

THE FIRST POLISH TANK BATTLE - BOBRUJSK 28 AUGUST 1919.

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Abstract

General Haller's army returned to Poland in 1919, and with it came 1 Tank Regiment to Łódź, which was equipped with the most modern tanks in the world - Renault FT. The article presents the results of research, which focus on the use of the first subunit of Polish tanks in combat. An important part of the research was to present the course of the first Polish tank battles near Bobrujsk (28.08.1919), which were successfully supported by infantry units in the fight against the Red Army. The presented results are not limited to the description of combat operations but are the basis for presenting tactical conclusions related to the use of tanks on the battlefield at the time.

Key words: art of war, tank, Haller's Army, Bobrujsk, tactics

At the Eastern section, an attack of our brave infantry, efficiently supported by tank details, used in our operations for the first time, led to taking the city and fortress of Bobrujsk on 28 August 1919, despite a series of barbed wire positions and strong fortifications.

Press release of the General Staff of 29 August 1919

Bobrujsk has been taken without generally any resistance from the enemy, demoralized by previous failures and the usage of tanks.

J. Łapiński, *Zarys historii wojennej*
58-go Pułku Piechoty Wielkopolskiej, Warszawa 1928

Introduction

This essay aims to examine the beginnings of the armoured history of the Polish Armed Forces, as well as some brief characteristics of the first tank to be employed by Polish armoured units – the Renault FT. We will present an outline of the history of the 1st Polish Tank Regiment, its organisational structure and roots connecting it to the 505th Tank Regiment of the French army. We will conclude by describing the first Polish tank battle, fighting the Red Army for our Eastern border at Bobrujsk

on 28 August 1919, followed by tactical conclusions resulting from an analysis of the Bobrujsk battle. The essay does not intend to cover the entire history of the 1st Tank Regiment and its combat record, but solely aims at shedding some light on its origins and conclusions resulting from its first actual combat situation, in particular its tactical aspects. However, to analyse these issues, we must start with the origins of not only the French armour, but also of the general application of a new invention on battlefields of the First World War – the tank.

The creation of the tank resulted from the challenge of the Western front where, after almost three and a half months of war, the front lines stabilised, stretching from the North Sea to the Swiss border. On its entire length, both sides started intensive earthworks. Moving towards positional defence warfare practically ended manoeuvring actions and put to rest the dreams of the war ending Christmas 1914.

Major changes in the defence structure and, in particular, a significant increase of its durability and depth led to positional warfare dominating the Western front. The foundation of that defence, apart from artillery barrages and engineering works, was the machine gun fire, accompanied by the second echelons and reserve actions. A need to break through a fixed, heavily fortified front line forced the attacking armies to change their *modus operandi*.

One of the ways to break through heavily fortified defences is a so-called technical battle, so, in other words, to amass strong forces and military means at one location, or to introduce novel technical solutions and inventions, like poison gases or tanks.

15 September 1916 was a milestone for military art, when the meadows of Flers got scarred by the tracks of British tanks, rolling into the history of warfare¹. However, due to their rather insignificant technical value, they failed to make an impact on that battle. From 1917 onwards, the advancement in technology allowed the perfected tanks (mainly French and used in great numbers) to play more and more important roles on battlefields. Despite these advancements and perfections, the tanks of the time were unable to operate on their own and until the end of WWI, they were used as only infantry direct support tanks².

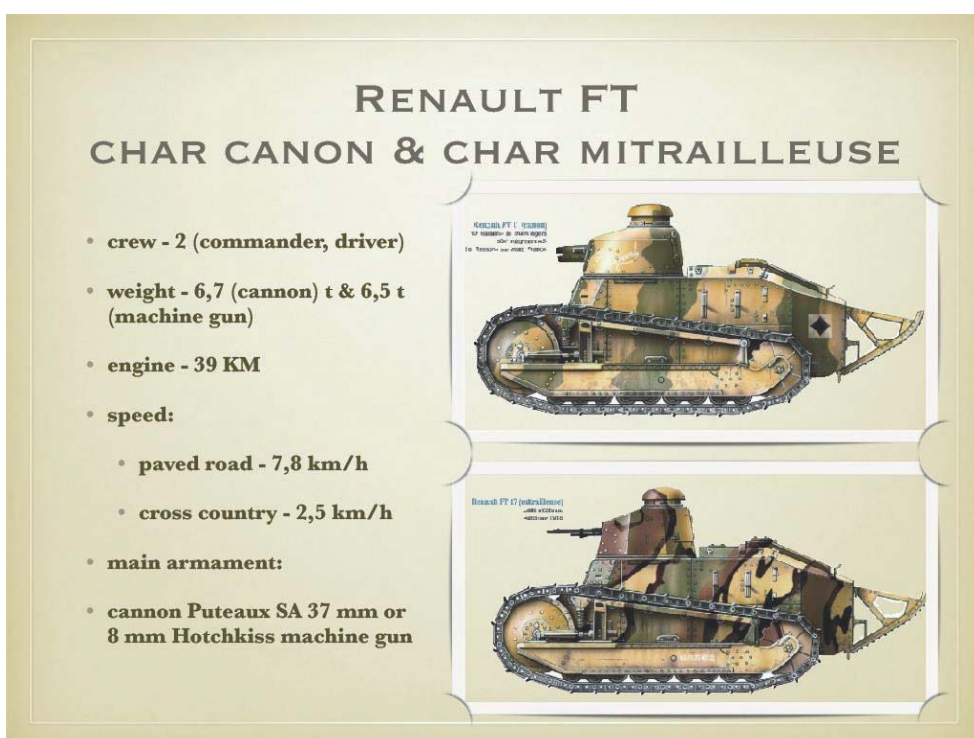
Origins of Polish armour

The early beginnings of Polish armour are strongly connected with French tanks, French units and French doctrine on battlefield use of tanks.

¹ The tactical aspect of the battle of Flers in J. Lasota, *Diabeł nadchodzi -Mark I nad Sommą* [w:] M. Baranowski, A. Gładysz, A. Niwiński (sc.ed.) *W panczerzu przez wieki*, Oświęcim 2014, p. 210.

² More about the first tank battle in J. Lasota, *24 kwietnia 1918 r. pod Villers-Bretonneux - pierwszy bój czołgów* [w:] A. Niwiński (sc.ed.) *Mieczem i szyćchem. Broń na polu walki*. Oświęcim 2016, p. 203.

A new French tank, Renault FT, was very much different from the first armoured vehicles used by British, French and German forces. It was much more modern and it employed revolutionary technical solutions. The most novel feature was placing its main armament in a rotating turret and dividing the tank into combat, driver and engine compartments. The driver compartment was placed at the front of the tank – that's where the driver sat. The combat compartment with the turret was located in the middle, while the engine compartment was at the back, separated by a special partition from the crew. The combat mass of a Renault FT armed with an 8 mm Hotchkiss machine gun was around 6.5 tonnes, rising to 6.7 tonnes with a 37 mm Puteaux cannon.



Own elaboration based on specifications Renault FT from Gale, Tim. „French Tanks of the Great War: Development, Tactics and Operations”. iBooks., s. 377. Tanks illustrations from <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/50/e5/2a/50e52a566e0279c6412ec1622d0fe700.jpg>

Tank Renault FT – Specifications

Renault FT tanks saw combat for the first time on 31 May 1918 around Ploissy village and Chazelle ravine, 72 km north-east of Paris. 501st Tank Regiment commanded by Lt.Col. Pol-Maurice Velpry was sent there to support the French infantry's counterattack of six infantry divisions from general Mangin's 10th Army

against the German 7th Army advancing on Paris, led by Gen. Hans von Böhn³. From that point, Renault FT tanks were used more and more to support infantry, albeit more in local skirmishes than on a mass scale. Despite combat losses, their total number in the French army increased fast, and at the end of WWI, the French were able to field 24 battalions of Renault FT tanks, and around 3177 tanks of this type were sent to units⁴.

On 15 March 1919, by the order of the Polish Army Command in France, the 1st Polish Tank Regiment was created (*1-er Regiment des Char Blindes Polonais*), which was created from the structures of the 505th Tank Regiment of the French army⁵. The formation of the regiment started on 22 March 1919 and ended on 1 May 1919 in Martigny-les-Bains in Vosges⁶. 1st Tank Regiment was created from the five tank companies allocated by the French, together with equipment and technical infrastructure. Due to the lack of skilled personnel, the majority of command and technical posts (like tank drivers and mechanics) were French officers, NCOs and soldiers. The Poles started joining the regiment from 28 March 1919. They were mostly Polish volunteers from the USA, Canada and France, as well as POWs from the German and Austro-Hungarian army. The regiment's structure was modelled on a French light tank regiment order as approved by the Ministry of War on 8 November 1918. The regiment consisted of 1st tank battalion in a two-company structure and 3rd tank battalion in a three-company structure, as well as a transport & repair platoon. The composition of the 1st Polish Tank Regiment was:

- 1st tank battalion transformed from the 15th tank battalion:
 - 1st tank company transformed from 343rd tank company,
 - 2nd tank company transformed from 344th tank company.
- 3rd tank battalion transformed from 14th tank battalion:
 - 3rd tank company transformed from 340th tank company,
 - 6th tank company transformed from 341st tank company,
 - 7th tank company transformed from 342nd tank company⁷.

Each tank company was equipped with 24 Renault FT tanks in 3 platoons of 5 tanks each (3 tanks armed with a Puteaux 37 mm gun and two armed with a Hotchkiss 8 mm machine gun⁸) plus the company commander tank, five reserve tanks and three tanks in the supply platoon. The regiment was equipped with 120 Renault FT tanks in total, including 72 tanks with a Puteaux 37 mm gun and 48 tanks with a Hotchkiss 8 mm machine gun, plus 10 cars, 18 trucks, 13 half-

3 W.J. Ławrynowicz, *Czołg Renault FT. Powstanie, budowa i użycie w boju na froncie zachodnim i w Polsce, Oświęcim 2015*. p. 87.

4 R. Ogórkiewicz, *Czołgi. 100 lat historii*. Łódź 2016, p. 52.

5 W.J. Ławrynowicz, *Czołg Renault FT...*, op. cit., p. 230.

6 D. Radziwiłowicz, *Błękitna Armia. W 80 rocznicę utworzenia*. Warszawa 1997, p. 52.

7 W.J. Ławrynowicz, *Czołg Renault FT...*, op. cit., p. 232. Tank battalions and companies had numbers corresponding to numbering of infantry corps and divisions of the Polish Army in France under gen. Haller, namely 1st Corps with 1st and 2nd Inf.Div and 3rd Corps with 3rd, 6th and 7th Inf.Div.

8 A platoon commander had a Renault FT tank with a Puteaux 37 mm gun.

trucks, 5 tractors with trailers, 2 tracked tractors, 10 motorcycles, 10 bicycles, 8 field kitchens and 8 workshop trailers⁹.

After the regiment was created, a problem appeared – what to call this new type of unit and new type of equipment, never previously seen in Polish forces. Major Bohdan Jeżewski recalls how the problem was solved¹⁰: *In general, Haller’s army staff officers were thinking what to call the first Polish armoured unit, equipped with state-of-the-art weapons then, victorious in WWI. The French term “Chars Blindes” or “Chars d’assaut”, would translate into Polish as chariots, assault cars or armoured cars, which didn’t catch. The English term “tank” already had a different meaning in Polish. But this armoured vehicle able to transverse difficult terrain on its tracks and cross natural and artificial obstacles did look a bit like a crawling dragon. Lt. Władysław Kohutnicki proposed the name “czołg” (‘crawler’) then (...) it was approved and accepted, and the dragon became the emblem of the regiment for its entire life. Apart from the French name, which survived until 15 October 1919, so until the moment the regiment was taken over by the Polish command, there appeared a Polish name: 1st tank regiment, at first with additional ‘Polish’¹¹.*



Own elaboration based on W.J. Ławrynowicz, *Czołg Renault FT...*, op. cit., pp. 231–232.

1st Polish Tank Regiment – Organisational structure

⁹ W.J. Ławrynowicz, *Czołg Renault FT...*, op. cit., p. 232.

¹⁰ In 1919 sub-ensign, in 1920 second lieutenant of the 1st tank regiment.

¹¹ D. Radziwiłowicz, *Błękitna Armia...*, op. cit., pp. 52-53.

After initial training, the unit started on its way to Poland, first by rail from Martigny-les-Bains through Germany to Łódź. This took from 1 to 16 June 1919¹². When leaving France, the regiment numbered 841 officers, NCOs and soldiers, of which 388 were French and 453 Polish. There were 11 Poles out of 45 officers, 54 out of 112 NCOs and 388 out of 684 privates¹³. During the first period of the regiment's operations, namely from June to October 1919, command and officer positions were manned by the French, while the Polish officers remained unallotted. In August 1919, the regiment underwent its first reorganisation, consisting in battalions changing from a three-company structure to a two-company structure and the creation of a reserve company, the so called Instruction Centre¹⁴. Only in October 1919 did Polish officers start to take over, with some French officers returning to France, and some staying in Poland as advisors and observers.

Before the takeover took place in October 1919, the 2nd tank company was sent to fight for the Polish eastern border to the Lithuanian-Belarussian Front in August 1919.

Bobrujsk 28 August 1919 – the first battle for Polish tank crews

The Bobrujsk battle was not the first contact of Polish soldiers with tanks. Such contact took place in February 1919 around Tiraspol, 50 km NW from Odessa on the Black Sea. On 7 February 1919, a Polish combat group¹⁵ consisting of 14th Rifle Regiment of Knight's Legion, an artillery platoon, an uhlan platoon and an engineer platoon commanded by Col. Paweł Kozubek, supported by the French 303rd company of 501st Tank Regiment attacked Tiraspol¹⁶.

The first Polish tank detail to see combat was the 2nd company of the 1st battalion of the 1st Polish Tank Regiment commanded by the French officer, Captain Jean Dufour. Platoon commanders of the 2nd tank company were also French: 2Lt. Labourdette, 2Lt. Clement-Francois Galtier and most probably 2Lt. Francois Faure¹⁷. 2nd tank company was then equipped with 24 Renault FT tanks, 3 half-trucks and one car, and numbered 9 officers and 107 soldiers. The company was augmented by a repair & transportation platoon of 5 trucks and two tractors with trailers, numbering 33 NCOs

¹² To commemorate the return to Poland of the 1st Tank Regiment of the Polish Army in France in 1919 by the resolution of the Minister of National Defence No 22 of 9 June 2009 a Celebration of Armoured and Mechanized Forces was established, so called the Tank Day, 17 June.

¹³ W.J. Ławrynowicz, *Czołg Renault FT...*, op. cit., p. 231.

¹⁴ Tasks of the reserve company included training of specialists of all levels for the needs of the regiment.

¹⁵ This group was formed from 4th Rifle Division commanded by general L. Żeligowski, which cooperated with the French Intervention Corps.

¹⁶ H. Bagiński, *Wojsko polskie na wschodzie 1914-1920*, Warszawa 1990, p. 507.

¹⁷ W.J. Ławrynowicz, *Czołg Renault FT...*, op. cit., p. 238. Footnote no 17 on J. Kruszelewski, *Fragmety niektórych działań naszych czołgów na froncie w latach 1919–1920 (...)*

and soldiers. The company entered its first combat commanded by French officers with mixed Polish-French crews of combat equipment. Such a structure resulted from the lack of experience of Polish soldiers with its new equipment.

The above forces were loaded on rail carriages at the Łódź Kaliska railway station in Łódź and transported to Lida on 19 August, where they were put under command of the Lithuanian-Belarusian Front. After unloading, the 2nd company regained its combat capacity in Lida for a few days, and was sent to the frontlines on 2 August.

The 2nd tank company's combat equipment was loaded on rail carriages¹⁸ in Lida and transported to the Jasień station. It got there on 27 August 1919 around 8.30 pm and after unloading, together with an engineer platoon assigned to it, in secured march formation started moving towards its starting point for the attack on Osów around 9 pm. The 2nd tank company reached its starting point around 2 am on 28 August and started its attack preparations. The march was not without problems, as a wooden bridge over a stream collapsed under the first tank on the approach to the village. The extraction of the tank and getting the remaining tanks over the stream through a ford slowed down the company march.

The 2nd tank company was ordered to support the attack of the 4th Great Poland Rifle Regiment (later 58th infantry regiment) from 1st Great Poland Rifle Division (later 14th Infantry Division) on Bobrujsk to push back the Red Army from that town. Polish forces were confronted by 8th Rifle Division of the 16th Army, reinforced by field artillery and an armoured train equipped with one 120 mm and four 75 mm guns, operating along the Bobrujsk-Jasień railroad. The Bolsheviks placed their forces on approaches to Bobrujsk in two main defensive positions: 1st position on the eastern bank of the Volchanka river, 2nd position at the line of Kislejewicze village. 8th Rifle Division units used extensive Russian field fortifications from the times of WWI, creating a significant number of points of resistance.

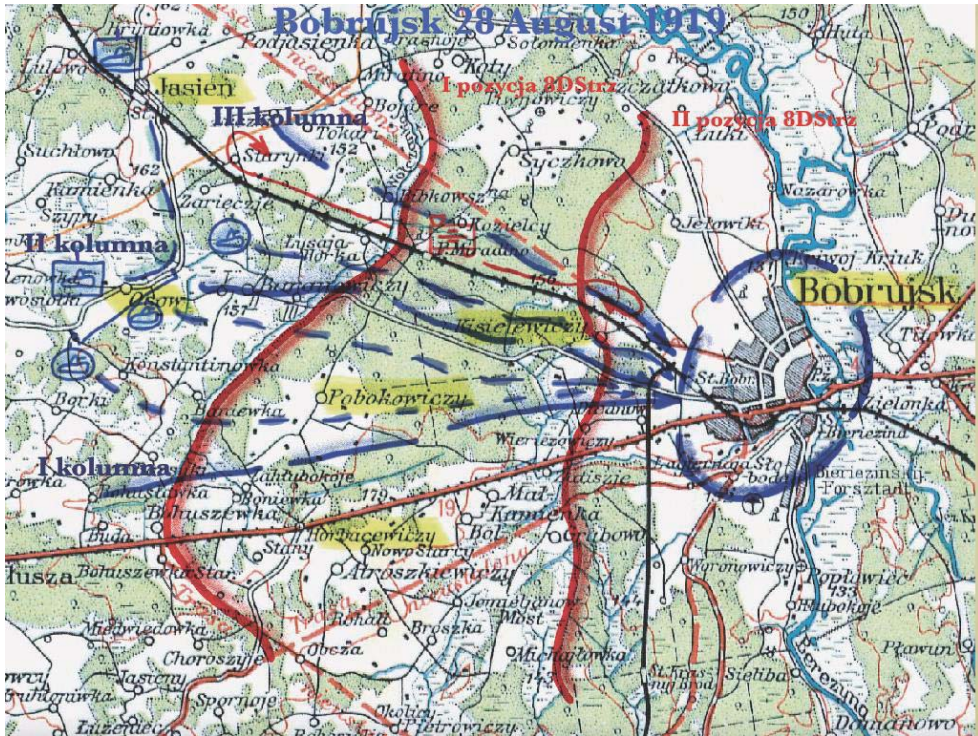
The commander of the 4th Great Poland Rifle Regiment intended to take Bobrujsk by an attack of 3 columns, reinforced by the 2nd tank company, 3 artillery batteries and an engineer platoon. The units were positioned as follows: 2nd battalion in the vicinity of the Jasień railway station and Baranowicze, 1st battalion around Bohuszówki, and 3rd battalion, the division reserve, around Tarasowicze.

The columns received the following orders:

- I column comprising of 1st battalion, 2 artillery batteries and an engineer platoon was to attack towards Horbacewicze - Pobokowicze - Balczyn and take the city and fortress Bobrujsk;
- II columns comprising of 5th and 7th rifle companies, 2nd tank company, 2nd heavy machine gun company, an artillery battery and an engineer platoon was to attack east towards Semkowo, take the Bobrujsk railway station and then capture the city;

18 Three platoon of 5 tanks each were loaded, plus a reserve platoon with 5 tanks, plus the repair and transportation platoon. In total the 2nd tank company started the attack with 20 tanks.

- III column comprising of 6th and 8th rifle companies, 4th heavy machine gun company and a mine thrower unit was to attack towards Rybkowszczyzna and then to continue the attack along the railroad to capture Bobrujsk¹⁹.



Own elaboration based on W.J. Ławrynowicz, *Czołg Renault FT...*, op. cit., p. 238, J. Łapiński, *Zarys historii wojennej 58-go Pułku Piechoty Wielkopolskiej*, Warszawa 1928, p. 12. <http://www.wbc.poznan.pl/dlibra/publication?id=31545&from=&dirids=1&tab=1&lp=11&QI=>, map from http://maps.mapywig.org/m/WIG_maps/series/300K/49_BOBRUJSK_1934.jpg

Battle of Bobrujsk, 28 August 1919. Polish (blue), Soviet (red)

The attack of 3 columns of the 4th Great Poland Rifle Regiment on Bobrujsk commenced on 28 August at 4.30 am. I column attacked on the right wing of the regiment and, after a series of skirmishes at Horbacewicze, Pobokowicze and Bałczyn, got to Bobrujsk at 11:00 am. There at the crossing of the road and the railroad, it was stopped by fire from the armoured train. The train, however, quickly withdrew behind the Berezyna river, following well-aimed fire from Polish artillery batteries. After taking over the city and the fortress, I column continued with fire pursuit of the enemy withdrawing to the eastern bank of the Berezyna.

¹⁹ J. Łapiński, *Zarys historii wojennej 58-go Pułku Piechoty Wielkopolskiej*, Warszawa 1928, p. 12. <http://www.wbc.poznan.pl/dlibra/publication?id=31545&from=&dirids=1&tab=1&lp=11&QI=>, dostęp 12.04.2016.

II column attacking in the centre failed to meet the enemy at first, with the first resistance only at Baranowicze village. Infantry units of the 8th Rifle Division were placed on the eastern bank of the Volchanka river, 5m wide at that spot. The defences were reinforced here by field artillery. Steep and muddy banks of the river proved another obstacle here, as well as old WWI fortifications located there. Forging the river was also hindered by the fire of the armoured train from Rybkowszczyzna. The tanks formed a battle line and, attacking under enemy artillery fire, reached the bank. When approaching the steep banks, tanks from 1st and 2nd platoon fired on the Bolsheviks' position point blank. At the same time, the 3rd platoon reconnoitered the banks and having found the ford, crossed the river. Then the platoon attacked the enemy from its side, inciting panic and breaking through defences. Then, Polish infantry attacked, previously pinned to the ground by sustained machine gun and rifle fire from the Red Army troops. The infantry forded the Volchanka river, capturing enemy trenches on its eastern bank. After pushing the enemy back, the engineers repaired a bridge destroyed by the Bolsheviks, allowing tanks from 1st and 2nd platoons to cross.

Eight tanks from 2nd and 3rd platoons engaged in pursuit of the withdrawing enemy, while 4 tanks stayed at the river to help tow 4 other tanks, immobilised in the muddy river bed when fording the river. The attacking tanks met with resistance at the enemy's second defensive position around Kislejewicze village. The infantry attack on the Red Army positions at Kislejewicze was supported by tanks from the 2nd platoon. After a brief exchange of fire, the enemy withdrew. Around 10.30 am, using forest as cover, the commander of the 2nd tank company ordered some rest. A three-hour break was used to service the equipment, refuel the tanks and have a meal. During the break, some tanks towed from the Volchanka river reached the company. Then, around 1.30 pm, 14 tanks of the 2nd tank company with supporting infantry entered Bobrujsk, already captured by 1st battalion of the 4th Great Poland Rifle Regiment, where the local populace welcomed the Polish tanks enthusiastically.

The left wing saw the attack of III column – it overcame weak enemy resistance at Rybkowszczyzna and followed the attack along the railroad, continuously engaging the withdrawing armoured train. The column reached Bobrujsk at 1.40 pm.

In the city, around 500 Red Army soldiers were taken prisoner. 2 field guns were captured, along with numerous machine guns²⁰.

Having taken the city, the 2nd tank company recreated its combat readiness for the next 3 days, and on 1 September 1919, it departed by rail to Wilno to repair the equipment.

A report submitted by the commander of the 2nd tank company, Capt. Jean Dufour, is noteworthy, describing the first battle of a Polish tank detail:

“At 0600 on 28 August, we encountered heavy machine gun fire (for several minutes you had the impression of being at the French front, the more so that

20 W.J. Ławrynowicz, *Czołg Renault FT...*, op. cit., pp. 238–242.

accompanying weapons were also used) and fire from the armoured train. The barrage fell west of the Volchanka river, approx. 50m from its bed. The infantry started to dig in. The tanks followed the pre-determined signals: for 1st platoon to form north of the road, and for 2nd and 3rd platoons to form south of the road and to start the attack by performing the manoeuvre. No losses were suffered from the artillery fire. Then 1st platoon having reached the river opened intensive fire. At the same time 2nd and 3rd platoons, smartly manoeuvring, performed an encircling move, opening fire at the enemy trenches. 3rd platoon found a ford and started crossing the stream. The enemy panicked and started running abandoning arms, food and equipment. This is how a fortified position was captured (5 lines of barbed wire, heavy machine guns in bunkers, the 5m wide Volchanka river (...))”

At 0645, a further 5 tanks cross the stream (2nd platoon). The tank crews are so enthusiastic that the tanks move forward with open hatches, catching up with the infantry, despite heavy barrage fire from the enemy. The remaining 4 tanks are used to tow the tanks that got stuck in the mud (...)

Before Semków town, the infantry was stopped at the enemy second line and asked us for support. 2nd platoon reformed, overtook the infantry, captured the second line without firing a shot - the Bolsheviks seeing the tanks fled the trenches in fear (...) At 1330 the company reached Bobrujsk, invoking admiration among the local people with its attitude²¹.

The actions of the 2nd tank company were conducted without any losses and greatly facilitated the attack of the 4th Great Poland Rifle Regiment.

Conclusions – tactical aspects

While analysing the battle of the first tank unit of the Polish army at Bobrujsk, we need to stress that it was a novel application of the modern equipment – the Renault FT tank – by the Polish army. These actions laid the foundations for later discussions and analyses on tank usage rules in the 2nd Republic.

At first, we need to look at the tank use regulations of the French army, as the company commander and platoon commanders were French, and the tank crews were mixed, Polish-French. Taking into account the training of the French tank crews and their combat experience, we may safely assume that the company acted pursuant to French army regulations, which say: *Tanks accompany attacking infantry, clear the way through barbed wire positions for the infantry and protect its attack. A tank is equipped with a gun and machine guns, but its most powerful combat tool is its move forward. The fire is opened at close quarters, with the gun able to fire at 200 m, and machine guns at 300. Fire at longer distances may be opened only*

²¹ CAW, AO III ND, sygn. 301.10.5, quote after: W. J. Ławrynowicz, *Czołg Renault FT...*, op. cit., p. 242.

exceptionally. Tanks and infantry are strictly co-dependent during combat, but tanks shouldn't wait up for the infantry if they can move forward. After the attack has been commenced, the tanks move towards their designated targets and stop only for obstacles they cannot break using on-board equipment. Own infantry catching up with such stopped tanks helps them cross such obstacles with any means available. If the infantry is stopped before the tanks reach it, it lays low and waits for the tanks to come. The tanks go round the infantry towards the enemy and suppress its fire. Tanks and infantry support each other during an attack at a common target. They wait for each other only when they are unable to move forward using just own resources²².

Analysing the Bobrujsk battle, we can see that this was precisely the way the 2nd tank company attacked. We may also note, however, how the attack of infantry in cooperation with tanks was organised by the commander of the Polish unit. The tanks were assigned to II column, equalling a battalion, and supported by an engineer platoon. The Polish 2nd tank company reached the Jasień railway station at 8.30 pm and after a short break moved to Osów, 8 km away, where it was to assume the initial position for the attack. The march was performed at night (21:00-02:00²³) on non-reconnoitred unpaved roads. The incident with the collapsed bridge was the result of the lack of reconnaissance of the march route. The target, namely the Bobrujsk railway station, was 24 km away from the initial area, which from the point of view of the radius of operations of Renault FT tanks was at the limit of their tactical capabilities. The total distance to be covered by tanks was 32 km, while the range of Renault FT without refuelling was 35 km on roads and 20 km off-road²⁴. When we add problems with fuel supply (some fuel was transported by commandeered horse-drawn carts), the selection of the section the 2nd tank company was to attack was also far from perfect. The ground was muddy and marshy. The commander of the 2nd tank company lacked sufficient information about the attack area. The attack was probably not preceded by reconnaissance, hence problems with fording. This task was performed in a combat situation only thanks to the skills of the tank crews, well-prepared tanks and a good decision of the company commander to take a break after breaching the 2nd defensive line. As we may assume, the time the crews spent on technical maintenance during the night and during the attack was not lost. Another positive experience was the support of the engineer platoon, already showing its efficiency during the march from the Jasień railway station. The engineers also performed well during the attack, i.e. repairing the Volchanka bridge destroyed by the Red Army and helping to tow out the tanks stuck in the river during fording. The tank crews also performed very well during the attack, skilfully unfolding from a pre-battle formation into a battle line under fire. An individual platoon displayed some initiative, surprising the enemy with a manoeuvre, including at the wings (3rd

22 H. Guderian, *Achtung Panzer!*, Warszawa 2012, p. 130.

23 Roughly speaking, a march column advanced at 1.7 km/h. The regulation speed was 7.8 km/h on roads, 2.5 km/h offroad.

24 W.J. Ławrynowicz, *Czołg Renault FT...*, op. cit., p. 326.

platoon). Tactical actions were at a high level, as evidenced by the cooperation of platoons during fording of the Volchanka. The accusation concerning the attack with open hatches is often raised, citing a lack of training and combat experience. However, this may also be interpreted as an attempt to increase manoeuvrability in unknown, rugged terrain. Visibility for the tank commander and the tank driver was quite limited, and opening hatches and panels facilitated driving the tank. In my opinion, the tank crews, with combat experience from WWI, assessed the Bolshevik fire to be ineffective and therefore decided to open hatches and panels during the attack. Much appreciation is also due to the infantry which was adequately trained, and despite never having cooperated with tanks before, carried out the task admirably. Some drawbacks of the new combat device in combat may have been:

- drawing enemy artillery fire to tanks,
- insufficient visibility from the tank, preventing the driver having a full view of the situation and staying in contact with the infantry,
- poor fire efficiency with moving tank.

Summing up, during the first attack of the Polish tanks, we can see that the regiment command had some problems with planning and organising the attack on rugged, unfavourable terrain, at the limits of the technical capabilities of Renault FT tanks. The reconnaissance was probably faulty, as no adequate information was provided on the enemy and the terrain. A major defect was probably the lack of arrangements between the 2nd column commander and his subordinate units (company and battery commanders) to finetune the tasks. The success of the attack may predominantly be attributed to the enemy being surprised by the combat use of tanks. The Red Army defence was well-organised, using terrain features and field fortifications and supported by machine gun and artillery fire as well as a well-armed armoured train. Well-armed and armoured tanks, skilfully commanded by pro-active commanders, taking the initiative and sometimes even bravado, caused the enemy to withdraw in panic. The company commander efficiently commanded his unit (by e.g. using combat signals) and surprised the enemy by a manoeuvre (attack on the wing by 3rd platoon). He kept in mind the military art rules – the purpose of actions and preserving combat capacity.

The first Polish tank battle and subsequent battles for the borders of the Republic in 1919-1920 contributed to outlining tasks for Polish tanks, which may be found in the Handbook for operational service of staffs, published in Warsaw in 1927. Concerning marches it says:

- *Tank marches should be limited to day legs of 15 km, followed by technical maintenance of 2-3 hrs. Travelling a leg of 25 km requires an overhaul lasting half a day.*
- *Rail transport bears no difficulty, loading and unloading are facilitated by movable ramps the tank units are equipped with. The loading or unloading time for a tank company is around 3 hrs²⁵.*

²⁵ Podręcznik dla operacyjnej służby sztabów, Warszawa 1927, p. 234.

Looking at these provisions in the battle of Bobrujsk context, we can see that the pressure from time and distance in tank operations has been observed. Also, tank tasks show the influence of French regulations and combat experience of the 1st Tank Regiment, i.e.:

- Tanks are solely an infantry auxiliary weapon – they are unable to fight on their own.
- The principal task of tanks is making way for infantry by breaking the enemy resistance in defensive positions.
- Tanks are used solely in attacks, possibly counterattacks.
- In order to support infantry adequately, a minimum of 1 tank platoon per 1 infantry battalion should be assigned²⁶.

It says the tanks should be sent to fight when:

- infantry reaches the defensive positions of the enemy and is about to commence the assault.

It was also thought that:

- To disperse enemy artillery fire and reduce the time for tanks to remain under fire, the tanks should be introduced in great numbers, on a broad front, from initial positions as close as possible,
- The tanks should be delivered to initial positions in secret, so that their appearance in combat may be surprising for the enemy,
- The cooperation of tank units with attacking infantry must be prepared before the attack to coordinate actions²⁷.

The handbook also emphasises the role of the commander the tanks were assigned to. A commander being assigned tanks should remember:

- To prepare initial positions for the tanks;
- To discuss very meticulously the cooperation between tanks and infantry on the battlefield (discussing all possible events which may take place during the battle, and discuss the functions of tanks and infantry in each case; the better defended the target, the more meticulous preparations must be made);
- That attacking infantry should assist tanks in crossing major terrain obstacles, be it by auxiliary work, or be it by delivering necessary tools or materials;
- To attack, in particular by fire from infantry auxiliary weapons, these terrain spots which contain or may contain anti-tank weapons of the enemy²⁸.

The first tank battle of 28 August 1919 in Bobrujsk influenced many later events of the 2nd Republic battles, as well as regulatory provisions. Even among modern tank crews we can note the reverberations of these times.

²⁶ Ibidem, p. 234.

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 235.

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 236.

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