

Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919

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WIERZEJ EWSKI Wincenty

Person

WIERZEJEWSKI Wincenty

Born

1889

Died

1972

Description

Pseudonyms: "Józef, Jerzy Warecki", "Skaut", "Orsza" and "Poznański", officer of the Polish Army, painter and sculptor, co-author of the scouting and guiding movement in Poznań and Greater Poland and founder and commandant of the Polish Military Organisation of the Prussian partition - a military underground organisation which prepared the Greater Poland Uprising. He was born on 29 November 1889 in Poznań, to the family of Franciszek and Michalina née Majewska. He had a brother, Jan, an independence activist in the Prussian partition and a sister, Maria, a teacher and an

independence and social activist in Bydgoszcz and in the Kasubia region. From his youth he demonstrated two passions: for art and for the military. He started his education in Poznań at decorative painting courses, then studied painting and decorative techniques as a free student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow. He was an active member of the self-education society for working youth - "Iskra" [Spark]. In the years 1910-1912 he did his military service in the Prussian army (of the German Empire). He treated this service as an element of the necessary military training, which the Polish youth getting ready for the uprising should acquire and then use for fighting the invader. In 1912, information regarding the scouting movements formed in the area of Cracow and Lviv started to reach Poznań. Wierzejewski thought that the scouting concept was perfectly suited for use in Greater Poland, which was under the Prussian partition. However, this movement had to be treated as an element preparing the youth for the fight against the invader. In October, there was an organisational meeting during which the first covert scout patrol called "Poznań" was formed, one month later the first Poznań Scout Group - "Piaś" was formed, and one year later, this "Piaś" scout troop was led by Wincenty Wierzejewski. The scout centre which he ran was the strongest in the entire Prussian partition. Wierzejewski was an activist with great authority, at the same time he had the suitable qualifications and abilities which allowed his efficient management of the scouting movement under conspiratorial conditions. For organisational purposes he also used his artistic skills, designing many postcards with scouting and patriotic themes. He also designed the first standards for the scout groups and troops as well as the badges for the scout groups and ranks. After the outbreak of the "Great War", as World

War I was called, he was conscripted into the Prussian army. During fighting on the Western Front, he was lightly wounded and at the beginning of 1915 he arrived in Poznań. However, he did not return to the army but rather conducted his independence activities under covert conditions. He became intensively involved in the formation of the structures of the Polish Military Organisation of the Prussian partition, and his scouting duties were taken over by his close collaborator - Henryk Śniegocki. During his collaboration with Józef Kostrzewski - a subsequent professor - hiding from the Germans in premises located in the attic of the Museum of Archaeology, he became engaged in the production of forged documents for Poles who were deserters from the Prussian army. The formed Polish Military Organisation of the Prussian partition relied mainly on scouts and deserters. Each member took an oath. The main tasks of the Polish Military Organisation of the Prussian partition were targeted at the disorganisation of German orders and the motivation of Polish society to take action. These activities drew the attention of independence circles in Warsaw. Close contacts with the following representatives of Marshal Józef Piłsudski were established: Adam Koc, Stanisław Rudnicki and the priest, Jan Mauersberger. Wierzejewski was given the task of freeing Józef Piłsudski from the fortress in Magdeburg. Despite advanced preparations, this did not happen because the Germans themselves released the Marshal. On 13 November 1918, Wierzejewski took part in the "town hall coup" in Poznań, which contributed to the Polonisation of the Worker and Soldier Council, by organising a course and designating the Polish representatives for the Council. However, Wierzejewski, despite his major role in the events was overshadowed by such leaders as Mieczysław Paluch and Bohdan

Hulewicz. At that time, the action taken by Wierzejewski was mainly focused on the military and intelligence training of scouts, which later resulted in the education of staff for the Greater Poland Army. Owing to the scouts, the German radio station at the Citadel was taken and the scout company seized Fort Grolman on 28 December 1918. The above-mentioned company, as the first scout company under the command of Wincenty Wierzejewski, subsequently took part in the relief of Lviv and was involved in many heroic actions in the war aimed at the establishing and strengthening of the borders of Poland in the east. In 1920, Wierzejewski, leading the 1st company, took part in the capturing of Leszno. The 1st company became the inception of the first organised unit of the Greater Poland Armies - the 1st Greater Poland Rifle Regiment (after the renaming of the 55th Poznań Infantry Regiment) and its soldiers, to a great extent, became part of the staff of other companies. During the period after the regaining of independence, he was still involved in the activities of the scouting movement, i.e. in the years 1921-1923 he held the post of commandant of the Poznań Banner of the Polish Scouting Organisation. He stayed in the army. Initially, he served in the 55th Infantry Regiment in Leszno. In the years 1924-1925 he completed a 10-month course in the Central Military School of Gymnastics and Sport in Poznań, later, he was a lecturer in the Infantry Reserve Officer Training Centre in Śrem, and then went to work in the Poznań Corps District Command VII. In the years 1932-1935, he served in the Military Transit Storage on Westerplatte as the deputy commandant. This service was related to plans which the Polish authorities had in relation to the area of the Free City of Gdańsk and its reintegration into the Polish territory. Wierzejewski was sent to Westerplatte as an experienced conspirator who had an in-depth

knowledge of the situation in Germany and contacts with the local scout circles. During his service on Westerplatte, he organised the secret expansion of guard posts which, as a consequence of this, turned into armed defensive bunkers. For camouflage, he was involved in artistic activity at that time and painted a series of oil paintings entitled "Na plaży Westerplatte" [On Westerplatte Beach]. Before the outbreak of World War II, he organised and coordinated the work of the so called Secret Military Organisation in the area of the Corps District Command VII in Poznań, that is the Social Information Network and Non-Front-line Sabotage Network "Okrzeja". The network, to a great extent, consisted of former Greater Poland insurgents and scout instructors. Its task was to prepare Greater Poland for German aggression, and the arms and explosives depots created by it were intended to be used by secret underground units. Apparently he was transferred to the reserves. From the year 1936, together with his brother Jan, he organised the structures of the Scout-Citizen Movement. The goal of the movement was to involve the former scouts in work on the rebirth and economic development of the country. Together with his brother they were the originators of the concept of the construction of a monument next to Malta lake in Poznań, to commemorate the Greater Poland scouts fallen while fighting for independence. At the same time, based on the design of Wincenty Wierzejewski, a Commemorative Gorget for Scouts from the Times of Fighting for Independence in the years 1912-1920 was established. It was given to the living heroes of those battles. Because of the pending war he was mobilised and assigned to the General Staff with which he left the country going to Great Britain through Hungary and France. In the year 1940, he took part in the formation of the 1st Rifle Brigade within the 1st

Corps of the Polish Armed Forces in the West, stationed in Scotland. After the end of the war in the year 1945 he retired with the rank of captain, subsequently receiving promotions from the exiled authorities to the rank of colonel. He remained in Great Britain, living in Leeds. He did not return to Poland as he had been warned about repression which would threaten him. During the post-war period, his role in the formation of the scout movement and in the Greater Poland Uprising was marginalised by the authorities, nevertheless it took the place it deserved in the publications of historians. Wincenty Wierzejewski is considered the main representative of the military pre-uprising conspiracy, based on the Greater Poland scouting organisation. Wincenty Wierzejewski is the author of many paintings and sculptures, including many works of patriotic but also sacral nature. He is the creator of many postcards which refer to such themes. On top of this, he is the author of the commemorative badge of the 1st Greater Poland Rifle Regiment (55th Poznań Infantry Regiment) and the 1st Rifle Brigade of the Polish Armed Forces in the West. He died on 8 September 1972 in Leeds, Great Britain. From his first marriage with Irena Janowska (she died in 1926), he had two daughters: Danuta and Stefania. The marriage with his second wife, an English woman, Mary Powell was childless. He received, among others? The Wartime Order of Virtuti Militari of the 5th class, with the low number of 847, the Cross of Independence with Swords, the Cross of Valour (four times), the Golden Cross of Merit, the Commemorative Medal for the 1918-1921 War, the 10 Years of Independence Commemorative Medal, the Medal for Long-Standing (XX) Service, the Commemorative Cross of the People's Council in Poznań „For Valour”, the Commemorative “Orlęta” [Eaglets] badge and the Scout Badge of Gratitude. Posthumously he was awarded the

Greater Poland Insurgent Cross.

Bibliography

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Author of the entry

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