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THE BATTLE OF WARSAW, 1920 PIŁSUDSKI AND WEYGAND

I. INTRODUCTION

May 12, 1960, is the twenty-fifth anniversary of the death of Marshal Józef Piłsudski, Chief of the Polish State and Commander in Chief of its armed forces at the time of the Polish-Soviet war of 1920. During the four decades since that great historical drama, in which Piłsudski played the major part, scholarly students have brought to light the full truth about the Battle of Warsaw. This battle, "the eighteenth battle of the world", which Marshal Piłsudski had won by his maneuver on the Vistula, has become a classical historical example in the military training of war colleges and general staff schools in many countries of the world.

The Battle of Warsaw, personally planned and led by Józef Piłsudski, had decided the outcome of the Polish-Soviet war by defeating the enemy who was already approaching the gates of the Polish capital. A number of trustworthy and prominent witnesses have testified that it was Piłsudski who was the author of the operational plan which, for twenty years, had saved Poland and Europe from the red tide. This was confirmed repeatedly by both General Weygand and Lord d'Abernon. The number of studies written by Polish, French and English specialists about the Battle of Warsaw is already quite impressive.

However, in spite of the obvious historical facts, a legend has grown around them claiming that it was General Weygand who then saved Poland from the Bolshevik invasion, and that he -- not Marshal Piłsudski -- was the author of the strategic concept of that battle. This legend has grown partly from Polish partisan squabbles, in which right-wing parties--inimical to Piłsudski-- did their best to extoll the alleged merits of General Weygand at the expense of the Polish Commander in Chief. Their campaign found a propitious political climate in France with

the result that the legend about Weygand's allegedly decisive part has found its way into a number of some general historical studies.

The matter became topical again when General Weygand's Memoirs were recently published. In these Memoirs the General presented his own role in a way which differs from his earlier pronouncements on the subject, and which may be interpreted as confirming -- partly at least -- the erroneous legend about the role he had played. In his Memoirs, he writes that the general idea of the maneuver on the Vistula occurred simultaneously to the Commander in Chief, Piłsudski, to the chief of the Polish General Staff, General Rozwadowski, and to himself. As is well known, the idea was to stop the Bolsheviek advance and to attack the enemy from the south in a northern direction. General Weygand adds that there were some differences as to the ways of the execution of the maneuver, and he admits that in that respect Piłsudski's plans were superior to his own.

Since these statements of General Weygand are likely to add to the confusion as to the actual authorship of the Warsaw maneuver, the Józef Piłsudski Institute of America (which is a research center devoted to studies of recent Polish history) approached General Kazimierz Sosnkowski, who at the time of the Battle of Warsaw was Minister of National Defense and participated in staff meetings with General Weygand and General Rozwadowski, as well as the Polish historian, professor Tytus Komarnicki. Moreover, the files of the Polish General Staff, now in the Institute's archives in New York, once more have been thoroughly studied.

We present the opinions of General Sosnkowski preceded by a more general article by professor Komarnicki, and confirmed by the results of the study of documents pertaining to the Battle of Warsaw.

TYTUS KOMARNICKI

II THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF GENERAL WEYGAND'S MISSION TO POLAND IN 1920.

General Sosnkowski, in view of his position in 1920 in the Polish Government and the Council for the Defense of the State, is certainly the person best qualified to judge the role played by General Weygand in 1920 in his capacity of adviser of the Polish High Command. General Sosnkowski's comments are very fair and courteous. In this article I wish to review the political background of General Weygand's mission as such a study will enable us to understand the policy of the West towards the problems of Eastern Europe at that time.

General Weygand's Memoirs (Vol. II, *Mirages et Realite*, Paris, Flammarion, 1957) confirm what is already well known from published diplomatic papers, that the Western Powers not only did not have any far-sighted plan as regards the problems of Eastern Europe, but held quite distorted views on the situation which arose from the desperate efforts of an isolated Poland to establish a political order in Eastern Europe which would ensure a just and lasting peace. The Western countries, absorbed by their own domestic troubles and economic difficulties resulting from a long war, regarded any initiative on the part of Poland in this matter as a symptom of megalomania and imperialistic trends. After the collapse (in June 1920) of the Polish offensive whose military aim had been to forestall a Soviet offensive under preparation, there prevailed in the West the view that the ensuing situation was due exclusively to the political and military errors of Marshal Pilsudski, then Chief of State and Commander in Chief. This view was not without support from the Polish right wing opposition inimical to Pilsudski.

General Weygand was a member of an Allied Mission to Poland in which the diplomats had the upper hand. Sending this mission was presumed in the West to be their best means of assisting Poland. This assistance was to consist, in the first place, in helping to negotiate an armistice between Poland and Soviet Russia.

The mission was, however, quite unable to render any immediate military help, by dispatching a few Allied divisions to Poland, by supplying arms and munitions before the decisive battle, or by opening transit ways through Danzig. In these circumstances one understands Pilsudski's disappointment when in his first conversation with General Weygand after the arrival of the latter to Warsaw, he learned that the Allies were not to send any divisions to Poland, Marshal Pilsudski then questioned at once the utility of sending an Allied mission to Poland. On the other hand, it is well known that no assistance in arms and munitions reached Poland before

the Battle of Warsaw. Weygand loyally confirms this fact ("ce concours parvint aux Polonais apres la victoire").

The assistance rendered by the Allied Mission as a whole was not, therefore, of a military nature. One can speak only of General Weygand's personal contribution. He was a man of great military knowledge and experience, his friendly feelings towards Poland were unquestionable, but he was not conversant either with the particular conditions of the Polish-Soviet warfare, totally different from the conditions which had prevailed on the Western, immobile front, or with other essential factors of the military and political situation of Poland at that time. (Let us quote, for instance, his curious remark on page 58, where he writes, as if he were quite unaware of the fact that the Polish army had to be formed in action, in front of an enemy eager to launch a decisive attack: "Before committing herself to a struggle on such an extended front, with an army of second-rate value, Poland should have formed a solid starting base, completed the organization of her army and reconstituted her moral unity disrupted by over a century of servitude under different masters"). However, the question of General Weygand's contribution to the operational planning and conduct of the war is dealt with most competently by General Sosnkowski, and it is, therefore, outside the scope of this article.

Summing up, we can state that the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs at that time, Sapieha, was right when he wrote in a dispatch sent by him to all Polish diplomatic missions, dated August 23rd, after the victory:

"We can consider the victory in the Battle of Warsaw to be final. The Bolshevik army offers no serious resistance. Every day we capture tens of thousands of prisoners . . .

Will you, please, stress the point that Poland defended herself before the Allies gave her any assistance, because we have not received any concrete help so far, except for the strong moral support of France, whose loyal attitude held the Germans in check".

Even the political premises on which the action of the Allied Diplomatic and Military Mission to Poland was based and which included General Weygand as its military member, were out of touch with reality. General Weygand frankly admits it. In fact, as already mentioned, the Mission had to cooperate in negotiating the terms of an armistice with Soviet Russia. However, it became obvious that as long as the Soviet troops were advancing the Soviet Government did everything possible in order to frustrate any attempt at an armistice, ("les instructions ne parlaient que d'armistice alors qu'en fait la bataille continuait"). The Allies acted on the wrong assumption (for which the Polish right-wing opposition parties

one hand, the French Government supported Poland, they recognised, on the other hand, General Wrangel's "Government" as a legitimate heir to the Russian State idea. During his stay in Warsaw General Weygand when interviewed by a correspondent of "Le Temps", expressed very optimistic views on the future of General Wrangel's action: "We should not neglect an important and positive factor. A cautious, sagacious and lucky captain, Wrangel, continues his action. He has at his disposal well-disciplined and hardened forces and war-material". A few days after the Polish-Soviet armistice the forces of this "lucky" captain had hurriedly to retreat and vanish.

One can understand the illusions cherished at that time by French policy, they were the heavy legacy of the past, but it seems that after 40 years of bitter experience General Weygand should have revised his views on the political problems of Eastern Europe, and he should have passed a more objective judgment on that great historic drama on the Vistula and on the Niemen which he had witnessed in 1920.

Tytus Komarnicki

KAZIMIERZ SOSNKOWSKI

III GENERAL WEYGAND ON THE BATTLE OF WARSAW

It was with great interest that I read the passages in General Weygand's Memoirs referring to the Battle of Warsaw. As I was at that time Minister of War, member of the Council for the Defence of the State, and, I may say, one of Marshal Pilsudski's most intimate associates, I was in close contact with the events which developed into one of the most dramatic pages of history, called by Lord d'Abernon one of the decisive battles of the world.

My role mainly consisted in providing the means for the battle, that is, complements of strength and new hastily formed units, supplying the armies with military equipment and munition, and, finally, maintaining order and discipline at the rear of the Polish front-line. It is hardly necessary to emphasize that the Polish armies badly needed reinforcements as their strength had been exhausted in many battles and by the retreat from the river Auta, more than 400 km. from the Vistula line.

I did not take a direct part in the operational planning of the Battle of Warsaw, but I kept in touch with it whenever the need arose. I was, however, constantly informed of the plans as well as of developments on the front, and the very nature of my duties involved a steady contact with the C-i-C, Marshal Pilsudski, with his Chief of Staff, then General Rozwadowski, as well as with General Weygand who had come from France. With both these generals I had daily conferences during the period preceding the battle. All this entitles me to express my opinion

on the above mentioned passages of General Weygand's memoirs. should like to add some remarks and to correct some of his statements: I have particularly in mind certain passages which are not entirely clear to me and which, moreover, seem hardly consistent with General Weygand's attitude as I have known it.

Indeed, he has always refused the laurel wreath offered to him either in the interests of some domestic policy by Polish politicians or by his fellow-countrymen in their efforts to enhance the military glory of France, at the expense of Poland. (As if France had any need for it.)

I have, moreover, a moral duty to see that there is no perversion of the truth about the great Polish commander to whom my country owes one of the most brilliant victories in its history and the whole world the salvation of Europe from the red flood.

Unfortunately, the West has failed to exploit Poland's victory of 1920, and the results of that neglect are now more than obvious. General Weygand fully realizes it; he says: "There seems to be no exaggeration in saying that the danger which menaces the West at present was delayed for twenty years and the world incurred a great debt of gratitude to Poland".

One might add that if in 1920 the Western countries had been able to take strong decisions (half-measures being of no use) to tackle the Russian question according to the principles of democracy, the freedom of nations and their right to self-determination, the world would now be free from the nightmare of Soviet imperialism. After the defeat of the Soviet armies, the Western countries together with a victorious Poland were in a position to institute in Russia the rule of justice; together they would have accomplished a task which had proved too difficult for the Western Powers to undertake without Poland and too difficult for Poland without them.

In that situation the military forces and material means which the Western Powers would have had to contribute were relatively small. What was needed was a strong will on the part of the West to assume a great political responsibility.

General Weygand was an honest and noble man; he proved his friendship for Poland by deeds, of which our nation keeps a faithful and grateful memory. So far as I am personally concerned I wish to add that both during those dramatic days in Warsaw and afterwards, in our contacts in Paris, I have been impressed by his captivating personality which commands universal respect. I hope that he will not object to my saying that our relations have always been loyal, cordial, and — I should like to add — truly friendly. I feel I can, therefore, express quite frankly what I thought when I read in his description of the battle of Warsaw the passages deal-

shared some part of responsibility) that pressure should be exercised chiefly on Poland, in order to force her to accept what was considered at that time — especially in England — to be “reasonable” terms of armistice. In anticipation of a still outstanding military assistance and a problematic diplomatic backing (I say problematic, because it was not supported by any mention of military assistance or any pressure on Soviet Russia) the Allied demanded from Poland complete obedience and submission to the lines of policy drawn up by the Supreme Council (cf. the French instructions of 21st July 1920, quoted by General Weygand: “Dans le cas ou le Gouvernement polonais se preterait en toute confiance et bonne foi a suivre la politique qui lui est tracee”).

In connection with this policy General Weygand considered that his main duty was to remove Marshal Pilsudski from his post of Commander in Chief and to enforce the appointment to this post of a Polish general, ready to carry out the orders and to follow the advice of the Allied Chief of Staff (“un general ayant du prestige et une grande energie, decide a faire executer les ordres et a suivre les conseils d'un Chef d'Etat Major allie”).

One must admire General Weygand's frankness in confessing that he had nurtured such plans, which — as we know — failed completely. We understand, however, how disappointed he must have been when, after becoming conversant with the situation on the spot and having heard the advice of General Henrys — who, by the way, held a higher rank in the army and was utterly devoted to Pilsudski — he had to be content with the much more modest role of adviser, and, above all, to abandon any attempt of intervention in the organization of the supreme authority in Poland. Gen. Weygand realized on the spot that the domestic policy of Poland should not be judged from the point of view of party rivalries, for it was the united will of the people in general that counted, and the masses were alien to any partisan plots and ready to bear enormous sacrifices in order to safeguard the independence of Poland. General Weygand deserves praise for having refused to be involved in these domestic intrigues, but it was not his attitude, but the united will of the nation, which was instrumental in producing a united front.

As a matter of fact, General Weygand puts great stress on the alleged influence of the Allied Mission on the “morale” of the Polish nation. He says that its mere presence in Warsaw should have convinced Poland that it was no longer isolated, as it had been because of Pilsudski's erroneous policy. On his way to Poland Weygand considered the necessity of forming a broad coalition government in Poland and he intended to press this point after his arrival in Warsaw. But here, too, he was to be surprised: he was told in Warsaw that such a government had already

been formed a few days earlier, under the pressure of events and not because of foreign intervention. Moreover, one gets the impression when reading his description of Polish domestic policy that he had to do mainly with right-wing politicians who were naturally eager to approach him. Here again we find some misleading information: Paderewski was not born in Galicia but in Russian Poland (Szepietowka) and did not belong to the National Democratic party). It seems to me that contacts with the leaders of peasants' and workers' parties (Witos—Thuggutt—Daszynski) would have been more important since it was the attitude of these parties that had most influenced the people in general and the troops in the field.

General Weygand emphasizes that the world incurred a great debt of gratitude to Poland because the Polish victory had saved Europe from the red flood for a period of twenty years. I wonder whether he realizes now that should Poland have unreservedly put her fate into Allied hands and limited her claims to the provisional border traced by the Declaration of the Supreme Council on December 8th, 1919, and repeated in Lord Curzon's telegram to Chicherin of July 11th, 1920, a border-line which was the expression of a common policy of the great western Powers and not of Great Britain alone, Poland would not have been able to remain an independent State. She would inevitably have become a satellite of Soviet Russia or, perhaps, would have been annexed by her. It would be difficult to find a more gross and wicked distortion of the truth than Lloyd George's utterances at the Brussels—Spa Conference, which are quoted without any comment by General Weygand: “Poland should forswear her annexionist and imperialistic policy. One should be able to tell the British Parliament: Lithuanians, Ruthenians, Czechs are free”. One can leave out the Czechs as the Allies knew very well that the territory of the Teschen Silesia invaded by the Czechs had an overwhelmingly Polish population, but the remark about the Ukrainians and the Lithuanians was a tragic distortion of the facts in asserting that in the event of Poland withdrawing to the Curzon line they would automatically become free. In fact, the Ukrainian nation had paid very dearly for the failure of Pilsudski's plan to liberate the Ukraine. Would Lithuania have been able to preserve her independence if Poland had limited her claims to the Curzon line? The events of 1939 gave a peremptory answer to this question.

Unfortunately, we do not find in General Weygand's Memoirs any understanding of the magnitude of the political stakes in the Polish Soviet war. An explanation for this omission can be found outside the Memoirs, in the policy of the French Government of that time, unwilling to face the impossibility of restoring the old Russia. Whilst on the

ing with the role played by Marshal Pilsudski as the Polish C-i-C.

General Weygand states rightly that Marshal Pilsudski "electrified the troops during the three days he spent amongst them", that "from the depth of his soul he was able to instil in the souls of his soldiers his own unshakeable faith and the will to triumph over all difficulties" and that "nobody else could attempt it." Neither is there anything to add to the following sentence in which General Weygand states that the full exploitation of success was made possible because it was led by a master hand, demonic drive and fierce energy of Marshal Pilsudski who gave the enemy army no chance to recover breath until he eventually annihilated it".

General Weygand shows great sagacity in his judgment of the domestic policy of Poland when he very convincingly states that he tried "to avoid the exaggerated views on his own role which political passions tried to inflate to the detriment of the C-i-C" and "which the intrigues of the Polish parties of the opposition of that time wished to use as a weapon against the Chief of State".

I confess that I am rather embarrassed in turning now to some objections which crossed my mind while reading General Weygand's Memoirs.

He asserts that "from the military point of view the victory in the Battle of Warsaw was due to a simple basic right idea of the Polish High Command". I cannot help thinking that in discussing this basic idea and operational planning General Weygand appears to diminish somehow the role played by Marshal Pilsudski. I am rather puzzled by this impersonal phrasing. This impression becomes still stronger when one analyses another passage which is essential and which, therefore, I feel obliged to quote in full:

"In the field of military operations one has to distinguish between the general plan of the battle and its execution. The purpose of the basic idea of the plan was to stop the enemy on a position from which he was pressing forward and this was coupled with a counter-attack to be carried out from the right flank and directed northwards, against the flank of the enemy offensive. Owing to its simplicity and the possibility of its realization, this idea attracted the attention of General Rozwadowski, the C-i-C and myself so spontaneously and concurrently that I can say that it was common to all of us".

I find it difficult to follow General Weygand's line of reasoning. In my opinion it is quite impossible to separate an operational conception from its tactical execution, the latter depending on an exact estimate of the existing position, actual circumstances and available means. All these factors constitute essential elements of what is called "a plan of battle", or more exactly—a plan of the initial stage of a battle.

To stop the enemy in one place in order to attack him along the flank or from both flanks is the A. B. C. of any operational move. Should the whole problem be reduced to it, any layman would be able to raise a claim to be an expert strategist. If it is not so, it is because consideration of the problems related to tactical execution is intrinsic to any operational plan. Without it, the whole plan would easily be but meaningless.

By its very nature "the idea of a maneuver" is purely theoretical as long as its value is not tested by practical application on the battlefield. Such a test occurs in varying conditions and circumstances which one cannot foresee. There are many imponderables which matter; above all, the unknown will and reaction of the enemy. Thus the term, "plan of battle", is not quite compatible with reality. One can plan only the beginning of a battle, "the opening move". But the drama rises to its climax, passing through many unforeseeable events. Unless there is an overwhelming superiority of technical means and arms, victory will belong to a commander who surpasses the enemy by his skill in directing the operations (tactical execution), his capacity to inspire his troops with the will to win. The Battle of Warsaw is an example of a big scale operation, in which the super-human efforts of the C-i-C, his brilliant conduct of the campaign together with perfect maneuvering led to a final triumph.

When planning a decisive battle a C-i-C must carefully consider many factors from the point of their tactical feasibility: when and where the enemy is to be stopped; in which direction to strike and how deeply; he has to evaluate his possibilities of concentrating his human and material resources in a decisive spot and doing it in a way which would confuse and surprise the enemy; he must, finally, accurately estimate the morale and fitness of his own troops, and try to spare his soldiers' lives as much as circumstances allow. These are the main elements which the operational decision must take into account for otherwise the whole plan would be left dangling in the air in the course of its execution. All this intellectual and spiritual effort has to be carried out under the stress of responsibility which must be borne by the commander alone. The heavier the burden of responsibility, the greater is his loneliness. Nobody can relieve him from this burden; even the Chief of Staff is only his adviser and assistant in a purely technical capacity, as he does not assume any direct responsibility. Free from the anguish which is the lot of the Commander in Chief in making a decision, the Chief of Staff can offer advice in profusion, multiply plans and alternatives, while for his superior even to choose one of the alternatives entails an inner struggle. It is very easy to realize the intensity of moral torment and

immense responsibility which fell to Marshal Pilsudski during the weeks preceding the battle, which was to decide the final outcome of the war and the fate of the nation. I expect that all these things are well known to one who during one war assumed the duties of the Chief of Staff and in the course of the second carried out the heavy burden of responsibility on the highest post of command.

As regards the original plan of the maneuver in the operational plan of the Battle of Warsaw, it would be difficult to agree with General Weygand's assertion that this idea was conceived jointly by him, Marshal Pilsudski and General Rozwadowski, since we know that General Weygand advised an attack from the southern tip of the Warsaw bridge-head in the direction of the road Warsaw-Minsk Mazowiecki — a short and local operation of a limited extent; and General Rozwadowski proposed to launch the main blow to the north of Warsaw, from the Fifth Army sector.

It was Marshal Pilsudski who conceived the operational plan of the Warsaw Battle and executed it. This plan consisted in striking with five divisions from the banks of the river Wieprz at the rear of the four Soviet armies. Passing from retreat to a counter-offensive required a very bold re-grouping of troops, an operation rendered particularly difficult by the fact that the retreating front was absorbing all available reserves.

General Weygand, a true friend of Poland, has done everything he could for Poland, and the C-i-C expressed his thanks to him in Siedlce. The gratitude of Poles would only increase if General Weygand's noble statement, "La victoire est bien polonaise, plan polonais, armees polonaises" made publicly before his leaving Warsaw and repeated in his letter to Marshall Foch, could be read by the whole world in a sense compatible with the historical truth. And the truth is that all of it—the idea and the plan of operation, the concept of the maneuver, the preparation of the battle, its conduct, the exploitation of its success, the enormous intellectual and spiritual effort, the moral influence on the troops, have contributed to the laurels with which the winged goddess crowned Marshall Pilsudski in 1920. The victory was his, as well as of the armies under his command and of the Polish nation which fought under his leadership.

Kazimierz Sosnkowski

IV. NOTES ON RESULTS OF A STUDY OF DOCUMENTS RELATED TO THE BATTLE OF WARSAW.

Long before World War II, the files on the 1920 Battle of Warsaw were transferred from the Polish General Staff to the Military History Bureau and later to the Józef Pilsudski Institute in Warsaw. These files contain two kinds of documents: the files of the General Adjutancy of the Commander in Chief, and those of the chief of the General Staff, General Rozwadowski.

In September, 1939, at the time of the evacuation of Warsaw, some of these files were safely transferred abroad. They are now in the Józef Pilsudski Institute, a center of research on Polish history, in New York.

The files of General Rozwadowski contain all the original operational proposals of General Weygand, most of them in his own handwriting. Their study allows us to ascertain without error what kind of plans General Weygand had submitted in view of stopping the Soviet offensive on Warsaw. Those dated July 30, as well as August 1, 2, 3, and 5, 1920, are the most illuminating. On July 30, and on August 1, 1920, General Weygand advanced several ideas on how to stop the enemy on a stabilized front line, but he did not suggest any counter-offensive moves. On August 3 and 5, he proposed to stabilize the front on the Omulew river — Ostrołęka — Bug river line and to counter-attack in the north; he also suggested that the Ostrołęka army group be considered the nucleus of the attacking forces.

Next day, on August 6, the Polish Head-Quarters issued the decisive order for regrouping the troops, moving the front to the Orzyc — Narew — Pultusk — Warsaw — Dęblin — Wieprz — Seret line, and concentrating operational forces on the lower Wieprz river in order to counter-attack from the south to the north on the flank and the rear of enemy troops marching on Warsaw.

The special operational order issued on August 10 by the Chief of Staff confirms the execution of these plans, and so does the operational order of the Commander in Chief, dated August 15.

These documents demonstrate beyond any possible doubt that the operational plans of General Weygand were entirely different from the Polish plans, and that the Polish Commander in Chief never used them when making the final plan of the Battle of Warsaw.