

What Are, and What Is in, the Central Military Archive?

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The Central Military Archive, or CAW for short [Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe], headquartered in Warsaw, is located on the spacious grounds of the Ministry of National Defense. One might say this is a city within a city, with housing developments, schools, hotels, restaurants, and shops as well as the Archive. The complex is surrounded by a wall with an entry gate guarded by sentries. The whole area is covered with greenery, and in the officers' mess you can hear the language of Americans....

The procedure for getting permission to inspect the records lasts several days. After the appropriate documents and applications are submitted, the Head of CAW gives his consent. Standard procedure is to grant permission to look at five files a day, but I was able to get permission to look at 20 files in the course of one day. In all I studied over 60 files.

Over the course of three days, I had a chance to get a general knowledge of the resources in the Archive, and to do more careful research regarding the Polish Legions during the period 1914–1925.

In general, the CAW has been collecting records since 1908, and they are divided into four sections:

1. 1908–1939
2. 1939–1945 - wartime
3. 1943–1954 - the Polish Army
4. post–1945

I worked with the first section, with emphasis on the Polish Legions. Here, in order, are the subdivisions of that section:

- The oldest documents, 1908–1914, deal with pre-war Polish associations, or Polish Military Independence Organizations. They were created and were active primarily in the territory of Galicia.

The documents deal with the following organizations:

- 1908 – The Union of Active Struggle [Związek Walki Czynnej]
- 1910 – The Riflemen's Union [Związek Strzelecki]
- 1911 – The Polish Riflemen's Squads [Polskie Drużyny Strzeleckie]
- 1912 – The Falcon Field Squads [Drużyny Polowe Sokół]
- 1913 – The Podhale Squads [Drużyny Podhalańskie]
- 1914 – The Bartosz Squads in Lwów [Drużyny Bartoszkowe we Lwowie]*

The records of these sets are not complete. They are in fact rather fragmentary— all kinds of reports, teaching journals, correspondence and identity papers.

- The Polish Legions and Polish Auxiliary Corps [Polski Korpus Posiłkowy], 1914–1918. These military formations were created on 16 August 1914 by the Supreme

**Editor's Note—Please note that the names by which Polish organizations became known in English are not always accurate translations of their Polish names. I have checked these names whenever possible; so for instance I did find documents online that referred to the Związek Walki Czynnej as “the Union of Active Struggle.” But whenever I could find no English documents that confirmed the English names of these organizations, I simply translated them literally as best I could.*

National Council, with the agreement of the Austro-Hungarian government. In October 1915 the first three brigades of the Legions were created, which Austria in 1917 designated for the Provisional Council of State and the German government. An uprising soon arose in the ranks of soldiers who refused to swear loyalty to the Central governments and were interned in camps in Beniaminów and Szczypiorno. The remaining soldiers were incorporated into the Polish Auxiliary Corps, which was also dissolved after an armed uprising.

The documents from this group (74 sets) deal with, among other things, 3 brigades, 6 infantry regiments, 2 regiments of Uhlans, 1 artillery regiment, 4 battalions, the field postal service, a school for ensigns and junior officers, lists of individuals by name, lists of the Legions' soldiers, pay sheets, lists of those treated, tried, and fined, and applications and nominations for decorations.

- Polish Armed Forces [Polskie Siły Zbrojne], 1916–1918. The Polish Armed Forces came into existence as a result of an order of the Emperor of Austria transferring the Polish Legions to the “Polish Army,” named the Polish Armed Forces. This came about as the result of the so-called “oath crisis” [*Editor—so called because members of the Legion refused to take an oath of loyalty, as mentioned above*]. The soldiers of this formation were called “Królewscy” because they came from the territory of the Kingdom of Poland. Those interned earlier were also incorporated into this army. After Poland gained its independence, the Polish Armed Forces became part of the Polish Army. Documents from this time are: lists of officers and soldiers by name, correspondence, orders, promotions, and court records.

- The Eastern Formations, 1917–1920. These were Polish corps; the 4th Division of the Polish Riflemen, and the 5th Siberian Division, created in Russia 1917–1918. The soldiers were Poles serving temporarily in the Russian army. Documents: orders, lists of soldiers in the hospital.

- A separate section deals with the army of General Haller, 1917–1919. This army was created in France 4 June 1917 and recruited Polish soldiers serving in the French army as well as former prisoners of war. Also enlisting in it were volunteers from the former armies of Germany and Austria,

as well as the English and American formations. The forming of the army lasted up to June 1919. These documents comprise 17 different sets; they are mainly materials dealing with identification and finances.

- The Polish Military Organization [POW, Polska Organizacja Wojskowa], 1915–1920. POW was created on the initiative of Józef Piłsudski in Warsaw shortly after the outbreak of World War I. It was formed as a result of a union between the Riflemen's Union and the Polish Riflemen's Squads. Initially it was active in the Polish Kingdom, and then later in Galicia, Ukraine, and Russia. As of December, 1918, POW was incorporated into the Polish Army. These divisions took part in the Uprisings in Great Poland and Silesia, as well as in the Polish-Soviet War, 1919–1920.

Records: regulations, instructions, statutes, communiques, registrations, circulars, bulletins, reports, status as regards numbers, and identification papers.

- The Uprising in Upper Silesia, 1919–1920, comprises over 90 sets of documents. The common bond of the divisions of the Upper Silesian Uprisings was the POW. After the first uprising in 1919 the divisions that rebelled took the name of Upper Silesia Militia [Milicja Górnosląskie], and the POW took the name Polish Defence of Upper Silesia [Polska Obrona Górnego Śląska]. The documents deal with 16 regiments of infantry, 6 *powiat* commands, and the Supreme Command. The most materials are on the subject of the 3rd uprising. There are some personnel records preserved.

- The Self-Defense of Lithuania and Belarus, 1918–1920—the spontaneous activity of groups of Polish ethnicity living in Lithuania and Belarus. The documents are fragmentary historical materials, letters and lists of names of officers, volunteers, and officials that have been preserved.

- The Committee of National Defense in America [Komitet Obrony Narodowej w Ameryce], 1913–1920. It was created on 16 December 1912 as a political organization representing the leftist nationalist movement. There is a very small supply of documents, reports, bills, summons, books of members and press clippings.

- The Armed Forces [Siły Zbrojne] of the former Prussian partition, 1919–1920. These

formations were created by the Commissariat of the Supreme National Council in Poznań (December 1918–1919). Among the many administrative and operational documents there have been preserved soldiers' personnel files, lists of officers, personal data of officers, personal correspondence, and there is also a list of names of police commissioners in Poznań.

- The Military Personnel Bureau [Wojskowe Biuro Personalne], 1927–1939. There is a list of professional officers and of reserves. Documents of the whole officer staff, soldiers' personal matters, criminal affairs, nominations, and mobilization allotments.

- The next dozen or so sections are records of individual military departments: of industry, health, justice, disarmament, artillery, recruitment, air force, technical forces, communications, engineering, etc.

- Military missions in Vienna, Lithuania, and Eastern Galicia. 🇺🇦