

Windsor's Wartime Legacy: 85th Anniversary of the Polish Army Recruiting Station (1941–1942)

Between 1941 and 1942, Windsor served as the Canadian headquarters for recruiting volunteers into the Polish Armed Forces, fighting alongside the Allies.

By Jerry Barycki, President, the Polish-Canadian Business and Professional Association of Windsor

In 2026, Windsor proudly commemorates the 85th Anniversary of the Polish Army Recruiting Station, which operated in our city during the Second World War, from 1941 to 1942. This remarkable, but often overlooked chapter of Windsor's military heritage, reflects not only the determination of the Polish nation during its darkest hour, but also Canada's vital role in supporting the Allied forces and displaced European armies, fighting for freedom. The Second World War began on September 1, 1939, when Nazi Germany invaded Poland. On September 17, the Soviet Union attacked from the east. Within weeks, Poland was occupied and divided under the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the non-aggression pact between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Despite this defeat, the Polish armed forces continued the fight abroad. A Polish Government-in-Exile was established in Western Europe, determined that Poland one day would be liberated and restored as a free nation.

Canada and Poland: An Allied Partnership

Negotiations between the Polish Government-in-Exile and Canada began almost immediately in September 1939, with the goal of recruiting Polish citizens living abroad to join the Allied war effort. In April 1941, Polish Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief General Władysław Sikorski visited Canada, finalizing plans to establish Polish recruiting and training units on Canadian soil. To fund the undertaking, Poland deposited \$2 million in gold and additional currency with the Bank of Canada to cover the costs of the necessary facilities and training.

Why Windsor Was Chosen

Windsor became the headquarters of the Polish recruiting effort in Canada, due to its strategic location near the United States, allowing Polish Canadians and Polish Americans alike to volunteer. On July 21, 1941, a group of 43 Polish officers arrived in Windsor under the command of General Bronisław Duch, a respected military strategist, fluent in both Polish and English. The City of Windsor provided key facilities rent-free, demonstrating strong Canadian support for the Allied cause. The former East Windsor Town Hall (Old Ford City Hall) was converted into recruitment and administrative offices, medical inspection rooms, and equipment depots. Additional buildings were repurposed, including "Henckel House" (renamed Polish House) as officers' quarters, and barracks space at the Burroughs Adding Machine Company. Although recruitment took place in Windsor, the main training camp was established in Owen Sound, Ontario, where Polish troops conducted drills, target practice, and battlefield exercises. A lasting symbol of their presence remains today: a tree, carved with the opening line of the Polish national anthem: "Poland is not yet lost, as long as we still live."



1. General Bronisław Duch, Commander of the Recruiting Station in Windsor. Courtesy of the Polish Army Veterans Association, Post 126.
2. The Old Ford City Hall, recruiting headquarters for Polish Army volunteers in Windsor. Courtesy of Janina Wilk.
3. Polish Army volunteers in Windsor, 1941. Courtesy of the Polish People's Home Association.

The Newspaper *Odsiecz*: Voice of the Polish Army in Canada

The Polish Army's recruiting effort in Windsor produced a weekly newspaper named *Odsiecz / Fighting Poland*, from July 17, 1941, until April 19, 1942. Published in both Polish and English, the paper was heavily illustrated and circulated widely across Canada and the United States — about 20,000 copies per issue — with the purpose of informing and encouraging the Polish diaspora to enlist. It included news from the front lines, reports on activities in Windsor and the training camp at Owen Sound, and other features, pertinent to the wartime Polish military community. Scanned volumes of *Odsiecz (Relief Force)* are preserved as part of the Southwestern Ontario Digital Archive, hosted by the Leddy Library at the University of Windsor — where researchers and the general public can view them online. Explore the digitized issues of the newspaper at: <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/swoda-windsor-region/102>

Support, Service, and Contributions

Local Polish institutions played a critical role in sustaining recruits. The Dom Polski and the Holy Trinity Church hosted gatherings, rallies, performances, and religious services, strengthening morale and reinforcing the shared purpose of the Allied struggle. Although recruitment numbers were affected after the United States entered the war in December 1941, Windsor's station successfully enlisted 722 volunteers into the Polish Army. Many of these soldiers later fought with distinction alongside Canadian and Allied forces in major campaigns, including Monte Cassino, Operation Market Garden, and the closing of the Falaise Pocket with the 2nd Canadian Army. Their service remains a powerful example of Poland's contribution to the Allied victory.

An Enduring Legacy

After the war, many Polish veterans could not return safely to a communist-controlled homeland. Windsor became home once again, and their legacy remains part of the city's multicultural and military history. In 2005, a commemorative plaque was unveiled honouring the Polish Army's presence in Windsor and the lasting friendship between Canada and Poland. This story is not only Polish history — it is Windsor's history, Canada's history, and an enduring Allied legacy worth remembering.



1. A weekly Polish Army newspaper, titled *Odsiecz / Fighting Poland*, published in Windsor, 1941-1942.
2. Unveiling of the memorial plaque at the Dom Polski Hall, 2005 as a contribution to the Polish soldiers and friendship between Canada and Poland. Courtesy of Jerry Barycki
3. Unveiling of the memorial plaque by Piotr Konowrocki, Consul General of the Republic of Poland in Toronto, 2005. Courtesy of Jerry Barycki