

THE WAR SPREADS



Brutal repression in Bolshevik-occupied in 1921 Georgia forced its native inhabitants to emigrate. Some of them went to Poland, which tried to support all states and nations conquered by Russia.

The Georgian émigré community in Poland numbered a few hundred, but had a very large potential. Among its ranks were prominent politicians (Pavle Tumanishvili, Joseb Salakaia, Giorgi Nakashidze), clergymen (Fr Grigol Peradze) and writers (Sergo Kurulishvili, Vitalis Ugrekhelidze). The largest group were military officers. Over time, many of them developed close relationships with Poles, and younger ones married Polish women. The meeting places were initially the Polish-Georgian Club, the Eastern Institute in Warsaw, and the Prometheus Club. Georgian balls were also organised periodically.

📍 Kakutsa Cholokashvili, hero of the 1924 uprising, during a visit to Poland (Photo from the collection of David Kolbaia)

📍 Holy Trinity Church Stepatsminda, Georgia (Photo: Alamy)

📍 Georgian emigrants in Poland, Krakow, 1935 (Photo from the collection of David Kolbaia)



IN THE POLISH ARMY



☛ Lieutenant Jerzy Turashvili with Polish officers during a competition for the Illustrated Daily Courier cup, 1931 (Photo: NAC)

The most numerous group among the Georgian emigration in Poland were officers and officer cadets. At the invitation of the Polish authorities, they were accepted into the ranks of the Polish Army as contract officers. In the interwar period, a hundred or so Georgians served in the Polish Army.

No separate unit was created for Georgians, but it was decided that they should serve alongside Poles in various branches and types of weapons: cavalry, artillery, armoured troops, the navy and others, and the Polish authorities tried to have them participate in training and courses as often as possible, and delegated them to the War College. The purpose of the Georgians' military service was to prepare them to rebuild the army of an independent Georgia in the future.

Among the Georgians serving in the Polish Army were many eminent military officers, including several generals (Alexandre Chkheidze, Alexander Koniashvili, Zakaria Bakradze, Alexander Zakariadze, Kirile Kutateladze, Ivane Kazbegi), numerous senior officers, as well as the writer and future translator of *Pan Tadeusz* into Georgian – Vitalis Ugrekhelidze, the author of numerous publications – Jan Kavtaradze, or Akaki Ramishvili, son of the Georgian Minister of the Interior assassinated in Paris in 1930.

☛ Commemorative badge of the War College (Photo: Museum of the Second World War)

☛ Photo of Polish Army soldiers, Georgians and Poles (Photo: National Parliamentary Library of Georgia)



DEFENDING THE FATHERLAND



All Georgian officers and officer cadets, although not obliged to do so as contract officers, took part in the war in September 1939. They fought both on the Western Front against the Germans and on the Eastern Front against the Bolsheviks. Many of them distinguished themselves by their courage and bravery, for which they received the highest Polish war decorations. After the fighting ended, some were taken prisoner by the Germans or the Soviets and suffered death there.

Georgians fought in a variety of weapons, including the Navy. On 1 September 1939, after the death of Second Lieutenant Commander Stefan Kwiatkowski, the last commander of the Polish minesweeper ORP Gryf became Viktor Lomidze. Under his orders, the ship took part in battles against German destroyers on 3 September 1939 near the Hel Peninsula.

🚢 Seamen on board of Minesweeper ORP Gryf. On 3 November 1939, the ship was bombed and sunk by German planes, Gdynia 1938–1939 (photo: L. Durczykiewicz, Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London, photo courtesy of the KARTA Centre Foundation)

🏚️ Ruins of Warsaw, September–December 1939 (photo: Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London, photo courtesy of the KARTA Centre Foundation)

[...] I am Georgian, and I did not have [Polish] citizenship, but in order to fulfil my duty of honour towards my second homeland Poland, I did not need rights.

Letter by Vano Nanuashvili from 1973
(collection of the Korneli Kekelidze
Georgian National Center of Manuscripts)



Trails of Hope
The Odyssey of Freedom

TOGETHER IN SUFFERING



POW camp in Murnau, 1939-1945 (Photo: AIPN Rzeszów)

After the end of battles in 1939, most Georgian officers who fought against the Germans were imprisoned in prisoner-of-war camps (e.g. in Murnau).

The fate of those who were wanted by the NKVD was particularly tragic. They were caught from among the Polish officers and deported to Moscow, where most of them disappeared without a trace. Among those who found themselves in such a situation were General Alexandre Chkheidze, Arkadi Skhirtladze, Iuliane Kakabadze, Vasil Injia, Giorgi Ratishvili, Alexander Tabidze and his son, also a contract officer.

After enduring brutal investigations by the NKVD, only a few managed to get out of Soviet prisons and gulags. Among them were Captain Vladimir Lagidze and Judiciary Major Alexander Kipiani.

Oflag VII-A Murnau, where lower-ranking officers were probably quartered, Murnau am Staffelsee, Bavaria, Third Reich, 1939-1945 (Photo from the collection of Marcin Rudziński, KARTA Centre Foundation)



Mine and part of Camp no. 6. The Vorkuta camps were established in 1939. Their inmates exploited coal deposits in the foothills of the Polar Urals. One of the many places of exile in the USSR. Vorkuta, like Kolyma, Norilsk, Karaganda, was a large industrial region created by slave labour of prisoners, Vorkuta, Komi ASRS, USSR, 1955 (Photo: KARTA Centre Foundation)



Interned Polish and Georgian officers with Col. Nikolai Vachnadze (Photo: Soviet Past Research Laboratory, Tbilisi, Georgia)



Trails of Hope
The Odyssey of Freedom

WITH ANDERS

Evacuation. I'm happy, and on the other hand I'm afraid, maybe they won't want to let me go. [...] While still on the ship, I was still in fear.

Capt. Vladimer Lagidze



Evacuation of the Polish Army from the USSR to Iran, Krasnovodsk, 1942 (Photo: AIPN)

First meal in Iran, July 1942 (Photo: AIPN)

After the signing of the Polish-Soviet agreement on the formation of the Polish Army in the Soviet Union in July 1941, Georgians, like other Polish officers, were granted amnesty, released from the camps, and allowed to go to the Polish Army's formation points. Soon those who got out of the Soviet Union were joined by those who were in German prisoner of war camps or escaped from German units.

Evacuation of the Polish Army from the USSR to Iran, Krasnovodsk, 1942 (Photo: AIPN)



SUPERHUMAN EFFORT

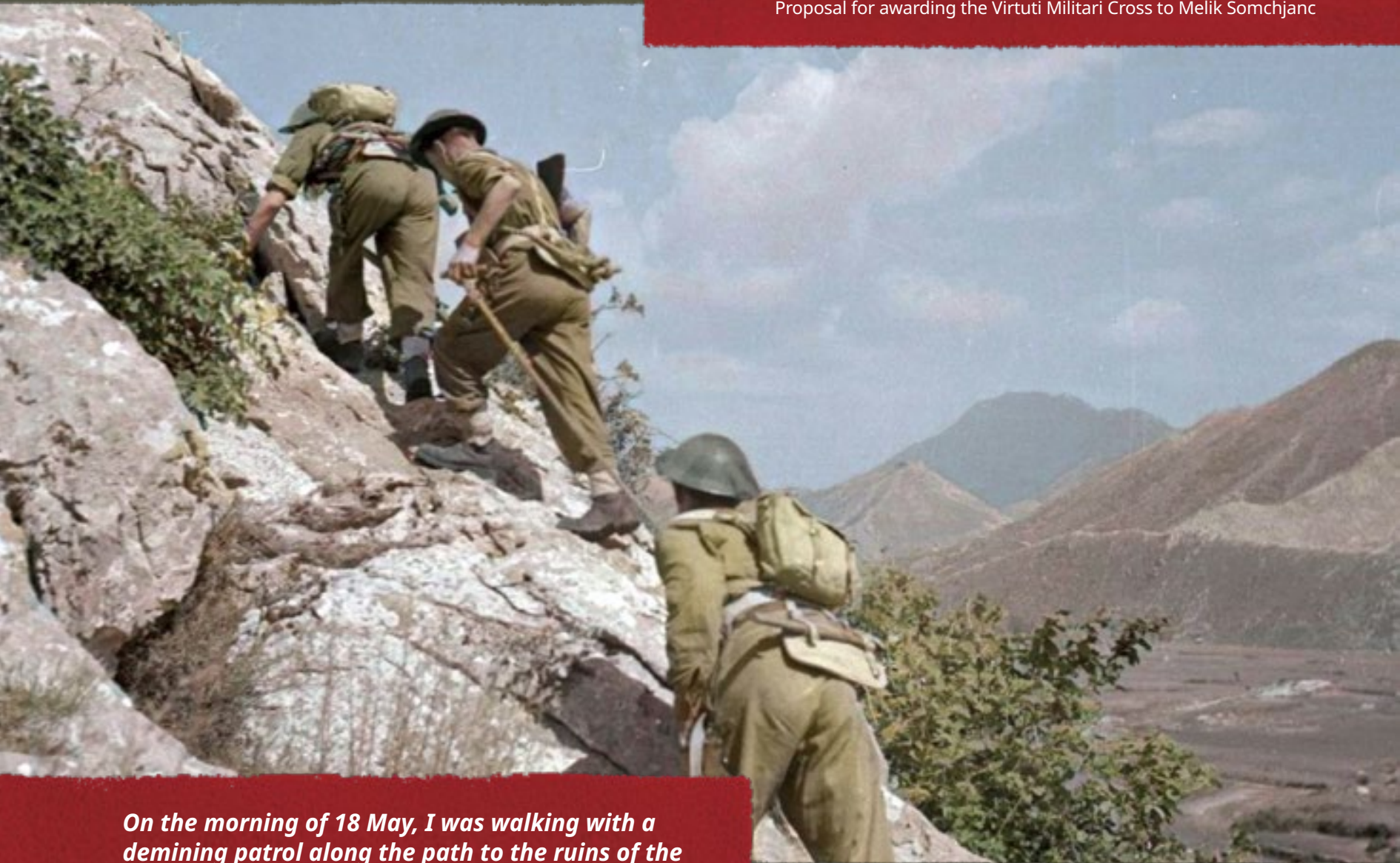


📍 Polish banner on top of a mountain, among the ruins of the demolished abbey, Cassino, Italy, 18 May 1944 (Photo by Felicjan Maliniak, Gen. Sikorski Polish Institute in London, photo courtesy of the KARTA Centre Foundation)

📍 Battle of Monte Cassino. Soldiers with boxes of ammunition climb to positions on the mountainside, Monte Cassino area, Italy, May 1944 (Photo: Józef Pilsudski Institute in London, photo courtesy of the KARTA Centre Foundation)

Having taken over the command of the 4th Battalion [...] after the death of late Lt. Col. Fanslau, on 17 May 1944 he continued the assault on Hill 593. Despite the fierce fire of enemy machine guns and mortars, he personally rallies the troops to the assault, showing extraordinary courage and determined will to fight. Commanding in very difficult conditions, he is able to wring superhuman effort from his troops.

Proposal for awarding the Virtuti Militari Cross to Melik Somchjanc



On the morning of 18 May, I was walking with a demining patrol along the path to the ruins of the Abbey; you could already see the white-and-red banner hoisted there at dawn. On the way, we came across a group of soldiers: half lying around a rocky protrusion, they were listening to an argument by their commander, a Georgian in Polish service; in a booming voice [...] he was persuading them by means of a "logical chain of military facts" that "we Poles have won the Second World War."

Gustaw Herling Grudziński

📍 Battle of Monte Cassino, panorama of the mountains. In the foreground a soldier's helmet shot through, Cassino, Italy, May 1944 (Photo: Polish Institute named after General Sikorski in London, photo courtesy of the KARTA Centre Foundation)



Trails of Hope
The Odyssey of Freedom

A COMMON PATH



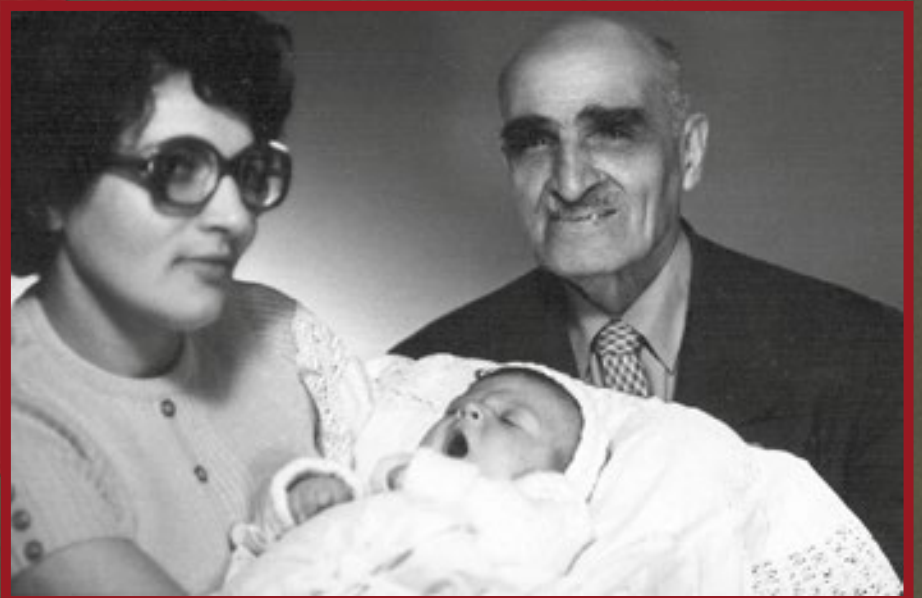
After the end of the Second World War, communist authorities brutally repressed members of the Polish independence underground and those Georgians who were associated with it. Only a few managed to successfully hide from the secret police for many years.

The majority of Georgian officers who had served in the Polish Armed Forces ended up with Polish soldiers in the UK, and were subsequently demobilised in 1947. Some Georgians maintained contacts with their Polish colleagues, participated in the life of Polish veterans in exile, belonged to regimental circles and wrote for Polish emigrant press. In the 1950s, Witalis Ugrechelidze translated Adam Mickiewicz's Pan Tadeusz into Georgian.

Georgians and Poland shared a difficult history. Some of them are buried in cemeteries considered to be "Polish" in exile, and their beautiful story is part of the history of both Poland and Georgia, including their common struggle for independence.

✎ Mikheil Kvaliashvili with his family after the end of World War II (Photo: Korneli Kekelidze Georgian National Center of Manuscripts)

✎ Mikheil Kvaliashvili served in the Polish Army in the 15th Poznań Uhlan Regiment in 1939. After 1945, he was arrested by the Soviet secret police. After a cruel investigation and time in prison, he was sent to labour camps. He managed to return to Poland only after several years of captivity, with his health destroyed. The KGB was still interested in Nikolai Kvaliashvili in the 1970s. Photo shows the Kvaliashvili family after the Second World War (Photo: Korneli Kekelidze Georgian National Center of Manuscripts)



Trails of Hope
The Odyssey of Freedom

GIORGI TUMANISHVILI

The Tumanishvili family left Georgia back in 1921, and thus survived – avoiding repression when the Bolsheviks murdered the Georgian aristocracy. Giorgi's mother was a Pole, Jadwiga Szyszko, daughter of General Cezary Szyszko. His father, Prince Pavle Tumanoff-Tumanishvili, Marshal of the Georgian nobility, headed the émigré Georgian Committee in 1924.

Giorgi Tumanishvili became an officer on the destroyer ORP Burza in 1939, and took part in the "Peking" plan, among other things. From 1940 to 1941 he was the 1st officer of submarine guns on the OF Ouragan. Promoted to the rank of Lieutenant of the Navy, he was sent to ORP Krakowiak, where he served as 2nd Artillery Officer. During this time, he took part in Channel patrols, and was wounded in the leg during a battle with German units.

From December 1942, he served for a year at the Fleet Specialist Training Centre. In January 1944, he was appointed 1st Artillery Officer on ORP Piorun. He took part in missions against the German battleship Tirpitz and in support operations of the Allied landing in Normandy.

In October 1950, he emigrated to the United States. He was a member of the New York-based Józef Piłsudski Institute in America.



📍 Rear Admiral Giorgi Tumanishvili, 2009 (Photo: Polish Navy)



📍 Current repairs on ORP Piorun, 1940 (Photo: Imperial War Museum)