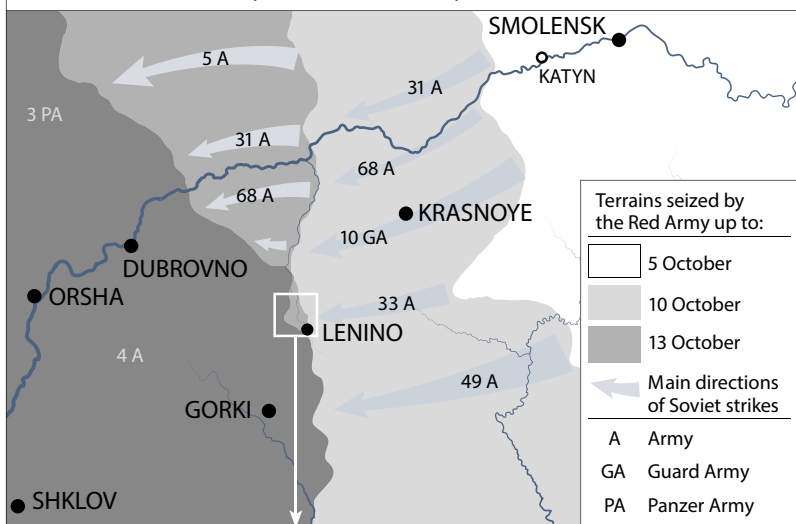


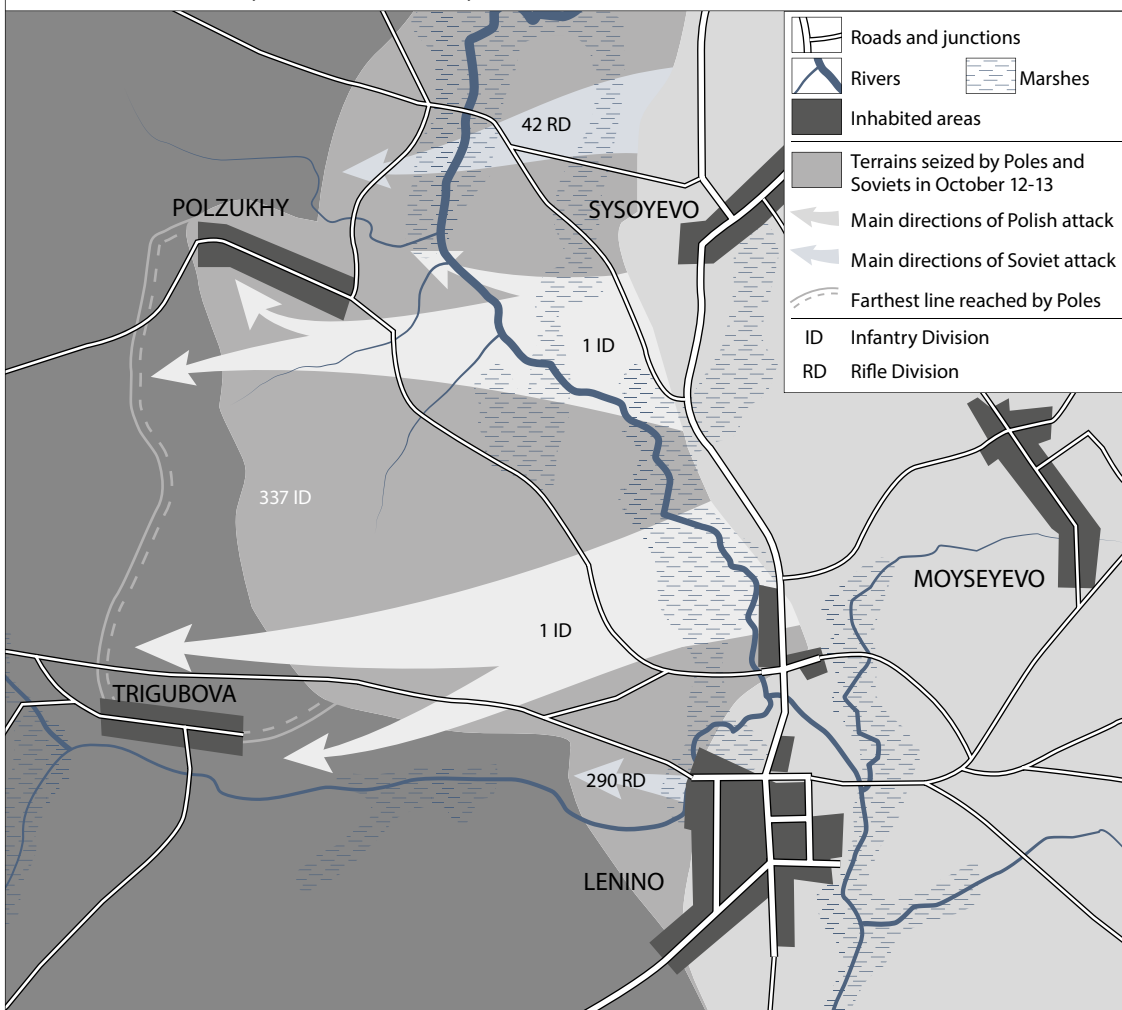
SOVIET-GERMAN FRONTLINE IN MID-OCTOBER 1943



THE ORSHA FRONT, OCTOBER 5-13, 1943



BATTLE OF LENINO, OCTOBER 12-13, 1943



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AT THE SOURCE OF THE MYTH.

THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE POLISH PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC ON THE STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL BACKGROUND OF THE BATTLE OF LENINO

Abstract

This article is an attempt to examine the Communist-era historiography of the Battle of Lenino by introducing the context of the fighting in Belarus in 1943. The operational and strategic analysis of the tasks of the Western Front and the forces serving there shows the scale of Soviet operations in the autumn of 1943, and the size of the defeats they suffered. One of the battles conducted at the turn of 1944 in the Belarusian direction was the second Orsha operation of October 12–18, 1943. Due to mistakes made at the planning stage, the offensive

towards Orsha turned into a bloody battle that took place in the area between the towns of Lenino and Bayevo. Throughout the existence of the USSR, Soviet historiography diminished the importance of the fighting in Belarus in 1943 and avoided research into this operation. The military historians of the Polish People's Republic were in a different situation; they had a keen interest in the Battle of Lenino because of its propaganda importance. In all the academic publications from the period of the Polish People's Republic, military historians presented only the first two days of the battle of the 1st Infantry Division at Lenino, avoiding any descriptions of the broader background of the operation, even though they had access to German military sources. The reason was the political dependence of the Polish People's Republic and the Polish People's Army to the USSR, which made any criticism of the Red Army impossible. As a result, the battle of Lenino was mythologised: it was presented as a success for the soldiers of the 1st Infantry Division.

Keywords: Belarus, 1943, Battle of Lenino, Eastern Front, Historiography, Red Army, Polish People's Army, Orsha operation, Western Front

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Introduction

With the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact on August 23, 1939, the USSR joined the war on the side of the Third Reich, and participated in the invasion of Poland in September 1939. The German-Soviet alliance ended on June 22, 1941 with the Third Reich's attack on the USSR. The interests of the Polish people, both in the occupied country and in exile, were represented by the Polish government-in-exile based in London, which was linked to Great Britain by a political and military alliance. At the urging of the United Kingdom's government, representatives of the Polish government established diplomatic relations with the USSR. On July 30, 1941, an agreement was signed between the prime minister of the Polish government in exile, General Władysław Sikorski, and the USSR ambassador to Great Britain, Ivan Maysky. The Soviets were eager to make concessions to Poland and agreed to form a Polish army

under the command of Gen. Władysław Anders. The Soviet side's willingness to compromise resulted from the USSR's military weakness. The initial period of the USSR's invasion by the armed forces of the Third Reich and its allies brought colossal losses to the Red Army. For this reason, Stalin was anxious to recruit Polish soldiers to fight, and to ensure good relations with Great Britain. Another change in the USSR's policy towards Poland took place under the influence of the Red Army's victories in winter 1942–3. This series of successes in the war with Germany gave Stalin the option to launch another invasion of Polish territory by the Red Army and impose his own puppet power centre. The pretext for breaking off relations between the USSR and the Polish government-in-exile was the German discovery of mass graves in Katyn on April 11, 1943, where Polish officers captured by the Soviets in 1939 and then murdered by the NKVD in 1940 had been buried in mass graves there. The Sikorski government asked the International Red Cross to investigate the Katyn affair. The Soviet authorities falsely charged the Germans with the crime and used the Polish attempts to find out the truth to accuse them of collaborating with the enemy. As a consequence, relations between the USSR and Poland were broken off on April 23, 1943. As Great Britain had based its strategy in the war against Germany on its alliance with the USSR, it was not interested in supporting a militarily weak partner such as Poland. (For more see McGilvray 2010, *passim*).

After breaking off relations with Poland, Stalin set about forming a political centre there which would be dependent on the USSR. By summer 1943, the Soviet authorities had created the Union of Polish Patriots (*Związek Polskich Patriotów*, ZPP), chaired by the Polish Communist Wanda Wasilewska, who was closely associated with Stalin. The ZPP's intention was to represent the interests of Poles in the USSR, but in practice it was a tool in the hands of Stalin. The establishment of the ZPP gave international opinion the appearance that there was an alternative authority to the Polish government in exile. Stalin initiated the creation of an armed force in order to strengthen the ZPP's position, in the initial form of one infantry division, and later, of further tactical and operational units.





Fragment of the Monument of the Soldiers of the 1st Infantry Division (Xawery Dunikowski, 1963), Warsaw, Poland.
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The first to be established was the 1st Tadeusz Kościuszko Infantry Division. Its formation began on May 14, 1943 in the Sel'tsy and Bieloomut military camps in what was then the Moscow Military District. The soldiers of the 1st Infantry Division (1st ID) were recruited from the victims of the mass resettlements carried out by the NKVD in the Polish borderlands in 1939–41. The commander of the division was Zygmunt Berling, a former officer of the Polish Legions; he had been arrested by the Soviets in October 1939, but undertook voluntary cooperation with the NKVD and thus avoided death in Katyn. During 1941–2, Berling served under General Anders in the Polish Army in the USSR while at the same time acting as an NKVD agent (by August 1942, General Anders' army had been evacuated from the USSR to Iran, and then took part in the Allies' Mediterranean campaign: see Davies 2015, *passim*). At the orders of Moscow, Lt. Col. Berling deserted General Anders' army; after some time he joined the ZPP, and was tasked with forming a Polish division alongside the Red Army. The Soviet authorities promoted Berling to the rank of colonel, and then to major general. (For more see McGilvray 2019, pp. 113–17).

From the beginning to the end of the war, the overwhelming majority of the 1st Infantry Division's staff were commissioned officers from the Red Army. Political and educational officers recruited from the milieu of Polish Communists, who mostly accepted Soviet citizenship, supervised the mood of the Polish soldiers incorporated into the ranks. Any manifestations of hostility towards the Soviet Union were combated by the military information unit, which was manned by Soviet officers of military counterintelligence known as "Smersh" (an acronym from the Russian *Смерть шпионам*, or "death to spies").

The Monument of the Soldiers of the 1st Infantry Division (Xawery Dunikowski, 1963), Warsaw, Poland. © Franciszek Dąbrowski, 2021





Soldiers of 1st Polish Infantry Division taking military oath, Sel'tsy on Oka River, Soviet Union, July 15, 1943. National Library of Poland, ref. no. F.53664/II, polona.pl

The division consisted of the command and staff, the 1st, 2nd and 3rd infantry regiments, the 1st tank regiment, the 1st light artillery regiment, support and service units. In October 1943, the division numbered 12,600 troops.

In August 1943, the training programme in the 1st Infantry Division was shortened so that the division could go to the front on 1 September. This had a symbolic dimension as it was the fourth anniversary of the Third Reich's aggression against Poland, but the decision affected the training of the soldiers, who were left with only a vague idea of the realities of the war on the Eastern Front. On October 12–13, 1943, the 1st Infantry Division received its baptism of fire after an unsuccessful attempt to break the front line near Lenino in Belarus. The 1st ID lost almost a quarter of its manpower in the battle. Several hundred soldiers surrendered to the German side and were taken prisoner. After two days of bloody fighting, the division was withdrawn from the front, and the battle itself ended in defeat for the Red Army. Of course, Stalin and the Polish Communists hoped that Lenino would mark the start of a success story that would lead the Polish army through Belarus to Poland; however, this did not happen. Admitting that the 1st



ID had been defeated would have undermined the position of the already unreliable ZPP. In this situation, the battle of Lenino began to be presented, contrary to the facts, as a “victory”. Over time, Communist propaganda completely falsified the image of the 1st ID’s first battle, creating the myth of the “battle of Lenino”, which gained a foothold in the minds of an entire generation of Poles. This article is an attempt to present the genesis of the Lenino myth, the role of Communist-era military historiography in perpetuating a false image of this battle, as well as the problem of the Red Army’s forgotten campaign in Belarus, of which the 1st ID’s battle is an integral part.

During the Polish People’s Republic, the anniversary of the Battle of Lenino was celebrated with great pomp. The best exemplification of the importance given to the battle was the proclamation of its anniversary, 12 October, as Polish Army Day in place of its former commemoration on 15 August. In the justification to the decree of the Council of Ministers of 7 October 1950, it was stated that this day had been established

“to commemorate the Battle of Lenino, in which the Polish People’s Army, which was in the process of being raised, won the first battle over the fascist invader on 12 October 1943 while making its way back to the country [Poland].”
(Decree on Polish Army Day 1950)

Wanda Wasilewska [left] and Col. Zygmunt Berling [centre], leading personalities of the Soviet-organised ‘Polish’ 1st Infantry Division, in the military training camp in Sel’tsy on Oka River, Ryazan’ district, Soviet Union, 1943. National Library of Poland, ref. no. F.53663/II, polona.pl



German propaganda booklet "Służyłem w dywizji Tadeusza Kościuszki" ("I have served in Tadeusz Kościuszko Division"), Warsaw, 1944, containing letters of Polish POWs taken at Lenino to their nearest ones in Poland, describing their fates in Soviet Union after imprisonment or deportation in 1939–1941. National Library of Poland, ref. no. I 216.776, polona.pl

The Battle of Lenino was examined in several hundred articles in the press as well as several hundred publications of fiction or popular science. It is enough to mention two of the series published by the Ministry of National Defence (*Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej*, MON) devoted to military issues: the pocket-sized *Biblioteka Żółtego Tygrysa* (Yellow Tiger Library) published in 1957–89 (Dubicki 1980; Podgórski 1975; Koniewiega 1980) and *Bitwy, Kampanie, Dowódcy* (Battles, Campaigns, Commanders, 1967–77) (see i.a. Sroga 1975). The subject of Lenino also turned up in the *Historyczne Bitwy* (Historical Battles) series published from 1980 (Sobczak 1983). The aforementioned titles were published in hundreds of thousands of copies. Lenino is also the subject of numerous novels, the most popular of which was *Bohater spod Lenino kpt. Władysław Wysocki* (Capt. Władysław Wysocki, the hero from Lenino: Wójcicki 1986) and the book *Początek drogi – Lenino* (The beginning of the road: Lenino) by Alojzy Sroga (Sroga 1978), based on the works of Melchior Wańkiewicz (Wańkiewicz 2018). The popular science publications included occasional brochures and publications addressed to primary school students. The following titles can serve as examples: N. Stanisławski, Michał Żurkowski, *O bitwie pod Lenino* (About the battle of Lenino: Nadzin, Wachtel 1948); Julian Sawica, *Bitwa pod Lenino* (The battle of Lenino: Sawica 1962); Tadeusz Jurga, *Z ziemi radzieckiej do Polski* (From the Soviet land to Poland: Jurga 1975), Karol Móravski, *Od Lenino do Berlina* (From Lenino to Berlin: Móravski 1988). A common feature of these titles is their focus on the fight by the soldiers of Polish nationality, which obviously gave the narratives a Polono-centric character. Another common element is the presence of key issues that organise the narratives according to the following pattern: — the starting point, that is the foundation of the 1st ID, with a proper emphasis on the role of the Union of Polish Patriots, an organisation organised and led by the Polish Communists in the USSR; — the process of forming the 1st ID, containing a description of the military camp in the vicinity of the Sel'tsy settlement (whose name for the purposes of propaganda was transformed into the more familiar-sounding Sielce nad Oką); a description of the process of training the soldiers (emphasising the role of

the Soviet instructors); the military oath, sworn on the 533rd anniversary of the Battle of Grunwald; and the 1st Infantry Division's march to the front on the fourth anniversary of the Third Reich's invasion of Poland;

— the march of the 1st ID along the Moscow-Vyazma-Smolensk route, which is described by the historical Russian name of “the Warsaw highway”, to emphasise that “the Kościuszko boys” [*kościuszkowcy*] were “returning home by the shortest route”;

— a sketch of the situation on the Eastern Front, starting with the Battle of Kursk—even though the 1st Infantry Division was directed to the operations on the Western Front, which did not participate in this battle;

— the description of the Battle of Lenino is limited to a summary of the 1st Infantry Division's activities on October 12–13, 1943;

— a summary of the 1st ID's battle, from which the conclusion is drawn that the division fulfilled its task proudly, and the Battle of Lenino became “a symbol of the alliance of the Polish people with the fraternal Soviet peoples” (*W rocznicę Lenino* 1948, p. 8).

One example of the use of this scheme is the description of the formation of the 1st Infantry Division and the Battle of Lenino contained in chapter I of the third volume of the publication *Polski czyn zbrojny w II wojnie światowej* (Polish armed actions in World War II), which is one of the Polish People's Republic's flagship works of military historiography (*Polski czyn* 1973, pp. 29–73).

An indispensable element of all the publications on Lenino in this period was the adoption of two dogmas underlying the mythologisation of the battle. These are the date of the battle (October 12–13, 1943) and its result (victory for the Polish troops): a relatively positive one, in terms of having carried out the task set them (one of the few exceptions is the book by Henryk Hubert, who gave the dates as October 12–18, 1943). Although the author compressed the description of the fighting between 14 and 18 October onto a single page, this is a much truer approach than simply passing over this part of the battle in silence (see Hubert 1959, p. 235). However, the adoption of the aforementioned assumptions resulted in another problem that the historiography of the Polish People's Republic could not

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N. p. dnia 12. X. 1944 r.

WOJSKO POLSKIE

Arząd pol.-wych. 1 Armji
Wydzial Propagandy

W rocznicę boju pod Lenino

Rok temu żołnierze polski walczący przeciw
rozbrajanu z bronią lenińska 12 i 13 października dy-
wizyjny 1. Armji Polaków stoczył pod Lenino swój
początek walki z Niemcami i stoczył ją zwycięsko.

1 dnia ten i dnia następnego boj pod Lenino miał
ogromne i strategiczne znaczenie. Wykro-
mie to chodziło nie o przesłanie niemieckich linii ob-
rony i zapobieżenie poręki wytyczony, najgłębszej
rozmaej i atakowanej brzoźnej wódki frontu. W ra-
joni katolowej brzoźnej wódki frontu. W ra-
joni katolowej brzoźnej wódki frontu. W ra-
joni katolowej brzoźnej wódki frontu.

Nie był to jednak zwykły, jakie miałyby
cy, walczyć o własną ziemię, jakie miałyby
cy, walczyć o własną ziemię, jakie miałyby
cy, walczyć o własną ziemię, jakie miałyby

Zachętem dywizji byłoby stowarzyszenie
nie mieściłoby imi obrony niemieckiej, wami
nie mieściłoby imi obrony niemieckiej, wami

nie. Niemcy podjęli wszelkie kontrataki ale nie
do się im odebrać zdobytego przez nas terenu.

Wieczern 12 października 1-ry dywizyjny
został wzniesiony, a ich siły najwięcej 2-ty dywizyjny.
Przez cały noc i cały dzień 13 października odpo-
rz za zalanie kontrataki i broni swoich pogocy pod
12-go na 14-go w kierunku Wyższego Dowództwa dy-
wizyjnego odobły radzieckie.

Sprawy i w najwyższym stopniu 3 p. p.
wyższe dowództwo poręki zmieniającym jednostkami
armji Czerwonej.

Dywizja sama walczyła obok sławnych dywizji
radzieckich, obok żołnierzy, którzy broniłi do na-
i Stalingradu. Lecz nie, który wznosił się do na-
i Stalingradu. Lecz nie, który wznosił się do na-

Do wrogów, który stał przed nami pod Lenino,
to był ten sam okrutny wrogi, którego zmienił z
to był ten sam okrutny wrogi, którego zmienił z

Niemca walczył bez wiar. Zwycięstwo okpiła
krew bohaterów. Zwycięstwo okpiła krew bohaterów.

Wtedy orzekł rząd radziecki odzwaz i uprosi-
my wiarci.



podległego żołnierza. Tężem osobom, a wśród nich
kierownictwo szer. Inoeli Krypyak zadano tytuł Bo-
hatera Związku Radzieckiego. Liczne
strzyżonyj inżynierów odznaczony radzieckie. Liczne
krzyże i tytuły Militarni i "Walecznych" nadane
przez nasze Dowództwo, są przedmiotem dumy tych,
co walczyli pod Lenino.

Dziś, po roku, obdaje kół bohaterom tej
bitwy wyrażony ich kielichoweńk upamiętnianej se-
bitwy wyrażony ich kielichoweńk upamiętnianej se-

Jak trudno zadobyci nasz masną dźwi, którym
kanno lic do Polski przez pniaki frontu, jak słowem
okazało się nasza droga, jak owoceom one: myśle-
nie rannem w Krasnowodsku w teatru Andeolow
nie rannem w Krasnowodsku w teatru Andeolow

Jankowi - w chwili, gdy Niemcy polowali pod Sa-
lingrad - po. Anders wyszły swe wojska z ISBR.
To nie było zwycięstwo dla rzymskich tradycji pol-
skiego żołnierza, który nigdy w historii nie stracił
swojej siły w bojach, który nigdy w historii nie stracił

Niemcy nie mogli się wywrzeć odbyć do swoich. Niemcy
nie mogli się wywrzeć odbyć do swoich. Niemcy
nie mogli się wywrzeć odbyć do swoich. Niemcy

Śmierć niemieckim najfédcom!
Niech żyje polsko-radzieckie braterstwo broni!
Wieczna chwala poległym bohaterom!

P. o. Stefa Wydzialu Propagandy
Z. P. W. 1 Armji W. P.
(-) BIEROWSKI kpt.

The propaganda leaflet
"W rocznicę boju pod Lenino"
("On the Anniversary of
the Battle at Lenino") issued
by Political-Educational
Directorate of the 1st Army,
October 12, 1944.
National Library of Poland,
ref. no. DZS IA 7 Cim.,
polona.pl

LENINO - BERLIN

(SZLAK BOJOWY WOJSKA POLSKIEGO)

§ 1.

Od chwili zdradzieckiego napadu hitlerowskiego we wrześniu 1939 r. aż do ostatecznego zwycięstwa naród polski ani na chwilę nie złożył broni, nie przerwał nieublaganej, śmiertelnej walki z niemieckim najazdem.

W kraju walka ta toczyła się w mrokach konspiracji, w szeregach organizacji podziemnych i w bojowych, leśnych oddziałach partyzanckich.

Na emigracji, natychmiast niemal po klęsce wrześniowej, rozpoczęło się formowanie regularnych polskich jednostek wojskowych, które, zdala od kraju, u boku armii sprzymierzonych broniły wolności i honoru Polski. Wśród winnic francuskich i nad mglistym La Manchem, w skałach Norwegii i w piaskach afrykańskich, w bitwie o Londyn, w bojach pod Narvikiem i Tobrukiem żołnierze, lotnicy i marynarze polscy okryli chwałą biało-czerwone sztandary. Jednak liczebność polskich wojsk, sformowanych we Francji i Anglii, była niewielka, a możliwości ich uzupełnienia jeszcze bardziej ograniczone ze względu na to, że emigracja polska na zachodzie nie stanowiła poważnej siły liczebnej.

§ 2.

Największym skupiskiem polskiej emigracji był Zw. Radziecki. Burza wojenna rzuciła różnymi drogami na rozległy ZSRR miliony Polaków, rekrutujących się spośród robotników, olników i pracujących inteligencji. Na terenie ZSRR znajdowało się wielu żołnierzy i oficerów W. P., weteranów kampanii wrześniowej. Polonia radziecka była bogata w element nader wartościowy pod względem wojskowym. W oparciu więc o nią można było myśleć o stworzeniu poważniejszej polskiej siły zbrojnej na obczyźnie.

Docenił to ś. p. gen. Władysław Sikorski i gdy tylko przystąpienie ZSRR do wojny dało po temu odpowiednie warunki — zaproponował rządowi radzieckiemu stworzenie z rozproszonych na terenie radzieckich republik Polaków — Armii Polskiej, która by obok Armii Czerwonej wzięła udział na froncie wschodnim w walce ze wspólnym wrogiem — Niemcami.

§ 3.

Rząd radziecki nie tylko zgodził się, ale zaofiarował rządowi Sikorskiego pożyczkę w wysokości 300 milionów rubli na koszty formowania. Oddziały polskie zrównano pod względem zaopatrzenia z walczącymi oddziałami Armii Czerwonej. Ośrodki formowania przeniesiono na prośbę władz polskich do południowych obwodów ZSRR, gdzie były lepsze warunki klimatyczne. Jednym słowem, władze radzieckie uczyniły wszystko, by stworzyć Armii Polskiej jak najlepsze warunki.

Od samego jednak początku ujawniły się w dowództwie armii z gen. Władysławem Anderssem na czele tendencje niegodne z duchem sojuszu polsko-radzieckiego i wrogie żywotnym interesom naszego narodu. Sanacyjni oficerowie, którzy opanowali wszystkie kierownictwa stanowiska, zaciekłe przesładowali przy pomocy starych, przedwrześniowych metod wszelkie przejawy demokratycznego ducha w szeregach wojska.

Nie myśleli oni o walce z Niemcami wspólnie z Armią Czerwoną. Zw. Radziecki uważali nie za sojusznika, ale za śmiertelnego wroga. Posuwano się nawet do uprławiania szpiegostwa na terenie sprzymierzonego państwa radzieckiego.

Układ, zawarty przez gen. Sikorskiego z rządem radzieckim, przewidywał, że formacje polskie będą kierowane na front w miarę osiągania gotowości bojowej, przy czym pierwszym terminem miał być 1. X. 1941 r. Ale sanacyjni dowódcy nie mogli i nie chcieli dotrzymać tych warunków. Niektóre dywizje były już całkowicie uzbrojone i wyszkolone, ale gen. Anders wciąż odraczał termin wysłania ich na front. Wreszcie w lipcu 1942 r., w chwili gdy wojska niemieckie stały pod Stalingradem, gdy ZSRR znajdował się w śmiertelnym niebezpieczeństwie — gen. Anders powziął hańbęłą decyzję wycofania swych oddziałów do Iranu. Zdradzając w ciężkiej chwili sojusznika, plamiąc honor swego mundur, doprowadził on ponad 70.000 doskonałego żołnierza polskiego z najkrótszej drogi do kraju, skazując go na długą tułaczkę i poniewierkę na obcej ziemi.

Ale na ziemi radzieckiej pozostały wielotysięczne rzesze uchodźców, wśród których nie brakło jeszcze ludzi zdolnych do noszenia broni. Polonia radziecka boleśnie odczuła hańbę armii Andersa i postanowiła tę hańbę krwią własną zmyć. Postanowiła stworzyć nową polską siłę zbrojną w ZSRR, by nie zabrakło polskiego żołnierza na froncie, na którym rozstrzygały się losy Polski.

§ 4

Z inicjatywy mas demokratycznego uchodźstwa polskiego, skupionego dookoła znanej pisarki Wandy Wasilewskiej, powstał wiosną 1943 r. Związek Patriotów Polskich w ZSRR — organizacja, jednocząca ludzi różnych poglądów politycznych, których łączyła jednak chęć zmyślenia tego piętna hańby, jaką nas w oczach narodów radzieckich okrył gen. Anders i reakcyjni politycy londyńscy.

Jednym z pierwszych poczynań ZPP było zwrócenie się do rządu radzieckiego z prośbą o zgodę i pomoc w utworzeniu nowej polskiej formacji zbrojnej, która by u boku Armii Czerwonej ruszyła do walki o wolność Ojczyzny.

Rząd radziecki dał raz jeszcze dowód swego życzliwego stosunku do narodu polskiego. Pomimo gorzkiego doświadczenia z armią Andersa władze radzieckie wyraziły zgodę na formowanie dywizji i obiecały okazać wszelką możliwą pomoc.

§ 5

Na skutek tego w maju 1943 r. w lasach pod Riazaniem nad rzeką Oką, w okolicy wsi Sielce, zaczęła się formować 1. Polska Dywizja Piechoty w ZSRR im. Tadeusza Kościuszki. Na wieść o jej powstaniu ze wszystkich krańców olbrzymiego Zw. Radzieckiego pośpieszyli polscy wygnańcy do sieleckiego obozu, by przywdziać konfederatki z piastowskim orzełkiem.

Olbrzymia większość polskich oficerów wywieziona została przez Andersa do Iranu i dlatego wśród ochotników, napływających do dywizji im. T. Kościuszki, oficerów było mało. I tu nieocenioną pomoc okazał Zw. Radziecki. Dowódcą Armii Czerwonej nie tylko wzięło na siebie koszty utrzymania dywizji, nie tylko ofiarowało jej pełne umundurowanie, doskonały sprzęt bojowy i całkowite wyposażenie — ale i zdecydowało się przekazać dywizji wszystkich oficerów Polaków z Armii Czerwonej, którzy mieli w szkoleniu przebrębony zapas doświadczenia bojowego, zdobytego na froncie. Oficerowie ci wraz z instruktorami Rosjanami rozpoczęli szkolenie nowej kadry oficerskiej.

Formowanie i szkolenie 1. Dywizji szło szybko. 15 lipca 1943 r., w rocznicę bitwy grunwaldzkiej, Dywizja złożyła przysięgę.

1-go września tego roku, równo w cztery lata po zbójckim napadzie Niemiec na Polskę — Kościuszkowcy ruszyli na front.

§ 6.

Dnia 12 i 13 października 1. Dywizja przeszła swój chrzest bojowy pod wsią Lenino na Smoleńszczyźnie. Dowiedziawszy się, że mają przeciw sobie Polaków, Niemcy ścignęli przeciw Kościuszkowcom wszystkie siły, jakimi dysponowali. Nie tylko ze względów strategicznych, ale i polityczno-prestيجowych zależało im na zniszczeniu tej jedynej polskiej formacji na Wschodnim Froncie. Z innych odcinków frontu ścignięte zostały przeciw Kościuszkowcom znaczne siły lotnicze, dużo artylerii, szcziółolowych moździerzy itd.

W ciągu dwudniowych walk samoloty niemieckie dokonały na odcinek 1. Dywizji 1200 nalotów, byłyby powstrzymać napór naszych żołnierzy.

Jednak, mimo nierwyknie zaciekłego oporu nieprzyjaciela, oddziały polskie złamały niemiecką obronę, sforowały rzekę Mieręję wraz z jej bliźniastymi odnogami i odparowały hitlerowskie kontrataki — umocniły się na zdobytych pozycjach. W walce żołnierze i oficerowie 1. Dywizji wykazali bezprzykładne męstwo, wywołując spontaniczny entuzjazm, obserwujących polską naterę, oficerów radzieckich.

Niesmiertelna chwala okryli się bohaterowie bitwy: kpt. Juliusz Hübner, weteran wojny domowej w Hiszpanii, oraz oficerowie pol.-wch. — por. Kalinowski i ppor. Paziński. Polegli śmiercią walecznych ppor. Czarkowski — były oficer armii Andersa, który oddał swe życie w obronie sztandaru; kpt. Wysocki, stary oficer pułku ułanów W. P. — były uczestnik raidu polskiej kawalerii do Prus Wschodnich; por. Wiśniewski — oficer z Armii Czerwonej i wielu innych.

Za zasługi bojowe dowództwo nasze nadało 254 oficerom i żołnierzom Dywizji odznaczenia wojskowe, w tym 16-tu — Krzyż „Virtuti Militari”.

Sprzymierzony rząd radziecki odznaczył orderami i medalami ZSRR 242 polskich żołnierzy.

Fizylierka Aniela Krzyżoń, kpt. Juliusz Hübner i kpt. Władysław Wysocki otrzymali tytuł Bohatera Związku Radzieckiego.

examine, namely the operational and strategic background of the battle. Not only was the battle of Lenino never discussed within the wider context of the Red Army's activities on the Eastern Front, but indeed, the very opposite took place: any attempts to present such a description would only have overshadowed the image of the battles in Belarus of autumn 1943.

This article is an outline of the strategic conditions that lay at the origin of the Red Army's operation at Lenino, and at the same time it attempts to explain why the military historiography of the Polish People's Republic ignored this aspect of the Battle of Lenino.

The Red Army's Actions in Belarus in 1943 as the Operational Background of the Battle of Lenino: an Outline



The victory in the battle of the Kursk region was the first stage of the summer-autumn campaign planned by the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command (*Ставка Верховного Главнокомандования*, hereafter the *Ставка*), the highest military body performing the strategic management of the USSR's armed forces in wartime.

Soviet historiography maintained that the *Ставка's* strategic intention was to oust German troops past a line running through Smolensk, the river Sozh and the lower Dnieper, and then to break the so-called eastern rampart (*Великая Отечественная* 2012, vol. 3, p. 531). However, a reading of the *Ставка's* directives from the turn of October 1943 (published in 1999) suggests that the goals of the summer-autumn campaign were much more ambitious (*Ставка* 1999, doc. 327, p. 205). The overall campaign was made up of overlapping strategic plans that consisted of smaller regional offensive operations. The Red Army was to have launched its main attack towards the West (Belarus) and south-west (Ukraine), thus entering the area of the so-called Polish theatre of military operations. The Red Army's offensive actions after smashing the German "Citadel" operation were carried out as part of three great strategic operations codenamed "Rumyantsev" (*Полководец Румянцева*),

The propaganda leaflet – draft for the political officers "Lenino-Berlin (szlak bojowy Wojska Polskiego)" ("Lenino-Berlin. The Combat Trail of the Polish Army") issued by Head Political-Educational Directorate of the Polish Army, September 24, 1945. National Library of Poland, ref. no. DŻS IX 1a., polona.pl

“Kutuzov” and “Suvorov”. It should be noted that the Soviet troops’ activities in summer 1944 as part of Operation Bagration proved that it was possible to develop an attack by infantry and mechanised troops along the Chernigov-Minsk axis, in the corridor between the Dnieper and the Pripjat. This was only possible after taking the experience of the battles in Belarus in 1943 into consideration, and after thorough operational preparation; but these were auxiliary activities in relation to those carried out in the area of the “Smolensk gate” (Glantz, Orenstein 2001, pp. 19–21).

Due to the characteristic shape of the front line on the northern and southern flank of the Kursk arc, the counteroffensive against the German forces was carried out in the Belgorod-Kharkiv direction (south of Kursk) and Orlov (north of Kursk). The offensive turn from Belgorod towards Kharkiv was codenamed “Rumyantsev”, and the Orlov operation received the designation “Kutuzov”. The conquest of Kharkiv opened the way to Poltava, and then to Dnipropetrovsk and Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine. The attack in the Orlov direction was only intended to weaken the *Heeresgruppe* “Mitte”. The conquest of Oryol and Bryansk did not lead to any strategic decisions, as further progress towards Gomel and Roslav led to the movement of Red Army units into the marshy areas of Polesie (for more on the military importance of the Polesie area for operational activities, see Umiastowski 1924, pp. 130–51).

The strategic operation “Suvorov” was of key importance for the success of the Red Army’s actions in Belarus. It was aimed at capturing the Smolensk region together with the strategically important area of the “Smolensk gate”, a strip of lowland plain between the upper Dnieper and the river Daugava, 80–90 km wide, which allowed for rapid movement westwards or eastwards, and made it easier to supply the large attacking forces. A road and a double-track railway line from Warsaw to Brest along the Bug-Minsk-Orsha-Smolensk-Moscow line ran through the “Smolensk gate” (Niezbrzycki 1930, p. 237). The historical importance of the “Smolensk gate” area was appreciated by the outstanding Polish military historian Col. dipl. Roman Umiastowski, who in one of his works emphasised the strategic importance of the “Gate” by highlighting its isthmus as a key part of the route from old Poland via the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to Moscow, essential

for controlling the watershed of the Volga and the Dnieper (Umiastowski 1921, p. 37).

In summer 1941, the German army launched an offensive through the “Smolensk gate” aimed at capturing Moscow. In autumn 1943, the capture of the “Smolensk gate” opened the way to Poland and the Baltic states for the Red Army. Stalin attached great importance to the Smolensk operation. This is evidenced by his two trips to the front line. On August 3, 1943 Stalin visited the village of Yukhnov, where he visited the Western Front’s command post, and on August 5, he arrived in the village of Khoroshevo, at the command post of the Kalinin Front. Stalin was particularly interested in the issues of the troops’ combat readiness, undertakings in the field of operational masking, and the positioning of the cadres in war councils. It was the commander of the armed forces first and last visit to the front line (Khlevnyuk 2016, p. 306).

Operation “Suvorov” began on August 7, 1943 with the attack from the Western Front. Six days later, the Kalinin Front joined the offensive actions. The troops of both operational groups had a combined force of 1.25 million officers and soldiers, 20,600 cannons and mortars, 1430 tanks and armoured guns, and 1100 aircraft (*Великая Отечественная* 2012, vol. 3, p. 531). As a result of the drawn-out battles, Smolensk was captured on September 25, 1943. Then the troops of the Western Front’s right wing moved towards Orsha and the “Smolensk gate” (*Ставка* 1999, doc. 327, p. 205). The further direction of the Western Front’s offensive actions, as well as of its neighbours (the Kalinin Front on the right side, and the Central Front on the left), was determined by the *Ставка*’s Directive No. 30210 of October 1, 1943:

The Headquarters of the Supreme High Command orders:

1 October 1943, 22:00 hours.

1. After capturing the region of Orsha and Mogilev, the Western Front will continue its offensive towards Borisov and Molodechno, and go to the frontier at Dokshitse, Dolginovo, Radoshkovichi. The future goal is to capture Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania.
2. On the right—the Kalinin Front, in the general direction of Vitebsk, Polotsk, Daugavpils, with the further task of capturing Riga, the capital of Latvia. The dividing line: to Luchkovaya

Stanica as before, and further on to Kamien, Plisa, Koziany. All points including for the Kalinin Front.

On the left—the Central Front will advance in the general direction of Zhlobin and Bobruisk, and will take over Minsk, the capital of Belarus. The demarcation line for them: Kirov, Snopot, Prigory, Krichev, Dashkovka, Berezino, Radoshkovichi. All points including the Western Front.

The Bryansk Front will be disbanded on 10 October.

3. Responsibility for securing the points of contact rests: with the Kalinin Front on the Kalinin Front, and with the Central Front on the Western Front.

4. Confirm receipt of this directive. The operation plan, with an indication of the dates and stages, is to be submitted by 5 October 1943.

The HQ of the High Command

[Iosef] Stalin, A[leksey] Antonov. (*Ставка* 1999, doc. No. 345, p. 215).

This document shows that the depth of the nearer objective (the exit to the north of Minsk) for the Western Front was 240 km, and 440 km for the farther objective. Equally ambitious operational goals were to be achieved by the Kalinin Front, for which the depth of the nearer objective was 300 km, and that for the farther objective was 500 km. Due to the terrain conditions in Polesie, the Central Front performed an auxiliary task in relation to the other two fronts, at a depth of 180 km to the nearer objective and 320 km to the farther one.

Simultaneously with the offensive in Belarus, the troops of the Voronezh, Steppe, South-Western and Western Fronts advanced along the Dnieper and, in accordance with the *Ставка*'s guidelines, launched a strategic offensive deep into the left bank of Ukraine. On 25 September 1943, the *Ставка* issued directive No. 30203, according to which the troops of the South-Western Front's right wing were to capture Kyiv and go to the border along the Ovruch-Korosten-Zhytomyr line (a depth of 150–180 km), and the left wing was to strike towards Berdichev, Zhmerinek and Mogilev Podolski (a depth of 280–350 km). The Steppe Front attacking on the left was supposed to take the Uman–Nowoukrainka–Voznesensk border (a depth of 150–230 km) (*Ставка* 1999, doc. No. 337, p. 210). The average strike depth, according to the *Ставка*'s directives, was

to be 250–350 km, thus, the depth of the operational tasks set for the front commands in the Belarusian direction was even greater than for those operating in Ukraine. This testifies to the scale of the Red Army's summer-autumn campaign.

If the troops of the Western, Kalinin and Central Front had implemented Directive No. 30210, the Red Army would have entered the territory of Soviet Belarus and the eastern territories of the pre-1939 Republic of Poland. This would have had far-reaching political consequences, especially in the context of the planned meeting between the leaders of the United States, Great Britain and the USSR in Tehran scheduled for November 28, 1943.

Of the three fronts listed in the *Ставка's* directive, the strongest was the Western Front, commanded by Army General Vasily Sokolovsky, who led the offensive in an area with a breadth of 150 km, from Dobromyśl to Chausa (compare with *Отчетная карта. Положение войск* [October 9, 1943] [The location of troops on the Western Front], stored in *Центральный архив Министерства обороны Российской Федерации* [the Central Archives of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, hereafter TsAMO], file reference number: фонд 208, опись 2511, дело 2588; this and other documents accessed via the website www.pamyat-naroda.ru). According to a report of October 5, 1943, this front had fifty divisions and 340,293 soldiers (on September 20, 1943 the Kalinin Front numbered 256,878 people, and on October 5, 1943 the Central Front had 255,703 troops; see *Сведения о численном и боевом составе боевых частей Центрального Фронта* [Information on the numerical and combat composition of the Central Front's units], TsAMO, фонд 62, опись 321, дело 139, р. 284; *Журнал боевых действий войск Западного фронта* [Journal of the Western Front's combat activities], TsAMO, фонд 208, опись 2511, дело 2589, р. 98; *Ведомость боевого и численного состава войск Калининского Фронта по состоянию на 20 апреля 1943 г.* [Report of the size and composition of the Kalinin Front's combat troops on April 20, 1943], TsAMO, фонд 213, опись 2002, дело 1015, р. 27). The front line included (from the right wing): the 5th, 31st, 68th armies, the 10th Guards Army, the 21st, 33rd, 49th and 10th armies; air support was provided by the 1st Air Army (*Боевой* 1972, pp. 246–7).

Having completed their assigned task, the troops of the Western Front developed their offensive actions as part of the (first) Orsha offensive operation, which lasted from 3 to 11 October 1943. The most important task fell on the 31st army, which struck at the road from Smolensk to Orsha—right at the “Smolensk gate”. The operation did not result in breaking the frontline, but the plan was continued as part of the second Orsha offensive operation, which was carried out on October 12–18, 1943. The difference in the grouping of the Western Front was that, apart from the troops of the 31st army, a strong strike was also launched out of the front’s left wing. This task was given to the 21st and 33rd armies, focused on attacking a 10 km section of the front from Bayevo to Lenino. Most of the not subordinated to armies artillery, cavalry, armoured and mechanised units, which had been transferred from the front command reserve, were deployed in the rear of the forces being transferred. This significant number of forces and resources allowed the forces of the 33rd army to be grouped into six echelons. Three more armies from the Western Front (the 68th army, the 10th Guards Army and the 49th army) secured the wings of the advancing troops, whereas the 5th and 10th armies remained passive (Glantz 2016, p. 63).



The Course of the Second Orsha Operation (October 12–18, 1943) and the Battle of the 1st Infantry Division at Lenino

Apart from the publications devoted to the battles of the 1st Infantry Division at Lenino, the offensive actions of the 21st and 33rd armies at Bayevo and Lenino were not subject to operational analyses in the form of monographs. The greatest substantive value was presented in a two-part article by Robert Wróblewski devoted to the activities of the German troops in the Lenino region on October 12–18, 1943 (Wróblewski 2010; Wróblewski 2011). On the basis of the currently available literature and archival sources, it is possible to present an outline of the events of October 12–18, 1943 (For more on the Battle of Lenino, see McGilvray 2019, pp. 118–36).

The troops of the Western Front only began preparations for the offensive towards Orsha on October 8, 1943. The date of the attack was set for October 12. The time allocated for the preparation of this complicated operation was insufficient. The Western Front troops were displaced in conditions similar to those encountered by the Wehrmacht on its way to Moscow in the autumn of 1941. The movement of the vehicles was hindered by the ubiquitous mud. The retreating Germans used the *Verbrannte Erde* [scorched earth] tactic; most of the settlements along the roads were burned down, bridges were blown up, and minefields were laid (Carell 2017, pp. 307–10).

The troops of the 21st and 33rd armies numbered 136,000 soldiers in total, and were supported by two corps of armoured weapons and a cavalry corps. While the Soviet divisions managed to assemble in the Bayevo and Lenino regions on time, stockpiling a sufficient amount of artillery ammunition was a problem. A large part of the stocks were in warehouses located 200 km from the front line, and there was not enough fuel to transport them on a regular basis. The Western Front's vehicle fleet also left a great deal to be desired. Apart from the modern American trucks delivered under the Lend-Lease Act, the Red Army's transport still relied on battered locally-made trucks. The shortage of ammunition had a fatal impact on the course of the battle (Наступление правого крыла ЗапФ на Оршанском направлении в октябре 1943 г. [Offensive of the Western Front's right wing in the Orsha direction in October 1943], TsAMO, file reference: Ф.208. ОР.2511. Д.2589, к. 97; Ф. 241. ОР. 2593. Д. 2, sheet 137; Glantz 2016, p. 76). The entry to Orsha was defended by the German XXXIX *Panzerkorps*, commanded by Artillery General Robert Martinek. In the first ten days of October, the corps consisted of (from the north): the 1st SS-*Infanterie Brigade* "Reichsführer-SS", the 25th *Panzergranadierdivision*, the 337th and 95th *Infanteriedivision*, the 78th *Sturmdivision* and the 252nd *Infanteriedivision*. The troops of the XXXIX *Panzerkorps* manned the front around the towns of Bayevo, Lenino and Gorki. The section of the front facing the troops of the left wing of the 21st and the entire 33rd army was defended by the 337th *Infanteriedivision*, numbering about 8000 troops. The Germans based their defence on the

line of the *Panther-Stellung* field fortifications, which was a section of the hastily built *Ostwall*. The defenders were favoured by the terrain, as the fortifications ran through the hills dominating the area, from which there was a perfect view onto the lower area on the eastern side of the front. The fighting armies were separated from each other by the narrow river Mereya, which flowed through a peaty valley (Wróblewski 2010, pp. 57–9).

By order of the Western Front's commander, the 1st Infantry Division was included in the 33rd army commanded by General Vasily Gordov. On October 10, 1943, the division occupied the initial bases for the attack. Moods among the soldiers varied. Many of the former Gulag prisoners did not trust the Communists, and were ready to enter their homeland at any cost. The night before the battle, a group of 11 soldiers deserted to the German side. These people had overtly demonstrated their intention to do so from the moment they were incorporated into the division's ranks. After switching to the German side, the deserters revealed that the battle would begin at dawn on October 12, (*Wojsko Polskie w ZSRR*, p. 171). After receiving this information, the command of the XXXIX *Panzerkorps* put all its units on alert and asked for the support of the Luftwaffe (BAMA, file reference RH19-II/307K, HG "Mitte", *Kriegstagebuch Heeresgruppe "Mitte" (Ostfront-Mittelabschnitt)*, Bd. 2 (1–31 X 1943), pp. 91). The Orsha operation of the Western Front's troops began on the morning of October 12. The general attack by the Soviet armies was preceded by reconnaissance activity. The aim of this tactic was to reveal the firing positions before the artillery barrage commenced. The reconnaissance was carried out in the zones of the 10th Guards Army and the 21st, 33rd and 49th armies. In the section of the 1st Infantry Regiment, two companies attacked the German positions. The attackers broke into the enemy trenches over a distance of several dozen metres, but a moment later they were shot at from two sides and surrounded. After a short exchange of fire, 80 Poles were captured. This was the first such case during the Battle of Lenino. In the remaining armies' lines of action, the reconnaissance ended with proportionally large losses among the advancing battalions and penal companies (Wróblewski 2010, p. 65).

The actual attack was to be preceded by a powerful “softening-up” by artillery. Four artillery divisions were concentrated in the attack zone of the 21st and 33rd armies, one of which was armed with heavy 300-mm stationary rocket launchers. According to the plan, the artillery was to fire for 1 hour and 40 minutes. The artillery barrage started at 9:20 a.m., but the cannons unexpectedly stopped firing after only 40 minutes. The reason was that the ammunition stocks were shrinking with every minute, and the quartermaster was unable to restock them on a regular basis. (Extract from the log of Combat Activities of the 1st Infantry Division [*Dziennik Działań Bojowych 1. Dywizji Piechoty*] for the period 9–13 October 1943, CAW-WBH, file reference: III-7-555, 4).

The infantry attack began after 10:00 a.m. The 1st and 2nd regiments of the 1st Infantry Division made an attack on a two-kilometre stretch of the front between the villages of Trigubovo and Polzukhi. It quickly turned out that the German defences had not been sufficiently incapacitated. In the machine-guns’ crossfire, the sub-units of the 1st Infantry Division mixed with each other, which made command difficult. Despite their increasing losses, the soldiers of the division stormed the village of Trigubovo, and also soon entered the fortified settlement of Polzukhi.

At the same time, the adjacent Soviet divisions (the 42nd and 290th rifle divisions of the 33rd army) failed to keep up. This resulted in the exposure of the 1st Infantry Division’s wings, two kilometres forward. Thus, the 1st and 2nd IRs found themselves in a fire trap, under constant fire from German artillery from three directions.

After the initial failure, the Germans regrouped and proceeded to counterattack Trigubovo. The attack was performed by a company of grenadiers with the support of three units of the *Sturmgeschütz* III. The attack came as a complete surprise to the command of the 1st ID. When German planes from the 6th *Luftflotte* appeared overhead, panic ensued. The soldiers of the 1st Infantry Regiment began to leave Trigubovo in panic. At this point, the Soviet artillery joined the battle again, but its imprecise fire struck both the attackers and the defenders. Some of the soldiers of the 1st Infantry Regiment, cut off by the fire of their

own guns, surrendered to the Germans (Wróblewski 2010, p. 65–7).

This was not the only case when the Soviet artillery fired on the lines of the 1st Infantry Division. Ten minutes after the start of the attack, a volley of 300 mm-calibre rockets devastated the ranks of the 1st Infantry Regiment. The 2nd Infantry Regiment, attacking on the right wing, came under fire from its own howitzers twice. (*Dziennik działań bojowych 1. DP*, CAW-WBH, III-7-14, p. 6). Among other things, it became impossible to hold onto the village of Polzukhi which, as a result of the shelling, was burned down and fell back into the hands of the Germans. In the fight for Polzukhi, 200 soldiers of the 2nd Infantry Regiment were captured by the Germans (Wróblewski 2010, pp. 65–9).

The German command, who had been informed by the deserters from the 1st Infantry Division of the attack date, sent the powerful air force of the 6th *Luftflotte* to Lenino. The Junkers Ju87 dive bombers (popularly known as Stukas, short for *Sturzkampfflugzeug*) primarily attacked the artillery positions and supply columns. All traffic through the Mereya valley was paralysed relatively quickly. Because of this, the frontline soldiers ran out of ammunition. In desperation, the infantrymen used the weapons they had captured from the enemy. The attack then died down completely (Wróblewski 2010, pp. 65–9).

Although the 33rd army command had numerous anti-aircraft artillery units at their disposal, they were only armed with light 37 mm-calibre cannons and coupled machine guns; they lacked the more effective medium-size 85-mm guns. The forces available turned out to be insufficient in view of the considerable intensification of the air raids. The Soviet soldiers later recalled that they did not remember any such heavy bombardments since 1941. The 1st Infantry Division itself did not have any organic anti-aircraft weapons. Their makeshift solution involved firing anti-tank guns supported on wooden logs at the diving planes, but this kind of fire was not very effective.

The air space over the battlefield at Lenino was secured by the 1st Air Army subordinated to the Western Front (one of the aviation divisions included the 1st “Normandie” fighter

aviation regiment, composed of French pilots). The Soviet airmen had already lost air superiority during the first day of the battle. On October 12, the 33rd Army's observation and report service reported 205 German aircraft over the battlefield, and on October 13 there were as many as 455. Intensive raids on the positions of the 21st and 33rd armies lasted until October 16 (Staff message from the 1st Air Army [Сводки штаба 1-й воздушной армии], TsAMO, file reference: Ф. 290. ОР. 3284. Д.296, к. 152–159).

Darkness fell at 6 p.m., which saved the 1st Infantry Division from further air attacks. After dark, attempts were made to resume offensive operations. The political and educational officers urged the soldiers to continue their attack with threats and curses. There were cases when the exhausted soldiers actually faked an attack, just so they could surrender to German captivity. The Germans realised this and did not open fire. Calls in Polish were heard from both sides of the front. A group of soldiers conscripted into the *Wehrmacht* in Upper Silesia were serving in the 337th *Infanteriedivision*. With their help, the division headquarters prepared a propaganda appeal to the soldiers of the 1st Infantry Division in Polish, broadcast through megaphones. At one point, the melody of the national anthem of Poland was even played.

Due to shameful negligence, the soldiers of the 1st Infantry Division did not receive their own tanks on time. The division was responsible for the 1st tank regiment, armed with 32 T-34 tanks and 7 light T-70M tanks. However, the regiment commander, Lt. Col. Anatol Wojnowski, was a notorious drunk, and was also intoxicated during the battle. Most of the tanks became bogged down in the muddy Mereya valley because Lt. Col. Wojnowski did not take the care to build reinforced ramps towards the river crossings. When Lt. Wojnowski became aware of the imminent consequences, he fled to the HQ of the 33rd Army asking for protection from General Berling. As a result, Lt. Wojnowski was removed from the list of officers of the 1st Infantry Regiment, but he did not suffer any further consequences of his alcohol addiction (Anduła 2015, pp. 106–16).

The engineering was also weak in the 33rd army. In the course of the battle, General Grodov ordered the 5th mechanised corps to enter the breach. Some of the tanks

got stuck in the bog of the Mereya, or drove into minefields. Only a few individual tanks from the 233rd Tank Brigade and the 154th Tank Regiment took part in the battles for Trigubovo, immediately supporting the 1st Infantry Division's soldiers with fire. However, the introduction of these armoured weapons into battle was premature. The artillery and infantry failed to destroy the German anti-tank defence. At the foot of Lenino and Trigubovo, the XXXIX *Panzerkorps* had about a hundred armoured guns of the *Sturmgeschütz* III Ausf. G type, as well as Sd.Kfz. 164 Hornisse (Nashorn) and Sd.Kfz. 138 Marder III tank destroyers, half of which were operating in the Trigubovo region and north of the village. (Report of losses October 12–15, 1943 [Донесение о потерях с 12 по 15.10.43 г.], TsAMO, file reference Ф. 388. ОР. 8712. Д. 405, sheet 132; Anduła 2015, p. 100). The artillery of the 1st Infantry Division also suffered losses. Many of the gun-pulling horses were white or grey in colour, and made excellent targets against the grey-brown earth. Some batteries lost all of their horses. All the regiment's artillery was immobilised, while the isolated infantry was bleeding out without any fire support.

On the night of October 12/13, the decimated 1st IR was relieved by the 3rd IR and moved from the division's second row. After several hours of fighting, the balance was staggering. Out of the three battalions of the 1st IR, only 500 soldiers remained fit for combat. Gen. Berling blamed the regiment commander, Lt. Franciszek Derks, and wanted to shoot him personally. Sensing the threat, Lt. Col. Derks escaped to the 33rd army HQ and found shelter there (Anduła 2015, p. 110).

On the morning of October 13, General Gordov decided to continue the attack. The weather was even more favourable to the operation of aviation than it had been the previous day. Moments after sunrise, German bombers flew over the battlefield. The attack by the 1st Infantry Division broke down after the first attempt to remove the soldiers from the trenches. Seeing the increasing losses, General Berling ordered the offensive actions to stop. This decision was a clear breach of General Gordov's orders. The generals met at the 33rd Army's command post. A vulgar row broke out between the commanders, in which General Berling did not mince words. Following the quarrel, General Gordov decided that the 1st ID

was unable to fight on its own, and ordered it to be withdrawn to the rear of his army. With this the 1st ID's fight at Lenino ended. In a report to the command of the Western Front, Gen. Gordov stated: "The 1st ID proved unable to fight the Germans." (*Боевое донесения штаба 33 А* [Combat report from the 33rd Army's HQ], *Центральный архив Министерства архив Министерства*, p. 172). This was confirmed by desertions before the battle, as well as by the cases of Polish soldiers being taken into captivity during the fight; at around 2 p.m. on October 12, 1943, during the counterattack on Trigubovo, one German company of grenadiers captured 150 prisoners from the 1st IR, which is confirmed by reports and entries in the combat operations log of the 337th *Infanteriedivision* (*Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv*, Freiburg im Breisgau; further: BAMA, file reference: RH26-337/33, *Kriegstagebuch* No. 5 der 337. ID, 28 September-31 December 1943, pp. 14-15; RH26-337/37, *Tagesmeldungen der Rgtr. Am* 12 October 1943, Anlage No. 1-32; *Wojsko Polskie w ZSRR* 2003, doc. 27, p. 168).

On the night of October 13-14, 1943, the 1st Infantry Division was released from the front line and went to the reserve of the commander of the 33rd army. The 1st Infantry Division did not take part in any further offensives towards the "Smolensk gate" (*Wojsko Polskie w ZSRR* 2003, doc. 27, p. 168).

According to one report, during the two days of the Battle of Lenino the 1st ID lost 510 killed, 1776 wounded and 652 missing, a total of 3054 people (23% of the unit). Against the background of the losses of the 33rd army's other units, the high number of those who went missing without a trace was noteworthy. Some of the missing were later found in field hospitals, but the vast majority had been taken prisoner by the Germans. During the first day of the Battle of Lenino alone, the command of the 337th *Infanteriedivision* reported that 441 prisoners had been captured. During the interrogations, the Poles talked in detail about the organisation, weapons and relations among the nationalities prevailing in the 1st Infantry Division. The prisoners of war from Lenino were kept in camps at the rear of the front until the winter, and then they were transported to Stalag IX Altengrabow near Magdeburg, where they stayed until the end of the war (Wróblewski 2010, pp. 67-9).

The large group of POWs from the 1st Infantry Regiment included a group of a dozen or so people led by Lieutenant Adolf Wysocki, who decided to collaborate with the occupier. These people were transported into the territory of the General Governorate. The German authorities used them in propaganda activities. Lieutenant Wysocki himself participated in anti-Soviet rallies, and was the author of a report published in the Polish-language *Kurier Częstochowski*. After the war, the authorities of the Polish People's Republic concealed the information about the POWs from Lenino. The case was all the more embarrassing as Lieutenant Adolf Wysocki had been declared dead and posthumously decorated with the *Virtuti Militari* Order, 5th class.

The 33rd army's battle at Lenino lasted until October 18, peaking on the 14th and 15th. Despite sending more armoured and infantry units into combat, it was not possible to recapture Trigubovo. The Soviet divisions' losses were even heavier than those of the 1st Infantry Division. Eventually, the 33rd army's divisions were consolidated on a several-kilometre-long bridgehead on the western bank of the Mereya, which had no operational significance and was not worth the losses incurred.

Even worse was the attack by the adjacent 21st army (with elements of the 10th Guards Army), which attacked the positions of the 1st *SS-Infanterie Brigade* and the 25th *Panzer Grenadier Division*, as well as the left wing of the 337th *Infanterie Division*. The battle took place between the villages of Bayevo and Sukino. Only small breaks, merely a few hundred metres wide, were made in the German lines. The breach was not widened. The introduction of independent tank units into combat ended in defeat due to their failure to detect the minefields. After seven days of persistent fighting, the army was still in its original position (Glantz 2016, pp. 75–7). The casualties among the soldiers of the 21st army were so severe that the Western Front's HQ decided to temporarily disband the army and send its command to the rear (The 21st army's combat log [Журнал боевых действий 21-й Армии], TsAMO, file reference Ф. 375. ОП. 6675. Д. 71, sheet 84). On the left wing, the 49th army, which was advancing south of the 33rd, performed an auxiliary task in relation to the strike grouping. On the German side of the front,

it faced the 95th *Infanteriedivision* and 78th *Sturmdivision*, manning the section of the front from Lenino to the town of Gorki. The very beginning of the attack turned out to be unfortunate. A sub-unit of one of the Soviet divisions which was performing combat reconnaissance on October 12 gave a false report that the first line of trenches had been captured. In order not to strike their own soldiers, the artillery of the 49th army opened fire deep into the German positions. When the main attack began, it turned out that the report that the Germans had been removed from the front positions was false. As a result, the attackers encountered very strong fire from machine guns, which inflicted heavy losses on them. (The 41st army's combat log [*Журнал боевых действий 49-й Армии*], TsAMO, file reference Ф.404. ОР. 9711. Д. 176, pp. 5–10).

The successive strikes by the Western Front's army at Lenino began to resemble the dynamic familiar from the trench warfare of 1914–18. The infantry assaults were repeated each day, but were repelled at the front line of the German trenches with significant losses. As a result of the fighting, on October 12–18, 1943, the troops of General Vasily Sokołowski (later a Marshal of the USSR, known for his work *Military Strategy*, Sokolovsky 1963 *passim*) suffered losses of 23,336 (5858 killed and 17,478 wounded) men, which constituted 7 percent of the number of troops before the operation (*Великая Победа* 2015, doc. no. 32, p. 40). The fight to capture the “Smolensk gate” continued throughout the autumn and winter until the spring of 1944. It was not until the first days of April 1944 that an operational pause was called. Offensive operations in Belarus resumed on June 22, 1944, 83 days after the defeat of the first Belarusian campaign. As part of the carefully planned crypto-strategic Operation Bagration, the Red Army encircled and destroyed the *Heeresgruppe “Mitte”*, seized the entire territory of Belarus and crossed the river Bug. Soviet historiography strongly emphasised the success of Operation Bagration, in this way papering over the memory of the failures of 1943 and 1944 (Beshanov 2015, pp. 73–9).

The Belarusian strategic offensive, which was aimed at taking control of Belarus and the Baltic states, lasted from October 2, 1943 to April 1, 1944, but ended in failure for the Red Army. The goals set could not be achieved, and the

combined losses of the Kalinin, Central and Western fronts throughout the campaign were estimated at 150,000 killed and 550,000 wounded and missing (Glantz 2016, p. xix).

The clear failure of this series of offensive operations by the Western Front's troops in Belarus became the subject of a work by the Special Committee of the State Defence Committee (*Государственный Комитет Оборонь, GKO*), under the leadership of Georgi Malenkov, and composed of Lieutenant Gen. Aleksandr Shcherbakov from the Main Politburo of the Red Army; General Col. Sergey Shtemenko and Lieutenant General Fyodor Kuznetsov, representing the *Ставка*; and Lieutenant General Aleksei Shimonayev, a representative of the General Staff of the Red Army. These persons were accompanied by a staff of supervisors and specialists in all types of weapons and services. The result of the commission's work was Report No. M-715 of April 11, 1944, addressed to Stalin and the members of the *Ставка* (*Великая Победа* 2015, pp. 39–41; *Великая Отечественная* 2012, vol. 4, pp. 775–87).

In the eyes of the GKO's extraordinary commission, the responsibility for the above-described state of affairs rested with the command and the staff of the Western Front, who in their assessment had worked badly, were staffed with incompetent people, and were intolerant of criticism. The report emphasised that the blame was borne personally by the commander of the Western Front, Gen. Sokolovsky. The commission also assessed the commander of the 33rd army, Lt. Gen. Vasily Gordov, in negative terms; “instead of using the artillery correctly, he tried to break the enemy's defence with human forces”, and the battle of Lenino was indicated as the most glaring example of his incompetence. The battle of Lenino was just one of many bloody clashes. During the entire campaign in Belarus in 1943, the 33rd army's losses reached 50 percent of their initial numbers (*Великая Победа* 2015, pp. 39–41; *Великая Отечественная* 2012, vol. 4, pp. 775–787).

After reading the report, Stalin took the immediate decision to remove General Sokolovsky from his post as commander of the Western Front. The same fate was shared by the commander of the 33rd army and General Gordov. The *Ставка*'s next step was order No. 220076 of April 12, 1944,

on the dissolution of the Western Front as an independent operational union (*Приказ ЦВГК СССР* no. 220076 от 12 апреля [19]44 [г.] [Order no. 220076 of April 12, 1944]; *Великая Отечественная* 2012, vol. 4, pp. 787–8; Shtemenko 1969, p. 255).

Polish Military Historiography Describing the Battle of Lenino in the Years 1945–89



On the eve of the start of the Western Front's second Orsha operation, the 1st ID was the strongest of the 33rd army's three first-line divisions. In the case of a breakthrough at Lenino, the Polish soldiers' success would have provided an opportunity to open up the "Smolensk gate", and the division would indeed have been able to march along "the shortest way to Poland". These hopes turned out to be in vain with the defeat of the 21st and 33rd armies at Bayevo and Lenino. The contribution of the 1st ID to the hostilities of the Red Army in Belarus was limited to the two attacks carried out on October 12 and 13, 1943 between Polzukhi and Trigubovo. The division suffered losses that made it impossible to continue fighting without political consequences. The balance of the 1st Infantry Division's combat operations at Lenino was tragic, as was the entire offensive of the Western Front towards Orsha. According to reports from the 1st Infantry Division's HQ, within two days the unit's losses amounted to 3054 people, that is 23.7% of the total personnel, including 510 killed, 1776 wounded and 652 missing (Grzelak, Stańczyk, Zwoliński 2009, p. 212).

In the light of the course of the second Orsha operation, the offensive actions of the 1st Infantry Division were only an episode in a much larger battle. At the same time, the image of the "Polish" battle of Lenino created by the historiography of the Polish People's Republic differed significantly from the one that emerges from an analysis of the combat operations of the Western Front. The genesis of this discrepancy can be traced to the political activity of the Communists from the ZPP and the members of the Main Political and Educational Board of the Polish Army (*Główny Zarząd Polityczno-Wychowawczy Wojska Polskiego*), who held the monopoly on information about the 1st ID and its battles on the eastern front.



Pieces of equipment of 1st Infantry Division soldier: backpack, military cap, mess tin, shoulder straps with sergeant insignia. Katyn Museum in Warsaw – the Martyrological Branch of the Polish Army Museum.
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The establishment of the 1st ID was a political act directed against the Polish government-in-exile. In August 1943, its training programme was accelerated so that the division could go to the front on September 1, 1943, a date with a symbolic dimension, as it was the fourth anniversary of the Third Reich's aggression against Poland (Grzelak, Stańczyk, Zwoliński 2009, pp. 203–4). The ZPP's periodical *Nowe Widnokreği* devoted an article to the 1st ID's departure from the Sielce camp entitled "Two Septembers" (*Nowe Widnokreği* 17, 1943, p. 1). In the periodical's next edition on September 20, the ZPP's chairwoman Wanda Wasilewska expressed her hope that "the route of the 1st ID will lead straight back into the country" (*Nowe Widnokreği* 18, 1943, p. 8) in her speech "We are heading for the front".

The conviction that the division had started to fight its way towards Poland was heavily emphasised in the military press. The newspaper *Zwyciężymy*, edited by Paweł Hoffman, published a request by Cpr. Ludwik Mysłowski of the reserve infantry regiment for sketch maps to be included in subsequent issues of the periodical, on which readers could follow the 1st Infantry Division's route towards Poland (*Zwyciężymy* 31, 1943, p. 1). This request was granted in the October 13, 1943 issue, alongside the first official reports on

the battle. The first page reproduces a special order by the deputy commander of the 1st Corps of the Polish Armed Forces in the USSR, General Karol Świerczewski, dated at 1.30 am on October 13, 1943, with the following wording: “According to the news we have just received, yesterday, on May 12, the 1st Tadeusz Kościuszko [Infantry] Division broke through the line of the German defence and fulfilled the task of the day.” For counterintelligence reasons, the name of the Battle of Lenino could not be included in the newspaper, as it would have revealed the division’s location and the direction of subsequent operations to the enemy (*Zwyciężymy* 31, 1943, p. 1). The order as quoted was very restrained, as it did not mention the word “victory”, and the information about the 1st ID having completed “the task of the day” clearly suggested that fighting was still going on. The withdrawal of the 1st ID from the front lines on October 14, 1943 thus came as even more of a surprise. One had to wait 276 days to hear about the next battle by the “Kościuszko boys”. Only on July 16, 1944 were the 1st Light Artillery Regiment of the 1st Infantry Division engaged to support the Soviet 69th army on the river Turia in Volyn. The 1st ID next faced the enemy as a coherent unit on August 1, 1944 on the Vistula near Dęblin (Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe Wojskowego Biura Historycznego im. gen. broni K. Sosnkowskiego [the Central Military Archive of the Gen. Sosnkowski Military Historical Office, hereafter *CAW-WBH*], III-7-15, *Dziennik działań bojowych*, k. 11–12, 17).

Contrary to the hopes of the Polish Communists, Lenino marked both the beginning and the end of the Polish army’s route in the East in 1943. Although, in the opinion of the 1st ID’s political apparatus, the mood among officers and soldiers after the end of the fighting was good, the soldiers later made statements about the trauma caused by their first contact with the enemy. This was confirmed by the following reports:

We were in a situation like in 1939 in Poland, we weren’t protected by our planes; we didn’t receive support from the wings, we found ourselves in a dead end under crossfire; they did with us like they did with the Czech division: they threw it into battle, and it bled away into nothing. (*Wojsko Polskie w ZSRR* 2003, doc. 29, p. 177).



W HOLENIE
POLEGŁYM
POD LENINO
ŻOŁNIERZOM
1-DYWIZJI PIECHOTY
IM. TADEUSZA
KOSCIUŃSKI
12-18 X 1943 R.



This was a reference to the 1st Czechoslovak Independent Field Battalion, commanded by Lt. Ludvik Svoboda, which received its baptism of fire on March 8–9, 1943. The Czechoslovak soldiers were tasked with defending the village of Sokolovo during a German counter-offensive aimed at retaking Kharkiv from the Soviets. The Czechoslovak soldiers suffered heavy losses in the battle, up to 69% of the battalion's manpower (for more see Richter 2017, pp. 11–43).

Similar conclusions can be drawn after reading the unpublished accounts of the veterans of the Battle of Lenino, which are currently kept in the resources of the Central Military Archives (CAW-WBH, IX.4.44.15, testimony by Mieczysław Stępiński, p. 6; *ibid.*, IX.4.44.450, testimony by Edmund Dobrowolski, pp. 9–14).

In order to counter any such unfavourable statements, the 1st ID's political and educational apparatus made an effort to create a heroic myth out of the battle of Lenino. The first news about the battle was disseminated through the press. One of the periodicals published by the ZPP was the newspaper *Nowe Widnokreği*. The articles published in this periodical were written by Polish Communists and were clearly pro-Soviet in nature. On October 20, 1943, *Nowe Widnokreği* published an article from the field of the 1st Kościuszko Division's battle by 2nd Lt. Edward Ochab, a participant in the battle. Ochab had been a member of the Communist Party of Poland until 1927, co-organised the ZPP during the war, and was a political educator in the 2nd Infantry Regiment of the 1st Infantry Division. After the war, he performed a number of important functions in public administration and the party hierarchy. In 1956 he briefly became the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, and in the years 1964–8 he was the chairman of the State Council. In the article, Ochab presents the dramatic episodes of the battle, praises the heroism of the soldiers, and emphasises that “the Division fulfilled its military duty with dignity” (*Nowe Widnokreği* 21, 1943, pp. 8–9). For the purposes of propaganda, the Political and Educational Department of the 1st Infantry Division received ten copies of the journal of the division's combat operations (CAW-WBH, III-7-555, Extract from the Journal of Combat Activities of the 1st Infantry Division for the period October 9–13, 1943,

The Monument in Homage of 1st Infantry Division Soldiers Fallen at Lenino (1998), Powązki Military Cemetery (section A6), Warsaw, Poland.

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passim). On the basis of these documents, prints and leaflets giving a pseudo-historical description of the battle were created. One of these documents is a three-page brochure *Historia dywizji*, drawn up at the beginning of 1945 by the 1st ID's political and educational department for the needs of the current propaganda (CAW-WBH, III-7-556, *Historia dywizji*. 1. Warszawska Krzyża Grunwaldu III klasy, Krzyża Virtuti Militari IV klasy, Orderu Czerwonego Sztandaru, Orderu Kutuzowa II st. Dywizja Piechoty im. T. Kościuszki [The division's history. The 1st Warsaw Grunwald Cross, 3rd class, the Virtuti Militari Cross 4th class, the Order of the Red Standard, the Kutuzov Order, 2nd degree of the Kościuszko Infantry Division], *passim*). The battle of Lenino was described in the following terms:

The division was ordered to attack and break through the German defensive lines near Orsha, in the area of the settlement of Lenino. This task involved crossing a two-kilometre stretch of the marshy Mereya River, taking the triple line of the German trenches, and capturing the villages of Trigubovo and Polzukhi. In the morning of October 12, after initial bombardment by the artillery of the 1st and 2nd Infantry Regiments, they started their assault. As a result of the battle, they occupied the designated villages of Trigubovo and Polzukhi.

On the night of October 12–13, the 3rd Infantry Regiment released the 1st Infantry Regiment, which was withdrawn to the second echelon of the division. On the night of October 13–14, the 1st [Infantry] Division was relieved by Red Army troops. The heroism of the “Kościuszko boys” was admired and highly appreciated by the Soviet officers.

In this battle, Aniela Krzywoń was particularly distinguished, as she saved the papers from a burning staff car, but found death in its flames.

At Lenino, the Polish soldiers sealed the brotherhood of arms between the Polish Army and the Soviet Army with their own blood. At Lenino, the betrayal of [Władysław] Anders, a politician who deals in standing idle with his arms at his feet, was resisted by the Kościuszko boys with their armed deeds and their relentless struggle to liberate the country from occupation as soon as possible. The Battle of Lenino was one

of the greatest military deeds of Polish soldiers, one of the greatest pages in the history of Polish arms (CAW-WBH, III-7-556, *Historia dywizji...*, p. 2).

The document quoted is a testimony to how the political apparatus tried to interpret the 1st ID's battle at Lenino for its own purposes. A special feature of the text is the focus on the tactical elements of the battle (the regrouping of the sub-units), the heroism of individual soldiers (Aniela Krzywoń) and the political results of the battle (the brotherhood of Poles and Soviets). After the end of the war, these elements became the basis of the scheme according to which the historiography of the Polish People's Republic perpetuated the propaganda interpretation of the 1st ID's battle at Lenino.

One of the first hagiographers of the Battle of Lenino was Col. Henryk Werner, the 1st ID's political and educational officer during the war. It should be noted that Werner was an experienced worker in party propaganda: in the 1930s he was a member of the Communist Party of Poland and editor of the *Czerwony Sztandar* newspaper. He belonged to the group of 181 Communists appointed by Col. Berling as educational officers to the 1st ID. As Werner had been a journalist in the pre-war period, the deputy commander of the education division, Maj. Włodzimierz Sokorski, appointed him editor-in-chief of the divisional newspaper *Żołnierz Wolności* (Nussbaum 2016, pp. 71, 85; Pakier 1967, p. 128). In a short article titled "12–13 October 1943. Lenino", published in October 1946 in the *Żołnierz Polski* weekly, the author began by stating that the 1st DP had been tasked with "taking German defensive positions near the town of Lenino, on the Russian-Belarusian border, some one hundred kilometres east of Orsha." The author did not describe the details of the Battle of Lenino; he only emphasised that "the soldiers went to attack with ferocity and bravado, at times contrary to the principles of infantry fighting on open terrain". He stressed that "it is not the military aspect of this battle which is of historical importance". Moreover, Werner compared the 1st Infantry Regiment's baptism of fire to the Battle of Grunwald in 1410, and also stated that "the honour of Polish soldiers, which had been tainted by the shameful retreat of [Władysław] Anders, was saved", a line borrowed

from the propaganda materials produced by the 1st ID's staff (Henryk Werner, "12–13 October 1943. Lenino", *Żołnierz Polski. Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 37, 1946, p. 4).

The above mentioned elements of the description of the Battle of Lenino were reproduced in other publications by Werner (Werner 1945; Werner 1950, pp. 27–32). Other members of the 1st ID's political and educational apparatus were very influential in creating the heroic image of Lenino through their publications, including Janina Broniewska ("W 4. rocznicę bitwy pod Lenino. Warszawa – za białoruską mgłą" [On the 4th anniversary of the Battle of Lenino. Warsaw—behind the Belarusian fog], *Ziemia Pomorska* 280, 1947, p. 1), Juliusz Hibner (Juliusz Hibner, "Oddajemy hołd poległym bohaterom" [We pay tribute to the fallen heroes], *Żołnierz Wolności* 82, 1950, p. 5), and Jakub Wachtel (see Nadzin, Wachtel 1948).

For obvious reasons, these articles could not contain any critical analysis of the course of the autumn campaign in Belarus in 1943. This was the task of the military historians.

In People's Poland, military historiography was closely related to the authorities responsible for supervising the military. In the period 1944–59, historical research was carried out alternately by institutions subordinate to the General Staff of the Polish People's Army (*Ludowe Wojsko Polskie*: the official name in the period from July 29, 1944 to 1952 was the Polish Army, *Wojsko Polskie*. The description "People's" [*Ludowe*] was used in Communist propaganda, but was never officially approved in a normative document. The author is using this informal name to clearly distinguish the *LWP* from other formations of the Polish Army during World War II, which is dictated by the desire to indicate its specificity, subordination to the USSR, and the actions it took contrary to the Polish *raison d'état*: see Cenckiewicz 2017, p. 8) and the Main Political and Educational Board (*Główny Zarząd Polityczno-Wychowawczy*) of the *LWP* (known from April 1950 as the Main Political Board of the *LWP*) (Rutkowski 2007, pp. 82–83, 335–7). On February 24, 1959, the Military Historical Institute (WIH) [*Wojskowy Instytut Historyczny*] was established; this body became the largest academic research institution dealing with the history of the Polish Armed Forces in the USSR in the wartime. Its activities were strictly subordinated to the Main

The grave of the Gen. Zygmunt Berling, commander of the 1st Infantry Division. Powązki Military Cemetery (section A4), Warsaw, Poland.
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Political Board, which was expressed in its rigorous publishing policy, self-censorship, and the one-sided orientation of its scientific research. In addition to the politicisation, the poor level of the WIH's academic work was further hindered by the insubstantial qualifications of the researchers it employed (Rutkowski 2007, pp. 565–9).

Academic literature from the Communist period referring to the Battle of Lenino is extensive. It includes histories of the tactical units (Przytocki 1981; Krajewski 1979; Kałłaur 1978; Krajewski 1976; Guterman, Welfeld 1966; Wachtel 1962) and the individual services (Dideńko 1978; Majewski 1976; Nowicki 1972). Lenino itself became the subject of three monographs: Stanisław Szulczyński's 1958 work *Bitwa pod Lenino. Studium wojskowo-historyczne* [The battle of Lenino. A military-historical study] was the first academic attempt to examine this battle; the second study was Czesław Podgórski's book *Lenino* from 1973 (Podgórski 1973); and then Kazimierz Sobczak, who wrote a history of the 1st ID, devoted a large chapter of *Lenino–Warszawa–Berlin. Wojenne dzieje 1 Dywizji Piechoty im. Tadeusza Kościuszki* [Lenino–Warsaw–Berlin. The wartime history of the 1st Tadeusz Kościuszko Infantry Division] to the Battle of Lenino. This work was published in 1977, and then reissued in 1979 and 1988 (Sobczak 1979, pp. 92–167).

Any consideration of the Military Historical Institute and its researchers requires us to consider the biographies of the authors of the above-mentioned works.

Col. Stanisław Szulczyński, a.k.a. Szlama Zelman Szulzyner (August 1, 1915–January 24, 2013), was born in Warsaw to a Jewish family. From 1946, he was a member of the Polish Workers' Party, and then a member of the Polish United Workers' Party until 1965. In the period 1934–9, he was an activist of the *Centrala Gwiazd* sports club, which was associated with the *Poalej Syjon-Lewica* party. In September 1939, fearing the approach of the German troops, he moved to Lida. In May 1940, he was arrested by the NKVD and sentenced to three years in prison for refusing to accept a Soviet passport. He regained his freedom in the summer of 1941 as a result of an amnesty under the Sikorski-Maysky treaty; after his release, he worked as a teacher. He joined the 1st ID on his own initiative, Polonising his name and surname.

From 30 May 1943, he was a political and educational officer in the 1st Infantry Division. He participated in the Battle of Lenino, and then he served in the ranks of the 3rd ID. He took part in the Battle of Kołobrzeg in 1945 and in clashes with the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) in eastern Poland. In 1946 he became a student of the Infantry Training Centre in Rembertów. During 1947–50 he was a lecturer at the General Staff Academy and a member of the editorial board of *Mysł Wojskowa* [Military Thought], a periodical for officers. In 1951–2 he served as a political officer in the command of the 11th Mechanised Division, and then in the staff of Military District No. 5. On October 6, 1952, he was employed at the General Staff Academy as a researcher. In the course of his service, he was repeatedly criticised for his arrogance, self-centredness and careerism, and was punished with party reprimands. In the period 1959–65 he was editor-in-chief of *Przegląd Wojsk Lądowych* [the Land Forces Review] and manager of the WKS Legia military sport club. On June 22, 1965 he was expelled from the Polish United Workers' Party for financial fraud during a trip by WKS Legia to Bulgaria. On February 3, 1967, as a result of the anti-Semitic campaign unleashed after the Arab countries' defeat in the Six-Day War, he was dismissed from the army and stripped of his officer rank. In 1971 he left for Israel, and returned to Poland in 1991 (CAW-WBH, Personal files of Col. Stanisław Szulczyński, 800/93/52, *passim*; *ibidem*, 1600/76/350, *passim*; *ibidem*, IX.445.130, Biographical notes, p. 78).

Colonel Czesław Podgórski (May 30, 1923–January 14, 1999) worked as a labourer in Zamość during the German occupation. After the Soviet troops arrived, he joined the Citizens' Militia (MO, Communist criminal and order police units). He became a member of the Polish Workers' Party, and then the PZPR. He joined the Polish Army on August 28, 1944. He served in anti-tank artillery units until mid-1946, but did not take part in the war. In the years 1946–8 he was a student at the Higher School of Political and Educational Officers [*Wyższa Szkoła Oficerów Polityczno-Wychowawczych*] in Rembertów. In 1950–1 he was a political officer at Officers' Infantry School No. 2 in Jelenia Góra. Then, in 1951–3 he studied at the Lenin Political Academy in the USSR. After returning to Poland, he was a lecturer at the Department

of Marxism-Leninism of the Feliks Dzerzhinsky Military Political Academy. He was removed from this position due to his low qualifications and lack of teaching experience. In 1957, he graduated in history from the University of Warsaw. In the years 1959–78 he was employed at WIH at a research position. He did not manage to complete his doctoral dissertation devoted to the history of the Polish Armed Forces in the USSR. He was criticised by his superiors for his lack of academic qualifications and progress in research work. He willingly wrote works of popular science, compilation and journalistic articles. On June 17, 1978 he was dismissed from the service and retired. (CAW-WBH, Personal files of Col. Czesław Podgórski, 1679/84/574, *passim*).

Colonel Kazimierz Sobczak (February 14, 1923–February 9, 2004) was a member of the Polish Workers' Party from May 15, 1945, and later of the Polish United Workers' Party. He joined the army in 1945 as a result of the general draft. In 1945–6 he served in the Navy. In 1946–9 he was a cadet at the Officer's Political and Educational School in Łódź. Over the period 1949–51, he was a lecturer at the Officers' Armoured Weaponry School [*Oficerska Szkoła Broni Panczernej*] in Poznań, and then a political officer in the 10th Mechanised Division. In 1954 he graduated from the Dzerzhinsky Military Political Academy and remained there as a lecturer. In 1961 he obtained a doctoral degree in humanities; in 1967 he completed his habilitation. In 1970–81 he was a commander at the MPA's Historical and Political Department. In 1977, he was the main organiser of the MPA's commemorations for the 100th anniversary of Dzerzhinsky's birth and the 60th anniversary of the Great October Revolution. From 1972 he was associate professor, and from 1982 a full professor there. In the period 1981–90 he was a commander at WIH. On January 10, 1991 he retired. (CAW-WBH, Personal files of Colonel Kazimierz Sobczak, 1849/95/2129; *Kto jest kim* 1989, p. 1210).

After reading the works written by Szulczyński, Podgórski and Sobczak, we learn how these authors interpreted the Battle of Lenino. It is worth quoting a comment by General Juliusz Rómmel, the former commander of the Łódź Army in 1939 (General Rómmel was characterised by an egocentric personality, and went down in infamy because he abandoned his troops on the battlefield in 1939), who had the opportunity

to listen to a lecture by Szulczyński on Lenino during an academic session devoted to the “war of liberation” organised at the headquarters of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw on October 4–6, 1958:

This was the first time I had heard a lecture about the Battle of Lenino. Therefore, I would like to share my impressions with my colleagues. This battle was extremely successful and very well prepared by the command. Listening to this paper, I envied you, Kościuszko boys, that I could not have been with you when you were going along with the roller of the victorious [Red] Army and you were still enjoying such successes.

This statement, although bizarre from today’s perspective, well reflects the attitude of historians and military men of the time to the Battle of Lenino (*Sesja* 1961, p. 187).

Szulczyński already notes in his introduction that he could not develop a complete monograph about the battle as he had no access to the key documents from the command of the 33rd army and the Western Front. This was the reason why one chapter of his book receives the title “The presumed task and nature of the 33rd army, and the place and role of the 1st division in the army’s operational group”. The author correctly states that Orsha was the target of the operation at Lenino, but maintains (completely incorrectly) that the 33rd army operated without any cooperation with its neighbours (Szulczyński 1958, p. 35). He draws this far-reaching conclusion on the basis of a single sentence uttered by Col. Włodzimierz Sokorski, the 1st ID’s deputy commander for political and educational matters: “We were not part of the general attack” (CAW-WBH, IX.4.44.2, Chronicle of Lucjan Szenwald, p. 73). Later in the monograph, Szulczyński does not spare his criticism of the 1st Infantry Division’s command, or the manner in which the Red Army fought (Szulczyński 1958, pp. 124–44). In his conclusion, the author notes:

Technically speaking, the dry result of the battle, compared with the task which the army commander assigned to the division, could indicate the division’s incomplete execution of its combat task. The task was to enter the border to a depth of about 17 km. In fact, however, it should be considered that

the 1st Division performed its first combat task proudly—in the conditions in which it fought, it could not have done any more (Szulczyński 1958, p. 124).

Summing up, Szulczyński states, “Despite this harsh assessment of the division’s activity, it seems justified to say that the Battle of Lenino was a success.” (Szulczyński 1958, p. 144). The author does not describe anything beyond the 1st ID’s battle, ignoring the further actions taken by the 33rd army at Lenino.

Czesław Podgórski’s work *Lenino* was published by the *Wiedza Powszechna* State Publishing House; there is no bibliography in this book, but there is an academic annex [*aparat naukowy*]. The greater part of this publication is a description of the 1st Infantry Regiment’s history, from the moment of its formation to the end of its participation in the Battle of Lenino. Like Szulczyński, Podgórski states incorrectly that the 33rd army operated in isolation, without any cooperation with neighbouring units (Podgórski 1973, p. 67). The author admits that “the attack by the 33rd army and the 1st Division, which made the main strike, broke down” (Podgórski 1973, p. 207). He criticises the organisation of the combat operations, but in the end states that “the Battle of Lenino should be seen in a much broader context, both operational and political”. At this point, Podgórski refers to Kurt von Tippelskirch’s work *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkriegs* (Tippelskirch 1954, *passim*), purchased for the WIH’s library, in which the strategic importance for the German side of Orsha and the “Smolensk gate” are emphasised. Podgórski uses the operational and strategic background thus outlined as justification for the 1st Infantry Division’s failure, which encountered particularly strong enemy resistance while attacking towards Orsha. Podgórski completely ignores all the negative aspects of the command of the 33rd army and the Western Front; nor does he provide any information about the further course of the battle on October 14–18, 1943.

Kazimierz Sobczak devotes a 75-page chapter to the Battle of Lenino in his monograph about the 1st ID (the page numbers are given according to the 1979 edition). The author notes the tragedy of the Polish soldiers who tried unsuccessfully to overcome the German defences, but any attempt to publish

critical comments about the battle by the 1st Infantry Division met countermeasures. The book's manuscript was reviewed by Maj. Gen. Józef Baryła, the first deputy head of the Army's Political Board. After reading chapter 3, "Bitwa pod Lenino – chrzest bojowy Kościuszkowców [Battle of Lenino: a baptism of fire for the Kościusko boys]", General Baryła criticised Sobczak's findings in the following terms:

The fighting by the 1st ID, especially on October 12, [19]43, was presented in too dark colours. Much is neglected concerning the spheres of command, cooperation and supply, especially in the 1st IR. There are many inaptnesses with the description of the use of the organic tank and artillery units in combat, a lot of chaos and unnecessary losses. The battlefield's dramatic character was also poorly brought out through the individual reactions of commanders, the political and educational apparatus, officers, the staff, and finally, the rank-and-file soldiers. One gets the impression that the battle was fought in an impulsive fashion, by the force of inertia, without much influence from the command and staff. The activity of the latter is not shown at all. There is too little optimism, too few examples of heroism, the sacrifice of the soldiers, and too much hustle and bustle. This view of the first, historical battle by the regular troops of the [Polish People's Army] is not inspiring, and does not fully present a model for the imitation and education of subsequent generations of soldiers. (CAW-WBH, IX.4.45.187, Review of the work by Col. Dr. Kazimierz Sobczak entitled *Lenino–Warszawa–Berlin*, 19 March 1973, p. 14).

In his summary of the review, General Baryła wrote:

The author correctly presents the struggles of the 1st Infantry Division against the background of the great operations of the Soviet Army in 1943–5. Nevertheless, this work cannot turn into a monograph concerning the frontline or even the army operations, and it should focus primarily on the battles and people of the 1st ID. (CAW-WBH, IX.4.45.187, p. 49).

While the above remark seems justified, especially with regard to the Red Army's actions in 1944–5, which were the

subject of a wealth of literature during the Polish People's Republic, the history of the protracted fighting in Belarus in 1943 was almost completely unknown, and as such, all the more deserving of detailed discussion in the context of the Battle of Lenino.

In the face of these censorship restrictions, Sobczak described the operational background of the Battle of Lenino as an attempt to conquer Orsha and liquidate the German fortifications on the Dnieper, which was consistent with Henryk Werner's earlier interpretation based on his talks with General Berling. Werner described the 33rd army's operational objectives as follows:

The section which the Poles were to strike was an area just in front of a railway line which was extremely important for the Germans, the so-called Dnieper rocade. This section led along the western bank of the upper reaches of the Dnieper, linking Ukraine with Belarus and Lithuania closer to the front line; at that time it was the most convenient way for the Germans to supply the front troops. (Henryk Werner, "12–13 X 1943. Lenino", *Żołnierz Polski. Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 37, 1946, p. 4)

Unlike Szulczyński and Podgórski, Sobczak did link the 33rd army's operational intention to the tasks of their neighbouring units on the front, the 21st and 49th armies. At the same time, he emphasised that all three armies were operating in a difficult, marshy area, which was an implicit excuse for their failures.

Sobczak made similar comments in his summary of the Orsha operation. Assessing the 33rd army's activities, the author noted:

The neighbouring Soviet divisions encountered stronger resistance from the enemy. It was understandable, considering that the enemy, while fighting to maintain the main line of resistance, used the necessary amount of force [...] and directed their main blows at the divisions on the wings. (Sobczak 1979, p. 149).

In contrast to earlier publications, Sobczak noted that the Battle of Lenino did not end with the withdrawal of the

1st Infantry Division, and stated that it had not been possible to eliminate the German fortifications on the Dnieper as a result. The author attributed this failure to the strong resistance from the German side. There is no criticism of the actions of the Soviet side, but emphasis is placed on the brotherhood of arms between the Poles and the Soviets (Sobczak 1979, p. 150).

From the publications discussed above, an image emerges of the Battle of Lenino which was constructed according to the scenario familiar from the propaganda materials of the Polish People's Party, and the 1st ID's political and educational department. Only Sobczak went beyond this scheme, describing the battle of the 1st Infantry at Lenino in an operational context; and even then he only gave the bare facts, declining to assess the second Orsha operation as a whole.

On this basis, we may herein list the most compelling reasons why military historians during the Polish People's Republic failed to present the entirety of the second Orsha operation of the Red Army's Western Front:

1) Access to source materials.

In order to fully describe the course of the Battle of Lenino from 12 to 18 October 1943, it would have been necessary to consult the staff documentation of both the Red Army commands and the Wehrmacht operational units. The documentation produced by the command and staff of the 1st Infantry Division and gathered in the resources of the Central Military Archive did not provide any insight into the overall battle. This was due to the command system characteristic of the Soviet units. The accepted practice among the Red Army's higher commands was to limit the information provided to subordinate operational units to the minimum necessary. The commander of the 1st Infantry Division and his staff were treated in this way, being given only an extract from the combat order of the 33rd army's commander, and not the entire order which explained the guiding principle of the operation (see Annexes 3 and 5 in *Wojsko Polskie w ZSRR* 2003, pp. 88, 98).

The archives of the USSR Ministry of Defence, which holds the operational-level documents of the 21st and 33rd armies as well as those of the Western Front as a whole, remained

with few exceptions closed, even to Polish historians from strictly controlled research centres such as the WIH. From the moment the Institute was established, it made attempts to obtain documents concerning the 1st Infantry Division. It had some success in the early 1960s, when the first batch of photocopies of documents devoted to the formation of the 1st Infantry Division and its role in the Battle of Lenino (CAW-WBH, IX.4.12.1–9) were delivered to the WIH's scientific documentation workshop; one should note here that from 1959, the WIH's charter included a provision stating that the tasks of the Institute included collecting, developing and publishing source materials on the Polish military, in particular, the history of the Polish armed effort during World War II. Materials obtained through purchases or from private persons were made available to WIH employees in the academic documentation laboratory (cf. Roman 2002, p. 84). From June 1963, these documents were prepared by Podgórski; in the 1970s, the material was researched by Sobczak. Both of them used the materials they obtained in a limited way, focusing on specifying the tasks of the 1st Infantry Regiment, providing exact personnel numbers, and recreating tactical details such as the course of the trenches (Sobczak 1979, p. 107). As a result, the sources obtained only slightly enriched the state of knowledge about the Battle of Lenino.

The operational documents of the commands of the German divisions (the XXXIX *Panzerkorps* of the 4th *Armee*), which were kept in archives in the Federal Republic of Germany and in the United States, remained beyond the reach of the historians of the Polish People's Republic until the early 1960s.

It was a problem that concerned both the research on the course of the Polish campaign in 1939 and the activities of the Polish People's Army and the Polish Armed Forces in the West, because without access to sources on enemy units, a military historian is doomed to present a one-sided image. For this reason, in the years 1963–80 WIH successively acquired microfilmed German documents from the collections of the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, the *Oberkommando des Heeres*, operational units of the *Wehrmacht* and *Waffen-SS*, and from civil institutions

from the United States National Archives in Washington. This resource is known unofficially as the “Alexandrian microfilms”, and is named after Alexandria in the state of Virginia, where the documents were filmed.

By the end of the Polish People’s Republic, 180 archival units had been collected, including 2709 rolls of microfilm containing 3,352,444 pages of documents from 28 sets of files. It took many years to obtain the “Alexandrian microfilms”, but the majority of the WIH’s materials were purchased between 1963 and 1967 (Szafran, Wojciechowski 2001; extract from a doctoral dissertation defended at the National Defence University in Warsaw, lent for inspection by the authors; the copy, unavailable, is at the Main Library and Archives of the War Studies University [*Akademia Sztuki Wojennej*] in Warsaw). By March 16, 1981, the contents of these documents had been described in detail by WIH employees in the form of an inventory intended for internal use (WBH, CAW, IX.7.1.146). From this list it is known that the materials obtained included the log of the combat activities of the German 4th *Armee* from the period from October 10, 1943 to March 31, 1944, with a description of the battles in the Lenino-Bayevo sector and references to the Polish 1st Infantry Division. While this valuable source material may have brought much new detail to descriptions of the Battle of Lenino, it was not used in an academic context. However, even Podgórski and Sobczak’s lack of knowledge of the German language would not have constituted a serious problem when studying the “Alexandrian microfilms”; some of the documents of the *Heeresgruppe* “Weichsel” command from the period of the fighting in Pomerania in 1945 had been translated and made available in Polish, and so nothing would have prevented them from doing the same with the documents of the *Heeresgruppe* “Mitte” from 1943 (CAW-WBH, IX.7.1.135).

Only one employee of the WIH, Tadeusz Sawicki, after making a query about one group of the “Alexandrian microfilms”, wrote a letter to the editors of *Wojskowy Przegląd Historyczny* entitled “On the assessment of the enemy in the battle of the 1st Kościuszko Infantry Division” (Sawicki 1974, pp. 402–4). Sawicki’s two-page text is the only example of German-language operational documents being used to

describe the Battle of Lenino throughout the existence of the Polish People's Republic. Nevertheless, Sawicki was far from criticising the actions of the 1st ID and 33rd army, because he only used the sources from the "Alexandrian microfilms" for a detailed description of the organisational structure and the size of the German 337th *Infanteriedivision*, and concluded that the 1st ID had enjoyed a tactical success (Sawicki 1974, p. 404).

It was only in 2010 that Robert Wróblewski used the "Alexandrian microfilms" to fully describe the course of the second Orsha offensive of October 12–18, 1943 from the German perspective. The result of his research into the documents from the command of the 337th *Infanteriedivision* and the XXXIX *Panzerkorps* was his article "Bitwa pod Lenino w niemieckich meldunkach" [The Battle of Lenino in German dispatches] (Wróblewski 2010, pp. 58–69; Wroblewski 2011, pp. 54–64). His assessment of the Red Army's actions at Lenino was decidedly negative. Likewise, his conclusion regarding the 1st ID's activity during the first two days of the battle was far from the propaganda myth of the victorious struggle. The WIH could have come to conclusions similar to Wróblewski's in the mid-1970s. Both Podgórski and Sobczak were familiar with the contents of the "Alexandrian microfilms", but did not use these sources because it would have undermined the foundations of the myth of the Battle of Lenino and portrayed the allied Red Army in a bad light. The WIH's employees treated the testimonies of the Soviet commanders during the war in a similarly selective manner. A valuable account was left by the aforementioned General Shtemenko, who described the circumstances of the dissolution of the Western Front (Shtemenko 1969, p. 255). Artillery Marshal Mikolai Voronov, who on behalf of the *Ставка* coordinated and controlled the artillery operations of the fronts in Belarus, described the fighting in the Orsha campaign in critical terms (Voronov 1966, pp. 337–339). The opinions of both commanders are undoubtedly very economical and do not mention Lenino *ad verbum*, although their remarks do relate to the battle. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the above-mentioned works were well known to the WIH's employees and reviewed by them, their more critical extracts were not used in any of the publications concerning the battle of Lenino.

2) Disinformation as the legacy of Soviet historiography.

The Soviet military historiography of World War II compiled from 1945 to 1991 is rightly criticised. The number of errors and distortions resulting from propaganda undermine the academic value of many publications from this period. Soviet historians were not the only ones who studied the history of the fighting on the eastern front. During the Cold War, in-depth research also continued on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Due to the threat which the USSR posed to the post-Yalta order in Europe, understanding of the potential of the Red Army during World War II was of interest to US Army strategists.

From 1946, operational studies of the hostilities on the eastern front were undertaken by various civilian and military institutions. One of them was the Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO), which prepared analyses and research for the US Army and reported to the United States Army Combined Arms Centre at Fort Leavenworth. The Cold War period favoured the development of historical research on the history of the USSR's armed forces; this research was based on German-language sources. Many hypotheses and views could not be verified due to the lack of access to the Red Army archives. It was not until the disintegration of the USSR in the early 1990s that the former archives of the USSR Ministry of Defence were partially opened. In the years 1991–3, the FMSO was managed by the American military historian Colonel David M. Glantz, who contributed to the revision of many myths about the “Great Patriotic War”. After he retired in 1993, Glantz initiated the creation of *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, of which he became the editor-in-chief (JSMS Editorial Board). In 1995, Glantz published an article entitled “The Failures of Historiography. Forgotten Battles of the German-Soviet War (1941–1945)”, in which he proposed the existence of so-called “Forgotten Battles of the Eastern Front” (Glantz 1995). In this article he pointed out that for political reasons and the concomitant restrictions of censorship, Soviet historiography ignored many of the Red Army's unsuccessful operations. Glantz included the Belarusian strategic operation of 1943 among the “forgotten battles” of the eastern front, which he described in detail in his 2016 work *Battle for Belorussia. The Red Army's Forgotten Campaign of October 1943 – April 1944* (Glantz 2016, p. 63). Apart from

recreating the course of the Belarusian campaign, Glantz drew attention to the role of Soviet historiography in shaping a false image of the fighting in Belarus. Due to the clear defeat suffered by the Red Army in its attempt to open the road towards Minsk and the Baltic countries, the efforts of Soviet historiography were aimed at diverting attention from the real intentions of the *Смавка* in 1943. At the same time, the successes in Ukraine, where the strategic offensive brought great territorial gains and a prestigious victory in the capture of Kyiv, were emphasised (Glantz 2016, p. xxii).

A key role in blurring the memory of the inconvenient events of World War II was played by the publication of multi-volume studies in substantial tomes. The authors of the Polish books about the Battle of Lenino—Szulczyński, Podgórski and Sobczak—widely and uncritically drew upon the publications of their Soviet colleagues. This is hardly surprising, the more so because the WIH put a great deal of effort into translating the works of Soviet military historiography, and Podgórski and Sobczak were members of the successive editorial boards that performed this task. Podgórski was a member of the editorial board that published a translation of the six-volume Soviet publication, *Historia Wielkiej Wojny Narodowej Związku Radzieckiego 1941–1945* (History of the Great National War of the Soviet Union, 1941–5) (*Historia Wielkiej 1964–1967*). Kazimierz Sobczak was a member of the editorial board that published a translation of the twelve-volume Soviet study, *Historia drugiej wojny światowej 1939–1945* (History of the Second World War 1939–45: *Historia drugiej wojny 1976–1985*). On the basis of these works, the historiography of the Polish People's Republic contributed to the spread of the myth of the “Great Patriotic War”, which included the Battle of Lenino.

3) Political restrictions.

The cadres dealing with history in military institutions were chosen by the Army's Political Board, which guaranteed that publications on the battle of Lenino would be in line with the interests of the authorities of the Polish People's Republic. Gen. Baryła's review of the typescript of Sobczak's monograph *Lenino-Warsaw-Berlin* is a vivid example of how the Army's Political Board (and earlier the People's Army's Political-Educational Board, GZPW) defended the myth of the Battle of

Lenino. Self-censorship for political reasons and loyalty to the Polish People's Army may explain the reluctance of the WIH's employees to investigate the materials from the *Wehrmacht* command. The approach of Communist Poland's historiography to the Battle of Lenino leads to the conclusion that, for political reasons, it was not possible to present the battles in Belarus in 1943 in accordance with the state of knowledge at the time.



Conclusion

Throughout the period of the Polish People's Republic, Polish military historiography showed a keen interest in the Battle of Lenino. In the vast majority of publications published during the Polish People's Republic, the image of the Battle of Lenino is limited to a discussion of the 1st Infantry Division's fighting on 12 and 13 October 1943. The outline of the Red Army's offensive operation at Lenino and the actions of the German side as a whole were not subject to academic considerations, even though WIH was able to carry out a strategic and operational analysis of the fighting in Belarus in 1943.

From the 1960s, WIH systematically collected documents and reports on the Battle of Lenino. In the WIH's academic documentation workshop there are documents from the German 4th *Armee*, the Soviet 33rd army, and a rich literature on the subject. The collected source material revealed more about the operational aspects of the Battle of Lenino. Knowledge of military geography, and in particular the strategic importance of the "Smolensk gate", prompted reflection on the significance of the Red Army's offensive in Belarus.

In the early 1980s, WIH was preparing to print a book entitled *Wojsko Polskie na bratniej ziemi radzieckiej (relacje i wspomnienia)* (The Polish Army on the Fraternal Soviet Land (Reports and memories)), edited by Mikołaj Kałaur and Zbigniew Świącicki. It was to have been issued on the 40th anniversary of the creation of the 1st Infantry Division in the USSR. For unspecified reasons the publication was withdrawn, and on May 26, 1983 the typescript was transferred to the academic documentation workshop of WIH. Among the reports selected there is an extract from the memoirs of Włodzimierz Sokorski, who described the briefing at the

Western Front's headquarters and the purpose of the Orsha operation. In a footnote to this extract, one of the editors stated that

“the task of the 1st ID and the task of the 33rd army were, in the plan of the Supreme Command of the Soviet Army, to prepare offensive operations for the liberation of Belarus” (CAW-WBH, IX.4.44.611, *Wojsko Polskie na bratniej ziemi...*, ed. M. Kałfaur, Z. Święcicki, p. 333).

This sentence reveals that the researchers at the WIH had a well-developed view of the strategic conditions of the Battle of Lenino, and had correctly interpreted the *Ставка's* intentions in the autumn of 1943. Nevertheless, the commentary quoted was never attached to the earlier editions of Sokorski's memoirs (Sokorski 1979, pp. 87–88; Sokorski 1971), and the very issue of the objectives of the Orsha operation was marginalised in official publications.

The activity of the WIH was limited to duplicating the theses of Soviet military historiography, which aimed to diminish the importance of the lost campaign in Belarus in 1943. The role of the Battle of Lenino as the founding myth of the Polish People's Republic and the submission of the WIH's researchers to the Army's Political Board were other factors that made it impossible to undertake in-depth studies on the 1st ID's baptism of fire. As a result of the above-mentioned limitations, the military historiography of the Polish People's Republic perpetuated the false image of the Battle of Lenino, which was created during the war for the purposes of political indoctrination. In this way, the myth of Lenino, apart from the role it played in the political life of the Polish People's Republic, fit into the idealised image of the “Great Patriotic War”.

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