

## January 1813 r. - Recruitment

It's been six months since I left my family and signed up for a new force cavalry of Warsaw Principality formed by Napoleon himself. General Umiński has become our commander. Because of the clothes we had, similar to Kozaks' ones, he named us *Krakusi*. "You will be a curse for Kozaks and you'll learn how to approach them and force them to run away each time they hear about you" he said solemnly. We've become the "Fire Army" for the Great Napoleon's Army whose main goal is to wipe out Kozaks.

## The end of February- The first blood

At the beginning there were 6 thousand of us but, as they say beginnings are always difficult, rough times has come, and many of us deserted after the first battle

It was the middle of February in Stawiszyno. I will never forget that day.

We were thrown in the deep end, our attack was badly organised and because of our disruptiveness the enemy crushed us at the first shot.

It was a horrible feeling to watch millions of gun barrels pointing at you. Many of us were terribly frightened, and the fear spread throughout the regiment like a disease.

Unlike regular army we all came from villages: badly educated and illiterate. Looking indifferent, wearing peasants' clothes, riding on small, scrawny horses...It is rumoured that we look like Scythe-bearers on ponies. Yet, I know, we'll become The Army one day. We won't run from the battlefield because we are Polish - we never ever give up.

Today I thank My Lady of Częstochowa for saving me from all those sanguinary bullets.

I was just a bit hurt, nothing serious...I'm not complaining because I have got used to hard conditions.

Being in the army I've also improved my writing skills. I have known only some letters so far. Our commander has said that reading is a very useful ability. I've been given some paper by one of the French soldiers whose army stationed next to ours, so I could practice my writing.

I wanted to write to my beloved Marianna, tell her I'm healthy and fine. I reckon she has heard about our temporary failure but it seems impossible to send my letter now.

That's why I want to note all my adventures to tell her all about them one day. It will be a proof of me being a real patriot and a responsible man...even though I'm an average peasant.

I have heard that new recruits are coming soon and so is the spring.

### May- Blood, Sweat and Tears

In Poland there are already lots of signs of Spring. Lately Napoleon himself has acceded prince Poniatowski, the great Commander of Rzeczpospolita, and agreed to incorporate our two regiments into one Advance Guard or, like people call us here, Krakusi Regiment. Along with the strongest formation we are led by general Umiński, our instigator. While displaying our division, Poniatowski seemed surprised. We were sitting on horses wearing dingy shirts with guns hanging on strings and bayonets. He hadn't been used to such views. However, in his astonishment, I'm sure, I could barely spot a glare of faith deep in his eyes. All in all, we are the vanguard and we're determined to combat our longtime enemy, the Kozaks. There is a fire in each of us, we can feel it and that makes us the Napoleon's Avant-garde. Nevertheless, we can't escape from life's ordinariness. Yet, strenuous exercises from early mornings to late evenings take a toll on us, I know it's worth it. Lifting up rocks while riding a horse is a clear sailing. Last week we even organized catching sand while galloping.

So, my Dear Home Country we work hard developing self – reliance, maneuverability and agility to bring you glory one day.

### September- Parade in front of The Great Commander

Recently Napoleon has gone through the troops. He was very delighted especially by the sand trick. What's more, we use optic signals at a very high level. Our commanders taught us this ploy. The agility is a result of long and tedious work. We're trained mostly to create a diversion and change the front line if needed.

We are looking forward to fight some battles. We are totally different from that small, indolent regiment formed in February. I can't believe ... We are The Army! I have never dreamed about it even in my deepest dreams...

Of course, I miss home and my love but I know I have to devote myself and fight for my Homeland. I'm feeling it's something I've been made for as well as all my division.

We are mounting good horses now, we're all dressed in navy jackets and grey coats. Even the people from local villages through which we were coming back said: "This great army is completely different from those brave, wild people we saw a year ago...". That's who we are. We attack

suddenly, through the ambush. Kozacy run away as soon as they spot us. Some time ago my division camouflaged at the enemies back. We purported to Kozaks. We obviously speak their language and look alike so...To our surprise, we managed to arrest their commander because he was so stupid believing we belonged to other Kozak's regiment. Unimaginable fun!

### November- The Glory Days

I was extremely proud when Napoleon the Great was decorating me with The National Order of Merit. All the soldiers were looking at us-77 Polish people and our Commander being decorated for our last victories. I couldn't breathe for a moment. I'd been given an order from the Great Leader himself. Finally I had a proof of my bravery and I may come back to my Marianna and tell her father I served my country well. "For our freedom and yours" that was our motto. We fought not only to liberate our Nation from oppression but to bring independence to peasants and those who needed it. Our Regiment has been very successful lately. The French Army couldn't have handled the diversion without our support. They lack passion. Discipline and understanding as well as a special stick made of horsehair called Buńczyk were the features the French didn't have. I can tell the army is my family. I know everyone here and we can count on ourselves. For instance like in Strahwolde's battle where we crushed two Russian regiments - nobody had done it before.

### July 1814 - The Final Battle and The Last Trip

A few months ago there was the worst massacre I had ever seen. It was the Battle of Leipzig where The French and Russian army fought against each others. This memory gives me creeps every time I think about those three days....

Everything had gone well until pulling the troops across the Elster river. Me and some of my companions moved forward to clear the passage for Poniatowski prince. I hadn't known then it was a mistake.

One of the French soldiers confused us with Kozaks, blew up a dam, leaving 150 thousand soldiers and our Commander on the other side. Stung by the blast I stood there, completely confused and then I saw him, our Prince, holding his chest where he was shot a minute ago by some Russian soldier. I saw his face getting paler and paler...From his wound, like from a spring, a stream of red blood was flowing down. I knew it was over. Not controlling myself, I started to run towards him. He noticed me, kissed his sabre, made a sign of the cross, gave me the blessing and on his

last legs he repeated the sentence each of us knew so well...."Poland is not lost yet" I couldn't hear but I'm absolutely sure those were the words.

A long time has passed since that day. Less than half of our army survived The Battle of Leipzig. Our division was regrouped again, we got new clothes and new commanders...Now, we're coming back home, finally. I haven't seen my precious Homeland for years....but I still remember those silver streams, trees full of apples and the taste of mushrooms. I will not forget it. NEVER.

Our last task is to escort our Commander Poniatowski and to accompany him on his last journey. After a long time of fighting for the Country we finally can return home. I remember after The Final Battle he said to me: "We are coming back home my dear. I miss our beloved Homeland so much". The sound of his voice was so bright, as if he spoke about a little child. Deep in my heart I think our Homeland was a real child for this great master. Without him our army isn't the same anymore. We, older recruits have no motivation, our passion is gone. I have heard about reopening our division but I have decided to come back to my beloved Marianna.

Yesterday, I got a letter from her. Thanks God, she is fine but I must hurry. I must bring up my future children to be true patriots as my regiment was and in the way prince Poniatowski would want to see them.

I'm going home, to my rivulet and birchen forest but changed. I'm not the same man I used to be. I'm a patriot and a free man.

The End