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FOR THE COMMAND AND GENERAL STAFF SCHOOL  
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There were three bivouacs. During the operations the attackers spent the night in rifle pits or cellars of the villages on the battlefields. Subsistence through field kitchens was, with the exception of a few days, regularly available. Infantry ammunition was sufficient. Cooperation with artillery was satisfactory. Knowledge of the effect of enemy weapons resulted in appropriate combat formations.

**THE RUSSO-POLISH WAR 1919-1920. NONCRITICAL  
AND CRITICAL VIEWS**

[*"Der Russisch-Polnische Krieg 1919-1920. Unkritische und kritische Betrachtungen."* By Colonel von Wittich. *Militärwissenschaftliche Mitteilungen*, June 1933.]

Abstracted by Captain F. During

Very little has been written about the Russo-Polish War of 1919-1920, which is to be regretted, as the war is of especial interest because it was fought immediately after the World War in which highly trained armies faced each other; while in the Russo-Polish War, on the other hand, we find poorly trained, poorly armed and equipped troops, led by inefficient leaders. This war resembles to some degree the American Civil War. The technique of war, material, and detailed organization played a great role in the World War, while in the Russo-Polish War all this was very primitive. Strategy and operations were faulty, and only towards the end of the battle of the Vistula do we find a change on the Polish-French side. In the World War cavalry was placed in the background, but only two years later it came back into its own and the opinion, that no more cavalry battles would be fought after the World War, was nullified. In eastern Europe the role of the cavalry is not at an end.

The war of 1919-1920 can be divided into the following three phases. Until May 1920 the star of Poland ascended; the occupation of Kiev being the high light of the Polish advance. During the second phase the Russian forces advanced to the doors of Warsaw. In the third phase, the battle of the Vistula, we again have a change of scene—the defeat and withdrawal of the Russian troops in rear of the Niemen.

On 13 November, 1918, the All-Russian executive committee declared the treaty of Brest-Litovsk void, and the loss of any territory of the former Russian empire was counter-

manded. The population of all such territory was asked to join in a brotherly union with the workmen and farmers of Russia, and assistance was offered for the organization of their own soviet. The Soviet leaders disapproved of the independence of the border people of former Russia as well as the new territorial arrangement of eastern Europe, advocating to revolutionize the west as a counter measure. During a meeting of the war council on 18 November, Trotzki said, "the road via Kiev leads to a unison of the Austrian and Hungarian revolution; a German revolution can be united with the former via Pskov and Vilna. Offensive in the west, offensive in the south, offensive on all fronts." It was a natural sequence that this would mean friction with the young Polish state. The Soviet regime, however, had to deal first with the White-Russian armies, which were lead by Generals Deniken, Wrangel, Judenitsch, Miller, Awaloff-Bermond, and Admiral Koltshak. The White armies advanced from all sides on Moscow.

Soon after Lenin and Trotzki came into power they saw clearly that a new army was needed. In opposition to the White army, a Red army was organized on 28 January, 1918, composed of volunteers, armed workmen, Chinese coolies, etc. Until April, 1918, the strength of the Red army was 100,000 men, which was found to be insufficient. On 8 April, 1918, the Soviet leaders decided to start compulsory service for all workmen, small farmers, etc., between the ages of 18 to 40. Former officers were taken into the army, iron discipline was inaugurated and, amid hunger, misery, and gruesome bloodshed, a new and fairly well fed and paid army was built up. Gradually 14 to 16 armies of 70 to 80 divisions were organized and with this strength the Soviet leaders were able, in 1919, to checkmate the White armies. After the German troops had left Russia, poorly organized Russian troops gradually occupied the vacated areas. On 5 January, 1919, they occupied Vilna and two weeks later Minsk, Lida, and Brest-Litovsk were occupied.

This brought the Russian troops into contact with the advancing Polish forces. The Russians who used only mediocre troops on this front (the better ones were fighting the Russian White Armies), immediately began to organize the forces into three armies of a total strength of about 40,000

men, but they were unable to prevent the Poles from extending their boundary eastward. At the beginning of 1920 the northern front was along the Duna and Berezina Rivers. (See Sketch No. 1.) In order to gain time and increase their forces the Russians started negotiations with Poland.

When Pilsudski came into power on 11 November, 1918, the young Polish state had about 30,000 soldiers. But this was changed quickly. Volunteers from the former Polish legion, re turned soldiers from the Austria-Hungarian Army, and those who had served in the German and Russian armies, formed a new Polish Army, which in February, 1919, had a strength of 8,800 officers and 147,000 enlisted men. There was a great shortage of arms, ammunition, clothing, and shoes, however, and it was impossible to properly train and organize this new army; troops had to be sent to the different borders and the officers changed constantly.

On 8 December, 1919, the Entente decided to designate the "Curzon line" (the Njemen and Bug rivers) as the east boundary of Poland. Of course Poland, having already advanced more than 300 km. farther east, was dissatisfied with this decision and, considering the designated boundary only as temporary, it pushed eastward to a line more favorable from a military point of view, in order to have the advantage in the final decision for a permanent eastern boundary.

As early as February, 1919, twelve battalions of infantry, twelve squadrons of cavalry, and three batteries of artillery of the Polish Army came in contact with the Russian forces. This was the beginning of the war, which did not fully develop until the spring and summer of 1920. The events of the war during 1919 can be divided into three phases: first, from the beginning of the war until April, when the Polish troops took Wilna; the second phase included the occupation of East Galicia and West Wohlhynia; and the third phase: the advance of the Polish front to the Duna—Berezina and the line: Novograd—Proskurow—Kamieniec. (See Sketch No. 1.)

During all this time the army was continually being increased, and the volunteer system was replaced by compulsory service. Between April and June General Haller brought his army, consisting of six divisions, from France. With this army, which was fully equipped and armed, came many French officers and much war material. While this

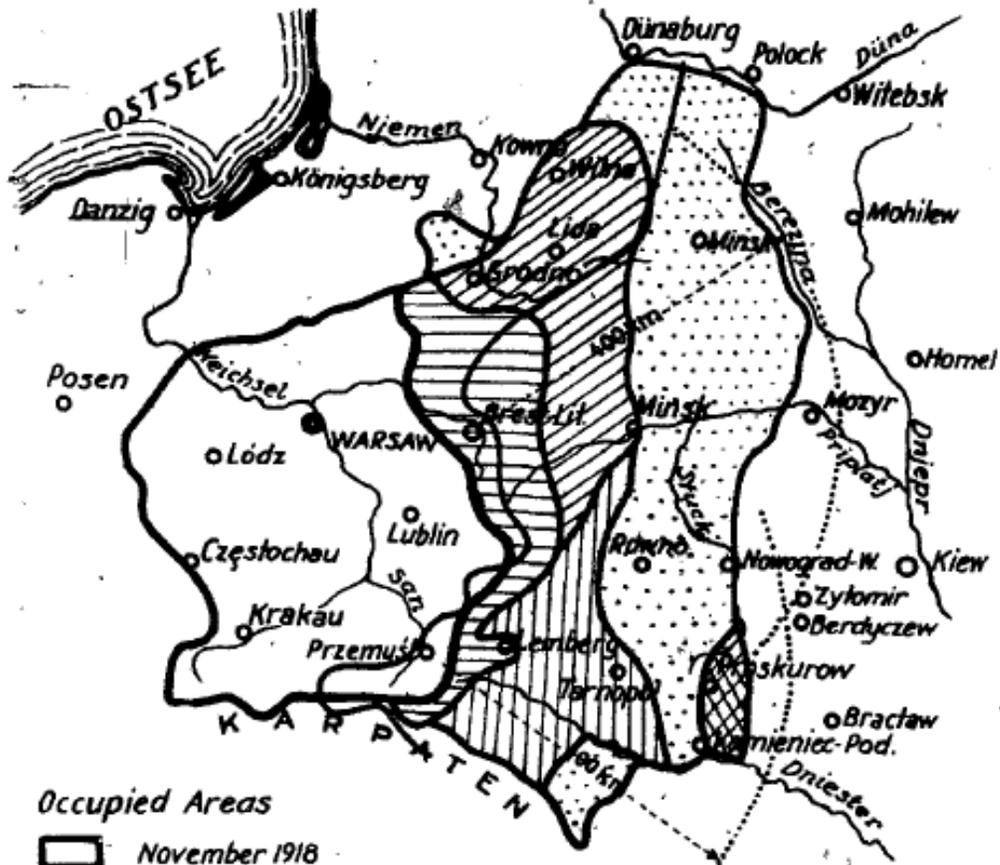
help was very favorable for Poland, it was offset by the friction among the Polish leaders. Polish officers did not understand each other personally or professionally, and they refused to obey foreign leaders. Pilsudski did not keep Haller's army intact, but sent five divisions of that army to different fronts, which action did not meet with approval in Poland or France. At the end of 1919, twenty infantry divisions of three regiments each, and seven cavalry brigades of two regiments each, were fighting at the different fronts. Poland states that it had 600,000 men; this seems rather high, considering how weak the fronts were held. The French officers considered the soldiers of good quality, but, on account of lack of material, thought that the army as a whole was mediocre.

Both sides prepared for a final decision. Russia, in addition to military preparation, started effective propaganda. The conclusion of the operations against Koltshak, Judenitsch, and Deniken (October-December, 1919) allowed the majority of the Red troops to be sent to the Polish front. These troops were better than the troops which had opposed the Polish troops so far. Morale was high, munition plentiful, and they had much war material of French and British manufacture. The increase in machine guns, armored cars, and tanks was enormous, and the number of artillery pieces and airplanes were doubled. The eight divisions which were at the front in January, 1920, were increased to twenty infantry divisions and several cavalry divisions. In the rear areas war industries and transportation were reorganized.

Soviet Russia was also politically busy. Germany and Czechoslovakia were sounded out, Latvia and Esthonia were offered neutrality, Lithuania was offered Wilna if it would become an ally, and peace overtures were made with Rumania. A lively and effective propaganda was started in Russia and among the workmen of foreign nations. It became impossible for France to ship troops or material by train to Poland. British workmen prohibited the export of arms and munition to Poland. Poland was the only place where the Russian propaganda was ineffective.

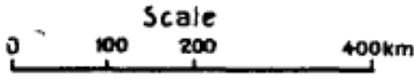
Poland continued the organization of its army, but it met with many difficulties. Replacements were trained for four weeks only before being sent to the front. Discipline suffered, subsistence and equipment were bad, roads were in a

# Sketch No. 1



## Occupied Areas

-  November 1918
-  February 1919
-  May 1919
-  July 1919
-  August-December 1919
-  January 1920



— Division between the Polish and Ukrainians and White Russians.

Sketch No.2



Sketch No.3





poor condition, and the railroads could not handle the required troop movements. Artillery material came from different nations, including Japan; ammunition supply was insufficient.

After five and one-half years of war, Poland was tired and wanted to live a normal life again. The attitude of the people was carried to the fronts and gave the leaders some worry. But Pilsudski remained unchanged; he knew that Poland would never get what it wanted without fighting for it.

Hardly a rifle shot was fired on either front during the first quarter of 1920. Only the army group Polesie advanced its front in the beginning of March, in order to cut the enemy's line of communication. (See Sketch No. 2.)

The theater of operation can be divided into two parts, north and south, divided by marshes and woods. In the north is the rolling country of White-Russia with many small and larger rivers, lakes, and woods; in the south we have plains with no obstruction in visibility. Creeks run mostly parallel to each other and are dry or marshy. This is an ideal country for cavalry actions.

The direction of the railroads and roads, which leave Warsaw, gave Poland the advantage of operation on interior lines. The north and south road: Wilna—Baranowitchi—Samy—Rowno, was therefore of special importance. Russia, on the other hand, was forced, on account of the three railroads running via Dunaburg, Polock, and Orscha to Warsaw, to consider the northern front as the place from which to launch the main attack. The important role which the railroad net played in this war is seen by the fact that, until the battle of the Vistula, the operations followed closely the direction of the roads, and by the struggle over important rail centers.

The Russian war plan contained the political aim to advance the revolution towards the west. It was planned to raise an army of 170,000 rifles and 18,000 sabers against Poland. The main attack was to be made in the direction: Wilna—Lida. The troops were to be ready by the end of April. It was thought that Poland would hold the south of the Polesie defensively, and would, by the end of March, concentrate their main forces in the north.

On 10 March, a meeting between Kamenew and the Commanding General of the northeast front, at that time Gittis, was held; and the following decisions were made:



(1) The main attack was to be made on the northwestern front with the occupation of Minsk as the objective.

(2) The southwestern front was to contain the enemy and to use the cavalry under Budennij for this purpose.

(3) Further attacks to be made by both army groups simultaneously, the direction of the south group to be: Berdyczew—Rowna—Brest-Litovsk.

(4) The operations were to be in charge of Commissar Kamenew, with Tuchatschewskij in command of the northwest front and Jegorow in command of the southwest front.

This plan of operation appears to be simple and logical. The railroad net favored the main attack to be made on the north front; the flanks would later rest on Lithuanian and German territory, thus driving the Polish army from its lines of communication. This latter was only possible if the main attack was to be made in the north; but this plan had the disadvantage that it threatened the Russian rear by Rumania and Wrangel's Army. In the execution of the plan it became important for the high command to coordinate both fronts, to act in unison in order to take from Poland the advantage of their interior lines, and not to permit the Polish reserves to make a planned and decisive counterattack.

It seems that the Polish forces had no plan in the beginning of 1920. General Szeptycki says in his memoirs, "that he did not know of any plan. In case there has been a plan, it was not only a political but also a military secret." General Sikorski says: "We had no plan in the beginning. We did not learn until the second part of June that the Russians made their main attack in the north." The French General Faury, Director of the Polish War School, said: "Only from 13 August, 1920, did we operate according to a plan."

Poland could act in two different ways: (1) To wait for the Russian offensive and to make a decisive counterattack; (2) To attack before the Russians had their forces assembled.

The situation was not favorable for a defense. The more than 1000 km. front was held by 16 weak divisions and 4 cavalry brigades. The positions were hastily prepared, and second lines were barely reconnoitered, which accounts for the fact that most breakthroughs by the Russians could be widened so quickly.

Pilsudski decided on the second alternative. He wanted to take advantage of the weakness of the Russians. He also decided to attack south of Polesie with Kiew as his objective. Political considerations favored this plan. On 23 April, the Polish-Ukrainian peace treaty was signed, which provided for a free Ukraina under Polish protection. Information of the enemy (until the end of March) indicated that he would make his main attack on the south. It was not until the middle of April that the general staff at Warsaw received correct information of the enemy situation, but it was too late to re-group the Polish forces. Sufficient transportation was lacking and the preparations for the operations had advanced too far to be changed. General Haller insisted, however, on a change of plan, and when Pilsudski refused, stating that time would be gained by a rapid attack on Kiew, General Haller left the Polish Army under protest.

The Polish operation toward Kiew, in which 9 infantry divisions, 4 cavalry brigades, and 2 Ukrainian groups of the strength of one division participated, were to be divided into two phases as follows:

(1) To advance to the line: Owruetz—Berdytzev—Zmerinka—Mogilew.

(2) To continue the advance with a view of taking Kiew and the Dniepr line on both sides of Kiew. (See Sketch No. 3.)

The cavalry was to open the way. The 1st Cavalry Division had as an objective the railroad point Kozotin, at which place the Red XIV Army headquarters was located. The 7th Cavalry Brigade was to take the bridges over the Teterew near Malin. The north flank (Third Army) and the center (Second Army) should advance at the same time, while the south flank (Sixth Army) was to start the advance 24 hours later in the direction: Winnica—Mogilew.

The offensive, which started on 25 April, surprised the Russians, but they refused battle, withdrawing along the entire front. On 26 April, the divisions of the north flank had advanced about 50 km., and the 3d and 7th Cavalry Brigades had reached the Teterew. The 1st Cavalry Division was at Kozotin, after having marched for 39 hours. The attack on the town was to be a surprise; the cavalry was to gallop to the outskirts of the town, dismount, and attack dismounted. This was not a success, as some regiments

dismounted 2 km. from the town, which gave the Russians time to prepare for defense. The train which carried the Russian army headquarters was derailed, but the army headquarters was able to get away. At dawn on 27 April, the town was occupied. The 1st Cavalry Division considered its mission fulfilled and took up a defensive position. It failed to pursue or to cut the Red lines of communication. (See Sketch No. 3 for lines reached on 28 April and 3 May.)

On 4 May, the first phase of the operation was completed. The troops rested and reorganized the next two days. On 7 May, the Polish cavalry entered Kiev, followed the next day by infantry.

Following the methods of 1912, the Russians had withdrawn without giving any serious opposition, even Kiev was given up without a fight. On 10 May, the Russians attacked the Polish bridgehead east of the Dniepr. This attack was unsuccessful, and the Polish troops pursued the Russian troops 30 km. east of Kiev.

According to plans and in conjunction with the advance of the Third Army, the Polesie group also advanced now to the Dniepr. (See Sketch No. 3.)

The Polish troops had reached their objectives, but strategically the operation was a failure, for they had failed to get a decision over the Russian forces. The new front forced the Polish Army to place great forces at a place where a decision would not be fought, for the Russian command had not changed its plans.

Politically the advance was also unsuccessful. The Ukrainian people did not help the Polish troops, but often robbed their supply trains. England became suspicious of Poland and was rather cool, when Poland asked for assistance. Russia used the occupation of Kiev advantageously in its propaganda and called on the Russian people for vengeance for Kiev. Many former officers of the old army now joined the Red Army.

In view of the above we must come to the conclusion that Pilsudski, after he was informed of the Russian plan, should have cancelled the contemplated offensive on Kiev, and prepared for a defense in the north in the area: Minsk—Wilna. Of course, from the viewpoint of a critic who knows the entire

war, the "uncertainty of the situation," which weighs so heavy when a leader has to make a decision, was absent.

#### LESSONS

1. Could success be reasonably expected, when the Polish troops made a frontal attack on a 500 km. front, having their forces equally divided?

2. Did not the cordon-like defense of the Russian troops favor a massing of the Polish forces?

3. Would it not have been better, after the Russian front had been broken, for the Polish Army to continue the advance, without waiting to reorganize?

4. Did not the situation on the front of the Third Army offer the possibility to make the attack on Kiew from two fronts: one from the south flank in the direction: Zytomir—Kiew, and the other from the north flank along the Pripjatj and Dniepr (via Czernobyl and Dymmer) in order to cut off parts of the Red Twelfth Army, which held the bent front?

5. Would it not have been better for the cavalry to rapidly take the bridges over the Dniepr at Kiew in order to force the enemy to withdraw in a southeasterly direction, between the Dniepr and the Dniester?

The right to ask above questions and to answer them, no doubt, is a matter of opinion. One thing is certain: that the days from 25 April to 15 May gave Poland only an apparent military and political success, and to those who call the advance to Kiew an adventure, we wish to say that they are right.

#### FRENCH AUTUMN MANEUVERS, 1933

[*"Die französischen 'Exercices combinés' 1933."* Militär-Wochenblatt, 25 September 1933.]

Abstracted by Major A. Vollmer

It will be remembered that last year's (1932) great autumn maneuvers in France, the so-called "Exercices combinés," were held in the vicinity of the troop training place at Mailly and Suippes.(1) They served to afford experience with new motorized troops.

(1) Militär-Wochenblatt, 18 and 23, 1932. See QRML No. 48 pages 16, 18, and 23.