

The Napoleon Series

The Germans under the French Eagles: Volume III the Saxons in Our Ranks Chapter Three Part III: Campaign of 1812

By Commandant Sauzey

Translated by [Greg Gorsuch](#)

CHAPTER III

CAMPAIGN OF 1812¹

IV. -- History of the 7th Corps in 1812.

1. -- MARCH ON POLAND.

On the 27th of March, the corps left the neighborhood of Guben in two columns, the one on the right formed by the 1st Division and the one on the left by the 2nd. It was directed on the Oder.² Each division was preceded by one day's march by an advanced guard consisting of six squadrons, a horse battery and a light infantry regiment. The trains and convoys followed, under the protection of a battalion of grenadiers of the 1st Division, with which General Reynier marched: an order of the latter, of 6 April, had assigned the 6th squadron of hussars to the escort of the headquarters.

The Oder was crossed at Neusalz (Nowa Sól) on the 1st and 2nd of April, on a pontoon bridge thrown over by the pontoons. Kalisch was reached on the 9th. In 14 days, without stop, 48 miles had been crossed. General Lecoq, writing to the King of Saxony, showed him his great satisfaction at the perfect discipline of the troops during these marches.

At Kalisch, General Reynier received from Berthier, Chief of Staff of the Grand Army, the order to send immediately to Posen the regiment of light horse "Prince Albrecht"; this regiment had just been appointed to form, with two regiments of Bavarian light horse, the 17th Brigade of Light Cavalry, with the 3rd Cavalry Corps commanded by Grouchy. The next day, the regiment of the Life Guards and that of the cuirassiers of Zastrow were appointed to form the 20th Brigade of Heavy Cavalry, which entered the division of General de Lorge at the 4th Cavalry Corps. The command of this brigade, with which marched the von Hiller 2nd Horse Battery, was given to General Thielmann.

The departure of these troops diminished the number of the 7th Corps by 2,070 men and 2,177 horses; it then counted only 19,313 men, 4,996 horses and 50 pieces of cannon.

Reynier addressed the most earnest complaints to the general headquarters, against such a diminution of the cavalry of a corps to which his position on the extreme right made a large number of squadrons necessary. General Lecoq also mentioned in his reports how much this measure had displeased the whole Corps.

¹ This chapter is based on the excellent work of M. Lieutenant-Colonel Exner: *Der Antheil der Königlich Sächsischen Armee am Feldzuge Gegen Russland 1812* (Leipzig, Dunker and Humblot, 1896). -- We have followed the same divisions in material, and we have happily followed the rich contribution made by the Saxon Archives of War in this part of our national history.

²*The Emperor to the Chief of Staff*. Paris, 6 March 1812. -- "...The Saxons must be ready to cross the Oder twenty-four hours after they receive the order..."

Continuing eastwards, the 7th Corps reached Radom on April 24; it confined itself to the environs of this city until the middle of May, by exercising there every day, and by doing service in the country. General Reynier inspected successively all the brigades and in his orders of the day of 12 and 22 May expressed his satisfaction for the good behavior and the good state of the troops "whose zeal and the application left little to be desired".

At the beginning of May, seventeen weeks after the declaration of war, an order arrived from the general headquarters, signed by Berthier, which placed the 7th Corps under the command of the commander-in-chief of the right wing of the Grand Army, King Jerome from Westphalia. The troops that were subordinated to him were the 5th Corps (Poles), the 8th (Westphalians), the 7th (Saxons), and the 4th Cavalry Corps.

Jerome's chief of staff was Major-General Count Marchand, who sent Reynier to take a position on the far right wing, and after the passage of the Vistula at Borek placed him in the neighborhood of Lublin. The cavalry and brigade of Sahr arrived at Lublin on the 10th of June, and the other elements of the corps cantoned between Lublin and Warsaw.

Since the beginning of the operations, one already had difficulties in feeding the army. The orders of Count Daru, commissary general of the army, could only be partly executed, for the necessary provisions were wanting in the stores of Warsaw, as well as in the poor countries which the corps had traversed till then. The order of May 17 said textually:

"Every regiment or battalion commander whose troop are short of food for a single day will immediately be sent home as unable to serve. Let them procure what is necessary, but let them know that all excesses will be punished; the brigade generals will be responsible for their sub-orders."

This order did not cure the evil.

300,000 biscuit rations were assigned to the 7th Corps; this represented a consumption of 15 days; they were carried off on 300 small newly built carriages; these wagons, miserably coupled with oxen, could not follow the movements of the troops, and soon served to supply the campfires.³

General Lecoq pointed out these difficulties in a report to the Minister of War Cerrini, requesting the dispatch of food and announcing that there would soon be no more regular distributions.

"Until then," he said, "they had always been happier than the other corps of the right wing, whose rations have already been reduced by a third. They owe it to the care of General Reynier, and to the sobriety and discipline of the troops. Food became more and more rare, and it would soon be impossible to find oats for horses."

On the 1st of June, King Jerome inspected the troops of the army corps still on the left bank of the Vistula, and showed his full satisfaction to General Lecoq for their dress and their fine appearance.

The strong marches, the great heat of the day, followed by cold nights, insufficient food had had an adverse influence on the health of the troops since the beginning of the campaign. At the end of May, 16 officers and 1,900 men were in miserably organized hospitals, most of them sick with typhus.⁴ This disease also struck at Puławy on 7 June, the commander of the 2nd Division, lieutenant general von Gutschmid "a model of humanity and chivalry" says the report of General Lecoq. The command of the division passed to General von Funck, and the Major General von Gablentz received the command of the three cavalry regiments which remained with the 7th Army Corps. Lieutenant-Colonel Zezschwitz, hitherto Chief of Staff of the 2nd Division, replaced General von Gablentz at the head of the Uhlans Regiment "Prince Clement".

³*The Emperor to the Chief of Staff*. Paris, 6 March 1812. -- "The Saxons must have, for 25 March, on carts, flour and biscuit for the whole Saxon army corps for twenty days, so that they can make their movement without being stopped by any consideration."

⁴*Note for the Prince Chief of Staff*. Thorn, 4 June 1812. -- "...The 5th, 7th (Saxon) and 8th Corps will send their patients to the Warsaw Hospital..."

2. -- THE THEATER OF WAR.

The terrain in which the two opposing armies maneuvered in the second half of 1812 extended to the east of the Bug and the Narew. The Bug forms in its middle course, from Kryłów to the north of Drohiczyn, the boundary between the Duchy of Warsaw and the Russian government of Volhynia. To the south and east, the theater of operations is bounded by the Lutsk-Mazyr-Minsk line; to the north, by the Niemen.

The appearance of the ground and the viability have changed profoundly for nearly a century and hardly allow today to realize the extraordinary difficulties presented by operations, marches and supplies during the campaign of 1812.

On the right bank of the Bug extended marshes several miles wide, which met at the marshes of the Pripyat, above Ratne and Dyvin; to the north and south, the country had the appearance of sandy hills very slightly broken, covered with wood and traversed by rivers with marshy edges; these rivers could only be crossed in summer and autumn on solid bridges, the construction of which required all the more time because the flooded meadows along the banks often required the construction of very long roads.

The forest of Bielowisk and the swamps of Podolia had a considerable influence on the conduct of operations. The forest stretched for 50 miles from the Narew and Lesna springs to Mazyr; it was a maze of woods, swamps, and flooded meadows; its breadth ranged from four to eight miles, and was traversed only by two great roads: one from Brest-Litovsk by Kobryn and Pruzhany to Slonim and Nieswicz (Nyasvizh); the other left Pinsk, went on Nieswicz and from there to Minsk. These two roads were wide, indeed, but made of sand and earth, they became difficult in the wet season, and often were not even practicable for artillery and convoys.

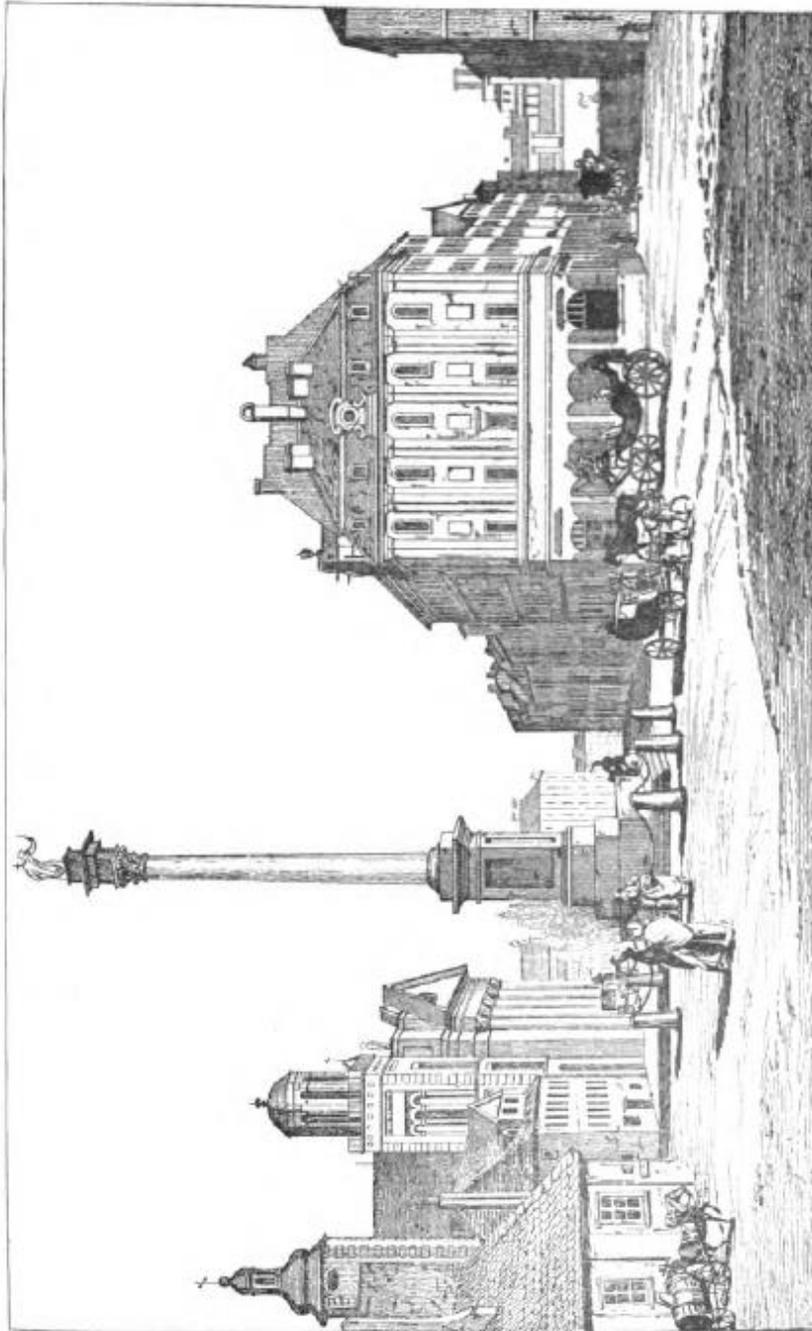
On the banks of Pripyat, with rare exceptions, the country was a desert. In his "Souvenirs of the Campaign of 1812" General von Funck expresses himself thus:

"Torrents and streams flowed into their beds only by exception; they covered their banks, extended into the country, and rendered it inextricable. The swamps covered woods and thickets, each big tree formed like a sort of island, and if one set foot on a solid ground, two steps further one fell into a deep-water hole."

One only rarely encountered human dwellings; people lived off their hunting and fishing. This country was inhabited with myriads of stinging insects and many ferocious beasts.

The swamps of Podolia, which start on the left bank of Murawiec above Kobryn, are separated from the Bug by an almost uninterrupted chain of sand hills; they extend as far as the environs of Luboml, and terminate to the east towards the marshes of Pripyat. Only one road, from Kamenetz to Dubno and Ratno, passed through these marshes. Its importance, from the point of view of the operations, was all the greater as the bridges and the pavements covered with logs could be easily destroyed and defended by weak detachments of troops.

In all localities, the houses were almost without exception of wood; only churches, castles or convents built of stoneware rarely found. Half of the inhabitants were Jewish, with a very commercial spirit and who rendered many services to the troops. In parts of the country that were not submerged, plowing and livestock rearing took place. It was a precious resource for food, but the Russians had destroyed all the mills and the remaining flour. Such measures had been taken by them for the fountains which gave drinking water. In autumn, it was possible to make up for the lack of bread by the potatoes. The retreat of all the Russian officials of the enemy-occupied countries was going to be another difficulty, for the food and transport of the invaders.



Varsovie.
(D'après la *France militaire*.)

Warsaw.
(After *Military France*.)

3. -- MARCH ON NIESWIECZ, MEETING WITH THE 5th AND 8th CORPS;
DEFENSIVE ROLE OF THE 7th CORPS.

According to the orders of the general headquarters, the 7th Corps was to wait on its Lublin positions for the arrival of the Austrian auxiliary corps, to send detachments in reconnaissance towards the Bug and to seek, by a march in the direction of the south to deceive the Russian army on the movements that were in sight. But this goal was not

reached, because despite the threats made on its left flank, the Russian army marched in a straight line on Brest-Litovsk.

The 7th Corps was thus directed on Praga and Okuniew and reached the 19 of June around Warsaw, by forced marches. There it had to cover Praga and the fortress of Modlin until the arrival of the Austrians. When the latter, coming from Galicia, reached Sielec in the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, General Reynier was ordered to lead the 7th Corps to Nieswicz to join the 5th and 8th Corps. The marches were most painful, by a heat of more than 25 degrees (Celsius meaning 77 degrees Fahrenheit); the infantry lost a hundred men as a result of sunstroke; many horses died of exhaustion and were replaced by young animals that could not resist to the fatigues of the service. The movements of the army corps were observed and disturbed by small detachments of Cossacks, which necessitated for the cavalry a tiring service of safety and reconnaissance.

Napoleon had just officially declared war on Russia.

He announced it to the troops by the following proclamation (*2nd Bulletin of the Grande Armée*):

"Soldiers! the second war of Poland is started. The first ended at Friedland and Tilsit; at Tilsit, Russia swore eternal alliance to France and war on England. She is violating her oaths today. She will give no explanation of her strange conduct, while the French eagles have not again crossed the Rhine, thus leaving our allies at her discretion. Russia is driven by fate! Its destiny must be fulfilled. Would she believe us degenerate? Are we no longer the soldiers of Austerlitz? It places us between dishonor and war. The choice cannot be doubtful; let's march forward! Let's go to the Niemen! Let's carry war on its territory. The second war in Poland will be glorious to French arms as the first, but the peace we conclude will carry with it its guarantee and put an end to this proud influence that Russia has exercised for 50 years on the affairs of Europe."

"In our imperial headquarters in Wilkowisko, 22 June 1812."

NAPOLEON.

On the 28th of June, the 7th Corps arrived at Zambrów; from there, 3 squadrons of hussars were sent in the direction of the Narew, towards Suracz, with the mission of informing on the position of the enemy which was to be on this river with 40,000 men. Only a few Cossack posts were found, but it was ascertained that the body of the Cossack hetman, Platov, had left the neighborhood of Bialystok for Grodno, and that Brest was occupied by Russian troops. This information was confirmed by Major von der Planitz, who, with 100 well-mounted hussars chosen from all over the regiment, had been sent for reconnaissance south of the Narew.

The 7th Corps, continuing its march towards the east, reached 5 July Bialystok, where the battalion of grenadiers of Brause was left for the protection of the stores and hospitals; it was on the 10th at Slonim, on the 15th at Kletzk: the junction with the 5th and 8th Corps was made, but it lasted only one day, for the 7th Corps was sent to replace the Austrians who had just occupied Brest, Kobryn and Pinsk and thus form the extreme right wing of the Grand Army. Prince von Schwarzenberg was advised to withdraw from the positions assigned to the Saxons.

The army corps was given a task which it could not fulfill, in view of the state of its forces: it was indeed, according to the Emperor's orders, to cover the Duchy of Warsaw, to preserve its liaison with the Great Army and oppose an enemy offensive out of Wołyń (Volhynia), on a line of more than 20 miles; and that, in front of an opponent very superior in number. Reynier -- who corresponded directly with the general headquarters since Jerome had left the army and Marshal Davout had received the command in chief of the right wing -- claimed in vain reinforcements to ensure the execution of the mission entrusted to the 7th Corps. He was not even given the regiment of light horse "Prince John" who had just left Saxony to go to the theater of war.

Napoleon would not grant anything; he accused the information he received of the gathering of important Russian forces in Dubno, Kovel, Luboml as improbable. The following letter from the Emperor to Berthier -- a copy of which was sent to Reynier -- shows:

"Write to General Reynier that I find his position in harmony with his role, which is to operate in Volhynia... Tomarov's corps cannot embarrass him; it's a bunch of third battalions and recruits. As for Russian troops coming

from Crimea, there is no need to take it into account..."

General Bogdanovich, whose work on the campaign of 1812 is based on Russian sources, points out that the forces of the Saxon corps employed in Volhynia were too few, in view of the difficulty of their mission and the considerable number of Russian troops opposed to them; that Napoleon, moreover, was ill informed about the events of the theater of war in the south and the forces of the Russians.

Meanwhile, the cavalry general Tormasov had gathered at Luboml, Lutsk and on the Styr the Russian 3rd Army of Observations and Reserve. This army included:

54 battalions;
76 squadrons;
9 Cossack regiments;
164 pieces of cannon:
altogether 46,000 men.

It was to take the offensive, operate in the Duchy of Warsaw and threaten the lines of communication of the Grand Army. The Russian forces were about to receive a new increase on this side: as a result of the peace between Russia and Turkey, the Russian Army of Moldavia, which became available, was ordered to go to Volhynia.

In accordance with the orders he had received, Reynier set out from Kletzk on the 17th of July to go by Bytin to Pinsk, Ivanovo, Kobryn, and Brest-Litovsk, in order to relieve the Austrian troops of the posts which they occupied there.

In the middle of July, General-Major von Watzdorff, Inspector General of Reviews and Saxon ambassador to Russia until the end of 1811, was attached to the General Headquarters with the consent of the Emperor. His mission was to regulate all matters concerning the Saxon troops, to inform the King of Saxony on the events of the theater of the war and to maintain the diplomatic relations between the courts of France and Saxony.

He did not stay long in the immediate vicinity of Napoleon (His Majesty did not like to have near him the representatives of foreign armies) and was attached to the diplomatic service in the department of Maret, Duke of Bassano, Secretary of State for Business Foreign. He fulfilled his task in a remarkable manner. The reports of the General, to whom the Staff Captain von Schreiberhofen had been attached, contain the most interesting documents on the course of operations of the Grand Army.

4. -- MARCH OF THE KLENGEL BRIGADE ON KOBRYN; BREST-LITOWSK AND IVANOV COMBATS.

The 7th Army Corps arrived at Bytin on the 21st of July, after the most painful marches. From there General Klengel was sent to Brest-Litovsk and Kobryn with his brigade, composed of the King's, Niesemeuschel regiments, and the "Prince Clement" uhlans.

He was to relieve the Austrian troops who had remained there after the march of the auxiliary corps at Nieswicz, on the line of the Murawiec.

On the 24th of July, at noon, General Klengel entered Kobryn with the Niesemeuschel regiment and two and a half squadrons of uhlans. A detachment of 80 horses commanded by Captain Heymann was sent to Brest. The King's Regiment continued its march, and reached the same day the village of Bulkowo, on the left bank of Murawiec; the French colonel of the engineers Brulay, Major Slutzner of the staff and Lieutenant Erhardt of the engineers, were with the regiment: they were to direct the construction of works of fortification at Brest, to make this important town on the Bug a shelter from an attack by the enemy.

The replacement of the positions of the Austrian General Zechmeister in Brest and Kobryn was done on the evening of the 24th in the prescribed manner. The latter departed at the beginning of the night, after informing General Klengel of the information he had about the enemy and pointing out to him that as the Russian forces were yet to assemble in Dubno, Lutsk and Kovel, one should not expect any offensive moves from them soon.

Nevertheless, General Klengel insisted on placing a strong line of outposts south of Kobryn. The 1st Battalion of Niesemeuschel occupied Ploskaye and the environs, on both sides of the Dyvin road, and heavy patrols of uhlans sprang up to that point which was found unoccupied. The 2nd Battalion, the regimental artillery, and the rest of the cavalry camped on the market place, at Kobryn, and on the right bank of the river, ready to fight, if necessary.

The Russian 3rd Army of Observation had also received, in the middle of July, the order to march forward on Brest and Kobryn. Leaving some detachments to cover its communications and to observe the Duchy of Warsaw, General Tormasov set out in several columns: the principal, preceded by a day's march by the vanguard of General Count Lambert, four battalions of jäger, 16 squadrons and 3 regiments of Cossacks, had to reach Brest by Orchemwo; Prince Scherbatov, with 6 battalions and 12 squadrons was also to go to Brest, but by Ratno and Mokrani; finally General Chaplits, with 2 battalions of jäger and 16 squadrons, marched directly by Dyvin on Kobryn.

At the same time, General Melissino was sent in the direction of Pinsk and Ivanovo with a strong detachment of all arms, to attract the attention of the enemy on this side.

Generals Scherbatov and Lambert had orders to arrive in front of Brest on the 25th of July, to attack the enemy forces, and then to march on Kobryn, to join on the 27th to the main column and to General Chaplits' troops: all the columns together were to attack Kobryn and occupy it.

Prince Scherbatov arrived on the night of the 24th of July at Rudnia, where he learned from his reconnaissance that Brest was occupied only by a weak detachment of enemy cavalry.

Leaving the infantry there, he immediately marched on Brest with his squadrons, and reached the city at 3 o'clock in the morning. Two hours earlier it had been evacuated by a squadron of Austrian hussars of Kienmayer. Captain Heymann had divided half of his detachment into two small posts: one on the left bank of the Bug, the other on the road to Rudnia; the rest, under his own command, was massed north of the city.

The small posts were first assaulted by clouds of Cossacks and taken. Although surrounded, Captain Heymann went to meet the enemy horsemen with 40 uhlans; but the Tartar regiment of Colonel Knorring soon forced the weak Saxon detachment to retire: only a few men were able to escape. Captain Heymann, Lieutenant de Salza, and 26 uhlans, nearly all wounded, were taken prisoner. On the 26th, at 6 o'clock in the morning, Lieutenant von Bärenstein rejoined the "King's" infantry regiment, with what remained of the detachment. Brest was occupied by the enemy, who boasted of having destroyed two Saxon squadrons: only 80 uhlans had been engaged at Brest.

The advance guard of General de Gablentz, reinforced by the 2nd Battalion of the 2nd Light Infantry Regiment, had entered Borki on the 20th. The Major von Seydlitz was sent to Pinsk with the 3rd Squadron of the Uhlan Regiment to occupy the crossing of the Pina; Major Lindenau left in the direction of Ivanovo with 2 squadrons of hussars and a squadron of "Polentz" Light Horse, with the order to seize this village if the enemy was not already there with superior forces. Lieutenant Freilitzsch arrived at Ivanovo on the 25th of July, at dawn; before reaching the village, the 50 hussars of the vanguard were attacked by the Russian cavalry of the Melissino detachment; Major von Lindenau, galloping with his squadrons, drove the enemy into the village; it was defended by dismounted dragoons who opened a very hot fire; yielding to the numbers, the Saxon horsemen retreated to the vanguard of their column, which soon attacked the Russian dragoons and drove them out of the village; Ivanovo was occupied by the light infantry, and the enemy pursued as far as the Pina. The losses of the Saxons were of 15 men; Captain von Lindemann and a sub-lieutenant of the hussars were wounded, and Lieutenant von Schweinitz, of the uhlans, killed.

5. -- COMBAT OF KOBRYN, 27 JULY.

The outposts of Ploskaye, under the orders of Colonel Zezschwitz, were attacked on the evening of 25 July by important enemy forces. Nevertheless, they remained on their positions and, at nightfall, were called back on Kobryn. Strong cavalry patrols left in contact with the enemy reported that the enemy had occupied the village of Ploskaye with 6,000 men.

In the meantime, Colonel von Göphardt, of the "King's" Regiment, had informed Bulkowo of the disaster of the Heymann detachment at Brest-Litovsk, and, suspending his march on this point, demanded new orders required by

the gravity of the circumstances. General Klengel ordered him to return to Kobryn and reported to the headquarters about the plight of his brigade. This report, carried by the Lieutenant von Gössnitz, was soon followed by a second opinion which announced, according to the Russian prisoners, that Kobryn was going to be attacked by four regiments of cavalry and eight regiments of infantry.

On the 26th, at 6 o'clock in the morning, the King's Regiment entered Kobryn and settled on the right bank. The regiment of "Niesemeuschel" occupied the city; a squadron surveyed each of the roads of Brest, Ploskaye, and Antopol, where no movement of the enemy was reported; there was no engagement during the day.

In the evening the officers sent to General Reynier, whose return was eagerly awaited, returned to Kobryn. The Lieutenant von Gössnitz reported from the headquarters of Bezdecz the following order (dispatched on 26 July in the afternoon):

To the Major General Klengel.

"Our vanguard met the Russians on the 25th and drove them out of Ivanovo, inflicting losses on them. The corps will go forward to hunt on the other side of the Pina all enemy fractions that may be on this side of this river. We will probably arrive on the 27th at Antopol and the 28th at Kobryn. Your Excellency must hold the Kobryn post at all costs and keep his communications with us. The mission of the brigade is to cover Pruzhany, to hold Kobryn and, if the regiment of the King was able to reoccupy Brest, to also hold this locality. Make strong reconnaissances to hear from the enemy, without compromising the troops. Have the greatest circumspection and vigilance."

"P.S. -- I have presented to the general-in-chief this dispatch, and he orders me to remind you that to cover the Brest-Pruzhany road, the Kobryn station must be occupied until we arrive. This is self-evident. If, as General Reynier so desires, you think that you may use the King's regiment in whole or in part to cover the road, without compromising your position or the regiment, do as you think fit. We cannot send you cavalry, because we are ourselves engaged with the enemy. I am waiting for your reports, first by Chomsk and Ivanovo, then directly to Antopol, where we will be in any case tomorrow."

The Chief of Staff, Colonel VON LANGENAU.

On the 27th of July, at 4 o'clock in the morning, General von Klengel received from Reynier a new dispatch informing him that the 7th Corps would reach the 26th Drohiczyn, march on the 27th on Antopol, and would probably also occupy Horodetz.

Antopol being only four miles distant, and Horodetz only three miles from Kobryn, General Klengel thought he could count on the arrival of the army corps for the evening of the 27th in the neighborhood of his position, and thought that he would connect with them by Zalyessye. He therefore resolved to remain at Kobryn and receive the enemy's attack.

He still had to cover the road from Brest to Pruzhany; to employ in this mission an entire regiment would have weakened the defenders of Kobryn too much: so on the 26th, he sent at 11 o'clock in the evening, in the direction of Pruzhany, only two companies of the regiment of Niesemeuschel, under the command of Major von Bose.

On the morning of 27 July, the brigade had 2,433 men under arms:

18 officers	321 men	of the reg. of uhlans	"Prince Clement",
24	-- 1,019	-- of the reg. of infantry	of the King,
22	-- 897	-- --- --	of Niesemeuschel,
2	-- 123	--	regimental artillery.

General Klengel had occupied the position of Kobryn in the following manner: at each of the three principal entrances of the city, two or three companies, with two pieces of cannon; on the Place du Marche, a battalion of the King's regiment, in reserve; on the right bank of Murawiec, two companies, two pieces of cannon and the squadron of Matthaï. The accesses of the city were barricaded and some houses put in state of defense. The squadron of Major Gecka was half an hour from the town on the road to Brest; that of Major Piesport, on the road of Ploskaye.

Kobryn, a small town at the crossroads of the Dyvin-Pruzhany and Brest-Pinsk roads, is situated on the left bank of Murawiec; only a few houses are on the right bank, connected to the city by a wooden bridge over which the Pruzhany road passes. The only stone building, able to serve as a point of support for the defense, was the small chapel of a former convent, built on the left bank: near there, but on the other side of the road, was an old half ruined redoubt, built during the wars of Charles XII and surrounded on all sides by wooden houses. Between the roads of Dyvin and Antopol lay swamps that could only be crossed on the roads. The Murawiec, only six to eight feet wide, was fordable in number of points.

The brigade was going to measure itself with the enemy for the first time: General Klengel, very assured of the morale of his troops, expected to be able to keep his position until the arrival of the army corps.

The trains of the brigade, -- 50 wagons of food drawn by oxen, -- were still, on the evening of the 26th, at Luciewiczzy, north of Zalesie; they were to reach Kobryn by a night march; but the bridge, although consolidated the day before by the sappers, having broken, the carriages had to be engaged on the road to Antopol; the whole convoy fell the next day into the hands of the Cossacks.

General Klengel's report to General Lecoq gives a fairly accurate idea of the struggle of Kobryn; here is the content:

"I fulfill the sad duty of sending you the report of the unfortunate events of this day."

"At 6 o'clock in the morning, enemy columns appeared on the Brest side. The uhlans marched against these columns, and shortly thereafter commenced the fight. The enemy's cavalry was growing stronger from moment to moment, and soon strong columns also appeared on my left flank. My uhlans had to fall back on the city and soon the cannonade began. I still had two lines of retreat, one on Pruzhany, the other on Antopol; but I had the formal order to defend Kobryn against the forces of the enemy."

"Numerous cavalry forded the river in different places; at 8 o'clock the city was entirely enveloped, and I had only one resource left: to defend myself fiercely until the arrival of the expected help."

"The entrances of the city were defended as long as possible; but the position became untenable as a result of the city's fire. Colonel von Zezschwitz wished to penetrate with the rest of his squadrons; although the officers of the staff thought that this was impossible, he tried it, crossed the bridge, and attempted to embark on the road to Pruzhany; but he was scarcely in the burned out suburb, when 12 squadrons fell on his little troop and forced him to return to the city."

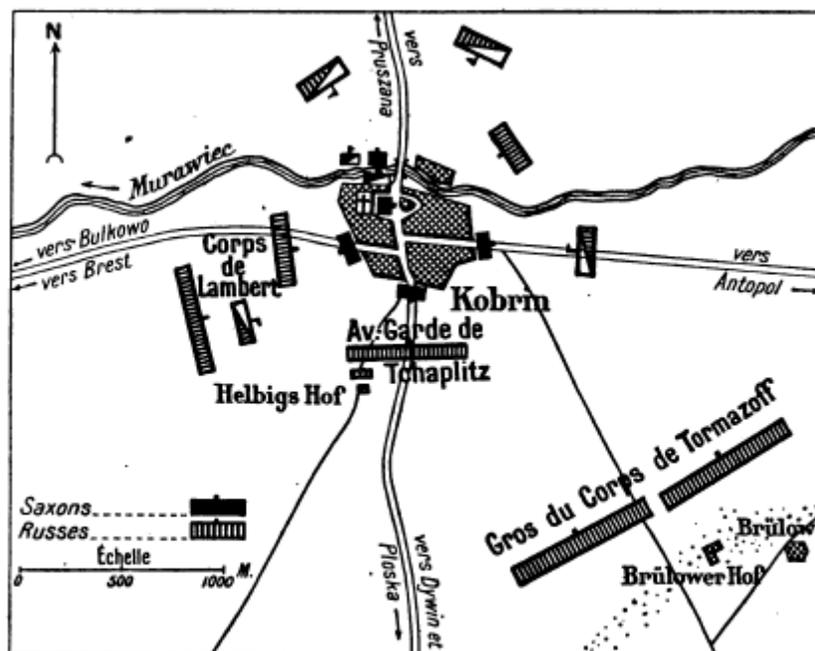
"The fire became more and more violent; half of the city was in flames. I defended, with the greater part of the infantry, an old entrenchment, the bridge, and a little convent. At this hour ammunition began to fail; at 1:30, it was exhausted. The defense became impossible and I had to surrender after a six-hour fight; 4 flags and 8 guns fell into the hands of the enemy."

In detail, the facts were as follows: on the 27th, the cavalry patrols of the Brest road announced at 6 o'clock in the morning the approach of strong enemy columns. Major Gecka attacked with determination and jostled the bands of Kalmucks and Bashkirs who first appeared; meanwhile, Piesport's squadron was forced back on the Dyvin road to the road of Helbings-Hofs, after two counter-attacks from him. The two squadrons, in the midst of Cossack clouds, were forced to abandon their positions at about seven o'clock and retreat to Kobryn. On the other hand, some Russian squadrons having crossed the Murawiec in several places, the squadron of Matthai had to evacuate the land north of the city.

As General Klengel wanted to keep free and defend the Antopol road by which he awaited the arrival of the bulk of the army corps, Major Bevilaqua with 2 companies of the "King's" regiment and 2 pieces of cannon were sent in the direction of Zalyessye, to drive back the enemy troops which would be on this point; but 16 squadrons and 12 enemy guns opposed this movement and forced the weak Saxon detachment to return to Kobryn after repelling two cavalry attacks.

While waiting for the arrival of the infantry, the Russian cavalry had completely enveloped the city. The retreat of the Saxon brigade was no longer possible before such superior forces.

"The hope of seeing the corps arrive and the feeling of honor and duty alone could animate the troops, for a last fight whose outcome could not be doubtful ..." (Memoirs of Major-General Stunzner).⁵



Combat de Kobryn.

(D'après Exner.)

Battle of Kobryn (After Exner.)

At about ten o'clock, Russian dismounted dragoons sought to penetrate the Dyvin road into the city already partly burned by enemy batteries; but they were prevented by the cannon and musketry of the Saxons.

General Lambert's infantry now extended to the west, that of General Chaplitz to the south of the city; the attack on the position was getting ready, it was becoming more and more problematic to be able to save the situation. General Klengel asked Colonel Zezschwitz to try to make a gap in the north, to save at least some of his squadrons. Officers at the head, the Saxon Uhlans rushed on the bridge and tried to reach the Pruzhany road: superfluous efforts! Assailed by the enemy cavalry, they were thrown into Kobryn with bloody losses.

The Russian assault columns approached around 11 o'clock on three sides at a time. While Colonel von Göphardt resisted with a part of the "King's" regiment at the attacks made by the Brest road, Major Bevilaqua defended the Antopol road with 4 companies, and Major Schlieben the southern part of the city with 6 companies from "Niesemeuschel". On these three points, the resistance was energetic, and the house defended one by one.

By noon, the Russians had advanced to the marketplace; there Major Schlieben stopped them for nearly an hour. The "King's" regiment occupied the church, the bridge, and the redoubt, where the pieces still capable of firing had been rolled. For its part, the battalion of "Niesemeuschel" pressed from all sides and surrounded by flaming houses, had, at about one o'clock, to retire also in the redoubt. Several attacks by the foot dragoons who had crossed the river and driven the Saxons back were repulsed.

⁵ Do not these lines involuntarily remind us of Rampon's address to the heroic defenders of the Montelegino Redoubt! ... We are defeated when we fear it: Rampon's infantrymen did not want to be, -- and were not. Never did the idea of a possible capitulation stop in their minds.

Finally, the ammunition failed the infantry; artillery only had 50 shots. General Klengel judged a longer resistance impossible; as the enemy infantry was preparing to storm the parapets of the redoubt, he had a drumbeat rolled to put an end to this deadly fight.

Russian generals Markov and Oldekop immediately advanced, reestablished the order and declared prisoners of war the defenders of the redoubt and the fractions of troops still standing near the church and near the bridge.

The losses of the Saxons were 13 officers and 260 men killed or wounded; among these, the majors von Schlieben and Bevilaqua; 62 officers and 1,992 men were prisoners. The Russians had lost more than 600 men.

After the fight, the Saxon officers were taken to the farm of Brüllow to be presented to General Tormasov, who congratulated the defenders of Kobryn on their intrepidity, and had their swords returned to the officers: "Their conduct," -- he said, -- "deserves this distinction. "

Officers and troops were interned at Kiev. In the autumn of 1813 they returned to Saxony; 700 of them had died in Russia from their wounds or illnesses.

Major Bevilaqua, of the "King's" regiment, left in his manuscript memoirs some interesting details concerning this captivity: the Russians had the Saxons give their word not to escape; Barclay de Tolly proposed to them to enter the Russian service, but this proposition had no success. The column of Saxon prisoners found at Lutsk a great meeting of Russian volunteers; these young peasants and other "good-for-nothings" seemed to give their instructors much trouble in containing and training them... The author did not think that this mass levy could ever become dangerous to the enemy... in the city of Zytemyrz humanity and the good care given to the Saxon prisoners by the governor, general and senator de Cambourlai, a Frenchman who became Russian with the Duke de Richelieu, "*ein sehr feiner und artiger Mann...*" (a very fine and handsome man)

Why did General Reynier prescribe the occupation of Kobryn until the 28th of July, since he knew the presence of superior Russian forces at Brest and Dyvin?

He thought that the real attack of the enemy would not take place on the Murawiec, but on the side of Ivanovo. The Russian troops whom General von Gablentz had met had been taken for the vanguard of Tormasov's army; so the whole of the 7th Corps had marched against them. On the 26th, when it was learned that Kobryn's position was seriously threatened, the initial direction was changed; and on the 27th an eight-hour march took the 7th Corps to the Horodetz-Antopol line; while on the road, a violent cannonade was heard; but the exhaustion of the troops obliged them to stop, and the march on Kobryn could not be continued.

When Reynier learned of the catastrophe at Kobryn, he did not go further, and in the face of the overwhelming superiority of his adversary, he thought of nothing more than a meeting with the Austrian corps.

The defense of Kobryn had a great utility for the 7th Corps, although it had cost him a quarter of its strength; if General Tormasov had not been arrested in his operation, he would have fallen into the right flank of the 7th Corps marching on Antopol, forced it to retreat northward and could have prevented him from joining with Prince von Schwarzenberg.

But the Russian general, satisfied with his success, remained motionless for several days, and left to Reynier every facility to meet at Slonim with the Austrian corps. It is with reason that the Russians have reproached Tormasov for not having known how to profit by his victory; if he had immediately proceeded to the north, he might have given the operations in Volhynia and Podolia a decisive character; the cause of his immobility must be attributed to the lack of food supplies of his army.

According to the Russian documents, and in particular the *Journal of Saint Petersburg*, No. 69, of 29 August 1812, 12,000 men had been engaged at Kobryn, and 25,000 men were in position on the northern edge of the Brüllow Woods, ready to take part in the fight. The Saxons had therefore fought eight hours 1 against 5. In his work, General Bogdanovich pays homage to their courage.

General Lecoq announced on the 30th of July, to the King of Saxony, the capitulation of Kobryn:

"Captain Probsthayn, of the Hussar Regiment, sent on the night of the 28th to reconnoiter Kobryn, reported the news of the capture of the Klengel Brigade by the enemy. All the reports, as well as the plan of the day of General Reynier, testify to the bravery of this troop. We can only withdraw to Slonim, where the Austrians must come to meet us. The enemy's cavalry is ten times superior in number to ours, and it engages only in large masses."

"The general-in-chief remarked to the Emperor, -- but unfortunately in vain, -- his numerical weakness and the too great extent of the front to be covered. This, with the rapid retreat of the Austrians, is the cause of misfortune. No human power, no prudence could prevent it. On our side, we sacrificed everything to save the honor of the troops."

Reynier, in his plan of the day of 30 July 1812, said:

"The general-in-chief here declares to all the Royal Saxon troops under his command that he has been pleased with them from the beginning of the campaign to this day. He thanks them for the ardor and good will with which they have endured the fatigues of recent times; these are sure guarantees for the future."

"Major Lindenau, of the hussars, and Major von Seydlitz, of the uhlans, had the opportunity to distinguish themselves particularly. General Reynier orders that his satisfaction with them be communicated to the troops."

"Major General Klengel had the order, with the regiments "of the King" and "Niesemeuschel" and a part of the Uhlans Regiment, to march on Brest and Kobryn: the enemy, without being able to doubt, had gathered all his strength on this last point. General Klengel fought for ten hours with 2,300 men against an enemy eight times greater in number and would have retired in good order, if his communication with the corps had not been interrupted as a result of the fire of a bridge."

"Soldiers will be told that their comrades have fought as brave Saxons; General Reynier is convinced that the troops will seize the first opportunity to avenge the loss that we have made on the enemy."

By order: The Chief of Staff, Colonel VON LANGENAU.⁶

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⁶That's the pious military lie! -- Use an eclipse to raise the morale of his troop, and present a misfortune that cannot be hidden in such a light, that the heart of the soldier beats stronger, that his courage is inflamed and his desire to avenge the crushed comrades makes him want a quick revenge!

This order of the day of Reynier must have been more than a success for the morale of the Saxon army: happy the generals who know the soldier's soul well enough to make the most of a disaster, and have it served for the good of their cause!