

Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919

<https://pw.ipn.gov.pl/pwe/history/insurgent-troops/3507,The-German-air-raids-on-Lawica-on-7-and-8-January-1919-in-the-Poznan-press-cover.html>
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The German air raids on Ławica on 7 and 8 January 1919 in the Poznań press coverage.

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On 6 January 1919 the Ławica Air Base was seized by insurgents after a short battle. "Over 200 ordinary soldiers and a few officers were taken captive at the seized airport"¹. This numerous and mixed crew (soldiers from different types of units: pioneers, grenadiers, artillerymen and aviators) posed a real threat for Poznań.

Therefore, the threats by German aviators that they would bomb the city were treated very seriously. According to the press coverage and the contents of a letter found in the occupied barracks and published in the Poznań press, the supply for the above-mentioned crew was provided by means of an “air bridge” from Frankfurt an der Oder, wherefrom large aeroplanes supplied “food, ammunition and military instructions”². This, in fact, contributed to the decision to make the attack.

The air base was seized after a short battle lasting no more than 20 minutes³. The losses in men on both sides were relatively small and, according to estimates, amounted to 2 dead⁴ and 3 wounded on the Polish side and one dead (officer) and several wounded soldiers on the German side⁵.

After the fighting came to an end, “(...) hangars with aviation equipment (30 pieces), ammunition and bomb storages, petrol depots, automobiles, a train and large repair workshops” were all in the hands of insurgents⁶. The value of the seized material was estimated at 160 000 000 marks⁷!

Also, development of the seized airport was started quickly. Order No. 2 of Central Command read: “Tactically, the Air Base in Ławica is directly subjected to Central Command⁸”. In the next order, the following instructions were given: “All units will send any aviators who serve with them to the Air Base in Ławica near Poznań

(based on identity documentation)⁹”. As time passed, calls for joining the ranks of aviators also started to be published in the press¹⁰.

As early as the following day - 7 January 1919 - in the early afternoon, German aircraft appeared over Ławica and bombarded it. This unprecedented fact was reported by all Poznań newspapers, but as it turns out, their relations differed greatly.

The air raid took place on the next day¹¹, at noon¹², either at 12:45¹³ or 13:00¹⁴, when 4 aeroplanes flew over the Air Base in Ławica and dropped 6 bombs¹⁵, or possibly the number of aircraft was the same, but 18 bombs were used¹⁶, or there was only one aviator with one bomb¹⁷. The coverage in “Przewodnik Katolicki” is probably the most sparing with figures, as almost two weeks after these events it only made a mention about “German aviators dropping bombs on the Air Base¹⁸”. Despite the surprise air-raid, the losses were relatively insignificant as “one of the bombs set the barracks where the kitchen was located on fire. Although other bombs landed on areas with some buildings scattered here and there, they did not cause too much damage. (...) There were no human casualties.” – according to reports presented in “Kurier Poznański”¹⁹. On the other hand “Dziennik Poznański” mentioned two burned barracks²⁰ and “Postęp” talked about only one²¹. There was a report in “Wielkopolanin” that a “few soldiers on our side were wounded and a

fire broke out in one of the barracks²²”. The fire was put out by the fire brigade which arrived from Poznań²³.

One witness of the air raid was an officer using the alias Adlot, who had arrived from Warsaw: “Suddenly, at 12.00 we heard some sporadic machine gun fire and then the noise of engines. Several German aeroplanes had arrived to bombard the air base. Everyone that was present rushed to grab their weapons trying to deter the Germans with machine gunfire. After a short while, the clack of machine guns came from the tower. Then we heard the explosions of bombs which the German aviators had dropped on the hangars, offices, depots, etc. After this half-hour bombardment, the Germans flew away, never to return again. Immediately after this, we went to see the damage caused. Fortunately, no significant losses were suffered”²⁴.

The air raid surprised the crew in Ławica, which, despite attempts made at defence, was not able to prevent it. Fortunately, there were no losses in people. The German attack, however, became a valuable lesson, from which conclusions were drawn very quickly. On the next day, 8 January 1919, at 11.00 a.m. or 12.00 a.m. aeroplanes appeared over Ławica²⁵ yet again²⁶. “Przewodnik Katolicki” did not provide any information about the time of the attack. There were three German aeroplanes²⁷. No number, not even an approximation, was reported by “Dziennik Poznański”, “Wielkopolanin” or “Przewodnik Katolicki”. The crew prepared for the defence

with barrage fire from machine guns which curbed the zeal of the German aviators, who dropped several bombs in an open field²⁸. After about 20 minutes, the German aeroplanes flew away from Ławica having performed a “plainly criminal act”²⁹: The next bombs fell on the buildings of a farm owned by Władysław Zoch, in Strzeszynek (2 kilometres away from the Ławica Air Base) and on the village of Krzyżowniki. The house and the shed were damaged in the farm owned by the Zochs family, and fragments of the bomb killed Zoch’s son (10 years old)³⁰ and wounded Mr. Zoch and another of his sons³¹. What is interesting here is that “Kurier Poznański” and “Postęp” wrote about the wounded daughter (but not the son!). As a result of the explosion of a bomb in Krzyżowniki, a farmer, Pawlak, was severely wounded³². Władysław Zoch later died as a consequence of his wounds, on 9 January 1919³³. Another farmer from Krzyżowniki, who was wounded, was taken to the hospital run by Sisters of St. Elizabeth [on Łąkowa Street] where his condition was described as “hopeless”³⁴.

However, according to a notice published in “Wielkopolanin”, the farmer, Mateusz Pawlak, died on 11 January 1919 at the age of 29³⁵.

As a consequence of the German bombardment on 8 January 1919, three people died: Witold Zoch aged 15 († 8 January 1919), Władysław Zoch aged 58 († 9 January 1919) and Mateusz Pawlak aged 29 († 11 January 1919) and a daughter or son of

Władysław Zoch was wounded (it is not known how severely).

The above-mentioned statement is important inasmuch as there was no consensus in the literature as to the number of the victims of the air raid dated 8 January. Based on the information contained in the then press (Dziennik Poznański No. 6, dated 9 January 1919) Zygmunt Bulzacki reported that one person had died and three people had been wounded³⁶. However, the author did not study any other issues and limited himself to these figures. Kazimierz Sławiński wrote about several women and children killed (sic!)³⁷. The information about one person being killed and three people wounded is repeated after Z. Bulzacki by Krzysztof Hoff, in a book issued in 2005, entitled "Skrzydła niepodległej. O wielkopolskim lotnictwie w okresie Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej"³⁸. Also Radosław Nawrot, in his article "Pierwszy nalot Polaków" mentions one dead and three wounded people³⁹. However, he mistakenly positions these four people as victims of the first air-raid on Ławica on 7 January 1919.

There is also an issue which cannot be definitely determined, i.e. where the above-mentioned three people were buried. We only know that the funeral of Witold and Władysław Zochs took place on 12 January 1919⁴⁰ at 2:00 p.m.⁴¹, starting from St. Joseph's hospital on Piotra Street (currently Krysiowicza Street). However, the burial place was not specified. Neither could the date nor place of burial of Mateusz Pawlak be determined.

In retaliation for the bombardment, the Polish authorities took General von Bock und Polach who had already been arrested on 28 December 1918 hostage, and this information was reported by Kurier Poznański dated 9 January 1919⁴². This was supposed to prevent further German air-raids and to force the Germans to release the Poles interned by them. The Germans obviously demanded the immediate release of the general⁴³.

In issue No. 9 of "Wielkopolanin", dated 12 January 1919, the general content of the telegram sent by General Bock und Polach to the German minister of war was reported. In this telegram he called the bombardment of Poznań and Ławica "a nonsensical and criminal act"⁴⁴. He also threatened to step down from his post if such attacks were repeated⁴⁵. This must have brought certain effects as no more air raids on Poznań were reported. Did the retaliatory air-raid on the airport in Frankfurt an der Oder, which was organised by the Polish pilots on 9 January 1919, contribute to this to some extent? This very popular episode - the first such action in the history of the Polish aviation is called into question by Priest Robert Kulczyński. According to his findings, that air raid did not take place at all, and the first mention of it appeared as late as in 1975 in a book written by Kazimierz Sławiński entitled "Ławica poznańskie lotnisko"⁴⁶.

¹ Kurier Poznański No. 5 dated 8 January 1919, p.1

[2](#) Kurier Poznański No. 5 dated 8 January 1919, p.1; Dziennik Poznański No. 5 dated 8 January 1919, p.1

[3](#) cf.

[4](#) One of these was Feliks Łukaszewicz (cf. Lists of Losses of the Greater Poland Uprising (LSPW), item 1060).

[5](#) cf. Kurier Poznański No. 5 dated 8 January 1919, p.1; Dziennik Poznański No. 5 dated 8 January 1919, p.1; In the case of the report in DP, there is information regarding several other privates killed in action. In the Postęp journal No. 5 dated 8 January 1919, the number of the wounded Germans amounts to exactly three (p. 3).

[6](#) Kurier Poznański No. 5 dated 8 January 1919, p.1

[7](#) Dziennik Poznański No. 5 dated 8 January 1919, p.1; Postęp No. 5 dated 8 January 1919

[8](#) Order No. 2 of Central Command, dated 7 January 1919

[9](#) Order No. 3 of Central Command, dated 8 January 1919

[10](#)cf. Kurier Poznański No. 9 dated 12 January 1919, p. 2.

[11](#) Przewodnik Katolicki No. 3 dated 19 January 1919, p. 23

[12](#) Wielkopolanin No. 5 dated 8 January 1919, p.2;
Postęp No. 5 dated 8 January 1919, p.3

[13](#) Kurier Poznański No. 5 dated 8 January 1919,
p.1

[14](#) Dziennik Poznański No. 5 dated 8 January 1919, p.1

[15](#) Postęp No. 5 dated 8 January 1919, p.3;
Dziennik Poznański, No. 5 dated 8 January 1919,
p.1

[16](#) Kurier Poznański No. 5 dated 8 January 1919,
p.1

[17](#) Wielkopolanin No. 5 dated 8 January 1919, p.
2.

[18](#) Przewodnik Katolicki No. 3 dated 19 January 1919, p. 23.

[19](#) Kurier Poznański No. 5 dated 8 January 1919,
p.1

[20](#) Dziennik Poznański No. 5 dated 8 January 1919, p.1

[21](#) Postęp No. 5 dated 8 January 1919, p. 3.

[22](#) Wielkopolanin No. 5 dated 8 January 1919, p. 2. Let us remember that this was caused by one bomb dropped by a single aeroplane.

[23](#) Kurier Poznański No. 5 dated 08 January 1919, p.1; Postęp No. 5 dated 08 January 1919, p.3

[24](#) Adlot, Z minionych dni, [w:] Polska Flota Napowietrzna No. 2 dated 15 August 1919, p. 58.

[25](#) Dziennik Poznański No. 6 dated 9 January 1919, p.3; Wielkopolanin No. 7 dated 10 January 1919, p.1

[26](#) Kurier Poznański No. 6 dated 9 January 1919, p.3; Postęp No. 7 dated 10 January 1919, p.1

[27](#) Kurier Poznański No. 6 dated 9 January 1919, p.3; Postęp No. 7 dated 10 January 1919, p.1

[28](#) Kurier Poznański No. 6 dated 9 January 1919, p.3; Postęp No. 7 dated 10 January 1919, p.1

[29](#) Przewodnik Katolicki No. 3 dated 19 January 1919, p. 23.

[30](#) Dziennik Poznański No. 6 dated 9 January 1919, p. 3; Kurier Poznański No. 6 dated 9 January 1919, p. 3; Postęp No. 7 dated 10 January 1919, p. 1; Wielkopolanin No. 7 dated 10 January 1919, p. 1 (here, the age of 11 years old was reported)

[31](#) Wielkopolanin No. 7 dated 10 January 1919, p.1; Dziennik Poznański No. 6 dated 9 January 1919, p.3

[32](#) Kurier Poznański No. 6 dated 9 January 1919, p.3; Postęp No. 10 dated 14 January 1919, p.3

[33](#)cf. the obituary in Dziennik Poznański No. 7 dated 10 January 1919, p. 5

[34](#) Dziennik Poznański No. 7 dated 10 January 1919, p.2; Postęp No. 8 dated 11 January 1919, p. 2

[35](#) Wielkopolanin No. 14 dated 18 January 1919, p. 3.

[36](#) Zygmunt Bulzacki

[37](#) Kazimierz Sławiński, Ławica poznańskie lotnisko, Warszawa 1975, p. 38.

[38](#) Krzysztof Hoff, Skrzydła niepodległej. O wielkopolskim lotnictwie w okresie Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej, Poznań 2005, p. 14.

[39](#) Radosław Nawrot, Pierwszy nalot Polaków [in:] alehistoria, No. 6(56) dated 11 February 2013, p. 7.

[40](#) Dziennik Poznański No. 7 dated 10 January 1919, p. 5

[41](#) Dziennik Poznański No. 8 dated 11 January 1919, p. 3

[42](#) Kurier Poznański No. 6 dated 9 January 1919, p. 3.

[43](#) Wielkopolanin No. 7 dated 10 January 1919, p. 2.

[44](#) Wielkopolanin No. 9 dated 12 January 1919, p. 2.

[45](#) Wielkopolanin No. 9 dated 12 January 1919, p. 2.

[46](#) Post at www.dws.org.pl dated 6 January 2018 01:36

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