

Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919

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The victory of the Uprising and its significance for Poland and Greater Poland

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[The formation of regular troops ensured the defence \(...\)](#)

[As early as January 1919 \(...\)](#)

The formation of regular troops ensured the defence of those territories of the Poznań region which were liberated by the insurgents. After the offensive undertaken by the Germans in February 1919, it turned out that, in the long run, the Greater Poland inhabitants were not able to win militarily against the Germans. For this reason, the Polish diplomatic action in Paris was intensified. The announcement of an armistice in Trier on 16 February 1919, and the delimitation of the demarcation line did not mean the

immediate cessation of military operations. The Germans resumed their military activities along certain sections of this line and were not interested in any normalisation of relations with the Poles. Between 1 and 19 March 1919, the Inter-Allied Mission was in Poznań, attempting to ensure that the armistice arrangements were intact. As a consequence of discrepancies among the states forming the coalition, the Germans were not put under any sufficient pressure to enforce the observance of the armistice conditions. The army led by General Józef Haller did not arrive in Gdańsk and the territorial aspirations of the Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council and the Polish National Committee in relation to Pomerania were suppressed.

Here, it must be clearly emphasised that the defence of the liberated territories would not have been possible without the effort made by the Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council and the National Committee in Paris. Without such a robust diplomatic intervention, it would not have been possible to force the Germans to sign the armistice obligations.

The official end of the Uprising allowed for the conducting of elections in the liberated territories. From 23 March 1919, democratic elections to municipal and poviats councils took place and on 1 June, supplementary elections to the Legislative Parliament (Sejm) were held. Before the outbreak of the Uprising, the political relations in Greater Poland were very transparent. The primary determinant was the division into Poles and Germans. The Poles were

generally obliged to follow the slogan of national and social solidarity. In the new democratic reality, new political movements and parties were soon formed. As well as the Democratic-National Party (endecja), the National Workers' Party began to play a greater and greater role on the political scene, and with time also the Christian-social movement and peasants' groups.

The drafts of the peace treaty at the Paris conference upset the German government. Military authorities started preparations for war in order to regain the Poznań region. The German High Command prepared an offensive plan code-named "Spring Sun", whose aim was to regain Greater Poland and further on to liquidate the Polish state. The threat of the German aggression surely sped up the integration of the Greater Poland Army with the national army, i.e. unification with the Polish Army. On 25 May 1919, the Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council delivered a written proposal to Józef Piłsudski regarding the subordination of the Greater Poland Armies to the Chief of State. A fragment was later quoted in the memoirs of General J. Dowbor-Muśnicki: "[...] the Polish society in the entire Prussian partition has always felt a vital need to form a uniform Polish army. The moment of the integration of all Polish territories within the borders of one Republic of Poland is coming. [...] "The war with Germany may soon spread to all the western borders of Poland. We are therefore ready to offer our country the dearest treasure that we hold - the sons of Greater Poland, Prussia and Silesia, organised under the command of General Józef Dowbor-

Muśnicki into independent military forces into your hands, as Chief-of-State and Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces chosen by sovereign parliament.”. As a consequence of this, the Greater Poland Army was subordinated to the Supreme Command of the Polish Army and the Polish army as a whole was operationally subordinated to Marshal Ferdinand Foch – the chief commander of the victorious coalition. The Poznań Central Command and the Warsaw Supreme Command of the Polish Army started to cooperate very closely and as a result of this, a detailed plan for a defensive operation was developed. The Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council resigned from previous political postulates directed to the government in Warsaw.

Numerous German provocations on the Front and repressions in the areas controlled by the Germans led to the proclamation of a state of emergency on 6 June 1919 by the Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council within the area under its control. The military action taken by the Germans lasted until 28 June 1918, when the delegation of the Berlin government signed the text of the peace treaty. The treaty came into force only after its ratification in January 1920. In the most critical period (May-June), both the Central Command, and the Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council demonstrated high organisational skills and took optimal advantage of the capacities of the region.

It must be expressly emphasised here that the most important outcome of the Greater Poland Uprising was its impact on the delimitation of the

western border of the reborn Polish state. At the peace congress in Paris, nobody questioned the granting of the territory liberated by the insurgents to Poland any more. It was the insurgent effort of the inhabitants of Greater Poland which was decisive in awarding this region to the Polish state.

The territory occupied by the insurgents until 28 June 1919 was officially recognised as part of Poland. Poland also obtained the majority of the Gdańsk Pomerania area as well as territories which were not conquered by insurgents, located in the north, south and west of Greater Poland. The state of emergency in Greater Poland was cancelled on 13 July 1919. The process of the integration of the Poznań region with the rest of the country slowly began to proceed.

Having its own armed forces was a great boon for the Commissariat of the Supreme People' Council in the reconstruction of Polish life in the liberated territories, especially in the areas of government and local governmental administration, education, judiciary, finance and economy. The Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council became a local government which represented the Polish population in Germany. The post of Poznań voivod was taken by Witold Celichowski, and the poviats were turned into starosties. At the same time, Greater Poland made a significant material contribution to the reborn Polish state. The area of the Poznań region, as opposed to the territories of the Russian and Austrian partitions, avoided destruction caused by military operations. The economic potential, and above all, the financial and agricultural potential

of the region was higher than those of other partitions.

Here, it must be added that the eastern poviats of the historical Greater Poland region which used to belong to the so called Congress Kingdom (Kalisz, Koło, Słupca and Turek regions), remained outside the borders of the Greater Poland province until the year 1938. On the other hand, some poviats of the former Bydgoszcz administrative district, including Bydgoszcz, Inowrocław, Mogilno, Nakło, Strzelno and Wyrzysk were kept within the borders of this province.

A consequence of the Uprising's victory was the outflow of a significant part of the German population from Greater Poland. The German immigrants kept here by the Berlin authorities artificially, thanks to high allowances added to salaries, would leave first. Even as early as the outbreak of the Uprising, during clashes, (January-February 1919), German soldiers as well as administration officials and their families left the region. The departures of German families were, in the majority of cases, of a voluntary nature, even up until spring 1919, when numerous German settlers and merchants left the Poznań region. However, during the fighting, both the insurgents and the Supreme People's Council tried to maintain proper relations with the German civil population. The Polish repressions took place as late as in May-June 1919, as soon as the Uprising had come to an end, when the Berlin authorities threatened to resume military operations. Ultimately, a considerable part of this population left Greater

Poland after the fighting ended and the new Polish-German border was delimited. The workplaces left by Germans, sometimes also their houses, were occupied by the Polish returnees from Germany, most frequently the Westphalia and Rhineland regions. At least 3000 Polish workers who came from there took part in the Uprising. Most of them subsequently stayed in Greater Poland, bringing their families from Germany.

A consequence of those events was a change in the relations between various groups of nationalities. In 1910, the population was 38.4% German in the Poznań province. In 1921, only 16.5% of the overall number of inhabitants in the Poznań province were of this nationality. The changes in this case were mostly visible in the border poviats such as. Czarnków, Chodzież, Leszno, Międzychód, Rawicz and Wyrzysk. Still the largest number of Germans lived in the countryside.

Undoubtedly, the successes of the insurgents in the Poznań region contributed to the patriotic revival of the Polish national movement in Pomerania and Silesia, stimulating the people from these regions to activities and military involvement. Secret independence organisations were established there, and they cooperated strictly with the Commissariat of the People's Council. Even though insurgent action in Pomerania did not develop, in the middle of the year 1919 this region was partly awarded to Poland. As a result of the three consecutive uprisings and the plebiscite in the Upper Silesia, with significant help from Greater Poland

inhabitants, the Polish inhabitants of this district regained their freedom too.

As early as January 1919, General Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki started to prepare an operational plan together with his staff, which involved the occupation of Gdańsk and Vistula Pomerania. For this purpose, the Greater Poland rifle regiments were quickly formed to use them in this direction in March. The troops commanded by General Józef Haller were to move from the side of Gdańsk. This intention, however, was never fulfilled. Despite stubborn efforts made by Roman Dmowski and the support received from Marshal Ferdinand Foch, the issue of sending the "Blue Army" to Gdańsk at the beginning of April 1919 failed irrevocably.

After the peace treaty with Germany had been signed, the legal situation of the Polish territories of the former Prussian partition changed. Therefore, the Greater Poland formations were subordinated operationally to the Chief of State. The Poznań Central Command started preparations for the repossession of those territories granted to Greater Poland. For this purpose, the "Plan for the seizure of West Prussia and part of the Kingdom of Middle Silesia granted to Poland" was prepared. It was predicted that during the repossession operations the Germans would offer armed resistance. Based on the staff of the Greater Poland armies, the decision was taken to speed up the process of the formation of the Western-Pomeranian Division (Pomerania Rifle Division). After four months of Polish-German talks, both parties signed a compromise agreement (25 November 1919). From 17 January

1920, the Greater Poland troops (3rd Greater Poland Rifle Division) occupied; Kępno, Zduny, Leszno and Rawicz. Meanwhile, the troops of the 2nd Greater Poland Division reached the line of the Bydgoszcz Canal and the Noteć River on 19 January and, by the end of the month, had occupied; Bydgoszcz and Fordon, Nakło, Świecie, Tuchola and Chojnice. Chodzież, which was conquered and then evacuated by insurgents, was returned to Poland. The area on the eastern side of the Vistula River was occupied by the troops of General Józef Haller. The parallel operations on both fronts (Greater Poland and Northern Fronts) contributed to the integration of the Pomeranian and Greater Poland territories with the rest of Poland.

On 20 August 1919, the Greater Poland Army was fully under the authority of the Supreme Command of the Polish Army and the Ministry of Military Affairs in Warsaw. The process of the taking over of the commands and military institutions per se lasted till the end of November 1919. In December, the Greater Poland soldiers were sworn into the ranks of the Polish Armed forces. After the above-mentioned repossession operation was completed at the end of January 1920, the German threat ceased to exist. Thus, the Greater Poland Front (against the Germans) was liquidated. The activity of the Poznań General District Command established in August 1919 (Division General Zygmunt Zieliński), was oriented towards the expedition of Greater Poland troops to the Eastern Front. More than 70000 Greater Poland soldiers, of almost all types of armies, made up the ranks of the Polish Army.

Volunteers, who joined the insurgent troops, until the middle of January 1919, constituted one-fifth of this number and all formations were of insurgent origin. 19 infantry regiments (5 divisions), 5 artillery regiments, 4 cavalry regiments, air forces and auxiliary services were all organised. In this short calculation, one should not forget about the local units of the People's Guard (National Defence) - with over 100000 soldiers, this was the most numerous formation of this type in Poland. In comparison with other formations of the Polish Army, the Greater Poland units were characterised by good military training, discipline and equipment.

Much credit with regards to the number and quality of the Greater Poland Army goes to the Greater Poland authorities, i.e. the Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council. Even, from the very beginning, the Poznań politicians thought that the possession of a military formation would determine the result of the Uprising in the entire Prussian partition. The formed armed forces were an effect of the endeavours which the national democrats highlighted during the Partition Sejm of Poznań (3-5 December 1918). When the Uprising broke out and when it covered the region of Greater Poland, the possessed army could be used for the purpose of the accomplishment of the objectives of the existing Polish state.

The success of the Greater Poland Uprising in the years 1918-1919 had one more dimension: soon, Polish western thought started to take shape. An important role in the development of this concept was played by Poznań, and especially the Piast

University (Wszechnica) established on 30 January 1919, even during the Uprising. It was transformed the following year into the Poznań University.

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