

## **SOLDIERS OF POLISH ORIGIN IN THE DARDANELLES (1915-1918)**

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It would be no exaggeration to state that at least several Poles have participated in every military conflict that has broken out in any of the corners of the globe. The same is true for the period between 1772 and 1795, when Poland lost its independence only to regain it in 1918. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Polish insurgents fought in their homeland and in other European lands, particularly against Russia and Austria-Hungary and here hand in hand with other nations. All of those insurrections were to end in defeat and thus some of them were forced to emigrate to France, Italy and to the Ottoman Empire. But during the First World War, their fate was even harder as they had to join the armies of their invaders: Germany, Russia and Austria-Hungary. Wearing the uniforms of those European powers they fought on several fronts of the Great War and sometimes, unknowingly were forced to shoot each other. However, not only the ordinary conscript soldiers, but also officers of Polish origin served in those three large armies. Some of them renounced their ancestors and became loyal to their new countries, but most of them believed that their own country would regain its independence one day and hoped that in the newly established Polish army they would make use of the experiences they had gained at the frontline.

The Ottoman front in the First World War where the highest number of Polish soldiers fought was undoubtedly the Dardanelles. Here, like on other fronts, Polish soldiers fought on both sides. Those who wore Ottoman uniforms were the grandchildren of refugees at Adampol/Polonezköy who had settled there in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Al-

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though we may not know their exact number, we can name a few of them here:

Alfons and Józef Wrzostek brothers were killed on the Gallipoli Peninsula and put to eternal rest in unknown graves along with their Ottoman Muslim fellow soldiers. Another two, Marek Gażewicz and Józef Dohoda returned to Adampol alive at the end of the war. Their families, unfortunately, do not have any documents to confirm the troops they had served for. It is also impossible to determine where and when the first two lost their lives.

The most famous Pole who undertook various military activities in the Ottoman army in the Dardanelles between 1915 and 1918 was Ludomił Rayski (1892-1977). His father Teodor had taken refuge in the Ottoman land after the uprising of 1863. He participated in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, retired in 1889 and moved back to the Polish lands. When World War One started, his son Ludomił Rayski was 22-years-old. During the initial weeks of the war, he had served for Polish units within the Austria-Hungarian army and was slightly wounded towards the end of 1914. When he was still in hospital he was called up by the Ottomans as a result of his dual nationality. He had gained his commander's permission to serve in Turkey, an ally of the Austria-Hungarian Empire, and arrived in the Dardanelles on March 15, 1915. As he could speak both German and Turkish and had a driving license, during the initial months Rayski worked as a driver at the Dardanelles Fortified Area Command.<sup>1</sup> Since there were only two automobiles on the Dardanelles front at that time, he probably drove the highest-ranking German and Turkish officers from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps and the 5<sup>th</sup> Army headquarters.

In September 1915 he graduated from the Maltepe Air Force School and returned to the Dardanelles as an observer. After service of seven months in the 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron he was transferred to the 5<sup>th</sup> Squadron based at Seydiköy near İzmir. On June 19, 1916 he was promoted to the rank of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant. Beginning from late August he flew many reconnaissance missions as an observer over the Aegean coast and the Dodecanese Islands. In April 1917 Rayski started his pilot's training. On 12<sup>th</sup> of May he crashed a Gotha LD.2 plane

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<sup>1</sup> J. S. Łątka, *Lot ku gorzkiej sławie. Gen. Ludomił Rayski*, Kraków: Społeczny Instytut Historii i Kultury Turcji, 1994, p. 32.

during a night landing and along with his instructor, a German pilot Varscheit, was slightly wounded. After being discharged from hospital he completed his pilot's training in September. At the end of 1916, Rayski was one of the three pilots of the 5<sup>th</sup> Squadron (besides Lieutenant Zekeriya and Sgt. Varscheit). Until the mid January of 1918 this Polish pilot continued his routine flights, although not without unpleasant incidents. He crashed two other planes, but in both cases survived with only a few scratches.<sup>2</sup> After the battle cruiser *Yavuz Sultan Selim* (ex *Goeben*) had grounded near Nara Point in the Dardanelles, while returning from her splendid raid on Imroz on January 20, 1918, Rayski was among the pilots who defended the ship from the British air attacks.<sup>3</sup> On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January he flew six missions and the day after another six. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of January he flew again his AEG plane together with the German commander of the 5<sup>th</sup> Squadron Capt. Pfanensteil as an observer. During this mission they noticed an enemy submarine in the Dardanelles but bad weather made their attack on the ship impossible. As it was later to be revealed this vessel carried the famous *E14* which entered the Dardanelles with the aim of torpedoing the damaged *Yavuz*. However this attempt was unsuccessful and the submarine was destroyed by the Turkish coastal artillery on her way back.<sup>4</sup>

As there are only a few documents preserved with regard to his career in Turkey, we do not know for which services Rayski was granted the Order of Mecidiye (Mecidiye Nişanı), the Legion of Merit (Liyakat Madalyası) and the War Medal (Harp Madalyası). Between 1919 and 1921 he joined the Polish army in the war against Bolshevik Russia as a pilot and fighter squadron commander and painted the crescent and star emblem on the fuselage of his plane. Between the two world wars, Rayski was to become famous as the founder of the Polish aircraft industry and as the commander-in-chief of the Polish Air Force until August of 1939.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> **Ibidem**, pp. 37-47 and 101-111.

<sup>3</sup> **Ibidem**, p. 102.

<sup>4</sup> P. Nykiel, **Goblo! Rajd na Imroz 20 stycznia 1918**, "Okrety Wojenne", 1/2008(87), pp. 24-30.

<sup>5</sup> **Ibidem**, pp. 54-66; **Polski Słownik Biograficzny** [henceforth quoted as *PSB*], Tom XXX, Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków – Gdańsk – Łódź: Polska Akademia Nauk, Instytut Historii, Zakład Narodowy Imienia Ossolińskich, Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1987, pp. 273-276; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ludomił\\_Rayski](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ludomił_Rayski) (10.10.2015).

Another famous Pole who participated in the Gallipoli Campaign, but on the other side of the frontline was Włodzimierz Steyer (1892-1957), an officer of the Russian *Askold* cruiser. His ship took part in the naval stage of this operation, which lasted until the 18<sup>th</sup> March and afterwards in the Gallipoli landings. Steyer maintained his brilliant naval career in the Polish Navy from 1919 onwards. In 1937, he became the commander of the strategically important Hel Peninsula Fortified Zone on the Baltic Sea. As World War Two started, he resisted for a whole month the naval and aerial attacks of the German forces; forces much stronger than those of the Polish defense. Then as a prisoner-of-war he stayed in a POW camp until the very end of the war. He served as a commander in the Polish Navy holding the rank of rear admiral between 1947 and 1950.<sup>6</sup> In his memoirs, published under the pseudonym of “Brunon Dzimicz” in 1930s, Steyer writes about the presence of many other Polish sailors among the crew of the *Askold* cruiser.<sup>7</sup> In the chapter on the Kumkale landings supported by the *Askold*, he also mentions a Polish sailor Adam Puszka who transported French soldiers to the shore in his launch and was shot dead in the vicinity of the village of Kumkale where he was strolling around, although he was not allowed to go ashore.<sup>8</sup>

The only Pole whom we have ever encountered among the Anzac forces was William Frederick Wrobleske. This soldier, whose father had migrated to New Zealand from Poland, fought in the Auckland Infantry Regiment and was killed at Chunuk Bair (Conkbayırı) on August 8, 1915 at the age of 27.<sup>9</sup>

We know that there were at least three other soldiers of Polish origin among the French forces who participated in the Gallipoli Campaign: Andre Lubinsky, Louis Alousky and Glodkowsky – whose surname alone is known to us. Their graves are in the Seddülbahir French Military Cemetery.

<sup>6</sup> J. Królikowski, *Generałowie i admirałowie Wojska Polskiego 1943-1990*, t. III: M-S, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2010, pp. 526-530; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Włodzimierz\\_Steyer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Włodzimierz_Steyer) (10.10.2015).

<sup>7</sup> B. Dzimicz, “Samotny krążownik”, *Przegląd Morski*, Rok 6, nr. 49, Toruń 1933, p. 3210.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, Rok 6, nr 58, Toruń (1933), p. 52.

<sup>9</sup> The author acknowledges the help of Prof. John Crawford (of New Zealand) and Dean Hunter (Fez Travel Office, Istanbul) on providing him with the information about Wrobleske.

We should also keep in mind that besides those mentioned above, there were many other sailors with Polish roots among the crews of the *Yavuz Sultan Selim* (ex *Goeben*) and *Midilli* (ex *Breslau*) and among the members of the German Military Mission in Turkey. There are 29 Polish surnames recorded in the list of German soldiers who were killed or died on the lands of the Ottoman Empire between 1914 and 1918.<sup>10</sup> We do not know how many others remained alive and left Turkey in 1918.

While talking about Polish soldiers in German uniforms, we should equally bring up the case of Paweł Ziółkowski (1878-1938). He came to Adampol/Polonezköy in 1902 after he had retired from the Prussian army and worked there as a teacher. During World War One the Germans recruited him as a military consultant on board the *Yavuz Sultan Selim* cruiser. His German uniform from this period is on display in Zosia Auntie's Home in Adampol. After the War, Ziółkowski worked for 12 years as an accountant in Turkish firms and served as a purchasing manager at the Polish Embassy in Ankara between 1932 and 1938. We should also mention that he was the author of the first book on Adampol, published in French in 1922 and in Polish in 1929.<sup>11</sup>

The last Polish soldier who was in the Ottoman Empire during the First World War and whom we would like to mention here is Józef Jan Klemens Pomiankowski (1866-1929). He was born in the city of Jarosław (now in SE Poland) and served as the military attaché of the Austria-Hungarian Empire in Istanbul between 1909 and 1918. He was also officially the commander of all the Austria-Hungarian troops that then served in Turkey, including the artillery units deployed on the Gallipoli Peninsula in October 1915. Pomiankowski, out of diplomatic obligation, accompanied the Ottoman Minister of War, Enver Pasha, during his visit to Vienna, Berlin and to the Galician front in 1916. He was promoted to the rank of marshal in 1917 and served in the Polish Armed Forces, being responsible for arms

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<sup>10</sup> H. Kasar, *Birinci Dünya Savaşında Ölen Alman Askerlerin Kayıp Listesi* (The Lost List of the German Soldiers who died in World War One) [http://www.geliboluyuanlamak.com/200\\_Birinci-Dunya-Savasinda-Olen-Alman-Askerlerin-Kayip-Listesi-\(-Hafize-Kasar-\).html](http://www.geliboluyuanlamak.com/200_Birinci-Dunya-Savasinda-Olen-Alman-Askerlerin-Kayip-Listesi-(-Hafize-Kasar-).html) (10.10.2015)

<sup>11</sup> J. S. Łątka, *Słownik Polaków w Imperium Osmańskim i Republice Turcji*, Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2005, p. 366.

and ordnance supply at the rank of general after World War One.<sup>12</sup> He is also the author of the book entitled *Der Zusammenbruch des Ottomanischen Reiches*, first published in Vienna in 1928.<sup>13</sup>

The case of soldiers of Polish origin fighting on the Ottoman fronts during the First World War certainly deserves much more detailed research. As we can see, there were two groups of such individuals: the first one consisted of those Poles who left the lands where they were born or even the Polish national forces formed within the Austria-Hungarian Army where they already fought, joined the army of the Ottoman Empire or its Allies and came to Turkey to fight against the common enemies hand-in-hand with the Turks.

In the other group were those who, more or less willingly wore the uniforms of the states where they lived, and had to attack the Ottoman Empire despite the sympathy that Poles held for the Turks since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

However, all those soldiers who fought for or against the Turks and then survived made use of the experiences they had gained in Turkey and served very effectively for their own state after 1918.

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<sup>12</sup> M. Cieplewicz, **Pomiankowski Józef**, PSB, t. XXVII, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków-Gdańsk-Łódź 1983, pp. 382-383.

<sup>13</sup> This book was also translated into Turkish and published under the author's misspelled name as: Josef Pomiankowiski, **Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Çöküşü. 1914-1918 1. Dünya Savaşı**, (Trans. Kemal Turan), Kayihan Yayınevi, İstanbul 1990.