

THE WAR DIARY OF THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF GENERAL WŁADYSŁAW SIKORSKI. VOL. IV (1ST AUGUST 1942 – 5TH JULY 1943)

The fourth volume of the War diary of the Commander-in-Chief, General Władysław Sikorski covers the period from 1st August 1942 to 5th July 1943, when the tragic news of his death reached the President of the Republic of Poland Władysław Raczkiewicz and members of the government and high command. This was a period in which key events took place, both in the military, as well as the political spheres of the Polish Prime Minister's, responsibilities, especially regarding international relations.

In mid-August 1942 the Polish Armed forces numbered 108,744 persons (97,669 soldiers of the land army, 9259 airmen and 1846 sailors). By July 1943 this number had fallen to 106,191 men – nearly by 2.5%. Of the land army, 65,000 served in the Polish Army in the East and over 17,000 men in the Ist Armoured-Motorised Corps in Scotland.¹

Following the evacuation of the whole of the Polish Forces in the USSR to Iran (30 August 1942), the C-in-C confirmed the new organisation of the Polish forces in the Near and Middle East. This was based on Lieutenant-General Władysław Anders' earlier project. It formed the Polish Army in the East with General Anders as its General Officer Commanding. His deputy was Lieutenant-General Józef Zajac and the Chief of Staff was Major-General Bronisław Rakowski. The army was formed of the following units: 3rd Carpathian Rifle Division (GOC: Maj-Gen. Stanisław Kopański), 5th Infantry Division (GOC: Maj-Gen. Bronisław Rakowski followed by Maj-Gen. Zygmunt Bohusz-Szyszko), the 6th Combined Division (GOC: Maj-Gen. Michał Karaszewicz-Tokarzewski) and the 7th Infantry Division (OC: Col. Leopold Okulicki). During the first half of 1943 this army underwent both organisational and personnel changes. In March 1943 Lt-Gen. Michał Karaszewicz-Tokarzewski was appointed deputy GOC of the Polish Army in the East. The 5th Infantry Division was expanded and renamed the 5th Kresowa Infantry Division, whilst the 6th Division was disbanded. In May 1943 the army headquarters was divided into the operational part and the supply and lines of communication echelon which was placed under the command of Maj-Gen. Józef Wiatr.² The Commander-in-Chief visited units of the Polish Army in the East in June 1943.

¹ Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum (PISM), C-in-C's Secretariat, arch. ref. A.XII.1, file 75 pag. p. 61–62, 130, *Polskie Siły Zbrojne w drugiej wojnie światowej, Vol. II: The Campaign Abroad, part 2*, London 1975, p. 118.

² *Polskie Siły Zbrojne w drugiej wojnie światowej, Vol. II, part 2*, p. 312–327.

Major changes took place in the structure and command of I Corps in Scotland, re-named I Motorised Armoured Corps on 31 August 1942. The next day Maj-Gen. M. Boruta-Spiechowicz took over command of the Corps, replacing Lt-Gen. Marian Kukiel who became Minister of Military Affairs. In December 1942 I Corps was made up of 1st Armoured Division (GOC: Maj-Gen. Stanisław Maczek), 1st Independent Rifle Brigade (GOC: Maj-Gen. Bronisław Duch) renamed the 1st Grenadiers Cadre Division in March 1943. Until the end of 1942 there was also the Training Brigade which became the Territorial Units HQ (GOC: Maj-Gen. Janusz Głuchowski). The 1st Independent Parachute Brigade (OC: Col. Stanisław Sosabowski) was subordinated directly to the Commander-in-Chief and was earmarked for use in Poland. In March 1943 Gen. J. Zając took over command of Ist Corps. From the pages of the war diary, it is clear that General Sikorski was concerned for the well-being of the soldiers of I Corps. He visited all the major divisional and brigade formations. His January 1943 visit to the Corps was mired in controversy because of political comments during his speeches and the revue like nature of the whole event.

The Polish Air Force meanwhile expanded. In September 1942 Polish officers took over command of RAF Northolt (W/Cdr. Mieczysław Mumler) and RAF Heston (W/Cdr. Stanisław Brzezina). From 14th March 1943 "Skalski's Circus" began operations in North Africa as part of 145 Fighter Squadron RAF. On 20th March 1943 a new Polish Fighter-Reconnaissance Squadron, no.318 was formed, whilst a Polish Flight was set up within 138 Squadron for flights between the UK and occupied Poland. In June another Polish Wing (no.3) was formed under Sq.Ldr. Walerian Żak. Polish airmen played a meaningful role in the air operations over Europe. General Sikorski often visited various Polish squadrons both fighter and bomber, in this way showing his appreciation for their contribution.

General Sikorski's main control of command was the General Staff. From March 1942 directly subordinated to the Commander-in-Chief were: the Chaplain General of the Forces (Bishop Józef Gawlina), Vice Minister of Military Affairs (Maj-Gen. Izydor Modelski), Chief of the Army Judicial Services (Col. Stanisław Szurlej), Inspector of the Polish Air Force (Maj-Gen. Stanisław Ujejski), Chief of the Navy Directorate (Vice-Admiral Jerzy Świrski) and the Chief of the C-in-C's Secretariat (Lt-Col. Zygmunt Borkowski). The Chief of General Staff since summer 1940 was Maj-Gen. Tadeusz Klimecki, who accompanied Gen. Sikorski on his last trip and was also killed in the air crash on 4th July 1943. The Deputy Chief of General Staff, overseeing the work of the I and IV Bureaux was Col. Mieczysław Sulisławski who doubled up as Chief of the IV Bureau General Staff. The I (Organizational) Bureau was headed by Col. Wielisław Krajowski (Kralicek), the II (Intelligence) Bureau by Lt-Col. Stanisław Gano, the III (Operations and Training) by Col. Andrzej Marecki, the V (Personnel) Bureau by Lt-Col. Józef Bischof and the VI (Special) Bureau by Lt-Col. Michał Protasewicz. To the Chief of General Staff were also subordinated the Chief of Signals Col. Heliodor Cepa, the Inspector of Armoured Trains Col. Leonard Michalski, the Cypher Office and the Military Institute of Technology. On 25th November 1942 the General Staff underwent a further organizational change which divided the offices into those directly subordinated to the Chief of General Staff (mainly operations and intelligence) and those (Organisational and Personnel Bureaux) subordinated to the CGS via the Deputy Chief of General Staff. This organisation remained in place up to Gen. Sikorski's death.³ The above named officers formed General Sikorski's closest military aides, their joint briefings often

³ Op. cit., p. 103–106; *General Staff of the Polish Army 1918–2018*, Warsaw 2018, p. 84–85.

figure in the War diary. Two of them, Maj-Gen. T. Klimecki and Col. A. Marecki accompanied the C-in-C on his final trip and were killed alongside him in the Gibraltar air crash. President Władysław Raczkiewicz in his decree of 27th May 1942 regarding the organisation of the supreme military authorities in time of war⁴ brought in modifications to his predecessor's decree (of 1st September 1939) concerning the supreme command of the Armed Forces, the organisation of the supreme military authorities and civilian commissioners, to bring them into line with the actual situation as needed in 1942.⁵ The President of the Republic relieved General Sikorski from the post of Minister of Military Affairs, appointing General Marian Kukiel as Minister of this portfolio. On 19th November 1942 the name of the ministry was changed to that of the Ministry of National Defence.⁶

Apart from holding the post of Commander-in-Chief, General Sikorski was also the Prime Minister. Many of the entries in the War diary deal with his work as head of the civilian government. The period covered by this volume was crucial when it came to international relations. Paradoxically, yet logically, allied successes in North Africa, the Pacific Ocean but especially on the eastern front strengthened the hand of the USSR in international politics, aiming to shift her frontier westwards at Poland's expense. The moment when it seemed that good relations between Poland and the USSR as neighbours (the Polish-Soviet Agreement of July 1941, Gen. Sikorski's visit to the USSR in December 1941) could be built, had passed. The evacuation of the Polish Army from the USSR to Iran certainly had not helped to forge relations. Unquestionably this détente in relations between the two countries could only continue under the condition that Poland acceded to Soviet demands at Poland's cost. For Joseph Stalin this was but a tactical game. This is borne out by the Soviet government's attitude to increasing the size of the Polish Army in the USSR and its attitude towards Polish diplomatic outposts in the USSR.

During the period covered in this volume, Polish-Soviet relations took on a dramatic turn. In answer to the Foreign Minister Edward Raczyński's note of 27th August 1942 concerning the expansion of the Polish Army in the USSR, Soviet Ambassador Bogomolov replied on 31st October in a memorandum, accusing the Polish Government of breaking Polish-Soviet agreements made in July and August 1941. On 16th January 1943 the Soviet Government annulled their earlier decision to recognise Polish citizenship of those who had this citizenship living in the so-called western Ukraine and western Belorussia, annexed by the USSR in November 1939. As of January 1943, they would be regarded as Soviet citizens. The Polish Foreign Minister replied rejecting the recognition of unilateral decisions. On 13th April 1943 the Germans announced the discovery of mass graves of Polish officers in Katyń, accusing the USSR of the crime. As a result of the Soviet rejection of this accusation and despite British pressure to quieten the whole affair down, on 16th April the Polish Government requested that the International Red Cross in Geneva investigate the circumstances surrounding the massacre. This move led the USSR to break off diplomatic relations with the Polish Government on 25th April 1943 accusing the Poles of co-operating with Hitler in besmirching the innocent Soviet authorities.⁷

⁴ Journal of Law Statutes for 1942, no. 5, pos. 9.

⁵ Journal of Law Statutes for 1939, no. 85, pos. 21.

⁶ Journal of Law Statutes for 1942, no. 10, pos. 21.

⁷ M. Kukiel, *General Sikorski. Żołnierz i mąż stanu Polski Walczącej*, London, p. 205–207, 217–218, 223–231; J. Tebinka, *Dyplomacja brytyjska wobec sprawy katyńskiej w latach 1943–1945*, [in:] *Z dziejów Polski i emigracji (1939–1989)*, ed. M. Szczerbiński, T. Wolsza, Gorzów Wielkopolski 2003, p. 454–457; T. Wolsza, „Katyń to już na zawsze

In the face of the increasingly difficult relations with the USSR, Gen. Sikorski worked for ever closer relations with Great Britain and the USA. He maintained regular contact with the British Government and its Prime Minister Winston Churchill. During the span of this volume, he met Churchill five times.⁸ Their last meeting on 28th April 1943 coincided with very tense Polish-Soviet relations. There is little doubt that the British Government aimed at easing these tensions. Agreeing that the culprit may be the USSR it argued that making vocal accusations would be counter-productive in the present political and military situation. Following the break in Polish-Soviet diplomatic relations, Great Britain accepted the Soviet viewpoint, as well as recognising that the alliance with the USSR was of greater importance and value than the alliance with Poland. This can be seen in two utterances by Winston Churchill. On 15th April he said that he “stands without any reservations by the Polish Government and Prime Minister Sikorski, with whom he has, does and will co-operate, having complete confidence in him”.⁹ Not a month later, on 10th May 1943 he sent a telegram to his Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden saying, “Sikorski, together with his colleagues should feel that they have found themselves in an impossible situation as a result of publicly attacking Russia. It is but a small part of their punishment for their stupidity. [...] I am increasingly convinced, that we cannot be too delicate with these unintelligent people”.¹⁰ He ascertained that if Gen. Sikorski does not accept the Soviet demand for the reconstruction of his cabinet, Great Britain “will wash her hands of Polish affairs”.¹¹

On 29th November 1942 Gen Sikorski departed by air for his third trip to North America. During his visit to the USA (1st–17th December 1942 and 31st December 1942–10th January 1943) he met with the most important US political and military figures. He met President Roosevelt on three occasions (2nd and 3rd December 1942 and 5th January 1943) at the White House. The discussions were broad and varied. Among matters discussed were the general situation and allied plans. Sikorski tried to convince Roosevelt to open a second front in the Balkans, which would allow the allies to throw the Germans out of Central Europe including Poland, before the arrival of the Red Army. At the time this concept was in tune with President Roosevelt’s thinking. Polish-Soviet relations, policies vis a vis Germany after their defeat, the operations and needs of the Polish Home Army, aid for the Polish underground and plans for a post war federation of Central-East European countries were all discussed. The American president was much interested in the last of these topics.

General Sikorski’s trip to the USA included meetings with the Vice President of the USA Henry Wallace (22nd December 1942), the Secretary of State Cordell Hull (5th December 1942), Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. William D Leahy (5th December 1942), Chief of the Army General Staff Gen. George Marshall (7th–8th December 1942), 7th January 1943), Secretary of the Navy William Knox (9th December 1942). On 7th January 1943 Gen. Sikorski attended a meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee in Washington. On 7th December 1942 he gave a speech during a secret meeting of the US Congress

katy i katorwani. W „polskim Londynie” o sowieckiej zbrodni w Katyniu (1940–1956), Warsaw 2008; W. Materski, *Katyni. Od kłamstwa ku prawdzie*, Warsaw 2012.

⁸ For details of their meetings see: *Na najwyższym szczeblu. Spotkania premierów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej i Wielkiej Brytanii podczas II wojny światowej*, ed. M.K. Kamiński, J. Tebinka, Warsaw 1999, p. 76–96; E. Raczyński, *W sojusznym Londynie. Dziennik ambasadora Edwarda Raczyńskiego 1939–1945*, London 1960, p. 173–174; J. Tebinka, „Wielka Brytania dotrzyma lojalnie słowa”. *Winston Churchill a Polska*, Warszawa 2013, p. 141–142.

⁹ *Na najwyższym szczeblu*, p. 90.

¹⁰ Quote after J. Tebinka, „Wielka Brytania dotrzyma lojalnie swojego słowa”, p. 145.

¹¹ Op. cit.

Committee for Foreign Relations, whilst two days later he was a guest of the Supreme Court of Justice. During his stay in the USA, he visited Washington, New York, Chicago (where he met representatives of the *Polonia*, Poles living in the USA), Detroit, New Orleans where he spent Christmas and Fort Worth in Texas. Overall, General Sikorski was pleased with the results of his trip. After his return to the UK, he stressed US support for Poland's politics. However, in private conversations he did not hide the fact that it would be difficult to count on America's full support for the pre-war Polish-Soviet border. Between 27th and 31st December 1942 General Sikorski visited Mexico, where among other subjects he discussed the granting of a haven to Polish refugees who having left the USSR, found themselves in the Far East. The result of these talks was the establishment of the Santa Rosa settlement for around 20,000 Polish refugees. He met President Manuel Avila Camacho twice and received the Mexican Order of the Aztec Eagle.

Another important aspect of General Sikorski's international politics were animated contacts with the prime ministers of allied countries whose temporary seat of government was in London. They took on the form of monthly meetings of inter-allied conferences, during which the prime ministers and foreign ministers of these countries took part. General Sikorski used this forum to exchange thoughts and ideas with the prime ministers of Belgium (Hubert Pierlot), Norway (Johan Nygaardsvoldem), Yugoslavia (Slobodan Jovanovic), Greece (Emmanouil Tsouderos), The Netherlands (Pieter Gerbrand) and Czechoslovakia (Jan Sramek). It was the post war vision of Europe discussed here that Gen. Sikorski presented to President Roosevelt during his trip to the USA.

General Sikorski also had occasion to meet other leaders in this period, including King George VI of Great Britain, King Haakon VII of Norway, King George II of the Hellenes, King Faruk I of Egypt, Edvard Benes President of Czechoslovakia, Jan Christian Smuts Prime Minister of South Africa, Nuir as Said Prime Minister of Iraq, Abd al-Ilaha ibn Ali ibn Hussein the Regent of Iraq and Cardinal Hinsley the Catholic Primate of England and Wales.

General Sikorski's public mission was cut short on 4th July 1943. The Commander-in-Chief, returning from his trip to visit Polish forces in the Middle East, was on board Liberator II AL-523 which took off at 23.07 from Gibraltar heading for England. It had not gained its altitude when after several seconds it plunged into the sea. Besides General Sikorski, those who lost their lives included Maj-Gen. Tadeusz Klimecki the Chief of General Staff, Col. Andrzej Marecki the Chief of the Operations and Training Bureau General Staff, Col. Victor Cazalet the British Liaison Officer to the Polish C-in-C and Lt. Józef Ponikiewski PN, naval ADC to Gen. Sikorski. Others traveling with the Polish Prime Minister were his daughter Zofia Leśniowska and his private secretary Adam Kułakowski, whose bodies were never found. The coffin bearing the body of General Sikorski was brought back to England on board the Polish destroyer ORP "Orkan". Between 10th and 14th July his coffin lay in state at the Council of Ministers building situated in Kensington Gardens. On 14th July the coffin was transferred to Westminster Cathedral where the following day the funeral mass took place. The following day he was laid to rest in Newark-on-Trent Cemetery alongside Polish airmen buried there. Here he lay until September 1993 when his body was exhumed, returned to Poland, and buried in the crypt of Kraków Cathedral on Wawel Hill alongside Polish monarchs and national heroes.

The cause of the crash remains an open question. Danger accompanied the General on his air trips. I have mentioned the incident with Lt-Col. Bohdan Kleczyński in the introduction

to volume III of the War diary of the Commander-in-Chief.¹² In the time period of this last volume, during a planned trip from Montreal to Washington on 30th November 1942, shortly after take-off both engines failed. The pilot made an emergency landing in a field. Apart from some bruising nothing befell the passengers. However, the whole of the baggage was destroyed. Among the supporters of the theory that General Sikorski died as a result of sabotage are Tadeusz A. Kisielewski, Dariusz Baliszewski and David Irving.¹³ In support of this theory are the conflicting accounts of eye witnesses, and the continuing lack of access to all the British documentation. Note should be taken of the analyses that possibly the aircraft was overloaded and a shift in the distribution of weight resulted in the crash.¹⁴ Part of the speculations about an assassination attempt on Sikorski, were quashed by an autopsy carried out on his remains in 2008, on the instructions of the Institute of National Remembrance. It established that he did not die by shooting, suffocation, stabbing or poisoning. The injuries were consistent with those resulting from accidents whilst travelling. It showed that the General was alive and conscious at the time of the crash.

The death of the Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief resulted in the necessity of a speedy transfer of his responsibilities. Many politicians who were in opposition to his policies, wanted the two functions to be separated. On 8th July 1943 the President of the Republic of Poland appointed General Kazimierz Sosnkowski as Commander-in-Chief¹⁵, whilst on 14th July Stanisław Mikołajczyk became Prime Minister.¹⁶ The disaster at Gibraltar coincided with the arrest of the Commandant-in-Chief of the Home Army, General Stefan Grot-Rowecki by the Gestapo. A few months earlier, in February 1943 the Germans had arrested the Polish Government Delegate in Occupied Poland Prof. Jan Piekałkiewicz. These losses were incurred by Poland at a time of important and sensitive changes on the international political and military scene, and which weakened Poland's ability to actively influence world and European events.

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Writing up the daily notes concerning the C-in-C's daily activities was the responsibility of his ADCs. Between August 1942 and July 1943 these were: Lt. Józef Ponikiewski PN (from 26th June 1941) who was killed alongside Gen, Sikorski at Gibraltar, Lt./Capt. Czesław Głowczyński PAF (from 2nd March 1942) and Capt./Maj. Michał Miszke (from 23rd April 1942).¹⁷ Regina and Edmund Oppman took part in the editing of the war diary. As I have

¹² J. Rabiński, *Wstęp* [in:] *Dziennik czynności Naczelnego Wodza gen. Władysława Sikorskiego*, ed. J. Rabiński; assist. eds, J. Kowalska, A. Gładysz, G.P. Urban, Vol. III, Lublin–Warsaw 2022, p. 9.

¹³ D. Irving, *Wypadek. Śmierć generała Sikorskiego*, Pruszków 2000; T.A. Kisielewski, *Zamach. Tropem zabójców generała Sikorskiego*, Poznań 2005, idem, *Zabójcy. Widma wychodzą z cienia*, Poznań 2006; idem, *Gibraltar i Katyń. Co kryją archiwa rosyjskie i brytyjskie*, Poznań 2015; D. Baliszewski, *Gibraltar. Tajemnica Sikorskiego*, Warszawa 2017; see J. Iranek-Osmecki, *Edward Szarkiewicz*, [in:] K. Iranek-Osmecki, *Powołanie i przeznaczenie. Wspomnienia oficera Komendy Głównej AK*, Warsaw 2004, p. 590–592.

¹⁴ J. Ziebrok, *Studiów katastrofy Liberatora AL523. Gibraltar 1943*, Warsaw 2012; see F. Grabowski, *Liberator AL 523. Analiza techniczna katastrofy gibraltarskiej*, Warsaw 2017.

¹⁵ *Journal of Law Statutes* 1942, no. 7, part II, p. 52.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ PISM. Ci-n-C's Secretariat, ref. A.XII.1/47, Personnel structure of the C-in-C's and Minister of National Defence's Secretariat 1942, sheet 28; *ibid.*, Personnel structure of the C-in-C's and Minister of National Defence's Secretariat from 1.I.1943 to 23.I.1943, sheet.35; *ibid.*, Personnel structure of the C-in-C's and Minister of National Defence's Secretariat from 23 I 1943 to 31 V 1943, sheet 45; *ibid.*, Personnel structure of the C-in-C's and Minister of National Defence's Secretariat from 1 VI 1943 to 1 VIII 1943 sheet 50.

often underlined, the typescript version of the war diary prepared by Regina Oppman was the inspiration and model for the project of which this publication is the end effect and was used here as one of the source texts.¹⁸

The published material is held in the War diary of the Commander-in-Chief sub-archival grouping, being a part of the General Władysław Sikorski Papers (ref. KOL.1) in the Archives of the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London. The period under review is covered by files DCNW 57 (1 August–3rd December 1942), file DCNW 58 (1st January–22nd May 1943) and file DCNW 59 (1st January–24th May 1943). File DCNW 59 is a draft of file DCNW 58. The diaries were written up in black, navy blue and green ink as well as in pencil, whilst crossings out were done in red crayon. As mentioned previously, the basis of this publication is the typescript prepared by Regina Oppman, covering the period 1st August 1942 to 5th July 1943, kept in twelve files numbered files DCNW 37-DCNW 48. For the period 25th May to 5th July 1943 Regina Oppman's typescript is the only source of information regarding Gen. Sikorski's activities.

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¹⁸ More on this see: J. Rabiński, *Wstęp* [in:] *Dziennik Czynności Naczelnego Wodza gen. Władysława Sikorskiego*, ed. J. Rabiński, assist. eds. J. Rabiński, E. Rzczkowska, J. Kowalska, Vol. I, Lublin 2016, p. 21–24; idem, *Wstęp* [in:] *Dziennik czynności Naczelnego Wodza gen. Władysława Sikorskiego*, ed. J. Rabiński, assist. eds.: J. Rabiński, J. Kowalska, E. Rzczkowska, Vol. II, Lublin 2017, p. 12.