Research Article

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The Kiev operation and Tukhachevsky's two offensives in 1920 as attempts at undertaking strategic and operational initiative during the Polish-Soviet War of 1919-1920

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Abstract: The article is an analysis of: 1) the Kiev operation from late April and early May 1920, 2) Tukhachevsky's first offensive in May 1920, 3) Tukhachevsky's second offensive launched in July 1920. All the three operations were attempts at undertaking strategic and operational initiative during the Polish-Soviet War of 1919-1920. The first offensive pertained to the Polish army, in the subsequent two cases it was the Soviet Western Front. Tukhachevsky's second offensive resulted in the battle of the Bug in late July and early August 1920. By discussing each of the operations, the author presents the fighting potential of the armies involved, the tactical and operational goals, the course of the fighting, the turning points, both parties' planning mistakes and the consequences of the operations.

Keywords: Polish-Soviet War of 1919-1920; Polish Army in 1919-1920; Red Army in 1919-1920; Kiev operation in 1920; Tukhachevsky's first offensive - May 1920; Tukhachevsky's second offensive - July 1920; Mikhail Tukhachevsky.

1 Introduction

In the spring of 1920, the Supreme Headquarters of the Polish Army launched an offensive against Ukraine; the operation's climax was the capturing of Kiev. The events definitely shifted the centre of gravity in the war. Poland made an attempt at undertaking the strategic initiative. Soviet Russia considered it an attack at the Russian ethnic and cultural territory while the war with "white" Poland was deemed "sacred". For the first time in its short history, Soviet propaganda resorted to patriotic language. Veterans of the former tsar army from WWI were conscripted on a mass scale. However, the Kiev operation offered Poland an opportunity for defeating the Red Army. From the point of view of the strategy, the operation had the potential of restricting and halting the expansion of Soviet Russia to the West of Europe¹. The Kiev operation conducted by the Polish Army resulted in the first offensive of the Western Front under the command of Mikhail Tukhachevsky, launched in Belarus in May 1920. The result of the war with "white" Poland was to be affected by the second offensive of the Western Front in July 1920. The goal of each of these operations was to undertake operational initiative.

1 Kutrzeba T., *Wyprawa kijowska 1920 roku*, Gebethner i Wolff, Warsaw 1937, pp. 333-345; Davies N., *Orzeł biały czerwona gwiazda. Wojna polsko-bolszewicka 1919-1920*, translated by Andrzej Pawelec, Wydawnictwo Znak, Krakow 1998, pp. 135-143.

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2 Methods

In his work on the article, the author used a critical analysis of the sources as one of the main research methods. It proved extremely useful in work on the documents stored in the Archive of the Józef Piłsudski Institute of America in New York. The documents included files of the *Principal Aides-de-Camp of the Commander-in-Chief* from 1919-1921 and the files of *General Tadeusz Rozwadowski, the Chief of Staff of the Polish Army*. The same method was used to analyse the documents on the battle of the Bug published by the Military History Bureau². In order to analyse the size of the armies, statistical and comparative methods were employed. For identifying the area in which the events described in the article took place, the geographic method was used. In the course of constructing the narrative, the author also applied the monographic method. The goal of this article is to present the circumstances of the battle fought in the foreground of Warsaw in August 1920.

3 The Kiev operation (25 April – 9 May 1920)

One of the turning points in the Polish-Soviet War was the Kiev operation from late April and early May 1920, conducted in the right-bank Ukraine by the Polish 3rd, 2nd and 6th Armies. The opponent was represented by weak troops of the South-Western Front: The Soviet 12th and 14th Armies. The operation's strategic plan provided for establishing in the captured territory the Ukrainian People's Republic with Kiev as its capital city. This was followed by forming the Ukrainian armed forces which were to take over defence of the Ukraine from the Polish troops. The operational plan provided for enveloping and destroying the Soviet 12th and 14th Armies. Later on, the Polish divisions were to be transported from the Ukraine and used against the major concentration area of the Western Front in Belarus³.

The first stage of the operation proved to be a success for the Polish troops. On 7 May 1920, the Polish Army entered Kiev which was not defended. On 9 May 1920, after 15 days, the Kiev operations drew to an end. Having suffered considerable casualties, the Soviet 12th and 14th Armies retreated behind the Dnieper and thus avoided destruction. Notably, when in late April 1920 the Polish offensive in the Ukraine started, the Soviet South-Western Front prepared for its own offensive operation. However, it was only the initial stage of the preparations. The front's headquarters expected replenishments and new forces⁴.

The biggest threat to Poland was posed by the 1st Cavalry Army under the command of Semyon Budyonny. The army consisted of the 4th, 6th, 11th and 14th Cavalry Divisions and an Auxiliary Unit Cavalry Brigade. The fighting strength amounted to 15,712 sabres, 496 machine guns, 97 cannons, 20 armoured cars, 5 armoured trains and 15 aeroplanes. It was the major attack force during the planned offensive⁵. The remaining two operational forces of the South-Western Front: the 12th and the 14th Armies had in total 16,000 bayonets and 4,000 sabres. Together with the 1st Cavalry Army, the Soviet units gathered against the Polish forces in the Ukraine 16,000 bayonets and 22,000 sabres. Across the frontline, the Polish units had the strength of 120,000 soldiers including 60,000 bayonets and sabres⁶.

On 5 June 1920, after more than a week of fighting against the Polish 3rd and 6th Armies and a number of skirmishes, the units of the 1st Cavalry Army successfully disrupted the front. The Polish tactical forces made attempts to exhaust the 1st Cavalry Army's impetus. However, in this vast operational area, the Polish infantry divisions had problems facing the Soviet cavalry divisions which always enjoyed better

² *Materiały do historii wojny 1918-1920 r., Bitwa warszawska*, Volume 1: *Bitwa nad Bugiem 27.VII – 7.VIII 1920*, Part 2: *Dokumenty*, Wojskowe Biuro Historyczne, Warsaw 1935.

³ Kutrzeba T., *Wyprawa...*, pp. 334-335.

⁴ *Ibid.*; p. 91-106, 135.

⁵ Smoliński A., *Zarys dziejów I Armii Konnej (1919-1923)*, Wydawca Eko-Dom, Grajewo 2003, p. 57; Biernacki M., *Działania Armji Konnej Budiennego w kampanji polsko-rosyjskiej 1920 r., Studja taktyczne z historii wojen polskich 1918-1921*, Volume 3, Wojskowy Instytut Naukowo-Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1924, p. 13.

⁶ Biernacki M., *Działania...*, p. 21; [1] *Armia Konna*, [in:] Odziemkowski J., *Leksykon...*, pp. 14-15.

manoeuvrability⁷. In these circumstances, on 16 June 1920, the Polish units returned to their initial positions from which, on 25 April 1920, they started the operation in Ukraine.

According to General Tadeusz Kutrzeba, one of the most prominent Polish military theoreticians in the Second Polish Republic, the Kiev expedition was Poland's defeat in an operational and political aspect. However, on a strategic level, it should be deemed considerably successful. This is because the Kiev operation forced Soviet Russia to instigate military operations in least favourable circumstances⁸.

4 Tukhachevsky's first offensive (14 May – 8 June 1920)

In April 1920, Polish intelligence found out that the Soviet Western Front deployed new forces in Belarus. So, on 11 May 1920, the Chief Commander of the Polish Army ordered preparations for a pre-emptive strike targeted at Zhlobin, Rahachov and Mogilev with the goal of severing communication between the Soviet Western Front and the South-Western Front by capturing the railway line between Orsha and Zhlobin. The offensive was to start on 17 May from Polesie and rely on the 4th Army: the 9th, 16th, 14th Infantry Divisions and the 2nd Cavalry Brigade. The Supreme Headquarters of the Polish Army considered transport of the 4th Infantry Division from the Ukrainian Front. As the intelligence of the Western Front discovered preparations for the operation and, consequently, its commander Mikhail Tukhachevsky intended to retaliate in a situation when the Chief Commander of the Polish Army did not expect offensive activities on the part of the Western Front⁹.

On 14 May 1920, the Western Front launched the offensive. As Mikhail Tukhachevsky said "(...) In order to maintain our positions and not open up an opportunity for the Poles to engage our major troops in forced operations, transition from defence to attack was imperative"¹⁰. Interestingly, the Western Front did not finish gathering for the planned full-fledged offensive which had been on for several months. Consequently, the subsequent divisions arrived from various parts of Russia. In these circumstances, Mikhail Tukhachevsky decided to treat the divisions as reserve¹¹.

The offensive launched by Tukhachevsky by deploying the 15th and the 16th Armies was aimed at pushing the Polish divisions to the swamps of Polesie and destroying them. That was Tukhachevsky's plan for annihilating the northern section of the Polish front¹².

When the offensive was launched, the fighting strength of the Western Front amounted to 181,473 units including 75,227 bayonets, 5,018 sabres, 459 cannons, 1,935 machine guns, 10 armoured trains, 15 armoured cars and 60 aeroplanes. The tactical forces of the Lithuanian-Belarus Front, located opposite, included the 1st and 4th Armies, 63,817 bayonets and 3,828 sabres¹³. In its major attack, the Soviet 15th Army consisting of six infantry divisions and a cavalry division clashed with the Polish 1st Army which had at its disposal barely four infantry divisions. Further in the south, the Soviet 16th Army attacked the positions of the Polish 4th Army. It attacked Barysaw and Igumen and posed a threat to Minsk. Once the 1st Army was reinforced by the 6th Infantry Division from the 4th Army, the offensive of the Soviet 15th Army was stopped in the section between Kozyany, Pastavy, Krivichs, Okolovo and Pelik Lake. The offensive of the Soviet 16th Army was also stopped by the divisions of the 4th Army¹⁴.

7 In the spring of 1920, the Polish infantry divisions faced a tactical challenge in the fight against the 1st Cavalry Army. In June and July 1920, the Polish 18th Infantry Division proved very effective in the fights against the 1st Cavalry Army. 18. *Dywizja Piechoty*, [in:] Odziemkowski J., *Leksykon...*, pp. 297-298; Odziemkowski J., *Piechota polska w wojnie z Rosją bolszewicką 1919-1920*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego, Warsaw, 2010, pp. 479-550. More on the division in Zakrzewski B., *18 Dywizja Piechoty WP w wojnie polsko-sowieckiej*, Wydawnictwo Neriton, Warsaw 2016.

8 Kutrzeba T., *Wyprawa...*, pp. 333-345; Davies N., *Orzeł...*, pp. 135-143.

9 Przybylski A., *Wojna polska 1918-1921*, Wojskowy Instytut Naukowo-Wydawniczy, Warsaw, 1930, pp. 143-144; Wyszczelski L., *Wojna polsko-rosyjska 1919-1920*, vol. 2, Bellona, Warsaw, 2010, pp. 408-409.

10 Tukhachevsky M., *Pochód za Wisłę. Wykłady wygłoszone na kursie uzupełniającym Akademii Wojskowej R.K.K.A. w Moskwie, 7-10 lutego 1923 r.*, translated by Antoni Bogusławski, a major in the Headquarters, [in:] Piłsudski J., *Rok 1920. Z powodu pracy M. Tuchaczewskiego „Pochód za Wisłę”*, Tow. Wyd. "Ignis" (E. Wende i S-ka) Spółka Akcyjna, Warsaw, 1924, p. 13.

11 Moszyński J., *Natarcie i odwrót XV. Armii Sowieckiej maj-czerwiec 1920 r., Part 1*, "Bellona", 1923/12, pp. 89-114.

12 Przybylski A., *Wojna...*, p. 145.

13 Wyszczelski L., *Wojna...*, vol. 1, p. 417.

14 Moszyński J., *Natarcie...*, Część 1, p. 101; Przybylski A., *Wojna...*, p. 145.

Map-2 Tukhachevsky's first offensive in Belarus, May-June 1920, based on: Przybylski A., *Wojna...*

The frontline and the gathering of the Soviet 15th and 16th Armies assumed a bulging shape. This facilitated the Polish troops' counter-strike launched on 1 June under the personal command of the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army. The strike involved the newly-formed Reserve Army under the command of General Kazimierz Sosnkowski. According to the plan, the army struck the Soviet 15th Army concentrically in an attempt to push its divisions to the upper Berezina. At the same time, the 1st Army was expected to hold back the Soviet troops in fighting and prevent their premature retreat. The 4th Army was tasked with counteracting an offensive of the 16th Army towards Minsk. The plan of destroying the Soviet 15th Army was implemented only partially while a majority of the troops retreated in time, avoiding envelopment. The Polish divisions reached the Avuta and the Berezina where the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army ordered to stop the attack. General Stanisław Szeptycki was appointed commander of the Lithuanian-Belarusian Front and tasked with organising a new line of defence. He had at his disposal twelve infantry divisions and a cavalry brigade¹⁵.

In the course of fighting in May 1920, the Polish divisions incurred losses in the Soviet 15th and 16th Armies amounting to 40,000 casualties, wounded and POWs¹⁶. Once the retreat of the 15th Army was completed, its morale was so low that 80,000 soldiers deserted the Army¹⁷. However, during the offensive the units of the Western Front successfully captured the strategically important Smolensk Gate¹⁸ including the railway line between Maladzyechna and Polotsk. This provided good starting positions for the major offensive in July 1920¹⁹.

5 Tukhachevsky's second offensive and retreat to the Bug

On 4 July 1920, after several months of preparations, the counter-offensive of the Western Front was launched under the command of Mikhail Tukhachevsky²⁰. As for the organization, the Western Front was divided into five operational formations: the 4th Army (4 infantry divisions and 2 cavalry divisions), the 15th Army (5 infantry divisions), the 3rd Army (4 infantry divisions and 2 cavalry divisions), the 16th Army (5 infantry divisions) and the Mazyr Group (2 infantry divisions). The III Cavalry Corps, formed as part of the Front, was particularly dangerous to the Polish troops. The Corps was under the command of Haik Dmitrievich Bzhishkyan Gai. While the corps was not as big or infamous as the 1st Cavalry Army, it was tasked with breaking the front, encroaching the enemy's rear and creating chaos. Consequently, the commander of the Western Front had at his disposal 21 rifle divisions and 2 cavalry divisions²¹.

As of 4 July 1920, the fighting strength of the Soviet Western Front amounted to approximately 160,500 soldiers including 97,500 bayonets and 5,000 sabres²². To ensure effective supplies for the Soviet 4th Army, 8,000 farmer carts were mobilized; the 15th and 3rd Armies received 15,000 carts and the 16th Army received approximately 10,000 carts²³. However, it was doubtful if even this large number of small carts drawn by small, emaciated horses provided by Belarus farmers, could raise to the task. The more so that the organization of

¹⁵ Przybylski A., *Wojna...*, pp. 144-147.

¹⁶ Moszczeński J., *Przygotowanie i plan drugiej ofensywy Tuchaczewskiego (czerwiec-lipiec 1920)*, Part 1, "Bellona", 1925/17, p. 269; Szeptycki St., *Front Litewsko-Białoruski 10 marca 1919 – 30 lipca 1920*, Krakowska Spółka Wydawnicza, Krakow 1925, pp. 17-28.

¹⁷ Moszyński J., *Natarcie...*, Część 2, p. 220.

¹⁸ The Smolensk Gate – an area of geostrategic importance, about 80 km wide, forming an isthmus between the upper Dźwin river and the lower Dnieper. The terrain is conducive to march of large troops from the west to the east i.e. from Western and Central Europe towards Moscow. From the west, the isthmus is marked by Vitebsk upon the Dźwina and Orsha upon the Dniester, and from the east by Smolensk upon the Dniester. Large troops marching from the west to the east through the Smolensk Gate towards central Russia and Moscow could avoid crossing the large rivers: the Dźwina and the Dniester, and bypass the swamps of Polesie in the north. Umiastowski R., *Geografia wojenna Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej i ziem ościennych*, Wojskowy Instytut Naukowo-Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1924, p. 122; Piłsudski J., *Rok 1920...*, pp. 67-68.

¹⁹ Tukhachevski M., *Pochód...*, pp. 13-16.

²⁰ Moszczeński J., *Przygotowanie...*, Część 2, pp. 44-46.

²¹ Davies N., *Orzeł...*, p. 143; Wyszczelski L., *Wojna...*, vol. 1, p. 565.

²² Moszczeński J., *Rosyjski plan bitwy nad Wisłą w 1920 r.*, "Bellona", 1925/19, p. 138; Moszczeński J., *Przygotowanie...*, Część 1, p. 281.

²³ Tukhachevski M., *Pochód...*, p. 20.

Map-3 Tukhachevsky's second offensive in Belarus, July 1920, based on: Przybylski A., *Wojna...*

the logistic system of the Soviet Western Front was inefficient. At the same time, the fighting strength of the Soviet South-Western Front amounted to 45,000 bayonets and 13,250 sabres. Therefore, in total the strength of the Red Army on the Polish front amounted to approximately 160,750 bayonets and sabres²⁴.

On 4 July 1920, when the Western Front launched an offensive, it had diverse stocks of daily food supplies for the specific armies lasting for 30 to 60 days. It was also the case of forage for the horses (hay and oats), the stocks of which could last for 1 to 20 days. The stocks of various types of uniforms stored in the warehouses of the Western Front exceeded 100%. However, the specific divisions suffered from serious shortages of uniforms. This was definitely evidence of an inefficient provision system. 49% of the units of the Western Front were equipped with Mosin M1891 rifles; the remaining part was represented by other types of rifles including English ones. The number of machine guns amounted to 106% of the staffing strength. However, the stocks of ammunition at the disposal of the specific units of the Western Front on the first day of the offensive remain unknown. The standard monthly use of rifle ammunition for a Soviet infantry division gives an indication of the scale of the phenomenon, namely 1 million 100 thou. cartridges. On the other hand, the stocks of the artillery ammunition of the Western Front for the 48-inch guns sufficed for 152 days and for the 6-inch guns for 307 days; there is no data for the 3-inch guns²⁵.

Opposite the Soviet Western Front was the Polish North-Eastern Front (formed on 5 July 1920) with a fighting force of 101,443 soldiers. The front included (from the left): the 1st Army – 40,536 soldiers, and the 4th Army – 60,907 soldiers. In total, it consisted of 11 infantry divisions, 2 infantry brigades and 2 cavalry brigades. They represented approximately 65% of the fighting strength of the Polish Army²⁶. Undoubtedly, a linear grouping of the division on the frontline was a big mistake. However, it resulted from the guidelines of the Supreme Headquarters of the Polish Army of 21 March 1920 on filling the positions along the strongly fortified line of resistance. It was classical positional defence. Attempts at forming an operational reserve of the fort failed; the same held true for replacing the casualties in the specific divisions after repelling Tukhachevsky's May offensive. The fighting strength of the specific divisions of the South-Eastern Front did not suffice to effectively follow the guidelines of largely extended positional defence. More so because each of the divisions on the front was in charge of a defence section approximately 40 km wide²⁷.

The defence lines of the North-Eastern Front stretched for 600 km from the river Dźwina, along the river Szczara, through Polesie to the middle Dnieper. On the left was a section of the 1st Army, approximately 90 km long (from the Dźwina to the source of the Berezina); the defence section of the 4th Army covered about 300 km (along the Berezina and the Szczara). The Polesie Group, subordinated to the 4th Army, was positioned in a defence section in Polesie, approximately 200 km long. This long defence section and the linear grouping of the Polish divisions led to a situation where the Soviet units of the Western Front had several times more soldiers, cannons and machine guns in the sections of the major penetration.

Detailed information about the concentration of the Western Front in Belarus was collected by the Polish intelligence (including radio intelligence); the Supreme Headquarters of the Polish Army were regularly informed about the situation. Of great importance was the fact that Polish cryptologists cracked Soviet codes. So, the Supreme Headquarters had regular insight into the Red Army's communication, on the strategic, operational and tactical levels alike²⁸.

In late April 1920, Józef Piłsudski, the Chief Commander of the Polish Army, was aware of the threat in Belarus when he was making a decision about the offensive in Ukraine. The Chief Commander's plan was as audacious as it was risky. He intended to quickly resolve the situation in Ukraine. After destroying the Soviet troops gathered there and capturing Kiev, he planned to move a majority of the divisions to the Belarus section against the Soviet Western Front before it launched an offensive. However, this scenario

²⁴ Moszczeński J., *Rosyjski...*, p. 138.

²⁵ Moszczeński J., *Przygotowanie...*, Część 1, p. 283.

²⁶ Wyszczeński L., *Wojna...*, vol. 1, pp. 565-567.

²⁷ Szeptycki St., *Front...*, pp. 30-31.

²⁸ More on the role of the Polish radio intelligence during the Polish-Soviet War of 1919-1920 in Nowik G., *Zanim złamano „Enigmę”... Polski radiowywiad podczas wojny z bolszewicką Rosją 1918–1920*, Volume 1, Wydawnictwo Rytm, Warsaw 2004; Nowik G., *Zanim złamano „Enigmę”... rozszyfrowano rewolucję. Polski radiowywiad podczas wojny z bolszewicką Rosją 1918–1920*, Volume 2, Wydawnictwo Rytm, Warsaw 2004.

proved unsuccessful and the situation in Ukraine developed against his expectations²⁹.

At the beginning of the offensive, Tukhachevski enjoyed operational freedom which was limited only by the terrain and the ineffective logistic system. According to his plan, the right flank of the Western Front was to reach Lithuania and East Prussia³⁰.

Since the North-Eastern Front (the 1st Army, the 4th Army and the Polesie Group) was largely outnumbered by the units of the Soviet Western Front, in July 1920 the Polish troops could not effectively put a stop to the offensive. The worst situation was in the section of the left-wing 1st Army which was attacked by three Soviet armies. In these circumstances, the Supreme Headquarters of the Polish Army were forced to order retreat on 5 July 1920 (operational order no. 7269/III). Alas, this was a belated decision. The North-Eastern Front was to withdraw to the line of the former German trenches from WWI and to cover Vilnius and Luninets in the north³¹.

From then on, the Chief Commander of the Polish Army attempted to play for time because both on the North-Eastern and the South-Eastern Fronts, the enemy troops were involved in a successful offensive. Therefore, new troops had to be formed and the casualties replenished to stabilize the frontline. On the South-Eastern Front, of great importance was a tactical cavalry formation that would engage in equal combat with the 1st Cavalry Army. The Chief Commander intended to resolve the situation in the south, to regain the operational initiative and to put a stop to the Soviet offensive in the north.

In an operational order no. 7344/III of 10 July, the Supreme Headquarters started preparations for stabilizing the frontline and launching a counter-offensive. The units of the North-Eastern and the South-Eastern Fronts were expected to position themselves on the ultimate retreat line: the vicinity of Vilnius, the former German trenches from WWI, Luninets, Styr, the area of Brody and Ternopil. At the same time, active defence was recommended. Once the above-mentioned line of resistance was seized and the casualties replenished, the front was to proceed with a counter-attack³².

However, the advantage of Tukhachevski's front was too big and his army's thrust too fierce. The space for the manoeuvre was too confined. Consequently, both defence lines were broken by the Soviet divisions. Minsk surrendered on 11 July and Vilnius, of key importance to the plan, on 14 July. The line of the previous German trenches was penetrated on 17 July. Grodno was seized on 19 July and Slonim on 20 July³³.

On 21 July, fighting started to the south of Grodno, on the left bank of the Niemen, to the west of Slonim and the Zelvianka. On 22 July, the counter-attack of the Polish 4th Army near Byaroza against the Soviet 16th Army proved unsuccessful. Under enemy pressure, on that day the 4th Army was pushed out towards Byaroza and Białowieża Forest; on 23 July, the divisions of the 1st Army were dislodged from the area of the Niemen. Attempts at active defence proved futile. On 23 July, the divisions of the 4th Army took positions near Byaroza, Pruzhany and Białowieża Forest and the 1st Army near Białystok and Tykocin. Fighting near Svislach and Sokolka, which took place on 25 July, ended with Poland's failure. By 25 July, the Polesie Group was involved in fierce fighting near the mouth of the Styr and the Pripyat. On that day, the army received an order to retreat to the line between Liubeshiv, Drohiczyn and Byaroza³⁴.

On 25 July, on the South-Eastern Front, the 3rd and 2nd Armies fought at the Styr against the Soviet 12th Army and the units of the 1st Cavalry Army. Near Brody, the 18th Infantry Division together with the 6th Army fought against the 1st Cavalry Army. The remaining units of the 6th Army resisted the Soviet 14th Army and retreated behind the line of the Zbruch and the Seret. At the same time, two cavalry divisions from the Cavalry Operational Group gathered in the vicinity of Hrubyeshov and Zamość under the command of General Jan Sawicki. The 2nd Army, under the command of General Kazimierz Raszewski and consisting

²⁹ Wyszczelski L., *Wojna...*, vol. 1, pp. 569-570, 560-561.

³⁰ Sikorski W., *Nad Wisłą i Wkrą. Studium z polsko-rosyjskiej wojny 1920 roku*, Wydawnictwo Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich, Lwów-Warsaw-Kraków 1928, p. 19-21; Kukiel M., *Pierwsza wytyczna operacji warszawskiej*, "Bellona", 1925/19, p. 113.

³¹ Szeptycki St., *Front...*, pp. 56-68.

³² *Operational order of the Supreme Headquarters of the Polish Army of 10 July 1920, no. 7344/III, Principal Aides-de-Camp of the Commander-in-Chief*, the Józef Piłsudski Institute of America in New York (further referred to as the AGNW, AIJP) inscription 701/2/10.

³³ Szeptycki St., *Front...*, pp. 77-108.

³⁴ Sikorski W., *Nad Wisłą...*, pp. 19-21, 22-28.

of the 1st Legions Infantry Division, the 6th Infantry Division, the 4th Cavalry Brigade and the Cavalry Operational Group, was to be deployed against the Soviet 1st Cavalry Army³⁵.

A breakthrough in Polish operational planning happened when General Tadeusz Rozwadowski was appointed Chief of the General Staff of the Polish Army, officially on 26 July and, unofficially, several days earlier³⁶. He replaced General Stanisław Haller who resigned. General Rozwadowski was an experienced, talented and conscientious staff officer and an ideal candidate for this key position in such a critical moment. He was absolutely loyal to Józef Piłsudski, the Chief Commander of the Polish Army. During typically animated meetings with his superior, Haller suggested operational variants, key decisions were made and the subsequent actions planned. He followed suit by preparing the assumptions for operational orders. Consequently, the communication between the Chief of the General Staff and the Chief Commander of the Polish Army was smooth and efficient until the end of warfare with Soviet Russia. Józef Piłsudski appreciated the attitude of his major collaborator. A case in point was Piłsudski's opinion on General Rozwadowski, expressed in March 1921:

"General! In a moment so difficult for our Mother Country and our Army, I have appointed you as Chief of Staff, my direct and major aide in commanding the troops. At that time, many courageous and seasoned officers started to lose hope for survival, and a huge part of the nation, horrified by the quick developments, was uncertain and distrustful of the Army and own power. General, I reminisce fondly about your responsible work at that time, work full of energy and full of unshakable faith in the ultimate victory. I have never heard a staff member under your command to express any doubts or weakness of spirit. In small and important issues, the staff managed by you continuously strived to support soldiers growing weak in fighting and to take advantage of any circumstances to steer the army to a path of the tradition of the former regular successes and glorious victories. Your skills and agile mind helped you to find the solution in the direst of circumstances and to enhance the situation (...)"³⁷

General Rozwadowski had an adviser, General Maxime Weygand from the French Military Mission with which he arrived on 25 July in Warsaw. Both generals would meet on a daily basis in the building of the Ministry of Military Affairs in Warsaw where their offices were located. They would analyse the situation on the front and the possible operational solutions. General Weygand, as a French staff officer would do, wrote down his remarks after each meeting. General Rozwadowski would oftentimes not agree with General Weygand's views; the latter thought and planned as they did on the western front of WWI. However, a fresh look from the outside was of value to General Rozwadowski and both soldiers spoke highly about their cooperation³⁸.

In late July 1920, the units of the North-Eastern Front retreated in chaos. Due to the numerous failures, the casualties, poor supplies and constant retreats, the morale in most of the units was very low. Therefore, the main task of General Rozwadowski after he assumed the position of Chief of the General Staff of the Polish Army was to stabilize retreat, withdraw the troops to favourable positions and launch a counter-attack.

On 27 July, General Rozwadowski (already appointed Chief of the General Staff of the Polish Army) approved of the first operational order of the Chief Staff of the Polish Army no. 7945/III. It contained an operational intent of stabilizing the front along the Bug. One of the most important changes in the zone of operation of the North-Eastern Front was abandoning the concept of line defence. The specific armies of the front were to be gathered in the three major directions: the 1st Army – the area of Białystok between Grodno

³⁵ Kukiel M., *Pierwsza...*, p. 114.

³⁶ *Materiały do historii wojny 1918-1920 r., Bitwa warszawska*, Volume 1: *Bitwa nad Bugiem 27.VII – 7.VIII 1920*, Part 1, Wojskowe Biuro Historyczne, Warsaw 1935, p. 5.

³⁷ *Releasing General Tadeusz Rozwadowski from the position of the Chief of General Staff of the Polish Army because of elimination of the position, words of thank to General Rozwadowski, Commander-in-chief of the Polish Army, as he was promoted to general of arms and appointment to the Army Inspector and member of the Close War Council, Warsaw, 1 March 1921*, Journal no. 6923, *Files of General Tadeusz Rozwadowski, Chief of the General Staff of the Polish Army, the Józef Piłsudski Institute of America in New York* (ASSGWP, AIJP), inscription 701/3/3.

³⁸ *Materiały...*, Volume 1, Part 1, pp. 9-16; Patelski M., *General broni Tadeusz Jordan Rozwadowski żołnierz i dyplomata*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Rytm, Warsaw 2002, pp. 202-210.

Map-4 The Battle of the Bug, location of the frontline as of 7 August 1920, based on: Przybylski A., *Wojna...*

and Warsaw, selected units of the 4th Army – the vicinity of Bielsk towards Warsaw and the remaining part of the 4th Army together with the Polesie Group – the vicinity of Brest. The left (northern) flank of the front was to be covered by Lieutenant colonel Kopa's Group. The North-Eastern front was tasked with stopping the Soviet Western Front by 5 August along the line between Grajewo, the Narew and Brest. At the same time, in the vicinity of Brest, an operational reserve was to be formed, consisting of one division and an infantry brigade. The reserve was to be employed to launch a counter-attack. The South-Eastern Front was tasked with defending the area between Kovel and Volodymyr-Volynskyi³⁹.

Of key importance to the above plan of the Supreme Headquarters of the Polish Army was defeating the 1st Cavalry Army along the section of the South-Eastern Front, followed by moving the units to the

³⁹ Operational Order of the Supreme Headquarters of the Polish Army from 27 July 1920, no. 7945/III, [in:] *Materjały...*, Volume 1, Part 2: Documents, pp. 89-90; *Materjały...*, Volume 1, Part 1, pp. 6-7.

area between Brest and Kovel. Meanwhile, the units of the North-Eastern Front had to maintain the line of resistance between Grajewo, the Narew and Brest (including its suburbs). In order to launch a counter-attack from the bridge-head of Brest to the flank and the rear of the Soviet Western Front, General Rozwadowski planned to deploy the reserve, namely the 11th Infantry Division and the 7th Reserve Infantry Division, the 9th and 14th Wielkopolska Infantry Divisions from the Polesie Group and a division from the 4th Army. Therefore, the attack group in the vicinity of Brest was to amount to 4.5 infantry divisions. It was also assumed that from the South-Eastern Front, 2-3 infantry divisions from the 2nd Army would be transported. Therefore, the group could even have had 7.5 divisions. A counter-attack launched with these significant troops while the casualties and ammunition stocks of the fighting divisions were being replenished, must have brought about results. When the order was given, the situation on the front indicated that the assumptions were realistic. In order to put the plan forward, the divisions and operation groups of the North-Eastern Front had to retreat in an organised fashion behind the line of Brest-Osowiec-Grajewo. In case of interruption of this line of defence, the front was to retreat behind the line between the Bug and Ostrołęka. Brest and Brest Fortress together with the bridge-head were the key points of resistance⁴⁰.

Over the next few days, the developments on the North-Eastern Front were unfavourable to the Polish troops. On 29 July, to the north of Brest, the Polish 4th Army surrendered to the overwhelming Soviet 16th Army whose units crossed the Bug. The operations of the Polish 1st Army on the left flank of the front were also unsuccessful. The divisions of the Red Army attacked Lomza, seized the area between Grajewo and Osowiec, and the Polish troops were pushed out from the line of the Orlanka river. Appointing General Józef Haller commander of the South-Eastern Front on 29 July (upon General Rozwadowski's recommendation) was undoubtedly a good move. The change made command more effective from an operational point of view. In these circumstances, on 30 July, General Rozwadowski issued a new order (no. 8068/III) for the North-Eastern Front, according to which a counter-attack was still possible. The line between Grajewo–Osowiec–the Narew–the Orlanka–Brest–Stokhid had to be maintained at all costs. Defeating the 1st Cavalry Army in the area of Dubno and Brody, coupled with moving the troops to launch an offensive, remained the prerequisite for a counter-attack. General Rozwadowski re-organised and reinforced General Wroczyński's Group tasked with ensuring stability on the left flank of the front. The 14th Wielkopolska Infantry Division and a part of the 27th Infantry Brigade were tasked with retaking the line of the Orlanka river. The 3rd Army's responsibility was to maintain the area of Kovel⁴¹.

On 30 July, the Supreme Headquarters of the Polish Army issued an order for the 4th Army to stop the retreat of the 15th and 17th Infantry Division, to counter-attack and seize the line between the Leśna and Nurzec rivers. General Sikorski was to add support the fighting to the north-east of Brest with an infantry division from the Polesie Group and thus underpin the operation of the 14th Wielkopolska Infantry Division. When the order was given, the specific units of the North-Eastern Front were in the course of an uncoordinated retreat to the line of the river Bug. Since the Polesie Group retreated too late, there was a gap in the frontline between the Group's gathering and Brest. The enemy units entered the gap from the north. This hindered the 16th Infantry Division's and the 21st Mountain Infantry Division's retreat to the suburbs of Brest. The 14th Wielkopolska Infantry Division was breaking through from the direction of Zhabinka to the Bug. General Jung's Group retreated to the line of the Bug in the section between Mielnik and Siemiatycze. The units of the 1st Army, gathered with their front to the east, north and west, fought in the section between Bransk–Suraż–Tykocin–Lomza–Nowogród⁴².

On 31 July, the above-mentioned formation of the North-Eastern Front went into the battle of the Bug. The operational situation was disadvantageous to the Polish troops. The 4th Army was pushed out behind the Bug and the units of its left flank were enveloped near Siemiatycze. To the right, the Polesie Group

⁴⁰ Sikorski W., *Nad Wisłą...*, pp. 19-21; Kukiel M., *Pierwsza...*, pp. 114-115; *Materiały...*, Volume 1, Part 1, pp. 6-7; Rostworowski St., *The Battle of Brest (29 July – 1 August 1920)*, "Bellona" 1920/9, pp. 674-679.

⁴¹ *Operational Order of the Supreme Headquarters of the Polish Army from 30 July 1920*, no. 8068/III, [in:] *Materiały...*, Volume 1, Part 2: Documents, pp. 217-218.

⁴² *Operational Order of the Supreme Headquarters of the Polish Army of 31 July 1920*, no. 8112/III, [in:] *Materiały...*, Volume 1, Part 2: Documents, p. 264; Kukiel M., *Pierwsza...*, p. 117; Sikorski W., *Nad Wisłą...*, pp. 19-21.

reached Brest where it was repelling the Soviet 16th Army with difficulty. Near Tykocin and Brańsk, the 1st Army was repelled from its positions. On 1 August, General Haller tried to launch a counter-attack but the enemy's advantage was too big. All the reserves were deployed to the endangered sections while General Haller issued an order to defend the positions. On the evening of 1 August, five divisions of the 16th Army attacked Brest and two subsequent divisions crossed the Bug near Mielnik and repelled General Jung's Group from its position⁴³.

Before the evening of 1 August, General Rozwadowski informed Colonel Zagórski, Chief of Staff of the North-Eastern Front, about the intention to stabilize the front along the Narew (the shortest route to the Bug), along the Bug to the south of Brest. He planned a counter-attack from the suburbs of Brest towards the north to the flank and the rear of the enemy. At the same time, the left flank of the front was to attack to the north and the north-east to retake the line between Osowiec and Grajewo. By means of these two attacks, he intended to gain time to move the 2nd Army from the south towards Brest and then to launch a decisive counter-attack⁴⁴.

On the night of 2 August 1920, the city of Brest was seized by the divisions of the 16th Army; only Brest Fortress was kept by the Polish troops. However, on 2 August the position of the Polish soldiers on the Bug further deteriorated. The Soviet divisions, located between Pratulin and Drahichyn, crossed the Bug in an attack on Biała and Terespol. As the tactical situation worsened, the Polish crew left the fortress in Brest⁴⁵. Since the Soviet divisions of the 16th Army had already broken through to the western bank of the Bug, in order to stop their progress, on 2 August General Haller issued order no. 2721/III for the 14th Wielkopolska Infantry Division and a part of the Polesie Group to launch a counter-attack from Biała to Janów Podlaski. Meanwhile, the 15th Wielkopolska Infantry Division was expected to attack Mielnik⁴⁶. In response to this dangerous situation, on the evening of 2 August, General Rozwadowski gave an operational order no. 8177/III to maintain the line of the Bug from Brest to the mouth of the Nurzec and the railway between Małkinia and Ostrów. He was going to buy some time to bring reserves from the South-Eastern Front to the area of Siedlce and to deploy them in the counter-attack⁴⁷.

On the night of 3 August, the Headquarters of the North-Eastern Front instructed the commander of the Polesie Group to follow order no. 2721/III of 2 August and carry out a counter-attack from Biała to Janów Podlaski. The counter-attack of the 14th Wielkopolska Infantry Division and the Polesie Group from Biała to Janów took the units of the Soviet 16th Army completely by surprise and the attack was continued. To the left of the Polesie Group, units of the 4th Army were preparing for a counter-attack. However, the situation in the section of the 1st Army was serious. The divisions of the Red Army enveloped the left flank of the 1st Army and proceeded to the rear. Consequently, the 1st Army made an attempt to retreat to the line of the Bug. This plan was accepted by the commander of the North-Eastern Front who ordered the 1st Army to extend its right flank to the Bug and to support defence with the left flank between the Bug and the Narew⁴⁸. On 3 August, following his earlier plan General Rozwadowski ordered transport of the 18th Infantry Division from the South-Eastern Front to the area of Łuków. However, the transport never materialised⁴⁹.

On 4 August, the battle of the Bug continued. The attack of the 14th Wielkopolska Infantry Division and the Polesie Group on Pratulin and Janów were successfully continued. The Soviet units suffered serious casualties while the 14th Wielkopolska Infantry Division seized Janów. To the south of Brest, the situation

⁴³ Kukiel M., *Pierwsza...*, pp. 118-120; Rostworowski St., *Bitwa...*, p. 678.

⁴⁴ *Telegraph conversation between General Tadeusz Rozwadowski, Chief of General Staff of the Polish Army and Colonel Maria Zagórski – Chief of Staff of the West-Northern Front, 1 August 1920*, [in:] *Materjały...*, Volume 1, Part 2: Documents, pp. 310-313.

⁴⁵ Rostworowski St., *Bitwa...*, pp. 678-679.

⁴⁶ *Operational order of the commander of the North-Eastern Front of 2 August 1920, no. 2721/III*, [in:] *Materjały...*, Volume 1, Part 2: Documents, pp. 378-379.

⁴⁷ Kukiel M., *Pierwsza...*, p. 122.

⁴⁸ *Order of the Headquarters of the North-Eastern Front of 3 August 1920, no. 2808/III*, [in:] *Materjały...*, Volume 1, Part 2: Documents, pp. 427-428; *Order of the Headquarters of the North-Eastern Front of 3 August 1920, no. 2811/III*, [in:] *Materjały...*, Volume 1, Part 2: Documents, pp. 428-429; Kukiel M., *Pierwsza...*, p. 122.

⁴⁹ The date of the departure of the 18th Infantry Division to Siedlce from 3 August was initially delayed till 4 August. Next, in an order of 6 August, the transport area was changed to Modlin. *Operational Order of the Supreme Headquarters of the Polish Army of 3 August 1920, no. 8261/III*, [in:] *Materjały...*, Volume 1, Part 2: Documents, pp. 419-420.

was critical to the Polish troops. The Soviet units crossed the Bug to its western bank, seized Terespol and successfully continued an attack on Sokołów.

On 5 August, General Sikorski, the commander of the Polesie Group, subordinated the 14th Wielkopolska Infantry Division, successfully continued the attack and pushed out the Soviet 16th Army behind the line of the river Bug in the section from Terespol via Janów to Drahichyn. In this fighting, the 14th Wielkopolska Infantry Division inflicted so many casualties to the 16th Army that it lost its fighting capacity for a few days. To the left of the Polesie Group, General Jung's Group did not withstand the attack of the Soviet divisions and was pushed towards Sokołów. On 5 August, near Małkinia, the units of the Polish 1st Army were also engaged in fierce fighting and consequently put a stop to the offensive launched by the units of the Western Front between 29 July and 8 August⁵⁰.

On 6 August, General Haller, the commander of the North-Eastern Front, ordered the 4th Army to gather the 14th Wielkopolska Infantry Division near Łosice and Sarnaki and to launch a counter-attack along the river Bug to the north-west. Since the 14th Wielkopolska Infantry Division was allocated a risky task, its commander General Daniel Konarzewski received personal guidelines from General Józef Haller⁵¹. General Jung's Group, the 1st Army and General Roja's Group were also to make a counter-attack.

On 2-4 August 1920, on the section of the South-Eastern Front, the 2nd Army and the 18th Infantry Division together with the Cavalry Group defeated the 1st Cavalry Army in the battle of Brody. According to the plan of the Supreme Command of the Polish Army, the 18th Infantry Division was to be transported to the vicinity of Brest and to support the fighting near the Bug. Both General Rozwadowski and General Weygand wanted to win the battle of the Bug and stop the armies of the Soviet Western Front along the line of the Omulew, Ostrołęka and the Bug. Their intention was to simultaneously gather the reserves on the northern flank, proceed with a counter-attack and stop the advancement of the Soviet armies between the border with Prussia and the Narew⁵².

In early August 1920, when the divisions of the Red Army gained tactical advantage near the Bug, the Supreme Command of the Polish Army concluded rightly that continued resistance along the river Bug was extremely dangerous. Hour after hour, the specific Polish divisions lost soldiers (killed, wounded and missing) in fierce fighting. Due to the regular contact with the Soviet units, the Polish divisions could not replenish the casualties while their fighting potential diminished every day. This was aggravated by fatigue due to a lengthy retreat and intense fighting⁵³. In these circumstances, the only reasonable solution was re-grouping and retreating strategically to the line of the Narew and the Wisła and organising another line of defence based on the fortresses in Modlin and Warsaw.

6 Conclusions

The offensive of the Polish Army in Ukraine in the spring of 1920 was an attempt at taking the strategic and operational initiative during the Polish-Soviet War which had progressed to the advantage of the Polish troops. According to Józef Piłsudski, the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army, from the operational point of view, the offensive of the Polish troops in Ukraine was to result in enveloping and destroying the Soviet 12th and 14th Armies from the South-Eastern Front. However, this goal was not accomplished and both Soviet armies retreated to the eastern bank of the Dnieper thus avoiding destruction. When the Polish divisions seized Kiev without fighting on 7 May 1920, it was an apparent and interim success.

On 14 May 1920, the first offensive of the Soviet Western Front was launched in Belarus with the operational goal of stopping the local actions on the part of the Polish troops (the Polesie Group and the 4th Army) and identifying the fighting value of the Polish defence system in that section of the front. The

⁵⁰ Kukiel M., *Pierwsza...*, pp. 121-123.

⁵¹ *Operational Order of the commander of the North-East Front from 5 August 1920, no. 3012/III, [in:] Materjały...*, Volume 1, Part 2: Documents, pp. 563-564; *Operational order of the commander of the North-Eastern Front from 5 August 1920, no. 3013/III, [in:] Materjały...*, Volume 1, Part 2: Documents, pp. 464-565.

⁵² Kukiel M., *Pierwsza...*, pp. 123-125; Sikorski W., *Nad Wisłą...*, pp. 22-30; Davies N., *Orzeł...*, pp. 187-188.

⁵³ *Ibid.*; p. 129.

strategic goal was to divert attention from the South-Eastern Front in Ukraine. The offensive of the Western Front was to engage the Polish divisions in fighting to prevent deployment thereof to Ukraine. Finally, Tukhachevsky's offensive was an act of buying time as the South-Eastern Front was preparing for a counter-offensive which took place on 26 May 1920. The main breaking force was represented by the 1st Cavalry Army which broke through the front. As a result, the Polish divisions taking part in the operation were forced to retreat and move to their initial positions. Due to the operational planning mistakes made in the spring of 1920 by the Supreme Commander of the Polish Army, the Polish troops lost not only the operational initiative in Ukraine but also the strategic initiative on the entire front of the war.

On 4 July 1920, the second offensive of the Western Front was launched from the Avuta and the Berezina, prepared for many months under the command of Mikhail Tukhachevsky. Its strategic goal was a military victory over Poland, seizing the Polish territory and enforcing the communist regime. Operational aims were employed to accomplish the goal. The first operation consisted in penetrating the defence of the North-Eastern Front and pushing the defeated divisions towards the west. In the main attack directions, the advantage of Tukhachevsky's front was so big that after several days, the Polish operational formations of the North-Eastern Front were forced to retreat. Attempts at stopping the pressure of the Western Front on the line of the previous German trenches and the defence of Vilnius, Grodno and Minsk, proved futile and the retreat of the Polish divisions continued. In late July and early August 1920, the Superior Command of the Polish Army tried to stabilize the front along the Bug with the main point of resistance in Brest (the city and the fortress). A few day's long defensive battle proved unsuccessful as were the Polish troops' attempts at stopping the armies of the Western Front; Brest was seized by the Soviet divisions. In this situation, the Superior Command of the Polish Army decided to retreat to the line of the Wisła where the decisive battle was to take place.

Undoubtedly, the second offensive of Tukhachevsky in early July 1920 led to the Soviet Western Front re-taking the strategic as well as operational initiative. In the spring and summer of 1920, many factors contributed to the failures of the Polish Army. First and foremost, it was errors in strategic and operational planning committed by Józef Piłsudski, the Supreme Commander of the Polish Army. It was also organisational negligence on the part of the Headquarters of the Polish Army and disregarding the enemy's mobilisation and fighting capabilities⁵⁴. Tukhachevsky's second offensive was a battle in the foreground of Warsaw, fought in mid-August 1920, which changed the outcome of the Polish-Soviet War.

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⁵⁴ The organisational negligence on the part of the Supreme Command of the Polish Army included lack of an efficient replenishment system (topped with very brief training of the recruits), failure to organise operational reserves, demobilisation of experienced privates and NCOs and lack of field service regulations. Kukiel M., *Z doświadczeń kampanji r. 1920 na Ukrainie i w Małopolsce*, part 1, "Bellona" 10/1920, pp. 721-728.

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