

## [Warsaw Uprising 1944](#)

**Note:** Gen. Leopold Okulicki, 1898-1946, last commander of the Home Army. On 01/19/45 he dissolved the Home Army, arrested on 02/27/45 by Soviet Union's NKVD (political police), tried in Moscow in the 'Trial of Sixteen' Polish underground leaders, sentenced in June of 1945 to ten years of hard labor. Died in Butyrki prison under unclear circumstances on 12/24/46. Source: Davies, *Raising '44: The Battle for Warsaw*. (some spellings corrected, ed.)

see also article: [Gen. Leopold Okulicki: the Last C-i-C of the Home Army](#)

### **The Warsaw Rising: Its Causes, Course, and Capitulation**

Deposition composed for the NKVD by General Leopold Okulicki 'Bear Cub'  
[Extracts: translated from the Russian by Dr. Polly Jones]

The London government left the decision to start the battle for Warsaw entirely in the hands of the Vice-premier and Home Delegate Yankovski, who, as the front approached, received advice from the AK [Armia Krajowa, Home Army] Command ... After rather lengthy discussions, the decision was taken to begin the fight as soon as the Red Army crossed the German defences on the Otvotsk-Rembertov-Radzimin line, which did not appear to be heavily fortified.

These are the reasons which made the Battle necessary:

1. The desire to seize Warsaw before the arrival of the Red Army, with a view to organize state power and greet the Red Army as Warsaw's rightful owners.
2. To prove to the whole world that we had fought unstintingly against the Germans, since nothing had so far been reported about our earlier battles (in Vilnius, Lvov, and the Lublin regions).
3. To prove our desire to defeat the Germans in conjunction with the Red Army in a large-scale engagement, and thereby to resolve the Polish-Soviet conflict.
4. To take revenge for the Germans' five-year destruction of the Polish people.
5. To paralyse German actions and communications on the left bank of the Vistula River: and through this, to facilitate the Red Army's attack and to save Warsaw from destruction.
6. To prevent the front from stabilizing along the Vistula, because this could cause huge damage to Warsaw and to civilians, who might be forcibly evacuated.
7. To prevent the Germans from selecting 100,000 men from Warsaw for fortification works which would have deprived us of strength ... and generated a very disadvantageous situation.
8. The morale of our soldiers and civilians, whom we have been preparing for battle over five years, could very well have fallen, if we had remained passive at this crucial moment ...
9. There were well-grounded fears that the popular enthusiasm for a showdown ... could provoke disorganized fighting without our participation or leadership.

In addition, there were persuasive arguments against launching the battle for Warsaw:

1. The failure to regulate Polish-Soviet diplomatic relations prevented us from knowing what position the Soviet Government would take ... There was a well-founded fear that the Soviet Government would halt the Red Army's offensive and would not give us assistance ...
2. The absence of communication with the Red Army command meant that we could not coordinate our actions with them.
3. The fear that the forces stationed in Warsaw were inadequate ... There were not enough arms, especially for fighting German tanks, and an absence of artillery, AA equipment, and planes ... General 'Monter' Khrustel, the commander of the Rising, announced that he had sufficient resources for only five days' fighting.

4. There were fears about large numbers of civilian casualties and about large-scale damage to the city, especially if the Red Army were to halt its advance.

Two opinions had formed in the High Command. The first opinion proposed that the rising begin at the moment when the front ranks of the Red Army had crossed into the German bridgehead. The second, more cautious opinion proposed that the rising be launched to coincide with the Red Army's occupation of Praga, the forcing of the Vistula, or the encirclement of Warsaw. Despite the huge amount of slanderous propaganda put out by the press of the Provisional Lublin Government, which depicted us as traitors and criminals ... I admit that I, as a member of the High Command, was the prime initiator and proponent of the first option ... If anyone has to stand trial, then I should take responsibility for forcing through the decision adopted ...

Notwithstanding the Provisional Government's arguments, I will continue to maintain that the decision was correct ... Had they not fought for 63 days in Warsaw, and had not incurred those losses, the Polish people would have emerged from this war with enormous disadvantages for their future independent existence ... The next generation of Poles, as well as the peoples of other states, would have been right to condemn us as cowards, who lacked courage at the decisive moment.

Within the High Command, General 'Bor' Komorovski had supported the more cautious option. General 'Gzhegozh' Pelchinski supported my view, as did the head of the 2nd department, General 'Geller' Iranek and the General 'Kutshev' (I do not know his surname). General 'Monter' Khrustel ... was convinced that he would be able to seize Warsaw and defend it until the Red Army arrived.

In my opinion, therefore, the failure of the Warsaw Rising must be attributed to political factors rather than to mistakes by the military leadership. If a political mistake was made, the people responsible are the politicians who should have reached a settlement in our relations with the Soviet Union. The commanders and soldiers of the AK, in carrying out the Battle for Warsaw, were only fulfilling their obligations. They could not have acted otherwise.

## **B. The progress of the battle**

General fighting began on 1.8.44 at 17:00, although firing had begun earlier in some places. We did not succeed in taking the Germans unawares, because they had been prepared in advance to crush a rising ... The first attacks only succeeded in taking 20% of the designated objectives. This was a difficult time. The German tanks came out onto the streets and an unplanned battle began ... Fighting with the tanks went on for another 3-4 days. Our fortifications became stronger, and the soldiers learned how to fight the tanks, using bottles, grenades, handmade flamethrowers and grenade-launchers. The Germans suffered heavier and heavier losses with each passing day (we were able to seize about 10 Tiger tanks in good working order and to use them for our own purposes) ... The supplies and equipment seized from the Germans convinced us that we would be able to continue fighting for a relatively prolonged period.

From the first days of fighting, the Germans concentrated their efforts on clearing the roads leading to the Vistula bridges ... There were particularly fierce battles round Volska Street and Jerusalem Alley. After ten days, the Germans were able to move traffic across the Kerbedz bridge, but they were never able to break through to the Poniatovski Bridge ... They also broke into Schuh Street, where the Gestapo HQ was located. We were left in total occupation of the City Centre, the Old Town, Jolibord and Mokotov.

The next phase saw the Germans directing heavy artillery and aerial bombardments onto particular districts ... Their advance on the Old Town began in mid-August and lasted for 20 days ... Every house was fought over. An order found on the body of a dead German battalion commander allowed us to discover that the Germans had directed 12 infantry battalions, masses of artillery, mortars and tanks

against this area and had subjected it to a large-scale aerial bombardment. Our remaining forces escaped through the sewers to reach the Jolibord and the City Centre.

The Germans then hit the Riverside district and began bombing the city centre's northern perimeter. The defences did not withstand it, through poor leadership and lack of fortifications ... Aerial bombardments spread fire ...

Around 10.9.44, the German commander, Von dem Bach, building on these successes, proposed via the Polish Red Cross that negotiations for the surrender of Warsaw should begin. The Germans announced that since England and the USA recognized the Home Army's combatant rights, all AK officers and soldiers would be accepted as prisoners of war in accordance with the Geneva Convention ... General 'Bor' Komorowski began these negotiations, at first in order to gain time. But in due course it was discovered that he was taking them seriously. The London government had granted him the authority to resolve the issue. And it took a great effort to break the negotiations off ... But the rumble of Soviet artillery and the appearance of Soviet bombers ... increased our strength for further combat.

As the Red Army approached Praga, the Germans made for Cherniakow, with the objective of taking over the Vistula shore and preventing Red Army detachments from joining up with Warsaw. The fighting lasted several days. One of the battalions involved was part of Berling's Polish Army. It was not the least prepared for street-fighting; and, unfortunately, no further reinforcements arrived. Owing to the absence of observers, Soviet artillery support turned out to be insufficient.

After the fall of Cherniakow and of Mokotow, the Germans concentrated significant cavalry and armoured tank forces on the approaches to Jolibord. As far as I recall, around 30.9.44, the fighting in the Jolibord district was stopped by 'Bor' Komorowski ... Negotiations began for a second time with General von dem Bach on 30.9.44 and immediately led to the fall of Jolibord, which was in a hopeless position.

#### **Attempts to establish links with the Red Army**

1. At the beginning of the rising (I do not recall which date), the Red Army captain Kalugin came to see General 'Monter' Khrustel ... On the 5th or 6th of August, he transmitted a dispatch addressed to Marshal Stalin via our radiostation. He also assured us that he could contact Marshal Rokossovski. As proof he showed us a letter from Rokossovski, which, turned out to be a forgery. Captain Kalugin had been tricked by a blackmailer ...
2. On 14.8.44, General 'Monter'-Khrustel sent a radiotelegram via London to Marshal Rokossovski, in which he ... asked for assistance. As far as I know, he did not receive a reply.
3. Immediately after the Red Army's occupation of Praga, an officer was sent across the Vistula with all the information necessary to establish radio communications with Rokossovski's HQ. Through this, around 20.9.44, we received a radiotelegram from the Marshal, in which he asked us to say how we thought the Red Army's entry into Warsaw should be organized, and how we could co-operate. Our demands and opinions were sent back immediately via radiotelegram, but we received no answer.
4. Independently of the measures taken by us, Marshal Rokossovski sent in two of his own officers by parachute. Their radiostation was damaged by the jump, but we quickly managed to fix it. One of these officers was soon killed, and the other recrossed the Vistula.
5. Seeing our forces were suffering from a near-complete absence of provisions, on 26 or 27 September, we sent another telegram to Marshal Rokossovski, indicating that we could only hold out until 30.9.44. This radiotelegram also received no reply.

Relations between the Home Army and the People's Army and the PPR (Polish Workers Party) were in my opinion good, despite the fact that the People's Army (AL) and the Korpus Bespechenstva (KB) were

extremely weak. (They constituted about 5% of those fighting.) The Polish People's Army (PAL) did not post a single platoon.

The accusations directed against the Kraiovia Army of fascism and of crushing elements subject to the provisional Lublin government does not correspond to reality. On the contrary, we did everything possible to save these elements from German repressions.

### **C. The surrender of Warsaw**

The reasons for the capitulation, which was decided on by Government Delegate Yankovski during the night of 30.9.44, were:

1. The absolute absence of food provisions. There were already incidents when soldiers had tried to take food from civilians by force ...
2. The near-total absence of water. Disturbances were started to occur round the sources of water ...
3. The curtailment of the Red Army's advance. After the fall of Mokotov and Jolibord, the situation had become all but hopeless.
4. We had been unable to organize a voluntary evacuation of civilians.

Reasons for the imprisonment of large numbers of officers, who were necessary for further fighting with the Germans:

1. Fatigue from having worked in secret for five years ...
2. The fear that the Germans would easily catch everyone after the capitulation.
3. The conviction that Germany would soon fall and that, as a consequence, it would be possible to break through to the Polish Army abroad and together with them to return to Poland.
4. Fear of the Soviet authorities. It was well known that arrests had been carried out in Vilnius, Lvov and Lublin provinces.
5. An incorrect understanding of the idea of honour in fulfilling the conditions of surrender agreed with the Germans.

Over 12,000 officers and soldiers were taken prisoner ... A much smaller number, I guess around 3-5 thousand, went into hiding with the civilian population. Each did as his conscience dictated.

During the night of the 30.9.44, I asked 'Bor' Komorovski for his ideas on the continuation of fighting with the Germans and on its leadership. I told him I was not tired, and that I was ready. After a prolonged discussion, he agreed with me, transferring all his powers to me and informing London. That same night, I said farewell to him and left HQ, without speaking to anyone else.

### **The further leadership of the Home Army**

Given the conditions imposed by 'Bor' Komorovski, I could not take anyone from HQ with me. On 3.10.44, I left Warsaw in the company of a woman and a child and two other officers whom I had met on the street ... I ended up in the camp at Prushkov. On 4.10.44, we were loaded onto wagons and taken in the direction of Krakow where we were going to be sorted ... As we passed Kyeltsy, I jumped from the wagon and with the help of a doctor of my acquaintance, who worked in the children's hospital, I contacted the chief of the staff of the Keltsy region. Lt.Col. 'Eliton' (I don't know his surname). I then sent a radiogram to London ... requesting that an order be issued for regional commanders to obey me. After several days, I received an answer from General Kopanski stating that the matter had been attended to ...

April 1945

GARF, Moscow. No file number supplied.