

Institute of National Remembrance

<https://eng.ipn.gov.pl/en/news/13641,Poland-honours-Julien-Bryan-the-man-who-showed-the-world-the-truth-about-besiege.html>

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On 28 September 2026, the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN)

commemorated American photographer, filmmaker and traveller Julien Bryan, whose photographs and film footage documenting the German invasion of Poland and the siege of Warsaw in September 1939 became an important visual record of the suffering of the Polish capital's civilian population.

A ceremony held at the Central History Point of the IPN in Warsaw marked the presentation to Bryan's family of the Commander's Cross with Star of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland, awarded to him posthumously on 18 September 2025 for his outstanding contribution to preserving the memory of Poland's recent history and documenting the fate of Polish victims of the German invasion of 1939.

The distinction was presented on behalf of the President of the Republic of Poland, Karol Nawrocki, by Agnieszka Jędrzak, Undersecretary of State at the Chancellery of the President. Prof. Jason Waite accepted the decoration on behalf of Julien Bryan's family.

A witness to the siege of Warsaw

Julien Bryan was the only foreign photojournalist to remain in besieged Warsaw in September 1939. Equipped with both a still camera and a film camera, he documented the consequences of German air raids, the destruction of the city and, above all, the experiences of its inhabitants.

Bryan left Poland on 21 September 1939, taking his photographs and film footage with him. Within weeks, his photographs were published in major Western magazines, providing international audiences with

visual evidence of the German attack on Poland and the reality of life in the besieged capital.

His photographs include images of destroyed buildings, refugees, wounded people and the victims of German air raids, as well as everyday scenes showing the determination of Warsaw's inhabitants to survive the siege.

Addressing Prof. Jason Waite, IPN Deputy President Karol Polejowski emphasised the enduring significance of Bryan's testimony:

Your relative preserved for future generations the dignity of the victims and the memory of the martyrdom of our nation. To this day, his photographs and film footage remain an invaluable record of the tragedy of Warsaw's civilian population in September 1939. A free Poland will never forget the man who, in its darkest hour, stood on the side of truth, justice and freedom.

Bryan's photographs at the IPN

The ceremony began with a musical tribute accompanied by a presentation of photographs by Julien Bryan preserved in the IPN Archive. An original composition dedicated to the defenders and civilian population of Warsaw was performed by Damian Szymczak on

clarinet and Piotr Tomala on accordion.

The participants also watched the documentary *1939: Siege of Warsaw*, directed by Eugeniusz Starky and based on restored original photographs and film footage by Bryan. The screening was followed by a discussion with the director, moderated by Tomasz Stempowski, IPN historian and archivist and author of the album *The Siege of Warsaw in the Photography of Julien Bryan*.

Preserving Julien Bryan's legacy

The IPN has worked for many years to preserve and make available Julien Bryan's photographic legacy. In 2010, an agreement with his son, Sam Bryan, enabled the IPN Archive to acquire digital copies of the photographer's images. The material subsequently became the basis for publications and exhibitions devoted to Bryan's work and his documentation of Warsaw in September 1939.

In 2012, Julien Bryan was posthumously honoured by the IPN with the title of Custodian of National Memory.

More than eight decades after the siege of Warsaw, Bryan's photographs and film footage remain an important source for documenting the German invasion of Poland and the experiences of the city's civilian population. His work also continues to serve as a visual testimony to the events witnessed by Warsaw in September 1939.

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