europe. The declaration proposed to create a Central and Eastern European national armed force operating within NATO. This act can be considered the earliest Polish accession to this organisation.
- The death of General Anders came as a surprise to many. Just two days earlier he had been at a party with friends. The funeral ceremony at Westminster Cathedral was attended by representatives of Queen Elizabeth II and US President Richard Nixon. An RAF special aircraft brought the general's coffin to Italy. In accordance with his wishes, he was buried among his troops at Monte Cassino, Italy.



