

Critique of the Warsaw Operation in the Light of the Offensive ¹

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The present work has as its object the presentation of a study of the problems of strategic defence and of defensive operations based on the Warsaw operation of 1920.

In order best to acquaint the reader with the situation under consideration, I shall first present a brief description of the operation in general, after which I shall undertake a more detailed treatment of the operation and conclusions in connection therewith. I have endeavoured to present the progress of the defensive actions along the approaches to Warsaw with great minuteness as they may serve as an object lesson of a defensive battle fought by an army.

Progress of the Warsaw Operation in General

A. Line of Departure

On July 26, 1920, the Polish forces were on the defensive on two fronts; the Southeast and Northeast Fronts. The success of the enemy was particularly noteworthy in the north, where his main forces consisting of four armies (Fourth, Fifteenth, Third and Sixteenth Armies) and the Mozyr Group were employed. In the south our front had been pierced in the Dubno – Brody area by Budënný's First Cavalry Army, which here constituted our main adversary; the two other armies, the Twelfth and Fourteenth, we were able to delay or render innocuous without difficulty.

The Commander-in-Chief decided to make use of the only reserve remaining at his disposal, that is, the newly formed strategic cavalry group, for the purpose of defeating Budënný's Cavalry Army. By this action he hoped to transfer a considerable part of the forces from the South Front to the north for decisive action there. The strategic defensive which Poland was compelled to observe as a result of the enemy offensive, was to be carried into effect by means of two successive operations; on the one hand was an offensive against Budënný direction against his flanks and rear in conjunction with a coordinated frontal attack; and on the other hand, by a large-scale operation in the north, which our armies of the North Front

¹ The text that follows is not an exact replica of the original.

- 1) I have amended some errors and replaced archaic language and phrasing, especially where it might confuse readers who do not have English as a first language.
- 2) All places are given in the modern Polish form, not the German form of the original, except for a few places with standard English variants (especially Warsaw, Brest-Litovsk, the Vistula and L'viv).
- 3) Most clarifying notes are as they stand in the original, including any indication who they are from. My personal notes are followed by "MP".
- 4) Notes only concerned with citing references are marked ^{ref}



were to stage defensively along the line of the Bug and Narew with the expectation that this would lead to a decision as soon as the flanking action on the part of the forces transferred from the south would make itself felt.

The plan adopted implied a manoeuvre on interior lines, that is to say, two successive principal operations; moreover, the forces participating in the first operation were again to be employed in the second decisive one. Each of these operations was to have both defensive (delaying action, local defence) and offensive (enveloping the enemy's flank) features.

On the evening of August 5, the situation which had developed was as follows: Budënyy's cavalry had been defeated, it is true, but not destroyed; fighting had terminated under conditions still somewhat obscure as to the actual situation. The Polish forces – the Sixth Army (three divisions and Ukrainian detachments); the Second Army (two divisions and the strategic cavalry group); the Third Army (two divisions and small detachments of our allies) – were still strategically pinned down along the lines of the Sereth and Upper Styr and between the Stochód and Bug Rivers. The Commander-in-Chief then directed that one infantry division and a part of the cavalry be immediately brought up with a view to their transfer to the North Front. These units, however, continued to remain in the previous positions and in contact with the enemy.

The position warfare on the Bug referred to led up to severe fighting in the north in which all available forces participated; yet the progress of this fighting, although entailing heavy losses on both sides, did not lead to any halt in the advance of the enemy. Of our armies on the North Front the Polesie Group (three weak divisions) was engaged in fighting to the west of Brest; the Fourth army (about four divisions and one cavalry brigade) was giving battle on the middle Bug – at Janków, Sokołów, Kosów; the First army (five weak divisions with numerous independent regiments and battalions) rested with its right flank on the middle Bug in the region of Malkinia, its left flank being situated between the Narew and Bug. Finally, General Roja's group, consisting of about one division, was maintaining itself on the Narew at Ostrołęka. The Commander-in-Chief had no reserve at his disposal. The Minister of War just then was engaged in reorganising four large units, of which one was stationed at L'viv and the other three in the vicinity of Warsaw; a fifth unit was also in the process of organisation.

The enemy had lined up against the Polish North Front the Mozyr Group (about two divisions), and his armies disposed as follows: the Sixteenth Army (five divisions) in the vicinity of Brest and to the north thereof; the Third Army (four divisions), moving up to the Bug; the Fifteenth Army (four divisions) between the Bug and Narew; and the Fourth Army (four divisions) together with III Cavalry Corps, moving downstream along the Narew.

Under the conditions of the situation above depicted the Commander-in-Chief decided to accept a general battle at Warsaw.



B. Polish Plan of Operations

The Polish plan of operations appeared for the first time in a directive of August 6, under the caption “Order for regrouping”. The underlying idea called for the “shifting of the Northeast Front to the line of the Vistula, accepting at the same time a general battle at Warsaw.”

The basic defensive front decided upon extended along the general line: “the Orzysz River – the Narew River – Pułtusk – Warsaw – the Vistula – Dęblin – the Wieprz River, the Sereth, and the Strypa Rivers.” “This line will afford us an opportunity,” so we read the order, “for distributing our forces over delaying positions in such a manner as to strike the enemy in the flank and threaten his communications while his various groups are advancing.”

Thus the proposed operations plan combined a withdrawal and regrouping, in conjunction with a stabilised defence and an offensive manoeuvre.

The fundamental idea of this operation had for its object: (1) to contain the enemy in the south, covering L'viv and the oil fields; (2) to prevent the enemy from carrying out a turning movement in the north along the German frontier, and to check his progress by repelling his anticipated attacks on Warsaw, (3) and to pass to the offensive with the centre. The latter was to concentrate rapidly on the lower Wieprz as an army of manoeuvre, with the mission of attacking the rear and flanks of any enemy force advancing on Warsaw, and of defeating it. Moreover, the group of forces on the upper Wieprz, gathered there for the purpose of covering the concentration of the army of manoeuvre against enemy action from the east and southeast was to cooperate with the manoeuvring army in the latter's advance north-eastward. At the same time, special attention was to be paid to coordinating properly the action by the forces of the North Front.

Thus, in the south, the mission called for checking the enemy's progress, i.e. a mobile defence with the object of ultimately assuming the offensive. In the north, on the one hand, it required a position of defence within the Warsaw fortified area, against which the enemy was expected to direct his main effort; while on the other hand, the mission demanded defensive action on a large scale, and the protection of the northern flank against an expected enemy turning movement. In the centre the mission enjoined an enveloping manoeuvre directed against the flanks of the enemy attacking Warsaw and covered on the east against the forces of the Soviet Southwest Front.

For the accomplishment of the plan as outlined above, three Fronts were formed: the South, North and Middle Fronts. The **North Front** consisted of one army in the Warsaw fortified bridgehead for defensive action (First Army); one army for flank protection against enemy action from the north on the Orzysz and the Narew Rivers (Fifth Army); one weak army on the middle Vistula for looking after the flank and maintaining connection with the Middle Front (Second Army). The **Middle Front** was composed of an army of manoeuvre on the



lower Wieprz (Fourth Army) and the army between the upper Wieprz and the Bug, which furnished flank protection for the concentration area and also constituted the strong flank of the offensive manoeuvre (Third Army).

The concentration of these forces in the areas designated for their defence or on their intended lines of departure, was to be carried out in the following manner: (1) Units of the former Northeast Front on the right flank were to be withdrawn for the purpose of regrouping; the strategic withdrawal and disengagement from the enemy was to be effected by a divergent movement of flanking forces while threatened by attacks on the part of the enemy; on the left flank – this was to be accomplished by a series of delaying actions supported by heavy artillery bombardments. (2) Concentration of the forces released from the Southeast Front was to be effected between the upper Wieprz and Bug; the latter were to be granted complete freedom of action with reference to the execution of long marches or other troop movements. (3) forces of the Northeast Front were primarily to dig in at those points which, it was anticipated, the first enemy thrust would reach, i.e. at the approaches to Warsaw.

To the First Army were assigned units organised by the Minister of War,² together with one combat division of veterans, transferred from the south for that purpose.

The time schedule called for the following: By August 12, all work on the Warsaw fortifications was to be completed; by August 16, concentration of the army of the North Front was to be consummated, i.e. that manoeuvre was to start approximately on August 17.

Therefore, the North Front, having had an opportunity to gain time from August 7 to 12, was to prevent the enemy from reaching the line of the fortified area of the capital. This explains the difficult defensive mission of the First Army involved in the withdrawal to the bridgehead fortifications and the difficulties incident to the concentration of the new Fourth Army on the Wieprz. The units of the latter were to protect the flank of the First Army; thereafter by abruptly changing direction, they were to move by the flank in a southern direction.

Further, the North Front was, for a period of five or six days, to defend the bridgehead fortifications of Warsaw and prevent their envelopment. All these missions were accurately determined with due regard to time and space involved. Calculations pertaining to the combat strength of the forces took into consideration the efforts which the enemy was expected to put forth while delivering the main blow against Warsaw.

The North Front had eight divisions, or the equivalent thereof, which it proposed to commit to action under the First Army along the approaches to Warsaw; two and a half infantry divisions and one cavalry division were available for action under the Fifth Army to the north;

² These units were quite varied, and included field units formed from paramilitary groups such as border guards, both infantry and cavalry, an entire "Volunteer Infantry Division" and a division's worth of volunteer cavalry as well, spread across several brigades. There were also a large number of units sent as garrisons for the larger towns, such as Modlin and Płońsk. MP.



while two divisions, with cavalry attached, i.e. the Second Army, was to look after the middle Vistula.

The Middle Front intended to commit to action in the Fourth Army four and a half divisions, and under the Third Army three divisions, Bałachowicz's units,³ and a cavalry brigade.

The South Front only maintained three Polish divisions and the Ukrainian Army.⁴

In general, of the 23 large units 20 were to participate in the Warsaw operation; here the major cavalry units were also to be employed. Of these 20 divisions, 12½ were given defensive missions, while of the latter eight were designated for participation in the main blow; of the 7½ divisional units of the Middle Front, 5½ were to take part in the enveloping manoeuvre.

The events of the days that followed compelled the High Command to effect some changes in its plan of operations by adapting it to the changed situation, i.e. to the enemy's plan which by that time had become quite obvious. This consisted, on the one hand, in a movement of the III Cavalry Corps and the Fourth Army from Ostrołęka to Przasnysz, Ciechanów and Mława, that is to say, in an enveloping manoeuvre on a large scale, menacing the Polish left flank. The line of the Orzysz, upon which this flank rested, the enemy had managed to pierce before the Polish Fifth Army (which had been designated for its protection) had an opportunity to get organised. On the other hand, Budënný's Cavalry Army had been manifesting some activity; there was a likelihood that it would undertake an advance either on L'viv or Lublin.

This situation brought forth the new directive designed to conform to the new developments – the so-called “special strategic order of August 10, 1920”. The general plan of the operation, however, remained unchanged.

The Fifth Army in the north, reinforced by two divisions at the expense of the First Army, and by half a division at the expense of the Fourth Army, was now to cover the flank by means of an offensive direction against the western wing of the enemy while the latter was engaged in an envelopment of Warsaw on the north. In the event of the Polish operation being successful it was expected to cut across the Narew on the north, thus severing the supply lines in the rear of the Soviet armies. The Wkra River was proposed as the line of departure for this offensive operation.

The South Front was to hold in readiness its main cavalry force and three infantry divisions for the purpose of bringing the advance of the Soviet Cavalry Army to a standstill.

All the other missions remained unchanged.

³ Bałachowicz's men were largely Byelorussian (or ethnic Poles from that area) mixed with various Soviet deserters. The original text labels them as “Ukrainian”, but few would have been. MP.

⁴ In fact there were a lot more men than this down on in the south. For a start the entire Polish 1st Cavalry Division was fighting Budënný, although not formally in that Front, plus there was a sizeable garrison in L'viv (including tanks). There were also some small independent brigades operating. MP.



The Polish plan of operations then assumed the following form:

In the plan itself the separate stages to be observed in the execution took on more concrete shape as time went on: that is:

- a) Withdrawal, regrouping, and delaying actions intended to gain time;
- b) Position defence on the Warsaw bridgehead fortifications, and an advance from the Wkra River.
- c) Flanking actions of the Middle Front, implying a passing from the defensive to the offensive.

C. First Stage of the Operation: Withdrawal and Regrouping

The first stage began on the night of August 7/8 with a rapid disengagement and withdrawal from the enemy by the Polesie Group and Fourth Army. Rear guards, consisting of cavalry and infantry battalions with machine-guns on carts, covered the retrograde movement, delaying the enemy at designated points and falling back only under heavy hostile pressure.

The main divisional forces first formed a new front west of their former positions along the line Kock – Łuków – Siedlce – Liwiec River, from where they did not start for the “basic defence line” until the night of 10/11 August. Already during this stage the new reserves were designated.

Moreover, the divisions comprising the Fourth Army were now concentrated by means of forced flank marches along the line of the Wieprz River, while others (on the left) fell back to the middle Vistula and to the Warsaw fortified bridgehead.

Having been misled by the original direction of the retreat, the enemy failed to discern the direction of the withdrawal of the three Polish divisions towards the Wieprz.

On the front of the Polish First Army and of Baranowski’s group (formerly Roja’s) delaying actions with the object of gaining time were in progress. These were to prevent the enemy from forcing back prematurely the units of the North Front to the fortified bridgeheads of Warsaw and Modlin. During these operations the forces of the former Northeast Front were undergoing a reorganisation of their units accompanied by a shifting into place of new units, in conformity with the recent assignment of these organisations.

The movement of the Third Army to its concentration area was carried out under pressure of the Russian Twelfth Army, which by that time had crossed the upper Bug. The right flank held by the 1st Legion Division, by a successful attack on the enemy east of the Bug, secured for itself complete freedom of action and moved to Sokołów, from which point it was to be transferred by rail to its concentration area.⁵ Other units of the Third Army continued fighting

⁵ On the left flank of the Third Army – Ed



on the Bug. At first it was proposed that their mission – covering the concentration of the forces designated for the enveloping manoeuvre – be carried out defensively, and that it would be necessary to transfer them to the upper Wieprz.

Subsequently, however, in conformity with the “special strategic order”, this decision was modified as follows: the Third Army was to assume suddenly the offensive on the Bug and defeat the enemy at Hrubieszów and Chełm, after which the 3rd Legion Division, advancing northward on Włodawa, was to cover the flank of the movement on the right, whereas the remaining forces of the Third Army were to provide at the same time security for the rear of the Middle Front.

On the morning of the 13th, the forces on the Middle Front designated for the attack had not yet completed their concentration. The main forces of the Third Army were advancing eastward, driving the Russian Twelfth Army beyond the Bug. The forces of the North Front were gathered on the basic line of defence; the Fifth Army on the north was still assembling on the line of the lower Wkra and the Modlin area. The units of this army, having been moved up, were now gaining time; a comparatively weak independent group was operating in the spacious gap between the left flank of the army and the frontier. In view of the fact that the direction of the advance of the Russian Fourth Army toward the lower Vistula was now well established, the group designed to cover the lower Vistula (fortress garrisons, volunteers, and other units) was now forming up in the area between Wyszogród and Włocławek.

It was at this stage of an unfinished concentration that the battle of Warsaw had its beginning.

However, the Polish forces, grouped together in accordance with the basic idea of the enveloping manoeuvre, were able to meet the first onslaught of the enemy and thus to prepare successfully for the operations that were to follow.

D. Second Stage of the Operation: Defensive Battle Along the Warsaw Bridgehead Fortifications and the Advance from the Wkra River

The commander of the North Front, who was required by the general plan of the Warsaw operation to contain the enemy by defensive action along the approaches to Warsaw, in conjunction with an advance from the Modlin area, decided to hold with the forces of the First Army the first line of the Warsaw defences and of the bridgehead fortifications of Zegrze and Dębe at all costs. The Fifth Army was to advance from the lower Wkra, whereas the small Second Army on the middle Vistula was at first regarded as an observation group, and later as a force of reserves. One division in Front reserve was stationed at Jabłonna, between the two combat sectors of Warsaw and the Wkra, from where it would be able in part to effect rapid transfers of troops.⁶

⁶ By means of motor transport – Ed. The area was also a useful rail junction. MP.



At this stage we distinguish two separate operations: namely, the defensive operation of the First Army along the approaches to Warsaw, and the offensive operation of the Fifth Army from the direction of the Wkra.

1. The Defensive Battle Along the Approaches to Warsaw

The Warsaw bridgehead fortifications consisted of two lines. The first line, i.e. the main line of resistance, hastily constructed as it was, extended from the Vistula at Karczew, along the Świder River, to Wiązowna; from there turning northward in the vicinity of Miłosna and Okuniew (both points inclusive) it continued along the Czarna River up to the Narew, at which place Fort Benjaminów served as a supporting point and where it formed connection with the Zegrze bridgehead fortifications. There were no obstacles before the front; at the same time, both radius of observation and field of fire were limited; the conditions for observation were especially unfavourable. The length of the line measured about 57 kilometres. Shortest distance from the Kierbedzia bridge⁷ amounted to 18 kilometres. The second line (reserve) coincided with the old German bridgeheads with their concrete works and numerous obstacles that were still intact. This line, above the Świder River up to Wiązowna ran parallel to the first line, from there it traversed the sandy hill country to the northwest by way of Pustelnik to Benjaminów and the Narew. The field of fire and conditions for observation were much better here. The extent of the line was about 50 kilometres.

The first line was chosen as battle position in consideration of its greater distance from the city of Warsaw.

The basic idea of the First Army contemplated holding the first line of the bridgehead fortifications with three divisions (the 15th, 8th and 11th), and also the sector Zegrze – Dębe on the Narew by means of the 7th Reserve Brigade and frontier-guard units; in the Pustelnik – Marki area, one division constituted the Army reserve.⁸ Thus, on a front of 60 kilometres, bridgehead positions were held by only three divisions, averaging for each division about 20 kilometres.

The exhausted and depleted 8th Division was given a sector of about 8 kilometres, while to each flank division was assigned a sector of between 24 and 25 kilometres.

Such enormous stretches could not very well be adequately defended with the armament that was available in 1920; nor could it be done with the aid of the most modern weapons of the day. None of the divisions was able to organise a battle position sufficiently strong as to break down the advance of the enemy.

⁷ On the Vistula at Warsaw – Ed

⁸ This was the 19th Infantry Division, also known as the 1st Lithuanian-Byelorussian Division. MP.



The disposition of the divisions along the first line of bridgehead fortifications did not lend itself to the execution of the missions that were about to confront them. Information of the enemy indicated that his main effort would be against Radzymin. This unequal task fell to the lot of the 11th Division, which had had its weak cadres recently filled up with untrained replacements, and which moreover extended over a distance of 25 kilometres, without any reserves at its disposal. The army reserve, however (19th Infantry Division), was posted behind the threatened area; also the Front reserve (10th Infantry Division) was nearby.

The entire artillery of the First Army, 273 guns, had been set aside for the defence of the first line extending along the bridgehead fortifications, from there to Zegrze, and the Narew region up to the Modlin forts.

Since he had at his disposal only one battery for each two kilometres of front, the Army Commander endeavoured to ensure coordinated fire action on the part of the artillery by means of centralised control of all the batteries. In the northern (Radzymin) sector, some 24 kilometres in width, the divisions had been deprived of the control of their organic artillery, their organisational affiliations having been broken. Both command and means of communication were concentrated in the hands of the commander of the Army artillery. On the other hand, the existence of separate artillery sectors, together with the nature of the terrain itself, rendered it difficult for the artillery commanders to give direct support to the infantry. Their work became even more complicated when the fighting changed into a war of movement, and when the communications net and that of observation had been disrupted.

This disorganisation was further complicated when the principal artillery forces, situated between the first and second lines of the bridgehead fortifications, were compelled to partially abandon their positions during the very first day of fighting; the communications net could not be restored immediately, leaving the artillery practically without control. Though repeatedly affording splendid general support to the infantry, the artillery of the bridgehead fortifications was nevertheless slow in accomplishing its missions with regard to direct support of its infantry.

On the 13th the fighting started in the vicinity of Radzymin with an attack launched by two enemy divisions: namely, the 27th Division (Fifteenth Army) and the 2nd Division (Third Army), which by chance had assumed the role of advance guards. A secondary attack on the part of the enemy was in progress at Leśniakowizna, north of Okuniew.

At Radzymin one of the regiments of the 11th Infantry Division was defeated, leaving the division without reserves; the weak Polish line had been broken, and Radzymin occupied by the enemy. By evening, the leading elements had reached the second defensive line north of Pustelnik. The Commander of the First Army was now compelled to throw into the battle his Army reserve (19th Division), which on the next day at daybreak advanced from the vicinity



of Pustelnik along the highway in the direction of Radzymin, with a view to restoring the situation.

The breakthrough of the enemy brigade in the Leśniakowizna – Ossów area was finally disposed of by the reserves of the 8th Infantry Division.

On the next day (the 14th), the troops came into contact with the enemy along the entire line of bridgehead fortifications and at Zegrze. A second breakthrough on the part of the enemy at Ossów was liquidated after a sanguinary struggle, the result of a counter-attack on the part of the divisional reserves. However, the fighting that developed at Radzymin was of a highly mobile nature.

The counterattack of the 19th Infantry Division along the Marki-Radzymin highway brought about the recapture of Radzymin; however, a counterattack directed against its flank from the east (Helenów – Ciemne) from where the enemy committed to action his 2nd Rifle Division, had compelled the 19th Infantry Division to withdraw to its line of departure, i.e. to the area of the second line north of Pustelnik. Elements of the 11th Infantry Division were maintaining themselves further to the left, with the left-flank regiment in the vicinity of Beniaminów. The enemy occupied the village of Wólka Radzyńska and exploited his victory still further by an advance on Jabłonna.

The commander of the North Front now turned over to the First Army the North Front reserve (10th Infantry Division) for the purpose of launching a decisive concentric counterattack in conjunction with the 19th and 11th Divisions. The command of these three divisions that were about to be committed to action at Radzymin devolved upon General Żeligowski. The counterattack was to start on this same day, while the 10th Division was to move to its station in Front reserve on the next day.

The remainder of the day was spent in preliminary movements. Not until night-time did the 10th Division occupy with regiments of the first echelon the line of departure for the counterattack. With one battalion it was to attack from the south the village of Wólka Radzyńska, while the main body was to assemble along the Jabłonna – Zegrze highway for an attack from a north-westerly direction on the right flank of the enemy.

During the night of the August 14/15 the enemy, who was being delayed by one volunteer squadron, was advancing by way of Izabelin and Kąty Węgierskie on Jabłonna. Meanwhile one battalion of the 10th Infantry Division in conjunction with elements of the 19th Infantry Division had embarked on a counterattack from the south in the direction of Wólka Radzyńska.

On the morning of the 15th the general counterattack of the Polish forces was launched as follows: by the 10th Division, by way of the woods of Nieporęt, in the direction of Mokre village (north of Radzymin), participated in also by elements of the 11th Infantry Division; by



the 19th Division (together with elements of the 11th Division) from the south on Radzymin and Wólka.

After the battle, the concentric advance which had been carried on during the entire day, led to the withdrawal of the enemy and to the recapture of Radzymin and Mokre; a struggle, however, ensued for the possession of the other points on the first line and continued through the next day.

On the 16th the enemy was endeavouring in vain to regain the initiative at Radzymin. Yet his determined efforts to take Zegrze and Dębe were frustrated. The Polish 8th Division gained a local victory in the vicinity of Okuniew.

On this day, the Army Group of the Commander-in-Chief, now concentrated on the Wieprz River, likewise began its advance with the object of striking the hostile rear. The North Front was required to assist in the operations of the Middle Front by an advance with the 15th Division along the Siedlce highway on Mińsk-Mazowiecki, making wide use of tanks and armoured trains and relying on the assistance of artillery and aviation. This contemplated advance was to begin at daybreak on the 17th. Remaining units of the First Army were to continue on the defensive. However, on the next day, the 18th, they were to embark on offensive operations and to deliver their attack in the general direction of Wyszaków.

Meanwhile the enemy at the approaches to Warsaw was regrouping his divisions, with the object of once more launching an attack from the Okuniew area. But before completing his preparations, on the morning of the 17th, the Polish forces launched a surprise attack against Mińsk-Mazowiecki, by concentric action from the Garwolin and Kołbiel areas, and from the direction of the Warsaw bridgehead fortifications.

The Battle of Warsaw, as far as the Polish side was concerned, now passed from the defensive to the offensive. The third stage of the fighting at Warsaw had begun.

2. Assumption of the Offensive by the Fifth Army on the Wkra River

The mission given to the Fifth Army, then concentrating in the Modlin area, called in its final form for an advance to the northeast from the line of the lower Wkra River in the general direction of Pułtusk and Gołymin, against the Russian Fifteenth Army which, it was supposed, had embarked on the movement whereby it sought to turn Warsaw via Ciechanów and Nasielsk toward Modlin. The Polish Fifth Army was to defeat the Russian Fifteenth Army and drive it beyond the Narew; thereafter it was to join the other forces in crushing the Russian Third Army, which was operating in the vicinity of Zegrze and Serock.

The commanding general of the North Front, within the scope of the mission given him, recognised that the fate of the Warsaw battle would be decided here. Of the enemy armies, the Fourth on the right, in conjunction with the Third Army, advanced with their corps from



Przasnysz and Mława towards the lower Vistula, some of their forces making their appearance at Działdowo, Sierpc, Raciąż, and cavalry at Nieszawa.

The execution of the mission of the Fifth Army was beset with the danger which the activities of the Russian Fourth Army from the west had in store for it, both against the flanks and rear. It was here that the hazard of occupying a central position manifested itself. On the other hand, a victory of the Fifth Army over the Russian Fifteenth Army was apt not only to decide the outcome of the battle along the Warsaw bridgehead besides pinning down all the enemy reserves north of the Bug and the Narew, but also to put an end to all doubts with reference to the situation north of the Bug, the Narew and the Vistula; moreover, it would afford the Fifth Army an opportunity to strike with its unengaged forces against the flank and rear of the Russian Fourth Army. The action to be taken by the Fifth Army had been decided upon by the Polish High Command in the shape of a manoeuvre to imply, (1) directing all of this forces first against the Russian Fifteenth Army, (2) immobilising the north groups of the latter in the vicinity of Ciechanów by aggressive action, and (3) thereafter cover the Fifth Army against enemy action from the west, that is, against the Russian Fourth Army. The Polish right was resting on the fortress of Modlin, which constituted the pivot of the manoeuvre; the reserves were located here.

The beginning of the advance was fixed for August 14. However the Fifth Army did not complete its concentration for the development until noon, and presently met with strong offensive action on the part of the enemy. On the left of the Fifth Army, thanks to the suddenness of its blow and the favourable terrain, succeeded in throwing back the superior numbers of the enemy.

On August 15 the reserve units entered the battle on the right flank. As yet the fighting along the entire front was marked by successes. In the direction of Modlin, the 17th Division which had been committed in action at Nasielsk, in conjunction with the general attack of the army, inflicted heavy losses on the Russian Fifteenth Army and also on part of the enemy's Third Army. Nasielsk was captured. To be sure, units of the Russian Fourth Army advanced from the west on Płońsk, but were driven back by the cavalry covering the Polish army.

On the 17th, after the enemy concentric attack at Nasielsk had been repulsed, the pursuit on Serock and Pułtusk was started. Units of the Russian Fifteenth and Fourth Armies were putting up a stiff resistance in the Ciechanów area. Pressure from the west now began to increase. Next the Polish security group at Płońsk drove the enemy back beyond the Żuromin. It was at this juncture that the regrouping of the Fifth Army for the next phase in the battle against another enemy force began. The main effort was now directed against the left flank, in the direction of Ciechanów.

Beginning with the 18th, the retreat of the Russian Third and Fifteenth Armies was joined also by the Sixteenth Army. A desperate struggle on the part of the enemy ensued for the



possession of Ciechanów, for the line of retreat of his Fourth Army was at stake. At this time the commander of the Polish Fifth Army began to move against the rear of the Russian Fourth Army.

On August 19 the fighting at Modlin came to a close, while the enemy was driven out of Ciechanów in the direction of Mława. Operations were now begun with the object of cutting the line of retreat of the enemy's western group.

The operations of the Polish Fifth Army to the north of Modlin during the period from August 14 to 19 had the effect of deciding the defensive situation by means of several blows delivered in rapid succession, combined with containing actions, which in the majority of cases were also executed offensively.

E. The Third Stage of the Operation: The Assumption of the Offensive

The flanking movement of the mass of manoeuvre of the Commander-in-Chief, from behind the Wieprz on August 16, drove back the left group of the enemy forces (Mozyr Group). On August 17 this army struck with its left against the flank and rear of the Russian Sixteenth Army to the south of Warsaw. Here it became involved in combat with the enemy, who was simultaneously being attacked from the bridgehead by units of the Polish First Army, and by engaging him in a wide front it reached the line of communications of the Russian Sixteenth Army (Brest highway). During the fighting on the 17th and the night of the 18th, of five divisions of the Russian Sixteenth Army three were defeated while two were destroyed. From this time on the Russian Sixteenth Army was obliged to fall back. On the morning of the 18th, the First Army began to join the offensive operations, the Second Army having already on the 16th been divided up between the Middle and North Fronts. The general offensive at once was turned into a pursuit, having for its object the complete destruction of the entire enemy western group.

Lessons and Conclusions Derived from Defensive Operations

A. Means of Strategic Defence

Strategically, the defensive situation in which the Polish Army found itself in 1920 could be solved only by means of the offensive. Only rarely will it be possible to successfully meet an enemy offensive with defensive means alone; the events preceding the Battle of Warsaw prove this. A purely defensive battle may bring about the exhaustion of the enemy provided the defensive lines possess very strong fire power and are equipped with powerful material and weapons. (Ypres, 1914; Champagne, 1915; Verdun, 1916; Chemin-des-Dames, 1917, French Fourth Army, 1918).



The problem incident to the operations which had for their object the execution of a defensive mission were in this instance – as is nearly always the case under similar circumstances – solved by a combination of defensive and offensive actions.

This is true of the Polish plan of operations of July 27 (on the Bug), of the plan of August 6 and 9, and of the mission and plan of the Polish Fifth Army in the Warsaw operation.

Because of the basic idea underlying this campaign and the defensive operations of the forces concentrated on the enemy flank, we may apply to the Warsaw operations the term of an “indirect defence”. However, this “indirect defence” merged in the strategic plan of the “direct defence” as conducted by the main forces that were disposed opposite the principal lines of advance of the enemy, and charged with the mission of engaging, harassing and containing him. The “direct defence”, then, formed part of the plan of operations of those forces that were concentrated at Warsaw and to the north of it.

The purpose of the “indirect defence”, was to settle the defensive situation in the usual way, that is, by aggressive action from its disposition on the flanks of the enemy’s strategic lines of advance (Middle Front). Thus we find that the operations connected with this campaign were in every sense of the word, offensive ones; only the covering of the movements had been effected in part by defensive measures, with the object of gaining time (actions on the upper Bug).

The “direct defence” parried the blow of the enemy along his principal lines of advance, thus checking his progress towards his strategic objective which was assumed to be Warsaw – Modlin. Here, on the North Front, the defensive took a form which more exactly corresponded to the true sense of the term, and a real defensive battle developed.

Thus combining the **indirect** defence with the **direct** one, and the actual defence with aggressive action, the Warsaw operations confirmed the old Clausewitz thesis: “In a defensive campaign it is possible to deliver offensive blows; in a defensive battle one may employ separate divisions for offensive action; and finally, while accepting the enemy’s frontal blows, he may nevertheless be met aggressively with bullets. The defensive form of war is therefore no mere shield, but a shield formed of blows delivered with skill.”

B. Form of Defensive Operations

The Warsaw operation was a combination of stabilised warfare involving positions previously designated in orders, and of various other forms of defensive and offensive manoeuvres.

1. Stabilised Defence

Some attempts were made to resort to stabilised warfare in July 1920, on the line of the old German trenches along the Auta and Berezina, on the Szczara and Niemen and on the Bug.



All of these attempts failed to produce any positive results, since the missions, unlimited as to time and space, proved to be out of all proportion for the forces that were designated to execute them.

A typical example of the Warsaw operation is the stabilised defence on the Vistula, extending from Dęblin by way of the Warsaw and Zegrze bridgeheads, and the Narew to the Orzysz River, and representing a line of 400 kilometres, limited however as to the time to six or seven days, i.e. August 12 to 17 or 18.

The principal directions of the enemy advance, as anticipated from the very beginning, were supposed to emanate from Brest, Ostrów and Ostrołęka and converge on Warsaw (Praga). Other assumed lines of advance leading up to the large barrier forts on the Vistula below Warsaw, that is to say on Modlin, or still further below to the line of the river between Modlin and Toruń, were considered as secondary. It was for this reason that the defence of the “principal line” was not proportionally strengthened. Along the approaches to Warsaw provision was made for a concentration of forces that was to comprise a powerful system of fire; upstream of Warsaw a weak flank group was posted along the middle Vistula, with the mission of observing the enemy; and finally to the north of Warsaw there was stationed a somewhat stronger flank group with the double mission of furnishing flank protection and at the same time covering the country between Warsaw and Danzig.

Changes in this conception were created later, in conjunction with the defence on the left (north) flank, by the enemy who was engaged in a turning movement in this quarter. Consequently, the stabilised defence was confined to the Vistula – Dęblin – Karczew sector, the bridgeheads of Warsaw and Zegrze, and the line of the Bug and Narew as far as Modlin, the mission being defined by a line extending for a distance of 180 kilometres, of which 100 extended along the strong barrier presented by the Vistula, and 80 across the principal avenues of approach.

Contenting themselves with the observation of a front extending 100 kilometres with by limited forces, the Poles employed for an active zone defence on a front of 80 kilometres, in all six corps units, i.e. five divisions and one independent brigade of the strength of a division. The mission, it is true, was a difficult one, but nevertheless capable of being executed, remembering that the stabilised defence is a form of defensive operations, which is limited as to time and space by the quantity of forces available. Any unreal correlation of time and space with regard to the available forces will lead to the dispersion of forces in cordon fashion – to their loss, and eventually to their defeat.

2. Manoeuvre in Defensive Positions

In the Polish plan of operations and in its execution provision was made for the following forms of manoeuvre.



- a) A strategic withdrawal for the purpose of re-concentrating (a regrouping for a new offensive); a typical example of this was the exocentric (diverging) retreat of the Polish Fourth and First Armies from the Bug to the Wieprz and to the approaches to Warsaw.
- b) A retrograde movement for the purpose of gaining time, a typical example of which we find in the manoeuvre of the left of the Polish First Army during the period of August 7-12.
- c) A manoeuvre on interior lines from the central position undertaken not only during the preparatory stage, as exemplified by the shifting of the assault group of the Third Army to the Wieprz, but during the battle itself as well (advance of the Polish Fifth Army).

These various types of strategic movements in the Warsaw operation finally culminated in a manoeuvre having for its object the attainment by the armies of a “basic line of defence”. The latter also formed a line of departure for the flanking operation of the army of the Central Front, and for the offensive action of the Fifth Army’s left.

- d) That the offensive would be assumed became at once apparent both during the preparations for the operation that was to be staged aggressively in connection with the defence of the area of concentration (advance of the Third Army in the direction of the Bug), and the battle that followed. In it the execution of the defensive mission on the part of the enemy’s left found expression in the advance of the Polish Fifth Army on August 14. In both instances the offensive manoeuvre proved very effective towards securing the essential objective sought: namely the place and direction of the main blow. In the first case, the offensive movement ensured freedom of action to the armies of the Middle Front; in the second, it deprived the enemy (in the north) of the initiative and successfully immobilised the major portion of his forces; in both instances it proved a very effective factor in the struggle for liberty of action.
- e) Moreover, the flank manoeuvre, of the typical form of effective operation with the armies of the Middle Front employed from behind the Wieprz, brought about a complete change in the strategic situation, the defensive being replaced by the offensive.

This manoeuvre, then, pertains to the category of offensive operations and stands out as a most valuable example in that it illustrates the passing from the defensive to the general offensive.



C. Strategic Plan

1. Deciding Factors

In the Polish plan of operations we note the following deciding factors:

- a. **The situation and conditions affecting the concentration:** opportunity to withdraw by means of a exocentric (divergent) movement the right of the Northeast Front for the purpose of a subsequent flank attack, and to concentrate in the attack zone the forces that were shifted from the Southeast Front.
- b. **Peculiar features of the terrain:** Warsaw constituting the logical enemy objective, naturally attracted his attention; the Vistula formed an obstacle to the enemy in his attempt at encircling Warsaw; the line of the Wieprz representing, so to speak, a bridgehead and fortified flanking position in advance of Warsaw, lent itself very favourably to a line of departure for the enveloping group of the forces. It was this factor which influenced most of the nature of our plan of operations in that it pointed out both the principal and secondary directions of the enemy's advance, and suggested the nature of our counter-measures in the premises that it would promise the best chances of success.
- c. **Information of the enemy, and his probable intentions:** we assumed that the enemy would make his main effort against Warsaw from the east and northeast. However, this assumption was but partly correct, inasmuch as the enemy was actually advancing on Warsaw only with a portion of his forces, while he was turning it on the north in mass. Nevertheless, the principal idea of the plan of operations, based on the considerations heretofore referred to, was being carried out in full.

2. Basic Idea of the Operation

The guiding thought of the whole plan implied the use of the strongest counter-measures against the enemy at Warsaw (stabilised defence by the armies of the North Front), coupled with an offensive movement from behind the Wieprz against the enemy's flank and rear (flank movement of the Middle Front Armies).

The operation thus planned was intended to contain the enemy along the Warsaw bridgehead fortifications, and while thus contained to threaten him both in flank and rear. The enemy would thus be required either to accept battle on two fronts, or else, to regroup his forces so as to face to the south, parallel with his line of communications, with the Bug and the Narew in his rear.

The assumption with respect to the enemy main effort did not come up entirely to the expectations that had been entertained.



The adaptation of the plan to the changed situation led to the transfer of forces of the North Front from the Warsaw area to the left wing north of Modlin; the mission of the latter being changed as to require it to pass to the offensive and to respond with a flank attack to the enemy's flanking manoeuvre. Its line of departure was changed accordingly.

Yet the movement from behind the Wieprz river was carried out as planned, the basic idea of the general plan in this respect remaining unchanged.

It was held that the more vigorously this manoeuvre was executed, the more certainly would it contribute towards accomplishing its mission along the approaches to Warsaw. Instead of one action it was now possible to foresee two engagements, or a double battle: namely one at Warsaw, and one to the north of Modlin.

After the defeat of the enemy's left at Warsaw, his remaining forces to the north of Modlin would either have to save themselves by a hasty withdrawal, or else sustain a frontal attack under most unfavourable conditions. For, they would be deprived of their line of retreat, and their supply lines would run towards the Prussian frontier; they might even be compelled to fight with a reversed front.

The battle envisaged by the strategic plan of operations was to constitute one form of the manoeuvre under consideration. The strategic movement that was contemplated was to pave the way for a successful employment of the forces in action – ensuring at the same time that those forces would be directed against the most vulnerable front of the enemy.

3. Distribution of Forces

The distribution of the available forces for the execution of individual missions depended on the completion of the regrouping provided for in the plan of operations. It involved the distribution of all forces that were able to participate in the operation to be staged jointly by the Middle Front (for the offensive manoeuvre concentration) and the North Front (defensive concentration, having for its mission the repelling of enemy frontal attacks).

Taking into consideration the number of units participating in the Warsaw Operation we find that two-thirds of the forces were employed on the defensive, while one-third was used for the offensive manoeuvre. The distribution of forces was subject to such changes as the defensive fighting and the offensive manoeuvre might render necessary in conformity with the situation. Of peculiar interest, however, is in connection with the mission given the North Front the great strength of the First Army along the approaches to Warsaw. This Front possessed a strong group of forces in the centre with two weak advance detachments on its flanks.

In adapting the distribution of forces to the situation, some changes had to be made. The centre was considerably weakened on behalf of the left which, in addition to its mission



covering the flank, was also given an offensive mission, the execution of which was destined to have a decisive effect upon the outcome of the battle at Warsaw.

The distribution of forces, therefore, resolved itself into an allotment of troops to the task in hand, in accordance with the effort they were expected to make. It was subject to changes in accordance with the developments of the situation so as to meet new contingencies. Yet no change was made in the fundamental idea, that is to say, in the requirement that the largest possible force be made available for the main blow and that an irreducible minimum of forces be employed in containing the enemy which, in the present case, was the object of the defensive operations of the North Front.

4. Organisation of Command

There being two principal missions, two Front headquarters were established.

Within the command zone of each Front, each separate mission was assigned to a particular army commander.

There was no such thing as a special plan of organisation. Some armies consisted of two units (Second Army) and others of as many as eight (First Army, in accordance with the assignment of August 6).

The type of missions to be given the troops determined the organisation of command.

5. Coordination of Effort

The execution of the missions called for coordinated action in regard to time and space.

In order to afford the Third Army an opportunity to join the manoeuvring group on the Wieprz, it was imperative that the enemy forces should be delayed at Warsaw by the armies of the North Front for a period of six days – counting from the day the execution of the plan was begun. In order to gain the time needed for the construction of bridgehead fortifications, the First Army was required to hold out along the unprotected approaches to the Warsaw bridgeheads until August 12, that is, for a period of five days. In order to enable the First Army to contain the enemy for that length of time, the left wing of the Fourth Army, before departing from the Wieprz, was directed to hold temporarily the Siedlce – Łuków line, while facing eastward.

Proper coordination of action was obtained by deciding upon each move in good season and being seeing to it that all actions taken were correlated as to time and space.



D. Preparatory Movements during the Defensive Operation

Preparations for the battle that was to be fought in the Warsaw operation consisted first of all in the concentration of forces, and their disposition in pursuance of the adopted plan of the operations.

The Commander-in-Chief, the Chief of Staff, the commanders of the various fronts and armies, all were engaged, with due energy, in carrying out the movements, regrouping, and the shifting and transfer of units to the areas designated for their respective concentrations.

The troops were exhausted from previous fighting, and units were partly depleted. Looking after them and advancing them to a state of fitness for combat called for unusual efforts. Difficulties increased in proportion as in the process of regrouping enemy pressure became noticeable. The enemy was keeping up his offensive, he had seized the initiative, and his will tended to impede our freedom of action and even to deprive us of it.

The acquisition of freedom of action, i.e. the concentration and grouping of forces for battle, depended upon various elements in the situation. These factors included a hasty disengagement from the enemy; action of rear guards, which at times had to be sacrificed (Polish Fourth and part of First Armies); covering operations of entire units (Polish Third Army on the Bug), conducted so as to meet the requirements of the situation offensively; delaying actions on the part of units previously involved in fighting, and the withdrawal from action at the same of other units which were in contact with the enemy (First Army). The further comprised rear guard actions of units which were in contact with the enemy and the protection of concentration areas of new units (Narew group of Fifth Army); containing the enemy by an advance with part of one's forces (the offensive manoeuvre of the Fifth Army, in connection with the armies that were assembling on the Wieprz); and finally actions which tended to mislead the enemy. The latter was illustrated by the offensive actions of the Polish Third Army on August 12,⁹ by that of the Fifth Army on August 14,¹⁰ and also by the original direction followed in the withdrawal of the Fourth Army and Polesie Group.

The more manoeuvre space there is available, the easier it is to draw away from the enemy; the fewer will be the forces that have to be set aside for the purpose of gaining time; the greater is the assurance that there will be an opportunity for transferring forces to designated concentration areas; and the greater will be the facility for their reorganisation and rehabilitation. This we find in the example furnished by the Polish Fourth Army, the 1st Legion Division and the Polish Third Army. The contrary, however, is true in the case of the Polish Fifth Army. Here units of the former Narew Group were moved to the concentration

⁹ Advance of the 3rd Division on Hrubieszów, in order to cover the regrouping of the Third Army – Ed.

¹⁰ This refers to the prompt launching of the counter offensive for the purpose of easing the situation of the Fifth Army at Warsaw – Ed



areas where they were to be reorganised only when units that had been transferred from other sectors of the front had already been sent into the front line.

During the entire preparatory phase and the period of defensive operations the Polish High Command was engaged in a relentless struggle with the will of the enemy. The latter, enjoying freedom of action with respect to his strategic designs, the Polish High Command had to continue the contest for the initiative in order to accomplish that part of the plan which held out the means for the decision.

E. The Defensive Battle

1. Preparation

Without dwelling on the great effort put forth in the direction of morale while the preparations for the Warsaw Battle were under way, we shall touch upon the material aspects of the preparations, of which the following are of interest:

- a. Inadequate technical preparation – as stated above. The results of the work in connection with the organisation of the combat area fell short of the actual needs and demands of the situation. However, such organisational efforts as were incident to the construction of the bridgehead fortifications, the protection of rear communications (crossings), as well as the covering of movements are worthy of note.
- b. Assembling and organising the combatants. Considerable work was done in the matter of reorganisation; masses of replacements were absorbed in the filling of depleted units, many separate organisations even being incorporated in divisions and line regiments. On the main line of defence, the reserve of the Commander-in-Chief (11th Infantry Division, 7th Reserve Brigade, frontier regiments and fortress garrison troops) was moved up to serve as a covering force for the retreating army.
- c. Increasing the firepower. To that end, all available artillery was put into action; moreover, the armoured forces (tanks, armoured trains) and air service were readied.

2. Plan of Battle

The plan of battle was formulated in accordance with the selection of the combat area, the grouping of forces and material, as well as the means of their employment.

The Front commanders were charged, as already stated, with the observations of the middle Vistula (Second Army); the stabilised defence of the Warsaw bridgehead fortifications, of the Zegrze fortifications and of the Bug – Narew sector up to Modlin (First Army).

They were further to counterattack from behind the lower Wkra in a north-eastern direction, with the object of driving the Russian Fifteenth Army into the Narew; to involve in the retreat



of the latter the Russian Third Army; and by so doing, to draw the main Russian forces away from the Warsaw bridgehead fortifications (Fifth Army). The Front reserve, i.e. one combat division behind the centre (vicinity of Jabłonna)¹¹ was to be prepared for action in two directions: namely, towards the Warsaw bridgeheads and to the north of Modlin.

From this the field of battle, or rather, that of two battles readily resolved itself. The site of the Warsaw battle, for instance was predetermined by the outline of the first bridgehead defence line, as well as the fortifications of Zegrze and Dębe. The area for the Modlin battle was chosen so that its outcome would have an immediate maximum effect on the progress of the fighting at Warsaw, and that thereafter the offensive manoeuvre on the part of our (Polish) Fifth Army would carry it to the flank of the Soviet armies circling Warsaw.

The location of the Front reserve at an even distance from Warsaw, Zegrze and Modlin, near the highway junction, insured a rapid transfer of units, and thus enabled the commander of the Front to properly bring his influence to bear on the progress of the fighting either in one area, or by alternating in both areas.

In the case of the First Army, whose mission called for a defensive battle, the plan for the latter coincided with that of the general defence, while the selection of the field of battle coincided with the position against which the principal counterattack was to be launched. This position we already know: it is the first line of the bridgehead fortifications to which the Zegrze and the Bug – Narew sectors were joined. Of decisive importance in the selection of this position was the psychological factor represented by the capital, and the endeavour of removing the battle as far from Warsaw as possible. This, however, was a mistake. The difference of six kilometres in the distance measured from the Warsaw bridges to the first and second lines, respectively, although the latter was more advantageous and technically stronger, proved nevertheless unimportant, particularly in view of the fact that on August 13 the successful action of the enemy had carried his forces to the very bridgeheads themselves.

In the selection of possible positions of decisive importance, the tactical conditions of defence are paramount; they call for the most effective use of the entire fire power and destructive effect of all weapons that the defensive position has at its disposal.

The army disposed of its forces by placing into the line four of its major units and leaving the fifth unit in reserve behind a threatened sector. This constituted the only possible way in which to group the forces, inconvenient though it was and close to the cordon. The Warsaw bridgehead fortifications, unprotected as they were by any natural obstacles extended over a distance of 60 kilometres, and averaged 20 kilometres per division of the first echelon. A further weakening of the first echelon on behalf of the reserves would have rendered impossible the defence of the first line, and would have caused its task to be turned into a

¹¹ The 10th Division belonging to General Żeligowski, which decided the outcome of the fighting at Radzymin – Ed



delaying mission for the purpose of gaining time. Such an action, however, called for space in depth which, in this instance had been lacking. Conversely, the throwing in of the reserve division of the army into the line of battle would have considerably increased the resistance of the first echelon, but on the other hand, deprived the army commander of the only means to influence the progress of the fighting; moreover, in the event the enemy effected a breakthrough in the defensive grouping, that fact alone would have threatened with disaster the entire army and the capital.

The Polish High Command arrived at the strength of the first echelon by computing the indispensable minimum of forces that was needed for effective resistance. The forces available precluded the organisation of a strong impenetrable fire screen, although they were sufficient for the purpose of affording an opportunity to create a system of centres of resistance with the mutual support of artillery and machine-guns, arranged in two echelons. Such a system might have increased the power of resistance of the division in the first echelon and increased the ability of the first echelon and of the divisional reserves to manoeuvre against the flank and rear of the enemy, in the event of his piercing the front. The system actually adopted, however, was quite different; it precluded an impenetrable line of defence, which was out of all proportion to the available fire power, and besides within close proximity to the cordon.

By putting four divisions in the first echelon, the army commander was faced with the problem of dividing the new front line into sectors, and of gauging the strength of their garrisons by the effort that the enemy was expected to make against each one of them. Yet, for various reasons, this scheme of the army commander was not carried out; and so, the sector that was threatened most actually received the least forces, which was compensated for to a certain extent by the close proximity to the sector of the army reserve.

In connection with the rigidity of the defence system, it must be stated that it had been organised in a manner altogether too concentrated in that it failed to insure to the infantry sufficient direct support and relied completely upon the possession of the first line of trenches with the aid of the immobile disposition of the artillery. The crescent shape of the bridgehead fortifications, particularly of the northern sector, with the fan-like grouping of artillery had complicated the concentration of fire and the mutual support of the artillery groups. The line of defence, evolved without due regard to the requirements of artillery observation, at once nullified all the advantages accruing from the greater amount of artillery thus made available. From the moment this line was lost the artillery plan of fire and the organisation of the artillery in general would immediately collapse within the entire combat sector.

The following conclusions suggest themselves: Artillery in defence should primarily afford protection and direct fire support to the infantry; it cannot do this if over-concentration takes it from the control of division commanders. On fronts that are considerably extended over-concentration is ruinous. General tactical groups ensure the proper handling of the artillery,



assist in locating targets, and favour economy of fire, which is both desirable and necessary; at the same time, the artillery must be given due support in making proper use of its power. In view of the over-extension of the army front a certain portion of the artillery, namely the 105-mm (range 12 km), and the 149-mm Italian guns (unfortunately not employed), would have allowed the organisation of such groups, and thereby afforded the army commander an opportunity personally to influence the progress of the battle by causing this artillery fire to be shifted about as circumstances required.

No record of an artillery plan dealing with the employment of available means was kept. Consequently, we can piece it together only from data depicting the actual progress of the operation.

The first line in relation to the combat front as a whole was rather weakly held. Yet consideration of the possibility that a hostile concentrated attack on a selected point in the line might break through the front dictated such disposition. Foreseeing the probable directions where the enemy might endeavour to break through, and making provision for appropriate action on the part of the reserves of adjacent combat sectors as well as the army reserve entered likewise into consideration.

F. Progress of the Battle

The Front Commander personally commanded the forces during the battle. This included reinforcing the First Army with the Front reserve, and organising a concentric counterattack on August 14/15; preparing the First Army for the assumption of the offensive by August 17-18; rehabilitating – at the expense of the Second Army – his reserve for the purpose of assisting the Fifth Army; withdrawing one of the divisions of the First Army from action and placing it in Front reserve as soon as the situation permitted.

The Commander of the First Army made his influence felt on the progress of the fighting along the approaches to Warsaw by committing to action his Army reserve on August 14; by ordering limited counterattacks of a delaying nature (8th Infantry Division, on August 15 and 16); and by preparing the attack on Mińsk-Mazowiecki on August 17, and assuming the general offensive on August 18.

With reference to the progress of events along the approaches to Warsaw, the following remarks would seem to be pertinent:

1. The frontal counterattack of the First Army reserve (19th Infantry Division) directed against the enemy's breakthrough attempt ended in failure; yet it severed in the vicinity of Pustelnik the approaches to the line Marki – Warsaw, which constituted the only positive result.



2. The counterattack on August 15, however, yielded decisive results, thanks to the action of the Front reserve (10th Division) against the enemy's flank in conjunction with a coordinated convergent attack of the First Army units.
3. A similar experience of frontal and flank counterattacks in defensive action was the cause of combat of a local nature on August 13 and 14 at Ossów.
4. The advance of the 15th Infantry Division in the direction of Mińsk-Mazowiecki, which was of such importance to the operations as a whole, had actually been executed by only 4 battalions out of some 70 odd battalions belonging to the army, and out of 16 battalions forming part of the division. The stabilised defence, conducted on a broad front, tended to immobilise psychologically the commanders as well as the army as a whole, in spite of the fact that the situation on August 16 had been quite favourable for the First Army, and enemy pressure on its front had ceased.

The passing to the offensive from the defensive required the employment of reserves especially designated or organised for the purpose. In the case of the divisions of the first echelon, unusual stamina on the part of commanders and of the army was demanded, and, as in this instance, limited counter-thrusts by local reserves were needed.

Yet the success of the fighting is primarily attributable to the action of the armoured trains and tanks, which added to the otherwise unimportant striking power of the infantry the essential punch, and also to the artillery's valuable support. In the present case it was the armoured equipment and the army artillery which played the part of the army reserve.

G. Passing from the Defensive to the Offensive

On August 13 the Fifth Army, in the execution of its mission, was assembling for action along the lines of the Wkra, with the object of gaining time in the face of the advancing Russian Fifteenth Army, its flank and rear being menaced at the same time by the Russian Fourth Army and the III Cavalry Corps. On the next day, August 14, just when the Fifth Army was developing for action against the enemy, it was itself attacked. It finally succeeded in assuming the offensive after struggling with the aggressive determination of the hostile commander, who still possessed complete strategic initiative.

The Army commander, however, brought about a change in the offensive initiative of the enemy, and caused him to yield to his will successively as follows: a) on August 14 – on his left flank, thanks to an advantageous situation; b) on August 15 – on his right flank, by committing the reserves to action in the vital direction; c) on August 16 – by an advance directed against the enemy's flank with one division which until then had been his reserve (17th Infantry Division advancing from Modlin on Nasielsk).



This employment of forces in the decisive direction (i.e. the enemy flank) determined beforehand the outcome of the battle with the Russian Fifteenth and Third Armies.

There still remained to be dealt with the enemy that was threatening our flank and rear (the Russian Fourth Army together with the hostile Cavalry Corps and units of the Fifteenth Army).

On August 16 there presented itself to the Army Commander a double task: a) exploitation of the success at Nasielsk, in the spirit of the mission that had been assigned to him (energetic pursuit eastward), and b) acquiring freedom of action with respect to the enemy groups in the north and west which in turn called for the organisation of reserves and manoeuvring with them on interior lines.

This further implied the exercise of the utmost economy in forces, manoeuvring with reserves, and changing the direction of the main effort so as to conform to the basic idea of the operation; it moreover brought out the decisive role of flank attacks, and that for the exploitation of the success it was necessary to embark upon an energetic, unrelenting pursuit, at the same time reconstituting one's reserves.

Thus the Army Commander successfully applied the principles enunciated by Blum in his "Strategy" dealing with operations on interior lines: "If success is achieved in delivering a blow against one part of the enemy's forces, it will then be necessary to sweep down at once with an overwhelming force on that part which is next in order. At the same time, the defeated enemy must be pursued with such a large force and so energetically as to deprive him of every opportunity of again participating in combat at an early date, as Blucher did after Ligny. Whether one will succeed in completing the victory still further depends upon the forces with which it will be possible, without risk, to strike against the remaining enemy forces."

Besides, in the battle of the Polish Fifth Army we find of particular interest the importance of Modlin as a controlling factor during the manoeuvre – clearly showing the role a fortress can play in a war of movement, especially when on the defensive, even though the fortress be partly destroyed and possessing but poor equipment.

H. Passing to the Offensive while Strategically on the Defensive

Through the battle at Modlin the Polish Fifth Army acquired an opportunity of assuming the offensive on interior lines.

Passing to the offensive generally, in connection with a complete change in the strategic situation, was rendered possible by the flanking offensive of the Commander-in-Chief launched from behind the Wieprz in the direction of Siedlce and Mińsk-Mazowiecki, and subsequently against Białystok, Osowiec and Kolno.



A study of the events incident to this offensive is beyond the province of our present examination of the defensive operations.

From a strategic standpoint, this was a flanking counter-offensive. The troops designated for this operation were concentrated and organised on the flank of the expected advance of the enemy. This was accomplished behind the cover of a river, the crossings of which were in our hands; moreover, the troops were protected by rear-guards in addition to other mobile covering detachments of considerable strength, and stood ready to embark upon the defensive battle at any moment.

This start and the development had been effected in the midst of constant fighting with the flank guards of the enemy. The suddenness and rapidity of the movements, secured with lightning speed the collapse of resistance on the part of the enemy. The manoeuvre paralysed the hostile commander's will, as a result of which the Polish forces, thanks to their strategic surprise, were now able to manoeuvre and bring about the drastic tactical changes. The Polish mass of manoeuvre, moreover, gathered strength by the very impetus of its aggressive action and movement. At the beginning, it comprised but one quarter of the entire forces participating in the operations; on the second day, one-third; on the third day, two-thirds; and on the fourth day nearly all forces of the Polish Army participating in the Battle of Warsaw.

The operation from behind the Wieprz constitutes a classic example of an indirect defence, conducted by means of an offensive manoeuvre from a flank. Stage in a strategically defensive setting this manoeuvre, then, decided not only the outcome in the theatre of operations under consideration, but indirectly that of the entire campaign as well.

In this connection, a quotation from "Essays on Military Art" by Jomini, which has not yet lost its original meaning, is very much to the point: "A general who, like an automaton, supinely waits for the enemy, with nothing in mind but to fight bravely, will always be worsted by a skilfully conducted offensive. The general who awaits the enemy with the firm determination of making up means of grand tactics for that advantage in morale which aggressive action bestows, will escape this fate, as will also he who resolves never to rely solely on the defensive, without considering to commit to action the bulk of his forces in the decisive direction." "A swift, vigorous assumption of the offensive" – so once wrote Clausewitz – "represents the flashing sword of vengeance, and the best means of defence."

