

**Liaison Patrol**

*"It is easy to assimilate the theoretical principles of fighting for victory in the military profession: the real art, however, lies in being able to apply these principles deliberately in any actual case!" (Jomini).*

Our professional literature is rising to ever greater heights. This is a good and necessary sign, testifying to the growing intellectualism of the authors and readers, but it is good to turn our eyes from time to time away from the great questions of organisation, history or tactics, in order to return again to insignificant, almost everyday phenomena, i.e. those phenomena which constitute the daily bread of all lowly commanders in the line.

These phenomena include activities which in peacetime seem to present no difficulties.

A young officer or non-commissioned officer accepts them with great self-confidence: he knows the regulations and trusts his cleverness, and so he comes to believe, by way of peacetime service, that the difficulty of commanding increases with the size of the force, while leading a patrol, for example, is a trifle not worth talking about!

Yes, leading a patrol on a plan or amid the delightful safety of manoeuvres, in favourable weather, really comes down to going for a ride. Since everything is known and certain, then the patrol must "succeed". Usually there is not even an "uncollegial peacemaker", who would disgust the carefree action with unbearable remarks.

And so the generations go on, year after year, with the passage of time increasing the carelessness and misjudgement – the remoteness from reality assuming ever greater proportions. We naturally evolve so that our lower commanders evaluate the reality of war through the prism of their experience on manoeuvres.

Therefore we need to warn, to draw attention to the difficulty of small actions, to acquaint the peacetime officer with the coefficients of "reality", about which whole volumes could be written.

Hence the idea of describing a patrol I led 19 years ago in difficult and quite unusual conditions.

The description of my patrol is for young people.

But before I start about that patrol, a few general words.

Tactics in its realisation comes down to real acts being executed – because apart from the mind creating the concept, in this instance giving orders, there are those that must perform them! This mundane and often despised word "perform" has a different meaning for each type of person depending on their employment. For people in normal paid employment – in the serenity of peaceful times – the execution of their occupation is usually mechanical and easy, mostly without significant difficulties and obstacles. This very consideration has degraded the colloquial meaning of the words "perform" and "execute".

Hence, perhaps, the popular notion that to perform means to do something of secondary importance, in terms of real value, lower than the idea, concept or order that was behind it.

In military life, especially in war, it is somewhat different: idea and action combine, as in any art, closely into one harmonious whole.

The best concept becomes worthless if it is followed by poor execution. An average concept, containing forgivable errors, can still be rectified by the initiative of those executing it.

Hence victory in combat requires both these factors and so the huge importance of execution at every level, down to the last rifleman or lancer.

If I speak of the equivalence of these factors, I by no means wish to depreciate the merit and importance of the planning, I only wish to properly emphasise the difficulty of execution!

The war word "execute" means at a lower level to endure endless hardships and shortcomings and to risk one's life. A good soldier, therefore, is constantly forced to subordinate all his natural human habits and weaknesses to the imperative of the higher duty to achieve the collective goal.



One must first understand and appreciate the essence of the goal in order to arouse and sustain such great qualities to bring victory. But it also takes the correct preparation, awareness and attitude to be able to bring out the highest ideological and moral values that war demands of a good soldier.

Peacetime distances us from the reality of war, but not just us – everyone around the world. We teach the officers, we train the recruits. We inculcate in them the principles of victory and the methods of fighting, without ever actually introducing them to the true conditions in which they are applied.

As a result, over time individuals acquire a mistaken idea of tactics and combat. It is all too easy and quick for novices to overestimate their own values and talents, and consequently to underestimate their opponent's countermeasures.

We already have a dozen or so new, post-war officer cadres in Poland. Units smaller than division are now mostly commanded by men who have not seen war time. Therefore, it would not be out of place if from time to time we descend from the high level of tactical issues to the low level of combat, but not that of the old one, but so we can draw conclusions about the future one.

While we train in our subordinates the ability to make decisions, usually abstract ones, let us also give them the opportunity to get to know about reality as general background for the future.

### **Reason for the patrol**

I am afraid the reader will be a little disappointed. I led my patrol not on horseback but on foot; moreover, it was a patrol composed of random military policemen. However, I was not in pursuit of any criminal: I was only looking for (then) Colonel Becker, who had been cut off with his troops in Sądowa Wisznia by the Ukrainians.

At the beginning of 1919, I was the first staff officer in Brigadier Minkiewicz's group, from which the 3rd Infantry Division was formed a few weeks later. We were at war with the Ukrainians. Our command was based in Przemyśl at the time. In March 1919 most of our troops were grouped on the general line: Przemyśl–Chyrów, resting on the railway line in question.

Along the Przemyśl–L'viv railway line, loose groups were fighting to keep this important artery in Polish hands. Thus, for example, in the area of Mościska, the tried and tested squadron of Captain Dunin-Borkowski was active at the time, while in the area of Sądowa Wisznia [Sudova Vyshnia] a sub-group of Colonel Becker had been present for some time. Both these groups were under the orders of my commanding officer in March 1919.

The end of the winter of 1918-19 marked a rather critical period, which was soon brought to a successful conclusion by the arrival of the late General Iwaszkiewicz at the head of considerable reinforcements. However, at the beginning of March these reinforcements had not yet arrived. The Ukrainians became very active, especially along the Przemyśl–L'viv railway line, aiming to dislodge the groups holding it.

It was at this time that Colonel Becker's sub-group was cut off from all sides in Sądowa Wisznia. We lost contact with it completely and those of us in Przemyśl did not what was happening to it.

There was no air force. There were no intelligence agents operating. We waited a day and then another – no news. The commander of the group started to get quite worried.

I was in charge of the operational department at the group HQ, so the concerns of my commander were well known to me. I was aware of the importance of the possible destruction of the sub-group.

As all the usual ways of establishing communication with Sądowa Wisznia having failed for two days, a circular was sent to the troops on the third morning, asking for a volunteer to go to Sądowa Wisznia to see what was happening there!

The circular went out rather late. Time was running out – by noon on the third day no one had come forward. Moreover the distances to most of the units were so great that the desired volunteer would not even manage to arrive in time. So I decided to put forward my candidature and go to Sądowa Wisznia personally.

Brigadier Minkiewicz finally agreed to my request.



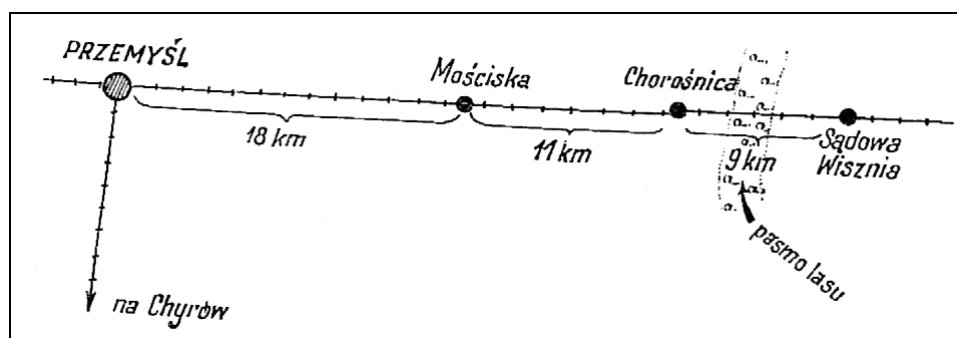
## Plan for the Patrol

I knew that Colonel Becker's sub-group had been in Sądowa Wisznia three days ago, with its infantry (2 to 3 battalions) and the armoured train "Smok" [Dragon].

The enemy was grouping itself around that town; it was cutting it off from the direction of Chorośnica [Khorosnytsya] and Gródek Jagielloński [Horodok], and also from the north and south – the more so because from those directions the country had not been pacified by us at all.

Borkowski's sub-group, on the other hand, held out in Mościska [Mostyska] and somewhat to the south. From Przemyśl to Mościska the road was free and secure. The problem we faced, the nut to crack, was therefore to successfully complete the Mościska to Sądowa Wisznia section, about 20 km.

To illustrate the location and conditions I give the following schematic sketch:



I knew the methods of the Ukrainians quite well, so I knew that at night they concentrated their troops in the villages to give them a rest. I also knew that, where there was no close contact, they held only the more important points at night (mostly on the communications lines) with strong outposts.

We did not know exactly what kind of contact existed on the section from Chorośnica to Sądowa Wisznia, but I assumed that any contact would be neither close nor continuous. Only the stretch Chorośnica to Sądowa Wisznia was considered, as it was the shortest way to the destination, so I did not consider any other route.

In view of the fact that the contact could be neither close nor continuous, I decided that, with a bit of luck, it would be possible to walk a straight line to Sądowa Wisznia, avoiding the Ukrainian outposts.

Of course, the march had to be done at night, taking advantage of the darkness. My plan of action, resulting from the above reasoning, was extremely simple: to go to Sądowa Wisznia along the Przemyśl – Sądowa Wisznia line so that that the last, most dangerous part of the way would be done there and back under the cover of night.

## Execution of the Patrol

As an escort I was assigned nine military policemen from Przemyśl: they were senior non-commissioned officers, participants of the Great War.

The weather was awful: it was March, so there was snow with rain and mud. I had a good feed, armed myself more heavily, and about 4 p.m. I left with my gendarmes along rail track to Mościska. There I established personal contact with Rittmeister Borkowski, from whom I learned that his patrols were reaching Chorośnica, where they met enemy patrols, but he did not know what was happening inside Chorośnica. There was no communication with Becker.

From Mościska to Sądowa Wisznia was about 20 km. I did not want to walk all the way, as it would take too long, so I decided to get to Chorośnica by train.

There was a steam engine in Mościska, with a driver; but he refused to go at any price. I used all possible threats, including a gun, but nothing helped. Finally I decided we would go without him.

In 10 minutes I learnt how to drive a steam engine (fortunately one of the gendarmes knew a little about it).



We left about 6 p.m., and it was already dark. We reached Chorośnica quietly and without a single shot. There we stopped the steam engine a few hundred metres past the station. We had some difficulty stopping, as there was some technical secret about it that I hadn't managed to grasp, and the engine wouldn't stop. The station shed was empty.

I left the engine there, under steam, with a couple of policemen as guards.

It was already a completely dark night when we set off on foot. I was afraid to stray, so I kept close to the track. We had gone about two kilometres perhaps, when the shadows of a wide forest that cuts the area between Chorośnica and Sądowa Wisznia into two parts appeared in front of us.

I reasoned as follows: if the Ukrainians maintain outposts at night, they are in the forest, and one of them will certainly be on or near the track. So, I turned about 400 m south of the track, wanting to cross the forest outside the hearing distance of the potential outpost.

So far everything was going smoothly. We entered the forest happily and had gone a few hundred meters, when suddenly out of nowhere we received a fire from very close, which seemed to be coming from all directions. I fell onto my knees and struggled to get my bearings. I heard voices of Ukrainians to the left of me. The fire became less frequent after a while, irregular and uncertain, which is usual at night and in a dense forest. I made a second decision: to run forward, in the direction of the task, i.e. towards Sądowa Wisznia.

So I ran from tree to tree quite quickly and after quite a while I found myself at the eastern exit of the forest. I looked around ... I was alone! My gendarmes had got lost somewhere. It turned out later that they had made a decision similar to mine but they chose the opposite direction: through Chorośnica back to Przemyśl! One of them stayed in the forest and searched for me for a long time, one was wounded, but most of them returned to Przemyśl late at night, spreading the sorrowful news there of my fate. Fortunately, I returned alone in the morning of the next day and managed to call off the mourning for myself in time! But that is yet to come.

So, the moment I found myself at the exit of the forest, I was alone. I decided to move across the field to the railway track, and then continue along it to Sądowa Wisznia. During this time, something quite unexpected and quite ugly happened.

At the station in Sądowa Wisznia, some 3 km away from where I was, an armoured train called *Smok* was loose. The Ukrainians had pulled up the tracks so thoroughly that it could only move a few kilometres, and in particular, it could not reach Mościska in order to establish contact with Borkowski. Well, this armoured train was very alert. As soon as they heard the shooting in the forest, he thought rightly that something was going on, because Ukrainians generally did not shoot at night. So the *Smok* immediately set off in the direction of the forest and started shooting at its edges, thinking that he would hit Ukrainians who were fighting with Poles coming from Chorośnica.

At that moment I gained a sincere respect for Polish armoured trains. Cannon, kb., machine guns and hand guns and all hell came from it. As soon as I saw the sizeable silhouette of the train emerging from the direction of Sądowa Wisznia, my heart beat with joy. But this joy was dearly paid for. All *Smok's* wrath was poured out on me, who at that moment was halfway between the forest and the train. Soon the Ukrainians started to fire from the other side. I was taken under fire from both sides.

The railway track was on an embankment. I decided to crawl to that embankment and then along it to the train, which stood phlegmatically in all its glory and firing without mercy.

That crossing of 200-300 metres lasted maybe half an hour; finally I got to the level of the train wheels, and the firing had died down.

One might think that everything was now over, but here a new obstacle unexpectedly emerged: how to get inside the armoured wagons which did not have the polite doors we are used to. I climbed up on the buffers between the first and second carriages and started beating on the wall of the carriage with the handle of my pistol. The train did not stand still, but went back and forth bit by bit. I did some gymnastics on the buffers, like a tightrope walker. Finally, a tiny window opened up from the carriage, but instead of a smiling face welcoming his anguished fellow countryman, what appeared first through the gap was a thin



barrel. Just in case, I hid my head below the barrel and cursed the “armoured personnel” with the most eloquent incantations and curses, so that they would finally let me in. Finally, I was heard and I entered the carriage.

It took some time before they believed that I was who I claimed to be.

I looked awful. Have you ever crawled a few hundred metres across a ploughed field in March? Try it, please, and then look in the mirror.

First of all, I was wet and cold. I dried myself off at the stove, cleaned up a bit and made extensive use of the hospitality of the *Smok*’s crew, as I was very hungry and “thirsty”.

Around midnight I checked in with Colonel Becker, who received me like an apparition from the other world.

I memorised the location of his units and their healthiness. I remember to this day that he had ammunition and food for three days. We made some plans for cooperation towards Mościska, and about 1 a.m. I said goodbye to him.

There remained only to return to Przemyśl to inform my commander of what I had learned. I decided to return immediately, so as to make my way back through the chain of enemy outposts at night, between 2 and 4 a.m., that is, at the time when vigilance is at its lowest. In March, that time is not one of walking about.

From Colonel Becker I found out that the station company of Lieutenant Abłamowicz knew the enemy locations in the Chorośnica area particularly well.

So I went to Lieutenant Abłamowicz and asked him for guides. That noble lieutenant gave me many good tips and four “pistols” who led me brilliantly to the side of the forest. We walked about a kilometre more to the south of where I had my encounter in the evening. My scouts explained to me that I must have passed by an outpost of Ukrainians at the time and that is why I was spotted, shot at and nearly caught.

We parted at the edge of the forest.

I marched at a marathon pace along the track to Chorośnica. There was no steam engine. About 7 o’clock I reached Mościska and telephoned Przemyśl.

A jigger was sent to me and at about 8 a.m. I drank well-deserved, hot coffee in the HQ of the group, which I enjoyed considerably.

The commanding officer and the chief of staff, Captain J.W. Rozwadowski, hugged me warmly. They had both been a little concerned about me.

The news I brought reassured my commander and was used to prepare for action. In two days communication with Becker’s sub-group was restored. We repaired the railway tracks so that the brave *Smok* could again move freely to patrol the railway track and maintain tactical communications along it.

My description would not be complete if I did not give the reader an account of my inner experiences, the feelings I experienced during the period from half-past nine to half-past eleven at night, i.e. during the two hours, perhaps, which elapsed from the first shot in the woods to the moment when I was sitting safely in the armoured train.

During those two hours I experienced my patrol inwardly, for during that time I had to overcome the difficulties that arose in carrying it out. Everyone has their own “opportunist coward”. Well, this coward was also in me. I overcame it in myself with the awareness of my higher duty. Far from any pose of heroism, I confess frankly that my heart jumped with emotion several times from the first moment of surprise. However, instead of fleeing, I stayed where I was, then fled, but forward. I yielded to my natural instinct for self-preservation just enough to reduce the danger, but without letting myself be pushed away from the goal I was aiming for.

Similarly, the further stages of those two hours, containing all the phenomena of uncertainty, loneliness and danger and forming in their totality the usual background difficulties of war, I overcame only by a conscious will towards the goal.



After reading these episodes, the reader will, I believe, better understand what I meant when I said that in our profession, execution is as difficult as conception.

## Conclusions

The first conclusion is that leading a patrol is never easy and can never be done by the book.

The patrol leader establishes his small plan of action before setting out and sticks to this plan as long as circumstances permit.

The commander must be preoccupied with the essence of the task and strive to complete it completely and regardless of the stakes. On patrol, on the offensive, and always in war, the one who reaches his goal is the one who has the firm and unbreakable will to reach it; the one who pursues the goal consistently, considering all the difficulties encountered only as intermediate obstacles, which may hinder the fulfilment of the task, but which are incapable of cancelling it.

The officer who undertakes any task in war and says to himself in spirit: "I will accomplish it, if I can", will never fulfil it. For difficulties and unexpected obstacles are not the exception in war, but, on the contrary, form the daily background against which every activity develops. It is necessary to be aware of this in advance in order to be able to accept any difficulty as a natural thing and not to be put off by any of them.

One's own will, character and once more will – this is the proper source from which an officer draws strength to fulfil his tasks.

You have to trust yourself and your good star. When undertaking any enterprise one must say to oneself in spirit: "I will fulfil it without regard to what follows!" Only from that state of mind can decisive and complete deeds arise! He who cannot give himself completely will never achieve anything!

In peacetime you constantly hear about tactics, but you always see it in the garish colours of knowledge grounded in regulations. Well, that form of tactics contains only quarter of its real content. The other three quarters lies within yourselves. In your personality, in your individuality, in your character.

To execute – in the martial sense – means to stake everything on one card. It means "believing that you can succeed" and therefore wanting with all your might.

Hence the great difficulty of every act in war, and this is what gives even the smallest effort in it a certain tinge of greatness, from which the fortunate can derive for themselves a spark of fame.

And one must strive for this fame, for I believe that it is the only thing worth living for – and even dying for.

The facts of the above patrol can be confirmed by all the living officers mentioned in the description.

*The relevant citation, written in 1919 by General Minkiewicz, read:*

*"In March 1919, when Sądowa Wisznia was cut off from Przemyśl, for getting through Ukrainian lines to Sądowa Wisznia surrounded by the enemy from all sides with orders from the group of my name, and breaking through back to Przemyśl with a report from the units in Sądowa Wisznia, Lieutenant Aleksander Pragłowski again deserved a promotion and a high decoration."*

*Brigadier Minkiewicz*

