

The Czar's General Life and Career of General Alexey Yermolov¹

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General Alexey Yermolov is a true legend in Russia. A man who overcame imperial disgrace and exile to command armies and conquer provinces, he was the epitome of a military man of action. His career spanned decades as he served in the Russian army against Napoleon and expanded Russian territory into the Caucasus. Shrewd, perceptive and often sarcastic, Yermolov had just as many friends as enemies. His sharp and unforgiving observations rendered many apprehensive of him. Once, when asked how a certain general had acted in combat, he mockingly noted, “[He is] shy.”² When Adjutant General Alexander Menshikov, notorious for his sharp tongue, asked whether his beard was too long, Yermolov taunted him, “Yes, so stick your tongue out and shave it off.”³ He was a nationalist of the highest degree, proudly declaring “The feeling of being a Russian never leaves me!” and detesting the influx of German officers, who often won easy preferment at court and in the Russian army. When Emperor Alexander asked what favor he would like as a reward for his services, Yermolov famously replied, “To make me a German for then I shall be able to get all I want.” Yet, he was not so blinded by his feelings that he could not see the flaws of the Russian army. In his retirement, Yermolov hung a large portrait of Napoleon behind his chair in his study. When a friend of his, General Golev, visited him, Yermolov told him, “Do you know why I have Napoleon’s portrait behind my back? Because, while alive, he was accustomed to only seeing our backs [as we ran].”⁴ To some of his detractors, he was a byword for brutality and his actions in Chechnya were, and still are, often cited as an example of his brutal and colonial attitudes towards local populations. But beside destruction, Yermolov also left a positive legacy in the Caucasus contributing to the economic and cultural development of the region. Throughout the Napoleonic Wars, he kept a detailed diary, which later served as basis for his recollections. His brilliant and engaging memoirs capture the spirit of his times, while his acidic wit, acute powers of observation and grasp of drama make him a unique source on the Napoleonic Wars.

Alexey Petrovich Yermolov (often spelled as Ermolov) was born to a Russian noble family in Moscow on 4 June 1772. His father, Peter Alexeyevich, belonged to the nobility of the Orlov province and had enjoyed a relatively successful military career before retiring and

¹ Excerpt from Alexander Mikaberidze, ed. *Czar's General: The Memoirs of a Russian General in the Napoleonic Wars*, (Welwyn Garden City [UK]: Ravenhall Books, 2005). All Rights Reserved © Alexander Mikaberidze.

² Paul Vyazemsky, “Staraia zapiskaia knizhka,” in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (St. Petersburg, 1883), VIII, 383. Vyazemsky passionately collected hundreds of stories about various prominent personalities, which were later published in separate volume.

³ *Istoricheskie rasskazi i anekdoty iz zhizni russkikh gosudarei i zamechatelnykh ludei XVIII i XIX stoletii* (St. Petersburg, 1885), 245.

⁴ *Russkii literaturnii anekdot XVIII – nachala XIX veka*, (Moscow, 1990), 209; *Russkaia Starina*, (1881), XXX, 889.

...serving in various civil positions.⁵ Young Alexey was initially educated at home before going to the boarding school of the Moscow University in 1784-1791. Throughout the 18th century, the nobles exploited loopholes in the enlistment system by enlisting their children at the time of their birth or infancy so that by the time the children grew up, they had already obtained the rank of officer without any experience or training. Yermolov was no exception and, at the age twelve, he was enlisted as *kaptenarmus*⁶ in the Life Guard Preobrazhensk Regiment on 16 January 1787 and promoted to sergeant in 1788 and to lieutenant in 1791. That same year, Yermolov decided to give up his Guard rank to participate in the military operations against the Ottoman Empire. His request was granted and he transferred to the Nizhegorod Dragoon Regiment with the rank of captain. However, by the time Yermolov reached his regiment in Moldavia, the war was over. The following year, Peter Yermolov made sure his son was not stuck in the provinces. Young Yermolov was recalled to St. Petersburg, where he was appointed an adjutant to General Prosecutor A. Samoilov. This was no accident as his father was the head of Samoilov's chancellery. By this time, Yermolov had already made up his mind to join the artillery. In March 1793, he procured an appointment as the quartermaster of the 2nd Bombardier Battalion and began studying for the exams at the prestigious Artillery and Engineer Cadet Corps. In August of the same year, he passed the tests, received the rank of captain of artillery and entered the Cadet Corps. While studying here, he met the young captain Alexey Arakcheyev, who was already distinguishing himself in the Gatchina Troops of Grand Duke Paul.

In 1794, Yermolov again requested a transfer to the regular army. This time, he wished to get a place in the Russian army under the legendary General Alexander Suvorov, who marched against the Polish insurgents. Yermolov's request was granted and he joined General Derfelden's staff, distinguishing himself on the Bug River in October 1794 and then in the assault on Praga, suburb of Warsaw. For his actions, he was decorated with the Order of St. George (4th class, 12 January 1795). Returning to St. Petersburg, Yermolov was instructed to accompany a Russian diplomatic mission to Italy and took advantage of this opportunity to travel extensively throughout that region. Furthermore, he volunteered for service in the Austrian army and took part in the operations against the French in the Alps in the summer of 1795.

In late 1795, Yermolov heard the rumours of an impending war against Persia, whose armies ravaged eastern Georgian principalities of Kartli-Kakheti, Russian allies. He immediately returned to St. Petersburg and secured an appointment to the Russian expeditionary force under Prince Valerian Zubov; Yermolov was assigned to Major Bogdanov, a prominent artillery officer who had just organized the first Russian horse artillery company. In the course of the expedition, the Russian corps advanced along the Caspian coastline and Yermolov proved himself an able and courageous officer; he distinguished himself in the crossing of the Tabassaran mountain range and commanded a battery during the siege of

⁵ In 1785-1792, Peter Yermolov served in the Civil Court of the Orel namestnichestvo and later directed the chancellery of Prosecutor General A. Samoilov in St. Petersburg. During the French invasion of 1812, he took active part in war effort in the Orel province. He died in June 1836. He was married to Maria Denisovna Davidova, who was the aunt of the famous guerilla leader Denis Davidov and was previously married to Mikhail Kakhovsky. Peter and Maria had two children, Alexey and Anna (1778-1846).

⁶ *Kaptenarmus* originated from French *capitaine d'armes*. It was a non-commissioned officer in charge of ammunition wagons. On the bivouacs, *kaptenarmus* were often in charge of provisions within the unit.

Derbent in May 1796, for which he was awarded the Order of St. Vladimir of the 4th class with ribbon.

However, the expedition was soon recalled because of the death of Empress Catherine II. Returning to St. Petersburg, Yermolov joined Ivanov's artillery battalion, becoming a major on 12 January 1797. Serving under Ivanov must have been an interesting experience for Yermolov. As he later told Denis Davidov, his superior was 'a thorough alcoholic,' who whilst drilling 'had the habit of having a servant standing behind him with a flask of vodka; on the command of "zelena," he was given a flask which he immediately gulped down.' Furthermore, on one occasion, after his soldiers were mistreated by the residents of the nearby city of Pinsk, Ivanov 'deployed twenty four guns outside the city and ordered to bombard it; fortunately, thanks to the prudence of Officer Zherebtsov, the cannonballs were hastily removed from cartridges and the city did not suffer from the ensuing blank rounds. The drunken Ivanov did not notice this, soon halted the bombardment and triumphantly entered the city; [unfortunately], he saw Policemeister Lawdon in the window of one of the houses and had him thrown out of window.'⁷

On 31 January 1797, Yermolov transferred again, this time to Lieutenant General Eyler's battalion, where he continued his service for the next two years. Promoted to lieutenant colonel on 12 February 1798, he received the command of an artillery company in Nesvizh on the western border of Russia.⁸

At this period, Yermolov was influenced by the ideas of Enlightenment as well as by the Russian free thinkers (A. Radischev, N. Novikov and etc) and helped his half-brother Alexander Mikhailovich Kakhovsky to establish a political group called the 'Smolensk Free Thinkers.' The group promoted the ideas of the Enlightenment in Russia and criticized Emperor Paul's policies. Also, as Davidov noted, 'Kakhovsky's independent manners and the love and respect he enjoyed everywhere set him against the unworthy Tretyakovsky, who made a pact with the despised Lindener, Emperor Paul's favorite, to act against Kakhovsky, his relatives and acquaintances.'⁹ The secret police soon raided Kakhovsky's village of Smolevich and arrested Kakhovsky and his devotees, including Yermolov, in late 1798. Investigations revealed that some members even had plans for a coup d'état to remove Emperor Paul. Kakhovsky was stripped of the status of nobility, had his property confiscated and was imprisoned at the Dumanud Fortress, where he remained until 1811. Yermolov was arrested in Nesvizh on 10 December 1798. Eight days later, he was transported under strict security to a court-martial in Kaluga, where Emperor Paul initially pardoned him. However, General F. Lindener, who presided over the investigation, personally questioned him about the group.¹⁰ Lindener then told Yermolov that his personal papers, seized during his arrest, had been sent to Smolensk except for a journal on the operations of the Austrian Army in the Alps in 1795 that was requested by the emperor. Therefore, Yermolov traveled to Smolensk to pick up his papers and then joined his company in Nesvizh. It was two weeks later that he was told to make his way to St. Petersburg, where he was then arrested for the second time. General Lindener, who

⁷ Denis Davidov, Stories about various personalities, mostly about Alexey Petrovich Yermolov, in *Voennie zapiski*, (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1982), 313. Davidov recorded numerous stories told by Alexey Yermolov, Ataman Platov and other officers, which were published together with his military recollections.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 314. He shared apartment with the Golitsyns - Prince Dmitri Vladimirovich, his brother Boris and cousin Yegor Alekseyevich

⁹ *Ibid.*, 314-15.

¹⁰ According to Davidov, Lindener profited from the arrest of Kakhovsky and Yermolov; the former's estate and property were sold and Lindener pocketed 20,000 rubles.

interrogated Yermolov in Kaluga, believed he was one of the ringleaders of the conspiracy and thought it better to have him imprisoned. In mid-December 1798, he informed Governor of St. Petersburg and Prosecutor General Peter Lopukhin about his findings and received approval for Yermolov's arrest.

Yermolov spent almost three years in exile in Kostroma province, where he met and befriended Ataman Platov. The latter was exiled for a bizarre, if not absurd, reason. Emperor Paul was dissatisfied with his senior officers for some reason and sentenced Platov, Prince Alexey Gorchakov and others to *hauptwache*, where they remained three months. Davidov recalled an interesting story Platov told him,

“While detained, Platov had a dream that left a strong impression on him. ‘He dreamed that he was fishing on the Neva River and, after casting his net, he found it burdened with his own sabre, which was already rusted.’ Soon after his dream, Platov was visited by Adjutant General Ratkov (that same Ratkov, who as a poor staff officer arrived at St. Petersburg the very moment Empress [Catherine] died; he was first to learn the news and galloped to Gatchina, found Emperor Paul half way to it and congratulated with the accession to the throne; a sash of the Order of St. Anna, the rank of adjutant general and thousand serfs comprised the awards for his devotion.) In any case, Ratkov now had imperial orders to return Platov his sabre; Platov immediately unsheathed it, wiped it on his uniform and, [remembering his dream,] he exclaimed, ‘It is not rusted yet so now it will exonerate me...’ However, Ratkov thought Platov’s words meant he intended to lead the Cossacks against the government and decided to take advantage of this opportunity to denounce him to the Emperor, who ordered him to be exiled to Kostroma.”¹¹

So, Yermolov now had an opportunity to enjoy Platov’s company; the latter was famous for his knowledge of “practical astronomy” and the two often walked in Kostroma, with Platov pointing out various stars in the night sky, “This star leads to the point where the Volga River turns to the south, that one to the Caucasus, where we would have fled if I have not had so many children...” Yermolov took full advantage of the free time in the exile to educate himself, voraciously reading books on history and learning the Latin language; every morning, he awakened the local priest Yegor Gruzdev with the words, “Father, its time to wake up, Titus Livius [Livy] is awaiting us.”¹²

He later recalled that “the local inhabitants treated me very generously, finding nothing incriminating in my character and behavior.” However, he was also very disappointed that he could not participate in the 1799 Campaign in Italy, where a generation of Russian officers made careers under the command of Field Marshal Suvorov. In a letter to a fellow officer Ogranovich, Yermolov complained, “I wish I could share your labors, participate in your glory but yet, there is no opportunity and all possibilities are frustrated.”¹³ Fortunately for him, Emperor Paul died in March 1801 and was succeeded by Alexander I, who immediately rehabilitated those persecuted by his father. Among the pardoned was Alexey Yermolov, who was allowed to quit his exile in late March 1801.¹⁴ As he later recalled, “I arrived in St. Petersburg amid many other thousands of people seeking employment after their hateful

¹¹ Davidov, *Stories About Yermolov*, 316-17.

¹² *Ibid.*, 317.

¹³ Yermolov to Ogranovich, 11 July 1800, cited in Kavtaradze, *General A.P. Yermolov*, 20.

¹⁴ For details see, D. Ryabini, *Ssilnie pri Pavle, Russkii Arkhiv*, (1876): I, 379-383.

designation of ‘dismissed’ from the service was substituted by the word ‘discharged.’” Yermolov was fortunate to secure a position as a lieutenant colonel in the 8th Artillery Regiment in June 1801 and later that summer, he was given command of a horse artillery company in the remote Vilna province.

This was a difficult and disheartening period for Yermolov. An ambitious young officer, he certainly resented the fact that many of his peers had passed him in ranks whilst he was in exile. Yermolov constantly tried to find ways to excel himself and earn promotion. In a letter to a close friend, he revealed his feelings, “It is already the third week that I constantly see in my dreams that it would not be so bad to get into the Cossack horse artillery [company] in the guise of a worthy officer who was needed to improve it, and then [it would be easy to get] another two companies... my ambition forces me to desire becoming a *feldzugmeister* of these units. A great idea indeed! Don Ataman [Platov] is a friend of mine from the time we spent [in exile]; so if there should be anyone commanding [these units], I am more deserving than anyone else. I am burning with desire [*strashnaia okhota*] to experience all branches of service, find fortune at every step... Perhaps, all my plans are meaningless, but they are not impossible...”¹⁵

While serving in Vilna, Yermolov encountered his old acquaintance, Alexey Arakcheyev, who now had become the powerful Inspector of All Artillery. Grim Arakcheyev disliked Yermolov’s brash character and reviewed his company more often than those of other officers. In early 1805, Yermolov was ordered to make a long march with his troops to Vilna. The company arrived at the town only to find General Arakcheyev waiting; he immediately reviewed it but found it in good order. However, in order to find a reason for criticism, he ordered Yermolov to deploy his exhausted company in positions on some nearby heights. He then reviewed it for the second time and criticized Yermolov for having weary horses, noting that artillery officer’s reputation depended on horses. Yermolov bluntly responded, “It is pity indeed that the reputation of officers in the Russian artillery very often depends on beasts [*ochen zhal, chto v russkoi artillerii reputatsia ofitserov slishkom chasto zavisit ot skotov*].” Arakcheyev never forgave him for this phrase. In April 1805, Yermolov complained, “I have either to retire or wait for war where I will be able to gain with my sword everything which I have lost.”¹⁶ Still, he later recalled, “My army life proceeded blissfully, service flattered my ambition and was my main aspiration; all other passions were subordinated to it! I turned 24 years old; full of dedication and good will, as well as good health! The only thing missing was a war.”

His wish soon came true. In 1805, Russia joined the Third Coalition and mobilized its forces against Napoleonic France. During the campaign in Moravia, Yermolov commanded a horse artillery company in the rearguard and advance guard and distinguished himself at the combat at Amstetten and minor actions during the ensuing retreat as well as at the decisive battle of Austerlitz. For his actions in this campaign, he was awarded the Order of St. Anna (2nd class) and promoted to colonel on 16 July 1806. Returning to Russia, he was initially assigned to the 3rd Division of Lieutenant General Osten-Sacken and later took command of artillery brigade in the 4th Division of General Dmitri Dokhturov on 7 September 1806.

In late 1806, Yermolov participated in the campaign against Napoleon in Poland, distinguishing himself at Golymin, for which he was awarded a golden sword with the inscription “For Courage.” The following year, he served in Prince Bagration’s advance guard

¹⁵ Alexander Yermolov, *Alexey Petrovich Yermolov: Biograficheskii Oчерk* (St. Petersburg, 1912), 19.

¹⁶ Yermolov to Kazadaev, 18 April 1805, *Ibid.*, 22.

participating in numerous actions, including Liebstadt (January 24), Mohrungen (January 25), Vorlack (February 4), Wolfsdorf (February 5), Landsberg (February 7), Eylau (February 7-8), where he received the order of St. Vladimir (3rd class), Zechern (4 March), Peterswalde, Altkirch (5 June), Quetz (6 June), on the Passarge River (8 June), Guttstadt (9 June), Heilsberg (10 June) and Friedland (14 June). Paul Grabbe, who served in Yermolov's unit, recalled, "At Friedland, our Guard artillery, enduring the brunt of Marshal Ney's decisive attack, poorly performed itself... Yermolov tried in vain to rally the fleeing battery of the Guard Artillery and had an unpleasant encounter with [its commander Lieutenant Colonel Alexander] Eyler [regarding his performance]. However, when this incident became known after the battle and Yermolov was ordered to submit report on it, he gallantly responded that he simply carried out his duty and had no desire to snitch on others."¹⁷ For his actions in the 1807 Campaign, Yermolov was decorated with the Order of St. George (3rd class, 7 September 1807) and the diamond signs of the Order of St. Anna (2nd class).

On his way back to Russia, Yermolov's path again crossed that of Arakcheyev. In late August 1807, Arakcheyev reviewed Russian troops returning from the campaign and, recalling Yermolov's earlier criticisms, he ordered him to remain in camp until October while other units returned to their quarters in September. Insulted by such treatment, Yermolov even considered leaving the military. To his surprise, Arakcheyev personally called upon him, offered Yermolov a leave in order to rest and visit him in St. Petersburg. Yermolov was then assigned to the 9th Division of Lieutenant General Arkadii Suvorov, the son of great Suvorov, in the Volhynia.

Serving in the western provinces, Yermolov earned promotion to major general on 28 March 1808 and was then appointed inspector of horse artillery companies.¹⁸ In early 1809, he went on an inspection tour of the artillery companies of the Army of the Danube and, as he wrote later, "traveled through Bender and Odessa to the Crimea, visiting ancient ruins, enjoying the beautiful afternoon seashore....." Yermolov was approaching the prime years of his life. One of his adjutant described him,

His appearance carried certain power and impressed from the very first sight. He was tall, with Roman profile, small gray eyes with quick and perceptive glance. Pleasant and unusually insinuating [vkradchivii] voice; endowed with a rare talent of eloquence, desire to charm everyone around him, sometimes too obvious... This last trait, which he greatly developed, bonded him with many people from the crowd but distanced others more deserving his attention. Because of this, he was later given an acerbic nickname, *c'est le héros des enseignes*. This was true, but he was a hero not only for ensigns. Influence of a man like him on surrounding people had one negative aspect. He disliked Count Alexey Arakcheyev and Prince Iashvili so we all hated them with intensity as young men usually do and I, more close to him than others, loathed them more than anyone else. This was a major mistake that later caused much harm to me.¹⁹

Although his division took part in the 1809 campaign against Austria, Yermolov commanded the reserves in the Volhynia and Podolsk provinces; after the war, his troops were

¹⁷ *Iz pamiatnikh zapisok Grada Pavla Khristoforovicha Grabbe* (Moscow, 1873), 70-71.

¹⁸ Yermolov's headquarters was set up in Count Walewski's estate at Lubari in Volhynia and then at Prince Joseph Lubomirski's estate at Rovno.

¹⁹ Grabbe, *Iz pamiatnikh zapisok*, 76-77.

deployed throughout the Kiev, Poltava and Chernigov provinces, while Yermolov's headquarters was set up in Kiev,²⁰ where he remained for the next two years. On 22 May 1811, he assumed command of the Guard Artillery Brigade and, after July of the same year, he also commanded the Guard Infantry Brigade comprised of the Life Guard Lithuanian and Izmailovsk Regiments, but he could not assume his new position in time because he fractured hand in two places and had to recuperate until late 1811. In the spring of 1812, Yermolov was also given the command of the Guard Infantry Division consisting of the Russian elite units.

During the 1812 Campaign, Yermolov was appointed Chief of Staff of the 1st Western Army on 13 July 1812; he was initially reluctant to accept this position and asked Alexander to reverse his decision. Although Emperor Alexander disliked Yermolov's independent and arrogant character, he appreciated his abilities and confirmed his decree, allowing Yermolov to keep his earlier command of the Guard Infantry Division as well. Yermolov then took part in the retreat to Smolensk and played an important role in the quarrel between generals Barclay de Tolly and Bagration.

The discord between Barclay de Tolly and Bagration was not just a quarrel between two prominent generals. This conflict stemmed from a deeper discord between the old Russian aristocracy and the foreigners, whom the Russians often referred to derisively as "Germans." The immediate cause for the tension was the difference in views on strategy among the senior officers and army commanders. Barclay de Tolly²¹ was surrounded by the "German party," who supported his defensive strategy. Opposing them was the "Russian party," composed of many Russian officers, including Grand Duke Constantine, Generals Alexander Yermolov, Nikolay Rayevsky, Dimitry Dokhturov, Matvei Platov, Illarion Vasil'yichkov, Nikolay Tuckov, Paul Tuchkov and Alexander Tuchkov, Peter Konovnitsyn, Paul Shuvalov and others; it is noteworthy that the most vocal in the party was Prince Bagration, a Georgian by origin. These officers sincerely believed that Barclay de Tolly's strategy would lead to disaster for the Russian army and argued that it was possible to defeat Napoleon by a vigorous offensive. Furthermore, they detested the numerous foreigners that flooded the Russian army and called for purity of ranks.²² Yermolov became known for his quip when, upon returning from Barclay's headquarters, he commented, "All of them are Germans, pure blood Germans, there. I found only one Russian and even he was [Senator] Bezrodnii."²³ Therefore, Barclay de Tolly became the main target for their attacks and Yermolov was actively involved in these intrigues.

Yermolov and Barclay de Tolly did not like each other. The latter thought his new chief of staff was arrogant and ambitious and some contemporaries noted that Barclay de Tolly "mistrusted [Yermolov], never got close to him and was reluctant to consult him."²⁴ On the other hand, Yermolov respected Barclay de Tolly but noted "awkward at the court, he did not earn respect and the good will of the people close to the Emperor. His aloof attitude did not secure him the amity of his colleagues or the loyalty of subordinates. He had only a few

²⁰ Ibid., 84, 90.

²¹ Barclay de Tolly himself was third-generation Russian from Livonia, where his Scottish ancestors settled in the 17th century. See Tartarovsky, *Nerazgadannyi Barklai: legendy i byl' 1812 goda* [Unknown Barclay: Legends and Tales of 1812], (Moscow, 1996), 5-15; Josselson, *Barclay de Tolly*, vii, 1-5.

²² Denis Davidov recalled, "Inspired with ardent love to our mother land, Prince [Bagration], with unrestrained ardor characteristic of all Asians, felt anger against Barclay; this feeling, based only on antipathy to the German party, increased considerably due to constant retreat of our troops" Tartarovsky, *Unknown Barclay*, 65.

²³ Bezrodnii meant bastard. *Russkii literaturnii anekdot XVIII – nachala XIX veka*, (Moscow, 1990), 211.

²⁴ *Ruskaia Starina*, 151(1912): 324.

competent men around him and so rarely thought of sharing his work with them and wanted to accomplish everything through personal hard work. Thus, matters initially proceeded very slowly, then gradually actions became uncoordinated and that eventually led to an unavoidable mess.”

Shrewd and perceptive, Yermolov played a dangerous game involving his superior Barclay de Tolly and his friend Bagration. In July-August, he wrote a series of letters to Emperor Alexander explaining the precarious circumstances in the army and the need for a better commander-in-chief. On 28 July, he wrote, “We need one commander-in-chief for all the armies. The junction of the armies will be implemented much faster and their actions will be coordinated better.” Eleven days later, he again repeated, “We need unified command [*edinonachalie*]!”²⁵ After the successful actions at Mir, Romanovo, Ostrovno, Saltanovka and Klyastitsy, the Russian senior officers, especially Prince Peter Bagration, commander of the 2nd Western Army, became convinced that the Russian army was able to contain Napoleon’s forces. Bagration’s conviction was further reinforced by the letters he received from Yermolov, who constantly urged him to oppose Barclay and assume command of the armies. In response, Bagration complained to Yermolov, “One feels ashamed to wear the uniform. I feel sick.... What a fool.... The Minister [Barclay de Tolly] is running away himself, yet he orders me to defend all of Russia.”²⁶

The two commanders finally met in Smolensk in early August and publicly reconciled; Bagration, though senior in rank, gallantly agreed to subordinate himself to Barclay de Tolly. The unity of command seemed to be preserved. However, anti-Barclay sentiments remained strong among many senior officers, and they continued to intrigue for his removal from command. Yermolov even appealed (without Bagration knowing) to Emperor Alexander requesting that Barclay de Tolly be replaced by Bagration.²⁷ Senior officers detested Barclay de Tolly, his associates and the current strategy and so Bagration’s consent to obey Barclay de Tolly irritated them. A contemporary recalled, “This event [the reconciliation of commanders] infuriated all our generals and officers, who unanimously detested Barclay.... Yermolov, Rayevsky, Dokhturov, Konovnitsyn, Ataman Platov, Vasilchikov, the Tuchkovs [brothers] and all influential persons were upset by this turn of events; [Yermolov]... and Grand Duke Constantine Pavlovich expressed their contempt and mistrust to [Alexander]”²⁸

These misguided officers tried to induce Bagration to oppose Barclay de Tolly publicly. General Vasilchikov recalled, “Yermolov encouraged Bagration to oppose him [Barclay de Tolly], not to subordinate [himself] to the junior in rank, to this *German*, and to assume the overall command. It is obvious what disastrous results these intrigues could bring at the time when the fate of Russia was at stake and everything depended on good relations between commanders.”²⁹ Criticizing Barclay de Tolly, Yermolov appealed to Bagration, “I am worried about the consequences, but Your Excellency should not be quiet about our actions. You can

²⁵ For Yermolov’s letters see Kavtaradze, *Yermolov*, 33.

²⁶ Bagration to Yermolov, 27 June 1812, Tarle, *Napoleon’s Invasion of Russia*, 91.

²⁷ Yermolov to Arakcheyev, Yermolov to Alexander, 7 August 1812, *General Staff Archives*, XIV, 259-61.

²⁸ Muravyev, *Writings and letters*, 102.

²⁹ Pogodin, *A.P. Yermolov: Materiali dlia ego biografii, sobranie Pogodinim* [A.P. Yermolov: Materials for His Biography] (Moscow, 1864), 445-46. Quartermaster General of the 2nd Western Army, Mikhail Vistitskii, stated that Bagration “was encouraged to gather generals of both armies and replace Barclay [by force]” Iz zapisok Vistitskogo [From Vistitskii’s Recollections, hereafter cited as Vistitskii’s Memoirs] V. Kharkevich, *1812 god v dnevnikh, zapiskakh i vospominaniakh sovremennikov* [1812 Campaign in Diaries, Memoirs and Correspondence of the Contemporaries] (Vilna, 1900) 184.

and must speak up! Your glorious reputation based on so many exploits, the hopes depending on you, the love of the troops and your prominence throughout Russia give you the rights that no one else has. All of this should make you speak and be heard! We have no idea what we are doing and, it seems, we only do what is unnecessary.”³⁰ Yermolov kept urging Bagration to write directly to the Czar and boldly suggest that he be named supreme commander of the Russian armies. “Please write to His Majesty [and appeal for the command]. You must fulfill your duty.... I am young and no one will believe me. People will start talking, portray me as one of the discontented, who criticizes everything new, and they will bring shame on me and then discard me! Believe me, I am not afraid of this. When everything is perishing, when the Fatherland is threatened with ignominy, there is no danger too high, there are no private concerns....”³¹

To his credit, Bagration rejected such treasonous suggestions and refused to openly intrigue against Barclay de Tolly. He rejected all appeals to write to the Czar and told Yermolov, “I will not write the Czar asking for the command, because this would be attributed to my ambition and vanity, not my merit and abilities.”³² However, Barclay de Tolly’s refusal to fully commit to the Russian offensive at Smolensk and the subsequent loss of the city further revived radical sentiments in the army. British commissioner to the Russian army Sir Robert Wilson recalled, “The spirit of the army was affected by a sense of mortification and all ranks loudly and boldly complained; discontent was general and discipline relaxing. The nobles, the merchants and the population at large, were indignant at seeing city after city, government after government abandoned, till the enemy’s guns were almost heard at Moscow and St. Petersburg doubted of its safety. The removal [of Barclay de Tolly]... had become a universal demand.”³³

Events at Smolensk played a crucial role in this conflict. Most Russian generals and senior officers opposed the surrender of the city.³⁴ According to a contemporary, “the soldiers were disappointed, looking downcast.... Everybody was concerned about the future of the army”³⁵ Artillery officer Ilya Radozhitsky noted, “I have to recognize that after the battle for Smolensk our soldiers were downcast. Blood, shed on the ruins of Smolensk, despite all our stubborn efforts at defense, and our retreat on the Moscow road into the heart of Russia manifestly made everyone feel our impotence in the face of the frightful conqueror.”³⁶ The loss of Smolensk hurt Russian pride and inspired nationalistic sentiments. Soldiers grumbled, “If we were defeated, that would have been a different case. But now we are just surrendering Russia without a fight.”³⁷ Many officers publicly slandered Barclay de Tolly. The Grand Duke Constantine was among the most vocal detractors, telling the rank-and-file, “We can do nothing... there is not a single drop of the Russian blood in our commander-in-chief’s veins.”³⁸ In Dorogobuzh, Constantine insulted Barclay in the presence of the aides-de-camp and staff

³⁰ Yermolov to Bagration, 12 August 1812, Secret Correspondence, 176.

³¹ Yermolov to Bagration, 1 August 1812, Secret Correspondence, 178; also see Yermolov to Bagration, 31 July 1812, *Ibid.*, 177; Fabry, Campaign de Russie, IV, 320, 356; Muravyev, Writings and Letters, 96.

³² Bagration to Yermolov, (to exact date), July 1812, Yermolov, Memoirs, I, 176; Fabry, Campaign de Russie, IV, 358-59.

³³ Wilson, Narrative of events...., 130.

³⁴ Emperor Alexander also reproached Barclay for the surrender of Smolensk, “The loss of Smolensk has had profound moral repercussions throughout the empire.” Mikhailovsky-Danilevsky, Campaign of 1812, II, 340.

³⁵ Ilya Radozhitsky, Poxodnie zapiski artilerista s 1812 po 1816 [The Campaign Notes of Gunner, 1812-1816] (Moscow, 1835) I, 125, 129.

³⁶ Radozhitsky, Poxodnie zapiski artilerista, I, 97-98.

³⁷ N. Mitarevskii, Nashetsvie nepriatelja na Rossii [The Enemy Invasion of Russia] (Moscow, 1878) 53.

³⁸ Ivan Zhirkevich, Zapiski [Notes], Russkaya Starina, 8(1874): 648.

members, “You are a German, traitor, vermin, and you are betraying Russia!”³⁹ Other Russian generals, some motivated by bigotry, jealousy and self-interest, opposed Barclay de Tolly no matter what he did. General Dokhturov considered Barclay as “stupid and loathsome person”⁴⁰; Ataman Platov declared that he would not wear the Russian uniform since Barclay de Tolly disgraced it.⁴¹ Relations between Bagration and Barclay de Tolly also rapidly deteriorated. Yermolov later recalled that, on one occasion, the two commanders had a passionate argument with Bagration yelling to Barclay, “You are German and do not care for Russia”, and Barclay replying, “You are fool and do not even understand why you call yourself Russian.” Yermolov stood nearby and told some officers and troops passing by that “the commanders are simply having a discussion.”⁴²

After the Russian armies united on 2 August, Yermolov fought at Smolensk and Lubino (Valutina Gora) for which he was promoted to lieutenant general on 12 November 1812 with seniority dating from 16 August 1812. He continued writing letters to Alexander; on 22 August, describing widespread discontent in the army, “The retreat continuing for such long time and the arduous marches cause disgruntlement among the troops, who lose trust in their superiors. A soldier, although fighting like a lion, is always certain that his efforts will be in vain and the retreat would continue.... Moscow is not far now and we have to fight! Every Russian knows how to die [for the Fatherland]!”⁴³ The same day, he also wrote a letter to Bagration, “We finally stopped [at Dorogobouzh]. Even a defeat should not take our hopes from us; we should continue fighting until the last minutes of our existence.” In his letter to Peter Pahlen, Yermolov noted, “God forbid the enemy reaches Moscow! But if fate, envying our happiness, allows this to happen, this would not end the war since we would continue fighting to the last extreme. The scoundrels would be deceived and the war would continue, destroying any [of Napoleon’s] hopes to end the war until the winter, and lack of supplies and other hardships would reduce his forces until the other nations, now still under a delusion, would no longer find any benefit for themselves and would ... break away...”⁴⁴

In late August, Emperor Alexander, taking note of public discontent, appointed General Mikhail Kutuzov as the commander-in-chief of the Russian armies. As his memoirs reveal, Yermolov was not particularly thrilled by Kutuzov’s appointment. He understood Kutuzov’s cunning personality and often-duplicitous actions. Still, under Kutuzov’s command, Yermolov distinguished himself at Borodino, where he was lightly wounded leading a counterattack that recaptured the Great Redoubt. For his courage, he received the Order of St. Anna (1st class). During the rest of campaign, he served as duty officer in the headquarters of the main Russian army and was often assigned to the advance guard under Miloradovich. He took part in the battles at Maloyaroslavets Vyazma and Krasnyi. In late November, he commanded one of the

³⁹ A. Muraviyev, “Avtographiobicheskie zapiski” [Autobiographical notes], Dekabristi: Novie materialy, (Moscow, 1955), 187; Idem., Writings and Letters, 103.

⁴⁰ Dokhturov wrote to his wife - “You can not imagine, my friend, what a stupid and loathsome person Barclay is: he is irresolute, sluggish and not capable of commanding any section, least at all an army. The devil knows what got into him... leaving so many wounded in the hands of the enemy. My heart bleeds when I think of it.” ‘9 September’ 1812, *Russkii arkhiv*, 1 (1874): 1099-1100. The date is not correct because Dokhturov wrote the letter the next day after the battle of Smolensk.

⁴¹ Sir Robert Wilson, Narrative of events during the Invasion of Russia by Napoleon Bonaparte and the retreat of the French army, 1812, (London, 1860), 114-15.

⁴² Zhirkevich, *The Notebooks*, *Russkaya Starina*, 8(1874): 650.

⁴³ Yermolov to Alexander, 22 August 1812, in Kavtaradze, A.P. Yermolov, 34.

⁴⁴ Yermolov to Pahlen, August 1812 in Kavtaradze, *Yermolov*, 39.

detachments in the advance guard under General Rosen, witnessing the horrors of the scene on banks of the Berezina River. On 3 December 1812, Yermolov was recalled to the main headquarters where he initially became the chief of staff of the Russian army before being appointed commander of the artillery of the Russian armies in late December.

Unfortunately, Yermolov's memoirs end with the 1812 Campaign. One of his biographers, M. Pogodin, did claim that he has seen Yermolov's diary of 1813-1814 Campaign but they were never located and are believed to be lost.

In the spring of 1813, Yermolov reorganized the Russian artillery and fought at Lutzen, where Count Wittgenstein tried to turn him into a scapegoat for the Allied defeat and unjustly accused him of failing to supply the artillery with sufficient ammunition; Yermolov was transferred to the lesser position of the commander of the 2nd Guard Division.⁴⁵ After the battle, Yermolov wrote the following letter to Arakcheyev to justify his actions,

“During my stay in Dresden, Your Excellency calculated the means to furnish the artillery with men, horses and ammunition and set five days to carry out everything. When the men, horses and park No.1 arrived at Dresden, this allowed me to complete your orders prior to the deadline and so all parks that I had at my disposal joined the army by 2 May. On 7th, I submitted a detailed report on the preparations to the commander of artillery Lieutenant General Prince Iashvili.

I present this letter and report on all the arrangements that depended on me and on the means that were at my disposal and humbly request Your Excellency to bring them to the Emperor's attention.

Having served for a long time under Your Excellency's command, I could not have concealed my service from you and do not doubt that Your Excellency is aware that I never intrigued in order to achieve my goal... Common belief accuses me for the lack of artillery ammunition. I had everything with the army that was at my disposal and could not have had more than I was given in the first place. My reports will explain in detail the condition of the artillery. If I missed anything due to negligence or lack of enterprise, I request only one last favor – military court, which I do not fear and perceive it as the only means for exoneration.”⁴⁶

Following the battle of Lutzen, Yermolov distinguished himself at Bautzen, where he played a crucial role in stabilizing the Russian center and then commanded the Russian rearguard during the retreat, “firmly resisting the enemy and defending defiles and gardens before retreating in excellent order... and demonstrating throughout the battle his great skills as a commander, and the exemplary courage and gallantry that inspired his subordinates in the midst of danger.”⁴⁷ In August, Yermolov took part in the battle at Kulm, where he persuaded the Russian high command to retreat to Kulm to isolate Vandamme's corps⁴⁸ and later took

⁴⁵ Division comprised of the Life Guard Jager Regiment, the Pernov and Kexholm Grenadier Regiments, Glukhov Cuirassier Regiment, the Guard ekipazh and horse artillery company.

⁴⁶ Yermolov to Arakcheyev, 29 May 1813, in Yermolov: Biograficheskii Ocherk, 69.

⁴⁷ For details, see Pavel Pototzky, Istoria gvardeiskoi artillerii (St. Petersburg, 1896), 238-239.

⁴⁸ One of the Russian officers noted, “General Yermolov's great accomplishment was to persuade Count Osterman-Tolstoy of the necessity of stopping the retreating army near Toplitz and preventing, at any cost, the French capture of the city and the nearby mountain pass.” M.A. Fonvizin, Zametki ob A.P. Yermolove, in Kavtaradze, Yermolov, 56.

over general command after General Osterman-Tolstoy was seriously wounded. In his report, Osterman-Tolstoy wrote, “ I cannot overlook the actions of Lieutenant General Yermolov: everything was organized in the best possible way... Having lost my left arm, I had to leave the battlefield and entrusted my troops to Lieutenant General Yermolov, whose dedication and activity I constantly witnessed.”⁴⁹ For his actions, Yermolov was decorated with the Prussian Iron Cross; when Osterman-Tolstoy received the Order of St. George (2nd class), he noted, “This order does not belong to me, but Yermolov, who played a crucial role in the battle and ended it with such glory.”⁵⁰

On 16-19 October, Yermolov distinguished himself in the battle of Leipzig. The Russian officer, Muromtsev, left an interesting account of the battle,

The entire army proceeded to one point, Leipzig. Napoleon, trying to prevent our concentration, attacked the Russian, Austrian and part of the Prussian armies on 4 [16] October. The French attack was swift and vigorous and an intense fight began at all points. In the middle, there was the village of Gossa, which we all called “red roof.” The Prussian troops were constantly sent against it during the day, but were repulsed with heavy casualties because the French were deployed as tirailleurs. In the afternoon, Yermolov was ordered to seize this village by assault. The French were fortified behind its stonewall and it was very difficult to dislodge them. Yermolov then commanded the Russian and Prussian guards. He deployed the regiments in columns on both flanks and in the center and marched with a drumbeat, having scattered the Guard jagers as skirmishers in front of him. Observing our flanking columns, the French had to retreat pursued by the jagers. There was a large stone house (it was the “red roof”) in the middle of the village and, as the jagers rushed in, fierce fighting occurred; all windows and mirrors were smashed to pieces. The French were finally driven out of the village. Corpses were taken out of the house and several of us, aides-de-camp, occupied it with out general [Yermolov]. There were many interesting incidents on that memorable day of 4 [16] October] and I want to describe some of them. Before noon, while our corps commanded by General Yermolov was still idle, our general decided to observe the actions on the left flank, where General Rayevsky’s troops were under heavy attack and could hardly hold their ground. He took me with him and we rode there, about half *versta* away. Having witnessed the action and talked to courageous Rayevsky, we turned back to our positions. The Guard cavalry was moving to the left of us, by three to the right [*po tri napravu*], and presented a long but thin line. The French, meanwhile, were deployed in squadron columns. Yermolov noted the mistake [in the Russian cavalry deployment] and told me, “Look, the French will soon charge and rout them.” He had hardly finished when the French cavalry indeed charged. The entire [Russian] line wobbled and then fled. Thus, we found ourselves in the middle of our fleeing cavalry and the pursuing French, but [fortunately] were a bit to the left and so had some open space in front of us. We soon saw several French cavalymen, who probably noticed us, and galloped in our direction. We immediately spurred our horses and, thanks to their agility, quickly outdistanced them. It is well known that the French horses

⁴⁹ Osterman-Tolstoy to Barclay de Tolly, in *Ibid.*, 58.

⁵⁰ Pogodin, *Alexey Petrovich Yermolov*, 179-180.

moved awkwardly [*tupo shagayut*]. General [Yermolov] had his hat blown off by the wind and I managed to dismount, pick it up and then ride away. We soon reached a small dam on the creek, which separated us from the Emperor and his entire suite, and encountered the Life Guard Cossacks, the Emperor's escort, that were dispatched to support our cavalry. These good lads routed the French at once and our cavalry recovered....⁵¹

As the Russian army pursued the French, Yermolov's division advanced through the Duchy of Baden and Yermolov discovered a monument to the great French commander, Henri de La Tour d'Auvergne, Vicomte de Turenne at Sasbach, where Turenne was killed in July 1675. Although at war with the French, Yermolov greatly admired Marechal Turenne and decided to halt his division to pay his respects. In his proclamation to the division, he stated that great men should be equally respected by any nation and ordered his troops to march in front of the monument in parade uniform and with music. According to a witness, standing under the tree where Turenne was mortally wounded and where the original cannonball that killed him was hanging on a chain, Yermolov greeted the companies as they passed him competing with each other in loud acclamations. The entire division then stopped and, at Yermolov's sign, paid its respects to the French commander with deafening shouts of 'hurrah.' The officers then visited the house that was built near the tree. Yermolov was presented with a guestbook in which he wrote that General Yermolov with all officers of the 2nd Guard Division paid due respect to the memory of the fallen French commander.⁵²

During the 1814 Campaign in France, Yermolov also temporarily commanded the Prussian and Baden guard units, distinguishing himself in the battles around Paris for which he was awarded the Order of St. George on 7 April 1814. He took part in the negotiations leading to the capitulation of Paris and personally wrote an imperial manifesto proclaiming its capture.⁵³ In May 1814, Yermolov was given command of reserve army forces on the Austrian borders and had his headquarters set up in Krakow.

In March 1815, he learned about Napoleon's escape from Elba and, writing to a fellow general, he noted, "I am afraid Napoleon will isolate the Allies and attack Wellington in Flanders... Is it really more magnanimous to sacrifice thousands of innocent lives instead of taking the life of the villain [Napoleon]?"⁵⁴ In April, Yermolov was ordered to lead the 6th Corps back to France but, as he reached the Rhine River, he was transferred to command the Grenadier Corps. In a letter to General Vorontsov, he complained about being delegated to secondary position, "I am treated kindly, probably to sweeten the fact that they have deprived me of my earlier command and gave me a position where I have either to serve a mass for the victories of others or become an advance guard of the victorious army after the war is over."⁵⁵ In another letter, he again grumbled, "I am in Frankfurt... I am followed by the main headquarters so I am on one constant parade. Besides, it seems all kings and princes of Europe are wandering [*shatautsia*] along my route."⁵⁶

⁵¹ *Russkii Arkhiv*, 1890, I, 377-380.

⁵² Pokhozhnie zapiski o 1814 g. ofitsera 2-i gv. Divizii, in Pototzky, *Istoria gvardeiskoi artillerii*, 296. Also see, Pogodin, *Alexey Petrovich Yermolov*, 174-182.

⁵³ Pogodin, *Vospominania ob A.P. Yermolove* (Moscow, 1867), 466; Yermolov, *Yermolov: Biograficheskii Ocherk*, 77-78.

⁵⁴ Yermolov to Vorontsov, March 1815, Kavtaradze, *Yermolov*, 62.

⁵⁵ Yermolov, *Yermolov: Biograficheskii Ocherk*, 79.

⁵⁶ Kavtaradze, *Yermolov*, 63.

The Russian troops arrived too late to engage Napoleon, who was defeated by the Anglo-Prussian army at Waterloo on 18 June 1815. Yermolov lamented, “My happiness about the defeat of the haughty enemy is bitter sweet since the Russians took no part in the victory.”⁵⁷ Still, the Russian army triumphantly entered Paris and Yermolov wrote to his half-brother Kakhovsky, “Our troops are in an incredible condition. Troops from all over Europe are here but none of them can be compared to the Russian soldier!”⁵⁸

Yermolov later recalled an interesting incident that clearly shows his independent character. As the Russian army triumphantly entered Paris, some soldiers in companies from the 3rd Grenadier Division from Yermolov’s corps tripped on their feet during the parade. Emperor Alexander was infuriated and ordered to arrest several regimental commanders. According to Alexander Mikhailovsky-Danilevsky, who attended Alexander at the time, “many Russian senior officers protested against this decision... The Prussian king invited some officers of the St. Petersburg Grenadier Regiment to his lunch, where the Emperor [Alexander] continuously lambasted the abovementioned colonels and even drove General [Loggin] Roth, the commander of that division, to tears.”⁵⁹ That day, British troops took over guard duty at the Emperor Alexander’s palace. Yermolov recalled, “The Emperor ordered me to send two regimental commanders to be confined in the British *hauptwache* for this mistake. However, I told him, ‘Your Majesty, both these colonels are excellent officers, please consider their previous service and especially do not detain them at foreign *hauptwache*: we have Siberia and our own prisons for this purpose.’”⁶⁰ Yet, Emperor Alexander shouted at him, ‘Obey your duty at once. They must be kept under English guard for greater shame’” Yermolov did not respond anymore and decided not to arrest the colonels thinking that the Emperor’s rage would soon fade away. Furthermore, in the evening, he met Grand Dukes Constantine and Nicholas at the theater and openly expressed his disgruntlement, “Do Your Excellencies really believe that the Russian officers serve only the Emperor, not their Fatherland? They came to Paris to defend Russia, not for parades.”⁶¹ Both Grand Dukes were astonished to hear such an audacious speech; one of Yermolov’s biographers argued, quite plausibly, that Yermolov’s words offended Grand Duke Nicholas, future emperor, who therefore mistrusted Yermolov for the rest of his life.⁶² General Roth, meantime, told Alexander I, “I am sorry my division does not have an opportunity to fight the enemy since it would have proved that it does not deserve Your Majesty’s disgrace.”

According to Yermolov, “Had the Emperor inquired about the colonels, I was prepared to tell him that the colonels had already marched with their regiments to their quarters in the colony settlements. Late that day, the Emperor asked Prince Volkonsky whether the colonels had been arrested or not and threatened to have him detained as well. Volkonsky was so frightened that he sent his adjutants to search for me all over Paris; they found me in the theater. One of the adjutants begged me in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ to sign a receipt that I received Volkonsky’s note. I had to get out into the lobby where I signed for delivery.

⁵⁷ Pogodin, *Alexey Petrovich Yermolov*, 188.

⁵⁸ Kavtaradze, *Yermolov*, 63.

⁵⁹ Alexander Mikhailovsky-Danilevsky, *Journal of 1815 Campaign*, in Nikolay Shilder, *Imperator Alexander I: Ego zizn i tsarstvovanie* (St. Petersburg, 1897), III, 336.

⁶⁰ *Zapiski Nikolaya Nikolayevicha Muravyeva, Russkii Arkhiv* (1886), III, 299.

⁶¹ Mikhailovsky-Danilevsky, *Journal of 1815 Campaign*, in Shilder, *Imperator Alexander*, III, 336. Also see, Kavtaradze, *Yermolov*, 64. Kavtaradze used an archival document that has a somewhat different account of Yermolov’s conversation with the Grand Dukes.

⁶² Kavtaradze, *Yermolov*, 64.

The following day, I again tried to appeal to the Emperor, but was rejected. I was given the orders again and had to place our colonels under arrest at the English *hauptwache*.”⁶³ However, Yermolov’s actions impressed Alexander, who soon ordered the officers to be transferred from *hauptwache* to a special room in his palace.

Yermolov remained in Paris for several months and, although his corps was soon dispatched back to Russia, he stayed behind on imperial orders to study the British artillery, living with his adjutants at a house on 100 Fauburg St. Honoré. Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington, showed him two artillery companies and allowed one of Yermolov’s officers to make a sketch of ammunition caissons and limbers.⁶⁴ In November 1815, Yermolov took a furlough, transferred command of the corps to General Ivan Paskevich and returned to his family estate at Lukyanchikov in the Orel province.

Yermolov enjoyed the tranquility of the rural life for only a couple of months. He was appointed commander-in-chief of the Russian forces in Georgia and commander of the Independent Georgian Corps on 21 April 1816. In addition, he was also nominated as Russian ambassador to Persia. By the late eighteenth century, the ancient kingdom of Georgia was divided into several principalities, with eastern Georgia in the Persian sphere of influence, and the western - under that of the Ottoman Turks. On 24 July 1783, King Erekle II of Kartli-Kakheti (eastern Georgia) concluded the Treaty of Georgievsk with Empress Catherine II, whereby Russia guaranteed Georgia's independence and territorial integrity in return for Erekle's acceptance of Russian suzerainty. Despite this agreement, Kartli-Kakheti was annexed in 1800 by Emperor Paul I, the thousand year-old Bagrationi royal dynasty was deposed and replaced by Russian military governors who deported the surviving members of the royal house and provoked several popular uprisings. The western Georgian principalities opposed the Russian dominance, but were soon subdued. The Kingdom of Imereti was annexed in 1810, followed by the principalities of Guria and Mingrelia. The local population, which had previously felt that the Orthodox Russians would save Georgia from the Muslim enemies, now realized how similar Russian domination would be compared to Turkish or Persian. Therefore, anti-Russian sentiments gradually became widespread, especially in western Georgia, where King Solomon II continued his resistance to Russian expansion and appealed to Napoleon for support.⁶⁵

In addition to Georgian resistance, Russian authorities faced the daunting problem of dealing with the North Caucasian mountaineers. Russia first established its presence in the region in the 16th century, when several fortresses were constructed on the Terek River between 1567 and 1588. Peter the Great campaigned in the region in 1722-1723, expanding the Russian territories along the Caspian coastline. Russia initially resorted to indirect rule using various tribal alliances. However, as the Russian authorities tried to secure their control over the region, the relationships with local population of Kabarda and Chechnya rapidly deteriorated. The late eighteenth century saw a succession of anti-Russian movements, including the widespread uprising of Sheikh Mansur in Chechnya in 1780s. The mountaineers

⁶³ Schilder, *Imperator Alexander, III*, 336-338.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁶⁵ David Lang, *The Last Years of the Georgian Monarchy, 1658-1832*, (New York, 1957), 266-275; *Utvverzhdnie russkogo vladichistva na Kavkaze, 1801-1901: K stoletiu prisoedineniia Gruzii k Rossii*. [Establishment of the Russian Administration in Caucasus, 1801-1901: To the centennial anniversary of accession of Georgia to Russia] Edited by V. Potto and N. Beliauskii (Tbilisi, 1901), 104-116; For Franco-Georgian relations, see Alexander Mikaberidze, *Franco-Georgian Diplomatic Relations*, electronic publication at Napoleon Series, <<http://www.napoleon-series.org/>>

soon allied themselves with the Ottomans and attacked Russian interests during the Russo-Turkish Wars in 1787-1791 and 1806-1812. Russia, meanwhile, was engaged in the wars against Napoleon and was not able to direct the necessary resources to deal with the problems in the Caucasus. However, by 1815, the Napoleonic Wars were over and Emperor Alexander chose General Yermolov to extend and secure Russian influence both in the North Caucasus and in Transcaucasia.

Yermolov arrived in Tbilisi, ancient capital of Georgia, in October 1816 and spent almost six months studying the region. In April-October 1817, he traveled to Persia to negotiate with Fath Ali Shah and succeeded in confirming the Russian conquests recognized by the Treaty of Gulistan of 1813, for which he received promotion to general of infantry on 4 March 1818.⁶⁶ **Despite specific Imperial instructions,⁶⁷ he deliberately ignored the formalities of diplomacy to persuade the Persians to negotiate. He believed that “it is my duty to look to the honour of my master and of Russia, and if the Shah receives me coldly, or during the subsequent negotiations I see any intention of breaking the peace, I will myself declare war, nor end it until I have made the Aras my boundary.”⁶⁸** In a letter to Count Zakrevsky, he wrote “My grim visage always showed pretty clearly what I felt and when I spoke of war, I gave the impression of a man ready to set his teeth in their throats. Unluckily for them I noticed how little they liked this and, consequently, I relied on my wild beast’s muzzle, gigantic and terrifying figure, and extensive throat; for they were convinced that anyone who could shout so vociferously must have good and weighty reasons.... When I spoke the Persians seemed to hear not my voice alone, but the voices of 100,000 men.⁶⁹” He refused to put on the red stockings required when visiting the Persian crown prince and the shah and said about General Gardanne, who made no such objection, “After the red cap of Liberty, the red socks of Servitude-naturally!” When he wanted, Yermolov was very courteous with the Shah, recalling that “it happened not once only that, praising his Majesty’s rare and exalted qualities of soul, and assuring him how vastly I was devoted to him and affected by his perfections, I summoned the tears to my eyes and simply melted with emotion.” Yet, he persistently refused to recognize Crown Prince Abbas Mirza “as an heir to the throne finding in this nothing beneficial for us, though my instructions stipulated this.” As a result, Abbas Mirza remained very hostile to any rapprochement with Russia and later turned into the bitterest enemy of Yermolov.

Returning back to Tbilisi, Yermolov now felt prepared to take on the Caucasian tribes of Chechnya and Daghestan, whose resistance undermined Russian efforts to introduce imperial administration in the region. Unlike his predecessors, Yermolov rejected the notion of indirect rule and negotiations with local tribes and instead adopted a strategy of systematic subjugation and expansion. He proudly declared, “I believe that having taken the responsibility of protecting this land... we must reign by force, not appeals.”⁷⁰ He firmly believed that “Condescension is to the Asiatics a sign of weakness... only executions [kazn’] can save the

⁶⁶ Because Yermolov was in retirement in 1827-1831, his seniority in rank was changed to 1 February 1822.

⁶⁷ Emperor Alexander explicitly told him, “In Asiatic ceremonials, there are many things that, owing to their strangeness, often appear improper to foreigners; in such cases you must be reasonable, for it is not difficult to distinguish what is merely customary from such things as may justly be considered humiliating.”

⁶⁸ Yermolov to Nesselrode, October 1817, in *Akti sobrannie Kavkazskoi Arkheographicheskoi Komissii*, vi. ii. 179. Also see Pogodin, *Alexey Petrovich Yermolov*, 208.

⁶⁹ Yermolov to Zakrevsky, 12 October 1817, Pogodin, 241.

⁷⁰ Yermolov to Zakrevsky, 24 February 1817, in *Sbornik imperatorskogo russkogo voenno-istoricheskogo obschestva* (1890), LXXIII, 218.

lives of hundreds of Russians and keep thousands of Muslims from betraying us.”⁷¹ In a letter to Vorontsov, he commented, “I am tormented by all these khanates that disgrace us with their way of life. The government of khans is a clear example of primordial society... absurd, villainous autocracy and other abuses that haunting humanity.”⁷²

In 1817, Yermolov began the construction of a new line of Russian fortifications near the foothills of the Caucasian mountains and launched the systematic destruction of the forests to prevent raids and ambushes. **Russian superiority in artillery often proved decisive as Yermolov observed about the effect his guns had on the enemy, “Such a convincing proof of our rights could not fail to give me the advantage. It is very interesting to see the first effect of this innocent means on the heart of man, and I learnt how useful it was to be possessed of the one when unable all at once to conquer the other.”**⁷³ He was most active against the Chechens, whom he drove across the Sunzha River in 1818. Yermolov then built two fortified camps Pregradnii and Narzanovskoe and one fortress Groznyi,⁷⁴ and connected them by means of a series of fortified lines to Vladikavkaz, the main Russian city in the North Caucasus. Yermolov then turned to Daghestan, where he established the fortress of Vnezapnii in the main pass into Daghestan and connected it with fortifications to Groznyi. It is noteworthy that the names of fortresses carried particular meaning - Groznyi (Terrible), Burnaya (Stormy), Pregradnii (Defending), Vnezapnii (Unexpected), etc. – that Yermolov used to project Russian might in the region. **When Emperor Alexander criticized his methods of conquest, Yermolov had replied, “I desire that the terror of my name shall guard our frontiers more potently than chains or fortresses.” One of the greatest Russian poets, Alexander Pushkin, soon wrote, “Humble thyself O Caucasus, for Yermolov is coming!”**

In 1818, Yermolov faced a widespread uprising in the northeastern Caucasus and responded with ruthless reprisals and systematic conquest. By late 1819, he had succeeded in subduing northern Daghestan and destroying the Kazikum Khanate. To secure his communications with Transcaucasia, Yermolov began the construction of a new road in the Terek River Valley, which later became the famous Georgian Military Road. His decisive actions soon pacified the eastern North Caucasus, but he faced an uphill struggle in the western part of the mountains, where powerful Circassians, supported by the Ottomans, refused to acknowledge Russian sovereignty despite Yermolov’s incessant campaigning in 1821-1824.

Meanwhile, Europe was hit by another wave of revolutions. Starting in Spain in early 1821, revolt quickly spread into Naples, where the royal family was forced to flee. The European powers quickly convened a congress to address the situation. Yermolov was recalled to St. Petersburg and then to Laibach, where Emperor Alexander attended a congress. He was given command of the Russian corps that was to march into Italy and support Austrian efforts to suppress revolutionary activities. However, the Austrian troops soon succeeded in capturing Naples and restoring royal authority there so Yermolov had to return back to Russia and then to the Caucasus.

Yermolov served in Georgia for another six years. In 1822-1824, he supervised legal reforms in Georgia and began the methodical exploration of raw material, organizing expeditions to Daghestan and western Georgia. He used his salary as the ambassador to Persia to construct a large hospital in Tiflis (Tbilisi) and facilitated the construction of several resorts

⁷¹ Kavtaradze, *Yermolov*, 76.

⁷² Kavtaradze, *Yermolov*, 75.

⁷³ Yermolov to Davidov, 10 February 1819, in Pogodin, *Alexey Petrovich Yermolov*, 297.

⁷⁴ Groznyi later became capital of Chechnya.

at the Caucasian mineral springs in the 1820s. He noted, “At these springs, a wounded soldier would recover his strength to continue his loyal service to the Fatherland and would always be grateful for such care.”⁷⁵ He invited hundreds of German colonists to revive and develop the local economy and received the first group of 500 Württemberg families in 1817. He abolished some commercial fees and reduced tariffs on European goods, oversaw construction of a widespread network of roads connecting the key cities and urban centers throughout Transcaucasia and Daghestan, and established an effective postal service. Under his orders, the Russian Caspian flotilla was repaired and reinforced and a new wharf was established in Astrakhan. Yermolov paid particular attention to the beautification of Tiflis (Tbilisi), where he supervised the construction of European style buildings, an arsenal, a military hospital, caravanserai for merchants and bridges over the Kura River, improved the education at local boarding schools and facilitated the publication of newspapers.

However, times were changing. The Decembrist Uprising of 25-26 December 1825 greatly affected Yermolov’s life. Emperor Nicholas I succeeded in subduing the rebels in St. Petersburg and immediately launched an investigation into this incident. The investigators soon reported that there was a connection between the Decembrists and General Yermolov. The Caucasus was often referred to as “Warm Siberia” because of the thousands of exiled officers and punished soldiers that were sent to serve in the Separate Caucasian Corps. Yermolov, as the corps commander, had some interaction with these discontent elements, many of them future Decembrists, and shared their freethinking and open-mindedness. **In an earlier letter to his brother Nicholas, Emperor Alexander noted, “There are rumors that a pernicious spirit of free thought or liberalism is spreading – or at least developing – among the troops; that in both armies as well as in the [Georgia] independent corps there are secret societies or clubs in different places, with hidden missionaries to propagate their gospel – Yermolov... and many other generals, colonels and regimental officers.”**⁷⁶ Some of Yermolov’s adjutants became actively involved in secret societies and participated in the Decembrist Uprising. Furthermore, the Decembrists even considered Yermolov for their Provisional Government. During the uprising itself, Yermolov, for still unexplained reasons, deliberately delayed pledging the allegiance of his troops to the new Emperor; rumours in St. Petersburg claimed that Yermolov had joined the insurgents and was marching on Moscow. A Russian officer, A. Koshelev noted in his diary, “Yermolov also refuses to pledge allegiance and is marching with his troops on Moscow,” while his fellow Decembrist A. Gangeblov also recalled, “I heard rumors that Yermolov crossed the Caucasus with his corps and was advancing to join the insurgents.”⁷⁷ In such circumstances, the official Investigation Committee naturally implicated Yermolov, but it could not uncover convincing evidence against him. In 1826, several missions were sent to the Caucasus to spy on Yermolov and his possible involvement in any societies.⁷⁸ Throughout this trying time, Yermolov remained true to his forthright character. Emperor Nicholas disliked Yermolov even before this incident ⁷⁹ and,

⁷⁵ Yermolov to Zakrevsky, 15 August 1817, *Sbornik imperatorskogo russkogo voenno-istoricheskogo obschestva* (1890), LXXIII, 242.

⁷⁶ I. Antronikov, *Lermontov v Gruzii v 1837 godu* (Moscow, 1955), 205-206.

⁷⁷ Zapiski A.I. Kosheleva, in *Dekabristi i ikh vremia* (Moscow, 1932), II, 310; Vospominania A.S. Gangeblova, *Russkii Arkhiv* (1886), II, 212.

⁷⁸ In January 1826, the Investigation Committee opened a special case with the title “Case on Existence of Secret Society in the Separate Caucasus Corps.”

⁷⁹ In his letter to General Diebitsch, he noted, “I trust Yermolov least of all.” Nicholas to Diebitsch, 24 December 1825, *Russkaia Starina* (1882), III, 195.

although his mistrust now increased, he was reluctant to arrest Yermolov, one of the most prominent men in the empire, the hero of the Napoleonic wars and the Caucasian conquests.

Meantime, relations between Russia and Persia rapidly deteriorated. In July 1826, the Persian army invaded Transcaucasia and initially achieved considerable success. Yermolov was criticized for his failure to contain the Persian invasion and Emperor Nicholas appointed General Ivan Paskevich the deputy commander of the Russian armies, although Paskevich's actual task was to replace Yermolov. The two commanders quickly quarreled; Paskevich was one of closest associates of Emperor Nicholas I who even called him "Father General," and openly defied Yermolov. In February 1827, Chief of Staff General Diebitch was dispatched to the Caucasus to reconcile the two generals, but he instead supported Paskevich and coerced Yermolov into resigning. Yermolov did write a letter of resignation on 15 March 1827, but it was too late since Emperor Nicholas had already signed the order dismissing him. Yermolov was officially removed from command on 9 April 1827 and then discharged from military service on 7 December 1827 with a full pension.

Disgraced and unemployed, Yermolov returned to his estate in Orel. Two years later, the famous Russian poet Alexander Pushkin visited him there and the two had a pleasant discussion. Pushkin wrote, "Yermolov received me with his usual kindheartedness. At first glance, I could not find any similarity with his portraits, which were usually in profile. He had a round face, fierce gray eyes, gray prickly hair. The tiger's head on Hercules' torso. His smile was unpleasant because it was not genuine. But when he thought and frowned, he became very handsome and closely resembled that poetic painting by [George] Dowe."⁸⁰ In 1831, Yermolov moved to Moscow, where he bought a small house. The following year added anguish to his heartache when his father died. Still, the old general enjoyed life in the capital, where his house gradually became a center of opposition to autocracy. The famous Russian philosopher Alexander Herzen recalled, "His military experience, opposition to Nicholas' military officialdom and, finally, his exile thrust enormous popularity on Yermolov." Paul Grabbe, who served under Yermolov during the Napoleonic Wars, visited him at this period and left interesting description of the aging general.

"Returning back to Moscow, I visited Alexey Petrovich Yermolov at his village estate. In my youth, I served as his adjutant and his caring and fatherly treatment made me attached to him like a son. Yet, I have not seen him for nineteen years after 1815 when I received command of horse artillery company. He was appointed commander-in-chief of troops in the Caucasus and ambassador to Persia and all of Russia gazed at him. Every word uttered by his mouth or written by his quick and sharp squib quickly spread to all corners of Russia. At that moment, no one got so much public and detailed attention in Russia as he did. And rarely was anyone endowed by such a gift of fascinating both masses and individuals with his appearance and power of words. Loyalty that he instilled in me was limitless.

Yet, now I found only an old man, white as the Moon; his enormous head was covered with thick gray hair and rested on wide firm shoulders. His face was healthy but somewhat rough, small gray eyes sparkled in deep hollows and enormous permanent wrinkle run across his powerful forehead just above his gray

⁸⁰ For details see, Alexander Pushkin, *Puteshestvie v Arzrum vo vremia pokhoda 1829 goda* (Tiflis, 1899).

scruffy eyebrows. Case of a genius Russian old man. Nothing to fear about such old age. From 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. we had not even moved in our chairs, forgetting about sleep and fatigue. I could not satisfy my eyes looking at him, carefully studying him and listening to his words. What unfortunate circumstances could have removed such a man from serving his Fatherland, especially under such Emperor! Without a doubt, he made some mistakes. But is this the only measure of talent? Among other things, I told him that he should not lose his hope that the Emperor would remember him in times of need and recall back to active life. He responded that he feared consequences of such prolonged inactivity and possible mistakes that could be critical for the position that rightly belonged to him – the position of commander-in-chief.

His house was in a mess. His study had not a single decoration; his large table had no cover and had a few chairs of regular white wood, all dirty. Books and maps were scattered everywhere as well as small pots with glue, carton paper and tools. His favorite pastime was to bind books and paste maps. He was dressed in a dirty blue coat of thick cloth that was buttoned on hooks. A chaotic and confused life of a remarkable man!⁸¹

Destitute but proud, Yermolov refused to appeal to Emperor Nicholas and suffered in silence. Nicholas, meanwhile, changed his mind and decided to employ this experienced general. In November 1831, he was restored in the service⁸² and, the following month, he was appointed to the State Council. However, his decision to return to service also hurt his image of dissenter and his name somewhat lost its luster. Over the next two decades, he quietly lived in Moscow, collecting books for his library which eventually contained over 9,000 volumes; Yermolov bound many of them himself and later sold his library to the University of Moscow, where it is still preserved. In 1848, he again showed his rebellious character when he criticized European governments fighting a new wave of revolutions. In a letter to Vorontsov, he wrote, “Vienna already has a constitution... How despicable are the actions of the Provisional Government in France! And what about the King of Prussia, who forced his troops to fight under the windows of his palace, where he hid in drunken stupor? He earned a worthy name of scoundrel and coward [*podletsa i trusa.*]”⁸³

Yermolov often attended Emperor Nicholas I at various parades, fetes and maneuvers. On one such military exercise near Voznesensk, the Russian forces were divided into two groups, one under Emperor Nicholas, who was advised by Yermolov, and the second under Adjutant General Count Witte. During the maneuvers, General Witte suddenly began withdrawing with his forces. Nicholas was surprised and asked “Why is Witte retreating when he is in much better position than I am.” Yermolov, with his usual sarcasm, responded, “Your Majesty, that is probably because Count Witte thinks this is a real battle.”⁸⁴

During the Crimean War, Yermolov was actively involved in the war effort and criticised the Russian military preparations. Despite his age, he remained one of the most

⁸¹ Grabbe, *Iz pamiatnikh zapisok*, 17-19.

⁸² Yermolov's rank of general of infantry was confirmed in 1833 and his seniority in rank was changed to 1 February 1822.

⁸³ Kavtaradze, Yermolov, 107.

⁸⁴ *Russkii literaturnii anekdot XVIII – nachala XIX veka*, 209.

prominent and popular personalities in the empire. When Nicholas I issued a call for militia in January 1855, Yermolov was elected head of the militias of seven provinces!⁸⁵ However, Nicholas I and his close advisers became concerned by Yermolov's popularity and made known their decision to prevent Yermolov from leading the militias; Senator Lebedev even claimed that "they feared that Yermolov, elected to such high command, would become a dictator!"⁸⁶ When a secret ballot was held in Moscow, a witness described, "The election of Yermolov, despite all the machinations of many powerful personalities, ended with 200 for and 9 against. After the result were announced, a thundering 'hurrah' continued for almost ten minutes."⁸⁷ As usual, he was critical of the Russian high command and its actions against the Allies. Prince Menshikov once visited him in Moscow and greeted Yermolov with "We have not seen each other for so long! Many waters had passed!," Yermolov replied, "Indeed, Prince, many waters had passed! Even the Danube has floated away from us!" Naturally, his dissenting views soon clashed with the Imperial court and, four months after his elections, Yermolov resigned from his position in June 1855. That same month, Yermolov became seriously ill when the fever he had contracted in the Caucasus suddenly returned. In March 1856, his condition worsened even further when he learned about the fall of Sebastopol and took it so close to heart that he suffered paralysis and partial loss of vision. He lived for another five years, but those were years of misery and declining health.

General Yermolov breathed his last on the morning of 23 April 1861 in Moscow. His funeral was the largest Moscow had seen in decades and thousands of people followed his coffin laid on an artillery limber and escorted by the honorary guards of the Nesvizh and Samoritsk Grenadier Regiments. On 30 April, his body was buried at the Trinity Church in Orel. Yermolov was never officially married but had three temporary marriages that were allowed under local Caucasian traditions and produced five sons and one daughter.⁸⁸ He recognized all of them and enrolled his sons in the artillery schools setting them onto a military career. In addition to the already mentioned decorations, Yermolov was also decorated with the Russian Orders of St. Andrew the First Called, of St. Vladimir (1st class), of Alexander of Neva, of the White Eagle, and of St. Anna (1st class); foreign orders received included the Prussian Orders of Red Eagle (1st class) and the Pour le Merite, the Austrian Order of Maria Theresa (3rd class), the Baden Order of Karl Friedrich, the Persian Order of the Lion and the Sun, and two golden swords for courage (including one with diamonds).

Yermolov was a complex and subtle character with simple, one even may say Spartan, habits, careless of his personal safety and comfort, informal in relations and always caring for his troops. A man of many faces, he who was to Griboedov, who knew him better than anyone else, "the modern sphinx" while Pushkin, his another admirer, was often baffled by him, describing him both "the tiger's head on Hercules' torso" and "the great charlatan." Emperor Nicholas' head of the Secret Police left interesting portrait of Yermolov. "Nothing has any

⁸⁵ Yermolov was elected in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Smolensk, Kaluga, Pskov, Novgorod and Ryazan provinces.

⁸⁶ *Russkii Arkhiv*, (1888), III, 268.

⁸⁷ Recollections of A. Koshelev, *Russkii Arkhiv*, (1886), I, 355

⁸⁸ Yermolov's wives Suida, Totai and Sultanum-Bamat-Kazi stayed in the Caucasus and remarried after Yermolov left. Yermolov's sons were Bakhtiar (Victor), 1820-1892; Omar (Claudius), 1823-1895; Allah-Yar (Sever), 1824-1892, Isfendiar and Peter, and daughter Satiat (Sofia Khanum), 1825-1870. For details see Ad. Berzhe, "A.P. Yermolov i ego kebinnye zheny na kavkaze," in *Russkaya starina*, 1883, vol. 43, 523-528; Pismo A.P. Yermolov o docheri ego Satiat (1859) in *Istoricheskii Vestnik* 1885, vol. 22, 732; Pisma Yermolova k knyazyu V.O. Bebutovu, in *Russkaya starina*, 1872, V (March), 453.

influence on Yermolov except his own vanity. He sometimes permits certain of his admirers to speak truth to him, but he never follows their advice. The more intelligent the man beside him, the less influence he has, so that no one can say he is guided by anyone else. Yermolov has the unusual gift of binding to himself – unconditionally, like slaves – the people near to him... Officers and men truly love him for quite trifling things: on active service, he allows the soldiers, even when off duty, to wear loose trousers and jackets, and the officers to go about in forage-caps and to dress how they please... In time of need, he shares his last crust. Yermolov's great virtue is that he is not greedy for gain and despises wealth."⁸⁹

⁸⁹ M. Medvedeva, *Novoe o Griboedove i dekabristakh*, in *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo* (Moscow, 1956) LX/1, 485-486.