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Poland's Union With The Sea

For Poland, the independence and freedom of her nation was the most significant article of the Treaty of Versailles. For over a hundred years she had been waiting for this moment. She hailed with great satisfaction the guarantee of independence by the League of Nations.

There were many problems connected with the restoration of the western frontiers as Russia plunged into a civil war and no final decision on the eastern boundaries was yet made.

On June 28, 1919 the Treaty of Versailles promised Poland its own access to the sea. The strip of the Baltic coast and the intricate solution of the problem of Danzig, which became a free city with special rights for Poland, did not become a reality until early 1920.

In April, 1919 General Jozef Haller's 2nd Legion Brigade came to Poland from France. This army which was comprised of 10,000 volunteers in 1918, by an agreement with the French government was placed under the authority of the Polish National Committee of Dmowski. In February, 1919 the demobilized French troops transferred military equipment and uniforms to the new Polish detachments so that by the middle of 1919, Haller had about 100,000 men under his command.

The Polish General Staff with Pilsudski were concentrating most of their efforts on Galicia and the eastern parts of Poland to bring the situation under complete control.

The Baltic strip and access to the sea were probably as important to Poland as was her independence, and General Jozef Haller was chosen to legally and officially manifest this union to the Polish Nation and the world.

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On February 10, 1920 General Haller arrived with a cavalry regiment on the Baltic beach at a town

named Puck. There, after the celebration of mass, the Polish flag was unfurled. The fishermen ("Kaszuby") who guarded the sea, stepped down to be replaced by the Polish Navy, the new guardians of the sea.

It was at this time that General Haller threw a ring into the Baltic waters as a symbol of Poland's marriage to the sea and officially declared Poland's rightful access to the sea.

Thus began a new era for Poland. New seaports like Gdynia, Jastarnia, Hel and Orlowo were opened. A new chapter in Poland's history was being written when she acquired her own ships like "Wicher", "Burza", "Grom", "Blyskawica", "Wilk", "Rys", "Pilsudski", "Batory" and others.

The song, "Morze, Nasze Morze" was sung by millions of free and happy Poles.

The Miracle of the Vistula

The Eastern Boundaries of Poland were not fully stated in the Treaty of Versailles. Peace negotiations with Russia by 1920 were still without results. Both sides prepared for war.

In April, 1920 the Ukrainian liberation campaign began. Russians at first offered little resistance and on May 7, 1920 the southern city of Kiev was in Polish hands. Up north, Pilsudski's army reached the Dzwina and Berezina rivers. This triumph was short lived. Russian troops assumed a great offensive at the end of May. On June 13 Kiev was abandoned and the retreat of the Polish armies began.

The retreat continued through the month of June and soon Wilno and Lwow were in Bolshevik hands. Up north, they reached Torun and in some instances, they crossed the Vistula river, devastating the countryside. On August 6, 1920 the Bolshevik armies approached Warsaw. The "London Times" reported:

"It's a terrible truth, that once more we stand on the edge of a crisis."

At this tragic time with the nation in danger the Poles united. Thousands and thousands, from all walks of life, young and old, women and children, made ready to defend their homeland.

Marshal Pilsudski assigned General Jozef Haller to organize the volunteer army aided with arms and supplies from France.

A bold, strategic plan was formed by Pilsudski. On August 15, 1920 the Bolsheviks, only 20 miles from Warsaw received a sudden blow. A swift and unexpected attack near Warsaw was lead by Pilsudski's army, Gen. Haller's volunteers and Gen. Sikorski's forces. Not only soldiers, but scouts and students took up arms.

Two senior classes of students from Lebkowski high school in Warsaw signed as volunteers with Father Ignatius Skorupka as their chaplain. This was their first experience with war and the young priest saw their plight. Dressed in his cassock and stole, Father Skorupka urged the boys on with his cross held high. He shouted, "Sing the hymn to the Blessed Mother, 'Serdeczna Matko', and forward!" With a song on their lips and inspired with courage they attacked. Father Skorupka was hit by an enemy shell, fell on the battlefield, but the boys went on to beat the enemy.

The courage of the young, the faith of the old, and their deep love for God and country — this was the Miracle of the Vistula — "Cud Nad Wisla"!

— Roman H. Strzelecki

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