

ARDUOUS ROAD TO STATEHOOD AT THE END OF IMPERIAL RULE

SACRIFICE COOPERATION TRADITION

GREATER POLAND UPRISING (1918-1919) - A PATRIOTIC REVOLT THAT ENDED IN VICTORY

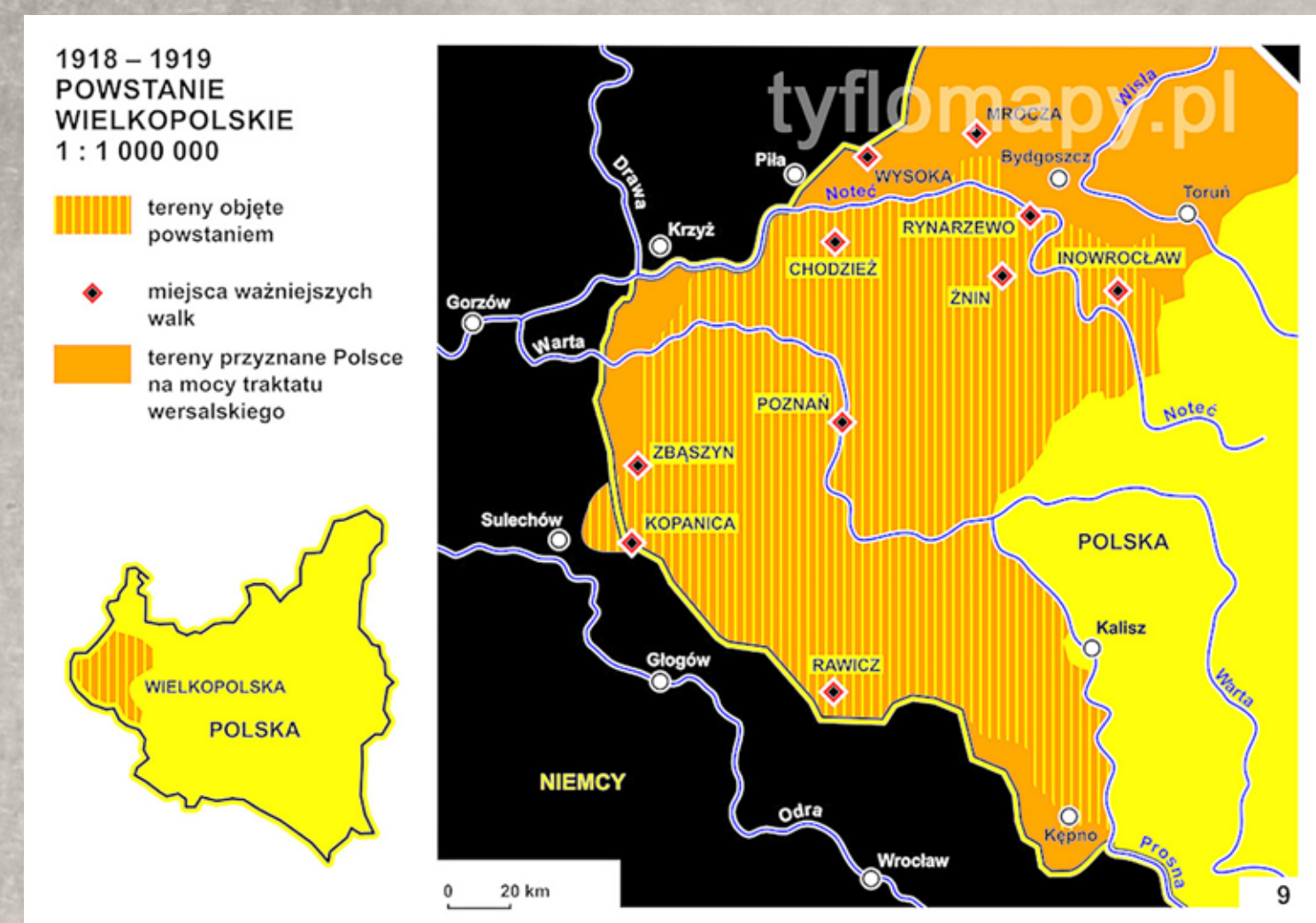
The armistice signed at Compiègne on November 11, 1918, which ended the military operations of World War I, stipulated that Poland would regain its independence after 123 years of partition. At the same time, the territories formerly belonging to Rzeczpospolita [the Republic], which had remained in German hands in the 19th century, were partially granted to the partitioner, even though it had lost the Great War and was officially blamed for unleashing it. Such a decision also applied to part of the lands known as Wielkopolska, i.e. Greater Poland (also called Poznań Province), which was a "nest" of Polish statehood headed by Poznań - the first Polish bishopric, established back in the 10th century.

Poles living in the Poznańska Province initially tried to obtain international consent to join the reborn Homeland peacefully, gradually taking over the administration from German hands. To this end, they organized a government (the Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council in Poznań), established a legislature (the District Sejm [Parliament]) and units to guard order (the People's Guard).

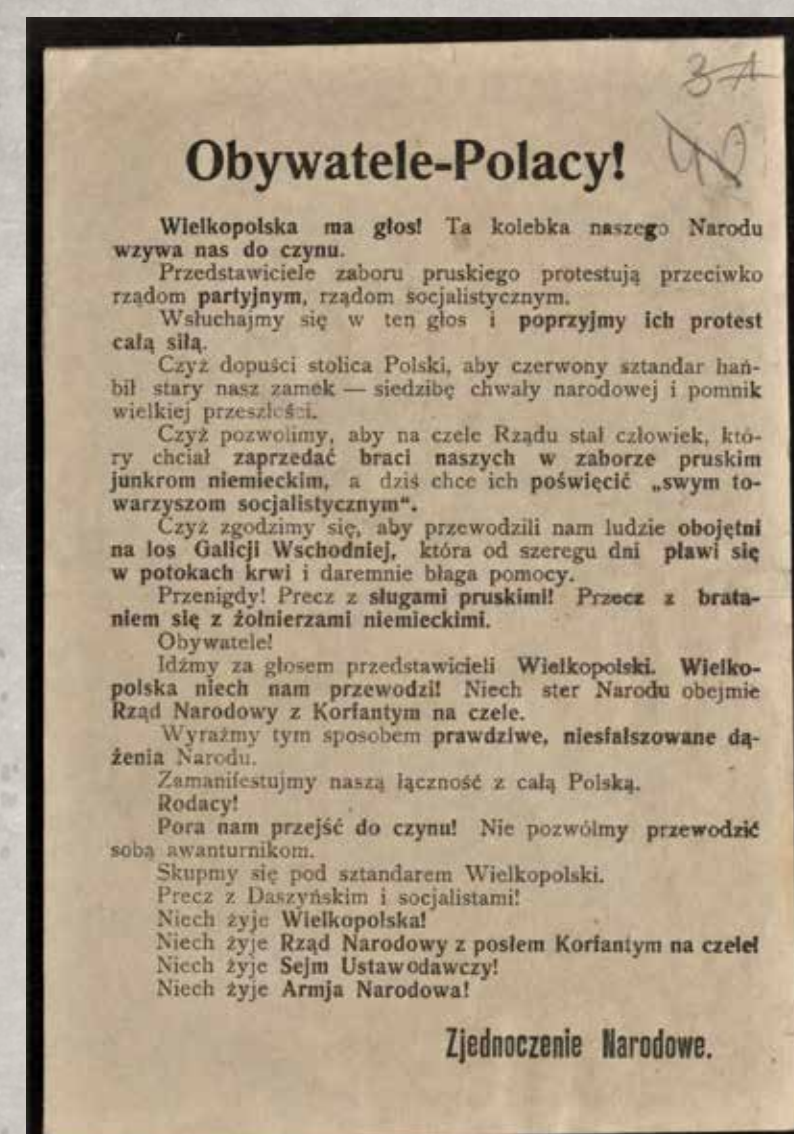
Seeing, however, that these actions do not bring the expected results, the young residents of Greater Poland began to think about engaging in armed combat. The uprising of the residents of Poznań unexpectedly occurred during a visit to the city by Ignacy Jan Paderewski - a world-famous Polish pianist, but also a politician and diplomat. He arrived at Poznań's Bazar Hotel on December 26, 1918, where he was greeted with an ovation by his compatriots. In response to these manifestations of patriotic feelings, the Germans organized provocative actions the following day, during which they tore down the flags of Poland and of the countries of the coalition that won World War I (English, American and French). In response to such actions by the partitioners, riots ensued, from which street fighting followed.

Over the next three days Poznań was in the hands of Polish insurgents, and fighting broke out at successive points in the Province. From January 1919, the command of the volunteer insurgent units was taken over by Gen. Józef Dowbor-Musnicki, who - in the extremely difficult conditions of the newly revived country - transformed them within three months into the regular Greater Poland Army. It achieved victories over the steadily increasing German forces. Impressed by the determination of the Poles the authorities of the victorious Entente states (especially France) in the First War, ultimately led to the signing of the Polish-German armistice in Trier on February 16, 1919. It granted to the Rzeczpospolita the territories of Greater Poland won by the insurgents and ordered the Germans to cease offensive operations. Realistically, however, to provocative attacks by the former partitioners continued in the following months. The decisions of the Trier Agreement were confirmed - and even changed in favor of Poland - at the Versailles Peace Conference, while the actual end of the era of the Greater Poland Uprising is considered to have come on March 8, 1920.

Despite the fact that the insurrection broke out spontaneously, without a prepared prior plan and - at least at the beginning - without adequate training and armaments, it was victorious. This was determined by the courage of the participants and their deep love of the Homeland, of which to this day are reminded by numerous initiatives and patriotic ceremonies.



Map of the consequences of the Greater Poland Uprising on the course of the western border of the Second Republic - the recovery of Greater Poland, the land that was the nucleus of the Polish state (shift of the border after the Treaty of Trier and under the Treaty of Versailles, compared to the preliminary arrangements of the truce of November 11, 1918).



A proclamation calling on Poles to support the Greater Poland Uprising - headline: "Citizens - Poles! Greater Poland has a voice! It is the cradle of our Nation that calls us to action", 1919.



Welcoming at the railroad station in Poznań Jan Ignacy Paderewski - world-famous pianist, diplomat and advocate of Polish independence - whose arrival on December 26, 1918, mobilized the people of Greater Poland to organize the uprising.



Disarming the German army by the insurgents of Greater Poland

Memorable, never forgotten will remain the second Christmas of 1918 in the history of Poznań. Upon hearing that Ignacy Paderewski was coming to the capital of Greater Poland, a wave of joy and enthusiasm surged in Polish hearts. Everything that had been suppressed for a hundred years, that had clung and withered at the bottom of the soul under the yoke of cruel slavery, erupted with vigorous force and found expression in a powerful manifestation. For here, for the first time, our longings and hopes most fervently took on a familiar symbol, in the living form of a man who will stand before us as a messenger bringing good news from the West. Paderewski the musician, Paderewski the artist, Paderewski the philanthropist, magnanimous in rescue action could always count on a reception as warm as possible. But this time he was something even more to us. He was greeted with outstretched arms by the people as an exponent of the great idea of a united and independent Poland, as a messenger dear to our hearts of the National Polish Committee in Paris [the Polish representation abroad], as a man enjoying the mirth and solemnity of the offices of the coalition [of countries victorious in World War I] and, finally, as the closest friend of President [U.S.] Wilson. The most powerful monarch could not have had a more royal reception than that given to Paderewski and his accompanying venerable wife by the Polish people of Poznań. It had to be that way. For with him came to us the majesty of a great, independent Poland, allied and fighting alongside the Coalition.

excerpt from the article Paderewski's arrival in Poznań from the "Kurier Poznański" of December 26, 1918



The swearing-in of the People's Guard at Liberty Square in Poznań - in the foreground General Charles Dupont (chairman of the International Allied Commission) and General Józef Dowbor-Musnicki (commander of the Greater Poland Uprising), February 23, 1919.



Visit of the International Coalition Mission to Poznań, which, impressed by the insurgent activities, was to bring about the amicable transfer of Greater Poland into the hands of the Poles, March 1, 1919.



Gen. Józef Dowbor-Musnicki presents a banner to the 1st Greater Poland Rifle Regiment, February 4, 1919.

In the face of Almighty God in the Holy Trinity I swear that I will always and everywhere serve Poland, my homeland, and the cause of the entire Polish Nation, that I will defend my homeland and national welfare to the last drop of blood, that I will obey the Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council in Poznań [i.e., the government of the uprising] and the commanders and my superiors appointed by the Commissariat always and everywhere. I swear I will behave as befits a brave and righteous soldier - Pole, and that after the reunification of Poland I will take a soldier's oath, established by the Polish state authority.

text of the military oath taken by the insurgent Greater Poland Army



Field hospital from the period of the Greater Poland Uprising

The doctor of the Kuyavia regiment [Sylwester] Szwarz expressed great respect for Mrs. Ostrowska from Tuczno, who at Rabin, and in those days in the battles near Bydgoszcz, with great valor went into the fire for the wounded and was of great help in bandaging. From Gniezno through Trzemeszno, Mogilno, Strzelno and Kruszwica to Inowrocław, Captain P. Cym's troops were accompanied by the wife of a doctor in St. Louis, Missouri in the United States, Mrs. Siems. Having arrived shortly before the mobilization to Europe, the lady stayed with relatives in Poznań, and was later interned. Staying near Mogilno, during the fighting of Capt. Cym's troops, she joined the army as a nurse and rendered invaluable services to the wounded.

Information about women's participation in the sanitary service on the northern front of the insurgent struggle, published in the "Kurier Poznański [daily]" of 26 I 1919



Insurgents converting German military coats into Polish ones



Soldiers from the 2nd Greater Poland Rifle Regiment



Greater Poland insurgents in the shooting trenches



Aerial squadron of the Greater Poland Army, testimony to the ability of the Greater Poland insurgents to rapidly organize military facilities



Erhardt E-V4 armored car captured by the Greater Poland insurgents



Celebration of the first anniversary of the outbreak of the Greater Poland Uprising - testimony to the presence of the independence uprising in the memory of Poles, Poznań, 28 December 1919



Laying wreaths under the cross commemorating the fallen insurgents of Greater Poland - ceremony with the participation of representatives of the authorities, social organizations and banner-holders, Poznań 1934



Celebration of the anniversary of the Greater Poland Uprising in 1935 - testimony to the presence of the independence uprising in the memory of Poles



Celebration of the anniversary of the Greater Poland Uprising in 1937 - testimony to the presence of the independence uprising in the memory of Poles



Contemporary mural in Koziegłowy commemorating the Greater Poland Uprising

