

Henryk Prajs As A Polish Army Soldier



This is a photo of me, when I was a soldier in the Polish Army before the war. It was taken in Suwalki in 1938. I was drafted at the age of 21. It was a regular draft, all the boys born in 1916 were drafted in November 1937. I served in the Jan Hipolit Koziatowski 3rd Mazovian Chevaux-Leger Regiment in Suwalki. There were only three regiments of elite cavalry in Poland, the other two were the Jozef Pilsudski Regiment, stationed in Warsaw, and the Dwernicki Regiment in Stargard Gdanski. I was assigned to the regiment because I was an absolutely unblemished and loyal citizen, and I was not a member of any anti-Pilsudski organizations. My commander was Colonel Edward Milewski, and my officer in charge - Borys Zaryn. How was the army? Well, I was a tailor suddenly turned cavalryman. And I had always been afraid of horses. Well, I had seen them, pulling a coach for example, but that's different. I mounted a horse for the first time then, but I did learn to ride, and how! A recruit was trained for a few months and then given a rifle. I managed to figure it all out somehow. In 1938 I was assigned to a non-commissioned officer school, as I had completed seven years of school. It wasn't very common, many of the recruits were illiterate. I used to write letters for everyone. They began with 'Praised be Jesus Christ' and ended with 'Waiting for your

reply, now and for ever, amen.' I ranked high in the NCOs school, because I was able. I ranked second out of 85 in the knowledge of Poland course, the first place was taken by a Mastalerz from Warsaw. I was promoted to corporal. I was doing well in the army, I can't say I was favored but they treated me fair, no complaints. In the Polish army before the war every unit had a few Germans, some Jews, a couple of Belarussians and Ukrainians. The Ukrainians - we called them Ruthenians - were very good soldiers, first of all very physically fit, and the best riders. At a Saturday or Sunday muster the officers would call, 'Of Jewish persuasion, step forward, of Lutheran persuasion, step forward, of Orthodox persuasion, step forward!' and if you wanted to pray, you went your way.