

Historic Polish Forces – Armoured Brigade

The Polish 1st Armoured Division was an Allied military unit during World War II, created in February 1942 at Duns in Scotland. At its peak it numbered approximately 16,000 soldiers. It was commanded by General Stanisław Maczek

In the early stages the division was stationed in Scotland and guarded approximately 200 kilometres of British coast.



Normandy

By the end of July 1944 the division had been transferred to Normandy. The final elements arrived on August 1 and the unit was attached to the First Canadian Army. It entered combat on August 8 during Operation Totalize.

The division twice suffered serious bombings by Allied aircraft yet it achieved a brilliant victory against the Wehrmacht in the battles for Mont Ormel, Hill 262 and the town of Chambois.

This series of offensive and defensive operations came to be known as the Battle of Falaise in which a large number of German Wehrmacht and SS divisions were trapped in the Falaise pocket[2] and subsequently destroyed.

Maczek's division had the crucial role of closing the pocket at the escape route of those German divisions, hence the fighting was absolutely desperate and the 2nd Polish Armoured, 24th Polish Lancers and 10th Dragoons supported by the 8th and 9th Infantry Battalions took the brunt of German attacks trying to break free from the pocket.

Surrounded and running out of ammunition they withstood incessant attacks from multiple fleeing panzer divisions for 48 hours until they were relieved.

Belgium and the Netherlands

After the Allied armies broke out from Normandy, the Polish 1st Armoured Division pursued the Germans along the coast of the English Channel, It liberated, among others, the towns of Ypres, Ghent and Passchendaele.

A successful outflanking manoeuvre planned and performed by General Maczek allowed liberation of the city of Breda without any civilian casualties (October 29, 1944).

The Division spent the winter of 1944-1945 on the south bank of the river Rhine, guarding a sector around Moerdijk in the Netherlands.

In early 1945 it was transferred to the province of Overijssel and started to push along with the Allies along the Dutch-German border, liberating the eastern parts of the provinces of Drenthe and Groningen with towns such as Emmen, Coevorden and Stadskanaal.



Image from authors own collection

Photographer unknown.

Description: Tanks and other vehicles of the Polish Divisions in a town somewhere in Northern Europe.

In the distance, parked on the left a mark 1 Daimler Armoured Car can be observed.

Date unknown.

Germany

In April 1945 the 1st Armoured entered Germany in the area of Emsland. On May 6 the division seized the Kriegsmarine naval base in Wilhelmshaven, where General Maczek accepted the capitulation of the fortress, naval base, East Frisian Fleet and more than 10 infantry divisions.

There the Division ended the war and was joined by the Polish 1st Independent Parachute Brigade. It undertook occupation duties until 1947, when the division was disbanded, see Haren, Germany.

The majority of its soldiers opted not to return to now Soviet puppet state of People's Republic of Poland and stayed in exile.

Organization during 1944-45

10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade (10 Brygada Kawalerii Pancernej) - Col. T. Majewski

- 1st Polish Armoured Regiment (1 pułk pancerny) - Lt.Col. Antoni Stefanowicz
- 2nd Polish Armoured Regiment (2 pułk pancerny) - Lt.Col. S. Koszutki
- 24th Polish Lancers Regiment (Armoured; 24 pułk ułanów im. Hetmana Żółkiewskiego) - Lt.Col. J. Kański
- 10th Polish Dragoons Regiment (10 pułk dragonów zmotoryzowanych) - Lt.Col. Władysław Zgorzelski

3rd Polish Infantry Brigade (3 Brygada Strzelców) - Col. Marian Wieroński

- 1st Polish Highland Battalion (1 batalion Strzelców Podhalańskich) - Lt.Col. K. Complak
- 8th Polish Rifle Battalion (8 batalion strzelców) - Lt.Col. Aleksander Nowaczyński
- 9th Polish Rifle Battalion (9 batalion strzelców flandryjskich) - Lt.Col. Zygmunt Szydłowski
- 1st Polish Independent HMG Squadron (samodzielna kompania ckm.) - Maj. M. Kochanowski

- 1st Polish Motorized Artillery Regiment (1 pułk artylerii motorowej) - Lt.Col. J. Krautwald
- 2nd Polish Motorized Artillery Regiment (2 pułk artylerii motorowej) - Lt.Col. K. Meresch
- 1st Polish Anti-Tank Regiment (formed in 1945 from smaller units) (1 pułk artylerii przeciwpancernej) - Major R. Dowbór
- 1st Polish Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (1 pułk artylerii przeciwlotniczej) - Lt.Col. O. Eminowicz, later Maj. W. Berendt

Other Units

- 10th Polish Mounted Rifle Regiment (10 pułk strzelców konnych) (recce) - Maj. J. Maciejowski
- HQ, Military Police,
- engineers (saperzy dywizyjni) - Lt.Col. J. Dorant
- signals (1 batalion łączności) - Lt.Col. J. Grajkowski
- administration, military court, chaplaincy, reserve squadrons, medical services.

establishment

- 885 - officers and NCOs
- 15,210 - soldiers
- 381 - tanks (latter in the campaign mostly M4 Shermans)
- 473 - artillery pieces (mostly motorized)

4050 - motor cars, trucks, utility vehicles, artillery carriers and very possibly at least one Dingo and two armoured cars.



Photo taken at a review of the 1st Mounted Rifles Regiment of the 1st Polish Armoured Division in Scotland.

51 denotes Senior Armoured Regiment 6

F205601 (possibly)

The Dingo passenger is in fact the President of the Polish Republic Wladyslaw Raczkiewicz (not Prime Minister Sikorski) and the driver is Colonel Franciszek Skibinski the then regimental commander.

31st August 1943



Image from <http://maczuga.blog4ever.com/blog/voirphotos-133783-2-1948342549.html>

Photographer unknown.

Description: Tanks and of the Polish Divisions under camouflage sheets, on the far left also under wraps looks to be a Daimler Armoured Car, recognisable from the unusual wheel hubs and instantly recognizable front wing. In addition there appears to be the covered turret of another car to the rear and facing in the opposite direction.

November 1944.

Property of the Polish Institute & Sikorski Museum of London



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Image from http://www.cultura.marche.it/cultura/mostraguerra/default_sik.asp?page=41&order=id%3F

Photographer: unknown of the Sikorski Museum of London

Description: Italy, Engineers of the Light Aid station maintain a troop of Dingo's

Date Unknown -1943-1945

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Image from http://www.cultura.marche.it/cultura/mostraguerra/default_sik.asp?page=41&order=id%3F

Photographer: unknown of the Sikorski Museum of London

Description: Italy, Possibly images of the final victory parade? DSC's F206787 & F206471 are parked near the saluting base.

Date Unknown - circa 1945