

Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919

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Distinctions and awards related to the Greater Poland Uprising of 1918-1919 and the Greater Poland Armed Forces, introduced in the period of the 2nd Polish Republic

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The Wielkopolska Military Museum is the oldest Polish military-historical museum. Its origins are connected with the events of the Wielkopolska

Uprising of 1918-1919, as it was one of the institutions operating within the Scientific Section of the General Command of the armed forces of the former Prussian partition. It was solemnly opened by the Chief of State and Commander-in-Chief Józef Piłsudski on 27 October 1919.

It was originally located at 7 Marcinkowskiego Avenue, later on the premises of the barracks of the 58th Wielkopolska Infantry Regiment at Bukowska Street, and in 1922 it was given its own headquarters in a building excluded from the Central Artillery Depot in Poznań, located at 1 Artylery Street, at the junction with Franciszka Ratajczaka Street. It was solemnly opened on 22 April 1923.

It housed a collection of several thousand objects related to Polish and foreign militaria. Among them were undoubtedly exhibits related to the armed activities of the Wielkopolska Region. The Museum conducted a wide range of activities, making its collections available to both the military and civilians, presenting them in permanent and temporary exhibitions. It was destroyed during World War II. Part of the collection was evacuated to the East, and what was left on site was dispersed or destroyed by the occupying German authorities. The anti-Polish terror introduced on the territory of Greater Poland, which was incorporated into the Third Reich, also resulted in the irretrievable loss of most of the insurgent memorabilia found in homes and private collections.

Reconstructed after the events of 1956, the museum was incorporated into the organisational

structure of the National Museum in Poznań and became one of its branches. Not yet having its own premises, as it did not return to its pre-war building, it organised its first exhibition in December 1958 in the main building of the National Museum in Poznań. It thus commemorated the fortieth anniversary of the outbreak of the Wielkopolska Uprising 1918-1919 by presenting its first acquisitions and deposits. The permanent exhibition, in a newly acquired building in the middle of the Old Market Square in Poznań, was opened on 22 February 1963. It was created from militaria preserved at the National Museum in Poznań and objects on loan from the Museum of the Polish Army in Warsaw.

One of the basic tasks undertaken by the museum staff was to collect, compile and exhibit a collection commemorating the participation of the Wielkopolska region in national uprisings, above all from the period 1918-1919. On the basis of ever new donations and gifts, these were presented at exhibitions organised every ten years in the museum's main building or on the grounds of its branches: the Museum of Arts and Crafts, the Museum of History of the City of Poznań and the Wielkopolska Military Museum.

All exhibitions presented an ever-growing collection of distinctions awarded for participation in the Wielkopolska Uprising of 1918-1919 and service in the Wielkopolska Army[1]. They were included in publications accompanying the exhibitions. Undoubtedly a very important event was the publication of a catalogue on the occasion of an exhibition organised by the National Museum in Poznań in

1978, on the 60th anniversary of the outbreak of the uprising[2]. It contained sources and materials mainly from the collections of the Wielkopolska Military Museum, but also other branches of the National Museum in Poznań, the Marcin Kasprzak Museum of the History of the Workers' Movement (now the Wielkopolska Museum of Independence), the Provincial State Archive in Poznań, as well as Poznań libraries and museums from the Wielkopolska region. Another catalogue was published by the Society for the Remembrance of the Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919 in 2003,[3] confirming that the basic collection of sources and materials, as well as various types of insurgent memorabilia, is in the collection of the Wielkopolska Military Museum.

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Honours awarded for the Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919 have been the subject of many studies. Their authors were mainly employees of the Wielkopolska Military Museum[4]. Recalling these distinctions was the main motive for organising the exhibition "Wielkopolska Victory Signs" to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the Wielkopolska Uprising 1918-1919[5].

In the interwar period, these were mainly badges commemorating military service and veteran activities, accompanying documents, including those that confirmed the right to wear them: identity cards, patents and diplomas. Accordingly, they are divided primarily into commemorative badges of military institutions and formations, as well as membership badges of veterans'

organisations.

Commemorative badges of the Greater Poland Army[6].

The most well-known badge, and the one most frequently awarded, was the Commemorative Badge of the Greater Poland Forces. Confirmation of the award came in the form of a badge and decorative patent, on which its unusual symbolism was described:

"To commemorate the armed national impulse to throw off the hated Prussian yoke, and to unite with the Motherland, and the period of organisation and activity of the formations of the Greater Poland Forces, there was approved on the 14th of March 1920 by decree of the M. S. Wojsk. of 14.5.20 - 4135 W.M. The commemorative insignia of the Wielkopolska Forces symbolically depicts the traditional fight of the Polish people against the Teutonic Order's butchery, barbarism and perversity in the form of an eight-pointed cross, used by the Teutonic Knights and crossed with a Bolesław's Szczerbiec half-cut from the scabbard as a sign of constant vigilance and zeal for fighting in defence of the Independent Fatherland. The broken chains hung on the cross's arm signify the broken bonds of slavery. As a sign of the independence of the formations of the Greater Poland Army in the period from 27 December 1918 to 21 August 1919 is the scabbard of the sword girded with a ribbon of the national colours and decorated with a monogram of the letters W.W. (Greater Poland Army). As [...] was granted, under No. [...], the right to wear the Commemorative Badge of the

Forces of Greater Poland [...], born [...]. Poznań, on [...] 1921".

Another badge commonly awarded to former soldiers of the Greater Poland Army was the Commemorative Badge of the 14th Infantry Division (1st Division of Greater Poland Riflemen). It was awarded for "[...] bravery and faithful service to the Fatherland in memory of the battles fought in the ranks of the division [...]"[7]. Approved by the Minister of Military Affairs in January 1923, the badge was in the shape of a short double-edged sword made of white metal, with a gold handle covered in blue and black enamel (in the colours of the ribbon of the War Order of Virtuti Militari), and a miniature of the above-mentioned order placed in the centre of the sword. The whole is encircled by a golden laurel branch. In this case, too, the awardees were issued with cards and decorative diplomas.

Other commemorative badges, much smaller in scope, include the "Leszno Group" Commemorative Badge, introduced in 1929 to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the formation of the group of troops operating on the south-western front of the uprising. It was awarded by a committee made up of its former commanders, headed by Lt. Col. res. Dr Bernard Sliwinski. Badges were issued to the decorated. And this badge was in the shape of a vertical sword with a handle in the shape of a crowned eagle's head. The history of the formation was recalled by inscriptions on the badge: the name of the formation, the motto "MOCA BÓG - CELEM DÓCZYŻNA" (THE POWER OF GOD - THE PURPOSE OF DADDY), the date of the beginning

of the formation "1919", the date of the jubilee "1929" and the names of seven localities.

In 1936, the Commemorative Badge of the Soldiers of the former 1st Poznan Frontier Battalion in Szczypiorno was established for the circle of former soldiers of the battalion in Ostrów Wielkopolski, being part of the Association of Veterans of the Polish National Uprisings of 1914-1919. According to the adopted statute, the committee appointed for this purpose awarded a badge, an ID card and a diploma for "[...] voluntary service in the battalion as a preparatory formation of the Greater Poland Uprising of 1918-19" in the period from 14 November to 31 December 1918. It was given the shape of a cavalry cross with a sword and torch between the arms. On the central shield, around the eagle, was placed the inscription "1 BATALION POGRANICZNY POZNAŃSKI W SZCZYPIORNIE", and on the arms the date: "10" "XI" "19" "18"[8].

Commemorative badges of former insurgent authorities

The first initiative to honour persons of merit for the Wielkopolska Uprising 1918-1919 was taken by General Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki, Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces in the former Prussian partition. At his request, the Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council introduced, by decree of 22 April 1919, a badge called the Wielkopolska Mothers of the Fallen commemorative sign[9]. It was in the shape of a cavalry cross with balls on the shoulders, joined by branches of laurel, with the inscriptions: "GREAT" "POLAND" "MATKOM" "POLE-"

"GŁYCH", with an eagle on the central shield[10].
The ornamental patents bore the inscription "On
the basis of the DECREE OF THE
COMMISSIONARY OF THE NATIONAL
PEOPLE'S COUNCIL in POZNAN of 22 April
1919. I herewith bestow upon Mrs. [...] as the
Mother of [...] fallen in battle for the freedom of
the Fatherland [...] a PAMIĄTKOWY CROSS.
Poznań, day [...] 1919. Commander-in-Chief of the
Polish Armed Forces b. pr. [...] gen. of infantry"
and signature of the initiator of the award.

The initiative to award "[...] all those Poznań
citizens who, at the end of December z. and
January of this year who distinguished
themselves, either with arms in hand, or by acts
of sacrifice for the good of the city of Poznań [...]"
were also put forward in November 1919 by
former members of the People's Council of the
City of Poznań. It was planned that the first
decorations would already take place on the first
anniversary of the outbreak of the uprising.

Accordingly, two types of badges were
introduced. The first group were badges called
Commemorative Cross "For Valour" of the
People's Council of the City of Poznań, the second
group were badges called Commemorative Cross
"Civic Merit" of the People's Council of the City of
Poznań.

The badges in the form of a cross inscribed in a
circle, with the letters: "R." "L." "M." "P." on the
shoulders and the date: "27." "12." "19" "18."
between its shoulders, so they differed in the
inscriptions placed above the eagle on the central
shield, "FOR VALIDITY" or "FOR OBEDIENCE."

The decorated were issued cards (not dated) and patents with the date "POZNAN, on 27. December 1919" and the inscription:

"The fifth year of the terrible European war has wrought defeat and downfall on Germany and its allies. France and the Entente have triumphed. The justice of history has resurrected Poland, our Homeland. When the thrones of emperors began to totter and crowns fell from the heads of tyrants and selfish men, the Polish people took up arms and drove the eternal enemies from the banks of the Vistula and Warta. In this immense work, he helped the Fatherland to break its bonds [...] The People's Council of the City of Poznań, wishing to repay the debt of gratitude and show its appreciation, pursuant to its resolution of 3 November 1919, awards the patriotic deed with a MEMORIAL CROSS: "FOR BRAVERY" [or "for bravery"] Poznań, 27. December 1919. PEOPLE'S COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF POZNAN".

The idea of rewarding participants in the uprising was also taken up by members of the former Supreme Command of the People's Guard with its commander Col. O. K. Julian B. Lange at the head. They introduced their own badges, modelled on those of the RLMP, with the letters on the arms of the cross changed to "N" "K" "S" "L". Those awarded badges were issued with the name 'Commemorative Badge for bravery in the 1918-19 Greater Poland Uprising'. On the patents, in addition to repeating the first part of the text, a new notation was introduced: "The Supreme Command of the People's Guard wanting, by virtue of a resolution of the Ministry of Spr. Wojsk. 1919 to repay the debt of gratitude

and express appreciation, rewards the patriotic deed with a MEMORIAL MARK "FOR VALORITY" Poznan, 27. December 1919. B. CHIEF COMMAND OF THE PEOPLE'S GUARD B. ZAB. PR.". The variety awarded for merit was not introduced.

In November 1922, the badge was given the character of a decoration by adding a wreath to the ends of the arms of the cross and hanging the badge on a green ribbon, and in October 1924 a third version of the badge was introduced under the name of "Badge of Commemorative 'For Bravery' of the former Supreme Command of the People's Guards of the former Prussian partition"[11], also changing its appearance by returning to its original form, using a different material.

Commemorative and membership badges of veterans' associations

The original form of the badges of the RLMP and NKSL was also referred to by the Societies of Participants in the Greater Poland Uprising of 1918/19, originally introducing a badge in the shape of a cross inscribed in a circle with the letters: "U" "P" (Participants of the Poznań Uprising ?) on the shoulders, and "WIELKOPOLSKA" above the eagle in the middle of the badge. Later they were made with altered inscriptions: "Z" "T" "U" "P" (Union of Societies of Participants in the Greater Poland Uprising 1918/19)... and "WLKP 1918-19" above the eagle. The name of the badge "Pamiętkowy Krzyż Z. T. U. P. Wlkp. 1918/19 r.". However, a different inscription was placed on the patents: "The fifth

year of the terrible European war has wrought defeat and downfall on Germany and her allies. France and the Entente have triumphed. The justice of history has resurrected Poland, our Homeland. When the thrones of emperors began to totter and crowns fell from the heads of tyrants and selfish men, the people of Greater Poland took up arms and drove the eternal enemies from the banks of the Warta. The Union of Societies of Participants in the Rising, as heir to the People's Council of the City of Poznań, wishing to repay the debt of gratitude and show its appreciation, rewards the patriotic deed with a PAMIĄTKOWY CROSS Poznań, March 1920. Związek TOWARZYSTNIKÓW UCZESTNIKÓW POWSTANIA w WIELKOPOLSCE 1918-19 r."

The General Association of Societies of Insurgents and Warriors of the Western Territories of the Republic of Poland has introduced its own pattern of commemorative badges. And it comes in three categories: "insurgent of arms", "insurgent of merit" and "warrior". In the first category, the badge depicted an eagle superimposed on a cavalry cross suspended on a red ribbon, with insurgent symbols and letters superimposed: "T." "P." and "W" (Society of Insurgents and Warriors) and the letter "P" on the lower shield denoting "insurgent of arms". The badges of "insurgents of merit" were in the shape of an eagle with the letters: "T." "P." and "W.", while removing the military symbols: cap-rogative, rifle and sabre and "Z" on the lower shield. On the "wojak" badge, a barrel and cannonballs and crossed: rifle and lance were superimposed on the eagle, and the letter "W" on the lower shield. Both versions had

a pin fastening. Various types of ID cards were issued to decorated individuals.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the two main unions introduced their own badges. The Association of Insurgents and Warriors' Societies DOK VII operating on the territory of the Poznań Voivodship introduced new designs of badges, maintaining their division according to previous categories. The badge of "insurgent of arms" was superimposed on the national eagle, introduced in 1927, with the letters: "Z" "P" "W". On the shield, the letter 'B' was placed on a half-circle of laurel branches.

The Association of Societies of Insurgents and Warriors of DOK VIII, operating in the Pomeranian Voivodship, introduced its own badges. Among them were the Commemorative Badges "Cross for Merit", gold, silver and bronze. They were given the shape of a cavalry cross with two crossed swords between the arms, with an applied red enamel shield with the Pomeranian Griffin in the middle. Individually made diplomas were issued to the awardees.

Between 1928 and 1931, some veterans of the Greater Poland Uprising of 1918-1919 joined a nationwide veterans' organisation called the Union of Former Participants in the National Uprisings of the Republic of Poland, which had its own badge called "Insurgent Badge". It was awarded, by issuing a diploma to the honoured person confirming the award, by the Main Board in Warsaw or the Western Territories Board of the Union of former Participants of National Uprisings of the Republic of Poland in Poznań.

Made in the shape of a gold cavalier cross with bunches of rays between the arms, covered in red enamel, with a white eagle (in the enamelled version) or a silver eagle on the central shield.

In 1931, the Wielkopolska part of the organisation formed a new national veterans' organisation called the Union of Veterans of National Uprisings of the R.P. 1914-1919. The badge was then changed by adding the letter "W" on the lower arm of the cross and the dates: "1914" and "1919" on the side arms. Badge recipients were issued diplomas with the name 'Union Badge'.

Badges under the name of "Cross of Valour" were awarded by the Association of former volunteers of the Wielkopolska Army operating in Poznań. In the middle of the white-enamelled Cross of Valour, on the shoulders of which was the motto "DÓG" "and DENY" and the dates: "1918" and "1919", on a red circular shield there was a white eagle without a crown on its head, and on the reverse there was the inscription "FOR VALIDITY". The ribbon was probably red in colour.

The Association of Participants in the Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919 in Katowice also awarded its own badge under the name 'Cross of Honour of Participants in the Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919'. It was given the shape of a cross with an elongated lower arm, covered with white enamel and edged with red enamel. In its upper part is placed the inscription "FOR" "FOR SERVICE", in the lower part the outline of an eagle without a crown. The cross is surmounted by a closed royal crown, and between the arms of

the cross are bunches of rays and connecting fragments of a wreath of laurel leaves and fruits. On the reverse, plain side, the inscription "WIELKOPOLSKA" and the dates: "1918" i "1919". The badge was suspended from a white ribbon with five blue stripes.

In the post-war period, the veterans of the uprising were brought together by the Association of Greater Poland Insurgents of 1918-1919, which was reconstituted in 1946. In 1949, it was incorporated into the Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy. It did not introduce its own badge, and in its activities referred to the Greater Poland Uprising Cross, established by a decree of the National Council of 1946.[12] The decree of the Council of State of the People's Republic of Poland of 1957 introduced a badge of the same name, but in a changed shape.

Niniejsze opracowanie nie obejmuje wszystkich wyróżnień przyznawanych byłym uczestnikom Powstania Wielkopolskiego 1918-1919 i żołnierzom Wojsk Wielkopolskich. Ze względu na przyjętą objętość nie ujęto w nim odznak pamiątkowych nadawanych członkom zwyczajnym i honorowym przez poszczególne koła, np. z okazji ich jubileuszy. Tym bardziej nie obejmuje różnych wersji i odmian itd. Celowe jest więc wydanie pełnego katalogu wyróżnień znajdujących się w zbiorach Wielkopolskiego Muzeum Wojskowego.

[1] The events in Poznań and Greater Poland in 1918-1919, today generally referred to as the Greater Poland Uprising of 1918-1919, are clearly divided into an insurrectionary period, involving

the actions of individuals and units of a voluntary nature, and a period of regular troops, formed on the basis of compulsory conscription, called the Greater Poland Army. This was of great importance for veterans' organisations, bringing together only "participants of the uprising" or "insurgents and warriors."

[2] Sources and materials for the history of the Wielkopolska Uprising and the Wielkopolska Forces 1918-1919. Catalogue, edited by T. Jeziorowski, Poznań 1978.

[3] Powstanie Wielkopolskie 1918-1919. Katalog źródeł i materiałów, ed. by S. Sierpowski, Poznań 2003.

[4] For a review of these studies, see the article by J. Łuczak, Wielkopolska Military Museum. Its history and participation in commemorating the 1918-1919 Wielkopolska Uprising and the Wielkopolska Army, [in:] 1918. From Revolution to Uprising, ed. by P. Matusik, "Chronicle of the City of Poznań" 2018/3, pp. 309-328.

[5] J. Łuczak, Wielkopolska Signs of Victory. W stulecie Powstania Wielkopolskiego 1918-1919, Poznań 2018.

[6] The name Wielkopolska Army unifies the previously used terms: Armed Forces of the former Prussian partition, Polish Army of the former Prussian partition, etc. As the article refers to distinctions awarded for participation in the Greater Poland Uprising of 1918-1919, it does not include badges awarded to graduates and instructors of military schools: Wielkopolska

School of Infantry Cadets, Wielkopolska School of Infantry NCOs and School of Artillery Cadets.

[7] On the second version of the certificate the justification for the award reads "[...] for bravery and faithful service to the Fatherland in memory of the battles fought in the ranks of the 14th Infantry Division Wlkp. (1. dyw. strzelc. Wielkp.) I confer the commemorative insignia of the division."

[8] On the miniature the inscription has been simplified to "1.
POGRANICZNA.BATL.SZCZYPIORNO".

[9] The given name of the badge was adopted in the hitherto elaborations despite the fact that in the decree of the NRL there is a notation "a commemorative sign for mothers of the fallen in the fights for the Polish borderlands", and in the order of the Main Command announcing this decree "a commemorative sign for mothers of the fallen in the fights for the Polish borderlands". In the statute of the badge there is the name "Commemorative Mark" and on the patent presented together with the badge "MEMORIAL CROSS". This shows the very common inconsistencies in the definition and use of the names of a badge.

[10] The eagle in the middle of the badge in the collection of the Wielkopolska Military Museum was deprived of the crown on the eagle's head. One can guess that the red enamel underneath it was damaged and replaced in the process. This confirms the practice of removing crowns in the post-war period not only from the heads of

military eagles, but also on various types of badges.

[11] The name of the badge developed; on the ID card an abbreviated inscription "ODZNAKA PAMIĄTKOWA ZA WALECZNOŚĆ B. NACZ. K-DY STR. LUD. B. Zab. PR."

[12] Although the decoration was not introduced, the image of the Wielkopolska Cross of the Uprising was placed, among others, on the flaps of the prescribed flags of the union circles.



