

The Battle of Horka 1708 - a what-if battle

The Great Northern War started in 1700 when a coalition formed by Peter the Great of Russia, Frederick IV of Denmark-Norway and Augustus II the Strong of Saxony-Poland attacked Sweden. The coalition were formed following the death of the Swedish King Charles XI and based on the belief that the new and very young King would not be able to put up an organised fight. Following a Swedish successful expansion during the 17th century these disfranchised neighbours wanted lost territories back, limit Swedish economic dominance and access to the Baltic Sea.

However, the King turned out to be a skilled warrior and leader of men and the preparedness, quality and efficiency of battle methods of the Swedish army built up by his father was second to none during this era¹. The King quickly pacified Denmark and a Peace Treaty was signed in 1700 at Travendal. The Russians were defeated at the Battle of Narva in 1700, but the King did not pressed on but instead turned his attention to Saxony-Poland and Augustus. However due to a number of factors it took the King another 6 years to defeat the Saxon-Polish and force the abdication of Augustus the Strong from the Polish crown (1706 Treaty of Altranstädt).

But the King still had unfinished business with and the time had come to march towards Moscow

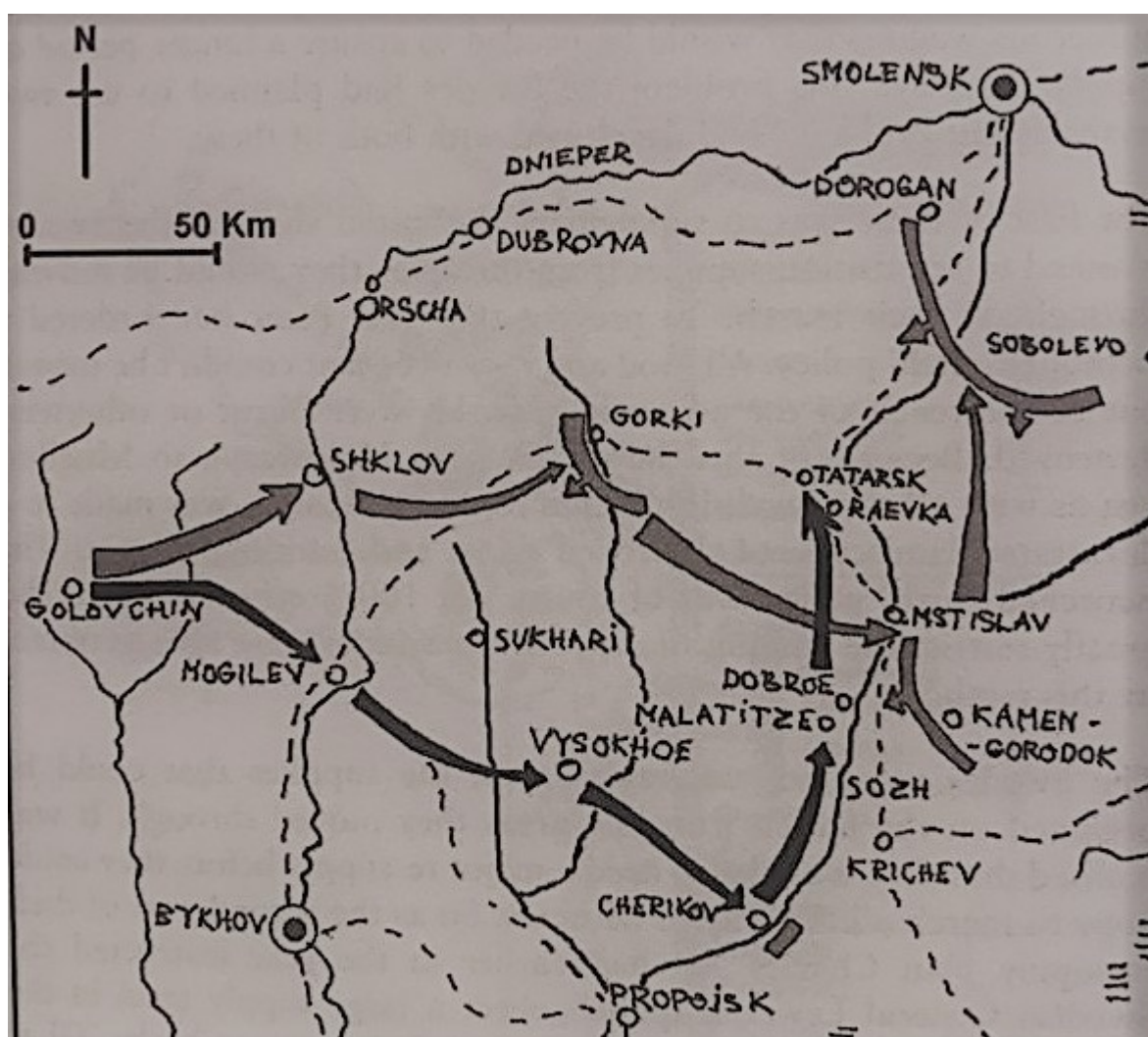
In the beginning of July 1708, shortly after his victory against the Russians at Holowczyn, the King had reached the Dnieper river with the Crown Army at Mogilev (in today's eastern Belarus). It was, he believed, the last major physical obstacle on the road towards Moscow. The Russians had not made the advance easy as they had applied an scorched earth policy (the same policy that both Napoleon and Hitler would come to know later in history) destroying or removing supplies, burning bridges, withdrawing from villages, harassment of the moving army by irregular Cossack and Kalmuck light horse and dragoons, in combination with the constant rain (it had rained for about 4 weeks almost every day) that destroyed the crops and the hay and also affected the roads that further slowed down the March. The Russians would not give the King the decisive battle he needed. An army does indeed not only march on roads in knee deep mud but also on its stomach and there were still another 300 miles to Moscow - but as we know

¹ It is however clear that the King was lacking in the strategic aspects of waging the war that would lead to the end of Sweden as a great power in the region in 1721. But that it is for another day.

hope was on the way in the form of the column of supply and soldiers being brought by General Lewenhaupt².

"So once the Swedes had secured the area around Mogilev they stopped to wait for Lewenhaupt and his vital supplies to arrive. ... Meanwhile the Russian army had also halted and encamped, as the next obvious destination of the Swedes was the city of Smolensk, the Russians occupied a strong position on the road from Mogilev to this city. The camp was at Horka, sometime called Gorki, a short distance east along the road to Smolensk. ... The Swedes considered attacking the position but in the end did not. Had they done so it seem likely that the Russians would have stood and fought."

from *The Dawn of the Tsarist Empire*, by Nick Dorrell



MAP 1 - The historical movement of the armies. The upper grey arrows are the Russian Army and the lower black arrows the Swedish - note the position at Gorki (Horka) in the middle of the picture - that is where today's battle was not fought.

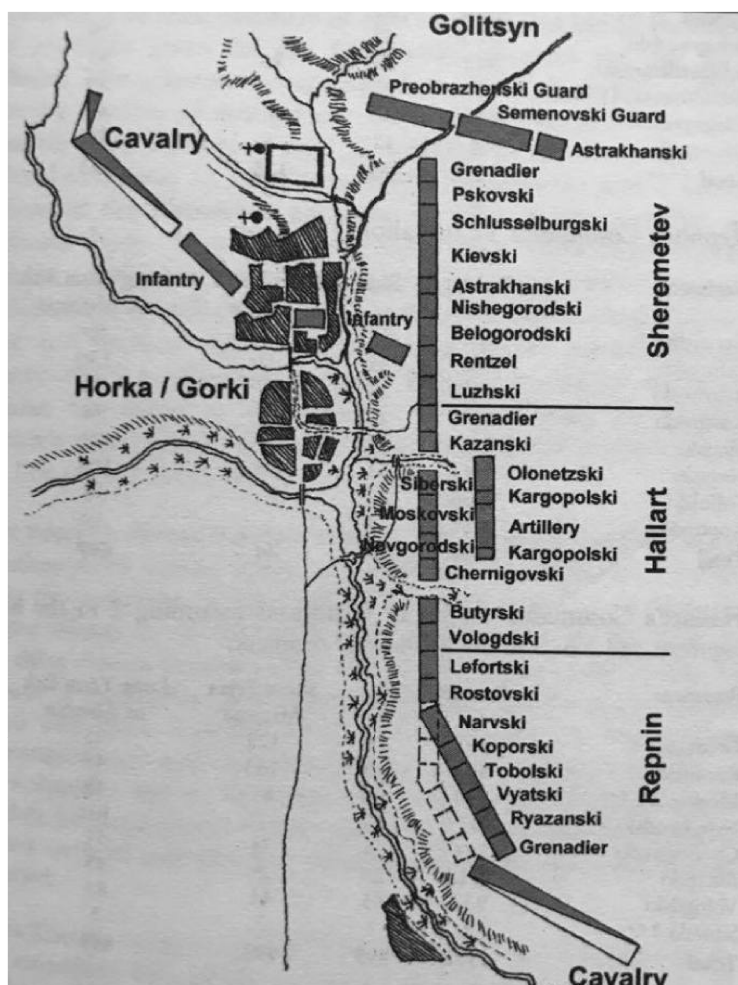
² However this column were to be ambushed by the Russians at the Battle of Lesnaya the same year.

We know the King would have liked to get on with it.

"Charles XII wanted to march on and put further pressure on the Russians after their disappointing defeat at Holowczyn - the sooner the better - before they had a chance to recover."

Translated from *Katastrofen vid Poltava*, by Peter From

So in our scenario the King gave the order to break up the camp and "Gå-På" towards the Russian position at Horka and the Russians did not slip away. It is large battle for the period and roughly represent a force of 32,000 Swedes vs. 55,000 Russians. As this would have been the largest battle of the war we could not resist trying to put this on a wargames table - even if it did not happen. The Russians are ready and the Swedish King, eager to gain a Victory, has pressed on with the Artillery being left far behind. Will the Swedish Gå-På tactics, more veteran troops and the inspiring leadership of the King lead to another Victory? - or will the better position, superior numbers and recent drill give the Russian the edge required to win the day?



The battle is fought on a 12' by 5' table using Baccus Miniatures from the Great Northern War and the Spanish Succession Range. They are 6mm scale. The mat was made using plastic back drop cloth with acrylic sealant, paint and sand. This was further drybrushed with three colours and static grass in two colours applied. Some grass sheets were used for fields and roads made with Chinchilla sand. The river was varnished to create some shine/reflection.

Typically a base on infantry represent a battalion of about 400 to 600 men

armed with muskets and pike, typically represented by 24 miniatures. They are grouped in either normal units of 2 bases or large units of 3 bases. A base of cavalry represents two or three squadrons of about 200 to 300 men, as for the cavalry they can be organised as normal or large units. There are normally between 7 and 9 cavalry models on each base. There is more than 3,700 miniatures on more than 270 bases for this battle.

We have done some high level rating of the various regiments to simplify running the game. The Swedish side have overall a more experienced force which we think is realistic and whilst the Russians regiments perhaps had a wider spread from Raw to Veteran we have decided on the average level of trained for most regiments. The Russian Grenadiers and the Flying Column regiments has been rated as Veteran. Similar simplification has been applied to the Commanders.



We are using the Twilight of the Sun King Rules to run the game, The rules are, to quote the Design Philosophy notes, "...radical, some would say reductionist, in their conception. It is based on the premise that during this time period, morale rather than numbers of casualties was the key to deciding combat and even the outcome of battles. Many wargames rules pay lip-service to this; however, these rules take the radical step of collapsing shooting and close combat into morale. This dramatically simplifies game play but does so, in the designers' opinion, without significant loss of historical accuracy."

We are the Wyre Forest Wargames Club and the Game is Umpired by Nick Dorrell who has edited the latest version of the Twilight of the Sun King Rules and Per Brodén who has painted the miniatures and made the terrain.

We will be back next year putting on the Battle of Poltava 1709, with even more men on the table, less Swedes but more Russians. Hope to see you there.

For further information:

Wyre Forest Wargames club: wfgamers.org.uk

Per Brodén's Wargaming blog: Rollaone.com or twitter @roll_a_one

Twilight of the Sun King rules:

www.wfgamers.org.uk/resources/C18/Twilight/ToSK.htm

The Battle of Horka 1708 at Joy of Six 2018

Here are the forces of the Day:

Russian Army - Overall Commander Peter the Great of Russia

Unit	Type	Ref	Base	Quality	Commander	Rating	ToTSK Unit		
Sheremetev's Squadron	Dragoons	R46	2	Trained	General of Cavalry Karl Ewald von Rönne	1	Normal Unit		
Vladimirska	Dragoons	R47	3	Trained			Large Unit		
Moskovska	Dragoons	R64	4	Trained			2 Normal units		
Archangelgorodska	Dragoons	R66	3	Trained			Large Unit		
Livregementet	Dragoons	R67	4	Trained			2 Normal units		
Kazanska	Dragoons	R69	3	Trained			Large Unit		
Tobolski	Dragoons	R72	3	Trained			Large Unit		
Yaroslavski	Dragoons	R73	3	Trained	Large Unit				
Cossack	Light Cavalry	R75	8	Trained	Cossack Commander	1	4 normal units		
Preobrazhenski	Russian Infantry	R01	3	Veteran	Prince Mikhail Mikhailovitch Golitsin	2	Large Unit		
Semenovski	Russian Infantry	R02	3	Veteran			Large Unit		
Ingermanlandski	Russian Infantry	R03	3	Veteran			Large Unit		
Astrachanski	Russian Infantry	R04	1	Veteran			Small Unit		
Moscowski	Russian Infantry	R05	2	Trained	Lieutenant-General Ludvig Nikolaus von Hallart	1	Normal Unit		
Sibirski	Russian Infantry	R06	2	Trained			Normal Unit		
Kazanski	Russian Infantry	R08	2	Trained			Normal Unit		
Vologodski	Russian Infantry	R09	2	Trained			Normal Unit		
Novgorodski	Russian Infantry	R16	2	Trained			Normal Unit		
Butyrski	Russian Infantry	R17	2	Trained			Normal Unit		
du Bois' Grenadier Regiment	Grenadier	R19	2	Veteran			Normal Unit		
Kargopolski	Russian Infantry	R22	2	Trained			Normal Unit		
Olonetzki	Russian Infantry	R27	2	Trained			Normal Unit		
Chernigovski	Russian Infantry	R30	2	Trained			Normal Unit		
Light Gun	Light Gun	LG	4	Trained			Normal unit (small bases)		
Nijegorodska	Dragoons	R49	4	Trained			Lieutenant-General Hessen-Darmstadt	1	2 Normal units
Novgorodska	Dragoons	R53	3	Trained					Large Unit
Troitska	Dragoons	R57	3	Trained					Large Unit
Belozerska	Dragoons	R65	3	Trained	Large Unit				
Astrakhanski	Dragoons	R87	4	Trained	2 Normal units				
Kalmuk	Light Cavalry	R74	8	Trained	Kalmuk Commander	0	4 normal units		
Sibirska	Dragoons	R48	3	Trained	Major-General Pflug	1	Large Unit		
Vjatska	Dragoons	R50	3	Trained			Large Unit		
Novska	Dragoons	R51	3	Trained			Large Unit		
Rostovska dragonregementet	Dragoons	R54	4	Trained			2 Normal units		
Smolenska	Dragoons	R56	3	Trained			Large Unit		
Repnins Grenadier Regiment	Grenadier	R12	2	Veteran			Czar of Russian Peter I Romanov	1	Normal Unit
Narvski	Russian Infantry	R14	3	Trained	Large Unit				
Rostovski	Russian Infantry	R18	2	Trained	Normal Unit				
Lefort's Regiment	Russian Infantry	R21	2	Trained	Normal Unit				
Koporski	Russian Infantry	R23	2	Trained	Normal Unit				
Tobolski	Russian Infantry	R24	2	Trained	Normal Unit				
Ryazanski	Russian Infantry	R28	2	Trained	Normal Unit				
Vjatski	Russian Infantry	R29	2	Trained	Normal Unit				
Field Gun	Field Gun	FG	6	Trained	Normal Unit				
Light Gun	Light Gun	LG	4	Trained	Normal unit (small bases)				
Pskovski	Russian Infantry	R07	2	Trained	Field Marshal and General Boris Petrovich Sheremetev	2			Normal Unit
Nizhegorodski	Russian Infantry	R10	2	Trained					Normal Unit
Busch's Grenadier Regiment	Grenadier	R11	2	Veteran					Normal Unit
Kievski	Russian Infantry	R13	3	Trained					Large Unit
Schlisselburgski	Russian Infantry	R15	2	Trained			Normal Unit		
Rentzel's Regiment	Russian Infantry	R20	2	Trained			Normal Unit		
Belgorodski	Russian Infantry	R25	2	Trained			Normal Unit		
Luzhski	Russian Infantry	R26	2	Trained			Normal Unit		
Light Gun	Light Gun	LG	4	Trained			Normal unit (small bases)		
Tverska	Dragoons	R60	4	Trained			Field Marshal and Lieutenant-General Heinrich von der Goltz	0	2 Normal units
Azovska	Dragoons	R68	3	Trained	Large Unit				
Rjazanska	Dragoons	R70	3	Trained	Large Unit				
S:t Petersburgska	Dragoons	R71	3	Trained	Large Unit				
Pskovski	Dragoons	R90	4	Trained	2 Normal units				

Swedish Army - Overall Commander Charles XII of Sweden

Unit	Type	Ref	Base	Quality	Commander	Rating	ToTSK Unit		
Skånska Ståndsdragoons	Galloping Horse	S17	5	Trained	Major General Hugo Johan Hamilton	1	1 large and one normal unit		
Östgöta Cavalry Regiment	Galloping Horse	S07	4	Veteran			Two normal units		
Vallacker Light Cavalry	Light Cavalry	S18	6	Trained			3 normal units		
Norra Skånska Cavalry Regiment	Galloping Horse	S08	4	Veteran	Major General Carl Gustaf Creutz	2	Two normal units		
Södra Skånska Cavalry Regiment	Galloping Horse	S09	4	Veteran			Two normal units		
Hielm's Dragoons	Galloping Horse	S10	4	Trained			Two normal units		
Taube Dragoons	Galloping Horse	S12	4	Trained			Two normal units		
Duckers Dragoons	Galloping Horse	S13	4	Trained			Two normal units		
Gyllenstierna Dragoons	Galloping Horse	S15	3	Trained			Large Unit		
Upplands 3 männingar	Galloping Horse	S16	3	Trained			Large Unit		
D Albedyhl Dragoons	Galloping Horse	S14	3	Trained			Large Unit		
Skaraborgs Infantry Regiment	Gå-På Infantry	S31	2	Veteran			Major General Axel Sparre	2	Normal Unit
Södermanlands Infantry Regiment	Gå-På Infantry	S32	2	Veteran					Normal Unit
Kronobergs Infantry Regiment	Gå-På Infantry	S33	2	Veteran	Normal Unit				
Jönköpings Infantry Regiment	Gå-På Infantry	S34	2	Veteran	Normal Unit				
Västerbotten Infantry Regiment	Gå-På Infantry	S38	2	Veteran	Normal Unit				
Kalmar's Infantry Regiment	Gå-På Infantry	S39	2	Veteran	Normal Unit				
Närke-Värmlands Infantry Regiment	Gå-På Infantry	S40	2	Veteran	Normal Unit				
HRH Foot Guard	Gå-På Infantry	S29	6	Elite	King Charles XII of Sweden	3			3 normal units
Upplands Infantry Regiment	Gå-På Infantry	S30	2	Veteran			Normal Unit		
Dalarnas Infantry Regiment	Gå-På Infantry	S35	2	Elite			Normal Unit		
Östgötas Infantry Regiment	Gå-På Infantry	S36	2	Veteran			Normal Unit		
Västmanland Infantry Regiment	Gå-På Infantry	S37	2	Veteran			Normal Unit		
Drabanterna	Galloping Horse	S01	1	Elite			Field Marshal and General of Cavalry Carl Gustav Rehnsköld	3	Small Unit
Life Horse	Galloping Horse	S02	6	Elite	3 normal units				
Life Dragoon	Galloping Horse	S03	6	Elite	3 normal units				

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS AND/OR WANT TO ROLL SOME DICE PLEASE APPROACH US - THAT IS AT THE END OF THE DAY WHY WE ARE HERE AT THE SHOW.