

## The Polish Badge of Honor for Wounds and Injuries

Lukasz Gaszewski, OMSA No. 6681

Wounds and injuries incurred in battle have always been regarded as a great personal sacrifice to the nation. In most cases, however, the sole act of being wounded or injured does not justify recognition by the award of a decoration for gallantry. For this reason, many nations have instituted a specific “wound” decoration. These vary in form from the well-known U.S. Purple Heart to small, red enamel crosses that were attached to the ribbons of Belgian decorations.

The Polish Badge of Honor for Wounds and Injuries (Badge of Honor) was instituted at the peak of the 1918-1921 Polish-Soviet War by a decree of the Council of State Defense dated 14 July 1920. The Badge of Honor was the second award instituted by an independent Poland and the first one without an earlier tradition.<sup>1</sup>

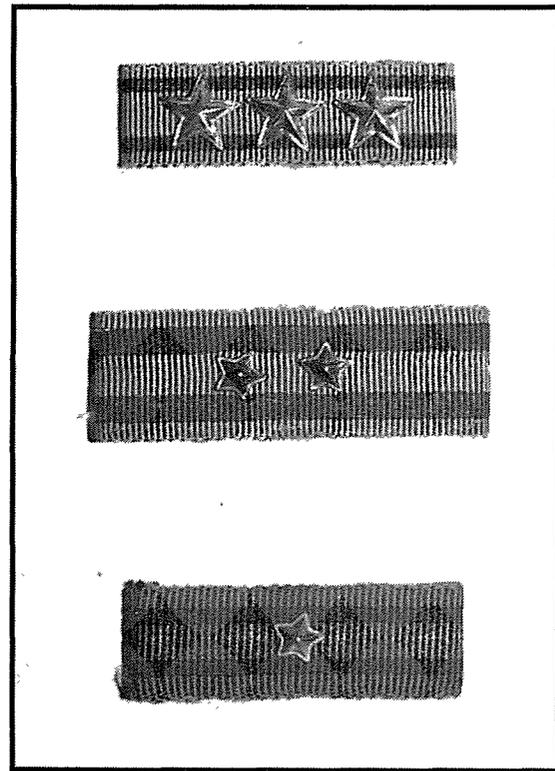
The Badge of Honor is a light blue ribbon bar with a narrow, black horizontal stripe near the top and bottom of the bar. The color pattern of the bar is intended to reflect the color pattern of the Order of *Virtuti Militari*. Each battle that resulted in a wound or injury was indicated by a small, five-pointed silver star attached to the bar in a row. Regardless of the number of wounds and/or injuries incurred, only one star was authorized for each battle. Criteria, dimensions of the badge, and the method worn can be divided into two periods, pre-World War II and World War II and beyond.

### Pre-World War II

The Badge of Honor was initially awarded to officer and enlisted personnel of the Polish Armed Forces who suffered a wound or injury after 1 November 1918 that required surgical intervention. Eligibility was extended to personnel wounded or injured prior to 1 November 1918 while serving in a specifically designated unit or in any of the following formations:

1st, 2nd, or 3rd Brigade of the Polish Legions

<sup>1</sup> The Order of *Virtuti Militari* was the first award established by an independent Poland. The Cross of Valor was instituted one month after the Badge of Honor. By 1921, the list of awards was expanded to include two orders for civil merit, the Order of the White Eagle and the Order of *Polonia Restituta*.



*Polish Badge of Honor for Wounds and Injuries*

1st, 2nd, or 3rd Polish Army Corps in Russia  
The Polish Army in France (the “Blue” Army)

The dimensions of the pre-World War II badge varied considerably. The height ranged from 12mm to 15mm, and early badges are visibly taller than later badges. Depending upon the number of stars that were attached to the badge, the length ranged from about 38mm to 46mm. The regulations initially stipulated that no more than three stars could be displayed on a single badge. The fourth through sixth star was to be placed on a second badge worn immediately under the first badge. Additional badges were authorized if necessary. Because of manufacturing differences, the width of the black stripes also varied from badge to badge.

The Badge of Honor was sewn on the left side of the tunic about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch above the full-size or miniature awards or a group of ribbon bars.



*General Wladyslaw Anders  
Note the lengthened Badge of Honor for Wounds  
and Injuries that is the top row of General Anders'  
ribbon group*

### World War II and Beyond

During World War II, criteria for the Badge of Honor was expanded to include military personnel who were wounded or injured in the campaigns against Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union or while serving in the Polish Armed Forces in campaigns in the West, Russia, Near East, or Italy. Also eligible were those who were wounded or injured in military actions organized by the Polish resistance and military personnel who were wounded or injured during the 1944 Warsaw uprising.

The war also brought a change in the manner of wearing the badge for members of the Polish Armed Forces in the West. When worn with other ribbon bars, the badge was no longer placed above the bars with a space between but instead became the upper row in a ribbon bar group. Subsequent badges were accommodated by merely lengthening the badge into a single long ribbon bar.

After the war, an unofficial miniature Badge of Honor lapel pin in enamel appeared. It was made in England and was worn on civilian clothing above the miniatures of other awards. The dimensions of the basic badge remained the same until the period of the People's Republic when the height was reduced to 8mm.

The badge is frequently found on the tunics of veterans who served in both the western and eastern fronts. The stars of western front veterans were made of either an oxidized gray metal or a silvered plastic. Stars worn by combatants of the "People's" Army were usually made of woven silver thread.

The Badge of Honor is still a current Polish decoration. From private to general, the badge was worn with pride by all recipients. General Leon Berbecki, one of the commanders of the Polish Legions and later an Army Inspector, wore a lengthened badge with five stars. A lengthened badge with six stars was earned by Lieutenant General Zygmunt Bohusz-Szyszko, who was the commander of the Independent Brigade of the Carpathian Rifles, the hero of the Battle of Narvik, Norway, in 1940, and later the commander of the 5th "Kresowa" Infantry Division and deputy commander of the 2nd Polish Army Corps. Finally, General Wladyslaw Anders, the commander of the 2nd Polish Army Corps and one of the best known of the Polish World War II generals, wore a lengthened badge with no less than eight stars for wounds sustained during the Polish-Soviet War and the Polish-Soviet campaign of 1939.



### In the News

#### Hillary Clinton Receives Prestigious DoD Award

On 5 January 2001, departing First Lady and the new U.S. Senator for New York, Hillary Rodham Clinton, was awarded the Secretary of Defense Medal for Outstanding Public Service by Secretary William S. Cohen during a ceremonial farewell at Fort Myer, Virginia, for both President and Mrs. Clinton. The Department of Defense (DoD) presently has two awards that recognize public service by a private citizen, the medal to Mrs. Clinton and the higher ranking DoD Medal for Distinguished Public Service.

*Submitted by Mike Harrison, OMSA No. 6064*

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