

Police Cavalrymen in Defence of Warsaw During the Bolshevik Offensive of 1920

Marek Fałdowski

ORCID: 0000-0002-1861-0523

Police Academy in Szczytno, Poland

Abstract. Forces responsible for internal security in Poland include the Police. However, shortly after regaining independence in 1918, the officers of the newly created State Police (Act of 24 July 1919) played an important role not only in ensuring internal security, but also in critical moments in defending the independence of their homeland. A mounted police squadron taking part in the defence of Warsaw in August 1920 provided the “Zegrze” group command with precise, reliable, and thus extremely valuable information about the enemy army movements. Thanks to the knowledge of the planned directions of attack, the military commanders were able to make appropriate decisions that would make it impossible for the Bolsheviks to achieve the assumed military goals.

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Introduction

The process related to the unification of services responsible for security, peace and order occurred at a particular time. The Polish state, which was reborn after 123 years of captivity, was struggling with many problems at that time. They were related to the necessity of merging into a single state organism the territory previously under three different annexations (Russian, Austrian and Prussian), where a unified legal system would be in force. In November 1918, in connection with the existing threats, a necessity arose to establish the state borders of the Second Republic of Poland. Hostility towards it was not hidden by the defeated Germany, but also by Czechoslovakia, Lithuania, revolutionary Russia and Ukraine.¹

The war with the Bolsheviks, when the future of the Western European civilisation was decided, was a test of the professional efficiency and moral and patriotic attitudes of the State Police officers². At a critical moment, the police were able, with full awareness and dedication, to stand guard not only over internal security, but also in defence of the independence of the Homeland, shoulder to shoulder with

¹ See more: Przybylski J, Walka o wschodnią granicę II Rzeczypospolitej 1918–1921, [in:] Misiuk A (Ed.), *Udział policji w wojnie 1919–1920*. Szczytno, 1999, pp. 28–38; Fałdowski M, *Działalność niepodległościowa funkcjonariuszy Policji Państwowej, Przegląd Policyjny*, 2019, Vol. 2, pp. 58–73. It. Wrzosek M, *Wojny o granice Polski Odrodzonej 1918–1921*. Warsaw, 1992.

² Misiuk A, *Rola Policji w kształtowaniu państwowości polskiej po I wojnie światowej*, [in:] Misiuk A (Ed.), *Udział Policji ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

the soldiers of the Polish Army³. During the Bolshevik offensive, the State Police, which had already been organized in a large part of the country, took an active part in the battles, "carrying a generous tribute of the blood and life of their officers"⁴.

The aim of the article is primarily to present the role played by the Mounted Police squadron in the defence of Warsaw, especially by conducting a thorough reconnaissance of the enemy's forces and intentions. An additional justification is the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Warsaw in 2020, which is an excellent opportunity to recall the contribution of Polish police officers to this important victory.

Police squadron

The first strike of the Bolshevik offensive was directed at the provinces of the Borderlands (Kresy), therefore the police officers serving in these areas, not being prepared for warfare, withdrew from their posts together with military units. During the retreat, they resisted the enemy, creating special units organized by individual county commanders. As the Bolsheviks' offensive moved towards Warsaw, "a powerful call "to the front" was coming from the police lines. Superiors received thousands of reports from their police officers about their commendations to the army; failure to take them into account threatened to desert from the police ranks"⁵. The situation created in the police was assessed as dangerous, carrying a real threat of destruction of the formation. It was therefore necessary to adopt a position that would clearly and concretely explain the seriousness of the situation and, what is particularly important, would stop the police from taking part in the front activities. On July 9, 1920, Władysław Henszel, Commander in Chief of the State Police, issued the following order to his subordinates: "Out of all the subordinates of the State Police Headquarters, the reports about the spontaneous rushing of the police officers into the army are coming to my attention. Although this desire to defend the endangered Fatherland is praiseworthy and understandable in all its dimensions, the general national interest is more important. It is also the will of the head of the Ministry of the Internal Affairs, and it is a heavy duty for me to direct your zeal for the right path of the strictest execution of your hard service. The enemy not only surrounded our country with an armed ring, but also undermined our freedom, crawled trickily into the interior of Poland and creates confusion to facilitate its ultimate goal: the annihilation of our independence and culture. Police officers! You will seize this blow and overpower the Bolsheviks' killing arm. Therefore, you will give all your strength and all your time, sleepless nights and drifting days to your

³ W sprawie materiałów dotyczących udziału policji w wojnie 1920 r., *Na Posterunku*, 1929, Vol. 17, p. 11.

⁴ Szeryński J, Granatowe mundury w walkach o niepodległość, *Na Posterunku*, 1929, Vol. 32, p. 493; More: Peplowski A, Zwalczenie bolszewickiej dywersji i propagandy wywrotowej w okresie wojny 1919–1920, [in:] Misiuk A (Ed.), *Udział policji ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 30–51; Bylina S, Współdziałanie Policji Państwowej i Wojska Polskiego w trosce o bezpieczeństwo niepodległego państwa, [in:] Fałdowski M, Kardela P (Ed.), *Dawniej niż wczoraj. 100 lat polskiej Policji*, Szczytno 2019, p. 215.

⁵ Szeryński J, Granatowe mundury..., *op. cit.*, p. 496.

service: you will make a sacrifice out of your war enthusiasm and be alert, watchful and armed; you will stand guard over order and righteousness — on this trench of the inner front. You will perform equal service to the Fatherland as a soldier. You will protect the back of the army. In you, then, the enemy's murderous weapon will hit. You are the last lines of the army. If the finality came, you will go, as the last soldier of the Republic, for victory or death in the trenches"⁶. This appeal, it can be assumed, has largely achieved its objective.

July 30, 1920. The State Defence Council issued a regulation on forced service in the State Police, under which each of its officers was obliged to remain in service for the duration of the war⁷. Non-compliance was punishable by a criminal sanction (defined in Article 37 of the State Police Act). In the following days, the State Defence Council, taking into account the unfavourable assessment of the situation on the front, issued another regulation. Since August 6, 1920, during the war, the police officers could be used for military purposes, and thus were obliged to carry out orders issued by the military authorities. At that time, the police were granted the powers of the Military Police with regard to military personnel, while in the guard service they had the rights of military guards⁸. The detailed duties of the police officers and the mode of service with the use of the Police for military purposes were regulated by a separate instruction⁹. Their main task at that time was to fight desertion, symptoms of panic and chaos among the evacuating civilian population¹⁰.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ On 1 July 1920, the government proposed to the Sejm the creation of a State Defence Council, which was justified by the serious military situation of the Republic of Poland and the urgent need to mobilise all its resources. On the same day, the Sejm adopted a resolution on the establishment of a State Defence Council consisting of nineteen members, headed by the Head of State, Józef Piłsudski. It also included the Speaker of the Sejm and 10 deputies appointed by the Sejm, the Prime Minister and three ministers, three representatives of the army appointed by the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces. The competences of the State Defence Council included deciding on all matters related to the conduct and end of war and the conclusion of peace, as well as issuing legal acts with the force of law. The Council existed until November 1920. See: *Electronic source*: <<http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU19200530327/O/D19200327.pdf>>, accessed: 27.05.2019; Rozporządzenie Rady Obrony Państwa z 30 lipca 1920 r. w przedmiocie przymusowej służby w Policji Państwowej, Dz.U. of 1920, No. 76, item. 518, art. 1, *Electronic source*: <<http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU19200760518/O/D19200518.pdf>>, accessed: 31.05.2019.

⁸ Rozporządzenie Rady Obrony Państwa z 6 sierpnia 1920 r. w sprawie tymczasowych zmian dotyczących organizacji i zadań Policji Państwowej, Dz.U. of 1920, No. 75, item. 511, art. 6, *Electronic source*: <<http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU19200750511/O/D19200511.pdf>>, accessed: 17.05.2019; It Wardęski H, *Moje wspomnienia policyjne*. Warsaw, 1923, p. 302.

⁹ Rozporządzenie Rady Obrony Państwa z 6 sierpnia 1920 r. w sprawie tymczasowych zmian..., art. 5; *Cf.*: Rozporządzenie ministra spraw wewnętrznych z 8 grudnia 1920 r. w przedmiocie wprowadzenia na obszarze b. Galicji „Tymczasowej Instrukcji Służbowej dla Policji Państwowej”, Dz.U. of 1921, No. 6, item. 35. *Electronic source*: <<http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU19210060035>>, accessed: 25.05.2019.

¹⁰ Gajewski M, 213 *policyjny pułk piechoty wojny 1920 r.*, Białystok 2003, p. 12; Fałdowski M, *Zagłada polskich policjantów więzionych w obozie specjalnym NKWD w Ostaszkwie*. Szczytno, 2016, p. 44.

Responding to the expectations of the majority of officers, the National Police Headquarters in consultation with the Ministry of Military Affairs proceeded to form an infantry regiment of volunteers-police officers¹¹. The regiment was given number 213 and consisted of three battalions¹². Its organization began in Warsaw, where the first battalion was established. The second battalion was formed in Łódź; the third one was formed from police officers from Kielce and Lublin provinces, partly from units evacuated from operational areas. The command of the regiment was entrusted to Colonel Res. Brunon Betcher — the then deputy police commander in Łódź. Initially, the first battalion of this regiment was incorporated into the operational group of the Warsaw section of General Antoni Zawadzki. His combat action was directed mainly against enemy patrols, which were breaking through the front. Apart from that, the battalion also patrolled its own foreground. After the Bolsheviks had repulsed from Warsaw, the regiment was assigned to the 10th Infantry Division under the command of General Lucjan Żeligowski, where it chased the enemy while performing military and police service. Until mid-September 1920, it served as a front unit, and then until December 1920. — as border guard service on the Zbrucz River near Satanowo, Skala and Husiatyn¹³.

The formation consisting of police officers, who at critical moments of the retreat of the Polish army wanted to fight against the Bolshevik invader on the front, was especially the Mounted Police squadron formed on the order of the Commander in Chief of the National Police on 7 August 1920. Commander of the squadron was appointed Lt. Andrzej Jezierski, whose deputy became 2nd Lt. Stefan Rozumski¹⁴. The Commander in Chief of the State Police, Colonel Janusz Jagrym Maleszewski, wrote about them: "The sun and the winds burned their faces. They became black and thin, but the strong spirit always remained in them. There was no event for which they were not ready to go"¹⁵.

A mounted police squadron left Łódź on 9 August in the number of 88 lower officers, applauded by the society and the representatives of the authorities: the governor Antoni Kamiński¹⁶ and Provincial Commander-in-Chief colonel Bolesław

¹¹ After the establishment of the State Defence Council, a decision was taken to establish a voluntary army. See: Buras D, Organizacja 213 ochotniczego pułku piechoty policyjnej w czasie wojny polsko-bolszewickiej 1920 roku, *Ogólnopolski Kwartalnik Międzynarodowego Stowarzyszenia*, IPA 2005, No. 29, pp. 30–31.

¹² Kozolubski J, Dwudziestolecie Policji Państwowej w Polsce, *Przegląd Policyjny*, 1938, No. 6, p. 408. The regiment was in command of the captain Brunon Betcher, while the battalions: I — lieutenant Jan Mordas, II — captain Franciszek Polaniszek, III — captain Jan Suchan. The regiment did not take part in the war activities, but it was used for the gradual service in Eastern Małopolska.

¹³ Szeryński J, Granatowe mundury..., *op. cit.*, p. 497. About the activities of the 213th Police Infantry Regiment see: Gajewski M, 213 policyjny pułk piechoty..., *op. cit.*; Compare: Odziemkowski J, Leksykon wojny polsko-rosyjskiej 1919–1920. Warsaw, 2014, p. 154.

¹⁴ Biechoński J, W dziesiątą rocznicę zwycięstwa nad Rosją Sowiecką, *Na Posterunku*, 1930, No. 42, p. 820(4).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Na szlaku niepodległości..., *Ilustrowana Encyklopedia Historii Łodzi. Okres II Rzeczypospolitej lata 20., lata 30. XX wieku*, *Piotrkowska 104. Miesięcznik Łódzki. Suplement historyczny*, Vol. 9, p. 247. *Electronic source*: <https://uml.lodz.pl/files/public/dla_mieszkanca/o-miescie/Ilustrowana_Historia_Lodzi/ENcyklopedia_lodzi_nr9.pdf>, accessed: 25.05.2019.

Wróblewski. On August 10 he arrived in Warsaw, was located in the barracks of the Mounted Police at 13 Ciepła Street, where he stayed until August 12th. In addition to the forming squadron, 30 mounted police officers from the Warsaw Province and one officer — 2nd lieutenant Sarnecki were incorporated into the squadron. Eventually, the police squadron consisted of 118 privates and 3 officers.

The command of the squadron remained — as already mentioned — in the hands of Lt. Andrzej Jezierski; 2nd Lt. Sarnecki received command over the 1st and 2nd platoon, and the 2nd Lt. Rozumski over 3rd and 4th platoon. In this way, the Mounted Police squadron was divided into two half-squares. The commanding sergeant of squadron was Józef Smołaga. The 3rd platoon was under Sgt. Janiczek command, while the 4th platoon was under command of Sgt. Stanisław Pakuła. As a result of the efforts of the Police Headquarters, the military authorities replaced Russian and German rifles with English infantry rifles. Unfortunately, these rifles were inconvenient for cavalry. Apart from that, the squadron was assigned two Maxim machine guns and two Colt machine guns. Command over the service of machine guns was taken over by Sgt. Kazimierz Kurowski, who was considered a specialist in this type of weapons, which resulted from his previous service in the Russian army. At the same time, officers and privates in the squadron were awarded military ranks. The officers received the rank of 2nd lieutenant. Senior Sergeant Wieczorek was awarded with the rank of staff sergeant, while individual non-commissioned officers were assigned as the platoon commanders (senior sergeant Kurowski for example). Except for the senior sergeant Pakuła, who received the rank of cavalry sergeant and therefore acted as deputy of the cavalry chief.

Initially it was planned that the squadron would be used on the front together with 213th police infantry regiment, consisting of 33 officers and 1352 police officers, under the command of the captain Betcher. However, on August 12th, according to the order of the Warsaw Governor General Franciszek Latinik¹⁷ commander of the 1st Army at that time, was included in the “Huzarzy Śmierci” (Hussars of Death) squadron, under the command of Lieutenant Józef Siła-Nowicki¹⁸. This squadron had previously consisted of two squadrons; therefore, the included police squadron was given the official name of the 3rd squadron of the “Huzarzy Śmierci” squadron. Since then, the “Huzarzy Śmierci” consisted three squadrons and a platoon of machine guns. On August 12th, Lieutenant Siła-Nowicki in the evening hours was ordered to march to Zegrze to defend the bridges of Zegrze-Dębe, located on the Narew river line¹⁹.

¹⁷ Odziemkowski J, *Leksykon wojny...*, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

¹⁸ In the initial period of organization and existence of the unit, in the operational acts of 1st Polish Army unit of Lieutenant Józef Siła-Nowicki was called the Voluntary Cavalry Squadron of the 1st Army. Soon this name was arbitrarily changed by its commander to Hussars of Death Squadron. The new name probably resulted from the ambition of the commander, who wanted to create an “elite” of the cavalry with a dangerous sounding name. See Gajewski M, *Huzarzy śmierci wojny 1920 r.* Białystok 1999, pp. 8–9.

¹⁹ This unit has also been assigned to the 10th Division. He operated during the most intense fights in the front area on the line of Beniaminów, Nieporęt and Wólka Radzyńska, maintaining communication and intelligence service. For his brave attitude, bold excursions and example given to other units he received praise from General Żeligowski, and from the command of the “Hussars of Death” squadron, with which he fought together — a memorial gift.

This order was warmly welcomed by the police cavalry, especially since they were to fight in defence of the capital of Poland — Warsaw. It is worth quoting at this point the words of Jerzy Biechoński, who, highlighting their high morale and enthusiasm for combat, wrote: “So they drove ahead with great desire and faith in victory, and over their heads in the light wind of August the banner, offered by the Lodz society still in January 1919, was fluttering. It should be noted that the police officers were always very attached to their banner and never parted with it in all the battles in which they later participated. When the commander of the squadron or Lt. Jezierski pointed out to them that it would be more comfortable for them to fight without a flag, they always answered: “It’s our honour, we’ll die, and we won’t give the flag”. And they really made their banners famous.”²⁰

The squadron found itself in Zegrze after 11 p.m., which is also mentioned in the situational report of the “Zegrze” group command: “12 of current month, midnight, 250 horse-riding unit of “Huzarzy Śmierci” from Warsaw are reported”²¹.

At that time, Zegrze was converted into a fortress with a significant number of soldiers. The command of the “Zegrze” group had to man a section of the front along the Narew River and two bridgeheads — in Zegrze and Dębe²². Enemy troops arrived at a sector of the group on the night of August 12th to 13th. When the “Huzarzy Śmierci” squadron arrived in Zegrze, the group command remained in the hands of kadm. Kazimierz Porębski. The next day, i.e. 13 August, command was handed over to Colonel Stanislaw Malachowski, who took it at the most decisive moment. At that time, the Polish troops, operating west of the Narew River, retreated in accordance with the order of the Commander-in-Chief, Marshal Józef Piłsudski, in the direction of Modlin, Winnica and Nasielsk. On the other hand, the units operating in the east, after crossing the Bug River, also retreated to the Radzymin-Marki section. As a result of operational activities, the front in this section of Zegrze was regrouped. Although it was calm on the foreground, the information about what was going on was very inaccurate²³.

The squadron of “Huzarzy Śmierci”, which came to the Zegrze, was directed, after only two hours of rest, to further actions. The police squadron, as the most military trained and best equipped squadron of the “Huzarzy Śmierci” unit, was given the task of reaching Fort Dębe, where the 7th reserve brigade and 3rd and 4th platoon with Lieutenant Rozumski and a sergeant Pakuła were already located. Then the 1st and 2nd platoon were ordered to carry out patrol service in the direction of Serock.

In Dębe, the service of the platoons commanded by 2nd Lieutenant Rozumski involved patrolling the foreground. With the exception of situations connected with mutual shooting at each other, no serious fights took place there. Whereas near Serock both platoons (half-squadron) of the cavalry police of Lieutenant Jezierski were assigned to the 155th Infantry Regiment, whose commander ordered the reconnaissance of the situation in Serock and urgent transmission of information.

²⁰ Biechoński J, *W dziesiątą rocznicę zwycięstwa...*, *op. cit.*, p. 821. This banner was stored in barracks of the Lodz Mounted Police and presented during all of the events.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 822(6).

²² The “Zegrze” group included VII Reserve Brigade, 6th Border Rifle Regiment, 4th Battalion of the 157th Infantry Regiment and field artillery. See: Gajewski M, *Huzarzy śmierci...*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

²³ Biechoński J, *W dziesiątą rocznicę zwycięstwa...*, *op. cit.*, p. 822(6).

The first patrols have already established that Serock is occupied by the Russians, who are also starting to direct their approach towards the Zegrze. From the enemy's movements it was concluded that the enemy was going to occupy the Zegrze. As a result of this information, considered to be alarming, battalions of the 155th Infantry Regiment (and with them one police half squadron), anticipating the enemy's attack, set off in the direction of Serock, carrying out the counter-attack. There were several hours of fights near the town, in which police cavalrymen took an active part.

When the Bolsheviks captured a machine gun belonging to the 155th Infantry Regiment in the course of the described military operations, the police officers who supported the soldiers regained the machine gun. It is worth noting that the police cavalrymen fought on foot. The result of the clashes at Serock was the repulsion of the enemy, but it was not possible to break up his troops in this section. The first day of victorious fights fought by police officers together with soldiers remained in the memory of the participants, contributing to the strengthening of mutual trust between police and army soldiers²⁴.

Near Nieporęt and Beniaminów

In the morning hours, on August 14, 1920, the whole squadron of "Huzarzy Śmierci" ["Hussars of Death"], according to Colonel Małachowski's order, was sent back to Nieporęt, where it was partly at the disposal of the 48th Infantry Regiment and partly under the command of the 19th Brigade of Colonel Wiktor Thommée²⁵, which was part of the 10th Infantry Division commanded by General Lucjan Żeligowski²⁶.

Since the fights near Nieporęt and Beniaminów, as well as Dąbkowizna and Wólka Radzymińska played an extremely important role in the overall battle of Warsaw, it is necessary to briefly mention the operational situation, which at that time was created on the front of the 1st Army of General Latinik²⁷. First of all, it should be stressed that at the beginning of August 1920 the Bolsheviks were at the peak of their success, convinced that the seizure of Warsaw was a matter of time. The command of the enemy army was particularly keen to conquer Warsaw at all costs, which would probably have a negative impact not only on the morale of the soldiers, but also on the entire Polish society. Since it was expected during the offensive that there would be more resistance, therefore, on August 10, 1920 Mikhail Tukhachevski, commander of the Western Front, issued orders to three of his armies, ordering them to cross the Vistula river and cut off Warsaw from the Poznan and Pomeranian provinces. The 16th Army was assigned to capture Warsaw. This task was to be carried out on 14 August 1920.²⁸

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 822–823(6–7).

²⁵ In June 1920, he took command of the 28th Infantry Regiment. He distinguished himself in defence of the outskirts of Warsaw, for which he was awarded the Order of Virtuti Militari V class. See: J. Odziemkowski, *Leksykon wojny...*, *op. cit.*, p. 413.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 484.

²⁷ See more: *Ibid.*, pp. 337–342.

²⁸ Biechoński J, *W dziesiątą rocznicę zwycięstwa...*, *op. cit.*, p. 823(7).

The intentions of the enemy were known to the Supreme Command of the Polish Army. For this reason, the 1st Polish Army received an order: firstly, to fight off all attacks of the enemy, secondly to keep all defensive lines and thirdly, to inflict at the same time the greatest possible losses to the enemy. The aim of these actions was to weaken the enemy's so-called combat immunity. In turn, the 5th Army of the Polish Army, operating in the area of Modlin and from Modlin towards Pomerania, and the 4th Army, concentrating on the line of the Wieprz river from Dęblin to Kock, the striking group of the 3rd Army, operating in the area of Chełmno and Ostrów, were to attack the enemy from the flanks, leading to the destruction of its forces²⁹.

A large-scale project required that each of the commanders should have completed the objectives assigned to them. On 14 and 15 August 1920, the 1st Army received the most difficult task. Not only it had the duty to withstand the strongest strike of Tukhachevsky's army, but it also needed "with its resistance to break the combat and moral value of his soldiers"³⁰. At that time, the Front of the 1st Army had two defensive positions. The first one ran on the western bank of the Rządza River southeast of Radzymin, in the direction to Wołomin and further through Wiązowna along the Świder River towards the Vistula River. On the other hand, the second position was behind the first one at a distance of 5–8 km. It consisted of post-German fortifications, built on sandy dunes stretching from Wiązowna through Rembertów to Rynja. The first line, what should be stressed, did not have a full defence capability. Moreover, the artillery on this line did not have the required combat readiness³¹.

Therefore, the enemy initially managed to break through the sector defended by the 11th Infantry Division commanded by Colonel Bolesław Jaźwiński and lead to the seizure of the Radzymin region by the Bolshevik 21st and 27th Riflemen's Divisions. In this way, the communication between the particular units of the Polish army was interrupted. A very dangerous gap was created between Beniaminów and Wólka Radzyńska, which, fortunately, the enemy did not take the opportunity to exploit. In the command of the "Zegrze" group, which at that time was fighting against the divisions of the 3rd Soviet Army of Vladimir Lazarevich, the situation in the Radzymin region was not known³².

Colonel Małachowski, aware of the operational situation and imperfect communication, in the morning of August 14th ordered Lieutenant Siła-Nowicki to go with the squadron to Nieporęt, where he was to conduct a constant reconnaissance of enemy forces and groups in the area of Dąbkowizna and Wólka Radzyńska, and immediately provide information. He was also to establish contact with the Lithuanian-Belarusian division of the Polish Army³³. Since the two squadrons of "Huzarzy Śmierci" were insufficiently equipped, only the police squadron headed by 2nd Lieutenant Jezierski left to Nieporęt. After some time

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 823–824(7–8). This task was fulfilled by the 1st Army thanks to the bravery of the soldiers.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 823–825(7–9).

³² *Ibid.*

³³ At the same time, the result of this action should be reported to the group headquarters on a regular basis.

Lieutenant Siła-Nowicki also came to Nieporęt with several dozen of "hussars". After the deploying, patrols were sent in the direction of Wołka Radzymińska, Dąbkowizna and Beniaminów. Their commander, Lieutenant Siła-Nowicki, also took part in patrols of "Huzarzy Śmierci". Unfortunately, at the beginning of the action, together with the whole patrol, he was ambushed, suffering losses in the form of several wounded and killed. In addition, some of the subordinates were taken captive. This failure made it necessary to retreat to Zegrze. At this moment, the entire burden of the reconnaissance service was placed solely on the police officers³⁴.

At an order of the command of "Zegrze" group, a telephone was installed in the quarters of 2nd Lieutenant Jezierski, thanks to which he had a direct connection with the command. Therefore, he kept Col. Małachowski, as well as Lt. Strenga-Nowicki stationed in Zegrze, informed about the situation at Dąbkowizna and Wołka Radzymińska. Since there was a need to increase the manning of fort Beniaminów, where initially only one battalion of the 48th Infantry Regiment was stationed, 2nd Lt. Jezierski sent there a platoon of 2nd Lt. Sarnecki. The platoon did an excellent job, as evidenced by the following mention in the history of the 48th infantry regiment: "Communication to the right with the batteries near the town of Nieporęt maintained and led the patrolling of the forest to the southwest of the road fort Beniaminów-Nieporęt platoon from the 1st volunteer regiment of hussars, composed of police officers from Łódź, assigned this morning (14. August 1920) to the disposal of the regiment. The mentioned platoon performed this service very well"³⁵. Moreover, the platoon located in Beniaminów performed the same duty as the other platoons in Nieporęt, i.e. sent liaison officers and patrols to Dąbkowizna and Wołka Radzymińska, up to the Pustelnik-Marki road leading to Radzymin, where the Lithuanian-Belarusian division was located. The reports delivered by the police officers from these patrols were concise and precise. They presented an inestimable value not only for the command of the "Zegrze" group, but also for all the units that were fighting on this front.

The night of the 14th to 15th of August 1920 was especially hard to survive, because the Bolsheviks, already from the afternoon of the 14th of August, repeated their constant attacks on Nieporęt. The Beniaminów was also in such a situation, where later significant reinforcements with artillery were sent. The soldiers fighting in this section had to endure a few hours' attack of the enemy that was trying to capture both these towns and then reach the Vistula River. These attacks were victoriously fought off, which is a significant merit of the police officers-soldiers. The command of the Polish army, which was informed quickly and accurately by the police officers, had the possibility to issue orders that prevented or preceded hostile actions. Therefore, the next day, i.e. on August 15th, General Żeligowski came to Nieporęt to thank 2nd Lt. Jezierski, Rozumski and Sarnecki for the perfect execution of orders by the police squadron.

The brave and prudent behaviour of police officers in Beniaminów and Nieporęt was also not unnoticed in the command of the "Zegrze" group. In the operational

³⁴ Despite the difficulties and many dangers, they did an excellent job. See: Biechoński J, *W dziesiątą rocznicę zwycięstwa...*, *op. cit.*, p. 825(9).

³⁵ *Ibid.*

order no. 9 of 15 August 1920, Col. Małachowski included, among others, the following note: "I must express my appreciation for the voluntary cavalry squadron sent to Nieporęt, for very well conducted interviews and, as a result, for sending early, clear and very accurate reports on the situation on the right flank, which helped the local command of the Zegrze sector to gain a better orientation on the situation. In a single word, the voluntary cavalry squadron fulfilled its task without any complaint"³⁶.

The performance of the above-mentioned tasks entailed many difficulties, which required not only courage but also prudence. In order to illustrate the conditions under which the police service was carried out, characteristic facts may be indicated. After Jerzy Bocheński, let us recall as an example the case of Master Corporal Bronisław Braun, who started a patrol in the area of Wólka Radzyminska together with five police officers in the evening of August 14th. Immediately after his departure, the enemy concentrated its forces and launched an attack on the fort Benjaminów. As a result, Master Corporal Braun could not return to the fort. In addition, he was spotted and surrounded by the enemy. However, he did not surrender, but quickly attacked and broke through the surrounding military and made his way to his own troops.³⁷

In a similar situation was also found the cavalry Sgt. Pakuła, who at the same time, together with a unit of 10 police officers, patrolled the road between Nieporęt and Benjaminów, while maintaining communication between the fighting soldiers of the Polish Army. Due to the fact that both near Benjaminów and near Nieporęt, enemy attacks took place, Sgt. Pakuła together with its men got under strong fire of artillery and machine guns. Leaving the fire range, he was surrounded by the enemy infantry. Nevertheless, his unit broke through, losing two men who were taken prisoner of war³⁸.

However, the biggest danger was faced by the Master Corporal Smołaga — the commander of the 2nd platoon of the Mounted Police. On August 14th, in the afternoon, he left at the head of a patrol made up of several people to assess the situation in the vicinity of Wólka Radzyminska. When he reached the foot of Wólka, he stopped at the edge of the forest and found that the village was occupied by enemy troops, consisting largely of Cossacks. He and his patrol were so close to the enemy that he could hear the sounds of conversations that, unfortunately, he could not understand. Probably as a result of orders given by the Bolsheviks, several Cossacks left Wólka Radzyminska for reconnaissance, heading for Benjaminów. The Cossacks rode past the Master Corporal Smołaga, but they did not notice anybody. The commander of the police patrol decided to let the Cossacks go and attack them later, when they were far away from Wólka. Unfortunately, he was noticed by the Cossack squadrons in Wólka, which went in the direction of the Polish patrol. A rather grotesque situation arose, because on the one hand the Master Corporal Smołaga, together with his police officers, raced the "Cossack reconnaissance patrol", while on the other hand he was raced by the whole Bolshevik squadron. This chase ended just before the infantry positions of the 48th

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 826(10) [record in accordance with the original].

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

regiment, which covered Cossacks and police officers with dense fire. "The Cossack squadron, rushing behind Smołaga, went straight to all sides, turning back to its own troops, while in the foreground there remained a few more Cossacks from patrols and Smołaga with his men. As a consequence of the desperate signs made by the police officers, the infantry ceased fire and as a result, the Cossack patrol, reduced by a few people who managed to escape sideways, got into our hands. The fact that neither Smołaga nor any of his men died at that time can be attributed to a special graciousness of fate"³⁹.

During the fights at Nieporęt, the "Huzarzy Śmierci" squadron suffered the following losses: 11 dead, 9 wounded and several missing men⁴⁰. On 16 August 1920, after fighting the enemy off from Warsaw, the Mounted Police squadron was withdrawn to Zegrze⁴¹.

Summary

On 13 and 14 August 1920, when the fate of the battle was decided, Lt. Siła-Nowicki's squadron was engaged in combat operations near Zegrze, Nieporęt and Wólka Radzymińska. In fact, it was mainly conducting reconnaissance and patrol service, but during that time, clashes with the enemy took place, among others, near Serock, Beniaminów, Kuligów and Myszyniec. The tasks performed by the police officers were significantly demanding, requiring not only extraordinary courage but also prudence. Police patrols, even if surrounded by the enemy, did not surrender, but with a quick attack made their way through the surrounding forces. Due to the fact that the command had at its disposal current information obtained by officers, it could issue advance orders preventing the enemy from achieving the assumed goals.⁴² The break in communication between the Polish troops fighting on the front line and the lack of precise information about the enemy forces and groups had a negative impact on the staff work of the "Zegrze" group command and the 1st Army. The most trustworthy and credible, and thus valuable, information in the fights at Nieporęt was provided by horse patrols of the "Huzarzy Śmierci" squadron. After elaboration by the squadron commander, these reports were the only source of information about enemy positions. They were used by the command of the group, the army and the front of General Józef Haller⁴³.

The presentation of heroism of Polish police officers in the fights for independence coincides with the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Warsaw in 2020. It is therefore our duty and obligation to preserve the memory of those who gave their lives.

(jm), (rm)

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 827(11).

⁴⁰ Gajewski M, *Huzarzy śmierci...*, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

⁴¹ Biechoński J, *W dziesiątą rocznicę zwycięstwa...*, *op. cit.*, p. 827(11).

⁴² *See more:* Peplowski A, *Zwalczanie bolszewickiej dywersji...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 39–51.

⁴³ *Cf.:* Gajewski M, *Huzarzy śmierci...*, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

About the Author

Marek Fałdowski, Police Col. dr hab., prof. WSPol, commandant-rector of the Police Academy in Szczytno. The graduate of the Police Academy in Szczytno (2000), the National Defence Academy in Warsaw (2003) and the University of Natural Sciences and Humanities in Siedlce, where in 2006 he obtained the degree of PhD. In 2011, he completed his Internal Security Studies, in 2015. — postgraduate studies in the field of criminological pedagogy: prophylaxis and prevention of migration crime. In 2019, he received the academic degree of doctor with habilitation in the field of social sciences in the discipline of security sciences granted by the resolution of the Council of the Department of National Security of the War Studies University. Editor-in-chief of the quarterly "Przegląd Policyjny" (Police Review), chairman of the editorial committee of the periodical "Policja. Kwartalnik kadry kierowniczej Policji" (Police. Quarterly of Police Managers). Chairman of the editorial committee of the semi-annual "Internal Security", as well as a member of the International Advisory Board of the journal "NBP — Journal of Criminalistics and Law", the Polish Society of Security Sciences, the International Police Association, the Scientific and Technical Council at the Minister of Internal Affairs and Administration, the Scientific and Technical Council at the Police Commander in Chief and the Scientific Council of the Central Forensic Laboratory of the Police. His research interests focus on internal security. Author of publications with particular emphasis on public safety and order, the history of the police and the ethos of service. Correspondence: Wyższa Szkoła Policji w Szczytnie, ul. M.J. Piłsudskiego 111, Poland. E-mail: rektor@wspol.edu.pl.

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Streszczenie. *Do formacji odpowiedzialnych za bezpieczeństwo wewnętrzne w Polsce należym.in. Policja. Jednak tuż po odzyskaniu niepodległości w 1918 r. funkcjonariusze nowo utworzonej na mocy ustawy z 24 lipca 1919 r. o Policji Państwowej odgrywali istotną rolę nie tylko w zapewnieniu bezpieczeństwa wewnętrznego, lecz także w krytycznych momentach bronili niepodległości swojej Ojczyzny. Szwadron Policji Konnej biorący udział w obronie Warszawy w sierpniu 1920 r. dostarczał dowództwu grupy „Zegze” precyzyjnych, rzetelnych, a przez to niezwykle cennych informacji o ruchach wojsk nieprzyjacielskich. Dzięki wiedzy o planowanych kierunkach natarcia władze wojskowe miały możliwość podejmowania odpowiednich decyzji uniemożliwiających osiągnięcie bolszewikom zakładanych celów militarnych.*

Резюме. *Польская полиция входит в состав формирований, отвечающих за обеспечение внутренней безопасности в стране. Вскоре после восстановления независимости государства в 1918 году сотрудники Государственной полиции, созданной на основании Закона от 24 июля 1919 года, сыграли важную роль не только в обеспечении внутренней безопасности, но и в решающие моменты защищали независимость своей Родины. Эскадрилья конной полиции, принимающая участие в обороне Варшавы в августе 1920 года, передавала штабу группы «Зегже» точную, достоверную и, следовательно, чрезвычайно ценную информацию о передвижениях вражеской армии. Благодаря информации о запланированных направлениях нападения, начальство смогло принять правильные решения и помешать большевикам достичь поставленных военных целей.*

(mj)