

# THE DEFENCE OF POLAND

## I—ARMS AND THE MEN

### LANCERS AT EXERCISE

*Below is the first of two articles by the Belgian military expert who, in "The Times" of August 17 and 18, described a visit to the French Maginot Line, and who now gives his impressions of the Polish Army and defensive resources.*

**By Robert Leurquin**

It is common knowledge that Poland, together with Brazil and Japan, has the highest birth-rate in the world; she has therefore ample human reserves to draw upon. While the classes called up in a normal year in France produce no more than 250,000 conscripts, the classes of the "lean years" in Poland produce over 300,000 men. Without sufficient credits the command cannot absorb more than about half the yearly contingent. As a result the active army is composed of only 300,000 men, though it could easily put into the field 600,000. This force is modelled upon the great European armies, but with a characteristic of its own in the form of a division and 12 independent brigades of specially strong cavalry. To these must be added 6,000 sailors and a picked corps of frontier units, 25,000 strong, which ensures adequate covering. On a war footing the Polish army has a strength of 2,000,000 men.

### PRACTISED PEASANTS

If its particular form of recruiting does not allow it to make use at the same time of all the vast human resources of the country, it does, on the other hand, allow of a very strict selection. The army is thus composed of the best available human material. Nor must it be overlooked that this selection is made from large numbers who, compared with the classes in industrialized communities, are already picked men. Poland is three-quarters peasantry, that is to say, the basis of her population is inured to fatigue, strong on the march, and by reason of poverty accustomed to all kinds of privation. Even before entering the army these peasants are practised marchers, a factor which enables the command to spend the whole of its time on strictly military training. For example, a Polish infantryman can without difficulty make daily marches of 50 or even 60 kilometres, thus keeping up with the cavalry. Polish human material is therefore physically of the highest quality. But, as Napoleon said, "in war the moral is to the physical as three to one." Morally the Polish soldier also displays high qualities. He is animated by an ardent patriotism, even tinged with chauvinism, which is accentuated by the peculiarities of his race. Touched as he is by the East, the Pole has the fatalism of the oriental in the face of death. But this fatalism, which might otherwise be a dangerous streak in his passive Slav make-up, is redressed by the vivacity of demeanour and thought of the born horseman.

The Pole has indeed the horseman's love of obstacles, that is to say of risks, as well as the

able territory, offer a military command interesting opportunities for manoeuvring. And the Polish command is inspired, in every grade, by the doctrine of the offensive. It is a doctrine of excellent teamwork in the army mind. The cadres consist of 19,000 officers and 35,000 n.c.o.s on the active list and 100,000 officers of the reserve. In all regiments, both in the large towns and at the frontier, the officers are subjected to hard service identical with that of the cadres of the French covering corps. In a regiment at Posen certain officers of particularly good standing complained in the visitor's hearing of their inability to find time to prepare for the Staff College.

With an instrument at hand so imbued with the spirit of offence it was to be feared that the Polish command would fall into the same mistake as the French chiefs in 1914: the doctrine of the *offensive à outrance*. It has wisely avoided such an error; its method, perfectly adapted to the country, is as flexible as could be desired. What the Polish commanders wish to avoid, in event of war, is allowing themselves to be hypnotized by the terrain instead of using it to create surprise through mobility and avoiding as far as possible the fatal stabilization of opposing forces. They have not the rigid conception of keeping in touch which prevails in the western armies and paralyses the initiative of their chiefs. The tendency is already evident in an increased flexibility in the very organization of the army, which bears no resemblance to the French or German type of army corps. The Polish command inclines more to operational groups combining a variable number of divisions, according to need, and supported by artillery proportionate to the task before them. These independent groups are intended to operate on very wide fronts; they would not be combined for a decisive effort until a favourable moment. The training of the units themselves is similarly inspired by an idea of manoeuvre different from our own. The Poles are trained to "mount" an operation on a regimental, in preference to a divisional, basis. In regard to manoeuvre their commanders put great faith in bold raids, conducted like forlorn hopes, without care to cover themselves at all costs. In this respect the basis of their doctrine lies in the use of cavalry, according to the lessons of the Russo-Polish war, rather than in manoeuvring dense masses of infantry, as was the rule in the Great War.

### THE MARE KAZTANKA

The Polish army is the only one in Europe which has retained a large number of cavalry. Its cavalry, called "cavalry of the line," has a strength of 36 regiments: 27 of lancers, three of light cavalry, and six of mounted chasseurs, distinguished by the colour of their cap-band. All this cavalry is permanently on a war footing; only the divisional cavalry mobilizes. The authorities allowed an inspection at Pinsk of the 7th Lancer Lubelski regiment, known as "General Sosnkowski's" after the hero of Pilsudski's legions, who to-day occupies one of the highest military posts. It should be noted in parentheses that a further asset of this army is to have carried traditions to the very heart of its regiments by calling them after famous heroes or battles; and the practice is honoured of awarding active and reserve soldiers a different decoration for each regiment. With the purpose of creating a bond between the regiment and the civil population this decoration can be awarded by the colonel to civilians as a mark of respect or to recognize services rendered. The 7th Lancers is a regiment of picked cavalry which guards the remains of Kaztanka, Marshal Pilsudski's favourite mare, whose grave lies in front of the officers' mess. The regiment dates back to the Napoleonic wars, and distinguished itself at the Battle of Hanover. The standard, decorated by the *Virtuti Militari*, carries six battle-honours, not embroidered on silk, as with us, but engraved on the golden nails of its staff.

For the inspection the regiment was deployed in squadrons, together with its war equip-

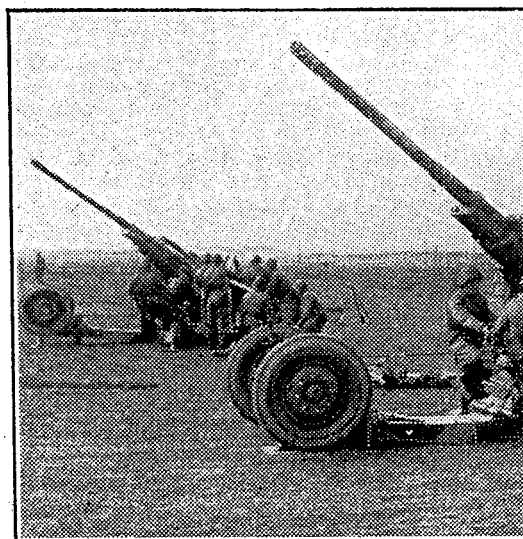
ment consisting of four anti-tank guns, 12 heavy machine-guns, and three transport wagons, all horse-drawn, as well as a section of cyclist signallers. Only the front rank of each troop carries lances; the others are armed with carbines, bayonets, and swords, which they carry, like Spahis, below the saddle, and with light machine-guns, four to each squadron. After the lancers had returned the colonel's salute in chorus in the Russian manner, they deployed, and to the accompaniment of loud "Hurrahs!" made a superb charge which would have aroused the enthusiasm of a Balaclava veteran. Then each squadron carried out attack exercises mounted and dismounted, both with and without covering fire from their light machine-guns. The men had had only five months' training, and although tradition dictates that a cavalryman shall not obtain the coveted title of lancer until the sixth month has passed, their horsemanship, air of assurance, and initiative were most impressive. All the equipment, drawn by three horses harnessed abreast, showed itself highly mobile, making light of obstacles, even if dangerous, with an ease which, on this terrain at least, spoke eloquently for the superiority of the horse

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Polish anti-aircraft guns a

over the machine. At the end of the field exercises, after a perfect march past which demonstrated the breeding of the English arabs mounted by the lancers, riding-school exercises revealed the skill of the Polish cavalryman in the use of sword and lance. There was also an opportunity of admiring the horsemanship of the Olympic champion, Major Kuleza, instructor at the cavalry school at Grudziadz, the Polish Saumur.

But the 7th Lancers is one of the units designed to operate on their own, in some respects like a forlorn hope. In general the cavalry brigades have, besides the anti-tank gun, detachments of armoured cars, light tanks, and anti-aircraft artillery. The Polish command has reckoned that it must at all costs avoid weighing down the cavalry unit with too great a fire-power. If the cavalry wishes to remain cavalry, however, it must use both fire and movement as its weapons, fire being not an end but a means for executing its manoeuvres. Armoured cars, anti-tank guns, light tanks, and anti-aircraft artillery are meant only to facilitate these manoeuvres by covering against surprise on the ground or from the air. In the opinion of the Polish military

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Armoured cars, anti-tank guns, light tanks, and anti-aircraft artillery are meant only to facilitate these manoeuvres by covering against surprise on the ground or from the air. In the opinion of the Polish military chiefs, cavalry will to-morrow rediscover those qualities of decision which the Great War took from it, provided always that it changes its method and field of action.

### HELP FROM THE AIR

The view expressed at staff headquarters and among the regiments was that aviation has released cavalry from its exhausting role of reconnaissance, which often made it incapable of playing its part as a shock weapon at the decisive moment. Kept informed in its turn from the air, it will be able to throw all its forces into battle active and fresh when the moment has arrived for forcing a decision. But it will only be able to obtain this decision if it manoeuvres on a terrain different from that on which it has been used hitherto. Whereas formerly it looked for open territory suitable for making a charge, its object to-day is to manoeuvre in territory that is covered and difficult and will give it superiority over both infantry and mechanized forces.

This Polish theory is no doubt suited to a particular kind of terrain lacking roads, intersected by woods and lakes, and sprinkled with marshes, and of a width which excludes *a priori* every possibility of establishing a continuous front. The doctrine is again conditioned by the wealth of the country in horses; a wealth which makes up for so poor a development of industrial resources as is not propitious to extensive mechanization. Poland possesses 3,950,000 horses classed as fit for military service. The remount commissions only requisition, on an average, five horses from each lot of 500 examined. All in all, the Polish cavalry has available a remount strength of eight horses a man.

*To be concluded*

### UNIVERSITY NEWS

#### OXFORD, JULY 4

The examiners have reported to the Vice-Chancellor that they have awarded the Theodore Williams Scholarship in Anatomy, 1939, to M. P. Lewis, Exhibitioner of Magdalen College.

The examiners have reported to the Vice-Chancellor that they have awarded the James Mew Rabbinical Hebrew Scholarship, 1939, to J. G. T. Sheringham, B.A., Christ Church. *Proxime accessit*.—A. J. McIntosh, B.A., St. John's College.

### BOOK OF THE ROYAL TOUR

King George's Jubilee Trust announce further details of the book which is to be published, by permission of the King, commemorating their Majesties' visit to Canada and the United States. The book will contain the speeches and broadcast addresses delivered by the King and Queen. There will be 65 photographs, reproduced in half-tone, showing many of the most important events of the tour, and a chronological narrative of the day to day progress. It is a fine art production to be priced at 3s. 6d., and will be published by Macmillan and Co., Ltd., not later than July 15. Many firms have made a generous contribution of services or material towards the volume, and all profits from its sale will be devoted to King George's Jubilee Trust.

### HONESTY PAYS

An interesting item in the annual report on the running of Bournemouth Corporation trolley and motor-omnibuses refers to the "honesty boxes" which were placed in all the corporation's vehicles last year. These boxes, into which passengers who have been missed by the conductors are invited to drop their fares, yielded a total of £181, or the equivalent of 43,440 penny fares.

### BARRAGE BALLOON ADRIFT

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