

Major in the Reserve Antoni Czudowski

Battles of the 12th Lancer Regiment on 12 September 1920, Forcing the Bug River

On 9 September we arrived in Kosmów village, with orders to halt the offensive, to garrison the left bank of the Bug River and await further orders while troops to the south and north could regroup, in order to launch a further attack beyond the Bug River line.

The right bank of the Bug River was garrisoned by Bolshevik troops. Immediately after our arrival in Kosmów a place on the Bug River, appropriately hidden from enemy observation, was found and the construction of the bridge (M) began.

Late on 10 September the bridge was ready. The day had passed without any special events, apart from some light shooting between our garrison and Bolshevik patrols.

On 11 September, around 10 a.m., we were informed that two Cossack envoys had arrived on the opposite bank of the river, at the place indicated by an asterisk on the drawing. I went to them, together with Colonel Mikołaj Koiszewski, then commander of the 12th Lancer Regiment. The Bug is not wide at that spot, so the talks were conducted across the river. The Cossacks stated that they had been delegated by a detachment of about 500 men, who would like to go over to the Polish side, but were afraid of reprisals from the Poles. Colonel Koiszewski reassured them that not only would they not be in any danger if they switched to sides, but they would even be left armed if they joined us in fighting the Bolsheviks. He also added that such incidents had already occurred and that there were whole Cossack detachments fighting together with the Polish army against the Bolsheviks. After this statement they left.

In the evening of 11 September we received an order from the commander of the 6th Brigade, Colonel Plisowski, to prepare for a night march on foot to seize a bridgehead, which would enable a peaceful crossing on horseback for the 1st and 14th Lancer Regiments and the *divizion* of horse artillery that were part of our brigade. At 2 a.m. the regiment began to prepare for the march. Our horses were saddled, and left in the care of the grooms.

The machine guns were removed from the saddlebags, the squadrons were inspected, and final orders not to smoke and to keep absolute silence were given. The regiment moved in a column of three almost without a murmur towards the bridge.

The night was warm and autumnal, the moon was not shining as the sky was full of clouds – perfect circumstances for a stealthy excursion.

We had agreed with Colonel Koiszewski that, after crossing the bridge, the Colonel and two squadrons would take the village of Młyniski [Mlynyshe], while I with the other two would move forward to the eastern edge of the forest. We had the machine guns divided equally between the squadrons.

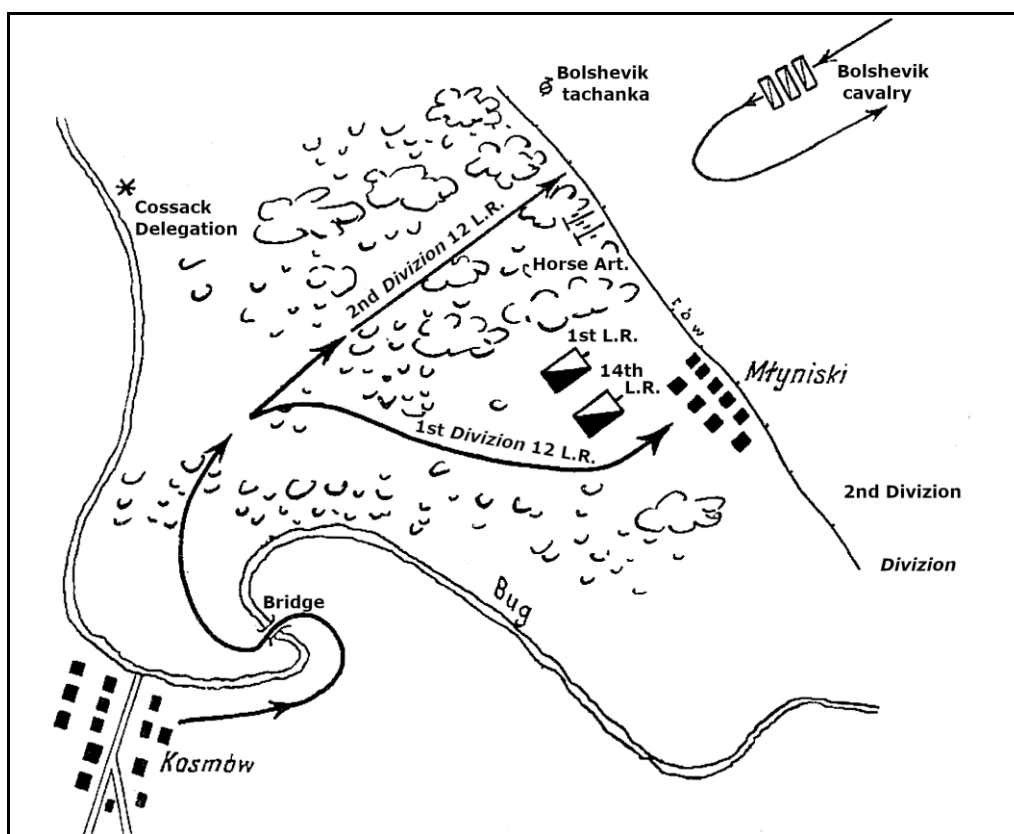
We crossed the bridge and then about 500 metres past it without firing a shot. I dispersed my squadron into a line and set off at a fast walk towards the forest. Col. Koiszewski with 1st Squadron moved towards Młyniski village. Our movements, however, woke up the Bolsheviks. From the north, that is on the left wing of the squadron, the silence was broken by the crack of a Bolshevik machine gun, followed a moment later by the whistle and rumble of exploding artillery shells. From the noises of the shells flying over our heads, I was pleased to work out that it was our artillery assisting us, trying to force the enemy machine gun to withdraw. The shells were falling closer and closer to our battle line, and when they finally wounded one of my lancers, I was forced to halt the advance and to send a message to the telephone station by the bridge to order the artillery to cease further firing on the forest.

After a ten-minute break we continued at a run through the forest towards its eastern edge. Less than an hour and a half had passed since crossing the bridge, when we reached our destination. At the edge of the



forest there was a convenient ditch, which we manned, exploiting it for machine-gun positions. From our right wing rifles were rattling heavily; it was Colonel Koiszewski taking the village of Młyniski.

As dawn arrived, we saw an open field in front of us, and we had excellent fire from our positions. Then, to the left of us, a Bolshevik tachanka rode out, surrounded by a few horsemen. Attacked by our rifle and machine gun fire, it was disabled by killing the horses and wounding several men. A few minutes later a Bolshevik cavalry unit appeared in front of us. I observed it through binoculars as it came towards us at a trot in a platoon column. Thinking it might be the unit from which the envoys had come the previous day, I ordered my men to stop shooting. Reaching some 800 metres from the forest, the unit dispersed into a line and galloped towards us, but after advancing about 200 metres, it stopped, turned around and started to ride away, pursued by the fire of our machine guns. I did not know that the 1st and 14th Lancer Regiments had already crossed the bridge and that they were now standing in squadron formation close together in the depression between the forest and the village of Młyniski. The Bolshevik unit charging at us apparently noticed the superiority of forces on our side and therefore abandoned their charge, saving itself by escaping. The commands "mount up" were heard from 1st and 14th Regiments, who were preparing to chase the enemy. Meanwhile two cannons of the horse artillery *divizion* approached the forest at a trot, near to the edge where we were in line formation, and began firing.



The Bolshevik artillery also began to fire, putting six shells into the woods and then moving fire in the direction of Młyniski village. However, one of the shells, which fell about 15 m behind us, hit the harness of one of the guns, killing two horses and seriously wounding several gunners, including Major Tadeusz Lechnicki, the artillery *divizion* commander. The confusion was short-lived, as the orderlies took away the wounded, and our guns immediately began to aim their fire towards the Bolshevik battery, forcing it to fall silent.

Our squadrons joined up under the command of Colonel Koiszewski, and the whole regiment moved in line formation, on foot, towards Pomorów [Poromiv] village. The Bolsheviks put up a strong resistance – our attack was slow. We laboriously captured village after village. Near Bozhanka [Buzhanka] village, while taking positions in potato fields, we were temporarily immobilised due to heavy fire from Bolshevik



machine guns. At one point, Lieutenant Karpiński, who was lying about five paces from me, said, laughing: "I seem to be wounded" and showed his left arm with a hole in the sleeve above the elbow, with blood oozing out. I sent him to the orderlies, where he was bandaged and then returned to the line. The wound was light, a muscle had been punctured. Throughout the day we fought on foot, only just before evening did our commanders bring the horses up. The joy of sitting on a horse again and the approaching dusk encouraged a fierce charge on Niskinicze [Nyzkynychi] village, which we took with a bold mounted attack. Night fell before the regiment could regather.

Our forward troops captured the village of Tyszkiewiczze [Tyshkovychi]. We spent the night in that village. The next day of fighting was hard and we suffered considerable losses, but it was also a breakthrough day. In the following period the Bolsheviks did not put up strong resistance; we pursued them tirelessly, making 40 km a day. In 3 days we reached as far as Olyka, and the cavalry corps made it to Rivne.

This description gives an abridged account of the events of the day of the battle on the Bug River, as seen through the eyes of the 12th Lancer Regiment, which was the lead unit of the leading brigade of the 1st Cavalry Division.

The above-mentioned events relate to the period when the Polish side had complete superiority in both morale and initiative. Nevertheless, the movement of Budenny's Horse Army away from the Bug line required a solid effort and a bloody battle, which lasted almost a whole day on that river.

The description of Major Czudowski, at that time a squadron commander in the 12th Lancer Regiment, captures an extract from the events of this battle.

The choice of place for building a bridge over the Bug River under the nose of the enemy is interesting, their supervision being so careless that they did not notice either the construction or the bridge itself over a period of 36 hours. Thanks to that it was possible to attack with surprise at dawn on 12 September and march the 12th Lancer regiment to create a bridgehead on the line where the forest edge faced the village of Młyniski with impunity. That bridgehead (supported by the main forces of the 6th Cavalry Brigade) secured the crossing of the cavalry corps, which lasted from dawn until noon of the same day.

Interesting, and typical in similar terrain, is the role of the advanced horse artillery, which with its actions supported the boldly advancing cavalry rifle line.

Finally, it is significant that a single enemy tachanka, standing resolutely in the field, caused the northern division some trouble.

Editor.

