



POLISH AT HEART GUIDES



2. TRACING FAMILY : WORLD WAR 2

Poland was invaded by Germany on 1 September 1939 and by the Soviet Union a fortnight later on 17 September. Polish soldiers fought back valiantly but some were taken prisoner, officers were murdered by the Soviets, millions of civilians were deported to forced labour or concentration camps. Soldiers who escaped to France and the UK and civilians who survived Soviet labour camps joined the Polish forces under British command to continue the fight. As Europe was liberated many more joined from labour camps or escapees from those forced into the German army. From 1947 with no homes to go to and refusing to return to a communist Poland, many came to the UK, living in resettlement camps before settling or emigrating to Canada, USA, Australia and South America. Your family story will be amongst these and there is ever more information being posted on the internet about their wartime odysseys.

Soldiers in the 1939 campaign

If your ancestor served in the 1939 September campaign, for information about their service record, write to: **Central Military Archives**, ul. Czerwonych Beretów 124, 00-910 Warsaw-Rembertów, Poland. Email them for the process of how to do this: wbh.informacja@ron.mil.pl and give them as much detail as you have about the person (birth date, names, where you think they may have served).

Prisoners of War and Escape to France

You can obtain records for Prisoners of War (POWs) following the Polish 1939 Campaign - for further information write to: **Central Museum of POWs in Łambinowice**, ul. Minorytów 3, 45-019 Opole, Poland. If a family member served in the Polish Army in France 1939-1940 and did not subsequently serve under British Operational Command, write to: **Bureau Central des Archives Administratives Militaires**, Caserne Bernadotte, 64023 Pau, France.

Katyń Lists

Katyń is the name given to a series of massacres perpetrated by the Soviets on Polish POW's to wipe out Poland's officer class in the spring of 1940. Over 20,000 murders took place in the Katyn Forest, at Charków and Miednoje. Some locations are still to be found, but known names are in these [lists of officers](#).

Soviet Repressions

The Soviets deported possibly over a million government workers and their families from Eastern Poland to labour camps in three waves on 10 February, 13 April and June 1940. The Institute of National Remembrance in Poland have a [searchable list](#) of all those repressed by the Soviet Union: Insert the surname (nazwisko) and christian name (imię) to see what comes up. You can also add year of birth (rok urodzenia). Please note that you need to use Polish letters in the spelling of names. Between 1943 and 1944, the [Polska Walczaca](#) newspaper published lists of deported military families with names and birth dates. Each list is alphabetical so you should search them all. Often you'll find some family members on one and others on another. These sources should give you the names of POW or labour camps which you can find on [these maps](#) of camps and if you want exact locations, [old detailed maps](#). No list is 100% accurate.

Release and Evacuation

In 1941 the Poles in Soviet labour camps were allowed to leave due to the Soviet Union joining the Allies in the war against Germany. Making their way south by various means, they joined a Polish army forming in the Soviet Union which was evacuated to Persia (Iran) in two phases; March to April and August to September 1942 from Krasnovodsk to Pahlevi. Civilians related to these soldiers and orphans were evacuated at the same time but this group of 114,000 were about 10% percent of those deported. [These pages](#) will give you more information about the evacuation. There are [lists of those briefly in Teheran](#), Persia but many died of exhaustion or illness and there are lists of the [civilians buried in cemeteries](#). Some remained in the Soviet Union eventually returning home, others settled there but many are unaccounted for. An army under Soviet control was also formed, fighting on the Russian front against Germany.



Polish Armed Forces in the West

The II Polish Corps formed in the Soviet Union and after training and rehabilitation in the Middle East, fought at Monte Cassino, Italy and liberated many Italian towns. There are incomplete [lists of soldiers in the II Polish Corps](#) on the site Polish Exiles of WW2 including women in the auxiliary services. General information about the [II Polish Corps](#), organisation and battalions can be found on wikipedia and for some battalions, you can find a lot of detail on where they were trained and posted.

For soldiers who joined the Polish Air Force either as pilots or ground crew, fighting in the Battle of Britain, [Lista Krzystka](#) is a complete list of the nearly 17,000 Polish men and women in this service. The site [Naval history](#) includes information about the vessels and also some submarines on which the Polish navy served but there is also a [specific site](#) devoted to the Polish navy.

Of the [I Polish Corps](#), formed mainly from soldiers escaping through France in 1939 - 1940, the Parachute Brigade fought at Arnhem during the Market Garden operation and a few sites are dedicated to them [including this one](#). Soldiers of the 1st Armoured Division landing in France 1944 and advancing through Europe can be found on the [Polish Exiles of WW2 site](#). Other units early in the war fought at Narvik in Norway and [Tobruk in North Africa](#). There are lists of volunteers from South America and soldiers who sailed to Glasgow from the Soviet Union on [other pages](#). 600 elite paratroopers _'Cichociemni' trained in Scotland and at [Audley End in Cambridgeshire](#) to operate in occupied Poland. The [Polish Underground Movement Study Trust](#) hold some records on them, also on the Home Army, fighting from within Poland. The [Sikorski Institute in London](#), holds the main archives of the Polish Forces, but you need to know what you are specifically looking for. Many documents in their archive are now online. The [Hoover Institute](#) in the USA also hold many Polish documents, particularly personal accounts of WW2.

Civilians evacuated from Russia

Many of the families of men who joined the II Polish Corps were sent from Persia to other British Empire countries. Some were sent to India, the largest group were in [Valivade Camp](#) near the City of Kolhapur. About 20,000 Poles reached the British colonies in [Africa](#) and groups of mainly orphans were sent to [New Zealand](#) and Mexico.

Deceased soldiers

Lists of men who died or were declared missing in the USSR as the army was forming, in Egypt, Palestine, the Middle East, Italy, in England and Scotland can be found on the [Polish Exiles of WW2 site](#). There are many graves in the UK including Newark, Lincolnshire and Gunnersbury, London.

Warsaw Uprising

For those belonging to the Home Army (AK) who took part in the Uprising in 1944 the [Museum of the Warsaw Uprising](#) now has a site in English along with a [Facebook page](#). They hold a [list of people](#) who took part and actively work on improving information.

Personal records of soldiers

The British Ministry of Defence has the army records of all Polish soldiers who fought under the British Forces. You need the soldier's exact birth date, proof of kinship (birth certificate) and a copy of the death certificate which you can get through the [British Government](#) for a small fee. Write to: APC Disclosures 5 (Polish), Building 1 (Ops), RAF Northolt, West End Road, Ruislip, Middlesex HA4 6NG or email: Monika.Helman100@mod.gov.uk but please note there is only one person dealing with many requests so it will take a matter of months.

German sources

You can submit a request to the [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#) and at the moment they will send you any files they have for your relatives who were sent to German concentration or labour camps during World War 2. There is a Polish site for people killed or [repressed by the Germans](#) where you can search by surname (nazwisko) and first name (imię.)

You can apply for information about a relative forced to serve in the German army, from resources in the [German Federal Archives](#) by filling in a request form. For war dead, check the [German war dead records](#). You can also file a request for information from the [Arolsen Archives](#).

Resettlement in the UK

There is information about where [Polish Army Resettlement Camps](#) were situated on this site, both for soldiers and their families with personal stories. It also has passenger lists of ships arriving in the UK but these are of the families of soldiers, not the ships which carried army personnel. You need to check all the ships unless you know exactly which ship or date your family arrived on.

Emigration and Naturalisation

Many people were given the option of emigrating in the years following World War 2, some were resettled as orphans. For more information on emigration to specific countries contact the [Australian National Archives](#), [Canadian National Archives](#) or [United States National Archives](#). For the UK, you can find records of any Poles naturalised as British citizens in the [London Gazette](#).

Background reading

For background information, Norman Davies's [Trail of Hope: The Anders Army](#), an Odyssey across Three Continents covers all those deported to Russia during WW2. There's also the very comprehensive book called English [Poles in India 1942-1948](#) which covers the history of the family members of serving soldiers settled there for the duration of the war. [First to Fight](#) by Roger Moorhouse describes in detail Poland's September 1939 Campaign against the Germans.

