

## ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE WARSAW UPRISING

By Frank Milewski

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Veterans of Poland's anti-Nazi and anti-Communist underground resistance - the Home Army (Armia Krajowa) were in the forefront of the annual commemoration of the Warsaw Uprising that took place from August 1st to October 3rd, 1944.

In New York City, a commemorative mass marking this important Polish anniversary was held on Sunday, August 3rd at St. Stanislaus Bishop & Martyr Church in lower Manhattan, the first and oldest church serving the city's Polish community. Its pastor, Rev. Lucius Tyrasinski OSP, was the celebrant. Joining the AK veterans in the religious observance was the Downstate Division of the Polish American Congress and members of its Holocaust Documentation Committee.

This World War II event is often confused with the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of April, 1943 which was confined to the Jewish district of the city and on a much smaller scale. While 20,000 Jews were killed during the liquidation of the ghetto, 200,000 Poles perished in the 1944 Uprising, mostly all of them Catholics.

The two-month battle of 1944, fought on the city's streets, from within its buildings and down in its sewers, ended tragically for the Polish inhabitants of Warsaw with such a staggering loss of life. And to make this catastrophe even worse, Adolf Hitler was so enraged by the Polish people's anti-Nazi revolt that he ordered Warsaw bombed and burned to the ground.

The Warsaw Uprising was one of the most brutal and costly events Poland suffered during the entire time it was under German occupation, according to Michael Madejski, president of the New York Chapter of Armia Krajowa and a member of the Holocaust Documentation Committee of the Polish American Congress.

At the time Hitler invaded Poland in 1939, Madejski belonged to a Polish scouting troop named Zosia. Rather than disbanding then, the boys and girls of the troop resolved to stay together and join their adults to fight the enemy as part of the underground resistance.

During the first days of the Uprising, the Polish insurgents held a temporary advantage over the Germans. Madejski and his scouting compatriots seized the opportunity and were able to liberate 350 Jewish prisoners from the Nazi concentration camp Gesiowka inside Warsaw. In recognition of their heroic act, Israel's Yad Vashem honored Madejski and the rest of the Zosia scouts in 2001.

The Home Army's high command launched the Uprising on August 1st at the time German forces were retreating from the Russian front and passing through Poland on the way back to Germany. The Poles' objective was to recapture their country's capitol city and establish it as a symbol of a free and independent post-war Poland.

„It might have turned out to be a momentous victory for the heroes of Warsaw had it not been for the treachery and deceit of the Soviet army after it arrived at the city's outskirts in pursuit of the fleeing Germans,” Madejski said.

As they camped outside, the Russians urged the Polish underground to rise up against the Germans while the Reds were to attack simultaneously. But as the Poles went into action, the Communist army - their so-called allies - did nothing. The Soviets would not even permit U.S. and British planes flying in supplies for the Poles to use any of the air fields they controlled.

It was a calculated ploy to hold back and allow the Germans time to crush the Polish people with their overwhelming military strength. „They wanted the Germans to kill as many of us as possible,” said Madejski. It paved the way for the Communists to eventually take over Poland and rule it from the time World War II ended until the return of democracy in 1989.

The war in Europe officially ended in May, 1945. But not for Armia Krajowa. AK members, hated and hunted by both the Nazis and Communists during the wartime years, then became the peacetime target of the Communists who had taken over Poland. They had been the backbone of the largest and most effective underground resistance anywhere in German-occupied Europe. Now these Home Army veterans were being jailed, beaten, and tortured. Many were executed as „enemies of the state.”

All this was combined with a vicious propaganda campaign against the AK „that still lingers until today,” said Madejski. „Worst of all, some of it has been imported here to the United States and picked up by hostile elements in the media and the academic world which try to misrepresent the sacrifices we made in fighting the Nazis and the Communists.”

Like most of the members of Armia Krajowa, Mr. Madejski is a Catholic. He is a resident of Sea Cliff, N.Y.

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