

= Battle of Kostiuchnówka =

The Battle of Kostiuchnówka was a World War I battle that took place July 4 ? 6 , 1916 , near the village of Kostiuchnówka (Kostyukhnivka) and the Stry River in the Volhynia region of modern Ukraine , then part of the Russian Empire . It was a major clash between the Russian Army and the Polish Legions (part of the Austro @-@ Hungarian Army) during the opening phase of the Brusilov Offensive .

Polish forces , numbering 5 @,@ 500 ? 7 @,@ 300 , faced Russian forces numbering over half of the 46th Corps of 26 @,@ 000 . The Polish forces were eventually forced to retreat , but delayed the Russians long enough for the other Austro @-@ Hungarian units in the area to retreat in an organized manner . Polish casualties were approximately 2 @,@ 000 fatalities and wounded . The battle is considered one of the largest and most vicious of those involving the Polish Legions in World War I.

= = Background = =

In World War I , the partitioners of Poland fought each other , with the German Empire and Austro @-@ Hungarian Empire aligned against the Russian Empire . The Polish Legions in Austro @-@ Hungary were created by Józef Piłsudski in order to exploit these divisions , serving as one of his primary tools for restoring Polish independence .

The Polish Legions first arrived in the vicinity of Kostiuchnówka during the advance of the Central Powers in the summer and autumn of 1915 , taking Kostiuchnówka on September 27 , 1915 . That autumn they experienced heavy fighting , with each side trying to take control of the region ; a less known battle of Kostiuchnówka took place from November 3 to 10 ; the Russians managed to make some advances , taking the Polish Hill , but were expelled by the Polish forces on September 10 . Polish forces held Kostiuchnówka , and due to their successes in defending their positions , several landmarks in the Kostiuchnówka region became known as " Polish " (called such by Polish as well as by allied German @-@ speaking troops) : a key hill overlooking the area became the Polish Hill (Polish : Polska Góra) , a nearby forest ? the Polish Forest (Polski Las) , a nearby bridge over the Garbach ? the Polish Bridge (Polski Most) , and the key fortified trench line ? Piłsudski 's Redoubt (Reduta Piłsudskiego) . Polish soldiers built several large wooden camps ; the larger of which was known as Legionowo (where the Polish HQ was located) . During late autumn , winter and spring no one saw any major moves by either sides , but this changed drastically with the launching of the Brusilov Offensive in June 1916 . The Brusilov Offensive would be a major Russian victory , and the greatest of Austro @-@ Hungarian defeats .

= = Opposing forces = =

Facing the major Russian offensive , the II Brigade of the Polish Legions was deployed out of Kostiuchnówka , at Gruziatyn and Hożula . The I Brigade held the lines advancing down the Polish Hill , Kostiuchnówka village ; the III Brigade , positioned to its left , held the lines near the Optowa village ; the Piłsudski 's Redoubt was the most advanced Polish position , just about 50 metres (164 ft) facing head on the most advanced Russian redoubt , called the " Eagle 's Nest " . Further down the Polish Hill the Hungarian 128th Honvédség Brigade took positions opposite the Polish right flank , the Hungarian 11th Cavalry Division opposite the left flank . Two Polish fall @-@ back lines were drawn beyond the first line of defense : one drawn through the Polish Forest and the Engineer 's Forest , and the second one through the villages of Nowe Kukle , Nowy Jastków , the camp of Legionowo and Nowa Rara?cza . The Polish Legions at Kostiuchnówka numbered from 5 @,@ 500 to 7 @,@ 300 (6 @,@ 500 infantry and 800 cavalry) , with forty @-@ nine machine guns , fifteen mortars and twenty @-@ six artillery units . The Russian forces , composed of the most part of the 46th Corps (primarily the 110th and 77nd Infantry Division) , numbered 23 @,@ 000 infantry , 3 @,@ 000 cavalry and were backed up by a larger artillery force consisting of 120 units .

= = The battle = =

Starting on June 6 , a major Russian push was directed against the 40 km line between Końki and Kostiuchnówka , with the aim of taking the position and then advancing towards Kovel . With Polish legionnaires staying put and holding the ground , more Russian reinforcements were thrown in , while the battle of Kostiuchnówka had become one of the major struggles in the area during World War I. Polish forces launched a counterattack , pushing back the Russians ? who had not expected such a bold move ? on the night of June 8 and 9 .

The major Russian push came on July 4 , after a major artillery pre @-@ empty assault . The advancing Russian infantry , numbering around 10 @, @ 000 , faced about 1 @, @ 000 Polish troops in the front lines (the rest were held in reserve) , but the Russians were stopped by heavy machine gun fire and forced to retreat . The Hungarian forces at Polish Hill were pushed back , however , and the Russians advancing on the Poles ' right flank , threatened to take the high ground in the area . A counterattack by the Poles was not successful ; as the Hungarian units were retreating , the Polish forces sustained very heavy losses and had to fall back either to the remaining part of the first defense line or , in the area of Polish Hill , to the second line . Another Polish counterattack , launched during the night of July 4 / 5 , was also beaten back . Throughout the day , the Russian offensive managed to push the Polish forces further back ; although the Poles managed to temporarily retake Polish Hill , a lack of support from the Hungarian forces once again tipped the battle towards the Russians , and even German reinforcements ? deployed after Piłsudski sent a report to the army 's headquarters about the possibility of a Russian breakthrough ? failed to turn the tide away . Eventually , on July 6 , the Russian offensive forced the Central Powers ' armies to retreat along the entire frontline ; Polish forces were among the last to retreat , having sustained approximately 2 @, @ 000 casualties during the battle .

= = Aftermath = =

Brusilov 's offensive was stopped only in August 1916 , with reinforcements from the Western Front . Despite being forced to retreat , the performance of the Polish forces impressed Austro @-@ Hungarian and German commanders , and contributed to their decision to recreate some form of Polish statehood in order to boost the recruitment of Polish troops . Their limited concessions , however , did not satisfy Piłsudski ; in the aftermath of the Oath Crisis he was arrested and the Legions disbanded .

The presence of Piłsudski , who would later become the dictator of Poland , during the battle , became a subject of several patriotic Polish paintings , including one by Leopold Gottlieb , then also a soldier of the Legions , as well as of another painting by Stefan Garwowski . Wincenty Wodzinowski created a series of drawings and sketches on the dead and wounded from the battle . During the Second Polish Republic , several monuments and a mound were raised nearby to commemorate the battle . A 16 m mound with a stone obelisk and a museum with two additional obelisks were raised during the years 1928 ? 1933 ; a military cemetery was also built . They fell into disrepair during the rule of the Soviet Union (which often purposefully tried to erase traces of Polish history ? the mound was for example lowered by 10 m) . In recent years restoration work has taken place through various Polish @-@ Ukrainian projects , with notable projects carried out by Polish boy scouts .

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