

The Battle of Wismar 1711

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(Translation - Dan Schorr)

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After their defeat in the Battle of Helsingborg in 1710, the Danish Army evacuated Scania. Fredrik IV then decided to turn his attention to the Swedish possessions in Northern Germany. The fortress of Wismar was the first and nearest goal, and a Danish Army of 19,000 men was assembled in Holstein in the beginning of July in order to open the new campaign.

In the meantime Fredrik IV's alliance partners, especially August II of Poland, convinced him to first concentrate all efforts on the capture of the very strong and important fortress of Stralsund. As a result, the Danish army continued its march through Mecklenburg towards Pomerania leaving only a weak observation and blockading corps of 2 infantry battalions (Viborg and Hansen) and 28 squadrons of cavalry (1.Fynske Ryttergmt., 1. and 3. Sjællandske Ryttergmt., Brockdorff's and Fursmann's Kyrasserergmt., and Bulow's Dragonrgmt.) under the leadership of Jørgen Rantzau. Rantzau burned to revenge the defeat at Helsingborg, and it would not be long before an opportunity offered itself.

The Swedish garrison of Wismar totaled about 5,000 men, and consisted of 1 dragoon regiment (Bassewitz's dragoons) and 4 infantry regiments (Fürstenberg's, Posse's, Lewenhaupt's, and a commanded regiment with drafts from the Pomeranian regiments) under the command of General Schoultz. The Swedish general had with the help of spies a good knowledge of the conditions in the Danish camp. He found out that the Danish strength was reduced to 3,000 men because of sickness and desertion - less than the garrison of Wismar - and Rantzau had sent 1,000 men to Lübeck and Rostock to obtain forage. He decided to attack and destroy the Danish camp and force them to retire. Schoultz assembled a force of 6 battalions, 6 squadrons and 12 cannon (2,500 men) on the night of 4 December for that purpose.

Unluckily for the Swedes, Rantzau received word that something was going to occur. He ordered his cavalry to saddle up and his whole force stood to arms during the middle of the night. At 5:00 in the morning the Swedes attacked and threw themselves with fury on the Danish right flank. Bülow's dragoons wavered in the face of numerical superiority, but received the support of the 3. Sjællandske Rytterregiment, Brockdorff's Kyrasserer and Fursmann's Nationale Jyske Kyrasserer. Thereafter, the fight ebbed and flowed a couple of hours. Meanwhile, the Swedish dragoons entered the Danish camp where they began to plunder and burn. Shortly after, the Swedish infantry followed and in the excitement fired to their right and left. Rounds were flying around the ears of Schoultz and his dragoons. Many of the camp huts were already in flames, and the confusion increased more as the Swedish artillery continuously fired into the camp. Some Swedish infantry were wounded. Their cries of pain caused " a considerable confusion", and the

battalions began to dissolve. Schoultz realized that the attack had come to a standstill, and he decided to retire.

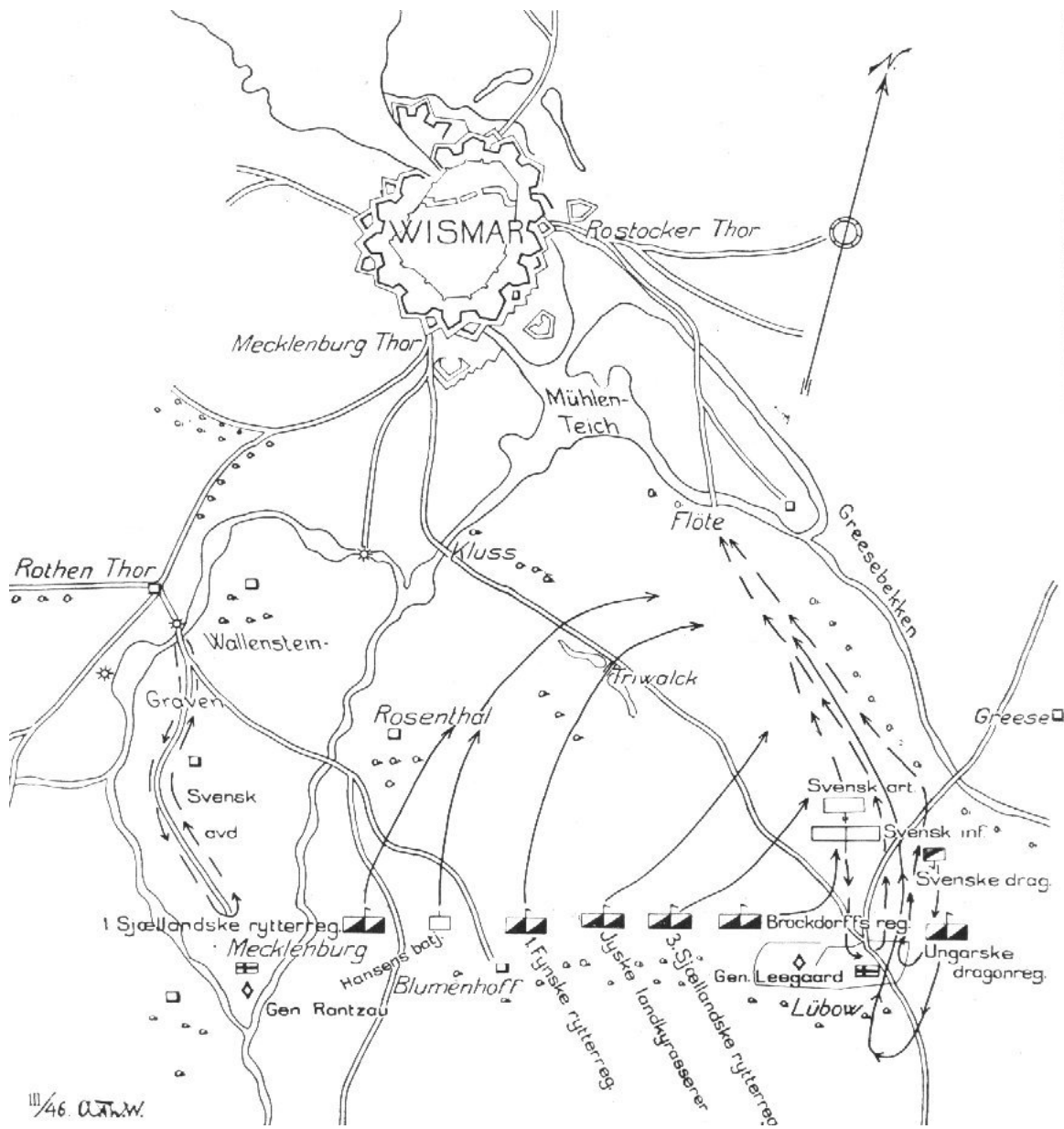
In the meantime it had begun to get light. Rantzau now got an overview of the conditions and made his dispositions. In full gallop he led the 1.Fynske Rytterregiment under Juel past the enemy and attacked them in the rear. At the same time he ordered Brocksdorff's Kyrasserer and Lovenhjem's 1.Sjællandske Rytterregiment to attack the enemy's front and flank.

Bassewitz's dragoons were the first to break. They fled and left the infantry and artillery to save themselves. A few of the Swedish battalions formed square and placed cannon in the intervals in order to resist the Danish cavalry during the retreat, but their fate was sealed. The Jyske Nationale Kyrasserregiment under Fursmann broke the squares in a furious assault. All who did not throw down their arms were cut down. Of all the Swedish infantry only 29 escaped. Schoultz only saved himself with difficulty and barely made it back to the fortress.

The Swedish loss amounted to 478 dead and 1,904 prisoners of whom 500 were wounded. All the Swedish artillery, 12 cannon, fell into Danish hands. The Danes lost 279 killed and wounded, including Brigade General Bülow, whose wound was so serious that he died a few weeks later.

Rantzau had once again shown what a brilliant cavalry leader he was, and the Danish cavalry had shown great courage and tenaciousness during the day. Unfortunately, Rantzau could not use his victory to take Wismar. He lacked artillery; and even when he finally received a few pieces from the army at Stralsund, he had to cease firing for lack of ammunition,

It would be four more years before this important fortress was captured. This happened on 24 April 1716 when a Danish-Prussian corps captured the city after a long bombardment and fierce fighting.



Sources:

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