

Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919

<https://greaterpolanduprising.eu/pwe/history/the-course-of-insurgent/fighting-on-insurgent-f/3495,THE-FIRST-BATTLE-OF-SZUBIN-2-8-January-1919.html>
26.04.2024, 17:09

THE FIRST BATTLE OF SZUBIN 2 - 8 January 1919

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Soon after the outbreak of insurgent fighting in Poznań, particular importance was gained by the Noteć River line, which separated Greater Poland from Western Pomerania and the strongly germanised Bydgoszcz which was a serious threat for the development of the uprising. As early as on 1 January 1919, Nakło was liberated - it was an important railway junction through which transports for the German Ober-Ost army, returning to the Reich by virtue of the Białostok agreement, were carried. Later on, Nakło was in fact given to Germany at the request of the

Entente states, which saw a serious threat for the stabilisation of the situation in the region because of this 'traffic jam'. However, victorious skirmishes near Mrocza, Ślesin and Wysoka were fought.

Given this situation, the fighting which took place along the Noteć River line gained particular importance and the Northern Front became the most important front of the Greater Poland uprising. Also here, in the vicinity of Szubin and Chodzież, simultaneous battles took place in the period between 2-8 January 1919. They will be discussed separately as the Szubin section will become a location for intensive fighting in the near future.

The first attempt at taking control of Szubin was made on 2 January 1919. During the night of 2 to 3 January, Grenschutz soldiers occupied the town again while the local insurgents joined the units stationed in surrounding localities. On 3 January 1919, the Germans concentrated the forces which were to be used along the Żnin-Kcynia section in Szubin. These were:

- *the 3rd Grenschutz Battalion (commander: Second Lieutenant Drost),*
- *a light field artillery platoon,*
- *a unit which consisted of local Germans and settlers (commander: Second Lieutenant Manthey).*

Altogether, this made about 380 people with 2 heavy machine guns, 2 light machine guns and 2 cannons.

On 5 January, a clash between a German unit which was sent to recover Żnin, and the Żnin unit commanded by Marcei Cieśliski took place. It ended in the Germans' defeat. In Szubin per se, the inhabitants of Polish nationality were interned and taken to Bydgoszcz, and then to camps founded in Szczecin Dąbie and Goleniów.

These unfavourable developments along the Szubin section forced Central Command to prepare a plan for the seizure of this town and the elimination of the obnoxious German garrison. The entire action was to be managed by Second Lieutenant Kazimierz Grudzielski, the commander of the Northern Front. Four insurgent units were assigned the completion of this task:

- from *Września* *commander: Władysław Wiewiórowski*

- from *Kcynia* *commander: Jan Sławiński*

- from *Gniezno* *commander: Stanisław Szaliński (staying in Nakło)*

- from *Żnin* *commander: Marcei Cieśliski*

The town was to be seized by a concentric, simultaneous attack from four directions: from the north and west, the insurgents from Gniezno and Kcynia, from the south - the insurgents from Żnin, from the east - the soldiers from Września. The beginning of the attack was planned for 8.00 a.m. on 8 January 1919.

Only two of the three groups managed to take up

the agreed positions at the expected time, the one from the Kcynia - Gniezno regions (which intended to attack along the road running from Nakło and Kcynia) and the one from the Żnin region, positioned along the road running from Żnin. In total this was about 500 people. The Września unit commanded by Wiewiórowski arrived later because of black ice on the road.

Despite the unfavourable situation and the absence of the insurgents who were to strike from the east, the decision to launch the attack was taken, however, it broke down under the heavy fire of the German defence. The Kcynia unit, commanded by Józef Codrow, which entered the town from Nakielska Street, was pushed back by a counter-attack, resulting in high losses among the insurgents. As a result of this, the attack of the north-western group and southern group was repelled. The eastern group commanded by W. Wiewiórowski, attacked alone, even after his neighbours had already been defeated. This attack also failed. The railway station was not seized and the insurgents had to retreat with heavy losses. The group commander, among others was injured and having been taken into captivity he died of his wounds on 13 January in a hospital in Bydgoszcz.

The attempt at the seizure of Szubin ended in a severe defeat for the insurgents: 23 insurgents were killed, 20 were wounded and 92 were taken into captivity. On 8 January, the Germans occupied Łabiszyn and Żnin, thus safeguarding the approach to Bydgoszcz.

The most important cause of the defeat was the

lack of uniform command and coordination between the respective groups. The attack was conducted in waves, not as a line formation, flanks were uncovered and there was no communication ensured between the groups, therefore elementary mistakes were committed and the Germans immediately took advantage of them, defending Szubin skilfully. With regards to the Germans, it was noticeable that the coordination between the infantry and the artillery was very good and the machine gun fire and cannon fire were directed appropriately. The sacrifices made by the insurgents and their will to fight could not compensate for the ineptitude of the commanding staff which is held fully responsible for the defeat in the first battle of Szubin. As a result of fighting on 8 January, not only was the city not seized by insurgents, but also the initiative was handed over to the enemies which increased the area under their occupation.

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