



# WARSAW

## Uprising



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# Warsaw Uprising

1944

The Warsaw Uprising broke out at 5:00 pm on Tuesday, **August 1, 1944** (code named '**W-Hour**' as in "Wolność" being Polish for freedom). It was one of the most fundamental yet dramatic events in the city's history. Anticipated for a few days, it lasted over 2 months.

The Insurgents wanted to liberate the capital city from the Hitler's occupation before the entry of the Soviet Army and thus ensure Poland's sovereignty after the end of the war.

Although numerous, the insurgent forces had to face a regular, fully militarized German army without relevant weaponry. Sadly, being denied any assistance from the allies, they were doomed to fail. The support they hoped for never came. Clashed between two mighty armies, the Soviets and the Germans, the Uprising slowly bled out.

The looming destiny of Warsaw, known as the 'Paris of the East' before the war, was fulfilled by Heinrich Himmler's order saying: 'Every citizen is to be killed. No prisoners are to be taken. Warsaw has to be razed to the ground. Let it be a horrifying example for the whole Europe.'



Zamkowy Square (Archive of the City of Warsaw, photo: Zdzisław Marcinkowski)





*Grójecka Street. Capitulation. The civilians leave the city (Warsaw Rising Museum, photo: unknown author)*

The Polish capital city was devastated in nearly 85% and its residents were taken to transition and POW's camps.



*View of Zamkowy Square, from Krakowskie Przedmieście Street. The ruins of the Royal Castle on the right, on the left destroyed house on Świętojańska Street. (Warsaw Rising Museum, photo: Ryszard Witkowski)*

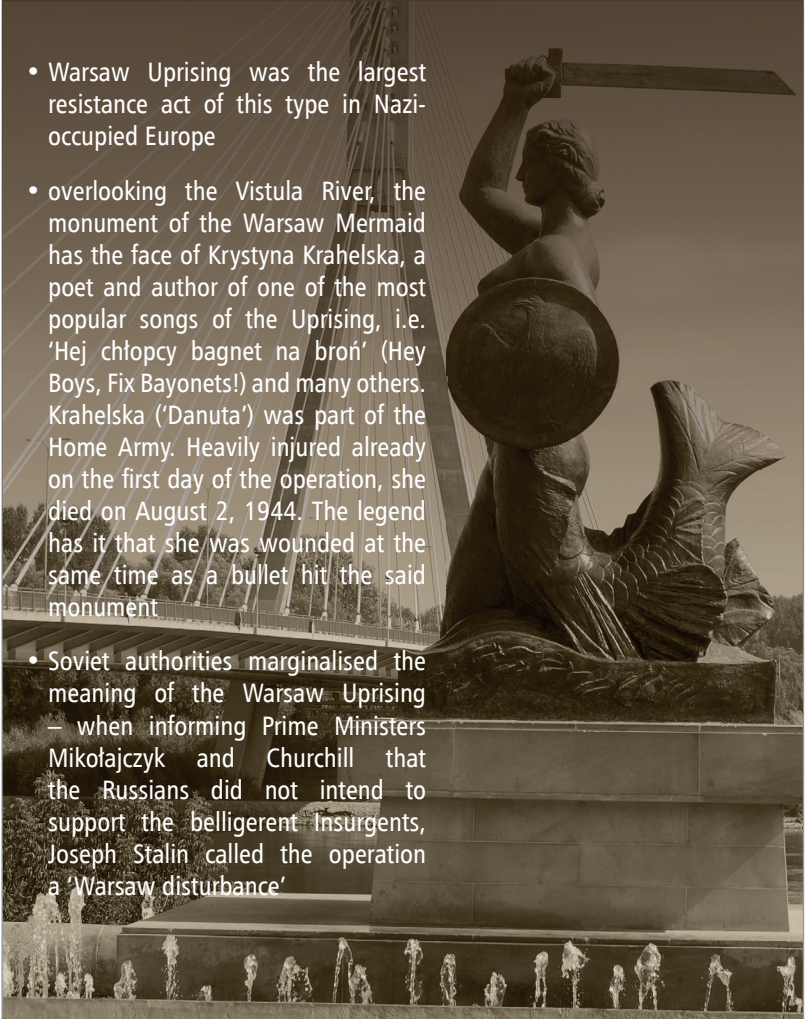


- Uprising lasted **63 days**
- approx. 30,000 Home Army soldiers from the Warsaw District took up the fight
- only 10 per cent of the Insurgents were armed
- Insurgents had to face approx. 20,000 fully armed soldiers who used armoured front units, artillery and aircrafts
- 18,000 Insurgents were killed and 25,000 were injured
- approx. 150,000 civilians died
- approx. 500,000 residents were expelled from Warsaw after its capitulation
- last shot was fired on late October 2, 1944

Krakowskie Przedmieście Street, from the ruins of Holy Cross Church toward Kopernika Street  
(Warsaw Rising Museum, photo: Eugeniusz Haneman)



- Warsaw Uprising was the largest resistance act of this type in Nazi-occupied Europe
- overlooking the Vistula River, the monument of the Warsaw Mermaid has the face of Krystyna Krahelska, a poet and author of one of the most popular songs of the Uprising, i.e. 'Hej chłopcy, bagnet na broń' (Hey Boys, Fix Bayonets!) and many others. Krahelska ('Danuta') was part of the Home Army. Heavily injured already on the first day of the operation, she died on August 2, 1944. The legend has it that she was wounded at the same time as a bullet hit the said monument
- Soviet authorities marginalised the meaning of the Warsaw Uprising – when informing Prime Ministers Mikołajczyk and Churchill that the Russians did not intend to support the belligerent Insurgents, Joseph Stalin called the operation a 'Warsaw disturbance'



Mermaid Statue at Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie (photo: T. Nowak)

**August 1** – Outbreak of Warsaw Uprising. 1:50 pm the first Uprising fights start in the Żoliborz district, near Wilson Square. 5:00 pm official outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising.

**August 2** – Insurgents take up strategic positions in the following city districts: Old Town (Polish Security Printing Works), Śródmieście (Main Post Office, building of Arbeitsamt), Powiśle (power plant), Czerniaków (building of the Social Insurance Institution) and others.

**August 4** – Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński, poet and soldier, dies in the Blanka Palace.

**August 5** – 'Black Saturday' – mass murder of civilians in Wola. In the following days, the Nazis kill approx. 40,000 residents of this city district. The 'Żośka' battalion overtakes the Nazis concentration camp, 'Konzentrationslager Warschau', at Gęsia Street and liberates 348 prisoners from different European countries, mainly the Jews. Some of them join the Insurgents.

**August 16** – two outstanding Polish poets – officer cadet Zdzisław Leon 'Chmura' Stroiński and Tadeusz 'Topór' Gajcy – die in the ruins of a house at Przejazd Street.

**August 20** – capturing the Polish Telephone Joint-Stock Company (Polska Akcyjna Spółka Telefoniczna) so called PAST at 37/39 Zielna Street. Approx. 115 Germans fall into the Insurgents' hands.

**September 1** – general attack of the Germans on the Old Town. The Insurgents escape to Śródmieście and Żoliborz through the city sewers.



Sec. Lt. Eugeniusz Lokajski 'Brok' with the cat, standing in the gate of bombed tenement house at 1 Moniuszki Street. (Warsaw Rising Museum)



Burning building of Polish Telephone Joint-Stock Company at 37/39 Zielna Street. (Warsaw Rising Museum, photo: Eugeniusz Lokajski)



*Insurgent from the Old Town leaving of the city sewers at Nowy Świat Street corner of Warecka Street.  
(Warsaw Rising Museum, photo: Joachim Joachimczyk)*



*Units of Insurgents going into captivity. Grójecka Street.  
(Warsaw Rising Museum, photo: Marian Grabski)*

**September 2** – in the night of September 1, tank shells destroy King Sigismund's Column. The Old Town is seized by the Nazis. The fight in other Warsaw districts continues.

**September 10** – Red Army begins its offensive on the Praga bank of the Vistula River.

**September 18** – 107 American B-17 planes conduct the largest drop of arms, ammunition, food and medical supplies. Unfortunately, the Insurgents manage to collect only 20 per cent of the airdrop.

**September 25** – Sec. Lt. Eugeniusz 'Brok' Lokajski, Olympic athlete, dies in the ruins of a house at 129 Marszałkowska Street. During the Uprising, he was a liaison officer and a documentary filmmaker. Even today, his photos provide an invaluable insight into the reality of those days.

**October 2** – Uprising fails. An agreement on the cessation of hostilities in Warsaw is signed in Ożarów. Its provisions recognize the Insurgents as rightful prisoners of war protected by the Geneva Convention and ensure that civilians will not face any consequences for actions against German ordinances.

During the next days, the Insurgents abandon the city, being transported to POW camps. The civilians, on the other hand, are directed to transition camps in Pruszków, Ursus, Włochy, Ożarów and others. Unfortunately, over 100,000 of them are sent to forced labour in the Reich and a few dozen others to concentration camps.





## Old Town and its surroundings

**Polish Security Printing Works** (Państwowa Wytwórnia Papierów Wartościowych) ul. Sanguszkii 1 – for nearly a month it was the northernmost point of the Old Town defended by the Insurgents. Even today, its fence bears traces of the fights.

**Church of St. Casimir** (Kościół św. Kazimierza) Rynek Nowego Miasta 2 – church served as an insurgent hospital, where over 1,000 people died in an air raid. Baroque puttos (figures of infants with wings, cupids), once decorating the tomb of Maria Sobieska nee Wessel, were rescued from under the debris.

**Tank-trap** (Czołg pułapka) at the corner of ul. Podwale, ul. Kilińskiego – on August 13, 1944, the Germans gave the Insurgents a type of a 'Trojan Horse'. At the barricade closing the end of Podwale Street at Castle Square, the Germans abandoned a Borgward explosive carrier. The Insurgents erroneously assumed it was a small tank and inconsiderately drove it into the streets of the Old Town. At around 6 PM, during a triumphal presentation, the vehicles exploded killing some 500 people. This event was commemorated with a memorial tablet.

**Cathedral Basilica of Martydrom of St. John the Baptist** (Bazylika Archikatedralna pw. św. Jana Chrzciciela) ul. Świętojańska 8 – fierce fights for the cathedral took place August 21-27. A bomb raid and a mass attack of the German infantry completely destroyed the church. It is said that a fragment of a caterpillar track from the so-called 'goliath' (light, caterpillar explosive carrier) was embedded in the Cathedral wall from the side of Dziekonia Street. However, it is not true. Most probably, the track is a part of the tank-trap that exploded at 1 Kilińskiego Street.



*Ruins of St. John Cathedral – remains of chancel. View from Świętojańska Street. In the background tenement of houses at Kanonia Street. (Warsaw Rising Museum, photo: Ryszard Witkowski)*



*The ruins of Warsaw, 1945. New Town Market Square. Ruins of the Church of St. Casimir. (Warsaw Rising Museum, photo: unknown author)*





Shattered column and statue of King Sigismund's lying on the pavement at Zamkowy Square. In the background – destroyed houses of western frontage of the square. (Warsaw Rising Museum, photo: Eugeniusz Haneman)



Warsaw Uprising. North Śródmieście district. Roof top view at the Holy Cross Basilica in flames. (Warsaw Rising Museum, photo: Joachim Joachimczyk)

**King Sigismund III Vasa Kolumn** (Kolumna Zygmunta III Wazy) plac Zamkowy – the oldest and the highest secular monument raised in 1644 from the initiative of Władysław IV in honour of his father, Sigismund III Vasa, who transferred the capital of Poland from Cracow to Warsaw. Three hundred years later, the monument was destroyed into pieces during the German attack on the Old Town. The first trunk of the column from the 17th century and the one destroyed during the Uprising are located now next to the Royal Castle.

**Arsenal** (Arsenał) ul. Długa 52 – the Arsenal had a strategic importance during the Uprising, as it protected access to the Old Town from West. Over a year before the Uprising, a different historical event took place in the Arsenal – the 'Arsenal operation' led to liberating over 20 prisoners transported from the seat of Gestapo at aleja Szucha to the Pawiak prison. The building was bombed by the Germans on August 23, 1944. Today, the building is the seat of the National Museum of Archaeology, whose walls were renovated with fragments still bearing the traces of insurgent fights.

**The Basilica of the Holy Cross** (Bazylika pw. Świętego Krzyża) ul. Krakowskie Przedmieście 3 – on September 6, the Germans drove two 'goliaths' inside the building. The explosion caused the church vault to collapse and the statue of Christ dragging a cross with the 'Sursum corda' sign (Lift up your hearts) to fall from the stairs balustrade. The church pillars contain urns with the hearts of composer Fryderyk Chopin and Nobel-awarded writer Władysław Reymont.



## Centre

**ul. Nowy Świat 53** – manhole covering the entrance to the sewers through which the Insurgents escaped from the Old Town to Śródmieście.

**Children hospital fence** ul. Kopernika 43 – in 1944 the building served as a field hospital for the Home Army. The Daughters of Charity helped both the Insurgents and German soldiers. The hospital fence with bullet holes still reminds passers-by about the Uprising.

**Traditional Wedel Shop** (Staroświecki Sklep Wedla) ul. Szpitalna 8 – located in the house of Emil Wedel, a pre-war chocolate manufacturer. During the Uprising, many residents living nearby found a safe haven in the building cellars. It was also home to a radio station. As before the war outbreak, the place is today a stylish company shop and a chocolate café.

**Palladium** ul. Złota 7/9 – opened in 1937, the cinema survived the war and served its functions until 2000. During the occupation, the Germans changed its name to 'Helgoland'. Having seized the building, the Insurgents played their chronicles called 'Warsaw is Fighting'. Today, it is a music club and a theatre.



Scouts at Złota Street. In the background, buildings at Zgoda Street. Entry to the 'Palladium' cinema on the right side.  
(Warsaw Rising Museum, photo: Marian Grabski)

**Prudential** pl. Powstańców Warszawy 9 – before the war it was the tallest building in Poland and one of the tallest ones in Europe. Already on August 1 it was seized by the Insurgents who fixed the Polish flag made of a white sheet and a red pillow cover on top of it. Seriously







*'Prudential' building at 9 Napoleona Square.  
(Warsaw Rising Museum, photo: Eugeniusz Lokajski)*



*Little Insurgent Zbigniew Ślęzakowski 'Kędziorek' with fireman helmet. Zgoda Street.  
(Warsaw Rising Museum, photo: Eugeniusz Lokajski)*

damaged during the fights, the building was reconstructed in the socialist realist style. Currently, after renovation it houses a hotel.

**Seat of the Polish Telephone Joint-Stock Company** (Budynek Polskiej Akcyjnej Spółki Telefonicznej – PAST) ul. Zielna 37 – owing to its location and height (the second tallest building in pre-war Warsaw), the building had a strategic importance during the Uprising. Until August 20, 1944, it was in the hands of the Germans, serving as a good observation and shooting point in Northern Śródmieście. In consequence of fierce fights, the Insurgents overtook the building. It was one of the greatest military successes of the Uprising commemorated with the Fighting Poland emblem placed on the building roof.

**Scout's Post** (Pocztą Harcerską) – the Field Scout's Post organised by the Grey Ranks was located in a building at 35/41 Wilcza Street. Letters were distributed by the youngest participants of the Uprising, the so-called Zawiszacy.

**The Earth Museum** (Muzeum Ziemi) al. Na Skarpie 27 – marble stairs in the building still bear the traces of blood of an anonymous Insurgent. A memorial tablet commemorates the past events.



*'Koszta' company insurgents simulate an attack at the corner of Marszałkowska and Sienkiewicza Streets. First from the left senior shooter Maciej Urbaniec 'Bartek', second - senior shooter Jerzy Chyliński 'Karol'. In the background barricade at Marszałkowska Street. (Warsaw Rising Museum, photo: Eugeniusz Lokajski)*

## Others

**Warszawa Gdańska railway station** (Dworzec Gdański) ul. Zygmunta Słomińskiego 4 – fights for the Warszawa Gdańska railway station are regarded as the bloodiest ones during the Uprising. In the nights of August 20 and 21 nearly 500 soldiers of the Home Army died in the attacks. Those events were commemorated with a statue of a young woman leaning over an insurgent tomb.

**'Zieleniak'** ul. Grójecka 95 – in the beginning of the Warsaw Uprising, this fruit and vegetable market place located close to today's Banacha Market Place was a venue where the Germans organized a gathering point for the residents of Ochota district expelled from their houses. After a few days of waiting for a transport to Pruszków, the prisoners began to die from hunger and exhaustion.

**Aleja Niepodległości 227/233** – Władysław Szpilman, distinguished composer and pianist, was hiding in this house until August 21, 1943. He then moved to the attic of a house at 2 Sędziowska Street, where he stayed for another 3 months until January 17, 1945. He managed to survive helped by Cpt. Wilm Hosenfeld, a German officer. These events inspired Roman Polański to shoot the movie 'Pianist'.

## The Warsaw Rising Museum (Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego)

ul. Grzybowska 79, tel. 22 539 79 05, [www.1944.pl](http://www.1944.pl) – the museum located in the building of the tram power plant was opened on the 60th anniversary of the outbreak of Warsaw fights. It is an expression of tribute paid to the residents of Warsaw who fought and died for liberated Poland and the Polish Capital. The exposition reflects the atmosphere of insurgent Warsaw, presenting not only military events of 63 days of fights, but also the life of civilians. One of many attractions of the Museum is a replica of the Liberator B-24J bomb aircraft.

## Warsaw Uprising Mound (Kopiec Powstania Warszawskiego)

– it is approx. 120 metres high. It was constructed 1946-1950 from Warsaw debris. The hill has become a pantheon, as the material contained not only ruins but also remains of city residents killed in the Uprising. In the 50th anniversary of the outbreak of the Uprising (in 1994), former soldiers of the Home Army placed the 15-meter high Fighting Poland emblem on its peak. The top of the Uprising Mound can be reached by going up the longest stairs in Europe, 400 steps and 40 landings.

## Warsaw Uprising Monument (Pomnik Powstania Warszawskiego)

pl. Krasińskich – monument commemorates thousands of heroes of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising. It consists of two parts. The first one presents the Insurgents running from below a pylon (bridge support), while the second one those entering the sewer system. A hatch to the sewers through which the insurgent troops and Starówka residents fled from the Germans is located on Krasiński Square.

## Monument to General Zbigniew Ścibor-Rylski, nom de guerre "Motyl" [Butterfly]

(Marshal Edward Rydz-Śmigły Park) – the monument commemorates the war hero, Home Army officer and company commander in the Warsaw Uprising who died in 1948 at the age of 101. He received many decorations for his valour, including the Order of Virtuti Militari and the Cross of Valour, as well as the Order of Polonia Restituta. The monument's location is connected with General "Motyl's" service during the Uprising. He commanded a platoon in this area during the extremely bloody defence of the Czerniaków bridgehead.

## Little Insurgent Monument



## (Pomnik Małego Powstańcy)

ul. Podwale – statue of a young boy who wears an oversized helmet, commemorates the heroic children who took part in Warsaw Uprising 1944. The monument was unveiled by cardiology doctor J. Świderski, who participated in the Uprising as a 14-year old liaison 'Lubicz' in the 'Gustaw' battalion of the Home Army.



*Little Insurgent Monument. (photo: Wanda Hansen)*

**Murals** – contemporary artists pay tribute to the Insurgents also by means of modern art. Thus, it is worth visiting the Rose Garden in the Museum of Warsaw Uprising. It exhibits the works of Wilhelm Sasnal, Henryk Chmielewski better known as Papić Chmiel and others. Further works were painted on a wall of the presbytery of the Church of the Visitation of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary in New Town, wall of the 'Polonia' sport club stadium at Konkwitorska Street and in other locations.



*Mural. Church of the Visitation of the Virgin Mary at the New Town. (Archive of Warsaw Tourist Office)*

## 'Mokotów March' (Marsz Mokotowa)

– a song written by two Insurgents, Mirosław 'Karnisz' Jezewski (words) and Jan 'Krzysztof' Markowski (music), during the Uprising, which became an informal anthem of the district. Today, the melody can be heard every day at 5:00 PM from the clock tower of a Gothic house at 59 Puławska Street.



*The clock tower of a Gothic house at 59 Puławska Street. (photo: Beata Zwadziszewska)*



Powązki Military Cemetery. Celebrations of August 1. (Archive of Warsaw Tourist Office)

**August 1** – every year Warsaw pays tribute to the Insurgents. At 5:00 PM the sirens are sounded and for one minute the whole traffic freezes. The national flags are hung on the street of Warsaw and candles are lit in places sacred with the blood of the murdered residents of the city. In the Powązki Military Cemetery, under the Gloria Victis (Latin for “Glory to the Defeated”) monument, the representatives of the highest state authorities, combatants and residents of the capital lay flowers. In the evening on Piłsudskiego Square, the residents of Warsaw sing insurgent songs.

**Warsaw Uprising Night Race** (Nocny Bieg Powstania Warszawskiego) – race at the distance of 5 or 10 kilometres, organised to honour another anniversary of the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising, is also educational in nature. Barricades are located in selected points of the route. There are performances presenting the past events and the joggers wear white and red arm bands with the emblem of Fighting Poland.

**Insurgent Mass** (Masa Powstańcza) – a bike rally organized as tribute to the Warsaw Insurgents. The route is different every year and follows the traces of, e.g.: ‘Radosław’ and ‘Żywiciel’ groups as well as ‘Baszta’ regiment.



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[www.go2warsaw.pl](http://www.go2warsaw.pl)  
[info@go2warsaw.pl](mailto:info@go2warsaw.pl)



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Cover photo:

The insurgents on a barricade at Zielna Street watching the burning Polish Telephone Joint-Stock Company  
(photo Eugeniusz Lokajski / Warsaw Rising Museum)

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