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The Unwanted Heroes: War Invalids in Poland after World War I

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ABSTRACT. This article focuses on the unique and hitherto unknown history of disabled ex-servicemen and civilians in interwar Poland. In 1914, thousands of Poles were conscripted into the Austrian, Prussian, and Russian armies and forced to fight against each other. When the war ended and Poland regained independence after more than one hundred years of partition, the fledgling government was unable to provide support for the more than three hundred thousand disabled war victims, not to mention the many civilians left injured or orphaned by the war. The vast majority of these victims were ex-servicemen of foreign armies, and were deprived of any war compensation. Neither the Polish government nor the impoverished society could meet the disabled ex-servicemen’s medical and material needs; therefore, these men had to take responsibility for themselves and started cooperatives and war-invalids-owned enterprises. A social collaboration between Poland and America, rare in Europe at that time, was initiated by the Polish community in the United States to help blind ex-servicemen in Poland. KEYWORDS: World War I, Eastern Front, disabled ex-serviceman, war claims, disability, Poland.

FOR the citizens of Poland, the end of the Great War marked the beginning of independence after 123 years of partition under foreign powers. It also represented a new, indeed, an unprecedented experience of providing care for both thousands of disabled ex-servicemen but also the innocent civilians who were
injured during the war. It might have been easier for a society with an established societal infrastructure to take care of the vulnerable members of their society, but it was very difficult for the fledging Polish government.¹

At the time, the various governments of the European states oscillated between two policies regarding disabled ex-servicemen. Under the German system, rooted in Bismarckian social insurance principles, the duty to meet the material and moral needs of disabled ex-servicemen was relegated to the state. The German Ministry of Labor granted pensions to disabled ex-servicemen and at the same time required the men to participate in training courses in preparation for postwar occupations. Following the completion of these courses, disability pensions were discontinued.² The second policy, most commonly used in England, held that the material responsibility for disabled ex-servicemen and civilians should be determined based on the severity of injury attained during the Great War. The responsibility for permanent care or long-term care was relegated to various public charitable organizations.³ In Poland, the care for disabled veterans straddled between these systems by and large due to historical reasons. The new state inherited four different legal systems, three covering areas which had been under the control of the three Imperial powers: Austria, Russia, and Germany, and a fourth for the Polish Kingdom, which had been established in 1916 under the German occupation. This was even more complicated in that the new country had seven different currencies in use, an overall shortage of public health facilities, not enough state organizations in place and a bankrupt economy.⁴

After the Great War, as historian Seth Koven noted, “the British state and society constructed institutions and discourses that allowed them simultaneously to remember and forget, depending on political circumstances.”⁵ In Germany, on the other hand, the management of

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disabled ex-servicemen was rationalized and standardized. Although one of the main frontlines of World War I took place in Poland, the rather difficult and chaotic situation in Eastern Europe is not well known in the Anglophone literature. As William C. Fuller has argued, the history of the Eastern Frontline in English language historiography is largely absent due to the language barrier, which has made accessing Russian language sources difficult. This article aims to fill this gap through the examination of the Soviet written records, even though these records were heavily censored. The Eastern Frontline has long been one of the most uncomfortable issues for the Soviets since it was there that the Red Army suffered a crushing defeat in 1920. This study will offer a critical assessment of the significance of disability history within this theatrum, expanding the existing disability historiography related to World War I.

The armistice between Germany and the Allied states did not mean a cessation of fighting on the Eastern Frontline. In November 1918, Ukrainian armed forces invaded part of Austrian Poland, where they were defeated by the offensive of the Polish army in July 1919. At the same time, the Red Army occupied north-east Poland and in 1920, attacked Polish forces in the Ukraine. Faced with an exceedingly difficult military situation, the Polish government issued a request to the Allies for help. But a condition of aid rested upon Poland accepting the Curzon Line as its eastern border. Bolshevik Russia placed the same demands on Poland. The outraged Poles decided instead to fight for independence on their own. Thousands of volunteers joined the Polish army which proceeded to defeat the Red Army in the Battle of Warsaw on 13 August 1920. Weeks later, the Polish army crushed the Red Army’s 1st Cavalry Army then commanded by Semyon Mikhailovich Budyonny, thereby preventing any successful Bolshevik offensive in Western Europe.

This article argues that the above events contributed to the social stratification of the disabled ex-servicemen in interwar Poland. For example, those who were disabled while participating in the Polish-

Soviet war enjoyed the highest esteem. There is, however, room for a more comprehensive analysis. John Pickstone has argued that the current historiography of society and medicine has overwhelmingly focused on the West and North. Few studies of disability have examined the impact of the Eastern Front and the subsequent policies for disabled servicemen that were developed in the postwar period. This study traces the development of the welfare system, social networks, and medical services for disabled ex-servicemen and civilians whose disability occurred as a direct result of events of World War I. This article also examines the discourse between the state and society along with the legal basis of their care in interwar Poland. Finally, the connection between modernization, government, and public intervention in the care and management of war invalids is investigated.

The meaning of the term “disabled ex-servicemen” has differed over time. David A. Gerber has recently offered a comprehensive theoretical framework that incorporates the political, social, and medical aspects of caring for disabled ex-servicemen in the twentieth century. In Poland, the expression “disabled ex-serviceman” was first defined in 1916 by Henryk Eile, to provide legal status to Polish disabled prisoners-of-war, who languished in prison camps in the depths of Russia. The present article assumes Gerber’s definition of a “disabled ex-serviceman” as being “a man injured or becoming chronically ill while in military service, usually though not necessarily in combat.” This study similarly incorporates Eile’s definition of “disabled ex-serviceman” as “a man, who being on military duty became disabled or ill, or his disease that existed before the war was worsened, or his ability to earn was reduced.” However, it is worth noting that in interwar Poland, members of society generally regarded all those injured by the war as deserving of equal humanitarian aid. Thus a different term, “war invalid,” was used to cover not only disabled ex-soldiers but

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also civilian victims of war. The civilian victims of war included: volunteers fighting for Polish independence in the years 1918–20, women injured in mine explosions or misfires, as well as the families of soldiers who lost their lives in combat and who were thus deprived of financial means. Consequently, the term “war invalid” seems most appropriate for this study.\textsuperscript{14}

This article is based on documents held in the State Archives in Poznań and Warsaw, Legal Acts and regulations concerning disabled ex-servicemen and other victims of war, data from statistical yearbooks, as well as reports of charity organizations and state administrative bodies in interwar Poland.\textsuperscript{15} As mentioned above, after World War I, public life in Poland was somewhat chaotic, which resulted in a shortage of reliable archive material for this period. Moreover, records concerning the government’s approach to the problem of disabled ex-servicemen are also sparse. There are, however, some secondary sources important for this article. For example, this study agrees with Daniel Pick’s conceptualization of World War I as “a system rooted in mid-nineteenth century Prussian military might, subsequent German unification and fin-de-siècle rationalization of industry, space and time,” which burdened Germany with moral responsibility for the millions of victims.\textsuperscript{16} However, this study challenges the stereotypical image that World War I exonerated Russia from any responsibility as a world super-power. Russia used secretive means of oppression like exiling political dissidents in Siberia and allowing prisoners-of-war to die from hunger and neglect. The omission of the Central and Eastern Europe within western historiography has led to this biased interpretation. For example, the League of Blinded Soldiers, established in 1916 in Berlin, was described by Greg Eghigian as the first association for disabled veterans in the world. However, it was only one part of a wider process and many such organizations were founded in Polish territories at the time.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14} Ministry of Welfare, catalogue number 530, State Archives in Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland.

\textsuperscript{15} The most interesting records are kept in the State Archives in Warsaw and Poznań, Poland.


\textsuperscript{17} Eghigian, Making Security, 180.
Jeffrey S. Reznick’s investigation of British soldiers’ recollections about their experiences of voluntary aid, rest facilities, and general military hospitals has been of great value to this study. Reznick examined the national differences in the culture of care-giving and demonstrated that World War I was a process which turned a once large section of the male workforce into a social burden. As a state built from practically nothing, as Poland was between 1918 and 1939, creating policies to manage disabled ex-servicemen had considerable social and economic consequences. Rehabilitating the war invalids and creating a viable workforce nevertheless required adequate financial and organizational infrastructure. As Heather Perry demonstrates, such infrastructure existed in the Weimar Republic. As a matter of policy, disabled soldiers were supplied with two prostheses and trained in a new occupation so that their living standards could be the same as before the war. By contrast, Poland did not have a comparable infrastructure.

Disability historiography has not only become a fruitful subject of original research, but it has been used as an analytical tool to illuminate issues of gender, sexuality, masculinity, and war, and historical memory and nation. In an important study, Seth Koven focused on the discourse constructed by the British state and society simultaneously to remember and forget the child victims of crippling poverty-related illness at home and the adult male victims of the Great War. The Poland case resembles the British story, but it was also understood that war–widows may well have to take control of the household.

The relation between the health problems of disabled ex-servicemen and the development of medical knowledge has been clearly illustrated by Edgar Jones, who examined the connection between war neuroses suffered by ex-servicemen and the institutionalization of psychotherapy in England after 1945. Unfortunately, little attention was paid to

war-neurosis and shellshock in interwar Poland, largely because of the serious shortage of resources. However, Roger Cooter’s study of orthopedics and the organization of modern medicine from 1880 to 1948 revealed new dimensions to this topic. Cooter examined Konrad Biesalski, an orthopaedic surgeon in Berlin and the first person “to distinguish a cripple as a sick person.” Cooter explored Biesalski’s impact on the organization of healthcare for disabled people in other countries, and demonstrated that Biesalski’s conclusions influenced a new diagnostic/social category: that the war invalid was a “special biological person.” Or rather as Mia Fineman argues, a war invalid was described as “differently able.”23 A former student of Biesalski, physician Ireneusz Wierzejewski, founded the first and only interwar period Polish university orthopedic clinic in Poznań in 1923. This clinic, using Biesalski’s concepts, specialized in the rehabilitation of crippled children and disabled victims of the Great War.24

DISABLED EX-SERVICEMEN AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 1920S

After World War I, the Polish government had to manage a new class of disabled citizens. Prior to 1918, men were conscripted into the armies of Austria, Prussia, or Russia, the three powers which had occupied Poland since the end of the eighteenth century. Poland, a new and weak state in 1922, was charged with managing the large number of disabled ex-servicemen who had been injured in earlier wars such as the Franco-Prussian War or the Manchuria War along with those injured in the Great War. There were also thousands of disabled ex-servicemen who had served in actual Polish units. The first ones, the Polish Legions, were formed in 1914 in Cracow by Józef Piłsudski with just two hundred volunteers. Two years later, their number increased to a force of more than twelve thousand volunteers. These men supported both the Austrian and German armies on the Eastern Front, which played a key role in forcing the Russians to retreat. Nevertheless, when the German commanders tried to get the Poles to swear allegiance to Germany, most of them refused. As a result, most of those who came from the territory annexed by Russia

were treated as prisoners-of-war. Those who came from the territory annexed by Austria were formed into a new military unit, the Polish Reinforcement Corps, and were sent to the Italian front. Later on, some servicemen from this Corps made their way to France, and they were enlisted in the Blue Army formed in 1917 by the French general Louis Archinard (later replaced by Polish general Józef Haller). The Polish servicemen who swore allegiance to Germany were incorporated into the so-called Polnische Wehrmacht. An answer to the question, “Which disabled ex-servicemen should be accepted as being the responsibility of the new state?” was necessarily ambiguous since by 1918, the status of many of the disabled servicemen remained unclear.

Rumors about men suffering in the POW camps deep inside Russia resulted in the formation of several charitable organizations including the Polish Committee for Sanitary Assistance, which helped all wounded soldiers regardless of nationality; the Polish Women’s First Aid Society; the Charitable Society in Vilnius; the Vilnius Municipal Committee; the Service Agency for Reservists’ Families; the Union of Disabled Ex-servicemen and Civilians in St. Petersburg; the Lvov Rescue Committee; the Vilnius Female Committee; and the Polish Society for Aid to War Victims.25 The last one planned to organize a modern system of social reintegration for war invalids modeled on the German system of rehabilitation and re-education.26

However, their plans and activity paled in contrast to the actual size of the problem after 1918. Poland soon became an area of migration—immigration, emigration, re-immigration, re-emigration of thousands of people including Poles, Germans, Russians, Jews, Ukrainians, and others, most of which were impoverished and suffering various forms of ill-health. Leaving out civilians, the number of returning servicemen was staggering. In December 1918, approximately seventy-five thousand soldiers from the Polish units returned to Poland, followed in April 1919 by Haller’s Blue Army of fifty thousand from France. At the end of that year, ten thousand men from the Polish Military Unit in Murmansk, Siberia, arrived home. Six months later, in June 1920, another ten thousand from the Polish Siberian Brigade, which consisted of Poles conscripted into the Tsar’s Army in 1914 and who had been trapped in Russia

by the revolution, managed to find their way back to Poland. The Treaty of Versailles did not define the borders of the new state of Poland; hence, some western areas of Poland such as Pomerania, Silesia, and Greater Poland (Wielkopolska) were only included after the uprising and plebiscites. The uncertainty of the borders of Poland caused conflict between Poland and Russia and the Ukraine. Another social problem concerned about one million people being repatriated from the interior of Russia, where many had fled in 1916 to avoid the German advance. Thus, trying to determine accurately the actual number of war invalids immediately after the Great War is an impossible task.27

Due to insurmountable famine, POWs were suddenly released from the Austrian, German, and Russian prisoner-of-war camps. However, they returned home without any evidence of military service and thus proof that they were disabled in the war. Parliament responded to this social problem with the creation of the Commission for Repatriating Disabled Prisoners-of-War. Nevertheless, the Commission was unable to provide food or orthopedic devices for these men.28 In the years between 1918 and 1921, thousands of Poles died of starvation, pregnant women miscarried, newborns died because their hungry mothers could not feed them, and tuberculosis and rickets crippled human bodies.29 Such tragic events were all too common in Eastern Europe and the only hope was the procurement of foreign aid.30 As an example, Poles never forgot the American aid they received or the packages sent from the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA).31

When the first register of war invalids was compiled in 1921, it covered only people from the territory of former Prussian areas and the figures were only approximate, but it did include, in addition to disabled ex-servicemen, a list of the families of soldiers killed in

28. Teodor Molkner, Ustawowe uregulowanie kwestii inwalidzkiej w Polsce (Kraków, Poland: Krakowska Spółka Wydawnicza, 1921), 10–12.
action who were also in need of support.\footnote{Protocol of conference organized 30 September 1921, catalogue number 3857, Division of Welfare, State Archives in Poznań, Poland.} This register, along with Polish registers, differed from their English counterparts.\footnote{For more on the cultural context of medically unexplained somatic diseases, see Edgar Jones and Simon Wessely, “War Syndromes: The Impact of Culture on Medically Unexplained Symptoms,” \textit{Med. Hist.}, 2005, 49, 55–78.} Within all of the Polish registers, the term “war invalids” was used instead of “disabled ex-serviceman.” As previously mentioned, this was a much broader term that covered both ex-servicemen and civilians who had been injured during the war and could no longer work and earn a living. Compensation and care was provided to all victims, both servicemen and civilians, if severe disability had been caused by any aspect of the war. This covered blindness resulting from gunshots and mustard gas attacks, deafness, or loss of limbs (amputation of a limb(s) was the frequent method of treating gunshot wounds during the Great War). Moreover, a social category of “people affected by war accidents and in need of assistance” was created in Poland, which covered not only widows and orphans who had lost husbands and fathers, but also elderly parents unable to earn their own living because their sons had been killed in action.\footnote{Anon., \textit{Rocznik Oficerów Rezerwy RP} (Warszawa: Związek Oficerów Rezerwy, 1929), 14. The quotation in Polish is: “ludzie dotknięci wypadkami wojennymi i potrzebujący pomocy.”} A 1921 census covering the entire country listed seventy-five thousand war invalids. These registers reveal that the majority of disabled ex-servicemen lived in the western part of Poland and they had been conscripted to serve in the Prussian army (Table 1).

In 1925, an estimate from the Polish Ministry of Military Affairs gave the total number of disabled ex-servicemen as 136,452, of whom 83,377 were considered permanently unfit to work and 53,075 as temporarily unfit to work.\footnote{Anon., \textit{Książka Jubileuszowa Wielkopolskiego Zarządu Wojewódzkiego Związku Inwalidów Wojennych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej} (Poznań: Drukarnia DOK, 1925), 206.} In 1929, these figures were revised. Out of a population of twenty-seven million, there were one hundred and thirty-six thousand registered disabled ex-servicemen with an additional one hundred and thirty-one thousand widows and orphans. Thus, a total of two hundred and sixty-seven thousand people were entitled to disability pensions and benefits.\footnote{Anon., \textit{Książka Jubileuszowa}, 122.} This figure is considerably lower than the English equivalent for 1930. According to
### TABLE 1
Victims of the Great War in the Former Prussian District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Number of disabled ex-servicemen and civilians</th>
<th>Number of war-widows</th>
<th>Number of half-orphans</th>
<th>Number of orphans</th>
<th>Number of orphans born out of wedlock</th>
<th>Number of elderly parents in need of support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western and Central regions of Poland</td>
<td>34,274</td>
<td>13,315</td>
<td>35,414</td>
<td>1,449</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>7,129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pomerania</td>
<td>17,000</td>
<td>9,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Together</td>
<td>51,274</td>
<td>22,351</td>
<td>37,414</td>
<td>2,749</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>12,129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: State Archives in Poznań, Records from the interwar period, catalogue number 3,857, the protocol of conference, 30 September 1921.
Edgar Jones and Simon Wessely, in an analysis of data compiled from the English National Archive, in March 1930, in South-East England alone 1,644,000 pensions were being paid by the Ministry of Pensions. This was equivalent to 60 percent of all such pensions paid that month in England. A total of about three million people were receiving war pensions out of a population of thirty-nine million.\(^{37}\)

Only two hundred and sixty-seven thousand Poles received war pensions; in England, the number was nearly eleven times higher. The size of the difference, however, was not just the result of different policies adopted toward ex-servicemen in Poland and the much wealthier England. It was also affected by the fact that the new state of Poland was still finding its feet and lacked an organized healthcare and welfare system. In particular, psychiatric care, as inherited from three different systems from three different rulers, was poor and inconsistent. Improvements did not come until well into the 1930s.\(^{38}\)

In comparison, the development of neuropsychiatric care in England was advanced enough to recognize that it was not only the obvious disabilities such as blindness, deafness, or loss of limbs which needed treatment, but also war neurosis and other mental traumas suffered by ex-servicemen.\(^{39}\)

In Poland, unlike England, there was no lump sum of compensation for war-induced disability; there were only disability pensions which were paid to a comparatively small number because the system was based on the Prussian model which provided pensions only for the time required to train for new skills. This meant that war invalids in Poland could only receive short-term financial and material help—unless their disability made it impossible for them to work at all.

Based on the registers of war invalids from 1921, covering ex-servicemen and civilians, it is possible to draw a map of Poland in the period of World War I showing the position of the frontlines, the nature of the battles, and the types of weapons used. The percentage of women amongst war invalids shows the dangers faced by civilians during the war due to the number of mines and unexploded hand-


grenades. Indeed, the victims of these explosions were very often women working in the fields near their homes after the armies had moved on. In 1921, women accounted for one-fifth of all invalids without one or more limbs, almost half of the blind and half of the deaf, with the greater percentage coming from the area of the Austrian/Russian frontlines. In these areas, there was an average 20.4 men and 6.5 women per 10,000 of the population, who had lost limbs in this way (Table 2).

The largest percentage of men who had lost limbs (22.3 men per every 10,000 of the population) came from the western provinces, supporting the hypothesis that they were ex-servicemen from the Prussian army. As pointed out by Heather Perry, the German surgeons amputated limbs with excessive frequency.41 According to one German statistic, it was estimated that amputations among German

41. Perry, "Re-Arming the Disabled," 75.
soldiers reached about eighty thousand cases.\textsuperscript{42} The statistics also show that one-quarter of these amputations were carried out on Poles who were conscripted by force into the Prussian army. During the Partition period, Prussia had a system of conscription in the areas they controlled; thus, most of these injuries would have been sustained by men serving on the western front.\textsuperscript{43} The figures show that more than ten thousand people in the eastern and central provinces were blinded as a result of exposure to mustard gas and gunshot wounds. This demonstrates both the length and ferocity of the battles in the eastern provinces (Table 3).

These two lists show a connection between the frequency of occurrence and type of disability along with the types of weapons used on the frontlines in World War I. It also proves that being conscripted into the Austrian, Prussian, or Russian armies was the main

\renewcommand{\arraystretch}{1.2}
\begin{table}
\centering
\caption{The Blind in Poland in 1921}
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
Voivodeships (provinces) in Poland & Together & Blind men & Blind women & Blind women per 10,000 inhabitants & Blind men per 10,000 inhabitants \\
\hline
The whole territory of Poland & 16,144 & 8,700 & 7,444 & 5.6 & 7.2 \\
Central voivodeships & 6,768 & 3,609 & 3,159 & 5.4 & 6.7 \\
Eastern voivodeships & 3,250 & 1,800 & 1,450 & 7.8 & 10.3 \\
Western voivodeships & 1,442 & 712 & 730 & 4.8 & 5.2 \\
Southern voivodeships & 4,630 & 2,546 & 2,084 & 5.3 & 7.2 \\
Silesia’s Cieszyn & 54 & 33 & 21 & 2.8 & 4.8 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}


\textsuperscript{42} Fineman, “Ecce Homo Prostheticus,” 88.
\textsuperscript{43} Anon. and Anon., \textit{Rocznik Statystyki Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej 1927} (Warszawa, Poland: GUS, 1930), 54.
cause of disability in interwar Poland. The total number of disabled ex-servicemen in the Polish military forces, who fought for Poland, was about ten thousand which was a small part of the whole.\textsuperscript{44}

\textbf{THE BREAKDOWN OF THE GERMAN SYSTEM OF SOCIAL REINTEGRATION OF DISABLED EX-SERVICEMEN}

For a new state, trying to organize both its agendas and bodies without adequate financial resources or any experience in public administration, as was the case of Poland post-1918, making the full provision of benefits for disabled ex-servicemen and their families impossible. The only system for helping war invalids or providing pensions was based on the German concept of “forced social reintegration,” revised in 1915 when each individual Prussian province started a separate program of promoting employment for war invalids. In the following year, a new social movement of disabled ex-servicemen emerged in Berlin, where blind patients at Dr. Silex’s School for the Blind founded an association, especially for disabled ex-servicemen called the League of Blinded Soldiers (Bund erblindeter Krieger). This organization was soon followed by other organizations hoping to provide economic security to disabled ex-servicemen.\textsuperscript{45}

This movement to aid disabled servicemen was similarly developed in the Prussian-controlled area of Poland by a group of disabled Polish ex-servicemen who formed themselves into the Poznań War Invalids Association (Gospodarcze Zrzeszenie Poznańskich Inwalidów Wojennych). The Association was formed independently of the Prussian administration, which annoyed the district authority so much so that it forbade disabled soldiers who were being treated in hospital from becoming members of the organization. Despite the ban, however, more than one hundred Poles did become members, and perhaps more surprising, they were joined by about a dozen Germans who declared their support for both Polish affairs and independence.\textsuperscript{46}

However, the main role in the Prussian partition was played by the private German society Haupt für Sorge Ausschuss für die

\textsuperscript{44} Jan Likowski, \textit{Związek Inwalidów Wojennych RP istnieje 80 lat, 1919–1999} (Warszawa, Poland: Retro-Art., 1999), 12.

\textsuperscript{45} Eghigian, \textit{Making Security}, 180.

\textsuperscript{46} Stachecki, “Historia rozwoju,” 11–29.
Kriegsbeschädigten der Provinz Posen, which collected money from the public and decided how the funds (then managed by the office of the district authority officials) would be dispersed. In the province of East Prussia, which covered some of the Polish-annexed territories, there was an additional source of pensions for war invalids: the so-called Ludendorff fund.  

Even prior to the end of the war, disabled ex-servicemen’s movements had appeared in Warsaw, at that time ruled by Prussia, and in Cracow, at the time ruled by Austria. In 1915, the Austrian system was re-organized on the lines of the German social insurance system. A state agency, the “Kriegsorganisation der Arbeitsvermittlung,” was developed specifically to promote employment for ex-servicemen. At the same time, the Austrian military authorities established the “School for the Disabled” in Cracow, which became a center for the social life of war invalids. Like the German model, pensions were granted only to those with at least a 20 percent loss of working ability, and then only for the duration of the war and six months thereafter. The Austrian Ministry of War also granted benefits for the families of disabled ex-servicemen and soldiers killed in action. The Polish units were granted benefits as well, although some individuals were excluded because they were born in Russia–Poland. As a consequence of this, on February 1915, Marshal Józef Piłsudski gave orders which secured the health and social needs of all disabled soldiers from Polish units. This was the first, official legal regulation for war invalids. 

After the war, the Polish state administration made use of all this experience to create their own system of care for victims of World War I. In the Ministry of the Former Prussian Ruled Area, formed to meet temporary demands, the Main Department of Care for War Invalids was established with its headquarters in Poznań. This center facilitated pension requests for disabled victims and offered legal advice for ex-servicemen. This department, funded by the army,
also supplied disabled veterans with prostheses and provided professional training courses. The department worked with the State School of Training and Craftsmanship in Poznań to teach disabled ex-servicemen new trades: cobbling, tailoring, carpentry, and locksmith among them. Nevertheless, the army did not provide adequate funds to include, for example, the salaries of the officials of the Main Department of Care, so the Ludendorff fund was also used to support the center.\textsuperscript{53} Almost all those requesting support were simple soldiers with only basic education and they were encouraged to return to their prewar occupations if they were unable to complete a new training course.\textsuperscript{54} In 1921, a similar school for blind ex-soldiers was opened in Bydgoszcz.\textsuperscript{55}

In the western part of Poland, there were over fifty-one thousand disabled ex-servicemen and only a few dozen could learn a new skill at any one time. This meant that the efforts of the state organizations to facilitate the social integration of disabled ex-servicemen were inadequate to meet the demand. Claims for financial aid were handled systematically, but there were not enough funds to support the thousands of disabled ex-servicemen and the families of those killed in action. Thus, the Polish government assigned responsibility for the invalids to the former ruling powers. This directive was justified on the grounds that most injuries had been sustained in guarding the rights of the former ruling powers, not the rights of the new state of Poland. Following this decision, victims were told to direct their claims not to the Polish government but to the Prussian, Austrian, or Russian governments depending on which army they had been conscripted into before 1918.\textsuperscript{56}

The Polish government announced that it was only responsible for ex-servicemen of the Polish army and that any compensation for ex-servicemen from the armies of Prussia, Austria, or Russia should be a matter discussed among Prussia and the former ruling powers. Soon after the adoption of this policy, the Polish government began referring claims to Berlin, Vienna, and St. Petersburg, but with

\textsuperscript{53} Protocol of conference, State Archives in Poznań.
\textsuperscript{55} Marian Gumowski, \textit{Dzieje Polskiego Czerwonego Krzyża w Wielkopolsce, 1918–1928} (Poznań, Poland: Drukarnia University Press, 1930), 39.
\textsuperscript{56} Protocol of conference, State Archives in Poznań.
meager results. Disabled veterans returned empty-handed and increas-ingly embittered. Hungry ex-servicemen took to the streets of Warsaw and other Polish towns to protest this treatment on at least three occasions. They next began to work on a charter for their own organization. On 27 November 1920, the Polish War Invalids Association (PWIA) was legalized and represented the claims of almost three hundred thousand members. This figure is higher than the one taken from the government register because about half of the members of the PWIA did not obtain the formal status of disabled ex-servicemen. Even during the founding Congress in 1919, it was accepted as a fundamental principle that all war invalids were considered equal in the eyes of Polish law. A citizen of Poland, no matter what ethnicity or regardless of the unit in which he was disabled, was entitled to social and medical care and a war pension.57 These new regulations met with the disapproval of some war veteran communities along with a general reluctance among state authorities to accept this policy.58

THE START AND FAILURE OF THE GOVERNMENTAL SYSTEM FOR DISABLED EX-SERVICEMEN

The government responded with an Act 18 March 1921 outlining provisions for disabled ex-servicemen and their surviving families. According to the Act, the following persons were regarded as war invalids: “Those whose health was damaged or who were injured due to their service in the army of the Republic of Poland, in Polish units of foreign armies recognized by the Polish State, and in the armies of the invaders, provided that they served in the army during World War I.”59 The courts examined witnesses under oath to find out the facts about injury or death in military service. Not all ex-servicemen were entitled to pensions. At the beginning, those from the former armies of Wrangel and Denikin were refused pensions and they were granted financial aid only as a result of an order from the Ministry of Defence on 3 October 1922.60 The new law had not

57. Likowski, Związek Inwalidów, 11.
59. Witold Czechowicz, Przepisy o zaopatrzeniu inwalidów wojennych i pozostałych po nich rodzin (Warszawa, Poland: Drukarnia PKO, 1925), 18.
60. Bolesław Kikiewicz, Do pana Jana Zamorskiego, posła na Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (Warszawa, Poland: Drukarnia Olesiński, 1926), 8.
been in place long when policemen in Warsaw gunned down three of the disabled ex-servicemen and wounded eighteen others during a demonstration held by disabled veterans protesting against the infringement of their rights.\textsuperscript{61}

Apart from a disability pension (the amount depended on the loss of earning capacity, which had to be at least 5 percent), benefits for war invalids also included free medical treatment, rehabilitation, and orthopedic appliances. These benefits were funded through the state budget. War invalids, who stayed in hospital for a period longer than four weeks, received 5 percent of the pension and a cost-of-living allowance. After training, the blind received a set of tools necessary to perform their new occupation and if necessary, a guide dog. The cost of leg brace repairs were covered by the state. Additionally, war invalids were given priority for employment in state and local institutions, as well as in state monopolies. Those who lived with their families but were infirm received a carer’s allowance of one-quarter of the disability pension. Such benefits were granted to the families of soldiers killed in action, including legitimate, illegitimate, and adopted children, widows, and elderly parents. At the request of the army forces, the county courts examined witnesses under oath in order to ascertain the connection between military service and infirm health, bodily injury, or death.\textsuperscript{62}

This ambitious plan of support for disabled ex-servicemen, however, was not developed that year due to massive inflation of over 400 percent. Indeed, the lack of state funds led to a suspension of disability pensions in March 1922.\textsuperscript{63} Subsequently, the government started to work on a new law for disabled war veterans. In 1923, in accordance with the Social Care Act, which was organized at that time, the whole system was brought under the control of the Ministry of Social Care. The institution for both treatment and education was converted to a school for re-education and training (Figure 1).

It was thus possible, for example, for disabled persons to learn a new trade or occupation in cobbling, basketry, or weaving, which was run by the Polish Red Cross. The greatest handicap in the development of

\textsuperscript{61}. Likowski, \textit{Związek Inwalidów}, 12.
\textsuperscript{63}. Czechowicz, \textit{Przepisy}, 22.
economic and educational institutions for war invalids was the shortage of funds available from the central government.64

For the next few years, the problems of war invalids were exploited, both in the press and in Parliament among members of government and members of the opposition party. Opponents of the government brought up the point that the Invalid Act of 18 March 1921 had actually decreased the provision for the “bloody victims of war” because in the eastern territories, records had been destroyed during the Bolshevik invasion in 1920. Other problems included the loss of files on disabled ex-servicemen, which deprived them of their right to claim material support. The Parliamentary opposition skillfully manipulated the problems of managing the disabled war victims in order to convince the public of the ruthlessness of the government. As one example, it was suggested that disability pensions be increased by 30 percent and a higher subsidy be granted to the War

64. Anon., Rocznik Statystyki Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej 1923 (Warszawa, Poland: GUS, 1923), 189.
Invalids’ Bank, which was impossible in the face of the economic situation.

The opponents of the government published a story in the press which concerned the family of a soldier that was refused all rights to any kind of material support. This particular soldier died a deserter’s death in France. In other words, while escaping from the Prussian army to the Polish army, he had been captured by the Germans and executed. There were also stories of people, who, after the war had ended, were sent into the forests to collect unexploded grenades and they lost limbs, yet had not acquired the right to financial support. The problem was that a soldier on the battlefield had difficulty finding witnesses who, in the future, would or could confirm that he had been injured severely enough in the line of duty that he suffered permanent damage to his health.

The opponents of the government argued that any legislation concerning the disabled should not only provide support for those who defended their country, but should also include insurance for those who would defend Poland in the future. On the other hand, the Members of Parliament in support of the government highlighted abuse of the system. It was argued that less than credible witnesses were testifying that an injury in question was the result of army service during World War I. And as a result, disabled veterans were granted land and concessions on tobacco products at wholesale outlets too generously, which made them wealthy. Yet, these discussions were empty, since it ought to be kept in mind that from 1923, due to the Social Care Act, the government relegated the responsibility for war invalids to local authorities and philanthropists.\textsuperscript{65} Introducing the Social Care Act of 16 August 1923 meant that the duty to care for war invalids began to shift from the government to society.\textsuperscript{66} Up to the end of 1925, as many as one hundred and three legal acts were issued concerning provisions for war invalids; these were mainly circular letters and orders of the Ministry of Defence, which limited the possibilities of obtaining social care and free healthcare for new candidates and,

\begin{footnotesize}
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  \item \textsuperscript{65} Bolesław Kikiewicz, \textit{Do pana posła dr. Brunona Gruszki} (Warszawa, Poland: Drukarnia Olesiński, 1926), 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{66} Stanisław Grocholski and Edward Chwalewik, eds., \textit{Opieka społeczna. Zbiór ustaw i rozporządzeń z wyjaśnieniami i komentarzami} (Warszawa, Poland: MPiŚ, 1929), 9.
\end{itemize}
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at the same time, increased the range of privileges for those who had already been registered.\textsuperscript{67}

In 1924, there were 25,352 registered unemployed, while in 1925, this number rose to 133,527 and by 1926, it had grown to 302,179.\textsuperscript{68} For those who had difficulty in making ends meet, attaining the status of a disabled war victim was attractive. As prices increased, more and more people attempted to prove through the testimony of sworn witnesses that their service in World War I resulted in permanent damage to health, thus entitling them to material aid. In 1923, thousands of people made efforts to be classified as either war invalids or close relatives of soldiers killed in combat. There were women who claimed to be the widows of killed soldiers, but during World War I, wedding ceremonies generally took place in a field or a forest and they were therefore unable to provide adequate documentation as proof. Those with a visible disability often reported that documents confirming the connection between their disability and military service were lost during the war, but as a result of their obvious disability may have found more support. The government was flooded with an increasing number of claims seeking war invalid status.\textsuperscript{69} Although similar deceptive practices were reported in other belligerent countries, the problem of missing documentation and the subsequent opportunities for fraud was especially severe in Poland.

At the time, Germany began a five-year-long customs war to hamper the economic development of Poland. But Poland also suffered from the worldwide economic crisis in the postwar period.\textsuperscript{70} Hence, the responsibility for war invalids was assigned to local governments, which tended not to favor disabled ex-servicemen and even decreased support for them.\textsuperscript{71} This is illustrated in the budget for the City of Cracow for the financial year 1930/31, when PLN 49,463 was spent on the very poor in the general population, while disabled ex-servicemen and the families of soldiers killed in action received a total of PLN 214. Out of this small amount (the equivalent of three

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{67} Kikiewicz, \textit{Do Brunona Gnszki}, 2.
\bibitem{68} Anon., \textit{Rocznik Statystyki Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej 1929} (Warszawa, Poland: GUS, 1930), 88–98.
\bibitem{69} Czechowicz, \textit{Przepisy}, 22.
\bibitem{70} Gałe ˛zowski, “II Rzeczpospolita,” 65.
\bibitem{71} Anon., \textit{Rocznik Statystyki 1929}, 363.
\end{thebibliography}
average salaries), exactly PLN 1 was spent on the war widows and orphans, and PLN 60 on prostheses for war invalids.\textsuperscript{72}

State revenues decreased gradually and the government accordingly further reformed the requirements for receiving aid. A new Act concerning the provision of aid for war invalids required that pensioners demonstrate that as a result of injury, their loss of earning capacity exceeded 45 percent. This reduced the number of war pensioners significantly. The Act came into effect on 17 March 1932, when a total of 150,208 disabled victims of World War I were in Poland. The largest group, 52,590, were those with damaged limbs, but other significant groups were those who had lost one or more limbs, 14,197, and those who had been blinded, 5,828.\textsuperscript{73}

After 1935, some economic growth enabled the government to extend the range of the war pensions. Thus, disabled ex-servicemen who were hitherto deprived of any material help such as Poles serving in the Austrian army on the Italian frontline were granted relief. This was a calculated move because the number of disabled ex-servicemen entitled to war pensions was at the same time limited by imposing a requirement of the minimum 45 percent of loss of health.\textsuperscript{74} Not only were the long-term consequences of traumatic war experience unrecognized in interwar Poland but even earning a living was difficult for many disabled veterans; hence, their social status deteriorated. Austria, Germany, and Russia also neglected to pay war compensation to the state, or to the citizens of Poland who as a result of being conscripted into their armies lost the ability to work.\textsuperscript{75}

**THE SYSTEM OF MUTUAL HELP**

Systems of care for those disabled by the war were not limited to government programs. As soon as the war was over, material support for war invalids and for the families of soldiers killed in action was spontaneously organized by the war invalids themselves (Figure 2).

\textsuperscript{72} Anon., *Budżet wydatków i dochodów gminy miasta Krakowa na rok 1932/33* (Kraków, Poland: Gmina m. Krakowa, 1932), 72. PLN is the abbreviation for the unit of the Polish currency, the zloty.


\textsuperscript{74} Anon., “Protokół z czynności rewizyjnych dokonanych w Fundacji m. stol. Warszawy Pomocy dla Inwalidów Wojskowych Polskich za okres 1936/37,” *Dziennik Zarządu Miejskiego w m. stol. Warszawie*, 1939, 34, 2–4, 2–3.

\textsuperscript{75} Białecki, *Życie i walka*, 63.
At the end of November 1918, more than a hundred disabled ex-servicemen associations and organizations in the former Russian-rulled area, transformed the former Union of War Invalids (which had been active in St. Petersburg during the war), into the Central Association of Disabled Ex-servicemen. At the same time, some groups from Cracow reorganized themselves into the Association of War Invalids in Poland. A short time later disabled ex-servicemen boards, founded by Austrian local authorities in Silesia, reorganized themselves in the same way.

In April 1919, these groups organized their first conference and created the Polish War Invalids’ Association (PWIA), which was recognized by the government in 1920. As representative of the majority of war invalids, their families, war widows, and orphans, the PWIA took the view that neither the poor public response nor the fact that Poland had never formally entered World War I could relieve the Polish State of the duty of repaying the debts run up by Austria, Prussia, and Russia. The PWIA published the journal Inwalida (The Disabled Man) to reveal how bad the situation was; the

Fig. 2. Meeting of the Mutual Aid Association of the Participants of the January 1863 Uprising, organized in 1932, Warsaw. Photograph by Leon Jarumski. (Courtesy of the Polish National Digital Archives.)
government responded by ordering police to confiscate some issues. The Association was self-sufficient thanks to the support of a number of companies, which had been founded by disabled ex-servicemen. Amongst the growing membership, there were many Ukrainians who represented the ethnic minority then isolated by the internal politics of the government. Nevertheless, the PWIA accepted them and regarded them as temporary ex-patriots. These people, who had been members of the Association of Disabled Ex-servicemen in the former Ukrainian Republic, formed their own Branch, which published its own journal, Z dniv radosti (From Happy Days) in Ukrainian.

Several thousand disabled ex-servicemen from the Polish-Jewish community formed themselves into a separate organization outside of the PDVA, and incorporated several local associations of Jewish disabled ex-servicemen (Figure 3).

Most of these people were fully assimilated as Polish citizens holding full allegiance to the Polish State. Their publications were Polish, but they lived within their diaspora outside the main-line Polish movement (for example, they ran their own employment office). Another isolated group of Polish war victims were the approximately one thousand five hundred disabled ex-servicemen who remained in Belgium and France after the cessation of hostilities. These men were, however, registered at the Polish Ministry of Welfare as Polish citizens and were thus granted benefits. By the early 1920s, poverty among war victims was so serious that a group of disabled ex-soldiers from Haller’s Blue Army organized themselves into the Society of Agricultural and Craft Settlements for War Invalids, which showed great enterprise in helping to set up businesses, small co-operatives, and companies. Many of these enterprises had optimistic names including: “Family Force,” “Together,” The Development,” or “The Unity of the Disabled.” These organizations concentrated on various projects including storage services, advertising, retail tobacco, trade, and transport services. They also organized charitable events, rented canteens, opened bakeries, and tobacco shops, published and

77. Z dniv radosti 1 (1928).
79. Białecki, Życie i walka, 42–43; “Statut Kooperatywy. Infob” Inwalidów i Ochotników Formacyj Obcych, które Walczyły w Szeregach Armii Polskiej Podczas Wojny 1920 roku
sold journals to collect money for these and other enterprises and cooperatives. A new cinema in the city of Tczew was an interesting example of enterprise, run by a group of disabled ex-servicemen. The money needed for opening the cinema came from the sale of a book, which had been published with this particular objective in mind. The book was a collection of statements by well-known Polish writers about war invalids.  

Cognizant of the extremely difficult economic situation in the country, leaders of these societies sought to develop and foster a system of mutual help, which could benefit all disabled ex-servicemen, particularly those who were not entitled to war compensation and/or

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who could not find work without vocational training. In 1926, the Society of Care for War Invalids was established to promote the cooperatives of disabled ex-servicemen, to train them in new professions, support their efforts to find a job, provide for their emotional needs, and organize healthcare for the ex-servicemen and their families. These activities were financed by the general public. This was an ambitious project, a worldwide journey beginning with three disabled ex-soldiers, which was initially developed in order to both promote Poland and foster a connection with other foreign organizations of war veterans. With the success of this initiative, the PWIA became a member of two pacifist organizations: the Confédération Internationale des Associations de Mutilés de Guerre and the Fédération Internationale des Anciens Combattants. Even so, many disabled ex-servicemen were common paupers who were unable to cope with day-to-day living without social support. By 1927, only one-quarter of the invalids and close relatives of soldiers killed in action who had been registered for disability pensions in 1921 were still receiving them. The number of war invalids receiving pensions in the United States, a stable economy, similarly declined but for very different reasons. By 1927, most ex-servicemen in the United States had been fitted with prostheses or had been successfully re-trained and employed in a new occupation. Unfortunately in Poland, an empty public purse forced the Polish government to adopt radical budgetary cutbacks. However, the 52,394 ex-servicemen, 9,730 widows, and 7,837 orphans were still more than the total number of ordinary civilian pensions (41,200) and the regular army pensions (19,200) a fact not missed by politicians. The problems of war invalids became increasingly politicized from the end of the war to 1926, when unemployment in Poland reached its peak. The PWIA had always been free of politics, but after the

82. Statut Towarzystwa Opieki nad Inwalidami Wojskowymi na Województwie Łódzkie (Łódź, Poland: unknown publishing house, 1926).
84. Likowski, Związek Inwalidów, 15–16.
86. Anon., Rocznik Statystyki 1930 (Warsaw, Poland: GUS, 1930), 343.
coup d’état by Piłsudski in 1926, which was supported by a group of high-ranking officers, the organization lost its political neutrality.\textsuperscript{88} The discontent of disabled ex-servicemen, something which was widespread in Europe at the time, was fully exploited by the government opposition. In 1927, an umbrella organization with a very odd name, the Union—Legion of the Republic of Poland (ULRP), openly antigovernment, came into being and took over the PWIA and other organizations. In response, the ruling party established the Federation of Polish Associations of Homeland Defenders, a similar umbrella organization, but it only included associations declaring support for the government (Figure 4). When efforts to get the ULRP to join the Federation failed, the government took over the management ULRP by force and made it join. Some groups of ex-servicemen organized a protest, but the cabinet was suddenly replaced and the new cabinet unexpectedly increased their social benefits.\textsuperscript{89}

As a result of the War Invalid Act of 1932, thousands of members of the PWIA were deprived of war compensation for their injuries, so the organization decided to focus their attention on the government and action through politics. Edwin Wagner, who was an ex-officer of the Polish Unit, was elected as the new president of the PWIA. Eighteen disabled ex-servicemen became Members of Parliament and lobbied for social privileges for disabled ex-servicemen. For example, it became law in the mid-1930s to employ them in a state institution if possible. But still, the cuts in the War Invalid Act of 1932 deprived thousands of disabled ex-servicemen even the minimum needed for living and leading to general discontent among the members.\textsuperscript{90}

These associations of disabled ex-servicemen did not forget the most vulnerable war victims, the orphans, and war widows, who they argued should be a priority in any social and healthcare activity. For example, in a clinic organized by the PWIA in 1930 in Poznań and financed by members’ subscriptions and subsidies of the Ministry of Welfare, war orphans and widows were patients on equal terms with disabled ex-servicemen.\textsuperscript{91} Honor was a characteristic feature of

\textsuperscript{88} Gałęzowski, “II Rzeczpospolita,” 69–73.
\textsuperscript{89} Białecki, Życie i walka, 48 – 56.
\textsuperscript{90} Likowski, Związek Inwalidów, 15.
\textsuperscript{91} Białecki, Życie i walka, 67.
disabled ex-servicemen. Soon before the outbreak of World War II, fifteen thousand members of the PWIA stepped forward for military service.\textsuperscript{92}

\textbf{PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR DISABLED EX-SERVICEMEN}

Only a few wealthy individuals could afford to donate money to organizations of disabled ex-servicemen. One of them was the Polish Duchess Eustachowa Sapieżyna who established in 1921 a Committee for Care of the Blind co-opting several doctors and aristocrats and appointing General Józef Haller as the Chairman. This Committee received a great deal of support from the large and influential Polish community in the United States, when it invited the American philanthropist Winifred Holt to organize an institute for blind ex-servicemen in Warsaw, the ninth such institution in the world.

\textsuperscript{92} Anon., “Inwalidzi wojenni zgłaszają gotowość ochotniczej służby w Armii,” \textit{Gazeta Polska}, 1939, 9, 3.
Afterwards, two blind officers were sent to France to study the programs and methods used in craft schools for the blind. After returning, one of them became the headmaster of a new school for blind ex-servicemen in Warsaw. Contact was also made with some nongovernmental organizations in America which led to the creation of the Polish Section of the American Braille Press, which published the first books in Braille in Poland. This school, a publishing house, and other workshops were supported by the Ministry of Welfare and the Society for Aid for Blind War Victims in Poland, which had been established by the Committee for Care of the Blind. The cooperation between the American philanthropist and the Polish social elite, supported by the Polish community in the United States and the Warsaw state bodies, demonstrates the way in which Americans influenced public life in the new Polish state, something which was of considerable importance in Poland.\(^93\)

Public support for orphans also resulted in important institutional developments. After the war, a physician named Makowski had become so distressed by the sight of the orphans then living on the streets, dressed in rags, and begging for food, that he found a suitable building and established an orphanage for the orphans of soldiers killed in action in May 1921 in Skolimow near Warsaw. Desperate, homeless women, widowed by the war, appeared, pleading with him to take their children into his care. He maintained the orphanage by donations from the general public, particularly from officers still on active military service. Charity events were organized to fund and maintain the home, but the number of orphans increased steadily until it became imperative to find a bigger building. This was when the army stepped in and handed over an old, ruined barracks to house them.\(^94\)

The building, however, was in need of complete renovation; water and drainage systems had to be connected and heating and catering arrangements had to be installed. All attempts at getting government help proved futile and in this case even an appeal to the general public was a failure. Contributions consisted of nothing but a wagon load of potatoes and supplies of worn second-hand clothing, most of

\(^{93}\) Latarnia, Towarzystwo Pomocy Ociemniałym Ofiarom Wojny w Polsce, 1931, 1, 1–9.

which were of little use. Once again it was the officers, colleagues of those killed in action, who came to the rescue. They founded an organization to collect money for the support of the orphans. They also joined forces with other groups such as the clerks from the Ministry of Education who collected money for notebooks and teaching aids, railway clerks who worked together to provide socks, stockings and materials to make other articles of clothing, and finally, members of religious organizations who donated other necessities. It was thanks to these people that the orphanage in Skolimow survived.

The following is a recollection by the founders of the orphanage, which outlines the harsh reality of the situation:

There was not enough money for repairs, which consequently were not done when needed, for food, books, footwear and clothing, while every day more desperate, emaciated women appeared at the office in Mazowiecka Street with barefooted children in worn-out clothes, who they were unable to feed, clothe, or provide with an education, very often even without a roof over their heads. There were women who, after the death of their heroic husbands, had lost their health and strength to fight for a living for their children, appeared at the hospital begging for shelter for them. There were the wives of Polish officers who had died in German or Soviet captivity, the latter returning from Russia completely destitute; the wives of Polish Army lieutenants who, having sold all their possessions from better times in order to feed their children had reached the limit of their endurance. . . . There were also weeping children who arrived alone, ragged and emaciated saying: Daddy was killed in the war, Mummy died and Granny died last week and I have nowhere to live and nothing to eat, so maybe you could take me in.

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95. Opieka nad sierotami, 63–69.
96. Opieka nad sierotami, 64. The quotation in Polish: “Brak było pieniędzy na remont, który z tego powodu przedłużał się, na żywność, na książki, na obuwie i ubrania, a tymczasem do biura Zarządu na Mazowieckiej codziennie zgłaszały się zrozpaczone, wy forCellReuseIdentifierne kobiety prowadzące swe dzieci zmizerowane, prawie bose, zaślewie odziane w wytrąt sukienki, którym nie można już było dać ani dostatecznego pożywienia, ani ubrania, ani nauki, a często i dachu. Były takie, które straciwszy siły i zdrowie, borykając się po bohaterce śmierci męża z życiem o byt dzieci, szły do szpitala i błagały o schronienie dla tych dzieci. Były żony oficerów i żołnierzy polskich zmarłych przez okropnością niewoli niemieckiej i przez bolszewików, powracające z Rosji w nędzy ostatecznej, były żony pułkowników polskiej armii, które już ostatnie pamiętać dobrych czasów wyprzedały, by jeszcze trochę swe dzieci podchować i już dalej nie mogły. . . . Były wreszcie dzieci, które przychodziły same, stawały jak obraz nędzy w progu: ‘Tatus na wojnie zabity, mama umarła i babcia w tygodniu zeszła’—i płacze.” Translation by author.
The policy of taking in any child in need was perhaps imprudent, but the founders of the orphanage were unable to say “No” and they had as many as 130 children at one time. In all, a total of more than four hundred children passed through the house in the years 1921–27. The children were given four meals a day with meat being served four times a week. Nevertheless, this overcrowding created problems such as the persistent recurrence of scabies in the children.97

There were other child day-centers, shelters, and orphanages founded and financed by charitable institutions such as the Polish White Cross, the Russian Red Cross, and the Society for Support to the Blind Victims of War as well as some local government institutions which organized humanitarian aid for children.98 In Lublin alone, such care centers helped more than fifteen thousand children, including more than four thousand war orphans, by providing free meals.99 The help was developed around the specific needs or resources of a local community. For example, in Cracow, a city with a strong religious community, it was mainly monks and other church institutions that took care of war orphans.100

THE MODERNIZATION OF THE CARE SYSTEM FOR WAR INVALIDS

At the end of the 1920s, the university orthopedic clinic in Poznań and the factory of orthopedic devices in Warsaw, which produced the simplest and cheapest prostheses, formed the only institutionalized support for the treatment and rehabilitation of crippled children, disabled ex-soldiers, and industrial workers. Generally, the disabled experienced illness and deformity of body at home and only some of them became the patients of surgical clinics and wards. The British nineteenth-century orthopedic infirmaries for crippled children or the American orthopedic teaching facilities as described by Cooter found equivalents in the history of medicine in Poland.101 There was, however, no equivalent to England’s St. Dunstan’s, a home for

97. Opieka nad sierotami, 68.
100. Anon., Budżet wydatków i dochodów gminy miasta Krakowa na rok 1927/8 (Kraków, Poland: Gmina m. Krakowa, 1927), 68–71.
blind ex-servicemen, “culturally significant in its presentation of these men as heroic, upstanding, masculine and employable.” In Poland, meeting the basic living needs of the war invalids was deemed more important than restoring their dignity.

After World War I, there were few orthopedists in Poland. The postwar economic crisis slowed down both the progress in orthopedics and the development of the welfare system in Poland. Ireneusz Wierzejewski (an ex-member of Biesalski’s staff and also the first Polish Professor of orthopedics) was a tireless advocate for the development of specialist care for crippled children, victims of work accidents, and war invalids. In 1928, he founded the Polish Orthopedic Society and started a journal, Surgery of the Motor Organs and Polish Orthopaedics, which was subsidized by the government. There was an economic dimension to the social inclusion of the disabled that was well known to the medical fraternity in interwar Poland, familiarized with Biesalsky’s catchphrase: “taxpayers rather than charity recipients.” Doctors did use figures from German publications to estimate that supporting one disabled person fully would cost PLN 600 annually, but he or she could learn new skills and earn PLB 500 annually. In general, though, the Polish were more familiar with the German concept of forced social reintegration. However, because of bias from the Partition period and the Great War, they preferred to follow American or Swedish ideas for rehabilitation and re-education not only for disabled ex-servicemen but also for the innumerable children who had been struck by diseases such as tuberculosis and rickets.

Orthopedic devices produced by the American company Carnes Artificial Limb Co. were presented as excellent models of prostheses, although only the cheapest and the simplest models were produced in Poland. The Americans had estimated that there were a total of more than four million disabled juveniles throughout the world, the

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103. Likely due to the relationship of Wierzejewski, former lieutenant-general and joint editor of the journal, with the ruling party in Poland at that time.
105. Ministry of Welfare, Catalogue Number 530, 5, State Archives Warsaw, Poland.
support and care of which generated tremendous costs for any government. Doctors with an interest in founding orthopedic clinics in the medical schools in Polish universities, where this new field of medicine could develop into a real specialty, tried to persuade politicians to support the new clinics. Unfortunately, the argument was not strong enough to sway politicians in the difficult economic circumstances and they refused to fund the new clinics. It was thus decided that the existing surgical wards already in the hospitals would have to be sufficient to cope with all of the disabled. Two years later, Wierzejewski died suddenly which translated into a loss of support for both the treatment and rehabilitation of the disabled in Poland. The first university orthopedic clinic was closed and re-opened just five years later but only for the treatment and rehabilitation of crippled children.

The full costs of hospital, sanatorium, and ambulatory treatment for disabled ex-servicemen and civilians were provided by the state, a fact that required constant increases in expenditure. For example, between 1 January 1931 and 30 March 1932, the costs had risen to PLN 1,596,196 without including sums put aside for prostheses, administration, or guide dogs. There were also the costs of managing retraining schools in Poznań and Cracow, training courses in the city of Gniezno, Pleszew, and Kępno, and the maintenance of an Invalids’ House in Lwów with sixty-five residents. Free meals, supplied to the very poorest war victims, regardless of ethnic origin, were funded by local authorities. Even though the new Act decreed that employers were obliged to employ one disabled person whose loss of earning capacity exceeded 35 percent, for every fifty able-bodied employees, in the mid-1930s, the cost to the government of providing for all disabled (war and civilian invalids, disabled ex-servicemen, industrial accident victims, and disabled children) rose to PLN 348,643,558.

It was clear that the continuing rise in costs would be a problem for any government.\textsuperscript{110}

In December 1934, more progress in the system of care for disabled persons was made with the establishment of a Section for Medical Care for the Disabled within the Ministry of Welfare as a result of an initiative by the Polish Orthopaedic Society. This section was patterned on the American Board of Consultants on Hospitalization and recruited doctors from various specialties.\textsuperscript{111} Among them included the orthopedic surgeons Adam Gruca, Leon Kalina, and Franciszek Raszeja, an ophthalmologist, Witold Kapuściński, and a psychiatrist, Witold Łuniewski. Together, they focused on the education of specialists in orthopedics and traumatology. Their initiative was the beginning of specialization in orthopedics in Poland, which was crucial for the modernization of care for the disabled.\textsuperscript{112}

\textbf{Conclusions}

After the Great War, the Polish state had to pay off material and moral debts toward thousands of disabled ex-servicemen from Austria, Germany, and Russia. The disappearance of the three powers in Poland meant that no one took responsibility for their plight. In a country economically devastated by the invading powers during the partition and in the course of the war’s events, Poland was struggling to establish its own legal order and put an end to economic chaos. It was thus impossible to provide war invalids with adequate social and economic status. To meet its moral obligations toward the disabled ex-servicemen, the government transferred the responsibility for their well-being to local governments; however, in view of their limited resources, they were only able to provide aid to the poorest cases. This contributed indirectly to the development of a movement spearheaded by the disabled themselves. This movement proved vitally important to disabled ex-servicemen in Poland, a country at that time where philanthropy was a privilege of very few. The community of disabled ex-servicemen in Poland was marked by the same ethnic, political, and cultural

\textsuperscript{110} Ministry of Welfare, catalogue number 530, 19–29, State Archives in Warsaw, Poland.
\textsuperscript{112} Ministry of Welfare, catalogue number 529, 56, State Archives in Warsaw, Poland.
divisions as the entire society. There were separate war veteran organizations for disabled war veterans of Jewish and Ukrainian descent and for veterans of the 1863 uprising. PWIA was the largest association of war invalids, which represented the community before the state authorities, whereas smaller associations focused on solving social and material problems.

In Poland, there were no material resources to organize a system of rehabilitation and social reintegration for all of the war invalids. Schools for retraining the disabled, some of which already existed in the area while under German rule, were subsequently expanded and supported by the new Polish government. Though these served as an important tool for the social reintegration of the disabled, their number was insufficient to train all of the disabled ex-servicemen. Moreover, the Polish had ambiguous views on the German concept of forced social reintegration of disabled ex-servicemen. On the one hand, it was only one pattern of dealing with disabled war victims; on the other hand, the Poles were biased toward the German model and thus American ideas were more popular among Polish doctors and society. It was the American statistics which provided Polish doctors in the 1930s with a model for organizing a complex system of rehabilitation and social reintegration of disabled ex-servicemen.

Nevertheless, despite the empty public purse, Poland made great progress in solving their problems and providing help for the disabled by the mid-1930s. Perhaps the most lasting benefit was the social and scientific collaboration which developed between Poland and America, unique in interwar Europe, which had been initiated by some individuals and the large Polish community in the United States.

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