

FOREWORD

Polish history is a chain of wonderful and noble as well as tragic and catastrophic events. In our dreams and in our forefathers' dreams, these events have always been links in a chain leading to freedom. Through the ages this desire for freedom, deeply rooted in us, defined Poland as a nation, inspired poets, and strengthened the spirit of those who fought. Today we are enjoying this freedom while remembering the voyage, the sacrifices that were made, and the heroes who strived to regain this freedom in the past.

In building today's modern, democratic and free Poland, we often refer to recent history. As a young man I led the millions that comprised the Solidarity freedom movement. Solidarity eventually brought about the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union—and ended the Cold War. However, we would not have been victorious if not for the spirit of freedom forged through the ages during our tragic Polish history.

The ideals for which Polish people fought during World War II—freedom, human dignity, and the right of self-determination—are the same ideals that inspired the Solidarity movement. The fight taken up by the Poles during that war was a lesson of patriotism and devotion to our country. Without the World War II generation, there would not have been the Solidarity generation.

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World War II destroyed millions of families around the globe, including my own. My father was arrested by the Germans and sent to a camp. He survived the imprisonment but was so broken that he died two months after his release. He was thirty-three years old and I never got to know him.

That war left a tragic imprint on the shape of the world and the condition of nations for many years to come. The world that emerged from the war was one that we Poles could not accept, and yet one we were forced to live in for almost fifty years. Although Poland fought fiercely on the side of the Allies, it was betrayed by its Allies who ceded it to communist totalitarianism after the war.

Thousands of books have been written about the war—but there are few, if any, by a child soldier. This remarkable book,



The Polish flag waves proudly over a German armored car captured by the Home Army during the 1944 Warsaw Uprising.

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written when Julian Kulski was a sixteen-year-old soldier in the Polish Army, brings to life a part of the war that is virtually unknown in the West.

This account, written from the heart and by the hand of an adolescent boy, gives us unique and moving insights into World War II. In describing his wartime experiences, improbable from the point of view of today's teenager, this young Pole shows incredible emotions—fear, but also pride, determination and strength of spirit. It is a superb lesson of humanity and patriotism.

Thank you for your courageous stand in those times and this testimonial for future generations! Honor to our heroes!

Lech Wałęsa

President of Poland (1990–1995)

Nobel Peace Prize Laureate (1983)

