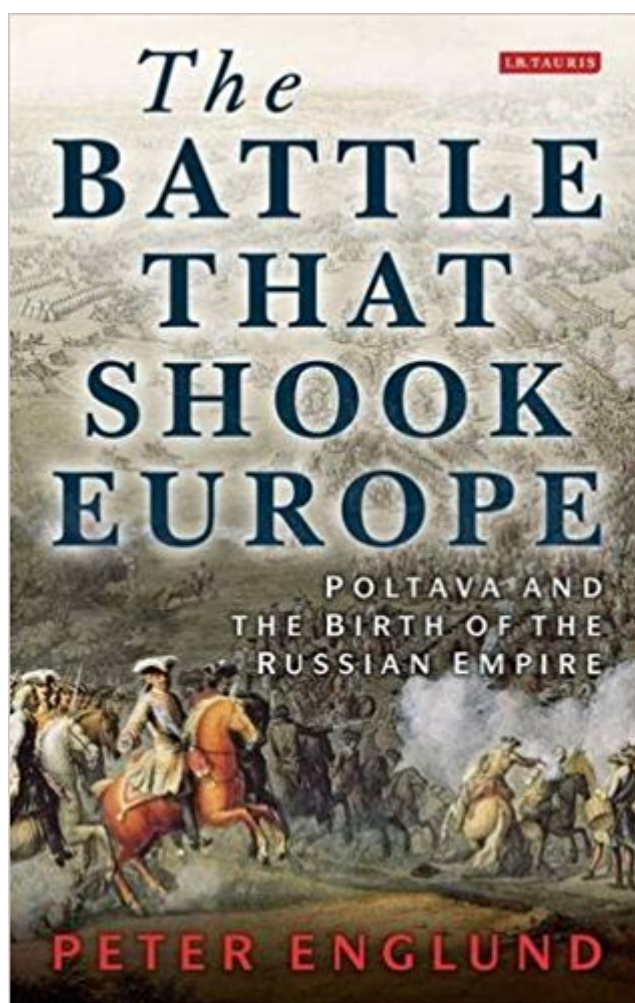


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# The Battle That Shook Europe: Poltava And The Birth Of The Russian Empire



## Synopsis

'This victory', exulted Peter the Great, 'has laid the final stone in the foundations of St Petersburg!' The Battle of Poltava, 1709, marks the birth of the Tsar's vast Russian Empire. In 1700, seeking to open Russian trade routes to the West, the Tsar combined with Denmark, Saxony and Poland to attack Swedish hegemony in the North. Against the odds, King Charles XII of Sweden subdued the hostile coalition for nearly a decade, but in 1708 took his fatal decision to march for Moscow. His defeat at Poltava, in the Ukraine, proved the turning-point of the Great Northern War, heralding the collapse of the Swedish Empire and the rise of Russia, the effects of which would be felt for almost three hundred years. Swedish historian Peter Englund's vivid account of the three violent days of battle is an internationally acclaimed classic of military history, admired by scholars and the lay reader alike.

## Book Information

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: I.B.Tauris; Reprint edition (April 15, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1780764766

ISBN-13: 978-1780764764

Product Dimensions: 5.7 x 0.9 x 11 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 stars 15 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #565,117 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #28 in [Books > History > Europe > Scandinavia > Sweden](#) #1493 in [Books > History > Asia > Russia](#) #1553 in [Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Military](#)

## Customer Reviews

"The most outstanding brilliant military history I've ever read" --Sunday Telegraph --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Peter Englund is Professor of History at Uppsala University, Sweden's oldest and most prestigious seat of learning. He is heavily involved in the international media and has worked as a war correspondent in Afghanistan and the Balkans. He has recently been elected to the Swedish Academy, responsible for awarding the Nobel Prize for Literature. His bestselling *The Battle that Shook Europe* is recognized as the definitive work on the subject, and an international classic of the

genre.

This book ranks amongst the very best military history I have ever read. It incorporates a detailed account of Charles XII's campaign that led his army deep into Ukraine, the action at Poltava, clear portraits of the main actors and moving accounts of what happened to so many of the ordinary Swedish soldiers (the wealth of information that the writer has for such an old battle is really astonishing). As it says on the cover, it pulls no punches about fighting. It makes an excellent starting point for delving into warfare of the era. I was especially impressed by the descriptions of the artillery fire and its consequences, the terrible fate of the wounded, the sacrifices made by the Swedish soldiers in order to save their king and the paradox ethics of warfare at that time. The book is mainly focused on the Swedish side with the Russians mentioned in a general and not so analytical way. Thus the subtitle on the cover should rather be "Poltava and the Demise of the Swedish Empire".

good book good price

"The Battle That Shook Europe" is for sure the only real definitive account of the Battle of Poltava. Peter Englund has written a riveting story that gives us a lens to peer into this incredible era of warfare. Not only does he send you to that hot Ukrainian battlefield in the boots of the Swedish soldier, he also provides valuable insight into the battle tactics of the time. I can think of no better book that truly puts the characteristics of 17th and 18th century warfare into perspective for the modern reader. Englund does fill a few pages with dry statistics of casualties and also the regimental structures of the Tsarist and Carolean army, but this should not deter the reader; For this only testifies to the impeccable scholarship shown by Englund. The author does not write about the battle and the Great Northern War solely in textbook fashion, he also brings out the human face of war. The descriptive re-telling of the iron-disciplined Swedish infantry unflinchingly marching to the Russian line under stupefying volleys of cannon round-shot and grapeshot then finally the vaunted mass of musketry, is by itself enough reason to read this. Englund includes a variety of personal accounts from the Swedish side, and does not at all glorify the ugly reality that the rank and file experienced on campaign and in combat. War crimes and massacres are not left out, and the gruesome after-effects of battle are descriptively told throughout. I read every page of this book with pleasure, and will no doubt come back to it again in the future.

Firstly it must be said that this narrative is told from a distinctly Swedish perspective. The Russian forces are largely faceless and there nowhere near the same degree of detail about the Russian forces of Peter the Great as there is those of Charles the XII. Englund starts with detailed analysis of force organisation. How did such a small country with a combined population of a little over a Million become the major power in Northern Europe? Some clues are found in the revolutionary way of raising the Swedish Army and the skilful leadership of Charles XII. The Swedes were also not the lovable pastey-faced ideologues of peace and understanding as we know them today; they were ruthless in their suppression of enemy populations and their rapacious behaviour in coving almost all of central Europe. Moreover they highly motivated by territorial incentives. Peter the Great's Russia was unfortunate enough to be the nearest and most logical enemy to attack with Sweden traditionally controlling almost all of the modern-day Baltic states as an advanced glacis to both protect and launch offensives against Russia. Englund dwells very little on the political motives for war and plunges right in with the march of the Armies from Livonia and modern-day Poland into the heart of Russia. We follow this army as Russia eventually draws is deeper and deeper into Sweden trading land for time and letting the elements of Russia eat away at the invader. In the hot summer sun the Battle of Poltava is really the only military option that Charles had and although it may have been successful one is always amazed at the plan to battle through a line of heavily armed forts, reform on the other side and then wheel to attack the main Russian force, also heavily entrenched. But Englund gives us a breath of adventure and dash in the movements of the Swedes and we hope that they will somehow pull it off... The fighting is as desperate and intense as in any war, but as with the Germans over 300 yrs later, there is a particularly frightening shadow of being isolated and cut off by the Russians with no hope of reuniting with your main force.... all the time being deep in the Russian hinterland. We follow the army as it turns and tries its getaway. Compressed within the ends of the Dnieper it eventually gives way, but our redoubtable Charles XII escapes. Englund leaves us there, there is nothing more about the remarkable adventure of Charles from that point, or his further attempts to dominate Europe, all crushed eventually. Poltava ended a 100 year dominance of the Swedes as the greatest land army in Europe, unbeatable until Poltava, but never really challenging the heartland of Russia.

This is a unique book. It combines a near-novelization with a documentary approach. I have no idea how it reads in Swedish, but the power of the words in English is still felt. It puts you into the shoes of the doomed army of Charles XII as he leads them deeper into Russian Empire and through hubris, ill luck and bad planning changes the fates of his men and the course of history. Highly

recommended.

A wonderful book detailing the events leading up to and following the climatic battle at Poltava. As a great-...-grandfather fought, was captured there and spent 13 years in Russia it had significant interest. It was a hard read due to that but provided significant information as to how and why the event took place. It is I think a must read for those who might be interested in how/why Sweden's position in the world changed so dramatically and that of Peter (the Great) and Russia eclipsed.

I have never read a history book as finely detailed as this one. From the descriptions of the weapons and tactics of the era, to naming individual troops and commanders as we follow along with their fates, this chronicle of the Battle of Poltava should be the gold standard that all history books are measured by.

The author was able to transmit the bloody horror of this debacle for Charles XII of Sweden. His description of the major players is amazing. I would have liked a little more information about the role played by Hetman Mazepa.

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