

Commentary on the poem by Lidia Kosk, " Like Rivers Going to the Sea,"  
translated into English by Danuta E. Kosk-Kosicka

“walked the Polish soldier” – this refrain, repeated three times, refers to the specific details of Poland’s history. Partitioned among three occupying empires at the end of the 18th century, it was wiped from the map of Europe for 123 years. Poland regained its independence in 1918, only to lose it 21 years later when invaded by both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union at the start of the WWII. Between 1939 and 1941, these two totalitarian states jointly occupied Poland; when the former attacked the latter in June 1941, Poles captive in the USSR were presented with what the poet calls “a miracle: the right to fight.” On very short notice, men could join a newly formed army to fight for Poland, which had been their dream all along.

Like Polish insurrectionaries sent to Siberian camps in the 19th century, these mid-20th-century freedom-fighters had a long and winding path back to their homeland. They were forced to make it on their own from the taiga and the steppes to form a new Polish army. Then, these soldiers marched all over the world, fighting on multiple fronts, “for your freedom and ours” (an 18th-century rallying cry for Poles fighting in the American and French Revolutions). Like rivers running to their destined shores, the Polish soldiers arrived at their Baltic Sea in March 1945.