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The Battle of Lubar (Liubar)

26 September 1660

The Crushing Defeat of the Russian–Cossack Tabor Rearguard

Lębork (Poland)

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Table of contents

Introduction.....	3
The Charge:.....	4
Opposition forces.....	8
How did hussars charge?.....	12
Bibliography:.....	17

Introduction

The year 1660 A.D. is referred to as '*a happy year*' by Polish historians. It was the welcome year of recovery of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth (P-LC). The successful end of the Polish–Swedish war (1655–1660) was indeed a turning point. After the Treaty of Oliva (May 3, 1660), the Poles could once again use all their resources to regain their previously lost Eastern territories of the P-LC. So, on the one hand, when Lithuanians, supported by Polish soldiers (Czarnecki's Division) were delivering Lithuania from Russian occupation, the main Polish forces under Grand Crown Hetman Stanisław Rewera Potocki and Field Crown Hetman Jerzy Sebastian Lubomirski, who, under an alliance with the Tartars, had a daunting task to deliver Ukraine from the Russians and to subordinate the local unruly Cossacks– the former subjects of Polish kings. On the other hand, in the same time-frame, deploying in Ukraine, was a Russian army under Vasily Borisovich Sheremetev (Russian: Василий Борисович Шереметев; Polish: Wasył Borysowicz Szeremietiew), who (supported by the rebellious Cossacks) envisioned an ambitious plan to push the Poles farther west, and to capture the royal city of Lviv (Polish: Lwów; Ukrainian: Львів; Russian: Львов).

The armies met at Kutysche (Polish: Kutyszczce; Ukrainian and Russian: Кутище), near Liubar (Ukrainian and Russian: Любар; Polish: Lubar, but in the 17th c. it was often referred to as Lubartow), where the first battles took place on the 14th of September, 1660. Soon after (on the 16th of September), these combined Russian–Cossack armies (all together there were some 31,000 soldiers and 30,000 armed camp followers) were checked and blockaded in their fortified camp by the Polish–Tatar forces. Russian commander Sheremetev, meeting a much stronger opposition than he had expected before the campaign, wanted to join with the garrison (some 1,000 horses) left at Chudniv (Ukrainian: Чуднів; Russian: Чуднов; Polish: Cudnów) and further, with an additional Cossack army (some 20,000 Cossacks and 20,000 camp followers), under Yurii Khmelnytsky¹ (Ukrainian and Russian: Юрій Богданович

¹ Yurii was the son of Bogdan Khmelnytsky- leader of the Cossack uprising-Civil War of 1648 against the Polish nobility.

Хмельницький; Polish: Jerzy Chmielnicki). Therefore, he ordered to depart the camp at Liubar and headed to Chudniv...

The Russian–Cossack armies formed a *tabor*² and, on the 26th of September headed to Chudniv. The Poles tried to prevent this move. In a fierce battle which took place this day, an element of the Russian–Cossack army was destroyed, but a major part of the army was still able to reach Chudniv.

The action described below was an initial battle between the marching tabor and the Polish army. In this action a single charge of only 2 hussar banners (companies) smashed the Russian-Cossack forces, which protected the rear of Russian–Cossack tabor, that is: one regiment of Russian cavalry and one regiment of Cossack infantry.

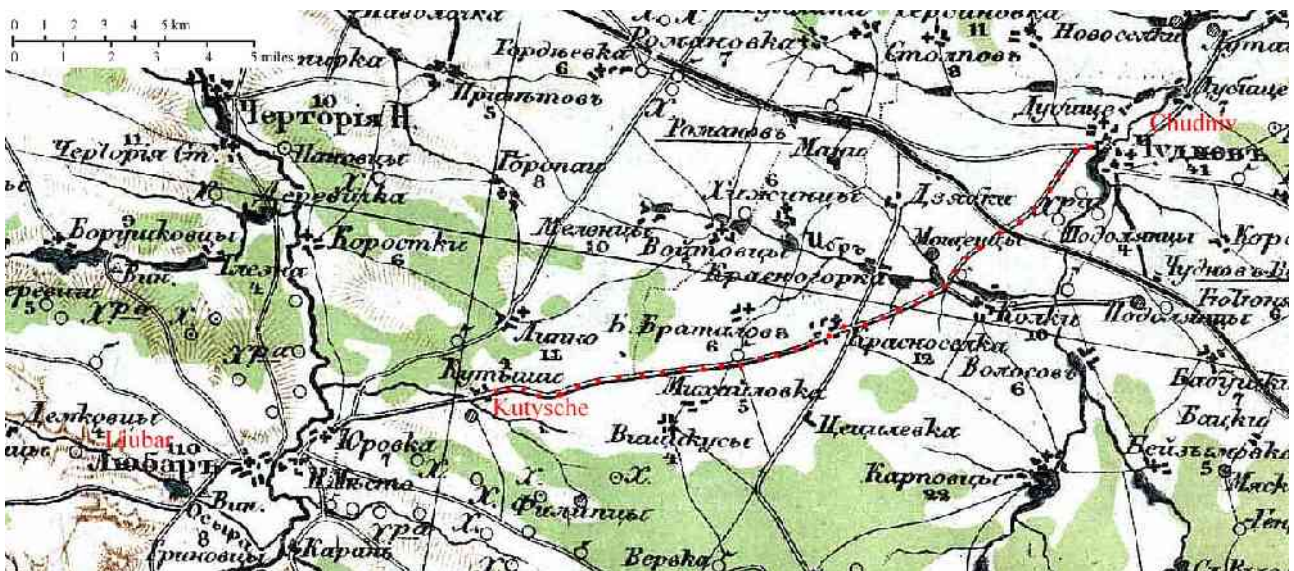
The Charge:

I was able to research and secure 4 descriptions of the hussar charge, written by the commanders of the Polish army, who fought in the battle on the 26th of September, (Hetman - Jerzy Sebastian Lubomirski; Captain of Jerzy Lubomirski's dragoons - the Scotsman Patrick Gordon; Colonel of Polish cavalry in Stanisław Rewera Potocki's division - Samuel Leszczyński; and, an anonymous officer in Stanisław Rewera Potocki's Division). Apart from this, I know of two accounts of this battle written by Poles, who, at that time, were not present in that Polish army (Joachim Jerlicz and Wespazjan Kochowski). All these sources give us excellent documentation of the events. Thanks to them we do indeed possess an immeasurable amount of tactical details of this encounter.

According to the accounts at hand:

– The rearguard of the tabor had been attacked before the tabor entered the forest; this took place at the location of Kutysche.

² Tabor: a concentration of wagons brought together for the purposes of forming a defensible placement against an outside attack against infantry and cavalry at a moments' notice.



Strelbicki's map from 1867 (the map thanks to and courtesy of Jerzy Czajewski). Red points – the route of the Russian-Cossack tabor.

- The Russian rearguard was composed of one regiment of Russian horse, Jerlicz called them the *'kiryśnicy'* (cuirassiers). This regiment of horse *'was drawne up in two great squadrons'*. And there was also *'a regiment of foot [Cossack infantry] being also drawne up behind the squadrons a little to the right of them'*. Jerlicz stated that these troops had 6,000 soldiers altogether, but I will prove that this number is an exaggeration.
- The Russian rearguard was charged by the Aleksander Michał Lubomirski's hussar banner (led by its Lieutenant, Władysław Wilczkowski; the standard-bearer in this unit was Przystawowski), supported by the Stanisław Herakliusz Lubomirski's hussar banner (led by Lieutenant Stanisław Wyżycki). Jerlicz accounts that altogether some 500 hussars charged, however, I will prove that this number is also an exaggeration.
- These 2 hussar banners were followed by other Polish units, but they entered the battle in support after the rearguard had been already thrown into disarray by the hussars' initial charge.
- Charging in the vanguard was the Aleksander M. Lubomirski's hussar banner under Wilczkowski.
- Incidentally, this charge had not been ordered by either of the Polish

hetmans; the husaria charged only thanks to Wilczkowski's initiative and his own order.

- Wilczkowski's hussars slowly approached the Russian cavalry at the distance of one furlong - '*staje*'³. Then, quickened the pace of their horses.
- Wilczkowski's hussars, while still wielding lances in '*toks*' (that is in the upright position in the lance leather holders) then '*let their lances fall to the charging posture*' and charged the enemy's cavalry.



The lance in the '*tok*' in a charging posture (photo courtesy of the author)

- Before the husaria's lances came into contact with the Russians, the latter had been discharging their guns at the oncoming hussars. Unfortunately, primary sources vary in their descriptions of their fire density. Patrick Gordon stated: '*Moskovites seeing [the advancing hussars], haveing fired some few karabins*'. Samuel Leszczyński offers quite a contrary opinion to the one above. His account states about '*niezmierne strzelanie*' (that is, '*an immense fire*'). Leszczyński's description also indicates that the Russian firing line had already commenced at some notable distance further away than the already stated one furlong-staje.

³ Staje (called also '*stajanie*') – an unit of distance in old Poland. Unfortunately there were different, varying degrees of '*staje*' in use in that time. In my opinion, the most probable, is that the '*staje*' in Leszczyński's description refers to '*staje statutowe*' (the statutory staje) which was equal with 84 Polish elbows. In layman's terms, this means that 1 '*staje*' was equal with about 49 – 50 m.

- Carabin (carbine) fire wounded only 1 hussar (a hussar comrade/companion Ożga was wounded in the knee) and also some horses.
- The Lances of Wilczkowski's hussars came in contact and penetrated into the Russian cavalry.
- Having shattered their lances the Wilczkowski's hussars then used their *'pallashes' (sabers?)*⁴.
- In support of the already fighting Wilczkowski's hussars, Wyżycki's hussars, also wielding lances, charged the Russians.
- *'Moskovites [...] fled and put the regiment of [Cossack] foot behind them in confusion'*

– *'The husars followed closs to their [Russian - Cossack] leaguer [tabor], troading downe and killing many of the foot souldiers, and takeing 3 collours.'*

However, this was no easy engagement or an easy fight. Jerzy S. Lubomirski added that Cossacks were firing at the Polish cavalrymen, killing and wounding many hussars. The Cossacks cleverly tried to avoid Polish lances by falling flat on the ground. In the melee, the Cossacks squeezed-in, crowding under the hussars' horses and overturned some of them. All in all, despite this chaotic distraction, the husaria ultimately managed to reach the last wagons in the tabor, inflicting serious damage to the Russian-Cossack forces.

– Then: *'Being come neer the arrier guards and fired upon, they [hussars] in wheeling of beat through a body of the cosakes foot, and so confounded [them] that about 7 or 8 hundred [Cossacks] being separated from the rest, gott into a wood and fyred upon us [Patrick Gordon's dragoons] going by. Which, being in a manner inclosed, made me make a stand, but more dragownes comeing up, wee got orders to dismount and attact these cosakes, whom after halfe ane houres dispute wee overcame and gave no quarters.'*

⁴ By that time the term 'pallash' already had two meanings. The first one - a saber-hilted broadsword made for hacking and slashing. The second and newer one – was becoming synonymous for the saber. Therefore it is not known in this sense, exactly which refers to the sword-weapons the hussars used in this battle.

– According to accounts of an anonymous officer in Stanisław Rewera Potocki's Division, the husaria accounted for the killing of several hundred enemy soldiers in this action.

Opposition forces

As I have previously noted, the numbers given by Jerlicz are exaggerated. In reality the forces of both enemies, the Polish and Russian-Cossacks, were much less numerous than Jerlicz stated. Let's examine this issue closer.

According to the existing Polish register of the army, Aleksander M. Lubomirski's hussar banner had 142 portions in the 3rd quarter of 1660. In that time Stanisław H. Lubomirski's hussar banner had 143 portions. This result gives us 285 portions all together. This is much less than the number of 500 so accounted for by Jerlicz.

Portion – a unit of soldier's salary.

The 'on paper' strength of the Polish army is not the same as the actual number of its soldiers. The first fact which diminished the actual number of soldiers was the method of payment to the officers from "*blind portions*". To count the actual number of soldiers in the unit, in the second half of 17th c., you have to deduct at least 20% (*because this is the percentage devoted to the officers' payment*) from its theoretical amount (*that is, from the number of "portions" of the individual unit*). This method was used with the entire Polish cavalry. So, for example, the '100-horses' banner of winged hussars had, in its full strength, only 80 hussars.

It had 80 soldiers, but it got from the state treasure 100 portions. A single portion for hussars of the so called 'komputowa army' was 50 zł / 3 months in 1660. So, the state treasure paid 5000 zł / 3 months for this banner.

The number of portions (the 'on paper' strength of a cavalry unit) was not the same as the actual number of a cavalry unit. And not only blind portions diminished the actual number of soldiers. There were also vacancies in units, because of marching losses, desertion, diseases, combat losses, etc.

Taking into account 'blind portions', this means that there could be, at most, 228 hussars in these 2 units. However, there are sources which indicate that

the *actual* number of soldiers of these 2 units were even lower.

Samuel Leszczyński, colonel of Polish cavalry, stated that the Polish army was numerous, but only *'on paper'*. In reality, this army did not have more than 15,000 soldiers. This same number of 15,000 similarly coincides with Colonel Pułaski's account. It was the actual number of soldiers of the army, while its *'on paper'* strength was 30,723 portions⁵. So, the actual number of soldiers was roughly 49% of its *'on paper'* strength.

Famous memoir writer, Jan Chryzostom Pasek, who was a noted soldier of Stefan Czarniecki's Division, confirmed a fatal condition of hetman Jerzy S. Lubomirski's Division. He described Czarniecki's and Lubomirski's soldiers before the campaign of 1660:

'From Marienburg an army also returned with Field Hetman Lubomirski. When the banners had mingled during the march, it was not necessary to ask which division a banner had belonged to, for when looked at it, it was obvious. When the men were emaciated, poor, shabby, barefooted and on foot, they came from Marienburg; if, however, they were on horseback, armed, well dressed, they were those from Denmark, or Czarniecczykowie [Czarniecki's men] as we were called'

Both Aleksander M. Lubomirski's and Stanisław H. Lubomirski's hussar banners belonged to Jerzy S. Lubomirski's Division. So, we can assume that in reality, the total, actual number of soldiers of these 2 hussar units was approximately around **140 hussars**. It was these mere 140 hussars who defeated the Russian–Cossack rearguard. Now, let's look at the numbers of Russian and Cossack regiments.

*

It should be noted that the Russian cavalry, met by the Polish husaria in this engagement, was not of the old model, feudal (so called *pomiestna*) cavalry. This was already the upgraded regiment of the new (called also foreign) order. The Russian army in that time had already begun forming its regular cavalry according to the Western European military standards. The

⁵ Number of portions of the Polish army according to: Ossoliński, *Cudnów*, p. 34, 98 – 102.

cavalry was being trained by foreign officers and equipped similarly to the Western European cavalry; their weaponry was often purchased in Western Europe. This presented an entirely new face of the Russian Cavalry to the world and a more formidable opponent to the Polish army.

We have an interesting description of this new order of Russian cavalry from an impressed Polish spy, who saw the muster of Sheremetev's army before the campaign began. According to this spy, the new order of Russian cavalry used excellent guns, rode very good horses, their heads were protected by helmets and their torso's and arms were protected by armor.

This new order cavalry was formed in 'Полки' (Polish: pułki), fashion; that is, in regiments. Usually one regiment had 10 companies and each company, 100 soldiers. So, usually a single regiment had 1,000 cavalrymen. However there were also regiments which only had 5 companies and others that had even up to 17 companies.

Sheremetev's army at Lubar, had quite typical regiments of cavalry:

- 3 Sheremetev's regiments consisted of 3,000 cavalrymen
- 2 Shcherbatov's regiments consisted of 2,000 cavalrymen
- 1 Kozlowski's regiment consisted of 1,100 cavalrymen

These were only on-paper numbers for the strength of the Russian regiments. What were the *actual* numbers of soldiers in these regiments? The account of the Polish spy indicated that the Russian new order cavalry was in a very good condition, so the actual numbers of soldiers should be close to their on-paper strength. On the other hand, in the opinion of modern Polish historian Łukasz Ossoliński, who states that in 1660, an average company of the new order Russian cavalry had only 60-70 soldiers. So, the actual number of a single regiment of the new order cavalry should be 600–700. Unfortunately, while presenting conflicting details, Ossoliński doesn't explain where his numbers might have come from.

During the battle, the cavalry regiments were divided into units larger than companies known as squadrons, and Patrick Gordon confirmed this: '*a regiment of horse [...] was drawne up in two great squadrons*').

*

The Cossack army was also composed of Полки (regiments). At Liubar there were 6 regiments in the Cossack army:

1. The Pereiaslav regiment (Ukrainian: Переяславський полк; Polish: pułk perejesławski)
2. The Myrhorod regiment (Ukrainian: Миргородський полк; Polish: pułk mirhorodzki)
3. The Kiev regiment (Ukrainian: Київський полк; Polish: pułk kijowski)
4. The Poltava regiment (Ukrainian: Полтавський полк; Polish: pułk poławski)
5. The Cherkasy regiment (Ukrainian: Черкаський полк; Polish: pułk czernihowski)
6. The Lubny regiment (Ukrainian: Лубенський полк; Polish: pułk łubieński)

Unfortunately, it is not known how many soldiers were in each regiment and which regiment was deployed in the rearguard. All these regiments had in total, roughly 15,000 Cossacks (this is an actual number of the soldiers), so 'an average' regiment should be some 2,500 strong divided into *sotnias* (companies). But the inconsistent numbers of sotnias in the regiments varied greatly. What is more, the number of soldiers in sotnias varied greatly as well. Given as such, it is hardly worth a try to discuss the specifics of an 'average' Cossack regiment of this time.

The lowest number of Cossacks can be estimated another way. According to Patrick Gordon: *'7 or 8 hundred [subtracted from the already defeated Cossack regiment] being separated from the rest [Cossacks of this regiment], gott into a wood and fyred upon us [dragoons] going by'*. And this is only one element of the defeated regiment. Another element to consider in this example is the number of

Cossacks who had already been killed.

According to the anonymous officer of Stanisław Rewera Potocki's Division, the husaria cavalry decimated several hundred enemy soldiers during the battle. Taking into account that cavalry casualties were usually much lower than those of the infantry, we can safely assume that the bulk of enemy soldiers killed were the Cossacks.

And finally, we should also keep in mind, that some (possibly most?) of the defeated Cossacks survived the battle and hid in the tabor.

All in all, it is the opinion of this author, that the lowest number of the destroyed rearguard regiment's Cossack was 1,000. It is however, possible that this number was much higher. Perhaps 1,500, perhaps 2,500... It is my hope and intention that further investigation will throw a new light on this issue.

Taking into account the lowest possible numbers involved here: (140 hussars; 600-700 Russian cavalry, and 1,000 Cossacks), it would appear that the husaria cavalry were outnumbered some 12-to-1 in this particular battle. Coincidentally, this is also the disproportion between the opposing forces given by Joachim Jerlicz's account, (500 hussars vs. 6,000 enemy forces).

How did hussars charge?

Aleksander Michał Lubomirski was a brother of the Hetman Jerzy Sebastian Lubomirski, while Stanisław Herakliusz Lubomirski was Hetman's son. Stanisław Herakliusz had a brother – a future Hetman (in the period of 1702 - 1706) Hieronim Augustyn Lubomirski.

Hieronim Augustyn Lubomirski was the author of the earliest (that is known today) regulations documented for the Polish cavalry. It bears the date 1704. These regulations describe in detail how the hussars should charge. And what is particularly interesting, the manner of the charge in the regulations is almost identical with the description of the charge of Aleksander M. Lubomirski's hussars at Liubar. The table below permits us a comparison of the regulations and the charge at Liubar.

Recommendations of the regulations from 1704	The description of the charge from 1660
Before the charge, the commander of the hussar squadron should give the order <i>'Silence'</i>	-
He should then order <i>'Close up knee to knee'</i>	-
The next order <i>'Sabers on lanyards'</i>	-
The next one <i>'March on'</i>	-
A slow approach to the enemy (horses should move in <i>'a small trot'</i>)	Hussars slowly approached the enemy (horses moved in <i>'a small pace'</i>)
When the hussars are half way to the enemy, on the order <i>'Lower your lances'</i> , lances fall to the charging posture	-
Withstanding of the enemy fire (the enemy fire <i>'must be withstood for a better effect [of the charge]'</i>)	Withstanding of the enemy fire (<i>'at the immense firing they [hussars] did not even flinch⁶⁾⁾</i>
After the enemy salvo, (from a trot) hussars quickened the pace of their horses to a gallop	Hussars quickened the pace of their horses (<i>'[hussars] spurred [their] horses'</i>) initiating the charge.
-	Lances wielded in toks (i. e. lance - rests) and fell to the charging posture
After lances break at the enemy, hussars throw away broken lances, reach for sabers and strike / cut hands of the enemy to prevent their use of any other weapons.	Lances broke at the enemy; hussars used pallasches (<i>'Into a well-nigh abyss these worthy soldiers pounced, and there was not a sight of them because of a fierce battle dust, only the shattered lances and pallasches' din of arms, wonderful scream⁷⁾⁾</i>

And what about the concept that hussars could alter their formation, even *during* a charge? There is still some rather strong controversy over this issue.

⁶ Leszczyński's account translated by Dariusz Wielec.

⁷ Ibid.

Published in 2006, in his Osprey book '*Polish Winged Hussar 1576 – 1775*', author Richard Brzezinski noted:

'A theory has developed in recent years that hussars conducted half the charge in loose formation, and closed up knee-to knee just before the final spurt, so minimizing missile casualties and allowing the charge to be aborted at the last moment. This theory, apparently introduced by the historian J. Teodorczyk in 1966, flies in the face of western cavalry doctrine. Western writers insist that the entire charge be conducted in tight order, as cavalry formations tend to spread out when horses gallop, with braver riders dashing ahead, and cautious or poorly mounted men falling behind.'

After the analysis of the Lubomirski's regulation, Brzezinski concludes:

'The idea that hussars could alter formation even during a charge is clearly a myth.'

The example presented above, of the charge at Liubar however, says nothing about the cohesion of the hussar formation during the charge. The similarity between Lubomirski's regulations and the description of the charge would suggest (and directly imply) that the hussars at Liubar charged knee-to-knee the entire the time of the charge, and thusly, it would appear to support Brzezinski's generalized thesis.

As a matter of fact, this conclusion, among other highly debatable issues, is not such an easy one to arrive at. The hussars, in fact, could have altered and did alter their formation during a charge. But I should start from the very beginning of the story...

In 1966 Jerzy Teodorczyk published his article about the battle of Gniew (Mewe) 1626. This article caused enormous damage in the Polish historiography of this period, because of the fact that Teodorczyk's erroneous arguments were widely accepted in Poland after their presentation, and had remained undisputed until the publication of my book, '*Fenomen Husarii*' in 2004.

As a personal note, allow me to clarify, that for nearly a decade, I have been a

critic of J. Teodorczyk's hussar thesis work. Through my extensive research, I have detected and demonstrated flaws in his work. My first books and my PhD thesis demonstrate how my own findings have concluded in opposition to Jerzy Teodorczyk's thesis. That said, I would be the last person who would need to defend Jerzy Teodorczyk's work. However, not everything in his article deserves a harsh critique...

Jerzy Teodorczyk indeed introduced the idea that hussars altered their formation during a charge. He based this on various sources and Polish regulations for cavalry from the 18-20th century. He also knew of Hieronim Augustyn Lubomirski's regulations from 1704. It is my conclusion, that most of these sources unfortunately were incorrectly interpreted by J. Teodorczyk, as I said most but not all of them.

Among other things, Teodorczyk provided a fragment of Bartosz Paprocki's recommendation for Polish cavalry from 1578. Paprocki wrote:

'Whereas the martial exercise is to train a soldier so he could orderly stand in formation, where they order him, quickly attack, and to spread/loosen [open ranks] and to come together [close ranks]'

This clearly indicates a concept and practice of altering the cohesion of a formation of the Polish cavalry.

Paprocki wasn't alone in writing about this altering of cavalry formation during its movement. I submit that neither Teodorczyk, nor Brzezinski were aware that Marcin Bielski, in his book published in 1569, wrote in his description a passage very similar to Paprocki. Bielski wrote that for *'knight people'* it is useful very much to train often in the field. Among other things they should train *'spreading and cramming/crowding'* (opening and closing ranks). Bielski's account also described that there were various signals given by the trumpets to open and to close the ranks.

Did hussars open and close ranks in battles too? And, did they do it during a charge?

The simple answer is – yes. They did all these things.

Fortunately, I was able to find a primary source, written by the Polish hussar Wespazjan Kochowski, who described the actual altering of formation during a charge. This occurred in the battle of Basya, the same fortunate year 1660 AD. Kochowski wrote that, being under a fierce fire of some 40 Russian cannons, Polish cavalry (7 banners under Chalecki), in order to avoid casualties; '*spread their formations into a moon*'. (Which, from most descriptions of cavalry formations, they describe that the center *was* slightly *behind* the wings of the formation, so, in this case, it could acceptably be interpreted more correctly as a 'Crescent-moon' shape). This happened *after* the trumpet had given a signal to begin their attack. So, as we can see by this example, the change of formations could and did happen *during* a charge.

What is the conclusion then? It is, therefore, my conviction that hussars usually charged in knee-to-knee formation that made perfect sense. This was the most typical manner to deliver a successful charge. Thus this manner or method was recommended either by the Lubomirski's regulation of 1704 or by Andrzej Maksymilian Fredro's military treaty of 1670 (publication date). But sometimes, given the unusual circumstances of the battlefield, it was better to charge with open ranks. And therefore hussars also trained and charged this way as well, utilizing both techniques. And such trained they were also much better able to alter the formation density during their charge.

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