

**A Lecture by Zbigniew Mieczkowski  
in honour of the 120th Anniversary of the birth of  
General Stanislaw Maczek  
University of Edinburgh, 31st March 2012**

I feel very honoured to be giving this talk today on the 120th anniversary of the birth of my commanding officer, General Stanislaw Maczek. To present his life-span, lasting over 100 years, in less than one hour is quite a challenging task. I shall try, however, not to exceed the time allotted.

The bibliographical survey which I have completed for the book "The Soldiers of General Maczek in World War II", published by the Foundation for the Commemoration of General Maczek, First Polish Armoured Division, contains 213 publications written in Polish, English, French, Dutch, Flemish and German. We have distributed a few hundred of those heavy volumes, bearing on the cover the coats of arms of towns liberated by the Division, to military museums and national libraries all over the world. Historians in Australia, Canada, Great Britain, the USA, Russia, France, Germany, Belgium, Holland, the Ukraine, Latvia and other countries are well informed of the saga of General Maczek and his troops.

It is tempting to reflect on what motivates the authors of further historical works. Piotr Potomski's biography of General Maczek, partly financed by our Foundation, was published by the University of Warsaw in 2008. Since then, many articles and brochures have appeared in Poland, edited by members of various historical associations. Among the English authors the most concise and beautifully illustrated book, with my foreword, was written by Dr. Paul Latawski, Senior Lecturer at The Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst; "Falaise Pocket", published by Sutton in 2004; General Mike Reynolds, the author of "Steel Inferno", presents in detail the Polish Armoured Division battles in Normandy (published by Spellmount). Ken Tout, in "An End of War", published by Spellmount in 2011, even gives the Polish name to the whole chapter "Daleko do Domu" - Far Away from Home.

Seventy years have passed since our battles in Normandy, 15 since we buried our General among his soldiers in Breda Cemetery, but his presence is still felt among us. The song "Old Soldiers Never Die" has never been more accurately applied.

General Maczek was born in 1892 in a relatively peaceful part of Poland, annexed in 1795, partitioned by the Austrian Empire. Unlike the oppressive



2

Germanisation of the Prussians and dictatorial Russification policy of the Tsars of Russia as the response to Polish insurrections, the long, liberal reign of Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria had assured peaceful co-existence and human rights for all his subjects.

Young Maczek completed his secondary education at a Polish school in Drohobycz where his father, a retired judge, had his chambers. He read philosophy and psychology at the Jan Kazimierz University in Lwow (Lemberg). The dominating influence in his upbringing, however, was his mother, Anna Czerny, who came from the landed gentry. He spent all the summer holidays at his uncle Karol Czerny's country estate, Wielkie Oczy. In the old Manor House, full of books, and against the backdrop of Polish Commonwealth traditions, he read the classics of Polish literature.

Stanislaw Maczek was fascinated by the history of the Commonwealth of Poland, Lithuania, White Russia and the Ukraine, the Granary of Europe. Comprising almost 10,000,000 square kilometres, the Commonwealth, formed at the end of the 14th century by the marriage of the Polish Queen Jadwiga to the Grand Duke Jagiello of Lithuania, who accepted Christianity from Poland, dominated Central and East European history for 300 years.

With the end of the Jagiellons dynasty in the 16th century Poland became a Republic of Nobility. It was the only state in Europe to elect its own monarchs - the Kings of Poland. This, the largest country in Europe, provided freedom of religion, language and commerce to many Scottish immigrants and other oppressed people. The book "Scotland and Poland, Historical Encounters 1500-2010", edited by T. M. Devine and David Hesse, published last year in Edinburgh by John Donald with the support of the Polish Cultural Institute, provides an interesting study of this period.

The Polish Commonwealth traditions became the founding ideals for Poland, reborn after 1918. Those were the ideals of co-existence among various nations, upheld by Marshal Jozeph Pilsudski with his followers of the General Maczek generation and his soldiers of the Second Republic.

With the outbreak of the First World War, Stanislaw Maczek was called up for military service in the Kaiser-Jager Regiment of the Austrian Empire. At the time he was reading the works of Plato and Aristotle. He was attending seminars focussing on the analysis of human psychology in literature. An unusual educational background for a future General.



His courage and excellent skiing skills were soon recognised by the Highlanders Battalion in which he served. As a young officer, decorated for bravery, he became an expert in map-reading. In his book "Od Podwozy do Czolga" ("From Horse-cart to Tank", published by Tomar in 1961), he recollects that the multitude of contour lines on maps indicating the heights of the mountains helped him in planning military operations in September 1939 and in the closure of the Falaise Gap.

The collapse of former partitioning powers in 1918 brought Lieutenant Maczek under the colours of Jozeph Pilsudski's Army, fighting for the restoration of the Polish Republic. Captain Maczek formed a rapid assault unit, conveyed in horse carts, known as Kompania Lotna (Flying Company). This was the threshold for his future motorised warfare.

When in action for the defence of Lwow, his University town, he met Jozeph Pilsudski, the future Marshal of Poland, the victor of the Polish-Russian War in 1920 which for two decades halted the march of Communism into Central Europe. "The Decisive Battles of the Western World" by J. F. Fuller (several editions published by Granada) gives an accurate account of those heroic struggles which determined the frontiers of the Second Polish Republic and the fate of Western Europe.

With the growing threat to Poland's independence Major Maczek remained in the military service of his country. The Conference of Locarno in 1925 assured the stability of French frontiers with Germany, but opened the way to "Drang nach Osten" (Expansion to the East). It was ironic indeed that, in 1925, Sir Austen Chamberlain, the British Foreign Minister, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for an agreement leading to the Second World War.

Major Maczek, with the Virtuti Military Cross and other distinguished decorations, after long service at the front finally achieved some well-deserved respite. In 1928 he married Zofia Kurys, a descendant of a family involved in the 1863 insurrection against Russia. Their children, Renata, Andrzej and Malgorzata, were eventually to reside with their parents in Edinburgh. Dr. Andrzej Maczek became a senior academic at the University of Sheffield.

In 1930, after completing a two-year course at the General Staff College, Colonel Stanislaw Maczek took command of the 81st Regiment of Rifles in Grodno, and in 1935 was nominated Second in Command of the Seventh Infantry Division at Czestochowa. These were the happy days of family life and his



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4

military service. Held in high regard by his superiors, at one of the War Games Conferences attended by Marshal Pilsudski his strategic solution was publicly acclaimed the best by the Commanding Officer of the Polish Forces.

Anticipating the conflict with Germany, the modernisation of Poland's Forces resulted in the formation of the First Motorised Cavalry Brigade. At the time, Poland envisaged possible hostilities only against Soviet Russia. Her eastern borders, consisting of poor country roads, the Pripet Marshes and enormous forests, were unsuitable terrain for the operation of mechanised troops. For their defence the Polish Rapid Deployment Forces numbered 40 regiments of cavalry. The conflict with Germany demanded preparation for modern warfare.

In 1938 Colonel Maczek was nominated C.O. of the 10th Motorised Cavalry Brigade. It consisted of two non-mounted Cavalry regiments on trucks, a reconnaissance unit, an anti-tank unit, an artillery unit, a battalion of engineers, a squadron of British-made Vickers tanks, a squadron of Polish-made light TKS tanks and other services. The total strength was 4,000 men led by 175 officers.

In the book "The Soldiers of General Maczek" I have included a copy of a letter written to me on 6th June 1989 by a former British Prime Minister, Lord Home. I quote: "Certainly the Polish action in 1939 changed the face of Europe and the course of its history."

Poland's decision to make a stand against Nazi Germany in 1939 changed the course of the Second World War! Had she accepted Hitler's proposals to protect Europe against the march of Communism, as she did alone in 1920, the initial German offensive against the West would have altered the outcome of the conflict and reshaped the balance of political forces in post-war Europe. Hitler was proposing that Poland should join with Italy and Japan in an alliance called The Anticomintern Pact, the alliance of countries opposing Communism. Until the end of March 1939, Hitler hesitated about whether to attack first the West or Poland. His decision was made after Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister, made a declaration in the British Parliament on 31st March 1939 extending a guarantee to Poland should her independence be threatened (this eventually led to an Anglo-Polish treaty of mutual assistance).

The British and French initiative was obviously made with the aim of diverting Hitler from attacking the West. Polish resistance was purposefully backed by her powerful Allies. In August 1939, contrary to his original plans, Hitler made an alliance with Russia instead of Poland.



5

The decision to oppose Germany brought to Poland unforeseen and tragic consequences. Left without help in September 1939, in spite of promises and guarantees, and deserted by Western powers at the end of the war, she alone among the victors sustained complete defeat.

The Second World War was the most dramatic episode in Poland's entire history. Hitler's revenge for the refusal of co-operation matched Stalin's settling of old scores. To understand, one would have to go back to the 17th century to the old struggles between Russia and Poland for domination of Eastern Europe. Very few people realise that after the fall of Communism in 1989 Russia chose, instead of May Day Parades, to celebrate her National Day on the date commemorating the liberation of Moscow in 1612 from Polish Forces who had occupied it for four years. Three hundred years later, in 1920, Poland halted the march of Russian Communism aiming to conquer Western Europe.

Both aggressors were aiming to eliminate for ever all those opposing their plans. Therefore, Polish intelligentsia, university professors, clergy, landowners and other people representing national establishments, were the first targets for extermination.

In 1939 from the peacetime strength of 40 infantry divisions and 10 cavalry brigades, Poland confronted Germany with a million men. Well-disciplined and patriotic, the Polish Army inflicted on the Germans - twice their number and much superior in equipment - losses greater in tanks and equipment than they sustained later when defeating Anglo-French forces in 1940.

The 10th Motorised Cavalry Brigade under General Maczek fought defensive battles in the south of Poland against the XXII Panzer Mechanised Corps. His tactics were to launch surprise counter-attacks, stopping the enemy forces from leaving the mountain passes and deploying for action. After two weeks the Brigade was still attacking the Germans approaching Lwow. General Maczek was often seen among his troops, praising their skill and courage.

On 17th September 1939, when Poland was stabbed in the back by the Red Army, the Brigade, still a 1,500 men strong fighting unit, with her Regimental Colours, was withdrawn and ordered by Marshal Smigly Rydz, C-in-C of Polish Forces, to cross the borders of Hungary. From there, by various ways and means, it made its way to France.



6

Half of the Brigade took part in several engagements in June 1940 in the Champagne region. The Battle at Montbard was the last Brigade encounter on French soil. With no petrol available, after destroying the vehicles the Brigade marched in small groups to unoccupied France.

General Maczek, 48 years old, led his group in a cross-country march, often bivouacking under the noses of the German occupying forces. After 18 days the whole Group, all still dressed in uniform, arrived in Clermont-Ferrand. To their surprise, they met there the C-in-C of the French forces, General Weygand, who thanked General Maczek for his outstanding leadership in the defence of France.

By the end of 1940 the Brigade re-assembled in Scotland under the same Commander, General Maczek, who himself made his way through Algiers disguised as a labourer.

In 1940 the Polish Army in France, 80,000 strong, fought in various regions. Only 20,000 were evacuated on Polish liners to Great Britain. The Polish Navy and the commercial fleet sailed to British ports in 1939. We arrived as Polish soldiers, not exiles, but as troops carried by Polish ships, sovereign territory of Poland. After a hazardous journey we reached Plymouth.

It is difficult to find words to describe the hospitality and warm welcome we were given by the Scottish people in 1940. In great camps of tents in Crawford, Douglas and Biggar we embarked on a new chapter of our history. We were visited by Winston Churchill, General Sikorski and, in 1941, we were marching past His Majesty King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, who had come to inspect our defences along Scottish shores against a possible German invasion from Norway.

The Polish Corps was defending the shores from Montrose to the Firth of Forth, 200 km. long. General Maczek's 10th Cavalry Brigade, with its headquarters at Carmyllie, was defending the port of Arbroath and the beaches of Barry Links, controlling the approach to Dundee.

After these military operations, our second preoccupation was in forging Scottish/Polish friendship, which manifested itself in many love affairs and marriages.

In 1944 we were again ready for action. The Polish Armoured Division landed in France in July as part of the British Army of Liberation. Field Marshal



7

Montgomery, to whom General Maczek presented all senior commanders, visited us on 5th August. Our attack near Caen, and the heavy casualties sustained by the Division, marked the battles in Normandy. It culminated in the closure of the Falaise Gap.

Falaise was the Second World War's Battle of Nations. The German armies were confronted by American, Canadian, English, Scottish, French and Polish troops. The Polish Armoured Division played the dominant role in this encounter. Acting on the direct orders of Montgomery, it penetrated deep behind the front lines and closed the last German escape route by occupying the dominating hills of Montormel near Chambois.

For three days we were surrounded, fighting on one side with the German 70,000-strong army groups, now physically closed in the pocket, and on the other being attacked from behind by the Second SS Panzer Division attempting to open the road for those trapped in the pocket. We were cut off from all supplies of petrol and ammunition since neither Canadians nor Americans could reach our position.

On the evening of 21st August the 4th Canadian Armoured Division fought their way to our position, whilst at Chambois another Polish combat unit liaised with Americans. A few months later Montgomery, when decorating General Maczek and other soldiers of the Division, said "In Normandy we closed the Germans into a bottle and your Division was the cork of that bottle."

The victorious march through Northern Europe is well illustrated on the map indicating towns and villages liberated by the Division. A great many streets and squares bear General Maczek's name. In March 1945 the Division entered Germany, facing strong resistance from the defenders of their country. On 5th May Germany capitulated. When entering Wilhelmshaven we captured 1,900 officers and 32,000 other ranks, and in the port over 2,000 vessels of the German Fleet were taken over by the representatives of the Polish and English forces of occupation. In the France-Germany campaign, the First Polish Armoured Division suffered 5,000 casualties in killed and wounded - almost one-third of its total strength.

In 1945 General Maczek took leave of his Division and, promoted to Lieutenant General, he became Commanding Officer of the First Polish Corps based in Scotland. Polish plans for the First Corps and General Anders' Second Corps to be transferred to Germany, forming the Polish Army of Occupation,



favoured by Churchill, were not accepted by the new Labour Government. The Yalta Conference divided Europe, and for almost half a century Poland remained under Soviet domination. General Maczek, deprived by the Communist Government of Polish citizen status, refused to return to the Polish People's Republic. His beloved Lwow and the country of his childhood were incorporated into the Soviet Union. He decided to settle in Edinburgh with his family. For the next 50 years Scotland became his adopted new country. Those were hard times for the hero of the Second World War. His attitude to the outside world could only be admired. Employed as a manual labourer, he later became a barman in an hotel belonging to his former sergeant. Perhaps the study of Plato's philosophy inspired the General once again to adopt an objective view on a new way of life. It even amused him when the hotel guests, his ex-soldiers, stood to attention when ordering their double whiskies.

Communist authorities in Poland, well-informed of the General's financial situation, were trying unsuccessfully to bring about his return. It would be a blow for the Polish Government in Exile and patriotic *émigré* circles. This attitude radically changed with the collapse of Communism in 1989 and the re-birth of independent Poland. The final accolade to his military decorations was his investiture, by a special decree of the President of Poland, with the Order of the White Eagle.

In Poland General Maczek will always be a source of pride and inspiration to future generations, but among his soldiers he is remembered with special affection. As one of them I should like to express not only great admiration of my Commanding Officer, but also my gratitude for his friendship, demonstrated on many occasions when attending together various anniversaries of his victories in Northern Europe. In my book "Horizons - Reflections of a Polish *Émigré*" I have included some of the General's letters to me. The last one, dated 15th April 1994, was addressed to President Lech Walesa. It was introducing me to the President of Poland as the Chairman of a committee for building the monument to the Polish Armoured Division in Warsaw. In consequence, the President extended his patronage to us. The monument was unveiled on 30th September 1995, to our sorrow, a year after our General's death.

The monument in Warsaw bears General Maczek's message to us, when entering action in Normandy. "The Polish soldier fights for the freedom of all nations, but dies only for Poland". It also bears the coat of arms of the capital of Scotland. I hope that the Memorial to General Maczek, this time in Edinburgh,



will soon be realised as planned. It will bring back the memories of the days of hope and glory and the Scottish/Polish friendship in the past and for the future.

**For further reading :**

1. Warsaw 1920, Lenin's Failed Conquest of Europe, Adam Zamoyski (Harper Press 2008)
2. Churchill, Hitler and the Unnecessary War, Patrick J. Buchanan ( Crown Publishers, New York (2008)
3. Poland Betrayed, David Williamson ( Pen & Sword 2009)
4. Poland Alone, Jonathan Walker (The History Press 2008)
5. Rising '44 – The Battle for Warsaw, (Norman Davies Macmillan 2003)
6. Europe at War 1939 -45, Norman Davies ( Clarendon Press Oxford 2008)
7. Behind Closed Doors, Laurence Rees ( BBC Books, Television Programme 2008)



10

## Zbigniew Mieczkowski

Zbigniew Mieczkowski was born in Poland into a family of centuries old traditions of struggles for the independence of their country. In 1939, at the age of 17, he joined the Polish Army under General Sikorski in France and at the time of the French Armistice he was evacuated with his unit to Great Britain.

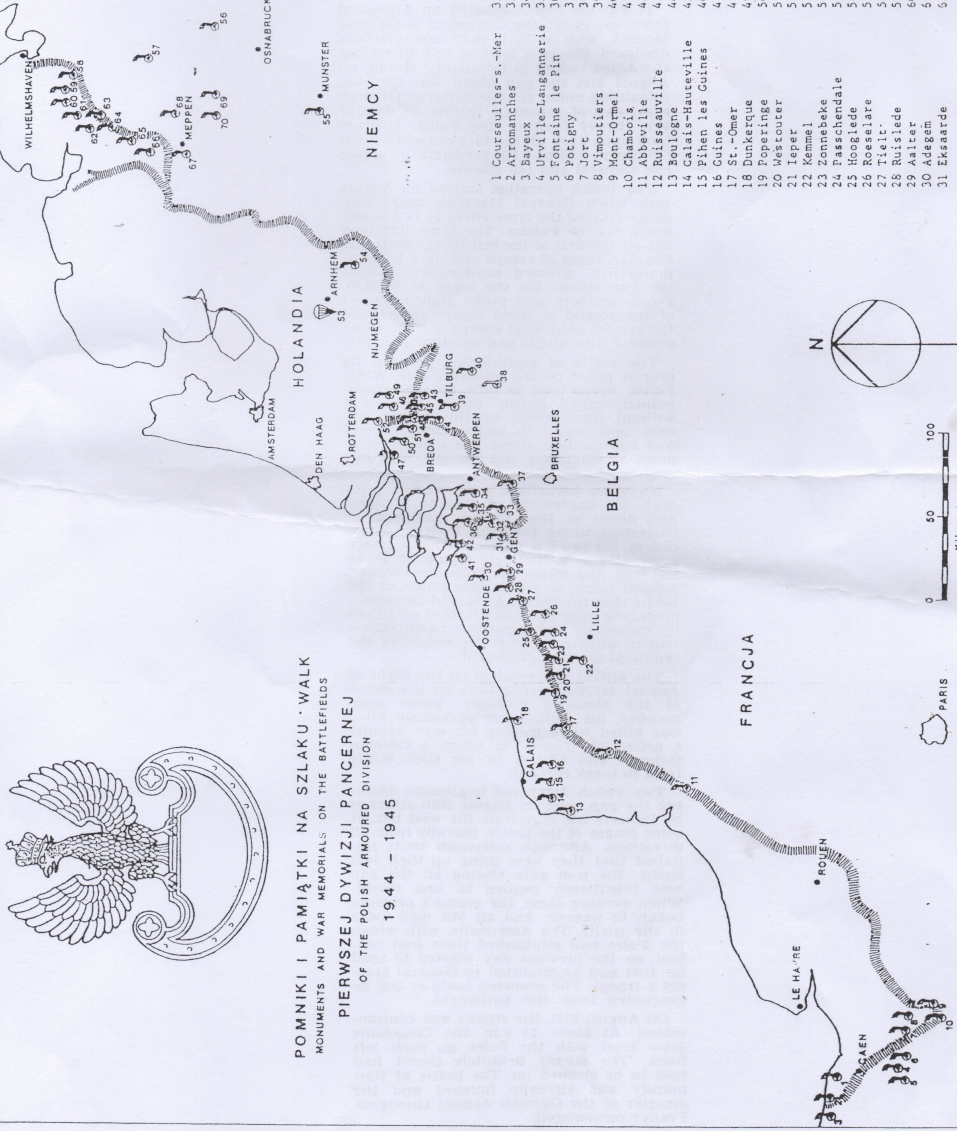
In 1944 as a young officer of the Polish Armoured Division he fought in Normandy and thereafter with the British Liberation Army in the 1944/45 campaign entering Germany.

After the War he settled in England. In his book "Horizons - Reflections of a Polish Émigré" Zbigniew Mieczkowski describes the years of the Cold War, his involvement in the political life of Polish Diaspora and the important contact he established with prominent members of the British Government. As a successful businessman he supported various cultural ventures of the Polish community in Great Britain and after the fall of Communism he established the Foundation whose aim was to commemorate the achievements of Polish Forces in the West.

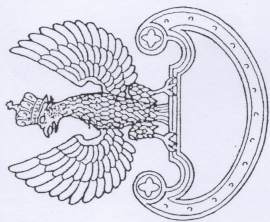
In the book "Soldiers of General Maczek in World War II" he presents the contribution of Poland to the final victory and brings back memories of the Liberation of Northern Europe.

Holder of the Military Cross for valour and many other war time decorations, Zbigniew Mieczkowski was also awarded various civilian honours:- President of Poland, Lech Walesa conferred on him the Insignia of the Commander of the Order of Polonia Restituta, The King of Belgium the Insignia of an Officer of the Order of Leopold and the President of France nominated him Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur.





POMNIKI I PAMIĄTKI NA SZLAKU WALK  
MONUMENTS AND WAR MEMORIALS ON THE BATTLEFIELDS  
PIERWSZEJ DYWIZJI PANCERNEJ  
OF THE POLISH ARMOURD DIVISION  
1944 - 1945



Pomniki i pamiątki Pierwszej Dywizji  
(Monuments and war memorials)

Główny kierunek działania  
(Action route)

Pomnik 1ej Sam. Bryg. Spadochronowej  
(Monument of Polish Parachute Brig.)

- 1 Courseulles-s.-Ver
- 2 Arromanches
- 3 Bayeux
- 4 Urville-Langannerie
- 5 Fontaine le Pin
- 6 Potigny
- 7 Jort
- 8 Vimoutiers
- 9 Mont-Ormel
- 10 Lemel
- 11 Abbecot
- 12 Ruissseauville
- 13 Boulogne
- 14 Calais-Hauteville
- 15 Pihen les Guines
- 16 Guines
- 17 St.-Omer
- 18 Dunkerque
- 19 Foperinge
- 20 Westrouer
- 21 Ieper
- 22 Kemmel
- 23 Zonnebeke
- 24 Passchendale
- 25 Hoogfede
- 26 Rieltare
- 27 Rieltare
- 28 Ruisede
- 29 Aalter
- 30 Adegem
- 31 Eksaarde
- 32 Stekene
- 33 St.-Niklaas
- 34 Beveren
- 35 St.-Gillis-Haas
- 36 De Klinge
- 37 Wilbroek
- 38 Leopoldsburg
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- 51 Oosterhout
- 52 Capelsche Veer
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- 56 Ooyterhofen
- 57 Cluysburg
- 58 Westerstede
- 59 Remels
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- 61 Leer
- 62 Rhaude
- 63 Irhove
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