

Abstract

Cooperation of Polish military forces in battles of the period of Vasa Reign in Poland (1587-1668)

This dissertation is intended to provide the reader with a complete analysis of a phenomenon of cooperation in different types of tactic performed by Polish armed forces during a wary period started in last two decades of 16th century and lasting during almost all 17th century. Although there were a plenty of reasons of military conflicts in Europe and in Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth particularly, the reign of several members of the house of Vasa should be considered as a separate, outstanding period in Polish military history, because new conflicts were strictly connected to all of the Vasa kings and were undoubtedly defined by their visions, plans, political views, personal and dynastical attempts. All three kings from Vasa dynasty, who had been ruling in Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were involved personally and politiciely into the conflict with Sweden. First of them, Sigismund III Vasa also involved Polan into the new conflict against Muscovy during the great dynastical crisis in this state.

On the other hand, Polish Kings and Great Dukes of Lithuania from the house of Vasa had been developing rather good (at least from the military point of view) relationship with the Hapsburg Monarchy and with the Holy Roman Empire.

As the and of 16th century and (especially) the entire 17th century were periods characterized by almost sustain military conflicts, it was found impossible to analyze all battles from this long period. Wherefore, six battles were chosen to be analyzed as examples of cooperation on the battlefield, two from the period of each of three kings representing the house of Vasa on the Polish throne.

The constant threat from the Crimean Tatars and periodical Cossacks' attempts to receive more privileged social position, causing several uprisings on the Ukrainian territories of the Commonwealth had changed significantly among the catastrophic Khmelnycky uprising in 1648. Both foes made a surprisingly effective alliance and Polish forces confronted agile Tatars, mostly cavalymen fighting alongside with massive Cossack formations of infantry, armed mostly with firearms, including strong artillery and supported by irregular forces of Ukrainian insurgents. As we can see, in the Vasa period Polish forces were confronted with some new enemies:

1) Swedish armies, heavily reformed, especially by Gustav II Adolf and Carl X Gustav. The heavies struggles for surviving of the entire state were conducted during the Deluge (1655-1660). Also, in this war Swedish forces used to be supported by a large bunch of German formations from Brandenburgia. Interestingly, Swedish armies tend to borrow the overall structure and percentage of particular types of formations from Polish armies, especially upgrading their horseman formations in terms of their quantity (primary) and quality (additionally).

2) Cossacks and Tatars – a completely new type of enemies, previously fighting against each other and since 1648 cooperating on the battlefield operating against Polish army.

Also, during Vasa period there were some „old” opponents of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The most powerful were Roman Empire and Moscovia.

Facing such different enemies, Polish forces were obligated to develop different types of tactic, to perform well despite being outnumbered (in almost all campaigns) and operating on the different terrain.

The structure of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth armies was always dominated by cavalry. Large distances and massive role of agility, considered as the most valuable advantage determined such structure of forces. Despite this factor, facing multiple tasks like a defense of strongholds or storming them, skirmishing or conducting regular field battles Polish forces had to operate infantry and artillery units as well. Nevertheless, even in the scope of separate types of forces (e.g. cavalry), there were plenty of diversified formations (hussars, light cavalry, reitars, cossack-type cavalry etc.). This omnifarious military forces could perform in any circumstances and scenarios fielding various combinations of units, trained to supplement each other and to create different kinds of synergistic power.

Main types of cooperation, observed, described, analyzed and explained in this dissertation were:

- 1) homogeneous cooperation – when two units of the same type of formation were operating together on the battlefield (e.g. two squadrons o hussars);
- 2) cooperation of different formations, both from the same type of military forces (e.g. two cavalry units, one – hussars, second – reitars);
- 3) cooperation of different types of military forces (e.g. one squadron of hussars and one company of musketeers);

At the end of any chapter of this dissertation there is partial recapitulation, describing not only types of cooperation observed in analyzed battles, but also showing their influence on the overall result of the battle/campaign.

Bogdan Bommowski