Збірник засновано 2004 року. Вихід з друку – щомісячно

Фахове видання
з історичних наук затверджено наказом Міністерства освіти і науки України
№ 1328 від 21 грудня 2015 р.

Свідоцтво про державну реєстрацію друкованого засобу масової інформації: серія КВ № 22632-12532ПР від 24 квітня 2017 року

Друкується за рішенням:
Вченії ради Національного педагогічного університету імені М. П. Драгоманова
(протокол № 7 від 24 січня 2019 р.)

Збірник входить до міжнародних баз
Google Scholar; Index Copernicus (Польща); EBSCO Publishing, Inc. (USA); SIS (Scientific Indexing Services) (USA); InfoBase Index (Індія).

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The collection is founded in 2004. Printed on a monthly basis

Scientific professional publication
on history order of the Ministry of Education and Science
No. 1328 dated 21 December, 2015 (re-registration)

Certificate of printed mass media’s state registration (re-registration): Series KB № 22632-12532IIП from April 17th, 2017

Printed by decision
of National Pedagogical Dragomanov University (protocol № 7 from January, 24 in, 2019)

The collection is a member of international database
Google Scholar; Index Copernicus (Poland); EBSCO Publishing. Inc. (USA); SIS (Scientific Indexing Services) (USA); InfoBase Index (India).

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The activities of the Polish army of the interwar period, in addition to the tasks characteristic of each country’s army, were to develop and maintain continuous cooperation with civilian authorities and the population in the region of deployment. This cooperation mainly concerned the scope of increasing the general state of defense. Actions to train the population or prepare the area for the effects of war were intensively discussed in the main research problem of the work is the role played by the Polish Army in the process of preparing Lwów and its inhabitants in the event of war from autumn 1938 to summer 1939. The article shows the directions of undertaken actions and – if possible – their effects. The primary basis of the work are materials from the archives of Poland, Great Britain and Ukraine as well as studies and the daily press.

Keywords: Polish Army, Lwów, Eastern Małopolska, war, security, defense.

The geopolitical situation that arose in Europe in the fall of 1938 threatened European security. Nazi Germany, not intending to concede in matters relating to the annexation of the Sudetenland (Czechoslovakia), was ready, if not peacefully, then through an armed conflict to receive these territories. The Munich Agreement of September 30, 1938, on the basis of which an agreement was reached, only seemed to save Europe from the start of the war. One can even say that the signing of the agreement eliminated only in time what was inevitable – it was a pan-European war, the sprouts of which fell in different parts of the continent almost throughout the interwar period. However, it should be recognized that by the autumn of 1938 it seemed to politicians of most countries that Europe was not facing another large-scale war. Only thanks to the aforementioned events in Munich, was it possible to understand the aggressive face and intentions of Hitler, and only then many politicians understood the gravity of the situation [35; 42].

It is worth remembering that the political situation at that time was also used by the Polish authorities. Polish authorities decided to use the situation for their own purposes. The existing dispute between Poland and Czechoslovakia concerning the Zaołzie region (now the Lublin province), when the authorities of Prague took advantage of the complicated geopolitical situation in Poland with the requirement to obtain this region, found its solution on the eve of the war. On September 30, 1938, after the announcement of the provisions of the Munich Conference, Poland demanded that the Czechoslovak government correct the Polish–Czechoslovak border at Zaołzie on the basis of ethnic demarcation. After the consent of the Czechoslovak government, Poland received this territory on October 2, 1938 [30, s. 105; 34, s. 35–40; 35, s. 344–345, 371–372, 375–376, 409–410, 425–426, 437–439, 474, 478, 487–490, 496–499; 42, s. 252–253, 256–257]. Polish society fully contributed to the actions of the authorities and the army, which was reflected in a large number of manifestos for the purpose of support – including also, Eastern Małopolska (especially in Lwów, Stanisławów and Tarnopol) [4, s. 1–2; 5, s. 2; 16, s. 6; 17, s. 5–6; 19, s. 1; 20, s. 2]. However, the political success of Poland at that time was only partial. Soon it was Poland that became the object of expansionist German politics.
A new unfavorable situation in which Poland found itself meant that the Polish authorities, both military and public, in the last year of pre-war peace realized that it was necessary to quickly change the internal policy of preparing the state and the population for the consequences of the inevitable future war. For this, a number of activities were initiated – plans were organized to evacuate large cities, air defense was organized for cities and large industrial enterprises, trainings and exercises were conducted in the field of air defense (AD) and gas defense (GD) for the population. Instructions and regulations were issued to regulate the activities of the army, civilian authorities and people in the event of war.

This was especially noticeable in large cities, and therefore in Lwów. The city was an important point on the then map of Poland. Being the third most populous city in Poland (officially almost 319 thousand inhabitants in 1939), Lwów was the most important urban center of all of Eastern Małopolska—a key railway and automobile junction, as well as an important center of industrial trade. It was located: Provincional Office, Command of Corps District No.VI (CCD), Army Inspectorate No., Regional State Railway Administration, Provincional Headquarters of the State Police, Regional Directorate of Posts and Telegraphs, Court of Appeal, District Court, Labor Court, EasternMalopolskaBorder Guard Inspectorate, State Administrations Forest, High Mining Service, TaxChamber, Chamber of Commerce, Chamber of Crafts, Lwów School District. In the city, its representation in the form of consulates had 13 states, which testified to the great role of Lwów as a huge economic center in south-eastern Poland. It was here that every year in September, starting in 1921 and ending in 1939, the International Oriental Fair was held – the most famous economic event in this part of Poland after the Poznań International Fair [33, s. 11–42; 37, s. 94–95; 40].

It should also be remembered that in the event of war, the Eastern Malopolska should have become the territory ensuring the defense of the army. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Polish authorities attached great importance to the proper preparation of the region and the city in the event of a possible armed conflict.

The Czechoslovak crisis, and the imminent threat of war, showed large gaps in the preparation of air defense and gas defense in the city and the whole region. The possible beginning of an armed conflict, of which Poland would become a part, would have found the cities and the population not ready for defense activities. Major deficiencies in this matter were particularly acutely noted by General Władysław Langner—the commander of CCD VI. Back in February 1938, he noted the need to start training with the public in air defense [46]. General guidelines for self-defense in the field of air defense and gas defense were drawn up by the commander of air defense of CCD VI – Colonel Leon Dębski already in September 1937, but they were not properly implemented until the autumn of 1938 [51; 36, s. 180].

The intensification of the cooperation of the military authorities with the territorial administration, as well as with the defense and public organizations began in early September and October 1938. The winter period was mainly aimed at finalizing the work plan for spring. However, this does not mean that field operations have been completely canceled. At the beginning of the 1938/1939 school year, trainings of air and gas defense were conducted among teachers so that they could start implementing an eight-hour course for schoolchildren [47].

The first of the implemented recommendations was to be joining the construction of air defense channels [50]. The arrival of spring led to the beginning of work. The Ministry of Military and Internal Affairs has introduced systematic monitoring of individual activities. On this basis, it is known that lower–level local governments (mainly municipalities) often showed slowness in executing instructions. Residents of small towns for various reasons often declined to join the intended work. The situation was much better in large cities, including Lwów, where the population was more willing to cooperate in this area [45].

During the winter period, the staff of the CCD VI in Lwów also intensified work on the preparation of an updated reference manual for air defense, which was to serve as a training tool. The prepared instructions by Colonel Dębński headquarters were approved on March 28, 1939 by General Langner. It contained 16 points, among which were the rules for warning the air–raid alarm, ways of announcing and canceling the alarm, gas and fire alarm questions, and the sound signal type specification to distinguish the type of alarm and the activity of individual units in the event of a specific alarm [56].

In the first half of 1939, further exercises were started with air defense and gas defenses with the population. Already at the beginning of the year, General Langner established a correspondence with individual governors representing the scope of cooperation and the possibility of assistance from the army in this regard. Thus, on February 13–15, the Lwów Air Defense Center was trained and the simultaneous launch of a whole observation network in the OK VI territory (that is, the Tarnopol and Stanisławów provinces, as well as the eastern part of the Lwów voivodship) [13, s. 2; 14, s. 2; 15, s. 2; 44].

Exact training results are unknown. It is only known that part of the residents of the residential sectors in Lwów did not fulfill the orders of the leadership and reluctantly accepted the functions assigned to it. In connection with the above, the command of the CCD VI offered assistance in the preparation of civil air defense platoons. On May 20, 1939, cadets began training at industrial facilities in the city, and from June 26, training of civilian groups began. In Lwów, a civil center of air defense was created, its work was led by the government which fully coordinated its activities with the military authorities. In August 1939, the creation of a military air defense center was started, next to which the civilian center was to perform a supporting function [25; 28; 49; 48].

Meanwhile, on May 1, 1939, the Ministry of Military Affairs struck out all the voluntary organizations of the Polish Red Cross on mobilization
lists, transferring them to the command of the air defense. This necessitated their inclusion in field planning. In this regard, the air defense authorities of CCDVI adopted 20 rescue and sanitary sections of the Polish Red Cross. This increased the ability to assist victims of potential bomb or gas attacks [27].

The latest security actions in Lwów and its nearby suburbs in the framework of air defense and gas defense were the announcement on August 31, 1939 of guidelines for organizing and conducting reconnaissance and analytical actions within air defense [54].

August 31, 1939 was also put in order an ambulance air defense, which obliged all workers of institutions and drivers of motor vehicles to refrain from using sound signals (sirens). In addition, the city authorities were obliged to extinguish the neon lighting of the streets, and residents to curtain the windows in the houses in the evening [22, s. 8].

In addition to preparing the city and the population in the context of air defense and gas defense, which were carried out through the army, there was also preparation and provision of the proper mobilization course in the event of its announcement. During the period of heightened tension, the military authorities accumulated fuel reserves for automobiles. For example, on January 1, 1939, on the orders of General Langner, the sale of fuel materials at military prices was suspended for officers who have private cars throughout Lwów and the okrug. In addition, the bureau of the Commissariat in Lwów was obliged to provide, with a two–month advance, quarterly demand for fuel and lubricants, in order to make it possible to adjust production at the request of the Polimin refinery in Drohobycz. Thus, the process of saving and collecting fuel began, which was necessary not only for the effective implementation of a number of mobilization measures, but, above all, for waging war [31; 38, s. 316].

In February 1939, organizational activities were initiated related to the approaching completion of the term for studying students of 1918 births and accelerating the training of students for 1919–1921 years of birth. It is ordered, for example, that pupils pass their exams earlier and receive certificates of maturity in Lwów secondary schools. Certificates were to be issued until May 31, 1939 (this also applied to the Cadet Corps No. 1 in Lwów). In the case of public schools, it was not possible to comply with the regulations, but in the Cadet Corps on May 15–25, final exams were held, after which conscription from the District District of Lwów took place immediately after receiving certificates – on May 26 and 27 [52].

CCD VI also received permission to use school buildings throughout the district, although, as noted, in public and state interests, such activities could be carried out only when absolutely necessary [26; 32]. They tried not to apply this situation, but due to the lack of other opportunities, many units of some regiments mobilized on the premises of Lwów schools [36, s. 181].

Knowing the fact that mobilization in the city could be sabotaged by representatives of the German minority, in the spring of 1939, on the recommendation of the Independent Information Department of CCD VI, a detailed description of the representatives of this nationality was made. Particular emphasis was placed on the issues of belonging to minority organizations and assessing the degree of involvement in its work. As a result of the creation of relevant lists, especially active activists were controlled through secret control of correspondence. This, of course, led to acquaintance with the mood of this national minority. For example, it is known that in letters to families living in Germany, these citizens posted information about the attitudes and moods that had developed in Lwów and the region, pointing to the hostility of some Ukrainians towards the Poles [29; 38, s. 317].

Other initiatives have been used to ensure mobilization. On April 30, 1939, on the basis of the conclusions of the conference held in Lwów on April 12, representatives of local authorities with military authorities issued guidelines on the organization of the Civil Security Service in all of Eastern Małopolska. It was recommended to complete organizational issues in this regard by May 15, and to train members of the guard by May 31.

Instructions for the creation of the Civil Security Service provided for the establishment of its branches in each city, and therefore in Lwów. The main tasks of the organization was to control the population and help combat acts of subversion or sabotage. In addition, its members were to ensure peace and, if possible, also improve the implementation of emergency and general mobilization [43].

Another element of the activities that were supposed to prepare the inhabitants of Lwów for the consequences of the war was radio communications. As a result of the coordination of the military and civilian authorities with the leadership of the Lwów radio broadcasting of Polish Radio, starting from August 17, 1939, every Monday and Thursday ten–minute evening programs on air defense principles were conducted [6, s. 2; 7, s. 2; 8, s. 2; 18, s. 5].

Another example of joint actions by the army and civil authorities in preparing Lwów for the consequences of the war is the plan to organize the evacuation of city residents together with the Lwów City Hall in the event of a direct threat to the city. To this end, the Public Committee of the voluntary resettlement of the population of the city of Lwów was established, whose work was carried out in a building that belonged to CCD VI on Wałowa Street 16. The above–mentioned works were joined by the Flight Service of the counties and the communes of Lwów Voivodeship – «Bieszczady», which offered accommodation for the evacuees. Until June 30, 1939, a preliminary action plan was prepared, which provided for the distribution of city residents in the districts of Lwów, Bóbka, Gródek Jagielloński and Żółkiew. It was also taken into account the routes of railway and road communication with the proviso that the state should ensure the free passage of public transport buses. In addition, it was ordered that the territory in which the population will be evacuated will be located within a radius of 10–25 km from the center.
of Lwów, while these regions must simultaneously contain railway and automobile roads within a radius of 5–8 km [53]. As a result of the meeting of Colonel Dębski with the deputies of the listed counties, on July 27 it turned out that Bóbrka and Gródek Jagielloński were already reserved for civilian administration workers from the western territories of Poland. In the case of other districts, no objections were raised, so, the plan was adjusted to take into account only Lwów and Zółkiew counties [37, s. 342–343].

Work related to the preparation of the population and territory for the consequences of the war continued unabated until the end of August 1939. This is confirmed by the memoirs of General Langner and his deputy, General Maksymilian Milan–Kaminski. The first of them confirms a number of tasks performed in the interests of civilian local authorities and residents of Lwów in the field of security, the second emphasizes that even before the Minister of Military Affairs, General Tadeusz Kasprzycki, took office, he ordered that special attention be paid to security issues in CCDVI, especially the city of Lwów [24; 36, s. 178–190; 41, s. 154–162]. All this, of course, happened from August 23, 1939 on the territory of CCD VI during mobilization [39, s. 205–238].

In the last days before the outbreak of war, all kinds of organizations, governments, and individual citizens indicated their willingness to help prepare for defense. Shops in Lwów provided free equipment for defense purposes, and government officials, along with residents and soldiers, dug ditches for shelter in case of air defense. In general, the attitude of the population in most cases was very good. Organized manifestos, similar to those that occurred in early September and October 1938, testified to the solidarity of the whole society around the army and faith in victory. Obviously, this was also due to the strict implementation of military orders through the population and public organizations [1, s. 3; 2, s. 1; 3, s. 7; 9, s. 2; 10, s. 2; 11, s. 4; 12, s. 2; 21, s. 12; 23, s. 8–9]. Under such circumstances, on September 1, the world stirred up the beginning of the war.

Thus, preparations for the war, which took place in Lwów, can be divided into several types. The military authorities focused primarily on preparing the population of Lwów and its district for air defense and gas defense. A series of training sessions and field exercises were conducted to verify the effects of the above actions. In addition, representatives of the army supported civilian power in the preparation of emergency instructions. In collaboration with the Lwów City Magistrate, a detailed plan was prepared for evacuating residents in the event of a direct threat of war. A proper mobilization course has been prepared and ensured – which is important for effective military operations. In addition to these events, a number of small actions were founded, which also influenced the best preparation of the city and its inhabitants to the consequences of the war.

The soldiers of the Polish Army fulfilled their duty to serve the country and its citizens well. Although the dynamics of hostilities in September 1939 meant that many concepts, adopted in 1939, remained «on paper» (such as evacuating the inhabitants of Lwów), the pre-war preparation allowed the public to prepare for a future war. Could more have been done at that time? Perhaps – yes, but it should be remembered that the Second World War was very different from those that were previously. Actions performed by the army should be assessed positively in terms of psychological advantages. Society did not feel abandoned, that grew into a higher morality and a willingness to sacrifice for the common good.

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54. Ibid, Спр.1785. Wskazówki o organizacji rozpoznawczo-analitycznej w obronie przeciwlotniczej z 31 VIII 1939 r.

55. Ibid, Спр.1788. Ogólna instrukcja alarmowania w obronie przeciwlotniczej OK VI z 28 III 1939 r.

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