

Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919

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THE BATTLES FOR BABIMOST AND KARGOWA 11-12 February 1919

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Following their offensive plan, on 11 February 1919, the Germans attacked Babimost and Kargowa. If the attack was a success, they planned to attack further in the direction of Wolsztyn. The following forces were involved in this task:

- *the 38th Fusilier Regiment,*
- *a Battalion of the 58th Infantry Regiment (from Krosno),*
- *an Infantry Company from Smolno,*
- *2 Machine Gun Companies,*
- *a Light Artillery Regiment,*

- *a Division of Howitzers,*
- *a Platoon of Motorised Artillery,*
- *a Unit of Mine Launchers (mortars),*
- *squadrons of the 10th Uhlan Regiment (from Sulechów),*
- *Two armoured trains,*
- *a Sapper Company,*
- *some small Grenschutz subunits.*

Commander: Colonel Lieutenant Burchardi.

The forces were divided into five strike groups, two of which were to attack in the main direction, and others in auxiliary directions.

1. Group A was composed of:

- *the 1st Battalion of the 38th Fusilier Regiment,*
- *an infantry unit from Krosno,*
- *a Grenschutz Company,*
- *a Marching Squadron of the 10th Uhlan Regiment,*
- *2 Batteries of Field Cannons*
- *a Platoon of Heavy Howitzers,*
- *1 Motorised Cannon*

and was commanded by Captain Geisler. Their orders were to attack Kargowa. This group was subordinate to:

2. Group B was composed of:

- *a Squadron of the 10th Uhlan Regiment,*
- *a Machine Gun Unit,*

the task of which was to attack Wąchalewo – operating from an auxiliary direction.

3. Group C was composed of:

- *the 3rd Battalion of the 38th Fusilier Regiment,*
- *30 uhlans from the 10th Regiment*
- *10 howitzers,*

and commanded by Major Trievenberg, was to attack Babimost.

Other groups (similarly to Group B) were to take auxiliary actions.

4. Group D was composed of:

- *a Grenschutz Company,*
- *20 uhlans of the 10th Regiment*

was to attack and occupy the railway station building in Babimost with the help of an armoured train from Zbąszyń (commander: Lieutenant von Bose).

5. Group E;

- *300 local volunteers,*
- *2 batteries of cannons*

was ordered to support the attack on Babimost.

Despite the inaccuracy of data that have survived until the present day, it may be inferred that the Germans had planned an extensive operation, taking advantage of the fact that they outnumbered the Poles both in terms of people and equipment. This 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 now aware of the German plans, ordered his men to move positions by a few hundred metres. As a result, the cannon fire was ineffective, and the proper attack was repulsed with great losses on the German side. Their 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 and despite counter-attacks carried out by

the soldiers of Chobienice, the insurgents had to abandon the station. At the same time, the Germans started coming in on the left flank, and the insurgents ran out of ammunition. As a result, they were forced to leave Babimost. The Polish soldiers went to Wielki Grójec, but the Germans had managed to get ahead of them and occupied Chobienice. Second Lieutenant Siuda took the decision to form a strike group composed of the soldiers withdrawing from Babimost and soldiers from the reserve. Consequently, in a counter-attack, the Germans were pushed out of Chobienice.

During the battle for Babimost, the Germans also attacked Kargowa. They struck an area along an extended line which stretched from the road between Kargowa and Babimost, through the road to Chwalim, the Obra Canal (formerly Zgniła Obra, Obrzyca), and to the road from Kargowa to Karszyn. The insurgent positions were located on the outskirts of the town, 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 main attack, preceded with initial artillery fire.

The insurgents managed to repulse frontal strikes twice with close-range fire. 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 attack, but a

counter-attack to the enemy's left flank failed. Despite consistent and well-organised defence, the Germans pushed the insurgents out towards 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 battle, because, as well as the cemetery, the Germans also managed to take the southern part of the town and intended to continue the attack towards the north-east. Kopanica was defended by the insurgents retreating from Kargowa and a local unit commanded by Sergeant Józef Szwaba. The result of the fight would, however, would have been far more difficult to predict, if it had not been for a counter-attack by the reserve company commanded by Second-Lieutenant Eckert. The Germans were pushed back from the northern canal of the Odra River. On 13 February, they made another attempt at occupying Kopanica, but it was a failure.

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

In general it must be concluded that the battles for Babimost and Kargowa, which were part of a huge German offensive (which was not always followed consistently), made the insurgents aware, for the first time, on such a large scale, of the true risk posed by the entire military effort. The euphoria of the first weeks of fighting and the relatively easy liberation march in several

directions at the same time gradually faded. The period of safeguarding and defending the territory seized during the first spontaneous period of fighting had begun. This would not have been possible without the centrally organised system of the formation of a regular army and also without the strengthening of discipline. If Kargowa and Babimost would have had to have been defended in the middle of January, the Germans would certainly have arrived in Wolsztyn and other areas. One month later, however, these were different German units and different insurgents.

As opposed to the battles fought at the end of December 1918 and during the first three weeks of January of the following year, cases of incompetence in the commanders in February appeared very rarely. It seems that the basic mistake of the defence of Babimost and Kargowa was its stagnation and delayed activation of the reserves. In direct battle, everyone stepped up to the challenge and the defeat suffered was the result of the huge technical and numerical superiority of the enemy. Counter-attacks were conducted, though due to the small number of the Polish units, they did not achieve the expected results.



