

Polish Cavalry in World War II

Forward! After me!

The absolute last Polish cavalry attack

af Janusz Piekalkiewicz

We are in the western part of Pomerania, March 1, 1945. A cold wind blows low-hanging, heavy and threatening clouds across a hilly terrain. Small lakes light up between dark forest areas, and here and there lie the last dirty remnants of winter's snow. In a village near the town of Schönfeld, a military band plays the Polish national tune - the Dobrowski March.

Two squadrons parade at a trot past a group of senior officers. One squadron, under the command of Lt. Spisacki, now swings to the right towards a wooded area, while the other squadron, under the command of Lt. Starak, continues straight ahead towards a railway line. A few kilometers away, Schönfeld lies in a depression, surrounded by flat meadows intersected by drainage canals. The town is divided by a railway line and a country road runs along it. On both sides of this there are lakes and further away more meadow and forest areas. This is where the "Pommern Linien" went - the last German line of defense before Berlin.

The riders of the 1st Independent Cavalry Brigade "Warszawa" (1 *Somodzielna Warszawska Brygada Kawalerii*) - a cavalry brigade that was part of the 1st Polish Army fighting on the Russian side - had a difficult task ahead of them. They were to break through the German defense lines if at all possible. Polish infantry supported by tanks had been trying to accomplish this task for the previous two days, but had been stopped by the swampy terrain. They had suffered very heavy losses. From positions in the trenches, German anti-tank gunners had been firing on the tanks, while machine guns had taken care of the infantry. Two cavalry squadrons, supported by the remaining tanks, now had to solve the task that the T-34 tanks and the infantry attack commands had not been able to solve. The horsemen could only hope that the enemy would focus their attention on the chariots and not the horses.



A couple of tanks drove forward towards the highway. A red ball of light shot into the air - the signal for the cavalry's advance. Lieutenant Starak drew his saber and commanded, "Forward! After me!" With cheers, the squadron galloped and quickly crossed the road. Violent clouds of smoke from burning tanks hid the riders, who quickly cut in on the German anti-tank gunners. "Russian Cossacks! Russian Cossacks!" it sounded from all sides. No one had apparently considered it possible that cavalry would support a tank attack. After riding through the German positions, the horsemen dismounted and charged the enem

the back.

Meanwhile the second squadron, under Lieutenant Spisacki, assembled in a small grove, and soon fell behind in difficulties. Even before the attack began, the tank platoon which was supposed to support the attack was stuck in the terrain. The tanks were immediately set on fire. The black smoke caused confusion among the riders, but they continued forward. In the German positions behind the smoke, everything was quiet and peaceful, until suddenly fierce shots were fired at the advancing horsemen - perhaps the enemy had been momentarily confused by the sight? The squadron continued through the forward positions, found cover in a depression close to Schönfeld, and dismounted. Thus ended the last Polish cavalry attack in history!

Both squadrons fought closer to Schönfeld. Towards evening, the town, secured only by a few dug-in positions, was taken with the support of tanks and infantry. The infantry had 370 killed and wounded, while the cavalry lost only seven men.

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Postscript

The picture does not necessarily show Polish soldiers, but at least Russian soldiers - it is shown to create the right atmosphere.