

Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919

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The military aspects of the Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919

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In one of his texts devoted to the Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919, Professor Jerzy Karwat used the term “irridentism” to characterise this event. Let us recall, it means the struggle for national liberation. However, the context of this term related to the liberation movements from Italy, which were active at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, is more important. The aim of these movements was the unification of all of the Italian territories into one state. I mention this because in the case of any attempt at characterising the Greater Poland uprising 1918-1919 from a military perspective, the aspect of the spontaneous fight of the Poles inhabiting the German state was the one which emphasised the uprising’s character and dimension. Finally, this was the shape of the

relations between Greater Poland and Germany, which combined the political and military dimensions of the Greater Poland uprising.

It must be remembered that the events which took place at the end of 1918, both on the local and the European scale, made any hope of regaining independence by way of an international agreement futile. This was due to the differences among the main negotiators of the peace conference, that is, Great Britain and France. A new element of this discussion was the idea of liberation of the territories of the Prussian partition by means of a landing of the "Blue Army" commanded by General Józef Haller. A military uprising on the territories of the partition was to be an important element of this operation. The date of commencement of the offensive was event set to 19 December 1918. What is interesting is that the objectives of the uprising were to be accomplished using the forces of the Polish Military Organisation of the Prussian Partition. Deficiencies in preparations and, above all, pressure from the British diplomats caused the cancellation of this action. It can be said that this was fortunate as the involvement of external forces, and Haller's army was such a force, could have had unpredictable consequences, and the most important of these would be an internationalisation of the conflict, which could destabilise the ceasefire achieved with such difficulty on 11 November 1918. In my opinion, this notion was proof that any awareness of the true situation in the Poznań province was far from the reality. This equally referred to France and the Polish National Committee and also the

leaders of the Polish Military Organisation of the Prussian Partition. Taking into account the appearance of more or less realistic concepts for the military restoration of Polish independence, the leaders of the Supreme People's Council began to realise that the situation had become complex enough - not to say "tense" that they began to consider variants with the outbreak of an uprising. Evidence of such thinking was the establishment of the Military Division and then the Security Division. Military affairs in the Commissariat were handled by Wojciech Korfanty, who, together with Jan Maciaszek, conducted talks in Warsaw in December 1918 with representatives of the General Staff of the Polish Army. A fundamental issue was the bringing of a higher-ranked officer to Poznań, a person who was appropriately experienced in commanding soldiers and in staff work. There was an awareness that the officers with the highest ranks among the Polish conspirators were second lieutenants of the German Army, this was a consequence of the principle applicable in that army that soldiers of Polish nationality could not be promoted to higher ranks. From the point of view of military practice, these officers could, at best, take command of companies. One candidate for future commander of the uprising was to be Gen. Eugeniusz de Henning-Michaelis. These aforementioned facts contradict the claim, which is sometimes put forward, that the Supreme People's Council definitely opposed the military uprising and it was only the development of the situation at the end of December 1918 and the beginning of January 1919 which forced it to take overall control over the uprising. As the

Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council had good knowledge of the situation in Poznań and Greater Poland, it must have been aware that the level of political emotions threatened to create the potential for an outbreak of military operations. Perhaps it is also still possible that an awareness of the dynamics and range of these operations was not present.

In October, the process of the development of elements of the future insurgent army was initiated. The first of these was the People's Guard, which was modelled on the Citizen's Guard, established in October 1918. Given the circumstances, when there was an escalation of revolutionary sentiments throughout the territory of Germany, the task of this formation was to maintain order. From the very beginning, the commandant of the Guard was Julian Lange. Initially, Germans also served in the Guard, but as time passed, Poles definitely dominated the composition of the respective sub-units. In Poznań, Karol Rzepecki became its commandant, and at the beginning of November, it consisted of 2130 volunteers. The units were provided with uniforms, armed and even paid by the German authorities from beginning to end. On 27 November 1918, the Citizens' Guard changed its name to the People's Guard. An instruction was given to form units of the Guard throughout the Prussian partition. The existence of this service was reinforced by a relevant resolution of the Partition Sejm of Poznań, and on 8 December, the Public Security Division of the Supreme People's Council published the "Guidelines for the People's Guard". The units were subordinated to the

Supreme People's Council and served to maintain order and protect the property of citizens, regardless of their nationality or denomination. Members of the Guard also protected the activities of the poviats people's councils. The Guard was a voluntary formation and its members treated their service as an additional activity performed in addition to their professional work, and to distinguish themselves, the members wore blue rims on their military caps. It was observed that during Ignacy Jan Paderewski's visit to Poznań, over 2000 members of the Guard were on duty. If we add those who served in other cities, this figure in December 1918 could almost reach 5000 people. The units of the Guard were mainly recruited from members of the "Sokół" organisation [Falcons], but also members of the reserves, people on leave, deserters and members of other organisations. The information that the Guard units were organised in 30 out of 42 poviats of the Poznań province is very important. The full military potential of these units was revealed during the first hours and days of the uprising, being, on many occasions, the only organised insurgent forces.

This was during such a period that almost any bigger organisation or institution would establish its own military forces, whose aim was to provide protection to its members, or garrison service. Such objectives accompanied the foundation of the Guard and Security Service, which was an organism formed under the patronage of the worker and soldier councils. These units were to be equally composed of Germans and Poles. Members of these units were to strengthen the

gravely deficient garrisons of the German army. The leading role in the recruitment action was played by Mieczysław Paluch and his collaborators. They persuaded German members of reserves, wishing to join the ranks of the Guard, to rather go home to meet their families. A way to circumvent the parities was found very quickly, Poles with German-sounding names were sought and officially they filled the "German" quota. As an ultimate recourse, Polish names were germanised. The recruited members were barracked in two Poznań forts: Prittwitz and Rauch. Of particular interest was one company which consisted of 117 German seamen, later on complemented by Poles who had served in the German navy. All in all there were 3000 members of the Guard in Poznań alone, and another 3000 members in other cities. This was yet another force which joined the uprising in an organised manner.

15 February 1918 marked the date of the foundation of the Polish Military Organisation of the Prussian partition (PMOPP), possibly the most radical organisation when it came to the methods being planned for the regaining of independence. Wincenty Wierzejewski, the initiator and leader of this organisation gathered around himself a group of senior scouts and deserters from the German army. The organisation was deeply covert, which, from the current perspective, is the reason that there is a shortage of information about it, for instance, the number of its members. However, it is known that it was not designed as a mass organisation but rather an organisation that would ensure a large pool of professional

personnel resources. Members of the PMOPP demonstrated extraordinary activity and the most dominant among them were the following persons: Mieczysław Paluch, Henryk Śniegocki, Arkady Fiedler and Mieczysław Andrzejewski, who later on played a very important role in the uprising. The members of the PMOPP organised activities which consisted of the acquisition of weapons and other military equipment and attacks on warehouses (e.g. the action in the Poznań Arsenal). In the middle of November, a special unit also called the executive-intelligence division, with Jan Kalinowski as its leader, was established. One of the most well known fighters was Stanisław Nogaj, a controversial figure about whom opinions are very diversified. The members of the PMOPP held many important positions both in the administration and in the army, perhaps not the most prominent ones, but owing to this, they had an insight into the current situation. This helped them react rapidly, as was the case with the action of blocking the removal of almost 300 military aeroplanes from the Ławica airport.

To sum up this issue, it can be assumed that the Polish independence movement, on the eve of the uprising, had 8000-10000 people at its disposal. However, a reservation must be made that at least half of them did not have any weapons. Here, it is worth remembering the statement made by General Stanisław Taczak, in which he pointed out that among the insurgents, there were many Poles serving in the German army, who, upon returning home, carried their personal weapons with them (most frequently a rifle) in accordance with the applicable regulations. It

must be supposed that these weapons were the basic “insurgent arsenal” during the first days of the uprising.

As to the size of the German garrison, in this case we can also find various data in the literature, which mention figures between 2500 and 4500 soldiers. They were very well trained and armed. However, attention must be paid to the fact that the potential of these units was significantly limited. In general, the Germany army in the year 1918 was not the same army as four years before. The war, the long time spent on the front, and last but not least, the revolution, had all left their mark.

The events of November and December 1918 resulted in the fact that Poznań, in particular, resembled the proverbial “powder keg”. A military confrontation seemed to be inevitable. In principle, both parties were waiting for a sign, a situation, or just an incident which, as often happened in the past, would be the spark, that would ignite this keg. Despite numerous appeals, the situation in Poznań could not be considered peaceful, quite the contrary. Thus, the content of the daily report of the Corps Command sent from Poznań to Berlin, in which reassurances were made that things were quiet in Poznań, sounded rather strange. When it became clear that Ignacy Jan Paderewski was going to arrive in Poznań on 26 December, things took on a completely new dynamic. The Germans protested, not so much against the visit, because they were most unhappy about, or even outraged at, the fact that there was a mission of British officers participating in the expedition. On the other

hand, the Poles, knowing the attitude of the German authorities to Paderewski's visit to Poznań, for fear of the safety of the guest, commenced a mobilisation of forces which would guarantee his safety. This role could be fulfilled best by units of the People's Guard and the Guard and Security Service, which were quickly brought to Poznań. A prominent role was also played by the scouts of Poznań, who arrived at the railway station in uniforms and at full strength despite the fact that their activities were illegal. After many disruptions Paderewski arrived in Poznań on 26 December 1918, and at 9.00 p.m., got off the train at the Poznań railway station. On 27 December, the situation in Poznań, from the very morning, became even more complicated. Different groups of the Polish and German population marched through the streets, which either expressed their joy or irritation at the arrival of the guests. The units of the People's Guard tried hard to prevent these demonstrations from getting directly to the "Bazar" Hotel. However, it was probably there that a shot was fired at 4.40 p.m. symbolically initiating the uprising. During the following half hour or so, events started to unfold violently and spontaneously. It can thus be concluded that none of the parties had any intention to undertake their planned military activities. However, it turned out then that the long years of preparation, the organic and organisational work and the activation of various social circles had all brought an effect. However, in all likelihood, no one was aware at that time what was really happening. But even if this awareness was not present, instinct prompted that "something must be done

now". The militia groups were probably the first to reveal their activity, then later, all these activities began to be ordered and concentrated in one centre. Certainly the training of the subunits of the People's Guard and the Guard and Security Service bore fruit. Perhaps more intuitively than based on any plan, the activities of the insurgents were redirected to the sensitive areas of the city: the Main Post Office, banks and offices. The activities related to the seizing of the building of the Police Headquarters were particularly spectacular, for one thing because of the importance of this institution, and secondly because of the almost direct neighbourhood of the "Bazar" and the building of the Wilhelm's Museum, where the centre for the management of all activities was established. However, it is worth noting the fact that it was possibly the first time the decision was taken not to seize a building by force but rather to negotiate the conditions for the termination of operations with the Germans holding it. This was the case with the Citadel, Fort Grolman and the barracks, but an attempt at negotiating control of the Air Base in Ławica turned out to be ineffective. Similar cases were also observed in other areas of Greater Poland. This is certainly a very distinctly marked trait of the combat activities during the Greater Poland Uprising in that period. Another fact that was frequently taken advantage of was that there were many Poles among the serving members of those buildings, serving at that time in the ranks of the German army. Here, I would like to return to a reflection concerning the time of the outbreak of the uprising. It should be admitted that the mobilisation of the insurgent forces was

impressive. Units from several smaller towns surrounding Poznań, e.g. Kórnik arrived in Poznań as early as in the evening hours. Next day, the Commissariat of the Supreme People's Power tried to take matters into its own hands by issuing a statement in which it pointed out that the responsibility for the course of events on streets in Poznań during the preceding day lay with "pan-German instigators". There is also a characteristic statement that Polish blood was shed in defence of the banners of the coalition. In order to calm the situation and restore some order, a Polish-German Command of the City was established with Jan Maciaszek and Captain [...] Andersch as its leaders. A state of emergency was introduced which included a ban on carrying weapons. Patrols of the People's Guard and Guard and Security Service were in charge of order in the city. It seemed at that time that the events which had taken place on 27 December were just a minor incident and everything would soon return to normal. Such an approach did not really suit the commanders of radical militia groups, who strived for the expansion of military activities.

During its first hours or even days, the Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919 was the sum of many "local uprisings" in the Poznań region. The process of liberation was organised and conducted in all of these towns. Almost all of the organised insurgent units set the seizing of important areas in a given location, such as barracks, police stations, post offices, administration centres, etc. as their main goals. When these tasks were achieved, many of them

disbanded thinking that they had fulfilled their duties. It was only later, as the situation developed, that repeated mobilisation would take place. After the insurgents had definitely gained the military and administrative advantage, the Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council "took over" all their achievements. To be fair, it must be mentioned that the system of field people's councils had already proved its value.

The development of the Uprising during the first period was a reflection of the reality of the independence movement in general Polish society in the Prussian partition. In the period of the several months before the outbreak of the uprising, quite a large number of local leaders were "born", but there was no time for the appearance of any such leader who would be able to cover everything. In order to maintain the achievements of the local insurgent commanders and units, the need of the hour was to get everything in order and introduce some central management and command of it. Out of sheer necessity, and perhaps not to antagonise the local circles, the Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council chose to entrust the management of the uprising to Captain Stanisław Taczak, who, by accident, had stayed in Greater Poland. Although he was a Greater Poland resident and a professional officer, his service was in the General Staff of the Polish Army in Warsaw. A few days later, Stanisław Taczak was promoted to the rank of major and received the task of completing the insurgent staff. The command of the uprising was located in the "Royal" hotel at 38 Św. Marcin Street. Initially, it was Captain Stanisław Łapiński

who was appointed head of staff, however, from 3 January 1919, this post was taken by Lieutenant Colonel Julian Stachiewicz, who had been sent from Warsaw. Thus, it was necessary to build a command system in the heat of the battle, starting from the level of Central Command. In addition to the appointment of the above-mentioned head of the staff, a very complete organisational structure was rapidly formed with the aim of facilitating the command of the uprising. The command was very deeply covert, e.g. formulae used at that time in the Polish Army were avoided by using a different nomenclature. Stanisław Taczak was banned from publishing any information about the activities of Central Command in the press or in the form of leaflets or notices. Such actions were justified as there were attempts made during this time by the Supreme People's Council to create the impression that the events which had occurred in Greater Poland since 27 December were just spontaneous actions and not a regular war.

On the second day of the uprising, several spectacular activities took place. The Citadel (Fort Winiary), where a strong radio-station was present, was seized. Its seizure offered the possibility of uninterrupted communication to the Poles. Another action was the seizure of Fort Grolman. Here, the main role was played by Poznań scouts under the command of Wincenty Wierzejewski. The action at Fort Grolman was the beginning of the legend of the 1st Scout Company - an insurgent unit composed of scouts. The barracks of the 47th Infantry Regiment, the 5th Heavy Artillery Regiment, the 20th Light Artillery

Regiment, and also the barracks of the army service units were taken without any fighting. An attempt at taking control of the barracks of the 6th Grenadier Regiment ended much worse. The first attack, also conducted on 29 December, failed. Finally, the barracks were seized on 31 December. A smart move on the part of the insurgents was to arrest the German command, including: Hans von Eisenhardt-Rothe, the supreme president of the province, General Fritz von Bock und Polach, commander of the 5th Corps and his deputy, General Schimmelpfening. This resulted in a deadlock amongst the Germans. In the evening hours of 28 December, a meeting of all the leaders of the national and independence movement took place at the "Bazar" Hotel. The main objective was an agreement on how to proceed. The Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council and the Worker and Soldier Council rather advocated the limitation of military operations in favour of intensification of talks with representatives of the German authorities. On the other hand, Mieczysław Paluch and Bohdan Hulewicz were firm supporters of the maximum expansion of the military struggle. During this meeting there was a dramatic turns of events when Roman Wilkanowicz and members of the PMOPP appeared in the room during a meeting and strongly demanded the continuation of fighting.

The dynamics of the events seemed to strengthen the position of the latter party. The Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council was aware that it had to take determined political action in order to not lose its leading position. However, this was

not a problem of who was to manage the fighting, but who was to be responsible for it. The events of 27 December 1918 clearly exposed the shortcomings in the military preparation of the Poles from a strategic and tactical point of view.

The insurgent fighting was continued. Local insurgent units organised themselves spontaneously and also chose their commanders in the same manner. This situation proved, in the best possible way, that the programme of self-modernisation was successful. The general society in Greater Poland demonstrated a high level of national awareness at this time, and also the ties between these small communities. When we take a look at the process of the formation of the "insurgent army", it is difficult to believe that it ended successfully. If the insurgent outbreaks, dates and directions in which the fighting spread were to be mapped, they would remind the observer of the effect which appears when a stone is thrown into water. In this situation, that proverbial stone was the events which took place in Poznań on 27 December and then the fighting spread like ripples throughout the Greater Poland region. Certainly, strategic thinking and a general plan whose precise implementation could lead to the regaining of power were missing, but more importantly the same was true about the regaining of freedom. Greater Poland, at the end of 1918 and the beginning of 1919, still remained one of the provinces of Germany. The uprising, or rather the military operations, resembled methods used during guerilla warfare, thus the units were relatively small, as the then insurgent staff was only able to command such units.

The only deviation from the principle of spontaneous fighting was the operation aimed at the seizure of the Air Base in Ławica. Both the insurgents and the Germans were aware of the importance of being in possession of this site. Above all, this was the last military outpost remaining in German hands. Perhaps the base, which played the role of a training-service centre, did not represent much in the way of combat value, but the threat per se that it would be possible to organise air-raids using the aeroplanes stationed there, was sufficient reason to capture them. The action in Ławica was one example of a well prepared military operation using different units and services. Unfortunately such examples in the subsequent period of the uprising were few.

As the framework of this text does not allow for a detailed analysis of the military operations, I would like to draw attention to several issues important from the point of view of the ongoing events. The decision which definitely allowed for operations to be ordered was a decision taken at the plenary meeting of the Supreme People's Council of 3 January 1919, regarding the seizure of power. It was published as late as 8 January.

Activities related to the willingness of putting military operations into order were contained in the day order of 5 January 1919, regarding the subordination of all units fighting in the Greater Poland territory, including Poznań, to Central Command, and the establishment of 7 military districts, based on day order of 7 January. These decisions certainly had a positive impact on the organisation of the military forces and in some

way coordinated their field activities. This, also confirmed the existence of the insurgent army, i.e. these were no longer just some unspecified grassroots groups organising themselves without the knowledge of the Command. The army consisted of voluntary units, the People's Guard and gendarmerie - again also volunteers. It was discovered very quickly that, in order to maintain the dynamics of the activities and guarantee a force necessary to accomplish the set objectives, it was necessary to introduce a conscription apparatus. Major Stanisław Taczak was aware, however, that at that stage of the uprising, universal conscription was impossible, due to the fact that the population of people of German nationality was prevalent in many regions of Greater Poland. Limited conscription of young men born in 1900 was 1901 considered, but the implementation of this idea was too difficult and delicate for political reasons. All in all, it was postponed to a later time. However this problem resurfaced when command was taken by General Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki. A temporary resolution of this issue was the establishment of regional military draft offices, whose task was to conduct the recruitment of volunteers and draw up registers. This issue required the introduction of a certain order, as the previous "system" of participation in the uprising was not based on any conventions. As a consequence of this, starting from the interwar period until practically the present day, it is difficult to really determine an accurate number of insurgents. It was almost customary for insurgents to change their respective units or to not get signed into the register. Evidence of the existence of military

structures was the fact that insurgents received pay for their service, amounting to 30-300 German marks. Additionally, for each day on the front they would get 1 German mark (married men would receive 2 German marks). Also, a child allowance of up to 13 German marks per child was paid. On top of this, all the insurgents received guaranteed board and accommodation. These decisions, in a way, ended the period of spontaneous development of the uprising and on the other hand, they introduced a clear set of principles for the operation of the military forces. When we talk about organisational issues, here it is worth noting the attempt at introducing the institution of the soldier council to insurgent units. This initiative met with the kind reception of the Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council. Regulation of the organisational issues at a central level was followed by a necessity to standardise the uniforms of the soldiers and the symbols worn by them. In the majority of cases, the uniform of the German infantry and cavalry, from the 1910 model, became the insurgent uniform. In the day order dated 8 January 1919, Central Command issued an instruction to place metal eagles on the caps (produced for the most part in a factory in... Berlin) and also red and white cockades. Additionally, a red-and-white stripe should be visible on the collar. Obviously due to the restraining conditions and possibilities, by the time an official uniform of the Greater Poland Army was introduced, the margin of discretion in this regard was quite significant. Despite all the action taken by Central Command, the military operations were of a spontaneous nature and occurred without overly extensive

preparations, often the lack of coordination of the respective components taking part in a given activity was more than noticeable. In this context, the credit should go to Central Command, and personally Stanisław Taczak, for the preparation of various tactical instructions drawn up in writing and communicated by phone. In December 1918 / January 1919, an instruction was provided to the commands of the respective garrisons, with regards to the manning of their cities and railways. Attention was drawn in them to the necessity of providing posts at particularly sensitive areas like railway stations, tunnels and bridges. It was still emphasised that attempts at negotiations should be made before any possible military action. While reading the texts of these instructions, one cannot escape the overall impression that what we are really dealing with a crash course in command where theory could be quickly verified in practice. Absolutely fascinating was the idea of the formation of an insurgent army starting from the smallest tactical units (battalions, squadrons, batteries) to switch at a later stage to more complex units (regiments, brigades, divisions). At the same time, organisational work was performed with the aim of forming the respective types of arms and services.

The activity of Central Command was vital, as the first period of the uprising was characterised by a voluntary draft, which resulted in low levels of both command and discipline. Again, it turned out that democracy in the army was not a good idea. In order to take control of the spreading uprising, it was necessary to plan the sequence of all the

operations. Another task which Central Command had to face was the formation of front commands. A compact line of a Polish-German frontline in Greater Poland had to be established to coordinate operations on one hand and to maintain the territorial acquisitions on the other. Stanisław Taczak and his command were aware that the insurgent victories were the effect of the total surprise on the part of Germans and that when this moment was gone a massive counter-attack would be a consequence to reckon with. Time showed that these concerns were justified. During the first days of January 1919, it was possible to distinguish four front sections: the northern, western, south-eastern and southern.

The situation which began to take shape as a result of the victories of the insurgents outstripped the capacities to manage it in a half-amateurish manner. The territorial acquisitions of the uprising had to be safeguarded by the creation of larger forces which could be better organised. Central Command initiated a pretty intensive process of the transformation of loose insurgent groups and units into a single, efficient organism - an army. While taking the post of commander-in-chief, Stanisław Taczak made the reservation that he treated it as a temporary post until the Commissariat of the Supreme People's Councils could find an officer with the rank of general who would have more experience and competences to manage the situation and indicate the directions in which to take further action. Indeed, negotiations related to this issue were conducted by political activists in Warsaw all the time. The candidate accepted by both Warsaw

and Poznań was Division General Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki, an officer with a lot of experience in organisational matters and also as a commander. However, it is difficult for me to agree to the thesis that, by sending General Dowbor-Muśnicki to Poznań, Józef Piłsudski somewhat passed a sentence on him. The circumstances encouraged such a reflection, as what could a former Russian general expect when facing the Prussian Greater Poland reality? However, on the other hand, the potential of the insurgent army, which Piłsudski could use to accomplish his goals in the east, was all too obvious for him to resign from it so easily in the name of personal disputes. The general arrived in Poznań on 9 January together with a group of officers and set to work immediately. He was way too experienced an officer to introduce thorough changes in the course of ongoing battles, hence his decision to maintain the organisation of the insurgent army based on the German army. The new commander-in-chief took up the idea of his predecessor and ordered universal conscription. On 17 January, the Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council announced the conscription of young men born in the years 1897-1898. At a later time, the conscription also covered the age groups 1895-1896 and 1900 as well as 1894 and 1901. It is worth noting that many insurgents who had left their units returned to the army this way. In the case of older soldiers, it was proposed to them to join the People's Guard. The official announcement of this conscription took its toll on the Polish-German relations in Greater Poland. The Germans realised that the suppression of the uprising was impossible, and that the

Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council would try to defend the position which it had obtained in Greater Poland by all sorts of means.

Inasmuch as there was no problem with the recruitment of soldiers, the shortage of officers was still keenly felt. General Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki suggested that non-commissioned officers who demonstrated commanding skills be promoted to the first officer ranks. This way, dozens of valuable and experienced officers were gained. Also, an officer school was founded to guarantee a constant inflow of officers in the near future. Despite these decisions, the problem was not solved indefinitely, hence there was a need for the introduction of officers who had previously served in the Russian and Austrian army into the Greater Poland Armed Forces. This resulted in another problem, as the officers who were Poznań residents accepted that state of affairs with some resistance. In some situations, it even led to the outburst of conflicts. The general, in his talks with the Commissariat, came to the conclusion that an important element that would unify the new army would be an oath. After long talks, it was agreed that the soldiers would swear loyalty to the Commissar of the Supreme People's Council and the commanders, and that after regaining freedom, they would take an oath established by the Polish state sovereignty. The honour of taking the oath was granted to the 1st Greater Poland Rifle Regiment, and this took place on 26 January 1919 on the Wilhelmsplatz (currently Wolności Square). General Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki was the first to take the oath.

All these elements provided the grounds for a

well organised and functioning army, which counted 50000 soldiers in March 1919. It was high time for this, as after the first stage of surprise and defeats, the Germans had started to reorganise themselves and planned a counter-attack which was aimed at the restoration of the state of affairs from before 27 December 1918. The newly formed Greater Poland Army had to adapt itself to the tasks which awaited it in the near future, that is, the defence of the newly acquired positions. 18 January 1919 marked the date of the appearance of operational order No. 1 in which the new division of fronts was announced: the Northern Front - from the border of the Kingdom of Poland near Inowrocław to the Białe Lake located close to Czarnków: the commander of this front was Lieutenant Colonel Kazimierz Grudzielski. The Western Front - from the Białe Lake to the Odra canal near Wolsztyn: the Commander of this front was Colonel Michał Milewski. The South-Western Front, also referred to as "Group Leszno" - from the Odra Canal to Poniec: the commander of this front was Second Lieutenant Bernard Śliwiński. The Southern Front - from Poniec along the border of the Silesian province to the border of the Kingdom of Poland: the commander of this front was Second Lieutenant Władysław Wawrzyniak, who was substituted by Colonel Adolf Jan Kuczewski after the reorganisation. In order to increase the efficiency of the functioning of the fronts, the number of military districts was reduced to three, which corresponded territorially to the fronts. A particular role was to be played by the Poznań district, which was responsible for the establishment and maintenance of the operational

reserve whose units were to be directed to those sections of the front which were at particular risk. This was an effect of the experience from the first period of the uprising when the system of transferring units was successful and on many occasions tipped the scales of victories to the insurgents. The commanders of the respective fronts were responsible for the conscription and organisation of rifle regiments which were the basic force of the Greater Poland Army. A division consisting of four infantry regiments, a cavalry regiment and artillery units was to be formed in each district. A significant element that strengthened the Army was aviation, which came into existence at Air Base No. 4 in Ławica. The captured aircraft and the available human resources allowed for the organisation of four squadrons. Particular elements of the army were armoured trains and vehicles. Four armoured trains were used to serve the Greater Poland Army. "Poznańczyk", "Danuta", "Goplana" and "Rzepicha". Additionally, various types of services safeguarding the proper operations of the army were established. General Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki managed to organise an army whose structure was adapted to the political-military objectives of Greater Poland in the first half of 1919. It was supposed to be capable of countering the attacks of the German armies and defending the territories occupied by the insurgents. The potential of this army was large enough to fulfil the wish of Warsaw regarding the transfer of an infantry division and cavalry brigade to the Eastern Front.

Taking into account the fiasco of the talks

between the representatives of Greater Poland and Germany, which were supposed to lead to the cessation of military operations, the superpowers that assembled in Paris decided to investigate the situation in Greater Poland on their own. For this purpose, they appointed a special arbitration commission on 22 January 1919 which was to travel to Poland and bring about a definite end to the Polish-German conflict based on its own observations and information obtained from both parties. The commission started its work in Warsaw, where it arrived on 12 February 1919. Meanwhile the Armistice Commission discussed the issue of prolongation of the armistice treaty on 14-16 February 1919 in Trier. The German delegation was invited to the meetings of the Commission too. The negotiations which lasted many hours were finalised by the signing of a treaty on 16 February, which formally stopped military activities within the disputed area and allowed the territories occupied by the Poles to be kept by them. An assumption was made that a demarcation line would be delineated, which both armies would not be allowed to cross. The decision was also made that the number of military units on the front should be limited to 50 soldiers per kilometre of the front. Also, the number of artillery units was reduced to twelve four-cannon batteries. A front-line belt, 20km wide, from which all heavy artillery, armoured trains, tanks and flame throwers were to be withdrawn was also established. No firearms training was allowed within that belt. The decision was also taken with regards to the necessity of exchanging prisoners-of-war. Unfortunately, the Germans did not accept these

conditions and bilateral talks were broken off. The talks, which were to determine the future of the territories constituting the Prussian partition, were held until all the provisions of the peace treaty that ended World War I were arranged. On 28 June 1919, the German delegation signed the peace treaty of Versailles. From the legal point of view, all obstacles allowing for the return of the Poznań administrative district to the Republic of Poland were removed. In reality, this process still lasted much longer. It may be symbolically assumed that it ended on 25-27 October 1919, when the Chief-of-State Józef Piłsudski, during his visit to Poznań, seized civil and military power on the liberated territories of Greater Poland. How complex the situation was on the front, at both the diplomatic level and the military level, can be demonstrated by the fact that, in the course of the most heated debates between the Polish and German delegation aimed at the establishment of peace on the front-line, there were regular battles which could significantly affect the situation. Despite the official ceasefire, fighting was still going on. Although its intensity was decreased and it did not involve such great forces any more, the situation was still far from peaceful. The activities undertaken near Rynarzewo, Międzychód, Kargowa and Kępno were certainly among those which could have contributed to a change in the situation. Despite the existence of the Greater Poland Army, whose organisation and manner of command were definitely at a higher level, the tactics were still based on guerilla operations. The Greater Poland front was still too long to effectively fill it with combat units along its entire length. The pre-calculated method of

the transfer of respective companies and battalions, which had previously turned out to be successful, still served its purpose effectively.

When we analyse the situation before the uprising today, and also analysing the events which occurred during its course, both at the political level and the military level, we have the right to formulate certain reflections. At the moment of the outbreak of the uprising on 27 December 1918, there was no plan for it whatsoever. Dreams of the arrival of the "Blue Army" or vague projects presented by radical independence activists cannot be regarded as such a plan. Perhaps, it could be said that fortunately these ambitious but not too realistic plans collided with the attitude of the activists of the Supreme People's Council which was based on waiting for decisions to be taken at the peace conference in Paris. When the uprising became a fact, it turned out that there was an army, but its commanders were missing. The insurgent armies and their commanders came into the picture only during military operations, which sometimes entailed tragic consequences. There is one common agreement, that the uprising should be divided into two periods. The first one, from 27 December 1918 till 10 January 1919, is often called the authentic uprising, the grassroots movement which is opposed by the political power. It is also the time of the birth of local commanders able to win over hundreds of people ready to fight for the uprising. The second period, from 10 January 1919 till 16 February 1919, is the time of war on the Greater Poland Front, implemented by the Greater Poland Armed Forces, a modern and well

organised army.

The success of the uprising must primarily be attributable to the fact that it occurred, more or less accidentally, in very favourable circumstances, both on a European and Polish scale. A vitally important element of this equation was the morale of the fighting parties. However, I do not agree with the unambiguous division that it was higher on the side of the insurgents and lower on the side of the German soldiers. The truth lies somewhere in between - as always. Cases of lack of discipline and waywardness could be encountered on both sides, but also the moral attitude compensated for any deficiencies in military training or poor command. However we would mythologise the Greater Poland uprising, a thorough analysis could make us claim, that in the long run, there was no chance of victory. In spring 1919, the military operations in Greater Poland could have become a cause of open war between Poland and Germany. The revealed plans of both parties regarding such a conflict allow such a thesis to be put forward. Ultimately, the armistice in Trier and then the peace treaty signed in Versailles meant that all the territories of the Republic of Poland (with a few exceptions) could enjoy independence.

