

## **The Battle of Warsaw in August 1920 and the crisis connected therewith.<sup>1</sup>**

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Let us first agree to the meaning of the term “crisis of the battle” as representing that moment when one of the belligerents (or both), by reason of the action of the enemy or because of some other circumstance, is compelled to abandon the idea of maintaining his objective either entirely, or at least temporarily, pending a more favourable turn in the situation. Under the term “battle” we may list “war”, “campaign”, “battle proper”, “action”, “skirmish” and, therefore, in speaking of the crisis of a battle we may be guided by the criteria pertaining to the basic conception of “battle”, and terms derived from that. In analysing the crisis of the battle, we shall first establish the objective of the latter – after which we shall present the reasons for abandoning it.

With a view to avoiding misunderstanding, I shall first emphasise the fact that I draw a distinction between the so-called “Battle of Warsaw” and the “Warsaw Operation”, to which the term “Battle of Warsaw” was subsequently applied.

The “Warsaw Operation” involved on the enemy side their entire West Front<sup>2</sup> – and on the Polish side their Northern and Middle Fronts, extending in both cases from the German frontier to the line of the Wieprz River. The “Battle of Warsaw” on the other hand was restricted to the localities situated within the area of the immediate approaches to Warsaw between the Bug and the Wieprz Rivers – embracing the operations of the Polish First, Second and Fourth Armies, and of the Soviet Sixteenth Army, parts of its Third Army, and the Mozyr Group.

If, in the “Warsaw Operation”, the objective of the enemy may be stated to have been the “crushing of the opponent on the Vistula, driving him southward, and capturing the city of Warsaw,” and the objective of the Polish Armies, that of crushing the enemy on the eastern bank on the Vistula, and by so doing to prevent him from capturing Warsaw, then in the “Battle of Warsaw” the enemy was intent upon capturing the city of Warsaw, and the Polish

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<sup>1</sup> The text that follows is not an exact replica of the original.

- 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) Most clarifying notes are as they stand in the original, including any indication who they are from. My personal notes are followed by “MP”.
- 4) Notes only concerned with citing references are marked <sup>ref</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> A “Front” was the Polish and Russian term for what is often called in English an “Army Group”.



Armies in turn upon the thwarting of his attempts at capturing it, and on crushing his forces that were disposed along the approaches to Warsaw.

These objectives we shall regard as the basis for both sides in the “Battle for Warsaw”.

### **Guiding Strategic Conceptions of the Belligerents**

On the supposition that the principal Polish forces were located to the north of the Bug River, and that it was on the Vistula where the greater Polish resistance was to be expected, the controlling idea of the enemy manoeuvre was to deliver the main blow also to the north of the Bug. The mission of inflicting this blow had been assigned to three armies (Russian Fourth, Fifteenth and Third Armies) and to the Cavalry Corps. Starting from the latitude of Brok, the boundary lines between these armies were shifted northward<sup>3</sup> running due west, with the Russian Third Army assigned to the zone directly north of the Bug River, with the mission of seizing Modlin. After forcing the Vistula north of the Bug these armies were to change direction southward, driving by this manoeuvre the remaining forces of the enemy into the Carpathians, at the same time cutting him off from Gdansk and also from Poznań – “both hotbeds of reaction and of the Polish bourgeoisie.”

By thus encircling the city of Warsaw, it should meanwhile fall under the hammer blows of the Russian Sixteenth Army, which was to advance to the south of the Bug, making its main effort with its left wing with the object of forcing the Vistula north of Warsaw. The Russian Third Army, before reaching Modlin, was to assist the Russian Sixteenth Army in the execution of this mission by attacking with a portion of its forces from the vicinity of Załubice<sup>4</sup> in the direction of Praga, “with the mission of pushing those enemy forces away from Warsaw that were retreating before the Russian Sixteenth Army”.<sup>ref</sup> The weak Mozyr Group, covering this manoeuvre from the south, was to force the Vistula in the area Dęblin – Maciejowice, and thus turn Warsaw from the south.

The basic idea of the Polish plan of action consisted in the following: On the Northern Front, from the German frontier to Dęblin, it was proposed to prevent, with the aid of the Fifth Army which was to operate aggressively from the Modlin area, an envelopment along the German frontier, and to check the progress of the enemy “by means of a sanguinary defence directed against the expected enemy attacks on the Warsaw bridgehead”, which mission was entrusted to the Polish First Army. Then, by action of the Polish Second Army between Góra-Kalwaria and Dęblin, it was planned to frustrate possible attempts on part of the enemy to force the Vistula south of Warsaw.

On the Middle Front, it was proposed to make use of the time gained by the fighting on the Northern Front for a rapid concentration of the manoeuvring group (Fourth and Third Armies)

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<sup>3</sup> This is incorrect, they continued to move, in general, due west – Ed.

<sup>4</sup> Eight kilometres north of Radzymin – Ed.



in the Wieprz basin. After which, upon being supplied with fresh troops and properly organised, it was to strike in a northerly direction against the flanks and rear of those enemy forces that were engaged in fighting and exhausted from battle with the forces of the Northern Front. In active co-operation with the First Army, the manoeuvring group was to disrupt and drive back to the Bug the enemy forces situated near Warsaw. Afterwards, by co-ordinated action of all armies, it was planned to push the main enemy forces, upon turning them from the east, against the German frontier and to inflict on them a final defeat. Out of the Second Army units withdrawn from action in the first days of the offensive, it was proposed to form a reserve for use in a counter-offensive against such enemy forces as might threaten our forces from the south, or from some other direction.

The manner of execution and the difficulties that had to be overcome incident to the attack on the Wieprz, as well as the operation of the Polish Fifth Army, constitute a subject for special research. Adhering to the “sanguinary defence directed against the expected enemy attacks on the Warsaw bridgehead fortifications”, which more than anything else tends to bring us closer to the matter before us, we shall touch upon the operations of the Polish Fifth and Second Armies, as well as upon the operation on the Wieprz only in so far as these events exercised any particular influence on the campaign.

### **Situation on the Eve of the Battle**

On August 12, the eve of the battle, the Polish Fifth Army found itself in a situation in which its concentration had barely started, in the vicinity of Modlin, and was therefore far from being ready for the offensive. The Polish Second Army was establishing itself on the western bank of the Vistula, from Góra-Kalwaria (inclusive) to Dęblin (exclusive), and was occupying on the eastern bank some small bridgehead fortifications (at Góra-Kalwaria and Maciejowice), together with some small observation posts on this bank. In the basin of the Wieprz River preparations for the offensive were in full swing.

The Polish First Army now withdrawing to the Warsaw bridgehead fortifications was experiencing a change in commanders. The Military Governor of Warsaw, until then subordinated to the War Ministry, assumed command of this army, without any change in its mission.

The first, and at the same time the final, defensive line of bridgehead fortifications had been occupied for some time, considerable fortification work having been accomplished. Thus, within the Zegrze bridgehead fortifications the 7<sup>th</sup> Reserve Brigade was stationed; the sector extending from the mouth of the Rządza River to Leśniakowizna, inclusive, was held by the 11<sup>th</sup> Division; along the line Leśniakowizna – Karczew, inclusive, there were stationed separate battalions and replacement companies as well as garrison formations, which



eventually were to be combined into a division in proportion<sup>5</sup> as they were needed to occupy sectors within the bridgehead fortifications.

The divisions of the Polish First Army, which had been moved into the bridgehead fortifications, were distributed as follows: 10<sup>th</sup> Division, in the area Jabłonna – Łajsk – Chotomów, constituting the reserve of the Front Commander. This division had only three regiments, its fourth regiment not being expected to join until the evening of August 15; the 1<sup>st</sup> Lithuanian-Byelorussian Division was located behind the 11<sup>th</sup> Division in the Turów – Kobyłka – Pustelnik area, in army reserve; the 8<sup>th</sup> Division occupied the sector Leśniakowizna (inclusive) – Okuniew (inclusive) with one brigade in Rembertów in army reserve. The 15<sup>th</sup> Division held the sector extending from Okuniew up to Karczew (inclusive).<sup>6</sup> Divisional rear-guards were left on the line Dąbrówka – Tłuszcz – Stanisławów – Mińsk-Mazowiecki during the whole of 13 August.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Lithuanian-Byelorussian Division, having been ordered to join the reserve behind the 11<sup>th</sup> Division by way of Dąbrówka and Tłuszcz, was directed to occupy these points at a time when it had already passed through them. In consequence the elements designated for the defence of these villages had to turn back and to engage in fighting for their possession. The occupation of Dąbrówka proved unsuccessful; and so these elements which had been designated for the purpose, with the enemy at their heels (the 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division) retreated behind the first defence line during the night of the 12<sup>th</sup>. On the other hand, Tłuszcz was already occupied in the evening after a fight with the divisional cavalry of the Russian 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division. The battle of the Mińsk Regiment for the possession of Tłuszcz continued through the entire night with the utmost stubbornness; some prisoners were captured from the 27<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division.

Regarding the state of readiness on this day of the Polish Fifth Army, the following document speaks for itself: “the immediate mission of the army, which is just now concentrating on Modlin, consists of blocking the enemy’s advance by way of Pułtusk and Gołymin, so that the 17<sup>th</sup> Division and the detachment of Lieutenant Colonel Kopa may be able to effect an orderly withdraw on Nasielsk.”<sup>ref</sup>

### **State of Readiness of the Bridgehead Fortifications**

The advance of the enemy, directed as it was straight on Warsaw, was to be broken along the so-called first defence line of the Warsaw bridgehead fortifications, which, starting from the

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<sup>5</sup> Sikorski lists a “Szokalski Group” of some 3,400 bayonets. Antoni Zawadzki was commander of the Warsaw Garrison and Sikorski gives him a similar sized group as well. MP.

<sup>6</sup> Karczew had been included in the defence line at the very last moment; however, the work of fortifying the positions had been carried out so slowly that soon its defence was abandoned, the line being shifted to the rear of the Vistula and Świder. Here the front line now extended from Góra-Kalwaria (inclusive) along the western bank of the Vistula up to the mouth of the Świder and from there further on along that river.



mouth of the Świder river extended along the line of works built formerly during the World War by the Germans, and which formed part of the Warsaw bridgehead, the so-called “*Brückenkopf Warschau*”. This line comprised a complete system of excellently sited trenches constructed to meet the requirements of modern technique, strongly reinforced with concrete, and but slightly damaged by time and lack of proper care. The general arrangement of this defence system afforded a splendid chance for a flank attack; immediately in rear of it there were situated excellent artillery observation posts connected with one another.

The first defensive line conformed to the line of these fortifications only from the mouth of the Świder and further up that stream and the Mienia stream as far as Wiązowna, inclusive. At this point the defensive line left the German bridgehead – leaving it 8 kilometres behind – and headed directly due north via Mishałowek – Okuniew – Leśniakowizna – Wołomin – Czarna – Kraszew Dziełny – Radzymin – Mokre (all remaining within the belt of the Polish defence), extending further along the course of the Rządza River up to its mouth. This defence line terminated in the bridgehead fortifications of the Zegrze on the north bank of the River Bug.<sup>7</sup>

The line of the German bridgehead, comprising the second defence line, beginning at Wiązowna, ran along the sand hills somewhat to the east of Rembertów, via Zielonka and Pustelnik up to Wólka Radzyńska, where it turned north, extending to the Narew River and resting upon Fort Beniaminów. This shorter line rendered it possible to contract the various combat sectors and as a result to set aside larger reserves. Although it did possess all of the qualities which tended to facilitate a defence under conditions of modern warfare, its first line, which should have been prepared in good season, left much to be desired, no matter how one might look at it.

The Commander of the Northern Front,<sup>8</sup> on 12 August, characterised the first line and the condition of the work that was carried on in it as follows: <sup>ref</sup>

“The first line of this sector (of 11<sup>th</sup> Division) is still incomplete, the siting at many places is faulty. Wire entanglements do not permit the delivery of flanking fire. Work upon it is being conducted exclusively by recently arrived replacements, who have yet to undergo training and prepare themselves for combat and for service in the trenches. I have not met a single civil or military engineer on the entire line.”

The condition of this line from Leśniakowizna via Okuniew to Wiązowna, inclusive, was in no respect any better. The reports of unit commanders who had arrived ahead of time for the purpose of familiarising themselves with the conditions of defence, reflected extreme disappointment and rage; only rarely were trenches dug properly; wire entanglements were poorly arranged, in total disregard of the most elementary tactical precepts; artillery

<sup>7</sup> An error for River Narew. Note the dam there is modern and did not exist in 1920. MP.

<sup>8</sup> General Józef Haller de Hallenburg. His Army Commanders were General Władysław Sikorski (5A) and General Franciszek Latinik (1A). MP.



observation was poor; emplacements were not properly cleaned out; the space in front of the trenches abounded with dead space and hidden approaches, this being particularly true in the case of the Leśniakowizna – Okuniew sector; natural rear positions had not been fortified.

In the transfer of the system of defence to this line, the guiding thought, apparently, had been to remove a possible field of battle as far as possible from Warsaw.

### **Peculiarities of Terrain Features in the Radzymin Area**

The negative qualities of the terrain in the Radzymin sector, as regards both defensive lines, are so outstanding that they will become at once apparent upon a most superficial inspection of the map<sup>9</sup>. The corridor where Ciemne village is located, bounded on the north by a line passing through Radzymin and the end of the forest of Wiktorów, and in the south by the edge of the Nowy Janków forest, closed in from the west by a group of buildings along the Radzymin – Cegielnia road, becomes quite inaccessible for artillery observation from the moment the defender departs for the second defence line, in the event that he does not desire, finds himself unable, or for any other reason fails to make use of the observation post at Fort Beniaminów. This circumstance tends to greatly favour an unobstructed concentration of reserves on the part of the aggressor in the corridor of Ciemne village, particularly if the defender be deprived of means of aerial observation – as was actually the case in the Radzymin sector during the Battle of Warsaw.

Any movement northward on Stary Janków or Ciemne is flanked by the belt of defences of Helenów and by a natural barrier formed by the line of the Czarna River from Nadma to Nowy Czarna, which was at the time entirely unfortified – but which the enemy, nevertheless, at no time succeeded in taking. From the direction of Stary Czarna no observation is possible toward the north. Friendly movements along the Radzymin highway, that is, if the enemy is not pinned along this corridor – even after subduing his fire from the southern edge of the Nowy Janków wood – are menaced in flank from this corridor upon emerging from the wood and arriving on a line paralleling it.

The two parallel lines running along the villages of Radzymińska Wieska – Aleksandrów, on the one hand, and Cegielnia – Słupno – Mata – Wólka Radzymińska on the other, situated to the west of the Radzymin highway, form natural and very favourable defensive lines, as well as favourable lines of departure for an attack.

Artillery observation extends deeper into the corridor from the direction of Fort Beniaminów. At the same time, the latter affords splendid flank observation of the lines of villages just mentioned. An advance from the direction of Beniaminów, supported by properly observed artillery fire, will always serve to retard materially the advance of the enemy either on

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<sup>9</sup> German map 1:100,000 which was primarily used by the forces in 1920. This is why the original of this document gave all the place names in German forms. MP.



Pustelnik or Wólka Radzywińska. The terrain features in the area Pekelne Wrota to the south of Wólka Radzywińska really form the gate to the wide corridor of Izabelin – Stanisławów – Brzeziny – Praga at the present time drained and possessing several parallel roads leading to Praga.

The considerable attention which we have devoted to the nature of the terrain in the vicinity of Radzymin and Ossów is deemed necessary in view of the fact that through these points passed the principal enemy forces on their way to the Battle of Warsaw; Polish intelligence summaries repeatedly called attention to this several days before the battle.<sup>10</sup>

### **Method Pursued in the Employment of the Artillery**

Hope for the successful defence of the capital was to a large extent based upon a timely preparation of the bridgehead fortifications. But primarily the hopes were founded upon the successful employment of the comparatively large artillery forces, and their abundant ammunition supplies. Upon the infantry which, as we know, had been demoralised by their recent retreats, the least hopes had been staked.

The command of the entire bridgehead artillery had been placed into the hands of one commander. The bridgehead had been divided into two sectors: the north sector, which coincided with that of the 11<sup>th</sup> Division, and the south sector, which embraced the remainder. To each sector an artillery chief had been assigned, in whose hands rested the control of the sector artillery. The degree of centralisation of control depended, on the one hand, upon the instructions issued upon the subject, and on the other, of course, upon the personality of the particular sector chief.

In the south sector the requirement of centralisation did not manifest itself very strongly, and so the divisional artillery had remained with the respective organisations. In the north sector (“Radzymin” Artillery Group) centralisation had been effected to the utmost, in that the artillery sector was split up into three sub-sectors, conforming to the sub-sectors of the infantry regiments of the 11<sup>th</sup> Division. Each of these sub-sectors, independent of its organisational ties with divisions or artillery battalions, had received an equal number of batteries and embraced with mathematical exactness one-third of the entire sector. As a result the divisions, used as they were to their own artillery battalions, now received batteries with which they were not familiar. Aside from the divisional artillery, the sector artillery commander had at his disposal light and heavy batteries which did not form part of the divisions and which had been placed beforehand in suitable selected positions.

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<sup>10</sup> These intelligence summaries (based on radio intelligence intercepts – Ed) reported quite accurately the boundary lines of the divisions, the directions, and even the areas which the divisions were to occupy on August 14. They fairly agree, even as to details, with the data we now possess derived from enemy sources.



Dependence of the artillery upon commanders of infantry sectors up to and including divisional commanders was much restricted. As a general rule, all orders for the opening of fire – either preparation or barrage – were issued by brigade or divisional commanders at the headquarters of the artillery group commander who, depending on the situation, designated for the purpose the batteries or number of groups of light or heavy artillery, as he saw fit. The batteries were arranged in groups within their respective sectors: in the left sector – primarily east of Fort Beniaminów; in the middle sector – in the immediate vicinity of Radzymin; in the right sector – in the area between the Czarna River and the railway at Wołomin. In all, there were 32 batteries in the north sector.

Only one long-range battery was located west of the second defence line, under the immediate control of the sector commander. The remaining batteries were located between the first and second defence lines. A detailed plan for the mutual support of artillery sub-sectors had been worked out. Two signal lines connected the artillery batteries with one another; the first passing through Marki – Pustelnik – Struga – Dąbkowizna; the second through Marki – Kobialka – Izabelin – Dąbkowizna. Both lines joined at Dąbkowizna (near Beniaminów), where the central telegraph station of the left and north sub-sectors was located.

The artillery of the first defence line, already distributed and grouped for several days, stretched out in cordon fashion over a distance of 34 kilometres; it was protected by the 11<sup>th</sup> Division which had just been brought up to war strength, with many new officers assigned to it. The regimental strength of this division was quite considerable;<sup>11</sup> two regiments alone boasting four battalions.

In a report characterising the condition of the bridgehead fortifications, the commander of the Northern Front, on 12 August, had this to say: <sup>ref</sup>

“Without the knowledge of the Front Commander, but in compliance with direct instructions of the War Minister and of the Commander-in-Chief, two battalions of the 11<sup>th</sup> Division were tonight sent out to Wyszków, as a result of which the sector of the 11<sup>th</sup> Division has been weakened considerably.”

These were those “fourth battalions” of the regiments which had formed the divisional reserve. Detaching these two battalions so complicated the divisional defence that later on, throughout the whole battle the division found it impossible to organise a new reserve.

## Enemy Situation

As a result of the severe fighting on the River Bug (from Granne to Brest, inclusive), the south flank of the Russian Sixteenth Army had been thrown back a considerable distance,

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<sup>11</sup> On 10 August the effective strength of the 48th Regiment of this division alone exceeded 2,000 bayonets, while the average strength of regiments in the 1st Lithuanian-Byelorussian Division amounted to 1,920; in the 8th Division it was 1,664, and in the 15th Division there were 4,753 men.





while its north flank had moved forward. The shifting of the northern boundary line from Miedzna<sup>12</sup> to Łochów and Modlin resulted in a situation which made it necessary for the divisions of the Russian Sixteenth Army to advance on their Warsaw objectives rather cautiously, and thus prevented them from reaching them in good season.

The Polish manoeuvre of rapidly transferring Polish forces from the left flank of the Russian Sixteenth Army to positions behind the Wieprz, without being noticed by the enemy, had brought about a situation where the 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> Divisions of the Russian Sixteenth Army had now before them an unobstructed route to Warsaw and the Vistula. Consequently, the Russians were able to move up without being in the least opposed by Polish forces, wondering at the good order in which the latter were retreating, and possessed a hazy feeling that the enemy was somewhere lying in wait for them.

However, this feeling prevailed only among the lower echelons. Only the 27<sup>th</sup> Division of the Russian Sixteenth Army, being further advanced in the north and nearest to Warsaw, had some skirmishes with the enemy on the line of the River Liwiec and at Tuszcz; a similar encounter was fought by the Russian 8<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division at Łuków, which point it had reached with its left flank.

Thus the factors which had brought about a situation in which it had become impossible for the divisions of the Russian Sixteenth Army to reach Warsaw and the line of the Vistula simultaneously, this failure did not at the time violate the dominant principle that was then being followed – that of “speed”. Nor did it explain the enemy’s counter-measures, but primarily the original disposition on the Bug and the low of time and space that was responsible for it. Violation of this principle would have been inevitable had been decided to hold back the divisions that were furthest advanced. In the present instance, in order to observe the principle, it was necessary to accelerate the advance of the slower divisions; but, in spite of the measures which had been taken in this connection, all divisions of the Russian Sixteenth Army, on the evening of 13 August were still at one day’s march from the Polish first defensive line. This line was reached only by the right flank (27<sup>th</sup> Rifle) Division, which went into bivouac for the night as follows: 79<sup>th</sup> Brigade in Międzyłęś – Cygów – Banachowizna area; 80<sup>th</sup> Brigade in Jasienica – Klembów area; 81<sup>st</sup> Brigade in Klembów – Rasztów – Emilianów area.

In this area the 81<sup>st</sup> Brigade found units of the 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division belonging to the Russian Third Army, which had been concentrated in that area with a view to advancing on the next day via the Radzymin – Praga Highway, with the mission of “pushing those enemy found away from Warsaw that were retreating before the Russian Sixteenth Army” – as already stated above.

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<sup>12</sup> The original text is extremely unclear at this point. MP.



Simultaneously, the other divisions of the Russian Third Army (the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>) were to cross the Narew River at Serock, in order to advance on Modlin and seize it on August 15.

The Russian Sixteenth Army, advancing with its divisions as prescribed within their respective zones of action, was to occupy with its main forces as follows: 13 August, 27<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division – the Nieporęt – Jabłonna – Łajsk area, with advance guard detachments on the Vistula; 14 August, 2<sup>nd</sup> Division – the Radzymin – Stanisławów (inclusive) area, with advance guards on the Vistula; the 17<sup>th</sup> Division – the Wołomin – Turów – Marki area; 10<sup>th</sup> Division – the Rembertów – Wawer – Jarosław area; 8<sup>th</sup> Division – the line of the Vistula if possible, protecting the flank of the Sixteenth Army.

The Russian Sixteenth Army had no reserves at its disposal. It relied primarily on speed and powerful blows. Apparently, this manner of conducting the operation, involving as it did a total disregard of the enemy forces, had resulted from the fact that the 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division succeeded with its first “speedy” blow in throwing back the Polish forces from Radzymin to Praga. Therefore, it was supposed that the 27<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division would, without much difficulty, be able on this day to seize Jabłonna, cut the communications between Warsaw and Modlin, and begin reconnoitring the Vistula crossings. As a result of the 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division’s moving up to Praga, the way was being prepared for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Rifle Divisions, which had been somewhat slow in their progress; moreover, because of the activities of the 27<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, they would find a favourable line of departure on the line of the Vistula for an advance on August 14. At the same time, the 10<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division would attack Warsaw frontally, while the 8<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division would execute an enveloping movement by way of the Vistula from the south.

An order of the Commander of the West Front<sup>13</sup> of 10 August provided that Warsaw be taken on August 14. However, during the night of 12/13 August only two divisions of the enemy were posted in the immediate vicinity of our first defence line of bridgeheads. On this self-same night these divisions were duly identified by Polish reconnaissance detachments; but even before this the approximate areas which the enemy was about to occupy had been fully outlined in intelligence summaries.

### **First Day of Battle – 13 August**

In carrying out its mission, the 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division at daybreak of the 13<sup>th</sup> began its attack on the Polish defence line at Załubice – Kraszew, making its main blow against Radzymin, but before long it found itself stopped before the Polish trenches and wire entanglements. With the concurrence of the Commander of the Russian Sixteenth Army, the Commander of the

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<sup>13</sup> Throughout this article all Soviet commanders are referred to only by their positions. M. N. Tukhachevski was Commander of the West Front (KomZapFront). His army commanders during the battle were Sergejev then Shuvayev (4A), Kork (15A), Lazarevich (3A) and Sollohub (16A). Gai commanded the III Cavalry Corps, and Khviesin the Mozyr Group. MP.



27<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division now came to the assistance of the 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division in taking Radzymin by attacking with two brigades from Kraszew toward Ciemne, while the 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division was conducting its attack on Radzymin along the highway. Upon capturing Radzymin by means of this concentrated action, the 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division was to extend its gains by launching an attack on Praga, whereas the 27<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division was to attack Jabłonna. In accordance with the instructions of the Commander of the Russian Sixteenth Army, the third brigade of the 27<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division (79<sup>th</sup> Brigade) was simultaneously to attack from the Lipiny – Majdan area, by way of Ossów and Turów in the direction of Marki, with the object of “facilitating the advance of the 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division on Praga.”

The general offensive was to begin at 2:00 p.m. and it did start at that very time in the vicinity of Radzymin – moving forward with its mass over a width of 8 kilometres against the sector of the Polish 46<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment between Helenów and Mokre, inclusive. By evening, after a two-hour battle, this regiment was defeated and repulsed at several points; remnants of the other regiments were still holding out near the second defence line.<sup>14</sup> The battle immediately wiped out the weak divisional reserve. The other two regiments of the division (the 47<sup>th</sup> in the Beniaminów – Ruda – Rządza area, and the 48<sup>th</sup> on the Wołomin – Czarna sector) limited their action to refusing their flanks and repulsing feeble attacks of the enemy on their sectors; thus they maintained themselves completely. All of the batteries of the middle sub-sector, and partly those of the north sector were required to change positions and to withdraw behind the second defence line, exhibiting great courage both in engaging the enemy and in defending themselves.

The enemy occupied Radzymin, where the 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division immediately entered all its transport and installations. After moving up one brigade on Słupno, the 27<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, in advancing on Jabłonna with one brigade (the 81<sup>st</sup>), got as far as Wólka Radzyńska, at which place its patrols intercepted on the highway leading to Nieporęt Polish messengers and disrupted motor traffic; another brigade (the 80<sup>th</sup>), while involved in fighting, had remained in the Ciemne – Nowy Janków area. The 79<sup>th</sup> Brigade, having been delayed on the line Stare Grabie and Nowe Grabie by the Mińsk Regiment, which was withdrawing from Tłuszcz, did not take Leśniakowizna until evening. Upon being driven out, after units of the army reserve had been committed to action there, it once more renewed the attack at daybreak, which at Ossów developed into that episode in the fighting which had become celebrated by the heroic shadow of the Polish priest Ignacy Skorupka.

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<sup>14</sup> A description of this regiment has been given above. The peculiar nature of the various organisations as to their make-up, is indicated by the losses suffered in officer and non-commissioned officer personnel: 17 officers killed and wounded. Those killed in action were exclusively men wearing the uniform of Haller's forces, originating in the old non-commissioned officer cadre; of the khaki-clad replacements which had arrived, some 500 men were lost without a trace being found of them – Russian Ed.



The enemy attack launched against the fortified front of the Polish First Army with only two divisions did not lead to the results that had been outlined in the mission in great detail. The Polish forces retreating before the Russian Sixteenth Army had not been cut off from Warsaw by the 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division. Nor did the 27<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division take Jabłonna, or reconnoitre on this day the crossings over the Vistula. Similarly, one of its brigades failed to reach Marki via Ossów and Turów. Nevertheless, the enemy had succeeded in penetrating at Radzymin the Polish fortified line, disrupting its minutely organised system of artillery defence. Besides, it had forced the Polish High Command, even before the arrival on the field of battle of the main forces of the Russian Sixteenth Army, to commit to action, on the very morning of the next day, the as yet incomplete reserves of the Polish First Army. This unquestionably signal success of the enemy served in no small measure as a reason for placing in readiness the Front reserve, i.e. the 10<sup>th</sup> Division, whose organisation at that time was as yet incomplete. It moreover was the cause of the Polish Fifth Army being directed to attack at once, although this army was still in the process of concentration in the vicinity of Modlin.

The Polish First Army was told to re-establish its situation on August 14, “without counting upon any reserves outside its own, and employing for the purpose all technical means (tanks and armoured trains) that it had at its disposal.” In case the situation permitted, it was to “launch an energetic attack in the direction of Dąbrówka – Wyszaków, along the railway line Warsaw-Białystok, and in the direction of Mińsk-Mazowiecki.”<sup>ref</sup>

The Polish First Army in turn directed the 1<sup>st</sup> Lithuanian-Byelorussian Division, together with the 46<sup>th</sup> Regiment, to launch a counter-attack in the general direction of the highway leading to Radzymin, with the object of retrieving the loss of both Radzymin and the first defence line.<sup>15</sup>

## **Second Day of Battle – August 14**

At daybreak on August 14 the same rifle divisions (the 21<sup>st</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>) were ready to continue their offensive. The remaining forces did not reach the Polish first defence line until noon, whereupon they merely occupied their sectors. The latter – particularly those in the north – “showed an intermingling of troops as a result of the 27<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division’s transgressing the boundary lines designated for it, and much time was lost in disentangling the units.” The 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division, in accordance with orders previously issued to it, was to take advantage of the penetration effected in the Polish front in the vicinity of Wólka Radzymińska, and with two columns, by way of Pekelne Wrota – Izabelin – Olesin – Aleksandrów – Kobialka deliver an attack on Bródno, after that on Praga, and then seize the crossings over the Vistula situated there. The 27<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, as before, was to endeavour to take Jabłonna.

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<sup>15</sup> This mission could only be carried out by three regiments. The Mińsk Regiment, until late into the night, had been conducting a rear-guard action at Tłuszcz. On August 14, having only 125 men left, it had lost its value as a combat unit.



At daybreak both divisions proceeded to carry out their missions. Already before dawn, however, a new battle had suddenly started in the sector of the Polish 8<sup>th</sup> Division; here the 79<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade had again gone into action, attacking the Polish 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Divisions, contact with which it had lost since the day before. Upon occupying Leśniakowizna the enemy directed his main attack from the northeast against Ossów and Turów and the hills north of Ossów, at the same time staging a secondary attack along the Leśniakowizna – Ossów road.

The Polish counter-attack – battalion after battalion – was directed along the road from Ossów on Leśniakowizna and was flanked by machine-gun fire from the hills, referred to above. The enemy occupied part of Ossów and also reached Turów and the Rządza River.<sup>16</sup> A battalion of volunteers which had arrived as replacement for the 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment and which had been committed to action as a last sector reserve, “opened an unusually strong but rather ineffective fire”.<sup>ref</sup> Coming under machine-gun fire, it suffered tremendous losses (among them the Polish priest Skorupka) and disintegrated without affecting an improvement in the general situation.<sup>17</sup> However, the attack launched from the south against Leśniakowizna and directed against the rear of the enemy, brought about the result which enabled “the regiment of the 79<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade to barely succeed in slipping away through the narrow corridor into the Lipiny – Majdan region; the losses of the brigade on this day consisted of 620 killed and wounded.”<sup>ref</sup>

The Polish artillery in the middle, and particularly in the south sub-sectors, delivered an intensive fire, the observation of which was rendered difficult by reason of the intermingling of Polish and enemy units. The effectiveness of the fire, upon the withdrawal to the second line and during the whole night suffered greatly because of the unduly long time that elapsed between calls for concentrations and their actual execution. This condition had been brought about by the slow process of issuing orders through regular channels, which prevented the battery commanders from quickly opening fire on important targets.

As a result of the occupation by the enemy of Dąbkowizna,<sup>18</sup> which place the central telephone station of the north sector was forced to leave, communication between the two telephone lines – the first and second reserve lines – was interrupted. Because of this, and also in view of the enemy’s advancing as far as Nieporęt, the commander of the north artillery sector considered it necessary to remove the batteries from position in the vicinity of Fort Beniaminów, and to send them to the rear, although the 47<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, not only did not entertain any idea of abandoning Beniaminów but even during the entire Battle of Warsaw

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<sup>16</sup> An error, presumably this is meant to be the Długa River. MP.

<sup>17</sup> This Volunteer Battalion was mostly students. It had joined the 36<sup>th</sup> “Academic Legion” Infantry Regiment – an similar unit formed from Warsaw university students and academics (but later filled out with volunteer ex-POWs too). Part of the 8<sup>th</sup> Division. Skorupka was the new battalion’s chaplain. MP.

<sup>18</sup> South of Fort Beniaminów – Ed



held steadfastly to its entire sector along the first defence line. The whole artillery group, caught by the enemy en route to Nieporęt was compelled to fight heroically, but only in self-defence.<sup>19</sup>

Taking advantage of the penetration made between Fort Beniaminów and Wólka Radzyمیńska, the enemy began to mass his forces in the Izabelin corridor by way of Pekelne Wrota, concentrating throughout the entire night in the Cegielnia – Słupno – Wólka Radzyمیńska area and moving up in the direction of Nieporęt.

During August 14 the Front Commander noticed that the Polish First Army would be unable to carry out the mission assigned to it, “without relying upon any reserves outside its own”, and as early as 3:45 p.m. allotted to it the Front Reserve – i.e. the 10<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division – which was directed on Kąty Węgierskie – Rembelszczyzna, with the mission of recapturing Radzymin and the first line of trenches. During the night the First Army was required to place in reserve, subject to the control of the Front Commander, one of its former divisions.<sup>ref</sup>

Actually there was at Kąty Węgierskie only one battalion of the 10<sup>th</sup> Division (1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry, commanded by Lieutenant Pogonowski). The main forces of the division – in conformity with the finally accepted plan of the manoeuvre – had been designated to be transported from Jabłonna to Nieporęt by marching and in part by Warsaw buses. General Żeligowski, commanding the 10<sup>th</sup> Division, under whose control – for the purpose of delivering the counter-attack – were also the 11<sup>th</sup> Division and the 1<sup>st</sup> Lithuanian-Byelorussian Division, moved it northward along the highway. This he did on returning from Fort Struga where he had a conference with the division commanders concerned, fighting off enemy patrols on his way until he ran into this battalion at Stanisławów.

Upon reaching the line of Pekelne Wrota, this battalion together with the Grodno Regiment<sup>20</sup> which had been actively defending Hill 104,<sup>21</sup> halted the advance of the enemy toward Izabelin and covered the flank of the units occupying the defence line. It is in this respect that great credit is due both those units – crowned by the heroic death of Lieutenant Pogonowski and of two score of soldiers that fell during one of the attacks on Wólka Radzyمیńska.

The underlying idea of General Żeligowski’s manoeuvre was as follows: upon the concentration at Nieporęt of the main forces of the 10<sup>th</sup> Division,<sup>22</sup> covering the left flank with

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<sup>19</sup> This refers to the attack of the 243rd Petrograd Regiment on Hill 37.2, between Nieporęt and Dąbkowizna, at which point there had been captured a Polish battery together with its crew and ammunition.

<sup>20</sup> A regiment, along with regiments named for Wilno, Mińsk and Nowogród, in the 1<sup>st</sup> Lithuanian-Byelorussian Division. MP.

<sup>21</sup> Just west of Słupno? MP.

<sup>22</sup> 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiments. The division comprised only three regiments. The 31<sup>st</sup> Regiment, *en route* to the join the division was situated on this night at Kałuszyn (one day’s march from Nieporęt in the direction of Modlin). The division was committed to action before it had been quite brought up to a state of combat readiness. – Ed

The 30<sup>th</sup> Regiment was in Front reserve. MP.



Polish units posted at Beniaminów (47<sup>th</sup> Regiment of 11<sup>th</sup> Division), to deliver a sudden attack from the vicinity of Nieporęt via Beniaminów and Wólka Radzyńska on Aleksandrów and Mokre, and by so doing, to turn Radzymin from the North. The latter was to facilitate the advance of the 1<sup>st</sup> Lithuanian-Byelorussian Division from Pustelnik on Radzymin, which was supposed to deliver its main attack along the highway. The 48<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, acting on the defensive in the Czarna-Leśniakowizna (exclusive) sector, was to cover this operation from the direction of Wołomin.

For the purpose of insuring the success of its main attack from the direction of Helenów and Ciemne, the Lithuanian-Byelorussian Division was to deliver a secondary attack from Czarna on Stary Janków. The general reserve of the assault group (30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment) was to move up by way of Kąty Węgierskie and Izabelin, so that – after having occupied a central position – it would be committed to action either in the sector of the 10<sup>th</sup> Division, or in that of the Lithuanian-Byelorussian Division. The general objective was the recapture of Radzymin and the first defence line. The immediate objective of the action on the ground – the seizure of Wólka Radzyńska by a concentric attack from the direction of Nieporęt (28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment) and from the direction of Pekelne Wrota (battalion commanded by Pogonowski and Grodno Regiment). The attack was to begin in the morning of August 15.

In the remaining part of the bridgehead, at this time, the following events occurred: the episode at Ossów had been liquidated; in the Wołomin–Okuniew sector contact was established with the Russian 17<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division which had just arrived, and also with the 10<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division. The advance guards of the latter, upon approaching the Okuniew – Karczew sector, became engaged with the rear-guards of the Polish 15<sup>th</sup> Division (which had already fallen back with its main forces behind the defence line). Here, on the Polish side there was an evident superiority of forces and material, especially in the sector of the 15<sup>th</sup> Division, because the forces operating on the defensive were favoured by the fact that from Beniaminów on, extending downstream along the Świder River, the first line of defence coincided with the old German bridgehead – the *Bruckenkopf*. On the Vistula, from Karczew up to Dęblin, the enemy did not give on this day any special evidence of his presence.

The Polish Army embarked upon the attack on Nasielsk in a condition far from completely combat ready. This attack proved very costly and it developed very slowly. While engaged with the Russian Fifteenth Army which had launched counterattacks, this Polish Army was being threatened from the east by an advance of the Russian Third Army. By its motion the Polish Fifth Army was supposed to draw the Russian Fourth Army and the Cavalry Corps away from the Vistula; yet the latter had succeeded on this day in crossing with small elements over the Vistula at Bobrowniki, near Nieszawa. The numerical superiority of the enemy which it encountered indicated the need for reinforcements, if the entire strategic plan was not to be ruined from the very start – which was bound up with the mission of the army.



The calculations of the Northern Front commander with regard to the “placing of one of the old divisions in Front reserve during the night”<sup>ref</sup> despite assurances of the “unquestioned execution of the order”<sup>ref</sup> evidently were not to be realised, inasmuch as very soon a new order issued<sup>ref</sup> which among others contained the following:

“The First Army, notwithstanding the fact that it was reinforced by the Front reserve, has been unable to cope with the enemy, who has pierced our front in the vicinity of Radzymin. The First Army is strictly conjoined to proceed as follows: its 1<sup>st</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Divisions<sup>23</sup> will, before daybreak, in a grouping formed during the night, launch an energetic concentric attack on Radzymin, and will without fail drive the enemy back to the first line of trenches by not later than noon of August 15. The Army Commander, in execution of the above, will, with the utmost speed, take all necessary steps for the transfer of the 10<sup>th</sup> Division to Kałuszyn and Skrzyszew, north of Jabłonna, making every possible use of buses for the purpose – the first echelon reaching the above points not later than 12:00 noon.”

As a further characteristic aspect of the operation on August 14 we observe on the north sector of the bridgehead the committing to action of all reserves, inclusive of the general reserves. We also note the conviction of the Commander of the First Army that it will be impossible for him to constitute any new reserves from his own army, although in the entire south sector there had been no fighting of any special severity; moreover, while acting on the defensive this army had the best of the enemy on this part of the front numerically and particularly in technical means. Another factor worthy of notice, in the course of these two engagements, is the fact that the initiative of the enemy had prevented reorganisation, concentration and replenishment of Polish units before the resumption of fighting – which had been the main object in view when the Polish armies shook off the enemy on the Bug River. Of all the divisions arriving at the front, the 15<sup>th</sup> Division was the only exception in this respect.

On this day, however, an event occurred which was destined on the next day to have considerable effect on the operations of the belligerents, both at Radzymin and Modlin.

The Russian Third Army, after crossing the Narew River at Serock in its dash for Modlin, which it was meant to occupy on August 15, considered itself exposed to enemy action from the direction of the Zegrze bridgehead.<sup>24</sup> In the ensuing battle for the possession of Zegrze the entire 6<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division became involved, thus leaving for the advance on Modlin only two divisions: the 56<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>. On the flank of these divisions, however, there was still the hostile Zegrze position which had not yet been reduced. Inasmuch as the taking of Zegrze could not

<sup>23</sup> The “1<sup>st</sup>” is presumably a mistake for 11<sup>th</sup>. The 19<sup>th</sup> cited here is what is referred to in the text as the 1<sup>st</sup> Lithuanian-Byelorussian Division. MP.

<sup>24</sup> The group belonging to Colonel Malakhowski: the 7th Reserve Brigade, part of the 6th Border Regiment, and other improvised detachments with artillery – Ed





be postponed, the 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division was directed as early as the afternoon of August 14 to abandon its “Warsaw” effort.<sup>25</sup> Instead, it was to bring its action into harmony with the strategic objective of the Russian Third Army, which was advancing over the roads passing through Izabelin and Nieporęt in the Łąsk – Wieliszew area, “with a view to facilitating the capture of Zegrze by the 6<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division”.<sup>ref</sup> The 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division, having meanwhile become involved in fighting, did not actually proceed to the execution of this order until daybreak of the 15<sup>th</sup>. As far as the Polish Fifth Army was concerned, which on the next day was required to continue its advance on Nasielsk, it was not without importance that the enemy was approaching the Wkra River and Modlin with only two divisions, and not with the entire Russian Third Army. Thus the fighting at Radzymin and Zegrze, although it deprived the Polish Fifth Army of the assistance of the 10<sup>th</sup> Division, had at the same time cut in half the enemy force that was to operate against the Polish flank making its main effort in the direction of Nasielsk.

On August 14 the Soviet Sixteenth Army had scored a considerable victory at the Warsaw bridgehead, particularly if the influence that this success might exercise on the decision of the Polish commander be considered. This success had been achieved by the concentration of superior forces on the point of the main attack, three Soviet divisions facing but one Polish division.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, the Russian Sixteenth Army after all had failed to carry out its mission, one of its divisions not reaching the area designated for it. On the next day, the mission of the army remained unchanged. However, the situation had undergone a change in that the 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division was no longer required on this day to clear the way for the Russian Sixteenth Army’s advance on Praga.

The Russian Third Army was, on this day, to endeavour to capture Zegrze with two of its divisions and with the other two to take Modlin. The orders stressed an immediate assault with units of the 56<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division on the fortress<sup>ref</sup> and with the 5<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, after forcing the Wkra River, against the Kroczewo – Zdunowo area.

During this time, behind the Wieprz river on the great stretch between the Vistula, the Western Bug, B---- and Lublin, a counter offensive was being prepared with the utmost energy. The Commander-in-Chief, at this time in Puławy, felt that it was absolutely “senseless” to commit to action such a great number of troops in the battle near Warsaw. He was firmly convinced of the correctness of his plan of action and was following with much

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<sup>25</sup> The 21st Rifle Division of the Russian Third Army had been endeavouring to take Praga by way of Pekelne Wrota.

<sup>26</sup> This is incorrect: “nearly the entire day of the battle on August 14 passed in single combat between the 27th Rifle Division and three Polish divisions, each of which was numerically superior to our own, and particularly well supplied with ammunition by the enemy.” Thus says Comrade Putna. The Polish Divisions were the 10th, 11th and 1st Lithuanian-Byelorussian Divisions – Ed. Putna, who commanded a division for the Soviets in 1920, wrote an analysis of this campaign “To the Vistula and Back”. It should be noted that Putna was also exaggerating the other way at this point: for example, only half the Polish 10<sup>th</sup> Division was involved up to this time. MP.



satisfaction the steady northward movements of the enemy to the north of the Bug river, as well as his movements in rear of the Wieprz river toward the Vistula, which so greatly coincided with the plan conceived by him.

The Commander-in-Chief was being minutely informed in regard to the situation on the Wkra and at Radzymin; he was also aware of all the “Warsaw apprehensions” and, after taking everything into consideration, he decided to embark upon his manoeuvre on August 16. Most of all he was concerned, however, as to whether or not the units would be equal to the task of carrying out the movements at the rate of speed which had been designated for them. This he contemplated to bring about by the following means:

“a) I shall personally sit on the neck of the 14<sup>th</sup> Division, which, according to my calculations, should be hurrying to reach with its advance guards at least the region of Garwolin.

“b) The (central) 16<sup>th</sup> Division, with similar instructions to speed up its advance, I shall turn over to the Commander of the Fourth Army.

“c) The 1<sup>st</sup> Legion Division, en route to Parczew and beyond, will – since General Rydz-Śmigły himself is in command – likewise develop great speed. Consequently, the 21<sup>st</sup> Division marching between them, even if it should not hurry on its own accord, will be carried along by the forward movements of the divisions adjoining it.

“It is my desire that the Fourth Army and the 1<sup>st</sup> Legion Division develop from the very start a similar speed and impetuous tempo in their advance as I once did in the invasion of the Ukraine. If this should prove successful – for I shall spare no efforts to make it so, and shall commit to action the entire army in this direction – then my calculations will prove correct. However, it is impossible to depend on this alone, and therefore, it is extremely important that on August 16 my exchange of intelligence with Warsaw be made as thorough as possible. In that manner, everybody at Warsaw by about noon or, say, four or five o’clock in the afternoon, would be able to find out whether or not my efforts have been crowned with success in regard to speed. It is upon celerity of movement that early in the morning on August 17 will depend the execution of the sorties on the north sector, in the direction of Mińsk-Mazowiecki, if this should prove possible of accomplishment. However, assuming a lesser objective, these attacks might be launched in the direction of Garwolin from Karczew and Wiązowna, in the event that the first direction should prove too hazardous because of the situation in the Radzymin – Miłosna sector.”

The situation at Radzymin was particularly reflected here, and the Commander-in-Chief decided to employ the First Army – although it had originally been designated and duly prepared before the beginning of the manoeuvre from behind the Wieprz River for



participation in the general attack<sup>27</sup> – for a “modest advance in the direction of Garwolin”. He was leaving the decision of the question involved here up to those who were better acquainted with the situation near Warsaw. And who were therefore better qualified to judge the situation. At the same time, the Commander-in-Chief rejected the former variant of the tank attack on Mińsk-Mazowiecki in the afternoon of August 16. His argument was that “where calculations are based upon the stability at Warsaw, there should be no hesitation in regard to the employment of the tanks against the principal body of enemy forces, i.e. the Radzymin area, so that the safety of the capital might be insured for at least an additional 24 hours”<sup>ref</sup>

The Commander-in-Chief moreover believed that on the second day of the attack, i.e. on the 17<sup>th</sup>, he would be in a position to open the Dęblin – Warsaw road on the right bank of the Vistula, as well as the Mińsk-Mazowiecki – Warsaw road. If this attack were to take a satisfactory course also on the next day, he felt certain that on the third day, i.e. on the 18<sup>th</sup>, the Warsaw – Siedlce – Łuków railway line “would render quite practicable combining all operating forces and reinforcing, if necessary, the left flank of the Fourth Army in the area near the bridgehead, as well as the threatened Radzymin sector and the highway leading from Radzymin to Warsaw.” In this same letter, the Commander-in-Chief turned down the idea according to which the 4<sup>th</sup> Division was to cross the Vistula, on the grounds that he did not credit it with the ability of undertaking any offensive action. Instead he advocated the employment of this division at Warsaw or further south.

### **Third Day of Battle – August 15**

In preparation for the attack, which was to begin at daybreak, the hostile divisions had to effect a regrouping during the night for the purposes of properly constituting and restoring the organisational strength of units. The 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division, having moved up with its main force in the Wólka Radzyńska area, now changed its direction of advance from Warsaw to Modlin. The 27<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, the 81<sup>st</sup> Brigade of which was located in the same area, was endeavouring during the night to assemble there the 80<sup>th</sup> Brigade, which had become involved in combat in the Nowy Janków – Czarna area. Likewise it tried to gather here the 79<sup>th</sup> Brigade; the latter, having been subjected to attacks at Ossów, had been held up in the vicinity of Zagościniec and become involved in battle.

The relief of these brigades with smaller units was to be effected by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Rifle Division, concentrated with its main forces in the vicinity of Radzymin, after which they were to join the 81<sup>st</sup> Brigade before daybreak.

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<sup>27</sup> main attack with the right flank; the employment of all armoured means against Mińsk-Mazowiecki; secondary attack in the direction of the Lublin highway.



However, these brigades were so heavily engaged in combat with the enemy that efforts at relieving them suffered delay.<sup>28</sup> The 81<sup>st</sup> Brigade rushed forward at dawn and soon reached with one of its regiments by way of Izabelin and Kąty Węgierskie, Jósefów where it was delayed by the Polish Cavalry<sup>29</sup> on the heights situated to the west of Jósefów. Upon hearing strong reports of firing coming from the direction of Nieporęt, the regiment responded to the sound of the shots and moved northward. It finally arrived at Nieporęt in the rear of the Polish line of advance, the forces of which, in accordance with orders issued the day before by General Żeligowski, had commenced to develop for action, strongly supported by its artillery. In a speedy advance the Polish forces repulsed the enemy at Nieporęt and seized the village of Wólka Radzyńska, which had been simultaneously attacked from the southeast.<sup>30</sup>

This attack struck the intermingled units of the 81<sup>st</sup> Rifle Brigade and 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division; some of them even succeeded in breaking through – by way of Pekelne Wrota – to Izabelin. After being driven out of there, they commenced to move on Wólka, endeavouring to force their way through at that point. Here the fighting assumed a stubborn, drawn-out character<sup>31</sup> and ended in the retreat of the enemy in a north-easterly direction on Aleksandrów, at which point his retreat was cut off by the advance of the Polish forces from Beniaminów.<sup>32</sup>

As a result of a new action and the pursuit of the retreating enemy, Mokre and the line of the Rządza river were occupied by Polish forces, thus facilitating the advance of the Lithuanian-Byelorussian Division together with the 46<sup>th</sup> Regiment on Radzymin, which point also passed to the Poles. However, the desperate counter-attacks of the enemy on Mokre, during which Major Walter<sup>33</sup> made the supreme sacrifice, and on Radzymin, from the direction of Ciemne, from which point the Russian 2<sup>nd</sup> Rifle Division in conjunction with the 80<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade were attacking, brought about a situation in which Radzymin changed hands several times during the day.

The secondary attack of the Lithuanian-Byelorussian Division from Czarna on Janków, now directed against units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Rifle Division, had been halted at the edge of the woods by machine-gun fire from the direction of Janków and Helenów. Twice on this day this Lithuanian unit suffered casualties inflicted on it by its own artillery fire.<sup>ref</sup> It was the firm occupation of Mokre and the advance of the Grodno Regiment from the northern outskirts of

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<sup>28</sup> According to Comrade Putna, this relief had been delayed for some unknown reason by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, which was to take over during the night the sector of the 80<sup>th</sup> Brigade (Ciemne to Stary Czarna). The 81<sup>st</sup> Brigade had received an order from the commander of the 27<sup>th</sup> Division, issued at 2:30 a.m. directing it to assume the offensive on Nieporęt – Łajsk.<sup>ref</sup> – Ed

<sup>29</sup> One squadron of the 201<sup>st</sup> Regiment, posted in this area in accordance with instructions from General Żeligowski, for security and reconnaissance purposes

<sup>30</sup> The battalion commanded by Pogonowski, and elements of the Grodno Regiment.

<sup>31</sup> Two regiments participated on the Polish side: the 28<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the 10<sup>th</sup> Division and the Grodno Regiment of the Lithuanian-Byelorussian Division.

<sup>32</sup> 29<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the 10<sup>th</sup> Division and the 47<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the 11<sup>th</sup> Division.

<sup>33</sup> Commander of the 29<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the 10<sup>th</sup> Division



Radzymin on Kraszew, coupled with the occupation of Kraszew, which caused the enemy<sup>34</sup> now holding the Ciemne corridor to apprehend being enveloped and to beat a hasty retreat in an easterly direction. Radzymin was finally occupied late in the evening.

This miserable town – as Żeligowski likes to refer to it – was situated between the rather poor first line of defence and the excellent second line; in other words – the town for which, during three days there had been waged a sanguinary, furious battle, was neither on the first line of defence nor the on the second, but rather half way between the two defensive lines.

Although for three consecutive days this battle had cast ominous shadows upon the safety of the capital and the decisions of the Polish leaders, it was destined to continue playing the same role for at least another day.

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The 81<sup>st</sup> Rifle Brigade, having advanced the farthest, suffered the most in the battle of Radzymin. The enemy, which had everywhere been driven back beyond the first defence line, was now regrouping his forces as follows: 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division: on the eastern bank of the Rządza River, in the vicinity of Łosie; the 27<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division: in the Dybów – Rżyska area; the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division: in the Dobczyn – Pasek area. On this day the 6<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division once more attacked Zegrze, and notwithstanding its redoubled efforts it again failed in attaining its objective.

On the remainder of the front the Russian Sixteenth Army endeavoured everywhere to break down the Polish resistance. The 17<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division now attempted to advance on Ossów against the sector of the Polish 8<sup>th</sup> Division.

The comparatively narrow zone of its sector (8 kilometres) together with a very considerable strength the 8<sup>th</sup> Division now enjoyed – thanks to the replacements it had received – enabled it not only to beat off this enemy attack without difficulty, but even to launch several counter-attacks. Among the latter, one on Majdan, which was being strongly defended by the 150<sup>th</sup> Rifle Regiment and which was later awarded the honorary Red Banner for this very battle, deserves to be mentioned.

The 10<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division was unsuccessful in its advance on Wiązowna, at which point it encountered strong defensive works and stubborn resistance on the part of the troops holding it. It next endeavoured to launch attacks against other sectors, but was forced to withdraw in each instance. However, its attacks resulted in the absorption in the front line of all reserves of the Polish 15<sup>th</sup> Division. Consequently this division had no reserves left for the next day – except for some formed detachments which, however, were not an organic part of the division.

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<sup>34</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Rifle Division and the 80<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 27<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division



The 8<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division was reconnoitring the crossings over the Vistula, attempting at various points to cross the river. In the evening it launched an attack on the Polish bridgehead at Góra-Kalwaria and by midnight it had forced its garrison to withdraw to the western bank of the Vistula. This incident induced the Commander of the Northern Front to detrain at Góra-Kalwaria the entire 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division for the purpose of engaging in the “active defence of Góra-Kalwaria”. This brigade, together with the entire 4<sup>th</sup> Division was to be transferred on the next day by narrow gauge railroad to Warsaw and from there to Marki for the purpose of “reinforcing the Polish First Army”.<sup>ref</sup> The 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade of this division, on the evening of the 15<sup>th</sup>, was already concentrated at Góra-Kalwaria and in readiness for departure.

The vigorous advance of the Polish Fifth Army, in its endeavour to take Nasielsk, failed to accomplish its object. However, this army heroically withstood all enemy counter-attacks and not only did not yield any ground to him, but even succeeded in gaining some.

The Front Commander on this day was not able to reinforce with his reserves the Polish Fifth Army. The 10<sup>th</sup> Division, which had become involved in combat at Radzymin, had found it impossible not only by noon, but throughout the day, to “concentrate in the Kałuszyn-Skrzeszew area”. Notwithstanding the fact that all general reserves had been absorbed – which deprived the Front Commander of freedom of action – the fighting at Radzymin and Zegrze yielded some very favourable results for us. They consisted in the restoration to us of the entire first line of defence in the Radzymin sector and in the prospective immobilisation of at least half of the forces of the Russian Third Army – i.e. the 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division and those of its units which had been ----- fighting for the possession of Zegrze.<sup>35</sup>

The battle of Radzymin, which was fought on August 15, with an even number of forces (the ratio being 3:3), if the number of divisions that participated on both sides of the fighting is considered, completely deprived the enemy of those advantages which he had gained during the preceding days, but did not compel him to refrain from new attempts at attacking the Warsaw bridgeheads. On this same night, enemy units once more occupied lines of departure before the Polish first defence line; where they went into assembly positions, organised themselves for battle, forced the Grodno regiment out of Kraszew, and once more occupied Helenów. This was carried out by the very same units of the 27<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division which previously had borne the brunt of the battle, two of its brigades (79<sup>th</sup> and 81<sup>st</sup>) being the most exhausted and suffered the greatest number of casualties.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> The entire 6<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division and part of the 56<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, as indicated by prisoners of the 409<sup>th</sup> and 501<sup>st</sup> regiments of this division that were captured there.

<sup>36</sup> Comrade Putna<sup>ref</sup> in referring to this writes, “In general, this estimate is correct; however it is necessary to explain the ratio of the strength of the forces as being 3:3, or even. Actually only two of our divisions had participated in the fighting (27<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>); our third division (2<sup>nd</sup>) had not undertaken any offensive action. As to strength, each separate Polish regiment on this day equalled any one of our divisions” – Editor.



The 2<sup>nd</sup> Rifle Division held its own, while the 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division was continued to prepare during the night for a new attack on Wieliszew.

Prisoners captured from the 17<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division during this night, in the sector of the Polish 8<sup>th</sup> Division, stated that there were rumours in circulation about a new powerful attack on Ossów, and that what seemed to be a new division had been designated to assist the 17<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division in the execution of this undertaking. At the Polish headquarters this intelligence was immediately associated with the arrival of the 35<sup>th</sup> Division which had been expected all along while the fighting was in progress, although in reality it never showed up.

The 15<sup>th</sup> of August marked the **crisis of the battle of Radzymin**. From this day on Radzymin ceased to constitute for the enemy an **intermediate objective** towards attaining the principal objective of the battle – which was Warsaw.

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On this day the Commander of the Polish Northern Front issued an order in the afternoon <sup>ref</sup> announcing the beginning on August 16 of the contemplated Polish attack with forces of the Third and Fourth Armies. The order, requiring the left of the First Army to co-operate with the Fifth Army in an assault on Serock, and at the same time to “contain the enemy in the direction of Wyszaków,” gave the right of the First Army the mission of “capturing on August 16 with **strong infantry forces**, assisted by all available tanks, armoured trains and armoured cars, the city of Mińsk-Mazowiecki, as well as the railway line located in the Kolbiel – Pustelnik sector (near Stanisławów); the attack on the part of the First Army’s right to commence after a brief artillery preparation on August 16 at 2:00 p.m.; particular attention to be paid to the physical preparation of the entire operation.”

The order represented an offshoot of the conception, now abandoned by the Commander-in-Chief, concerning a sortie on Mińsk on August 16 – regarding which the Commander of the Northern Front had as yet no knowledge. Thus, this order tends to show that the commander of the Polish First Army was already aware of the plan of attacking Mińsk “with strong infantry forces,” on the 15<sup>th</sup>, and the time allowed for the preparation of this operation.

In the evening of that day, the Commander of the Northern Front received an order from the High-Command which proved to be a development of the conceptions outlined by the Commander-in-Chief in his personal letter to General Rozwadowski. The order detached from the Second Army the entire 4<sup>th</sup> Division and placed it under the control of the Northern Front with instructions to “employ it either in the bridgehead, or farther to the north”; it moreover required the concentration of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division near Kozienice. At the same time, the order fixed the time for the beginning of the attack as the morning of August 16, the Third and Fourth Armies commanded by the Commander-in-Chief attacking in a northerly direction. The Fourth Army was given for this day the mission of reaching as a minimum objective the



line Gończyce – Żelechów – Radzyń, with advance guards at Garwolin, while on the second day (August 17), it was to take up a “rapid, energetic advance in co-operation with the First Army.”

Mission of the First Army: “The active protection of the Warsaw Bridgehead, paying particular attention to enemy activities in the direction of Radzymin. On the 16<sup>th</sup>, the First Army will concentrate near its line of departure, on the Brest Highway, the attached tanks and armoured trains in such a manner as to enable them to begin the advance in the morning of the 17<sup>th</sup> in conjunction with the infantry, artillery, and aviation. Immediate objective of the attack – Mińsk-Mazowiecki; subsequent objectives – as the situation may dictate. Simultaneously, units of the 15<sup>th</sup> Division will take up the advance **on the Lublin Highway** with the object of establishing contact with the advancing units of the Fourth Army.”

The estimate of the situation at Warsaw, prepared by the Chief of the General Staff, had permitted the letter with respect to the right flank of the First Army, to carry out this idea of the Commander-in-Chief in the manner most desired by him, notwithstanding the fact that he had been given the right to modify the plan of action so as to reduce it to a “modest sortie in the direction of Garwolin”.

The Commander of the Northern Front did not issue any new orders, since the instructions previously issued were basically in complete agreement with the controlling idea of the new order. It was affected only by the change in time of the beginning of the operation with respect to the right of the First Army against Mińsk-Mazowiecki, having been changed from 2:00 p.m. of August 16 to the morning of August 17. The contemplated advance on the part of this right wing on August 16 had already been abandoned before this, inasmuch as an amendment to Order No. 4012/III contained instructions to this effect: “while the situation at Radzymin is not entirely restored, the attack of the right wing of the First Army, as prescribed in Order 4012/III, will be held in abeyance”.<sup>ref</sup> None of the orders – either that of the Commander-in-Chief or of the Commander of the North Front – had changed the substance of the mission of attacking Mińsk-Mazowiecki, and there had been introduced no changes in the preparation for this attack. However, the time for these preparations had been extended.

#### **Fourth Day of Battle – August 16**

The Russian Third Army, like the Sixteenth Army, had not succeeded in accomplishing the mission prescribed for it on the 15<sup>th</sup>. Modlin had not been taken. The reasons for this failure were, on the one hand the stubborn fighting of the Polish Fifth Army in the vicinity of Modlin and on the Wkra River, and on the other hand the fighting of the Polish First Army at Zegrze and at Radzymin.

With a view to having the attack on Modlin repeated on August 16, the Commander of the Russian Third Army issued these instructions: <sup>ref</sup> “the enemy is stubbornly resisting the





advance of our Third Army, occupying fortifications on the line Orzechowo – Dębe – Zegrze. The 6<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division will overcome the enemy resistance and take possession of the Zegrze area, making its main effort on its right. The 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division will advance in the general direction of Nieporęt and Wieliszew, with the mission of gaining the rear of the enemy group at Zegrze.”

The 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division was to advance with one brigade by way of Kempiste and Białobrzegi on Zagroby and Wieliszew, and with two brigades via Beniaminów and Nieporęt against Łajsk and Wieliszew. The most energetic action was demanded of the 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division in the execution of this order.

Actually, notwithstanding its failure on the previous day, the 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division, at daybreak, launched a furious attack. Its assault struck the sector of the Polish 10<sup>th</sup> Division. Throughout the day it had succeeded several times in forcing the Rządza river; it then moved up to Kempiste, occupied the forester’s home situated two kilometres southwest of Mokre, took Mokre after a severe struggle, and even had its reserves moved to Mokre.

Also the units of the 27<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division were involved in intense fighting on this day for the retention of the lines of departure which they had occupied and which had proved so advantageous to them during the first day of the battle. They strengthened their positions and were strongly defending themselves at Dybów and Rżyska. Despite the heavy Polish artillery concentrations, the likewise put up a defence with remarkable tenacity at Helenów, from which point they were finally driven out by units of the Lithuanian-Byelorussian Division.

The 17<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, at 5:00 a.m. launched a vigorous attack against Leśniakowizna, and a lesser assault against Okuniew, the sector of the Polish 8<sup>th</sup> Division. This in turn, at 5:00 p.m., embarked on counter-attack from Okuniew, supported by tanks, and occupied Zabraniec, Małków, Krubki and Górki. After which, upon capturing prisoners and some machine-guns, it returned to its line of departure. The prisoners taken confirmed once more rumours in circulation to the effect that the Russian 17<sup>th</sup> Division was being prepared in the rear for an advance by way of Ossów on Warsaw.

The Polish 10<sup>th</sup> Division, in conjunction with the attached 48<sup>th</sup> Regiment, beginning at dawn engaged in an action for the possession of Mokre and the line of the Rządza River, launching several counter-attacks while strongly supported by artillery. By about 5:00 p.m. it had finally succeeded in restoring the situation – driving the right wing of the 27<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division out of Dybów and beyond the Rządza.

Meanwhile the Polish Front Commander was once more constrained, because of the situation at Radzymin,<sup>ref</sup> to revoke the order just issued,<sup>ref</sup> according to which the First Army was to place immediately the 10<sup>th</sup> Division in Front reserve, and instead gradually to transfer it by



busses to the Kraszew – Zagościniec area.<sup>37</sup> It was replaced from Warsaw by the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division which moved out by marching; its several units were scheduled to arrive on the same day.<sup>38</sup>

The movement of the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division, which had been ordered as early as 3:00 a.m. to get ready “with the utmost energy”, had been subjected to some delay on account of the impression created by its units giving way – as mentioned above – at the Góra-Kalwaria bridgehead, whereupon it was given the mission of “holding this point without fail”. The enemy, who had caused the issuing of these instructions (23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> Brigades, 8<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division), had been engaged in reconnaissance all day on the Vistula, and while attempting to cross the river at various points had brought his artillery into action. In the vicinity of Kępa Nadbrzeska he succeeded in seizing several barges which had been carelessly left there and under cover of his artillery had endeavoured to cross the Vistula, and even started throwing a bridge over the river. In the evening the enemy launched an attack from Karczew on Otwock, and succeeded in blowing up the railway bridge across the Świder River there, with a view to impeding the movement of Polish armoured trains.

The 10<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division on this day was engaged in a fruitless attack against the left flank of the Polish 15<sup>th</sup> Division.

The 57<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division of the Mozyr Group, which was to cross the Vistula at Dęblin and Maciejowice as early as August 14, was only now endeavouring to effect a crossing in the vicinity of Maciejowice.

On the enemy side there was nothing to indicate that the idea of taking Warsaw had been even temporarily relinquished. On the contrary, efforts to realise this object found confirmation in the new directive of the commander of the Russian Sixteenth Army,<sup>ref</sup> received by the divisions in the afternoon. However, this directive already reflected some concern on the part of the commander of the West Front for the left flank of his forces on the Vistula, which finds support in his undertaking to transfer one of the divisions of the Sixteenth Army to the Front reserve.<sup>39</sup> This division was to take station at Łuków, echeloned in rear of the left flank of the Russian Sixteenth Army, for the purpose of counter-acting aggressively the efforts on the part of the enemy at attacking the units of the Russian Sixteenth Army in flank while this army was advancing on Warsaw.

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<sup>37</sup> Presumably the transfer here is the part of the 10<sup>th</sup> Division not already at the front: the 31<sup>st</sup> Regiment had been late arriving and the 30<sup>th</sup> Regiment had been front reserve up to this point. MP.

<sup>38</sup> Presumably the “it” being replaced here is the Front reserve, and it was to the area around Legionowo.

<sup>39</sup> The commander of the West Front up to this time had not given any serious thought to a possible strong Polish attack from the south, notwithstanding the fact that he had information in his possession of the concentration of some Polish forces there. Believing that the Polish main forces were located north of the Bug River he felt that if he would soon crush them, there would not be left any other forces which could seriously threaten him.

The author is not quite correctly representing the thoughts entertained by the West Front Commander, M. Tukhachevski, see “The March Behind the Vistula” – Ed.



In accordance with the directive of the Commander of the Sixteenth Army, on August 16 the divisions were to continue their advance on Warsaw.<sup>ref</sup> However, they were to make their main blow not by way of Radzymin, but via Ossów instead. For this purpose two divisions were designated: namely the 17<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, which was to extend its zone of action up to the Brest highway, where it was to relieve part of the 10<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Rifle Division, which was to assemble during the night in the Lipiny – Majdan area. The 27<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, the south boundary of which passed through Czerwony Dwor, was to cover the main effort from the north by means of an advance on Pustelnik. The 10<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, having been partially relieved by the 17<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, and employing its free forces that had become available as a consequence, was to relieve with one brigade the 8<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division in the sector extending from the Świder River to Magnuszew, with the remaining brigades to advance on Warsaw, generally by way of Aleksandrów. The 9<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, as soon as it could be relieved, was to take station at Łuków, where it was to form the general reserve of the Commander of the West Front.

The regrouping was to be effected under cover of darkness; it was to be accomplished “quickly and energetically” keeping always in mind that the entire 8<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division was to assemble at Łuków by noon of August 18 at the latest.

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At the same time, apparently due to the fall of Nasielsk, the 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division was ordered by the Russian Third Army<sup>40</sup> to turn over its sector to the Sixteenth Army (27<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division) and to withdraw at the close of the day to the Ciepielin – Pobyłkowo area,<sup>41</sup> where it was to arrive not later than the evening of August 18, passing to the reserve of the Russian Third Army. This new instruction in relation to the activity of the enemy during the night had the effect that the units of the Russian Sixteenth Army and of the 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division, having lost their proper orientation and become involved in the fighting, found it impossible to carry out the disposition prescribed for them and at the same time be ready for the required advance by morning.

To the north of the Bug and Vistula rivers, from the forts of Modlin and the banks of the Wkra river, the Polish Fifth Army had been ceaselessly and persistently pushing forward for three days towards Nasielsk – which constituted its first objective. Gaining every inch of

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<sup>40</sup> This order was timed August 16, 11:05 p.m.<sup>ref</sup>

The general situation of the Russian Third Army, in accordance with this order was as follows: the 5<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division had received an order to occupy the line Siennica – Krogule – Nuna – Stanisławowo. The 6<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division continued its fight for the possession of Zegrze, its brigades occupying the line Bolesławowo – Szadki – Ludwinowo – Zegrsynek – heights somewhat south of B------. The 56<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division was concentrating in the Maków – Przasnysz area.

<sup>41</sup> North of Serock



ground only at the expense of intense efforts, the soldiers of this army were already displaying a spirit of victory.

The commander of the Northern Front, in view of the situation in Radzymin – as was the case on the preceding days – found it impossible to detach any forces whatever from the First and Second Armies for the purposes of reinforcing the Fifth Army. Now, however, the order for the transfer of the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade would no longer exercise any influence upon the fighting on the front of the Fifth Army. For the latter took Nasielsk at 4:30 p.m. on this day by its own efforts – i.e. if we do not consider the repulse of the units of the Russian Third Army in the fighting on the left flank of the Polish First Army.<sup>42</sup>

These actions served in great measure to weaken the aggressive spirit of the Russian Third Army in its offensive against Modlin and Nasielsk.

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In connection with the taking of Nasielsk, orders<sup>ref</sup> were issued according to which the group holding Zegrze was, immediately upon joining the left flank<sup>43</sup> of the Fifth Army, to begin an attack for the possession of Serock and Pułtusk. Instructions of the Front commander placed this group under the control of the Fifth Army. As new boundary line between the First and Fifth Armies Serock – Popowo was now designated.<sup>44</sup>

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The attacks against Wyszaków and Mińsk-Mazowiecki, of which the latter was directed against the sector of the First Polish Army, had been planned as early as August 15 and were to begin on August 16 at 3:00 p.m. With reference to Wyszaków the orders demanded “**containing the enemy by aggressive action** in the direction of Wyszaków”, and regarding the second direction of attack, “**taking** of Mińsk-Mazowiecki with **strong infantry forces**, assisted by all tanks, armoured trains and armoured cars”<sup>ref</sup> was enjoined. Upon receipt of the order from the Commander-in-Chief<sup>45</sup> which developed at considerable length the idea of Marshal Piłsudski on the subject, as presented in his letter, the Front Commander postponed<sup>ref</sup> the attack scheduled for August 16. He took this action because he was waiting for a special order; finally, at 6:00 p.m., he directed<sup>ref</sup> that the attack be launched at daybreak of the 17<sup>th</sup>. This attack has been referred to throughout as the “action” or “operation” and also as “joining the right flank of the First Army in the general attack”.

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<sup>42</sup> Zegrze sector – Ed.

<sup>43</sup> Right? – Ed.

<sup>44</sup> Assuming this means Popowo Kościelne, and no other “Popowo” seems to fit, then the boundary became the Narew and Bug Rivers. MP.

<sup>45</sup> The designation “Commander-in-Chief” in this case should be understood to mean the Chief of the General Staff, General Rozwadowski, who ordinarily prepared and signed the orders in the name of the Commander-in-Chief. – Ed.



In an order to the First Army, <sup>ref</sup> issued on this day late in the evening, we read: “The First Army will support the action of the Fifth Army by means of a **thrust** against Serock, and the action of the southern group with an **attack** on Mińsk-Mazowiecki. Further missions of the First Army: the containing of the enemy forces on the front, maintaining close support with them, and in the event of an enemy retreat, to take up the pursuit immediately.”

The execution of the **attack** was entrusted to the commander of the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. It was to start at 7:00 a.m. on the 17<sup>th</sup> from the line: Miłosna railway station – Królewskie Bagno, in the direction of Mińsk-Mazowiecki.<sup>46</sup> As immediate objective the Wielgolas area was designated. For the execution of this operation there were attached to the 15<sup>th</sup> Division: a) the armoured group under Major Nowitski (3 armoured trains and 5 tank platoons); b) one aviation squadron (10 planes); c) the assault detachment under Major Matczynski – which was to arrive at Miłosna railway station by 6:00 a.m. on the 17<sup>th</sup>.

From the account of the 15<sup>th</sup> Division we learn that: “Our successful resistance on August 13, 14 and 15 had weakened the enemy forces. Complete calm reigns on the front. There is confirmation of the concentration on the part of the enemy of considerable forces in the Karczew – Otwock-Wielki area.”

The entire 15<sup>th</sup> Division and some of the small detachments which had been attached to it were now disposed along the front line.<sup>47</sup> The divisional reserve was concentrated in the Zakręt – Janówek area and consisted of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 142<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the Kovno Rifle Regiment, and of one company of Marshal Piłsudski’s Guards. The division had just been brought up to war strength throughout. The soldiers, endeavouring to make up for their previous failures, were now eager for battle.

Yielding to this spirit of the troops, the division commander prepared on the night of August 16/17 for an attack on Pęcłin, designating for this purpose a part of the divisional reserve and a part of the 59<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment.

In this same account of the 15<sup>th</sup> Division we read further:

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<sup>46</sup> The time required for the concentration of the tanks and armoured trains rendered doubtful the possibility of designating an earlier hour.

<sup>47</sup> Disposition of the 15<sup>th</sup> Division on this day:

30<sup>th</sup> Brigade: sector from Góra-Kalwaria to Emów (inclusive). On the active front: a) from Góra-Kalwaria to the mouth of the Świder: 1 battalion of the 168<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment; b) from the mouth of the Świder to Emów: the 4<sup>th</sup> Company of the 7<sup>th</sup> Posen Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 61<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment and the 62<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment. In Brigade Reserve: 2 battalions of the 61<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment, in the Falenica – Aleksandrów area. Brigade headquarters: at Falenica.

29<sup>th</sup> Brigade: sector from Emów (inclusive) to Długa creek. On active front: a) from Emów to Michałowek: 59<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment; in its reserve, 6<sup>th</sup> Warsaw Guard Battalion; b) from Michałowek to Długa creek: 60<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, and in its reserve, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 223<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment. Brigade headquarters at Zakręt.

Total number of batteries in sector of the division: 13 light and 4 heavy batteries.

Total number of battalions: 18.

Headquarters at Rembertów.



At 7:00 p.m. the liaison officer at Front Headquarters advised that this attack was not authorised, in view of the general intentions of the Commander-in-Chief for August 17. At 8:00 p.m. the Chief of the Operations Section of the First Army gave to understand that this attack was superfluous and that instead, on the morning of the 17<sup>th</sup>, there would be launched an attack on Mińsk-Mazowiecki. Up until 9:00 p.m. no concrete instructions regarding the attack had been received. But at this hour there arrived at division headquarters the commander of the assault detachment (Major Nowitski), and the commander of the tank battalion. All of these units were to take part in the attack; to this end they were proceeding by rail to Miłosna, where they were scheduled to arrive at 6:00 a.m. on August 17. Later Captain Tserklewicz commanding the assault group of the 15<sup>th</sup> Division also arrived. Up to this time no other missions except that of taking Mińsk-Mazowiecki had been given out. Further objectives had not been announced. Nor was there anything definite known about the beginning of the action on the part of the 14<sup>th</sup> Division, or anything concerning the direction of this attack.

After a brief conference, the following was decided upon:

**Direction of attack** – a frontal attack, it being the shortest method and moreover greatly favoured by the railroad line, over which the armoured trains could be operated. This also required the least time for regrouping.

**Time of attack** – 8:00 a.m., August 17.

**Main column**, to advance along the Warsaw – Mińsk highway, comprising the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 142<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment; 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, Kovno Rifle Regiment; composite battalion organised from the 59<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup> Regiments; one company of Marshal Piłsudski's Guards; one squadron of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ulan Regiment; one battalion of the 15<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Regiment; two platoons of tanks.

The **group** of armoured trains (“Danuta”, “Mstitel” and “Paderewski”) to proceed along the railroad.

The detachment under Major Matczynski<sup>48</sup> with a platoon of tanks attached, was to advance to the north of the railroad.

The commander of the 29<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 15<sup>th</sup> Division to assume command of all the forces.

The 9<sup>th</sup> Aviation Squadron meanwhile to execute a flight over the enemy rear lines in the vicinity of Mińsk-Mazowiecki for the purpose of disrupting the enemy infantry columns and batteries.

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<sup>48</sup> The reserve battalion of the 50<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment – an excellent combat unit.



The regiments of the 15<sup>th</sup> Division were to remain on the first defence line, to defend it, and to await further instructions.

Such was the state of readiness – on the evening of August 16 and early in the morning of August 17 – of the right wing of the First Army; it was given the mission of assisting the attack on Mińsk-Mazowiecki which was about to be launched from behind the Wieprz River, in a northerly direction.

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“Speed and energetic action” were particularly in demand by the enemy in the sectors of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Rifle Divisions, because of the limited space of time in which the 8<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division had to be relieved, assembled, and transferred to the Łuków area. In order to relieve the 8<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division and carry out the missions prescribed in the directive of the Russian Sixteenth Army,<sup>49</sup> the commander of the 10<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, whose command post was at the Ruda estate near Dębe Wielkie, issued an order for the regrouping of units during the night.<sup>ref</sup>

At about 5:00 p.m. the commander of the 10<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division conversed over the telephone with the commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, whose headquarters was located on the Sufczyn estate near Kołbiel. From the latter he found out the Garwolin had been occupied by what appeared to be **partisans**; also that they had driven out of that town the 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment. From a telephone conversation at about midnight, the commander of the 10<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division learned that the 72<sup>nd</sup> Rifle Regiment which had been sent to Garwolin for the purpose of relieving the situation there, had not succeeded in its mission, and that at daybreak the entire 24<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade would march on Garwolin. He also learned that units of the Mozyr Group had “apparently become completely scattered.” Finally the situation is sized up as presenting the possibility of an unimportant attack by some small manoeuvring group from the Dęblin concentration centre, with the object of impeding the advance of the Sixteenth Army on Warsaw. It was therefore decided to speed up the relief of the 8<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division and to allow it sufficient time, before leaving for Łuków, to dispose of this enemy group. The commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division also stated that he had already reported all of these events to the headquarters of the Sixteenth Army, together with his own views as outlined above.<sup>50</sup>

The commander of the Russian Sixteenth Army, on this day, was also far from being pessimistic. He was convinced that only the Polish 14<sup>th</sup> Division was advancing from Dęblin, and he regarded the retreat of the Mozyr Group as only a temporary indication of its exhaustion and limited strength. This same view was also shared by the commander of the Mozyr Group. However, the Commander of the West Front, having in his possession an

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<sup>49</sup> To assist with its right the general attack of the Sixteenth Army against Warsaw. <sup>ref</sup>

<sup>50</sup> This part of the work of Major Perkevicz is based upon an extensive use of the article by N. E. Kakurin, entitled “On the Way to Warsaw”, published in the magazine “War and Revolution” in 1921. The author, in numerous places, imputes to Kakurin thoughts which the latter never expressed in the article. – Ed



intercepted enemy order, and being completely convinced that strong enemy forces would make their appearance from the direction of Lublin – now regarded the situation otherwise. It was this that prompted him to form reserves, as expressed in the order for the transfer to the Łuków area of the 8<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division of the Sixteenth Army. Although convinced of the likelihood of an attack from the south, the Front Commander did not for one moment allow the thought to enter his mind that events might develop with such overwhelming speed, as they actually occurred on August 17 and 18.<sup>51</sup>

On the Polish side, too, during this evening, the Commander-in-Chief, “sitting on the neck of the 14<sup>th</sup> Division”, had a telephone conversation with the Chief of the General Staff, who was at Warsaw.<sup>ref</sup> The Chief of Staff offered his congratulations on behalf of the splendid success achieved when Garwolin and the line Radzyń – Sarnów – Stoczek – Pilawa were reached. The first questions which the Commander-in-Chief asked was whether it would be possible to stage a sortie at daybreak on August 17 against Mińsk-Mazowiecki, following in general the direction of the Brest highway. The Commander-in-Chief was eager for an immediate reply on this score, because his decision concerning the Fourth Army depended on this. He pointed out that the sortie which he had previously called for along the Lublin highway was now “no longer necessary, because of the situation wrought by the 14<sup>th</sup> Division.”

The Chief of Staff ensured him that **the entire 15<sup>th</sup> Division** would be in a position to launch its attack on Mińsk on August 17 at 7:00 a.m. In view of this, he even suggested that the 14<sup>th</sup> Division participate in the operation against Mińsk with only one of its regiments, and that it should direct the remainder of its forces on Kałuszyn “for the purpose of turning the enemy in greater depth.” However, the Commander-in-Chief adhered for his former decision according to which the 14<sup>th</sup> Division was to advance due north, remarking that he was “counting and relying upon the 15<sup>th</sup> Division, and that the latter would be incorporated into the Fourth Army at Mińsk-Mazowiecki.” He then agreed to having this division begin its advance at 7:00 a.m. at the same time expressing the wish that it might start earlier. He next concurred in the ruling of the Chief of Staff according to which the remainder of the units of the First Army, because of their being “unduly fatigued, would not be suitable for employment in combat before August 18.” At the close of the conversation the Commander-in-Chief mentioned that he was publishing the Fourth Army orders requiring the advance of the **entire 15<sup>th</sup> Division** on Mińsk-Mazowiecki: “this will serve to urge them on, although they have today exhibited sufficient vigour – even though they have as yet not produced any important results.” The Commander-in-Chief attached great importance to the advance to be undertaken against Mińsk-Mazowiecki via the Brest highway by the **entire 15<sup>th</sup> Division** at the earliest possible hour; he was expecting it, and moreover, received from the Chief of Staff the assurance that this would be accomplished. The latter at once issued the necessary instructions.

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<sup>51</sup> Kakurin and Melikov: “The War with White Polish Forces in 1920”, 1925.





In response to these instruction, the Commander of the North Front issued an order which called upon the First Army to carry out Orders No. 4012/III and 4132 and required the advance on Mińsk-Mazowiecki to be started not later than 6:00 a.m. on August 17. In accordance with this same order, the Second Army<sup>52</sup> was subordinated to the commander of the Fourth Army, while the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade, after crossing the Vistula in the vicinity of Kępa Nadbrzeska during the night, was to attack Mińsk-Mazowiecki in force by way of Karczew and Glinianka, and then pass to the command of the First Army. The latter, by noon of August 17, was to send the 10<sup>th</sup> Division to the Pustelnik area, from where it was to be transferred by busses to the Fifth Army. The Fifth Army was to exert every possible effort with the greatest number of force available to cut off the enemy forces operating west of the railway lines Modlin – Ciechanów – Mława.<sup>53</sup>

This order, however, had no longer any effect upon the operations of the right flank of the First Army against Mińsk-Mazowiecki. The plan of operations and the composition of the forces designated for it remained unchanged – as decided in the evening at the conference held at the headquarters of the 15<sup>th</sup> Division. As far as the left wing of the First Army was concerned, another order of the Front Commander<sup>ref</sup> to the effect that it “will make preparations for the launching of an attack in the **general direction of Wyszaków**, for which purpose special instructions will be issued” did not, in general, change the “**containing operations by means of aggressive action in the direction of Wyszaków**” prescribed on the day before. Aside from this, the order of the First Army required solely “holding the defensive line and observing the enemy movements so that, in case there should be noted a withdrawal on this part, it could follow the enemy without losing contact with him.”

### **The Fifth Day of the Battle and the Crisis – August 17**

On the Zegrze – Dębe sector beginning early on the morning of August 17, the enemy opened and intense artillery bombardment. However, at 4:00 a.m. he commenced to withdraw in a northerly direction under pressure of the Polish Zegrze group, which, in accordance with the instructions it had been given on the day before, had launched an attack with the object of gaining possession of Serock and Pułtusk, in conjunction with the left<sup>54</sup> wing of the Fifth Army.

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<sup>52</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Legion Division and 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade.

<sup>53</sup> On this day the commander of the First Army issued an order<sup>ref</sup> in which the group belonging to General Żeligowski – consisting of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Lithuanian-Byelorussian Divisions – was to occupy the entire Radzymin sector up to Leśniakowizna. The 11<sup>th</sup> Division was to be transferred to the Pustelnik area, in army reserve. The Lithuanian-Byelorussian Division was to be brought up to full strength at the earliest possible moment, inasmuch as the incessant fighting in which it had been engaged up to now had prevented this. In connection with this order, it was found impossible to transfer the 10<sup>th</sup> Division to the Front Reserve.

<sup>54</sup> Right ? – Ed



The 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division had unexpectedly encountered difficulty in the execution of the order requiring it to cross over to the north bank of the Bug and from there to move to the Ciepelin – Pobyłkowo area. The principal impediment here was the delay on the part of the 27<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division in coming up to relieve it. This division, owing to the late arrival of instructions concerning a secondary mission, had found it impossible to simultaneously relieve the 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division in the north, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division in the south. The latter had been rendered necessary by the shifting of the boundary line to Tuł – Czerwony Dwor in connection with the scheduled combined advance of both the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Rifle Divisions in the direction of Ossów. Finally, the successful sortie of the Polish 8<sup>th</sup> Division during the night on the sector of the 17<sup>th</sup> Division, coupled with a tank attack in the morning, had caused the enemy before noon of August 17 to regroup along the north sector of the Warsaw bridgehead, with the object of occupying a line of departure for a new attack. The enemy accomplished this reorganisation under cover of short containing actions opposite the sector of General Żeligowski's group.<sup>55</sup> The enemy exhibited greatest activity in his efforts at crossing the Rządza near Mokre, as well as in his attempts at taking Wiktorów, Helenów and Czarna, during which he had even temporarily succeeded in breaking through the wire obstacles.

In the Radzymin sector, throughout the day, the Poles had also been engaged in regrouping their forces, in connection with the withdrawal from the front line of the 11<sup>th</sup> Division, which had finally been designated to reinforce the Fifth Army. As fast as it could be relieved, it assembled in the vicinity of Pustelnik. Its northern sector was taken over by the 10<sup>th</sup> Division, while that on the south up to Leśniakowizna was occupied by the 1<sup>st</sup> Lithuanian-Byelorussian Division. With the aid of exceptional artillery support it was possible to frustrate all enemy attempts at breaking through the first defensive line. In the sector of the 8<sup>th</sup> Division, after the execution of several splendid sorties, comparative quiet set in. Here both sides kept very weak contact elements at the approaches to the first defensive line and limited their activities to maintaining their positions; moreover, on this day the Polish forces had instructions to strengthen the trenches of their first line.<sup>56</sup>

In the 15<sup>th</sup> Division area, outside of the sector from which the advance on Mińsk-Mazowiecki was to start, the artillery engaged in a heavy bombardment, coupled with intensified activity on the part of scouts. A battalion of the 168<sup>th</sup> Regiment stationed on the eastern bank of the Vistula, was concentrated near Kąty<sup>57</sup> in readiness to cross over. The 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade (4<sup>th</sup> Division) crossed the Vistula in the Góra-Kalwaria area at 10:00 a.m.

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<sup>55</sup> 10<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Lithuanian-Byelorussian Divisions, on the former sector of the 11<sup>th</sup> Division, up to Leśniakowizna

<sup>56</sup> This indicates the attitude of the enemy along the sector of the Polish First Army on the fifth day of the battle – Ed.

<sup>57</sup> The text is unclear on the place name, not helped by the apparent error about which bank the unit was on. MP.



As a result of the delay in the arrival of the detachments with tanks and of Major Matczynski's force on its way from Radzymin, the advance from the Miłosna and Królewskie Bagno areas did not start until 9:30 a.m. It was carried out just as scheduled: with the main forces along the highway on Mińsk-Mazowiecki; the group of armoured trains operating over the railway line; and Major Matczynski's detachment advancing via Długa – Mrowiska – Rysie, protecting the left flank. The resistance of the enemy along the first line was soon overcome; they then withdrew towards Dębe Wielkie, resisting only in small groups. By noon the main forces occupied Brzeziny. The armoured trains were delayed by strong artillery fire at Skruda. Matczynski seized Skruda and Długa Kościelna, where he ran into the 10<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Rifle Divisions. Upon continuing his advance he was met at the cemetery north of Długa Kościelna by units of the 17<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division (153<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Regiment) which launched a counter-attack against his flank from Mrowiska. Also having before him units of the 10<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division (89<sup>th</sup> Rifle Regiment), he halted and became engaged with them. The enemy put up stiff resistance on the line Duchnów – Wielgolas – Dębe Wielkie – Mrowiska.

The secondary attack of the Polish advance encountered the Russian 10<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Rifle Divisions, while the main effort struck the Russian 30<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigades of the 10<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division on the Mińsk highway. The 88<sup>th</sup> Rifle Regiment of the 30<sup>th</sup> Brigade was driven from Brzeziny towards Dębe Wielkie, drawing along in its wake the entire brigade. Later on this brigade was ordered to withdraw step by step to Mińsk, and separated as it was from the other divisional units by the marshy valley of the Mienia river, it was told to defend every inch of ground with the utmost stubbornness. Brigade headquarters was at Dębe Wielkie. The 85<sup>th</sup> Rifle Regiment of the 29<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade was driven back to Duchnów, dragging along with it, from Boryszew on Pęcłin, the 81<sup>st</sup> Rifle Regiment. These regiments, occupying behind the Mienia river a flanking position in relation to the direction of the main advance of the Polish forces, were able to delay with their fire and counter-attacks the Polish advance considerably, first at Duchnów and later along the line Duchnów – Bolgolas. At the same time. The 87<sup>th</sup> Rifle Regiment of the 29<sup>th</sup> Brigade, quietly and without any interference on the part of the enemy, relieved the 83<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Regiment of the 28<sup>th</sup> Brigade in the sector Emów – Wiązowna. The relief was accomplished by 10:00 a.m., after which the 83<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Regiment, assembled at Ruda, calmly moved before the entire Polish defensive line by way of Jabłonna (northeast of Karczew) to Karczew, at which point, at 1:00 p.m. it proceeded to relieve the 22<sup>nd</sup> Brigade of the 8<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division. Of the remaining regiments of the 28<sup>th</sup> Brigade, the 84<sup>th</sup> Rifle Regiment occupied at this time the sector extending from Emów (exclusive) along the Świder up to the Vistula, and the other regiment (the 83<sup>rd</sup>) was in brigade reserve at Jabłonna. Alongside of the latter, at Pogorzelski, the 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment was posted, with the mission of observing toward the south and covering that part of the front, as well as the stretch along the Lublin highway. The headquarters of the 29<sup>th</sup> Brigade was located at Teresław, near Ruda, and the headquarters of the 28<sup>th</sup> Brigade at Malcanów.



While individual batteries accompanied the brigades and regiments, the greater part of the artillery of the 10<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division was grouped in the Dębe Wielkie area, where the church tower of the Catholic village church furnished an excellent observation point for the division commander. From this point the “Warsaw suburbs could easily be seen, even when visibility was poor.”<sup>58</sup>

At 6:00 a.m. the commander of the 10<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division again conversed over the telephone with the commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, who was still at Sufczyn at that time. He learned from him that nothing had been heard from the 24<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade, which had been sent towards Garwolin; that the 23<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Brigade was at Lubice, and that from the vicinity of Kołbiel there could be heard much firing. At 9:30 a.m., i.e. at the time of the beginning of the Polish advance from Miłosna, the assistant chief of staff of the 8<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division arrived at Ruda.

The latter, by using the telephone line of the 10<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, reported to the Headquarters of the Russian Sixteenth Army at Wysoka-Litewska, that the 8<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division had ceased to exist as a combat unit and that the commander of the division was “now merely taking measures for the removal of the divisional transport, of the remaining artillery, and of such individual troop units as had escaped destruction;” also that the “division commander, accompanied by his staff, was on his way to Mińsk.” Actually, on August 17, from early morning on, an endless string of baggage trains, separate mounted individuals, small detachments of foot troops, interspersed here and there with some artillery, in all a motley conglomeration, was moving along the highway and adjacent roads from Kołbiel to Mińsk-Mazowiecki. Kołbiel had been occupied by the Polish forces, i.e. by the advance guard of the 14<sup>th</sup> Division, at 7:00 a.m.; from there they now proceeded towards Oleksin.

The time of the report of the commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division from Ruda coincided with the time of the issuing of the new directive of the commander of the Russian Sixteenth Army, dated August 17, 6:00 a.m. and distributed at 10:00 a.m. The contents of this directive<sup>ref</sup> follow:

Wysoka-Litewska, August 17, 6:00 a.m.

On the morning of August 16 the enemy took up the offensive against our Mozyr Group – and by delivering a number of attacks from the Wieprz River in a northerly direction, he compelled the 57<sup>th</sup> Division to withdraw eastward beyond Radzyń, occupying Żelechów, Adamów and R-----.<sup>59</sup> Enemy cavalry, assisted by armoured trains, occupied

<sup>58</sup> In the article of Comrade Kakurin, we read: “From this church tower there could be seen even in unclear weather, the roofs, towers, and church steeples of the city of Warsaw.”

Major Perkewicz records the two periods of the attack as at 9:30 a.m. which was repulsed; and at 12:00 noon, which caused the enemy to establish himself at Brzeziny. – Ed

<sup>59</sup> It appears to say Rudin, which I cannot find. There is a Rudno east of Radzyń that fits, but also a Rudnik north of that town. MP.



Garwolin. Headquarters of the 57<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division has been transferred to Łuków. In the zone of our Third Army, in general, there is no change. The Commander of the West Front has directed that the 9<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division be placed in Front reserve beginning at noon, August 18, stationed in the Łuków area; channel of communications with Front Headquarters through the Headquarters of the Sixteenth Army.

I direct as follows: 1. The commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division will, on the morning of August 17, launch an attack with forces not less than one brigade against Garwolin from Osieck and Kołbiel. The division will defeat the enemy forces stationed in this area, drive them southward, and occupy by the close of August 17 the area Laskarzew – Żelechów. By so doing it will insure that its remaining units reach first the Stoczek area (northwest of Łuków), and then, if the situation permits, that of Łuków.

2. The commander of the 10<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division will hasten the relief of the 8<sup>th</sup> Division, returning to its commander the 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment.

In this directive there is as yet no perceptible sign of any wavering on the part of the Soviet commander in regard to taking Warsaw as representing the ultimate goal of the entire operation.

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Meanwhile the brigades of the 8<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division which, according to the report of the division commander had ceased to exist as combat units as early as 9:30 a.m., were engaged in battle, and it should be stated in fairness to them, that they were fighting rather well.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Brigade, at about 11:00 a.m., advanced from Rudzienko via Oleksin, on Kołbiel and drove the Polish 55<sup>th</sup> Regiment into the very town of Kołbiel. Units of the 24<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade were advancing from Sępochów, the hilly country in the vicinity of this village greatly facilitating its progress. By 1:30 p.m. the Polish forces were barely holding out in the southern part of the town. Only the arrival of another regiment of the Polish 14<sup>th</sup> Division rendered it possible by means of counter-attacks to dispose of the enemy's attack from Sępochów after occupying the heights. At 3:55 p.m. the regiment, having broken down the enemy resistance at Oleksin, was moving along the highway on Mińsk-Mazowiecki. The remaining forces of the 14<sup>th</sup> Division now gradually closed on Kołbiel, some elements proceeding to Siennica and occupying it.

At about 3:00 p.m. the 22<sup>nd</sup> Rifle Brigade, as fast as it was being relieved by the 82<sup>nd</sup> Rifle Regiment, was beginning to withdraw from Karczew in an easterly direction, with a view to assembling in the Kołbiel area which had been designated for it the day before. Meanwhile the commander of the 10<sup>th</sup> Division, while still at Ruda, had twice gotten in touch with the Operations Section of the Sixteenth Army headquarters, and in vain asked for new instructions. A conscientious soldier feels that he is duty-bound to remain in the position held



by him without becoming panicky; all the more so when on the left flank of his division things are yet quiet, and on the right, even though friendly units have somewhat withdrawn, this part is still holding out well. Indeed, the enemy had made little progress and the nature of the fighting as yet had failed to disclose the substantial numerical superiority the enemy enjoyed. The division commander caused his artillery to deliver concentrations upon the enemy armoured trains whose presence exercised a demoralising influence on the troops. He was informed that at Kołbiel some units of the 8<sup>th</sup> Division were still fighting with some success; consequently, he sent to the rear only his transport and part of his artillery.

However, the receipt of additional information recounting the final occupation of Kołbiel by the enemy and even that of Siennica, as well as the complete disintegration of the units of the 8<sup>th</sup> Division, confronted him with the necessity of making an independent decision. All the more so was this necessary as by that time the enemy while advancing from the west had captured the villages of Dębe Wielkie and Cisie and was continuing to advance further. Communications with the brigades was maintained well; however, communication with the 17<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division was lacking. At about 3:00 p.m. the commander of the 10<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, advising Army Headquarters of his action, issued an order requiring the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigades to withdraw gradually and to occupy and establish themselves firmly along the line Choszczówka – Chrośla – Choszczak – Podrudzie – Zamienie. “The 28<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade, stationed further to the south, together with the 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment, will concentrate in the area Ostrów – Pogorzal. Thereafter, upon covering itself on the south with the 84<sup>th</sup> Rifle Regiment, it will, depending on the situation, either assist the units of the 8<sup>th</sup> Division, in the case the latter are still fighting at Kołbiel, or else, strike the enemy in the flank by way of Dębe Wielkie. This will require it to advance over the Kołbiel – Mińsk-Mazowiecki highway, and then proceed to Mikanów where it will join the other units of the division in the Zamienie – Mikanów area. Brigade headquarters will open in the immediate proximity of Mińsk-Mazowiecki, while division headquarters will move to Osiny Farm.”

However, the units of the 10<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division were not destined to carry out these instructions, especially since some of them, i.e. those who had occupied the line Wiązowna – Karczew, did not receive the order until 5:00 p.m. Meanwhile, when the regiments of the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigades commenced to withdraw to the new position designated for them, in front of Mińsk-Mazowiecki, this line proved to have been pierced by the swift action of the Polish armoured trains. The latter, at 6:00 p.m., had forced their way into the Mińsk-Mazowiecki railway station and passed through it with such speed that it was found impossible to effect the demolition of the bridges as planned. Then too, the Polish aviation squadron was harassing with bombs and machine-gun fire both trains and artillery that were advancing in several columns over the highway from Mińsk-Mazowiecki eastward, spreading panic among them. At the same time the leading elements of the Polish 14<sup>th</sup> Division were now coming up at Mińsk-Mazowiecki from the direction of Kołbiel.



Under the pressure of the Polish infantry and tanks, advancing behind their armoured trains, the regiments of the 30<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade commenced to withdraw by way of Mińsk-Mazowiecki and to the north of it. They were headed in the direction of Jakubów, where they established contact with the 17<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division. This unit had been withdrawing eastward, and under cover of its rearguards along the line Chobot – Poręby – Cyganka – Mistów, having completely disengaged itself from the enemy, was now falling back in accordance with the instructions contained in the order of the commander of the Sixteenth Army.

The commander of the 10<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, upon establishing communication with the 17<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division at Osiny<sup>60</sup> learned of the order which required the units of the Russian Sixteenth Army to retreat during the night to the line of the Muszwoka and Liwiec rivers.<sup>ref</sup> This order was the result of the directive issued by the Commander of the West Front,<sup>ref</sup> which, in connection with the occupation by the enemy of the line Kołbiel – Siennica – Łuków – Biała, had prescribed as the immediate mission, the crushing of the “Lublin Group” of the enemy and the nullification of his successes in the vicinity of Modlin, thus relegating the question of taking Warsaw into the background.

Upon arriving at this decision, the Soviet Commander-in-Chief,<sup>61</sup> because of the action of the enemy, was compelled to postpone for the time being the plans for obtaining his basic objective until a more favourable situation developed, which he hoped to bring about by crushing the hostile Lublin Group and nullifying the success at Modlin.

It is quite another matter that the enemy did not succeed in creating those favourable conditions in the further progress of this operation, and soon had to even give up his principal aim entirely, which at the outset was expressed in the desire of capturing Warsaw. Of particular importance to us, in this connection, is the matter of noting the postponement of this objective, for it confirms our argument regarding the crisis in the operation in general, and in the battle of Warsaw in particular.

The paragraphs of the directive in question that are of special interest to us are the following.<sup>62</sup>

3. The Third Army will defend the approaches to the Narew and also the course of the Western Bug extending from the mouth of the Narew to the right flank of the Sixteenth Army. At Wyszaków it will prepare a fortified bridgehead on the left bank of the Western Bug. The 21<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division, in three stages, will be transferred by way of Kosów to the Drohiczyń area in Front reserve.

4. The Sixteenth Army will withdraw behind the Liwiec, and place two divisions in reserve behind its left flank.

<sup>60</sup> in Jakubów at 11:00 p.m., Ed.]

<sup>61</sup> presumably this is Tukhachevski, as overall commander of that theatre. MP.

<sup>62</sup> Compare Melikov, “Marne, Vistula, Smyrna”, 1928.



5. The Mozyr Group will drive the enemy out of the Biała area and defend the line Janów – Biała – Sławatycze.

However, on this day, two divisions of the Sixteenth Army<sup>63</sup> had ceased to have any combat value that could be in any way considered in the execution of this directive. Only one brigade of the 10<sup>th</sup> Division (the 30<sup>th</sup>), very much exhausted, to be sure, but still having all of its regiments, succeeded in reaching Jakubów by way of Mińsk. The second brigade (the 29<sup>th</sup>), even before reaching the line Podrudzie – Zamienie, no longer represented a complete combat unit, since the 87<sup>th</sup> Rifle Regiment had remained in the Wiązowna area, having failed to receive the order in due time; and so it was destroyed somewhere between Wiązowna and Wielgolas. The 85<sup>th</sup> Rifle Regiment had forced its way from Podrudzie through the leading elements of the Polish 14<sup>th</sup> Division, and upon hearing the roar of cannon near Mińsk-Mazowiecki, it had turned through the woods towards Piaseczno, at which point it found the remnants of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade of the 8<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division. The 86<sup>th</sup> Rifle Regiment, after forcing its way through the Polish forces from Zamienie by way of the highway, got lost in the woods near Tartak and they did not join the division.

The regiments of the third brigade<sup>64</sup> commenced to clear the line of the Świder River in the evening, though they had lost contact with their brigade headquarters. The 83<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Regiment, on reaching Józefów, engaged in fighting with the enemy advancing along the highway; here it lost its accompanying battery and was compelled to turn to the north in search of a road via Kąck, to the northern flank of the army. While crossing the river at Duchnów this regiment was completely destroyed. The 82<sup>nd</sup> Rifle Regiment, together with the 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment, moving along from Karczew via Glinianka, encountered the 24<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 8<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, accompanied by the 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment. The unsuccessful action at Zamienie had compelled part of this mixed force to retreat on Glinianka.

The Polish 14<sup>th</sup> Division, reaching Mińsk-Mazowiecki with its advance guard between 6:00 and 7:00 p.m. and concentrating its main forces there during the night, proved an insuperable barrier for the enemy who had been moving to and fro between the Vistula and the highway, which it was supposed to follow (Kołbiel – Mińsk-Mazowiecki). Simultaneously with the 14<sup>th</sup> Division the units of the 15<sup>th</sup> Division that had effected a sortie had entered Mińsk-Mazowiecki; because of lack of space, they were, however, required to abandon Mińsk-Mazowiecki and to spend the night in the Chrośła – Choszczówka area.

During the greater part of this day, the Polish 15<sup>th</sup> Division had remained in the bridgehead of the first defensive line. In a report of this division we read: “ In the process of the development of the battle, the commander of the division learned of the victory of the 14<sup>th</sup> Division, and also that the sortie against Mińsk-Mazowiecki no longer amounted to a more

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<sup>63</sup> 8th and 10th Rifle Divisions.

<sup>64</sup> The 28<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade. MP.





local undertaking, but that it was now affecting the general attack, and that therefore the 15<sup>th</sup> Division was placed under the control of the commander of the Fourth Army; however, during the further progress of the battle it received no additional instructions.” In consequence, by evening of August 17, the 29<sup>th</sup> Brigade of this division was moved up as far as the line Długa Kościelna – Brzeziny (100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment – maintaining connection with the 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division), as well as to the line Wielgolas – Dębe Wielkie (59<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment). In like manner, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade<sup>65</sup> was ordered to assemble in the Glinianka – Celinów area. The latter started forward between 6:00 and 7:00 p.m. from the line Emów – Otwock: 63<sup>rd</sup> Regiment via Wólka Mładzka and the 61<sup>st</sup> Regiment via Swierk. Upon entering Glinianka, the advance guard of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Regiment was suddenly attacked from all directions, and with tremendous losses, it was driven out of the village (by remnants of units of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Rifle Divisions).<sup>66</sup> Due to the darkness which had set in, as well as to the general disorder that prevailed during the night, it was impossible either to expel the enemy from Glinianka, or to come to the aid of the advance guard. Not until an attack was launched at 4:00 a.m. on August 18, now with two regiments, was the enemy finally defeated. The captured included 1,120 prisoners, 3 guns, baggage trains and peasant vehicles. The prisoners taken belonged to the 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 57<sup>th</sup> Rifle Divisions.

Part of the enemy forces, which had rushed in a northerly direction, to the crossings of the Mienia River and towards Mińsk-Mazowiecki, had come upon the screening forces consisting of the armoured trains and units of the 15<sup>th</sup> Division, posted along the Brzeziny – Mińsk highway. In the fighting that ensued here during the night, which lasted up to 7:00 a.m. of August 18, approximately 800 prisoners, about 30 or 40 machine-guns, baggage trains, field kitchens and other spoils were taken. This was the picture that presented itself to the Commander-in-Chief upon his arrival at Mińsk-Mazowiecki: “on both sides of the highway there were batteries – some facing towards the north, others facing south.” The Commander-in-Chief then issued orders for further action in the immediate future.

In the zone of the Polish 8<sup>th</sup> Division, contact with the enemy had already been lost during the night of August 17/18.

On the sector of General Żeligowski’s group, during the night of August 17/18, the enemy again launched several vigorous attacks, particularly in the vicinity of Helenów; he also continued his artillery fire on Radzymin. This, however, proved to be merely a rear-guard action. On the morning of August 18 contact with the enemy could no longer be maintained. Upon reaching Wyszaków, the Polish forces discovered that the bridge over the Bug at that point had been destroyed.

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<sup>65</sup> 30<sup>th</sup> Brigade? MP.

<sup>66</sup> 28<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade



On August 17 the right flank of the Polish Fifth Army occupied Serock. The bridges across the Narew were found to have been destroyed at Serock, Helenów and Pułtusk.<sup>67</sup>

On this same day, units of the manoeuvring groups operating beyond the Wieprz, aside from taking Łuków and Biała, occupied Siedlce and Międzyrzec; while the 3<sup>rd</sup> Legionnaire Division, upon defeating the 58<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, rapidly moved forward to Włodawa and Brest.

Thus, on August 18, the plans of the Soviet leaders with regard to defeating the Lublin group of the enemy along its line of departure – the Narew, the Bug with the Warsaw bridgehead and next on the line of the Liwiec, were completely disrupted. The divisions of the Mozyr Group<sup>68</sup> which, in accordance with the directive, were to drive the enemy out of Biała and to crush him – were in turn themselves crushed by the adversary. The 17<sup>th</sup> of August not only marked the crisis of the battle of Warsaw, but also was the day from which on the enemy never regained the initiative. This day crowned Polish military strategy with a great triumph; it was a day of magnificent victory, covering with glory the nation, its military forces, as well as their leader and organiser.

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<sup>67</sup> I can't find any Helenów on the river, nor any third bridge over the Narew. Even today between Różan and Zegrze there are bridges only at Serock and Pułtusk.

<sup>68</sup> 57<sup>th</sup> and 58<sup>th</sup> Rifle Divisions.

