

## PART II

### Reorganisation of the Eastern Front, the Battle of the Vistula and the Operations of the 5th Army on the Wkra River

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#### CHAPTER III

##### Decision of the Commander-in-Chief to move the war to the middle Vistula

###### Order of 6 August 1920 Regrouping the Polish Army

The crossing of the Neman and Bug rivers by the Russians, in conjunction with the unsuccessful attempts to counter-attack by the 1st and 4th armies and the on-going struggle against Budenny's Horse Army, demonstrated the need to withdraw our entire front to the interior.

During the month of July, that is during the period of the decisive Russian offensive above, we had absolutely no reserves other than some independent battalions. As a result of that, we had no possibility of taking the initiative.

This is true always and everywhere.

Our attempts to regain the initiative on the Dvina-Dnieper and then Neman-Bug rivers were unfruitful, because we did not create the required conditions for the success of the planned, or rather theoretically considered, counter-measures. In order to change our disadvantageous state of affairs, we first needed to break away from the enemy and regroup our forces, to gain the time and reserves required.

This idea was outlined for the first time in the "General Instruction for the Defence", worked out by Colonel Piskor, then Chief of the Operations Branch of the General Staff and approved by the Chief of General Staff, General Rozwadowski, whose task was to prepare the decision of moving the battle to the Vistula River. The instruction contained only preliminary orders of an organisational and technical nature. That is by 4 August, it was already being suggested that the battle with the Soviets be moved to the line of the Orzyc, Narew, Vistula, Wieprz rivers and Lwów.

General Weygand also spoke in favour of moving the front back. He consistently promoted the idea of a permanent and stable front, withdrawn far enough into the country to be able to form serious reserves, and then use them for a two-front counter-offensive. General Weygand agreed with General Henrys, head of the permanent French mission in Poland, that our capital was in greatly threatened by an encircling attack from the north, and recommended forming a strong army on the northern flank.

At the same time, the Polish Commander was considering the concept of a one-wing counter-attack, to be executed with the help of reserves concentrated on the right wing of our front retreating over the Vistula, that would be launched into the enemy's flank as he was attacking Warsaw from the east.

This operational concept can be seen in the historical order of 6 August 1920, which reads as follows:

###### Order to Regroup.

The enemy's rapid advance deeper into the country, as well as his serious attempts to cross the Bug River and reach Warsaw, has prompted the Supreme Command to move the North-Eastern Front to the Vistula line and, at the same time, to accept a great battle for Warsaw.

###### I.

The Commander-in-Chief has chosen as its defensive line: the line of the Orzyc and Narew Rivers with a bridgehead at Pułtusk; a bridgehead at Warsaw on the Vistula River, a bridgehead at Dęblin on the Wieprz River and further along the Seret or Strypa Rivers. This line will allow the formation of our own troops into echelons, allowing them to strike the flanks and communication lines of the advancing enemy.

The nature of the terrain, the enemy's positions and objectives, and our own intentions divides this front into three principal sectors:

- a) Northern Front, from the German border to Dęblin bridgehead, exclusive,
- b) Centre Front, from Dęblin, inclusive, to Brody, exclusive.
- c) Southern Front, from Brody inclusive to the southern border.

###### II.

The main operational concept of the Commander-in-Chief for following period is:



1. In the south, tie down the enemy, while covering Lwów and the petrol wells.
2. In the north, prevent any flank movements along the German border, and weaken the enemy by bloody checks in front of the Warsaw bridgehead, which he will likely attack.
3. The centre has an offensive mission: to quickly assemble an army of manoeuvre on the lower Wieprz River, which will then strike at the flank and rear of the enemy attacking Warsaw and destroy it. A group of troops on the upper Wieprz River, will initially protect the concentration of the army of manoeuvre from the east and southeast, and will then join the action of the army of manoeuvre in a north-eastern direction. The collaboration of the Northern Front's forces is also expected.

### III.

Characteristics and tasks of the sectors:

#1) The north, under the command of General Haller, is the most endangered due to the enemy's attempts to capture the capital, either by a frontal attack or by an encircling movement from the north. Therefore, the northern section is divided into 3 sub-sectors:

a) from the German border to Pułtusk inclusive, is the sub-sector of the 5th Army under Maj-General Sikorski. Mission: to hold the crossings of the Narew River, and the Narew and Orzyc rivers; to use the cavalry actively on the enemy's right wing. All attempts of the enemy to break through should be defeated.

b) From Serock up to and including Karczew, the Warsaw bridgehead, is the sub-sector of the 1st Army under the command of Maj-General Latinik, the current military governor of Warsaw. Mission: to repel attacks on Warsaw and to inflict the greatest possible losses on the enemy in order to weaken his resistance.

c) from Góra Kalwaria (inclusive) up to Dęblin (exclusive), is the sub-sector of the 2nd Army under Lt-General Raszewski. Mission: observe and hold the line of the Vistula.

#2) The centre, under the command of Lt-General Rydz-Śmigły, is to be the manoeuvre group. This will exploit the enemy's fatigue caused by the attacks on the Warsaw bridgehead and inflict a decisive defeat on the main forces with a vigorous strike from the flank. This sector has two sub-sectors:

a) from Dęblin (inclusive) to Kock (inclusive), will be the sub-sector of the 4th Army, which is the main attack group under the command of Lt-General Skierski. Mission: to concentrate in the area of Dęblin, Łysobyki and Kock with the formation of reserves at depth and to strike in the general direction of Mińsk Mazowiecki;

b) from Kock (exclusive) to Brody (exclusive), is the sector of the 3rd Army under the command of Maj-General Zieliński. Mission: initially to cover the concentration of the 4th Army; tying up the enemy's cavalry with its own cavalry; then when the 4th Army starts its attack, strike in depth with infantry towards Łuków, covered to the east with cavalry.

#3) The south, under General Dowbor-Muśnicki, is to cover eastern Małopolska in the areas of Hrubieszów and Rawa Ruska [Rava-Rus'ka]. It has two subsectors for this purpose:

a) from Brody (inclusive) to the border, which is not strictly defined by the Commander, is the sub-sector of 6th Army under the command of Maj-General Iwaskiewicz.

b) the southern part of the front's sector is occupied by the army of General Pavlenko<sup>10</sup>.

### IV.

General instructions:

1) Break contact at night, making a very long march on the first night. Only weak rear-guards of cavalry or infantry with machine-guns in carts are to remain in place, who are only to give way under heavy enemy pressure. These instructions apply mainly to the Polesie group and the present 4th Army.

2) Immediately start the evacuation of supply parks, trains and services, bearing in mind that the number of crossings on the Vistula and Wieprz are limited. Maintain order in the vehicle columns so that they do not obstruct the roads and crossings.

<sup>10</sup> This was what remained of Petliura's UNR, so Ukrainian nationalists.



- 3) To speed the retiring of units that are changing armies in the order of battle and go elsewhere, they should be pulled out and directed now so that the roads are free for later retreating units.
- 4) The new sectors, especially the line on the Warsaw bridgehead and on the Vistula, should be manned carefully, on time and in order. Detailed instructions to this end will be issued by the Northern Front HQ after consultation with General Latinik.
- 5) Take into account the fact that in the new sectors the divisions will have to organise themselves quickly and absorb many reinforcements in the form of volunteer and staging battalions.
- 6) the following crossings exist on the Vistula:
  - Iron bridges : Modlin-Warszawa (for railway traffic), Dęblin, and Sandomierz.
  - Bridges on piles : Warsaw and Dęblin.
  - Wooden bridges : Puławy and Annopol.
  - Heavy pontoon bridge : Modlin.
  - Under construction : at Warsaw a light pontoon bridge, to be completed by 12 August. At Góra Kalwaria, an improvised pontoon crossing will be ready by 15 August;
  - Steam ferries - Jabłonna and Góra Kalwaria, from 8 August.

V.

#### Execution

a) The retreat of the armies of the North-eastern Front will begin overnight on 7 August. It must be executed in such a way that General Roja's Group and particularly the left wing of the 1st Army will hold for as long as possible and push the enemy towards Malkinia and Warsaw. In no case allow our forces covering Warsaw to be attacked in the positions of the Warsaw bridgehead earlier than 12 August, when the fortifications of these positions will be completed.

With this aim therefore, the left wing of the 1st Army must remain at the line of Wyszaków until the rest of the front to the south reaches the Liwiec – Siedlce – Łuków – Torkawice – Wieprz River line. During the following retreat, our units in the positions of the Warsaw bridgehead must repel all enemy attacks until the concentration of the 4th Army south of the Wieprz River is complete, i.e., around 16 August.

The left wing of the 3rd Army will retreat in close communication with the Polesie group to the line of the Wieprz in such a way that its units will be level with the rear-guard of the Polesie group, thus securing its retreat. The commanders of both current fronts will agree in on the details of this retreat.

The new order of battle comes into effect as soon as the retreating troops reach the final lines; the 4th Army will remain subordinate to General Haller until the completion of its concentration.

b) Grouping at the final line of retirement:

The sectors of the individual armies are indicated in part III.

1. – 5th Army.

In addition to the existing group of General Roja, it will receive troops from the north wing (see the order of battle) and the 17th Infantry Division, which will be transported to the Pułtusk region by the Northeast Front Command as soon as possible.

2. – 1st Army.

On the bridgehead at Warsaw, in addition to the retreating units of the 1st Army and the 15th Infantry Division, will have at its disposal

- a) the 11th Infantry Division and the 7th Reserve Brigade, currently being reorganised;
- b) the 18th Infantry Division, which is at present in transport from the 6th Army;
- c) the troops already subordinated to the Military Governor of Warsaw.

3. – 2nd Army.

Composed of:



a) the 2nd Legion Division and 4th Infantry Division, which will cross the Vistula at Dęblin and Warsaw, or at Gora Kalwaria if the bridge is ready by that time.

b) some cavalry to be additionally assigned.

4. – 4th Army.

Composed of

a) the 14th, 21st, 16th Infantry Divisions, 17th Infantry Brigade,

b) the 6th Infantry Division, the withdrawal of whose brigades will be ordered by the commanders of the south-eastern and north-eastern fronts as soon as possible and will be transported by rail to Dęblin.

5. – 3rd Army.

Composed of: the 6th Ukrainian Division, General Bałakhowicz's 7th Division, a cavalry brigade and the 1st and 3rd Legion Divisions.

6. – 6th army.

Composed of: the 13th and 5th Divisions, a cavalry brigade and the army of General Pavlenko.

### **General analysis of the order**

This order would not be executed in its entirety, due to events. There were changes, especially in relation to the 5th Army sector. Those took place when the assumptions of the Commander-in-Chief's decision of 6 August were incorrect and had to be abandoned.

Nevertheless, the basic idea of the manoeuvre contained in the order, remarkable for the depth of strategic concept and the boldness of decision, would remain throughout the Battle of the Vistula and would be the principal factor in the Polish victory in that battle.

The Commander-in-Chief, breaking completely with half-heartedness, which at that moment would have been tantamount to the final defeat of the Polish army, and taking advantage of the temporary incapacitation of the Horse Army, which followed our victorious battles at Brody, as well as of the temporary halt in Tukhachevski's advance along the middle Bug River, which was later extended with the help of General Roja's Group formed on the left wing of the front, decided to move the north-eastern front to the Vistula line and accept a major battle for Warsaw.

The natural centre of the enemy's military operations from the east was the capital of the Polish State – Warsaw. It was there that his efforts would be concentrated, taking advantage of the numerous roads leading to the capital from all directions – from the north-east, east and south-east. It was not luck that the direction of the attack, given to Budenny on 13 August, lay along the Hrubieszów – Lublin – Dęblin axis, that the 16th Army and the Mozyr Group marched on Warsaw from the middle Bug River, and that the great concentration of Russian troops in 1920 took place in the north.

On our side, when planning the battle on the Vistula, we had to take into account first of all the two main directions for the Russian attack.

The first one – the eastern one – starting from Brześć-on-the-Bug, went through Siedlce in the heart of Poland; for the frontal attack on Warsaw, it was the secondary direction, using the Brześć to Warsaw road as the main line of communication and parallel roads running north and south of it.

Due to the fall of Brześć, the central strategic key in eastern Poland, those roads were open to the Red Army from 6 August.

The other direction for a Russian attack on Warsaw, more important than the first, was the one lying on both sides of the Grodno – Białystok – Zambrów – Ostrów – Wyszaków – Radzymin road. It encompassed the whole complex of lines of communication and roads flowing from the northern operational area towards the capital city of Poland. It was guarded by the Grodno fortress on the Neman river, which fell in the second half of July, and so ceased to play the role of a dam holding back the piled-up wave of the Russian invasion. That line was protected to the north by the Primeval Augustów Forest, the marshes along the Augustów Canal and the Biebrza River, as well as by a chain of now semi-destroyed fortresses, stretching from Grodno through Osowiec, Łomża, Ostrołęka, Pułtusk up to Serock and Zegrze, which secured the former westernmost war theatre of Russia against East Prussia. The operational area in question, bounded by the Bug and Narew rivers, narrows towards the west and finally ends at the forks of the Narew, Bug and Vistula rivers.



The confluence of those rivers is an obstacle which, by its very nature, an attacker of Warsaw from the east and north-east will always try to avoid.

This was the source of the fundamental assumption of the Commander-in-Chief on 6 August, which was based on the expectation that the main Russian attack would develop south of the Bug River, while the Russian armies marching north of the Grodno – Białystok – Warsaw road would cross the Bug River at Malkinia, Brok or Wyszaków. To the north of the Bug River and on Bug-Narew, only a secondary strike was expected, consisting of attempts to bypass the left flank along the German border.

On 6 August, these actions expected by our Commander were to be opposed by a fixed front, formed along the Orzyc River, which was our last natural barrier in the north, and further along the Narew with the bridgehead at Pułtusk, and along the Warsaw bridgehead stated in the order, as well as along the Vistula River with its right flank supported by the Dęblin Fortress.

The plan was to cover Lwów and the oil basin of eastern Małopolska with the minimum of forces and wear out the enemy by accepting a prolonged battle at the Warsaw bridgehead, to “prevent out-flanking along the German border” and to gather an army of manoeuvre on the lower Wieprz in order to strike at the flank and rear of the enemy attacking Warsaw and destroy him. At the same time, it was planned that the group of troops, which in the first stage was assigned the task of covering the manoeuvre army from the east over the Bug River, would join it in the final phase of the offensive, as well as those fighting in the northern section.

The Wieprz, running loosely in an arc towards the Vistula, provided natural cover for the area of concentration planned in the northern part of the Lublin plateau, with its left supported by Dęblin.

By concentrating as many of our forces as possible, the goal was to impose our will on the opponent. Avoiding weakening the main army of manoeuvre at the risk of important, but in relation to the decisive battle, secondary goals, meant risking a temporary sacrifice of the most valuable areas of the country in favour of seeking a complete victory.

The plan of 6 August contained the danger of losing Lwów and eastern Małopolska, so heavily under threat from Budenny and the Soviet 14th Army, and in fact defended by only one Polish army. This danger was to a certain extent neutralized by Romania, whose stance on the Polish-Russian war was admittedly wait-and-see and neutral, but who nevertheless would not look on passively from the point of view of a possible annihilation of the Polish Army and occupation of Eastern Małopolska by Russia. For that would have struck directly at its most vital interests. The Romanian army, thus, by seriously threatening the flank of the Red Army advancing into Małopolska, automatically impeded their movement in that direction.

Nevertheless, the risk did exist, and true fortitude was required to take responsibility for it.

What stood out in the ordered regrouping was the extremely bold idea of withdrawing the 4th Army from the Siedlce region to the lower Wieprz River, as it had to be done by changing the army's direction of retreat by 90° and performing a flank march along the Bolshevik front. That decision shows its creator's eminent strategic talent.

The plan of action, drawn up on 6 August, contained a disregard for the forces massed on the Russian right wing. It did not eliminate the immediate and severe risk to the Commander-in-Chief's manoeuvre group from the lightly covered east during the attack. The 3rd Army of General Zygmunt Zieliński, which guarded that flank from the entire Soviet 12th Army east of Lublin, was made up of fictional units apart from the 7th Infantry Division. The “Ukrainian army”, consisted of less than 1,000 men; the “Belorussian National Army”<sup>11</sup> of up to 1,600 men; and the numerous Polish volunteer formations, joined into operational groups, did not have the effectiveness or solidity of regular formations.

### **Organisation of the Polish Front in August 1920**

Marshal Piłsudski, in deciding to move the North-eastern Front to the middle Vistula and to accept a major battle on the edge of the national capital, ordered at the same time a general regrouping of the fronts and introduced a new division into sectors: northern, central and southern.

These three groups of armies were to work together at different times and in different ways for one purpose, which was to inflict defeat on the main enemy forces.

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<sup>11</sup> This is the army of Stanisław Bułak-Bałachowicz. Sikorski is doing them a major disservice by describing them as “fictional” as they were a good unit in 1920. They performed well during the Battle of the Neman, only a few months later.

The Ukrainians were demoralised and struggling with typhus, so probably could only field 1,000 men in mid-1920, but still held together through the campaign and afterwards.

It seems Sikorski, like many Poles of the time, was politically opposed to Piłsudski's alliances with groups that claimed areas that he considered part of Poland. His opinion of their military worth appears to be flavoured by that.



The Northern Front under General Józef Haller tasked with preventing the outflanking of the Polish line and defending the capital. This sector was regarded by the Chief of General Staff as the one most endangered, due to the enemy's great superiority in numbers and his firm intention to capture Warsaw. Accordingly, the 6 August orders formulated those tasks to be carried out in an exclusively defensive manner. The defence of the Orzyc and Narew Rivers, together with the defence of the bridgehead of Warsaw, were to consist of engaging the main Russian forces frontally, and then tie them down and wear them out, inflicting heavy losses. The role of the Northern Front was also to prevent the Red Army attacking the capital from moving south to face the decisive counter-attack of our manoeuvre group.

That strike was to be made by the troops, initially under the command of General Rydz-Śmigły, then led by Marshal Piłsudski, advancing from the Wieprz River towards Mińsk Mazowiecki, Siedlce and Biała Podlaska.

The southern front, under General Iwaszkiewicz's orders (General Dowbor-Muśnicki refused to accept command) was to remain, was to cover eastern Małopolska on the Seret or Strypa line and to cooperate directly with General Zieliński's 3rd Army in shielding our attack group from enemy forces that might strike at its right flank and later at its rear.

The manoeuvres planned on 6 August thus involved a sudden break between the Polish forces and the enemy, a top-secret regrouping of our divisions in order to defend the capital on the Vistula, Narew and Orzyc rivers, as well as the bridgehead at Modlin – Warsaw, then to launch an army of manoeuvre from beyond the Wieprz with a decisive counter-attack. This strike was to be carried out under the cover of the armies standing on the Bug River and in the south.

In this framework, the mission of the northern front in the plan's success came to the fore, not in the realisation of the principal action, but in ensuring its first phase. It was imperative that the northern front, including the 5th Army, withstand the advance of the Red Army and at the same time prevent a flanking to the north until the action of the Commander-in-Chief had time to achieve the decisive result.

The completion of the withdrawal of the armies of the north-eastern front near Warsaw was expected by 13 August, and the completion of the concentration of the manoeuvre group behind the Wieprz River by 16 August. In this way the time and space were to be created for the unexpected and sudden attack of the manoeuvre group on the left wing of the Russian Western Front.

The passive role of the Northern Front changed in the course of time into an active one on its left wing. This happened when we found that the centre of gravity of the Russian forces attacking us was north of the Bug River, in the 5th Army's sphere of operations. The bulk of the enemy would be too far from our Centre Front, which was preparing the decisive strike, and too close to the capital, threatening to seize it before the flanking movement of the Polish armies developed. The fall of Warsaw in such conditions would not only be a major success for the Red Army, with fertile political and general consequences, but also permit it to change face with the bulk of its forces towards the Commander-in-Chief's manoeuvre group, who already – as we shall see later – had Budenny's Horse Army to his rear.

### **Organisation of the Northern Front**

General Józef Haller, organising his sector as commanded and with modifications caused by the situation of the enemy, on 8 August ordered its divisions into the following three sub-sectors, starting with the left wing:

The first sub-sector, of the 5th Army, reached from the Prussian border along the line Rzęśnik – Pniewo (exclusive) – Pokrzywnica – Nasielsk (inclusive) – Modlin (exclusive).

The forces of that sector were initially to be extremely thin. It consisted of General Roja's Group, the 17th Infantry Division and the 41st, 36th and 201st Infantry Regiments.

The task of this army was partly modified from the 6 August orders. It had been to cover the left wing of the front with an active operation on the enemy's right wing and holding the line of the Orzyc River. But the Front commander was aware already on 8 August that the line indicated two days previously had been crossed by the Russians. Modifying the order in question, he ordered the 5th Army to strive to regain the line of the river.

I had been tasked personally with choosing the location of that army's HQ, after examining the possible connections and links with the Front Headquarters. This meant a further change of the earlier order, as I designated Ciechanów as the location of the 5th Army Headquarters.

The second sub-sector, that of General Latinik's 1st Army, reached from Modlin (inclusive) to Góra Kalwaria (exclusive). The 1st Army was to retain its existing composition, with the exception of the 2nd Lithuanian-Belorussian Division. It therefore had the 10th, the 15th, 11th and 18th Infantry Division, the 7th Reserve Brigade, and the Warsaw bridgehead garrison.





The role of the 1st Army was to repel all attacks on Warsaw and inflict the greatest possible losses on the enemy in order to weaken its strength.

The third sub-sector of the front, with General Raszewski's (later General Roja's) 2nd Army, reached south from the 1st Army to Modrzyce<sup>12</sup> and Radom and was occupied by the 2nd Legion Division, 4th Infantry Division, 2nd Cavalry Brigade and the Aviation Regiment, with the task of observing and holding the Vistula completely.

The 8 August order of the Northern Front commander also detailed the organisation of the Warsaw bridgehead which, although it fell under the competence of the 1st Army HQ, was so important that its outline was determined directly by the front commander.

The bridgehead had two fortified defensive lines:

– the first line ran through Karczew – Wiązownia – Okuniew – Radzymin – Serock – Narew up to the border of the 5th Army sector;

– the second line led through Nowa Wieś – Alexandrów – Miłosna<sup>13</sup> – Rembertów – Pustelnik – Fort Benjaminów – Ostrów – the Narew and to the inner line of the Modlin fortified area.

The security garrison, subordinated to General Latinik, included:

a) in the Miłosna sub-sector under the command of General Falewicz, reaching from the Vistula through Karczew – Wiązownia – Okuniew to the Rządza stream,<sup>14</sup> were four infantry battalions and the 11th Border Rifle Regiment, with corresponding artillery;

b) in the Radzymin sub-sector, under the command of Colonel Jaźwiński from the Rządza stream to the Narew river near Serock (exclusive), were the 11th Infantry Division, three infantry battalions and some artillery;

c) in the Zegrze sub-sector, under the command of Admiral Porębski, running from Serock (inclusive) along the Narew River with bridgeheads at Zegrze and Dębe,<sup>15</sup> up to Poddębie village, had the 7th Reserve Brigade, the 6th Rifle Regiment and some artillery.

d) in the Modlin sub-sector, under the command of Colonel Malewicz, reaching from Poddębie village, along the outer line of Modlin fort, was a garrison of five and a half infantry battalions and the artillery of the fort.

### **Our Inaccurate Assessment of the Enemy's Intentions**

I have discussed the Northern Front Command's modifications in his orders because it followed from our incorrect assessment of the Russian intentions and our adaptations in line with that error. For this reason, the 8 August order is an interesting historical document. It shows that even then we were not yet aware of Tukhachevski's intentions. Namely that despite the possible danger of "flanking along the German border", as stated in the order of 6 August, we did not take into account the deep bypass he was actually preparing. We did not foresee his intention to cross the Vistula near Płock and Wyszogród, in order to capture Warsaw from behind, from the west.

What is more, we had not yet appreciated the size of the enemy forces massed on the Orzyc River. Thus, we seriously underestimated the second part of the Bolshevik manoeuvre, later accepted as a matter of faith and becoming the basis for later orders, that is the concept of an attack by the **bulk** of the Red forces from the area of Maków [Mazowiecki], Przasnysz and Ciechanów on Modlin and the Modlin – Zegrze line; thus anticipating direct cooperation of the Soviet 15th and 3rd Armies with the 16th Army in a coordinated and simultaneous attack on the Warsaw bridgehead. Our positions were based on the incorrect assessment of the importance and strength of the movement of the right wing of the Russian army.

This is why at the moment when the Red Army had broken the barrier of the Orzyc River, the Front Headquarters changed the 6 August order of the Commander to move the line of the 5th Army's main resistance to Mława – Ciechanów – Pułtusk – Warsaw bridgehead. Thus, when the fall of Pułtusk was imminent, we stayed with our original strategic concept, adjusting to it a new defensive line, imposed on us by the pressure of the Red units approaching Ciechanów and Mława at that time.

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<sup>12</sup> I think this is now a suburb of modern Dęblin.

<sup>13</sup> I think this is Stara Miłosna.

<sup>14</sup> This waterway, sometimes called a river and sometimes spelled as Rzondza, can be hard to find on modern maps. It enters the Narew above Rynia (now larger than it was in 1920, as the Narew is dammed) and passed by Ruda, Zawady, Wictorów and Tłuszcz. While not much of a barrier, the Poles ran much of their first line of defence along it, for want of more substantial features in the area.

<sup>15</sup> At the time usually spelled Dembe.



What is also striking in the orders is the disproportion of forces and means placed at the disposal of the 1st and 5th Armies. The 5th Army received General Roja's Group, exhausted and nearly destroyed, whose broken and incomplete tactical units were the fighting strength of four full infantry regiments and one cavalry brigade – with the 17th Infantry Division, completely worn out in hard fighting, and the 18th Infantry Brigade. Retreating alongside the 1st Army, these troops were to stop the victorious advance of the three and a half Bolshevik armies, and even to take the line of the Orzyc River from them, at least according to the orders given.

On the other hand, the previously organised Warsaw bridgehead, contrary to our predictions, was in fact approached by only one Bolshevik army. To be grouped there, taking into account the 1st Army, were more than five divisions and one brigade of infantry with their artillery reinforced, with some newly formed security battalions, as well as an unprecedented amount of heavy artillery (46 batteries), tanks and armoured trains. In addition, two full divisions were stationed in the area of the 1st Army as a reserve for the Front Command. (The technical organisation of the Warsaw bridgehead and the securing of the crossings of the Vistula continued to be very energetically handled by the General Staff and Front Staff, as testified by the four orders given in relation to it of 12 August 1920.)

The concept of a strong frontal attack threatening Warsaw from the east, was also reflected in the order commanding the 2nd Army not only to observe, but also to ruthlessly defend the Vistula River south of Warsaw. For this purpose, it received two full infantry divisions, one cavalry brigade and an aviation regiment.

That was how the organisation and tasks of the front looked in theory. In practice, and above all thanks to the enemy, it would all be quickly overturned, both in the matters of organisation and composition of individual units, as well as in their roles. The role of the 5th army went from least to most important. The role of the 2nd Army would be limited to passive observation of the Vistula River, while that of the 1st Army would be limited to the defence of the Warsaw bridgehead, an operation conducted with varying degrees of success but at too great a commitment of forces

### **Regrouping of the Polish Army.**

The troops who were to carry out the Warsaw operation had been in ongoing retreat since 4 July. Most of them had withdrawn more than 600 kilometres, in constant hard combat conditions. Many of those divisions was badly commanded. It is hardly surprising that their offensive strength had diminished considerably, and their morale was broken. And yet those same troops were required, under the threat of final destruction, to try to turn the tide and undertake a desperate battle. The hitherto victorious march of the Red Army had to be halted and the capital sheltered, so as to build a foothold on the Vistula and launch a counter-attack.

This task was as difficult as turning panicked and fleeing soldiers on their heels and forcing them to launch a vigorous counter-attack. All the more so because it had to be performed by such a young, and therefore doubtfully solid, army.

In order to execute the operational plan of 6 August, it was necessary to regroup our own forces, and to do so on an enormous scale.

I will not discuss in detail their separation from the enemy, which began on the north-eastern front on the night of 7 August, as well as their regrouping.

With space and time at our disposal, we were able to carry out the regrouping, despite the risk to the Commander-in-Chief's manoeuvre group. The massing of the vast majority of the enemy's forces on his right wing greatly facilitated the operation in this.

This regrouping, in spite of many difficulties with the thorough reorganisation of the front and the formation of new armies, was generally accomplished efficiently.

During this time our retreat progressed so rapidly towards Warsaw, that the two authorities of the management of the war – The High Command and the Ministry of Military Affairs – were together, which would not have happened in normal conditions.

Warsaw's preparations for defence were personally led by Deputy Minister for Military Affairs, General Sosnkowski, who later became Minister in the Government of National Defence. The Military Governor of Warsaw, General Latinik, was under his direct orders. A so-called "triangle" of defence was formed around Warsaw, with a line running through Modlin and Karczew forming the base and with its apex in Serock. In that triangle a bridgehead was established, running through the towns mentioned in the order of the northern front commander above, and consisting of two hastily fortified defence lines. In this bridgehead a security garrison was deployed, subordinated to General Latinik, consisting of the 11th Infantry Division, the 7th Reserve Brigade, and a dozen or so un-brigaded security battalions in the process of reorganisation.

The 1st Army, retreating towards Warsaw, thus found its positions already in place on the Rządza river. In view of the relatively speedy retreat, Minister Sosnkowski was forced to regulate the passage of the 1st Army divisions into those positions, indicating to various units their lines of retreat, and regulating the flow of the supply trains behind the





Vistula. While tidying up the vehicular and pedestrian traffic crowded onto the Kierbedzia Bridge, General Sosnkowski was frantically building a second pontoon bridge in the vicinity of the destroyed Poniatowski Bridge. This bridge, however, could not be put into service for fighting troops until 11 August.

The regiments retreating to the Warsaw bridgehead were meant to absorb all the miscellaneous formations of the security garrison, thus obtaining much desired reinforcements. This order was carried out in the entire sector, with the exception of Modlin, whose security garrison maintained its unstructured, independent organisation until the battle was completed.

Minister Sosnkowski's orders concerning the retreat and the movement of columns, were strictly enforced with the help of special officer patrols, preventing any confusion and chaos from threatening the Polish Army as it reached Warsaw.

Those units assigned to the 5th Army which were fighting on the left wing of the Polish front, were in the most difficult position during the regrouping. Both General Roja's group and the 17th Infantry Division could not break away from the enemy in time. The former was retreating with incessant heavy fighting, with no chance of success, and had already been doing so since Ostrołęka. The second took part in the retreat of the 1st Army. Thanks to their position, I intended to use these units to cover the grouping of the 5th Army, giving them the difficult and extremely important role of delaying the enemy's march. They would have to fulfil that mission without any reinforcements, come what may. The claim of some Russian writers, who falsely believe due to a lack of documents, that the Russian army, crossing the Orzyc River and occupying Pułtusk, and then advancing to the Wkra River, threw back the 5th Army, is wrong. This was not the case, as the 5th Army was not thrown into the balance until 13 August, a few days later.



## CHAPTER IV

### The formation of the 5th Army

#### Partial Modifications to the 6 August Orders

I received the news of my appointment as commander of the 5th Army through the Chief of Staff of the Polesie group, Lt-Colonel Wolikowski, on 6 August, before midnight. We were informed of it by Colonel of the General Staff Zagórski, who had been acting as the chief of staff of the front for several days. At the same time, he informed Lt-Colonel Wolikowski of the intended withdrawal of the entire Northern Front to the Vistula River and about the execution plan worked out that night by the front commander.

I was convinced of the necessity and urgency of executing the plan, seeing that the idea persistently supported by General Haller and Colonel Zagórski of winning the war over the Bug River clearly could not be realised. General Rozwadowski urged me by phone to come without delay to GHQ. However, I could not leave the Polesie Group immediately, as extricating it from its positions eighty kilometres further forward than the rest of troops on the northern front was a risky undertaking and required particularly careful execution.

On top of this, on the following day the Polesie Group was attacked between Kodeń and Piszczwał. Having thrown back that attack, and having restarted the movement towards Janów which the 14th Infantry Division had halted the previous day, I arranged in detail for the withdrawal of the group from near Brześć to Łuków. Finally, I disengaged my units secretly, leaving energetic covering troops, and began the strategic retreat ordered for us on 7 August, at around midnight.

The rapid retreat of the Polesie group, without which the guiding idea of the plan of 6 August could not be realised, exposed the left wing of the South-eastern Front, headed by General Rydz-Śmigły, to serious danger. The strength of that front was to be further weakened firstly by the loss of the 18th Infantry Division, transferred to Modlin, and then by the detachment of the 1st and 3rd Legion Divisions, to join the army of manoeuvre. General Rydz-Śmigły, whose right wing was then in the midst of very heavy fighting in a retreat between the Seret and the Strypa rivers, took advantage of Budenny's temporary weakness to maintain the left wing of the front on the Bug River at all costs, thus effectively securing the effective cover of the Warsaw operation. His orders, aimed at an active defence of the Bug section, required a close liaison between the Polesie group and the 3rd Army, which also delayed my departure for Warsaw.

So, it was not until the morning of 9 August that I handed over command of the Polesie group to General Konarzewski, and went to Warsaw. There I reported to General Rozwadowski, who had strategic panache, an unquenchable energy and unbreakable will, all combined with precision in grasping a situation and great decision-making ability, based on calm, consistency, rational and methodical thinking. These qualities were equally present in General Weygand, who collaborated with him.

He oriented me with the Commander-in-Chief's plans, according to which the results of his strike would be felt in front of Warsaw by 19 August at the latest. He formulated the operational scope of the 5th Army, emphasising that should it find itself in a difficult situation, it could be reinforced by the 10th Infantry Division, stationed for that purpose in Jabłonna.

General Józef Haller, who enjoyed the widespread confidence of soldiers, as the commander of the Northern Front then acquainted me with his assessment of the situation, as well as detailed information on the mission and role of the 5th Army within his front.

General Weygand assessed our position north of the Bug-Narew as serious. He did not hide the fact that the situation in the region was not sufficiently clear and that our assumptions about the enemy, taken as the basis for the decisions made, would remain to be verified in the course of events. He stressed the great numerical advantage of the enemy in the sector of the 5th Army's future operations, but that on the basis of the information gathered so far it was difficult to ascertain his final intentions. Predicting surprises in that sector, he expressed his conviction that it would be led with energy and determination, as the situation absolutely demanded in his opinion.

In this way I was able to ascertain that the concept of the Battle of the Vistula, as I knew it from the order of 6 August, had undergone a serious modification by 9 August. The Commander-in-Chief's decision of 6 August was based on the information we had on the enemy on that day. Not only did that not accurately reflect the situation of the Red Army at the time, which was making a decisive attack on the northern part of the front, but they also gave a completely false picture of the enemy's positions in general.

The gravest mistake was that we placed the centre of gravity of the Russian forces advancing on Warsaw south of the Bug-Narew River, while in reality it was north of that river. Only later did we recognise the circular movement of the Soviet 4th Army, executed in conjunction with the 3rd Cavalry Corps.



Observing the mobility of the CavCorps, which as early as on 7 August crossed the Narew River near Różan, and having thrown back our 8th Cavalry Brigade, which tried to resist it on the Orzyc River, headed further west, we wondered whether its objective was Pomerania or the so-called "Gdańsk Corridor". This supposition was justified by the Russian command's desire to cut off Poland from supplies of foreign war material. It was also justified by the nature of the 4th Army. Indeed, its riflemen were partly transported by carts, so that when cooperating with cavalry units they strengthened the firepower and combat capacity of the 3rd CavCorps and enabled it to undertake deep raids, truly transforming it into a large, yet mobile, combined-arms unit.

### **Plan of Counter-attack on the Omulew**

A telegraph conversation between Colonel Piskor (Head of the Operations Bureau of the General Staff) and the Front commander, General Haller, of 8 August noted that part of the Soviet 4th Army had been detected moving to the west, and concluded that in general its mission was to turn our left wing. Influenced by this major news, the possibility of modifying the previously established plan of action was seriously considered. We resolved that first of all we needed to attack the Soviet northern group with a flank attack from Modlin and Pułtusk in order to consolidate the left wing of the front along the Omulew River and further along the Różan – Pułtusk – Zegrze line.

One of the first and indispensable conditions for the success of the outlined plan was to keep Pułtusk in our hands. That important strategic junction had played a prominent role in the history of Poland before. In 1806 Marshal Davout fought at Pułtusk, thus initiating Napoleon's 1806/7 campaign. In 1914 Pułtusk was to be the target of the German attack, which according to Schlieffen's plan was to come from East Prussia in harmony with a planned simultaneous Austrian army attack on Lublin. In 1920, keeping Pułtusk in our hands was decisive for the success of the counter-offensive planned for 8 August. Its fall would in turn introduce a fundamental change in the realisation of the plan of 6 August. According to the plan considered on 8 August by the General Staff, our right wing would need to pivot around Pułtusk nearly 180° in order to throw the enemy back towards the east. Its loss would not only utterly foil this intention, but would also annul the mission of the 5th Army, assigned to it on 9 August, which consisted of a defensive covering of the left wing of the Polish front against an encirclement undertaken by the Red Army marching along the German-Polish border.

The second condition for the success of the concept sketched out by Colonel Piskor was the quite early transfer of fresh forces to the Modlin and Pułtusk areas, to strike from there. This did not at first sight seem feasible, in view of how advanced the Russian right wing was and the excessive wear and tear of our 1st Army. That army, moreover, was engaged in constant heavy fighting, and so could not provide the reserves necessary to organise the planned counter-attack. In spite of this, our assessment of the situation was optimistic that by moving the front line to the Narew and Omulew rivers not only would we achieve sufficient protection for the Polish left flank, but also would obtain an excellent starting position for striking from the north in a southerly direction against the enemy units attacking Warsaw. In this way it would be possible to achieve a two-winged encirclement of the Russian troops, or to replace the counter-attack planned from the Wieprz River with one launched from the Omulew River in the opposite direction.

### **Replacement of the One-wing Counter-attack Plan with a Two-wing One**

This plan was abandoned very quickly for understandable reasons. However, at a conference with General Rozwadowski and General Weygand, held on 8 August, the Commander-in-Chief decided to partially change the previous decisions, agreeing to create a stronger manoeuvre group in the area of Modlin and Pułtusk, consisting of the 18th Infantry Division and the Siberian Brigade.

These decisions were included in a 9 August order of the Commander, written by the Chief of the General Staff and communicated directly to the relevant commanders. That order assumed that the decisions of the Commander-in-Chief, made on 6 August were known to the enemy. This was how we explained the movement of the Russian forces towards their right wing, which our plan had precipitated. This regrouping was intended, according to our assessment at the time, to enable the main Russian forces to face the counter-strike we had prepared from the south.

Tukhachevski, having supposedly got wind of the imminent danger threatening him, would abandon his original plan of attack on Warsaw, according to our estimation at the time, and prepare a strong resistance on his endangered wing (the left) with the help of the Bug line, feverishly fortified between Brok and Brześć. He could shield himself indirectly by directing the 12th Army and Budenny's horsemen towards Lublin, i.e., towards the flanks and rear of the Commander-in-Chief's manoeuvre group. During this time, he would launch the bulk of his forces on Warsaw, Zegrze and Modlin together with the Polish-Gdańsk corridor.

This reasoning corresponded to reality insofar as it took into account the existence of a strong mass of troops on the Russian right wing, consistently maintained since the Battle of the Auta River.



It was a typical example of how often in war we see on the enemy's side what we fear most, whereby we attribute positions and intentions which are a logical response to our own positions.

Our reasoning and conclusions of 9 August overthrew what we had assumed about Tukhachevski's intentions when we made the decision made of 6 August: they could in principle even cancel that decision. We were particularly worried about the danger of an attack by Budenny and the Soviet 12th Army in a dangerous direction, such as towards Lublin – Dęblin, which might have induced us to abandon the manoeuvre planned from the banks of the Wieprz River. Fortunately, this was not the case, and the principle of the decision of 6 August remained intact.

On the other hand, the danger becoming more and more apparent in the north, led to the reinforcement of the 5th Army, which was to operate north of Modlin.

Placing the 18th Infantry Division and the Siberian Brigade at my disposal, on top of the units already forming part of the 5th Army, weakened the forces of the Warsaw bridgehead. Thus, it corrected the mistake made when the 1st Army was made overly strong. It also indicated a healthy tendency to take serious account of the superior forces massed on the right wing of the Russian front.

While reinforced, the 5th Army still faced with a very difficult mission. It was to:

- a) prevent the enemy from pressing further on between Modlin and the German border;
- b) protect the Modlin to Mława railway line, and
- c) prevent the Bolsheviks from reaching Pomerania.

This part of the task was clearly defensive in character.

As it was planned, the 5th Army was meant to strike at the enemy's northern flank, and having encircled his right wing, push him from the Narew River southwards. This was to be the main task of General Krajowski's attack group consisting of the 18th Infantry Division and the 8th Cavalry Brigade. That group was to break away from the 5th Army at the right moment, being at the moment of the Soviet Army's engagement on the approaches to Warsaw, in order to strike through Ostrołęka to the rear of the Russian forces.

In reality, hardly any of the plans presented in this way were possible

The planned attack of the 5th Army from the area of Pułtusk was abandoned, as was forming a separate attack group under General Krajowski to operate independently on the left wing of the front. However, the reinforcement of the 5th Army, and above all the idea of counter-attacking from its left side would be maintained. This idea, approved on 9 August by the Commander-in-Chief, was an essential and extremely important modification of the decision of 6 August. In this way, the original plan of a single flank strike from the Wieprz River, which was to develop parallel to the front up to the Prussian border, was transformed into a two-sided flank action. General Weygand had always agitated for that in his notes, and – as we shall see later – it corresponded closely with the military situation north of Modlin.

The order also guided the immediate work of the Southern Front, instructing General Iwaszkiewicz to tie down the enemy's initiative using manoeuvre with mobile operational groups. It also specified the role of the 3rd Army, which we have seen was awkward. That army, before releasing the two divisions that were to join the assault group at Międzyrzec Podlaski and Brześć-on-the-Bug, was given the task of undertaking an apparent counter-offensive against the right wing of the Soviet 12th Army in order to confuse the enemy and secure freedom of action. Finally, the general directions for the attack of the army of manoeuvre from the Wieprz River, as determined on 6 August, were modified. At the same time the Chief of the General Staff was also concerned with the danger posed by Budenny's cavalry, which could at any moment turn back from the direction of Lwów and strike at Lublin – Dęblin. If this happened, a cavalry group of from the southern front was ordered to attack the rear and flanks of the Horse Army in order to slow its progress.

Order No. 10.000 kept in principle, in spite of certain reservations, the prediction that the decisive strike by Russian troops would be from the east on the Warsaw bridgehead, as had the instruction of 6 August. The main direction of that attack was expected to be the Radzymin – Praga<sup>16</sup> axis, which the Northern Front HQ was also fixated on at that time.

According to General Haller's predictions, and his plans built around them, serious and prolonged fighting would develop in front of Praga, the aim of which was to exhaust the enemy. This was to be immediately followed by an active engagement of the 5th Army, expected to take place on 15 August, while the commander's manoeuvre group, which would have completed its concentration by 16 August, was to strike on the morning of 17 August.

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<sup>16</sup> Praga was then a small town directly across the Vistula bridge from Warsaw. The direction towards Praga given here is really then just directly towards the bridge to Warsaw.



## **Situation on the Ground in the Sector of the 5th Army**

From Warsaw I immediately went with Major Rostworowski on a tour of the section of the front subordinate to me. I headed first for Pułtusk, which was defended by General Baranowski and the group formerly under General Roja. On the way I saw that the Modlin – Serock – Pułtusk road was clogged with wagons heading for the Vistula, as well as small units escaping the battlefield without orders. The four wide row of carts and wagons inhibited movement so much that in many cases it was necessary to force our way through. Stopping the evading groups of men, I became convinced that among those fleeing there were brave soldiers who had lost faith in victory and, in despair, had succumbed to the general hypnosis of the retreat.

In Pułtusk itself, I found a catastrophic situation. Around 2,000 soldiers were struggling there against superior Russian forces, trying to consolidate a dislocated front around the town. The numerical superiority of the Russian forces was so enormous there that it was only due to the fierce resistance of our troops that the Soviet 15th Army and some of the 3rd Army, fighting in the area, advanced relatively slowly.

There was no question of stopping the Russian avalanche at the Orzyc River line, even for a few days, giving time for the 18th Infantry Division and the Siberian Brigade to arrive and organise an effective resistance along the river. Using our last fresh forces in such a manner appeared seriously doubtful. In effect it would gradually wear down the 5th Army without any prospect of serious success as compensation.

The likelihood of Pułtusk falling increased the more the units in General Baranowski's group were exhausted. That group had been improvised at almost the last moment, and so it had all the advantages, but also all the disadvantages of improvised troops. The soldiers were very eager but lacked training, the commanders were deeply patriotic but excessively individualistic, and above all there was a lack of combat experience, especially among non-commissioned officers. The group had been poorly supplied when setting out for the battlefield, and after fighting heavily in the retreat from Łomża to Pułtusk, looked in a terrible way. The heavy losses suffered by the regiments of the group (up to 50% of the fighting strength of the units) had massively weakened them. Many were ragged and barefooted, especially in the front line. Hungry and inhumanly exhausted, they seemed to me around Pułtusk to be living corpses, stuck stubbornly to their appointed positions.

Nevertheless, Pułtusk had to be held despite the high price of its defence. Its rapid fall would have incalculable consequences. Keeping that junction, even temporarily, greatly improved the 5th Army's chances of success and allowed our plan for an offensive based on the Narew River, to be possible.

Having obtained a telephone connection from Pułtusk to Colonel Thiel, commander of the 17th Division, I organised cooperation between the 17th ID and General Baranowski's group, focussing their efforts around Pułtusk.

From Pułtusk I headed to Ciechanów, where the Chief of General Staff had instructed the headquarters of the 5th Army to be established. However, near Ciechanów we were received very inhospitably by some Bolshevik patrols, as the Russian 4th Army had occupied the town on 10 August.

My own examination of the local conditions therefore clearly showed that Warsaw had an entirely false picture of the situation, and hence the possible options for the left wing of the Polish front. That wing had already been forced back from the German-Polish border. The swelling tide of the Red Army was moving westwards so fast through the gap created between Pułtusk and East Prussia that the tasks of the 5th Army, in the Commander's latest two orders and similarly from the Front, were already impossible by 10 August, as were the overall objectives set out in them. At a stage when the 5th Army could not yet take action, as it was still in the process of a complete reorganisation, and when Russian cavalry units were already emerging to the west of the Modlin to Mława railway line, there could be no question of victoriously holding the crossings of the Narew and Orzyc rivers and preventing the left wing of the Polish Army from being bypassed to the north, as had been ordered by the Commander-in-Chief. Nor was it possible to effectively maintain the Ciechanów to Pułtusk line, as Front Headquarters had ordered, or even the Modlin to Mława railway line, as directed on 9 August, as that line was already in the possession of the 3rd CavCorps. Even less was an independent diversionary action by General Krajowski's group possible, as it was too weak to attack the much stronger enemy, who enjoyed an unlimited freedom of manoeuvre against us.

## **The importance of the Wkra River and Modlin**

A glance at the terrain of our future operations indicated that the only obstacle in the terrain, which we could operate from, was the Wkra River; to which General Weygand had already drawn my attention on 10 August.

From a theoretical standpoint, it was not much of a barrier. The Wkra in normal conditions would not even be an obstacle for the Soviet troops. In the middle and lower reaches, it flows through a valley that is generally dry and several hundred metres wide, with gentle slopes only a few metres high. It has a sandy bottom, a gentle current, an average depth of less than a metre, a width of up to 60 metres and gentle banks. The Wkra can therefore be forded in most places, and it was not difficult to build bridges over it, if required. It was a trivial obstacle for the cavalry,



constraining only the movements of the artillery. Its eastern bank, covered in its lower reaches with numerous small woods, facilitated a hidden approach by the enemy.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, the Wkra's mental significance was great. In the conditions of that time, with war weariness and battle fatigue clearly visible in the ranks of both fighting sides, the Wkra became in Russian eyes an obstacle to be overcome, and in our eyes an effective screen behind which our concentration could be completed in relative peace.

Its strategic value was augmented by the Modlin fortress, located near the confluence of the Wkra River with the Bug-Narew, and then of that with the Vistula. Modlin dominates the entire area, being erected on the high right bank of the Bug-Narew, and guards the meeting of the Bug and Vistula valleys. The forks in the Bug-Narew and Vistula rivers are closed off here by a number of forts, scattered across the area in two lines, the first of which runs through Pomiechówo and Wymysły to Zakroczym, and the second surrounds the fortress in a wider radius, running from fort No. 16 by Toruń Dworskie, Goławice Drugie, Błędówka and by a line of forts west of Pieczołoga and Zakroczym.

On the western bank of the Vistula a strong defensive line was built, consisting of six minor forts protruding out from the main one. The left bank of the Bug-Narew was reinforced with a group of forts at Janówek and fort No. 17.

Despite the partial destruction of the fortress, the outer forts represented a serious impediment in 1920 when supported with the field fortifications and entanglements added during the Great World War. They protected the core of the fortress sufficiently well. The town of Nowy Dwór, attached to the latter, later became the Headquarters of the 5th Army.

Numerous ponds and marshes at the confluence of the Wkra River and the Bug-Narew increased the strategic value of the latter river, which is up to 300 m wide near Modlin. The individual forts around Modlin, judiciously placed in the terrain, enhanced its natural defensive qualities. As a result, Modlin was a first-rate defensive centre in those times which, if properly used, could have played a major role in the battle on the Vistula River.

In Modlin itself, however, I found a generally unfavourable situation. The fortress was not properly prepared for defence, and its garrison was of problematic value. The security battalions, which manned the fortress proper, consisted of volunteers, with no individual instruction and so unable to shoot a rifle and unfamiliar with machine-guns, and knowing still less about how to conduct themselves in combat. For the most part, the artillery was an interesting repository, with no shortage of museum pieces, but which were of no value in combat. Extremely diverse, without horses, without the necessary supplies of ammunition, without aiming devices, this artillery had only a moral significance for those unaware of its true state of affairs. This diminished, but did not cancel the significance of Modlin, which could and should have formed a natural basis for the actions being prepared in the 5th Army's sector.

### **Conclusions.**

From my observations it became apparent to us in the Army command that it was necessary to:

- a) thoroughly revise our analysis of the enemy's strength and grouping and to draw new conclusions, as the decisions taken so far were based on an analysis that did not correspond to reality;
- b) in the face of Russian superior numbers on the northern flank, end our fragmentation of the 5th Army, that is abandon our plan to form a group under General Krajowski;
- c) use the Modlin stronghold as the material and moral base for the future actions of the army, that is as its supply base and operational base.

These were the conclusions I arrived at on the night of 10/11 August in Warsaw, and which were immediately sent by me for approval.

On 11 August I took command of the army, with Headquarters in Modlin, and had at my disposal:

- a) General Baranowski's group, of the 17th Infantry Division and the 8th Cavalry Brigade, engaged on the line Pułtusk – Przewodowo – Gąsocin – Łopacín;
- b) The 18th Infantry Division, whose transport elements were arriving at Modlin;
- c) The Siberian brigade, which had marched on foot from Warsaw to Zegrze, from where it was originally intended to be used to strike in the direction of Pułtusk, but which I also sent to Modlin;
- d) The 18th Infantry Brigade and Lt-Colonel Koc's group,<sup>18</sup> which were retiring together with the left wing of the neighbouring 1st Army;

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<sup>17</sup> I have visited the Wkra. Sikorski is not exaggerating for effect here: it is indeed a trivial barrier.

<sup>18</sup> This was to become the Volunteer Division fairly soon afterwards.





e) The 17th Infantry Brigade, which had been verbally placed at my disposal, who at that time were in Łuków.

### **Material Condition of the 5th Army Troops**

The condition of the troops, as I found out personally or from staff officers sent on mission, was generally mediocre.

General Roja's group, which on 1 August still had 65 officers and 4,390 bayonets, now had only half that. As a result of the extremely heavy tasks it had performed during August on the northern wing of the front, operationally the group existed only on paper. Without transports or field kitchens, which had fled behind the Vistula, and without sufficient ammunition (some had to be rapidly transported to Pułtusk), it was deprived not only of the means of fighting but also of the means of life. Its soldiers, including first-rate volunteers, had not eaten warm food for several days. They had not slept for several nights. Constantly in combat and danger, some collapsed from utter exhaustion, despite the enthusiasm that fired them.

Lt. Colonel Koc's group, formed from volunteers, was in an identical situation. After the heavy fighting that had taken place near Łapy and Ostrów Łomżyński, this group had less than 1,000 bayonets<sup>19</sup> at its disposal on 12 August, when it placed at my disposal in Kazuń Polski. The bloody feet and worn-out shoes of the soldiers bore clear witness to the forced marches the group had undertaken. It remained functional only because of the enthusiasm of its officers and men, including the MP Thugutt, Fathers Starkiewicz, Chaciński and Śin Żurowski, and the editors Straszewicz, Hołówka and Gieżyński. Without divisional equipment and facilities, it was incapable of immediate action.

The brave 18th Infantry Brigade, with Colonel Łuczyński at its head, was not in any better condition when it returned from near Grodno – where it suffered up to 35% losses. At that time, it had only 1,000 bayonets<sup>20</sup> fit for combat. Wasted in bloody counter-attacks despite the brilliant local success at Mężenin, my old friends from the Polesie battles received the news of my return with enthusiasm on their way to Modlin, rejoicing that “we will have good food and a real war again.”

Having endured a year's worth of both good and bad fortune at the front with the 9th Infantry Division, in which never failed in combat and had been hardened up by the arduous battles of the Polesie group, I wanted to have it back together again as soon as possible.<sup>21</sup> However, this could not be achieved quickly. The 17th Infantry Brigade, up to 2,200 bayonets strong, had only just disembarked in Łuków. And the overloaded railway lines, particularly at the Dęblin and Warsaw junctions, meant that we had to reckon with a delay of several days before its arrival in Modlin.

The Siberian brigade, freshly formed in Pomerania and led by Colonel Rumsza, with a combat strength<sup>22</sup> of about 2,850 bayonets and 120 sabres, included excellent officers and non-commissioned officers of the former 5th Division in Siberia. It was animated by the indomitable spirit of the Polish Pomeranian people, and hardened by their own struggles. As the brigade was also abundantly supplied in technical and material respects, it seemed to me, when I reviewed it during its march to Modlin, to be a strong and completely reliable tactical unit. However as I later discovered, it retained some negative consequences of an excessively hasty creation. Its soldiers and commanding officers were not yet in tune. Moreover the men were not familiar with the mismatched technical and combat equipment it had been issued on the march from Zegrze to Modlin. (It had been directed by an 11 August order of Commander-in-Chief to Pułtusk to reinforce General Baranowski's Group, but had been halted in Zegrze.)

The 17th Infantry Division, newly under the command of General Osiński, had suffered such heavy losses during the retreat that at the moment of entering Modlin it had only 560 bayonets combat ready. It therefore had the strength a battalion would normally have in a war footing.

The core of the 5th Army was the 18th Infantry Division. Experienced in the hard but glorious battles with Budenny's Horse Army on the South-eastern Front, on 11 August the division numbered 102 officers, 3,759 bayonets and 222 sabres. This was raised the next day to 125 officers and 5,000 bayonets after the enlistment of fresh, but obviously under-trained, replacements. The division's excellent officers and NCOs, headed by General Krajowski and with Major Arciszewski as the chief of staff, had brought the newly conscripts under their iron discipline, and with its excellent morale it was quickly transformed into a first-rate fighting unit that could be counted on.

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<sup>19</sup> The Polish version has 1,200.

<sup>20</sup> Again, the Polish version has 1,200.

<sup>21</sup> The 9th ID was composed of the 17th and 18th Infantry Brigades.

<sup>22</sup> The Poles seem to have counted “combat strength” as literally the number of men with a rifle or lance. The number of combat effectives is therefore higher than the figures cited here, once machine-gunners, artillery crews, technical elements, sappers etc are added in.



The last major unit was General Karnicki's cavalry group, made up of the 2nd, 8th<sup>23</sup> and 115th Ulan Regiments, the first *divisions* of the 18th and 108th Ulan Regiments, an armoured car *divizion* and a horse artillery *divizion*. It had a combat strength of only 750 sabres on 10 August.

As a result of the diversity of armaments in the various divisions, we had all possible types of rifles within the army at that time: French, Russian, German, Austrian, Italian and English versions. Such a mix of weapons would be hard enough to manage in normal circumstances, let alone in a quartermaster's office that was not yet organised and in the absence of any supply equipment. With disorganised and disoriented divisional and group headquarters, with the Front Command almost powerless in this matter, and with the uncoordinated and separate evacuations of Warsaw by the departments of the Ministry of Military Affairs, all sorts of official archives were left in place even as indispensable munitions were evacuated with an untimely haste.

The initial designation of Toruń as the material base for supplying the 5th Army, poorly located and badly connected with Modlin, also worsened the situation.

The situation, whose picture is poorly sketched today, seemed to us in those tragic days as desperate and largely hopeless. The discrepancy that existed between the absolute need for the 5th Army to take action as quickly as possible and its organisational state, which made any action impossible, was the tragic nature of the situation that we were all in at the time. Our anguish deepened as worrying news flooded in from all sides of the front: the enemy's immense numerical superiority, his uninterrupted moves westward, or his change of direction towards Płońsk from Ciechanów. We felt like a noose was consistently and inexorably tightening, which would strangle the 5th Army before it even grew sufficient strength to be capable of a serious duel with the enemy.

In these conditions, a staff was quickly improvised for the Army, based around the modest staff of the Polesie group. This *tour de force* could only be achieved by efficient and confident officers. The army's Chief of Staff was Lt-Colonel Wolikowski, the former Chief of Staff of the Polesie group, who was calm in battle and exact in his actions. Major Rostworowski retained his post as commander of the operational division, as a seasoned General Staff officer and excellent soldier. The quartermaster's office was taken over by Lt-Colonel Dr. Jakubski, who was hard-working and full of enthusiasm.

The definitive organisation of the army staff, the establishment of the internal communication lines, the creation of a supply base and sorting out the sanitary service of the army – very urgently needed as the existing front hospitals and ambulances were already overcrowded – took almost 24 hours. In such critical circumstances, one has to be harsh and ruthless, to break through any obstacles in order to satisfy the needs for life and combat.

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<sup>23</sup> The 8th Ulan Regiment was never part of this unit. The 203rd Ulan Regiment was though.



## CHAPTER V

### Operational Plan of the 5th Army

#### Initial Situation of the 5th Army

The 5th Army's plans were not drawn up immediately but, as is usual in war, were defined and refined gradually. It evolved more thoroughly as we came to see more clearly the possibilities for action in the 5th Army's sector, all the more so as when the army was formed, we had only a very summary and uncertain notion of the enemy's situation. Regardless, from the very first studies of the intended mission of the 5th Army, it was clear to most of us that the only solution to our difficulties lay in an energetic counter-offensive. Acting rationally, we could expect from the Polish soldier an almost unlimited enthusiasm and an extraordinary sacrifice, but one could not demand from him things that were impossible. And it would be impossible to organise an effective and long-lasting defence on the 5th Army sector after such a long and unplanned retreat, which had caused nervous tension in the young soldiers taking part in it, and induced a victorious mood in the other side. It was impossible to think of halting the advance of the Russian army by defending when it had a three-fold advantage on that sector of the front. The victorious enemy wave, as proved by the events that took place near Radzymin on 14 and 15 August, would have broken through any, even the best-developed, defensive position of the 5th Army. The more so, since we would not have thwarted the enemy's movements in the north, encircling our left wing, by passively defending our positions.

So while putting together the first elements of a plan in the morning of 11 August, we based them on an offensive conception of the 5th Army's operations. We aimed at clarifying our knowledge of the positions of the enemy, ending the retreat of our own troops, strengthening them both morally and materially, and halting the retreat of General Baranowski's group and the 17th Infantry Division on a line that would provide us with the most favourable starting position for the projected counter-attack.

This is the reason for the imperative orders made to the retreating troops at that time. This is also the reason for the first offensive movement of our cavalry towards Ciechanów, ordered on 11 August.

As far as the enemy's situation was concerned, we were already convinced at that time that the Russian troops, in a large but as yet undetermined number, were making a manoeuvre westwards about which we knew nothing at all. This fact was confirmed by intelligence from the Northern Front, sent us around 21:00, that the Soviet 53rd and 18th Divisions were moving in the direction of Ciechanów, behind the front of their 15th Army. This observation was confirmed by a reconnaissance of 5th Army troops, which clearly indicated the movement of Red troops, taking place along the Różan – Maków – Ciechanów – Raciąż – Sierpc axis, the latter having observed Bolshevik cavalry already by the 11 August.

We saw in that movement an imitation of Field Marshal Paskevich's not-so-distant-ago march on Warsaw. Aiming to complete the campaign of 1831 as quickly as possible, after his attempts to capture the Polish capital from the east were unsuccessful, Paskevich set off on 4 July from Pułtusk going through Ciechanów, Raciąż and Sierpc towards Płock, in order to cross the Vistula there and then take Warsaw by storm from the west. Influenced by the possible historical precedent, we attached an analogous meaning to our observations of Tukhachevski's movements. We thought that he was parading the entire Russian army before our eyes, as had been done in 1831 in front of the inactive Skrzynecki, gathering north of the Bug River, securing his left flank with the help of the troops allocated to the line of Pułtusk to Ciechanów. Our knowledge of large numbers of the enemy in the vicinity of Pułtusk, combined with their relative slowness of movement in view of the Russian's relative freedom of movement, confirmed this hypothesis.

Such a perfect opportunity – as it seemed to us – could be exploited by returning to Colonel Piskor's concept of 8 August and striking according to General Prądzyński's plan, unrealised in 1831, from the south on the left flank of the Red Divisions advancing on Płock. Surprising them on the move, not only would we protect the endangered wing of the Northern Front, but we could also inflict a defeat on the bulk of the enemy.

#### The Loss of Pułtusk and its Consequences

As I noted above, holding Pułtusk would have made it much easier for us to carry our intended plan. However, during the morning of 11 August the situation on the left wing of our front worsened considerably. Despite the energetic efforts of the Front Command, and despite well-thought-out measures, the 1st Army started to give ground. In particular, General Żeligowski's group was driven out by a larger enemy group and were forced back to the Bug and a line of Wyszaków, Barcice and Pniewo. The retreat exposed the right wing of General Baranowski's group along with the sector of the 17th Infantry Division which made maintaining Pułtusk impossible.

In truth we tried to defend just Pułtusk itself, but it was unsuccessful. Both the 17th Infantry Division and General Baranowski's group received the information of the withdrawal of the 1st Army and were ordered to carry out the operational directives issued the day before. That task, however, was beyond their strength and was too difficult. Pułtusk, threatened by envelopment from nearly every side, fell at about 14:00. The 17th Infantry Division, forced



back to Budy – Gładczyn – Psary, had to force a crossing of the Narew River during the retreat, and suffered heavy losses in doing so.

The regrouping of troops of the 5th Army, intended for that area, had to be moved southwards.

The realisation of our basic idea was given in the first operational order of the 5th Army, in which its mission was formulated – of necessity in general terms – in the following manner:

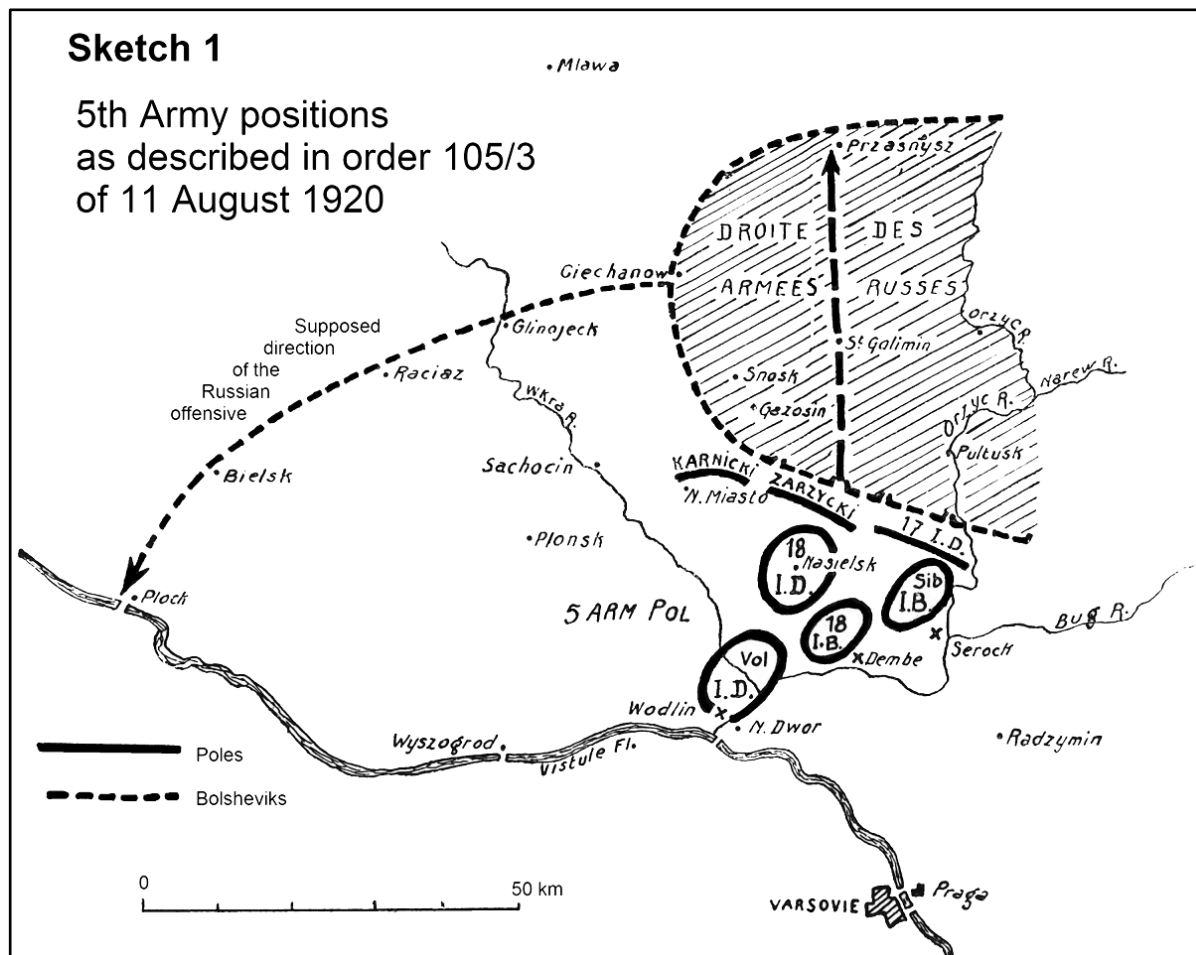
The mission of the 5th Army is to undertake in the shortest possible time a vigorous counter-offensive northward in order to break up the enemy forces concentrated in that area and to regain a section of the front along the Narew River to Pułtusk, and further along the Orzyc River to the German border.

In order to launch a decisive blow aimed at breaking up the enemy forces massed in the north, and then to capture the line of the stated rivers, it was necessary to assemble the required forces for the attack. This was ensured by the second paragraph of the order in question, which contains the only possible method in the situation of the time, and specifies the immediate intentions of the army commander as follows:

... In order to achieve this goal and to smash the enemy and inflict the greatest possible losses on him, the Army Headquarters must above all have the possibility to properly concentrate fresh troops, which can be done under the cover of the troops currently in the line. From the latter I absolutely demand that they hold their positions until a counter-offensive can be launched. ...

In accordance with that intention the order specified the tasks of the units remaining in the first line, giving them the role of covering troops and dividing them into three groups, of which the 17th Infantry Division was to prevent the enemy coming from Pułtusk southwards along the Narew River, General Baranowski's group was to protect Nasielsk from the north and north-east, and General Karnicki's 8th Cavalry Brigade was to bar the passage from Ciechanów to Modlin with the participation of armoured trains. General Karnicki received an order to avoid a frontal battle while persistently harassing the enemy on his wings and impeding his possible advance.

The front line on 11 August passed through Pokrzywnica – Winnica – Świercze – Klukowo – Nowy Miasto, which was ordered to be stubbornly defended “at any cost and under the personal responsibility of group commanders”. The other forces of the 5th Army: the 18th Infantry Division and the Siberian Brigade in the first wave, and the 16th Infantry Brigade and the Volunteer Division in the second wave, were to regroup in the Nasielsk – Modlin area to prepare an attack. (See Sketch 1)



## Divergence in the Assessment of the Enemy Situation

The order could not be carried out in full. During the evening of 11 August, a strong attack by the Bolsheviks took place along the whole line between Pułtusk and Ciechanów, directed south and south-west. It was particularly directed at General Baranowski's group, command of which was taken over on that day by Colonel Zarzycki, the group's former Chief of Staff. The 101st Infantry Regiment, led by Lt-Colonel Hellman, distinguished itself by repelling several attacks by the Russian troops and taking several machine guns from them. Under the influence of the enemy pressure, our troops withdrew late in the evening to a line running through Holendry – Pokrzywnica – Winnica – Gąsiorowo, establishing communications on the right wing with the 7th Reserve Brigade, which was fortifying itself on the bridgehead near Serock, but with its left wing hanging in the air.

The attack of the 8th Cavalry Brigade on Ciechanów, which took the enemy by surprise, led to the partial capture of the town and contributed to a further clarification of the enemy's situation.

In the region of Ciechanów, the Russian columns advanced in the evening along the Ciechanów to Modlin railway line, and further to the east and west of that line, reaching Gąsocin station and the towns of Koźniewo Wielkie and Szczawin. Strong Bolshevik units also appeared on the Ciechanów to Płońsk road. These facts indicated that not all of the Russian forces grouped on the right wing of Tukhachevski's front were moving westward, as we had previously assumed, but that after crossing the Orzyc River they had split into two separate manoeuvre groups. One of these groups, namely the Soviet 4th Army, was making a deep bypass of the Polish left flank, heading for Płock. Meanwhile the other group was veering to the south, with the secondary task of covering the left flank of the western manoeuvre group, but it seemed with the main task of a strike from the north. This view was clarified by the situation report of the Chief of Staff of the 5th Army, communicated to Front Headquarters on 11 August at midnight.

Situation report given by Telegram on 11 August 1920, at 24:00:

The enemy is conducting a very strong offensive on the front of the 5th Army, with the object of capturing Warsaw. His attack is directed from the north to south through Pułtusk and Ciechanów *while also making a long bypass in the direction of Płock*. The Soviet 16th Division has attacked Pułtusk. The Soviet 4th division attacked Przewosowo. An enemy column passed Garnowo to Koźniewo Wielkie, which it occupied; Strzegocin was also occupied by the enemy. The Soviet 53rd Rifle Division is concentrated in Ciechanów, from where it strongly attacked Gąsocin and advanced to Wyżynka. On the Ciechanów to Płońsk road the enemy took Ojrzeń with two squadrons of cavalry and one infantry battalion. An enemy column of 300 horsemen, 5 guns and 400 rifles marched through Strzegowo on the Mława to Raciąż road. These forces were occupied Biezuń in the evening hours of 11 August according to the unconfirmed reports.

1. A post of the 6th Infantry Regiment in Płock reports that the enemy cavalry, to the strength of two squadrons and two guns, has taken Sierpc. Prisoners, taken on the morning of 11 August by the attack of the 203rd Ulan regiment on Ciechanów, come from the Soviet 469th Rifle Regiment, commanded by Kulikowski. The regiments of the 53rd Division have 200 bayonets and 6 MGs. The mood among the Bolshevik soldiers is very low, and they are ready to surrender. Each officer is watched by a commissar. Each company and battalion has a political commissar, the so-called "politruk", who has the right to arrest officers on the basis of soldiers' complaints. Requisitioning is carried out by separate detachments, managed by the "politruk". Patrols rob the population. On 9 August, near Stary Gołymin [Gołymin-Ośrodek], the Bolsheviks murdered the owner of Klejtrew farmstead, chopped off his wife's hands and pillaged the whole house.

2. The 17th Infantry Division withdrew at 15:00 through Pułtusk to the west bank of the Narew River, damaging the bridge. It has received orders to hold the occupied line of Holendry – Pokrzywnica and to extend it towards Domosław.

General Baranowski's group was in fierce fighting all day. The 101st Infantry Regiment captured 6 machine guns during three morning attacks, while the fourth attack, led in four lines, forced it to withdraw with the loss of one battalion commander, five more officers and 250 soldiers.

As the reserves had been used up, the group was forced to withdraw at 14:00 in complete order to Pokrzywnica near the road to Nasielsk. It was ordered to garrison the line Winnica – Czerbaki – Chmielewo.

The 8th Cavalry Brigade, in a morning attack on Ciechanów, captured four machine guns and 68 prisoners, but under the pressure of strong enemy attacks at 19:00 withdrew from Gąsocin in the



direction of Nowe Miasto. It has been ordered to cover Nowe Miasto and maintain a squadron in Płońsk as long as possible.

Two squadrons of the 2nd Ulan Regiment withdrew under enemy attack from Sierpc towards the west. No communication with the Mława group has been established so far.

3. There is extreme fatigue in the 17th Division and the Baranowski Group; there is a lack of material due to the disorganisation in our supply services.

4. Temperature: cold. I ask that if it is as possible to speed up the transportation of the six battalions of the 18th Division and the 17th Infantry Brigade.

Command of the 5th Army: No. 106/3.

Lt-Colonel Wolikowski, Chief of Staff.

In the capital, overtaken by the danger threatening it from the east, no attention was paid to the content of the quoted report. The news of the march of the Soviet 4th Army on Płock, given there for the first time, was disregarded. On the other hand, our assumptions about the possibility of an enemy attack from the north were eagerly accepted by the Front Command, as they confirmed their more or less solid predictions about the cooperation of the northern group of Russian armies in capturing Warsaw on the Modlin – Zegrze line.

Among other things, General Weygand had also predicted as early as on 11 August, that is before he had identified the movements of the Red Army on the lines from Mława and Ciechanów, and leading through Raciąż and Bieżeń to Płock, a strike in that direction. At the same time General Weygand designed a plan of action so flexible that it could be pursued even if further developments changed many of its premises.

His note from that time reads as follows:

“On the eve of the decisive battle I consider it advisable to specify the matters I wish to draw your attention to this morning, also those of the Chief of State, on his arrival.

The success of the plan depends on maintaining the defensive line of Warsaw from Modlin to Góra Kalwaria.

In order for the 5th Army to stop and then thwart the enemy's encircling movement, it is necessary that the Warsaw [bridgehead's] northern sector from Modlin to Serock hold firmly.

In order to gain time for the 4th Army to concentrate and for its activities to develop, it is necessary that Warsaw's eastern sector from Serock to Góra Kalwaria be unwavering.

On the basis of what I know of the orders made or projected, I have to state that:

1. the northern sector from Modlin to Serock will be defended by only one brigade and a few battalions, whose command is poorly organised. That section may be exposed to an attack of the entire enemy 15th Army and part of the 4th Army.

2. The 5th Army, the last force that can oppose the enemy's encircling movement, should be used only after gathering their forces and in the right direction. The need to assemble forces and to know the direction of the enemy's 4th Army rule out any premature attack by the 5th Army. It might happen that this army, after obtaining a partial and temporary success, would be thrown back to the Warsaw bridgehead, leaving the enemy the possibility of executing its flanking movement.

Therefore, I think that while holding the Modlin – Serock section should be assured, the 5th Army should disengage and gather under the protection of the Wkra River northeast of Modlin, basing its right wing on that point of resistance, stopping the enemy's encircling movement, should it come to light, and prepare to launch a strong offensive to the north-east when the opportune moment comes.

This morning before noon I pointed out to you the divergence of opinion as to the mission of the 5th Army which seems to exist between your conception and that of the Northern Front Command, and I do not know whether you have given written orders in this respect. But I can confirm to you this evening after meeting the French General assigned to General Haller that this discrepancy exists and that it is a concern for the success of Polish operations.

In other matters, the delay in the transporting of the 18th Infantry Division, the transporting of the 17th Brigade, the retreat of the 17th Infantry Division, and the instructions given to the Siberian Brigade, in my opinion, require constant supervision and activity to ensure the possibility of assembling the forces of the 5th Army in the desired time.





Finally, I take the liberty of drawing your attention to the numerous fords that seem to exist downstream from Modlin, which could produce a surprise that must be avoided.

### **Orders of the Commander-in-Chief**

These views seemingly corresponded with General Rozwadowski's order of 12 August, which reads as follows:

The immediate task of the 5th Army, gathering in Modlin, must be to halt the enemy's advance through Pułtusk and Stary Gołymin so that the 17th Infantry Division and Lt-Colonel Kopa's<sup>24</sup> units can safely withdraw to Nasielsk.

The 5th Army, supporting itself on Modlin and grouping itself along the road Zakroczym – Płońsk – Raciąż, will continue to defend the crossing of the Wkra River as far as Glinojęck (inclusive) and will direct its cavalry group towards Szreńsk, thus preventing the enemy cavalry from reaching Sierpc. Then the supply lines of the 5th Army can be from Torun via Sierpc and by the Vistula River to Płock and Wyszogród.

As the units of the 5th Army arrive, its formation along the Zakroczym – Płońsk – Raciąż road should be shifted accordingly.

It would be advisable, as soon as the unloading of the 18th Infantry Division is complete, to move it at once to the vicinity of Raciąż, and the Siberian brigade to the vicinity of Płońsk, leaving the 17th Infantry Division, Lt-Colonel Kopa's group, and the 9th Infantry Division closer to Modlin in order to facilitate faster reinforcements for these units.

Masking this grouping of the 5th Army should be done by all means, while manning the Wkra line, so that the enemy will not have the impression that large forces are gathered there.

The light armoured cars of Lt-Colonel Kopa's group, reinforced with further units from Warsaw, should be used to support our cavalry and to contribute to closing the gap between 18th Division in Raciąż and the border.

Carts should be organised for the rapid redeployment of all the units, especially the 18th Division and the Siberian Brigade.

As can be seen from the quoted documents, General Weygand anticipated an attack by the Soviet 15th Army and some of the 4th Army on the Modlin to Serock section of the front, taking into account the fact that the Soviet 3rd Army was crossing the Bug, probably near Wyszaków, and would probably join up with the 16th Army in a frontal assault on Warsaw from the east. Parts of the 4th Army, and above all the 3rd Cavalry Corps, could at the same time bypass our left flank above Ciechanów. According to General Weygand, in order to parry this danger and ensure the possibility of preparing a blow from the south, it was necessary, firstly, to hold firm the northern section of the Warsaw front between Modlin and Serock, and then to effectively defend the eastern bridgehead from Góra Kalwaria to the Bug. It was then that the conditions necessary to organise a sufficiently strong army in the north and to concentrate the manoeuvre group on the lower Wieprz River could be created. General Weygand, stating that the 5th Army is the "last force" after the hitherto numerous and unsuccessful attempts to organise a group on the Polish left wing that could stop Tukhachevski's advance, strongly warns against committing it too early to battle, pointing out the consequences of any mistake made that way.

The 5th Army should only be used after gathering its forces and after a proper reconnaissance of the movements of the Soviet 4th Army, so uncertain on 11 August. Otherwise it, even if temporarily successful, could easily be thrown back onto the Warsaw bridgehead.

As General Weygand understood the situation, it seemed to him that the 5th Army should be relieved of the responsibility for the Serock to Modlin section, which hindered its freedom of movement. It should "gather under the protection of the Wkra River northeast of Modlin" and its right wing should be based on that strong point, "stopping the enemy's encircling movement, should it come to light, and prepare to launch a strong offensive to the north-east when the opportune moment comes."

Despite attaching too much importance to the Serock to Modlin section, General Weygand's logical and correct plan of action was altered by the directives of the Commander-in-Chief in the 5th Army sector. They muddled the concept of an offensive use of the 5th Army, which aimed at thwarting the enemy's superior forces threatening the entire Polish front from the north. Instead, they included a vaguely formulated task to "halt the enemy's advance through

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<sup>24</sup> Lt-Colonel Kopa's Group had been at the far northern end of the Polish line on the Neman. It was heavily reduced during its retreat. In July it included the 101st Reserve Infantry Regiment, the 5th Battalion of the 157th Infantry Regiment, and the 2nd Battalion of the 109th Infantry Regiment. Kopa served in the Volunteer Division, which included much of his former group.



Pułtusk and Stary Gołymin” and a task of allowing units, fighting near Pułtusk, to withdraw calmly to Nasielsk. Simultaneously they asked for a defence of the crossings of the Wkra River, up to and including Głinojeck, and in covering the supply connections with Toruń, which was to take place by preventing the enemy cavalry from reaching Sierpc. Toruń was to continue to be the material base of the 5th Army. These orders counted only on an encirclement by the 3rd Cavalry Corps, whose further advance would be cut by a cavalry group of the 5th Army, supported by infantry units and light armoured vehicles, closing the space between Raciąż, where the 18th Infantry Division was to be directed, and the Polish-German border. Since at the same time the Siberian brigade was to be directed to Płońsk, and the 17th Infantry Division, Lt-Colonel Kopa's group and the 9th Infantry Division were to be directed around Modlin, the 5th Army would be thus spread out over too wide an area, from Modlin through Płońsk, Raciąż, Szreńsk, to the German border, which would render it incapable of serious action should the orders above have been carried out.

### Orders of the Northern Front Commander

Northern Front Command's assessment of the enemy movements was somewhat different. Intercepted Russian dispatches had confirmed that in the 5th Army's sector there were three rifle divisions of the Soviet 15th Army and two rifle divisions of the 4th Army, as well as the 3rd Cavalry Corps. General Haller assumed as a result that the enemy would strike from the north in the area of Zegrze – Modlin – Wyszogród with all their forces.

The following report was sent to 5th Army at 20:45 on 11 August by the Northern Front:

From intercepted Bolshevik radio messages it appears that beyond the front of the 4th, 6th and 16th Rifle Divisions, the 53rd and 18th Rifle Divisions have moved in the direction of Ciechanów – Sońsk. The HQ of the 53rd RD moved to Wróblewska, 10 km east of Ciechanów. This group of five rifle divisions, together with 3rd Cavalry Corps, is expected to attack the Zegrze – Modlin – Wyszogród region. The command of the 5th Army will ensure through a rapid redeployment of the units at its disposal - 1) securing the left wing of Colonel Zarzycki's group, and 2) establish direct communication by this group with the 8th Cavalry Brigade. A column with the strength of a brigade of rifles on wagons escorted by cavalry was moving towards Łochów from the east about 19:00. today. Its intended destination is unknown.

Colonel Zagórski, Chief of Staff

Thus, the front commander, not accepting the idea that the Soviet 4th army was operating to the north, limited the movement of the right wing of the front commanded by Tukhachevski to a cooperation with the 16th and the 3rd armies from the north, to bypass Modlin and strike at Wyszogród in order to capture the Vistula crossing there and probably move towards Warsaw, albeit not clearly formulated. The last part of the hypothesis was quickly abandoned in the front command. In the order issued on the following day there was no mention of it. In the meantime, General J. Haller intended to respond to the danger threatening us from the north, as specified in the following order:

I. Five enemy divisions are heading for a decisive battle on the Zegrze – Modlin line.

II. According to the GHQ order 8756/III, it is the mission of the 5th Army, concentrating in the Modlin area, to halt the enemy's advance through Pułtusk and Stary Gołymin, so that the 17th Infantry Division and Colonel Zarzycki's units can safely withdraw to Nasielsk.

III. To this end, and in execution of the order 8756/III, I order:

1) The 17th Infantry Division and Colonel Zarzycki's group will hold the line currently occupied until the evening of today, then withdraw to the line Dębe (exclusive) – Nasielsk (inclusive).

Under the cover of the 17th Infantry Division and Colonel Zarzycki's group, the 5th Army Command will advance the Siberian Brigade and units from General Żeligowski's group to the Nasielsk – Konary<sup>25</sup> area.

2) The 8th Cavalry Brigade will occupy Sochocin today, defending the crossing from the Ciechanów side, and will reconnoitre Ciechanów, Głinojeck and Raciąż.

3) The 18th Infantry Division will assemble by the morning of 14 August in the Borkowo – Joniec area. A strong infantry detachment on carts with a platoon of artillery should be sent as quickly as possible through Płońsk to Sochocin to reinforce the 8th Cavalry Brigade.

4) On receiving this order, the Modlin sector (Colonel Malewicz) is subject to the command of the 5th Army, to whom it will report the defensive measures taken.

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<sup>25</sup> By present day Malczyn.



- 5) The 1st Army will hold the bridgehead of Serock until the evening of today, then withdraw the garrison of the bridgehead in close communication with the 17th Infantry Division and Colonel Zarzycki's group to Zegrze – Dębe (inclusive).
- 6) The rear-guards of the 5th Army, and the Serock sector, remain the current line and are retreating under enemy pressure.
- 7) The front reserve, the 10th Infantry Division will assemble during the day in the area of Skrzyszow – Kałuszyn and will establish direct telephone communication with Front HQ.
- 8) The task of the remaining units of the front remains unchanged, but I would like to draw your attention to an efficient manning of the main defensive line.
- 9) The troops of the 5th Army should be supplied with a sufficient number of horse-drawn carts in order to be able to deploy rapidly.
- 10) The above-mentioned movements of the 5th Army must be carried out as quickly as possible with all the energy, and as far as possible with the use of transport.
- 11) The regrouping and taking of positions must be reported in detail to the Front Command as soon as possible.

### **Evaluation of the Front Commander's Orders**

The operational orders of the front commander, just quoted, grouped all the available units of the 5th Army on a line running through Dębe – Nasielsk – Borkowo – Joniec, at the same time advancing the 8th Cavalry Brigade to Sochocin. By changing the directives of the Supreme Command in this way, the intention was to extend the Warsaw bridgehead by means of the semi-circle around Modlin.

The detailed placement of the whole army and the overly general definition of its mission indicated that the idea of an offensive had been abandoned and emphasised the defensive character of the orders.

Moreover, they reversed the mission of the individual units of the 5th Army. While the units fighting the Soviet 15th Army, belonging to Colonel Zarzycki's group and the 17th Infantry Division, had been given a covering task by the army commander, the Commander-in-Chief and Front Command, on the contrary, ordered the fresh divisions of the army forward, to allow the units engaged in the battle to quietly withdraw to the Nasielsk area. This would expose the fresh forces of the 5th Army to premature and pointless wear.

By executing the given orders, with the relatively poorly known position of the enemy, I would lose all ability to use my units tactically, placing them all into the line and giving up any effective influence on the course of the battle in the army's sector.

These orders of the Front Command were caused primarily by concern for the security of the capital.

Fearing above all else the fall of Warsaw, the high command directed all its attention on any possible attack from a direction that would directly strike the capital. There is no doubt that an attack from the north by five divisions on Warsaw, together with an attack from the east, would have been dangerous for us in the conditions of the time, despite the natural obstacles in their way. Therefore, for fear of it, we were inclined to take the above-mentioned assumptions for granted, and react in a defensive manner, organising the Northern Front in an even spread.

Being at the place of the 5th Army's future operations, I was closer the reality to the war, with extremely rapid changes in the enemy's situation, and emphasising in a manner different from those adopted as the basis for operations in Warsaw the possibilities on our side, which explained the divergence in the orders under consideration.

The front commander's instructions narrowed down the 5th Army's area of deployment, previously ordered by the Commander-in-Chief, limiting it to Joniec – Borkowo – Nasielsk – Dębe, and at the same time they pushed the 8th Cavalry Brigade, reinforced by a "strong infantry detachment in carts and a platoon of artillery" to Sochocin, which was more realistic in relation to the demands made on our cavalry by the Commander-in-Chief. Finally, they moved the defence of the Dębe – Zegrze section to the 1st Army. More importantly, they made the Modlin stronghold subordinate to the commander of the 5th Army, which was one of the most crucial decisions that would positively influence the future operations of that army.

### **A Different Assessment of the Situation at the 5th Army Command**

During 12 August, we at the Army Headquarters collated all intelligence data provided to us by the Front Headquarters or from our own means, and examined them critically to check whether the hypothesis of a strike from the north on the Modlin – Zegrze line corresponded to the actual state of affairs. That hypothesis had its arguments for and against.



First of all, it was justified for first-rate strategic reasons. This is because the direction of attack by the Soviet armies operating in the north was in concord with the first phase of such an attack, and would support in the second phase the Russian offensive developing along the Radzymin – Praga axis. Thus, in the event of success, it ensured the coordination of efforts in such an important operation as the capture of Warsaw.

On the other hand, however, there were serious reservations about this hypothesis, which I have already mentioned above. The marshy estuaries of the Wkra River into the Bug-Narew River and the latter into the Vistula, closed off by the forts of Modlin in combination with the wooded areas adjacent to it, appeared to be a serious strategic obstacle for this movement. Forcing the Bug, without fords and defended by Modlin and Zegrze, would place the Soviets on the right bank of the Vistula, which then had to be crossed in turn in order to take Warsaw. It seemed to be a task exceeding the strength of a Red Army lacking technical material. It could undertake such a movement with impunity only on the condition of a complete demoralisation of the Polish troops.

The capture of Modlin, which Russian military circles considered an excellent and modern fortress, seemed even more improbable. Such an attempt would have unnecessarily tied up serious amounts of the Russian forces, thus delaying the capture of Warsaw, which was deemed so urgent by the Bolshevik high command.

Taking those facts into account, we also considered the special and very characteristic features of the Red Army's command, namely great self-confidence and complete disregard for the enemy. We saw this in their lack of the coordination between separate armies, their predilection for the path of least resistance, and their tendency to chase spectacular goals, such as cutting the Polish links to the sea. We therefore thought that the attack planned on the Modlin – Zegrze line would be limited, in practical terms, to a possible strike by part of the forces at Zegrze and Dębe, at the Narew crossings, and that the movement westwards of most of the divisions of the Soviet 4th Army, which we had noticed the previous day, should not be ignored.

But against those eventualities, as well as those envisaged by the Front Commander, it was impossible to succeed by reacting defensively.

The 5th Army's northwards attack, which we had prepared the previous day, also became obsolete in the event we accepted the hypothesis of an attack by some Soviet divisions on the Modlin – Zegrze line. It would have hit a concentrated mass of the enemy frontally, and with the enemy's attacking spirit and by sheer weight of numbers the 5th Army might be pushed into the confluence of the Bug-Narew and Vistula Rivers.

Thus, while still intending to use the 5th Army offensively, it was necessary to modify the projected direction of its attack and to select a concentration area that would best suit the various possibilities. This region had to be moved backwards, as the concentration of forces, placed at my disposal on 9 August, was clearly hopelessly delayed.

The Wkra River, as General Weygand had correctly stated, was the only suitable line in our operational area. By concentrating behind the Wkra we gained not only the already noted protection, but could at the same time form an organically unified and strongly connected sector of the front, through the use of the Zakroczym – Płońsk – Raciąż road parallel to the Wkra and the many perpendicular roads, with the strong support for the right wing of the Modlin fortress.

Standing behind the Wkra River, we also took a position that was significantly advantageous in relation to the enemy's grouping despite his greater numbers. For only the Wkra River in the terrain gave a centrally located starting position, with the help of which we could equally well check a possible attack of five Soviet divisions on Zegrze and Dębe, as well as parry the danger threatening us from the direction of Ciechanów. Taking this position also allowed us to counter-attack the Soviet 14th and 4th armies in case they continued their march towards Płock.

While preparing primarily against a southwards attack by the divisions threatening us to the north in accordance with the expectations of the front commander, at the same time we did not forget that according to our own reconnaissance we expected an attack by the Soviet 15th Army on Płońsk and Wyszogród, and an attack by the Soviet 3rd Army on the Vistula crossing near Wyszogród. It seemed to us therefore necessary to gather the army's reserves in Modlin, from where we could strike northwards if necessary. It seemed equally necessary for us to abandon the badly situated Toruń as the supply base for the 5th Army and to rely on Modlin, which was also the base for our operational activities.

I presented all these arguments, and a sketch of the 5th Army's operations based on them, to General Rozwadowski and General Weygand, who visited the Army Headquarters in Nowy Dwór at 11:00 on 12 August. They considered them very interesting, and so the Chief of the General Staff annulled both Order 8756/III of the Commander-in-Chief and Order 3702/III of the Front Command.

Deciding to ignore those enemy's forces moving west of the Mława – Ciechanów – Gąsocin rail line, an easterly strike was established as the most logical for the 5th Army. The objective of the planned attack was to engage in battle and drive back across the Narew River the five Russian divisions threatening us from the north, after which the 5th Army



was to turn against the Soviet 4th Army, which until then would be held in check by a strong group formed on our left flank.

Thus the previous orders were radically modified, providing the 5th Army with the possibility of effective work, both in its immediate task and in the overall battle planned over the Vistula River.

The Chief of the General Staff, departing for Warsaw, authorised me verbally, due to the necessity of swift action, to issue the necessary orders connected with the decisions of principle he had made.

### **Order of the 5th Army for Operations on the River Wkra**

On the basis of the authorisation given, an operational order was drafted, which I give in full:

#### I. Enemy situation.

According to the intercepted orders, five Soviet divisions are advancing from the north towards the Modlin – Zegrze line, seeking a decision of the battle for Warsaw in that area.

#### II. Intentions and own situation.

The Commander-in-Chief and the Front Commander have decided to engage the majority of the enemy forces in a battle on the above-designated line and have ordered the 5th Army to group behind the Wkra River as quickly as possible, with the task of undertaking a major counter-offensive to the east. A prerequisite for the success of the intended action is the observance of the entire plan in the strictest secrecy, to which I oblige individual commanders and to which all movements of their own troops must be adapted.

Front Headquarters, by order 3702 III, have placed Colonel Malevich's group (Modlin sector) under the command of the 5th Army.

Our 1st Army will keep its left wing on the Serock bridgehead, withdrawing the majority of its forces to the Zegrze – Dębe (inclusive) line.

The situation on our own sector remains unchanged since the last orders. On the left-wing communication has been established with Colonel Habicht's<sup>26</sup> group, which is manning the line of the Działdówka river.

#### III. Execution.

In execution of the orders received I command:

1. the Siberian Brigade of Colonel Rumsza is to concentrate without delay in the area of Borkowo – Błędówka and cover the section of the Wkra River from the 14th fort up to the crossing at Zawady (exclusive). It must be accomplished by 08:00 on 13 August.

2. The 18th Infantry Division with two tank companies, which are on their way, are to concentrate as quickly as possible in the area of Płońsk – Joniec and cover the section of the Wkra River from the crossing under Zawady (inclusive) up to and including Sochocin (exclusive).

Both units are to keep the bulk of their forces concentrated, so as to defend their sections in an offensive manner if required.

3. Colonel Malewicz, as a commander of the Modlin stronghold and the line of the Vistula, is given three armoured trains from the Mława – Modlin line as well as the tank unit in Nasielsk. He will garrison the sector from fort Goławice to fort Czarnowo as strongly as possible. The section from the Vistula River to the Wkra River should be covered only with observation posts. The observation posts of the Vistula River between Wyszogród and Modlin are to be recalled on 13 August and sent to Modlin. The garrison from Wyszogród will assign a platoon of machine guns and a platoon of infantry for the protection of the bridge there; the rest should be moved immediately to Płock as reinforcements, together with the gun battery.

4. The 18th Infantry Brigade (Colonel Łuczyński with the 35th and 41st Infantry Regiments plus attached units), is to withdraw at 21:00 on 12 August from its present sector on the Narew and will go via Serock – Zegrze – Kałuszyn to Nowy Dwór into the reserves of the 5th Army.

5. The 17th Infantry Division (command and composition unchanged) will hold the currently occupied sector until 22:00 hours on 12 August, after which it will leave in place two infantry battalions with

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<sup>26</sup> Sikorski refers to him consistently in the German form as Habicht, but his name is usually given in the Polish form as Habich.



machine guns and a platoon of cannons as rear guards; The main part of its forces will be withdrawn through Błędowo – Jaskółtowo – Psucin by the bridge on the river Wkra near Kozybek (4 kilometres north of Modlin) to Kroczewo, where the most vigorous efforts should be made to immediately restore the division to full combat readiness.

The division's rear-guard will hold the area of Zabłocie – Jaskółtowo – Popowo – Borkowo for the day of 13 August; at 22:00 of that day it will retire from that area via Dębe to join the rest of the division as quickly as possible.

6. General Baranowski's Group is placed under the orders of Colonel Zarzycki, as ordered by the Commander-in-Chief and the Front Command. It will be reorganised, but for the time being it retains its present composition.

General Baranowski is placed at the disposal of the Commander-in-Chief.

The group will withdraw the bulk of its forces at 22:00 on 12 August via Nasielsk to the Wron area, assigning three strong battalions and a battery of artillery as a rear-guard under the command of a brave officer in order to garrison and hold Nasielsk the entire day of 13 August.

The three armoured trains together with infantry units and artillery presently near Wyzka, will withdraw at 22:00 on 12 August to the area of Mazewko and will place themselves under the orders of the rear-guard command of General Baranowski's group. The above detachment is to defend the area around Nasielsk at all costs for the entire day of 13 August. In case of enemy pressure, this detachment will retreat step by step along the Nasielsk – Modlin road and the Mława – Modlin railway track on 14 August, trying to draw the enemy to the line of Modlin forts and mislead him in regard to our plans.

7. The cavalry. The 8th Cavalry Brigade and the column of light armoured vehicles, together with the 9th Cavalry Brigade which will soon be in our sector, will form a combined division under Lt. General Karnicki. The sapper company that belongs to the 8th Cavalry Brigade, which is currently stationed in Modlin, will leave immediately for the HQ of the combined cavalry division.

The task of the cavalry division is to cover the left wing of the 5th Army in its new concentration area. To this end General Karnicki will move his troops at 21.00 on 12 August to Nowe Miasto, and on 13 August to Sochocin. General Karnicki will establish and maintain constant contact with the enemy in the following areas:

- a) Sochocin – Ciechanów,
- b) Nowe Miasto – Stary Gołymin,
- c) Nowe Miasto – Przewodowo
- d) Nowe Miasto – Nasielsk.

Moreover, General Karnicki will send a detachment of two full squadrons to Raciąż with the task of patrolling in the direction of:

- a) Raciąż – Ciechanów,
- b) Raciąż – Biezuń,
- c) Raciąż – Sierpc.

8. All commands included in the above order must be carried out with mathematical precision. Let the soldiers of the army I command understand that the success of our complex plan depends on their bravery and discipline.

When redeploying, use vehicles as much as possible!

#### IV. Communications

There are still some issues in the field of communication. Certain unit commanders are not taking proper care about establishing and maintaining communication links, which might lead to loss of their troops. For the final time I draw the commanders' attention to this matter; the future I will hold those guilty of negligence in this regard personally responsible with severe consequences.

Supply matters will be the subject of a separate order. Commanders of individual divisions should already be making the most vigorous efforts to reorganise their supply service and remove any existing





deficiencies. The 5th Army is in the process of organisation. However, the Army Headquarters will try as soon as possible to organise the staging and the entire supply service.

### **Analysis of the Orders of the Commander of the 5th Army**

When ordering the concentration and designing the course of action based on it, we had at our disposal – besides Colonel Zarzycki's group and the 17th Infantry Division who were engaged in the front line – the 18th Infantry Division and the Siberian Brigade. The former was concentrated at the time in Modlin, with the exception of one regiment, while the Siberian Brigade was marching to the fortress from Zegrze. These two units, together with the 8th Cavalry Brigade, would therefore stand in the first line of the concentration area of the army, while all the other units, including those fighting in the covering line, would be in the second. The detachments that had been on duty covering the concentration of the 5th Army were to be reorganised and reinforced to restore their combat capability, worn down by heavy losses. In this natural, simple, and thus the most effective way, the army's grouping was settled.

The whole of the grouping was offensive in character, with the exception of the fortress sector whose outer forts, lying on the line Toruń – Goławice – Błędówka, were to be occupied defensively. The garrison of the section from Pieczolugi to the Vistula was pulled in, in order to gain its units. The line of forts was garrisoned only by independent battalions of security units, reinforced by three armoured trains and a tank company. The centre of the army was occupied by the Siberian brigade. General Krajowski's group, consisting of the 18th Infantry Division and General Karnicki's cavalry, was directed to its left wing. The right wing of the army was firmly based on the fortress. In Modlin and its surroundings all the reserves of the army were gathered, i.e. the 17th Infantry Division, the 9th Infantry Division, the Volunteer Division and Colonel Zarzycki's group that was attached to it.

The strong formation of the left wing of the army, whose flank would be uncovered by necessity, was to secure for us as far as possible, from the Red Army units known to be bypassing us, and which would threaten the 5th Army from the west. Both the gathering of reserves in the vicinity of Modlin and the weak strength of the army centre corresponded to the then anticipated rather than confirmed intention of the Russian 15th and 3rd Armies to bypass Modlin to the north.

On the section of the Narew River from Modlin to Dębe only observation was ordered, which also corresponded to the assumptions highlighted above.

The cavalry was gathered into a unified whole, to bring out its strength, subordinating it for operational reasons to the commander of the 18th Infantry Division, as the commander of the left-wing group. Having as its mission to establish and maintain contact with the enemy, our cavalry was to use its mobility to most effectively cover the outer wing of the army. At that time it was engaged in very successful holding battles, and then carried out its ordered retreat to the west, which automatically brought it into the area of General Krajowski's group's main concentration. In order not to lose contact with the enemy units operating west of the Ciechanów – Mława line, it was entrusted with intensive reconnaissance in the directions mentioned in the order. By throwing a detachment in the direction of Raciąż, intensive reconnaissance was undertaken in the area that was the most dangerous for us and the least known, containing the most potential surprises, and therefore the most important. Regarding the enemy's positions only that information that was necessary for the commanders was given. No hypothesis was formulated regarding the bypassing of the Polish front, and especially that of the 5th Army, but only the necessary orders connected with the movement of the Soviet 4th Army, i.e. to reinforce the garrison of Płock and to ensure permanent contact between the cavalry and that army.

Preparing for the battle with the Soviet 15th Army, Colonel Zarzycki's group was ordered to make a retreat in the direction of Modlin's forts in order not only to confuse the enemy as to our intentions, but also to prepare a more favourable situation for striking from the banks of the River Wkra eastwards.

The success of the operation depended to a large extent on the perseverance of those divisions of the 5th Army who would carry the demanding role of covering troops for the army. For only the strict execution of firm and strict orders for them to retreat slowly, step by step, in the event of an enemy advance, could effectively cover the concentration area of the army, which was still in a stage of organisation. This retreating manoeuvre was thus a classic example of the fight for time, indispensable to the commander of the 5th Army.

A serious examination of the enemy's situation and a confirmation of the indicated predictions is contained in the conversation of the commander of the 5th Army with the Front Chief of Staff, which took place around 23:00 on 12 August. That conversation bears witness to our constant search for the truth about the enemy's position and intentions on our right wing.

During the conversation I emphasized the fact that we had observed a gradual shift towards the west of the centre of gravity of the enemy forces gathered in the north, indicating Płońsk as a likely target for the attack of their 15th Army, which was indeed in accordance with reality. Whereas, by wrongly attributing the 11th Rifle Division to the Soviet 3rd



Army, I predicted the march of that army on Nasielsk, which later also did take place. These suppositions later gained the partial approval of the Front Commander. The whole plan of action, ordered on 12 August, and the initial grouping of the 5th Army adjusted to fit it, took place with the tacit approval of the front command. The first written evidence of the disagreement of the views on that subject is contained in the conversation between the Front Chief of the Staff and the Army Chief of the Staff, which took place on 13 August. In that discussion Colonel Zagorski, abandoning the previous plans of the Front Headquarters, wished to strike with the 5th Army, reinforced with the 10th and 11th Infantry Divisions, from south to north, with the right wing along the Narew. He indicated clearly the direction of Stary Gołymin and Pułtusk for the 5th Army's counter-attack, to destroy the Soviet 3rd Army (operating there according to his inaccurate assumptions) and then to turn towards the forces encircling its left wing.

In reality, the Soviet 4th Army together with Gai-Khan's 3rd Cavalry Corps pushed straight to the west after the fall of Pułtusk, already by 6 August exploiting the gap that had appeared between Pułtusk and the German border. Therefore, our divisions had no contact with those enemy units on 12 August. Instead, they fought with divisions of the Bolshevik 15th and 3rd armies without interruption. The fierce resistance put up in those battles by Colonel Zarzycki's group, as well as by the 17th Infantry Division, hampered, impeded and delayed the advance of the superior Russian forces, creating the necessary conditions for the organisation and concentration of the 5th Army.

The vigorous and victorious enemy attack risked catching the 18th Infantry Division and Siberian Brigade on the march to the concentration area, the latter moreover without its machine guns; and also the 18th Infantry Brigade which was retreating. It was striking at the still disorganised 5th Army, and threatened the rear of our disorganised 1st Army.

The withdrawal to the concentration area of the 5th Army behind the Wkra River was therefore solidly justified by the situation existing then and the position of the left wing of the Polish front. Besides, it was not contrary to the interests of the whole of the front. That was because dragging the Red Army deep into the country – up to certain limits – exposed it even more to the disastrous consequences of a blow from the Wieprz River. However, our situation at that time was so serious that few of us realised it at the time.

#### **Events on 12 and 13 August North of Modlin.**

The events that took place on 12 August in the 5th Army section seemed to confirm our suspicions about the Russian attack being from north to south. That day heavy fighting developed in the whole area of Holendry – Winnica – Chmielewo, with attacks coming from Pułtusk and Przasnysz. Colonel Zarzycki's group, which was fighting there, mostly held off the advance of the overwhelming enemy forces during the day. The Bolshevik assault on the Winnica area was particularly strong. It was defended until 16:00, with several counter-attacks. However, towards evening the group, exhausted by the heavy losses, had to retreat in two bounds to the Nasielsk – Jaskółowo line, which in turn caused the 17th Infantry Division to retreat to the Jaskółowo – Wierzbica line, shifting the entire burden of the 1st Army's cover from the north to the 7th Reserve Brigade, stationed around Serock and Zegrze.

On the left flank of the covering troops of the 5th Army, another battle also took place, as a consequence of which the 8th Cavalry Brigade withdrew from Świercze station, evading in the manner ordered to Nowe Miasto. The Red Army then attacked Nasielsk, which was defended late into the night by Colonel Hellman [101st IR]. During the night, however, Nasielsk was also captured by the Russians, while our units withdrew partly to the forts of Modlin, and partly west to behind the Wkra.

At the same time, east of Działdowo, the Soviet 12th Division attacked Colonel Habicht's independent detachment, driving it back towards Pomerania.

On 12 August, vigorous effort was put into the defence works in the downstream section of the Vistula River, ordered by General Sosnkowski. The Minister of National Defence was responsible for the supply of war material from France, and so was more sensitive than others to the danger threatening Warsaw's connections with the seacoast. As a result, as early as 12 August he called into action General Osikowski's "Lower Vistula" Group with headquarters in Kutno, while at the same time accelerating the strengthening of bridgeheads at Wyszogród, Płock and Włocławek, sending a diverse set of staging and militia units.

On the following day (13 August) General Osieński, commander of the 17th ID, occupied the Bug-Narew section between Modlin and Dębe with one infantry regiment, due to the lack of approval from the Front Headquarters of my proposal to surrender that section to the 1st Army. He concentrated the rest of his division in Nowy Dwór, to absorb the reinforcements being sent there.

Colonel Zarzycki's group, after leaving Nasielsk in relative peace, moved on 13 August to the area of Wron, while the assigned section of the Wkra River was occupied by the Siberian brigade after a forced march from Zegrze. The bridgehead at Borkowo was garrisoned by some of the 1st Siberian Regiment, our first line was on the Ruszkowo – Cieksyn hill and one battalion was in reserve in the Borkowo area. The second Siberian regiment went in as brigade's reserve to Józefowo.



In accordance with the operational instructions, the 18th Infantry Division set off that day on foot from Modlin to its assigned area, also on the Wkra River. The division was still incomplete, as it consisted of only three infantry regiments as the 42nd Infantry Regiment and the divisional services were still arriving from Brody. The troops of the division, on approaching Sochocin, found its environs heavily garrisoned by Russian troops. As a result, and in view of the falling night, they took up positions three kilometres to the south of the town, with only their right wing on the Wkra River. One regiment of the division stayed as reserve of the group at Płońsk, which at that time was threatened from the area of Raciąż.

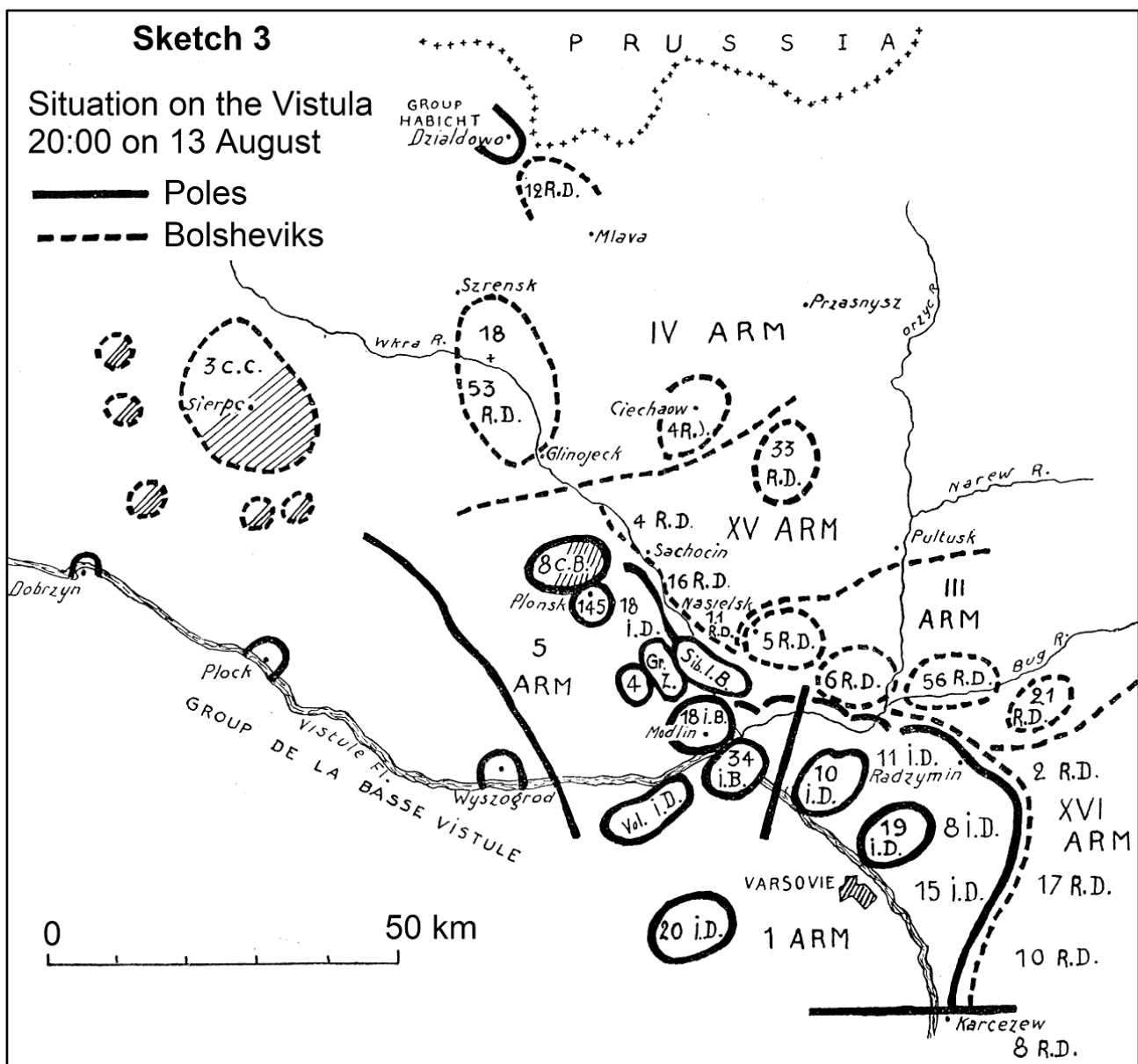
The 8th Cavalry Brigade, positioned around Sarbiewo and Baboszewo, covered the left wing of the army.

In the morning of 13 August the Russians received their first painful lesson from the 5th Army, near Płońsk. The 8th Cavalry Brigade attacked by surprise units of the 4th Rifle Division near Milewo, who had been marching towards Płońsk from Sochocin disdaining sufficient security measures, and forced them into a quick retreat. In the evening our cavalry, repelled a Bolshevik attack, inflicted heavy losses on the attacking rifles, and took prisoners from the 3rd Rifle Regiment. The 2nd and 203rd Ulan Regiments distinguished themselves in that action.

The advanced cavalry units, which had been entrusted with reconnaissance to the northwest of Płońsk, spotted and observed the movement of large columns of enemy rifles from the northeast in the general direction of Płock. The enemy cut the Płońsk to Płock road, occupied Drobin and drove out our depot units, which had been entrusted with the observation of the area.

In the afternoon the Russians attacked the 18th Infantry Division's sector from the area of Kuchary [Kuchary Żydowskie] and Idzikowice. Those attacks were repulsed.

Apart from that, the area in front of the 5th Army was generally calm during 13 August, undisturbed by any major incidents. Apparently, the enemy, surprised by the resistance in the area of Nasielsk, and observing the increased movement of our troops north of Modlin, had stopped its advance in order to get more precise information, organise its units and prepare them for further action (sketch no. 3).



## CHAPTER VI

### Enemy situation on the Vistula in 1920

#### The Nature of Tukhachevski's Pursuit and its Objectives

I shall now try to reconstruct, in view of the many possibilities, the actual grouping of the Russian troops as it existed on 13 August facing the Polish front. I will rely on historical documents published so far and on post-war works by commanders of the Soviet army, as well as my own data, which in many cases may correct the facts given by historians. For the orders published up until now have undergone many changes in their execution. In turn, their authors' interpretation of the events in question bears a subjective element that is understandable from a human standpoint. Therefore, these documents need to be supplemented with those of the adversary in order to give a complete picture of the position of Tukhachevski's troops on the eve of the battle which would decide the fate of the Polish-Russian war.

The commander of the Russian Western Front, at the start of his historic march on Warsaw after the victory at the Auta River in July, sensibly took advantage of the massing of his subordinate armies on his right wing to throw them by the shortest route at the Polish capital. The regrouping of such a powerful concentration of divisions, as was done at the mouth of the "Smolensk Gate" in the summer of 1920, indeed required considerable effort, especially in the difficult communication conditions at the time. It was unrealisable to do so on a larger scale east of the Neman and Bug rivers.

These considerations partially exonerate the Western Front commander, who kept a strong concentration of his forces so he could vigorously and quickly pursue the beaten Polish armies. For the war of 1920 was a classic war fought in an open field. Tukhachevski's attack on the Auta caused, in a very short time, the disintegration of almost half of the Polish troops on the North-eastern Front. In order to extend this dislocation to the entire Polish front, the success had to be further developed. If Tukhachevski was unable to make a flanking move, for various reasons which I will discuss elsewhere, then the best guarantee for the success of his action was a fast forward movement. As far as the enemy was concerned, such a move was possible and even relatively easy to achieve in the first phase of the battle in the North, as our shallow defensive facilities prevented a flexible defence of the front. On top of that the Polish Army, as a result of constantly retreating from position to position over hundreds of kilometres, was gradually wearing out and deteriorating.

Therefore, Tukhachevski feared a break in the continuity of his actions that would allow the enemy to rest and reorganise his forces, which might enable us to try to regain the initiative lost on the Auta River. The uninterrupted action applied by the Russian commander after the victory of 4 July demoralised us to the greatest extent, both materially and morally. It was an indispensable condition for the success of his plan, which consisted in continuing the attack with a strong right wing by the armies of the Western Front.

The mistake he made did not lie in that. The boldness and vigour of his pursuit testify to his qualities as a commander of large armies. He only started to err seriously when, impatiently aiming at the strategic goals he had outlined, he completely forgot about the means at his disposal at the time. This was when he broke with the required prudence for every commander and detached himself from the base of reality, pursuing blindly and without limits, without any manoeuvre, straight ahead.

Kamenev advised him during the battle on the Bug River, to strike parallel to that river. However, Tukhachevski did not listen to this counsel.

Believing in the superior morale of the Russian troops, feeling themselves to be victors, and above all yielding to the pressure of the political commissars assigned to his subordinate armies, he strongly desired to use anything he could that would allow him to take advantage of his victory. Having abandoned a deep flanking of the left wing of the Polish army, since he was not able to cut off its natural retreat routes, so pursued the armies of our Northern Front directly ahead of him. Hastening the march of the armies of his Western Front, he did not change its initial formation in any fundamental way, and did not care at all that a pursuit undertaken in that way would exclude any strategic surprises for us. In this last respect, Tukhachevski counted on the fact that our intelligence service would not function properly in an atmosphere of general defeat. As later events indicated, he was not at all wrong about that. The rapid fall of the forts of Osowiec, Łomża and Ostrołęka, defended by the units of our Volunteer Army, made a great impression on the Russian side, even though they were outdated and built facing north. These facts confirmed Tukhachevski in his false reasoning. He concluded that the Polish Volunteer Army, which would go on to terrorise Bolshevik Russia, would not be a serious threat to the Red Army.

Such swift captures of the northern forts made the Russians forget that we were destroying the bridges and communication links; and reduced attention being paid to the resistance put up by the Polish troops in the centre and on the South-eastern Front.



Under these conditions, the triumphant manifestos sent out by Comrade Radek, with the exuberance of a revolutionary dictator, were self-explanatory. They, as well as the Communist information bulletins of the time, stated unanimously that the Polish army was completely broken.

Half of the Polish State was already occupied by the Soviet army. Although the other half was materially and morally stronger, more aware of its patriotism, and definitively opposed to Communism, it was to be incapacitated by Tukhachevski before it could begin to resist with its large but unorganised forces. The occupation of Warsaw, and then of the whole of Poland, to this way of thinking was only a matter of time.

Bolshevik circles also understood the importance of cutting Poland off from Gdansk, where, after intimidating local workers and under the cover of French warships, shipments of ammunition and war material needed to sustain the fighting were still being unloaded, despite Tukhachevski's announcements and the commitments of the Gdansk Communists.

The seizure of Warsaw, scheduled for 12 August, besides the advantages mentioned above, would allow Tukhachevski to install a Communist government in Poland and thereby gain an effective ally inside it. For such a government would, with the help of officially spread communist propaganda, sow anarchy in the ranks of the Polish army destroying its remaining strength and resistance, a technique used with such success in the Russian civil war.

The proclamation of a "Soviet Government" in Warsaw would also place the organisation of the Polish Red Army on a real footing, especially as the recruitment of volunteers, started in Vilnius and Białystok, produced almost no results.

The capture of the Polish capital would make it possible, apart from anything else, to organise propaganda for a pan-European revolution – the preliminary vibrations of which had become visible in Europe. The fall of Warsaw therefore would place in the hands of the Soviets not only a powerful trump card inside Poland, but an equally powerful factor in the international arena.

Those perspectives, seductive at first sight, inclined them logically to:

- a) seize Warsaw as soon as possible,
- b) rapidly occupy the west of Poland,
- c) cut the communication routes connecting Poland with its seacoast.

Thus, the decision was taken to cross the Neman River and continue the pursuit.

The execution of that decision depended on three decisive factors, as always: the enemy, the position of the armies on the Western Front at that time, and the terrain on which the future events were to take place. At that time, all those factors favoured a decisive attack with a strong right wing.

Indeed, Tukhachevski, aiming to end the war with a single blow, according to the information he had, was expecting the main Polish forces to be in the areas of Ciechanów, Modlin, and Warsaw. He erroneously estimated the strength of those forces at 70,000 bayonets and sabres. Hence, in his mind, the enemy's situation more than justified the need for a strong concentration of troops on the Russian right wing.

The second factor that influenced the decision of the commander of the Western Front was also in favour of striking with a strong right wing. For his units remained generally as they had been on 4 July [relative to one another]. As a result, on approaching the Vistula River, Tukhachevski had a concentration of three armies on his right wing, which he could use for frontal action or for a deep bypass of the left wing of the Polish front.

### **The Influence of Terrain on Tukhachevski in 1920**

However, in order to understand Tukhachevski's manoeuvre on the Vistula, it is necessary to consider the third factor influencing his decision at the time – namely the strategic consequences of the terrain of the Warsaw operation, discussed at the beginning of this work, and its fortifications.

Our last line of natural defence facing east fell when Tukhachevski, advancing on Warsaw in 1920, took Grodno and crossed the middle Neman River, when he bypassed the Białowieża Forest and appeared at Wołkowysk [Vawkavysk], when Brześć-on-the-Bug was taken, and when the troops of the South-Western Front took the middle part of the Bug. All the routes leading into the interior of the country were then open to him.

Tukhachevski, approaching the capital of Poland, had an exaggerated idea of the extent of our technical preparations, carried out since the second half of July on the Warsaw bridgehead, and therefore overestimated its power to resist. This consideration argued for bypassing the bridgehead, avoiding the anticipated difficulties.

There was also another reason. Armies advancing on Warsaw from the east or north have to reckon with the necessity of crossing the major strategic barrier of the Vistula before taking the capital, an operation that is full of danger. The



terrain conditions for forcing the river near Warsaw are, as described in the terrain section, particularly unfavourable for an attacker from the east, while the bridges near Wyszogród and Włocławek give their owner mastery of that river. Therefore, it is easier to break the city's resistance by striking at its rear, a clear example being the fall of Warsaw in 1831.

Further topographical considerations also led Tukhachevski to direct his men towards the bridges near Wyszogród, Płock and Włocławek. The troops advancing on Warsaw on his right wing had only two options.

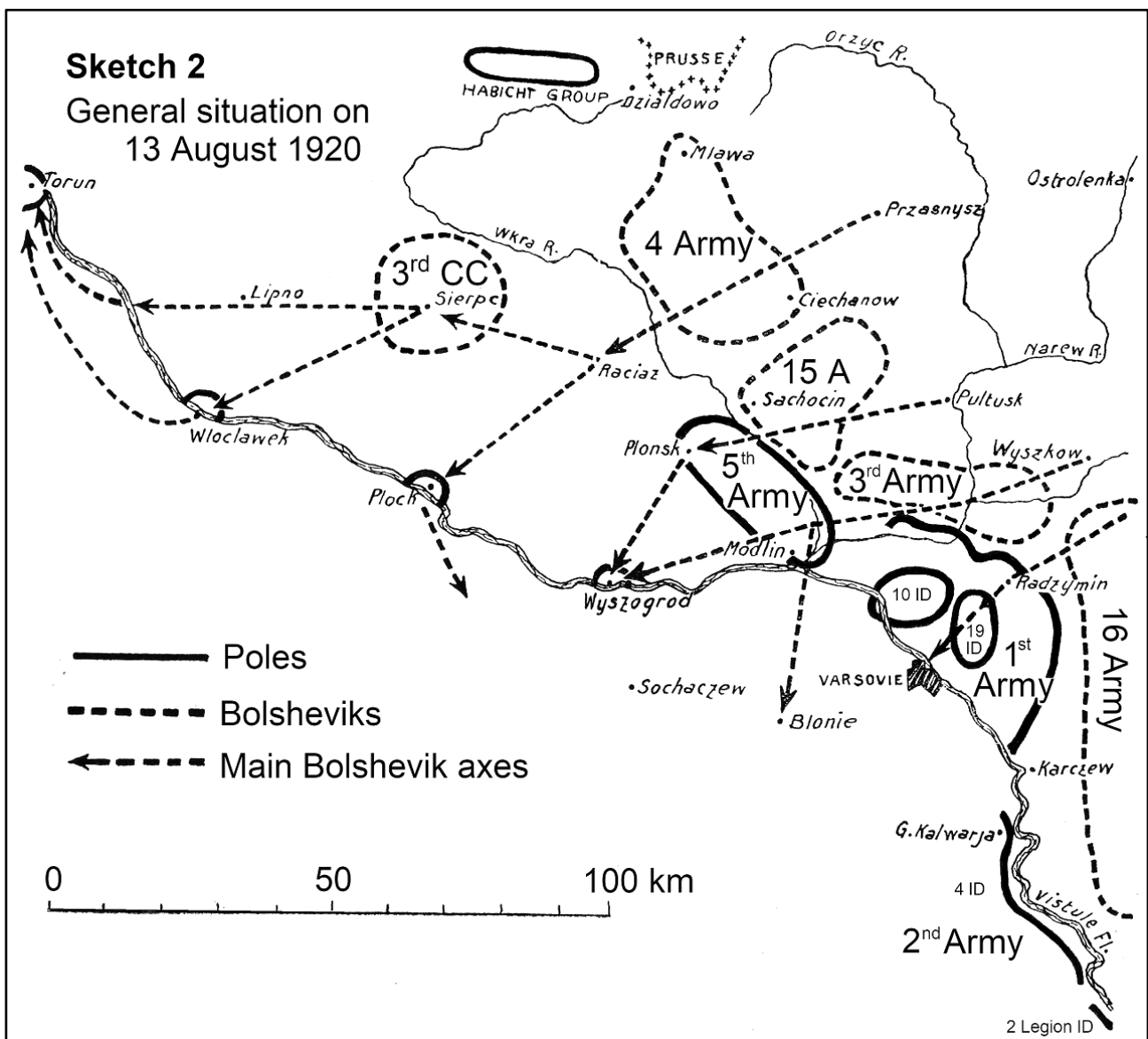
As I have already pointed out when discussing the orders of the Polish High Command of 6 August, they could move from the right to the left bank of the Bug River near Malkinia, Brok, or eventually Wyszów, where permanent bridges exist to attack Warsaw from the west.

Or they could continue move westward, crossing the Narew and the Orzyc rivers, to break away from them and get as quickly as possible to the Mazovian operational theatre, which is a plateau and suitable for manoeuvring large masses of troops, from where only one bound will lead them to convenient crossings and bridges over the Vistula, and then to Warsaw, demoralized by this traffic, or to the Pomeranian railway lines.

In conclusion, while Tukhachevski decided right from the start against a frontal attack on the Warsaw bridgehead, he needed to avoid the area of where the Narew, Bug and Vistula meet – a difficult and dangerous place for armies and furthermore heavily fortified – so he had to march as Paskevich did to the west and strike, taking advantage of the terrain conditions, and put his main effort into his right wing.

### Positions of the Russian Armies near Warsaw

So, to explain the troop positions of the Russian Western Front, which in mid-August 1920 reached from the Polish-German border to Dęblin (sketch No. 2).





The 4th Army of Comrade Shuvaev operated on the extreme right wing, made up of the 10th and 15th Cavalry Divisions, organised as Gai-Khan's 3rd Cavalry Corps, and the 12th, 18th, 53rd and 54th Rifle Divisions, with the 164th Rifle Brigade in Grodno and the 143rd Rifle Brigade in Vilnius. In accordance with the 4th Army commander's order (No. 1479/op.) of 13 August these divisions were heading to their designated areas. The cavalry had reached Sierpc on 13 August, from where it sent scouts in the direction of Toruń, Włocławek and Płock; the 18th and 53rd Divisions were in the area of Głinojeck – Szreńsk; the 12th Rifle Division had made Działdowo and was marching along the Prussian border to cover the Army from the north, while the 54th Rifle Division, which was in the army's reserve, had reached Ciechanów.

To the 4th Army's left was the 15th Army of Comrade Kork, which contained four rifle divisions, namely: the 4th, 11th, 16th, and 33rd, which were on the move in the direction of Płońsk from the north and northeast, the 4th in the first line, the 33rd in the second, the 16th after capturing Nowe Miasto was preparing to force the Wkra River near Popielżyn, and the 11th was undertaking the same task near Nasielsk.

The 3rd Army of Comrade Lazarevich, made up of the 5th, 6th, 21st and 56th Rifle Divisions, was fighting in close liaison with the left wing of the 15th Army. Our combat intelligence noticed the 5th Division as early as 13 August<sup>27</sup> near Nasielsk, while the 6th and 56th Divisions were operating at the same time in the Serock area, and the 21st Rifle Division was preparing to attack Radzymin with the 27th Rifle Division.

The 16th Army of Comrade Sologub, consisting of the 27th, 2nd, 17th, 10th, and 8th Rifle Divisions were positioned in that order facing the sector of the Polish 1st Army, with the exception of the 8th Rifle Division, which occupied a position opposite our 2nd Army.

According to Russian sources the Mozyr Group of Comrade Khvesin, consisting of the 57th and 58th Rifle Divisions and a combined detachment, continued its advance to the area of Żelechów – Kock, while part of it approached Lubartów.

Further south, the South-western Front was made up at the time of Comrade Voskanov's 12th Army, consisting of the 25th, 7th, 44th and 24th Rifle Divisions and Comrade Golikov's Group.

On 13 August that army received an order (No. 2716/op.) to attack at Tomaszów – Rawa Ruska in order to capture these places by 15 August, and at the same time make a deep raid in order to capture the San River crossings at Sieniawa and Radymno. For this purpose, Comrade Golikov's group was to be augmented by the 25th Cavalry Brigade, the Bashkir Horse Brigade, the 1st and 7th Cavalry Regiments and the 44th Rifle Division.

On 13 August the 12th Army occupied more or less a front along the Bug River from Opalin to Sokal, with the 24th Rifle Division securing the right wing of the 1st Horse Army.

Comrade Budenny's 1st Horse Army, made up of the 14th, 6th, 4th and 11th Cavalry Divisions and an independent Cavalry Brigade, was fighting in the area of Busk, with the 45th and 47th Rifle Divisions on its left flank, fighting for Brody – Podkamień [Pidkamin'], and cooperating in the so-called "Zloczów" [Zolochiv] direction with the Horse Army, with a common mission of taking Lwów.

Comrade Molkochanov's 14th Army had the 60th and 41st Rifle Divisions, of which the 60th was fighting at that time around Jeziorna, while the 41st held positions on the Strypa River from Zlotniki [Zolotnyky] to the Dniester.

The armies of the Western Front were to strike from positions above in the following directions:

The Soviet 4th Army with the 3rd CavCorps, was launched by Tukhachevski at Płock, using the axis of Przasnysz and Raciąż, to capture the bridge there and effect a crossing of the Vistula. This army was to receive further operational directives on the left bank of the river, depending on the front's situation. In turn, after crossing the Vistula near Włocławek and Bobrowniki, the Cavalry Corps was to march on Pomerania, bypassing the fortress at Toruń, in order to paralyse that region and cut the Warsaw – Gdansk – Gdynia and Poznan – Gdańsk – Gdynia railway lines.

The axis of a simultaneous attack by the 15th Army was towards Płońsk and then towards Wyszogród, where it was to cross the Vistula in order to cooperate, if necessary, with the Soviet 3rd and 16th Armies in capturing the capital, or to receive other orders in case it had fallen.

The eventual axis of the 3rd Army was to pass between Nasielsk and Modlin. The initial mission of this army was to capture Zegrze, to tie up Modlin and thus support the actions of the 15th and 16th Armies. The 3rd Army was to cross the Vistula near Modlin, having captured the bridge there. In case that proved impossible, it was to bypass Modlin to the north in order to cross the Vistula together with the 15th Army near Wyszogród and strike at Warsaw from the west.

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<sup>27</sup> The Polish version has 12 August.



Tukhachevski's decision to strike with a strong right wing was so consistent that even the 16th Soviet Army was advancing the bulk of its forces along the Radzymin – Praga axis in order to cross the Vistula north of Warsaw if the bridgehead there provided too great a resistance.

### **Evaluation of the Russian Positions**

That the Russian army was deployed as outlined above provides evidence that they knew nothing about the plans laid out by the Polish Commander-in-Chief taken on 6 and 9 August.

Their intoxication with their victories was so great on the Russian side that it prevented the Red commanders from using their critical judgment of the overall situation, so necessary on the battlefield.

The Bolshevik armies did not notice the reconcentration of the Polish divisions in front of them in the first days of August, despite the fact that some of their marching routes were so difficult. The Russian commanders completely underestimated the enemy, and did not count on the possibility of a decisive battle on the right bank of the Vistula.

If Tukhachevski had taken our army seriously, and if he had considered the possibility that the Poles might be able to retake the initiative and seek a decisive battle on the right bank of the Vistula, he would probably have paused the advance of his forces on around 6 August. Basing himself on such a convenient route for such an undertaking as the Chorzele – Ostrołęka – Malkinia – Sokołów – Siedlce – Łuków – Parczew – Lubartów – Lublin road, and taking advantage of the good roads running along the axis of his march, and coming out from Malkinia – Siedlce – Łuków to the east, he could have regrouped his forces after clarifying the situation and prepared them for coordinated action near Warsaw.

Having failed to do so, he concentrated the vast majority of the Western Front troops north of the Bug River, while, as the Russians themselves today claim, he deployed only the 16th Army in the 180 km area from the Bug River to the Wieprz River, entrusting it with the most difficult task and exposing its left flank dangerously which, as we know, led to a decisive blow by our Commander-in-Chief.

Tukhachevski later tried to parry the imminent danger with the help of the 12th Army and Budenny's Horse Army which, had it arrived as ordered on 13 August at Lublin, would have come out in the rear of our attack group. Around Modlin, he anticipated rather than consciously prepared for a victory, counting on his massive superiority in numbers on his right to crush General Józef Haller's Northern Front.

Tukhachevski wrote:<sup>28</sup>

Thus, against the left wing of the main Polish group we directed no less than 14 rifle divisions, together with the 3rd Cavalry Corps. Taking into account the high morale of our troops, we had every right to expect victory there...

... thus in the sectors of our 4th, 15th and 3rd armies, with twelve rifle and two cavalry divisions, the Poles could field only three and a half infantry divisions, albeit at full strength, and various minor detachments.

We had every opportunity to deal the enemy a devastating blow here, exposing his left flank and connections. The 16th Army was leading a frontal assault on the most powerful Polish grouping and had to tie it down for the duration of the entire action. On the other hand, our left wing was inconveniently weak. Against two divisions of the Mozyr group and three divisions of the 12th Army, operating around Lublin, the Poles put up six divisions of infantry, brought to full strength, and thus had the advantage there.

Had we succeeded in concentrating the units of the Horse Army quickly enough at Lublin, our formation would have been dangerous for the "White" Polish units. Not only could the Poles not have thought of attacking from the Dęblin – Lublin area, but they would have found themselves in a very difficult position and would inevitably been thrown back to the west bank of the Vistula. This quite emphatically shows that we could have, and should have, chosen to attack beyond the Vistula and that this offensive had every chance of success had there not been errors in our strategic focus.

So the Northern Front, as is evident from the intentions of the opposing side, played a major role in the overall Battle of the Vistula. If it had collapsed prematurely, the Commander-in-Chief's strike, which failed to reach the centre of gravity of the Bolshevik forces gathered near Warsaw, going too far to their rear, would have found itself in a very difficult position, operating in a void. While Budenny might very well appear on the field of the Battle for Warsaw.

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<sup>28</sup> *The March Beyond the Vistula*. My edition has this printed at the end of Piłsudski's *Year 1920*. Both are polemics rather than just pure history, but nonetheless informative.

