

# Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919

<https://greaterpolanduprising.eu/pwe/history/the-course-of-insurgent/3213,The-Course-of-the-Uprising-from-mid-january-to-mid-february-1919.html>  
10.04.2024, 03:01

## The Course of the Uprising from mid- january to mid- february 1919

Marek Rezler

### Select Pages

[Mid-January 1919 marked the start of the second stage of the uprising](#)

[The battles for Rawicz \(...\)](#)

Mid-January 1919 marked the start of the second stage of the uprising, characterised mostly by the formation of a regular army and consolidating what had been achieved so far. The process started on 16 January, with General Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki signing a Day Order of Central Command. At that time, the region's political situation depended on the talks taking place at the peace conference in Paris, particularly on the opinion of France, which wanted to give a reborn Poland an important role in the post-war

arrangement of forces in Central Europe. It was in the French government's interest to weaken Germany and reinforce Poland, whose role was to act as counterbalance in the East to any possible German efforts to take revenge in the future.

Soon, General Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki won Greater Poland citizens over with his professionalism, determination and conservative opinions. He required absolute formal discipline and did not tolerate politics in the army; he followed these rules consequently, without paying attention to any signs of dissatisfaction or discontent within the army. The agreement signed on 11 January 1919 between the general and the Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council (SPC) described the competences of the new commander-in-chief, who was explicitly reminded of the CSPC's superiority over the army. Control over the army was exercised by the Military Division of the CSPC, which was successively led by: Jan Maciaszek, Captain Władysław Sczaniecki and Second Lieutenant General Kazimierz Raszewski. The competences of Central Command and of the Commissariat of the SPC were separated on 17 January, when the CSPC issued a regulation on the conscription of young men born in 1897-1898. It was the starting point for the formation of a regular army. Conscription was announced two more times: on 4 March 1919 (1895-1896 and 1900) and 24 April 1919 (1894 and 1901). The effort in terms of mobilisation was immense - one of the greatest so far in Poland. On 21 January 1919, the Commissariat of the SPC formulated the text of the oath that all the soldiers of the Greater

Poland Armies were obliged to take: "Before the One and Triune Almighty God, I swear that I will serve Poland, my Mother Country and the entire Polish Nation always and everywhere, that I will defend my Home Country and the national good to the last drop of my blood, that I will obey the Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council in Poznań and the commanders and superiors appointed by the Commissariat, that I will act as befits a brave and righteous Polish soldier and that when Poland is united, I will take a military oath approved by the Polish state authorities."

On 19 January, Central Command's structure was changed by the establishing of two functions: an administrative function and an organisational/tactical function. On the same day, Central Command was moved from the "Royal" Hotel to a new location: to the building formerly occupied by the German command of the 5th Army Corps, in Działowy Square. Simultaneously with the expansion of the Central Command and the Staff, General Muśnicki started choosing the right collaborators, irrespective of the political tendencies prevailing in that specific period. On 31 January, Lieutenant Colonel Władysław Anders, an officer of the 1st Polish Corps, was appointed Head of Staff. The third Head of Staff at Central Command was Colonel Jan Wroczyński who held this position from 18 April to November 1919, when Central Command was dissolved. Soon, other officers from the 1st Polish Corps came to Poznań. On General Muśnicki's order, they took a number of managerial positions in the Greater Poland Armies. The positions of higher commanders were taken by officers who not only

had the appropriate military rank, but who were also duly prepared to perform their functions, and who had extensive field experience.

On 18 January 1919, Central Command gave operational order no. 1, which divided the line that separated the insurgent side from the opponent into fronts: – the Northern Front: from the border with the Kingdom of Poland near Inowrocław to the Białe Lake near Czarńków, with Lieutenant Colonel Kazimierz Grudzielski as commander; – the Western Front: from the Białe Lake to the Obra Channel near Wolsztyn, with Colonel Michał Milewski as commander; – the South-Western Front (also called the “Leszno Group”): from the Obra Channel to Poniec, with Second Lieutenant Bernard Śliwiński as commander; – and the Southern Front: from Poniec along the border with the Silesian province, to the border with the Kingdom of Poland, with Second Lieutenant Władysław Wawrzyniak as commander. In operational terms, group (front) commanders were directly subordinate to Central Command, while supply and administration commanders were subordinate to Military District commanders. The task of the 1st Military District (covering Poznań) was to form an operational reserve which was expected to fight in any sections, depending on necessity. Individual front and section commanders were ordered to immediately form rifle regiments (infantry) in their subordinate areas. On 19 February 1919, the entire administrative and military structure of the area affected by the uprising was divided into three Military Districts, linked to specific fronts: 1. The

Northern Front: poviats: Wieleń, Czarnków, Piła, Chodzież, Wyrzysk, Bydgoszcz, Wągrowiec, Gniezno, Witkowo, Żnin, Szubin, Inowrocław, Strzelno, 2. The Western Front: poviats: Poznań – East, Poznań – West, Oborniki, Szamotuły, Międzychód, Skwierzyna, Nowy Tomyśl, Międzyrzecz, Babimost, Kościan, Grodzisk, Śmigiel, Leszno, Wschowa, 3. The Southern Front: poviats: Gostyń, Rawicz, Koźmin, Krotoszyn, Śrem, Jarocin, Pleszew, Września, Środa, Ostrów Wlkp., Odolanów, Kępno, Ostrzeszów. At the same time, district commanders, who were front commanders at the same time, were appointed: 1 – Colonel Lieutenant Kazimierz Grudzielski, 2 – Colonel Michał Milewski and 3– Colonel Adolf Jan Kuczewski. Thus, the same officer was responsible for the military action in his sections, as well as for provisioning and replenishing his subordinate army. To this end, a provisioning office was established in every district. Headquarters were located in Gniezno, Poznań and Jarocin. The number of soldiers in the army was determined on the basis of the region's mobilisation capacities and the needs of the fronts.

Selected battles at the second stage of the uprising: 15 January–16 February 1919. Central Command's operational order no. 1 of 18 January focused on the regulation of structural and organisational affairs. Fighting was, however, taking place on individual fronts. Insurgents tried to expand the scope of the uprising. Nevertheless, they had to be aware of the need to liberate new areas with hardly any support from the local

Polish population, which every day was getting scarcer and was controlled by its German neighbours. The uprising in Greater Poland considerably strengthened nationalist positions in German circles. The Berlin authorities had to face the threat of having to abide by the strict terms of a peace treaty that the victorious countries might demand. It was therefore necessary to close ranks, defend the largest area possible, and retain control over it. Grenzschutz units and forces of German settlers were too weak to stifle the insurrectionist movement in an open fight, but were sufficient to hold back the progressing Polish units. In the spring of 1919, the situation changed dramatically as a result of, among other things, the planning of a war against Poland as a show of strength combined with the destruction of resistance in Greater Poland. For the time being, however, in January and February, the Germans managed to hold the Poles back very effectively.

The battle for Kąkolewo on 28 January 1919. The battle, fought by insurgents from the Pawłowice section, was an example of a swiftly led clash against German fire shot from two armoured trains. The trains arrived at the station in Kąkolewo and opened fire to cover the infantry which was under attack. The Germans initially managed to occupy the station, but they were stopped by Polish machine guns as they were marching towards the village. As a result of a counter-attack, which was supported by a company from Środa, the Germans were forced to withdraw from the railway station and load the landing troops onto the damaged trains. Their

second attempt at occupying Kąkolewo in a similar way, on 14 February, was also a failure.

The attack on Nowe Kramsko on 2-3 February 1919. Upon the news of the German occupation of Nowe Kramsko, the Polish command decided to attack Nowe Kramsko from Babimost and to retake the village. On 2 February 1919, 152 insurgents with three light machine guns gathered in the market square in Babimost. The unit was divided into three groups, each of them composed of people residing in a particular area, from Nowe Kramsko and its vicinity. The first group (28 people and a light machine gun) marched along the railway track from Babimost to Sulechów and took positions along a dirt road one kilometre north of Nowe Kramsko. The Group's task was to cut off the withdrawal of any Germans trying to move along roads north of the village. The second group (89 people) marched from Babimost to Kuligowo, and then along forest paths through the woods of Wojnowo. They planned to form into a line near the cemetery located south of Nowe Kramsko and to occupy the parish and clear the village of enemy soldiers. The third group (27 people, mostly volunteers) marched initially with the second group, then walked on over the frozen Wojnowskie Lake and took positions at the edge of the forest, north of Stare Kramsko. The group's task was to seize a German battery of cannons located at the edge of the forest, south of Kolesin. At that time, a company of German infantry of approximately 150 soldiers, commanded by Rittmeister von Kleist were staying in Nowe Kramsko; they were mostly uhlans from the 10th Sulechów Regiment.

The forces occupied the church, the school and a homestead, which was additionally secured with barbed wire entanglements. A four-cannon battery, barely protected, was located south of Kolesin. At 4:00am, all the Polish groups took their positions. The third column, which had not found the cannons it was supposed to seize, moved forward towards Kolesin. Although it was fired at from village buildings, it managed to get through between Kolesin and the Wojnowskie Lake to Nowe Kramsko. The second group's attack was also a success. The surprised Germans defended themselves only in the church and, for a very short time, in the school. Most of the soldiers, taking advantage of darkness and of the first group's weakness, escaped towards the north. Polish losses were 6 dead and 17 wounded. The German army ended up with 4 officers and 32 privates dead, 30 soldiers wounded and 25 taken into captivity. The insurgents successfully seized: 7 heavy and 2 light machine guns, more than 40 hand guns, 15 thousand rounds of ammunition, 6 horses, a field kitchen and an HMG ammunition cart. The village was recovered by the insurgents. Not for long, however, because soon the Germans counter-attacked and re-occupied it.

The battles for Rawicz: 3-4 and 5-6 February 1919. Both battles for Rawicz, as well as earlier battles in the vicinity of Poniec and Kąkolewo, were a part of clashes fought on the Southern and South-Western Fronts of the uprising. In February 1919, the Southern Front, commanded by Second Lieutenant Władysław Wawrzyniak, was divided into four sections: I (Górka) - commanded by Second Lieutenant Alfons Breza, II (Krotoszyn) -



commanded by Second Lieutenant Marian Modrzejewski, III (Odolanów) – commanded by Sergeant Feliks Witecki and IV (Ostrzeszów) – commanded by Second Lieutenant Stanisław Thiel. On 13 February, Colonel Adolf Jan Kuczewski took command of the front. The total Polish forces on the front were approximately 2100 soldiers. In this section, the Germans involved the forces of the Leszno garrison. Furthermore, the following units were also stationed in the vicinity: the 6th Grenadier Regiment (formerly in Poznań, now in Rawicz), the 11th Grenadier Regiment (from Wrocław), the 37th Infantry Regiment (from Krotoszyn), a voluntary battalion of Hannover riflemen, the 1st Uhlan Regiment (from Milicz), the 4th Uhlan Regiment, the 5th Cuirassier Regiment, the 5th Heavy Artillery Regiment (formerly based in Poznań), an infantry battalion and 2 field artillery battalions in Międzybórz, a field artillery regiment of the Twardogóra guard, units from Kępno, Bralin and Słupia Kapitulna (250 people) and a group from Oleśnica. Despite the large number of units, it should be noted that in most cases the number of soldiers considerably differed from the number initially assumed by the commanders. The disproportion of the forces was very clear. The Polish decision on occupying Rawicz was rather of emotional and prestigious significance. The German forces in Rawicz and in its vicinity were commanded by General Kurt von dem Borne. On 23 January 1919, the Germans wanted to occupy Miejska Górka. Their attack, however, was a failure despite all their artillery, and the German side decided to limit its activity in this section to firing at Polish positions from

cannons. Given the situation, the Poles decided to undertake offensive manoeuvres aimed at occupying Rawicz. In early February, German forces in the Rawicz-Leszno section comprised: the 6th and 11th Grenadier Regiments, the 37th Fusilier Regiment, the 50th Infantry Regiment (Leszno, Rawicz), the 56th Field (light) Artillery Regiment, the 5th Heavy Artillery Regiment and the 5th Sapper Battalion (Leszno). The composition of the Polish forces did not change. In accordance with a plan drawn up by the front's Head of Staff, Zygmunt Wieliczka, the insurgents intended to take Łaszczyn and Dębno Polskie, cut the telegraph and railway connections and protect the town from a possible attack by German reinforcements that might be sent from Sarnowa, Bojanowo and Gierłachowo. The final plan of attack on Rawicz was, however, drawn up by Second Lieutenant Alfons Breza, who by that time was the Commander of the Rawicz section. Three assault groups were formed: Group 1 (approx. 260 people): the Zakrzewo company (commander: Wojciech Kozal, approx. 80 people), the 1st Jarocin Company (commander: Feliks Nadolski, approx. 114 people), the Jutrosin unit (approx. 40 people) and the Dubin unit (approx. 20 insurgents). Task: to attack Rawicz from the north, from the Zakrzewo - Kawcze region. Group 2 (approx. 330 insurgents): the Górka Battalion (commander: Konstanty Pietruszyński). Task: to attack in the Żołędnica - Niemarzyn belt, towards Sarnowa. Group 3 (approx. 500 soldiers): insurgent units from towns or villages such as Chojno, Golejewo, Słupia Kapitulna, Zielona Wieś and Koźmin. Task: to attack Dębno Polskie, Kąty and Szymanowo from Słupia Kapitulna and

Zielona Wieś. The attack started during the night of 3 to 4 February. Despite initial successes, the occupation of Łaszczyn, Szymanowo and the reaching of the Rawicz suburbs, insurgent units withdrew back to their starting positions. The first battle for Rawicz was a defeat. After the events of 3 and 4 February 1919, both sides prepared themselves for another attack. The Germans were reinforced by units from Żmigrów, Leszno and Bojanowo, and temporarily from Oborniki Śląskie. 500 new insurgents came to the Rawicz section: the 3rd Jarocin Company (commander: Stanisław Krystofiak) and the 4th Jarocin Company (commander: Alojzy Nowak). Both Jarocin companies were commanded by Bronisław Kirchner. Also the 2nd Pleszew Company (commander: Antoni Kozłowicz) and the 2nd Koźmin Company (commander: Franciszek Ciesielski) joined. The front commanders, having learnt their lesson after the first battle of Rawicz, made the decision to occupy Rawicz during the night of 5 to 6 February. The line of the attack was to be 6 kilometres' wide. The attack itself was divided into two stages: the occupation of Konarzewo, Łaszczyn and Sarnowa and an assault on Rawicz. A. Breza, however, made the unauthorised decision to occupy Dąbrówka as well, which extended the attack line to the north-east. His decision was one of the fundamental mistakes in the battle of 3-4 February. Forces attacked from the front, from several directions simultaneously. The attack of the 2nd company from Koźmin on Dąbrówka was unsuccessful, despite the fact that the soldiers managed to reach the edge of the village. The second, central group occupied Sarnówka and, after fierce

fighting, also Sarnowa. However, the insurgents failed to keep the towns, because the commanders did not duly protect them; furthermore, the Pleszew company was mistakenly fired at by soldiers from the 1st Górka Company. In the meanwhile, the Germans took advantage of the fact that the insurgents left railway tracks undamaged, and made use of their armoured train. At the same time, on 7 February, soldiers from the Hannover Rifle Battalion and the 50th Infantry Regiment counter-attacked, with the support of the train. The Germans retook Sarnowa and forced the insurgents to withdraw from Sarnówka. It was only the 3rd Jarocin Company near Miejska Górka that managed to stop them. As a result, both battles of Rawicz did not change anything in the position of either of the sides. The extreme incompetence of the section commanders and repetitive mistakes committed, despite prior experience, resulted in bitterness and discouragement among the insurgents. The Górka battalion and the Pleszew company left. They were replaced by a battalion from Śrem (commander: Stefan Chosłowski) composed of approx. 550 well-organised, armed and disciplined soldiers. In the meantime, the Germans, encouraged by their victories, planned to attack the left flank of the Polish section on 10 February. To this end, they gathered the Hannover Rifle Battalion, which was given the task to attack the town of Stwolno. One battalion of the 50th Infantry Regiment from Dębno Polskie was ordered to attack Zielona Wieś, while two companies of the 6th Grenadier Regiment from the region of Nowa Wieś were to occupy Wydawy, attacking it from the south. The last two groups

were to receive cannon support from Dębno Polskie, Dębno (former Dębno Niemieckie) and Nowa Wieś. From a captured soldier, the Polish side learned about the German plans, the insurgents were therefore ready to repulse the attack. On 10 February, German artillery fire caused great losses among the town's defendants. When the proper attack started, they managed to occupy Wydawy, Zielona Wieś and Stwolno. Near Zawady and Słupia Kapitulna, insurgents commanded by Marian Szulc and Michał Lorkiewicz successfully resisted the enemy. The Germans left Stwolno and Wydawy, and were pushed out of Zielona Wieś. For a bloody price (nearly 300 soldiers dead in both the battles of Rawicz), the insurgents held their positions.

The battles for Babimost and Kargowa, 11-12 February 1919. Following their offensive plan, on 11 February 1919, the Germans attacked Babimost and Kargowa. If the attack succeeded, they planned to attack further towards Wolsztyn. The following forces were involved in this task: the 38th Fusilier Regiment, a battalion of the 58th Infantry Regiment (from Krosno), a company of infantry from Smolno, 2 machine gun companies, a (light) field artillery regiment, a squadron of howitzers, a platoon of motorised artillery, a unit of mine throwers (mortars), squadrons of the 10th Uhlan Regiment (from Sulechów), two armoured trains, a company of sappers and some small Grenzschutz subunits. Commander: Colonel Lieutenant Burchardi. The forces were divided into five assault groups, two of which were to operate in the main directions, and the others in auxiliary directions. Group A composed of: the 1st

Battalion of the 38th Fusilier Regiment, an infantry unit from Krosno, a Grenzschutz unit, a marching squadron of the 10th Uhlan Regiment, 2 field cannon batteries, a platoon of heavy howitzers and a motorised cannon, commanded by Captain Geisler, was ordered to attack Kargowa. It was subordinate to Group B, composed of a squadron of the 10th Uhlan Regiment and a machine gun unit, the task of which was to attack Wąchalewo - operating in an auxiliary direction. Group C, composed of: the 3rd Battalion of the 38th Fusilier Regiment, 30 uhlans from the 10th Regiment and 10 howitzers, commanded by Major Trievenberg, was to attack Babimost. Other groups (similarly to Group B) were to take auxiliary action. Group D: a Grenzschutz company and 20 uhlans of the 10th Regiment, were to attack and occupy the railway station building in Babimost with the help of an armoured train from Zbąszyń (commander: Lieutenant von Bose). Group E: 300 local volunteers and 2 batteries of cannons, was ordered to support the attack on Babimost. Despite the inaccuracy of any data that have survived until the present day, it may be inferred that the Germans planned an extensive operation taking advantage of the fact that they outnumbered the Poles, both in terms of people and equipment. It was mostly a regular army, not as willing to retreat as it was at the turn of December and January. The insurgent forces were much weaker; the region of Babimost and Kargowa was defended by the 4th Battalion of the Western Group, commanded by Second Lieutenant Stanisław Siuda. A company from Wolsztyn, commanded by Second Lieutenant

Stanisław Tomiak, was stationed in Babimost. The defence of Kargowa was commanded by Second Lieutenant Kazimierz Szcześniak, who had insurgents from Wielichowo, Wilkowo and Kopanica at his disposal. The Polish side had been warned about the planned attack on Babimost by a Polish deserter from the 38th Fusilier Regiment. As the Germans planned to precede the attack with artillery fire, Second Lieutenant Siuda, who was aware of German plans, ordered his troops to move positions by a few hundred metres. As a result, the cannon fire was ineffective, and the proper attack was repulsed at great cost. The second attack failed as well. The Germans, therefore, changed their initial plan and set off towards Babimost from three directions: from Nowe Kramsko, from the south and from the north-east, towards the railway station. Both armoured trains were used as well. One of them managed to break through to the station. Despite the counter-attacks carried out by the soldiers from Chobienice, the insurgents had to abandon the station. At the same time, the Germans started bypassing the left flank, and the insurgents ran out of ammunition. As a result, they had to leave Babimost. The Polish soldiers went to Wielki Grójec, but the Germans managed to get ahead of them and occupied Chobienice. Second Lieutenant Siuda made the decision to form an assault group composed of soldiers withdrawing from Babimost and soldiers from the reserve. In a counter-attack, the Germans were pushed out of Chobienice. During the battle for Babimost, the Germans attacked Kargowa. They struck the area from the road from Kargowa to Babimost, through the road to Chwalim, the Obra

Canal (formerly Zgniła Obra, Obrzyca), to the road from Kargowa to Karszyn. The insurgent positions were located on the outskirts of the town, in parallel to the German attack line. The area was divided into northern, central and southern sections. Each section was defended by a platoon of insurgents, with one platoon staying in reserve. On 11 February, the Polish posts situated north and west of Kargowa were pushed out. On the next day, the Germans started their full attack preceded by initial artillery fire. The insurgents managed to repulse the frontal assault twice with their close range shooting. Then, the Germans started flanking the soldiers defending Kargowa from the north-east, attacking with cannon fire and machine guns at the same time. Initially, the insurgents successfully repulsed the strikes, but the counter-strike to the enemy's left flank failed. Despite consistent and well-organised defence, the Germans pushed the insurgents out to Kopanica and even managed to occupy a cemetery located in the southern part of the town. The defence of Kopanica was the next stage of the fight, because, apart from the cemetery, the Germans took the southern part of the town and intended to continue their attack towards the north-east. Kopanica was defended by insurgents retreating from Kargowa and a local unit commanded by Sergeant Józef Szwaba. The result of the fighting would, however, have been difficult to predict, if it had not been for a counter-attack of the reserve company commanded by Second Lieutenant Eckert. The Germans were pushed out of the northern canal of the Obra River. On 13 February, they made another attempt at occupying Kopanica, but it



was a failure. The brave although unsuccessful defence of Babimost and Kargowa brought severe losses: 40 insurgents were killed, 70 were wounded and 30 were taken into captivity. Losses among the Germans were 70 dead and a great number of wounded.

Attempt at recovering the forebridge area near Wielki Grójec, 15 February 1919. On 12 February 1919, the Germans took the forebridge area near Wielki Grójec, which was a good location to start an attack on Wolsztyn from the vicinity of the Grójeckie Lake. Liquidation of the forebridge was therefore a necessary tactical move. Few details are known about the course of the fighting. The 2nd Poznań Battalion was to start the attack. The forebridge was attacked by two separate groups. Victory was within reach, when a German unit, marching from Wielki Grójec to replace German soldiers who were stationed there, appeared unexpectedly. The sudden attack and the doubling of enemy forces determined the victory of the Germans. One of the Polish groups was pushed back, the other one (North) was surrounded and destroyed; its commander, known for his participation in the battles that took place in December in Poznań, Second Lieutenant Edmund Krause, committed suicide. Second Lieutenant Maksymilian Moellenbrok also fell. In total, 32 insurgents were killed and 35 were wounded. 40 German soldiers were killed and 70 were wounded. Although Wielki Grójec was successfully defended, the insurgents failed to push the Germans out of the forebridge area.

The battles near Nowa Wieś Zbąska, 17 February 1919. In contrast to the situation near Wielki

Grójec, the insurgents had their bridgehead near Nowa Wieś Zbąska. To liquidate it, the Germans attacked the town from three directions: from the north - from the road linking Nowa Wieś Zamek to Kosieczyn, from the west - from the edge of the forest between Zdzisław colony and the road linking Nowa Wieś Zbąska to Podmokła Wielkie and from the south - from the edge of the forest to the north of Grójec Wielki. Nowa Wieś Zbąska was defended by the 2nd Company of the 2nd Poznań Battalion, commanded by Second Lieutenant Korneliusz Mann. The Germans outnumbered the Polish forces seven to one. The enemy attacked simultaneously from the three directions. The insurgents initially managed to hold the attack off, soon, however, they were forced to retreat. Thanks to reinforcements, the Germans were pushed back out in a counter-attack. However, the losses were heavy: 20 insurgents were killed (including Second Lieutenant K. Mann) and many soldiers were wounded or taken into captivity.

The battles on the Northern Front between Łabiszyn and Kcynia: 21 January - 17 February 1919. The German winter offensive was pursued with particular strength on the Northern Front, between Kcynia and Łabiszyn. Thus, this location once again became crucial to ensuring that the insurgents' achievements were not lost. To break the Polish defence, the Germans involved nearly 3000 well-armed and well-equipped soldiers. By striking between Kcynia and Łabiszyn, they wanted to break through the defence line and get further into Greater Poland, towards Gniezno. The army's morale was rather low. What is more,

the Worker and Soldier Council from Bydgoszcz and a local Grenzschutz command delayed activities and obstructed the transport of food. The German plan of attack was based on the idea of dividing their forces into four assault groups and a reserve. The first group: the 4th Grenzschutz Battalion (commander: Captain Just). Task: to occupy Chmielniki, contact the right flank of German forces, attack Antoniewo and Nowa Wieś Wielka. The purpose of the action was to draw attention away from the direction of the main attack. The second group: the 1st Grenschutz Battalion (commander: Major Schemmel) and the 2nd Grenzschutz Battalion (commander: Major von Meisel). Task: to attack and occupy Kcynia. Third group: a unit of the 14th Infantry Regiment (from Bydgoszcz) - (commander: Rittmeister Scholl) and Lieutenant von Greiffenberg's unit. Task: to occupy Szubin. The fourth group: the 4th Grenschutz Battalion, a voluntary unit of navy seamen (commander: Lieutenant Parsenov). Task: to occupy Rynarzewo. Reserve: the 2nd Grenschutz Battalion (commander: Captain Huber). The offensive was commanded by General von Belov. The Germans planned to break through the Polish defence line by occupying three towns which served as bases: Kcynia, Szubin and Rynarzewo. The manoeuvre was intentional, because von Belov had 3000 men at his disposal (in terms of numbers, it was merely an infantry regiment that was rather heterogeneous and in terms of value, quite considerably different from a regular formation) and they were not able to carry out offensive action on an extended front which was more than 25 kilometres wide. Occupation of the

main towns in the region would allow for the establishing of bases for further attacks towards Gniezno, and guaranteed safety in the event of success. Polish intelligence managed to obtain information on the enemy's plans. It made it possible for Second Lieutenant K. Grudzielski, Commander of the Northern Front, to prepare defences. The area threatened with attack was divided into seven sections: section 1, Inowrocław - commander: Second Lieutenant Paweł Cyms, section 2, Łabiszyn and section 3, Szubin, under joint command of Captain Jan Tomaszewski, section 4, Kcynia - commander: Second Lieutenant Konrad Gólniewicz, section 5, Margonin - commander: Second Lieutenant Maksymilian Bartsch, section 6, Chodzież - commander: Lieutenant Włodzimierz Kowalski, section 7, Czarnków - commander: Second Lieutenant Michał Zenkteler. According to the Germans' plans, the attack was to focus on the first four sections. The German to Polish forces ratio was very unfavourable for the insurgents. The ratio was three German soldiers per one insurgent. There was also a large disproportion in firearms and artillery equipment. The situation improved on 21 January, when the Northern Front was reinforced with a company of heavy machine guns (commander: Second Lieutenant Józef Trawiński) and an artillery unit (commander: Second Lieutenant Edmund Zagrodzki). Furthermore, the insurgents had some time to perform engineering work to secure the defences and strengthen the protection of the crossings in Antoniewo and Dębionek. The commanders did not know the exact directions from which the German army would strike, the

insurgents were, therefore, prepared for mobile defence, focusing on organising strong reserves. The Polish side finally decided to take the initiative and occupy a number of field points and towns which would make it difficult for the Germans to extend their attack. According to this plan, on 22 January, Captain Jan Tomaszewski and Second Lieutenant Paweł Cymś occupied Brzoza – however, they were forced to retreat soon afterwards as a result of a counter-attack carried out by a Grenschutz unit, which, according to the German plans, was the first strike group in the operation. Having occupied Brzoza, the same group marched towards Antoniewo. The attack carried out by Captain Just's battalion, accompanied by artillery fire, was initially successful, and the company from Barcin, which was defending that section, abandoned its positions in panic. The Grenschutz unit preparing itself to attack Nowa Wieś was stopped by Feliks Dziennik's machine gun fire and by cannon fire shot by Second Lieutenant Tadeusz Fabian's company which had so far been in reserve. On 23 January, the Germans crossed the Noteć River in the vicinity of Ruda, but were pushed back. From that moment on, fighting in the entire front section from Kcynia to Łabiszyn turned into a series of local clashes fought by the insurgents with changing fortunes. Between 28 and 30 January the Germans finally managed to launch all four groups. Heavy battles were fought near Nowa Wieś. On 1 February, the Germans managed to cross the Noteć River once again, occupying Szubin, Rynarzewo and Łachowo. In this situation, the decision was made to counter-attack Rynarzewo with three companies: a

company commanded by Second Lieutenant Tadeusz Fabian: along the Szubin - Rynarzewo road, a company commanded by Second Lieutenant Władysław Wlekliński and Master Corporal Wincenty Pluciński: towards Rudy-Florentynowo-Rynarzewo, and a company commanded by Second Lieutenant Józef Dratwiński: towards Dębionek. The battle for Rynarzewo took place on 2 and 3 February; the town changed hands several times. The final victory belonged to the Polish army. On 3 February, the insurgents successfully defended Kcynia. Not only did they manage to stop the German attack with artillery fire, but also flanked the enemy, forcing Major von Meisel's battalion to retreat with heavy losses; the Polish army captured 6 German cannons and other weapons. The event marked a visible weakening of the German army. Although more battles were fought near Rynarzewo, Zamość, Antoniewo, Brzoza, Rosek, Wrzeszczyna, Romanowo and Wilkowice, they did not change much in the overall structure of the front. On 3 and 4 February, the Germans unexpectedly (despite prior agreements) occupied Chodzież and Margonin. There was some fighting in the vicinity of Czarnków on 7 February, however, it did not bring any significant results. The German offensive on the Northern Front ended in defeat. On the Southern Front, which was the most peaceful one, the insurgent forces consisted of approximately 1000 soldiers, and the largest unit was the Ostrzeszów Battalion commanded by Second Lieutenant Stanisław Thiel. It was a region where relatively few battles were fought, but where both sides carried out numerous intelligence-related operations.

Between 15 and 16 January, Polish forces won battles near Ligota and Kobyla Góra. Three days later, a larger battle was fought at Rogaszyce. Around 9 February, Mikorzyn, Jutrków, Mechnice and Lubczyna were taken, and on 13 February, military action directed at Kępno was initiated. On 19 February, the insurgents were defeated near the town of Korzeń. Finally, they managed to reach the line along Kotowskie, Szklarka Przygodzicka, Jezioro, Dąbrowa, Myślniew, Kobyla Góra, Zmyślona Parzynowska, Korzeń, Klin, and Kierzno up to Mirkowa on the Prosna River. The insurgents planned an attack on Kępno during the night of 17 to 18 February 1919, but cancelled it on learning that the German side had discovered their plans.

## Select Pages

1

2







