

Jewish Soldiers in Polish Armies 1794-1945 **Tadeusz Dubicki and Grzegorz Łukomski**

Jewish settlers started to arrive in Poland early in the reign of the first Polish royal dynasty of Piasts. Since living conditions they found here were much more favorable than in the countries of Western Europe, Jewish population grew rapidly. In the centuries to come there were many waves of Jewish immigrants seeking refuge from pogroms and persecutions in the West. The number of Jews living in Poland in the mid-seventeenth century, at the golden age of the Polish Commonwealth, both politically and territorially, is estimated roughly at 450,000, whereas late in the eighteenth century, during the reign of King Stanislaw August Poniatowski (from 1764), at 750,000, most of them (about half a million) in cities and towns. Their percentage varied notably from province to province, with the eastern territories at the top of the list. Despite being mainly urban population engaged in trade and crafts, Jews could not easily be defined as “the third estate” (middle class) because of their legal and cultural distinctiveness.¹

Many Jews became soon adapted to their new environment, assimilating to the new homeland in spiritual and cultural sense, and, with time, in the religious sense as well. Many identified themselves with Poland, contributing their knowledge, experience, and work to the common good. Many sectors of Polish economy, trade and crafts in particular, were dominated by Jews, who thus added to Poland’s development. Still, Jews, along with burghers or peasants, were not obliged (or rather privileged in the then perspective) to serve in the armed forces. References in early sources, however, indicate that Jews took up arms to defend Polish borders. As incidental and scantily documented as they might be, those illustrious episodes attest not only to the Jewish sense of belonging and sharing economic and political interests with the Polish society, but also to capabilities and inclinations of many representatives of the Jewish minority, and also to their industry and diligence. As early as in the 16th c. Jews participated in the defense of the south-east borderlands (Kresy). A Mendel Izakowicz was a military building engineer paving the way for the armies of King Stefan Batory marching at Polock and Wielkie Luki. Greatest Jewish contributions date back to the seventeenth century wars against the Cossack, Muscovy, and Turkish invaders, when Jews participated in the defense of Lvov sieged by Bohdan Khmelnitsky’s Cossacks, of Przemyśl fortress against the Swedish army, or Witebsk against Muscovians. Jews actively backed up the Bar confederates in the years 1768-1772.²

Jewish efforts were appreciated by Tadeusz Kościuszko, who in his proclamation of March 24, 1794, appealed to Jews to join the war for Polish sovereignty. Two Warsaw Jews responded to the appeal, Jozef Aronowicz and Berek Joselewicz, and suggested a Jewish regiment should be set up to fight against the Russian armies. The leader of the insurrection was overjoyed at the idea and on September 17, 1794 issued a proclamation to the Jewish population encouraging Jews to join the uprising. The appeal was published in *Gazeta Rzadowa*. With Kościuszko’s approval the Jewish regiment of light cavalry, 500 people strong (that number was actually exceeded), was being set up under the

¹R. Mahler, *Żydzi w dawnej Polsce w świetle liczb. Struktura demograficzna i społeczno-ekonomiczna Żydów w Koronie w XVIII w.*, [in:] *Przeszłość demograficzna Polski. Materiały i studia*, Warszawa 1967, p. 154; I. Schipper, *Rozwój ludności żydowskiej na ziemiach dawnej Rzeczypospolitej*, [in:] I. Schipper, A. Tartakower, Al. Haffika (eds), *Żydzi w Polsce Odrodzonej. Działalność społeczna, gospodarcza i oświatowa*, vol. 1, Warszawa, pp. 29 – 36; J. Kowecki, *U początków nowoczesnego narodu*, [in:] B. Lesnodorski (ed), *Polska w epoce Oświecenia. Państwo – społeczeństwo – kultura*, Warszawa 1971, p. 131; 443.

²X. Liske, *Cudzoziemcy w Polsce*, Lwów 1876, pp. 77–80; M. Bałaban, *Żydzi polscy z bronią w ręku*, [in:] *Księga Pamiątkowa ku czci Berka Joselewicza*, Warszawa 1934, pp. 145–153.

command of Berek Joselewicz, who was nominated a colonel. Moreover Joselewicz received a grant of 3,000 zlotys for the purpose. In October Berek Joselewicz issued his own pronouncement to his fellow men, which was also printed in *Gazeta Rzadowa*, encouraging them to fight for the freedom of Poland.

The appeal said: "Listen, Sons of the Tribes of Israel! Whoever has the Infinite and Almighty in his heart engraved and whoever wants to help in the fight for our homeland, as everybody should, now is the time to apply our powers to the cause... It comes easy now, too, as our protector, the Chief Commander Tadeusz Kościuszko, being indeed an agent of the Infinite and Almighty One, undertook it upon him to set up a Jewish regiment. His are all potencies, good mind and heart towards his neighbor; he is the Chief of the defense..."³.

Some of Jewish volunteers to the regiment are known, and these include: Marek Jakubowicz of Moscicki, Major Herszkowicz of Szczekociny, Chaim Judkiewicz, Mordko Wolfowicz of Maciejow, and Josel Abrahamowicz. It took several months to organize the "light cavalry regiment of Colonel Berek Joselewicz", in short "the Jewish regiment". The unit participated in bloody battles, including heroic defense of Praga quarter, whose defenders and population were massacred by the invading Russian army on November 4, 1794.

Jews served also in other units of the insurrection army. In particular, their accomplishments were invaluable in the intelligence service, transportation, and logistics. Generally, the Jewish participation in the uprising was meaningful, or even massive, as far as the defense of Warsaw was concerned. In many units the number of Jewish soldiers amounted to 20 per cent.⁴

Berek Joselewicz himself, soon to become a legendary figure of the uprising, continued in the military ranks following its defeat and the third partition of Poland. Imprisoned while he was headed towards the Austrian border, after some time spent in an Austrian prison Joselewicz offered to organize a Jewish unit in the Austrian army to fight against Napoleon Bonaparte. There was nothing extraordinary in the political immaturity of his suggestion, as many Polish leaders of the time tended to favor such solution. When his proposal was rejected, Berek escaped abroad and on June 9, 1798 turned up at General Jan Henryk Dąbrowski's headquarters. Not only readily accepted, but heartily welcomed by the initiator of the Polish Legions, Berek was enrolled into the legion of General Jozef Wielhorski and was with the Legions throughout all their campaigns, though his colonelship was not recognized. In his legionary service Berek Joselewicz earned the rank of a captain and was appointed a commanding officer of a cavalry rifles squadron under the supreme command of Colonel Adam Turna (1775-1852) from Wielkopolska region. Joselewicz proved his superb riding skills, which had been considered a Polish specialty, and was many times decorated for bravery, also with the highest Polish award for the military, Virtuti Militari order, for capturing six enemy canons with his bravura charge during the Friedland battle (June 14, 1807).

Pursuing his military career in Turna's regiment, this time in the army of the Duchy of Warsaw, established by Emperor Napoleon, Joselewicz won a wide repute and authority for his training skills with young officers. Upon the outbreak of the French war against Austria, Berek served in the advance guard of the Duchy of Warsaw army lead by Prince Jozef Poniatowski. Two horse squadrons under Berek's command fought the main

³ E. Łuniński (Ernest Deiches), *Pułkownik Berek Joselewicz*, Lwów 1908, pp. 14–18.

⁴ *Ibidem*, passim.; also *Żydzi bojownicy o Niepodległość Polski. Ilustrowana monografia w opracowaniu zbiorowym*, ed. by N. Getter, J. Schall, Z. Schipper, Lwów 1939, pp. 29-34; extensively on the insurrection in both political and military context comp.: B. Szyndler, *Powstanie kościuszkowskie 1794*, Warszawa 1994, passim; *Powstanie kościuszkowskie 1794. Dzieje militarne*, t. 1, ed. by T. Rawski, Warszawa 1994, passim.

forces' way, e.g., at Grzybow and Ostrowek. Berek Joselewicz died a hero's death on May 5, 1809, in the battle of Kock, where his units were surrounded by the superior strength of the Austrian forces.⁵ Prince Jozef Poniatowski himself appreciated Berek's services for Poland in an official announcement to the army upon Berek's death. His memory was kept alive. The inscription at the memorial plate, funded on the hundredth anniversary of his death (in 1909), included meaningful quotation from a folk song, saying that Berek Joselewicz "Not by likker nor by tricker, but by his blood did he earn his fame..."⁶

Beside a long succession of his Jewish brethren, it was also Berek's son, **Jozef Joselewicz**, who followed in his father's footsteps. He began his military career in 1809 in the ranks of 13th regiment of hussars, and during the 1812 campaign against Russia served in the Krakovers' unit under the command of Jozef Dwernicki. From Moscow he came back with many wounds, but also with military awards and commission. With the onset of the 1830 uprising for Polish independence, Jozef with his teenage son, Leon, addressed the National Government on December 21, 1830, to set up "a Jewish cavalry regiment". Most of the uprising leaders were, however, averse to any major Jewish military participation. Hardly outspoken about actual reasons for their reluctance, such as old prejudice, many military leaders, including general Jozef Chlopicki, excused themselves formally by the fact that Jews did not possess civil rights. It is to note here that the constitution of the Duchy of Warsaw, dictated, and signed by Emperor Napoleon on July 22, 1807 in Dresden, granted equal citizen's rights to Jews, whose number was then estimated at 7 per cent of the general population. Nevertheless, by the government's decree of October 17, 1808, their political rights were suspended for a decade for fear of "believers in Mosaic religion" dominating local government in many municipalities. The law did not apply to christened Jews. It certainly hindered the assimilation of Jewish population with the Polish society and affected their mutual interaction in the years to come. During the 1830 November uprising, despite some voices (of Joachim Lelewel and Major Walerian Lukasinski) in favor of Jewish emancipation, neither political nor public climate encouraged any general project aimed at normalizing legal status of Jewish population. Some segments of the Jewish society were also critical of the idea of creating a separate military unit on ethnic and religious terms, being of opinion that military service in mixed detachments would better work for Polish-Jewish integration. Faced with such obstacles Jozef Berkowicz with his son signed up at the Lithuanian League and in the rank of major fought in Lithuania. After the fall of the uprising he emigrated to France, then to England, where he died in 1846. His two sons found refuge in America.⁷

Meanwhile by the February 28, 1831 decree of the insurgents' National Government, Municipal Guards were called up in every city, which was a capital of a voivodship (province). These formations were under the command of the chief officer of the National Guard and consisted of battalions and companies. Their role was to protect law and order. The strongest Municipal Guard was set up in Warsaw. Assimilated Jews could join up the National Guard. Their group must have been quite numerous, amounting to 300 soldiers and officers, who took part in major battles of the uprising, at Stoczek, Wawer, and Ostroleka; they also defended Warsaw in September 1831 against

⁵ E. Łuniński, Pułkownik, op. cit., p. 32.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 33.

⁷ Ibidem, pp. 34–37; tegoż, *Berek Joselewicz i jego syn*, Warszawa 1909, passim.

the invading Russian army under the command of Ivan Paskevich. A rough estimate indicated that about 25% of Jewish community participated in the heroic defense.⁸

Jews were also active in the Polish clandestine independence movement after the uprising was defeated, during the 1846 Krakow revolt, and the 1848 Springtime of Nations. On February 23, 1846 the Revolutionary Government of Krakow Republic proclaimed its plan to grant civil rights to “our Israelite brothers”, hoping for their massive participation in the insurgent army.⁹ Thus permanent normalization of Polish-Jewish relations seemed to explicitly enter Polish independence case. Such a solution was endorsed by the most famous Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz, who put his words in action. In 1848 he set up in Italy the so-called Roman Legion to fight against Austria and liberate southern Polish territories. Its ranks included Jewish volunteers, such as Izydor Brúner, seriously wounded in the battle of Rome, Eisenbaum, Lejzerowicz, and Kierski. The latter two were killed in the field. Upon the defeat of the Italian revolution the Legion moved to Greece and was disbanded there.¹⁰ With the Crimean war (1853–1856) Adam Mickiewicz, working on it in Istanbul with Michal Czajkowski, tried to organize a Polish army, whose soldiers would join Turkey, Great Britain, and France against Russia. And there again the poet launched a project of setting up “an Israelite League” of Polish Jews, who would desert Russian army. About 200 men volunteered.¹¹

The 1863 uprising was a major event in the history of Poland and in the relations of Poles and Jews joining efforts to strive for Polish sovereignty. Internal situation of the Congress Kingdom was complicated with evident social divisions, conflicting interests, antagonisms, distrust and even hostilities. Ethnic categories seemed to matter less than political controversies, differences in social and material status. The major parties in the controversy were the Whites, more inclined to negotiate with the Russian regime, and the Reds, who planned armed resistance and social reforms and hoped for the Western powers to come to Polish fighters’ aid. There were Jewish activists in both groups. The leaders of the Whites, beside Count Andrzej Zamoyski, a Polish landowner, included the Jewish banker Leopold Kronenberg, or highly esteemed by Jewish intelligentsia Edward Jurgens, the leader of the so-called Milleners, while the Reds also attracted many young Jews. Jewish public generally supported both parties or else (Orthodox Jews in particular) were entirely opposed to the idea of uprising.

The National Government attempted to win massive support of Jews by promising them full civil rights. Pertinent proclamations were published in summer 1863 in Polish press, as well as in Hebrew versions. Warsaw rabbis did also encourage Jews to join the independence movement. In response young Jewish men, additionally threatened by forced conscription into the Russian army, started to enter insurgent units. The central leadership of the uprising had some Jewish members, as Henryk Wohl, the financial consultant of the National Government, whose staff included Henryk Merzbach, son of well-known bookseller, and Izaak Goldman, author of Hebrew announcements of the central leadership. Under the regime of Romuald Traugutt, the National Government included Wladyslaw Epstein, son of the director of the Warsaw-Vienna railway company.

In many regions, especially in Podlasie, Jewish involvement was very impressive. Beside active participation in the fighting, Jews acted as couriers, reconnoiters, and purveyors for the armed forces. They often, out of major cities, appeared in the role of

⁸ I. Schipper, *Żydzi w dobie powstania listopadowego*, Warszawa 1932, passim; W. Zajewski, *Powstanie listopadowe 1830–1831*, [in:] S. Kieniewicz, A. Zahorski, W. Zajewski, *Trzy powstania narodowe, kościuszkowskie, listopadowe, styczniowe*, pod red. W. Zajewskiego, Warszawa 1992, pp. 151–279.

⁹ M. Bałaban, *Dzieje Żydów w Galicji i w Rzeczypospolitej Krakowskiej 1772–1868*, Lwów 1914, passim.

¹⁰ S. Kieniewicz, *Legion Mickiewicza 1848–1849*, Warszawa 1955, passim.

¹¹ *Żydzi bojownicy*, op. cit., p. 56–57.

deputies or assistants of the National Government representatives. Being knowledgeable and familiar with local topography they could operate all the more efficiently using the network of Jewish contacts. Authors of numerous existing, though necessarily incomplete, narratives and accounts of the insurgents' actions mentioned hundreds of Jews, although most of them remain anonymous. In the aftermath of the defeated uprising many Jews shared the tragic fate of their Polish comrades and were exiled to Siberia or sentenced to many years of penal servitude.¹²

I would like to quote Józef Piłsudski on Jewish participation in the January uprising, since the Marshal was known for his admiration of this independence endeavor and all its participants. He voiced his opinion in an address to the audience celebrating its anniversary in Coliseum Hall on January 20, 1924.

He said: "Let me choose the most original of these memories, seemingly improbable, but indicating the power of persuasion that the National Government exercised. They concern massive Jewish participation in the uprising. There was a certain pattern of organization everywhere. In a town, the mayor was Christian and his assistant – Jewish. And I remember a young Jewish guy, who was entrusted the most dangerous missions, who carried carry all top secret things, who supplied arms in large numbers, and who did not ask for anything in return, except for just the least significant award from the Polish government. In my life I have encountered the tradition of this work. During the Russo-Japanese war my conspiracy paths lead me to Siedlce. I was given a recommended address of a factory, which turned out to be an ordinary dyeing workshop, whose holder, a jovial plump man, was to receive me. I turned up at his place as a no-name man, a delegate of some secret authority. He was awed to welcome me. When we finished talking and settling our affairs, he must have felt some extraordinary sympathy for me and upon our farewell said: 'It is not right to part just like that, let me share with you my most precious keepsake'. And out of a hiding place by the ceiling of his workshop he took out two pieces of tissue paper wrapped in many layers of ordinary paper. The tissues were stamped with the stamp of the National Government. I ask him where fro; he recounts me their story. The tissues had survived the hell of Siberian exile and returned to Poland. Such a mayor's assistant, a Jew, upon his return from the exile, unable to settle in his new life, as he was pushed off one shore and could not reach another, dying in agony and pain, gave this sacred keepsakes to the father of the craftsman I met. And now this successor of Rawicz' tradition [Władysław Rawicz, the insurgents' leader of the Siedlce province, hanged by the Russians in Siedlce on November 22, 1863] shared with me this sacred thing as if it were a holy wafer; he kept one tissue and gave me the other for the rest of my life..."¹³

It is impossible to disregard the distinguished Polish leaders of Jewish origin, whose names have been imprinted in the Polish hall of fame. To mention just a few: **Jan Dembowski**, a captain in the insurrection army of Tadeusz Kościuszko, in the Legions of General Dąbrowski he was a member of the general staff; according to the testimonies, recognizable for his talents; later Dembowski served in the Italian army having under his command half-brigade; in the 1812 campaign he participated in the rank of brigadier-general.¹⁴

His elder brother, **Maciej Ludwik Dembowski** (1768–1812), served in the Legions as well. He started his career in the royal army in 1785 as a teenager and was

¹² S. Kieniewicz, *Powstanie styczniowe*, Warszawa 1983, passim (wg indeksu).

¹³ J. Piłsudski, *Pisma zbiorowe. Wydanie prac dotychczas drukami ogłoszonych*, t. 6, Warszawa 1937, pp. 165–166; the lecture was first published as a separate pamphlet: J. Piłsudski, *Rok 1863*, Warszawa 1924.

¹⁴ A. Skalkowski, *Z dziejów insurekcji 1794 r.*, Warszawa 1926, p. 215; *Encyklopedia Wojskowa*, ed. by Otton Laskowski, t. 2, Warszawa 1932, p. 173.

soon promoted, to a captain in 1791. Maciej fought against Russia and Prussia, and took part in the Italian campaign in the Legions. In 1799 he had a half-brigade under his command, in July he was taken prisoner by the Austrians during the defense of Mantua; upon arriving in France in September 1800 he joined the French army, where he was soon promoted. In the officers' corps he was promoted to a brigadier-general in 1807. He was killed in a duel in July 1812.¹⁵

Artillery General **Jan Krysiński** merited his fame during the 1830 November uprising. As a colonel he was appointed the commanding officer of the Zamosc Fortress (1830), and successfully defended it against the attacking Russian forces; his tactic was an active defense including successful raids at the besiegers, earning him promotion to a general and the appreciation of General Jozef Dwernicki.¹⁶

General **Antoni Jezioranski** was a prominent leader of the 1863 January uprising, highly valued by his superiors and subordinates. Jozef Kosciesza Ozegalski gave an interesting remarkable portrayal of Jezioranski: “[he] was quite tall and blond, with his long beard he looked nice and suave”, in contrast to a dictator of the uprising, Marian Langiewicz, who despite being “a pure Aryan” was “a dark-haired man of medium height”.¹⁷ Jezioranski gained his first experience during the 1848 revolution (Springtime of Nations) in Hungary. Having spent the Crimean war in the Ottoman empire he returned home to join the conspiracy against the Russian rule. On March 11, 1863 he was nominated a general and the war commander of the Rawa powiat (county), and then the commander of the armed forces of the Lublin voivodship (province). He defeated the enemy in over a dozen skirmishes, including the ones at Malogoszcz and Pieskowa Skala.¹⁸

These illustrations attest beyond doubt to the long-standing tradition of the social assimilation of Jewish population, but most of all to the enthusiasm and commitment of the neophytes, who were more steadfastly dedicated to the Polish Republic than many ethnic Poles.

The 1863 uprising marked an end of the long series of military efforts towards political independence. Subsequent generations did not abandon clandestine work. After several decades the idea of undertaking military action against the foreign rule began to gain impetus again. “The universal war for the freedom of nations”¹⁹, as Adam Mickiewicz saw it, was increasingly prayed for by political leaders. Young Poles, despite the borders that divided Poland into three parts under three foreign rules, and often differing as to the best means to achieve freedom, were getting ready to fight for it.

Accurate figures are difficult to estimate due to the scarcity of historical sources, but it is assumed that dozens of Jewish volunteers joined the several thousand strong Legions of Józef Piłsudski. They usually came, as their Polish comrades-in-arms, from the clandestine paramilitary organizations, the Association for Armed Struggle, and a Riflemen's Association. The epic of Polish Legions of Józef Piłsudski on the memorable day of August 6, 1914 with the First Cadre Company 6 marching out against the eternal enemy – the Russians. Many legionists were killed in the battles of WWI (1914–1918), others continued in the ranks of Polish Army and in their efforts to secure recently regained independence of Poland, endangered chiefly during the Polish-Bolshevik war of 1918–1920. These struggles determined the ultimate structure of the Second Polish

¹⁵ *Encyklopedia Wojskowa*, op. cit., t. 2, p. 175.

¹⁶ W. Tokarz, *Wojna polsko-rosyjska 1830–1831*, Warszawa 1930, p. 216.

¹⁷ J. Kosciesza Ozegalski, *Wspomnienia krwawych czasów r. 1863*, Kraków 1908, p. 23.

¹⁸ *Encyklopedia Wojskowa*, op. cit., t. 3, p. 684.

¹⁹ A. Mickiewicz, *Księgi narodu polskiego i pielgrzymstwa*, Paryż 1832 (*Modlitwa pielgrzymia zamykająca Księgi ...*).

Republic. Here are some of the soldiers who were awarded the Virtuti Militari Order for their outstanding courage and heroic deeds:²⁰

Jozef Appel (6.08.1896 – 27.11.1985), captain; born in Vienna to a railways worker Antoni and Sara Roland; trained to be a printer in Krakow (1912); member of the Sokol paramilitary organization; in August 1914 joined the Polish Legion (2nd Infantry Regiment); from November 1917 in the Polish Reinforcement Corps, at the battle of Kaniow (May 11, 1918) taken prisoner by the German army; in August 1918 signed up to 4th Division of Riflemen of General Lucjan Zeligowski: June through August 1919 as a cadet fought at the Ukrainian front (28th regiment of Kaniow Riflemen); on July 19, 1919 by the Szypowce village on the Seret, with his platoon crossed the river under enemy fire; for this brave act he was awarded Virtuti Militari (5th class, no. 6920); on February 1, 1920 he retired from the army, settled in Warsaw, got a job at the army printing house; on March 7, 1939 was promoted to a captain; he survived WWII held prisoner-of-war in German camps; after the war worked as a printer to 1961; died there and is buried at the Northern Komunalny cemetery; his medals included: Independence Cross and three Crosses of Valor; he was married to Amelia Milecka (in 1922) with a daughter, Danuta (b.1928).²¹

Zygmunt Goldszlag, nom de guerre Murzyn (26.06.1896 – 29.07.1920), captain; born in Kolomyja to Wolf, director of the Nieglowice oil refinery near Jaslo, and Debora nee Gottlieb, sister of Leopold, the famous painter of the Legions, and of Maurycy, student of the famous Polish painter Jan Matejko; as a student of the high school in Kolomyja he joined scouting and a riflemen's association; in 1914, in his senior grade he signed up to the Polish Legion and on August 6 was assigned to 5th battalion of the First Brigade; then served at a intelligence unit of Swietopelk (Rajmund Jaworski); from August 15, 1915 a cavalry sergeant in the legendary first regiment of uhlans of Wladyslaw Belina-Prazmowski; he distinguished himself by carrying under fire his wounded colleague captain Herwin (Kazimierz Piatek) to safety; in the Legions served to the end and was injured in battles; in November 1918 Goldszlag set up a platoon of volunteers in Jaslo and captured Janow; on December 28, 1918 with nine men took over Krzywoczyce, taking prisoners, for which he was commended by the headquarters; on January 1, 1918 promoted to a second lieutenant; had a platoon and a company under his command, serving in turn in: 3rd battalion of 5th infantry regiment of the Legions, in the battalion of captain Jerzy Bleszynski, and in a squadron of captain of horse Dzieduszycki; on April 15 1919 wounded at Czartowska Skala, got a leave and began to study chemistry at the Yagellonian University; in 1920 he must have been working at the arsenal laboratory in Vilna; in June 1920 he volunteered to the army again; fought in 1st company of tanks at Bialystok and Lapy; then in 201 volunteers' infantry regiment; killed at Suraz as a commanding officer of a volunteers' unit; posthumously awarded Virtuti Militari (5th class no. 3167) and Cross of Independence for "taking part in the fight for independence in the ranks of the Polish Legions". Goldszlag never married.²²

Wolf Izaak Jungerman (1894-1919), sanitarian non com; born in Bedzin, to Zysya and Estera nee Pormanitz; having finished his education at elementary school he worked as a tinsmith; on August 15, 1914 joined the Legions and was assigned to 1st battalion of 1st infantry regiment: he had a sanitarian patrol under his command. In the

²⁰ W. Milewska, J. T. Nowak, M. Zientara, *Legiony Polskie 1914–1918. Zarys historii militarnej i politycznej*, Kraków 1998, passim; G. Łukomski, *Walka Rzeczypospolitej o kresy północno-wschodnie 1918–1920. Polityka i działania militarne*, Poznań 1994, passim.

²¹ Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe w Warszawie (dalej: CAW), VM 75-7131; akta personalne, sygn. 1258; selected by his daughter, Danuta Olbryś, Warsaw.

²² CAW, VM 20-1421 i KN, information from Anna Majkowska (Warsaw) and Czesław. Talbot (Australia).

battle at Przepiorowa carried our seriously wounded Captain Heller from the battlefield under heavy enemy fire; afterwards he returned to dress the wounds of several soldiers and carry out dying Sergeant Aleksander Bartkowski. In the battle at Wielki Miedwiez November 2 through 15, 1915, Jungerman all the time carried out his duties of a sanitarian non-com with dedication, perseverance, and bravery. For this he was awarded *Virtuti Militari* (5th class no. 7209). He took part in all the battles of his regiment. In November 1918 he enlisted in the Polish Army and went to the Polish-Bolshevik war, whereupon he was killed at the Lithuanian front. His burial place is unknown. Posthumously Jungerman was also awarded the Cross of Independence. Not married.²³

Dawid Kelhoffer (18.10.1891 – 27.10.1926) captain; born in Boryslaw, to Markus Kelhoffer (office worker) and Sala Spinrad; graduated from the law faculty at the Jan Kazimierz University (Lvov) in 1914; in the years 1914–1918 served in the Austrian army, from November 1918 in the Polish army (as a lieutenant) in 18th artillery regiment (1 division). He distinguished himself most at the battle of Warsaw as a commanding officer of 3rd battery of his regiment; on August 19, 1920 at Ojrzyn he defended his sector against the attacks of the 4th Bolshevik army with forces which were several times superior, and then led a successful counter-offensive. For this feat he was awarded *Virtuti Militari* (5th class, no. 1692) and promoted to a captain. Demobilized in 1921, Kelhoffer settled in Boryslaw as the manager of a local mine. He lost his life in a mine accident in Drohiczyn and was buried at a local Jewish cemetery. He never married.²⁴

Motel Natan Lewinson (5.09.1896 – 13.06.1916), sergeant of the Polish Legions; born in Lublin to Samuel, a former participant of the 1863 uprising, and Rywa nee Apatow; graduated from science (“real”) high school in Lublin; from September 1915 in the Polish Legions (6th infantry regiment, 2nd battalion). He took part in all the battles of his regiment; he distinguished himself most at the battle of Opatowa: he volunteered for a patrol to reconnoiter the enemy forces; during the fight with Russian units of battalion strength, he covered the retreat of his platoon; heavily wounded, Lewinson died soon at a field dressing station and was buried on the battlefield (14.06.1916); for his deed awarded *Virtuti Militari* (5th class no. 6401). He never married. Posthumously awarded also the Cross of Independence.²⁵

Beniamin Obstler (3.09.1889 – 26 III 1919), lieutenant; born in Niepolomice (Bochnia powiat) to Mojzesz and Laya Hillee; graduated from a high school in Krakow (1913), studied philosophy at Vienna university; from 1914 in the Austrian army; promoted to a lieutenant; volunteered to the Polish army on December 9, 1918 (1st regiment of Podhale Riflemen); from January 1919 participated in the succor of Lvov and in the fighting in Eastern Galicia, where he had 1st company under his command; distinguished himself most at the defense of Belz (7.02.1919), leading his detachment and driving the enemy out of town streets under the gunfire; killed during an attack at Ukrainian fortifications near Nagierow; for this posthumously awarded *Virtuti Militari* (5th class no. 5779). He never married.²⁶

Jan Rotwand (28.02.1888 – 16.06.1915), second lieutenant; born in Warsaw to Leon and Leontyna nee Kon; attended a commerce high school in Warsaw; took part in an anti-Russian school action; in 1905 left for Paris, where he graduated with a high school diploma and studied at Ecole des Beaux Arts; in August 1914 volunteered to Polish forces organized in France, the so-called Bayonne Legion (*Bajonczycy*, 2nd company), conscripted into 1st regiment of the Foreign Legion; from October 22, 1914

²³ CAW, VM 72-6566.

²⁴ CAW, VM 80-7673; akta personalne, sygn.. 12427.

²⁵ CAW, VM 77-7383.

²⁶ CAW, VM 24-1778.

fought at the German front, promoted to a sergeant, on May 9, 1915 – to a second lieutenant; in command of a platoon; killed at Arras by a poison gas. In 1923 his remains were reburied in Poland, at Powazki cemetery in Warsaw. His tombstone was decorated with a sculpture of the famous Polish artist Ksawery Dunikowski. For his action in the battlefield Rotwand was posthumously awarded *Virtuti Militari* (5th class no. 5715). He never married. His medals included the Cross of Independence and Cross of Valor.²⁷

One cannot disregard a soldier, who rose to brigadier general in the service of the Second Polish Republic. **Bernard Stanislaw Mond** (1887–1957) was born on November 14 in Stanislawow to Maurycy, a railroad clerk, and Salomea nee Spanier. Mond graduated from an eight-grade high school in 1907 and six terms of the law school at Lvov University. He was active in Bartosz Squads. In WWI he served in the Austrian army, and from November 1918 in the Polish army: defending Lvov as the commanding officer of Cytadela sector, then in the Polish-Bolshevik war; getting promoted to a second lieutenant in 1914; lieutenant in 1916; captain in 1918; major in 1920; second colonel in 1922; colonel in 1924; and finally brigadier general in 1933. He completed his professional education at the Center of Military University Studies in Warsaw (1930–1931). Colonel Stefan Rowecki's survey of Polish military leaders in May 1939 included a description of Mond, which was not very fortunate: "A brave Jew of the 1918-1920 war. Hardly eligible to be a major general, not to mention higher rank." And yet in the defense war of September 1939 General Bernard Mond showed his competence and dedication as the commander of 6th infantry division, pursuing covering actions at Pszczyna, and in the Bilgoraj forest (the last battle). Having run out of ammo, the exhausted division capitulated on September 20. Mond spent the rest of the war in the prisoner-of-war camps: VII A Murnau and VI B Doessel. In January 1946 returned to Poland; died on July 5, 1957 in Krakow and was buried at Rakowicki cemetery. His medals included: *Virtuti Militari* (5th class), *Polonia Restituta* (4th class), Cross of Independence with Swords, and Cross of Valor (four times). Even if his position was not among the top general corps of the Second Republic, still his services for his homeland are considerable and deserve to be appreciated.²⁸

In reborn Poland Jewish war veterans were as active in public and social life as their Polish comrades-in-arms. Their involvement was particularly visible after Pilsudski's coup of May 1926 and must have resulted from political sympathies for the Marshall and his state-recovery efforts. In December 1929 on the initiative of former legionists and members of the Polish Military Organization, the Association of Jewish Fighters for Polish Independence was set up in Warsaw. One of its major goals was to help with the integration of young Jews with their Polish homeland. Making use of the armed struggle tradition, the Association strove to create a new model of Jewish independence fighter, turned into a modern citizen of the Second Republic. This activity involved many contexts connected with the political scene after May 1926, but also genuine enthusiasm and commitment, so looked-for especially in the face of impending threat of a new military conflict. The members of the Association made their appearance at the world forum, for instance in June 1935 at the International Conference of Jewish Veterans in Paris.²⁹

Jews were active participants of Polish independence movement during WWII. There were Jewish soldiers of the underground state in German-occupied Poland, and at Polish armed forces abroad. Many of them managed to get out of Soviet camps and leave

²⁷ CAW, VM 63-5370.

²⁸ CAW, akta personalne, sygn. M – 7522; *Encyklopedia Wojskowa*, op. cit., t. 5; *Tygodnik Powszechny* 1987. 19.07 (article of R. Terlecki).

²⁹ *Żydzi bojownicy*, op. cit., pp. 322–325.

the Soviet Union with General Anders' Army, arriving then at the Middle East, where they stayed to build their own state in the complex political and military situation. Polish leadership of the army were generally sympathetic and approved individual applications of Jews asking to be dismissed from the service, although the implications of such decisions were sometimes unforeseeable and could negatively affect mutual relations.³⁰

It is worth mentioning that as early as in October 1941, two delegates of the Jewish Diaspora, Marek Kahan and Miron Szeskin, turned to General Anders suggesting establishment of a Jewish Legion in the Polish Army. It must have been an attempt to revive the historical tradition. The idea was dropped, probably on political grounds.³¹ Many other Polish soldiers and officers of Jewish origin covered the entire combat trail of the 2nd Corps (Polish army) and after the war either settled in Western Europe or returned to Poland under communist regime.

In conclusion I would like to quote an opinion of a brilliantly rational and knowledgeable at the university of life Jew on the problem of Jewish identity in Poland. Dr. Henryk Ritterman-Abir quite self-ironically distinguished three categories of Jews in the Krakow community: "First, there are some, who are ashamed of their Jewishness and try to escape from it, wash it off, cover up, mask. That's why they change their names, their religion, in some cases they would be happy to change their sex from male to less discriminating female." The second category are those, who, "like Tevye the dairyman, do not feel neither disgraced nor honored by their Jewishness." The third category "believe that Jewishness is nothing to be ashamed of and denied, because it is something to be proud of."³²

Regardless of the identity dilemmas, ensuing life choices and their consequences, most Polish Jews put trust in the good future of the homeland they shared, Poland. They proved it by their actions on numerous battlefields, with the supreme sacrifice of blood and life. Even in historical research, the extent of this sacrifice seems to be underestimated.

³⁰ Kazimierz Zamorski wrote on the subject in his work. In Palestine Jewish leaders joined the fight for the establishment of their own state. British authorities, with formal compliance of Polish ones, regarded such activity as terrorism. It was for such activity that Menachem Begin and many other were wanted by the British judiciary. Begin got a twelve month leave from the army; in the years 1977–1984 he was the prime minister of Israel. K. Zamorski, *Dwa tajne biura 2 Korpusu*, Londyn 1990, p. 116–117.

³¹ K. Zamorski, *Dwa tajne biura*, op. cit., p. 113–114.

³² H. Ritterman-Abir, *Nie od razu Kraków zapomniano*, Israel 1984, p. 11 (quoted after: K. Zamorski, *Dwa tajne biura*, op. cit., p. 51).