

The Battle of Punitz

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by

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(Translated by Dan Schorr)

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Charles XII stayed on in Lemberg until 13th September when the army columns were again set in motion northward in order to try to bring about something serious with King August. He had during the summer slipped out of the Swedish grasp with a skillful maneuver resulting in the Swedish Army looking unusually off balance and the new Swedish-friendly regime of Stanislav I downright shaken to its foundation. August could temporarily bask in the glory of this feat, which among other things meant the capture of the new Confederation's capital city Warsaw and the capture of Charles XII's first minister Arvid Horn, together with punishing the Swedish-friendly Poles who did not flee in time. This situation, however, was very preliminary and temporary; this was recognized on the Saxon side. The Swedish counterattack was only a question of time – Charles XII could not remain in Galicia the whole winter, most of all since one had already plundered to satisfy needs among the nobles around Lemberg. The hunt would soon be taken up again, and for August, the next question was only how he would be able to get himself and his troops away from the Polish theater of war.

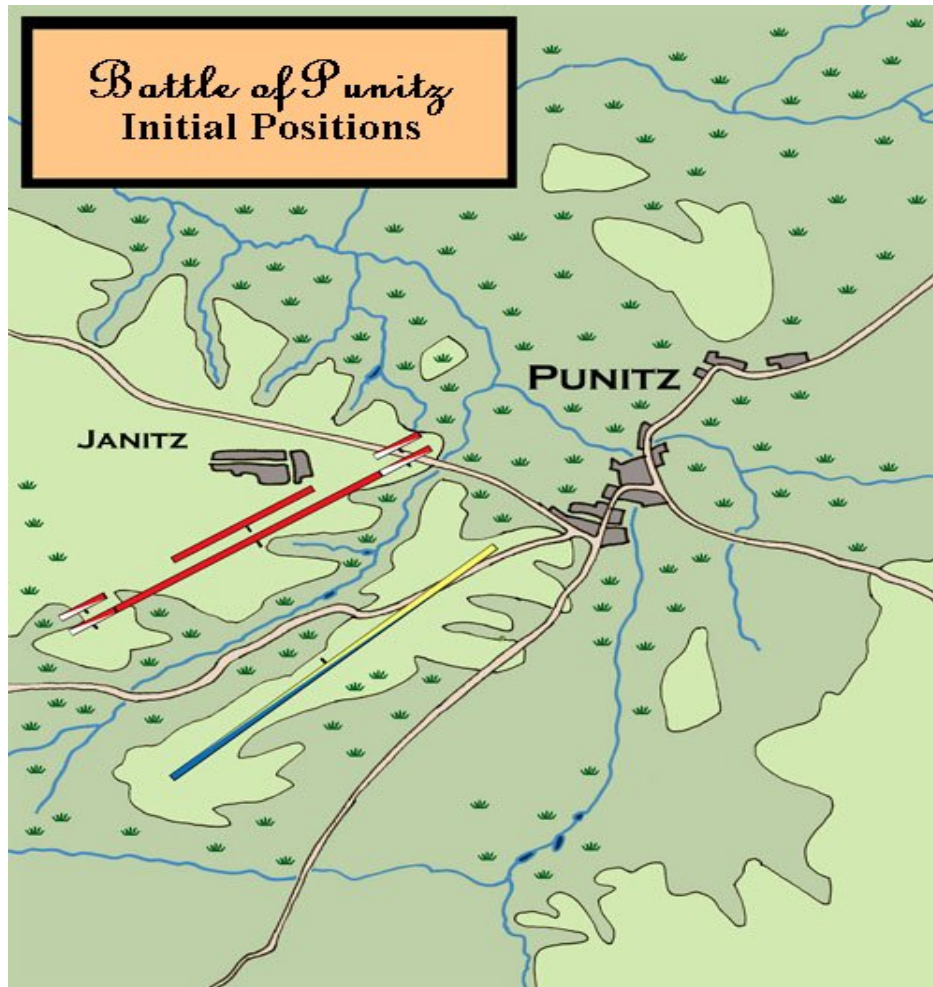
At Lemberg, the Swedes had not been in any great hurry to try to save what could be saved of Stanislav's Confederation. Instead, the army camped around the city and bided its time in quiet quarters. They had occupied themselves in the usual contribution collection activities and brought loyalty actions against defiant noblemen. The Swedish soldiers had at times become involved in theological debates with the local Catholic monks, and life had been generally peaceful with the exception of sporadic attacks by wandering corps of August's faithful who grappled with outposts "with a loud shriek and cry, as these people are accustomed to do". However, in the middle of September, the army broke camp and marched northward again, along the difficult roads one came upon and which wound through woods and marshes. The army was divided up in several columns and the opportunity was taken to plunder the area through which they passed. The King's army group was quickly able to extort a heavy contribution from the fortress of Zamosc and Stenbock's column conducted a successful campaign of devastation against the estates of the opposition Starost Michael Potocki. The speed of the march increased the closer one came to the enemy and indeed several reliable reports on them had arrived.

The Swedes, however, were observed the whole time by Saxon scouts. Charles XII could hardly count on surprise, above all since August always held the ability to depart quickly in the highest readiness. The warning report of the Swedish Army's return to the region of Warsaw in the beginning of October, therefore, was scarcely received with great amazement in the Saxon headquarters. August quickly decided to retreat to the west towards Silesia, and succeeded again in gaining time by successfully spreading false reports that he was on the way east and the stronghold Pultusk. Both Rehnskiöld and the King's Corps had thrown themselves headlong in that direction at the first scent, but quickly stopped when contrary reports indicated the enemy's haste in the opposite direction. Despite this, Charles XII summoned an enormous energy for the pursuit and did not give the game up for lost. At the front of six cavalry regiments, the King set out after his slippery cousin. The pace of the hunt increased and on 23rd October the Saxon army's lagging tail was at last struck. A few parties from the enemy's rearguard were attacked and dispersed. On the following day, 24th October, the King's party reached the town of Uniejow, situated on the Warta River about halfway to the Silesian border. The party had marched 170 kilometers in three days, an enormous achievement. The King decided to take a breather at Uniejow (they remained there for 36 hours) total unaware that only a few hours before the Swedes arrived, King August had crossed the river there. August on the other side of the Warta had separated from the rest of his army and under escort of a few cavalry units, once again proceeded to southern Poland in the direction of Krakow. He himself was saved, but it had been close. August slipped through Charles XII's hand one more time. However, his army, now led by August's faithful right hand von der Schulenburg, of course remained.

On 25th October a further three cavalry regiments joined the King's force, Södra Skånska Cavalry Regiment, together with Dücker's and Krassow's Dragoons. The day following the pursuit was resumed and the town of Kalisz was taken quickly following a little sword rattling with a party of Saxons. On 27th October, he caught up with Schulenburg at Krotoszyn, where he intended to make camp. The Saxons, however, in the presence of the Swedish troops were forced to withdraw quickly from there. Charles XII order a night attack on what he thought was the Saxon camp, but in reality were only the remaining campfires maintained by a few Saxons. Under the light of the moon, the Swedish cavalry charged these illuminations and took a few individual prisoners. However, the deception caused no waning of the King's aggressiveness, just the opposite. Early on the morning 28th October he resumed the hunt with the hope that at last he could the Saxon Army to battle. In the outskirts of the town of Punitz, he hit Schulenburg's rearguard.

The Swedes attacked and quickly drove the enemy before them at a brisk pace. The hunt went straight through the town, and Schulenburg, who was with his main body on the other side of Punitz, had no other choice than to deploy for battle.

On a field at the village of Janitz west of Punitz, the Saxon deployed his troops, with the left flank anchored on a rugged, marshy field and the front covered by a deep ditch. All together there were 12 infantry battalions and 14 squadrons of cavalry, deployed in two lines. Charles XII, who characteristically enough did not see the need to wait for all of his regiments, had at this point in time the Livdragonregement, Krassow's and Dücker's



Dragoon Regiments , together with some squadrons from the Södra Skånska Cavalry Regiment. The King, therefore, received advice not to begin the attack without reinforcements. Schulenburg's position was good, and cavalry only unwillingly charged infantry without support from their own infantry. However, Charles XII feared more that a further delay only would encourage the Saxons to take to flight again. The day was already well advanced, and under the cover of darkness, the enemy could slip away. Orderlies were sent eastward with orders to the remaining regiments to hurry to Punitz at the quickest pace. The King took personal command of the squadrons from the Södra Skånska Cavalry furthest out on the Swedish left flank whose task it was to attack the Saxon Army's only exposed flank, the right, and scattered the cavalry squadrons that stood there. The dragoons received the rather unthankful task of frontally attacking the Saxon infantry over the deep ditch.

The King's intention was to scattered the Saxon cavalry on Schulenburg's right flank, after which he hoped that the infantry would fall into confusion and flee the field. The attack would take place with only cold steel. On the King's flank, it went well at first. The Saxon cavalry, after the first volley, began to flee at the prospect of colliding with the Swedish squadrons. After a short chase, which at one time went through and over a couple of Saxon battalions (which threw themselves to the ground before the assault of

horses and riders), the King turned back in order to set to work on the Saxon infantry. There the initial dragoon attack was repulsed, and Schulenburg had time to form a gigantic square with his battalions, a formation suited to repulse cavalry attacks. Five of the following Swedish cavalry regiments showed up and proceeded to attack. The Saxons were attacked from all sides, and the Swedish cavalry had instructions to concentrate on the gaps in the enemy ranks. The Swedes crashed into the infantry's bayonet-packed lines time after time. The Saxons answered with powerful musket volleys. After heavy losses, the Swedes were forced to pull back to Punitz with the fall of darkness, without having been able to dislodge Schulenburg's disciplined troops. All of the Swedes who had succeeded in getting inside the square were cut down.

Schulenburg did not remain long, as he knew that Charles XII had a large number of reinforcements approaching. As soon as the Swedish attacks ended, he ordered the march to continue. In haste, parts of the train and nine cannon that preyed on the Swedes were left behind. By midday on 29th October his army group crossed the Silesian border. The battle had been costly in human lives. The Saxons lost upwards of 200 infantry and about a hundred cavalry, the latter to the greatest extent were "stuck through the back". A couple of hundred men were also taken prisoner. The Swedes lost around 130 cavalymen and a hundred wounded.

The Battle of Punitz was not the decisive battle that Charles XII sought. Certainly, the enemy was again driven out of Poland, but not defeated. Schulenburg had shown an enormous skill in saving his army group from the Swede's devastating hands, and August had once again slipped through the hands of his ungracious cousin. The Swedish cavalry, however, had shown an unparalleled quality. During the pursuit's nine most intensive days, an average of 50-60 kilometers per day was maintained. The Södra Skånska Cavalry had fourteen horses break down on the road. The Saxon's performance was equally impressive.

However, the hunt was still not over, despite the fighting at Punitz. After a short rest and once again collecting his forces in the region around Punitz, Charles XII with his nearby regiments threw himself over the Silesian border and on Imperial territory.

Schulenburg's troops were quickly met again in the middle of a critical phase when they were in the process of crossing the Oder on a hastily constructed bridge. The Saxon position, however, was too strong to attack with the memory of the engagement at Punitz fresh in mind. Therefore, Schulenburg got away again and Charles XII could only ride back to Poland. On 30th October a report arrived from General Otto Wellingk that the same day a small Russian force had been defeated at Fraustadt. The 600 Russians had fortified themselves in a wagon fort with eleven cannon, and after a heated fight with the overwhelmingly more numerous Swedes (four cavalry regiments and a dragoon regiment), they had almost all died according to a German major. With this information, the King decided to join Wellingk's unit and moved in that direction. On the way, the King's Corps ran across a Cossack force of 1,200 men at Oderbeltsch that was on its way to cross the Oder. Since they were all on foot, the Swedes surrounded them and the dragoons dismounted. When the Swedes attacked, panic broke out among the Cossacks,

of which some threw themselves in the river (where most went under), some fortified themselves in nearby buildings. The Swedes, however, did not go to any great trouble to force them out, but set fire to the houses and cut down all who tried to fly from the flames. The bloodbath was justified with references to earlier Russian outrages. It was perhaps the largest massacre during Charles XII's lifetime.

The troops concentrated in the district around Fraustadt, and the rest of the Swedish army were ordered to move there. On 1st November the King inspected the battlefield at Fraustadt where the Russian soldiers still lay unburied on the field. Then one entered winter quarters. The long campaign of 1704 was over and clearly showed that the war was still to be won.

It is difficult to say which side can take the glory of victory at Punitz. The battle has all the trappings that characterize a Swedish victory, but with the course of the battle, it is difficult to accept the reasoning. Naturally, it was important for Swedish propaganda that, at the end of the 1704 campaign, one could be proud of a victory. On the other side, it was the Swedes who left the battlefield first. Nor had one achieved the stated goal of namely driving the Saxons into the ground. Schulenburg had held his own against the Swedes, and saved August's troops for later campaigns. The Battle of Punitz is instead a good metaphor for the war in Poland: much fruitless fighting.

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Translator's Appendix

Saxon Order of Battle

There is a lack of information on the strength of the Saxon forces present at the Battle of Punitz. Swedish and Saxon sources all agree that there were 12 infantry battalions present. Probably, these were the same ones that were under Schulenburg's command when he crossed the border into Poland in August 1704, and they are listed below. The problem is that we do not know for certain what the strength of these battalions was. At the Battle of Posen in August 1704, each battalion apparently averaged around 330 men. It is probably safe to assume that by October each battalion numbered only 300 men, or 50% of authorized strength. If this is accepted, then the Saxon infantry strength at Punitz was roughly 3,600 men.

Infantry

Fuß-Garde (2)
Königin (1)
Drost (1)
Kurprinz (1)
Kanitz (1)
Fürstenberg (1)
Westromirsky (1)
Schulenburg (1)
Thielau (1)
Wackerbarth (1)
Sacken (1)

The strength and composition of the Saxon cavalry and dragoons at Punitz is the cause of some confusion. Swedish sources state that the Saxons had 14 squadrons, but provide no strength figure. The book, *Leben und Denkwürdigkeiten Johan Mathias Reichsgrafen von der Schulenburg* (Leipzig 1834) states that Schulenburg had only 500 mounted troops, and Schuster and Francke, *Geschichte der Sächsischen Armee* (Leipzig 1885) agrees with this figure and provides the names of the three units present that are shown below. Each Saxon cuirassier and dragoon regiment had eight companies in four squadrons, which is close to the 14 squadrons mentioned in Swedish sources. However, is a combined strength of 500 men for these three units realistic? At Posen in August 1704, each of the Saxon cavalry and dragoon squadrons had an average strength of 83 men. A year later at the Battle of Warsaw in July 1705, the Saxon mounted regiments numbered only 240-250 men each, or roughly 60 men per squadron. Therefore, it is reasonable to think that by October 1704 the strength of each squadron could have been a little over 40 men each. The Beust Kuirassier Regiment, in particular, had been in Poland since 1703, and probably was seriously under strength. The figures in parenthesis next to the unit are my best guess regarding strength.

Cavalry and Dragoons

Beust Kuirassier Regiment (ca.100)
Oertzen Dragoon Regiment (ca.200)
Bayreuth Dragoon Regiment (ca.200)

Leben und Denkwürdigkeiten Johan Mathias Reichsgrafen von der Schulenburg (Leipzig 1834) states that Schulenburg had six guns; however, the Swedes indicate that they captured nine.

Artillery: 6-9 guns

Saxon Deployment

According to *Leben und Denkwürdigkeiten Johan Mathias Reichsgrafen von der Schulenburg* (Leipzig 1834), the Saxons deployed in two lines with 8 infantry battalions in the first, and 4 infantry battalions in the second. In between both he placed the six artillery pieces and the greater part of the 500 horse that he had with him. Behind the second line, two small units of cavalry took position.

Swedish Order of Battle

Initial Force

Livdragonregementet (420-450)
Krassow's (Bremiska) Dragoon Regiment (700-750)
Dücker's Dragoon Regiment (420-450)
Södra Skånska Cavalry Regiment (700-750)
Total: 2,240 – 2,400 men

Reinforcements – arriving late in the day

Svenska Adelsfanan (560-600)
Nylands Cavalry Regiment (700-750)
Upplands tremännings Cavalry Regiment (700-750)
Pommerska Regiment of Horse (420-450)
Bremiska Regiment of Horse (420-450)
Total: 2,800 – 3,000 men

Note: The strength figures are estimates.