

## Chapter V

### April – July 1919

#### 1 – General Situation

The struggle in the first months of 1919 had been limited on the Polish side to a strictly defensive character. Polish troops repelled attacks on themselves but remained on the defensive, trying merely to retain at any price the possessions that they had.

This state of affairs could not last indefinitely. The length and nature of the struggle in eastern Little Poland showed that what had been taken at the start to be a simple revolt was really a Polish-Ukrainian war. The establishment to the north of the Pripyat' of a Polish-Russian front had to be considered as a prelude to a new war against Soviet Russia.

The methods of operating adopted early on now had to be abandoned as ineffective. To realise the aims of the war – to achieve the liberation and pacification of eastern Little Poland and to throw back the Red troops as far to the east of the borders of the Congress Kingdom as possible – required abandoning the defensive and operations that were uncoordinated and had limited objectives and moving towards decisive offensives.

Yet this desired strategy, so obvious and simple in principle, was made complicated by the muddled state of organisation in the Polish Armed Forces. To achieve the desired goals it was first necessary to create an appropriate war machine: armed forces based on the principles of organisation of contemporary regular armies. Until this time battalions, squadrons and batteries had been grabbed roughly out of the highest organisational level then existing, the regiment, and had been merged equally roughly at the front into tactical groups and sub-groups, to be used for operations of greater or lesser importance. They now had to be assembled and melded in larger units – infantry divisions and cavalry brigades.

The increase in the number of units required demanded a movement away from the system of voluntary engagement adopted initially and towards conscription.

From these two premises, of strategy and organisation, directly linked to each other, followed a principle which was taken up by the Polish High Command from February as the basis for its later rationalised system and which led to two consequences: a defensive attitude on the various fronts towards the current possessions with the forces already engaged, while at the same time creating new forces which were not to be engaged prematurely. The movement over to the offensive would then occur when the available forces generated allowed for decisive action.

There has been plenty of discussion above of this work of organising the troops rationally, which started in February 1919, as well as the means used and the conditions in which it was executed. At the end of March it was advanced enough that the time had arrived that the use of the forces for the offensive operations could be envisaged.

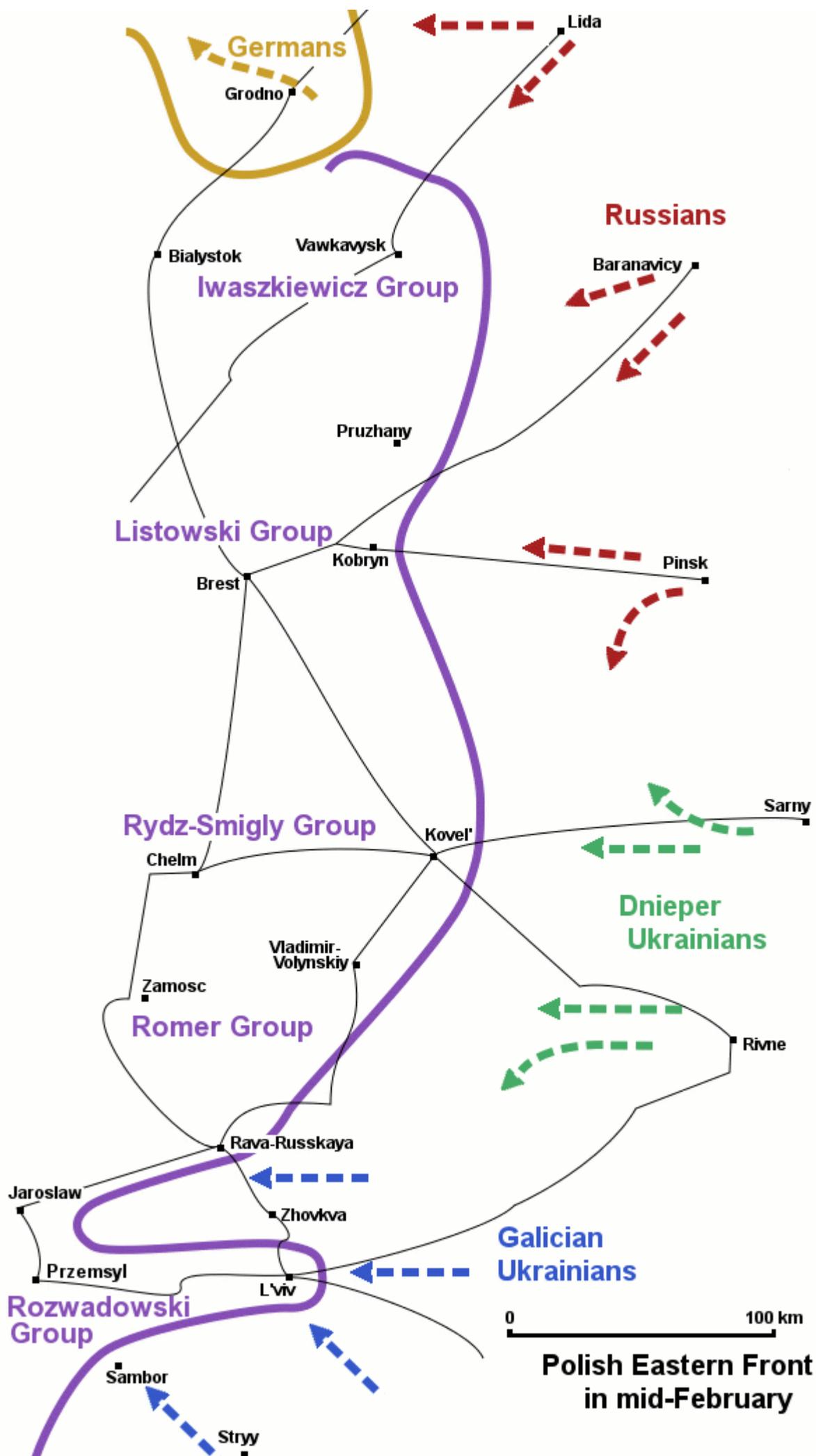
At this time the concentration of the whole country was on eastern Little Poland, where the situation was so grave that L'viv itself and its communications with the interior were constantly and directly threatened by the Ukrainians. Public opinion, as in political circles, had for a long time demanded that the High Command commence decisive action to chase the Ukrainians from the L'viv–Rava Russkaya–Przemyśl triangle, separating them from the L'viv–Sambor rail line and thus definitively clearing the danger.

This pressure grew in the middle of March, at the critical moment when L'viv found itself completely surrounded for the second time, and did not stop even after the crisis had been weathered and the previous situation had been re-established by General Iwaszkiewicz's counter-offensive.

The universal interest in the situation in eastern Little Poland and the domination of the desire for an immediate decisive operation on the Ukrainian front overwhelmed all other matters, leaving the question of the invasion by the Soviet Red Army up to the edge of the country, and of Polish-Russian relations in general, almost completely in the shade.

The Commander-in-Chief and Head of State [Piłsudski] did not follow this line of thought, he actually opposed it, and suggested that the greatest need at the time was to take the initiative on the Russian front without delay. He was the first and the only one in Poland to formulate a political plan of any power which would assure Poland of its place in the general scheme of international relations in eastern Europe.

The understanding of the reality of the Russian situation, of its continuing imperialism independent of the form of the state, imposed on reborn Poland the need to push Russia back as far as possible to the east of its core territory. A refusal by Poland to make its voice heard while the fate and attribution of the lands east of the Bug was decided, lands which had previously belonged to the [Polish] republic, would have been equivalent to renouncing all aspirations for the later development of the country, and would even have menaced its existence.



**Polish Eastern Front  
in mid-February**

The first stage of the realisation of this plan would be the liberation of Vilnius, which has always been the political and cultural heart of the Lithuanian and Belorussian lands. To achieve this goal, not only would Russia have to be contended with the Soviets, and the force of its army currently holding that city, but also the more general difficulties coming from a third factor. It is true that the Allied Powers, despite their political opposition to the Soviets, opposed in principle all expansion of Poland to the east, because they believed in a rapid renaissance of the former Russia and the engagements that they had taken with it during the time of the common war against the Central Powers. They considered Poland's crossing of the Bug as an annexation to the prejudice of the former, and perhaps future, Russia.<sup>1</sup> So what was needed was the creation, by force, of a *fait accompli*, so as to later obtain legal recognition. The eastern borders of Poland needed to be imposed on international councils with the sword. And here the time factor became particularly important. The Vilnius operation needed to take place before the decisions of the Peace Conference in Versailles.

Seen from this carefully calculated angle, which looked past the more obvious immediate issues, the situation in L'viv, while definitely serious, lost a great deal of its urgency. It came down to a question of knowing if it was possible to hold back on operations there, with the intention of a more radical change in Poland's situation.

Here the commander-in-chief recognised that General Iwaszkiewicz's current forces could, if not improve the situation, at least maintain it such as it was before the Ukrainians' offensive. Consequently, the sending to L'viv of the newly available forces was not a sufficiently burning issue to justify the renouncing the Vilnius offensive and the vast political plans that went with it.

Thus the commander-in-chief, for the reasons given above, gave priority at that time to the attack on Vilnius. He allowed a short delay only in the formulation of decisive action in eastern Little Poland, time needed to organise new units, including the entry into the line of the Polish Army organised in France, which was arriving at that time.

## 2 – The Vilnius Offensive

In the same way that the decision to undertake the operation was made by the commander-in-chief, its plan of execution was also his work.

At the time that the plan arrived at its definitive form, the Polish troops on the Russian front were established on the line of the Yasel'da and the Oginski Canal (east of the Shchara), then approached the Baranavičy–Lida rail line and the Ditva to the north of the Nemen. Behind the left wing were the German troops still in the Grodno region. At this time the position of enemy forces, according to the information which the Polish Command had, was:

A group in the Vilnius area; with advanced elements facing west on the line Žasliai–Aukštadvaris–Perjola and weakly linked up with the Lithuanian and German troops in Lithuania<sup>2</sup> and only their detachments on their left wing, in the Marcinkonys area, were partially oriented to face the Polish troops.

Another sizeable group occupied the Lida area, linked by weak detachments near Navahrudak with a third large group in the Baranavičy area.

In Polesia the Russian troops formed a larger group, concentrated in the Luninyets area.

The reserves were grouped at Minsk and Babruysk.

At first glance at the sketch map showing the spread of Russian forces on the front one can see the gap between the forces based on Vilnius and those around Lida, slightly further east. Through this almost defenceless hole passed the principal lines of communication with Vilnius, being three roads and a rail line.

The commander-in-chief based his bold and risky plan of operations relying on the weakness in the enemy's positions. It consisted of a secret and rapid concentration of troops to the west of Lida, consisting of a cavalry and an infantry group, then a direct push north by these troops. The horse group was to track parallel and east of the Lida–Vilnius rail line, avoiding Lida itself, with the aim of taking Vilnius as quickly as possible. The C-in-C counted on the cavalry attacking Vilnius on the third day, and no later than the fourth day of marching. The infantry was to follow using forced marches and was to ensure the occupation of the town which the cavalry was to take. Another strong group, well supplied with artillery, would attack Lida while this was happening, in order to cover the movement on Vilnius and at the same time give the required base for the follow-up of the offensive. So as to prevent the Russian forces south of the Nemen from counter-attacking on Lida, they were to be fixed by simultaneous attacks on Baranavičy and Navahrudak. Finally, given that the Germans still occupied the Grodno area, and their attitude to the Polish operations on Vilnius was not clear, a special group in the Skidel' region would assure the operation was covered to the west.

---

<sup>1</sup> Przybylski here fails to mention that the Allies considered the Bug to be the natural ethnic boundary of the country. Since the entire case for Poland's rebirth stood on the right to self-determination of each people, it followed automatically that the Allies would not support expansion outside these borders, because that would deny to other people the right to *their* self-determination.

He is also deliberately confusing different issues about expansion to the east. The Allies wanted the Vilnius area to go to the newly recreated Lithuania rather than to Russia, and thus Poland's annexation of the area was not considered prejudicial to Russia.

<sup>2</sup> He seems to be implying that the Soviets were co-operating with the Lithuanians and Germans. This is completely incorrect for this period – they were actively fighting each other. It was later on that the Lithuanians and Soviets were to co-operate.

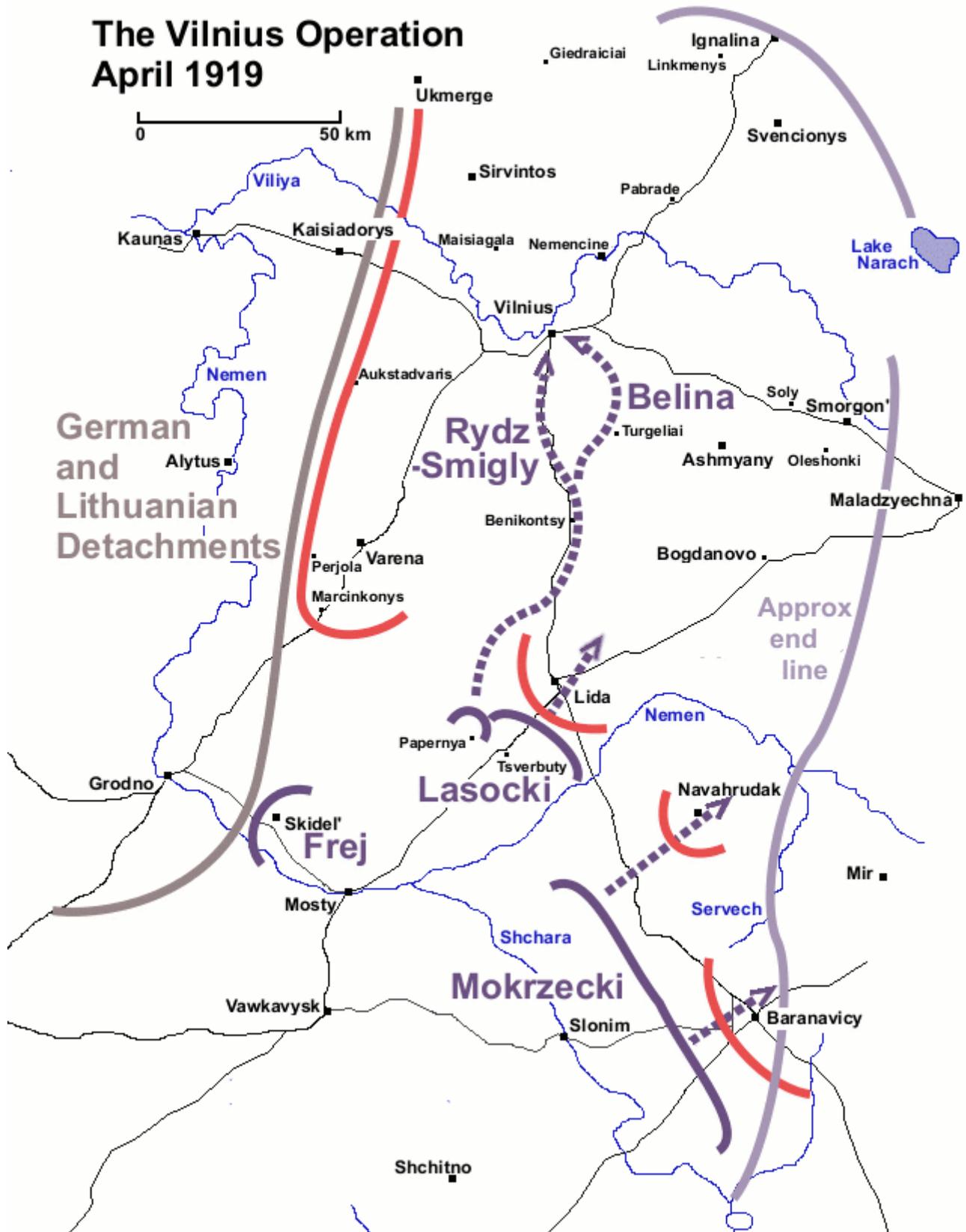
The forces available were:

General Szeptycki's group, reinforced by a portion of General Listowski's Polesia Group;

Units newly formed in the interior – the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Legion Divisions and squadrons from the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Brigade.

The necessary regrouping and concentration of those arriving from the interior was finished by 15 April.

The commander-in-chief personally directed the operation. To this end he arrived in Tsverbuty, in front of Lida, on 15 April.



On 16 April General Lasocki's group, made up of a part of the former Upper Nemen Group and units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Legion Division, attacked Lida. At the same time Colonel Belina Prazmowski began his march on Vilnius at the head of nine cavalry squadrons and a section of horse artillery. He left from the Papernya area, moving round Lida to the west and north. Behind him General Rydz-Smigly set out with three battalions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Legion Division and two artillery batteries.

The occupation of Lida, expected during the first day of action, failed. The enemy's resistance was energetic and was not broken under the next day, when two freshly arrived battalions from the 1<sup>st</sup> Legion Division were thrown in. These had arrived late and had been intended for the march on Vilnius.

From the start numerous practical difficulties were encountered, hindering the movement of the units heading towards Vilnius. The poor state of the roads prevented the supply trains from moving and the units could not count on being fed on time. This applied above all to the fodder for Colonel Belina's horses. The lack of technical means made liaison between units and the commander-in-chief insufficient and too slow.

Nevertheless the movement went forward according to the general plan. When orders did not arrive on time, the local commander used his initiative. Gaps and deficiencies in physical materials were overcome with enthusiasm and the will for victory, which animated the young soldiers marching towards "their old friend, Wilno [i.e. Vilnius]".

By 18 April the cavalry had already assembled in the Turgeliai-Skynimai area, ready to attack the city, more than a day ahead of the infantry, whose forward elements were reaching Benikontsy. Up until then the enemy had made no opposition at any point. The westward facing troops started, it is true, to head to Vilnius, but nothing indicated that the Russian command had learned of the danger which that town faced. The invigorating idea behind the commander-in-chief's plan "to use the greatest treasure in war – surprise – which can smash strength" was being realised in full.

At dawn on 19 April the Polish squadrons arrived at the city, still with the benefit of surprise. In one swoop they took the station and a large section of the town, spreading panic and complete disorder in the garrison. However, little by little the enemy succeeded in holding itself in the north and west of the town, and began to put up a stubborn and co-ordinated defence. Sometimes they even attacked. The cavalry, not very numerous, dispersed throughout the streets of the large town and not used to fighting in such conditions, found itself in a difficult situation. But during the night help arrived in the form of the first infantrymen, transported in a train seized at Vilnius and sent to meet them. Still, it was only on 21 April that the issue was finally decided, with the arrival of General Rydz-Smigly and the rest of the infantry, allowing the Poles to attack decisively those parts of the town still held by Russian troops. During the afternoon of that day the entire town fell to the Poles. The enemy retired in disorder to the north and the north-west, towards Maišialgala.

Simultaneously with the actions against Lida and Vilnius, there were combats to the south of the Nemen for the towns of Navahrudak and Baranavičy. These were led by General Mokrzecki's group, scarcely 9 battalions, 7 squadrons and 3 batteries. The enemy put up serious resistance and Navahrudak was only occupied on 18 April and Baranavičy the 19<sup>th</sup>, after four days of heavy combat.

The fatigue of the troops, above all the Vilnius Group and General Mokrzecki's group did not permit an immediate following up of the offensive. The Mokrzecki Group halted as a result on the line of the old German trenches to the east of Baranavičy, and along the Servech up to the Nemen. The Vilnius Group pushed leading elements to the line Naujoji Vilnia-Bezdonys-Nemenčine-Maišialgala-Rykantai-Seniejei Trakai [basically a ring 10–20 km round the city]. Only General Lasocki's group pushed its cavalry ahead, in order to occupy Bogdanovo and Oleshonki and to fill the hole which existed in the centre of the new front.

The ultimate aim of the commander-in-chief was to move on and seize Maladzyechna, an important point for the Russians, and then launch a cavalry raid on Minsk. But the enemy moved ahead of these projects and established an offensive of his own, aimed at recovering Vilnius.

The Polish attacks had severely rattled the Russians' defensive network. The Vilnius-Lida-Baranavičy line, considered by the Russian command as an advanced defence, had been lost and the movement of Polish troops towards the east threatened Maladzyechna, an important point in the second line of defence that went Daugavpils-Minsk-Homel'. Besides these purely military considerations, the abandonment of the important political centre of Vilnius was a heavy loss.

The Russian command redoubled its efforts to re-establish the situation and especially to recover Vilnius. In the first instance, all available reserves were sent to the threatened sector. Forces were even taken from Polesia and the neighbouring front of Latvia. During the last days of April the Russian forces formed in a semi-circle around Vilnius, so as to act concentrically against it. They concentrated in three regions: the Širvintos area, north-west of Vilnius; the Pabradė area to the north-east; and the Soly-Ashmyany area, to the east of Vilnius.

The commander-in-chief, who was obliged to return from Vilnius to Warsaw on 27 April, gave the task of defending Vilnius from the expected attack to General Rydz-Smigly. He was given the "Vilnius Group" made up of detachments from the 1<sup>st</sup> Legion Division, a brigade of cavalry and some units from General Lasocki's group hastily sent from Lida. It totalled 8 infantry battalions, 8 squadrons and 4 artillery batteries. He was promised that reinforcements from the interior would be sent immediately, and these soon increased the force by two further infantry battalions.

The following few days of combat for Vilnius, against a superior enemy, were a glorious episode for the young Polish army. General Rydz-Smigly predicted the enemy's plans, in an effort to thwart them and to prevent a simultaneous attack of the three groups, so as to fight them separately.

An attack against the enemy troops in the Pabradė area obliged them to hastily retire to around Švenčionys. The enemy forces operating from Ashmyany, including right up to the edges of the city, were contained and thrown back. Finally, General Rydz-Smigly pushed back the remaining Russian forces, including some which had at the last moment fortified themselves in the north-western part of Vilnius, towards Širvintos.

By 1 May all the enemy plans to directly threaten Vilnius were broken. From then on the Polish troops pressed forwards and, by a series of attacks, threw the enemy far from the city. They occupied Maišialgala, Giedraičiai, Pabradė and Smorgon'. During the several days that the Vilnius Group fought for the city there was no serious action on the rest of the front. South of the Nemen, General Mokrzecki still occupied the line of the German trenches and organised his troops defensively, only pushing weak detachments eastwards. General Lasocki, operating in the region to the east of Lida, advanced on 8 May up to the line of the old German trenches, to the east of Bogdanovo and Ashmyany.

The occupation of the German trenches temporarily put an end to the Polish offensive. A change in the general strategic situation and new needs pressing on the commander-in-chief did not allow him to press on towards Minsk. Only General Rydz-Smigly's group, with a series of actions, still progressed a little. By the middle of May had reached the line: Narach Lake–Adučiškis–Ignalina–Linkmenys.

So as to complete this sketch of our first offensive against Russia, it is useful to add in a few words about what was happening during the interval in the Polesia sector. Two attempts made in April and May to move east and seize the railway hub of Luninyets had failed due to the weakness of the troops at General Listowski's disposal. In the end the front line in Polesia was drawn via the Yasel'da and Oginski Canal, and it was only south of the Pripyat' that weak detachments of the Polesia Group moved on, up to the upper reaches of the Styr.

The increase of forces on the front and the extent of the theatre of the Polish-Russian war forced modifications in the organisation of the command. General Listowski remained in control of the Polesia sector, whose left wing extended up to the confluence of the Oginski Canal and the upper Shchara. The sector to the north of Baranavičy formed the Lithuanian-Belorussian Front, under the orders of General Szeptycki and divided into four sub-sectors corresponding to his four groups: General Mokrzecki held the Baranavičy area; General Lasocki was in the region east of Navahrudak; Colonel Zarzycki in the region east of Lida; and General Rydz-Smigly's group was deployed in a vast circular arc to the east, north and partially to the west of Vilnius.

As well, the Lithuanian-Belorussian Front was charged with watching Lithuania and the German troops in its territory. This mission was accomplished in the Vilnius area by General Rydz-Smigly's troops, further south by Colonel Dziewulski's group, spread out in little packets to the west of the Grodno–Vilnius rail line, and finally by the troops of the Grodno Fortress Command.

### **3 – Liberation of eastern Little Poland**

Parallel with the development of the operations on the Russian front, the preparations for an offensive against the Ukrainians continued.

The crucial moment had arrived in this struggle, for two reasons. The first was the general political situation: the Allied Powers, principally England, had adopted such an unfavourable attitude regarding the apportioning of eastern Little Poland that occupation and integration of the territory constituted the best guaranty of Poland's rights to the area. The second factor was strategic: the increasing need at this time to prepare to act militarily against the Germans demanded that the Ukrainians be definitively finished off – with this the Polish forces fighting in Little Poland could then be used for new tasks, including establishing a direct liaison with Romania.

At the same time, the strength which the Polish High Command could call on corresponded perfectly to the needs of this operation.

The long awaited return to Poland of the Polish Army organised in France had finally arrived. The first transports of this army, a total of four complete infantry divisions and elements of two others, had started to arrive after crossing Germany. It was precisely these four full divisions, combined with two other divisions formed in the interval on the Little Poland front, which gave sufficient forces to allow the attack to have a decisive character. This allowed for the secondary missions to be carried out by those units fighting in Little Poland and Volhynia which had not yet been merged into divisions.

However, the High Command's plans faced a serious danger. The Allies, in sending their Polish Army home after such a long delay, had formally subordinated its commander to the Generalissimo of the Allied Armies, and had thereby limited the free disposition of it by the Polish Command. In particular, there was a restriction that this army was not to be used in eastern Little Poland.

Nevertheless, the High Command, in its plan for the offensive made in the first days of April, included the partial participation of the units just arrived from France.

The guiding idea of the plan was a northern outflanking of the Ukrainian troops assembled around L'viv and to its south-west, in order to throw them back over the Dniester. To this effect the bulk of the forces, under the orders of General Haller, made up of two divisions of Chasseurs<sup>1</sup> from France and some units previously occupying the Volhynia front (General Karnicki) were to attack from the Vladimir-Volynskiy–Rava Russkaya area towards the general direction of Krasnoye and Buchach, covered to the east by the line of the Styr. A bit later the forces on the Galician front, under the orders of General Iwaszkiewicz, were to attack from the region of Khyriv–Przemyśl–Sudovaya Vishnya in the general direction of Stry.

During the first days of May, General Josif Haller was given direction of the whole operation. Within the above plan, he positioned his forces and give them the following missions:

The left wing of General Karnicki was tasked with covering the offensive towards the east, by means of a concentric attack starting from the Kovel–Vladimir-Volynskiy area on Luts'k, then Rivne; the right wing would extend up to Sarny.

The centre group of General Odry, of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Chasseur Divisions and the troops of the Volhynian Front, which were then operating in the Rava-Russkaya region, were to attack from Rava-Russkaya towards Brody and Krasnoye, while maintaining cover against Dubno.

Finally, the right wing of General Iwaszkiewicz, made up of the current troops of the Galician Front, which were later to form the basis of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Legion Division and the 4<sup>th</sup> ID, were to concentrically attack Sambor via Khyriv and Mostiska, while making a demonstration from L'viv south, towards the Dniester.

On about 10 May the preparations for the offensive, and corresponding regrouping on the front, were close to being finished and General Haller was able to set 14 May as the start date.

Then on 12 May, almost on the eve of the attack, the Polish High Command was forced to radically change its plans for the operation and to structure its forces differently, with the inevitable consequences.

Under pressure from the English and American governments, and to avoid political complications, it was necessary to refrain from using the Haller divisions in Little Poland. One of these, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chasseur Division, was to be completely withdrawn from the front and await transport to the German Front, which was threatened at that time. Another, the 1<sup>st</sup> Chasseur Division, had to turn to face east and act in Volhynia, between the Galician border and Luts'k, taking the line of the Styr as its objective. This meant that the powerful group that had been ordered to make the flanking movement almost completely ceased to exist, and it was necessary to reconstitute it with other units. General Babianski's group was primarily used to this purpose, being sent from the Kovel' region to Vladimir-Volynskiy. This group, together with Colonel Minkiewicz's, which was stationed in the Rava-Russkaya area, was to assume the mission previously assigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chasseur Division: the attack on the Brody–Krasnoye rail line. As the attack progressed, it was to be joined by some of the troops from L'viv. Other than these changes to the operation, the command structure was modified so that the High Command formally reserved for itself the immediate direction of the whole operation.

This order, approved moreover by the High Command, was only partially executed by General Haller. It was anyway too late to conform completely. General Karnicki was left with General Babianski's group and with an unchanged mission: to attack the line of the Styr. The direction of the 1<sup>st</sup> Chasseur Division was changed to head a little northwards, so as to not cross the Galician border; whereas the line of attack of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chasseur Division was left still crossing Little Poland. Nevertheless, the plan was greatly modified in the sense that the general direction of the left wing was moved towards the north, which removed the possibility of throwing the Ukrainians back southwards.

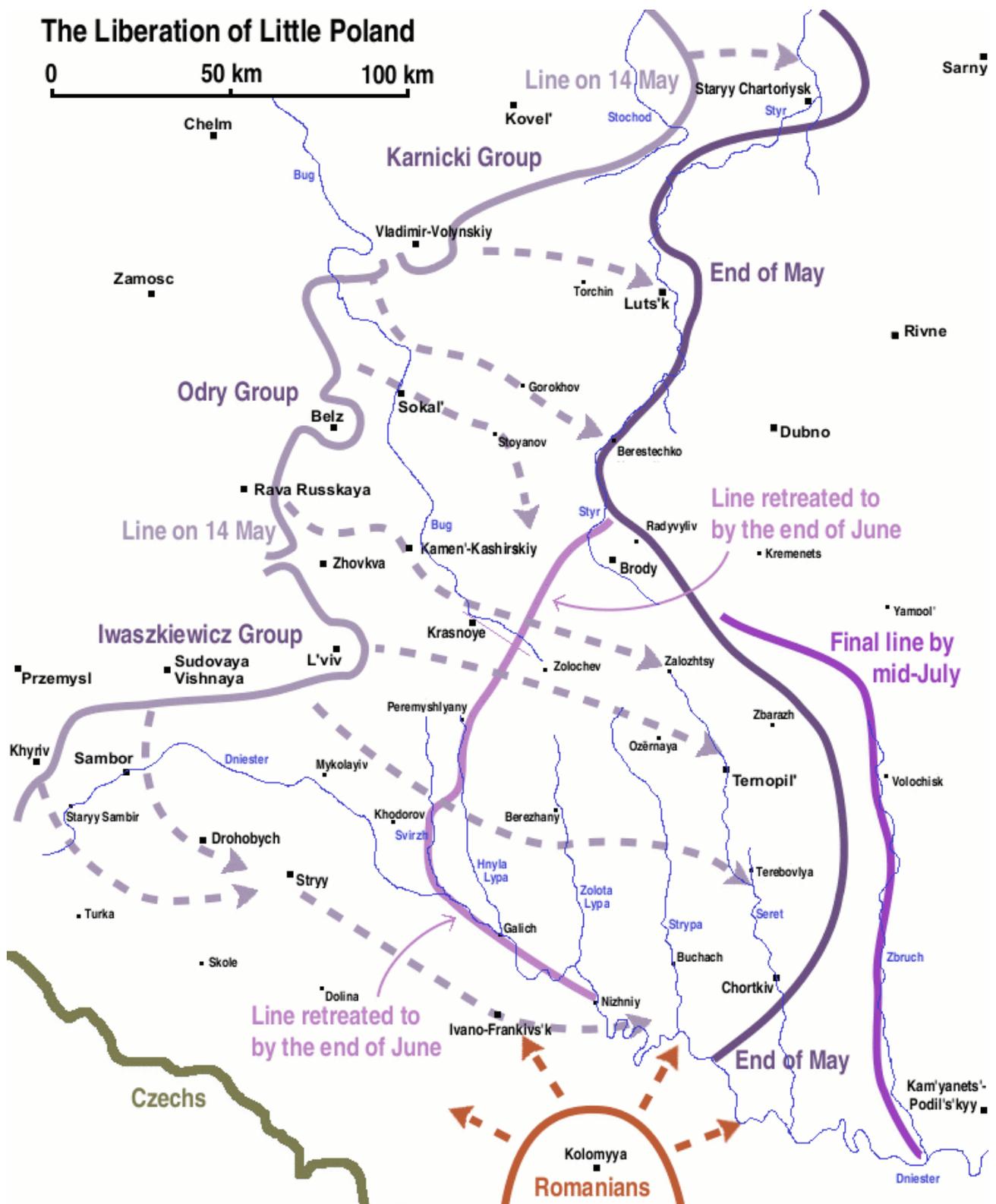
The offensive was launched on 14 May in the northern sector, and on 15 May on General Iwaszkiewicz's front. The combatant forces that attacked in Volhynia and Little Poland reached 50,000 men and 200 canon.

During its first days this attack, almost simultaneous on a front line of 400 kilometres, almost completely broke the resistance of the enemy forces and threw them into disorder and confusion. General Iwaszkiewicz's troops, conducting a rapid march from the west and the L'viv region, had by 20 May reached the line Novyy Yarychev–Stryy–Turka and thus had seized the petrol producing regions, which were important from an economic point of view. At the same time General Odry's group advanced more slowly and had reached the line Gorokhov–Stoyanov–Kamen'-Kashirskiy.

From this point the operations basically took the character of a pursuit. Many columns operated in parallel, pushing without great difficulty in a basically easterly direction, heading for the line Brody–Nizhniy–Kolomyya. The High Command wanted to reach this line as quickly as possible as it feared further opposition from the Allied Powers to the use of the Polish units formed in France. On 27 May, south of the Dniester, Polish troops occupied Galich and Ivano-Frankivs'k and linked up with Romanian troops. These, one infantry and one cavalry division strong, co-operated with the Poles: the next day they occupied Kolomyya and pushed their leading elements towards the Dniester. To the north of that river, the Polish troops arrived at the same time at the line Radyvyliv–Brody–Zolochiv–Peremyshlyany–the Hnyla Lypa: during the four following days they progressed up to the line Radyvyliv–Ozernaya–Berezhany–the Zolota Lypa. During this time the troops in Volhynia occupied up to the line of the Styr, with a huge bridgehead at Luts'k.

---

<sup>1</sup> “Chasseur” being a French term for light infantryman.



The High Command's expectations with respect to the Allied Powers were found to be correct. At the moment of greatest Polish success at the front they intervened again, and even went so far as to threaten Poland that they would halt the transport of munitions and war material. To prevent the issue from getting worse the High Command gave the order to stop the offensive in Little Poland on the line Brody–Zalozhtsy–Ozernaya–the Zolota Lypa, insisting particularly on the need to retain the link already established with Romania. East of this line, activity was to be confined to reconnaissance, and the eventual occupation of Ternopil' as an advanced point. The forces on the front were to be repositioned in such a way that they were concentrated in the regions of Brody, Krasnoye and Zolochov: south of the Dniester only sufficient troops as were necessary to maintain order in the country were to be left.

At the same time the High Command proceeded to take a large number of troops from Little Poland. The first to leave

were the two Haller divisions, which had in fact already started to withdraw while the offensive was still progressing; next were various non-integrated battalions which, after reorganisation in the interior, were to be incorporated into divisions.

There remained at the front line: three divisions in Little Poland – the newly formed 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> and General Jedrzejewski's Group – while the Volhynia Front was to be sent General Babianski's division as well as General Żeligowski's division, recently arrived in the country after crossing Romania. Along with this there was a change in command: Little Poland and Volhynia were confided to General Iwaszkiewicz, as General Haller was called to the German front.

The High Command's instructions were not followed: isolated detachments pushed the front line forward and were not content with simple reconnaissance, permanently occupying places well to the east, such as Skalat, Terebovlya and Chortkiv, which led to a large dispersion of the forces and reduced their capacity for resistance.

Thus when the Ukrainians, after reorganising and putting a part of their forces back into order after their defeat, launched a counter-attack on 8 June in the Skalat–Chortkiv area, the Polish front could not hold. Shaken, it started to retire, unable to hold on any of the defensive lines ordered by the High Command. During the last days of June, the front found itself along the line of the upper reaches of the Styr, upper reaches of the Hnyla Lypa and the lower reaches of the Svirzh, at which time resistance started to slowly increase. Thus, not only was there no question of retiring from Little Poland all the forces envisaged by the High Command, but rather it was necessary to hastily send large forces from the interior, such as the 6<sup>th</sup> Chasseur Division and some hastily raised auxiliary groups.

It was in these conditions that the commander-in-chief arrived at the front to take personal charge of the action. He decided to pass immediately over to the counter-attack, after making the necessary regroupings. Starting on 28 June across the whole front, with the principal effort directed at Berezhany, it had a complete success and the enemy's resistance was broken the next day. Two days later units reached the line Brody–Berezhany–the Zolota Lypa and, on 5 July, they had made it to Podkamen'–Ozernaya–Stryya, at which time they halted until 14 July, without being worried by the enemy. A further movement east began on that day, without meeting any obstacles. The Ukrainians were already in full retreat and on 17 July the Polish troops arrived at the Zbruch. The demoralised remains of the Western Ukrainian People's Army were pushed across the Zbruch and were placed at the disposition of the Dnieper Ukrainian government [Directory], who soon directed them to the Soviet front.

These events of June in Little Poland had no influence on the Volhynia front. Nevertheless, the situation on that front was itself greatly changed, made essential by the radical transformations on the enemy's side. As stated before, our adversary [the Directory Ukraine] had until then fought on two fronts in Volhynia: against Poland to the west and Russia to the east. The struggle against the Soviets was consistently unfavourable to the Ukrainians. In March Kiev and Odessa were occupied by Soviet troops, who then pushed west constantly, forcing back the Ukrainians to the north and south until in the first half of May they had forced them back to the line Sarny–Ostrog–Yampol'. At the end of May then, while the Polish troops were already established on the Styr and at Luts'k, the Soviet troops were occupying Rivne, Dubno and Kremenets, and closing in to the south on the Zbruch. From this time the whole army of the Dnieper Ukraine found itself in a very limited territory, caught between the Polish troops and West Ukraine (Galicia) on one side and the Soviet troops on the other. A new push by the Soviet troops from the west and south threw the remains of the Ukrainian Army into the Kam'yanets'-Podil'skyy area. It was there, in the second half of July, that they linked up with the Galician Ukrainian detachments, which were retiring from Little Poland across the Zbruch. Finally, with a last effort, accompanied by the first attempts at a friendly understanding with the Polish command, they faced the Red Army one more time and took the offensive.

In this way the "third" adversary<sup>1</sup> was removed, after so many months of separating us in the territories of Soviet Russia south of the Pripyat'. Soon, by the start of June, the Polish troops of the Volhynia Front found themselves in immediate contact with the Red Army. This new adversary immediately showed aggressive tendencies and attacked the Babianski Group vigorously at Staraya Rafalivka and Staryy Chartoriysk, as well as the troops in Radyvyliv on the Galician border. Initial success in General Babianski's sector was rapidly crushed, while General Iwaszkiewicz replied on 10 June to the pressure on Radyvyliv, which was in his command as part of the Galician Front, with a rapid strike on Rivne. From then on a relative calm reigned over the whole Volhynian Front: it would last quite a while.

In the second half of July, the general situation on the Volhynian and Galician fronts was: from the Pripyat' the line followed the Styr and then, via Brody and Zalozhtsy, went along the Zbruch. The northern part faced the Russians; in the southern area, approximately from Podvolochisk, the Polish troops were in contact with the troops of the Dnieper Ukraine, who observed a neutral attitude towards us and concentrated all their attention on the fight against the Soviets.

The combat for eastern Little Poland, which lasted three months, was finally over and the country, which had remained a battleground for so long, found itself in Polish hands. Its future would be decided by way of international law. On 25 June, during the struggle, the Allied Powers formally authorised the Polish government to occupy former Galicia up to the Zbruch, and to introduce a civil administration in its eastern portion. A later decision of the Supreme Council, dated 21 November 1919, gave Poland a provisional mandate of 25 years to administer the region called eastern Galicia. This

---

<sup>1</sup> [Note in the original]An allusion to a Polish proverb: "When two fight – a third profits".

decision was subject to a protest by the Polish government who, on the night of 10 December 1919, stated to the president of the Peace Council that it considered the area of eastern Galicia in question as an integral part of Poland. By its vote of 22 December, the Supreme Council confirmed its decision of 21 November. Thus it was only later that eastern Little Poland was definitively reunited with the motherland.

#### **4. – Guarding against Germany**

A general state of tension was created at the start of May when the projected peace treaty prepared by the Allied Powers was put to Germany in the form of an ultimatum. People wondered if this was not to be the starting point for more international complications.

In Poland the fears raised by this, which went as far as envisaging the possibility of armed conflict, promptly found justification in the news that the Germans were assembling large forces in Silesia, while at the same time they hesitated to evacuate the Suwałki region and still maintained large forces in the Baltic States.

The threat of a war with a such a powerful new enemy, while Poland already found itself in difficult conditions, left the Polish High Command facing a heavy and complicated task. Thus during May, while there was still time, the High Command started work preparing to face this eventuality and, above all, it preoccupied itself with creating and assembling the necessary forces.

The troops available at that time in the interior to the High Command were tiny and in need of reorganisation. Indeed the bulk of Polish forces were on the eastern front, principally in eastern Little Poland. It was vitally important to withdraw, as early as possible, the maximum number of troops from the eastern front and to form, also as quickly as possible, the new divisions provided for in the general organisational plan. Other than General Haller's Polish Army, which was arriving from France at this time, there was the need to build up a pool of forces.

The need to pull back some of the forces from the eastern front could not but exercise an influence on the conduct of operations on that front. On the Russian front the effect, as we have already seen, showed itself in the halting of the progress to the east and north, despite the offensive on Minsk already planned. Any action against Russia was considered inadvisable because the German troops in Lithuania threatened the rear of our Lithuanian-Belorussian front, making it important to pay very careful attention to the security of this rear. As for the Ukrainian front, on the contrary the new general situation made the taking of a vigorous offensive imperative, as any retirement of the troops engaged there was impossible. Besides, throwing back the Ukrainians from Little Poland would permit us to link up with Romania, our only contact with the Allied Powers in the case of the expected war.

As we know, the operations in Little Poland did not go according to the plans of the High Command, in the sense that the Ukrainian army was only finished off definitively in the middle of July and until that time the projected retirement of a portion of the forces engaged in the region was not possible. Moreover, it had to be reinforced at the expense of units originally destined for the German front.

At the start of June the organisation of the German front was finished. Properly speaking it was subdivided into four fronts. The right wing was the Lithuanian-Belorussian Front which, in principle, continued to face Russia, but which nonetheless watched the German troops in Lithuania with its left wing, keeping a powerful reserve in the Lida region designed for use against the Germans. The Mazovian Front extended from Rajgrad to the former border of the Kingdom and Little Poland and was under the command of General Massenet, from General Haller's army; on this front were, starting from the right wing, the still-forming 8<sup>th</sup> ID, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chasseur Division and the Chasseur Training Division. Further on was the Great Poland Front, which as has been discussed previously, consisted of the three infantry divisions of the Great Poland Army: this front was not formally subordinated to the High Command, and reported only on the basis of an understanding. The last front, that of the left wing, was the South-Western Front under General Haller's orders. It consisted of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chasseur Division, a part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Chasseur Division (after their retirement from Little Poland and Volhynia), and the still-forming 6<sup>th</sup> ID. In the Łowicz–Skierniewice–Łódź area was the commander-in-chief's reserve, under the orders of General Karnicki, composed of the 7<sup>th</sup> Chasseur Division and a tank regiment. The reinforcement of this reserve was planned – it was meant to be increased by the 6<sup>th</sup> ID, but this unit was soon entirely withdrawn from the German front and sent to Little Poland.

The German front was not really a combat front, in the strict sense of the term. It was created solely in the form of a "Army of Alert", as a cadre for the creation, if required, of a real front – if the half-expected war became a reality. Nevertheless, the High Command and the staffs of the various fronts resolutely set to work to prepare specific plans in the case of an eventual war. A series of defensive positions were organised.

The signing of the Versailles Treaty between the Allies and Germany, on 28 June, put an end to this "Army of Alert". The threat of war evaporated and the Polish High Command, while naturally still continuing to watch the Germans, was able to envisage the despatch of a part of the forces from the interior to the eastern front, with the aim of recommencing operations on there.