

Kriget i Finland 1714

by

H.E. Uddgren, Stockholm, 1909

The Battle of Storkyro (Napue/Lappola) 19th February 1714

(Translated by Dan Schorr)

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The concentration of the [Russian] troops for the attack on Österbottens occurred in this way. All of the infantry was assembled in Björneborg around 20th January 1714. Those who were taken from Åbo left that city on the 16th of the same month and were transported by wagons to the assembly area. On the 26th January the infantry left Björneborg and marched to Mouhijärvi where they arrived on the 29th, and where the cavalry had established a magazine beforehand. The latter carried out their assembly at the same time at Tavastahus where the last unit under Tscherntsoff arrived from Savolax on 6th February. Already on 25th January, the day before the infantry left Björneborg, the greater part of the trains, together with the regimental colours and standards were sent to Tavastahus. Simultaneously, all of the remaining infantry, except for two battalions under Lieutenant General Bruce, marched off to Åbo where they could be more easily provisioned and reorganized. Observation of the roads into Österbottens on the line Tammerfors-Björneborg was entrusted to the two battalions [under Bruce] which were equipped with skis, together with the remaining cavalry, the latter at most 2,000 men.

For the invasion of Österbottens, Galitzin decided on the road Mouhijärvi-Tavastkyrö, and from there the winter road over Ikalis to Kurikka, along with the main road over Ilmola to Vasa. Besides this route he could have chosen the coastal road Björneborg-Kristina or the road Tammerfors-Rouvesi-Lappo. The first of these routes could not be selected because it had been totally devastated during military activities in November and December 1713. The choice of the latter road would have resulted in the infantry at Björneborg taking a long detour, which would have further delayed the operation. The force was waiting for the cavalry under Tscherntsoff, but these days of waiting were probably necessary in any case for the completion of necessary preparations. In Mouhijärvi the Russian infantry baked a number of biscuits that were necessary for their provisions during the coming operation.

On 7th February the Russian advance began, but again in Ikalis a few days were spent completing the supply of provisions before they disappeared into the deserted, wooded districts which were then commenced. During the night of 14th/15th February Russian cavalry overran a Finnish outpost of 30 cavalry together with some infantry and local levies three kilometers from Kurikka. On the 15th the Russians reached Ilmola where they

rested on 16th February. Although Galitzin says nothing of the difficulties that his troops endured especially during this march or in fact the whole campaign, they must have been great. The snow this year had fallen abundantly in Finland, and made it impossible to march on the sides of the roads without skis. During the advance through the sparsely populated area between Ikalis and Ilmola, they ran into difficulty finding sufficient space to bivouac, and the desolate terrain could hardly supply the troops with provisions. Almost at the same time that the Russians reached Ilmola, the Finnish infantry, which were encamped at Storkyro, broke camp and marched the three kilometers to Nappo to meet the enemy.

Armfelt had been informed in plenty of time of their preparations, and through his outposts at Kurikka and other Finnish units had been kept informed of the enemy's movements during their advance to Ilmola. On the other hand, he had not succeeded in getting completely reliable information about Galitzin's strength. A 3rd February report gave the strength as 10,000 infantry and all of the standing cavalry in Finland, but Armfelt on good grounds thought that these figures were exaggerated. He expressed this in a letter on 17th February to the government in Stockholm, when he said that despite zealous reconnaissance efforts were unsuccessful in finding out the enemy's strength. Full knowledge of this he did not get until the reconnaissance of the enemy camp that he undertook on the afternoon of 17th February.

Armfelt had, however, decided that Österbottens would not be left in enemy hands without a fight. A motive for this decision was the Government's order of November 1713 that ordered him to offer stiff resistance, and this order was never retracted. In addition, he considered the fact the country would suffer just as much whether he left it in the enemy's hands without a fight, or if as the result of a defeat was forced to leave. The shortages of supplies also meant that the Finnish Army could not move north to Uleå without collapsing. To reduce the defense of Österbottens to defense of passes and defiles, he regarded as meaningless in wintertime when they could easily be bypassed. "To cut down the woods", he said "harms oneself more than the enemy."

.... At midday on 16th February the Finnish Army occupied the position chosen by Armfelt. Not including officers, noncommissioned officers and noncombatants, the disposable troops amounted to 2,686 infantry and 1,426 cavalry, together 4,112 corporals and men. In addition, 1,016 farmers and 70 so-called burgher servants had joined the Army. Of the former at least half were *5-männingar* and the remainder was levied peasants from Storkyro and the surrounding parishes. All together Armfelt's strength totaled 5,198 men. The sick amounted to an additional about 500 men and 1,000 men were detached, that is Major von Essen's unit in northern Tavastland, colonel Danielsson's in Kajana and the *5-männingar* of the northern parishes were detached to watch the border with Savolax. To support the Army in case it was forced back, armfelt had arranged for the Governor to assemble the peasants at Gamlekarleby, which had not yet happened.

The field at the village of Nappo, where the battle came to be fought, is located 3 kilometers southeast of the Storkyro village church. Armfelt called it a "choice field",

and it seems that even based mainly on tactical consideration, he decided to fight the decisive battle here. A few days of rain had quickly caused the snow in this district to melt in the open areas. However, in the woods it remained to a large extent making troop movements difficult. The field at Nappo was surrounded on all sides by hilly, wooded, overgrown terrain, and at the time of the battle was divided in the direction southeast – northwest by the frozen Kyrö River on whose left bank ran the main road Ilmola – Vasa. On this road and in the field's southeastern corner lay the village of Nappo, and on the opposite side of the river from Nappo lay the village of Turpa. In the northern part of the field was another village, which perhaps was the village that in Russian reports was called Lappola.

Immediately after the troops arrived, Armfelt formed them in battle order in which they remained day and night until the Russians arrived. All of the regular troops were formed into one line with the infantry in the center and the cavalry on the flanks. Behind the infantry a very weak second line was formed by the *5-männingar*, farmers and burgher servants. The infantry was divided into 12 battalions with the larger regiments forming two and the smaller one battalion. These, however, were of widely varying strength. The different regiments stood in the following order from right to left: Åbo, Tavastahus, Savolax, Österbottens, Wattrangs, Nylands, Viborgs and Björneborgs Regiments.

The cavalry was with attention paid to regimental organization divided in 22 units of varying strength (50 to 80 men each). The right flank consisted of 12 and the left of 10 so-called units. From the right to the left on the right flank were ½ of Brakels Dragoon Regiment, the whole of Nylands, Tavastahus läns and ½ of Åbo och Björneborgs Cavalry Regiments. On the left was the remainder of the Åbo och Björneborgs Regiment, the whole of the Karelska Cavalry and the remainder of Brakels Dragoon Regiment.

The artillery, seven so-called regimental pieces and one howitzer were positioned in pairs in front of the infantry.

The division of command responsibilities is not known with certainty, but Armfelt appears to have led the infantry in the center. Major General de la Barre commanded the larger, right, flank. The Nylands Cavalry was located there, and since the Battle of Pälkäne he served as its colonel. Of the colonels only three took part in the battle, namely Otto Reinhold von Yxkull, Odert. R. von Essen and Otto Johan Maidell, all with the infantry. Colonel Jacob Danielsson, as mentioned, was at this time in Kajana. Colonel Erik Fitinghoff, the oldest of the regimental commanders, immediately after the Battle of Pälkäne traveled to Sweden, where he was living in the spring of 1714, and Colonel Johan Stiernschantz left the Army two days before the battle without permission with the excuse that he suffered from ague (fever and chills), something that Armfelt pointed out that he previously had never complained about.

The Finnish army took up a position in the edge of the woods that lined the field in the northwest facing to the southeast and with equal strength on both sides of the Ilmola-Vasa road with the front line at a right angle to this road.

On the ice of the Kyro River in line with the village of Nappo there was a cavalry outpost, and in the eastern edge of the village a breastwork was constructed of wood from torn down houses; however, it does not appear to have been occupied.

The position chosen by Armfelt was well selected. The field gave possibilities for employment of his own troops, because it was narrower than the enemy expected, it would prevent the full use of their numerical superiority. The enemy could not form line of battle except in sight of and close to the Finns, and therefore, they were putting themselves in a position to be attacked. The flanks of the position were protected by extensive, hilly and broken, and snow-filled woods through which large troop movements could only be undertaken with the greatest difficulty.

Galitzin's appearance in the days immediately preceding the battle was marked by great caution. On 16th February his troops rested at Ilmola, and not until 3:00 in the afternoon on the 17th did they arrive at Pilmak, 3 kilometers southeast of Nappo, where he let them make camp.

Galitzin received confirmation that Armfelt was formed up on the field at Nappo first from a captured farmer and later from Cossack Captain Solovkin who had been sent to reconnoiter the opponent's position. On 18th February he conducted a reconnaissance accompanied by his closest subordinates. On his return to camp he called together all officers, lieutenant colonel and higher grade, to a council of war. Although the Finns were considered superior in number – the Finnish peasants with the army were considered to number between 4,000 and 6,000 men – it was decided to attack the following day. No other choice was available. Galitzin's instructions were clear in this matter, and his troops would probably suffer from lack of provisions and the difficult march just as much during a retreat as in an attack.

Early on the 19th Galitzin set his attack in motion. Seeing the difficulties that a frontal attack would encounter, he chose to execute a turning movement with the bulk of his forces against the Finnish left flank. With all of his infantry formed in 8 battalions, together with 3 regiments and a squadron of cavalry he marched in an arc to the northeast towards the northeast corner of the field. The Cossacks were sent in an even larger arc in order to come up in the rear of the Finnish position. The remaining cavalry, 4 regiments and 1 squadron, were to advance on the ice of the Kyro River towards Nappo with the mission of protecting the Russian Army's line of retreat and the camp at Pilmak.

The troops that Galitzin led to attack the Finnish left flank were divided into two columns during the march. A Finnish farmer by the name of Matts Pålson Turi, who was a Russian spy, served as guide and led the march over the frozen marshes where it was easier to advance than through the woods. At noon the Russians reached the field at Nappo. Thereafter, as Armfelt expressed it, "a desperate fight" began.

The Finnish troops had remained in battle order throughout enduring 72 hours of cold and rain continuously waiting the enemy's attack. Still they kept up their courage, and when their benefactor, the Finnish merchant Frisius, out of compassion for them promised that

after the battle he would give the officers a month's pay and the men a month's drinking money, they, after the military customs of the time, beat their weapons and promised to endure everything.

Armfelt himself had reconnoitered the enemy's camp at Pilmak on the afternoon of 17th February, and early on received word of the danger that threatened his left flank. In order to meet this threat he undertook the following actions. The infantry that stood in battle order in the middle was to move north and take the place of the left flank. At the same time the front changed to face the northeast. As a result, the infantry of the first line crossed to the north side of the Kyro River and the cavalry on the left flank, which was forced to give up its place, moved behind the infantry. The Karelska Cavalry 4 "units" on this flank also moved to reinforce the cavalry on the right flank. The reinforced right flank followed along with the infantry's change of front and came into position south of the Kyro River in line with the village of Nappo. The *5-männingar* and levies that made up the Finn's second line remained in their original positions, partly south and partly north of the river.

The Finnish Army occupied this position when Galitzin at 1:30 in the afternoon was deploying his troops for battle. Furthest to the right in the edge of the woods that bordered the field at Nappo on the northwest stood his infantry in two lines with 5 or 6 battalions in the first line and 2 or 3 battalions in the second line. Behind the infantry's right flank stood 3 dragoon regiments and 1 squadron, which took part in the envelopment. The remaining cavalry had advanced to a point immediately east of the village of Nappo where they halted opposite the Finnish right flank cavalry. The Russian artillery took up positions in front of each infantry's flank.

The battle was begun by the Finnish artillery that fired on the Russian infantry as they were forming up. The fire was quickly answered by the Russian artillery. After the Finns fired a few rounds per cannon, Russian sources say 8, the fire was lifted and Armfelt led all of his infantry to the attack. Although the wind drove smoke from buildings that the Russians had set on fire along with rain and musket smoke into the faces of the Finns, they executed quickly and regulated their movement. Armfelt's intention was clearly to try to turn both Russian flanks, which was made easier by the fact that the Russian infantry line at this time in the battle was formed in an arc. Fortunately, the Finns simultaneously struck the flank units of the Russian infantry.

At 100 pace distance from the enemy, Armfelt halted and opened infantry fire. On the Finnish infantry's right flank, one shot per man was fired after which they went over to the bayonet attack. The Russian left flank infantry was thrown back disordered after a fierce hand-to-hand fight in the woods. Galitzin succeeded in restoring stability at this point by sending an infantry battalion from the center and two squadrons of cavalry that were located east of Nappo, but since Armfelt reinforced his infantry with cavalry, probably the Åbo och Björneborgs läns Regiment and possibly even some infantry from the second line, the Finns returned to the attack and forced the Russians back a second time into the woods administering heavy losses on them.

At the same time as this was being played out on the Finnish infantry's right flank, the infantry on the left also gained ground, but not as much as on the right. During this time the Finns had taken 6 of the 10 Russian artillery pieces, but it is uncertain as to which flank they were on. Armfelt had clearly directed his main effort against the Russian's left flank. By so doing he threatened their line of retreat. At that moment he saw himself as the victor. But then an unexpected setback occurred. The cavalry, which Galitzin took along on the march through the woods, had without being observed by the Finns completed an enveloping movement and succeeded in taking up a position in the rear of the Finnish infantry's left flank. The peasants who made up the Finnish second line seem not to have followed with first line's movement to the north and change of front. In addition, probably at least half had to be sent back to the trains to protect them from the Cossacks who had also completed their envelopment and appeared in the rear of the Finnish Army. The Russian dragoons, who according to Armfelt had dismounted, executed an attack on the rear of the Finnish infantry just at the critical moment for Galitzin. Where the Finnish left flank cavalry were that should have parried this attack, is not known. In any case, these amounted to no more than 400 men against the 1,200 that executed the attack. Armfelt was forced to stop his attack against the Russian infantry, and repulse the force that threatened his rear, which he thought to only be a regiment. This is explained by the low numbers of the Russians. But Galitzin knew what to do with the situation, and succeeded in leading his infantry on a renewed attack. This turned the tables in the battle. The Finnish line broke and everything dissolved in flight.

While this was happening, a unit of Russian dragoons at Nappo completed an envelopment of the Finnish right flank. This movement, which is passed over in Russian reports, appears to have been completed by a smaller force, and was accomplished at the same time as the corresponding maneuver on the opposite flank. The attack met a unit of 300 peasants under the command of a Captain Sising. This force was surrounded and offered quarter, but it tried to fight its way through and marched all the while exposed to enemy attacks along the Kyro River to Vasa. Only a lieutenant and 20 men of the unit survived.

During the Finnish infantry's brave and to begin with successful fight, the cavalry was as good as completely inactive. The only case that is known for certain where they intervened in the battle was when a small unit supported the attack against the enemy's left flank. Otherwise, no mention is made in Finnish reports on the cavalry's activities. It seems not unreasonable, although it is by no means proven, that the units, which had been located behind the Finnish left flank, had left the battlefield before it had turned against Armfelt. Opposed to this is Armfelt's own explanation when in the report of 22nd February he says that all who escaped had to fight their way through. The Finnish right flank cavalry appears, with the exception of the participation in the attack against the Russian left, to have limited themselves to observing the numerically superior Russian cavalry, and did not advance before the infantry's misfortune decided the battle. However, it is not impossible that earlier this cavalry in one way or another had participated in the fight. This is indicated by the fact that the Nylands och Tavastahus läns Cavalry, which was on this flank, lost 142 out of 474 men.

There was no question of an orderly retreat for Armfelt's troops. Their line of retreat was cut and for what remained of the infantry there was nothing to do other than to create their own way through the enemy's line whenever an opportunity appeared. The infantry dispersed in different directions, particularly towards the woods, in order to save themselves. Armfelt himself was one of the last who narrowly fought his way out in time. The right flank cavalry was unable to keep itself together during the retreat, and withdrew first in a southeasterly direction towards the point where the Finnish right flank had originally stood. Then they succeeded in taking the road to Vasa on which they continued their retreat without hindrance from the enemy.

As soon as the battle was over, it had not lasted longer than 2 hours, the Russian Army assembled south of the river along the Ilmola-Vasa road. On this road Major General Teschekin was sent with the dragoons to take up the pursuit. The forward units reached Lauka, 8 kilometers from Vasa, the same day, consequently covering 12 kilometers. The Russian infantry reached Storkyro village church the evening of 19th February. Armfelt was in Gamlakarleby on the 22nd where his scattered army immediately began to assemble.

The Battle of Storkyro had been hot and caused the combatants great losses. Despite the results, it is indisputable that the Finnish soldiers generally fought with great bravery. Armfelt expressed this repeatedly in his reports, and Governor Clerk did the same. On 22nd February he wrote "that all the officers, high as well as low, with the soldiers and peasants had shown uncommon and fearless bravery." Armfelt further stated that bodies lay so thick on the battlefield that one could not move by horse over it, and Galitzin stated the dead numbered 5,133, but this figure is definitely exaggerated. According to his report of 22nd February the Russians lost 421 dead and 1,014 wounded. Most of the latter were mortally wounded.

The Finnish Army lost 535 men captured of which 20 were officers and 200 farmers. This figure does not include those who were wounded but released by the Russians after four days. Total losses in dead and wounded are not possible to give exactly as the army was completely dispersed by the battle; however, one can develop a picture from the following sources. Since the Russians buried a large part of the dead that remained on the battlefield, 1,165 Finnish and Russian soldiers, of which the Finnish Army lost the greater part of the dead. More certain is a comparison of the Finnish strength before and after the battle. As mentioned earlier, the regular army's soldiers in January 1714, excluding Nyslott's garrison, numbered 2,500 infantry and 2,100 cavalry together with about 600 sick, or a total of 5,200 corporals and men. On 19th March the strength was 3,292 men for a loss of 1,900 corporals and men from the regular army. The losses of officers and noncommissioned officers is more uncertain, but probably no more than 150. A few hundred peasants were lost. Among the Finnish officers lost was Colonel O.R. von Essen of the Björneborgs läns Regiment.

Concerning the circumstances which caused the defeat, Armfelt admitted only that the enemy was too superior in numbers....

By inflicting heavy losses on the Finnish Army, Galitzin had fulfilled the mission given to him by the Russian military leadership for the winter campaign in Österbottens. For although he had not succeeded in forcing Armfelt over the Kvarken or northward to Torneå, his victory secured the Russian main operations for 1714 from attack from this direction. The victory, however, was not celebrated, which was usual, with ceremonies and festivities in his army. In Petersburg, however, this occurred on the Tsar's orders, and at the same time a pamphlet was published in German, which announced to Europe this new Russian advance.

On 21st February the Russian dragoons reached Vasa, which had already been abandoned by the inhabitants. The infantry, which had remained for a few days in Storkyro Parish where Galitzin had allowed the execution of all males taken, arrived at Vasa on the 23rd. In order to allow the infantry to rest after their efforts and to reorganize after the great losses suffered in the battle, as well as to bake bread, etc., it remained in Vasa for a few days. The cavalry continued northward in part to destroy the countryside and partly to gather provisions. According to his instructions, Galitzin was to destroy a 60 kilometer wide area in Österbottens to prevent the possibility that Armfelt, at least in the short term, from being able to head south again.

Finnish Order of Battle and Strength
(Taken from C-P Petander's *Slaget vid Napue*, Vasa 1963)

	Officers	NCOs	Corporals & Men	Total
Infantry				
Åbo läns Regemente	22	31	402	455
Björneborgs Regemente	19	31	362	412
Tavastahus läns Regemente	23	14	219	256
Viborgs läns Regemente	8	15	102	125
Savolax Regemente	19	34	513	566
Nylands Regemente	22	36	268	326
Österbottens Regemente	18	31	620	669
Wattrangs bataljon	10	14	200	224
Infantry Total	141	206	2,686	3,033
Cavalry				
Åbo och Björneborgs läns Kavallerireg	28	8	591	628
Nylands och Tavastahus läns Kavallerireg	22	7	355	384
Nyslotts och Viborgs läns Kavallerireg	11	3	211	225
Brakels Dragonregemente	20	21	260	301
Adelsfanan	1	--	8	9
Cavalry Total	82	39	1,426	1,547
Artilleriet	3	7	38	48
Levy, etc.	10	--	1,186	1,196
Total Strength	236	252	5,036	5,524

Russian Order of Battle

Infantry

According to C-P Petander in *Slaget vid Napue*, Vasa 1963, the Russian Army consisted of 5,588 infantry organized in 8 temporary field battalions. Drafts of the best men were taken from the following regiments to make up this force:

Vyborgski
1.Grenadier
St. Petersburgski
Sibirski
Galitzki
Arkhanguelogorodski
Moskovski
Troitski
Kazanski
Nijegorodski

W. Zweguintzow in *L'Armee Russe*, 1st Part 1700-1762, gives the following additional regiments from which drafts were taken:

2.Grenadier
Velikoloutski

Notes: To further add to the confusion, Vlad Velikanov has provided the following:

1. Galitzin's states that he had 5,588 infantry (2.Grenadier, Velikoloutski and 6 temporary battalions from 9 infantry regiments).
2. Apraksin gives 5,636 infantry (8 temporary battalions from 10 regiments). This agrees with the data from Petander.

Cavalry

The cavalry strength according to Petander is given as 2,907 men under General Tschekin and consisted of 7 dragoon regiments and 2 independent squadrons. W. Zweguintzow in *L'Armee Russe*, 1st Part 1700-1762, gives the following dragoon regiments as present:

Loutzki
Viatski
Vologodski
Olonetzki
Tobolski
Tverski
Governor's Squadron

However, this is only 6 regiments and 1 squadron. One dragoon regiment and 1 squadron are missing.

Notes: To further add to the confusion, Vlad Velikanov has provided the following:

1. Galitzin's states that he had 2,907 cavalry (7 dragoon regiments and 2 squadrons). This agrees with Petander's data.
2. Apraksin gives 3,068 cavalry (6 dragoon regiments and 1 squadron). This agrees with Zweguintzow.

Petander also indicates that there were 1,400 cossacks in the army.



