

# Polish military involvement in the French Army of the Napoleonic period and its consequence for the modern Poland

Tadeusz M. Klupczyński

By the time the last king of the Jagiellonian dynasty died in 1572, Poland had created a unique and democratic system of governing the country that involved the election of the king with the strong participation of the Parliament in making all political decisions. The Poles were so proud of having created this system without civil war that they forgot to improve on it during the following 200 years, with the result that the Polish-elected monarchical system collapsed at the time when the surrounding countries were benefiting from the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment. Poland's neighbours – Austria, Prussia and the strong and fast developing Russia – partitioned the country in 1772, 1793 and again in 1795, causing it to disappear from the maps of Europe.

As a result of these 'disappearances' many patriotic and military-minded Poles emigrated rather than submit and were to be found in different countries fighting 'for your freedom and ours', believing that they would be able to encourage others to help resurrect the Polish state. Two such patriots were Tadeusz Kościuszko and Kazimierz Pułaski who joined the American rebels fighting for the freedom of the USA from the British Crown: Pułaski died at the Battle of Savannah (1779), but Kościuszko, an excellent engineer who became an American general, survived and, when the Great French Revolution gave birth to new hope for Poles, returned to Poland and led the 1794 uprising. The uprising failed, but by containing the Russian army and causing

the Prussians to withdraw from the French front and to focus on Poland, they prevented them from participating in the First Coalition against the French (1793-1797) and thus probably saved the French Revolution itself.

After the third partition of Poland in 1795, which followed the failure of Kościuszko's uprising, a great number of Polish soldiers and officers, including General Jan Henryk Dąbrowski, left Poland ready to enlist in any army that was fighting against those that had partitioned Poland in the belief that this would provide a chance to resurrect their homeland. The French, in particular, were an obvious choice. So, marching with Napoleon and sharing with him the difficulties of all the campaigns from Italy, Egypt, Spain, and Russia until Elba and Waterloo, the Poles proved themselves faithful allies, providing many examples of loyalty and sacrifice.

The Polish units serving with the French army in Italy were created by an agreement between the Republic of Lombardy and General Dąbrowski on 5 January 1797<sup>1</sup> and ratified by the Commander-in-Chief of the French Army of Italy, General Napoleon Bonaparte, in Verona on 27 January 1797<sup>2</sup>. However, according to the constitution of the French Republic, the foreign corps could not serve under the French colours. This not

---

<sup>1</sup> Tadeusz Korzon, *Dzieje wojen i wojskowości w Polsce*, Vol. III, Kraków 1912, reprint, 318.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Bielecki, *Encyklopedia wojen napoleońskich*, Warszawa 2001, 360.

withstanding, within four months three battalions of volunteers had been established before the armistice of Leoben (18 April 1797) brought action against Austria to an end.

The growth of the Polish forces in Italy<sup>3</sup> continued and, by the following year, there were two three-battalion legions (regiments) and three companies of foot artillery: a total of 7,900 soldiers. Each battalion consisted of one company of grenadiers, one company of sharpshooters (light infantry) and eight companies of fusiliers. Each company consisted of 4 officers, 14 NCOs, 2 drummers and 123 privates, while an artillery company had 101 soldiers of all ranks. Later, in 1799, a regiment of Polish Cavalry was established but the shortage of horses restricted its strength to 350 soldiers of all ranks.

After the 1797 Treaty of Campo Formio between France and Austria, the Polish Legions entered the service of the new Cisalpine Republic and in May 1798<sup>4</sup> they captured and invested Rome. They then took part in the sieges and battles of Agnani, Alatri, Veroli, Ferentino, Frosinione, Piperno and Terracina, all with considerable loss of life. When the Neapolitan army attacked Rome, the Franco-Polish counter-offensive pushed them back and the Polish Legions, commanded by General Kniaziewicz, won the battle of Civita Castellana (4 December 1798)<sup>5</sup> and together with the French army entered the Kingdom of Naples. General Championnet, the commander of French units in Naples, valued the Polish troops so highly that he honoured the Polish

commander by sending him to Paris with all the Neapolitan colours captured during the campaign.<sup>6</sup>

In the spring of 1799, however, Russian-Austrian Forces formed the Second Coalition and invaded Northern Italy. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Polish Legion under General Franciszek Rymkiewicz engaged them and was more or less destroyed at the battles of Verona (26 March) and Magnano (5 April) with the loss of 1,000 lives. The remnants of the legion took refuge in Mantua, defending the fortress until its capitulation on 30 July 1799. The surrender document that General Latour-Foissac, the French commander of the fortress, was forced to sign treated the Poles not as French soldiers but as Austrian subjects and deserters and they were then punished with the utmost rigour under Austrian Law.<sup>7</sup>

In the mean time, the 1<sup>st</sup> Polish Legion, commanded by General Dąbrowski, took part in the bloody battles at Trebbia (17-19 June 1799)<sup>8</sup>, Genoa (July 1799) and Novi (15 August 1799) where 37,252 French and Polish soldiers fought against 68,500 soldiers commanded by the Russian general, Suvorov<sup>9</sup>. Amongst the Poles, some 1500 died or were captured leaving the Legion with only 700 soldiers.<sup>10</sup> After these unpleasant reverses, the French seemed to understand how important Polish forces could be when fighting against Russia or Austria, and accepted the organization of another two new legions into French service: the Legion of

---

<sup>3</sup> Tadeusz Korzon, *Dzieje wojen i wojskowości w Polsce*, Vol. III, Kraków 1912, reprint, 320.

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit. 322.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem.

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit. 323.

<sup>8</sup> Jan Pachoński, *Generał Jan Henryk Dąbrowski 1755-1818*, Warszawa 1987, 224-229.

<sup>9</sup> Op. cit. 232.

<sup>10</sup> Tadeusz Korzon, *Dzieje wojen i wojskowości w Polsce*, Vol. III, Kraków 1912, reprint, 323.

the Danube (8 September 1799)<sup>11</sup>, which took part in the battles of Hochstädt (19 June), Offenbach (12 July) and Hohenlinden (3 December 1800)<sup>12</sup>, and the Legion of Italy (13 March 1800).

The Treaty of Lunéville between the French and the defeated Austrians resulted in two Polish legions being disbanded and many soldiers of different ranks enlisted directly in French regiments, while 6,000 legionnaires formed the French 113<sup>th</sup> half-brigade and were sent to Saint-Domingue in May 1802. Haiti, as it is now called, became one of the darkest episodes in the history of the Polish forces in Napoleonic times: fighting for the independence of their own country, they were engaged in trying to smother the bid for freedom of Saint-Domingue's African and Creole people. By the end of 1803, the French had been defeated and fewer than 400 Polish soldiers were amongst those who returned to Europe. Those who had not been sent to Saint-Domingue stayed in Italy and, following the decree of Saint-Cloud, became, from 4 August 1806, the Guard of Joseph Bonaparte, the King of Naples.

During the European campaign of 1805 only two Polish formations remained outside Italy: the Regiment of Polish Infantry and Aleksander Roźniecki's Ulan Regiment. Both of them, whilst in French service, had served in Italy and, during the war against the Third Coalition, they fought against Austria on the Italian Front where the Polish Infantry played an important role at the battle of Castelfranco on 23 November 1805, resulting in the defeat of Prince Rohan's Austrian Corp.

---

<sup>11</sup> Maryan Kukiel, *Dzieje oręża polskiego w epoce napoleońskiej*, Poznań 1912, reprint, 76.

<sup>12</sup> Tadeusz Korzon, *Dzieje wojen i wojskowości w Polsce*, Vol. III, Kraków 1912, reprint, 328.

There were no separate Polish units at the 1805 Battle of Austerlitz but many individual Poles served in French regiments while more than 50 officers served on the General Staff. Many, being fluent in Russian and German, served in the position of interpreter and their names can be found in the documents held in the Military Archive in Vincennes (box C 2-17).<sup>13</sup> At the Headquarters of the Grand Army of France, Colonel Wincenty Aksamitowski (ex-commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> half-brigade of the Polish Legions and a future general of the Polish Army in the Duchy of Warsaw), and Captain Hipolit Falkowski (a future colonel and aide-de-camp to Napoleon) served directly under Marshal Berthier. A few Polish officers commanded French battalions: Kazimierz Małachowski (a future commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment of the Duchy of Warsaw Infantry and later a general), Captain Ignacy Bolesta (a future commander of the 16<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the Duchy of Warsaw Infantry) and Stanowski and Junges, two officers who stayed in French service.<sup>14</sup>

Also at the Headquarters (*à la suite*) were General Józef Zajączek, Commander-Adjutant Ludwik Dembowski (a future general in French service), Lieutenant Jakub Filip Kierzkowski, Second Lieutenant Stanowski and Second Lieutenant Orłowski, while Captain Darewski and Lieutenant Pornorowski served as interpreters on the Staff of Bernadotte's 1<sup>st</sup> Corps.<sup>15</sup>

Marshal Davout had two officers on his Staff of 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps: Captain Michał Zadra (who stayed with Davout until the end of

---

<sup>13</sup> Robert Bielecki, *Austerlitz 1805*, Warszawa 1993, 206.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>15</sup> Op. cit. 207.

the Napoleonic Wars and returned to Poland in 1815) and Captain Jasiński. There were two Poles on Marshal Soult's Staff: Second Lieutenants Bilewicz and Wilczyński, although the latter was not at Austerlitz. Despite the fact that Marshal Lannes had no Poles on his Staff, Captain Milkiewicz and Captain Paszkowski served as Staff Officers for Marshal Ney and Second Lieutenant Wójcikiewicz served on the Staff of the 1<sup>st</sup> Heavy Cavalry Division, Lieutenant Różycki on the Staff of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Heavy Cavalry Division, and Lieutenant Jamrzyński on the Staff of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dragoons Division.<sup>16</sup>

Many Poles of different ranks served in French line regiments and even in the Guards, although today it is difficult to evaluate their numbers accurately. There were also many military prisoners being forced to serve in the Austrian Army who deserted when they could to enlist in French regiments. Among the officers who served in the best known of the later campaigns were Jan Paweł Jerzmianowski (a future officer of the light cavalry, the *Cheveau-légers* of the Guard fighting in Spain, Somosierra 1808), Captain Konstanty Przebendowski (a future commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment of the Duchy of Warsaw Mounted Rifles and a future general) and Lieutenant Franciszek Żymirski (a future general).<sup>17</sup>

To be fair, it must be said that many more Poles served in the Austrian and Russian Armies than served France, although many of them were recruited from the Polish territories taken under the Partition Agreements and had no choice between serving in the Austrian or Russian armies. The Russian Draft Board made up the vacancies in its regiments from the

territories of Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine, all formerly part of Poland, while the three Russian regiments that fought at Austerlitz consisted almost entirely of Poles. Not many Polish officers in the Russian Army were noticed, but those who served hoped that their active participation on behalf of the Tsar would give him a reason for rebuilding an independent Poland. Unfortunately, none of them understood that the Tsar did not want a conflict with Austria or Prussia – the countries that had partitioned Poland. At the battle of Austerlitz, Prince Adam Czartoryski, a former Polish Foreign Minister, accompanied Tsar Alexander as a civilian adviser and General-Lieutenant Przybyszewski, commander of the Russian Third Column. There were also some Polish noblemen, believing in the good will of the Tsar, who served in different Russian regiments, among them Colonel Sulima, who fell into captivity during the battle, and General Bartłomiej Giżycki (a future nobleman marshal of Province).<sup>18</sup>

During the first and third partition of Poland, the Austrian Army recruited from parts of Poland, mainly Galicja (the southern part of Poland between Kraków and Lwów) and one such Austrian battalion consisting of Poles fought in Kolowrath's 4<sup>th</sup> column.<sup>19</sup> To maintain discipline, Polish recruits were sent to many different regiments, often serving with other non-Austrian nationalities. The number of Poles in the Austrian army had to be very large if account is taken of the massive scale of desertion that appears to have taken place.

For Poles serving in opposing armies, the battle of Austerlitz was a conflict of political convenience. All of them, even

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem.

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>19</sup> Op. cit. 208.

those serving of their own free will in the Russian or Austrian Armies, believed that sacrifice would bring independence and the possibility of rebuilding their country. They were real patriots searching for the chance of repairing previous mistakes. For many of them Austerlitz was a fratricidal battle which could be another step towards the resurrection of Poland: they fought in the hope that war would come to their country and change the status quo.

Undoubtedly the victory at Austerlitz brought fundamental benefits to Napoleon himself, for example:

1. It strengthened Napoleon's position, both on the international and national scene. It modified relationships in central Europe and helped him to solve some of the national problems connected to internal opposition. Napoleon had proved that he was the right person in the right place.
2. The campaign of 1805 was the first one led by the Grand Army. Victory at Austerlitz overcame the divisions within the army. Before the 1805 campaign the army was divided into two groups: the first was made up of old comrades of Bonaparte who had fought with him in Egypt and Italy, and the second consisted of soldiers of the old Army of the Rhine who were loyal to General Moreau. Moreau had been arrested in 1804 and sentenced to two years in prison, but it did not mean that Moreau's adherents accepted Bonaparte. After Austerlitz, the Grand Army became one amalgamated unit.
3. It helped to broaden the sphere of French business influence, supporting trade and industry in new markets.

4. The social position of the army had risen. On their return to France, the regiments of the Guards and Cavalry were warmly welcomed and treated as heroes, suggesting that soldiers, from private to officer, were considered as belonging to the social elite.
5. The Austerlitz victory, in Napoleon's view, should have established a long-lasting peace, based on the idea that an excellent French army, led by a genius commander, was the strongest power in Europe.

The 1805 campaign moved the theatre of war into Central and Eastern Europe and used new recruits from Poland in higher numbers than it had before, thus giving a greater prominence to the Polish problem.

The Treaty of Preszburg (Bratislava) signed on 26 December 1805 finished the war against the Third Coalition. It annulled the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation over which the Austrian emperor ruled and Austria lost its Southern European territories while 14 German principalities created the Rhine Union on 12 July 1806. The treaty brought peace but not the end of war.

Prussia was not engaged in the conflict of 1805, but maintained a neutral policy as it waited for the results and declared friendship for both sides hoping to reap the greatest benefits for itself. For example, Napoleon promised Prussia the Duchy of Hanover but if he had lost Hardenberg, Frederic Wilhelm's minister had in his pocket a declaration of war against France.

The development of Napoleon's anti-British Continental System, the French blockade of seaports against British products and, above all, English financial

support gave rise to a Fourth Coalition against France consisting of Great Britain, Russia, Sweden and Prussia. The objective of this coalition was to stop Napoleon's march north and to save the Baltic ports for British trade.

The Baltic played an important role for the entire British economy, especially its heavy industry and it is worth noting that 4,000 British merchants lived in St Petersburg, providing a dynamic growth of a British trade in raw materials and timber for shipyards, and selling ready-made products from both light and heavy industry.

The Prussian army at this time did not really participate in the war against Napoleon despite having what, since the time of Frederic the Great, was thought to be the most invincible army in the world. The Prussian press propaganda did not show the real result of the battle of Austerlitz and thus encouraged a quarrelsome army. In the main squares of Berlin, Prussian officers were sharpening their swords, shouting that one battle would be enough to knock out the 'Corsican savage's' teeth. '*Que fiz, tanto quiz*' as ancient Romans said, 'It was done what was said'. One day would be enough to beat a proud and boastful army, but they had not faced Napoleon. The two battles of Jena and Auerstädt that took place on 14 October 1806 ended with the Prussian army total defeated, changing it into a group of deserters. It was true that, 50 years before, Frederic the Great's Prussian Army was the best in Europe, but not any more.

At the time of the 1806 campaign, the Prussian regiments had not been modernized for many years and were no match for the modern French army. In Prussia itself the panic was so great that

Queen Luisa and King Frederic Wilhelm III escaped to Königsberg (Kaliningrad) leaving their subjects behind and the Prussian regiments gave up one by one. Even strong fortresses like Stettin (Szczecin) surrendered without a single shot. The French general, Lasalle, commanding the light brigade of mounted troops with only 700 cavalymen (5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> regiments of Hussars) arrived at Stettin on 30 October 1806 to find the town and fortress defended by 5,500 Prussian soldiers and a great number of canons. Lasalle held a parley with the Prussian commander and told him that his brigade was only one part of the Grand Army and, after a few hours of negotiations, the French took the fortress without any loss life.<sup>20</sup> Prussia had collapsed!

Napoleon, in the mean time, was preparing his forces for a triumphal arrival in the capital of Prussia. On 26 October 1806 a meeting took place in Charlottenburg<sup>21</sup> between Napoleon and General Dąbrowski at which they talked about recreating the Polish army. The next day Napoleon, accompanied by his marshals and General Dąbrowski, entered Berlin. On 3 November, Dąbrowski and Józef Wybicki met Napoleon again and, after receiving their official orders, they went to Poznań.<sup>22</sup> At this time Napoleon did not give any clear declaration concerning rebuilding Poland, but the Poles understood that its independence was in their hands. Napoleon, in his letter addressed to the Deputies of Poznań Province and dated 19 November 1806, said that '...France never accepted the partition of Poland (...) and (...) independence depends on the Poles

---

<sup>20</sup> Marcel Dupont, *Generał Lasalle*, Kraków 1993, reprint, 119-126.

<sup>21</sup> Jan Pachonński, *Generał Jan Henryk Dąbrowski 1755-1818*, Warszawa 1987, 336.

<sup>22</sup> Op. cit. 338.

themselves'.<sup>23</sup> Napoleon's letter arrived in Poznań where work on building up the Polish administration, the civil service and the military organization was strongly advanced. The Emperor's declaration obviously encouraged the Poles and showed that efforts would bring freedom.

The Polish decree of 16 November 1806 provided for the creation of a Polish army based on three elements:

1. recruiting 20,828 soldiers as the basis of the infantry and line cavalry, initially from three departments (Poznań, Kalisz and Warszawa);
2. enlisting Prussian deserters of Polish origin;
3. mobilizing the Polish Nobleman Volunteer Mounted Corps.<sup>24</sup>

In November 1806, the French Army entered Poland but the fall of Prussia did not mean that all the Prussian troops had lost their will to fight. After the first panic and shock, survivors of the routed army began to concentrate in the Pomerania region (the northern part of Poland between Szczecin and Gdańsk). The southern Baltic coast had two unconquered fortresses: Kolberg (Kołobrzeg) and Danzig (Gdańsk). There the rest of the defeated Prussian regiments organized themselves into two volunteer corps (*freikorps*) under the command of Major Reinhold von Krockow and Lieutenant Ferdinand Shill and these two corps, using partisan methods of fighting, started a real campaign. At the beginning

of February 1807, Shill had 1,467 infantrymen, 500 cavalrymen and 11 field canons while Krockow had a battalion of 1,091 sharp shooters and 2 three-pounders.<sup>25</sup> The Polish Nobleman Volunteer Mounted Corps, commanded by General Jan Łubieński, undertook operations against the Prussians until 4 March 1807 when Marshal Lefebvre, commander of the French X Corps, incorporated the Poles into his line cavalry.<sup>26</sup>

The ports and fortresses in Kolberg and Danzig played an important role in the war of 1807 as they were supported by sea from Russia and England and could fight for a long time, creating a real threat to the French.<sup>27</sup> The siege of Danzig lasted until 29 May 1807 when Field Marshal Kalkreuth, seeing the hopeless situation of being deprived of food and ammunition, took the decision to surrender the fortress and Marshal Lefebvre, as a prize, was given the title 'Prince of Danzig'.<sup>28</sup> Kolberg did not surrender until 3 July 1807, seven days after the armistice between Napoleon and King Frederic Wilhelm III had been signed.<sup>29</sup> The rest of Poland, as far as Vistula River, was free of fighting in 1806. French regiments with Marshal Murat arrived at Warsaw on 28 November 1806, a day after it was liberated by General

---

<sup>23</sup> *Correspondenz Napoleons I, Dritter Band*, Bildburghausen 1870, 66. 'Antwort des Kaisers an die Deputierten der Woiwidschaft Posen', letter no. 888, dated 19 November 1806, Berlin.

<sup>24</sup> Tadeusz Klupczyński, *Działania kawalerii polskiej na Pomorzu Zachodnim w latach 1806-1807*, Słupsk 1987, Praca magisterska WSP Słupsk, 12.

---

<sup>25</sup> Op. cit. 15.

<sup>26</sup> Tadeusz Klupczyński, *Działania kawalerii pospolitego ruszenia województwa rawskiego generała Jana Łubieńskiego w Kampanii Pomorskiej 1807 roku*, Rocznik Słupski 1988-1989, Słupsk 1991, 216.

<sup>27</sup> Tadeusz Klupczyński, 'The Battle of Gdańsk (Danzig) Then and Now 1807-2002', *Member's Bulletin, Napoleonic Society of America*, No. 73, Spring 2003, 8-10.

<sup>28</sup> Tadeusz Klupczyński, 'The Battle of Gdańsk (Danzig) Then and Now 1807-2002', *Member's Bulletin, Napoleonic Society of America*, No. 73, Spring 2003, 10.

<sup>29</sup> Hieronim Kroczyński, *Polacy w walce o Kołobrzeg 1807*, Warszawa 1974, 108.

Milhaud's mounted rifles. Napoleon himself entered Poznań on 27 November and Warsaw on 19 December 1806, where he stayed until 29 January 1807.<sup>30</sup> A new Polish administration and the business of raising an army did not stop the fighting and the action moved north and east of the Vistula River.

In excess of 70 skirmishes and battles between the Poles and the Prussian and Russian units took place in the first half of 1807 but Napoleon's activities in the central and north-eastern parts of Poland are better researched and documented. It is true that the main fighting, absorbing the highest number of troops, took place in north-eastern Poland and in almost all of them the French regiments were accompanied by Polish troops. It is worth noting that Marshal Blücher ordered any Polish soldier who had served in the Prussian army and had changed sides to be shot as a deserter, and it is thought that that is why many Poles, especially in the Nobleman Volunteer Mounted Corps, refused to take off their Prussian uniforms, and merely replaced the Prussian eagle on their hats with the Polish one, thus eliminating all doubts and to show the Prussians who they were fighting.<sup>31</sup>

The first Polish campaign of 1806-1807 was very difficult for the French as the severe climate and the frost and snow of a Polish winter made military operations more than usually exhausting. After some success and gruelling skirmishing, two major battles: Press Eylau (7-8 February 1807) and Friedland (14 June 1807) finally resulted in the Treaties of Tilsit. Two weeks of hard talks begun on 25 June

1807<sup>32</sup> in a tent erected on an island in the middle of the Niemen River resulted in an agreement which was signed on 8 July 1807. Two official documents (there was a third, a secret one between Russia and France) said that two principalities, Poznań and Warszawa, would create a Polish independent state named the Duchy of Warsaw (sometimes incorrectly called the Grand Duchy of Warsaw), with Frederick Augustus of Saxony as ruler.<sup>33</sup> With 104,000 km<sup>2</sup> and 2.6 million inhabitants, it was seven times smaller than before partitions when Poland had 734,000 km<sup>2</sup> and, given the Polish contribution to the French war effort and the sacrifice of Polish soldiers on all fronts, it was not much, but the Duchy of Warsaw existed for as long as Napoleon was Emperor.

In 1815, the Congress of Vienna annulled the Polish independence, partitioned the country again and offered it to Russia and Prussia; the Poles had to wait almost 100 years for their independence which finally came at the end of the First World War. It is still an open and hotly debated question: if Napoleon could have given the Poles more, how would the Napoleonic wars have finished? But the truth is that Napoleon was Emperor of France and that country was his priority; however, thanks to the victory at Austerlitz and the subsequent French campaigns in Eastern Europe, the war came to Polish territory and Polish matters were taken into account in the Treaties of Tilsit.

Napoleon, despite giving Poles so little as their reward, did give them a sense of

---

<sup>30</sup> Robert Bielecki, *Encyklopedia wojen napoleońskich*, Warszawa 2001, 577.

<sup>31</sup> Gabriel Zych, *Rok 1807*, Warszawa 1957, 162.

---

<sup>32</sup> Adolphe Thiers, *Historia Konsulatu i Cesarstwa*, Warszawa 1850, Vol. IV, 235.

<sup>33</sup> Op. cit. 252.

freedom and is considered in Poland as a mythical saviour of the nation. The myth has helped generations to survive and Poland is the only country which mentions Napoleon in its national anthem.

'We'll cross Vistula and Warta  
Rivers, we'll become Poles,  
Bonaparte has shown us the way,  
how to win.'

Polish service in the French cause during the Napoleonic wars created a great pantheon of national heroes whose portraits decorated the walls of many patriotic houses, and it was common for many manor houses and cottages to have a portrait of Bonaparte or a painting recalling the glory of the Napoleonic period hanging above an ancestor's two crossed swords over the fireplace. Memories of the past and family stories told during long winter evenings encouraged succeeding generations to revere Napoleon and to glorify his time. For example, Prince Józef Poniatowski, the only foreigner who became a French marshal, and his heroic death during the Battle of the Nations (18 October 1813) became symbols of sacrifice and duty to the end. Polish generals in Napoleonic service, officers and even simple soldiers became examples for teachers to use when educating children in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and those born at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century grew up with the myth of bygone glory and were encouraged to rebuild Poland in 1918.

A French historian at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century said that 'Poland is more Napoleonic than France itself'. Maybe it is true! But if history had not had Napoleon with his victory at Austerlitz, the Poles would not have had their legend and tradition, nor would they have had their

Duchy of Warsaw as a continuum of a partitioned country and in consequence no national uprisings in 1830-31, 1848 and 1863-1864. Perhaps without those events nobody would have rebuilt Poland, and Polish identity would have disappeared in the dark times of history.