

# Films of the Anti-Nazi Resistance



*OLLI Spring 2024*  
*Week 2: **Poland***

## Today's Film: *Kanał*

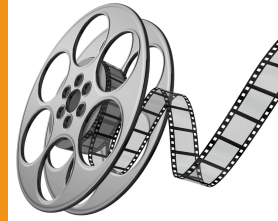


### *Kanał* (Poland, 1957)

- Director: Andrzej Wajda
- Principle Cast
  - Teresa Iżewska
  - Tadeusz Janczar
  - Wieńczysław Gliński
  - Tadeusz Gwiazdowski
  - Stanisław Mikulski
  - Emil Karewicz
  - Maciej Maciejewski



## Today's Film: *Kanał*



Written By: Jerzy Stefan Stawiński (1921-2010)

- Joined Polish partisans in 1940.
- Served as an officer in the Home Army during the 1944 uprising.
- The story is based on his experience surviving in the sewers.

# The Polish Home Army



## Organizing the Resistance

- The organizing body was the Polish Underground State, which was aligned with the British (and later United States).
- The military arm was the Polish Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*). Equipment was initially very scarce.
- The fact that Poland was split into three districts (one was occupied by Germany, one by the Soviet Union, and one was incorporated directly into the German Reich) made organizing difficult.



# The Polish Home Army



## Organizing the Resistance

- The German invasion of the Soviet Union in June of 1941 simplified the organizational problem, as all of the former territory of Poland was now under German occupation and the Soviet Union became an ally (if an uncomfortable one).
- It also made the occupation more brutal.

# The Occupation



- The German occupation of the West was (comparatively) mild. All cultural and educational institutions resumed operations and in many ways life went on as before (provided you were not Jewish, Communist, or gay).
- In the East, all cultural institutions and institutions of higher education were closed and all aspects of Polish culture were suppressed.
- The long-term goal was eradication of Polish (and all Slavic) culture, and reduction of the eastern populations to the status of serfs or slaves.



## Rivals in Resistance



- The Home Army eventually included about 600,000 active members, most of them not armed fighters. Over 40% of all intelligence gathered in the east for British Intelligence was from the Polish Underground State organization.
- The Soviet-back People's Army was considerably smaller (sources vary, but somewhere between 30,000 was their likely peak combat strength), but due to Soviet support they were much better equipped than the Home Army.

# The Occupation



## The Expulsion Order of 1942

- November 12, 1942: Himmler issues order expelling Poles from the countryside of Zamość and Lublin. Within three months 100,000 Poles were expelled, some to forced labor camps, others to Auschwitz and who perished in the gas chambers.
- Tens of thousands of German settlers were moved in to become farmers in their place, a first step in completely replacing the Slavic population with Germans.
- The Home Army had virtually no arms at this point and an open clash with the German occupation forces would have been disastrous, and accomplished nothing.



# The Occupation



## The Response: The Zamość Uprising

- Instead of attacking the German occupying armed forces, the Home Army began attacking the German communication infrastructures, as well as farm families who had been moved in as settlers. Livestock were slaughtered, buildings burned, and some settlers were killed.
- Surprised at the reaction, the Germans wavered and then in February of 1943 (three months after they began) the expulsions were halted.

# The 1944 Warsaw Rising



- The Home Army rose because it believed the German Army was beaten. The Government in Exile ordered a rising in August to forestall a possible Communist takeover.
- The Home Army had about 30,000 poorly-armed fighters in the city and another 10,000 in the near vicinity. The Germans threw 40,000 better trained and equipped troops against them with air support.



# The 1944 Warsaw Rising



- When resistance crumbled, the surviving Home Army fighters were treated as prisoners of war, but the civilian population was massacred.
- The Home Army suffered 10,000 confirmed dead and 5,000 missing (almost certainly dead). 7,000 were wounded but survived to surrender. A total of 11,668 Home Army soldiers entered captivity.
- German losses were 10,000 killed, 7,000 missing, 9,000 wounded.

# The 1944 Warsaw Rising



- Warsaw was almost completely destroyed in the block-by-block fighting.
- Total civilian deaths during the uprising were between 150,000 and 200,000. An additional 90,000 civilians were sent to labor camps, and 60,000 were sent to death camps and murdered.
- The memory of the civilian cost remained a bitter legacy of the uprising.