

Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919

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Distinctions and awards related to the Greater Poland Uprising of 1918-1919

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

The Greater Poland Military Museum is the largest historical-military museum in Poland. Its origins are related to the events of the Greater Poland Uprising since it was one of the institutions operating as part of the Scientific Section of the Central Command of the armed forces in the former Prussian Partition. It was officially opened by Chief of State and Commander-in-Chief Józef Piłsudski on 27 October 1919.

The museum was initially located at 7 Marcinkowskiego Avenue. Later it was moved to

the barracks of the 58th Greater Poland Infantry Regiment on Bukowska Street and in 1922 it got its own premises adjoining the Central Artillery Depot in Poznań, at 1 Artyleryjska Street, at the junction with Franciszka Ratajczaka Street. The museum was ceremoniously opened on 22 April 1923.

Its collection was composed of tens of thousands of exhibits related to Polish and foreign military domains. They undoubtedly also included objects related to military activities undertaken by Greater Poland residents. The museum was involved in a broad scope of activities, making its exhibits available to military and civil persons both as part of its permanent exhibition and at temporary exhibitions. The facility was destroyed during World War II, but part of the collection was evacuated to the east. The remaining exhibits were either scattered or destroyed by the German invaders. The anti-Polish wave of terror taking place in the territory of Greater Poland annexed to the Third Reich resulted in the irretrievable loss of the majority of uprising souvenirs stored in houses and private collections.

The museum, rebuilt after the events of 1956, was included in the organisational structure of the National Museum in Poznań and became one of its departments. The museum organised its first exhibition in the main building of the National Museum in Poznań in December 1958; it was organised here as the military museum did not return to its pre-war location and was therefore without its own, independent premises. The exhibition was a form of commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the outbreak of the Greater

Poland Uprising of 1918-1919, and it presented its first exhibits and deposits. A permanent exhibition, in a newly occupied building in the centre of the Old Market Square in Poznań, was opened on 22 February 1963. Its exhibits included military objects preserved in the National Museum in Poznań or borrowed from the Museum of the Polish Armed Forces in Warsaw.

One of the basic tasks given to the museum's employees was to collect, prepare and exhibit a collection to commemorate the participation of the Greater Poland residents in national uprisings, particularly in the years 1918-1919. On the basis of incoming donations and gifts, the pieces were presented at exhibitions organised every ten years in the main building of the museum or in one of its branches: the Museum of Arts and Crafts, the Museum of the History of Poznań or the Greater Poland Military Museum.

All of the exhibitions presented a continuously growing collection of distinctions awarded for participation in the Greater Poland Uprising of 1918-1919 and for service in the Greater Poland Armed Forces^[1]. They were described in publications which accompanied the exhibitions. A particularly important event was undoubtedly the publication of a catalogue on the occasion of the exhibition organised by the National Museum in Poznań in 1978, on the 60th anniversary of the Uprising^[2]. It included sources and materials mainly from the collections of the Greater Poland Military Museum, but also from other branches of the National Museum in Poznań, the Marcin Kasprzak Museum of the History of the Labour Movement (currently the Greater Poland Museum

of Independence) and the Provincial State Archive in Poznań, as well as Poznań libraries and other museums located in Greater Poland. Another catalogue was issued by the Society for the Memory of the Greater Poland Uprising of 1918-1919 in 2003,[\[3\]](#) and this one confirmed that a basic set of sources and materials was in the collection of the Greater Poland Military Museum.

* * *

Distinctions awarded for the Greater Poland Uprising of 1918-1919 were a subject of numerous publications whose authors were mainly employees of the Greater Poland Military Museum[\[4\]](#). To commemorate the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the Greater Poland Uprising and, on this occasion, to display the distinctions, an exhibition titled "Greater Poland Distinctions of Victory" was organised[\[5\]](#).

In the interwar period, these were mostly badges commemorating military service and activity in veterans' organisations, and the accompanying documents that confirmed the right to wear them: cards, award documents and certificates. In this regard, they are chiefly divided into memorial badges of military institutions and formations, and to veterans' organisations membership badges.

The Greater Poland Armed Forces Memorial Badges[\[6\]](#)

The best known and most frequently awarded distinction was the Greater Poland Armed Forces Memorial Badge. It was awarded together with a

card and a decorative award document, which described its rich symbolics:

“To commemorate the armed national movement aimed at the casting off of the hated Prussian yoke and at becoming one with the Mother Country, and the period of organisation and activity of formations as part of the Greater Poland Armed Forces, on 14 March 1920, A GREATER POLAND ARMED FORCES MEMORIAL BADGE, presenting symbols portraying the traditional fight of the Polish spirit against Teutonic pride, barbarity and perversity, in the form of the eight-ended cross used by the Teutonic knights and crossed by Bolesław's Szczerbiec sword, partly removed from the scabbard, as a sign of vigilance and zeal to fight to protect Independent Poland, was approved by a resolution of the Ministry of Military Affairs of 14/05/20 – 4135 W.M. The broken shackles hung on the cross shoulder symbolise the broken bonds of slavery. A scabbard wrapped with a ribbon in the national colours and decorated with a monogram “W. W.” (“WojskaWielkopolskie” - the Greater Poland Armed Forces) is a symbol manifesting the independence of the formations of the Greater Poland Armed Forces from 27 December 1918 to 21 August 1919. As [...] has been awarded, under no. [...], the right to wear the Greater Poland Armed Forces Memorial Badge [...] born on [...]. Poznań, on [...] 1921”

Another distinction often awarded to former soldiers of the Greater Poland Armed Forces was the 14th Infantry Division (the 1st Greater Poland Rifle Division) Memorial Badge. It was awarded for “[...] bravery and faithful service to the

Mother Country, to the memory of the battles fought as part of division [...]”[\[7\]](#). The badge, approved by the Minister of Military Affairs in January 1923, was in the shape of a short double-edged sword made of white metal, with a golden handle covered with light blue and black varnish (in the colours of the Virtuti Militari War Order ribbon). In the centre of the sword, there was a miniature of the Virtuti Military Order. The entire composition is encircled by a laurel branch. Also in this case, distinguished persons were awarded cards and decorative certificates.

Other memorial badges, the range of which was much smaller, included the “Leszno Group” Memorial Badge, introduced in 1920, which was related to the 10th anniversary of the formation of a group of units which operated on the southwestern front of the uprising. It was awarded by a committee composed of its former commanders, led by Lieutenant Colonel of the Reserve, Bernard Śliwiński. The persons distinguished with the badge also received award cards. The badge was in the shape of a vertical sword with its handle in the shape of a crowned eagle head. The history of the formation was provided in the inscriptions engraved on the badge: name of formation, its motto “MOCA BÓG – CELEM OJCZYŻNA”, date when the formation started - “1919”, date of anniversary - “1929” and the names of seven towns.

In 1936, the 1st Poznań Border Battalion in Szczypiorno Memorial Badge was established for a group of former soldiers of a battalion in Ostrów Wielkopolski included in the Union of Veterans of National Uprisings of 1914-1919 in the Polish

Republic. Under the adopted statute, a specially designated committee awarded the badge, the card and the certificate for “[...] voluntary service in the battalion as a formation preparing the National Uprising of 1918-1919” from 14 November to 31 December 1918. It was in the shape of a cavalry cross with a sword and a torch between the cross's shoulders. On the central shield, around the eagle, there was an inscription reading “1 BATALION POGRANICZNY POZNAŃSKI W SZCZUPIORNIE”, and on its shoulders there was a date: “10” “XI” “19” “18”[\[8\]](#).

Memorial badges of former insurgent authorities

General Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki, Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces in the former Prussian Partition, came up with an initiative to distinguish persons who had made considerable contributions to the Greater Poland Uprising of 1918-1919. At his request, the Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council introduced, with its decree of 22 April 1919, a badge named “Wielkopolska matkom poległych” (“Greater Poland Mothers of the Fallen”) Memorial Cross[\[9\]](#). It was in the shape of a cavalry cross with the shoulders connected with laurel branches, and the following inscriptions: “WIELKO” “POLSKA” “MATKOM” “POLE-” “GŁYCH”, with an eagle on the central shield[\[10\]](#). Decorative award documents included the following inscription: “By DECREE OF THE COMISSARIAT OF THE SUPREME PEOPLE’S COUNCIL in POZNAŃ on 22 April 1919, I hereby award Ms. [...], Mother of [...], who fell in the

battle for the Mother Country's freedom, [...] with a MEMORIAL CROSS. Poznań, on [...] 1919. Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces in the Former Prussian Partition, Infantry General [...]” and the signature of the distinction initiator.

In November 1919, former members of the Poznań People’s Council came up with an initiative to award “[...] all the residents of Poznań who, in late December last year and in January this year, were distinguished by having joined armed fights or by their sacrificial acts for the good of the city of Poznań[...].” The first decorations were planned for the 1st anniversary of the outbreak of the uprising.

Two types of badges were therefore introduced. The first one was a badge named the Poznań People’s Council Memorial Cross “For Bravery”, the second one was a badge named the Poznań People’s Council’s Memorial Cross “For Civil Merits”.

The badges, in the shape 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, therefore differed with the inscriptions placed above the eagle on the central shield “ZA WALECZOŚĆ” (“for bravery”) or “ZASŁUDZE OBYW.” (“for civil merits”). The persons distinguished received undated cards and award documents with the date: “POZNAŃ, 27 December 1919” and the inscription:

“The fifth year of the terrible European war brought defeat to the Germans and their allies. France and the Entente were triumphant.

History's justice contributed to the restoration of Poland, our Mother Country. When the thrones of emperors started to totter and crowns started to fall off the heads of tyrants and egoists, the Polish people grabbed weapons and chased the enemy away from the vicinity of the Vistula and the Warta. By his contribution to this memorable event, [...] helped the Mother Country to break her shackles. Willing to pay back the debt of gratitude and express its recognition, under the resolution of 3 November 1919, the Poznań People's Council rewarded the patriotic act with a MEMORABLE CROSS: "FOR BRAVERY" [or "FOR CIVIL MERITS"] Poznań, on 27 December 1919, THE POZNAŃ PEOPLE'S COUNCIL".

The idea of awarding the uprising's participants with badges was also adopted by members of the former People's Guard Supreme Command with its Commander, Colonel O. K. Julian B. Lange. They introduced their own badges inspired by the ones awarded by the Poznań People's Council, replacing the letters on cross shoulders with the letters "N" "K" "S" "L". The distinguished recipients received cards with the inscription: "Memorial Badge for bravery in the Greater Poland Uprising of 1918-19". Award documents, as well as repeating the first part of the text, introduced a new provision "the People's Guard Supreme Command, willing, under the resolution of the Ministry of Military Affairs of 1919, to pay back its debt of gratitude and express its recognition, rewards the patriotic act with the MEMORIAL BADGE "FOR BRAVERY", Poznań, 27 December 1919, THE FORMER PEOPLE'S GUARD SUPREME COMMAND OF THE FORMER

PRUSSIAN PARTITION". A variation awarded for civil merits was not introduced.

In November 1922, the badge changed its classification to a distinction, which was manifested by means of soldering a wreath to the cross shoulder ends and hanging the badge on a green ribbon. In October 1924, a third version of the badge was introduced, under the name "former People's Guard Supreme Command's Memorial Badge 'For Bravery'" [\[11\]](#). The badge's look was changed by returning to its initial form but with the use of a different material.

Memorial and membership badges of veterans' associations

The Greater Poland Uprising of 1918/1919 Participants' Associations also made a reference to the initial form of RLMP and NKSL badges, introducing a badge in the shape of a cross inside a circle with letters: "U" "P" "P" ("Uczestnikom Powstania Poznańskiego" - "to the participants of the Poznań Uprising") on its shoulders, and "WIELKOPOLSKA" ("Greater Poland") above the eagle located in the centre of the badge. Later the inscriptions were changed into: "Z" "T" "U" "P" (an acronym of the Greater Poland Uprising of 1918/1919 Participants' Associations Union)... and "WLKP 1918-19" above the eagle. On the cards, there was the name of the badge: "Pamiętkowy Krzyż Z. T. U. P. Wlkp. 1918/19 r.". On the award documents, however, the inscription was different: "The fifth year of the terrible European war brought defeat to the Germans and their allies. France and the Entente were triumphant. History's justice contributed to

the restoration of Poland, our Mother Country. When the thrones of emperors started to totter and crowns started to fall off the heads of tyrants and egoists, the people of Greater Poland grabbed weapons and chased the enemy away from the vicinity of the Warta. [...] actively participated in this memorable event. The Greater Poland Uprising Participants' Associations Union, as the successor of the Poznań People's Council, willing to pay back the debt of gratitude and express its recognition, rewards the patriotic act with the MEMORIAL CROSS. Poznań, in March 1920. THE GREATER POLAND UPRISING OF 1918-1919 PARTICIPANTS' ASSOCIATIONS UNION".

The General Union of Insurgents and Soldiers Associations in the Western Lands of the Polish Republic introduced its own pattern of memorial badges. The badges came in three categories: "insurgent of arms", "insurgent of merits" and "soldier". The badge in the first category presented an eagle placed on a cavalry cross hung on a red ribbon, with the symbols of the uprising and the letters: "T." "P." and "W" (acronym for the Insurgents and Soldiers Association) and the letter "P" on the bottom shield, meaning "insurgent of arms". "Insurgent of merits" badges were in the shape of an eagle with the letters: "T." "P." and "W.", but with all military symbols removed (the "rogatywka" cap, rifle, sabre), and had the letter "Z" on the bottom shield. "Soldier" badges had a gun barrel and cannonballs, as well as a rifle crossed with a lance. On the bottom shield there was the letter "W". All versions were fastened with a pin. The distinguished recipients received different types

of cards.

At the break of the 1920s and the 1930s, two basic unions introduced their own badges. The Union of Insurgents and Soldiers Associations within the 7th Corps District Command operating in the Poznań Province introduced new badge patterns, maintaining their division according to the aforementioned categories. On the “insurgent of arms” badge, the national eagle, introduced in 1927, was placed, with the letters: “Z” “P” “W”. On the shield, on a semi-wreath made of laurel leaves, the letter “B” was placed.

The Union of Insurgents and Soldiers Associations within the 8th Corps District Command, operating in the Pomeranian Province, also introduced its own badges. They included golden, silver and bronze “Cross for Merit” Memorial Badges. These were in the shape of a cavalry cross with two crossed swords between the shoulders, with a red-varnished shield and a Pomeranian Griffin in the centre. The distinguished recipients received personalised certificates.

In 1928-1931, some of the veterans of the Greater Poland Uprising of 1918-1919 joined the national veterans’ organisation named the Former Polish National Uprisings Participants Association, which had its own badge called the “Insurgent Badge”. This was issued, together with a suitable certificate, by the Central Headquarters in Warsaw or by the Board of the Western Lands of the Former Polish National Uprisings Participants Union in Poznań. The badge was in the shape of a golden cavalry cross with rays coming out from between its shoulders, covered in red varnish,

with a white eagle (in the varnished version) or a silver eagle on the central shield.

In 1931, the Greater Poland part of the organisation established a new, national veterans' organisation named the Polish National Uprisings of 1914-1919 Veterans Union. The badge was modified with the addition of the letter "W" on the lower shoulder of the cross, and the dates: "1914" and "1919" on the side shoulders. The distinguished recipients received certificates with an inscription reading "Union Badge".

A badge called the "Gallantry Cross" was awarded by the Former Greater Poland Armed Forces Volunteers Union operating in Poznań. In the centre there was a cavalry cross, painted with white varnish, which had the mottoes "BÓG" ("God") and "OJCZYŻNA" ("Mother Country") and the dates: "1918" and "1919" on its shoulders, on a red, round shield there was a white eagle without a crown, and, on the reverse, there was the inscription "ZA WALECZNOŚĆ" ("for bravery"). The ribbon was most probably red.

The Greater Poland Uprising of 1918-1919 Participants Union in Katowice also awarded its own badge, entitled the "Honorary Cross of the Greater Poland Uprising of 1918-1919 Participants". It was in the shape of a cross with an elongated lower shoulder, painted with white varnish and edged with red varnish. In its upper part, there was the inscription "ZA" "ZASŁUGĘ" ("for merit"), and in the lower part there was a contour of an eagle without a crown. In the centre of the cross, there was a closed royal crown. Between the cross's shoulders there were rays

and elements of a wreath made of laurel leaves and fruit. On the plain reverse side, there was the inscription "WIELKOPOLSKA" and the dates: "1918" and "1919". The badge was hung on a white ribbon with five light-blue stripes.

In the post-war period, the veterans of the uprising were gathered together in the Greater Poland Insurgents Union, recreated in 1946. In 1948, it was incorporated into the Union of Soldiers Fighting for Freedom and Democracy. It did not introduce its own badge. Its activity was inspired by the Greater Poland Insurgent Cross, established by a decree of the State National Council of 1946.[\[12\]](#) A distinction of the same name but of a different shape was introduced by decree of the Polish Council of State in the Polish People's Republic, in 1957.

The present publication does not cover all of the distinctions awarded to the former participants of the Greater Poland Uprising of 1918-1919 and to the soldiers of the Greater Poland Armed Forces. Due to obligations which limit the volume of the paper, it does not include memorial badges awarded to ordinary and honorary members by individual circles, e.g. on the occasion of their anniversaries. It does not cover different versions and varieties of badges either. It would therefore be justified to issue a complete catalogue of the distinctions which are included in the collections of the Greater Poland Military Museum.

[1] The events that happened in Poznań and in Greater Poland in 1918-1919, today referred to as the Greater Poland Uprising of 1918-1919, can be clearly divided into an insurgent period, covering the voluntary activities of individual persons and units, and the period of the action of regular armies, formed on the basis of mandatory conscription, called the Greater Poland Armed Forces. This was of great significance for veteran organisations, which were composed of either “uprising participants” or “insurgents and soldiers”.

[2] *Sources and materials on the history of the Greater Poland Uprising and the Greater Poland Armed Forces of 1918-1919. Catalogue*, edited by T. Jeziorowski, Poznań 1978.

[3] *The Greater Poland Uprising of 1918-1919. The Catalogue of Sources and Materials*, edited by S. Sierpowski, Poznań 2003

[4] A review of these publications is included in J. Łuczak's article entitled *The Greater Poland Military Museum. Its history and contribution to the commemoration of the Greater Poland Uprising of 1918-1919 and the Greater Poland Armed Forces*, [in:] *1918. From a Revolution to an Uprising*, edited by P. Matusik, “Chronicle of the City of Poznań” 2018/3, pp. 309-328.

[5] J. Łuczak, *Greater Poland Distinctions of Victory. On the 100th Anniversary of the Greater Poland Uprising of 1918-1919*, Poznań 2018.

[6] The name "Greater Poland Armed Forces" unifies the previously used names: the Armed Forces of the Former Prussian Partition, the 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 cover those distinctions awarded to graduates and instructors of military schools: the Greater Poland Officer Cadet School, the Greater Poland Non-Commissioned Infantry Officers School and the Greater Poland Artillery Officer Cadet School.

[7] In the second version of the certificate, the award justification was worded as follows: "[...] for bravery and faithful service to the Mother Country, to the memory of battles fought as part of the 14th Greater Poland Infantry Division (the 1st Greater Poland Rifle Division), I hereby award the memorial badge of the division."

[8] The miniature featured a simplified inscription: "1
BATL.POGRANICZNY.SZCZYPIORNO".

[9] The name of the badge was adopted in publications despite the fact that the SPC's decree includes a provision "„znak pamiątkowy dla matek poległych w walkach o kresy Polskie", whilst in the same provision in Central

Command's order that announced the decree, the "p" was not capitalised. The badge's statute refers to a "Memorial mark", while the document awarded with the badge makes a reference to a "MEMORIAL CROSS". This shows that there were frequent inconsistencies in the names of an individual badge.

[10] The eagle in the centre of the badge from the collection of the Greater Poland Military Museum did not have a crown on its head. The red varnish underneath was probably damaged and replaced. It proves that in the interwar period there was a practice of removing crowns from military eagles and eagles on other types of badges.

[11] The name on the badge is extended; the inscription on the card is abridged "ODZNAKA PAMIĄTKOWA ZA WALECZNOŚĆ B. NACZ. K-DY STR. LUD. B. Zab. PR."

[12] Although the distinction was never introduced, the image of the Greater Poland Insurgent Cross was placed, among others, on the banners of union circles.

[Military Museum of
Wielkopolska – branch of the
National Museum in Poznań](#)





