

# Red Star White Eagle: The Russo – Polish War of 1920

## Part I – Pilsudski's Offensive in Ukraine

This is a replay of the campaign scenario of RSWE. It will be the first time I have played it in probably 15 – 20 years though it was a favourite of mine in the 1980s. Now I have the Compass Signature Edition, I want to enjoy the fresh map and other components.

One thing I may have played wrong in those earlier games was the Polish Rally. I recall that I kept the Rally going until all the available units were used up. I think at some point I realised that was wrong but my Poles had already enjoyed a few wins as a result. The new edition of the rules makes clear that I was mistaken. This will be a point of comparison I will look at even if it was a false one originating in an ancient error of mine own.

I am going to be using the Vassal Module (by Joel Toppen) so as to have a record of the game.

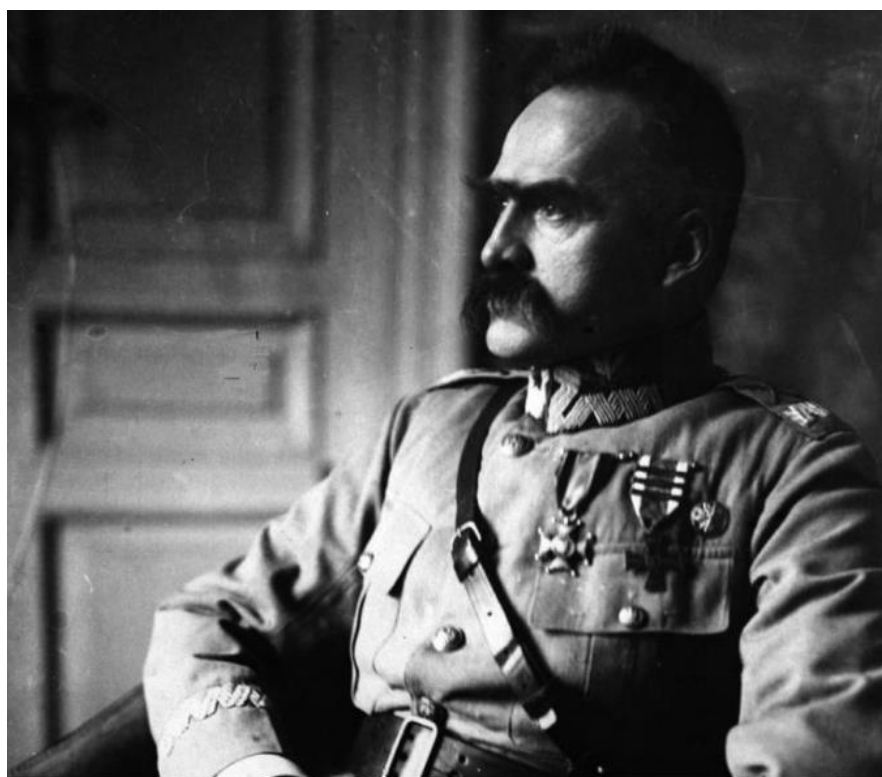


Figure 1: The Polish leader and commander-in-chief, Josef Pilsudski.

## Setup

This is an exercise divided into two because of the rules concerning the Northern Theatre of Operations [23.4.9]. The set-up in the north is not so critical because units may not move adjacent in the first three turns of the game. I immediately faced the question could the Poles set up adjacent? I decided they could though this is limited to the Drysa-Polotsk area and not likely to be important.

Most of the thinking for the set up is expended by the Russian player worrying about the fate of the South West Front which is about to be attacked by the Poles. Perhaps the most significant element of the game mechanics which affect this set up is the relative ease by which units can move through zones of control. The Russians must be concerned that the initial Polish attack will penetrate their

positions, perhaps deeply. In addition, advances after combat will make it even worse. The Russians would like to save some of their irreplaceable units from this onslaught.

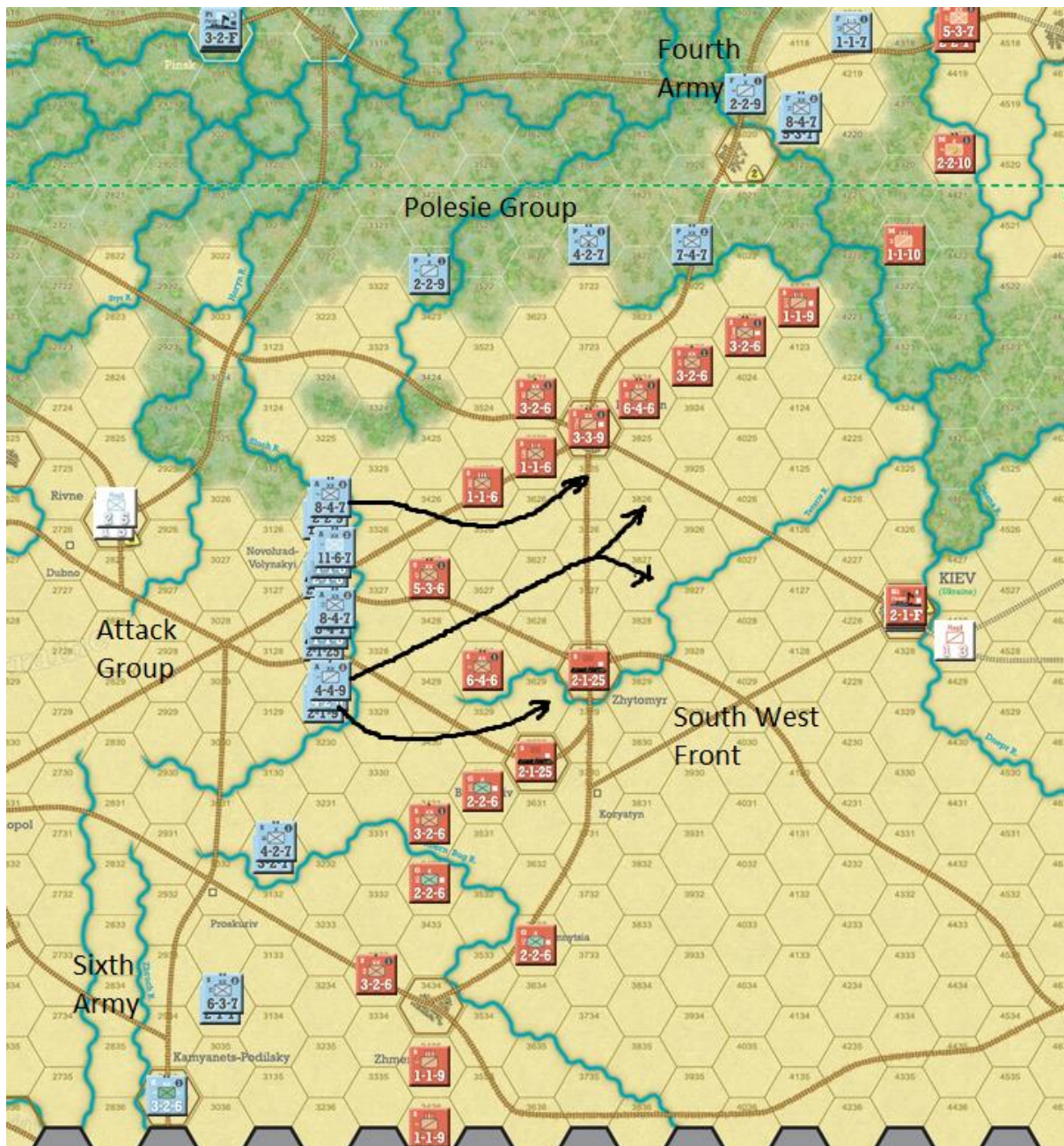


Figure 2: Initial set-up positions of the Russian South West Front and opposing Polish forces, April 1920. Arrows show the capabilities of Attack Group Cavalry as possible penetrations of the Russian positions.

The Russians have three enemy forces to contend with. From north to south these are the Polesie Group, the Attack Group, and the Sixth Army.

The Polesie Group consists of only three units but it can be reinforced by units from the Polish Fourth Army which will also be set up for this purpose just north of Mozyr. The reinforced Polesie Group threatens to get into the rear of the South West Front and so get to Kiev before any retreating Russians. Such a movement also could see an encirclement of the Russians near Korosten as the Attack Group provides the other arm of a pincer. The Russian response to this threat is to create a continuous line so that the Poles at least do not get through their positions during movement.

This means there is insufficient force to have a continuous front in front of Zhytomyr and opposing the Polish Attack Group. Polish Cavalry could run through the line which has been created. My thinking here was accepting something had to be sacrificed and really units opposing the Attack Group are going to be in trouble regardless of what is done. I wouldn't be surprised if someone else comes up with a better defence on this part of the front but nothing is going to be suggested which does not have some potential flaws.<sup>1</sup> At some point the Poles will have to stop to destroy Russian units and that might slow them down. If the Polish Cavalry keeps riding then they can cross the Korosten-Zhytomyr railway line.

The last section of the South West Front which is of interest is the part south of Berdychiv. This is also vulnerable, but the Poles are unlikely to make the far south the focus of their attack. A Russian weakness is that the Galicians may defect after Polish movement. Ironically this might help the Russian defence if the Poles leave those units alone hoping they will take control.

The Polish set up required much less thinking. I have mentioned already preparing the Fourth Army to assist the Polesie Group. The Attack Group set-up is required to be concentrated. I put the cavalry on the flanks to minimise the zones of control they have to pass through.

**VP Count - At Start: Russian 8; Poles 30 = Major Polish Victory**

## **GT1: April IV**

**Polish: 25 – 30 April 1920.**

The game begins with a Polish turn. Because of the Northern Theatre of Operation rule the action is going to be chiefly limited to the Russian South West Front. However, there is also a certain amount of organisation of units which are currently behind lines and replacements which will move forward. A few of these can actually join the offensive such as the Pinsk Flotilla. In Warsaw, the Polish 16<sup>th</sup> Division takes replacements and starts heading towards the front in the Ukraine using strategic movement.

The Poles fail to recruit a Ukrainian unit on their first attempt applying [21.1.4].

Of the optional rules I will use: Lithuanian-Russian relations; and the Kosciuszko Squadron. I will consider whether Partisans in the Ukraine will be in effect and some of the others later.

One Galician unit stays loyal to the Russians and one joins the Poles. The third disintegrates. I cannot find a Polish Galician unit in the Vassal Module so that might need an update.

After Polish movement, the South West Front is thoroughly penetrated through to the line Korosten-Zhytomyr and both places will be attacked. The Polish motorised units do not break down this turn so most of these were pushed forward aggressively.

The main concern for the Poles is the fact that supply and zones of control are so loose in this game that the Russian survivors of the attacks will potentially be in a position to cause trouble afterwards. I cannot claim great expertise in the moves or the forthcoming combats but I hope to destroy everything the Russians have in the area through which the Attack Group is moving. The Russian forces on the flanks have been less bothered with the main exception being the Russian 3/17 Cavalry

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<sup>1</sup> Afterwards I was fairly certain I could have done better. The Armoured Trains could have plugged a couple of holes. Being placed further in the rear didn't save them.

Regiment which is being hit by Polish Fourth Army units trying to turn the rear flank of the South West Front.

### Combats

Place	Attacker	Defender	Odds/die	Result
NW of Zhmerinka 3333	Pol 18 XX, UK 2XX	Russian 44 XX	4:1 D6	D1/2E D5 Russian 44 XX elim Poles Advance
Upper Teretiv River 3528	Pol 13XX, 15 XX, UK 6 XX	Russian 7 XX	5:1 D3 RD5	D4 Russian retreat, Polish advance
Berdychiv 3630	Pol IX X, Arm. Train	Russian Arm.Train	6:1 D4	X4 Russian Arm. Train elim Pol IX X reduced Polish advance
SW of Korosten 3525	Pol 7 XX	Russian 392 Reg	8:1+1 D6	D1/2E D7 Russian 392 Reg elim Polish advance
East of Sluch River 3427	Pol Leg 1 XX, 3 <sup>rd</sup> Mot Batt, Arm Train	Russian 47 XX	4:1+1 D3	X 3 Russian 47 XX elim Polish 3 <sup>rd</sup> Mot Batt, Arm. Train elim Polish advance
Zhytomyr 3728	Pol 1 Cav XX, 1 Pol Leg Cav Reg, 1 Arm Car Batt	Russian Arm Train	8:1 D3	X 5 Russian Arm. Train elim 1 Pol Leg Cav Reg elim Polish advance
Korosten 3724	Pol 4 XX, Rybak X, 3 Cav X, Koscuisko Sqd.	Russian 17(-) Cav XX	4:1 D3 RD4	D3 Russians retreat, Polish advance
SE of Mozyr 4122	Pol 14 XX, XVIII X, Pinsk Flotilla	Russian 3/17 Cav Reg	8:1+1 D2	X 4 Russian 3/17 Cav Reg elim. Pol XVIII X reduced Polish advance

The combat phase reminds me just how slippery units can be in RSWE as well as a couple of other features of the combat results table. First, this is the WWI era and attacks are dangerous. There are a lot of exchanges and these generally mean the attackers lose more strength points. The Russian 47<sup>th</sup> Division put up a fight despite being in a hopeless position and forced the Poles to eliminate a motorised battalion and an armoured train.

Retreating through zones of control is also possible. The best escape was by the Russian 7<sup>th</sup> Division which escaped from strong enemy forces while the Poles were finishing off the Russian armoured trains in Berdychiv and Zhytomyr.

Despite these adverse results, the Russians lose two Divisions and the Poles have clearly broken through the South West Front and Kiev is now in danger. The Poles have also isolated the Russian



**Poles Captured: Korosten; Zytomyr; Berdychiv; Zhmerynka.**

## GT2: May I

In this turn the Russian West Front is only really concerned with absorbing replacements and receiving reinforcements. The Northern Theatre of Operations rule prevents the Mozyr Group from effectively intervening to help the South West Front even to the extent of blocking the Pripjat River.

The South West Front is mainly aiming to get as much strength as possible back to cover Kiev. The escape of the Russian 7<sup>th</sup> Division from the debacle last turn is critical because this unit is able to defend the city itself. Most of the effective Russian strength is from the northern flank of the Front which retreats back toward the Dnepr north of Kiev. The Poles used their volunteer air squadron to slow this retreat.

Other Russian units are stragglers unable to join the main line. The Russian 60<sup>th</sup> Division retreats into the Pripet Marshes having been isolated west of Korosten. Other Russians are south of the main Polish breakthrough and they are in danger of being caught by Polish mopping up operations during the Poles' next turn.

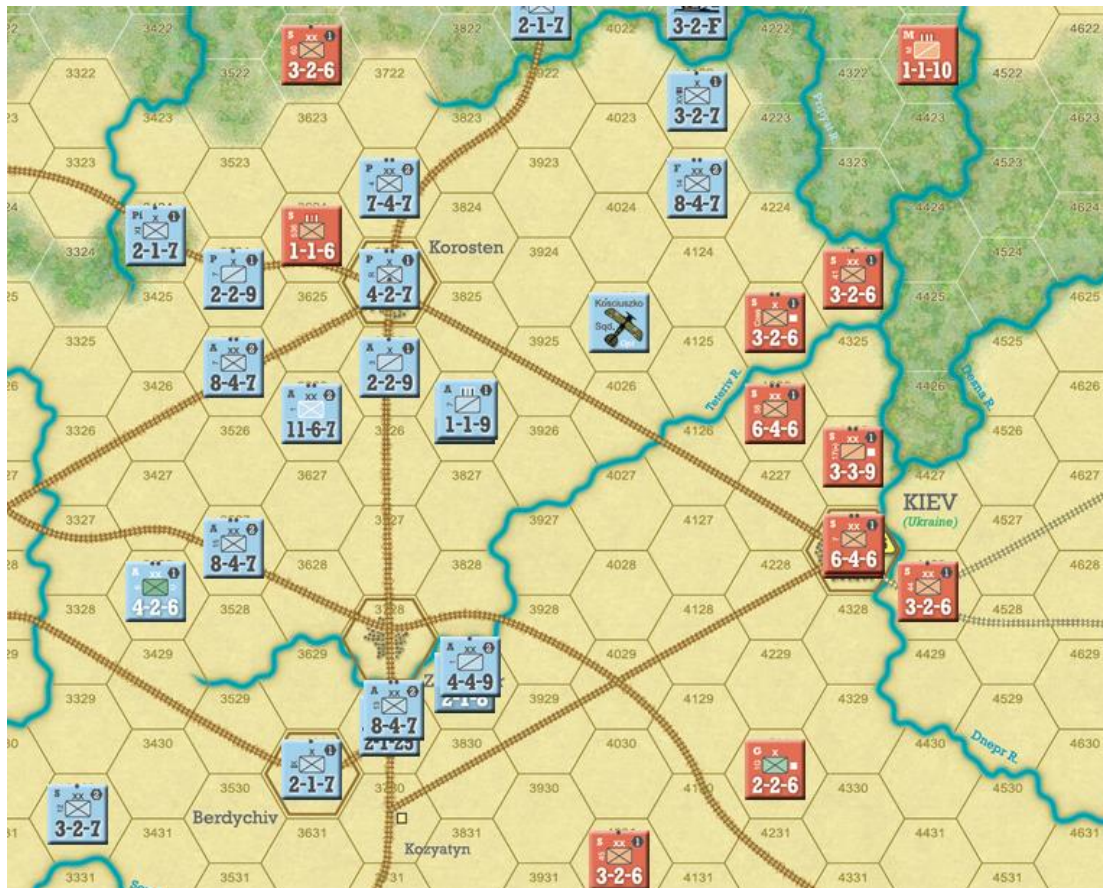


Figure 4: The Russian fall back to Kiev and the Dnepr, May I turn.

## No Combat

**Russians Captured: None.**

**Polish: 5 – 8 May 1920**

The Northern Sector remains quiet. The Northern Sector will get the bulk of the replacements and reinforcements currently available because a Russian offensive has to be anticipated there on the May III turn.

In the south, the Polish objective is to swiftly take Kiev. Secondary objectives are to drive the remaining forces of the South West Front east of the Dnepr and to clear up as many Russian stragglers left behind after the rout last turn.



The Polish motorised units start rolling for mechanical breakdowns and by the time they get to the outskirts of Kiev there is only one battalion of armoured cars left.

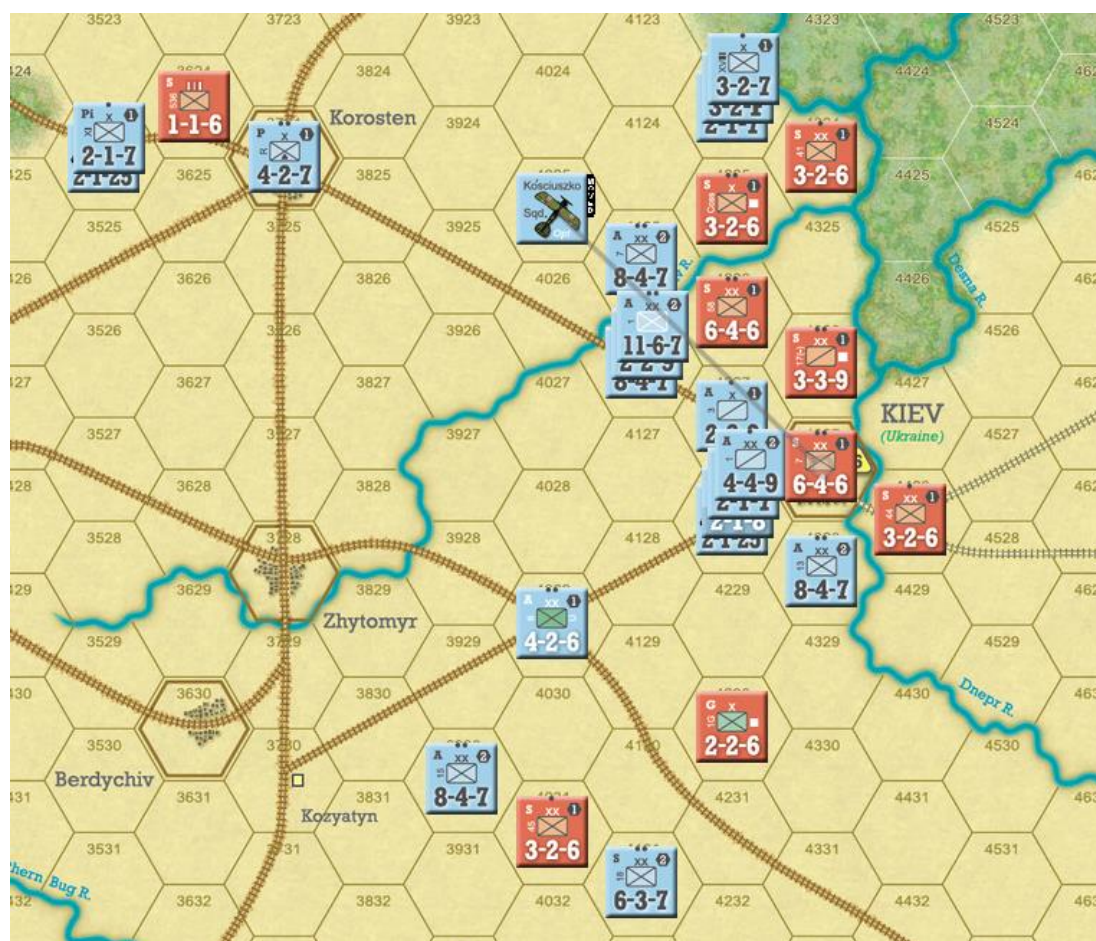


Figure 5: After the Polish May I move, the Poles are ready to attack Kiev.

### Combats

Place	Attacker	Defender	Odds/die	Result
SE of Vynnytsia 4035	Polish 12XX, UK 2 XX, Pol X Brigade	Russian 7 Cav Reg	8:1 + 1 D3	DE 6 Russian 7 Cav Reg Elim Polish advance
SE of Kozyatyn 4031	Polish 15 and 16 XXs	Russian 45 XX	7:1 D6	DE 7 Russian 45 XX Elim Polish advance
Kiev 4327	Polish 13 XX, 1 Cav XX, IX Bde, 1 Arm Car Batt, Arm. Train, 3 Cav X, Kos. Squadron	Russian 7 XX	5:1 D5	D1/2 E D5 Russian 7 XX reduced and retreats. Poles advance
Teteriv River 4226	Polish Legion 1 XX, 14 XX, 7 Cav Bde	Russian 58 XX	5:1 D4	X 4 Russian 58 XX destroyed Polish 14 XX reduced Poles advance
Teteriv River 4225	Polish 7 XX, XII and XVIII Bdes, Pinsk Flotilla	Russian Coss X	8:1 D6, RD5	D1/2 E D7 Russian Coss X reduced Poles advance

NW of Korosten 3624	Polish Rybak and XI Bdes, Arm. Train	Russian 536 Reg	8:1 + 2 D5	D1/2E D7 Russian 536 Reg destroyed Polish advance
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Figure 6: The Poles ride into Kiev, 7 May 1920.

By the end of the combat phase the Poles have achieved pretty much all they wanted. Kiev has been captured and the Russians who escape to the east bank of the Dnepr are heavily depleted. There was only one exchange combat result reducing the Polish 14 XX.

There are a few loose ends. The Russian 60<sup>th</sup> XX is in the Pripet Marshes north of Korosten and in the far south there is still one Russian Cavalry unit in action. Lack of supply doesn't eliminate units, but these peripheral survivors can probably be prevented from doing any trouble.

#### **Poles Captured: Kiev**

**VP Count – After May I: Russian 2; Poles 36 = Major Polish Victory**



## GT3: May II

### Russian 9 – 12 May 1920

The Poles made sure they kept contact with all Russian units on the South West Front save a few which had long retreats and could not be pursued so far. This means, in their turn, the Russians cannot use strategic movement because they start in enemy ZOC.

The Russians receive reinforcements for both fronts and these are very welcome on the South West Front. Nevertheless, the Russians keep falling back. Some hide in the marshes. There is a large concentration south of Chernihiv which could be expensive for the Poles to attack. Others remain in the Russian Reaction area which will generate double replacements if the Poles were so bold as to go there. There are still some stragglers in the far south. It is difficult to see them surviving to the end of the turn.

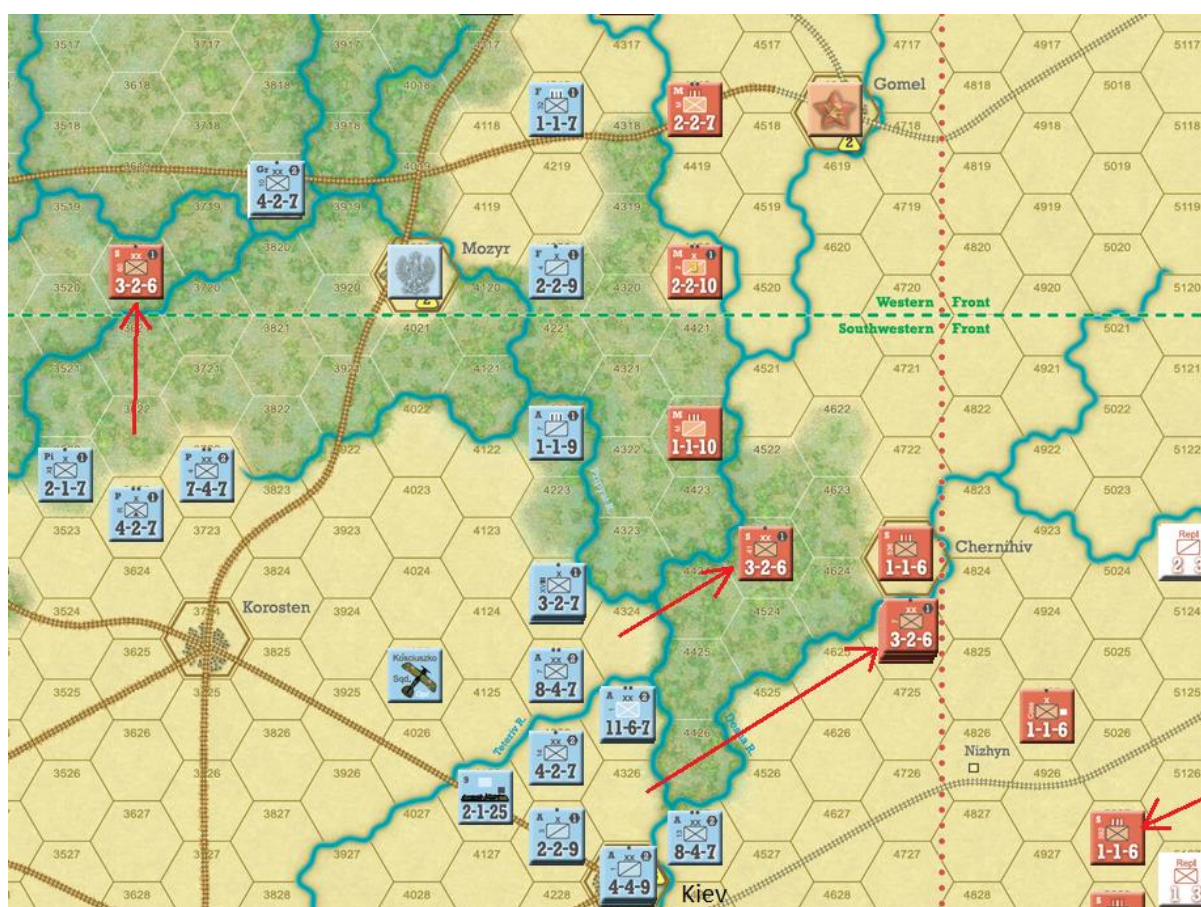


Figure 7: The Russians continue to fall back after the loss of Kiev, May II.

On the West Front, the Russian build-up continues. The main Russian strength is being concentrated along the Orsha-Minsk railway and to the north of that up to Vitebsk. This hopefully will be a good basis for turning the Polish line and would leave the Poles in Babryusk and the marshes wondering if they should pull back before being cut off.

### No Combat

**Russians Captured: None**

## Poles: 13 – 16 May 1920

Now the Poles have to take account of the imminence of Russian offensives. On the South West Front, the Konarmiya is due to arrive on the May IV turn. Therefore, the Poles must be careful not to advance too far and get caught in positions they cannot quickly withdraw from. The Russian West Front offensive could begin next turn and the Poles need to assume positions now to meet that.



Figure 8: Poland prepares for Russia's attack, May II, and showing likely initial advances of West Front.

To prepare for the Russian West Front attack Poles pull back in the north east. Other than some Belorussian Cavalry everything is brought behind the Berezina. These positions are assumed to restrict Russian combat opportunities. A strongpoint is formed at Barysau which may be able to deter a frontal attack by the Russians. Much of the thought behind this move is to take as much advantage of the terrain as possible especially the rivers and the Berezina Marshes.

The Poles now have their control of the Ukrainians confirmed as they control both Kiev and Lvov.

The Poles chase down the remaining Russian units still west of the Dnepr River and destroy these remnants including the Russian 60<sup>th</sup> Division in the Pripet Marshes. The last Galician unit still in action is the one which chose to fight with the Poles.

At only one point did the Poles carry out an attack east of the Dnepr as they advanced up the east bank of the river to encounter the Russian 41<sup>st</sup> Division west of Chernihiv. Despite the odds being 8:1, the Poles lost a reduced Cavalry Brigade in this combat so it was not a complete success.

One difficulty for the Poles where they have had losses is getting on map replacements. The advance in the Ukraine does not make the union of reduced units and replacements very easy.



## Combats

Place	Attacker	Defender	Odds/die	Result
Far South 4335	Pol 12 XX, UK 2 XX, Galician 3 XX, Pol X Bde	Russian 1 Cav Reg	8:1 + 1 D3	DE 6 Russian 1 Cav Reg destroyed, Poles advance.
SW of Dnepr 4632	Pol 15 and 16 XX, UK 6 XX	Galician 1 XX	8:1 D4, RD1	D1/2E D7 Galician 1 XX reduced and then destroyed in retreat. Poles advance
Dnepr Marsh 4523	Pol Legion 1 XX, 14 XX, 7 Cav Bde, Kosc. Squadron	Russian 41 XX	8:1 D1	A1/2X D3 Russian 41 XX and Polish 7 Cav Bde destroyed.
Pripet Marsh 3620	Pol 4 and 10 XX, Rybak and XI Bde	Russian 60 XX	8:1 D5	D1/2E D7 Russian 60 XX destroyed, Poles advance

**Poles Captured: None**

**VP Count – After May II: Russian 2; Poles 36 = Major Polish Victory**

*This concludes the first phase of the replay of RSWE. Part 2 will follow highlighting the start of the Russian Offensive until the Standdown.*

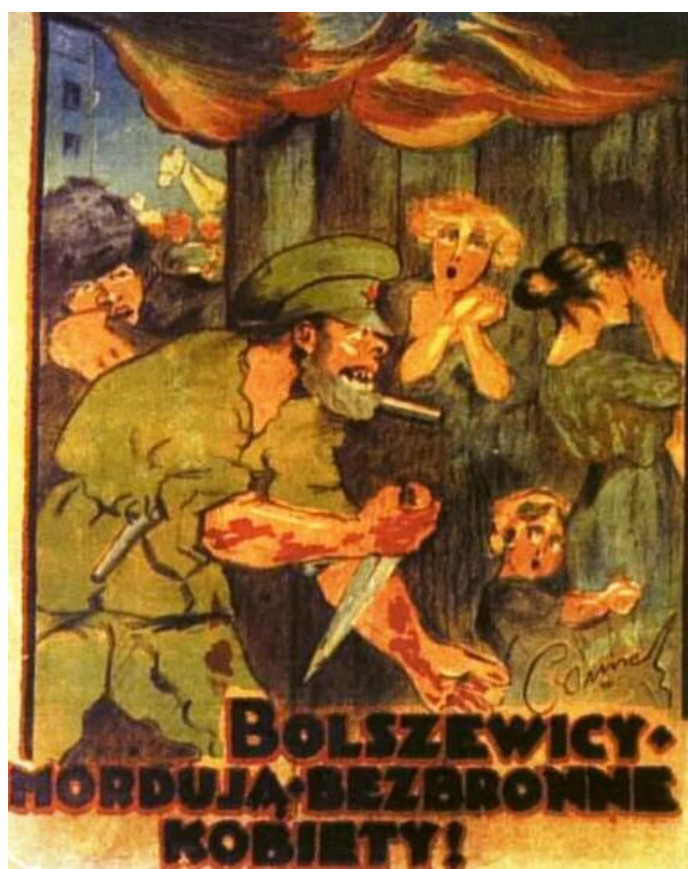


Figure 9: The Bolsheviks are coming, May 1920.