

# INTRODUCTION

The phrase *military transport* first appeared in Polish military vocabulary in the late 1920s, when the Polish Armed Forces extended the existing scope of tasks of the Railway Division of the General Staff to include other modes of transport for military use, as part of an exercise aimed at re-organising its quartermaster services (to the French army model). In 1928, Headquarters for Military Transport were established as part of the General Staff.<sup>1</sup>

According to one definition, the phrase *military transport* shall apply to all of the following items:<sup>2</sup>

- Military forms of transport and communication (fixed and mobile) used in any organised process of moving (transferring) and carrying troops and military supplies.
- Organisational and technical ventures associated with the handling of military transport and ensuring the viability of the transport network in use during such ventures.
- Military transport service bodies responsible for the management and control of any process involving such ventures.
- Military transport units reporting to aforementioned bodies.
- Militarised bodies and units (formations) of civilian transport divisions and local forces reporting to the aforementioned bodies operationally.

Another definition of military transport references the actual communication system, which comprises a network of mutually connected roads, military transport units deployed along them, together with assorted military transport formations.<sup>3</sup>

Once thus defined, the scope of the phrase blatantly includes all modes of land and air transport employed to move troops, equipment and supplies, as well as other related matters. In this work, I have decided to limit the scope of the phrase to the issues of military use of rail transport, essentially restricting it to the operational use of the Polish State Railways network as a mode of transport for the Warsaw Pact troops.

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1 Mioduszewski (1974) 1/134, 155.

2 Ministry of National Defence, Transport Command, 33/64, *Komunikacja wojskowa* (1965), 20.

3 *Mała encyklopedia wojskowa*, Vol. 2 (1970), 73.

The fundamental purpose of this work is to present the history of the Headquarters of Military Transport of the Polish Armed Forces and of the railway units involved, and to analyse all technical issues tying in with military transport from a historical perspective. I took on a task of no lesser importance: that of describing the planned operational use of railway infrastructure on the Polish territory along the Western and Coastal Operational Directions as part of the strategic plans drafted by the parties to the Warsaw Pact.

In addition, my intention was also to create a detailed portrayal of the organisational structure and missions (during warfare and times of peace alike) of military transport bodies and railway troops, and strategic post-war use of railway transport. The narrative describing the transport of Red Army forces (operational transport and supplies) with the use of the Polish State Railways network was of no lesser importance.

Chronologically, the work spans the period of 1944–1960. The timeframe identified for the purposes of the project ties in closely with the fact that in the late 1950s, following a reduction to the armed forces, railway battalions were reformed into railway regiments, their purpose and organisational structure duly changed. For the Headquarters of Military Transport 1962 became the fundamental watershed: this was when railway transport units were integrated with the road service. In November 1962, the Headquarters of Military Transport of the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces merged with the 15th Division of the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces and the Headquarters of Military Transport of the Ministry of National Defence was formed. Due to the interconnectivity of technical matters associated with the preparation of the Polish State Railways network for warfare (requiring a more comprehensive approach), I described the issue up to and including the year 1990. If considered only up until 1962, the account would not have shown the size or importance of comprehensive investments on the Polish railway network.

In analysing significant investments on the Polish State Railways network, one cannot help but ask an undermining question concerning the effectiveness of the techniques used, and the organisation of military rail transport in times of a planned conflict. The usability of infrastructure developed for military purposes, as well as matters concerned with its potential use in times of peace following the Cold War, are also of vital interest. I attempted to answer these questions in individual chapters.

Considerable difficulties were encountered at the stage of collecting source material for this work, due among other things to the fact that the majority of archival materials regarding military transport have until recently been considered classified. Furthermore, given the orders to dispose of documentation

describing operational and mobilisation exercises as well as technical documents, a considerable part of all resources has been completely destroyed. At the stage of gathering materials for the purpose of this work, it was found that only the very basic military transport service files from the 1970s and 1980s had been preserved at the Ministry of Defence Central Archives in Modlin. Additionally, issues connected with post-1945 military transports were shrouded in secrecy, which is why the few existing materials were published as classified military instructions, or as articles in restricted-access military journals of the time, such as *Przegląd Kwatermistrzowski*.

Reference sources for this study include technical and operational military and railway files, technical documentation related to rolling stock used for military transport, track layout plans for railway stations, military sidings, transfer routes and transshipment areas; assorted regulations and service instructions related to military transports, as well as the destruction and reconstruction of temporary and permanent railway lines (both military and civilian).

When compiling the reference list I only included the most important sources and studies.

Vital items include an extraordinarily extensive in-house study by Colonel Marian Gembora titled *Wojska kolejowe*, preserved at the Library of the Military Bureau for Historical Research, as well as a largely forgotten work by Captain Ryszard Strózik, *Wojska kolejowe 1944–1946*, [*The Railway Military 1944–1946*], (Master thesis under Professor Stanisław Herbst at the Department of History at Political-Military Academy) Military Office of Historical Research Archive (Military Office of Historical Research Archive), which describes the organisation and military activities of the military transport service of the 1st and 2nd Polish Armies. Interesting items depicting the organisational structure of the military transport service include a study by the Head of Staff of the Military Transport Service of the Chief Quartermaster of the Polish Armed Forces, titled *Zarys historii Szefostwa Służby Komunikacji Wojskowej* (unpublished). A valuable reference source for the description of tactical, organisational and technical matters related to warfare (“W”) military transport has been provided by a Ministry of Defence Manual, Chief of Transport 33/64, *Komunikacja wojskowa*, Warsaw 1965.

A double-volume collective work published by the Ministry of Transport (*Odbudowa mostów kolejowych, Stalowe konstrukcje składane*), [Reconstruction of Railway bridges – Folding Structures], Part I, Warsaw 1966, Part II, Warsaw 1968 was the fundamental source used for the purposes of describing the structure of post-war military folding bridge facilities. A collective work titled *Zheleznodorozhniki v velikoy otchestvennoy voyne*, Moscow 1987, was an

extremely interesting reference source. This is a collection of reports filed by the people involved in the Red Army railway units. Once Soviet propaganda is set aside, it is possible to use the information contained therein. In describing the system of backup crossings of the River Odra prepared for warfare I have also used the information provided by A. Kuhlmann in his study *Eisenbahnen über die Oder-Neiße-Grenze*, (Pürgen, 2004).

In describing the body of reference sources, one cannot fail to mention the only Polish publication discussing the military transport activities over the centuries by Professor Eugeniusz Nowak: *Komunikacje i wojna*, (Warsaw, 1994).

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