



# INTRODUCTION

## THE WAR SO FAR

The war that later became known as the *Great Northern War* started in 1700 and initially went very well for Swedish King Charles XII. After delivering knockout blows to the Danes and Russians at Copenhagen and Narva, respectively, the young king turned his attention and armies southeastwards towards Saxony and later the Polish-Latvian Commonwealth.

However accomplished Charles was on the battlefield, strategically this choice has been called a mistake by many afterwards. While the Swedish main armies were occupied in Germany and Poland, the Russians, led by Tsar Peter I, were given time to recover from the hammer blow of Narva. Over the following years, inch by inch and fortress by fortress, they established themselves in Sweden's Baltic provinces with the creation of the city of St. Petersburg in Swedish Ingria in 1703 as the most visible achievement. In addition to the territorial gains, the Russian army was given the time to modernize and reorganize, turning from the largely feudal army of 1700 into an effective modern army.

Finally, after seven years, Charles turned east again, marching 500 miles to winter just west of the Berezina river. The Russian army stretched out along the right bank of that river, intending to deny the crossing to the

Swedes. Charles moved again in June, feinting towards Borisov which prompted the Russian army to concentrate there. The Swedish army swerved south however, and crossed the Berezina well south of the Russian concentration at Borisov.

## THE VABICH RIVER

At the next river line, that of the Vabich or Babich river, the Russian army—commanded by Field Marshal Boris Sheremetyev in the absence of Tsar Peter—was determined not to be outflanked again. In order to prevent this, the army was spread out on the east side of the river along a 15km front, with two strong infantry commands covering two major crossing points. North was a large group of infantry under Golitsyn covering a crossing point opposite the village of Holowczyn or Golovchin, the best crossing point across the river.

A handful of kilometers further south was Reprin with the remainder of the infantry covering a second good crossing opposite the village of Novoje Selo. Both infantry commands had time to fortify their positions

The Russian cavalry was divided over four commands covering minor crossing points.

## THE SWEDES ARRIVE

When the Swedes arrived opposite this formidable defense line King Charles quickly noticed that the gap

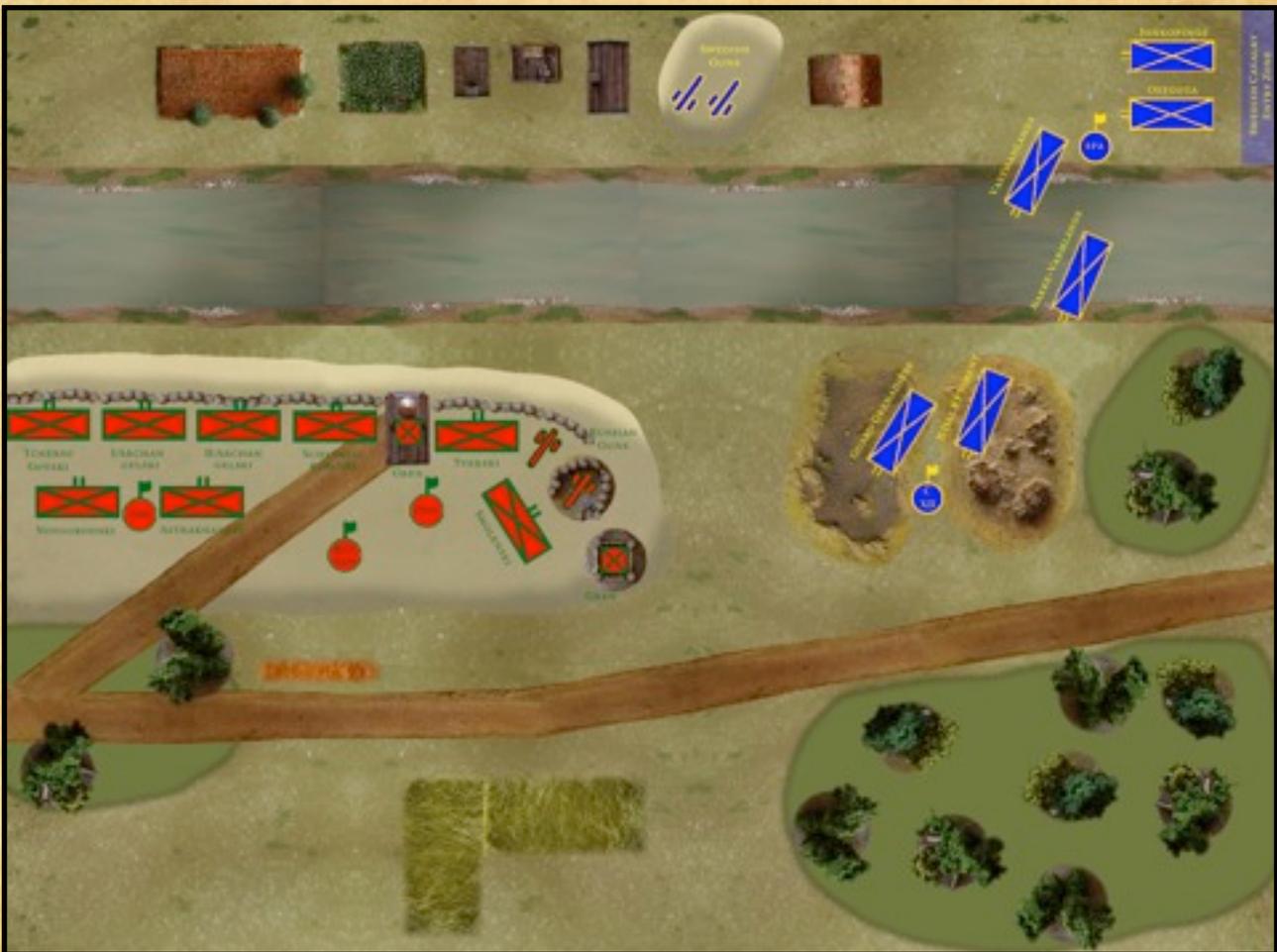


Figure 1 Scenario map. Blue units are Swedish, red units Russian

between Golitsyn's and Repnin's commands, while boggy and marshy on the Russian side of the river, offered a good opportunity. He decided to attack there and the battle of Holowczyn entered history.

## THE WARGAME

Following is a scenario allowing gamers to refight the battle of Holowczyn using Black Powder rules. We played the scenario on a 8' by 6' table using 28mm figures but reduced all distances in the rules by a third. If you want to play this scenario on a differently sized table or with a different figure scale, it should be easy to adjust the sizes accordingly.

### TERRAIN

Please refer to figure 1 for the setup of the terrain and the deployment of the figures. North is to the right of the map, west is at the top.

All terrain on table halves movement for all troop types, including the river north of the swamp. South of the swamp the river is uncrossable. The woods can only be crossed in open order, at half movement.

### SPECIAL RULES

In order to simulate the 'do or die' nature of the Swedish advance in this battle, Brigade Morale rules are not applied for the Swedes. The Russians are subject to the Brigade Morale rules.

## SWEDISH BRIEFING

### INTRODUCTION

It is July 1708. You are King Charles XII of Sweden. You have been at war with Russia for almost ten years now but have been occupied elsewhere. Now, after a long march and wintering in Poland, you have finally invaded Russia and are currently confronting the Russian army across the river Vabich.

The Russians have spread out on the other bank, covering all obvious crossing spots. However, they have left a marshy area between two crossing points at the villages of Holowczyn and Novoje Selo uncovered and you have decided to cross the river there and attack one of the Russian infantry commands.

### SITUATION

At the start of the game, part of your army has already crossed the Vabich river and is currently crossing the marsh beyond it. Refer to the accompanying table for detailed troop stats.

\* Across the river in the marsh:

- King Charles XII (you)
- Grenadier Battalion of the Life Guard Regiment

- 1st Battalion of the Dal Regiment

\* Crossing the river

- 1st Battalion of the Västermannlands regiment
- 1st Battalion of the Närke-Värmlands regiment

\* Still on the Swedish side of the river:

- Colonel Sparre
- 1st Battalion of the Jönköpings regiment
- 1st Battalion of the Östgöta regiment
- General Kreutz and all the cavalry. These troops enter the table in the zone indicated on the map.
- Two guns which remain on the Swedish side of the river, uncommanded

You take the first turn in the game.

### ENEMY SITUATION

You are crossing the river between enemy positions. Closest to you, on the table, is an infantry command led by General Repnin. About 4km north is another infantry command of slightly smaller size—though containing the best infantry in the Russian army—and 3km south is a sizeable cavalry command. Deployment of the on table enemy command is as seen in the accompanying map.

### ORDERS

You are to decisively defeat the Russian command defending the Novoje Selo crossing.

## RUSSIAN BRIEFING

### INTRODUCTION

You are Prince Anikita Ivanovich Repnin, commanding a large command of infantry, currently stationed along the banks of the river Vabich. Your command is part of the larger Russian army defending the crossings across the Vabich against the Swedish army under King Karl XII. You have been detailed to defend a crossing near the village of Novoje Selo. Immediately to your north is a marshy area, thought to be impassable to formed troops and then, 4 km further on, another infantry command defending the major crossing near the village of Holowczyn.

You have fortified your position over the last few days and are confident in your ability to repulse any Swedish attack on it.

However it seems that during the night, the devious King has crossed the river north of you and is currently struggling in the marshes. He is trying to outflank your position! Quickly, you send off couriers north and south and prepare for battle.

### SITUATION

At the start of the game, your troops are deployed as depicted on the accompanying map. Your forces consist of, from left to right (refer to the accompanying table for detailed troop stats):

- \* Prince Repnin (SR8)
- \* Brigadier Abrahamski (SR7) with a brigade of 5 infantry battalions
  - Tchernigovski Regiment
  - I/Archangelski Regiment
  - II/Archangelski Regiment
  - Novgorodski Regiment
  - Astrakahnski Regiment
- \* Brigadier Oahnski (SR7) with a brigade of 3,5 infantry battalions
  - Schlussemburgski Regiment
  - Tverski Regiment
  - Smolenski Regiment
  - 2 companies of grenadiers. Both count as Tiny units.
- \* An artillery battery consisting of 2 field guns
- \* Brigadier Ifland (SR7) cavalry brigade. This brigade arrives on the road from the south in turn 3 on a 5+, in turn 4 on a 3+ or in turn 5. It consists of:
  - 4 squadrons of the Yaroslavski Dragoons (4 units)
  - 2 squadrons of Kropotov's Horse Grenadiers (2 units)
  - 1 squadron of Moskovski Dragoons (1 unit)
- \* Brigadier General Golitsyn with a unit of Preobrazhenski Guard Grenadiers. They arrive in turn 8 on the northern road.

## ORDERS

You are to avoid destruction and throw the Swedish army back across the Vabich river.

## SCENARIO DESIGN NOTES

The battle of Holowczyn is a very interesting battle, if only because it is probably the best illustration of the enigma that is Karl XII, king of Sweden. While occasionally displaying a lack of political and strategic insight, Karl has often been called a tactical genius, and in no other battle is this as evident as in that of Holowczyn. Proving that the line between genius and insanity is drawn by the winner, Karl took a part of his army, crossed a river at night, deployed in a swamp and attacked a numerically stronger opponent who had ready access to reinforcements and was well dug in behind field fortifications—and all that with no practical way of retreat should things go wrong. It is no surprise then that this was reputedly Karl's favourite battle and an inciting battle to refight.

Translating Holowczyn to the tabletop presented a bit of a challenge however. The real genius (or, again, insanity) of the battle was the night river crossing at a place thought unsuitable by the Russians, while the battle itself was essentially a hard fought but confused fight without much subtlety left in it. Simulating only the river crossing—however daring and challenging for the Swedes—leaves the Russians somewhat lacking in scenario participation. While the river crossing itself can be a nice scenario for a less conventional type of game, I wanted to create a

classical wargames scenario where two sides get to roll dice against each other.

One option to do this is to focus only on the battle after the Swedish have crossed the river. The wargames table then essentially becomes the area east of the Vabich bounded by the Russian positions on one side, and woods and the road north on the other side. During the course of the game, Russian and Swedish units would arrive on their respective base edges (representing the Vabich River and Russian initial positions respectively) and become available for the fight. While this does have potential to recreate the 'just in time' nature of the main battle at Holowczyn, I nevertheless found it to be too generic. If you want to recreate the battle of Holowczyn, I think you need the river and the Russian fortifications on table.

Recreating both the river and the fortifications on anything but the most outrageously sized wargames tables means you change the flow of the battle however. There is no sane way of recreating both of these and at the same time trying to funnel the miniature battle into the area where it happened in the actual battle (between the fortifications and the forest, as well as in the forest) with 28mm figures, which are my preferred scale. While this is a very good argument for recreating the battle in 6mm or even smaller scales, it is not what I wanted to do.

So, having accepted that the scenario would recreate the geographic features if not the actual flow of battle, I came up with the table layout shown above.

After the table layout, the forces were next. Holowczyn, at least in terms of units actually engaged, was a relatively small affair. After looking up the number of battalions and squadrons engaged on both sides I was pleasantly surprised that I could represent them at a scale of one wargame unit to two actual units. The names of the units involved were then unashamedly renamed to match those in my collection and the OOB of the scenario was born. The artillery deserves a special mention. The Swedish artillery at Holowczyn did not play a big (if any) role in the battle itself, being used instead in a preliminary bombardment before and during the river crossing. Some of the Russian artillery was able to fire on the approaching Swedes, so I have sited one of the Russian guns to be able to do this on the table as well. The Swedish artillery is in a position on the table where it can lob some token shells across the river but with little chance of actually inflicting any damage.

The final part of scenario design was the finetuning of initial deployment and arrival times of reinforcements. The idea is to get the troops into contact quickly (there's no sense in setting up the scenario and then spending half or more of your evening getting into contact). The uncertainty involved with the arrivals of reinforcements also adds a tiny amount of healthy stress for the players. It is thus recommended that, if at all possible, the Swedish player does not know exactly when and where any Russian reinforcements will arrive.

## REFERENCES

Nicholas A. Dorrell, *The Dawn of the Tsarist Empire: Poltava & the Russian Campaigns of 1708–1709*. (Partizan Press, 2009)

Peter Englund, *The Battle that Shook Europe—Poltava and the Birth of the Russian Empire*. (I.B. Tauris, 2006)

Angus Konstam, *Campaign 34: Poltava 1709—Russia Comes of Age*. (Osprey Publishing, 1994)

## SWEDISH FORCES

King Charles XII (Staff Rating 10), with

Unit	Type	Armament	HtH	Shooting	Morale	Stamina	Special
1st Battalion Dal Regiment	Regular Infantry	Musket & pike	7	2	4+	3	First Fire, Elite, Ferocious Charge
Grenadier Battalion, Life Guard Regiment	Regular Infantry	Musket & pike	7	2	3+	3	First Fire, Reliable, Elite, Ferocious Charge

Colonel Sparre<sup>1</sup> (Staff Rating 8), with

Unit	Type	Armament	HtH	Shooting	Morale	Stamina	Special
1st Battalion Västermanlands Regiment	Regular Infantry	Musket & pike	7	2	4+	3	First Fire, Elite, Ferocious Charge
1st Battalion Närke-Värmlands Regiment	Regular Infantry	Musket & pike	7	2	4+	3	First Fire, Elite, Ferocious Charge
1st Battalion Östgöta Regiment	Regular Infantry	Musket & pike	7	2	4+	3	First Fire, Elite, Ferocious Charge
1st Battalion Jonköpings Regiment	Regular Infantry	Musket & pike	7	2	4+	3	First Fire, Elite, Ferocious Charge

Major General Kreutz (Staff Rating 8), with

Unit	Type	Armament	HtH	Shooting	Morale	Stamina	Special
Åbö och Björneborg Lans Ryttare	Regular Cavalry	Carbine, Swords	8	2	4+	3	Ferocious Charge
Östgota Ryttare	Regular Cavalry	Carbine, Swords	8	2	4+	3	Ferocious Charge
Skanska Stands Dragoons	Regular Cavalry	Carbine, Swords	8	2	4+	3	Ferocious Charge
Gyllenstierna's Dragoons	Regular Cavalry	Carbine, Swords	8	2	4+	3	Ferocious Charge

Artillery (uncommanded)

Unit	Type	Armament	HtH	Shooting	Morale	Stamina	Special
9 Pdr field gun	Smoothbore artillery		1	3-2-1	4+	2	32" (66p) range
9 Pdr field gun	Smoothbore light artillery		1	3-2-1	4+	1	32" (66p) range

<sup>1</sup> Sparre is represented by the figure of Lewenhaupt

## RUSSIAN FORCES

Major General Repnin<sup>2</sup> (Staff Rating 8)

Brigadier Oahnski<sup>3</sup> (Staff Rating 7)

Unit	Type	Armament	HtH	Shooting	Morale	Stamina	Special
1st Battalion Smolenski Regiment	Regular Infantry	Musket & pike	6	3	4+	3	First Fire
1st Battalion Tverski Regiment	Regular Infantry	Musket & pike	6	3	4+	3	First Fire
1st Battalion Schlüsselburgski Regiment	Regular Infantry	Musket & pike	6	3	4+	3	First Fire
Company, Von Repnin's Grenadiers	Regular Infantry	Musket	7	3	4+	1	First Fire, Tiny unit
Company, Von Repnin's Grenadiers	Regular Infantry	Musket	7	3	4+	1	First Fire, Tiny unit

Brigadier Abranski<sup>4</sup> (Staff Rating 7)

Unit	Type	Armament	HtH	Shooting	Morale	Stamina	Special
1st Battalion Archangelski Regiment	Regular Infantry	Musket & pike	6	3	4+	3	First Fire
2nd Battalion Archangelski Regiment	Regular Infantry	Musket & pike	6	3	4+	3	First Fire
1st Battalion Tchernigovski Regiment	Regular Infantry	Musket & pike	6	3	4+	3	First Fire
1st Battalion Novgorodski Regiment	Regular Infantry	Musket & pike	6	3	4+	3	First Fire
1st Battalion Astrakahnski Regiment	Regular Infantry	Musket & pike	6	3	4+	3	First Fire

<sup>2</sup> Represented on the table by the figure of Tsar Peter

<sup>3</sup> Represented on the table by the figure of Menshikov

<sup>4</sup> Represented on the table by the figure of Count Sheremetyev

Brigadier General Iland<sup>5</sup> (Staff Rating 7). Arrives on the table on a 5+ in turn 3, 3+ in turn 5 or in turn 6 on the road from the south:

Unit	Type	Armament	HtH	Shooting	Morale	Stamina	Special
1st Squadron Yaroslavski Dragoons	Regular Cavalry	Carbine, swords	7	1	4+	3	
2nd Squadron Yaroslavski Dragoons	Regular Cavalry	Carbine, swords	7	1	4+	3	
3rd Squadron Yaroslavski Dragoons	Regular Cavalry	Carbine, swords	7	1	4+	3	
4th Squadron Yaroslavski Dragoons	Regular Cavalry	Carbine, swords	7	1	4+	3	
1st Squadron Kropotov's Horse Grenadiers	Regular Cavalry	Carbine, swords	7	1	4+	3	
2nd Squadron Kropotov's Horse Grenadiers	Regular Cavalry	Carbine, swords	7	1	4+	3	
1st Squadron Moskovski Dragoons	Regular Cavalry	Carbine, swords	7	1	4+	3	

Artillery (uncommanded though CiC may rally it)

Unit	Type	Armament	HtH	Shooting	Morale	Stamina	Special
9 Pdr field gun	Smoothbore artillery		1	3-2-1	4+	2	36" (66p) range
9 Pdr field gun	Smoothbore artillery		1	3-2-1	4+	2	36" (66p) range

General Golitsyn (Staff Rating 7) arriving on turn 8 on the road from the north:

Unit	Type	Armament	HtH	Shooting	Morale	Stamina	Special
Preobrazhenski Guard Grenadiers	Regular Infantry	Musket	6	3	3+	3	First Fire, Reliable, Elite

<sup>5</sup> Represented on the table by the figure of General Bauer