

Captain Stanisław Alexandrovicz

My First Victory

It was in the winter of 1919.

The late Captain Władysław Dąbrowski formed a self-defense regiment of Wilno Lancers in that city. The regiment was quartered in the barracks of the 3rd Don Cossack Regiment in Antokol in Wilno [Vilnius].

I had been serving for a few months as a volunteer in the 1st Squadron of the Regiment under the command of the late Lieutenant Zaborski. One day I was called to the deputy commander, Captain Jerzy Dąbrowski, from whom I received an order to go to Nowa Wilejka [Naujoji Vilnia], 10 km away, and bring back for the regiment some oats left in one of the factories by the retreating Germans. I was to take with me 3 lancers to help and 15 sleds from the regiment's rolling stock.

Ulan Sylwestrowicz (who had been in the 1st Krechowce Lancer Regiment of the I Dowbor-Muśnicki Corps), Ulan Romer, and another whose name I do not remember anymore, volunteered to join me. We reached Nowa Wilejka without any problems. At the depot I found the oats left by the German cavalry and, with the help of the civilian population, I proceeded to bag and load the oats onto the sleds. After a few hours of work, I heard the marching of a mounted detachment on the street next to the factory. It turned out that our 1st Squadron was marching through Nowa Wilejka to the village of Łożniki Wielkie to collect from the civilian population some heavy machine guns and grenades allegedly left there by the retreating Germans.

After checking in with the squadron commander, I received an order from him to wait for the squadron with the rolling stock after loading the oats, with which I was to return to the regiment. After a short time I completed my task, and since the civilian population were very interested in us and the oats, I decided to withdraw with all the transport to the western edge of the town and wait for the squadron there. On the edge of the town I stopped the sleds, and after tying the horses to fences, I went to an inn to drink hot tea. I was still a completely inexperienced volunteer, so I did not think about setting up a guard. Civilian coachmen had similarly left their horses and were taking shelter from the cold in the cottages of the town. I sat down quietly with two of my companions to drink, which we enjoyed greatly after a few hours of loading oats in the cold. Ulan Romer went into the town.

After a while I felt someone pulling my coat sleeve. Behind me stood a boy, 12 or 13 years old, who whispered to me: "Some foreign soldiers came by the inn, not your soldiers and not Germans. They looked through the windows, questioned the Jews, and were going to shoot you through the windows. Now they are heading to the train station!"

My blood froze. I remembered that the previous day our patrols in Niemenczyn [Nemenčinė] and Bezdany [Bezdony] had skirmished with the Bolsheviks. I ran out with Sylwestrowicz and the other ulan and we got the horses. Breathless and gasping, Ulan Romer came running up, shouting that there were a lot of Bolshevik infantry at the railway station.

I shouted to Romer to take the rolling stock out of the town along the road to Wilno two or three kilometres, then wait. With the other two lancers, I decided to catch up with the Bolshevik patrol which had just been at the inn, and then see the Bolshevik infantry for myself. We galloped off with our sabres out along the street directly towards the railway station. At the end of the street, at a bend behind a railway crossing, I saw five soldiers walking towards the station in burly coats and lambswool hats. They saw us only at the last minute, because the bend of the street blocked visibility and the heavy snow dampened the hooves of the horses. I watched as all five of them turned to us and pointed their rifles. Only one shot was fired before we were upon them.

The Bolshevik patrol gave up the fight. With the shooting and yelling several railway men ran out of a nearby building and helped disarm the Reds. One of the enemy, in a green *bekiesza*,¹ looked like a commander. I asked him where they had come from. He pointed to the station and the church. I could see a lot of silhouettes in the snow in burly coats and *papakhas* that way.

¹ A short heavy coat with braid on the chest, a bit like a hussar pelisse.



Triumphantly I led away my first prisoners. On the way I learned from them that they had spent the night in Bezdany and had come from there to Nowa Wilejka. They had been a patrol sent to the western edge of the town. Arriving at the inn he saw our horses and carts in the street and us through the inn's window, but was afraid to shoot and start a fight, because he assumed that with a such a large fleet there were far more soldiers than we really had.

After joining Romer and the transports, proud of my first captives, we all set off to Wilno. After a few minutes, however, I got a chill, but not from the cold. It occurred to me that my squadron commander had told me to wait in the town for them to march through it. What if the squadron went to the town without cover, not knowing that there were Bolshevik infantry already there?

I knew the route. On the one side was a high railway embankment, on which there was Bolshevik infantry, on the other side, the Wilenka River, frozen only at the banks, with a strong current in the middle.

However, I decided quite quickly. Sylwestrowicz was to take the transports with oats to our barracks. Romer with the remaining lancers would escort the prisoners to the self-defense command, to General Wejtka in Wilno. I myself turned my horse back towards the town.

I did not have a map and I did not know the area well either. I had to ask locals about a crossing of the river. A passage was located, but it was almost in the middle of the town. I must admit that I was afraid to ride down a street towards an enemy I had already seen, with my only choice to be to turn and gallop away if I encountered any Bolsheviks. Apparently, however, my pride was stronger than my fear and I reached the indicated foot bridge, over which it was possible to ride with some care. Luckily for me, they started shooting at me only when I was already on the other side. I galloped uphill into the buildings that obscured me from observations and shooting.

I found the village of Łoźniki Wielkie, but the squadron had left. Locals told me that it had gone to the village of Shaterniki. I galloped along the tracks and after a few kilometers I encountered the returning squadron. Happy, and flush with my exploits and galloping, I reported to the squadron commander what had happened and my first victory. The squadron marched around Nowa Wilejka along a road that the squadron commander found on a map.

I still remember that day because it was the first victory over the nerves and fear of a young volunteer.



Captain Stanisław Alexandrowicz

How I Got My Brother a Promotion

In 1919, the 13th Wilno Lancer Regiment, under the command of the late Major Władysław Dąbrowski, took part in the operations around Minsk on the flank of our infantry.

At that time I was in the regiment's 1st Squadron, commanding the 3rd Platoon as Lance-Sergeant.² The previous platoon commander had fallen ill and left for the hospital. My brother Antoni was also lance-sergeant, but in the 1st Squadron's 2nd Platoon.

On a day, whose date I don't recall, the regiment encountered an enemy defense line manned by Bolshevik infantry with machine guns. On the flank of the Bolshevik defense, on a decent sized commanding height stood a farm, which was occupied by Bolshevik cavalry with machine guns. About two kilometres from the farm there was a forest of tall trees. I was sent with my platoon and a machine gun, under Corporal Buko, to the edge of this forest to guard our flank and observe the farm containing the Bolshevik cavalry.

On the main line of the regiment's advance, quite far from my position, a battle with heavy rifle and artillery fire could be heard. I remained quietly on the edge of the forest for about two hours. The Bolshevik cavalry, about two squadrons strong, behaved passively, not even sending out scouts. At one point I heard distant cries of "urra", saw a cloud of dust and recognised through binoculars that our 2nd Squadron was charging head-on at the farm manned by the Bolshevik cavalry. That charge collapsed under the fire of the Bolshevik rifles and the squadron turned back, leaving behind several horses on the ground.

Seeing the squadron turning back under the fire, I decided to attack with my platoon. I was joined by Corporal Buko and his machine gun. From the farm to the forest was about two kilometres. The Bolshevik cavalry seemingly did not know about our presence in the forest, and since the platoon galloped without shouting, no-one shot at us. When the platoon had almost reached the top and there remained no more than 300 or 400 metres to the farm buildings, the horses began to sink up to their bellies in a wet meadow, which could not be seen from the forest. This halt caused disorder and shouting, and at that moment the platoon received rifle fire from the farm. I yelled, "Off the horses and follow me!" The platoon moved on foot for the rest of the advance, leaving the horses behind. Only one horse, with the HMG, carried on.

Attacking on foot from the direction of the forest, with a loud cry of "urra", apparently caught them by surprise and succeeded completely. The enemy cavalry rushed to their horses and began to flee the farm, leaving behind a machine-gun and some horses. Panting, the platoon and I ran up the hill into the farm and started firing at the fleeing *sotnias*. The Bolsheviks mounted their horses just outside the farm. A hastily positioned heavy machine gun began to fire and caused damage among fleeing men.

The captured hill and farm allowed us to observe the rear of the first line of infantry defense. I sent a few lancers to bring up our horses, and on captured horses I sent a message to the 2nd Squadron with a report that the farm had been captured. The deputy commander of the regiment, Captain Jerzy Dąbrowski, arrived after a few minutes at the head of the 2nd Squadron. After realising the situation, the 2nd Squadron attacked the enemy's flank, together with my platoon. The attack was successful and the Bolshevik infantry line began to retreat hastily. The regiment immediately pursued.

The next day I read in the orders a commendation and an instruction to present crosses to the lancers of my platoon, who distinguished themselves with their courage during the attack on the farm. Corporal Buko was promoted to Lance-Sergeant, and Lance-Sergeant Antoni Alexandrowicz to Sergeant. Fortune fell upon my brother, because Captain Dąbrowski had mixed up our names.

² *Plutonowy*, platoon commander.



Captain Stanisław Alexandrovicz

Fire, Attack and Surprise

The 13th Lancer Regiment, participating in our general operation at Minsk in 1919, was ordered to carry out and blow up the railway track in the area of the Olechnowicz [Olekhnovichi] station on the line from Molodeczno [Maladzyechna] to Minsk line.

On 29 June the regiment entered the Nalibocki Forest and marched all day until midnight along the road crossing the Nalibocki Forest to Iwieniec [Ivyanets].

Heavy rain fell all day and night soaking us not only us completely, but even the leather of our saddlebags and the cloth of our Canadian saddles.

On the edge of the Nalibocki Forest not far from Iwieniec, we received a three hour rest to feed our horses who had not fed since the morning. We had no hay, the transport was still on the sandy and soggy road; but in the saddles we each had one feed of oats. The next day we would have to find ourselves the oats for our "comrades in arms".

At three we continued our march to Iwieniec. We took it with a charge, capturing a platoon of Bolshevik infantry and a commissar, so that there were no witnesses to the regiment's leaving the blue shadows of the Nalibocki Forest.

After getting some oats in Iwieniec, we marched on towards Pierszaje [Pershai]. After passing that village, the regiment's 1st Squadron, of which I commanded the left-wing platoon, went as a vanguard to Gródek [Gorodok]. Ulan Bukowski and I rode as scouts out to the left; the platoon was in column. After passing a forest, the country road reached a large clearing. At this point we saw the leading scouts stop, and in front of them a Bolshevik mounted patrol of seven men trotted from the right side of the road to the left towards a farmstead lying 500 metres from the road. Bukowski and I galloped around the farm to cut the path of the enemy patrol. It went into the farm buildings and we lost sight of them. However, I saw our lead platoon come out of the woods into the clearing and the enemy must have seen us.

We rode with ulan Bukowski towards the farm, which had a barn and orchard on that side. By the barn stood a frightened farmer looking at the clearing. By his hut, sheltered from the direction of the road, there was the Bolshevik cavalrymen, closely observing the road. None of them were looking in the direction of the barn. The lead platoon could be seen in the column calmly marching along the road, the front of the rest of the squadron had already appeared from the forest.

Ulan Bukowski and I looked at each other. The sabres went into their scabbards. I pulled out my large "Steyer" pistol and he took the rifle off his back. In a flash we were shooting from horseback at the group of seven men. The effect of the shots was excellent, because the patrol fled through the only way out of the farm between the fences to the front of our squadron, while actual the result of the shooting was zero: all the enemy riders remained in their saddles, with just blood on one gray horse. We rushed in pursuit of the fleeing patrol. I shot the entire magazine at the back of the fleeing men and missed. Only my drawn sabre and a good horse allowed me to cut two cavalrymen from the saddle. Bukowski did likewise, I did not see him throw his carbine onto his back, but I saw how he took off and pulled a Bolshevik rider off his horse by grabbing his shoulder.

Our colleagues in the leading platoon of the squadron set off to meet our chase. The Bolshevik patrol quickly evaporated. We took six good horses and one wounded. There were three prisoners and four corpses – the success of the sabre, not the bullet.

Before dawn on 1 July the regiment quietly and secretly approached Olechnowicz station. One squadron rushed up and lay down on a hill on one side of the station while the other squadron surrounded the station from the opposite side, occupying the hills on that side.

At dawn we saw a long enemy train enter the railway station. The 2nd Squadron began to fire at it. Their bullets began to whistle over our positions. My squadron, thinking that the crew of the recent Bolshevik transport was shooting at us, began a violent and nervous fire in return. How this mutual shooting of the



enemy, and basically of each other, would have ended was not found out. It was interrupted in an energetic and not very elegant way by the commander of the 1st Squadron, Lieutenant Maślowski, who led us in an assault on the train crew and the station.

The crew of the transport was taken prisoner, along with a member of the government of "Soviet Lithuania and Byelorussia", Comrade Levin.

The captured steam locomotive, leaking steam from bullet holes, was used for a trip to a railway bridge a few kilometers away. A large amount of explosives and some volunteers were taken on the tender. The defenders of the bridge, impressed by the sounds of fighting at the station, surrendered without a shot. A large amount of explosives was placed on the bridge. After lighting the fuse, we rushed to the steam engine to drive away from the bridge. But the holes in the boiler, through which steam escaped, delayed our departure and then the explosion on the bridge blew us off the tender onto the railway track like we were feathers. The steam engine and tender became welcome shields from the falling debris of the bridge and stones thrown high by the force of the explosion.

The regiment had performed its task.

The three colourful episodes described by the author reflect vividly and in simple words some of the experiences and impressions of soldiers.

In the first story, I would like to highlight two significant facts, one of which is negative and the other is very positive.

Negative – although somewhat understandable – was the lack of guard during the stop in the inn.

Positive – and worthy of the highest recognition – is the fact that the young volunteer remembered the squadron and notified its commander of the presence of the enemy despite the great personal danger associated with finding it.

In the second story, I direct the reader's attention to a very glorious act – the execution of a charge on the farm on his own initiative. This was brave, accurate and was rewarded with success. I also understand that the "charge" took place in difficult conditions and had to be done immediately.

For the future, we recommend the reader to foresee such circumstances, to see in advance an appropriate, possible covered point, and to not leave the horses unattended, because they will run away and may be lost.

Finally, in the third episode, I point to an exemplary example of the activity of a side picket. This example brings honour to the author.

Editor

