The foundation of the Institute of Maritime and Tropical Medicine of Gdynia in 1939, thus the separation of maritime health service, was the result of a rapid growth of seafaring and maritime industry in Poland. The background of these events was the foundation of the harbor of Gdynia. The development of maritime industry was closely related to the need to abide by international conventions on sanitary protection of coastal waters and borders as well as of the rapidly growing harbor and town. A substantial contribution to the foundation in Gdynia in 1937 of a Branch Office of the National Institute of Hygiene was made by prof. G. Szulc – the director of the National Institute of Hygiene in Warsaw, doctor W. Chodžko – the head of the State School of Hygiene, and a prominent specialist in maritime and tropical medicine doctor J. Jakóbkiewicz who became the first head of the Branch Office.

It was on 5 June 1939 that on the basis of the Branch Office of the National Institute of Hygiene, the Institute of Maritime and Tropical Hygiene, one of the oldest scientific institutions in Poland, came into being. A valuable contribution towards developing the new institution was made by doctor J. Morzycki MD, the first director of the Institute with a support of his co-workers: St. Byczkowski Msc (Master of Sciences) and doctors M. Janicki, T. Przyborowski and St. Rutkowski. The Institute was housed at 50 Starowiejska Street. Just before the beginning of the Second World War, the Institute had a vast set of scientific facilities including the lecture rooms, laboratories and an excellent library (over 6,000 books). The statutory duties of the Institute included the health protection of the local community and of maritime industry workers, sanitary protection of state borders, the continuing education and training of specialists in maritime and tropical medicine and hygiene. After World War II in 1945 the Institute was reactivated under an altered name of the Institute of Maritime and Tropical Medicine, as one of the first scientific institutions, being included in the Medical Academy of Gdańsk. Associate professor E. Nowicki MD, was appointed director of the Institute, followed by prof. J. Morzycki MD in 1946. Initially the Institute was situated at 1 Morska Street and consisted of 5 departments: Bacteriology and Epidemiology, Parasitology, Maritime and Tropical Hygiene, Clinical Division and Maritime Biological Station.

In the years 1945-1957 the principal activities of the Institute were sanitary protection of state borders, control of epidemics of poliomyelitis, smallpox detection and prevention, detection of tick-borne meningitis, tularemia, diagnosis of intestinal infections and food poisoning. Prof Morzycki’s outstanding merit was to draw attention of the Polish scientists to the underrated medical parasitology. In 1948 in Gdańsk the I Conference on Parasitology was held and the Polish Parasitological Association was formed. To arrangements as well as educational and research
activities highly contributed the scientific workers who subsequently became professors: W. Bincer, F. Bławat, W. Bogusławski, Z. Kozar, J. Lachmajer, S. Kryński, E. Pautsch, E. Skrodzki, E. Sym and so on. In 1948 the Institute started issuing its own Bulletin which is still being published (under the actual name of the “International Maritime Health”). In 1954 after prof. J. Morzycki’s death, prof. S. Kryński MD, PhD became director of the Institute, followed by prof. Z. Buczwowski MD, PhD in the years 1955 – 1972. In 1957 the name of the Institute was altered to the Institute of Maritime Medicine and it became an independent scientific research institution subordinate to the Ministry of Health. At that time the National Salmonella Centre with Bacteriophage Typing which closely cooperated with the WHO was founded. The Center was run by prof. Z. Buczwowski MD, PhD who offered a solid basis for routine and scientific investigations into human and animal salmonelloses in the whole country. The work was then taken over by prof. R. Głośnicka MD, PhD. In 1960 a Tularemia Reference Centre for Poland under the guidance of prof. E. Skrodzki MD, PhD was founded. At the same time the Virology Laboratory was set up with prof. F. Blawat MD, PhD being in its charge who joined with the laboratory the smallpox eradication program.

The Laboratory of Helminthology and Protozoology run by prof. Z. Kozar MD, PhD became the National Centre for investigations into toxoplasmosis. In 1963 the Clinic of Occupational Diseases was set up. It was housed in the Polish Red Cross Hospital in Gdynia-Redłowo where the Caisson Disease Treatment Pavilion was established. The subsequent heads of the Clinic were: prof. W. Bincer MD, PhD, prof. W. Kierst MD, PhD, dr L. Łaba MD, ass. Prof. J. Chmielewski MD, PhD, dr B. Jaremin MD. Prof. W. Kierst was the first to write a genuine Polish textbook of tropical medicine „The Compendium of Tropical Medicine”. The principal aims of the Institute were among others: to take diagnostic and preventive measures to combat infectious, parasitic and tropical diseases, to promote the marine transport hygiene as well as to protect health of the maritime industry workers. These aims were carried into effect by a group of outstanding scientists, biologists and physicians: prof. W. Bincer MD, PhD, prof. Z. Buczwowski MD, PhD, prof. A. Dolatkowski MD, PhD, prof. W. Kierst MD, PhD, doctors A. Krynicki MD, J. Lalko MD, L. Łaba MD, P. Myjak DSc, K. Pietkiewicz MD, M. Szudarski MD, prof. Z. Wegner MD, PhD, prof. Cz. Zwierz MD, PhD, prof. K. and A. Taylor MD, PhD, Z. Teissere MD, prof. S. Tomaszunas MD, PhD. In 1972 prof. R. Dolmierski MD, PhD was appointed director of the Institute. In 1974 the Institute was renamed Institute of Maritime and Tropical Medicine of Gdynia. A greater orientation towards occupational medicine took place, new departments and laboratories (Department of Psychology of Labour) were set up and the activities of the clinic and of the Department of Hygiene were intensified. In the course of this period substantial contributions of the following scientific workers and doctors must be emphasized: prof. R. Dolmierski MD, PhD, prof. J. Filikowski MD, PhD, prof. K. de Valden-Gałuszko MD, PhD, prof. W. Ejsmont Md, PhD, prof. W. Gwoździewicz MD, PhD, prof. J. Waśkiewicz Md, PhD, prof. M. Cempel MD, PhD, R. Wiglusz MD, J. Dąbrowski MD, P. Mikulski MD, prof. J. Chmielewski MD, PhD, B. Jaremin MD, PhD, R. Tomaszewski Md, PhD, prof. L. Zaborski Md, PhD and so on. In the 70-ties international agreements were signed, on the basis of which scientific workers of the Institute (among others prof. S. Tomaszunas Md, PhD) participated in malaria and smallpox eradication programs. The Department of Tropical Medicine run by prof. Cz. Zwierz MD, PhD – the national consultant in maritime and tropical medicine, launched prophylaxis of exotic diseases among travelers to the tropics. Prof. Zwierz’s desire was to establish a branch office of the Institute in a tropical country (Viet-Nam or Zaire) – however, this could not be fulfilled because of the local riots or wars.
This dream came true nearly 30 years later owing to a determined effort made by dr W. Nahorski MD, which resulted in an agreement signed with the Angolan authorities about an interfaculty cooperation including a specialist supervision by the Institute of the Saint Lucas Medical Centre in Kifangondo. In the Department of Tropical Parasitology under the guidance of prof. Z. Wegner MD, PhD important research work among others on arthropods – the vectors of transmissible diseases was in progress. After prof. Wegner’s retirement the Department was taken over by prof. P. Myjak DSc, PhD. The new head implemented modern molecular methods to the research and diagnostic procedures. Sanitary protection of costal waters and borders has been the statutory duty of the Department of Environmental Protection and Hygiene of Transport run subsequently by ass. Prof. Z. Sobol D. Eng. and J. Nowacki, Doctor of Geography. In 1975 the Institute was empowered to bestow the MD degree, and later on in 1977 to bestow also the Doctor’s degree in the scope of natural sciences. In 1985 the Institute was housed in a newly erected complex of buildings in Gdynia Redłowo. It was possible owing to an enormous effort and a personal commitment made by the then director prof. R Dolmierski Md, PhD. In 1990 doctor W. Renke MD was appointed a new director of the Institute. More attention was directed towards increasing the services and economic issues. The National Centre for Hyperbaric Medicine (appointed by the Ministry of Health in 1998; head: dr Z. Sičko MD) was founded, the Radiology Department was set up and the Department of Laboratory Diagnostic Investigations was modernized. These achievements were attained owing to the then respective heads: ass. Prof. J. Felczak MD, PhD, doctors H. Podgórczyk MD, E. Hać MD and A. Winnicka MD. The scope of the educational and scientific activities of the 90-bed clinic was widened through further development of a sustained research into occupational diseases, tropical medicine, cardiovascular, gastrointestinal and hematologic diseases. The progress was induced by the then heads running the clinic: doctors B. Jaremin MD, K. Gockowski MD, and prof. J. Górski MD, PhD. The range of activities of the Microbiology and Immunology Department as well as of the Department of Tropical Parasitology was extended. The Laboratory of Molecular Biology was set up due to the efforts made among others by prof. P. Myjak DSc, PhD, H. Pietkiewicz Md, PhD, J. Stańczak DSc, PhD. The Department of Tropical Medicine run by dr A. Kotłowski MD has carried on scientific and medical work in the field of tropical diseases and local parasitic infections. In 2001 prof. J. Górski MD, PhD became director of the Institute who implemented several restructuring changes. In 2002 the directorial duties were performed in turn by doctor Z. Sičko MD, prof. P. Myjak DSc, PhD and doctor L. Nahorski MD. In 2003 the Institute was joined to the structure of the Medical Academy of Gdańsk (actually: Medical University of Gdańsk), the Institute’s name being altered to the Inter-Faculty Institute of Maritime and Tropical Medicine. At the same time the Academic Centre for Maritime and Tropical Medicine of the Autonomous Public Clinical Hospital of the Medical Academy of Gdańsk was formed. The Hospital consisted of 4 principal clinics: the Clinic of Cardiology and Cardiac Rehabilitation, Clinic of Occupational and Internal Diseases, Clinic of Tropical and Parasitic Diseases, Clinic of Hyperbaric Medicine including an Out-patient Department and out-patient clinics. Doctor Z. Sičko MD was appointed director of the Hospital. Since 2008 prof. B. Jaremin MD, PhD has been director of the Inter-Faculty Institute of Maritime and Tropical Medicine. Actually, the Inter-faculty Institute consists of 9 departments and clinics. A total of 248 workers including 5 independent scientific research workers are employed in the Inter-Faculty Institute and the Academic Centre. There are 3 national reference centres: the National Centre for Hyperbaric Medicine founded in 1998 (head: doctor Z. Sičko MD), National Centre for Tropical Medicine appointed in 2002 (head: doctor L. Nahorski MD) functioning on the basis of the Chair of Tropical Medicine and Parasitology (head: prof. P. Myjak DSc, PhD) and the National Centre for Maritime Medicine formed in 2007 on the basis of
the Clinic of Occupational and Internal Diseases (head: prof. B. Jaremin MD, PhD). Moreover, the Inter-Faculty Institute comprises the Department of Environmental Toxicology (head: prof. L. Wolska MD, PhD), Department of Environmental Protection and Hygiene of Transport (head: J. Nowacki, Doctor of Geography), Department of Maritime Medicine – WHO Inter-regional Collaborating Centre on Maritime Occupational Health (head: prof. S. Tomaszunas MD, PhD). The principal scope of research activities of the Inter-Faculty Institute encompasses the investigations related to maritime, tropical and hyperbaric medicine, occupational medicine, toxicology, protection of the environment, legislative projects, diagnosis and treatment of patients afflicted with occupational, maritime, tropical and underwater pathologies.

Every year about 4 research grants from the Research Work Committee related to various topics (environmental pollution, harbor-related epidemiology, parasitology, immunology, microbiology, hyperbaric therapy and clinical medicine) are conducted in the Institute. The scientific workers perform about 30 statutory studies and publish 30 – 40 papers in international and national scientific journals. The Institute continues to publish its own scientific periodical “International Maritime Health” (ex-“Bulletin of the Institute of Maritime and Tropical Medicine in Gdynia”). During the 70-year history of the Institute 2 400 papers have appeared, 67 scientific workers have obtained the MD degree, 25 – the PhD degree and 27 have obtained the title of professor.

Cooperation with the WHO, Ministry of National Defence, National Academy of Sciences and with several national and foreign institutes of maritime, tropical and occupational medicine (e.g. in Atlanta, Hamburg, Lisbon, Turku) is carried on. Every year a number of our scientific workers attend national and international conferences and symposia and many guests pay visits to our Institute. Education has been directed towards the training of specialists in maritime, tropical and transport medicine as well as the delivery of lectures on biology, parasitology, maritime, tropical, occupational and hyperbaric medicine intended for Polish and foreign medical students. Diagnostic, therapeutic, prophylactic, health promotion and legislative services are provided for several thousand patients every year.

The 70 year history of activities of the Institute can be divided into 3 periods: the first period before World War II during which the Institute was founded and strove to form the basis of maritime and tropical medicine with an appropriate scientific, educational and housing background, owing to such eminent workers as dr J. Jakóbkiewicz and prof. J. Morzycki MD, PhD. The second period covering the post-war years was characterized by prevalence of temporary duties and measures aimed at solving the epidemiological and sanitary emergencies during which several remarkable bacteriological and virological achievements were made. The longest period has extended over dozens of years during which most dreams and projects of the pioneers in the fields of maritime and tropical medicine came true. The principal achievements include: the training of specialists in maritime and tropical medicine, provision of health care for the maritime industry workers and local community, standardization of medical procedures, implementation of the rules for disease vector control, introduction of modern diagnostic and therapeutic methods in tropical pathology, theoretical and practical endeavours in the fields of hyperbaric and occupational medicine and psychophysiology of labour as well as investigations into the environmental impact on the health of the seaside population.
One can hardly enumerate all the noteworthy scientific and practical activities and achievements of the Institute over these 70 years. They have been numerous and fruitful owing to the contribution of many prominent scientists and common workers. The broad spectrum of interests and activities includes among others: the diagnosis and treatment of malaria, amoebiasis, hydatid disease, bolelioses, dengue, cardiovascular and occupational diseases, problems of hyperbaric medicine including the successful use of hyperbaric therapy in an increasing number of clinical indications, and the issues of psychology of labour, toxicological and environmental problems, education and an increasing cooperation with national and foreign institutions. Independently of the general economic conditions of our region and country the Institute has always been closely connected with the town and harbor of Gdynia.

Figures:

1. Act of foundation of the Institute of Maritime and Tropical Medicine in 1939
2. The cornerstone is being laid at the site of the future construction of the complex of buildings of the Institute in Gdynia Redłowo in 1977
3. Director of the Institute, prof. R. Dolmierski MD, PhD, prof. Cz. Zwierz MD, PhD and doctor W. L. Nahorski MD with a group of patients from Viet-Nam