

SS “Germania” Regiment

Hutsul Rifle Regiment under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Karol Hodala. When General Prugar was informed by one of the local inhabitants that there was a staff of an SS-unit in Muzyłowice, situated near Wisznia Sądowa, he ordered Lieutenant Colonel



GEN KAZIMIERZ SOSNKOWSKI

Gen. Kazimierz Sosnkowski (1885–1969), the Commander of the Southern Front in September 1939. After the unsuccessful rescue of Lwów, which capitulated to the besieging city with the Germans Russian troops, he crossed the green border to Hungary, and then to France. From 1940, he stayed in England with the Polish government, and in 1943–1944, he was the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army; then, he emigrated to Canada where he died in 1969.

they had faced for the first and last time in their lives. The corpses of SS-men, which Polish officers saw after the battle, looked horribly. “The terror, in the midst of which they died, never faded from their faces,” wrote Prugar in his report after the battle.

One-of-a-Kind Victory

Colonel Prugar-Ketling reached the battlefield in Muzyłowice only at dawn. “In the ever-brighter smudges of the morning dawn, we could distinguish houses, trees, fences, and then... cannons, caissons, tractors, cars –

single ones at first – then groups, then whole parks. We did double take to make sure it wasn’t an illusion. A large, rich village, with wide courtyards and gardens, was flooded with equipment and war material to the brim.” In Muzyłowice, “Germania” lost almost all heavy equipment, including eight 105-mm howitzers, an anti-aircraft gun battery, most mortars and machine guns, and all cars.

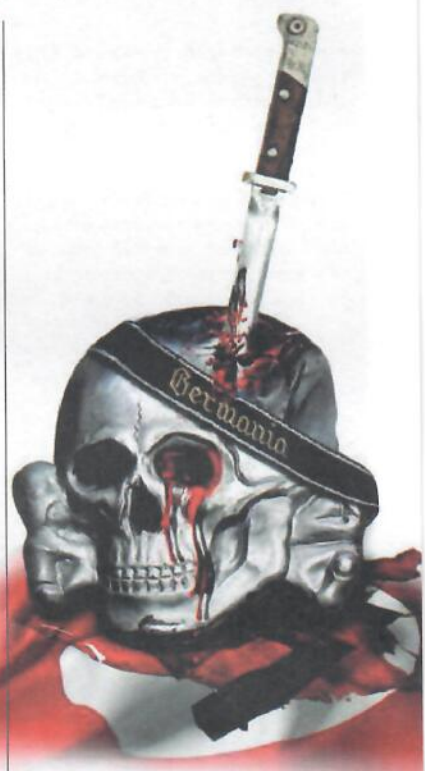
Unfortunately, the heavy equipment could not be used due to the lack of properly trained drivers and soldiers. Thus, the bomb squad destroyed it on the spot. For the SS-men, though, the loss of people was much more painful. High-ranked officers died from the blows of Polish bayonets, and the regiment’s panicked staff escaped from the village; its German soldiers scattered around the whole area took a few days to gather.

In his memoirs written during the internment in Switzerland, General

Prugar-Ketling noted that Hitler had gotten furious when he had heard about the massacre of his regiment, and had ordered to remove it from the army status list. In reality, however, most of the regiment’s forces got concentrated already on September 17; then, they were deployed to cover the wings of the 17th Army Corps, and they remained in that capacity until the end of the campaign in Poland. After the end of the fighting in 1939, all the “Germania” troops reunited, and the regiment was moved to the territory of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, which was annexed to the German Reich. In the following years of the war, “Germania” was a part of the 5th SS Panzer Division “Wiking.”

Aftermath

The victory over “Germania” and other units of the German 1st Mountain Division lifted the morale of General Sosnkowski’s soldiers. However, they did not have much time to rejoice in the victory. The next heavy battles awaited them on the way to “the most faithful city,” – as Sosnkowski called Lwów during the briefing in Sądowa Wisznia. On the night of September 20–21, 1939, Colonel Prugar dissolved his 11th Carpathian Infantry Division, ordering the soldiers to scatter and push in small groups towards the southern border, to Hungary. Some of the soldiers, including the Colonel himself, managed to get to France; but most of them were taken prisoner by the Soviets and Germans. Lieutenant Colonel Hodala, awarded with a *Virtuti Militari* order, thus the highest Polish military order, was one of the officers of that division murdered by the Russian NKVD in 1940. The soldiers and the few officers who survived Russian captivity found themselves in the ranks of the Polish Army in the USSR, which was formed in the Soviet Russia by General Władysław Anders. This was made possible by the aggression of Germany against Russia in June 1941, thanks to which Poland transited unexpectedly, for a short time, from an enemy to an ally of the Russians.



Paradoxically, the defeat of Hitler’s SS-minions was exploited by their Wehrmacht competitors. Its superior commanders, hostile to the SS, emphasized in their reports the inadequate training and lack of experience of the SS-men. The defeat of “Germania” was a strong asset in spoiling the blood of Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler, who had to admit that his subordinates still lacked much to join the military elite of the German army, and the fanaticism and experience gained during the genocide of Polish civilians was not enough to fight against the good and determined soldiers – the subordinates of General Kazimierz Sosnkowski. ■

Piotr Korczyński



Remains of the German SS Regiment “Germania” in Muzyłowice in Eastern Little Poland region (September 1939)

do so, however, they had to convince the world that the Soviets were responsible for the crime, especially since the authorities of the Soviet Union immediately accused the Third Reich of committing it. They needed an independent and credible institution that would examine the bodies, establish the date of the crime, and identify the perpetrators. They turned to the International Committee of the Red Cross, which, however, refused to send a delegation to Katyn.

Why?

All interested parties would have to agree to such a survey, and one of them was the Soviet Union, which, of course, did not agree. The Germans then formed an International Medical Committee (called the Katyn Commission), which included over a dozen prominent forensic specialists from the countries occupied by the Third Reich – Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark,

the Netherlands, Finland, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, Italy, and also neutral Switzerland. However, doctors invited from Spain, Portugal, Sweden and Turkey did not reach Katyn. From April 28 to April 30, the members of the commission carried out their work in Katyn, setting the date of the crime, i.e. on the basis of examining the sediment formed on the corpses of the murdered. The dates on letters, photographs, newspapers, notes and diaries found with the bodies did not go beyond March 1940, indicating that the executions had taken place in the spring of 1940, which proved that the crimes were committed by the Soviets. Having concluded their work, the commission prepared a report, pointing to the Soviets as the perpetrators. Slightly earlier, delegations of journalists had arrived in Katyn; the first one came from neutral countries –

KATYN MASSACRE

As a consequence of the Russian aggression against Poland in September 1939, tens of thousands of officers and soldiers of the Polish Army were taken prisoner, and another tens of thousands of civilians, reservists and professional soldiers were imprisoned after the annexation of eastern Polish territories by the Soviet Union. Upon the decision of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist [Bolshevik] Party of the Soviet Union (the Politburo) of March 1940, signed, inter alia, by Joseph Stalin, Vyacheslav Molotov, the Soviet Foreign Minister, and Mikhail Kalinin, the nominal leader of the Soviet Union, it was decided to murder at once about

26,000 persons from among Polish prisoners of war and political prisoners who were deemed potential enemies and who constituted the elite of the Polish nation. The mass murder took place in April and May 1940. The bodies of about 4,400 victims, Polish officers from the Kozielsk POW camp located in Western Russia, were discovered in 1943 by the Germans who occupied the area after their aggression against Russia one and a half years earlier. The corpses of the restrained victims, piled up in layers, killed by shots to the back of the head and blows of bayonets, were resting in several mass graves in the vicinity of Katyn near Smolensk. ■

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