

# Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919

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## THE FIGHTING IN THE VICINITY OF ZDZIECHOWA 29 - 31 December 1918

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[A clash in this vicinity took place \(...\)](#)

[On 31 December, in the morning \(...\)](#)

A clash in this vicinity took place as a result of reactionary measures taken by the Germans upon the news of the seizure of Gniezno by the insurgents. The commander of the German garrison in Bydgoszcz formed an expedition unit which consisted of 400 soldiers, a cannon battery and 30 light and heavy machine guns. These forces were led by the commander of the 54th Infantry Regiment. In the afternoon of 29 December, the Germans arrived in Zdziechowa by train. From the railway station, they directed their path to the estate of their countryman,

Wendorff and quartered themselves there - this was the location from which the recovery of Gniezno was to be started.

The news of the German plans reached the commandant of Gniezno, Zygmunt Kittel, who immediately started to gather the forces necessary to repulse the expected attack. A delegation was sent to Września with a request for help; Kittel himself ineffectively tried to negotiate with the Germans. However, the sentiments and attitudes of the Gniezno insurgents did not allow for passiveness and demands were made to march to Zdziechowa immediately. In order to perform the task, it was necessary to concentrate as many forces located within the given area as possible. All insurgent units from the vicinity of Zdziechowa were withdrawn, only a strong outpost commanded by Antoni Skwerens was left, near the village of Pyszczynek.

During the night of 29 to 30 December 1918, reinforcements from Września arrived in Gniezno: two infantry companies and a machine gun subunit. 80 insurgents were sent from Poznań under the command of Captain Władysław Sczaniecki. At the same time Bronisław Sulczewski Ph.D. arrived, he brought a directive of the Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council which prohibited Kittel from fighting with the Germans whose forces were concentrated in Zdziechowa. As a result of this, by 10.00 a.m. that day, the reinforcements from Września had left Gniezno. Initially, the directive of the Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council was observed despite its hostile reception by the

insurgents from Gniezno.

Meanwhile, the Germans started to strengthen their forces in Zdziechowa. The majority of them remained in Wendorff's estate, and one platoon occupied the school building in Zdziechowa while the artillery took positions near Mączniki, north of Zdziechowa and patrols were sent on reconnaissance.

At around noon, on 30 December, Kittel, Szulczewski and Sczaniecki made another attempt at negotiating with the Germans. The Germans demanded the immediate restoration of the German authorities in Gniezno. Also all weapons in the possession of Poles were to be laid down. Z. Kittel announced consultations regarding this issue with the Supreme People's Council. This further stoked unrest among the insurgents gathered in Gniezno as they were already unhappy with the action taken by the civil authorities so far. Given this situation, the initiative was taken by Doctor Wojciech Jedlina-Jacobson, who had arrived on that day from Gdańsk and had contributed to the formation of a unit headed by Sergeant Teofil Bojanowski, which consisted of 300- 400 people. This group marched towards Zdziechowa, and it was joined on the way by the local insurgents. At the same time Doctor Jacobson addressed the Polish units in Trzemeszno and Kłecko with a request to cut off the railway connections with Bydgoszcz. During the march, the Polish delegation returning from Zdziechowa was met. As a result of its agitation, a large number of volunteers returned to Gniezno and the expedition was continued by hardly a few dozen insurgents.

This small unit developed a line formation south of Zdziechowa, right in front of a brickyard. There, Jacobson took over the leadership of the entire action and established the location of his command post. The insurgents managed to approach the school building unnoticed from the southern end of the village. The surprised German crew (3 officers, 50 non-commissioned officers and privates) capitulated after a grenade had been thrown inside the building, further fighting was stopped. At that time Zdziechowa had already been surrounded from the north by small Polish units located in Bojanice, Świątniki Wielkie, Modliszewo and north-east of Kopydłowo. In the vicinity of Świątniki Małe and Modliszewko, Polish mounted patrols were active. Jacobson and Skwerens met the Germans to negotiate with them. A group consisting of more than a dozen people stayed in Zdziechowa. Other insurgents returned to Gniezno taking the prisoners-of-war with them.

However, insurgent operations were continued. While talks were being conducted at Wendorff's estate, the Polish soldiers from Zdziechowa managed to capture the German cannons in Mączniki. At the same time, the railway station in Łopienno was seized and this way the Germans were unable to retreat to Bydgoszcz. Finally, an agreement was signed and on its basis the German soldiers would return behind the Noteć River line, in exchange for the release of prisoners of war and return of the weapons captured in the school, including all machine guns. At this point, most of the insurgents went back home, and the German cannons captured in

Mączniki were left unsupervised - a situation which the Germans immediately took advantage of.

Meanwhile, during the night of 30 to 31 December 1918, the Polish units from Września and 12 soldiers with 4 machine guns, commanded by Władysław Wiewiórkowski and Alojzy Nowak, arrived in Gniezno. On top of this, reinforcements from Kłecko, Witkowo, Powidz, Trzemeszno etc. arrived.

On 31 December, in the morning, another march towards Zdziechowa began. The units from Września developed a line formation south of the village, the 1st company on the right flank and the 2nd company on the left flank; the flanks and gaps between the subunits were covered by machine guns. Later on, one platoon of the 2nd company, with a machine gun, took up positions north west of Wendorff's estate in Zdziechowa. The surrounded Germans opened fire, killing one insurgent. Finally, an agreement was reached according to which the Germans were allowed to withdraw to Zbąszyń. The Polish acquisitions were considerable: 500 hand guns, 12 heavy and several light machine guns. Ultimately, however, the Germans managed to get out to Bydgoszcz through Żnin, together with their newly-abducted Polish negotiators and the cannons which had been captured by the Poles the previous day. Then, the Polish envoys were exchanged for German officers who had been taken into captivity in Zdziechowa.

The evaluation of the skirmish near Zdziechowa must be rigorous. It was organised without due

consideration and chaotically, even without the moral support of the political authorities of the region. The lack of consistency in the action taken was noticeable, the political and military actions were not synchronised and the lack of experience in command (especially on 30 December) manifested itself on many occasions. This phenomenon was clearly visible in the lack of consistency in all the action taken against the Germans during both days, and in the positive though shameful (in terms of organisation) end of the whole affair. A supposition must be made that the final success was owed, to a great extent, to the determination of the rank-and-file insurgents and the surprisingly low operability of the Germans, who limited themselves to imposing harsh demands on the insurgents. It is rather hard to claim that this was a battle or bigger military clash. This was just a skirmish, based more on fighting nerve than military success. However, it must be concluded that, in the end, the events in Zdziechowa protected Gniezno from German intervention and significantly increased the morale of insurgents and were a true incentive for the continuation of the fight.

The differences in the level of training and command were clearly visible when units from different towns are compared. As early as two days after the outbreak of the uprising, it was possible to carry out activities using the forces of a well organised and commanded infantry battalion. These subunits, formed on the basis of the Guard and Security Service, were, above all, of a regional nature - thus the preserved descriptions and other accounts mention the

Poznań insurgents, the Września insurgents, the Środa insurgents, etc. These units would usually be tight and disciplined as opposed to the platoons and companies formed spontaneously in a given area (though in terms of their numbers, they were usually much smaller than the normal size of a platoon, company, etc.). Certain facts, rather uncommon for a regular army, also occurred, e.g. going back home after the fighting was over on a completely arbitrary basis. In addition to this, sometimes even the heavy military equipment, which had been captured with so much effort several hours ago, was abandoned. At this stage of the development of events, the Germans demonstrated greater initiative and recovered their losses often without too much trouble. However, as fighting was continued, they demonstrated, in general, less psychical resistance, irrespective of the so far presented confident or even arrogant behaviour. On the other hand, they quickly took counter-measures during moments of confusion and disorganisation among insurgents.

Unfortunately not many good things can be said about the qualifications of some of the Polish commanders. Undoubtedly, there were many factors here which resulted from the lack of professional qualifications among frequently self-appointed commanders. The common enthusiasm and willingness to fight did not always go hand in hand with solid and proven skills and a sense of discipline. The fighting for Poznań, the liberation of Gniezno and then the skirmish near Zdziechowa all presented the characteristics typical for a spontaneous uprising.

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