

= Polish ? Russian War of 1792 =

The Polish ? Russian War of 1792 (also , War of the Second Partition , and in Polish sources , War in Defence of the Constitution (Polish : wojna w obronie Konstytucji 3 maja)) was fought between the Polish @-@ Lithuanian Commonwealth on one side , and the Targowica Confederation (conservative nobility of the Commonwealth opposed to the new Constitution of 3 May 1791) and the Russian Empire under Catherine the Great on the other .

The war took place in two theaters : northern in Lithuania and southern in Ukraine . In both , the Polish forces retreated before the numerically superior Russian forces , though they offered significantly more resistance in the south , thanks to the effective leadership of Polish commanders Prince Józef Poniatowski and Tadeusz Kościuszko . During the three @-@ month @-@ long struggle several battles were fought , but no side scored a decisive victory . The largest success of the Polish forces was the defeat of one of the Russian formations at the Battle of Zieleńce on 18 June ; in the aftermath of the battle the Polish highest military award , Virtuti Militari , was established . The war ended when the Polish King Stanisław August Poniatowski decided to seek a diplomatic solution , asked for a ceasefire with the Russians and joined the Targowica Confederation , as demanded by the Russian Empire .

= = Background = =

= = = Decline of the Commonwealth = = =

By the early 18th century , the magnates of Poland and Lithuania controlled the state ? or rather , they managed to ensure that no reforms would be carried out that might weaken their privileged status (the " Golden Freedoms ") . Through the abuse of the liberum veto rule which enabled any deputy to paralyze the Sejm (Commonwealth 's parliament) proceedings , deputies bribed by magnates or foreign powers or those simply content to believe they were living in an unprecedented " Golden Age " , paralysed the Commonwealth 's government for over a century .

The idea of reforming the Commonwealth gained traction from the mid @-@ 17th century ; it was however viewed with suspicion not only by its magnates but also by neighboring countries , which had been content with the deterioration of the Commonwealth and abhorred the thought of a resurgent and democratic power on their borders . With the Commonwealth Army reduced to around 16 @, @ 000 , it was easy for its neighbors to intervene directly (The Imperial Russian Army numbered 300 @, @ 000 troops overall ; The Prussian Army and Imperial Army of the Holy Roman Empire , 200 @, @ 000 each) .

= = = Attempts at reform = = =

A major opportunity for reform presented itself during the " Great Sejm " of 1788 ? 92 . Poland 's neighbors were preoccupied with wars and unable to intervene forcibly in Polish affairs . Russian Empire and Archduchy of Austria were engaged in hostilities with the Ottoman Empire (the Russo ? Turkish War , 1787 ? 1792 and the Austro @-@ Turkish War , 1787 ? 1791) ; the Russians also found themselves simultaneously fighting in the Russo @-@ Swedish War , 1788 ? 1790 . A new alliance between the Polish ? Lithuanian Commonwealth and Prussia seeming to provide security against Russian intervention , and on 3 May 1791 the new constitution was read and adopted to overwhelming popular support .

With the wars between Turkey and Russia and Sweden and Russia having ended , Tsarina Catherine was furious over the adoption of the document , which she believed threatened Russian influence in Poland . Russia had viewed Poland as a de facto protectorate . " The worst possible news have arrived from Warsaw : the Polish king has become almost sovereign " was the reaction of one of Russia 's chief foreign policy authors , Alexander Bezborodko , when he learned of the new constitution . The Kingdom of Prussia was also strongly opposed to the new Polish constitution

, and Polish diplomats received a note that the new constitution changed the Polish state so much that Prussia did not consider its obligations binding . Just like Russia , Prussia was concerned that the newly strengthened Polish state could become a threat and the Prussian Foreign Minister , Friedrich Wilhelm von Schulenburg @-@ Kehnert , clearly and with rare candor told Poles that Prussia did not support the constitution and refused to help the Commonwealth in any form , even as a mediator , as it was not in Prussia 's interest to see the Commonwealth strengthened so that it could threaten Prussia in some future . The Prussian statesman Ewald von Hertzberg expressed the fears of European conservatives : " The Poles have given the coup de grâce to the Prussian monarchy by voting a constitution " , elaborating that a strong Commonwealth would likely demand the return of the lands Prussia acquired in the First Partition .

The Constitution was not adopted without dissent in the Commonwealth itself , either . Magnates who had opposed the constitution draft from the start , namely Franciszek Ksawery Branicki , Stanisław Szczepny Potocki , Seweryn Rzewuski , and Szymon and Józef Kossakowski , asked Tsarina Catherine to intervene and restore their privileges such as the Russian @-@ guaranteed Cardinal Laws abolished under the new statute . To that end these magnates formed the Targowica Confederation . The Confederation 's proclamation , prepared in St. Petersburg in January 1792 , criticized the constitution for contributing to , in their own words , " contagion of democratic ideas " following " the fatal examples set in Paris " . It asserted that " The parliament ... has broken all fundamental laws , swept away all liberties of the gentry and on the third of May 1791 turned into a revolution and a conspiracy . " The Confederates declared an intention to overcome this revolution . We " can do nothing but turn trustingly to Tsarina Catherine , a distinguished and fair empress , our neighboring friend and ally " , who " respects the nation 's need for well @-@ being and always offers it a helping hand " , they wrote . The Confederates aligned with Tsarina Catherine and asked her for military intervention . On 18 May 1792 Russian ambassador to Poland , Yakov Bulgakov , delivered a declaration of war to the Polish Foreign Minister Joachim Chreptowicz . Russian armies entered Poland and Lithuania on the same day , starting the war .

= = Opposing forces = =

The Russian army numbered nearly 98 @,@ 000 . It was commanded by generals Mikhail Krechetnikov and Mikhail Kakhovsky . The Russians also had an advantage in combat experience . The Russian plan called for Kakhovsky to advance through Ukraine , taking Kamieniec Podolski , Chełm and Lublin , and approach Polish capital of Warsaw from the south . Krechetnikov was to advance through Minsk , Wilno , Brześć Litewski and Białystok , and approach Warsaw from the north , where he was to link with Kakhovsky . Whereas the Russians had good intelligence network in Poland , and were mostly aware of Polish army distribution and strength ; the Poles had much less intelligence , receiving contradictory and often erroneous reports , and unsure whether the war would even start up to the point the Russian troops crossed the border .

Stanisław August Poniatowski , King of the Polish @-@ Lithuanian Commonwealth , was the commander @-@ in @-@ chief of the Polish forces , but in practice he delegated this position to his nephew , Prince Józef Poniatowski . Poniatowski had in theory at his disposal a 48 @,@ 000 strong Crown army and the Lithuanian army more than half that size to confront them . In practice , Polish forces , still forming following the reforms of the Constitution of 3 May (which specified an army size of 100 @,@ 000) numbered only 37 @,@ 000 . The army was in the midst of reorganizing , with key documents on unit numbers and composition passed as recently as in April ; it was also short on equipment and experienced personnel .

In the southeast corner of the country ? the Ukrainian lands ? the Polish forces were initially concentrated separately in three regions of the expected front , under Tadeusz Kościuszko , Michał Wielhorski and Prince Poniatowski himself . The Polish Crown army in Ukraine , led by Prince Poniatowski , and supported by Kościuszko , was about 17 @,@ 000 , 21 @,@ 000 or 24 @,@ 000 strong (Derdej distinguishes between the primary force of 17 @,@ 000 and Prince Michał Lubomirski 's reserve division , of 4 @,@ 500) . They were faced on this southeastern war theater with a nearly four times larger enemy army under General Mikhail Kakhovsky , who had about 64

@, @ 000 men under his command . Kakhovsky 's forces were divided into four corps : 1st , 17 @, @ 000 strong , under the command of General Mikhail Golenishchev @-@ Kutuzov , 2nd , under General Ivan Dunin , 3rd , under General Otto Wilhelm Derfelden , and 4th , under General Andrei Levanidov . The Targowica Confederates did not represent any real strength ; and their attempts to gather popular support in Poland upon crossing borders failed miserably , with only few dozens joining at first ; later the number would grow but not significantly , and even the Russians saw them as not having any military value , keeping them from frontlines .

In Lithuania , Commonwealth Lithuanian Army numbered about 15 @, @ 000 , with an additional Crown detachment of about 3 @, @ 000 . They were commanded by Duke Louis of Württemberg . Württemberg made no plans for the war , and the troops were not readied for action by the time the war started . The Russian army in that theatre under General Mikhail Krechetnikov was 33 @, @ 700 strong or 38 @, @ 000 strong . The Russian army was also divided into four corps : 1st under one of Targowica Confederate leaders , Szymon Kossakowski 7 @, @ 300 strong , 2nd under General Boris Mellin , 7 @, @ 000 strong , 3rd under General Yuri Dolgorukov , 15 @, @ 400 strong , and 4th under General Ivan Fersen , 8 @, @ 300 strong .

Additional Polish forces , about 8 @, @ 000 strong , were to concentrate in Warsaw under command of King Poniatowski as reserve .

Tadeusz Kościuszko proposed a plan where the entire Polish army would be concentrated and would engage one of the Russian armies , in order to assure numerical parity and to boost the morale of mostly inexperienced Polish forces with a quick victory ; this plan was however rejected by Prince Poniatowski . (Only a few months ago , however , both commanders had the opposite idea ? Poniatowski wanted the troops concentrated , and Kościuszko , dispersed) . Poniatowski also planned to avoid serious engagements in the first phase of the war , hoping to receive the expected Prussian reinforcements of 30 @, @ 000 which would bring parity to the two sides .

= = War = =

= = = Southern theater = = =

First Russian forces crossed the border in Ukraine on the night of 18 / 19 May 1792 . The Russians in that theater would encounter significantly more resistance than they expected , as Commonwealth 's top commanders , Prince Poniatowski and Kościuszko were stationed there . Kościuszko joined Prince Poniatowski near Janów on 29 May . The Crown Army was judged too weak to oppose the four columns of enemy armies advancing into West Ukraine and began a fighting withdrawal to the western side of the Southern Bug River , towards Lubar and Połonne , with Kościuszko commanding the rear guard . Poniatowski , in face of a significant numerical inferiority of his forces , and promised reinforcements by King Poniatowski , decided to abandon Ukraine and move to Volhynia , where Połonne was to be fortified as a major defensive point , and where Lubomirski was tasked with gathering supplies .

On 14 June Wielhorski 's unit was defeated at the Battle of Boruszkowce . On 17 June Poniatowski finally received awaited reinforcements , about 2 @, @ 000 troops led by Michał Lubomirski . Next day the Poles , led by Prince Poniatowski , defeated one of the Russian formations of general Irakly Morkov at the Battle of Zieleńce on 18 June . The victory was celebrated by King Poniatowski , who sent the new Virtuti Militari medals for the campaign leaders and soldiers , as " the first since John III Sobieski " .

The Russian forces , however , kept advancing . The Polish army , under the command of Józef Poniatowski , was still retreating in order , yielding to the more powerful enemy as necessary to avoid annihilation , according to the Prince 's judgement . In early July , near Dubno , Prince Poniatowski and Kościuszko were betrayed by Michał Lubomirski , who was tasked with King Poniatowski with resupplying the troops ; instead Lubomirski joined the Russian side , and either hid the supplies for the Polish army , or outright passed them to the Russians . Lubomirski , however , was a powerful magnate , and it took until late May for the King to officially relieve him of his

command . Within about a month of the Russian invasion , the Poles have mostly retreated from Ukraine . On 7 July Kościuszko 's forces fought a delaying battle with the Russians at Volodymyr @-@ Volynskiy (Battle of Włodzimierz) . Meanwhile , Poniatowski 's army retreated to the Bug River , where Kościuszko 's units fought the Battle of Dubienka on 18 July to a draw . With about 5 @, @ 300 troops Kościuszko defeated the attack of 25 @, @ 000 Russians under General Michail Kachovski . Kościuszko then had to retreat from Dubienka , as the Russians begun flanking his positions crossing the nearby Austrian border . Although the Poles had to retreat from the Bug River line , they were not defeated so far , and a decisive battle or battles at more favorable locations closer to Warsaw were expected .

= = = Northern theater = = =

In the Grand Duchy of Lithuania the Russians crossed the Commonwealth border four days later than in the south , on 22 May . Poland 's ally , the Kingdom of Prussia , broke its alliance with Poland and the Prussian commander of the Lithuanian army , Duke Württemberg , betrayed the Polish @-@ Lithuanian cause by refusing to fight the Russians . He never reached the frontlines , feigned illness in Wołczyn , and issued contradictory orders to his troops .

Thus the Army of Lithuania did little to oppose the advancing Russians , and kept withdrawing before their advance . Minsk was abandoned , after some skirmishes , on 31 May . Only after a change of commander on 4 June , did the Army , now under General Józef Judycki , try to stand and fight the Russians . The Russians however defeated Judycki at the battle of Mir on 11 June and kept advancing through the Grand Duchy . The Commonwealth army retreated towards Grodno . On 14 June the Russians took Wilno , after only a small skirmish with local garrison ; on 19 June , incompetently defended Nieśwież ; and on 20 June , Kaunas , this time without any opposition . Judycki , disgraced , was replaced by Michał Zabiełło on 23 June . Nonetheless , since Mir , no decisive engagements occurred in the northern theater , as Polish army withdrew in relative order towards Warsaw , after minor defeat at Zelwa , eventually taking defensive positions along the Bug river near Brest . Russians took Grodno on 5 July and Białystok on 17 July . On 23 July the Russians took Brest , defeating the local garrison , but on 24 they were defeated near Krzemień @-@ Wieś ; this last battle was the first significant Commonwealth victory on the northern front .

= = = War ends = = =

While Prince Poniatowski and Kościuszko considered the outcome of the war still open , and were planning to use the combined Polish @-@ Lithuanian forces to defeat the still separate Russian forces , King Poniatowski , with the consent of the Guardians of the Laws (cabinet of ministers) decided to ask for a ceasefire . Tsarina Catherine demanded that the King Poniatowski joins the pro @-@ Russian aristocratic faction , the Targowica Confederation ; with his cabinet split , he gave in to her demand around 22 ? 23 July , which effectively forced Prince Poniatowski to terminate military resistance . The last military confrontation of the war was fought on 26 July at Markuszów in Lublin province , where an enemy attack was repelled by Polish cavalry led by Poniatowski .

At the time King Poniatowski decided to sue for peace , the Polish army was still in good fighting condition , not suffering from any major defeat nor from lack of supplies . King Poniatowski thought that due to Russian numerical superiority defeat was nonetheless imminent , and more could be gained through negotiations with the Russians , with whom he hoped a new alliance could be formed . Although subsequent events would prove him wrong , the question of whether this could have been foreseen , and prevented through continued military resistance , has been subject to much debate among historians .

The Polish military was widely dissatisfied with the ceasefire ; Kościuszko , Prince Poniatowski and many others would criticize the King 's decision and many , including Kościuszko , would resign their commission in the coming weeks . Prince Poniatowski even considered rebelling against his uncle 's orders , and even issued orders to bring the King to the army 's camp by force if necessary , as was postulated by the more radical faction . Ultimately he decided not to continue fighting against his

uncle 's will , and the order was rescinded at the last moment before the departure of the group charged with capturing the King .

= = Aftermath = =

Most Polish historians agree that the Polish capitulation was a mistake both from the military perspective , and the political one . In the realm of military , the Poles had reasonable chances to defend the Vistula river line , and exhaust the Russian invading forces . From the political one , showing willingness to fight could have persuaded the partitioning powers that their plan was too costly .

King Poniatowski 's hopes that the capitulation will allow an acceptable diplomatic solution to be worked out were soon dashed . With new deputies bribed or intimidated by the Russian troops , a new session of parliament , known as the Grodno Sejm , took place , in fall 1793 . On 23 November 1793 , it concluded its deliberations under duress , annulling the constitution and acceding to the Second Partition . Russia took 250 @,@ 000 square kilometres (97 @,@ 000 sq mi) , while Prussia took 58 @,@ 000 square kilometres (22 @,@ 000 sq mi) of the Commonwealth 's territory . This event reduced Poland 's population to only one @-@ third of what it was before the First Partition . The rump state was garrisoned by Russian troops and its independence was strongly curtailed .

This outcome came also as a surprise to most of the Targowica Confederates , who had wished only to restore the status quo ante bellum (Commonwealth magnate @-@ favoring Golden Freedoms) and had expected that the overthrow of the 3 May Constitution would achieve that end , and nothing more . The last bid to restore the reformed Commonwealth came with the Kościuszko Uprising in 1794 . The uprising failed and resulted in the Third Partition in 1795 , in which the country lost all its remaining territories and the Polish @-@ Lithuanian Commonwealth ceased to exist .