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Two decades of the Polish Armed Forces in the NATO Championship

Lt. Col. Sławomir Kędzierski

Chess is a popular sport discipline in the military environment of the NATO member states. This is evidenced primarily by the competitions organized at the allied level: the 12 NATO Tournaments (1978-1988 and 1993) and the 31 NATO Championships (1989-2021).

The allied rivalry began in 1978 with the participation of 38 competitors from Denmark, Germany, UK and the USA. Currently, representatives of several countries take part in the games, sometimes the number of chess players alone exceeds 100 people.

The NATO Championship, including the team and individual classification, has a strictly defined format - it must be held within five working days, during which 7 rounds of classic games and a blitz tournament are played (the number of rounds is not fixed). In Berlin, in 2019, the classic tournament was played for the last time at a pace of 40 / 2h + 30 ", moving from the next edition of the competition to P-90 '+ 30" for each move made.

<group photo 2005 Kolobrzeg>

Each member state has the right to field 6 players for the national team and 2 for the NATO team. It should be noted that in NATO Tournaments, countries could have two teams. For team scoring, the results of the 4 highest placed competitors count. Nevertheless, the organizer of the championship may, with the consent of all participants, admit a larger number of players from a given country to the tournament - this option is most often used by the British and Americans. Team captains and players who have participated in the championship five and eight times, respectively, are eligible to participate (beyond the 6 + 2 limit) provided that they only play for the NATO team. Chess players from one country, with few exceptions dictated by the needs of matchmaking, do not play with each other.

In most cases, competitions are organized on the premises of military units and have an excellent setting. The opening ceremonies are attended by ministers or deputy ministers of defense, generals, officers and representatives of civil authorities and the National Chess Federations. The nice atmosphere does not interfere with fierce sports competition. As a rule, representatives of local chess clubs are invited to participate in the blitz tournament.

The team from Germany was definitely the most successful in the team. Suffice it to say, it won gold 33 times in 42 editions. The second chess force in the Alliance is Poland, which stood on the highest podium three times in 19 editions; The national teams of the Netherlands and Turkey won two gold medals each, and Norway once in the NATO Tournament. Only the representatives of the UK participated in all NATO Tournaments and Championships.

<i>Representatives Polish Armed Forces</i>		
<i>Bajgrowicz Andrzej</i>	<i>Kędziński Sławomir</i>	<i>Przedmojski Rafał</i>
<i>Bielawski Michał</i>	<i>Kraiński Sławomir</i>	<i>Sarnowski Witold</i>
<i>Bieluszewski Piotr</i>	<i>Listowiecki Tadeusz</i>	<i>Skindzier Saturnin</i>
<i>Bobula Mateusz</i>	<i>Łokasto Anatol</i>	<i>Skwarczyński Marcin</i>
<i>Bregoszewski Leon</i>	<i>Marek Mariusz</i>	<i>Stańkowski Aleksander</i>
<i>Cichy Kamil</i>	<i>Matyja Stanisław</i>	<i>Sycz Dariusz</i>
<i>Graczyk Damian</i>	<i>Michalski Daniel</i>	<i>Sypień Mateusz</i>
<i>Kaczorowski Piotr</i>	<i>Nurkiewicz Maciej</i>	<i>Szcześniak Andrzej</i>
<i>Kapral Krzysztof</i>	<i>Pietruszewski Marcin</i>	<i>Tustanowski Mateusz</i>
<i>Karbowiak Adam</i>	<i>Pioch Zygmunt</i>	<i>Waruga Wojciech</i>

Individual NATO champions included famous grandmasters, such as Simen Agdestein (manager of the current world champion Magnus Carlsen) or Jan Gustafsson (a popular commentator on Chess24). The competition was played by such outstanding chess players as grandmaster Elisabeth Pähtz (Germany's women national team first board player for many years) or the renowned endgame specialist Karsten Müller (then FM).

The Polish Armed Forces representation has been participating in NATO Chess continuously since 2002, usually taking a place on the podium in the team competition. The need to field the strongest team was the direct reason for the reactivation of the Polish Armed Forces Championship, which also became the qualifying rounds for NATO Chess - the first three players are nominated for the national team.

The remaining squad is completed based on the Elo ranking, results in other tournaments, and psychophysical condition. Before leaving for the competition, the team usually participates in a weekly training camp, where players are finally selected for the national team and NATO.

So far, 30 soldiers and civilian employees of the armed forces have represented Poland, some of them many times.

<photo King Canute>

The team trophy, a walking statue of King Canute the Great, was donated by Denmark. It should be remembered that the above-mentioned ruler was the king of England (1016-1035), Denmark (1018-1035) and Norway (1028-35), as well as the governor of Schleswig. He was the younger son of Sweyn Forkbeard, king of Denmark, Norway and England, and his mother was Sigrid the Haughty, daughter of Mieszko I and probably Doubravka of Bohemia.

In addition, in two editions of the competition, the Team Blitz Tournament was played, in which Poland I and Poland II won gold and bronze respectively in 2017, and Poland I silver two years later.

Medals in an individual competition in classic chess. Silver: 2005 - Rafał Przedmojski; 2009 - Mateusz Sypień; 2014 - Dariusz Sycz; 2018 - Damian Graczyk; **Bronze:** 2003 - Saturnin Skindzier; 2012 - Mateusz Sypień; 2016 - Rafał Przedmojski; 2019 - Damian Graczyk.

Blitz chess - gold medals: 2005 - Adam Karbowski. **Silver:** 2010 - Piotr Bieluszewski; 2012 - Adam Karbowski; 2013 - Sławomir Kraiński; 2016 - Damian Graczyk. **Bronze:** 2005 Piotr Bieluszewski; 2013 - Adam Karbowski; 2014 - Daniel Michalski; 2015 - Piotr Bieluszewski;

Year 2017

Poland I: Silver medals: II Szach. - Mateusz Sypień; III Szach. Damian Graczyk. **Bronze:** IV Szach. Marcin Pietruszewski

Poland II: Gold medal: IV Szach - Kamil Cichy

Year 2019

Silver medals: II Szach. - Dariusz Sycz; IV Szach. - Marcin Pietruszewski. **Bronze medals:** III Szach. - Damian Graczyk; IV Szach. - Aleksander Stańkowski.

Year 2021

Bronze medal - Marcin Pietruszewski.

<table with Polish participation in NCC events and final team ranking (gold, silver, bronze)>

<group photo 2013 Warsaw>

To this list it should be added that in 2018 Mateusz Bobula won the tournament accompanying NATO Chess, the "Lubbock Open".

The Polish Chess Association appreciates the achievements of military chess players in the allied arena, awarding "Hetman" (the equivalent of the Oscar film) to the Polish Armed Forces representation in recognition of the team winning NATO Chess on the 100th anniversary of independence. The representatives of Lubbock-2018 were also awarded honorary badges of the Association (6 silver and two bronze).

Poland's involvement in NATO Chess is also visible in the organizational field, where Polish officers have been directing the work of the International Military Chess Committee (IMCC) for several years, continuing the mission of their predecessors from the Netherlands.

Chairman IMCC

in years:

1991 - 2011 Brig. Gen. Hendrik Steffers.

2011 - 2021 Col. Tomasz Malinowski.

2021 - nowadays Lt. Col. Sławomir Kędzierski.

Secretary IMCC:

in years:

1991 - 1998 Lt. Col. Gert-Jan Ludden.

1998 - 2011 Capt. (Navy) Harm Theo Wagenaar.

2011 - 2021 Maj. Sławomir Kędzierski.

2021 - nowadays 1st Lt. Dariusz Sycz.

Participation in the NATO Championship is a very good way to promote the Polish Armed Forces in the allied arena. The game played, most often associated with the subsequent joint analysis, not only integrates, but also creates an excellent opportunity to make a closer acquaintance or friendship.

At this point, it is worth noting that the Ministry of National Defense founded the "Friend of Chess" medal, which is presented to representatives of the competition organizers.

In addition, during the 26th edition of the competition (Amsterdam-2015), Brig. (res.) H. Steffers received the Silver Medal of the Polish Army awarded by the Minister of National Defense, Tomasz Siemoniak.

We hosted the best NATO chess players twice during the 16th and 24th editions of the competition (Kołobrzeg - 2005 and Warsaw - 2013, respectively), during which they could get to know the beauty of our country, in particular the rich military traditions.

What factors determine that the representatives of the Polish Armed Forces are successful in the allied arena despite relatively low Elo rankings?

First of all, I would mention youth and the will to fight for the highest laurels, as well as a good atmosphere in the team.

In terms of organization, the grouping and the experience gained in the team competition of the Championship of Uniformed Services and the Polish Public Administration, won many times by soldiers.

Regular Polish Armed Forces championships are not only a great overview of chess forces, but also an incentive for year-round training and improving one's own skills.

Of course, all this would not be possible without the financial support of the Ministry of National Defense, and above all, the favor of the commanders of military units in which representatives serve or work on a daily basis. Words of thanks also go to the Office of the Minister of National Defense, the Academy of War Art, the 1st Brest Sapper Regiment and the Military Association "Sport - Tourism - Defense" for many years of organizational support.

More information on the history of allied competitions can be found at **www.natochess.com**