

Cossacks sometimes failed to inform the headquarters of the movements of the enemy !
During pursuit they could be easily sidetracked upon encountering a baggage train :-)

Lava - tactical formation

In combat the Cossack regiments (of 5 *sotnia* each) used the so-called *lava* formation. The word *lava* is an abbreviation of the tartar word *oblava*, which means "hunting by driving game into an enclosed space."

The great extent of front covered by the *lava* made it possible simultaneously to envelop one flank of the enemy, to direct attacks against his rear, and to take advantage of any opening by partially assembling.

In taking up the *lava* formation a *sotnia* first formed line of half-platoons 50 paces to the front, on the center platoon and then deployed that line so that there will be 1 Cossack for every 4 paces of front. In this manner *sotnia* covered a front of 400 m. One platoon followed the deployed line in close order. If this platoon also deployed, 1 NCO and 6 Cossacks remained with the guidon to mark the rallying point, the so-called *majak* (lighthouse).

In the War of Liberation (1813-14) similar formation was used by the Prussian Landwehr cavalry. The Prussian Landwehr cavalry used single-rank formation, generally avoided the shock delivered by bodies in close order, and attacked flank and rear of the enemy.

William Balck writes, "To attack them (Cossacks) in close order is futile as the Cossacks in *lava* formation evade every collision and can not be caught at any point. But even granting that the Cossacks possess superior skill in handling their sabres and lances, a statement that is contested by the Russians themselves, cavalry of the line is superior to them in speed, and in size and weight of mounts. The superior stature of their mounts gives the cavalymen of the line a distinct advantage over the Cossack in hand-to-hand combat." (*William Balck - "Tactics"*)

Prokesh however claim that the Cossacks were able to use close formation. He writes, "The way of doing battle is for the Cossacks the dispersed formation; the close formation is less natural to him. But one makes a mistake if he concludes from this that there are no cases in which they would have to be used in closed column, in which role it will serve well..."

The Cossack jumped from his horse and cried;
"Now you can catch me !"

Britten-Austin described Cossacks' tactics during Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812. "Each morning it's the light cavalry, joined by Joachim [Murat](#) (ext. link) in person, that opens the march, the hussar and chasseur regiments ... Day after day the Russian rearguard carries out the same manœuvre. By pretending to make a stand, it lures Murat into mounting a full scale attack - and then melts away into forests. Towards midday the heat becomes intolerable; and the chasseurs and hussars 'seeing the Russians dismount, unbridle their horses and give them something to eat. Yet General St. Germaine kept us standing in battle array, bridle on arm, at our horses' heads. (*Britten-Austin - "1812 The March on Moscow" p 124*)

Picture: Red Lancer pursued by Cossacks.

Napoleon's cavalry struggled in the small warfare against the Cossacks, including the elite unit of light cavalry, the 2nd Lancer Regiment of the Imperial Guard, the famous Red Lancers. Austin writes, "Approaching stealthily, Cossacks nevertheless (again) carry off the Dutch regiment's outpost picket. And again 'only one man escaped flat out at a gallop and brought the news to our camp. Even an hour and a half's pursuit couldn't catch up with the Cossacks.' Mortified by this second surprise of the campaign, Colbert doubles the 2nd Regiment's outposts; and, to make assurance doubly sure, mingles the Dutchmen with the warier, more experienced Poles." (*Britten-Austin - "1812 The March*

