

**Jan (Johann) Bezard  
1871–1954**



and his field compass



at the University of Physical Culture  
in Kraków



9–25 June 2026

He was born on 5<sup>th</sup> of May 1871 in Kraków. His father was Johann Bezard, a colonel in the Imperial and Royal Army, and his mother was Anna Maria von Bézard, née Gartenauer.

He came from a family with well-established military traditions and was prepared for a military career from an early age. He received a thorough education, which enabled him to begin his military training at the Military Academy in Wiener Neustadt between 1889 and 1892, and later at the War College in Vienna between 1895 and 1897. After a brief period of service in the 13<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in Tarnów, he was transferred, with the rank of lieutenant, to the Military Geographical Institute in Vienna. Following a period of service in line units, he continued his teaching and scholarly work at the Military Academy and the War College between 1905 and 1911. There, he taught topography and cartography.



He was tasked with preparing new maps of Tyrol. During this work, he realized that the maps available to him largely failed to reflect the actual terrain.

It soon became apparent that the compasses then in use were not sufficiently helpful in accurately mapping the area. As a conscientious cartographer, he was compelled to construct a tool that would enable him to complete the task.

To a simple compass, he added a graduated scale, a sighting device, and a movable mirror.



In 1902, he presented his invention to staff officers of the Austro-Hungarian Army. Following a competition for a field compass, Bezard's compass was adopted as part of the army's equipment, and its mass production began in 1910. Between 1911 and 1928, several models were developed and patented in many countries around the world, including Austria, Russia, the United States, France, and Japan. Bezard's system was soon introduced into service in most armies.



At the outbreak of the First World War, he was serving as commander of a battalion of the 2nd Regiment of the Tyrolean Imperial Rifles. He fought in the Battle of Komarów. He distinguished himself on the night of 6–7 September 1914 near Bełz, where, by attacking a Russian encampment, he captured eight artillery pieces and took two generals and several hundred soldiers prisoner. For this action, he was awarded the Order of the Iron Crown, 3rd Class. The following day, he was wounded and, together with the field hospital, fell into Russian captivity.



### A Pole by Choice

After the end of the First World War, gravely ill, he returned from captivity to his family manor in Przyborów, where a new chapter of his life began as a Pole by birth and by choice. Upon his return to Poland, he reported for service in the Polish Army. His specialist knowledge of topography was put to use when he was entrusted with training soldiers departing for the front of the Polish-Bolshevik War. For this service, he was awarded the Medal “Poland to its Defender”. From 1922, he taught terrain studies at the Polish War College, and later co-organized the Military Geographical Institute. On 1 December 1925, as a reserve colonel called up to active service, he was assigned to the Polish War College as Deputy Director of Studies.



### The Tadeusz Kościuszko Foundation

The Foundation, run by Kraków-based collector and history enthusiast Tomasz Otrębski and holding the world’s largest collection of field compasses, has organized an exhibition entitled “European Field Compasses – Jan Beżard”, which is currently on display in the halls of the University of Physical Culture in Kraków.

The Foundation is associated with a military antiques shop at 17 Felicjanek Street in Kraków, which gives it the opportunity to acquire items for its collection. Many interesting, and not necessarily expensive, objects have been saved there from destruction or complete oblivion.



The exhibition was prepared by Tomasz Otrębski and Robert Springwald of the Tadeusz Kościuszko Foundation in Kraków, in cooperation with the Małopolska Regional Board of the Association of Polish Army Soldiers. The Foundation holds a substantial collection of surviving memorabilia relating to Col. Jan Beżard.

Antyki - Militaria. ul. Felicjanek 17, 31-103 Kraków  
tel. (012) 421-28-02, kom. 604 188 400  
e-mail: [militaria@data.pl](mailto:militaria@data.pl)  
<http://fundacjakosciuszki.pl/>

