

Mot Moskva!

The Battle of Holowczyn / Holovzin, 1708.

By Nick Dorrel.

Reproduced courtesy of Nick Dorrel from his Wyre Forest Wargames Site www.wfgamers.org.uk

In this article I will provide the details for re-fighting one of the battles in the Russian campaign of 1708 - 1709. The title, "Mot Moskva!", means 'On to Moscow!' in Swedish and the battle was fought in 1708 as the Swedes advanced into Russia.

Background

The Great Northern War started in 1700 as a coalition of powers, Denmark, Russia and Saxony / Poland, sort to take advantage of the accession of a young, new Swedish King. They had though underestimated this king, Charles XII. He rose to the challenge and by invading Zealand forced Denmark out of the war. He then turned to the Russians, who were besieging Narva at the time, and inflicted a humiliating defeat on them. Deciding that the performance of the Russian army at Narva indicated they were no real threat he turned to deal with his last enemy Saxony whose leader was also King of Poland. The years 1701 to 1706 saw a protracted campaign in Poland and finally an invasion of Saxony before the Swedish King finally secured his desired victory.

By 1707 he stood on a threshold. He had forced two of his enemies to the peace table and the third, Russia, was trying to obtain peace. The warring parties in the ongoing War of Spanish Succession were trying to woo him to join them in their war. Sweden and the reputation of the Swedish army were at an all time peak. Yet Charles XII was not the kind of man to 'forgive and forget'. He did not think very highly of the Russian army after it's performance at Narva and other engagements with the Royal army. Also it seems that he could not the Russian aggression of 1700 and he determined to teach Russians Tzar, Peter, a lesson he would not forget.

So in 1707 the Swedish army rested and prepared for its invasion of Russia in 1708. They were though not to face the same kind of Russian army that Charles XII was expecting. Following the defeat at Narva in 1700 Tzar Peter, who would be known to history as Peter the Great, had used his time well. He had organised and trained his army. Frequently detachments were sent to help the Saxons and Poles. While in the secondary theatres of the Baltic States and Finland the Russian area slowly reduced the Swedish position there. These operations gave the Russians some experience and built their confidence. The army was perhaps still not capable of standing up to the Swedes in a 'fair' fight but it certainly was no longer the 'armed rabble' that Charles XII had crushed at Narva.

Charles XII had assembled the largest Swedish army of the war in Poland, something like 35,000 men. In the face of this Peter the Great adopted what was to become the classic Russian tactics against a foreign invasion. First of all he burnt or took anything that would be

useful to the invader and presented them with nothing but 'scorched earth' to advance into. Secondly he used his light and mobile forces, irregular Cossack and Kalmuck light cavalry, Russian dragoons and mounted infantry to harass the Swedish advance. Finally the bulk of the army took up a series of positions behind river lines to try to block the Swedish advance. Two such positions had been taken up but in both cases the Swedish King and his army had rapidly outflanked them and the Russians had withdrawn deeper into Russia.

By July 1st 1708 the third of these positions had been reached. The Russian army was now more concentrated than it had been and they had taken up a position behind the river Vabitj. It was a strong position that could not be outflanked as the earlier ones had but it had what would turn out to be a fatal flaw. The Russian army was divided into four divisions, 2 of infantry and 2 of cavalry. One division of each type, the strongest two, under General Scheremetjev and Prince Menschikov were deployed on the most likely attack route for the Swedes. While the other infantry division under General Repnin and the cavalry division of General Goltz were deployed on the less likely southern route. The problem was that the two parts of the Russian army were separated by a swampy, wooded area that was considered impractical for the Swedes to use. Another problem was that Tzar Peter was not with the army and the army had been assembled from various detachments. This meant that none of the Russian commanders had a clear idea of who was supposed to be in charge.

Charles XII was quick to note the gap between the two sections of the Russian army. So he paused for a few days to allow his army to close up. Meanwhile he ordered detachments of his army to make feints and other manoeuvres to confuse the Russians. He hoped to convince the Russians that he planned to attack the northern section of their army. In reality he was, with characteristic abandon, going to assault General Repnin's southern position. He would go through the 'impractical' swamps and woods and strike from Repnin's exposed right flank. With all preparation made the part of the Swedish army that was to undertake the operation moved into position during the early hours of July 3rd. As dawn broke, the Swedes rushed forward to the river hoping to achieve surprise and eager to clear the road to Moscow.

Orders of Battle

The first thing to note is that there are an awful lot of Russian troops in this list. The good news is though, you probably wont need all of them! They just represent the potential troops which could have reached the battlefield.

Swedes:

Army Commander:

Charles XII, King of Sweden: **Monarch** (Ex 6), also in direct command of Royal Command.

Royal Command:

1st Brigade: 3 bases may have pontoon sections, see Special Rules

- Kunglig Majestats Livgardet till fot (Foot Guards): 4 Elite Ga Pa bases
- 2nd Battalion, Dalregementet: 1 Veteran, Determined GA Pa base

2nd Brigade:

- 1st Battalion, Dalregementet: 1 Veteran, Determined GA Pa base
- Upplands regemente: 2 Veteran , Determined GA Pa bases

3rd Brigade:

- Ostagota regemente: 2 Trained, Determined GA Pa bases
- Vastermanlands regemente: 2 Veteran , Determined GA Pa bases

Light Horse Brigade:

Valackregementet: 3 Trained, Light Horse Melee bases

Artillery: 3 Field Guns, 4 Light Guns - all Veteran

Rehnskiold's Command:

Commander: Rehnskiold (Ex 3)

1st Cavalry Brigade:

Kunglig Majestats Livregemente dragoner (Guard Dragoon): 4 Elite Galloping Horse bases

2nd Cavalry Brigade:

Livregementet till hast (Guard Horse): 3 Elite Galloping Horse bases

Drabantkaren (Bodyguard): 1 Elite Galloping Horse base

3rd Cavalry Brigade:

Livregementet till hast (Guard Horse): 3 Elite Galloping Horse bases

4th Cavalry Brigade:

Smalands kavalleriregemente: 4 Veteran, Determined Galloping Horse bases

5th Cavalry Brigade:

Nylands och Tavastahus lans kavalleriregemente: 4 Veteran, Determined Galloping Horse bases

6th Cavalry Brigade:

Ostagota kavalleriregemente: 4 Trained, Determined Galloping Horse bases

Russians:

Army Commander:

General Scheremetjev: (A 4), also commands his own Wing.

Scheremetjev Wing:

Schere's Battery: 1 Trained Field Gun

1st Dragoon Brigade: Vladimirski Dragoon Regiment: 3 Trained Dragoon bases

1st Mounted Infantry Brigade: Ingermanlandski Regiment: 3 Trained Russian School Mounted infantry bases

d'Albion's Command:

d'Albion (P 2)

1st Brigade:

- Pskovski Regiment: 2 Trained, Russian School bases
- Astrakhanski Regiment: 2 Trained, Russian School bases

2nd Brigade:

- Kievski Regiment: 2 Trained, Russian School bases
- Nishegorodski Regiment: 2 Raw, Russian School bases

- Unknown Grenadier Battalion: 1 Veteran, A prest, Grenadier base

De Deut's Command:

De Deut (P 1)

1st Brigade:

- Luzkski Regiment: 2 Raw, Russian School bases
- Rentzelski Regiment: 2 Trained, Russian School bases

2nd Brigade:

- Byelgorodski Regiment: 2 Trained, Russian School bases
- Schluselburgski Regiment: 2 Raw, Russian School bases
- Unknown Grenadier Battalion: 1 Veteran, A prest, Grenadier base

Repnin's Wing:

General Repnin: Wing Commander (P 1+2) / Army Commander (P 3)

Note: Repnin is the Army Commander until Scheremetjev arrives on table, then he becomes a Wing Commander.

Von Chambers' Command

Von Chambers (A 1)

1st Brigade:

- Koporieschski Regiment: 2 Trained, Russian School bases
- Tobolski Regiment: 2 Raw, Russian School bases
- Artillery: 1 Trained Light Gun

2nd Brigade:

- Narvski Regiment: 3 Trained, Russian School bases
- Vjatski Regiment: 2 Trained, Russian School bases
- Artillery: 1 Trained Light Gun

Artillery: Kogan's Battery: 2 Trained Field Guns

Von Schweden's Command:

Von Schweden: (P 1)

1st Brigade:

- Rostovski Regiment: 2 Raw, Russian School bases
- Lefort Regiment: 2 Trained, Russian School bases
- Artillery: 1 Trained Light Gun

2nd Brigade:

- Ryazanski Regiment: 2 Trained, Russian School bases
- Prince Repnin's Grenadier Regiment: 2 Veteran, A prest, Grenadier bases
- Artillery: 1 Trained Light Gun

Artillery: Repnin's Battery: 1 Trained Field Gun

Von Der Goltz's Wing:

General Goltz: Wing Commander (P 1+1)

Note: All units in this command are Wavering.

Ifland's Command

Ifland (P 1)

1st Brigade: Pskovski Dragoon Regiment: 3 Trained Dragoon bases

2nd Brigade: Tverskoy Dragoon Regiment: 3 Trained Dragoon bases

3rd Brigade: Belozerski Dragoon Regiment: 3 Raw Dragoon bases

Heinske's Command:

Heinske (A 1)

1st Brigade: St Petersburgski Dragoon Regiment: 3 Trained Dragoon bases

2nd Brigade: Azovski Dragoon Regiment: 3 Trained Dragoon bases

3rd Brigade: Ryazanski Dragoon Regiment: 3 Raw Dragoon bases

Von Hessen Darmstadt's Command:

Von Hessen Darmstadt (P 1)

All units in this command are 'Uncommitted' (see Kliszow 1702 list).

1st Brigade: Astrakhanski Dragoon Regiment: 3 Trained Dragoon bases

2nd Brigade: Troitski Dragoon Regiment: 3 Trained Dragoon bases

3rd Brigade:

- Novgorodski Dragoon Regiment: 2 Raw Dragoon bases
- Nishegorodski Dragoon Regiment: 2 Raw Dragoon bases

Light Horse Command:

Unknown Commander (P 1)

All units in this command are 'Uncommitted' (see Kliszow 1702 list).

Kalmuck Brigade: 3 Trained Light Horse Fire bases

1st Cossack Brigade: 4 Raw Light Horse Mixed bases

2nd Cossack Brigade: 4 Raw Light Horse Mixed bases

3rd Cossack Brigade: 4 Raw Light Horse Mixed bases

Deployment:

There are a large number of Russian troops available but it is likely that the game will be decided before all of them are needed. In the historical battle only the first three groups from Scheremetjev's Wing and the first two from Goltz's took any part in the battle, see Russian reinforcement groups below. If you wish you can restrict the available reinforcements to just these groups.

Russian Deployment:

On table:

Scheremetjev's Wing:

Schere's Battery: Unlimbered in the defences adjacent to entry point B.

Repnin's Wing:

All units have 2 levels of Shaken at the start of the game. The Russians have just realised the Swedes are attacking and are not 'combat ready'.

The majority of this command is deployed occupying the defences. They are in line or unlimbered facing towards the river. The sequence is from the southern end, near Visoki, to the point behind the unnamed village is as follows.

Tobolski, Narvski (2 btns only), Kogan's Battery, Vjatski, Rostovski, Lefort (1 btn only), Ryazanski and Repnin's Grenadiers (1 btn only).

The other battalion of Repnin's Grenadiers is deployed in line occupying the northern section of the main defences, it is facing north. One base from the Koporieschski regiment is occupying the southern section of the main line, it is facing south west.

The missing battalions from the above list, one each from the Koporieschski, Narvski and Lefort regiments, are deployed within 4" of the rear of the other battalion or battalions of the regiment. In addition the Narvski battalion may be deployed within 4" of the rear of Kogan's Battery. All units are in line and facing towards the river.

Repnin's Battery is deployed, unlimbered, in the small village in front of the Russian line.

Brigade artillery is deployed, unlimbered, next to any battalion of the brigade.

Goltz's Wing:

Ifland's Command are deployed, dismounted, within 2BW of point D. When activated (see below) they receive 2 levels of Shaken.

Swedish Deployment:

Royal Command:

Charles XII, the 1st Infantry brigade, the Light Horse brigade and the artillery start the game on table. They must be within 4 BW of point X and west of the river. Units may be in any formation, limbered, unlimbered, etc. No unit may be within 1 BD of the river.

Historically the infantry were north of point X and crossed the river there. The artillery and light horse were south east of X to cover the crossing.

Reinforcements:

Russian:

Russian reinforcements do not arrive automatically. Once a Wing has been activated then units from that wing may start arriving as reinforcements.

Russian Activation:

At the start of the game only Repnin's Wing is active. Both of the other Russian Wings are inactive. Starting with the second turn to activate a command you must roll a D10 and score 12 or more, after modifications. Roll a D10 for each Wing during the Russian players Tempo Allocation phase..

Dice Modifiers:

- +1 for each turn after the second turn.
- -2 if rolling for Goltz's Wing
- +1 for each 2 TPs spent by the Army Commander this turn (sending messages for help).

Once activated any on table troops from these commands receive 2 levels of Shaken. When a Wing is activated the Russian player may act with any on table units from that Wing.

If any unit of a Wing is fired upon or a Swedish unit comes within 3 BW of a unit in the Wing, then the Wing is activated automatically.

Russian Reinforcements:

Once a Russian Wing is activated the Russian's can roll for reinforcements to arrive from that command, during the Tempo Allocation phase. On the turn following activation roll a D6 for each activated command with reinforcing units available. On a score of 0 a reinforcing group arrive. You receive a -1 die roll modifier for each turn after the first that you roll, but this is

cancelled once a unit arrives and you start again. Scheremetjev's Wing receive a +1 modifier, Goltz's Wing receive a +2 modifier. An unmodified dice roll of 6 always fails however.

Example: It is turn 4 and the Russian player rolls for activation. He gets +2 to the dice because this is the third time he has rolled. He has also spent 2 TPs to give himself an additional +1 to activate Scheremetjev. He rolls a 4 for Goltz and 9 for Scheremetjev, he has failed to activate Goltz ($4+2 = 6$, not good enough) but succeeded with Scheremetjev ($9+3 = 12$, good enough). In the next turn he rolls for reinforcements but he can not succeed - he needs a score of 0 on a D6! On the next turn he receive a -1 modifier and manages to roll a 1 on the D6, which with the -1 modifier for a second attempt means that reinforcements have arrived. In this case the 1st Dragoon Brigade. On the following turn he can again roll for further reinforcements, the 1st mounted Infantry Brigade this time, but now he has lost his -1 and again he can not actually succeed.

Russian reinforcement groups. Each time group must arrive before you can start rolling for the next.

Scheremetjev's Wing:

- 1: 1st Dragoon Brigade: Arrive at point B in march column.
- 2: 1st Mounted Infantry Brigade: Arrive, mounted, at point C in march column.
- 3: Scheremetjev and 1st Brigade, d'Albion's Command: Arrive at point B in march column
- 4: d'Albion and his 2nd Brigade.
- 5: De Deut and his 1st Brigade.
- 6 De Deut's 2nd Brigade.

Goltz's Wing: Only 1 brigade can arrive each turn and you may not start rolling for reinforcements again until all of the Command are on table.

- 1: Goltz and Heinske's Command: Arrive in march column at point E.
- 2: Von Hessen Darmstadt's Command: Arrive in march column at point E.
- 3: Light Horse Command: Arrive at point E or F.

Swedish Reinforcements:

Each turn starting with the first turn a Swedish brigade arrives on table at point A. They are in march column and may move for free on their turn of arrival.

The sequence of arrival is:-

- 2nd Infantry Brigade
- 3rd Infantry Brigade
- Rehnskiold and his 1st Cavalry Brigade
- Rehnskiold's 2nd Cavalry Brigade
- Rehnskiold's 3rd Cavalry Brigade
- Rehnskiold's 4th Cavalry Brigade
- Rehnskiold's 5th Cavalry Brigade

- Rehnskiold's 6th Cavalry Brigade

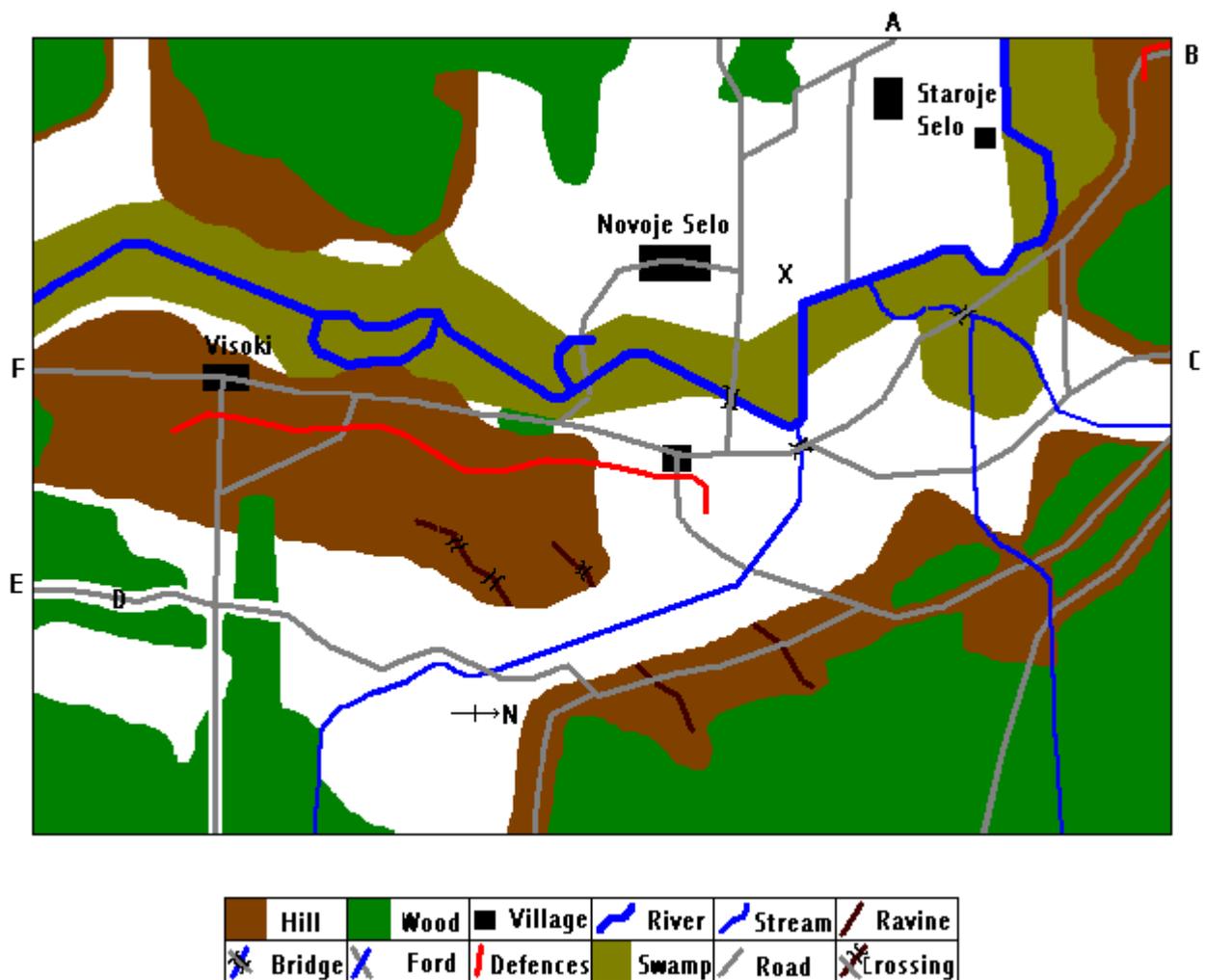
So on the first turn the 2nd Infantry Brigade arrives. On turn 5 Rehnskiold's 3rd Cavalry Brigade will arrive.

Russian Army Command:

At the beginning of the game, and until Scheremetjev arrives on table, Repnin is the Russian army commander. Once Scheremetjev arrives on table he assumes army command and Repnin becomes a Wing Commander under him.

Terrain:

Map:



The table should be 35 BW by 25 BW. If you are using 60mm as your BW measurement this makes the table 210cm (8 feet) by 150cm (5 feet). The Russians main defensive position is 15 BW long with a 1 BW section angled back at each end.

Hill: Level 1 slopes.

Village: The villages are very open so count them as Enclosures with a defence factor of 1.

River: In theory this should not be crossable by all units and certainly the Russians should be told that this is the case. But historically the Swedes proved capable of crossing the river with out the use of their pontoon bridges in the area where the road goes to the river north of point X. Within 1 BW of this point the river is Obstacle Value 2 and may be crossed. The Russians did not know this! Everywhere else the river is not crossable except by using a ford or bridge.

Alternatively the pontoon bridges can be used. The infantry units carrying them must start the turn next to the river. They then take the whole of a turn to erect them and units may cross them as if they were a standard bridge on the following turn.

Stream: Obstacle Value 1, Defence Value 1.

Ravine: Obstacle value 2, may not be occupied and do not block line of sight. They have a defence value of 2 for Charges and Close Combats if the attacker cross them.

Fieldworks: Obstacle Value 1, Defence Value 1 Vs Fire and 2 in other cases.

Victory Conditions:

Total victory for either side is achieved by breaking their opponents army. Only on table units at the time are considered. If the on table part of a command breaks then any reinforcements are lost.

The Historical Battle:

Charles the twelfth of Sweden had hoped that his surprise attack would not be discovered until the army had crossed the river. This was not to be and as the Swedes reached the river a warning shot was fired from the Russian side. Deciding that the emplacing the pontoon bridges would take too long the Swedish army plunged across the river and formed for the attack. Meanwhile on the Russian side of the river confusion reigned as Repnin's Wing frantically manned their positions. While the Russians took up position the Swedes forded the supposedly unfordable river, not bothering with their pontoon sections, and formed up for the attack.

General Repnin the local commander sent urgent messages to the adjacent commanders for help but had not received any reply. To the north Scheremetjev had detached a few units which he dispatched south but they had yet to arrive. While to the south General Goltz for a

long time did not believe that the attack was happening and refused to commit his units. Repnin's command meanwhile was trying to do two things at the same time and succeeded in doing nothing. Part of the command was ordered to defend the entrenchment's while the rest tried to stop the Swedish advance. This though left gaps in the line, as the confusion in the Russian ranks increased, which the arriving Swedish troops exploited. While the troops sent to confront the first part of the Swedish army soon realised they were outclassed. A running fire fight was the result as Charles XII urged the Swedes on but the Russians would not stand and constantly retreated away from the Swedes.

So with his fortified line compromised and the other part of his army in retreat Repnin's command began to withdraw. It was at this time that help finally began to arrive. Goltz, in the south, had finally realised what was happening and started to move his command to attack the Swedish infantry's flank. So the Iland cavalry group (the on table dragoon units) moved to the attack. Help though was at hand for the Swedes in the shape of the first of their cavalry arriving. With initially just two squadrons General Rehnskiold charged towards the oncoming Russian dragoons. This succeeded in halting the Russian advance and soon with the arrival of more Swedish cavalry this first wave of Russian horse was routed. With the Swedish cavalry now massed the following waves of Russian dragoons proved little problem as the victorious Swedes smashed into each in turn.

Meanwhile General Scheremetjev had arrived in the north and elements of his command. He tried to organise a counter attack to aid his colleagues to the south and hopefully to swing behind the Swedish army and cut their lines of supply and retreat. By the time he had sufficient forces though it was too late. Repnin's and Goltz's commands were in retreat and part of the Swedish army was advancing to meet this new threat. So fearing that if he did not move he would be cut off from retreat his command also started to retreat and the battle ended.

The battle had been a costly one from the Russians. Perhaps as many as 5000 men were lost while the road east now lay open for the Swedes. Yet it was also not a complete victory for the Swedes. The Russian army had survived more or less intact to fight another day. While the Swedes also had lost many men and these were very difficult for them to replace, unlike the Russian losses. This would prove decisive nearly a year later when the Russian army achieved the decisive victory of the campaign, and indeed the war, at Poltava.

Acknowledgment:

I would like to thank the many people who have helped me when I was writing this article. In particular I would like to thank Thomas Arnfelt for his encouragement, supplying information and answering a lot of silly questions from myself, Johan Herber for his discussions on the orders of battles and translations of Swedish text and Vladimir Velikanov for his help with the Russian army. Although of course any opinions, mistakes, etc are my own and through no fault of others.