Research Article

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Redundant but fashionable. Hussars in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the Polish-Saxon union

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Abstract:**Keywords:**

In the XVIII century in many European countries light cavalry troops modelled upon the Hungarian hussars began being formed. Similarities included not only the specific uniforms, but also most of all the weaponry and combat usage. Without defence weaponry and equipped with rifles, pairs of pistols and sabres, they performed exploratory tasks along with actions of diversion and menacing the enemy troops. During battles participated in by the main military forces, they covered the flanks and constituted reserve troops, usually engaged into combat in critical situations or during pursuits. In the wars at the end of the XVII century and in the first half of the XVIII the hussar squadrons and companies appeared in the Austrian, French, Russian, Swedish, Danish, Dutch, Spanish and some of the German states' armies. As for the latter, the earliest hussar troops were formed in Bavaria, in 1688; however, the hussars gained the greatest significance in the Prussian army, becoming the only light cavalry formation in the time of the Silesian wars¹. They never became a part of the Saxon and the Commonwealth armies, although it was the Kingdom of Poland that was the first state, at the turn of the XV and XVI centuries, to begin implementing the Hungarian and Serbian models in creating infantry and cavalry troops. However, in Poland in the second half of the XVI this type of cavalry transformed into heavy – armoured troops named “husaria”².

It may be speculated that this similarity of names of two such different types of cavalry was the reason why the state armies of the Commonwealth did not adopt it when in Europe it came into fashion to form cavalry troops following the Hungarian or Serbian hussar models. However, it does not seem very likely, and the reason for the lack of interest in forming hussar troops in the Polish and Lithuanian armies was the fact that they already had good light cavalry troops, namely the units modelled upon Tatar and Moldovan troops. Armed with 2.4 – 3 m long lances, light firearms and sabres, occasionally with archaic bows, without

1 György Nagyrévy von Neppel, *Husaren in der Weltgeschichte*, Wiesbaden 1975; Anton Kersnovskij, *Istorija russoj armii 1700-1881*, Smolensk 2004, p. 60-61; Christopher Duffy, *The Army of Maria Theresa, The Armed Forces of Imperial Austria, 1740-1786*, Vancouver-London 1977, p. 95-99; Brian L. Davies, *The Russo-Turkish War, 1768-1774. Catherine II and the Ottoman Empire*, London [Bloomsbury] 2016, p. 41, 77-79, 85-86, 94-96, 114; Ferenc Tóth, *Nagyar Huszárok Francia földön / Hussard hongrois en France*, HM Hadtörténelmi Intézet és Múzeum 2016, p. 17-110; Claus von Bredow, *Das Husarenbuch. Geschichte der preußischen Husaren von ihrer Entstehung bis auf die Gegenwart*, Köln 1894; Curt Jany, *Armia Fryderyka Wilhelma. Od wstąpienia Fryderyka Wielkiego na tron do wybuchu wojny siedmioletniej*, Oświęcim 2016; Günter Dorn, Joachim Engelmann, *Die Kavallerie-Regimenter Friedrich des Grossen*, Friedberg 1984, p. 115-155; Robert Kisiel, *Strzegom-Dobromierz 1745*, Warszawa 2001, p. 41-42, 60-63

2 Jerzy Cichowski, Andrzej Sulczyński, *Husaria*, Warszawa 1977; Zdzisław Żygulski (junior), *Husaria polska*, Warszawa 2000; Bronisław Gembarzewski, *Husarze: ubiór, porządzenie i uzbrojenie: 1500-1775*, Warszawa 1999.

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armour or camp equipment and with horses of properly selected breeds, they equalled if not surpassed the hussars as far as mobility was concerned. Moreover, other formations similar to light cavalry, due to their relatively light equipment, were the dragoon regiments in the Polish and Lithuanian armies, as well as a part of the more poorly equipped armoured and Petyhorcy units. As for the latter, due to the costs, defence armour ceased to be a mandatory part of the equipment in the XVIII century, mostly for the privates. In consequence, in the Commonwealth the light cavalry that permanently constituted 7% of both armies, in reality accounted for almost 20% of their composition³.

This percentage participation was sanctioned in the 1760s and 1780s, when the Lithuanian army was reinforced with two Uhlan regiments, and a part of the dragoons was transformed into light cavalry. As a result, the Commonwealth with the armies of maximum 17-19 thousand soldiers had approximately 4000 of light cavalry. Its weaknesses included the organization into very small units, practically unsuitable for the realities of the XVIII century's war (with the exception of 2 dragoon regiments), inadequate equipment, poor training, low discipline and lack of combat experience⁴. Despite that, due to their great mobility, the troops were a difficult opponent, which the Swedish, the Russian or the Saxon armies experienced for themselves. As for the latter, it led to a change in the perception of necessity of having light cavalry.

For over 50 years the Saxon army did not have that type of cavalry. In 1680, when a regular Saxon army was formed, that type of military formation was perceived as not quite useful, or even unnecessary in war conditions. Such a perception was not changed by experience gained from participation in wars against the Ottoman and France, when the Saxon army supported the imperial troops that had a lot of light cavalry. In the time of the Great Northern War, the military forces of Augustus II reigning the Commonwealth included units of light Polish and Lithuanian cavalry, constituting a great supplement for the electoral army's potential; a part of those, approx. 1200 people, were financed from the royal treasury, not the state one. The first serious warning indicating the necessity of having light cavalry, was the experience of the civil war in the Commonwealth in 1715 – 1716, when the royal forces were able to defeat the confederate troops in each battle but they were unable to combat mobile Polish and Lithuanian cavalry, which seriously impeded supplying the army provisions, and foremostly prevented bringing the war to a victorious end⁵.

After the civil war in the Commonwealth ended, Augustus II and his military consultants were aware of that state of affairs, but due to the fact that the electoral treasury was empty, they did not form light cavalry within the Saxon army, compensating for its lack with a light cavalry company named the uhlan, financed by royal treasury in the Commonwealth, consisting of 160 soldiers. Those troops, however, were of parade character, and so were their uniforms and equipment. Moreover, they were dissolved at the beginning of the 1730s, at the latest within the first weeks following the death of Augustus II in the winter – spring of 1733. As a result, when launching the military intervention in the fall of 1733 the Saxons did not have cavalry troops that would equal the mobility of the Polish cavalry. Soon it became apparent what a serious shortcoming that actually was, and the Dresden court attempted to rent one or two hussar regiments from emperor Charles VI, however, they were refused. In consequence, the hussars did not become a part of the Saxon

³ Tomasz Ciesielski, *Armia koronna w czasach Augusta III*, Warszawa 2009, p. 203-206, 251-279, 446-448; Tomasz Ciesielski, *Jazda koronna i Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego autoramentu narodowego armii Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów w latach 1717-1776*, in: *Do szarży marsz, marsz.... Studia z dziejów kawalerii*, ed. A. Smoliński, vol. 1, Toruń 2010, p. 23-93; Mariusz Machynia, *Kawaleria litewska w początkowym okresie działań Komisji Wojskowej Rzeczypospolitej Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego, Lata 1765-1766*, in: *Do szarży marsz, marsz.... Studia z dziejów kawalerii*, ed. A. Smoliński, vol. 2, Toruń 2012, p. 23-91; Maciej Trąbski, *Kawaleria autoramentu narodowego armii Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów w epoce stanisławowskiej. Lata 1775-1794*, in: *Do szarży marsz, marsz.... Studia z dziejów kawalerii*, ed. A. Smoliński, vol. 2, Toruń 2012, p. 93-262.

⁴ Janusz Wielhorski, *Szable w dłoń*, Melocheville-Tarnowskie Góry 1991; Michał Bąk, *Reformy wojska Rzeczypospolitej w latach 1775-1776. Część 2: Rok funkcjonowania i upadek nowego systemu władzy wojskowej*, in: *Studia nad staropolską sztuką wojenną*, vol. 3, eds Z. Hundert, K. Żojdź, J.J. Sowa, Oświęcim 2014, p. 143-170; Leopold Ratajczyk, *Przewyciężenie kryzysu militarnego Polski przed reformami Sejmu Czteroletniego*, Warszawa 1975; Leopold Ratajczyk, *Wojsko i obronność Rzeczypospolitej 1788-1792*, Warszawa 1975.

⁵ Oskar Schuster, Friedrich August Francke, *Geschichte der Sächsischen Armee*, Leipzig, 1885, Th. 1, p. 120-123; Alexander Querengässer, *Das kursächsische Militär im Großen Nordischen Krieg 1700-1717*, Paderborn 2019; Tomasz Ciesielski, *Konfederacja tarnogrodzka i obrady Sejmu Niemego – aspekt militarny*, in: *Sejm Niemy. Między mitem a reformą państwa*, ed. M. Zwierzykowski, Warszawa 2019, p. 37-60.

army, as the Saxons were unable to form such troops on their own. They attempted to compensate for the lack of light cavalry by means of obtaining additional reinforcement Russian cavalry troops of the Cossack type and forming two Polish cavalry companies, however, because of poor training and low morale, it did not produce the expected effect.

A solution that was actually effective was only found in 1734, when two regiments of „chevaux legers” were formed. Those were new types of light cavalry formations, whose equipment was modelled after the dragoons, however, thanks to poorer shooting gear, camp equipment reduced to an absolute minimum and special selection of horses, their mobility was far better. In practice, those were light dragoon units that were not inexpensive as far as forming and upkeep were concerned, and they also required suitably well – trained soldiers, which delayed the moment of combat – readiness of the troops. However, those units proved to be highly effective in combating Polish cavalry and confirmed the usefulness of such formations in the eyes of the Saxon commanders. Therefore, it came as no surprise when after the military operations ceased in 1735 that a third chevaux – legere regiment was formed. Moreover, Augustus III – the new ruler of the Commonwealth and Saxony seized the opportunity and took over a dozen of the Polish Tatar units, with the strength of over 1000 soldiers, constituting militia of a Polish aristocrat. Within the royal service, this cavalry was called the Uhlan units and originally it was reformed in 8 units, then it was transformed into a regiment commanded by col. Jakub Błędowski. It proved its great usefulness in peacetime when it carried mail, performed messenger missions, protected royal estates along with important routes and borders. When during the first two Silesian wars the Uhlans showed their great combat ability in reconnaissance and victualling missions, as well as in fighting Austrian and Prussian cavalry, at the beginning of 1740s new Uhlan regiments were formed. In 1745 Augustus III’s army had 8 such units, including one named the Bosnian unit. Following the end of the second Silesian war, five of those units were dissolved, however, three Uhlan units of 400 soldiers each still existed. Additionally, there were three chevaux – legere regiments and the light cavalry at the disposal of the Saxon command that consisted of 3200 soldiers. These units were highly valued, which could be confirmed by their performance of both peacetime and war services. As for the latter, they could pride themselves on a number of victories over the Prussian hussars, along with defeating 2 – 3 dragoon regiments in the battle of Zehren – Lommatzsch in December 1746. Moreover, the chevaux – legere and Uhlan units proved their worth in subsequent campaigns of the Seven Years’ War. No wonder that for as long as the Polish – Lithuanian – Saxon union existed, i.e. until 1763, the Saxons did not feel the urge to possess other types of light cavalry, and the Uhlans made the citizens of the Commonwealth proud, paying homage to the tradition of the Polish cavalry tradition⁶.

The foregoing, however, did not prevent the hussars from becoming a certain fashion among the Polish and Lithuanian aristocracy and nobility, as the latter began to form their personal guards with the hussars. The origins of this phenomenon may be traced back to the XVII century, as especially in the voivodeships located along the border with Upper Hungary there appeared mounted hajdúks both in private and local authorities’ services. Most likely, some of them were equipped in accordance with the hussar style. In the second decade of the XVIII century, the number of hussars in the service of Polish nobility definitely increased, because of the inflowing former Rakoczy insurgents looking for new service posts. However, the hussars became a real “fashion” in the 1740s, not so much due to their war fame, but more for their impressive and ornate uniforms. Less wealthy noblemen were satisfied to have a few, or even just two hussars in their service, as the latter accompanied their principals during journeys, thus adding to one’s splendour. Wealthy noblemen could afford small units consisting of several soldiers, and aristocrats formed entire hussar companies. The hussars could be found in the militia units of the Chodkiewicz, Czartoryski,

⁶ *Das Sächsisch-Polnische Cavalleriecorps im Oesterreichischen Solde von 1756 bis 1763*, „Jahrbücher für die Deutschen Armee und Marine”, 1878, vol. 28, p. 48-59, 129-160, 237-273; Tomasz Ciesielski, *Polscy ułani w służbie Wettynów i Habsburgów w latach 1730-1763*, in: *W służbie obcych monarchów i państw: mechanizmy karier obcokrajowców w armiach oraz administracji państwowej*, ed. T. Ciesielski, Warszawa 2015, p. 179-196; Tomasz Ciesielski, *Österreichisch-polnische Militärkontakte in der Zeit der polnisch-sächsischen Union 1697-1763*, in: *Polnisch-österreichische Kontakte sowie Militärbündnisse 1618-1918*, Wien 2009, p. 141-152.

Poniatowski, Sapieha, Sułkowski and, most of all, the Radziwiłł families⁷. As for the latter, prince Hieronim Florian Radziwiłł was simply fascinated by the hussars. He began forming his first squadron modelled upon the imperial cavalry at the beginning of 1741, and that was the reason why it was frequently referred to as “the Hungarian hussaria”. The unit was supposed to be the personal mounted guard of prince Radziwiłł. According to a note originating from that period, the plan was to recruit even 1000 such cavalry soldiers. However, only 3 squadrons were finally formed, with 300 soldiers at their peak. The first squadron, first referred to as “frei”, then “leibcompany”, initially consisted of 40 soldiers, then it expanded to over 100, including 3 officers, a cornet, a quartermaster, 7 non-commissioned officers, a wachmeister, a drummer, a trumpeter, a saddler, a blacksmith, a coach driver and 89 soldiers. By the spring of 1742, a second squadron had been formed of the so – called white Hungarian hussars, consisting of up to 90 soldiers. In 1744 – 1746 the organizational structure of this unit also included a so – called glide of 30 dark-blue hussars. The equipment for both hussar units was brought from Tylża, so it was most definitely modelled upon the one used by the Prussian hussars. It was the result of prince Hieronim Florian’s fascination with the Prussian military. He not only imported weaponry and uniforms from Prussia for his private army of approximately 2000 soldiers, but also officers and non-commissioned officers to become his command and training personnel. The prince’s fascination may furthermore be confirmed by the form of the third squadron of the black hussars, created by the fall of 1746 and based on the dark – blue hussar unit. What is more, that unit survived the reduction carried out in 1751, when the white hussar unit was dissolved. Since that moment, the strength of the prince’s hussars had been limited to 180 – 200 soldiers, typically stationing in the main residences in Suck and Baima. Following prince Hieronim Florian’s death, his brother, great Lithuanian hetman Michał Kazimierz Radziwiłł inherited the units, leaving their strength and structure practically unchanged. Those units constituted a part of his funeral processions, thus performing their duties for the last time in the service of the creator of the regular Lithuanian army. When the hetman’s son, Karol Stanisław Radziwiłł took over from his father, the hussars served under his command for two years, then fleeing alongside the prince to Moldova in 1764, after having been defeated in battles with the Russians and the supporters of Stanisław Augustus. In the fall of 1765 the units consisting of 160 hussars were taken over by Franciszek Ksawery Branicki and dissolved soon after that, which denoted the end of the strongest hussar formations within the military forces in the Commonwealth’s territory⁸.

The foregoing was not, however, the only contacts of the Commonwealth’s citizens with the hussars in the XVIII century. The 1760s and 1770s were an opportunity for everyone to discover how powerful light cavalry actually was, as the hussar regiments were a part of the Russian corps stationing in Poland and fighting the Bar confederates⁹. Following the year 1772, without a doubt, Maria Theresa’s new subordinates of Galician origin were recruited into the hussar regiments of the imperial army. One of the most interesting examples includes the Polish soldiers service in the hussar regiments of the Prussian army as commanders and officers. Four such hussar regiment commanders should be mentioned here. The shortest – lived career was the one of prince Marcin Lubomirski, who in January 1758 commenced his service for Frederick II, simultaneously deserting from the Crown’s army where he had served as major – general and colonel in an infantry regiment commanded by his father. The Prussian king entrusted him with commanding a red hussar regiment, however, it was dissolved only a year later. Frederick II no longer intended to give Lubomirski the

7 Jędrzej Kitowicz, *Opis obyczajów za panowania Augusta III*, ed. R. Pollak, Wrocław 1951, p. 387-389, 540; Tomasz Ciesielski, *Milicje magnackie i ich potencjał militarny w połowie XVIII wieku. Zarys problematyki*, in: *Wobec króla i Rzeczypospolitej. Magnateria w XVII-XVIII w.*, eds. E. Dubas-Urwanowicz i J. Urwanowicz, Kraków 2012, p. 773-786; Mariusz Machynia, *Czarnobylski garnizon Jana Mikołaja Chodkiewicza 1759-1792*, in: *Militarne tradycje Kędzierzyna Koźła, Śląska i Rzeczypospolitej*, ed. T. Ciesielski, Kędzierzyn-Koźle 2013, p. 152-165

8 Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych, dz. VII, no 236, 291, 355, 374-388, 435-437, 450, 528-550, 611-614; Maria Pasztor, *Milicje magnackie Radziwiłłów: Michała Kazimierza „Rybeńki” i Karola Stanisława „Panie Kochanku” – skład, organizacja, funkcje*, in: *Trudne stulecia. Studia z dziejów XVII i XVIII wieku ofiarowane Profesorowi Jerzemu Michalskiemu w siedemdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin*, eds Ł. Kądzioła, W. Kriegseisen, Z. Zielińskiej, Warszawa 1994, p. 129-151; Valdas Rakutis, *Radivilų milicija XVIII a., „Karo archyvas”*, 2005, XX, p. 101-162; Valdas Rakutis, *Legion Radziwiłłowski czasów Sejmu Czteroletniego*, in: *Radziwiłłowie w służbie Marsa*, eds. M. Nagielski, K. Żojdź, Warszawa 2017, p. 357-367; Bernard Kłyszajko, *Dezercja w wojskach prywatnych Radziwiłłów w XVIII w.*, in: *Spółeczeństwo Staropolskie*, Seria Nowa, t. IV, p. 259-295.

9 Władysław Konopczyński, *Konfederacja barska*, vol. 1-2, Kraków 1936-1938.

command of another unit, and the latter deserted along with several soldiers of the Prussian army and fled to Poland. There he was arrested by Polish soldiers in quite dramatic circumstances, brought to a military tribunal and sentenced to death, which later on was changed to a life – imprisonment sentence. He was held in Hungarian Mukachevo, after his release from prison and return to the Commonwealth during the time of the Bar confederation he returned to performing active military service, not as a hussar, although with equally poor results¹⁰.

The person to undertake service for the Prussian king the earliest, during the reign of Frederic I, was Jan Bronikowski (Oppeln-Bronikowski). In 1725 he ceased his service for the Lithuanian army and joined the expanded Prussian army as a rittmeister. He participated in forming the first regiment of hussars, recruiting people in Poland; moreover, he initiated the practice of the Prussian cavalry acquiring their horses in the Commonwealth and the Danubian Principalities. For over a dozen years, until his retirement in 1747, he commanded the hussar units, since 1740 he had been the chief of the hussar regiment no. 1. He distinguished himself in the battle of Chotusitz in 1742, and three years later in the battle of Hohenfriedberg he commanded one of the reserve cavalry brigades. His service for the Prussian king earned him the title of major – general, the Pour de Merite order and a good retirement pension¹¹.

The person whose career was the longest and the honours the greatest, was Paweł Józef Małachowski. In 1742 he joined the Prussian army as the rittmeister of the Uhlans. For five years he served in the regiment of Georg Christoph von Natzmer, formed in 1741 as an Uhlans unit, based on recruits from the Commonwealth and equipped in the Saxon fashion. In 1742 the unit was reformed to a hussar one, however, the officers along with Małachowski remained there. His companions in arms included outstanding cavalymen of the time: a practitioner Friedrich Wilhelm von Seidlitz and a theoretician Charles Emmanuel de Warnery. In 1746 Małachowski became the commander of the “brown hussars” regiment. Then, since 1753 he was the chief of regiment no. 7. Awarded with the Pour Le Merite order during the Seven Years’ War, he was promoted to major – general in 1758, and to lieutenant – general in 1771. He left the active service in 1770 and died in 1775. He was one of the few Małachowski men serving in the Prussian hussar regiments. Two of his brothers, serving in the hussar regiment no. 3, lost their lives during the second Silesian war. The younger one, Peter, was a rittmeister and died in the battle of Pless in December 1744. The older brother, Hiacynt, since 1741 a colonel and chief of regiment no. 3, died in Brzeg from a wound suffered during a battle with imperial hussars near Strzelce Opolskie. Other hussars were the sons of Paweł: Józef, Waldemar Karol and Ferdynand, however, they did not earn any greater honours or privileges¹².

The careers of Bronikowski or the Małachowski in the Prussian army presented above confirm the fact that the Polish were no strangers to the hussar service. However, in the armies of the Commonwealth there was no urge felt to form hussar units, as the light cavalry of long tradition was considered sufficient. Moreover, in the mid XVIII century, when the old Polish art of war was in deep crisis, the Uhlans formed in the Commonwealth became famous in the wars fought in central Europe.

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¹⁰ Wacław Zarzycki, *Książę Marcin Lubomirski 1738-1811*, Warszawa 1998, p. 56-99.

¹¹ Anton Balthasar König, *Johann von Oppeln-Bronikowski*, in: *Biographisches Lexikon aller Helden und Militairpersonen, welche sich in Preußischen Diensten berühmt gemacht haben*, Bd 1, Berlin 1788, p. 269; Kurt von Priesdorff, *Soldatisches Führertum*, Hamburg 1937, Bd. 1, p. 251-252.

¹² Kurt von Priesdorff, *Soldatisches Führertum*, Hamburg 1937, Bd. 2, p. 465-466.

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