

The following is a quick and free translation of the article – it is not to be considered as completely accurate.

Italics are as the original and most punctuation is, even when daft.

Proper names have generally been left in the original format, except that I have replaced W with V in most cases (I really hate the river Wolga) and have changed Carycyn to Tsaritsyn, and Ulajag to Ulagai for comprehensibility. In any event many names appear to be misspelled (or inconsistently spelled) in the original.

*Revue de Cavalerie - Jan-Feb 1930*

## **A conference with General Shinkarenko on cavalry during the Russian Civil War**

At the start of summer 1921, the 28 year old Russian general Shinkarenko arrived in Warsaw from Wrangel's army. Some time after his arrival in the Polish capital, he presented himself to Colonel Loir, director of the cavalry in the French military mission, who welcomed him warmly.

After numerous conversations between the two officers on the role of cavalry, as much during the Russian Civil War as during the Russo-Polish war of 1920, it was decided that General Shinkarenko would give a lecture to the officers of the French military mission on the employment of cavalry during the RCW. That lecture took place in the Hotel Polonia, under the presidency of General Niessel, chief of the mission. A large number of French and Polish officers attended.

Some time after, General Shinkarenko left for Russia to put his sword once again at the service of General Wrangel, for whom he had great admiration. Before this, he had asked Colonel Loir to try to publish the lecture in the *Revue de Cavalerie*. Colonel Loir was quite a time in Poland without being able to satisfy the request of the General. A copy of the conference remained in the archives which came with me to Morocco, where I thought it would perhaps be time to profit the readers of the *Revue de Cavalerie* with the report of General Shinkarenko, which does not lack a certain interest.

The lecture is presented *in extenso* as it was given by the author to the audience.

There is no point commenting on the whole of the work. Still it seems interesting to me to draw attention on the important, once could even say preponderant, role played by cavalry during the Civil War and the care of that cavalry to combine fire and shock, at the moment of its attacks.

General Shinkarenko attributes the preponderance of cavalry to the decrease in valour<sup>1</sup> of the infantry, and he adds: "One will meet them again everywhere where one wishes *to campaign with a militia, or at least an army of which the warrior qualities approach those of a militia*. It is the case with all the *European armies, extremely worn down and changed by the War, and the question may become reality*".

Glance at what is happening at the moment: we see, with the adoption of short term service, an army which is effectively turning itself into a militia – a militia composed of 21-year-olds, children in war, for whom physical resistance and morale, the aptitude for hard work, are far from the worth of the troops of 1914. This militia are armed, it is true, with rapid fire weapons, automatic weapons, well perfected machines of all sorts, capable of a high performance. But the performance is subordinated to the use by clever men, driven by unflinching desire. The best machine-gun, if it works badly or does not work at all, is not worth a simple rifle.

Well this material, delicate to handle, will it be serviced by personnel inferior to the task? Will its influence be what one could expect? Besides, in what battle conditions will this material be employed from the commencement of operations? Will the combatant, as during the Great War, have the time to gradually get his nerves used to the thick sheets bullets from automatic fire-arms, to the formidable bombardments by all calibres of guns and the bombs of planes? It is suspected not. From the start, the combatant will be subjected to actions of an intensity such that his body and soul will be immediately shaken. The weakening will be complete if to the actions of projectiles will be added those of poison gas, vesicants, blinding

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<sup>1</sup> *valeur* can be translated as value, valour or courage but probably means all these concepts together. I have tried to pick the most suitable English word for each occasion



agents, the electronic waves that one can predict for the future. To all this will be added, in most cases, the impossibility of being fed, the need to consume poisoned rations. From the start the combatant, despite his perfected arms, won't he rapidly become morally and physically broken, incapable of resisting an improvised and vigorous action? The horseman, held from the start a little behind the battlefield, and led there quickly by surprise, as soon as possible after the crisis, with a machine-pistol or even simply a sabre or lance, will he not have then the possibility of exploiting this momentary weakness?

A good number of my comrades must still remember those Germans in the trenches in Champagne, who, in September 1915, vigorously resisted our victorious infantry but who surrendered in front of a charge from our Hussars coming to grief in the wire. The surprise did its work!

Equally one does not forget the well-attested fear by some of our infantry, harassed, dispersed, not fed for two days, in May and June 1918, after the attacks *on the Aisne*, when the presence of German cavalry was signaled to them. What beautiful targets, during those days, for bodies of cavalry appearing by surprise at the gallop, committed to go to the maximum!

What terror the famous cavalry of Budienny threw all of Poland into, in May and June 1920, in falling on the rear of the Southern Polish army. The Polish soldiers were, however, not a militia, nearly all of them having seen time in the Great War.

Finally, I saw personally numerous times during the Russo-Polish War of 1920 where Polish squadrons would charge by surprise advancing Red infantry, knock them over and take, almost without losses, prisoners, rifles and machine-guns. Yet hadn't this Red infantry, come from the depths of Russia and the borders of Asia, arrived almost at the walls of Warsaw?

With all these facts, doesn't one regret the all the cutbacks that have been decided for our cavalry?

The combination of fire and shock was strongly favoured, as much in the Russian cavalry as the Polish. The Russian and Polish cavalymen were reluctant to dismount to fight by means of firepower. They would happily shoot from horseback, on offence or in defence, but this method of shooting would never be very effective or enough for all occasions. From then on, the command, who did not wish to abandon combat on horseback as the principal mode of cavalry action, came to join to the cavalry, and specialise cavalymen in, powerful mobile weapons able to follow it in all situations. Which led to, beside the cavalymen still on horseback, the appearance of large numbers of machine-guns, be it on pack-saddles, be it on the types of coaches called *taczenkas*, and leading also to, in the brigades and divisions, the appearance of a large number of armoured cars, tanks and armoured trains. Armoured trains, tanks, cars, machine-guns, shooting at maximum, to prepare the entry into action of the horse elements and their charge. They protected and even accompanied the charge. Possibly, their fire covered the retreat of elements of cavalry if the charge failed. This combination of fire and shock has sometimes given excellent results.

It has had such results that, if one believes General Shinkarenko, cavalry will be called up again in future wars, where it will be used from depth and at the opportune moment on infantry which are inexperienced, undisciplined and demoralised by the formidable means which will be applied on the battlefield.

It is to publish the ideas and make known the personal memories of General Shinkarenko that it appears useful to publish the conference in the *Revue de Cavalerie*.

Capitaine Moslard

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Conference of General Shinkarenko

I have the honour, sirs, of speaking to you about the results of cavalry combats in the Russian Civil War. I regret, I do not have any documentation and I am reduced to using my memory exclusively.

Well, I will try to speak only of things and actions that I have seen with my own eyes. As for the tactical examples, I am going to stick to combats in which I was present and the many cavalry charges in which I took part, as squadron commander at first, and then later those that I had the honour to lead, when I had under my orders a regiment, and later a division of cavalry.



The civil war in Russia, of which the end is not certainly yet presently in view, and of which we are seeing only an intermission, has been full of cavalry actions, actions very varied in form and which sometimes have given decisive results. Up to the last moment, the history of this war has been nearly always in its largest part the story of the cavalry arm, *and whose role predominated on the battlefield.*

*For an explanation of the fact of this rebirth,* it is necessary to look into the particular conditions of the war in Russia; but certainly these conditions may be met again in the future, even in the near future, and even outside the Russian theatre of operations. *One will meet them again everywhere where one wishes to campaign with a militia, or at least an army of which the warrior qualities approach those of a militia. As the term militia could be applied to all the European armies, extremely worn down and changed by the Great War, the study of this matter is for the present one of reality.*

Firstly, the most important circumstance which assured the large success of the cavalry arm, *was a very pronounced lowering of the military value of the armies occupied in Russia*

*And it is the infantry which has most suffered from this illness.* The former noble arm, apart from a few exceptions, has completely disappeared from the battlefield.

On the Red side, there are the scraps of the old imperial army which fought in the first actions of the Civil War. These regiments are only the lowest of troops, retaining the remains of their military instruction *but having no longer a shade of discipline.* In the course of the struggle, the Soviets came to replace this decomposing infantry with the new regiments of the new Red Army, formed from conscripts marching only under constraint and deprived of nearly all military instruction. Well, true discipline, internal discipline, is always lacking in the new units of that army. It possesses nevertheless *an exterior discipline, that of the masses intimidated by force.*

That imposed discipline is preferable, all in all, to a complete lack of discipline, And, it has to be said, the value of the Red infantry is growing every day.

In 1920, the divisions that we saw in the Northern Tauridia (that of the 51<sup>st</sup> ID) gave me the impression of being superior to all that we beat in 1919 near Tsaritsyn, and the divisions of Tsaritsyn had been better than the formations of militia mostly destroyed, in 1918, in the combats of the Kuban.

Perhaps in the future one will see a Red infantry of superior value but up to the present the infantry elements of that army, except for very rare exceptions, showed themselves to be very flimsy (to the point of dropping their weapons quickly enough) and with pitiful training. Their fire was ineffectual and the losses inflicted on the enemy were nearly always minimal.

On our side, the value of the infantry units, thanks to the large number of officer cadres and the large number of volunteers, was not so tested; we had certain elements of infantry of the first order; such as the regiments of Kornilov, Drozdovski, Markov and others; all these regiments formed the true core of the Volunteer Army but their numbers were low, and all the rest did not differ much from the Red infantry.

As for the combative qualities of the *cavalry, they had certainly also dropped.* During the Great War, *it was impossible for a regiment that commenced a charge to make an about-turn.* During the Civil War this certainty was shaken, and it happened often enough.

So, the cavalry declined, but this decline was not in proportion to the *decline in the value of the infantry.*

To explain the cause of this decline, it is necessary for us to recall the nature of the elements that had composed our cavalry. It was composed, for the most part, of Cossacks from the Don, Kuban, Terek and Astrakhan. All these cossacks had kept their former organisation and were strictly territorial. At the start of the insurrections in the cossack regions, one immediately saw the revival of the sotnias, and the old regiments. To the point that the men in them were nearly all the same as during the Great War; and it was sometimes equally true for the officers. So, from the first days, the insurgents possessed units of cavalry having been trained, *and more or less having that interior unity, that always gives the esprit de corps.*

The line regiments of the Volunteer Army, not very numerous however, were packed with officers of the old Russian army, students of the military schools and volunteers from bourgeois families. If I recall correctly, my squadron counted in its ranks, during the summer of 1918, more than 50 officers, and it was



possible to put a colonel in charge of each platoon. In these conditions, the line regiments differed in terms of instruction, but they always burned with a combative spirit.

The bulk of the cossack forces aligned out our side, our adversaries struggled to create a decent cavalry. Nevertheless the cavalry regiments of the Red Army, having received renegade cossacks and all the daredevils with a taste for adventure (a taste with certain analogies with the love of war), behaved *from the start as elite troops*.

The Red cavalry grew and improved and this progression was rapid, notably during the Summer of 1919, when Trotsky launched his vibrant call “Proletarians, to the saddle!” *which call was understood by all the Soviet country*.

Up to the end, recruitment for the Red cavalry kept its purely voluntary nature. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Army, that had been desired formed in 1920, was to be composed of squadrons furnished by the communist organisations of the large towns.

Well, the Red cavalry always obtained the elements of the social revolution most penetrated by communist ideas, which assured it a considerable value.

As for training, whilst the pretty much complete absence of officers always presented large difficulties, the Red cavalry was able to make great progress. This success is certainly due to the work of former NCOs of the imperial army possessing very sound knowledge of the principal elements of tactics for the arm and knowing how to teach the little details of daily service which constitute the base of the military life of a regiment. Certain NCOs, being enriched by the experience of the Great War, had developed a incontestable military talent and they gave to the Red cavalry many commanders of value/courage. The best known are: Dumenko, former Chief Warrant Officer<sup>2</sup> of the 17<sup>th</sup> Nizegorodski Dragoon regiment, shot in 1920 at Rostov, and Budienny, former Adjutant<sup>3</sup> of the 18<sup>th</sup> Siewierski Dragoon regiment, commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Army.

The consequence of this favourable situation was that our cavalry at first, and later that of the Reds, was aware of its superiority *over the other arms, and very quickly it started to dare to undertake operations that the commanders would not have dared to permit during the Great War. From that to the tendency to attack everywhere and anytime without worrying about either the number or the tactical position of the enemy infantry*.

That tendency had to be justified however by a great weakening of the technical means of the belligerents; these means no longer corresponded to those of the Great War. Neither the artillery nor the engineers were in a state to block the way of cavalry raids. Contrariwise, the large cavalry masses of the Civil War themselves possessed rich tactical means, machine-guns, armoured cars, tanks etc ... In the last battle of the Northern Tauridia, for example, in October 1920, the cavalry corps of Bartovicz was followed by a column of 24 Fords armed with machine-guns. The divisional group of Ulagai, in the series of combats at Kotluban in September 1919 was reinforced with 2 detachments of tanks and 5 armoured trains. The number of machine-guns assigned to cavalry regiments also grew. In 1914, a cavalry division of 4 regiments had only 8 machine-guns total; in 1919, it was difficult to find a regiment where the number of machine-guns *did not reach 20, even 30 and 40 pieces*.

I will go further. The theatres of operations in the Civil War remained vast and the fronts extended, but the effectives of the armies were greatly lowered. During the Autumn campaign of 1919 in all the armies of General Denikin, on a front extending from the Volga to the former border of Galicia, there were only 10 army corps of low strength<sup>4</sup>. And the army of General Wrangel, in the campaign of Northern Tauridia in 1920, only counted four army corps, with close to 30,000 combatants.

At the same time, the numbers of the cavalry bodies was increased by a large proportion, and sometimes that growth in forces approached the corresponding figures for the Great War. For example, the day of Wielikokniazeskaja, 21 May 1919, General Wrangel was able to combine, on a battlefield, 8 ½ divisions of

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<sup>2</sup> *Maréchal des logis chef*

<sup>3</sup> *Adjutant*

<sup>4</sup> throughout “low strength” and “high strength” are translations of *faibles effectives* and *fortes effectives*



cavalry (36 regiments, with 20,000 to 25,000 sabres). At the battle of Jegortyckaja the largest meeting of cavalry in the Civil War took place. General Pavlov had then under his orders more than 25,000 sabres against his adversary Budienny who disposed of equal forces.

In these conditions, the Civil War in Russia always having the space indispensable for the execution of manoeuvres, had to present a favourable aspect for the action of large amounts of cavalry, in the strategic as well as the tactical senses.

In order for the cavalry to be able to fulfil the multiple roles offered by the Civil War, the higher commanders had to make profound changes in the manner of its employment. In the course of the Great War, the command always had, to obtain a result, other means than those likely to be furnished by the cavalry. The commanders chose the strongest and, above all, most certain means. They were likely to regard the action of the cavalry as a luxury, and intended to look after it. For example, the 12<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division, whilst having been one of the most active and most worn-down, had suffered nonetheless losses greatly inferior to those of the infantry. Yet, each winter it was retired to the rear to rest.

On the other hand, in the armies of the Civil War, as the cavalry nearly always constituted the most solid troops and as it was so numerous, the command had to regard cavalry action as the most powerful and certain means available, very often the only one possible.

*Consequently, the arm ceased to be considered a luxury* and indeed its use became little by little to be considered as normal. So, in the Civil War, a cavalry division never had a rest during the course of an operation and no combat took place without cavalry being involved.

The masses of cavalry showed themselves to be very active and it was there that was the great secret of their success. In war one can do anything one wills, but the “will” only comes when one demands it<sup>5</sup>.

In order that the techniques of cavalry action in the conditions that I characterise be more clear, I am going to try to recount, in broad outline, the operations of September 1919 and the combats around Tsaritsyn involving the Army of the Caucasus, composed, for the large part, of cavalry elements, and commanded by the great leader of men, and above all cavalry, that is General Wrangel.

In the month of August, the Army of the Caucasus, stopped by the Reds in its march on Saratov, exhausted and beaten morally, was obliged to retreat along the Volga towards Tsaritsyn. This long recoil, executed in very difficult conditions, punctuated by continual combats against a more numerous enemy, produced a degree of disorganisation and a weakening of the morale of the troops. Our cavalry, which had always been victorious up to then and which the regiments of Dumenko and Budienny had taken care with when nearing, had completely lost the will to win. In truth, it was only good for watching from afar the lines of the Red cavalry, and no longer had enough firmness to be able to hold for the shock [of a charge].

Well, despite the measures taken by General Wrangel (establishment of a fortified position defending the approaches to the Northern sector of Tsaritsyn, arrival of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kuban “Plastun” brigade and some tanks) there was no doubt of the result of the coming battle. The Army of the Caucasus would be beaten; beaten soundly.

Yet for many reasons it was impossible to avoid the battle, and General Wrangel found himself having to deliver it.

On the morning of the 5<sup>th</sup> September, the Army of the Caucasus was concentrated in two groups: General Pisarev (2<sup>nd</sup> Kuban Plastun brigade, the remains of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Kuban Plastun brigade, the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and two divisions of cavalry - the 4<sup>th</sup> Kuban Division and the Mountain Division) occupied the fortified position from the Volga up to the station of Gumrak; General Ulagai (1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, 1<sup>st</sup> Kuban Division, 3<sup>rd</sup> Kuban Division) near the station of Kotluban, on the outer flank and in front of the fortified position.

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<sup>5</sup> Or something to that effect, I hope - *à la guerre on peut tout si l'on veut, mais le “vouloir” ne vient que quand on l'exige.*



As one can see, the bulk of the army was cavalry, close to 70% of the total effectives. But all the cavalry divisions, except the 3<sup>rd</sup> Kuban, were very weak and with shaken morale. The mixed Mountain Division, of which I had the honour of being under my orders, only contained 350 to 400 sabres and 8 canons.

During the 5<sup>th</sup> September, the enemy continuing his march to the South and with the aim of conquering Tsaritsyn, had simultaneously attacked the fortifications and the station of Kotluban.

The double battle of Tsaritsyn was very interesting above all from the point of view of the cavalry action. As I took part in the combat for the fortified position, I will be able to describe it in some detail. The fortified position ran along the crest dividing the ravine of Suchaja Meczетка from the ravine of Orlovka, the ravine of Griaznaja cut the front of the position into two pretty much equal parts.

The works, that is to say the trenches<sup>6</sup> protected with wire, had been dug pretty much all along<sup>7</sup> but the approach galleries<sup>8</sup> remained only sketchy for the most part. For the Civil War this position presented a considerable defensive power. (see the sketch #1)

The terrain in front of the fortified line descended gently towards the village of Orlovka. The ravine of the same name and the ravine of Suchaja Meczетка, with steep slopes, wooded at the bottom, constituted the interior of the position<sup>9</sup>, and presented very great difficulties for manoeuvring cavalry, but gave a good protection from artillery fire. A line of farms and two villages, Gorodyszcze and Uvarovka, were situated in the ravine

The defence of the sector between the Volga and the Griaznaja ravine was confided to the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and the “Plastuns” of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Kuban brigade; 3 battalions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> “Plastun” Kuban Brigade occupied the sector between Griaznaja ravine and Gumrak station. A battalion (4<sup>th</sup> Kuban Plastun) remained at the disposition of General Pisarev in Ivanovka.

As for the cavalry, the 4<sup>th</sup> Kuban Division had to be placed in reserve of General Pisarev, south of Iajevkalla station. The mixed Mountain Division received the order to go south of Tsaritsyn to be reorganised. The two divisions came from making a night march and, as they were very tired, they halted for some hours, the 4<sup>th</sup> Kuban at Gorodyszcze and the Mountain at Uvarovka. The troops did not think that the enemy would be able to attack the position that day; they felt secure and unsaddled their horses.

Well, the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division of the Reds (9 regiments of high strength, reinforced by a regiment of sailors and a brigade of cavalry) having Tsaritsyn as their objective, advanced energetically. Towards 11 o'clock, elements of its vanguard contacted the forward posts of the 6<sup>th</sup> ID. Shortly afterwards, a brigade of the Red 28<sup>th</sup> ID started to move forward between the main road to Saratov and Griaznaja ravine. Between 14 and 15 o'clock, it initiated an attack in the same sector. The attack was protected by fire from numerous batteries placed in the Orlovka areas and supported on their flank by the Red Volga flotilla. A part of the Saratovski regiment, composed of conscripts of little valour, who had been assigned the defence of the attacked sector, gave way, and the remainder of the regiment passed over to the enemy. The infantrymen of the Saratovski left their trenches, organised passages in the wire and some even turned their arms against us.

The adversary quickly occupied the works and the interior of the attacked sector. Lines of Red skirmishers descended towards the outskirts of Gorodyszcze. The 4<sup>th</sup> Kuban Plastun battalion tried to counter-attack but its élan quickly evaporated.

Given the total lack of reserves, the situation had become critical.

During this time the two divisions of cavalry had remained in their cantonments, knowing nothing and receiving no orders. However, as the fire gave the impression of increasing and warned of danger, the order was given to saddle the horses. Around 15 o'clock, the 4<sup>th</sup> Kuban Division assembled itself in the main street of Gorodyszcze and the Mountain Division on the slope south of Uvarovka.

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<sup>6</sup> *Tranchées à profil de campagne*

<sup>7</sup> Actually *partout*, or “everywhere”

<sup>8</sup> *boyaux d'approche*

<sup>9</sup> The ravine of Suchaja Meczетка only would appear to be in the interior, that of Orlovka in front.



The situation was on a knife-edge. It was necessary for all the cavalry to intervene immediately even though no orders had arrived. Colonel Skvorcov, commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Kuban, launched his regiments to the north-west and the north of Gorodyszczce, straight onto the slopes steep enough to permit only a trot. Nevertheless, the charge succeeded and the enemy took flight, pursued and sabred by the cossacks.

At the same time, I started, with all the regiments of the mixed Mountain Division, a movement towards the church of Gorodyszczce.

The movement was made at the gallop in column of march, the way being very narrow. The head of the column arrived at the church from where the terrain climbed gently towards the north. I immediately launched the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kabardynski Regiment and the Kazakzajewski Regiment straight to the north. The regiments left, deploying at gallop of attack. The 4<sup>th</sup> Kabardynski Regiment charged in the second line and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Kabardynski advanced behind, constituting a reserve. Given the abruptness of the events, not one of the batteries of the division had time to take part in the combat. The charge was only protected by bursts of fire from 2 guns of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Plastun battery already deployed to the north of the church, who shelled<sup>10</sup> the Reds at a distance of 200 to 300 metres.

The charge of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kabardynski and the Kazakzajewski cleared first the heroic battery, and, some instants later, reached the opposing infantry. The Reds did not wait for this counter-attack and set to fleeing.

The charge by the 4<sup>th</sup> Kuban and the Mountain divisions had a magical effect. All the enemy infantry that had penetrated the interior of the fortified position were overturned, sabred, made prisoner. The Mountain Division had itself captured 1,500 prisoners and a large number of machine-guns. The pursuit was continued almost up to the village of Orlovka. Our abandoned works were reoccupied by the 4<sup>th</sup> Plastun battalion.

After this charge, about 16 o'clock, the parts of the two divisions reassembled to the north of Gorodyszczce.

During this time General Wrangel arrived on the heights of Razgulajewka and he saw the first charge of his cavalry. The situation became less critical, whilst remaining serious. The Reds, around 17:30 released a new attack along the Volga. The sailor regiment broke our line, occupied the French factory and the canon factory: its advanced elements were already approaching the town.

General Wrangel saw the danger and, having at that time no reserves at hand, he threw his escort sotnia at the factories taken by the Reds. At the same time, he gave orders for the concentration on our right of all the cavalry on the battlefield. As the 4<sup>th</sup> Kuban Division was nearby, it arrived first and, reinforced by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Kabardynski, was directed by the General in a manner so as to take the Reds in the flank. This second charge, executed under the eyes of great commander adored by his troops and with the expectation of great success which came to won, was accomplished with enthusiasm and gave decisive results. The sailor regiment which opposed the charge of our cavalry with persistence, was completely destroyed and the situation re-established. About 18 o'clock, the Reds tried a third attack along the ravine of Griaznaja: that attack was repulsed by a charge of the 4<sup>th</sup> Kabardynski regiment.

The results of the combat were:

1. A complete check for the Reds, who renounced for some time trying to attack the fortified position
2. The morale of our troops, above all the cavalry regiments, was lifted again. As the victory had been won by a series of supreme efforts by our cavalry, a cavalry that had already started to lose the habit of winning, that same cavalry, victorious again, quickly regained the taste for victory, even whilst it had heavy losses. The Mountain Division lost close to 120 men dead or wounded. It was ready, however, for more sacrifices.

On 7 September, the tanks finally arrived. General Wrangel committed himself to a counter-offensive and to destroying the grouping at Orlovka, carrying the decisive blow, from West to East, from beside the farm Biezrodnieski.

The offensive was to be launched on 9 September, at daybreak near Biezrodnieski. To this end a cavalry group was formed. It contained the 3<sup>rd</sup> Kuban division and the Mixed Mountain Division, supported by 6 tanks. About 5 o'clock, the cavalry, commanded by General Babiev, started moving. It crossed the Konnaja

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<sup>10</sup> *mitrailleient* = shrapnelled?



ravine and directed itself to the north of Orlovka on the communications of the enemy. The tanks advanced on the right wing of the body, escorted by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Kabardynski Regiment. At about 5:30, the tanks and the advanced elements of the cavalry made contact with the Reds. The effect produced by the tanks was so decisive that the whole of the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division immediately started to retreat. At the same time, the infantry of General Pisarev, starting from out fortified line, started a frontal attack.

General Babiev was still advancing, the Mountain Division at the head. The Kazakzajewski Regiment, having repulsed the elements charged with protecting the enemy's flank, approached the main road to Saratov, cluttered with columns in retreat and executed a charge which transformed this retreat into a disorganised flight. It captured close to 2,000 prisoners. At the same time, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Kabardynski Regiments, on the orders of General Babiev, went further north. They cut the main road south of the village of Jerzowka, sabred the convoys and took 13 canon. The defeat of the Reds became a catastrophe.

But the elements of the Mountain Division were very weak and were dispersed and spread out on a huge battlefield. The situation could change, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Kuban Division being late.

Indeed, the Red Gorodivodov cavalry brigade appeared from the direction of Orlovka. This brigade, who had to protect the retreat of its infantry, was only thinking to save itself, but it marched in perfect order. Heading north, it inevitably had to bump into parts of the Mountain Division, victorious until then but no longer in order.

The result was that the Kazakejewski Regiment had to leave the conquered booty and retire onto the 3<sup>rd</sup> Kuban Division. The two Kabardynski regiments suffered major losses. The entry into action of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Kuban Division re-established the situation. But that division having made its approach at the walk, the Red cavalry had time to save itself to the north and the remainder of the 28<sup>th</sup> ID avoided total destruction.

Despite this, the success of 9 September was important. The enemy suffered heavy losses, and retired in disorder to the north of Dubovka, 40 kilometres from Orlovka.

And this time again, the victory was due to the action of the cavalry, even if that cavalry was only directed in a very mediocre manner.

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In the second half of September, the Reds retook their offensive against the Army of the Caucasus, with their main effort against the group of Ulagai near Kotluban. General Ulagai had then under his command the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Kuban Divisions, the Kabardinskaja Division (formerly the Mixed Mountain), the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade of the Kuban Division, the Inguszkaja Brigade, the 4<sup>th</sup> Plastun Battalion, 2 detachments of tanks and 5 armoured trains.

The first day of the combat (22 September), the Reds having repelled the advanced elements of General Ulagai, occupied the village of Graczi, but a charge of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kuban and Kabardinskaja Divisions, made at night after sunset, dislodged them from this village. The Zloba corps of the Red cavalry, which advanced in the sector to the west of the railway line was able to penetrate momentarily the village of Rozsosza, but under the menace of an attack in the rear it retired to the north. On 23 September, the Reds, having entered into action with the bulk of the 37<sup>th</sup>, 38<sup>th</sup> and 39<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions, were beaten to the north of Graczi, where they lost more than 3,000 prisoners. But their cavalry still remained intact. (see the sketch #2)

On 26 September, they attempted to reach a decision by means of a grand cavalry action. The Kloba Cavalry Corps (8 strong regiments), reinforced by the first elements of the Dumenko Corps which had started to arrive, leaving the region of Medviediev -Varlamov in the direction of Graczi. On our side, at Graczi were the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kuban Divisions and the Kabardynskaja Division, and four tanks, under the orders of General Mamonov. The concentration of that cavalry was protected by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kubanski Regiment and the 4<sup>th</sup> Kabardynski Regiment extended to the north of Graczi.

About 7 o'clock, the Red cavalry, advancing in columns of mass<sup>11</sup>, made our covering regiments recoil to the crest to the north of Graczi. Then General Mamonov, commander of the Graczi group, led the bulk of the three divisions onto the crest, the Kabardynskaja Division forming the right of the order of battle, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kuban the centre and the 1<sup>st</sup> Kuban the left wing. The formation adopted for the approach march and for

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<sup>11</sup> *colonnes de masses*





the combat was the columns of mass and line of columns of platoons<sup>12</sup>. All the regiments of the Kabardynskaja Division advanced in line of columns, the tanks in the gaps between the divisions.

Our movement was made out of the view of the enemy thanks to the folds in the ground. We were not bothered and, the march of the Reds being made in the open, all our batteries had the opportunity to fire effectively.

At the moment where we arrived on the crest, the thin lines of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kubanski and 4<sup>th</sup> Kabardynski retired to the rear, pursued vigorously by the deep bodies of the enemy. The distance was close to 2 kilometres. I ordered the colonel commanding the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kubanski to rally his regiment on my right wing, and, at the same time as the neighbouring divisions, my regiments advanced forward at the trot. The tanks led. The enemy came to meet us at the gallop, but it was a gallop that progressively slowed.

When the bodies were within 1 kilometre of us, they turned around and left at the gallop as quickly as they had made their approach. There was no impact against my division or any of the others. Still, on our left the Reds had shown themselves firmer and the 1<sup>st</sup> Lubinski Regiment reached and sabred them. It was not however true shock. There was only the pursuit of elements that had been able to hold up to the moment of collision.

This combat terminated the first period of operations around Tsaritsyn. These operations could be called : Grand defensive battle won by cavalry against an army of all arms in normal proportions.

The combats of Wieliko - Kniazeskaja, in May 1919, were also a victory won by the cavalry in an offensive battle.

One may ask me why, having chosen the battle of Tsaritsyn to illuminate the question, I was not able to find some episodes where the shock<sup>13</sup> [of a charge] had taken place. Because the question of shock is the still the principal issue of all cavalry theories.

*Well, I have come to participate in at least a score of cavalry combats and I have never seen shock.*

I will always recall the combat for the station of Kavkazkaja of 10 March 1920, where I was given the chance to observe from close-up, but in a tranquil position, the psychological moment.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Kuban Divisions made an approach march against the Red cavalry (Kudzyszko Brigade, reinforced by elements of the Gaj Division). The 2<sup>nd</sup> Kuban Division advanced directly, and I was ordered to lead the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade of the 4<sup>th</sup> Kuban Division (1<sup>st</sup> Czernomorski Regiment and 1<sup>st</sup> Partizanski Regiment) and attack the enemy in the flank. The terrain being cut with ravines which it was necessary to cross and my distance from the enemy being greater than that of the other divisions, the decisive moment came before the entry into action of my brigade, but I was able to see, and I saw clearly. My brigade being on top of the last crest, a picture presented itself: one of the regiments of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kuban Division, deployed for battle, approached at the trot a Red brigade, also deployed and marching at the trot. Further away another regiment was in lines of columns of mass. The Reds drew their sabres first. The two opposing lines approached each other very quickly. They were then separated by only 150 to 200 paces. Then the Red brigade as well as the regiment at the head of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kuban Division abruptly stopped. And, at the same time the other regiment, which was marching in support in lines of columns, turned tail. A moment of waiting, a moment of only a few seconds, but it seemed to last an eternity.

The bulk of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was still advancing. Then the Reds, in place of charging, turned their backs and galloped away. The regiment at the head of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kuban Division, the one that had stopped, refound its élan and set to pursuing the enemy.

But as the horses of those who are trying to save themselves run more quickly, the cossacks of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division were not in a position to reach their adversaries.

There was thus no shock, as there wasn't in no matter what meeting between the two cavalries. For it to be able to take place, it is necessary not only that the two cavalries be of a morale equivalent, which happens often enough, but that they both have a very high morale, which happens very rarely.

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<sup>12</sup> *la ligne de colonnes de pelotons*

<sup>13</sup> *choc* = in this case specifically the shock or impact of a charging cavalry unit, hereafter merely “shock”



I have been told of the shock which took place at the combat of the 10<sup>th</sup> Russian Cavalry Division near to Brody, in August 1914, against the Hungarian hussars. I have seen some officers of that division who carry scars from wounds received in the middle of the face in 1914, but that combat was exceptional.

Well, in 1921, although I have seen the charge of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Osetinski Regiment near Gumrak on 30 June 1920, a charge where that regiment having only 20 sabres total, had rolled a Red regiment, without any shock of course, I recall the words of Ardent de Picq regarding the Eglofsheim Cuirassiers and would like to repeat it a thousand times: *the shock is only a mirage*.

But if the shock does not exist in reality, if belief in it is only a prejudice, one knows enough to insist on the absolute necessity of that belief for the morale and success of the arm. There is always one cavalry which turns its back, and it is always the one which trembles at the idea of shock, those who hope to see their enemy weaken and who weaken themselves.

The cavalry of the Army of the Caucasus, having always been victorious from Stavropol up to Tsaritsyn, had got used to always seeing the enemy cavalry flee. It had forgotten even the possibility of shock. So, when for the first time the Red cavalry, at the psychological moment, did not turn their backs, it was then our cavalry, who, in place of seeking the shock whose idea alone assures victory, turned their backs in their turn.

And very quickly, an exceptional case became a habit. Then came the defeat north of Kamyszyn, a retreat, nearly a débâcle. Finally, the miracle of 5 September which was needed to revive the lost taste for victory.

On the other hand, cavalry which has that belief in shock, who does not wait to see his adversary flee and who seeks the shock, will never find it. It will have the supreme joy of seeing the back of the enemy. Such was the General Wrangel's cavalry of the combats of Autumn 1919 around Stavropol and Pietrovskoje, such was again Barbovicz's cavalry during the Summer 1920 campaign.

Shock does not exist, but it is necessary to seek it. *It is necessary to wish to collide with the enemy, whether they are on foot or on horse. It is the eternal soul of cavalry combat, the unchangeable soul, the soul which did not change during the Civil War.*

Well, if the principal thing is seeking shock, do formations have any large importance?

At the start of the Civil War, during the campaign of Summer 1918, the cossack cavalry regiments and even the divisions, hardly felt burning desire and not having great leaders at their head, adopted as the sole combat formation that which made it easiest to get away. The Red cavalry, inferior to ours, imitated us in employing on the "lava" at first. Well, the "lava" it is true, is a combat order made up of a screen of skirmishers followed by a line in dense formation. But the "lavas" which one saw at the start of the Kuban campaign were really a staggered set of lines deployed in skirmisher.

In these conditions, the cavalry always dispersed over too large a front, having no hammer to carry the decisive blow and incapable of manoeuvring, were never able to do anything other than wander<sup>14</sup> around on the spot. It was unable to obtain any appreciable success.

In August, the army saw General Wrangel arrive and take command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division (4<sup>th</sup> Kuban Regiment and the Circassian Regiment). Immediately after the first combats he commanded, General Wrangel *had strictly forbidden the use of the lava*, and had demanded that his cavalry adopt dense formations. The victories of Michaljlovkaja, Uruskaja and Stavropol proved him right.

The order of battle adopted, first by General Wrangel, and afterwards by all the army, was a combination of lines of columns of platoons and of mass, preceded by a very weak covering screen. The format of a cavalry division in combat formation according to these ideas, could be defined as follows:

1. The covering screen, having as its goals:
  - a) covering the deployment
  - b) scouting the battlefield
  - c) preparing the attack with fire

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<sup>14</sup> I'm uncertain of this as the original appears to have a spelling mistake



To this end, the covering screen was only ever formed from one or two sotnias in skirmisher; but it was always reinforced by large number of machine-guns capable of producing a considerable effect and repelling the enemy's advanced elements.

2. The elements of shock having as its goal the charge as such. This demanded sufficient forces, capable of breaking any resistance and manageable enough to be able to change direction, the size of these shock elements were generally about half the disposable forces, that is a brigade for a cavalry division. The relevant units formed as line of columns of platoons, this formation being at the same time manoeuvrable and lively. It was only at the decisive moment of 100 paces, and even some tens of paces from the enemy, that they deployed their frontage.

3. The elements of manoeuvre, for which the aims were:

- a) supporting of the first shock elements
- b) exploiting any success
- c) parrying an unforeseen events from a combat

These elements advanced in the densest formations, that is to say columns of mass.

Such an order of battle, strong and supple at the same time, was nearly always employed, as good against the enemy's cavalry as its infantry.

It would be fair to stress here this idea that, on today's battlefield, you can no longer have different orders of battle against the different arms. The three arms are, indeed, intimately linked, you can always expect to meet in a charge against cavalry some elements of foot and, on the other hand, behind the lines of skirmishers you can never be sure not to find some cavalry units.

This last possibility is particularly dangerous. Nothing weakens cavalry as much as having success. And you will never see as much disorder in the ranks of charging regiments as after a victorious charge.

Well, how many times has a counter-attack from enemy cavalry, made by greatly inferior forces, caused certain success to be lost? I have already cited the case of the Kazakzejewski Regiment in the combat of 9 September; I am able to recall the charge made by the 1<sup>st</sup> Kuban, 1<sup>st</sup> Umanski and 1<sup>st</sup> Zaporozski Regiments of 12 June at the combat of Czervlennaja, the charge of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kabardynski on 14 June near Voroponov station and a number of other encounters where the fruits of heavy sacrifice were lost as a result of a lack of forward thought.

That is why it is necessary that the battle order for cavalry masses be unique.

At least during the Civil War, it was General Wrangel and commanders of his school who acted according to these principals. Our adversaries quickly profited from the lesson, and the horsemen of Dumenko, Budienny, Zloba and others still, ended by adopting the same methods.

Well, in the battle order that we are studying, one can discern the these major characteristics:

1. The tendency to combine the force of shock with the force of firepower

Following this idea one wants to arrange the cavalry in deep combat formations. At the same time, to increase firepower one needs to multiply the number of machine-guns. Each regiment possessed, as I have already said, 30 to 40 pieces. The co-operation of tanks, armoured cars and other technical means must also be pursued with the double aim of allying shock and firepower.

2. Our cavalry, only running into infantry and artillery of mediocre courage and training, started to despise enemy fire. One even risked attacking in columns of mass without deploying. Such a case was for example the great charge of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kuban Division, the morning of 14 June when these divisions broke through the fortified position of the Reds south of Voroponov (before Tsaritsyn). Without any doubt, it would be rash to think that such a method would be admissible in a European war. But it can be that exaggerated prudence prevents a charge, passing success to the other side. In any case, if one does not renounce completely cavalry action in battle, if one admits the possibility of great [cavalry] rides<sup>15</sup>, one cannot be worried by enemy fire.

<sup>15</sup> *chevauchée* which has, in English, the association with deep cavalry raids in the rear, but maybe not here



If you will permit me to recall two great attacks of the Great War: the charge of Demnia of 12 September 1914 and that of Gajvoronka, in Galicia, on 12 September 1915, in which I took part. In the moments preceding the latter charge above all, it was necessary for me to cross a barrage, a German barrage, and I passed.

One needs to will it and one will always pass. Will to beat the Reds always gave victory even when charging in columns of mass.

Time is lacking to specify the details of questions to which great importance rests, the questions of the approach march and the preparation of an attack. But it would be wrong to think that, during an operation, the cavalry commanders of the Civil War were not concerned to preserve their forces from enemy fire. As cavalry is only strong when charging, and as minor useless losses, during the preparation, kill the victory in advance, one was always attentive to the exploitation of the terrain. And the battlegrounds of the Civil War presented the same look of a desert as the battlegrounds of the Great War.

Before finishing, I would like to raise the question of the influence of technical means in the methods of combat, above all tanks, armoured cars and plane squadrons. It has to be said that, during the Civil War, the cavalry felt itself nearly weaponless against these machines of war. Neither the Red cavalry nor ours knew how to fight armoured cars and tanks. And, to paralyse it, there was no other way than to install batteries intended to shoot only at the enemy's armour. During the Summer 1920 campaign, I saw in a combat at Forgajenka an armoured car break through the front of two regiments, of which one was the Guard. I saw in the combat of Graczi on 26 September 1919 the Red cavalrymen desperately rush our tanks to be destroyed by point-blank fire.

Neither human bravery, nor the shells of special batteries could do anything against the war machines and the solution to the problem is yet to be found. This sought-for solution is all the more important as the next war will see ten times more cars and tanks than we have seen up to now. Well, one will only be able to keep cavalry mass from the formidable shock of the assault machines by adding to it the same tools of war in sufficient numbers.

As for aviation, it has shown itself to be an enemy which the cavalry has to be careful of. I recall a tragic episode at the combat of Heidelberg, at the start on August 1920, where the General Kloczkov's Don cossack brigade was attacked by a squadron of our aeroplanes, bombarded without pity despite the signs of distress and suffered heavy losses.

Well, for aviation as for tanks and armoured cars, there is only the fight of machine against machine and aerial victory will assure the success of the cavalry.

Consequently, the development of technical means of war carries the need to increase the strikepower of independent cavalry. Even the purely tactical conditions demand an action en masse, and if one wishes to see the cavalry be in a state to realise more extended goals, one is obliged to follow even more strictly the law of concentration of mass.

But I am not going to leave the limits of combat. I know that even isolated squadrons are able to produce large results. The memory of Bechtolsheim at Custozza will never be extinguished.

I received from the Civil War a feeling of absolute clearness. Tactical success depends on the forces in action. Above all it is a question of psychology. When one finds oneself isolated, the inner feeling of those that have to conquer is never of a comfortable nature, but when one sees lots and lots of friendly squadrons, then one feels strong and one is certain of victory.

During the Summer 1918 campaign, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Regiment filled the role of divisional cavalry for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division of the Volunteer Army. The work of divisional cavalry is always a labour of details, a labour away from the masses. Well, that regiment, for which training and morale were superior to cossack regiments, was never able to obtain great success although there were some splendid actions.

I will cite an example: at the combat of Bielaja Glina, on 5 July 1918, I had the honour of having under my orders the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> squadrons of the regiment. General Denikin ordered me to charge retiring enemy infantry. The two squadrons had only a 100 sabres. An armoured car was to support the charge. The little troop went out in front. As far as one was able to see there was only long dense chains of skirmishers recoiling in good order. Their fire was very violent. The order of the commander-in-chief was explicit. It



was necessary to attack with no chance of success. The 2<sup>nd</sup> squadron went in front and the Polish squadron in support at the trot, then at charge gallop. By bad luck, the armoured car had a mechanical problem and stopped. Having seen the halt of the car and the small number of cavalymen, the Red skirmishers redoubled their fire. Simultaneously a group of Red cavalry appeared on our flank, but it was repulsed by the Polish squadron, which altered direction. The 2<sup>nd</sup> squadron continued its charge, but having lost 50% of its effectives, it was not able to reach the enemy and had to rally to the rear. It was only the entry into action of the armoured car, fixing its problem, which was able to shift the Red infantry.

That was a charge executed by insufficient forces and feeling isolated. Well, that day, General Erdedi's independent cavalry, having attacked large enemy forces near Kalnibolotskaja, smashed them, although its regiments at the time only were of mediocre value. But in the first combat there was only a smattering of cavalry, in the second the rush of a mass.

And later still, one always succeeded better when one did not neglect to concentrate forces. If the big battalions are always right, that maxim has to be still more justified for the big squadrons.

If, in the course of the Civil War, the role of the cavalry was often of the highest importance, sometimes predominant importance, the Army of the Caucasus, which was a cavalry army in May and June of 1919, was able to beat and finish off the Red Armies defending the area around Tsaritsyn. If the Budienny's Cavalry Army, in the Autumn of 1919, was able to carry the decisive blow to the extended armies of General Denikin, it is because Budienny's cavalry, as well as that of General Wrangel, constituted a large mass and a real force.

Here is the substance of the concepts of the Civil War. Large masses, desire for combat, resolution to commit fully, a battle order supple and deep, *the combination of shock and firepower, these are the cavalry combat methods of the Russian Civil war.* All the embedded ideas at the battles of the Kuban, Tsaritsyn, Northern Tauridia, are as old as the soul of cavalry itself, ideas somewhat forgotten under the influence of technical progress, but which have to retake their place in the war of tomorrow.

