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Polish Military Thought in the Interwar Period of the 20th Century and the Role of Marshal Józef Piłsudski

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Polish military thought of the interwar period was derived from the country's position in the international arena, its geostrategic location, the position and role of Józef Piłsudski, as well as economic and social factors determining specific development opportunities of the armed forces of independent Poland.

Introduction

The newly reborn Second Polish Republic was forced to fight for its survival from the very first days of its independence in 1918. The war with Bolshevik Russia and conflicts with Lithuania and Czechoslovakia, as well as with Germany, required the government and authorities to make difficult and sometimes even painful decisions, demanding tremendous effort from a large part of society, not only militarily but economically as well. However, owing primarily to military successes, it was able to maintain Poland's independence.

Combat against Bolsheviks, Germans, Czechs and Lithuanians was conducted based on experience gained by Polish soldiers who had fought in Polish Legions, armies of the former empires that had partitioned Poland at the end of the 18th century, and in different regions not only of Europe but also across other continents. Within just two years (November 1918–October 1920), the Polish military authorities were forced to implement strategic and operational plans based on the experience of the officers involved in their preparation, but also, more importantly, taking into account the rapidly changing situation on multiple fronts.

This demanding art of assimilating knowledge from various schools of warfare theory, while conducting hostilities in correlation with ongoing situational analysis, brought not only a significant contribution to the victory over Bolshevik Russia, but also raised important questions about Poland's military future: In what direction should Polish military thought develop? What criteria should operational art adopt in a geostrategic dimension? Which factors should be focused on regarding potential conflict scenarios involving Poland? And consequently, in what direction should Poland's armed forces develop? Polish theoreticians devoted themselves to addressing these questions. Several figures had a decisive influence in shaping certain theories that gained enormous popularity or attracted significant interest not only from military authorities but also the broader officer corps of the Polish Army.

Józef Piłsudski and his influence on the development of military thought

During the interwar period, Polish military theoreticians concentrated on a number of key issues, such as the nature of future warfare, the role and capability of aviation, the relevance of mobile and mechanised troops, and the effective deployment of infantry and cavalry. Strategically, the focus was, above all, on the concept of mobile defence as the most predominant fighting form against a stronger opponent, for it was assumed that potential conflicts would take place with Germany and/or the Soviet Union, whose military potential was substantially greater than Poland's, despite the limitations imposed on Germany by the Treaty of Versailles. In theoretical terms, manoeuvre warfare doctrine dominated Polish military thought, and its authorship was attributed to Marshal Józef Piłsudski.

This belief was fuelled by Józef Piłsudski himself. However, it was not so much his genius as factors such as the nature of the theatre of war and its opportunities, the duration of war, as well as the tactics used by the Bolsheviks that led to the implementation of the strategy

of manoeuvre warfare. Disregarding the questionable authorship of this theory, which is ascribed to Piłsudski, it is worth noting that he claimed that the conditions of the war forced both sides to conduct manoeuvring operations whose aim was the destruction of the enemy's armies. He remained a supporter of the theory until the end of his life. Its main theses boiled down to the need to maintain strong reserves in case of unfavourable developments on the front. Skilful manoeuvring would compensate for the lack of strength and resources. However, this was a wrong assumption because the Second World War proved the need for both strength and resources as well as manoeuvres. He believed in the superiority of improvisation in war over planned activities, and this reluctance to create military doctrines had a negative effect on the organisation and training of the army.

In Polish geostrategic conditions, against the militarily more powerful neighbouring countries – Germany and Soviet Russia – the theory of manoeuvre warfare was associated with the concept of operational (mobile) defence as the main form of combat against a stronger opponent. It was supposed to bring the balance of power to a point that would allow for the destruction of a tougher enemy through prolonged combat, conducted in stages.[1] As mentioned previously, Polish manoeuvre warfare theory was accepted and its ideas replicated by the majority of Polish military theoreticians, including General Marian Kukiel[2] and

[1] Lech Wyszczelski, *Polska myśl wojskowa 1914–1939* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, 1988), 191–192, 264–269.

[2] Marian Włodzimierz Kukiel (1885–1973) was a Polish general and military historian, dr. phil. from the University of Lwów in 1909. He fought in the Polish Legions in World War I, and in the Polish–Soviet War, he was commander of the Komorowo Cadet School. In 1920–23, he served as the head of the Historical Bureau of the General Staff. Kukiel was made a Brigadier General in 1923. Following Piłsudski's May Coup of 1926, Kukiel moved to the reserves. In 1927, he received a dr. habil. from the University of Kraków. Between 1927 and 1939, he lectured on modern history and was made a professor in 1935. Kukiel served as Minister of War (national defence) of the Polish government-in-exile in 1939–40 and 1942–49. His best-known works include *Zarys historji wojskowości w Polsce* (An Outline of the History of Military Science in Poland) (1921) and *Wojna 1812 roku* (The War of 1812) (1937) (Editor's note).

Colonel Stefan Rowecki.[3] Its critics included General Tadeusz Kutrzeba,[4] who claimed that the specificity of the Polish–Soviet war limited the value of conclusions drawn from it and that it was impossible to build Polish military doctrine based on it, assuming only offensive and manoeuvring actions.[5]

However, the doctrine dominated further studies on the development of operational plans in case of conflicts with neighbours, as a kind of testament to Marshal Piłsudski's influence. In fact, it was actually implemented in the "West" plan devised in the spring of 1939, which became the basis for preparations for war with Germany. The course of events in September of 1939 made all the flaws of this doctrine evident. Nevertheless, we should also note the completely

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[3] Jan Pilżys, "Wojna i doktryna wojenna w myśli wojskowej lat 1921–1939", *Zeszyty Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Oficerskiej Wojsk Lądowych* 164, no 2 (2012): 212; Tadeusz Urbańczyk, "Polska myśl wojskowa i doktryna wojenna na łamach "Bellony" w latach 1918–1939", *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego* MCXLII*: Prace Historyczne*, no 112 (1994): 36; Marian Kukiel, "Miejsce kampanii 1920 w historii wojen", *Bellona* XVI, no 2 (1924): 125–136; Stefan Rowecki, "Polska źródłem świeżej myśli wojskowej", *Bellona* XXVIII, no 3 (1927): 228–262. Stefan Paweł Rowecki (1895–1944) was a general and journalist who fought in World War I and the Polish–Soviet war. After the war, he became chief of the Science and Publishing Institute of the Polish Army and co-founded a military weekly called *Przegląd Wojskowy* (Military Review). He was commander of the 55th Infantry Regiment in Lezsno in 1930–35, and in summer 1939 organised the Warsaw Armoured Motorised Brigade. In 1940–41, he was commander of the Union of Armed Struggle, and in 1942–43 served as commander of the Armia Krajowa (Home Army). Was arrested by the Gestapo and likely executed in Sachsenhausen concentration camp (Editor's note).

[4] Tadeusz Kutrzeba (1886–1947) was a general and military theoretician. He studied in 1910–14 at the General Staff Academy in Vienna, and fought as a general staff officer of the Austro-Hungarian Army in World War I on the Serbian, Russian and Italian fronts. In the Polish–Soviet War, he served as chief of staff of various divisions and larger formations – during the battle of the Niemen (1920), for example, he was chief of staff of the 2nd Army. Afterwards, he became a lecturer in general tactics at the General Staff School. He also participated in developing military regulations. In 1927, he was made a Brigadier General and served from 1928 to 1939 as commandant of the Higher Military School, where he lectured in tactics and combat history. In 1939, he was promoted to Major General. He published works on the Polish–Soviet War and on theoretical and practical issues. He advocated for modernising the army, especially by motorising it and creating armoured units. In 1939, he was named commander-in-chief of the Poznań Army. He was captured by the Germans and was in prisoner-of-war camps from 1939 to 1945. In 1945, he moved to London, where he became the chairman of the Historical Commission of the September Campaign and the Polish Armed Forces in the West (Editor's note).

[5] Wyszczelski, *Polska myśl*, 198.

Colonel Tadeusz Kutrzeba at his desk, 1925. Source: Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe, 3/1/0/7/259

different nature of the theatre of warfare at the time (as opposed to the conditions of the Polish–Soviet war of 1919–1920), as well as inconsistent Polish strategic planning, which altered with the changes of the geopolitical situation.

Concepts of conducting warfare

Like Piłsudski, the remaining Polish theorists considered the future theatre of warfare on Polish territory in terms of the concept of defensive warfare. However, they varied in terms of their emphasis on individual issues resulting from the very nature of defensive warfare. In any case, none of them had either the influence or the potential to influence the actual development of the Polish armed forces in the way Piłsudski did.

Nonetheless, their voices did not go unnoticed, and they were even subjected to analysis, comments and criticism. The leading role here was played by two officers: General Władysław Sikorski[6] and Colonel Stefan Mossor. To a lesser extent, officers such as General Jan Romer[7] and Colonel Stanisław Rola Arciszewski were involved in this field.

Sikorski was a well-known military theorist and a longtime critic of Piłsudski's activities and his political antagonist. He had been a military commander during the Polish–Soviet war, and later served as prime minister and minister of military affairs in pre-war Poland.[8] He wrote several books, prominent among which was one on the nature of a future war,[9] its many facets and scenarios for how events might unfold. Mossor, meanwhile, was distinguished by a theoretical sense that predisposed him to assume functions connected with military planning. As a graduate of the Higher School of Naval Forces as well as École Supérieure de Guerre in Paris, he had extensive theoretical knowledge, which resulted in him becoming a lecturer at the Polish Higher Military School and a staff officer at the General Inspectorate

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[6] Władysław Eugeniusz Sikorski (1881–1943) graduated from Lwów Polytechnic in 1908, attended the Austro-Hungarian Military School, and became a Lieutenant Colonel in 1914. He was made commissioner in charge of the recruitment to the Polish Legion and later commander of a Legion's officer school. In 1915, he was given the rank of Colonel. In 1921–22, he served as the Chief of the Polish General Staff before becoming Prime Minister in 1922–23. In 1923–24, as Minister of War, he led the modernisation of the army. In the late 1920s, Sikorski joined the opposition against Piłsudski. In 1939–43, he served as Prime Minister of the government in exile in London. Sikorski died in an air accident in Gibraltar (Editor's note).

[7] Jan Edward Romer (1869–1934) graduated from the Technical Military Academy in Vienna in 1890. He became Lieutenant Colonel in 1911 and Colonel in 1914. He fought in World War I in the Austro-Hungarian Army on the Russian and Italian fronts as the artillery commander of the infantry divisions and army corps. In 1918, he was promoted to Major General. In the same year, Romer joined the Polish Army and fought in the Polish–Ukrainian and Polish–Soviet wars. He headed the Polish Military Purchase Mission in Paris in 1919 and was a member of the Polish delegation at the armistice negotiations with Soviet Russia in 1920. He rose to the rank of Division General in 1922 and was appointed a member of the War Council in 1924. From 1926 to 1932, he served as Inspector (i.e., Commander-in-Chief) of the Army (Editor's note).

[8] Marek Jabłonowski, "Gen Władysław Sikorski w świetle publicystyki", *Generał Władysław Sikorski w zbiorach Centralnej Biblioteki Wojskowej*, joint publication (Warszawa: Centralna Biblioteka Wojskowa im. Marszałka Józefa Piłsudskiego, 2011), 9–27.

[9] Władysław Sikorski. *Przyszła wojna – jej możliwości i charakter oraz związane z nimi zagadnienia obrony kraju* (Warszawa: Bibljoteka Prawnicza, 1934).

of the Armed Forces, where, together with General Tadeusz Kutrzeba, he was involved in expanding on a study of Polish strategic planning against Germany. His most important book, concerning the art of warfare in the conditions of modern war, was published in 1938.[10] The remaining theoreticians no longer had such a significant impact on military thought, although their works did not pass unnoticed.

As already mentioned, the nature of a future war became the subject of Sikorski's study. His most influential work, *Przyszła wojna: jej możliwości i charakter oraz związane z nim zagadmienia obrony kraju* (The Future War: Its Possibilities and Nature, and Related Issues of Defence of the Country), published in 1934, made several accurate predictions about the next war. He believed that it would be global in scope. Analysing the geopolitical relations of the time, he saw the real threat of the outbreak of a new war and predicted that Adolf Hitler's Germany would be responsible. He correctly foresaw that Hitler would likely launch a blitzkrieg within five or six years. The consequence, he accurately predicted, was that in response to the German aggression, a coalition would be formed based on the alliances and pacts in place in Europe.[11]

Another distinguished Polish officer, Major General Jan Romer, agreed with Sikorski on the nature of a future war. In fact, he predicted even earlier, in 1927, that the conflict would prove to be global.[12]

One last theoretician who had a crucial impact on the perception of the nature of the next war was Colonel Stefan Mossor.[13] Like

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[10] Jarosław Pałka, *Generał Stefan Mossor (1896–1957). Biografia wojskowa* (Warszawa: Rytm, 2008).

[11] Wyszczelski, *Polska myśl*, 86–89.

[12] Ibid., 90; Jan Romer, "Przyszła wojna", *Bellona* XXVI, no 3 (1927): 249–268.

[13] Stefan Adolf Mossor (1896–1957), general, fought in World War I in the Austro-Hungarian Army and graduated from the Austrian cavalry officers' school (1918). He joined the Polish Army, also served in General Józef Haller's army in France, and formed the 5th Siberian Division (1919). After studying at Lwów Polytechnic in 1921, the Higher Military School in Warsaw in 1927–28, and École Supérieure de Guerre in Paris in 1928–30, he lectured at the Higher Military School (1930–34, from 1935). He was promoted to Captain in 1922. From 1937 to 1938, he served as the 1st general staff officer in the Headquarters of General Inspector of the Armed Forces, where he developed the Study of the Strategic Plan of the War Against Germany (known as 'General Kutrzeba's memorandum'). He published works on modern warfare. In 1939, as Lieutenant Colonel

Sikorski, he anticipated that it would be a clash of coalitions of warring states and, naturally, its reach would be worldwide.[14]

All three officers noted that the duration of a future conflict would be crucial. Sikorski believed that the war would be long-lasting and would require full mobilisation of all the human and material resources. He did not preclude the possibility of employing a blitzkrieg variant, but not as a key tool for the implementation of strategic planning.[15] Mossor, in turn, heavily criticised the concept of a blitzkrieg. He affirmed that it was impossible to win a war using only a professional army that was highly mechanised and supported by a strong air force. He underestimated the importance of tanks and aircraft on the battlefield. His remarks may have stemmed from the fact that he was familiar with Poland's economic and military situation.[16]

Yet another issue that emerged among Polish theoreticians discussing a future war was whether it would prove to be a positional conflict or one of manoeuvring. The majority agreed with Piłsudski and the Polish theory of a manoeuvre-based conflict, based on the experience of the Polish–Soviet war. The major assumption here was that war would be waged with traditional weapons, namely infantry supported by cavalry, through active forms of manoeuvring activities. Colonel Stanisław Rola Arciszewski[17] should be included among the

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of the General Staff, he commanded the 6th Cavalry Regiment of the Łódź Army. From 1939 to1944, he was held as a German prisoner of war and later volunteered the Polish People's Army, advancing to Major General in 1947. He headed the Study Office of the Ministry of National Defence (1949–50) before being arrested in 1950, accused of conspiracy against the communist party, and tried in a show trial in 1951. He was released in 1955 (Editor's note).

[14] Stefan Mossor, *Sztuka wojenna w warunkach nowoczesnej wojny* (Warszawa: Wojskowy Instytut Naukowo-Oświatowy, 1938), 165; Urbańczyk, "Polska myśl wojskowa", 38–39.

[15] Wyszczelski, *Polska myśl*, 104.

[16] Ibid., 91.

[17] Stanisław Teofil Rola Arciszewski (1888–1953) graduated from the Technical College of Vienna in 1910. During World War I, he fought in the Austro-Hungarian army on the Russian and Italian fronts, graduated from ensign school in 1915, and was promoted to Lieutenant in 1918. He served in the Polish army as a logistics officer from 1918, studied at the Higher Military School in Warsaw (1922–24), and became a lecturer of general tactics there, advancing to Major in 1924. In 1928–30, he served as Chief of Staff of the 13th Infantry Division, was promoted to

main proponents of this theory. Romer had a somewhat different view that converged with this one in some respects. He claimed that the future war would consist of two stages, the first one involving manoeuvring activity, and the other comprising positional fights as a result of the stagnation of the front.[18] This indicated that, unlike Piłsudski or Arciszewski, Romer recognised the possibility of interrupting offensive activities. Similar viewpoints were formulated by authors such as Sikorski and Mossor, who also presumed that a future conflict would involve both active measures and elements of positional warfare.[19]

Concepts of using new types of weapons

Modern combat measures used in the First World War became an object of interest for military theoreticians in terms of their applications in future conflicts. In Poland, the focus was, above all, on determining the role and tasks of aviation and fast troops, which emerged from the shape of the Second Polish Republic's borders, as well as economic possibilities of the country.

Aviation was first mentioned in the independent Republic of Poland as early as 1919, in lecture topics presented by members of the Air Force Officers' Club. In their speeches, they touched upon issues such as the development of Polish aviation. However,

Lieutenant Colonel in 1931, commanded the 1st Motorised Regiment in Modlin (1931–35), the 1st Motorised Artillery Regiment in Stryj (1935–37), and the 7th Light Artillery Regiment in Częstochowa (1937–38). In 1938, he was promoted to Colonel, and served as Commander of the 3rd Armoured Group in Warsaw. In September 1939, he was the Commander of the Armoured Forces of the Łódź Army, later Deputy Chief of Staff of the Warsaw Army. In 1939–45 Arciszewski was a German prisoner of war. In 1945, he joined the Polish Armed Forces in the West. From 1947, he lived in London, working in the Historical Commission of the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces in the West. His best-known book on military history is *Sztuka dowodzenia na zachodzie Europy* (The Art of Command in Western Europe), published in 1934 (Editor's note).

[18] Romer, "Przyszła wojna", 266.

[19] Wyszczelski, *Polska myśl*, 103–108.

the most principal accomplishment was pilot Stanisław Jasiński's[20] book *The Most Urgent Demands of Polish Military Aviation*.[21] Jasiński, being unfamiliar with Douhet's work,[22] put forth an interesting and original concept of how aviation can be used. He believed that it could be used for independent operations. However, unlike Douhet, he did not foresee that those actions would allow the achievement of strategic goals of war. According to Jasiński, the task of the air force was to support the operations of ground armies.[23]

Another theoretician who played a major role in discussing air force issues was Colonel Sergiusz Abżółtowski, who was also trained as a pilot.[24] In 1923, he released his first book,[25] in which he predicted that the main task of bombers in a future war would be to destroy material and people, and to lower morale. Fighters' assignments

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[20] Stanisław Jasiński (1891–1932) studied at the Austrian Mining Academy in Loeben and graduated from the school of air observers in Wiener Neustadt in 1916. He served as an observer and later as a fighter pilot in the Austro-Hungarian Army and subsequently in the Polish Army. He was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in 1924 and to Colonel in 1932. He commanded the 3rd Air Force Division (Grupa Aeronautyczna) in Kraków. He participated in the theoretical development of the Polish Air Force, published articles in the military press and served as a member of the editorial board of the journal *Przegląd Lotniczy* (Air Review). He died in a car accident (Editor's note).

[21] Stanisław Jasiński, *Najpilniejsze postulaty polskiego lotnictwa wojskowego* (Warszawa: s.n, 1921).

[22] Giulio Douhet (1869–1930), Italian air power theorist and Air Force General.

[23] Wyszczelski, *Polska myśl*, 120–127; Tadeusz Kmiecik, "Węzłowe problemy wykorzystania lotnictwa w przyszłej wojnie w polskiej myśli lotniczej lat 1919–1939", *Słupskie Studia Historyczne*, no 10 (2003): 133–135.

[24] Sergiusz Abżółtowski (1890–1939) studied at the Sumy Cadet Corps and attended the Michael Artillery School in St. Petersburg (1907–10). He left Russia in autumn 1917 and initially served as an Artillery Lieutenant in the Polish Army. In 1920, he underwent pilot training in France in Dijon and Pau and was promoted to Major. He became a general staff officer (1922) and was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel (1924), serving as military attaché in Moscow (1922–23). He commanded the 3rd Poznań Air Force Regiment (1925–29) before being dismissed and retired. Later he lectured at the Higher Air Force School (1936–39), was a prolific author on air force matters, formulating the foundations of Polish operational air force, and served as editor-in-chief of the *Mała encyklopedia lotnicza* (Small Aviation Encyclopaedia) (Editor's note).

[25] Sergiusz Abżołtowski, *Taktyka lotnictwa* (Tactics of the Air Force) (Warszawa: Wojskowy Instytut Naukowo-Wydawniczy, 1923).

would result from the need to gain air superiority. A year later, he published another book in which he clearly put forth a thesis on the need to develop independent air force units for offensive tasks such as bombing communication centres and destroying enemy airfields or industrial centres. In the years that followed, Abżółtowski's views evolved, influenced by the research of European theoreticians as well as the changing geopolitical and economic situation of the Polish state. In 1932, he published his most influential work on the operational use of the air force.[26] He recommended that it become a separate branch of the armed forces. He forecast that the air fleets of the leading countries of the world would be designed to fight enemy aircraft and gain superiority. However, he rejected the possibility of implementing strategic aviation tasks – i.e., defeating the opponent through air power alone.[27]

It is crucial to keep in mind that Polish theorists endeavoured to create their own original visions and avoid imitating others. Regrettably, the inability to postulate was influenced by Piłsudski's own attitude. He was not a supporter of new, mechanised forms of fighting. For him, the air force's role was limited to conducting surveillance and reconnaissance activities only.[28]

In Polish military thought, work on the use of troops concentrated around five fields of study: the theory of manoeuvring war and the experiences of the Polish–Soviet war; the operational role of the cavalry; concepts of creating mixed and light units; using motorised and armoured troops; and the role and significance of anti-tank defence.

Concepts for the use of mixed and light units in Polish military thought appeared after foreign theoreticians had already addressed the topic, and they were quite conservative in comparison. What did this mean? Above all, a small number of officers saw the need for total motorisation of the army and the creation of light

[26] Sergiusz Abżołtowski, *Operacyjne użycie Lotnictwa* (Operational Use of the Air Force) (Warszawa: Wojskowy Instytut Naukowo-Wydawniczy, 1932).

[27] Wyszczelski, *Polska myśl*, 128–133; Kmiecik, "Węzłowe problemy", 136–140.

[28] Wyszczelski, *Polska myśl*, 151.

units. General Kazimierz Fabrycy,[29] Colonel Marian Przybylski,[30] Major Jan Rzepecki[31] and Captain Wacław Popiel[32] were supporters of this idea. It was the same with forming mixed units. However, the tone of the entire discussion was set by cavalry officers such as Colonel Aleksander Pragłowski,[33] Colonel Tadeusz

[29] Kazimierz Fabrycy (1888–1958) graduated from the Technical University of Munich. He fought in the World War I and in the Polish–Soviet War, where he successively commanded the XXXI, XX and XXII Infantry Brigades. He was promoted to Brigadier General in 1924. From 1926 to 1934, he served as Deputy Minister of War. He was promoted to Major General in 1931, and from 1934 to 1939, he held the position of Inspector of the Army. In 1939, he commanded the Carpathian Army and was subsequently evacuated to Romania. During World War II, he served in the Middle East and later lived in exile in London (Editor's note).

[30] Marian Emil Przybylski (b. 1884) graduated from the Lwów Polytechnic as an engineer. He joined the Polish Army in 1919, advancing to Major (1920) and Colonel (1922). After studying at the Higher Military School (1922–23), he served as Chief of Staff of the District Command of the 1st Corps in Warsaw (1924–25) and then as acting head of the department of Technical Troops at the Ministry of War. He became editor-in-chief of the monthly *Przegląd Wojskowo-Techniczny* (Military-Technical Review) in 1927, retired in 1929, and served as railway commander of the Kraków Army in 1939 (Editor's note).

[31] Jan Rzepecki (1899–1983), military historian, fought in the Polish–Soviet War. He studied at the Higher Military School in 1922–24 and lectured on tactics and military history at the Infantry Officer School in Warsaw. Promoted to Major (1931) and later Colonel, he lectured tactics at the Higher Military School (1935–39). During World War II, he served as Chief of the Bureau of Information and Propaganda of the Home Army (1940–45). After remaining in Poland and enduring a show trial, he worked at the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences (1955–59) and received his PhD in 1964 (Editor's note).

[32] Wacław Popiel (b. 1896) was a military writer, he graduated from the Michael Artillery School in Petrograd in 1916. He joined the Polish Army in Siberia in 1919 and served as an instructor at the school of artillery officers of the 5th Field Artillery Regiment, was promoted to Captain in 1919. After studying at the Higher Military School in Warsaw (1925–27), he was promoted to Major (1930) and Lieutenant Colonel (1938). In September 1939, he was captured by the Germans. After his release, he served as head of the department of tactics at the Higher School of Artillery, the Higher Officers' Artillery Course and at the Artillery Training Centre in Toruń (1945–47). He published several works mainly on artillery tactics (Editor's note).

[33] Aleksander Tadeusz Pragłowski (1895–1974) studied at the Theresian Military Academy in Wiener Neustadt (1912–14) and served as an officer in the 4th Uhlan Regiment of the Austro-Hungarian Army, fighting in the Carpathians and Alps. He served in the Polish Army during the Polish–Soviet War, reaching the rank of Captain by 1920. After studying at the General Staff School, he served as an assistant in general tactics until 1924 and was promoted to Major in 1923. Following further training in France in a course for regiment commanders (1926), he became a lecturer at the Higher Military School, advancing to Lieutenant Colonel (1928) and Colonel (1931). He commanded the 17th Uhlan Regiment in Leszno (1929–36) and served as 1st general staff officer of the Army Inspector Headquarters (1936–39). During World War II,

Machalski,[34] Major Włodzimierz Dunin-Żuchowski[35] and Major Zygmunt Powała-Dzieślewski,[36] who criticised concepts of mixed and light units for fear of restricting the role of cavalry.[37] The opponents of fast motorisation included preeminent theoreticians such as Sikorski and Mossor.

Polish theorists had a wide variety of views on army mechanisation issues, in particular on the possibility of employing tank units. On this, they lagged behind the findings of theoreticians elsewhere. Above all, the experience from the Polish–Soviet war, where the use of tanks brought negative sentiment, lingered. Therefore, negative conclusions regarding the potential of armoured weapons dominated in Polish analyses. The prevalent thesis was that armoured units could not undertake independent operations, let alone achieve strategic goals. Regrettably, technical progress in the construction of new models of tanks went unnoticed. Concepts of using the tank as an auxiliary means, cooperating with infantry, were preferred. Finally, they emphasised that tanks were useless in night combat, difficult atmospheric and defensive

he was a German prisoner of war, later served in the 1st Armoured Division (1945–46), and lived in London after 1947. He was promoted to Brigadier General in 1964 (Editor's note).

34 Tadeusz Machalski (1893–1983) graduated from the Theresian Military Academy in Wiener Neustadt. He fought in World War I and the Polish–Soviet War. From 1921 to 1922, he studied at the Higher Military School in Warsaw. He later served as military attaché in Turkey and as Minister of Finance of the Polish government-in-exile (Editor's note).

35 Włodzimierz Dunin-Żuchowski (1893–1940) graduated from the cavalry school in Saumur, France, in 1920 and the Higher Military School in Warsaw in 1923. He later served as a lecturer at the Higher Military School. He was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in 1932. From 1932 to 1934, he served as head of the studies section of the Department of Cavalry of the Ministry of War. In 1939, he commanded the 8th Uhlan Regiment in Kraków. In late 1939, he was taken prisoner by the Soviets, held in a camp in Starobielsk, and was among the victims of the Katyń massacre (Editor's note).

36 Zygmunt Henryk Powała-Dzieślewski (1898–1953) graduated from the Higher Military School in 1925. He served in the 2nd Cavalry Division in Warsaw, in the 3rd Silesian Uhlan Regiment, and in the Cavalry Brigade in Toruń. He was promoted to Captain in 1931 and later to Major. In 1939, he was taken prisoner by the Germans but fled to London in 1940. He published works on cavalry organisation (Editor's note).

37 Włodzimierz Dunin-Żuchowski, "Związki mieszane. Zasady użycia i celowość", *Bellona* XXXIII, no 1 (1929): 111–122; Tadeusz Machalski, "Zagadnienie organizacji wielkich jednostek kawaleryjskich", *Przegląd Kawaleryjski*, no 2 (1927): 185–198; Tadeusz Machalski, "Związki mieszane", *Przegląd Kawaleryjski*, no 10 (1927): 907–915; Zygmunt Powała-Dzieślewski, "Nowoczesne poglądy na organizację kawalerii", *Przegląd Kawaleryjski*, no 1 (1927): 21–34; Aleksander Pragłowski, "Związki mieszane", *Bellona* XXIV, no 2 (1926): 123–136.

operations. This was the prevalent opinion in the twenties. Even in the thirties, there was talk of the need to create big motorised and armoured units of various ranks. Notable among these works were papers by Stanisław K. Kochanowski[38] on motorised divisions, by Colonel Roman Saloni[39] and Colonel Marian Jurecki[40] on armoured brigades, and by Rzepecki on armoured divisions.[41] Curiously enough, neither Sikorski nor Mossor were supporters of a greater use of armoured weapons.

Polish theoreticians did not discuss the issue of anti-tank weapons much for two reasons: Poland lagged significantly behind the developments of the armoured forces in the world, and the theorists underestimated the advantages of armoured weapons and so saw no need to research anti-tank defence measures or equip the infantry and cavalry units with them to any significant extent. It was believed that grenades and armour-piercing ammunition for small arms would be sufficient.[42] That situation reversed slightly in the lead-up to World War II, when Poland began to equip units with anti-tank rifles such as the UR Anti-tank Rifle. However, it did not affect the course of events.

The role of the infantry and cavalry in military thought

The most space in theoretical deliberations was devoted to the role of the infantry and cavalry, because of the conviction that the main burden of warfare would rest on them.[43] It was recognised that infantry

[38] Stanisław K. Kochanowski (1873–1943) was a military officer, lecturer and painter. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts at the University of Kraków, fought in World War I in the Polish Legions and served in the Polish Army during the Polish–Soviet War, was promoted to Captain in 1918. He later served as a lecturer at the Academy of Foreign Trade in Lwów (Editor's note).

[39] Roman Saloni (1895–1986) was a Colonel who commanded the 10th Infantry Regiment of the Polish Army in France in 1940.

[40] Marian Jurecki (1896–1984) graduated from the artillery school in Odessa and fought in World War I in the Russian army. He studied at the Higher Military School in Warsaw (1922–24) and was promoted to Major in 1927. From the late 1920s until 1932, he served as an anti-aircraft artillery officer in the Artillery Department of the Ministry of War. He published the *Podręcznik obrony przeciwlotniczej* (Anti-Aircraft Defence Manual) in 1936 (Editor's note).

[41] Wyszczelski, *Polska myśl*, 216–217, 219–225, 231–232.

[42] Ibid., 246–247.

[43] Pilżys, "Wojna i doktryna", 213.

would continue to be the most useful and versatile type of troops, and also the cheapest. Accordingly, the majority of theoreticians agreed that the infantry would be an essential component of operational units. It was to perform the most important offensive tasks and to be capable of defence, even when the enemy had a significant advantage. Following Piłsudski's theory of manoeuvre warfare, it was believed that by virtue of its mobility and manoeuvrability, the infantry would manage to eliminate the enemy's technical advantage. Apart from Piłsudski himself, the supporters of this thesis included Mossor, Rowecki and Arciszewski. However, a group of opponents directly asserted that if using only horses, the Polish infantry would be unable to engage in combat on an equal footing with other modern infantries or eliminate their technical advantage. Tadeusz Felsztyn, Jurecki and Rzepecki were among them.[44] They saw the solution as increasing the number of supporting weapons in the Polish infantry units and partially motorising them. The weaknesses of the infantry were noted by many officers, but few of them made their voices heard.

In 1930, Colonel Roman Umiastowski drew attention to the fact that the Polish infantry would be unprotected in a battle involving not only armoured weapons, but even infantry units reinforced by armoured units.[45] In 1937, General Kazimierz Sosnkowski confirmed that the organisation of the infantry division was the same as it had been in 1914 and that the staff training was also outdated.[46] Colonel Tadeusz Zakrzewski postulated the creation of mixed units, including formations and services beyond just infantry with transport vehicles.[47]

Given the long tradition of using the cavalry, its role in a future war was one of the most interesting issues theoreticians discussed. There was little disagreement on how to use it on a battlefield, but its possible mechanisation was debated. Above all, the theoreticians

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[44] Jan Rzepecki, "Kierunki przyszłych zmian w organizacji piechoty", *Przegląd Piechoty*, no 4 (1937): 426–438; Marian Jurecki, "Walka piechoty z pancerzem", cz. I., *Przegląd Piechoty*, no 8 (1932): 33–84; Tadeusz Felsztyn, "Broń towarzysząca", *Bellona*, no 10 (1921): 867–875.

[45] Roman Umiastowski, "Bezbronna piechota", *Przegląd Piechoty*, no 4 (1930): 32–54.

[46] Wyszczelski, *Polska myśl*, 253.

[47] Ibid., 253–254.

Cavalry manoeuvres around Brody in Poland, Volhynia, August 1925. From left to right: General Jan Romer, Major General Juliusz Malczewski (?), head of cavalry manoeuvres General Jósef Haller (1873–1960), inspector-general of Polish cavalry units General Count Tadeusz Jordan-Rozwadowski (1866–1928), member of the War Council General Władysław Sikorski, and Inspector of the 4th Army in Krakow General Stanisław Szeptycki (1867–1950). The chief of the Estonian General Staff, Major General Juhan Tõrvand (not in the photo), observed the manoeuvres. Source: National Archives of Estonia, RA, ERA.1131.1.149.104

considered whether to use the cavalry to cover mobilisation and strategic military development, or to carry out independent operations.[48] Supporters of the first concept included General Edward Śmigły-Rydz (also sometimes called Rydz-Śmigły) and General Juliusz

[48] Juliusz Tym, *Kawaleria w operacji i w walce. Koncepcje użycia i wyszkolenie kawalerii samodzielnej Wojska Polskiego w latach 1921–1939* (Warszawa: Fundacja Polonia Militaris, 2006), 199.

Edward Śmigły-Rydz, General Inspector of the Armed Forces and Marshal of Poland, speaking, between 1936 and 1939. Photo by Witold Pikiel. Source: Biblioteka Narodowa Polski, F.40714/II

Rómmel,[49] both of whom played a significant part in cavalry. In order to cope with the military-technical innovations, the cavalry would have to be organised into major troop units. Zdzisław Chrząstowski and Tadeusz Machalski discussed independent cavalry operations in both joint and independent publications.[50] In order to carry out the tasks assigned to the cavalry, they, like Śmigły-Rydz and Rómmel,

[49] Juliusz Karol Wilhelm Józef Rómmel (until 1918 von Rummel, 1881–1967) graduated from the Cadet Corps in Pskov and in 1903 from the Konstantin Artillery School in St. Petersburg. He fought in World War I in the Russian Imperial Army as commanding officer of the 1st Artillery Brigade, was promoted to Captain in 1915 and to Colonel in 1916. He joined the Polish Army in 1917 and served as commander of the 1st Legions Infantry Division and commander of the 1st Cavalry Division. He became inspector of Vilnius in 1921, promoted to Brigadier General in 1922, and to Major General in 1928. He served as Army Inspector from 1929 to 1939. In 1939, he commanded the Łódź Army and surrendered in Warsaw. He was held as a German prisoner of war from 1939 to 1945 and retired in 1947. He was a prolific military and political writer (Editor's note).

[50] Such as Zdzisław Chrząstowski. *Zasady natarcia konnego małych jednostek* (1925); *Natarcie współczesnej kawalerji (taktyka jednostek wielkich)* (1926).

saw the need to form large corps-level units. However, opponents argued that such huge formations would constitute an enormous mass of horses and people vulnerable to airstrikes and armoured weapons.[51] The independent operational use of the cavalry faced a similar fate, due to indecision on the part of Marshal Śmigły-Rydz, who took on all the most important military roles after Piłsudski's death. In fact, the lack of clear and precise directives resulted in the use of cavalry units as covering formations and to conduct delaying actions in the campaign of 1939.

Cavalry mechanisation is an example of an issue on which Polish theorists' views were very conservative, even archaic. Due to the growing number of publications in the world indicating the need to create mixed units or strengthen the process of motorisation of the army, Polish theoreticians, especially cavalry officers, felt the existence of the cavalry as an independent branch was under threat. Therefore, they came up with fierce criticism of those theories, with Machalski, Pragłowski and Klemens Rudnicki playing a special role. Machalski based his arguments on the notion of the need to form large cavalry units.[52] Pragłowski held that too much motorisation of the cavalry would inhibit or paralyse its combat assets.[53] Strictly speaking, the greater the motorisation of cavalry, the lower its effectiveness. On the other hand, Rudnicki stated in 1937 that the decisive role of the cavalry as a speed factor could not be questioned. He insisted that the operational and even strategic future of the cavalry was huge. A year later, he still tried to prove that cavalry was the most versatile branch and that there was no question of eliminating it from modern battlefields.[54]

In conclusion, it can be said that while plans to use armoured and motorised troops were being developed in other countries, Polish theorists were claiming that cavalry was the primary branch that would provide manoeuvrability in a future war.

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[51] Tym, *Kawaleria w operacji*, 202–203.

[52] Machalski, "Zagadnienie organizacji".

[53] Aleksander Pragłowski, "Kawaleria samodzielna w nowoczesnem wojsku", *Bellona* XLIII, no 3 (1934): 358–369.

[54] Wyszczelski, *Polska myśl*, 261–262.

The navy and its role

Because Poland had few achievements of its own in naval warfare, Polish military thinkers tried to learn from the experiences of other countries. Nevertheless, it was impossible to employ different theories to the full as the sea border of the Polish state was limited to a narrow strip of coast and it faced the threat of being cut off in the event of a conflict. For that reason, the navy was treated as a supporting armed service, although it was strong enough to take on the naval forces of Germany and/or Soviet Russia. The main idea deliberated, in the first years of independence, was cooperation between the Polish fleet and the allied fleets in the Baltic Sea in case of war with Germany. The task of the Polish fleet was to attempt to cut off communication routes between Germany and East Prussia. However, the Polish fleet did not have the potential to achieve that, so the possibility of cooperation with the fleets of the Baltic states was considered.[55] This took into account the formation of a broad coalition of states acting against Germany and/or Russia, which was impossible to implement because of the wide gap in the political goals of potential coalition partners.

The lack of a unified position on the navy's goals, and consequently its needs and potential, proved to be problematic for Polish theoreticians. As with the remaining branches, Piłsudski also interfered with the navy. In 1927, he recognised that the Polish fleet would be able to operate only in the waters of the Gulf of Gdańsk, which led to the conclusion that Poland did not need a strong fleet.[56] This position left its mark on further work, both in the theoretical sphere and, more importantly, at the executive level. As early as the thirties, as a result of planning analyses, it was recognised in the highest echelons of the military that in case of conflict with Germany, the coast would be cut off and it would become an independent operational area, so the operational activities of the Polish fleet would be extremely limited or

[55] Bogdan Zalewski, *Polska morska myśl wojskowa 1918–1989* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2001), 64–66.

[56] Ibid., 75.

paralysed. Therefore, the two main tasks for the naval fleet were supporting ground forces by supplying them with weapons, equipment and supplies, and destroying the maritime communication routes of the enemy as well as defending important coastal points, enabling evacuation of the population by sea or exerting pressure on neutral states.[57]

Summary

During the interwar period, Polish military theorists' studies were shaped by several key factors: Poland's experiences in the war against Soviet Russia, the military's position within the state structure and Józef Piłsudski's influence, and constraints arising from Poland's economic potential and population.

The main idea shaping the positions of individual theoreticians was the concept of manoeuvre warfare as a strategy for future conflict scenarios, specifically the mobile defence concept attributed to Piłsudski. Owing to the position and role he held in society and the army, the concept was basically embraced as a dogma of sorts and went mostly unquestioned.[58] Piłsudski's position was taken as valid by Polish military planners preparing operational plans in case of conflict with Germany or the Soviet Union. The rebuttal of this way of thinking was reflected in a plan that, with some modifications, was implemented prior to the outbreak of World War II.

For economic and social reasons, Polish theoreticians did not envisage a considerable modernisation of the army in terms of mechanisation, instead planning to implement operational plans using the infantry and cavalry. The naval fleet and air force were left to perform solely auxiliary tasks. In both instances, Piłsudski had the deciding vote about the nature of their use. Simultaneously, cavalry officers strongly opposed the modernisation of the army, perceiving it as a threat to the existence of their branch.

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[57] Ibid., 81–82.

[58] Pilżys, "Wojna i doktryna", 216–217.

Some Polish theoreticians, led by Sikorski and Mossor, accurately predicted the nature of future conflicts and their genesis. They foresaw the potential for the war to go global and saw Germany as the greatest threat. They predicted that it would initiate the conflict and that a wide coalition of countries would be formed to fight against it.

Despite bold statements on the need for change, Polish military thought of the interwar period remained conservative. The deciding voice on the image of the army and its development, as well as on strategic planning, was Piłsudski's. Did he not see other solutions? Did he not take them into account owing to factors such as cost or his animosity towards their authors (such as Sikorski)? Regrettably, it is impossible to figure it out now. Undoubtedly, innovative ideas based on the latest trends of the time also appeared. However, their authors' clout in decision-making circles was negligible, or even non-existent. The Polish state experienced the results of this in 1939.

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