

## Article 4

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### Dr Tadeusz Kondracki, The Warsaw Uprising

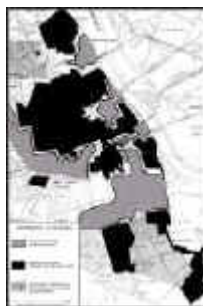
The Red Army entered Poland in January 1944, in pursuit of the Germans. The Soviets refused to recognise the legitimate Polish authorities loyal to the Polish Government-in-Exile based in London. Thus, as they progressed, they disarmed the Home Army (AK) detachments they met along the way which remained loyal to their government. This persuaded the Polish authorities to return to a concept that had been shelved earlier, of staging an uprising in the capital – Warsaw. The Commander-in-Chief of the Home Army, General Tadeusz Komorowski (pseudonym “Bór”) was to explain later: “Fighting everywhere, we could not remain passive on our own land... The nation that wants to live in freedom cannot be passive at moments when its fate is being decided.”

On July 26, 1944, the Polish Government-in-Exile authorized General Bór-Komorowski and its Home Delegate – J S Jankowski, to commence armed action with the aim of liberating Warsaw. Soviet radio-stations were also calling for an uprising. With news of the Soviet forces approaching the city, on July 31, 1944, General Bór-Komorowski gave the order to rise up. This order was given to Colonel Antoni Chrusciel (pseudonym: “Monter”) who issued an order setting the time of the uprising to commence at 17.00 hours on August 1, 1944.

The Home Army forces of the Warsaw District numbered about 50,000 soldiers of whom 23,000 were combat-ready. Their state of arms on August 1 was as follows: one thousand rifles, 300 automatic pistols, 60 sub-machine guns, 7 machine guns, 35 anti-tank guns and PIAT bazookas, 1700 pistols, and 25,000 grenades. In the course of the fighting further arms were obtained through air drops and by capture from the enemy (including several armoured vehicles). Also, the insurgents' workshops were busy all the while producing: 300 automatic pistols, 150 flame-throwers, 40,000 grenades, a number of mortars and bazookas, and even an armoured car.

In the course of the fighting against the Germans, detachments from smaller Polish resistance formations joined in. Mostly, these were detachments from the Peoples' Army, the Polish Peoples' Army, the Security Corps and the National Armed Forces, numbering some 1700 people all told.

The German forces on the left bank of the river Vistula initially numbered about 15 to 16,000 men, including the garrison of 10 to 11,000 men under the command of General Stahel. On the first day of the Uprising, the Poles managed to take a significant part of the left bank of Warsaw but the attempts to take the bridges proved unsuccessful. Fighting on the right bank died down on August 2. The maximum territorial hold of the Uprising was attained on August 5, 1944, (see Map 1), just as the German reinforcements were arriving.



**Map 1:**  
**Warsaw - 5.VIII.1944 r.**  
**The position on 5 August 1944: the highest**  
**point of the insurgents' control in Warsaw**  
**Source:**  
***Armia Krajowa w Dokumentach, Vol. IV.***  
**London 1977**

Large German reinforcements already arrived on August 3 and 4 (several thousand policemen and SS-men). SS Reichsfuehrer Himmler issued the order: "Every inhabitant should be killed, no prisoners are to be taken. Warsaw is to be razed to the ground and in this way the whole of Europe shall have a terrifying example."

The basic aim of the Germans was to drive east-west thoroughfares through the city towards the bridges on the Vistula, and subsequently, to close off and destroy the insurgent areas. In the first place it was to be those which were alongside to the river. A German strike was delivered from the direction of the Wola district on August 5 – 6, towards Kierbedz bridge. This divided the areas controlled by the Home Army forces. In the occupied areas, particularly in the Wola district, the German forces perpetrated crimes of a massive scale on the civilian population (about 25 to 30,000 people executed by firing squad). The areas controlled by the insurgents were split into three as the run of the battle took its course:

- The northern area including the cemeteries, the former Jewish ghetto, the Old Town, the district of Zoliborz and the forests to the north of Warsaw
- The region of the city centre (Śródmieście) together with two riverside areas - Powiśle and Czerniaków
- The southern region – the district of Mokotów together with the sub-district of Sadyba and the Home Army detachments in the forests to the south of Warsaw

From the first days of the Uprising, a surrogate form of normality informed everyday life - with a food distribution system, and a postal service run by scouts. The insurgent radio station Blyskawica ("Lightening") made its inaugural broadcast on August 8.

Meanwhile, the Germans systematically reinforced their armies in Warsaw. SS General Erich von dem Bach Zalewski took charge of quelling the rising. By August 20, his forces increased to about 25,000 men. Periodically, detachments from three panzer divisions – the 25<sup>th</sup>, the 19<sup>th</sup> and the "Hermann Goering" divisions – were drafted into action. Besides bomber aircraft, the Germans used numerous sub-units of sappers, self-propelled "Goliath" mines and exploding tanks used for demolishing fortifications, rocket launchers and the heaviest artillery (including the 600mm "Karl" mortars).

The last point of resistance in the Ochota district fell on August 11, with the Home Army forces being simultaneously pushed out of the Wola district. On August 19, the Germans launched a mass assault on the Old Town. The Home Army made two unsuccessful attempts, on August 20 and 22, at breaking through the German redoubts, in the open terrain separating the Old Town from Zoliborz district. This cost 400 dead and wounded. The insurgent detachments were a lot

more effective in built up areas which to some extent compensated for the German superiority in weapons and equipment. The biggest successes of the Uprising in the latter part of August were the taking of the German stronghold entrenched in the building of the Polish Telephone Company (PAST-a) on Zielna Street on August 20, and the police centre in Krakowskie Przedmieście Street and the telephone station on Piusa XI Street on August 23.

Already in August, the insurgents were widely exploiting the network of sewer canals to communicate beneath enemy-controlled areas. Thus, as the fighting for the Old Town abated to August 2, most of the defenders fled via these canals – 4,500 to the City Centre and 800 to Żoliborz.

The insurgent forces were conspicuously supported by air dropped supplies which commenced on the night of August 4 to 5, 1944. The RAF were to make a total 116 sorties, the Polish Air Force – 97. Losses during these missions were considerable: the RAF lost 19 aircraft, the Poles 15, which was just over 16% and 15% respectively. Plans of there-and-back flights by American Flying Fortresses with stopovers for refuelling and reloading at Soviet bases behind the Eastern Front, were torpedoed by the Soviets.

Up to September 10, 1944, the Soviet armies, which were massed barely a few kilometres outside Warsaw, remained completely impassive, giving the Luftwaffe freedom of the skies to destroy the city with impunity. Soviet propaganda described the uprising as a fracas obstructing Red Army operations.

Between September 3 and 6, the Germans pushed the insurgents out of Powisłe, and the struggle for Czerniaków commenced on September 12. It was only on September 10 that the Russians began to move into action against the Germans in the Warsaw region. Some supplies were air dropped and Soviet fighter planes began to chase German bombers from the skies above Warsaw. This persuaded the Home Army leadership to discontinue the initiated capitulation negotiations. In the prevailing circumstances, the half-hearted Soviet aid to the Uprising helped to extend the struggle which was only weakening both the Germans and the Poles to Soviet advantage. In the period September 13 to 15, the Soviet armies and detachments of the 1st Polish Army subordinated to the Soviets, pushed the Germans out of the right bank of the city. After a long period of waiting for Soviet acquiescence, an air drop operation mounted by 107 American Flying Fortresses which then landed in the Ukraine, took place on September 18. Between September 16 and 19, 1st Polish Army detachments made landings in several points of left bank Warsaw (in Czerniaków, Powisłe and Żoliborz) but due to inadequate Russian support, these bridgeheads were unsustainable. The last groups of Home Army insurgents and 1st Polish Army soldiers fought on in Czerniaków to September 23 (some of these managed to escape via the sewers or back across the Vistula. The Germans, upon gaining control of the sub-districts of Sadyba and Sielce in the southern part of the city, went onto the offensive on September 24, to quell the insurgents in the Upper Mokotów area. Its evacuation via the sewers was ordered on September 26. A day later, the last defenders capitulated. A strong German attack against Żoliborz commenced on September 29 (mainly the 19<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division), leading to that district's capitulation the following day.

The two-months' fighting for Warsaw was a tremendous ordeal for the city's inhabitants, especially for the hundreds of thousands of civilians seeking refuge in the cellars. Tens of thousands dead and wounded, illnesses, lack of water, hunger – these were the realities of the last weeks of insurgent Warsaw. On October 1, 1944, in the face of unavoidable defeat, the Commander-in-Chief of the Home Army, General Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski, who as from September 30 was also the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces as such, nominated General Leopold Okulicki (pseudonym "Niedzwiedek") as his successor in the Polish underground. (The areas of fighting on October 1, 1944 – see Map 2).



**Map 2**  
**Position of the insurgents in Warsaw on 1 September 1944 following the fall of the Old Town**

**Source: *Armia Krajowa w Dokumentach*, Vol. IV. London 1977**

A ceasefire agreement was signed on the night of 2 to 3 October in Ozarów near Warsaw. Over 15,000 insurgents went into captivity together with General Bór Komorowski. About 18,000 insurgents were killed and 6,000 were seriously wounded during the fighting. Also, over 150,000 civilians perished in consequence of the fighting. The Germans lost about 10,000 in dead and wounded. After the capitulation, the Germans proceeded to systematically destroy the surviving buildings in the city. By January 1945, when the Red Army resumed its offensive, they had demolished 70 percent of the city.

Stalin's vetoing of Allied help for Warsaw tore off his mask to reveal to the world the true nature of his policy towards Poland. At the same time, the 63 day battle for Warsaw – despite the military defeat – proved the will of the Poles to fight for their own sovereign state. This theme was given expression in the address of the Council of National Unity (RZN) and the Domestic Council of Ministers (KRM) to the Polish nation of October 3, 1944: "The Warsaw Uprising has again put the Polish question before the world in the final phase of the war, not as a problem for diplomatic behind-the-scenes haggling, but as an issue relating to a great nation, fighting bloodily and unremittingly for freedom, unity and social justice in the lives of peoples and nations, for the noble principles of the Atlantic Charter, for everything that the better part of the world is fighting for today.'

*Tadeusz Kondracki, Warsaw*  
*Translated from Polish by Antoni Bohdanowicz*