

FREEDOM ABOVE ALL
JERZY IWANOW-SZAJNOWICZ – A HERO OF TWO NATIONS

JERZY IWANOW-SZAJNOWICZ'S CHILDHOOD

Jerzy Iwanow-Szajnowicz came from a Polish-Russian family. His father, Vladimir Ivanov (1879-1946), was a retired colonel of the Tsarist army, who, after completing his military service, began working as a railway employee in Warsaw. Jerzy's mother was Leonarda Jadwiga (1890-1978) - a Polish woman from the Szajnowicz merchant family from Warsaw. Jerzy's parents met by chance and soon got married. On 14th of December 1911 in their Warsaw apartment at Tamka Street their only son, Jerzy was born. He received the name in memory of St. George (pol. Jerzy) icon, which had been offered to the young, married couple by Jerzy's grandmother.

After the outbreak of World War I, the Ivanov family first went to Moscow. After Jerzy's father was drafted into the Russian army, they moved to the Caucasus. During the war, the marriage of Jerzy's parents began to deteriorate, and they eventually broke up. Then, Leonarda met the Greek merchant, Yoannis Lambrianidis, to whom, after divorce, she got married. In 1922 their son Antonis was born. Leonarda and her sons returned to their home city in Warsaw in 1922, and soon Yoannis who bought a mill near Warsaw, joined the family.

Jerzy started education in a school in Warsaw, run by one of the religious orders. Shortly afterwards, his parents decided to leave permanently for Thessaloniki. The boys stayed in Warsaw and Jerzy, deprived of parental care, began to cause educational problems, which led to a change of school. At that time he joined the scouts and in the mid 1925 he took the scouting oath. At the end of the year, his stepfather sold the mill in Poland, and soon Antonis and Jerzy left for Greece.



Wearing his school hat, early 1920



After arrival to Warsaw, 1923

YOUTH IN GREECE, STUDIES IN BELGIUM AND FRANCE

In 1926 Jerzy Iwanow-Szajnowicz came to Greece and settled in Thessaloniki at 3 Mavrokordatou Street with his family which expanded, in 1929 with the birth of his brother Aleksander. On arrival, Jerzy undertook studies in a French lower secondary school. He also became involved in the Scout movement. In 1933 he graduated from the Lyceum of the French secular mission school. This school was a branch of the Académie d'Aix-Marseille. One of the subjects that he decided to take during the matriculation examinations was the Polish language. In the late summer of 1933 Jerzy Iwanow-Szajnowicz went to Belgium, to start his studies at the Catholic University of Leuven. Initially he chose law, but after a year he changed the field of study to overseas agronomy.

Two years later, a particularly important event took place in the life of Jerzy Iwanow-Szajnowicz. As a son of a Russian officer, he had previously been a citizen of the former Russian Empire, but for several years he had tried to obtain Polish citizenship. He received it on 30 November 1935. Due to his studies he was not recruited to the Polish Army, but was transferred to the reserve. He received a Master's Degree in Agricultural Science on 15 October 1938. Despite gradual deterioration of his family's financial situation, he continued his studies and in the same year he undertook studies at the Institut national agronomique de la France d'Outre-Mer in Paris. He received his diploma three weeks before the outbreak of war in August 1939. He was also a member of the Polish Students' Association in Paris.



Reaching the Hortiatis Mount., 1931



*With his mother Leonarda and stepbrothers
Antonis and Alexandros, 1936*

SPORTS CAREER

On arrival in Greece, Jerzy Iwanow-Szajnowicz started his sports career. He became a member of the "Iraklis" ("Heracles") Sports Club in Thessaloniki. He trained short distance running, football and water polo, representing the club in all major competitions since 1928. In 1934 he was the champion of Northern Greece in the 100m race, but his extraordinary talent was shown in diving and swimming. In 1931 he took 2nd place in the 200m freestyle swimming competition for the Greek Cup. In 1933, he won a gold medal in sea swimming in Thessaloniki, and at the competitions in Athens on 23 September 1934, besides the second place in swimming, he was awarded a medal for best sportsman.

He did not give up sports when he started his studies at the Catholic University of Leuven. He co-founded the university basketball team which won the Belgian championship. During his studies he won a gold medal in diving at the Vijverpark competition in 1934 and a gold medal at the swimming competition in Leuven in 1938. While in Paris, he was a member of the Club des Nageurs de Paris swimming club.

In Poland, where he stayed during summer months, he joined a water polo team of the Warsaw University Sport Association. His achievements were so extraordinary that since 1937 also became a member of the Polish national team in this discipline.

In addition, he sailed on the family's "Leonarda" yacht and together with his stepbrother Antonis won first place in a sailing competition in the Thermaic Gulf in 1936.



On the board of the yacht "Leonarda"



During swimming competition, 1934

JERZY IWANOW-SZAJNOWICZ IN GREECE AND THE MIDDLE EAST 1939-1941

The outbreak of World War II found Jerzy Iwanow-Szajnowicz in Greece. Soon, through the Polish Legation in Athens, he began to seek help in his departure for the Polish Army being formed in France. In the absence of a clear answer, he even considered the possibility of emigrating to the Belgian Congo. At the same time, he helped survivors from the Polish army arriving in Greece to get to France, and from April 1940, to the Middle East, where the Carpathian Rifle Brigade was being formed. The Polish delegation, recognized the potential of Iwanow-Szajnowicz, and hired him as a secretary at the Athenian institution. From November 1940 he was sent to the military evacuation point in Thessaloniki for a volunteer expedition. He worked there until the evacuation of the point just before the entry of German troops, in April 1941. In 1940 Jerzy Iwanow-Szajnowicz was recruited by the Athenian cell of the Polish intelligence. The Cairo branch of the 6th Division of the Staff to the Commander-in-Chief, that was responsible for communication with the resistance in the occupied country, was also interested in him. In April 1941, just before the Germans entered Athens, Jerzy Iwanow-Szajnowicz left Greece on board a Polish ship SS Warsaw and arrived in Palestine. Initially, he was in the Rally Station of the Carpathian Rifle Brigade, but soon he was requested by the intelligence service. Due to the knowledge of 6 foreign languages: Greek, English, French, Russian, Italian and German, he was a valuable acquisition for the intelligence. From May to September 1941 he underwent appropriate training and received the code name "Athos". He was designed for intelligence work in Greece. From the "T" branch - cell of Polish intelligence in Jerusalem, he was tasked to create courier communication with the occupied country in co-operation with other intelligence cells in the Balkans. Probably at the same time Iwanow-Szajnowicz was also recruited by the British intelligence - MI-6, by the commander Cuthbert Bowlby, head of the Inter-Services Liaison Department in Cairo - the headquarters of the British intelligence in the Near East. The British gave him, more suited to his temperament, the task of organizing the intelligence and sabotage network in the Athens area.

Stacja Zborna Ośrodka Zapasowego S.B.S.K.	Rally Station Reserve Unit of the Polish Independent Brigade Group.
8. 5. 1941 No. 4226	
Zaświadczenie	Certificate
Zaświadczam, że <i>Siergiejowicz</i> <i>Iwanow Jerzy</i> zameldował się dnia <i>8. 5.</i> 1941 na Stacji Zbornoj Ośrodka Zapasowego S.B.S.K. i w myśl orzeczenia Komisji Wojskowo Lekarskiej otrzymał kat. <i>1</i>	I hereby certify that Mr. <i>Ite</i> <i>Iwanow Jerzy</i> reported on <i>8. 5.</i> 1941 at the Rally Station of the Polish Independent Brigade Group and accord- ing to the Military Medical Commis- sion has been classified under category <i>1</i>
Wyżej wymieniony do czasu ewentu- alnego powołania do Armii Polskiej został przekazany do dyspozycji Komenda Generalnego R. P. w Jerozolimie.	The a/m man has been placed under the authority of the Consul General in Jerusalem until his eventual calling up to the Polish Army.
Komendant Stacji Zbornoj S.B.S.K.	O. C. Polish Rally Station

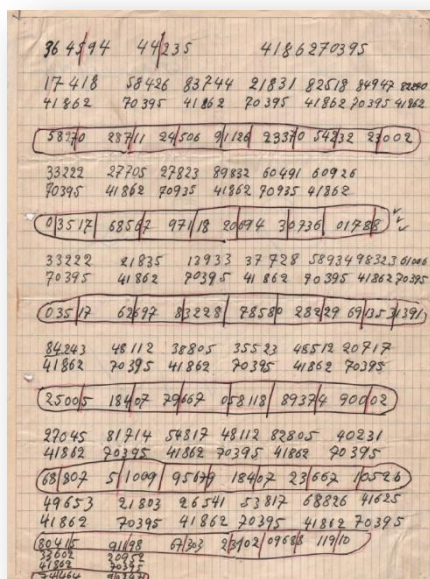


Registration certificate of the Rally Station of the Reserve Unit of the Polish Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade, May 1941

Wearing the tropical uniform of a soldier of the Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade, Palestine, 1941

**IN ALLIES SERVICE –
JERZY IWANOW-SZAJNOWICZ'S INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITY**

After a five-month intensive training of intelligence-sabotage operations, Jerzy Iwanow-Szajnowicz left Egypt on board the British "Thunderbolt" submarine, commanded by Com. Lt. Cecil Crouch. In early October the ship left Alexandria. Iwanow-Szajnowicz was provided with a radio station - for communication with the headquarters - , specialist sabotage equipment, funds for conspiratorial work, and weapons - a gun and a knife. After a few days of voyage, he was disembarked, probably on October 14th, on the eastern shores of Attica. There, owing to cooperation with the Gianatos family, Jerzy Iwanow quickly organized a small network of underground places. Some of them comprised a shelter, while in others radio stations were placed. During the eleven-month operation, Jerzy Iwanow-Szajnowicz failed to organize courier communication between Greece and occupied Poland. He devoted himself mainly to intelligence and sabotage work. By establishing cooperation with the local conspiratorial Nation Rebirth Organization (OAG), he quickly managed to create an extensive network. Its members collected information on maritime traffic near Athens, mainly in the port of Piraeus, as well as on German-Italian air bases in Attica and on enemy defense installations. Iwanow-Szajnowicz's associates were initially recruited among former officers of the Greek Armed Forces, especially from the Navy, and students who later formed specialized intelligence units. It is not excluded that apart from OAG, Jerzy Iwanow-Szajnowicz also established contacts with other smaller underground organizations; among which were: Fight-Reconstruction-Independence called 3A, Homer and Midas-614. Then, he transferred the intelligence information gathered to Cairo, the headquarters of the British intelligence in the Middle East.



Ciphertext written by Iwanow-Szajnowicz hand from the period of this intelligence work in Greece, 1941-42



Dagger of Jerzy Iwanow-Szajnowicz

JERZY IWANOW-SZAJNOWICZ'S SABOTAGE ACTIVITY

Concurrently with the intelligence activity, Jerzy Iwanow-Szajnowicz was involved in sabotage operations. Particular attention of his network was paid to the well-guarded air bases in central Greece, the Malziniotti aviation plants in New Faleron and the naval units of the Axis powers. The saboteurs were able to enter the Malziniotti plants, where they damaged the newly manufactured and repaired aircraft engines installed in planes. Inside these engines, they placed a special substance that destroyed the oil, which led to engine seizure during the flight, and consequently to the aircraft crash. German airplanes which were ready for action at the airports were also the targets for Jerzy Iwanow-Szajnowicz and the OAG activists. They also managed to blow up fuel storages. These actions took place at the airports of Chasani, Eleusis, Tatoi and Patras.

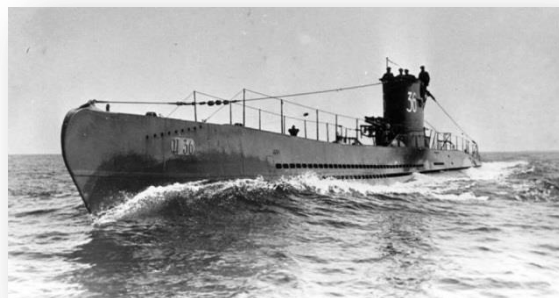
The unique swimming skills of Jerzy Iwanow-Szajnowicz facilitated him to conduct sabotage against naval units of the enemy. Many times, he swam under the cover of night to vessels anchored off the coast of Attica, and fastened special magnetic mines with a clock mechanism to their sides. After some time they exploded, which usually ended in severe damage or sinking of the unit.

Iwanow-Szajnowicz's largest success was most likely the sinking of a German U-133 submarine which, according to official reports, sank in unexplained circumstances in the Saronic Gulf on 15th of March 1942. He probably also contributed to sinking 6 vessels which disappeared on Greek waters for unknown reasons between 1st of November 1941 and 31st of August 1942.

Today it is difficult to determine the scale and effectiveness of the Iwanow-Szajnowicz network. Witness accounts are contradictory. It is known, however, that his intelligence reports sent to the headquarters of the British intelligence in Cairo, from where they reached the British High Command in the Middle East in Alexandria and the staff of the Mediterranean Fleet, helped the Allies to coordinate operations against German-Italian navy in the most difficult period of fights for the Mediterranean Sea control. In this way, he contributed indirectly to the destruction of at least some of the 96 enemy units that were sunk in the eastern Mediterranean Sea by the British between 1st of November 1941 and 20th of September 1942. His intelligence and sabotage activities had an impact on the efficiency of the communications lines of the "Axis" powers and effectively weakened the potential of the German-Italian forces fighting against the British 8th Army in the sands of North Africa in the decisive phase of struggles near El-Alamein.



Junkers Ju 87 Stuka German dive bomber, frequent target of iwanow-Szajnowicz's network attacks



German U-133 submarine which sank in the waters of Saronic Gulf in March 1942

DEATH OF THE HERO

The German security apparatus quickly found Jerzy Iwanow-Szajnowicz. Less than two months after starting his activity in Athens, he was exposed and arrested. Konstantinos Pantos, a young acquaintance from his youth, who became a collaborator after the beginning of the occupation of Greece in April 1941, denounced him. German security services arrested Iwanow-Szajnowicz at his meeting with Pantos in the center of Athens. Initially, he was taken away for a short hearing to the Gestapo headquarters on the 3rd of September Street. He was then taken to the "Averoff" jail. He managed to escape on the 19th of December 1941 during his transportation to the Gestapo headquarters. The Germans sent wanted posters for the fugitive, promising a high prize - 500,000 drachmas - in exchange for aid in the apprehension of the dangerous Pole. They were unsuccessful, even though Iwanow-Szajnowicz still conducted active sabotage activity. Only nine months later, on the 8th of September 1942, he was captured again. The arrest was a result of betrayal, probably within his own organization. Shortly his entire network was broken. Among the imprisoned there were the Gianatos and Kontopoulos families who had given him shelter at the end of 1941 and in 1942. The Germans conducted the investigation for a long time. The prisoners were tortured to extract as much information as possible about the Greek resistance movement. After the judicial process in early December 1942, most of them were sentenced to death. Some of the Greek elites, among whom was Damaskinos, the Patriarch of Greece, engaged in the attempt to save Jerzy Iwanow-Szajnowicz. They offered to exchange a Polish-Greek hero into one of the high-ranking German officers taken into captivity by the British, but eventually it did not happen. On January 4th 1943, in the Kessariani district of Athens - the famous execution site of Greek members of the Resistance - Jerzy Iwanow-Szajnowicz was executed along with 4 members of his sabotage group. He rested at the 3rd cemetery in Athens, located in a district of Nikea.



Grave of Jerzy Iwanow-Szajnowicz at the 3rd Athens cemetery in Nikea district



A representative subdivision of the Polish Army paying tribute to the hero in the place of his execution - shooting range in Kessariani, January 2013

AD MEMORIAM

The first ceremony dedicated to the memory of Jerzy Iwanow-Szajnowicz took place in Athens at the end of March 1945. Representatives of the Greek authorities, staff of the Polish Legation in Athens and the Greek comrades-in-arms all gathered at his grave on March 1945, the Polish government in exile honoured Iwanow with the Virtuti Militari cross, in March 1962 he was decorated by the British government for his service with the Polish forces, and on the 25th of May 1976, he was awarded the highest Greek medal for gallantry, the Gold Cross of Valour.

In the spring of 1945, a two-month cycle of articles dedicated to Iwanow-Szajnowicz's war achievements was published in the Greek newspaper "Asyrmatos". In 1954, he was also recalled by the Greek newspaper „Apogevmatini”. Concurrently, press references about him also appeared in the Polish emigration and national press. A book “One against the Germans” by Henryk Landowski was published in Italy in 1946, and a fictionalized biography by Stanisław Strumph-Wojtkiewicz entitled “Agent No. 1” was published in Poland and translated into Greek and Russian. In 1980 another book by Maria and Janusz Przymanowscy “Leonarda and her sons” was published in Poland. In 1971 the Polish director Zbigniew Kuźmiński made a feature film entitled: “Agent No. 1”, presenting Iwanow-Szajnowicz's war achievements. The popularity of the books and the film about Iwanow-Szajnowicz resulted in the appearance of several scouting teams and schools in Poland, which chose the Polish-Greek hero as a patron. He was the subject of sculptural works and commemorative medals. His monument, created by Polish sculpture Mieczysław Welter was unveiled in Thessaloniki in 1985. His mother Leonarda, who had visited Poland several times since 1959, was the main guardian of his memory. She gave a part of priceless mementoes of her son to the Museum of the Polish Army in Warsaw. Today the family archives are under the care of her granddaughter, also bearing the name Leonarda. To Honor Iwanow-Szajnowicz, the "Iraklis" sports club in Thessaloniki has been organizing the "Ivanofeia" swimming competitions since 1953, and has named the sports hall “Ivanofeio” and unveiled his statue in 1993.

In the recent years, in January 2013, the Polish Office for War Veterans and Victims of Oppression and the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Athens paid tribute to the memory of Jerzy Iwanow-Szajnowicz, by organizing ceremonies at the place of his death in Kessariani and his burial at the Nikea cemetery. In November 2017 an important event took place at the War Museum in Athens with an exhibition opening and historical seminar which was honored by the presence of the presidents of both countries: Andrzej Duda from Poland and Prokopios Pavlopoulos from Greece. In December 2017 an exhibition about Iwanow-Szajnowicz was presented at the War Museum in Thessaloniki.

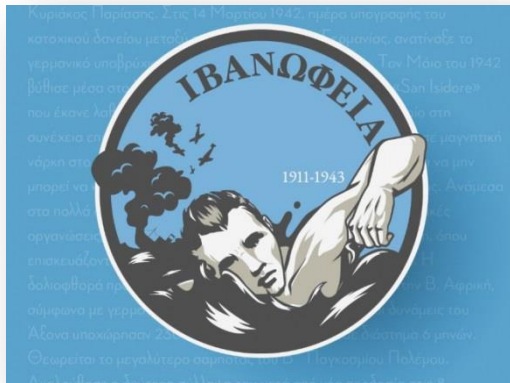
In order to mark the 200th anniversary of the Greek Revolution, the Polish Post introduced a stamp commemorating this Hero of the Nations in 2021.



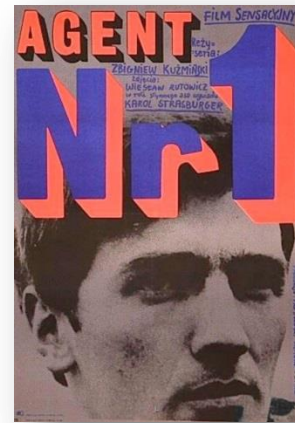
Greek, British and Polish military decorations



Statue of Jerzy Iwanow-Szajnowicz in Thessaloniki



Swimming competition "Ivanofoeia" logo



"Agent Nr 1" film poster



Commemorating ceremony at War Museum in Athens with the presence of Presidents of Poland and Greece, November 2017



Commemorating stamp introduced by Polish Post in 2021

Sources:

Museum of Polish Army

Archives of Leonarda Lambrianidou

Archives of the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Athens