

Battle of Jaktor w

Summary: The Battle of Jaktor w was a partisan battle fought on 29 September 1944 near the village of Budy Zosine close to Jaktor w, ending with the defeat of the main forces of the Kampinos Group by the Germans.

After the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising, the eastern and central areas of the Kampinos Forest became a base for a strong partisan group of the Home Army. On 27 September 1944, the Germans launched a large-scale anti-partisan operation in this area, codenamed Sternschnuppe. The Kampinos Group t...

The Battle of Jaktor w was a partisan battle fought on 29 September 1944 near the village of Budy Zosine close to Jaktor w, ending with the defeat of the main forces of the Kampinos Group by the Germans.

After the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising, the eastern and central areas of the Kampinos Forest became a base for a strong partisan group of the Home Army. On 27 September 1944, the Germans launched a large-scale anti-partisan operation in this area, codenamed Sternschnuppe. The Kampinos Group then began to retreat towards the Włocławskie Mountains. Initially, the Polish group successfully evaded the German encirclement, but due to command errors, they were surrounded by the Germans on the second day of the retreat near Jaktor w. After nearly a full day of fighting against superior enemy forces, the Kampinos Group was defeated, losing from 150 to 200 killed, around 120 wounded, and 150 taken prisoner. However, many Home Army soldiers, including several cohesive units, managed to break

out of the encirclement.

The Battle of Jaktor w was likely the largest partisan battle fought during World War II on Polish territory west of the Vistula river.

"Independent Republic of Kampinos"

After the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising, the Kampinos Forest also became a theater of military operations, with units from the VIII Region of the Warsaw County Subdistrict of the Warsaw District joining the fight. This region was commanded by Captain Józef Krzyczkowski, codenamed Szymon. On the eve of the uprising, his Home Army structures could muster two infantry battalions comprising five frontline companies, although only from 350 to 400 soldiers were armed. Fortunately for the Polish side, the balance of power in the Kampinos Forest changed dramatically at the end of July 1944, when the Stowbtsy-Naliboki Group of the Home Army, which had arrived from the Naliboki Forest in the Eastern Borderlands, took up position in Dziekanów Polski. The group consisted of 861 well-armed soldiers led by Lieutenant Adolf Pilch, codenamed Głuch or Dolina – a Silent Unseen paratrooper and experienced partisan

who had been fighting the Germans and Soviet partisans since the fall of 1943. After the uprising began, small Home Army units from various districts of Warsaw also appeared in the Kampinos Forest, having left the city after the failure of the initial Polish attacks during the "W" Hour. Gradually, units from other areas of the Warsaw County Subdistrict and the neighboring Western Subdistrict of the Warsaw Area (codenamed Hallerowo or Hajduki) also arrived.

In mid-August 1944, a partisan group called the Kampinos Group was formed from the units continuously arriving in the forest. At its peak, it numbered around 2,700 soldiers and 700 horses. By the end of August, the Kampinos Group controlled the central and eastern areas of the Kampinos Forest, including the villages of Ławy, Ubiec, Róztoka, Kicinie, Krogulec, Wdżiszew, Brzozówka, Truskawka, Janówek, Pocięcha, Zaborów

Leń, and Wiersze. Polish patrols could also penetrate numerous neighboring localities not yet occupied by the enemy. The area controlled by the Home Army soldiers was called the "Independent Republic of Kampinos". Its informal capital was Wiersze, where the headquarters of the Kampinos Group was located.

The Kampinos Group was the only organized Home Army unit to carry out General Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski's order of 14 August 1944 to organize a relief effort for the capital. More than 900 well-armed "forest" soldiers moved from the Kampinos Forest to Warsaw's Żoliborz district. However, two night assaults on the heavily fortified Warszawa Główna railway station ended in failure and the loss of nearly 500 soldiers (on the nights of August 20/21 and 21/22). After the defeat at the Warszawa Główna railway station, the Home Army High Command assigned the Kampinos Group tasks of a primarily passive nature, focusing on receiving Allied airdrops and organizing regular deliveries of weapons and supplies for the fighting capital. By the end of August, however, the Germans had completely blocked communication between the forest and insurgent Warsaw. At the same time, the Home Army High Command lost interest in the Kampinos Forest, concluding that relief or substantial supplies from there could no longer be expected. From then on, the actions of the Kampinos Group were treated by the Polish command as part of the operations of insurgent Żoliborz.

Meanwhile, from mid-August, the Germans began limited offensive actions against the Kampinos Group, aiming to push Polish outposts away from the strategically important Warsaw Modlin road. A second focal point of the fighting emerged around the area of Kampinos, Leszno, Borzęcin, and Zaborów, where the enemy tried to drive Polish units deeper into the forest, fearing that their presence in this region might threaten the strategically vital Poznań–Sochaczew–Warsaw road. The Germans and their collaborators also conducted limited offensive actions in the area of Truskaw and Pocięcha. Almost until the end of September, the Polish group successfully held their positions, tying down significant enemy forces. The Poles also undertook numerous raids on German outposts and communication lines. Notable successes included the clash at Kicinie and raids on the collaborative Kaminski Brigade units quartered in Truskaw and Marianów.

By mid-September, it was already clear that the Warsaw Uprising was heading towards defeat. It was expected that

after the fighting in the capital ended, the Germans would proceed to "clear" the Kampinos Forest. In these circumstances, remaining near Warsaw posed a threat of annihilation for the entire Kampinos Group. The upcoming autumn chills made it clear that the villages in Kampinos would not be able to provide enough food, clothing, and dry shelters for the numerous partisan group. On September 14, Major Oko sent a dispatch to the Chief of Staff of the Home Army Headquarters, General Tadeu

sz Pe czy ski, codenamed Grzegorz, informing that the Germans were tightening the encirclement around the forest and asking for instructions on further actions. The response came two days later, containing an order for the entire group to break through to Colonel Mieczysław Niedzielski's, codenamed Wawiciel, units in Oliborz. Orders of this kind were repeatedly issued by the insurgent command. However, Oko was convinced that his units were not suited for urban combat, so without directly refusing to carry out the orders from the Home Army Headquarters, he decided to break through with his soldiers to the Wiłkowskie Mountains, where he intended to continue the fight against the occupier in cooperation with local Home Army units. As early as September 12, Oko had sent a radio dispatch to the Polish headquarters in Brindisi, requesting that, in addition to weapons and ammunition, detailed maps of the Wiłkowskie Mountains and Silesia be included in the containers dropped by Allied aircraft over the Kampinos Forest.

The news of Oko's intentions reached the command of the Western District of the Home Army Hajduki, from which one of the strongest units of the Kampinos Group, Major Korwin's Sochaczew Battalion, originated. The district command decided that Korwin's soldiers would not participate in the planned evacuation and would be demobilized when it began. This decision was communicated to the Kampinos Group command, simultaneously proposing to Oko the demobilization of the entire group. However, the decision to retreat to the Wiłkowskie Mountains was supported by the commanders of those Home Army units whose soldiers were from the Kampinos Forest area or had limited possibilities to hide among the local civilian population.

Around September 20, Major Oko sent a written request to the Hajduki district command for the deployment of German forces located along the planned retreat route i.e., between the Kampinos Forest and the forests around Włocławek and Skierniewice. This request was granted, with the caveat that not only could permanent enemy garrisons be encountered along the route, but also armored and motorized units, alarmed by the march of a strong partisan group. The district command expressed the belief that the evacuation of the entire Kampinos Group to the Wiłkowskie Mountains had little chance of success and that such an attempt could result in the group being intercepted in open terrain and consequently completely destroyed. The Hajduki command again proposed the demobilization of the Kampinos units, offering assistance in relocating and caring for the soldiers. As an alternative, they suggested that Oko break through with all forces to Warsaw's Oliborz to continue the fight in the capital. However, the commander of the Kampinos Group left both proposals unanswered.

Between September 24 and 26, the forest units carried out several raids to gather food supplies before the planned march. By then, Polish intelligence and forward outposts were reporting increased enemy activity and the concentration of significant German forces near the forest.

Order of the Kampinos Group at the end of September 1944

At the end of September 1944, the strength and structure of the Kampinos Group were as follows:

Regiment Palmiry-Mociny (Second Lieutenant Adolf Pilch, codenamed Dolina)

regimental headquarters and staff: 6 officers, 32 non-commissioned officers (NCOs), 24 enlisted men, 8 women

quartermaster corps: 8 officers, 11 NCOs, 17 enlisted men, 29 women

I Squadron of the 27th Uhlan Regiment (Captain Zdzisław Nurkiewicz, codenamed Nieczaj)

Headquarters: 2 officers, 7 NCOs, 6 enlisted men, 6 women

1st Squadron: led by Staff Sergeant Jan Jakubowski, codenamed Woodyjowski: 18 NCOs, 84 enlisted men, 4 women

2nd Squadron: led by Staff Sergeant Józef Niedwiecki, codenamed Lawina: 26 NCOs, 101 enlisted men

3rd Squadron: led by Sergeant Cadet Narcyz Kulikowski, codenamed Narcyz: 17 NCOs, 99 enlisted men, 2 women

4

th Squadron: led by Second Lieutenant Aleksander Pietrucki, codenamed Jawor: 1 officer, 25 NCOs, 59 enlisted men, 2 women

Machine Gun Squadron: led by Lieutenant Jarosław Gsiewski, codenamed Jar, forming the nucleus of the 23rd Grodno

Uhlan Regiment: 3 officers, 42 NCOs, 83 enlisted men, 1 woman

II Battalion of the 78th Suck Rifles Regiment (Second Lieutenant Witold Lenczewski, codenamed Strzała)

Headquarters: 4 officers, 8 NCOs, 13 riflemen, 2 women

2nd Company: led by Second Lieutenant Zygmunt Sokołowski, codenamed Zetes: 3 officers, 40 NCOs, 149 riflemen, 2 women

3rd Company: led by Sergeant Walerian Łuchowicz, codenamed Opoczka: 3 officers, 25 NCOs, 125 riflemen, 11 women

Machine Gun Company: led by Second Lieutenant Henryk Dobak, codenamed Olsza: 6 officers, 34 NCOs, 77 riflemen, 8 women

Pioneers Platoon: 3 officers, 15 NCOs, 38 riflemen, 1 woman

Cavalry Reconnaissance Platoon: 1 officer, 16 NCOs, 65 riflemen, 3 women

Other units of the Kampinos Group

Sochaczew Battalion: led by

Major Władysław Starzyk, codenamed Korwin: 30 officers, 451 NCOs and enlisted men

Legionowo Battalion: led by Second Lieutenant Bolesław Szymkiewicz, codenamed Znicz: 15 officers, 170 NCOs and enlisted men

Zemsta Company from the Piasek Battalion: led by Second Lieutenant Stefan Matuszczyk, codenamed Porawa: 6 officers, 115 NCOs and enlisted men

Company of Special Insurgent Units Jerzyki: led by Second Lieutenant Jerzy Strzalkowski, codenamed Jerzy: 5 officers, 119 NCOs and enlisted men

Independent Air Company for Special Tasks: led by Second Lieutenant Tadeusz Gaworski, codenamed Lawa: 4 officers, 29 NCOs, 34 riflemen, 3 women

Company from Wiersze: led by Second Lieutenant Franciszek Wiszniowski, codenamed Jurek: 1 officer, 75 NCOs and enlisted men

Smaller subunits

The Kampinos Group had a total of 2,432 soldiers, with the strongest unit, the Palmiry-Mociny Regiment, comprising 40 officers and 1,335 non-commissioned officers and soldiers (including 652 infantrymen and 588 lancers). This

count does not include foreigners fighting within the Home Army units (i.e., Hungarian volunteers, Dutch fighters, and Soviet prisoners of war freed from German captivity). It also excludes the People's Army unit under Second Lieutenant Teodor Kufel, codenamed Teoch, as it did not subordinate to the Kampinos Group command (the People's Army unit's strength ranged from a dozen to forty soldiers). Therefore, it can be assumed that the total number of partisans stationed in the Kampinos Forest area at the end of September 1944 ranged from 2,400 to 2,500.

The Kampinos Group was commanded by Major Alfons Kotowski, codenamed Oko. He was an energetic commander with unquestionable personal courage. However, as a pre-war professional officer, he struggled to adapt to the specifics of guerrilla warfare. Oko also failed to earn the respect and trust of his subordinates. Due to his explosive temperament and coarse demeanor, he was widely disliked by officers and soldiers, with many cases of outright hatred. At one point, a group of junior officers even proposed removing Oko from his command of the Kampinos Group. However, Lieutenant Dolina persuaded them against this plan.

Operation Falling Star

The presence of a strong partisan group directly behind the front lines was a significant concern for the German command. The threat posed by the Kampinos Group to German rear lines was discussed at a special meeting in the 9th Army headquarters on 20 September 1944. It was concluded that the partisans' presence in the Kampinos Forest significantly complicated the supply lines for the IV SS Panzer Corps fighting in the Modlin area. German staff officers were particularly worried that if the Red Army resumed vigorous offensive operations, the Kampinos Group could effectively support potential Soviet efforts to establish bridgeheads on the left bank of the Vistula river (north of Warsaw). Moreover, in the second half of September, the 9th Army command received reports of a large m

obilization allegedly planned by the Home Army Command on the lands west of the Vistula. German intelligence indicated that this mobilization aimed to form six partisan divisions, with the Kampinos Group units as their core. The German command's concerns were heightened by intelligence significantly overestimating the size of the Polish group. In the second half of August 1944, the 9th Army command estimated that about 5,000 soldiers were fighting in the Kampinos Group. Some informants even claimed that the number of partisans in the Kampinos Forest reached 15,000, supposedly equipped with artillery and anti-aircraft defenses. The Germans' belief in the large size of the Kampinos Group was likely reinforced by the vigorous actions of the Polish cavalry, which frequently attacked and raided areas far apart.

With the Soviet offensive on the Warsaw front halted and the Warsaw Uprising clearly nearing collapse, the German command decided that the time was right to eliminate the Kampinos Group. On 22 September 1944, the 9th Army headquarters began working on a plan for a large-scale anti-partisan operation, codenamed Sternschnuppe (English: Falling Star). That same day, a detailed operational order (No. 5199/44) was issued. The task of eliminating the Home Army units in the Kampinos Forest was assigned to Lieutenant General Friedrich Bernhardt, commander of the 532nd Army Rear Area (Kor ck 532). His units were to advance along an east west axis, gradually "clearing" the forest (initially up to the Modlin B onie line). The operation was scheduled to commence on September 27.

In connection with the operation against the Kampinos Group, Bernhardt was given command of an ad hoc tactical group, divided into two combat groups. During Operation Sternschnuppe, Bernhardt and his Kor ck 532 staff were also subordinated to the so-called Von dem Bach Corps Group (German: Korpsgruppe von dem Bach) fighting in Warsaw. The following units were deployed to combat the Kampinos Group:

Un

its directly subordinated to the tactical group:

104th Engineer Regiment

for evacuation:

emergency battalion of the rear command

2nd company of the 234th Battalion

field gendarmerie company

for reconnaissance:

Reconnaissance Group Widder

308th Frontline Reconnaissance Detachment

525th Frontline Reconnaissance Detachment

Northern Group (Colonel Klein commander of the army war school, with the attached staff of the 391st Security

Division):

emergency battalion from the 1st Fallschirm-Panzer Division Hermann G ring

emergency battalion from the 3rd SS Panzer Division Totenkopf

emergency battalion from the 5th SS Panzer Division Wiking

183rd Security Battalion

emergency company of the army war school

emergency company from the 73rd Infantry Division

500th Assault Engineer Battalion

743rd Hetzer Assault Gun Detachment (without the 1st company)

six reconnaissance groups (each with three armored personnel carriers)

battery of light mortars

battery of heavy mortars

battery of 105mm infantry g

uns

six light anti-aircraft gun sections (from the 80th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Regiment)

Southern Group (Major of the protective police Nachtwey commander of the 34th Police Regiment):

II and III battalions of the 34th Police Regiment

31st Schutzmannschaft Battalion of the SD (Ukrainian Legion of Self-Defense)

Cossack battalion

737th Engineer-Construction Battalion

tank company from the 19th Panzer Division (if needed)

four reconnaissance groups from the 19th Panzer Division (each with three armored personnel carriers)

battery of infantry guns

six anti-aircraft gun sections from the 1st Parachute Panzer Division Hermann G ring

23rd Machine Gun Battalion (with the permission of Army Group Centre)

25th Machine Gun Battalion (with the permission of Army Group Center)

The Northern Group consisted of approximately 3,000 soldiers, while the Southern Group had about 2,800. The total strength designated to crush the Kampinos Group surpassed, both in terms of numbers and armaments, the structure of a regular infantry division, indicating the significant importance attached by the Germans to accomplishing this task.

On September 23, the command of the 9th Army informed the police commanders in Sochaczew and owicz, as well as the governors of the Warsaw, Radom, and Krak w districts, and the president of the Zichenau region about their plans. It was noted that Operation Sternschnuppe would cover the area between the Vistula and the Bzura rivers, as well as the

Warsaw Leszno Kampinos Broch w road. The police commanders were asked to cooperate in actions against the partisans, while the governor of the Warsaw district and the president of the Zichenau region were instructed, in cooperation with General Bernhardt, to evacuate the population from the areas affected by the operation, and then conduct a "selection" of the displaced people based on their ability to work.

The detailed plan of operations, developed by General Bernhardt, envisaged that in the first phase of the operation, German units would depart from their starting positions in the area of D browa Le na omianki Dziekan w W lka W glowa Horn wek and by the end of the first day would reach the line of Palmiry Pociecha Truskaw Buda. In the event of successful combat, it was planned to reach the line of Adam wek eastern part of Jan wek forest clearing southeast of Jan wek the same day (or the next day). In the second phase of the operation, the goal was to reach the line of Cybulice Du e Sowia Wola Borki southern edge of Aleksandr w Krogulec awy. The aim of the third phase was to reach the line of Grabina K piaste Zabor wek. Simultaneously, the northern combat group was to secure the northern edge of the forest, while the southern group was to cover the Zabor w Kampinos road section. For this purpose, the southern group was additionally assigned the collaborationist 308th Russian Battalion (Russische Battalion 308). The demarcation line between the two groups was to run along the Burak w Jan wek li ne.

On September 26, the staff of the 9th Army made some amendments to Bernhardt's plan. First, it was decided to divide the operation into two parts. The main assumptions of the final version of Operation Sternschnuppe's plan were as follows:

The first part of the operation, consisting of three phases as envisioned by Bernhardt, was to last from 4 to 5 days. However, while the objectives set for the first and second phases of the operation remained essentially unchanged, the goals of the third phase were significantly expanded compared to the original plan. The intention was to reach the line of Helen wek Nowa D browa Nowe Budy Leszno, while simultaneously securing the road of Leszno Kampinos Kistki (Sochaczew), as well as the Bzura riverbank from Kistki to Wyszogr d. The aim of the first part of the action was thus to achieve freedom of movement east of the Bonie Modlin line, as well as new supply routes for the SS IV Panzer Corps.

The second part of the operation was intended to capture the entire central and western part of the Kampinos Forest in six phases. No time limit was set for the execution of this part of the operation.

The Polish population residing in the Kampinos Forest area was to be deported to the Reich for forced labor with the help of the civil administration. An exception was to be made for the inhabitants of the villages that were part of the "Independent Republic of Kampinos". Their fate was not specified, but it could be assumed that they would be treated similarly to partisans.

Before midnight on September 26/27, the Chief of Staff of the 9th Army, General Helmut Staedke, sent the revised

operation plan to the command of Army Group Center. That same night, the staff of the 391st Security Division handed over the command of the defense of the Vistula section in the Piaseczno area to the Hungarian 5th Reserve Division, after which it took over the duties of Colonel Klein's northern combat group headquarters.

On the morning of September 27,

German Focke-Wulf Fw 189 Uhu reconnaissance aircraft conducted a detailed survey of the Wiersze area. Concerned by the enemy air activity, Lieutenant Strzała withdrew his infantry battalion from the village. His caution proved entirely justified, as around 3:45 PM, eight German Junkers Ju 87 dive bombers raided Wiersze. The German bombs destroyed a brick building that housed the headquarters of the Kampinos Group, and also demolished a radio station and an ammunition depot. The raid resulted in the deaths of two Polish soldiers (including a liaison officer) and wounded several others. Meanwhile, starting from the morning hours, German infantry supported by armored vehicles attacked Polish positions in Brzozówka, Janówek, Pocięcha, Zaborów Leśny, and Ubiec. The initial assaults were not very vigorous and were repelled everywhere. However, the Germans repeatedly launched harassing attacks with the support of artillery, armored vehicles, and aircraft. After 3:00 PM, the enemy pressure began to increase significantly. The course of the battles fought that day by the Kampinos Group was as follows:

Brzozówka was defended by soldiers of Lieutenant Znicz's Legion Battalion and the Zemsta Company under Lieutenant Porawa. Early in the morning, soldiers from Lieutenant Prawy's platoon (Zemsta Company) noticed that the village of Sowia Wola, located northeast of Brzozówka, had been occupied by German armored cars the previous night. A regular battle ensued, during which Porawa sent two more platoons to support Prawy. However, the Polish soldiers were unable to drive the Germans out of the village. Almost simultaneously, German infantry advancing from Małocice attacked Brzozówka and nearby positions. The first enemy attack was relatively weak and was repelled by the Home Army soldiers. In the afternoon, however, the Germans resumed their assault, this time with the support of armored vehicles and artillery shelling from Kąży and Małocice. Around 6:20 PM, Brzozówka was also bombed by German dive bombers, causing significant casualties in the Legion Battalion. Ultimately, the Polish soldiers managed to hold their positions. Reports also indicated the destruction of a German tank. Józef Krzyczkowski estimated that eight Polish soldiers were killed and five wounded in the battles near Brzozówka and Sowia Wola, while German losses were three killed and seven wounded.

Janówek, the easternmost outpost of the Kampinos Group, was defended by an infantry platoon from Captain Wilhelm Kosiński's (codenamed Młociński) company (Major Korwin's Sochaczew Battalion) and a cavalry platoon from the Palmiry-Młociny Regiment. German forces launched an assault there almost simultaneously with the attack on Brzozówka. Supported by ten armored vehicles, the German infantry soon pushed back the Polish defenses. Alarmed by the unfavorable course of the battle, Major Korwin ordered Captain Młociński to immediately support the defenders of Janówek.

wek with his remaining two platoons. At th

e same time, Lieutenant Dolina supported M cis aw's soldiers with a captured 75 mm gun. Facing the enemy's superior firepower, M cis aw decided to occupy the hills in a nearby forest, avoiding combat in the village buildings or adjacent meadows. The Polish gunfire temporarily halted the German armored vehicle advance. For several hours, the Polish soldiers held their positions under heavy enemy fire. J zef Krzyczkowski estimated that four Polish soldiers were killed and seven wounded in the battle at Jan wek, while German losses were four killed and four wounded. German reports described the battle for Jan wek as one of the day's toughest engagements.

Pociecha was defended by Lieutenant Nawrot's infantry company from Major Korwin's Sochaczew Battalion and a platoon from the 3rd Squadron of the 27th Uhlan Regiment, commanded by Platoon Sergeant Antoni Burdzie owski (codenamed Wir). Around noon, the Polish outpost was attacked by German infantry supported by three tanks. Despite signific

ant losses, the Poles managed to repel the initial German attacks. In the evening, however, the Germans pushed the defenders of Pociecha back about 2 km from their original positions. An attempt to recapture the lost positions failed under German artillery fire. Nevertheless, the Poles maintained positions in the forest north of the village. J zef Krzyczkowski estimated that five Polish soldiers were killed and four wounded in the battle at Pociecha, while German losses were two killed and three wounded.

Zabor w Le ny was defended by the Jerzyki Company. In the afternoon, the village was attacked by German armored vehicles supported by a small number of infantry. The German attacks were cautious and failed to dislodge the Jerzyki from their positions. J zef Krzyczkowski estimated that two Polish soldiers were wounded in the fighting at Zabor w, while German losses were one killed and two wounded.

German reports indicated that Sternschnuppe units encountered only sporadic resistance tha
t day. Larger battles reportedly occurred only in the areas of Palmiry and Jan wek. During the latter skirmish, the Germans claimed to have stormed a fortified position on a hill. German losses were estimated at four killed (including three Cossacks) and nine wounded, with 14 partisans killed and 140 civilians captured. The commanders of both German combat groups believed that all objectives planned for the first day of the operation were achieved. The Germans significantly overestimated the strength of the Kampinos Group, which resulted in relatively cautious assaults on September 27 and did not lead to a significant breakthrough in the Polish defense. This fact greatly facilitated the withdrawal of Polish units from the Kampinos Forest.

Withdrawal of Home Army units from Kampinos Forest

Major Oko quickly realized that the German actions were only the prelude to a large-scale operation aimed at breaking up the Kampinos Group. After the first German air raid, he withdrew the main for
ces of the group to the forests south of Wiersze, Brzoz wka, and Truskawka. He also decided to immediately start

preparations for the group's "leap" to the western part of the Kampinos Forest. From there, Kampinos Group was to break through to the forests south of Włocławek (Puszcza Mariańska and neighboring forest complexes) and then move under their cover to the Świętokrzyskie Mountains. Officers who assessed that their units would not withstand the hardships of the march and the upcoming battles were instructed by Oko to disband their soldiers and send them home. In line with previous announcements, Major Korwin decided to demobilize his soldiers and return to underground activity. Second Lieutenant Teoch also decided to disband his unit, instructing soldiers and party activists to individually make their way to the Grójec area. Lieutenant Jerzy decided that the Jerzyki company would continue fighting, only sending sick and physically weak soldiers to the Międzyrzecz and Pruszków areas.

At 10:00 PM, all outposts received orders to disengage from the enemy and join the forming column in Wiersze. Around 11:00 PM, the several-kilometer-long column set off westward. The march route led along forest roads near Roztoka, Grabina, and Zamość. At the head of the column marched Major Oko with the cavalry vanguard under the command of Lieutenant Zygmunt Koc (codenamed Dąbrowa). Next came the infantry, supply wagons, and part of the cavalry. The rearguard was made up of the 3rd squadron under Warrant Officer Narcyz, accompanied by Lieutenant Dolina. Many civilian refugees joined the departing soldiers that night, gradually separating from the group along the way to seek shelter with relatives and friends. The column also included a group of between 100 and 150 German prisoners.

Years later, veterans and chroniclers of the group were highly critical of Major Oko's actions related to the withdrawal from Kampinos Forest. The retreat to the Świętokrzyskie Mountains had been considered for some time, but the commander of Kampinos Group failed to send the dozens of wounded and sick soldiers to a safe place in advance. He also did not reduce the enormous supply train, which included from 200 to 350 wagons filled with food, ammunition, equipment, documents, and often personal items. The soldiers were also unnecessarily burdened with additional ammunition supplies. Additionally, Oko neglected to conduct detailed reconnaissance of the march route and did not inform his officers of the planned route. Managing the march of such a large and heavily laden group was a significant challenge, but Oko did not have his own cavalry escort or personal staff, and he even sent back the platoon of couriers from the 2nd squadron provided by Lieutenant Dolina. Under these conditions, the night march along sandy forest roads was very slow and exceptionally arduous. Frequent bottlenecks were caused mainly by overloaded supply wagons. Ultimately, after an all-night march covering more than 20 km, the Polish column arrived in the vicinity of the village of Bieliny in the morning. There, Oko ordered a full day of rest.

Meanwhile, the Germans continued Operation Falling Star. On September 28, their units, cautiously advancing into the forest, moved from 4 to 6 km westward and reached the line: Stare Grochale Aleksandrów Kiecki Roztoka Krogulec and so on. However, due to the withdrawal of the Kampinos Group, the German attack hit a void. The Sternschnuppe units could only report killing 12 partisans and detaining 36 civilians. German losses were mainly caused by mines left by Home

Army soldiers amounted to three dead and four wounded. Thanks to reports from agents and information provided by captured civilians, the German command realized that the Polish group had begun a retreat. Suspecting that the partisans were heading to the western part of the Kampinos Forest, preparations were made to intercept the Polish group at the Bzura line, while simultaneously directing m

otorized reconnaissance groups to monitor the roads leading from the forest southward. However, the agents' reports were so inaccurate and contradictory that the German command still lacked reliable information on the direction of the Polish retreat and the location of the Kampinos Group. This, along with the rather modest progress of Operation Sternschnuppe so far, allowed the Kampinos Group nearly a full day of rest near Bieliny.

On the afternoon of September 28, a staff briefing for the Kampinos Group took place in Bieliny. It was decided to break through to the south, not directly from Bieliny but rather from a more eastern route. As a result, the Polish units had to retreat to the village of Zamczysko, nearly 8 km away, and from there proceed along side-roads southward, passing the western edge of Czarn w and uszczewek. This route allowed them to avoid German fortifications and the marshy meadows north of the village of Kampinos. However, it was clear that retreating southwards w

ould essentially be impossible without fighting, as the Kampinos Group had to break through enemy outposts on the route from Leszno to Kampinos, and then cross three busy highways (Warsaw Sochaczew, Warsaw yrd w via Grodzisk, and Warsaw yrd w via Nadarzyn) and two railway lines all heavily guarded by the Germans. The march on the night of September 27/28 demonstrated how burdensome the extensive supply wagons were for the Polish units. Nevertheless, Major Oko had brusquely rejected all suggestions from his officers regarding sending away the wounded and reducing the number of supply wagons. He also did not allow any grassroots initiative in this regard. The course of this discussion was presented somewhat differently by Oko 's adjutant, Corporal Lucjan Wi niewski, codenamed S p, who claimed that Lieutenant Dolina was the most vigorous in protesting against abandoning the supply wagons, arguing that he had brought them all the way from the Naliboki Forest, and the equipment on

the carts might be useful in future operations. Regardless of who supported keeping the supply wagons, this decision, according to J zef Krzyczkowski, largely determined the subsequent defeat of the Kampinos Group.

On September 28, around 4:00 or 5:00 PM, the Kampinos Group resumed its march. The vanguard consisted of the 2nd and 4th Cavalry Squadrons, accompanied by Major Oko and Captain Nieczaj. They were followed by the airborne company of Lieutenant Lawa, the infantry battalion of Lieutenant Strza a, the machine gun squadron, the captured gun commanded by Second Lieutenant Leszczyc, soldiers of the Sochaczew and Legionowo battalions, and the Zemsta company. The rear guard was formed by the 1st and 3rd Cavalry Squadrons under the command of Sergeant Narcyz, supported by infantry from the Jerzyki company. The flanks of the column were protected by mounted reconnaissance platoons. According to Lieutenant Dolina, the march was poorly organized, and in the dark of night and unfamiliar terrain, it was extremely difficult to maintain the cohesion of the column. However, the Germans still did not know the location of the Kampinos Group, so the unit managed to reach Zamczysko without incident. There, the column turned

right, heading towards Wrblewo, Korfowe, Powzki, and Wilkowitz towards Czarnków. Around 11:30 PM, the vanguard reached the road connecting Leszno with Kampinos near the village of Wiejca. The Polish soldiers broke through the cordon formed by the collaborationist 308th Russian Battalion with relative ease. However, the column had to cross the road under fire from the alerted German artillery. German reports later indicated that the anti-aircraft artillery fire caused significant losses in the Polish units. Polish veterans, however, recalled that the Germans fired almost blindly, and the effectiveness of the fire was minimal. Meanwhile, the column continued marching southward. After covering about three kilometers, Major Oko ordered a stop, instructing th

e soldiers to leave some of the wounded and sick in the buildings of the estate in Gawartowa Wola and the hospital in uszczewek. This decision was undoubtedly correct, albeit belated. The commander of the Kampinos Group also ordered the search for a local guide. However, the first guide did not appeal to Oko for unknown reasons, so the soldiers had to find another. In this way, at least 45 minutes of valuable time was lost. Meanwhile, the Germans, alarmed by the fight near Wiejca, had already dispatched a pursuit force against the Kampinos Group units. This pursuit likely included several armored personnel carriers from reconnaissance groups patrolling the area as part of Operation Sternschnuppe, and truck-loaded soldiers of the 308th Battalion, possibly supported by the mounted reconnaissance group Widder.

Less than an hour after resuming their march, the Polish column reached a small wooden bridge over the Utrata river near uszczewek. As the infantry and cavalry had already crosse

d to the other side and the convoy was preparing to cross, the rear guard was unexpectedly attacked by several German armored vehicles. Most witnesses described these vehicles as "tanks", but they were likely Sd.Kfz. 251 armored personnel carriers belonging to one of the German reconnaissance groups. Deprived of anti-tank weapons, the 1st Squadron quickly scattered after brief resistance. The convoy was thrown into chaos, with the transporters breaking formation and attempting to save themselves independently. Some carts tried to ford the Utrata and got stuck in the reeds or river mud, while one temporarily blocked the wooden bridge.

At this point, the Jerzyki company engaged the German pursuit, and Dolina sent the 3rd Squadron under Sergeant Narcyz to assist them. The cavalrymen galloped across the "safe" side of the Utrata, where they left their horses, then returned on foot to fight. The convoy misinterpreted this maneuver as a retreat, which temporarily increased the panic. Meanwhi

le, the Jerzyki, pressured by the enemy, gradually retreated toward the bridge. During the fight, Lieutenant Jerzy was captured after being injured. In this difficult moment, however, the lancers of Narcyz managed to slow the German assault with their PIAT anti-tank weapons. Despite losing part of the convoy and suffering significant casualties among the rear guard, the Polish column managed to complete the crossing to the other side of the Utrata. The Germans did not continue their pursuit, probably fearing that the wooden bridge would not support the weight of their vehicles and that fording the river under fire from Polish PIATs would be too risky. According to German reports, the Kampinos Group lost 39 killed, 14 captured, 5 mortars, 5 medium machine guns, 7 light machine guns, 2 Panzerfausts, one submachine gun,

90 rifles, pistols, and many ammunition and explosives. The Germans captured or destroyed 91 wagons, seized 66 horses, and killed another 95. The Poles also lost their only 75 mm gun, which was abandoned and blown up during the retreat. Józef Krzyczkowski, however, estimated that during the fighting near Łuszczewek, the Polish units lost 20 killed and 10 wounded, while German casualties were 5 killed and 10 wounded.

Meanwhile, the Polish column, urged on by Oko's orders, continued its rapid march southward. The units of the Kampinos Group managed to cross the Warsaw Sochaczew highway without much difficulty. The lancers of the 2nd squadron, who were at the vanguard, surprised and destroyed a German supply column, demolishing several vehicles. At around 3:30 AM, the Polish column crossed the Warsaw Sochaczew railway line near the village of Seroki-Parcela, engaging in a brief skirmish with German alert units. The march was not without challenges – there were frequent disruptions in the formation, causing bottlenecks, and Lieutenant Dolina along with other officers struggled to maintain order within the column. Throughout the night, individual soldiers and small groups continually broke away from the column, seeking safety on their own.

At dawn on September 29, the vanguard reached the village of Stanisławów, where a unit of Hungarian cavalry was stationed. Although allied with the Germans, the Hungarians welcomed the Home Army soldiers warmly and not only did not hinder their march but even supplied the Poles with food, some ammunition, and grenades. Between Stanisławów and Basin, the Home Army soldiers unexpectedly encountered another German supply column, which they easily overran.

Meanwhile, Major Oko ordered a reorganization – he directed the entire cavalry to move to the front of the column, while the rearguard was to be taken over by Lieutenant Jurek's company from Sochaczew (due to his injury, command was assumed by Second Lieutenant Józef Regulski, codenamed Biały, the former organizer of the drop-reception base). Overall command of the rearguard was held by Lieutenant Dolina. It was likely around 8:00 AM when the rearguard units marching near the villages of Stanisławów and Baranów were attacked by German armored vehicles. A fight ensued, but initially, the Germans did not attack too vigorously, limiting themselves to firing at the Polish soldiers from a safe distance. The shelling caused casualties among the men and the supply wagons. Around 9:45 AM, reinforced German forces renewed their attack, forcing the soldiers of the Sochaczew company and the lancers of the 3rd squadron to retreat from Baranów. During the retreat, Second Lieutenant Biały was captured. Some stragglers and remaining supply wagons in the village also fell into German hands. Józef Krzyczkowski estimated that 15 Polish soldiers were killed and another 6 wounded in the battle at Baranów. Due to the losses suffered during the night of September 28/29, and because individual soldiers and small subunits continued to break away from the main column, the Kampinos Group had dwindled to around 1,200 soldiers by this time.

Destruction of the

Kampinos Group near Jaktor w

On the early morning of September 29, the vanguard of the Polish column reached the railway tracks of the Warsaw yard w line. Near the village of Budy Zosine, the lancers captured an enemy supply wagon, taking several German soldiers prisoner. Warrant Officer Jan owicki, codenamed otysz, commander of the 1st platoon in the 2nd squadron, reported to Major Oko that only a few enemy soldiers were guarding the tracks. However, the commander of the Kampinos Group did not agree to launch an attack and ordered otysz to return to the main forces of the squadron. Around 7:00 AM, the main forces of the Polish group reached a distance of approximately 300 500 m from the railway line. At this point, Major Oko unexpectedly ordered a several-hour halt, instructing the troops to have a meal, set up security, and, as far as possible, position the units under the cover of the small alder carr present in the area. The commander wanted to allow the soldiers to rest and

use the halt to reorganize the column. The break in the march was also intended to allow stragglers and the rearguard fighting at Baran w to join the main forces of the Kampinos Group.

The rank-and-file soldiers, exhausted from the night battle and the forced march, were very pleased with the decision to halt. However, some officers were concerned about Oko 's decision. They were aware that the Germans already knew the direction of the Kampinos Group's retreat. The gunfire in the Baran w area and the appearance of a German reconnaissance aircraft over the main forces of the group suggested that the German pursuit could be expected soon. Engaging in a fight was highly inadvisable since the Kampinos Group's resting place consisted of extensive marshy meadows, dotted with a small alder carr a terrain very difficult to defend and favorable to the Germans with their superior firepower. Meanwhile, the distance from Budy Zosine to the Radziejowicki Forest on the other side of the tracks wa

s only 6 km. The officers believed that the soldiers could make one final effort and cross the railway line. However, Oko stubbornly stuck to his decision, angrily rejecting all the advice of his subordinates. He did not even secure the passage over the embankment or blow up the railway tracks. When the chaplain of the Palmiry-M ociny Regiment, Father Jerzy Baszkiewicz, codenamed Radwan II, tried to persuade Oko to cross the tracks immediately, Oko insulted the priest and threatened to shoot him on the spot. However, Oko allowed Lieutenant Lawa's air company to detach from the group and cross the tracks independently. Lawa, leaving Major Kurs's drop platoon in Budy Zosine, directed the rest of his company to the village of Roz ogi, then took a roundabout route, experiencing many difficulties along the way, but crossed the railway line without losses the next day. Individual soldiers and small groups of partisans also began to separate from the main group.

Thanks to reports from age

nts, alerts from units engaged in the night fight, and information obtained from captured Home Army soldiers, the German command realized that Major Oko intended to retreat through the yrd w and Skierniewice forests towards the wi tokrzyskie Mountains. Since most of the units participating in Operation Sternschnuppe were too far away, the

Germans began organizing an improvised combat group. Its individual units were transferred in an emergency to yard w with the task of forming a blockade line before the town, then surrounding and destroying the Polish group. To fight the Kampinos Group, the German command deployed primarily the 70th Grenadier Regiment of the 73rd Infantry Division, a guard battalion (probably the aforementioned 308th Russian Battalion), alarm units from the yard w and Grodzisk Mazowiecki garrisons, two companies of armored personnel carriers, a tank platoon, and armored train No. 30. From the north, units of the Bernard group under Colonel K nig's command (these were the units that had fought the rearguard of the Polish group on the morning of September 29) were sent to Baran w. The German units directed to yard w numbered about 2,000 soldiers and nearly 40 armored vehicles (mainly armored personnel carriers, as well as a few tanks). They also had air support.

At around 10:00 AM, the rear guard, led by Lieutenant Dolina, joined the main forces of the Kampinos Group. Around the same time, another German reconnaissance aircraft, an Fw 189, began circling over the Polish group. After several passes, the pilot lowered the altitude and began strafing the Polish soldiers with onboard weaponry, causing significant casualties and inducing panic among the partisan units. In response, the Polish soldiers opened fire intensely; one officer even fired a TT pistol. On the third or fourth pass, the German plane unexpectedly caught fire and crashed, causing great enthusiasm among the soldiers. Adam Borkiewicz reported that the German aircraft was shot down by a well-aimed burst from a light machine gun by Second Lieutenant Andrzej P o o ski, codenamed Hlebowicz, although this information cannot be verified.

Meanwhile, around 11:00 AM, Major Oko finally decided to start the breakout across the tracks. According to the plan he presented to his officers during a meeting in Budy Zosine, the Polish group was to be divided into two columns. Lieutenant Strza a's infantry battalion was to secure the railway tracks near the crossing in Budy Zosine, then hold the yard w Grodzisk road and maintain the corridor thus created until the wagons and remaining infantry units had passed. Simultaneously, the second column, which included all the cavalry and the Kampinos Group's headquarters, was to cross the tracks via the railway crossing in Mi dzybor w, about 1.5 km away. The group's re-concentration was to occur in Puszcza Maria ska.

At approximately 12:00 PM, Strza a's battalion began its attack on the railway crossing. Initially, the attack went well for the Polish side. Strza a's soldiers, covered by intense fire from Second Lieutenant Olsza's HMG company, pushed the German infantry to the other side of the railway embankment, reaching close to the tracks. About 30 soldiers from Platoon Leader Hipolit Tumi owicz's platoon from Sergeant Opo cza's company managed to break through to the other side of the embankment. A group of soldiers from Second Lieutenant Zetes' company (from Cadet Officer Janusz Warmi ski's platoon, codenamed Murzyn, and Corporal Art's squad) also seemed to succeed in breaking through. At this point, when victory seemed near, a turning point occurred. A German armored train appeared on the tracks from yard w. Most sources describe it as an armored train, but Szymon Nowak, relying on participants' accounts, claims it was actually an "improvised mobile battery" carrying several Panzer IV tanks and armored personnel carriers on open flat

wagons. Strza a's battalion, attacking across an open plain, was quickly pinned down and decimated by the intense fire from the tanks and machine guns. The Polish soldiers tried to respond with PIAT grenade launchers, but their shots did little damage to the German vehicles. An unequal fight was also engaged by the crew of a captured 20mm gun under the command of Second Lieutenant Leszczyc. After only a few shots, the gun was destroyed. Meanwhile, the armored train crew, having halted the Polish infantry's advance, shifted their fire to the wagons, causing enormous losses among the vehicles and horses.

After the attack collapsed, the decimated Strza a's battalion withdrew to their starting positions. The Kampinos Group's units then took defensive positions in the shape of a large quadrangle, relying primarily on the natural obstacles in the area. Part of Strza a's infantry occupied a drainage ditch running along the eastern side of Budy Zosine, while the rest of the battalion, positioned some distance from the railway line, formed a defensive line on th