

***The Bialystok region, 1944-1945,
in the light of underground and official documents
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When in the summer of 1944, the Red Army had entered the territories of the Bialystok area (counties of Grodno and Wolkowysk, and further those of Bialystok Suwalki, Bielsk Podlaski and others), it took over the control on the area hitherto dominated by the Home Army (ca. 30 thousand people) and the civil apparatus of the Government on Exile Delegation. Central and western areas of the voivodship were also controlled by national organizations such as: Narodowe Sily Zbrojne (National Army Forces) and Narodowa Organizacja Wojskowa (National Military Organization), which as the last ones joined the Home Army on the consent of the respective district headquarters.

The Bialystok District of the Home Army was one of the weakest in the country in terms of fighting disposition, which undoubtedly can be explained by a dramatic lack of weapons. Nevertheless, this had no impact on the fact that it would be difficult to find then (as well as later) a village in the Bialystok area which would not be controlled by one of the conspiring organizations (with the exception of only the eastern territories of the Bialystok county). As show the documents n° 6-21, the conspiracy “network” closely controlled the area.

One should make a difference between the “network” and forest divisions; the structure of the latter was the same as in the pre-war Polish Army. On the territory of the district there was one division directly submitted to the command of the district. Their commanders were at the same time heads of self-defense of the district.

Such was the structure of the Home Army in the summer of 1944, when the Red Army entered. Following the already tried in the region of Wilno and Lvov tactics, the command of the 2nd Belorussian front invited the delegation of the Home Army and Representatives of the Government on Exile, which were following the orders of their government. Nevertheless, the aim of the talks was not to consider the principles of

cooperation during the common fight against the German occupation, but to know better the structure of the underground organizations and the names of the commanders. Two weeks later the delegation was arrested and sent to the camps in the USSR. Massive arrests of the soldiers from all the underground formations followed.

During 1944 the hitherto conspiracy activities almost ceased. In the face of numerous Soviet troops, there was no possibility of the partisans' activities; the detachments had been disbanded. Until January 12, 1945, when the East Front had been formed, their activity was focused primarily on helping the fugitives from behind the Curzon line, organizing desertions from the "Berling's troops," continuing publishing activities (leaflets and underground papers which acquired more and more importance with time), organizing espionage and counter-espionage, and on rather limited self-defense activities (liquidation of the enemy's agents).

The situation in the underground structures had been also complicated by their growing decomposition. The command of the district NOW of Bialystok withdrew its detachments from the Home Army structures and started to build the National Military Union.

The situation in the Bialystok National Forces was most confused, since from the beginning of September 1944 until January 1945, there were two (separated by the front-line) commands of the district: the command of the lieutenant "Kalina" (NSZ-NOW) – west of the front-line, and that of "Mńcislawski" (NOW - ZJ), east of it. In December 1944 "Mńcislawski" was arrested; "Orlowski," who replaced him, continued his attempts to unite NSZ with the Home Army.

This action evoked a great dissatisfaction in the NSZ file and ranks and in the counties' headquarters; some of the county commands started to subdue themselves to the respective county commands of the NZW. Until September 1945, the Bialystok command district of the NSZ stopped its activity, and most of its officers went over to the NZW.

In aim to weaken the Soviet penetration in the conspiracy ranks, the commander of the district, lieutenant-colonel "Mńcislaw" renamed the HA district to the Home Army of Citizens' district. New cryptonyms and names were introduced. On the break of April and May, he contacted the newly active Representation of the Military Forces in Warsaw, and subdued to it.

Although the losses were huge, the Bialystok district of the HA-CHA survived the first year of the Soviet occupation in a good or even very good organizational condition. The losses from 1944 had been filled in a short time. The military equipment had also improved in the forest detachments, which found themselves in a difficult position as they were unable to enlist all the volunteers. In Spring 1945 they could easily liquidate a network of county militia stations and the communist civil administration. In May, the communist power was limited to the bigger towns, where strong NKVD garrisons remained.

Until mid-year 1945 there was a consolidation (and a strong split) in the Bialystok conspiracy organizations. Two of them – CHA and NZW – remained on the political stage (as NSZ did not count any more).

In the late spring of 1945, the Bialystok communists faced the threat of a total defeat, as they found themselves isolated, and unable to have – as it seemed – any

influence on events. But they had a strong argument imposed by the military force of the USSR, which they used with no scruples.

Numerous military operations undertaken by the Soviet security forces had been extermination actions conducted with cold blood. They bore a resemblance with such actions to the Nazi "Einsatzgruppen." Once more, as in the times of the Nazi occupation, Polish villages burned, people were murdered in broad daylight, their property robbed, and they were sent to camps by the thousands.

The recent documents from the archives of the NKVD enable us to attempt to describe the behavior of the NKVD, which in the period of the "Lublin Poland" used the 64th Assembled Division of the Home Troops. Later, in May of 1945, this strength had to grow to, at least, 9 regiments of the NKVD operating on the whole area of Poland. To this, one should add the forces of UB-MO (internal security apparatus and militia), and KBW (built on the basis of the 4th Division of Infantry of the Polish Army), and at least of the 6th Division of Infantry of the Polish Army.

From among those troops, three regiments of the 64th Division NKVD had been sent to the region of Bialystok (until December 1944), and in mid-1945 these had been strengthened by further NKVD regiments and subdivisions 1 and 18 of the Polish Army. Operational groups of the NKVD, Polish Army and KBW disposed of not only broadcasting stations and cars, but also of heavy equipment, such as artillery, tanks, and planes.

Local population could do little against this large and well-equipped enemy. The forest detachments in the region of Bialystok (with no more than 1000-1200 people in the summer of 1945, and then much less) had only infantry light weapons. Broadcasting stations were replaced by peasant carriages, or people's own feet, since bicycles were scarce in those times. Taking into account such a disproportion in strength, and the occupants' terror, the outcome of the struggles couldn't have been any different from what it was.

Struggles continued during the whole year of 1946 and the beginning of the next. Eventually, the Parliament's bill on amnesty from February 20, 1947, virtually resolved the problem of the military resistance on the country's level. Since those days, only few detachments have continued their struggle, isolated, and diminishing with the time, and without any hope for victory. Chased and murdered with premeditation, deprived of graves, they remained peoples' memory only. Historians should change this state of affairs if it is still possible. I do hope that this publication will contribute to broadening our knowledge about those awful years.