
It remains for us to speak of the military forces of the colossal empire against which Napoleon was going to make his masses of men act!... What were the Russian armies that Alexander could oppose to them?... Were the resources of Russia sufficient to resist this French army which, under the orders of the great emperor, undertook this political crusade against her?... The examination of these considerations is all the more essential, as it will bring down many prejudices in this respect and will restore to each the share of glory which is due to him.

And first of all, let's say that the Russian army was not recruited, as in France, by means of a regularly established system of conscription. When the czar judged that a levy of men had become necessary for the guard and defense of the Fatherland, an imperial ukase declared that so many recruits would be taken from a thousand, or even from five hundred subjects; and every government in the empire hastened to respond to this patriotic appeal. Owners of land and villages thus recruited their peasants (moujiks) at their own expense; and each lord, after having dressed these improvised soldiers, sent them to the governor-general of the province, who then had them enlisted in the different corps of the Muscovite army.

This state of affairs resulted in many frauds in the allocation of quotas. Often the cadre of a regiment was immense, while the strength was small; and when the czar came to pass the personal inspection of this regiment, there were great gaps in it, filled only on paper: an abuse which the minister of war tried every year, but always in vain, to repress. It was thus that,
according to an approximate statement of the situation of the Russian armies at the beginning of 1812, which Napoleon had succeeded in obtaining, while he was still at Dresden, the military forces of this power amounted to the figure of 485,000 men, while the actual effective amounted only to a total of 238,000 infantry and 89,200 cavalry, in all 327,200 men: difference less, 57,800 men.*

*See the Appendix (Second Part), the numerical state of the Russian armies which were to be opposed to us at the opening of the campaign.

But back to the Muscovite soldiers.

Once educated, disciplined and trained, the young soldier became calm and fearless on the battlefield. Accustomed to fatigue and privations of all kinds, he remained imperturbably at his post, because he knew how to die there, and great care was taken to maintain in him, by means of religion, the idea that dying in defense of his sovereign and his country, he would rise again immediately afterwards. Moreover, hardened to all fatigues, and prompt in maneuver, the infantryman was accustomed to crossing icy rivers and sleeping under the fir trees of the forests. As for the cavalry, it was numerous and admirably well mounted: the artillery, no less well harnessed, composed of immense equipment and educated and seasoned officers, was no less formidable than the infantry.

And then, as a complement to this military organization, the Cossacks guarded the flanks and rear of the army, scouting its march ahead. Light cavalry, capable of disquieting, of surprising, of breaking up convoys, these Tartars and these Bashkirs were a kind of Arabs of the North, who ran over the ice and in the snow with as much surety as the Mamluks of Egypt on the burning desert sand.

Independently of these natural means of defense offered to the Russians, there were others, no less precious to them, which proceeded from the very form of their government, as well as from the manners and habits of the people. In general, the Russians, especially the lowest class, lived with extreme sobriety. All inhabited villages built of wood, which they can burn without loss and rebuild without cost. In the middle of this vast territory covered with fir forests, uncultivated moors and impassable marshes, with only three months of blazing sun, under this exceptional climate, nature develops with energy, but it also dies quickly.

Now, to return to the military forces of Russia and the enumeration of their armies, we will say that, in the month of January 1812, they were composed and organized in the following manner:

In Finland, General Steingell's corps, composed of two dragoon regiments and the 6th, 21st, and 25th Infantry Divisions, presented a total of 30,653 men.

In St. Petersburg, the corps of the Grand Duke Constantine was made up of the cavalry division of the Russian Imperial Guard, the infantry division of the Guard, the two cuirassier regiments of the Guard, two grenadier regiments of line, and an infantry regiment of the same arm: which offered a total of 28,526 men.
In Livonia and Courland, Count Wittgenstein's corps, composed of the 1st Cavalry Division and the 5th and 14th Infantry Divisions, presented a total of 34,290 men.

In the governments of Vilna and Vitebsk, General Baggovut's corps was composed of the 1st Cuirassier Division, the 2nd Cavalry, and the 1st, 4th, and 7th Infantry Divisions, and gave a total of 47,520 men.

In the governments of Grodno and Mohilev, General Essen's corps, formed of the 3rd Cavalry Division and the 23rd, 3rd, and 11th Infantry Divisions, presented a total of 41,045 men.

In Volhynia and Podolia, Prince Bagration's army, consisting of the 2nd Cuirassier Division; of the 4th and 5th Cavalry Corps, and of the 2nd, 7th, 12th, 18th, 24th, and 26th Infantry Divisions, offered a total of 104,322 men.

On the Danube, General Kutuzov's Army of Moldavia consisted of the 6th and 7th Cavalry Divisions, and the 8th, 9th, 10th, 15th, 16th, and 22nd Infantry Divisions, forming a total of 87,026 men.

In the Crimea and the surrounding area, the corps of the Duke de Richelieu, composed of the 8th Cavalry Division, the 13th Infantry Division, and eight battalions detached from the 9th Division, offered a total of 19,501 men.

In the Caucasus, General Rtischev's corps, composed of a regiment of dragoons and the 19th Infantry Division, presented a total of 9,928 men.

In Georgia, the Marquis de Paulucci's corps, formed of two regiments of dragoons and the 20th division of infantry, gave a total of 23,745 men.

At Moscow there was still the newly created 27th Infantry Division, 10,641 strong.

By adding, to the general sum of the aforementioned forces, 2417 men of exercise troops, 4051 pioneers, 4851 of reserve artillery, and finally 69, 166 of garrison and invalids in active service, we find the number of 517, 682 men, which at that time formed the total of the settled troops of the Russian Empire.

Independently of this powerful army, the activity of the Russian government still thought of creating numerous reserves. A second imperial ukase, dated 16 September 1811, had already given a levy of four men out of five hundred males, throughout the whole extent of the empire, with the exception of New Finland, of Georgia, and of the provinces of Bialystok and Ternopol. This recruiting served for the formation of the depots of recruits established in the interior provinces nearest to those where the partial armies were to be united.

It was also necessary to think of ensuring the subsistence of the troops gathered on the frontiers. The main depots for food, drink and fodder were established at Novgorod, Sosnitsa and Troubzewsk. Large stores were also formed at Riga, Dunabourg, Bobruisk, Kiev and Vilna, and others of lesser size at Drisa, Velikiye-Luki, Willkomir (Ukmerge), Swentsiany and Grodno.
The entry of French troops into Prussia and their march towards the Vistula, having finally given the signal for the rupture between France and Russia, Alexander understood that the time had come to occupy himself with the organization of an active army on the western frontier of his empire; accordingly, the Russian Imperial Guard was ordered to leave St. Petersburg and proceed to Vilna; at the same time, General Kutuzov was instructed to detach from the army of Moldavia the infantry divisions which had joined him at the end of the campaign of 1811 and to direct them to Lutsk, designated as a point of concentration for Prince Bagration's army.

Moreover, the urgency of the circumstances decided the czar to order a third recruitment of two men by five hundred males, which must have further increased the mass of recruits assembled at the depots in consequence of the first two ukases which had received their execution.

All these forces, gathered on the western frontier, formed two armies, divided into different corps.

The First Army called of the West, of which General Barclay de Tolly, Minister of War, as we know, received the command, had its headquarters in Vilna and was composed of six corps of infantry and two corps of cavalry reserve. The 1st Corps, detached from the right, commanded by General Count of Wittgenstein, was composed of the 5th and 14th Infantry Divisions, besides the cavalry, and three artillery brigades with three regiments of Cossacks.

The 2nd Corps, commanded by General Baggovut, consisted of the 4th and 17th Infantry Divisions, a regiment of hussars, two brigades of artillery, and a company of horse artillery.

The 3rd Corps, commanded by General Tuchkov, was formed of the 3rd Division and the 1st of Grenadiers; two brigades of artillery, a company of horse artillery, the regiment of Cossacks of the guard, and a regiment of irregular Cossacks.

The 4th Corps, commanded by General Shuvalov, was composed of the 11th and 23rd Infantry Divisions, a regiment of hussars and two artillery brigades.

The 5th Corps, commanded by Grand Duke Constantine, comprised the Russian Imperial Guard Infantry Division, the Combined Grenadier Division, the 1st Cuirassier Division and the Guards Artillery.

The 1st Reserve Cavalry Corps, commanded by General Uvarov, was composed of the cavalry division of the Russian Imperial Guard (with the exception of the Cossacks of this guard and the three regiments of dragoons from the 1st and 3rd Cavalry Divisions), and a company of horse artillery.

The 2nd Reserve Cavalry Corps, commanded by General Korff, was formed of a regiment of uhlans, four regiments of dragoons, and four companies of artillery.

The 6th Corps, or corps detached from the left, commanded by General Essen, was composed of the 7th and 24th divisions of infantry; of the 3rd Cavalry Division, two artillery brigades, and four Cossack regiments.
The cavalry of this latter corps formed the 3rd Reserve Cavalry Corps, which was thus amalgamated with the 6th Army Corps.

All these forces were quartered as follows: the 1st Corps at Charwly; the 2nd in Willkomir; the 3rd in Vilna, and the 4th in Wassilichki.

The 1st Cavalry Corps at Onikchty; the 2nd at Nowogródek, and the 6th at Proujani; in addition, General Platoff was at Bialystok with a flying corps consisting of fifteen Cossack regiments and a company of horse artillery, also forming part of the First Army.

The Second Army, called *of the West*, was commanded by General Prince Bagration, who was ordered to move his headquarters from Zhitomir to Lutsk.

This Second Army was formed of four corps of infantry and two corps of cavalry in reserve.

The 7th Corps, commanded by General Rayevsky, was composed of the 26th and 12th Divisions, with two artillery brigades.

The 8th Corps, commanded by General Kamenski, was formed with the 18th Infantry Division, to which was added that of the Combined Grenadiers, plus a brigade of artillery.

The 9th corps, commanded by General Markov, was composed of the 15th and 9th Divisions, with two brigades of artillery.

The 10th Corps, commanded by General Dokhturov, was formed of the 2nd Grenadier Division and the 2nd of Cuirassiers.

The 4th Cavalry Corps, commanded by General Chaplits, consisted entirely of the 4th Division of this arm.

The 5th Cavalry Corps, commanded by General Lambert, included only the 5th Division.

In addition, the Second Army had twelve companies of light artillery and ten regiments of Cossacks in its train.

All the regiments of infantry employed in the formation of the two active armies were composed of only two battalions, those of the heavy cavalry of four squadrons, and those of the light cavalry of eight squadrons. There were only the six regiments of infantry of the Imperial Guard which, exempted from this rule, entered the field with their three battalions. The 3rd battalions, the 5th heavy cavalry squadrons, as well as the 9th and 10th light cavalry squadrons, formed the reserve troops. The companies of grenadiers were cut off in a few regiments, which united, formed battalions of the companies of grenadiers, which, united, formed battalions of grenadiers. A few divisions, nevertheless, kept these battalions; but those of the First Army were united into a division, and formed part of the reserves of the Imperial Guard commanded by the Grand Duke Constantine: those of the Second Army were placed under the orders of Count Vorontsov.
Reserve battalions and squadrons were organized into eight new infantry and four cavalry divisions.

These troops formed two corps.

The 1st Reserve Corps, of which General Müller-Zakomelsky took command, had its headquarters at Toropets: it was composed of the 32nd and 33rd Infantry Divisions and the 9th Heavy Cavalry.

The 2nd Reserve Corps, commanded by General Ertel, had its headquarters at Romen, and was composed of the 27th, 34th, 35th, and 36th Infantry Divisions, and the 10th and 11th Cavalry.

The 30th and 31st Infantry Divisions formed the garrison of the town of Riga, under the orders of General Prince Lobanov, military governor of this city.

Finally, the 12th Cavalry Division remained in reserve at Ol'viopol, ready to join, at the first signal, the so-called Army of Moldavia, or reserve, or finally the Second Army of the West.

We will point out that these reserve battalions and squadrons were all the weaker, as they had been forced to complete, at their expense, the active battalions and squadrons, and that these troops, after the subtraction of the grenadier companies, were now composed of only three companies, which themselves were not at full strength.

Depots of recruits, arranged in three lines, and scattered in the provinces of the interior closest to the theater of war, were to serve to supply the corps put into action.

The depots of the first line were at Padgosch, at Houssa, at Kholm, at Vyaz'ma, at Jelna, Novhorod-Siverskyi, at Konotop, at Zmiiv, at Czigrin, at Novomyrhorod, at Elisabethgrad and at Ol'viopol; those of the second line, at Petrozavodsk, at Novgorod, at Tver, at Moscow, at Kaluga, at Tula, at Orel and at Ekaterinoslav; finally, those of the 3rd line, at Vologda, Iaroslav, Vladimir, Tambov, Voronezh and Cherkessk.

Besides these depots, there were five more, which had been established at Kargopol, at Olonets, at Iwanówka near Slovianoserbsk, at Taganrog and at Azov.

The first two were to serve for the 6th and 21st Divisions, which remained in the New Finland. The depot of Iwanówka was intended for the 13th Division, cantoned in the surroundings of Odessa, and in the Crimea. Those of Taganrog and Azov belonged to the 19th and 20th Divisions employed in the Caucasus and in Georgia.

In order to mobilize the front-line depots, it was deemed appropriate to organize them into 4th infantry battalions, 6th heavy cavalry squadrons and 12th light cavalry squadrons. These battalions and squadrons were called depot troops.
The establishment of reserve artillery parks none the less excited the solicitude of the Czar. The parks of the first line were established in Vilna for 3 divisions; at Dunabourg, for 5; in Neswige, for 1; in Bobruisk, for 2; at Polownoi, for 3, and at Kiev, for 6. Those of the second line were indicated at Pskov, for 4 divisions; in Porkow, for 4; at the powder magazine of Chostenk, for 5, and at Smolensk, for 2. Finally, the parks of the third line were placed at Moscow, for 2 divisions: in Novgorod, for 8, and in Kaluga, for 10.

After having taken and ordered all these measures, the Emperor Alexander had left St. Petersburg to come, as we said in our preceding chapter, to Vilna.

Thus, a terrible, bloody, fierce struggle was about to begin, on a vast scale, between the two greatest powers of Europe! It was no longer one of those little wars of the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries, which began with small fights and ended with insignificant sieges, then nothing after: Napoleon would lead, this time and in person, against the imposing forces of Russia that we have just enumerated* the most beautiful, the most valiant armies that have ever been seen under the orders of kings, princes and marshals; in a word, this expedition had no comparison in history except the religious crusades of the eleventh century against the East. This great French army, so chivalrous, was going to find itself face to face with iron soldiers and opposed to a people fanaticized by its mystical ideas, and whose devotion to the fatherland was to be further supported, first by an ungrateful land and a sky of fire, then afterwards by a still life and an icy sky!

*See the appendix (second part), the numerical state of the Russian armies.