

General Stanislaw Maczek

1892-1994

Many of us in the Club will have noticed the recent articles in the press announcing the installation of a memorial in the City Chambers quadrangle to this famous Polish General. What most club members don't know is that he was manager of the club between 1957 and 1959, just before Hadyn Davies. Among those who recollected him are Bill Shaw and Michael Campbell.

The Press Cuttings and photos shown below refer to the creation and installation of the memorial, some information about his military and Edinburgh life, also WWII images of him with Montgomery and Eisenhower, along with his grave in Breda.

Edinburgh statue will honour Polish war hero General Stanislaw Maczek



Edinburgh statue will honour Polish war hero General Stanislaw Maczek waving on his way to the statue.

Polish general takes his seat in history outside City Chambers



General Maczek with a memorial in the City Chambers quadrangle.

General Maczek's 'Baba' watch over Edinburgh



A photograph of the proposed memorial to General Stanislaw Maczek who commanded the 1st Polish Armoured Division.



General Maczek sitting on a bench in Edinburgh.

Maczek had a long military career, including during WWI and the inter war years. He was heavily involved in the unsuccessful defence of Poland against the invading German army. The Polish army was reformed in France in 1940, and his units were eventually forced out of France by the German advance, and the Polish army reformed in UK locations including Scotland, where they were initially assigned to the defence of Scotland's eastern coastline.

Towards the end of July 1944, Maczek led the Polish 1st Armoured Division when it was transferred to Normandy, where it was to prove its worth during the 1944 invasion. The division twice suffered attacks of 'friendly fire' from U.S. Army Air Force aircraft, yet achieved brilliant victories against the Wehrmacht several battles. Maczek's Division continued to spearhead the Allied drive across the battlefields of northern France, Belgium, the Netherlands and finally Germany, where it liberated several Belgian cities. (Coincidentally, the Polish word maczek means "poppy" in English, the symbol of remembrance associated with the area around Ypres in the First World War.) It also liberated Breda in the Netherlands after a hard fight but without incurring losses in the town's population. A petition on behalf of 40,000 inhabitants of Breda resulted in Maczek being made an honorary Dutch citizen after the war. The Division's finest hour came when its forces accepted the surrender of the German naval base of Wilhelmshaven, taking captive the entire garrison, together with some 200 vessels of Hitler's Kriegsmarine.

Maczek commanded the 1st Armoured Division until the end of European hostilities and was promoted to major-general. After the capitulation of Germany he went on to command the Polish I Corps and became commanding officer of all Polish forces in the United Kingdom until their demobilization in 1947.

After the war, Maczek was stripped of Polish citizenship by the Communist government of Poland, and thus had to remain in Britain. He left the army on 9 September 1948 but was for some reason denied a general's pension by the British government. As a result, Maczek worked as a bartender in a variety of locations including the Edinburgh Sports club until the 1960s.

Although living in the United Kingdom, General Stanislaw Maczek had a strong connection to the Netherlands. Besides being a regional hero to the areas he liberated in World War II, he was awarded honorary citizenship of the city of Breda. Recently acquired archive documents show that the Polish general secretly received a yearly allowance from the Dutch government, for the rest of his life. He got his allowance, because Mayor Claudius Prinsen of Breda was worried in 1950, after receiving information that Maczek was in a 'difficult financial situation'. The Polish general was doing unskilled labour to make ends meet. He also had to take care of a chronically ill daughter who needed costly treatment.

In 1989, the last Polish Communist Government of Prime Minister Mieczyslaw Rakowski issued a public apology to the General, and in 1994 he was presented with Poland's highest state decoration, the Order of the White Eagle.

Lieutenant General Stanislaw Maczek died on 11 December 1994, at the age of 102. According to his last wish, he was laid to rest among his soldiers at the Polish military cemetery in Breda, the Netherlands. Each year during Liberation Day festivities, Breda is visited by a large Polish contingent and the city devotes part of the festivities to the fallen Polish soldiers.