

## Corporal Witold Jarosiński

### Night Liaison Patrol – August 1920

It was in the first days of August 1920, during the difficult moments of the retreat, near Brok. Our 1st Squadron of the 203rd Light Horse<sup>1</sup> Regiment (Lieutenant Jan Skawiński) was part of Major Matczyński's group. The group commander had received a not very accurate message that General Żeligowski should be in the vicinity of Rybki village. Establishing communication with him was extremely difficult, as the enemy had already infiltrated between our group and General Żeligowski. There was also a natural obstacle in front of us – the Bug River, which here has a very steep bank and a swift current.

It fell to our patrol, 10 men under the command of Sergeant Maciejewski, to establish communication with General Żeligowski. We set off at night. We crossed the Bug River about two kilometres from Brok. We crossed one by one, preceded by a guide, to whom I gave my horse. When all the cavalymen were on the opposite bank, the guide gave me my horse. I threw myself into the cold current of the river and my friends – who had already had that unpleasant bath – laughed when, seized by the cold to the very marrow of my bones, I began to utter shouts that barely resembled human speech. The horse, tired after crossing twice, struggled to resist the current. When I finally reached the bank, its precipitous slope was a new obstacle to overcome.

Cold and dripping wet, we continued our journey very cautiously. We anticipated coming into contact with the enemy at any moment. We were tormented by the uncertainty of whether we were even moving in the right direction, and whether in a flash we might fall into enemy hands. The darkness of the night and the forest hid us. From a forester we met on the way we found out that the village we were looking for was called Dybki, not Rybki, and it was only four kilometres away. Our hearts beat faster, because we supposed we had found the right village and our men would be there.

I rode at the front. The night was dark. In vain I strained my eyes to see anything. The thick veil of the forest jealously guarded its secrets. Sight could only penetrate upwards through the branches of the trees. In the sky, the clouds were moving with dizzying speed, while on earth a mysterious silence reigned. The branches against the sky looked like apocalyptic monsters. There was a kind of horror in the silent majesty of the trees emerging every now and then from the darkness. I was aware that the forest was a blessing, that it guarded me, and yet I was eager to reach its end as soon as possible. But it, mute to my desires, persisted in the obstinacy of its vastness.

Suddenly ... something flashed and disappeared. I sped up my horse. The light emerged again and from then on it started to reach through the trees more and more strongly. I was in doubt as to whether it meant some kind of dwelling, and if so, whether in the forest or outside. I stopped for a moment to make sure that my companions were following me, and then I moved forward quickly. But the forest here was dense and it was difficult to get through. Fortunately, the thicket disappeared quickly. I passed a few dozen more trees and found myself at the edge of the forest.

In front of me, 400 metres away, there was a village. The only light, the one that showed me the direction, came from the building furthest from the forest. I stopped. When my comrades arrived, we made a quick decision: they would stay here, at the edge of the forest, while I would leave my horse with them and walk by myself to the first huts to have a "chat".

I moved forward boldly. In just a few minutes I reached my destination. But I was disappointed, as there was not a soul in the house. I went to a second one and then a third, with the same result. If it weren't for that single light, I would have thought that the whole village had been abandoned. I was on my way to the next farm when suddenly I heard some footsteps. I crouched against a fence and froze in silent anticipation.

---

<sup>1</sup> szwoleżerów



I could tell by his pointed hat that it was a Bolshevik. My heart was pounding so loudly that he must have heard it, because having reached my hiding place he stopped and looked back. But this was his downfall. In the blink of an eye I rushed at him from behind, knocked him to the ground, took out my revolver and put it to his temple. I disarmed him and announced that if he made any sound I would put a bullet in his head. After this "chat", I ordered him to get up and walk in front of me. In a few minutes we reached our men.

From our captive we learned that the Polish army had indeed been in Dybki, but it had withdrawn towards Wyszaków in the face of the Bolshevik forces. The Bolsheviks had followed them only a dozen minutes previously and it was only luck that we had not been caught. Our captive turned out to be a straggler, of course.

So our anguish began again. Once more the uncertainty grew by the hour. Our only compass was the sound of the fighting. We circled the battlefields, aware that both warring parties might take us for the enemy. After a long wander we finally reached Wyszaków, where we reported and handed over the prisoner.

I was surprised to meet the heroic Colonel Wielkopolanin-Nowakowski, who was well known to me from my time in the Legions, and who, after a warm welcome, invited our whole patrol to stay with him.

The next morning we returned to our squadron, this time by a safe route, with an easy crossing of the Bug River near Brańszczyk. We were well received by the squadron. Lieutenant Skawinski and our colleagues had thought that we were lost, so there was general joy on our return.

*A short episode presented in a colourful and enjoyable style. Experiences don't depend on the size of the unit one commands, or even on the importance or size of the task one performs.*

*In war one survives! Trivial actions, like a patrol with ten men, create a chain of events lasting forever in the soul of a young soldier.*

*Crossing the river to stealthily take a message to a commander, taking a prisoner of war, and finally pressing on to complete the task – all these are experiences related by the author.*

*Each of them was well done, each required thought, courage and character for its fulfilment.*

*The author's description reproduces the psychological side of the matter very clearly. The reader will benefit from considering this episode in spirit as well, for it vividly paints the burdens of performance. The greatest difficulty in execution will always be to fight the opportunist and coward in oneself.*

Editor

