

Captain Edward Capala

Combat at Suszki and Bielka

After the glorious and victorious raid on Korosteń, on 11 October 1920 we started to move to the area of Zwiahel [Novohrad-Volynskyi].

The 201st Light Horse¹ Regiment was the advance guard at the head of the 9th Cavalry Brigade, which also included the 1st Light Horse Regiment and the 4th Horse Artillery *Divizion*.

As fate would have it, the regiment was to fight a victorious battle to break through roads closed off by units of the Soviet 7th Infantry² Division.

The brigade marched along the good Uszomir [Ushomyr] to Bielka [Bilka] road, and the regiment's advance guard encountered firm resistance from the Soviet troops at the exit of the forest, on the muddy Nierycz [Nerch] River.

I recall well that immediately after passing through Uszomir we were sent to quarter in Bielka, but did not reach the ordered area. The lead men ran into enemy at the edge of the forest, and were luckily able to withdraw without loss.

The combat was difficult, as the regiment found itself in the forest, where it could not deploy properly; the enemy artillery, having the whole regiment visible to it, fired but caused no losses, as the shells missed or did not explode. The Russians had a very good defence line; they manned not only the western bank of the Nierycz River, but also some buildings that covered the forest exit.

The 1st and 2nd Squadrons fought hard to capture the bridge but were unable to do so; the resistance of the Russians, who were reinforced, was found to be getting stronger and stronger.

Then the regiment's commander, Captain Rudolf Dreszer, ordered the commander of the 3rd Squadron, Lieutenant Menel, with a platoon of machine guns, to go around the forest from the south and strike at the flank of the Russians defending the bridge.

My machine gun platoon was assigned to that strike. The 3rd Squadron advanced one kilometre to the left of the road on foot, with the machine guns on the left wing. The assault went quickly, as there was no shooting from the buildings. Encouraged by that silence, I took the initiative and, not waiting for the squadron, crossed the Nierycz, which turned out to be very swampy. We wrestled with machine guns in the water above our waists. After reaching the other bank the platoon ran to get to the buildings faster.



(This map is from 1890, but presumably the roads hadn't changed much by 1920.)

¹ *Szwolężerów*. This was a 1920 Volunteer unit (indicated by a number in the 200's).

² As in the original, but it should be the 7th Rifle Division.



However, the silence had been deceptive, because when we reached the fences of the houses, about 20 Russians came out from behind the cottages and rushed with their bayonets at the platoon with shouts of "urra!" I was somewhat surprised, to say the least! Apart from the small machine-gun crews, I had no one, and the squadron was about 100 metres to my right. But the surprise lasted only a few seconds. I grabbed the machine gun nearest to me and, bracing it on Warrant Officer Siola, gave a few short bursts, which was enough to win time to set the rest of the machine guns on their bases. The fate of the Russians, who raised their hands in the air, was decided by Second Lieutenant Stolle's platoon, which came to our aid and took them captive.

Taking advantage of the momentary confusion, I quickly took my platoon to the road leading from the Uszomir-Bielka road to Suszki [Sushky], where I took up positions, preparing to repulse the counter-attack, which at that time came out from the Cegielnia [?] area and began to advance in three lines towards us.

After occupying the road, the bridge and the exit from the forest were captured.

A beautiful view opened up in front of us. We could see a Russian battery firing into the forest from Bielka. From forest in the Cegielnia area the enemy infantry was advancing towards us in three lines. All the regimental machine guns took up positions and began to fire on them.

The road to Suszki and Bielka was open. Now came the decisive moment. The 1st Light Cavalry Regiment headed to charge through Suszki towards Bielka; our regiment, gathering its squadrons, also charged towards Bielka. It was 19:00. The Russians did not manage to withdraw their battery, which fired so beautifully, and it fell into our hands. We captured over 200 prisoners in total, with seven machine guns, etc.

The Russians were so surprised by the brigade's quick action that they did not even manage to blow up the explosives on the bridge over the Usza [Uzh] River.

My platoon had no losses in these actions.

The characteristic features of this episode are initiative, speed and manoeuvre. Here we find all the above stages of victory applied within a brigade. The enemy is demoralised!

Hence the nerve to act, bordering on disregard or – to put it popularly – battle madness. In a good sense, the author gives evidence of this attitude by the commander of a machine gun platoon, overtaking the unit he is to support and, as a last resort, firing "from the belly".

The art of commanding cavalry includes, among other skills, in guessing correctly when one can afford the full development of rapid manoeuvre – action based on effect. Here I attribute the prime importance more to the impressions of the moment and the effects of naked steel than to methodical action based on fire.

Editor

