

Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919

<https://greaterpolanduprising.eu/pwe/form/r520562407652,RATAJCZAK-Franciszek.html>
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RATAJCZAK Franciszek

Person

RATAJCZAK Franciszek

Born

1887

Died

1918

Description

Independence activist, second lieutenant in the Polish Army, platoon commander, the first Greater Poland insurgent to fall in Poznań. He was born on 24 November 1887 in Śniaty (former Kościan powiat), to the family of a farm worker- Józef, and Eufrozyna née Piotrowska. He completed public school in Kościan and then began to learn the profession of a carpenter. Because of the difficult material conditions of his parents and the lack of any possibility to earn a living in his native village, he was forced to leave it when still quite young, and decided to emigrate to Germany. He settled in the region of Westphalia where he was employed as a mining carpenter and he worked in this profession until the outbreak of World War I. While establishing contacts with other Poles - emigrants, he was active in the life of the local Polish community. He got involved (1910) in the works of the Polish Gymnastic Society "Sokół" (Falcon), becoming a member of its board. When war broke out, he was compulsorily conscripted into the German army and fought on the Western Front, mainly in France, and was promoted to the rank of deputy officer. Contacts with the Polish diaspora were still maintained by him. After the

outbreak of the revolution in Germany in November 1918, he established contacts with the Secret Recruitment Committee of the Sokół [Falcon] organisations in Westphalia and Rhineland (District VII), which dealt with the organisation and smuggling of groups active in covert operations to Poland. He was sent to Greater Poland as a representative of this Committee. He arrived in Poznań at the beginning of December with a group of 10 armed people - "Falcons". They were sent to join the forming troops of the Guard and Security Service, which were stationed in Fort Rauch (Berdychowo). Ratajczak was assigned to the 2nd company of Second Lieutenant E. Krause, with the post of commander of the 3rd platoon. On 27 December, at about 3.30 p.m. the company was called by telephone by Z. Łakiński to the Castle, in order to reinforce the protection of the guardhouse of the Guard and Security Service command and the telephone exchange. Moving along św. Marcin Street, it drove the German posts out of the buildings of the Land Credit Society (Agricultural Bank) and Post Directorate, returning at about 5.30 p.m. via Wiktorii and Berlińska Streets (currently Gwarna and 27 Grudnia streets). At the corner of Berlińska and Rycerska Streets (Ratajczaka Street), heavy machine gunfire was concentrated in its direction from the posts located in front of the Police Headquarters building. Ratajczak was hit by a burst of bullets and was moved to the watchmaking shop of S. Klupieć located round the corner, a doctor was then called in. After first aid was given, he was transported to the main fortress hospital at Królewski Square, where he died in the late evening hours. According to another version by A. Kandziora, he died after he had been transported to the hospital, even before the doctors could operate. K. Rzepecki claims, in contradiction to the established facts, that Ratajczak died after 7.00 p.m. when the insurgents repeated their attempt at seizing the police headquarters building. In yet another version, F. Nogaj reported that the 2nd company moved along Berlińska Street from the "Bazaar" towards Wiktorii Street. On its way back, when it was passing the police headquarters building, Ratajczak stopped and took a shot at it with a machine gun. Then he was fatally wounded by a burst from the HGM. He was the first fallen insurgent in Poznań. He was solemnly buried on 2 January 1919 in the Górczyn cemetery together with another insurgent fallen on that same day - Antoni Andrzejewski. W. Korfanty and C. Rydlewski, among others, made speeches at their tombs. At a later time, insurgent organisations erected a common tomb devoted to the first fallen insurgents in the years 1918-1919. At the place of Ratajczak's death, there is a provisional wooden memorial plaque, and the name of the street was changed from Rycerska to F. Ratajczaka. During the 10th anniversary of his death (27 December

1928), a new plaque, which was later destroyed by the Nazis, was unveiled. A third one, in turn, was unveiled on 27 December 1956. Numerous schools, streets and scout groups are named after him, for instance, in 1965, his name was given to Primary School No. 52 in Poznań (Grunwald), and in 1967 the Vocational School (later renamed as the Vocational School Complex) in Kościan. In front of the building of that school, a memorial stone devoted to Franciszek Ratajczak was unveiled in 1984. He had two children from his marriage to Marianna née Maćkowiak - a daughter, Cecylia (1914) and a son, Eryk Franciszek (1910-1935).

Bibliography

P. Bauer, Ratajczak Franciszek (1887-1918) (in:) Słownik biograficzny powstańców wielkopolskich 1918-1919, ed. A. Czubiński, B.Polak, Poznań 2002, pp. 302-304.

Author of the entry

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