Chapter V
The first battle of Polotsk
August 17\textsuperscript{th} to 18\textsuperscript{th}

Despite what Gouvion St-Cyr said in his memoirs, it seems that Oudinot had prepared his troops to receive the Russians on this morning of the 17\textsuperscript{th} of August. His plan was perhaps not the best, but it did exist.

The problem for this battle is that we don’t have any detailed reports of the actions of the II Corps, in contrast to those of the VI Corps and of the Russians. So, we must do suppositions.

On the previous day, the rearguards (the French belonging to the division Legrand, the Bavarian to division von Wrede) were targeted by the Russians until late in the evening.

Oudinot, according to several military critics, committed a tactical error in abandoning the village of Prissmimitza. From this farm, the edge of the forest could easily be held under the fire of artillery. the Russians would have had a lot of trouble to leave the forest.

Moreover, the marshal will let almost alone two divisions of his five infantry divisions to fight the Russians. Even if two bridges were thrown over the stream Polota in the area of the Bavarian division von Wrede, these two divisions will fight the back to the stream.

In the zone where the actions took place on August 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th}, there were kitchen gardens separated...
by small ditches. These obstacles, although not preventing the passage of cavalry or artillery, will interfere with their movements. So, the cavalry won’t almost intervene, or by one or two squadrons only simultaneously.

Oudinot had entrusted the defense of the village and convent of Spass to the 20th division of von Wrede (about 7,000 men). This village was the key of the Franco-Bavarian position: if it will fell into the hands of the Russians, Legrand, without support on his right, would be obliged to retire in Polotsk while the Bavarians would be separated from the French, on the left bank of the Polota. The 6th Legrand division, reinforced by the 37th line infantry regiment belonging to the 8th division had about 9,000 men with him. He had to extend von Wrede’s left and cover the Polotsk ramparts. The 19th division Deroy stood in support of von Wrede, on the left bank of the Polota. The other two infantry divisions of the II Corps, the cuirassiers, the Castex light cavalry brigade and almost all the artillery of the II Corps (except some pieces left to Legrand) had crossed the Dwina and stood on its south banks. The walls of Polotsk were lined with Bavarian pieces of 12£. The only French cavalry present on the battlefield was the Corbineau Brigade, to the left of the entire line. Three bridges connected Polotsk to the right bank of the Polota, in addition to the two other throws further north, behind Spass, where the Bavarians were present.

The preparation of the Battle

2 am:

The 1/2nd Bavarian line infantry regiment Kronprinz (brigade Vincenti / division von Wrede) took position at Spass to replace the 2nd light battalion (von Treuberg) (same brigade), which were here since the evening before. It deployed in line in the edge of the village, in front of the forest whence the Russians will come. This Bavarian battalion was supported in his left by the 26th light infantry regiment (division Legrand). On his right, this 1/2nd Bavarian line battalion leaned on the castle of Spass, where one and half company of the 6th Bavarian line infantry regiment Herzog Wilhelm were deployed. The rest of the brigade Vincenti stayed on the left bank of the Polota: 6th Bavarian line infantry regiment Herzog Wilhelm (less one and half company) and 2/2nd Bavarian line infantry regiment Kronprinz nord-east of Spass; the 2nd light battalion (von Treuberg) south-east of Spass. Always on the left bank of the Polota, the 3rd brigade Habermann was on the right of Vincenti, in touch with the 6th Bavarian line regiment; the 2nd brigade Beckers on the right of the 3rd.

4 am:

It was at 4am that the Bavarians present at Spass saw movements of the Russians on the edge of the forest.
near Prissmînitza: From the road of Nevel, it was Vlastov who arrived, following the Bavarians since Bieloe. The units under in command were the 24th Jäger regiment, the converged grenadiers of the 5th division, four squadrons of the Grodno hussars, Cossacks and 6 guns from horse battery #3. From the road of St. Petersburg, emerged Helfreich who followed the division Legrand. He had with him, the 25th & 26th Jäger regiments, the four other squadrons of the Grodno hussars, some Cossacks and the light battery #26.

The diary of the Russian I corps said that there was a clash at Ropno and that Vlastov had to fight to take position in the tavern of Lozovka, on the road of Nevel. In fact, it seems that Russians came quietly out of the forest.

Following closely the vanguard of Helfreich, the brigade Prince of Siberia (Perm & Mohilev regiments) entered in Prissmînitza, which was evacuated the day before at 9 pm by the Bavarian brigade Habermann. In this position, the prince of Siberia joined the two vanguards.

Still according to the diary of the Russian I Corps, Wittgenstein arrived late on the battlefield and decided to focalize the actions against Spass, while General Berg had

---

**General de Division Count Claude-Juste Legrand (1762-1815)**

(Antoine-Jean Gros, Palace of Versailles)

Soldier since 1777 (sergeant major on the eve of the French Revolution), he was appointed general de Brigade in September 1793. General de Division in April 1799, he was present in Hohenlinden.

He participated in all the great battles of the campaigns from 1805 to 1809: Austerlitz in 1805 (where he covered himself with glory by resisting the coalition on the right wing of the Grande Armée); Jena and Lutèbe in 1806; Eylau and Heilsberg in 1807; Ebersberg, Aspern, Wagram and Znaim in 1809.

“Officer of First Merit” (29th bulletin of the Grande Armée), he positively influenced Oudinot during the Russian campaign because of his seniority, his service and his experience (he was the main reason for the defeat of Kulniev in Oboïarszina on 1 August 1st). He commanded temporarily the II Corps from October 21st until the return of Oudinot.

Seriously wounded at the passage of the Berezina, he only participated in the campaign of 1814, in defending Chalons-sur-Saône.

He died in 1815 from the wounds received at the Berezina. His only son, second lieutenant in the hussars, was killed in Madrid during the insurrection of the dos de Mayo (1808) by the fall of a pot of flowers thrown from the top of a roof by two Madrilenes. He was not 18 years old.
commanded a general attack, more dangerous for the Russians because they were outnumbered.

In fact, it was at 5 am that Wittgenstein visited the future battlefield to make his arrangements. He hoped to find no resistance to the investment of Polotsk by his troops. He thought, considering the more than hesitant attitude of Oudinot in the last two weeks, that the enemy would have taken refuge behind the Dwina. Seeing, on the contrary, French and Bavarian troops drawn up in order of battle under the walls of the town, he noted nevertheless that by blowing up Spass, he would force the apprehensive French marshal to cross the Dwina.

He knew, notwithstanding the disproportion of forces in his disfavour, the moral ascendancy he had taken over Oudinot. Napoleon knew that too. In a letter dated August 7th, he wrote: “he (Oudinot) has retreated, the enemy has advanced. The enemy knew that two divisions had passed the Dwina, he advanced even more; War is a matter of opinion, and art was to preserve the opinion which he had, in his favour.”

The testimony of Wittgenstein himself perfectly illuminates the conduct of the operations on the Russian side on August 17th: “Seeing the advantageous position of the enemy, who, thanks to the dominant heights on the right bank of the Polota, covered his whole front with batteries; seeing too that he leaned in his left flank on the advantageous position of the town of Polotsk, I resolved not to attack it, but to make a demonstration lower down on the Dwina and higher up on the Polota.”

Wittgenstein, therefore, ordered Prince Jachwill, at the head of the forces of Vlastov and Prince of Siberia, to take Spass. He sent Colonel Sievers with the pioneers and two battalions of the 2nd converged Infantry regiment, to build a bridge over the Dwina River, 3 miles downstream of Polotsk. Wittgenstein hoped thus to urge Oudinot to recross the Dwina, afraid of having his line of communication cut off.

The order of battle of Wittgenstein is noted in the annex 3. The right wing under Helfreich, was between the roads of Sebej and Drissa; The center under Kazatchkowsky, between the road of Sebej and Prissminitz: Sievesk and Kaluga Infantry regiments, the 1st
converged Infantry regiment, the guard hussar’s depot squadron, 33 guns (Horse battery #1, Light #9 and Position #5); The left under Jachwill, from Prissminitza to the Polota; The reserve was at Ropno.

Actions on August 17th

6:30 am:
At this hour, the Russians in front of Spass were ready for fight and it was the artillery which begins the action: up to 10 guns will thus fire on the Bavarians in the edge of the village for one hour and cause the retreat of the 1/2nd Bavarian Line Infantry Regiment in the shelter of palisades and barns inside Spass.

7:30 am:
Vlastov, seeing the retreat of the Bavarians into Spass, ordered to the 24th Jäger and the Converged Grenadiers of the 5th division, to attack

Map 7: the first battle of Polostk on the morning of August 17th
Spass by the two flanks, one battalion of each regiment in each flank. During this attack, the Russian artillery continued its fire against the village.

**8:00 am:**
To respond to this attack, von Wrede ordered the batteries Gotthard and Gravenreuth, located on the left bank of the Polota, to advance, unlimber on the steep banks of the stream, in one of its loops and made a conuter-battery fire. Two companies (from 6th and 2/2nd Bavarian infantry regiments) must settle to the right of these batteries to skirmish against the Russian infantry on the other bank. After three quarters of an hour, the Bavarian batteries won the duel of artillery and silenced the ten Russian guns, dismantling even one gun. The Russian infantry was obliged to cease its attack on Spass and to retreat because of the Bavarian guns. It is possible that the silence of the Russian guns was also caused by the lack of ammunition.

**From 9:00 to 10:00 am:**
After this first failure, Jachwill will launch a new direct assault on Spass, sustained by 18 guns (doubtless the light battery #26 and 6 guns from the horse battery #3) which reopened fire on the Bavarian artillery. Then, will participate to attack the village, the converged Grenadiers of the 5th division, and a battalion of each 24th Jäger, Perm and Mohilev regiments. While the Russian artillery supported this attack on the left (firing on the Bavarian guns), the two other battalions of Perm and Mohilev regiments were in support on the right flank.

According to the Bavarians, they held the position of Spass, despite the overwhelming superiority of the Russians, until the 26th French light regiment on their left (only a company of skirmishers) withdrew. The Russians would have taken advantage of this withdraw, to take the Bavarians on their flank.

In any case, the Bavarian line (essentially the 1/2nd Bavarian line infantry regiment) withdrew behind stables which were at the entrance of Spass. Then, the Bavarians crossed the ravine which cut the village in two, and settled behind the ponds of the castle. The castle itself, remained in the protection of the one and half company of the 6th Bavarian line infantry regiment, despite the enemy artillery that bombarded the position.

**Around 11:00 am:**
Von Wrede tried to slow down the Russian assault against Spass and ordered the 1/6th Bavarian infantry regiment to deploy on the right of the Bavarian batteries and to skirmish against the flank of the Russians who were still advancing on Spass. After a moment of exchanging shots with the Russians, the Bavarian battalion retreated and left only a company of skirmishers. The 2/6th Bavarian infantry regiment, at the same time, deployed to the left of the Bavarian batteries. According to von Wrede, but the diary of the 6th Bavarian infantry regiment don’t mention it,
this 2\textsuperscript{nd} battalion would have crossed the Polota by a ford at this place and would have taken the Russians in flank.

In any case, supported by the fire (or bayonets) of this 2/6\textsuperscript{th} Bavarian, the 1/2\textsuperscript{nd} Bavarian took the offensive, supported on the right by the 5\textsuperscript{th} light battalion. This light battalion had received the order at 11:00 am to pass on the right bank of the Polota by the bridge behind the ponds of the castle. This Bavarian counterattack stopped the Russians who could not take the village of Spass. In this action, General Vincenti was hit by a bullet in his left arm.

At noon:

Russians pushed away, the 5\textsuperscript{th} light battalion took the opportunity to relieve the 1/2\textsuperscript{nd} Bavarian line regiment in Spass. At the same time, a part (3 companies) of the 2/2\textsuperscript{nd} Bavarian line regiment superseded the 6\textsuperscript{th} Bavarian line regiment, which had continued to skirmish, remaining on the left bank of the Polota.

Later, at 2 pm, it will be the 1/5\textsuperscript{th} Bavarian line regiment (from the 3\textsuperscript{rd} brigade Habermann) which relieve the 2/2\textsuperscript{nd} Bavarian line regiment. And itself will be relieved at 4:30 pm by the 2/11\textsuperscript{th} Bavarian line regiment (same brigade).

According to the Russian reports, the Bavarians presents on the right bank of the Polota, would have followed Vlastov in his withdrawal into the forest, which seems very incredible because of the weak Bavarian forces engaged.

Wittgenstein, seeing his left wing rejected again, orders Berg to come to the rescue of Jachwill with the Sievesk, Kaluga and 1\textsuperscript{st} Converged infantry, supported by 6 guns of the Position battery #5. These troops, taken from the first line in the center, left nothing but artillery in front of Legrand. Oudinot noticing that, orders Legrand to assault the Russian center. We don’t know if it was the first attack of Legrand or not.

From 1:00 pm to the night:

In accordance with Oudinot’s orders, Legrand advanced his battalions towards the Russian center, preceded by skirmishers. But Wittgenstein called Hamen to the rescue from the second line: this general took the head of a battalion of the Tula regiment, the 18\textsuperscript{th} Jäger depot battalion, and six pieces of Position battery #27’s. The two thin battalions (700 men in all) advanced in column of attack, but unable to stand against the pressure of the French infantrymen, they retreated. However, this withdrawal of the Russian infantry left the field open to the Russian artillery (horse battery #1 and position battery #27: 15 pieces in all). The two batteries, by a cross fire, stopped Legrand’s infantry and forced him to retreat. The Russian skirmishers pursued the French, followed by two battalions, one from the Estonia regiment, the other from Navajinsk.

Meanwhile, in the Bavarian sector, Berg, coming from the centre, passed by a small road leading to the
main road of Nevel, out of sight and fire from the enemy. He emerged in the sector held by the Bavarians at about 1 pm. He was at the head of three regiments, preceded by a screen of skirmishers.

On the other side of this sector, the half position battery #5 unlimbered, supported by a battalion of the Sievesk Infantry regiment. These six guns had been given the mission to silence the 4th Bavarian light battery (Gravenreuth), which continued to do much harm to the Russians. According to the Bavarian reports, the battery Gravenreuth, better placed and probably better served, won his duel against the six Russian guns by reducing them to silence.

However, in a favourable numerical situation, with fresh troops, Berg carried his three regiments of infantry forward against the west flank of Spass protected from the devastating Bavarian guns. Perm and Mohilev Infantry regiments had to support the new attack, as well as the guns of two batteries (position #28 and light #9). This attack succeeded, and the Russians drove back the Bavarians, who retreated behind the Spass ravine, after burning the houses in the village to the north of the ravine.

Some Russian skirmishers tried to pass this ravine but were repulsed with losses.

According to the diary of the 5th light Bavarian battalion, three attacks and counter-attacks would have taken place until 6 pm. In one of the Bavarian counter-attacks, skirmishers had reached Russian horse battery #3 but were repulsed by two squadrons of the Grodno hussars.

In the center sector, after the failure of his first attack, Legrand renewed his efforts and forced the Russians to engage successively all their battalions of the second line, except one of the Navajinsk Infantry regiment. No information has been saved of the French movements but according to Wittgenstein, Legrand would have been repulsed in the evening under the walls of Polotsk.

After that, the battle degenerated into a shooting exchange of skirmishers.

According to a letter from von Wrede to his king, at around 6 pm, Oudinot came to congratulate him for the bravery of the Bavarians, and as he was recrossing the bridge over the Polota behind Spass, he was seriously injured.

Gouvion St Cyr, himself slightly injured in the day, replaced the marshal.

On the south-west sector, near the Dwina, nothing happened. There was only a small attack against the engineers of Sievers, which was repulsed by the fire of the two battalions in support.
Result of the first day

The diary of the Russian I Corps gives us for this first day of combat, 2,500 losses for the Russians and 4,000 killed and wounded for the Franco-Bavarians, plus 1,000 prisoners. We can think that the numbers for Russians is available, but surely not for the Franco-Bavarians.

Indeed, in the diary of the different Bavarian regiments which took part in the fights of the first day, we have the following statistics: 27 killed and 164 wounded for the 2nd regiment (20 killed and 109 wounded for the first battalion; 7 killed and 55 wounded for the second); 9 killed and 179 wounded in the 6th regiment; 5 killed and 97 wounded in the 5th light battalion; 26 wounded for the 1/5th regiment and 11 in the 2/11th regiment. So, a total of 41 killed and 477 wounded for the infantry. The total Bavarian losses for this day is also known: 584 killed and wounded, whose 37 officers. So, the artillery would have 66 losses. There must have prisoners and we know the total for the two days: 715 Bavarians.

For the French regiments involved, we don’t have any figures. The losses in officers given by Martinien are very low, while the fights lasted at least six hours (from noon to 6 am): 9 for the 26th light regiment, 2 for the 56th line, 6 for the 37th line. It is possible that some of the officers lost in the second day and given by Martinien, were killed or wounded in the first day.

In the annex 4, we gave an estimation of the losses (killed, wounded, prisoners and missing) for the forces which took part of the fight of August 17th: about 800 Bavarians and 1,700 French.

In brief, in this first day of action, we can estimate the losses of the belligerents like the following data: 2,000 Russians killed and wounded, plus 500 prisoners; the same figures for the Franco-Bavarians, distributed as follows: 1,400 French and 600 Bavarians killed and wounded, plus 500 prisoners (300 French and 200 Bavarians).

Another problem is the Bavarian forces involved in the actions: on August 3rd, we have about 16,000 men in the Bavarian VI Corps, 4,900 sick and 2,500 men in detachments. In his memoirs, Gouvion St Cyr wrote that Bavarians were 12,000 when they arrived at Polotsk. According to Vernon (Vie du maréchal Gouvion-Saint-Cyr, 1866), the Bavarians were 14 to 15,000 men at this date.

However, many accounts give the appalling state of health of the Bavarians when they arrived in Polotsk. And the movements between the 7th and the 16th of August will not improve this situation.

Indeed, according to the states of strength of August 3rd and 29th, the Bavarians lost between these two dates, about 7,500 men (they are only about 8,200 on 29 August 29th). If we count about 2,500 men lost in the first battle of Polotsk (included Bononia on August 22nd), we see that the Bavarians have lost about 5,000 men.
apart from fights, in less than four weeks! So, more than 200 men per day! So, how many were present under arms on the morning of the 17th? About probably 13,000 men (16,000 on August 3rd less 200 losses by day during two weeks).

If we take into account these figures, we can estimate the numbers after the first day of battle of about 19,000 Russians (reinforcements included), who will face 23,000 French and 12,000 Bavarians.

Actions on August 18th

The Russian troops spent the night near the edge of the forest, having just slightly withdrawn from the enemy's line. The headquarter moved to Prissmimitza.

Map 8: Polotsk - disposition of the forces on August 18th before the clash
The reserve came during the night from Ropno to the road of st Petersburg, behind the left wing, which was the most engaged on 17th: This reserve had about 2,800 seasoned grenadiers, under Kakhoffski in reinforcements (converged grenadiers of the 14th division and the depot battalions of Grenadiers). Colonel Sievers, with the engineers and under protection of a squadron of the Grodno Hussars, had ordered to start another bridge, but this time on the Russian left wing, on the Polota.

Wittgenstein ordered the engineers of Colonel Sievers under the protection of a squadron of Grodno hussars, to move this time to the far left of the Russian line, to build a bridge over the Polota and thus threaten the Bavarians firmly installed on the left bank of this stream. Prince Repnin arrived at dawn with the depot cuirassiers squadrons and joined the reserve.

Wittgenstein, lucid about his numerical inferiority, intended to retreat with all his troops to Bieloe. But he did not want to execute this movement until 4 pm, after having seen the intention of the enemy. He envisaged two possibilities: either the French continued to retreat and abandoned Polotsk, and then he would cancel the order of retreat and take possession of Polotsk; either The French remained in order of battle, and then he would retire as planned at Bieloe. But there was a third hypothesis, which he did not envisage at all: that the French attacked him!

The inactivity of the French during all the morning of the 18th, the movements of baggage, artillery park and some cavalry going on the left bank and taking the direction of Oula in the afternoon, persuaded Wittgenstein that Oudinot will again retreat. But he saw a bit later that the VI Corps and Legrand stayed in their positions, Wittgenstein changed in mind and thought that Oudinot wanted to stay but without fighting, since he had pulled back some of his forces. Therefore, in the middle of the afternoon, Wittgenstein gave orders to retreat to Bieloe, but to begin this movements only after 9 pm to do it in the darkness.

But, what Wittgenstein did not know was that the command passed from Oudinot to Gouvion St Cyr, because of the serious wound received by the marshal the day before. According to Prince de Tour and Taxis, Oudinot had decided on the evening of the 17th, before his wound, to retire to the city, and even to pass on the left bank of the Dwina. Moreover, Oudinot had already sent almost all his cavalry on this side of the river as early as August 17th, as well as the 8th division.

During the night, St Cyr will make the exhausted Bavarians relieve by those who don’t fight. The brigade Raglowich (2/19th division) relieved the brigades of the 20th division which had fought the day before. This brigade settled on the outskirts of the Spass convent, in the southern part of the village. The brigade Beckers (2/20th), the only one of the 20th
division that had not fought the day before, also went to the right bank of the Polota and settled in the cover of the thickets, in the gardens of Spass Castle. The rest of the Bavarians spent the night and the morning of the 18th on the left bank of the Polota: brigades Siebein (1/19th) and Rechberg (3/19th) south-east of Spass, brigades Vincenti (1/20th) and Habermann (3/20th) on their right, with the artillery.

It seems that Saint-Cyr too, thought he will be attacked by enemy, but nothing happening, he decided to attack. In order to make the Russians believe that they did not risk anything, he simulated a retreat, as we have said. At 1 pm, the artillery park began to move off on the road to Oula, on the south bank of the Dwina. On the same bank, the 8th division left its settlements and took place as following the artillery park. The cuirassiers, stationed at Semenets the day before, and the Castex brigade, coming from Roudnia, seemed to be preparing to take the head and cover the flanks of the whole column. At 2 pm the convoy began to flee on the road to Oula. Like he expected, St Cyr had succeeded to fool the Russian general, with the inaction of the troops in first line and the retreat movement of the other units.

The plan of St Cyr was simple and leaned on the Bavarians: fixing the Russian left and targeting Prissmunitza in order to separate the Russian left from the other troops. The brigade Beckers (2/20th) had to advance against the enemy’s left to threaten it. The 6th light battalion, detached on Hamernia at the far north of the battlefield, had to make believe an attempt to cross the Polota in force at this place. This light battalion, originally belonging to the brigade Rechberg (3/19th), was detached and replaced by the 4th light Battalion from the brigade Beckers. As soon as Beckers was deployed, General Deroy had to begin his attack from the Spass convent at the head of the brigade Raglowich (2/19th). It was this Raglowich brigade which had to be the spearhead of the Bavarian attack. The brigade Rechberg (3/19th), which had remained on the left bank of the Polota, had to follow Raglowich and deploy on his left. Finally, the brigade Siebein (1/19th) had to remain on the left bank of the Polota, in reserve, with the exhausted brigades Vincenti and Habermann.

General Clemens von Raglowich (1766-1836)
(Barbara Krafft, in Österreichische Galerie Belvedere; bilddatenbank.belvedere.at)
The light cavalry brigade Corbineau, which had retreated to the left bank of the Polota for the night, had to cross this little but steep stream by the bridge near the cemetery. The cavalry had to deploy more to the right than the day before, on the left flank of the Bavarians.

Legrand, who had remained on the right bank of the Polota, had to leave his cantonments of the night which were along the Polota on the north of Polotsk. Away from Russian eyes, he had to move discreetly, using a hollow path along the Polota, to settle on the left of the Bavarians and Corbineau.

The 8th Division, commanded by General Valentin, was on the south bank of the Dwina. Valentin had been ordered to pass discreetly on the north bank, after a beginning of movement that seemed to indicate that he followed the baggage and the artillery park towards Oula. This division had to be deployed on the left of the division Legrand, having on its own left the cuirassiers of Doumerc, themselves flanked on their left by the Castex brigade which had to follow the 8th division in its crossing of the Dwina.

According to Gouvion-Saint-Cyr, Corbineau had finally to fill the hole left between the 6th and the 8th infantry divisions, because Valentin settled too much on the left.

St Cyr hoped for a coordinated general attack, starting at 5 pm. It should be initiated on the right of his line, by the fire of a grand battery of 31 Bavarian guns, established on the same place where the batteries Gotthard and Gravenreuth had fired the day before.

The 9th division Merle, still always, had to remain in reserve: the brigade Candras (1st and 2nd Swiss line regiments: about 1,900 men) on the north of Polotsk, on the left bank of the Polota; the brigade Coutard, probably commanding by Colonel Avizard, chief of the 123rd line regiment (123rd ‘Dutch’ line regiment and 3rd Swiss line regiment: 1,300 men) was in the city and on the ramparts; The brigade Amey (4th Swiss Line regiment and 3rd Provisional Croatian Regiment: 2,300 men) had to deploy just behind Castex, on the road to Drissa.

It was at 1:30 pm that the 8th division, after turning around, began to cross the two bridges over the Dwina located in Polotsk, to go in the north bank. It was followed by the artillery of the II Corps, the cuirassiers of Doumerc and the Castex brigade. It seems that all this movement was not noticed by the Russians, asleep by the first movements seeming to indicate a French retreat. Simultaneously, Legrand began his march towards the Bavarians and Spass, by taking a difficult hollow road along the Polota. He managed not giving the alert, but it seems that the precautions taken, made him waste a lot of time. Corbineau at the same time, crossed the Polota by the bridge next to the cemetery.

In any case, the whole of the II Corps did not reach its starting positions at the appointed time and the Bavarians will begin their attack without the support of the French.
At 4:30 am, St Cyr, who was standing next to the Bavarian grande battery, gave the signal for the attack by ordering the 6th Bavarian battery (Roys) to fire. Soon the 31 Bavarian guns targeted the position of Prissminitza. The Russian guns replied quickly, more numerous than St Cyr expected. The artillery fire will last until about 5:30 am. On average, each battery will give about fifty shots in about an hour. As ammunition ran out on both sides, the fire diminished, but the Bavarian batteries disassembled several guns from Russian light batteries #27 and #9.

5:30 am was the moment of entry into action of the Bavarian infantry, already present at its starting positions, as we will see.

At Harmenia
At 4:00 pm, Colonel La Roche, commander of the 6th Bavarian light battalion, received the oral order of General von Wrede to march on Harmenia. This little village, on the banks of the Polota, was situated on the extreme north of the battlefield. The Bavarian light Battalion had to cross the Polota and to make demonstrations there, to attract enemy forces. A cannon was added to Colonel La Roche’s command. The Bavarians easily crossed the Polota by a ford near Harmenia, dislodged the few grenadiers present in the village. In doing so, La Roche fulfilled his role perfectly: he attracted against him the squadron of Grodno hussars that covered the Russian engineers occupied in laying a bridge over the Polota a few kilometers away. Moreover, Vlastov, anxious of what happened in Harmenia, sent a battalion of the converged grenadiers of the 5th division and the depot battalion of the Pavlov Grenadiers. The 330 Bavarians resisted until the nightfall against the 600 Russian grenadiers, despite the three attacks led by them against Harmenia.

At the end of the day, La Roche’s losses were 3 dead and 16 wounded.
We do not know the losses of the Russian forces engaged in Harmenia, but they were surely higher, the Russians going up against well protected troops, and three times in a row.

According to St Cyr, when the all Russian forces withdrawn, those on Harmenia tried to join the main Russian forces, by retreating through the forest, under cover of darkness. “Most of them managed to escape, wrote St Cyr, the rest were killed or taken.”

According to Wittgenstein, the Pavlov grenadiers made their way through the Bavarian infantry and succeeded in taking with them in their retreat a hundred prisoners, including six officers. At the same time, always according to Wittgenstein, the Grodno hussar squadron would have managed to rejoin the Russian line after repelling the numerically superior enemy cavalry. But there was no French cavalry on this point of the battlefield. We can therefore legitimately doubt all the explanations.
given by the Russian general-in-chief on this point.

**Sector North**

In the area of the main attack, around 5 pm, the brigade Beckers moved from the garden of the Spass’s castle, marched along the Polota for a while, on a narrow and difficult road, away from Russian eyes. The 3rd line infantry regiment led the column, followed by the 7th. Because of the narrowness of the road, the column of Beckers’s infantry was very spreaded: when the first men of the column entered a ravine formed by a small stream coming from the forest and flowing into the Polota, the rear of the column just began to march.

Deroy was waiting for Becker’s brigade finishing his movement, and he sent his chief of staff in the front line to warn him when Beckers would be ready to go on the attack. This officer came to report at around 5:30 pm that the first men of Beckers appeared ready. It was at this moment that Deroy ordered Raglowich’s brigade to advance as planned, with the 3rd light battalion in the head, followed by the 10th line regiment, then the 4th and finally the 4th light battery. The Bavarians left the outbuildings of the convent, entered the bridge separating the two parts of the village and went to the front of the village, the 3rd light battalion on the right, the 10th regiment on the left. When the Bavarians emerged from

---

**First battle of Polotsk (2nd day) depicting the first battle of Polotsk from the Bavarian lines on the left bank of Polota**

General Deroy is seen on a stretcher as well as the St. Euphrosyne convent on the right with its two churches and the nearby Polota bridge, through which Bavarian troops pass; we also see the church of the cemetery to the left and further, still left, the cathedral of Polotsk.

*(from Wilhelm Kobell, Zeitgenössisches Gemälde web page Polozk)*
the village, as the 4th regiment had not yet crossed the village, the Russian artillery stopped firing at the great Bavarian battery and turned its shots against the Beckers Brigade, combined with a violent fire of infantry. In the same time, part of the Bavarian artillery ceased fire for fear of shooting at its own infantry. The division Legrand, delayed in its deployment, was unable to support the attack of the Bavarians, who found themselves alone under the pressure of the Russian left. Quickly, general Raglowich was wounded and his brigade backed down, soon followed by the enemy infantry.

It was at this moment that the 4th Bavarian regiment, just emerged from the village, was formed in line by Deroy, covered by a slight depression of ground. It received the Russians in the centre of the action, by a well-nourished fusillade that stopped it. In his pursuit of the Bavarians, the Russian infantry deployed to the left felt face to face with the other Bavarian brigade, that of Beckers, remained hitherto hidden. The problem was that this brigade was not yet in formation and remained disorganized because of its difficult movement in the ravine of the small stream. The Bavarian 2/7th Bavarian, which formed the rear of the Beckers’s column, was still in the ravine and had not reached the protection of the trees like the rest of the brigade. His leader resolved to attack the Russians who appeared, rather than risk being overwhelmed and rejected in the Polota. This was the right decision: this movement on their left flank associated with the fire of the 4th Bavarian regiment deployed under the cover of trees, finally able to come into action, stopped there also, the Russian infantry.

Deroy took advantage of this halt of the Russian attack and of the floating which followed, to reform the brigade Raglowich and to push it forward, supported by the 4th light battery, which had just unlimbered. Finally, the two Bavarian brigades (Beckers and Raglowich), formed in a

Bavarian light and line Infantry (Author Collection)
continuous line, advanced and rejected the Russians. The Brigade Rechberg (3/19th division), which had crossed the Polota at 5:00 pm, followed the brigade Raglowich, deployed to the left of this brigade, the 8th Bavarian in the head, followed by the 4th light battalion. This brigade had joined with the division Legrand, which had finally arrived on its position.

During these actions in the first line, a part of the brigade Siebein (1/19th division), which had to stay in reserve on the left bank of the Polota, had crossed the stream and settled near the the bridge of Spass: it was the 9th line and the 1/1st line infantry regiments. They arrived when the brigade Raglowich were retreating. And when the whole Bavarian line had started to go forward, these elements of the brigade Siebein, joined by the 2/1st line infantry regiment, went forward and took position in front of Spass, just behind the three brigades in first line (from left to right, Rechberg, Raglowich and Beckers).

It was at this crucial moment that Deroy was mortally wounded. The severity of the wound of their venerated general will spread rapidly throughout the Bavarian line, and with it, the discouragement and the floating; especially in the 8th infantry regiment (brigade Rechberg), of which Colonel von Wrede was also wounded. It is possible that without this wound, the Russian retreat had turned into a rout.

As for the previous day’s battle, we don’t have accurate reports of the actions of the II Corps. However, it seems that, in the same time of the Bavarian counterattack, the division Legrand had led a first attack against Prissminitza, an attack that will fail.

St Cyr then went in the area center of his line to restore the situation. He gave orders to Siebein, to attack Prissminitza with his brigade, in collaboration with the division Legrand, which had to launch a new assault.
On the side of the Bavarian attack, because of the injury of General Deroy, it was von Wrede who will take the command in this sector. He succeeded, by his influence, in restarting the assault made by the Bavarian infantry, which then advanced vigorously. The regiments and battalions will find themselves amalgamated in this attack.

Despite the fire of Russian infantry and artillery, they were pushed back into the forest by the Bavarians. Russians lost even four guns of artillery in the area.

The combined attack of Legrand and Siebein also took the key position of Prissminitsa. Three pieces of Russian artillery will also be captured in this area.

These two events of capital importance announced a Franco-Bavarian victory. But how St Cyr could hope to turn this beginning of victory into a rout for the Russians? To do this, the Bavarian reserve should have been engaged at the breaking point, between the left and the Russian center, on the point of Prissminitsa. This Bavarian reserve consisted of two brigades: the 1/20th division under Vincenti (about 1,900 men) and the 3/20th division under Habermann (2,300 men). Although they had fought the day before, Habermann’s 5th and 11th infantry regiments had suffered little loss.

However, the order never came. In the same way, the Bavarian batteries, which had become useless on the left bank of the Polota, because of the Russian retreat, did not receive order to cross this stream to support the efforts of their infantry.

This inaction enabled the three squadrons of Grodno hussars present in this area to cover effectively the retreat of their infantry. The 24th Jäger as well as the converged grenadiers of the 14th division, not yet engaged, were also deployed to cover the retreat. According to Vlastov, this rearguard resisted against the exhausted Bavarians for two hours before they too retreated under cover of the night. Although this duration seems exaggerated, the Russian left could retreat without being pursued. Although the Bavarian infantry remained in contact for some time, the Russians were able to retreat to Ropno, which reached at around 10 pm. The brigade Raglowich, joined by the 4th light battalion, provided the Bavarian outposts.
Central Sector
While Berg and Vlastov tried with difficulty to prevent the break-up of the Russian left, General Hamen in the central sector, well supported by his artillery, was opposing to the 8th division and part of the 6th (units that not took part of the assault against Prissminitza): about 7 or 8,000 infantrymen. Hamen had nine infantry battalions on his hands (the 2 battalions of each Tula, Estonia, Navajinsk and Tenguinsk infantry regiments; and the converged jäger battalion: less than 3,000 infantrymen. But his front was occupied by more than 50 pieces of artillery (including pieces of 12), while the French opposed him only barely 30 gune. Regimental artillery is not counted for the French (about twenty pieces of 3), first assault on Prissminitza, a brilliant charge of two squadrons of Russian cuirassiers at the junction point between the 6th and 8th French divisions, surprised the 11th light infantry and put disorder in its ranks. Although this regiment was composed of prestigious battalions, its strength had been increased, at the beginning of the campaign, by young recruits. The loss of many officers since June, especially its colonel, did not help this unit to stand firm against a charge of heavy cavalry. We are no longer in 1805! General Maison restored order in the regiment, but this attack of the Russian cavalry on the left flank of

Charge of the Russian cuirassiers against French chasseurs a cheval at Polotsk
the troops attacking Prissminitza, will participate in the failure of the first assault against this village.

Valentin and Legrand will attempt several attacks on Hamen, but without success, mainly because of the Russian artillery, more numerous that the French artillery, as often in this sector of the Russian campaign.

The good behavior of Hamen in this central area of the battlefield will allow the Russian left wing and the reserve to retreat to Ropno more easily.

This retreat will also be facilitated by a new brilliant charge of the Russian converged cuirassiers, done at a critical moment for the French. Indeed, once Prissminitza conquered by Legrand and Siebein, St Cyr decided to break through the Russian center. To take advantage of the retreat of the Russian line, he advanced the artillery of the II Corps (about thirty pieces available), under the protection of a detachment of the 24th chasseurs à cheval regiment. In the same time, he ordered brigade Siebein, which had taken part in the taking of Prissminitza without too much loss, to put itself in reserve behind and on the right of the French central line.

Wittgenstein quickly saw the danger of the setup of the French artillery. So, he ordered General Balk to advance his cavalry and hinder, or even prevent, the fire of French guns. Balk charged the 24th chasseurs à cheval with two squadrons of the converged cuirassiers regiment (one from the Czar cuirassiers and one from the Empress Cuirassiers). At the same
time, a squadron of Grodno hussars charged the French chasseurs in their flank. Overwhelmed by the number, the French cavalry retired in disorder in the direction of French batteries, just unlimbered. The French gunners hesitated to fire, the French cavalry being mixed with the Russians. This hesitation gave the Russian cuirassiers time to reach the French guns and slashed some artillerymen. They continued, however, to pursue the French cavalry and arrived where Gouvion St Cyr stood with his staff. The French general had only time to jump into a ditch to avoid capture. According to the Russians, the cuirassiers only stopped once the ramparts of Polotsk reached.

General Siebein, who had observed the charge of the enemy cuirassiers on his left, ordered the 1st Bavarian line infantry to form in square and the 4th light Bavarian battery to unlimber to shot at the cuirassiers on their flank.

At the same time, about a hundred men of the 3rd Swiss regiment (brigade Avizard) left Polotsk and threw themselves into a walled cemetery. From this position, they targeted enemy cuirassiers, with great efficiency and without encountering charge from the cavalry. Lastly, the 4th French cuirassiers under Berckheim’s orders charged against the right flank of the Russian. They finally retreated, with losses, but they managed to completely disrupt the French in this sector. Moreover, without the help of the Bavarians, a heavy French battery, submerged by the enemy cuirassiers, would have been entirely swept away.

Sector south

During all the battle, the south sector of the battlefield was very quiet. The brigade Amey, helped by the light cavalry brigade Castex (about 3,300 men & 8 guns), was opposed against the Russians of general Helfreich (about 3,500 men & 15 guns). The

The Swiss Regiments of the 9th “Red” Division Merle (Author Collection)
Russians claimed to have executed a brilliant attack with three squadrons of the Grodno Hussars, supported by the Horse battery #1, which would have facilitated the charge of the Russian cuirassiers in the central sector.

When order to retreat came for the Russians, this right wing will be the last to leave the battlefield.

**Result of the second day of battle**

The losses suffered by both, Russians and Franco-Bavarians, were heavy on August 18th in Polotsk. The fierceness of the fighting and the high proportion of guns are the main causes.

The Russians recognize a little less than 5,000 men hors de combat and the loss of seven guns. Generals Berg, Kazatchkowsky and Hamen were wounded.

On the French side, generals Gouvion St Cyr (already wounded the day before), Pouget and Valentin were wounded. The colonels of the 19th (6th division Legrand) and 37th French Line regiments (8th division) were killed; Those of the 2nd French line (8th division), 56th French line (6th division) and 124th ‘Dutch’ line infantry regiments (8th division) were wounded. The 2nd French line regiment lost in addition four of its five battalion commanders (1 killed and 3 wounded).

Based on the figures given by Martinien, the French losses can be estimated at 2,400 men, including prisoners.

On the Bavarian side, generals Deroy, von Wrede and von Raglowich are wounded. General Deroy will succumb to his injuries on August 23rd. The colonels of the 8th and 10th line infantry regiments were mortally wounded, and the commander of the 3rd light battalion was also wounded.
According to general von Wrede, 1,279 men were killed or wounded (including 118 officers) for the two days of combat. However, in comparison with the figures given by Vœldendorff (Observation sur l’ouvrage du comte de Séguir, 1826), the number of 1,279 killed is rather the losses of the 18th only. Also, we can estimate the Bavarian losses for the 18th, to 1,279 killed and wounded, and about 200 prisoners.

So, for all the forces under the command of Gouvion-Saint-Cyr, the losses were about 3,800 men for this second day of battle.

For the two days of this first battle of Polotsk, the Franco-Bavarians lost about 6,300 men (4,000 in the II Corps and 2,300 in the VI Corps) and the Russians, 7,500.

While Gouvion-Saint-Cyr still has about 33,000 men, combat capable but, for lot of them, very exhausted, Wittgenstein had only about 15,000 men.

14th Bulletin de la Grande Armée

“Smolensk, August 23rd, after the clash of Drissa, the Duke of Reggio, knowing the enemy general Wittgenstein had been reinforced by twelve 3rd battalions from the garrison of Dünaburg, and wishing to attract him on this side of the pass under Polotsk, came to put the II and VI Corps into battle order under Polostk. General Wittgenstein followed him, attacked him on 16th and 17th, and was vigorously repulsed. The Bavarian division of von Wrede, of the VI Corps, has distinguished itself. At the moment when the Duke of Reggio was making his arrangements to take advantage of the victory and to corner the enemy on the pass, he was struck on the shoulder by a biscayen. His wound, which is serious, obliged him to be transported to Wilna; But it doesn’t appear that it must be worrying in the future.

General Count Gouvion-Saint-Cyr took command of the II and VI Corps. On the evening of the 17th, the enemy retired beyond the pass. General Verdier was wounded. General Maison was recognized as General de division, and replaced him in the command of his division. Our loss is estimated at one thousand men killed or wounded. The Russian loss is threefold; They were given five hundred prisoners.

On the 18th, at four o’clock in the afternoon, General Gouvion-Saint-Cyr, commanding the II and VI Corps, came out into the enemy by attacking his right by the Bavarian division of the Count von Wrede. The struggle began on the whole line; The enemy was put in a complete rout and pursued for two leagues, as far as the day permitted. Twenty pieces of cannon and a thousand prisoners remained in the power of the French army. Bavarian General Deroy was wounded.”

The pursuit: August 19th-22nd

Following the battle at Polotsk, which led to a severe diminution of his strength, Wittgenstein decided to retreat behind the Drissa in the direction of Sebej. On August 19, his main force went to Gamzelovo, the reserve at Bieloe where it incorporated the depot battalion of the Mohilev regiment and horse battery #23, coming both from Pskov. The forces of
general Helfreich, that had not been engaged in the fighting at Polotsk, served as rearguard at the Ropno gap. The vanguard of Vlastov, which had been repulsed the day before on the Nevel road, remained on the morning of the 19th at the tavern of Lozovka, before retiring to Arteikovitzi.

Gouvion St Cyr considered the pursuit impossible because of the state of its units. He only sent some patrols on the roads to Nevel and to Sebej, but even after covering 5 or 6 miles, they found no enemies: contact was lost with the Russians.

On August 20, the Russians continued to retreat towards the Drissa, softly pursued by the Franco-Bavarians. The Russian reserve reached Siwochina, the main force, Bieloe and Helfreich, Gamzelovo. Vlastov retreated behind Arteikovitzi.
It’s only on August 22\textsuperscript{nd} that St Cyr sent a midly strong force to the pursuit of the Russians on the road to Sebej: it was 1,800 Bavarians, led by general Siebein, but curiously, no cavalry.

After Polotsk, the 19\textsuperscript{th} Bavarian division, greatly reduced, was reorganized into two brigades: the first brigade comprising the 1\textsuperscript{st} and 6\textsuperscript{th} light battalions, the 1\textsuperscript{st} and 9\textsuperscript{th} line infantry regiments (1,800 men); The second brigade composed by the 3\textsuperscript{rd} light battalion and the 4\textsuperscript{th}, 8\textsuperscript{th} and 10\textsuperscript{th} line infantry regiments (2,100 men). It was the first brigade which was under Siebein command, and which met the Russians of Vlastov at Bieloe.

Siebein decided to carry out a frontal attack on the village while part of his forces would attempt an overflow movement on the right. The frontal attack failed in face of the Russian musketry fire and the two guns of 12£ set in battery in the village. The attempt to overflow, on the other hand, seemed to be successful, as the Bavarians conquered the farm of Bieloe. But when they continued their movement to take the Russians from behind, they were attacked by two squadrons of the Grodno hussars led by Colonel Silin. This charge put disorder in the Bavarian infantry and repulsed it. Colonel Roth at the head of the 26\textsuperscript{th} Jäger took the opportunity to take back the farm of Bieloe. Colonel Rudiger at the head of the other two squadrons of the Grodno hussars managed to repel another overflow attempt from the Bavarians, this time by the left.

The twilight announced the end of the fighting: the Bavarians decided to withdraw, without being pursued. General Siebein was mortally wounded in this affair and was replaced by Colonel Stroehl at the head of the brigade reduced to about 1,550 men. The fighting cost the Bavarians 253 killed, wounded and missing (including 17 officers). The Russian claimed to have lost only 94 men, which is plausible.

Wittgenstein began the construction of some fortifications to protect his positions near Siwochina. He also built some buildings in sebej, where he had had his stores, his artillery park and warehouses.

The Franco-Bavarians did the same in Polotsk.

The decision of the two belligerents to settle on the defensive, will inaugurate a period of a month and a half of a near non-activity.