

"KENTOWSKI"



John Aleksander Kent, Leconfield, 24 October 1940 (Photo: Imperial War Museum)

John Alexander Kent was born on 23 June 1914 in Winnipeg, Canada. In 1935, he arrived in the United Kingdom and was accepted into the Royal Air Force. In August 1940, with the rank of captain, he was assigned to the 303rd Tadeusz Kościuszko Warsaw Fighter Squadron as commander of the 'A' Flight. He fought as the unit's flight commander until 18 December 1940, including in the Battle of Britain. In April 1941, he was appointed British commander of the 1st Polish Fighter Wing. In October 1941, he was awarded the highest Polish military decoration, the Silver Cross of the War Order of Virtuti Militari. His colleagues gave him the nickname "Johnny Kentowski".

Left to right, pilots of No. 303 Squadron: Mirosław Ferić, Bogdan Grzeszczak, Jan Zumbach, Zdzisław Henneberg, John Kent, Leconfield, 24 October 1940 (Photo: Wikimedia Commons)

[...] the results of the Poles are absolutely fantastic. They simply demolish everything that gets in their way. They have great vision and excellent shooting skills [...].

John Aleksander Kent



Trails of Hope
The Odyssey of Freedom

CANADA DURING THE WAR

Canada has been giving refuge to Poles since the seventeenth century. More immigrants arrived there at the turn of the twentieth century (approximately 60,000 Poles). The past century also saw the development of Polish-Canadian diplomatic relations, with the establishment of a Consulate General in Montreal in 1919. Polish-Canadian relations grew closer during the fighting on the fronts of the Second World War. Soldiers contributing to the Polish and Canadian armed forces worked together on land, sea, and air; they fought at Arnhem, Falaise, and Monte Cassino, which they captured, among other battles. Poles fighting in the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 could count on Canadian military assistance. Polish national treasures, including valuable works of art, were hidden in Canada.

After the end of the Second World War, Canadians did not forget about the Poles. Their government gave shelter to Polish war refugees, including children, people liberated from concentration camps, and veterans of the struggle for an independent Poland. Over a ten-year period (1945–1955), some 55,000 Poles who arrived and settled in Canada were, for various reasons, unable to return to their homeland. In the 1990s, an additional 115,000 Polish activists against communism settled in the Canadian provinces, mainly in Toronto and Ontario.

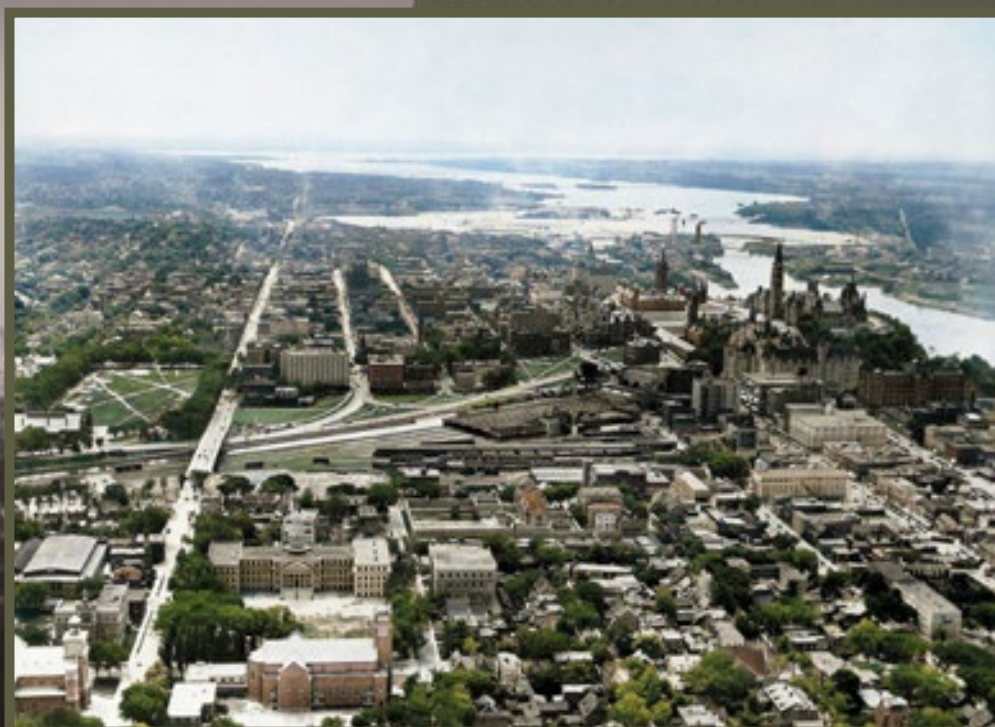
The Canadian Polish community has been very active since its first days. Its members established many Polish organisations and institutions, which maintained Polish traditions and culture, organised exhibitions, and conferences, and supported Polish schools and the Polish-language media—such as newspapers, television, and radio.



📍 Jasper National Park, Alberta, Canada (Photo: Alamy)

📷 “Wait for me, Daddy”—one of the most famous Canadian photographs of World War II. The British Columbia Regiment marches through New Westminster, 1 October 1940 (Photo by Claude Dettloff, City of Vancouver Archives)

📍 Ottawa, 1940 (Photo: Granger/BE&W)



KOŚCIUSZKO CAMP

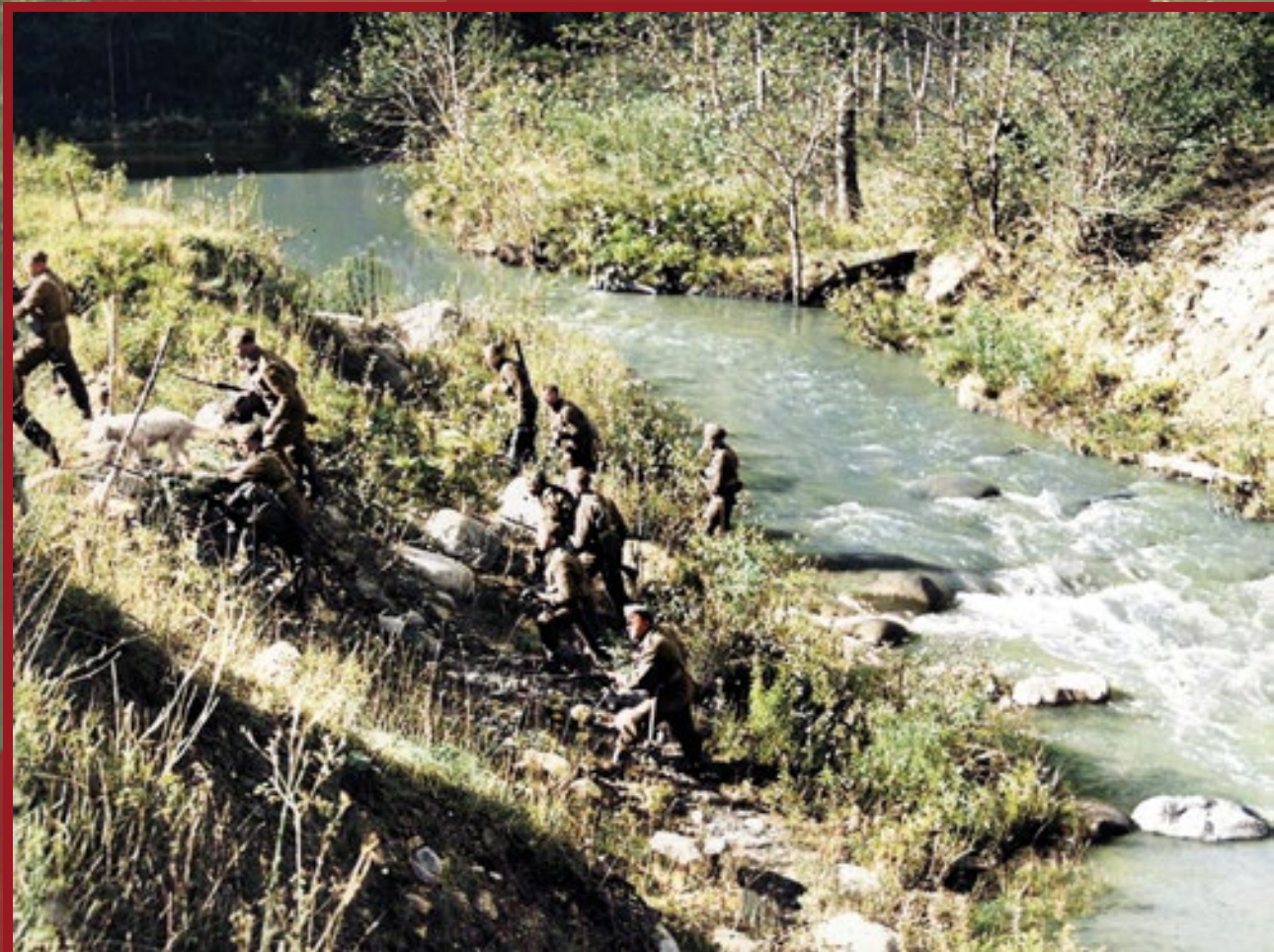


In March and April 1941, Prime Minister General Władysław Sikorski visited Canada and the United States. The talks conducted by Commander-in-Chief Sikorski resulted, among other things, in Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King signing a declaration to create units of the Polish Armed Forces in Canada. General Bronisław Duch was appointed their commander. Almost immediately, the organisation of a recruitment camp in Windsor and a training camp (Tadeusz Kościuszko Camp) in Owen Sound began. Polish units were created with substantial support of the Polish Canadian community, the Canadian Red Cross, and local Canadians, like Owen Sound's mayor, George Marron. Polish officers were accommodated in the homes of Owen Sound residents, and soldiers occupied the buildings of a furniture factory.

After the United States entered the war in December 1941, most volunteers chose the US Army.

☑ Volunteers from Tadeusz Kościuszko Camp, Canada, 1941–1942 (Photo: Hoffman Photo Studio, Polish Institute and General Sikorski Museum in London, photo courtesy of the KARTA Centre Foundation)

☑ Volunteers from Tadeusz Kościuszko Camp during field exercises, Owen Sound area, Canada, 1941–1942 (Photo: Hoffman Photo Studio, Polish Institute and General Sikorski Museum in London, photo courtesy of the KARTA Centre Foundation)



☑ Junction Creek, Lively, Ontario, Canada (Photo: Alamy)

☑ Tadeusz Kościuszko Camp's volunteers in the camp's canteen, Owen Sound, Canada, 1941–1942 (Photo: Hoffman Photo Studio, Polish Institute and General Sikorski Museum in London, photo courtesy of the KARTA Centre Foundation)



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BROTHERS FROM ZAKOPANE

The skiing history of the Zając brothers begins in Zakopane, Poland, where their passion was born. Marian took part in many competitions and cross-country skiing races; his younger brother Karol, in addition to competing in the Polish Championships, represented Poland in the 1936 Winter Olympics.

Marian was passionate about sport aviation. After graduating from high school, he enrolled at the Air Force Officer Cadet School in Dęblin, where he studied until the outbreak of the Second World War. He made his way to the United Kingdom, where he received bomber navigator training. After the training, he was assigned to the 305th "Land of Greater Poland" Bomber Squadron. In 1944, he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant and took up duty with the 45th Transport Group in Dorval, Canada. His task

was to deliver combat aircraft across the Atlantic Ocean. He died on 16 April 1945 in a plane crash while piloting a bomber aircraft from Canada to the United Kingdom.

Karol's career was in law, but unfortunately his university studies were also cut short by the Second World War. At the beginning of 1940, he crossed Poland's border on skis to Hungary and then travelled further west where he joined the Polish Army. After the end of the war, he settled permanently in the United Kingdom, where he completed his studies in psychology at Oxford University. He defended his doctoral thesis in 1955 and was an academic lecturer in psychology at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg and at the University of Saint Louis. He died on 18 May 1965.

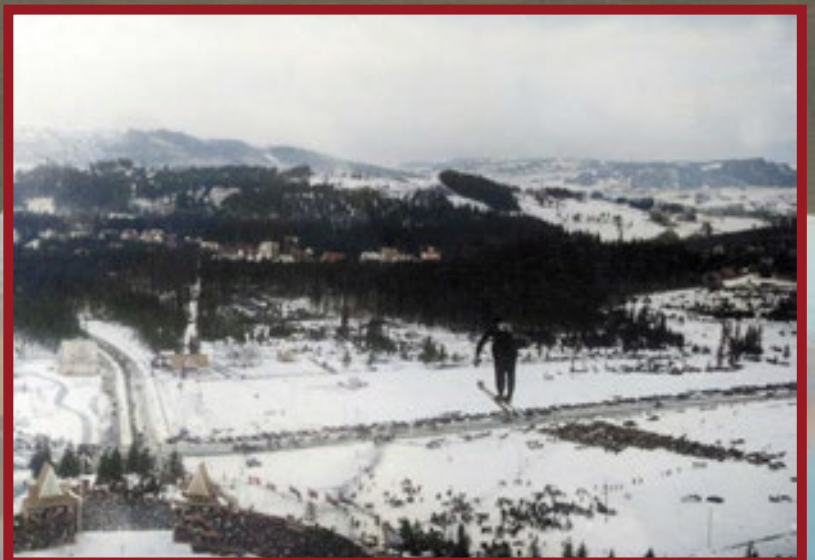
📍 Skiing competition of the Polish Scouting Association in Zakopane. From the right: Czerniak, Karol Zając, Pawlica, 2 May 1937 (Photo: NAC)



📍 Jasper National Park, Alberta, Canada (Photo: Alamy)

📍 Marian Zając (centre), in Canada, 1945 (Photo: KARTA Centre Foundation)

📍 FIS Nordic World Ski Championships in Zakopane, 1938 (Photo: NAC)



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ON THE TRAIL OF THE 1ST ARMoured DIVISION



Landing in Normandy in August 1944, General Stanisław Maczek's 1st Armoured Division was among the units of the 2nd Canadian Corps commanded by Lieutenant-General Guy G. Simonds, part of General Harry D. G. Crerar's 1st Canadian Army. During more than a month's interaction with the Canadian divisions, Poles proved their high combat skills in the armoured unit, receiving the highest marks from their Canadian commanders.

🚩 Emblem of the 1st Armoured Division of Gen. Stanisław Maczek (Photo from the collection of Grzegorz Grzeskowiak)

👥 Group of girls greeting soldiers of the 1st Armoured Division as their tanks pass through a Belgian town, September 1944 (Photo: KARTA Centre Foundation, courtesy of Katarzyna and Tomasz Krzywicki)



ASYLUM

The events of 1939–1945 and the political changes that resulted from them made the Canadian territories home to many Poles. During the Second World War, approximately eight hundred Polish war refugees found their way to Canada. However, the largest wave of emigration took place between 1945 and 1957, when a total of approximately 64,000 Poles came to Canada. Most of them were soldiers who had served in the Polish Armed Forces along with their families, as well as a group of 123 Polish orphans from

an orphanage in Tanganyika (Tanzania), who found their way to Canada after being evacuated from the Soviet Union.

The situation of the Polish soldiers in exile was difficult. Circumstances forced General Kazimierz Sosnkowski, commander-in-chief of the Polish Armed Forces, to stay for a longer period of time in Canada, where he had initially come for a few days' leave in 1944. The general criticised the Allies' policy of appeasement towards the Soviet Union, for which he suffered severe consequences.



✎ Kazimierz Sosnkowski had five sons. Aleksander, who served in the Polish Navy during WWII, settled in the United States, the other four went to live in Canada: Jan was a pilot in the Polish Air Force, Zygmunt Antoni (Tony) was a lieutenant colonel in the Canadian Horse Artillery, Mieczysław Józef (Joe) was a lieutenant colonel pilot of the Canadian Fighter Aviation, the youngest, Piotr, was a businessman. At the turn of 1946/1947 Sosnkowski bought a farm in Arundel, about 115 kilometres northwest of Montreal, where he worked physically as a manual labourer to support his family. Photo of Kazimierz Sosnkowski with his wife Jadwiga, son Piotr and grandchildren, Arundel, 1966 (Photo from the collection of Jerzy Kirszak)

✎ An unknown Polish soldier from Kościuszko Camp in Owen Sound (The Tadeusz Kościuszko Polish Army Training Camp) carved this inscription in Polish on a beech tree: "Poland is not yet lost a Polish soldier from Pomerania 14 April 1942." For decades, the tree was a silent witness to the Polish presence at the site (Photo by Piotr Figura, Polonijna Agencja Informacyjna)

✎ Charlton Lake, Ontario, Canada (Photo: Alamy)



DIVINE PROVIDENCE



📍 Housing settlement in Tengeru, 1945 (Photo: Archives of the Center for Documentation of Deportations, Expulsions and Resettlements of the Pedagogical University of Krakow)

📍 President of the Republic of Poland, Lech Kaczyński awarded Father Łucjan Królikowski with the Commander's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta, 11 November 2007, Warsaw (Photo: Archives of the Franciscan Publishing House "Bratni Zew")

Father Łucjan Królikowski (born 7 September 1919 in Nowe Kramsko) joined the Franciscan order in Niepokalanów before the war while still a teenager. There, he came to know Father Maximilian Kolbe, an exceptional authority and spiritual guide who gave his life for one of his fellow prisoners in KL Auschwitz. In the summer of 1940, Łucjan was arrested by the NKVD and deported to Siberia, where he laboured under inhuman conditions at clearing the taiga. After the "amnesty" for exiled Poles in 1941, the young Franciscan graduated from the Artillery Cadet School in Kyrgyzstan and reached Iran and Iraq with the Polish Army. He then went on to study theology in Lebanon, at St Joseph's University in Beirut, where he was ordained a priest on 30 June 1946. He began his pastoral work at the War Hospital in Al-Kantara, in north-eastern Egypt. After the demobilisation of the Polish army, he worked among former exiles in the Polish camp in Tengeru, Tanzania. When the British closed the camps in Africa in 1949, he accompanied 150 children to Canada. There he took care of their education and upbringing until they reached adulthood. The Franciscan remained at a monastery in Chicopee, in the United States, until his last days. He died on 11 October 2019.



*There are no coincidences in life.
Everything good is encompassed in Divine Providence.*

Fr Łucjan Królikowski

📍 The Lower Mission Seminary in Niepokalanów. Łucjan Królikowski stands smiling in the middle of third row (Photo: Archives of Friars Minor Conventual in Niepokalanów)

