

Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919

<https://pw.ipn.gov.pl/pwe/history/insurgent-troops/3264,The-Poznan-Death-Battalion.html>
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The Poznań Death Battalion

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Other names: The Death Battalion, the Poznań Battalion, the Poznań Volunteer Death Battalion, the Józefowicz Battalion, the Józefowicz Poznań Battalion, the Poznań Unit, the Poznań Unit of the Lithuanian-Belarusian Division, the Poznań Volunteer Unit and the Volunteer Unit from the Grand Duchy of Poznań (on the standard). It was formed in March and April 1919 at Fort V in the Winiary district and consisted of volunteers and soldiers who caused disciplinary problems, along the lines of a similar troop formed by Gen. J. Dowbor-Muśnicki within the 1st Polish Corps. The uniforms were similar to those worn by the infantry of the Greater Poland armies, but included a white-metal skull (of varied design) on the rims of the four-cornered caps (rogatywka), referring to the symbols of assault companies from World War I. The troop also had its own standard. From the very beginning, it was assumed that the Polish Death Battalion would operate outside the borders of the Greater Poland region.

In May 1919, the troop consisted of 10 officers, 8 cadets, 94 non-commissioned officers and 395 privates organised into 3 assault companies. The official commander was Lieutenant Colonel Feliks Józefowicz, a veteran of the uprising in 1863 and former soldier of the Knights' Legion in the 1st Polish Corps. In reality, however, the Battalion was commanded by his deputy and at the same time the head of staff, Lieutenant Jan Kalinowski. Adjutants: Lieutenant Jan Kąkolewski and Roman Wilkanowicz. Consecutive company commanders: Lieutenant Grodzki (later Edmund Kabzda), Lieutenant J. Kąkolewski and Second Lieutenant Stanisław Nogaj (during the war). In June 1919, Lieutenant Colonel Józefowicz and Lieutenant Kalinowski left their positions and were replaced by: Jan Tomaszewski and lieutenants Jankowski-Jasiński and J. Kąkolewski. The unit was not supplemented by soldiers from the Poznań region, in June 1919, only the 1st platoon of the 2nd field artillery battery from the 1st Legions Infantry Brigade was assigned to it. Initially, the soldiers did not know where they would be sent.

Having taken an oath on 17 April 1919, the battalion was sent through Łódź to Warsaw, where it participated in the symbolic establishment of brotherly bonds between the armies from three different partitions. Then, the soldiers from the unit were sent through Białystok to the Lithuanian-Belarusian Front, near Vilnius, and were incorporated into the 6th Legions Infantry Regiment. The unit participated in battles against the Bolsheviks, including those near Vilnius, Maišiagalaw and Molėtai. Throughout the transport and then on the Front,

the soldiers of the Battalion caused serious disciplinary problems, which raised the concern of the front-line command and the direct superiors of the unit - there were cases of desertion and malingering. In July 1919, one of the companies even considered switching sides on the front. Ultimately, on 31 August, the Supreme Command of the Polish Army decided to dissolve the troop and send the soldiers back to Greater Poland. According to some preserved stories, the standard of the Battalion was placed at the chapel of Our Lady of the Gate of Dawn in Vilnius. Some soldiers of the battalion participated in the 3rd Upper Silesia Uprising and during the inter-war period, they stuck together and honoured each other. After World War II, several former soldiers of the Poznań Death Battalion were entrusted with prominent functions in the National Committee for Veterans of the Greater Poland Uprising, operating within the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy.



