

Aleksander Smoliński

The Raid on Korosten' – October 1920

Institute of National Remembrance
Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation
Szczecin Branch, 2020

Text:

Prof. Dr. Aleksander Smoliński

Series Coordinator:

Dr. Przemysław Benken

Editing, proofreading:

Ewa Pankanin

Graphic design and typesetting:

Stilus Rajmund Dopierała

Printing:

Rex-Druk Szczecin

Iconography:

*Central Military Archive/War Historical Bureau
Museum of Independence Traditions in Łódź
Public domain*

Cover photo:

A fragment of Wojciech Kossak's painting "Horse Recon" (National Museum in Warsaw/phot. Krzysztof Wilczyński)

Inside cover: obverse of the Commemorative Medal for the 1918-1921 War (Collection of Przemysław Benken/photographer Jacek Bilski)

Photo on the back cover:

Polish sabre wz. 1917 with scabbard (National Museum in Kraków/public domain)

Translation Notes:

The original uses Polish names for all the place names. As Korosten' is currently in the Ukraine, and wasn't even in inter-war Poland, I have replaced the names of the major towns with their current Ukrainian versions, to aid location on maps. For smaller places I generally put the Polish name [in square brackets] the first time it appears unless it is very similar because that is how they appear on the maps in the text.

Lancer is preferred over *ułan* for readability. References to "Light Horse" are my translation of *Szwależerów*.

I have translated *dywizjon* throughout as "divizion". This is a battalion-level unit when horse artillery, or a half regiment when cavalry, and is not to be confused with a division.

As the text is Polish I have used *taczanka / taczanki* which is the direct equivalent of the Russian *tachanka*.

I have retained all the original footnotes. Any additional comments by me are in serif font.





Lancer on horseback 1920

(Independence Traditions Museum, Łódź)

Introduction

The Polish-Soviet War of 1919-1920-1921 is one of the most important events in the recent history of the Polish nation and state. It was fought not only over the exact territorial shape of the Polish Republic, but also for its independent and fully sovereign existence. For in the event of defeat, Poland and its newly regained independence would have become the first victims of the Soviets' bloody march to the west, in the quest for European and world Communist revolution. By the same token, a Soviet victory in this war and the realisation of their political and military aims would mean the end of a broadly defined European Mediterranean civilisation based on antiquity and Christianity. It was therefore the proverbial "war for everything", and the Polish victory saved not only Polish independence, but also European democracy, culture, lifestyle and the remnants of the European social elites who had managed to survive the hecatomb of the Great War of 1914-1918. Thanks to the Polish military, economic and social effort of those years, Europe owed it to itself that it did not have to experience the pathologies it would have suffered had it been flooded by a "revolutionary wave" in the shape of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army.¹ It is a pity, therefore, that this is so rarely remembered in Europe, while our own memory of these events leaves much to be desired, as does our ability to interpret them and draw the right conclusions from them.

It should also not be forgotten that in spite of significantly growing literature, the history of the Polish-Soviet war in the years 1919-1920-1921 still conceals many mysteries and gives rise to many controversies and doubts, sometimes even very large ones. The most poorly described elements of this conflict, often ignored by Polish historians, remains the actions of the Red Army, including the size of its forces and resources as well as its losses in personnel, horses and war material, mainly during the campaign of 1920.²

Meanwhile, without a precise calculation of this information neither Polish military successes nor defeats of the time can be reliably assessed. As a result, the picture we have of this conflict is far from perfect.

¹ E.V. d'Abernon, *Osiemnasta decydująca bitwa w dziejach świata. Pod Warszawą 1920 r* (The Eighteenth Decisive Battle of the World: Warsaw, 1920), Warsaw, 1932.

² See A. Smoliński, *Bilans straty w ludziach, koniach i materiale wojennym poniesionych przez 1 Armia Konną w trakcie walki na polskim teatrze działań wojennych w okresie Maj-Wrzesień 1920 r* (Total of losses in people, horses and war material suffered by the 1st Cavalry Army during the battles in the Polish theater of military operations in May-September 1920). in: *Od Grunwaldu do Bzury – bitwy i boje polskie na przestrzeni dziejów* (From Grunwald to Bzura – Polish Battles and Wars throughout History) ed. J. Jędrusiak, D. Koreś, J. Maroń, K. Widziński, Wrocław 2012, p. 283-309.



The raid on Korosten' was carried out between 8 and 12 October 1920 by the Cavalry Corps of Colonel Juliusz Rómmel. Beside the raid on Vilnius and the raid on Kozyatyn – which had taken place earlier – it is one of the most beautiful Polish cavalry actions, and accompanying horse artillery forays, of the Polish-Soviet War. According to the findings of earlier, mainly pre-war, Polish historiography, the specific feature of this operation that distinguished it from the other two mentioned was the fact that during its course regiments of light cavalry and lancers as well as horse artillery clashed with Soviet “armoured trains”. As a result of its success, there was already extensive literature about the battle in the inter-war period,³ which always emphasised the fact that the Cavalry Corps destroyed numerous Red Army armoured trains. On closer examination, however, it appears that facts previously regarded as absolutely certain are not sufficiently clear and are not confirmed by the sources.

The Glory Days of Armoured Trains

The first classic armoured trains appeared during the Boer War of 1899-1902, when they were successfully used by the British. The then war correspondent, later First Lord of the Admiralty and eventually British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill was on one of them. On the Eastern Front of the First World War, which unlike the Western Front had not lost all elements of manoeuvre, they were also used successfully by the armies of Russia, Austro-Hungary and Germany. On that front the railways, including the narrow gauge ones, played the most important role both in the control and supply of the fighting troops. Poor operation of the main lines or loss of the main railway junctions could very seriously affect the combat potential of the armies operating in the east, as happened to the Tsar's army in 1916 and 1917. Hence, as well as their typical roles in combat, armoured trains also performed other important tasks related to protecting the lines and railway junctions and combating the armoured trains of the opposing side.

However, they were to reach their absolute peak of importance on the battlefields of the Russian Civil War, from 1918 to 1922, for both the “Whites” and the “Reds” – and then also for the Polish army and Ukrainian armies⁴ fighting against the latter. By May 1919 the Polish army already had seventeen armoured trains ready for combat on the fronts operating against the Ukrainians⁵ and the Red Army, as well as inside national territory. Even more of them fought in 1920. In August of that year, there were at least 33 armoured trains operating against the Soviets. Although their number was constantly changing, as a rule the lost units were replaced by newly built or captured vehicles or even single armoured railcars.⁶

It is worth emphasising that in the period of interest to us here, the concept of an armoured train should be understood as a vehicle with a construction and capabilities defined as follows:

An armoured train is a combat unit armed with cannons and MGs and protected against small arms fire and shrapnel from artillery, and at the same time capable of rapid movement. It is a manoeuvre unit of an outstanding offensive character, especially in a mobile war. It operates either independently, or cooperates with other arms. Its disadvantages are its large size

³ See. J. Chludziński, *Epizod z zagonu na Korosten – październik 1920 (Episode from the Raid on Korosten - October 1920)* in *Epizody kawaleryjskie. Zbiór wspomnień (Cavalry episodes. Memoires)*, Oświęcim 2012 (1st edition: Warsaw 1939); E. Hinterhoff, *Zagon na Korosten, (Raid on Korosten)* in *Przegląd Kawaleryjski (Cavalry Review)* 1932, R. 9, nr 4 (78); S. Skotnicki, *Sprostowanie do artykułu kpt. dypl. Eugeniusza Hinterhoffa pt. „Zagon na Korosten (Corrigendum to the article „Raid on Korosten” by Capt. Eugeniusz Hinterhoff)* in *Przegląd Kawaleryjski (Cavalry Review)*, 1932, R. 9, nr 7 (63); A. Pragłowski, *Zagon na Korosten (Raid on Korosten)*, in *Przegląd Kawaleryjski (Cavalry Review)* 1936, R. 13, nr 3 (125).

⁴ The author uses the plural because he is referring to both the UNR, which was the armed force of the Ukrainian People's Republic, and the UHA of the West Ukrainian People's Republic.

⁵ “The scarcity of artillery and the lack of technical means, especially explosives, made extensive use of armoured trains possible in the campaign for Eastern Galicia, rendering invaluable services in capturing and securing railway lines and cooperating in the fighting nearby. For this reason, both sides tried to improvise as many armoured trains as possible and bring them to the war zones” - quoted from: J. Sopotnicki, *Kampania polsko-ukraińska. Doświadczenia operacyjne i bojowe (The Polish-Ukrainian Campaign. Operational and Combat Experience)*, Lwów 1921, p. 29-30.

⁶ Central Military Archives (hereafter: “CAW”), Branch and Mobilisation-Organisation Staff, 300.7.2, Order of Battle No. 560 of 10 May 1919.



(making it a good target for artillery) and its complete dependence on the – functioning – railway network. Nevertheless, any action by an armoured train, if well-coordinated and with a dedicated well-trained crew, will produce positive results by at least partially immobilising and demoralising the enemy.⁷

Therefore at the time the armoured train was a weapon of the Polish Army well suited both for cooperating with cavalry and for fighting against it – provided, of course, that they were operating in the vicinity of railway routes.

Similar considerations applied at the time to the Red Army, as well as into the inter-war period, and such trains had even greater significance for it than in Poland and the rest of Europe, mainly due to the vastness of the Soviet empire and the number of potential theatres of operations.⁸

The particular popularity of this method of combat was due both to the experience the Russians had gained from World War I and to the specific conditions prevailing on the fronts of the civil war, with their extensive manoeuvre and low troop densities. Moreover the battles of that war stretched over very large areas of the former Romanov Empire with very poor, or even no, road transport infrastructure, which significantly hampered the movement of supplies to the fighting troops. As a result, the importance of railway routes increased enormously, all the more so because in some of these areas there was a relatively dense railway network, relative to Russian conditions and its technical infrastructure. All these considerations favoured the operation of armoured trains. Although both the railway network and its support infrastructure were much poorer than in other European countries or North America, they were still sufficient – at least in theory – to secure their operations fairly effectively.

On the other hand, the support and supplying of troops by the railways in Russia was hampered by the extensive and very serious damage to railway infrastructure and rolling stock, and by shortages of fuel and skilled labour. Correct and effective management and control of railway traffic had been very badly affected by the turmoil of the Bolshevik coup, along with the organisation of maintenance. In addition, huge problems were posed by damaged bridges and culverts and the devastation of other elements of the infrastructure, such as signalling equipment, turnouts, telegraph lines, water pumps and fuel depots.⁹

The attention given to armoured trains in the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, and at the same time in the "White" armies fighting the Bolsheviks, was due to the fact that they were successful, mainly in the steppes of southern Russia, in the Urals, in the North Caucasus, and along the Trans-Siberian railway, where both in peacetime and in wartime economic and social life was largely concentrated around large railway stations.¹⁰ As a result, the bulk of the activities and manoeuvres of the forces involved in Russia's civil war took place along or in the immediate vicinity of the railway routes, which were the main supply arteries for all the warring parties. Hence, railway junctions and the capture and maintenance of the main trunk routes

⁷ Quote from: CAW, 2nd Directorate of the Polish General Staff, 303.4.519, *Training instructions for armoured trains* – General and Organisational Office of the Ministry of Military Affairs, Warsaw 1928.

⁸ CAW, 2nd Division of the Polish General Staff, 303.4.3038, *Armed Forces of the USSR. Armoured Trains*, Warsaw, 23 May 1931 and: A. Smoliński, *Pociągi pancerne 1 Armii Konnej podczas walki na polskim teatrze działań wojennych w 1920 roku (Armoured trains of the 1st Horse Army during the battles in the Polish theatre of military operations in 1920)*, in *Wojna polsko-rosyjska 1919-1920 i jej międzynarodowe odniesienia z perspektywy 90-lecia (The Polish-Russian War 1919-1920 and its international consequences from the perspective of 90 years)*, ed. J. Ślipiec, T. Kośmider, Warsaw 2010.

⁹ For more on these issues see A. Smoliński, *Stan kolejnictwa rosyjskiego i sowieckiego w okresie wojny domowej w Rosji oraz w czasie wojny z Rzeczpospolską - lata 1918-1922 (The condition of the Russian and Soviet railways during the civil war in Russia and during the war with the Republic of Poland - 1918-1922)*, in *Przegląd Wschodni (Eastern Review) 2010*, vol. 11, z. 1 (41), pp. 75-100; idem, *O "czerwonej" Rosji, "czerwonej" Europie i "czerwonym" świecie. Studia o potencjale militarnym Sowietów w latach 1918-1941 ("Red Russia", "Red Europe" and the "Red world". Studies on the military potential of the Soviets in 1918-1941)*, Toruń 2015, pp. 245-294 in the chapter: *Stan techniczny oraz możliwości przewozowe kolejnictwa rosyjskiego i sowieckiego w okresie wojny domowej w Rosji oraz wojny z Rzeczpospolitą Polską, Lata 1918-1922 (Technical State and Transport Capacity of the Russian and Soviet Railways during the Civil War in Russia and the War with the Republic of Poland in the Years 1918-1922)*.

¹⁰ For a more extensive discussion of these issues see CAW, *Armed Forces of the USSR. Armoured Trains*.



were contested with particular ferocity. At the stations, in addition to the various railway technical equipment, there were often warehouses with weapons, ammunition, food, uniforms and other necessary war supplies, as well as repair workshops capable not only of repairing and overhauling rolling stock, but also various repairs to armaments, sometimes even artillery.

As a result, the Red Army's armoured trains were given a wide range of different and important tactical tasks to perform. These included breaking through enemy defences, supporting the advance of their own infantry or cavalry, pursuit of the defeated enemy, seizing tactically important positions and holding them until the arrival of one's own forces, fighting enemy armoured trains, reconnaissance and covering the retreat or wings of their own troops. Under such conditions, armoured trains rendered invaluable services to all combatants. For despite their organic disadvantages and technical and tactical limitations – mainly due to their attachment to the tracks – they almost immediately became, alongside the emerging Red cavalry, an important factor of manoeuvre, sometimes organised on an operational or even strategic scale.¹¹

Furthermore, these trains and their crews were also used to repair or destroy railway lines. It should be remembered that "White" Russians and other armies fighting the Soviets at the time, such as the Polish Army, used their trains in largely the same way and for the same tasks. They also provided very valuable fire support for their own infantry and cavalry – and both in attack and defence they acted independently and constituted the nucleus of resistance for forces facing encirclement. Often their crews were the last to leave the battlefield or were killed in combat.¹²

In Soviet Russia, and later in the USSR, armoured trains became one of the elements of the mythos of the victorious civil war for the "Reds". The armoured train of the Chairman of the Revolutionary Military Soviet of the Republic, Lev Trotski became famous. It has passed into legend that for over two years, as one of the "commanders of the revolution and leaders of the world proletariat", he directed from it the actions of the Red Army on almost all fronts of the conflict, mercilessly administering "justice" to numerous real or imagined enemies of the revolution and severely punishing deserters and all kinds of "traitors" to its ideals.

Hence, the appearance of his train aroused fear both in the ranks of ordinary "Red Army men" and among the "commanders"¹³ and military commissars. The man himself, after the Soviet victory, recalled the years spent aboard it as follows:

Now it is time to discuss the so-called "Train of the Chairman of the Revolutionary Military Soviet". During the years of the highest tension of the revolution my personal life was most closely connected with that train. But also the train was closely connected with the life of the Red Army. The train connected the front with the rear, settled urgent matters on the spot, enlightened, appealed,¹⁴ supplied,¹⁵ punished¹⁶ and rewarded.¹⁷

¹¹ S. Małagowski, *O zastosowaniu i taktyce pociągów pancernych (On the Use and Tactics of Armoured Trains)*, Bellona, 1919, R. 2, vol. 3; B. Sobczyński, *Rozwój historyczny pociągów pancernych (The Historical Development of Armoured Trains)*, in *Przegląd Wojskowo-Techniczny (Military-Technical Review)*, 1934, vol. 15, p. 1.

¹² CAW, 1st Directorate of the Polish General Staff., 303.3.754, *Pismo Departament VI Wojsk Technicznych Ministerstwa Spraw Wojskowych (Letter of 6th Department of the Technical Forces of the Ministry of Military Affairs)* l. dz. 695/23.tjn. of 7 April 1923; B. Sobczyński, *Rozwój historyczny pociągów...*, pp. 14-14; M. Gajewski, *Pociągi pancerne w wojnie polsko-bolszewickiej 1919-1920 (Armored trains in the Polish-Bolshevik war 1919-1920)* in *Pociągi pancerne 1918-1943. Organizacja-struktura-działania wojenne (Armored trains 1918-1943, Organization-structure-warfare)*, ed. U. Kraśnicka, K. Filipow, Białystok 1999, p. 14; I. G. Drogovoz, *Крепости на колесах. История бронепоездов (Fortresses on Wheels. A History of Armoured Trains)*, Minsk, 2002, pp. 51-52, 60.

¹³ As officers were called at the time in the Red Army.

¹⁴ That is, agitational activities.

¹⁵ The train sometimes delivered necessary supplies, such as ammunition or shoes to the front.

¹⁶ Mainly executions under the sentences of various revolutionary military tribunals.

¹⁷ Indeed, sometimes the supplies mentioned above brought by Trotsky to the front, such as warm underwear or footwear, were treated as a form of collective reward for outstanding Red Army formations.



Without repression, no army can be formed. You cannot lead a crowd of people to their death without having the death penalty in your arsenal. ... The most solid glue binding the new army together was the ideas of the October Revolution. The train delivered this glue to the fronts.¹⁸

As a result, the Soviet armoured trains aroused respect in all the opponents fighting them, including the soldiers of the Polish Army. In an archival document of the time, the author assesses the combat value of the various Red Army formations fighting on the Soviet's Southwestern Front: "Cavalry good, well-trained and extremely brave. Infantry bad, untrained, consisting mostly of local peasants in civilian clothes and cowardly. Artillery quite good [...]. The armoured trains were excellent, well equipped [...]"¹⁹ Captain Władysław Broniewski, analysing his own combat experience, stated:

Generally the Bolsheviks had few, and bad, artillery pieces. After the counter-offensive their numbers dropped to a minimum. The role of the artillery was, however, replaced well by the armoured trains, of which the Bolsheviks had very many, and good ones; sometimes three armoured trains operated simultaneously on a single track. The Bolshevik armoured trains were far superior to ours in risky ventures and daring expeditions.

The latter were always too sensitive to the possibility of being cut off and did not support the infantry action for very long, or at all during deeper attacks. The Bolshevik armoured trains were all the most troublesome because of the artillery was installed well. During the Dvina offensive²⁰ our artillery did not know how to deal with the armoured trains. The battle of Wyszki will serve as an example: for three days the Bolshevik armour stood 500 m in front of our line, unmoved by the fire of our artillery. The Bolshevik trains were dealt with most effectively by tearing up or undermining the track to their rear.²¹

Positive opinions about the Red crews can also be found in other official reports of Polish officers and their Ukrainian allies of the time, especially those who had to deal with them during the 1920 campaign. It is also worth remembering that the armoured trains were one of those formations of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army which had fought for the longest time on the anti-Polish front in 1920. The last time they clashed was precisely from 8 to 12 October 1920, when the Polish Cavalry Corps of Colonel Juliusz Rómmel made its raid on Korosten.

¹⁸ L. Trotsky, *Moje życie. Próba autobiografii (My Life. An attempt at an autobiography)*, Warsaw 1930, p. 456.

¹⁹ Quote from *Bitwa lwowska 25 VII - 18 X 1920. Dokumenty operacyjne (Battle of L'viv, 25 July – 18 October, 1920. Operational documents)*, Part 1: (25 July – 5 August), ed. M. Tarczyński, Warsaw 2002, p. 335.

Note, the cavalry on the South-western Front by this time were largely the 1st Horse Army.

²⁰ Referring here to the joint operation of the Polish and Latvian armies in the winter of 1919-1920 to take Daugavpils.

²¹ Battle experience report by Capt. Władysław Broniewski, commander of the 2nd Battalion of the 1st Legion Infantry Regiment at Łużki, 7 April 1921. Quoted from: G. Gołębiowski, *Kapitan Władysław Broniewski "Orlik" o doświadczeniach bojowych z wojny 1920 roku (Captain Władysław Broniewski "the Eagle" on his combat experience in the war of 1920)*, in *Przeżywgląd Historyczno-Wojskowy (Historical Military Review)*, 2012, R. 13 (64), nr. 2 (240), p. 143-144.



Squadron of the 12th Podolian Lancer Regiment crossing the Sluch River, October 1920.

(Source: CAW)



The Advance of the Cavalry Corps on Korosten in October 1920

Korosten was an extremely important railway station, then in Soviet hands. As many as five important railway lines converged there; namely from Kiev, Zviahel, Sarny, Kalenkovich and Zhytomyr. In particular, the route between Kalenkovich and Zhytomyr would be of great importance to the Red Army command in the event of a possible resumption of offensive combat operations against the Polish Republic. The next railway line that could be used in further military operations was across the Dnieper River. This meant that practically all the supplies for the Soviet 12th Army passed through Korosten. Moreover, the technical base located at that railway junction, including the repair facilities, was of major importance for the efficient functioning of the entire communication infrastructure in that part of the Ukraine under Soviet control.²²

Therefore, alongside the usual formations and services, in October 1920 Korosten was reportedly also home to as many as five Soviet armoured trains²³ patrolling the railway lines in its area and providing protection and valuable reinforcement for the defence of the transport junction.

The raid was made by the Cavalry Corps, under the command of Colonel Juliusz Rómmel. It consisted of two cavalry divisions, each of which had two brigades. Their basic organisation and approximate numbers are shown in the table, next page.

The table shows at the time when the advance on Korosten began, the Cavalry Corps consisted of twelve cavalry regiments²⁴ and six or seven horse artillery batteries with a total of about 3,610 “sabres”, that is cavalrymen in fighting condition.

Their armament at that time consisted of 140 HMGs and 24 or 28 guns. So, it was not a particularly large force, although quite substantial for the Polish capabilities of that time.²⁵

²² For more see: T. Kutrzeba, *Wyprawa kijowska 1920 roku (The Kiev expedition of 1920)*, Warsaw 1937, p. 46 and passim.

²³ That was the understanding of the Polish army at that time. However, on 8 October 1920 a documents with data closer to reality stated: “At the Korosten railway junction we should expect 3 or 4 enemy armoured trains”. See *Bitwa wołyńsko-podolska 5 IX - 21 X 1920. Dokumenty operacyjne (Battle of Volhynia-Podolia, 5 September to 21 October, 1920. Operational documents)*, ed. M. Tarczyński, Warsaw 2014, p. 963, doc. no. 815.

²⁴ However, one of them, namely the 203rd Volunteer Lancer Regiment, was sent on reconnaissance and did not take part in the attack.

²⁵ For more details see J. Grobicki, *Organizacja taktyczna polskiej kawalerii strategicznej w latach 1914-1920 (Tactical Organisation of the Polish Strategic Cavalry in 1914-1920)*, in *Przegląd Kawaleryjski (Cavalry Review)* 1934, R. 11, no. 10 (108); T. Machalski, *Ostatnia epopeja. Działania kawalerii w 1920 roku (The Last Epic. Cavalry Operations in 1920)*, London, 1969.



Organisation and Numbers of Col. Rómmel's Cavalry Corps at the beginning of October 1920

1st Cavalry Division

6th Cavalry Brigade

1st "Krechowiecki" Lancer Regiment – 400 sabres, 12 HMGs

14th "Jazłowiecki" Lancer Regiment – 350 sabres, 12 HMGs

12th "Podolian" Lancer Regiment – 300 sabres, 12 HMGs

1st Battery, 3rd Horse Artillery *Divizion* – 4 guns

2nd Battery, 3rd Horse Artillery *Divizion* – 4 guns

7th Cavalry Brigade

2nd "Rokitniański" Light Horse Regiment – 150 sabres, 8 HMGs

8th "Prince Józef Poniatowski" Lancer Regiment – 400 sabres, 12 HMGs

9th Lancer Regiment – 300 sabres, 12 HMGs

1st Battery, 1st Horse Artillery *Divizion* – 4 guns

2nd Battery, 6th Horse Artillery *Divizion* – 4 guns

2nd Cavalry Division

8th Cavalry Brigade

2nd "Grochowski" Lancer Regiment in honour of Gen. Dwernicki – 400 sabres, 12 HMGs

108th Reserve Lancer Regiment – 200 sabres, 12 HMGs

115th Reserve Lancer Regiment – 200 sabres, 12 HMGs

1st Battery, 8th Horse Artillery *Divizion* – 4 guns

9th Cavalry Brigade

1st "Józef Piłsudski" Light Horse Regiment – 400 sabres, 12 HMGs

201st Volunteer Light Horse Regiment – 300 sabres, 12 HMGs

203rd Volunteer Lancer Regiment – 200 sabres, 12 HMGs

1st Battery, 4th Horse Artillery *Divizion* – 4 guns

1st Battery, 7th of Wielkopolska Horse Artillery *Divizion* (probable) – 4 guns

Total: 3 610 sabres, 140 HMGs and 24 (28) field guns

Notes:

The numbers apply only to the combat strength of brigades, divisions and the whole corps, and do not even include the artillerymen serving in the horse batteries listed. [Nor do they include MG crews]. Thus the numbers should be considered minimums.

In the official history of the later 9th Horse Artillery *Divizion*, it states that the entire 8th Horse Artillery *Divizion*, of nine guns in three batteries, took part in the raid on Korosten as part of the 8th Cavalry Brigade. During this action, and especially during the retreat to Zviahel, that *divizion* cooperated with the 2nd Lancer Regiment. See W. Legun, *Zarys historii wojennej 9-go Dywizjonu Artylerii Konnej – byłego 8-go Dywizjonu Artylerii Konnej* (*An Outline of the Military History of the 9th Horse Artillery Divizion – formerly the 8th Horse Artillery Divizion*), Warsaw 1929, pp. 14-18; *Rodowody artylerii konnej Wojska Polskiego* (*Ancestry of the Horse Artillery of the Polish Army*), ed. J. Boguski, London 1964, pp. 44-45.

The inclusion of the 1st Battery of 7th of Horse Artillery *Divizion* is from a citation that: "during the famous raid on Korosten [...] the Volunteer 'Kraków' Battery distinguished itself by its activity". In November 1920 that battery was a part of the 9th Cavalry Brigade, but may have been so since August. It was renamed the 1st Battery of the (wartime) 9th Horse Artillery *Divizion*. See W. Tomaszewski, *Zarys historii wojennej 13-go Dywizjonu Artylerii Konnej* (*An Outline of the Military History of the 13th Horse Artillery Divizion*), Warsaw 1931, pp. 12-13, and: L. Dunin-Wolski, *Zarys historii polskiej artylerii konnej* (*An Outline of the History of the Polish Horse Artillery*), London 1948, pp. 187, 219-220; *Rodowody artylerii konnej...*, pp. 47-49, 53.

Author's own compilation on the basis of: E. Hinterhoff (*Zagon na Korosten*,) and other references.



On the other hand, the composition and strength of his corps was presented somewhat differently in his diary by the later General Juliusz Rómmel. He wrote for the date of 4 October 1920:

The whole day has passed today with the troops busy smithing horses, repairing equipment, cleaning weapons and putting the rolling stock in order. During that I held a briefing for all the division and brigade commanders, in order to discuss together what the regiments should take with them and what formation to set off in. It became clear that the regiments of the 1st Cavalry Division had recently received reinforcements, although not many. The composition of the divisions was as follows: The 6th Brigade had about 500 sabres in each of the 1st Krechowiecki, 12th and 14th Lancer regiments; the 7th Brigade had 500 sabres in the 8th Lancers, 400 sabres in the 9th Lancers and the 2nd Cavalry Regiment had 250 sabres; so altogether the 1st Cavalry Division had about 3,000 sabres. Moreover the machine-gun squadrons were large, and we counted the machine guns they possessed separately. The number of machine-guns in each regiment varied, but on average it ranged from 16 to 24, which created considerable fire power in the divisions as a whole. They were mostly *taczanki*. Of these, each squadron always had two organic *taczanki*,²⁶ with the rest being grouped in a machine-gun squadron at the direct disposal of the regimental commander.

The artillery of the 1st Cavalry Division was four batteries. This artillery was decentralised and it was only on the battlefield, when there was a joint effort between the two brigades, that the artillery become re-centralised. Thus the 3rd Horse Artillery *Divizion* (1st and 2nd Batteries) was permanently assigned to the 6th Brigade, and the 1st Battery of the 1st *Divizion* and the 2nd Battery of the 6th Horse Artillery *Divizion* to the 7th Brigade.

In all, the 1st Cavalry Division was about 5 000 men, 120 machine-guns, 16 guns, 5 200 horses.

2nd Cavalry Division: The 8th Cavalry Brigade had some 600 sabres in the 2nd Lancer Regiment, 250 sabres in the 115th [Reserve] Lancer Regiment, and 150 sabres in the 108th [Reserve] Lancer Regiment; for a total of about 1 000 sabres with 60 machine guns, and the 1st and 2nd Batteries of the 8th Horse Artillery *Divizion*. The 9th Brigade had about 500 sabres in the 1st Light Horse Regiment and 400 sabres in the 201st [Volunteer] Light Horse Regiment, with 40 machine-guns and the 1st Battery of the 4th Horse Artillery *Divizion* [...].

Altogether the 2nd Cavalry Division consisted of 3 000 men, 100 machine-guns and 8 guns, with 3 500 horses.²⁷

According to the above account, on 4 October 1920, Colonel Rómmel's Cavalry Corps had a total of 8 000 men and 8 700 horses, with an armament at the time of 220 machine guns and 24 field guns. This is quite a lot higher than the than the one presented in the table. However, it must be recalled that in this case we are probably dealing with the number of men drawing rations, which in addition to the combat troops also includes all the other soldiers serving in the Corps, i.e. horse artillerymen and soldiers of the rear services of the divisions and brigades, as well as the transport column. As a rule, they did not take part in direct fighting with a weapon in their hands. Moreover, many of them did not form part of the combat formations that set out on the march and reached Korosten. This was because Colonel Rómmel regulated them:

As for the rolling stock, I ordered it be limited to only what was necessary to transport ammunition and oats. Rifle ammunition was 200 rounds per head (of which 120 per lancer, 80 per unit wagon), machine gun ammunition was 10,000 rounds per HMG, artillery ammunition was 150 rounds per gun. As far as food and supplies were concerned, each squadron had a field kitchen with a soup wagon and an oat wagon. These three wagons constituted a squadron's train, which followed directly behind its own squadron, or behind the regiment when it was in the advance guard or formed a detachment. In brief, I considered ammunition to be the most important thing, and then oats. As far as feeding men was concerned, I

²⁶ That is, HMGs on horse carriages, permanently assigned to individual squadrons of the line.

²⁷ *Kawaleria polska w pościgu za Budiennym. Dziennik wojenny b. d-cy 1 Dywizji Kawalerii generała dywizji Juliusza Rómmela (The Polish Cavalry in Pursuit of Budenny. War Diary of the 1st Cavalry Division of General Juliusz Rómmel)*, part 2, Lwów (b.r.w.), pp. 147-148.



expected that we would live on local resources. It is true that we had no bread, but that was the least of our worries, because cattle and potatoes could be found in abundance everywhere. On the other hand, it was very difficult to find oats.²⁸

As a result of these regulations, Rómmel's Cavalry Corps was transformed into a manoeuvre cavalry group, thanks to the reduction to a minimum of wagons and leaving all rear formations behind. The task of the Polish forces in carrying out this daring offensive was to ensure that they were able to make rapid and unobserved marches behind enemy lines.

The aim of the raid was to destroy the Red Army troops gathered in Korosten, including the Soviet armoured trains, as well as station equipment and bridges located along the railway routes leading to that junction. In order to be able to carry out this destruction covertly, and thus prevent the armoured trains from operating effectively, it was intended to strike at Korosten by night. The element of surprise was to play a significant role. The intention was that Korosten be eliminated for as long as possible as a potential supply base and concentration area for Soviet troops, should they intend to resume operations against the Polish Army, despite the armistice signed on 12 October and the start of peace negotiations in Riga. Therefore it was an undertaking that could be performed only by a well-commanded, large, mobile unit with good horse artillery. Moreover, during the return trip from the raid, the direction of the Cavalry Corps' march was selected in such a way as to enable it to "smash to pieces" the Soviet 7th Rifle Division.²⁹

The corps commander, Colonel Juliusz Rómmel, was aided in the execution of these tasks by his chief of staff at the time, Capt. Aleksander [Radwan] Pragłowski.

A concentric attack by the Polish cavalry on the railway station and the city, as well as on the railway bridges lying nearby, took place in the morning of 10 October 1920. However, the first and rather fierce clashes with Soviet infantry had already taken place late in the evening and during the night of 9-10 October. They mainly involved the regiments of the 6th Cavalry Brigade of the 1st Cavalry Division.³⁰ As a result, the element of surprise was greatly reduced. The whistle of locomotives and the movements at Korosten station testified to the preparations for defence or evacuation that the Soviet side were making.³¹

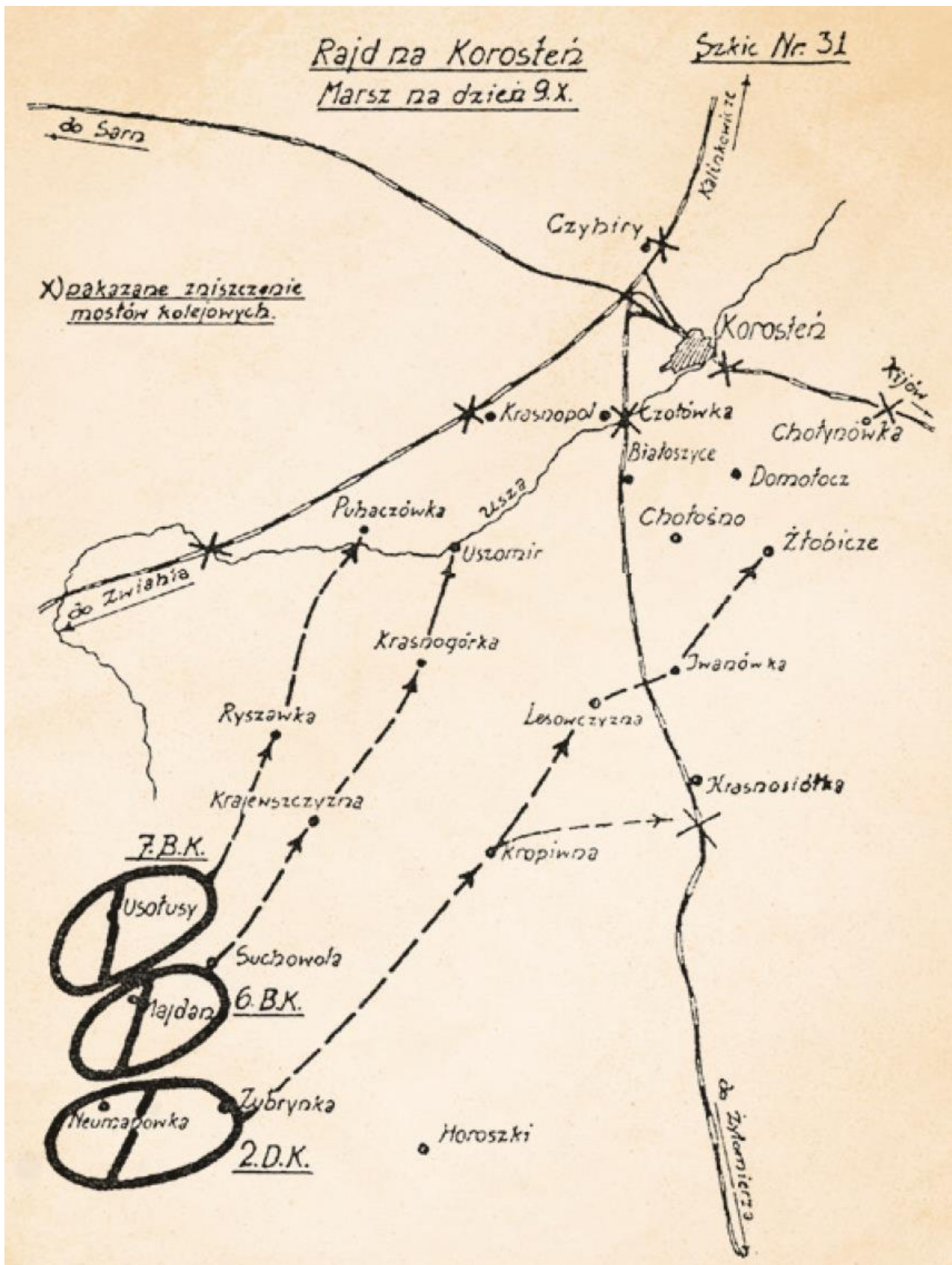
²⁸ *Kawaleria polska w pościgu za Budiennym ...*, p. 148. This information is confirmed by the official history of the 3rd Horse Artillery Division, which states: "Only the cavalry and horse artillery were to take part in this expedition. At the same time, there was an order to leave behind the wagons and any horses unsuitable for forced marches". See W. Górecki, *Zarys historii wojennej 3-go Dywizjonu Artylerii Konnej (An Outline of the Military History of the 3rd Horse Artillery Division)*, Warsaw 1929, p. 29.

²⁹ One order stated: "The detachment which will occupy Korosten shall first endeavour to destroy as thoroughly as possible the railway station and the tracks or, if possible, to blow up the railway bridge leading across [the river] Uzh". See *Bitwa wołyńsko-podolska...*, p. 963, doc. no. 815.

³⁰ J. Turkiewicz, *Zarys historii wojennej 12-go Pułku Ułanów Podolskich (An Outline of the War History of the 12th Podolian Lancer Regiment)*, Warsaw 1928, p. 27; A. Wojciechowski, *Zarys historii wojennej 1-go Pułku Ułanów Krechowieckich (An Outline of the War History of the 1st Krechowiecki Lancer Regiment)*, Warsaw, 1929, p. 48; J. Litewski, W. Dziewanowski, *Dzieje 1-go Pułku Ułanów Krechowieckich (History of the 1st Krechowiecki Lancer Regiment)*, Warsaw 1932, p. 393-394; Various, *Dzieje Ułanów Jazłowieckich (History of Jazłowieckie Ułans)*, Londyn 1988, p. 60; Various, *Ułani Podolscy. Dzieje Pułku Ułanów Podolskich 1809-1947 (The Ułans of Podolia. The History of the Podolian Lancers Regiment 1809-1947)*, Wrocław - Warsaw - Kraków, 1991, p. 107.

³¹ F. Skibiński, *Ułańska młodość 1917-1939 (Young Ułans, 1917-1939)*, Warsaw, 1989, p. 147; A. Mniszek, K. Rudnicki, *Zarys historii wojennej 2-go Pułku Szwoleżerów Rokitniańskich (An Outline of the War History of the 2nd Rokitniański Light Horse Regiment)*, Warsaw 1929, p. 32; T. Śmigielski, *Zarys historii wojennej 8-go Pułku Ułanów ks. Józefa Poniatowskiego (An Outline of Military History of the 8th Prince Józef Poniatowski Lancer Regiment)*, Warsaw 1929, p. 31; J. Tatar, *Zarys historii wojennej 9-go Pułku Ułanów (An Outline of Military History of the 9th Lancer Regiment)*, Warsaw, 1929, p. 29; K. Krzczunowicz, *Ułani księcia Józefa. Historia 8 Pułku Ułanów ks. Józefa Poniatowskiego 1784-1945 (The Prince Józef Lancers. The History of the 8th Józef Poniatowski Lancer Regiment, 1784-1945)*, London 1960, p. 185; J. Milewski, *2 Pułk Szwoleżerów Rokitniańskich (The 2nd Rokitniański Light Horse Regiment)*, Warsaw, 1993, p. 9.





Sketch 1. Plan for the routes of the divisions and brigades of the Cavalry Corps during the raid on Korosten, drafted on 9 October 1920. Crosses marked the places where it was planned to damage railway lines in order to interrupt railway traffic and cut off the retreat of the Soviet Korosten garrison, including the Red Army armoured trains operating there.

Source: Kawaleria polska w pościgu za Budiennym, part 2, L'viv (b.r.w.), p. 161.



Meanwhile the Polish side was able to obtain a more accurate and reliable picture of the Soviet forces gathered in Korosten and its surroundings. This is shown by a report of Lieutenant-General Władysław Jędrzejewski's Operational Group of 10 October, which stated:

The information is confirmed that the headquarters of the 7th [Rifle] Division is in the town of Korosten. Two armoured trains are operating on the Zviahel – Korosten line, including the “Komunar”³² with three wagons, two cannons on one, and 4 HMGs in the others, the other with two MG wagons and one gun is permanently stationed at Yablonets [Jabloniec]. The brigades [of the 7th Rifle Division] are located to the north-east of the town of Zviahel (reconnaissance is on-going) ... The 7th RD has 1200-1500 bayonets and 30-35 MGs.³³

In the evening of 9 October the squadrons of the 12th Lancer Regiment reached the village of Ushomyr [Uzomierz] located eleven kilometres from Korosten. From there its commander sent the Technical Squadron and the 4th Squadron to the village of Krasnopil' in order to destroy the railway bridge over the Mohylyanka River, thus blocking the Korosten – Zviahel line. After a brief clash with its guard, that task was completed late at night. According to the findings of Polish historians, as a result of blowing up the ferro-concrete bridge located there (as well as the wooden bridge which was no longer in use at that time) the retreat route to Korosten was cut off for the Armoured Trains “Groza”³⁴ and “Kommunar” as well as two freight trains³⁵ and a hospital train.³⁶

At the same time the rest of the 6th Cavalry Brigade reached the villages of Polis'ke [Mogilno] and Schorsovka [Czolowka], where around midnight squadrons of the 12th and 14th Lancer Regiments were halted by a barrage of machine-guns and infantry dug in about three hundred metres north of a level crossing on the line to Zhytomyr. In the distance an armoured train could be heard moving along the line. Most likely, it was a formation that the Polish side had earlier identified as Armoured Train No. 39 “Subbotnik” (Субботник). Opposing it, the 4th gun from the 2nd Battery of the 3rd Horse Artillery *Divizion* was placed on the track. It was commanded by Lieutenant Kazimierz Falewicz. Around 02:00 a Soviet attack on the railway crossing took place, repulsed by the cannon with the help of 12th Lancer Regiment. Meanwhile the other guns of that battery were shelling the town and the railway station in Korosten until the morning. During the night of 9/10 October, the 2nd Battery of the 6th Horse Artillery *Divizion* also fired at the same targets. However, it is difficult to say at present whether it had any significant effect on the actions of the Soviet armoured trains identified by the Poles.³⁷

³² Actually the No. 56 “Kommunar”, (Коммунар). In English, “Communard”: a member of the 1871 Paris Commune.

³³ *Bitwa wołyńsko-podolska ...* , p. 997, doc. no. 846

³⁴ Which should be Гроза. In the Russian-language materials on the RCW known to the author, there is no unit of this name fighting on the side of the “Reds”. However, the light (“assault”) Armoured Train No. 27 “Burya” served in the Red Army, and both “Groza” and “Burya” translate into “Storm”. It seems likely that there may have been a misrepresentation of the proper name of this train in the Polish sources, and in fact the Armoured Train No. 27 “Burya” was in Korosten.

On the other hand, however, the light Armoured Train “Groza” had previously existed in the AFSR. It was formed in November 1919 in the Odessa area using the Armoured Train “Vilnius Ukraine” (Вільна Україна) captured from the UNR. This in turn had been created by renaming the Soviet armoured train “Communist Korosten Province” (Коммунист Коростенського Района) after its capture by Ukrainian forces in early August of that year. In January 1920 the “Whites” left the train “Groza” at the station in Tiraspol, where in February of that year it fell once again into Soviet hands, after which it was renamed the “Communist” (Коммунист). Its further fate, however, is unknown to the author. It seems that perhaps these armoured trains may have had some common history.

³⁵ In Polish historiography there is no clarity about the number of goods trains destroyed in this place. Some sources give that only one train of this type was derailed in the area.

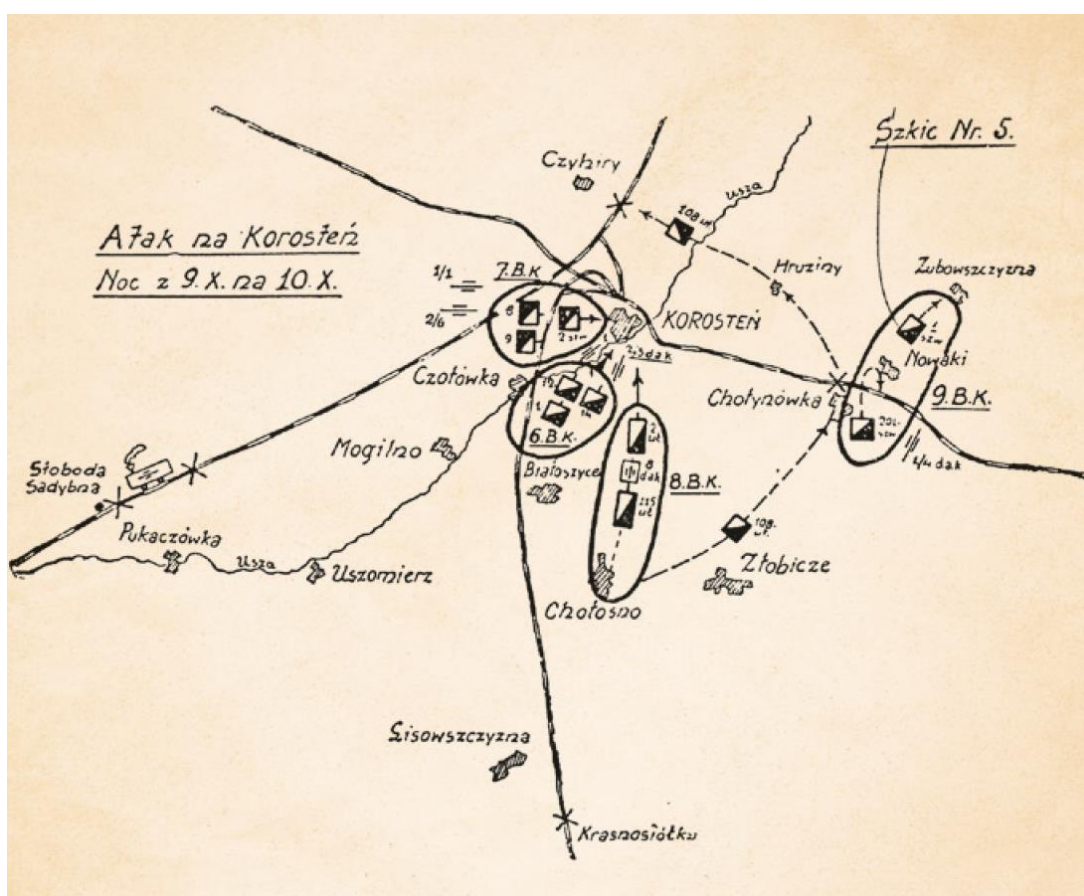
³⁶ *Zarys historii wojennej 12-go Pułku Ułanów...* , p. 27; *Ułani Podolscy ...* , pp. 107-109

³⁷ *Zarys historii wojennej 12-go Pułku Ułanów...* , p. 27; *Zarys historii wojennej 3-go Dywizjonu Artylerii Konnej ...* , p. 30; Z. Mianowski, *Zarys historii wojennej 6-go Dywizjonu Artylerii Konnej (An Outline of the Military History of the 6th Horse Artillery Divizion)*, Warsaw 1930, p. 16; *Dzieje 1-go Pułku Ułanów Krechowickich ...* , p. 394.



In the evening of 9 October, the 2nd Light Horse Regiment of the 7th Cavalry Brigade reached Horshchuk [Sloboda Sadybno]³⁸ with the task of covering the halt of the 1st Cavalry Division. On its own initiative, its command sent at that time a patrol under the command of Staff Commander Stefan Kajderowicz, which removed some tracks on the Korosten to Zviahel line. Shortly afterwards, according to Polish authors, the armoured trains "Groza" and "Kommunar", as well as freight and sanitary trains, which had already been cut off from Korosten, derailed there. In that way those two trains were prevented from taking an active part in the defence of the town and railway station of Korosten. The extent of the disaster was such that it precluded their crews from putting the trains back on the tracks by themselves and repairing the damaged section. This required specialist equipment and additional locomotives, which could only come from Korosten.

However, it is quite surprising that the experienced crews of these trains (or rather a single train) allowed them to be derailed so easily. Contrary to what I wrote earlier, this does not speak well of the quality of the service performed on them at the time. It may also show that an operation so deep behind their lines, with such a large detachment of Polish cavalry, was a major and unpleasant surprise for the Soviet command and the Red Army men.³⁹



Sketch 2: The attack on Korosten by Colonel Juliusz Rómmel's Cavalry Corps formations during the night of October 9-10, 1920. Crosses mark the places where the regiments actually did damage on particular railway lines.

Source: J. Rómmel, *Kawaleria polska w roku 1920* (Polish Cavalry in 1920), Warsaw, 1934, p. 59.

After blowing up a number of bridges the the 1st Cavalry Division began its attack on Korosten town and station at 03:30 on 10 October. The 12th and 14th Lancer Regiments and three squadrons of the 1st Lancer

³⁸ Polish sources disagree on the name, also using "Swoboda Sadybno" and "Sadyba-Słobódki".

It is now called Sabydne, but it is not on the railway. Therefore I have gone with Sloboda Sadybno Station being in modern Horshchuk, as it is the only place with a station in the required spot.

³⁹ *Zarys historii wojennej 2-go Pułku Szwoleżerów ...*, p. 32



Regiment, as well as the 2nd Light Horse Regiment which was the advance guard of the 7th Cavalry Brigade, attacked on foot, supported by the 1st Horse Battery⁴⁰ of the 1st Horse Artillery *Divizion* commanded by Lieutenant Stanisław Kopański. During the ensuing battle for the western railway station the battery successfully and courageously fought off a Soviet armoured train, whose fire initially caused some brief confusion in the Polish ranks. In that confrontation Lieutenant Kopański once again distinguished himself in the Polish-Soviet war⁴¹ and was later presented with the Cross of Valour⁴² for commanding the battery and for his “exceptional” personal courage and sacrifice during the entire advance on Korosten. On the other hand, the defence of the “Red Army men” in the suburbs was supported by an armoured train with very heavy fire,⁴³ which was only forced to withdraw in the direction of the railway station by the 4th gun of the 2nd Battery of the 3rd Horse Artillery *Divizion*.⁴⁴

The actions of the Polish side on 9 October and the speed and determination of the early morning attack of the light horse, lancers and horse artillerymen on the following day prevented the Soviet side’s attempt to base its defence on the armoured trains located in Korosten. Despite the fact that two of them “bravely” protected the numerous Soviet infantry retreating from the outskirts towards the city under the pressure of the 2nd Light Horse and 1st, 12th and 14th Lancer Regiments, the Poles managed to capture all their key objectives. A duel was waged by one of the trains firing from the railway station in Korosten and the 1st Battery of the 3rd Horse Artillery *Divizion*. As a result of the battery’s fire the train was forced to withdraw from the station. On the other hand, the second train kept up a very heavy fire for a long time preventing the Lancers from taking the town. Eventually the 4th gun of the 2nd Battery of the *divizion* caused it to withdraw from the battle and leave the town. In the course of the duel the 1st Battery of the 3rd Horse Artillery *Divizion* had one bombardier and five horses wounded. One of these armoured trains that day is said to have been “captured” by the 6th Cavalry Brigade, or rather the entire 1st Cavalry Division.⁴⁵

Meanwhile the armoured trains “Groza” and “Kommunar”, derailed in the area of Horshchuk due to the destruction of the track, were joined by another train. According to current Polish historical literature it was the Armoured Train No. 64 “Centrobrown” (Центробро́нь)^A. The train’s leading locomotive plunged deeply down an embankment after leaving the track. Behind it were two other locomotives, whose crews escaped.

⁴⁰ Following the Russian model, this was the title given by Polish cavalrymen to the oldest horse artillery formation of the Polish Army during the Polish-Soviet War and until the 1920s.

⁴¹ Juliusz Rómmel, recalling these events years later, wrote: “Before dawn [of 10 October 1920] the [7th Cavalry] brigade approached the western Korosten railway station and started to fight with the Korosten garrison and an armoured train. The latter was smashed by horse artillery. Lieutenant Kopański’s battery distinguished itself there beyond all praise. Constantly operating with its individual guns in the front lines of the cavalry, the battery constantly paved the way for the brave Light Horsemen [of the 2nd Light Horse Regiment] who, despite having received an order from the brigade commander to retreat, went on to the attack and chased the enemy into the city at the same time as the 6th [Cavalry] Brigade, although from a different direction”. From J. Rómmel, *Kawaleria polska ...* , p. 63.

⁴² CAW, Akta Personalne, 1769/89/2430, Kopański Stanisław. Application for the Cross of Valour for Lieutenant Stanisław Kopański, 13 July 1921. “For the first (and not the last) time Lieutenant Stanisław Kopański distinguished himself during street fights in Vilnius on 19 and 20 April 1919. The man himself, as befits a ‘genuine professional’ and true horse artillerist, did not mention his deeds in that battle.” See S. Kopański, *Moja służba w Wojsku Polskim 1917-1939 (My Service in the Polish Army 1917-1939)*, London, 1965, p. 109.

⁴³ In his memoirs (*Kawaleria polska w pościgu za Budiennym ...* , p. 172), the commander of the Cavalry Corps at the time, Colonel Rómmel, clearly writes about two armoured trains shelling the Polish attack in the morning of 10 October 1920: “[...] they all broke and a disorderly retreat [of the Red Army] began. Only two armoured units bravely covered the retreating units. It was the climax of the battle.”

⁴⁴ *Zarys historii wojennej 12-go Pułku Ułanów...* , p. 27; *Zarys historii wojennej 2go Pułku Szwoleżerów...* , pp. 32-33; *Zarys historii wojennej 3-go Dywizjonu Artylerii Konnej ...* , pp. 30-31; *Dzieje 1 Pułku Ułanów...* , p. 394.

⁴⁵ This is how its damage and subsequent abandonment by its crew is sometimes described in inter-war and contemporary literature on the subject. It should be remembered, however, that none of these trains were ever manned by Polish crews. Thus, assuming that the events have been presented accurately in the professional literature to date, this was in reality a loss inflicted on the enemy, and not a trophy of war.

^A Properly speaking it should be “Tsentrbron”, which is what the directorate of the Red Army in charge of armoured units was colloquially called (meaning approximately, “Central Armour”).



There are reports that some of the vehicles were set on fire before being abandoned by their crews at this time. A total of six locomotives were reportedly derailed there. The armoured trains contained four field guns⁴⁶ and one 152.4 mm (?) naval gun of the Canet system, as well as many HMGs. According to Polish historians, at the site of the disaster the track presented a number of overturned and piled up wagons and locomotives. Behind them stood goods trains, abandoned by their operators, and one hospital train.

At the same time the regiments of the 2nd Cavalry Division, after destroying the bridges lying on the railway routes located to the east and south-east of Korosten, began their march on the city, fighting the "Red" forces trying to escape it. A *divizion* made up of the 3rd, 4th and MG Squadron of the 201st Volunteer Lancer Regiment, of the 9th Cavalry Brigade, together with the 1st Battery of the 4th Horse Artillery *Divizion* garrisoned the area of the village of Khotynivka [Chotynówka]. These forces were commanded by Captain Ludwik Szejczer. The 1st and 2nd Squadrons of the Regiment garrisoned the village of Novaky. These villages lay on either side of the railway track running to Kiev. The regiment's horse artillery succeeded in damaging the line with artillery fire, which supposedly caused a Soviet locomotive with a platform manoeuvring on it to derail.⁴⁷

The 108th Reserve Lancer Regiment, also operating in the Khotynivka area, together with the Technical Squadron⁴⁸ of the 2nd Lancer Regiment received orders to destroy the railway bridge on the Kiev line by 03:00. The regiment reached the village marked in the order on time, and after taking some "Krasnoarmiets" prisoner of war, advanced towards the railway track. The task could not be completed, however, as the bridge was built of stone, and the amount of explosives the unit had left after the previous action on the bridge near Krasnosilka was no longer sufficient to blow it up. Consequently, the rails were damaged⁴⁹ and after an hour the regiment marched on to its next objective. Despite the makeshift damage, the bridge was soon derailed by a goods train coming from Kiev carrying ammunition and food to Korosten along with the staff of a Soviet infantry brigade. Its locomotive plunged deep into the sand of the embankment, effectively blocking the line. Fifteen prisoners fell into the hands of the lancers of the 1st Squadron, along with the cargo carried on the train. The lancers from the Technical Squadron in their turn captured the banner of the 49th Rifle Regiment along with, after a short combat, several dozen "Red Army men" of the train crew as well as six members of the staff of the Soviet 17th Rifle Brigade. The banner was found during a search of one of the captives. The victorious cavalrymen then further damaged the locomotive.⁵⁰

In the morning, as a result of the success of the Polish attacks from the west and south-east of Korosten, the Soviet forces fighting the corps began to retreat, first to the town and then mostly to the east. As a result, a train withdrawing from Korosten was seen at Khotynivka, which was identified by the Poles as the "Subbotnik". In spite of the fire from the Polish artillery and two HMG platoons stationed in front of Novaky village, its crew managed with their own efforts to put back on the tracks a locomotive with a freight car(s) which had derailed on a section of tracks blown up earlier by the 108th Reserve Lancer Regiment. The

⁴⁶ These were probably Russian 76.2 mm field guns of the 1902 model.

⁴⁷ The Polish literature to date is unclear as to the actual course of these events and the fate and origin of the train mentioned here. E. Gruszecki writes about its derailment as detailed in *Zarys historii wojennej 3-go Pułku Szwoleżerów Mazowieckich imienia Pułkownika Koziatulskiego (An Outline of the Military History of the 3rd Mazovian Light Horse Regiment in honour of Colonel Koziatulski)*, Warsaw, 1929, p. 27. However it is not impossible that the events refers to the same train which was derailed by the 108th Reserve Lancer Regiment.

⁴⁸ Despite its name, in reality this was a platoon.

⁴⁹ According to the official history the track was damaged in two places, the second damage allegedly contributing to the derailment of an armoured train coming from Korosten. In reality, however, it appears that no such was train was derailed there. See W.S. Herkner, *Zarys historii wojennej 2-go Pułku Ułanów Grochowskich im. gen. Józefa Dwernickiego (An Outline of the Military History of the 2nd Grochów Lancer Regiment in honour of General Jozef Dwerniecki)*, Warsaw 1929, p. 36.

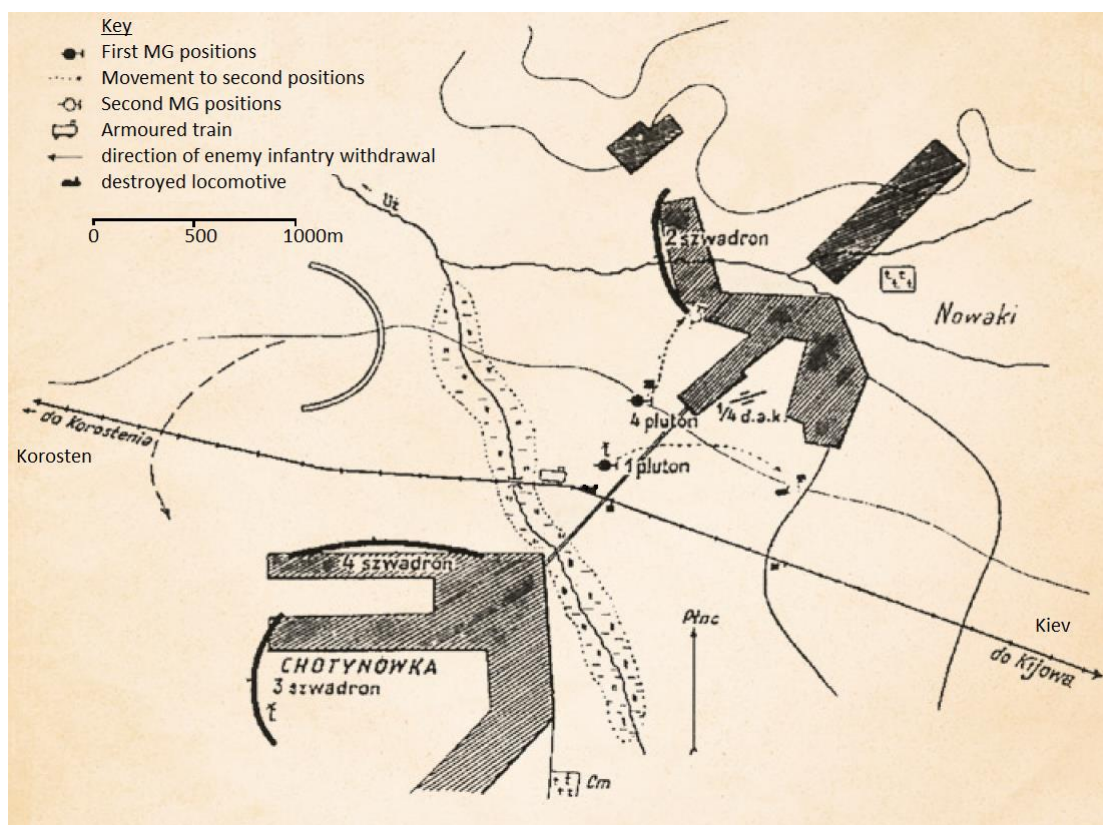
⁵⁰ *Kawaleria polska w pogu za Budiennym ...*, p. 173-175; *Zarys historii wojennej 2-go Pułku Ułanów...*, p. 36; A. Dobroński, *Ułani Grochowscy (The Grochów Lancers)*, Warsaw – Białystok, 1992, p. 39; J. Majka, A. Cebula, *Ułani Króla Jana. Z dziejów 20 Pułku Ułanów im. Króla Jana III Sobieskiego (King John's Ulans. The history of the 20th King Jan III Sobieski Lancer Regiment)*, Warsaw, (b.r.w.), p. 18.



Polish HMGs fired at the train's artillery observers deployed "on the roofs of the train". This resulted in return artillery fire being directed against Novaky, which duly soon began to burn.

Two batteries of Polish horse artillery also participated in this dramatic battle. The first of them, namely the 1st Battery of the 4th Horse Artillery *Divizion*, due to the terrible lie of the land, fired from a semi-covered position near Novaky.⁵¹ Major Jan Dunin-Wąsowicz, who was directing its fire, was wounded. Several men were killed, some horses wounded and one ammunition wagon was lost. The 1st Battery of the 7th Horse Artillery *Divizion* had its position on the hill north of the village of Novaky.⁵²

Despite the fire of eight Polish guns and despite the supposedly "very heavy" losses, the train managed to withdraw in the direction of Kiev. A barricade erected on the tracks behind the village of Novaky by Lieutenant Edward Witkowski's men also failed to stop it.



Sketch 3: The combat of 1st and 4th Platoons of the 201st Volunteer Lancer Regiment's MG Squadron and 1st Battery of the 4th Horse Artillery Division with supposed Armoured Train No. 39 "Subbotnik", but in reality with Armoured Train No. 56 "Kommunar", near the village of Novaky in the morning of 10 October 1920.

Source: Epizod z zagon na Korosten ... , p. 67.

Years later, these events were described in this way by one of the participants, who was later awarded the Silver Cross of the Virtuti Militari for this combat.⁵³

⁵¹ W. Łubieński in *Zarys historii wojennej 4-go Dywizjonu Artylerii Konnej* (An Outline of the Military History of the 4th Horse Artillery Division), Warsaw, 1929, p. 22, erroneously states that the battery occupied a position near the village of Nowinki.

⁵² In the official inter-war version of the history of the 7th Wielkopolska Horse Artillery *Divizion*, it says that on 10 October 1920 this battery fired at the "Kommunar" and not at the "Subbotnik". As the further text of this study shows, this may be consistent with the reality of the time. See J. Antopow, *Zarys historii wojennej 7-go Dywizjonu Artylerii Konnej Wielkopolskiej* (An Outline of the Military History of the 7th Wielkopolska Horse Artillery Division), Warsaw 1928, p. 11.

⁵³ Sergeant Jan Chludziński, later a permanent cavalry officer.



Before 4 a.m. the piercing sound of a trumpet woke up those sleeping. A dozen or so minutes later the squadrons set off in the ordered directions. The grey, dirty, rainy morning of 10 October was dawning. ... From the incessant roar of the cannons at Korosten we concluded that the battle had begun in earnest. ... We pushed the horses as fast as we could.

At about 7-8 a.m. we reached the village of Khotynivka, situated beside the Korosten – Kiev railway track. ... As soon as the [201st Volunteer Lancer Regiment's MG] squadron crossed the railway track, heading from Khotynivka towards Novaky we saw a column of enemy infantry A Bolshevik locomotive, which had been sent off the rails and hit by an accurate shot of our artillery [1st Battery, 4th Horse Artillery *Divizion*], was on the tracks. A short order was given by the squadron commander: "Enemy infantry to the left. We fight on foot. ... We did not have to wait long for the firing to begin. ... The column began to scatter to the north and south of the tracks ... Only a few dozen Reds remained on the line, having given their souls to the devil. ... At the moment the order was given, a smoking armoured train came out of the forest from the direction of Korosten. It moved slowly towards us. Then a messenger ran up to the first machine-gun platoon from the village and that platoon began to retreat. ... Retreat! Why? "What the hell is our artillery doing? It's silent, as if someone had shoved a stick down its throat," said one of the ammunition men. Actually, I too thought, by now it should have started firing. ...

In the meantime the armoured train reached the back of the Red lines and began firing artillery at the village. Shells flew over our heads with a clatter. ... They hit the houses and started fires in several places. The village was full of horses and carts. The situation was very difficult. ... In the village one could hear shouting and see horses wandering around panicked. One of the shells hit the ammunition wagon of the first machine-gun platoon. Platoon sergeant [Eugeniusz] Majewski, was killed, cut in half, and the horses' bodies were torn to pieces. ...

Meanwhile, the armoured vehicle slowly approaching our positions with impunity. It stopped for a moment before reaching the bridge over the River Uzh, then it crossed it slowly and went up to a locomotive that had been thrown off the rails. Without any orders, both machine-guns directed their fire at the armoured train. You could hear the bullets hitting the steel walls without causing any damage. I ordered a cease fire, but the train, noticing it was us, began to fire at us with all its heavy machine-guns. We were not dug in, because we had had no time for that. ... We all clung to the ground and God knows how long we would have lain motionless, had it not been for the shots of our artillery directed at the train from the village of Novaky. As a result of those shots, the machine-guns of the train shifted their fire to our artillery, leaving us alone. The fire of our artillery was inaccurate, the shells flying over or hitting the base of the railway embankment, without causing any harm to the vehicle. [This was the 1st Battery of the 7th Horse Artillery *Divizion*.]

Their effect was the same as ours, the only difference being that some of the shells fell near our platoon. Emboldened by the ineffective fire, the Bolsheviks left their wagons and started to raise the broken engine in front of them. Some of them got on the roof of the wagons. In a low voice I give a command: "Corporal Frenkiel, aim at the observers on the roof of the armoured wagon. Corporal Koszewski, target the people working at the repair of the locomotive. Distance 400 metres." After a moment I heard the answer, "Ready" ... "Fire!" I commanded. The wheel of the locomotive got stuck, the observers dropped from the roof to the ground. In response to that we again received fire from the armour vehicle, but having learnt from the previous experience we had managed to dig some shooting pits for ourselves. When the fire calmed down, I heard the squadron leader's voice from the village: "Sergeant Chludziński, withdraw with your guns to the village". ... While we withdrew the Reds resumed work on the broken steam engine, but this time hiding behind steel shields. After placing our guns in their new positions, we started firing at the workers, but it was to little effect. The Reds put the broken locomotive on the rails and, pushing it in front of them, withdrew to Kiev. As if



to say goodbye, a short burst was fired from a machine gun of the Bolshevik "Subotnik". Corporal Frenkiel, hit in the heart, fell to the ground. ... The battle was over.⁵⁴

Such an outcome in favour of the Soviets should be regarded as a considerable feat. Apart from the seemingly ineffective fire of the Polish artillery, it was also the result of a very good attitude of the crew of that armoured train and the powerful and effective fire of its artillery and machine guns. Another important factor was the fact that the cavalymen and horse artillerymen were forced to simultaneously fend off strong attacks by Soviet infantry trying to break through the Polish positions. To a certain extent, their defeat saved the alleged "Subotnik". It is also worth remembering that, according to Polish histories up to this time, it was the only train that managed to break out of Korosten or, while operating in the vicinity, was not destroyed by Colonel Rómmel's Cavalry Corps.⁵⁵

Analysing this particular tactical case in the late 1930s, then-Captain Aleksander Radwan-Pragłowski stated:

Out of five enemy armoured trains, grouped within range of the Korosten railway junction, "Subotnik" was the only one to break through and survive.

She did so because she had a brave commander and good technical services. In the fight to break through it inflicted serious losses on our cavalry, as well as on the horse artillery. The action of this train – although concerning the enemy – may serve as a good example. The author's description based on the background of his tactical perspective at the time ... does not provide sufficient information to assess whether the Polish side could have stopped the train. Maybe it would have been possible, if the artillery fire had been more accurate. In fact, only the artillery could have inflicted effective blows on the armour. But our battery was countered by a train with thick armour, numerous machine guns and guns. Since there was no surprise to our fire, all the advantages of the fire fight were on the side of the train.

The lucky escape of the train was an act of selfishness, sacrificing the remaining Soviet troops to their fate. In the aftermath of events they were carried off by us.⁵⁶ The train saved itself, but did nothing to save its comrades-in-arms.⁵⁷

After the capture of the town and the station, the technical infrastructure of the railway was thoroughly destroyed. Rómmel's Cavalry Corps, burdened with many prisoners of war and captured trophies, spent the night of 10-11 October near Korosten and set out on the return journey the next day.⁵⁸ During that march, near the village of Horshchuk, the 1st Cavalry Division passed the place where the three Soviet armoured trains, mentioned above, were reportedly derailed. As a result, Colonel Rómmel gave the order to destroy them more thoroughly. This task was carried out by a gun of the 1st Battery of the 3rd Horse Artillery *Divizion*, which fired one shot at the boiler of each of the locomotives from a distance of several dozen paces. Its fire was allegedly directed by Colonel Rómmel himself, who was a Russian-born artilleryman, having once served in the Tsar's Life Guards. Moreover, the corps' horse artillery supplemented their

⁵⁴ *Epizod z zagonu na Korosten ...*, p. 66–69.

⁵⁵ *Zarys historii wojennej 4go Dywizjonu Artylerii Konnej ...*, p. 22; *Zarys historii wojennej 7-go Dywizjonu Artylerii Konnej ...*, p. 11; *Zarys historii wojennej 3-go Pułku Szwoleżerów...*, p. 27.

⁵⁶ In total, during this clash about 500 prisoners and one MG fell into the hands of the soldiers of the 201st Volunteer Lancer Regiment.

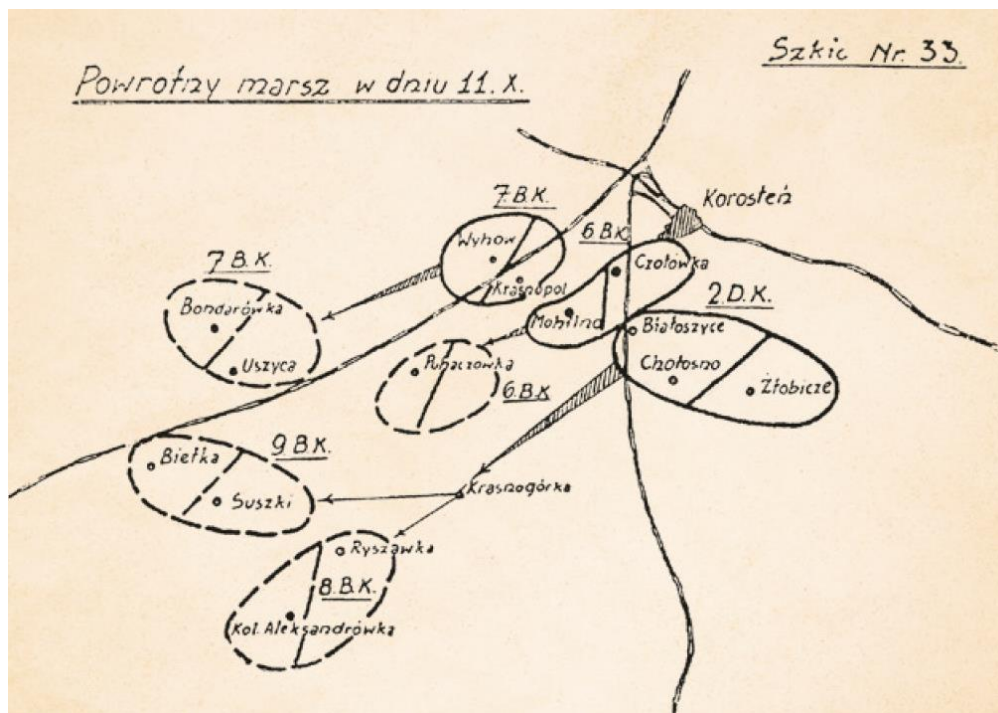
⁵⁷ See the editorial note to Chłudziński's memoirs by Colonel Radwan-Pragłowski [in:] *Epizody kawaleryjskie ...*, p. 70.

⁵⁸ Kornel Krzeczunowicz in *Ostatnia kampania konna. Działania armii polskiej przeciw Armii Konnej Budennygo w 1920 roku (The Last Cavalry Campaign. Actions of the Polish army against Budenny's Horse Army in 1920)*, London 1971, p. 313) wrote: "Col. Rómmel decided to return by a shorter route along the Korosten – Zviahel railway line, both to save the strength of the tired men and horses and to destroy the 7th RD, which was threatening our rear. The next object of our attack was to be the enemy 58th RD in Olevsk, which had its flank on the Korosten – Sarny railway line (this attack will not take place due to the cease-fire)".



ammunition shortages from the ammunition stocks abandoned in the trains⁵⁹ by their crews and demolished the guns in them by unscrewing the locks.⁶⁰

During these actions, several Soviet engine drivers came running out of a nearby forest, who, according to the diarist, supposedly asked that the locomotives not be destroyed.⁶¹ One of them was completely drunk and “pushed forward boldly, got a slap on the face and immediately calmed down”. The horse artillerymen did not really know how to treat these men: whether as veterans or as civilians forcibly mobilised by the Bolsheviks. Their desperation, however, stemmed from the fact that without their locomotives, they were useless ballast, with no means of livelihood. The whole incident and the division’s pause did not last more than one hour.⁶²



Sketch 4. Plan of the retreat of divisions and brigades of the Cavalry Corps from Korosten on 11 October 1920.

Source: *Kawaleria polska w chgu za Budiennym ...*, part 2, Lwów (b.r.w.), p. 176.

⁵⁹ This information is rather puzzling in view of the fact that, according to some Polish authors, the vehicles derailed near Horshchik had already been set on fire by their own crews. If this was the case, how was the artillery ammunition saved from the fire?

⁶⁰ Kornel Krzeczunowicz (in *Ostatnia kampania konna ...*, p. 313) described the event as follows: “During the morning of 11 October we had reports from our patrols that there were three abandoned armoured trains, cut off on this railway line [from Korosten to Zviahel]. Col. Rómmel personally amused himself by “shooting” their locomotives with one shell each, so as to not waste ammunition. Meanwhile, we enriched ourselves with the ammunition unloaded from those trains and unscrewed the locks from the guns.”

⁶¹ But what about their earlier arson, most probably carried out by the same people? Again, a contradiction is evident.

⁶² *Kawaleria polska w chgu za Budiennym ...*, pp. 156-179 and pp. 49-68; *Moja służba ...*, p. 111; K. Florjanowicz, *Zarys historii wojennej 1-go Dywizjonu Artylerii Konnej imienia Gen. Józefa Bema (An Outline of the Military History of the 1st Horse Artillery Division in honour of General Józef Bem)*, Warsaw, 1929, p. 24; *Zarys historii wojennej 9-go Dywizjonu Artylerii Konnej ...*, p. 15; *Ostatnia kampania konna ...*, pp. 306-313.



Official results of the Korosten Battle

The raid on Korosten ended with an unquestionable success for the Cavalry Corps. On 12 October 1920, after having defeated the Red Army's 17th Rifle Brigade on its way back, it found itself back on the Polish side of the front. A report submitted by its command that day stated that in the course of this raid:

Three Bolshevik armoured trains, the "Groza", "Komunar" and "Centrobron", moving constantly between the villages of Korosten – Andriievychi [Andrejowicze], were cut off, derailed and completely destroyed between Ushomir^B [Kolonia Wiesenthal] and the village of Krasnopil. The crew of the armoured train with some of the machine-guns managed to escape ... The station and the bridge in Korosten were seriously damaged. ... Enemy losses – considerable, around 400 killed.

Captured to date: around 2,000 prisoners (from the 17th RB), 12 guns, 5 of which were destroyed on armoured trains, 4 tanks[!],⁶³ around 40 MGs, three enemy armoured trains destroyed, a cash box, and several telephone and telegraph sets taken. There is no precise list of the captured.

Our own losses: Lt. Czeslaw Jakubowski of the 14th Lancer Regiment was killed, several officers wounded and about 50 privates wounded and killed. No detailed casualty report is available. ...

Morale condition – excellent. Physical condition – considerable exhaustion in the men and horses.⁶⁴

On the next day the numbers, presumably after collecting detailed reports from individual units, were made more precise, and in the report of the command of the Cavalry Corps it was then noted: "According to the latest information the Cavalry Corps captured: 3,400 prisoners, 45 or more MGs, 14 cannons (of which 8 cannons have been kept, 5 remained on the armoured train and one was dismantled by the 8th Cavalry Brigade). Three armoured trains were derailed and demolished near Ushomir, plus parts of the 7th Division's rolling stock, numerous pieces of telephone equipment, etc."⁶⁵ Polish losses also increased slightly and eventually amounted to one officer killed and four wounded, one officer cadet wounded, as well as around 25 privates killed and missing and fifty wounded.⁶⁶

The numbers quoted here concerning the gains and losses suffered by Colonel Rómmel's Cavalry Corps during the attack on Korosten, apart from the alleged "tanks" and – as detailed below, the controversy over the number of destroyed Soviet armoured trains – can be considered quite reliable. They go towards showing the success of the raid.

Based on the archival documents examined by the author, as well as accounts and official sources written before 1939, the history of the units participating in the October 1920 attack on Korosten, at least in general outline, is thought to accurately describe the events that happened. This is also how the destruction of the Soviet armoured trains is said to have occurred. The author also hopes that – in spite of numerous inconsistencies, inaccuracies, contradictions, understatements and misrepresentations in the Polish literature on the subject that he is aware of – his interpretation of the factual material contained therein is reasonably correct and objective.

⁶³ This is an obviously wrong. Actually just four cannon locks and no tanks – none of which were in Korosten or its vicinity at that time – were taken.

^B The only former German colony in the area that is on the railway line in approximately the right place is modern Ushomir, but I have been unable to confirm it was ever known as Wiesenthal.

⁶⁴ *Bitwa wołyńsko-podolska ...*, pp. 1041-1042, doc. no. 885. In the same place, pp. 1043-1044, doc. no. 888, it is stated: "Captured so far: about 2,000 prisoners [...], 12 cannons, 5 of which remained destroyed on the armoured trains. Four [gun] locks were taken. About 40 MGs. Three armoured trains, a hospital train, a goods train, six locomotives, a very large number of rolling stock, a cash box, over a dozen telegraph and telephone sets, etc. ... Details of losses and captures are not yet tallied". However, there is no mention of the alleged "tanks".

⁶⁵ *Bitwa wołyńsko-podolska ...*, pp. 1061-1062, doc. no. 904, and pp. 1063-1064, doc. no. 906.

⁶⁶ *Bitwa wołyńsko-podolska ...*, pp. 1061-1062, doc. nr 904.



Controversy over the Number of Soviet Armoured Trains Destroyed in Korosten

In spite of the events presented above, a thorough analysis of the earlier literature – mostly written in the period of the Second Republic – gives rise to certain, sometimes quite fundamental, doubts as to whether it properly represents what actually happened. There are several areas of concern. The first of them relates to the number and names of the Soviet armoured trains operating between 9 and 10 October 1920 in Korosten or in its immediate vicinity. The answer to this question then leads directly to a precise indication of the number of trains which could have engaged in combat with the Polish cavalry at that time. This in turn gives us a correct and reliable assessment of the success achieved by the cavalry in this operation and the possibility of a relatively accurate description of the battle for the city and railway stations. Doubts also arise concerning the number, circumstances and names of the Soviet armoured formations destroyed by the Cavalry Corps in Korosten and its vicinity. Finally, we need to clearly establish the list of trains, or rather armoured formations, that managed to withdraw or break through the ring of Polish forces during the battle.

Relating to the first of these, it should be noted that in the official war information statement issued by the General Staff of the Supreme Command of the Polish Army on 20 October 1920, it was stated that “according to precise calculations, the numbers captured by the Cavalry Corps during the operation on Korosten grew to 3,400 prisoners of war, 8 [sic!] armoured trains, one hospital train, 14 guns, 70 machine-guns and 250 items of rolling stock.”⁶⁷ However, a statement published three days later gave that: “our Cavalry Corps after a large battle during a deep raid smashed the Soviet 17th Reserve Brigade near Korosten, taking 3,400 prisoners, 14 guns, about 70 MGs, the entire rolling stock of the Soviet 7th [Rifle] Division, 3 armoured trains, a hospital train, a goods train and 6 locomotives.”⁶⁸

From the above it can be seen that within just a few days the number of Soviet armoured trains destroyed in Korosten as officially presented by the Polish military authorities was significantly reduced – from as many as eight to just three.⁶⁹ It should also be remembered that they cannot really be considered captured, as they were never manned by Polish crews in order to lead them to the Polish side of the front.

Still other data on Soviet losses, as well as on the size of the Polish gains, the number of prisoners of war and the destroyed armoured trains was provided by Tomasz Grzegorzczak in his monograph, who, quoting one of the archival documents, claims that:

During the raid on Korosten about 400 enemy soldiers were killed, and about 2,000 were taken prisoner. The corps captured 12 guns (5 of which were destroyed on the spot due to the impossibility of disassembling them from the armoured trains), 4 tanks [sic!]⁷⁰ and 40 machine-guns. On the Korosten – Andrejovichi railway line the three armoured trains: “Groza”, “Komuna” and “Centrobroń”⁷¹ were cornered, derailed and destroyed.

Meanwhile, which should be duly emphasised, almost all Polish historical studies known to the author mention five Red Army armoured trains located in Korosten during the period of interest. However, we know only four of them by name, namely: the “Groza”, No. 39 “Subbotnik”, No. 56 “Kommunar” and No. 64 “Centrobroń”. Leaving aside the previously mentioned issues related to the “Groza”, it should be noted that

⁶⁷ Quoted from: *Wojna polsko-sowiecka. Komunikaty wojenne Sztabu Generalnego, dokumenty, fotografie, wybór, oprac.* (The Polish-Soviet War. Communiqués of the General Staff, documents, photographs, selection, compilation) ed. by K. Paduszek, Warsaw 2011, p. 277.

⁶⁸ Archive of New Files, Military Attachés of the Republic of Poland 1918-1939, A/II/88, Communication on the External and Internal Situation No. 32 of 20 October 1920. General Staff of the Supreme Command of the Polish Army No. 48799/II of 23 October 1920.

⁶⁹ Of course, this statement is true only on the assumption that the first of the above-mentioned figures was not a simple mistake on the part of the writer of the bulletin or a proverbial “printer’s error”. [After all, a handwritten 3 is often mistaken for an 8.]

⁷⁰ This information was not provided with any commentary. It seems, therefore, that the author was not aware of the fact that it was an inaccuracy resulting the officer preparing the document confusing the locks taken out of the captured guns with the bogus “tanks”, none of which existed in our area of interest.

⁷¹ T. Grzegorzczak, *6 Armia Wojska Polskiego w 1920 r.* (The Polish 6th Army in 1920), Toruń 2009, p. 398.



according to the Russian-language literature, Armoured Train No. 64 "Centrobron" was not at the time in Korosten – or even in the composition of the forces fighting on the anti-Polish front.

In a nutshell, its history was as follows: its formation began in August 1918 at the Sormovo factory of the Society for Metal, Foundry and Mechanical Work, which was one of the more important arsenals, producing very good armoured trains for the Red Army. Construction was completed in January of the following year and it was initially named Armoured Train No. 3 "Vlast Sovetam" (Власть Советам, "Power to the Soviets"). It was a light "assault" armoured train⁷² consisting, in the combat section, of an armoured locomotive and two armoured artillery cars. Each car was armed with two excellent Russian 76.2 mm cannons, model 1902, placed in rotating cylindrical turrets with a firing angle of 270°. The artillery cars were also equipped with numerous machine guns, including one in a revolving turret located on the roof and having a full angle of fire. In addition, a commander's observation turret was located on the steam locomotive's tender. All in all, therefore, in terms of construction it was a very useful fighting vehicle.

Its commander, who even for the Bolsheviks was quite a rarity, was the Communist Ludmilla Georgievna Mokiyevsckaya-Zubok. In the first days of March 1919 the train was placed under the Soviet 13th Army and took an active part in the fights in Donbas on the line Debaltsevo – Kupiansk. In the course of an attack on Debaltsevo station on 9 March, Mokiyevsckaya-Zubok, who was only 23 at that time, was killed. On 1 June 1919 the name of the unit was changed to Armoured Train No. 3 "Centrobron". It then fought in the defence of Kharkov and as a part of the 10th Army in the defence of Tsaritsyn against the AFSR.

In the course of these battles, the train suffered considerable losses in men and was repeatedly seriously damaged, mainly by artillery fire. As a result, as many as three times in 1919 alone, namely in March, July and December, it underwent major repairs in Nizhny Novgorod, Lugansk and Saratov. After the last of them, by now 1920, it was subordinated to the Terek Army Group that was a part of the Caucasian Front and fought anti-Bolshevik partisans in Transcaucasus. Most likely its number was changed at that time, and from then on it was Armoured Train No. 64 "Centrobron". It was then incorporated into the Bukharan Forces Group of the Turkestan Front and on 12 December 1921 renamed to the Armoured Train No. 3 "Budenny" (Будённый).⁷³

The history above shows that the "Centrobron" never took part in the war between Soviet Russia and the Republic of Poland. Provided the Russian-language literature on the subject is sufficiently reliable and as long as this train did not have a twin with the same name,⁷⁴ it is more or less impossible that it was in Korosten in October 1920. So how to explain its appearance in histories up to this time? If this train was not there at that time, then perhaps there was some other train, misidentified by the Polish side. However, I will show that there may be another explanation for this inaccuracy.

Another issue that needs to be clarified first, is the fate of Armoured Train No. 56 "Kommunar".⁷⁵ This was a unit with a rather unusual history and which had already fought on the anti-Polish front. Its most important details are that it was a fire support train, built in Sormovo in February 1919. Its combat section

⁷² The Soviet armoured trains of this type usually consisted of two armoured wagons and an armoured steam engine and two "control wagons", one of which was placed in front of and the other behind the train set-up. The armoured cars usually contained two 76.2 mm guns mounted in revolving turrets and from four to six heavy machine guns. The armour of units of this type was up to 16-20 mm thick. These trains were intended for direct intervention on the battlefield to support their own infantry or cavalry.

The "control" wagons were known as "safety" wagons in other armies, and were usually simple flat-bed types, sometimes also carrying repair equipment. They were placed at the ends to set off mines before the crucial parts of the train were reached, and gave early warning of problems with the track.

⁷³ CAW, 2nd Directorate of the General Staff, 303.4.3104, *Charakterystyka sowieckich pociągów pancernych* (*Characteristics of Soviet armoured trains*), undated document; *Гражданская война и военная интервенция. Энциклопедия*. (*Encyclopaedia of Civil War and Military Intervention in the USSR*), Editor-in-Chief S.S. Khromov, Moscow, 1983, pp. 353-354; *Крепости на колесах ...*, p. 58.

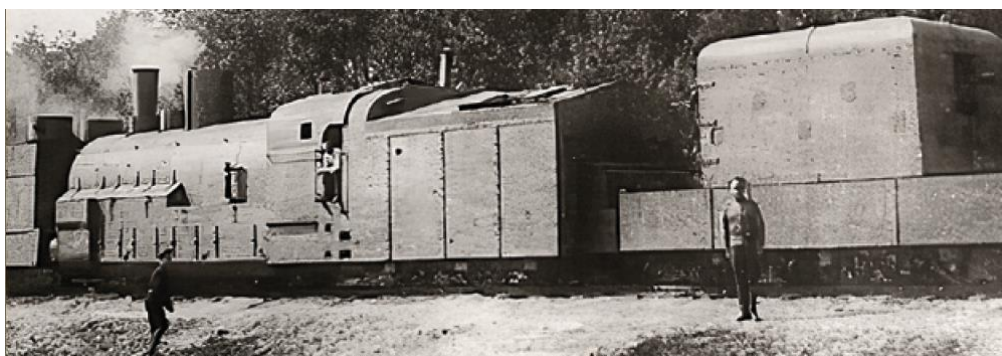
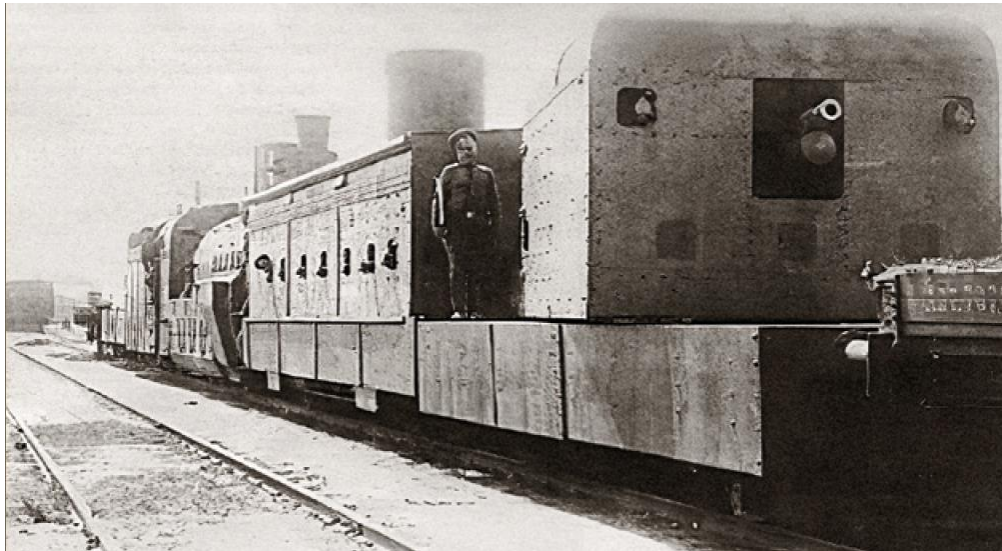
⁷⁴ Theoretically, but to a very limited extent, this is possible. In the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army there were several armoured trains bearing the names of the leaders of the "world proletariat", such as Lenin or Trotsky.

⁷⁵ Initially, most probably, this train was numbered '4'.



consisted of two independent parts – light and heavy⁷⁶ - which could fight as a single unit or operate completely independently, each with its own locomotive. The former consisted of four small and light, three-axle armoured wagons armed with one 76.2 mm cannon, M1902, and four “Maxim” MGs each. The cannons and guns were housed in fully rotating rectangular turrets. The armoured locomotive was of the Russian “O” type with a four-axle tender.

The heavy part consisted of three small, two-axle armoured wagons. One of them was equipped with a 152.4 mm howitzer, and the other two with 107 mm cannons M1910. Its task was to support the light assault train, which was made possible by the range of its guns and the high destructive power of the shells fired from them.



Armoured Train No. 56 “Kommunar” (public domain)

In the summer of 1919, it is likely that just the light section of this armoured train was assigned to the Horse Corps commanded by Semyon Budenny. However, it soon disappeared from his order of battle and was no longer present in the 1st Horse Army that was subsequently formed from it. Meanwhile, the second (heavy?) part of this train, was commanded by former seaman, and later Marshal, Ivan Fedorenko. In September 1919 it took part in the battles near Daugavpils, where it was seriously damaged in a duel with the Polish Armoured Train “Śmiały” and Polish tanks. Moreover, due to Polish sappers blowing up the railway bridge over the Daugava [Dvina] River, the armoured artillery cars of the “Kommunar”, which was just about to enter the bridge, were derailed and damaged. However, according to Soviet reports, which ignore the fact that the train crossed the bridge undermined by the Poles, its crew managed to damage the steam engine of the Polish train and destroy two FT17 tanks.

⁷⁶ The heavy field armoured trains of the Red Army consisted of one to two armoured wagons, a locomotive and one to two control wagons. The armoured wagons usually had one 107mm cannon and two or three HMGs. Their armour was 8 to 10 mm thick. One of their tasks was to support the light armoured trains with artillery fire.



After the repair or reassembly of the surviving wagons of the heavy part of the Armoured Train No. 56 "Kommunar" in October 1920, it found itself in Korosten. It is possible that its light portion was also stationed at the same place. Most probably, although misunderstood by the Polish side, this train became the real hero of the spectacular act of breaking the Polish ring around Korosten and escaping towards Kiev. Evidence for this is the description of that action in the application for the award of the Honorary Revolutionary Red Banner to the train for heroic deeds during the civil war.⁷⁷ Even if we take into account the excess of sentimentality that usually accompanies such documents, and the propaganda skills of the Bolsheviks, it is still worth at least a look.

In the description of its operations in Korosten on 9 and 10 October 1920, the following information can be found: during the Polish attack on the town on the morning of 10 October, this train covered the retreat of the Red infantry with fire and, subsequently making a series of counterattacks, held the Korosten railway station. However, the "Polish detour group" captured the towns of Khotynivka and Novaky and forced the "Kommunar" to withdraw. When it approached the bridge over the Synyavka River, located at a distance of about seven or eight km southeast of Korosten, it came under heavy fire from Polish artillery in the village of Novaky. At the same time, the track at that location was blocked by a derailed shunting locomotive, which had been delivering ammunition to Korosten. As a result of this situation, a firefight began with the Polish troops occupying positions in front of the villages of Novaky and Khotynivka, who opened up heavy rifle and MG fire in the direction of the train, thus making it impossible to dislodge the engine to clear the railway track.

Simultaneously, two cavalry units launched an attack from the north-west and south-east to encircle the immobilised train. The first of these, numbering about three hundred 'sabres', went on the attack three times and each time was repulsed by hurricane fire. More or less at the same time the "Kommunar" crew forced the Polish riflemen to withdraw deep into the two mentioned villages and disabled the artillery observer, forcing the artillery battery firing from Novaky first to stop firing, and then to change its position.

Taking advantage of the weakened Polish fire, some of the train crew went out onto the tracks and, although they had no specialist equipment to do so, began work to clear them. These efforts lasted about two hours. The result was that the previously derailed steam locomotive was put back on the tracks and the damaged section of the line was patched up, which enabled the armoured train to continue its movement.

Then the Polish side resumed their hurricane of artillery shelling and fire from machine guns and rifles, trying to stop and destroy the "Kommunar" at any cost. It was shot from close range. However, the accurate fire of its crew allowed it to pass the most dangerous section, and after removing railway sleepers laid by the Poles on the rails, the armoured train managed to escape encirclement by the Polish troops.

During this battle, its crew fired about six hundred artillery shells and about 8,000 cartridges. These are impressive quantities, particularly for the artillery ammunition, testifying to the high intensity of artillery fire from the "Kommunar". Despite this dramatic battle, if Soviet sources are to be believed, the train suffered relatively few losses. Indeed, it received only two direct hits that pierced its armour, and lost one killed and five wounded.⁷⁸

From the above description it is clear that we are dealing here with an action which Polish historical literature has previously attributed to Armoured Train No. 39 "Subbotnik". It seems beyond any doubt that this feat was accomplished by Armoured Train No. 56 "Kommunar". This is also the train, which often appears as unidentified or again as "Subbotnik" during the description of the combat in Korosten suburbs and at the station. As a rule, it is multiplied in Polish literature – usually two trains are given defending direct approaches to the town and the railway station. In reality, however, it is most likely that the Polish

⁷⁷ This was one of only two armoured trains awarded this high honour in the Red Army.

⁷⁸ Russian State Military Archives, Directorate of the First Cavalry Army, 245.8.7, *Доклад члена Рев.-Воен. Совета I Конной Армии тов. Ворошилова (Report by RMS member of the First Cavalry, Comrade Voroshilov)*, 11 March 1920; *Боевые подвиги частей Красной Армии: 1918-1922 гг. Сборник документов. Под руководством А.Ф. Горленко (Fighting exploits of the Red Army units: 1918-1922. Collection of documents. Under the direction of A.F. Gorlenko)*, Moscow, 1957, pp. 124-125; A. Rostworowski, *Ziemia, której już nie ujrzę. Wspomnienia kresowe (A land he will never see again. Memories of the Borderlands)*, Warsaw 2001, pp. 273, 280-284.



cavalry had to deal with one, but very active and effective light armoured unit and a supporting heavy unit or a single car of this type belonging to the same armoured train, namely "Kommunar".

The presence of the latter in Korosten in October 1920 is also evidenced by the description of the battlefield near the village of Horshchyk. Among the artillery equipment, which the Cavalry Corps of Colonel Rómmel found there during its retreat, there was a wagon with a Canet mounted gun.⁷⁹ According to my reckoning, this is one of two armoured wagons of the heavy section of the "Kommunar" armed with a 107 mm naval cannon of that system. Most probably it also had its own locomotive – probably a "black" one, i.e. unarmoured. This is the source of later Polish statements about the alleged destruction of the "Kommunar". In reality, only one wagon of his heavy train fell victim to Rómmel's cavalry.

If that was the case, then the question arises as to where the other two (or rather only one) heavy wagons of the train went. It seems that the answer is quite simple. They withdrew in the direction of Kiev together with the light train. This would also explain, at least in part, the failure of the Polish horse artillery in the battle with the "Kommunar" near Novaky and Khotynivka. On the other hand, however, it should be borne in mind that there is no concrete and irrefutable indication of their presence in Korosten at that time.

The question of the number of trains destroyed by the Polish side also needs to be resolved. It seems that the accepted number of trains resting on the track near Horshchyk, which has up to now been three, is overestimated. An important clue comes from the description of the battlefield on 11 October 1920. Colonel Rómmel wrote in his diary for that date:

We set off on time and around 10:00. we neared the village of Horshchyk, where the 2nd Light Horse Regiment derailed three armoured trains last night. We can already see the track and a line of overturned and piled up cars and locomotives. I get closer and order the column to halt in order to destroy the armoured trains more thoroughly. They are the three armoured trains: "Groza", "Komunar" and "Centrobron". The leading steam engine had plunged deep into the embankment, behind it there were two more, whose crew escaped after the catastrophe. In total there were 6 locomotives, 4 field guns, and besides there was one 6-inch naval gun of the "Canet" system. Behind the armoured cars there were also a goods trains abandoned by its personnel and one hospital train. I called for a cannon from the 1st Battery of the 3rd Horse Artillery *Divizion*, which placed itself few dozen paces away and fired one shell into each of the steam locomotives. ... After a one hour stopover we moved on ...⁸⁰

It follows from the above description that, apart from the 107 mm cannon specified, there were only four other field guns. Most likely these were 76.2 mm guns from some light train. That number would arm only two artillery wagons, so only one armoured train.⁸¹

Another clue as to the actual number of Soviet trains taking part in this battle may also be provided by the number of locomotives there. As Colonel Rómmel wrote, there were as many as six of them. If we assume that in order to increase the number of trains needed for patrolling the routes within the Korosten railway junction the light train was divided into two parts consisting of a locomotive (in one case armoured, the other not) and one artillery car as well as an control wagons⁸² and that the carriage of the "Kommunar" heavy train also had its own steam engine, we get to three locomotives. When we add to them three more, being the derailed two goods trains and one hospital train, that number is consistent with what the diarist recorded years later.⁸³

⁷⁹ *Kawaleria polska w pościgu za Budiennym ...* , p. 179.

⁸⁰ *Kawaleria polska ...* , p. 179.

⁸¹ This line of reasoning is also confirmed by a photograph in the abridged version of Rómmel's memoirs (*Kawaleria polska ...* , p. 48), which shows a very badly destroyed light armoured train – an armoured steam engine and one artillery carriage with 76.2 mm cannons.

⁸² Such a set-up can be seen in the photograph shown above – an armoured locomotive, an artillery carriage and an ordinary wagon.

⁸³ *Kawaleria polska ...* , p. 179.



Having established all this information, we can try to specify the number of armoured trains destroyed at Horshchyk and during the entire attack on Korosten. If we consider the facts above, and so exclude the presence in Korosten of the "Centrobron", and also exclude the "Kommunar", which managed to withdraw in the direction of Kiev, we come to the conclusion that in fact the Red Army only lost one complete light armoured train, which was most likely the unidentified "Groza", and one artillery car of the heavy section of the "Kommunar" in this battle. When we count up the artillery carriages, as was probably done during the retirement past Horshchyk, we see how the three Soviet armoured trains allegedly eliminated became accepted as true in Polish historical literature. In this writer's opinion, while the raid was undoubtedly a painful loss for the Red Army forces stationed in Ukraine, it did not result in the destruction of as many as three armoured trains, all neutralised in the course of one relatively short operation.⁸⁴

Continuing this line of reasoning, and taking into account the considerations above, one may also be tempted to reconsider the number of weapons units of that type defending the railway junction in Korosten on 9 and 10 October, 1920. The five trains up to now given in Polish histories, and generally considered to be reliable, should be definitely rejected as not reflecting the real state of affairs. Since the "Centrobron" was not there, the only thing we can assume as fairly certain is the presence of the rather mysterious "Groza" and the "Kommunar". In total, therefore, it appears that there were two trains, and if we accept that two parts of "Kommunar" appeared separately on the battlefield, we obtain a total of three armoured units belonging to two armoured trains.

It is unlikely that at the time of interest here the "Subbotnik" was part of the garrison of Korosten. At the critical moment, it may have been some distance from the area, even if it had previously been garrisoned there. If this is wrong then the Cavalry Corps, as the worst case scenario, had to deal with three armoured trains or rather with four units forming of them. It seems, however, that the first possibility is more likely.

However in the interests of historical accuracy, one more armoured train should be mentioned, which, although it appeared on the battlefield, was not noticed by the Polish side at all. It was a unit endowed with the pompous and sentimental name of Armoured Train No. 51 "Grozniy Mstitel' za Pogibshikh Kommunarov" (Грозный Мститель за Погибших Коммунаров, Dreadful Avenger of Fallen Communards). On 9 October 1920 it was at the disposal of the commander of the 58th Rifle Division occupying the Korosten – Olevsk sector. After the occupation of Korosten by Rómmel's Cavalry Corps this train was cut off from its division. In spite of this, and in spite of the damage done to the communications infrastructure at the junction and the Polish cavalry in the area, the crew of that train took it to Korosten station in order to clarify the situation. They returned the observation that the town was occupied by the Polish Army.⁸⁵

However, the next day (presumably 11 October) it once again approached Korosten, with the intention of carrying out orders to break through to Ovruch station. Reconnaissance was sent out again, and the train entered the Korosten-Podolsk station, where it found a burnt wooden bridge. Its crew immediately set about rebuilding the destroyed bridge and after four hours of work made it passable. This allowed further traffic in the direction of Ovruch and contributed to the re-occupation of Korosten by fresh forces of the Red Army. It is worth noting that during these actions practically no fighting took place with Polish cavalrymen. In comparison with the "Kommunar" action, these events look rather less heroic. Nevertheless, like "Kommunar", this train was awarded the Honorary Revolutionary Red Banner.⁸⁶

Conclusions on the number of Soviet armoured trains present in Korosten on 9 and 10 October 1920

Summarizing the above considerations, it noted that while preparing the attack on Korosten the Polish side most probably recognized five combat units belonging to four armoured trains, namely, No. 39 "Subbotnik," No. 56 "Kommunar," No. 64 "Centrobron," and the "Groza. It should also be remembered that one of them was probably misidentified and in fact was not in Korosten at that time.

⁸⁴ It is quite significant that to the knowledge of the author the Polish cavalry attack on Korosten and the related losses of the Red Army are not recorded in the Soviet and Russian literature on the Polish-Soviet War.

⁸⁵ It follows that these events took place on 10 October 1920, after the capture of Korosten by the Cavalry Corps. After making this "discovery", due to the late hour, the train left for Bilokorovychi station.

⁸⁶ *Боевые подвиги ...* , p. 124; *Крепости на колесах ...* , pp. 75-76, 165-166.



Perhaps there was also some information about No. 51 “Grozniy Mstitel' za Pogibshikh Kommunarov “. If this was the case, then the fact that five armoured trains is given in the Polish literature may indicate that Colonel Rómmel’s staff was not aware of the fact that there were two combat units of the “Kommunar” train. However, it seems that the former situation is more likely.

Of these four trains, only two probably took part in the direct fighting for Korosten, namely “Groza” (or some other train similar to it) and “Kommunar”, perhaps having a total of three combat units operating independently of each other. At the same time, it seems that the number of trains lost in this operation by the Soviet side was also much lower than previously assumed. In total, the Polish soldiers destroyed probably three artillery wagons forming one complete and difficult to identify light armoured train and one armoured wagon from the heavy portion of No. 56 “Kommunar”.

Finally, it should also be emphasised that the real hero of this clash was not the “Subbotnik”, but rather the “Kommunar”. At the present stage of our knowledge on this subject, this can be considered sufficiently certain and verified.

Up to 1939, Colonel Juliusz Rómmel’s Cavalry Corps’ raid on Korosten in October 1920 was regarded as one of the most important actions of the war, showing the heroic and victorious cavalry ethos of the Polish Army of the Second Republic. At the time, it was needed to build an *esprit de corps* in the Polish armed forces, reborn in 1918. A victorious war was perfect for this. Today, however, the time has come to look at all such matters in a different and more balanced way, while making use of sources, mainly archival, produced by our adversary at the time. It should be stressed that looking objectively will certainly not diminish the glory of the Polish success in the Polish-Soviet war of 1919-1920-1921, including the raid on Korosten related here.⁸⁷ Nor will it diminish the glory of the Polish cavalry and its combat merits during the “wars for independence and borders”.

Besides, these events are an excellent testimony to the fact that it is worthwhile to study history carefully, providing successive generations of historians with extremely interesting and instructive research problems, with each of them always being able to find issues worthy of repeated analysis and description – if only to avoid the mistakes made by our predecessors. After all, it was not without reason that someone once said *Historia magistra vitae est*.⁸⁸ Let us just hope that we do not forget this and that we are able to skilfully draw on the experience of the generations that preceded us in this world. In other words, one cannot understand the present (let alone prophesy about the future) without knowing the past. In brief, “a world without history” will always be crippled, incomplete.

⁸⁷ For a more extensive discussion of this matter see also: A. Smoliński, *Kontrowersje wokół porażki sowieckich pociągów pancernych w Korosteniu 10 października 1920 roku (Controversy over the defeat of Soviet armoured trains at Korosten on 10 October 1920)* in “Przegląd Historyczno-Wojskowy” (“Historical-Military Review”), Warsaw, 2003, R. 4 (55), no. 2 (197), pp. 75-94; A. Smoliński, *Kawaleria kontra pociągi pancerne, czyli kontrowersje dotyczące porażki sowieckich pociągów pancernych w Korosteniu dnia 10 października 1920 r. przyczynek do dziejów jazdy Wojska Polskiego oraz wojny polsko-sowieckiej z lat 1919–1921 (Cavalry versus armoured trains, or the controversy over the defeat of Soviet armoured trains in Korosten on 10 October 1920. Contributions to the history of the Polish Army cavalry and the Polish-Soviet war of 1919-1921)*, in *Do szarży marsz, marsz... Studia z dziejów kawalerii (To charge, march, march... Studies in the history of cavalry)*, vol. 5, ed. A. Smoliński, Toruń 2014, pp. 185-248.

⁸⁸ History is a teacher of life.





Decoration with the Order of Virtuti Militari of officers and soldiers of the 2nd Grochów Lancer Regiment by General Stanisław Haller, October 1920.

(Central Military Archives/War Historical Office)

Postscript

It is worth mentioning one more issue. In the armed forces of the Second Republic of Poland, Juliusz Karol Wilhelm Józef Rómmel attained the rank of Major General on 1 January 1928. In March 1939, he became the commander of one of the most important armies to resist the Nazi Wehrmacht.⁸⁹ It remains an open question, however, to what extent his commanding the famous Raid on Kozyatyn [sic] helped him in this remarkable military career. Field Marshal Józef Piłsudski, in an opinion on generals of the Polish Army written probably in December 1922, wrote about the then Brigadier General Rómmel:

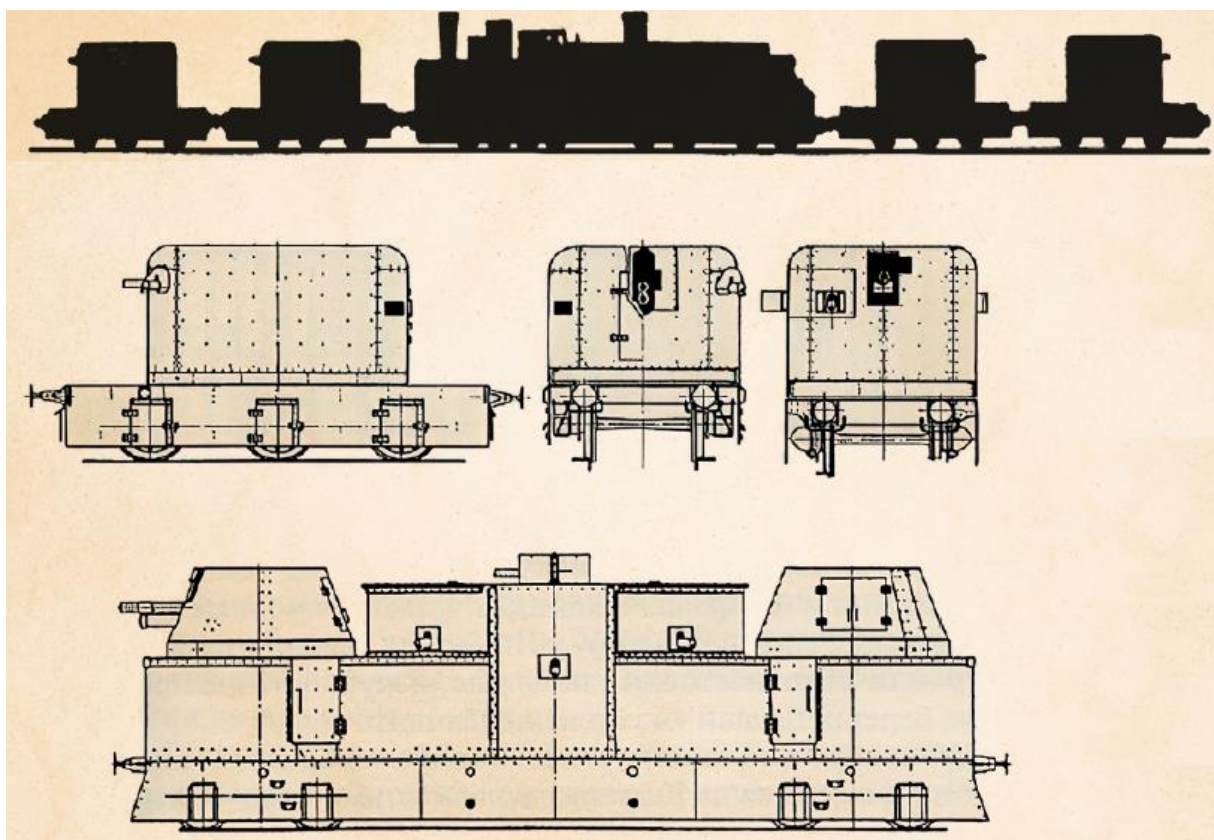
The best of the three officers mentioned above [i.e. better than Brigadier-General Aleksander Pajewski and Colonel Gustaw Orlicz-Dreszer]. He has more general military knowledge, as he is an artilleryman by profession, and he also commanded an infantry division during our war. An energetic man with a strong character, very fond of his guns, a good type of soldier, capable of further developing his natural abilities, a bit protective towards people and even military units.⁹⁰

It seems to follow from the above that, for Marshal Piłsudski, the command of General Rómmel in the successful attack of the Cavalry Corps on Korosten need not have been his most important combat achievement. This is suggested by the complete omission of mention of it in the opinion the former Commander-in-Chief wrote. The time that had passed between the campaign and the writing of that opinion was too short for the events to have slipped Marshal Piłsudski's memory. Could it be, then, that he was correctly informed about the real extent of that success? For the time being, however, this important question must remain unanswered.

⁸⁹ Namely, of the "Łódź Army".

⁹⁰ *Polska generacja w opiniach Marszałka Piłsudskiego (Polish Generals in the opinion of Marshall Piłsudski)*, ed A.Cz. Żak, Warsaw 2012, p. 119.





Top: Outline of light armoured train No. 56 "Kommunar" from I.G. Drogovoz, *Крепости на колесах. История бронепоездов (Fortresses on Wheels. A History of Armoured Trains)*, Minsk 2002, p. 85.

Middle: The artillery wagons of No. 56 "Kommunar" from *Крепости на колесах ...* , p. 77.

Bottom: The artillery wagon the assault train No. 27 "Buria", which may have operated near the Korosten station in early October 1920 from *Крепости на колесах ...* , p.133.



"A Bolshevick armoured train after the battle on Korosten." Most likely it shows a train at Horshchyk. Source: *Kawaleria polska w roku 1920*, insert after p. 48.

