

## THE WAR DIARY OF THE SUPREME COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF POLISH ARMED FORCES, GENERAL WŁADYSŁAW SIKORSKI

The increasing time distance from the end of the Second World War goes hand in hand with the growing number of published historical source materials dealing with the period. The archival source material for the period is vast and many fundamental documentary sources still await publication. Among these is the material presented in this publication. Namely, the daily calendar of business of the most prominent Polish wartime politician and soldier, General Władysław Sikorski (1881–1943). Between 1939 and 1943 he held the key posts of Prime Minister and Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces, playing a pivotal role in the political and military activities of those years and in such specific conditions – those of a leader in exile of a country that was actively participating in the war from its very first day. This period brought fundamental decisions for Poland and the Poles. Decisions which are reflected to this day not only as far as the country's borders are concerned, its political set up, economy and social relations, but also the mentality of its citizens and emotional attitude to the events which took place during the war. All these factors mean that the documentation illustrating General Sikorski's wartime activities have a special value as primary source material.

Until the 18th century supreme military command was vested in the monarch. From then on it devolved to a professional soldier. Regulating his position and powers became essential when Poland regained her independence after 123 years of being partitioned between Russia, Prussia/Germany and Austria. Between 1918 and 1922 the Supreme Commander-in-Chief was Marshal Józef Piłsudski<sup>1</sup> the founder of the Legions of the 1st World War and as well as having a singular authority among his fellow Poles.

The March 1921 Constitution provided for supreme military over the armed forces vested in the President of the Republic who however could not exercise supreme command during wartime. In 1926 the post of Inspector General of the Armed Forces was created, a post which in the event of war became that of Supreme Commander-in-Chief. His responsibilities included the preparation of the army and the state for war, including control over the

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<sup>1</sup> Józef Piłsudski (1867–1935) – Marshal of Poland. Statesman and soldier. 1914–1916: Officer commanding 1st Brigade of the Polish Legions at the side of the Austrians. 1918–1922: Head of State. 1919–1920: victorious Supreme Commander-in-Chief during the Polish-Bolshevik War. Retired in 1923. Came to power through the May 1926 coup d'état. 1926–1935: Inspector General of the Armed Forces and Minister of Military Affairs. He twice held the premiership briefly in 1928 and 1930.

planning of mobilisation and operational plans. The General Staff and the individual army inspectors (army commanders in the event of war) were subordinated to the Inspector General.

In accordance with the April 1935 Constitution the President of the Republic remained supreme head of the armed forces and to his competence belonged the nomination and removal of the Inspector General of the Armed Forces and Supreme Commander-in-Chief. In the event of the nomination of a Supreme Commander-in-Chief the control of the armed forces were transferred to him and he became responsible to the head of state for his activities.

The presidential decree of 9th May 1936 provided the precise scope of the responsibilities and prerogatives of the Inspector General. These included: presenting the Government with requirements regarding the defence of the state, creating mobilisation and operational plans, overseeing military training, and putting forward candidates for senior command posts. His command structures were the Inspectorate General of the Armed Forces and the General Staff.

Following the German invasion of Poland on 1st September 1939 the Polish President issued a decree concerning the control of the armed forces in a time of war. These were expanded and made more precise giving the Supreme Commander-in-Chief extensive powers including formulating demands of the Government concerning all matters relating to the defence of the state, including changes to administrative and local government appointees. That same day President Ignacy Mościcki appointed Marshal Edward Śmigły-Rydz<sup>2</sup>, erstwhile Inspector General of the Armed Forces as Supreme Commander-in-Chief. He held this post until 7th November 1939, when the new President, Władysław Raczkiewicz<sup>3</sup> appointed Lt-General Władysław Sikorski as the new Supreme Commander-in-Chief.

The importance of this publication is also shown by the person of the main protagonist, namely General Władysław Eugeniusz Sikorski. He was born in 1881 in Tuszów Narodowy in southern Poland then a part of the Austrian partition. Between 1902 and 1908 he studied engineering at the Lwów Polytechnic, gaining his degree as a chartered hydro engineer. Earlier he had begun to be politically active, having joined the National-Democratic Association of Polish Youth whilst still at secondary school. During his student days he had transferred to the Association of the Rebirth of Poland an organisation with socialist leanings. During his compulsory service in the Austrian Army (1904–1905) he discovered his military interests. He subsequently began to lecture army tactics to socialist members of the „militia circles”. His listeners included future Polish generals, such as: Józef Piłsudski, Marian Kukiel<sup>4</sup> and Kazimierz Sosnkowski<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Edward Śmigły-Rydz (1886–1941) – Marshal of Poland. Soldier and politician. 1917–1918: Commandant of the Polish Military Organisation an underground formation fighting for Polish independence. 1919–1920: during the Polish Bolshevik War he was a divisional and an army commander. 1935–1939: Inspector General of the Armed Forces. 1st September 1939–7th November 1939: Supreme Commander-in-Chief. On 18th September 1939 crossed into Romania where he was interned.

<sup>3</sup> Władysław Raczkiewicz (1885–1947) – lawyer and politician. Actively involved in the struggle for independence. He held the portfolio of Minister of the Interior in several governments. 1930–1935: Marshal (Speaker) of the Senate (Upper House of Parliament). From 1934 Chairman of the Association of Poles Abroad. 30th September 1939–6th June 1947: President of the Republic of Poland.

<sup>4</sup> Marian Kukiel (1885–1973) – Lieutenant-General. Soldier and historian. Active in the struggle for independence. During the Polish-Bolshevik War commanded an infantry brigade. 1925–1926: Chief of the Military Historical Bureau. After 1926 on the retired list. Director of the Czartoryski Museum in Cracow. After 1939 one of General Sikorski's closest colleagues. 1939–1940: Deputy Minister of Military Affairs. 1940–1942: GOC Polish I Army Corps in Scotland. 1942–1949: Minister of National Defence. After the war, one of the founders and later Chairman of the General Sikorski Historical Institute in London, since 1964 The Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum.

<sup>5</sup> Kazimierz Sosnkowski (1885–1969) – General. Active, in the struggle for Poland's independence. He was Chief of Staff to Józef Piłsudski and one of his closest collaborators. 1920: GOC Reserve Army. 1920–1923: Minister

During the first months of the First World War Sikorski co-operated closely with Józef Piłsudski being Chief of the Military Department of the Supreme National Committee and Commandant of the Officers School in Kraków. In 1915 the paths of the two men diverged. Sikorski believed that the development and expansion of a Polish army could only take place at the side of Austro-Hungary. Piłsudski on the other hand believed in greater flexibility, adjusting his political approach to the changing international situation.

In 1918 Sikorski was Chief of Staff of Polish Forces in Galicia and in Silesia. He participated in the Polish-Bolshevik War of 1919–1920 commanding the 9th Infantry Division. Promoted major-general on 1 April 1920 during the summer counter-offensive he was GOC 5 Army which played a central role in the Polish victory in the Battle for Warsaw. By tying down Soviet forces he provided time for the main counteroffensive from the Wieprz river. From the end of August 1920 he was GOC 3 Army. On 28th February 1921 he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-general. Between April 1921 and December 1922 General Sikorski held the post of Chief of the General Staff.

On the assassination of Professor Gabriel Narutowicz<sup>6</sup>, the first elected President of the Republic of Poland on 16th December 1922, General Sikorski was appointed Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior, posts he held until May 1923. During his few months of tenure he managed to calm the political atmosphere. His main success in foreign policy was to see through the recognition of Poland's eastern border by the Conference of Ambassadors in March 1923. He attached much importance to the question of national minorities trying to activate their pro-Polish leaders.

On returning to active military service General Sikorski held the post of Inspector General of Infantry (1923–1924), Minister of Military Affairs (1924–1925), GOC Lwów Military District (1925–1928). It was at this last posting that the May 1926 coup d'état caught him. Sikorski took a waiting position, not wanting to commit himself to either side. This and past differences between him and Marshal Piłsudski, led to General Sikorski being not so much retired, but put at the disposal of the Minister of Military Affairs without a posting. Still under military jurisdiction he was effectively without a position.

During the period 1928–1932 General Sikorski spent most of his time abroad, mainly in France and Switzerland. He spent much of this time writing. His first book was a history of his role in the Battle of Warsaw in 1920 (*On the Vistula and the Wkra. A study of the Polish-Russian War of 1920*<sup>7</sup>). This was a combination of his personal memoirs and an analytical study of the battle of the 5 Army. In his next book (*Poland and France in the past and in the present*<sup>8</sup>) Sikorski analysed Poland's geo-politics, supporting Poland's alliance with France. His book on the future war, *The future war – its possibilities, character and related problems*

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of Military Affairs. 1937–1939: an Army Inspector in eastern Poland. 1939: GOC Southern Front. 1939: escaped via Hungary to France. 1939–1941: Commandant-in-Chief of the underground Union of Armed Struggle. 8 July 1943–30 September 1944: Supreme Commander-in-Chief.

<sup>6</sup> Gabriel Narutowicz (1865–1922) – academic and politician. Until 1920 he was professor of Chemistry at the Zurich Polytechnic, when he returned to Poland. 1920–1922: Minister of Public Works. 1922: Minister of Foreign Affairs. 11th–16th December 1922: President of the Republic of Poland. Assassinated at the Zachęta Art Gallery.

<sup>7</sup> W. Sikorski, *Nad Wisła i Wkrą – studium z polsko-rosyjskiej wojny 1920 roku*, Lwów-Warszawa-Kraków 1928. The book was also published in a French translation with a foreword by Marshal Ferdinand Foch (W. Sikorski, *La campagne polono-russe de 1920*, Paris 1928).

<sup>8</sup> W. Sikorski, *Polska i Francja w przeszłości i w dobie współczesnej*, Lwów 1931. A French translation was published under the title *Le problème de la paix. Le jeu des forces politiques en Europe Orientale et l'alliance franco-polonaise*, Paris 1931.

of the country's defence<sup>9</sup>, had the greatest resonance amongst military theorists of the world. In it General Sikorski accurately predicted the importance of manoeuvre as the main characteristic of a coming conflict. A main theme running through his theoretical works was the conviction that Poland's greatest threat lay from Germany.

General Sikorski's period in France gave him the opportunity of making new as well as strengthening existing ties with eminent French politicians and soldiers including Marshals Ferdinand Foch and Philippe Pétain as well as generals Maxime Weygand, Henri Gouraud, Henri Niessel. Among the politicians were the former President, Raymond Poincaré and the former Prime Minister Paul Painlevé.

However what is most important for these deliberations, is that for General Sikorski, the thirties were a period of building a political grouping in Poland, which came to be known in history as the Front Morges. Sikorski has been described as the *spiritus movens* of this initiative which aimed to be an understanding of various authorities standing above politics, who were disenchanted with the ruling *Sanacja* authorities. It was not without reason that the Front Morges began its activities in 1936, when following the death of Marshal Piłsudski, his followers began to divide into rival factions, which led to a weakening of the ruling camp. The standard bearer of the Front Morges was Ignacy Jan Paderewski<sup>10</sup>, with whom Sikorski gradually became close. Since 1928 they had regularly corresponded. In his letters General Sikorski had kept Paderewski then living in Switzerland, abreast of details of the political and social situation in Poland. Both were convinced of the need for fundamental reforms in the political and social life of the country. The roads to this could be by consolidating the opposition towards the *Sanacja* regime. The creators of the Morges Front agreed that the overriding demand be the removal of the Piłsudski-ites from power and creating a government of national unity from among the opposition. When forming his government in France in 1939 General Sikorski was to hark back to this theme.

A conspiratorial executive centre was set up to realise the aims of the Front Morges. This centre was called the Union of the Re-birth of Poland. It included Paderewski, Sikorski, General Józef Haller<sup>11</sup> and Ryszard Świątochowski<sup>12</sup>. It's Kraków branch was headed by General Marian Kukiel, whilst at the head of the Poznań branch stood Professor Antoni Jurasz<sup>13</sup>. The main repre-

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<sup>9</sup> W. Sikorski, *Przyszła wojna – jej możliwości i charakter oraz związane z nim zagadnienia obrony kraju*, Warszawa 1934. The French edition was entitled *La guerre moderne. Son caractère ses problèmes*, Paris 1935 (with a foreword by Marshal Philippe Pétain). The Russian edition was called *Будущая война. Ее возможности, характер и связанные с ними проблемы обороны страны*, Moscow 1936. The American edition came out as *Modern Warfare*, Washington 1943 (with a foreword by Gen. George C. Marshall).

<sup>10</sup> Ignacy Jan Paderewski (1860–1941) – pianist, composer and politician. 1919: Prime Minister also holding the portfolio of Foreign Affairs as Poland's main delegate to the Peace Conference in Paris. 1940–1941: Chairman of the Polish National Council (mini parliament in exile).

<sup>11</sup> Józef Władysław Haller de Hallenburg (1873–1960) – General and politician. During the First World War commander of the II Brigade of the Polish Legions (1916–1918), then of the II Corps (1918) and the Polish Army in France (1918–1919). 1920: GOC Northern Front. 1922–1923: deputy to the Sejm (Lower House of Parliament). 1936: co-founder of the Front Morges. 1939–1941: Minister without Portfolio. 1941–1943: with the title of minister he headed the Office for Education and Schools.

<sup>12</sup> Ryszard Świątochowski (1882–1941) – publicist, politician and inventor. During the occupation he founded the Central Committee of Organisations for Independence and the Political Bureau. Arrested he was murdered in the German concentration camp at Auschwitz.

<sup>13</sup> Antoni Tomasz Aleksander Jurasz (1882–1961) – medical doctor. 1920–1939: Professor of Medicine at the University of Poznań. During the Second World War instrumental in setting up the Polish Faculty of Medicine at the University of Edinburgh and was its first dean.

sentatives of the Front in the Polish capital included Professor Stefan Glaser<sup>14</sup> and Rev. Zygmunt Kaczyński<sup>15</sup>. Besides those named the following also belonged to the Front Morges: Professor Stanisław Kot<sup>16</sup>, Karol Popiel<sup>17</sup>, Col. Izydor Modelski<sup>18</sup>, Stanisław Mikołajczyk<sup>19</sup> and Professor Stanisław Stroński<sup>20</sup>. Accommodation with Sikorski was sought by some politicians of the *Sanacja* such as August Zaleski<sup>21</sup> and representatives of the business and financial world including Henryk Strasburger<sup>22</sup> and Alfred Falter<sup>23</sup>. The General managed to draw together politicians of various persuasions as well as non party activists. They formed a cadre base which he took advantage of when he was prime minister. It should be remembered that whilst the published material here

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<sup>14</sup> Stefan Antoni Glaser (1895–1984) – lawyer. 1920–1924: lecturer at the University of Lublin and from 1924 professor of law at the Stefan Batory University of Wilno. Removed from his chair in 1934, for protesting against the court cases faced by the opposition. 1939–1941: Director of one of the departments of the Ministry of Justice. 1941–1945: Minister Plenipotentiary to the Belgian Government in Exile and from 1945 in Brussels (also accredited to Luxembourg). 1944: Dean of the Polish Faculty of Law at the University of Oxford.

<sup>15</sup> Mons. Zygmunt Kaczyński (1894–1953) – Roman Catholic prelate, Christian Democratic politician. 1919–1927: deputy to the Sejm. 1929–1929: Director of the Polish Institute of Catholic Action. 1942–1943: member of the Polish National Council. 1943–1944: Minister of Religious Affairs and Education. Returned to Poland in 1945 where he was a parish priest in Warsaw. Arrested by the communist police in 1949 he died in prison.

<sup>16</sup> Stanisław Kot (1885–1975) – historian and politician. 1920–1934: Professor at the Jagiellonian University of Kraków. In 1933 he was dismissed from his post for his public opposition to the ruling government. Friend and confidant of General Sikorski. 1940–1941: Minister of Internal Affairs. 1941–1942: Ambassador to the USSR. 1942–1943: Government Delegate in the Middle East. 1943–1944: Minister of Information and Documentation. In 1945 he returned to Poland and became ambassador for the Warsaw regime in Rome (1945–1947). From 1947 again in exile.

<sup>17</sup> Karol Popiel (1887–1977) – politician. 1922–1926: deputy to the Sejm. 1941–1943: Minister without Portfolio and Head of the Bureau for Administrative Reconstruction. 1943–1944: Minister for the (post war) Reconstruction of Public Administration. In 1945 returned to Poland where he was active in opposition politics, but fled two years later into exile.

<sup>18</sup> Izydor Modelski (1888–1862) – soldier and politician. During the 1926 coup came out against Marshal Piłsudski. From 1939 in exile. As a Major General was I Deputy Minister of Military Affairs (1939), then II Deputy Minister of Military Affairs (1939–1940). 1942–1944: Undersecretary of State in the Ministry of National Defence. In 1945 joined the communist Polish Army and promoted Lieutenant-General. 1945–1946: Chief of the Polish (Warsaw) Military Mission in London. 1946–1948: Military Attaché for the Warsaw regime in Washington. In 1948 he sought and obtained political asylum in the USA.

<sup>19</sup> Stanisław Mikołajczyk (1901–1966) – politician. 1930–1935: deputy to the Sejm as a representative of the Agrarian Party. 1940–1941: Deputy Chairman of the Polish National Council (though in effect he was acting Chairman). 1941–1943: Minister of Internal Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister. 14 July 1943–24 November 1944: Prime Minister. In 1945 he returned to Poland and became Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture and Agricultural Reform in the communist dominated Provisional Government of National Unity. 1945–1947: Deputy Chairman and then Chairman of the of the Polish Agrarian Party in opposition to the communist authorities. Fled Poland in 1947 and settled in the USA.

<sup>20</sup> Stanisław Stroński (1882–1955) – Professor of French Philology, politician and publicist. He held a chair at the Jagiellonian University of Kraków and from 1927 at the Catholic University of Lublin. 1st October 1939–17th June 1940: Deputy Prime Minister. 1940–1943: Minister of Information and Documentation. 1945–1951: Chairman of the Executive Committee of the General Sikorski Historical Institute in London.

<sup>21</sup> August Zaleski (1883–1972) – diplomat and politician. 1919–1921: delegate then Minister in Athens. 1922–1926: Minister in Rome. 1926–1932 and 1939–1941: Minister of Foreign Affairs. 1941–1947: Head of the Civil Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland. 1947–1972: President of the Republic of Poland (in exile).

<sup>22</sup> Henryk Leon Strasburger (1887–1951) – lawyer, economist, politician and diplomat. 1918, 1921–1923: director of the Ministry of Industry and Trade. 1924–1932: Polish Commissioner General in the Free City of Danzig. 1939–1942: Minister of Finance and Minister of Industry and Trade. 1945–1946: ambassador of the Warsaw regime in London.

<sup>23</sup> Alfred Falter (1880–1954) – industrialist. 1939–1940: Undersecretary of State in the Ministry of Finance.

is the business diary of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief it is also that of the Polish Prime Minister, a position held by Sikorski already from 30th September 1939.

The documentation of the daily activities of persons holding important public positions was and is often practiced. In the case of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief the making of these notes rested with his adjutant's office. Many individuals wrote the notes which were augmented and corrected. As a result notes for one day would be written by several persons. The notes were written by hand in notebooks and desk diaries. These manuscripts form the basis for General Sikorski's war diary. For the purpose of this publication the text prepared by Regina Oppman, an archivist and historian who during the war was a civilian employee of the General Staff and Ministry of National Defence is also regarded as an original source. According to her biographer, General Sikorski's war diary was a work "which was to be the work of her life. In 47 monthly files she created the backbone source material for all of General Sikorski's biographers and for all interested in Poland's wartime fate. For many historians the War Diary of the Commander-in-Chief became and remains the starting point in beginning archival research"<sup>24</sup>. The editors of this publication regard themselves as the continuers and producers, albeit in a changed format, of Regina Oppman's unique undertaking.

The reader of this diary will be able to follow General Sikorski's efforts to be given an army appointment in September 1939, discern his perceptions of the unfolding events, understand the decisions he took including political ones.

During the „French” period (1939–1940), dealt with in this volume, General Sikorski's main effort was to rebuild the Polish Army in France and Great Britain. He took command of Polish Forces in France on 28th September 1939 and six weeks later on 7th November was appointed Supreme Commander-in-Chief. In the difficult conditions of exile he re-established the command structures and concentrated on obtaining recruits to the Polish Army.

The War Diary of the Commander-in-Chief is also a record of political events. One can trace the efforts to nominate appropriate candidates for the most important postings, the thought process in the conceptual creation of a government of national unity, and the formation of the principle directions of the actions undertaken. It is also a source of information concerning the evolution in the ideas behind setting up of the National Council of the Republic of Poland, its composition, General Sikorski's relations with individual politicians and the process of the formation of the major political statements made by the Prime Minister and his ministers.

On the pages of the first volume the reader will also find a record of the first serious political crisis to effect the government since its creation. It was caused by the fall of France in June 1940 and the necessity of rebuilding Poland's political and military structures in Great Britain. General Sikorski was blamed for mistakes made during the evacuation of Polish soldiers from France, the misuse of his powers (especially in the context of his declarations concerning Polish-Soviet relations), and the loss of the gold of the Bank of Poland. The culmination of the crises took place on 18th July 1940 when President Raczkiewicz dismissed Sikorski from the post of Prime Minister. After a day of fruitless attempts to form a coalition government by August Zaleski, President Raczkiewicz re-appointed Sikorski as Prime Minister. On the one hand the crisis strengthened General Sikorski's position – it showed there was no other serious candidate for the post who would be able to obtain the support of

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<sup>24</sup> A. Suchcitz, *Regina Oppmanowa – pierwsza dama polskiej archiwistyki na obczyźnie (Regina Oppman – first lady of the Polish archival service in exile)*, „Tydzień Polski” (Polish “Weekly”) 23 October 2004, p.10.

the parties forming the erstwhile coalition. Unequivocal signals of support for Sikorski also came unofficially from leading British political circles. On the other hand – there appeared strong though until now suppressed voices criticising the Supreme Commander-in-Chief and premier. They expressed the attitude of a part of the exiled community, which grew with the passage of time.

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