

**Recipients ('Cavaliers') of the VIRTUTI MILITARI cross 1792 – 1945
Biographical Register**

Koszalin, 25.08.1994

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To:
Mr. Henryk Cygielski

We hereby acknowledge with thanks receipt of your letter regarding the above Register.

Would you please supply information as follows:

- 1.Names/surname, and military rank
- 2.Precise date and place of birth
- 3.Name and occupation of father, and mother's maiden name (and occupation if appropriate)
- 4.Accurate life-sketch until 1939
- 5.Accurate life-sketch from 1939 to present day
- 6.Participation in the freedom effort and military activity (detailed)
- 7.Circumstances in which the Cross was awarded, and Cross number
- 8.Precise date and place of death, place of burial, commemorative plaques, statues, roads named in memory, etc, relating to the deceased (concerns those deceased only)
- 9.Other awards/distinctions (Polish and foreign)
- 10.Wife (husband) – name, occupation, date of marriage
- 11.Children - names, dates of birth, occupations
- 12.List of basic sources and publications about the hero

Of course any photographs and documents received will be returned after copying.

Editorial Office

Recipients of Virtuti Militari Cross 1792-1945 Biographical Register

CYGIELSKI, Henryk, Major, British Army Staff College, graduated Staff Captain in 1946.

Graduated in Chemistry following chemical studies at Beirut University (of St. Joseph), Lebanon, then at Imperial College, University of London where he gained a Bachelor of Science (B.Sc. special studies) in 1951.

A year's study of Business and Economics at the American University in Beirut, Lebanon.

Member of Royal Society of Medicine (FRSM), Member Drug Information Association (FDIA) of the USA.

Awarded the Winthrop Order of Merit (Officer Class) in 1977 in London.

Director of Sterling-Winthrop (Continental) Ltd.

Following junior school in Siedlce, he completed his studies at the secondary school in Koluszki and obtained a certificate of general education in 1937.

Following a year at Officer School (for reservists) at Skierniewice he was accepted to Infantry Officer School at Komorowo, which he completed and obtained promotion in 1939.

On the day of the outbreak of WW2 he was assigned to the 5th Legion in Wilno, where he reported on 3 Sept. 1939. There he organised a two week officer course for eight Government officials from various ministries in Warsaw after their evacuation to Wilno. These were gilded youth/young people of wealth and privilege (*złotej młodzieży*) attached to the Government, including several well-known nationally. One of them, Zbigniew Racieski, was later a correspondent for Radio Free Europe.

After the fall of Poland towards the end of September 1939, together with the 2nd detachment of the 5th Infantry Division "Legious", he was evacuated to Lithuania where he was interned until the spring of 1940. After the occupation of Lithuania by the SSSR, and the takeover of the camps by the Red Army, he was transferred through several camps near Moscow. Then he was at Kozielsko from where groups of senior officers were sent in unknown directions. As it turned out these groups were sent to Katyn with the aim of liquidating Polish intelligentsia, which was an integral part of the plans to change the structure of society in the eastern areas of occupied Poland.

From the camp at Juchnowo, to which by some miracle he was sent together with a group of other young officers, after night-time interrogations by the NKVD (Narodny Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, a forerunner of the KGB) he was sentenced to 5 years labour in soviet camps 'for wearing the uniform of the Polish Army', and was transferred by rail, via Murmansk, and then by ship to the peninsula of Kola. There they were building a military airfield, and the first

stages of work involved the digging of irrigation ditches in the tundra. Among others there were two colleagues, Janek Romaszko and Michael Ladacki.

That was the Spring of 1940. In the camp, guarded by Ukrainians, life was very difficult, hard physical work and food allowance determined by the number of metres of ditch achieved. There were seven kettles (urns); the first contained almost just water – while the seventh contained a modicum of something more ‘solid’. A quick calculation of the balance between energy expended digging and nutrition gained from the ‘food’ showed that there was no benefit in working. The result was that few people dug the ditches. He was there till the summer of 1940 when a sudden announcement was made that the Poles were the friends of Stalin, and that there was an amnesty. They even gave the prisoners something to drink and some Lwow sausage (no one could explain how that Lwow sausage got to the Kola peninsula).

After the amnesty, still under guard, they all were loaded on to a ship at the small port on the river Ponoï, and they sailed to Arkhangelsk. The trip was unpleasant. The rumour was that the ship, in fact the whole convoy, was stopped by a German submarine, but wasn’t torpedoed after the ‘cargo’ was identified as being ‘Poles’. How much of this is true no one knows. In Arkhangelsk nothing was prepared for them except for wooden barracks. There was no food, and after many problems, including a threat to burn down the camp, they were loaded on to a cargo train, fifty to a wagon, and set off south to a camp about 500Km east of Moscow. There, official confirmation was made of the amnesty.

Together with Janek Romaszko he escaped from that camp, and for two weeks tasted freedom, travelling from village to village. He spoke good Russian. In the end they started drawing the attention of the militia, so rather than face a Russian jail they decided to return to their original camp. And so they did. There, their absence was ‘covered’ by their colleagues. Soon afterwards they travelled by rail to the Polish army at Taciszczewo, where the 5th Infantry Division was being formed. From there they were transported to Buzuluk, and then to Totskoye. This was winter 1941/42.

That winter the temperature fell to –50 deg. C, and they slept under canvas. He was the ‘unloading officer’ at Totskoye station, where shipments of equipment from England, via Murmansk, were being received. Cases of frostbite were an everyday occurrence.

The service assignment to the 6th Infantry Division (6 Dywizja Piechoty) lasted about a month and then after enthusiastically volunteering for the Special Parachute Battalion (Battalion S), he left for Jangi-Julu, along with the Command of the Polish Army in the USSR. After reporting to Captain Kiedacz, in charge of Battalion S, he was assigned as deputy to Lt. Tadeusz Zielinski, commander of 1st Company.

The next 6 months were spent on organizing and everyday training for the role of paratroopers, with special exercises. Battalion S was at that time the only unit which had full fighting equipment, including live ammunition.

In August 1942 came the evacuation of Battalion S, along with the Polish Army, from the USSR to the Middle East. A few days before the transport he suffered an injured knee while rescuing a drowning soldier and was sent to hospital, and then further

evacuation through Krasnowodzk to hospital in Teheran, in Persia. Here, an English doctor planned to amputate the leg in order to save the knee and his life. After refusing permission for the operation, a visiting Polish medic from the PCK hospital in Teheran suggested transfer to the PCK hospital to continue treatment. The knee recovered slowly and amputation was no longer a necessity. Two months later he left the hospital and reported in Quizil-Ribat in Iraq to Battalion S, which in the meantime was renamed first as the 15th Armoured Cavalry Regiment, and later as the 15th Poznan Lancer Regiment.

After promotion to the rank of Lieutenant, and tedious work to motorize the regiment, which became the reconnaissance regiment of the 5th Kresowa Infantry Division, in September 1942 he was transferred by road 920 miles to Mughazi Camp near Gaza, as Deputy Commander of the 1st squadron. The route went through Oitawa – Baghdad – Vadi Mahamadi – Rutha – H 4 – Mafrag – Kefara – Yonado. Thus the Iraq desert was left behind, where the regiment changed from a parachute regiment to a detachment of armoured cavalry using armoured cars Staghound and Fox, and caterpillar vehicles for the transport of machine guns and assault infantry. Before leaving Iraq he spent two months in Kirkuk defending an oil refinery, together with a unit of RAF fighter planes (Royal Air Force).

At this time Gaza was in Palestine under English administration. Shortly after arrival in Palestine the 1st squadron was sent for high altitude training in Lebanon, in the mountain area along the border region between the Lebanon and Syria. The road route led through Haifa – Beirut – Damascus. Christmas 1942 was spent in those mountains. The whole of 1943 the regiment spent on manoeuvres in Palestine training for battle assignments and spent the next Christmas in Egypt, in Quassassin, near the town of Ismailia, on the Suez Canal.

In December 1943 part of the 2nd Corps had already been transferred to Italy, within the triangular region Taranto – Mottola – Barletta. They landed, with the squadron, in Taranto in February 1944. Taking part in the transport were the Polish ships 'Batory' and 'Pulaski' and also ORP (warship of the Republic of Poland) 'Krakus' and 'Slazak' formed part of the convoy protecting the transport fleet.

The 1st squadron, with Captain Tadeusz Zielinski in charge with Henryk Cygielski as deputy, comprised 7 'Staghounds' – a heavily armoured car with an armoured tower and a 37mm calibre anti-tank gun, two Browning .303 machine guns, plus one machine gun mounted inside for defence from aerial attack. The total weight of the car was 14 tons. The armoured 'Fox' car was a medium, 7-ton armoured vehicle from Canada, armed with 1 Browning .303 machine gun and 2 other Browning machine guns. In addition the squadron had 10 'Fox' vehicles, plus 21 caterpillar carriers, and 4 armoured cars of the 'White' type for the assault platoon, and 1 field ambulance vehicle.

During the march of the squadron to Civitanova, and then to the section of battlefield on the river Sangro, an eruption of Vesuvius, adjacent to Naples, covered all the vehicles with a layer of dust. On the 5th of April 1944 the squadron took over the battle zone Capracotta, relieving the 6th unit of the 2nd brigade of Carpathian Rifles. The squadron was hurried into this action and the equipment was left in Civitanova.

At that time he was sent to the English school for instructors in anti-mine training, after completion of which he returned to the squadron, and organised courses in de-arming mines, for the squadron and regiment.

After relief from the frontline near Capracotta, he went with the squadron to Route 6: Naples – Monte Cassino, as a base for further battles for Monte Cassino. The next station was Viticuso and the gorge of Inferno, immediately before transfer to the Castellone hill near Monte Cassino.

He took part in the whole of the battle for Monte Cassino from the 11th to the 18th May 1944 as the leader of the attack squadron of the 1st Regiment of Poznan Lancers under the command of Major Smrokowski, the commander of the Polish ‘COMMANDO’ – Polish commandos who arrived specially from England to take part in the battle for Monte Cassino.

For his fighting activity at San Angelo, in charge of the assigned attack squadron from the 15th Lancers, under the overall command of Major Smrokowski, and at his instigation, he was awarded the Virtuti Militari Cross, 5th Class, Cross no. 8662. The award was made by Gen. Sosnkowski, overall Commander of the Polish Forces, on 31 July 1944, at the celebrations at Ancona, Italy.

A detailed account of the combat action of the Commando and Lancer group on Sant Angelo during the battle for Monte Cassino, under the command of Major Smrokowski and Lt. Cygielski is reprinted below in its entirety from pages 297-308 of the book ‘The history of the 15th Regiment of Poznan Lancers, 1918-1962’, published in London, England, in 1962, through the efforts of the Association of Poznan Lancers.

P 297: The regiment during the second offensive on Monte Cassino

It is appropriate to describe separately the time between 16th and 19th May 1944, so far as the activities are concerned, of the attack squadron under Lt. Cygielski as detached from the main Regiment, and the Regiment’s own activities in the defence region.

The command from the Corps Commander for the second offensive set out goals for the divisions which were similar to those for the first offensive, but detailed them in terms of terrain. The Commander recognised that the key objective of the offensive by the Corps was the Sant Angelo ridge – (hill) 575, assigned to the 5th KDP. The start of the attack was set for 7.00 on 17th May. Up to that point the units were to take up start positions and make final arrangements.

To join the 5th Kresowa Infantry Division (5th KDP) - and it should be remembered that the state of their infantry battalions was significantly depleted not only in the first attack but in subsequent fighting from the positions held following withdrawal from those attained during that first attack – was allocated the Commando Company under Major Smrokowski.

This was a valiant and hardened unit. Trained to undertake special assignments, to fight in difficult terrain and in small groupings of a few soldiers, it rightly belonged to the military elite, having earned this deserved reputation in Italy. The Commandos were renowned for their physical endurance and personal initiative. The Commander of the 5th KDP (Kresowa Infantry Division) decided to reinforce it with a hand-picked offence squadron from the 15th Regiment of Poznan Lancers. The Lancers' experience was inferior to that of the Commandos. Also they did not have the same training. Therefore in a sense they were distinguished by the act of great trust on the part of the Corps Commander who knew what a difficult task was in store.

The task of the grouping under Major Smrokowski was to strengthen the infantry offensive on hill 575, to hold back any counter-offensive by the enemy, but also to be ready for pursuit. The unit was lined up for the second wave, behind the 17th rifle regiment. The regiment was supposed to move to position by 06.00 on 17th May. The whole grouping, defined as a 'Commando' unit, was supposed to:

1. As a rearguard to the Corps Commander, move with the attacking infantry battalions 16th and 17th, and protect their left wing.
2. Support the efforts of the infantry attack battalions, and be ready to –
 - (a) hold attained target positions
 - (b) repel enemy counter offensives.
3. In the event of the infantry attack failing, lead from the front by example to uplift the units to renew their move forward.

The detailed report made at the end of the action (on 21st May), by the leader of the offense squadron, Lt. Cygielski, paints a detailed picture of the tremendous effort put in by the Lancers and Commandos. Before we cite its full content let us give some attention to the course of the battle by the 5th KDP for Sant Angelo, and after its conquest, further territorial objectives set for them. The 17th battalion met with particularly fierce fire from the German bunker garrisons, whose positions were well camouflaged and difficult to take. Even after the successful breach of the firing lines, fire from the bunkers and from Pizzo Corno caused huge losses, and literally pinned the battalion to the ground. Exceptional help to the attack was given by concentrated fire from Monte Castellone, among others the mortars of the 16th unit, attached under the command of Lieutenant Tabor to the 15th Lancers, and also the activity of patrols in the forefront of the defence area and a simulated attack on Pizzo Corno undertaken by the Carpathian Lancer regiment. Battalion 13 found itself in the same situation as battalion 17, having taken over from 17 a part of their position. The Commando unit fell into such strong fire from German artillery that as a result of losses it was withdrawn in order to regroup on the right wing of battalion 16 in the region of hill 706.

At 16.00 hrs a fresh offensive was launched by the deputy commander of the 5th KDP (Colonel Klemens Rudnicki) utilising battalions 13, 16 and 17, together with the Commando unit. Owing to personnel losses the combined strength of the attack force numbered little more than one full battalion. The offensive was preceded by heavy artillery bombardment. From 15.40 to 16.00 the airforce also joined in, bombarding enemy firing positions further afield in Villa Sta Luzia and Piedimonte. The offensive gained the top of "little Sant Angelo" at 17.00 and moved further over the ridge of Sant Angelo. However the Germans steadfastly held hill 601, making impossible the achievement of the main objective of the attack by 5th Division, ie. hill 575.

Despite unarguable success, the night from 17th to 18th May found the Division in a grave situation. In order to increase live combat numbers, the Division improvised a 2-Company half-battalion from the 5th Sapper Battalion, and 3 half-battalions from members of the supply column and those soldiers not directly involved in the fighting from the 5th anti-tank and 5th anti-aircraft battalions(*plot-Zgrupowanie*). The Commando unit spent the night restructuring themselves after the battle.

At 10.45 hrs the Commander of the division's offensive (Col. Rudnicki) formed two assault groups: the first comprised battalions 17, 18 and the newly formed half-battalions, the second the Commando unit. To the Commandos fell the aim of conquering hill 601, which was such a threat to the whole operation. They started the attack at 14.20 hrs and following a heavy battle of several hours in difficult mountainous terrain they occupied the north side of hill 601 at 17.45 hrs. However the conquered hill suffered violent German artillery bombardment. Simultaneously the German infantry started a counterattack. The desperate defence of the Commandos and Lancers was supported by the 16th unit Company and at 19.30 hrs the forces under Major Smrokowski gained control of the whole of the summit of hill 601.

The essential battle for Monte Cassino was complete. After losing Sant Angelo the Germans could not contemplate further defence. In the night of 18th to 19th May their remnants withdrew to Piedimonte. In the morning the Lancers of the 12th Podole Regiment entered the abandoned monastery.

Description of the activities of the assault squadron, 16-19 May 1944 (According to the report by Lt. Henryk Cygielski)

The assault squadron started out comprising 3 officers + 59 privates.
Commander Lt. Henryk Cygielski:

Lead group - 5 Lancers from 1st squadron + ambulance patrol (6 Lancers from 3rd squadron);

I assault platoon, three teams from 2nd squadron, sub-Lt. Jan Lalko and 24 Lancers;

II assault platoon, three teams from 4th squadron, sub-Lt. Ludwik Duda and 24 Lancers. In addition, sub-Lt. Zygmunt Warchulka as liaison officer for the assault squadron to the Company Commander, Major Smrokowski.

"In the evening of the 16th May 1944 I assembled the assault squadron in the area of the Regimental Command, and together with sub-Lt. Wachulka I reported to Major Smrokowski in Region A." (A fold in the terrain approx. 400 m. from the left wing of the 4th squadron.) The description continues of the assembly of the Commando unit mentioned above.

"The assault squadron brought a one day ration of dry food and full flasks of tea provision of food for subsequent days was the prerogative of the Commander of the commandos I received an order to march and take up a start position in the area where the commandos were expected. Marched out at 23.00 hrs. At the start position the squadron was to group itself to the left of the 1st Commando company and liaise with the 17th battalion of Rifles (in the front line).

Execution:

After my return to the squadron I appraised the platoon leaders of the general position, and gave out an order for readiness to march. I set the readiness time for 22.20 hrs - departure for 22.30 hrs, in the order me + lead group, sub-Lt. Lalko platoon, sub-Lt. Duda platoon.

(After arrival at the waiting region A) I joined the commando company. A few minutes later I moved out behind the 1st commando company for the assault start position. The squadron formed a column spread over an increased distance. About 24.00 hrs I reached the narrow entrance to the road leading on to the hill Widmo. This entrance was under fire from enemy artillery and mortars, thus Major Smrokowski changed the route of the march and we entered a deep and exceedingly steep gorge, through which we climbed to the top of a hill which in turn connected with the Castellone hill and 706. As we were sneaking along a path among dense bushes we were met from the front and from our left side with fire from an enemy machine gun. Each salvo of luminous missiles was followed immediately by enemy mortar fire on to the indicated area.

I reached the assault start position without loss. At that location I took up a position to the right of 1st Commando company, in accordance with the modified order, and I secured the whole (position) from the right by grouping the platoon of sub-Lt. Duda in 'staircase' formation to the left. Sub-Lt. Lalko was charged with keeping in liaison with the 1st Commando company. First, I sent a liaison patrol to the 17th Rifles battalion and established communication with them, and reported this to Mjr. Smrokowski. I received an order to report when the 17th unit left its start position.

At 07.00 on 17 May 1944, together with incessant artillery fire the 17th Rifle Battalion moved forward, which I reported immediately, receiving an order (liaison with Mjr.Smrokowski assured by sub-Lt.Wachulka and radio station no.18) to move forward to the front. The squadron structure/grouping as before (that is securing the whole force from the right side). At all times I maintained radio communication with the commander.

After approximately half an hour of marching I received an order to change the direction of attack, to the left on to hill 706. After the change of direction (as per order) I received an order to halt the squadron. I reported to Mjr. Smrokowski and obtained an order: the Commando unit would embark on to hill 706 and was to act in the direction of S.Angelo, on the right wing of the attacking infantry battalions. Grouping as follows: 1st Commando company at the head, I and the squadron as a second thrust, in a deep formation. We were to move along the north side of hill 706. To the left of us, on the hill Widmo a fierce battle was raging involving tanks and infantry, attacking the pillboxes. Enemy artillery fire was intensifying. I changed the squadron grouping: the platoon of sub-Lt. Duda in the front, with the aim of maintaining liaison with the 1st Commando company. Sub-Lt. Lalko's platoon behind sub-Lt. Duda's.

With the first platoon I attained hill 706. Enemy artillery fire was still intensifying, the shells exploding within the squadron grouping. A deluge of enemy artillery and mortar fire was directed on to hill 706. I ordered the platoons to move to the north side of hill 706 and to move forward at pace. There were a few wounded whom I evacuated on to the Castellone hill (ie. to the Regiment's position; previously one wounded lancer was evacuated to the 15th Rifles unit). Through the radio I received an order to stop and then to retreat the squadron to the Castellone hill. I pulled back the platoons, which bounded quickly to the rear, and after this manoeuvre I remained together with my lead group and became pinned to the ground through a sudden concentration of fire from artillery and heavy mortars. One of the heavy missiles explodes 5 metres from me, deafening me for a period of umpteen minutes. When the fire intensity subsided, after consultation with the commander, I withdrew with the lead group towards Castellone hill and reported to Mjr.Smrokowski.

There were 12 wounded, of these 3 heavily, resulting from the artillery fire I evacuated these to the regimental ambulance. 3 were lost, (*of which*) two rejoined later, and one was found to have been killed. I was allowed half an hour to eat my breakfast and tidy myself up, and then at 10.45 (17th May) I reported the squadron's readiness for further action.

The hill of S. Angelo, more accurately its summit was not conquered. Before evening I received two loaves of bread and 2 tins of beef for the squadron. For the night of 18th/19th May I received the same task as the night before. Half of the squadron was in readiness, half was resting. In the evening the Germans illuminated us again with flares, the rest of the night

passed peacefully. A patrol of the 17th Rifles battalion passed through our watch into the terrain ahead of us. In the night we received excellent provisions. The cold was felt acutely. At dawn the patrols ascertained that the enemy had withdrawn leaving behind many dead. The Sant Angelo hill had been occupied. In the morning hours of the 19th May 1944 I received an order to prepare the squadron for relief. At 09.00 hrs I was relieved with the squadron and departed in detachments for the designated meeting place near hill 706. There the general commander Mjr.Smrokowski read out an order concerning the capture of the Cassino hill, and thanked all the soldiers for tasks well carried out. Having de-reported from Mjr. Smrokowski I led the squadron to the site of main Regiment.

During the whole of the action all the Lancers performed splendidly, in some cases pushing towards the enemy with great courage. Losses Numbered five dead, sixteen wounded (of which Lancer Piotr Juszczyzyn died in hospital) and three suffering shell-shock.”

The report was signed by Lt. Cygielski, leader of the assault squadron. He supplemented it on 31st May with ‘Observations and Suggestions’ presented in the form of a report given to the Regiment Commander. Those ‘Observations and Suggestions’ by Lt. Cygielski contain a detailed analysis of shortcomings and failings both of the equipment and the organisation of the assault force, and have training implications, the more interesting because they concern a type of warfare to which a reconnaissance regiment using motorised equipment is not normally assigned. It is worth noting the observations concerning the ineffectiveness of radio-station no.18 in mountainous terrain and under enemy fire, and the statement that in order to ensure adequate provisioning and evacuation there is a need for at least the same number of personnel as are taking part in the attack activity.

The Lancers of the assault squadron were very proud of their cooperation with the Commandos, knowing that they proved their equals in combat although they did not have commensurate training and experience.

Interaction between the Commando regiment, later expanded to a full battalion within the 2nd (Polish) Corps, and the 15th regiment of Poznan Lancers developed into solid comradeship and exceptionally amicable relations. The first sign of this was the exchange of letters between the leaders of both units. Mjr. Smrokowski wrote to Mjr. Kiedacz on 20th May 1944:

“ It is with pleasure that I hasten to inform you about the result of the efforts of your officers and men who were assigned under my command during the battle for Colle S. Angelo between the 16th and 19th May 1944.

1. Lt. Cygielski, commander of the squadron, calm and composed, enjoying the full confidence of his soldiers during the whole effort, maintained excellent control over the unit and the situation

..... in very difficult conditions he maintained his squadron in constant readiness and vigilance. Through his initiative and feel for the situation he was very helpful to me as Commander during the whole of the action.

2. His officers were very energetic, very mindful of their people.
3. Non-commissioned officers and Lancers of the squadron Established a pleasant relationship with the soldiers of my Commando company Courageous and daring in action, sometimes downright reckless in keeping with the splendid tradition of the 15th Poznan Lancer regiment.

After reporting to the Corps Commander on the efforts of the squadron please recommend the commander of the squadron for an award ... also officers, non-commissioned officers and Lancers according to recommendation by the squadron commander, with whom I have personally discussed this matter.

In conclusion I wish to express deep sorrow regarding losses suffered by the squadron, albeit in this type of operation these were inevitable.

I enclose warm wishes for a soldier's good luck

(--) Smrokowski Mladyslaw, major “

Mjr. Kiedacz replied to the letter on 24th May 1944 (L/dz 930-TJ/44) :

“I am deeply moved and gladdened by your letter, in which you underline the soldiers' virtues and creditable execution of battle assignments in the battle for Sant Angelo – Cassino. This battle becomes part of the regiment's history, thanks to excellent leadership by yourself and wonderful fighting values of your men. My officers and Lancers do not have (adequate) words of recognition and admiration for you personally and your soldiers. Let me thank you once more for your excellent leadership of them.

May the blood jointly spilt by the Polish Commandos and the Lancers of the 15th regiment of Poznan Lancers become one more milestone on the way to Poland.

Regiment Commander
(--) Kiedacz, major “

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Together with the Commandos the assault squadron upheld several consecutive attacks on Monte Cassino by units of the 2nd Corps and, with its own last effort captured hill 601 – Sant Angelo, repelled German counter offensives and forced the (German) defenders to withdraw from the defensive line from under Monte Cassino,

thus ensuring fire cover on the rear of the monastery itself and Piedimonte which formed a defensive bolt on the road to Rome.

It is necessary to underline that the Grouping of Commandos and the Assault Squadron of the 15th Poznan Lancer Regiment was the only battle unit in the battle of Monte Cassino which survived on the field of battle throughout the whole period of the 16th to the 19th May 1944, while all other units were withdrawing, took reinforcements and were reorganised and supplemented with fresh units before further battle action. To some extent this is a measure of the toughness of both Lancers and Commandos on the battlefield. There is no doubt that this tough attitude of the soldiers enabled the Corps to swing the victory towards their side, and the final conquest of the monastery and the opening of the road to Rome in the Italian Campaign.

For work within the Association of the 15th Lancers he is awarded the 'Cross of Merit' (krzyz zaslugi); other decorations and medals, Polish and English, together with the 'Cross of Valour' (krzyzem walecznych), the Monte Cassino Cross (krzyzem Monte Cassino) and 6 Polish and English medals for various battle campaigns.

Following the conquest of Monte Cassino Lt. Cygielski returned with the squadron as deputy to Capt. Zielinski and took part in armoured vehicle (Staghound armoured cars) regimental battles in the direction of Ancona. After the wounding of Capt. Zielinski in the battle for Case Nuove, Lt. Cygielski took over command in the action at Chiaravelle, Iesi, Borgo Loreto, Angeli, Borgo Stazione, Cerreto, Villa Milliani alla Sega, and finally on the river Metauro.

Peritonitis raised the need for an urgent operation under field conditions, recommended by the Regiment medic Dr. J. Kwell, with subsequent evacuation to the hospital in Bari for convalescence, after first the handing over of the 1st squadron to Lt. E. Wojciechowicz.

This was the end of August 1944.

He returned to the Regiment at Predapio, where Lt.-Colonel Kiedacz was blown up by a mine; at his funeral Lt. Cygielski directed the honorary squadron. The Regiment was at that time stationed in Civitella di Romagna.

In the late Autumn (December 1944) he left Civitella di Romagna with the Regiment for Porto Civitanova (26.12.44), Lanciano (27.12.44), Canossa (28.12.44), and finally to Maglie (29.12.44) near Taranto. After the division of the Regiment as the 25th Wielkopolska Lancer Regiment, he travelled with the 15th Regiment to Egypt, with the aim of retraining on tanks (11 January 1944).

Within the 15th armoured Regiment ('Sherman' tanks and light armoured vehicles, 'scout cars') he passed the Tank Instructors' course in Abbasia (suburb of Cairo), where he was accommodated in beautiful surroundings at the command of the English 12th Lancer Regiment.

After completion of the 3-month course, he returned to the Regiment at Quassassin and shortly afterwards he reported for an examination to the English Higher Military

School. The exam took place in Italy. He passed this and as one of three Poles (out of 500 who applied for the examination) he obtained a place at the British Army Staff College at Haifa, in Palestine. He returned to Palestine for a course which lasted from 13th August 1945 to 9th February 1946, and attained the designation of Staff Captain (S.C.).

After refusing an offer to join the British Army he returned to the command of the Polish Army in the Middle East. Having rejected an offer of a position as liaison officer at the British HQ of the Middle East, he received an assignment to higher education studies in Beirut, in the Lebanon. Here he was admitted for studies in Economics and Commerce at the American University in Beirut (a one-year course), and then undertook chemical studies at the French University, also in Beirut. He became the representative of the Polish Union of students in Beirut.

Following two years of studies in Beirut, the English obliged all Poles to travel to England with the aim of demobilization. He did not go through the Polish Resettlement Corps PKPR (Polski Korpus Przysposobienia i Rozmieszczenia) but went directly to Imperial College, University of London, to finish his chemical studies. He prepared for the examinations as an external student. In the Spring of 1951, after 3 years of study, he was awarded by the University of London the degree of Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) in chemistry (Special Studies).

His first civilian job was with the British Steel Casting Association in Sheffield. After a year he transferred to Dartford in Kent for the post of Educational Information Officer in the Institute of Educational Studies of building materials and cement, with the English firm Blue Circle Portland Cement, in Greenhithe, Kent.

In the previous year he married Miss Ismini Zographides, of Greek origin but living in England. The wedding took place in Leicester. They have two daughters, Juliet Ann and Margaret Susan, one married to a Spaniard the other to an Englishman. Both (girls) completed higher studies in psychology, with Margaret obtaining a Masters degree. Henryk and Ismini have two grandsons and one granddaughter.

After 11 years he transferred to the American pharmaceutical company Sterling-Winthrop, in Surbiton, where he remained for 23 years, right up to retirement. His final position was that of director of one of the firms in the Group, Sterling-Winthrop (Continental) Ltd.

For his work in the Company he was awarded the Order of Merit, Officer Class. He went into retirement in 1985 and currently lives in Surbiton, Surrey.

Henryk was also involved in scientific work as the editor of a bi-monthly pharmaceutical journal, Russian Pharmacology and Toxicology, which has a world-wide distribution

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[There follows a translation, from English to Polish, by Henryk Cygielski of extracts concerning the Battle of Monte Cassino, taken from the book 'The Campaign in Italy', by Eric Linklater, as follows:

Start: Top of page 212
Finish: End 1st paragraph page 230

.....and further:

Start: 'GEN. ANDERS STRIKES AGAIN' onwards, page 246
Finish: Page 247, line 17 (ends with '.....day's achievement; ')]

COMMENTS BY THE TRANSLATOR

Normally it is not the role/responsibility of the translator to comment, supplement, or discuss the material being translated. However in this particular case the situation is totally different from a number of points of view, and the description of the battles of the Polish Corps at Monte Cassino demands supplementation in order simply to record the real history of this battle.

'The Campaign in Italy', which was put together as one of a series of books regarded by many as an 'official history' of the British Army in various *theatres* of the World War in the years 1939-1945, is based to a large degree on material from the archives of the British Ministry of War, and on some other documents from that time. In our particular case the Author had additional difficulties with gathering material for his book: the language barrier. Polish documents concerning the battle activities of the Corps were, of course, written in the Polish language with which Linklater was not familiar. Material which was available in English was not always accurate historically, nor complete.

The history of the battle activities of the Poles at Monte Cassino, as portrayed by E. Linklater, is very sympathetic so far as the contribution of the Poles to that battle. Nevertheless, even in the short description of this battle within the whole of the Italian Campaign - and here it should be remembered that the latter was the aim of Linklater's book, and the description of the battle for Monte Cassino is only a small part of that book - it is appropriate to stress much more the role of the Castellone hill as a key position both in the defence of the Gustav Line and in the assault by the Corps on this German defensive line. For this reason it is important to stress the role of the 15th Regiment of Poznan Lancers, which was a reconnaissance regiment of the 5th KDP and as a highly-mobile regiment took part in both offensives on Monte Cassino with the aim of holding the assault start positions by holding the Castellone hill, and the protection of the right wing of the Division's offensive from counter-offensives by the enemy.

The Castellone hill was partly the start position for the attack on Widmo by the 5th Kresowa Division, and part of the mountain ridge - which pointed like a finger towards Monte Cairo - formed a cover for the attack on Widmo and on Sant Angelo, and was more or less the key position for the whole Corps and its activities. Maintaining a hold on the Castellone hill during the offensive on Monte Cassino was regarded as so key for the Corps that general Anders entrusted this task to the unit which he himself recognised as one of the best in the Corps: the 15th Poznan Lancer

Regiment, which was mobilised for this purpose, and after leaving its motorised equipment the regiment occupied a defensive segment of the Castellone hill, and held it during both offensives on Monte Cassino.

During the first offensive by the Corps, the 15th Lancers held their defensive position on the Castellone hill and performed a reconnaissance function in the battle foreground and towards Monte Cairo. During the second offensive the 15th Regiment continued to hold its defensive positions, protecting the right wing of the assault, with further intensive patrolling of the battle foreground. But in the preparation for the final breakthrough of the front of the Gustav Line General Anders decided to throw into the battle his last Corps reserve: the Commando Company which had just arrived from Britain, and was being held in the Corps reserve as a select unit for special tasks. Just then this 'special task' was to ensure breaking through the Gustav Line. It is for that reason that Gen. Anders gave the order for the formation of a special assault squadron by withdrawing, from the front on the Castellone hill, the assault platoons from all of the squadrons. This special assault squadron from the 15th Poznan Lancers was now separated out from the Regiment and joined with the Commando Company, with its commander as the commander of the whole. This strengthened Commando unit followed the 16th Battalion into the assault on San Angelo. When this battalion was halted under heavy fire, and after suffering large losses in men, the Commando and Lancer grouping prolonged the assault on San Angelo, took the hill from the direction of Santa Lucia and there held its defensive positions, later together with the 17th Battalion, right up to the next morning, 18th May 1944. On that day the remnants of the (German) defence garrison in the monastery surrendered to a patrol of the 12th Podole Lancers.

After the conquest of San Angelo and reaching the road which led right up to the back of the monastery, many German bunkers, together with their garrisons, were left behind. Some of these bunkers still continued to defend themselves during the morning of the 18th May, but gradually even these bunkers began to surrender one after another.

(Prepared by acting Capt. Henryk Cygielski, who took part in the fighting on the Castellone hill and commanded the assault squadron separated out from the 15th Poznan Lancer Regiment.)

Mass Albaneta and hill 593, which commanded the German defence line in this segment of the front, were the offence objectives for the Carpathian Division. The 2nd Brigade, reinforced by the 2nd Tank regiment and a platoon of anti-tank soldiers, decided to take them with a direct attack. Soon after 7.00 am on 17th May the 6th Battalion started out with a sapper company and achieved positions on an escarpment over a ravine north of Mass Albaneta. It rapidly became apparent that throwing out of the Germans and cleaning up the area would take more time than had been estimated. That is why the decision was made to attack hill 593, using the 4th Battalion, while only covering Mass Albaneta with fire. The 4th Battalion began its attack at 9.20 and was immediately met with a strong German counterattack from the south. All the companies of the 4th Battalion were involved in the battle, and at about 11.30 am the hill summit was attained, from which was afforded a good perspective downwards on to the enemy positions. Yes, hill 593 was taken. In the meantime the sappers in the ravine continued to disarm mines.

Early afternoon that day one company of the 1st Battalion got within 200 metres of Mass Albaneta, where it was halted by fire from a network of well-hidden bunkers. The 4th Battalion was attacking hill 569 from the south, but faltered - as previously did an Indian unit, near something which took on the look of a new front. This company faded in front of the very eyes under fire from the monastery and heavy machine guns from hill 575. The 5th Battalion threw itself forward to help, but without control of Mass Albaneta the attainment of hill 569 was totally impossible. The Division had to recognise this fact and the order was given to prepare positions for the night.

Following a day of heavy fighting, much of it using bayonets, the Poles broke through the enemy's defensive line. Much rest and reorganisation were required before undertaking further clean-up of the area from the remainder of the enemy, and before being able to descend to Highway No.6.

The Carpathian Division was assigned the task of preventing German troops from withdrawing from the monastery along the Mass Albaneta hill, and of preparing Colle San Angelo to repel the expected counteroffensive. However, the Germans neither counter attacked nor withdrew, and simply stayed in place fiercely defending their rock bunkers. To tell the truth, many of them did this, but not all. The monastery garrison had had enough of the war, and when on the morning of the 18th May a patrol of the 12th Lancer Regiment set out from the Colle d'Onufrio, there was no further opposition from the 30 Germans, some of them wounded, who defended the monastery ruins. Their commander surrendered, and at 10.30 am on the 18th May, 1944, a Polish flag was hoisted above Monte Cassino monastery.

In the township of Monte Cassino below the monastery details of the 4th Allied Division cleansed the town of survivors of German units, searching through cellars and other hiding places within hotels and houses. 'Search and destroy' - this was also the motto of the Poles in the mountains above the monastery. It was not a straightforward task, as some soldiers found to their cost, trying to extricate Germans from bunkers on the slopes, and it took some time to clean up the whole front after the battle. However, on the afternoon of 18th May, 1944, the 2nd Polish Corps established communication with the 78th Division on Autoroute No.6 below the monastery, at a point slightly south of San Angelo.

The battle assignment of the 2nd Polish Corps was finally fully complete.

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[Translated, from Polish to English, by Andrew W. Rak]