

CHAPTER X

Repulse of the Soviet 15th and 3rd Armies beyond the Narew and the Left Wing of the 16th Army is Destroyed

Victorious Battles of the 5th Army at Płońsk and Pułtusk

The rejection of the hitherto successful enemy from the banks of the Wkra River strained the cohesion of his front. After the defeat at Nasielsk the 15th and 3rd Armies clearly divided into two parts, one was still fighting south of Ciechanów, while the other was retreating with some divisions towards Pułtusk, and others towards Serock – Wyszaków.

The command on the enemy side was aware of the danger threatening it. Therefore, taking advantage of our inability to mount a pursuit, on the night of 16 August it put all its efforts into controlling the panic that had arisen near Nasielsk. In turn, having thrown in the fresher units of the 56th Rifle Division, theoretically at the disposal of the commander of the 15th Army but actually halted in Nasielsk, into a counter-attack, it gathered the retreating units in Pułtusk and Serock, frantically introducing discipline and organisational order there. The decisions made at that time by the commanders of the 3rd and 15th Armies did not take into account the decisive action of the Polish Central Front from the banks of the Wieprz.

The victory at Nasielsk brought us closer to the second mission of the 5th Army, namely, a major battle with the Soviet 4th Army and the cavalry corps operating on the lower Vistula River. In order to prepare for that action, the eastern group of the enemy had to be thrown back beyond the Narew River as quickly as possible, and having thus secured the right wing of the army, it was then necessary to turn the rest against the forces that would remain to the west of that river.

According to the orders of that day, this intention was to be carried out in the following manner:

The 7th Reserve Brigade subordinated to me by the front commander, which was done while extending the 5th Army's sector to Zegrze – Serock – Popowo, was given the task of quickly capturing the Narew crossing near Serock by means of a vigorous attack from the south, in order to cut the units of the 3rd Army, retreating to Wyszaków, from their main line of retreat.

A simultaneous capture of the second bridge over the Narew River near Holendry, which was to be done by the 17th Infantry Division on the right wing of the 5th Army, was to fulfil a similar role in the north and while also pushing its front lines to south of Pułtusk.

Pułtusk on the other hand, where the major part of the army retreating from Nasielsk was located, was to be taken from the north-west by the Siberian Brigade reinforced with the 22nd Infantry Regiment. That brigade, situated on 17 April in the area of Chmielewo and Prusinowicz, stood on the attack axis of Przewodowo – Pułtusk and occupied a convenient starting position for the planned action. The implementation of a two-wing operation as planned could bring serious advantages, while at the same time protecting us from unnecessary losses.

At the same time the left wing of the army had to rely on its own forces; it had been reinforced gradually by forming Colonel Dreszer's operational group of in Płońsk, consisting of the 8th Cavalry Brigade and units of the 8th Infantry Brigade transported by buses from when they disembarked in Modlin.

The assignment of two infantry divisions, namely 9th Infantry Division and Volunteer Division, to the army's reserve, as provided for in the quoted order, indicates our desire to release part of our forces as quickly as possible in order to turn them against the western enemy units.

These dispositions were not changed by the commander of the Northern Front, who ordered the 5th Army in his order (received at dawn of the 17th) to continue the attack in order to cut off the Russian forces operating west of the Modlin – Mława line, while at the same time organising in detail the cooperation of the right wing of the 1st Army with the action of the Commander-in-Chief, by establishing an attack of the 15th Infantry Division planned for Mińsk Mazowiecki from the west.

The commanders of the Russian armies, suffering bloody losses on their withdraw from the banks of the Wkra River and Nasielsk, and striving to rectify the situation, countered these intentions with a new plan of action. In this the 15th Army would counter-attack with its right wing, using the 33rd Kuban Division as the lead, and at the same time stop the retreat of the left wing. The Russian 3rd Army was to use the Narew River to recover, and to counter-attack at Nasielsk. The whole plan was supplemented by the ongoing attack by two Soviet divisions on Płońsk and Sochocin.

This theoretically sound plan of action could be executed only in the absence of any activity by the 5th Army and on the condition that the Russian armies involved each case would be capable, in spite of their disorganised units, of a uniform action coordinated in both time and space. Both would prove impossible. Nevertheless, the activity of



individual Soviet divisions initiated on this basis dragged almost all the divisions of the 5th Army into battle, thus changing our plan of action set up during the night.

Thus, although the enemy was finally broken as a result of the battles that developed over the day, it impeded the progress of our troops, which saved the divisions crossing the Narew and delayed the intended regrouping of the 5th Army.

Indeed, the ordered manoeuvre of the 7th Reserve Brigade was seriously delayed by the activity of the 3rd Army, so that Colonel Malachowski reached Pokrzywnica only in the afternoon, taking at the same time the western bank of the Narew near Serock – Wierzbica. As a result, he was unable to get into the rear of the units retreating from the vicinity of Nasielsk, some of whom were retreating towards Wyszaków, while the rest were moving towards Holendry and Pułtusk.

An energetic counter-attack of units of the 5th, 11th and 56th Rifle Divisions, made in the morning of 17 August in our army's centre also tied up the 17th Infantry Division, and then dragged the 9th Infantry Division and the Volunteer Division into battle from the army's reserve. The 17th Infantry Division thus reached Holendry only in the evening, and found the bridge over the Narew River burnt.

The 9th Infantry Division and the Volunteer Division were forced to fight on the Winnica – Kędzierzawice line, with the Volunteer Division again suffering heavy losses. Eventually the 9th Division, having broken the resistance of the Russian troops near Winnica, together with the Volunteer Division forced the units of the Soviet 5th and 11th Divisions to retreat and took Pułtusk at 18:00.

In the area of Chmielewo and Prusinowice, where the Siberian Brigade was positioned, an equally fierce battle with varying fortunes took place in the morning, as a result of which our units had to leave Prusinowice for a while. Eventually, the resistance of the Soviet troops was broken in this area as well, and they subsequently occupied Strzegocin and Gąsiorowo.

However, as a result of this fighting the Siberian Brigade could not carry out the attack on Pułtusk from the north-western side as ordered.

On the left wing of the army, the 18th Infantry Division repelled repeated fierce assaults by the Communist regiments belonging to the Soviet 33rd Division as well as to the 4th and 16th Divisions. All the attacks of these regiments were made in the direction of Gąsocin, Sarnowa Góra and Ojrzeń. The 8th Cavalry Brigade spent the day in Ojrzeń.

The weak point of the 5th Army, Płońsk, was on 17 August the scene of characteristic and tactically interesting events, in which our cavalry regiments distinguished themselves.

Colonel Dreszer had a difficult task to fulfil here. With two cavalry regiments and an incomplete infantry brigade at his disposal (as the transport of the 8th Infantry Brigade had not yet been completed), he received an order to attack the enemy threatening Płońsk, whose forces amounted to less than two rifle divisions. Those forces attacked Colonel Dreszer's group from Sarbiewo, at the moment when an attack on Boboszewo was being prepared. As a result, both his regiments found themselves entangled in a defensive battle, and were threatened by the encirclement from the north, and then also from the south. The 201st Cavalry Regiment found itself in a particularly difficult situation, all the more so because its commander, Major Kulesza, was seriously wounded on the battlefield. The situation was saved by Major S. G. Grobicki, who at the most critical moment charged at the head of the 1st Light Horse Regiment from the north to the south, along the front of his threatened neighbour. While unfortunately suffering heavy casualties, he smashed the already heavily engaged enemy, thus settling the battle in our favour.

As a result of his energetic action, Colonel Dreszer captured an artillery battery, 21 heavy machine guns and took about 700 prisoners of war along with the rolling stock of the Soviet 18th Division, which suffered heavy losses in killed and wounded.

The events on the lower Vistula section were developing that day in a lazy manner, and, apart from the shelling of Włocławek, did not come to much. The day of 17 August was evidently used here to push the 53rd Rifle Division closer to the Vistula to fulfil Operational Order No. 22 of 4th Army's commander, who still betrayed a complete lack of knowledge of the general situation facing the Soviet forces.

As a result of those directives, Gai-Khan's Cavalry Corps revived its reconnaissance activity, sending numerous and strong detachments in the direction of Toruń.

Summarizing the events of 16 August, it must be said that it was a day of firm defeat for the Soviet 15th and 3rd Armies, as Russian sources admit, and at the same time a day of success across the entire front of the 5th Army.

Apart from the local victory near Płońsk, where we threw back the units of the 4th Army, which were counter-attacking the left wing of the 5th Army, we simultaneously defeated the Red divisions fighting with us on the eastern



sector and threw them behind the Narew River. That loss could have turned into a disaster for them, if the planned attacks on Putusk and Serock could have been executed fully.

To take advantage of the victory achieved on 17 August, we intended to secure ourselves on the Narew River, where the Bolsheviks were still holding on to the left bank, and to direct as large a force as possible against the 4th Army, clearing and closing the corridor separating us from East Prussia, and thus cut off that army's line of retreat.

First Results of the Commander-in-Chief's Strike

Towards evening of that day, we received the first news of the victorious march of the Commander-in-Chief. The result of the previous two days' fighting in that operational area was considerable. Thus, General Konarzewski, advancing further on 17 August, smashed the Soviet 8th Division in battles near Koźbiel and Dębe Wielkie. The neighbouring 16th and 21st Divisions simultaneously took Kałuszyn, Łuków and Siedlce without a fight, while the 1st Legion Division reached Międzyrzec and Biała.

On the right flank of the central front, General Berbecki, having taken Włodawa at night, continued his march towards Brześć-on-the-Bug in the morning of 17 August, and together with the 4th Cavalry Brigade reached the 58th Rifle Division near Sławatycze and beat it decisively.

Our 15th Infantry Division, fighting on the southern section of the Warsaw bridgehead, joined the attack of the troops of the Central Front. The commander of that division, General Jung, held down by an attack on the Warsaw bridgehead made at night by the Soviet 10th Division, could only partially undertake the task assigned to him. After breaking through the enemy positions in the morning of 17 August, he struck along the Warsaw – Mińsk Mazowiecki road, with just Major Matczyński's assault battalion and three reserve battalions of the division, rather than with the whole division, as was requested of him. In spite of this, Mińsk Mazowiecki fell without much difficulty into our 15th Division's hands, as it was simultaneously threatened by the 14th Division from the south. The 15th ID then became a part of the 4th Army.

This concentric movement of the two Polish divisions broke the Soviet 10th Division defending the access to Mińsk.

The troops of the Central Front, having taken about 10,000 Bolshevik prisoners, 40 guns and several dozen machine guns as a result of the battles above, left in the evening of 17 August, with the cooperation of the 15th Infantry Division, for the line Mińsk Mazowiecki – Kałuszyn – Siedlce – Międzyrzec – Biała Podlaska.

The Soviet 16th Army was thus beaten. The Mozyr covering group and both right wing divisions (8th and 10th) were destroyed, which put the 16th Army in a very difficult position. Its commander, in order to rebalance the situation, ordered vigorous local counter-attacks, which indeed temporarily halted the advance of the left wing of the Central Front and allowed the 16th Army to withdraw from the Warsaw lines, despite the disorder in its individual divisions.

The Soviet 12th Army and Budenny's Horse Army did not play any role in this battle. The former did not show any activity during the day, while the latter stubbornly and aimlessly advanced towards Lwów, both these armies acting against the clear orders of the Russian Commander-in-Chief.

On the following day the units of the Central Front were reorganised, and the 2nd Army, consisting of the 1st, 3rd, 19th, and 21st Infantry Divisions, as well as the 4th Cavalry Brigade and Major Jaworski's independent cavalry detachment, was created. The composition of the 4th Army was changed to the 14th, 15th, and 16th Infantry Divisions, and the 12th Infantry Brigade. A newly-formed 8th Army, consisting of the 2nd and 7th Infantry Divisions, was also incorporated into the Central Front.

The 2nd Army's axis of advance was set as Międzyrzec – Bielsk – Białystok; the 4th Army was directed from Kałuszyn to Ostrow-Ostrołęka, while the 3rd Army was still responsible for covering the rear and right flank of the armies advancing to the north.

The events that took place between 14 and 17 August on the northern flank of the Russian front, and the developing flank march of the Supreme Commander's Manoeuvre Group on 17 August, caused a feverish reaction in the Russian High Command. The Russians tried to oppose the Polish initiative, but did so in an utterly disorganised manner. The radio dispatches intercepted by the Northern Front on 17 August indicated further vacillation in Tukhachevski's mind at that time. In one of those dispatches he ordered the commander of the 4th Army to strike without delay with the 3rd Cavalry Corps and the 53rd Rifle Division at Płońsk. In the next one he ordered the concentration of the whole 4th Army in the area of Ciechanów, Maków and Przasnysz, limiting the group which was to strike at Płońsk to the 3rd Cavalry Corps! In the end, finding himself in an extremely difficult situation due to the unprecedented dispersion of his units, he mainly tried to bring the 4th Army back together in order to obtain a strong "fist" in the north.

In the end however, as a result of his own mistakes, he would be forced to confront his own weakness at this decisive moment of the war, against the great strategic concept of the Polish High Command, implemented with great tenacity on one front and with rare vigour on the other.



Attempts at Russian Counter Action on the Vistula in 1920

The plan of Russian counteraction, however unrealistic, was given in the order of the commander of the Western Front 406/Op of 17 August, according to which:

- 1) The 4th Army is to leave cover facing Bydgoszcz and to regroup by 20 August in the area of Przasnysz – Ciechanów – Maków, no less than two or three divisions of riflemen and the 3rd Cavalry Corps, with the task of attacking the enemy, who is still pressing the 15th and 3rd Armies, from the rear.
- 2) The 15th Army is to cover the regrouping of the 4th Army and at the same time attack with part of its forces the enemy group in the area of Płońsk.
- 3) The 3rd Army is to defend the access to the Narew River as well as a section of the western Bug River from the mouth of the Narew to the right wing of the 10th Army. Near Wyszaków it is to establish a bridgehead on the left bank of the western Bug River, the 21st Rifle Division is to be moved in three marches through Kossów to the Drohiczyń region to be the Front's reserve.
- 4) The 16th Army is to retire behind the Liwiec River and place two divisions in reserve behind the left wing.
- 5) The Mozyr group will drive the enemy from the Biała region and will stubbornly defend the Janów – Biała – Sławatycze area.
- 6) The 12th Army is to press on with its main forces in the direction of Chełm – Lubartów. The 58th Rifle Division returns to the 12th Army.
- 7) The First Horse Army should exert all its strength to regroup at all costs by the fixed date in the region of Włodzimierz Wołyński [Volodymyr-Volynsky] – Uściąg [Ustyluh], with a view to attacking the rear of the enemy's attacking group.

The work of the Russian command at this time, as well as an interpretation of the order above is further discussed in a Russian work (Kakurin and Melikov) as:

In view of the great strategic importance of this instruction, which in fact combines a whole series of separate orders for the period from 15 to 17 August, we consider it necessary to discuss it in more detail.

Taking into account that on 17 August the 18th Rifle Division was fighting in the area of Płońsk, and the 54th Rifle Division was advancing from the area of Wola Druze to Sochocin, while the other four divisions (10th Cavalry, 15th Cavalry, 12th and 53rd Rifle Divisions) were far ahead, the commander of the Western Front reckoned that the 4th Army in executing a new counter-manoeuve would have to go through three phases.

The first of these was to move to the designated area, in other words, its transformation into a strategic reserve for the Western Front.

The second was that, while the 4th Army was executing its march-manoeuve to the new area of Przasnysz – Ciechanów – Maków [Maków Mazowiecki], it was to strike in the meantime in the region of Płońsk to the rear of the enemy group in Modlin in order to eliminate its pressure on the 15th and 3rd Armies;

The third was, in case of an even more greater deterioration of the situation of the 15th and 3rd Armies would be strike south, somewhere between the Liwiec and Western Bug rivers.

And it must be said that, given the strategic situation present on the right wing of the Western Front, this operational plan was well suited. The plan, however, consisted of two fundamental principles, and required a delicate manoeuvre. It required of the troops not only speed of action, but also highly developed independence and initiative from the army commanders, as well as a considerable measure of skill in commanding the troops.

As far as the withdrawal of the 16th Army behind the Liwiec River was concerned the Front commander, having noticed a substantial degradation in the combat value of the units of the Mozyr group, assumed that by means of a quick retirement of the units from the enemy at their throats, it would be possible to liberate them and thus obtain the possibility of a quicker deployment and grouping on the left flank of the front. In this way it would be possible to quickly pull out and regroup on the left wing of the front in the form of reserve by the assigned divisions, the 8th, 10th, and 21st Rifle Divisions (the latter, from the 3rd Army, which after its concentration in the Drohiczyń area was to move further south).



Generally speaking, this part of the order should be assessed as a consequence of the decision to retreat across the entire front with the exception of the 15th and the 3rd Armies, which were to hold their positions to allow the withdrawal of the 4th Army.

As far as the 12th and the 1st Horse Armies are concerned, it may be noted that the same mission of destroying the enemy's Lublin group by striking at the rear of the advancing Polish 3rd and 4th Armies is repeated with them: for this purpose, the 58th Rifle Division was returned to the 12th Army, and the 1st Horse Army is once again ordered to carry out more rapidly the instruction 361/op. of 15 August.

Having received the Western Front Commander's Instruction 406/op. the Commander-in-Chief, analysing the reports received from the right wing of the Western Front, thought it advisable to propose certain amendments to the new plan of the front command, the expression of which we find in a telegram conversation on the morning of 18 August.

Commander-in-Chief: According to today's news, I believe that the 4th Army is in a situation convenient for striking the enemy's flank. Therefore, it seems to me that your instruction to concentrate the divisions of the 4th Army in the Przasnysz – Ciechanów – Maków area is not quite correct. It is better to continue the manoeuvre already started by its divisions. Gai has already crossed to the left bank of the Vistula and I don't think it would be a good time to change his task.

I sent you the 55th Rifle Division and the Kuban Brigade from Comrade Goldberg's reserve army to be at your disposal.

Front Commander: If the 15th and the 3rd Armies had fulfilled their missions, then it is obvious that the 4th Army, operating from Włocławek towards Kutno, could give positive results. But the 15th and 3rd Armies are constantly under the enemy's pressure, so that KommandArm Kork openly states that the units are beginning to weaken. That fact forces me to strive at all costs to break the enemy's Modlin group, especially since the Cavalry Corps has only partially crossed (15th Cavalry Division) with no positive results so far.

The Modlin group apparently has very serious forces at its disposal, since despite being surrounded from three sides by as many as nine divisions it continues to have success upon success.

For that reason, I have decided to strengthen my cover approximately on the line Brodnica – Włocławek – Goślice, and with my main forces crush the enemy group in Modlin.

Moreover, in view of the current situation, I will need reinforcements in order to carry out my redeployments. In general, until the Modlin group is defeated, I doubt whether I will be able to form a strong force to strike from north to south.

This fear of dispersing the large forces of my right wing has forced me to reduce the mission of the 4th Army, as it was completely detached from the principal area of operations.

The Horse Army reported that on 16 August that it was in the area of Busk – Bielirzec – Białogóra – Wisznowiec [Vyshnivets'], and that it was already meeting resistance.

Commander-in-Chief: You have misunderstood me, as I am talking about making use of the 4th Army's position in order to strike at the rear of the Modlin group and I believe that the Cavalry Corps may also strike at the rear of Warsaw, provided that it is immediately directed towards Płock.

What you are preparing for now, as I wrote to you immediately after you gave your instructions concerning the movement of all the armies of the front, and then pointed out in a conversation the next day, was the need to strike from north to south, but that was during the battle on the Western Bug line. You refused, stubbornly carrying out your own plan, and now I want to squeeze out of it at least some advantage, which in my opinion is possible, namely by carrying out vigorously and with all forces the attack on Płońsk – Zakroczym and Płońsk – Nasielsk. And here I require an answer from you whether you will do that or whether you will maintain your decision to group your divisions in the Ciechanów – Maków – Przasnysz area.

Western Front commander: In ordering this concentration I gave a mission of striking into the rear. It is true that I have made it more difficult with the delay, but I will explain to the commander of the 4th Army that the task of hitting the rear should be carried out before it concentrates; the 15th and the 3rd Armies have been given a defensive mission for the time being, because two to three days are needed for the Cavalry Corps to get there and at the moment they are unable to act actively.



The point is that, although we are victors, we are much weaker than the Poles and it is easier for them to manoeuvre. And the 1st Horse Army, which I had hoped to have on the left wing of the main forces, has been delayed. As a consequence of this state of affairs, destroying the Modlin Group becomes a necessity.

Commander-in-Chief: Are you sure that the Horse Army will march in the direction required?

Western Front commander: I think that there is no particular difficulty with them doing that, but at given the lack of communication, I cannot check if it is moving in that direction.

The conversation above seems to end uncertainly, as if the Western Front commander did not want to express the intentions of his instructions. They have the definite character of a retreat, in order to give the ability to manoeuvre. Only the 15th Army is given an active task, and that of purely local importance, with the aim of facilitating the retreat of the 4th Army. On the other hand, the instructions are formulated in terms of a regrouping, without saying a word about retreat.

It is obvious that the front commander, not counting on a quick defeat of the Polish 5th Army, did not intend to enter into battle with it, until the situation of the 16th Army and the Mozyr Group could be fixed.

In any case, after the conversation, the instructions remained in force and unchanged. However, neither the instructions of the Commander-in-Chief concerning the new deployment of the 4th Army, nor the assumptions of the commander of the Western Front concerning the 1st Horse Army and the 12th Army were to be met in practice. Because while we moved to crush the Polish 5th Army in the Modlin area, and also were striving to capture Lwów at any price, the enemy launched a powerful attack from south to north, crushing the left wing of the Western Front and thus thwarting all our operational ideas.

...

Fighting in difficult conditions the divisions of the 4th Army, advanced so far to the west, by the Vistula, that news of their successes or failures reached the commander of the Western Front with great difficulty. Operational documents clearly indicate that the Front commander did not have any detail on tactical situation of the units of the 4th Army on 17 August, because even the 4th Army commander moving from the headquarters of one division to the headquarters of another, was falsely informed in that regard.

On 15 August the commander of the 4th Army, Comrade Shuvaev, was in Lipno, with the commander of the 3rd Cavalry Corps, Comrade Gai . They received from 18th Infantry Division HQ (in Drobin) a message that three emissaries of the Polish command had arrived at their headquarters with a proposal that the Soviets lay down arms and surrender all their divisions, because they were encircled, and Ciechanów was already in Polish hands.

The Polish delegates said they would wait until 17 August for an answer from the commander of the Soviet 4th Army. After that time a refusal on the part of the army command, would lead to concentrated strikes on Sierpc, Lipno and Mława from the Toruń fortress, Włocławek, Płock, Płońsk, Ciechanów and Soldno (Działdowo) to encircle and destroy the troops of the 4th Army.

As a response to this new enemy plan, before departing for the army headquarters in Sierpc the next day, the commander of the 4th Army, Comrade Shuvaev, ordered the CavCorps commander to “occupy the Włocławek area and cross the Vistula River”.

At this point the 18th and 54th Rifle Divisions were fighting with the task of capturing Płońsk , while the 53rd Rifle Division and the Cavalry Corps (the 10th and 15th Cavalry Divisions) continued to operate in the area south of Lipno. The 12th Rifle Division was in the Brodnica area.

The situation created in the area of the 4th Army and the situation of the cavalry divisions on the “lower Vistula” is clearly explained by the commander of the 3rd Cavalry Corps, who began to execute the order to capture Włocławek. Gai wrote:

After a series of unsuccessful combats, the corps managed to capture, with the help of a brigade of the 53rd Rifle Division, the bridge over the river near Włocławek and to throw some reconnaissance troops into the town and down the Vistula. The right wing of the corps at the same time captured the town of Bobrowniki, seized two steamboats and several canned goods barges near Nieszawa, and threw scouting units across to the left bank of the Vistula ...



On 17 August, the enemy, having pushed back the right wing of the 15th Army in the Ciechanów area, threw several divisions from Modlin in our direction. Some of these enemy forces successfully held back the attack of the left wing of the 4th Army on Płońsk .

The situation of the Western Front, including the 4th and 15th armies, was never known at the Corps HQ, due to the speed our units moved and the lack of means of communication. Apart from scanty information from newspapers about the Western Front, some news received from neighbouring divisions via horse messengers, and sometimes news about the enemy, given by the commander of the 4th Army in battle orders, there was no information at the corps headquarters. Sometimes we got sacks full of outdated messages. The army had left the radio with the 10th Cavalry Division, who lost it in Ciechanów.

On 17 August at around 6 p.m., I received an order (via the staff of the 53rd Rifle Division) to leave the Nieszawa – Włocławek area. The 6th Cossack Regiment, then scouting towards Toruń and Dobrzyń, was to be sent to the Kikół area at the disposal of the commander of the 53rd Rifle Division, Moreover, the 86th Cavalry Regiment was to be immediately sent to Działdowo at the disposal of the commander of the 12th Rifle Division. The remaining forces were to press on to Płock, “as the situation of the 15th Army is very grave, and assistance is required.”

It should be added that the condition of the 3rd Cavalry Corps at the moment it received that order from the 4th Army was poor. Having left its divisional services over 700 kilometres behind, and having had no possibility of using those of the 15th and 4th Armies during the entire march, the corps was severely reduced in numbers due to illnesses and losing various detachments. It no longer presented the formidable mobile force it had represented at the beginning of the operations on the outer wing of the Western Front.

Having received the order to regroup with the aim of attacking Płock the commander of 3rd CavCorps issued the necessary orders. But with little information on the situation of the 15th Army, could not know exactly what the purpose of all this was. He wrote:

“It was not clear to me what reason prompted that order from the Army commander. Did he intend to feint with the attack of the corps through Płock to Warsaw? Or did he intend to strike by a circular route the flank and rear of the enemy operating against the 15th Army, in order to weaken the pressure on that army? It seemed that the army commander did not take into account the available time and space, the situation of the corps or the position of forces. This blindness would cost us heavily a bit later.

The army commander's order also mentioned that one brigade was to attack Płock from Bielsk (18th Rifle Division).

The instructions of the Western Front commander, 351/op. and 406/op of 16 and 17 August, finally clarified that the goal of the operation was Płock.

The situation as it stood required a strike through Płock and in the general direction of Płońsk – Zakroczym with the task of relieving the 15th Army and the right wing of the 3rd Army in the face of the stubbornly pressing enemy Modlin group.

The enemy, having already achieved a major success there on 16 and 17 August, continued to exert all his strength to drive back the right wing of the Western Front as far as possible to the east, and by uninterrupted attacks prevent our planned relocation from the sectors of the 15th and 3rd Armies southwards to the sector of the retreating 16th Army. In order to reinforce the left wing of the Polish 5th Army, the Polish command directed the 6th Brigade of the 4th Infantry Division from its 2nd Army to the area of Płońsk . On 17 August, the enemy was constantly advancing on the front of the 15th, 3rd and 16th Armies, following our retreating units. A three-hour battle in the Winnica area, where the Polish 9th Infantry Division broke through our resistance, opened a straight road for the enemy to Pułtusk, which was captured on 17 August at 20:00. At the same time the 7th Reserve Brigade of the Polish 1st Army, acting in conjunction with the units of the Polish 5th Army, was advancing to the mouth of the Narew River and was occupying the area of Serock.

Evaluation of the Orders of the Russian Command

The work quoted above, prepared by the enemy's general staff, clearly shows the chaos that prevailed on the Russian side as a result of the events taking place. Kamenev, who at that moment played the role of a critical observer rather than that of a commander-in-chief, did not control events. His comments about Tukhachevski's decisions being unclear to him are partly justified.



At that time, only decisive exploitation of the situation made by the mistakes of the 4th Army could lead the Russian troops to their objective. It required a concentrated attack by the entire 4th Army with Gai's corps (except the 12th Division, tied up fighting some distance away near Brodnica), undertaken quickly and decisively, to the rear of the 5th Army. It was nonsense to continue the attack of the cavalry on Płock, and all the more nonsensical to push across the Vistula in order to make a march towards Warsaw along its left bank.

Kamenev was evidently misled by the reports of his subordinate commanders concerning the situation of the Russian forces fighting on the frontline in Poland. Hence, he was wrong to advise Tukhachevski to continue the attack by the 3rd Cavalry Corps in the footsteps of Paskevich. His sarcastic remark at that time, where he recalled criticising the plan of action on the Vistula submitted by the commander of the Western Front, would remain only advice, not an order, just as his earlier opinion, to which he referred, remained only a criticism and did not take the form of a final decision binding on the Western Front. And yet the situation in the second half of August 1920 required more than ever a resilient, energetic and goal-conscious command on the Russian side.

Nor could one see in the Russian high command any energetic action in enforcing the order to regroup the troops on the Southwestern Front and the resulting transfer of Budenny's Horse Army to the north, which might have improved Tukhachevski's chances still further. Hence the Commander-in-Chief, in an 18 August conversation with Egorov, the commander of the Southwestern Front, and in response to his fantastical plan to capture Lwów, occupy Przemyśl and Sambor [Sambir], and then to push across the Dniester and threaten Rumania – which he kept even after being told to place Budenny's Horse Army at Tukhachevski's disposal – was content merely to deplore the delay in the execution of his instructions, regarding the redeployment of the 12th and the 1st Horse Armies towards Lublin. That delay had already had massive consequences, but he seemed entirely unable to remedy it with any firmness.

Tukhachevski reacted to the rapidly changing events in a way that was theoretically justified. However, being too distant from the theatre of operations under his command, he operated with inaccurate dates and had a false picture of the overall situation on his front, and could not control it in a practical sense. As a result of the 5th Army's mobility when defeating the Soviet 15th and 3rd armies, which in his opinion prevented him from carrying out his plan to capture Warsaw from the west, he overestimated the strength of that group, and as a result did not see clearly the danger threatening him from the south. He thought that, in order to get out of the trap, it would be enough to “crush the enemy group from Modlin with our main forces”, which as we know was not sufficient to remedy the situation.

That destruction was to be carried out by the 4th Army, which would launch a decisive attack on the rear of the 5th Army, while covering itself from the direction of Bydgoszcz. At the same time the Soviet 15th Army was ordered to cooperate with the 4th Army by attacking Płońsk from the northeast, while the 3rd Army was to cover the Narew River and the left wing of the 15th Army by seizing a bridgehead on the Bug near Wyszaków.

Under cover of these two armies and after breaking up the Modlin group, the 4th Army was to concentrate in the Ciechanów – Przasnysz – Maków triangle. In this way the entire 4th Army would stand behind the front of the 15th Army, with Gai-Khan's cavalry as a backup for the commander of the Western Front, who then intended to strike with that mass from the north to the south. The attack of the Soviet 12th Army, undertaken simultaneously and together with Budenny's cavalry army from the area of Hrubieszów – Włodzimierz Wołyński in the direction of Lubartów, was to be in harmony with this strike.

On the other hand, Tukhachevski's assessment of the situation in the centre of the front was so false, and at the same time so over-optimistic, that he believed that he would still be able to manage using largely the 16th Army, which he withdrew only beyond the Liwiec River, and not beyond the Bug River, directing the 21st Rifle Division to be a reserve, with three marches through Kossów to Drohiczyn. Besides this, he ordered the 16th Army to regroup thoroughly, expecting to be able to draw the 8th and 10th Rifle Divisions as the front's reserve, and to place them behind the Army's left wing, somewhere in the vicinity of Sokołów. The Mozyr Group would simultaneously defend Brześć and the left flank of the front along the Janów – Biała Podlaska – Sławatycze line.

If those plans were carried out, the stabilised line would have run more or less through Płońsk – Nowe Miasto – Winnica – Serock – Bug River – Liwiec River – Janów – Biała – Sławatycze. A two-wing operation in grand style was planned, consisting of a joint strike of the southern group (12th Army and Budenny) and the northern one (4th Army and Gai-Khan), with the strike directions of the groups converging near Mińsk Mazowiecki.

Tukhachevski's plan was too unrealistic, resting on foundations of thin air. It is difficult to understand today what caused him to make such an unrealistic assessment of the situation at that time. I have to say, however, that his orders at this time did not correspond at all to reality, and that they were unsuitable for execution even with units which were far more compact and far more capable of manoeuvre than the ones Tukhachevski had at his disposal in 1920.

His false image was so distorted by erroneous information that in a later instruction (No. 423/op.), believing in the supposed success of the assaults of the 18th and 54th Divisions on Płońsk and Sochocin, he ordered the 15th Army,



after the arrival of the 3rd CavCorps at Płońsk , to attack Nowe Miasto, and directed at the same time the 3rd Army to Nasielsk.

Tukhachevski continued to direct his units as if the situation had not been profoundly changed. But at that time the attacks of the 5th Army were progressively destroying his right wing, and impeded the 3rd CavCorps and the 53rd rifle division near Płock; the Polish Commander-in-Chief was already with his troops on the Mińsk Mazowiecki – Siedlce – Międzyrzec – Biała – Sławatycze line; the 16th Army was already broken and the Mozyr Group no longer existed, and Budenny was still wrangling near Lwów. No wonder that his plan, beautiful in theory, was to collapse in practice.

On the one hand, he overestimated the numerical strength of the 5th Army, on whose sector, according to Russian sources, we supposedly threw out several new divisions in the direction of Ciechanów on 17 August (in reality there was one cavalry brigade and one infantry brigade there), but meanwhile he did not adjust his conclusions to these premises. The concentration of the 4th Army in the area of Ciechanów – Przasnysz – Maków, ordered by him on 18 August, was possible only on the condition of the crushing of the 5th Army, or at least on the condition it remain motionless on the river Wkra on the following days. I do not think that the Russian general had the right to expect such a thing after the results of the 5th Army up to that point and the energetic character of its actions. All the more so if he really valued its forces so highly.

The situation of the Soviet 4th Army was further aggravated by the fact that the staffs of its constituent divisions had fled. On 17 August, upon hearing of the defeat of the 15th and 3rd armies, they turned back to Przasnysz – Ostrołęka and Łomża and headed for Grodno, which disorganised the command apparatus of the divisions.

The divisional wagons also fled simultaneously eastwards through Ciechanów – Chorzele – Kolno, carrying with them the 4th Army's provisions and ammunition and thus considerably worsening its material situation, which was further complicated by the army commander's completely inopportune orders. Comrade Shuvaev, in response to the demand for surrender made to him by the delegates we sent, on 17 August ordered the assembly of all his troops to gather as many forces as possible to strike at Płock, "since the situation of the 15th Army is very grave and we need to help them". This illogical order was inexpedient and very harmful to his cause, since it drew forces away from the main theatre of operations, which at that time lay in the fields of Płońsk . The cost of that capricious order by the 4th Army's commander, who was apparently unaware of its consequences, was later paid for in the bloody battles that took place on 18 August in the streets of Płock and then later by Gai-Khan at Kolno.

Tukhachevski's orders with regard to the centre of the Russian front were even more illusory. His 16th Army was so broken at that time that it was incapable of any serious action, much less such a complicated one as the commander of the Western front had assigned to it on 18 August 1920.



CHAPTER XI

Encirclement of the 4th Soviet Army and the Breakthrough of the Gai-Khan Group

Preparing for the Encirclement of the 4th Soviet Army

At that time, we did not know that the situation of the Russian army was so critical.

On the contrary, we still regarded the 4th Army and the 3rd Cavalry Corps, with their reputation for excellence, as serious opponents.

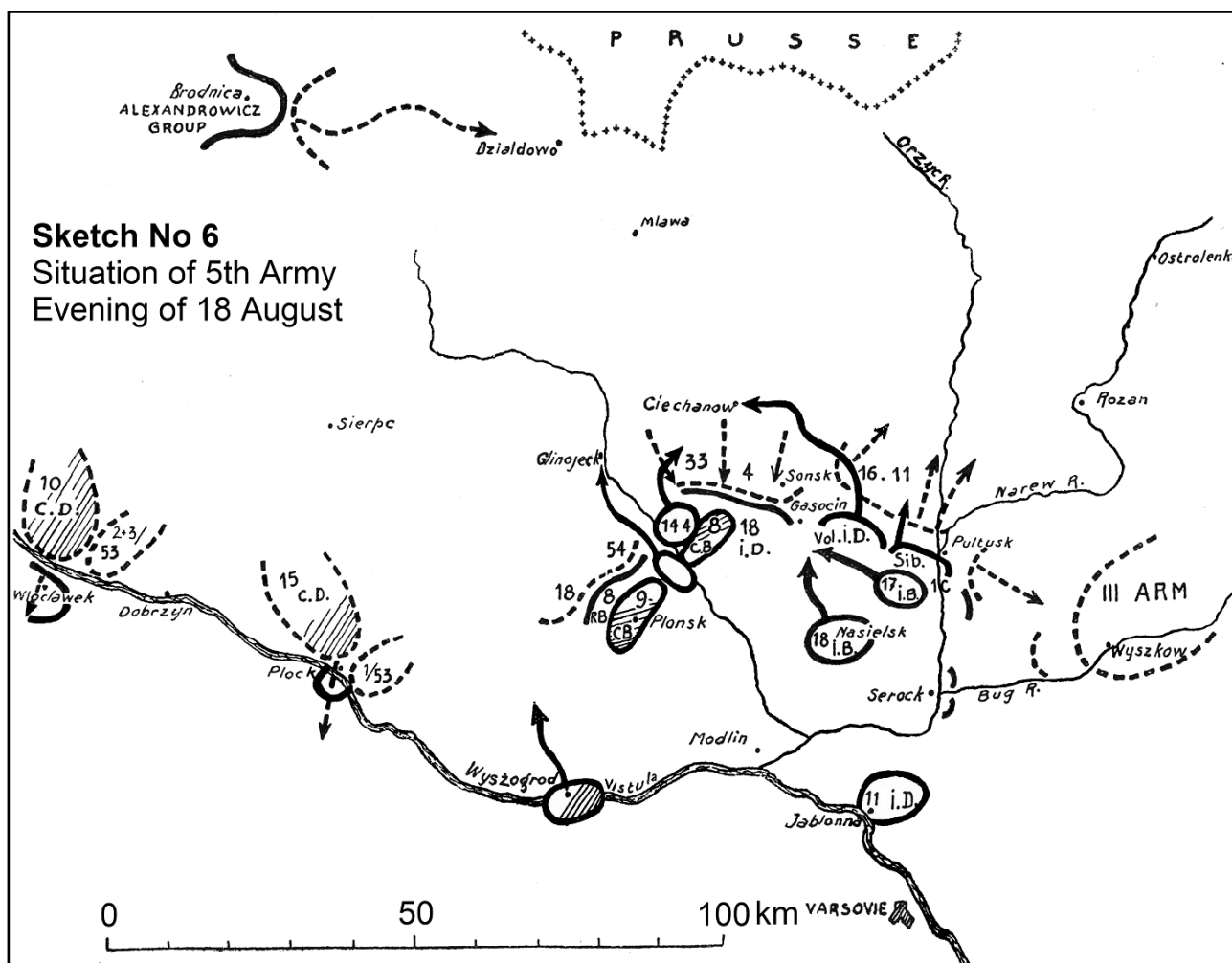
Therefore, on 18 August, in spite of the proclamations that the Russians would be completely destroyed, we were aware of the need for more serious fighting if they were to be finished off.

In order to surround the 15th Army, we had to destroy its left wing, which was covering the area of Ciechanów and Przasnysz. After the encirclement, we needed to prepare for a battle with two cavalry divisions and four rifle divisions, the parts of the 4th Army that had not been defeated at that time.

On the morning of 18 August, the 5th Army Headquarters considered the possibilities for the retreat lines of the Russian troops fighting on the lower Vistula. Looking at the roads at their disposal for that purpose, we saw four ways by which the 4th Army could head east.

The first of these led through Płońsk – Nasielsk – Serock – Wyszaków. This was the shortest route on which the Russian troops could have concentrated the 4th and 3rd Armies together. This choice, however, depended on the disintegration of the 5th Army and involved the danger of further difficulties, which the Russians had to reckon with north of Modlin. For these reasons we did not think that the 4th Army could have opted for that path – while operationally it was the most rational, tactically it was impossible as a line of retreat.

Thus, we were left with a choice of three other routes, the first of which led through Płońsk – Pułtusk – Wyszaków or Ostrołęka, the second lay on the Raciąż – Ciechanów – Maków axis, and the third led through Sierpc – Mława – Chorzele to Kolno and Grajewo.



In the end, we decided on the last of those was the most likely route for the 4th Army to follow, for the following reasons. First of all, there were psychological reasons. It lay closest to the axis of the 4th Army's initial march westward, and thus led through terrain generally known to it. Running along the Prussian border, it protected the flank of the retreating army against surprises from the north. And in the event of a disaster, it allowed the retreating troops to be saved relatively easily, as they could cross the German border.

This choice was also supported by tactical considerations, resulting from the offensive activity of General Krajowski and Colonel Dreszer, who were pushing the retreating axis of the 4th Army steadily towards the north.

Finally, that direction was supported by the possibility of reuniting with the five divisions fighting to the west and south-west of the Sochocin – Ciechanów – Mława line, as well as the 33rd, 11th, and 16th Rifle Divisions of the 15th Army, which, in the best case for the Red Army, could take place between Ciechanów and Mława.

For these reasons we considered the Mława area to be the place where the 4th Army should be expected to break through. It was therefore decided to direct the main forces of the 5th Army there, while at the same time securing the two other theoretically possible directions of retreat with the help of divisions in reserve, which were too distant from the northern theatre to affect it (sketch No. 6).

The order of the 5th Army Command, ordering the plan, reads as follows:

The enemy is in general retreat. According to some accounts they are moving beyond the Liwiec River, to others beyond the Bug River. The western group, concentrated in the Sierpc-Lipno area, according to aviation observations, is beginning a retreat towards Sierpc today and will probably aim to break through Mława.

The Soviet 54th and 18th Divisions are securing this retreating movement in the Płońsk – Sochocin area, the 33rd and 4th Divisions in the Ciechanów – Mława area.

The enemy is demoralised to the greatest extent.

Our own 3rd Army is advancing without much resistance towards Brześć, the 4th Army took Kałuszyn and Siedlce and is advancing to the north. The 1st Army took Mińsk Mazowiecki on its right wing during the day yesterday, while the left wing is advancing towards Wyszaków without resistance.

In order:

1. Colonel Małachowski's group will leave observation posts in the area of Zegrze and a garrison for the bridgehead at Serock and will take an eastern bridgehead of Pułtusk blocking all the roads in that area on the right bank of the Narew and will occupy the sector of the Narew up to and including Kleszewo.

This group will provide defensive protection for the right wing of the army. Colonel Małachowski will send his cavalry to the rear of the retreating enemy, adjusting its direction of march to the current situation on his own sector.

The assigned positions must be accomplished without exception before midnight of 18 August.

2. General Osiński's group will concentrate during this evening in the area of Pułtusk – Przewodowo, in order to strike at dawn on 19 August along the roads Pułtusk to Różan and Dzierżanowo to Maków, and then to capture bridgeheads on the Orzyc River in the area of Szelków and in the area of Maków. After capturing those two towns, the group will send a strong detachment towards Przasnysz, demonstrating the greatest possible energy towards Różan and Gąsewo [Gąsewo Poduchowne]. It will concentrate the bulk of its forces in the Maków area, holding Szelków firmly.

3. The Volunteer Division will strike at Stare Gołymyń with one brigade. After capturing that, a weaker pursuit detachment will head for Łukowo – Mosaki, while a stronger one will head for Kołaczów. The division will remain in that section, linking with General Osiński's group from Romanowo and securing the rear of Ciechanów until the situation is clarified. The command of the Volunteer Division will collaborate with its second brigade in the action on Ciechanów, which it will occupy after it is captured.

4. General Krajowski, after taking Ciechanów, will strike for Mława and Działdowo, and having garrisoned these two towns with the help of Colonel Habicht's group, regroup the bulk of his forces on the Mława – Ciechanów line in a place chosen by him, in preparation for an attack.

5. Colonel Dreszer will continue the attack of the 6th Infantry Brigade and the 4th Pomeranian Regiment towards Gora-Drobin and Raciąż, which began today, and try to cut off the retreat of the 3rd Cavalry Corps in the Szreńsk area with the entire cavalry division as quickly as possible.



6. General Osikowski, in accordance with previous orders, will strike before noon on 19 August with the 2nd Cavalry Brigade from the Gora region towards Drobin, while the rest of the units will go to Płock attack from there to occupy Bielsk.

7. The 9th Infantry Division, as the army reserve, will concentrate as soon as possible in Stare Gołymín, and protect that area.

8. The 11th Infantry Division moves as a front reserve to Nasielsk.

9. The garrison of the Modlin stronghold will be concentrated in Zakroczym as army reserve.

10. All aviation is to be directed to the Sierpc area.

The movements ordered above must be carried out at maximum speed and with the utmost precision. Their aim is to completely destroy and capture those enemy forces that have dared to break through to our rear.

In the order I mention the 11th Infantry Division as reserve for the Nasielsk front. This division was handed over to the 5th Army on 17 August, together with the 7th Infantry Brigade. Shattered in the battle for Radzymin, it was unfit for use in the field.

The order contains a clear operational concept, consisting in the fastest possible seizure of the line of the Narew and Orzyc rivers by the 7th Reserve Brigade, the 17th Division and the Siberian Brigade; in organising the army's protection against possible diversion from the east by firmly holding the bridgeheads near Serock, Pułtusk and Szelków, concentrating the majority of General Osiński's forces in the Maków area, and to turn the main forces of the 5th Army against the forces of the Soviet 15th Army, which were still fighting west of that line.

The necessity of capturing Ciechanów quickly, which was to be done by General Krajowski's group and the Volunteer Division, was uppermost. The latter, after taking Stare Gołymín, was to strike at Opinogóra, and from there at Ciechanów from the east, parallel to the front of the 18th Infantry Division.

In view of the confused situation in the 5th Army's sector, all the divisions had to secure themselves independently.

The western group of Russian troops was at the same time being kept in check by Colonel Dreszer and General Osikowski. Of particular importance was that Colonel Dreszer's group show the greatest possible activity. It allowed us to establish and maintain contact with the enemy and to hinder his retreat until the moment when the 5th Army, having achieved victory at Ciechanów, could finish regrouping and form the reserves needed for an effective attack on the Soviet 4th Army and attached CavCorps.

The cavalry division at Colonel Dreszer's disposal was, in his hands, a powerful reconnaissance tool, which always plays such a serious role in organising a pursuit. This was emphasised in a further order which made the results of the expected actions with the retreating enemy dependent on careful intelligence and the offensive initiative of individual divisions.

The immediate task for Colonel Dreszer's group was to cut the retreating path of the 4th Army, which was to be accomplished after breaking its right flank. It did not have to accept a battle in open field with Gai-Khan, for which Colonel Dreszer was too weak. Instead, it consisted in finding the main forces of the retiring group and harassing them until General Krajowski could block Gai-Khan's path.

Temporary Capture of Płock and Threat to Lwów

The course of events on 19 August was as follows:

In the morning Colonel Malachowski crossed the Narew near Wierzbica, and having driven out the Russians entrenched on the left bank of the river, began to rebuild the bridge destroyed there, on the orders of the Front Command.

General Osiński, to whom the 17th Infantry Division and the Siberian Brigade were subordinate at that time, began a similar action near Pułtusk. Under his direction, the units of the 17th Division crossed the river in the evening, while the Siberian Brigade occupied Przewodowo after a battle. At the same time Lt-Colonel Koc, having driven back the Russians to Stary Gołymín, remained in the afternoon with the Volunteer Division at the crossroads near Szyszki.

General Krajowski, having regrouped his infantry regiments during the night, intended to strike for Ciechanów in the morning. He was forestalled, however, by a counter-attack from the Soviet 33rd and 4th Divisions, which wanted to keep Ciechanów in their hands at all costs, in order to give the 4th Army relative freedom of movement, and so he



remained where he was, tied up in fighting on his entire sector. The exhausted regiments of the 18th Infantry Division could not hold out, so that Sarnowa Góra and Sońsk temporarily fell into enemy hands.

General Krajowski, however, having executed a skilful manoeuvre with the help of the 144th Infantry Regiment and the 5th Cavalry Brigade, directed at the enemy's right flank, had success at Bobrowniki, which completely rectified the situation of the 18th Division. In spite of that, it could not yet move to capture Ciechanów, as it was too tired.

At Płońsk, where the enemy withdrew towards Raciąż and Góra, there was silence during the day, which Colonel Dreszer took advantage of to finish organising his operational group.

The enemy situation in that area was not clear to us, as the news about the fate and intentions of the Soviet 4th Army still sounded contradictory. Some of them talked of renewed attempts by the Bolshevik forces to force their way across the Vistula and of their intended march on Warsaw from the west, while others said a retreat was being prepared in the Sierpc area.

In order to clarify the situation, I ordered the Płock garrison to advance to Bielsk and the 11th Cavalry Brigade to Góra and Biezuń. The latter could not carry out the task assigned to it. Two battalions of infantry sent from Płock, advancing too confidently, unexpectedly encountered a large concentration of Russian cavalry near Trepow⁴⁰ and were crushed. The Red cavalry and accompanying infantry chased the survivors of the detachment, attacked Płock and late in the evening, after a heavy battle, took the northern part of the town.

The inhabitants of Płock not only witnessed the events, but also took an active part in a bloody street battle, which lasted until midday the next day. Two-thirds of the city's permanent garrison were killed in the fighting, which included the participation of patriotic civilians, who spontaneously erected barricades in the streets. The city itself suffered extremely heavy casualties. I wrote in my dispatches:

To the heroic people of Płock, I send words of soldierly gratitude for their courage and valour in the defence of their endangered homeland. A few more days of perseverance and the Bolshevik hordes that dared to break through to our rear will be exterminated. Their outrages will be avenged.

Thus, despite the successes of the Polish forces and their offensive from the Wieprz River, the Soviet 4th Army continued to fight in the west, aiming at Płock and forcing its way up the Vistula near Dobrzyń. At that time, it was difficult to judge whether this offensive was the result of a lack of communication with the command of the Western Front, or whether it was a demonstration intended to divert our attention from the beginning of the 4th Army's retreat. The participation of the 53rd Rifle Division in the capture of Płock seemed to contradict the last hypothesis.

In any case, those battles showed that on 19 August that 3rd CavCorps and its accompanying infantry were present on the Vistula River. This mixed group, therefore, would travel about 150 km to reach Mława, where we expected they would attempt to break through.

The seizure of the Ciechanów – Mława line had to be accelerated in order to cut off the line of retreat of the Red divisions still fighting on the Vistula.

This task was facilitated by Colonel Aleksandrowicz, who on 18 August, at the head of a mixed group⁴¹ from Wielkopolska, organised by the Poznań Region staff, started a counter-attack from Jabłonowo [Jabłonowo Pomorskie], and then moved along the Prussian border to Brodnica – Działdowo – Mława. Colonel Aleksandrowicz had at his disposal three battalions of infantry, three squadrons of cavalry, two batteries of cannons and an air squadron formed from planes of a training school. Moving forward, he attacked the Soviet 12th Division near Brodnica on 18 August, and after a long battle defeated it and captured the town in the evening. The Bolsheviks, beaten at the same time at Golub, began a local retreat in that section and withdrew to Działdowo.

Those were the events of 19 August in the 5th Army sector.

In the southern half of our Front, according to information from General Haller, General Skierski and the 4th Army, was to continue the attack on Brok, while the 1st Army, consisting of the 19th and 10th Infantry Divisions, was given the task of organising an attack along the railway track to the Liwiec River and along the Radzymin – Wyszków road.

⁴⁰ Trzepowo, now a suburb of Płock?

⁴¹ This was much of the former Habicht Group, plus some hasty reinforcements.



From the quoted order we also learned that General Rydz-Śmigły, at the head of the 2nd Army, had already crossed the Bug River and was advancing towards Białystok.

Further to the right, General Zygmunt Zieliński was able to withstand strong pressure from the 12th Army, which was advancing on him from the direction of Hrubieszów, while General Iwaszkiewicz was struggling hard on the southern front with the Horse Army, opposing Budenny's momentum with his proven energy.

Finally, Budenny, exploiting the advantage that the Russians had in that terrain, defeated our 3rd Army, and having thrown them back, took Żółkiew [Zhovka] – Kulików [Kulykiv] – Jaryczów [Staryi Yarychiv] – Busk. Once on that line, however, he began feverish preparations for the capture of Lwów, intending only after the capture to turn back towards Lublin, as he had been previously directed.

Budenny, who was heading for Lwów along the Black Tartar trail and in the footsteps of Khmelnytski, had forgotten the examples of history and underestimated the moral strength of the borderland city, thinking that it would fall into his hands easily and quickly. He met with a well-deserved punishment, and a fate similar to that of the Khmelnytski expedition.

For Lwów, in accordance with its beautiful historical tradition, responded to the threatening danger with a resolute attitude, preparing for a ruthless and implacable defence with the spontaneous participation of the civilian population. The capture of the city was therefore no easy matter.

This was shown to one of the divisions of the Horse Army upon reaching Zadwórze [Zadvir'ya], garrisoned by a Lwów volunteer unit, and only a day's march away from the city itself. The unit at Zadwórze put up a heroic and determined resistance to the invaders, defending themselves to the last bullet. In the end it was almost completely cut down; however, it held up an enemy cavalry division for a whole day and inflicted very heavy losses on it. This finally convinced the commander of the Horse Army of the impossibility of capturing the "ever loyal" city quickly and reminded him – too late, in fact – of his duty to rush to Tukhachevski's aid. It was only after the bloody battle of Zadwórze, that is six days after receiving the order, that Budenny decided to abandon the capture of Lwów and turn back in the direction he had been ordered.

The Battles on the Narew River

We received no binding operational directives from the Front command. We knew that the 1st Army had been wrongly directed northeast, and so lagged behind and was wedged between the advancing armies of the Commander-in-Chief and the 5th Army, and so would take no active part in the battles on the front lines. Therefore we proceeded on 19 August – as the last quoted order shows – to solve the mission awaiting the 5th Army independently.

This task consisted primarily in destroying the remaining parts of the 15th Army west of the Orzyc River and in clearing as quickly as possible the space separating us from the Polish-German border, that is in gaining freedom of action versus the Soviet 4th Army. The fact that our 1st Army could not cooperate with the 5th Army at this decisive moment, which should have been accomplished by drawing into battle the remaining functioning units of the 15th and 3rd Armies, in order to prevent those forces interfering in the battle between the 5th Army and the Russian forces to the west, resulted in a separation of the 5th Army into three distinct groupings.

The first was made up of the 17th Infantry Division and Siberian Brigade, formed as a group under General Osiński', plus the 7th Reserve Brigade.

The second was made from the operational groups of General Krajowski, Colonel Dreszer and General Osikowski.

The third comprised the 9th Infantry Division and Volunteer Division, which were to be placed as quickly as possible in the army commander's reserve.

The task of the first of these groupings was to capture Maków and defensively garrison the bridge over the Orzyc River near Szelnków, and then to destroy those Russian divisions which, after our capture of Mława, would be boxed into the area delineated by the Orzyc River with the Polish-German border and the Mława-Ciechanów railway line, and finally to take part, if necessary and possible, in battles with the Soviet 4th Army. This group of troops was therefore to fulfil the task that, under normal circumstances, should have fallen to our 1st Army.

The task of the second group of armies was to capture Ciechanów and Mława as quickly as possible, and to thoroughly scout the situation of the 4th Army and to destroy the latter after a thorough entrapment. Without Ciechanów, which



despite the excellent actions of General Krajowski's group had remained in Russian hands up to that time, no detailed orders leading to this goal could be issued. However, the orders of the 5th Army Command from that time were clearly intended to:

- a) encircle the enemy from the south, north and west, which was to be done by Colonel Dreszer and General Osikowski, and from the Polish-German border by Colonel Aleksandrowicz;
- b) throw the cavalry division onto the line of retirement, which was done by directing it to Glinojock – Szeńsk with the task of cutting off Gai-Khan's retreat; at the same time to organise the most efficient intelligence possible, as a proper reconnaissance of the rapidly changing situation was still decisive for the success of our operations in that area;
- c) close the retreat of the main enemy forces, that is to gather most of the divisions near Mława, on the Ciechanów – Mława railway line, and to organise them in such a way that they would be able to strike offensively at the enemy forces breaking through.

These plans were overthrown by General Józef Haller, who in the course of the day sent us an order to take from the 5th Army the 17th Infantry Division, Siberian Brigade and 7th Reserve Brigade, so as to form a separate operational group of General Osiński, subordinated directly to the Front. General Osiński was given the mission of pursuing those Soviet troops that were operating between the Narew River and the Polish-German border.

This created a new operational group in a theatre of operations requiring unified leadership and extremely rapid action. It separated missions that were in reality inseparable, and was tantamount to a weakening of the 5th Army, carried out at a time when all its forces should have been concentrated. It would dissipate the energy so necessary for the final dismantling and destruction of the six rifle and two cavalry divisions still to the west of the Narew and Orzyc rivers. The resulting organisational confusions, as well as the division of forces and means, which at that time were at the disposal of the commander of the 5th Army, unnecessarily weakened us in the section Przasnysz – Maków and delayed the execution of the mission awaiting us urgently in the western sector.

Placing the 10th Infantry Division at my disposal at the same time did not cancel the negative consequences discussed above. That division was delayed due to the distances involved in its redeployment and did not reach the battlefield of the 5th Army in time. Thus, it did not take any active part in the battles with the Soviet 4th Army. Its redirection to the northern operational area is explained more by the desire of the Front command to garrison the retreat lines of the 4th Army, possibly south of Ciechanów, and to secure the capital from the west, than by the intention to reinforce the 5th Army. The fact that Warsaw still considered the necessity of protecting the capital from the west on 18 August is indicated by the order of that day, which stated that the 5th Army “continues to repel in an offensive manner the enemy's attacks, probably directed towards the area of Płońsk – Sochocin, and secures the left wing against the enemy troops, apparently wishing to capture the capital from the west”.

Carrying out the orders received, I had to reorganise the 5th Army on 18 August. I also changed the composition of General Krajowski's operational group, placing at his disposal the 18th Infantry Division, the Volunteer Division and two armoured trains. General Krajowski's task was still to take Ciechanów and Mława as quickly as possible, and then to join up with Colonel Aleksandrowicz's mixed group from Wielkopolska and to cut off the retreating path of the Soviet 4th Army.

Colonel Dreszer's operational group, reorganised at the same time, of the 8th and 9th Cavalry Brigades, the 8th Infantry Brigade and the 9th Regiment of Field Artillery, was to cooperate with General Krajowski in his offensive action, securing the left wing of the group and conducting a deep intelligence raid on Drobin – Raciąż – Szeńsk.

The Lower Vistula Group remained unchanged in its composition and retained the equally unchanged task of defending the river it manned.

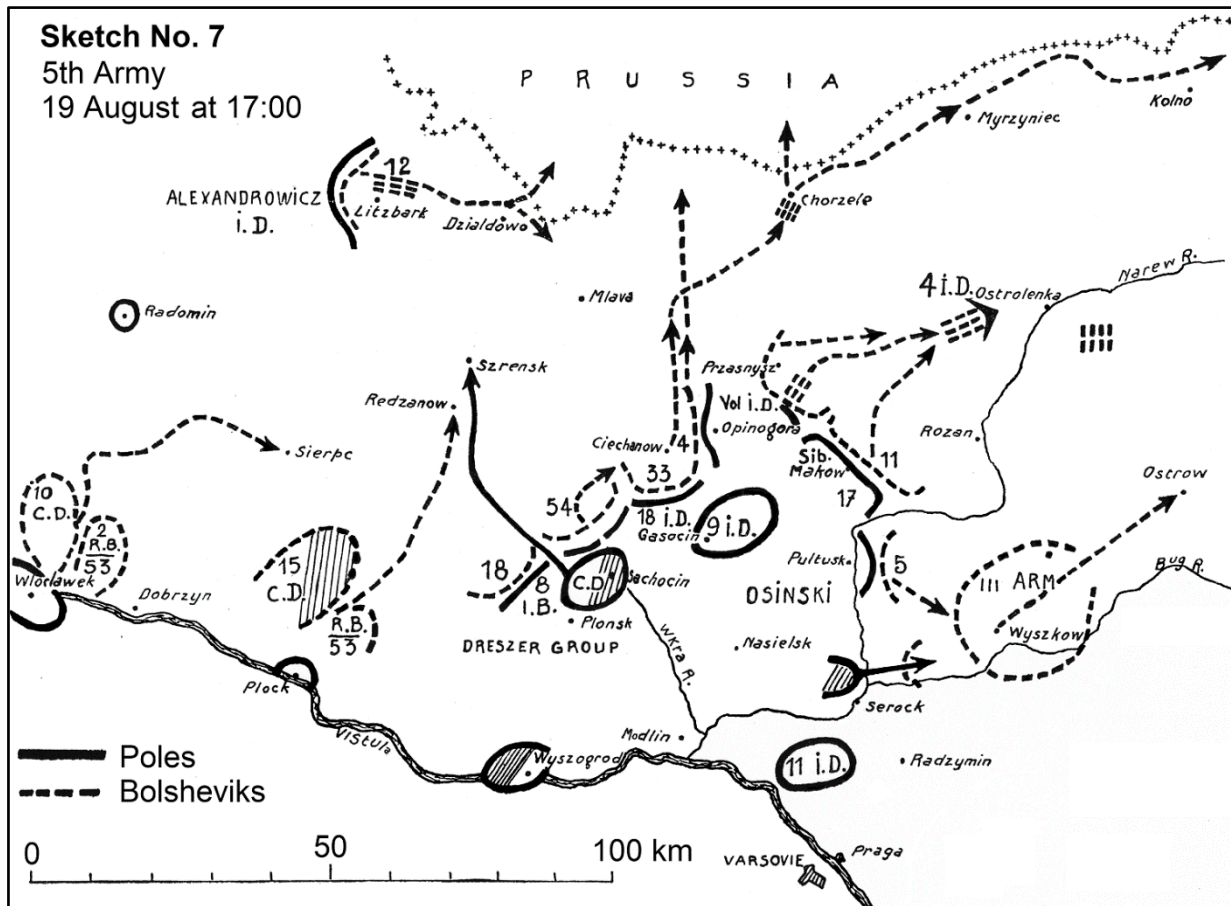
In the reserve of the army, the 9th Infantry Division, was directed from around Ciechanów to Gąsocin, and the 6th Infantry Brigade was moved to Zakroczym. (Sketch 7)

These dispositions and the specified grouping of the 5th Army were our response to Tukhachevski's known plans, although they could not be completed. The ordered regrouping of his subordinate armies, changed under the pressure of reality into a general retreat of the armies of the Western Front. The 15th Army initially defended Ciechanów, to enable the retreat of the 4th Army. The 3rd Army, on the other hand, having retreated in the first phase of fighting and as a result of the defeat at Nasielsk into the forks of the Bug and Narew rivers, left relatively quickly together with



the retreating wave of the Soviet 16th Army from near Wyszków, and in an effort to avoid the fatal blow threatening it from the south, retreated north-east.

The detachments of that army left on the Narew River, performed well and with great sacrifice. By constantly disturbing the 7th Reserve Brigade and the 17th Infantry Division with artillery and machine gun fire, they were able to mislead them, so as to delay the seizure of the bridgehead near Pułtusk by the Reserve Brigade for several hours. As a result, General Osinowski did not start his attack on Maków until 10:00 on 19 August 19th, at which time he encountered the enemy, strongly entrenched and prepared for defence, near Przemiarowo.



This action, poorly co-ordinated on our side, dragged on until the evening, while some regiments, particularly the 70th Infantry Regiment, suffered heavy losses of killed and wounded. Eventually the 17th Infantry Division took the bridge at Szeków, having broken through the field fortifications, but this did not happen until the following day at dawn. At about the same time, the Siberian brigade captured Maków, after a fierce battle near Czarnostów, where the brave regimental commander, Major Werner, fell.

On the opposite side were units of the 11th, 16th and 29th Rifle Divisions, which on their repulse withdrew to Ostrołęka. (Troops from the 29th Rifle Division were identified several times in the 5th Army sector after 15 August. However, their role and participation in the fighting has not been clarified.) The Volunteer Division, fighting the same Soviet group, attacked Stary Gołymin in the morning.

Capture of Ciechanów and the Destruction of the Russian Army in that Area.

Lieutenant Colonel Koc, having thrown back the troops in front of him and fought his way in to Stary Gołymin, proceeded to carry out the orders he had previously received, according to which he was to cooperate with the 18th Infantry Division in the capture of Ciechanów. He therefore launched a strike along the Stary Gołymin – Ciechanów road.

Ciechanów held its ground, defended by the 4th, 33rd and 54th Rifle Divisions.

The Volunteer Division, advancing from Stary Gołymin to Ciechanów, encountered determined resistance organised on the road. However, Lt. Colonel Koc broke through the enemy positions, and having smashed the Soviet 4th



Division, struck with vigour at Opinogóra, which he quickly captured, and finally took Ciechanów, along with many prisoners. The town which was entered at 19:00 by Major Mond, leading the Volunteer Brigade of Lt-Colonel Błęszyński, who had been seriously wounded at Opinogóra.

That evening the 18th Infantry Division also entered Ciechanów.

Meanwhile Colonel Dreszer, who was busy organising the combined cavalry division, did not undertake any serious activity that day, apart from the occupation of Smardzewo and sending out reconnaissance parties.

Colonel Aleksandrowicz beat the entrenched Bolsheviks at Lidzbark. Pursuing the Soviet 12th Division, he caught it near Działdowo, where he seized numerous prisoners and machine guns.

In view of these events, and with the Soviet 4th Army still to face, our most urgent task at the time was to capture Mława, in order to obtain a connection between General Krajowski's group and Colonel Aleksandrowicz's units.

We also needed to avoid the mistake made out of necessity at Nasielsk, and take advantage of the victory gained at Ciechanów to organise a pursuit of the fleeing enemy – to catch it before the Polish-German border. This pursuit was to be carried out by the 18th Infantry Division, reinforced on 20 August by Major Nowicki's armoured group, consisting of 46 tanks and 4 armoured trains.

The relevant orders were given for that to happen:

I. – The enemy is in disarray and retreating to the north in front of General Krajowski's group. The majority of his forces are advancing towards Mława. The majority of the enemy cavalry corps is still in the area of Sierpc; it will probably attempt to get through to around Sześć – Mława. The Bolsheviks have announced that if their line of retreat is cut off, they will move into German territory.

II. – I order:

To General Krajowski:

1. immediately occupy Przasnysz and with pursuit detachments, cut off the enemy's retreat routes between Przasnysz and the German border.

2. While pursuing the fleeing enemy, reach the Mława area as quickly as possible, then close it off as tightly as possible. A strong detachment should be sent to Działdowo in order to join Colonel Aleksandrowicz's group, advancing from Lidzbark, where the Soviet 12th Division has been defeated. At General Krajowski's disposal I put Major Nowicki's armoured group (46 tanks and 4 armoured trains). The ultimate mission of General Krajowski's group is, after forming a strong barrier at Przasnysz facing west, to destroy the enemy retreating towards Mława, and prepare to contain the cavalry corps in case it tries to break through to the east.

3. Colonel Dreszer will take command of the cavalry division, to which the 211th Ulan Regiment will be added, and will occupy Głinojeck as quickly as possible with the mission of cutting off the enemy's Ciechanów group from the Sierpc one. Later the mission of the cavalry division is to destroy the enemy cavalry corps. Colonel Dreszer may move where he sees fit, according to the enemy's movements. His general destination is the area of Sześć. Colonel Dreszer is to maintain the closest possible contact with General Krajowski, who, if necessary, will undertake an attack against the cavalry corps.

4. Colonel Zieliński takes command of the Płońsk group and will strike concentrically at Raciąż with all his forces, which must be occupied by this evening.

5. The "Lower Vistula" group, will hold the Vistula section defensively, and will take Drobin by tonight.

6. General Hauser will follow up Colonel Aleksandrowicz's attack as energetically as possible so that on the morning of 21 August his own troops can join them in Działdowo.

7. The reserve of the 5th Army is: the 9th Infantry Division in Ciechanów, the 10th Infantry Division in Maków, where it will head tomorrow, the 7th Infantry Brigade in Zakroczym, and the 11th Infantry Division as a reserve of the front command in Nasielsk.

I demand the greatest possible energy in continuing the pursuit from everyone.



Thanks to the energetic execution of this order, 20 August was a day of triumph and reward for the heavily bloodied 18th Infantry Division. That brave unit launched a decisive strike to the north at dawn. Its 35th Infantry Brigade attacked the Soviet 54th division, catching it on the road to Mława near Pawłowo and destroyed it in a bloody battle. It captured 4,500 prisoners of war, 14 cannon and over 100 machine guns belonging to the 54th and 4th Rifle Divisions, as well as several hundred vehicles of their supply train.

On the way to Grudusk the other brigade of the 18th Infantry Division encountered strongly entrenched units of the 33rd Kuban Division, which with the use of artillery and numerous machine guns fought bravely on their positions until the evening. They covered the outflow of Bolshevik wagons, crowding at that time on the road Mława – Przasnysz – Krasnosielc. During the night, the Russian division, having succumbed to the pressure, had to retreat to the north, which resulted in the Soviets only having one last road running along the German border, leading through Mława – Szumsk – Myszyniec – Kolno.

On the same day Col. Dreszer struck from Młock at Chotum, where he beat the 18th Rifle Division, taking over 1,500 prisoners, two batteries and 18 heavy machine guns.

Extremely characteristic of events at that time were the improvised battles fought by mixed units of Russian troops at Przasnysz on 20 August.

This diversion was carried out by the Bolsheviks so energetically that we temporarily lost Przasnysz, in spite of the obvious advantage it gave us at that place and time. The Volunteer Division soon took back the town by means of a counter-attack, but suffered very heavy losses doing so.

Another characteristic consequence of the division of forces in the northern operational theatre and the lack of proper communication was that General Osiński planned an attack on Przasnysz on 20 August even though Polish units were already holding it. Similarly, the commander of the 1st Army gave orders aimed at securing the passages across the Orzyc River from the east, even though there were no threats from there.

General Osiński, whose group was renamed the 1st Army, having moved the 7th Reserve Brigade to the Szelków – Maków area, pushed the rest of his army towards Przasnysz, which Colonel Rumsza entered at the head of the Siberian Brigade at 10:00. There he was surprised to meet the Volunteer Division, and set off for Chorzele, which the Russian units attacking Przasnysz had withdrawn to. He recovered from his mistake in the morning and marched over 50 km in the day, despite skirmishes with small enemy units. By evening he had reached Świniary and Krzynowłoga, located near Chorzele.

Lt-Colonel Koc, for his part, fulfilled his orders by sending one regiment to Grabowo, in order to observe the Mława – Grabowo – Chorzele road; while three regiments were concentrated in Grudusk, preparing to cut that road and cooperate with the troops of General Krajowski's group, in the battle planned for Gai-Khan.

At 13:00 on 20 August, General Krajowski captured Mława, and then established contact with Colonel Aleksandrowicz. He then took prisoner survivors of the 4th and 12th Rifle Divisions, who were crossing to the German border in loose groups.

Combat against Gai-Khan and the Breakthrough

And so ended the second act of the tragedy of the Russian troops, who had marched proudly at the beginning of August towards the conquest the whole of Europe. The third act, however, awaited us, the main content of which was to be a battle with Gai-Khan, retreating from the Vistula.

The situation of that corps was indeed dire on 20 August. Recall that by that day some of the 15th Army was already reaching Łomża in their hasty retreat, and the 3rd Army was nearing Białystok. So, there was no question of Tukhachevski being able to help Gai-Khan. As Marshall Piłsudski was marching very quickly towards the German border, and Budenny was delayed, Tukhachevski had to save what remained of his divisions in a hurry and withdraw them at a feverish pace behind the Neman, which he had so recklessly crossed.

This was all the more necessary as the divisions of the Soviet 15th Army, which had secured the remaining parts of their 4th Army a free passage to the north of Ciechanów, had been smashed up, while the 12th Rifle Division was also shattered by that time. Hour by hour the retreat of Gai-Khan's troops became more and more precarious and the pursuit more effective. The entire 18th Infantry Division and Major Nowicki's armoured group were already concentrated in the Mława region. On its right wing was Colonel Dreszer's combined cavalry division, already with the



mission of relentless pursuit of the retreating Gai-Khan. The Volunteer Division was to close the Przasnysz – Chorzele corridor to stop the retreating Russian troops and allow the remaining divisions of the 5th Army to strike their wings and rear.

Order nr. 1104/ill, dated 21 August 1920 of the 5th Army:

I find that some commanders do not know the current mission of the army under my authority.

Therefore, I emphasize that this task consists in pursuing and destroying the Soviet 4th Army. In order to achieve this aim, the fastest possible destruction of the enemy units located in the Przasnysz – Mława – Ciechanów triangle, is to be carried out. In undertaking this mission, General Krajowski will have Przasnysz covered from the east by the 1st Army, while the entire Volunteer Division will be used to close the corridor between Przasnysz and the German border.

After the capture of Mława and Działdowo the 18th Infantry Division will reassemble in the Mława area and Colonel Aleksandrowicz's group in the Działdowo area, as directed by the Pomeranian command, and are to prepare to strike in case the 3rd Cavalry Corps or Soviet 53rd Rifle Division attempt their escape there.

Action against the troops attempting to break through must include the most careful intelligence and the strongest possible offensive initiative. Our troops must not take up positions to secure a given sector passively, but must be as vigorous and active as possible as each case entails, tracking and eliminating the retreating troops. The task of the cavalry division is to drive off enemy troops it can reach, and above all, to search out and surround the bulk of enemy forces to the west.

The units in the sector from Raciąż to Nieszawa inclusive are to drive the enemy towards Ciechanów – Mława by strong offensive movements.

The Pomeranian troops will probably close off the area to the north, cutting off the cavalry corps from the road to Germany.

General Sikorski

Colonel Aleksandrowicz's division was to assemble at Działdowo. The 9th Infantry Division was in the army's reserve north of Ciechanów. It was to move to Borowo [Czernice Borowe] on 21 August.

Moreover, the units from the lower Vistula and the 4th Infantry Division were to operate in the rear and on the right flank of the Bolshevik troops breaking through, attacking them from the direction of Płock and Płońsk. They received an order to harass and bully the enemy in order to increase demoralisation in his ranks.

The described arrangement of the army in general terms met the intended aims. It allowed the retreating troops to be surrounded and gave us an advantage in strength and resources in the battle which we rightly expected at Mława. However, an indispensable condition for the success of any such action, apart from the initiative of the subordinate commanders, was – as I have already indicated – a well-functioning intelligence service. For it was intelligence that told us when to pull the trigger to set the apparatus in motion. The success of either warring parties depended on whether the trigger was pulled at the right, or wrong, moment.

Detailed reconnaissance of the situation of the 4th Army could be carried out in the first place by the aviation squadrons of the 5th Army. The lack of strong air power, and above all the lack of fighter planes on the opposite side, made it easier for them to perform this important task. Unfortunately, the abnormally low clouds and incessant rain, which lasted from 20 to 23 August, that is during the decisive period for the retreating units of the 4th Army, prevented the Polish pilots from taking flight.

In turn, the combined cavalry division, well directed to the main axis of the 4th Army's retreat, with its horses overtired and its men exhausted, was also unable to fulfil the task assigned to it, due to the unfavourable weather conditions. As a result, Colonel Dreszer's first report did not reach the army command until late in the evening of 21 August – which was too late. Moreover, it did not contain precise data on where and where the main forces of the retreating army had been found, and which retreating route they had chosen.



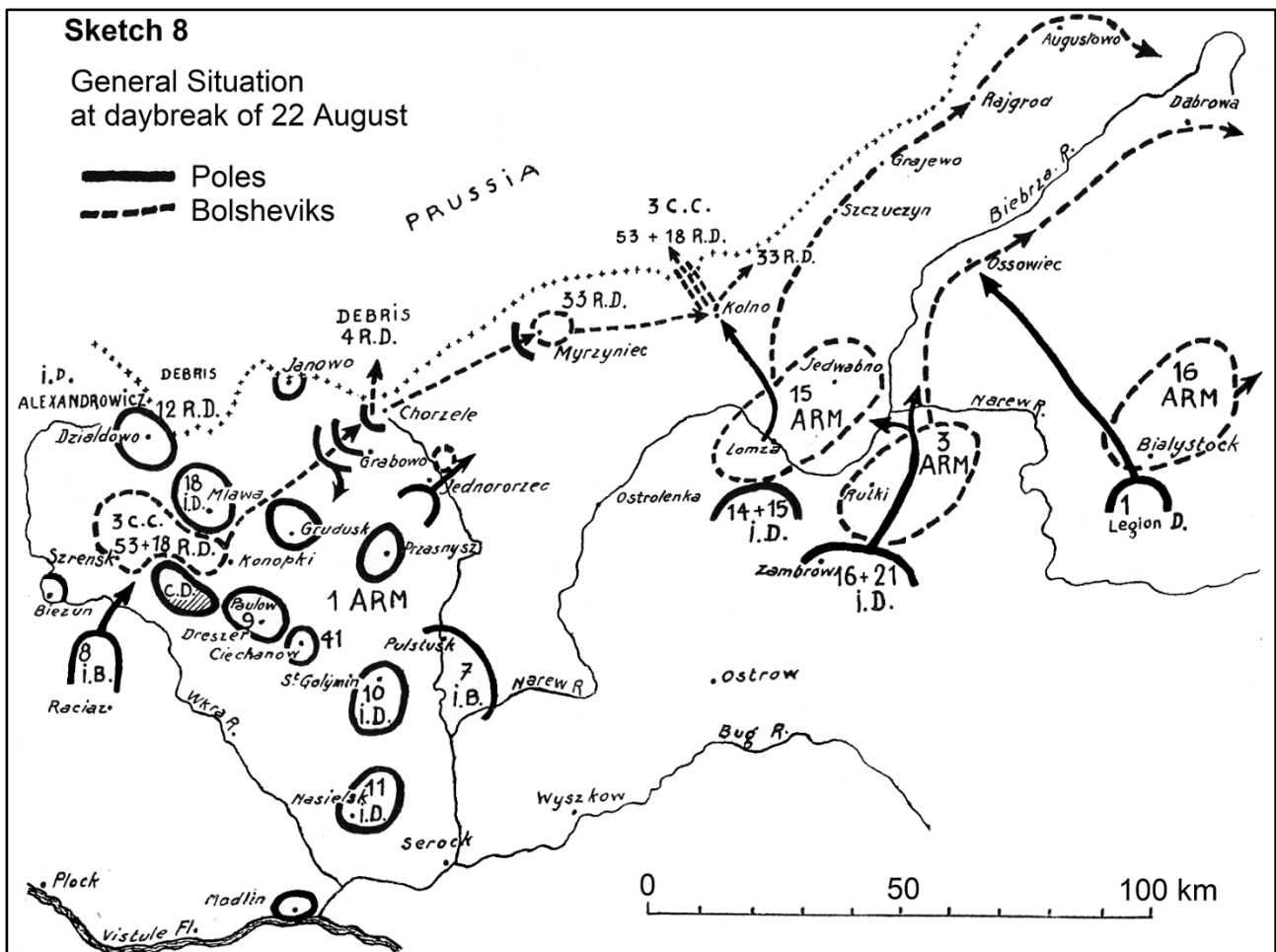
Meanwhile, on the opposite side, Gai-Khan, having taken command of the 4th Army on his own initiative, ordered the divisions fighting near Ciechanów to regroup in the area of that city, while he himself, at the head of the 3rd Cavalry Corps and 53rd Rifle Division, marched towards Płońsk in the afternoon of 19 August. He was not familiar with the situation of the rest of the Western Front. He did not know, therefore, that the Soviet 15th Army was, with the exception of the 33rd Rifle Division, torn to shreds and that being in full retreat it had already reached Ostrołęka. He was also unaware that the Russian 3rd Army, also beaten, had been swept away by the retreating wave of the neighbouring Soviet 15th and 16th armies, while the 16th Army, hit by the rapid movement of our troops from the south, was completely shattered and sought only to salvage the remainder of its divisions and some artillery material.

Gai-Khan's retreating troops were also inhumanly overtired and suffered from serious material deprivation. However, their good spirits remained. They were the vanguard of the victorious march of the Red Army to the West. Their troops had not been defeated at any time; instead, they had won relatively easy victories that lifted their morale. No wonder that such a commander of such good quality as Gai-Khan, in that critical moment, decided to rely first of all on the moral qualities of the troops under him. In spite of his tragic situation, he initially intended to strike for Płońsk, and after destroying the right wing of the 5th Army, to join up with the divisions still fighting south of Ciechanów.

However, upon reaching the Bielsk and Goślice area, Gai-Khan received information that his original plan was not feasible. Therefore, changing it, he decided to renounce any attack on Płońsk and to retreat through Raciąż to Ciechanów.

That movement would need to be covered by 54th and 18th Rifle Divisions, which were gradually moving towards Ciechanów, and which had attacked Płońsk and Sochocin in the previous days.

However, the defeat of the Russians in the 5th Army's sector on 19 August, the fall of Ciechanów, and the disastrous defeat of the 54th and 18th Rifle Divisions on 20 August, leading to their complete destruction, deprived Gai-Khan of any right-wing cover. He was forced to modify the previously planned route of the retreat, which had been from Sierpc through Drobin – Raciąż to Ciechanów – Krasnosielc, changing it to Mława – Chorzele – Myszyniec – Kolno.



Gai-Khan, skilfully bypassed the trap that had been set up for him. Alongside the 53rd Rifle Division, one brigade of which was still in Lipno on the evening of 19 August, he moved up to 50 kilometres a day, arriving late in the evening of 20 August at Mława, to find that the town was already occupied by us. He realised that he had to break through if he was to be able to move further east with the troops he was leading – which was at that time, the 3rd Cavalry Corps and the 53rd Rifle Division, which were the only survivors of the 4th Army, plus remnants of the 18th Division, which had rallied after being broken up at Chotum, and various elements of the 12th Rifle Division. (Sketch 8)

We were shocked by the first shots fired by Gai-Khan's artillery at Konopki station at 23:00 on 21 August. We misunderstood them as the announcement of the arrival of the main forces of the retreating enemy. Not having received any intelligence data from Colonel Dreszer, who after the battle of Chotum should have been – according to our calculations – to the south-west of Mława, being the most suitable place for him. Neither we nor General Krajowski could guess the position and intentions of the enemy. As we considered the positions of the 5th Army as appropriate in the event of Gai-Khan's breakthrough at Konopki, we were content to send Major Nowicki's armoured group there (whose tanks had to be used on railway carriages) and to speed up the organisation of the 9th Infantry Division and the Volunteer Division in the areas previously indicated for them.

Colonel Dreszer's cavalry division, meanwhile, having lost its bearings due to dense fog, encountered the main forces of Gay Chan's breakthrough group before dawn on 22 August near Żurominek. Colonel Dreszer, finding himself unexpectedly in the midst of a large mass of the enemy and unable to discern the situation quickly enough, hesitated and thus delayed the only correct decision – which was to strike as quickly as possible at the Russians, who were equally disorganised and in a terrible position. He attacked, but a bit too late. In the combat that followed the 1st and 201st Light Horse Regiments were to take a battery, most of the machine guns and over 800 prisoners, along with numerous wagons. These were small crumbs of success when we sought complete victory.

On 21 August we received information that there was a mass of Russian troops concentrated in the vicinity of Bieżeń, which later turned out to be incorrect. We were convinced that the main forces of Gai-Khan would pass Konopki at the earliest in the evening of 22 August. Thus, all the orders issued by the 5th Army Headquarters to the troops on 22 August would turn out to be delayed, and our actions at that time were like thrashing about while blind – confirming once again the principle that in order to be able to effectively direct a battle, or to properly prepare for it, requires sufficient information about the enemy. Unfortunately, the necessary information was not available to us on 22 August 1920.

So Gai-Khan was, against our predictions, already near Konopki station by midnight of 20/21 August. Having seen Polish troops on almost all sides, he was convinced that he could only escape from the trap by forcing a path through. Since the possibility of crossing the German border near Działdowo, previously considered by the 4th Army, had collapsed, due to the destruction of the Soviet 12th Division and the capture of Działdowo by Colonel Aleksandrowicz, he had no choice but to break through via the route Chorzele – Myszyniec – Kolno. Taking advantage of the night and dense fog, Gai-Khan struck Konopki at 03:00 on 21 August with unusual fury. Major Nowicki, the commander of the armoured group, and several of his officers were killed by the first shots of the Russian artillery. This caused great confusion on our side, and the strong armoured group on the railway line near Konopki, which should have stopped Gai-Khan for several hours, was completely unable to fulfil its task. Our armoured trains, being spread out over a large area, had left a battalion of the 49th Infantry Regiment, by itself near Konopki, as its only support.

Gai-Khan, recognising the weakness there, attacked them with full force. He cut the battalion of the 49th IR in two, then struck at the battalion securing the 18th Infantry Division's position in Mława from the southwest, bringing it down just as quickly. Continuing to manoeuvre skilfully, he made a feint attack on Mława and then, having misled the 18th Infantry Division, which as a result of General Krajowski's temporary absence was completely disoriented, he hastily moved his main force towards Chorzele. His movements were so fast that even our cavalry division could not keep up with him.

Detained, as was General Krajowski, in the early morning hours by the Bolshevik troops attempting to break through on the Grudusk-Mława road, I considered I was looking at small "pockets", under the false belief that they were the remains of the divisions we had destroyed in the previous days, and not Gai-Khan's retreating group. Meanwhile Gai-Khan, taking advantage of our absence deftly passed Grudusk, where almost the entire Volunteer Division was stationed, and attacked the 202nd Infantry Regiment in Grabowo. This regiment initially put up vigorous resistance under the command of Major Sierant. Not supported in time, however, it was forced to retreat to the south, in order to avoid annihilation by such an overwhelming enemy force.



The necessary support could have come from Colonel Rumsza and Lieutenant Colonel Koc. The former was stationed very close to Grabowo, near Chorzele. However, he was not capable of offensive initiative, as the Siberian brigade was poorly positioned. The second officer had three whole regiments in Grudusk.

Gai-Khan continued to escape eastwards with impunity as a result of our bad intelligence and the broken communications in the area. The Volunteer Division was sent too late to Chorzele, but without any useful result. The enemy was slipping through the net set up for him.

General Krajowski, arriving in Mława around noon on 22 August, immediately sent Major Ocetkiewicz with a pursuit force in pursuit of Gai-Khan. That detachment was too weak to take on Gai-Khan's main forces, but collected abundant booty: numerous stragglers, and wagons and cannons bogged down in the mud. It failed to catch up with the Russian commander, who on 23 August ran into the Siberian Brigade scattered defensively across a wide line.

In early dawn he attacked the second Siberian regiment west of Chorzele and forced it, after breaking its resistance, to retreat to Chorzele, where two other battalions of the Siberian Brigade were positioned. The indefatigable Gai-Khan understood that with troops relentlessly pursuing him from Mława there was no time to lose, so threw his units into an immediate assault on Chorzele. A fierce battle broke out near Chorzele in the afternoon in which both sides suffered heavy losses, and lasted until late in the evening.

Gai-Khan was then able to break through in the direction of Myszyniec, where a battalion of the 1st Siberian Infantry Regiment, sent there unnecessarily, was swept away. Marching on Kolno, he was caught up with on the way by the 69th Infantry Regiment and the 13th Ulan Regiment, and lost a battery, several machine guns and several hundred prisoners.

So Gai-Khan had thus escaped the trap set up for him at Mława, had thrown off a detachment of the Volunteer Division placed at Grabowo, had having broken through the barrier organised by the Siberian Brigade in front of Chorzele, in Chorzele itself and near Myszyniec. But then he encountered the entire Polish 4th Army at Kolno on 24 August.

The 4th Army had cut the Soviet 16th Army in half during its march towards the Polish-German border, and having fought a major battle with the Soviet 3rd Army near Ostrów on 19 August, it reached Łomża on 22 August. Then, taking numerous prisoners on the way, it stood in front of Kolno by 24 August. It made it there a few hours before the retreating Russian group and cut off its only line of further retreat to the east.

Almost at the same time, units of General Rydz-Śmigły's 2nd Army appeared at Grajewo, having marched 350 km in eight days without encountering any serious resistance until Białystok. General Rydz-Śmigły occupied Brześć nad Bugiem on 19 August, with the 3rd Legion Division, and on 23 August captured Białystok after a fierce battle fought with fresh Russian troops, taking several thousand prisoners. He then immediately sent mounted detachments to Grajewo to close the gap there, bordered to the south by the Biebrza marshes and to the north by the Polish-German border.

Gai-Khan, despite being at an enormous disadvantage at Kolno, tried in spite of everything, including ammunition shortages, to push further to the east. As a result of these attempts, an unequal battle ensued near Kolno, which lasted until the evening of the second day. In the end, however, having fired his last bullets, he followed the lead of the other Soviet troops, and on 25 August 1920, he and his group crossed the German border to avoid Polish captivity.

With that tragic epilogue, the great battle, which began on 14 August 1920 under the walls of Modlin and Warsaw, ended on 25 August 1920. The 4th Soviet Army ceased to exist on that day. The total combat strength of the remaining armies on the Western Front dropped to a dozen thousand bayonets and sabres or thereabouts.

