

Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, "Pysar z Mirandy," *Nowe Panstwo*, 30 August 1996, 14.

Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, "Śp. Zdzisław Zakrzewski: Z żałobnej karty," *Glaukopis*, nr. 28 (2013).

Zdzisław Ryszard Zakrzewski

Born: 11 November 1919, Lwów, Second Polish Republic

Died: 21 March 2013, Hayward, California, U.S.

Alma mater:

- Lwów Polytechnical University
- Polish University in Exile
- Royal Institute of Technology

Occupation: Optical engineer, philanthropist, banker, a veteran of Poland's defensive struggle in September 1939, and a social and political activist

Spouse: Zofia Witwicka

Awards: Polonia Restituta

Zdzisław Zakrzewski, of the Jastrzębiec coat of arms (11 November 1919 in Lwów – 21 March 2013 in Hayward, California) was a Polish American optical engineer, philanthropist, banker, veteran of the Second World War, and social and political activist.¹

Zdzisław Zakrzewski graduated from the Classical Gymnasium of St. Jadwiga and studied engineering at the Lwów Polytechnic Institute. He was an altar boy, a boy scout, an activist of the Lwów chapter of the All-Polish Youth and the "Fraternal Aid" Association, as well as a member of the "Ikaria" Student Fraternity.²

In September 1939, after the Germans and Soviets invaded Poland, Zakrzewski, along with a group of friends, left Lwów with the intention of searching for and joining the Polish armed forces. They fell into the hands of Ukrainian nationalists who wanted to shoot them. Afterwards, they were captured by the Bolsheviks, but – having managed to break out of jail – escaped to Romania, where they were interned. Soon, they escaped the Romanian internment camp and attempted to make their way to the West via Yugoslavia and Greece, where they snuck onto a ship which carried them to France.

In France, Zakrzewski enrolled in a cadet school, joined the Podhale Sharpshooters' Brigade, and fought against the Germans at Narvik in Norway and in France in 1940. He was captured by the Nazis, but, once again, he escaped their grip and managed to sneak into unoccupied (Vichy) France.³ His group then boarded a yacht and headed for British-controlled Gibraltar. Unfortunately, as a result of a storm, the vessel crashed on the Spanish coast. The Spaniards, suspecting that the hapless fugitives were communists, immediately arrested the Poles and incarcerated them in the Miranda del Ebro camp. A senior inmate, Alfons Jacewicz, mentions "Cadet Zakrzewski" as one of the prominent leaders of young

¹ https://en.everybodywiki.com/Zdzisław_Zakrzewski

² Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, „Śp. Zdzisław Zakrzewski: Z żałobnej karty,” *Glaukopis*, nr. 28 (2013).

³ Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, „Śp. Zdzisław Zakrzewski: Z żałobnej karty,” *Glaukopis*, nr. 28 (2013).

Polish prisoners. After several escape attempts, a hunger strike, and Allied pressure, the Spanish authorities eventually released Zakrzewski and his friends, who made their way to Britain via Portugal.⁴

In Great Britain

Once in Britain, Zakrzewski joined the air force and, for the remainder of the war, served in the RAF's 304th "Silesian Land" Bombing Squadron dedicated to Prince Józef Poniatowski, which pursued German U-Boats in the Atlantic Ocean.

He ran the All-Polish Youth organization in the UK during and after the war, yielding the post to Jędrzej Giertych, who meanwhile returned from a German POW camp and a clandestine expedition to Soviet-occupied Poland to retrieve his family and bring them to freedom in England in late 1945.

Zakrzewski twice organized Polish aviator mutinies: first, in August 1944, to protest the lack of Allied assistance for the Warsaw Uprising, and again in June 1945, in response to the Allied decision to withdraw recognition from the legal Polish government (based in London) in favor of the communist Soviet puppet regime in Warsaw. After the war, he organized Polish students in Western Europe and helped obtain scholarships for them to study at Catholic universities, particularly in Belgium. He also served on the governing board of the National Party as a youth representative.⁵

Continuing his education at the Polish University in Exile and the Royal Institute of Technology, he obtained a Master's degree in engineering with a specialization in optical engineering.

The United States

In 1949, he moved to the United States and began working in the national defense sector, including on such projects as the hydrogen bomb and spy satellites. The final project in which he was involved was the Strategic Defense Initiative ("Star Wars"), focusing especially on SDI's mirror component.⁶

Politically and philosophically, Zakrzewski was associated with the conservative movement. He also animated Polish American social and political life in the San Francisco Bay Area and eventually became the director of the Northern California Division of the Polish American Congress. In 1974, he also founded the Polish American Federal Credit Union (POLAM) in California, an institution he continued to lead until his death.

Social activism

Zakrzewski established several charitable organizations, including "Help to Poland" and the Tadeusz Ungar Foundation. He hosted a Polish-language radio program, edited the POLAM news bulletin, and authored numerous articles on social, political, and cultural issues. He also published a book *O Polsce i Polakach* [About Poland and the Poles] (Warsaw: Ronin, 1996).

During the 1970s, he supported the boy scout branch of the Committee to Defend Workers (KOR), an anti-communist dissident group in Soviet-occupied Poland, and "Solidarity" during the 1980s.

After the political transformation of 1989, he founded the Independent Research Team Foundation (Fundacja Niezależny Zespół Badawczy), supported the "Self-Determination" Foundation Samostanowienie, and funded the *Glaukopis* scholarly historical journal. However, his charitable activism

⁴ Alfons Jacewicz, *Miranda (Pamiętnik więźnia)* (London: B. Świdorski, 1962); Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, "Pysar z Mirandy," *Nowe Państwo*, 30 August 1996, 14.

⁵ Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, "Śp. Zdzisław Zakrzewski: Z żałobnej karty," *Glaukopis*, nr. 28 (2013).

⁶ *Who is Who in California* (1979).

focused primarily on the post-Soviet zone, including the areas of Wilno/Vilnius, Lwów/Lviv, and Kazakhstan.

Notable accomplishments

Zakrzewski held many patents and wrote numerous scholarly articles on engineering.

He was the author of a political work: *O Polsce i Polakach* [About Poland and the Poles] (Warsaw: Ronin, 1996).

He was awarded the Commander's Cross with the Star of the Order of Polonia Restituta by the Polish government.⁷

Family

Zakrzewski's grandfather, Józef, was most likely murdered by the Soviets in Proskuriv/Płoskirów (now Khmelnytski) during the "Anti-Polish Operation" of the NKVD.

His father, Wilhelm, was a Polish police officer in Lwów, had served in the Polish Legions during the First World War, and was a supporter of Józef Piłsudski. He was arrested and killed by the Soviets in late September 1939, and his wife, Franciszka, died of tuberculosis in Siberia, after being deported from Lwów with her 2 daughters, Irena and Elida.

Zakrzewski married Zofia Witwicka, after a failed first marriage to Lidia Janina Durr (Doerre). He was the father of seven children.

⁷ <https://www.iwp.edu/donor-spotlight/2013/03/25/in-memoriam-richard-zdzisaw-zakrzewski-1919-2013/>