

British Legation,
Warsaw.

D.5.

21st March, 1927.

Sir,

In response to repeated requests by Mr. Roberts, to which I have had some hesitation in responding on account of the difficulty of the subject, I have the honour to submit herewith a biography of Marshal Pilsudski.

The material for this is difficult to obtain, the only short connected accounts of his life being pamphlets full of flattering eulogies published for propaganda purposes, and if longer works exist, which I doubt, it would take too long to extract from the Polish the necessary summary.

What I have written is based on over six years' acquaintance with many (fifty to a hundred) of his closest supporters, some of whom have been with him for years; on personal acquaintance with the Marshal himself and several interviews and chance conversations with him, and also on various items of information culled from newspapers at various times; while not omitting to take into account criticisms levelled at him by his enemies.

The attached biography, therefore, represents a coherent summary of a mass of small details, learnt at various times in the last years.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,

J. Clayton

Lieutenant-Colonel, General Staff,
Military Attaché.

His Britannic Majesty's Minister,
H.B.M.'s Legation,
Warsaw.

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PILSUDSKI, Josef. Marshal of Poland.

1.

Josef Pilsudski was born in 1867 on his family property to the north of Wilno, an estate which is now included in the training ground of Podbrodzie. His family were of the lesser aristocracy, and of Lithuanian origin, a fact of which he is very proud. He seems from his earliest days to have been inspired with the idea of Poland's independence, and in his student days at Kharkoff became involved in revolutionary movements against Russia, which he regarded, and still regards, as the principal enemy of his fatherland. These ideas inevitably brought him into touch with the social revolutionaries, in whom he found his closest allies and co-operators, although he himself has never been a socialist. From the Russian Socialist Party a Polish Socialist Party was created, and as this party has consistently championed the cause of complete Polish independence, in contrast to other Polish political parties whose aim was some degree or other of autonomy by negotiation with the partitioning Powers, it was natural that Pilsudski found his main support in the Socialists both before and after the restoration of independence. In these days, about 1900-1905, he was hand in glove with Boris Savinkoff (the reputed thrower of the bomb that killed the Grand Duke Serge in the Kremlin about 1903 or 4) and the two used to rob banks, hold up trains, and so on, in order to obtain money, which, at any rate as regards Pilsudski, was always devoted to the cause and not to their own pockets. These activities naturally brought him into contact with the Tsar's police and at times in his career he was imprisoned in the Warsaw Citadel and exiled to Siberia, and at another time he was obliged to flee the country and spent some time in England. During the Russo-Japanese war he visited Japan in order to enlist the aid of the Japanese in his anti-Russian revolutionary schemes, but without success. In 1906 he, with two ardent supporters, Slawek (now Colonel of Reserve and a high official of the Związek Strzelecki) and Prystor (now a Major in the Polish Army and a very close confidant of the Marshal) were in residence at Lwow and used to stay in the house of Sikorski (now General), who helped them in their work for Poland's independence. Sikorski says that even in those days there was friction between him and Pilsudski, as he found their ideas too "red" to suit the taste of a "petit bourgeois" as he himself was. It was a little later than this that the movement started in Galicia to prepare the Polish inhabitants for the future fight for independence. He created the secret society Związek Walki Czynnej (League of Active Struggle) which eventually became the Związek Strzelecki (Rifle League) authorised by the Austrian Government, which spread rapidly, until branches were founded in foreign towns, e.g., Paris, where Poles congregated. During this period Pilsudski's closest co-operators were Slawek, Rydz-Smigly, Sosnkowski, Burhardt-Bukacki, Piskor, and others. Military Training and musketry instruction were regularly given to the members of the societies. Sosnkowski wrote the first military text-book in Polish, namely, a Field Service Regulations. A school was established at Nowy Sącz to train members to be officers. This school had a short existence, as after a few courses had been held the European War broke out. Those who passed these officers' courses, and one or two others held at the beginning of the war, have now the right to wear the badge known as "parasolka" (from its shape rather like an open umbrella). Amongst them are Piskor, Kasprzycki, Burhardt-Bukacki, Rydz-Smigly, Fabrycy, Bleszynski, and many others.

2.

When in 1914 the war broke out, Pilsudski summoned

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his organisations to Krakow, and with the consent of the Austrian Government proceeded to organise them into Polish Military Units, to take the field under Austrian command. This organisation took place in the gardens of Krakow known as Oleandry. The first Polish cavalry patrol of seven men crossed into Russian Poland as a demonstration on 2nd August 1914, the seven young adventurous spirits being Belina-Prazmowski in command (now landowner and reserve officer of 1st Chevauklegers), Gluchowski (O.C. 4th Cavalry Division), Grzmot-Skotnicki (O.C. 15th Ulan), Kwicic-Skrzynski (Colonel of Cavalry), Kulesza (O.C. 3rd Chevauklegers), and two others since dead. On 4th August the first company followed commanded by Kasprzycki (Now Head of IIIrd Bureau of General Staff), the platoon commanders being Burhardt-Bukaacki (now General, an Inspector), Krak-Passkowski (O.C. 22nd Infantry Regiment), Kruk-Kruszewski (O.C. 1st Legion Regiment), and one now dead. From this modest beginning a brigade (the 1st Legion Brigade) was formed by the end of the year, with Pilsudski as brigadier. The Austrian Government soon organised a second brigade, with a large cadre of Austrian officers, with Josef Haller (now General, then Captain of Reserve) in command. The difference between the two brigades was that whereas the first was organised by Pilsudski and their only aim was complete independence, the second was kept in check by the Austrians and looked rather for a large measure of autonomy within the Austrian Empire. The first also had a large number of Russian subjects, who enlisted under an assumed name, which they now have the right to hyphenate with their patronymic, hence such combinations as Grzmot-Skotnicki. Later a 3rd and 4th Brigade were added, but the 4th never took the field. The Austrian Government then, in order to have greater control over the political tendencies of the Legions, created a divisional commander over them, appointing in succession Zielinski and Trzaska-Durski to the post, and sending Zagorski (an Austrian General Staff officer) as Chief of Staff, with the job of reporting on their politics to Vienna. The divisional organisation was purely administrative as the brigades were never brought together in one formation. During this time Sikorski was with the National Committee at Krakow as its military member, in charge of the Military Department. The Legions fought on the Russian front, the 1st Brigade always under the command of Pilsudski, till early in 1918 the German authorities, who had created a "Council of Regency" under their control as a sort of provisional Government for Poland (that is to say, that part of Russian Poland in their occupation), decided to use Pilsudski's Legions as the basis of a new Polish Army, a Polnische Wehrmacht.

3.

They withdrew the 1st Brigade, therefore, from the front to Jablonna and Benjaminow in the neighbourhood of Warsaw, and busied themselves with the preparations for the new Army. The first thing they tried to do was to get the Legions to take the oath to the Polish State, but also to the German Emperor. (NOTE. The 2nd Brigade could not be included in this, as being organised by the Austrian Government they were composed of Austrian subjects and had already taken the oath to the Austrian Emperor). Pilsudski ordered the Legions to refuse to take the oath, and they were consequently disbanded and the leading officers were interned in various fortresses in Germany, Pilsudski being sent to Magdeburg. During these events, Zagorski, as Chief of Staff to the Legions, had made reports to the German Governor General Beseler regarding officers who were active in urging refusal to take this oath, and this has never been forgiven to him by the Legionaries. Before going to prison, Pilsudski organised among the disbanded Legionaries and among other of his supporters the secret organisation P.O.W. (Polish Military Organisation), with which he kept in touch with the men and carried on propaganda throughout the country in favour of Polish independence. It may be here inserted in parentheses that the 2nd Legion Brigade, as Austrian subjects, continued to take

part in the war, until the signature of the Treaty of Brest Litovsk showed them that they could not rely on the Central Powers to realise their dream of comparative independence, and having also by this time fallen under the influence of Pilsudski, they left the Austrian front and crossed over to the Russians, and being later on attacked at Kaniew on the Dnieper by the Germans and Bolsheviki, dispersed themselves, the individuals trying to make their way to join Polish troops being formed at Minsk, Marmansk, Odessa, and other places.

4.

When in 1918 the Germans applied for an armistice, Pilsudski obtained his freedom from Magdeburg by promising to give their troops on the Eastern Front free passage through Poland back to Germany. He returned to Warsaw, where he found that a temporary Government had been formed at Lublin. He was acclaimed as Chief of State, assumed supreme power, formed a new Government at Warsaw, and started to organise the State and an Army. The latter was necessary, as although the armistice had put a stop to the Great War, the Bolsheviki were still fighting against the Germans and continued their operations against the Poles who took their place, the Ukrainians were attacking Lwow which was being held by a Polish garrison, the Czechs wanted to take Teschen, and the Germans tried to push back the Poles who had driven out the German troops from Poznan. Pilsudski organised an army, based at first on his P.O.W. and Legionaries, then on the principle of compulsory service, and by the summer of 1919 had disposed of the Ukrainians and patched up hostilities with the Czechs and Germans. The Bolshevik menace, however, became more formidable and the operations against them, from being at first desultory, became a regular war, especially as the Bolshevik's defeat of Kolchak and Denikin enabled them to turn greater attention to the Poles. Finally, after the winter of 1919-20 Pilsudski, who was also Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army, fearing a Bolshevik advance in the summer, resolved to strike the first blow himself. The result was the expedition to Kieff, which has been severely criticised by many, but there is much to be said for Pilsudski's conception. The Bolshevik army was growing stronger daily in numbers, organisation and resources; the Poles had practically reached their limit. It was quite clear that the Bolsheviki would attack sooner or later, and Pilsudski's argument was that it would be better to use an active defence and strike a blow before their concentration and preparations were finished, than to sit down and merely await the attack. He was further influenced by his desire to detach the Ukraine from Moscow, and listened to the arguments of Petlura, the Ukrainian anti-Bolshevik leader, who said that the Ukrainian population would receive him with joy as their deliverer from the Bolshevik yoke. All these hopes were unfulfilled. Pilsudski arrived at Kieff, but a few days afterwards the Bolsheviki counter-attacked and drove the Polish army right back to the Vistula, Lwow alone remaining unconquered. North of the Pripet another Bolshevik army drove back the Polish northern army to the outskirts of Warsaw. In the middle of August the Poles made a stand outside Warsaw, and turned the tide. General Weygand, who had come out from Paris with General Sir P. Radcliffe, gave advice to the Poles which contributed to this success. The actual operation order was drawn up and signed by Rozwadowski, the Chief of Staff, and Pilsudski merely commanded an Army operation in accordance with Rozwadowski's order. The result is that Pilsudski became jealous, and still is, of Rozwadowski's share in this victory. The Polish armies continued to drive back the Bolshevik army till an armistice was signed in October, by which a demarcation line between the two armies was fixed, which became the present frontier by the Treaty of Riga of March, 1921. In October 1920 the Wilno episode took place, by which General Zeligowski led his division, without orders, to drive the

Lithuanians out of that town, which had been handed over to them by the Bolsheviks when they drove the Poles out of it. At the time, the Polish authorities declared that Zeligowski had acted on his own initiative and disowned him, but later on Pilsudski confessed that he had given the order. Wilno is a district particularly beloved by Pilsudski, and not only by him but by the great majority of Poles, who would never consent to its loss.

In the period of peace that followed, the Sejm voted the Constitution and in accordance with it was dissolved in the autumn of 1922. New elections were held, and when the new Legislature was assembled Pilsudski resigned the office of Chief of State. Narutowicz was elected President but was murdered after 2 days by a fanatic, as a result of the violent propaganda carried out against him by the Right parties. In this crisis, when it was feared that riots might ensue, Sikorski was hurriedly made Prime Minister, and Pilsudski became Chief of Staff of the Army. Thanks to this, no rioting took place and the situation was saved. When Sikorski was succeeded a few months later by a Right Government, Pilsudski retired into private life at Sulejów-ek near Warsaw. From this retreat he proceeded to watch, with a malevolent and critical eye, the efforts, first of the Witos Government, then of the Grabski Government to govern without him. He particularly criticised the attempts to draw up a "Law of the Higher Military Authorities" as no Government would give to the Inspector General (for which post no one ever considered any candidate other than Pilsudski, as it carried with it the designation of future Commander-in-Chief in War) the powers to make preparations for war without the approbation of the War Minister, which is what Pilsudski wanted. From time to time Pilsudski launched in the Press a violent and somewhat unreasoning attack against those who opposed him, especially Sikorski and Stanislas Haller. Finally, when the Grabski Government fell in the autumn of 1925, carrying with it Sikorski, Pilsudski's influence led to the appointment of Zeligowski as War Minister. Zeligowski was a mere cypher, he just did what Pilsudski told him. He arranged that the greater part of the important military posts in Warsaw should be held by Pilsudski's followers and so prepared the way for the events of May. Pilsudski's influence grew daily, and his followers became more aggressive. When a new Government consisting of the Right parties was formed in May, 1926, Pilsudski's indignation reached its limits. He attacked them in the Press, accusing them of all kinds of dishonesty, corruption, and lack of patriotism. It is supposed that the Government intended to arrest him, but there were too many supporters of Pilsudski in Warsaw, and he was kept informed of the Government's intentions. The rumour got about that an attack had been made on Pilsudski's house, and troops in the vicinity established themselves as his guard, and the next day, 12th May, Pilsudski led them to Warsaw. It is now certain that all he intended was to make a demonstration, he thought that he would be acclaimed by the population and that he would merely drive to Belweder, the President's residence, and obtain from him the dismissal of the Government. Events turned out otherwise. The Government attempted to stop Pilsudski's arrival by force, but the leading Generals deserted to Pilsudski and took most of the troops with them. Pilsudski thus gained the northern half of the town that evening with the exchange merely of a few shots. But the Government retired to Belweder and with the help of those troops that remained loyal and others that had already been summoned from Poznan prepared to defend themselves, until the arrival of reinforcements should enable them to retake the offensive against Pilsudski. But Pilsudski sent out also for reinforcements, and the battle began and lasted till the evening of the 14th, 48 hours in all. Reinforcements kept on arriving for both sides, but finally the Government

capitulated

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capitulated, and the President resigned. Pilsudski was then master of the situation. He refused to accept the Presidency when elected by the Legislature, but recommended a candidate who was chosen. He became Minister of War, and later Prime Minister in addition. He obtained from the Diet a grant of special powers to make laws by Presidential decree, and in this way drafted the "Law of the Higher Military Authorities" according to his own ideas, and then nominated himself Inspector General in addition. Some of his measures in the Army, especially the banishment to distant garrisons of some, and the placing on the retired list of others of those officers who were not his partisans, have given rise to certain discontent, but in general he is, at the present moment of writing (March, 1927) the master of the situation and the virtual dictator.

6.

Pilsudski is a man of many contradictions; he has great qualities and great faults. He possesses the following qualities:- intense love of country, for which he has conspired, laboured and fought throughout his life, earning often ingratitude, - unimpeachable honesty, he has never profited to a penny from the high positions he has occupied, and is now a poor man, - great personal attraction, those who have worked with him are devoted to him, and those who only know him from a distance, the mass of the population, regard him as a hero and recognise his commanding personality, - strength of purpose, in the very darkest moments he never lost sight of his ideal, Poland's independence, - strong loyalty, he is never forgetful of services rendered to himself or his cause, - he is generous, and is often ready to conciliate and co-operate with those who have recently been opposed to him (with certain exceptions of whom he is jealous), - he is single-minded in his labours for his country, but is inclined like all Poles to consider that he himself alone can govern it and that his policy alone is the correct one, consequently he is apt to identify his own success with the good of the country.

On the other hand he is handicapped by a number of faults. He is inordinately jealous, for instance of Sikorski, of Rozwadowski, and this is the main reason of his enmity for these two, - he is a bad judge of character, he is surrounded by men whose aims are entirely selfish, but to whom he has been indebted for co-operation in the past, and his sense of loyalty prevents him from dismissing them and they trade on this fact for their private ends, - he is vain, and susceptible to flattery, thinking himself a second Napoleon, and is apt to consider himself the one and only person responsible for the re-creation of Poland, in which he is more or less justified only that he himself is inclined to tell people so.

7.

He is neither a politician nor a statesman, nor a brilliant general. He is not at his best when at the head of an organised State. He is a leader of men, a man to take the lead in a crisis, to solve it by means of his native shrewdness, energy and personality, rather than by training and experience. He is better as the commander of irregular troops such as the Legions than of an organised and disciplined Army.

He is hard-working, with energy and drive, and can get things done in a country where this quality is generally lacking. He dislikes to take advice or opinions, he prefers to work out his plans himself. When in doubt what to do, he keeps silence, and waits, while all other Poles in such a situation are apt to talk and chatter, ask and give advice, consequently Pilsudski has gained a reputation for silent strength, which is largely justified. He overburdens himself with work to such an extent that he cannot possibly attend to it all by himself, consequently he has to leave a lot in the hands of those in his immediate

entourage, and take their reports without due examination. Undoubtedly these men take advantage of this, and use the power that they thus acquire for their own ends. Pilsudski is thus made responsible for many acts of meanness and revenge of which, in all probability, he knows nothing.

8.

In personal appearance he is a little above mean stature, or, in other words, rather tall for a Pole, being about 5' 8" or 5' 9", rather thin for a man of his age, though this is probably due to ill-health. He is inclined to stoop and is careless of his appearance. His hair and moustache were black but are now greyish. He has prominent eyebrow ridges and long, meeting eyebrows, a long untidy moustache. His chin is strong, his features clearly defined and his nose leptorhine. His eyes are bright blue. His head appears to be brachycephalic, and the back of his head is sloping. He wears on ceremonial occasions a uniform of dull, greyish blue, and disdains the Polish diamond-shaped P.S. cap, preferring a round-topped one. On other occasions he wears a dark jacket, buttoned up to the neck, a reminiscence of the days when he was merely the Chief of the Legions. His health is not good, every winter he suffers from bronchitis, and his constitution is weakened by early excesses. He cannot exist without work; when in retirement he looked ill and broken, but as soon as he took over the reins of power in 1926 he improved in looks, and in temper.

9.

As regards his political views, it can hardly be said that he has any. His one guiding principle is Poland, and in order to carry out what he considers good for Poland he uses whatever political party suits his plans. In the old days he was in close touch with the Socialists. They helped him, and they have always been his most devoted adherents, till the summer of 1926. He detests the National Democrats, Dmowski and Company, as in the pre-war days their aims were less pronounced as regards Polish independence than his. This hatred still exists and is justified by the attitude taken by the National Democrats towards him even in the critical days of 1920. But he likes to remind people that the Pilsudski family is also a noble family from Lithuania and does not disdain to choose his A.D.C.'s from the princely and countly families. Having lost the goodwill of the Socialists after May, 1926, he has been fishing for support among the Right, and has gained a large number of them, including landed proprietors of the East, industrialists and others, and has thus weakened his enemies the National Democrats.

10.

He would like to include in the Polish frontiers the Ukraine and Lithuania. He apparently has not renounced the hope of eventually inducing Lithuania to enter into a close union with Poland, as in the old days of the Jagiello dynasty, and if this could be brought off he would give up Wilno to the Lithuanian partner of this confederation. As regards the Ukraine, union of any sort is very difficult, but he would support any movement that would make the Ukraine an independent buffer State between Poland and Russia, perhaps in some sort of loose federation with Poland. The Russians are his main enemy; the Germans are enemies, but in a lesser degree. He has hitherto been a partisan of the policy of friendliness with Germany, but Germany has made no attempt to meet him; and perhaps the recent despatch of his confidant Patek to Moscow as diplomatic representative, and the cordial speeches exchanged on that occasion, may herald a reversal of the previous policy and an attempt at entering into friendly relations with Russia in order to have the field free against Germany. He has no hard or fast ideas on internal questions, he is content to leave financial, economic, social, and labour problems to those who can understand them.

He mistrusts and dislikes foreigners, and suspects them of trying to influence the course of Polish public

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life and policy.

11. Like his political life, his domestic life has been varied. He was married many years ago to a lady, whom he deserted before the war. He then lived with a lady, a school teacher, who also aided him in his work of preparing for Polish independence. By her he has two girls, born 1917 and 1919. When his first wife died, about 1924, she was buried with some ceremony at Wilno, and he married the second, who has now become a person of influence in the country.

He takes no exercise at all, and appears to have no recreations. He is a poor horseman and dislikes riding. He smokes innumerable cigarettes. He has a penchant for working at night, and gets most of his best work done in the small hours. He is very fond of children, and is devoted to his own, and one of the most popular photographs of him shows a much be-medalled and decorated Marshal with two very badly dressed children on his knee.

He is very well read, and studious. He can discuss many and varied subjects. But above all else he studies war, and his reading of military books has given him a certain knowledge of the subject which only comes to most Generals by years of practical experience and study combined.

Pilsudski, in spite of a rough exterior, brusque manner, and a habit of using exceedingly vulgar language to those momentarily displease him, has a singular personal attraction and charm, and it is no wonder that his supporters are devoted to him, and that those Legionaries who chucked up everything in 1914 to follow him on what must have seemed to be a forlorn hope, and brought that hope to fruition after years of struggle and despair, regard him with a devotion, and worship and serve him with a fidelity that is rarely equalled.

NOTE:

The second line of the second sub-paragraph of paragraph 6 should read as follows:

"faults. He is inordinately jealous of others who possess strength and decision, for instance of Sikor."