

= Military of the Polish ? Lithuanian Commonwealth =

The military of the Polish ? Lithuanian Commonwealth evolved from the merger of the armies of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania following the 1569 Union of Lublin , which formed the Polish ? Lithuanian Commonwealth . The army was commanded by the Hetmans of the Polish ? Lithuanian Commonwealth . The most unique formation of the army was the heavy cavalry in the form of the Polish winged hussars . The Polish ? Lithuanian Commonwealth Navy never played a major role in the military structure , and ceased to exist in the mid @-@ 17th century .

Commonwealth forces were engaged in numerous conflicts in the south (against the Ottoman Empire) , the east (against the Tsardom of Muscovy and later , the Russian Empire) and the north (the Kingdom of Sweden) ; as well as internal conflicts (most notably , numerous Cossack uprisings) . For the first century or so , the Commonwealth military was usually successful , but became less so from around the mid @-@ 17th century . Plagued by insufficient funds , it found itself increasingly hard @-@ pressed to defend the country , and inferior in numbers to the growing armies of the Commonwealth 's neighbors .

Following the end of the Commonwealth , the Polish military tradition would be continued by Napoleonic Polish Legions and the Army of the Duchy of Warsaw .

= = Background = =

The Commonwealth was formed at the Union of Lublin of 1569 from the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania . The armies of those states differed from the organization common in the west of Europe , as according to Bardach , the mercenary formations (Polish : wojsko najemne) , common there , never gained popularity in Poland . Brzezinski , however , notes that foreign mercenaries did form a significant portion of the more elite infantry units , at least till the early 17th century . In the 15th century Poland , several other formations formed the core of the military . There was a small standing army , obrona potoczna (" continuous defense ") about 1 @,@ 500 ? 3 @,@ 000 strong , paid for by the king , and primarily stationed at the troubled south and eastern borders . It was supplemented by two formations mobilized in case of war : the pospolite ruszenie (Polish levée en masse ? feudal levy of mostly noble knights @-@ landholders) , and the wojsko zaci??ne , recruited by the Polish commanders for the conflict (it differed from Western mercenary formations in that it was commanded by Polish officers , and dissolved after the conflict has ended) .

Several years before the Union of Lublin , the Polish obrona potoczna was reformed , as the Sejm (national parliament of Poland) legislated in 1562 ? 1563 the creation of wojsko kwarciane (named after kwarta , the type of tax levied on the royal lands for the purpose of maintaining this formation) . This formation was also paid for by the king , and in the peace time , numbered about 3 @,@ 500 ? 4 @,@ 000 men according to Bardach ; Brzezinski gives the range of 3 @,@ 000 ? 5 @,@ 000 . It was composed mostly of the light cavalry units manned by nobility (szlachta) and commanded by hetmans . Often , in wartime , the Sejm would legislate a temporary increase in the size of the wojsko kwarciane .

= = Operational history = =

At its heyday , the Commonwealth comprised the territories of present @-@ day Poland , and large parts of Ukraine , Belarus , Lithuania , Latvia , Estonia , and Russia . It was engaged in the struggles along most of its borders , with only the Western border with the lands of the Holy Roman Empire being relatively peaceful . In its first decades , major conflicts included the Livonian campaign of Stephen Báthory , the interventions in Moldavia , the Danzig rebellion , and the War against Sigismund . Early 17th century saw a number of the Polish ? Swedish wars , the Polish ? Ottoman Wars , and the Polish ? Russian Wars (Dymitriads , the Smolensk War) . The Commonwealth also suffered from a number of Cossacks uprisings , culminating in the devastating Chmielnicki Uprising of 1648 . That period also saw some of the Commonwealth 's most talented military commanders : Stanis?aw ?ó?kiewski (1547 @-@ 1620) , Jan Karol Chodkiewicz (1560 @-@ 1621) , Stanis?aw

Konieczpolski (1593 @-@ 1646) and Stefan Czarniecki (1599 @-@ 1665) . The Commonwealth managed to hold its weight in most of those conflicts , and scored a number of major victories on all fronts , such as the battle of Kirchholm , the battle of Klushino , and had briefly garrisoned Moscow . However , the Chmielnicki Uprising , together with the Russo @-@ Polish War and the Swedish Deluge , all taking place around the same period of the 1650s , proved devastating for the country , resulting in a loss of most of Ukraine to Russia in the Treaty of Andrusovo in 1667 . In 1683 the Commonwealth scored its last major victory that resounded on the European scene , the relief of Vienna by king Jan III Sobieski . During the 18th century , European powers (most frequently consisting of Russia , Sweden , Prussia and Saxony) fought several wars for the control of the territories of the former Polish ? Lithuanian Commonwealth , particularly during the Great Northern War . By the end of the 18th century a series of internal conflicts and wars with foreign enemies (the War of the Bar Confederation) led to the dissolution of the Polish @-@ Lithuanian Commonwealth and the partitioning of most of its dependent territories among other European powers . The final attempts to preserve independence of the Commonwealth , including the political reforms of the Great Sejm , eventually failed on the military front , with the Commonwealth defeats in the Polish ? Russian War of 1792 and the Kościuszko Uprising of 1794 , ultimately ending in Poland 's final partition and the final dissolution of the remains of the Polish ? Lithuanian Commonwealth .

= = Composition = =

= = = Organization = = =

By the time of the Commonwealth formation , there was little practical difference between the Polish and Lithuanian components ; the Lithuanian component formed about a fourth to a third of the Commonwealth army . The army of the Commonwealth was organized along several different models , with the primary division being that into two ' contingents ' or ' enlistments ' (or in Polish : *autorament*) : national and foreign . The name applied to types of formation , regulations and the officer cadres ; the majority of regular recruits for both came from within the Commonwealth , particularly from the 1630s onward . National units included the *towarzysz* cavalry (including the Polish hussars and lighter *pancerni* (Polish) and *petyhorcy* (Lithuanian) units) and some light cavalry units , with infantry being the distant second in reputation ; whereas the foreign units were primarily centered around the infantry and artillery formations , with dragoons gaining prominence from the 1620s , and reiter cavalry soon afterward .

The Polish ? Lithuanian national contingent was organized in traditional formations dating back to the earlier medieval times , with *chorągiew* (banner) unit , commanded by a *rotmistrz* and composed of smaller *poczet* (lance) retinues , each composed of one *towarzysz* and a varying number of aides . The size of a *chorągiew* could vary from as little as 60 to as many as 300 men . Two or more *chorągwie* (through rarely more than a dozen , and never more than about forty) formed a regiment (*pułk*) unit , a type of a unit similar to the medieval battle or modern division or corps . Its senior commander was known as *pułkownik* (colonel) . The foreign contingent was organized into regiments , often numbering around 500 @-@ 1 @, @ 000 , and divided into companies . King Jan III Sobieski made an attempt in the 1670s to replace the national @-@ foreign contingent divisions with a single structure , dividing units into infantry , cavalry and dragoons , but it would take many decades before those reforms bore fruit .

= = = Formations and their evolution = = =

After the creation of the Commonwealth , several new types of military units were introduced . First among these were the registered Cossacks , formed in 1578 . These were the troops made up of Cossacks , paid for their service and not subject to serfdom . Their numbers varied from about 500 to many times that number , with the Treaty of Zboriv setting the record at 40 @, @ 477 . The Cossacks ' refusal to submit to serfdom , and the Commonwealth 's nobility attempts to force them

into it led to much political wrangling with regard to the size of the Cossack register , and to numerous Cossack uprisings , particularly in the 17th century . These weakened the state , and eventually led to the Cossack subjugation and destruction by the Russian Empire . In addition to the Cossack formations , another group that provided notable service to the Polish state were the Tatars , some of whom resided in Lithuania , and were Commonwealth subjects . Known as Lipka Tatars , they provided some light and medium cavalry units for the Lithuanian army .

In the late 16th century , during the reign of Stefan Batory (1576 ? 1586) , a peasant @-@ based levy formation , *piechota wybranicza* (lit. drafted or selected infantry , also known as *piechota ?anowa* , lit. acreage infantry) was formed . It was based on peasants from the royal estates only , who received a unit of land (?an) in exchange for their service . The formation numbered about 2 @,@ 300 and after early disappointments was never seen as of much military value . It supplemented the few small units of *haiduk* infantry , which saw service in Poland primarily around late 16th and 17th centuries . In 1655 a new infantry unit was created , the ?o?nierz dymowy (or ?o?nierz ?anowy ? lit. chimney or ?an soldier , named again after the type of tax applied) . It required all lands , no matter whether owned by king , nobles or the Church , to provide peasant recruits , and applied a similar requirement to towns .

Starting in 1613 , the growing inefficiencies of the central government , as well as an increase in foreign threats , led to the creation of a local territorial defense force , known as ?o?nierz powiatowy (district 's soldiers raised by the *powiat* regions) . The artillery formations , at first staffed by foreigners , were reformed in the 1630s , with a new tax levied to support them . This time also marked the introduction of the General of the Artillery post into the Commonwealth army . In the mid @-@ 17th century , the numbers of *wojsko zaci??ne* and *kwarciane* proved to be insufficient , which led to the creation of *wojsko komputowe* (named after *komput* , a document passed by the *Sejm*) . *Wojsko komputowe* numbered (in 1649) 26 @,@ 000 . At the same time , *wojsko kwarciane* was disbanded , and *kwarta* directed towards the newly created artillery forces . Brzezinski notes that *wojsko kwarciane* was dissolved in the aftermath of its defeat at the battle of *Batoch* in 1652 . In 1659 , in aftermath of a series of wars , the reformed army numbered around 54 @,@ 000 @-@ 60 @,@ 000 ; it would decline from that point onward , as the country , impoverished from those wars , would not be able to support such a number again .

Another element of the Commonwealth army consisted of various private armies fielded by the most powerful magnates . In time of peace these consisted of usually small regiments of a few hundred men , but at their extreme they could number up to 10 @,@ 000 , including cavalry and artillery . In some instances the magnate contribution could surpass that of the main Commonwealth army on the frontlines , although often the magnates preferred to save their troops , as they were not compensated for the state for their contributions . The troops were paid for and equipped by the richest of the noble families , such as the *Opali?ski* , *Lubomirski* , *Potocki* , *Ossoli?ski* , *Zamoyski* , *Konieczpolski* , *Sieniawski* , ?ó?kiewski , *Sapieha* , *Chodkiewicz* , *Pac* and *Radziwi??* families . This was one of the reasons why the magnates played a major role in Polish politics , and on occasion , allowed them to engage in bloody civil wars (such as the Lithuanian Civil War in 1700) amongst themselves .

Similarly , occasional forces of town guard and militia were fielded by some cities . The most impressive town guard and accompanying fortifications belonged to the port of *Gda?sk* (*Danzig*) , which in 1646 boasted 12 infantry companies of 6 @,@ 000 men total . There was also a small royal guard regiment , paid for directly by the king . In peace time , the royal guard numbered around 1 @,@ 200 , but would often be expanded during time of war . The royal force included a hussar banner , reiter cavalry element , and an infantry unit , based upon the " foreign " model . Finally , there were also some irregular militia or mercenary troops which received no official pay but operated with the permission of the government and were allowed to retain their loot ; most notable of these were the *Lisowczycy* mercenary group which operated in the first half of the 17th century .

Both the state and the magnates supported the construction and renovations of several fortifications (such as the *Kamianets @-@ Podilskyi Castle*) .

= = = Command structure = = =

The army of the Commonwealth was commanded by king , under who served four hetmans : two Grand Hetmans (the Grand Crown Hetman and Grand Lithuanian Hetman) and two Field Hetmans (the Field Crown Hetman and Field Lithuanian Hetman) . The office of a hetman appeared in the late 15th century as a consequence of the introduction of the *wojsko zaciężne* , and a need for a more professional army commanders than the king could usually provide . By the 1530s the hetman system has evolved into that of regular offices that would exist both in Poland and Lithuania for the next three centuries . From 1581 it became officially a lifelong appointment . Hetmans had the right to carry out summary justice in the field . Grand Crown Hetman had the right to maintain his representatives in the Ottoman Empire , which allowed him to influence Poland ? Ottoman relations and also laid groundwork for the first Polish intelligence services . Hetman deputy was known as *regimentarz* and could replace a hetman on a temporary basis .

= = Navy = =

The Commonwealth Navy was small and played a relatively minor role in the history of the Commonwealth . Despite having access to the Baltic Sea , neither Poland nor Lithuania had any significant navy throughout their histories . In the 16th century , as Poland and Lithuania became involved in conflicts in Livonia , Polish king Zygmunt August supported the operations of privateers , but that met with opposition of the Poland 's primary port , Gdańsk (Danzig) , which saw them as a threat to its trade operations . This led to the development of a privateer port in Puck . At the turn of the century , Poland became ruled by the House of Vasa , and was involved in a series of wars with Sweden (see also *dominium maris baltici*) . Vasa kings attempted to create a proper fleet , and Władysław IV Waza built a dedicated port for the royal navy (*Władysławowo*) , but their attempts met with repeated failures , due to lack of funds in the royal treasury (seeing little need for the fleet , Polish nobility refused to raise taxes for its construction , and Gdańsk continued its opposition to the idea of a royal fleet) . Although Władysław bought 12 ships , they were sold between 1641 and 1643 , marking the end of the Commonwealth Navy .

= = Logistics and tactics = =

Due to lack of centralized logistical system , the Polish armies were encumbered by large baggage trains . To some degree , this was turned into an advantage with the development of the *tabor* ? military horse @-@ drawn wagons , usually carrying army supplies . The wagon use for defensive formations was perfected by the Cossacks , and to a smaller extent used by other Commonwealth units . The Commonwealth army relied on cavalry , which the nobility saw as a much more respectable type of a troop than the infantry . Despite the reforms of the 17th century , it lost much of its military significance in the 18th century ; the primary reason for this was a lack of sufficient funding .

= = Problems and reforms = =

With the growing influence of foreign powers in the Commonwealth , the Russian @-@ dominated Silent Sejm of 1717 declared that the size of the Commonwealth Army should be 24 @, @ 200 (18 @, @ 000 from Poland and 6 @, @ 200 for Lithuania) . Due to insufficient taxation , the military was often not paid properly , which led to a relatively small army size ; in mid @-@ 18th century , the Commonwealth had funds to field an army of around 24 @, @ 000 , whereas the Commonwealth 's neighbors ' armies were often up to 12 times larger : the Imperial Russian Army numbered 300 @, @ 000 ; the Prussian Army and Imperial Austrian Army , 150 @, @ 000 , and a few decades later , the Commonwealth could field an army of about 16 @, @ 000 , with Prussian and Austrian armies rising to 200 @, @ 000 . The stated size of the Commonwealth army was further exaggerated , as some money was lost due to corruption . The first half of the 18th century , following the 1717 Sejm , marks the nadir of the Commonwealth army , as it lacked funds and training , and was primarily

used for ceremonial purposes . The only constructive reform of that time was the introduction of a stable (if grossly insufficient) budget for the military . Furthermore , the unpaid units of the army were known for mutinying and forming confederations , occupying the Commonwealth 's own lands until such a time that they were paid properly or pillaged enough to satisfy themselves .

The trend reversed itself following the election of the last king of Poland , Stanisław August Poniatowski , in 1765 and the introduction of the new governing body , Permanent Council , in 1775 . Its Military Department attempted to modernize the army , and increase its size (although even the target number of 30 000 was never achieved) . A major military reform came with the passing of the Constitution of May 3 , 1791 , which stated that the Army was to be built up to 100 000 men . (The exact number would be settled on only on 22 May 1792 , at 25 654 cavalry and 72 910 infantry) . A new conscription law was introduced , affecting all lands (royal , noble and Church - owned) . With the days of the Commonwealth numbered , the Constitution was never fully implemented in practice , although the new Military Commission saw the Army expanded to 65 000 before the Polish defeat in the War in Defense of the Constitution . After the Commonwealth defeat in that war and the rescinding of the Constitution , the Army was reduced to about 36 000 . In 1794 Russians demanded a further downsizing of the army to 15 000 . This plan was one of the sparks that led to the Army 's (and Commonwealth 's) final conflict , the Kościuszko Uprising .