



Poland has marked the 82 anniversary of the formation of the Home Army, a resistance movement that emerged during the Nazi-German occupation.

The formation, which worked in unison with the London - based Polish government- in-exile, is believed by many historians to have been the largest underground force in occupied Europe, with estimates of its maximum size ranging between 200,000 and 600,000.

We must note that, though after the war Poland fell under Soviet - backed communist rule, the spirit and feats of the Home Army inspired those who continued to fight for Polish independence.

Unlike many other countries occupied by Germany during the war, Poland never had a collaborationist government. After the country rapidly fell to the German and Soviet invasions of 1939, a range of resistance groups emerged, while a government – in - exile was established first in France then in London.

Initially, the main resistance group was the Union of Armed Struggle (ZWZ), formed in November 1939. On 14 February 1942, it was renamed as the Home Army (AK) on the orders of Władysław Sikorski, the prime minister of the government – in - exile. Both the ZWZ and the AK progressively absorbed other, smaller underground groups.

The AK functioned as part of a broader underground state created in occupied Poland. It held allegiance, and was in theory subordinate, to the government -in - exile, though in practice it often functioned independently.



In his history of Poland, *God's Playground*, Norman Davies wrote that the AK "could fairly claim to be the largest European resistance formation".

However, given the nature of such underground activity, precise estimates of size are difficult. The Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, the Netherlands, and France also had large resistance forces.

The largest operation mounted by the AK – and indeed the largest single military effort undertaken by any European resistance movement during the war – was the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, which saw tens of thousands of fighters unsuccessfully seek to liberate the city from German occupation.

The Home Army, along with the Polish government – In - exile, also undertook efforts to raise awareness of the unfolding Holocaust and to help Jews in hiding.

Jan Karski, an AK courier, brought reports to western leaders – including directly to US President Franklin Roosevelt – about the situation of Jews in occupied Poland. He is among a number of Home Army members recognised by Israel as Righteous Among the Nations for seeking to save Jews from the Holocaust.

Another to receive that distinction was Henryk Woliński, head of the AK's "Jewish Department", who personally harboured more than 25 Jews in his apartment and helped establish Żegota, a Polish underground state organisation tasked with saving Jews, and which cooperated with the Home Army.

Sources: Dział 82. rocznica powstania Armii Krajowej. Tygodnik Solidarność. <https://www.tysol.pl>

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Author:



Danuta Piotrowska

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