

Institute of National Remembrance

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The year 2024 marks the 80th anniversary of the operation "Tempest"





■ Home Army detachments entering the town of Szczepieszyn in the Lublin region as part of Operation Tempest, 26 July 1944 (AIPN)



■ Gen. Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski, commander-in-chief of the Home Army from 1943 to 1944 (NAC)



■ Gen. Kazimierz Sosnkowski – Supreme Commander of the Polish Armed Forces in 1943–1944 (NAC)

The Home Army's political-military operation against the Germans lasted from 4 January 1944, when the Red Army crossed the pre-war Polish border, until January 1945. Two years earlier – on 14 February 1942 – Commander-in-Chief General Władysław Sikorski transformed the Union of Armed Struggle into the Home Army and appointed General Stefan Rowecki as its commander.

During the German occupation, plans for the so-called *general uprising* were being devised in the Polish underground state. Secret military structures were being established, partisans trained and arms

stockpiled so as to exploit an opportune moment and attack the Germans with the support of Polish units in the West: the air force and the parachute brigade. The insurgency was to erupt simultaneously all over the country when the German power showed signs of weakening. In this way, Poland would be liberated by the Western Allies and the Polish Armed Forces. This idea would have had a chance of succeeding if the English-American Balkan invasion plan was implemented. While the Balkan second front came to naught (also under pressure from the USSR), the hopes flickered on with the success of the Allied offensive in Italy, where Sicily and the entire southern part of the Apennine Peninsula had been liberated by December 1943.

Gradually, the prospect of an invasion by the Red Army, hostile towards Polish aspirations to independence, was becoming ever more realistic. The Poles felt they had to modify their original armed resistance plans to ensure that their military and political resonance would force the USSR to respect the coalition principles contained in the Atlantic Charter towards the Republic of Poland and to recognize its sovereignty.

In this situation, a new design of anti-German insurrectionist activity of the Home Army was developed, called *Operation Tempest*, which consisted in armed action conducted not simultaneously throughout the country but in individual regions just before the coming of Soviet troops. The intention was to organize local uprisings immediately behind the German line of the front and to have Polish forces liberate larger and smaller towns so as to appear before the Soviets as allies

and hosts. Civilian and military structures, once revealed, were to assume the duties of Polish administration and police force, ready to fight on against the Germans at the side of the Soviets as part of the anti-German coalition. It was assumed that political and propaganda reasons along with support from the British and Americans would force the Soviets to respect Polish power bodies and their sovereignty.

Following the logic of war Poland – with no other means of pressure – counted on its military efforts sparking political and propaganda reverberations in the Allied camp.

In January 1944, the Red Army crossed the eastern border of Poland for the second time during the war. On 20 January 1944, the government of the Republic of Poland issued a statement that “the Polish Nation categorically and unconditionally rejects Soviet claims to the eastern territory of the Polish State”.

Excerpts from the statement of the Government of Poland of 5 January 1944, issued in relation to the second crossing of the pre-war Polish–Soviet border by the Red Army:

The Polish nation was the first to oppose the German onslaught and has incessantly fought against the power and violence for the last four years, despite unprecedented sacrifices and suffering, having moreover issued no Quisling and rejected all and any compromise and collaboration with the invader. (...) Thus, the Polish nation is fully entitled to expect full justice and redress at the moment of liberation. The condition necessary for that justice is the return of sovereign state authority over the liberated territories of the Republic of Poland, and protection of the life and property of its citizens. (...) Being the only one and legal helmsman and speaker for the Polish nation, the Government of Poland, recognised in Homeland and by Poles in Exile and the Allied and free governments (...) ascertains the inalienable rights of Poland to independence, ensconced in the principles of the Atlantic Charter, shared by all the United Nations and in the international treaties in force. (...) The Government of Poland expects that the Soviet Union (...) will respect the rights and interests of the Republic of Poland and its citizens.

Source: We expect that the rights and interests of the Republic of Poland and its citizens will be respected. Statement of the Government of the Republic of Poland, Dziennik Polski i Dziennik Żołnierza”, 6 January 1944, no. 4.

The first Polish units of the Home Army that embarked on the implementation of the operation "Tempest" were active in Volhynia. Early in July 1944 the detachments from the regions of Vilna and Nowogródek battled with the Germans for Vilnius over the course of a few days. The Red Army joined the skirmishers in the city. The Home Army also participated in the fight for Lvov and hundreds of other cities and towns.

While fighting on the front lasted, Soviet commanders made use of the aid offered by the AK and frequently officially expressed gratitude for its support in the struggle against the Germans. However, when fighting ceased, the Soviets insidiously arrested Home Army

commanders, some during specially organized joint “command councils”. At the same time, they began to disarm and arrest the thousands of remaining AK soldiers. Some were incorporated into units subordinated to Moscow, others arrested and sent to labor camps deep in the USSR. Those who tried to keep their freedom and resist were ruthlessly murdered by the Soviets. Mass Soviet reprisals against Polish civilians resumed as well. The new occupation of eastern Poland became a fact.

All these actions, however, took place in territories which Stalin openly claimed for the Soviet Union. The Poles did not know how the Soviets would act west of the Bug River (the “Curzon line”), the territory which they officially did not deny as belonging to the Polish state. Therefore, as part of the operation "Tempest" the armed forces of the Home Army also joined the fight in the environs of Lublin, Rzeszów, eastern Mazovia, around Cracow, and near Kielce, liberating hundreds of towns on their own.

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