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## The Course of Insurgent Fights

The Course of the Uprising from mid-January to mid-February 1919



Mid-January 1919 marked the start of the second stage of the uprising, characterised mostly by the formation of a regular army and consolidating what had been achieved so far. The process started on 16 January, with General Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki signing a Day Order of Central Command. At that time, the region's political situation depended on the talks taking place at the peace conference in Paris,

particularly on the opinion of France, which wanted to give a reborn Poland an important role in the post-war arrangement of forces in Central Europe. It was in the French government's interest to weaken Germany and reinforce Poland, whose role was to act as counterbalance in the East to any possible German efforts to take revenge in the future.

Soon, General Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki won Greater Poland citizens over with his professionalism, determination and conservative opinions. He required absolute formal discipline and did not tolerate politics in the army; he followed these rules consequently, without paying attention to any signs of dissatisfaction or discontent within the army. The agreement signed on 11 January 1919 between the general and the Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council (SPC) described the competences of the new commander-in-chief, who was explicitly reminded of the CSPC's superiority over the army. Control over the army was exercised by the Military Division of the CSPC, which was successively led by: Jan Maciaszek, Captain Władysław Sczaniecki and Second Lieutenant General Kazimierz Raszewski. The competences of Central Command and of the Commissariat of the SPC were separated on 17 January, when the CSPC issued a regulation on the conscription of young men born in 1897-1898. It was the starting point for the formation of a regular army. Conscription was announced two more times: on 4 March 1919 (1895-1896 and 1900) and 24 April 1919 (1894 and 1901). The effort in terms of mobilisation was immense - one of the greatest so far in Poland. On 21 January 1919, the Commissariat of the SPC formulated the text of the oath that all the

soldiers of the Greater Poland Armies were obliged to take: “Before the One and Triune Almighty God, I swear that I will serve Poland, my Mother Country and the entire Polish Nation always and everywhere, that I will defend my Home Country and the national good to the last drop of my blood, that I will obey the Commissariat of the Supreme People’s Council in Poznań and the commanders and superiors appointed by the Commissariat, that I will act as befits a brave and righteous Polish soldier and that when Poland is united, I will take a military oath approved by the Polish state authorities.”

On 19 January, Central Command’s structure was changed by the establishing of two functions: an administrative function and an organisational/tactical function. On the same day, Central Command was moved from the “Royal” Hotel to a new location: to the building formerly occupied by the German command of the 5th Army Corps, in Działowy Square. Simultaneously with the expansion of the Central Command and the Staff, General Muśnicki started choosing the right collaborators, irrespective of the political tendencies prevailing in that specific period. On 31 January, Lieutenant Colonel Władysław Anders, an officer of the 1st Polish Corps, was appointed Head of Staff. The third Head of Staff at Central Command was Colonel Jan Wroczyński who held this position from 18 April to November 1919, when Central Command was dissolved. Soon, other officers from the 1st Polish Corps came to Poznań. On General Muśnicki’s order, they took a number of managerial positions in the Greater Poland Armies. The positions of higher commanders were taken by officers who not only had the appropriate military rank, but who were also duly prepared to perform

their functions, and who had extensive field experience.

On 18 January 1919, Central Command gave operational order no. 1, which divided the line that separated the insurgent side from the opponent into fronts: – the Northern Front: from the border with the Kingdom of Poland near Inowrocław to the Białe Lake near Czarnków, with Lieutenant Colonel Kazimierz Grudzielski as commander; – the Western Front: from the Białe Lake to the Odra Channel near Wolsztyn, with Colonel Michał Milewski as commander; – the South-Western Front (also called the “Leszno Group”): from the Odra Channel to Poniec, with Second Lieutenant Bernard Śliwiński as commander; – and the Southern Front: from Poniec along the border with the Silesian province, to the border with the Kingdom of Poland, with Second Lieutenant Władysław Wawrzyniak as commander. In operational terms, group (front) commanders were directly subordinate to Central Command, while supply and administration commanders were subordinate to Military District commanders. The task of the 1st Military District (covering Poznań) was to form an operational reserve which was expected to fight in any sections, depending on necessity. Individual front and section commanders were ordered to immediately form rifle regiments (infantry) in their subordinate areas. On 19 February 1919, the entire administrative and military structure of the area affected by the uprising was divided into three Military Districts, linked to specific fronts: 1. The Northern Front: poviats: Wieleń, Czarnków, Piła, Chodzież, Wyrzysk, Bydgoszcz, Wągrowiec, Gniezno, Witkowo, Żnin, Szubin, Inowrocław, Strzelno, 2. The Western Front: poviats: Poznań – East, Poznań – West, Oborniki, Szamotuły,

Międzychód, Skwierzyna, Nowy Tomyśl, Międzyrzecz, Babimost, Kościan, Grodzisk, Śmigiel, Leszno, Wschowa, 3. The Southern Front: poviats: Gostyń, Rawicz, Koźmin, Krotoszyn, Śrem, Jarocin, Pleszew, Września, Środa, Ostrów Wlkp., Odolanów, Kępno, Ostrzeszów. At the same time, district commanders, who were front commanders at the same time, were appointed: 1 – Colonel Lieutenant Kazimierz Grudzielski, 2 – Colonel Michał Milewski and 3– Colonel Adolf Jan Kuczewski. Thus, the same officer was responsible for the military action in his sections, as well as for provisioning and replenishing his subordinate army. To this end, a provisioning office was established in every district. Headquarters were located in Gniezno, Poznań and Jarocin. The number of soldiers in the army was determined on the basis of the region's mobilisation capacities and the needs of the fronts.

### **Selected battles at the second stage of the uprising: 15**

**January-16 February 1919.** Central Command's operational order no. 1 of 18 January focused on the regulation of structural and organisational affairs. Fighting was, however, taking place on individual fronts. Insurgents tried to expand the scope of the uprising. Nevertheless, they had to be aware of the need to liberate new areas with hardly any support from the local Polish population, which every day was getting scarcer and was controlled by its German neighbours. The uprising in Greater Poland considerably strengthened nationalist positions in German circles. The Berlin authorities had to face the threat of having to abide by the strict terms of a peace treaty that the victorious countries might demand. It was therefore necessary to close

ranks, defend the largest area possible, and retain control over it. Grenzschutz units and forces of German settlers were too weak to stifle the insurrectionist movement in an open fight, but were sufficient to hold back the progressing Polish units. In the spring of 1919, the situation changed dramatically as a result of, among other things, the planning of a war against Poland as a show of strength combined with the destruction of resistance in Greater Poland. For the time being, however, in January and February, the Germans managed to hold the Poles back very effectively.

**The battle for Kąkolewo on 28 January 1919.** The battle, fought by insurgents from the Pawłowice section, was an example of a swiftly led clash against German fire shot from two armoured trains. The trains arrived at the station in Kąkolewo and opened fire to cover the infantry which was under attack. The Germans initially managed to occupy the station, but they were stopped by Polish machine guns as they were marching towards the village. As a result of a counter-attack, which was supported by a company from Środa, the Germans were forced to withdraw from the railway station and load the landing troops onto the damaged trains. Their second attempt at occupying Kąkolewo in a similar way, on 14 February, was also a failure.

**The attack on Nowe Kramsko on 2-3 February 1919.** Upon the news of the German occupation of Nowe Kramsko, the Polish command decided to attack Nowe Kramsko from Babimost and to retake the village. On 2 February 1919, 152 insurgents with three light machine guns gathered in the market square in Babimost. The unit was divided

into three groups, each of them composed of people residing in a particular area, from Nowe Kramsko and its vicinity. The first group (28 people and a light machine gun) marched along the railway track from Babimost to Sulechów and took positions along a dirt road one kilometre north of Nowe Kramsko. The Group's task was to cut off the withdrawal of any Germans trying to move along roads north of the village. The second group (89 people) marched from Babimost to Kuligowo, and then along forest paths through the woods of Wojnowo. They planned to form into a line near the cemetery located south of Nowe Kramsko and to occupy the parish and clear the village of enemy soldiers. The third group (27 people, mostly volunteers) marched initially with the second group, then walked on over the frozen Wojnowskie Lake and took positions at the edge of the forest, north of Stare Kramsko. The group's task was to seize a German battery of cannons located at the edge of the forest, south of Kolesin. At that time, a company of German infantry of approximately 150 soldiers, commanded by Rittmeister von Kleist were staying in Nowe Kramsko; they were mostly uhlans from the 10th Sulechów Regiment. The forces occupied the church, the school and a homestead, which was additionally secured with barbed wire entanglements. A four-cannon battery, barely protected, was located south of Kolesin. At 4:00am, all the Polish groups took their positions. The third column, which had not found the cannons it was supposed to seize, moved forward towards Kolesin. Although it was fired at from village buildings, it managed to get through between Kolesin and the Wojnowskie Lake to Nowe Kramsko. The second group's attack was also a success. The surprised Germans defended themselves only in the church and, for a very short

time, in the school. Most of the soldiers, taking advantage of darkness and of the first group's weakness, escaped towards the north. Polish losses were 6 dead and 17 wounded. The German army ended up with 4 officers and 32 privates dead, 30 soldiers wounded and 25 taken into captivity. The insurgents successfully seized: 7 heavy and 2 light machine guns, more than 40 hand guns, 15 thousand rounds of ammunition, 6 horses, a field kitchen and an HMG ammunition cart. The village was recovered by the insurgents. Not for long, however, because soon the Germans counter-attacked and re-occupied it.

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