

# Military Review

By Lt.-Col. B. Roustam Bek.

"THE victory is with the big battalions," said Napoleon, "it can be obtained only by force and no force is too strong to bring victory."

When the Polish military leaders began their offensive against Soviet Russia four months ago, with Moscow as their strategical objective, they believed that their army was strong enough to accomplish this difficult task. The Russians, on the other hand, although their military strength was superior to that of the Poles, allowed the invasion to proceed, while they mobilized an army with reserves sufficiently strong and numerous not only to check the Polish advance in Russia, but also to resume a decisive counter-offensive.

Following the classical doctrine of Napoleon, the Soviet strategists looked with indifference upon the situation of the Russian frontiers, still unsettled and uncertain, and did not trouble to guard them, thus leaving open the gates of the Republic. The attention of the Russian Supreme Revolutionary Council was concentrated on the importance of uniting all the fighting forces of the Soviets in one army, which should operate under one trusted leader. This leader was Comrade S. S. Kamenev.

Since the beginning of the Polish campaign, the firm hand of the Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Army could be discerned in every movement of the Red Army, during their most dangerous and daring manoeuvres, and especially in their retreats. The latter, on every occasion, were accomplished in extraordinary good order; there was never panic or confusion. Even the enemies of the Soviets considered the flexibility of the Russian front as remarkable.

The Soviet's military command, with no desire to achieve a cheap victory, very skilfully evaded the battles in which their enemy was anxious to engage the Russians, and did not hesitate to do this even when the Reds were numerically superior to the invaders. The main strategical aim of the Soviet command is the complete annihilation of the enemy forces, and, in order to accomplish this, suitable circumstances must be created. When these circumstances were lacking, the Russian commander held his forces in check, even at times when he would have been able to inflict on the enemy's attacking army some considerable tactical reverses. Let us remember Kiev. There cannot be any doubt now that the Russians could have defended the city and stopped the Poles west of the Dnieper, as well as prevented their crossing the Dvina and Berezina. The huge Russian reserves were already in full readiness about fifty miles east of the Dnieper, and there was no difficulty in moving them to the battle front in time. But Kamenev knew well that a battle for Kiev would certainly be followed by the complete destruction of this historic city, and, moreover, that it would have been less favorable for the Russian strategy to engage the Poles west of the rivers than to counter-attack them after they had accomplished the rather difficult crossings, which they would be compelled to repeat during their retreat under vigorous pursuit by the victorious Red Army. Furthermore, thanks to the confusion which overtook the Polish army when it was forced back across the Dnieper, Budenny was able to penetrate in the rear of the Polish battle-front, and thus to accomplish the gradual annihilation of the Polish field army.

That this annihilation has been accomplished is proved by the fact that the Russian Soviet army not only was able to reach the gates of Warsaw on August 15, but, as I predicted, entered, on August 17, the northeastern part of that city, situated on the right bank of the Vistula, and known as Praga. More than that: the fortifications of Modlin (Novo-Georgievsk) were under the fire of the Russian siege artillery. These fortifications, newly built to replace the former Russian fortress, are situated about twenty miles northwest of Warsaw, where the river Bug joins the Vistula, and presents one single stronghold, ably protecting the entrance to the city.

Furthermore, the appearance of the Russians at Plock, about thirty-five miles west of Novo-Georgievsk (Modlin), on the Vistula, and later in Wloclawek, northwest of Modlin, thus completely cutting off communications between Warsaw and Danzig, both along the Vistula as well as by the Warsaw-Bromberg railway, proves that the Reds have accomplished a gigantic movement, encircling the whole Polish army in that region.

From a military standpoint, the Soviet troops had already reached Warsaw on August 17. The Russian cavalry, having crossed the Vistula at several points, entered Praga, as I have said, and we must note that Praga is even closer to Warsaw than Brooklyn is to New York. Being masters of the east of Warsaw, of Novo-Minsk (twenty-two miles from Warsaw); Tluszcz (eighteen miles); Radzimin (twelve miles); and of several points within range of field artillery of the city, and, at the same time, encircling Warsaw on the northwest and north-northwest, there could be no doubt in the mind of any military expert that Warsaw was bound to fall, after the bombardment of the city, the usual procedure in such cases.

I expected that at any moment we should hear of the shelling of the city, which, from the tactical point of view would have been a normal development of the military operation.

We must not forget that Warsaw is not a fortress, as I have already explained in my former article. The population of this town is about 1,000,000, and it must have grown even more, thanks to the presence of great numbers of refugees. I must point out an important fact: in most cases the military command of a besieged town is far from any idea of surrender, and is forced to raise the white flag either to avoid the useless bloodshed of the civilian population, or compelled by the latter to capitulate to the enemy under a menace of revolution. Military history is full of such examples. The national spirit of the Polish people in Warsaw was at a high level of patriotism, which was strongly supported by the Catholic clergy. Therefore the bombardment would have had to be of a most vigorous character, and consequently would have caused tremendous loss of life and property.

As I have often pointed out, however, the Soviet strategy aims not at the occupation of one town or another, but rather at the annihilation of the enemy's fighting force. Destruction of the enemy's forces can only be accomplished in the field. It has already been clearly shown in repeated instances that the Soviet strategy does not aim at unnecessary destruction. The recapture of Kiev was accomplished without bombardment—the Poles left it when they lost their battle in the field. Not one bomb was dropped from the air on Warsaw, while leaflets covered all the streets of the city, after they were dropped by the Russian airmen in great abundance.

This it is clear that the Russian military command decided to forego the cheap and easy victory of reducing Warsaw, by terrible destruction, in favor of the larger strategy of drawing the Polish army out for complete destruction in the field.

Once more the Russian General Staff has succeeded in deceiving the Franco-Polish command, as was also the case during the "great offensive" of the Red Army in April, which was considered by the Allies as a decisive movement on Warsaw.

The absence of bombardment by the Russian artillery was explained by the Polish military leaders by a lack of guns in the hands of the Reds. Finally, as was anticipated by the Russian command, the Poles undertook a desperate sortie from Warsaw, a movement which has been erroneously called in the papers a Polish offensive.

In such cases usually a sortie is a very fierce venture, and as the Reds are weak in number, they must lose ground in that sector and retreat towards Brest-Litovsk, and even further to the east.

So, practically, Warsaw remains without any garrison, as the latter was sent out to the field, while the city remained still encircled and seriously threat-

ened, from the north and north-northwest, without any hope of support from outside.

Suffering from a lack of reserves, and using even battalions of women, the Polish centre is approaching the river Bug, where fresh Red reserves are in full-concentration to meet the enemy's foolhardy attack.

The southwestern Russian front is gradually advancing on Lemberg, which is now within range of the Soviet artillery. I am absolutely convinced that the complete defeat of the Polish armed force is a matter of but a short time, for the following reasons: 1. The Poles have already lost their field army, during the constant battles since the beginning of March, 1920; their reserves were already almost annihilated during their flight from Kiev. They have at their disposition a newly-formed militia, and the troops which garrisoned the fortresses, which they are now using for their so-called offensive. 2. They have Halder's army in Galicia, of considerable value, but part of that army was removed to Warsaw at the request of their French military advisers. 3. The situation in West Prussia is very alarming for the Poles, and requires serious consideration, because the hostile feeling of the German population against the Poles is growing there, as may also be noticed throughout Germany. 4. That the British intend not to interfere with the Soviets is becoming apparent, and Danzig may even be guarded by the British navy from any attempt by the supporters of the Poles to send them arms, ammunition and men; this is sufficient for an understanding of the grave situation in which the Polish strategy is now placed. 5. The Polish command knows very well that it cannot count on any reinforcement from the Allies, nor does it count at all on Wrangel's army in South Russia, especially since England has pronounced her decisive word and the workers of Europe have made their final decision to prevent a war with Russia. 6. The morale of the Polish army is very high, supported as it is by the national and religious feeling of the imperialistic portion of the Polish population. The truth is hidden from the Polish people very carefully, and the time is near when it will come out; then the morale of the people must collapse, and finally it will collapse in the army also. 7. Three separate Polish armies, or rather groups, are fighting the Russians now, and in no case is the latter's army broken up; it is the Polish army that is broken into pieces that have to act independently, in several sections of the theatre of war. Should one of these groups be beaten, the remaining portions will perish, one after another.

Some of the military critics tried to find a similarity between the Battle of the Marne and the so-called "release" of Warsaw. Such a parallel is absolutely erroneous.

First of all, the Allies were in superior numbers to the Germans during the Marne battle, and the Germans were forced to abandon Paris altogether. Paris is itself a fortress, while Warsaw is not. Moreover, the Poles never can be superior in number to the Russians.

"I have not, however, any doubt that Warsaw will fall if war continues," declared Major-General Sir Frederic Maurice, in the "Daily News" of August 18. "By throwing in their reserves, the Poles can drive back the Russian advanced troops and gain time," he continues, "but the advantage of gaining time is small unless there are fresh resources that can be brought into play, and these the Poles have not got. The Russians must win through in the end, and the sooner that plain fact is recognized, the better for every one."

Such a statement by this important British general is of great significance, and absolutely corresponds with my standpoint, so often repeated in "Soviet Russia," as well as in the American press. The hours of the Polish army are numbered.

—"Soviet Russia."