

**“Napoleon’s Nemesis:
Russian Officer Corps During the Napoleonic Wars”¹**

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Anyone traveling from Paris to a small town of Vertus in September 1815 would have witnessed an awe-inspiring scene. Over 150,000 men, all in parade uniforms, were deployed in various formations on a vast field near the town. Around noon, soldiers marched past Emperor Alexander I of Russia and his entourage with thundering shouts of ‘hurrah’ and music. The scene was indeed breathtaking, the triumphal conclusion to the titanic struggle between two opposing worlds and a showcase of Russian military might and success. Only three years before, Europe watched in suspense as Emperor Napoleon led some half million men into Russia. However, within a year, the once mighty Grand Army was destroyed, thousands of its soldiers killed, captured or frozen in the vastness of Russia. The Russian army, led by its officers, emerged victorious from the depth of the East and marched all across the continent to the heart of France.

When westerners hear of Russian army and its leaders, they recognize very few by name with the exception of the most prominent generals such as Mikhail Barclay de Tolly, Mikhail Kutusov, Peter Bagration or Matvei Platov. Yet, the 1812 War Gallery at Hermitage alone contains over 330 portraits officers distinguished in the Napoleonic wars. Furthermore, stereotypes abound on the character and abilities of Russian officers. Well known British historian wittily described one of them, “For most of us terms like ‘the Russian officer’ have connotations of dissolute young wastrels, who were freed of care and responsibility by the labor of thousands of serfs, who spent their evenings throwing vodka glasses against the wall, and who finally subsided into unconsciousness

¹ This paper is a revised version of the presentation made at the Consortium of Revolutionary Era in 2005. Copyright © Alexander Mikaberidze

among a wreckage of a gilded furniture.”² Though there is some truth to this description, the Russian officer corps, naturally, was much more diverse and complex institution.

The beginning of the Russian officer corps is closely tied to the military reforms of Peter the Great. As he began modernizing Russia, Peter realized the importance of well-trained and professional officers leading his army. During the Great Northern War, Peter began inviting foreign officers to train and lead his troops.³ In many cases, these were adventurers, renegades or inexperienced foreign officers with no prospects in their native countries.⁴ So, while employing foreigners, Peter shifted his attention to conscripting the Russian nobility into service and creating the professional officer corps. He declared military service mandatory for the nobility and severely prosecuted anyone avoiding service. Under new regulations, at age thirteen, noblemen were eligible for conscription and had to begin service as soldiers with eventual promotion to officer’s rank. Peter hoped that the noblemen would gain experience while serving in the lower ranks of regiments. In 1700, some 1,091 Russian nobles were conscripted into the army and, within the next two years, another 2,913 were reviewed, with 940 of them starting service in the army.⁵ The ratio between Russian and foreign officers depended on the army branches since, in 1701, a third of 1,137 officers in the infantry regiments were foreigners while majority of cavalry officers had Russian origins.⁶

Ever since Peter the Great employed large numbers of foreigners, the friction between the Russian and “foreign” officers preoccupied the Russian military. In 1722, 13 out of 49 generals (26.5%) were of non-Russian origins,⁷ foreign officer share increased during the reign of Empress Anna Ioanovna, who surrounded herself with foreigners, most of them of German stock. As Empress Elizabeth tried to promote herself as a true Russian sovereign, she made efforts to reduce the number of foreigners in the Russian

² Christopher Duffy, Russia’s Military Way to the West: Origins and Nature of Russian Military Power, 1700-1800, (London, 1981), 136

³ In 1698, Peter hired some 700 foreign officers, though majority of them were fired within a couple of years. Volkov, Russkii ofiterskii korpuz [Russian Officer Corps] (Moscow, 1991), 69. For details on officer recruitment during the Great Northern War see, Istoria Severnoi voini 1700-1721 (Moscow, 1987), 31-32. For the new conscription laws, see Polnoe sobranie zakonov rossiiskoi imperii [hereafter cited as PSZ], 46 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1830-1839), volume IV

⁴ M. Bogoslovsky, Peter I, (Moscow, 1948), IV, 183; Istoria Severnoi voini 1700-1721, 33-34.

⁵ Beskrovny, Russian Army and Fleet in XVIII Century, 167-168, 170.

⁶ For details see, Avtokratov, Voennii prikaz (k istorii komplektovaniia i formirovaniia voisk v Rossii v nachale XVIII v. in Poltava: K 250-letiu Poltavskogo srazheniia) (Moscow, 1959), 238-40.

⁷ Peter to the Senate, 11 January 1722, SIRIO XI (1873), 440-442.

army. The Seven Years' War led to increasing anti-German sentiments in Russia, further intensified by the brief reign of Peter III, who tried to impose Prussian style and manners upon Russia. By the time Catherine II took power in 1762, over 34% of majors and 41% of 402 senior officers were non-Russians. The proportion was even higher among lieutenant generals (63.7%).⁸ However, this ratio significantly changed in subsequent decades. Emperor Paul's purges in 1790s expelled many foreign officers and shifted the percentage to Russian favor. Recent Russian study of 2,074 officers of the main Russian army at Borodino showed that almost 90% of them were Russian noblemen, 4,5% (89) were of German origins from Baltic provinces, 3,4% (70) were Poles and 2,5% (51) were foreigners.⁹

Studying over 750 senior Russian officers of the Napoleonic Wars, I was able to make a more detailed analysis, finding that 372 officers were of Russian origins (excluding 35 Cossacks), 189 of Germanic stock, 28 Polish, 25 Balkan (Greek, Serbian, Hungarian) and 24 French (including one Corsican). Among others in this diverse picture were 17 Georgians, 12 Dutch, 11 Scandinavians (Sweden, Denmark, Finland), 10 Italians, 8 Austrians, 7 English, 7 Scots and 2 Irish.

The Russian officer corps consisted predominantly of noblemen. According to D. Tselorungo's research, 86,5% of all officers in Russian army were noblemen, though my own research demonstrated that up to 96% (728 out 758) of senior Russian officers belonged to nobility. The non-nobles came from wide range of social classes. Based on abovementioned study by Tselorungo, 4,5% (94) of officers were children of soldiers, who gradually advance through the ranks; 0,5% (10) belonged to merchant class, 1,4% (29) to clergy and 0,9% (18) to peasantry.¹⁰ Nobles enjoyed important advantages in the enlistment and subsequent promotions, while non-nobles had first to serve as non-commissioned officers for extended periods of time and could hope for prospects of promotion after four, eight, or twelve years of service. After 1796, Emperors Paul and Alexander considerably restricted promotion of non-nobles. Emperor Paul insisted that all Russian officers should be nobles, ordered the War College to give preference to

⁸ A. Lebedev, *Russkaia armia v nachale tsarstvovaniia imperatritsy Ekaterini II: materiali dlia russkoi voennoi istorii* (Moscow, 1898), 4-69; Duffy, *Russia's Military Way*, 147

⁹ Tselorungo, *Ofitseri Russkoi armii – uchastniki Borodinskogo srazhenia*, (Moscow, 2002), 73.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 73-99.

nobles over non-nobles and reprimanded regimental commanders who recommended non-nobles for promotions. Emperor Alexander continued his father's policies requiring non-nobles to serve at least twelve years as NCO's before they qualified for promotion to officer rank.¹¹

The upper nobility, naturally, tried to circumvent laws requiring service in lower ranks. Nobles exploited a loophole in the system by enlisting their children at the time of their birth or in infancy; by the time, children grew up, they already had extensive "record of service" and received officer's rank without any experience or training. Peter the Great and his successors tried to eradicate this process, but it still continued through nepotism and corruption in the army as well as due to the Russian sovereigns themselves, who often granted special privileges to their favorites and their offspring.¹²

Family's social prominence and good connections at the court were key to a great career. Great nobles often enrolled their infant sons in regiments and procured leaves until children completed their 'studies' at home. Thus, future Field Marshal Rumyantsev was enlisted in the Imperial Guard at the age of five; future Minister of Police Alexander Balashov joined the Guard at the age of six and Alexander Bibikov had his son Alexander, future senator and militia commander in 1812, enlisted at age two and conferred officer's rank at nine. Great noble families like Dolgorukovs and Gagarins regularly enlisted their infant sons aged one to five. Furthermore, Peter Volkonsky (1776-1852) was enlisted in the Life Guard Preobrazhensk Regiment on the day of his baptism; he began active service at age sixteen, receiving the rank of ensign within a matter of weeks; two years later, he was already an adjutant in his own regiment. And even better example of system's faults is a career of Prince Peter Dolgoruky; he was enlisted in the

¹¹ PSZ, Nos. 17,534, 18,486, 20,542. The soldiers' children had some advantage in this process. They were considered in the military service immediately after their birth and actual service was counted from the age of fifteen. After fifteen years in the army, they were eligible for a discharge. The recruits, however, had to serve twenty-five years in the army to qualify for any advancement.

¹² Peter required all officers in the regiment to vote on granting new officer rank with the emperor having final say on their decision. In 1764, new regulations prohibited enlisting any youth before age fifteen. The only exception were children of soldiers, who could be assigned to units before turning fifteen, but only as clerks or musicians. Emperor Alexander forbade accepting young noblemen before age sixteen in the Quartermaster Section of the Imperial Retinue and the artillery. For details see, PSZ, V, No. 2,775, 3,265; XXX, No, 23,641

Life Guard Izmailovsk Regiment on 15 March 1778 at age two and a half months, became captain at 15, major at 16, colonel at 20 and major general at 21.¹³

Patronage was indeed very important in finding any position or vacancy because of the abundance of young noblemen ready to for service. Sergey Glinka, noted that in the Guard regiments new appointments usually took place on the first day of the new year; so, at the end of December, “the secretary would be pestered with questions: ‘Will my son get in?’ ‘Has my nephew been put on the list?’ and so on.”¹⁴ Another contemporary described the significance of becoming an officer: “Everyone who has obtained his first officer rank and a sword knows that there is scarcely any pleasure on earth to compare with this reward”¹⁵

Considering recent study of over 1,500 officers serving in the 1st and 2nd Western Armies in 1812 (see chart No.1), it becomes clear that majority of them (877 men) enlisted in the military between 16 and 20 years age. However, my own study of *senior* Russian officers (see chart No. 2) shows a somewhat different picture, where more than third of officers were enlisted between 7 and 10 years of age and almost 22% of them in infancy (ages 2 to 6). Directly tied to this issue is the age of Russian officers participating in campaigns against Napoleon. In 1812, out of 2074 officers of the main Russian army, 37,7% were aged twenty one to twenty five, 20,3% - ages twenty six to thirty and 12,5% were in their mid-30s.¹⁶

¹³ For details see See Alexander Mikaberidze, Russian Officer Corps in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1792-1815, (Savas Beatie, 2004); A. Romanovich-Slavatinsky, Dvorianstvo v Rossii ot nachala XVIII veka do otmeny krepostnogo pravas, (St. Petersburg, 1870), 128-30; N. Pavlov-Silvansky, Gosudarevy sluzhiliye ljudi: prosikhozhdenie russkogo dvorianstvo (St. Petersburg, 1898), 272-73; Zapiski Vinskago, Russkii Arkhiv, 1877, 98-99, 162-63.

¹⁴ Sergey Glinka, Zapiski (St. Petersburg, 1895), 136.

¹⁵ Martos, A. N., Zapiski inzhernnogo ofitsera Martosa o turetskoi voine v tsartsvovanii Aleksandra Pavlovicha, Russkaya Starina, 77/2 (1893): 306.

¹⁶ Tselorungo, Officers of the Russian Army, 138. Just over 5% of officers were in the teens (14-18), 5,8% aged 36 to 40 and 3,9% - 41to 50.

Chart No. 1. Age at Enlistment of the Officers Serving in 1812 Campaign
 (Base on Dmitri Tselorungo’s study of 2,074 officers involved in the battle of Borodino)¹⁷

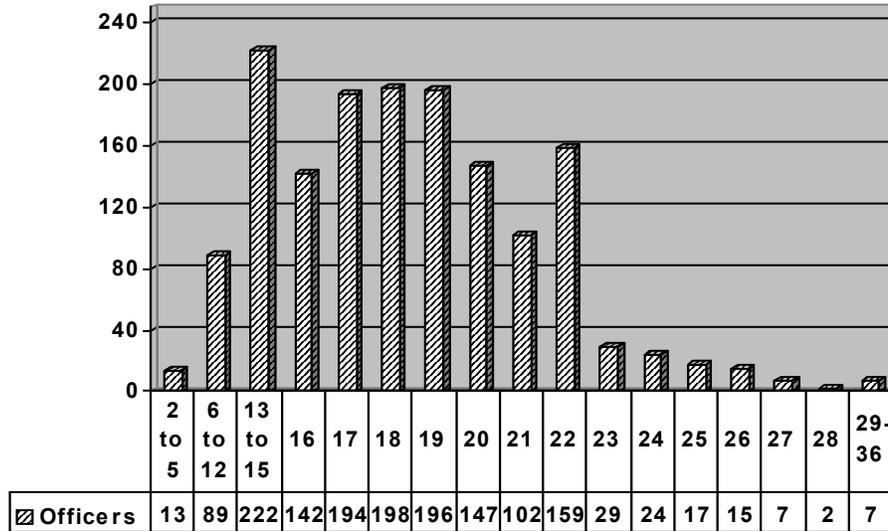
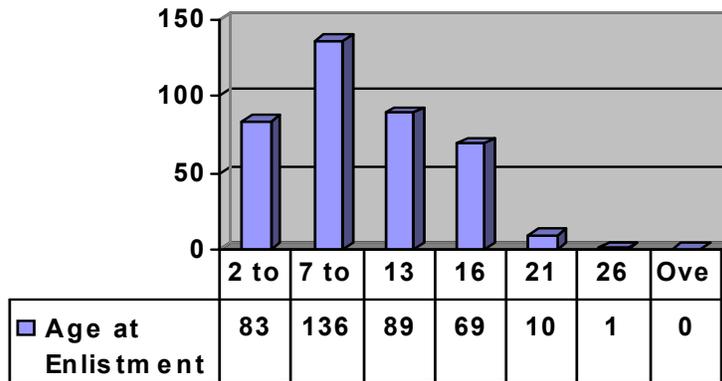


Chart No.2 Age at Enlistment of the Russian Officers
 (Based on 388 senior Russian officers)



The army was the only honorable career for young noblemen and the Russian monarchy did its best to create a hallowed tradition of service. Although Emperor Peter

¹⁷ Tselorungo, *Officers of the Russian Army*, 136-137.

III promulgated the Charter of Liberties in 1762¹⁸ that abolished mandatory military service for the nobles, the number of the noblemen enlisting in the army kept increasing. Thus in 1782, there were some 108,000 male nobles in Russia vying for careers in the army.¹⁹ Since regimental ranks were filled, new vacancies of supernumeraries [*sverkhkomplektnye*] had to be created. Eventually, the excess of supernumeraries particularly of the Guard officers turned into a major problem. Thus, by 1792, there were 6,134 non-commissioned officers in the Life Guard Preobrazhensk Regiment and 3,502 privates; although the Guard officially had vacancies for 400 non-commissioned officers, the actual number of officers soon exceeded 11,500 men.²⁰ So, regularly large groups of officers were appointed to regular units; 250 in 1782 and 400 in 1796.²¹ The size of the officer corps gradually increased during the Napoleonic Wars. While there were some 12,000 officers in 1803, campaigns of 1805-1807 saw officer corps increasing to over 14,000 in 1805-1807 and between over 17,000 men in 1812-1813.²²

After enlisting, nobleman was usually conferred the rank of non-commissioned officer, but had to serve as a soldier for three months before actually receiving the rank. Of course, patronage and nepotism played an important role in advancement. Many senior officers made sure their sons or relatives served in their units and received promotions in a timely or expedited fashion. On average, noblemen had to serve anywhere from a couple of months up to three years to earn an officer's rank. Thus, in 1812, 16,5% of officers in the 1st and 2nd Western Armies had served two years as NCOs before earning officer's rank, 12,6% received it in a year and 7,5% got it within several months of enlistment.²³ Civilians, who transferred to the military service, usually had their officer epaulettes within one to three years, depending on their previous civil rank and position. The timeline was considerably longer for non-nobles, who usually had

¹⁸ The original title was Decree Concerning the Granting of Privileges and Freedom to All the Russian Nobility. Catherine the Great confirmed this ruling by issuing another Charter of Rights, Privileges and Preferences of the Esteemed Russian Nobility.

¹⁹ Keep, *The Soldiers of the Tsar*, 232.

²⁰ Volkov, *Russian Officer Corps*, 55.

²¹ *Stoletie Voennogo ministerstva, 1802-1902: Chinoproizvodstvo po voennomu vedomstvu* (St. Petersburg, 1912), IV, part 3, 5-6.

²² Volkov, *Russian Officer Corps*, 87. In 1809, there were 2,113 staff officers, including 495 colonels, 442 lieutenant colonels and 1,176 majors. *Spisok shtab-ofitserov po starshinstvu na 1809 g.* (St. Petersburg, 1809). In his article on Russian officers, Dmitri Tselorungo gave a more precise number of 17,139 officers in 1812. "Kapitan N: Portret russkogo ofitsera 1812 goda," *Rodina*, (1992): 6/7, 10-11.

²³ Tselorungo, *Officers of the Russian Army*, 139.

to wait between five and seven years to become officers. NCOs from the soldier ranks were in the worst position because they on average served a decade or more before making officer rank. In 1812, 64 out of 92 these officers served between ten and twenty-five years while three of them remained in the NCO ranks for an incredible 24-27 years.²⁴

Limited number of vacancies created within each regiment restricted these promotions. Staff officers were in better position in regards since they could be promoted within entire army and could be transferred from their regiment to another unit with vacancy. When a vacancy opened, the most senior officer received promotion.²⁵ Therefore, dating seniority in ranks gradually became of a paramount importance and often led to squabbles between officers of the same rank, but different seniority. To accelerate their promotions, many officers transferred from one unit to another, often receiving a higher rank. Such transfers were particularly widespread in the artillery, where over 50% of officers changed regiments at least two times. However, once they achieved senior ranks, officers remained in their units for extended period of time.

Number of Transfers During Military Service²⁶

Number of Transfers	Guard		Infantry		Cavalry		Artillery		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
0	188	58,6	682	55,4	208	54,9	28	19,7	1,106	53,3
1	93	28,9	321	26,1	102	26,9	39	27,5	555	26,8
2	27	8,4	138	11,2	53	14	31	21,8	249	12
3	7	2,2	52	4,2	9	2,4	13	9,2	81	3,9
4	6	1,9	21	1,7	4	1,1	14	9,9	45	2,2
5	-	-	11	0,9	1	0,3	7	4,9	19	0,9
6	-	-	5	0,4	1	0,3	3	2,1	9	0,4
7	-	-	1	0,1	-	-	2	1,4	3	0,1
8	-	-	1	0,1	1	0,3	1	0,7	3	0,1
9	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0,7	1	0,05
10	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	2,1	3	0,1

²⁴ Ibid., 140-141.

²⁵ PSZ, Nos. 2,795, 3,120, 3,997, 7,022, 7,487, 8,724.

²⁶ Based on the records of service of 2,074 officers involved in the Battle of Borodino. Tselorungo, *Officers of the Russian Army*, 152.

Promotions could be delayed for numerous reasons, including no vacancy, an influx of new officers from privileged families and the transfer of the Guard officers to the regular army. Officers resuming active duty after retirement also caused a delay. Upon retirement, an officer who had served for at least one year in his current rank (five years in the case of colonels) was promoted by one grade.²⁷ Furthermore, seniority gained while serving in the civil service was often taken into account when a man returned to the army.²⁸

On other hand, during wartime, there were many chances to distinguish oneself in battle and receive a higher rank during promotions *en masse* to mark victories. Yet, these promotions were often accompanied by uncontrolled favoritism, leading to many complaints. This was especially true during the Russo-Turkish Wars in 1770s and 1780s, with some regiments having up to sixty majors.²⁹ In January 1813, Colonel Marin bitterly complained in his letter,

I was always against promotions for distinction [in battle] because it causes so much wickedness! [*skolko tut zla!*] For every good officer, five dreadful [*dryannoi*] are promoted and everyone is witnessing this; some were in drunken stupor ... at Borodino, and yet got promotions! Emperor's has no fault in this – he relies on the commanders-in-chief, who could not observe everything and trusts corps commanders, who, in turn, blatantly lie to them.³⁰

In another case, General Alexander Kutaysov, who was credited for bringing artillery companies to hold the Russian left flank at Eylau on 8 February 1807, was awarded the Order of St. George (3rd class) and praised by Emperor Alexander himself. However, many contemporaries decried this award and asserted that Generals Osterman and Ermolov should have been credited for these decisive actions. According to them, acting on the orders of Osterman, Ermolov was the first to arrive with thirty-six guns and Kutaysov only followed him with additional twelve guns. Rumors had it that Kutaysov received award because he was a cousin to the commander of the Russian artillery;

²⁷ PSZ, XXVII, 3 July 1802, No. 20,358.

²⁸ Vospominania L.A. Narushkina, in Kharkevich V. 1812 god v dnevnikakh, zapiskakh i vospominaniyakh sovremennikov, (Vilno, 1900-1904), II, 151.

²⁹ For details see, John LeDonne, "Outlines of Russian Military Administration 1762-1796: The High Command," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 33 /2 (1985): 192.

³⁰ Marin to Vorontsov , 2 January 1813, K chesti Rossii: Iz chastnoi perepiski 1812 goda (Moscow, 1988), 192-93.

Aleksey Ermolov received a lesser award, the Order of St. Vladimir (3rd class). According to Denis Davidov, Prince Peter Bagration was extremely upset by this favoritism and appealed to Commander-in-Chief Levin Bennigsen to award Ermolov a higher decoration. However, Prince Peter did not press the matter because Kutaysov's mother helped him at his wedding in 1800. Instead, he made sure that Ermolov received the Order of St. George (3rd class) for his actions in June 1807.³¹

Disagreement with senior officers or powerful favorites also could delay promotions. General Dmitry Rezvyi, who commanded the Russian artillery in the 1806-1807 Campaigns, provides one. In early 1812, Rezvyi unwisely made fun of Arakcheyev in a private conversation. The latter soon learned about this joke and persecuted Rezvyi for the rest of his life. He refused him the command of the Russian artillery in late 1812 and, two years later, rejected Rezvyi's promotion to lieutenant general, although Rezvyi served as major general for over fifteen years. Furthermore, when Rezvyi finally decided to meet the powerful minister to solve this predicament, Arakcheyev refused to meet him and had him discharged from the army on 29 December 1815.

Russian officer education system was surprisingly multifaceted. Peter the Great laid foundation for military education, establishing eight major artillery and engineer colleges in addition to some fifty garrison and thirteen admiralty schools at major towns throughout empire.³² Education system rapidly developed under Peter's successors. The *Shliakhetsky Kadetskii Korpus* [Noble Cadet Corps] was founded in 1731 to train noble children prior to active service.³³ However, low wages and lack of funding resulted in poor training; one of the reports to the Imperial Senate described a quarter of graduates having "no knowledge in any sciences."³⁴ During the reign of Catherine the Great, the Corps was reorganized, renamed to the *Sukhoputnii Korpus* [Infantry Cadet Corps] and

³¹ Ermolov, *Memoirs*, 94; Davidov, *Sochinenia*, (St. Petersburg, 1893), I, 142, 206-208, 221-22; G. Ratch, *Publichnie lektsii, chitannie gospodam ofitseram gvardeiskoi artillerii* [Public Lectures Presented to the Officers of the Guard Artillery] *Artilleriiskii Zhurnal*, 11(1861) 842; P. Pototsky, "Sto ler Russkoi konnoi artillerii," *Artilleriiskii Zhurnal*, 3 (1894) 41-42; Mikhailovsky-Danilevsky, *Campaigns of 1806-1807*, 202-203; Mikhailovsky-Danilevsky, *Campaigns of 1806-1807*, 203.

³² PSZ, IV, No., 2,467; V, No. Nos. 2,739, 2,798.; M. Lalaev, *Istoricheskii ocherk voennikh zavedenii, podvedomstvennikh Glavnomu ikh upravleniu* (St. Petersburg, 1880), 6-8. V. Krylov, *Kadetskie korpusa i Rossiiskie kadeta* (St. Petersburg, 1998), 15-16. N. Zherve, *Istoricheskii ocherk 2-go Kadetskogo korpusa, 1712-1912* (St. Petersburg, 1912), I, 2-9.

³³ PSZ, VIII, Nos. 5,811, 6,050. Between 1731-1761, the corps produced 1,557 graduates, with 1,200 of them receiving officer's rank Beskrovny, *Russian Army in XVIII Century*, 179.

³⁴ Krylov, *Cadet Corps*, 21.

became one of the best military institutions under skilled administrator I. Betskoy.³⁵ Under Emperor Paul I, this institution was again renamed to *Pervii Kadetskii Korpus* [1st Cadet Corps] in March 1800; between 1762 and 1800, over 2,180 cadets studied in this Corps - 985 of them graduated but only 820 received assignments in the regiments.³⁶ In 1812, the Corps produced 180 officers for the army. The corps graduates included some of the best officers in the Russian army, among them General Field Marshals Peter Rumyantsev, Alexander Prozorovsky and Mikhail Kamensky, Generals Mikhail Volkonsky, Karl Toll, Peter Repnin, Peter Melissino, Mikhail Kakhovsky and others.

Another major center of the military education, *Artilleriiskii i Inzhinernii Shliakhetsky Kadetskii Korpus* [Artillery and Engineer Noble Cadet Corps] was established in 1758. Directed by General Peter Melissino after 1783, the Corps became well known throughout the empire. In 1800, the corps was renamed to *Vtoroi Kadetskii Korpus* [2nd Cadet Corps] and, between 1765 and 1801, it trained over 1,500 cadets. Under Emperor Alexander I, it produced another 1,489 officers, including 781 artillery officers, 140 engineers and 536 infantry officers.³⁷ The corps produced such distinguished officers as Field Marshal Mikhail Kutuzov, Generals Fedor Buxhöwden, Aleksey Arakcheyev, Peter Müller-Zakomelsky, Aleksey Korsakov, Alexander Zasyadko, Vladimir Iashvili, Alexander Seslavin and others.

Graduates of the Artillery and Engineer Cadet Corps/2nd Cadet Corps in 1762-1825³⁸

	Artillery	Engineer	Guard	Army	Cavalry	Other	Expelled
Catherine II	703	210	35	336	-	76	48
Paul I	248	50	1	66	2	17	14
Alexander I	781	140	11	536	-	35	90

As Russia expanded her influence into the Balkans, Russian monarchs began inviting children of pro-Russian factions to study in Russia. During the Russo-Turkish War in 1769-1774, special *Grecheskii Kadetskii Korpus* [Greek Cadet Corps] was

³⁵ PSZ, XVII, Nos. 12,670, 12,741.

³⁶ Beskrovny, *Russian Army in XVIII Century*, 448-50. According to Krylov, some 3,300 students graduated between 1731-1801. *Cadet Corps*, 25.

³⁷ Krylov, *Cadet Corps*, 30-31, 120-122.

³⁸ Based on data in Krylov, *Cadet Corps*, 122-124.

established and later transformed to *Korpus Chuzhesterannikh Edinovertsev* [Corps of Foreign Fellow Believers] to reflect the addition of students from other Balkan nations.³⁹ This school proved effective training ground for these offspring of the Greek gentry, who entered the Russian service and achieved high positions in the Russian society. The corps existed until 1796 and prepared over 200 officers, including 100 naval officers.⁴⁰ Established in 1778, the *Shklovskoe blagorodnoe uchilishche* [Schklov Noble Boarding School] provided eight years of training for orphans and gentry.⁴¹ The school was reorganized into *Shkovskii kadetskii Korpus* [Shklov Cadet Corps] in 1799 and later transformed into the Grodno Cadet Corps and then to Smolensk Cadet Corps in 1807.⁴²

While the corps supplied the army with officers, numerous garrison schools trained non-commissioned officers and regimental clerks. In 1798, Emperor Paul established the Imperial Military Orphan Home [*Imperatorskii Voенno-Sirotskii Dom*].⁴³ In later years, special military orphanages were established throughout the empire and supervised by the Permanent Council for Military Schools beginning in 1805. The number of graduates grew steadily, with some 12,000 in 1797, over 16,000 in 1801 and 19,000 in 1812.⁴⁴

³⁹ PSZ, XX, Nos. 14,299, 14,300. For details see, N. Korguev, *Korpus Chuzhesterannikh Edinovertsev*, *Morskoi sbornik*, 7 (1897): 155-59. The curriculum provided general courses for junior students, including the French, German, Greek, Italian, Russian and Turkish languages in addition to arithmetic, geometry, geography, drafting and dance. Students, completing these courses, were to continue training for their branches of service. Prince Gregory Potemkin wanted to transfer this Cadet Corps to Kherson in the Crimea but then kept it in St. Petersburg, establishing a smaller Greek school in the Crimea in 1785. PSZ, XXI, No. 15,658; Korguev, *Korpus Chuzhesterannikh Edinovertsev*, 161.

⁴⁰ Krylov, *Cadet Corps*, 32-33; Beskrovny, *Russian Army in XVIII Century*, 452. For details on Paul's decision to abolish the corps, see PSZ, XLIII, No. 17,746; Korguev, *Korpus Chuzhesterannikh Edinovertsev*, 163-64.

⁴¹ It was organized into two cavalry squads and two infantry companies. Students advanced through five classes: 1st, 2nd and 3rd classes were one year long and taught foreign languages, mathematics, history, geography, theology and drawing; the 4th class (two years) and the 5th class (three years) provided advanced levels of mathematics, artillery, tactics, military architecture, horse riding, fencing, drilling, dancing and music. Beskrovny, *Russian Army in XVIII Century*, 452.

⁴² Krylov, *Cadet Corps*, 35. During the 1812 Campaign, the Smolensk Cadet Corps was evacuated to Tver and then Kostroma, where it remained for the next twelve years. In August 1824, it was moved to Moscow and renamed to the Moscow Cadet Corps.

⁴³ Imperial Military Orphan Home was divided into two sections. The first of them trained some 200 children who graduated with the ranks of junker and portupei-ensign. The second section trained some 800 orphans, who received the rank of non-commissioned officer upon graduation. The best fifty students from both sections were selected to continue education in the higher Cadet Corps.

⁴⁴ Liubomir Beskrovny, *The Russian Army and Fleet in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by David R. Jones, (Academic International Press, 1996), 80-81.

Emperor Alexander also founded several important institutions. The Page Corps [*Pazheskii Ego imperatorskogo Velichestva korpus*] was established for the upper nobility in 1802. Between 1800 and 1825, the corps produced 624 officers, among them General Field Marshal Ivan Paskevich, Alexander Tormasov, Dmitry Dokhturov, Alexander Chernishev and others. Following the Franco-Russian campaigns in Poland in 1806-1807, Emperor Alexander also set up the Volunteer Cadet Corps in 1807 to supply junior infantry officers; the Corps trained some 500 officers a year.⁴⁵ In 1808, it was converted into the *Dvorianskii Polk* [Noblemen's Regiment] and attached to the 2nd Cadet Corps. It proved an effective military institution, producing some 2,665 ensigns within the first five years.⁴⁶ Simultaneously, the Cavalry Squadron of the Nobility was also formed for 110 men to provide junior officers for the Russian cavalry. The latest addition to the educational system, the Tsarskoe Selo Lycée was founded in 1811 to train personnel for civil and military service and quickly became a privileged institution for wealthy and prominent noble families.

Despite great number of the cadet corps and other institutions, the quality of the graduates remained poor. Emphasis was usually made towards general subjects that broadened students' intellectual horizons and made them fit for both civil and military service.⁴⁷ Quality of instructors remained consistently poor. Many officers could barely read and write by the time they entered the army. Military subjects were taught briefly and erratically. Even if young nobleman got through the cadet corps, he still faced the daunting problem of adapting to life in the army. Sergey Glinka, Russian officer and graduate of a cadet corps, commented that "after completing such classical education, [his fellow cadets] collapsed under the weight of their learning when they encountered ordinary officers [in the army]; in despair, they took to Bacchus' cup and so were prematurely lost to the service; Some of them perished imitating the feats of classical heroes on the battlefield."⁴⁸ During the 1812 Campaign, General V. Vyazemsky complained to Emperor Alexander, "There are so many schools [in Russia], but only a

⁴⁵ Krylov, *Cadet Corps*, 33.

⁴⁶ For details see, M. Holmdorf, *Materialy dlia istorii bivshego Dvorianskogo polka 1807-1859* (St. Petersburg 1882).

⁴⁷ Krylov, *Cadet Corps*, 132.

⁴⁸ Glinka, *Zapiski*, 100.

few of them are first-rate.”⁴⁹ In 1809, Commander-in-Chief Peter Bagration of the Army of Danube complained about inexperienced officers arriving from St. Petersburg, “[These officers] neither know nor understand anything. They should be still studying in [military] schools. I need well trained and experienced officers!”⁵⁰

Home-schooled Russian officers received only scant education and remained largely illiterate. Sergey Tuchkov’s memoir provides interesting insight on the education of the Russian officer at this period. Tuchkov’s education began at age three, when two tutors, “a deacon and a soldier,” took care of him although “none of them had any abilities to convey their meager knowledge to [a child].” Later, Tuchkov’s father hired a Danish tutor, who “also taught without any methodology, forcing [Tuchkov] to write citations from the Holy Scripture and learn by heart excerpts from his own works. My Russian language instructor had no understanding of the grammar or spelling and barely taught me to read and write.” Besides his tutors, Tuchkov was also greatly influenced by his father, who “believed that physics, chemistry and mechanics were the most useful subjects to the future officers; yet, he could not teach us these subjects. Father thought that literature, eloquence and music were worthless and did not want us to study any Latin, which, he believed, was necessary only for priests and physicians. He considered theology and philosophy inappropriate for the future officer.”⁵¹

The records of service demonstrate interesting data on literacy among Russian officers. It becomes evident that, in 1812, the majority of the Russian officers (1,061 out of 2,074 men) could only read and write. At the same time, many were fluent in several languages, with 30.4% (630 men) speaking French and 25.2% (522 men) German, while English (17 men) and Italian (10) languages were less popular. It is noteworthy that only 61 officers (2.9%) studied military sciences and even fewer (7, 0.3%) were taught tactics. Many officers, especially those in artillery, were familiar with mathematics with 23.2% competent in arithmetic, 10.6% in geometry, 6.5% in algebra and 3.5% in trigonometry.⁵² In 1812, 67.6% of artillery officers were graduates of cadet corps, compared to

⁴⁹ V. Vyazemsky, *Zhurnal: 1812 g. in 1812 god: Voennii dnevniki* (Moscow, 1990), 211-12.

⁵⁰ Bagration to Arakcheyev, 7 October 1809, *Voennii sbornik*, 10 (1864): 63.

⁵¹ Sergey Tuchkov, *Zapiski, 1766-1808* (St. Petersburg, 1908), 2.

⁵² Tselorungo, *Officers of the Russian Army*, 118. By 1811, 34% of the graduates of the Noble Regiment could only read and write! Another 23% were described as “able to read and write, understands arithmetic.” A further 25% of the graduates were acquainted with two or three subjects, 11% with four or five and only 7% studied six to ten specialties.

disappointing 10.5% in the Guard cavalry and, even worse, 10% in the regular cavalry. On a better note, 21.6% regular infantry officer studied in corps and 21.2% of the guard infantry officers studied in the highest military institutions, albeit the majority of them were from the Noble Regiment.⁵³

In the upper levels of the officer corps, out of some 500 generals participating in the 1812-1815 Campaigns, 45 graduated from the Artillery and Engineer Corps (2nd Cadet Corps), 35 from the Infantry Cadet Corps (1st Cadet Corps), 22 from the Page Corps, 7 from the Corps of Fellow Believers, 4 from the Schklov Cadet Corps and 11 from the Naval Cadet Corps. Some prominent commanders, such as Peter Bagration and Ataman Matvei Platov received no military education at all. On other hand, General Miloradovich studied at the Universities of Hottingen, Konigsberg, Strasbourg and Metz, General St. Priest graduated from the University of Heidelberg and General D’Auvray from the Engineer Academy in Dresden. In 1805, out of fifteen brigade commanders of the Russian army, only four (Miloradovich, Muller, Kamensky and Panchulidzev) had studied in the institutions of higher military education.⁵⁴

Knowledge of Subjects by the Russian Officers in 1812-1815⁵⁵

Subject	Officers familiar with subject	Subject	Officers familiar with subject
French	630	Military Drawing	11
German	522	Logic	11
Arithmetic	482	Italian	10
Geography	320	Tactics	7
History	265	Philosophy	7
Basic Mathematic	238	Ancient Greek	6
Geometry	220	Natural history	6
Artillery Science	184	Fortress defense	5
Fortification	182	Engineering	5
Drawing	143	Topography	5
Algebra	134	Hydraulics	5
Physics	96	Swedish	4
Trigonometry	72	Technical drawing	3
Military sciences	61	Politics	3

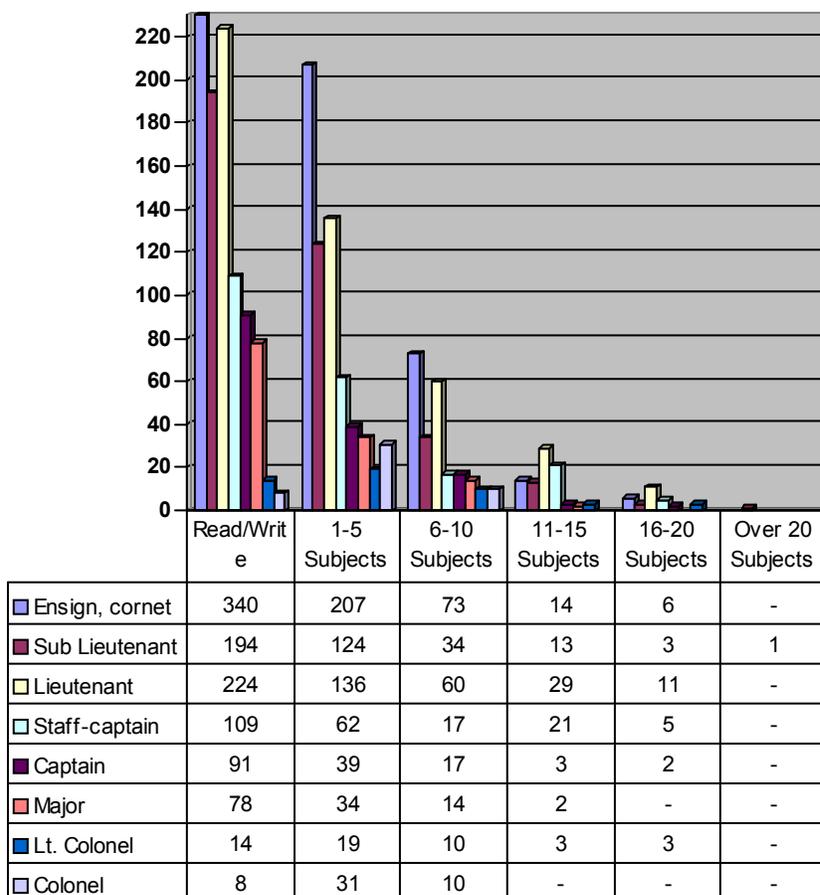
⁵³ Ibid., 119-20. Only 21,8% of the officers in the Quartermaster Section of the Imperial Retinue had received education in the highest military institutions and another 10% graduated from the civil schools.

⁵⁴ Brigade commander list is based on army order, “Deployment of Troops in Columns,” November 1805, RGVIA, f. VUA, d. 3174, ll. 13-18.

⁵⁵ Tselorungo, *Officers of the Russian Army*, 129.

Military operations	46	Diplomacy	3
Theology	46	Rhyming (Poetry)	3
Latin	43	Parade Execution	3
Architecture	42	Geodesy	2
Grammar	40	Mountain Engineering	2
Advanced Geometry	36	Astronomy	2
Mechanics	36	Jurisprudence	2
Russian	35	Literature	2
Horse Riding	29	Music	2
Polish	24	Finnish	1
Dancing	23	Military regulations	1
Chemistry	22	Naval science	1
Fencing	21	Political economy	1
Statistics	20	Catechizes	1
Military laboratory	18	Calligraphy	1
English	17	Only read/write	1061
Advanced Mathematic	45	Illiterate	2
Rhetoric	13	No information	6

Officer Literacy by Ranks, 1812⁵⁶



Although popular stereotype portrays Russian officers as wealthy serfs owners and spoiled aristocrats, in reality most Russian officers lived in poverty without any property or serfs.⁵⁷ Young officers from gentry often had nothing but a simple bundle of clothes when they joined the regiment. Officer quarters usually contained only a few objects indispensable for existence. According to Colonel Ilya Radozhitsky, “Beside his

⁵⁶ Based on the records of service of 2,074 officers of 1st and 2nd Western Armies. Tselorungo, *Officers of the Russian Army*, 125

⁵⁷ Volkov, *Russian Officer Corps*, 344. During the Napoleonic Wars, an average ensign received 125 rubles a year, sub-lieutenant – 142 rubles, lieutenant – 166 rubles, staff-captain – 192 rubles, captain – 200 rubles, major – 217 rubles, lieutenant colonel - 250 rubles, colonel - 334 rubles, major general – 655, lieutenant general – 794 rubles and general 1,302 rubles. At the same time, a complete officer uniform cost approximately 200 rubles while an officer could dine at a restaurant for about 5 rubles. The artillery and cavalry officers received 10% higher salaries and the Guard officers earned between 20% and 50% more than their regular infantry counterparts.

hand baggage, a pipe with scanty tobacco and stacks of cards spread around on the floor, [an average] Russian officer had virtually nothing in his quarters.”⁵⁸ Cossack Major General Adrian Denisov stated in his memoirs that his inadequate salary made him “short even of necessities.” Officers often could not accumulate enough savings to acquire equipment and food. General A. Zakrevsky recalled that when he was stationed in Lithuania, he could afford to eat only eggs.⁵⁹ In some cases, officers followed example of their rank-and-file in organizing ‘artels’ (corporations) to help each other to survive the campaign.⁶⁰

Records of service show that 77% of the Russian officers in 1812 did not own any property or serfs and 20% of them had shared ownership of serfs and property with their families. Furthermore, 95.6% of foreign officers in the Russian army held no assets in Russia and depended on their salaries; the same condition applied to 88.6% of the Polish officers and 83.1% of officers from the Baltic provinces. The data on army branches also clearly shows the difference in financial and property status. Naturally, the Guard units had the most affluent officers, with 38% of them owning serfs and property. The cavalry officers were less well off (21.95%) followed by infantry’s 20.3% and artillery’s 15.4%. Despite its imposing name, the officers in the Quartermaster Section of the Imperial Retinue were the most deprived and only 9.8% of them owned any property or serfs. Analyzing senior officers, it is surprising to find that, out 295 generals, the majority (160, 54.2%) had neither serfs nor property, thirteen owned less than 20 serfs, 34 possessed between up to hundred serfs and 79 over hundred serfs.⁶¹

The Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars produced many well known officers and commanders. Names of Generals Mikhail Kutuzov, Mikhail Barclay de Tolly, Peter Bagration, Peter Wittgenstein and many others evoke the triumphs of the glorious days bygone, numerous battles fought and victories celebrated. For decades, their names were venerated and admired in Russia. These officers spent the best years of their lives serving in the Russian armies. Some were talented commanders and administrators, others less

⁵⁸ Ilya Radozhitsky, *Pokhodnme zapiski artillerista s 1812 po 1816 gg.* (Moscow, 1833), II, 43

⁵⁹ D. Drutsky-Sokolinsky, *Biograficheskaia zametka o zhizni grafa Arsenia Andreevicha Zakrevskogo*, SIRIO, 78 (1890) I-xvi.

⁶⁰ Lowernstern, *Memoires*, I, 25.

⁶¹ Tselorungo, *Officers of the Russian Army*, 100-107. Tselorungo considered 295 generals serving in the 1st and 2nd Western Armies in 1812. Author also noted that, in 1812, there were 327 generals of the guard and army and 14 Cossack generals.

gifted leaders and arrogant courtiers. They came from all over the world – Alexander Langeron, Antoine Jomini and Emmanuel St. Priest from France; Peter Bagration, Ivan Djavakhishvili (Zhevakhov) and Levan Panchulidze from Georgia; Joseph O'Rourke from Ireland; Mikhail Barclay de Tolly from Scotland, Levin Bennigsen; Peter Wittgenstein, Karl Clausewitz and others from various German states. Russia embraced them all and, in return, they defended their adopted Motherland, many of them paying the ultimate price - their lives – for the well being of Russia.