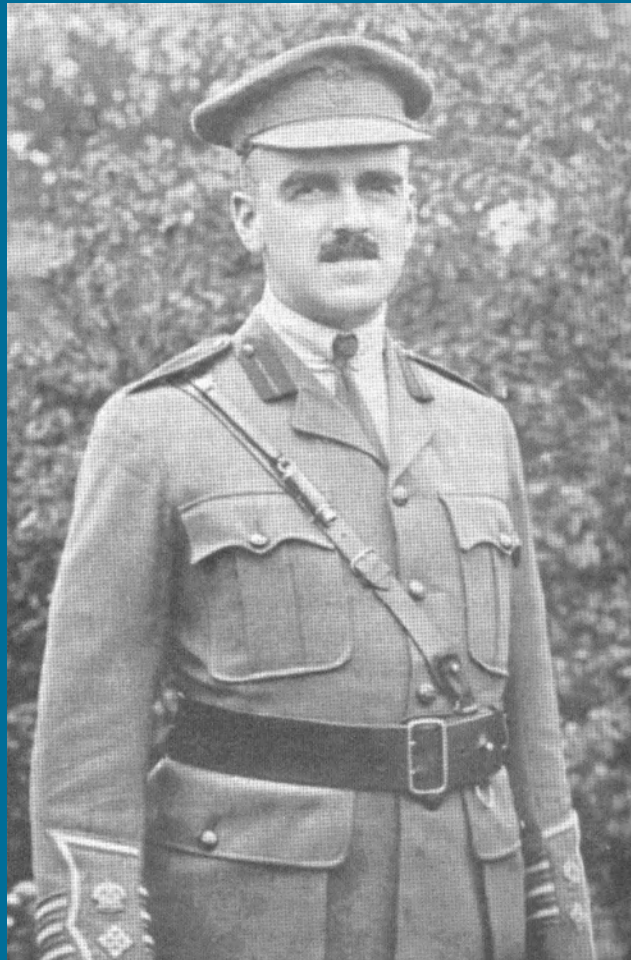


The Polish Army Camp in Canada during World War I

Niagara-on-the-Lake, 1917-1919



Lt. Col. Arthur D. LePan (1885-1976)

COMMANDER OF THE POLISH CAMP

Over 22,000 North Americans of Polish descent, who volunteered to join the Polish Army in World War I, were received at the Canadian training facility at Niagara-on-the-Lake between 1917 and 1919. Just over 20,000 of these Canadian-trained Polish soldiers went to France, where they became the core of a new Polish Army fighting on the Western Front. In the spring of 1919, the Polish Army was transported from France to Poland, where its soldiers played a vital role in the battles to secure Poland's eastern border from 1919 to 1920.

SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS:

- 1772-1795: The Partitions of Poland
- 1914-1918: World War I and an Opportunity to Free Poland
- 1917: Canada Begins to Train Polish Soldiers
- 1917-1919: The Niagara-on-the-Lake Camp in Canada - "Camp Kościuszko"
- Canadians Prominently Involved with the Polish Army
- 1918: The Blue Army Fighting in France
- 1919-1920: The Blue Army Soldiers in Poland
- 1919 to Present: Remembering the Polish Army's Stay in Canada



1772-1795: The Partitions of Poland

Poland ceased to exist as an independent country in 1795 after its third partition between Russia, Prussia, and Austria.



The Partitions of Poland, 1772-1795. *Courtesy of <https://www.britannica.com/event/Partitions-of-Poland>.*



Europe on the Eve of World War I, 1914. *Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.*

1914-1918: World War I and an Opportunity to Free Poland

The outbreak of the First World War was Poland's chance for rebirth. Its occupiers were pitted against each other - Austrians and Germans on one side and Russians on the other. While ethnic Poles found themselves in the armies of all three empires in 1914, the three brigades of the Austrian Army's "Polish Legions" fought many battles against the Russians on the Eastern Front between 1914 and 1917. By 1917, Polish lands were mostly cleared of Russian occupiers, but as the legionnaires refused to swear an oath of allegiance to Austria and Germany, the Polish Legions were disbanded. As these legions disappeared, North America became the source for an entirely new Polish Army and Canada played a critical role in its birth.



Polish Legion officers on the Eastern Front during World War I. *Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.*

When Great Britain declared war on Germany on August 4, 1914, Canada automatically became part of the Allied side during the First World War. Polish émigré leaders in the United States believed that many men from the sizeable Polish-American community were ready to enter Canada, form Polish units, and fight on the Western Front. It was thought that a significant Polish military effort in France would favourably dispose the Allies toward supporting the recreation of an independent Poland after an Allied victory. Both Great Britain and Canada considered organizing a Polish force in Canada with Polish-American volunteers, but the project was abandoned at the end of 1914 because American neutrality in the war posed a significant roadblock.

In 1916, the dream of creating a Polish force in Canada with American volunteers surfaced again. Senior Polish-American leaders met several times with various Canadian officials and the idea of a "Polish Legion of Canada" began to develop. Despite their initial excitement, the project lost its momentum in late 1916. However, it did not disappear entirely.



1917: Canada Begins to Train Polish Soldiers



In 1917, circumstances changed and it became possible to form a Polish Army in Canada. By that time, the Western Allies desperately needed more reinforcements to support the war effort. Russia, which had hitherto resisted the ideas of Polish independence and a national Polish Army, was now in a state of revolution. The United States was no longer neutral and had joined the war on the Allied side. In June, France announced a decision to create a Polish Army in the west. Intense and complex post-announcement negotiations led to an agreement by the fall of 1917: France would finance a Polish Army, the United States would allow Polish-Americans to join, and Canada would organize all aspects of training. In fact, Canada had already started training Polish-Americans as officers, initially in secret, at the University of Toronto in January 1917.



Building on this momentum, new Polish-American officer candidates began training in the summer of 1917 at the Polish College in Cambridge Springs, Pennsylvania. At the same time, the officer training in Canada was transferred from Toronto to Camp Borden, Ontario. By September 1917, the Cambridge Springs trainees were also transferred to Camp Borden.

Left: Polish-American officer candidates at the University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 1917. Courtesy of University of Toronto Archives, B1977-0029/002P (05).

Below: Polish-American officer candidates at the Polish College in Cambridge Springs, Pennsylvania, USA, 1917. Courtesy of the Museum of the Polish Army in Warsaw.



Officer instructors at the Polish College in Cambridge Springs, Pennsylvania, USA, 1917. Courtesy of the Museum of the Polish Army in Warsaw.

Training soldiers at the Polish College in Cambridge Springs, Pennsylvania, USA, 1917. Courtesy of the Museum of the Polish Army in Warsaw.



Camp Borden

The Polish-American officer training camp at Camp Borden, Ontario, Canada in 1917. *Courtesy of Wikipedia Commons.*

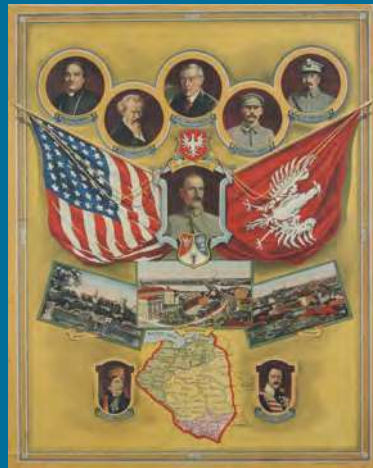
Once the Franco-American-Canadian agreement was reached, the small summer militia training camp in Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL), Ontario, became home for the Polish recruits, starting in October 1917. Official recruiting efforts began at the same time and continued until early 1919. There were 43 recruiting centres in the United States - the busiest being in Chicago, New York City, Detroit, Pittsburgh, and Buffalo - and 4 in Canada, at Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, and NOTL.



Polish Army Recruiting Centre No. 2 in Chicago, Illinois, USA in 1917. *Courtesy of the Museum of the Polish Army in Warsaw.*



American recruitment posters for the Polish Army in France. *Courtesy of Wikipedia Commons.*



American recruitment poster for the Polish Army in France by W.T. Benda. *Courtesy of the Archives and Museum of the Polish Combatants' Association in Toronto.*

1917-1919: The Niagara-on-the-Lake Camp in Canada - “Camp Kościuszko”

As soon as recruitment started, thousands of Polish-American volunteers flocked to the camp at NOTL and the Camp Borden trainees were transferred there as well. The NOTL training centre became known to the Poles as “Camp Kościuszko”, but to the Canadians as simply the “Polish Camp”. As the number of arriving volunteers in NOTL increased throughout the fall of 1917, it was necessary to create two sub-camps, one in St. Johns (St-Jean), Quebec and the other at Fort Niagara in Youngstown, New York, to provide accommodations through the winter of 1917-1918. The Polish Camp at NOTL operated until its closure in March 1919.



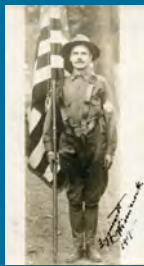
A Polish Army training contingent at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, Canada. *Courtesy of the Niagara Historical Society and Museum, #2006.001.015.*



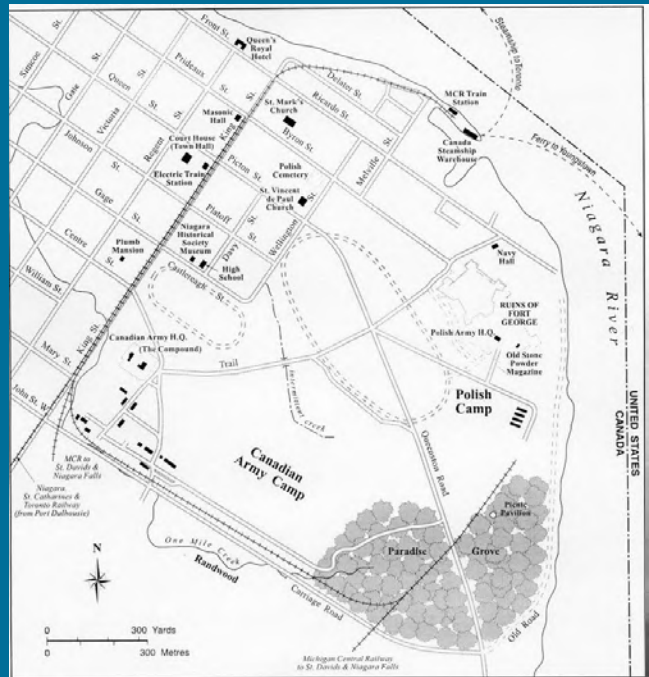
"Camp Kościuszko"



The Polish Army flagpole at Niagara-on-the-Lake, 1917. *Courtesy of University of Toronto Archives, B1978-0001/003P.*

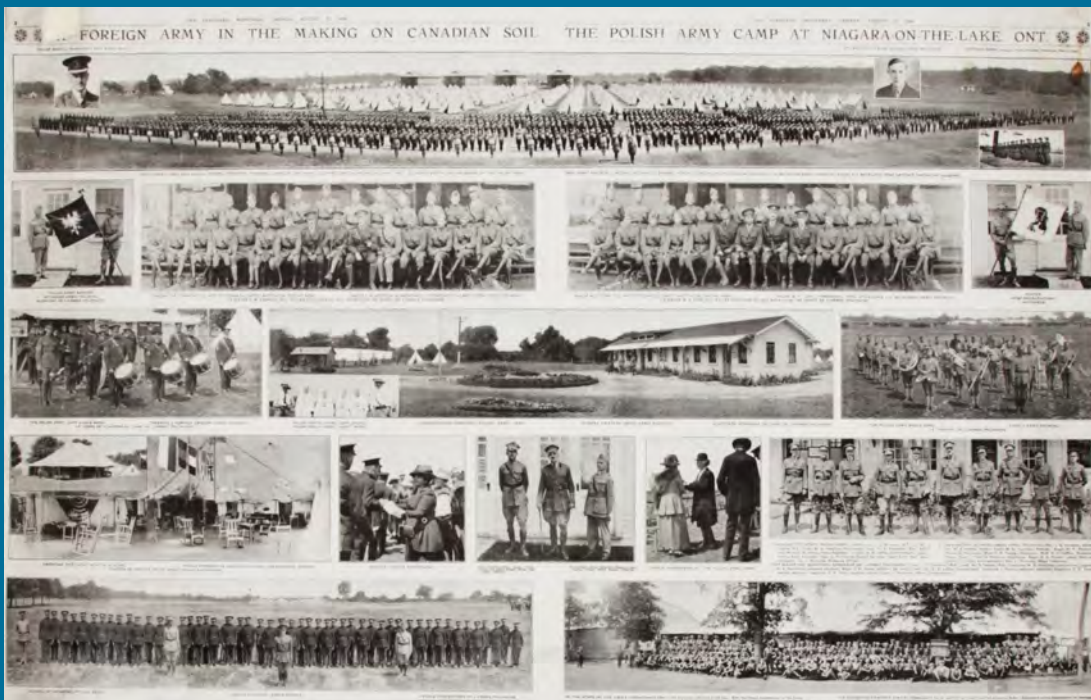


Zygmunt Wiśniewski, 1917. *Courtesy of the Museum of the Polish Army in Warsaw.*



Lt. Col. A.D. LePan and Polish Army Camp staff at Niagara-on-the-Lake, 1917. *Courtesy of the Archives and Museum of the Polish Combatants' Association in Toronto.*

Fort George Military Reserve/Commons, 1917. In 1917, Camp Niagara-on-the-Lake was probably near its peak capacity. In the fall of 1917, the cavalry camp was moved towards the western end of the camp and the new, year-round Polish Army Camp was established. *Courtesy of Richard D. Merritt.*



Polish Army Camp at Niagara-on-the-Lake, on August 31, 1918. *Courtesy of the Museum of the Polish Army in Warsaw.*



Lt. Col. A.D. LePan, Commandant, and Staff of the Polish Army Camp. *Courtesy of the Niagara Historical Society & Museum, #991.737.*



The reviewing stand at the Polish Army Camp with the future Prime Minister of Poland, Mr. Ignacy Jan Paderewski, standing in the centre of the dias. *Courtesy of the Niagara Historical Society & Museum, #972.497.*



Left: Polish soldiers in the Heroes Parade, Niagara-on-the-Lake 1918. *Courtesy of Jim Smith.*

Below: A panoramic view of the Polish Army Camp, Niagara-on-the-Lake. *Courtesy of Jim Smith*



POLISH WHITE CROSS (CAPT. WARE). POLSKI BIALY KRZYZ (KAPIT. WARE).

HEADQUARTERS COMPOUND, POLISH ARMY CAMP.

GLOWNA KWATERA OBOZU ARMII POLSKIEJ.

QUARTIERS GENERAUX DU CAMP DE L'ARMEE POLONAISE.



Canadians Prominently Involved with the Polish Army

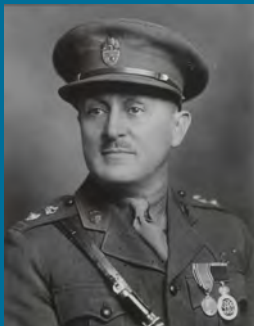
Beyond the extensive work done at the highest levels to arrange for a Polish Army to be trained in Canada, its success was also due to the efforts of many other Canadians who contributed to the training, care, and reputation of the Polish Army during its stay in NOTL from 1917 to 1919. Below are a few remarks about the more prominent ones.



MGen. Willoughby Gwatkin (1859-1925), the British-born Chief of the Canadian General Staff in World War I, was a key figure in arranging for the NOTL militia camp to be made available to the Polish Army. He became known as "the Godfather of the Polish Army" and continued his support for the Polish Camp for its duration in Canada.



LCol. Arthur D. LePan (1885-1976) was the commander of the Polish Camp. He had also been in charge of the earlier Polish officers' school at the University of Toronto and at Camp Borden. LCol. LePan's report about the closure of the camp in 1919 noted the excellence of the Canadian staff, the Canadian admiration for the discipline and patriotism of the Polish soldiers, and the positive relations with the townspeople of NOTL. He was highly decorated by Poland after the war and his diary as commander of the Polish Camp is in the collection of Library and Archives Canada.



Maj. Henry H. Madill (1889-1988) was initially LCol. LePan's second-in-command at the Polish Camp at NOTL and later went on to command the overflow Polish Camp at St. Johns (St-Jean), Quebec from 1917 to 1918. This camp received 2,400 soldiers from the NOTL training centre. He returned to the Polish Camp at NOTL once the camp at St. Johns was closed.



Maj. Clarence R. Young (1879-1964) was LCol. LePan's adjutant at the Polish Camp. He wrote an article in the *Niagara Advance* in 1919 (reprinted in another journal in 1923) about the Polish soldiers in the Polish Camp and noted their spirit, as reflected in the patriotism of their songs and music. He also made public presentations about the cause of a free Poland after the war and was also decorated by the Polish government.



Laura de Turczynowicz, née Blackwell (1878-1953) was a Canadian opera singer who was born in St. Catharines, near NOTL. She moved to the United States for her career and later to Poland for marriage. As a witness of the German invasion and occupation of Poland in 1914-15, she returned to St. Catharines in the spring of 1917 as part of her book tour during which she spoke of her experiences and the Polish cause. She also later supported the training of nurses for Poland and visited the Polish Camp at NOTL.



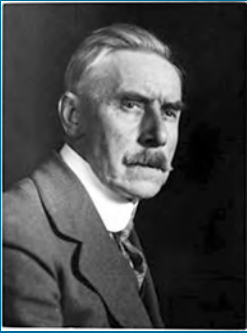
Elizabeth C. Ascher (1869-1941) was a local news reporter and a very active worker in the Red Cross who took a great interest in the Polish Army in NOTL. She conducted a tireless press campaign on behalf of the Polish Army and the Polish nation. She was a major force in organizing care for the well-being of the Polish soldiers, especially during the outbreak of the Spanish influenza in 1918-1919. After the war, she also tended to the graves of the Polish soldiers in NOTL and she too was highly decorated by Poland.



Janet Carnochan (1839-1926) was a teacher from Niagara. She helped to found the Niagara Historical Society and wrote many of its papers, one of which (published in 1923) described the experience of hosting the Polish Army in NOTL, speaking of the soldiers' exemplary behaviour and the goodwill and help offered by NOTL's citizens.



Ross L. Beckett (1892-1966) of Brantford, Ontario, was the first YMCA Chief of Staff at the Polish Camp, starting in October 1917. He and a few staff members worked hard to make life as comfortable as possible for the Polish recruits by organizing sports, entertainment, religious services, and providing reading and writing materials. Funds were raised through the camp's YMCA canteen revenues and donation drives. When he left the Polish Camp in December 1918, his successor was James W. Mercer.



Charles W. Jefferys (1859-1951) was a Canadian artist, who was commissioned by the Canadian War Records Office in 1918 and asked to record the Polish Camp. Through his many paintings, sketches and drawings, he helped to visually document the life of the Polish Army at NOTL. The Canadian War Museum in Ottawa has a number of pieces of his artwork in its collection.



George F. Rand (1867-1919) was a wealthy American banker from Buffalo, New York, who purchased 50 acres at NOTL in 1909 for his family's summer home, known as "Randwood". He and his wife were generous supporters of the Polish Camp and hosted social events with the officers at their summer home.

All above photographs are courtesy of Janusz Pletrus.

Philip Figary was a photographer from Toronto, who took many pictures of the Polish Camp between 1917 and 1919, leaving an important record of the Polish Army's presence in Canada during World War I.

Father Sweeney was the pastor of NOTL's Roman Catholic St. Vincent de Paul parish church. He celebrated the first mass for the Polish soldiers and he took on the extra duty of tending to the soldiers' religious needs until the Polish Camp received its own chaplains. Father Sweeney also loaned sacred vessels from his church to the Polish Army chaplains for use in their services. He arranged for a cemetery plot near the church as a final resting place for the Polish soldiers who died in NOTL and whose bodies were not returned to their home parishes.

Of course many other Canadians of various levels of prominence in and around NOTL in the years 1917-1919 played a role in welcoming the Polish recruits and trying to make their stay as hospitable and comfortable as possible.

1918: The Blue Army Fighting in France



General Józef Haller von Hallenburg. *Courtesy of Wikipedia Commons.*

Over 22,000 North Americans of Polish descent, who volunteered to join the Polish Army in World War I, were received at NOTL's Polish Camp between 1917 and 1919. Just over 20,000 of these Canadian-trained Polish soldiers went to France where they became the core of a new Polish Army on the Western Front.

Once overseas, the North American Polish volunteers were reinforced with Poles who were former prisoners of war taken by the Allies from the armies of Germany and Austria. The army gained the nickname "Haller's Army" because of its commanding officer, General Józef Haller. It also had a second nickname, the "Blue Army", because it was fitted out with the French horizon-blue uniforms when it reached Europe. The new national Polish Army then served on the Western Front in the 1918, taking part in the battles of the Champagne sector (June-July) and the skirmishes of the Lorraine sector (October).



Left: The Polish National Committee was sanctioned by France and other Western Allied nations as a provisional government in Paris, 1918. *Courtesy of Wikipedia Commons.*

Above: October 4, 1918: The Polish National Committee appointed General Józef Haller as Chief Commander of the Polish Army in France. *Courtesy of the Museum of the Polish Army in Warsaw.*



The blessing of the Blue Army's battle flags, 1918. *Courtesy of the Museum of the Polish Army in Warsaw.*



Soldiers of the Blue Army in a victorious attack on the German trenches on the Western Front in 1918 - a painting by Marian Adamczewski. *Courtesy of the Museum of the Polish Army in Warsaw.*



1919-1920: The Blue Army Soldiers in Poland

The armistice on the Western Front on 11 November 1918 coincided with the declaration of Polish independence on the same day. The fighting was not over for the Blue Army. In the spring of 1919 the well-trained and well-equipped Blue Army, with some battle-experienced soldiers among its ranks, traveled from France to Poland to boost the re-born country's newly organized military forces. The Blue Army played a vital role in the battles to secure Poland's eastern border in the spring and summer of 1919. The Blue Army was disbanded in September 1919 and the demobilization of the Polish-American volunteers began. Between April and August 1920, over 11,000 Blue Army veterans returned to the United States. However, with the Soviet Russian invasion of Poland in the summer of 1920, many of these veterans chose to stay and serve in the Polish Army. They participated in various battles against the Soviets, including the momentous Battle of Warsaw in August 1920. Even the former Blue Army commander, General Haller, was a key front commander in this battle. The Polish victory at the Battle of Warsaw saved Poland's newly won independence and prevented a Soviet advance into Western Europe. The return of the Polish-American Blue Army veterans to America resumed in February 1921 and by 1923 approximately 3,000 more of them had returned to the United States. Most of the Polish-American volunteers, who fought to defend Poland in 1919 and 1920, had come through the training camp at NOTL, evidence of Canada's significant role in the rebirth of Polish freedom in the twentieth century.



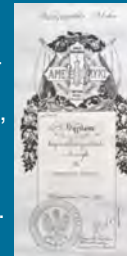
The front line in August 1920. *Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.*



Right: General Józef Haller commanded the Northern Front Army during the Battle of Warsaw in the Polish-Soviet War of 1920. *Courtesy of Wikipedia Commons.*



Franciszek Poleski, 1919, recruited in Chicago, trained at Camp Kościuszko, soldier in the Battle of Warsaw. Right: His medal and diploma, 1920. *Courtesy of Mark Polewski.*



A map of Eastern Europe in 1920, after the Battle of Warsaw. *Courtesy of Wikipedia Commons.*



The Blue Army's FT-17 tanks near the city of Lviv, c.1919. *Courtesy of Wikipedia Common.*



Various styles of Haller's Blue Army cap badges. *Courtesy of Edward Poznanski.*



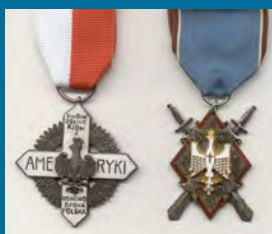
Right: The uniform of General Haller. *Courtesy of the Museum of the Polish Army in Warsaw.*

Left: An officer's uniform of the Blue Army. *Courtesy of the Archives and Museum of the Polish Combatants' Association in Toronto.*



Haller's Blue Army Commemorative and Veteran Medals and Badges

Courtesy of Edward Poznanski.



Commemorative medals



Veteran medals (obverse)



Veteran medals (reverse)



Commemorative badges



1919 to Present: Remembering the Polish Army's Stay in Canada

One of the few tangible reminders of the Blue Army in Canada is the small Polish Army cemetery next to St. Vincent de Paul Roman Catholic Church in NOTL. Forty-one Polish soldiers died in NOTL, most of them from the Spanish influenza of 1918-1919. While some of the bodies were returned to their homes, 25 bodies were buried in NOTL's Polish Army cemetery. The Army's former chaplain was buried there in 1949. The Polish communities in Canada and the United States come together annually in NOTL to hold a commemorative ceremony on the second Sunday of June to salute the soldiers of the Blue Army and to pay tribute to Canada's role in hosting and training them.



The commemorative ceremonies at the Polish Army cemetery at Niagara-on-the-Lake, 1939. *Courtesy of Dany Pogoda.*



An early picture of the Polish Army cemetery at Niagara-on-the-Lake. *Courtesy of Jim Smith.*



A Polish Guard of Honour at the Polish cemetery at Niagara-on-the-Lake during World War II. *Courtesy of the Fighting Poland. newspaper Vol. Nr. 15.*



Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, the future Pope John Paul II, visiting the Polish Army cemetery at Niagara-on-the-Lake in 1969. *Courtesy of Halina Bućko.*



Left: the Polish Army cemetery at Niagara-on-the-Lake, 2014. *Courtesy of Henry Soja.*

Right: Władysław Lizoń, President of the Canadian Polish Congress, at the Polish Army cemetery commemorative ceremonies at Niagara-on-the-Lake in 2008. *Courtesy of Jerry Barycki.*



Left and right: The late Maria Kaczyńska, wife of the late President of Poland, visiting the Polish Army cemetery at Niagara-on-the-Lake in 2009. *Both pictures courtesy of Franciszka and Stan Majerski.*



Right: The late Maria Kaczyńska, wife of the late President of Poland, visiting the Polish Army cemetery at Niagara-on-the-Lake in 2009. *Courtesy of Krzysztof Baranowski.*





2007 commemorative ceremonies at Niagara-on-the-Lake.



2014 commemorative ceremonies at Niagara-on-the-Lake.



2014 commemorative ceremonies at Niagara-on-the-Lake.
Courtesy of Tomasz Bakalarz.



2016 commemorative ceremonies at Niagara-on-the-Lake. *Courtesy of Ewa Sanocka.*



Courtesy of Franciszka Majerska.



Andrzej Duda

President of Poland

The commemorative ceremonies at Niagara-on-the-Lake with the participation of the President of Poland, Andrzej Duda, on May 9, 2016 .



Pictures on this page are courtesy of Henry Soja, if not signed otherwise.



Courtesy of Sebastian Król.

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Jerry (Jerzy) Barycki

President, PCBPAW, and Project Co-ordinator/Designer

Windsor, March 15, 2017.

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Many thanks to our contributors



Thank you, Canada
and Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake!

