

Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919

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The Greater Poland Armies Involved in Battles outside of the Poznań Region

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The borders of the recovering Republic of Poland were shaped in different ways and based on different expectations, therefore the government in Warsaw must have taken into account many factors which affected how far the state reached. Depending on the situation on the front, fighting

continued, with varying intensity, until 1921, however, a major influence was to be exerted by decisions taken at conference tables. The Greater Poland Army, the armed forces on the Polish territories which were best trained and had the best equipment at their disposal until April 1919, even before the signing of the peace treaty, were an object of interventions of the government in Warsaw, aimed at its utilisation on the most unstable Eastern Front. Officially, however, the army was subordinated to the sovereign Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council and General Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki, who was the most aware of the forces and the significance of the army under his command, and was also afraid of the weakening of the region in the case of a German offensive. However, during the period between the signing of the armistice in Trier (16 February 1919) and the date of the implementation of the plan codenamed "Spring Sun" by the Germans (May-June 1919), the Greater Poland Army was expanded without obstacles, and without the eventuality of participation in any major armed operations.

In November 1918, Polish-Ukrainian battles for Lviv broke out. From the very first days of January of the following year, the news from Lviv was published in almost every issue of "Dziennik Poznański" and "Kurier Poznański". On 22 January 1919, the first transport with food and sanitary materials left for Eastern Lesser Poland: 58 wagons, escorted by members of the People's Guard from Poznań, with one machine gun. A delegation of the Aid Committee for Lviv also travelled with this transport to the capital city of

Eastern Lesser Poland: Mrs. Niegoloewska, Priest Moyer V.F., Mieczysław Korzeniowski, Helena and Kazimierz Brownsword, Zofia Zielewiczowa and Mr. Szymański. After seven days of travelling, the transport, escorted from Przemyśl by an armoured train, was welcomed with great enthusiasm in Lviv. Warsaw was not able to grant effective support to the Poles fighting in Lviv, though many initiatives were taken. Given the circumstances, the decision was taken to turn to Poznań, but General J. Dowbor-Muśnicki was not really convinced about these plans, using the argument of an unclear situation on the anti-German front. Thus, on 8 March 1919, Prime Minister Ignacy Jan Paderewski arrived in Poznań. He presented the military situation near Lviv to the Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council and the Central Command of Armed Forces in the former Prussian Partition. Ultimately, General Dowbor-Muśnicki agreed to the formation of a voluntary unit which would set off for Lviv. The voluntary draft was announced in all the military districts of the region (42 people from each district, including one master corporal and four corporals). The formation was supposed to take place in the 1st Reserve Regiment in Poznań. In total, the establishment of two rifle companies commanded by officers chosen by lot from among the volunteers was planned. This was supposed to be an army which was completely ready to depart for combat, having also two sanitary non-commissioned officers and eight porters in its ranks, ammunition and food supply trains, a sanitary vehicle, a field kitchen, etc. Additionally, the companies were to receive four heavy machine guns.

Ultimately, a much smaller number of volunteers than expected was registered. On 9 March 1919, a company which consisted of 204 soldiers set off for Lviv. It was commanded by two second lieutenants: Jan Ciaciuch and Maksymilian Soldenhoff. After a solemn farewell at the Poznań railway station, the Volunteer Poznań-Lviv Company arrived through Warsaw and Przemyśl to Sudova Vyshnia, where it was subordinated to General F. Aleksandrowicz. The task of the entire group was to break through the Ukrainian ring in that area by driving out the besiegers from their positions to the north, east and south of Sudova Vyshnia. As early as 16 March, the company of Poznań region soldiers attacked the village of Dolgomostiska, took it after two hours of fighting and also defended against the Ukrainian counter-attack the next day. Two days later, battles took place in the area of Horodok, and near Melniki, the company lost 8 soldiers under heavy fire, 21 soldiers were wounded and 3 were missing in action. After dark, the company reached Horodok. During these battles, the Greater Poland inhabitants captured two cannons, one mortar and two machine guns. On 19 March, the company commander and officers received congratulations from three generals: Iwaszkiewicz, Rozwadowski and Aleksandrowicz as well as the heads of their staff. On 29 March, the company was sent to Lviv where it met with an enthusiastic reception. Then, until the middle of July, the unit participated in battles which took place in the vicinity of Lviv, as part of the 1st Lviv Rifle Regiment. Its combat trail included the vicinity of Lviv, Zarudtsi, Novyi Yarychiv, Zalissyia, Nilno, Velyka Berezovytsia, Zbiriv and

Oliyiv. On 7 July, Gen. Waclaw Iwaszkiewicz issued a "Laudatory appreciation", emphasising the fact that from the very first days of fighting for Lviv, this unit was "a paragon and example for all other units through its valour and discipline.[...] I did not receive any complaint related to this company from civilians, which I attribute to its high civic sense.[...] Glory to you, brave sons of Greater Poland!". On 29 July 1919, the company was assigned to the Greater Poland Group and on 6 August, it left for Poznań. One officer -J. Ciaciuch (M. Soldenhoff stayed in hospital, as he was ill) and 225 privates. 11 soldiers were dead, 58 were wounded and 7 were taken into captivity - thus, the losses amounted to one quarter of the human resources of the unit. All officers and privates in the company were given the Cross of Lviv Defence on 1 July 1919 "for bravery and hardship in combat, for the integrity and independence of the Republic of Poland during battles for the defence of Lviv from 12 March till 1 July 1919" by the Supreme Command of the Polish Armies. The remaining soldiers were soon dismissed and transferred to the reserves, and the recruits were deployed to different regiments; Jan Ciaciuch returned to his original 10th Greater Poland Rifle Regiment.

The groups of General Daniel Konarzewski

In Poznań, for the time being, support was provided in the form of a single infantry regiment and four heavy and light cannon batteries. The dispatch of further reinforcements (even as many as two rifle divisions) depended on a possible declaration of Marshal Foch which would guarantee a dynamic counteraction by the

Entente states if any military steps were taken by the Germans against Poland. Furthermore, the coalition was supposed to deliver a certain number of cannons as well as artillery and machine gun ammunition. On 12-13 March 1919, the Greater Poland Group, commanded by Colonel Daniel Konarzewski, was put at the disposal of Gen. Iwaszkiewicz. As well as the commanding staff, it consisted of: the 1st Greater Poland Rifle Regiment, the 1st Battalion of the 1st Greater Poland Light Field Artillery Regiment, the 1st Air Force Squadron and a signal platoon – about 5 officers and 3800 non-commissioned officers, three cannon batteries and seven aeroplanes. Konarzewski's group, which was solemnly bid farewell by the locals and the chief commander - General J. Dowbor Muśnicki and his staff - set off from the Bolechowo railway station in three transports, through Poznań-Skalmierzyce-Kalisz-Koluszki-Częstochowa-Cracow and Przemyśl to the rally point in Sudova Vyshnia. From there, together with the 2nd Battalion of the 10th Infantry Regiment from Dolgomostiska, which was assigned to it, the group was supposed to break through the siege ring around Lviv. The attack started on 17 March 1919 at 6.00 a.m. The soldiers from Greater Poland initially occupied such towns as Melniki, Bar, Milatin and then Vovchukhy, Putiatychi and Dobriany.

During the first day of fighting, the assigned task was accomplished and the route for a further march towards Lviv was prepared, despite the fact that they were significantly outnumbered by the enemy: about 7000 - 8000 soldiers with 30

cannons and 40 machine guns. During the fighting, which lasted two days, whose aim was to break the blockade of Lviv, the troops of the Greater Poland Group completely fulfilled the hopes placed in it by the Supreme Command of the Polish Armies in Warsaw. General Iwaszkiewicz, in his order dated 19 March, highlighted the fact that the “Iron armies of the Greater Poland soldiers under the command of Colonel Konarzewski, by their resolute attack [...] contributed to the victory”. Also, Colonel Konarzewski issued a laudatory order to the troops who served under his command. The losses of the Greater Poland Group on 18-19 March amounted to 17 dead and 178 wounded (including four officers) and 35 missing. Among other things, two cannons and five heavy machine guns were captured. In the period between 20 March and 17 April, the troops from Greater Poland switched to position fighting, occupying a 20-kilometre section stretching from Horodok to Henryków. From 19 April, the group was subordinated to Gen. Iwaszkiewicz, who had just one month before becoming the commander of the armies for Eastern Galicia (the “East” command) in lieu of the dismissed General Tadeusz Rozwadowski.

In order to relieve Lviv from artillery fire from the South-East, the “East” command proceeded with the “Jazda” [Cavalry] offensive operation, which was supposed to defeat the Ukrainian forces concentrated south of the Velykyi Liubin-Bartativ-Skniliv line and south of Lviv. The main task was assigned to the Greater Poland group. On 19 April, at the cost of heavy losses, Glinna and Navarya were taken, also a Ukrainian

armoured train was damaged. The task was accomplished and the soldiers of Colonel Konarzewski gained the recognition of command again. For the next three weeks Konarzewski's troops held their positions along the Navarya-Valychkovytse- Nagoriany- Pasiky-Zubrytski line. In the May offensive in Eastern Galicia, commanded by General Józef Haller, an attack on Stryi was planned. The soldiers from Greater Poland attacked from the direction of Horodok towards the south east, liberating Buchyna, Uhry, Neuuhof, Hodvyshnia, Sosnyna farm, Zavidovichi, Hoshany and Rudky. During the night of 15-16 May, the Greater Poland troops were concentrated in Koropuzh and Zavidovichi, from where they attacked Komarno. Two days later, Mykolaiv, Budnyky and Pesochnoe, were also in Polish hands and the military depots located there were seized. 800 prisoners-of-war were taken and seven cannons and twenty machine guns were captured. After conquering Stryi and taking about one thousand prisoners of war captive, the Greater Poland soldiers were sent to Lviv for a rest.

In the meantime, the preparations for the protection of Greater Poland moved into the culmination phase as a German invasion was expected. In turn, the situation in Lviv became clear enough, so the departure of Konarzewski's group back to Greater Poland would not mean the reoccupation of the capital city of the Eastern Lesser Poland region by the Ukrainians. Thus, on 5 June 1919, a farewell ceremony to the troops of General Konarzewski (since 1 June) took place on the Lviv's Citadel square. It ended with a military

parade in front of the municipal authorities and members of the coalition mission. On 8 and 9 June, the Greater Poland troops reached Poznań. In recognition of their services, the Supreme People's Council added a band, in the national colours and with the inscription "For the Defence of the Eastern Territories", to the banner of the 1st Greater Poland Rifle Regiment, and the aeroplanes and cannons which participated in the Lviv expedition also received additional insignia: metal eagles with plates including the same inscription. On 14 June, General J. Haller officially thanked the chief commander of the Greater Poland Army for his attitude during the May offensive. On 3 April 1919, a field hospital was sent to Lviv under the command of Major Doctor Emanuel Twórz, and a wagon of beds and dressings was also delivered there. The departure of the National Defence Battalion (the former People's Guard) was also planned, but the implementation of this decision was suspended due to the German threat.

After the signing of the Treaty of Versailles (28 June 1919), another period of fighting in Eastern Galicia began for the soldiers from Greater Poland. On 25 June 1919, the Entente states agreed to the military occupation of these areas by Poland. After obtaining guarantees from the Allied command with regards to the impending German invasion, between 22 and 26 June General Konarzewski's Group was sent to Eastern Lesser Poland, though it was at that moment composed of slightly different units: the 10th Greater Poland Rifle Regiment, the 1st Battalion of the 1st Greater Poland Field Artillery

Regiment, the 9th Battery of the 1st Greater Poland Heavy Artillery Regiment, the 3rd Air Force Squadron, a sanitary company and signal troops, ammunition columns (light and heavy) - altogether 89 officers, 4353 privates, 1091 horses and 14 cannons. Konarzewski's troops were concentrated in the lower course of the Hnyla Lypa River, from which, during the night of 27-28 June, they initiated an attack with the task of breaking through the Ukrainian Front and occupying Narayovychi-Mesto and Berezhany. After 2 hours of fighting, Belka, Kostenev and Yanchin and then Narayowychi-Mesto were seized. On 3 July, the Greater Poland infantry seized Vyshnivchyk, Budaniv and Kopychyntsi at the Strypa River, with almost no resistance. On 15 July, with the support of artillery, the Greater Poland Group, having driven them out of their positions on the Siret River, pursued the Ukrainians and managed to conquer Budaniv on the same day, and then on 16 July - Kopychyntsi. The last day of the Polish offensive was 17 July 1919. Konarzewski's Group, with support from five Greater Poland batteries, conquered Husiatyn in a daring attack. It stayed in this region until 6 August, and its command was taken over by Colonel Leon Billewicz. On 7 August, the Greater Poland Group was assigned to the Volhynian Front and subordinated to the command of the 3rd Rifle Division of the former army of General J. Haller. In marches through Khorostkiv, Skalat and Zbarazh, the Greater Poland soldiers reached Teofipol and Moskalevka.

On 25 June 1919, the 3rd Greater Poland Air Force Squadron, under the command of Second

Lieutenant Pilot Józef Mańczak, was sent to Eastern Galicia. It carried out reconnaissance and bombardments of railway stations, e.g. the Tzhmelivka railway station was attacked and destroyed from the Berezhnytsia airport near Ternopil. On 19 August, the squadron returned to Greater Poland. On 2 September, General J. Dowbor-Muśnicki dismissed Colonel Billewicz's Group to Poznań, and the activities of the Greater Poland Armies were focused on the Lithuanian-Belarusian Front until the end of 1919, where the Poznań Death Battalion, commanded by the veteran of the January Uprising - Lieutenant Colonel Feliks Józefowicz, remained active.

The Poznań Death Battalion

This unit was formed in March and April 1919 and consisted of volunteers and soldiers who caused disciplinary problems, along the lines of a similar troop formed by Gen. J. Dowbor-Muśnicki within the I Polish Corps. In spring 1919, a battalion consisting of 300 people, under the official command of Lieutenant Colonel Feliks Józefowicz, a veteran of the 1863 Uprising and a former soldier of the 1st Polish Corps in Russia, was formed. As previously mentioned, the unit was composed of soldiers who caused disciplinary problems and people with revolutionary views as well as a relatively small number of volunteers. In spring 1919, the soldiers of the Battalion were sent to Warsaw, where they participated in the symbolic establishment of brotherly bonds between the armies from three different partitions. Then they were sent through Białystok to the Lithuanian-Belarusian Front, near Vilnius. Even on their way, they caused disciplinary

difficulties, and when they reached the place of their destination they were not in any way regarded as an elite unit. Finally in September 1919 the Battalion was dissolved, the soldiers were deployed in different regiments and some of them were sent to Poznań.

The soldiers of the Greater Poland Armies confirmed their organisational qualities as well as valour in battle during the Polish-Bolshevik war, where two infantry brigades commanded by officers with identical initials became famous. These were: the 33rd Infantry Brigade, with Colonel Stanisław Thiel (the commander of the Ostrzeszów battalion during the Uprising), and the 34 Brigade with Colonel Stanisław Taczak as its commander. Also Colonel Władysław Anders became famous as the commander of the 15th Poznań Uhlan Regiment; from among these three officers his achievements in the army were deemed the greatest. General Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki did not take part in the Polish-Bolshevik war himself. When the Command of the Greater Poland Front was dissolved in March 1920 after the repossession of the territories granted to Poland, he left the army and settled in his estate in Lusowo near Poznań.

The Greater Poland inhabitants in the 3rd Upper Silesia Uprising

The Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council controlled all the territories of the Prussian Partition, from Warmia up to Bytom. The possibility of exerting any impact on Pomerania was very limited for Greater Poland. Only Gdańsk Pomerania and Varmia would remain at stake –

that is, those areas which had already been germanised to a great extent, and which did not have their own economic and ethnic base to commence a fight for annexation to the reborn Republic of Poland. In those territories, only propaganda activities could exert any sort of impact, especially in the period of the plebiscite. Completely different possibilities were available in the Upper Silesia region. The process of the organisation of Polish circles during the final period of the world war was similar there as in Greater Poland. However, the transfer of the structures of the Polish Military Organisation of the Prussian Partition failed. It was easier to organise covert civil structures, especially after the assembly of the Partition Sejm of Poznań, when the sub-commissariat of the Supreme People's Council was established in Bytom. Silesia was represented by Wojciech Korfanty in the Poznań headquarters.

The outbreak of the Uprising in Greater Poland did not lead to similar events in Pomerania and Upper Silesia. These regions were not yet ready to act. Also, Greater Poland did not have sufficient forces at its disposal to select any for the purpose of carrying out insurgent expeditions in the northerly or southerly directions; as a consequence of this, the conspirators in Pomerania and Silesia were directly instructed not to initiate any armed operations, which would immediately be doomed to failure from the very start. However, at the beginning of January 1919, action aimed at homogenisation of the structures of the military underground in Silesia was initiated. Also envoys, Zygmunt Wiza and

Kazimierz Jesionek, were sent there with money intended for independence-related work. These were also the people who contributed to the establishment of the Polish Military Organisation of the Upper Silesia (PMOUS) on 5 January 1919; the leader of the organisation was Józef Grzegorzek, an official of the People's Bank in Bytom. In February 1919, Central Command in Poznań decided to strengthen the links between the structures of the PMOUS and the Poznań headquarters, and to make the conspirators from Silesia take the same oath that was obligatory for the Greater Poland Armies. With time, however, control of the situation in Silesia was lost and on top of this, the lack of any guarantee for implementing the army commanded by J. Haller, which had returned to the country, was also a reason for refraining from any insurgent actions.

Ultimately, however, fighting, which ended in failure, broke out in August 1919. The inhabitants of Greater Poland tried to support their countrymen in Silesia with a large amount of involvement - not only during the armed struggle, but also in the years 1918-1921. Committees which demonstrated solidarity with this region were established, and money, as well as food and clothing wagons, were sent to Silesia. In spring 1919, the possibility of the commencement of insurgent operations in Silesia was taken into serious consideration in Greater Poland. A volunteer battalion consisting of exiles from Silesia started to be formed in Częstochowa in the February of that year. At the end of April the unit was subordinated to Central Command in Poznań and renamed as the Bytom Rifle Regiment; the

Poznań National Defence Battalion became the second battalion of this regiment. Then, the composition of the unit which fulfilled the role of a reserve unit for the Western Group of the Greater Poland Front became more and more mixed. In February 1920, the Bytom Rifle Regiment was transferred to Ostrów Wielkopolski, in March it was reinforced by a battalion from Września, and then it participated in the repossession of those territories granted to Poland, in the vicinity of Odolanów. From 1922, this regiment was to be renamed the 75th Infantry Regiment.

In 1920, both parties to the conflict were preparing for an armed confrontation using any possible means available to them. Covert platoons and companies undertook their activities under the facade of sport clubs or security services. In Upper Silesia, the same problem which conspirators from Greater Poland had to face in autumn 1918 appeared, that is, there was a shortage of higher-ranked commanders. Silesia, as part of the Prussian Partition was subject to the same rigours and limitations as Greater Poland, and the Polish troops formed there after the year 1919 suffered a great shortage of higher-ranked officers. In Greater Poland this problem was resolved by the inflow of officers from the former 1st Polish Corps, as well as accelerated courses for officers and the promotion of the most talented non-commissioned officers. As a result of this, after the formation of the regular Greater Poland Army, it was possible to fill all the posts. After the war with the Bolsheviks, these officers, which remained contracted for the wartime

period were no longer needed in such great numbers, and some of them could be sent to Silesia.

In the year 1920, granting active military aid to Silesia was, in reality, impossible. But after the fighting came to an end, organisational work was started immediately. Both from Warsaw and Poznań, camouflaged transports of weapons, ammunition and military uniforms started to be sent (without state insignia). Also, the granting of leave to officers and non-commissioned officers was practiced; they arrived in Silesia under assumed names (after the fighting broke out, they used pseudonyms one way or another). They joined the local security services and paramilitary associations with much lower military ranks. At the moment of the outbreak of the uprising they revealed their true rank and took the posts indicated within the structure of the insurgent army. It was particularly important to make sure that the arriving officers had experience of serving in the German army - that is the army in which their subordinates -the Silesians had served before the year 1918. Just as was the case with the Greater Poland Army, former soldiers of the Prussian army, who knew perfectly well, the regulations, drills, tactics and even German commands (despite the fact that the unit was composed of Poles) served in insurgent units in Upper Silesia - thus the commanders from Greater Poland and their subordinates from Silesia often understood each other without words. There was no need for additional training or explanations. It is no coincidence that in the year 1920, General Kazimierz Raszewski (a

former German officer), then the commander of the Poznań General District, based on the order of the minister of military affairs, was appointed as the military leader for the defence of the plebiscite in Upper Silesia. Particular attention must be paid to the selection of the politicians and officers occupying the highest posts in the army of the 3rd Upper Silesia Uprising in May 1921. The director of the uprising was Wojciech Korfanty - a native Silesian, but at the same time, one of the commissars of the Supreme People's Council from the period of the Greater Poland Uprising, who held his office from Poznań. From January 1921, two months before the plebiscite, Lieutenant Colonel Maciej Mielżyński (pseudonym: Novina Doliwa) arrived in Silesia. He had not participated in the Greater Poland Uprising but he was a land-owner from Greater Poland. He took command of the Plebiscite Defence Command - the future Supreme Command of the Insurgent Armies. He was the first supreme commander of the armies of the 3rd Upper Silesia uprising. After his dismissal on 31 May 1921, the post of chief commander was taken by a Greater Poland inhabitant, Lieutenant Colonel Kazimierz Zenkteler (pseudonym: Warwas), the commander in Grodzisk during the Greater Poland Uprising. The leader of the group "North" was Captain Alojzy Nowak (pseudonym: Neugebauer), previously the commander of the insurgents from Września and Jarocin. The "South" group leader - Lieutenant Colonel Bronisław Sikorski (pseudonym: Cietrzew), was a Greater Poland insurgent and infantry instructor of the Poznań General District Command. Some commanders of the 3rd Silesian Uprising were

also Greater Poland inhabitants, including Captain Krzysztof Konwerski – the commander of a subgroup in the “North” group, Major Leonard Krukowski – a battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Franciszek Rataj – commander of the Pszczyn regiment, Heliodor Cepa – a communications specialist, and Lieutenant Mieczysław Szreybrowski – head of the operational division of the “North” group. While comparing the involvement of the Greater Poland inhabitants and officers from central Poland who were then sent to Upper Silesia, and above all, the manning of the leading commanding posts by them, it can be concluded that the third Upper Silesia Uprising was a result of the effort of people representing all three partitions. About 6000 volunteers from Greater Poland participated in two of the Silesian Uprisings: several hundred in the first uprising and the rest in the third one. However, the point of this involvement was not the number of people, but the role which they played in the management and command of the uprising. It is estimated that around 40% of the volunteers from outside the Upper Silesia region who stood up to fight in May 1921, came from Greater Poland.

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