
Stories of a Dollhouse

Exploring our family
Memory and Traditions

Bitwa Warszawska

1920



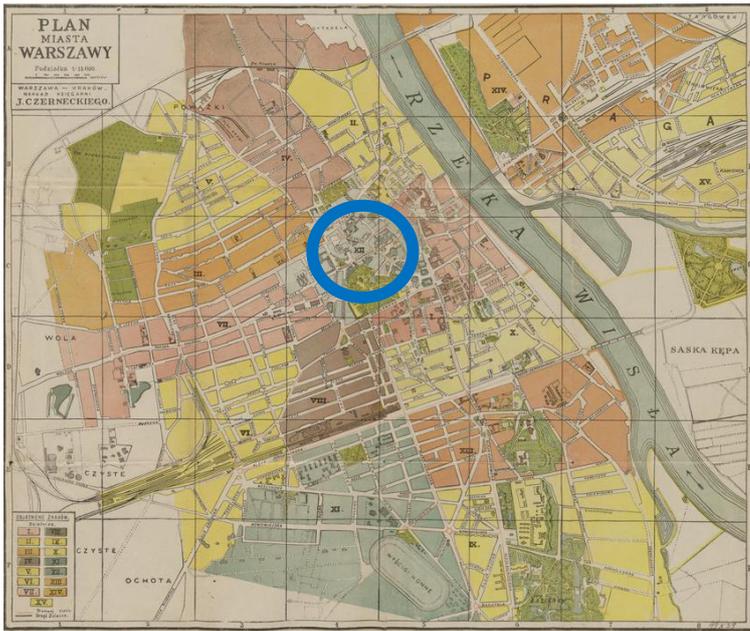
Introduction

Bitwa Warszawska (Battle of Warsaw) refers to the 1920 War between Poland and the Soviet Union. Summer 1920 remains a memory landmark for many Polish families. One century ago, in just a few weeks, our great grandparents have experienced a succession of contradictory feelings, from certainty to fear, from desperation to enthusiasm, from shame to pride. Our dollhouse pictures the memory of a Książyk boy aged 10 and living in Warsaw.

At this time, there were only few Książyk Families were living in Warsaw. Some had established in this town in the late 18th century. Others, originating from Greater Poland, had arrived in the years 1900s.

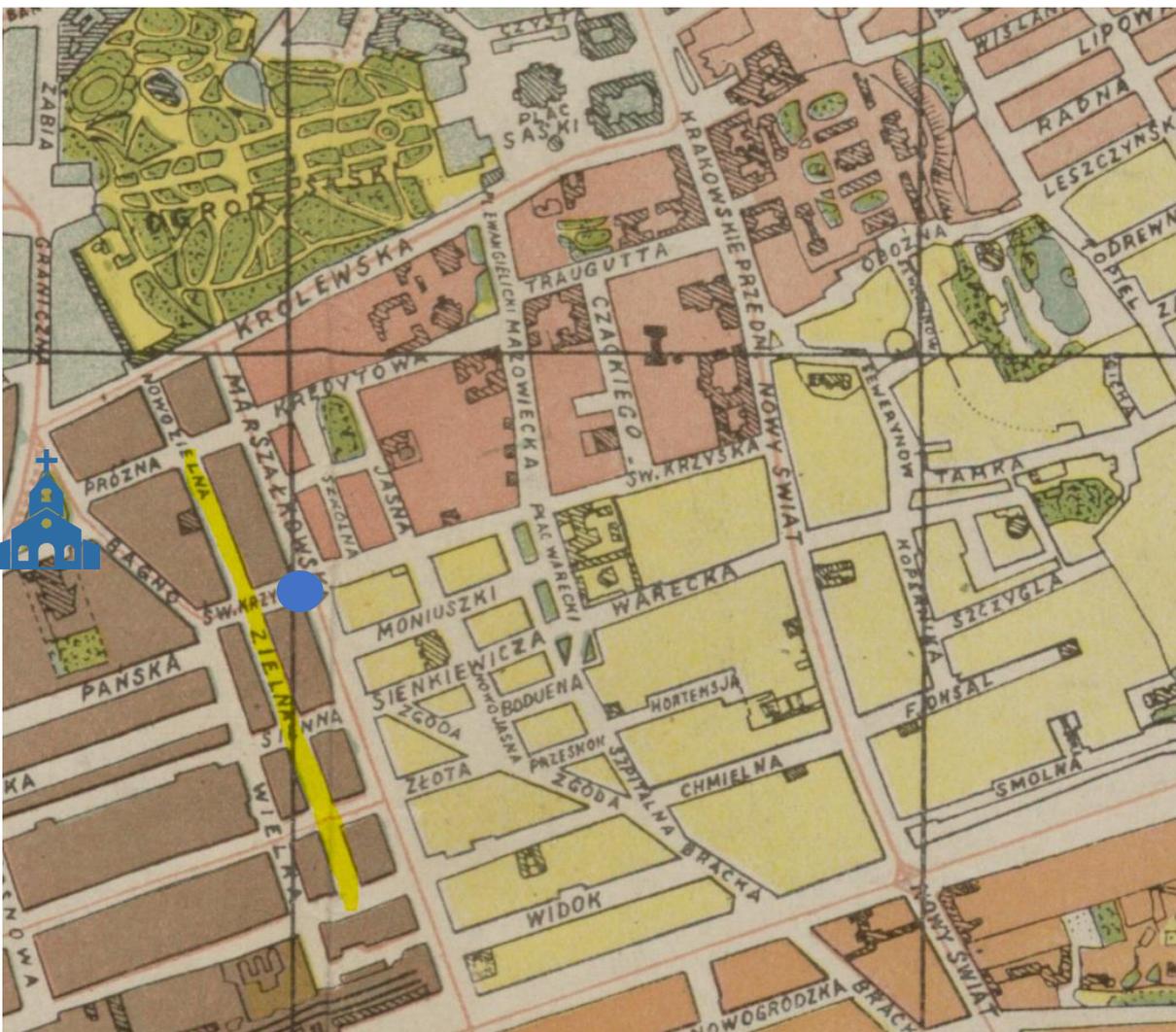
In 1920, Walenty Książyk was living with his family Zielna street. Małgorzata, his only daughter, had turned 21 in July. The house was blessed with the turbulent presence of two boys, Leon aged 9 and Ciesław aged 7. They were seconded in messing around by their little cousin who was living a few steps away in Ulica Świętokrzyska.





This [map of 1920](#) highlights the location of Ulica Zielna, not far from the Saxon Garden (*Ogród Saski*). Ulica Zielna was just in the back of Marszałkowska ul., the main shopping avenue of the city.

Zielna 24, the building of the Książyk Family, was located in the block at the corner of ul. Świętokrzyska.



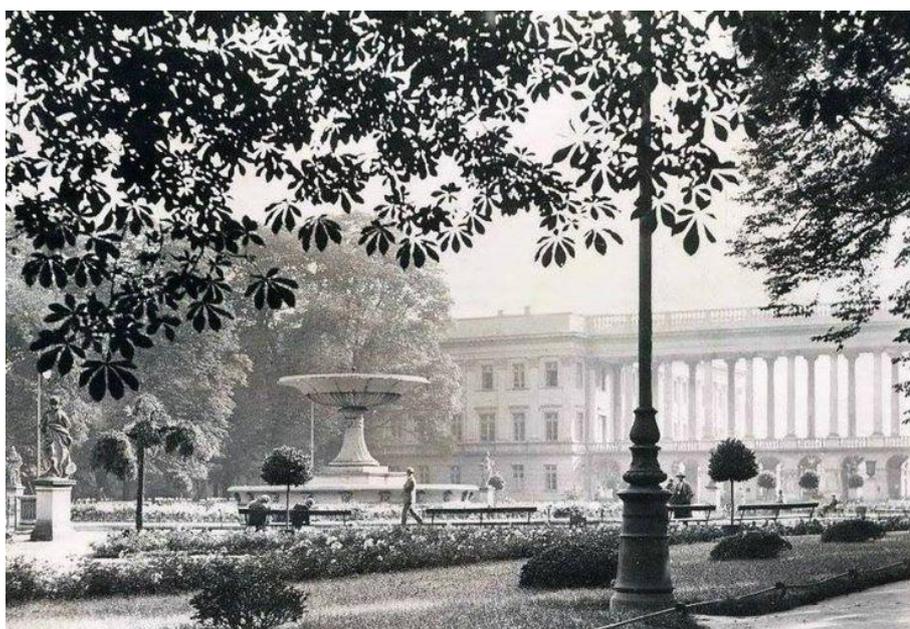
Since 1910, the Książyk Family had been living **ulica Zielna 24**. The parish of the Family was *Wszystkich Świętych* (All Saints Church) and the two youngest boys had been christened there.

Located in the centre of Warsaw (Śródmieście), Zielna was busy street. The photo on the right pictures the façade of the building with a flat neo-classical roof and stone balconies.

In 1920, this building had an inner courtyard with a few trees. There was no connection with Marszałkowska 129, the building in the back.



Zielna 24 before 1939 - (source Warszawa1939.pl)



The Saxon Garden (Ogród Saski) was the nearest park but the Książyk Family favoured long walks in Park Ujazdowski. During the Summer of the 1920 war, Ogród Saski was closed to the public and used as a logistics platform and a soldiers camp.

Bolshevik Hordes

In 1920, the borders of Poland were not secured. In Russia, the Bolshevik government was planning to extend revolution to Europe. In June, Russian troops had pushed back the Polish army and crossed the provisional borders of Poland. Bolshevik hordes were now rolling into the country, bringing with them violence, destruction, rapes and looting. In Warsaw, newspapers reported the exactions of the red terror. The general mobilization was launched.

Since mid-July, the Polish Army was retreating and in early August, the situation deteriorated further. News from the front were alarming. After losing the strategic line of the Bug River, the Polish Army was retreating beyond the Narew River. The front was coming closer on the right bank of the Vistula River. Warsaw was now preparing for a likely siege.

In 1920, there was no radio but the population was amazingly well informed. Street vendors shouted the news. The war was in all minds. People tried to position the front on whatever map they could find. They knew that the Bolsheviks had already appointed a communist "government" in Bialystok. They also knew that the Vistula River was the last line of defence of Warsaw.



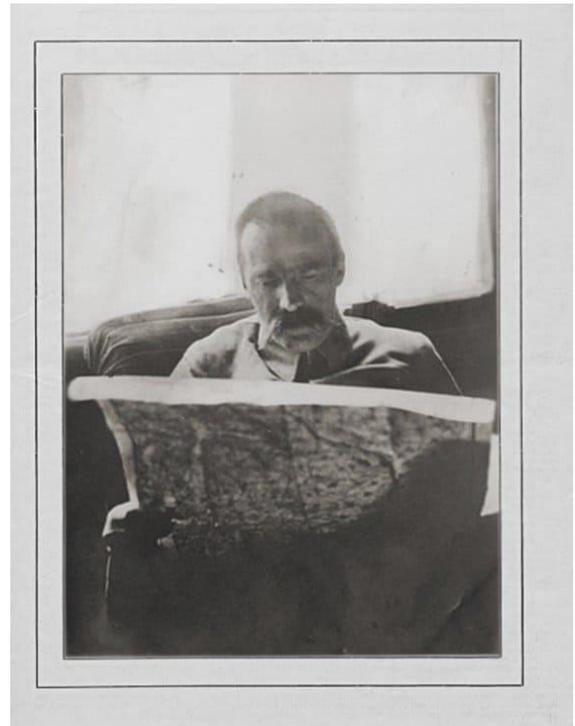
Signed in 1919, the Versailles Treaty had no definitive solution for the borders of Poland.

In the Eastern territories (Kresy), the Polish-speaking population was particularly vulnerable. Very early, the Soviet regime had planned to invade Poland, annex Polish-speaking regions and export the Communist Revolution to Western Europe.



At the end of 1919, Poland had only 500,000 soldiers against 2,3 million in the Soviet Union. Many troops in the Polish Army had served under Austrian, German or Russian flags before 1914. However, all men had a same collective determination to defend the nation.





Every day, the advance of Bolshevik troops across the Polish territory was traced with much anxiety.



Collective Mobilization

As soon as 8 July, the Polish government had launched a massive enrolment of volunteers (*ochotniki*). All men aged 17 to 42 were invited to join the armed forces, whatever their skills and capacities. *Ochotniki* came from all over the country, bringing with them guns, long scythes and forks. Aged 57, Walenty was not concerned. Still, as many other civilians, he was engaged in activities related to the logistics support of the Army.

Women of all ages were also mobilized as volunteers. Małgorzata had joined the Parish Committee to receive a ***sanitariuszka*** (nurse) training. She was now engaged in support to the thousands of refugees arriving from Eastern invaded territories.

In the coming weeks, some of her *sanitariuszka* friends would be sent the front after a few days of intensive basic preparation. Their courage during high intensity combats would be reported across the world and praised everywhere.

The iconic pictures of Polish women dressed in impaired military uniforms remain the symbol of this collective enthusiasm. To get a military look, magazines suggested adding pockets to an old jacket before dyeing this homemade uniform into a mixture of coffee, thyme and green leaves to get an approximate kaki green color.





Church on the Frontline

Walenty and his family attended the Church of All Saints (*Kościół Wszystkich Świętych*) in the centre of Warsaw. Father Marcel Godlewski was the leading Priest of this congregation. He was also a social activist with ideas close to Walenty who had been a moderate Socialist in his youth.

In 1915, Father Godlewski had begun his ministry with a series of initiatives to help the impoverished population of Warsaw. During the war, he had emerged as an influential profile in the diocese. Since the beginning of his priesthood, Father Godlewski had encouraged the scouts of *Wszystkich Świętych* to engage in social activities.

He was now calling for a massive mobilization effort in support to civilian defence. Many parishioners answered his call to become "soldiers of the Christ".



During the 1920 War, the Książyk boys were too young to join the local scouts. The enrolment was open for children over 11.



National Collect

Very early in the conflict, many newspapers launched a campaign to collect weapons or anything similar. In Warsaw, many families answered this patriotic call by giving relics from the past: swords, sabres, and even fake precious *karabela* used for decoration.

However, this generosity proved useless. Antic weapons were not reliable for a military service. Poorly maintained guns had no ammunitions. Antic sabres were not properly sharpened. Many disappointed families went back home with their patriotic but useless contribution. The Książek boys jumped on the opportunity to play with their inoffensive arsenal.



This effort was remarkable but far from addressing the needs. Marshall Pilsudski himself spoke out against the outrageous conditions of some *ochotniki* battalions. Shoes were the weakest link of the supply chain. So were the linen bands that many Poles used as socks at this time. Whenever possible, bed sheets were sacrificed to make "Polish socks". The conflict had begun in June. Two months later in August, combats on the battlefields were so intense that nobody could say how long it would be. The *mot d'ordre* was to prepare for a possible confrontation during the next Winter.

In parallel, newspapers and local committees had launched the collect of anything valuable for the front. The Polish Army was properly equipped but the thousands of volunteers needed almost everything. Useful item included clothing, blankets, cutlery, and tools. Local committees organized the production of "war bread" and homemade preserves. At home, ladies also organized workshops to sew clothing.





During a few weeks, the dining room of the Książyk house was transformed into a workshop. There, a group of ladies from the Parish Committee gathered to sew clothing for soldiers. As mentioned above, the Poles were preparing for a long war with uncertain outcomes. Several bed linen were converted into pyjamas. Wool covers became sweaters. Old fabrics made “Polish socks”, these long bands used to envelop feet and legs in boots.



This enthusiasm was very exciting for the three boys who got their own "uniform" made in a bedcover too warm for the season. After several days of little catastrophes caused by their uncontrolled presence into the workshop, they were irrevocably banned from entering.





Zbiórka gazet na front.

The contribution of the Warsaw population to the war effort was a precious support to the moral of soldiers. In the study of *Tato* (Daddy), the Książyk boys collected some books and newspapers to be sent to the front.



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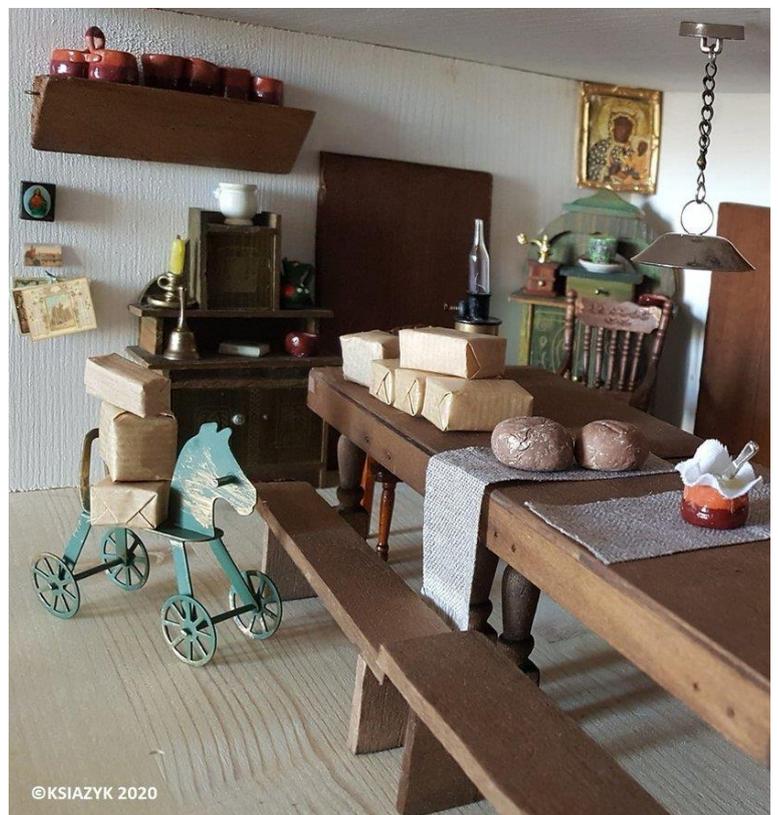


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At the peak of the conflict, more than 200,000 volunteers were engaged. They were waging a war a several battlefields at the same time.

Bread was not missing but the polish population was invited to supplement the military rations with some "comfort food": (sweets, cakes, jams) and whenever possible "colonial products" (chocolate, coffee and tea).

The Książyk boys decided to forgo desserts in support to combatting troops. The money saved from this little sacrifice was spent to send parcels.



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Forceful Propaganda

For the Książek boys, the war was a cause of great excitement. The enemy was clearly identified. Newspapers described the Bolshevik troops as a foul-smelling crowd of inebriated ogres. The memory of the Russian rule during the partition was vivid. During several generations, the population of Warsaw had paid a heavy toll with permanent harassment, arrests and deportations. The new Communist regime in Moscow was just another expression of the Russian grip.

Moreover, Polish authorities displayed a forceful propaganda in the streets of Warsaw. Their alarming messages were served by the talent of artists. Posters highlighted a long list of *czzerwony* crimes: blazed villages, destroyed churches, abused women, slaughtered cattle, and poisoned well. Stories of Bolsheviks eating little children were circulating. The Książek boys had no doubt about this fact.



Images from the 1920 have left a powerful patriotic footprint

in the mind of the young generations.

The words *Do broni!* (take your arms)

was a call to fight

until the last drop of blood.



The infamous *Budienovka* and the red star became the visual symbol of the enemy. Inspired by Russian Middle-Age helmet, this distinctive hat had been introduced a few years earlier by the Soviet government. In Newspapers, comments highlighted that this shape was actually the signature of the Asian hordes (Mongol) that had devastated Europe during the 13th century.

All the kids wanted a *Budienovka*. With scraps of fabric, the Książyk Boys made some kind of Bolshevik scarecrow. They had great fun chasing this mock enemy across the house. Two vases were broken and a chandelier fell down.

The boys were also proud of their homemade "uniforms" embellished by red and white paper ribbons. They had endless discussion about the right way to make a Polish cockade: red inside or outside? The debate ended with the decision to opt for a stream of ribbons. Interestingly, 100 years later, this discussion surfaces for Flag Day, every 3rd May.



Strategic Contribution

For the two Książyk brothers, the war was also a great frustration. In early August, the enemy was some 12 km away from Warsaw. According to a persistent street rumour, *Bolszewicy* had already entered the "raga suburb and they were "on the other side of the river". Some boastful kids were even reporting the heroic action of showing their asses to the enemy. Aware of a possible plot to perform such a feat, the anxious parents decided to locked the boys at home.

After the 12 of August, the population of Warsaw was anticipating a massive onslaught with cavalry assaults. The fear was palpable everywhere. Some families began to evacuate the city. Trenches and barricades were supposed to stop the enemy at strategic points such as crossings and bridges.

Boys and girls aged 10 and beyond got the permission to join their Sunday school for a strategic contribution to the war: dig trenches to stop the invasion that now seemed certain. The mission of the kids aged 10 to 12 was to help adults in the trenches work. Armed with shovels (when strong enough) and buckets, the children were dispatched in the neighbourhood under close adult supervision.



War Heroes

The official propaganda also emphasized the role of heroes. After the recent recovery of Independence, the young Republic needed consensual causes to stimulate patriotism and build cohesion. Within days, two profiles emerged to become the providential war heroes.

A young hero was a role model for Książyk boys. Engaged in the Scout brigade of Plock, **Tadeusz Jeziorowski** (aged 12) joined the Polish Army. On 18 and 19 August, he displayed remarkable courage during the defence of Plock, a town strategically located on the right bank of the Vistula River. Becoming the youngest combatant, Tadeusz survived the war and received the Cross of Valour from Marshall Pilsudski in 1921. .

Chaplain **Ignacy Skorupka** (aged 27) died in the Ossów battlefield, leading a charge with the Holy Cross in hand. On 17 August, his funerals were celebrated in Warsaw with much pomp and emotion.

After his heroic death, Chaplain Ignacy Skorupka got a special place in our family. During his sermons, Father Godlewski emphasized the heroic sacrifice of this young army chaplain who had been a parishioner of his church.

Indeed, just as the Książyk brothers, Ignacy Skorupka had been christened in the All Saints church (*Wszystkich Świętych*). Later, he had been altar boy in this same church. Moreover, Ignacy Skorupka had also attended the same school as the boys. The proximity of this war hero was very impressive for the kids.





Our little dollhouse scenery pictures the Książyk brothers
paying tribute to the courage of Ignacy Skorupka
during the Ossów Battle.



A Nation in Prayer

Since August 12, Warsaw had been holding breath. Reportedly, some elderly women were already wearing black mourning dresses. Across the city, churches were organizing prayer vigils and processions. Across the streets of the city, the words of *Boże! Coś Polskę* (May God Save Poland) were resonating a heart-breaking significance:

Boże! Coś Polskę przez tak liczne wieki

Otaczał blaskiem potęgi i chwały

I tarczą swojej zastaniał opieki

Od nieszczęść, które przywalić ją miały.

Przed Twe ołtarze za nosim błaganie,

Naszego Króla zachowaj nam Panie!

On August 15, the Assumption Day was an opportunity to remind Matka Boska, Saint Mary, that She had been the Holy Queen of Poland since 1656: "*Królowo Korony Polskiej, módl się za name*".

In the Książyk house, the portrait of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa had fresh flowers every day. There was a strong certitude that after centuries of adversity and grief, Matka Boska would never let down Poland.





Made during the Summer 1920 from scrap fabric,
this cockade is one of the most precious items
in the collection of the Książyk Family.



Miracle on the Vistula

The strategic plan of Marshall Pilsudski was to trap The Bolshevik blitzkrieg invasion. He was waiting for the concentration of Russian armies to break the front, encircle them and launch a major offensive. On 16 August, this plan proved successful.

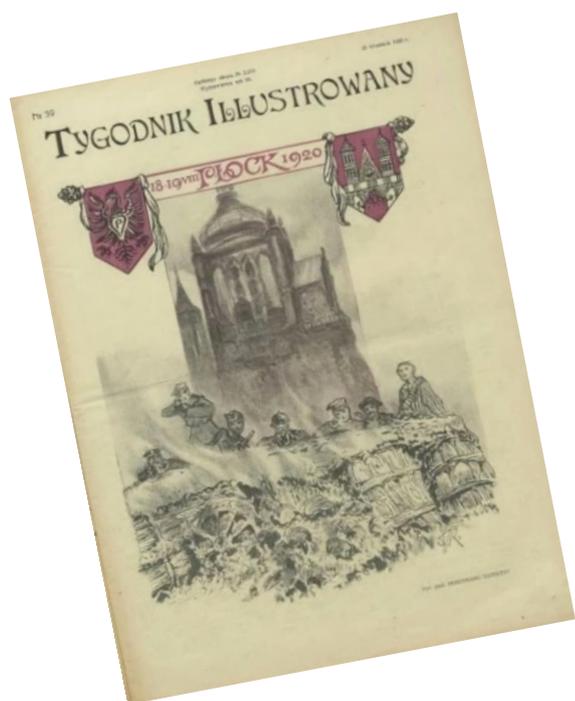
The counterattack of Polish forces was rapid and decisive. The population welcomed the victories in Ossów and Radzymin with eruptions of joy. In the immediate aftermaths of this military success, the Bolshevik hordes withdrew and began a disorganized retreat eastward. The Red Army left the Polish territory on 25 August and took refuge in Eastern Prussia, a region of Germany. The war was over. The Treaty of Riga signed in 1921 consolidated the recovered Polish territories and stabilized the Eastern borders.

The victory of Poland was celebrated across the world. The Miracle on the Vistula (**Cud nad Wisłą**) still resonates today as one of the most important battle in History. Once again, the Poles had confirmed their exclusive position of “saviour of Europe”. Previously, they had stopped the Turkish invasion in 1683. They were now protecting the continent from a Bolshevik contagion.



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During the four months of the 1920 war, Polish newspapers covered the conflict with much details about the battles. The heroic defence of Lwów and Płock (picture) are among the most celebrated episodes.





The victory of Poland was also widely celebrated at home. From newspapers and magazine, the boys cut any patriotic picture they could find. **Lech**, the legendary founder of Poland, became a member of the family.



War Booty

The Red Army fled Poland in chaos, leaving behind looted items and many equipment. Months after the war, thrift markets in Warsaw were proposing all kind of war booties collected on the battlefield. Leather items (belts, bags), were the most sought after. The boots of Red Army officers were expensive but they had much success. Same interest for the black leather coats of political commissars, the dreadful rulers of Russian regiments.

During the darkest hours of the Bolshevik offensive, two distinctive hats of the Red Army had been the fascinating and repulsive symbol of the enemy. One was the *budienovka* of the infantry mentioned above. The other was the Cossack *papachka* of the *konarmia*, made from black astrakhan. For every children, the possession of these items was the equivalent of receiving a medal from Marshall Pilsudski. Parents were horrified by the idea to have such smellv devil pieces in the house.





[Find this story in our Dollhouse](#)

