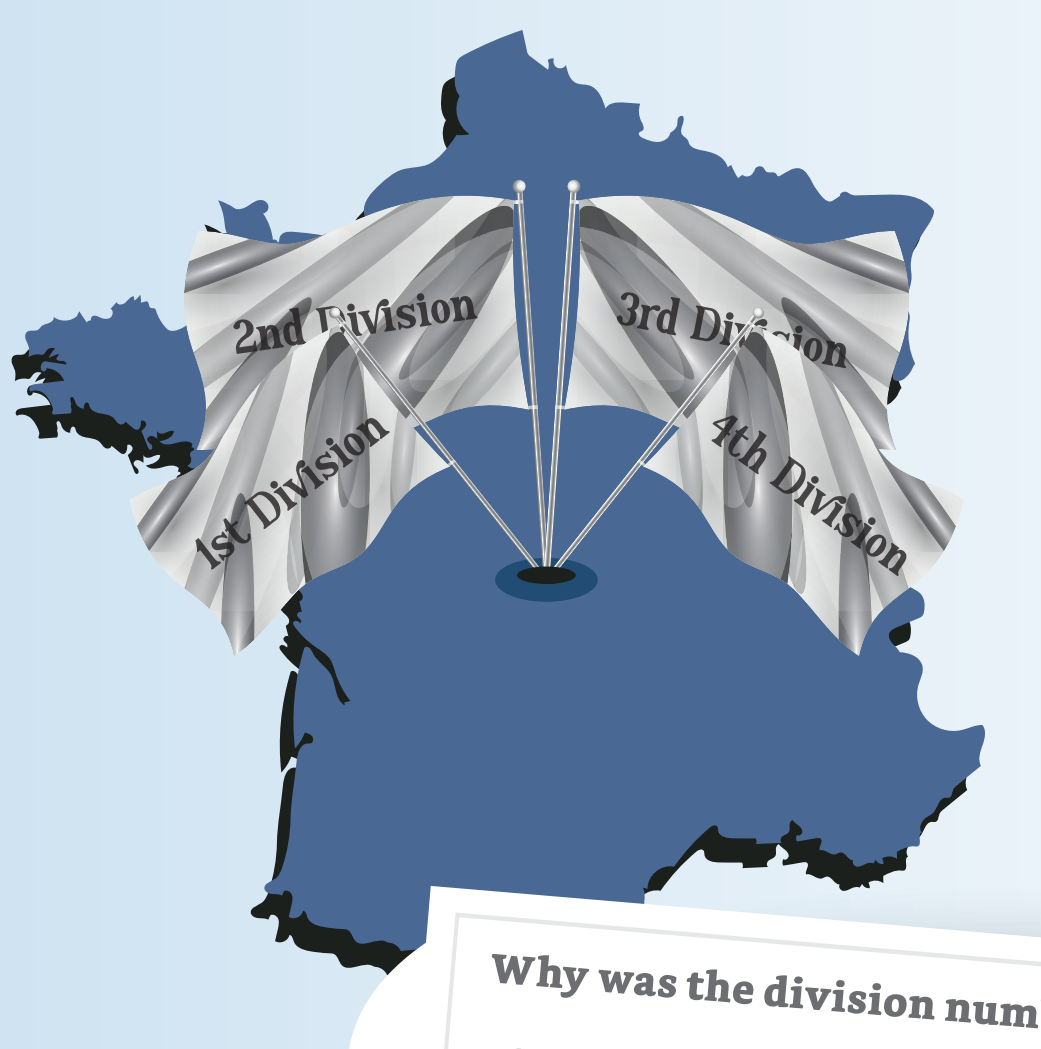
10 qualities of a veteran from THE 5TH DIVISION



Why was the division numbered the 5th?

The 5th Division was a part of the Polish Army in France, commanded by General Józef Haller. This is where the remaining four divisions stationed.

War is always a terrible experience. But there are conflicts whose brutality really frightens us. They include civil wars. Serving in the army during military actions is always associated with a risk of death. However, some troops were in such a complicated situation that the chance of surviving was even lower. Without a doubt, such formations included the Polish 5th Rifle Division, which fought in Siberia in 1919, and the Siberian Brigade, which fought in Mazovia in 1920.

What do these two formations have in common? Do you have the qualities and qualifications that were required of their soldiers?

5th Rifle Division (Siberian Division)
Commander: **Colonel Kazimierz Rumsza**
Number of soldiers in April 1919: 10,772 soldiers and officers

1 PATRIOTISM

To join the Polish army that was being formed in Siberia, you had to get to **Samara**. In this city on the Volga, **the Polish Revolutionary Committee for the Freedom and Unification of Poland** was formed on 28 June 1918. It was also the place where volunteers formed the first infantry company, which later became a division.

2 POLITICAL ORIENTATION

The Polish army served with the "Whites", i.e. formations that fought against the Bolsheviks, who were referred to as the "Reds". In this period, the strongest position in Siberia was occupied by **Admiral Alexander Kolchak**. He was also supported by **the Czechoslovak Legion. Do not be surprised with familiar red and white colours**, they are also used by the Czechs. In eastern Siberia, it was also possible to come across intervention Entente powers, i.e. **Americans and the Japanese**. You had to keep your eyes wide open, because the civil war was also fought by the "Greens", the Esers (social democrats), anarchists and Siberian Cossacks. **You needed to know whom you could shoot and with whom you could negotiate!**

3 OBEDIENCE

Despite the fact that the command of the division was Polish, from August 1918 to January 1919 **it was subordinate to the command of the Czechoslovak Legion**. Then it was directly subordinate to Pierre Janin, a French commander of all allied forces in Siberia.

RESISTANCE TO COLD 4

Polish soldiers served in **Siberia**. To survive, not only in barracks, but usually in a chilly wagon, in a dug-out or on watch under the moon, you had to wear many layers of clothing.

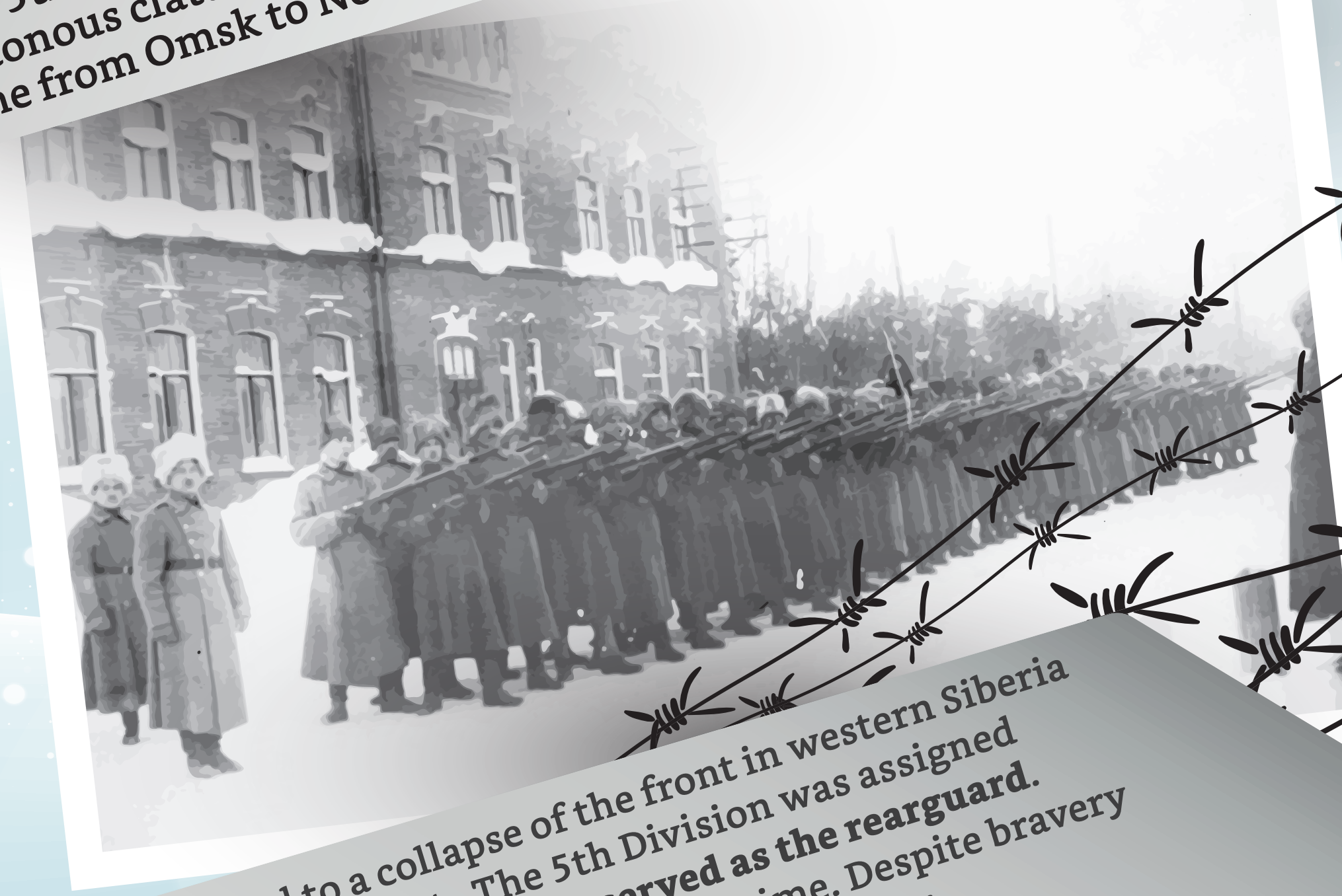
> *"At night, I often froze to the wall of the wagon. I was covered with two blankets, a sheepskin jacket and a coat, and yet I felt cold and every morning I woke up covered with frost."*
>
> *Stanisław Bohdanowicz*

MENTAL STRENGTH 5

During a civil war, it is not only soldiers who are killed, but also civilians. Soldiers serving in the 5th Division were ordered to fight with Communist partisans and the inhabitants of Siberian villages who did not want to give away food. The Poles pacified peasants, burned down houses and stole their humble belongings. The war quickly became dehumanising.

6 NO MOTION SICKNESS

This war was fought with relatively small forces, but over a vast area, from Warsaw to Vladivostok and from the Caucasus to the White Sea. This is why the most important routes were railway lines and the main tool for fighting was the train, often armoured. A soldier of the 5th Division had to endure the discomfort of the wagons, their coldness and the monotonous clatter of their wheels. Soldiers were responsible for protecting the railway line from Omsk to Novonikolayevsk, which stretches over **650 kilometres.**



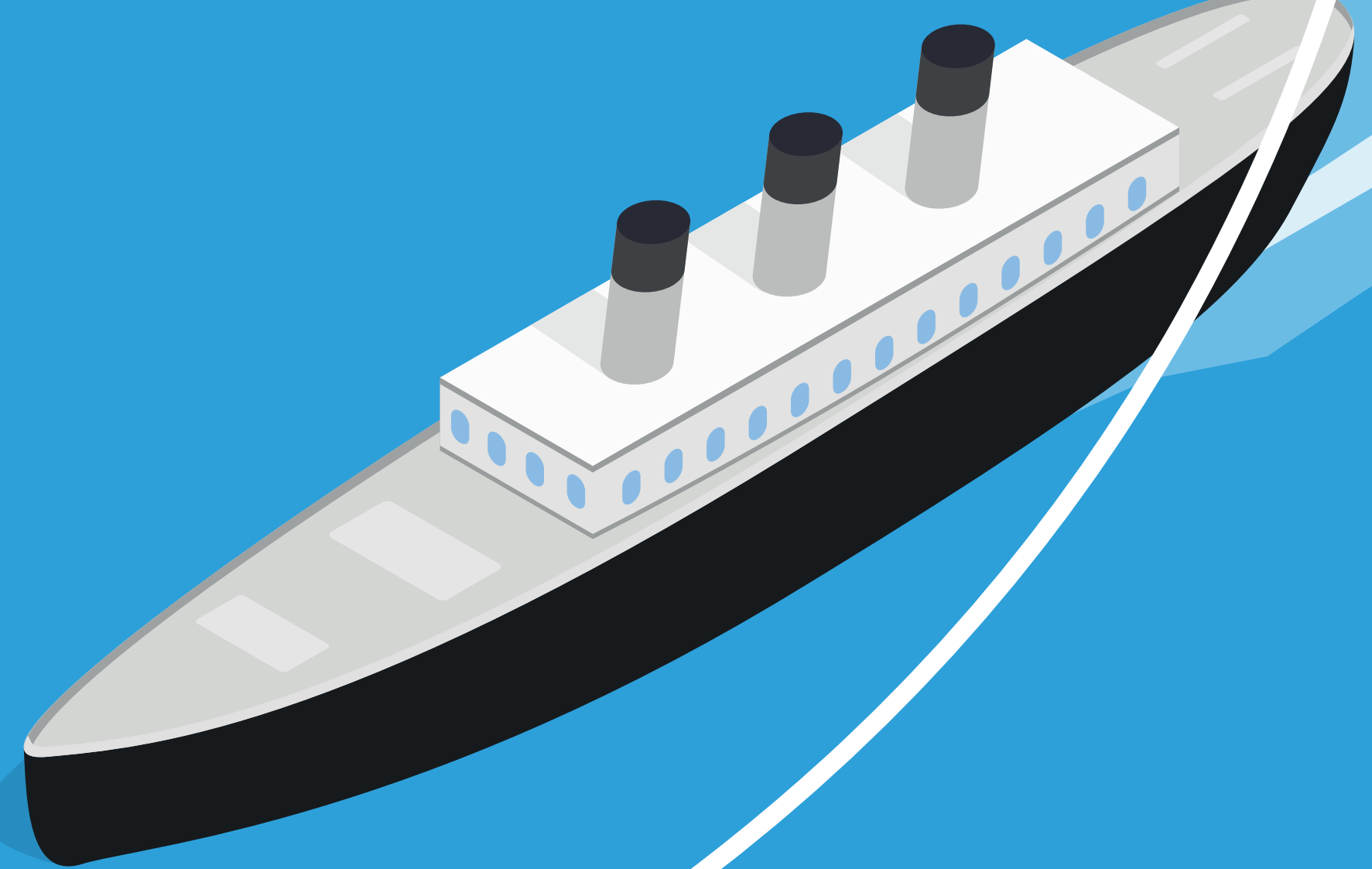
7 DISCIPLINE

Betrayal within the ranks of the "Whites" led to a collapse of the front in western Siberia and the retreat of Admiral Kolchak's army to the east. The 5th Division was assigned a thankless task of **protecting the rear, which means that it served as the rearguard**. The Poles were followed by the Soviets, who had to be fought all the time. Despite bravery in battle, on **10 January 1920** the Polish division was forced to surrender near the **Klyukvennaya** railway station. A few thousand soldiers were taken prisoner by the Soviets.

8 HEALTHY LEGS AND A SENSE OF DIRECTION

Not everyone laid down their arms. About **800 soldiers pushed their way through** Irkutsk to Harbin and then to the Chinese port of Dalian, where they boarded the British ship "Jarosław". The soldiers set out in April and reached Gdańsk after three months of sailing, **on 1 August 1920.**

Even organised groups joined the army at draft stations, for example "the members of a rowing club from Kalisz, two companies organised by the Polish Socialist Party in Łódź, two entire 7th and 8th grades with a priest and teachers. Volunteers come individually and in groups, they are all untrained and have never had a rifle in their hands and yet they are full of devotion and zeal."



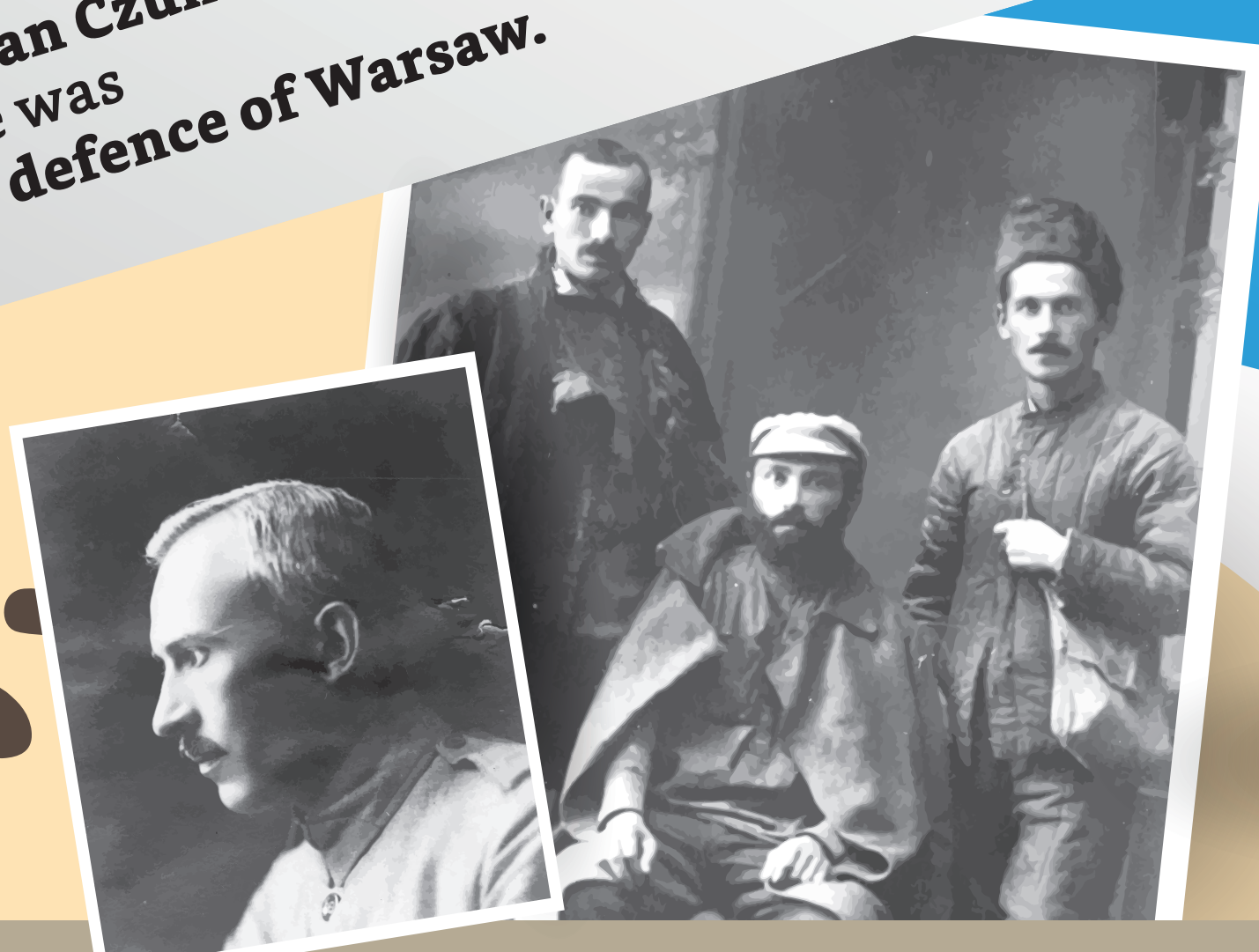
Gdańsk

9 WILL TO FIGHT

The surviving soldiers who came to Poland were sent to Grudziądz, where they served as the basis for the newly formed Siberian Brigade, consisting of two regiments. Experienced Siberian veterans fought along volunteers, who were often under-age.

10 CONTACTS

Those who fought in the 5th Division had an opportunity to meet many future heroes of the Second Polish Republic. One of them was Major **Walerian Czuma** (1890-1962). During 1939 defensive war he was the general commanding **the defence of Warsaw.**



Muzeum Historyczne w Przasnyszu

Ministerstwo Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego.

Narodowe Centrum Kultury

Dofinansowano ze środków
Narodowego Centrum Kultury
w ramach programu
„Kultura w sieci"

projekt rekreator

opracowanie:
Łukasz Wrona

Monika Miłoszewska
Bartosz Drejerski
Hubert Dęby