

Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919

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The Greater Poland residents in their fight for the borders of the Second Polish Republic 1918-1921

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The pro-independence movement of the Greater Poland residents in late 1918 cannot be considered only in the context of Greater Poland's

state affiliation. The inhabitants of Greater Poland played an immense role in the battles for nearly every border of the Second Polish Republic. Military units from the Poznań region were some of the most valuable throughout the two difficult years when the Polish eastern border was shaping. Furthermore, it was, among others, units from Greater Poland that first entered the lands of Gdańsk Pomerania, granted to Poland under the Treaty of Versailles. Numerous Poles from Greater Poland also took part in the Silesian uprisings, which influenced the final annexation of a part of Upper Silesia to the Second Polish Republic.

The Polish-Ukrainian war

Military action aimed at the revival of Poland commenced in the night of 31 October to 1 November 1918 with a conflict with the Ukrainians. Battles were initially fought in Lviv which was inhabited mostly by Poles. For the next several months, fierce Polish-Ukrainian battles were fought in Eastern Galicia and Volhynia. Even though a Ukrainian ring surrounding Lviv was successfully broken, the situation of the Polish soldiers in the contested lands was still extremely difficult.

Being aware of the deadly battles going on, the command of the Polish Armed Forces of the former Prussian Partition decided to send reinforcements. On 8 February 1919, over a week before the armistice in Trier was signed, the command announced voluntary conscription to a unit that would be sent to Eastern Galicia. On 9

March, the Voluntary Poznań-Lviv Company, composed of 200 soldiers, marched to the east. The soldiers were well-equipped and experienced in war.

More units from Poznań were sent several days later. On 12 March, a train with the first units of the Greater Poland Group, commanded by Colonel Daniel Konarzewski, set off. Its core was Lieutenant Colonel Gustaw Paszkiewicz's 1st Greater Poland Rifle Regiment. The soldiers from this regiment, whom the Ukrainians called "Horned Devils", demonstrated exceptional skills when they occupied Stryi.

An important element of the units sent from Greater Poland to Galicia was the 1st Greater Poland Air Force Squadron. As soon as it became ready for battle, the squadron, commanded by Second Lieutenant Pilot Wiktor Pniewski, set off for the east. Its main task on the front was reconnaissance, but it also attacked observation balloons and carried out bombing raids and air assaults. In the third week of April, it took part in operation "Jazda", the goal of which was to take certain positions before the general offensive planned for May.

In May, the Voluntary Poznań-Lviv Company proved its merits several times. On 14 May it occupied Zarudce in a daring attack, six days later it took Novyy Yarychiv, and on 28 May, together with the 38th Infantry Regiment, it occupied Zalissia. On 30 May, it occupied Monilovka near Zborov, located on the line of former Russian trenches. General Major Waclaw Iwaszkiewicz, who commanded the Polish forces

in this area, praised the soldiers from Greater Poland for that achievement.

Due to the risk that Polish-German military action might be resumed, the soldiers returned to Greater Poland. The veterans of the war with the Ukraine were welcomed in Poznań as heroes. On 11 June, the 1st Greater Poland Rifle Regiment, the 1st, 2nd and 3rd battery of the Light Artillery Regiment, the 2nd battery of the 2nd Heavy Artillery Regiment and the 1st Greater Poland Air Force Squadron were awarded with sashes in the national colours (for the infantry), and metal eagles with plaques reading "For the Defence of the Eastern Borderlands" (for the air force and artillery). The standard of the 1st Greater Poland Rifle Regiment was decorated with a ribbon for the defence of Lviv. Officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers of the Volunteer Poznań-Lviv Company received the Crosses of Lviv Defence.

For Minsk, Babruysk and all along the Berezina Line

The Greater Poland residents started military action on the north-eastern borders of the Second Polish Republic as early as 1919. Their new enemy was the Red Army. Regular battles in this war started in mid-February 1919. After three months, the Polish forces moved to attack Vilnius, and threw the Bolsheviks out of the city. Units of the Polish Armed Forces were soon reinforced by the Poznań Death Battalion commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Feliks Józefowicz. The PDB was composed of soldiers who were disobedient, whose beliefs were too revolutionary and who

were critical of General Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki.

The soldiers from the battalion were first sent to Warsaw, and later to Białystok. On their way to the front, Lieutenant Colonel Józefowicz's people showed disobedience and seemed to be a greater threat to other Polish soldiers and civilians than to the enemy. At the turn of April and May, they were sent to fight in the region of Vilnius, where they fought the battle of Giedraičiai on 9 May, and attacked Molėtai six days later. Participants of these battles were honoured with a badge "For Vilnius".

In the summer, the PDB guarded the Polish-Lithuanian demarcation line. The battalion was finally dissolved in early October. Its officers and soldiers were assigned to the 1st Greater Poland Rifle Division and regiments of the Polish Legions.

Until that time, more units from Greater Poland were sent to the Lithuanian-Belarusian Front. In late July 1919, the Greater Poland Group went east, it was composed of: the 3rd and 4th GPRR, the 1st Greater Poland Uhlan Regiment, a company of sappers, the 2nd Greater Poland Air Force Squadron and a sanitary company. The group was commanded by Colonel Konarzewski.

On 8 August, in cooperation with the 2nd Legions Infantry Division, the forces from Greater Poland occupied Minsk. Less than two weeks later, they reached Babruysk and reached the Berezina Line. On 28 August, the soldiers from Greater Poland, accompanied by tanks, occupied the town and the Babruysk fortress, taking a huge amount of

military property and many prisoners of war. Having occupied the fortress, they had to defend the Berezina Line from the Usha estuary up to Babruysk.

In mid-September, Konarzewski stepped down as commander and gave command to General Stanisław Dubiski (who died on 28 September, shot by a Bolshevik bullet). Konarzewski took command of the group in the north, composed of the 2nd GPRR and artillery. The brave "Poznańczyks" were praised by the Commander of the Lithuanian-Belarusian Front, General Stanisław Szeptycki.

Although the front literally froze in the turn of 1919/1920, with temperatures reaching as low as -30 degrees centigrade, the soldiers from Greatest Poland did not lose their spirit. In that period, the 1st GPRR made numerous sorties behind the Berezina Line. It moved extremely fast, mostly in snow storms, causing panic among the Bolsheviks and not allowing them to rest.

Recovery of the remaining parts of Greater Poland and Gdańsk Pomerania

As a form of a reward for the military efforts taken by the units that had fought in the insurgent forces, the soldiers were allowed to take part in the recovery of lands that were granted to Poland under the Treaty of Versailles.

The process started in January 1920. On 17 January, small Polish infantry units occupied Leszno and Rawicz, which, on the day of the

signing of the truce with the Germans, were outside the area occupied by the insurgents from Greater Poland.

The lands to the north of Greater Poland were to be taken by the 15th and the 16th Infantry Divisions (formerly the 2nd and 4th Greater Poland Rifle Divisions), comprising the Pomeranian Front commanded by Lieutenant General Józef Haller. In all of the towns, the Polish units were enthusiastically welcomed by their Polish residents.

On the left side of Haller, there was the 15th Infantry Division. Its 59th Infantry Regiment (formerly the 5th Greater Poland Rifle Regiment) reached Chojnice from Żnin. A little to the east, the 62nd Infantry Regiment (formerly the 8th Greater Poland Rifle Regiment) was recovering the region of Chodzież (including Chodzież), the region of Wyrzysk and also Nakło on the Noteć. On 20 January, its soldiers occupied Bydgoszcz. At the same time, the 60th Infantry Regiment (formerly the 6th Greater Poland Rifle Regiment) and the 16th and 17th Uhlán Regiments also entered the town. Then, all of the aforementioned units moved to the Ukraine. In the meantime, the 61st Infantry Regiment (formerly the 7th Greater Poland Rifle Regiment) was helping recover the region of Chodzież (including Chodzież), the region of Wyrzysk and also Nakło on the Noteć. Shortly afterwards, the regiment was directed to southern Greater Poland, where it guarded the border between Kępno and Rawicz.

Units of the 16th Infantry Division: The 63rd Toruń Infantry Regiment (formerly the 9th

Greater Poland Rifle Regiment) set off from Inowrocław towards Toruń and after a clash with the Germans near Gniewkowo, it entered its destination city. Then it continued its march to the north, occupying such towns as Wejherowo, and finally reached Kaszubia. The 18th Uhlan Regiment marched as a vanguard for the forces occupying Toruń.

Battles in the Ukraine

In the east, the winter of 1919/1920 was, for the Polish Army, an opportunity to rest. The Polish Commander-in-Chief Józef Piłsudski, however, was aware of how big the threat from the Red Army was. Assuming that the enemy would group larger forces in the southern section of the front, this is where Piłsudski planned to strike. Another argument in favour of the attack was the possibility of establishing a pro-Polish Ukrainian state.

The strike was to be carried out by three Polish armies: the 6th Army on the right flank, the 2nd Army in the centre and the 3rd Army on the left flank. The 16th and the 17th Uhlan Regiments as well as the 16th Heavy Artillery Regiment were a part of the 3rd Army. The first of these was included in the 5th Mounted Brigade (part of the Mounted Division). The 17th Uhlan Regiment, on the other hand, was a part of the 7th Mounted Battalion, which belonged to Colonel Józef Rybak's Operational Group. After three hours of bloody fighting in the streets, the 16th Heavy Artillery Regiment was assigned to Division General Edward Rydz-Śmigły's Operational

Group. During the operation, the Polish forces underwent reorganisation and in May, the 15th Infantry Division became a part of the 3rd Army.

In 1919, the soldiers from Greater Poland harassed the Bolsheviks so much, that the enemies learned to respect the units formed in western Poland. The very sight of the Greater Polish "rogatywka" caps on the front was, for them, a reason to retreat and occupy more favourable defensive positions.

On 25 April 1920, early in the morning, the largest Polish military operation since its return to the map of Europe commenced. Three Polish armies set off to the east intending to crush Alexander Yegorov's South-Western Front.

On 8 May, the Polish Army entered Kiev. One of the first units that entered the city was the 15th Infantry Division, which was the most glorified unit from all of the units from Greater Poland. Commander-in-Chief Marshal Józef Piłsudski claimed himself that, next to the cavalry and his favourite 1st Legions Infantry Division, it gave "its all".

Kiev was occupied, but the military goal was not achieved, and on 10 June the Polish 3rd Army started to retreat to the west. During two months of marching, the Polish soldiers had to continuously fight against units of the Red Army.

In these tough moments, there were acts of bravery committed by the units from Greater Poland. In early August, the cavalrymen from the 17th Uhlan Regiment managed to free the 6th

Infantry Division. This was just one of the episodes of the battle fought near Brody, participated in also by another cavalry regiment from Greater Poland - the 16th Uhlan Regiment.

In the summer, in relation to the planned counter-attack in the northern section of the Polish-Bolshevik Front, most of the units from Greater Poland left Eastern Galicia and Volhynia.

Exceptions were the 17th Uhlan Regiment (part of the 1st Mounted Brigade), the 115th Uhlan Regiment and 3 air force squadrons - the 15th Fighter Squadron (formerly the 4th Greater Poland Fighter Squadron), the 21st Destroyer Squadron, and later also the 14th Intelligence Squadron (formerly the 3rd Greater Poland Air Force Squadron).

The 15th Fighter Squadron played a crucial role in slowing down the march of the Bolshevik cavalry to Lviv. The Squadron's planes pestered the enemy so effectively, that the Polish Army had time to bring in the necessary reinforcements.

One of the last spectacular actions of the Polish Army in the Ukraine was the September intruder mission of an improvised automobile group, commanded by Major Włodzimierz Bochenek, on Kovel. An officer who was particularly glorified for the occupation of Kovel was Second Lieutenant Leonard Sulimierski from the 17th Uhlan Regiment. Major Bochenek even requested that his subordinate be honoured for his merits. He argued that Second Lieutenant Sulimierski voluntarily took command of one of the armed vehicles and "with all bravery" chased the units that were retreating. During the chase, he seized

4 cannons and drove into Kovel.

The Warsaw operation

While in the spring of 1920 the Poles were counting on the end of the war against the Bolsheviks in the southern section of the front, the soldiers from the Red Army focused on the north. On 14 May, Mikhail Tukhachevsky led the Western Front on an offensive against the Polish Army. Tukhachevsky's forces were pushed back, mainly thanks to the oldest Greater Polish infantry division - the 14th ID, and to three Greater Polish air force squadrons.

Undeterred by the failure, on 4 July Tukhachevsky commenced the great summer offensive of the Western Front, which ended on the outskirts of Warsaw.

Before it came to the trial of strength that would have a crucial impact on the outcome of war, in the second half of July and in early August, the Greater Poland infantry divisions (especially the 14th and the 16th ID, but also the 15th and the 17th ID) played a fundamental role in slowing down the movement of the Western Front. The attacking Bolshevik units had to lose a lot of blood to pay for every foot of land torn away from the Greater Poland and Pomeranian regiments.

However, despite their great commitment, in mid-August the Red Army reached Toruń, Nieszawa, Włocławek, Modlin fortress and Warsaw. Mikhail Tukhachevsky wanted to surround Warsaw at midnight and cut the supply lines between

Gdańsk and Warsaw, through which Warsaw received supplies from the Entente states. However, Tukhachevsky did not duly protect its southern flank.

The Polish Supreme Command intended to take advantage of the Western Front's unprotected left flank and strike there, basing the rest of the front on the line of the Vistula. Five armies were to take part in the Warsaw operation. These were, from the north: the 5th, 1st, 2nd, 4th and 3rd Armies. The first three were included in the Northern Front, while the following two armies formed the Central Front. The units from Greater Poland and Pomerania were assigned to different armies.

The Red Army started the offensive on 13 August, and on the next day, the 5th Army, commanded by Brigade General Władysław Sikorski, attacked Nasielsk. On 15 August, the 17th Infantry Division, part of Sikorski's Army, broke the resistance of two Bolshevik infantry brigades and found itself halfway between the Modlin fortress and Nasielsk. On 16 August, after heavy fighting which brought significant losses, it occupied Nasielsk and, two days later, Popławy near Pułtusk. From there, the division broke the stiff resistance of the Bolsheviks and went north.

Another Greater Polish unit which was part of the 5th Army was the 7th Reserve Brigade formed out of the Western Group of the Greater Poland Front. The brigade initially fought as part of the 1st Army, and was later subordinated to Sikorski. On 17 August, its 155th Infantry Regiment occupied Serock.

In the first days of the Warsaw operation, aviators from the 5th Army conducted some very successful actions. The Supreme Command of the Polish Armed Forces praised the 12th Intelligence Squadron (formerly the 1st Greater Poland Air Force Squadron) and the 13th Fighter Squadron (formerly the 2nd Greater Poland Air Force Squadron), which bombed enemy wagon forts and fired at their opponents with machine guns.

The 17th Infantry Division Infantry Division - On 20-21 August it managed to seize 23 machine guns. It was soon subordinated to the 1st Army, and, as part of it, made its mark near Chorzele, where, on its own initiative, it supported the Siberian Brigade.

The majority of units from Greater Poland had different roles to play. On 16th August, the Polish counter-offensive from the river Wieprz commenced. The Greater Polish divisions of the 4th Army under Second Lieutenant General Leopold Skierski were very busy. Their first task was to crush the enemy's 16th Army. The 14th and the 16th Infantry Divisions, as well as the 15th Uhlán regiment, were expected to strike from the line of the Wieprz towards the north, and to reach the Mińsk Mazowiecki - Kałuszyn - Siedlce line.

On 16 August, under the fire of enemy cannons and machine guns, they managed to cross the Wieprz. The 14th ID struck with such force that it did not come across any great resistance until Garwolin. It crushed the 171st Rifle Brigade (from the 57th Rifle Division) and occupied Kołbiel. After three hours of bloody fighting in the streets,

the 16th Infantry Division broke the enemy's resistance near Lipiny. The Poznań uhlans from the 15th Uhlán Regiment did their share in breaking the resistance of the 169th Rifle Brigade under Maciejowice. The Soviet 16th Army panicked and started to retreat towards Siedlce. Furthermore, the action carried out by the 15th Infantry Division (from the 1st Army) forced the Bolsheviks who were standing on the Warsaw - Brest line to withdraw.

The 14th ID took advantage of the panic and crushed the Bolshevik 8th Rifle Division and the 17th Rifle Brigade, and later, near Jędrzejów, defeated the remains of the 10th Rifle Division and again, the 8th Rifle Division. The 55th Infantry Regiment, as part of the division, entered Mińsk Mazowiecki. On 17 August, the 14th ID managed to resist a forceful strike by the retreating Bolshevik columns, which wanted to get through towards Siedlce. In the battle, the 58th Infantry Regiment took 1000 prisoners and several cannons. The 16th ID and the 14th ID then marched together towards Seroczyn and Latowicz.

Soldiers from the former Prussian Partition were also in the 2nd Army. One of the units comprising the Army was the 16th Uhlán Regiment, which on 16 August occupied Wisznice in a spectacular attack. On the next day, the regiment helped in occupying Biała, which contributed to the crushing of the Soviet 57th Rifle Division. Marching on as flank guard of the 4th Mounted Brigade, the regiment crushed the enemy's column, taking 500 prisoners of war, 16 cannons and several hundred carts.

By 18 August, the enemy's 16th Army was annihilated. On the same day, the 15th Infantry Division was assigned to the 4th Army. The new task of the 4th Army was to defeat the enemy's 3rd Army. To cut off its escape route, General Leonard Skierski ordered a change in the direction of the strike from north to north-east.

On 19 August, the 15th Uhlan Regiment broke the enemy's resistance in the area of Karczewo, and the 66th Infantry Regiment entered Węgrów. Vanguards of the 15th Infantry Division occupied Brok. The division sent one of its brigades towards Ostrów Mazowiecki and Śniadowo. In the area of Siedlce and Mokobody, and near Grębków, the 14th and the 16th Infantry Divisions fought victorious battles with the enemy's columns that had been cut off. Prisoners were taken and cannons and machine guns were seized.

On 20 August, the 15th ID occupied Ostrów after a "bloody battle". During the fighting, the Bolsheviks counter-attacked five times. In the days that followed, the 4th Army continued the chase. Although the enemy's 3rd Army managed to sneak out to the north-east, the morale of its soldiers was so low, that they were easily defeated in the region of Bielsk and Białystok by the Polish 2nd Army. Meanwhile, it was now also possible for the 4th Army to cut off the way back for the enemy's 4th and 15th Armies. For this plan to succeed, the routes passing through Łomża and Kolno had to be blocked.

On 21 August, the 59th Infantry Regiment, with the 15th Infantry division, fought a fierce battle

with the retreating Bolshevik 5th Rifle Division. Both sides were surprised with the situation. It was close combat, and the enemy was pursued and surrounded. Despite tremendous fatigue, the soldiers from Greater Poland fought with “exceptional obstinacy”. On the next day, the regiment occupied Łomża “after heavy fighting” taking prisoners from five different divisions.

On 24 August, the 15th ID seized 14 cannons, nearly 30 machine guns, standards, ammunition and wagon forts near Kolno. It also took a thousand prisoners. To succeed, the division had to endure the enemy’s immense pressure. The 60th Infantry Regiment repulsed 9 attacks. Vanguards of the 4th Army stood at the Prussian border and tried to prevent the Red Army from entering, but the enemy’s large forces managed to survive. On the following day, on 25 August, Józef Piłsudski ended the pursuit of the enemy.

The Neman operation

Victory in the Warsaw operation brought the initiative in the Polish-Bolshevik war back into Polish hands. The Red Army was retreating, although not entirely destroyed. Marshal Piłsudski was determined to bring it to a final defeat and, consequently, to force Russia to sign a peace treaty the terms of which would be favourable to Poland.

Another great battle with the Bolsheviks required thorough preparation. An important role was played by the Cavalry Operational Group, which was a part of the 2nd Army. One of its regiments

was the 16th Uhlan Regiment. At the turn of August and September, the regiment occupied Sejny, which it later fought for with the Lithuanians. Although Sejny was finally abandoned, in the following days the 16th UR demonstrated great courage, effectively attacking the enemy's much greater forces. After a week, the regiment's subunits returned to Sejny.

The Pomeranian and Poznań divisions of the 4th Army also had responsible tasks to complete. On 16 and 17 September, the 14th, the 15th and the 16th ID fought three heavy battles with three divisions and a brigade in the region of Kobryn, Lipovo, Ostromech and Kamen Shlahetsky. The 57th Infantry Regiment from Greater Poland fought with exceptional bravery. Regiment Commander Lieutenant Colonel Arnold Szyling, who personally led the soldiers on a counter-attack, was fatally wounded. The 55th and the 56th Infantry Regiments also fought effective defensive battles for many hours.

On 19 September, the Commander-in-Chief gave the orders to proceed with the new operation. Two armies were delegated to the offensive. The 2nd Army was to surround the Bolshevik positions from the left flank (trespassing into Lithuanian territory), while the 4th Army was to initially cover the 2nd Army.

On the left flank of the 4th Army, there was Second Lieutenant General Władysław Jung's group, the core of which was the 15th Infantry Division. Jung's group included one more infantry brigade and the 215th and the 18th Uhlan Regiments. Jung was to lead his soldiers to

Vawkavysk, and later maintain contact with the 2nd Army, continue the offensive towards Mosty and defend itself against a possible strike from Slonim. The remaining forces of the 4th Army were to go towards Byaroza. The 14th ID was to be grouped in the region of Ruzhany, while the 16th ID was to cooperate in the liquidation of the Soviet 4th Army and part of the 16th Army which were trapped on the Pinsk foreland.

On 21 September, the soldiers of the 55th and 58th Infantry Regiment defeated the enemy and, after fierce fighting, forced their way through the Khoyevo Marsh passage. Two days later, the main offensive of the Polish Armed Forces started, and on the next day, the 14th ID "in a daring attack" occupied Ruzhany and left the enemy with heavy losses. After three hours of bloody fighting in the streets, the 16th ID occupied Horodec, located near the route towards Byaroza, and on the following day, after a fierce battle, it entered Antopal. In the meantime, on 25 September, the 59th Infantry Regiment along with the 15th Infantry Division fought savage battles for Izabelin, which changed hands five times. The 61st and the 62nd Infantry Regiments from the same division repulsed nine attacks of the Red Army. The units that stood out in these fights were the artillery and the sapper battalion from this division.

On 27 September, the Pomeranian soldiers showed their best once again. "In a daring attack", the 63rd Infantry Regiment occupied Drohiczyn. Meanwhile, the 16th ID pressed on against the Bolshevik 4th Army and caused its total destruction.

The soldiers from Greater Poland demonstrated their battle skills once again on 30 September, when the 14th Infantry Division occupied Baranavichy in another “daring attack”. On the next day, its 55th Infantry Regiment, despite heavy fire from the enemy cannons and machine guns, with the use of bayonets and hand grenades broke the Bolshevik positions along the line of trenches built by the Russians during World War I and started the chase towards the east. The 57th and the 56th Infantry Regiments also had to fight their way through. The 18th and the 215th Uhlan Regiments were active at the rear of the enemy’s armies. The latter was even surrounded near Tsaryn, but managed to break out. In the meantime, the 18th Uhlan Regiment rose to fame with its effective charge through four lines of barbed wire.

On 2 October, the 15th Uhlan Regiment demonstrated its creativity when, while pursuing the enemy, it seized an artillery battery, blew up the railway track which then contributed to the seizure of an armoured train, and finally stormed into Snov. While doing all this, the regiment was cut off by the enemy, but it defended itself so effectively that the infantrymen from the 56th Infantry Regiment managed to support it.

As well as the 4th Army, the 2nd Army also played an immense role in bringing the Bolsheviks to a defeat. Two of its units were squadrons from Greater Poland: the 12th Intelligence Squadron and the 13th Fighter Squadron which was moved close to the border with Upper Silesia. The commander of the army, Lieutenant General Edward Rydz-Śmigły, thanked them later for their

“dedicated and bodacious work.”. Another element of the 2nd Army was also the 17th Infantry Division, which was given the task of surveilling the Polish-Lithuanian border.

On 3 October, the forces of the 2nd Army and the 15th ID from the 4th Army were combined near Stowbtsy, which finally brought the Neman operation to an end. Both sides were seriously exhausted by the war and intended to make peace.

One of the last clashes as part of the war took place on 11 October, near Stowbtsy. The 14th and the 15th ID fought savage battles for Koidanova, which changed hands several times. The opponents suffered heavy losses. The units that demonstrated exceptional bravery in the battle were the 55th, the 61st and, above all, the 58th Infantry Regiment

The Silesian uprisings and entering the territory of Upper Silesia

Another area which the soldiers from Greater Poland fought for was Upper Silesia. These lands were detached from Poland back in the Middle Ages and had been undergoing serious Germanisation for several hundred years. The Silesians therefore did not stand a chance of liberating themselves on their own.

In the first months of 1919, aeroplanes from Greater Poland flew over Silesia, dropping leaflets for the Poles who lived there. These were initially planes from the so-called “Combat

Group" from Ławica airport, then, later they were the planes of the 2nd, and then 3rd Greater Poland Air Force Squadrons.

At first glance, the July of 1919 seemed to pass peacefully in Upper Silesia, although the tension between the Poles and the Germans was growing. After the massacre of some Poles by Grenschutz soldiers, in the night of 16 to 17 August, an anti-German uprising broke out.

Greater Poland residents set up aid committees and sent food, money and armaments to Silesia. The spontaneous and largely unsupported uprising was, however, doomed to failure, and on 24 August the Silesian insurgents ceased fighting.

During the night of 18 to 19 August, when a deadly battle was being fought with the Red Army on the outskirts of Warsaw, the 2nd uprising in Upper Silesia broke out. The fighting stopped after a week. The insurgents did not manage to separate Silesia from the Weimar Republic, but they forced the Germans to make some concessions. Although the soldiers from Greater Poland had focused their greatest effort on rescuing Warsaw, they did not leave the Silesians without any support. One of the commanders of the 2nd Silesian uprising was Captain Mieczysław Paluch, highly renowned for his participation in the Greater Poland Uprising. In 1920, he was brought to Silesia by Wojciech Korfanty.

After signing an armistice with the Bolsheviks in October 1920, the Poles could finally pay more attention to Upper Silesia. In November, the 15th Fighter Squadron was moved close to the border

with Upper Silesia. The aviators made several demonstration flights along the Polish-Silesian border.

Over time, the participation of Greater Poland residents in providing help to Silesia expanded. In January and February 1921, funds were raised to finance the Polish plebiscite action. In March, an Albatros B.II plane from the 15th Fighter Squadron, with the inscription "Save Silesia" on its lower wing, flew along the Polish-Silesian border. On the area covered by the plebiscite, Polish crews dropped leaflets and other propaganda materials. To prevent any possible political repercussions, the planes sent to Upper Silesia did not have the Polish checkerboard marking. Instead, there was one square on each wing, light blue and white in colour (the colours of the Silesian Piasts), both with dark blue rims. The propaganda action was getting more and more intense. Lectures and educational events were organised. Clothes and food were sent from Greater Poland to Silesia. Polish Army officers from Greater Poland also visited the area.

On 20 March, a plebiscite in Upper Silesia was held. In the entire area covered by the plebiscite, the majority voted for Upper Silesia to remain part of Germany. In many poviats, however, most of the voters were for annexing the area to Poland. A decision concerning the future of Upper Silesia was to be made by the Inter-Allied Commission in Opole. The representative of France, General Henri Le Rond, was in favour of dividing Upper Silesia in a way more favourable to Poland, but the representatives of Great Britain and Italy wanted to leave almost all of Upper

Silesia to Germany. According to information obtained by the Poles, the pro-German option started to prevail, thus in the last decade of April, Wojciech Korfanty, who was the Polish commissioner for the plebiscite, decided to start another uprising. Fighting broke out in the night of 2 to 3 May.

The 3rd Silesian uprising was participated in by approximately 2000 Greater Poland residents. Poznań also provided the insurgents in the south with weapons, ammunition, uniforms, food, money and medication. The inhabitants of Greater Poland who went to Upper Silesia included some outstanding individuals, such as Lieutenant Colonel Maciej Mielżyński, a landowner from Greater Poland, who was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the uprising. In June, Mielżyński was replaced by Lieutenant Colonel Kazimierz Zenkteler - one of the most highly decorated officers from the Western Group of the Greater Poland Uprising. Captain Alojzy Nowak (former commander of the Września battalion during the Greater Poland Uprising) took command of the group "North", while Lieutenant Colonel Bronisław Sikorski (participant of battles in Poznań) became commander of the group "South". Mieczysław Szreybrowski, veteran of battles with the Germans in southern Greater Poland, was appointed Head of Communication. One of the units within the group "North" was the 9th Lubliniec-Opole Infantry Regiment (formerly the "Linke subgroup"). The adjutant of the 3rd battalion of this regiment, and, later, the commander of the 2nd company was Sergeant Tomasz Frankowski - veteran of the battles in the

Greater Poland Uprising fought in the region of Grodzisk Wielkopolski and Lwówek. Another Silesian insurgent unit was commanded by Captain Paweł Cyms, famous for his raid on Inowrocław in January 1919.

On 11 June 1921, after over a month of bloody fighting and under the pressure of the Inter-Allied Commission, an agreement was reached, and in October 1921 the Council of Ambassadors of the Entente states decided on a division of Upper Silesia that was favourable to Poland.

In June 1922, units of the Polish Armed Forces entered Upper Silesia. As a form of recognition of the Greater Poland residents' contribution to the annexation of Upper Silesia to Poland, the 23rd ID - a division created on the basis of the 7th Greater Poland Reserve Brigade, was given the task to recover Katowice and the adjacent territories. The division was commanded by a renowned participant of the Greater Poland Uprising and the Silesian uprisings, Lieutenant Colonel Kazimierz Zenkteler.

Conclusions

In 1919-1921, residents of Greater Poland were present in all the places where battles for the borders of independent Poland were fought. The graves of soldiers from Greater Poland appeared in the cemeteries of Galician towns and villages, as well as in the forests in the region of Vilnius and Suwałki. Greater Polish blood flowed down the Berezina, the Dnieper, the Wieprz, the Vistula, the Narew and the Wkra. It saturated the

sands of Masovia, the black soils of the region of Lublin, and the coal seams of Upper Silesia. Soldiers from Greater Poland were considered to be some of the best military men. Their enemies were afraid and respectful of the well-armed units from Greater Poland and Pomerania. Apart from a few rare cases, they were praised by commanders and entrusted the most responsible tasks. It would be hard to imagine the success of the Warsaw or Neman operations, or the political success of the 3rd Silesian uprising, without these soldiers from the former Prussian Partition.

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