

# The Swedish troops in the campaign, autumn 1813 and the battle of Roßlau

## Introduction

This article is based on a German language article on the Battle of Roßlau, written by Uwe Wild and found on the Compagnie d'elite website <http://www.compagnie-d-elite.de>

When I have chosen to process and publish the article, it is partly based on an interest in the Swedish troops from the Northern Army and their efforts in the battles of 1813, and partly because the article deals with a little-known operation in which the Swedes were, for once, involved with major units.

## The Swedish forces

The Swedes contributed to the Northern Army with a corps (Stedingk) and a brigade (Bergenstråle) in the Swedish Mecklenburg division in corps Wallmoden.



*Swedish Guard Cavalryman*

Section of planche by Moritz Ruhl

## **Korps Stedingk**

*ifølge Quistorp - History of the Northern Army*

### **1st division Skjöldebrand**

#### 1st Brigade Schultzenheim

Svea Life Guard Regiment 1 BTN  
2. Life Guard Regiment 1 BTN  
Grenadiers from the Life Brigade 1  
BTN Life Grenadier Regiment 2 BTN Queen's  
Regiment 1 BTN

#### 2nd Brigade Reuterskjöld

Infantry Regiment Upland 2 BTN  
Infantry Regiment Södermanland 3 BTN  
Infantry Regiment Nordra Skånska 1 BTN  
Pomeranian Legion on Foot 1 KMP

#### Cavalry

Lifeguard Dragoon Regiment on Horse 5 ESK  
Småland Dragoon Regiment 6 ESK  
Pomeranian legion on horse ½ ESK

#### Artillery

2 running BTR (6pd), Götha regiment

### **2nd Division Sandel**

#### 3rd Brigade Brändström

Infantry Regiment Västgöta 2 BTN  
Infantry Regiment Westmanland 3 BTN  
Infantry Regiment Nerike 2 BTN

#### 4th Brigade Posse

Infantry Regiment Skaraborg 3 BTN  
Infantry Regiment Elfsborg 3 BTN  
Feltjæger Regiment Wärmeland 1 BTN

#### 6. brigade Boije

Infantry regiment Kronoborg 3 BTN Infantry  
regiment Kalmar 3 BTN Infantry  
regiment Engelbrecht 1 BTN

#### Cavalry

Life Regiment Brigade's Cuirassiers 4 ESK  
Scanian Hussar Regiment 6 ESK  
Mörner Hussar Regiment 5 ESK

#### Artillery

3 BTR (6pd), Wendes regiment

### **Reserve Artillery**

1 BTR (12pd), Wendes regiment 1  
moving BTR (6pd), Svea regiment

## **Ved korps Wallmoden**

*ifølge Quistorp - History of the Northern Army*

5th Brigade Bergenstråle

Infantry Regiment Jönköping 3 BTN

Infantry Regiment Södra Skånska 1 BTN

Konungens Hvervade Infantry Regiment 1 BTN

Småland Grenadier Battalion 1 BTN

Scanian Carabinier Regiment 4 ESK

Mörnerske Husarregiment 1 ESK

2 BTR (6pd)

As you see; a not inconsiderable force, but when it comes to the descriptions of the efforts of the Swedish troops and their participation in combat, the matter is somewhat different.

## **The reputation of the Swedes**



*Bernadotte*

Much has been written about the campaigns in 1813 and 1814 and the major battles from that period. It is quickly noticed that the Swedes were only slightly involved in the fighting. This is largely due to the fact that Bernadotte [1](#)) wanted to save the troops for the upcoming campaign in Norway. The annexation of Norway was his primary goal from the start, but he had to wait.

When it comes to the German sources for the events, there is often direct criticism of Bernadotte's leadership of the North Army, which he constantly tried to keep out of the fighting.

Despite this caution from Bernadotte, the Swedish troops from Korps Stedingk nevertheless came into battle during the campaign in 1813. First in the battle of Gross-Beeren, later at Dennewitz and Leipzig, not to forget the battle of Bornhøved as well as various smaller skirmishes and sieges. In most of these episodes, however, it was mostly only individual Swedish units that came into battle; most often the artillery and the hussars.

The same situation applies to the Swedish troops from corps Wallmoden, where only the Mörner hussars come into clinch with the Danish Auxiliary Corps.

During the Battle of Roßlau, however, more than one entire Swedish brigade was involved in combat with the French.

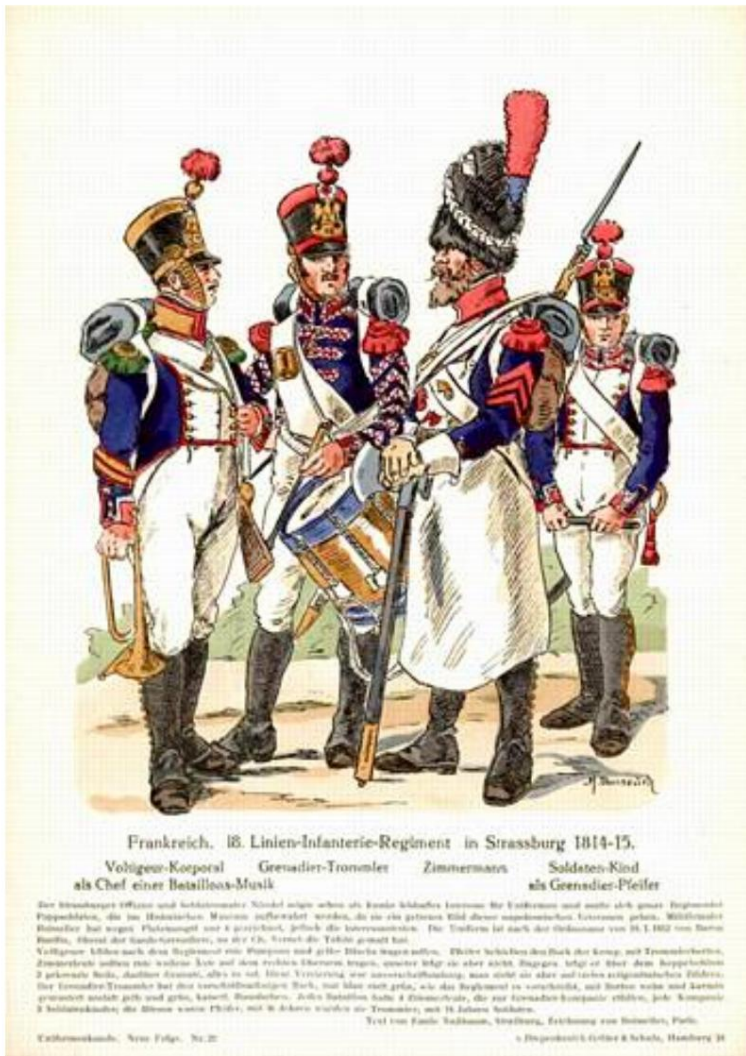
# The events around Roßlau

## The prelude

After the battle of Dennewitz, Marshal Ney's 2) retreated three corps (IV., VII and XII.) to the left bank of the Elbe to reorganize. Ney informed Napoleon that he would take up a position between the Elbe and the Mulde and await any reinforcements, as he did not see himself in a position to take up the fight against the strong Nordarme. On 10 September 1813, he received

orders from the emperor to assemble at Torgau and he therefore retreated closer to the Elbe. Ney feared that the Allies had already crossed the Elbe; that circulated among other things rumors that the Prussians had crossed the Elbe at Coswig.

In reality, however, it was only a matter of a few patrol corps, mainly Cossacks, who had already crossed over and now threatened the French lines of communication and supply.



## French infantry, 1813

The marshal was briefed by Napoleon on the proper state of affairs and was ordered to stand ready as the emperor planned an offensive against the Northern Army. Ney again requested reinforcements, but apart from a series of aimless advance and retreat, nothing happened.

During these days Ney's arms were reorganized. XII. corps was disbanded and the troops were transferred to the other two corps. The Bavarian troops were sent to the Main Army at Dresden.

## The Swedish bridgehead is established

During this relatively calm period, the Allies advanced towards the Elbe and bridges were built

the river at Elster, Roßlau and Acken. Already on September 16, 100 Swedes had crossed over and advanced towards Dessau, where they bumped into some Russian Cossacks. On the same day, 1,000 men from various Swedish units, including 200 Värmland hunters, advanced to reconnoitre the enemy's positions.

These troops formed the vanguard for a week, and during a night thrust on Wittenberg were engaged in fencing and forced to retreat. During the subsequent retreat, the Värmland hunters, who made up the rear, lost 3 men dead and 40 wounded. After the match they went back to Roßlau.

On September 19, 500 men arrived 3) to take over the securing of the bridgehead at Wittenberg and thus protected, the bridging and the construction of a bridge rampart at Roßlau began. The responsibility for the bridge construction lay with the Swedish engineer general Franc Sparre and a unit of pontoons from the Swedish navy was responsible for carrying out the work.

The bridge rampart could be built on foundations from old fortifications from the time of the 30 Years' War. The old fortifications had probably fallen into disrepair and local residents had collected materials for construction work, but the bulwark still existed.

On September 21, Ney received the following order from Napoleon:

*"Dessau must be immediately occupied with strong forces to be able to watch the river bank. The surest way to prevent the enemy from crossing the Elbe at Dessau is to draw the army together at Wittenberg."*

As a fortress, Wittenberg was considered an important point in the French line.

On September 22, the Cossack brigades Prendell and Staal 4) crossed the Elbe at Roßlau and then advanced along both banks of the Mulde. Hereby the 1st Bug Cossack regiment bumped into Dombrowski's and De France's 5) cavalry \_\_\_ and it came to a - for the Cossacks - losing battle. After the battle, the French retreated.

Behind the Cossacks, a vanguard consisting of the brigade Schultzenheim 6) as well as a platoon of Mörner hussars and an artillery battery moved into Dessau.

The bridgehead on both banks of the Mulde was extended and a work was built on the road from Roßlau to Dessau at the bank of the Mulde and another further east between the Mulde and the Elbe. Bernadotte's instructions were (as always) to fall back towards the bridgehead in case of attack.

### **Ney's advance**

On the night of 22 to 23 September, Ney received orders from Napoleon to advance to threaten the bridgehead to prevent the North Army's transition and thus the advance towards Leipzig. However, he must not allow himself to be cut off from Wittenberg. As reinforcements, he was promised III. Army Corps.

On the 24th there was a battle at Wartenburg, which frustrated Ney and led to a lot of headless jerking back and forth. The end was that IV. corps was left at Wartenburg to prevent a possible crossing over the Elbe (which, by the way, happened a week later anyway) and VII. Corps, General Reynier 7) was again withdrawn to Dessau. \_\_\_

On the 26th Reynier began the march towards Dessau in three columns. The middle of these, the 13th division of Guilleminot and Fournier's 8) cavalry charged with the vanguard into the Cossack brigade of Staal, which - after being reinforced with three battalions and 200 hunters on horseback - threw back on some Swedish units 9) . After a short skirmish with the Swedes, the French retreated. The Cossacks had lost 30-40 men, the Swedes five dead and approx. 40 injured. A Swedish Hussar patrol of four men, under the command of Colonel Ritterstolpe, was sent forward to find out how strong the French forces were. The patrol was discovered by the French vedettes and the hussars, apart from the colonel, were all killed or captured.

On September 26, three shots rang out from the Swedish alarm battery, followed by alarm signals from the hunters' horns. A large French detachment was reported to have been seen on the march at nearby Oranienbaum. Companies of hunters were immediately sent forward to reinforce the vedettes. On Mulde's bank by the road to Dessau, a battalion from the Life Grenadier Regiment stood as an outpost. They were attacked by a French unit, but in



at the same moment the hunters arrived and the French broke off the exchange of fire. The grenadiers had lost one man in the fight. One can hardly call this a blow; it was rather an outpost fencing. Even so, the Swedes were hailed as saviors by the inhabitants of Jonitz (then a small town of 500 souls, today a district of Dessau).



*The Queen's Life Regiment, 1813*

It was now so-so with the rescue, as the Swedes withdrew the following day and left the city to the advancing French.

When the French cautiously reconnoitered towards Dessau on the 27th, the Swedes withdrew from the southern bank of the Elbe. The Schultzenheim brigade retreated even before the enemy arrived, which did not please the Swedish soldiers. At On the 14th all outposts had escaped Dessau, but only one hour later the French appeared at Mulde without having even been moved into the town. Two companies of French voltigeurs occupied several houses near the bridge. After dark, some Cossacks advanced to Dessau and spent the night inside the city.

It surprised Bernadotte that the French had occupied Dessau. He had not expected the French to remain standing, but instead to have turned towards Wartenburg to attack Bülow's corps. He had therefore given the following order:

*"When it is certain that Dessau is unoccupied, a battalion under the command of Colonel Björnstjerna must reoccupy the city."*

### **The battle for Dessau**

When Ney saw that the enemy had retreated, he wanted - just like in the battle at Wartenburg - to push the enemy bridgehead back. He knew the crown prince and reckoned that the Swedish troops would immediately retreat.

The task was given to the 1st Brigade, Gruyer [10](#)) of the 13th Division together with the light cavalry.

The events of the 28th started from the morning with an exchange of fire in Dessau between the French voltigeurs and the Cossacks. The French quickly gained the upper hand and the Russians retreated. After that, however, the Swedes advanced with a battalion of the Elfsborg Infantry Regiment supported by 50 men from the Mörner Hussar Regiment and the Cossacks. The voltigors were pushed back and it came to a standing firefight that lasted half an hour until a battalion from the brigade Gruyer threw the Swedes back after an immediate movement on the town. The French then prepared to defend the town and at midday the remainder of the Gruyer brigade moved into Dessau. The Swedes had lost five men dead and 24 wounded during the battle.

Then followed a Swedish attack on the city. Colonel Björnstjerna advanced with three battalions of infantry [11](#)), [one](#) squadron of Mörner hussars and two guns from the Wendiske Artillerieregiment. The artillery opened fire at a distance of 1,000 meters and Swedish hunters attacked and forced the enemy out of the front gardens in several places and from an old brickworks outside the town.



Frankreich.

Trompeter

vom 10. Husaren-Regiment unter Napoleon I.

Die Uniform der Trompeter war ganz im Wille der Napoleonischen Revolution abgeändert. Vorher trug man gewöhnlich dunkle, einfache Uniformen, aber doch nicht ohne interessante Systeme, so dass es möglich war, durch die Größe der Trompeten einen feinsten Gegensatz zu den anderen zu erreichen. Hier sind jedoch auf eine sehr schön gezeichnete Art die Uniformen angegeben, die sich zu der Zeit befanden. Diese sind fast alle nach einer einzigen Handschrift in der Uniform des Königlich Preussischen Regiments gezeichnet. Im Allgemeinen haben die Uniformen des Regiments angegeben, um die Ähnlichkeit der Uniformen möglichst zu machen. 1810 wurde die Uniform der Trompeter, wie die Uniformen der Infanterie durch Einführung der Napoleonischen Uniformen verändert. Jedoch wurden immer noch Züge der alten Uniformen, die sich nicht veränderten, bei der neuen Uniform in Bezug auf die Trompeten beibehalten.

Kunstl. Vervielfältigung. X. Band. S. 35.

Verlag von Max Schöner in Berlin.

### 1st French Hussar Regiment

Next, the Swedes tried to enter the city through the northern gate. They unsuccessfully tried to break open the gate with crowbars and axes. When Colonel Björnstjerna realized the futility of this attempt, he gave the order to withdraw to the bridgehead, but when the Swedes had arrived approx. 50 meters away from the town, the French opened the gate and shelled the Swedes with a barrage from three cannons. This led to a renewed Swedish attack, which was however repulsed when the French retreated again.

In the infantry regiment's regimental history of Elfsborg, it is written about the fight in front of the gate:

*"It is not known whether the gate opened as a result of the efforts of the Swedes or whether it was the French themselves who opened it. The gate flew open and behind it stood three French guns, which immediately opened fire with muskets. Both sides of the road were surrounded by hedges, which made it impossible to retreat to the sides and the Swedes had to retreat into the firing line."*

The retreat from Dessau took place at 1500. The Swedes' losses were two officers [12](#)) and [72](#) men, mainly from the Elfsborg Infantry Regiment and the Queen's Life Regiment. Colonel Björnstjerna had three horses shot away from under him.

An hour later, several of Gruyer's battalions, supported by some cavalry, began an aggressive reconnaissance against Mulde. It came into battle with the Swedish Vedettes from the Infantry Regiment Västgöta under the command of Colonel Adlercreutz. The Swedes resisted and by a counter-attack over the bridge drove the French back into the city.

Later in the evening, four men from Småland's Dragoon Regiment were sent out to investigate. The three of them were wounded during an exchange of fire with the enemy.

### **The attack on the bridgehead**

After Ney had ascertained in the evening that the front here was too strong, he decided to attack the left flank of the Swedish position on 29 September.

The Swedes' entrenchment work had meanwhile been completed. The redoubt on the road to Dessau on the northern Muldebred and a 700 meter long entrenchment between the Mulde and the Elbe [13](#)) facing east provided cover against the French attacks. The entrenchment completely cut off the peninsula between the Elbe and Mulde, and since the right bank of the Elbe was the highest, the entire area was within range of the Swedish artillery. The Swedish troops in the bridgehead were the 4th Brigade [14](#)) and the Infantry Regiment [Västgöta](#) from the 3rd Brigade.

To the east approx. 2½ kilometers from the entrenchments stood 142 men from the Elfsborg Infantry Regiment, the condensed hunter companies (approx. 270 men) and 52 light dragoons from the Småland Dragoon Regiment. On the southern road to Dessau stood a battalion from the Västgöta Infantry Regiment. The rest of the Swedish corps stood north of the Elbe at Roßlau. Behind the redoubts on the northern bank stood two Russian batteries and 20 guns from the reserve battery of the Wendish Artillery Regiment. In front of the redoubt, batteries from the Svea Artillery Regiment were positioned on both sides of the pontoon bridge.

On the 29th at 0530 the Swedish reconnaissance patrols encountered the enemy. The French advanced towards the bridgehead with three battalions.

The Gruyer brigade supported by the 2nd hussar regiment began - after a longer artillery preparation - the battle with the Swedish outposts east of the bridgehead at 0730. In the meantime, the artillery fire against the bridgehead and the bridge over the Elbe increased and the Swedish artillerymen were also fired upon by French flares.

The French units, which until now had been standing in cover of the trees, now moved out into the open and advanced towards the bridgehead. Despite orders to the contrary from the Crown Prince, General Sandels gave the order to attack. A battalion from the Infantry Regiment Skaraborg [15](#)) moved forward together with the hunter detachment and formed a line in front of the bridgehead. This was the start of a lively exchange of fire, which led to the French retreating to a forest approx. 1,500 meters east of the bridgehead. For the uncovered Swedish soldiers, it was a horrifying experience to see how people fell to the right and left of them. The firefight was so intense that some of the Swedish infantrymen were unable to hold their muskets due to overheating, while others ran out of ammunition.

A further battalion from the Skaraborg Infantry Regiment was ordered forward and extended the first battalion's line and to evade the enemy's fire the two battalions now advanced - supported by the third



battalion from the regiment - forward and threw the French back into the forest.

It developed into a fierce melee. A Swedish infantryman reports that on the morning of the battle he was busy carving new wooden soles for his shoes. When the alarm went off, he stuffed the half-finished soles under his uniform jacket - it later saved his life. During the fight in the forest, a French vaulter thrust his bayonet into his chest. The impact was stopped by the wooden soles. The Swedes were knocked over, but immediately raised again when the French tried to pull out the bayonet. Next, the Frenchman tried to hit the Swede with his musket and it developed into a scuffle, which ended when the Frenchman was stabbed by another Swedish soldier.

Gradually the French resistance grew and the Swedes were forced out of the forest again. At the same time, the French artillery drove up the southern Muldebred and opened fire on the flank of the retreating Swedes. The Swedish losses as a result of the artillery shelling were heavy [16](#)) and they had to - under the protection of their own artillery - retreat to the bridgehead. The exchange of fire continued for another couple of hours and subsided at 13.

The fact that the weaker Swedish forces, which were also stationed in the open terrain, could hold out for so long can be attributed to the artillery support from the northern banks of the Elbe. The Swedes lost 15 officers [17](#)) and 277 men. The French losses have probably not even been half as great [18](#)).       

### **After the game**

When Ney backed away from attacking the strong bridgehead, he began a real siege instead. Smaller works and trenches were built for protection against the Swedish artillery. The plan was thus to slowly work their way to the bridgehead (which was also successful) and later build a pontoon bridge over the Mulde outside the Swedes' firing range, so that the French troops could quickly cross over to the northern bank if necessary. The whole operation was to be a mere blockade, while Ney concentrated on the patrol corps operating in his hinterland.

However, this strategy was overtaken by the Allied crossing of the Elbe at Wartenburg on 3 October and the French were forced to retreat.

## **Closing**

Thus ends a largely ignored chapter in the history of the autumn campaign of 1813. Due to contemporary dislike of the Swedish crown prince, the efforts of the Swedish troops in the battles have been largely swept under the carpet in the German literature on the subject.

However, one should not measure the quality and willingness of the Swedish troops with the same yardstick. In the Battle of Roßlau, the Swedes showed their determination not to be left behind by their Prussian and Russian comrades.

### **Sources**

1. <http://www.compagnie-d-elite.de/Start/Deutsch/Artikel/Rosslau/rosslau.html>
2. Quistorp - The History of the Northern Army
3. Uniformsplancher: Knötel plancher fra <http://www.grosser-generalstab.de>

## **Additional sources for the Swedish troops**

The uniforming of the Swedish infantry in the 1800s

Carl Gustaf Klingspor's diary from the wars in the early 19th century

The Swedish Army during the Napoleonic Wars by Magnus Olofsson

Sporschil - The campaign of 1813

Hundred - Anhalt in 1813

Sintenis - The Chronicle of Zerbst

Fricke - Various works on the Swedish army

The Swedish Armed Forces Museum - Between the imperial eagles 1998

Martinien - Tables of officers killed and wounded 1805-15, EME Pais oJ

Royal Life Guards of Horse - The regiment's history in brief. Stockholm 1914

Gustav Lagerhjelm - Napoleon and Carl Johann during the War in Germany 1813, Stockholm 1891

Christoffer Barnekow- Diary entries during the campaigns of 1806 and 1813-14

Wendes regemente 1813, Stockholm 1913

Max Schürer von Waldheim - The Scanian Cavalry Regiment 1658-1928, Stockholm 1928

Torgny Bondestam - Royal Älvsborg Regiment 1624-1974 - Stockholm 1974

SF Siösten - Minnen fran Tyska Fälttåget 1813, Stockholm 1888

Gustaf Thorsander - Skaraborg's regiment in Germany 1805-08 and 1813-14, Skövde 1913

Carl Johan Ljunggren - Memoirs during 1813 and 1814, Stockholm 1855

Johann Axel Kindberg - Notes on Värmland's field hunters - 1918

**To note:**

1) Marshal Jean-Baptiste Carl Johann (Bernadotte), 1763-1844, Prince of Ponte-Corvo, Crown Prince Carl Johan of Sweden 1810-18, King Carl XIV Johan 1818-44.

2) Marshal Michel Ney, 1769-1815, Duke of Elchingen, Prince of Moskwa.

3) The force was composed of Wärmaland-Jægere, a company from each of the Kronoberg and Kalmar infantry regiments and 33 Mörner hussars.

4) Brigades Prendel: 1st Bug and 3rd Ural cosac regiments.

Brigade Staal: Don Cossack regiments Andrejanow II and 1. Bashkir regiment.

5) 4th Heavy Cavalry Division Defrance 1st

Brigade Avice

Dragoon Regiments 4, 5, 12, 14 and 24 (each with one squadron)

2. Quinette de Cernay Brigade

Dragoon regiments 16, 17, 21, 26 and 27 and 13th cuirassier regiment (each with one squadron)

A total of 11 squadrons, 1906 men.

*Source: Quistorp*

Dombrowski's cavalry: Composition at Roßlau is not known, the strength is approx. 1,000 men strong.

At Leipzig, the cavalry consists of: 18th

light cavalry brigade Krukowiecki

2nd Polish Uhlan Regiment and 4th Polish Mounted Hunter Regiment (each with 4 squadrons)

Source: Nafziger.

6) Svea Life Guard Regiment, 2nd Life Guard Regiment, Grenadiers from the Life Brigade, the Life Grenadier Regiment and the Queen's Regiment.

7) Jean-Louis Ebenezer Reynier, 1771-1814.

The brigade consisted of: 13th French Division, 24th Saxon Division and 32nd French Division.

8) 13th Division Guilleminot: Brigade Gruyer: 1st Light, 18th, 7th, 42nd and 156th Line Infantry Regiments.

The Lejeune Brigade; Illyrian Regiment, 52., 67. und 101. line infantry regiment.

Cavalry Brigade Fournier: 5th, 10th, 13th, 15th, 21st and 22nd Regiment of Mounted Hunters.

9) It was the Grenadier Battalion from the Life Grenadier Regiment, the hunter company from the Life Grenadier Brigade and a squadron from each Mörner and Scanian Hussar Regiment.

10) 4. Battalion from 1. Light Infantry Regiment, 2. Battalion from 18. Line Infantry Regiment, 3. Battalion from 7.

Line infantry regiment samt 1. og 2. Battalion fra 156. Line infantry regiment.

11) A battalion of Värmland hunters, a battalion from the Queen's infantry regiment and a composite battalion of the hunter companies from the 4th brigade.

12) Ensign Eriksson of the Elfsborg Infantry Regiment was killed and Lieutenant Lyth of the Queen's Infantry Regiment was wounded. According to an officer from the Life Brigade's memoirs, 2 men were also killed at the Queen's Life Regiment, while 17 were wounded. According to the history of the regiment, the losses of the Field Hunter Regiment Värmland amounted to 2 dead and 12 wounded.

14) Infantry Regiment Skaraborg: 3 battalions - 1,425 men; Infantry regiment Elfsborg: 3 battalions - 1,485 men; Feltjægerregimentet Wärmland 1 battalion - 471 men.

15) Like. 470 mand.

16) Predominantly from the Infantry Regiment Skaraborg, which was positioned on the Swedish right flank.

17) Infantry Regiment Skaraborg: 11, Infantry Regiment Elfsborg: 1, Infantry Regiment Westgötha: 1, Småland Dragoon Regiment: 1.

18) No information is available about the losses among the rank-and-file personnel. Lieutenant Martinien lists the following casualties among the officers: From

the 1st Light Infantry Regiment: Lieutenant Boutet, wounded on September 28th From

the 36th Light Infantry Regiment: Captains Marquet and Lasalle wounded on September 26th From the

131st Line Infantry Regiment: Second Lieutenant Carlhian wounded on October 2nd According

to Swedish records, the French lost 1,500 men, but this seems mostly like propaganda.

The French were most of the time in cover and therefore cannot possibly have suffered as great losses as the Swedes in the open terrain.

The Swedish casualty figures are given in various regimental histories

for: Infantry Regiment Elfsborg: 4 men killed, 2 officers, 2 non-commissioned officers and 48 men wounded.

Infantry regiment Skaraborg: 1 officer, 1 non-commissioned officer, 41 men killed, 9 officers, 9 non-commissioned officers and 220 men wounded.

Infantry Regiment Västgöta: 1 officer wounded. Casualties among privates unknown.