

Battle of Cyców

Grzegorz Figiel

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The year 1918 brought Poland its much-awaited freedom, regained after 123 years of slavery. However, that was not the end of the Poles' war struggles. At the Paris Peace Conference, which ended the war, the representatives of the victorious powers established only the western border of our country. The eastern border still had to be fought over in a long and bloody battle with the advancing Red Army. Not only Poland's fate, but that of the whole of Europe depended on the outcome of that battle. This is how Cyców, a small town in the Lublin region, became widely known, for a glorious episode in the history of Polish arms.

The Battle of Cyców took place after Jozef Pilsudski decided, on 6 August 1920, to launch a strike from behind the Wieprz River against the left wing and rear of Tukhachevski's army attacking Warsaw. The plan was to launch a rapid offensive on the Mińsk Mazowiecki – Siedlce line, making contact with the troops defending the outskirts of Warsaw and pursuing the retreating enemy. The main strike group was to be General Leonard Skierski's 4th Army, concentrating on the Wieprz River from Dęblin to Kock. The 4th Army's concentration was to be covered by General Zygmunt Zieliński's 3rd Army deployed between Kock and Brody. After General Skierski launched the offensive, the 3rd Army, made up mostly of the 1st and 3rd Legion Infantry Divisions (Leg ID) and the 4th Cavalry Brigade, was to launch an attack on Parczew – Biała (1st Leg ID) and Włodawa – Brest (3rd Leg ID); the space between the Legion divisions was filled by the recently reorganised 4th Cavalry Brigade.

The execution of the plan outlined by the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army required precision and speed, and the whole operation was a logistically difficult. This was because it required withdrawing the units intended for the 3rd and 4th Armies from the front, transporting them to their places of concentration, and ensuring they were supplied with equipment, ammunition and provisions.

The 3rd Army divisions fought the advancing Red Army almost to the last moment. On 8 August the 1st Leg ID smashed the enemy 24th Rifle Division near Horokhiv. Five days later, the 3rd ID Leg inflicted a heavy blow on the Bolsheviks trying to force the Bug River near Hrubieszów. The regiments of the 4th Cavalry Brigade were scattered over a considerable area. The 16th Lancer Regiment was stationed at Abramowice near Lublin, while the 3rd and 7th Regiments provided cover at Sokal for the loading of the 1st ID Leg onto railway transports. Those two lancer regiments were among the oldest and most battle-tested units of the resurgent Polish Army.

The 7th Regiment had been formed in the Lublin voivodeship as early as November 1918, and the core was largely legionaries from the Polish Legion's 1st lancer Regiment, the so-called "Belina's Boys".¹ The 7th Regiment's squadrons distinguished themselves in battles at Rawa Ruska and Sokal and in Volhynia against Semyon Budënný's Horse Army. Captain Zygmunt Piasecki, experienced and well-liked by his subordinates, was appointed the formation's commander, being promoted to major.

The 3rd Lancer Regiment was known as the "Children of Warsaw", as it had been formed in the capital at the turn of 1918 and 1919, largely from volunteer Warsaw youth. The regiment had victorious skirmishes with the Soviets at Minsk, Slutsk, Mazyr and Chernobyl. Its commander, Major Cyprian Bystram, was very popular among the soldiers and known for his care for his subordinates.

The 3rd and 7th Lancer Regiments, after completing their task in Sokal, set off for Rejowiec along parallel march routes. On 15 August, a Sunday, the 7th Regiment was present at a mass held to bless the Polish Armed Forces in the church in Bończa, then reached Rejowiec in the evening of the same day. The 3rd Regiment arrived in the town at the same time. The troops were quartered in nearby villages. Despite their exhaustion, the mood among the soldiers was very good. The lancers were aware of how momentousness

¹ Named for their first commander, Major Władysław Belina-Prażmowski.



the moment was and that a battle was coming soon that might decide the fate of the homeland. Major Piasecki wrote:

We are clearly elated. At last the moment has come for the counter-offensive, in which we are to take part. Enough of this falling back. We are going forward.

A little earlier the two batteries of Major Edward Robakiewicz's 2nd Horse Artillery *Divizion*² (HAD) was railed in to Rejowiec, supplementing the 4th Cavalry Brigade. Each had four Russian three-inch guns and two heavy machine guns. The officers were an experienced, well-trained and battle-hardened team, who had proved themselves more than once in difficult times, and had now admitted some volunteers, mainly youngsters, who made up for their weak training with enthusiasm and a zeal for their duties.

After disembarking from the wagons, Major Robakiewicz led his *divizion* to Cyców, which had been designated as the 4th Cavalry Brigade's concentration point by the 3rd Army. Colonel Adam Nieniewski, a skilful former Legionnaire, was appointed the brigade's commander. Major Bystram, the most senior officer, commanded until the colonel's arrival from Warsaw.

While the units of the 3rd and 4th Armies regrouped, there were unfavourable changes at the front for the Poles. On 13 August the Red Army broke through Warsaw's first defensive line and took Radzymin. Alarmed, Piłsudski decided to accelerate the start time of his strike from the planned date of 16 August to 17 August.

Another unfavourable event that directly led to the battle at Cyców was the failure of the Polish 13th Infantry Brigade. That formation was supposed to hold the Włodawa – Łęczna – Lublin line, but it failed to contain the enemy near Tarnów and was forced to break its move to its designated position and instead withdraw to Sawin. The task of covering the Łęczna – Lublin road was then given to two stage battalions under Captain Zygmunt Zajchowski: the 5th Lwów and 5th Łódź. Those units were weak, as most of their soldiers were those previously wounded, deserters, or poorly trained men who had been serving in the army rear. The battalions had 900 men and 12 heavy machine guns.

The enemy sent a large part of their Mazyr Group, the Dotol' Battle Group,³ to fight in that sector, made up of the 514th and 515th Rifle Regiments, a cavalry *divizion*, a field artillery battery, and a sapper company, for a total of 1,550 bayonets, 235 sabres, four guns and 40 MGs.

On 13 August Captain Zajchowski halted his battalions six kilometres north of Cyców with the intention of carrying out his orders, i.e. defending the Włodawa – Lublin road at all costs. The commander organised his makeshift headquarters by the road to Włodawa near Świerszczów, sending Captain Dąbrowski's Łódź battalion to that village, and the Lwów battalion to Garbatówka. The mood among the soldiers was not great – they were scared of the enemy, and the atmosphere of uncertainty was heightened by the sounds of artillery cannonade coming from the direction of Tarnów. However, reconnaissance sent in that direction did not find any troops, either Soviet or Polish. The night and the next day passed quietly.

At dawn on 15 August, Captain Zajchowski ordered Lieutenant Hryniewicz's company to march to Wereszczyn to reconnoitre the enemy. In addition, Captain Dąbrowski was to send strong patrols to the Załucze – Zabrodzie line. At this point the enemy advance guard attacked Zabrodzie. Lieutenant Hryniewicz's company suffered heavy losses and panicked, and its commander was killed on the battlefield. Zajchowski had a good view of the situation from his position and could see groups of fleeing soldiers and Bolshevik riflemen advancing on Świerszczów. At the same time, cavalry appeared on the left wing of the Łódź battalion. Fortunately, the soldiers in Świerszczów did not lose their cool and forced the enemy to retire with their accurate fire.

The first Bolshevik attack had been stopped, but the next one was feared by the defenders, especially the threat of encirclement, as incredible tales circulated about the enemy's cruelty.

² A *divizion* in the Polish and Russian armies of the time was a sub-unit of a regiment. In English an artillery *divizion* might be a battalion, but there is no equivalent for such a cavalry unit – more than one squadron, but less than a regiment.

³ Named for *KomBrig* Fedor Kondratevich Dotol'.



At about 12:00 the Bolsheviks sent a second attack on Świerszczów, but this was also stopped by machine-gun fire. At 14:00 a further attack was launched on the village. Both sides were shooting at each other with machine guns and small arms when a liaison officer from 3rd Army HQ arrived at Captain Zajchowski's command post. He brought an order that both stage battalions were to take part in a general assault on Włodawa. The Captain immediately passed on that order to his subordinates, which came just in time, as the soldiers were increasingly beginning to express the opinion that they were fighting alone and that no help would come from anywhere.

Immediately after the departure of the 3rd Army officer, another arrived – Lieutenant Soltan from the 2nd HAD, with the information that two of the *division's* batteries had arrived in Cyców. Zajchowski immediately took the decision to withdraw his battalions so that they could get artillery support. He personally went to Świerszczów to pass on the order to retire to Wólka Cycowska – Cyców to the commander of the Łódź battalion.

Captain Dąbrowski gathered the officers and soldiers he had at hand and, without waiting for the liaison officers to inform everyone of the orders, started to withdraw. This was a very unfortunate decision, as some soldiers stayed in their trenches knowing nothing of the retirement. When the enemy laid siege to Świerszczów for the fourth time, the disproportion in numbers was too large to hold off the attack. Captain Zajchowski was surprised by the turn of events, as he had thought that the entire battalion was marching to Wólka Cycowska. It was too late to send any help and several dozen Polish soldiers were taken prisoner. The Lwów battalion, not waiting for events to develop, marched out of Garbatówka in the direction of Puchaczów.

Zajchowski realised that once the enemy had captured Świerszczów, the execution of his main task was becoming impossible. He therefore decided to strike at the village in the morning, with the support of the horse artillery batteries, to capture it and regain control of the Włodawa – Lublin road.

The commanders of the Dotol' group were also not satisfied with the results of the day-long struggle. Although the Red Army had managed to gain control of the Lublin road, the Poles were still a compact body, ready to fight. They therefore decided to strike once more at the weakened Polish forces on the following day and then march to Lublin.

The night passed peacefully. In the early hours of 16 August, Captain Zajchowski arrived at Major Robakiewicz's quarters to inform him of the planned assault on Świerszczów and ask for support. The arrangements were interrupted by the sounds of shooting from the direction of Wólka Cycowska and Janowica, which place was held by the Lwów battalion. Unfortunately, just as preparations for the attack on Świerszczów were being completed, units of the Soviet 515th Rifle Regiment entered the area between those two villages – undefended by the Poles – and forced their way across the swampy Świnka River, with another part of the regiment striking straight for Janowica.

The surprised Lwów battalion fled and the officers could not control the situation. The Bolsheviks seemed to be everywhere. The Poles fled by the bridge or by swimming across the Świnka, losing their rifles. Within a quarter of an hour the battalion was completely disorganised, apart from the heavy machine gun crew, who saved their equipment. Simultaneously with the 515th Regiment's attack on Janowica, the 514th Regiment attacked Wólka Cycowska. And, as with the Lwów battalion, the Łódź battalion also panicked. The efforts of the officers who, revolvers in hand, tried to stop the infantrymen, had no effect. Soldiers left their positions *en masse* and fled towards the river. Despite Captain Zajchowski's efforts, gathering about 100 soldiers around him, the enemy captured Wólka Cycowska and the bridge over the Świnka leading to it.

The disorderly retreat of the Łódź battalion was observed by Major Robakiewicz from Cyców, and he decided that, in the dangerous situation, the positions occupied should be abandoned. He therefore gave the order to send the batteries to the village of Biesiadki. From a hill near there he saw a wide enemy rifle line, advancing from Wólka Cycowska and Cyców towards Biesiadki and Głębokie. The batteries immediately opened fire, but they only halted the Bolsheviks' march for a moment. Robakiewicz gave the command to continue the retreat in the direction of Głębokie.

After an hour the *division* took up positions by the Wólka Cycowska – Trawniki road and waited for the enemy 514th Regiment to appear. The Soviets were greeted with a rapid and continuous fire from the



batteries and machine guns, inflicting heavy losses and forcing them to retire. The Polish commander then ordered the batteries to withdraw to the village of Barki. On the way, near Głębokie, they passed Captain Zajchowski, dug in on both sides of the road with a group of soldiers rescued from the Łódź battalion. The Captain intended to halt the enemy attack on Cyców this way.

By noon, the batteries of the 2nd *Divizion* were near the village of Barki. At that time the Soviet 514th Regiment attacked the Łódź battalion dug in at Głębokie. Despite fierce resistance, Captain Zajchowski was forced to surrender the field, and the speed of the action meant that the artillery failed to support the infantry. However, when the retreating Poles moved out of the cannons' line, the command to fire straight ahead was given. The experienced battery staff fired frequently and very accurately, and the compact Bolshevik rifle lines faltered. Captain Zajchowski seized the moment, roused his troops to counter-attack and try to regain the trenches at Głębokie. Despite a successful defence of their positions, it was doubtful that the 514th Regiment would survive another assault. Major Robakiewicz therefore decided to send a patrol to find and summon the 4th Cavalry Brigade to his aid.

Meanwhile, just after midnight on 16 August, a liaison officer from the 3rd Army headquarters arrived in Rejowiec to hand Major Bystram an order from General Edward Rydz-Śmigły:

- a) The 1st Legion infantry division will strike in the general direction of Biała from the Ostrów area, so as to reach and cut the Radzyń – Wisznice road during the day of 16 August.
- b) The 4th Cavalry Brigade (3rd and 7th Lancer Regiments) will march from the Rejowiec area as quickly as possible along the Hola – Opole road to Wisznice and link up westwards with the 1st Division and eastwards with the 3rd Legion Infantry Division.
- c) The 3rd Legion Infantry Division will attack Włodawa at dawn on 16 August.

In spite of the haste assumed in the instructions, Major Bystram did not send an order to the 3rd and 7th Regiments until 02:45, and it reached its addressees at 04:00.

The 4th Cavalry Brigade, consisting of the 3rd, 7th and 16th Lancer Regiments, which is to join in the operation, is to reach Wisznice, and in doing so cover the right wing of the 1st Legion Division, which is attacking along the line Lubartów – Parczew and further to the crossing of the Radzyń – Slawatycze road.

The brigade is to set out for Cyców at 05:00 today. Cyców will be the brigade's assembly point, to which the regiments will march independently.

The 7th Lancer Regiment immediately will send an advanced unit to Sosnowice, the 3rd to Parczew. The approach to Sosnowice should go through Cyców – Garbatówka.

The regiments are to take the fewest possible combat wagons with them.

In view of the late receipt of the orders, it was impossible for the regiments to leave at the appointed hour. After immediately alerting the squadrons, deployed in the surrounding villages, the column of the 7th Regiment assembled at 06:10 on the road near the village of Stajne. After breakfast had been served and the horses fed, the regimental commander sent out at 08:00 the ordered patrol under the command of 2nd-Lieutenant Stefan Moszyński. Half an hour later the rest of the regiment followed them. The 3rd Regiment set off at the same time, with Major Bystram riding alongside with the staff of the 4th Cavalry Brigade.

As they approached Cyców, the sounds of gunfire and the roar of cannon were heard more and more clearly. Everything indicated that the stage battalions were already embroiled in a battle. A few kilometres before Cyców, Major Bystram ordered a rest stop.

While it was resting, one of the messengers sent by Major Robakiewicz arrived. He reported on the difficult position of the 2nd HAD and the remnants of the stage battalions. Major Bystram ordered the 7th Regiment to accelerate its march, and he himself with his staff went to a hill near Stręczyn, from where he could observe nearby Cyców. From his vantage point he saw a group of lancers heading in his direction. It was 2nd-Lieutenant Moszyński's patrol, which was escorting enemy taken at Cyców. The major personally questioned the prisoners, obtaining comprehensive information about the enemy's intentions and



numbers. A cursory calculation showed that the enemy was twice as strong, and therefore the brigade commander ordered the 2nd HAD commander to immediately support Captain Zajchowski's battalions with artillery fire and:

... strike with the main forces (3rd Lancers and two infantry battalions), supported by the artillery, from the south, along the Trawniki – Cyców road, directing the 7th Lancers to an supporting flanking action, along the Świnka River from the Bekiesza area.

After sending that order, Major Bystram went personally to the 7th Regiment commander. In a short conversation he acquainted him with his intentions and explained that it would be good if one squadron crossed the Świnka and headed along the northern bank in order to get deeper behind the enemy. He also added that the regiment was to await a written order coordinating the attack and setting a time for it to begin. The conversation ended at 13:30 and the brigade commander departed to move at the head of the 3rd Regiment through Stręczyn towards the village of Barki. It was 14:00 when the lancer column arrived.

Major Bystram immediately sent liaison officers to Captains Zajchowski and Robakiewicz, subordinating the entire infantry to his orders and sent out scouts towards Malinówka, Albertów and Cyców. Then, in direct conversation with Zajchowski and Robakiewicz, he established that:

... the infantry attack will head along the road circling to the Wólka Cycowska bridge. On the right wing of the infantry will be two squadrons of the 3rd Lancers heading to Cyców. On the left wing, at the same time covering that wing from the forest, will be one squadron of the 3rd Lancers. Two squadrons will remain behind the centre of the advancing troops. The artillery will support with its fire on the bridge and Cycowska Wólka, as well as on Cyców.

So the infantry was to be bracketed, as it were, by squadrons of the 3rd Regiment. The start of the assault was set definitively for 16:30, so as to give the infantry an opportunity to rest and sort themselves out.

Once these strategic decisions had been made, Major Bystram sent an order to the commander of the 7th Regiment at around 15:30, as previously agreed, giving the time for the start of the action. At that time, an officer messenger from the patrol sent to Albertów arrived and reported on Bolshevik riflemen advancing on the forest near Głębokie. The brigade commander, sensing the serious threat, ordered the infantry to be collected and put in order and placed at the disposal of Captain Zajchowski, while he directed the 2nd and 4th Squadrons, under the command of Captain Marian Słoniński, against the enemy's riflemen. That officer was ordered to repel the enemy and seize Albertów.

Within minutes, both squadrons launched an attack and captured Malinówka. The road to Albertów was open, and the escaping Red Army soldiers were clearly visible in the space between. The lancers of Lieutenant Ignacy Kowalczewski, commander of 2nd Squadron, pursued the enemy and took the easternmost buildings of Albertów. But before they could prepare fire positions and before assistance from the 4th Squadron arrived, the village found itself under the crossfire of the enemy's heavy machine guns, which then started to encircle it. The 2nd Squadron left the captured portion of Albertów and began to retreat to the forest near Głębokie.

The 4th squadron, which was also under fire, turned back from the road to Albertów and garrisoned Malinówka. However, that place was not safe as the 515th Rifle Regiment, under cover of the woods, was nearing the village and threatened to outflank the unit. Słoniński therefore sent a messenger to the brigade commander with a request to reinforce the left wing of the battalion at Malinówka and to direct artillery fire on Albertów and the forest through which the Soviet infantry were passing. The batteries of the 2nd HAD immediately opened fire, but their effectiveness was limited by the lack of good observation points. To support the 4th Squadron, Lieutenant Jan Zapolski's Technical Squadron, which had remained so far in reserve, was sent with two heavy machine guns.

This turned out to be a very good move, as Zapolski's unit, moving to its designated positions, ran straight into the enemy wing hurrying towards Malinówka. The Bolsheviks were enormously surprised, especially as the attacking lancers were supported by a mounted patrol of the 4th Squadron under Captain Zyjewski, who made a charge on the enemy upon seeing the huge confusion. The Red Army men rushed to escape, leaving prisoners and equipment behind. The danger of encirclement for the 4th Squadron was temporarily averted.



The 2nd squadron, which occupied a hill near Głębokie, also experienced some difficulty. Although the lancers fired on the enemy column, the lack of machine guns prevented them from inflicting any major losses. The enemy soon mastered the confusion in their ranks and advanced on the 2nd Squadron in a wide rifle line, followed by three more. Lieutenant Kowalczewski sent a messenger to his commander with a request to send support with machine guns. The Bolsheviks, sensing the weakness of the defence, attacked boldly, inflicting heavy losses on the Poles and forcing them to retreat. And as with the 4th Squadron, the 2nd was also in danger of being encircled. Every lancer and every gun was needed in the fight. So Kowalczewski sent all his subordinates into the battle and issued a ban on taking away the wounded. However, despite the heroism and good training of the lancers, the numerical superiority of the enemy prevailed, both at Głębokie and at Malinówka, where Captain Słoniński struggled to defend the village against the enemy counterattack.

The commander of the 4th Cavalry Brigade, in order to reinforce the squadrons, threw into the battle all his reinforcements. Punctually at 16:30 Captain Zajchowski's infantrymen moved into the attack on Wólka Cycowska. A fierce battle broke out as the Red Army put up fierce resistance. The Poles were let down by inaccurate artillery support, which not infrequently hit its own lines. There was hesitation in the infantry ranks, which turned to panic after Captain Zajchowski fell seriously wounded. The officers tried to establish order in vain, with the soldiers withdrawing in disorder, firing chaotically on the enemy.

The position of the Polish troops was becoming drastic. Major Bystram had already used up all his reserves, and on the battlefield, instead of two infantry battalions he had a handful of terrified infantrymen and the exhausted lancers from the 3rd Regiment, tired from several hours of fighting. No reports came in about the 7th Regiment's action at Cyców. On the other hand, the enemy was attacking fiercely all along the line and everything seemed to indicate that it had not yet reached the end of its capabilities.

Seeing no chance of continuing an uneven fight, Major Bystram decided to retreat. He had already prepared the appropriate orders, and sent Lieutenant Jerzy Kobylanski, his adjutant, to Major Piasecki with the information, when a liaison officer from the 1st Squadron arrived with the news that the 7th Regiment had smashed the enemy's charge near Cyców and was advancing victoriously. The news was, as the brigade commander stated, a ray of sunshine shining from clouds not yet dispelled. Without a moment's hesitation, he ordered the happy news to be passed on to the fighting troops and changed the order to retreat, instructing:

... move the squadrons to counter-attack in mounted formation, in *ława*, endeavouring to reach the line of the Świnka River.

The late involvement of the 7th Regiment and the lack of information about its actions was due to purely technical problems. Immediately after the conversation with Major Bystram, the commander of the 7th Regiment calculated that the time needed for the messenger to reach the headquarters, write orders and for the troops to take up their starting positions for the assault, would be about two hours. He decided that the break should be used to feed the men and horses. Due to the lack of water in the area, this could only be done in Kulik village, where the regiment was sent. Major Piasecki, together with the 2nd Squadron and the commander's detachment, remained on the spot and, at around 16:00, from his observation point he saw Soviet infantry advancing towards Głębokie. He therefore decided that the time had come to attack.

The regiment was ready to fight, but the pre-arranged order with the time of the attack had still not arrived. So an officer was sent to the brigade commander with the information that the 7th Regiment was in position and waiting for a command, but that it was still not forthcoming. Finally, at 17:10, a messenger arrived with the long-awaited order, which read:

I set the offensive on Cyców to start at 16:30. The 1st Squadron of the 3rd Regiment will head along the Świnka River, as the extreme left wing. Two squadrons of the 3rd Lancer Regiment, on horseback and on foot, will attack from Stręczyn directly on Cyców. The 7th Lancers, will attack from Kulik and along the river on the right wing, sending one squadron for a deep encirclement on Cyców from the Bekiesza area. I am on the road to Trawniki, south of Głębokie.



The start of the attack was set for 16:30, so there was as much as a 40-minute delay, which was caused by the messenger taking an hour and a half searching for the 7th Regiment. Major Piasecki, realising that every further minute of delay could result in the loss of the battle, immediately gave the order to advance, which ended with the words:

The enemy has penetrated deep into our land, inflicting losses in men and material. For all this, he should not be spared, but thrashed as much as we can, taking the battlefield in our hands.

The attack on Cyców was carried out by two squadrons of the 7th Regiment, supported by heavy machine guns. The 3rd Squadron attacked the right side closer to the river, while the 4th Squadron bypassed Cyców and headed straight for the bridge near Wólka Cycowska. The 2nd Squadron, supported by a machine gun on a cart, was to make a deep bypass of Cyców through the villages of Stawek and Bekiesza, and head along the northern bank of the Świnka River to exit onto the road leading towards Wólka Cycowska.

The regimental commander, despite a clear order to attack with the whole regiment, left the 1st Squadron and the Technical Squadron in reserve. He was convinced that two squadrons would be able to cope with taking Cyców, and he retained the rest of his forces to hit the left wing of the Bolshevik riflemen, spotted earlier at Głębokie. He intended to make the charge at the moment of the enemy's retreat from Cyców.

The lancers, with the song *Jak to na wojence ładnie*⁴ on their lips, set off for Cyców. They quickly seized the village, which was empty of the enemy and, without slowing down, continued their assault on the bridge at Wólka Cycowska. Only when they reached a wide drainage ditch near the road did an enemy machine gun sound from across it. Ignoring the fire, the squadrons set off at a gallop. Wading up to their waists in water, they crossed the ditch and captured the bridge, and then took control of Wólka Cycowska.

The Bolshevik defence collapsed completely. The infantrymen fled across the river in disorder, firing in all directions. The momentum of the Polish attack broke all attempts at resistance to such an extent that the field batteries situated behind the village were unable to stop it. Alerted by the shooting, the Dotoł' Group HQ was completely surprised by the Polish counter-attack. By the time they realised the situation, escape was the only solution. Before leaving, they managed to send information about the Polish attack to the commanders of 514th and 515th Rifle Regiments .

At the moment when the 3rd and 4th Squadrons were capturing Wólka Cycowska, the companies of the 514th Rifle Regiment had forced the lancers of the 3rd Regiment out of Biesiadki and pushed them towards Stręczyn. The main forces of the 514th Rifle Regiment were advancing from Głębokie against Captain Zajchowski's infantry. Major Piasecki could see this from his position and, noting that the advance of the Red Army was bringing them to the rear of the Polish units fighting at Barki, decided to attack the enemy's left wing. He directed the Technical Squadron of Second Lieutenant Edward Wilczynski to the attack, assigning a platoon of heavy machine guns to it and the *taczenka* of Private Konstanty Kułagowski.

Second Lieutenant Wilczyński, with an excellent sense of direction, struck at the weakest point of the wing of the advancing Soviet rifle line, which was additionally hit by the *taczenka*'s accurate fire. Confusion broke out in the enemy ranks, the riflemen began to waver, and some of them started to retreat. Major Piasecki knew that this was the best moment to make a charge onto the wing of the enemy retreating in disorder. The regimental commander threw in his last reserve – the 1st Squadron of Lieutenant Tadeusz Jakubski, with 90 sabres. At the same time, 2nd-Lieutenant Kulagowski was ordered to extend the left wing of the advancing squadron, and the horse-holders of the Technical Squadron were ordered to immediately lead the horses to the lancers fighting on foot.

Second Lieutenant Jakubski split his squadron into two lines and at the head of the first one moved forward, gradually passing into a gallop. The second line, at a distance of 500 metres, was led by Lieutenant Wacław Haczynski. The left wing was joined by a *taczenka*, but it could not maintain the fast pace and, with a broken drawbar, had to slow down – but it was able to hit the Bolshevik riflemen with its fire.

⁴ *It's nice in war*, a 1863 song which became popular in the January Uprising. It had been adjusted slightly and that version became the traditional song of the Polish Lancer.



The charging lancers soon caught up with the fleeing Red Army troops, who at the sight of the cavalry completely lost their heads and made no attempt to resist the handful of Poles. However, the conditions were not favourable for the charge, slowing it down with numerous marshes and wetlands.

These terrain conditions were exploited by the Soviet commissars rallying their soldiers and encouraging resistance. Second-Lieutenant Jakubski, with a few lancers, headed towards a large group of Bolsheviks taking cover in a boggy swamp, in front of which the lancers had to stop. At this point, one of many dramatic scenes played out:

“Surrender,” shouted the lancers

“You will kill us,” replied the Bolsheviks, stopping to shoot.

“No,” yelled Jakubski.

At this some of the Bolsheviks begin to come out of the bog abandoning their weapons. Then a lancer, who was carrying a squadron pennant, arriving excited by the charge, attacked the surrendering men with his lance. With shouts of “betrayal”, the Bolsheviks opened fire, which killed Lieutenant Jakubski and several lancers, and wounded several others. The Bolsheviks mistreated them, trying to kill them.

Among the injured was Private Henryk Suchodolski, who recalled those moments as follows:

There were three of them above me. My hands were empty. One with a sabre stood over my head and raised his sword to cut me. I covered my head with my hands, waiting for the blow. He lowered the sword and, almost hitting me on the nose with it, shouted: “What are you fighting for, you son of a bitch, we’ve been liberating you, idiot!”

Despite the casualties suffered, the charge was successful and the lancers reached the road near Głębokie, causing panic among the troops of the 514th Regiment. Major Piasecki, advancing behind the 1st Squadron, wanted to take full advantage of the effect of the charge, so withdrew the Technical Squadron to the rear. He then used it for a dismounted attack at the last moment of the battle. The effect was immediate, the 514th Regiment was completely shattered, which caused the battle to end as the 515th Regiment, which had been attacking the 3rd Lancer Regiment, started to retreat.

Exhausted and frightened, the Red Army men fled all along the front line, abandoning their equipment and hiding in the surrounding forests. Some of them sought shelter in the Cyców farmyards. They were pulled out of there by the horse holders of the 7th Regiment, who were willingly helped by villagers armed with pitchforks and cudgels. The 3rd Regiment’s lancers pursued the Bolsheviks to the Świnka, and there the fleeing clusters fell under the murderous fire of the rifles of 7th Regiment’s Technical Squadron.

While the main forces of the 514th Rifle Regiment were trying to break out of the Polish encirclement with the remnants of their strength, Lieutenant Kobylanski of the 4th Brigade command arrived at the observation post of the 7th Regiment with an order to retreat. It was received by Major Jan Lewandowski, deputy regimental commander:

“We are winning the battle and will not thinking of retreating,” he replied.

When the lieutenant still insisted, the irritated major added:

“If that is not enough for you, report to the regimental commander.”

Kobylanski optimistically sought out Major Piasecki on the battlefield, who replied without undue courtesy:

“Tell Major Bystram that the 7th Uhlán Regiment has smashed the enemy, taken Cyców and Wólka Cycowska. Instead of retreating, I propose you join me and we make a joint pursuit.”

The lieutenant galloped back to the brigade headquarters, where he was greeted by the smiling faces of the officers. The success of the 7th Regiment was already known from reports, and now reports from the front lines spoke of the hasty retreat of the enemy from all areas. Late in the evening the battle at Cyców was over, and communication with the 3rd Army command had also been achieved.



The victorious squadrons from both lancer regiments began to assemble for the night at Cyców and Wólka Cycowska. The infantry were sorting out their ranks in the village of Barki.

The triumph was bought with significant losses: the 3rd Regiment lost an officer and seven lancers, the 7th Regiment lost five officers and seventeen lancers, and the infantry lost eight soldiers. Among the fallen officers were young men of the Lublin area: Tadeusz Jakubski (25 years old), Michał Stawisz-Pohoski (32 years old) and Aleksander Bieliński, a 26-year-old student at the Jagiellonian University.

The losses of the Bolsheviks could not be calculated, as the falling darkness prevented a thorough search of the battlefield. However, from accounts of the Red Army's lines strewn with their bodies, it can be concluded that the enemy suffered far greater losses than the Polish side. From the battlefield the lancers took about 600 prisoners, 50 horses, 5 heavy machine guns, several ammunition carts, military and telephone equipment, carts, and more than 150 abandoned rifles and rucksacks.

At dawn on 17 August, its nominal commander, Lt-Colonel Adam Nałęcz Nieniewski, reached the 4th Brigade and ordered it to march towards Wisznice, in accordance with an order received from General Rydz-Śmigły:

The 4th Cavalry Brigade, ignoring the remaining units of the 58th Division in our rear, will march along the Cyców – Garbatówka – Zienki – Polówno axis behind the 16th Regiment and establish communication with the 3rd Legion Division.

Immediately after breakfast the Brigade set off northwards. The march, interspersed with numerous victorious skirmishes with the retreating enemy, took it as far as the Suwalszczyzna region.

The battle of Cyców was one of many battles fought on Polish soil in the summer of 1920, but it was of great strategic importance. The words of Marshal Piłsudski, written four years after the victorious battle, can testify to its importance:

The main puzzle I wanted to solve for myself was the mystery of the so-called Mozyr group. Actually, it was just the 57th Division, but understanding that concept contradicted the impressions I had been absorbing day by day for a whole month. After all, it had seemed like some kind of apocalyptic beast against which numerous divisions had been retreating for a month. I thought I was dreaming.

The commander was echoed by Antoni Rist, head of the Cyców public school, writing in 1922:

The collective effort of the nation nullified those tempted to impose the system of Eastern Communism on us. The Bolsheviks were repulsed. In Cyców, which was one of the links of resistance, this invasion collapsed, a fact which history will certainly not fail to record.

The victory of the Polish side was determined by several factors. First of all, one should emphasise the excellent leadership of Major Piasecki, who, despite the long delay, did not lose his cool and was able to carefully position the squadrons of his regiment, in order to smash the enemy at the end with an impressive charge. In addition, a mistake was made by the Dotol' Group's staff, too confident of victory, who failed to provide adequate reconnaissance and reserves. The self-sacrificing attitude of the artillerymen and some of the infantry, cheered into battle by Captain Zajchowski, should not be forgotten either. All the rest was decided by a fortunate coincidence, when made the attack of the 7th Lancer Regiment – intended as an supporting measure – become the main and decisive attack for the victory.

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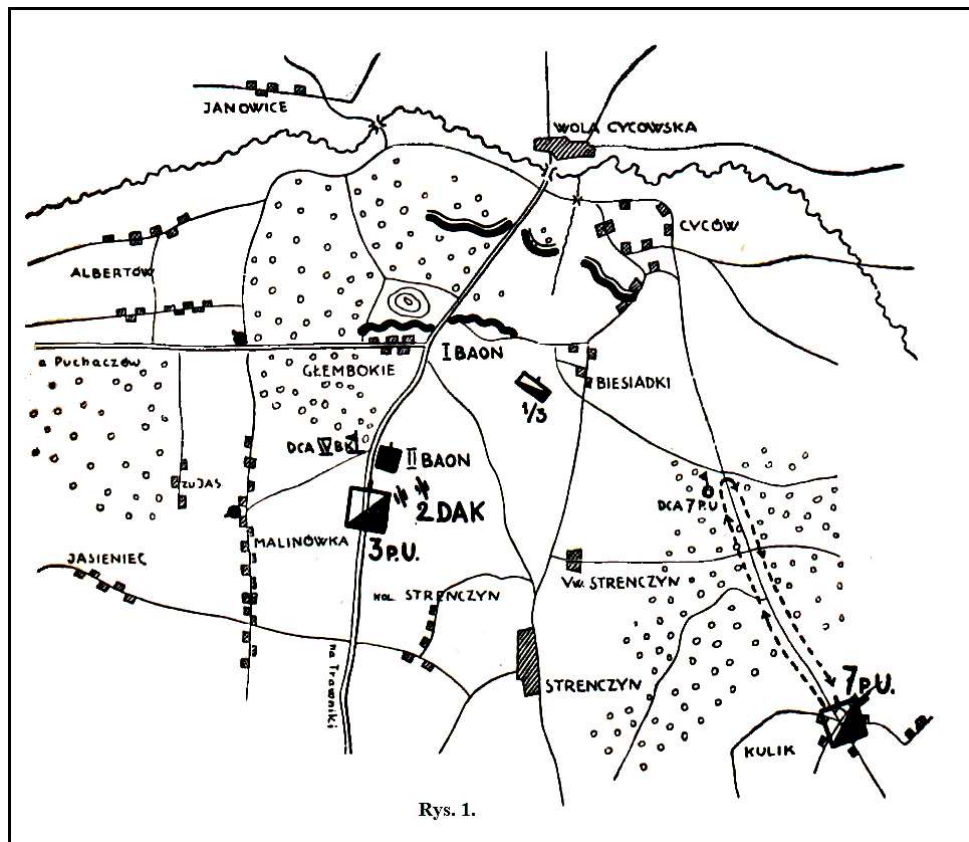
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Map from C. Bystram's, *Bój IV brygady kawalerii pod Cycowem* showing the situation at 10:30.



The actions of the 7th Lancer Regiment at Cyców

