

# 100 years

Silesian  
Uprisings

1919

1920

1921

2021



26 April 2021

Partner wydania  
DZIENNIK ZACHODNI Gazeta Krakowska GŁOS WIELKOPOLSKI Gazeta DZIENNIK POLSKI Dziennik Bałtycki Dziennik kurier POLSKA  
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# Everyone and Everything for Upper

In the reborn Republic of Poland, interest in the “Upper Silesian question” was enormous

Everyone and everything for Upper Silesia – this was the motto of “Upper Silesian Week” organised by the Central Plebiscite Committee in Warsaw at the turn of December 1920 and January 1921. Similar events, organised through the efforts of dozens of local Silesian committees, took place throughout Poland during this time. They were conceived as a show of support of Polish society for Upper Silesians seeking to unite Upper Silesia with Poland. “We want Upper Silesia to join Poland, but for us, Silesians are not just a supplement to coal; for us, they are brothers in flesh and blood, brothers who have already shed blood for their Polishness twice in the past two years, who deserve our help”, wrote Wojciech Trąpczyński, Speaker of the Polish Sejm, in a proclamation calling on his compatriots to actively participate in the event.

Interest in the “Upper Silesian question” in the reborn Republic of Poland had been lively since 1919, and it intensified in the following years. Silesian committees were dynamically formed already during the First Silesian Uprising.



They had great success in collecting money for Silesia. Later, they popularised knowledge about Silesia during rallies, lectures, in the press, and in dozens of appeals and proclamations to the public.

In the period before the plebiscite, the Committee for the Unification of Upper Silesia with the Republic of Poland, which coordinated activities of local Silesian committees throughout the country, raised funds to help refugees from Upper Silesia, to popularise the Silesian cause in Poland, and to support the propaganda campaign in Silesia itself. Over 142 million Polish marks were collected through public fund-raising and self-taxation.

The outbreak of the Third Silesian Uprising on the night of 2 May 1921 brought an almost immediate wave of support rallies in the whole country, Białystok, Będzin, Bochnia, Brześć, Ciecchanów, Częstochowa and Dobrzyń, through Grójec, Krzemienice, Mińsk Mazowiecki, Lwów, Łęczycza, Łomża and Łódź, to Poznań, Poddębice, Pultusk, Radom, Węgrów and Zawiercie.

As early as 3 May, the people of Warsaw organised rallies in front of the Entente states' embassies. In Kraków, participants of a demonstration declared that “the whole Polish nation is ready to help the Upper Silesian insurgents”.

On 4 May, students of the Jagiellonian University and the Academy of Mining declared that they were ready to join the Upper Silesian ranks at a moment's notice. In turn, at a rally on 6 May, students of Warsaw universities expressed their “deepest homage” to the Silesian insurgents, along with “most sincere gratitude and unshakable faith that the spilling of their blood will not be in vain”.

At a rally in Dąbrowa Górnicza alone, about 40 thousand people gathered at a rally on 8 May, and the resolution proclaimed there demanded “immediate convening of the Sejm, a quick and decisive action, the immediate and most vigorous repulsion of all Teutonic attempts and foul, treacherous schemes, even with the use of arms”.

It is now 100 years since those events of the three successive Silesian uprisings and the plebiscite, which resulted in part of Upper Silesia being united with the Republic of Poland. We recall them once again in the pages of our nationwide daily press, expressing our conviction that the “Upper Silesian question” is still part of the essence of Polish affairs.

Andrzej Sznajder Director of the Katowice branch of the Institute of National Remembrance



Group of Silesian insurgents in 1921



March of an insurgent unit, 1921



Funeral of insurgents killed during the fight for Kędzierzyn, Katowice-Zalęże, probably 9 May 1921



Pin commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Third Silesian Uprising

# Between Paris and London

Global superpowers did not deny themselves the right to decide about the shape and fate of Upper Silesia

Maciej Fic  
Silesian University in Katowice

It may seem that Upper Silesia, located on the Polish-German border, would be an area of interest only to those two countries. In the meantime, it turned out that although some politicians in Paris and London could not even point to the region on a map, it had become part of a greater international rivalry.

Although the Paris Conference (18

January – 28 June 1919) included

representatives of 32 so-called Major Allied and Associated Powers as the victors of the

Great War, it was the “big four” – US

President Thomas Woodrow Wilson, British

Prime Minister David Lloyd George, French

Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, and

Italian Prime Minister Vittorio Emanuele

Orlando – who decided on matters relating to

Europe. During the deliberations, it became

clear that achieving unanimity among the

victors would be difficult. The establishment

of a collective security system, to be

symbolised by the League of Nations,

initially proposed by T.W. Wilson as a means

of maintaining world peace, did not find

understanding with the European partners.

The British authorities were particularly

critical nearly from the start, having for years

preferred the concept of a balance of power,

which was the *idée fixe* of the British

continental policy. The differences between

the superpowers soon meant that instead of

the right to self-determination, Realpolitik,

based on the calculation of power and

national interests, became the guiding

principle.

At the start of the conference, the

position of the main decision-makers on the

issue of Upper Silesia were favourable

towards Poland. However, protracted talks

about the future of the region brought about a

change in the situation.



The Upper Silesian issue as an object of Franco-British political games. A satirical drawing from the era

The decision about where Upper Silesia belonged became part of an open and at times quite intense Franco-British conflict..

France supported solutions that were

favourable for Poland. As a result, it was

described by the German side as *Erfeind*,

“the greatest enemy”, or *Erbfeind*, “the

hereditary enemy” of Germany, who wanted

to hand Upper Silesia over to Poland, as the

Germans argued, without regard for the will

of the population and without considering

the role the German state had played in

shaping the region in the past two centuries.

The Upper Silesian issue thus became

part of the construction of a new European

equilibrium, in which the previous allies –

Great Britain (supported by Italy) and France

– became rivals. Fearing a fast

reconstruction of the military and economic

power of Germany, the French based their

foreign policy on three foundations: a quick

and decisive execution of the Treaty of

Versailles, the further weakening of

Germany, and the strengthening of one of the

Central European states. In the latter role, the

French government saw Poland, which with

their help was to become an important

element of the new European order.

However, a strong Poland meant a

weak Germany and consequently a strong

France, which the British did not want. For

them, the objectives of the Great War had

been mostly achieved with the destruction of

the German high seas fleet and the

dismantling of the German colonial empire.

All that was needed was to receive

substantial reparations. From there, it was

only a step to the famous and oft-quoted

(although frequently erroneously) statement

by D. Lloyd George, made during the Paris

Peace Conference that “giving the industry

of Silesia to the Poles would be like giving a

watch to a monkey”. The British also had a

strongly negative view of Polish competence

in the field of economy.

Finally, for the leaders of the third of the European powers deciding about the post-war order in Italy, the Upper Silesian issue was of secondary importance, being only one of many elements of the post-war political mosaic. It was only with time that fears of the rise of France’s position brought the Italian politicians closer to the British attitude. At the same time, the passage of time and progressing talks made it clear that the President of the United States increasingly avoided involvement in political activities concerning Europe.

The results of the differences in the vision of Europe’s future first included, among others, the Upper Silesian plebiscite of 20 March 1921 and then the widely divergent concepts for the demarcation of the Polish-German border in the region.

While the organisation of the plebiscite

was still a consequence of the principle of

national self-determination advocated by

T.W. Wilson, subsequent actions were a

good illustration of the so-called Realpolitik

put into practice by the leaders of the

European powers. Consequently, in addition

to steps taken directly in Upper Silesia and

the diplomatic activities of the Polish and

German sides, it is worth noting that the

complex “jigsaw puzzle” also consisted of

events taking place in other parts of the

world, such as the conference held in the

Belgian town of Spa in mid-1920, when

Germany’s delay in implementing the Treaty

of Versailles and its refusal to pay

reparations necessitated the need for Britain

to support France, or the so-called Greco-

Turkish affair of mid-1921, when the French

government’s concessions to Great Britain

outside Europe brought about a similar

British attitude towards France in Europe

(including the “Upper Silesia issue”).

The decision of the Council

(Conference) of Ambassadors about the

division of the region on 20 October 1921

was thus the conclusion to a complicated and

lengthy process, lasting over two years, of

shaping the influence of the victorious

powers. Although the border settlement did

not ultimately satisfy any of the rival sides, it

was generally perceived as a victory not only

for the Poles, but also for the French,

especially given that shortly after the Second

Republic of Poland took over the so-called

Polish Upper Silesia, a large part of the

industry there ended up in French hands.

## TIMELINE

1921

21 Col. Paweł Chrobok (codename “Kunowski”) appointed head of the Plebiscite Defence

Command

61 plebiscite rules proclamation issued by the

Inter-Allied Administration and Plebiscite

Commission

23 Inter-Allied Commission sets plebiscite date

for 20 March

18 Peace of Riga – end of Polish-Bolshevik war

20 plebiscite in Upper Silesia

22 Wojciech Korfanty declares Polish victory in

plebiscite

5 Lt. Col. Maciej Mielżyński (codename

“Nowina-Doliwa”) appointed head of Plebiscite

Defence Command after dismissal of Col.

Chrobok 26 Lt. Gen. Kazimierz Sosnowski orders

the PDC to be placed under Wojciech Korfanty’s

command; Lt. Col. Mielżyński orders insurgent

forces split into three operational units: 1. “North”

Group, 2. “East” Group, 3. “South” Group

28 Lt. Wojciech Korfanty and Polish Consul in

Opole, Daniel Keszycycki, meet with Gen. Henri Le

Rond in the Black Forest, likely to inform the

French about the planned start of the uprising in

Upper Silesia



Propaganda posters about plebiscites in Schleswig and Carinthia after World War I



PHOTO COLLECTION BY FREDERICK THE GREAT FOR HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPHY

## Plebiscites in post-Versailles Europe

In most of the territories where plebiscites were held, despite the borders being set out according to their results, political conflicts did not end

Ryszard Kaczmarek  
Silesian University in Katowice

The defeat of Germany in World War I was a triumph of an alliance of five superpowers: Great Britain, France, the United States, Italy and Japan. When the conference that would prepare peace with Germany was ceremonially opened on 18 January 1919 at the headquarters of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris, the leaders of the European Powers – British Prime Minister Lloyd George, French Prime Minister Clemenceau and Italian Prime Minister Orlando – knew that this time, Europe's borders would not be drawn arbitrarily, but in accordance with the new vision of a world order brought from overseas by American President Woodrow Wilson. Even during World War I, the American leader said that the new peace must be based not on harming the defeated side, but on justice and law. Thus, he presented these conditions for a future peace in Europe at a session of the combined houses of Congress on 8 January 1918. European politicians in allied countries, eagerly waiting for the Americans to join the war, did not attempt to explain the complexity of the historical and ethnic situation, especially in Central and Eastern Europe.

Ultimately, the solutions adopted in the Treaty of Versailles were the result of two tendencies. The first of these was the American president's desire for the emergence of small and medium-sized nation states, whose sovereignty, according to the principle of self-determination, would be guaranteed by a collective security system (the League of Nations). However, it is also easy to see in the treaty the effects of the British desire to maintain the traditional balance of power on the continent, and thus to limit the weakening of Germany, contrary to French hopes. Lloyd George made a concession only in the case of Alsace-Lorraine, accepting the annexation of these provinces to France, which had already been announced by Marshal Foch in 1918.

The plebiscites were only a small part of the Versailles Treaty's vision of the European post-war order. They were conducted in relatively small territories, where the pre-war borders definitely did not correspond to ethnic divisions, and where the superpowers could not come to an agreement on an arbitrary drawing of the new border.

The adoption of the principle of a vote by the entire population was thus not a common solution, but an exception. It was not a question of eliminating multi-ethnic and multicultural regions; people were aware that, because of the plebiscites, questions of rights for many national and cultural minorities, important to Europe's future, would emerge. Nevertheless, the vote was intended to give the superpowers an excuse to make decisions where they could not find a shared solution through compromise.

Plebiscites were to be held in the following areas bordering Germany: on the border with Belgium, in the municipalities of Eupen and Malmédy (after the vote in 1925, this territory was annexed into the Kingdom of Belgium; both municipalities have a significant German minority to this day); on the border with France, in the Territory of the Saar Basin, a plebiscite was announced after 15 years of a League of Nations protectorate (shortly after Hitler came to power, in a 1935 vote, a vast majority of the inhabitants voted in favour of a return to Germany);

on the border with Denmark, in Schleswig, a 1920 plebiscite divided the region into the northern part, where the majority voted in favour of Denmark, and, more to the south, Central Schleswig, where the Germans were successful:

- on the Polish-German border, plebiscites concerning the border questions were to take place in: 1. Warmia, Masuria and Powiśle (the vote was held on 11 July 1920 and the majority voted for annexation to Germany; Poland was granted only a few municipalities in Powiśle and Masuria, while the national border was drawn along the east shore of the Vistula); 2. Upper Silesia, where the plebiscite was not held until 1921, and where the eastern part of the plebiscite area was granted to Poland only after the Third Silesian Uprising, after negotiations were renewed in Paris and the League of Nations announced the decision of the superpowers.

The principle of settling disputed issues in certain border areas, adopted in Versailles for the German borders, were also extended to some border areas of the former Austro-Hungarian empire after the signing of peace treaties with Austria and Hungary. On this basis, plebiscites were held:

- on the Austrian-Yugoslav border in southern Carinthia in 1920 (60% of votes for Austria);

- on the Austrian-Hungarian border in Sopron (German: Ódenburg) in 1921 (more than 65% of votes for Hungary);

- on the Polish-Czechoslovak border, plebiscites were also to take place (in Cieszyn Silesia, Spiš and Orava), but ultimately they were not held; Poland, threatened by the Soviet offensive, agreed to an arbitration by the superpowers in 1920 and, as a result, to an unfavourable division of the disputed territory.

The idea of holding plebiscites in various border areas, proposed at the Peace Conference in Paris, and later also used to determine the new Austrian border, seems fair and noble today, if we are unaware of its historical context. The people themselves were to decide what country they wanted to be part of. Unfortunately, as it turned out, the results of the vote did not solve political problems, much less the ethnic and cultural differences. In most of the territories where plebiscites were held, despite the borders being set out according to their results, political conflicts did not end. After World War II, the idea of the plebiscites was not taken up again. The shape of the borders in Central and Eastern Europe was determined by leaders of the victorious superpowers at international conferences. Their guarantor was to be a new international organisation (the UN), which this time included the United States.

UPRISING GUIDE. SEE INTERESTING PLACES ASSOCIATED WITH THE THIRD SILESIAN UPRISING

**OBERGLOGAU (GŁOGÓWEK), OPPERSDORFF CASTLE**  
 During the Third Silesian Uprising, the castle housed the staff of the German Selbstschutz commander, Gen. Karl Hofer. Paradoxically, the owner of the site at the time, Hans Georg Graf von Oppersdorff (German aristocrat and Catholic politician) voted during the plebiscite for Upper Silesia to become part of Poland.

**SANKT ANNABERG (GÓRA ŚWIĘTEJ ANNY)**  
 The region of Sankt Annaberg (Góra Świętej Anny) was the site of key conflicts during the Third Silesian Uprising. The insurgents arrived there on 8 May 1921. Several days later, on 21 May, the German Selbstschutz launched a counter-offensive, relatively quickly capturing the insurgents' positions. However, this was only the beginning of the largest battle of the Third Silesian Uprising. The fierce struggle for Sankt Annaberg (Góra Świętej Anny) went on for many more days.

**SLAWENTZITZ (ŚLAWĘCICE), HOHENLOHE FAMILY PALACE RUINS**  
 The local palace, which has not survived to the present day, temporarily housed the headquarters of the First Division of the Insurgent Army commanded by Major Jan Józef Ludya-Laskowski. In the photo a group of insurgent officers in front of the Slawentzitz (Ślawęcice) palace, from left: cryptologist Lt. Jan Kowalewski, Capt. Jan Chodźko, Capt. Robert Oszek, Capt. Leon Bulkowski.

**GUTTENTAG (DOBRODZIEŃ), RAILWAY STATION**  
 On 4-6 May 1921, Guttentag (Dobrodzień) was the arena of intense fighting, which ended with the city under the control of the insurgents. During the fighting, the local railway station took significant damage when it found itself under insurgent artillery fire. In the photo, one of the destroyed steam locomotives.

**RYBNIK, STATE HOSPITAL FOR MENTAL DISEASES**  
 On 3 May 1921, the hospital premises became the arena of a fierce battle between Silesian insurgents and German troops and Italian soldiers supporting them. The insurgents were victorious in the battle; however, both sides suffered bloody losses. The Rybnik hospital has a long history with plenty of dramatic events.

**KATOWICE-SZOPIENICE, SECONDARY SCHOOL NO. 6 IN KATOWICE**  
 During the Third Silesian Uprising, this building housed the headquarters of the insurgents' General Civil Authority, headed by Wojciech Korfanty. Also located in Schoppinitz (Szopienice) was the General Command of the Insurgent Army, led by Lt. Col. Maciej Mielżyński (later Lt. Col. Kazimierz Zentkeller).

**KATOWICE, GARRISON CEMETERY ON METEOROLOGÓW STREET**  
 This military necropolis is the burial site of, among others, Silesian insurgents, including Capt. Robert Oszek. During the Third Uprising, Capt. Oszek commanded a unit of Polish sailors equipped with improvised armoured vehicles. The formation took place in, among others, the battle for Góra Świętej Anny, contributing to the halting of the German offensive.

**KANDRZIN-COSEL (KĘDZIERZYN-KOŹLE), RAILWAY STATION**  
 During the Third Silesian Uprising, Kandrzin (Kędzierzyn) was of strategic importance for both sides of the conflict because of the railway hub located there. For this reason, the town became the scene of two bloody battles that lasted several days. The Kandrzin (Kędzierzyn) railway station was fought over with particular ferocity.

TIMELINE			
30 IV	meeting of Polish political and military leaders called by Korfanty; decision made to begin an uprising	2 V	beginning of general strike in Upper Silesia
1 V	publication of a press dispatch, falsified by Korfanty, stating that the Allies had taken a decision, disadvantageous for Poland, concerning the division of Upper Silesia; Korfanty gives the order to the command of the PDC to begin the insurrection action on the night of 2 May 1921	23 V-5 VII	Third Silesian Uprising
		23-10 V	first stage of the uprising
7	strategic railway bridges of the Destruction Group commanded by Konrad Wawelberg (Capt. Tadeusz Puszczyński); towns captured by the insurgent forces: Königsblütte (Królewska Huta), Tarnowitz (Tarnowskie Góry). Unsuccessful attempts to capture Gleiwitz (Gliwice), Rybnik and Pleß (Pszczyna), battles for Kandrzin (Kędzierzyn) and Alt Cosel (Stare Koźle).	23 V	Operation "Mosty" [Bridges] - destruction of 7 strategic railway bridges by the Destruction Group
30 V	insurgent army temporarily captures Katowice, beginning of encirclement of the city	3 V	fighting between insurgent units and Italian troops in Rybnik; unsuccessful attempt to capture Groß Strehlitz (Strzelec Opolskie) by troops of the Polish "Harden" Sub-Group; clash with the Italian troops

# The Upper Silesian plebiscite of 20 March 1921 – the course of voting

Both the Polish and German sides presented the plebiscite as their own success

Angelika Bilinda  
IPN Katowice

The plebiscite, set for 20 March 1921, was to finally resolve the conflict over where Upper Silesia belonged. Both sides looked forward to it hoping for victory. The optimistic mood among the Poles was boosted by the press, which wrote extensively about the upcoming annexation of Upper Silesia into the Polish state, constantly urging inhabitants of the region to cast their vote for Poland and to encourage the undecided and hesitant to head to the polls. The German press echoed these sentiments, of course encouraging people to vote to keep the region within the Reich. The intensive propaganda and anticipation of the upcoming resolution undoubtedly raised the overall tensions in the plebiscite area.

**Everyone received two white cards...** Despite emotions flying high, the vote took place in a calm atmosphere. To maintain order and avoid conflict, the Inter-Allied Administrative and Plebiscite Commission issued an ordinance on 3 March, under which, starting on 9 March, it was prohibited under penalty of a fine or imprisonment, to carry out plebiscite agitation or to sell or distribute alcoholic beverages. Wojciech Korfanty also called for keeping the peace, appealing to the inhabitants to not let the other side provoke them and not to act rashly.

The vote lasted from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Before it began, members of electoral commissions were obliged to ensure that the urn was empty, after which they secured it with two locks, the keys to which were held by the commission chair and deputy chair. Every person eligible to vote, after providing their identification, received an envelope with a seal of the Inter-Allied Administrative and Plebiscite Commission along with two white ballot cards, labelled "Polska-Polen" and "Deutschland-Niemcy". Upper Silesians previously received identical cards from Polish and German trustees, which was intended to guard against possible fraud. After receiving such a "package", the voter went into a specially designated room, which took the form of a closed wooden booth, placed their chosen card into the envelope, showed their identification again to confirm their right to vote, and then placed the ballot in the urn.



Polling station in Katowice, 20 March 1921

It is worth noting that so-called "emigrants" – people born in Upper Silesia but no longer residing there – received ballot cards in a different colour, which made it easy to tabulate their votes.

Meanwhile, the staff of the Polish plebiscite campaign continued to work at the Lomnitz Hotel. The results from individual municipalities were tracked and analysed in the Statistical Department, which also compared them to previously prepared estimates. Newspapers also asked their readers to send in the results of the vote. **Watch closely what the Germans are doing** It should be emphasised that before the plebiscite, many flyers appeared in the area, informing the inhabitants of Upper Silesia what to do in order to ensure the vote they cast remained valid. In fear of the opponent's forgeries, the advice was to destroy unused ballot cards to prevent them from fraudulently being used again. The fear of forgeries was very visible and shared by both sides. The Polish Plebiscite Commissariat appealed to the Upper Silesians to closely observe the Germans' actions. There was even an award set for people who detected any abuse in the process of preparing electoral lists or during the voting itself. All irregularities were to be reported either to the Polish Plebiscite Commissariat or to the Polish Plebiscite Committees.

In the last hours before the vote, Upper Silesians were also alerted to fake ballot cards and warned against attempts to destroy the proper ones, which they had previously received from Polish trustees.

1 190 637 people (97.5% of those eligible) took part in the plebiscite, including 191,303 so-called "emigrants". 479,365 (40.3%) votes were cast for Poland and 707,393 (59.7%) for Germany. Interestingly, the Germans, with a few exceptions, triumphed in the cities and won among the so-called "emigrants", winning 95% of the votes in this group. However, according to the Treaty of Versailles, the results of the plebiscite were tabulated by municipalities.

Each of them was a separate voting district, which in practice meant that regardless of the number of voters, a city had the same significance as a village. In this case, the votes were split a little differently. In 44.7% of the municipalities, which were mainly rural, located east of the Oder line, the majority of the inhabitants voted in favour of incorporating Upper Silesia into Poland.

As a result, each side presented the plebiscite as their own success. Germany received the majority of all the votes, while Poland won in the eastern municipalities. This carried significant interpretative difficulties, with which the members of the Inter-Allied Administrative and Plebiscite Commission now had to deal with.



French Renault FT tank in the Katowice market square on the day of the plebiscite

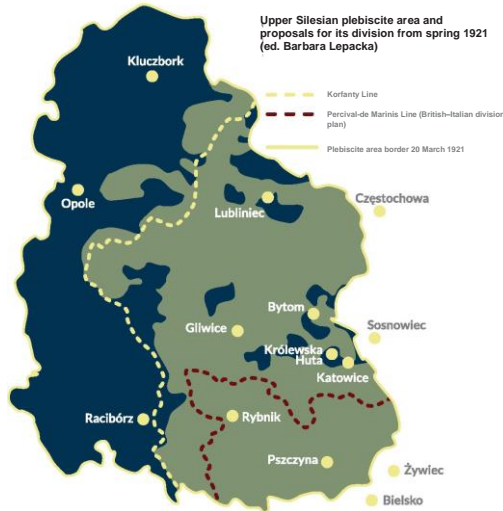
# Ideas for the Division of Upper Silesia After the Plebiscite

The settlement of the Upper Silesian matter depended on the representatives of the Allied countries

Renata Skoczek  
IPN Katowice

Contrary to expectations, the plebiscite did not settle the issue of Upper Silesia decisively. The ambiguous results of the vote led both Poles and Germans to interpret them in their favour. As early as 22 March 1921, Wojciech Korfanty, as the Polish Plebiscite Commissioner, issued a proclamation which read, "Compatriots! We have won a great historic victory in the struggle for the national belonging of Upper Silesia and the freedom and happiness of the Polish people. We have not managed [...] to gain the whole territory of Upper Silesia, but what we did gain is the most valuable part of it. In vain are the recent German prevarications, which try to convince the residents of Upper Silesia and the world that Upper Silesia is one indivisible whole and that the absolute majority of votes in the entire plebiscite territory decides on where Upper Silesia belongs".

This was followed by a listing of the exact course of the proposed border line dividing the plebiscite area into the eastern part, which was to be adjoined to Poland, and the western part, which was to be allocated to Germany. The argument in favour of dividing the disputed areas was to be the fact that over 70% of municipalities in the eastern part of the plebiscite area voted for Poland, and proponents of uniting the disputed area to the Polish state obtained an absolute majority of votes. The demarcation line, named the Korfanty Line after the Plebiscite Commissioner, was to run from the Czechoslovak Bohemia, along the Oder River, and then north-east along the Groß Strehlitz (Strzelce Opolskie) district, partly through the Oppeln (Opole) district, and farther along through the Rosenberg (Olesno) district to the Polish border. The Polish side would include 59.1% of the disputed territory inhabited by 70.1% of the population, along with the entire industrial district.



On the basis of the plebiscite results, the German government demanded restoration of authority over the entire plebiscite area, refusing to consider the loss of any districts, even those where a decisive majority voted for Poland.

Several days after the plebiscite, newspapers reported that the resolution of the Upper Silesian issue was up to the Allied Supreme Council, an executive body of the Peace Conference comprising of the heads of government of the great powers, to which the Inter-Allied Administrative and Plebiscite Commission would propose drawing a new border between Poland and Germany, taking into account the geographic and economic situation of individual towns.

The Polish press urged calm, arguing that any attempts to fight could change France's favourable attitude. Polish Prime Minister Wincenty Witos, in a letter to Wojciech Korfanty, expressed his hope that after the case was soon settled in the international forum, "Upper Silesian Poles will be reunited with Poland, welcomed with the greatest joy by the whole Republic of Poland".

PHOTO: HISTORICAL MAPS

In mid-April, the matter of Upper Silesia was taken up in Paris at a meeting of the Parliamentary Commission for Foreign Affairs, during which the French Prime Minister Aristide Briand proposed that the entire eastern plebiscite area, along with the "industrial triangle" should be annexed to Poland, leaving the entire agricultural area to Germany. Great Britain, supported by Italy, consistently proposed dividing the territory in such a way that the industrial area would remain wholly within German borders.

In the absence of compromise, the chairman of the Inter-Allied Commission, Gen. Henri Le Rond sent two entirely conflicting proposals for the division of Upper Silesia to the forum of the Supreme Council. The British-Italian proposal, called the Percival-de Marinis Line, after the names of the countries' representatives in the Inter-Allied Commission, was decidedly unfavourable to Poland, as it left the industrial area and most of the plebiscite area to Germany. The Polish side would only include the Pleß (Pszczyna) and Rybnik districts, a fragment of the Ratibor (Racibórz) district, and small fragments of the Polish border-adjacent Tost-Gleiwitz (Gliwice), Hindenburg (Zabrze), Beuthen (Bytom), Lublinitz (Lubliniec) and Rosenberg (Olesno) districts. In total, this was 25.6% of the plebiscite area, inhabited by 21% of the population, without the largest Upper Silesian cities or industrial plants. The French proposal, presenting a modified Korfanty Line under the name Le Rond Line, differed only slightly from the Polish concept. Poland was to receive the entire industrial district, but Germany would keep some areas in the north-east of the plebiscite territory, where they won the majority of the votes. The border would run along the Oder River; however, the western part of the Groß Strehlitz (Strzelce Opolskie) district would remain on the German side. In the northern section, the border cut through the Lublinitz (Lubliniec) district, with the town of Lublinitz remaining on the Polish side and the town of Guttentag (Dobrodzień) on the German side. North of Guttentag (Dobrodzień), the eastern fragment of the Rosenberg (Olesno) district would be incorporated into Poland.

Poles had already received alarming news through diplomatic channels that the Supreme Council did not intend to consider the partition concept proposed by France and that the chances of the Percival-de Marinis line being recognised as the future border were growing. The official review of both proposals was to take place at the beginning of May, at a Council meeting held in London. In this situation, Wojciech Korfanty, with the support of Upper Silesian politicians, having the approval of the Polish government, the aid of the Polish army, and the unofficial support of Gen. Le Rond, made the decision to begin the uprising on the night of 2 May.

**TIMELINE**

**4 V** Wojciech Korfanty becomes dictator of the uprising; the insurgents capture, among others, Hindenburg (Zabrze), Ślawentzitz (Ślawęcie), Zalesie, Ujest (Ujazd), Landsberg in Oberschlesien (Gorzów Śląski), Loslau (Wodzisław Śląski)

**5 V** insurgents control majority of the area demarcated by the Korfanty Line

**6 V** Guttentag (Dobrodzień) captured by insurgent troops; large rally of solidarity with Upper Silesia in Teatralny Square in Warsaw

**7 V** Groß Strehlitz (Strzelce Opolskie) captured by insurgents as a result of agreement with the allies

**8 V** insurgents capture Deschowitz (Zdzieszowice), Annaberg (Góra Świętej Anny) and reach the Oder; formal establishment of the Selbstschutz Oberschlesien

**9 V** Kandrzin (Kędzierzyn) and Cosel Port (Kozłe Port) taken by insurgents after heavy fighting; capture of bridgehead on the left side of the Oder near Siechowice; creation of First Division of the Insurgent Army consisting of "East" Group units; Wojciech Korfanty signs truce as a result of negotiations with Gen. Le Rond, the truce was not recognised by the German side.

**10 V** daily order from Korfanty declares the uprising victorious and a proclamation to the people calling for a return to work, end of first offensive stage of the uprising.

Z komentarzem [A1]: Tłumacz nie znalazł żadnej wzmianki o tym mieście

## Outbreak of the uprising – first fights victorious for the Polish side

The Third Silesian Uprising was the first of the Silesian insurgencies that was not only agreed upon with representatives of the Polish state, but also received political and military support

Michał Miwa-Miot  
IPN Katowice

As the date of the plebiscite approached, people realised the great importance of the decisions to be taken, so talks between Silesian activists and the Polish Ministry of Military Affairs had been ongoing for months. As early as January 1921, a plan was drawn up for an uprising that was to break out if the situation called for it. In April, when it became known that the Inter-Allied Plebiscite Commission planned to divide Upper Silesia along the Percival-de Marinis Line, which was unfavourable for Poland, an extraordinary meeting was held. It was attended by the Polish Army plenipotentiary, Maj. Roman Abraham, other military officers from the Plebiscite Defence Command, as well as politicians associated with Wojciech Korfanty. It was agreed then that the decision about the outbreak of fighting would be up to Korfanty, who was soon to become the dictator and hold political power over the uprising.

Korfanty's goal was simple: an armed demonstration to convince international opinion of a different division of Upper Silesia and consequently, the incorporation of a part of it, including the industrial district, into Poland. Korfanty intended to achieve political victory through a policy of *fait accompli*: to occupy the areas in which the majority of the plebiscite participants voted for Poland. This line was approximately delineated by the Oder-based Korfanty Line. Reaching and holding this line was the basic task. It was assumed that the insurgent forces would be able to handle the German self-defence on their own, while the key to success would be preventing the sending of reinforcements from deeper in Germany.

A special sabotage group under Capt. Tadeusz Puszczynski (codename Wawelberg) special sabotage was tasked with blowing up railway viaducts on routes connecting the Upper Silesian plebiscite area with the Weimar Republic. This operation was carried out on the night of 2 May under the codename "Mosty" [Bridges]. Insurgent troops soon attacked a number of towns. The Germans allowed themselves to be taken by surprise, even though lively movement on the eastern border of the plebiscite area could be observed for some time already. Weapons and military equipment were supplied from the Polish side, officers of the Polish Army slipped over the border, Polish Red Cross trucks appeared (many commanders, including Maciej Mielżyński, Jan Ludzga-Laskowski and Jan Wyglenda, would later praise the organisation and work of the medical services in the uprising).



Ceremony in Szopienice, the handing over of a banner to the insurgents by the inhabitants of Lviv. Jan Ludzga-Laskowski speaking, Wojciech Korfanty sitting next to him, May 1921.



Insurgent unit during the Third Silesian Uprising

The previous two Silesian uprisings were preceded by a general strike. When it began on 2 May 1921, it was a clear signal that armed action would come any day now. Fighting broke out in a vast area from Kreuzburg (Kluczbork) and Rosenberg (Olesno) regions in the north, to Loslau (Wodzisław) in the south. It was immediately apparent that it was not a spontaneous uprising, but a well-prepared military operation supported by the Polish state.

In his "Manifesto to the People of Upper Silesia", published on 3 May, Korfanty explained the objectives of the uprising. The existing Plebiscite Defence Command was transformed into the Supreme Command of the Insurgent Army, and Lt. Col. Maciej Mielżyński (codename "Nowina-Doliwa") was appointed the commander-in-chief.

The Germans did not expect the momentum with which the insurgent troops took action. They made many official complaints to the Inter-Allied Commission, especially about the passivity of the French troops, while the members of the German underground Fighting Organisation of Upper Silesia (Kampforganisation Oberschlesien) mostly retreated behind the Oder River. The fierce resistance put up at some points did not prevent the insurgents from capturing almost the entire area delineated by the Korfanty Line in the first week of May.

The Polish plans for Upper Silesia were supported by the French army, while the British and the Italians were hostile. After the outbreak of fighting, efforts were made to avoid the Allied garrisons so as not to provoke additional conflicts. As the Germans were better organised in the cities – there were more members of the self-defence, German Plebiscite Police and city guards, as well as Allied troops stationed there – the insurgents gave up on capturing them, and instead began the process of encirclement, or creating blockades. In this way, in the first days of May, the blockades covered Gleiwitz (Gliwice), Katowice, Königshütte (Królewska Huta), Hindenburg (Zabrze), Beuthen (Bytom), Tarnowitz (Tarnowski Góry) and Rybnik.

The beginning of the uprising was marked by the successful implementation of the plan: the interruption of transport routes leading to Germany, the occupation of the plebiscite area and the encirclement of cities. The area up to the Oder was under control, so Korfanty considered an armed demonstration sufficient and called off the general strike on 6 May. Everything was supposed to return to normal, but German resistance began to grow and the fighting intensified, especially in the area of the railway station in Kandrzin (Kędzierzyn), where armoured trains had already been used. When the insurgents captured that town on 9 May, with its strategic railway junction, the dictator once again decided to extinguish the conflict and consummate the political benefits offered by the successes of the Silesian insurrection. This was the end of the first stage of the Third Uprising, decisively victorious for the Polish side. Once formed, the front line was about 150 km long.



# Wawelberg Destruction Group

Polish diversionary actions had a real influence on the course of military operations

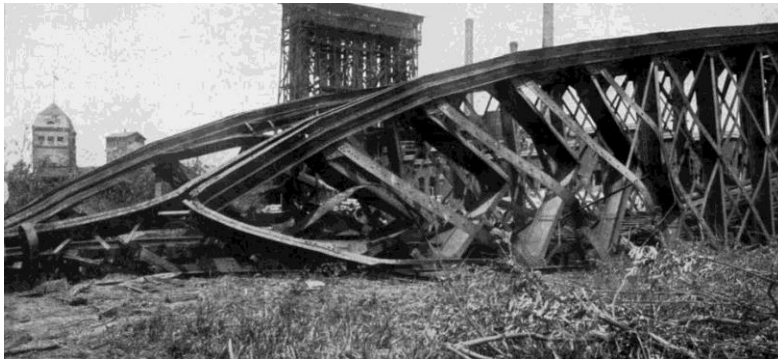
Adam Kurus  
IPN Katowice

Although the formal beginnings of Polish diversion can be traced back to 1923, when a special extra-frontal diversion unit was formed within the Second Division of the General Staff of the Polish Army, the first attempts at organised operations behind enemy lines were made much earlier. In this context, a special place belongs to the so-called Wawelberg Destruction Group, considered to be the first unit of its type, and what is particularly important, carrying out its tasks in the combat conditions of the Third Silesian Uprising.

The newly established High Command of the Polish Army was well aware of the role played by the actions carried out behind enemy lines. The Polish experience with diversionary activities included actions carried out by the Combat Organisation of the Polish Socialist Party (Organizacja Bojowa Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej) and then by the so-called "flying squads" of the Polish Military Organisation. Together with the experience gained by officers and soldiers during their service in the armies of the partitioning states, they made it possible to organise the first diversionary units as early as 1919.

During this period, the threat of a German attack on the reborn Polish state was still real, and one of the main enemy strikes was expected from the direction of Silesia. After the failure of the First Silesian Uprising, the situation became incredibly tense. It was clear that despite the plebiscite being ordered, the enemy would do everything to keep Upper Silesia within German borders.

**Spectacular action**  
The Polish side, unable to openly conduct military operations on behalf of the insurgents, undertook diplomatic actions, organised supplies of weapons and provisions, as well as formed the first volunteer units. Rarely mentioned, however, are the actions taken during this period to paralyse German transport routes within Silesia. One of the most spectacular actions was carried out on the night of 7 September 1919, when a six-man Polish diversion unit blew up one of the railway bridges near Löwen (Lewin Brzeski), which interrupted the main Breslau (Wrocław)–Oppeln (Opole) railway connection for more than two weeks.



The Polish side used diversionary tactics throughout the Third Uprising. Among other things, on 4 June 1921, during the German offensive on Kandrzin (Kędzierzyn), the insurgents blew up the bridge on the Oder in Cosel (Kozie)

The action was a complete surprise for the German side, since a strike so far in the rear was not expected – Löwen (Lewin Brzeski, presently in the Opole Voivodeship) was located about 90 km in a straight line from the then Polish-German border in Herby (near Częstochowa), where the Polish saboteurs crossed the border. It is worth noting that despite being pursued, all participants safely returned to Poland, and their daring action provoked wide coverage and outrage in the German press.

It was the experiences mentioned above, among others, that were the starting point for the creation of the first formal diversionary structure. In December 1920, Division II of the Supreme Command of the Polish Army set up the Destruction Section of the Plebiscite Defence Command, which after the outbreak of the Third Silesian Uprising was renamed the Wawelberg Destruction Group, after the codename of its commander, Capt. Tadeusz Puszczyński, codename "Konrad Wawelberg". The top-secret unit was made up of Polish Army officers, members of diversionary groups from the period of the Second Uprising, as well as the former PPS Combat Emergency Squads.

In February 1921, it comprised a total of 46 officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers. At the beginning of 1921, Capt. Puszczyński was appointed commander, and Lt. Stanisław Baczyński as his deputy. The command was divided into five groups: group "A" of Opole, group "G" ("Główna" – Main), group "U" ("Unieruchomienia" – Immobilisations), and groups "E" and "N". **Blowing up railway bridges** The most spectacular action was carried out on the night 2 May 1921, just before the outbreak of the Third Uprising. As part of a secret operation code-named "Mosty" [Bridges], the Wawelberg Destruction Group (formally, the name had been functioning since 7 May) blew up seven bridges on key railway lines connecting Silesia with the rest of Germany, including bridges near Oppeln (Opole), Alt Poppelau (Popielów), Konstadt (Wolczyn), Oberglogau (Głogówek) and Deutsch Rasselwitz (Racławice Śląskie). It was the largest Polish operation of its kind, planned in detail and synchronised, and in addition fully successful. It undoubtedly had a significant impact on the final success of the Third Silesian Uprising, paralysing German support, troop movements and supply transports.

In the following days, the Destruction Group took part in regular insurgent fights for Groß Strehlitz (Strzelce Opolskie), and then, withdrawn from the front line, it underwent reorganisation, during which its ranks grew to 130 officers and soldiers.

The group was divided into four units: the destructive sub-groups "East", "North" and "South", as well as a reserve unit. Re-integrated into the fighting, the Destruction Group was not withdrawn until mid-June, when the insurgent command decided to use it as basis for the creation of an assault unit under the new name of Konrad Wawelberg Group. Ultimately, the unit commanded by Capt. Puszczyński was disbanded after the end of the Third Silesian Uprising, in July 1921.

Undoubtedly, well-prepared diversionary activities played a significant role in the highly urbanised and communicated area of Silesia and had a real impact on the course of regular military operations. Based on the experience gathered from diversionary actions carried out in the period of the Silesian Uprisings, a special extra-frontal diversionary cell was created in 1923 within the framework of Division II of the General Staff of the Polish Army, as mentioned in the introduction. It may therefore be stated that the Wawelberg Destruction Group became the prototype for Polish special forces units, the level of whose training the Polish Army is famous for to this day.

## TIMELINE

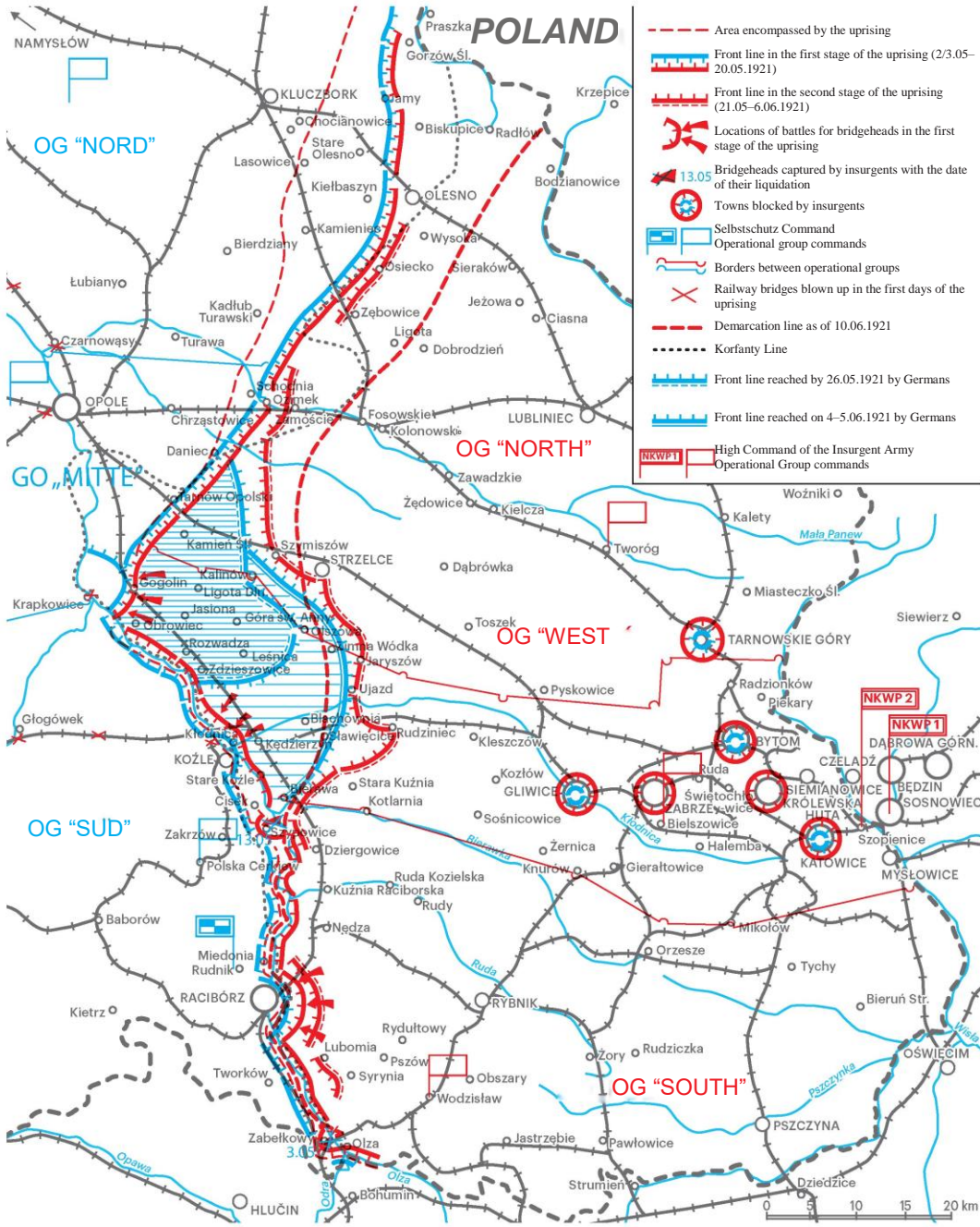
**11–20 V** second stage of the uprising relative stagnation on the fronts – Korfianty's unsuccessful attempts to conclude a truce and end the fighting – mobilisation and first counterattacks by German troops  
**11/12 V** fighting in the region of Rosenberg (Olesno)

**12 V** France, Britain and Italy reject a proposal by the Berlin government to place German Security Police units under Allied command for use against the insurgents  
**13 V** insurgents lose the bridgehead near Szybowice; British Prime Minister David Lloyd George gives anti-Polish speech – announcement of sanctions against the insurgents

**14 V** German troops capture the Strzebiń farm near Gogolin; French Prime Minister Aristide Briand sharply responds to Lloyd George's speech  
**15 V** insurgents recapture Gogolin  
**16 V** Wojciech Korfianteg sends note to Lloyd George

**17 V** insurgent troops retreat from Gogolin  
**18 V** clashes in the region of Landsberg in Oberschlesien (Gorzów Śląski); Zembowitz (Zębówice), near Szybowice; Wincenty Witos gives a speech in the Constituent Assembly of the Republic of Poland – statement of Poland's rights to Upper Silesia

MAP OF INSURGENT FIGHTING



# Polish forces during the Third Uprising. Numbers, structure, leaders

“From this moment on, you are soldiers” (from W. Korfanty’s Manifesto)

Zbigniew Golasz  
Museum in Gliwice

After the end of the Second Silesian Uprising, the Polish Military Organisation of Upper Silesia was transformed into the Headquarters for Physical Education and then into the Plebiscite Defence Command, formally subordinated to the Polish Plebiscite Commissariat. In fact, the conflict continued between the liminary leaders, who were pushing for an armed solution, and its opponent, Wojciech Korfanty, who *volens volens* soon himself gave the order for armed combat. The final uprising, however, was not spontaneous, unlike the previous ones. Indeed, preparations for a military showdown had been under way for some time and accelerated after the plebiscite loss, when rumours emerged of proposals for settling the dispute that were unfavourable for Poland. Let us therefore take a look at the Polish forces during the final battle.

## Organisation and command

In the middle of the third decade of April, the Polish forces in Upper Silesia were reorganised and split into three large tactical units: northern, eastern and southern. Their command staffs were also established. The largest and strongest Group “East”, commanded by Karol Grzesik, consisted of 9 regiments from Beuthen (Bytom), Gleiwitz (Gliwice), Katowice, Königshütte (Królewska Huta), Pleß (Pszczyna) and Hindenburg (Zabrze), made up of 34 battalions. It concentrated half the insurgent forces, and its headquarters were located in Bielschowitz (Bielszowice). Group “South”, commanded by Lt. Col. Bolesław Sikorsky consisted of 4 regiments from Rybnik, Ratibor (Racibórz), Loslau (Wodzisław) and Sohrau (Zory), made up of 12 battalions, with the headquarters in Loslau (Wodzisław). In turn, Group “North”, under the command of Capt. Alojzy Nowak, with its headquarters in Tworog (Tworóg), was made up of the forces from the Cosel (Koźle), Lublinitz (Lubliniec), Rosenberg (Olesno), Groß Strehlitz (Strzelce Opolskie) and Tarnowitz (Tarnowski Góry) districts, numbering 16 battalions. In addition, it included a squadron of artillery and a squadron of cavalry.



Wojciech Korfanty pointing to the Korfanty Line, demarcating the area where the majority of the municipality inhabitants voted for Poland in the plebiscite. Engraving of Stanisław Ligoń on a provisional banknote



Commander-in-chief Lt. Col. Maciej Mielżyński (codename “Nowina-Doliwa”) (1869–1944)

Thus, the operational groups consisted of 3 to 8 infantry regiments of 3–4 battalions and tactical groups in the strength of a regiment, consisting of 2–6 battalions, as well as rear and specialised units (sanitary columns, sappers, etc.). The operational groups were characterised by a high degree of independence and operated independently of each other. With time, they were reorganised. For example, the First Division of the Insurgent Army was formed from Group “East” and transformed into Group “Central” under the command of Capt. Maksymilian Żyła. Courts and field military police were attached to the operational groups.

With the outbreak of the uprising, all these units were subordinated to the Civil High Command, led by Wojciech Korfanty, who proclaimed himself its dictator. He directed military operations with the help of the insurgent command with the Commander-in-Chief. Initially, until 31 May 1921, this function was performed by Lt. Col. Maciej “Nowina-Doliwa” Mielżyński from Greater Poland, and after his dismissal, from 3 June, by Kazimierz “Cietrzew” Zentkeller, also from Greater Poland.

## Troop numbers and equipment

The insurgent troops numbered about 40,000, and during the course of the insurrection, as a result of an influx of volunteers, including from Poland, as well as compulsory conscription, they reached the number of 46,000 men by the end of May: 621 officers (including numerous Polish Army officers), 471 acting officers, 5,978 NCOs and 39,546 privates. The potential was thus half again greater than had been assumed in mid-March 1921. This speaks not only to the enormous mobilisation effort, but also to the organisational capabilities of the military conspiracy structures. The majority of the insurgents had not served in the recently ended world war. Many had no military experience until they joined the ranks of the insurgents. The average age of insurgents was about 23. Most of them were unmarried men with jobs in industry. They soon had to face experienced soldiers from German volunteer corps.

A significant number of weapons used by the insurgents came from secret supplies organised by the Polish Army intelligence service and from the warehouses of the Association of Friends of Upper Silesia, located in borderland towns. The supply of weapons increased significantly in the third decade of May.

The armament consisted of 26,474 rifles, 531 heavy machine guns and 136 light machine guns, 374 grenade launchers, 110 passenger cars and 52 transport cars, 60 motorcycles. Already during the operations, 50 cannons and armoured trains, of which there were 16 in total, including improvised ones, were smuggled from Poland. In addition, the insurgents had 3 armoured cars at their disposal. While the numbers did not look too bad, especially in comparison with previous uprisings, the diversity and provenance of armaments was a major problem. There were Austrian, Russian, German, French and British rifles, which caused technical problems. There was a shortage of parts and problems with obtaining suitable ammunition. Nevertheless, the insurgent army was a sizeable, well-organised and motivated force, which is evidenced by its successes, especially in the first stage of the uprising, and the accomplishment of its objective – the capture of the area up to the so-called Korfanty Line.

## TIMELINE

19 V Lloyd George gives anti-Polish press interview; French government sends note favourable to Poland

20 V Gen. Karl Hofer takes command of all German forces

21 V 5 VI-third stage of the Uprising German counter-offensive, last battles, ceasefire

21 V beginning of German counter-offensive, Selbstschutz units capture Sankt Annaberg (Góra Świętej Anny)

22 V German troops capture Klein Stein (Kamionek) and Groß Stein (Kamień Śląski) and Leschnitz (Leśnica) – unsuccessful insurgent counter-attack on Leschnitz (Leśnica) from the region of Lichynia (Lichynia) and Zalesie; German attacks in the region of Rosenberg (Olesno) and Zembowitz (Zębówice)

23 V unsuccessful attempt to retake Sankt Annaberg (Góra Świętej Anny) by insurgent troops of the “Bogdan” Subgroup; German attack in the region of Odrau (Odra) and Zabelkau (Zabelków)

24 V unsuccessful insurgent attack on Lichynia (Lichynia)

25 V Germans capture Zembowitz (Zębówice); French Prime Minister Briand gives a speech – threat to use force against Germany in

26 V successful insurgent counter-attack in the Rosenberg (Olesno) region; thwarted attempt of a Selbstschutz unit escape from Gleiwitz (Gliwice), encircled by the insurgents

Z komentarzem [A2]:

# Selbstschutz Oberschlesien – German forces during the Third

The highest combat value among the German units was represented by the so-called freikorps

Grzegorz Bębnik  
IPN Katowice

The situation of the German side in 1921 was fundamentally different from that of the two previous years. There was no organised armed formation like the Grenzschutz in 1919 and the Sicherheitspolizei a year later. The German underground, which could have responded to the actions of the Plebiscite Defence Command, i.e. KOOS (Kampf-Organisation Oberschlesiens), was paralysed already on the eve of the plebiscite, when the coalition forces, using information from Polish intelligence, conducted raids on its premises and weapon warehouses. Armaments were lost, many conspirators were arrested, and the rest had to seek refuge in Germany. It is no wonder then that only a week after the uprising started, the insurgent army managed to reach the Korfanty Line, postulated as the future Polish-German border. They encountered no significant resistance along the way, and if they did, it was put up by Italian coalition troops. The remnants of the KOOS either retreated west, or confined themselves to the few cities that remained under Allied protection.

The German response was to be the Self-Defence of Upper Silesia (Selbstschutz Ober-Schlesiens, or SSOS), the seed of which had already begun to form during the insurgent offensive, initially in the south, near Ratibor (Racibórz), and later also in the north, near Kreuzburg (Kluczbork). In the former of those places, as early as on 7 May, Gen. Bernhard von Hülßen (born in Cosel [Koźle]) arrived from Potsdam, in the latter, the SSOS was organised by Lt. Col. Grütznier. Soon the front was divided into three operational units, called groups: "South" (Gen. Hülßen), "Central" (Col. von Holleben) and "North" (Lt. Col. Grütznier). However, it was not until 20 May that overall command was assumed by Pleß (Pszczyna)-born Gen. Karl Hoefler, in 1919 commander of Grenzschutz. As the insurgents were not active in the central section of the front, he eliminated Col. von Holleben's section, but reinforced the forces in the bridgehead in Krappitz (Krapkowice), and moved his headquarters to Oberglogau (Głogówek). All this pointed to preparations for a counter-offensive.

For the time being, however, the appropriate forces had to be gathered.



Group of soldiers from one of the German freikorps during the Third Silesian Uprising

Initially, they consisted of local self-defence units; when Hoefler took command, those unfit for frontline service were separated from them and formed into militia units (the so-called Ortswehr), while the rest were concentrated in marching battalions. However, the area under German control soon saw an influx of volunteers from the interior of the country (and even from beyond), often grouped together in compact formations. These were often units that had already taken part in battles against external or internal enemies, and thus re-established forms of various volunteer corps (freikorps) from 1918–20. As early as 10 May, for example, companies of the Freikorps Oberland arrived from Bavaria; their numbers soon grew to 2,000 frontline soldiers. Breslau students formed the "von Eicken assault company", which later fought as part of the "Heinz assault battalion"; this, of course, refers to Ensign "Heinz" Hauenstein, head of the notorious Spezialpolizei, responsible for numerous assassinations. Aristocrats from Upper Silesia, such as Hyazinth Graf Strachwitz or Hans Heinrich XV von Hochberg, Prince of Pleß (Pszczyna), formed their own units.

The rallying point for the incoming volunteers became the Brieg (Brzeg) airfield, where they were split into individual companies and battalions; the latter constituted the highest tactical unit, although their numbers rarely conformed to accepted norms.

The German government, semi-officially supporting the creation of the SSOS, looked with barely concealed concern especially at the members of the former Freikorps, who were imbued with a radically anti-republican spirit. Similarly, the reactivation of the former Freikorps was welcomed by the German land governments; those where the Social Democrats or Liberals remained in power tried in many ways to obstruct the passage of volunteers and the transport of armaments. It is no wonder; in the notes of one of the SSOS leaders of the time, "Peter" von Heydebreck (Kandrzin [Kędzierzyn] was renamed "Heydebreck O/S" in his honour in 1934), there is a glimmer of hope that the action in Upper Silesia would be the beginning of a crackdown on republican reality. "We can deal with the Poles", von Heydebreck wrote.

"I know that we are just now being given a great opportunity, because the victorious army will not allow itself to simply be sent home again. Woe to him who dares to dissolve it – then *videant consules* (Latin: let the consuls beware)".

In mid-June 1921, the Upper Silesian Selbstschutz reached the apogee of its development.

Gen. Hoefler had at his disposal a general staff headed by Maj. Jacobsen, and the so-called Headquarters of Colonel Becker in Breslau, acting as a link with the rest of Germany. In addition to the two groups, which were divided into a total of seven sections, the most valuable special formations, usually derivatives of the former Freikorps, remained at Hoefler's personal disposal. It was they who largely contributed to the success of the German counter-offensive.

While, especially recently, historians have generally agreed that the SSOS could not have numbered more than 40,000 fighters in total (and this figure applies to the final stage of the struggle), the numerical ratio of Upper Silesians to outsiders is still a matter of dispute. The latter certainly made up a significant part of the units fighting on the front line (such as Freikorps Oberland or Freikorps von Heydebreck), and were therefore more noticeable. However, as early as 1921, Selbstschutz biographer Hermann Katsch counted 176 Upper Silesians killed in its ranks, including those with such familiar names as Banka, Blaschak, Hruzik, Juretzka, Kluczny, Pawlik, Stoklossa or Zurek. This matter is certainly worth a closer look.

Z komentarzem [A3]: XV, nie, V

# Sankt Annaberg and Kandrzin – the largest battles

The fiercest battles were fought near these towns, with the use of armoured trains and cars, as well as artillery

Zbigniew Golasz  
Museum in Gliwice

Unlike the 1919 and 1920 uprisings, the Third Silesian Uprising was a military operation with specific military objectives, conducted under the guidance of professional officers. What is more, a front line was formed during its actions.

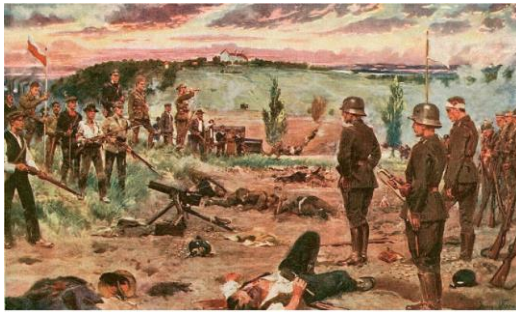
The outbreak of the uprising took the German side completely by surprise. The insurgents quickly captured the industrial area, with the exception of the cities to which access was forbidden by the Coalition. Their blockade began, and the main forces moved westwards, towards the Korfanty Line, i.e. the border of the area the dictator intended to occupy. On 8 May, the strategically important Sankt Annaberg (Góra Świętej Anny) fell into their hands right away.

After the Germans recovered, they launched a counter-offensive on 21 May, trying to drive the insurgents out of the area, which they eventually succeeded in doing. Bloody clashes, such as those at Lichinia (Lichynia), cost them about 500 dead, but brought them success. Despite counter-attacks, they did not give up the hill. The nature of the fighting was ruthless; prisoners were not taken, quarter was not given. There were cruel executions (example of Kalinow [Kalinów] and the murdered prisoners of the Mikulschütz [Mikulczyce] company). The battle became one of the symbols of bravery for both sides and was later mythologised, as evidenced by the mausoleums erected there by Germans and then by Poles.

Equally fierce battles took place in nearby Kandrzin (Kędzierzyn). They broke out on the night of 2 May. After the initial success, which was the seizure of the railway station, the insurgents were forced out of it by German APo (Plebiscite Police) officers under the command of Briton A. Craster. On 9 May insurgents again attacked Kandrzin (Kędzierzyn), defended by Lt. Hans von Matuschka. They managed to capture a strategically important railway station.



Assault unit under the command of Robert Oszek, taking part in the battles for Lichynia (Lichynia) and Zalesie



Attack of the Insurgents on Sankt Annaberg after Wojciech Kossak

This was a great success and a serious threat to the southern flank of von Hülsen's German forces. Armoured trains played an important role in the battle for Kandrzin (Kędzierzyn). As Lt. Włodzimierz Ablamowicz recalled, on the night of 8 May, they broke through from Krakow, and having reached Kandrzin (Kędzierzyn), they carried out a surprise attack on a German armoured train defending the station. To help them, an infantry battalion squadron with trains no. 1 and 7 (240 men, 4 field guns) was brought from Frankenstein in Schlesien (Ząbkowice).

“After a short, fierce battle we defeated the German armoured train, which, having escaped, only put up resistance in Oppeln (as in Opole), and we captured Kandrzin (Kędzierzyn) in spite of heavy losses in our unit”.

However, Korfanty unexpectedly stopped the military action and began political dealings, which was misunderstood by the insurgents as the end of the uprising. Some retreated to their homes. The troops became disorganised and discipline decreased.

The local distillery fell into the hands of the insurgents, along with weapon and food warehouses. The command postulated draining thousands of litres of spirit into the Oder River, as the situation was very bad. Drunken soldiers plundered the town. Eventually, most of the spirit was evacuated to the industrial area. The functioning of the local insurgent military police also left much to be desired, having not only failed to prevent pathological behaviour, but participated in it themselves, including the commander. At the first contact with the enemy, they fled. The Germans, on the other hand, gained time to rest and prepare retaliatory measures. The counter-offensive of the third decade of May led to the collapse of the front. To save the situation, on 23 May the garrison of Kandrzin (Kędzierzyn) set off to the front, leaving the city practically defenceless.

In this situation, during the second German counter-offensive in June, the fighting for Kandrzin (Kędzierzyn) began again. The front was broken near Zalesie. However, the German attack from the direction of Klodnitz (Kłodnica) was stopped, and the insurgents, taking advantage of the enemy's mistakes and supporting themselves with an armoured train, managed to break out of the encirclement threatening them. It should be mentioned that during the retreat from Kandrzin (Kędzierzyn), in contrast to the locals, a few units of the Brieg (Zabrze) military police under Lt. Nowakowski proved themselves. Well equipped, they set an example of determination and commitment, thanks to which the retreat took place in a relatively orderly manner. There was no uncontrolled escape, so the front was maintained. However, this allowed the Bavarians (Freikorps Oberland took part in the fighting) to regain the railway station and Kandrzin (Kędzierzyn), which was an important success. Polish counter-attacks, supported by an armoured train, and attempts to push the Germans out of Kandrzin (Kędzierzyn) ended in failure. Also another attack conducted on 5 June, supported by 3 armoured trains, was repulsed by Freikorps Heydebreck, after whom the town was later renamed. An attempt to recapture the city made on the following day also failed.

The Polish losses in the battle for Kandrzin (Kędzierzyn) are estimated at 700 dead, while the Germans lost twice as many men. It was the bloodiest battle of the Third Uprising. As a result, the front was moved several dozen kilometres to the east. The Germans saw the prospect of seizing Gleiwitz (Gliwice), the gateway to the industrial district, full of Selbstschutz fighters who had taken refuge there from the insurgents. The capture of the city would be the beginning of the end of the uprising.

## TIMELINE

**28 V** Korfanty's proclamation about the cessation of combat operations by the insurgents

**29 V** announcements that 80% of miners and steelworkers have returned to work

**30 V** Polish government rejects proposal to divide Upper Silesia into occupation zones: German, Polish and Allied; it consents to the creation of a neutral zone

**31 V** Lt. Col. Mielżyński dismissed as military commander of the uprising; insurgents repel German attack near Schimschow (Szymiszów) and in the area of Kalinow (Kalinów)

**1-4VI** command of the "East" insurgent group mutinies

**4 VI** another German offensive begins; capture of Slawentzitz (Ślawęcice) and (temporarily) Kandrzin (Kędzierzyn)

**5 VI** fighting for Kandrzin (Kędzierzyn) continues – insurgent counterattacks – Germans capture the city

**6 VI** insurgents unsuccessfully attempt to capture Kandrzin (Kędzierzyn); Lt. Col. Kazimierz Zentkeller appointed as military commander of the uprising

**8-11 VI** several-days-long fighting over Zembowitz (Zębówice) ends with German capture of the town; 12VI insurgent units withdraw from the region north of Rosenberg (Olesno) and the right-bank part of the Ratibor (Racibórz) district



Signing of the act of transfer of power from the Allies to the Poles in the Katowice district. Present among others are Wojciech Korfanty, Józef Rymer and Alfons Górnik, 19 VI 1922

## Another Ireland? From truce to partition of the region

The border in Upper Silesia was considered the most curious, most difficult and the worst in Europe

Maciej Fic  
Silesian University in Katowice

The associations evoked in the title were mainly associated with British officials and soldiers, who appeared in Upper Silesia as administrators of the area and as guardians of order until its fate was decided in a plebiscite. The reason for this connotation was the similarity of behaviour of the pro-Polish Upper Silesians and the supporters of the creation of an independent Irish state, who caused the April 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin. The pro-Polish Upper Silesians took up arms three times, and although each of the insurrections had slightly different goals, all of them were directed against the German administration and authorities, becoming evidence of dissatisfaction on the part of the inhabitants with the status quo and their aspiration to incorporate the region into Poland.

The fact that the basic objective of the pro-Polish Upper Silesians was the same did not mean that the means they used were uniform. This was clearly evidenced by the situation at the end of the Third Silesian Uprising, when the "East" group mutinied.

The members of the group (including the later Silesian Voivode Michał Grażyński) believed that the diplomacy promoted by Wojciech Korfanty should be replaced by armed struggle, which would result in the insurgents' military victory over the German opponent. The arrest of the group's members and the suppression of the revolt were the genesis of the open dispute between Grażyński and Korfanty which lasted throughout the interwar period. The fact that the coordination of the insurgents' activities temporarily remained in Korfanty's hands led to the suspension of military operations on 5 July 1921.

**Skirmishes were the order of the day** The results of the Upper Silesian plebiscite (59.4% of the voters voted to remain within Germany's borders, and 40.3% to incorporate Poland), as well as the principle, planned earlier in the annex to Article 88 of the Treaty of Versailles, that "the expressed will of the people (counted in municipalities) shall be taken into account", together with "the geographical and economic situation of the town", meant that a simple border demarcation was impossible. The islands of "German towns" in a sea of "Polish villages and towns" were already a sufficient difficulty to demarcate the area.

Moreover, the demarcation of the Upper Silesian border took place in the reality of an only slightly weakened Polish-German rivalry. Skirmishes between the warring parties were the order of the day in summer 1921, and the Polish-German Upper Silesian Police, established after the Second Silesian Uprising, was more concerned with mutual control than keeping the peace. In addition, the conflict between the Allies continued, and in view of the inability of France, Great Britain and Italy to compromise, the decision on partition was finally placed in the hands of the so-called Commission of Experts of the League of Nations Council, consisting of the Chinese representative in charge of its work (Wellington Koo) and delegates from Belgium (Paul Hymans), Brazil (Gaston Da Cunha) and Spain (Quinones de Leon). The draft they prepared became the basis for the final decision of the League of Nations Council, adopted on 12 October, which was approved on 20 October 1921 by the Ambassadors of the Allied Governments represented in the permanent body of the Council (Conference) of Ambassadors.

Under the new arrangements, Poland received 3,214 km<sup>2</sup> (29% of the plebiscite area), inhabited by 996,5 thousand people (46% of the total population).

The area taken over was economically more valuable and better industrialised than the part left within the German borders – on the Polish side, there were 53 hard coal mines, all 18 zinc, lead and silver metalworks, 13 zinc blende roasting plants, 11 out of 18 coking plants, 10 out of 15 zinc and lead ore mines, all 9 iron ore mines, 9 out of 15 steelworks, 5 rolling mills (2 on the German side), 3 out of 4 briquetting plants and 5 out of 9 steelworks with 22 out of 37 blast furnaces. The final stage of the work was the assuming of sovereignty over the plebiscite area by Germany and Poland, which lasted from 17 June to 10 July 1922. Following the completion of Poland's takeover of the assigned area in Katowice on 16 July 1922, nationwide celebrations were held, marking the signing of a commemorative act of Poland taking over part of Upper Silesia. A government and parliamentary delegation of about 150 people arrived in Katowice by special train, including Polish government ministers and the Speaker of the Polish Sejm, Wojciech Trąpczyński.

### The importance of Upper Silesia

The border divided previously close-knit settlement complexes, local communities formed over decades, and often industrial facilities or transport lines. There were places where buildings a dozen or so metres apart found themselves in two different countries. The Canadian scholar William John Rose described the border in Upper Silesia as "the most curious, most difficult and the worst in Europe".

On 15 May 1922, the Polish-German Convention (commonly known as the Geneva Convention or Upper Silesia Convention) was signed in Geneva, for a period of 15 years, with the two states committing themselves to, among other things, protecting minorities in the former plebiscite territory. As many as eleven sub-committees were set up to work out a compromise, and the Convention included over 600 articles, supplemented by additional protocols (the American historian F. Gregory Campbell even described it as "one of the longest and most detailed treaties ever fashioned"), which regulated the "civil and political" rights of citizens "without distinction as to nationality, language or religion". The Convention's comprehensiveness was the result of the adoption, during its construction, of a method of describing in detail of every potential situation that the law should regulate, arising from the parties' mutual distrust.

Formally created in 1920, the autonomous Silesian Voivodeship was the smallest administrative unit of its kind in the whole country, covering only 1.1% of the country's area, but in which 90% of Poland's industrial output was located. Without it, the Second Republic would have been an agrarian-pastoral country.

## Global Press about Upper Silesia

In May 1921, the front pages of newspapers around the world featured headlines about the events in Upper Silesia

Ryszard Mozgol  
IPN Katowice

The largest and most widely read press titles participated in the main political games of the powers interested in a favourable outcome to the Upper Silesian conflict. The outbreak of the uprising, preceded by the destruction of the railway lines, was connected with cutting off the plebiscite area from free information transmission via telephone and telegraph lines. In the first week of the uprising, information reached readers of press from Opole, Katowice and Bytom via the allied troops and interested Polish and German political centres, through Warsaw and Berlin. In France, England and the United States, it was unanimously agreed that the incoming information was far from credible and distorted by propaganda, differing only by ascribing disinformation to the German or the Polish side. The British *Daily Telegraph* admitted that in the first three days, only German reports had reached London, while at the same time writing about the effective propaganda of Polish agitators in Upper Silesian industrial plants. The daily *Le Matin* emphasised the Berlin provenance of the telegram which contained false information about the Entente states' decision to grant the plebiscite territory to the Germans, which enraged the Polish miners.

The extraordinary momentum of the uprising was widely emphasised. The New Zealand daily *Hokitika Guardian* reported on the superior numbers of the insurgents advancing towards the Oder River. In Ulster, *The Northern Wig*, hostile towards Poles, described well-organised and disciplined insurgent units marching through the cities under the nose of the humiliated Allied troops. The influential French daily *Le Temps*, meanwhile, emphasised the proper armament of the insurgent army, thanks to Korfanty's purchase of the Orsgech weapon supplies. The French daily *La Croix* denied the news about Polish soldiers participating in the uprising, even going so far as to insinuate that the insurgents disarmed by the French turned out to be German saboteurs. *Intrasingent* reported on a correction issued by the Chancellor, forced to admit that there was no proof of Polish presence, "although there [was] no doubt" about Polish support for the uprising. In the opinion of the French press, citing Polish sources, the 100,000-strong insurgent army was merely a local levée en masse. For the British *Pall Mall and Globe*, the insurrection was a "rebellion in Polish uniforms", although the American correspondent of *The New York Times* noted mainly German rifles and French or American uniforms of insurgent officers near Bytom.

News about Upper Silesia attracted readers' attention due to the clash of the superpowers taking place in the shadow of the insurrection. The British press had no doubts that Korfanty had played *va banque*, with the support of Warsaw and Paris behind him, playing for a division of the plebiscite territory that would be most favourable for Poland. The *Dundee Courier*, quoting London politicians, explained that the dictator's play was aimed at gaining control over Upper Silesia and making the decisions of the Supreme Council worthless. The *Daily Herald* published a text interspersed with statements by the British Prime Minister, containing harsh words against Korfanty and the Republic of Poland: "The children of the Treaty of Versailles cannot be allowed to break the crockery of Europe with impunity". Someone must place a restraining hand on them, otherwise there will be continual trouble".

Lloyd George's provocative speech, seen as a camouflaged attack on the politics of Paris, caused fury on the Seine. The most important French dailies wrote about Polish self-defence, directed against the Germans who, after being granted the entire plebiscite territory, would trigger a war of retaliation against France and Poland. A published statement by MP Henry Paté dispelled any doubts as to the true intentions. France sought to strengthen its ally in case of danger to itself.

The MP warned that no ratification of the agreement with Germany would be possible in France if it entailed harm to Poland, just as Lord d'Abernon did in London, warning that it was not possible to ratify any agreement on reparations without granting all of Upper Silesia to Germany.

The Italian *La Tribuna*, quoting the words of Foreign Affairs Minister Carlo Sforza called for everyone to come to their senses and base the decision on respecting the results of the plebiscite, while taking into account Polish aspirations and protecting German interests. The end of the Entente was widely heralded when the British Prime Minister, speaking of the great unanimity of the Entente (England, Italy and the US) did not mention France among its member states! However, what caused the greatest fear was a real outbreak of a pan-European armed conflict over Upper Silesia if the situation was prolonged and did not calm down. British correspondent Phillips Price warned that German entry into Upper Silesia would set in motion dangerous social and national consequences in the form of overt Polish support for the uprising.

At the same time in Saigon, the daily *L'Écho annamite* called attention to the words of Minister Briand, who said that it was the French and Italian armies (and not the British!) who had to make their own efforts of restoring peace in the mines.

The war of nerves lasted until the end of June 1921.

## Songs on the album

Grzegorz Płonka

The idea for an album with Silesian uprising songs came to me in early 2017. At that time, together with Janina Dygaczowa, we selected eleven songs from the collection of her husband, Prof. Adolf Dygacz.

Some of the melodies have 19th-century roots and were widely known among the people. Thanks to this, after adaptation of the lyrics to the theme of the uprising, they quickly found their way into the insurgent ranks.



Other songs are examples of independent creation. Their creators are anonymous, or known under pseudonyms. Most of the lyrics of these songs appeared in 1919–1922 in the *Kocynder* and *Powstaniec* magazines. When choosing pieces for the *Nadstawie ucha, kochani ludkowie* [Open Your Ears, Dear Folk] album, I was guided by the desire to present the various emotions and moods connected with those times. The lyrics tell the stories of, among others, the massacre of the miners at the Myslowitzgrube mine, about the battles for Sankt Annaberg, about Emperor William II's escape from Germany, about the fate of a boy from the lower social classes, who after school face the choice between joining the Prussian army or working in a mine as a "schlepper".

We will also hear the tale of a Silesian soldier sent to the front of World War I.

As far as music is concerned, I wanted the sound of the album to refer to the brass quintets popular in Silesia in early 20th century. The tracks were arranged by Andrzej Kaszuba. The album was recorded at Radio Katowice, featuring: Grzegorz Płonka – vocals, Wojciech Kaszuba – I trumpet, Adrian Gaweł – II trumpet, Michał Zdrzałek – French horn, Michał Czyż – trombone, Jakub Sznajder – tuba, Łukasz Kurek – drums and Klaudia Cymal as a guest in one of the songs. The published of the album is the "Dla Dziedzictwa" Foundation and its cover features a painting by Grzegorz Chudy.

## TIMELINE

24 VI agreement reached in Blottnitz (Blotnica) between the Inter-Allied Commission and the insurgent command on the evacuation of the plebiscite area

25 VI Gen. Hofer signs agreement on the withdrawal of German troops from the fighting areas

3 VII Polish side completes evacuation

5 VII Polish-German armistice – end of the uprising

10 X League of Nations Council divides Upper Silesia

20 X Council of Ambassadors approves the division

23 XI beginning of negotiations in Geneva on the signing of a Polish-German Convention guaranteeing the protection of national minorities in the divided plebiscite area

1922

15 V Polish-German Upper Silesian Convention signed in Geneva

17 VI Poland begins to assume sovereignty over the part of Upper Silesia granted to it

20 VI Polish Army ceremonially enters Katowice

4 VII protocol of Poland taking over part of Upper Silesia signed in Rybnik

The timeline was prepared by Miroslaw Wećki from the Institute of National Remembrance in Katowice



REMEMBER  
WITH US  
THE SILESIAN  
UPRISINGS

19 20 21  
21

Activities of the Katowice Branch of the Institute of National Remembrance commemorating the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the Third Silesian Uprising:

- ▶ **PUBLICATIONS** – academic and popular-science – on the subject of the Silesian uprisings
- ▶ **INFOGRAPHICS** about the First, Second and Third Silesian Uprisings and the plebiscite
- ▶ **OUTDOOR EXHIBITION *Silesian Uprisings 1919–1921***  
Presented in many cities in Poland
- ▶ **BILLBOARD EXHIBITIONS**  
*1919 / 1920 / 1921 in Upper Silesia*
- ▶ **WALL CALENDAR FOR 2022**  
available starting December 2021
- ▶ **GALLERY OF UPRISING POSTERS**
- ▶ **OCCASIONAL PINS**
- ▶ **EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS AND TEACHING AIDS**  
colouring book for children, colouring puzzles, historical puzzles, reprint of plebiscite result map



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[www.ipn.gov.pl](http://www.ipn.gov.pl)