

= Władysław Sikorski =

Władysław Eugeniusz Sikorski (Polish pronunciation : [vwaˈdʲswaf ʲiˈkɔrskʲi] ; May 20 , 1881 ? July 4 , 1943) was a Polish military and political leader .

Prior to the First World War , Sikorski established and participated in several underground organizations that promoted the cause of the independence of Poland from the Russian Empire . He fought with distinction in the Polish Legions during the First World War , and later in the newly created Polish Army during the Polish ? Soviet War of 1919 to 1921 . In that war he played a prominent role in the decisive Battle of Warsaw (1920) . In the early years of the Second Polish Republic , Sikorski held government posts , including serving as Prime Minister (1922 to 1923) and as Minister of Military Affairs (1923 to 1924) . Following Józef Piłsudski 's May Coup of 1926 and the installation of the Sanacja government , he fell out of favor with the new régime .

During the Second World War , Sikorski became Prime Minister of the Polish Government in Exile , Commander @-@ in @-@ Chief of the Polish Armed Forces , and a vigorous advocate of the Polish cause in the diplomatic sphere . He supported the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between Poland and the Soviet Union , which had been severed after the Soviet pact with Germany and the 1939 invasion of Poland ? however , Soviet leader Joseph Stalin broke off Soviet @-@ Polish diplomatic relations in April 1943 following Sikorski 's request that the International Red Cross investigate the Katyń Forest massacre . In July 1943 , a plane carrying Sikorski plunged into the sea immediately after takeoff from Gibraltar , killing all on board except the pilot . The exact circumstances of Sikorski 's death have been disputed and have given rise to a number of conspiracy theories surrounding the crash and his death . Sikorski had been the most prestigious leader of the Polish exiles , and his death was a severe setback for the Polish cause .

= = Early life and First World War = =

Sikorski was born in Tuszów Narodowy , Galicia , at the time part of the Austro @-@ Hungarian Empire . He was the third child in his family ; his father was Tomasz Sikorski , a school teacher ; his mother was Emilia Habrowska . His grandfather , Tomasz Kopaszyna Sikorski , had fought and been wounded at the Battle of Olszynka Grochowska in the November Uprising , during which he received the Virtuti Militari medal .

Sikorski attended the gimnazjum in Rzeszów (now Konarski 's High School in Rzeszów) from 1893 to 1897 , then transferred for a year to a Rzeszów teachers ' college . In 1899 he attended the Lwów Franciszek Józef Gymnasium , and in 1902 he passed his final high school exam there . Starting that year , young Sikorski studied engineering at the Lwów Polytechnic , specializing in road and bridge construction , and graduated in 1908 with a diploma in hydraulic engineering . In 1906 Sikorski volunteered for a year 's service in the Austro @-@ Hungarian army and attended the Austrian Military School , obtaining an officer 's diploma and becoming an army reserve second lieutenant (podporucznik rezerwy) . In 1909 he married Helena Zubczewska , whom he met while at the high school in Lwów . In 1912 they had a daughter , Zofia . After graduation he worked for the Galician administration 's hydraulic engineering department , working on the regulation of the Vistula river , and later was involved in private enterprises related to construction , real estate and petroleum trade .

During his studies at the Polytechnic , Sikorski became involved in the People 's School Association (Towarzystwo Szkoły Ludowej) , an organization dedicated to spreading literacy among the rural populace . Around 1904 ? 1905 he was briefly involved with the endecja Association of the Polish Youth " Zet " , and then drifted towards paramilitary socialist organizations related to the Polish Socialist Party , which was intent on securing Polish independence . He made contact with the socialist movement around 1905 ? 1906 through the Union for the Resurrection of the Polish Nation (Związek Odrodzenia Narodu Polskiego) . In 1908 , in Lwów , Sikorski ? together with Józef Piłsudski , Marian Kukiel , Walery Sławek , Kazimierz Sosnkowski , Witold Jodko @-@ Narkiewicz and Henryk Minkiewicz ? organized the secret Union for Active Struggle (Związek Walki Czynnej) , with the aim of bringing about an uprising against the Russian Empire , one of Poland 's three

partitioners . In 1910 , likewise in Lwów , Sikorski helped to organize a Riflemen 's Association (the Zwi?zek Strzelecki) , became the president of its Lwów chapter , and became responsible for the military arm within the Commission of Confederated Independence Parties (Komisja Skonfederowanych Stronnictwo Niepodleg?o?ciowych , KSSN) . Having a military education , he lectured other activists on military tactics .

Upon the outbreak of the First World War in July 1914 , Sikorski was mobilized , but through KSSN influence he was allowed to participate in the organizing of the Polish military units , rather than being delegated to other duties by the Austro @-@ Hungarian military command . In the first few weeks of the war he became the chief of the Military Department in the Supreme National Committee (Naczelny Komitet Narodowy , NKN) and remained in this post until 1916 . He was a commissioner in charge of the recruitment to the Polish Legions in Kraków , choosing this role over the opportunity to serve in the Legions as a frontline commander . On 30 September 1914 he was promoted to podpu?kownik (lieutenant colonel) , and soon after that he became the commander of a Legions officer school (Szko?a Podchor??ych) . The Legions - the army created by Józef Pi?sudski to liberate Poland from Russian and , ultimately , Austro @-@ Hungarian and German rule - initially fought in alliance with Austria @-@ Hungary against Russia . From August 1915 there was growing tension between Sikorski , who advocated cooperation with Austria @-@ Hungary , and Pi?sudski , who felt that Austria @-@ Hungary and Germany had betrayed the trust of the Polish people . In 1916 Pi?sudski actively campaigned to have the Military Department of NKN disbanded . In July that year , Sikorski was promoted to pu?kownik (colonel) . Following the Act of 5th November (1916) , Sikorski became involved with the Legions ' alternatives , the Polish Auxiliary Corps and Polnische Wehrmacht . In June 1917 Pi?sudski refused Austro @-@ Hungarian orders to swear loyalty to the Habsburg Emperor (the " oath crisis ") and was interned at the fortress of Magdeburg , while Sikorski abandoned Polnische Wehrmacht and returned to the Austro @-@ Hungarian Army . In 1918 , however , following the February Treaty of Brest @-@ Litovsk and the battle of Rara?cza , Sikorski chose belatedly to side with Pi?sudski , announcing solidarity with his actions , protesting against planned separation of Che?m Land from the planned Polish state , and thus soon joined Pi?sudski in internment (he would be held in Dulfalva (Dulovo)) . Nonetheless , this was not enough to smooth the differences between him and Pi?sudski , and these two major Polish leaders would drift farther apart in the continuing years .

= = War with the Bolsheviks = =

= = = Polish ? Ukrainian war = = =

In 1918 the Russian , Austro @-@ Hungarian and German empires collapsed , and Poland once again became independent , but the borders of the Second Polish Republic were not fully determined and unstable . In the east they would be formed in the escalating conflicts among Polish , Ukrainian , Lithuanian and Soviet forces in what culminated in the Polish ? Soviet War (1919 ? 1921) . Winston Churchill commented : " The war of giants has ended , the wars of the pygmies began . " Bolshevik leaders saw Poland as a bridge that the communist revolution will have to force to bring communism to the West , and Poland 's very existence would soon be at stake .

= = = Polish ? Soviet war = = =

After his release from internment , from 1 May 1918 Sikorski worked for the Regency Council , organizing the new Polish Army . He was soon at the frontlines again , this time in the Polish ? Ukrainian War , where troops under his command secured and defended Przemy?l in October ? November 1918 .

Polish independence came in November 1918 with the formation of the Second Republic of Poland . In the course of the Polish ? Ukrainian War , and in the opening phase of the Polish ? Soviet War , Sikorski , now a high @-@ ranking officer of the Polish Army was involved in further operations in

the Galicia region . In January 1919 he commanded troops defending Gródek Jagielloński ; in March that year he commanded an infantry division , advancing to Stawczany and Zbrucz . From 1 August 1918 Sikorski commanded the Polesie Group , and the Polish 9th Infantry Division . In order to curtail excesses of the forces under his command , he oversaw trials of 36 officers . His forces took Mozyr and Kalenkowicze in March 1920 , and he would command the Polesie Group during Poland 's Kiev offensive in April 1920 , advancing to Dniepr river and Chernobyl region . On April 1 that year he was promoted to brigade general .

As the Polish - Soviet War grew in intensity , in late April 1920 the Red Army of Russia 's new Soviet regime pushed back Polish forces and invaded Poland . Subsequently Sikorski successfully defended Mozyr and Kalenkowicze until 29 June , but later failed to hold the Brest fortress , although he defended it long enough to allow the Polish forces in the region to retreat in an orderly manner . On 6 August he was named the commander of the newly formed Polish 5th Army , which was tasked with holding the front to the north of Modlin , between Narew and Wkra rivers . He distinguished himself commanding the 5th Army on the Lower Vistula front during the Battle of Warsaw . At that time Soviet forces , expecting an easy final victory , were surprised and crippled by the Polish counter - attack . During that battle (sometimes referred to as " the Miracle at the Vistula ") Sikorski stopped the Bolshevik advance north of Warsaw and gave Piłsudski , the Polish commander in chief , the time he needed for his counter - offensive ; beginning with the 15 August his forces successfully engaged the Soviet 5th and 15th Armies . After the Battle of Warsaw , from 30 August , Sikorski commanded the 3rd Army . His forces took Piłsk , and fought during the latter stages of the Battle of Lwów and the Battle of Zamość , and then after Battle of Niemen advanced with his forces toward Latvia and deep into Belarus . The Poles defeated the Soviets , and the Polish - Soviet Treaty of Riga (March 1921) gave Poland substantial areas of Belarus and Ukraine 's (Kresy) . Sikorski 's fame was enhanced as he became known to the Polish public as one of the heroes of the Polish - Soviet War . He also kept publishing military science articles during the war itself . For his valorous achievements Sikorski was promoted to divisional general on 28 February 1921 , and was awarded Poland 's highest military decoration , the order of Virtuti Militari , on 15 March that year .

= = In government and in opposition = =

Despite their differences , Piłsudski praised Sikorski in his reports , recommending him for Chief of the General Staff and Minister of War positions ; only generals Kazimierz Sosnkowski and Edward Rydz - Śmigły received better evaluations from him . Sikorski was popular among many soldiers , and in politics , particularly appealing to Polish conservatives and liberals . On 1 April 1921 Sikorski replaced general Tadeusz Jordan - Rozwadowski as the chief of the Polish General Staff . Between 1922 and 1925 he held a number of high government offices . Based on his analysis , the Polish Council of Ministers adopted new foreign policy that would remain roughly unchanged until the late 1930s (preserving the status quo in Europe , and treating Germany and Russia as equal sources of potential threat) . On 12 December 1922 he issued a general order , stressing the need for the military to stay out of politics . After the assassination of President of Poland Gabriel Narutowicz on 16 December 1922 , the Marshal of the Sejm (Sejm being the Polish parliament) , Maciej Rataj , appointed Sikorski prime minister . From December 18 , 1922 , to May 26 , 1923 , Sikorski served as Prime Minister and also as Minister of Internal Affairs , and was even considered as possible President . During his brief tenure as prime minister , he became popular with the Polish public and carried out essential reforms in addition to guiding the country 's foreign policy in a direction that gained the approval and cooperation of the League of Nations and tightened Polish - French cooperation . He obtained recognition of Poland 's eastern frontiers from the UK , France and the United States during the Conference of Ambassadors on 15 March 1923 . He aided Treasury Minister Władysław Grabski 's reforms aiming at curtailing inflation and reforming the currency , and supported ethnic minorities . His government nonetheless lost support in the Sejm and resigned on 26 May 1923 .

From 30 September 1923 to 1924 he held the post of Chief Inspector of Infantry (Generalny

Inspektor Piechoty) . From 17 February 1924 to 1925 , under Prime Minister Grabski , he was Minister of Military Affairs and guided the modernization of the Polish military ; he also created the Korpus Ochrony Pogranicza . He worked actively to promote the cause of the Polish @-@ French military alliance . His proposal to increase the powers of the Minister of Military Affairs while reducing those of the Chief Inspector of the Armed Forces met with sharp disapproval from Piłsudski , who at that time was gathering many opponents of the current government . From 1925 to 1928 Sikorski commanded Military Corps District (Okręg Korpusu) VI in Lwów .

A democrat and supporter of the Sejm , Sikorski declared his opposition to Józef Piłsudski 's May coup d'état in 1926 ; however he remained in Lwów , refused to dispatch his forces , and played no significant role in the short struggle surrounding the coup . In 1928 he was relieved by Piłsudski of his command , and while he remained on active service , he received no other posting . That year also saw the publication of his book on the Polish ? Soviet War , Nad Wisłą i Wkrą . Studium do polsko ? radzieckiej wojny 1920 roku (At the Vistula and the Wkra Rivers : a Contribution to the Study of the Polish ? Soviet War of 1920) . He would spend the following years studying military theory , publishing works on military theory , history and foreign policy . His most famous work was his 1934 book Przyszła wojna ? jej możliwości i charakter oraz związane z nimi zagadnienia obrony kraju (lit . War in the Future : Its Capacities and Character and Associated Questions of National Defense , published in English in as Modern warfare . Its character , its problems in 1943) , in which he predicted the return of the maneuver warfare . He wrote several other books and many articles , foreseeing , among other things , the rapid militarization of Germany .

In due course , soon after he was relieved of his command , and as a semi @-@ dictatorial Sanacja regime was established , Sikorski joined the anti @-@ Piłsudski opposition . Sikorski largely withdrew from politics , spending much of his time in Paris , France , and working with the French Ecole Supérieure de Guerre (war college) . Even after the death of Piłsudski in 1935 , he was still marginalized , politically and militarily , by Piłsudski 's successors . In February next year , together with several prominent Polish politicians (Wincenty Witos , Ignacy Paderewski , and General Józef Haller) he joined the Front Morges , an anti @-@ Sanacja political grouping .

= = Prime Minister in exile = =

In the days before Poland was invaded by Germany in September 1939 , and during the invasion itself , Sikorski 's request for a military command continued to be denied by the Polish Commander in Chief , Marshal Edward Rydz @-@ ?migły . Sikorski escaped through Romania to Paris , where on 28 September he joined Władysław Raczkiewicz and Stanisław Mikołajczyk in a Polish government @-@ in @-@ exile , taking command of the newly formed Polish Armed Forces in France . Two days later , on September 30 , president Raczkiewicz called him to serve as the first Polish prime minister in exile . On 7 November he became Commander in Chief and General Inspector of the Armed Forces (Naczelnny Wódz i Generalny Inspektor Sił Zbrojnych) , following Rydz @-@ ?migły 's resignation . Sikorski would also hold the position of the Polish Minister of Military Affairs , thus uniting in his person all control over the Polish military in war time .

During his years as prime minister in exile , Sikorski personified the hopes and dreams of millions of Poles , as reflected in the saying , " When the sun is higher , Sikorski is nearer " (Polish : " Gdy słońce wyżej , to Sikorski bliżej ") . At the same time , from early on he had to work to reconcile the pro- and anti @-@ Piłsudski 's factions .

His government was recognized by the western Allies . Nonetheless Sikorski 's government struggled to get its point of view heard by France and the United Kingdom . The western Allies refused to recognize the Soviet Union as an aggressor , despite the Soviet invasion of Poland on 17 September 1939 . Furthermore , he struggled to secure resources needed to recreate the Polish Army in exile .

Poland , even with its territories occupied , still commanded substantial armed forces : the Polish Navy had sailed to Britain , and many thousands of Polish troops had escaped via Romania and Hungary or across the Baltic Sea . Those routes would be used until the end of the war by both interned soldiers and volunteers from Poland , who jocularly called themselves " Sikorski 's tourists " .

and embarked on their dangerous journeys , braving death or imprisonment in concentration camps if caught by the Germans or their allies . With the steady flow of recruits , the new Polish Army was soon reassembled in France and in French @-@ mandated Syria . In addition to that , Poland had a large resistance movement , and Sikorski 's policies included founding of the Zwi?zek Walki Zbrojnej (Union of Armed Struggle) , later transformed into Armia Krajowa (Home Army) , and creation of the Government Delegation for Poland position , to supervise the Polish Underground State in occupied Poland .

In 1940 the Polish Highland Brigade took part in the Battle of Narvik (Norway) , and two Polish divisions participated in the defense of France , while a Polish motorized brigade and two infantry divisions were in process of forming . A Polish Independent Carpathian Brigade was created in French @-@ mandated Syria . The Polish Air Force in France had 86 aircraft with one and a half of the squadrons fully operational , and the remaining two and a half in various stages of training . Although many Polish personnel had died in the fighting or had been interned in Switzerland following the fall of France , General Sikorski refused French Marshal Philippe Pétain 's proposal of a Polish capitulation to Germany . On June 19 , 1940 , Sikorski met with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and promised that Polish forces would fight alongside the British until final victory . Sikorski and his government moved to London and were able to evacuate many Polish troops to Britain . After the signing of a Polish @-@ British Military Agreement on August 5 , 1940 , they proceeded to build up and train the Polish Armed Forces in the West . Experienced Polish pilots took part in the Battle of Britain , where the Polish 303 Fighter Squadron achieved the highest number of kills of any Allied squadron . Sikorski 's Polish forces would form one of the most significant Allied contingents .

The Fall of France weakened Sikorski 's position , and his proposal to consider building a new Polish army in the Soviet @-@ occupied territories led to much criticism from within the Polish community in exile . On 19 July Raczkiewicz dismissed him from his position as the Prime Minister , replacing him with August Zaleski , however within days pressure from Sikorski 's sympathizers , including the British government , made Raczkiewicz reconsider his decision , and Sikorski was reinstated as the Prime Minister on 25 July .

One of Sikorski 's political goals was the creation of a Central and Eastern European federation , starting with the Polish @-@ Czechoslovakian confederation . He saw such an organization as necessary if smaller states were to stand up to traditional German and Russian imperialism . That concept , although ultimately futile , gained some traction around that time , as Sikorski and Edvard Beneš from the Czechoslovak government @-@ in @-@ exile , signed an agreement declaring the intent to pursue closer cooperation on 10 November that year . On 24 December 1940 Sikorski was promoted to genera? broni . In March 1941 he visited the United States ; he would visit USA again in March and December 1942 .

Following the German invasion of the Soviet Union (" Operation Barbarossa ") in June 1941 , Sikorski opened negotiations with the Soviet ambassador to London , Ivan Maisky , to re @-@ establish diplomatic relations between Poland and the Soviet Union , which had been broken off after the Soviet invasion of Poland in September 1939 . In December that year , Sikorski went to Moscow with a diplomatic mission . The Polish Government reached an agreement with the Soviet Union (the Sikorski @-@ Maisky Pact of 17 August 1941) , confirmed by Joseph Stalin in December of that year . Stalin agreed to invalidate the September 1939 Soviet @-@ German partition of Poland , declare the Russo @-@ German Molotov @-@ Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939 null and void , and release tens of thousands of Polish prisoners @-@ of @-@ war held in Soviet camps . Pursuant to an agreement between the Polish government @-@ in @-@ exile and Stalin , the Soviets granted " amnesty " to many Polish citizens , from whom a new army (the Polish II Corps) was formed under General W?adys?aw Anders and later evacuated to the Middle East , where Britain faced a dire shortage of military forces . The whereabouts of thousands more Polish officers , however , would remain unknown for two more years , and this would weigh heavily on both Polish ? Soviet relations and on Sikorski 's fate .

Initially , Sikorski supported the Polish ? Soviet rapprochement , which reignited criticism of his person from some Polish factions . Nonetheless , Sikorski soon realized that the Soviet Union had

plans for Polish territories , which would be unacceptable to Polish public . The Soviets began their diplomatic offensive after their first major military victory in the Battle of Moscow , and intensified this policy after the battle of Stalingrad , showing less and less regard for their deals with Poland . In January 1942 British diplomat Stafford Cripps informed General Sikorski that while Stalin planned to extend Polish borders to the west , by giving Poland Germany 's East Prussia , he also wanted to considerably push Poland 's eastern frontier westwards , along the lines of the Versailles concept of the Curzon Line , and acquire Lwów and Wilno , if not both . Sikorski 's stance on eastern borders was not inflexible ; he noted in some documents that some concessions might be acceptable , however , giving up both Lwów and Wilno was not .

= = Katyn revelation and death = =

In 1943 the fragile relations between the Soviet Union and the Polish government @-@ in @-@ exile finally reached their breaking point when , on April 13 , the Germans announced via the Katyn Commission the discovery of the bodies of 20 @,@ 000 Polish officers who had been murdered by the Soviets and buried in Katyn Forest , near Smolensk , Russia . Stalin claimed that the atrocity had been carried out by the Germans , while Nazi propaganda orchestrated by Joseph Goebbels successfully exploited the Katyn massacre to drive a wedge between Poland , the Western Allies and the Soviet Union . The Soviet Union , and subsequently Russia , did not acknowledge responsibility for this and similar massacres of Polish officers until the 1990s .

When Sikorski refused to accept the Soviet explanation and requested an investigation by the International Red Cross on April 16 , the Soviets accused the government @-@ in @-@ exile of cooperating with Nazi Germany and broke off diplomatic relations on April 25 .

Beginning in late May 1943 , Sikorski began visiting Polish forces stationed in the Middle East . In addition to inspecting the forces and raising morale , Sikorski was also occupied with political matters ; around that time , a conflict was growing between him and General Władysław Anders , as Sikorski was still open to some normalization of Polish ? Soviet relations , to which Anders was vehemently opposed . On 4 July 1943 , while Sikorski was returning from an inspection of Polish forces deployed in the Middle East , he was killed , together with his daughter , his Chief of Staff , Tadeusz Klimecki , and seven others , when his plane , a Liberator II , serial AL523 , crashed into the sea 16 seconds after takeoff from Gibraltar Airport at 23 : 07 hours . The crash was attributed to cargo on the plane shifting to the back upon takeoff . Only the pilot , Eduard Prchal (1911 ? 1984) , survived the crash . Sikorski was subsequently buried in a brick @-@ lined grave at the Polish War Cemetery in Newark @-@ on @-@ Trent , England on 16 July that year . Winston Churchill delivered a eulogy at his funeral . On 14 September 1993 , his remains were exhumed and transferred via Polish Air Force TU @-@ 154M , and escorted by RAF 56 Sqn Tornado F3 jets , to the royal crypts at Wawel Castle in Kraków , Poland .

= = Aftermath and remembrance = =

Immediately after the crash , a Polish officer who had witnessed the event from the airstrip began sobbing quietly and repeating : " This is the end of Poland . This is the end of Poland . " (" To Polska stracona ! ") General Sikorski 's death marked a turning point for Polish influence amongst the Anglo @-@ American allies . No Pole after him would have much sway with the Allied politicians . Sikorski had been the most prestigious leader of the Polish exiles and his death was a severe setback for the Polish cause . After the Soviets had broken off diplomatic relations with Sikorski 's government in April 1943 , in May and June Stalin had recalled several Soviet ambassadors for " consultations " : Maxim Litvinov from Washington , Fyodor Gusev from Montreal , and Ivan Maisky from London . While Churchill had been publicly supportive of Sikorski 's government , reminding Stalin of his pact with Nazi Germany in 1939 and their joint attack on Poland , in secret consultations with Roosevelt he admitted that some concessions would have to be made by Poland to appease the powerful Soviets . The Polish ? Soviet crisis was beginning to threaten cooperation between the western Allies and the Soviet Union at a time when the Poles ' importance to the western Allies ,

essential in the first years of the war , was beginning to fade with the entry into the conflict of the military and industrial giants , the Soviet Union and the United States .

The Allies had no intention of allowing Sikorski 's successor , Stanisław Mikołajczyk , to threaten the alliance with the Soviets . No representative of the Polish government was invited to the Tehran Conference (28 November ? 1 December 1943) or the Yalta Conference (4 ? 11 February 1945) , the two crucial events in which the Western Allies and the Soviet Union discussed the shape of the post-war world and decided on the fate of Poland . Only four months after Sikorski 's death , in November 1943 , at Tehran , Churchill and Roosevelt agreed with Stalin that the whole of Poland east of the Curzon Line would be ceded to the Soviets . In Teheran , neither Churchill nor Roosevelt objected to Stalin 's suggestion that the Polish government in exile in London was not representing Polish interests ; as historian Anita Prażmowska noted , " this spelled the end of that government 's tenuous influence and *raison d'être* . " After the Teheran Conference , Stalin decided to create his own puppet government for Poland , and a Committee of National Liberation (PKWN) was proclaimed in the summer of 1944 . The Committee was recognized by the Soviet Government as the only legitimate authority in Poland , while Mikołajczyk 's Government in London , was termed by the Soviets an " illegal and self-styled authority . " Mikołajczyk would serve in the Prime Minister 's role until 24 November 1944 , when , realizing the increasing powerlessness of the government in exile , he resigned and was succeeded by Tomasz Arciszewski , " whose obscurity " , in the words of historian Mieczysław B. Biskupski , " signaled the arrival of the government in exile at total inconsequentiality . " Stalin soon began a campaign for recognition by the Western Allies of a Soviet-backed Polish government led by Wanda Wasilewska , a dedicated communist with a seat in the Supreme Soviet , with General Zygmunt Berling , commander of the 1st Polish Army in Russia , as commander in chief of all Polish armed forces . By the time of the Potsdam conference in 1945 , Poland has been relegated to the Soviet sphere of influence ; an abandonment of the Polish government in exile that has led to the rise of the Western betrayal concept .

A number of poems dedicated to Sikorski have been written by Polish authors during the war . In its aftermath , in the People 's Republic of Poland , Sikorski 's historic role , like that of all the adherents of the London government , would be minimized and distorted by propaganda , and those loyal to the government in exile would be liable to imprisonment and even execution . In time , restrictions on discussing Sikorski began to ease ; on a centennial anniversary of his birth in 1981 , commemorative events were held on the Rzeszów Voivodeship , including an academic conference , and revealing of plaques in Nisko and Łęka . Ryszard Zieliński published a novel on him , *Wejście w mrok* (1971) , and in 1983 a movie , *Katastrofa w Gibraltarze* by Bohdan Poręba , was made . The Polish government in exile , of which Sikorski was the first Prime Minister , would continue in existence until the end of communist rule in Poland in 1990 , when Lech Wałęsa became the first post-communist President of Poland . On 17 September 1993 a statue of Sikorski , sculpted by Wiesław Bielak , was revealed in Rzeszów . In 1995 , Sikorski became the patron of the newly formed Polish 9th Mechanized Brigade . In 2003 , the Polish parliament (Sejm) declared the year (60th anniversary of Sikorski 's death) to be the " Year of General Sikorski " . A number of streets and schools in Poland bear Sikorski 's name .

Memory of General Sikorski was also preserved both in Poland and abroad , by organizations like the Sikorski Institute in London . In the UK , Sikorski received *honoris causa* degrees from the University of Liverpool and University of St Andrews . In 1981 , a commemorative plaque was revealed at Hotel Rubens in London , where during the war Polish Military Headquarters , including Sikorski 's office , were located . He is commemorated in London 's Portland Place , near the Embassy of Poland , with a larger than life statue , unveiled in 2000 . A propeller from the plane in which he died is the centrepiece of a new memorial to Sikorski at Europa Point , Gibraltar .

= = Controversy surrounding his death = =

A British Court of Inquiry convened on July 7 that year investigated the crash of Sikorski 's Liberator II serial AL 523 , but was unable to determine the cause , finding only that it was an accident and " due to jamming of elevator controls " , noting that " it has not been possible to determine how the

jamming occurred but it has been established that there was no sabotage . " . The Polish government refused to endorse this report , due to the contradiction about the cause not being determined but sabotage being ruled out .

The political context of the event , coupled with a variety of curious circumstances , immediately gave rise to numerous speculation that Sikorski 's death had been no accident , and may have been the direct result of a Soviet , British , or even Polish conspiracy . Some modern sources still note that the accident is not fully explained ; for example Jerzy Jan Lerski in his Historical Dictionary of Poland (1996) , entry on the " Gibraltar , Catastrophe of " , notes that " there are several theories explaining the event , but the mystery was never fully solved . " However , as Roman Wapiński noted in his biographical entry on Sikorski in the Polish Biographical Dictionary in 1997 , no conclusive evidence of any wrongdoing has been found , and Sikorski 's official cause of death is listed as an accident .

In 2008 Sikorski was exhumed and his remains were examined by Polish scientists , who in 2009 concluded that he died due to injuries consistent with an air crash , and that there was no evidence that Sikorski was murdered , ruling out theories that he was shot or strangled before the incident ; however they did not rule out the possibility of sabotage , which is still being investigated by the Polish Institute of National Remembrance . As of 2012 , the investigation continues .

= = Honours and awards = =

Order of the White Eagle (posthumously in 1943)

Commander 's Cross of the Order of Virtuti Militari (in 1923 ; previously awarded the Silver Cross in 1921)

Grand Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta (previously awarded the Commander 's Cross)

Order of the Cross of Grunwald , I Class - July 2 , 1946 , posthumously by the State National Council

Cross of Valour - four times

Gold Cross of Merit

Grand Officer of the Order of Leopold (Belgium)

Grand Cross of the Order of the White Lion (Czechoslovakia)

Cross of Liberty (Estonia) , Classes I and II (Estonia)

Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour (France)

War Cross - August 1943 , posthumously (Norway)

Grand Cross of the Order of the Crown of Romania , with spades (Romania)

= = Works = =

General Sikorski was also an active writer on the subjects of military tactics and describing his personal war experiences . His works include :

Regulamin musztry Związku Strzeleckiego i elementarna taktyka piechoty (Drill Regulations of the Riflemen 's Association and Basic Infantry Tactics) , 1911 .

Nad Wiszą i Wkrą . Studium do polsko - radzieckiej wojny 1920 roku (At the Vistula and the Wkra Rivers : a Contribution to the Study of the Polish - Soviet War of 1920) , 1923 ; latest edition , Warsaw , 1991 .

O polską politykę państwową . Umowy i deklaracje z okresu pełnienia urzędu prezesa Rady Ministrów 18 XII 1922 - 26 V 1923 (Polish National Policies : Agreements and Declarations from My Tenure as Prime Minister , December 18 , 1922 to May 26 , 1923) , 1923 .

Podstawy organizacji naczelnych władz wojskowych w Polsce (Basic Organization of the Supreme Military Authorities in Poland) , 1923 .

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