

Military Commission .....  
File Number .....

**POLISH ARMY IN FRANCE**

Recruiting Center .....  
File Number.....

APPLICATION TO THE POLISH ARMY IN FRANCE

Recruiting Center No. 30 Location Toledo State Ohio

Name and Surname of Volunteer Jozef Sporysz

Age 27 years, born on day 1 month January year 1890

in the locality Osiek village, in Osiek gmina, Biata district, Galicia  
(district or city, county, province)

Civil status bachelor Children —  
(single, married, widower)

Present Address 158 Dexter - Toledo, Ohio  
(house #, street, city, and state)

Address of closest relative in America Ignac Stasiak  
158 Dexter St. - Toledo, Ohio  
(name, house #, street, city, and state)

Address of closest relative in Poland Jann Sporysz - father  
Osiek village, in Osiek gmina, Biata district, Galicia

Are you a citizen of the United States of America (second papers)? no (yes or no)

Did you serve in the army? .....type of arms?.....how long? .....

Rank upon discharge? .....

What Polish organizations in America do you belong to? .....

If you belong to the Falcons, for how long? ..... and do you hold any office? .....

Occupation laborer present employment factory-motor (?)

Height 5 feet 9 inches Eyebrow.....

Hair blond Eyes.....

Nose normal Teeth two missing

Face round Chin normal

Weight 160 lbs. Distinguishing marks .....

Sent from the Recruiting Station in Toledo, Ohio number .....

Remarks .....

.....

VOLUNTEER'S DECLARATION

I the undersigned, wishing to fight for the freedom and independence of a united Poland, join the ranks of the Polish Army in France of my own free will and pledge my unconditional obedience to the military authorities. So help me God!

I pledge to be ready for departure on 25 November 1917.

After having read the contents of this application to the Polish Army, I attest by my signature that all of my statements made above are true.

Jozef Sporysz  
Original signature of volunteer

This declaration was filled out and signed in my presence on

22 November 1917.

W. Piekarz  
Recruiting Officer

in Toledo, Ohio

Volunteer was sent to the camp in Buffalo, N.Y. Transport list number 2  
on day 27 month November 1917.

The volunteer received for support \$ 1.50

Joz Sporysz  
Original signature of the volunteer

# POLISH ARMY IN FRANCE. MEDICAL EXAMINATION REPORT

(Applicant Stripped).

Name in full ..... Joseph Sparyga ..... No. of Application .....

Height ..... inches.

Weight ..... lbs.

**Vision—**

Right eye ..... 24/20

Left eye ..... 24/20

**Hearing—**

Right ear ..... O.K.

Left ear ..... O.K.

**Chest measurement:**

At Expiration ..... 37 ..... inches.

At Inspiration ..... 40 ..... inches.

(Fully expanded).

**General examinations (head, chest, abdomen, extremities):**

Remarks: ..... O.K. ....  
.....  
.....

I certify that I have carefully examined the applicant and have correctly reported above the result of my examination, and to the best of my judgement and belief

~~he is~~ } qualified for acceptance for enlistment at the { auxiliary } service in the Polish Army in France .  
~~he is not~~ } front }

..... Frank G. Skell .....  
(Signature of Army Medical Officer or Civilian practitioner, as the case may be.)

Place .....

Date .....

(\*Strike out words not applicable.)

**B**y mid-1918 this problem was pretty well resolved. In Chicago, for instance, the recruiting center headquarters moved from the Polish Women's Alliance Building on Ashland Avenue to the PRCU Building, where a local draft board was already functioning. In case of a problem, it was now easier for Selective Service and Polish Recruiting Personnel to consult each other. Recruitment continued to supply men who trained in Canada before departure for France. When the Armistice was signed in November, 13,700 men had sailed, and by the time recruitment ended in February, 1919, another 7000 Polish Americans had joined them in Europe.

**I**mmediately after the Armistice Jozef Pilsudski, head of the restored Polish Republic, requested the transfer of the Polish Army in France to Poland. Disagreement among the Allies postponed its departure. Finally, beginning in April, 1919, the Army, now a force of more than 60,000 men, moved by rail across Germany to Poland.

**M**any of the volunteers eventually returned to the United States. When the Army reached Poland, Pilsudski and his followers suspected the soldiers of supporting his rival Roman Dmowski, the head of the National Democrats. The Allies, on the other hand, insisted on supervising the use of the Army. So it was quickly integrated into the Armed Forces of Poland. In the process many Polish Americans felt that their service to Poland was minimized in comparison with that of the Polish Military Organization, a conspiratorial group that took its orders from Pilsudski during the war. Disillusioned over their treatment, over 12,000 of the men who came from America returned to the United States beginning in 1920, where they organized the Polish Army Veterans Association. SWAP, as it is known, still exists today.

**T**he Polish Army in France was instrumental in winning American recognition for the Polish National Committee in Paris. This action reinforced President Woodrow Wilson's support for an independent Poland. The Army was organized too late to affect the outcome of the war, but it helped the Polish Republic meet the military challenge of 1919-1920, which threatened the new state's survival. Despite the disillusionment many Polish Americans took pride in their service to Poland, as the organization of SWAP in 1921 attests. The "Polish American Army" was testimony to the immigrant's readiness to fight for the freedom of Poland. Its broad support in Polonia demonstrated that the community had not forgotten the homeland.

*Joseph T. Hapak  
Professor of History  
Moraine Valley Community College*

#### **FOR FURTHER STUDY:**

Stanley R. Pliska, "The 'Polish-American Army' 1917-1921," *The Polish Review*, 10:3 (September, 1965), 46-59.

M. B. Biskupski, "Paderewski as Leader of American Polonia, 1914-1918," *Polish American Studies*, 43:1 (Spring 1986), 37-56.

Joseph T. Hapak, "The Polish Military Commission, 1917-1919," *Polish American Studies*, 38:2 (Fall 1981), 26-38.

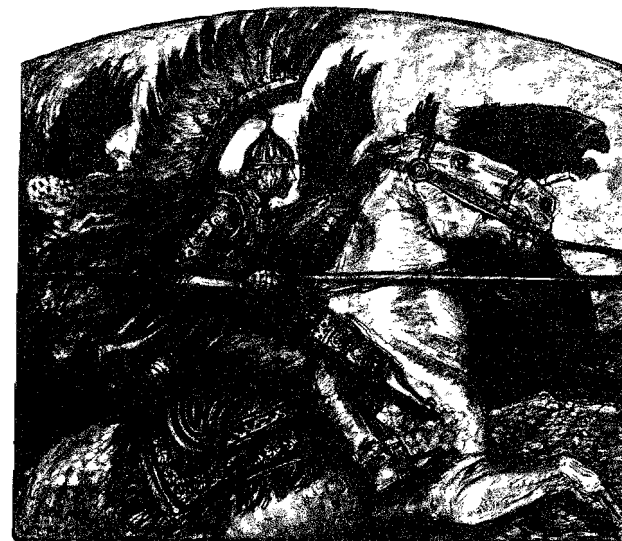
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# **The Polish Army in France, 1917-1919**

**Exhibit of  
Polish Museum of America  
October 10-November 15, 1987**

The Polish Museum of America  
984 North Milwaukee Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60622  
(312) 384-3352

**OPEN DAILY  
NOON – 5:00 P.M.**



In April, 1917, America went to war. A month later Congress approved the draft to increase the size of the American Army. Already volunteers were flocking to the colors. Among them were numerous Polish Americans, including immigrants. They saw the war as a way of settling scores with the Prussian occupiers of their homeland. Imperial Russia too had ruled Polish territory, from which it was driven by the German Army in 1915. In any case, a revolution dethroned the czar in March, 1917, and the new Russian Provisional Government soon acknowledged Poland's right to limited self-determination. Most Polish Americans regarded the Germans, the current rulers in most of Poland, as the hated oppressors of their national aspirations.

Polish Americans dreamed of organizing an ethnic unit within the American Expeditionary Force (AEF). The piano virtuoso Ignacy Jan Paderewski unsuccessfully proposed the formation of "Kościuszko's Army" when the United States declared war on Germany. Two months later French President Raymond Poincaré established the Polish Army in France, and Polish Americans slowly changed their minds about a separate ethnic unit in the AEF, favoring instead the French-sponsored force. When a Polish Military Mission headed by the popular novelist Waclaw Gasiorowski arrived in America in August, Polonia negotiated the terms under which it would supply men for the Polish Army in France. The American Government authorized recruitment in October.

Men not subject to the draft could volunteer for the Army. This Selective Service rule excluded many Polish Americans, whom the French hoped would enlist in the Polish Army. In general, recent immigrants who had not applied for American citizenship were the only men eligible to join. Sons of immigrants born in the United States were by law subject to the draft. The American Government rejected pleas from both Polish Americans and French officials that men who enlisted in the Polish Army would see action sooner than Polish American doughboys. This stance corresponded to the American attitude toward all Allied recruitment in the United States. While Polish Americans pleaded for relaxation of the American restriction on recruitment, even urging without success the transfer of Polish-speaking draftees to the Polish Army in France, they practically ignored the implicit, though informal, recognition of Polish statehood that authorization to recruit troops conferred.

Recruitment officially began in Chicago on October 14 at the Dexter Park Pavilion in the Stockyards. On the dais that afternoon sat an impressive array of Polonia's leaders and representatives of the Allies. Paderewski honored the occasion by his presence. The Filarets, a male chorus of eighty voices, premiered his new battle hymn, *Leć, Orle Bialy*. Tadeusz Wroński, an opera singer, directed the choir and, after the rally, organized the Polish Army Band at the Maestro's urging. On November 3 the band gave its first concert in the Polish Roman Catholic Union (PRCU) Hall, where this exhibit is now mounted. For two weeks it performed in Chicago and vicinity before departing on a tour of the East Coast.

The Band publicized the Army. Its concerts in more than 40 cities included patriotic and folk music, folk dances and an allegory which featured the flags of all the Allies, the United States and, of course, Poland. Time was set aside for speeches and collections for the Army. The enthusiasm generated at the concert often propelled men to volunteer, as in Utica, New York, where seventeen men signed up at the performance. By the time the Band returned to Chicago in January, it had raised \$65,000 for the effort.

But men joined the Army even before the official inauguration of recruitment. Many Polish Falcons had pledged to respond immediately to the call for volunteers. They made up a significant proportion of the first recruits. By the end of the year, almost 6000 men had reported to the Polish Army Camp at Niagara on the Lake, Ontario, for training. Of this number, over 1200 sailed for France in December. In January, 1918, almost 2200 would follow them, and another 3200 in February.

Forty-seven recruiting centers, each with subordinate stations, were established in the United States and Canada, and volunteers came from all over the country. The Chicago center supplied 1160 men by December 31, 1917. Pittsburgh, the Falcon national headquarters, and Detroit each sent almost 600 men to the Polish Army Camp. Milwaukee, New York and Bridgeport each provided over 400 volunteers. Buffalo dispatched 354 and Cleveland 200. Indicative of the reach of recruitment were the 89 men from the Duluth center, the 21 who came from Omaha, the 44 Kansas City recruits and the 25 from the St. Louis region, including Southern Illinois, as well as Wilmington, Delaware, which sent 48 men. Selective Service directed Polish immigrants at Lewistown, Montana, to contact the Omaha center for information on the Polish Army.

In France the recruits joined some 2000 men who formed the nucleus of the Army. Volunteers from the Prisoner of War camps in France, which held a significant number of Polish subjects of the German Emperor, and in Italy, where most of the Polish POWs were Austrian subjects, would later augment the French Army veterans and the Polish American recruits. A few men also came from Polish settlements in Brazil.

As the force increased in size, it focused attention on the Polish Question. By mid-1918 all of Germany's enemies were committed to a restored Polish state as a war aim, though they did not agree on its size or its boundaries. The Army was now ready to fight as a unit in the French 4th Army on the Western Front, entering the trenches in Champagne in July. In the same month, General Józef Haller reached France from Russia and was coopted in the Polish National Committee in Paris. In October, the French Government and the Committee agreed that he would head the Polish Army in France. From this point on the Army was often called Haller's Army, after its commander. Another name, the Blue Army, derived from the skyblue uniforms the men wore.

The growing number of Polish American volunteers brought the Army repeatedly to the attention of the United States War Department. When recruitment started, Selective Service had already called the first draftees for basic training and was adjusting its procedures to ensure that the second call would not repeat the mistakes of the first. Questions regarding the Polish Army were minor problems compared with finetuning the draft. By 1918, however, indications that ineligible men had enlisted in the Polish Army caused the agency to look more carefully at the Polish Army Recruitment.

Polish Americans were divided, for purposes of the draft, into non-declarant immigrants, declarant immigrants, and citizens, whether immigrant or native born. The first group had not applied for citizenship; the second had. Volunteers for the Polish Army automatically negated their pledge of loyalty to the United States by joining the force. Polish recruiters either did not know this or ignored it, and reports of the violation of Selective Service prescriptions multiplied at the central office in Washington and the local boards. Similar problems occurred, it should be noted, with other recruiting missions in the United States.