Even before the second battle of Polotsk begins, a clash will announce the ferocity of the future fighting: 300 Swiss grenadiers, mostly belonging to the 1st regiment, had been detached to Ropno to observe the arrival of the enemy. Around 7 pm on October 17th, they were attacked by the infantry of Vlastov Vanguard (23rd and 24th Jäger), who had taken advantage of the night and the proximity of the forest to approach the enemy without being seen. The Swiss, however, managed to free themselves and took refuge behind the walls of the cemetery of Ropno. After a heroic defense, their ammunition exhausted, they charged with the bayonet to break encirclement through the Russians and join Polotsk. They arrived there, leaving half of them, either killed or too much wounded to support the march towards Polotsk. Of the 150 survivors, 50 were also injured but supported by the other 100. They finally arrived in Polotsk despite the 3 miles they had to make.

First day: October 18th

In order to comply with the Czar’s will, Wittgenstein’s plan was to fix the French on the right bank of the Dwina, while Alexseiev would pass quietly on the left bank, near Gorianou, at the mouth of the Obol. By setting the enemy on Polotsk, Wittgenstein also wanted to protect Steinheil’s advance on the left bank of the river. With this plan, Wittgenstein considered following the general instructions received in September: he will cut Gouvion St Cyr from the Grande Armée. Threatened on both sides and on his rear, the French marshal could only order a precipitate and therefore hazardous retreat of his forces behind the river and leave Polotsk in the hands of the Russians. But things will go differently because of the heavy rains of the previous days.

St. Cyr, meanwhile, was waiting for the arrival of the enemy on the right bank of the Dwina, from the west, especially from the St. Petersburg and Nevel road, as in the first battle of Polotsk. The violent attack on the Swiss at Ropno
reinforced him in this opinion. In addition, as the autumn rains made the dirt roads tricky underfoot, the only road that could easily be taken by artillery and logistics were those of Nevel, St. Petersburg and Disna, all on the right bank of the Polota.

At 6:00 am, the 6th and 8th divisions were order of battle on the left bank of the Polota, but facing west, and thus protected behind the Polota, against an attack coming from the west. The 6th division Legrand was on the right, relying on Redoubt #7. The 9th division Merle was deployed on the right bank of the Polota, in front of its cantonments. Merle had been ordered to withdraw as soon as the enemy appeared and set up behind redoubts #4 and #5, occupied by the Bavarians. This 9th division was to be used to attract the Russians on these redoubts. Gouvion St Cyr hoped that cannonade from these redoubts would stop the Russians with the help of the artillery unlimbered on the left bank of the Polota.

But Wittgenstein had another plan: he decided to provide the main attack on the left bank of Polota after crossing the river the day before at Jourevitchi. In their forward march, the Russians repelled Castex’s cavalry and a battalion of the 26th light infantry which guarded a ford at this place. This clash
alerted the French and that’s why St Cyr was not totally surprised to be attacked on the left bank of the Polota. Moreover, he had protected this left bank, by some defensive constructions oriented to the east, including the redoubt called Tuileries (redoubt # 9), as we have seen.

**On the left bank of the Polota**

As soon as the alert was given of the massive arrival of the Russians on Polotsk by the northeast, St. Cyr ordered to divisions Legrand and Maison to make a half turn. The division Legrand continued to rely on the redoubt #7, while Maison came to rely on the ‘Tuileries’ redoubt. It was the Valaisan battalion of the 11th light regiment which had to occupy this redoubt. At the outset, the two divisions left their artillery facing the west to support the Swiss against the enemy who was to arrive by the roads of Nevel and St. Petersburg.

The first contact on the left bank of the Polota occurred between the little French post in Gromy and the vanguard of Balk which repulsed easily the French and pursued them into the wood between Gromy and the French line, formed by the 6th and 8th divisions.

This Russian vanguard divided in two groups at the approach of this enemy line. The 26th Jäger, two squadrons of the Grodno hussars, half of the horse battery #3 formed the right and advanced against the French line by the road which bordered Polota. Near the village of Amernia (or Hamernia), the Russians were repulsed by the men of Legrand and the regiment of Sievesk was sent to this sector as reinforcement and to cover the retreat on this point. The other part of the vanguard (25th Jäger, battalion of the Kexholm Regiment and four pieces of the light battery #45) took the main road towards Polotsk, which passed near the Wolowoi pond. The Mohilev and Perm regiments followed a little further to the left. A little more to the left, the other two squadrons of the Grodno hussars and Rodianov’s Cossacks took a path to take the French line on its flank. It seems that at that moment Marshal Gouvion St Cyr went to Wolowoi Pond to better judge the situation and was then injured by a musket’s shot in his left foot.

The rest of the Russian forces followed behind these first units and leaving the Gromy wood, the Russians were able to deploy their artillery: the position battery #5 unlimbered opposite the ‘Tuileries’ redoubt, another battery on its left, and the light battery #27 on a height in front of the Russian line and to the left of the other two batteries.

Wittgenstein, then wishing to recognize the enemy’s right wing, made his way to the Vitebsk road along the Dwina, accompanied by the Kaluga regiment and the Guard squadrons. Seeing this troop movement, the excellent chef d’escadron Curély, at the head of two light squadrons (one from the 20th chasseurs à cheval and one from the 8th chevau-légers) did not hesitate to charge the Russian left and put the disorder in the enemy who just began
to emerge from the wood. He even provisionally took possession of the 12 guns of light battery #27. According to Russian prisoners, Wittgenstein would have been a moment in the hands of the French, who did not recognize him. Very quickly, however, the French cavalry was brought back by the squadrons of the Grodno hussars and those of the Guard. Curély took refuge behind the two squadrons of the 14th cuirassiers, the only other French cavalry in this sector. Nearly half of the men who took charge of Curély were missing and the light battery #27 was freed.

The Russian reserve of Beguiczef arrived then and was immediately
deployed: the converged cuirassiers, the two battalions of the converged grenadiers of the 14th division and the 2nd battalion formed by the depots of the 1st grenadiers division were placed behind the batteries, in the center of Russian line. On the right, the Guard infantry regiment deployed behind the 25th Jäger. The 1st battalion of depots of the 1st grenadiers division took place more to the right, in support of the Russian right manhandled by the men of Legrand. The rest of the reserve remained under the protection of the Gromy wood.

For the moment, the French effectively contained the Russian troops.

The situation changed when, in the center, Russian skirmishers, apparently provided by opolochenia, advanced against the ‘Tuileries’ redoubt, through the pond of Wolowoi. Other troops were ordered to follow this enthusiastic movement of Russian militiamen and the redoubt was stormed. A French counter-attack quickly repulsed the enemy, but the Perm regiment and the 3rd depot battalion of the 1st grenadier division took the redoubt yet again. Taking advantage of this success, Rüdiger, at the head of the 25th Jäger, the Guard infantry regiment, two squadrons of Grodno Hussars, advanced again against Legrand and was able to deploy to the right of the ‘Tuileries’ redoubt, onwards the pond. Beguiczeff followed Rüdiger with the converged grenadiers under his command.

And lastly, to the left of the ‘Tuileries’ redoubt, Berg also advanced with the Kaluga regiment and the cavalry. The Russian artillery followed and unlimbered in front of the new position which was leaned on the redoubt freshly conquered.

Twice, the French cavalry charged bravely at the center to delay the advance of the enemy, but, in numerical inferiority, they were escorted by the Russian cavalry (Riga dragoons, converged cuirassiers and squadrons of the guard). This cavalry, however, was taken to task by the French artillery, and retreated outside the effective fire of the French guns.

At the same time as the attack against the division Maison and the ‘Tuileries’ redoubt, a second Russian column assaulted Legrand’s position near Redoubt #7. This attack was provided by the 26th Jäger, the converged grenadiers of the 5th division, the Sievesk Regiment and the Polotsk Regiment Battalion about (2,500 infantrymen). The redoubt was taken and recovered three or four times, but finally the French line held out until evening.

However, at the end of the day, the French retreated to entrenchments prepared in advance, under cover of their artillery. Wittgenstein preferred to stop his attack and he was even obliged to evacuate the ‘Tuileries’ redoubt, too exposed to French artillery. He ordered Diebitsch to form a screen of skirmishers all along the line facing the French line. He pulled back all his forces and settled himself with his staff at Gromy for the night.
According to Gouvion St Cyr, the Russians were 30,000 in this part of the battlefield, against two low divisions (3,900 for the 6th and 4,200 for the 8th). In fact, the Russian strength was about 20,000 men: 15,300 infantry, 2,600 cavalry and 1,200 gunners serving 74 guns. The French were outnumbered at two to one. They were about 10,000 men: 8,200 infantry, 500 cavalry and 1,200 gunners serving 56 guns.

It can be said that this day ended with a French victory in this sector of the battlefield: the French have indeed resisted all enemy attacks and the Russians have settled for the night, on their starting line of the morning. The losses are difficult to estimate because they are poorly known and there are no separate counts between the 18th and the other two days of fighting.

**On the right bank of the Polota**

On the right bank of the Polota, Prince Jachwill, after having forced the gap of Ropno in the night, deployed his forces on the plateau opposite Polotsk. The soldiers stayed with the weapon almost all the day because Jachwill was ordered to attack only at 4 pm!

The vanguard under Vlastov was in the front line (3,100 infantry, 800 cavalry and 6 guns), followed by Sazonov’s forces (6,000 infantry, 300 horsemen and 800 gunners serving 64 guns): a total of about 11,000 men. To these forces of Prince Jachwill, we must add the detachment of Colonel Stolypin (1,700 men, including 360 cavalry) whom Wittgenstein sent to make the junction between his forces and those of Jachwill.

On this side of the Polota, it was general Merle who was opposed to the Russians. He had under his command 6,400 infantrymen (about 5,800 in his 9th division and 600 Bavarians in the redoubts) as well as 400 gunners serving about 30 pieces of cannon. The defense of the position was based on two redoubts (#4 and #5) built at this location and occupied by Bavarian artillery (4 batteries). 300 Bavarian infantry had been deployed in each redoubt, in support of the gunners. All Bavarians were under the orders of general Vincenti. On paper, Merle could count on the artillery of the 6th and 8th divisions, placed in the same point as the Bavarian artillery during the first battle of Polotsk. But following the Russian offensive on the left bank of the Polota, this artillery will be recalled by Legrand and Maison who needed it.

The 9th Division was deployed in echelon at the edge of the woods in the north-west of Polotsk and had ordered to retreat as soon as Jachwill advanced. Merle had then to deploy his troops behind the redoubts #4 and #5 and under trench protection #10 (these entrenchments used the hollow road along the Polota that Legrand took on the second day of the first battle of Polotsk). But it was not counting on the desire of the Swiss to do battle! The Candras brigade does not obey the withdrawal order when the Russians appear. On contrary, his two regiments (the 1st and 2nd Swiss) marched toward the enemy, soon followed on his left by the Amey brigade (4th Swiss and 3rd Croatian
The frustration of never having been engaged since the beginning of the campaign and having to retreat without fighting was the cause of this disobedience.

First, the 1st and 2nd Swiss deployed in line of battle marched toward the enemy, regularly delivering fire by platoon. But the Russians, supported by the cavalry of the second line, obliged the Swiss to retreat. Suddenly the Swiss stopped, opened fire again, with formidable efficiency, and then immediately charged with the bayonet. The Russian infantry turned back in front of this "furia svizzero", but soon turned and it was a general melee. The Swiss, in numerical inferiority, retreated again, but without haste, at the normal pace, without being let down.

A charge of the Russian cavalry was received by fire at closed range which put it in disorder. But the Swiss was obliged to form squares, because

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Map 13: Position of the forces in the clash on the right bank of the Polota at Polotsk, on October 18th (author collection)
of the increasing number of enemy cavalry. The Russian artillery took advantage of it, to fire on the two regiments which formed only a combined mass. In the same way, the Russian light infantry, who had advanced on the left flank of the Swiss, opened fire on them. All this put disorder in the ranks of the valiant Swiss infantry. The Russian Guard cavalry squadron depot took advantage of this disorder by a charge: the Swiss found their salvation by taking refuge in the entrenchments #10 on the steep banks of the Polota.

The Swiss suffered enormously from their enthusiasm: Colonel Dulliker, commander of the converged voltigeurs, was killed; Colonel Castella, commander of the 2nd Swiss, had two horses killed under him and was himself wounded. The eagle of the same regiment was almost taken by the enemy, and the two regiments were close to destruction despite their courage.

Fortunately, the events did not leave indifferent the 3rd Swiss in charge of the defense of the city of Polotsk. This regiment had been reinforced by its battalion stationed until then in Kozianouki and by 300 new recruits having joined the day before. Helped by the artillery deployed on the ramparts of the city, by the two redoubts (in particular the redoubt #4 whose guns had been removed to put them on line), the 3rd Swiss advanced forward and managed to repel the Russians.

Finally, because of the nightfall, Russians stopped their attack and they even had to return under the protection of the woods, being severely bombarded on their right by the Bavarian artillery placed on the other side of the Dwina.

According to Gouvion St Cyr, Prince Jachwill's infantry left 1,500 killed on the ground that day. But the 1st and 2nd Swiss also suffered enormously: they lost 1,100 killed and wounded of the 1,800 they were in the morning. 300 volunteers of the various regiments of Merle division took advantage of the withdrawal of the Russians to make a new exit in the plain to bring back the wounded: they picked up back 250 men who were transferred in the ambulances. Twenty Swiss of the 3rd regiment managed at the same time to liberate 300 Bavarian prisoners made by the Russians in the attack.

In the end of the day, Vlastov occupied the ruins of Prissmimitza with the help of Stolypin, but Spass remained in the hands of the French, relying on the redoubt built on the site of the monastery.

Thus, the French, or rather the Swiss, had brilliantly resisted the assaults of the Russians despite a balance of forces of more than two against one, like on the other bank of the Polota.

**On other areas of the battlefield**

The reports of the cavalry that Gouvion St Cyr had sent downstream and upstream of Polotsk, on the left bank of the Dwina, were reassuring. But wrongly...
Downstream from Polotsk, Corbineau had stopped on the bank of the Uzacz river, because his horses, wrote St Cyr, were very tired. He had met four or five squadrons of Russian hussars supported by three or four infantry companies. It was thought, on the French side, that they were men from the Bedriagua detachment, and no one on the French side imagined that they could be men belonging to the Steinheil Corps. Indeed, if Corbineau had pushed his scouting a little further, he would have seen all the forces of Steinheil, who were arriving on the Uzacz.

Upstream of the Dwina, on the road to Oula, Doumerc had found nothing alarming either, while the concerns of St Cyr were focused on this point. Indeed, because of the attacks that had occurred near Gorodok the previous days, the French staff worried about the possible passage of Russian forces on the left bank of the Dwina, between Vitebsk and Polotsk, which would cut Polotsk of the Grande Armée. We saw that it was the original Russian plan wanted by the Czar, which was abandoned by Wittgenstein, due to the difficulty to set foot enough men on the south bank of the Dwina. The hope of Wittgenstein was that the crossing of Alexeiev’s forces on the left bank of the Dwina would be enough to cause the withdrawal of St Cyr in the south bank of the Dwina.

**Losses**

It is difficult to estimate the losses of this first day of this battle. It is certain that they were high, especially for the Swiss. The 1st Swiss lost 33 of its 50 officers present on October 18th; the 2nd regiment, 42. These two regiments together were 1,800 strong on the morning of the 18th; they were reduced to 700 men at the end of the day. The 3rd Croatian provisional lost 10 officers, but it seems, for the two days of battle.

**Second day: October 19th**

The night of October 18th to 19th was calm on the battlefield. On the morning of the 19th, the Russians moved only to correct the location of
some units in order to create a kind of hermetic semicircle around Polotsk. Wittgenstein went to Gorianoui, about 15 miles from Polotsk, where Alexseiev was. He wanted to see by himself the possibility or the difficulty of crossing the Dwina. His orders to the forces positioned in front of Polotsk were to wait either for the arrival of Steinheil or the French withdrawal, to resume the offensive. Jachwill was ordered to fire all his artillery as soon as he saw Steinheil’s vanguard on the left bank of the Dwina. Thus alerted, all the Russian forces had to advance against the town.

St Cyr took advantage of the Russian inaction to lead his wounded, contact with an enemy force estimated at 5,000 infantry and 12 squadrons of cavalry: it could not be Bedriagua, but necessarily reinforcements from Riga.

To the testimony of the staff officer, general Corbineau was vigorously repulsed by the Russians. These would soon reach Polotsk by the south bank of the Dwina if nothing was attempted to slow them down. Gouvion St Cyr decided to discreetly remove a regiment from each of the three divisions of the II Corps: the 19th line regiment for the 6th division, the 37th line (combined with the 124th) for the 8th division and the 2nd Swiss for the 9th division: about 3,000 men. They were able to go covertly on the left bank of the Dwina using the steep banks of the Polota to hide their movement. At noon, these regiments, under the command of general Amey, were assembled behind old Polotsk on the left bank of the Dwina. They took the road to Roudnia to join Corbineau, soon followed by the 7th cuirassiers of

At about 10:00 am, an aide-de-camp of general Corbineau arrived to warn St Cyr and rectify the falsely reassuring report of the day before. Indeed, general Corbineau was now in

The second battle of Polotsk, October 18-19th (Peter von Hess)
general Lhéritier, brought back to Polotsk.

The Russians saw the movements on the left bank of the Dwina, but they believed in fresh reserves, and not in units that had left the north bank stripped.

At around 2 pm, Corbineau’s aide-de-camp returned to St Cyr, announcing that the enemy seen on the banks of the Uzacz was the Steinheil Corps, 10 to 12,000 men strong, and that the small force opposed to it, was completely routed. Shortly thereafter, convoys of sick and wounded from units opposed to Steinheil arrived on Polotsk. The Russians on the right bank of the Dwina enjoyed seeing this convoys. Their joy increased when they saw the Bavarian artillery on the left bank of the Dwina, which had done so much harm to them the day before, turning against the Russian troops which would soon arrive from Roudnia: It was 3 pm.

It was at this moment that Gouvion St Cyr decided to abandon Polotsk and go on the left bank of the Dwina. Urged by several generals to withdraw immediately (especially general Aubry, chief of his artillery), the Marshal refused: he hoped for a saving haze which would conceal from the eyes of the Russians the withdrawal of the troops. Without it, it was necessary to wait until at least 4:30 pm and beginning of darkness before he can start to retreat. But precisely, a providential haze was formed, which allowed to hide the troop movements that began a little before 4 pm. Fortunately for the Franco-Bavarians, the troops who retreated from Bononia, because of Steinheil advance, reformed in the woods near Ekimania (about 2-3 miles from Polotsk) and were able to stop the Russians.

With the protection of the fog and then the darkness, the artillery began its withdrawal, followed by the division Legrand, then the Bavarians of redoubts #4 and #5. The division Maison followed and finally the division Merle.

Unfortunately, around 8 pm, soldiers of the division Legrand, reluctant to abandon their cantonments to the Russians, set fire to them, alerting Wittgenstein of the withdrawal. As a result, 60 Russian howitzers and heavy pieces fired on Polotsk. At 8:30 pm, the city was in flames and everyone saw like in broad daylight. Seeing the damage that the Russian artillery did to the houses of the city, Gouvion Saint-Cyr sent a parliamentarian so that the hospitals were not the target of the Russian guns.

Finally, at 11 pm, the Russian infantry reached the old ramparts of
Polotsk on three points. The divisions Maison and Merle, each on their side of the Polota, were on the rearguard and managed to contain the enemy. The 4th Swiss, assisted by the 11th light infantry regiment, repulsed the first assault bayonet; the 123rd line put a brave face by repelling a second assault. The 1st and 3rd Swiss as well as the Croatian provisional regiment, whose colonel was killed on this occasion, also heroically defended the retreat of the II Corps, before themselves crossing the Dwina.

At 2 pm on October 20th, the Russians were the masters of a city of Polotsk consumed by the flames. The 4th Swiss, which remained the last unit of the II Corps on the right bank of the Dwina, defended its retreat, street by street, then crossed the Dwina by the last of the three still passable bridges, and blew it up. Only one French gun will remain in the hands of the Russians.

According to the Russians, the French would have had more than 1,000 prisoners (not counting those made the day before), lost a gun and a considerable number of food and provisions.

In any case, these last fights were expensive for the II Corps: the 4th Swiss, for example, lost 35 officers and 400 men. The untransportable wounded were left in the hands of the Russians, the others were sent to Wilna.

According to the diary of the 1st Russian Corps, the Russian losses for the two days of combat amounted to 8,000 men hors de combat. Balk, the prince of Siberia and Hamen were wounded. The French, according to the same diary, have lost 6,000 men, including 2,000 prisoners.

**Testimony of Colonel Ameil, leader of the 24th chasseurs a cheval**

“There were four Swiss regiments in the French army in Russia. ... There was a bias against these units, and General Merle, perhaps, led to it. Unhappy to command foreigners, he affected not to rely on them for a day of action. It resulted that these troops were always in reserve, therefore, in a humiliating position. [...] These Swiss troops, however, behave well. They were disciplined, leave barely the service, don’t abandon themselves in foraying.

Till then, the Swiss troops had been regarded with indifference. Their countenance and valor in Polotsk (i.e. the second battle, particularly the retreat in the streets of Polotsk) became the model of the Army Corps. Marshal Gouvion St. Cyr treated these troops with great respects and consideration. The Swiss troops distinguished themselves several times when the II corps was in retreat to join the IX Corps, which Marshal Victor, duke of Belluno, brought from Smolensk. [...] On November 28th, they took part in the bloody battle which the III Corps* supported in the woods of Borisov to cover the passage of the Berezina. General de brigade Candras was killed at the head of the brigade. General de brigade Amey was made General de division for the conduct of the Swiss at Polotsk. As he is a very mediocre man, it may be said that he owed this favor to the bravery of his troops.”

* in fact, long before the Berezina, the III Corps no longer existed! It was the debris of the II Corps which formed the core of the forces which covered the passage. It was Ney who command these forces, instead of Oudinot, wounded.
Third day: Clash at Bononia on October 20th

Gouvion St Cyr, who was wounded on October 19th, quickly took the necessary actions against Steinheil, who, on October 20th, had become the only immediate danger. He would have liked to give command of the forces opposed to the Russians to general Legrand, but this officer was too exhausted; he had also received two severe concussions the day before, especially when his horse was killed under him. Maison and Merle had just arrived from the left bank of the Dwina, as exhausted as practically no men to command, who took lead of the forces engaged against Steinheil.

In his letter to Marshal Berthier of October 20th, St Cyr said he had reinforced the units under Amey’s orders by two new regiments who had passed the Dwina during the night. And in his memoirs, he wrote that it was the Legrand division who passed the Dwina first, and made that its regiments had a few hours to restore. So perhaps it was the 26th light infantry and 128th line regiments

Légende du plan

1 : Batteries à barbette sur la rive gauche de la Dwina, pour soutenir les positions de la rive droite à Struwnia
2 : Palanque appuyée au château de Struwnia
3 : Chapelle entourée d’un mur et d’un fossé, et disposée pour la fusillade
4 : Inondations produites par des digues établies pour la défense de la tête de pont
5 : Batteries pour soutenir les inondations

Map 14: Struwnia bridgehead held by the Bavarians (author collection)
On the 20th, at 4:00 am, von Wrede gathered the forces at his disposal: the 19th, 37th, and 124th line regiments; the 2nd Swiss; what remained of the Bavarian brigade Ströhl; the 7th cuirassiers; the brigade Corbineau and 18 guns: about 4,000 or 4,500 men, to which we must probably add the forces under Grundler, which arrived a little late (26th light infantry and 128th line regiments: about 1,300 men). Von Wrede in a letter to Berthier dated October 30th, mentioned a detachment of the 11th light infantry under his command. Would not it be rather the 26th light infantry?

The Bavarian general organized his forces in three columns and a reserve. The left was under Amey and consisted of the 2nd Swiss, the 124th Line and three squadrons of cavalry. He took the road to Roudnia and aimed turn the Russian right flank. The center, commanded by von Wrede himself, consisted of the 19th and 37th line supported by the Corbineau cavalry brigade (minus the three squadrons under Amey), the 7th cuirassiers and 15 guns (9 of 6pdrs and 6 of 12pdrs). He took the road to Bononia. The right-hand column consisted of what remained of the Bavarian Ströhl Brigade, thirty light cavalrymen (from the 8th chevaulegers regiment) and three guns. He had to march along the Dwina to the point where the Uzacz flows into the Dwina. Finally, Grundler was in general reserve, with like we wrote, probably the 26th light infantry and the 128th line regiments.

Steinheil, who thought attacking later in the morning, was surprised by von Wrede’s attack, which reached the Russians in the woods in front of the Uzacz and the Bononia gap. The 2nd and 3rd Jäger regiments which formed the vanguard of the Russians, were jostled and retreated with difficulty behind the river. These two regiments lost 1,800 men, most of them prisoners, at the beginning of the clash. The diary of the 1st Russian Corps even speaks of a loss of nearly 3,000 men in

28th bulletin of the Grande Armée

« Smolensk, November 11, 1812: General Wittgenstein, having been reinforced by the Russian division from Finland, and by a great number of troops from the militia, attacked, on the 18th of October, Marshal Gouvion St. Cyr; he was repulsed by that Marshal and General Wrede, who took more than 3,000 prisoners, and covered the field of battle with his dead. On the 20th, Marshal Gouvion St. Cyr, having been informed than Marshal the Duke of Belluno, with his 9th corps, was advancing to reinforce him, repassed the Dwina, and marched to meet him, in order, on having effected a junction with him, to fight Wittgenstein, and oblige him to repass the dwina. Marshal Gouvion St. Cyr bestows the highest eulogiums upon his troops. The Swiss division distinguished itself by its sang froid and bravery. Colonel Gueheneuc, of the 26th regiment of light infantry, was wounded. Marshal St. Cyr received a ball in the foot; Marshal the Duke of Reggio has arrived to replace him, and he has retaken the command of the 2nd corps.»
Steinheil's forces, this October 20th, which seems excessive.

Despite the support of his artillery, Steinheil failed to hold his position against von Wrede, who was reinforced by Amey. This general had just arrived, alerted by the sound of the cannonade. The Russian finally withdrew up to Disna. Wittgenstein, who had seen the action from the opposite bank of the Dwina, decided to send Sazonov to Disna with 12,000 men to join and support Steinheil.

Von Wrede had received order not to pursue the enemy, but to settle on the Uzaca with all the Bavarians, supported by the Corbineau brigade. The other units had to rejoin their respective division the following day. Those under the command of La Mothe, on the east sector, had evacuated the Struwnia bridgehead as of 20 October, because of misunderstanding an order of St Cyr. In previous days, he had twice pushed back the Russians, who wanted to seize the bridge over the Dwina.

Finally, it was on October 20th that, after having verbally passing his orders and his command to Legrand, St Cyr left Polotsk and battlefield to heal his wound.

The losses of these three days of fighting around Polotsk were heavy for both belligerents. According to the diary of the 1st Russian Corps, there would have been on the French side, 6,000 victims (including 2,000 prisoners) for the two days; nearly 11,000 on the Russian side (8,000 for Wittgenstein and 3,000 for Steinheil).

Nafziger gives 7,000 killed and wounded and 2,000 prisoners for the French; 10,000 killed and wounded and 2,000 prisoners for the Russians (prisoners whom the French took with them in their retreat).

We will see that the same diary of the 1st Russian Corps claims the taking of 4,000 prisoners between Polotsk and Czarnicki, during the pursuit of the enemy.

In fact, by cross-checking all these sources, we can calculate the loss of 8,000 Russians and 6,000 French.

So, there were still between 38,000 and 40,000 combat capable Russians, but it is now their turn to leave troops on their roads to hold key positions. On the evening of the 20th, there remained about 12,000 men in the II Corps. Most infantry units will be amalgamated because of the weakness of the battalions, if not already been done. For instance, when they left Polotsk on October 21st, the four Swiss infantry regiments will be reduced to less than 2,000 men.

The Bavarians were less than 2,000 men at Roudnia on October 21st. They were still a little over 3,600 four days before.

Fortunately for the French, Marshal Victor is not too distant with his IX corps (about 25,000 men on October 10th).

Placed on the Napoleon Series: March 20