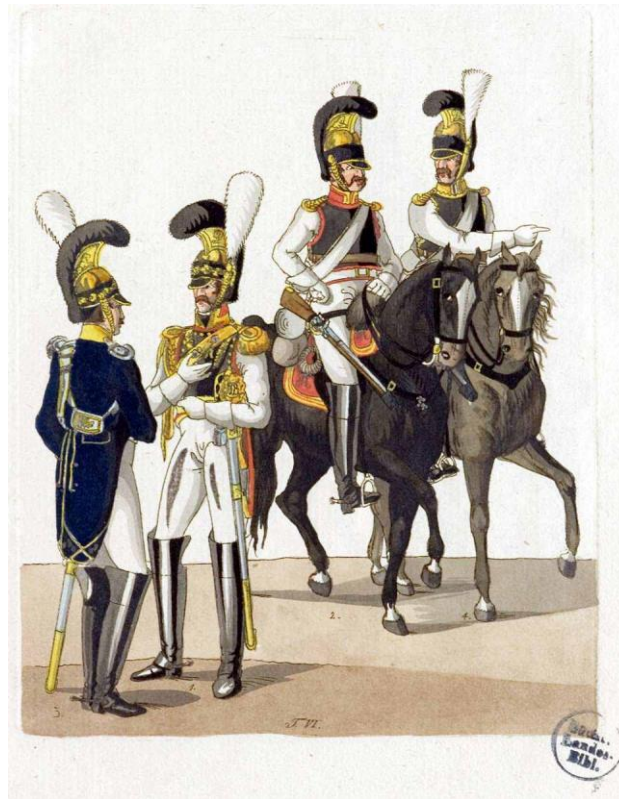


Extracted from: *Die Feldzüge der Sachsen 1812 und 1813*

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Report on the Royal Saxon Heavy Cavalry Brigade under *Generalleutnant* von Thielmann, which was assigned to 4^e *corps de cavalerie* (Latour-Maubourg's) of the French *Grande Armée* during the campaign in Russia in 1812.

The cavalry brigade placed under the command of *Generalleutnant* von Thielmann upon the departure of the Royal Saxon Auxiliary Force in the spring of 1812 was formed from the detachment from the Saxon Corps of the two Kürassier regiments, Garde du Corps and von Zastrow, and the Prince Albrecht Light Horse Regiment. They departed from Saxony with the corps, but the Prince Albrecht Regiment received orders in Karge [Kargowa, three miles west of Kopnitz] to march to Posen [Poznań] to form part of the 3^e *corps de cavalerie* to be formed there under the French *général de division* Grouchy, while the other two regiments from the brigade marched with the Saxon corps to the area around Kalisz, where the inevitable imperial order to separate these two Kürassier regiments from their other brothers-in-arms had to be carried out.¹ Napoleon had ordered the formation of large cavalry reserves in four corps and supplemented these with troops from the *Rheinbund* [*Confédération du Rhin*], the Prussians and the Poles. The first of these cavalry corps, which were united under the supreme command of the King of Naples [Murat], was commanded by General Nansouty, the second by General Montbrun, the third by General Grouchy, and the fourth by General Latour-Maubourg.

Although the cavalry brigade under *Generalleutnant* von Thielmann, which was now separated from the Saxon corps and to which *Hauptmann* [Captain] von Hiller's horse artillery battery had to

¹ See Map No. 1 Duchy of Warsaw.

be added, continued to be regarded as part of the 7^e Corps, the history of the campaign of this cavalry force cannot be placed under the same heading as that of the other Saxon troops, which came under the designation of 7^e Corps and were placed under the dedicated command of the French *général de division*, comte Reynier, since, following that separation, they were employed in a different part of the theatre of war throughout the campaign without any connection to them. But the harm which these regiments suffered during the events of this memorable campaign deserves all the more special representation, since their diligence, their endurance and their suffering are in an equally complimentary proportion to the actions in which they took part in this campaign.

The strength of each of the two Kürassier regiments mentioned above was 628 men with 605 war horses, in addition to some 30 officers. Hiller's horse artillery battery consisted of three officers, 88 artillerymen, and the train of one officer, 82 men, and 158 horses. The entire brigade therefore numbered some 70 officers, 1,426 men, and 1,368 horses.

In this state of completeness, excellently mounted, well equipped and provided with everything necessary for the campaign, long and painstakingly trained and prepared for the upcoming action, in a word: battle-worthy, this body of cavalry, like the entire Saxon corps, eagerly looked forward to their serious mission. The conviction from each individual of the good state of the whole, the mutual trust - of the officers in the good will and the fresh courage of the soldiers, and these in the insight, experience and worthiness of their officers - also gave this force, under a commander full of spirit and determination, an expression of self-confidence and awareness of self-worth, which - so long as it does not degenerate into arrogance - marks and completes the true warrior.

It was sad for both elements - the loss of half of its cavalry was painful enough for the Saxon corps to endure - this decision was incomparably more oppressive for those who were detached than for those who were left; because apart from the advantage of living and fighting alongside one's fellow countrymen, which the detached troops had to forego, there were also very significant disadvantages associated with this separation; in particular, the regiments detached from the Saxon corps lost their entire share of the provisioning and medical facilities that had been set up and equally managed with such care. Not only was there no way of making up for such a loss, but the new situation seemed all the more oppressive because it had to be assumed that the presumptuous, egotistical lack of comradely behaviour which Napoleon's soldiers were accustomed to show towards the foreigners who joined their ranks, and the difficulty of communicating caused by their mutual ignorance of the language, must necessarily cause some unpleasantness.

The Garde du Corps and von Zastrow Kürassier regiments, together with the 2. *Reitenden Batterie*, formed a brigade commanded by General von Thielmann of 7^e *division de cuirassiers*, which was later reinforced with a Polish *Pulk Kirasjerów* [cuirassier regiment] - which, however, only contained about 300 men in two squadrons - and the French *général de division* Lorge was appointed divisional commander.

The second brigade of this division consisted of 1. *Westfälisches Kürassier Regiment* and 2. *Westfälisches Kürassier Regiment*, together with a horse artillery battery from the same contingent, commanded by *Generalmajor* von Lepel. The 7^e *division de cuirassiers* formed the 4^e *corps de cavalerie*, together with the 4^e *division de cavalerie légère*, which, commanded by General Rozniecki, included the 2, 3, 7, 11, 15, 16 and 17 Polish *Pulk Ułanów* [lancer regiment] and two horse artillery batteries, all of whom received a most excellent corps commander in General Latour-Maubourg.

It is worth noting that there was a particular discrepancy in the official hierarchy, in that the corps commander had reached the rank of *général de division* many years later than *général de division* Lorge who was assigned as his subordinate.

Although Thielmann's brigade had already been informed of this composition during their

cantonment at Warta, which it took up on 13 April, the linking up did not take place itself until later in the Warsaw area, where the various commanders arrived at their posts and the course of business was initiated in accordance with the various levels of authority.

Already in this first cantonment, during which the brigade was based at Rudniki [Rudunki], serious and entirely justified concerns about longer-term subsistence were evident, and the brigade therefore set out on 18 April for the area around Uniejow, where a magazine was to be found. But here too, after only a few days, the lack of provisions became apparent and the soldiers were restricted to the food that a poor Polish innkeeper might be able to provide. There was no longer any talk of regular provisioning, requisitions alone had to help out and the yield and fruits of these are well known.

The nomadic life began. Once food and fodder were used up, the men moved on and the survival of the troops was only ensured for a few days at a time.

All inquiries and representations to higher authorities remained fruitless, because this important matter had been treated by the highest of them with a neglect and indifference of which history can hardly show any examples of a similar case.

On 23 April, the brigade moved to the area of Lutomierz [Lutomiersk] and on 25 April to Lenczyca [Łęczyca], where they remained until 3 May, and on 6 May moved into cantonments in the area of Sochaczew. The brigade headquarters was located in Guzow [15 miles south-west of Błonie] near Wiskitki.

Only seven *Meilen* [32 miles] from Warsaw, the commander of the brigade urgently appealed to the highest authorities there for regular supplies, but without success, and on 15 May the brigade moved to Falenty [seven miles north-east of Nadarzyn] near the capital, where, on 19 May, they were ordered to cross the Vistula the following day, but were first to pass inspection before King Jérôme, along with several other formations stationed in the same area. The regiments set out that evening to link up in front of Raszyn and were ready at Wola [three miles west of Warsaw] at the appointed hour on 20 May. After waiting for several hours, the troops were led past the city to another location and stationed near Willanow [Wilanów, seven miles south of Warsaw], where King Jérôme was staying. After the arrival of this general had been awaited for some time, news was received that he had suddenly fallen ill and General Latour-Maubourg took his place in reviewing the army. The brigade then had to march to Gora [Góra Kalwaria] and cross the still unfinished pontoon bridge there, some immediately and some early on 21 May. Only the field equipment crossed the Vistula on the Warsaw Bridge.

As the exertions of the previous day were followed by inadequate provisioning and the new cantonments assigned in the area of Macieowice [Maciejowice, 18 miles west of Żelechów] could only be reached after two long marches, the troops arrived there unnecessarily tired, the horses especially were in an exhausted state. Here the Polish *Pulk Kirasjerów* assigned to the Saxon Brigade joined forces. On 29 May, King Jérôme mustered Lorge's division on the battlefield where the noble Kosziusko had been defeated by superior Russian forces on 10 October, 1794, and did perfect justice to the Saxon cavalry.

On 2 June, Thielmann's brigade set out once more from the cantonments near Masieowice and, after resting for a few days, particularly in the area of Zelechow [Żelechów] and Woyziskow [Wojcieszków, 11 miles south of Łuków], approached the Bug in a northerly direction via Siedlce, arriving in the area of Kaluszyn [Kałuszyn] on 8 June. Here, after the brigade's horses for several days had to make do with half their fodder, which still consisted mainly of buckwheat, the bitter necessity had arisen of having to mow green grain.

During the brigade's stay at Kaluszyn, General Thielmann received orders from King Jérôme to assign eight sappers to each regiment and to arm them with axes. This arrangement was most

expedient because of the many impassable areas through which the troops had to pass; and they soon proved their usefulness (preferably trained carpenters were to be selected).

As a result of orders received on the evening of 18 June, the brigade was to set off immediately and cross the Bug near Kamienczyk [Kamieńczyk, 15 miles west of Brok] the following day. The inadequate and poor means of crossing offered at this location compelled them to ford the river; the horses had to swim at times, but the crossing was accomplished without any loss. On the right bank of the Bug the situation took on a different appearance. From now on, the cavalry corps marched together, in closed order, with caution, taking up positions where they were to camp and posting field sentries. From now on, the brigade was on alert throughout the entire campaign.

On 20 June, the corps arrived at Ostrow [Ostrów Mazowiecka] and, taking various rest stops in the meantime, continued its march in the direction of Grodno via Sniadow [Śniadowo], Lomza [Łomża], Stawiszki [Stawiski], Szczuczyn, Raygrad [Rajgród] and Augustowo [Augustów].

King Jérôme set out from Pultusk at this time and proceeded in the same direction via Ostrolenka [Ostrołęka] and Nowogrod [Nowogród]. The total force under his command was over 60,000 men with 9,000 to 10,000 horses. Rozniecki's division formed the vanguard; they were followed by Hammerstein's light cavalry brigade belonging to 8^e Corps, then Dąbrowski's division from 5^e Corps; they were followed by Lorge's division, and finally 5^e Corps and 8^e Corps. The 7^e Corps were several days' march behind and were moving towards Białystok.

The commander of the von Zastrow Regiment, *Oberst* von Grünwald, was seriously ill and remained behind in Ostrow where he died on 24 June. The regiment lost a highly respected leader in him.

The infamous proclamation issued from the Imperial Headquarters in Wilkowschken [Vilkaviškis] on 22 June, in which the Emperor Napoleon called this war the 'second Polish war,' to which Russia had been drawn by her fate, was communicated to the corps under General Latour-Maubourg in the vicinity of Augustowo. This form of words, however, did not produce the intended impression on the German soldiers.

It was not until 30 June that the vanguard of the army of the right wing arrived in front of Grodno on the Neman. Because this place was occupied by Platov's Cossacks, who had recently relieved Pahlen's retreating cavalry, and the bridge had been burned down, Polish troops under General Dąbrowski crossed the river in hastily collected boats, some of them even swimming. They drove out the Cossacks, who soon retreated in the direction of Lida, pursued by Polish light cavalry. On the same day, King Jérôme made his ceremonial entry into Grodno over an hastily constructed bridge.

Lorge's division arrived in Grodno via Nowy Dwór [Nowy Dwór (Sokółski), 31 miles south-east of Augustów] on 1 July. The Garde du Corps Regiment, together with the Westphalian brigade, after passing through Grodno, were stationed about an hour's march from the city, close to the right bank of the Neman, while the von Zastrow and Małachowski's regiments were sent a few hours' ride up the left bank in the direction of Wołkowysk [Wawkavysk], probably because of the uncertainty that prevailed at that time about the movements of General Bagration and the Cossacks from Grodno who were still swarming around the Białystok area. On 2 July, the Saxon Brigade were reunited on the right bank of the Neman.²

General Pahlen, who had previously been holding Grodno, had been reassigned to General Dokhturov's corps stationed at Lida - which belonged to First Western Army - before King Jérôme's arrival on the Neman, while General Dokhturov, who had already departed Lida on 28 June, was attempting to bring about his unification with the army which was moving towards the entrenched

2 See Map No. 2 Bielorrussia

camp on the Drissa, which, in spite of the measures taken by Napoleon against them since the last days of June, they succeeded in doing in the vicinity of Swenziany [Švenčionys] on 9 and 10 July, although not without the loss of a considerable part of their baggage.

Without doubt, the intention of the Russian commanders was to unite both western armies behind the Dūna [Daugava or Dvina], and Napoleon was obliged to do everything in his power to prevent this union.

While Marshal Davout had been dispatched in the direction of Minsk with three divisions from his *1^{er} Corps*, *3^e corps de cavalerie* and Valence's *division de cuirassiers* from Napoleon's main force in order to oppose Prince Bagration, who was moving towards the Dūna with Second Western Army, King Jérôme received orders to follow the movements of this enemy army closely and to press them as hard as possible. Several units were sent in order to support Davout from the then Viceroy of Italy, Eugène. Bagration, who had set out from the area of Slonim and Wołkowysk in the last days of June, moved in the direction of Minsk via Nowogrodek [Novogrudok] and Nesvizh. The Cossacks under Platov, who had encountered French cavalry outposts from Grouchy's *corps de cavalerie* near Iwje on 5 July, quickly turned back towards Nowogrodek via Nikolajew [Nikolaev], where they linked up with Bagration's main body and screened their movements. This general, who had arrived at Swierzno [Novy-Sverzhen] with the head of his columns on 8 July, may have realised the impossibility of reaching Minsk before Marshal Davout. He therefore abandoned the objective of joining forces with the Western Army behind the Disna, abruptly changed the direction of his march and turned south-east towards Bobruisk on the lower Berezina via Slutsk. In fact, Marshal Davout had already arrived in Minsk by 8 July, and Bagration's recently dispatched orders to destroy the magazines there came too late.

After a stay in and around Grodno that was evidently too long, the army of the right wing moved towards Nowogrodek on 4 and 5 July, via Skydel [Skidsel, 20 miles south-east of Grodno], Kamionka [Kamyanka, 12 miles north of Mosty], Szuczyn [Szczuczyn] and Bielica [Belitsa], where *5^e Corps*, *8^e Corps* and Latour-Maubourg's cavalry arrived on 8 July. *7^e Corps* were headed for Slonim and occupied this place on 9 July.

Jérôme did not leave Grodno until 6 July and arrived in Nowogrodek on 9 July. General Rozniecki's light cavalry left Nowogrodek on 8 July and encountered Cossacks beyond this place, in the direction of Koralicze [Karelichi], who, however, withdrew towards Mir after an insignificant skirmish. On 9 July, the battle between the Polish light cavalry and the Cossacks resumed, with Hetman Platov holding Mir all day. King Jérôme's infantry and heavy cavalry remained at Nowogrodek and only advanced to Koralicze quite late on 10 July. Once the Polish light cavalry found that Mir had been evacuated on the morning of 10 July, they eagerly pursued the Cossacks who were retreating towards Nesvizh, but soon found themselves involved in a battle with Bagration's rearguard, consisting of regular cavalry and supported by numerous artillery pieces, which ended to their disadvantage. The Poles were driven back towards Mir with very significant losses.

On 11 July, Platov continued his retreat almost unchallenged to the vicinity of Timkowicze [Timkovichi] via Nesvizh.

King Jérôme arrived in Mir that day and the masses camped behind Mir towards Turez [Turets, eight miles north-west of Mir]. The vanguard occupied Nesvizh.

King Jérôme and his infantry remained in Mir on 12 July. Lorge's division did not pass through this place until evening. After advancing about a *Meile* along the road to Nesvizh, General Lorge received orders from royal equeries to deploy immediately. It was believed that the enemy were approaching and the troops were preparing a suitable reception for them. In the meantime, only King Jérôme appeared and, after riding through the ranks of the division, he hit upon the strange

idea, almost unbelievable in the present situation, of having the heavy cavalry regiments perform rapid evolutions for over an hour at last-light on very uneven and difficult ground. After it had become completely dark during these exercises and the emaciated and weakened horses were in a high state of exhaustion, the King returned to Mir; but the division continued its march and finally camped on the right side of the road, near a village.

On 13 July, King Jérôme went to Nesvizh; Lorge's Division passed through this place and camped on the far side. The small town of Timkowicze, located approximately halfway between Nesvizh and Romanow [Romanovo], was still occupied by Platow that day. As Lorge's division was advancing from Nesvizh on the morning of 14 July, the vanguard under Rozniecki was being kept busy by the enemy. The Russian outposts located in front of Timkowicze were attacked and driven back into the town. Once the Russian rearguard was in full retreat and Timkowicze had been occupied by Rozniecki, General Lorge led his division to a nearby village for feeding. The enemy had retreated towards Romanow. On the high ground beyond this village Prince Bagration had positioned a strong rear guard to advantage. Romanow itself, and especially an old earthwork, not far from a mill on the right wing, were strongly garrisoned. Close to Romanow (in front of the enemy position) flows a stream with swampy banks, in front of which stood several strong cavalry detachments, partly hidden by scrub, whose vanguard, as usual, were Platov's Cossacks.

The brave and indefatigable Poles did not want to give the enemy any rest, and in the afternoon, under the covering fire of several batteries of horse artillery, General Latour-Maubourg, whose light cavalry had been reinforced with Hammerstein's brigade from 8^e Corps and Tyskiewicz's brigade from 5^e Corps, renewed the attack on the Cossacks and cavalry units swarming around him, who also did not resist for long. Too eager in the pursuit, Latour-Maubourg's cavalry came under extremely fierce and effective fire; the repeated attacks to drive the enemy from the occupied position failed with heavy losses, the Polish *1 Strzelców Konnych* [*chasseurs à cheval*], who fell into an enemy ambush, were almost completely wiped out. After two hours of bitter fighting, in which the Russians, instead of retreating, were pressing ever more vigorously against the Poles, General Latour-Maubourg strove to break off the battle and brought in Lorge's division in order to secure this. These men advanced at the trot through Timkowicze towards Romanow. They arrived in the nick of time, because the Russians had noticed our preparations to withdraw the combat exhausted and hard pressed light troops, to retreat past Lorge's division. The enemy now unexpectedly found a very significant mass of heavy cavalry in their place, with a calm bearing and ready for battle, and were thus deterred from further advances and, as dusk fell, retreated unseen to Romanow; General Latour-Maubourg led his force to Timkowicze and placed strong outposts facing Romanow.

The Polish light regiments had been badly mauled and their losses from 9 to 14 July may have amounted to 1,500 men.

Thielmann's brigade, which took no active part in these battles, lost only a few men and horses assigned to protect General Latour-Maubourg, because this general was usually to be found in battle where the hail of bullets was thickest, even when his presence did not appear necessary.

Bagration's main body arrived in Slutsk on 14 July, and continued its march towards Bobruisk on 15 July; the rearguard, however, after destroying all bridges and supplies, left Romanow on 15 July and followed the army to Bobruisk via Slutsk.

General Latour-Maubourg did not follow up the enemy movement until 16 July, and only slowly because of the delay caused by the destruction of the bridges in this swampy region, yet Lorge's division arrived in Slutsk on that same day. No enemy detachments were visible either on the way there or in Slutsk itself; only two Cossacks, who claimed to have been left behind to burn down a magazine, but who had become drunk in the meantime, were captured in this condition. General Latour-Maubourg was ceremoniously welcomed by the clergy of a monastery in Slutsk.

8^e Corps remained at Nesvizh, but 5^e Corps under Poniatowski proceeded via Romanow. 7^e Corps were assigned to operate on the Volhynia border against the forces commanded by Kamensky and Tormasov, which meant that they remained separated from the *Grande Armée*.

The current mission of 4^e corps de cavalerie over a period of more than four weeks, despite many exhausting marches and various alternating positions, had produced no results, because throughout this time it never got close enough to the enemy. It even seemed as if the movements that preceded Latour-Maubourg's eventual crossing of the Dnieper had no specific objective. The conjecture regarding the real intentions behind the movements undertaken by this cavalry corps in each of the various directions during that period, in view of the total lack of reliable information on this, can only be derived from the course of contemporaneous events during the campaign, and it therefore seems necessary to recall here the movements and positions of those army level formations standing facing each other, which may have had a greater or lesser influence on those marches. Yet this summary will confirm rather than refute the suspicion that the movements by General Latour-Maubourg, during the period from 16 July to 18 August, were partly caused by false intelligence.

Once it became clear to him that Prince Bagration had abandoned the plan to link up with First Western Army via Minsk, Marshal Davout and his force left the city on 13 July, advanced via Igumen [Chervyen] and Jachice, crossed the Berezina at Brasno [Berezino?] and arrived in Mogilev on 20 July, where Bagration, who had set out from Bobruisk on 16 July and advanced up the Dnieper, had unsuccessfully attempted to forestall him. Before his departure from Minsk, Marshal Davout had been given command of 5^e Corps, 8^e Corps and 4^e corps de cavalerie by Napoleon, who was annoyed at his brother's long halt in Grodno and his slow advance. These orders were immediately communicated to King Jérôme, who was still in Nesvizh, and who, probably following secret instructions he had received, left the army and began his return journey to Kassel on 16 July. Nevertheless, it was probably as a consequence of the inaction caused by this change in command that Marshal Davout was unable to bring those formation, at least in part, to the battle that was about to take place at Mogilev. Despite their absence and although Davout had not even been able to concentrate all the formations under his command (Grouchy, for example, remained outside Orsha), he nevertheless fought a battle very honourable for French arms on 23 July between Mogilev and Dashkovka [five miles south of Saltanovka], on the road to Stary Bykhov, with about 15,000 men against Bagration's army, which was at least twice as strong. The Russian general therefore abandoned his plan to break through at Mogilev and to unite with the First Western Army via Vitebsk. He crossed the Dnieper at Stary Bykhov on the night of 23 to 24 July and continued on the following day in the direction of Kutna and Mstislavl. General Barclay de Tolly, commander of First Western Army, was informed of these events, with the hint that Second Western Army - to which Platov's Cossacks still belonged - could and would now only reach First Western Army via Smolensk. The above-mentioned general immediately decided to leave the entrenched position at Drissa and, if possible, to forestall the French at Vitebsk. On the one hand, he was worried about the flanking movements begun by elements of the French forces since the entry of First Western Army into the entrenched camp at Drissa, which indicated that his army would not be attacked in their current positions, but would probably be enveloped from the left flank and thus cut off from Vitebsk and from the desired union with Bagration; on the other hand, he was influenced by Bagration's earlier report, according to which this general had abandoned the plan to lead Second Western Army to First Army via Minsk and had retreated to the lower Berezina. In fact, on the night of 19 July, Barclay's army moved undisturbed to the right bank of the Düna, then upstream to Vitebsk via Polotsk, where they arrived on 24 July and crossed back to the left bank of the Düna.

As a result of a second dispatch from Bagration received in Vitebsk on 27 July, concerning events at Mogilev, his crossing of the Dnieper at Stary Bykhov and the move towards Smolensk, General Barclay decided to lead First Western Army towards a link up with Second Army in the vicinity of Smolensk, or rather, forward of this location. He therefore set out from the positions he had

occupied near Vitebsk during the night of 27 to 28 July, where a major engagement with a large part of the French army awaited him the following morning, and directed his march towards Smolensk in several columns, the first of which went via Liozna and Rudnya, the second and third via Porechye. Bagration was ordered to speed up his march there. After the latter, having left Neverovsky's division on the left bank of the Dnieper at Krasny, crossed back to the right bank of the Dnieper at Katan on 6 August, the long-awaited link up of the two armies finally took place near the village of Nadva. The now united army, whose left wing was formed by Bagration's force, took up positions under Barclay's command near the village of Volokova, with the right flank leaning on Lake Kasplya, the Vidra stream, which flows into the lake, forwards of the front, but the left flank extending towards Nadva towards the Dnieper.

Several French formations had followed General Barclay's moves from Vitebsk, but this had not disrupted his march. Napoleon remained in Vitebsk until 13 August, but had concentrated the main body of his forces on the left bank of the Dnieper, between Orsha and Smolensk, between 8 and 14 August, and then advanced along the highway through Krasny. By this means he forced the Russian general, who could not possibly surrender Smolensk without a serious fight, to withdraw the Russian army from their advantageous position on the right bank of the Dnieper and finally accept the battle which he desired on a less favourable and hastily formed position.

From now on, the designation of the right wing of the French army was dropped completely, or was at least limited to the two corps, Austrian and Saxon, that remained in Volhynia.

Marshal Davout, after the fighting at Mogilev, marched down the Dnieper to its confluence with the Berezina at Gorval [18 miles north of Rechitsa], had bridges built over this river and provided them with bridgeheads, when no enemy appeared, he abandoned this position in early August and, moving upstream again, arrived in Dubrowna, on the left bank of the Dnieper, on 8 August, heading from Orsha towards Smolensk.

8^e Corps were directed towards Orsha. Two divisions and the cavalry from 5^e Corps, which was now stationed in Mogilev, advanced to Romanovo. On 14 August, Napoleon set up his *quartier général* in Krasny and on 15 August his army, assembled there, set off towards Smolensk.

In the swampy region of Slutsk, where the cavalry corps under General Latour-Maubourg had arrived on 16 July, every bridge and causeway far and wide, especially in the direction taken by the enemy trains, had been utterly ruined so that no reconnaissance could be undertaken, even with infantry, before they had been rebuilt. On 18 July, the corps suddenly set out in the direction of Bobruisk, but after only a few hours march from the former camp, General Latour-Maubourg changed his mind and led them back to Slutsk. A similar march in the direction of Minsk was repeated with a similar result the following day. On 22 July, however, the march towards Bobruisk was begun again and the corps arrived at Glusk on 25 July after very tiring marches across swampy ground.

Although there had been no regular resupply of rations for 4^e corps de cavalerie since the beginning of the campaign, their commander had issued several, sometimes very strict, prohibitions against all requisitioning, and it required the firmness of the commander of the Saxon brigade and the diligence of the officers entrusted with the management of the regiments' administrative affairs in particular to prevent the immediate demise of the force, which would have been the result of blind obedience on the part of the brigade command. It is also almost inconceivable that such an experienced and proven general as the corps commander could have intended anything other than to limit as much as possible the abuses which permission to requisition was bound to give rise to, especially in enemy territory. The scarcity and sometimes complete lack of provisions and the variable quality of the fodder obtained en route, which consisted mainly of unripe grain, the recent long marches over swampy ground, the often very sudden changes in weather, with a most unbearable heat being followed by persistent cold rain, had a very detrimental effect on the

condition of the horses, which were also subjected to unspeakable assaults on the requisition parties that had to be sent out every day. It was certainly only due to the tireless activity of the officer corps, in many respects the practical domestic arrangements of the regiments, and the care which is peculiar to the Germans, and especially to the Saxons, as equestrians, that the loss of war horses was not even more significant at that time. On 22 July, the Garde du Corps Regiment was deficient 34 war horses, the von Zastrow Regiment 43, the horse artillery battery 13 war horses, and 61 horses from the brigade could not be ridden. The regimental transport was already in a very bad state at that time, and the dilemma over their continuing movement was all the greater because the requisitioning of horses was, if possible, even more strictly prohibited than that of provisions. The number of sick men in the brigade was very insignificant at that time.

After a halt of several days at Glusk, the march was renewed on 29 July, diverting north towards Gorodok [12 miles north of Glusk] from the previous direction along the main road to Bobruisk. After very arduous marches through swampy terrain intersected by many small waterways and through dense forest, where the sappers established at Warsaw, as before, rendered the corps a most vital service, having crossed the Ptsich at Gorodok and the Berezina at Svislach, they arrived at Shklov on the Dnieper on 4 August, approaching this place with the greatest caution. It was all the more to be expected that Latour-Maubourg's cavalry would now be assigned to take part in the great operations that Napoleon was preparing against Smolensk, since elements of it, in Lorge's division at least, had not yet come into contact with any enemy during the entire campaign. The next morning [30 July] the corps moved down the Dnieper towards Mogilev, where Dąbrowski's division from 5^e Corps joined them and from there on towards Rogachev via Stary and Novy Bykhov. The above-mentioned force arrived there on 9 August and screened themselves with great caution, especially in the direction of Bobruisk.

The march from Shklov to Rogachev differed from the previous ones in that it took place on well-paved, wide roads, bordered by a number of beautiful birch avenues, and generally placed the troops in a more cultured and friendly environment.

The small fortress of Bobruisk could not possibly contain a significant mass of troops, nor was it known that any considerable army detachments had been assembled under its protection at that time. Either the dangers that might threaten the French army from the rear had been overestimated, or the establishment of 4^e corps de cavalerie and Dąbrowski's division at that time had been intended to provide an observation corps facing the force assembled at Mozyr under the designation Second Reserve Army and commanded by General Ertel, about whose strength and intentions there was great uncertainty. Nevertheless, after a halt of several days at Rogachev, either General Latour-Maubourg had become convinced that there really was no immediate danger to the French army from this direction, or Napoleon considered the cooperation of 4^e corps de cavalerie more vital to the great blows he was preparing than its continued deployment at Rogachev; on 14 August they actually set off from there once more and returned via the same route to Mogilev, where they arrived on 17 August.

Cossacks, who appeared to have come from the Bobruisk area, followed the cavalry rearguard as they left Rogachev, but at a considerable distance and without pressing them.

Dąbrowski's division, together with two *Pułk Ułanów* from Rozniecki's division, remained behind to monitor the fortress of Bobruisk and any movements that General Ertel might undertake.

Having arrived at Mogilev, it finally seemed that a more important mission awaited General Lorge's heavy cavalry than the previous movements in various directions had been able to provide.

A depot was formed in Mogilev in order to give the corps greater mobility for the impending marches, and to reduce the number of vehicles as much as possible because the horses were already very few in number, and to give all the men and horses who were temporarily unfit for service time

and opportunity to rest and recover. Of the ten covered wagons belonging to the brigade, six had to stay behind unharnessed, loaded with the saddles of dead horses. This was the only possible way to keep the remaining four in harness, on which the most vital necessities, as well as some brandy and hard-tack were carried for emergencies. The loss of horses had increased at an alarming rate since the departure from Slutsk. On 17 August, the two Saxon regiments were already 140 horses short of their full complement, but over 100 were in such a state that only a few could be expected to make a full recovery and become fit for further cavalry service. The true loss of war horses was actually even more significant, because not only had almost all the trumpeters been remounted on requisitioned horses, but all the hacks had also already been replaced. The teams of the horse artillery battery, which had been fairly well preserved until then, also began to cause concern and the loss of a large number of their train horses was soon to be expected.

4^e corps de cavalerie having now been directed towards Mstislavl, crossed the Dnieper on 19 August and arrived at Drybin [31 miles west of Mstislavl] on 21 August, where they rested for two days. It was here that General Latour-Maubourg learned of the capture of Smolensk, which was festively announced to the troops and a church parade was also held on this occasion. Whatever food had been abandoned in the town was distributed among the troops, and a fairly cheerful mood prevailed in the camp.

Having set out from Drybin on 23 August, the corps arrived in Mstislavl late in the evening of 24 August. On 25 August the march was continued in the direction of Khislavichi and it was here that the corps first entered Old Russian territory. Although there were no outward signs of this transition, a new phase in the whole situation was nevertheless very noticeable, even tangible. The hatred of an agitated people was ubiquitous, who had been told that the enemy had come not only to destroy their cottages, their fields, their herds, in a word, their prosperity, but also to topple their sacred altars. Often, on the earlier marches from Nesvizh onwards, the corps had found the locations it passed through deserted, with the exception of Jews, especially those it entered immediately behind the retreating Russian forces. But after crossing onto old Russian soil, where, moreover, no Jews lived, the entire landscape through which the march moved, seemed to have been depopulated. However, this was only apparently so, because the refugee inhabitants had gathered in remote corners, or hid in the forests with all their belongings, and sallied forth whenever they believed themselves to be stronger, and woe betide anyone who fell into their hands. The fate that awaited those who could not follow the corps because of illness or other circumstances was clear to see, as were the difficulties and dangers of procuring food from then on; and yet men had to be sent out to search for them, because everything that was essential for human survival had disappeared from the deserted villages passed through on the march. A gift for searching and finding was required, which is only given to some, in order to discover supplies of all kinds here and there, especially dried cereals, buried deep in the earth. But such a single find was of less particular use on the whole than the more valuable supplies which the brigade still carried with them and whose all too frequently occurring losses were all the more irreplaceable.

The corps received a foretaste of what was to come from the population on the very first day of their entry into old Russian territory, when the Polish lancers, who formed the vanguard, were resting dismounted in the middle of the day in order to refresh themselves and their horses, they were attacked most unexpectedly and with much shouting by a considerable number of peasants armed with scythes and pikes, some of them on horseback, who rushed out of the forest from all sides, led by their landlord and a priest. However, the wild mob scattered in haphazard flight once the Poles fearlessly stood to arms.

A peculiar and, because of the guerilla nature that the war had assumed at this time, disturbing phenomenon was the large number of Russian deserters who daily, often in whole groups, emerged from various directions, making their way in the opposite direction of the advancing corps, and thus soon found themselves behind our lines and in general in the rear of the French army. Earlier, in the

Shklov area, 4^e *corps de cavalerie* had encountered a number of Russian deserters, but not in such numbers as now. At that time, however, it was assumed that every deserter was a native of Poland from the provinces that had fallen to Russia, who no longer wanted to fight against the prospective restoration of their fatherland. Now greater caution seemed necessary in this respect, but this was neglected.

The corps marched to Khislavichi on 25 August, to Radyshkovo [25 miles north-east of Khislavichi] on 26 August, to Boltutino on 27 August, and to Yelnya on 28 August, a not insignificant town located in the same proximity to Moscow as Dorogobuzh [*sic*, Yelnya is 26 miles from Dorogobuzh, which is 197 miles from Moscow]. The French army had arrived at the latter place on 26 August. 29 August was a rest day in Yelnya, but from 30 August onwards their march continued to the right of the military road from Smolensk to Moscow, gradually approaching it via Rizikowo [Rozhdestvo?], Ermaki [20 miles south of Vyazma], Bezobrazovo and Bialosowa. On 5 September, the cavalry corps arrived at Ostrogh.³

The area through which the corps had passed since leaving Mogilev was fertile and mostly flat. Light woodland, consisting mainly of small birch forests, are scattered across the landscape between meadows, villages and orchards, providing pleasant contrasts to the eye. The Russian villages are, by the way, laid out much more elegantly than the Polish, and the interiors of the houses are also cleaner and more inviting.

The marches from Drybin onwards were very tiring and usually lasted from daybreak until late in the evening. The closer 4^e *corps de cavalerie* got to their rendezvous with the *Grande Armée*, the more frequently were the flames of burning villages seen to the left, as if they were signals to indicate the positions of the various corps; the masses of camp fires might also be mistaken for villages that had been set on fire.

The submission of precise strength returns and ammunition holdings, ordered on 5 September, showed the imminent proximity of the looming battle.

The march on 6 September soon led Latour-Maubourg's cavalry to join forces with the French army which, on 5 September, had already fought a fierce battle with the Russian army encamped in a fortified position 11 *versts* [seven miles] from Mozhaïsk behind the village of Borodino, and had captured a redoubt located forwards of the Russian left flank. General Kutuzov, who had been placed at the head of the Russian army since the last days of August, was determined to accept the pitched battle that Napoleon had already often offered.⁴

Lorge's division had been dismounted in the vicinity of the redoubt captured by the French on 5 September, to the left of the so-called old road from Smolensk to Mozhaïsk and thus on the extreme right wing of the French position, since ten o'clock in the morning, awaiting further orders. The whole day of 6 September passed without fighting, both armies busy with the essential preparations for the following day. It was almost evening when Lorge's division was put on the move and assigned to a bivouac position a few thousand paces to the left in a small birch grove, behind which the Kolocha river flowed. Rozniecki's division had moved further to the right and fought alongside 5^e *Corps* on 7 September. During the night the horses were left unsaddled and every moment that remained was devoted to resting. Orders stated that everyone was to be ready for battle at reveille the following morning, the officers were to be dressed in parade uniform (*en grande tenue*), and on 7 September, at daybreak, the regiments were ordered to mount up and advance.

The Saxons went to battle with the greatest enthusiasm. So great was their eagerness to fight that several officers who had been suffering from fever for weeks, despite their weakness and all their remonstrances, rejoined their regiments; indeed, private soldiers who were not to be placed in the

3 See Map No. 3 Smolensk to Moscow.

4 See Map No. 4 Borodino

line because of illness or because they were too poorly mounted had to be physically prevented from surreptitiously joining the troops as they formed up.

The Saxon regiments, although reduced to almost two-thirds of their original strength, still presented a fine sight and were closer to establishment and, as far as the horses were concerned, in better condition than almost all the regiments of the French, German and Polish cavalry. The French *Garde* greeted us joyfully as the brigade marched past them in an excellent and proud manner.

On 7 September, the Garde du Corps Regiment had 450 men in the ranks, the von Zastrow Regiment had no more than 400 men, while Małachowski's Polish *Pulk Kirasjerów* had about 180.

King Murat, the Commander-in-Chief of the entire cavalry, also saw the brigade here for the first time. He rode through the ranks in his fantastic outfit, with a happy expression on his face, and was greeted with jubilation.

Napoleon, surrounded by the great *État-major général*, halted by the redoubt captured on 5 September, near his *Garde*. At two o'clock in the morning he had dictated the famous order of the day, which was also communicated to Lorge's Division before they went into action.

The Saxon Brigade did not need any encouraging speeches to increase their fighting spirit, but the prospect of abundance and good winter quarters was enough to put the soldier, who had been deprived for so long, in a good mood.

Although the purpose of these pages is by no means to provide a complete picture of the great battle on the Moskva, while the aim here is actually only to describe the part that the Saxon cavalry brigade played in the events of 7 September, it is nevertheless indispensable, in order to understand the individual story, to sketch out in a few strokes a general picture of the ground on which the battle took place, of the mutual dispositions and the main events of the battle.

The position of the Russian army was on the right bank of the Kolocha river, along the high ground that rises on both sides of the village of Borodino, through which the military road from Smolensk to Moscow passes. On our left, the slopes descend close to the Moskva; those on the right, however, extend much further towards a large forest, and where the so-called old road cuts through the forest, they gradually disappear into gentle rises. Borodino lies on the left bank of the Kolocha, which flows almost northward towards the Moskva, into which it flows at a distance of one and a half hours march from this place, not far from the village of Staroe Selo. Having come very close to Borodino, the Kolocha flows close beneath the line of hills rising from there on its right bank; however, the hills to the right of Borodino recede further and further from the Kolocha in a south-easterly direction, the further one moves away from that place. The greater part of the French army was stationed in the space thus created between the high ground and the right bank of the Kolocha.

The right wing of the Russian army, under the command of General Barclay de Tolly, - II Corps commanded by General Baggovut, IV Corps commanded by General Ostermann, and including I Cavalry Corps and II Cavalry Corps - was on the left of the road leading from Smolensk to Moscow, and was protected by entrenchments both along the bank of the Moskva and at the village lying on the road behind Borodino, which is said to be called Gorki. Borodino itself was occupied by the Russians at the beginning of the battle.

The centre, formed by VI Corps (Dokhturov's) and III Cavalry Corps, was under Bennigsen's command, to the right of the main road, and to the left of a large rampart which dominated the greater part of the battlefield. On the other side of the large rampart, the left wing joined the centre. This consisted of VII Corps and VIII Corps (Raevsky's and Borozdin's) under Bagration's command, IV Cavalry Corps and several other cavalry detachments.

VII Corps leaned its right wing against the large redoubt and its left against the village of Semenovskoe, which lay on the edge of the high ground and which had been razed and whose

entrance facing the Kolocha was blocked by entrenchments. VIII Corps, leaning on the right of Semenovskoe, followed the direction of the line of hills along which it extended, angled back, leaning against the forest in front of which they stood. There was a redoubt forwards of the position of this corps, and a second one covered its left flank. At some distance and separated from VIII Corps by a swamp, even further to the left of the latter, covering the so-called old road, stood General Tutchkov with III Corps and the Moscow *Opolchenie*. The reserve, to which V Corps belonged, was stationed behind the centre, to the right of the road from Smolensk to Moscow.

The French army, with the exception of the left wing commanded by the Viceroy Eugène, was in a rather cramped battle formation on the right bank of the Kolocha facing the enemy position on the high ground. The ground on which the main mass of the French forces was concentrated is undulating, intersected by small ravines towards the high ground occupied by the enemy. But this high ground rises, for the most part, rather steeply from the lowlands. The left wing, positioned on the other bank of the Kolocha, very close to Borodino, was formed by 4^e Corps and two divisions from 1^{er} Corps and 3^e corps de cavalerie. The extreme right wing was formed by 5^e Corps under Prince Poniatowski. He advanced along the old road towards the village of Utitsa as soon as the fighting began.

Marshal Davout was stationed between the village of Shevardino and the forest with three divisions of 1^{er} Corps, with his right towards Utitsa. 3^e Corps under Ney was on the high ground between the villages of Alexinki and Shevardino. Behind them, in the second line, was 8^e Corps, which had also been placed under Ney's command for this day of battle. 1^{er} corps de cavalerie, 2^e corps de cavalerie and 4^e corps de cavalerie, together with the Garde, were located not far from the redoubt captured on 5 September, which lay to the right of the village of Shevardino. Two large batteries had been set up on the high ground forwards of Shevardino; the captured redoubt also had artillery.

The dispositions for this deployment of the French army were developed from a reconnaissance carried out on 6 September. As a result of which, and realising that the enemy left wing - in itself its weakest point - had been further weakened by the loss of the redoubt, Napoleon decided to concentrate his best forces on his right wing and to attack their left flank as much as possible.

It might have been possible to outflank the Russian position on their left and force General Kutuzov to retreat in haste, as he also had to be concerned at being cut off by the loss of the narrow defile through Mozhaisk behind him, but Napoleon now wanted to fix the enemy at all costs and force them into a major battle that would decide the fate of the war, so a frontal assault was decided upon.

When one compares the various reports on the strength of the armies on that day, it emerges that the French had about 130,000 actual fighting men, and the Russian probably not more than 120,000. The number of guns brought into battle by both sides on 7 September is estimated at between 800 and 900 pieces.

Shortly after six o'clock in the morning, Lorge's division was led to the battlefield by the corps commander, where the bloody business had already begun.

The Garde du Corps Regiment were at the head of the division, followed by the von Zastrow Regiment, then Małachowski's Polish *Pulk Kirasjerów*, and finally the Westphalian brigade.

At the same time that Prince Poniatowski was attempting to advance against General Tutchkov along the old road, the attacks by marshals Davout and Ney were directed against the entrenchments covering the left wing of the Russian position. The former threatened the one upon which the left flank rested, the latter the one forwards of the Russian left wing. During the fighting for these two redoubts, the Saxon brigade was heavily bombarded from the high ground at Semenovskoe, which they had gradually approached by means of various turns and formation changes, to within canister range.

Once those two redoubts - situated to the right of the brigade - had been captured after a most desperate resistance, were retaken by the Russians, were stormed again and finally remained in French possession, General Lorge received orders to seize control of the high ground at Semenovskoe with his division.

This order was carried out by Thielmann's brigade with remarkable determination just at the moment that one of the divisions from Ney's corps were coming back down the slopes in disorder, having raced from the newly captured redoubt, thrown themselves upon the enemy force positioned in the razed site of Semenovskoe, but had been repulsed from there. The going was difficult, the slopes were steep, the enemy fire was murderous, and the fields above were burning. The high ground was reached with the Garde du Corps Regiment in the lead in column of squadrons, but it was impossible to deploy the regiment back into line. Each sub-unit rushed impetuously upon the enemy as soon as they reached the crest. The Garde Regiment was followed by that of von Zastrow, and then that of Małachowski. The Russian forces were stationed on the plateau to the side of the village in strong squares arranged in a chessboard pattern. Several of them were cut down and overrun, and a battery that had initially been on the forward slope was captured. Many of the enemy bled under the sabres of the riders, yet others threw themselves flat on the ground and let the wild swarm chase over them. A large detachment of enemy cavalry rushed towards the Saxon cavalry and was driven off by the Saxons after a short fight, and was pursued only too fiercely by some of them. But it was high time to recall the scattered sub-units and to face the enemy as a united force, because strong cavalry lines were already appearing near the right flank in order to protect their hard-pressed infantry. Many of those who appeared to have been killed or wounded by our advancing cavalry while lying on the ground, rose up when they saw their rescuers and fired again from all sides into the still disorganised groups of cavalry on our side; the enemy also still occupied the razed site of Semenovskoe. The regiments rallied as quickly as possible and were formed up in line. The Westphalian brigade, which had immediately followed the Saxon Brigade, was on its left. The Russian cavalry which had been observed on the right flank, consisting of lancers, dragoons and hussars, had arrived and in the meantime abandoned their attempted, indecisive attacks, because several brigades of French cavalry from *1^{er} corps de cavalerie* had moved up to support Lorge's division, whereupon those units of Russian infantry which had regrouped under the protection of their cavalry retreated to the left towards the forest. Meanwhile, after Friant's division from *1^{er} Corps* had driven the enemy out of Semenovskoe and *3^e Corps* had positioned themselves to one side of this location, Lorge's division was led back down from the plateau onto the plain and, by a move to the left, was brought closer to the centre of the enemy position. Lengthy and fierce fighting continued on the high ground at Semenovskoe until afternoon, as the Russians did everything they could to regain possession of the village, but Marshal Ney steadfastly held onto the conquered ground. The Saxon brigade brought back a captured cannon and 250 prisoners, but lost many good officers, capable fighters and, among others, the brave commander of the Garde du Corps Regiment, *Oberst von Leyßer*, who was wounded and taken prisoner. There was much joy among the regiments when some of their officers and soldiers, who had been thought lost, returned to the division which had meanwhile redeployed on the plain.

This small group had experienced a curious fate during this period. In pursuit of the Russian cavalry formation which had thrown itself at the Saxon regiments immediately behind the blasted infantry squares but had been forced to retreat by them, a group of perhaps 100 men, with six to eight officers at their head, chased after the Russians without paying any attention to whether their own regiments were coming up behind them. The enemy detachment, mounted on better fed horses, soon gained a significant lead. Thus, they rushed along in unstoppable pursuit past enemy batteries and battalions, even entire reserve masses, such that even those who had meanwhile regained their composure were forcibly dragged along and were unable to escape the tightly packed press of the pursuers.

Only once the fleeing enemy had reached a nearby wood did the company pause and reform. A fight now broke out which could not end well for those who had so carelessly pursued the enemy, and it was only too certain that this little band was at that moment behind the reserves of the Russian army, that in order to return to their division they would have to retreat right through the Russian army, who held that whole sector of the battlefield they had just crossed. Indeed, since they were finally within firing range of both armies, the few who, in spite of this, were fortunate enough to return to their regiments could justifiably be regarded as being favoured by fate.

It was probably about ten o'clock in the morning when Lorge's division moved into the new position assigned to them on the plain. At this time the situation of the French army was approximately as follows:

On the extreme right wing, Prince Poniatowski was fighting against General Tutchkov near the village of Utitsa with varying success. *8^e Corps* had been sent to support *5^e Corps*. *4^e Division* and *5^e Division (1^{er} Corps)* occupied the redoubts closest to the forest, which had been captured in the morning and had been intended to protect the Russian left wing, and were defending the high ground which the enemy wanted to regain at any cost. *1^{er} corps de cavalerie* were in support of these two divisions in the area between the old road and the two captured redoubts on the Russian left wing. *3^e Corps* were defending the slopes around Semenovskoe against Bagration's repeated counterattacks, which were carried out with the greatest bravery. Friant's division held the village itself. The troops on the left wing, after the capture of Borodino, had crossed over to the right bank of the Kolocha, but encountered such strong resistance that they gave up the attempt to push down the main road towards Mozhaisk and retreated to Borodino. From here, Morand's division had moved further to their right, between the old and new roads, via bridges over the Kolocha, in order to take the large redoubt located in the centre of the Russian position.

This attack was repulsed and Morand was driven back with considerable losses. The Viceroy rushed to help with two more divisions (Girard's and Broussier's), the *Garde royale italienne* also moved to the right bank of the Kolocha and a lengthy and fierce battle ensued at this point against several divisions from the Russian VI Corps and VII Corps.

2^e corps de cavalerie were positioned behind Lorge's division in a substantial dip. Elements of it had moved further to the left to support the divisions of the left wing, which had crossed to the right bank of the Kolocha and were engaged in battle, and fought at the foot of the high ground on which the large redoubt was located.

Thus the fight continued at several points simultaneously, with the utmost bitterness, for hours, without giving any particular advantage to either side. Meanwhile, the cannon fire raged with a rare intensity and thinned the ranks of the cavalry exposed to it. The Saxons now held as resolutely and calmly in the dense hail of bullets as they had previously shown themselves to be swift and determined. Shifts were ordered, now to the left, now to the right, in order to bring Lorge's division into better covered positions wherever possible but death reigned everywhere. Napoleon directed the battle without mounting his horse, from the redoubt which had been stormed on 5 September. His *infanterie de la Garde* did not enter the battle and camped at his side.

After a long and murderous engagement at the foot of the great redoubt, to capture which several failed attempts had already been made, Eugène was about to attack it with the *Garde royale italienne*, when his attention was distracted by a Russian cavalry attack beyond Borodino, on the extreme left flank of the French position, which prompted him to employ that force to protect the threatened flank.

Thielmann's brigade had meanwhile been moved further forward to the left and now saw the large redoubt in front of them at a slight distance, not suspecting that its capture would be the objective of their efforts today.

At about two o'clock in the afternoon, after the Russian cavalry attack on the left bank of the Kolocha had been repulsed and the threatened flank had been completely secured, Eugène returned to his divisions, which were still engaged in combat on the right bank of the Kolocha, in order to make a final attempt on the great redoubt. Just at that moment, one of Napoleon's aides-de-camp delivered orders to *Generalleutnant* Thielmann to storm this place with his cavalry. The regiments immediately set themselves in motion, and hastened towards the redoubt at the fastest pace of which the exhausted horses were capable, from which a stream of canister and musket balls now poured out to full effect. Nothing hindered the victorious march of the intrepid warriors; first the right wing of the Garde du Corps Regiment, following Thielmann's aide-de-camp, *Leutnant* von Minckwitz,⁵ succeeded in crossing the shallow trench dug in loose sand, and broke into the redoubt over the shattered breastwork. Other sub-units followed and the earthwork was filled with Saxon horsemen. Some of the garrison had escaped through the gorge; others who did not want to leave their guns were cut down alongside them.

The Russians had now been driven out of the fortification, but by no means intended to give it up entirely. Troops from every combat arm advanced against it from the right and left. General Thielmann had observed from the high ground that considerable enemy forces were approaching and, in order to prevent the Russians from advancing any further, he ordered the rest of his brigade to form up by squadron and position themselves to the side of the redoubt. In the meantime, a large element of his cavalry had already come into contact with the enemy and a furious battle was now breaking out around the earthwork.

2^e corps de cavalerie, in which two fine French *régiments des carabiniers* were particularly notable, came to the aid of Lorge's badly pressed division, yet at this moment the battle seemed to be taking a favourable turn for the Russians, who threw themselves with ever increasing impetuosity upon the sub-units nearest to them. All the troops occupying the top of the redoubt on this side, had already disappeared; they were already beginning to give way to the enemy advance up to the crest of the high ground, and individual Russian infantrymen were firing at the few horsemen who were still holding out in the redoubt; the number of these steadfast men was dwindling and abandoning the earthwork seemed almost inevitable; then eventually an infantry regiment from the army of the left wing came charging forward, reached the redoubt, in which there were barely ten men from Thielmann's brigade remaining, and established themselves inside. They were soon followed by several French regiments, and now the Russian troops, still fighting on the flanks, also gradually retreated; the cuirassiers, however, only retreated after the most stubborn resistance, and Kutuzov, seeing that this strong-point was irretrievably lost, fought only to secure the retreat.

Soon after this decisive victory, Marshal Ney also found less resistance on the high ground at Semenovskoe, and gradually gained more ground here.

After a long, bloody fight at Utitsa, General Tutchkov retreated in front of Poniatowski, but not until the afternoon. The French troops on the right wing now occupied and held most of the enemy left wing positions. However, no further major attacks were made on the entrenchments that had been built on the main road to Mozhaïsk to protect the right Russian wing. It was now clearly apparent that the Russian left wing was beginning to retreat; in the forest behind their front, the columns were forming up for their departure with the greatest regularity.

French forces were harassed from the Russian right wing, which remained unchanged from its original positions and probably remained in their entrenchments during the night, until it became dark, partly from heavy artillery and partly from sharp-shooters. The Russian cavalry also made a final attempt, quite late, to retake the large redoubt, but this was repulsed with losses.

General Grouchy, who had crossed over to the right bank of the Kolocha during the battle at the

5 Later a Royal Saxon *Oberst* and ambassador to the Royal Prussian Court.

great redoubt, carried out a few more charges with Chastel's division, which included the Saxon Prinz Albrecht Light Horse Regiment. Firing from both sides did not cease until after seven o'clock in the evening, and Napoleon's exhausted troops mostly took a much-needed rest on the battlefield itself, for which they had fought throughout the day. Lorge's division, which had fallen back somewhat to the right towards Semeovskoe after the capture of the large redoubt in the last hours of the battle, now returned to spend the night of 7 September in the same birch grove where they had camped behind the French position.

While the casualties suffered by friend and foe in this great battle - estimated at more than 60,000 men, dead and wounded, for both sides - appear to be unprecedented, the losses suffered by the Saxon brigade on this day were, in proportion, probably greater. Of the 450 men that the Garde du Corps Regiment had under arms on the morning of 7 September, 103 remained that evening, of the 400 in the von Zastrow Regiment, 136 remained, of the 180 from the Polish Regiment, 95 remained, thus out of 1,030 men, 334 remained.

But after a number of lightly wounded men had turned up on the morning of 8 September and all the horseless cavalry and riderless horses of the brigade had been rounded up and put on parade, the three regiments still had a total of 420 able-bodied mounted men. Nevertheless, the net loss was still over 600 men, among whom were 287 dead or missing. The horse artillery battery, praised for having fired outstandingly, lost 12 men and 23 horses that day, proportionately fewer than the regiments. They had fired 600 rounds.

The loss of officers was great. Almost at the beginning of the battle, *Rittmeister* Graf von Seydewitz, aide-de-camp to *Generalleutnant* Thielmann, was killed by a cannon ball. Three officers from the Garde du Corps Regiment, died on the field (Major von Hoyer, *Leutnant* von Feilitzsch and Baron Biedermann) and a similar number died of their wounds a few days later (*Leutnant* von Kirchbach, Graf Hagen and von Polenz). Eleven officers, including *Oberst* von Leyßer, who was taken prisoner, were also more or less badly wounded.

Five officers from the von Zastrow Regiment died on the field (*Oberstleutnant* von Selmnitz, who had taken over command of the regiment upon the wounding of *Oberst* Trützschler, *Rittmeister* Graf Oertzen, *Leutnants* von Hake, von Thielau and von Matzdorf). *Leutnant* von Altrock died of his wounds almost immediately. In addition to him, another 11 officers were wounded, one of whom being taken prisoner.

The Polish *Pułk Kirasjerów* suffered the loss of one officer killed instantly, while six officers were wounded.

If but few examples of individual distinction were cited among the Saxon regiments, the reason for this was probably that the whole brigade, animated by a similar spirit, had fought with equal bravery, and the noble emulation of each to surpass the other in all that befits a soldier was so ubiquitous that no one could stand out in particular.

But the glory that the brigade as a whole won for Saxon arms on this day of honour is brilliant and everlasting. Their name was spoken of with great respect throughout the army, and even the enemy praised their bravery.

Something to be remarked on is that in the course of the battle, four horses each were shot from under Major von Nehrhoff and *Rittmeister* von Berge, and six from under *Leutnant* Reimann. Several non-commissioned officers whose horses had been killed remounted themselves on horses belonging to wounded or fallen riders, and there were some of them who executed this duty three times that day.

General Latour-Maubourg, a man who combined elevated insight with bold heroism, a noble disposition and a character free from selfishness and self-interest with simple, unpretentious morals,

stayed primarily with Thielmann's brigade on 7 September and suffered a light graze on the neck. *Général de division* Lorge, on the other hand, devoted his attention that day more to the Westphalian brigade, which also suffered tremendous casualties. In particular, their commander, General von Lepel, was seriously wounded and *Oberst* von Gilsa from 1. *Kürassier-Regiment* was killed instantly.

Conditions for the wounded were deplorable. These unfortunates were gradually brought together in one place near the Kolocha river and lay on the hard ground for two cold nights, without shelter, without nourishment, and without any hospital facilities. They were tormented by the groans of the dying and those in agony, tortured by the sight of the operations and the work of the surgical knife. Drugs and dressings were limited to the few items that the surgeons carried with them.

When the force moved towards Mozhaïsk on 8 September, *Generalleutnant* Thielman entrusted *Leutnant* Scheffel of the von Zastrow Regiment, as the most robust of the wounded officers, with the care of all the wounded from the brigade, while the regimental surgeon Hafter of the von Zastrow Regiment remained behind to treat them. On 9 September, they were housed in the surviving stables and barns of a burned-out village set back in the forest, but six days later were in the buildings of the Mokroe Monastery, located to the left of the old road. It required alert and prudent action from *Leutnant* Scheffel, almost until the time of the general retreat, in order to prevent the angry peasants swarming around the area from entering this place of sanctuary.

The Russian army began their retreat along the main road to Moscow on the night of 7 to 8 September. Murat, who led the vanguard of the entire French army - into which the remnants of 4^e *corps de cavalerie* were also drawn - proceeded at noon on 8 September and marched as far as Mozhaïsk, which the enemy abandoned that evening.⁶

The Russians had found the means to transport all their wounded along the road to Moscow, such that only a few fell into the hands of the French. On the morning of 9 September, the vanguard moved through Mozhaïsk, proceeding a short distance behind the Russian rearguard. Towards evening a large group of light troops threw themselves at the head of the vanguard, and kept up a fairly lively battle almost until nightfall, in which artillery was also brought into action. The same tactic was repeated in a similar manner every evening until the entry into Moscow, and the Russians thereby not only achieved their probable intended purpose of setting up camp undisturbed, but at the same time tired out the French troops, who had to remain under arms for several hours longer each day, while the bulk of the Russian army was resting. These clashes also weakened the strength of the light cavalry on our side more and more every day.

This increasing resistance led to the assumption that the enemy army would once again challenge their adversary in front of Moscow. In fact, the Russian army had taken up an entrenched position half a *Meile* from Moscow, which was still occupied by troops on the morning of 14 September. It was the rearguard commanded by General Miloradovich that were spotted by Murat's vanguard still in its entrenched position on the Sparrow Hills [Vorobievo]. Kutuzov had already abandoned this post on 13 September, as it was claimed, following a council of war, and had led the main army through Moscow that day.

When Napoleon received the news that his vanguard had encountered an enemy occupied entrenched position, the French force still on the return march had to hastily follow up and immediately form up in battle formation. A skirmish had already begun along the line, and Murat was just about to order a cavalry attack when a Russian *parlementaire* appeared and, in order to spare Moscow, agreed to evacuate the posts they held and retreat a few *versts* behind the capital, on condition that the French did not interfere with the march that was about to begin. Napoleon unhesitatingly agreed to a proposal which would put him in possession of Moscow and its immense

6 See Map No. 3 Smolensk to Moscow

resources without a stroke of the sword. The Russians withdrew and a Cossack screen shielded the retreat.

Murat set off soon thereafter, the light cavalry leading the way, the heavy cavalry following. When they reached the crest of the Sparrow Hills, the immensity of Moscow with its countless towers and gilded domes appeared before their astonished eyes. On the plain, the Russian rearguard was still moving toward the city. The vanguard was slowly advancing; not a shot was fired from either side.

For several hours, Napoleon waited not far from the barriers for a deputation that would lay the keys of Moscow at his feet but without result and eventually gave Murat orders to have the vanguard follow the Russians through the city. No man was to stray from his regiment during the march, on pain of death. The city was deserted. The vanguard passed through deserted streets for a long time and not a single human being had shown themselves. Every house door and entrance was barricaded, every window was firmly shuttered, every vault and kiosk was locked and bolted. The first people seen during the march were lunatics who came to the windows of the asylum and betrayed their state of mind through bizarre gestures.

The march through the city was carried out with the greatest order. While the heavy cavalry including Lorge's division were still quite far behind, as some of the light cavalry had just passed the Kremlin - the fortified imperial palace - a crowd of armed residents rushed at the column just as it was passing that point. This unexpected attack caused a momentary halt in the procession, and a French regiment of hussars was spread out from the Kremlin square into the adjoining streets. A few rounds of canister, fired by two hastily brought-up pieces, soon restored order to the march. The crowd fled, throwing away their muskets, or smashing them and begging for mercy. As the advance penetrated further into the city, a few inhabitants were noted, mostly foreigners, who thought that by remaining in Moscow they had chosen a better fate than the refugees. Many broken-down wagons and shed loads of all kinds lying in the streets testified to the hasty flight of the unfortunate inhabitants and the choice of their route.

The Russian army had taken the road to Kolomna. Kutuzov's headquarters were in Zhilina until 16 September. All the wounded and sick that could be carried away had been carried off along the road to Yaroslavl; those left behind in Moscow faced a terrible fate, as most of them would certainly perish in the flames that consumed their capital soon after with irresistible force. After a five-hour march through Moscow, during which the crossing from the right to the left bank of the Moskva took place via a single bridge, Thielmann's brigade reached the far end of the city. They camped in the cemetery, a quarter of an hour's march to the left of the road to Kolomna, in whose beautiful church services were held throughout the night. Many residents had fled there with their belongings, and General Latour-Maubourg had sentries posted at the church doors so that the devotions of the devout would not be disturbed in the sanctuary they had sought.

The vedettes, who were stationed directly facing the Russians, were advised to exercise the greatest caution and to avoid any hostility; the Cossacks, although they frequently rode up to the outposts on our side, did nothing, and both sides remained at peace.

On the morning of 15 September, matters were already very disorderly in Moscow; nothing could stop the starving French soldiers, who had long been hoping for better times, from plundering and committing atrocities. At around midday, the regiments from Thielmann's brigade received orders to send food supplies into the city; however, regular distribution was out of the question.

After fires had already broken out in several places during the early hours of 15 September, as yet almost unnoticeable outside the city, a significant fire broke out around midday, appearing from outside to be in the centre of the city; in the afternoon, however, high pillars of smoke were rising from several places. The flames spread rapidly; by nightfall a large part of the town was ablaze, and during the night of 15 to 16 September the vanguard had to take extra precautions. The vedettes had

to remain mounted, and the regiments were partly put at readiness.

When Murat set out to follow Kutuzov's movements on 16 September, the burning city resembled a sea of fire. The *Légion de la Vistule*, which had been attached to Napoleon's *Garde* infantry, were placed under Murat's command and were the only infantry with the vanguard.

Kutuzov left Zhilina on 16 September, initially advancing along the road towards Kolomna, but suddenly turning right at Myachkovo [four miles south of Ostrovtsy], crossed the Moskva and on 18 September, having left a rearguard on the right bank of the river, advanced to Podolsk. This place lies on the Moscow to Tula road.

In order to deceive the French army with regard to their actual direction of march, a corps of Cossacks moved along the road towards Kolomna. On 19 September, Kutuzov set off from Podolsk once more and took up positions on the Moscow-Voronovo-Kaluga road, near Krasnaya-Pakhra behind the Pakhra.

Murat was following the Russian rearguard by short marches, even interrupted by rest days, and engaging in numerous skirmishes with them, advanced along the road towards Kolomna, via Novopreoranienskoe and Zhilina towards Bronnitsy. It seems that it was only in the Bronnitsy area, after a reconnaissance on 23 September, that he gained an accurate understanding of the route Kutuzov had taken. On 24 September, Murat's army set out in three columns, each of which dragged a large wagon train behind them in the direction of Podolsk, and reached a large stud farm complex late in the evening. The Cossacks left behind on the road to Kolomna rushed into the village, which had just been abandoned by Latour-Maubourg's cavalry, and pressured the rear guard impetuously.

Once Murat's force had reached the Moscow to Tula road near Podolsk on 25 September, they found enemy detachments advanced by Kutuzov offering the most stubborn resistance, and Murat now ordered his army to take up positions to the right of that road, where they remained until 27 September. Lorge's division was positioned on the high ground on the far bank of a stream in order to cover the right flank, but were not disturbed by the Cossacks. On 27 September, the march continued on the left bank of the Pakhra, in the same direction, in order to reach the Kaluga road. There were several short cannonades on this day, because the enemy, moving in front of Murat's force, used every suitable point to defend themselves. Therefore, despite the timespan of the march, no great distance was covered, but in the evening a firm footing was gained near the village of Svetnitsa, and the troops remained in this position, between the two roads from Tula and Kaluga, on the following day.

On 29 September, Murat set out at midday and continued his march in the same direction. Towards evening, as he reached some high ground, the King of Naples saw a considerable enemy corps below him in the valley, on the right bank of the Pakhra. Light troops had to move down, and skirmish with the Cossacks on the nearside of the minor river at the foot of the slope bordered by swampy banks. The heavy cavalry, which had taken up positions on the high ground together with the artillery, heard strong continuous fire on the right flank for several hours, which, as was later learned, came from the resistance encountered near the village of Chirikovo by Prince Poniatowski, advancing with 5^e Corps on the Moscow to Kaluga road, not far from Krasnaya Pakhra. Once darkness had fallen and the enemy light troops had retreated beyond the Pakhra, Murat had his troops move down into the valley and camp around various villages on the left bank. The Saxon battery remained on the high ground; only the minor river separated Murat's force from the enemy outposts on the far bank.

On 28 September, Kutuzov had broken camp at Krasnaya Pakhra, leaving General Miloradovich there with a strong rearguard. There is no doubt that the enemy detachments which had been holding up Murat's advance since his arrival at Podolsk belonged to this corps. Kutuzov, advancing

along the Kaluga road, reached Tarutino on 2 October, and on 4 October took up entrenched positions at Letashevka - referred to by some as Lietatevka - on the right bank of the Nara.

Murat remained in the position he had taken up on the Pakhra from 29 September to 1 October. It was here, on 30 September, that an unfortunate incident occurred when a shot from a Saxon gun positioned on the high ground hit two French officers belonging to General Latour-Maubourg's staff and shattered the feet of both (Colonel Serron, who was serving as *chef d'état-major*, 4^e corps de cavalerie and Capitaine Marché).⁷

When Murat ordered his troops to cross the Pakhra on the morning of 2 October in order to continue the move towards the Kaluga road, only a weak Russian rearguard was left, which conducted a fighting retreat.

At about two o'clock in the afternoon, the road was finally reached not far from the village of Babenkova and an advance was made towards the small town of Voronovo, which the enemy still held. A heavy cannonade broke out here, which ended with the Russians withdrawing from the burned out town. Hiller's battery performed very important and excellent services that day; the casualties in Thielmann's brigade were not insignificant.

On 3 October, General Latour-Maubourg led his cavalry through Voronovo, but he had to halt not far from this place. Murat, who had advanced with other units, also encountered strong resistance, which hindered his progress.

When General Latour-Maubourg heard firing from directly ahead on 4 October at around noon, he set out in that direction and after a march of about three hours the corps was positioned on the left side of the road in front of the village of Vinkovo. However, the battle that had taken place near this location seemed almost over, several cavalry detachments that had been on the spot earlier from our side were returning to camp, and as evening was already approaching, some of 4^e corps de cavalerie had just been sent back to fetch forage, when General Sébastiani (who commanded 2^e corps de cavalerie after Montbrun's death), advancing towards the scrub at some distance to the left of 4^e corps, was unexpectedly attacked by a strong mass of enemy light cavalry, which charged impetuously at the head of his column and drove them back. The enemy repeated their attacks, with some success, and General Sébastiani found himself in an even more precarious situation as the ground to his rear was swampy. General Latour-Maubourg now led his corps, which was meanwhile being heavily bombarded with shells, into a position which threatened the Russian left flank, who were engaged in combat with Sébastiani's cavalry. The *Légion de la Vistule*, which had been called up to support Sébastiani, had thrown themselves into the scrub, but could not hold out and were put to flight. Strong detachments of Russian cavalry had already twice galloped up to the troops on our side, who prepared to receive them at the halt with sabres drawn, however, to their front, after receiving a few rounds of canister from Hiller's battery, they always turned back. But when these cavalry units repositioned themselves near Lorge's division and fired at them with carbines and pistols, Latour-Maubourg gave the order to attack. The first attack was repelled by Russian lancers and the division was thrown back; but once they had quickly rallied behind a line of Polish *Ułanów* and advanced again together with them, they succeeded in freeing the *Légion de la Vistule*, which had formed square and were being attacked and were surrounded on all sides, and prevented the

7 The cause of this accident was as follows: Murat, having arrived on the hill where the Saxon battery was stationed, in order to observe the enemy movements beyond the Pakhra, noticed that a Russian general with a strong escort was riding along the outpost screen which ran close to the right bank of the minor river; he ordered *Hauptmann* von Hiller (commander of this battery) to fire a shell at the sizeable group. Instead of reaching the far bank, however, it dropped short into the bivouacs of Latour-Maubourg's cavalry on the near side, and the fragments that shot out hit several horses, as well as the two officers mentioned above. Their feet were amputated on the spot and they were evacuated to Moscow, where they soon died. A thorough investigation revealed that the artillerymen were in no way to blame for the accident, but rather that their ammunition was otherwise in perfect condition, yet this individual charge had undoubtedly been defective.

enemy from advancing any further. Once it was dark, the Russians withdrew completely, and Murat's force also took up bivouacs in the nearby villages, behind the battlefield. Latour-Maubourg set up his headquarters in Chernishno [four miles west of Teterinka], a town on the left of the Moscow to Kaluga road.

Several officers and 12 to 15 men from the Saxon brigade were wounded in the fighting at Vinkovo including *Rittmeister* von Tietz who was wounded for a second time since the battle on 7 September. About 20 horses were lost. A low total, but considering the weakness of their numbers, a very serious loss. After the fighting at Vinkovo, there were still 250 men in the rank and file of the brigade's three regiments.

Murat had great respect for the resolute attitude of the Saxon regiments. He came to the front that same evening, heaped praise on General Thielmann and ordered the names of the most distinguished to be submitted for receipt of decorations.

After the Russians had entirely retreated to the right bank of the Nara on 5 October, Murat established his *quartier général* at Tarutino, near the left bank of this little river which separated the positions of the two armies, which now, as if by tacit agreement, ceased all hostilities. This calm all the more aroused the hope of an imminent peace, which was so comforting given the state of the troops at that time, since General Lauriston twice passed the outposts on our side with orders from Napoleon to General Kutuzov.

While General Latour-Maubourg's corps was camped near the village of Chernishno, the shortage of food and fodder reached a high level. The forage hunters had to be sent many hours away and often returned empty-handed, always with the loss of horses; *Leutnant* von Wietersheim of the Garde du Corps Regiment was also taken prisoner with a requisition party.

These shortages probably prompted the departure of General Latour-Maubourg, who on 10 October left the Chernishno area and took up positions about an hour and a half's march to the right of the Kaluga road, on the extreme right wing of Murat's position behind Tarutino. The latter moved into a manor house belonging to the village of Kamenka [five miles west of Spas-Kuplya] and Lorge's Division camped in the adjacent English gardens. The heavy baggage from all units under Murat's command were stationed behind Vinkovo on the main road. 5^e Corps were stationed forwards of Vinkovo towards Tarutino, the *Légion de la Vistule*, were stationed near Tarutino; Sébastiani's cavalry were on the extreme left wing.

At this time the dismounted cavalry in Moscow were armed with small arms that had been found there, in order to serve as infantrymen. But since no higher authority was responsible for the subsistence for this unit and everyone's main focus had to be on procuring food, it was a difficult task to keep them together and so the new terms of service, which they as horsemen could find no taste for, gradually dissolved.

There were still villages rich in fodder at some distance from the bivouacs that Lorge's division had lately occupied, which could be wholly foraged, which was done with considerable success in the first few days; but the Cossacks and armed peasants soon spirited this bounty away with ever increasing efficiency.

The 4^e corps de cavalerie, in its isolated location, by the extreme outposts of the right wing, with no infantry, found themselves in a situation ever more precarious as their administrative weakness was increasing daily. The increased outpost duties in this exposed position, the daily skirmishes during foraging, the very cold nights that suddenly set in after mild weather, as well as the ever-increasing shortage of food, were leading the remnants of the brigade towards their complete dissolution. On 17 October, the Garde du Corps Regiment still had 79 men in the ranks, the von Zastrow Regiment 92, the Polish *Pulk* about 50, while the battery had only a few mounted men. Three empty ammunition caissons had to be burned due to a lack of horses.

On the morning of 18 October, just as the usual foraging was about to take place, a strong and fairly close cannonade was heard on the left flank. The remnants of *4^e corps de cavalerie* had barely formed up as swiftly as they could when the Cossacks fell upon the recently abandoned bivouac and seized most of the officers' carriages and a considerable number of draught horses.

General Latour-Maubourg advanced as quickly as possible through the forest towards the road. The enemy having enveloped the left flank of Murat's position, had thrown themselves on the campaign baggage that had been piled up behind the position next to the main road, and seemed to want to block the line of retreat towards Moscow completely. But the enemy light troops, more busy plundering the wagons than with the attack itself, gave Murat time to rally his surprised detachments, while General Latour-Maubourg in particular managed a timely arrival on the high ground forwards of the forest through which the road to Moscow leads. *5^e Corps*, on which the main force of the enemy had thrown themselves after the dispersal of Sébastiani's cavalry, had, in the meantime, fought a glorious battle. The enemy contented themselves for a time with numerous artillery pieces bombarding the detachments rushing towards the road from several directions, and only advanced quite rapidly again once the troops, now retreating in good order, had come approximately in line with the position of Latour-Maubourg's cavalry. The enemy cavalry attacks were capably repelled by the troops, despite the sad condition of their horses.⁸ The Westphalian *Kürassiere* launched a glorious attack on this occasion. Individual platoons, led against the enemy with resolve, forced the enemy squadrons to retreat. The infantry of *5^e Corps* and the *Légion de la Vistule*, positioned at the edge of the forest in squares, secured the retreat of the cavalry and repelled all subsequent attacks attempted on them with unshakable courage.

General Latour-Maubourg led his cavalry back to the area of Voronovo, where they remained from 19 to 21 October.

It is almost unanimously accepted that the retreat which Murat was compelled to undertake on 18 October as a result of the Russian attack, would have taken place even without this attack. The orders to concentrate the force in positions near Vinkovo were said to have been issued on the day of the attack. Opinions are divided as to whether the King was persuaded to concentrate his force in this manner because he considered his position too weak in the vicinity of an enemy who had assured General Lauriston at the Russian headquarters that the war would now begin in earnest, or whether Napoleon, busy planning his departure from Moscow, had ordered the King of Naples to retreat. One thing remains certain: moves from Moscow related to the retreat began as early as 15 October. Once Napoleon saw his hopes of peace fading, winter approaching, Moscow threatened on all sides, the condition of the army deteriorating more and more every day with no prospect of speedy reconstitution, while on the other hand he received intelligence on the excellent condition of the Russian army, which was growing by the hour, he finally realised that it was time to change the army's situation. He also seemed convinced that he would have no other way out than across the Dnieper and the Düna, but it was important to find a route through preserved areas, because otherwise the poorly supplied army was threatened with certain ruin. There was indeed such a route, through fertile country well-stocked with supplies, south of the great military road through Borovsk,

8 The following incident deserves mention as a sign of the determination of the common soldier. Because of the weakness of the two Saxon regiments, each of them carried just one standard in the ranks, the other three were away with the campaign equipment. As the Cossacks were attacking the trains, the wagon carrying the standards of the Garde du Corps Regiment was plundered and the guard soldier Jonas, who was providing escort, was beaten and dragged away. He crawled into a ditch in this state and pretended to be dead. But when the Cossacks ignored the standards, as they were waiting for the regimental treasury to be forced open, which still contained several hundred Thalers, Jonas quickly unhitched a cart horse, seized the standards and two silver trumpets and brought them safely to the regiment as the battle still raged. *Generalleutnant* Thielmann immediately promoted this soldier to *Standartjunker* [staff-sergeant], had the standards removed from their poles and packed in a portmanteau, which was always kept in the general's custody at night, but during the march was carried by a mounted non-commissioned officer from the brigade.

Medyn, Yukhnov, and Yelnya to Smolensk; but the move there could only be carried out undisturbed if the Russian army had first been driven back past Kaluga. This achievement remained the mission of the French commander. After all the deployed corps had been brought closer to the city limits, on 15 October, the army trains set off with the sick, the wounded, munitions stores and the captured trophies along the military road towards Smolensk - under the protection of part of the *Jeune Garde*. Delzons' division from 4^e Corps was pushed forwards to Fominskoe on that same day, along the road to Kaluga via Borovsk.

There are two main roads from Moscow to Kaluga: the southern one via Voronovo, Tarutino, Letashevka, the northern one via Borovsk and Maloyaroslavets. These separate routes are indeed designated by the titles of the old and new roads to Kaluga, but this designation is so often confused that there has been some hesitation in using it here.

On 19 October, once the news of the events at Tarutino arrived, Napoleon set out from Moscow with all his troops, taking the road to Kaluga via Voronovo, and only Marshal Mortier remained there for the time being, with 3,000 men of the *Jeune Garde*. 1^{er} Corps and 3^e Corps, together with the *Vieille Garde*, marched with Napoleon himself, who set up his *quartier général* in a village called Troitskoe, a few *Meilen* from Moscow, midway between the two roads to Kaluga.

The entire fighting force was transferred from the southern Kaluga road to the one leading there via Borovsk and concentrated at Fominskoe on 21 and 22 October. Prince Eugène arrived there on 21 October with the rest of his corps and 5^e Corps, who continued the march in the direction of Vereya. Murat, who had set out from the Voronovo area on 22 October and camped at Bonikasova during the night, arrived in front of Borovsk on 23 October.

On 23 October, Marshal Mortier also left Moscow after blowing up part of the Kremlin. He also took the route via Fominskoe and from there followed the movements of 5^e Corps towards Vereya. On the same day, Napoleon directed 4^e Corps towards Maloyaroslavets, whose division under Delzons reached this place in the evening and found it unoccupied. All the remaining units marched towards Borovsk on 23 October. General Kutuzov, who had remained in his camp at Letashevka with the main body of the Russian army until 23 October, left there on 24 October, having been informed of Napoleon's movements, and took the shortest route to Maloyaroslavets, whither he had so far only sent the corps under General Dokhturov.

When Dokhturov entered the town on the morning of 24 October, one of the bloodiest and most stubborn battles of the campaign broke out for possession of the town, and, after enormous losses on both sides, it did not end until nightfall. The French finally held the place. Actually, only the French 4^e Corps fought against the Russian VI Corps; for while some reports say that the French 4^e Corps had to fight with the entire Russian army, on the other hand it has been asserted just as definitely and with a higher degree of probability that Kutuzov's main force did not arrive at Maloyaroslavets until late in the evening.

Napoleon sent almost all available troops from Borovsk to assist that corps on the afternoon of 24 October, but it was already dark before two divisions from 1^{er} Corps and Latour-Maubourg's cavalry arrived at Maloyaroslavets. Despite the darkness, the artillery fire continued for several hours; the town was fully in flames. Both infantry divisions from 1^{er} Corps were transferred to the right bank of the Luzha, but the cavalry remained on the left bank of this small river, to the left of the road leading to Maloyaroslavets. The outposts on our side were directly opposite the enemy's; General Latour-Maubourg rode to support them several times during the night. When Napoleon, who had spent the night at Gorodnya on the Protva, set out on the morning of 25 October in heavy fog with his usual mounted escort to advance to Maloyaroslavets, they were attacked and scattered by a band of Cossacks near the place, and he himself found himself in the greatest danger. Latour-Maubourg's cavalry, called to assist by some officers who had ridden ahead, hurried back up the hill as Napoleon and his *quartier général* came towards them in visible confusion. But the Cossacks

had already been driven away. On the far side of the road, a few of them could still be seen fleeing into the forest, pursued by the Saxon light cavalry of the Albrecht Regiment (which had a squadron assigned to the Imperial *quartier général*).

Napoleon rode to Maloyaroslavets and inspected the enemy positions. The great bravery with which the Russians had fought the previous day and the obvious difference between the strength and condition of their army and that of his own convinced him beyond doubt that it was not advisable to offer the enemy a pitched battle at this time. Nor could he hope to reach Smolensk unchallenged via Medyn and Yukhnov, since Kutuzov had already sent strong detachments towards Medyn on 24 October. The sad necessity arose, therefore, to order a retreat along the main road to Smolensk. The greater part of the force that had advanced to Maloyaroslavets retreated to Borovsk during the night of 25 to 26 October.

Kutuzov also abandoned his position behind Maloyaroslavets on 25 October and directed the army about five *Meilen* further along the road to Kaluga, to a position near Goncharovka, where they arrived on 26 October.

Some units from Murat's cavalry, including the Saxon brigade, remained at Maloyaroslavets until the evening of 26 October, while 1^{er} Corps remained at Maloyaroslavets until the morning of 27 October.

The position occupied by Latour-Maubourg's cavalry was changed several times during the day of 25 October; eventually they camped on the edge of a valley covered with scrub on the left bank of the Luzha; behind them, but somewhat higher up, was part of the *infanterie de la Garde*. At about two o'clock in the morning the outposts on our side were attacked with a mighty shout of Hurrah! and were driven back. Several shots from a gun placed on the high ground, which began to fire at random despite the darkness, discouraged the enemy from pursuing their advantage, but the bivouac was evacuated and the cavalry had to remain on horseback, covered by the infantry, until daybreak.

That raid was supposed to have been aimed at the headquarters of the King of Naples, which was located an hour's march further back, and therefore missed its intended target.

During the afternoon of 26 October, Latour-Maubourg set off towards Borovsk on country lanes to the left of the direct route and, in anticipation of General Sébastiani undertaking a reconnaissance, probably along the road to Medyn, proceeded so slowly that Thielmann's brigade did not arrive at Borovsk until late at night. Sébastiani had, however, had chosen an alternate route.

On 27 October, Napoleon moved from Borovsk to Vereya with the remaining main body of his combat force. Marshal Ney reached Mozhaïsk that day while Prince Poniatowski was a little further ahead, towards Gzhatsk. On 28 October, Napoleon's *quartier général* was in Mozhaïsk.

On 28 October, General Latour-Maubourg marched through Borisovo, exiting this place to the right towards the main road. On that day the Garde du Corps Regiment still had 24 horses in the ranks, while the von Zastrow Regiment still had 38.

There might have been around 60 horses from both regiments in the rear depots, but there was little hope of them being received soon. 4^e corps de cavalerie, which had more than 6,000 horses at the beginning of the campaign, had dwindled to 250 barely fit horses by 28 October. The condition of the soldiers was better in comparison and the numbers of sick were much lower than could have been expected under the circumstances, given the extreme discomfort, the almost constant lack of proper rations, the cold nights that had to be spent mostly in open fields without any shelter and always without straw bedding. The complete lack of medicine and hospitals made falling ill all the more tragic.

During these first days of retreat, every move by the French army was marked once more by burning towns and villages. Whether this was Napoleon's order remains unconfirmed, since the

Saxon brigade at least never received such orders, nor lent a hand in the devastation.⁹

Once the various formations of Napoleon's force had all reached the great military road in the region of Mozhaïsk, the order of march was as follows: Napoleon went ahead with his *Garde*, followed by the cavalry under King Murat, then 5^e Corps, 8^e Corps and 3^e Corps, then 4^e Corps; 1^{er} Corps brought up the rear.

On 29 October, Thielmann's brigade passed the battlefield of Borodino, and on through Gridnevo, on 30 October through Gzhatsk, on 31 October halfway to Vyazma, and closed up to this place on 1 November. The marches up to that point were at a forced pace because there was concern that Vyazma might be seized by the Russians from Yukhnov before the arrival of the French. On the morning of 2 November, Thielmann's brigade passed through the destroyed town and over the river Vyazma, and after resting behind it for a few hours - during which a battle was developing on the far side - advanced towards Semlevo. General Latour-Maubourg moved along country lanes as often as possible, partly to reduce the interruptions to his march, and partly because it was easier to find some nourishment for the men and horses along the sides of the main road. The artillery could not follow these lanes and had to move along the main road. From this point on, the Saxon brigade never saw its battery again.¹⁰ On 1 November, *Hauptmann* Hiller reported that he could not move the battery any further without the aid of at least twenty horses. They were delivered to him by the brigade, much to the heartache of the riders who were affected. On that same day, they encountered their comrades who had been converted into infantrymen in Moscow and were creeping along the main road like beggars, as well as a convoy of their wounded, who, having been chased out of the Mokroe Monastery at the beginning of the retreat, had joined the train of the heavy field equipment that had set out from Moscow on 15 October.

Thielmann's brigade had a rest day at Dorogobuzh on 6 November. Here, on 7 November, Latour-Maubourg's and Sébastiani's cavalry and 4^e Corps were transferred to the right bank of the Dnieper. The latter moved towards Vitebsk, the former, amid daily harassment and attacks by the Cossacks and armed peasants, continued towards Smolensk, in whose suburbs on the right bank of the Dnieper they arrived on 10 November.

After several days of continuous snow, the cold had reached a severe degree; on the other hand, the villages through which the brigade had passed in the last few days had offered the troops some food and fodder. Given the increasing boldness of the Cossacks during this march, a detachment of Prussian lancers mounted on fresh horses, having come from a field depot and joined Sébastiani's corps, was of great value. The cavalry were repeatedly stood to arms during the night.

Many had hoped to find an end to their suffering in Smolensk, but all who had struggled to reach it were to descend to a much lower level of misery, and only a few had the strength of mind and body to survive it unscathed.

In Smolensk, *Leutnant* von Schreckenstein, who had been sent to the King in Dresden with the battle report from Borodino, was waiting for the brigade. He brought *Generalleutnant* Thielmann a Baron's diploma and the approval of all the proposals he had made for honours and awards. Several

9 The following illustrates the glaring opposition that General Latour-Maubourg's nobility of mind would have encountered with such an inhuman decree. As that general set out in the morning on one of the first days of the retreat, and was already half an hour away from the place where he and his corps had spent the night, he suddenly saw it burst into flames. Remembering that he had seen an old matriarch near his living quarters who had been too weak to leave with the other local residents, he quickly sent some men back to rescue the helpless woman and take her to safety. The deed was another green leaf in his unblemished laurels. The same general never left a dwelling in Russia where the owner was still present without having fully compensated them for his own expenses and those of his entourage.

10 Furthermore, neither the valiant Hiller nor any man from the aforementioned battery (with the exception of a previously captured train sergeant) ever saw their homeland again.

of those recommended no longer had any use for an earthly decoration!

Bad news awaited Napoleon in this city. Although there were considerable supplies there, there was no means of getting them to the troops in good order or of letting them enjoy them in peace. Marshal Victor, whose arrival with a fresh corps had been expected, was tied up with Wittgenstein's corps. The fighting on the Düna had been unsuccessful, Polotsk and Vitebsk were in enemy hands, and Chichagov was on the final advance towards Minsk.

There was therefore no longer any question of winter quarters on the Düna and the Dnieper. Cast iron necessity demanded a further retreat and limited it to the narrow frontage of a single road. Instead of opening the local magazines and resupplying the troops and distributing everything that could be carried as quickly as possible, the city was closed off and men began to be mean where generosity was the obvious prerequisite for survival. As a result of this unholy regulation, the majority of the troops were left without supplies and starved to death, while once they had set off on their onward retreat, the supplies had to be destroyed.

On the afternoon of 12 November, the Saxon brigade left the suburbs of Smolensk, recrossed to the left bank of the Dnieper and moved along the route to Krasny.¹¹ On 14 November, orders were issued to form the so-called cadres. This measure was intended to merge all the still capable remnants of the four cavalry corps with a significant number of officers into a single mass, which was to be used mainly for outpost duty and was to have General Latour-Maubourg as its commander. To that end, the Garde du Corps Regiment had to provide a major, a *Rittmeister*, three *Leutnants*, a *Wachtmeister* [sergeant-major] and two non-commissioned officers; the Zastrow Regiment had to provide a *Rittmeister*, three *Leutnants* and two non-commissioned officers; the Polish *Pulk* had to provide three officers and ten men. All remaining remnants of *4^e corps de cavalerie*, which was now in a state of complete dissolution, came under the command of *Generalleutnant* von Thielmann. The urgent representations of the general against this measure which, without essentially assisting the whole, would deprive the cavalry of the foundations for a speedy recovery, fell on deaf ears. The remaining dismounted troops from the brigade were formed into a column under the command of two officers, but soon fell to straggling and scattered during the onward march.

Captain Hiller's battery was as good as lost by this time; each cannon was drawn by just two horses and all the powder wagons, except one, had been blown up. The Saxon Prinz Albrecht Light Horse Regiment was in the same condition as the Garde du Corps and von Zastrow regiments, and their remnants, after the cavalry was disbanded, joined those of Thielmann's brigade. The cold reached 15 degrees of frost, and rations consisted of meat from dogs and fallen horses.

On 14 November, *Generalleutnant* Thielmann marched to Krasny, which had been attacked by Cossacks the night before; on 15 November, the attacks were repeated and all able-bodied men had to take up defensive positions as best they could, but the Cossacks withdrew once Napoleon arrived in Krasny with the *Garde* in the afternoon. Here, on 16 and 17 November, *1^{er} Corps* and *4^e Corps* fought hard with the Russians, who were advancing along the converging route from Yelnya. Marshal Ney, who had already commanded the rearguard of the French army on the march from Vyazma to Smolensk, was given the same difficult mission from Smolensk. On 18 November, he fought against superior forces in the area of Krasny, but was cut off from the rest of the French force and had to make his way along the right bank of the Dnieper to Orsha, bringing back only a tiny remnant of the corps.

Having been notified of the approaching enemy, General Thielmann set out from Dubrowna at three o'clock in the morning on 18 November, thus saving those who were with him from being taken prisoner; because at daybreak a Cossack raid took place, and several officers who could not be

11 See Map No. 2 Bielorrussia

found and had been straggling for some time fell into their hands, as did the commander of the Polish *Pułk Kirasjerów*, *Pułkownik* Małachowski.

Proceeding along the right bank of the Dnieper, General Thielmann reached Orsha on the morning of 18 November. Near this place, in the early hours of 19 November, the able commander of the von Zastrow Kürassier Regiment, *Oberst* von Trützschler, died.

On 19 November, the march towards Kokhanovo was continued, and here order were received to form the so-called *Legion sacré*, a bodyguard to protect Napoleon's person, composed of all the cavalry officers who were not employed in the cadres and were still mounted.

The officers from each of the four cavalry corps were to be merged into a squadron of about 150 men, and the four squadrons were thus to form a cavalry regiment, which King Murat was to command with General Grouchy subordinate to him. General Thielmann, who was given command of the fourth squadron, had to submit a list of all its members on 20 November, whose strength, however, could not come close to the required total of 150 men.

When Napoleon set out from Kokhanovo on the morning of 22 November, the *Legion sacré* was on the road, drawn up in line, but without receiving any particular attention from him. On 22 November the *Legion sacré* escorted him to Tolochin, and on 23 November to Bobr, and on these days they had to march to face the Cossacks several times; but since neither Napoleon seemed to attach any value to their service, nor did the *Legion* seem to be animated by any particular, inner drive, this service also gradually dissipated, especially as a result of the crossing of the Berezina.

Napoleon's army, which, with the exception of the 8,000 *Garde*, consisted of about 40,000 exhausted, half-frozen, starving, ragged, and unarmed men, now received an addition of about 35,000 well-armed fighting men. Some of them had advanced to meet the French army beyond Bobr under Oudinot, to which Dąbrowski, who had been ejected from Borisov, had joined, but the others (9^e Corps under Victor) brought about their rendezvous via Kholopenichi.

Napoleon, who had already arrived by the Berezina at Nemanitsa on the high ground by Borisov on the evening of 24 November, had concentrated all his formations around Borisov on 25 November and had decided to cross the Berezina at Veselovo, and had two bridges built there next to each other on the morning of 26 November. Marshal Oudinot was sent ahead to Veselovo with his corps in order to protect this work. Despite the difficulty of the work, which was made harder by the marshy banks of the river, which was about 40 *klafter* wide [one *klafter* equals two yards], it was completed on 26 November before nightfall, and Oudinot, having immediately moved to the right bank, attacked Czaplitz's division, which had been sent to the area of Zembin by Chichagov, and drove them back through the forest through Brili towards Borisov. Leaving Marshal Victor behind facing Borisov, on 26 November all units were withdrawn from this place to the vicinity of Veselovo. On 27 November, Napoleon crossed over with his *Garde* and the infantry detachments that were still in good order and took the road to Zembin. Marshal Victor left Borisov that day and took up positions near Veselovo. On 28 November, Chichagov attacked the French troops that had crossed to the right bank, but was forced to retreat with losses. On the left bank, the attack by Wittgenstein's corps on that of Marshal Victor increased the disorder to a high degree. The enemy artillery smashed into the dense mass of countless individual riders and those on foot who were trying to reach the bridges in motley confusion. The army's trains were tightly jammed together for at least half an hour's march from the front and to the right and left of the bridges, like a tangled knot, and so the individuals on foot and horseback found access to the bridges increasingly blocked the closer they got to them. The urge to move to the other bank became more and more intense the more often the enemy fired into the chaotic mass.

Many of them managed to reach the bridge purely by chance, as men close to them were struck down by fragments from shells that had detonated right in front of them. Horsemen, pedestrians and

artillery trampled mercilessly over any man pushed to the ground in the crowd. Near the bridges lay heaps of such crushed and broken people.

By the morning of 28 November, one of the bridges had already broken, and the other had to be repaired several times. This delay only increased the crowding, with people blocking each other's way, so that the bridge was often empty, while people fought for access in the dense crowd, dragging each other back or pushing each other to the ground.

Even *Generalleutnant* von Thielmann and the few officers and soldiers who had held together under his leadership and who had spent the night of 24 to 25 November in a small forest outside Borisov, 25 November close that place itself, 26 November near Studyanka and 27 November near Veselovo, found themselves in the murderous crush from the early morning of 28 November. When this situation had lasted for about six or seven hours and there was still no hope of reaching the bridge ramps towards which the masses were streaming from all sides, enemy bullets were hitting more and more frequently, Marshal Victor was preparing to cross, and several riders decided to swim across the Berezina on horseback; an undertaking which was made particularly difficult by the swampy banks; the water was also covered with drifting ice and dead bodies. The attempt cost many their lives; the five or six officers from Thielmann's brigade who dared to try it, however, all reached the right bank; but even here their situation was helpless and hopeless, because without shelter, without having eaten anything since 27 November, they found themselves compelled to dry their wet clothes by a meagre fire in the increasing cold. *Generalleutnant* Thielmann and several officers managed to reach the right bank of the Berezina by means of the bridge.

After the last combat capable force had crossed, Girard's division, consisting of the Saxon von Rechten and von Low infantry regiments and Polish troops, the bridges were burned to protect themselves from Wittgenstein's pursuit. Everything that was still on the left bank now fell under the power of the enemy and, according to conservative reports, 10,000 men from the French army were killed and 20,000 men taken prisoner on the Berezina.

It was already getting dark as the remnants of the small band of Saxon horsemen set off towards Zembin, where they arrived after nine o'clock in the evening. The night was very cold, there was no firewood to be found in the area for a watch fire, and the whole place was already crowded with French troops, who vehemently refused entry to the houses and farmyards. All the provisions that one or another had brought with them had been lost in the crush or had been left behind on the left bank, and no food could be obtained anywhere or at any price. The horses had not even received a single piece of straw for the last 48 hours. On 29 November, they set off in utter despair on the road to Vilna as far as Pleshchenitsy. Five officers from the Saxon Prinz Johann Light Horse Regiment, who, due to illness, had not been with the regiment when Partonneaux's division surrendered (on the night of 27 to 28 November), thus escaped capture and joined the remnants of Thielmann's brigade.

Military bearing and discipline had completely broken down after the Berezina crossing; only the *Garde* and the troops that had recently joined the army were still in tolerable order. Every individual went their own way, regardless of which arm or to which contingent of the army they belonged; yet small cooperatives were formed, usually based on the bond of nationality or at least on the sharing of a common language, whose members always stuck together, shared the duties of obtaining firewood, water and food among themselves, and supported one another in times of need and in death.

Obtaining food was almost impossible on the main road; in this respect, the reappearance of the Jews since crossing the Polish-Russian border was indeed a welcome phenomenon, but because of their customary timidity, they only rarely provided any food. Many therefore preferred to spend the night in remote villages, where it was easier to find or to extort something. But this daring act was often punished with loss of liberty or life, because the armed peasants and Cossacks, who were

everywhere in the surrounding area and who were in front of, behind and on both sides of the fleeing troops, often rushed at night upon such villages, which were overcrowded with unarmed stragglers, and inflicted a miserable fate upon them. After several marches, the leading French troops reached Molodechno on 1 December. The cold, which had been getting milder during the period 18 to 27 November, increased steadily after 28 November and reached a low of at least 18 degrees of frost in the first days of December.

On the great military road, generals and drummers, officers and infantrymen, artillerymen and carabineers, on horseback and on foot trudged side by side in a heterogeneous crowd, without distinction of rank or status, and moved in silence towards Vilna, as quickly as their limited strength would allow. Even those who still had a horse generally preferred to walk because of the severe cold and the unsteady gait of the long-since shoeless animals on the hard-frozen, slippery snow. Many succumbed to hunger, cold and despair on this march.

Anyone who collapsed was stripped, often still alive, of their warmest clothing as quickly as possible together with whatever money or watches they had on them by those close by and was pushed into the roadside ditches. Every shed, barn and farmyard near the road was full of the dead and dying.

The appearance of those still on the march was bizarre. Wrapped in all kinds of furs, some in Moscow ladies' overcoats, their shoeless feet wrapped in furs or bast, their heads bandaged, their faces disfigured by misery, hunger and frostbite and blackened by the smoke of the watch fires, they were barely recognisable. Many of them, mostly without side-arms, were wandering around in the form of total beggars, with long staves. The cold and the extent of their misery had also had a destructive effect on the morale of many of the stragglers. The sight of such pitiful vagabonds was heart-rending.

The march usually began early, from first light, and continued until sunset. The small group that accompanied General Thielmann spent the night in Molodechno on 1 December, evaded the dangerous raid there on the morning of 2 December, passed through Smorgon on 4 December, and arrived at Oshmyany on 7 December. The Cossacks had already executed a raid here the day before.

At Smorgon, on 6 December, Napoleon abandoned the wreckage of his army, the supreme command of which was transferred to the then King of Naples.

General Loison, whose division had advanced as far as Oshmyany in order to meet the fleeing army, received orders to take over the army's rearguard as far as Vilna. The increasing biting cold - it reached over 20 degrees of frost overnight on 7 to 8 December - also caused this newly arrived division to dissolve within a few days and soon rendered them unable to offer resistance to the advancing enemy.

It became as clear as day that under these circumstances the cadres of cavalry, which had taken a very active part in the fighting at Krasny on 16 and 17 November, and the infantry units which had still maintained their military bearing, were shrinking more and more every day.

The officers and non-commissioned officers of the Saxon brigade who had been detached during the formation of the cadres had almost all lost their horses upon arrival at the Berezina and from then on shared the fate of their comrades who had already become dismounted.

The small Saxon band arrived in Vilna on 8 December and, after warming themselves up and eating their fill for the first time in a long time, continued their march to Kovno in the early hours of 10 December; however, many had to stay behind because the rapid change from a nomadic life to overheated rooms and rushed meals had proved fatal. The first night march was made more difficult by the ascent up a steep slope covered in black ice, two hours from Vilna. The few artillery pieces and vehicles that had been preserved, along with the main French war chest, fell into the hands of

the pursuing Cossacks at the foot of the hill, despite every effort, and the stragglers burdened themselves, in part, with the gold that lay in broken barrels along the way.

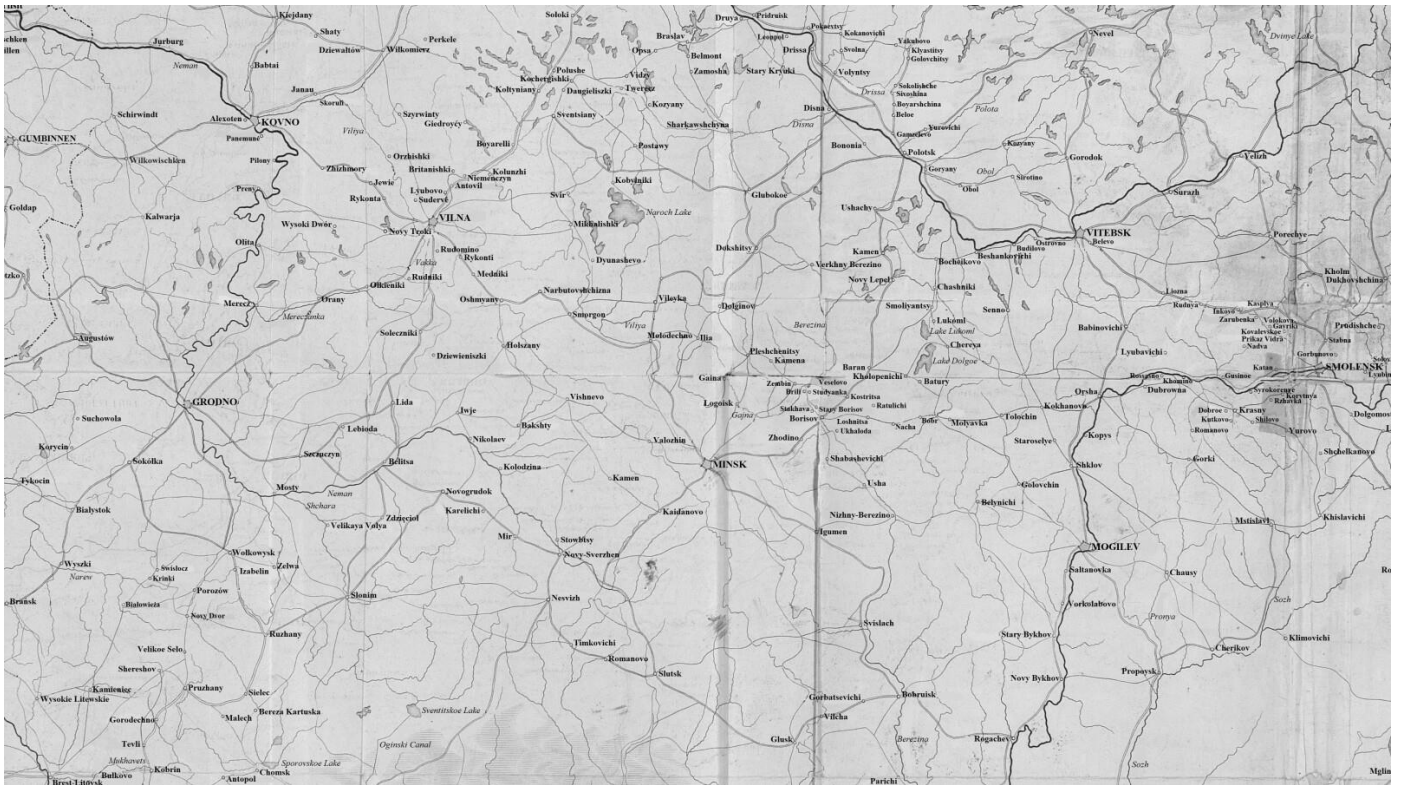
The small band of Saxons, after several forced marches, reached the Neman on 13 December, immediately crossed the frozen river, arrived in Gumbinnen on 17 December and, following a rest day, reached Königsberg on 20 December.¹² From there, at Murat's behest, *Oberst* Lessing of the Prinz Albrecht Light Horse Regiment led them to Saxony via Elbing, Marienwerder, Graudenz, Thorn and Posen. On 15 January, 1813, they reached Guben [59 miles west of Kopnitz]. The Garde du Corps Regiment now consisted of seven officers and four privates, while the von Zastrow Regiment consisted of 13 officers and three men. Three officers from the former and two from the latter later returned from Russian captivity with just over 40 men from both regiments.

12 See Map No. 1 Duchy of Warsaw

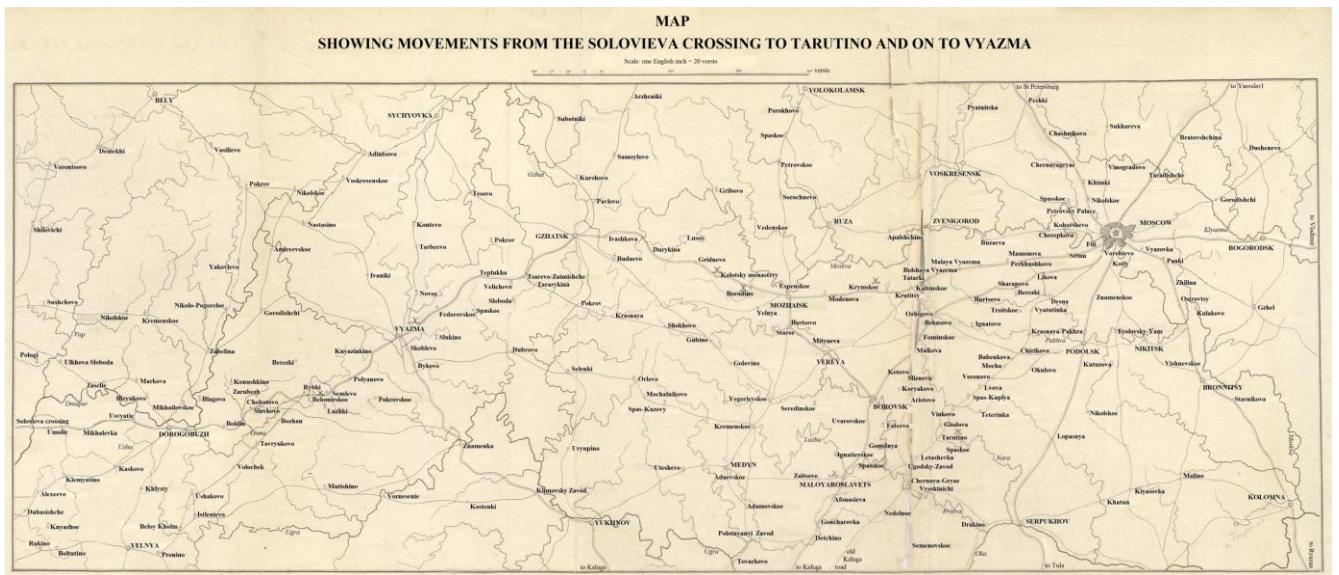
Map 1: Duchy of Warsaw



Map 2: Bielorrussia



Map 3: Smolensk to Vyasma



Map 4: The Battle of Borodino

