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30.04.2024, 12:31

11.01.2022

Wawelberg Destruction Group

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



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 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 (Wołczyn), 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. Puszczynski 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.

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