

Warrant Officer Jaworski

Platoon combat Against an Armoured Car (Chołojów - August 1920)

Due to an extremely interesting incident of a platoon of light cavalry immobilising an armoured car, I am quoting a description of that combat by the then commander of the platoon, Warrant Officer Aleksander Mazgajski.

In order to emphasize the skill of the commander and the morale of the ulans I would like to point out that it was the first time the regiment had fought armour.

On 14 August 1920 at noon the Technical Squadron of the 11th Legion Lancer Regiment was withdrawn from its positions in the line and garrisoned the outskirts of the settlement of Chołojów [Vuzlove], by the side of the road to Radziechów [Radekhiv]. (During the battles with Budenny the technical squadron of the Regiment fought as a line squadron, and differed only by the fact that it had no lances)

As the 11th Lancer Regiment had the task of covering the withdrawal of a column of the 1st Cavalry Division leaving for Kamionka Strumiłowa [Kamianka-Buzka], a hand-to-hand battle was expected and the possibility of an enemy armoured car strike was taken into account. The regimental commander ordered the technical squadron to be issued hand grenades.

About 13:00 the enemy infantry's attack on the Technical Squadron sector began. It moved very slowly and bogged down about 400 metres out, as a result of the squadron's fire.

An observer placed on the church let us know that some large cars were moving along the road coming from the Radziechów area. We guessed that these must be the enemy's armoured cars. We quickly cut down some roadside trees at the end of the street, then supplemented the barricade with timber and carts from the adjacent houses, so that in a short time the road was completely blocked.

The platoon, having done this work, hid behind the fences on both sides of the road. At my signal they were to throw grenades under the cars when they came up to the barricade.

At this time the other platoons of the squadron were fighting with the infantry and small cavalry units of the enemy, who were trying to force their way into Chołojów. At about 14:00 an armoured car approached the barricade and stopped; after a moment one of the Bolsheviks got out of it, and seeing no one near the barricade he started to give some signals to the rear, probably calling up the infantry, who were in a line some several hundred metres from us.

I took advantage of that moment and threw a grenade under the feet of the man standing by the open door of the car.

Upon this the ulans of my platoon started to throw their grenades at the car. A few short bursts were fired from the car's HMG, and then for a long moment the car did not move and the HMG did not shoot. I guessed that something was wrong with it, so the platoon and I ran up to it. The car's crew did not react. Through the open door I saw inside the ragged bodies of the crew, while the Bolshevik who had gotten out and stood by the door was lying dead on the road.

However, we could not get a decent look at the captured armoured car, because another one was already approaching and it started firing at us from its HMG and gun.

At this time the enemy infantry started running towards us at, shooting heavily with their rifles. When they were some 100 metres away I received an order to withdraw to my horses.

In the beginning the retreat was easy, as we ran through gardens and between buildings, but in the depths of the settlement the withdrawal was difficult, as a fight with the enemy – who had managed to enter through other routes – was already taking place in the streets.

We had to force our way out, and in that combat we used hand grenades twice more, which enabled us to get out of the streets of Chołojów and break away from the enemy.

After leaving the settlement, we had to run about one and a half kilometres to our horses. We reached them only thanks to the fact that the 1st and 4th Squadrons of our regiment stopped the pursuit by the enemy cavalry by charging several times.



As a result of the hand-to-hand combat we had several wounded, who we brought back to the regiment.
We joined the regiment's column.
After that battle we gained confidence with hand grenades; from then on we always took them with us when fighting on foot.

This episode, described by the author on the basis of the participant's recollections, illustrates very clearly the possibilities of fighting individual wheeled armoured cars when they can be ambushed.

The current capability to combat armoured weapons has grown and spread through the introduction of suitable anti-tank weapons. This does not change the fact that tanks – sometimes heavy armoured and heavily armed – will have to be fought at the closest distances by means of primitive improvisation based on the cold blood of the ulans. In this spirit, the above example from 1920, corresponding to the conditions of the time, is worthy of imitation.

Finally, from my own experience, I share the author's high opinion of hand grenades and recommend the reader to make prominent use of them whenever possible, above all just before the end of the assault and during the battle in the localities.

Editor

