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## MODLIN FORTRESS AS A MILITARY GARRISON OF THE SECOND POLISH REPUBLIC

### Abstract

The interwar period was a time of rapid development of our statehood. After 123 years, Poland regained its independence and began the reconstruction of the devastated country. The main task was to ensure the security of the state by creating a strong army. The Modlin Fortress, due to its convenient location and the existing infrastructure, was a suitable place to set up a strong garrison. Many military units were brought there to create training centres for various types of armed forces. Housing estates were developed to accommodate soldiers and their families. This large garrison quickly became a significant centre of military, educational, cultural, and religious life.

**Keywords:** history, Modlin Fortress, military garrison

TWIERDZA MODLIN JAKO GARNIZON WOJSKOWY II RZECZYPOSPOLITEJ

### Abstrakt

Okres międzywojenny to czas burzliwego rozwoju polskiej państwowości. Po 123 latach Polska odzyskuje niepodległość i zaczyna odbudowywać wyniszczony kraj. Głównym zadaniem było zapewnienie bezpieczeństwa państwa poprzez stworzenie silnej armii. Twierdza Modlin była dogodnym miejscem do stworzenia silnego garnizonu dzięki dogodnemu położeniu i dotychczasowej infrastrukturze. W tym celu sprowadzono tam wiele jednostek wojskowych, tworząc centra szkoleniowe różnych rodzajów wojsk. Wraz z żołnierzami do twierdzy trafiły ich rodziny, co spowodowało rozbudowę osiedli mieszkaniowych. Ten duży garnizon stał się szybko miejscem ożywionego życia wojskowego, oświatowego, kulturalnego i religijnego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** historia, Twierdza Modlin, garnizon wojskowy

## INTRODUCTION

Most of the war struggles of our Homeland had episodes related to the Modlin Fortress and to the community inhabiting the area of defensive fortifications located at the mouth of the Narew where the river flows to the Vistula. The Modlin Fortress was constructed in the area of the former village of “Mogłno”<sup>1</sup>. The name “Modlin” was mentioned in the Prussian plan of salt storages dated from 1759 as a village at the estuary of the Narew to the Vistula near Zakroczym (The Central Archives). The Swedes were the first to notice the strategic values of the place. After winning the battle on September 30, 1655, Field Marshal Gustaw Otto Stenbeck ordered the construction of defensive fortified military camp in the shape of a four-pointed star on the island close to the confluence of the Narew and the Vistula, as well as in Kazuń and Modlin (Gołąb 2006, 180-181; Herbst and Zachwatowicz 2006, 12). The famous “Bugskansen” was the first known fortification construction in this area (Bochenek 2002, 21-24; Mikołajczyk 2012, 27-29). The development of the defensive fortress on the Modlin scarp started by order of Napoleon at the time of the Duchy of Warsaw (Oleńczak 2008, 19-36). However, its major extension took place under the Russian occupation after the January Uprising. Modlin was renamed Novogeorgievsk and became a fortified camp of the tsarist forces (Flugiewicz 2006, 47-58). The Polish army entered Modlin and established here a Polish military garrison after Poland regained its independence.

## 1. SECURITY SYSTEM OF THE MODLIN FORTIFIED CAMP

The raising of the Polish flag on the citadel tower, marked the beginning of a new period in the history of the Modlin Fortress. The entire garrison participated in the ceremony, which had a very solemn character and a military setting (*Ilustracja Polska* 1919). Numerous military units were brought to the Fortress leading to the emergence of new organizational, logistic and security challenges related to both military facilities and housing estates. Buildings allocated for soldiers’ families and civilian employees of the army were located on the foreground of the citadel in the direction of “Korona Utracka”. There appeared new shops and service facilities. The garrison created a market for local farmers who delivered agricultural produce and goods. It also provided the locals with workplaces. The command had to ensure security, efficient organization of traffic and education. It fostered the spirit of patriotism and took care of the cultural life in and around the Fortress.

The military authorities were responsible for internal and external security system of the fortress. In addition to military tasks and combat training, the command, organized 24-hour security services, i.e., the garrison inspection service, internal services of individual military units, reaction units, the Gendarmerie and the Fire Department. The garrison inspection officer was in charge of his assistant,

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<sup>1</sup> The first mention of Modlin is contained in the Zakroczym Land Book from 1426. The Central Archives of Historical Records (Next: CAHR). *The Book of Zakroczym*.

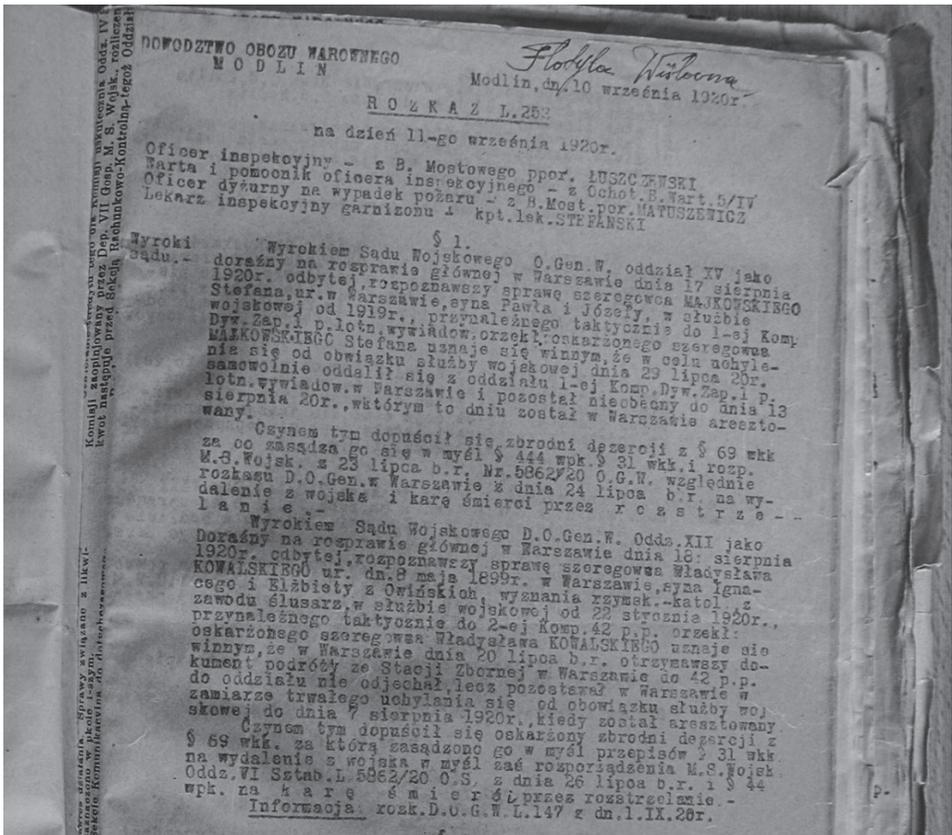
the garrison guard, the fire duty officer and the garrison inspection physician (CMA. *Order No. 245*). The order of service duties for individual military units was defined by the garrison commander (CMA. *Order No. 246*), with the exception of the garrison inspection physician service, which was defined by the commander of the Military Hospital (CMA. *Order No. 257*; CMA. *Order No. 273*) who passed the information to the Garrison Headquarters. The entire composition of services on duty was part of the daily order of the Modlin Garrison commandant. For example, on September 7, 1920, Lieutenant Andruszkiewicz from Baon Mostowy was on duty as the inspection officer of the Modlin Garrison, Lieutenant Liber from the Heavy Artillery Regiment was on duty as the inspection officer in the event of a fire, doctor Zajfe was on duty as the inspecting physician (CMA. *Order No. 249*). The garrison inspection officer supervised all services on duty in the garrison. With the help of the garrison guard, he controlled the traffic to and from the fortress. He also checked the preparation of soldiers for duty service, took an oath from the service and conducted their inspections. Maintaining discipline in the service was an essential element of ensuring safety. The garrison command decisively reacted to any instances of discipline violations. "Despite the repeatedly issued bans, gun fires can be heard at posts. I recommend that all unit commanders, which set up both internal and garrison posts, prevent any damage to the state property, which is so valuable nowadays, and carry out a detailed inspection in order to counteract similar offenses in the future. All those caught red-handed, as well as those who are proved that they fired weapons for no reason, should be brought to trial" (CMA. *Order No. 258*). Only decisive reactions allowed to maintain discipline. Internal services in units were organized similarly to garrison services and were subordinated to the duty officer of a given military unit (CMA. *Order No. 366*; CMA. *Order No. 147*; CMA. *Order No. 6*; CMA. *Order No. 124*; CMA. *Order No. 84*). The composition of individual services on duty as well as organizational matters were included in the daily orders of the military units' commanders.

Another element providing security in the Modlin garrison was the security service operating on the water and in the port. It was recruited from among seamen who served on the water and in the port (CMA. *Order No. 136*). This unit was called the Port Police of the Naval Port in Modlin. The port commander decided on the composition of the formation.

Outside the port, the public order was the responsibility of the firefighters. Fire Brigade soldiers, apart from performing firefighting duties, were also involved in maintaining public order during organized events and they also guarded the mess (CMA. *Order No. 258*).

The Gendarmerie formed a separate security service in the garrison. It performed policing tasks. Until September 16, 1929, the gendarmes were on guard at the entrance gates to the fortress, to be later released from this duty and directed to perform the patrol service and policing activities (CMA. *Order No. 260*). The greatest threat in the garrison were thefts and burglaries into military facilities and officers'

quarters. In justified cases, designated military units supported the Gendarmerie by appointing soldiers to patrol units (CMA. Order No. 293). The gendarmes pursued criminals, escorted convoys, and patrolled the entire area. This formation also pursued deserters. Desertion with the intention of permanently evading military service was punishable by death.



Source: CMA. Order of the Commander of the Fortified Camp in Modlin of September 10, 1920, No. 253. Archival complex: Command of the Modlin Fortified Camp. Ref. No. 1.372.36.1.

Death sentences in such cases were issued by Military Courts while the Gendarmerie carried out investigation and convoy tasks as well as other tasks ordered by courts. The first composition of the Military Court of the Modlin Fortified Camp is: Lieutenant Stankiewicz (head), Second Lieutenant Bujalski, Second Lieutenant Sokółowski and Second Lieutenant Tomassini (CMA. Order No. 252).

## 2. SELECTED AREAS OF MILITARY GARRISON LIFE

The military command tried to ensure the combat readiness of the garrison, provide the adequate level of soldiers' training, create appropriate logistic support

for military units stationed in Modlin as well as to take care of the families of soldiers and civilian employees of the army. The superiors put emphasis on providing soldiers with an appropriate level of general and specialist knowledge as well as on fostering patriotic values. The fortified camp housed the Officer's Mess of the Garrison and canteens in military units, the Soldier's House and shops. Soldiers and their families gathered in numerous associations, charity organizations and interest clubs. The military units organized cultural and educational activities. Military chaplains and clergymen of other denominations provided religious services for soldiers and their families. A number of patriotic, cultural and religious celebrations were organized. The Garrison Cooperative ran a mess, a canteen and a shop. The Officers' Club Library operated in the Officers' Mess (CMA. *Order No. 261*). In the white hall of the mess "an unusual event for the garrison took place on Sunday, August 29, 1920. The breakfast gathered the following people: Fr. Prof. Stanisław Gall – the first Field Bishop of the Polish Army, General Władysław Sikorski – commander of the 5th Army, Brigadier General Mikołaj Osikowski – commander of the 20th Infantry Division, General Stanisław Burhardt-Bukacki – General of French Military Service of the 8th Infantry Division, along with the command, officers, and officials of the garrison. The enrolment for the breakfast was conducted between August 27 and 28, by Second Lieutenant Wierzbiński, the host of the Officers' Club, upon payment of 70 marks" (Mikołajczyk 2012, 147-148). Dancing parties, masquerade balls, private parties, lectures, talks and even snooker competitions were also organized there. Cultural and Educational Department of the Garrison located in General Józef Bem street, was responsible for the distribution of periodicals (CMA. *Order No. 286*). The Drama Club staged plays and the cinema presented films. The "YMCA", Young Men's Christian Association operated in the Soldier's House.

From 1921, Towarzystwo Wiedzy Wojskowej [the Military Knowledge Society] operated in the Modlin garrison, and from 1930, social organizations, i.e., the Polish Red Cross, the Polish White Cross, the Maritime and Colonial League, and the State Air Defense League. These organisations dealt with the promotion of education, culture and patriotism. Illiteracy was combated, wastepaper collected, and dancing balls organized (CMA. *Order No. 67*; CMA. *Order No. 81*). The Polish White Cross instructresses performed a number of tasks. "The duties of a garrison instructor include:

- a. dealing with the needs in a given area,
- b. developing the educational activity program for the current period or school year in cooperation with the chairman of relevant sections,
- c. seeking and training associates, such as: permanent teachers and ad hoc speakers. The list of candidates for associates should be approved by the heads of the respective sections and military authorities,
- d. visiting lectures and talks,
- e. providing lecturers with teaching aids,

- f. convening pedagogical conferences,
- g. providing assistance to heads of day-room sections and day-room supervisors in the area of daily activities,
- h. controlling the functioning of libraries at least once a month,
- i. submitting monthly reports on its activities to the Club Board and through it to the Board of Governors according to the established procedure” (Mikołajczyk 2021, 152).

The Polish Red Cross prepared the society to support military actions in the area of running hospitals, sanatoriums, medical centres and transportation of the wounded. Medical equipment, medicines and dressings were collected, and medical personnel was trained. The State Air Defence League supported all activities for the benefit of aviation and physical culture. In 1933, an airport was opened in Modlin (CMA. *Preliminarz*). The Modlin branch of the Maritime and Colonial League carried out: “organization of mass events related to the maritime topics; water sports activities for children and soldiers; swimming pool in the summer; ice rinks during winter; tourism, including water tourism; activities aimed at the proper maintenance of waterways” (Mikołajczyk 2012, 155). The seat of the Yacht Club was located near the Narew river estuary to the Vistula river. Captain Sikorski from the 32nd Infantry Regiment led the Angling Club (CMA. *Order No. 76*). A Garrison Stadium was located at Bema street (CMA. *Order No. 31*) and a tennis court (CMA. *Order No. 78*). Medical care was provided by the Military Hospital (CMA. *Book of Orders*), Garrison Infirmary (CMA. *Order No. 89*; CMA. *Order No. 29*) and the Garrison Dental Clinic (CMA. *Order No. 22*). Stowarzyszenie Rodzina Wojskowa [The Military Family Association] dynamically operating in the area of supporting education developed a project of a four-class gymnasium in Modlin.

### 3. PASTORAL ACTIVITY

The large garrison personnel required extensive pastoral activity. The religious life of the garrison took place at the military parish of St. Barbara. Orthodox church of St. George was converted into a garrison church. The parish also owned a cemetery and a chapel at the Military Hospital. The author’s research shows that the activity of the garrison parish “was reflected in the account of the dean of the Corps District No. I. When describing the parishes of the military diaconate on March 23, 1938, he stated that the Modlin garrison had a multinational character. About 37% were soldiers of other religious denominations. They were mainly Orthodox, Jews and Evangelicals. Apart from the regular military cemetery, there were no other military cemeteries. The garrison church building was in good state. There were no construction projects in the parish for five years. No special events took place in the Modlin parish. There were no cases of theft on the premises of the church and chapels. The soldiers performed their religious duties. Both the officers

and non-commissioned officers together with privates attended church services and received the Holy Sacraments. The drawback, however, was suicidological behaviour among soldiers. There were as many as 8 of them in the parish of Modlin, which was the largest number of suicides of all parishes in the district [Dęblin, Łomża – 5, Warsaw I and III – 6, Zegrze, Ostrów Mazowiecka, Warsaw II and IV – not recorded]. Among all suicides in Modlin, only one received the Holy Sacrament before his death. It was also found that the garrison soldiers were not agitated by heretics. As the only one of the military parishes, the parish of St. Barbara was praised for increasing the morals and strengthening Catholic beliefs.

After Poland regained independence, several priests were in charge of the pastoral service in the Modlin garrison. Father Skokowski served as chaplain until 1921, when he handed his post over to chaplain Frater Piotr Rymarczyk. The next chaplain of the garrison was Frater Jerzy Wójcik, who held this position in the rank of a major in military service. According to the list of priests of the Corps District No. I, as of January 1, 1931, the duties of the parish priest of the military parish in Modlin were performed by the chaplain Frater Józef Czach, appointed to this position in 1927. His work was continued by Frater Franciszek Walasek, who handed over his duties to Frater Ferdynand Wawro on May 18, 1934. Before the fortress was taken over by the Germans, the last priest of the Modlin military parish was Frater Anastazy Rutkowski, appointed to this position on September 4, 1939. After a few days in office, he left Modlin, receiving an order to evacuate. There were also supporting chaplains appointed in other garrisons subordinate to the military parish of Modlin and holding the offices of local parish priests. This position was held from 1937 by the parish priest in Nowy Dwór, Frater Henryk Józwik, born in 1884, residing in Nowy Dwór at Warszawska 1 street. The priest was paid 30 zloty per month for performing his duties. Such a position in Kazuń was held from 1933 by Frater Tadeusz Majchrzak, born in 1893, residing in Kazuń Polski. He was paid a monthly salary of 75 zloty for the provision of pastoral service to soldiers stationed in Przedmoście Kazuńskie. In Działdowo, the function of the supporting chaplain was performed by Frater Jan Łubieński from May 1, 1935, who received 50 zloty a month for performing his duties. On November 21, 1938, the supporting chaplain in Pomiechówek was Frater Waclaw Gieryszewski, PhD” (Mikołajczyk 2010, 171-273).

## CONCLUSION

After Poland regained independence, the Modlin Fortress began its dynamic growth that lasted until World War II. The garrison developed in all spheres of military and social life. Many military units were brought to the fortress and together with soldiers arrived their families. Housing estates were built for soldiers' families and for non-military employees of the army. The garrison became the recipient of agricultural produce and other goods for the surrounding towns

and villages. Numerous training centres for soldiers of various types of armed forces were established in the fortress. An institutional security system for the entire garrison was created. There was a dynamic growth of educational, cultural and charity activities. The military and civilian communities were engaged in numerous undertakings, initiatives, as well as sports, artistic and culinary activities. There were shops, service facilities, messes, canteens, libraries, reading rooms, community centres, associations, social organizations and interest clubs. The military parish was a lively centre of spiritual life. The clergy were involved in numerous undertakings. They helped families of soldiers in various areas from school education, through work, service, family life, up to providing the last offices. They accompanied soldiers from recruitment, through education and training, to fights on the battlefield. Priests were witnesses of soldiers' fate until their heroic death for the Homeland. They also often shared soldiers' fate on the battlefield and in extermination camps.

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