

The Polish-Bolshevik Cavalry Campaigns of 1920

BY

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The conditions in the Polish-Bolshevik campaigns resemble more nearly those we are likely to meet with in future operations than anything seen in France. The great distances, lack of roads, insufficiency of railroads, and slight density of troops approximate somewhat to the conditions which might be met with in an American theater of war. These campaigns, therefore, present few points of resemblance with the warfare of the Western Front. They resemble the World War in the enormous length of front, but differ from it in the density of the line. They differ from wars of the past in that the weapons used were those developed by the World War and also in the fact that even in the theaters of principal operations the troops were deployed on a wide front. Cavalry played an important role. Twice, at least, it played a decisive one. It had a great, perhaps decisive, influence on the entire campaign.

The terrain and climate are admirably suited to cavalry operations. East of the Bug, on the whole front of over a thousand kilometers, there are only two macadamized roads. Both of these roads run perpendicularly to the front—one through Rovno to Kiev, the other from Brest-Litovsk to Bobrusk. The other roads are unsurfaced and vary according to the nature of the soil. In places they run through deep sand that is impassable at all seasons for motor vehicles. In other places, in dry weather, the roads are usually practicable; but the many streams, some very wide, with marshy banks, are serious obstacles for motor vehicles. The bridges are of wood, too light for heavy trucks. Most of them had been burned many times during the past six years and replaced by temporary bridges or not at all. Several times during the operations slight rains immobilized all motor transport for days.

The country is generally flat or slightly rolling, except in the extreme south. There are many forests. In the south, before the war, the country was well cultivated. Now there are everywhere large waste stretches. The population east of the Bug is sparse, except in the southern sector. The peasantry live usually in villages. The buildings are of logs, with thatched roofs. There are few isolated farms. In the center of the towns there are brick buildings with thick walls, clustered about a solidly built church. These towns formed strong points and were continually used as such. The railway facilities are poor. These were rendered worse by the destruction of many large bridges which required months to rebuild, the inadequacy of railway material, and the use of different gauges. The population varies greatly in character. Everywhere east of the Bug, clear to the Dnieper, the town population is partly Polish. Poles are scattered in patches among the country population. The great landowners are mostly Polish. They had left the country during the first Bolshevik occupation, 1918-1919. Their administrators, head farmers, house servants, and other dependents, who were generally Poles, had, however, remained. In the southeast the majority of the peasantry is Ukrainian, and the state of civilization is about that of the French peasantry before the Revolution. They are, however, much more warlike and willing to fight. In the north the peasantry is White Russian, with an admixture of many Poles, and in the extreme north some Lithuanians. The White Russian peasantry is very apathetic. In all towns a great part of the population is Jewish.

The Poles, wherever found or of whatever social condition, are intensely patriotic. Their devotion could be relied upon, and their knowledge of local conditions was of great value to the Polish armies. The attitude of the peasantry, except the Poles, may in general be characterized by saying that they were tired of war and were unfriendly to whichever army was in occupation. The Jews were at first very unfriendly to the Poles, and many of the younger ones were Bolsheviks. After the experience of a few weeks of Bolshevik occupation they became much more amicable to the Poles.

During the preliminary peace negotiations with the Bolsheviks the Polish High Command prepared a big stroke, to be launched in the event these negotiations failed. With the breaking off of these negotiations the preparations were rapidly completed. Heretofore the operations against the Bolsheviks had been conducted on a comparatively small scale, and consisted of a series of local actions which resulted in pushing the Bolshevik lines eastward. This time, profiting by the political situation in the Ukraine, a large-scale operation was planned with the intention of dealing a crushing blow. It was not merely planned to push back the Bolsheviks, but to cut off and eliminate as a fighting force a large part of their southern army, by placing forces in their rear and across their main lines of retreat. The advance was made at the end of April and was completely successful. By the end of May the country south of the Pripet was cleared of Bolshevik forces and Kiev was captured. During this operation, which can be considered as the first phase of the 1920 campaign, the cavalry played a decisive part.

The Polish morale was now high. Every man felt that he could beat half a dozen Bolsheviks. Polish losses had been insignificant. Then came Budenny. With daring and dash this astonishing leader threw his cavalry divisions against the Polish line, felt for its weak points, found them, and broke through. The Polish cavalry, greatly outnumbered, was neutralized, and the whole Polish force, almost without a fight, was thrown into confusion. It retreated, panic-stricken, from position to position, out of each of which in turn Budenny, by rapid movements, outflanked them. This second



phase ended with the Poles in full rout westward and Rovno evacuated to the enemy.

By these reverses the Polish High Command was impressed with the immediate necessity for additional cavalry units, and by the end of July there had been hurriedly got together a cavalry corps of two small divisions and a brigade. This force took the field against Budenny in the hope of capturing him and his whole force. They failed to accomplish this; but Budenny was beaten, the morale of the Poles was greatly improved, and the terror which the mere name of Budenny inspired disappeared. The field of active operations now shifted to the north, and a large part of the cavalry corps was transferred to the new front. Budenny did not follow, but advanced on Lemberg instead. Though there was little to oppose him, he advanced but slowly. About August 20 he was within 25 miles of the city, with his patrols well to the northwest and southwest of it. He received orders to proceed northward and attack the northern flank of the Polish armies, which were moving northeastward into the Bolshevik rear. Though several times repeated, the order was not obeyed for several days, Budenny insisting upon continuing toward Lemberg. Apparently the prospect of looting the city appealed to him more strongly than the importance of saving the main Bolshevik armies from defeat. Finally Budenny moved, but too late. In a series of actions near Zamosc, in early September, he displayed much energy, but was completely defeated and has since ceased to be a factor on the Polish front.

North of the Pripet the Poles had only one weak cavalry brigade when the Bolshevik attack started, on July 4. The Bolsheviks had a corps of cavalry of two divisions, which during their whole advance marched on the right flank, along the Lithuanian and German borders. This corps was not handled with the ability shown by Budenny, or things might have gone worse for the Poles. In addition to this cavalry corps, a cavalry division appeared for a time. The cavalry corps, called the IIIId, played an important part in the defeat of the Poles on July 4-6. It forced the front on the Polish left and reached their rear taking many prisoners and turning the Polish defeat into a rout. As a result, the Polish First Army was so badly beaten that it ceased to be a military force capable of resistance. The Fourth Polish Army, on the right of the First, was carried along in the retreat and soon became nearly as badly disorganized as the First. About July 27-28 the Poles evacuated Grodno. From then on, for a period of several days, there were no Polish troops between the Bobr and the German frontier. The Bolshevik cavalry advanced through this gap slowly, without energy. The menace of its presence, however, contributed to cause the continued Polish withdrawals.

While the fate of the whole campaign hung upon the operations in the north, the Poles at the end of July were preparing for their counter-offensive against Budenny in the south. The reasons which influenced the Poles to divert forces for an operation of secondary importance at so critical a moment appear to have been both political—that is, the desire to hold east Galicia—and the fear of Budenny and the desire to eliminate him. This diversion came near costing the Poles dearly.

In the north the lack of cavalry was keenly felt. To stop the Bolshevik advance along the German frontier, cavalry was needed. The Poles had organized a weak force of cavalry, which took part in the actions at Ostrolenka. It was very poorly handled. After the fall of Ostrolenka the Bolshevik cavalry displayed more energy. It crossed the Omuleto, occupied Chorzele, Prasnysz, Ciechanow, Mlawa, and continued to advance rapidly until on August 15 it crossed the Vistula at Wloclawek and, farther to the west, reached on the 17th and 18th the Drewenz River east of Thorn.

The main offensive operation of the Poles started from the Wieprz on August 16 and advanced northeastward into the Bolshevik rear. This great success could not be fully exploited, due to lack of cavalry. Motor trucks and horse-drawn carts were used to hasten the forward movement of the tired infantry, but the burned bridges stopped the vehicles, and part of the Bolshevik army escaped. The plans for this operation included the organization of a large cavalry force in the north. The formation of a cavalry corps north of Modlin was begun. This force was designed to protect the Polish left and, later on in the operation, turn the Bolshevik right. The first brigade of this corps started operations south of Ciechanow about August 13. Several brigades and regiments arrived in time to participate in the operation and assisted in the Bolshevik defeat. Events moved too rapidly, however, for the cavalry corps to complete its concentration. With the defeat of the Bolsheviks some of the cavalry was sent to assist in the operations against Budenny near Zamosc. Orders for this move were issued too late and the cavalry did not arrive.

The Polish High Command needed large forces of cavalry everywhere to carry out its strategic operations. Commanders at the front were continually calling for more cavalry to meet their local requirements. The numbers of the Polish cavalry were so far below these requirements that the cavalry was continually being moved. Orders for important cavalry movements, as a consequence, were frequently issued by general headquarters too late, and the best opportunities for the employment of cavalry were lost, permitting large forces of Bolsheviks to escape.

The Poles now planned a general advance in the south. A cavalry corps of two divisions, each of three regiments, was organized near Vladimir-Volysk. The regiments were so small that the total combatant strength did not exceed 3,500 sabers. This cavalry corps was to advance to Rovno and Dubno and cut off the Bolshevik retreat. The latter were already completely beaten and demoralized. The cavalry corps captured a large number of prisoners, but the Bolsheviks had begun their retreat before the Polish operations were ready, and a large part of the Bolshevik force escaped. Budenny withdrew without fighting.

Meanwhile an independent cavalry brigade, starting from the region north of Stanislawow toward Kremenetz, cut off the retreat of a large force of Bolsheviks and took many prisoners, guns, and material. The cavalry corps advanced to



Novgrad. From here it carried out a well-executed raid to the railway junction of Korosten, bringing back prisoners in excess of its own strength. There was only one Polish cavalry brigade in the north at the end of September. It was on the north flank, and by a rapid march reached the railway north of Lida, cutting off the retreat of the Bolsheviks in that direction.

In the foregoing paragraphs an attempt has been made to present a brief history of the Polish-Bolshevik operations, particularly as related to the cavalry of the two armies, throughout the whole campaign of 1920. Details have purposely been omitted. The first two phases of this campaign, however, including the advance and initial successes of the Poles and their subsequent rout by Budenny, deserve a more particular review. Before undertaking a further narration of events, this seems a proper point at which to remark upon the character of the cavalry forces involved.

The Poles had, at the beginning of the campaign, seven cavalry brigades. After the serious defeat by Budenny's cavalry in June, the Poles hastily organized new cavalry regiments and partly reorganized the old ones, creating in all thirty regiments. Each brigade consisted normally of three regiments and a group of artillery. Brigades often had two regiments, sometimes four. Two or three batteries constituted the artillery groups. Each regiment consisted of four "saber" squadrons, one machine-gun squadron, and one technical squadron. These squadrons had a prescribed strength of about 150 men. The machine-gun squadrons had eight guns. The technical squadron comprised headquarters orderlies, signalmen, etc. The squadrons usually had much less than 150 men.

There were no permanent divisions. A division was formed by placing two or more brigades together under a division commander, who was given a staff, etc. There were practically no division troops; even the artillery belonged to the brigades. Corps were organized by placing similarly more than one division under a corps commander. Staffs were unorganized and much too large. Auxiliary troops were lacking.

The troops were indifferently trained. Each regimental commander employed in his regiment the regulations he had previously used, Austrian or Russian, as the case might be. Lack of horses, food, clothing, and supplies prevented real training during the winter and early spring. The troopers carried the short carbine, saber, and lance. Officers and non-commissioned officers were armed with the pistol. There were no automatic rifles. The rifle was carried slung across the trooper's back. The machine-guns, of different models, were carried both on horseback and in carts. The terrain was flat or slightly rolling and almost everywhere practicable for small native wagons. The troops were generally well mounted. The small native horse, with a certain amount of good blood, predominated. In general, the height was well under 15.2, often 14.3, and occasionally less. These small horses are very hardy and have enough blood to gallop well. The Posnanians had large horses. They made a splendid appearance at first, but soon lost flesh. Some officers took their thoroughbreds with them. The care of the horses was good. This was not due to attention to this particular by the officers, but to the individual trooper, who was always foraging for his horse and at every opportunity fed him. Horses did not always receive enough water. Officers paid little attention to this and left it to the initiative of the individual trooper. The forage ration was in theory about the same as ours. In practice the horse got what his rider could rustle for him.

Marches were poorly conducted. Most of the marching was done at a walk, which was often too slow. On the other hand, individuals and small groups were continually galloping without reason. The length of marches varied greatly. Sometimes 75 kilometers were made in 24 hours; 30 kilometers was, perhaps, the average length of march. The First Cavalry Division made on the average about 1,000 kilometers per month during June, July, and August, exclusive of patrols and distances covered by small units. Tactical consideration allowing, the march did not usually start until about 8 a.m. A long halt was made at noon, during which girths were loosened. The number of sore backs, considering the conditions, was not large.

The officers did not concern themselves greatly with details, in the matter of caring for their men. In general, the men took care of themselves. Most units had rolling kitchens and received a hot meal from them each evening. In the morning they had coffee and bread. At noon they ate a piece of bread and occasionally some cold meat or sausage which they had left over from the night before. The issue of rations was largely supplemented by foraging.

Discipline in its outward forms was good. In reality there was none. Failure to obey orders, delay or slackness in their execution, was the rule, and more so in the higher grades. March discipline did not exist. Straggling and pillaging were the rule. In this respect the war was similar to that of the Middle Ages. The population suffered and was correspondingly hostile to all troops. The efforts made by the high authorities to protect the population met with no response from subordinate commanders, who openly admitted pillaging and stealing as the only means for the troops to live, since no regular supply system functioned.

With respect to the tactics employed by the Polish cavalry, it may be said to be characterized by the mounted charge. On every occasion they wanted to charge, usually without reconnaissance and without proper utilization of the terrain. This tendency to charge often cost dearly, but on many occasions was remarkably successful. The charge was executed in extended order with the lance. Its effect was almost entirely moral, as the trooper had insufficient instruction in the use of the lance. There were numerous instances of a charge at unbroken infantry and machine-guns over open terrain. So great was the moral effect of the charging cavalry that the enemy fled before them, abandoning excellent positions.



There was practically no dismounted action. The men did not know how to use their carbines. There was much useless firing from horseback, occasionally with real moral results, but never with many casualties. There was no effort to utilize the terrain or to take cover. Large units stood in close order in exposed positions, when near by there was excellent cover. This resulted frequently in direct hits from artillery at short range, which resulted in great confusion and panic.

At the commencement of Budenny's operations the Polish disposition lacked depth. Almost the whole Polish Army was spread out in a long line of companies or platoons, each in a village, with little or no contact with each other and with few reserves. When attacked at any point, the line had little power of resistance. Once through this line, Budenny's cavalry met with little opposition, and immediately occupied themselves with the destruction of communications. They then proceeded to carry out their mission by destroying a railroad center, massacring the population, and robbing. Later on, the Polish General Staff reorganized this system, disposing the units in the rear of the front and maintaining a very thin line of observation, thereby having sufficient troops disposed at intervals in readiness for a counter-attack. Directly the enemy had pierced the weak line of observation with his cavalry masses, the Polish units in rear, by maneuvering, would attack in the flank. This system gave excellent results. Insufficient cavalry usually prevented the Poles from pursuing their advantage.

Ever since the exploits of General Denekin's cavalry, the Bolsheviks have laid great stress on the employment of that arm. It was mainly through the instrumentality of large cavalry units formed by the Bolsheviks during the summer of 1919 that Denekin was later defeated. This success of the Bolsheviks resulted in the strengthening of the cavalry, which contributed to the success of the operations against the Poles during the summer. The Bolsheviks used extensively large mounted formations—Budenny's cavalry army in the south and the IIIrd cavalry corps in the northern sector of the Polish front. Budenny's cavalry was largely responsible also for Wrangel's defeat.

Budenny is said to be a large man, of good appearance, about thirty-five years old. He has little education. He rarely rides horseback, but moves by carriage. He was a non-commissioned officer of cavalry in the old Russian Army. Officers who knew him then say that he did not appear particularly able. Whether or not he has real military ability is questioned. It is often said that his Chief of Operations, Zotoff, is the man who really forms the military plans. But Budenny is without doubt a man of great determination and strength of will. His Chief of Staff and a large part of the staff usually remain well in the rear. Zotoff is in charge of the advance section of the staff, which remains with Budenny.

As in all Bolshevik units, there are commissaires attached to Budenny to watch him. No orders are valid without their approval. Most of the officers were in the old Russian Army. They were brought into the Bolshevik Army by different circumstances. A few joined because they are convinced Bolsheviks; many because it is easier to be an officer in the Bolshevik Army than to make a living otherwise; others were conscripted. Some entered from pure love of adventure and plunder.

The troops consist of Cossacks and non-Cossacks. The Cossacks serve the Soviet Government because it temporarily replaces the old Czar Government which they formerly served. They are, in general, anti-Bolshevik in sentiment. Whole units have deserted to the Poles. The non-Cossacks are mostly conscripted peasants or those who have volunteered for the good food and plunder or for the love of adventure. In the army, there are a certain number of real Communists.

Budenny's force was named the First Cavalry Army. It consisted of the 4th, 6th, 11th, and 14th Cavalry divisions. A division had two or three brigades, each of two regiments, and one battalion of artillery. The regiments had four squadrons of 70 to 100 combatants. Headquarters had a special guard of 500 picked men. Budenny's force may have had 12,000 or more cavalymen, in addition to the men in the trains and auxiliary forces. The armament was most varied. Most of the troopers carried a short carbine. Many of them carried the saber of curved, cutting model. None were armed with lances at the beginning, but later carried captured ones. Each squadron had two or three machine-guns. These were usually mounted on the back seat of a carriage, a Victoria, or similar sprung vehicle, from which they were fired to the rear. During the summer, when the grain crops of the Ukraine were very high, these machine-guns were able to fire over the top of the grain. Small-arms ammunition seemed to be supplied in plenty, and an enormous amount was expended, mostly in pure waste. The horses were only fair, being mostly small peasant horses.

The artillery, consisting principally of three-inch guns, was drawn by oxen when not in the presence of the enemy. The men were usually mounted. The guns were fairly well handled, but the shells rarely exploded. There was generally a shortage of artillery ammunition. A number of armored cars were used early in the operations. These seem to have disappeared in the course of the campaign. Four armored trains were assigned to the Cavalry Army. They were of doubtful value, as the cavalry usually operated too far from the railway. Each cavalry division and army headquarters had a radio station.

The Cavalry Army was moved from the Caucasus to the Polish front by marching. It required two months to make the march. The divisions marched separately, in general over the same road, following each other at distances of two days. The daily marches were from 30 to 35 kilometers. Every fourth day was normally a day of rest. There were also three rests of three days each during the entire march. There was no organized supply system and the troops lived by "requisition" (so called) and pillaging.



Budenny invariably tried encircling movements in order to reach the rear of his opponent without fighting. If he ran into opposition, he did not persist, but tried elsewhere. A second or third failure did not discourage him. With great determination he kept on trying. Having four divisions at his disposal, he could feel the line at different points with part of his force, while the remainder was in the reserve, ready to exploit a success. The Poles, having repulsed him at many points, would congratulate themselves on their success, when Budenny, having found the unguarded point, would pass through and suddenly appear in the rear. Confusion and retreat resulted for the Poles, usually almost without a battle. In this method of handling cavalry, Budenny may be regarded as almost a model to be followed.

Budenny's favorite formation for attack seems to have been one in which the attacking unit was formed in successive lines of foragers, with intervals of about 10 paces, on an extensive front, giving the impression to those attacked that the whole terrain was filled with advancing cavalrymen. In the rear of these successive lines of foragers would be machine-guns drawn by one- or two-horse teams. These were only used after the cavalry had wheeled to one or both flanks. Budenny's divisions usually operated at some distance from each other, with much independence of action. There is no instance of the whole force being engaged at one time under his immediate command, though each division appears to have been always well under his general direction.

The individual use of arms was poor. The saber was rarely used, except to torture or kill the wounded. The method of handling machine-guns, while as a novelty it had a great advantage against the enemy whose morale was shaken, would have been useless against good troops. After the Polish morale had been restored, the large target offered by the enemy's machine-guns frequently resulted in their elimination, either by direct fire of artillery, by hidden machine-guns, or often by a bold mounted charge. There were, however, numerous examples of excellent and effective work of machine-guns, especially in covering a withdrawal. The carbine was used but little dismounted. The Bolshevik cavalry usually fired from horseback—mostly in the air. While at times this had a great moral effect on retreating and demoralized troops, it did not pay for the expenditure of ammunition. The trooper was rarely dismounted to fire. There is no authentic example of a properly carried out dismounted action.

When the enemy was met the foragers did not charge. They usually fired from horseback, remaining at a safe distance. If the enemy attacked or his fire was serious, the foragers withdrew behind the machine-guns. The mounted charge occurred very rarely and was never pushed home. On one typical occasion a large force, a division, emerged from a wood in a comparatively compact mass, vaguely resembling a line of platoon columns, and advanced at a slow gallop toward a much smaller force of Polish cavalry which was assembled in close order in the open. The Bolsheviks, yelling and firing in the air, stopped at some distance from the Poles. When the latter appeared about to charge, the whole mass of Bolsheviks turned and fled.

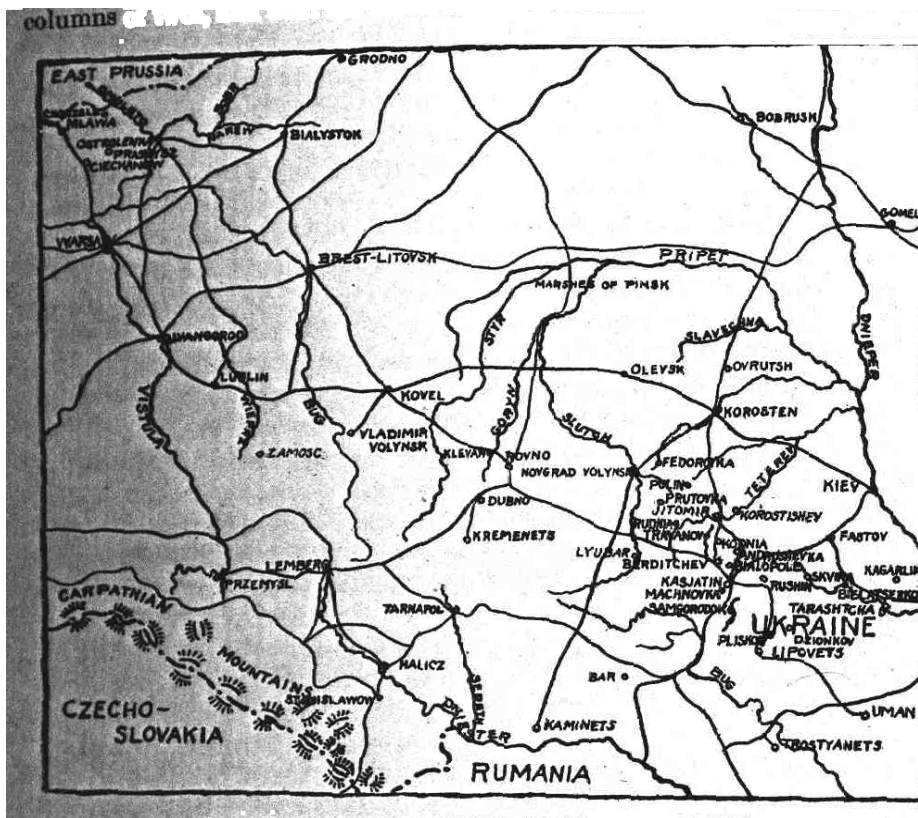
On reconnaissance and the service of information in the field, Budenny's cavalry was fairly good, especially his Cossacks. Their patrols covered the country well. They fully understood the principle that the duty of a patrol is to see and not to be seen; to reconnoiter and report, and not to fight. In the use of the terrain and the taking of shelter, the Bolshevik cavalry was excellent—in marked contrast to the Poles. Service of security hardly existed. Both sides relied on the other's not attacking during certain hours of the day and night. Frequently troops were surprised in their billets.

At the commencement of operations in April, 1920, the Bolshevik-Polish front in the southern sector was about as follows: From the Pripet River along the Slavechna River; thence across to Olevsk (80 kilometers west of the railroad junction of Korosten); thence south to and up the Slutch to near Lyubar; thence a line running generally south, passing about 10 kilometers west of Bar.

The Polish general plan of operations was to have cavalry forces make long, rapid marches through the difficult country between the railways and main roads and reach important strategic points in the rear of the enemy. As the cavalry reached its objectives the Poles were to advance on the whole front from the Pripet to the Dniester. There were three main forces of Polish cavalry. The cavalry division, starting from near Novgrad Volinsk, was to pass south of Jitomir and reach the important railway junction of Kasjatin. A cavalry brigade (the third), starting from near the same place and advancing north of the Novgrad Volinsk-Kiev highway, was to place itself across this highway east of Jitomir. Another cavalry brigade, starting from near the Slavechna River north of Ovrutsh, was to reach the important railway bridges over the Teterev on the line from Korosten to Kiev.

The cavalry division had been organized only a short time and had a mounted combatant strength of about 3,000 men, with 50 machine-guns and 16 field guns. General Romer, who had previously been commanding an infantry division took command just before the operation. The division was concentrated for the first time on the evening of April 24, in the region south of Novgrad Volinsk. At 3 a.m. on the morning of the 25th the division left camp, crossed the Slutch River, and marched toward Trayanov. The combat trains alone accompanied the troops. The trail was poor and narrow, through forest and swamp with many streams to cross. The troops could march only in columns of twos, and with the trains formed a column 15 kilometers long. The





SKETCH-MAP OF POLAND AND THE UKRAINE

Note:—The relative large amount of detail shown in theater of principal operation treated in this account does not mean that this region is a center of population. Relatively unimportant places are indicated in this region to assist in following the narrative of events.

division was preceded by a small advance guard about a kilometer in advance of the main body. Patrols covered the country thoroughly for 5 kilometers on each flank. The division commander and staff marched at the head of the main body. Ten-minute halts were made each hour.

The first encounter was east of Prutovka, where two regiments of Bolshevik cavalry were met. They tried to hold the village. A half regiment was at once sent to outflank them on the north and an equal force to outflank them on the south. These movements were rapidly executed mounted. The Bolshevik cavalry, fearing apparently to be cut off, retired eastward toward Jitomir. They were followed for a distance by a few squadrons. The column reached Rudnia at 2.30 p.m., having covered 52 kilometers. The first long rest was made here and the horses were fed. At 4.30 the march was continued to a point southwest of Trayanov, a distance of 24 kilometers. A regiment of Bolshevik cavalry was encountered here, which retired toward Kodnia. The division halted at 11 p.m., after a march of 76 kilometers.

On the morning of the 26th the march was resumed at 4 a.m. At 1 o'clock in the afternoon, after a march of 66 kilometers, the division halted. As the rear guard and carts were crossing the railway, a Bolshevik armored train came up and opened fire with machine-guns and artillery. The Polish artillery opened upon the train, which withdrew. The Poles had two killed and seven wounded, with casualties among the horses. The railway was cut in two places by explosives. The march was resumed at 3 p.m., over bad trails, toward the south, to Kasjatin, which was reached at 7 o'clock in the evening. Kasjatin Junction had been reconnoitered and patrols had cut the railways in all directions. As Kasjatin was occupied by the enemy, the division prepared at once to attack. Four regiments were designated to make an attack, with two batteries of artillery. The other two regiments and one battery were held in reserve.

The Bolshevik forces consisted of five train-loads of troops on their way to Berdichev, together with some garrison troops, in all several thousand. There were two armored trains and artillery at the freight station. The large railway yards and stations were filled with trains. The Poles entered the town mounted, in two columns. The few Bolsheviks, surprised, offered very little resistance, and the Poles continued rapidly to the railway station. The attack there began at 8 p.m. and the fighting continued until 6 o'clock on the morning of the 27th. The Bolsheviks fought well, placing machine-guns on the tops of the railroad cars and in the windows of buildings. The many trains in the station and the buildings around made the attack difficult. The Bolsheviks had three hundred killed and many wounded. Many prisoners and much material were taken. A train containing Bolshevik commissaires trying to escape to Kiev derailed at the place where the Polish patrol had cut the track. The next morning a Polish regiment was sent back toward Bialopol to intercept Bolshevik detachments.



On the morning of the 25th the Poles launched their general attack from the Dniester almost to the Pripet. This advanced satisfactorily. The news of the presence of the Polish cavalry in the rear of the enemy line caused a general retreat, which soon turned into a rout. On the 27th and 28th the cavalry division attacked the 44th Bolshevik division, retiring from the west, and took 3,000 prisoners, 27 field guns and 80 machine-guns. The regiment which was sent back to Bialopol similarly took 2,000 prisoners from Bolshevik units retiring from Berditchev. Near Machnovka a brigade of the cavalry division took large numbers of prisoners. In all the cavalry division, with a combatant strength 3,000 men and 16 guns took over 8,500 prisoners. Its losses were very small, amounting to 3 officers and 15 men killed and 70 seriously wounded.

The division remained in the vicinity of Kasjatin for several days, awaiting the general advance of the whole line. On May 2 it resumed the advance at 4 a.m. through Rushin. Only enemy patrols were encountered. One squadron took Skvira the same night. On May 3 the division reached Bielatserkov, and the same day one regiment continued to Pakitno, which was reached at 8 p.m. Patrols that same night continued 10 kilometers to the west and south. Tarashtcha and Kagarlik were occupied by squadrons the next day.

The third cavalry brigade, less one regiment which was attached to a neighboring infantry division, was concentrated April 24, south of Novgrad Volinsk. On this day the brigade marched 40 kilometers toward the northeast, to Fedorovka. The next day the march was resumed at 5 a.m. and 90 kilometers were made. The first Bolsheviks were met west of Pulin, and from there on small skirmishes took place continually. At one place the Bolsheviks made a stand. It was broken by a mounted charge of several squadrons against rifle and machine-gun fire. The losses of the Poles were slight in men, though fairly heavy among the horses. The Poles continued on to Korostishev. There they met a force of about 400 Bolshevik infantry, 50 cavalry, and 4 guns. The Poles had only 6 squadrons, numbering about 360 combatants, the remainder of the forces being detached on scouting or in pursuing small enemy groups. After a short fight, the Bolsheviks were driven back. On the 29th the brigade marched to Leshchin, a distance of 60 kilometers. No enemy was encountered. On May 1, in conjunction with infantry, this cavalry brigade took Fastov. Here it was joined by the third regiment. On May 3 the advance of this brigade had reached to within about 15 kilometers of Kiev.

The northern cavalry brigade started on April 25 from the region north of Ovrutsh. In two days it reached, through very difficult country, the railway bridge over the Teterev, a distance of about 130 kilometers. Instructions to this brigade were to cut off the Bolshevik forces at Korosten and also to prevent the destruction of the railroad, especially the large bridges over the Teterev. Two Bolshevik divisions and five armored trains coming from Korosten attacked this cavalry brigade repeatedly. The first attacks were driven off, but the Bolsheviks finally succeeded in outflanking the Poles on the south and pushing them to the north of the railway. As the Poles had, in accordance with orders, not destroyed the railroad, except for a small hasty destruction at the last moment, which was quickly repaired, the Bolshevik armored trains were able to accompany the rest of their troops, and retired toward Kiev.

Experience has shown that the small damage done to railroads with the explosives carried by cavalry is very rapidly repaired, unless a large bridge is destroyed. The Bolsheviks and Poles both have become very adept at rapid repairs of the railway.

The Polish Army at the end of May was completely victorious. With insignificant losses, it had destroyed the Bolshevik forces south of the Pripet. A new front ran from north to south along the Dnieper, with a bridge-head of about 30 kilometers radius at Kiev; thence the line ran southwest, passing south of Skvira through Samgorodok, Dzionkov; Pliskov, Lipovetz; thence along the Sab and Bug to Trostyanets; thence southwest to the Dniester near Kamenka.

From the Pripet to the Dniester the Polish forces consisted of two armies under the Army Group commander at Jitomir. The Third Army, with a front from the Pripet to the neighborhood of Dzionkov, had four Polish and one Ukrainian divisions, the latter only partly organized, and one cavalry brigade. The Sixth Army, continuing the line to the Dniester, had two Polish divisions and several partly formed Ukrainian units. Army Group reserves consisted of three very weak cavalry brigades and one infantry regiment.

The Bolshevik forces, before the arrival of Budenny, consisted of inferior infantry of very poor morale and one cavalry brigade of Baskirs opposite Kiev. The arrival of Budenny had been expected for some time. An American aviator, flying over Uman, saw what was probably Budenny's whole force concentrated there, apparently for a review. On May 28 this force was reported near the railway junction west of Uman.

It was known by radios that Budenny intended to march northward toward Bielatserkov and force the Poles to evacuate Kiev. The general situation, due to operations in the north, required the Poles to remain on the defensive. To meet this move the Army Group reserves were disposed as follows: one regiment of infantry and the Third Cavalry Brigade near Bielatserkov; the other two cavalry brigades well in advance of the line at Tarashtcha; at the Kiev bridgehead two divisions were centered; all the remaining troops were spread out thinly, in small detachments, over the entire front. There was no depth to the line. There were only local reserves and often none at all. The troops thus spread out were completely out of control of their commanders. The cavalry division, with hardly 1,200 combatants left, was far out in advance of the line. (Though losses were very slight during the first few days of the April operations, during May in many small patrol actions the losses totaled up to a large figure. The long and continued marches wore out the horses and many men were without mounts.) It was outnumbered at least five to one by the Bolshevik cavalry and had but little



chance in a fight.

From the information furnished by peasants, spies, and intercepted radios, the Bolshevik movements were pretty well known. On May 28 intercepted radios showed that Budenny, instead of marching directly northward, was going to march northwestward. He spread three divisions out fanwise and held the fourth division in reserve about a day's march in the rear. He chose favorable terrain by heading toward Pliskov and Lipovetz and avoiding the more difficult country further south, in the valley of the Bug.

On the Polish side two infantry regiments held the front from Lipovetz to Andrushevka and had excellent dispositions, with considerable depth. The regiments which held the front farther north, on the contrary, had everyone in [the] front line. Small detachments were scattered along the entire front. When headquarters heard of the change in Budenny's plans the cavalry brigade and the infantry regiment forming the reserve were ordered to the region of Rushin. The cavalry division remained at Tarashtcha until Budenny's force approached, when it withdrew somewhat.

On May 30 the 11th Bolshevik Cavalry Division, apparently well informed of the Polish disposition, marched straight toward the junction of the two Polish infantry regiments first mentioned. The Polish commander used good judgment. He maneuvered well with his reserve and was assisted by one battalion of the regiment in general reserve, which was hastily brought down from Rushin by rail. The 11th Bolshevik Cavalry Division was beaten back with losses. A little farther north the 6th Bolshevik Cavalry Division was also repulsed. The 14th Bolshevik Cavalry Division came against the Polish regiment which was disposed all in [the] front line and attacked. This division broke through easily and passed through to the Polish rear; but its commander lacked energy and failed to exploit his success.

On May 31 the first two of the Bolshevik divisions rested, apparently not far from the Polish lines. The Poles, however, made no effort to keep in contact with them. The 14th Bolshevik Division, bivouacked near Starostinev, was attacked by the Polish cavalry brigade and infantry regiment in reserve, was badly beaten, and lost several guns. The Polish cavalry division received orders to move south and to attack Budenny in [the] flank; whereupon Budenny sent his reserve division to protect the right flank and rear. These two cavalry divisions came in contact near Tatiev. (About half way between Lipovets and Tarashtcha.) Neither dared risk battle, and after a little skirmishing both withdrew.

In spite of the timidity of the Polish cavalry commander, the first two days had been successful for the Poles. This success was further increased by the desertion of one brigade of Budenny's 14th Division, which went over to the Poles. Had the Polish cavalry commander shown more energy, it is likely that much larger forces would have gone over.

On June 1 Budenny's whole force could nowhere be found. The Polish cavalry had failed to keep contact. The Polish command was worried at the disappearance of Budenny and ordered a thorough search made by the aviation. The aviators reported that they saw large red flags on the edge of a small wood east of Samgorodok. The Polish Army Group commander at once decided that all Budenny's cavalry and one infantry division were in this forest. Both Army Headquarters were therefore notified and ordered to countermand the advance which had been decided upon for the purpose of straightening the line. The Army Headquarters did not believe the reports of the aviators, but orders were given to suspend the operations. This order did not reach the commander of the 6th Battalion near Skvira.

On June 2 the Skvira group carried out the advance as originally planned passing within a very short distance of the forest in which lay Budenny's force. There appears to have been almost no reconnaissance, for his appearance was never reported. Budenny, on the other hand, undoubtedly observed the advance of the Poles. When the Polish infantry had passed, part of Budenny's force, preceded by armored cars, attacked the Polish forces at Osterna and Samgorodok and annihilated them. Then the main part of Budenny's forces came out of the forest, passed near Skvira, and attacked the Poles in the rear. Thus, without battle, Budenny's whole force was in [the] rear of the Polish front.

The Bolsheviks that day marched about 50 kilometers toward the west. The Polish cavalry brigade kept in contact. The cavalry division was farther east. When informed of events, it tried to pursue. Budenny appears to have divided his forces. He sent detachments toward Jitomir, Berditchev, Fastov, and Korosten. The Polish Army Staff at Jitomir fled a few minutes before the arrival of the Bolsheviks. Where resistance was encountered, the Bolsheviks did not persist, but in general there was little resistance. The Bolshevik detachments spread terror among the line of communication troops, scattered in small detachments. Those who were caught were tortured and killed. The reports of this quickly spread and a panic ensued. General Headquarters at Warsaw was seized with fear, although the whole Polish line had easily withstood repeated Bolshevik attacks and was undefeated, and ordered a general withdrawal in the Ukraine.

Budenny seems to have wasted several days. He did nothing to interfere with the withdrawal. One of his divisions watched a column of over a hundred trucks on the Kiev-Jitomir road without attacking. The Polish 7th Infantry Division, meeting a Budenny cavalry division, quickly drove it off. The Bolsheviks evacuated Jitomir and Berditchev. They did not dare attack Kasjatin, the most important railway point. General Headquarters wished to hold Berditchev and Jitomir, but Budenny suddenly appeared west of the latter place, so a retreat was ordered to the Slutch. This stream runs through a deep, narrow valley and forms a real obstacle. While Budenny created the impression that his whole force was near Novgrad Volinsk, a part of his force crossed the Slutch to the south, and was quickly followed by the remainder; whereupon the Poles withdrew to the Gorin.



Upon the report that Budenny was approaching, a withdrawal was made to a line through Rovno. A few days later Budenny's cavalry appeared at Klevan, 25 kilometers behind the new line. They showed no energy, not even cutting the railway or seriously attacking trains; but a panic took place at Army Headquarters quarters at Rovno and a withdrawal was ordered northward. This left a great gap in the Polish lines and the main road and railway to Warsaw was left open.

Thus ended the second phase of operations about July 4. In one month a force of about 12,000 cavalry had caused the previously victorious Polish army of 10 divisions, a total of about 200,000, to retreat a distance of 200 to 250 kilometers. This had largely been done without a serious battle. Polish morale was destroyed and the Polish army had suffered great loss and disorganization. The Polish cavalry had barely 600 effectives left and had to be withdrawn to be reformed. During all these operations the Bolshevik infantry took no important part, but the very name of Budenny caused a panic. This defeat in the Ukraine had far-reaching effects. It completely demoralized the high command and caused the sending of two infantry divisions from the north front when that many should have been spared from the Ukraine for the northern operations. The result was disastrous in the great action which began in the north on July 4, and Budenny is probably responsible for the subsequent events which almost upset central Europe.

Remarks on Polish-Bolshevik Campaign

Excerpted from a Letter from a Polish Captain of Cavalry Who Participated

The "right to vote" is a right belonging to about 18 regiments in Poland. After an officer has served six months with us the officers present with the regiment meet and vote on him. He either receives the "Order of the Regiment" (a cross) or is sent away. Colonel Rommel (soon to be General) believes in the lance. My brother officers, being of the old Austrian Cavalry, do not like it. The recruits lose faith in it after the first charges and drop the lance to draw saber. The Kozaks, whom we fought from Kiev to Livow and back to Korosten, never stood when we charged. They ran and we could clear all ground not swept by machine-guns.

The machine-gun mounted on a spring cart drawn by three horses was a new and very fine machine in the high wheat of the East. Like our western land, the fields are large and machine-guns placed on the ground were of no use. Cavalry in retreat can keep up a steady trot and never turn if followed by such a machine-gun cart. Only very determined men will come too close and your speed makes outflanking very hard. Any cart hinders cavalry. Our guns (Russian model) were too heavy and were a drag on us.

