

Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919

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The Polish Military Organisation of the Prussian Partition 1918-1919 (PMOPP)

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Select Pages

[The Polish Military Organisation \(...\)](#)

[Some of the activities of a few
inexperienced \(...\)](#)

THE POLISH MILITARY ORGANISATION OF THE PRUSSIAN PARTITION 1918-1919 (PMOPP) – an underground military organisation, the aim of which was to liberate the Polish lands from Prussian occupation. It was established in 1917, on the initiative of Wincenty Wierzejewski. Its first members were deserter scouts who had been

hiding in Poznań. The number of its members grew considerably after announcing, in the summer of 1918, the mobilisation of men born in 1900. To protect the scouts' organisation from repression, Wierzejewski separated military activity (Combat Organisation) from the scouts' activity led by Henryk Śniegocki. The purpose of W. Wierzejewski as a commandant was to create a conspiratorial cadre organisation. Henryk Dembiński and Józef Dunst, who had been hiding in the Congress Kingdom, made contact with the Warsaw-based leaders of the Polish Military Organisation (PMO) through Priest Jan Mauersberger, a scout activist. In December 1917, more conspirators, such as Alfons Gorzelańczyk, Mieczysław Kucharski and Stanisław Saroszewski, were sent to Warsaw to get familiar with the rules of local conspiracy. On 15 February 1918, the first group of ten members of the PMOPP were sworn in in the building of the Poznań museum. As well as the above-mentioned deserters, the group also included: Józef Ratajczak, Roman Skoraszewski, Leonard Skowroński and Sylwester Węglarz. In the spring of 1918, more groups were sworn in. They were led by Bronisław Drwęski, Jan Kąkolewski, Franciszek Piechowski, Stanisław Powalisz and Bohdan Szeffer. Most of the conspirators were scouts who had previously trained in the German army. In the middle of 1918, the PMOPP had approximately 80 members. Stanisław Saroszewski became a recruitment instructor, setting up militias in Gniezno (Stefan Engler), Gostyń (Leon Włodarczak), Grodzisk Wielkopolski (Stanisław Józefowicz), Inowrocław (Jerzy Kwieciński), Jarocin (Wacław Szkudliński),

Kościan (Franciszek Czaplicki), Kórnik (Marian Matelski), Szamotuły (Józef Kłos), Śrem (Aleksander Sobolewski) and Września (Piotr Jarociński). An important date for the organisation's development was 2 August 1918, when an administrative organ, the so-called council of eleven, was founded. The decision was taken on further development of the organisation in garrison towns, among adolescents from gymnasiums, sports clubs and "Sokół". The militias that joined the PMOPP were, among others, Stanisław Nogaj's "Unia" and Stanisław Franciszczak's "Czarni"; also contact was made with the organisation "Jedność" from the Jarocin garrison. Talks with Karol Rzepecki, leader of the Poznań branch of "Sokół", were, however, unsuccessful. Other members of the PMOPP included soldiers serving in German units, such as: Marian Beym, employed in the mobilisation department of the General Command of the 5th Corps, Czesław Michalski, non-commissioned officer with the military draft office and Mieczysław Niewitecki who ran a sanitary office. Small, temporary warehouses of weapons, ammunition and military equipment were created, among others at 6 Kozia Street, 12 Szewska Street and on Dolna Wilda Street. According to verification documents owned by the Association of Greater Poland Insurgents, 160 people declared their membership in the PMOPP before 6 November 1918. In the autumn of 1918, Wierzejewski visited the PMO Supreme Command in Warsaw to discuss, with Adam Koc among others, the issue of releasing J. Piłsudski from Magdeburg. The task was entrusted to Józef Jęczkowiak and Stanisław Pluciński, who were in

contact with Szczepan Piechocki and Stanisław Dąbrowski from the fortress guard unit. The plan was not carried out due to the outbreak of the revolution in Germany. When the revolution in Germany broke out, the members of the PMOPP started to form soldier councils in German units, taking partial control of unit commands and preparing for the occupation of these places. According to Wierzejewski's arrangements, J. Jęczkowiak went to Warsaw to organise the Poles serving in the German army and from the territory of the Prussian Partition. After 10 November 1918, the PMOPP became even more active. Second Lieutenant Mieczysław Andrzejewski, who was in close cooperation with Second Lieutenant Mieczysław Paluch and Second Lieutenant Bohdan Hulewicz from the Military Division of the Central Citizens' Committee (CCC), replaced Wierzejewski as Commandant. On 11 November, the leaders of the PMOPP held a stormy meeting in A. Fiedler's flat at 12, Długa Street. The ones who wanted to start immediate military action included H. Beychler, A. Fiedler, Jan Kalinowski and R. Wilkanowicz. As a result of an intervention of the CCC's representatives (Priest Stanisław Adamski), the participants of the meeting reached a compromise, and the organisation was subordinated to Lieutenant M. Paluch from the Military Division of the CCC. The enthusiasm of the young members of the Polish Military Organisation added fire to the so-called "attack on the Town Hall" on 13 November. An armed demonstration of several dozen members of the PMOPP allowed the Organisation to gain advantages in the Executive Division of the

Worker and Soldier Council. This gave the PMOPP an insight into military affairs in the area of the 5th Armed Corps. Hieronim Grzeszkowiak intercepted information on the possibility of forming security units (the Guard and Security Service - GSS) in the pay of the Germans. The PMOPP organised and ran conscription offices (8) for this formation. Efforts were undertaken to make the units look more German by enlisting Poles under changed German names. In November 1918, two companies composed of members of the PMOPP and "Sokół", barracked in the forts of Pritwitz (Sergeant Stefan Grodzki) and Rauch (Sergeant Edmund Krause), comprising approximately 500 members, were formed. On 5 December, on the initiative of M. Andrzejewski, the decision was made to form a company of navy soldiers at the PMOPP (Sergeant Adam Białoszyński) which was accommodated in the western part of the barracks of the 47th infantry regiment. By the end of December 1918, there were nine GSS companies, jointly composed of nearly 2000 soldiers. Members of the PMO carried out several attacks on patrols and military warehouses, e.g. occupying warehouses with weapons behind the Kalisz Gate (12 November) and Rycerska Street, the Uniforms Office in Jeżyce (15 November), removing gold from of the Poznań branch of the Reich's Bank (approx. 1 billion marks) and stealing operational and mobilisation-related files from the Command of the 5th Army Corps and giving them to the Ministry of Military Affairs in Warsaw.

Some of the activities of a few inexperienced soldiers ended in failure and imprisonment, such

as the attack of the Górczyn group on Fort IX on 16 November and an attempt at occupying the military barracks behind the Dębina Gate by a group led by Stefan Janasik (18 November). Certain members of the PMO, who did not respect the superiority of the Supreme People's Council, created an intelligence and executive unit commanded by Jan Kalinowski (approx. 90 people). W. Wierzejewski focused on activities related to intelligence, recruitment and the training of scouts. It was his effort that brought the 5th Army Corps' radiotelegraphic station into Polish hands (Sergeant Stanisław Józwiak), which enabled the interception of information transferred from Berlin. The PMO had its largest influence with the intendant's office (Kazimierz Okoniewski and Kazimierz Haber), the 5th heavy artillery regiment in Sołacz (Maksymilian George), the automobile unit (Second Lieutenant Mieczysław Grzybkowski), Ławica (Sergeant Pilot Józef Mańczak), and also in hospitals: Leon Lakner, Władysław Gabler and Stanisław Powel. Some of the PMOPP members were members of the secret military staff of M. Paluch and B. Hulewicz. These were: Józef and Zbigniew Górski, Witold Kutzner, Józef Lorenz, Feliks Różalski, Antoni Szymański, Paweł Szyfter and Bronisław Zamiara. At the end of December 1918, having previously informed the Commissariat of the SPC thereof, Zygmunt Wiza and Józef Grzegorzek went to Upper Silesia to carry out pro-independence propaganda activities. Kazimierz Czapla, Head of the Sub-commissariat of the SPC in Bytom, was critical of the actions of the PMOPP's emissaries. Cooperation with Józef Dreyza, Head of the Silesian branch of "Sokół", resulted in the

creation of the Polish Military Organisation of Upper Silesia, led by J. Grzegorzek.

A group of young intelligentsia from the Prussian Partition, associated within the Association of the Polish Youth ("Zet"), which included, among others, Czesław Chmielewski, Mieczysław Hedinger, Bohdan and Jerzy Hulewicz, Mieczysław Korzeniewski, Mieczysław and Włodzimierz Seydlitz and Adam Wierusz, also had links to the PMOPP circles. The envoys of J. Piłsudski and of the 2nd Division of the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces, including Major Ignacy Matuszewski, Major Bronisław Nakoniecznikow-Klukowski, Captain Stanisław Łapiński, Lieutenant Colonel Julian Stachiewicz, Tadeusz Hołówko and Wacław Sieroszewski, came to Poznań via Kościanki, the residence of the family Hulewicz, which was located on the border with the Congress Kingdom. Jerzy Hulewicz, as a member of the PMOPP and of M. Paluch's staff, sent regular site reports. Through the PMO offices in Słupca, Kalisz and Pyzdry, he organised and sent transports of military equipment bought in Poznań, including cavalry equipment, to Warsaw. According to the files of the so-called Belvedere Archives, J. Hulewicz's office recruited nearly 200 soldiers from technical service. They disagreed with the political line pursued by the Commissariat of the SPC and decided to discuss their further activities with J. Piłsudski. To this end, they delegated Mieczysław Hedinger, former doctor of the 6th battalion of the 1st Legions Brigade, to visit the Chief-of-State. After the talks, on 23 December 1918, on his way back, M. Hedinger died in a car crash

near Kalisz. It was impossible to send another trusted envoy to the capital, because events had already started to accelerate. On 27 December, around 05:00 pm, an alarm rang for the PMOPP. Combat groups from Poznań, Gniezno, Jarocin, Kórnik, Pleszew, Szamotuły, Środa, Września and other garrisons were summoned by phone, using the password "no time to wait". J. Kalinowski's intelligence and executive unit occupied the building of the museum, located next to the Bazar. It became the PMOPP's mobilisation and disposition centre. S. Nogaj's group was involved in taking over the Police Headquarters, while S. Dąbrowski's group occupied the barracks of the cavalry and trains, the arsenal in Wielkie Garbary Street was also captured and the warehouses in Fort VII in Łazarz were finally occupied during the night. On the next day, Franciszek Budzyński's group carried out a daring and successful attack on the Command of the 5th Army Corps, where a meeting of the commanders of the corps with the highest authorities of the Poznań province and administrative district was taking place. The commander of the 5th Army Corps, General Lieutenant Bock und Polach, Head of Staff, General Major Schimmelpfening, Upper President of the Poznań province, Eisenhart-Rothe and President of the Poznań administrative district, Kirschstein were arrested and escorted to the Bazar. Thus, the Germans were left practically leaderless. Wierzejewski, who prepared a company composed of older scouts, occupied Fort Grolman on 28 December around 04:00 pm. Other groups of the PMOPP occupied the barracks of the 20th Light Artillery Regiment on Solna Street. The Commissariat of

the Supreme People's Council (Lieutenant Jan Maciaszek) tried to block events directed against the Germans. This led to a conflict between the PMOPP commanders and M. Paluch's group. On 28 December 1918, in the Bazar Hotel, during a conference attended by commanders of insurgent units and political leaders who tried to persuade the members of the PMOPP to stop their activities and start negotiations with the Germans, there was an incident with R. Wilkanowicz, who, accompanied by PMOPP's militia, rushed into the conference room and threatened the politicians: "We will never give up on the fight we have started. Those who are against us are our enemies and deserve a bullet in the head.". The conflict was calmed by W. Korfanty, who promised to closely cooperate with the PMOPP. PMOPP militia arrested the President of the Police Knesbeck and Head of Security Police, Blankertz. B. Hulewicz, J. Lorentz, Z Łakiński, A. Szymański and W. Zakrzewski were included in the organised staff of Major S. Taczak. Leaders of the PMOPP and Lieutenant M. Paluch continued to pursue the "faits accomplis" policy. On 30 December 1918, there was an appeal calling for former soldiers - Poles, to join the Guard and Security Service at one of the four conscription offices, and join one of the services: cavalry, artillery, infantry or communication. These facts plus a demand on behalf of the GSS that the Commissariat of the SPC announce an "anti-German armed revolution" caused the political authorities to remove M. Paluch from his command of the GSS, moving him to the insurgent artillery, which had not yet been formed back then. Thanks to the activities of the

PMOPP and the GSS, the insurgent movement did not lose its dynamics, contrary to the orders given by the Commissariat. Poznań was liberated relatively quickly, which was almost entirely attributable to commanders M. Andrzejewski, J. Kalinowski, S. Nogaj, R. Wilkanowicz and the members of the PMOPP who were gathered around them. The last battle in Poznań which the PMOPP took part in in an organised manner was an attack on the air base in Ławica (6 January 1919), with the participation of the J. Kalinowski's unit. The militias of the PMOPP that took part in the developing insurgent actions in the Poznań province included those from Grodzisk Wielkopolski (commanded by J. Skrzydlewski), Gniezno (Stanisław Szaliński), Inowrocław (J. Kwieciński), Kościan (Janusz Czaplicki), Buk, Witkowo, Środa Wielkopolska, Wronki and Września. At the end of 1918, inspired by W. Wierzejewski, an office of the PMOPP was formed among employees of the railway node in Bydgoszcz (Ignacy Biernacki, Jan Bukowiecki). The activities of the PMOPP finally ceased in mid-January 1919 because its members joined the insurgent units. The Greater Poland Army took over nearly 600 soldiers from the organisation, mainly from GSS companies. The scout company became the basis to form the 1st Greater Poland Rifle Regiment. Those who were incapable of serving on the front, stayed in the Poznań garrison battalion. The group that remained in Poznań, including M. Andrzejewski, Mieczysław Grzybowski and R. Wilkanowicz, formed the PMOPP liquidation committee. The document on the dissolution of the organisation was signed on 27 November 1919.

Select Pages

1

2

