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SPLENDOURS AND SHADOWS OF OPERATIONS OF THE CROWN HUSSARS *in the Seventeenth Century*

Abstract

Hussars, as the breakthrough cavalry, were universal and very effective troops in fights against the Swedes, Moscow, and Turkey. Such clashes as the battles of Kirchholm in 1605 or Klushino in 1610 testified to their particular role within other branches of the Polish-Lithuanian Army. Although the hussars formed an expensive formation and the pay did not compensate the banner company (Polish: *towarzystwo chorągiewne*) for the costs of the unit, until the mid-seventeenth century there was no lack of those who were willing to serve as hussars due to the limited place in the so-called quarter army (Polish: *wojsko kwarciane*). However, already during the war for the Vistula estuary (1626–1629), the hussars were unable to break the Swedish positions due to the firepower of the Swedish troops. They failed to demonstrate their combat value also in fights against the Cossack units of Bohdan Khmelnytsky entrenched in a wagon fort. A three-day battle with the Swedes near Warsaw in 1656 revealed that without the support of armoured banners or companions (Polish: *chorągiew*) the hussars were incapable of breaking the Swedish-Brandenburg forces. A renewed renaissance of the hussars both in terms of their number and effectiveness we see during the reign of King Jan III (battles of Khotyn 1673, Vienna 1683), but already in the era of Moldovan campaigns the hussar cavalry went through a serious crisis, especially evident during the Great Northern War (1701–1716). This prompted historian Tadeusz Korzon, following in the footsteps of the eighteenth-century historian and writer Jędrzej Kitowicz, to call it the “funeral soldiers”, for they presented best at parades and funerals.