

## 80th Anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising



In the heart of a war-torn occupied country, Warsaw, stood up to her oppressors in the culmination of Poland's resistance: a valiant battle that lasted a total of 63 harrowing days, incredibly with little allied support. Stalin's ambitions to determine Poland's post-war borders and government resulted in his decision to not provide sufficient aid and support, whilst Churchill and Roosevelt professed practical difficulties which logistically could not provide much assistance to the Polish Home Army ("Armia Krajowa" aka "AK").

Poland was the only country that fought against Nazi Germany from the first to the last day of WWII. Acknowledged historically as the single largest effort opposing the brutal and deadly German occupation of Poland during World War II, the Warsaw Uprising was a major military endeavour of the relatively unarmed Polish resistance which started at "W Hour" (5pm) on August 1st 1944 and lasted until October 2nd 1944. Although the exact statistics of casualties are unknown, approximately 20,000 Polish resistance fighters died, whilst about 6,000 were badly wounded. In addition, between 150,000 and 200,000 Polish civilians perished, mostly in retribitional mass executions



by the SS, police, penal battalions and units of the Russian People's Liberation Army. German forces lost approximately 10,000. Following the capitulation of Warsaw, her remaining civilian population was deported to a camp south of the city, after which the Germans bombed Warsaw incessantly for 3 months, razing her to the ground, leaving her for Soviet troops to "liberate" in early January 1945.

The Warsaw Uprising is one of the decisive episodes in Polish history whilst its outcome is one of Poland's many national tragedies. The death and destruction that accompanied the Uprising were on an apocalyptic scale, yet for the survivors, for those who had to live through the decades of communist oppression that followed Stalin's victory over Hitler, the Uprising was a source of pride and inspiration.

Standing up to tyranny and oppression is not new to Poles who have always known that freedom has a price, that great sacrifices have to be made to achieve it, and that the related struggles and hardships do not always enjoy immediate and lasting results. The shocking graphic realities of the Warsaw Uprising and the moral legacy of mass wartime resistance bore witness to the Polish sense of national solidarity, articulated Poles' passion for dignity and freedom, and became an integral component of Poland's historical consciousness, which helped the decimated nation endure and survive the difficult years of abandonment under communist oppression that followed.



Over time, Warsaw, and indeed Poland, rose from the ashes of WWII like a phoenix, adapting to the ever-changing socio-political climate that shaped her destiny into the vibrant capital city of a modern country of proud, passionate citizens, acutely aware of their tragic past but optimistic about their emerging democracy, buoyant economy and respectful of their rich traditions and culture.

Every year now at 5pm on the 1<sup>st</sup> August, sirens wail across Warsaw and the entire city comes to an absolute standstill, to commemorate in eerie stillness the significance of those 63 days in 1944. I encourage everyone, wherever you happen to be at this historic moment, to pause in solemn recognition of lives lost in the struggle against oppression, for the sake of freedom.

Remember the heroes! Lest we forget!

Henryk Kurylewski  
 President  
 Polish Community Council of Australia

