

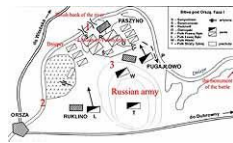
## Battlefields of '*Winged*' Hussars

I'd like to share with you some images I took of the battlefields where the Polish and Lithuanian hussars fought.

### Orsza 1514

Orsza, now in Belarus was the scene of one of the greatest battles in 16th century Europe involving almost 100 000 soldiers. It ended in a victory for the Polish-Lithuanian forces over the Muscovites. For a short description of the battle [visit](#)

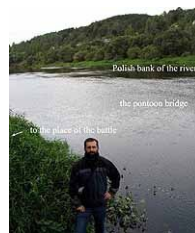
Now, look at the map



and the painting



Points 1,2,3 refer to where I've taken photos



The cross and the monument related to the battle are actually located some distance from the actual battlefield.



### Lubieszów 1577

Lubieszów (Lubiszewo Tczewskie) in Poland is a place, where hussars defeated landsknechts armed with pike and shot. For a short description of the battle [visit](#)



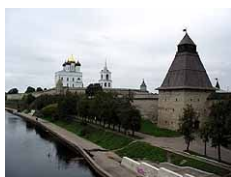
### Psków 1581 – 1582

The siege of Psków in Russia (Псков, Pskov) is interesting example of how the differences in geography between of eastern and western theaters of war influenced the compositions of the

armies. Western European campaigns covered relatively small distances through areas of high population density when compared with Eastern European campaigns which traversed much larger, sparsely populated areas. As a consequence Polish commanders had to pay more attention to, and devote more resources to, logistics than would any western commander of the same era. It should be remembered that Karl XII's, Napoleon's and Hitler's invasions of Russia failed primarily due to logistical problems.

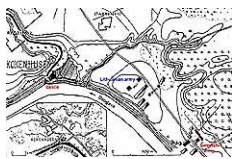
The Polish-Lithuanian army, which invaded Russia in 1581 numbered about 220,000 men, of whom only 50,000 were soldiers. The other 170,000 men were the armed servants who made up the logistical train of the army. Psków was well fortified and defended and the Polish-Lithuanian siege lasted over 5 months (In contrast Gustavus Adolphus laid siege to Psków 1615 and gave it up after only two and a half months). The countryside around Psków was completely plundered by foragers and by the end of the siege the Polish - Lithuanian armed servants were bring forage and provisions in from 350km away! Because of the considerable thought and resources devoted to the problems of supply the Polish – Lithuanian army was able to continue the siege for over five months through one of the coldest winters of the century. The Treaty of Jam Zapolski, ending the war was signed in January 1582 and the siege was finally ended on the 6th of February, 1582. During the course of this short war the Poles had retaken Livonia and extended their borders to include former Russian territory.

The role of hussars in the siege is also quite interesting, as siege warfare had little calling for their traditional role as armoured cavalry. Instead the hussars were employed as armoured assault troops during the attacks on the city walls. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of September, almost 1 500 dismounted hussars equipped with armour, lances, pistols and muskets took part in a major assault on the walls.



## Kokenhauzen 1601

Kokenhauzen in Livonia, now Koknese in Latvia, was a castle and fortified town held by the Swedes.



Krzysztof 'The Thunderbolt' Radziwiłł laid siege to the castle with 3000 Lithuanian troops. A relief army of 4 900 Swedes commanded by Carl Carlsson Gyllenhielm were defeated as they tried to raise the siege.

For more about the battle [visit](#)

Krzysztof Radziwiłł's hussar armour still exists in The Museum of Polish Army in Warsaw. As you can see, Radziwiłł was a big very guy. I think he was as tall as me (1.9 m) but at least twice my weight, which would make him about 160 kg! (I pity his horse!)



## Cesis 1601

At Kieś (Cesis) in Livonia (modern Latvia) in 1601 a force of 700 Lithuanians; mostly hussars, defeated a Swedish force of approximately 3000. The fighting started close to the castle and finished at Gawia river, where many Swedish troops were drowned. According to Herbst, the Swedes deployed pikemen in the battle. The Swedes lost 2000 men; Lithuanian casualties were 64 men and 90 horses.



This is an illustration of a Hussar commander from early 17th c. by Dariusz Wielec.

The final picture is of hussar armours from the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> c from the Museum of Polish Army in Warsaw.



## Kircholm 1605

The battle is famous for two things:

1. It was an overwhelming victory for a Polish-Lithuanian army of approximately 3700 soldiers over a Swedish force numbering about 11 000 soldiers.

At this point we should stop and examine the figures more closely as historians usually ignore a presence of armed servants in the armies of this era. This is a grave error, because the armed servants were not noncombatants; they were employed to defend camps and fortified positions and sometimes they also supported ordinary soldiers in field battles or in the storming of enemy fortifications. Moreover, usually an army had more armed servants than ordinary soldiers. As a general rule for PLC armies of the era, multiply the number of cavalry by two for the approximate number of armed servants.

The PLC army at Kircholm probably had around 5000 armed servants. The Swedish camp and presumably the majority of the servants, remained at Riga, so the Swedish force at Kircholm consisted only of soldiers. All in all, discrepancy between the numbers of 'armed men' at Kircholm wasn't as big as the disproportionate numbers of soldiers employed on both sides.

2. It was the battle where the winged hussars broke Swedish pikemen.

There has been much debate about this event and one frequently encounters the argument that the hussars broke the pike formations only because the Swedish infantry was already thrown into disarray by routed Swedish cavalry. This is partially true, but it is also not the whole truth. It is true inasmuch the second line of Swedish infantry was indeed broken in this way. But the first line, or at very least at least a part of the first line, was broken by a direct attack of the hussars. A Polish primary source states clearly that the first action of the battle was when Wojna's winged hussars charged and broke the Swedish pikemen. Therefore the blame cannot be transferred to the Swedish cavalry as they were not yet engaged, let alone routed.



The site of Kircholm is now in Latvia and called Salaspilis. These are two monuments there which relate to the battle of 1605. The first monument is very easy to find as it is close to the main road and everybody in Salaspilis knows it.



The second monument is dedicated to a Swedish reiter, who saved the life of the Swedish king, Karl IX and is much more difficult to find. Even the local police in Salaspilis couldn't direct us to it. Eventually we found it close to the main road, behind a bar!

Unfortunately, the site of the battle has changed completely over the last four centuries. For a video which shows the site as it appears today click [here](#).

## Kłuszyn 1610

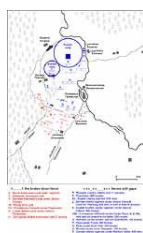
This battle is particularly noteworthy due to the disproportionate numbers involved and the consequences of the battle. An relatively small force of Poles defeated a much larger Russo-Swedish force and as a consequence was able to occupy Moscow. The Polish Army numbered around 2700 men, mostly hussars. Polish armed servants were left at Carewo Zajmiszcze, about 27 km away and played no part in the battle. Opposing them was a large army of approximately 3 300 Swedish soldiers and 15 000 Russian soldiers supported by about 20 000 – 30 000 armed servants, peasant levies etc.

The battle is also interesting, because the winged hussars broke Swedish pike and shot formations. The hussars also used their horses' chests to break down fences. How did they do it? Visit the file titled 'breaking fences' with the diagram drawn by my friend Dariusz Wielec.



The battle of Kłuszyn (eng. Klushino; rus. Клушин) in fact took place about 8 km from Kłuszyn, Russia.

If you look at the file 'Kłuszyn-map' you will see that the battlefield site is between the rivers: Gzhat (Гжать), Izezhenka (Изъезженка) and Vdovka (Вдовка). Now look at the file 'Kłuszyn-map2'.



Point 2 on the map refers to where the photo 'Kłuszyn2' was taken and similarly, point 3 relates to image 'Kłuszyn3'.





For an extensive description of the battle [visit](#)

## Smoleńsk 1609-1611 and 1632-1634

During the 17<sup>th</sup> century Smoleńsk was the most strongly fortified of all Russian cities, ringed by 6.5 km of walls, 11 m high, 6 m thick and topped with 38 towers. Long sections of the fortifications which were built between 1596 -1602, still exist and are in a quite good state of preservation.



The hussars were involved in two major actions at this site. In 1609 a Polish-Lithuanian army laid siege to the city. Which at its peak involved approximately 100 000 armed men (Polish and Lithuanian soldiers + their armed servants + Cossacks). On the 21st of August, 1610 there was an unsuccessful assault on the city by dismounted hussars. After two long years of siege, Smoleńsk finally capitulated, coming under Lithuanian rule for next 43 years (1654).

The second hussar action at Smoleńsk occurred during the Russian siege of 1632-1634 (refer to the file 'Smolensk-monument'; this monument relates to that siege – specifically to the Szein's bastion). In September, 1633 Polish king Władysław IV Waza arrived with an army to rescue Smoleńsk. There was much heavy fighting outside the city between the besieging Russians and the relieving Polish-Lithuanian army. This time the hussars were luckier and on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September, 1633 Russian pike and shot infantry formations were smashed by a charge of hussars in an open field battle. The besieging Russian army now found itself besieged, and eventually surrendered in 1634.



## Chocim 1621

Chocim (eng. Khotyn) in Ukraine was the site of seven battles involving Polish troops. The one we are interested in here, which was also the largest, took place in 1621.

An enormous Ottoman army of about 200 000 men (about 100 000 soldiers) unsuccessfully tried to capture Polish-Lithuanian-Cossack (P-L-C) fortified camp. The P-L-C army numbered 100 000 armed men in total, about 55 000 of which were soldiers.

The fighting lasted over a month, but if we are talking about hussars, there is one special day - 7th

of September, 1621. This was when 600 hussars charged and routed 10 000 Ottoman soldiers so decisively that Sultan Osman II was reduced to tears.

The map shows the place where the charge took place - look at the red pointer. Much has changed over the centuries and buildings now cover the site of the charge.



This map shows also the place (point 1), where the photo below was taken.



The photos 'castle1' and 'castle2'. They show the castle of Chocim, which was in Polish hands during the battle. There is marked point 1 on the photo 'castle1' (this is the place, where the file 'Chocim1' was taken). In image 'castle2' you can see where Polish bridge was situated and its construction.



### Kropimojza / Kroppenhof 1621

The battle of Kropimojza lake in Livonia (Latvian name: Lobes ezers), whilst a relatively minor engagement in terms of troop numbers (500-600 Lithuanian soldiers against 850 Swedish soldiers supported by camp servants) is all the more interesting due to the type of units involved. It was here that the hussars fought, and defeated the elite of the Swedish cavalry, Gustavus Adolphus' own cuirassiers.

The site of the battle was unknown until 2008, when my friends and I rediscovered it, using an only recently published account by one of the hussars who fought there.



### Kamieniec Podolski 1633 and 1634

At Kamieniec Podolski in 1633 a Polish army repulsed an Ottoman incursion into the Ukraine. For those interested in the husaria it is 'special', as there is firm evidence, in this case an account by one of the hussars that fought there, that the hussars wore their wings into battle.

In September of next year, 1634, the Poles, expecting another Ottoman offensive, mustered a large force (roughly 35 000 ordinary soldiers and an unknown number of armed servants) at Kamieniec Podolski. According to a surviving description of the muster, the hussars were there resplendent with wings and mounted on painted horses.

It appears that news of the Polish preparations reached the ear of the Sultan as the Ottoman invasion never materialized.

Below is a photo of Kamieniec Podolski castle - the most important Polish fortress in Southern Crown (modern Ukraine).



## Zbaraż 1649



The siege of Zbaraż (now in Ukraine) is one of the most famous sieges in Polish history. A huge Cossack-Tartar army estimated at 300 000 laid siege to a Polish army of some 15 000 armed men. It was typical siege with only minor actions outside of the main fortifications and siege lines. The hussars mostly fought dismounted during the siege, which ended in a Polish victory.

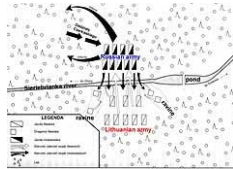


## Szklów 1654



At Szklów 1654 a Lithuanian army commanded by Janusz Radziwiłł, grandson of Krzysztof 'The Thunderbolt' Radziwiłł, defeated a Russian army five times its size.

The battle lasted for over five hours during which time every unit of Lithuanian cavalry charged at least five times and some as many as ten. After the victory Janusz Radziwiłł heaped praises on his hussar company, as well as his cossack company. In this battle the hussars were engaged against Russian cuirassiers.



Szklów is close to Mohylew/Mogilev (now in Belarus). The battlefield is near modern Szklów which is closer to the Dnieper than the old Szklów which was destroyed by fire in the 18<sup>th</sup> c.

Today in the place of old Szklów is a small village (Бол. Ст. Шклов). The site of the battle is between old Szklów and modern Szklów (map on the right – red circle).



## Mohylew 1655

Mohylew (now in Belarus) is another place, where hussars defeated infantry armed with pike and shot. In the winter 1655 the Russian defenders of Mohylew (musketeers and pikemen) left the city to engage the Poles in the open fields.

The Hussars charged crossing a frozen river and smashed into the Russian infantry. According to one of the hussars, the Russians “fired a couple of good volleys at the hussars, but thanks to God's grace we didn't suffer at all”.



## Prostki 1656



The battle of Prostki (modern Poland) was a victory for the Polish-Lithuanian-Tartar army (including hussars) over Swedish-Brandenburg army. Most of the battlefield is now covered in forest. For more information on the battle visit [this](#) and [this](#) site.

The commander of P-L-T army at Prostki was Wincenty Gosiewski, an ancestor of the former Polish deputy prime-minister Przemysław Gosiewski. Compare the pictures and decide for yourself if there is any family similarity. (The image of Przemysław Gosiewski is from [his site](#)).



Przemysław Gosiewski



Wincenty Gosiewski

## Połonka 1660

Now in Belarus, Połonka is the site of yet another battle where winged hussars broke pike formations. At this battle one of the hussars is reputed to have impaled six Russian soldiers on his lance at once!



## Basia (Бася) River 1660.



This battle against the Russians took place close to the village of Ugły (УГЛЫ) in modern Belarus. What is interesting about this engagement is the tactics employed by the Russian infantry to neutralize the effect of the hussars charge.

## Military theory

Military writers from a variety of countries advised that it was best to ‘give way’ when confronted

with an unstoppable force. One of the best Imperial commanders Raimondo Montecucoli stated:

*'For it is a general rule when there is something that cannot be resisted, it is necessary to give way.'*

and:

*'Certain captains among the ancients, like Hannibal, Pyrrhus, Antochus, and Jurgurtha employed elephants, which were stationed in the first rank of the army. Because of the huge size of their bodies, the horror evoked by their trumpeting, and the novelty of their use, they were able to upset both men and horses. With their vigor and impetus they smashed the opposing alignments, which gave way as to an earthquake. [...]*

*There were three ways of resisting this kind of impetus. First, one could establish a great number of intervals along the front. So that the gaps would not be disclosed and so that the line would seem united, the former were filled with velites, who were commanded, as soon as the elephants should arrive, to give way and to enter in between the legions via the ordinary spaces, thereby leaving a free path for the elephants. In this way the impetus of these beasts was nullified: being caught within the alignments, they could be seized together with those who were guiding them. [...]*

*It is said that in the wars which the King of Sweden [Gustavus Adolphus] waged with the King of Poland [Sigismund III] the former was accustomed to neutralize the impetus of the Polish lancers, whom their fellow countrymen call hussars, by opening up his ranks in the same fashion – a tactic which succeeds quite well.'*

This tactic was widely known and used in 17<sup>th</sup> c. by different armies including the Russians as witnessed below in the advice of Russian tsar from the time of the battle:

*„Да для помычек твоего полку конных вели рейтаром и пешим промешки строить пространнее, и как лучица помчат конных, вели им бежать в промешки, а строю не вели ломать [...] а будет помчат издалека конных на стройных людей пеших и конных, на середние роты, а не в те промешки, которые на то устроены, вели разступаться строем. А буде на конечные роты, вели потому ж разступаться или тем конечным ротам отдаваться и заходить за полк.”*

This tactic was used by the Russians against hussars in the battle of Basia river. Below is description of hussar charge, written by Jan Chryzostom Pasek – a Polish participant in the battle:



*'When our men encountered a weak spot in a crowd (as there were some of them who were afraid for their bellies), they would step aside for us, so we were able to pierce directly through the enemy ranks like a drill, without getting many of the lances broken. In this manner we pushed their way directly to the very gateway of the enemy's movable towers which sheltered the ranks and files of their army prior to their being led from between them and out into the battlefield. In breaking through our forces [some 160 cavalrymen] lost only one companion and one horse [in fact the Poles lost: 2 killed, 2 wounded and 2 captured soldiers and few wounded horses]. Once they reached and were directly facing their fortified gateway, they turned with their flag to face those enemy soldiers who were fighting in the lines through which they had just broken and at whose back they now were.'*

And finally battles with pictures taken by Bartosz Siedlar

## Obertyn 1531

Here almost 6000 Poles (+ 12 cannons + some armed servants) defeated roughly 17 000 Moldavians (+ 50 cannons).



More about the battle:

- [in Polish](#) (there are also many maps and the scheme of the battle order of the Polish cavalry and early hussars)

- [in English](#)

[The computer animation](#) by my brothers, Janusz and Grzegorz. Note that the Polish army is in red.

## Warsaw 1656

The three-day battle of Warsaw in 1656 ended in defeat for the Polish-Lithuanian forces. The actions of the hussars and the tactics used to counter the hussar charge make an interesting study.

On the first day of the battle a charge by the hussars smashed the Brandenburg-Swedish troops who fled into the surrounding forest. Only the closeness of the forest saved the Swedes from destruction, allowing them to regroup.

Cautioned by his experience the day before Swedish King Carolus X Gustavus the next day:

*"seeing this tempest coming towards his left wing, immediately advanced thither himself betwixt the battells with his guards of trabants and riters, and gave orders to all commanders of brigades and regiments that when the husars or lanciers should charge them, they should open and give way to their fury, which he knew was not to be withstood with any force or other policy at that tyme."*

The above passage is quoted from the memoirs of the Scottish soldier Patrick Gordon, who was present at the battle.

This is a repeat of the tactics employed by the Russians at Basia River, discussed above - and this time it succeeded. On the second day of the battle, July 29, 1656, 300 Lithuanian hussars charged through Swedish cannon fire, seemingly unstoppable, but were unable to press home into the Swedish cavalry squadrons who simply gave way before them. Once the impetus of the charge had been spent the Swedes used their superior numbers to surround the relatively small unit of hussars and attack it from all sides. The Swedish king took part in this action and some primary sources state that he was unhorsed by a hit from a hussar's lance whilst others claim he was targeted by a hussar who was killed before his lance could reach the king.

The Polish commanders were so confident that the hussars had smashed the left wing of the Swedish army that they... stopped for dinner! It was only later that they realized that the battle was far from won! After hard fighting the survivors of the 300 hussars managed to regain the Polish army.

In the face of further attacks from the Swedish army the moral of the Polish-Lithuanian army

faltered and the next day they retreated leaving the Swedes in possession of the field.

Today the battlefield is under the buildings of Warsaw.



the site of the charge during the first day of the battle.

the site of the charge during the second day of the battle.

