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The Military Organization of Pomerania (Polish abbreviation: the OWP), established in December 1918, was one of the Polish military underground organizations formed during the rebirth of the independent Polish state and aimed at consolidating the areas of pre-partition Poland as well as the lands in the west and north which did not belong to it (like Upper Silesia and Prussian Mazovia). However, after the end of World War I, it became the subject of Polish territorial aspirations due its inhabitation by Poles or people of Polish origin. Therefore, research on this organization should not only be carried out in the regional context, as thus far, but also in connection with the history of other forms of the Polish military underground at that time. I refer to both the previously founded Polish Military Organization and the small Polish Military Organization of the Prussian Partition, as well as

the Polish Military Organization of Upper Silesia developing in parallel to the OWP. These studies should not only have a strictly military dimension, but also take a social perspective, rarely present in studies devoted to this issue from the period of struggle for independence and the territorial shape of the recovered state¹.

The study of the history of the OWP against the background of other organizational forms of the Polish military underground at the end of World War I and subsequent struggles for independence and borders of the reborn Poland may also bring this organization into the radar of researchers from outside Pomerania and Greater Poland. Apart from the area of the former partitions of Prussia (and possibly Upper Silesia), it remains almost unknown. This is probably due to the lack of military action in Pomerania in the period preceding the return of this district to Poland in 1920. Although in the Second Polish Republic, especially in the 1930s, various, mostly occasional, publications attempted to show the existence of such activity at the turn of 1918-1919 as well as readiness for an armed uprising in connection with the expected landing of Gen. Józef Haller's army in Gdańsk, a closer look at the preserved sources reveals a certain ambiguity. Meanwhile, the Polish Military Organization (POW) of the Prussian Partition, numbering only about 200 members at the peak of its development² is known more widely due to its role in the period preceding the outbreak of the Greater Poland Uprising and in its first days. Similarly, the POW of Upper Silesia, counting many thousands of members at its peak – is known for organizing and conducting two of the three Silesian Uprisings while in close contact with the Polish military authorities in Warsaw. The nationwide symbol of the Polish military underground of World War I was, and will remain, the Polish Military Organization, created in the autumn of 1914 and operating in the Kingdom of Poland, the Taken Lands and Russia, and in the final pe-

¹ P. Olstowski, *O potrzebach badań nad dziejami walk o niepodległość i granice Rzeczypospolitej (1914-1921)*, [in:] *Z dziejów walk o niepodległość*, ed. M. Gałęzowski, S. Kalbarczyk, J. Kirszak, D. Koreś, vol. 3, Warszawa 2015, pp. 90-107.

² J. Karwat, *Od idei do czynu. Myśl i organizacje niepodległościowe w Poznaniu w latach 1887-1919*, Poznań 2002, p. 328.

riod of the war also in Galicia, whose structures later went down in history in terms of intelligence and subversive operations during the Polish-Bolshevik war of 1919-1920³. Against the background of the nationwide Polish Military Organization and the structures bearing the name in Poznań and Upper Silesia, the Military Organization of Pomerania is little known and almost forgotten today. It is symptomatic that after entering the “Military Organization of Pomerania” into the search engine we find the appropriate record in Gedanopaedia⁴, while Wikipedia returns the entry describing the organization bearing this name, but operating in Pomerania under the German occupation during World War II, although referring to its name predecessor from the last years of the Prussian partition in 1918-1920⁵ – all the more reason for putting forward a postulate to undertake further research on the OWP.

On the centenary of the return of the greater part of Pomerania (former Royal Prussia) to Poland in January and February 1920, it is not easy to write about the Pomeranian Military Organization – first of all, due to the nature of the preserved source database. Little documentation created at that time by the OWP or in connection with it remains. In the 1930s, it was in the hands of the Historical Directorate of the Corps District Command No. 7 in Poznań and, along with the files of this directorate, disappeared during World War II. Verification materials regarding the OWP members and people’s guards – as it turns out from existing studies – collected at the Historical Directorate at the Corps District Command No. 8 in Toruń have survived in the files of the Military Historical Bureau in the Central Military Archives in Warsaw, as well as in the State Archives in Poznań, giving the possibility of collective summaries in a statistical dimension, as well as the characteristics of the environment. The manuscript of the monograph of this organization by one of its former members, Major Szczepan

³ Cf. P. Olstowski, M. Wołos, *Rola militarna i polityczna Polskiej Organizacji Wojskowej w odzyskaniu niepodległości. Próba bilansu*, Przegląd Historyczno-Wojskowy 2018, no. 1-2, pp. 159-192.

⁴ Cf. https://www.gedanopedia.pl/gdansk/?little=ORGANIZACJA_WOJSKOWA_POMORZA (access of 16.04.2019).

⁵ Cf. https://wikipedia.org/wiki/Organizacja_Wojskowa_Pomorza (access of 16. 04. 2019)

Łukowicz – written before the outbreak of the war on the basis of the OWP files, probably in cooperation with MHB, but also as a resolution of the Congress of Pomeranian Philomaths in Toruń in 1936 – also went missing. In this situation, the occasional pre-war journalism⁶ influenced the perception of the OWP, and in the post-war period, to a considerable extent – i.e. the work of Tadeusz Grygier, a former employee of the Historical Directorate of CDC 7 in Poznań, who allegedly prepared a number of extracts from the OWP files as part of his documentary work during the war. The fact that this was indeed the case is evidenced by extensive fragments of his work⁷. Today, however, it is impossible to fully verify this information due to the lack of OWP files to which he referred. Meanwhile, the author used them to form the basis for his theses on the numbers, management and organizational structure, and Polish insurgent plans in Pomerania at the turn of 1918/1919, related to the arrival of Gen. Haller's army in Gdańsk and the activity of the armed structures of the Pomeranian military underground. Among the authors more widely referring to the activity of the OWP, we find those treating T. Grygier's data with a clear distance⁸ as well as others accepting it virtually without reservations⁹ or trying to combine both approaches¹⁰. Considering the state

⁶ For example: *Z dziejów Organizacji Wojskowej Pomorza*, [in:] *Księga pamiątkowa dziesięciolecia Pomorza*, ed. M. Sydow, Toruń 1930, pp. 29-34.

⁷ Cf. T. Grygier, *Powstanie wielkopolskie a plany wyzwolenia reszty ziem zachodniej Polski*, *Przegląd Zachodni*, 1948, pp. 567-659; S. Grygier, T. Grygier, *Polityczne i wojskowe kontakty Wielkopolski i Pomorza w latach 1918-1919*, [in:] *Wielkopolska a Pomorze, Warmia, Mazury i Ziemia Złotowska w dobie Powstania Wielkopolskiego 1918-1919. Materiały z II Ogólnopolskiego Seminarium Historyków Powstania Wielkopolskiego – Kościan 2 II 1973*, ed. Z. Grot and J. Witkowski, Leszno 1977, pp. 45-51.

⁸ M. Wojciechowski, *Powrót Pomorza do Polski 1918-1920*, Warszawa-Poznań-Toruń 1981, pp. 84-100.

⁹ B. Polak, *Działalność Organizacji Wojskowej Pomorza (OWP) w rejonach wiejskich 1918-1919 (stan badań, postulaty badawcze)*, [in:] *Dzieje wsi pomorskiej. II Międzynarodowa Konferencja Naukowa*, Dygowo-Szczecin 2003, pp. 75-84. This article is a sketch of the structure and activity of the OWP based mainly on the work of T. Grygier. The state of research is reduced to the content of footnotes. Research postulates are virtually missing, as is information about the OWP's activities in rural areas.

¹⁰ J. Karwat, *Od idei do czynu*, pp. 398-409, 513-523.

of knowledge about the OWP and the nature of the preserved source database, one can formulate an opinion that there are still more questions on this organization than facts based on the documentary material. Let us try to look at the subsequent stages of its history and activity.

In contrast to neighbouring Greater Poland, there were no forms of Polish armed underground before the end of World War I in Gdańsk Pomerania (in the province of West Prussia). We do not include here the armed groups in the Tuchola Forest, largely consisting of deserters from the German army, operating since autumn 1917, whose image, recorded in the subject literature as patriotic Polish partisans, has been rightly questioned for some time¹¹. The German defeat in World War I, which together with the revolution and the overthrow of the monarchy, shook the foundations of the state for some time, and brought with it the hope of joining Pomerania with the revived Poland. Above all, however, as early as in November 1918, it enabled the lively organizational development of the Polish national movement, halted in 1914 after the outbreak of World War I¹². Convened to Poznań and meeting on 3-5 December 1918, the Polish Regional Parliament appointed the Supreme People's Council together with the Commissariat as its executive body, representing Poles throughout the German Reich. Soon, the Council's Subcommissariats in Gdańsk (for Royal Prussia and Warmia) and in Bytom for Upper Silesia were opened, followed by Bydgoszcz for the Netze District. In the area of the province of Poznań, Western Prussia, and in Warmia, Masuria and Upper Silesia, Polish local people's councils in counties and towns were created – by election – as local representations of the Polish movement, all with the knowledge and consent of the German authorities, both central (in Berlin) and provincial. Furthermore, in the face of revolutionary events in Germany, also visible in the eastern provinces of Prussia, people's guards began to emerge and received weapons

¹¹ Cf. J. Borzyszkowski, *Partyzantka Borów Tucholskich XX w. – mity a rzeczywistość (przykład braci Gnacińskich)*, [in:] *Ludzie, idee, wojny. Studia z dziejów Europy środkowo-wschodniej*, ed. T. Kawski, J. Maciejewski, Bydgoszcz 2009, pp. 307-317.

¹² In addition to the monograph of Mieczysław Wojciechowski, cf. P. Kosiński, *Prusy Zachodnie 1914 – Pomorze 1920. Ludność regionu wobec przemian politycznych okresu I wojny światowej*, Warszawa 2002.

from the German official agents for the use of security services. Initially, according to the intention of these authorities, they were to have a general civic, rather than national flavour. However, in the areas inhabited by the Polish population, these guards shortly began to exhibit Polish nationalistic inclinations and people's councils of the county or town level in separate cities (Grudziądz and Toruń) became their only authority.

These guards had a protective function in relation to various undertakings of the Polish movement in public space, rally actions in particular. At the same time, however, due to their human resources – they consisted largely of members of the Polish military associations called “Unity”, which grouped demobilized soldiers of the German army and members of the local Gymnastic Association called “Falcon” – the leaders of the Polish movement in Pomerania considered them as what would become armed forces in the event of an actual military merger with Poland. An armed incident initiated by the Polish population of the Prussian partition (as well as Upper Silesia) was perceived as an argument for the Polish cause during the future peace conference rather than as a fundamental way of connecting with the reborn Polish state. It is possible, therefore, that – as T. Grygier and authors following him claimed – in the first half of December 1918, the concept of an armed act of Poles from Upper Silesia, Greater Poland, Pomerania and East Prussia (the so-called Korfanty's Plan) was being considered in the circle of leading Polish politicians in Poznań in contact with the Polish National Committee in Paris. That was in connection with the planned landing of General Józef Haller's Polish Army formed in France in Gdańsk, in December 1918 or in January of the following year. However, despite the existence of certain sources that indicate such a concept, unambiguous evidence for this is yet to be found¹³. Efforts for enabling the landing of Gen. Haller's army in Poland by sea in Gdańsk did take place, against a background of domestic and international policy issues. However, it is hard to resist the impression that the arrival of this army in Poland only from April to June 1919, not by sea as initially planned, but by rail through Germany, was not only

¹³ M. Wojciechowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-89.

caused by British opposition and the effective operation of German diplomacy, but also by the lack of a uniform Polish position in this matter, i.e. the opinion of the government in Warsaw and the Polish National Committee in Paris¹⁴. There were no real premises (perhaps except for the short-lived period of street fighting in Berlin at the turn of December 1918 and January 1919) for the success of the Polish insurgent action in Pomerania, and especially in Upper Silesia, Warmia and Masuria¹⁵. Anyway, even if part of Gen. Haller's army formed up to this time (two infantry divisions and support units – a total of about 30 000 soldiers)¹⁶ had landed in Gdańsk in the second half of December 1918, with the support of the hastily organized Polish insurgent forces, it would not have been able to successfully control Pomerania, let alone Warmia and Masuria. Both taking into account the resistance of major German forces (not even counting the armies of Ober Ost retreating by rail routes from the east), and the extent of the potential area of operations.

Meanwhile, the genesis of the Pomeranian Military Organization, as well as the Polish Military Organization of Upper Silesia, may be connected with the presumed insurrectionary plans of December 1918 in the course of confidential deliberations of the Polish Regional Parliament in Poznań on 3-5 November 1918, and the following days¹⁷. If the Supreme People's Council's Commissariat, which due to its constant contact with the Polish National Committee in Paris knew about plans to transfer General Haller's army to Poland by sea via Gdańsk, had actually intended to use this opportunity to organize a large-scale insurgent action from Upper Silesia through Greater Poland and Pome-

¹⁴ The logistics of this operation were also significant. It was easier, faster and cheaper to transfer General Haller's army to Poland by rail. Arrangement of the transfer by sea – as calculated in December 1918 – of about 30,000 soldiers and large quantities of war equipment would have required the gathering of a sufficiently large armada of large transport vessels along with cover from warships, regardless of the costs.

¹⁵ More on the political and military conditions of a possible Polish insurgent action in Pomerania during this period, see W. Rezmer, *Militarne szanse powstania na Pomorzu w 1919 r.*, [in:] *Problemy militarne na Pomorzu w latach 1914-1989*, ed. A. Stachula, Słupsk 2002, pp. 19-28.

¹⁶ B. Polak, op. cit., p. 78.

¹⁷ Ibid., s. 77.

rania to Warmia and Masuria, it might indeed have initiated such secret structures. How much of political gesture for the use of the future peace conference to decide on the borders in this region of Europe, and how much reckoning for military success there was therein is impossible to say. It is difficult to state whether the seeds of the OWP were indeed sown in November 1918, as T. Grygier claimed¹⁸. The defeat of Germany and the increase of hope for the return of Pomerania to Poland could then have resulted in local underground initiatives of a military as well as insurrectionary nature. It was even more probable due to the fact there was a serious leaven in the form of the secret – for a few generations – the Philomathic movement in Pomeranian middle schools of regular and elementary type and a large crowd of its followers¹⁹. Witnesses' accounts place the emergence of the OWP at the end of December 1918 or early January 1919²⁰, which is probable if we consider the close connection of the heads of the organization with the Subcommissariat of the Supreme People's Council for Royal Prussia and Warmia residing in Gdańsk. At the beginning of January 1919, the Polish Military Organization of Upper Silesia was established, except that it was in cooperation with the General Headquarters of the Polish Army in Warsaw. The OWP, by the SPC Subcommissariat in Gdańsk, was associated with the SPC Commissariat in Poznań, and in military terms with the Main Command of the Polish Armed Forces in the former Prussian partition, formed shortly after the outbreak of the Greater Poland Uprising on 27 December 1918. Submission to the military authorities in Warsaw began after transferring the entire armed forces of the Prussian partition under the command of the chief military authorities in Warsaw in August 1919.

Dr Franciszek Kręcki, the head of the Military Department of the Subcommissariat of Supreme People's Council in Gdańsk, became the

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See more: J. Szews, *Filomaci pomorscy. Tajne związki młodzieży polskiej na Pomorzu Gdańskim w latach 1830-1920*, Warszawa 1992.

²⁰ Cf. M. Wojciechowski, op. cit., p. 84. Janusz Karwat (op. cit., pp. 515-516) considers, for certain – on the basis of the correspondence of the Historical Branch of CDC 8 of December 1937 – that the first organizational units of the OWP were created in the third decade of December 1918.

leader of the OWP, whose headquarters were to be housed in the office of the People's Guards Department of the Gdańsk subcommissariat, and the head of this branch, Leon Czarliński, also belonged to the top executive of the organization. According to later testimonies, other members of the top executive were Oswald Potocki, a landowner from Piątkowo in the Wąbrzeźno county, and Dr Józef Wybicki, the deputy for Dr Stefan Łaszewski – the commissioner of the SPC for Royal Prussia and Warmia, who often managed the work of the SPC Subcommissariat in Gdańsk in the absence of the latter. In the literature on the subject it is assumed that Wybicki may have been subject to Kręcki as the OWP manager, which seems unlikely. A thesis may be put forward that while Łaszewski – a commissioner in Gdańsk, a member of the SPC Commissariat in Poznań and a large figure in the Polish movement throughout the entire Prussian partition – maintained patronage over the OWP, Wybicki, who continually supervised the entire activity of the SPC Subcommissariat in Gdańsk and to whom Kręcki was subordinate as a military official of the Subcommissariat, supervised underground military work concentrated in the OWP, which was openly conducted through the Department of People's Guards. Such organization of Polish military operations in West Prussia was both optimal in terms of strength and resources, and imposed itself in a situation where the main recruitment base for the OWP, and in the future for possible insurgent forces, were just people's guards, and within them or next to them – Polish military associations "Unity", units of "Falcon" as well as older scout team members.

The OWP was developed in terms of organization in the first half of 1919. However, it is difficult to determine when individual county organizations were formed, and when district commands were established over them. There are also differences in the subject literature concerning the number of districts and their territorial range, as well as the names of commanders, as illustrated by a certain discrepancy between news reports published in the 1930s in the circle of the OWP²¹ and findings of the Historical Directorate of CDC 7 on the basis of verification materials, and probably also the OWP documentation exi-

²¹ M. Wojciechowski, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

sting at the time²². Analysing journalist accounts and other written testimonies from the OWP circles, Mieczysław Wojciechowski mentioned four OWP districts: District I – counties of: Toruń, Wąbrzeźno, Chełmno (commander Leon Czarliński, and from September 1919, cavalry captain Wincenty Rawicz-Dembiński); District II – counties of: Grudziądz, Kwidzyn, Świecie, Brodnica, Lubawa, Działdowo, Warmia and Masuria (commander Józef Goga); District III – counties of: Starogard, Tczew, Złotów, Chojnice, Tuchola (no identification of the commander of the district); District IV – counties of: Puck, Wejherowo, Kartuzy, Kościerzyna, and the area of Brusy from the county of Chojnice (commander Bolesław Lipski). On the other hand, J. Karwat, relying heavily on theses on a paper by Major Szczepan Łukowicz titled “Military Organization of Pomerania and People’s Guards” from the end of the 1930s (stored in the Bureau of Military History files in the Central Military Archives), distinguished five OWP districts: District I in Toruń (Toruń and counties of Toruń, Chełmno and Wąbrzeźno, the names of commanders as above); District II in Grudziądz (counties of: Grudziądz, Kwidzyn, Susz and Sztum, subsequent commanders: Jerzy and Bolesław Donimirski); District III in Lubawa (counties of: Brodnica, Lubawa, Nidzica, Olsztyn, Ostróda, Reszel and Szczycień, commanders in various periods of time: Bolesław Ossowski and Teofil Rzepnikowski); District IV in Czersk, also known as Kashubian (counties of: Chojnice, Kościerzyna, Puck and Wejherowo; subsequent commanders: Bolesław Lipski and Augustyn Szpręga); District V in Starogard (counties of: Bydgoszcz, Gdańsk, Kartuzy, Malbork, Sępólno, Świecie, Tczew and Tuchola; commander – Dr Mieczysław Marchlewski). B. Polak (after T. Grygier) also mentioned the above five districts with an equivalent commanding cast and territorial range, adding, however, District VI in Bytów (counties of: Bytów, Słupsk, Wałcz, Lębork and Człuchów with commanders Aleksander Wysocki and Bernard Wera) and District VII in Ełk (counties of: Ełk, Olecko, Pisz, Giżycko and Mrągowo with commander Władysław Pieniężny). Let us add that B. Polak, following T. Grygier’s findings for all seven dis-

²² J. Karwat, *op. cit.*, pp. 516-517; B. Polak, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-81 (according to the findings of T. Grygier).

tricts, also mentioned the names of the commanders of individual counties in accordance with the organizational scheme that was to be established on 11 April 1919 and generally lasted until the Polish Army took over Pomerania and civil administration in January and February 1920. According to this scheme, each county was to be divided into 6-10 circuits, each of which issued a platoon if necessary, and each commander of the district had at his disposal a special unit for current combat operations (if necessary) consisting of 120-170 people, deployed in groups of 12. Thanks to such territorial organization, as well as recruitment based on people's guards and other Polish paramilitary organizations or ones close to them, the Main Headquarters in Poznań estimated the potential mobilization capabilities of the OWP at about 25 000 people, who were armed and remained on permanent combat standby²³.

This construction – let alone the multiple overestimation of the potential number of the OWP members – can be considered to be largely theoretical due to the fact that the Polish movement in many of the above-mentioned districts of West Prussia, but first and foremost East Prussia and Western Pomerania, was too weak to create efficient county organization, not to mention circuits. Certainly, taking into account the actual organizational possibilities of the Polish movement, the scheme proposed by M. Wojciechowski seems to be closer to reality. In his opinion, the organizational structure of the OWP was associated with its actual influences, which must have coincided with regions where the Polish movement had been most active for many years. This does not mean that the outline proposed by S. Łukowicz and supplemented by T. Grygier never came about. Indeed, in April 1919 – as Grygier reported – it may have emerged as a desired model in connection with the continuing Paris Conference, Polish territorial aspirations there, and information given by the Polish delegation to this conference about possible plebiscites in Warmia, Masuria or in the Kashubian counties of West Pomerania. In this case, the above structure in five or seven districts may have been derived from the expectations from the OWP formulated not only at the Headquarters

²³ Ibid., p. 81.

and the SPC Commissariat in Poznań, but also in the General Headquarters of the Ministry of Military Affairs in Warsaw. If that was the case, the efficient cadre organization in areas that may have been included in the plebiscite counted more than the potential number of mobilized insurgent forces.

As the materials which T. Grygier used have not survived, we do not know whether the list created by him (as well as by S. Łukowicz before the outbreak of World War II) was based on OWP documentation or rather on questionnaires created in the 1930s for the use of the verification commission for former OWP and people's guards members or for historical research. This is an important question not only for the legitimacy of the organizational structure and staffing presented above, but also for determining the proper nature of the OWP. To what extent was it an underground military organization for the purposes of insurgent operations, and how did it provide the answer to the grassroots need for action in a situation where the German state had lost the war in November 1918, with the Polish state revived in the Kingdom of Poland behind the border cordon? In addition, it happened when the outbreak of the November Revolution in Germany enabled the Polish movement to act openly and fairly unrestrictedly in public space in the Prussian partition, including organizational forms such as Polish people's councils, and thousands of demobilized soldiers (sometimes deserters) from the German army having returned from the front, ready to fight with weapons in hand to join Pomerania with Poland.

Both organizational schemes mentioned above refer to the period of the OWP's existence in the already developed structure from the spring of 1919. Both, and in particular the more extensive one, indicate that district commanders were recruited from local national activists, of whom only some had the necessary military qualifications so that in the event of the outbreak of an uprising they would act as commanders of the insurgent army at a district level. A similar – judging from the data left by T. Grygier – situation could be found at a county level²⁴, although here the county commanders of the OWP could have been mainly district commanders of people's guards. It must be re-

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 79-81.

membered, however, that it is not without significance whether the list drawn up by T. Grygier was based on the original OWP documents from the spring of 1919 or post-war relations, in particular those from the 1930s. Another aspect is that the verification action concerning members of the secret OWP and public people's guards, conducted in the 1930s, yielded results, seemingly different from the information contained in the German police and military documents of 1919. It is difficult to say during which period of the year 1919 these fragmentary data from the German official documentation refer to. They reveal that in Toruń the OWP allegedly numbered 500 members, in Grudziądz 800, in Brusy 220, in Brodnica 230²⁵. Undoubtedly, these estimates were inflated, unless German civil and military officials estimated the OWP including the potential of Polish people's guards, the military associations of "Unity" and "Falcon". The verification action carried out by the Historical Directorate of CDC 8 in Toruń at the end of the 1930s resulted in identification of 984 former OWP members and 1410 former members of people's guards in Pomerania. In 1919, the OWP supposedly existed in 156 towns (including Warmia and Masuria), and the People's Guard in 218 towns of Pomerania. In the light of these findings, the OWPs in Świecie (102), Chełmża (90), Czersk (over 70), Toruń (around 90), Kościerzyna (46) and Tuchola (42) were the most numerous²⁶.

Verification of former OWP and people's guards members, unfinished until the outbreak of the war in 1939, more likely showed the number of people willing to consider themselves years later as combatants of the Polish armed forces from the period preceding the return of Pomerania to Poland. The number of people's guardians (1410) is particularly underestimated here, since according to credible Polish data from some places, in 1919, the number of members of the people's guard in Starogard was estimated at 150-200 people, in Chełmża at 425, in the county of Chojnice at 800-1000, and in the county of

²⁵ J. Karwat, *op. cit.*, p. 518; cf. M. Wojciechowski, *op. cit.*, p. 85 (probably a spelling mistake in the case of Brusy, as the OWP facility situated there allegedly consisted of 820 members).

²⁶ J. Karwat, *op. cit.*, p. 518.

Toruń at 434²⁷. The last months of the Prussian rule marked the peak in the number of people's guards. According to the data of the Polish People's Council in Toruń, at the end of 1919, eight companies of this formation existed in the city, with an average number of 250 people²⁸. An important question arises in the context of the above, how many members of people's guards, as well as the "Unity" and "Falcon" (also taking into account the interpenetration of these organizations) were sworn in the OWP. If people's guards were considered as the main recruitment base for the insurgent units in the event of an uprising in Pomerania, there was no need to accept too many members of the guard into the ranks of the secret organization that the OWP was. The same could apply to members of the military associations of "Unity" or the "Falcon" Gymnastic Society. In that case, estimates of the number of the OWPs made by M. Wojciechowski (about 10 000 members)²⁹ and J. Karwat (6000-8000 members)³⁰ seem to be too high. Note, however, that the information from the end of the 1930s that the OWP had branches in 156 towns in the area covered by its organizational network, contradicts the belief expressed in the subject literature that it managed to reach rural areas to a small extent, even if we take into account that many large villages in Pomerania had the characteristics (and functions) of small urban units.

The origin of the OWP is related to the concept of an armed uprising in Pomerania as a route to its connection with Poland. Proponents of this solution were aware that it would not have a chance of success without external aid. Initially, such assistance was seen in the army of General Józef Haller, who was supposed to land in Gdańsk on 20 December 1918, which did not happen either then or in the following months. After the outbreak of the Greater Poland Uprising, for a short period, until the beginning of January 1919, there were hopes for extending its scope into Pomerania, until the decision of the SPC

²⁷ M. Wojciechowski, op. cit., p. 83.

²⁸ T. Zakrzewski, *Życie polskie Torunia w ostatnich latach zaboru pruskiego (1916-1920)*, Toruń 1985, p. 86.

²⁹ M. Wojciechowski, op. cit., p. 85.

³⁰ J. Karwat, op. cit., p. 518.

Commissariat in Poznań stopped the activities of the insurgent units in the northern direction. This was motivated by both the conviction that the uprising in Greater Poland was a military demonstration in the face of peace negotiations in Paris, and these would successfully bring all the formerly Prussian territories back to Poland, as well as – as previously mentioned – taking into account the broader background of Polish-German relations in connection with the evacuation of the Ober Ost army from the Belorussian and Ukrainian lands through the Polish lands. Finally, the potential of the insurgent forces was known to be insufficient, which in the case of the German offensive in Greater Poland would make it difficult to maintain the current territorial acquisitions of the Greater Poland Uprising. In this situation, a plan to occupy the southern districts of Pomerania, developed at the end of January 1919 by the commander-in-chief of the Greater Polish army, General Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki, and then in February–March by his chief of staff, Lt. Col. Władysław Anders, even if it was still created with the thought of landing the Haller army in Gdańsk, might appear as a purely theoretical construct³¹.

Even before the Polish-German war in 1939, in the circle of researchers of the Pomeranian armed movement, it was claimed that this movement played an important role in terms of military subversion for the Greater Poland Uprising, because it kept considerable German military forces deployed in West Prussia from the front of Greater Poland³². This view is also presented today³³. The thesis that the leading political and military factors in Greater Poland cared about consolidating the authorities of Berlin and Gdańsk's conviction of the reality of the outbreak of an uprising in Pomerania without actually launching it is worthy of attention. The armed insurrection of Poles in Pomerania did not have a chance of success due to the lack of help from outside, scant – against the declarations from the circle of the OWP in the 1930s – resources of stored weapons, too few of their own men (even

³¹ Cf. W. Rezmer, op. cit., p. 26; J. Karwat, op. cit., pp. 521-522.

³² K. Siudowski, *Rozwój idei niepodległościowego ruchu zbrojnego na Pomorzu*, [in:] *Ruch niepodległościowy na Pomorzu*, ed. T. Pietrykowski, Toruń 1935, pp. 79-80.

³³ J. Karwat, op. cit., p. 521; B. Polak, op. cit., p. 82.

if largely composed of experienced front soldiers) and the dearth of qualified commanders, and all this in the face of much larger German forces in Pomerania (regular army, Grenzschutz, volunteer troops of Heimwehr or Bürgerwehr) and a majority German population in many regions, especially in towns. Nevertheless, the very possibility of the outbreak of an armed uprising in Pomerania in January and February 1919 had to be taken seriously by the German civil and military authorities in West Prussia. It could involve troops of the regular army and Grenzschutz in this area, thus preventing them from being flung into conflict against insurgents in Greater Poland. However, taking into account the international context of those events (including the cease-fire conditions imposed on the Germans in November 1918), as well as the internal context regarding the political situation in the Reich itself, I would be willing to consider the thesis about the subversive role of the Pomeranian military underground for the Greater Poland Uprising as one that should be approached with caution. The same applies to local Polish military operations in Pomerania in January and February 1919, rightly defined in the 1930s as “military jerks”³⁴. Undoubtedly, they were the result of the Greater Poland Uprising and the local desire for an armed act (as in Chełmża), they may have been provoked by the Germans (as in Czersk), and also had a social context (as in Puck) parallel to the national factor³⁵. Only a few of those operations, such as attempts to immobilize the cannons in the Gdańsk fortress or seize the Toruń stronghold in January 1919 (unsuccessful when the underground was disclosed), may have been subversive, also in connection with the expected arrival of Haller’s army in Gdańsk. However, there was no central management visible in them. Apart from the Gdańsk and Toruń episodes (which may have been related to the plans of the Main Command in Poznań), they were local, quite accidental and consequently doomed to failure. In addition, during the local battles with the Germans, the fight was rather conducted by the troops of people’s guards. The role of the OWP is not obvious here.

³⁴ K. Tomaszewski, *Organizacje społeczne na Pomorzu w dążeniu do niepodległości*, [in:] *Ruch niepodległościowy na Pomorzu*, p. 74.

³⁵ Cf. M. Wojciechowski, op. cit., pp. 92-95.

The structure of the OWP was only being formed at that time. At the county and district level, it crystallized around April 1919, and here, with regard to its functionality, there are serious doubts as to the entire planned area of action, as I wrote above. Taking into account that during the aforementioned period a significant part of the OWP's activity involved the transfer of weapons and volunteers to Greater Poland (being potential assets in the event of their own military effort), it means that it ceased to be an insurrection organization (if it had ever been one at all), and it became a kind of Polish national underground in Pomerania, bearing the formal features of a military organization, supported by the oaths of the Greater Polish army, taken by members of the OWP – as T. Grygier claimed – from 1 April 1919³⁶. At the same time, it remained a regional organization and until the end it was sensitive to its separateness³⁷. Perhaps, from the very beginning the name “Polish Military Organization” was not adopted here deliberately, as it was in the whole country (though sometimes, like in Upper Silesia, with a regional determinant), but the “Military Organization of Pomerania” (OWP).

After the Germans – in the aftermath of the Greater Poland Uprising and armed Polish appearances in several Pomeranian cities – attempted to break the Polish movement in Pomerania in the period from January to March 1919, it also affected the secret and overt military structures of this movement, including the OWP and people's guards. Arrests, searches, and sometimes murders, suspension of the activities of Polish people's councils and of people's guards constituting their armed branch, significantly impeded organizational work. That was repeated in May as a reaction to the presentation of the conditions of the peace treaty to the Germans, finally signed on 28 June 1919 in Versailles. We do not know, therefore, what the creation of field structures was like in the first half of 1919, whether district and county commanders received nominations from the Main Command in Poznań (as the oaths were taken by the army of Greater Poland, the OWP was – implicitly – part of the armed forces in the former Prussian Partition), or from the

³⁶ B. Polak, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, s. 82.

Department of People's Guards in the SPC Subcommissariat in Gdańsk. Was it possible to do field exercises in any form, as in December 1918 the German authorities could have reacted negatively to the open activity of scouting teams in larger urban centres such as Toruń³⁸, and the wider activity of Polish people's guards in the public arena became possible only in the autumn of 1919, when Pomerania joining Poland was already a question of the coming months? In this situation, an important form of activity was the transfer of volunteers and weapons to Greater Poland, which is evidence of the organizational efficiency of the OWP structures, as was the case with intelligence activities for the Central Command in Poznań³⁹. At the same time, it seems that one of the secrets of these successes were environmental and organizational connections from the previous period⁴⁰. A separate issue was the participation of members of the OWP's field network – in the conditions of police pressure on the Polish movement in West Prussia in the first half of 1919 – in raising funds for the so-called national tax and transferring a large part of this money to Poznań⁴¹.

Certainly the dissolution of hope for the landing of Gen. Haller's army in Gdańsk and the organization of an armed uprising in Pomerania with their own forces caused a significant part of younger and military-trained volunteers from this district especially to break through the German cordon to Greater Poland in January and February 1919, often through the transfer points organized by the OWP, which were also used for the transfer of weapons transports. Thanks to that, many Pomeranians from various social strata had the opportunity to fight in the ranks of the Greater Polish army, and then, along with others who broke through the cordon, created the prelude for the Pomeranian Division. Later on, the organization maintained special contacts with this division, and its commander Colonel Stanisław Skrzyński was considered by the OWP's heads as their superior, which, in September

³⁸ J. Jankowski, *Harcerstwo Pomorza Gdańskiego i Kujaw 1911-1945*, Toruń 1988, pp. 41-42.

³⁹ M. Wojciechowski, op. cit., pp. 98-99.

⁴⁰ Cf. J. Szews, op. cit., pp. 297-300 (the activity of the OWP circle at the Higher School of Technology in Gdańsk).

⁴¹ J. Karwat, op. cit., p. 523.

1919, caused tensions between the leadership of the Pomeranian military underground and the generals Kazimierz Raszewski and Józef Haller intending to subdue the OWP structures⁴². The full consolidation of the Greater Polish army with the Polish Army, arranged a month before, and the preparations for the takeover of Pomerania made by the Polish army and civil administration in January and February 1920 – as a consequence of the decisions of the Versailles Congress – must have been the beginning of the end for the OWP's organizational independence. Gen. Józef Haller, the commander of the Pomeranian Front established in October 1919, who was to carry out the military reclamation of Pomerania, along with General Kazimierz Raszewski, the commander of the Pomeranian Regional District that was the organ of territorial administration which was to start functioning after returning to Poland, wanted to subdue the local military underground in advance regardless of its regional character and the desire to maintain organizational independence. There was nothing in this pursuit that would prejudice the Pomeranian underground members and their leadership. From the point of view of the needs of the military operation, which was to occupy Pomerania, it was an obvious course of action. The management of the OWP, as it seems, kept their attitude, however, and considered Colonel Skrzyński, the commander of the Pomeranian Division, as their superior. Their compatriots, often recent members of the OWP, served in this division.

It does not change the fact that it was precisely for the needs of the General Headquarters of Pomerania that the field apparatus of the OWP in the second half of 1919 performed very important documentation and logistics work in terms of registration of military facilities, drawing up national conscripts of drafts or preparing food depots and sanitary facilities for branches of the Pomeranian Front which were to enter Pomerania in January 1920. Members of the OWP were also involved in the creation of the branches of people's guards in each village, intended to fulfil police and security functions in the period preceding the entry of Polish troops⁴³. The involvement of the field

⁴² B. Polak, *op. cit.*, p. 82; J. Karwat, *op. cit.*, p. 523.

⁴³ B. Polak, *op. cit.*, p. 83. Cf. minutes of the meeting in the Supreme Command of the Polish Army on October 22, 1919, concerning the takeover of Pomerania by Po-

apparatus of the OWP in intelligence activities for the Pomeranian Front Command in the last months of 1919 remains an open issue. Its intelligence office organized its own information network in Pomerania, to a large extent on the basis of the local resources⁴⁴.

The OWP, although its activity was gradually extinguished from the autumn of 1919, functioned until the end of the Prussian rule. It was an important part of the multifaceted activity of the Polish movement in Pomerania in the last years of the Prussian partition⁴⁵. What remains secret to this day is the degree of centralization of this organization – determined in the mid-thirties by some representative members of it as small⁴⁶ – and a system of command and communication between the leadership of the OWP in the SPC Subcommissariat in Gdańsk and district commanders. There are even more questions of this kind. It seems, however, from the perspective of the whole century, that the OWP was an optimal structure in relation to then-existing conditions of action within the Polish movement and the Polish community in West Prussia (as well as in some counties of the West Pomeranian and East Prussian provinces), also those dictated by contraction of the German police and military authorities, ready to prevent these areas from developing the Polish armed movement following the model of Greater Poland. It allowed, over time, to capture the Polish insurgent aspirations and military activities in Pomerania in an institutional framework subordinated to the Polish national representation in Poznań and its field instance in Gdańsk. Thanks to this, the activity of those Polish communities in Pomerania, ready for military work, was

land, by major Stanisław Laudański [in:] *Powrót. Dokumentacja ustanowienia suwerenności polskiej na Pomorzu w latach 1918-1920*, choice of J. Bełkot and M. Wojciechowski, Toruń 1988, pp. 80-81.

⁴⁴ W. Skóra, *Organizacja i działalność wywiadu Frontu Pomorskiego w latach 1919-1920*, [in:] *Polski wywiad wojskowy 1918-1945*, ed. P. Kołakowski, A. Pepłoński, Toruń 2006, pp. 65-90; idem, *Placówka w Chojnicach. Z działalności wywiadu polskiego na Pomorzu Zachodnim w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym*, Słupsk-Chojnice 2006, pp. 140-142.

⁴⁵ P. Olstowski, *Działania Pomorzan na rzecz powrotu Pomorza do Polski w latach 1918-1920*, [in:] *Pomorskie drogi do Niepodległej*, ed. J. Borzyszkowski, C. Obracht-Prondzyński, Gdańsk 2018, s. 92-103.

⁴⁶ *Ruch niepodległościowy na Pomorzu*, pp. 87-88.

used rationally and for the Polish cause in the former Prussian partition, as opposed to the gloomy experiences from several Pomeranian towns in January and February 1919, when the clash of people's guard troops with the stronger German army ended in defeat. Those benefits were limited in the current dimension to supplying the Greater Polish forces with valuable volunteers from Pomerania and managing transports of weapons smuggled by Pomeranian underground members. Moreover, for the Main Command of Poznań, and consequently for the chief military authorities in Warsaw, intelligence reports provided by the OWP may have had significant value. The result of it were the *Virtuti Militari* crosses awarded to the most distinguished members of the OWP, with its commander, Dr Franciszek Kręcki. In 1919, through the participation in the OWP and people's guards, the foundations of their own security forces were prepared, and many people within these structures became familiar with the first – for them – form of the Polish military. They were also given a sense of value of their own participation in activities that benefited the national cause. During the Polish-Bolshevik war of 1920, especially during the summer months, it affected the number of volunteers from Pomerania, joining the army in the face of the threat for the state. It is also possible to believe that the experience of the people's guards from 1919 contributed to the efficiency of the Western Civil Guard functioning in the Poznań and Pomeranian Voivodeships in 1920-1921, established in the face of the approaching front in July 1920. The Pomeranian armed forces finally – to a large extent through the army of Greater Poland – provided the Polish Army with many excellent officers and petty officers, some of whom remained in professional military service after the 1920's war, especially in the Pomeranian and Greater Poland regiments and in military institutions in the Corps District Command No. 7 of Poznań and Torun Corps District Command No. 8. Many former active OWP members could also be found in the Second Polish Republic in the social, cultural, political and economic life of Polish Pomerania, as well as in state administration and the local government. However, after the Coup of May 1926, fate and political choices put many of them on both sides of the political dispute, in Poznań and Pomerania, which sometimes took on a sharp edge.

The Military Organization of Pomerania (OWP) grouped members of the Polish movement from all social strata, although at the regional and county command level, the representatives of the local leadership groups of this movement were dominant. It was an interesting experience for Polish communities in the district, which had modest traditions in the field of military underground, because the national work under the Prussian partition took place there using other methods. However, the Polish national movement showed that in times of need, along with people's councils and people's guards, it was also able to establish an efficient military underground, even if there were justified doubts as to the actual territorial range, number, weaponry and degree of centralization of this structure. It brought significant value to the activities of the Polish movement in Pomerania in the year preceding the return of this district to Poland, remaining an interesting subject of research from the point of view of military history, but also – perhaps more evidently in some aspects – social history. After many years, the environment concentrated around the OWP lacked, however, its own armed Pomeranian campaign similar to the one in Poznań and Greater Poland, which clearly echoes the memories and reflections of former participants of the Pomeranian military underground published in the 1930s. It was certainly influenced by passage of time from those events, as well as the historical narrative formed under the influence of the Polish ruling camp after May 1926, which raised the particular value of pro-independence activity and armed struggle. The OWP, against the background of the nationwide Polish Military Organization, and even its regional varieties such as the Polish Military Organization of Upper Silesia, was a separate entity, though. This could not be changed by the attempts made in the thirties by the veteran circles of the power camp, and calculated to broaden the influence of the ruling Sanation, to recognize the OWP almost as a “sister formation” in relation to the former Polish Military Organization⁴⁷. Because the OWP was not such a formation, even in relation to the Polish military underground modelled on the Polish Military Organization in Greater

⁴⁷ P. Olstowski, *Obóz pomajowy w województwie pomorskim w latach 1926-1939*, Warszawa 2008, pp. 247-248.

Poland and Upper Silesia. The condition of the preserved source database means that we may never reconstruct the entire picture of this organization and its activity. Nevertheless, it is worth making such an attempt even if the reproduction of this image largely consists in examining the individual fates of its members, including leading activists. However, this is not the only Polish military underground of the last century, whose research is thwarted by an almost entire lack of organizational documents and vast knowledge gaps regarding the most important aspects of its activity.

Translation Anna Kowalczywska