

Offensive from behind the Wieprz River

Operations of the Polish Fourth Army on 16, 17 and 18 August

By Captain Adam Berkewicz, Polish General Staff

This text is largely from a US Army War College translation of 1934, which explains some of the old-fashioned language.

However I have made some minor changes. 1) I have amended some errors and replaced archaic language and phrasing, especially where it might confuse readers who do not have English as a first language. 2) All places are given in the modern Polish form, not the German form of the original, except for a few places with standard English variants (especially Warsaw, Brest-Litovsk, the Vistula and L'viv). 3) I have removed any citations.

Most of the clarifying notes are as they stand in the original, including any indication who they are from. My personal notes are followed by "MP".

Plan of the Operation

On August 6, 1920 the Polish Commander-in-Chief decided to break off the fighting on the Bug and Narew Rivers and to effect and orderly withdrawal, with a view to regaining his lost liberty of action, and to regrouping his forces suitably for a decisive battle, taking due advantage of the natural strength which the lines of the Vistula and its eastern tributaries afforded. This decision aimed to concentrate a maximum of Polish troops for the purpose of destroying the main hostile forces that were advancing on Warsaw.

The width of the front on which the fighting was taking place, as well as the political necessity of protecting the capital and Western Ukraine, tended to complicate this design. Therefore, for the purpose of covering L'viv and the oil basin¹ the High Command designated the Polish Sixth Army, comprising three infantry and one cavalry divisions, together with the small Ukrainian Army, which had formed part of the South Front under General Iwaszkiewicz. The North Front commanded by General Josef Haller (Polish Fifth, First and Second Armies, with a total strength of 13 infantry and 1½ cavalry divisions and the greater portion of the heavy artillery²), was to delay, contain, and wear down the four armies under the Commander of the West Front³ Tukhachevski by means of a defensive battle along the Warsaw bridgehead, and also between the lower Narew and the Prussian frontier, at the same covering the sector of the middle Vistula situated between Dęblin and the right flank of the Warsaw bridgehead.

For the decisive blow, the troops constituting the Middle Front had been selected. The plan called for a sudden offensive enveloping manoeuvre from behind the Wieprz directed against the enemy flank and rear. The Polish Fourth and Third Armies, 5½ infantry divisions and 2 cavalry brigades – already concentrated, filled up to proper war strength and well rested as they were – would create by a sudden attack against the southern flank and rear of the enemy main forces a very favourable situation for the decisive battle, in which the combined forces of the Middle and North Fronts were to defeat the enemy.

Command of the Middle Front was assumed by Marshal Piłsudski in person. The movement in a northerly direction by the enveloping forces was to be covered against enemy action from the southeast by a detachment set aside for that purpose from the Third Army, composed of one infantry division, fresh volunteer formations, and allied units (Ukrainian, Cossack and Bałachowicz formations). The greater part of the forces designated for the enveloping manoeuvre consisted of the Fourth Army, which was referred to in an order of the Commander-in-Chief of August 6 as the "manoeuvring army" and the "assault group".

¹ Now in W Ukraine, the oil fields were centred around Drohobycz (Drohobych), 80 km SSW of L'viv. MP.

² Originally it was to be 6½ infantry divisions under General Rydz-Śmigły.

³ The original text uses "General" which was a term the Soviets did not use. I have replaced all references to Soviet "generals" with their actual rank. *KomZapFront* = Commander of the West Front.



Concentration of the Polish Fourth Army

The Fourth Army consisted of the former Fourth Army and of the Polesie Group. On August 6 both were still engaged in combat with the Russian Sixteenth Army and the Mozyr Group. In accordance with instructions of the Commander-in-Chief of August 6, the army effected its withdrawal in two stages. First of all it bounded back to the line Siedlce – Łuków – Kock and broke away from the enemy by rapidly refusing its right flank. Here it effected a reorganisation, with the result that there was now left of the former Fourth Army only 1½ divisions;⁴ two divisions coming from the Polesie Group. All this occurred between August 7 and 10. From this line, the 14th, 16th and 21st Divisions, using Kock as a pivot, executed an energetic flank march along the front, arriving in the north on the line Łuków – Siedlce – Dęblin. On August 12 the army successfully reached the boundary line which had been designated for it on the Wieprz river: the 14th Division and the 32nd Infantry Regiment: the Dęblin bridgehead; the 16th Division: the Baranów – Łysobyki area; the 21st Division: the Kock – Firlej area. Only the 12th Brigade was late; together with units of the Second Army it was withdrawing from the vicinity of Siedlce by way of Góra-Kalwaria, from which point it was ordered to Puławy in Army reserve.

The execution of this hazardous withdrawal on the part of the Polish Fourth Army was facilitated by the enemy in that the divisions of the Russian Sixteenth Army, headed as they were for Warsaw from the direction of the Bug River, had branched off almost at right angles with respect to the divisions of the Polish Fourth Army, merely touching their rear guards. In the second stage of the withdrawal only the 21st Division, which by forced marching had been moving from the vicinity of Brest via Radzyń to Dęblin,⁵ was actively engaged with the enemy, retreating under the direct pressure of the 57th Rifle Division of the Mozyr Group.

The concentration of the Polish Fourth Army was being covered against enemy action from the east by the Third Army. The latter continued in action along the Bug River opposed to the Russian Twelfth Army and to the left flank of the Mozyr group which was advancing from Parczew on Lubartów. Thus the Polish Fourth Army – having occupied, without being noticed, a flanking position in relation to the enemy main forces advancing on Warsaw – was entirely undisturbed from August 13 to 15; only the 21st Division had found it necessary to beat off on the 13th, near Kock, some feeble efforts on the part of the enemy at forcing a crossing over the Wieprz. The Kock bridgehead fortifications had already been abandoned on the suggestion of the commander of the 21st Division, and upon instructions of the Army commander.

This time was made use of for intensified preparation of the Army for the execution of the mission which was awaiting it. The Commander-in-Chief, who had arrived at Puławy on the 13th, supervised the work in person. Regiments were filled up to war strength by replacement and volunteer battalions;⁶ fresh artillery batteries were brought up. Moreover, the arrival in the concentration area of batteries that had been withdrawn from action for the purpose of rehabilitation was accelerated. The air force was reorganised a second time.

Strength and Order of Battle of the Fourth Army

as of August 15

Commander of the Army – General Leonard Skierski
Chief of Staff – Colonel Józef Rybak, General Staff
Deputy Chief of Staff – Colonel Kaminski

Ration Strength: 1,129 officers, 45,301 infantry soldiers

⁴ The rest went to the First and Second Armies, and one infantry brigade to the Fifth Army.

⁵ It had the mission of occupying the Dęblin – Kozienice area on August 14.

⁶ Replacements were furnished to the extent of about 100 officers and 7,800 soldiers, among whom were some 4,261 volunteers.



Total Combat Strength, in round numbers,
606 officers,
24,166 infantry soldiers,
1,530 cavalry soldiers,⁷
86 pieces of artillery, and
511 machine guns.

Main Forces:

14th Poznań Division, with 15th Ułan Regiment attached
– 12 battalions
– 4 squadrons
– 6 field batteries
– 5 heavy batteries
– 1 horse battery.

16th Pomorskie⁸ Division
– 11 battalions
– 1 squadron
– 3 field batteries
– 1 heavy battery (4 guns)
– 1 sapper company.

21st Mountain⁹ Division
– 11 battalions
– 2 squadrons
– 3 mountain batteries
– 4 field batteries
– 1 heavy battery (4 guns)
– 1 sapper company.

Reserves:

32nd Infantry Regiment
– 3 battalions
– 2 field batteries
– 1 heavy battery (joining on evening of the 16th)

12th Infantry Brigade¹⁰
– 6 battalions

Auxiliary Forces

Air Service: 3rd Air Squadron
– 2 squadrons (5 airplanes, with 12 yet to arrive)
Railway Troops
– 4 armoured trains (3 of standard gauge)
– 3rd Railway Battalion, of 6 companies
Signals Communication Troops
– 2 radio stations

⁷ Original footnote adds here, without comment: *499 officers, 21,944 bayonets (infantry combined with machine-gunners and artillerymen) and 838 sabres (cavalrymen together with horse artillerymen)*. I suspect this is the strength **prior** to the addition of the replacements noted above. MP.

⁸ That is, a Pomeranian division. MP.

⁹ That is, a Podolian division, from the south.

¹⁰ Half of the 6th Kraków Infantry Division. MP.



- 1 telegraph company¹¹
- 1 construction company
- Engineer Troops (besides the divisional ones)
 - 2 sapper companies
 - 1 railroad company
 - 2 road construction detachments
- Motor transport:
 - 4th Light Truck Division {*Divizion?*}
 - 35 truck motors in 5 parks,
 - 1 light motor
 - 1 ambulance
 - 2 technical motors
- Military Police
 - Gendarme section
 - 5 police battalions
 - 1 guard battalion
 - 11 labour companies, made up of POWs

Mission of the Polish Fourth Army

Order of the Commander-in-Chief of August 15

The mission of the Fourth Army was determined by the Commander-in-Chief during a series of conferences held on August 13, 14 and 15.

The written order of the Commander-in-Chief received by the Fourth Army on August 15, outlined the general situation as follows:

The enemy is endeavouring to take the capital and to effect an envelopment of the Polish forces. The Russian Fourth Army is turning Warsaw on the north, operating by way of Ciechanów towards Plock; the Russian Fifteenth Army – from the vicinity of Pułtusk, is attacking in the general area of Modlin and Zegrze; parts of the Russian Third and Sixteenth Armies are pressing against the Warsaw bridgehead fortifications, with the object of seizing Praga. On the front extending from Garwolin to the Wieprz (river) some supposedly weak units of the Mozyr Group have been operating. The Russian Twelfth Army, supported by the First Cavalry Army and Fourteenth Army, is advancing on Lublin and Tomaszów, and is endeavouring to seize the eastern part of Little Poland.¹² General estimate: the enemy's main forces are in the north; he is very weak in the centre, and not particularly strong in the south. The garrison of the Warsaw bridgehead fortifications is ready to resist the enemy, whose forward movement has been paralysed by the counterattack of the Polish Fifth Army from Modlin.

This is the situation that obtained at the time of the beginning of the decisive attacks directed against the flank and rear, as well as the supply lines of the opposing northern armies. The attack was to start at daybreak of August 16. The Polish Fourth and Third Armies were to crush with one blow the enemy's Mozyr Group, and by a rapid movement to the north, suddenly attack his main forces. These Russian armies were to be defeated in turn by a powerful Polish attack, augmented at the expense of the Vistula front and of the Polish bridgehead.

According to the plan, the advancing divisions were to be on the Brest highway as early as the morning of the third day.¹³ In view of the events at Radzyń, the Polish Fourth Army on the first day of the attack was to move up so far that by evening of the 16th it would be in a position to influence the fighting on the southern portion of the bridgehead fortifications; its main forces were to reach the line Gończyce – Żelechów. On the second day the attack of the Polish Fourth Army on Kałuszyn – Siedlce was to be

¹¹ There were also telegraph companies in each of the divisions.

¹² *Małopolska*. The area referred to here is effectively the westernmost portion of modern Ukraine. MP.

¹³ The entire Polish Second Army having been released, the southern flank of the bridgehead fortifications joined the left flank of the Polish Fourth Army.



supported by a thrust with the south flank of the Polish First Army from the Warsaw bridgehead fortifications against Novo-Mińsk. The movements of the Polish Fourth Army were to be covered during the first stage by the Polish Third Army, which was advancing to attack Parczew, with the mission of seizing Brest.

Connection between the armies was maintained by the volunteer cavalry of Major Jaworski (one brigade) which was operating in the direction of Radzyń – Międzyrzecz. Boundary line of the Fourth Army, in the west – the Vistula (river); in the east – Radzyń – Trzebieszów (on Krsna Creek), all points to the Fourth Army.

Basic Conception of the Commander of the Fourth Army, Plan of Action and Orders.

I. Estimate of the Situation and Fundamental Idea

On August 14, the Commander of the Polish Fourth Army did not possess any exact information regarding the Mozyr Group. Rear-guard action, the fighting at Kock, infantry and aviation reconnaissance, the questioning of prisoners and information supplied by scouts, all had established the fact that the army had before it on the advance guards of the 57th Rifle Division. Meanwhile the northern column of the Mozyr Group, proceeding from Międzyrzecz to Kock, had just occupied with its leading elements the line Wojcieszków – Kock, and with its main forces it had reached Radzyń. These forces (6,800 bayonets, 1,200 sabres, 45 guns) could be met only by the right flank of the army, i.e. the 21st Division. In view of this, the Army commander decided to have the main forces take up rapidly the direction referred to, and to cover this movement with the 21st Division. This division, by attacking in the direction of Łuków, was to contain the main forces of the Mozyr Group up to the time when the latter could be attacked and defeated by the 1st Legion Division.

II. Plan of Action and Orders of August 15

The order of August 14, issued at 9:00 p.m. designated the general strategic directions, and prescribed the following regrouping of forces by evening of August 15:

The command post of the Army (place where reports were to be sent) was the village of Irena, near Dęblin. The 14th Division was to post security detachments along the Okrzejka creek,¹⁴ and in the area of Ryki – Swaty – Brzeziny to assemble two infantry regiments together with the major portion of their artillery and an attached sapper company. One regiment with an artillery battalion attached, in the Kletnia – Rokitnia area, one infantry regiment at Irena, the 15th Ułan Regiment at Pawłowice. The 16th Division was to protect itself with security detachments along the line Ułęż – Przytoczno, and concentrate its forces at the crossings of Baranów and Łysobyki. The 21st Mountain Division was to occupy Kock with one battalion and concentrate with its main force at Wola Skromowska, with the mission of crossing the Wieprz (river) on the next day in the morning. The 32nd Infantry Regiment was to assemble at Skruka, the 12th Brigade remained in the Sieciechów – Wola Klasztorna area.

The order designated divisional boundary lines. Between the 14th and 16th Divisions: Pogonów – Bazanów – Derlatka – Paliszew – Łętów – Parysów, all points to the 14th Division. Between the 16th and 21st Division: Krupa – Krępa – Bielany – Adamów – Józefów – Mroczyki, all points to the 16th Division.

A field order issued at 2:30 a.m. on August 15 sets forth the following plan of action of the Army Commander:

- a) On August 16, the 14th and 16th Divisions will occupy the line of the Vistula River; on the 17th they will drive in enemy flank guards and advance to the Novo-Mińsk¹⁵ – Kałuszyn area.
- b) The Mountain Division will attack the column of the enemy Mozyr Group moving northward from the Wieprz River in the flank and, after providing cover against enemy action from

¹⁴ On the line Życzyn – Żabianka.

¹⁵ Mińsk Mazowiecki.



Radzyń, it will occupy with its main forces the line Ulan – Tuchowicz, and on the 17th seize Łuków, at the same time covering the operations of the main forces of the Fourth Army.

In the execution of the above plan, the 14th Division was to move forward on the 16th, at 4:00 a.m., with the main column along the highway Moszczanka – Garwolin; with its flanking force it was to follow the railway line by way of Sobolew – Laskarzew, in the direction of Rębków, and with the 15th Ulan Regiment the Vistula by way of Maciejowice, towards Wilga. On the 17th, the main forces of the division were to advance, via Puznówka – Sufczyn – Zalesie, on Mińsk-Mazowiecki; the cavalry column on the flank was to operate via Osieck – Kołbiel against Mińsk-Mazowiecki. In the event of an enemy retreat from the Karczew – Kołbiel area, the main forces of the division were to be directed via Siennica on Kałuszyn; and at all events, on the 17th, they would have to reach the Mienia River.

The 16th Division, which was to start its advance two hours earlier, with two columns, via Kłoczew and Okrzeja, in the direction of Żelechów, was to get to the Wilga on the 16th, occupy the area Ryczyska – Żelechów – Zawaliny, and on the 17th the Kostrzyn (river), in the Topór – Kamieniec area, seize the Mrozy station, and cooperate with the 14th Division. Connection with the 14th Division was to be maintained by the detachment which had been sent out on the first day in the direction of Tuchowicz, via Adamów – Krzywda.

The 21st Division was to start the advance simultaneously with the 16th Division on the 16th. It was to reach the line of the Bystrzyca river in the Świderki – Ulan area, moving up with its main forces over the Kock – Wojcieszków unimproved highway, and with its eastern column by way of Oszczepalin; this column was to leave a small security detachment to provide cover in the direction of Radzyń, namely one battalion at Borki on the Mała Bystrzyca. The 21st Mountain Division together with part of the 16th Division was to seize Łuków and move up to the line Kaczory – Krynka – Karwów.¹⁶

The 32nd Infantry Regiment, with a mixed artillery battalion, was to be in Moszczanka on the 16th at 6:00 a.m.; the 12th Brigade, at 9:00 a.m. in Irena.¹⁷

The Commander of the air forces had been directed to conduct a reconnaissance before 8:00 a.m. over both sides of the highway leading towards Garwolin and in the area Kock – Łuków – Stoczek Łukowski – Serokomla, and after 12:00 noon over the area Żelechów – Łuków – Międzyrzecz – Radzyń and also Kałuszyn – Mokobody – Siedlce – Garwolin.

The commander of the railway troops, by 2:00 p.m. of the 16th, was to have ready at the Dęblin railway station two railroad trains of 50 cars each for the transfer of troops, for which purposes there were also designated two-motor columns. Armoured trains were placed at the disposal of the commandant of the Dęblin fortified area for the purpose of protecting the rear of the movement.¹⁸

During the 15th, the enemy situation had cleared up even better than before. In front of the Polish Fourth Army the 57th Rifle Division was identified as occupying the Stara Dąbia – Gończyce area. This division intended to force the Vistula at Maciejowice. To the north of it, in the Kołbiel – Karczew area, there operated the 8th Rifle Division, which had formed part of the Russian Sixteenth Army. In the Łuków area an aviator had observed large movements of baggage trains in the direction of Dęblin and Warsaw. Because of this, the 21st Mountain Division was directed to devote all its attention to the Łuków area, while the 2nd Legion Division was ordered to assist the advance of the army's left by delivering artillery fire on the villages occupied by the enemy in the vicinity of Maciejowice.

¹⁶ The original text reads: *"the 17th Mountain Division"*, but this makes no sense. MP.

¹⁷ The 12th Brigade did not carry out this order, since on August 15 it had been placed under the control of the Commander of the Second Army by direction of the Commander of the Northern Front.

¹⁸ The axles of these trains having been changed to fit the standard gauge track, the fortress commandant of Dęblin assigned one train to assist the 14th Division.



D. Line of Departure

I. Disposition of the Polish Forces prior to the beginning of the Operation.

Before dawn on August 16 the divisions of the Polish Fourth Army were disposed along their respective lines of departure as follows:

The **14th Division** posted along the principal direction of attack, i.e. Dęblin – Garwolin, did not find it possible on the 15th to move up security detachments to the line Edwardów – Dąbia – Zalesie. The make-up of the march columns had been such as to compel the division to embark upon the attack ahead of time. With this in view, the 59th Regiment with three batteries of field artillery and a sapper company occupied Ryki at 3:00 a.m. The 57th Regiment halted with two battalions in the village of Swaty, and with one battalion and a battery of field guns in Brzeziny. The two batteries of heavy artillery which had been attached to the regiment were late in coming up because it was necessary to repair a bridge at Mierzwiączka. General Milewski had been placed in command of this brigade. The central column of the division was composed of the 56th Regiment together with two batteries of field artillery. This regiment, at 2:00 a.m. left Zdżary, near Dęblin, and proceeded on its way to Kletnia Nowo. The left-flank column – 15th Ułan Regiment with a battery of horse artillery attached – remained at Pawłowice. The divisional reserve – 55th Regiment with three batteries of heavy artillery – was detained by the division commander at Irena, where the motor truck column also remained. Baggage trains of the division and regiments assembled in the village of Występ behind the Vistula; field hospital and ambulances, at Dęblin.

The **16th Division** occupied a similar line of departure. Its main column consisted of the 63rd Regiment with advance guards at Przytoczno, and the 66th Regiment disposed as follows: one battalion at Łysobyki and two battalions crossing by ferry over the river at Blizocin (these battalions were late). The divisional reserve, the 64th Regiment, was stationed at Łysobyki. The main column had one battery of field artillery and one of heavy artillery. The western column, the 65th Regiment (two battalions) with three batteries of field artillery (of 4 guns each) attached, was in Drążgów at 2:00 a.m. The divisional sapper battalion, telegraph company and cavalry squadron, together with division headquarters, were at Michów. Division distributing point was Żyrzyn; installations and supply depot of division were partly in Dęblin, partly *en route* to Ułęż.

The **21st Mountain Division** (on the right flank of the army) was required to first restore the line of departure at Kock. Its advance was subjected to delay, due to the fact that when this division had retreated from Kock behind the Wieprz River it had burned the bridge over that river, and its units were now compelled to ford it. With this object in view, the division assembled in the vicinity of Wola Skromowska between the two tributaries emptying into the river at this point; its reserve, consisting of one infantry battalion with a section of mounted scouts and a battery of heavy artillery attached, was with divisional headquarters at Rozwadowska.

In rear of the mountain division, at Firlej, Major Jaworski's cavalry group was posted.

On the right, at Lubartów, the 1st Legion Division was assembling, its advance guards having occupied Parczew for several hours, i.e., ever since 11:00 p.m. of August 15.

All that remained in Army reserve was the 32nd Infantry, which by this time had brought together its batteries at the village of Sarna, and one artillery battalion (two 75-mm batteries, one heavy battery), which had just arrived for the 16th Division.

The 12th Brigade was ordered to Kozienice by the commander of the 2nd Legion Division, for the purpose of relieving in the Vistula sector the 2nd Legion Brigade which had been ordered to proceed to Dęblin, where the 4th Legion Brigade already was, in reserve of the Commander-in-Chief. The 4th Brigade, together with 10 batteries of artillery of the 2nd Legion Division, was about to show publicly what it could do in assisting the 14th Division from behind the Vistula.

II. The Actual Enemy Situation

The four Armies under West Front Commander Tukhachevski were covered on the south by the Mozyr Group, the headquarters of which had arrived at Brest (on the Bug) on the 15th. The three divisions of this



group extended on the 16th over a front of almost 200 km as follows:¹⁹ The 57th Rifle Division were positioned from Maciejowice to Ryki and from there along the Wieprz River to Kock. A mixed group operated in the Wohyń – Parczew area. The 58th Rifle Division in the Cyców – Tarnów – Włodawa area.

Before the front of the Polish Fourth Army only the 57th Rifle Division was in evidence.²⁰ The 169th Brigade of this division (the 505th, 506th and 507th Rifle Regiments, two artillery batteries, one partisan detachment, two sapper companies, one cavalry squadron) was assembled in the Kobylnica – Maciejowice – Kraski area, for the purpose of forcing the passage of the Vistula. The 171st Brigade (511th, 512th and 509th Rifle Regiments, the 57th Cavalry Regiment, and one engineer battalion) was concentrating in the Stara Dąbia – Bazanów area, with the mission of advancing on Dęblin.²¹ So far there had been stationed at that point only the 512th Rifle Regiment with one battery, occupying Edwardów – Dąbia and Zalesie, this regiment having been temporarily attached to the 169th Brigade. Part of the 511th Rifle Regiment was advancing from near Charlejew, where the remainder of the regiment remained. The entire 509th Rifle Regiment with two artillery batteries had occupied Budziska, Krzówka and Charlejew. Division headquarters were established at Łuków.

The 170th Brigade (508th and 510th Rifle Regiments and one battery of artillery), which had been under the immediate control of the commander of the Mozyr Group, was concentrating at Kock and at the village of Górka, with the mission of forcing the crossing over the Wieprz, to seize the Kamionka – Lubartów area, and from there to advance on Dęblin via Michów.

The mixed detachment had been ordered to drive the Polish forces from Parczew and at the same time, in conjunction with the 170th Brigade, to occupy Lubartów. The 58th Rifle Division was to occupy the line Łęczna – Piaski.

The Siedlce area was held by the 2nd Kazan Cavalry Brigade (600 sabres), which had been attached to the Russian Sixteenth Army. The commander of the Mozyr Group had at his disposal only two airplanes that could be used to good effect.

The 57th Rifle Division adjoined the 5th Rifle Division on the north, the brigades of the latter (the 22nd, 23rd and 24th) being disposed along the Vistula at Garwolin – Osieck – Karczew, with the 8th Cavalry Regiment at Rębków.

The 10th Rifle Division of the adjoining Sixteenth Army had occupied positions in front of the Warsaw bridgehead, confronting the Polish 15th Division along the Mienia River sector, up to Długa Kościelna. All of the brigades of the 10th Rifle Division (28th, 29th and 30th) were in contact with the Polish units, thanks to which on this wide sector nearly the entire division had become involved in combat.

The Russian Sixteenth Army was preparing for an advance on Praga by way of Ossów and Okuniew, having here the 17th and 3rd Rifle Divisions. In this connection, the 8th Rifle Division had received the mission of forcing the Vistula in the Świder sector between Wielki and Glinki. The 27th Rifle Division was engaged in fighting at Radzymin.

III. Battle for the Occupation of the Line of Departure

The order of the Commander of the Polish Fourth Army prescribed for the Mountain Division the mission of occupying Kock on August 15, and of seizing the crossing there, in order to insure the possibility of launching its attack at 2:00 a.m. on the 16th. However, on the 15th the Division Commander discovered that the northern bank of the Wieprz at Kock was being strongly held by fresh enemy forces, even though the security detachments of the division had succeeded in holding part of Ruska Wieś situated on that side

¹⁹ Maciejowice – Ryki – Charlejew – Kock – Wohyń – Parczew – Czyczew [?] – Włodawa.

²⁰ The combat strength of this division on 1 August was: 5,244 infantry, 48 mounted men, 96 machine-guns and 22 field guns; however the division having suffered losses afterwards received replacements (the 511th Rifle Regiment on August 16 acquiring over 1,100 men); on August 16 the division received four troops of cavalry.

²¹ The 57th Rifle Division should have included the 505th to 513th Rifle Regiments. I do not know why the 513th is not listed (it would usually be in the 171st Brigade). MP.

of the river. This permitted two battalions to cross over by fording, and two other battalions to negotiate the river unhindered during the night in the vicinity of Sułoszyn. One of the latter had been sent by way of the Tyśmienica in the direction of Borki, for the purpose of covering the operations of the division against enemy action from Radzyń and of cutting off the enemy line of retreat from Kock.²² However, the crossing took up much time, and the advance on Kock did not begin until daybreak.

At 4:15 a.m. the Polish battalion which had been advancing along the Ruska Wieś – Kock road entered the town; yet it was driven back soon thereafter with heavy losses towards the defile at the windmill (west of the town) by a powerful counter-attack on the part of the prematurely roused enemy who had occupied the high ground on the north of the town. In this disposition the battalion of the 1st Mountain Brigade took up the advance, having meanwhile reached the windmill, at which point a heated struggle ensued. Thus containing the enemy, this action had served to allow the commander of the 1st Mountain Brigade to move the 2nd Battalion by fording across the river and to enter the town of Górka.

The enemy units posted at this point, threatened as they were from behind the Tyśmienica River as well as by an attack from an easterly direction on the part of the 3rd Battalion, hastily retreated northward, exposing at Kock their left flank, which was now dealt a decisive blow. At 6:30 a.m. Kock was occupied by our forces.

Under cover of cavalry patrols, the enemy retreated through the woods towards Serokomla and partly in the direction of Radzyń. The battalion of the 2nd Regiment which had been sent forward in pursuit, defeated those enemy elements that were assembling at Annówka. A battalion of the 4th Regiment cut off the enemy's retreat on Radzyń, and occupied the village of Borki at 9:00 a.m.

At 7:30 a.m. the Mountain Division began developing its column for further action, so far without artillery, which had been delayed while awaiting the repair of some bridges. At this very time, the cavalry group under Major Jaworski began to advance in the direction of Radzyń.

At Kock we captured two machine-guns and 198 prisoners of the 170th Rifle Brigade, while the casualties of the Mountain Division at Kock and Borki amounted to four killed and 46 wounded.

As a result of this fighting, the progress of the operation had been delayed almost five hours.

E. Development of the Polish Fourth Army in Anticipation of the Battle

I. Distribution of Forces for the Operation

The distribution of forces for the advance on the 14th and 16th Divisions has already been outlined above. These divisions each sent forward security detachments of the strength of one regiment, and in addition to that, each detached one regiment as a flank guard to the western for the purpose of protection and maintaining connection.²³ In addition, the 14th Division had on its left flank a column of the 15th Ułan Regiment. The commanders of both divisions had each kept one infantry regiment with heavy artillery in reserve. The reserves were to follow the column of the divisional main forces as the latter advanced. The 14th Division had at its disposal an adequate amount of artillery; for each battalion within the division one battery of either heavy or light artillery were provided, and moreover three batteries of heavy artillery were attached to the divisional reserve force. On the other hand, the 16th Division, at the time of the beginning of the advance, did not even possess one single battery per infantry regiment. Its accompanying batteries were moving up with the battalions to which they were attached.

The delayed Mountain Division had disposed its forces somewhat differently, in view of the mission it had received and the likelihood of its encountering superior enemy forces.

²² Units of this division forded across the west branch of the Wieprz while the right crossed the Wieprz and Tyśmienica.

²³ I have no personal data on this score, but the Commander-in-Chief spent the entire day with the 14th Division and the Army Commander, and therefore the latter should have been well informed regarding the plans for August 17.



Actually its advance guard consisted of the flank (eastern) column, i.e. the 3rd Regiment (two batteries) sent from the Kock area towards Oszczepalin, covered on the east by the 4th Regiment (less one battalion which had been left behind at Borki). Five battalions of the main column constituted the main body of the division and were protected on the west by a detachment of the 16th Division. In reserve there was one infantry battalion and a section of Mounted Rifles, which had been left at Kock as an escort for the artillery; from here this reserve was to follow in rear of the main body.

II. Progress of Action on the First Day of the Operation

At the very time when the Mountain Division was engaged in battle for its line of departure, the left of the Army was moving ahead. The main column of the 14th Division, upon defeating the 512th Rifle Regiment at 3:45 a.m. by means of a concentrated blow against Stara Dąbia, occupied Ruda at 5:30 a.m., capturing one gun, 10 machine-guns and about forty prisoners. The 58th Infantry Regiment, now constituting the advance guard, together with an artillery battalion, had reached Gończyce at 8:25 a.m. Upon advancing further the commander of the advance guard learned that there were enemy forces at Garwolin; on his own initiative, he sent forward by truck a force consisting of two infantry companies, two machine-gun companies and an artillery platoon.

By 11:00 a.m. this detachment was already attacking Garwolin. Launching a sudden attack against the baggage trains gathered at this point, of the 8th Rifle Division, captured with practically no resistance on the part of the enemy 370 prisoners, a number of machine-guns, a field gun and 150 fully loaded vehicles. At about 1:30 p.m. the 58th Regiment reached the town, where it was accorded a very cheerful welcome by the populace. At this same time the Russian 8th Cavalry Regiment, by a mounted charge from the direction of Rębków and Wola Rębkowska, attempted to recapture Garwolin. With the aid of machine-gun fire it was repulsed, causing considerable losses among the enemy, who withdrew westward. By 4:00 p.m. the entire 28th Infantry Brigade, less one battalion remaining in Masurków, had arrived at Garwolin. This battalion blocked the line of retreat of the enemy units from the Vistula.

Intercepted orders and the questioning of prisoners established the fact that one brigade of the 57th Rifle Division had been cut off at Maciejowice and that the second brigade of this division, after its defeat by the main column of the 14th Infantry Division, was retreating northward. In view of this, the division commander, upon instructions of the Commander-in-Chief, who was present at division headquarters, moved his reserves by truck to Gończyce; as by nightfall no information had as yet been received from the flank columns and no contact established with the 16th Division. Consequently a strong reconnaissance detachment was sent out in the direction of the 16th Division.

The 56th Regiment, advancing with an armoured train along the railroad track, because of the sandy roads in its path, had only reached Sobolew at 12:30 p.m. At that point, it routed a column of the 505th Rifle Regiment, which was retreating from Maciejowice, and at Łaskarzew it became engaged with another enemy column, capturing six guns, part of the headquarters of the 169th Rifle Brigade, and about 200 prisoners. At 7:00 p.m. not being in contact with any of the other forces, it remained in the woods to the north of Izdebnó, from where it finally established communication with the division headquarters after 11:00 p.m.

The 15th Ułan Regiment, moving directly on Maciejowice, encountered the first enemy resistance at 10:00 a.m. near Kobylnica. Thereafter its advance developed into a steady action in which the artillery belonging to the 2nd Legion Division also participated, opening fire from the far bank of the Vistula. With the approach of noon the enemy began to beat a hasty retreat. Maciejowice was occupied at 3:00 p.m. As a result of cavalry attacks during the pursuit, one field gun and twenty or so of prisoners were captured. But at Maciejowice the regiment suffered heavy losses from the fire of its own artillery, which had failed to lift. A reconnaissance detachment having determined the presence of strong enemy infantry forces at Podlęż, the commander of the regiment decided to wait at Maciejowice and at the same time called for infantry reinforcements.

In the evening, the 28th Brigade repulsed at Garwolin the 72nd Rifle Regiment (8th Rifle Division) which was then advancing from Puznów and Jagodne, from which direction the enemy artillery was bombarding



Garwolin. Rębków and Wola Rębkowska were occupied by Polish forces, when they established connection with the 24th Rifle Brigade on the railway track northwest of Jagodne.

The main column of the 16th Division, reached the railway line south of Okrzeja at 11:45 a.m., after having routed the 509th and 511th Rifle Regiments near Charlejew and Krzówka at 6:00 a.m. It endeavoured to establish connection with its western column but was unsuccessful. Information of the capture of Kock was received at 9:30 a.m. One battalion was sent out from Charlejew toward Adamów and Tuchowicz for the purpose of maintaining connection with the Mountain Division. But contact with this battalion also was lost, and to make matters worse, the battalions effecting a crossing at Blizocin were late in coming up. Not until noon at Okrzeja, where the remnants of the 512th Rifle Regiment withdrawing from Rycza were found, did these two reserve battalions join the detachments of the main column.

When the division commander received an order from army headquarters to speed up the capture of Żelechów at 2:00 p.m., he was able to send eight battalions there, without waiting for the western column. Żelechów was taken at 7:00 p.m. as a result of a battle between our security detachments and the 57th and 8th Rifle Divisions, which retreated on Stoczek. The capture included three guns, two sets of colours, and some prisoners. At 9:00 p.m. the western column (65th Regiment) entered the town. This column had remained in Kłoczew for several hours after the action there, having lost connection with the other forces both on its right and left; besides, small detachments of the enemy were being encountered everywhere.

The main column of the Mountain Division likewise moved along slowly, encountering resistance at Serokomla and Wojcieszków, where the divisional advance guard had been successfully aided by a detached battalion of the 16th Division. Wojcieszków was taken at 4:00 p.m., and further advance was effected unimpeded. At about 8:00 p.m. the 1st Mountain Brigade occupied Świderki – Wólka Domaszewska and Zofibór on the Bystrzyca. The flank columns of the division had already arrived at Bystrzyca Mała at 1:00 p.m. and at 5:00 p.m. they occupied Sobole and Ulan, to which place Major Jaworski sent one battalion from Borki, in view of the information just then received that Radzyń had been captured. The regiments advanced without any artillery; the latter having crossed the Wieprz only at noon, did not join the regiments until late at night. Division headquarters, accompanied by its reserve, arrived at Wojcieszków at 6:30 p.m.

The 3rd Air Squadron carried out several combat missions during the day (in the morning and evening), harassing by means of bombs and machine-gun fire the congregating enemy forces; it also supplied valuable information regarding both enemy and friendly forces.

III. The Results of the First Day

By evening of the 16th the Polish Fourth Army had fully carried out its initial mission. Its main forces, having reached the Wilga river, came in contact on their left with the south flank of the Russian Sixteenth Army. Thus the Fourth Army directly threatened the communications of the latter, inasmuch as the 14th Division, at 11:00 p.m., already had three infantry regiments, three field and five heavy artillery batteries at Garwolin. The 56th Regiment had reached Czystków at 2:00 a.m. The 15th Ulan Regiment established contact with a regiment of the 2nd Legion Division and with the 12th Brigade at Maciejowice, which began crossing over to the east bank of the Vistula. During the night, the 14th Division replenished its supplies and ammunition at the Sobolew railroad station.

The 16th Division at Gózek, Żelechów and Jarczew had sent forward security detachments to the line Ryczyska – Wilczyska – Dwornia on the Wilga River. Division headquarters were at Żelechów. The troops being short of bread, trucks were sent to the Sobolew railroad station for it. No connection existed with the detached battalions, which had by midnight arrived at Wróblina. The 21st Division reached Bystrzyca.

The 32nd Regiment was transferred by motor trucks to Gończyce, while the 12th Brigade was to concentrate in the area Oblin – Domaszew. All of the forces that were required to move over unimproved roads were tired out; the artillery horses especially showed the effects of it. However, the morale of the army was splendid. The soldiers, intoxicated with victory and fired by the rousing cheers of the population, were eager for battle. At this very time the division commander was able to make use of the railway, now ready for operation as far as Sobolew and Krzywda. Only one police company had thus far been sent



towards Garwolin, Żelechów and Krzywda each, because the remainder of the companies had not yet arrived in Dęblin.

In general the situation was favourable. On the right of the Polish Fourth Army Major Jaworski's cavalry, after an engagement with the enemy, had occupied Radzyń at 12:40 p.m., from where it moved to Międzyrzecz at 5:30 p.m. (it was now approaching Kąkolewnica). The 1st Legion Division occupied the area Wohyń – Wiski without almost any fighting, sending the 16th Ułan Regiment forward to Wisznice. The remaining part of the assault group of the Third Army, after defeating the 58th Rifle Division, was still on the line Cyców – Włodawa.

Only one infantry brigade of the Polish Second Army had remained on the Vistula at Góra-Kalwaria; here the enemy tried during the day to cross the river. The 2nd Legion Division was assembling at Dęblin in headquarters reserve. One brigade of the 4th Division had been detached and sent to the Polish Fifth Army. Along the Warsaw bridgehead fortifications all the divisions of the First Army were engaged in battle for the possession of the line of the Rządza River. Greater calm reigned along the sector of the 15th Division which, at 7:00 a.m. on the 17th, was to launch, in conjunction with the tanks and the group of armoured trains, an attack on Mińsk-Mazowiecki from the vicinity of the Miłosna railway station. The Polish Fifth Army occupied Pułtusk on this day, repulsing the Russian Fifteenth Army; the Russian Fourth Army, however, was still continuing its turning movement.

F. Beginning of the Battle

I. Estimate of the Situation of the Commander of the Polish Fourth Army

Information from the divisions of the first line had reached the Army Commander somewhat late. Not until about 10:30 a.m. did he receive reports from the 14th and 16th Divisions; marked 7:30 a.m.

A complete picture of the situation, however, was not presented until about noon. Under the pressure of the Polish Fourth Army, the 57th Rifle Division was not retreating, a considerable portion of its forces having been cut off on the Vistula. There was another large enemy group which had been observed by the air service at Żelechów at 7:00 a.m., from which place field trains were observed to have been fleeing as early as 9:00 a.m. But the centre and right of the army were advancing so slowly that the 14th Division, which had been rushing forward along the highway, was getting farther and farther away from the main body of the army and thus was subjecting the exposed flanks to an attack from the wooded hill country. Because of this fact, the Army commander, by a directive issued at 12:30 p.m. accelerated the movement of the 21st and 16th Divisions, ordering the 16th Division to occupy Żelechów at the earliest possible moment. With this object in view, an artillery battalion was assigned to the division. Already by 5:00 p.m. the Army commander felt confident that the divisions would reach their designated areas; reports were received of the capture of Garwolin, about the fighting at Żelechów, and the crossing of Mała Bystrzyca.

By evening these reports were confirmed by air reconnaissance, which yielded valuable additional information: Polish cavalry held Radzyń; enemy field trains were retreating from Łuków on Trzebieszów. Moreover, two columns of enemy cavalry were advancing from Siedlce towards Seroczyn. While on their way they were bombarded by our air service on the highway at Skórzec. Further, it was observed that the enemy had occupied with strong forces the Kołbiel — Mińsk-Mazowiecki area. No indications had been noted that the enemy was about to take counter measures, nor did any retrograde movements seem imminent; so the aviator got the impression that the Russian leaders were as yet unaware of the results of the Polish advance.

The reports coming from the divisions made reference to the 57th Rifle Division as only retreating to the north and northeast. Nor had the air service on the right flank of the army observed any large enemy forces. But particularly in view of the fact that Radzyń and Parczew had already been occupied by adjacent units, at about 11:00 p.m. the Army commander reached the conclusion that the greater part of the Mozyr Group had been dispersed, that units of the 57th Rifle Division which had been cut off were assembling south of Garwolin, and that the remainder of this division was retreating towards Stoczek and Kałuszyn and abandoning Łuków. Still the 8th Rifle Division and other units of the Russian Sixteenth Army had remained in place, and the left wing of the army had become engaged with them. However, evaluating the Mozyr



Group this way did not as yet permit disregarding the menace from the east entirely, for there might yet be some strong forces in the Łuków area.

II. The Army Commander's Mission, Decision and Orders for the Next Day

At about 11:00 p.m. on August 16 the Army Commander was ordered by the Commander-in-Chief to have the Fourth Army, at daybreak on the 17th, push its offensive even more vigorously, its general direction pointing due north within the following boundaries: on the east Trzebieszów – Mordy (exclusive); on the west, the point where the 15th Division was to join this army, advancing simultaneously (at 7:00 a.m.) on Mińsk-Mazowiecki. The boundary line between the Fourth and First Armies was to pass through Długa Szlachecka – Pustelnik – Krawcowizna. During August 17 the 14th and 16th Divisions were to reach the Brest highway with their main bodies, in conjunction with the assault group of the Third Army.

In view of this, the Army Commander decided to exploit the success thus far achieved for a sudden dash with his main forces in a northerly direction; at the same time to drive back the 8th Rifle Division in a north-westerly direction so as to reach the line Mińsk-Mazowiecki – Kałuszyn; and with the Mountain Division to seize the Łuków railroad sector and push on beyond that town to the line Domanice – Krynka – Karwów.

With this object in view, the 14th Division was ordered to advance with one brigade and the 15th Ułan Regiment on Osieck and Kołbiel, and with the second brigade to occupy Siennica, after which the entire division was to march on Mińsk-Mazowiecki from the south, directing its main forces from Siennica on Jędrzejów, with the mission of cutting off the southern wing of the Russian Sixteenth Army.

The 16th and 21st Divisions were given the missions outlined for them in preceding orders, with the sole exception that the detachment which had been designated to join the 16th Division was to be shifted from Tuchowicz to Domanice; the 32nd Regiment was required during the day to move up to Garwolin; the 12th Brigade to Osieck, clearing the rear of the army of remnants of the 57th Rifle Division that had been routed on the Vistula. Army Headquarters was transferred on August 17 to Garwolin. In addition, the order stressed the need for better communication, which had been poor during the first day of the battle.

III. Enemy Situation

By evening of August 16 the Mozyr Group had ceased to exist as a combat unit. It had been crushed so quickly that its units found it impossible to submit accurate reports in proper time. In consequence, neither the Headquarters of the Sixteenth Army, nor that of the West Front had any idea of the extent of the Polish advance. It was for this reason that the commander of the 8th Rifle Division, who had received an order to withdraw with his division to Łuków as Army reserve by noon of August 18, upon learning at about 4:00 p.m. of the occupation of Garwolin, at first took this to be a raid of "Polish partisans". However, when at midnight the 72nd Rifle Regiment which had been sent there was repulsed, and there came the unexpected report of the commander of the 8th Cavalry Regiment stating that the 57th Rifle Division had been routed, the division commander made a decision: namely, to place his 24th Brigade on the line Osieck – Parysów, facing south; to place the 23rd Brigade in reserve at Lubice; and to transfer the 22nd Brigade via Kołbiel to Starogród. However, each brigade left one regiment along the Vistula in the general line Karczew – Warszawice, where these units were to be replaced by the 10th Rifle Division on August 17. The division commander himself remained in Sufczyn.

In executing this order, the numerically weak 8th Rifle Division became completely scattered over the wide area involved, its units losing connection with division headquarters. Advised of what had taken place in the south, the commander of the 10th Rifle Division directed his field and service trains to withdraw westward; at the same time he hastened to regroup his division, employing his weak reserve for the purpose of aiding his neighbour. However, this regrouping took until the very beginning of the advance of the Polish 15th Division. Both divisions commanders, as they reported the situation to the Army commander, seemed to be under the impression that they were dealing with a mere raid on the part of the Dęblin garrison whereby the Polish leaders endeavoured to counteract the advance of the Russian Sixteenth Army on Warsaw.



IV. Progress of Operations on the Second Day (August 17)

The Mountain Division embarked at daybreak on a concentric advance on Łuków. The 1st Mountain Brigade proceeded by the Świderki – Łuków highway; the 2nd Brigade via Jeziory; and one battalion marched by way of Strzyżew on Karwów.

At about 7:00 a.m. the columns of the three regiments of the division joined at Łuków, where their advance guards encountered energetic resistance on the part of the enemy. In view of this, at 7:30 the division launched a vigorous attack against the city from the southwest, the south, and southeast, using three regiments to that end. The city garrison, as it turned out, consisted of remnants of the 57th Rifle Division; after some feeble resistance they started to retreat towards Siedlce and Mordy, abandoning three guns, 150 machine-guns and other spoils. Upon occupying Łuków, the 1st Mountain Brigade was immediately sent forward to the Gołaszyn – Wiśniew area, which it occupied at about noon. By this time the 2nd Mountain Brigade had reached the region of Krynka – Karwów – Dębowica; leaving the divisional reserve in Łuków.

In Łuków the division was overtaken by the Commander-in-Chief who, upon finding it in such good condition, ordered it to march on Siedlce and to take that town on the very same day. After a brief rest, the division took up the advance, part of the forces being loaded on trucks. Military pride and enthusiasm over their victories served to overcome the fatigue of the troops. At midnight the advance-guard (1st Mountain Regiment with divisional cavalry) reached Siedlce. During a night attack, launched from the northwest and south, the troops entered the town, capturing at the same time a large quantity of enemy transport, cattle, military supplies, and several hundred prisoners. By morning the 1st Mountain Brigade was in possession of Siedlce, and besides captured some hostile field trains retreating from the west together with some enemy units. The 2nd Mountain Brigade by midnight had occupied the Zbuczyn – Wesółka area (one regiment having been left behind in Łuków), from where on August 18 it established contact with the cavalry group belonging to Major Jaworski at Mordy.²⁴

At daybreak the 16th Division, from the vicinity of Żelechów, advanced in three columns on Kałuszyn, Seroczyn and Wola Wodyńska. In the morning Colonel Ładoś, who had then assumed command of the division,²⁵ slightly altered the direction of the movement of several columns, as a result of which the advance of the division was somewhat delayed. Each regiment moved forward separately, as follows: the first echelon the 64th, 65th and 66th Regiments; in second echelon, in division reserve – the 63rd Regiment together with a battalion of artillery. The division did not encounter any strong enemy detachments; its forces, forming a wide net, captured only rear guard units of various enemy divisions with some field trains that were retreating eastward.

The 65th Regiment while advancing on Kałuszyn came, after it had passed through Latowicz, upon enemy forces of more substantial size, which it destroyed. After engaging in skirmishes at Waliska and Kuflew it occupied the Mrozy railroad station at 11:20, from where its main body advanced on Kałuszyn, which it entered on the morning of the 18th. One battalion meanwhile was advancing on Cegłów, where considerable enemy forces had been assembled. The 68th Regiment, skirting Seroczyn, reached the village of Borki by noon, capturing part of the headquarters of the 169th Rifle Brigade and the transport of the 8th, 2nd and 10th Rifle Divisions. At midnight the regiment occupied the Topór – Płomieniec area.

The 64th Regiment, moving in several columns, occupied the village of Żebrak at 11:30 p.m. One battalion, which had been detached in the direction of the Mountain Division, reached Domanice. The 63rd Regiment arrived at Seroczyn at 7:00 p.m.

The division now occupied the area that had been designated for it. Its movement had been rendered difficult due to the sandy roads over which it had to travel, and it was further complicated by a failure to maintain connection with the other units.

²⁴ Mordy had been occupied at 11:00 a.m. on August 18.

²⁵ The text says he had taken over the *Army*, but this seems unlikely as he had only just taken over the division. Often titled "General", Kazimierz Ładoś did not reach that rank until 1924. MP.



During the night the division commander issued orders for a new regrouping, which the division carried out on the 19th between 7:00 and 8:00 a.m. The 65th Regiment remained at Kałuszyn, the 64th Regiment occupied Oleksin and Bojmie, the 64th Regiment entered Skórzec and Wołyńce, while the 63rd moved to Żebrak.

Meanwhile on the left of the army a serious incident was taking place. Upon occupying Garwolin, the Commander of the 14th Division received an oral message from the Commander-in-Chief directing him to move up one regiment to Osieck and a second regiment to Kołbiel in the evening of the 16th²⁶. But because of the delay on the part of the columns of the divisions on the flank end of the engagement with the Russian 8th Rifle Division, the division commander was constrained to content himself with clearing the immediate Garwolin area of the enemy during the night and concentrating in that area the entire division; the more so, since the information regarding the occupation of Żelechów was not received until 2:00 a.m. Under the circumstances, the division commander decided to strike out with his entire force along the highway in the direction of Kołbiel, in order to gain the upper hand in the battle confronting him with the 8th Rifle Division.

The advance guard consisted now of the 55th Regiment with a battalion of field artillery attached. This regiment, after a night attack on Miętne and Jagodne, took possession of the wood near Czechy at about 2:00 a.m. However, during a further advance it met with a determined enemy attack near Puznówka and Poschła, which points it did not seize until after some very severe fighting. The 24th Rifle Brigade which had been posted at that point was driven back in a north-westerly direction. By this time (5:00 a.m.) the main forces of the division had left Garwolin, after leaving behind one battalion of the 56th Regiment pending the arrival of the 15th Ułan Regiment from Maciejowice.

V. Fighting on the Left Wing of the Army (August 17)

The advance guard of the 14th Division moved out at about 5:00 a.m. and after a skirmish near Żalanza, attacked the 23rd Rifle Brigade which had gathered in the Kąty – Lubice area. This brigade dispersed with the delivery of the first blow. Inflicting heavy losses on it, the advance guard (i.e. the 55th Regiment) drove it towards Kołbiel; which the regiment occupied at 9:00 a.m. At Kołbiel the regiment remained until 11:00 a.m. in order to reorganise, while awaiting the arrival of the main body of the division. Meanwhile, the defeated 23rd Rifle Brigade assembled in the Rudno – Oleksin area, where it was joined from Karczew by the 22nd Rifle Brigade. The latter immediately launched a vigorous attack from the direction of Gózd. At this point here developed a most severe and bloody struggle lasting several hours. Stara Wieś changed hands several times during the action. At about 2:00 p.m. – when the leading elements of the 14th Division were approaching – the 22nd Rifle Brigade retreated to Ostrów, at which point it joined the 24th Rifle Brigade, which had been cut off at Osieck.

The 55th Regiment, having been relieved by the 57th Regiment, moved on Mińsk-Mazowiecki and drove the 23rd Rifle Regiment in a north-westerly direction, also defeating units of the 10th Rifle Division on its way. At 6:00 p.m. the regiment entered Mińsk and found there a group of Polish armoured trains, which had forced their way into the city from the direction of Miłosna railway station. Following the advance guard there next arrived the regiment of the main body. In Kołbiel the 56th Regiment was left behind, one battalion of this regiment, which had been relieved at Garwolin, proceeding to Osieck. The main column fought off several attacks of various enemy units, which were endeavouring to break through eastward.

At 10:00 p.m. the 55th and 57th Regiments took possession of Mińsk-Mazowiecki, moving up security detachments to the line Arynów – Karolina – Osiny. In the meantime the 58th Regiment occupied the line Podrudzie – Zamienie, facing southwest. One battalion of the 57th Regiment, sent from Kołbiel by way of Siennica and Janów, arrived at that point at 3:00 a.m.

The 15th Division, considering its mission to be that of a raiding force, did not begin its advance from the vicinity of Miłosna railroad station until 9:30 a.m., as the tanks were late in coming up from Radzymin. The assault units of this division, moving forward against the 10th and 17th Rifle Divisions, reached by noon the

²⁶ The original text says the 14th, but that must be an error. MP.



line Brzeziny – Skruda – Długa Kościelna, where they were stopped by the enemy who put up a stubborn defence. However this advance, by immobilising these two hostile divisions (10th and 17th), had served to render it easier for the Polish 14th Division to carry out its mission. At 7:00 p.m. the units of the 15th Division, following in the wake of the retreating army, reached Mińsk-Mazowiecki,²⁷ but upon finding there the advance guard of the 14th Division, left the city and moved to the line Chrośła – Choszczówka. Here the main body of the 15th Division remained, not leaving the positions they had occupied until the close of the day.

The 30th Brigade, encountering a strong enemy force at Glinianka fought a severe action during the night. The fighting came to a close early the next day, with the result that the units of the 8th, 10th and 57th Rifle Divisions that happened to be there, suffered a decisive defeat. The 29th Brigade occupied the line Wielgolas – Dębe Wielkie on the evening of the 17th.

The 56th Regiment of the 14th Division, repulsing several enemy attacks on Kołbiel, established connection at 10:00 p.m. with a battalion of the 62nd Regiment (15th Division) in the vicinity of Sępochów. Moreover, fighting continued throughout the night, inasmuch as the brigades of the Russian 8th and 10th Rifle Divisions which had been cut off from their line of retreat, were still vainly trying to break through in an easterly directions. Their strongest attacks were twice beaten off by the 58th Infantry Regiment at Zamienie, the latter capturing several guns, 1,500 prisoners and a large quantity of military supplies. The battalion of the 57th Regiment at Janów, on the morning of the 19th, crushed some hostile elements that had succeeded in slipping away and were retreating on Kałuszyn.

The losses of the 14th Division in the action at Kołbiel and Mińsk amounted to 15 killed, 121 wounded and 15 missing; its spoils were augmented by 18 guns, 50 machine-guns, several hundred military vehicles (including trucks) and over 3,000 prisoners.

VI. Results of the Second Day

On the second day of operations the Polish Fourth Army had reached, in conformity with the intentions of the Commander-in-Chief, the Brest highway: the 15th and 14th Divisions occupying the line Dębe – Mińsk-Mazowiecki; the 16th Division, that of Kałuszyn – Skórzec, and the 21st Division the Siedlce area.

On the right of the Fourth Army, the assault group of the Third Army had reached Międzyrzecz with the 1st Legion Division (at 11:00 p.m. on the 17th). That town had been occupied even before this by Major Jaworski's cavalry group, just prior to their advance on Mordy. The right column of the 1st Legion Division defeated a mixed detachment of the Mozyr Group at Biała, but the 4th Cavalry Brigade, having been delayed by an engagement near Cyców, did not reach Sosnowica until the night of the 17th. The 3rd Legion Division, upon defeating the 58th Rifle Division in the vicinity of Włodawa, proceeded on its way to Sławatycze.

The plan of the enveloping manoeuvre had been carried out in full: the Middle Front having joined hands with the North Front, had struck the rear of the Russian Sixteenth Army and destroyed its southern wing.

By the night of August 17/18 the divisions of the Polish First Army began to lose contact with the enemy. On the morning of the 18th all of the Warsaw bridgehead fortifications were entirely cleared of hostile elements, even the rear guards of the Russian Sixteenth Army having withdrawn.

Farther to the north, the advance of the Polish Fifth Army had also taken a favourable turn. The right and centre of that Army had reached the Narew River on the line Pułtusk – Serock, from where the Russian Third and Fifteenth Armies were retreating.

²⁷ In fact the assault on Mińsk-Mazowiecki only contained a few troops from the 15th Division, being largely an *ad hoc* group under Matczyński including trains and tanks. The 15th Division's two brigades (29th and 30th Infantry Brigades) were elsewhere. MP.



G. The Pursuit

I. Estimate of the Situation, and Decision on the Third Day (August 18)

The Commander of the Polish Fourth Army, upon receiving information at about noon regarding the battle at Kołbiel²⁸ to the effect that the retreat of the major portion of the enemy forces had been cut off and that the latter were concentrating west of Kołbiel, at first became somewhat apprehensive, inasmuch as the 14th Division had assembled at Kołbiel and the 12th Brigade having been delayed was moving on Osieck from Domaszew. The enemy forces that had thus been enveloped could therefore break through at Osieck and Garwolin. Because of this, the 32nd Regiment was moved up to Garwolin, and the battalion of the 59th Regiment which had taken its place was sent to Osieck.

During the evening of the 17th, on the basis of reports that had come in from subordinate units and from Warsaw, as well as from the Polish Third Army, the Commander of the Polish Fourth Army concluded that the south wing of the Russian Sixteenth Army had been crushed, and that the Mozyr Group had suffered the same fate: remnants of the defeated 8th, 10th and 17th Rifle Divisions were hastily retreating behind the River Bug, impelling the retreat of the entire Sixteenth Army, which had lost the greater part of its transport. Consequently, the Polish Fourth Army commander directed his forces to assemble to the north of the Brest highway, with a view to launching an attack on the 18th. He proposed the 14th, 15th and 21st Divisions in first echelon, followed by the 16th Division, 12th Brigade and 32nd Regiment in second line, to attack the enemy along the general line Jadów – Węgrów – Sokołów, to completely destroy the Russian Sixteenth Army on the River Bug and from there to emerge across the communications of the Russian Third Army, regarding the retreat of which he was still in ignorance.

II. Retreat of the Enemy

Actually, however, on August 18 there began a new phase in the operation, that is, the pursuit of the retreating enemy. On the morning of the 17th, the West Front commander Tukhachevski, as a result of the sudden action of the Polish Fourth and Third Armies, had already ordered the Russian Sixteenth Army to withdraw toward the line of the Liwiec; at the same time he had directed the Russian Third Army to fall back on the Narew and Bug Rivers and the Fourth Army, to the Ciechanów – Maków area. The Russian Sixteenth Army and the Mozyr Group were to delay the Polish armies advancing from the south until the latter could be defeated by an attack of the Twelfth Army and the First Cavalry Army from the direction of Lublin.

But the Mozyr Group had already been destroyed on the 16th, and on the 17th the pincers represented by the Polish units advancing on Mińsk-Mazowiecki were destroying those divisions of the Russian Sixteenth Army that had not yet been sufficiently beaten opposite the Warsaw Bridgehead. All that was actually left of the 8th and 10th Rifle Divisions consisted of a few hundred bayonets – which had succeeded individually in breaking through the Polish lines at Jakubów, Cegłów and Piaseczno.

The gradual retirement of the Russian Sixteenth Army toward the line of the Liwiec was to begin on August 17, at 11:00 p.m. By that time, however, those divisions of the Russian Sixteenth Army that had escaped destruction were already compelled to retreat and were dragging along in their wake the entire West Front. Any further orders that Front commander Tukhachevski might issue would not restore the situation; and so in the end he could only attempt to avoid a complete disaster by extricating his armies from under the blows of the relentless pursuit of the Polish forces by taking them beyond the Niemen and Szczara Rivers.

III. Launching of the Pursuit

On August 18 an order of the Commander-in-Chief called for a general intensified pursuit, the basic mission of which implied a speedy occupation of the line of the Bug River, in order to prevent the enemy from

²⁸ The commander of the 14th Division at 11:40 a.m. had sent a message from Puznówka by motorcyclist announcing the occupation of Kołbiel.



organising a defence on that line. The principal mission was assigned to the Middle Front (consisting of the Polish Fourth Army, and the Second and Third Armies which had just been reorganised), now under the direct orders of the Commander-in-Chief.²⁹

The Fourth Army (14th, 15th and 16th Divisions, 12th Brigade and 32nd Regiment) was directed to advance on the line Kałuszyn – Mińsk-Mazowiecki. This army had transferred its 21st Division to the Second Army under General Rydz-Śmigły. The latter (comprising the 21st Mountain, 1st Legion and 2nd Legion Divisions and two cavalry brigades³⁰) was to move with the greatest possible speed on Białystok, with the object of enveloping the hostile main forces that were retreating in a north-easterly direction, the operation being covered by the occupation of Brest on the Bug River. The Third Army, reinforced by the headquarters reserve, was covering the Lublin area in front of the Russian Twelfth Army.

Simultaneously, the North Front was to advance frontally from the line Warsaw – Wyszaków – Ostrów – Łomża, while the mission of the Polish Fifth Army was to cut off the retreat of the Russian III Cavalry Corps and Russian Fourth Army, which had progressed as far as Płock, Włocławek and Toruń.

This pursuit was to be initiated by the Polish Fourth Army after 12:00 noon, on August 18.

²⁹ Piłsudski was always nominally in command of the Middle Front from its inception, although he did not always take direct operational control. MP.

³⁰ Jaworski and 4th Cavalry Brigades. MP.

