

CHAPTER VII

Respective Positions on the Wkra in Connection with the 5th Army's Offensive

The Attack of the 5th Army is Moved Forward

Around noon on 13 August, we intercepted some radio message in Warsaw from the Russian armies advancing in the northern sector. An order from the commander of the 16th Army stated that he was going to strike at dawn on 14 August with his whole army at the Warsaw bridgehead, intending to reach a line passing through Jabłonna – Marki – Wołomin – Wawer – Okuniew – Karczew – Osieck and Kołbiel.

This news had an electrifying effect in Warsaw. All doubts collapsed, leaving only one hypothesis, dictated by concern for the capital, and predicting a simultaneous joint concentric attack on Warsaw by three Bolshevik armies. This idea, formulated in the Northern Front Command, seemed all the more likely as that resembled to a certain extent the predictions of the Commander-in-Chief from before 11 August, in which three Russian armies, namely the 16th, the 3rd, and the 15th, were to strike frontally at the Warsaw bridgehead.

Thus, according to Colonel Zagórski, "the entire 3rd and 16th Bolshevik Armies are to attack the Warsaw bridgehead at dawn on 14 August", with two divisions in each line. In addition, the 15th Army, reaching Nasielsk, was to "attack from the north the sector of the Narew and Bug rivers, Zegrze and Modlin". The front commander, as a result of this news, ordered the acceleration of the counter-attack of the 5th Army, setting it for the morning of 14 August.

Knowing the exact strength of the Russian forces attacking from the east and north-east on the Warsaw bridgehead and Zegrze – Dębe, the concern of the front commander was that the poorly organised Warsaw bridgehead might collapse, despite its superior size. An appeal to my "historical responsibility" sent to me by the front command in to speed up the attack, took me by surprise.

The need for offensive action by the 5th Army did not require justification, and did not need to be explained to me. What puzzled me was the nervousness of the requested actions. The conversation took place around 18:00 on 13 August, which was when the order of the front command for the counter-attack reached my army command.

An attack of the 5th Army at dawn on 14 August was therefore impossible, if only due to the required time and space being considered in the situation of the time. Even if the Army HQ worked all night, alongside the division commanders, the attack orders could only reach the regimental commanders during the morning of the following day. And they also would need time to draft their own instructions and to organise the attack to achieve the missions set out for them.

On top of this the huge material shortages in the army, particularly acute for ammunition, which I have discussed earlier, had not been sufficiently remedied by 13 August, was another reason we could not attack that early. In the Siberian brigade, the armaments were only just being brought up to strength. For the Volunteer Division and Colonel Zarzycki's group, ammunition had to be hastily brought in from Kraków. It was also necessary to find their supply vehicles, together with the field kitchens of individual units, so as to make them combat ready.

For these reasons, Colonel Zagórski assured us in the evening of 12/13 August, by telegram, that the start of the 5th Army's action, scheduled for 15 August would not be brought forward.

Before the decisive attack could begin, the bulk of the 5th Army forces needed to gather in Modlin in order to have something to strike with. On 13 August this was not yet complete. The excessively slow speed with which the army had been formed was now producing negative results. At the time of my conversation with the Front HQ, some divisions were still on their way to their assigned concentration areas, and upon arrival would need 24 hours to prepare themselves for action. The Volunteer Division, merged with the units of Colonel Zarzycki's group, was in a feverish state of reorganisation and rearmament. The 17th Infantry Division, exhausted and entirely unable to fight, was slowly pulling back to Modlin, due to the 1st Army's delaying, so it could take over the Dębe – Zegrze section.

Therefore, a basic sense of responsibility to be adequately ready for combat, which is so important in the rational preparation of each battle, rather than an excessive love of method and order, was the reason for my reservations at that time.

The time factor, rightly emphasised by the frontline commander and his chief of staff, is of decisive importance in every military action. It was particularly important in the Battle of the Vistula in 1920. Inaction by the 5th Army would inevitably have exposed our armies to doom in the face of the enemy's great superiority and attacking spirit. Thus, only a rapid attack with the element of surprise against the Red Army, could save the situation of the army and the front.

On the other hand, however, throwing weak and disorganised units onto battle prematurely, as General Weygand so vigorously warned against, would lead inevitable breakdown, and disaster. Troops need sufficient preparation for an



attack, ensuring it has sufficient strength in the first wave, and continuity to the ones following. One must recognise the theory of rapidity of action, but not without creating the conditions in which it can work.

To disperse one's efforts, to spread one's forces in the grave situation we faced, would be tantamount to using them up gradually, to weaken them without gain. It would be to act without an active plan of operations. To start a battle without organised troops, without even assembling them properly, is absolutely impossible.

On the fields of Nasielsk and Płońsk, the crucial battles of the mortal combat, which had started in early July on the Northern Front, were going to play out. The fight had been very hard, in a hopelessly suffocating atmosphere of defeat. The fighting was undertaken by troops who, with the enormously hard retreat of several hundred kilometres behind them, were to strike at the enemy without a day's rest. The manoeuvre group, attacking on 16 August from behind the Wieprz river, had an easier task – being undertaken by relatively rested troops – than those fighting a simultaneous victorious struggle against superior enemy forces in the battlefields of the north. All the more so, therefore, that we did not ruin it by launching before we were sufficiently prepared.

Naturally the front commander did not know the situation of the 5th Army precisely. The difference in position and responsibility which existed between the front and army commanders in this case caused the differences in opinion which are evident in their communication. The front commander's primary mission was protecting the capital of the country, the fall of which he could not allow at any price. He was particularly worried by the vigorously led Soviet 16th Army's attack on the Radzymin – Praga axis, it being the easiest and shortest road to Warsaw. Although this route was blocked by General Latinik's strong army, two full front-line divisions, and crossed Warsaw's fortified defence lines, the organisation of the defence in that sector raised serious doubts in General Józef Haller's mind. Thus, concern for weakness in the 1st Army's sector may have been the reason for throwing the 5th Army into battle early. Tying up the forces of the Soviet 15th Army and drawing the bulk of the 3rd Army on itself if they were quickly repelled, could have relieved the rest of the northern sector of the front and thus indirectly saved Warsaw. This explains General Haller's order to move forward the attack of the 5th Army, regardless of the level of readiness achieved.

Our situation was becoming all the more complicated as intelligence data collected by us during 13 August indicated that the 5th Army was being encircled, such that the Soviet 15th Army and part of the 3rd Army might strike south-west or west rather than south. The silence we observed on the entire Modlin to Zegrze section of the line, and the lack of any enemy patrols on the Bug River, emphasized the correctness of the assumption that that sector would not be attacked. This made the task of the 5th Army more difficult, limiting the possibility of a surprise from our side. The positioning of the 5th Army behind the Wkra River was indeed a surprise for the Russian side, but only in a strategic sense. It was not, however, a surprise from the operational-tactical point of view. Although Tukhachevski, contrary to his publication, did not expect an army capable of offensive action north of Modlin, the formation and intentions of his 15th and 3rd Armies automatically reduced the possible movements and tactical surprise from our side in that region.

As a result, the flank attack predicted by the Chief of General Staff, turned into a much more difficult, and therefore requiring more careful preparation, encounter battle.

In view of these changes and their serious repercussions, any decision to hasten the attack of the 5th Army needed to be carefully thought out.

Without the will for decisive and rapid action, victory cannot be achieved. Those basic conditions for success were not lacking on that memorable day of 13 August. However, the will to win is not enough on the battlefield. The defeats suffered by the Polish Army during its 1920 retreat from the Dvina to the Vistula showed that eloquently – we failed on the intermediate lines despite not lacking proclamations of victory and an unshakeable resolve to defeat the enemy.

The final decision to postpone the 5th Army's attack until 12:00 on 14 August, entailed serious risk. The risk and responsibility were all the greater because the action of that army, once begun, had to be carried through to its completion, even at the threat of annihilation.

This is the series of messages by Telegraph between General Haller, Northern Front commander, Colonel Zagórski, his Chief of Staff, and General Sikorski, commander of 5th Army, from 17:00 to 18:00 on 13 August.

General Sikorski: I have just come back from a tour of the front line, and on the basis of direct observations I would like to ask to postpone tomorrow's date to the 15th. I am simply astonished by the date moving forward to the 14th, as the 5th Army is so unprepared that a catastrophe is certain. Do I need to explain my view?

Colonel Zagórski: General, I will present to you the situation and you will see that it is necessary to start the action tomorrow at dawn. The entire Bolshevik 3rd and 16th armies crossed today to the southern bank of the Bug River and will attack the bridgehead Warsaw tomorrow at dawn. There are two



divisions in each line. In addition, the leading elements of their 15th Army, whose composition is known, are at Nasielsk, and tomorrow will attack the section of the Narew River from Zegrze to Modlin from the north. Delaying the attack of the 5th Army by even half a day will result in tying up the reserve of the front command, the 10th Division, which as a result will no longer be assist the attack of the 5th Army. The Bug section from Zegrze to Modlin is weak and must be defended offensively. Besides, only by using the 5th Army in this way can we relieve the front of the Warsaw bridgehead for the following days. Under constant attacks of the massed Bolshevik divisions on the northern wing they might share the fate of many battles so far. I completely understand that the attack of the 5th Army on the 15th would have been absolutely stronger, but unfortunately there is not the slightest doubt that it would have been too late. The negligence of the Warsaw garrison and their lack of understanding of the importance of the Northern Front caused these conditions. Undoubtedly, the General fully understands the importance of tomorrow.

General Sikorski: Colonel, I do not need to be persuaded in this matter. However, the situation cannot be reversed in war by paper orders. Even if I resigned myself to losing the 5th Army and wanted to launch an offensive tomorrow, it would still be technically impossible. The situation of my troops is at present as follows: The 18th Infantry Division is concentrated in Płońsk. Baranowski's Group is in the Wrona area, without ammunition and without field kitchens, as its wagons are still in Zegrze. The Siberian Brigade is absolutely incapable of action and cannot be placed into the front line at the moment. The 17th Division is on the stretch from Dębe to Modlin, and the 18th Infantry Brigade is just gathering in the area of Zegrze. Apart from all the shortages of material, which are extremely large, please tell me how I am to launch the offensive tomorrow? I am so sure of defeat that I absolutely could not fulfil this task. I understand Warsaw's situation, but Warsaw has to hold out for at least two days, and I stress that with superhuman efforts I will only just be able to begin on the 15th, as I have to move at least the 18th brigade and get Baranowski's group ready. I believe that after this explanation the Colonel will change his mind. Not to mention that the 17th Brigade is necessary for my strike. Under present conditions my strike would be so weak that it would not make any difference, but would be a repetition of bad experiments from the past.

Colonel Zagórski: General, yesterday I sent a dispatch with that very purpose. I asked the armies to make material preparations for action on the morning of the 14th. Today, at noon, I spoke to Colonel Wolikowski extensively about this plan. Since I received no reply to either notification with objections, the Front Command issued operational dispositions for tomorrow. The 1st Army has been issuing orders as of the hour, based on this situation. These orders cannot be withdrawn without damage and chaos. As for the strength of the attack, there is not the slightest doubt that even if the conditions are the most unfavourable, the very unexpectedness...

General Sikorski: Colonel, I don't know what Wolikowski said. I clearly emphasised during the night that the 15th is the earliest date. Believe me, I never make the slightest difficulty, but I cannot undertake a plan that will cause the loss of the 5th Army without helping anyone else. The Siberian Brigade, which was to strike at Nasielsk, received its machine guns only a short time ago and has had no time to distribute them, everything being in short supply, so there is nothing to shoot with at the moment. The cavalry brigade has not yet received ammunition, and that will only be able to be sent out during the night. I ask unconditionally for a deadline of the 15th.

Colonel Zagórski: Sir, please allow me half a minute to think. General Haller is at the apparatus. He is of the opinion that a strike tomorrow is necessary, however, due to the material situation of the 5th Army, General Haller allows a postponement of the date until the 14th, i.e. the 5th Army will cross the Wkra River line around noon, grouped to attack in the directions indicated in the order, so that the strike can take place on the 14th, reaching the Popowo – Świercze line before night.

General Sikorski: Please report to the General that I will do everything in my power to respond to his wishes. I do not know, however, whether I will be able to achieve this date as well, as it depends whether the 17th Infantry Division can be withdrawn from the Narew River line. Otherwise I really have nothing to strike with.

General Haller: This is General Haller. I am quite sure that not only will you execute the whole plan, General, but tomorrow we will have news from you of success. I agree with General Rozwadowski and General Weygand, from whom I have just returned: we are agreed on the date which I insist. Everything rests on surprise, and the time factor is more decisive than that of strength. Most likely a delay in your action will cause us the liberty to manoeuvre. Up to tomorrow your forces will have the initiative, they will be co-operating with the other armies in the main attack, for which it is necessary that the enemy



be already thrown from the Wkra line to the Narew line. Naturally, I would absolutely prefer an earlier strike. I am convinced that when tomorrow before noon you orient yourself to the situation, that it is possible, thanks to the involvement of all enemy forces in other directions, that you will lead a strike at an earlier date. In any case I must be sure that you will cross the Wkra – Nowe Miasto line around noon, and not later, rather earlier.

As for the ammunition for Baranowski, the most energetic instructions have been sent to your men. Unfortunately, the 17th Brigade disembarked in Warsaw during the night, due to the clogged lines, but in any case, it will be in Modlin during the day. I will try to send it in wagons or cars. Moreover with your energetic strike General you will allow me to release the forces tied on the section Modlin to Zegrze, and especially the 10th Division, which is on standby at Jabłonna. That division will be able to operate effectively with you in any direction necessary, having at its disposal suitable transport. Naturally everything depends on your attack, which both defends the Russian attack on Warsaw from the area of Zegrze and will draw away forces from the attack on Radzymin. The sooner you cross the Wkra River, the sooner the 10th Division will be placed at your disposal. If your attack does not start quite early, then if there are very strong attacks on Radzymin the 10th Division could be drawn into action on the Warsaw bridgehead. Yesterday I was in Zegrze with the Siberian Brigade, whose spirit is excellent, while the 18th Division is rested and replenished, and I am convinced that it alone could achieve the results of your task. The more it is delayed, the less the probability of an effective strike, which, as I said, depends on time. Any later and a larger force will hit emptiness. Therefore, as the situation now stands, I place my trust absolutely in your hands, General for effective action. Is that so?

General Sikorski: Greetings, General. I understand the situation perfectly well and believe me, General, I would give my soul for the task to be completed within the required time. To give an example, just now at 16:00, when I was holding Colonel Rumsza responsible for the delay in manning the new positions, for the poor organisation during the march and for leaving the rear-guard in Modlin, he reported to me that the brigade was absolutely incapable of immediate action and asked that he not be held responsible for it. So I must have a day's respite, so I do not waste the attack. And what is the general's decision regarding the 17th Division, which now is on the Modlin to Dębe sector? What is the enemy situation west of Ciechanów according to the Front Command? Perhaps you, General, will keep me informed in that matter?

General Haller: All right, general, the 17th Division has already received an order from you to be relieved on the basis of a dispatch from the Front Headquarters, and its sector will be taken by the 1st Army.

General Sikorski: Excuse me sir, I've been on a tour all day, I didn't know about the shift.

General Haller: So you see that you also have the 17th Division at your disposal. I insist that you have to go on to the attack, as vigorously as possible. I expect with almost mathematical accuracy that the enemy will strike in the direction of Nasielsk – Dębe and Putusk – Zegrze early in the afternoon, as he usually does, and in this case possibly even before noon. This is how I see it and the more you understand the importance of your action, to take Nasielsk at the very least when the enemy attack towards Dębe – Zegrze. The situation of the enemy in the west will be given to you immediately by the Chief of Staff, as I have to leave. I am counting on tomorrow for sure. God bless.

General Sikorski: Sir, please give an order to the 1st Army to relieve the 17th Division immediately and direct it to Modlin, as I have ascertained at this moment that no such order came from us or the 1st Army. The relevant dispatch from the front has just arrived. So the division remains in that sector.

Colonel Zagórski: My respects, General. Sir, I shall enquire about the delay in the telegram. As far as the enemy situation is concerned, the 4th Army is heading for Nieszawa and Włocławek. As regards the relief of the 17th Division, I will repeat the order to the 1st Army to relieve it immediately. It is known that the enemy's 21st Division will attack tomorrow through Serock to Zegrze, or the more reason I believe that delaying the action of the 5th Army may lead to disaster. For my part, as front chief of staff, I have to state categorically that I consider the delay of this action as a fact which history will not forgive us, and I have to state it here and now.

General Sikorski: Colonel, let's leave history aside, or you will oblige me to respond differently. The order the Front Command issued is based on complete ignorance of our situation. If we could win with paper orders, then I am ready to start the offensive now. However, if we are to fight with soldiers, then please kindly take into account not only the actual material state of the troops but also time and space. I did not know that you no longer count on Fort Zegrze holding, even if only for a dozen or so hours. I will do what is in my power, and what I can demand of the soldiers, my last order of the day will show you.



However I would ask you, Colonel, not to lay the whole “pigsty mess” of the Polish authorities on me with respect to history.

Colonel Zagórski: Sir, I will not take up your time, General, with a reply. I see your indignation towards me, when I am only doing my duty. I am not laying the blame on anyone. I am, however, obliged to express what I honestly feel. My respects to you.

General Sikorski: And mine to you.

Order for the Attack from Northern Front

The order of the front commander, laying out the action in question, was received at the 5th Army Headquarters on 13 August at 19:00. It reads as follows:

The enemy's 4th Army, consisting of the 12th Division, the 18th Division, the 53rd Division, and the 3rd Cavalry Corps, is advancing from the Ciechanów – Mława region towards the west, with the probable intention of cutting the Toruń – Warsaw railway line, or rather of forcing the Vistula River in the Płock to Wyszogród area and striking at the rear of our army.

The enemy's 15th Army, consisting of the 4th, 11th and 16th Divisions, is on the line Świercze – Nasielsk –Narew River, with the 54th Rifle Division in reserve in the area of Maków. It continues its attack from the north to the south towards Warsaw.

The enemy 3rd Army, consisting of: 6th, 33rd and 56th Divisions and 21st Division in reserve, operates in the area north of the Bug and is moving west.

The enemy 16th Army, consisting of: 27th, 2nd, 17th, 10th and 8th Divisions, are pushing with the 27th Division on the sector Wolica – Zawady, the 2nd Division on Radzymin – Majdan, the 17th Division on Okuniew – Brzeziny [Królewskie Brzeziny], the 10th Division on Michałówek – Rycice [Józefów], the 8th Rifle Division on Otwock – Karczew. The 27th Rifle Division has the mission of later forcing the Vistula near Praga.

Tomorrow begins the decisive battle for the fate of the war and Poland.

In order:

In order to halt the enemy's intended moves and break up the 15th Army, the 5th Army will strike with a strong left wing. It will cross the Wkra River line at dawn on 14 August, with its right wing on the line of Modlin – Błędowo to Pokrzywnica, with its left wing from Gąsocin to Stare Gołymín. It will reach the Pokrzywnica – Stary Gołymín line and at the same time send strong detachments in the direction of Raciąż – Gliniojeck – Ciechanów. The flotilla presently in Modlin under its command, is to be sent to Płock.

Use the tanks on railway wagons.

The 5th Army's attack will be undertaken with the highest energy and as quickly as possible. It should push the 15th Army into the Narew River and even drag the 3rd Army into a retreat beside the 15th Army.

That is the decision.

The detachments that are to cover the left flank of the 5th Army must be particularly active, as this is an indispensable condition for success.

The 10th Division, as reserve of the front command, has been waiting since dawn in battle readiness in Jabłonna, where buses will hopefully arrive in large numbers, directed there by the Front Command. Division Headquarters will maintain direct communication with the Front Headquarters; an officer is to be constantly on duty at the telephone station.

The 1st Army is holding its positions at all costs, without relying on any reserves, and using all the technical means at its disposal for this purpose. As far as its situation allows, it will make attacks in the direction of Wyszaków, and along the Warsaw – Białystok railway track to Nowo Mińsk.

The order of the Northern Front Command brought us much closer to the actual state of affairs in terms of clarifying the enemy's situation and the intentions. Our order of battle of the Russian Western Front mistakenly placed the 54th Rifle Division in the 15th Army rather than 4th Army, but it should have included the 33rd Rifle Division mistakenly listed in the Soviet 3rd Army. Apart from that, however, the enemy forces were given accurately and in accordance with reality.



The movements of the enemy 4th Army and 3rd Cavalry Corps specified in the order did not entirely correspond to the actual movements of the Bolshevik divisions on the extreme right wing of the Russian front. As we already knew, those divisions were heading for Płock and the Vistula river crossings north of Płock.

The Soviet 15th Army was not correctly placed, being actually on the Sochocin – Nowe Miasto – Nasielsk line. The direction of the expected blow from there was incorrect, maintaining the concept of an attack of that army from the north towards Warsaw. It followed that the direction of the 3rd Army's interaction, as envisaged in the order, hit the 15th Army's axis of operation at an angle of 90 degrees.

The operational directives of the front commander, specified in this way, are of historical significance, as they initiated the decisive battle near Warsaw, the battles on the Wkra River, and the battle for Nasielsk and Ciechanów.

For the first time they clearly emphasise the divergence that would occur in the future between the actions of the 5th Army and the actions of the remaining armies of the Northern Front.

On the same day the line separating the 1st and 5th armies was moved by a separate order to the eastern forts of Modlin, which released the right-wing division of the Army (17th ID), which had already been transferred to Modlin.

Principles for the Decisions of the 5th Army Commander

As the course of events so far has shown, as it was preparing to counter-attack, the 5th Army had two separate masses of Russian troops facing it. One of them was the Soviet 15th Army, plus on its left wing the majority of the divisions of the 3rd Army. These units were in principle taking the offensive on the Wkra River, but with the exception that the divisions of the 3rd Army were to attack Zegrze and, depending on their position, could also strike at Warsaw from the north-east. The second enemy mass consisted of the divisions of the 4th Army and the 3rd Cavalry Corps, operating in an area enclosed by the Mława – Ciechanów – Modlin railway, the Polish-German border and the northern arc of the Vistula River.

These two enemy masses threatened the 5th Army in completely different manners, both in time and space. The offensive of the 15th Army, which at any moment might have been supported by the 3rd Army, struck directly at the area of the 5th Army's concentration, attacking the base of its operations, Modlin, with its left flank. If it succeeded to would seize the initiative, destroying the planned counter-attack from the banks of the Wkra River.

The troops of the 4th Army and 3rd CavCorps hung like the sword of Damocles over the 5th Army, threatening to surround it and, if they struck quickly into our rear, crush the left wing of the Northern Front. However, those movements could not take place immediately. At least three days would have been needed to bring the dispersed forces back together into a united force and to launch a such an attack. Moreover, when the 5th Army launched its counter-attack, the Soviet 4th Army was in constant motion westwards in a sweeping arc, which continued to widen the gap already visible on 13 August between the Soviet 4th and 15th armies. Thus, there was a chance of isolating the two Red Armies, one on the Wkra River and the other on the lower Vistula.

In these conditions the 5th Army, positioned between two strong enemy groupings, would strike them successively from the centre and attempt to beat each group separately.

In accordance with the already discussed decisions and the orders based on them, we would limit ourselves in the first phase of the battle to seeking victory on the Wkra River, in order to repel the Soviet divisions approaching it. For that purpose, we assigned all the divisions of the 5th Army, not excluding General Krajowski's group, although it operated separated from the left wing of the army. General Krajowski, in order to fulfil his immediate mission, had to beat the divisions of the 15th Army facing him. We would strive on 14 August to secure for ourselves local superiority over the enemy, needed not only for material reasons, but above all for morale ones.

Only after the victory across the Wkra would the time come for us to turn against the Soviet 4th Army.

In the Russian forces on the Wkra, we could also distinguish two separate concentrations, as far as their strength and intentions were concerned. One of them was situated in the area of Nasielsk, the second in the area of Sochocin. The first could pull up divisions from Serock in reinforcement, to become the stronger. A Bolshevik attack that originated from it, so as far as time was concerned, was the most dangerous for the 5th Army. We would therefore look for a decision in the battle on the Wkra River at Nasielsk, while at the same time covering it using a lively and energetic action of our left wing, organised on the axis of Płońsk – Sochocin – Ciechanów.

The mission given corresponded entirely to the decisions made the day before, so it did not require any changes in the main army grouping.

In this grouping (sketch no. 3) the principle of keeping the strongest possible reserves in our hands prevailed over the need to provide the greatest possible strength at the first strike of the army.



Those reserves were situated in the Modlin area, because we considered that the attack coming from Nasielsk the most dangerous. It also allowed the ability to manoeuvre from the south, in case the 15th Army attacked Płońsk, and the 3rd Army attacked Nasielsk – Wyszogród. Modlin was equally capable of checking both Russian attacks to the south and to the west, allowing us to protect our flanks in both cases.

The 5th Army's command was careful to avoid the disastrous consequences of spreading its divisions evenly across the occupied front. At the same time, we could not succumb to the threat of entrapment hanging over our left flank, which could easily result from too strong a concentration of the Army's troops in the Płońsk area. We had to ensure ourselves the possibility of quickly moving our reserves to a threatened area to reduce the risk of enemy counter actions in pursuit of our concept of manoeuvre.

This tactic was made possible by the Modlin – Ciechanów railway line, together with its branches, as well as the rolling stock prepared for this purpose. But above all the Warsaw buses put at the disposal of the 5th Army by the commander of the front.²⁹

Understanding of the Forces fighting on the Wkra River

Table 1 shows the combat effectives of the Russian Western Front armies on 1 August 1920. It had not materially changed by 14 August.³⁰

The portion that the Polish 5th Army faced during the battle of the Vistula was about 68,000 bayonets, 6,672 sabres, 1,406 heavy machine guns and 327 cannons. These figures are obtained by deducting the 16th Army, the Mozyr Group, the 143rd and 164th Rifle brigades (left behind in Vilnius and Grodno) from the Soviet 4th Army, as well as the 21st Rifle Division from the Soviet 3rd Army, which operated with the Soviet 16th Army in the capture of Radzymin, facing the Polish 1st Army.

An exact listing of the 5th Army's order of battle on that day, as well as the calculation of the number of bayonets that were available, is extremely difficult in view of the incredible fluidity of the army's inventories, the rapid pace of its improvisation, and the ever-changing internal composition. The graphical order of battle of the army done at the time, attached as Sketch 9, shows its weaknesses in terms of supply and services. Numbers from records held by the Military Historical Office and information from division commanders, gives the strength of the 5th Army in Table 2.³¹

Thus the 5th Army, at the most critical the period of the battle in its sector, had at its disposal 22,010 bayonets, not including artillery service, 3,826 sabres in combat strength, plus 452 heavy machine guns, 31 heavy artillery guns and 141 artillery guns, 9 armoured cars, 46 tanks and 2 armoured trains.³²

Orders of the 5th Army for the Attack

Commander of the 5th Army, acting in accordance with the discussed operational assumptions and directives of the front commander, decided to use his units as specified by the following orders.

...In order to neutralise the enemy's intentions and break up the enemy 15th Army, the 5th Army will strike tomorrow from the line of the Wkra River towards the east and north-east. Its first objective to reach the line of the rivers Narew and Orzyc.

²⁹ Like the more famous taxis of the Marne, these were civilian buses from the streets of Warsaw.

³⁰ This was taken from Kakurin and Melikov's War against the White Poles, and can be found separately on pygmywars.com.

³¹ I have separated this out to combine the numbers given in the text with the information from Sketch 9, which is a graphical representation of the order of battle.

³² Sikorski in his footnotes states that

"The figures shown on page 485 of Kakurin and Melikov, is too optimistic under the title "effectives of eaters". The Bolshevik divisions on our front never reached such a high percentage of combatants compared to eaters. On the contrary, the proportion of combat effectives to total numbers is less satisfactory in the Soviet army than in the Polish Army."

This is true, but Sikorski neglects to say that the very basis for counting "effectives" differed in the two armies. The Poles seem to have counted only men with a rifle in a rifle unit as a "bayonet", and men with a sabre or lance in a cavalry unit as "sabres". The Soviets counted everyone in the front line as an effective, including if they were machine-gunners or artillerymen.

This clearly makes size comparisons very difficult. The Poles in the north were outnumbered, but by how much?

As the Soviet 3rd Army was largely absent from the battle, the comparison should not include most of them in any case.

Counting effective strengths on the same basis, I would say the Soviets had much more infantry, MGs and artillery on the Wkra, just possibly twice the amount, but that the Poles were substantially better placed for cavalry (almost all the Soviet horse being 50 km away with Gai-Khan), armoured cars and trains, and were able to communicate, and therefore co-ordinate, much more effectively.

In the later stages the Poles probably had much more ammunition too. While their supply system was improvised and quite shambolic, they at least were delivering over short distances. The Soviet supply chain was largely non-existent by this time.



IV. Orders:

The troops of the 5th Army will regroup at 10:00 on 14 August as follows:

1. The garrison of the fort in its designated sector, with the task of holding the fortified area at all costs.
2. The 18th Infantry Brigade and the Volunteer Division, reorganised according to a separate order, are to assemble in the Borkowo area under the joint command of Colonel Łuczyński, commander of the 9th Infantry Division.
3. The Siberian brigade of Colonel Rumsza, in the area of Zawady on the river Wkra.
4. The 18th Infantry Division and the cavalry brigade, depending on the situation, are to be grouped at this time, with the infantry at least in the area of Sochocin, and with the cavalry in the area of Smardzewo.

The three groups above are attacking groups.

5. In army reserve: the 17th Infantry Division, with the exception of one infantry regiment remaining in the section of the Narew River, which should be temporarily subordinated to Colonel Malewicz, commander of Modlin Fortress; the 17th Infantry Brigade and the artillery of the 9th Infantry Division, are on their way from Warsaw to Modlin; the 9th Cavalry Brigade is also on its way to Modlin.
6. General Osikowski's group, to which I am subordinating the Vistula flotilla as of 14 August, is covering from Wyszogród to Włocławek inclusive, paying close attention to the bridges near Płock and Włocławek.

V. Strike:

From the above initial positions, they will strike on 14 August:

a) Colonel Łuczyński's group will attack Nasielsk resolutely, which they will occupy. The attack will start at 12:00. I expect it to reach Nasielsk by 18:00. The further mission of this group will be, after securing itself strongly from the south and in the direction of Serock, to strike as hard as possible at Pułtusk and occupy the important road junction there.

b) The Siberian Brigade will strike from the Zawady area in the direction of Nowe Miasto, occupy that town, and then the bulk of its forces will move in the direction of Stare Gołymín, trying to attain as quickly as possible the Modlin – Mława railway line in the region of Gąsocin – Słustowo. The attack will begin at 11:00. I expect that the ordered area will be reached by 18:00 at the latest.

The further mission of the Siberian brigade will be to support the attack of Colonel Łuczyński through Przewodowo to Pułtusk and to capture Stare Gołymín.

c) The 18th Infantry Division, having defeated the enemy advancing on Płońsk, will advance as vigorously and forcefully as possible towards Ciechanów in order to seize and firmly hold it. The beginning of the action depends on the local situation; the earliest possible hour is desirable.

d) The cavalry division of General Karnicki, to which the reserve squadron of the 4th Lancer Regiment in Płońsk is attached, will cover the left wing of General Krajowski during the whole action, cooperating with him during the action, and after capturing Ciechanów and establishing communication with the Mława group in the area of Głinojeck, will assemble up with the mission of covering the rear of the 18th Infantry Division and conducting close combat intelligence in the direction of Bieżeń, Sierpc, and Płock.

e) Colonel Habicht's group, currently standing by the Działdówka River, will strike at 10:00 in the direction of Mława and will strive to capture that town.

The ordered attack must be carried out with the greatest possible energy and maintain full cohesion between units. On the Ciechanów – Nasielsk line there will be an ordering of our units and preparation for further offensive. Once stationary it would be desirable for the Łuczyński group to secure itself at Poniaty Wielkie line (on the Nasielsk – Pułtusk road) and Żabiczyn (southeast of Nasielsk). If necessary, this group can count on strong cooperation from the direction of Modlin into the rear of any enemy who attack it from the direction of Serock – Dębe. My intention is to leave the Ciechanów sector in place for the time being, and to advance on the Stary Gołymín – Pułtusk – Błędowo line during the following day. All units must strive to exploit every opportunity that leads us to the enemy's rear, and to defeat his troops. The fate of the Polish-Russian war depends on the results of this offensive of the 5th Army, so none of can recoil from the greatest sacrifices so that we can achieve full success.



VI. Liaison:

I stress once again the need to maintain the closest possible communication with the army command and neighbouring units. Reports should be sent as soon as the action begins, by 12:00, 16:00 and 20:00 at the latest, plus upon any exceptionally important events. The command of the 18th Infantry Division will establish a local reporting point in Płońsk for the 18th Division and the Cavalry Division. The central reporting point of the army will be located above the intersection of the roads Zakroczym – Płońsk and Nasielsk – Górze [Przyborowice Górze].

The Łuczyński Group (18th Infantry Brigade and Volunteer Division) and the Siberian Brigade were in the centre of the 5th Army's starting positions. On the left wing of the army was the Krajowski Group (18th Infantry Division and 8th Cavalry Brigade). Both these groups, as well as the Siberian Brigade, had offensive tasks.

On the army's right wing, the Modlin and Bug-Narew sectors were to remain defensive, with only one infantry battalion remaining on the Bug the following day. The 17th Infantry Division and the 17th Infantry Brigade in Modlin and the 4th Pomeranian Infantry Regiment and a battalion of sailors in the Górze area, as well as the 9th Cavalry Brigade heading for Modlin, remained in the army's reserve.

All these units were grouped together over an area of some 25 kilometres.

The 5th Army commander directed the divisions of the 5th Army to the north-east or north, rather than east, which corresponded to the expected strike of the 15th Army towards Płońsk, and the 3rd Army towards Nasielsk. This was a response to the strong concentration of the enemy, hanging over our left wing in the area of Ciechanów.

In order to neutralise this threat as well as the danger threatening the rear of the army from the area of Raciąż, General Krajowski's group was directed towards Ciechanów. That may seem like a dispersal of forces, but in reality the 18th Infantry Division's attack needed to be outwards. And the security bonus proved to be useful and for a low cost with regards the results achieved.

We anticipated the decisive combats being in the area of Nasielsk. Thus, the Krajowski Group's independent, and extremely difficult task, was to cover the endangered wing and to simultaneously cooperate with it in seeking victory at Nasielsk. That group, by being directed away from the main drive, was to gain us space; by striking in the direction that threatened the rear of the Soviet 4th Army, it was to intimidate the enemy and thus cover our weakness there.

Moreover, our original expectation was that the 5th Army's whole front was to be turned, pivoting on Ciechanów. It was intended, after beating the enemy on the River Wkra and capturing Ciechanów, to clear the space between the River Wkra and the Narew, and then to make a turn with the right wing around Ciechanów and face the Russian group on the lower Vistula. In accordance with those intentions, the first stage of the 5th Army's attack was organized to attain the railway line Ciechanów – Nasielsk, and the next one Ciechanów – Pułtusk.

When planning the battle on the river Wkra, we should have taken into account the Commander-in-Chief's attack across the Wieprz by the Central Front and its consequences more strongly – in a few days the Polish divisions were able to penetrate into the rear of the Russian forces attacking Warsaw and our 5th Army. This would have been the case in normal conditions, but not in those in which the 5th Army was entering into action. The attack of the Commander-in-Chief relieved our 1st Army immediately. The distances involved were so short that the Central Group of Polish armies, striking against the Soviet 16th army, ensured immediate results on the front line of our 1st Army.

On the other hand, the situation of the 5th Army was completely different; its sector of the front was too distant from the initial positions of the group of armies attacking from the south for it to be possible to count on a quick effect in the rear of the Soviet 15th and 3rd armies.

In evaluating the possibilities, it is necessary to go back to that time and take into account the contemporary state of mind, so as to gain a picture consistent with reality. Then we see how uncertain the fate of the planned action on the Polish side was on 13 August, and how eagerly and widely our first success was needed on the Warsaw battlefield in order to rebuild the morale of the majority of our soldiers.

Thus, for morale as well as strategic reasons, the 5th Army's attack of 14 August bore the characteristics of a separate and relatively independent campaign.

Morale Preparation of the Battle on the Wkra

A telling illustration of the state of affairs is shown by the orders of that day from the 5th Army commander, with a focus on the morale factors. The subordinate officers were severely warned against exaggerated assessment of the enemy's situation and decisions to retreat based on it. Any retreat by individual commanders on the battlefield without a clear order to do so was formally forbidden.

It went, in regard to that:



"I am not accustomed to such attitudes, and I will not tolerate them in the army under my command.

The duty of a soldier in war is of necessity onerous, in which there are only two options: a strict and ruthless execution of orders, or death at your post.

Excluding for the time being incompetent commanders, I will court-martial any officer who commits, in the present serious moment, the least negligence in his duty.³³

Current positions must be held by all commanders to the last man, even if temporarily surrounded on all sides, if he is not ordered to retreat.

Abandonment of the position will entail legal investigation against the commander in whose section it occurred ...

... I point out that since I execute privates for fleeing the battlefield, I will not shrink from applying the death penalty to officers, who bear full responsibility for the conduct of their units.

The fate of Warsaw and the fate of Poland is at stake in the sector of the 5th Army. I will not allow the recklessness or thoughtlessness of some officers to destroy the Fatherland. I will remove bad officers from their posts without fear, the good ones will hold on to their positions, and I will win.

At the same time, I want all officers of the 5th Army to understand my sincere intentions, to base their mutual relations on absolute trust and to exert all their strength for the common cause. All officers subordinate to me, who fulfil their duty in its entirety, can be sure of the strongest possible support from me and the most friendly care in the case of need.

As can be seen from the juxtaposition of the forces of both sides, the 5th Army had to deal with a large numerical superiority of the enemy. This disadvantage was all the more dangerous because almost half of the tactical units of the 5th Army were improvised or volunteer formations, poorly supplied in material terms and bearing the stamp of hastily raised formation.

Moreover, the 5th Army, as a creation of the last few days, had no combat tradition. The invisible but nevertheless reliable thread of mutual trust that should bind a soldier to his commander if a unit is to be victorious did not exist in its ranks. During my travels I had often encountered, not just signs of exceptional heroism, but also units that were more like a panic-stricken herd than a disciplined, combat-capable military team.

In this ailing army the fading soul of the troops needed to be healed and made capable of action, to fight again. A sense of certainty and faith in a victorious end to the battle we were starting was required, in spite of the numerical superiority of the enemy.

I awakened this faith by issuing the following appeal on 14 August:

SOLDIERS!

Today is the beginning of our counter-attack, long-awaited by the Polish Army and the whole nation.

The 5th Army has been entrusted with the most noble task today, to launch the first strike and decide the decisive period of the Polish-Russian war.

Soldiers, when you set off to attack in a gale of fire, remember that you are fighting not only for fame, but for the freedom and power of our Homeland!

Today you carry the future of Poland on the blades of your bayonets.

The whole nation is with you with heart and thoughts. The whole Poland believes and trusts that in the fight, which begins today to the death, there can be only one result:

Victory and triumph for the armies of the Republic of Poland.

Persevere and be strong! The alleged power of the Bolsheviks will crumble under your blow. With swords we will carve out the old borders of Poland.

Forward, soldiers! Boldly look death in the eye, because death is fame, victory, our future!

Forward, until the complete destruction of the enemy!

Long live Poland!

³³ Colonel Habicht, commanding isolated forces to the far north was, it seems, prosecuted for dereliction of duty. So the threats issued here do not seem to have been mere bluster.



CHAPTER VIII

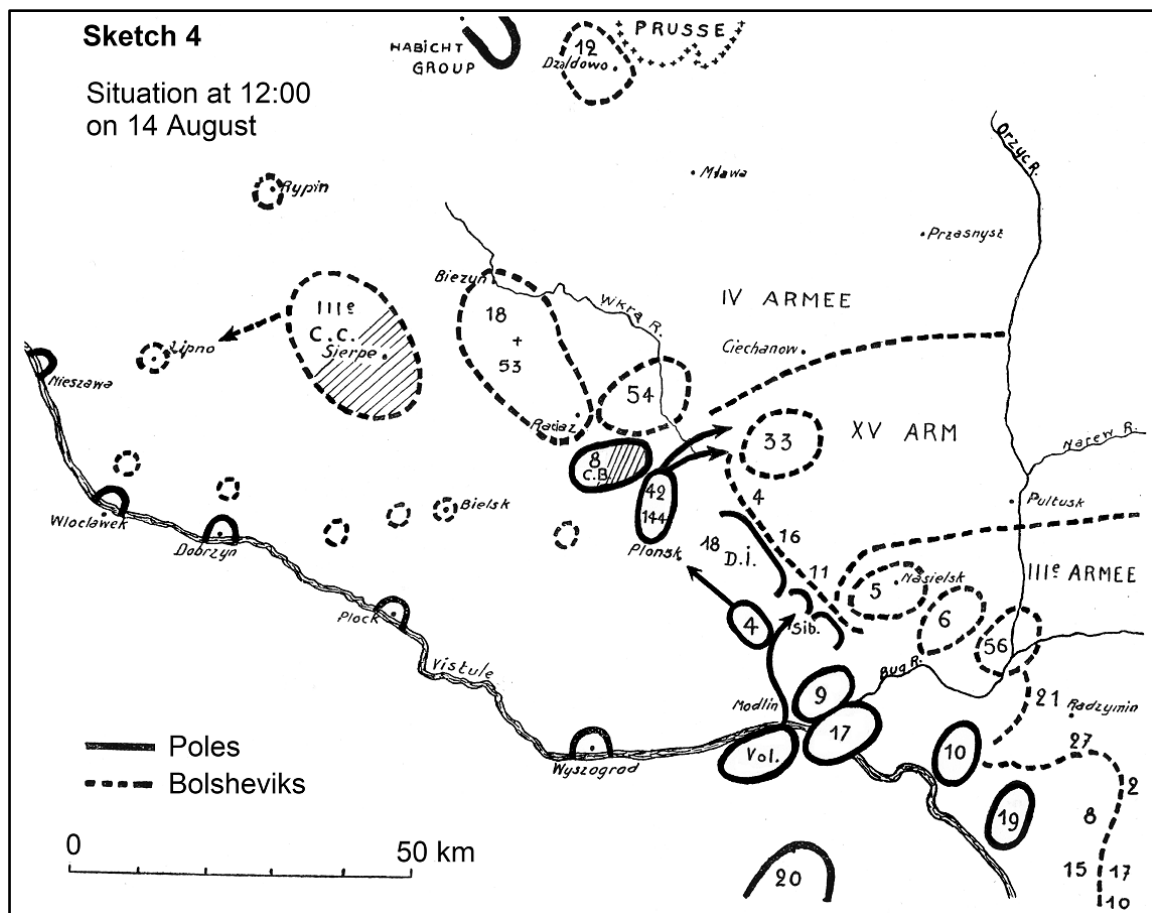
The Attack of the 5th Army and the Battle of the 1st Army for Radzymin

Start of the Battle on the Wkra River

When directing General Krajowski to the vicinity of Sochocin on 13 August, we were aware of the difficulties of his mission. His group, thrown at the middle of a strong enemy concentration, was always going to get a lively reaction. It was, however, difficult to predict the type and nature of the Russian counter-attack in that sector, given the numerous and varied possibilities for manoeuvre. Therefore, the Krajowski group's mission could not be formulated in detail – in general it consisted in exploiting any gaps found in the area of Ciechanów. By acting vigorously in the constantly changing situation, his group should have made it easier for us in the first phase of the battle of Wkra to achieve an advantage at Nasielsk and then to create conditions necessary for cutting off and surrounding the western group of Russian forces, operating at the same time on the lower Vistula.

The execution of such a difficult task required confidence in his own forces, as well as the initiative and decisive energy of the general, who had the left-wing group at his disposal. By indicating in my order that Ciechanów was to be the object of his aspirations, and by constantly stressing this direction in further developments, I was not only aiming at achieving clear operational-tactical goals, but also had considerations of morale in mind.

General Krajowski, having noticed on 13 August the increased movement of Russian columns on the Ciechanów – Raciąż line and having thrown back Red units that had crossed the Wkra River at Ślepowrony during the night, set off at dawn on 14 August at the head of five infantry battalions, four batteries and a cavalry brigade in the direction of Baboszewo – Sarbiewo and further on to Mystkowo – Rzewin (sketch no. 4). He reached those places about noon after minor skirmishes with the enemy. That movement by the 18th Infantry Division threatened the left flank of the Soviet 4th Army and the 3rd Cavalry Corps, operating at that time in the area of Sierpc, Biezuń, and Glinojek (with the exception of the 12th Rifle Division covering the 4th Army from the north). No wonder then that the enemy responded to the diversion with a strong counter-attack on the right wing of General Krajowski's group, which rested on the Wkra. The fighting that ensued during the morning of 14 August, on the area of Sochocin and Joniec, resulted in no positive gains for the enemy. It did, however, force General Krajowski to abandon his original direction of attack and to turn to face the pressing right wing of the 15th Army.



On the rest of 5th Army's section, the Russians launched an offensive in the morning of the same day, endeavouring to cross the Wkra River near Błędko – Borkowo, without positive results. They also attacked Modlin from the north and



two outer forts, lightly garrisoned by us, namely Miękoszyn and Toruń fell into their hands. This caused momentary confusion in Modlin, which was quickly overcome by Colonel Malewicz. Due to the lack of vigour in following up that success, we considered the fall of the forts to be an event of secondary importance, and did not engage a single reserve battalion as reinforcements.

The immediate neighbours of the 5th Army, the 7th Reserve Brigade led by Colonel Malachowski, at the same time threw back troops attacking Zegrze from the north.

The Fall of Radzymin and the Course of Battle in the South

However, the course of events in the eastern part of the 1st Army sector was different. Unfortunately, the predictions of the front commander, General Haller, and his Chief of Staff, Colonel Zagórski, proved correct.

In that sector two divisions, namely the Soviet 21st and 27th, attacked Radzymin, located in the valley of the marshy Rządza stream, at dawn. The Bolsheviks, encountering the 46th Infantry Regiment as a cordon, "swept it clean away", according to the Russian expression and took the town, subsequently advancing their leading troops to a line of Borki – Alexandrów – Helenów. The 11th Infantry Division, weakened by last-minute personnel changes and stretched over nearly 25 kilometres, had nothing to counteract it with. Thus, the enemy, without most of his forces fighting was at Radzymin on the second (and last) line of the Warsaw bridgehead, a line that used the sand dunes extending from Nieporęt to Rembertów, bordered by marshes to the east.

To regain the lost positions, it was necessary to bring the 19th Infantry Division³⁴ into battle, which had been in Marki as part of the front commander's reserves. Radzymin was retaken around noon the same day by a frontal counter-attack of that unit, only to soon fall into the hands of the Soviet 27th Division for the second time, as the 19th ID was unable to hold it for more than a few hours, and was then forced to withdraw. This caused General Haller to call up his last reserve³⁵, namely the 10th Infantry Division, but it was not in a position to intervene sufficiently rapidly.

The Russian victory in that sector on 14 August made a deep impression on everyone.

Radzymin is 23 km from Warsaw. Its fall, which happened so quickly despite the numerical and technical superiority of our forces in the Warsaw bridgehead, worried the capital considerably; it shook the Commander-in-Chief; it drew the attention of the front commander to that sector of the 1st Army and, above all, it exhausted his reserves, which could have created an extremely difficult situation in event of renewed Russian attacks towards Praga. Therefore, in addition to the counter-attack of the 10th Infantry Division, the decisive factor in relieving Warsaw was the counteroffensive of the 5th Army, launched around noon on 14 August as a result of the justified, as we can see, acceleration of its operations by the front command.

These difficulties of the Northern Front almost accelerated the action organised behind the Wieprz River as well. Under their influence, Marshal Piłsudski was asked to put forward the start of the offensive he was preparing to 15 August. Given the manoeuvre group's shortcomings at the time, that would have had a negative effect on its course. However, the Commander-in-Chief kept the date of 16 August.

In the centre of the Polish front, the 3rd Legion Division defeated the Soviet 7th Division near Hrubieszów on 14 August, forcing the right wing of the 12th Army to retreat. This gained us the space and time necessary to carry out the promised Central Front attack northwards.

On the same day our Southern Front had to retreat to Lwów, increasingly threatened by the pressure of Budenny's Horse Army.

Stubborn Fighting for Possession of the Wkra

The negative features of moving the 5th Army's counter-attack forward were revealed, above all in the central section. The reorganisation of the centre, so that Colonel Łuczyński's operational group and the Siberian brigade could cooperate fully, was not completed in the accelerated timeframe. Irreparable technical shortcomings prevented us from improvising a resilient operational group command, and similarly the reorganisation of the Volunteer Division could not take place in such a short time. That division was formed from General Baranowski's volunteer units and Lt-Colonel Koc's troops, that is from two distinct groups, and their cohesion was further weakened by the heavy losses sustained previously. To form a combat-capable division, and replenish it, was not possible within 24 hours, despite the feverish and dizzying pace of work.

The 18th Infantry Brigade's attack, which was to replace that of Colonel Łuczyński's operational group, was also somewhat delayed.

³⁴ More often known as the 1st Lithuanian-Belorussian Division, or LitBel Division.

³⁵ Not actually his last reserve, but his last major reserves of regulars.



As a result of that, only Colonel Rumsza and his Siberian brigade remained in the centre of the army. Colonel Rumsza, having not waited for the arrival of the 18th Infantry Brigade, began the attack he had been ordered to carry out at the appointed time: he directed one Siberian regiment from Zawady to Nowe Miasto, while the second regiment went from Borkowo to Nasielsk. This overconfidence in his forces, manifested by splitting them, as well as the delay of the units that were to cooperate with the Siberian Brigade, had to take a toll. Indeed, the result was not long coming. The Russians responded to our move with a vigorous counter-attack, which the Siberian brigade initially victoriously withstood. Its first regiment threw off the Russian troops storming the bridgehead at Borkowo, while at the same time the second Siberian regiment even crossed the River Wkra near Zawady.

However, at 18:00 the entire Soviet 11th Division launched a concentrated attack on the 1st Regiment's positions across on the left bank of the Wkra River. After suffering heavy losses, particularly of officers and NCOs, the regiment could not withstand the uneven fight and abandoned the bridgehead in the evening. That push of the 1st Siberian Regiment behind the Wkra River gave Borkowo to the Soviet 11th Division, which also captured a battery of guns and took prisoners. Zawady fell, and the Siberian brigade, having one regiment destroyed and the other seriously weakened, had to retreat to the area of Wrona – Józefowo.

This created an extremely unpleasant situation for the left-wing group, while in the centre of the army it led to the Russian troops crossing the River Wkra over a relatively large area.

On our left wing, General Krajowski, moving at dawn of 14 August ran into the flank of a Russian column marching towards Płock, but he had little detail about the local situation of the enemy. His offensive movement towards Raciąż made us aware that for the time being, no serious danger threatened us from that area, as the Soviet 4th Army was still vigorously engaged in heading west, covering itself from Płońsk only with the help of weak units.

The resulting gap between the Soviet 15th and 4th armies was advantageous for us, if we were able to exploit it. The lack of link between the inner wings of the armies opposing us left the right wing of the 15th Army hanging in the air. The commander of that army, reacting to the danger now posed to him and his western neighbour by the mobility of the 5th Army's left wing, moved his 4th and 16th Divisions into the first line, and with the 33rd Division in reserve, to make a concentrated attack on parts of the 18th Infantry Division and the 8th Cavalry Brigade present around Sochocin and on the river Wkra. We needed thus to profit from the freedom of movement we had as a result of the gap given to our 18th Infantry Division when it reached Rzewin.

Taking this situation into account, General Krajowski shielded himself from the Soviet 4th Army by sending the 8th Cavalry Brigade to Głinojeck, and struck at the right wing of the 15th Army in the early afternoon hours of 14 August at the head of two infantry regiments supported by divisional artillery, heading for Sochocin and Młock. This assault encountered a strong group of units of the 4th and 16th Soviet Divisions near Sochocin, surprising them as they prepared an attack on Płońsk. On the other hand, at Młock there was nobody. As a consequence of General Krajowski's strike, fierce fighting developed in the vicinity of Sochocin. This not only tied down the enemy's initiative, which otherwise presented us with great danger, but also led, after a few hours' struggle, to the victorious capture of that town at the bayonet late in the evening by the 145th Infantry Regiment, taking numerous material and prisoners of war.

The victory gained on the left wing of the army was diminished in its effects by the previously related defeat suffered by us simultaneously in the section of the Siberian brigade, as the Bolshevik troops who had followed up the 2nd Siberian Regiment across the Wkra River near Zawady, turned back to the north and attacked the right wing of the 18th Infantry Division. They attempted to break through to its rear, which led to fighting conducted by us with varying degrees of success, with exemplary perseverance by the 144th Infantry Regiment covering the right flank of our division. That Russian diversion restricted the freedom of movement of the 5th Army's left flank group, and entailed the serious danger of splitting our front into two, which would be tantamount to ruining our plans and threatened the gradual destruction of the entire army.

New Fall of Radzymin

The seriousness of the situation was intensified by the extremely frightening news of the repeated fall of Radzymin, of the supposedly complete destruction of the 19th Infantry Division and of the departure to Radzymin of the 10th Division, which had been in Jabłonna, covering the rear and the right flank of the 5th Army. Bolshevik patrols had after the second fall of Radzymin had approached the line of Wołomin – Izabelin – Nieporęt. Unsubstantiated gossip, always active in such situations, had them at the forts in Nowy Dwór and in the suburbs of Praga.

The news was exploited by local Communists, which gave it exaggerated shapes and spread panic in the rear of the 5th Army during the night of 14/15 August. The panic had to be brought under control at any cost, if the counter-attack of that army, undertaken at a time of what appeared to be general Polish defeat, was to achieve positive results.



Bolshevik patrols advancing on Praga also made us fear the possibility of being cut off from Warsaw. Therefore we needed to clarify the situation on the army's right wing. A strong reconnaissance by officers, sent at towards Benjaminów, found that the fort was held by Colonel Lukowski and the 48th Infantry Regiment, while Nieporęt had been taken by Bolshevik troops of indeterminate strength. It was therefore all the more imperative to make an effort to consolidate our section of the front, and to resume the offensive.

Indecisive Combats on the Wkra River

First of all, Colonel Łuczyński received the order to act as vigorously as possible, regardless of the fatigue of the 18th Infantry Brigade and the size of the casualties connected with his task.

This brigade, concentrated in the vicinity of Fort Błędowo, was to strike from the south on the left flank of the Soviet 11th division, which was occupying Borkowo, in order to pin it down and prevent it from widening the breach made along the Wkra River.

The 16th Infantry Brigade, moving off in the evening, could not fully accomplish this task, as it did not reach Borkowo and Wrona. It did, however, force the enemy to move some of its forces to the south, which temporarily deprived him of the dangerous freedom of movement he had there.

This respite was used to organise a coordinated action on our part. Having restored order in the rear of the Siberian Brigade and having used severe measures to bring the chaos spreading in the rear of the army under control, I went to Górne – Wrona that night to determine the actions of the Volunteer Division planned for the following day from Wrona. The division, reorganised and rearmed at lightning speed, was moved to the spot vacated by the Siberian brigade. However, in spite of a strenuous march and the persistent energy of its commander and the officers under his command, it could not reach the Wrona – Józefowo area before 22:00, where it immediately relieved the Siberian Brigade, using the cover of darkness to occupy the heights east of the two towns. The 9th Infantry Division – formed by the joining of the 17th and 18th Infantry Brigades, which until then had been in the rear of the army – was to collaborate with the Volunteer Division at Borkowo from the south.

In this way, while the 144th Infantry Regiment guarding the right wing of the 18th Infantry Division was repulsing repeated attacks made during the night, conditions were created for a counter-attack on the Borkowo – Nasielsk axis from the west and south-west. The Siberian Brigade, gathering south of Zawady, was to cover the left wing of the Volunteer Division, and relieve the pressure on the inside flank of General Krajowski's group by moving towards Nowe Miasto.

During the night I noticed the disintegration of some units, the discouragement of officers and the loss of faith in victory in the majority of the senior commanders. The latter suggested to my Chief of Staff that we immediately cease the allegedly pointless counter-attack that was causing excessive casualties, and requested a further retreat. As a result, at 02:00 I sent an order in which, citing higher considerations, I called on my subordinate commanders to carry out the missions entrusted to them unconditionally and to begin a new attack on the Russian forces at dawn on 15 August.

The combat the 5th Army which took place on 14 August, had the character of an encounter battle, bloody yet indecisive, for mastery of the Wkra River. Our units fought almost the entire Red 15th Army, with the exception of the 33rd Rifle Division, which was on the right wing of the army at evening, plus two divisions of the 3rd Army, which fought in the Nasielsk area. Moreover, General Krajowski attacked some covering units of the 18th Rifle Division, belonging to the Soviet 4th Army, during his movement towards Rzewin. By 14 August that army had reached the area of Sierpc, with the CavCorps, and Raciąż – Biezuń with the 53rd and 18th Rifle Divisions. At the same time the 54th Rifle Division by-passed Ciechanów and was nearing Głinojeck, while the 12th Rifle Division, marching along the German-Polish border, defeated Colonel Habicht's mixed covering detachment, made up of three squadrons of the 3rd Border Rifle Division, a mounted platoon, eight machine guns and an assault company, and took Działdowo, directly threatening Pomerania.

The battle for the Wkra River remained unresolved on that day. However, it clarified the enemy's positions to us and stopped the offensive movement of the Soviet 15th Army, and part of the 3rd Army.

Subordination of the Lower Vistula Group to the 5th Army

On 14 August, the Chief of General Staff made General Osikowski's Group, securing the lower Vistula, subordinate to the Commander of the 5th Army. That group was then directly under my orders. This gave me the means to cover the rear of the 5th Army. Also called the Lower Vistula Group, it was scattered over a vast area from Wyszogród to Włocławek, with a task of protecting the Vistula. Moreover, it always lost its combat value when moved, as it was made up of a diverse and poorly trained set of units.



In addition, the 5th Army ordered a reorganisation of their cavalry forces. A cavalry division was created under the command of Colonel Dreszer, composed from the 8th and 9th Cavalry Brigades, the latter having been sent to Płońsk. General Karnicki was given command over another newly-formed division in General Osikowski's group, made up of the 211th, 212th and 214th Ulan Regiments, as well as the 9th and 11th Border Rifle Regiments. The latter change did not come into effect until 17 August. General Karnicki's new cavalry division did not play any role in the battle – its improvisation, like any hasty cavalry improvisation in wartime, did not produce any positive results.



CHAPTER IX

Mastery of the Wkra, Victory at Nasielsk and Start of Counter-Offensive from the Wieprz

Enemy Actions cause a Modification of our Plans on the Wkra

At dawn on 15 August, the Russian army stole a march on us, and began an attack along almost the entire Wkra front line, from Sochocin up to and including Borkowo. They were repelled in both the 18th Infantry Division sector, where the attacking troops were thrown back behind the Wkra River, and even in the sector of the Volunteer Division, which held its positions near Wrona and Zawady. Nevertheless, this delayed, and partly changed, the plan of action established the previous night. These changes are captured in the operational order, issued on the morning of 15 August, according to which:

1. General Osiński will strike at Nasielsk from the south and take that town. The attack will commence at 11:00 from the line of the northern forts using the whole 23rd Infantry Brigade, the appropriate amount of division artillery and two armoured trains. General Osiński will cover his right wing with the units of the 17th Infantry Division, which are currently stationed on the section of Kikoły – Orzechowo, pulling them from their positions and advancing them to the area of Ciechanów, once Nasielsk is captured, to act as a protection from the Serock area.

All the above movements must be carried out in a decisive manner. General Osiński will maintain communication with the command of the army and attempt to liaise with Colonel Łuczyński. After capturing Nasielsk, he will take advantage of the fact that he is at the rear of the 11th Rifle Division, presently in the area of Borkowo – Tomaszewo.

2. Colonel Łuczyński will take direct command of the 9th Infantry Division and will immediately strike from the region of Błędowo at the right flank of the Soviet 11th Division in order to defeat it, after which he will turn about to face Nasielsk in accordance with instructions already received.

3. Colonel Koc (Volunteer Division) will fix the enemy on the line of Hill 103 – Zawady; and will then complete the mission previously instructed. From 15 August he will report directly to the commander of the Army.

4. Colonel Rumsza's mission remains unchanged. I ask that he command his subordinates directly and applies the greatest haste in carrying out the task entrusted to him.

5. The 18th Infantry Division is to assemble in the area of Sochocin. Having reinforced the cavalry division with one infantry regiment, it is to strike with that detachment at Ciechanów. The bulk of its forces are to be directed westwards to Stare Gołymín and Przewodowo. The cavalry division and the Siberian brigade I temporarily subordinate to General Krajowski.

New orders will be issued upon reaching the Ciechanów-Modlin railway line.

The 4th Pomeranian Regiment and battalion of sailors will leave for Płońsk as a permanent garrison.

I stress that some of the units are acting with insufficient energy and that the communication service is not functioning properly. I must insist on this matter.

I was forced to arrest two officers for failure to fulfil their duties on the battlefield, and one of them, Captain L. will be court-martialled.

According to the latest information, Borkowo and Błędowo have been taken by our troops

The quoted order introduced a clear division of the 5th Army into three distinct groups. The central one of Lt- Colonel Koc, was the most numerous after the reorganisation, and received the task of tying up the main direction of the Russian attack, coming from Nasielsk. The task was very difficult in view of the enemy's energy in this section. As we later found out, this was because there was an unusually strong Red troop formation in the area, as the Soviet 3rd Army's reserves were moving there. In the event of the planned action's success, the Volunteer Division should have been automatically transferred to the army's reserve.

Indeed, the reserves of the 5th Army were depleting at a rapid pace. When it turned out that the 9th Infantry Division was unable to break through the enemy's formation near Nasielsk on its own, it was reinforced with the 23rd Infantry Brigade. In the next phase that brigade would combine with the remaining parts of the 17th Infantry Division, under the command of General Osiński, and move on Nasielsk from the south. Thus, the 9th and 17th Infantry Divisions, which were to cooperate with each other, formed a southern strike group of relatively high strength, whose immediate task was to break up the Russian forces surrounding Nasielsk and to capture that town as quickly as



possible. The concept of a manoeuvre was being prepared, consisting in a flank attack from Modlin on the Soviet divisions encircling it from the north.

General Krajowski's group was reinforced on the left flank of the army, with the Siberian brigade being subordinated to him. A permanent garrison for Płońsk was also created by sending the 4th Pomeranian Infantry Regiment and battalion of sailors there. The latter formations were not of any serious value. However, their assignment to Płońsk and the army commander's establishment of a permanent garrison there emphasised the fact that he had taken responsibility for the Krajowski group's rear, which gave the latter greater freedom of movement. While the Płońsk garrison was weak, it was not intended to be so for long, as the first echelons of the 9th Cavalry Brigade were expected in Modlin in the evening of 15 August.

In summary, we continued to ignore the Soviet 4th Army and Gai-Khan CavCorps, which would have been particularly dangerous to us, and threw all the 5th Army divisions against the enemy attacking us from the east and north-east, in order to first win the battle on that primary sector at any cost.

The situation in which the 18th Infantry Division found itself at the time – forced to act independently, often in divergent directions – as well as the insufficiently energetic collaboration with the Siberian Brigade, exposed General Krajowski's group to being dispersed. This danger was countered by ordering General Krajowski to concentrate the entire 18th Infantry Division in the Sochocin area, and subordinating the Siberian Brigade to him. Thus strengthened, the group received two tasks. The first was to capture Ciechanów with the help of the cavalry, and the second was to launch the strongest possible attack eastwards. Ciechanów remained our objective from 13 August onwards, in an attempt to cut the communications between the Soviet 15th and 4th Armies, trying to bring about the greatest possible confusion in the Russian ranks. The northern group's attack on the right wing of the 15th Army in the direction of Golymin and Przewodowo turned out to be equally necessary because, without that move, it was impossible to count on beating the superior Russian forces attacking us on the Wkra and near Nasielsk.

Victorious Battles for possession of the Wkra

It was not easy to complete all the tasks assigned. In particular, the commander of the 17th Infantry Division, who had intended to carry out the task assigned to him by a mounted strike at the Modlin – Nasielsk rail line, could not undertake the attack within the time allotted to him. Gathering the division together, which was done on the northern forts of Modlin, delayed its actions, so that the strike anticipated in that area could not begin until 18:00 hours. And since north of Modlin lay, as it later turned out, an entire Soviet division, the attack on Nasielsk by the 17th ID, supported from Modlin, was equally spoiled. After a bloody and hard fight, General Osiński did indeed drive the enemy from the forts at Miękoszyn and Toruń, but his further movement forward was halted on the Toruń – Miękoszyn – Studzianki – Cegielnia [Cegielnia Psucka] line, despite great efforts on his part.

The events in the 17th Infantry Division's section had a decisive influence on the progress of the neighbouring 9th Division's attack. That division, attacking from around Borkowo, was also unable to advance at the appointed hour. Under the command of Colonel Łuczyński, it fought all day in the Błędowo region, and suffered particularly heavy losses in the 41st Infantry Regiment. It finally drove back the superior enemy forces, and with a brilliant bayonet attack took the bridge near Borkowo in the evening, capturing a dozen or so machine guns. The achievement of such a major result in spite of the risk of encirclement on the division's right flank, which the 22nd Infantry Regiment operated very skilfully to avoid, is one of the division's most glorious feats of arms.

This relieved the Volunteer Division, which since early morning had been in the throes of heavy fighting. Deprived of the support of the Siberian Brigade and thus exposed to encirclement from Adamowa Wola, it found itself in an extremely difficult situation. In order to hold its positions, it had to pay another heavy sacrifice in blood and use all its reserves.

The course of events on the left wing of the army was far more favourable for us that day though.

Thus the 8th Cavalry Brigade, led by General Karnicki and assisted by the French Colonel Loir, with a bold and skilful manoeuvre was able to capture Ciechanów. Fighting constantly, it broke through to the rear of the Soviet 4th Army. Destroying supply units and numerous wagons on the way, bringing chaos and confusion, at 11:00 it took the town. Beating off the garrison, it drove out the Soviet 4th Army's commander and his staff, capturing their papers, several hundred prisoners, and most important of all the army radio station – the only basis of communication between the Front and the 4th Army, advanced so far to the west, and the cavalry corps cooperating with it.

This happy raid by our cavalry understandably caused concern on the opposite side. In order to eliminate the unfortunate incident, or to protect the endangered wing of the 15th Army, its commander directed the 33rd Kuban Division, an elite unit of proven Communists, from the army's reserve towards Ciechanów. The fighting that ensued deprived General Krajowski of communication with the 8th Cavalry Brigade until 17 August. At the same time,



however, it tied up the reserves of the Soviet 15th Army, and thus played a major role in the overall battle on the Wkra River, which was developing simultaneously.

Ciechanów fell to the pressure of the Soviet 33rd Rifle Division, and our cavalry withdrew westwards under cover of darkness. That loss was not serious in relation to the service that the diversion had rendered to our army. On the other hand, the destruction of the 4th Army's only radio station and the dispersal of its command – accomplished by the 203rd Ulan regiment – was far more significant than could normally be expected.

The successful advance on Ciechanów, by drawing off the 15th Army's reserves and threatening its right wing, made it easier for us to deal with that army elsewhere. General Krajowski, having freed his left wing, was able to strike with two infantry regiments at Nowe Miasto. Having broken through the enemy's resistance after a fierce battle near Kuchary, he took Nowe Miasto at 20:00, and then moved on to Szczawin and Klukowo-Świercze. His second group simultaneously attacked from Młock towards Ojrzeń, Sarnowa Góra and Sońsk. That section went equally well for us, as the 18th Infantry Division was able to fight its way to the Ciechanów – Modlin railway line in the evening of 15 August, which was reached near Sońsk and Świercze. Pursuing detachments, meanwhile, advanced several kilometres to the west, stalking the retreating divisions of the 15th Army in the direction of Przewodowo and Stary Gołymin.

To recap: during the night of 15 August, the front line of the 5th Army ran from Sońsk to Świercze along the railway, then breaking off southwest to pass east of Borkowo to Miękoszyn – Studzianki – Cegielnia. The Wkra River line had thus fallen to us over its whole extent in our sector.

The enemy forces were as follows: The 12th Rifle Division was fighting on the German-Polish border near Lidzbark [Lautenburg]. The 3rd Cavalry Corps, having left the bulk of its forces in Sierpc, had sent detachments to Bobrowniki, Włocławek and Lipno, finding support from the 53rd Rifle Division, which was keeping pace with it, while the 18th and 54th Rifle Divisions operated in the Raciąż area.

The Soviet 15th Army, having suffered heavy losses, counter-attacked Ciechanów with the 33rd Rifle Division, in order to clear that city, cover the endangered flank, and relieve the 4th and 16th Rifle Divisions, which were forced to withdraw to the north and west of the line Sarnowa Góra – Sońsk – Słustowo – Świercze. The 11th and 5th Rifle Divisions also had to withdraw behind the Wkra River, placing the river into the hands of Polish units. The 6th Rifle Division was still fighting with us at the northern forts of Modlin.

Importance of our 15 August Success on the Wkra

Our successes on 15 August, had two major consequences.

First of all, it raised the spirits of our soldiers, arousing enthusiasm in the ranks of the 5th Army and strengthening the confidence of subordinates in their commanders.

I ended my situation report from that day with the words: "The men retain their spirit of victory." I said that because it was evident that morale was rising. I was aware of the importance for the entire front that matters had swung our way in the battle for Warsaw. The troops preparing to strike from the banks of the Wieprz River would not be indifferent to it. The Commander-in-Chief's proclamations spoke of these first Polish victories, refuting the opinion gaining ground in Poland the enemy was invincible, strengthened by the defeat at Radzymin. It revived the energy of the Polish troops, encouraged sacrifice to do the same, and sparked a healthy and valuable rivalry between individual armies and divisions on the battlefield.

Moreover, this success was of paramount operational significance. General J. Haller described it as follows with regard to the entire northern front:

"The enemy has thrown all the reserves at his disposal into an attack on the 5th Army. About ten enemy divisions are operating there. The energetic leadership of the 5th Army and the heroic attitude of its soldiers have drawn considerable enemy forces away from the gates of Warsaw ...

The advance of the 18th Infantry Division was equally decisive for the battle of Nasielsk, which had not yet been decided, despite our efforts.

Thus, our victories of 15 August in the 5th Army's sector, relieved the burden on Warsaw, drawing divisions of the Soviet 3rd Army to the Wkra River and thus separating them from direct cooperation with the Russian 16th Army in the attack on Radzymin – Praga, which was so dangerous for the capital. On the other hand the success of the left wing of the Army made it easier for us to search for victory at Nasielsk.

Threat of the Russian Counterattack at Płońsk

At this time GHQ intercepted Russian Operational Order No. 22, in which the commander of the Soviet 4th Army was ordered to finish off the left wing of the 5th Army, whose energetic movements were causing concern. In the order, the 18th and 54th Rifle Divisions were to strike immediately in the rear of the 5th Army, towards Płońsk, coordinating



their movement with a simultaneous counter-attack by the right-wing divisions of the 15th Army. The 12th Rifle Division was to remain in the vicinity of Lidzbark and the 53rd Rifle Division was ordered to remain in the region of Biezuń –Sierpc in order to cover the planned attack on Płońsk. The 3rd Cavalry Corps was ordered to carry out a similar mission in the vicinity of Lipno and Włocławek, in case of a Polish counter-attack from the Pomeranian side of the Toruń fort.

Comrade Shuvaev's operational dispositions were, if we consider the regrouping of his army, a not very successful interpretation of the orders of the Russian Western Front commander.

Indeed, Tukhachevski saw that (from Kakurin and Melikov's *War with the White Poles*):

The 15th and the 3rd Armies were fighting major battles to recapture the forward positions of Modlin. He believed that a further advance of the 4th Army to the northwest along the corridor, in the face of a sudden change of the general strategic situation, would not bring positive results. He therefore ordered the 4th Army to halt the fan-shaped advance of its divisions and use the bulk of them to take a vigorous, decisive part in the battles for the Modlin region.

According to these intentions the commander of the 4th Army should have "cut off the lines of retreat of the enemy operating against the 15th and the 3rd Armies" (Instruction No. 396 op.). That is, by means of a strike to the north-east, finish off the enemy deployed on the right bank of the Wkra River.

These instructions of the Western Front commander, taken under the pressure of the battle situation, clearly indicate that he had decided to take advantage of the movement of the Polish northern group, aiming to smash it on the right bank of the Vistula River. Indeed, success in that manoeuvre could open a path straight to the rear of the Polish army along the left bank of the Vistula, putting the strong northern grouping of the White-Polish army, calculated at 70,000 bayonets, under the threat of destruction.

The news of the Russian command's intended manoeuvre caused understandable concern on our side. All the more so because Płońsk is a small town with no massive buildings, located in the lowlands and deprived of any natural protection, and had to be defended with the help of field forces.

Well, at that time we did not have any reserves at our disposal. The local reserves had been completely exhausted, and the 9th Cavalry Brigade was still on its way. The 8th Infantry Brigade, promised by Front Headquarters, could reach Modlin by the dawn of 17 August at the earliest, having remained in the 2nd Army sector. In Płońsk there was only a weak garrison, while all of General Krajowski's group was engaged in lively action.

And the battle for Nasielsk, so far inconclusive, required a further outlay of fresh energy, rather than allowing any forces to be drawn away from it.

At that time our left wing was necessarily weak. A quick and tenacious exploitation of that, if only by the two Red divisions cited above, would have quickly removed the fragile Płońsk garrison. In the first phase two, and then if the commander of the Russian army carried out his orders, six enemy divisions would appear in the rear of the Polish troops engaged in fighting the Soviet 15th and 3rd Armies. Such an offensive, if harmonised within the three Russian armies and the 3rd Cavalry Corps, and coordinated with the attack of the Soviet 1st Army on the Warsaw bridgehead, could have brought decisive results in the Battle of the Vistula.

Maintaining the Guiding Idea of Manoeuvre for the 5th Army

These considerations led us to modify our previous plans, and the orders sent regarding them.

These new intentions were contained in an order from General Haller, received in the morning – that is before the alarming news about the attack on Płońsk from the west --according to which:

The 5th Army will continue its offensive with the aim of reaching the Narew line up to and including Pułtusk. That place will be garrisoned with weak forces, and the bulk of forces will then proceed to the Ciechanów – Mława area to cut off and destroy the enemy forces still to the west of that line.

This was the first solution.

A possible alternative consisted in ceasing further attacks on Nasielsk, going on to the defensive there, as well as weakening the right wing of the army, and reallocating the forces saved by these changes to the threatened Płońsk. The danger from the west was indeed dangerous, but equally dangerous, however, was to interrupt our unfinished battle with the 15th and 3rd Armies.

If we were resolute in pursuing the first alternative, the rapid loss of Płońsk and an attack from there to the south-east was entirely possible. However, the limitations of time and space came into play. These included firstly, the always



mediocre Russian communications system, and on top of that the remarkable self-confidence the commander of the Soviet 4th Army still had, spreading his army over a relatively large area and engaged around both Płock and Toruń. The distances involved in that choice, and the lack of coordination between the opponent's individual armies, as well as the news about the capture of Ciechanów, indicated that it was an acceptable risk on our part. We chose to stay with our previous decisions and continue to search for a decisive battle at Nasielsk, and thereby the whole 5th Army sector.

A decision in favour of the second alternative could have put us at risk of disaster. To suspend our attacks, which were in full swing on the Wkra, and regroup our forces engaged in battle, in order to organise an effective protection of the endangered flank and the rear of the army, would not only be half-measures and half-heartedness – always the worst thing in war – but could have led to the annihilation of the 5th Army in the near future.

While the first decision allowed for us to gain time, and hope for a victorious end to the battle of Nasielsk before the western divisions hit us. The second would lead to us defending simultaneously on two fronts, which the 5th Army could not withstand, as it stood then, even for a few hours.

For these reasons I proposed the first alternative at a conference held in the afternoon of 15 August at 5th Army HQ. The conference was attended by the Minister of Military Affairs, General Sosnkowski, the Chief of General Staff, General Rozwadowski and General Weygand. That proposal, supported by General Sosnkowski, received general consent. Thus, the assault on Nasielsk was to be continued regardless of the danger threatening us from the direction of Płońsk.

Information collected late in the evening in Płońsk and Sochocin confirmed our assessment of the situation on our left wing. Particularly interesting was a conversation with officers of the armoured car group, active since the dawn of 15 August in the rear of the Soviet troops advancing westward. The eight armoured cars of that group, under Major Arciszewski, were in the area of Raciąż – Drobin – Bielsk. During the day they had fought a two-hour battle with the Soviet 157th and 158th Rifle Regiments near Drobin. Skilfully penetrating between the Russian troops, destroying smaller detachments and smashing the transport and communications equipment, they rendered us, both that day and the next, a first-class service. With extraordinary mobility they multiplied their strength, bringing confusion to the rear of the Russian divisions, and giving the impression of preparations for a very large operation.

This paralysed the enemy's initiative in those days of widespread uncertainty and, by maintaining constant contact with him, provided valuable intelligence. From the information gathered during 15 August it was clear that Płońsk would be attacked, in the best-case scenario for the Red Army, only at the end of the next day. Therefore, there were 24 hours left at our disposal, which had to be used to bring success at Nasielsk, and then to organise an effective protection for the rear of the army.

The Course of Events in the Centre and on the Southern Front

On the other Polish front lines, the fighting that took place that day near Radzymin deserve particular attention as an integral part of the Battle of the Vistula. The course of those battles elicited sharp but deserved criticism from the frontline commander, contained in the following order.

Operational order 3939/III, at 21:00 on 14 August 1920, signed by general Józef Haller:

1) The 5th Army has taken the offensive and repulsed with its left wing the Bolshevik 18th and 4th Divisions, which retreated in panic to the north and northwest. The right wing of the 5th Army successfully repulsed the attacks of larger forces on the Wkra River line.

The 1st Army, despite being reinforced by the reserve of the Front command, was not able to cope with the enemy forces which broke through in the Radzymin area.

2) I saw with my own eyes that in some units of the 1st Army the command leaves much to be desired. The combat efficiency and punctuality in carrying out orders were simply poor.

3) For the 1st Army I formally order: the 11th, 19th and 10th Divisions will execute a concentrated and energetic attack on Radzymin before dawn; they must succeed in driving the enemy back to the former first line of trenches by 15:00 at the latest. The command of the 1st Army will then move the 10th Infantry Division with all haste and with the use of buses to Kafuszyn and Skielna. I expect the first transport of this division to arrive there no later than at 12:00 sharp.

I am greatly appreciative of the efficiency and especially the energy of the leadership of the 5th Army, which despite the unprecedented fatigue of its units has still managed to make a decisive strike today.



4) The 5th Army will strike with limited forces at the Bolshevik 18th and 4th Divisions, and with its main forces at Nasielsk, aiming to drive back the Bolshevik troops concentrated there towards the east and north-east.

5) The 10th Division will keep an officer on the phone in Jabłonna at all times and will establish a connection not later than by 12:00 on 15 August to Kałuszyn.

General Żeligowski took command of all three infantry divisions occupied with eliminating the Radzymin affair, namely the 10th, 11th, and 19th, and struck there at dawn on 14 August, advancing from the north along the Zegrze – Mokre road with the 10th Division, from the south with the 19th Division, and from the west with the 11th Division. As a consequence of this concentric assault, fierce fighting broke out near Radzymin, which lasted until late at night. Radzymin was fiercely defended by two Bolshevik divisions, which could not reconcile themselves to the idea of retreating from the capital of Poland. The fighting exhausted all the reserves of the front commander for a longer time than initially anticipated, which was inconvenient in view of the events forecasted in the north.

General Rozwadowski, acting in line with the directives received from Puławy by the Commander-in-Chief, gave instructions during the day that announced the launching of the counter-offensive of the Manoeuvre Group on 16 August, delineating its later stages and preparing the liquidation of the 2nd Army, with the majority of its units to become reserve for the Commander-in-Chief. General Rozwadowski also called for the commander of the 1st Army to maintain the bridgehead of Warsaw unconditionally, instructing him to form a special armoured group on the Brześć road, which on 17 August was to advance on Mińsk Mazowiecki in liaison with the 15th Infantry Division, in order to break through the 16th Army's front and thus cooperate with the Commander-in-Chief's attack.

The same order predicted that the Bolshevik 16th Army would become disordered, and its retreat routes cut; that the Bolshevik armies attacking Warsaw would be pushed onto the Bug River, and all Red armies would be thrown onto the German border.

The unexpected forced retreat of our armies on the Southern Front triggered equally apt orders from the Chief of the General Staff. General Rozwadowski ordered General Iwaszkiewicz to "abandon the method of continuous poorly manned lines giving the initiative completely into the hands of the enemy and making any manoeuvre on our part impossible..."

He recommended instead moving from fighting with defensive lines to offensive fighting with groups to be formed in the area of Zborów [Zboriv] – Busk – Kamionka Strumilowa [Kamianka-Buzka], gathering cavalry near Sokal and Krystynowo. In the opinion of the Chief of General Staff, the active intervention of those concentrations should neutralise the enemy's initiative and mobility, and thwart his plans.

In the same order the Chief of General Staff ordered preparations for the defence of Lwów. He ordered the 6th Infantry Division to be brought to the capital of Małopolska, and assigned Brigadier Mączyński's group to be its permanent garrison.

The battles conducted in this way in the north and south of the Polish front secured the Commander-in-Chief's freedom of action, providing him with the time necessary to assemble and organise the troops of the Central Front, and thus the great plan of the Battle of the Vistula River could be put into effect.

The battle for Nasielsk and the Unstable Left Wing of the Army

Numerous operational orders of the 5th Army Headquarters, dated 15 August, prove how intense the course of events that day was in its sector and how the constantly changing situation required constant and firm leadership.

The guiding idea of the operations we were conducting at that time is defined by one of the orders (in paragraph 4) as follows:

... Continuing our intention, which is to beat back as quickly as possible the enemy forces facing our front lines, and then turn to face the forces of the Soviet army which have passed to our rear, and whose communication (between the Soviet 15th Army and the neighbouring 4th Army) has been broken, I order the offensive launched to be conducted as vigorously as possible

According to the plan outlined in the orders of 16 August, Nasielsk was to be captured by means of a concentric attack from the south and north. The 17th Infantry Division was to attack Nasielsk from its positions from the south, while covering itself from Serock. At the same time the 9th Infantry Division, reinforced with 15th Infantry Regiment and two batteries, received orders to co-operate with 17th Division. Meanwhile the Volunteer Division was to tie up the enemy north of the Borkowo – Nasielsk road, and after the capture of Nasielsk it was to move to the army's rear. Elsewhere General Krajowski received an order to organise an attack in the direction of Stary Gołymin and Przewodowo, and, having co-operated in the concentrated attack on the Russian grouping in the Nasielsk area by striking with the Siberian Brigade from Nowe Miasto in the direction of Chmielewo.



The above order, as well as all other orders of the day, suffered from an inaccurate assessment of the enemy's situation in the Ciechanów area, due to the lack of communication with the 8th Cavalry Brigade. It was thus over-optimistic, but remained characterised by a definite attacking spirit. This also applies to the Lower Vistula Group, whose commander, General Osikowski, received orders to undertake reconnaissance from the bridgeheads on the Vistula he was holding.

General Osiński, carrying out the directions he received, covered himself on the Serock side with units of the 69th Infantry Regiment, directed to Nuna, and then attacked Nasielsk with three regiments of the 17th Division. He sought to advance along the Czarnowo – Psucin road and along the Modlin – Nasielsk railway line, grouping his reserves behind the left wing of the division. Colonel Łuczyński planned an attack by the 9th Infantry Division along the Borkowo – Nasielsk road, with two regiments in the first line and the third advancing along the attack axis in reserve. The Siberian Brigade would coordinate its movements in the previously established directions for the attack.

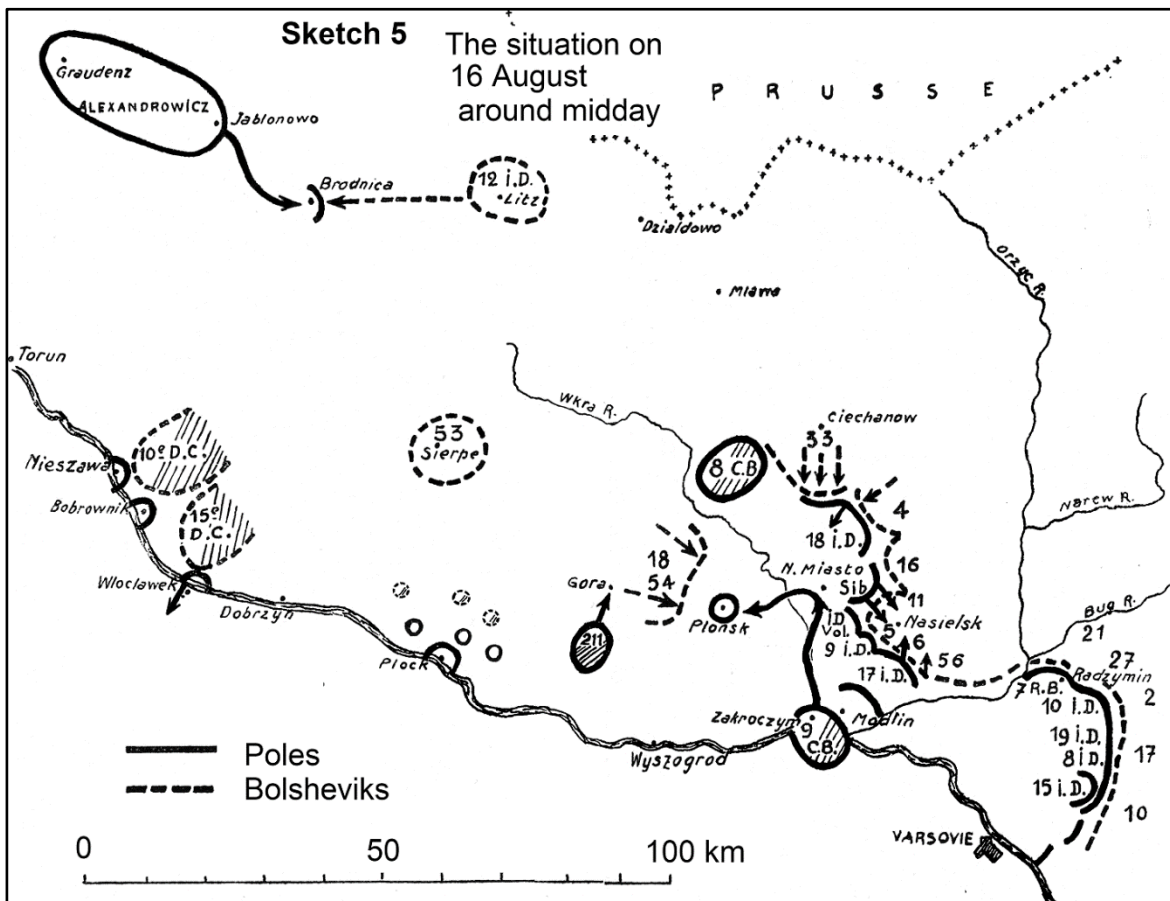
The battle for Nasielsk began across the front on 16 August around 07:00.

Thus, General Osiński, using the two armoured trains assigned to him, after heavy artillery preparation, set off with great energy north along the mentioned axes. His attack encountered the enemy's superior forces, reinforced during the previous night. At that time he had to fight with the 6th and parts of the 56th Rifle Divisions and a brigade of the 29th Division; with constant attacks and counter-attacks he advanced very slowly, so that his left wing reached only the Morgi – Wągrowo line around noon. The right wing of his division was echeloned back, around Krogule.

The simultaneous assault of the 9th Infantry Division encountered even stronger enemy resistance. Two regiments of that division, namely the 22nd Infantry Regiment and the 35th Infantry Regiment fought bravely and persistently until noon. However, attacked fiercely from Nasielsk, they were unable to advance in spite of diligent efforts. They briefly even lost the crossing of the Wkra River, only to recapture it later with a bayonet counter-attack.

The Volunteer Division was also only able to advance towards Ciekryn at noon.

The fighting confirmed there was a strong group of the Red Army around Nasielsk, where over four Soviet divisions were concentrated in a relatively small area, and that could not be broken by a strike from the west. Only simultaneous attacks from the south and north promised the desired result. The use of the Siberian Brigade in their designated direction therefore became an unavoidable necessity. In the meantime, there was an unforeseen delay, and it was not General Krajowski's fault.



General Krajowski's cavalry brigade was to the west of Ciechanów, and the Siberian Brigade were approaching from Nowe Miasto; in the morning of 16 August the 18th Infantry Division occupied the Sarnowa Góra – Sońsk – Gąsocin – Świercze line. Since 13 August that division had been in constant heavy fighting, suffering major losses, over 30% of the division's combat strength, with the losses of officers and NCOs being particularly severe.

General Krajowski, forced to hold such a large section of the front, had no reserves at his disposal other than the delayed Siberian brigade. His soldiers, in turn, were exhausted by the effort required of them at that crucial moment.

It was in these circumstances that the commander of the Soviet 15th Army, having cleared Ciechanów, sent the entire 33rd Rifle Division on a forced march south, so as to attack the 42nd Infantry Regiment at 08:00, exposed near Sońsk and Sarnowa Góra, with three rifle regiments, a cavalry regiment, and the divisional artillery. The 42nd Infantry Regiment could not hold off against such unequal odds. Having lost almost half of its strength and most of its machine guns, as well as the allotted gun battery, it retreated in disarray to Ojrzeń – Łopacin during the afternoon.

Almost simultaneously with the collapse of the left wing of the army the front columns of the Soviet 18th Division, having previously concentrated two infantry brigades near Raciąż and Góra, approached Płońsk from the west and northwest (sketch no. 5).

According to telephone reports from the Płońsk command at that time, the situation in that sector was utterly desperate. Those reports said that the entire 18th Infantry Division had been defeated, that part of it was withdrawing to Sochocin and that a mass of Bolsheviks were heading towards Płońsk from the west.

Major Rostworowski and I went to Płońsk, where we found the situation indeed extremely critical, but not hopeless.

We ascertained that General Krajowski, having not lost his head, had responded to the successful attack by the Red 33rd Division by undertaking a risky, but in the circumstances acceptable, assembly of the 18th Infantry Division's regiments, striving at all costs to rebuild the northern face of the front, lost by the dismemberment of the 42nd Infantry Regiment. Having shifted most of the regiments to face north, he rapidly moved the 145th Infantry Regiment to the area of Sarnowa Góra – Ojrzeń as his left flank, and prepared it there for the heavy battle that would follow. He gathered the survivors of 42nd Infantry Regiment in Sochocin, so as to introduce order among them.

Meanwhile, the 1st Light Horse Regiment with the 7th Battery of the 9th Field Artillery Regiment, under the command of Major Grobicki, arrived in Płońsk. This was the lead element of Colonel Dreszer's group, feverishly organised, which was to include the 8th Cavalry Brigade, already on the battlefield, as well as regiments of the 9th Cavalry Brigade, slowly approaching Modlin, and the 8th Infantry Brigade, transported by rail from Góra Kalwaria to Warsaw, by boat to Zakroczym and then by bus to Płońsk. Our calculations as to the date of readiness for the "Płońsk" group turned out to be overly optimistic. Its planned attack toward Raciąż, could not take place.

Major Grobicki entered Płońsk in the midst of complete chaos among its garrison, which was fleeing in panic from the town, while the western part of the town was being occupied by the leading Russian troops. His counter-attack at that time, launched with bravado and cavalry flair at the head of the 1st Light Horse Regiment, led to the destruction of the enemy. It averted the danger for us for the time being and halted the disoriented Russians for the whole night at a decent distance from Płońsk. In this way the left wing of the army was strengthened, albeit relatively, which was a success of great importance for the entire front.

Victory at Nasielsk.

The events described above did not shake my previous decision, but indicated more and more clearly the need to finish the battle for Nasielsk as soon as possible. I wrote in my order of that day:

Despite the great enemy concentration in the area of Nasielsk – Borkowo. I say that in this area we are numerically and technically stronger than the Bolsheviks.

In view of the importance of the battle that is taking place in that section, I again order, in the strictest terms, to move with all forces at the appointed hour to a concentrated attack on Nasielsk, which, regardless of losses, must be taken at the appointed time. I emphasise that I am observing the course of the action and that I will remove from his post any commander, even the most distinguished one, who does not show the necessary strength of will, fortitude and resilience at this crucial moment.

General Osiński also received a formal command to capture Nasielsk on the same day, by 16:00.

From General Krajowski, despite the difficult situation on his left wing, I demanded the execution of the planned attack on Nasielsk from the north, with the help of the Siberian Brigade.

Both commanders did not disappoint the trust placed in them. General Osiński, in fact, having launched the 69th Infantry Regiment, supported by artillery, in the direction of Nuna – Kukurzewo, thus liberated his right wing, and moved forward with the whole division in the early afternoon hours.



General Krajowski, on the other hand, despite the serious threat to his sector, directed the Siberian brigade as ordered. That brigade, having occupied Słustowo at 14:00, threatened the rear and flank of the Red Army fighting near Nasielsk, which had a demoralising effect, even on such determined opponents as the divisions defending Nasielsk at that time. Again and again, under the cover of artillery and making full use of machine guns, the Reds sent their regiments forward with bayonet attacks. However, pressed vigorously from the south and threatened from the north, they began to waver and give ground here and there.

At this point General Osiński threw his regiments into a direct attack and broke the 6th Rifle Division. Pushing the enemy vigorously in front of him, he entered Nasielsk victoriously at 16:00, for which capture he was awarded the *Virtuti Militari* Cross.

At the same time Colonel Łuczyński broke down the resistance of the Soviet 11th Division facing him. Pursuing the fleeing Red troops at the head of the 9th Infantry Division, he reached Nasielsk at 16:30 from the west. The 2nd Siberian Regiment, as well as some units of the Volunteer Division, also entered Nasielsk at about the same time, taking part in the final race for the town, which had energised the soldiers.

In order to exploit the victory, we needed to chase the retreating enemy – and in the Nasielsk sector that enemy was in full flight – without pause. Only a well-organised and energetically conducted pursuit could give us decisive results, causing the retreating and panicking troops to decay further and thus their destruction.

There was no question of the pursuit outflanking the retiring Soviets to the north and cutting off their lines of retreat. The right-wing divisions of the Soviet 15th Army not only held their ground after the fall of Nasielsk, but at the same time pressed our 18th Infantry Division so hard that it was in some peril. Its situation was too grave to think of pulling it out, much less of breaking the right wing of the 15th Army.

The whole situation could be radically changed by the attack of the 1st Army, ordered by the Northern Front commander. This army was to strike from Zegrze northwards towards Pułtusk. This well-chosen direction contained serious prospects for decisive success. Unfortunately, the 1st Army could not fulfil those orders, and the 7th Reserve Brigade, positioned in Zegrze, was too weak to break through the enemy trenches and make a deep advance.

Thus, organising the pursuit using only our means, the 17th Infantry Division was ordered to vigorously push back the enemy to secure the 5th Army from the east, and if possible, to outpace it and take the bridge over the Narew River near Serock. The 9th Infantry Division and the Volunteer Division, in cooperation with one regiment of the Siberian Brigade, were to organise alongside it a vigorous pursuit, using improvised pursuit detachments in cars and carts.

In the order, light field artillery were to be attached to the pursuit detachments, with the aim of “the fastest possible capture of the Narew crossing near Pułtusk, the disruption of the Bolshevik forces crowding there – as reported by our aviation – and the taking of as much bounty as possible.”

Unfortunately, it proved impossible to carry out the pursuit orders. The 5th Army, deprived of fresh forces after the use of its reserves, and out of necessity not grouped deep at that time, ran out of breath. Nor could the front commander support his appropriate directives with any reinforcements. At the time, the 10th Infantry Division, in reserve for this important moment, was involved in a protracted battle on the fields of Radzymin.

The soldiers of the units that had taken Nasielsk, having been in combat constantly for several days and nights, were too exhausted to be able to find the energy necessary for the pursuit. First of all, they had to eat something, and then get a few hours' sleep before they could move on.

The fall of night also led to a relaxation of nerves that had been stressed for too long, so that in the hours following the capture of Nasielsk it was impossible to carry out the orders given. In view of the panic with which the units initially defending Nasielsk retreated, this deprived us of the immediate fruits of victory and exposed us to their vigorous counter-attacks once the temporary confusion was overcome. In spite of that, and in spite of heavy losses incurred by us at Nasielsk, the news of the victory caused widespread joy. The commander of the Northern Front stated that he was “delighted with the work of the 5th Army”, and by subordinating the 7th Reserve Brigade to the 5th Army, he facilitated the operation towards Pułtusk that awaited us.

General Józef Haller, accurately assessing the enemy's position at that time, stressing the lack of planning and nervousness of action on the Russian side, and encouraging “victorious perseverance”, stated that “the Bolshevik offensive would soon falter”.

At Radzymin, on the other hand, difficulties continued. The fighting that had begun there in the morning of 15 August lasted, with varying degrees of success, all day long on 16 August. In the end General Żeligowski won over the whole line; however, he could not place the 10th Infantry Division at the disposal of the front, which forced General Haller to replace it with the 8th Reserve Brigade.



In the section of the lower Vistula, the enemy 15th Cavalry Division attacked Włocławek on 16 August, forcing its weak garrison to burn the bridge and withdraw to the left bank of the Vistula.

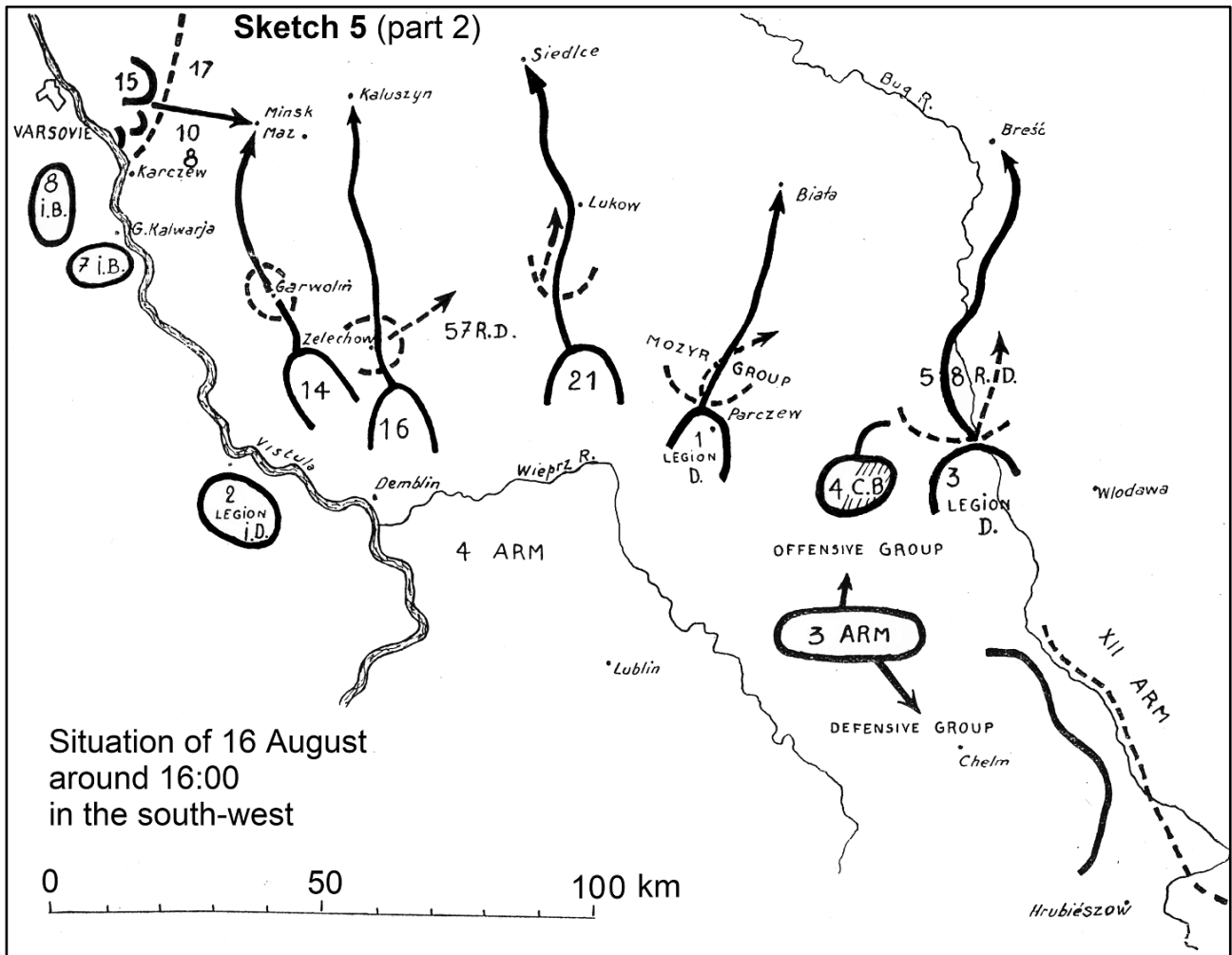
The enemy's 10th Cavalry Division reached as far as Nieszawa and Bobrowniki, and threw the first artillery shells at the Warsaw – Gdańsk – Gdynia railway line.

Weaker reconnaissance units of the enemy also arrived near Płock.

The engagement of the three Russian armies north of the Bug-Narew River and the decisive battles on the Wkra River and near Nasielsk, absorbed divisions of the 3rd Army that could otherwise have supported the offensive of the 16th Army, exhausted Tukhachevski's reserves and thus relieved the pressure on Warsaw and the 1st Army sector from the north.

Strike from above the Wieprz River

On the same day, the nation's capital was relieved of its siege by the strike from the Wieprz (sketch no. 5).



The command of the troops grouped in the Central Front was taken over directly by Marshal Piłsudski who, on 13 August was with a reduced operational staff in Puławy. Having organised a material counter-offensive in three days, and having replenished most of the divisions in the Central Front with fresh supplies, the Commander-in-Chief set off in the morning of 16 August from a general exit line running through Dęblin – Lubartów – Chełm, in order to strike decisively northwards.

On the left wing of the front, General Skierski attacked at the head of the 4th Army, consisting of the 14th, 16th and 21st (Mountain) Infantry Divisions. He was advancing from Dęblin – Lysoboki – Kock through Garwolin and Kołbiel to Mińsk Mazowiecki, and through Żelechów to Kaluszyn, and through Łuków to Siedlce.

On the right wing of the front was General Rydz-Śmigły at the head of the attack group of the 3rd Army, with the 1st and 3rd Legion Divisions and the 4th Cavalry Brigade at his disposal. He was advancing from areas north of Lublin and Chełm towards Parczew and Włodawa.



The attack of the Central Front took the enemy by surprise, both strategically and tactically. It encountered serious enemy numbers only on the line of march of the 14th Infantry Division.

General Konarzewski, was ahead of other divisions, and was advancing towards Garwolin through Maciejowice, at the head of the excellent Wielkopolska Division, whose outstanding combat value was always supported by Colonels Paszkiewicz and Anders. It encountered the Soviet 57th Division near Cyców, and defeated it.

General Ładoś, on the other hand, marching with the 16th Infantry Division towards Stoczek, and General Galica, advancing with the 21st Mountain Division towards Kock, did not meet any serious enemy forces on their way.

General Dąb-Biernacki at the head of the 1st Legion Division, advancing on Radzyń, threw out a combined detachment of the Soviet Mozyr Group, while General Berbecki, commanding the 3rd Legion Division, striking in the direction of Włodawa, defeated the Soviet 58th Division, which withdrew to the north.

The Commander-in-Chief, having thus broken the left flank of the Soviet 16th Army, reached the Garwolin – Żelechów – Radzyń line in the evening of 16 August, and positioned himself with the 3rd Legion Division near Włodawa.

This movement was efficiently protected from the east by General Zygmunt Zieliński at the head of a covering group of the 3rd Army, despite the loss of Hrubieszów, occupied that day by units of the Soviet 12th Army. This difficult task was made easier by Budenny, who on 16 August struck in the other direction, between Busk and Kamionka Strumiłowa, towards our Southern Front, in order to break through them and take Lwów.

The Commander-in-Chief's offensive and its first results, falsely assessed by Tukhachevski, did not cause any fundamental changes in his front's positions. However, they brought direct effects on the operations in front of Warsaw. Thinking the Wieprz offensive to be only of secondary importance, Tukhachevski abandoned the attack on Radzymin and the Warsaw bridgehead and imposed a strictly defensive role on the 16th Soviet Army, believing that that army would be sufficient to deal with it.

The northward advance of Polish divisions parallel to the Russian front underscored that the passive sector of the 2nd Army was no longer needed. That sector was therefore abolished, and first one then the second brigade of the 4th Infantry Division³⁶ were placed at the disposal of the 5th Army, while the 2nd Legion Division went to the Commander-in-Chief's reserve in Dęblin.

During this time, the units of the Soviet 4th Army, still marching westward, seriously threatened Pomerania. The 12th Rifle Division, after defeating Colonel Habicht's command, had taken Działdowo on 12 August, and then Lidzbark on 14 August. Breaking the resistance spontaneously organised by local civic units under the leadership of Maciej Mielżyński, it took Brodnica [Strassburg] on 15 August.

Meanwhile, Gai-Khan's cavalry took Żuromin and Rypin on 15 August, and captured two of our ships transporting food and ammunition to Modlin between Nieszawa and Bobrowniki. They were increasingly audacious in front of the Pomeranian stronghold of Toruń.

Pomerania was not capable of parrying the danger at that time, so a vigorous Russian cavalry attack might have led to the destruction of the Polish railway connections with the sea, which would have caused serious difficulties in replenishing our ammunition reserves, which were running out.

The command of the Pomeranian District, weakened by the formation of General Roja's group, did not have at its disposal at that time any trained soldiers or equipment necessary for the organisation of new units.

General Hauser, commander of the fort in Toruń, and surrounding fortified areas (Colonel Habsburg in Grudziądz, [not given] in Chełmno, General Bijak in Świecie, and Lieutenant Czarliński in Fordon) faced a difficult problem. Not having been informed early enough of the imminent danger, and deprived of regular troops, he had to improvise men for the fortified areas, making use of freshly conscripted recruits in reserve formations, fortress battalions, and deserters released from prison. The units organised in this way were a sham, but still better than being completely defenceless.

General Hauser also had at his disposal the 215th Cavalry Regiment, which he sent to the Drwęca line, in the vicinity of Brodnica, and decided to cover his weaknesses with the mobility of improvised units. Indeed, an infantry battalion and one battery near Nieszawa forced the Bolshevik troops operating there to withdraw to the right bank of the Vistula. In turn, strong reconnaissance units were sent east to cover Toruń, skilfully masking its complete defencelessness.

The Events of 15 and 16 August from Russian sources

The events of the two days find the following illumination in the historical work of the Russian General Staff (Kakurin and Melikov):

³⁶ On the map as the 7th and 8th Infantry Brigades.



On 15 August Comrade Shuvaev, commander of the 4th Army, intending to relieve the situation of the right wing of the 15th Army, gave orders for the following:

1. The 54th Rifle Division was to make a renewed assault in the direction of Raciąż – Płońsk, securing its wing against Głinojeck, maintaining tight communication with the 4th Rifle Division of the 15th Army, whose right wing was in the area of Kępno (on the Wkra River).
2. The 12th Rifle Division was to remain in the Lidzbark area,
3. The 18th Rifle Division was to energetically attack Płońsk by the shortest route, maintaining close communications with the 54th Rifle Division,
4. The 53rd Rifle Division, occupying the section Biezuń – Sierpc, was to cover the operations of the 16th and 54th Rifle Divisions,
5. 3rd Cavalry Corps was to occupy the front Lipno – Włocławek and cover the manoeuvres of the 54th and 18th RDs from Toruń and the Vistula, for which purpose it was ordered to watch carefully the Vistula river section from Włocławek to Płock.

The order went on to say that half of the army staff would be located in Ciechanów, and in the event of a change in the situation it would move to Mława.

It is difficult to predict what would have been the results of a strict execution by the divisions of the tasks assigned to them by the army commander, and also to what extent, in the event of their positive fulfilment, the success of the 4th Army in the region of Płońsk might have influenced the strategic situation at that moment over the entire Western Front. In reality, however, the tasks were not to be completed in most cases. The enemy, having broken into the gap created between the 4th and 15th Armies in the area of Głinojeck, took Ciechanów, where, as we know from the order, half of the staff of the 4th Army was located, at 10:00 on 15 August.

This success of one Polish cavalry regiment forced the commander of the 4th Army to leave the city at once. As a result, communication between the Front staff and the 4th Army was immediately broken, and was not re-established until our retreat (because of our total lack of any means of strategic communication).

The commander of the 4th Army, however, having temporarily lost Ciechanów, also lost communication after his departure from that city, not only with the commander of the Western Front but (apart from the 12th Rifle Division) also with his divisions, which for two days remained without instructions, according to the 15th Army.

The radio station of the 4th Army was burned, as its commander feared that it would be taken prisoner by the enemy, who had captured Ciechanów.

In this way, at the moment when the enemy renewed his vigorous attacks on the right wing of the 15th Army, the main forces of the 4th Army were already far to the west, and would require an appropriate period of time if they were to be regrouped in order to properly co-operate with the 15th Army,

The failure we suffered in the Ciechanów area and the retreat of the right wing of the 15th Army forced the commander of the front to issue order No. 351 of 16 August, in which he gave subordinate armies an additional mission to “encircle the enemy group engaged too far forward” in the Ciechanów area and on the river Wkra. Therefore, the commander of the 4th Army was ordered to attack, while leaving cover to the west, the main enemy forces in the vicinity of Sochocin – Zakroczym with the army reserves concentrated in the area of Ciechanów and Przasnysz.

The 15th Army was ordered to proceed to a decisive attack on Płońsk, with the task of reaching the Przasnysz – Ciechanów road on the right wing; the 3rd Army was to assemble a shock group on the right wing to cooperate with the 15th Army, attacking in the direction of Płońsk. At the same time, it was recommended that the movement of the 56th Rifle Division towards Maków be accelerated.

As line of demarcation between the 4th and 15th armies was established as Przasnysz – Ojrzeń, and between the 15th and 3rd armies as the line Różan – Nasielsk – Wyszogród.

Moreover, the commander of the 3rd Army was once again instructed, by dispatch No. 378 of 16 August, to immediately send the 56th Rifle Division to Maków at the disposal of the commander of the 15th Army, having set it the task of concentrating in the indicated area, not later than at 20:00 on 17 August, in order to move to the area of Przasnysz later. The 21st Rifle Division was to be placed into the reserve.



As a result of these moves, around 16 August the situation on the front of our 4th Army was as follows: the 12th Rifle Division occupied the region of Brodnica, the 10th Cavalry Division occupied the region of Bobrowniki, the 15th Cavalry Division occupied the region of Włocławek, the 53rd Rifle Division occupied the region of Lipno – Włocławek – Tulibowo, the 18th Infantry Division occupied Goślice with a flanking brigade, and the two other brigades were advancing from the region of Brudzewo – Mystkowo to Płońsk. The 54th Rifle Division continued to operate on the Sochocin – Ciechanów line.

Around Płońsk and Modlin, about 15 August, the enemy had concentrated considerable forces, which, according to the Western Front's intelligence staff, were estimated at 40,000 infantry and cavalry.³⁷

On the front of the 15th Army, the enemy conducted persistent fighting all day on 15 August. Our troops counter-attacked more than once, but having sustained heavy losses, especially due to heavy enemy fire, they were forced, around 19:00 on 15 August, to withdraw and resume on the lines:

The 4th Rifle Division at Sarnowa Góra – Bądkowo – Nowe Miasto;

The 16th Rifle Division, having brought into battle all its reserves, was at Novo Miasto –Andzin;

The 11th and 5th Rifle Divisions (3rd Army), having initially reached the Wkra River and crossed over to its right bank, could not withstand the enemy counter-attack and were forced to leave 8-10 km east of the Wkra River (Nasielsk – Wólka Kikolska station), while some forward troops held Błędowo.

The 33rd Rifle Division of the 15th Army, grouped in the evening of 15 August in the area of Koleczyn, received the mission of making a strike in the morning of 16 August from an area 8 km southeast of Ciechanów and throwing the enemy out of that city.

On the front of the 6th Rifle Division, the enemy conducted intense fire from the forts of Modlin and two armoured trains which moved between Czarnowo and the division's front lines.

The 21st Rifle Division, acting together with the units of the 27th Rifle Division, bravely rejected the persistent attacks of the enemy during 15 August, and having broken him with a joint effort, took the Radzymin region again.

The enemy was still shelling the front of the 15th and 3rd Armies all night on 16 August with heavy artillery and machine gun fire. Our artillery reserves in the armies were so insignificant that it was impossible to think about repelling the advancing enemy with firepower.

The lack of bullets and cartridges in our numerically very weak brigades and regiments forced us continually to remain silent in response to the enemy's fire.

At dawn on 16 August, the Polish troops launched a vigorous attack, both the right wing of the 15th Army and on the junction of the 15th and 3rd Armies.

On the same day 33rd Rifle Division carried out its task successfully. Taking 1,200 prisoners and 7 guns, it broke into Ciechanów and at about 19:00 cleared the region of the enemy. A cavalry group, consisting of the 86th and 90th Cavalry Regiments, placed at the disposal of the commander of the 33rd Rifle Division, successfully pursued the Polish units which had survived the battle and captivity and were retreating in panic towards the south-west.³⁸

As a result of the fighting of 16 August, the divisions of the 15th and 3rd Armies, having withdrawn to the line of the Ciechanów – Nasielsk railway and then to the line of Nasielsk – Nuna – Serock – Mokre station, struggled to hold back the advancing enemy troops.

The heavy fighting over two days (15 and 16 August), which developed in the area of Modlin and on the Wkra River line, clearly indicated that the initiative in this sector of the front was gradually passing into the hands of the enemy.

All our efforts during 14 and 15 August to break through the fortified belt of the Warsaw bridgehead, as well as in the area further south of Okuniew, were unsuccessful.

³⁷ Sikorski note: these numbers are twice the actual amounts.

However, this depends on whether the Soviets are considering "effectives" or all men in the Polish forces, as they normally would, in which case it might even be an underestimate.

³⁸ Sikorski notes: This is an error. The 32nd Division did not smash the 8th Cavalry Brigade in Ciechanów, as in fact the units of that brigade – whose strength the Russian author himself had previously estimated at one cavalry regiment – avoided a major battle in Ciechanów by withdrawing from the town in time. The defeat referred to above took place to a section of our 42nd Infantry Regiment in the region of Sońsk, as I have related in the text.



The fire of the enemy trains and armoured cars, going up and down the railways and roads that ran along the front of the fortified positions, mercilessly cut the advances of our tired and materially weak divisions. Around 16 August the enemy succeeded in driving back the 27th Rifle Division behind the Struga River, while the other divisions of the 16th Army were still engaged in the line occupied during 14 and 15 August.

On 16 August, however, the ratio of forces changed fundamentally. The news from the left wing of the Western Front was worrying and the intercepted enemy orders then clarified the meaning of his counter-manoeuve, forced the commander of the Western Front to take the necessary precautions against the situation of the 16th Army, whose commander was ordered to leave the 8th Rifle Division in reserve and not to bring it into action for the time being, and then to prepare for a redeployment of the 8th and 10th Divisions to the south, "more or less" to the Łuków area.

The halting of our attacks on the Wkra River, in the area of Modlin and on the outskirts of Warsaw - created for the Polish command a good moment of executing order No. 8752/III, initiating a well-thought-out operation of a counter-attack from the Wieprz River line.

The situation on the Western Front on 16 August is sufficiently defined in the Hughes Telegram conversation which the Commander of the Western Front had with the Commander-in-Chief on the night of 18 August, which we give here in extracts:

Western Front Commander: On 16 August, the enemy went on the offensive across the whole front, having thrown back the 4th, 16th and 11th Rifle Divisions on the Ciechanów – Modlin railway line, he took Nasielsk. The 3rd Army stopped the advance of the enemy more or less on the line Nasielsk – Nuna – Serock – Struga River. On the Warsaw bridgehead the advancing enemy drove back the 21st and 27th Rifle Divisions from Radzymin to beyond the Struga River. In the Mozyr Group; the 57th Rifle Division was driven back to the line Magnuszew – Laskarzew – Zelechów – Parczew; the Mixed Group to a line 5 km east of Parczew; the 58th Rifle Division continues to advance and reached the area 10 km northeast of Siedliszcze. The 12th Army took Hrubieszów, having advanced 10 km northwest of that point.

From enemy orders intercepted, it can be seen that a new army is concentrated in the Lublin region between the Vistula and Wieprz rivers in order to strike north. Moreover, the task of the Polish 3rd Army is to secure this concentration and win time until 18 August.

Thus, the redeployment of the 1st Horse Army has become an absolute necessity. I am pulling back the 8th Rifle Division to the Łuków region. The 56th Infantry Rifle Division entered into combat which delayed its redeployment. New volunteer troops are still appearing on the enemy side, while four Poznan divisions have been pulled from the front of the 16th Army. Today, on 18 August, the commander of the 15th Army, Comrade Kork, states that our units are still capable of fighting. A considerable amount of reinforcements are coming to us in transports. I am preparing their incorporation into the frontline units.

I admit that the Lublin group may play an unpleasant role, and that strong enemy attack is possible, therefore it will be necessary to dismember the shock group of the 16th Army (i.e. its right wing).

There is no news of the redeployment of the 1st Horse Army; the order was delivered to Comrade Budenny this morning. The commander of the 4th Army is in Sierpc.

Commander-in-Chief: I told you about the importance of the Lublin region already on my arrival in Mińsk and warned you later on, after the shift of your entire front towards the north; I was mainly afraid of the shift of the 16th Army. On 11 August, I issued an order for Budenny to regroup. Due to a series of unpleasant events, that assembly has not yet begun, and as of today it is uncertain whether it will begin tomorrow, because the Revolutionary Military Soviet of the Horse Army, having received instructions with only one signature (yours), is not certain of its authenticity and demands a counter-signature from a member of the Front RMS, which you must do immediately so that the order becomes official. I do not approve of the desire to move the 4th Army northward along the corridor. I advise to immediately move a brigade from Vilnius (143rd of 48th Rifle Division) to Brest-Litovsk [Brześć]. That you will dismember the shock group of the 16th Army, I am very happy with, because I absolutely disapprove of the frontal blow, which was undertaken by that group.

The quoted conversation between the commander of the Western Front, and the Commander-in-Chief shows that they knew that not just the left wing of the Polish strategic front, and especially its 5th Army, was successfully developing its offensive operations, but also the shock group under Marshal Piłsudski was beginning to implement its planned counter-manoeuve.



Before we move on to describe the development of the Polish offensive operation, we will first try to outline how the first Polish successes in the Wieprz region affected the command of the 16th Army and the Mozyr Group. We will also try to explain these instructions of the commander of the Western Front, which were issued in connection with the enemy's offensive actions.

The commander of the 16th Army, having received on 15 August reports on the retreat of the Mozyr Group, did not at all suppose that serious enemy forces were operating against them. He was certain that only the 14th Infantry Division was operating around Dęblin, and therefore he assumed that the withdrawal of the group was a temporary event, which had taken place thanks to the fact that the small Mozyr Group was very much worn out and exhausted.

The same optimism was shared by the commander of the Mozyr Group, who in his report to the commander of the Western Front (by telegram) confirmed Comrade Sologub's opinion that the enemy forces operating against him were not significant.

However, the quoted conversation between the Commander-in-Chief and the Western Front commander, who had seen some of the enemy's orders, shows they already knew about a new enemy army, gathering in the Lublin region, and that is why he assessed the situation differently on his left wing.

He was absolutely certain that the troops in the first line would be followed by a large enemy force, and that is why in his dispatch No. 392 Op. of 17 August, the Western Front commander orders the 8th Division to group on the left-wing quite clearly, as a front reserve in the Łuków area. It is true that if we consider the order more carefully, we can see that the commander of the Western Front does not count on the dizzying speed that events would occur on 17 and 18 August.

On the contrary, according to Tukhachevski (in Campaign on the Vistula):

... The Polish 5th Army, having been pushed back behind the Vistula,³⁹ received orders to move on to the attack and began it across the entire front of the 15th and 3rd Armies.

Our offensive had already been underway for five weeks. During that time we aimed at finding the remaining enemy steady forces and finally destroying them with a decisive strike. For five weeks, the "White" Polish army invariably avoided a decisive blow due to the disintegration of its troops, and it was only at the Vistula River, reinforced by new formations, that the Poles decided to fight. We did not know in advance where we would encounter the main enemy resistance – on the Vistula or beyond? But one thing we did know was that we would find his main forces somewhere and smash them in a decisive encounter.

And now the enemy himself was giving us the opportunity to fulfil this mission. The 5th Army, the weakest in the composition of its units and the weakest in spirit, attacked our 15th and 3rd Armies, while over its exposed left wing hung within reach of the freshest and best units of our 4th Army.

The front command could not contain its joy at this event. The 15th and 3rd Armies received orders to respond to the enemy's attack with a decisive counter-attack on the entire front and to drive him back behind the Wkra River, while the 4th Army, having secured itself in the direction of Toruń, was to attack the enemy's attacking flank and rear in the direction of Modlin from the Raciąż – Drobin area with all its strength.

It seemed that the destruction of the enemy's 5th Army was inevitable; its annihilation would have the most far-reaching consequences in the further course of all our actions. However, the Poles were lucky. Our 4th Army, where a new army commander lost communication with the front, was not clearly aware of the emerging situation. Not receiving orders from the front, it put up some vague semi-insurance in the Raciąż – Drobin area and scattered its troops between Włocławek and Płock. The enemy's 5th Army was saved and with total impunity, with our powerful army of four rifle divisions and two cavalry divisions on its flank and rear, it pressed forward on our 3rd and 15th Armies. Such a monstrous and unthinkable situation helped the Poles not only to stop the offensive of the 3rd and 15th armies, but also to push their troops step by step to the east.

In the meantime, the 16th army with a powerful strike swept away the Polish troops and came very close to crossing the Vistula, when the counter-attack of those troops forced it to retreat. It again moved into the attack and here the fighting began, with varying degrees of success, without any clear results...

³⁹ Sikorski notes: this is inconsistent, as we know, with reality.

