

camp in Stutthof (Polish: Sztutowo) already on September 2, 1939. In 1942, it was transformed into a concentration camp – a place of murder of Jews, Poles and civilian prisoners of war. KL Stutthof was the last such camp liberated by the Red Army; the liberation took place the day after the end of the war, on May 9, 1945. In the General Government, i.e. in the central areas of Poland which were not incorporated directly into the Reich, the leaders of National Socialist Germany established three concentration camps: in Lublin in the district of Majdanek, KL Warschau in Warsaw, commonly known as “Gęsiówka”, and KL Plaszow in Plaszów near Kraków. On the western lands of Poland incorporated into the Reich, at the turn of May and June 1940, the Konzentrationslager Auschwitz (later Auschwitz-Birkenau, Polish name: Oświęcim-Brzezinka) was established, which later became the largest German KZ-lager in occupied Europe. The first prisoners of Auschwitz were of Polish origin, while political prisoners were arrested for their conspiratorial activity – a transport of 728 people arrived there from the German prison in Tarnów on June 14, 1940. From 1941, Auschwitz-Birkenau also served as an extermination center for Jews from the territories occupied

by the Third Reich and from European countries allied with it. The extermination was carried out as part of the plan for the Final Solution of the Jewish Question (Endlösung der Judenfrage). A year later, pseudo-medical experiments were carried out on prisoners, including on Soviet prisoners of war, in that camp.

### Leben für Leben

*Life for Life* is the title of the famous feature film about Maximilian Kolbe, a Polish Conventual Franciscan friar, who decided to give his life for Franciszek Gajowniczek in July 1941. Kolbe sacrificed his life for an unknown fellow prisoner, father of two sons, sentenced by the Germans together with other prisoners to starvation in retaliation for the escape of one of the prisoners from the camp. He died on August 14, 1941, finished off with an injection of poison into his heart in a bunker in Auschwitz. His body was burned in the camp crematorium.

Gajowniczek recalled this moment as follows: “Ten prisoners from my block of flats were selected to die. The camp commander, Fritzsich, accompanied by Rapportführer Palitzsch, made a “selection” (choice). The unfortunate fate also befell me. With words, “Ah, I feel so sorry for my wife and the



Entry gate to the Auschwitz-Birkenau German concentration and extermination camp for transports with prisoners. On railway track, scattered personal belongings of the victims

children I am orphaning,” I went to the end of the block. I was to go to the starvation death row. Father Maximilian Kolbe, a Franciscan from Niepokalanów, heard those words. He came out of the ranks, approached Lagerführer Fritzsich and tried to kiss his hand. Fritzsich asked

the translator, “Was Was wunscht dieses polnische Schwein?” (“What does this Polish pig want [from me]?”). Father Maximilian Kolbe, pointing his hand at me, expressed his wish to go and die instead of me. Lagerführer Fritzsich moved his hand and said, “Heraus” (“Get

# Mathematicians Who Saved Millions

Marian Rejewski together with a group of cryptanalysts cracked the Enigma, a German rotor cipher machine.



MARIAN REJEWSKI

Polish mathematician and cryptanalyst, Marian Rejewski (1905-1980), who in 1932 broke the code of German Enigma

Their discovery enabled the Allies to track the movement of German forces, end the war sooner, and save millions of lives.

A young man is looking at us from a black and white photo. A jacket, a tie, a serious expression on his face, short hair, and round glasses. First impression? He must be a clerk, maybe a scientist, and certainly a bookworm. No one would guess that this inconspicuous guy had a huge impact on the course of World War II.

In the mid-1920s, the German military began coding their messages using the Enigma. The device consisted of a 26-key keyboard and a set of rotors. Whenever a letter key on the keyboard was pressed, a rotor turned, an electric circuit was closed, and the letter was replaced with a different one. Of course, it did not happen on a “one-to-one” basis. The rotors kept moving, and each letter could be substituted with a different letter each time it was used (e.g. an “a” could be replaced with a “z” and later with an “m”). The key to deciphering the code was determining the initial setting of the rotors, and the Germans changed the setting every day.

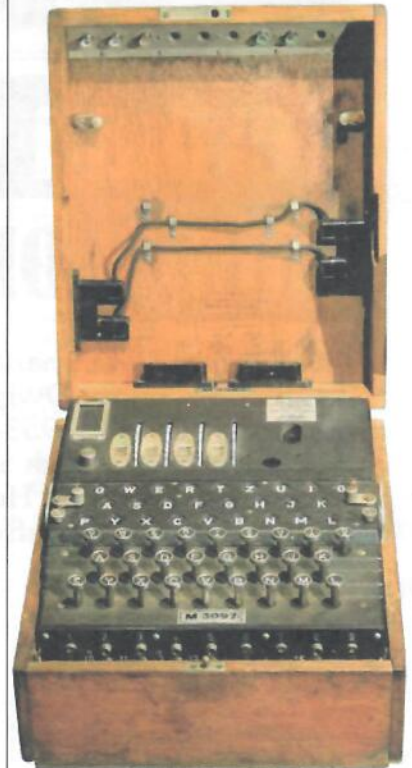
Counterintelligence specialists from the Polish General Staff knew linguists would not be able to break the code. They needed mathematicians, and Capt Ciężycki from the Polish Cipher Bureau decided to look for the most talented mathematicians at the Poznań University. Three young people were recruited: Marian Rejewski, Jerzy Różycki, and Henryk Zygalski. In 1932 they broke the Enigma code, and shortly after they even built a replica of the machine. The Germans were unaware of the Poles’ success, but nevertheless kept improving their security measures. Polish mathematicians did not fall behind the German technology and built “Rejewski’s Bombe,” a special deciphering machine. It was a prototype later used and developed by a genius British mathematician, Alan Turing. In July 1939, mathematicians from

the Polish Cipher Bureau shared their knowledge about Enigma with the British and the French. After the war broke out, the cryptanalysts were evacuated to Romania, then to France, and finally to Britain where they kept working on cracking German codes. Breaking the Enigma code enabled the Allies to track movement of German forces. Today historians agree that due to their efforts, the war lasted two or three years less than anticipated. As a consequence, millions of human lives were saved.

Rejewski ended his military career in the Polish Armed Forces in the West as a lieutenant. In 1946 he returned to Poland and worked as a clerk in a factory in Bydgoszcz. He could not talk to his friends about what he had done during the war as it was highly classified. He finally revealed the truth in 1967. At that time, the Polish role in the breaking of the Enigma code was marginalized and often not even mentioned. Historians attributed success to British cryptanalysts from Bletchley Park. This false image was also reinforced by film makers and their work, e.g. the Hollywood production “Enigma” with Dougray Scott and Kate Winslet.

Fortunately, this tendency is slowly changing. The merits of Marian Rejewski were appreciated by the Americans who posthumously awarded him with the Knowlton Award, recognizing individuals who have contributed significantly to the promotion of Military Intelligence. ■

Łukasz Zalesiński



Enigma encryption device used by the German army from 1926