

# NAUKI HUMANISTYCZNE

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## **ACTIVITY OF GERMAN MILITARY INTELLIGENCE AND OTHER INFO- INTELLIGENCE SERVICES IN EAST PRUSSIA IN THE YEARS OF 1919-1939**

*After World War I, Germany, apart from many restrictions on armament and manpower of the army, was also deprived of the right to maintain offensive military intelligence. As a result of the restrictions, in the 1920s German offensive intelligence was organized and conspired in trade and industrial companies as well as in numerous detective agencies in the Weimar Republic.*

*After the International Military Control Commission was liquidated in 1927, the Abwehr took over guidance over German intelligence. There were nine offices within the territory of Germany (after taking Austria into occupation in 1938 their number increased to ten), four of which – in Królewiec, Szczecin, Frankfurt upon the Oder and Wrocław – conducted intelligence activities mainly in Poland.*

*At the beginning of the 1930s, the Abwehrstelle in Królewiec conducted intelligence activities in Poland and the countries of the Baltic region. Then officer posts (Abwehroffizier) in Malbork, Olsztyn and Ełk were subordinated to it. What is more, the Police Presidium in Gdańsk worked for its benefit.*

*In 1933, the Gestapo came into being in Prussia. One of the most crucial tasks of the organization was to fight foreign espionage. The Gestapo activities as well as a widespread fear of that institution among the German society considerably hindered recruitment possibilities for foreign intelligence services.*

**Key words:** *East Prussia 1918-1939, German military intelligence, espionage, Sonderdienst Nuntia, Gestapo, Abwher*

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## INTRODUCTION

After World War I Germany, apart from many restrictions on armament and manpower of the army, was also deprived of the right to maintain offensive military intelligence. The Abwehr, which came into existence in 1921 as a department of *Reichswehrministerium* (the Ministry of Military Affairs of the Reich), was allowed only to hold counter-intelligence operations exclusively within the territory of Germany and 'identification' intelligence based on publicly available materials<sup>1</sup>.

The consequence of the restrictions imposed by the Treaty of Versailles was such that in the 1920s German offensive intelligence was organized and conspired in trade and industrial companies and in numerous detective agencies in the Weimar Republic. Those companies, besides economic intelligence, carried out military intelligence and often employed former German Army officers who did not have any positions in the limited *Reichswehr*. Espionage information was completed by the police, foreign formations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other German national institutions. All the information which was of military importance was received by the Abwehr.

### 1. NUNTIA

The most important German espionage organization in the 1920s was the secret civil organization the *Sonderdienst Nuntia*, which was one of the branches of the private trade and shipping company *Deutscher Überseedienst B.m.b.H.* The organization, being clandestine even to the German police, was headed by experienced officers of German intelligence.

The head office of the Nuntia in Berlin conducted secret foreign operations by field branches called *Zwingstellen*. In 1925, eleven of them were in existence. Intelligence activities in Poland were led by branches in Berlin, Wrocław and Królewiec. Those posts would place their agents in permanent foreign offices, for example as sales representatives<sup>2</sup>. The development of the Nuntia and other minor espionage organizations of that kind was supported by governmental authorities and the armed forces of the Weimar Republic. They received national subsidy as well<sup>3</sup>. Nuntia was one of leading German intelligence institutions and existed until the year of 1930.

According to Władysław Kozaczuk, Germany, despite many limitations of Treaty of Versailles, had efficient offensive intelligence service, which was aimed against Poland<sup>4</sup>. However, in the opinion of Henryk Ćwięk, at that time Germany did not have good recognition of the mobilization capabilities of the Polish Army. Later the Germans would gradually fill the blanks in that sphere<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> W. Kozaczuk, *Bitwa o tajemnice, Służby wywiadowcze Polski i Niemiec 1918 – 1939*, Warszawa 1999, p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>3</sup> H. Ćwięk, *Wywiad Republiki Weimarskiej przeciwko Polsce*, [in:] *Polski wywiad wojskowy 1918 – 1945*, pod red. P. Kołakowski i A. Pepłoński, Toruń 2006, pp. 272 – 273.

<sup>4</sup> W. Kozaczuk, *Bitwa o tajemnice*, p. 72.

<sup>5</sup> H. Ćwięk, *Przeciw Abwehrze*, Warszawa 2001, p. 52.

## 2. GERMAN INTELLIGENCE SERVICES IN EAST PRUSSIA IN THE EARLY 1920s

In East Prussia and in Gdańsk German defensive and offensive intelligence – according to the information obtained by Information Post I in Działdowo in May 1920 – from the beginning of that year was subordinated to *Zentralpolizeistelle Osten* with the head office in Frankfurt upon the Oder, which reported directly to *Reichswehrministerium*. The posts in Olsztyn, Gdańsk, Tczew, Królewiec, Elbląg and Toruń<sup>6</sup> (called *Militärpolizeistellen*) were subordinated to the Frankfurt head office.

The director-commissioner, 18 agents and 3 office clerks, were staff members of each of those posts. Agents were divided into two categories. The first of them – mobile agents – was composed of six people in every post who would move by rail. During the journey they did not stand out among other passengers and tried to gather information about them. They were particularly interested in foreigners. Mobile agents often cooperated with smugglers.

The other group – stationary agents – worked mostly in the places of their living. In the sphere of their interests were local circles of political parties and controlling passing travellers. Some of them, chosen by the head office, attended special training at the school for defensive agents in Berlin.

In the reports of Polish intelligence posts there was information lacking about the organization of German offensive intelligence, though they stated that it did exist<sup>7</sup>. A few months later *Zentralpolizeistelle Osten* in Frankfurt changed its name to *Zentralstelle der Grenzpolizei Osten* and its director was Captain von Prieve. Its organization as a formation subordinated to the border police and based on larger sections (*Oberabschnitt*) and the smaller ones (*Abschnitt*), in the structure of which there were particular police stations and border posts<sup>8</sup>.

According to the information of the agency in Grudziądz from May 1920, intelligence activities in the countries to the east and north of Germany were conducted by *Privat Nachrichtenstelle Ost* (to the west of Germany by *Privat Nachrichtenstelle West*)<sup>9</sup>. The director of the east section became Captain Herman Leser, who was the head of the intelligence post in Lithuania during World War I. In May 1920, Polish counter-espionage had very poor recognition of that organization. It was known that the post in Szczecin was directed by Major Sommer and he conducted profound intelligence activities in Warsaw, Poznań and Łódź.

<sup>6</sup> In this city, a secret organization was formed, which was to continue underground activities after invading the Polish Army forces in January 1920. There is no information whether the activities were continued after attaching Toruń to the Republic of Poland.

<sup>7</sup> Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe w Warszawie (CAW), Oddział II (O II) Sztabu Generalnego Naczelnego Dowództwa Wojska Polskiego, Biuro Plebiscytowe Warmia i Mazury, sygn. I 300.76.145, Raport kierownika Posterunku Informacyjnego II Oddziału Naczelnego Dowództwa Wojska Polskiego w Działdowie, ppor. Rudnickiego, w sprawie organizacji niemieckiej służby wywiadowczej z 8 V 1920 roku.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, *Nowa organizacja służby wywiadowczej niemieckiej*, Raport ekspozytury w Grudziądzu z 7 V 1920 r.

<sup>9</sup> According to A. Peplowski *Privat Nachrichtenstelle Ost und West* transformed later into *Nuntia* – A. Peplowski, *Kontrwywiad II Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa 2002, p. 121.

Within the territory of East Prussia, *Privat Nachrichtenstelle Ost* had posts in Królewiec, Gołdap and Bartoszyce. From Gołdap deep intelligence activities were conducted in the Baltic region countries, the Polish-Bolshevik front and Warsaw. The Polish Intelligence did not attain any names of directors of those posts or directions of activity of the posts in Królewiec and Bartoszyce.

From the beginning of the 1920s the propagandist organization *Ostdeutscher Heimatdienst* (East German Home Service), with the head office in Królewiec, conducted active intelligence and counterintelligence operations. In January 1920, the Polish counterespionage attained a lot of detailed information about it. It turned out that only in one of its numerous branches – in Gdańsk – there were about 50 intelligencers at the service of *Heimatdienst*<sup>10</sup>. Apart from the propagandist activity, the organization led offensive foreign intelligence activities with the use of its posts located in borders areas. A similar activity was conducted by *Heimatbund* (also with the head office in Królewiec). Both of the organizations in almost every town in the territory of East Prussia had a great number of people in a position of trust who constituted intelligence cells. Among them were teachers, mayors, clergymen and other members of the local social elite. They dealt mostly with obtaining information about people politically suspected<sup>11</sup>.

### 3. THE GESTAPO

In 1933, a new opponent for the Polish Intelligence – the Gestapo – appeared in Prussia<sup>12</sup>. Offices of that institution were placed at every notariate and were directly subordinated to the Prussian Ministry of Internal Affairs. It employed mostly members of Nazi fighting units who proceeded to fight all the factors and organizations that were hostile towards Nazi authorities and they strictly co-operated with the intelligence service SA having informers in numerous organizations.

One of the most important tasks of the Gestapo was to fight foreign espionage (the institution did not conduct offensive intelligence activity). For this purpose, it co-operated with military counterespionage. The Abwehr had own intelligence officers in every larger garrison who were obliged to close co-operation with the Gestapo similarly as officers of the military and municipal police. Due to the decree of the Prussian Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Gestapo had rights to control posts of the military and municipal police and to examine clerks of those institutions in respect of being prepared to fulfil tasks. Activities of the Gestapo and a widespread fear of that institution among the German society considerably hindered recruitment possibilities for foreign intelligence services<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, p. 119. When NSDAP came into power *Heimatdienst* was liquidated and replaced by *Bund Deutscher Osten*.

<sup>11</sup> H. Kopczyk, *Niemiecka działalność wywiadowcza na Pomorzu 1920 – 1933*, Gdańsk 1970, p. 203.

<sup>12</sup> Gestapa (niem. Geheimes Staatspolizeiamt – the secret police formed in Prussia in April 1933 by Hermann Göring. In 1936, the institution embraced with its activity the whole Germany and since then it acted under the commonly known name of the *Gestapo* (*Geheime Staatspolizei* – Secret State Police). More about it in.: M. Wildt, *Polizei der Volksgemeinschaft. NS-Regime und Polizei 1933 – 1945*, [in:] *Polizei und NS-Verbrechen - Aufarbeitung und Dokumentation im NSDokumentationszentrum*, Köln 2000; Z. Zofka, *Die Entstehung des NS-Repressionssystems oder: Die Machtergreifung des Heinrich Himmler, Bayerische Landeszentrale für politische Bildungsarbeit, Report 2004*, vol. 1.

<sup>13</sup> CAW, O II, Ekspozytura nr 3 w Bydgoszczy (Poznaniu), sygn. I 303.4.6274, Meldunek PO 1 w sprawie organizacji Gestapa w Prusach Wschodnich z czerwca 1934 r.

Furthermore, the institution penetrated into every sphere of social and private life and created the atmosphere of common terror in order to make people feel that the Gestapo is more omniscient and omnipresent than it really was<sup>14</sup>.

In every administrative district bordering with Poland, the Gestapo formed its own regional posts called *Staatsliche Polizeistelle* (*Stapo* in short), conducting active external intelligence activities. Besides Göring set up the accessory police (*Hilfspolizei*) consisting of Stahlhelm and SA members<sup>15</sup>.

In East Prussia, on 26th April 1933 four of the Gestapo's posts were formed: in Królewiec, Tylża, Elbląg and Olsztyn – one in each town. At first, all the East Prussian posts acted separately and were in direct contact with the head office in Berlin, but one year later they did it through *Staatspolizeiamt* in Królewiec, which collected information in the domain of the political police from other posts. What is more, the post in Królewiec was to co-ordinate the work of other East Prussian posts, especially in the field of fighting espionage. The system of regional agencies *Aussendienststelle* (*AD*) came into being in the areas subordinated to particular notariate posts. On the grounds of the circular letter by the head of the safety police from 23rd December 1937 in the territory of East Prussia were formed 12 police stations and 39 posts of the subordinated to the Gestapo border police, the staff of which was completed in the summer of 1939. Within the framework of preparing to the war with Poland, in late August 1939 in Olsztyn was organized *Einssatzgruppe Allenstein*, which a group of Gestapo officers from all the posts in East Prussia were delegated to. In September 1939 particular operation sections of that group following the units of the Wehrmacht invaded the territory of the north of Mazovia, where they secured buildings and files of Polish authorities and institutions, but, above all, they made mass arrests<sup>16</sup>.

#### 4. THE ABWEHR

After the International Military Control Commission was liquidated in 1927, the Abwehr took over control over German intelligence. There were nine *Abwehrstellen* within the territory of Germany (after taking Austria into occupation in 1938 their number increased to ten), four of which – in Królewiec, Szczecin, Frankfurt upon the Oder and Wrocław above all – conducted intelligence activities in Poland. Each of them owned

<sup>14</sup> More about it in: E. Crankshaw, *Gestapo*, Warszawa 1995.

<sup>15</sup> H. Koczyk, op. cit., pp. 182 – 183 According to the author *Prussia had the most extended police service. In the Prussian Ministry of Internal Affairs police sections were concentrated in Department III (Abteilung III), which supervised five independent police bodies: 1) the protective police (Schutzpolizei – Schupo) fulfilling internal duties and on the border line, 2) the municipal – town police (Stadtpolizei) protecting municipal offices and standing on guard of safety and law and order in towns, 3) the commune - country police (Landjägerie) descended from the former Prussian military police watching the order in communes and country districts, 4) the state criminal police (Landeskriminalpolizei) forming the separate police organization that dealt only with criminal and political issues in Germany and in the border line, 5) the line frontier police (Landeskriminalpolizei) originated from the military police guarding the border and fulfilling info- intelligence duties in the foreground of an opponent (Ibidem, p. 79).*

<sup>16</sup> A. Konieczny, *Uwagi o organizacji placówek gestapo w Prusach Wschodnich i na obszarach do nich przyłączonych w latach II wojny światowej oraz przeprowadzonych przez nie aresztowaniach w latach 1941- 1943* [in:] *Olsztyńskie Studia Niemcoznawcze* under the supervision of B. Drewniak, B. Koziełto – Poklewski, J. Sikorski, A. Sołoma, Olsztyn 1989, pp. 144 – 149.

a few intelligence posts<sup>17</sup>. The posts of the Abwehr from the beginning were run illegally, that is not in conformity with the resolutions of the Treaty of Versailles, intelligence and subversive actions aimed against Poland by their own and with the use of Nuntia<sup>18</sup>. Members of the German minority in Poland were used in espionage activities as well. One of the minority organizations *Deutstumsbund*, as it was proved in the court trial in 1923, had intelligence structures directed against Poland<sup>19</sup>. The Abwehr held all the agents acting from ideological motives in high esteem. Agents co-operating on financial motives were mistrusted<sup>20</sup>.

After Hitler came into power, the German intelligence system consisted of numerous organizations competing against each other. In practice, leadership over the entire German intelligence activities lied in Führer's hands, who intentionally fanned conflicts and rivalry between particular institutions.

Apart from the Abwehr, the head of the Foreign Ministry – Joachim Ribbentrop – had at his disposal considerably expanded intelligence service based on the system of diplomatic representative offices and he also set up the service of the radio monitoring. The source of foreign information for the minister of propaganda – Joachim Goebbels – was the official news agency *Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro* (DNB). In the Ministry of Economy and in the Statistical Office of the Reich there were offices dealing with intelligence work, mostly of an economic nature. *Forschungsamt* (the Research Office) carrying out telephone bugging, breaking codes and intercepting diplomatic, commercial and radio news was subordinated to Hermann Göring.

The 'armed arms' of NSDAP: SS (*Die Schutzstaffel der NSDAP – the Guard Squadron of NSDAP*) and SA (*SA - Sturmabteilungen – attack units*) had their own intelligence services. SA formed its own intelligence unit as early as in 1930; however, its activity was soon terminated. Nevertheless, the intelligence service SS-SD (*Sicherheitsdienst – the Security Service*) directed by Reinhard Heydrich grew in strength. Under the control of SD were the state police (including the Gestapo) and the criminal police. *Sicherheitsdienst* among others dealt with intelligence and counterintelligence and it constituted the most important competition to the Abwehr, with which SD was often in conflict.

Another section of the NSDAP – AO (*Auslandsorganisation – the Foreign Organization*) also acted for the benefit of intelligence service and the members of the Nazi Party living abroad worked for it.

From among private companies, I.G.Farben<sup>21</sup> and the Krupp's plants<sup>22</sup> played the most significant role in acquiring information, owing to which the Third Reich obtained professional technical data referring to, for instance military equipment<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> W. Kozaczuk, op. cit., p. 113.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem. p. 64.

<sup>19</sup> H. Cwiąg, *Wywiad Republiki Weimarskiej*, p. 277.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, p. 60.

<sup>21</sup> I. G. Farben (*Interessen-Gemeinschaft Farbenindustrie AG*) – the German chemical concern formed in 1925 in Frankfurt upon the Main. The company played the leading role in German war economy as a producer of strategic materials. Most of the plants *IG Farbenindustrie* worked for the needs of the German Army (among others it produced gunpowder, explosives, grease and synthetic fuel).

At the beginning of the 1930s, *Abwehrstelle* in Królewiec conducted intelligence activities in Poland and the Baltic region countries. Then officer posts (*Abwehroffizier*) in Malbork, Olsztyn and Ełk<sup>24</sup> were subordinated to it. What is more, the Police Presidium in Gdańsk<sup>25</sup> worked for its benefit. Within the range of the activity of the post in Królewiec on the Polish direction was the territory of Headquarters of Corps District in Warsaw, Toruń and Grodno<sup>26</sup>.

The Abwehr conducted agent, air and radio intelligence. Before World War II broke out, German military intelligence worked out the Great Guidebook Poland (*Grosse Orientebuch Polen*), which in three volumes it contained rudimentary information about the Polish Army. The first part of the Guidebook described the system of the organization and command of the Polish Army. The other two volumes presented the characteristics of particular kinds of weapons, the National Defence<sup>27</sup>, the state of motorization of the Polish Army and the organization of the 2nd Section. The Guidebook was sent to each headquarters just after Hitler signed the directive about attacking Poland<sup>28</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

Before World War II broke out, Germany introduced strict rigours of maintaining the state secrets, as in the plan of attacking Poland the speed of operations and a surprise factor were matters of great importance. According to Władysław Kozaczuk, the Abwehr was to take part in the system of operational masking and disinformation actions aiming to deceive the opponent about time, directions and forms of intended operations. Publications in German books and magazines expressing views that infantry was still the decisive kind of weapon served as disinformation activities. The significant military publications intentionally shifted to the background the importance of air forces and

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<sup>22</sup> The Krupp's plants - *Friedrich Krupp AG* - the German steel concern. One of the biggest producers of armament for the German Army (mainly cannons and tanks).

<sup>23</sup> D. Kahn, *Szpiedzy Hitlera. Niemiecki wywiad wojskowy w czasie II wojny światowej*, Warszawa 2000, pp. 68 – 78.

<sup>24</sup> According to H. Ćwięk the post in Królewiec had branches in Gdańsk, Elbląg, Giżycko and Olsztyn. However the author does not mention the period in which the subordination existed. Probably it was the end of 1930s. (H. Ćwięk, *Przeciw Abwehrze*, p. 135).

<sup>25</sup> The direct connections of the Police Presidium in Gdańsk with the Abwehr post in Królewiec were exposed by Captain Jan Żychoń while he was working in the Polish Commissioners in Gdańsk. (Idem, *Wywiad wojskowy II Rzeczypospolitej w Republice Weimarskiej*, p. 191).

<sup>26</sup> A. Pepłoński, *Kontrwywiad II Rzeczypospolitej*, p. 134.

<sup>27</sup> The National Defence (ON) – the volunteer military formation of the Republic of Poland II existing in the years of 1937-1939 and consisting of people who were not embraced with the common recruitment. It was organized as a system of brigades and semi – brigades subordinated to Headquarters of Corps District (DOK) and then to specific armies of the Polish Forces. The service in ON units was performed according to the rules of the territorial army. Operational plans did not destine them to the separate use, but only as a support to regular units. In September 1939 there were over 50 thousand soldiers in ON units.

<sup>28</sup> A. Nogaj, *Wojsko Polskie w ocenie wywiadu niemieckiego w lecie 1939 roku. Wprowadzenie*, [in:] *Polska myśl wojskowa na przestrzeni dziejów*, pod red. W. Łacha przy współudziale T. Gajownika i D. Radziwiłłowicza, Olsztyn 2008, pp. 290 - 293. The author is preparing more extensive publication on this subject entitled *Wojsko Polskie w ocenach wywiadu niemieckiego w lecie 1939 r.*, which is supposed to be released soon.

armoured weapons that, as it turned out in later war operations, were of crucial importance on the battlefields<sup>29</sup>.

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## DZIAŁALNOŚĆ NIEMIECKIEGO WYWIADU WOJSKOWEGO ORAZ INNYCH SŁUŻB INFORMACYJNO – WYWIADOWCZYCH W PRUSACH WSCHODNICH W LATACH 1919 –1939

*Po zakończeniu I wojny światowej Niemcy, obok wielu ograniczeń dotyczących uzbrojenia i liczebności armii, zostały również pozbawione prawa do posiadania ofensywnego wywiadu*

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<sup>29</sup> W. Kozaczuk, *Wehrmacht 1933 – 1939*, Warszawa 1978, pp. 400 – 407.

zagranicznego. Ograniczenia te spowodowały, że w latach dwudziestych niemiecki wywiad ofensywny został zorganizowany i zakonspirowany w firmach handlowych, przemysłowych oraz licznych w Republice Weimarskiej biurach detektywistycznych.

Dopiero po zniesieniu Międzynarodowej Wojskowej Komisji Kontrolnej w 1927 roku kierownictwo nad niemieckim wywiadem przejęła Abwehra. Na terytorium Niemiec istniało dziewięć ekspozytur (Office) (po zajęciu Austrii w 1938 r. ich liczba wzrosła do dziesięciu), z których cztery – w Królewcu, Szczecinie, Frankfurcie nad Odrą i Wrocławiu, prowadziły wywiad przede wszystkim na Polskę.

Na początku lat trzydziestych Abwehrstelle w Królewcu prowadziła wywiad na Polskę i kraje bałtyckie. W tym czasie podlegały jej posterunki oficerskie (Abwehroffizier) w Malborku, Olsztynie i w Ełku, a ponadto na jej rzecz pracowało Prezydium Policji w Gdańsku.

W 1933 r. w Prusach powstało Gestapo. Jednym z najważniejszych zadań tej organizacji było zwalczanie obcego szpiegostwa. Działania Gestapo i powszechny strach przed tą instytucją wśród społeczeństwa niemieckiego znacznie utrudniał możliwości werbunkowe dla obcych służb wywiadowczych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Prusy Wschodnie 1918 - 1939, wywiad wojskowy Niemiec, szpiegostwo, Sonderdienst Nuntia, Gestapo, Abwehra

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