

Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919

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THE BATTLES FOR RAWICZ 3-4 February and 5-6 February 1919

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

[In accordance with the plan \(...\)](#)

[The front commanders \(...\)](#)

Both battles for Rawicz, as well as earlier fighting in the vicinity of Poniec and Kąkolewo, were among clashes fought on the southern and southwestern fronts of the uprising.

In February 1919, the Southern Front, commanded by Second Lieutenant Władysław Wawrzyniak, was divided into four sections:

- I (Górka) - commander: Second Lieutenant Alfons Breza,

- II (Krotoszyn) - commander: Second Lieutenant Marian Modrzejewski,

- III (Odolanów) - commander: Sergeant Feliks Witecki,

- IV (Ostrzeszów) - commander: Second Lieutenant Stanisław Thiel.

On 13 February, command of the front was taken over by Colonel Adolf Jan Kuczewski. The total Polish forces on the front consisted of approximately 2100 soldiers. In this section, the Germans had the forces of the Leszno garrison. Furthermore, the following German 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 in Poznań),

- an infantry battalion and 2 field artillery battalions in Międzybórz,

- a field artillery regiment of the Twardogóra guard,

- *some units from Kępno, Bralin and Słupia Kapitulna (250 people),*
- *a group from Oleśnica.*

Despite the large number of units, it should be noted that in most cases the number of soldiers differed quite considerably from the number initially assumed by commanders. The disproportion of forces was very clear. The Polish decision on occupying Rawicz was rather of emotional and prestigious significance. The German forces in Rawicz and 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 the Polish positions from cannons. Given this situation, the Poles decided to undertake offensive manoeuvres aimed at occupying Rawicz.

In early February, the 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,*
- *the 5th Sapper Battalion (Leszno).*

The composition of the Polish forces did not change.

In accordance with the 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 strike groups were formed:

1. Group 1 (approx. 260 people):

- *the Zakrzewo Company (commander - Wojciech Kozal, approx. 80 people)*

- *the 1st Jarocin Company (commander - Felix Nadolski, approx. 114 people)*

- *the Jutrosin unit (approx. 40 people),*

- *the Dubin unit (approx. 20 insurgents),*

Task: to attack Rawicz from the north, from the Zakrzewo - Kawcze region.

2. Group 2 (approx. 330 people):

- *the Górka Battalion (commander - Konstanty Pietruszyński).*

Task: to attack in the Żołędnica - Niemarzyn belt, towards Sarnowa.

3. Group 3 (approx. 500 people):

- *insurgent units from towns and 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 in the night of 3 to 4 February. Despite their initial successes, the occupation of Łaszczyn, Szymanowo and the reaching of Rawicz suburbs, the insurgent units had to withdraw back to their starting positions. The first battle of Rawicz was a defeat. Z. Wieliczka claims that the person responsible for it was Alfons Breza, however, it seems that the matter is not that simple. Analysis of drafts, maps and the organisational structure of the insurgent units allows for the drawing of a number of conclusions:

- 1. there was no uniform command;*
- 2. the insurgent line was too stretched (about 15 km along a straight line) and the distance between the deployment line and the objective of the attack was too long - about 5 km.- which, to a certain extent was the result of small outposts and guards placed in the foreground by the Germans;*
- 3. there was an almost complete lack of coordination between the Polish units, some attacks were carried out by the respective commanders on their own, and they had scarce information regarding the forces the enemy had at their disposal;*

4. it is possible to have many reservations regarding the level of discipline among the insurgents;

5. the Polish units were not sufficiently supplied with ammunition.

In general, from a strictly military point of view, there is no way anyone could find any excuses for the Polish command which failed during the first battle of Rawicz, both at the stage of planning of the battle and during its course.

After the events of 3 and 4 February 1919, both parties 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),

- the 4th Jarocin Company (commander - Alojzy Nowak),

Both Jarocin companies were commanded by Bronisław Kirchner.

- the 2nd Pleszew Company (commander - Antoni Kozłowicz),

- the 2nd Koźmin Company (commander - Franciszek Ciesielski).

The front commanders, having learnt their lesson after the first battle of Rawicz, took the decision to occupy Rawicz during the night of 5 to 6 February. Thus, the attack was to cover a 6

kilometre wide front, and was to be implemented in two stages:

- the seizure of Konarzewo, Łaszczyn and Sarnowo,

- an attack on Rawicz from the positions gained in this way.

A. Breza, however, made the unauthorised decision to occupy Dąbrówka as well, which extended the attack line to north-east. His decision was one of the fundamental mistakes in the battle of 3-4 February.

The Forces attacked frontally 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 had left the railway tracks undamaged and made use of their armoured train. At the same time, on 7 February, soldiers from the Hannover Riflemen Battalion and the 50th Infantry Regiment counter-attacked, with the support of the train. The Germans took 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 side. The extreme incompetence of the section commanders and the repetitive mistakes committed despite their 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 Riflemen 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 killed in both battles of Rawicz), the insurgents managed to hold their positions.

The conclusions from the second battle of Rawicz are similar as in the case of the evaluation of the combat which took place on 3-4 February. The same mistakes were repeated, there was no control of the development of the events, the burden of the battles and their results rested almost completely on the shoulders of rank-and-file insurgents. What is more, it is even difficult to justify tactically the attempt at capturing Rawicz. Equally strong German garrisons, which threatened the uprising, were also stationed in the surrounding towns, but there were no attempts made at attacking them. Evaluation of the command of the front and the Rawicz section must be harsh, as it first launched an action, but then lost control of it. The situation was only saved by strong, disciplined reinforcements sent by Central Command. Alfons Breza was dismissed and his post was taken by Colonel Adolf Jan Kuczewski.

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