

Westerplatte. Cisterns filled to the brim with oil were rolled into the peninsula. However, the defenders running on the rest of their strength triumphed once again. They were helped by an accurate shot from a 37-mm cannon and a massive fire of their machine guns.

On September 7, at 4:30 a.m., Schleswig-Holstein again opened fire; the MMGs clattered silently; the German infantry approached the depot walls; their flamethrowers sprouted fire. A hail of bullets fell on them from the Polish fortifications. The Germans were forced to withdraw by a few hundred meters. After a while, however, they stroked again. Hitler himself had allowed for a general assault attack to wipe Polish defenders to dust. Meanwhile, the Polish "Pomerania" Army already retreated to the south, towards Warsaw; whereas Gdynia, Kępa Oksywska and Hel Peninsula kept fighting on fiercely – besieged from all sides; the commonly expected aid from France and Great Britain never came. The Polish soldiers on Westerplatte were already very exhausted; the wounded were in a terrible condition. The enemy still had a crushing advantage. But the order had been carried out – not twelve hours, but six days of Polish resistance passed at dawn that day...

On September 7, at 10:15 a.m., Major Sucharski gathered a group of officers. He had decided – "We surrender." Along with two soldiers, he took the white flag and set off to the German side.

#### Westerplatte Fights Aftermath

While defending Westerplatte, about 20 Polish soldiers died, nearly 40 were wounded. The Germans lost a few tens of soldiers. Most probably, 100–150 German soldiers suffered injuries, although, according to some estimates, this number could reach a few hundred. After the battle, the Polish soldiers were sent to POW camps. Major Sucharski, who died in Italy in 1947, was allowed by the Germans to carry a saber in captivity. They began to call Westerplatte *kleines Verdun* ("little Verdun").

The Defense of Westerplatte remained a symbol of soldierly courage, generosity and a sense of duty. It is also an illustration of good defense organization, which allowed for effective resistance against an attack of a much stronger enemy. ■

*Lukasz Zalesiński*



*Surrender. Gen. Friedrich Georg Eberhardt pays tribute to the Polish commander on Westerplatte, Maj. Henryk Sucharski (September 7, 1939)*



*A twelve-year old Kazimiera Kostewicz (Mika) leaning over the body of her older sister Andzia, killed by German aviator. The area of the Porwazki Cemetery at Tatarska street in Warsaw's Wola district, September 14, 1939. Photo by Julien Bryan, American reporter*

# WARSAW CRIES

**In one of the most moving photographs of September 1939, the photographer captured a desperate girl leaning over the massacred body of her elder sister lying on the grass. The woman was a victim of one of Hitler's sky-high knights who never missed an opportunity to sow death with their modern machines.**

From the first days of the war, Warsaw became one of the main targets of the Luftwaffe. The capital of Poland was a fortress for the German command, as the army was stationed there. For this reason, as General Johannes Blaskowitz put it, a blind bombardment of the center of the city with over one million inhabitants was not a war crime. The Commander-in-Chief of Luftwaffe, Marshal Herman Goering, planned a similar to the air raid on Wieluń attack on Warsaw, but those intentions were fortunately thwarted by the fog prevailing at many German airports. In the first week of the aggression, German pilots could not boast of too many victories over the city. Warsaw had an effective anti-aircraft defense, and the sky above it was defended by one

of the best formations of Polish aviation – Colonel Stefan Pawlikowski's Pursuit Brigade. However, on September 7, it was moved to the region of Lubelszczyzna, and a day later the enemy armored units approached the capital of Poland.

From that moment, the Germans intensified their air raids. Again, the German pilots proved that their favorite targets were hospitals and churches clearly marked with the Red Cross sign. On the bloody Sunday of September 17, at Hitler's personal request, the air force aircraft and the artillery destroyed the symbols of Warsaw – bombs fell on, in particular, the Royal Castle, St. John's Cathedral in the Old Town, and the National Theatre. The proof that religious holidays were important for the Luftwaffe, because then the

number of victims could be much higher, can be the air raid on the Jewish quarter on September 22–23, during the Yom Kippur, the holiest days of the year in Judaism. For the citizens of Warsaw, however, the worst was only to come.

On September 25, 1939, at 7:10 a.m., an observer from the anti-aircraft defense post on the roof of the State Social Insurance Institution at Kopernika street noticed an approaching wave of bombers. He counted that there were about 150 of them; they were flying at a high altitude. A moment later, hell broke loose over Warsaw. For twelve hours, 1,200 German bombers, wave after wave, dropped nearly 630 tons of demolition and incendiary bombs on the capital. More than two hundred fires broke out in the city. The Germans

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