

# GREATER POLAND UPRISING

## 1918-1919



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Scenario of the exhibition: Marcin Podemski

Iconography and documentary search: Marcin Podemski

The graphic concept of the series: Aleksandra Kaiper-Miszułowicz

The artistic concept: Karolina Zielazek-Szeska

Review: dr Piotr Grzelczak, dr hab. Filip Musiał

Photographs and documents from the collections of:

Regional Museum in Jarocin,

Poznań Medical University Museum,

Museum of the Wielkopolska Insurgents in Lusowo,

National Digital Archive,

Kórnik Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences,

POLONA,

as well as private collections of Maria Mielcarzewicz,

Katarzyna Prauzińska-Czarnul, Jan Szymański and Wawrzyniec Wierzejewski

Parade of one of the squadrons of 4th Regiment of Wielkopolska Uhlans, Poznań, 11th December 1919  
Photo from the collection of the Museum of Wielkopolska Insurgents in Lusowo

# THE LONGEST WAR...



The programme of organic work was carried out in various ways, through self-education, scientific, craft, religious and sports societies, as well as parish agricultural circles or Polish cooperatives and Polish banking systems.



Music circle of the "Sokół" Polish Gymnastic Society in Poznań

Photo from *Srebrna księga Sokola Poznańskiego* [Silver Book of Sokół in Poznań], Poznań 1911



Priest Piotr Wawrzyniak (1849-1910) – at the turn of the 19th and 20th century was the leader of Polish organic work movement in Poznań.

Photo from Jan Szymański's collection

In the second half of the 19th century the area of the Poznań Province was a place of clash between two elements: Polish and German. The Poles, wanting to preserve and develop their national identity, took a number of actions opposing the German policy against the Polish population of the Poznań Province. This whole undertaking for the civilisation development of Poles – called organic work – was a preparation of society to regain independence.



The Bazar hotel in Poznań. The building opened in 1841 and became the heart of Polish political, cultural and economic life during the partitions

Photo from the NDA collection



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# NOVEMBER 1918 IN THE POZNAŃ PROVINCE

W dniu dzisiejszym utworzyła się

## Rada Żołnierzy

i objęła władzę nad garnizonom tutajszym.

Spokój i ład w mieście zapewniony i podtrzymamy go z pomocą ludności cywilnej.

Obywatele! Każdy niech pilnuje swoich obowiązków; unikać zbiegowisk na miejscach publicznych. Wszelkie podburzanie do bezwzględnie. Wymaga żołnierskim.

Obywatele! Nadzwyczajnych zarządzeń. rękę!

Jarocin, dnia 9. listo

## Rada Żołnierzy

Adamczewski, Schulden, Leindecker,

Wassmann, Błaziejewski, Krüger,

Langeuberg Barth Kirchner Traber,



Priest Mieczysław Meissner (1877-1938), founder of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council in the town of Środa Wielkopolska.

Photo from Maria Mielcarzewicz's private collection

The armistice signed on 11th November 1918, which ended World War I, left the Province of Poznań within the borders of the German Republic. The related disappointment among the Polish population, however, did not stop the independence aspirations of Poles. The chaos and disorientation that prevailed in the German state as a result of the revolution and abdication of the Emperor Wilhelm II, was conducive to Polish goals.



The Supreme People's Council.

Photo from the Dziennik Polskiego Sejmu Dzielnicowego [Journal of the Polish District Sejm], Poznań 1918

This political organization, existing since 1916 (acting openly since November 1918), in the Prussian partition, supported the Allied states during World War I, and considered the National Committee of Poland, headed by Roman Dmowski, to be the legitimate Polish authorities. The aim of the SPC was to administer the Polish areas of the Prussian partition.

An appeal by the Jarocin Soldiers' Council, established already on 9th November 1918.

Photo from the collection of the Regional Museum in Jarocin

Since November 1918, a network of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils was established in Poznań and the entire region, and in the areas dominated by Poles those bodies took on a national character.



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# ROADS TO INDEPENDENCE

Before the outbreak of the uprising, two currents of approach to the armed act dominated in the area of the Poznań Province. The conservative one, represented by the Supreme People's Council, and the radical one, which mainly involved activists of the Polish Military Organisation of the Prussian partition. Both circles took part in the creation of two military formations in autumn 1918: The People's Guard and the Guard and Security Service.



Wincenty Wierzejewski (1889-1972) – founder of the Poznań scouting and leader of the Polish Military Organisation of the Prussian partition

Photo from Wawrzyniec Wierzejewski's collection

The members of the PMO (Polish Military Organisation of the Prussian Partition of Poland) were striving for an immediate uprising, and many of its members became part of the Guard and Security Service.



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|---------------------------------|--|
| Fotografja:                     | Legitymacja Nr.                                |
|                                 | Okaziciel niniejszej legitymacji<br>druh ..... |
|                                 | urodzony dnia ..... 18                         |
|                                 | mieszkanie:                                    |
|                                 | jest członkiem Straży Ludowej w Pleszewie      |
|                                 | <b>Komenda Straży Ludowej w Pleszewie.</b>     |
| Podpis właściciela legitymacji: | Komendant.                                     |
|                                 | Obwód  |

Photocopy of an identity cards of a member of the People's Guard in Pleszew  
Photo from the collection of the Kórnik Library of PAS

Before the outbreak of the uprising, the People's Guard had several thousand members in the whole Poznań Province.



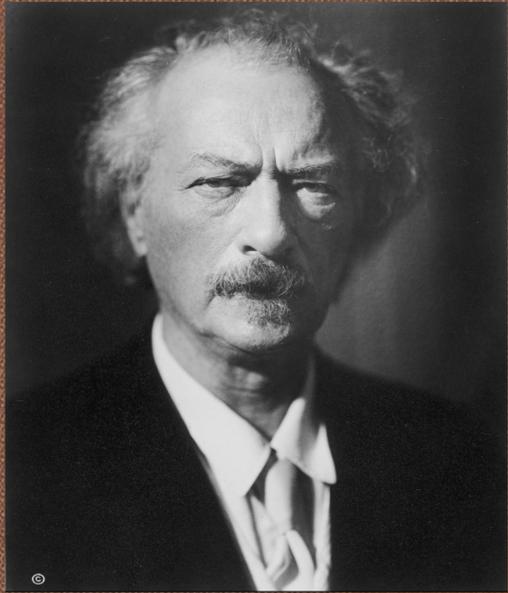
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The first session of the Polish District Sejm in the "Apollo" Hall at Piekary street in Poznań, 3rd December 1918.  
Photo POLONA.

During the PDS session, the Supreme People's Council was finally recognized as the legal Polish authority in the lands of the Prussian partition.

Paderewski's arrival to Poznań caused great enthusiasm among Polish residents of Poznań. In his honour, the city was decorated with Polish and Allied flags.

# PADEREWSKI IN POZNAŃ



Ignacy Jan Paderewski (1860–1941)

Reproduction of a watercolour postcard by Leon Prauziński from NDA collection



„[...] After long years of captivity the Homeland is being reborn. It has to be rebuilt on the same basis as the first construction was conceived here. No, even the most wisely, organised party will be able to rebuild our Homeland alone. For this work we need the unity and consent of all, love and strength, faith and self-denial; for this work we need all our power and all hearts of the team [...].”

(from the speech of I. J. Paderewski given in Poznań on 26th December 1918)



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Arrival of Ignacy Jan Paderewski to the centre of Poznań, 26th December 1918

Reproduction of a watercolour postcard by Leon Prauziński from the POLONA collection

# BIG DAY - 27TH DECEMBER 1918

On 27th December 1918, two demonstrations were organized in Poznań: a Polish demonstration with a few thousand Polish children, and a German demonstration with German soldiers taking part alongside civilians.

The meeting in the afternoon in front of the Bazaar of both demonstrations (without the participation of children) is considered as the beginning of the uprising. The first shot was fired in the crowd. Its consequence will be start of fights in Poznań.



Fights at the Chwaliszewski Bridge in Poznań, 27th December 1918

Reproduction of a watercolour postcard by Leon Prauziński from the POLONA collection

Franciszek Ratajczak (1887–1918).  
Often regarded as the first Polish victim  
of the uprising

Photo from "Ilustracja Wielkopolska" 1928,  
no. 13



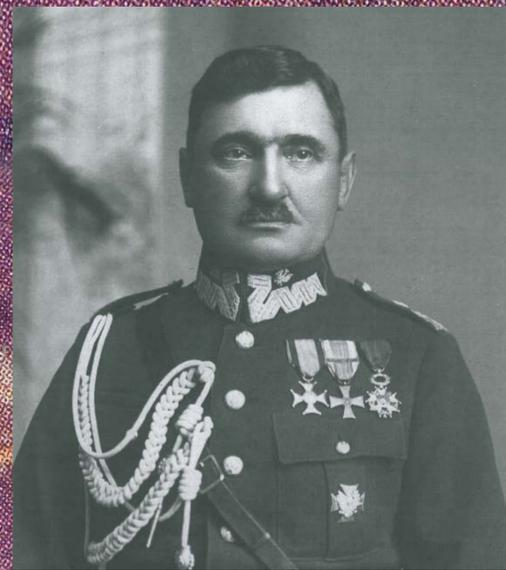
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Children with Polish flags on Ritterstasse (currently ul. Ratajczaka) in a march organized in honour of I.J. Paderewski  
27th December 1918

Photo Kazimierz Greger/ from the collection of Małgorzata Wierusz-Kozłowska [Museum of Medical University in Poznań]

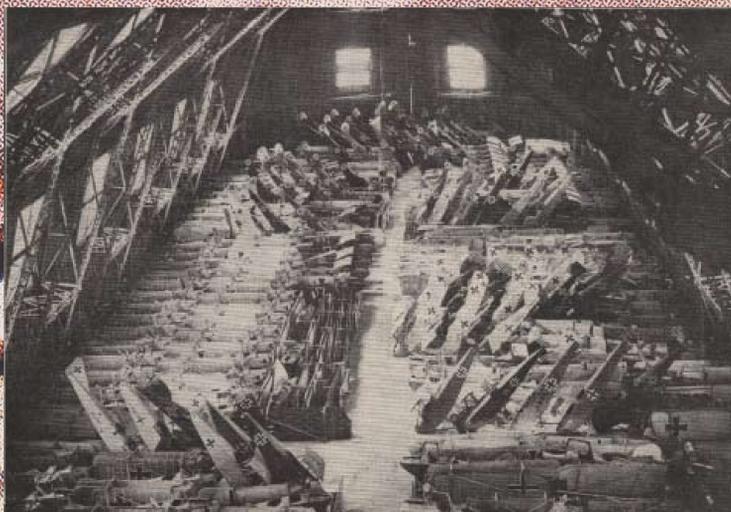
# TAKING OF ŁAWICA AIRPORT

Within two days, practically the whole city of Poznań was taken over by the insurgent forces. The only important point not conquered during the December days was the Poznań airport on Ławica. Finally, on 6 January 1919, on the order of Major Stanisław Taczak, the first commander in chief of the uprising, this place was also taken by the insurgents through a storm.



Major Stanisław Taczak (1874–1960)  
– the first commander of the Greater Poland Uprising 1918/1919 (in the photo in the general's uniform).

Photo from NDA collection



Zeppelin hall taken by the insurgents

Photo from *Ku czci poległych lotników [In honour of fallen aviators]*, ed. M. Romeyko, ed. S. Borowy, Warszawa 1933

## Taking of Ławica Airport by the Greater Poland Insurgents

Reproduction of a watercolour postcard by Leon Prauziński from the POLONA collection

The taking of Ławica airport is connected with the largest loot in the recent history of the Polish Army. About 30 operational airplanes were taken over, supplementing the loot with another 300 airframes stored in the Zeppelin Hall in Winiary near Poznań. The value of the acquired equipment is estimated at 160 million German marks.



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# TO ARMS! EVERYBODY TO ARMS

"[...] and when the order as a thunder sounds  
The enemies shall as birds flew,  
As our virtuous fathers crowns  
Wielkopolska part of crew!"

(R. Wilkanowicz, *Zwycięzali naszych Szwaby*)



The information about the outbreak of the uprising in Poznań reached the entire province in a flash. Quickly and spontaneously local communities formed voluntary insurgent units, which until 8th January 1919 liberated almost the whole Province

The map illustrating the spread of the uprising.  
Author Radosław Przebitkowski from: [pw.ipn.gov.pl](http://pw.ipn.gov.pl)



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The moment of hanging the Polish flag at the Jarocin Town Hall, 1st January 1919

Photo from the Regional Museum in Jarocin

# THE WIELKOPOLSKA ARMY

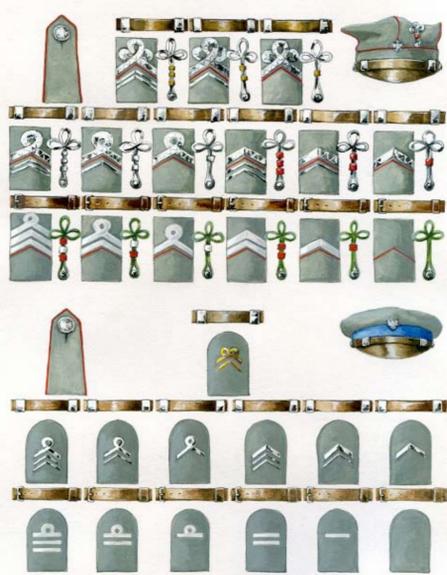
The successes in the first two weeks of the fighting did not eliminate the problems related to the voluntary form of participation in the uprising. Above all, discipline and enforcement of orders remained at a low level. The voluntary character of the units ended with the announcement of conscription to the Wielkopolska Army. Its founder was the new commander-in-chief sent from Warsaw, Gen. Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki.



Gen. Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki (1867–1937). Second commander of the Greater Poland Uprising 1918/1919.

Photo from the NDA collection

The new commander, despite the initial reserve with which he was received in Greater Poland, quickly won people of the Poznań Province with his professionalism, firmness and conservative views.



The patterns of the designation of ranks established on 21st January 1919, characteristic for the Wielkopolska Army and the People's Guard.

Author Leszek Rościszewski from: [pw.ipn.gov.pl](http://pw.ipn.gov.pl).



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Sworn-in ceremony of insurgents on the market square in Jutrosin, 19th January 1919.

Photo from the collection of the Kórnik Library of PAS

# THE 1919 GERMAN- GREATER POLAND WAR.



Soldiers of 1st Regiment of Greater Poland Uhlans in training, northern Wielkopolska, June 1919

Photo from the collection of the Museum of Wielkopolska Insurgents in Lusowo

The counter – offensive on the whole front line started by the Germans at the beginning of February 1919 was a prelude to the German – Greater Poland War. The bloodiest battles were fought on the northern and western fronts, and the fights in these areas were marked by the battles at: Kcynia, Łabiszyn, Szubin, Wielki Grójec, Nowa Wieś Zbąska, Babimost, Kargowa...

A group of Greater Poland insurgents (southern front) – Jutrosin Company under the command of the platoon leader Jana Śliwa (the first one on the left), next to First class shooter Franciszek Kaczmarek. Ostoje (Rawicz district), 1919.

Photo from the collection of the Kórnik Library of PAS



Platoon of 4th Battery under Wielki Grójec (western front), February 1919.

Photo from the collection of Katarzyna Prauzińska-Czarnul



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Granting Poland cities such as Zbąszyń and Bydgoszcz, as well as Leszno and Międzychód, which were not captured by the insurgents, was a success of Polish diplomacy.

# DIPLOMACY



Capturing Zbąszyń as part of the revindication action, January 1920.

Photo from the collection of the Kórnik Library of PAS



Demarcation line according to the armistice in Trier of 16th February 1919.

Author: Radosław Przebitkowski from: [pw.ipn.gov.pl](http://pw.ipn.gov.pl).



Roman Dmowski (1864–1939), Polish delegate to the 1919 Paris Conference and signatory of the Versailles Peace Treaty. He sought to incorporate the lands of the Prussian partition into the reborn Poland.

Photo from the NDA collection

As a result of the efforts of Polish diplomacy and the support of France (the great role of Marshal Ferdinand Foch), Germany was forced to conclude a truce in Trier (16th February 1919), and the Versailles Peace Treaty signed on 28th June 1919 finally established the shape of the Polish western border.

The success in the form of the incorporation of almost the entire Poznań Province into Poland was a consequence of the victorious uprising of the people of Wielkopolska and the activity of Polish diplomats in Paris.



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Capturing Bydgoszcz as part of the revindication action, January 1920.

Photo from the collection NDA

# THE END RESULT OF THE UPRISING

The Greater Poland Uprising of 1918/1919 was an independence impulse of the Polish society, which embodied the dream of several generations of Poles about a common struggle of all social groups - elites and "people".

It is estimated that the percentage share in the armed troops of Poles from the Poznań Province reached even 16%. About 2 thousand of them died in fights.



4th battery of the 3rd Regiment of Wielkopolska Riflemen on the front of the Polish-Bolshevik war, Bobrujsk 1919.

Photo from the collection of Katarzyna Prauzińska-Czarnul



12<sup>A</sup> ESKADRA WYWIADOWCZA



Bojowe odznaczenie eskadry.

Combat decoration of the 12th Reconnaissance Squadron (continuing the traditions of the 1st Wielkopolska Field Squadron) for "Defence of the Eastern Borderlands"

Photo from *Ku czci poległych lotników [In honour of fallen aviators]*, ed. M. Romeyko, ed. S. Borowy, Warszawa 1933

The People of Wielkopolska gave to the Reborn Poland a disciplined and well-trained Wielkopolska Army. Many of its soldiers will die in the war with the Ukrainians in the region of Eastern Lesser Poland, in the Upper Silesia Uprisings or the Polish-Bolshevik war of 1921.



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The Chief of the Polish State, Józef Piłsudski, receives the parade of the Wielkopolska army Poznań, 27th October 1919. Photo NDA

At the end of August 1919 the Wielkopolska Army was incorporated into the Polish Army

# GREATER POLAND UPRISING 1918/1919 IN NUMBERS

About 2,000 fallen insurgents and 6,000 wounded

160 million German marks at the time were worth the airborne equipment seized by the insurgents at the "Ławica" airport and in the Zeppelin Hall.

It took the insurgents 13 days to capture almost the entire Poznań Province

100,000 soldiers were in the Wielkopolska Army



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Oath-taking of the insurgent troops in Wilhelm Square (now Liberty Square) in Poznań, January 1919.

Photo from the collection of Katarzyna Prauzińska-Czarnul