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The Cossacks 1799–1815



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THE COSSACKS 1799–1815

INTRODUCTION

Even before the Napoleonic Wars westerners were fascinated by the Cossacks. This enthusiasm reached a peak in 1812–14 when reading in the newspapers about their exploits in helping to vanquish Napoleon's Grande Armée.

Travellers in Russia nearly always recorded in their diaries descriptions of Cossacks and their way of life. However, this way of life was changing. When the Cossacks had settled in Russia during the sixteenth century they were given many freedoms that were not enjoyed by the Russian peasants. They did not have to pay the poll tax and they were a truly democratic society, where all Cossacks had their say in how their *Host* or tribe was run and elected the head of their village. But during the eighteenth century the Russian Government imposed restrictions on the Cossacks and a ruling élite was established. True, there were some revolts against this infringement, but the reign of Tsar Alexander I (1801–25) represents a period of transition from the Cossacks' old ways to a new era in their society which was more subservient to the Russian crown.

There are many myths about the Cossacks which have come about since this time. They are often seen as cowards in battle, not daring to attack regular cavalry or formed infantry, but preferring to attack small bands of defenceless soldiers. Another myth was that they plundered their way across Europe and did not care if those they plundered were friend or foe.

There have also been many theories concerning the origin of the name Cossack (or to give it its proper Eastern name *Kazak*). Several sources suggest it means a robber or a wanderer. Campenhausen, who travelled to Russia early in the nineteenth century, suggests that it came from the word *kossa* or sickle, which instrument was originally used as a standard in battle. It has also been suggested that *Kazak* is a Tartar word, though no such word appears in the Tartar language. Another theory suggests the name originated from the Mongolian invasion, *Ko*, meaning armour or defence and *Zak* being Mongolian for border, or that it came from the Scythians who called a tribe living on the Don the *Saka* and *kos* was added to the name of the tribe because they were white. Even by the time of the Napoleonic Wars the meaning had long been forgotten.

Here, I hope to prove that the Cossacks were by no means cowards, and often attacked regular cavalry as well as formed infantry, preferring to use their brains rather than brawn when it came to battle. The only forces they did fear were the Turkish and Caucasian armies whose cavalry used similar tactics to their own.

Several unidentified French officers later recalled to the Russian General Benkendorf, who commanded several Cossack regiments during

the German War of Liberation in 1813: 'Your Cossacks ... routed us; when we kept in masses they surrounded us; if we extended our front equal to theirs, they united themselves quick as lightening to pierce our centre; and when we tried to upset them, our horses could never catch theirs.'

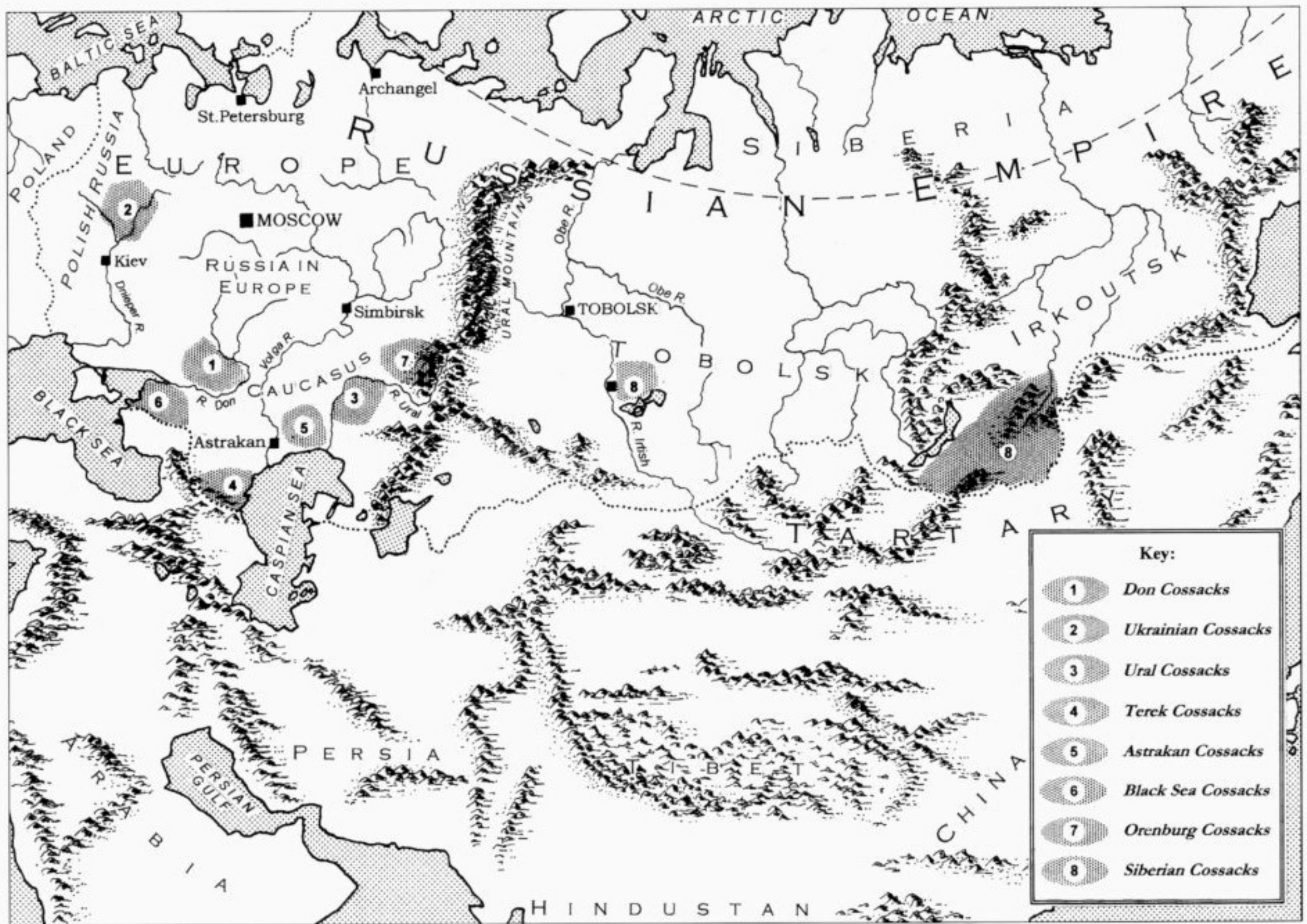
It is true that they plundered civilians, but this was a problem for all army commanders and civilians in the path of an army. The Grande Armée, before it invaded Russia, in 1812 plundered the eastern states of Germany, while at the same time the British Army under the Duke of Wellington, which was fighting in the Iberian peninsula from 1808–14, had plundered Badajoz.

The Cossacks made excellent scouts for an army and were called by the Russian General Suvarov (1729–1801) the 'eyes and ears of the army'. However, the biggest praise comes from Napoleon himself who is reported to have said that if he had the Cossacks in his army he could have 'ruled the world'.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1799** **War of the Second Coalition**
18–20 June Suvarov defeats a French force at the battle of Trebbia
15 August Suvarov defeats the French at the battle of Novi
27 August–18 September An Anglo-Russian force under the Duke of York and General Hermann lands in the Helder
19 September An Anglo-Russian army narrowly defeats a Franco-Dutch army at the battle of Bergen
25–26 September The Russian army of Rimski-Korsakov is defeated at the second battle of Zurich
2 October An Anglo-Russian army defeats a Franco-Dutch army at the battle of Alkmaar in the Helder
6 October An Anglo-Russian army is defeated by a Franco-Dutch army at the battle of Castricum
18 October Convention of Alkmaar, the Duke of York agrees a cease fire and agrees to withdraw his army
19 November Anglo-Russian army evacuates the Helder
- 1801** **12 January** 23,000 Cossacks are ordered to invade India, but the invasion is cancelled after the assassination of Tsar Paul I
- 1803–13** **Russo-Persian War**
- 1804** **1 July** General Tsitsianov defeats a Persian army at Echmiadzinom
1805 **9 July** Defeat of a Persian army by General Karyagin
1808 **9 October** Defeat of a Persian army at Karabahom
1810 **12–16 July** Ahmet Khan's force are routed near the town of Migri
16–17 September Battle between a Russian army under Major-General Pauluchoi and Hussein Kulin Khan's forces at the battle of Ahalkalakami
14–19 December Russians storm the fortified town of Ahalkalaki. Cessation of hostilities and peace negotiations begin.
- 1812** **13 May** Battle of Sultan-Buda
30 October A Persian army under Abbas Mirzi is defeated near the river Daurt-Clay
31 October Abbas Mirzi is again defeated at Landuz
- 1813** **23 October** The peace of Gulistan ends the Russo-Persian War
- 1805** **War of the Third Coalition**
8 September The Austrian Army under General Mack invades Bavaria, France's ally, and occupies Ulm
20 October General Mack surrenders at Ulm
16 November Prince Bagration's rearguard action at Hollabrunn against Murat enables Kutuzov's army time to retreat

	2 December The Russo-Austrian Army is defeated at the battle of Austerlitz
	26 December Peace of Pressburg ends the War of the Third Coalition
1806–07	War of the Fourth Coalition
1806	26 December Russians defeat the French at the battle of Golymin, but are defeated at Pultusk
1807	7–8 February Bennigsen fights Napoleon to a draw at Eylau, but Napoleon claims a victory 14 June Battle of Friedland; Bennigsen is defeated by Napoleon 7–9 July Treaty of Tilsit
1806–12	The Turkish War
1807	13 June A Russian force under General Miloradovitch defeats a Turkish force at the battle of Obileshtami
1809	18 September Bagration defeats a Turkish force at Rassevaton
1810	7 September Kamenski defeats a Turkish force at Batinye
1811	4 July General Kutuzov defeats the Vizier's army at Rushchuk 2 August The Russians defeat a Turkish force at Kalafotum 9 September The Turks defeat a Russian force at Giurgevo 9 October Kutuzov defeats the Turkish advance guard at Slobodzeei and the beginning of the blockade of the remaining Turkish Army 6 December Capitulation of the Turkish Army at Slobodzeei
1812	22 June Treaty of Bucharest ends hostilities and releases the Army of Moldavia to take part in the Patriotic War
1808–09	Russo-Swedish War
1808	20 February A Russian force invades Finland 18 April The Swedish Army defeats a Russian force at the battle of Siikajoki 14 July A Russian army defeats a Swedish force at the battle of Lappo 14 September A Russian army defeats a Swedish force at the battle of Oravais 27 October A Russian army is defeated at the battle of Virta Bro
1809	19 August A Russian army defeats a Swedish force at the battle of Savar 17 September Peace of Fridrikshamn, Sweden cedes Finland and the Aland islands to Russia
1812	The Patriotic War 24 June Napoleon's Grande Armée, 500,000 strong, invades Russia 17 August Battle of Smolensk 7 September Battle of Borodino is inconclusive, despite heavy losses on both sides 14 September Napoleon enters Moscow 18 October Battle of Vinkovo or Tarantino, which begins the Grande Armée's retreat 24 October Battle of Maloyaroslavets, Russians prevent Napoleon marching into southern Russia and he is forced to retreat 26–28 November Grande Armée crosses the Berezina 13 December Last remnants of the Grande Armée leave Russian soil
1813	The War of Liberation 2 May A Russo-Prussian army is defeated by Napoleon at the battle of Lützen 20–21 May A Russo-Prussian army is defeated by Napoleon at the battle of Bautzen 26–27 August Battle of Dresden, French victory 16–19 October Napoleon is defeated by the allies at Leipzig
1814	29 January Battle of Brienne 1 February The Allies narrowly gain a victory at the battle of La Rothière 7 March Napoleon beats a Russian force at Craonne; the Prussian force present fails to launch an attack on the French. 31 March Alexander enters Paris 12 April Napoleon abdicates 2–4 June Allied troops leave Paris



COSSACK LIFE

This map shows the different Cossack settlements, based on an 1801 map Russia.

The largest Cossack tribe or *Host* was that of the Don Cossacks, whose territory was estimated by Samuel Kittle in his *History of the Cossacks* at over 2,600 square miles, divided into 120 *Stanitzas* or cantons, which:

... have the appearance of badly fortified villages and their population is very unequal. Each of them, however, has a church, some of them two, as also a courthouse, an ataman and other officers with a few pieces of cannon. The churches are everywhere good; they are chiefly built of brick ... the houses are mostly of wood, placed on stone foundations and are constructed that they may be removed from one place to another. They are said to be much cleaner and better furnished than those of the Russians; many of their rooms are handsomely fitted by paper hangings and ornamented with no mean paintings of Saints, Virgins and bishops.

The *Stanitza* was further divided into plots of land for each male adult Cossack:

After centuries of raiding other people's lands the Don Cossacks finally settled down to farming their own land. Other Cossack *Hosts* took up different trades, the Grebensk preferred to trade in wine, whereas the Ural Cossacks' main industry was fishing. The majority

of these farms or trades were managed by women, since their husbands were often away fighting. Lieutenant-Colonel John Johnson, who toured Russia in 1817 noted that the Don Cossack women 'have little that is feminine in their appearance; and they are said to be ill-natured and shrewish in their tempers, always aiming to rule at home'. On the other hand, Edward Clarke and Reginald Heber, who both toured Russia at the beginning of the nineteenth century, found the Cossack women 'very beautiful'.

Originally the Cossacks were divided into three groups, the rank and file or *vyborni*, the poorer Cossacks (*pidpomichnyky*), who helped the *vyborni*, and finally those without any land, the *pidsusidky*, who were labourers hired to work on the *vyborni*'s land. The male population of each group was further divided into two categories: *razryady* or those eligible for service; and *kazaki sluzhilye i nesluzhilye* or non-serving Cossacks. Each Cossack had a say in the 'circle', which discussed their tribe's activities. However, as early as 1738 an Ataman or Hetman, who was the chief of the Cossacks was appointed by the Tsar. Moreover as the Cossack *Hosts* grew in size the role of the 'circle' was taken over by the village elders or *Starshini*, but they only met with the Ataman's approval.

By the end of the eighteenth century a new group was emerging, a noble élite who coveted the positions of power within their society and members of the Denisov, Grekov and Ilovaiskoi families came to the fore. In 1812 members of the Grekov family commanded at least nine regiments of Don Cossacks and the Ilovaiskoi family six. Two members of the Denisov family were also appointed to the position of Ataman within three generations.

Although, in theory, Cossack land within a *Stanitza* was distributed annually to all male Cossacks capable of serving in the ranks, the Cossack nobility pressurised or bribed the *vyborni* to give up their land, and so the nobility accumulated immense wealth, while increasing the number of *pidsusidky*. In 1775, the role of the elders was replaced by a Cossack 'government' formed from this Cossack élite to discuss civil and judicial policies. During the reign of Paul I (1796–1801) this government was replaced by a military chancellery, headed by the Ataman.

Edward Clarke noted that:

At the head of both of civil and military government is the *Voishovoy Ataman*, who is appointed by the emperor, and who has

Social rank	Cossacks	Russian equivalent	British equivalent
I		Feldmarshal	Field-Marshal
II	General of Cavalry	General of Cavalry	General
III	General Leutnant	General Leutnant	Lieutenant-General
IV	General Major	General Major	Major-General
V			Brigade commander
VI	Polkovnik	Polkovnik	Colonel
VII	Podpolkovnik	Podpolkovnik	Lieutenant-Colonel
VIII	Voiskovoi Starshina	Maior	Major
IX	Esaul	Kapitan	Captain
X		Stabs Kapitan	
XI			
XII	Sotnik	Poruchik	1st Lieutenant
XIII		Podporuchik	2nd Lieutenant
XIV	Khorunzhie	Praporshchik	Ensign

Table of Ranks of Tsar Paul I, 1798, which ennobled many a Cossack family at the expense of others because it established a hereditary élite.

the rank of lieutenant general ... [and] presides over – a chancery, composed of the administrator of war, the finances and civil affairs. His council, elected triennially by a general assembly of the Cossacks, consists of two councillors, who are major generals and four colonel assessors. The Cossacks pay no other taxes than a slight contribution to defray the expenses of the chancery.

Even the village Ataman lost authority. One eyewitness wrote: 'He used formerly, when the Cossacks were called upon actual service, to march at the head of his *Stanitza*, but now he merely furnishes the troops which are required, who are put under officers nominated by the crown.'

Paul I further undermined the Cossacks' authority by introducing Cossack officers into the Table of Ranks which ennobled the officers and their children. However, among the Cossacks this was not a popular move, as Reginald Heber records:

... this was objected to because it was seen as introducing an unconstitutional aristocracy. This step of establishing a hereditary nobility has been productive of very bad effects in taking away the military spirit of a government, where all were formerly equal or had only a temporary, but absolute power, when elected officers. At present the new made nobles affect to have several privileges in the service and claim a constant preference in the succession to vacant commissions.

Those who travelled through Russia at the beginning of the nineteenth century always commented on the Cossacks and how clean and hospitable they were compared to their Russian counterparts. Edward Clarke recorded:

There is no nation (I will not even except my own) more cleanly in their apparel than the Cossack ... I never saw a Cossack with a dirty suit of clothes. Their hands, moreover, are always clean; their hair free from vermin; their teeth white and their skin has a healthy and cleanly appearance.

Another contemporary of Clarke records:

... their manners are nearly the same as those of the Russian peasant, but in their furniture, in their dress and in the cooking of their food, they display more attention to cleanliness than the Russians. They prefer the breeding of cattle and horses to agriculture ... the Don Cossacks are extremely hospitable and strive to deserve the confidence of travellers.

They were deeply religious and followed the pre-reform doctrine of the Russian Church. Reginald Heber wrote: 'They are Starovertz (Old Believers), milk, eggs and butter are strictly prohibited and the more religious people even hold fish in abhorrence, their own food at this season (spring) consists of pickled mushrooms, onions, and wheat or millet fried in oil.' Another writer recalls: 'they never forgot their morning and evening prayers.'

Regular regiments	Regular regiments	Opolchenie regiments
Andriyanov's 2nd	Kuteinikov's 4th	Andriyanov's 1st
Andronov's	Kuteinikov's 6th	Andriyanov's 3rd
Ataman's	Kuteinikov's 8th	Belegorodtsev's
Barabanshchikov's 2nd	Lukovkin's 2nd	Chernozubov's 4th
Bihalov's 1st	Loshchilin's	Chernozubov's 5th
Chernozubov's 8th	Lotachilin's	Danilov's
Chililev's	Loukoffkin's	Golitsyn's
Denisov's 6th	Malachov's	Grekov's 1st
Denisov's 7th	Melnikov's 3rd	Grekov's 3rd
Diatchkin's	Melnikov's 4th	Grekov's 5th
Efremov's 3rd	Melnikov's 5th	Grekov's 17th
Gegova's	Odin's	Ilovaiski's 3rd
Gorin's 1st	Orlov's	Ilovaiski's 9th
Gorin's 2nd	Panteleev's 2nd	Koshkin's
Gordeiev's 1st	Papouzine's	Popov's 3rd
Grekov's 4th	Platov's 4th	Rebrikov's 3rd
Grekov's 6th	Platov's 5th	Shamshev's
Grekov's 8th	Popov's 5th	Sluysarev's 1st
Grekov's 9th	Popov's 13th	Suchilin's
Grekov's 11th	Radinov's	Sulin's 9th
Grekov's 18th	Rebrejev's 2nd	Tranlin's
Grekov's 21st	Rodionov's	Yezhov's 2nd
Grevtsov's 2nd	Rubashkin's	
Gzov's 2nd	Schaltanovka's	
Ilovaiski's 2nd	Selivanov's	
Ilovaiski's 4th	Semencikov's 4th	
Ilovaiski's 5th	Sisoyev's 1st	
Ilovaiski's 10th	Sisoyev's 3rd	
Ilovaiski's 11th	Sevassov's 2nd	
Isaev's 2nd	Sluysarev's	
Jagodin's 2nd	Sutsherinov's	
Karpov's 2nd	Sulin's 9th	
Karashev's	Tchernozoubov's	
Kharitonov's 7th	Turchaninov's	
Kireev's 2nd	Vlasov's 2nd	
Kisseiev's	Vlasov's 3rd.	
Kisilev's 2nd	Yagodin's 2nd	
Komissarov's 1st	Yanov's	
Korpov's 2nd		

In 1811 there was reported to be between 65 and 100 regiments of the Don Cossacks. Until 1835, unlike the regiments of other Hosts they bore the names of their commanders rather than numbers. In 1812 22 Opolchenie regiments were raised. This chart shows the names of the regiments that can be identified during the Napoleonic Wars, many serving in the glorious campaigns of 1812, 1813 and 1815. Some could trace their regimental heritage back to 1570 when the Don Cossacks were officially formed. (Orders of battle and sources mentioned in the bibliography)

An officer (seated) and a Cossack of the Ural *Sotnia* of the Imperial Guard 1798–1801. (From A. V. Viskovatov's work on the *Historical Description and Clothing of the Russian Army*) (Author's collection)

For punishment the Cossacks used the *knout*, made of leather or rope, to whip both male and females. The number of lashes depended on the crime. The Black Sea Cossacks, at least, also had a particular form of duel. The two combatants stripped down to their waists and grasped each other by the left hand. In their right hand they each carried a short whip with a musket ball tied to the end and to the sound of military music or a kettle drum the duellists would hit each other with the whip until one fell to the ground in exhaustion or admitted defeat.

ACTIVE SERVICE

In 1802 a report stated that the total number of Cossacks on active service was estimated to be around 100,000 or 22.62 per cent of the entire Russian Army.

According to Laurence Oliphant, who wrote an account of his journey through Russia in the middle of the nineteenth century: 'The ceremony of raising a regiment



consists in the simple process of ordering a certain number of men to meet at a given point, where they are marched ... to the scene of action.' The management of forming and equipping the regiments was the responsibility of the *Voinskaya ekspeditsiya* of the *Host* chancellery's military office. The *Host* chancellery would send orders to the district's *sysknye nachal'stva*, or chief investigating officer, assisted by the district's chief (*okruzhnye nachal'niki*) and their assistants who in turn sent orders to the village authorities to gather all Cossacks eligible for service. Reginald Heber writes:

The Cossacks when called out have been formed into regular regiments which has depressed entirely the power of the village ataman, by the introduction of colonels, captains etc. formerly the ataman was addressed in the Emperor's mandate almost as an equal, he himself marched at the head of his *Stanitza* now he merely sends the required contingent, which is part under officers named by the crown.

Once a male Cossack reached the age of 19 he became eligible to serve in the ranks of their *Stanitza's* regiment, though another contemporary source puts the minimum age limit at 15. However for the first two years the boys were *maloletnye* or underage and remained at home, carrying out internal duties. After this period they were enrolled for field service, as Heber confirms:

The Cossack, in consequence of his allowance, may be called on to serve for any term not exceeding three years, in any part of the world, mounted, armed and clothed at his own expense and making good any deficiencies ... food, pay and camp equipage are furnished by the government. Those who have served three years are not liable, or at least not usually called upon, to serve abroad, except in particular emergencies. They serve however in the cordon along the Caucasus and in duties of the police. After 20 years they become free from all service, except the home duties of police and assisting in the passage of the corn banks over the shallows of the Don after 25 years service they are free entirely.

One contemporary source said of the Cossacks: 'All the males from the age of 15 to 50 are soldiers, but they may serve by substitutes.' R. Ackerman, in his book *Characteristic Portraits of the Various Tribes of Cossacks*, recalls that despite their reputation for bravery, 'all who are able to purchase exemptions from military service; so that the whole burden falls upon vagabonds or the poorest class, who they oppress at pleasure'.



A print by K. Verne of a Cossack of the Ural Sotnia of the Imperial Guard during the reign of Alexander I; note the hanging sleeves which were often tied together behind the Cossack's back in action to keep them out of the way. (Courtesy of the Russian State Museum)

In his *A Historical and Statistical Survey of the Ural Cossacks*, published at the beginning of the nineteenth century, A. I. Levshin records:

The custom of military service by hire, which on the one hand would seem to be unfair, since the rich are always exempt from service, while the poor must serve, has on the other hand its advantages, since, firstly every Cossack who takes the field has the opportunity of acquiring good uniforms and weapons; secondly, when he leaves his family behind, he can leave them enough money to support them in his absence; thirdly a man who plies some trade or craft that is useful for himself and others is not forced to abandon his occupation for involuntary service.

Cossack merchants and craftsmen within the Don were excused from service as long as they obtained a substitute to serve in their place, or from 1804 they could pay 100 roubles each year instead. This money was to pay for equipping poorer Cossacks.

Although an Imperial decree gives the term of service as 25 years' field service and five years' internal duties after which the Cossack was considered to be retired, according to Ackerman:

When they have completed 25 years of service, their names are erased from the register and they cease to belong to the military force, though this has been confirmed by several *Ukases* [Orders], yet the number of old men to be seen in their pulks affords reason to doubt whether it is strictly adhered to.

In 1812, just as in other Russian provinces the Cossacks were required to raise Opolchenie or militia regiments. But, despite calling for no one under the age 17 or 18, one source records that: 'In some platoons ... [were] grandfathers and grandchildren, the first with whitened hair, the others in adolescence years.' These included young Ivan Popov who had a 'zealous desire [to] be ordered into service along with other Cossacks'. His wish was granted and he enrolled in Sulin's 9th Opolchenie Regiment. On the other hand, Stepan Churilov, who had already served 30 years and had been with the Russian General Suvarrov in Italy in 1799, 'even though considered unfit by old age, but prompted by a unique devotion to service, left to join [the Opolchenie] and served through the course of the campaign with fearlessness, as testified to by his regimental commander, Colonel Slyusarev 1st.'

While travelling through Russia in the 1840s Moritz Wagner was accompanied by a Cossack major, who spoke of his grandfather's exploits. His grandfather was Vassili Iguroff who in 1812 was reported to be 90 years old and over 6 feet tall who had seen service in Poland under Suvarrov in 1795, and earned himself the nickname of the 'Steppe Devil'.



Privates of the Don Sotnias of the Cossack regiment of the Imperial Guard during the reign of Tsar Paul I. (From A. V. Viskovatov's work)

My grandfather did not share in the campaign of the Russians in Italy and Germany, against the French. His great age excused his attendance, though his strength remained almost undiminished, and he was still unmatched in the saddle and with the lance. But when Napoleon declared war on Russia, in 1812, and set in motion his immense masses against the heart of our empire, when our beloved Tsar Alexander summoned all his people to arms for *Viera* (the faith) and *Otetchestvo* (country), the energetic veteran declared that he would join the fight with his grandsons.

ORGANISATION

In theory a Cossack regiment mustered between 500 and 1,000 men depending on the *Host* the regiment was raised in. However, during the campaigns of 1812–14 the regiments usually mustered between 80 to 120 men, with the strongest mustering just 320 lances, the rest having become casualties or being used for escort duties or guarding prisoners.

These regiments or *Pulks* were commanded by a *voskovois ataman* or *Poloniski* and were divided into between five and ten squadrons or *sotnias* of 100 men armed with lances. Each squadron was commanded by an *esaul* or captain, a *sotnik* or senior officer (for example, lieutenant), a cornet, who carried the colours and two or three *Charungii* or junior officers. To help them were ten *Uradnik* or NCOs all of whom were armed only with a sword. Each Cossack regiment usually had ten tirailleurs in each squadron, whose role it was to skirmish with the enemy. There were no trumpeters in a Cossack regiment.

General Benkendorf, who commanded a division of cavalry including several regiments of Cossacks, recorded that:



Print by A. Zauerveida of a patrol of the Cossacks of the Guard at ease in a courtyard. The uniforms had changed little since the reign of Paul I, except that they now wore blue trousers instead of red. (Courtesy of the Russian State Museum)

The non-commissioned officers are the soul of a regiment of the Don, because they almost always obtain that advancement owing to their own merit. In their turn as non-commissioned officer of the day (*duevalnoi*) they are responsible for everything. This non-commissioned officer is charged with the discipline, economy, and reports of the day; and the inborn carelessness of the officer relies upon him.

The Ataman could promote a Cossack up to the rank of cornet, but only the Tsar could appoint them to a higher rank. However, according to Benkendorf, becoming an officer was a 'ruin to a Cossack, because independently of the most complete ignorance, he abandons himself to all the vices of a parvenu. As officers they become tyrants over their old comrades; they demand an account of the trophies and booty acquired by them.' He also believed that: 'A body of Cossacks should be commanded by a Russian officer, because he has more intelligence than the Cossack, who, rising from the lowest class, is wanting education, and in the sentiment of honour which should invariably distinguish the officer.'

Adrian Denisov, writing in 1788, records how he raised his regiment, a process which had changed little by the time of the Napoleonic Wars:

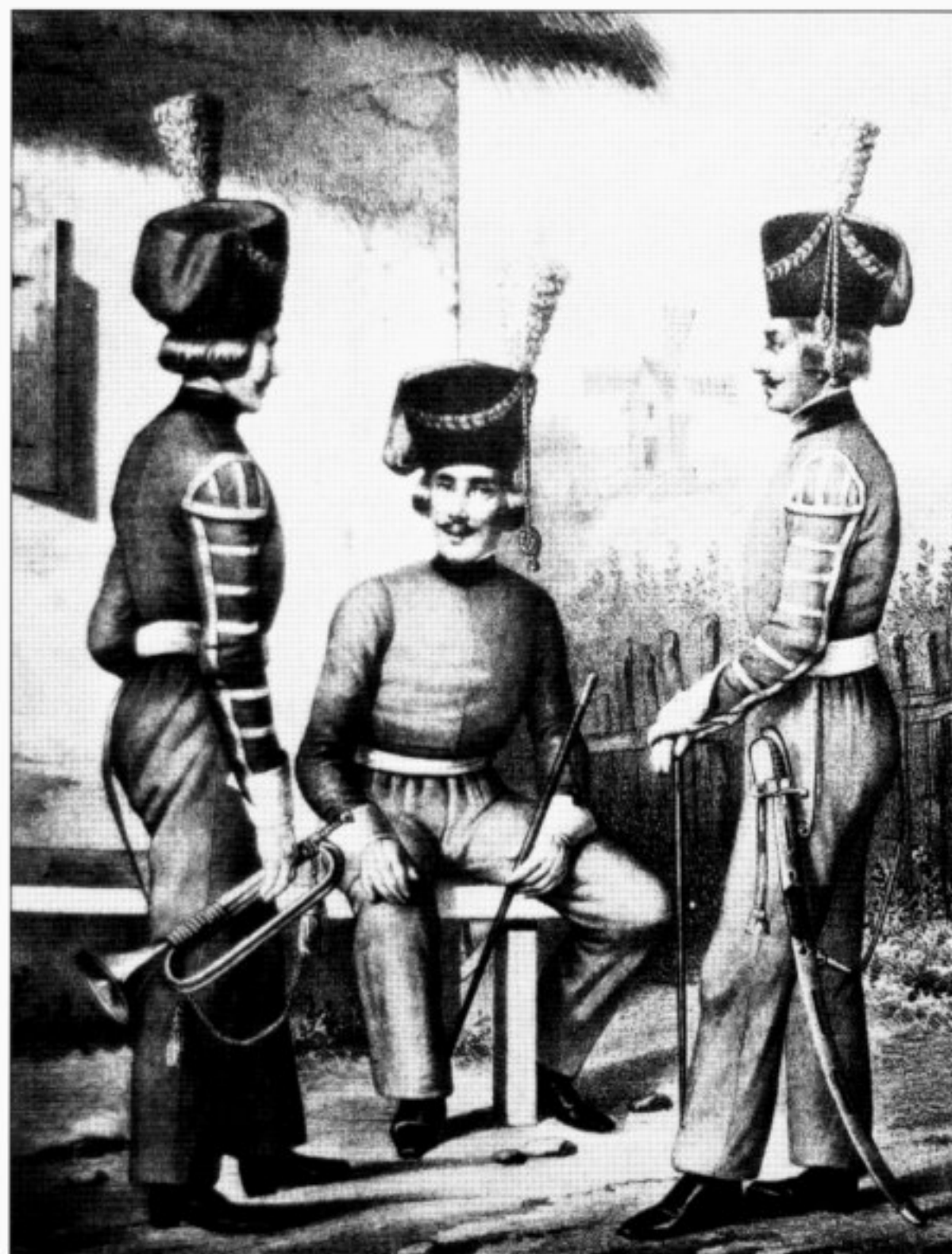
Having made out the effectives of the regiment, I divided them into sotnias, and promoted two of the Cossacks from each sotnia to serve as commanders. I wrote out an instruction which detailed the duties of every individual, while at the same time I fitted out the regiment and distributed the saddles, and had the missing items manufactured ... Finally, at the beginning of 1788 ... my regiment was fully equipped and the number of horses brought up to strength.

Since Denisov had to buy horses and equipment for his regiment, it appears that it was made up of poorer Cossacks who could not afford to buy their own equipment.

Don Cossacks

In 1802 there were 14,313, including 77 Kalmucks (a race of Mongols who had settled between Urals and Volga and their ancestors had ridden with Ghengis Khan), serving in the *Host's* regiments, of whom 466 men were allocated to the two companies of artillery and those on home service mustered 2,044, a total of 16,357 men. Besides these regiments a large detachment of Don Cossacks formed the Lifeguard Cossack regiment, which consisted of three squadrons. Unlike the other Cossack *Hosts* who numbered their regiments, the regiments of the Don were known by the name of their commanding officers, and at least four regiments, and probably a great many more, could trace their history back to 1570 when the Don Cossack *Host* was officially established.

Although Cossack regiments did not have trumpeters, the regiment of the Imperial Guard was organised along the lines of the regular cavalry regiments. Here we see, from left to right, a trumpeter, an NCO and a trumpet-major, during the reign of Tsar Paul I. (Author's collection)



Fit for service			Old and unfit		
Russian/Cossack rank	British equivalent	No.	Russian/Cossack rank	British equivalent	No.
Host's Ataman		1			
Podpolkovnik	Lt-Colonel	9			
Maior	Major	1			
Kapitan	Captain	19			
Poruchik	Lieutenants	26	Kapitan	Captain	6
Podporuchik	2nd Lieutenant	11	Poruchik	Lieutenants	26
Praporuchik	Ensign	26	Podporuchik	2nd Lieutenant	7
Polkovih Esaul	Captain	64	Praporuchik	Ensign	46
Sotnik	Lieutenant	70	Polkovih Esaul	Captain	28
Khorunzhi	Cornet	151	Sotnik	Lieutenant	6
Esaul Sotnia	Sergeant?	151	Horunzhiih	Cornet	31
Kuren Ataman	Corporal?	40	Esaul Sotnia	Sergeant?	3
Cannoniers	Artillery crew	159	Cossacks	privates	2,156
Cossacks	privates	14,744	Maloletnih	Under age	5,603
		15,472			7,912

Like their Russian counterparts the Cossacks answered the call to arms in July 1812, and although there were some Opolchenie regiments designated as Cossacks, these were nothing more than irregular militia regiments. There were 26 Don Cossack regiments which joined Kutuzov at Tarantino, 22 of which were Opolchenie regiments (raised during the war of 1812 for the defense of Russia), a total of 12,695 men, of whom 8,752 were volunteers, and the remaining 3,943 were serving Cossacks used as a nucleus for each regiment.

Census return dated 1 September 1802 for the male population of the Black Sea Cossacks. (Source: *The Complete Collection of the Laws of the Russian Empire*)

Ural Cossacks

The 1802 census recorded that the Ural Cossacks consisted of 28,459 people. Of these 5,688 were employed elderly and serving men and 2,494 men were reported to be on campaign, including 92 in the Lifeguard Ural *sotnia* and 452 on garrison duties.

In 1812 the 1st–4th regiments were serving with the Army of the Danube.

Black Sea Cossacks

The Black Sea Cossacks believed they were better than the Don Cossacks. They had a saying: 'A Cossack from the Black Sea is equal to three Cossacks of the Don.' As the Zaporogi Cossacks, they had been forcibly removed from their homeland for showing disloyalty to the Russian crown and so they hated the Russians and chose to be known by Polish names. However, after that, they distinguished themselves fighting for Russia, though a proportion of these Cossacks emigrated to Turkey, settling on the Danube, where they were known as the Cossacks of Nekrassa and fought with the Turkish Army against Russia.

The 1802 census of the Black Sea or Chernomorski Cossacks found that there was a total of 32,657 people living in 40 *Stanitza* or large Cossack villages. They were formed into 10 regiments of horse and ten regiments of infantry, each consisting of: 483 Cossacks 1 clerk, 11 quartermasters, 5 standard-bearers, 5 sotniks, 5 regimental esauls and 1 colonel, totaling 511.

In addition to these regiments there was also a detachment of artillery mustering 20 3-pdr guns manned by 159 cannoniers and even a small navy made up of rowing vessels manned by 406 Cossacks.

Churguevski Cossack

In 1802 the Churguevski regular regiment mustered 1,196 men in ten squadrons. Unlike the other Cossacks who were allowed to return home after three years, a Churguevski Cossack had to remain with his regiment until he was discharged.

Orenburg Cossacks

In 1803 a census was held of the Orenburg Cossacks which counted 22,327 people. At this time there was just one regiment of Orenburg Cossacks, which became known as the Ataman's or the 'Thousand' regiment, because it consisted of 1,000 Cossacks, 40 NCOs, two clerks and 32 officers (including one colonel, ten *esauls*, ten *sotniks*, ten standard bearers who carried the troop's colour and one quartermaster).

In 1804 four infantry battalions were also raised to garrison the fortresses of Verhne-Ozernoi, Tanalshchhoi, Magnitnoi and Stepnoi.

In 1807 two further cavalry regiments were raised, which took part in the War of the Fourth Coalition before being sent to the Moldavian Army. In 1808 they occupied quarters in the Dniester and in the following years took part in several major engagements against the Turkish Army. In 1812 while one regiment remained to guard the Russo-Turkish border the other one joined the army of Admiral Chichagov and which took part in the pursuit of the Grande Armée and the battle of Leipzig before occupying Paris.

Meanwhile, the Ataman's and a third regiment of five *sotnias* joined the main Russian army in 1812 and was among the besieging force of Danzig, before rejoining the main army in 1814.

In 1819 the two regiments which had been raised in 1807 were finally ordered to return home.

Caucasus Cossacks

The Caucasus province raised at least two regiments: (1) the Astrakan Cossacks, who mustered 521 men divided into five *sotnias* formed from the ten *Stanitzas* of the *Host*. It also included a detachment of 101 men garrisoned at Chernoyarskoi, 36 at Endtauski and 51 at Kpasnoyarskoi. (2) Grebenski Cossacks, who could only afford to supply 1,200 to 1,500 men to police the Caucasus.

Cossacks of the Siberian Line Inspection

In 1801 the Cossacks in Siberia mustered 6,051 men who garrisoned 124 settlements and fortresses within the province. By 1808 there were ten regiments of Siberian Cossacks each mustering 552 men: 500 Cossacks, 1 medic, 1 clerk, 47 *Uradnik* and 3 officers.

There was also two companies of horse artillery, a total field force of 5,950 officers and men.

Asiatic Russia

The Asiatic Russian Cossacks raised ten regiments of 500 men each, four reserve *sotnias* and two horse artillery batteries each of 12 guns, consisting in all of about 6,000 men.

Other tribes

The structure of the Bashkir regiments, and probably the other tribes of the Russian Empire, was identical to the Cossack regiments. In 1811 there

were just two Bashkir regiments, of which during the following year the 1st served with Platov's Cossacks and the 2nd with the 3rd Western Army. This increased in the following year by 23 Opolchenie regiments, each mustering about 400 men. The officers of each squadron were still appointed by the Bashkirs themselves, but the regimental commander was appointed by the Tsar.

As well as supplying some Kalmucks to the Don Cossacks regiments, they also formed, on 2 November 1803, the Stavropol regiment from the Orenburg Kalmucks which mustered 1,000 men. This regiment served with Platov's corps in 1812 and was present at the battle of Mir. On 7 April 1811 two *5-sotnia* regiments from the Kalmucks living in the Astrakan, Saratov and Caucasus provinces and also those in the lands of the Don Cossacks who were not attached to this *Host* were formed which served with the 3rd Western Army. They took part in the campaigns of 1813 and 1814.

Although robbers by trade the Kirgiz supplied 25,000 men for the War of 1812 and subsequent campaigns. However, the organisation of its regiments is not known, although it probably followed the five *sotnias* per regiment practice as in other tribes.

APPEARANCE

C. F. Masson, who wrote an account of his time at the courts of Catherine the Great and Paul I, stated:

Taken as a whole the Cossacks are more handsome, tall, active and agile than the Russians, and individually more brave. Being unaccustomed to servitude, they are more open, proud and outspoken.

Sir Robert Ker Porter who served with the Russian army in 1812 wrote: 'The men are robust and fit for service'. Moritz Wagner's Cossack major described those who joined the army in 1812:

Amongst all the uncouth and strange figures that followed the call of the Tsar from the remotest corners of the empire, scarcely one was a match for Vassili, the Step Devil. Yet there was an abundance of picturesque, fabulous, terrible figures in that army. Some of them were fellows who had passed half their life in the saddle – genuine Centaurs of the Steppe ... [Vassili

Print by Johann Adam Klein in 1815 of two Don Cossacks in Astrakan fur caps and another in a cloth cap. (Courtesy of Nuremberg Museum)



Iguroff] though ninety years old displayed the courage and endurance of a young man in the field. He bid defiance to storms, snow and hardships, and his body seemed as callous as leather.

Don Cossacks

The majority of Cossacks were dressed similar to those of the Don Cossacks. Between 1 September and 1 May the Cossacks wore a *Chekmen* or long coat and during the rest of the year a *Kurtka* or short jacket. According to the nineteenth-century historian on the Russian army, A. V. Viskovatov, on 18 August 1801 a new dress code was introduced replacing the uniform worn during the reign of Catherine II. Cossacks not on active service were to wear a dark-blue jacket with red piping on the collar and cuffs. On active service the Cossacks would wear a dark-blue jacket with piping on the collar and cuffs in the regimental colour, which was chosen by the Ataman. Unfortunately the colour of the piping for each regiment is not known, except for the Ataman's regiment which was sky blue. In 1812, while on active service the Cossacks were ordered to have red piping and braid on their coats and trousers, except for the Ataman regiment, which were to remain the same. In 1814 the lower ranks were ordered to have two sky-blue worsted buttonholes on the collar and cuffs and sky-blue worsted epaulettes with a fringe. At the same time the sky-blue piping on the collar and cuffs was abolished. Cossack NCOs were distinguished by having silver lace on their collars and cuffs.

Up to 1812 the trousers were also dark blue with the regimental piping along the side seam, which in 1812 was changed to dark blue with red piping down the side.

In theory the hat was of Astrakan fur, 23cm high with red cloth on top. On campaign a white plume and cords were also worn, the top of the plume being black and orange and the colour of the regimental pompom. NCOs had a mixture of white, orange and black cords and officers had silver cords. Blue cloth hats with red cap bands were also worn.

The Cossacks were also to have a sash, the colour of which was not prescribed by any official decree, but was to be 'as far as possible of one colour' in the regiment. The Ataman's regiment wore a white sash. All leather work was to be black.

The Cossacks' saddle cloth was dark blue with the border in the regimental colour, or from 1812, red, except for the Ataman's regiment which was sky blue.

Edward Clarke recorded in his memoirs:

... [the Don Cossacks] all wore uniforms. Each person's habit consisted of a blue jacket edged with gold and lined with silk, fastened by hooks across the chest. Beneath the jacket appeared a silk

Don Cossacks as seen by Johann Adam Klein in 1815. The white horse appears to have been branded with the Imperial cypher, a crown letter, 'A'. (Courtesy of Nuremberg Museum)



waistcoat, the lower part of which was concealed by a sash. Large and long trousers either of the same material as the jacket or of white dimity (a cotton fabric), kept remarkably clean were fastened high above the waist, and covered their boots. The sabre is not worn except on horseback, on a journey or in war.

However, in practice, the rigours of campaign meant that the Cossacks could not preserve this standard of uniformity. In March 1813 Lieutenant-Colonel Count Platov (the son of the Ataman) took command of his father's regiment: 'all were dressed in a different manner, uniforms of French units, "zipounes", short peasant jackets ... and all of this torn, soiled, pierced by bullets, [or] slashed by bayonets.'

If a Cossack could not afford to equip himself, he was provided with a horse and a lance by the host chancellery. In 1812 the Cherkassk District spent 3,000 roubles equipping poor Cossacks, and the merchants of Novocherkassk, Starocherkasskaya and Ust-Aksaiskaya settlements donated 10,000 roubles to buy weapons; sometimes the richer Cossacks were told to lend their spare weapons to the poorer ones. The Don nobility also donated 1,500 horses.

As well as a lance, two pistols and a carbine some Cossacks also carried a rope to lasso their victim: 'which they fling with such expertness and rapidity over a flying enemy'. The French General Philippe-Paul Ségur was captured in this way.

Black Sea Cossacks

The Black Sea Cossacks, who never served outside Russia, wore:

... [a] uniform in the Polish manner of excellent blue cloth and trimmed with silver. The pantaloons were the same as those worn by the Cossacks of the present day [1808]. The coat hung over his hips and its arms were wide and slit up [the seams], like those of the Georgians and Persians. During his manoeuvres with the sabre they were tied behind his back.

Reginald Heber described them as:

... [dressing] themselves at their own expense and in whatever colours they choose, without any regard to uniformity, the officers for their part wear red boots which is their only distinction; their arms are the carbine, slung over the right shoulder, a lance 10 feet long which they manage by means of a thong twisted around the right hand and arm and occasionally Turkish or Circassian sabres, pistols and poignards ... Their clothes made nearly in the Persian manner, are of the most glowing colours, and the richer sort have red and yellow boots. Their hair is shorn close to their head, except one long lock which hangs over the face.

These Cossacks had shaven heads with long moustaches. During Alexander's reign uniforms began to appear based on those of the Don Cossacks, but without facings and with the addition of two hanging sleeves at the back. It was not until 11 February 1816 that a proper uniform was introduced. From this date the only way to distinguish a



An officer and Cossack of the Churguev Cossacks, 1803–08.
(From A. V. Viskovatov's work)
(Author's collection)

A print of a Cossack of the Bug Cossack Host, 1803–12, from A. V. Viskovatov's epic work.
Unlike most other Cossack Hosts the Bug Cossacks wore a double-breasted jacket.
(Author's collection)



Don Cossack from that of a Black Sea Cossack was the hanging sleeves and a white sash, instead of the Don Cossacks' red ones. However, Moritz Wagner adds that: 'They only wear their uniforms at reviews and on holidays [feast days].'

They were armed with a lance painted red with a pennant, a curved sabre and a 'long carbine' which fired a small musket ball, later replaced by the same-patterned carbines as were carried by the Uhlan regiments.

Orenburg Cossacks

In 1803 the Orenburg Thousand Regiment was uniformed like the Don Cossacks – a dark-blue caftan and trousers with a crimson collar and piping, as well as a crimson cap with a black hat band and a white sash. The regiment's lance pennants were raspberry and white. The saddle cloth and valise was dark blue with crimson lace.

In 1808 the newly raised regiments were ordered to wear uniforms similar to the Don Cossacks, that is, the dark-blue caftan. The Ataman's regiment was to have crimson piping on the collar and cuffs; they also wore blue trousers with red stripes, usually tucked into their boots.

They wore a black fleece cap 22.5cm high with a red top, and white cords for the rank and file and a mixture of silver, gold and black cords for officers. The officers also had a white plume with black and orange feathers at the base. The colour of the sash at this time was not specified.

Churguevski Cossacks

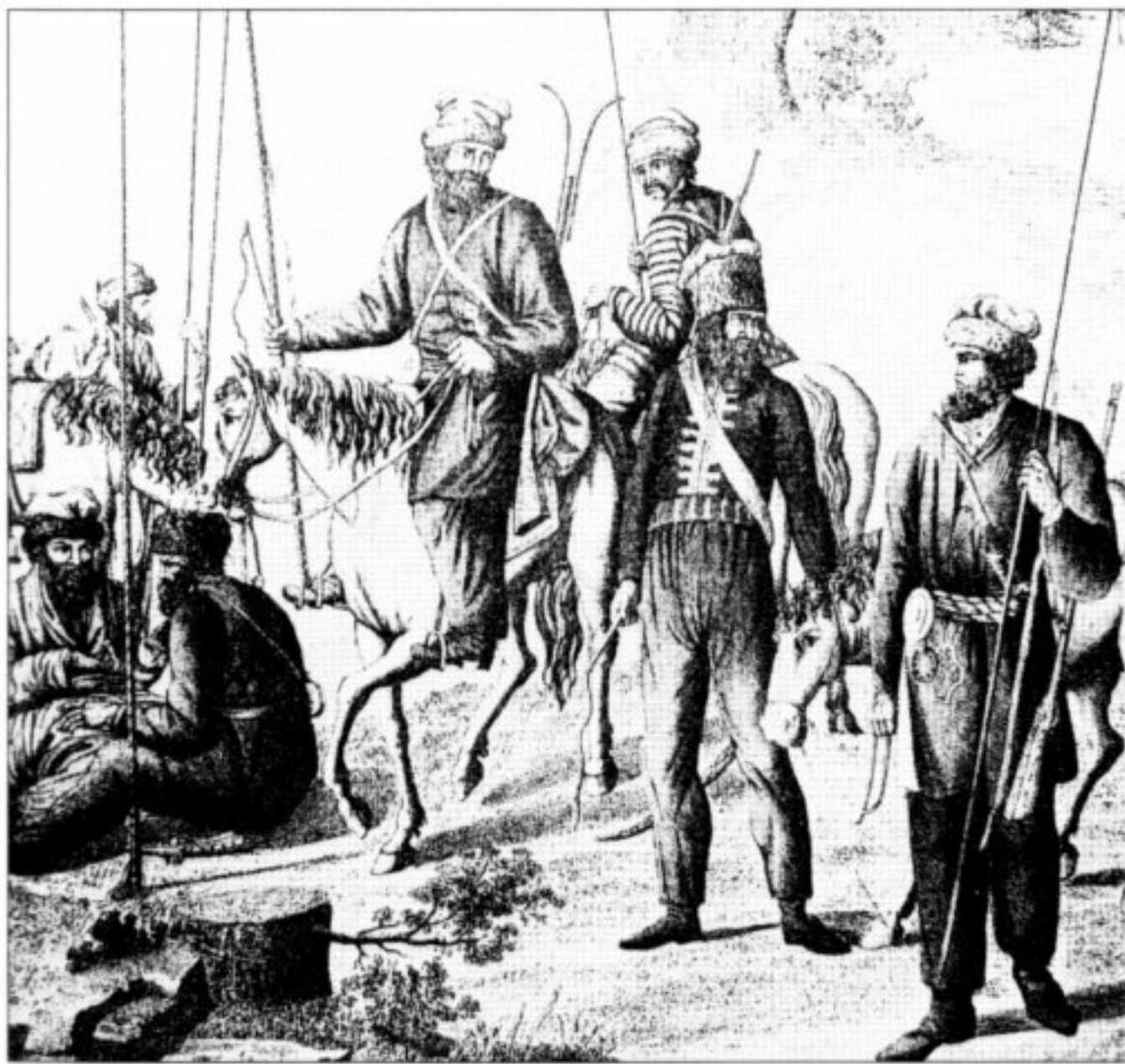
The Churguevski Cossacks wore black coats with a red collar and cuffs, until 19 August 1803 when their facings were changed to dark green. They also wore yellow patterned officers' boots with silver lace edging. In 1808 they adopted the Uhlan weaponry.

Bug Cossacks

The Bug Cossacks formed three regiments in 1803 which were ordered to have a dark-blue coat, with white piping on the collars, cuffs and shoulder straps, and dark-blue trousers with white piping and a white sash. By 1812 they were wearing double-breasted jackets with white metal buttons. They wore the typical Cossack cap with a white top, and white-and-blue cords and a white-over-black-and-orange plume. Like the other Cossack tribes they were armed with a sabre, carbine, a pair of pistols, a whip and a white lance with a black top. Their saddlecloth was dark blue with a white border and black leather work.

Ukrainian Cossacks

In 1812 four regiments of Ukrainian Cossacks were raised in the provinces of Kiev and Podolskoi, each of eight squadrons, a total of 3,600 men. They served with General Tormasov's 3rd Western Army and wore dark-blue coats with grey trousers with crimson collars, lapels



ABOVE LEFT **The uniform of the Ural Cossacks on campaign in 1799. The dismounted figure in the centre is Ataman D. Borodin. (Author's collection)**



ABOVE RIGHT **Little changed in the appearance of the Ural Cossacks. Here we see an officer and Cossack of the Ural Host, 1801-06. (From A. V. Viskovatov's work) (Author's collection)**

and piping on the shoulder straps and cuffs and sash for the 1st Regiment, red for the 2nd, sky blue for the 3rd and white for the 4th. They all wore black fur caps without plumes or cords. Their saddlecloths were black and they were armed with the usual Cossack weaponry and a black lance, fitted with a pennon and white metal fittings.

In every squadron there were 16 men or 'flankers' armed with a carbine, or muskets of different calibre.

Gredenski Cossacks

The Gredenski Cossacks are said to have abandoned the traditional Cossack dress in favour of:

Asiatic costume, the under garments made of some light stuff, and fastened around the body by a girdle, [which] comes to no lower than the knee. The upper is commonly woollen cloth lined, or at least bordered with fur and descends to the ankle. The head is covered with a cap in a form of a melon, ornamented with lace and a border of fur, they suffer the beard to grow.

Ural Cossacks

Between 1801 and 1806 the Ural Cossacks wore a caftan of crimson cloth with white collar and cuffs, and pale-blue Cossack trousers with white piping along the side seams. The sash was pale blue and they wore a black fur cap with a crimson cloth top. The belts were made of black leather. The shafts of their lances were painted black and decorated in three places with a brass plate. The saddle cloth and valise were crimson with a white border. The horse's bridle was of black leather.

In 1806 the Ural Cossacks changed to the uniform worn by the Don Cossacks, namely a dark-blue jacket with piping on the jacket and overalls. The colour of the cap and sash was unchanged. The sabre was the same pattern as those carried by the regular light cavalry with a sword knot. All leather belts were black.

Siberian Line Cossacks

Up to 1802 the Siberian Cossacks did not have a uniform, but then the Inspector of the Siberian Line Inspection, Major General Lavrov, ordered that the Cossacks were to wear a uniform similar to those of the Don Cossacks. On 18 August 1808 these uniforms were further defined as being of dark-blue caftans with red piping on the collar and cuffs for all ten regiments. The upper part of their cap would be red. They would have red piping down the seams of their trousers with black leather trim at the bottom and their sash would be light blue. Their belts would be of black leather and their sword would have a red leather sword knot. Like other Cossacks they carried a lance, with the shaft painted black and, although some were armed with flintlocks, many still carried matchlock muskets. The saddle was of the Mongolian design made from black, red or yellow leather with brass decorations on the front and rear pommels. The bridles were of black leather. The cartridge pouch was worn on the right shoulder and the musket strap on the left.

In 1812 in recognition of their 'zeal ... to the Imperial Service' the Siberian Cossack regiments were to have pennants on their lances. The top half of the pennant was to be white and the bottom half in the regimental colour, the 1st Regiment being light green; the 2nd, light blue; 3rd, yellow; 4th or the Ataman's regiment, blue; 5th, light crimson; 6th, brown; 7th, dark grey; 8th, red; 9th, violet; and the 10th, green. Their uniforms were also changed. Instead of the Cossack-style uniform, they were now issued with Uhlan uniforms of dark-blue cloth with red piping on the collar, shoulder straps, cuffs and turn backs. Their trousers were grey and also of the Uhlan style with red piping down the seams and leather edging to the knees. The sash was dark blue and red. They now wore a shako of lacquered leather with white cords and a red pompom and with brass chin scales. On campaign the shako was covered by an oilskin and worn without cords or pompom. Their boots had iron spurs and the sabre had a black leather sword knot with white cotton tassels. They wore black leather belts and on the cover of their cartridge box, which held 24 cartridges, was a brass plate with the double-headed Russian eagle in the middle. Their old muskets were replaced by Uhlan-pattern carbines with two pistols, and the lance poles were painted black. The saddle cloth was dark blue with a border and monogram of Alexander I in red cloth. Their greatcoats were grey and were carried rolled up behind the saddle.

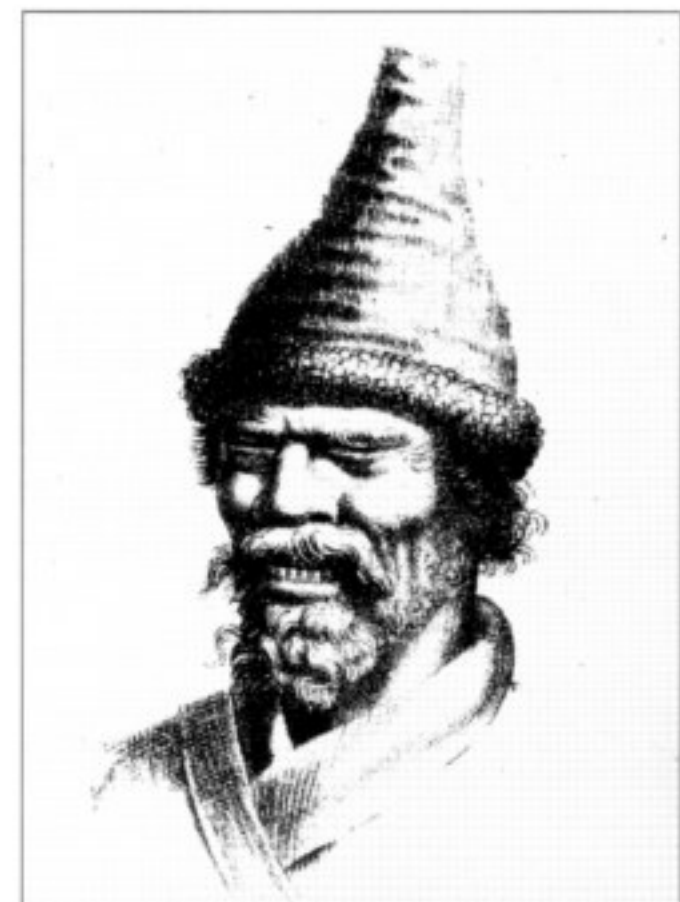
Up to 1816 the Siberian Cossack artillery wore the same uniform as their cavalry counterparts.

Other tribes

The Baskhirs are known to have served in the Friedland campaign in 1807, where they were known variously to the French as 'les amours' and 'les cupidons du nord' because of their bows (which were covered with



BELOW A Siberian Cossack as seen by R. Ackerman in Paris in 1815, which was the first time that they had left Russia's soil during the Napoleonic Wars. Being from the border with China, many had the appearance of Mongols, and who were no doubt the descendants of Genghis Khan's Horde who conquered much of Russia in the thirteenth century before being defeated and pushed back to Siberia in the fifteenth century. (Author's Collection)



OPPOSITE A print by A. V. Viskovatov of a Ukrainian Cossack during the reign of Alexander I. (Author's collection)

An illustration from A. V. Viskovatov's epic work showing the Siberian Line Cossacks in their new Uhlan uniform issued in 1812. However, in 1815 R. Ackerman saw some Siberian Cossacks in Paris in their old uniforms. This either suggests that they had still not been issued with their new uniforms or that they wore them just for parades and feast days, a practice known to have existed in other Cossack Hosts. (Author's collection)



bearskin) and arrows, both nicknames making reference to Cupid and his bow. They were also armed with lances and others with European weapons. They often wore chainmail and long robes trimmed with fur. Like the Cossacks they had to equip themselves at their own expense.

The Kalmucks wore a dark-blue half-caftan with yellow piping on the collars, cuffs and shoulder straps. In cold weather they were allowed to wear the Cossack's caftan. Their trousers were also dark blue with a yellow stripe down the side seam. They also wore the *chapka* or lancers' helmet with a yellow top and black sheepskin around the base. Their armaments were a sabre, pistols, a lance painted red and a bow and arrows.

There was no dress code for the Kirgiz, who were armed with a lance, a bow and arrow, a sabre and a matchlock musket, although the 'latter is still very imperfect to them'.

The Caucasians were divided into three types: the *Pschi* or princes; the *Work* or 'ancient nobility' who according to Ackerman in his *Characteristics of Various Tribes of Cossacks* went to war 'armed in the manner of ancient knights, wearing a cuirass or coat of mail, a large helmet, gauntlets, covering for the thighs and arms ... ornamented with silver, they add a sabre, carbine and pistols, on parade days they also carry a quiver bow and arrows.' Unfortunately, Ackerman does not describe the appearance of the third class of Caucasians who accompanied their masters to war.

COSSACK HORSES

The Cossacks' horses were smaller than their regular cavalry counterparts. According to Sir Robert Wilson the horse of the Cossacks was a 'very little, but well bred horse, which can walk at the rate of five miles an hour with ease, or, in his speed, dispute the race with the swiftest'. A letter dated 25 January 1799 from St Polten, near Vienna, records that the Cossack horses:

... are by no means handsome. Take in the town where you reside one of the smallest, the thinnest, and the poorest horse; put in its mouth a bridle worth two pence, and on his back a bad piece of wood, covered with a sort of pillow made of leather, or some sort of stuff; and you will have a perfect resemblance of a Cossack horse. But as to his qualities, the case is very different. Nothing is comparable to the vigour and suppleness of these little animals. Every day I see them on our frozen pavement, galloping and wheeling in a manner almost incredible.

Because of its robustness the Cossack horse was also used by the regular cavalry on campaign. But these robust horses could not easily be replaced. At the Battle of Austerlitz

many of the Cossacks fought dismounted because of the lack of horses and in 1814 many squadrons could only mount between 10 or 20 Cossacks.

The saddle was fixed to the horse's back by two large girths and the Cossack's possessions was stored in his saddle bags. The harness had no bit, so that the horse was free to eat whenever he wanted to.

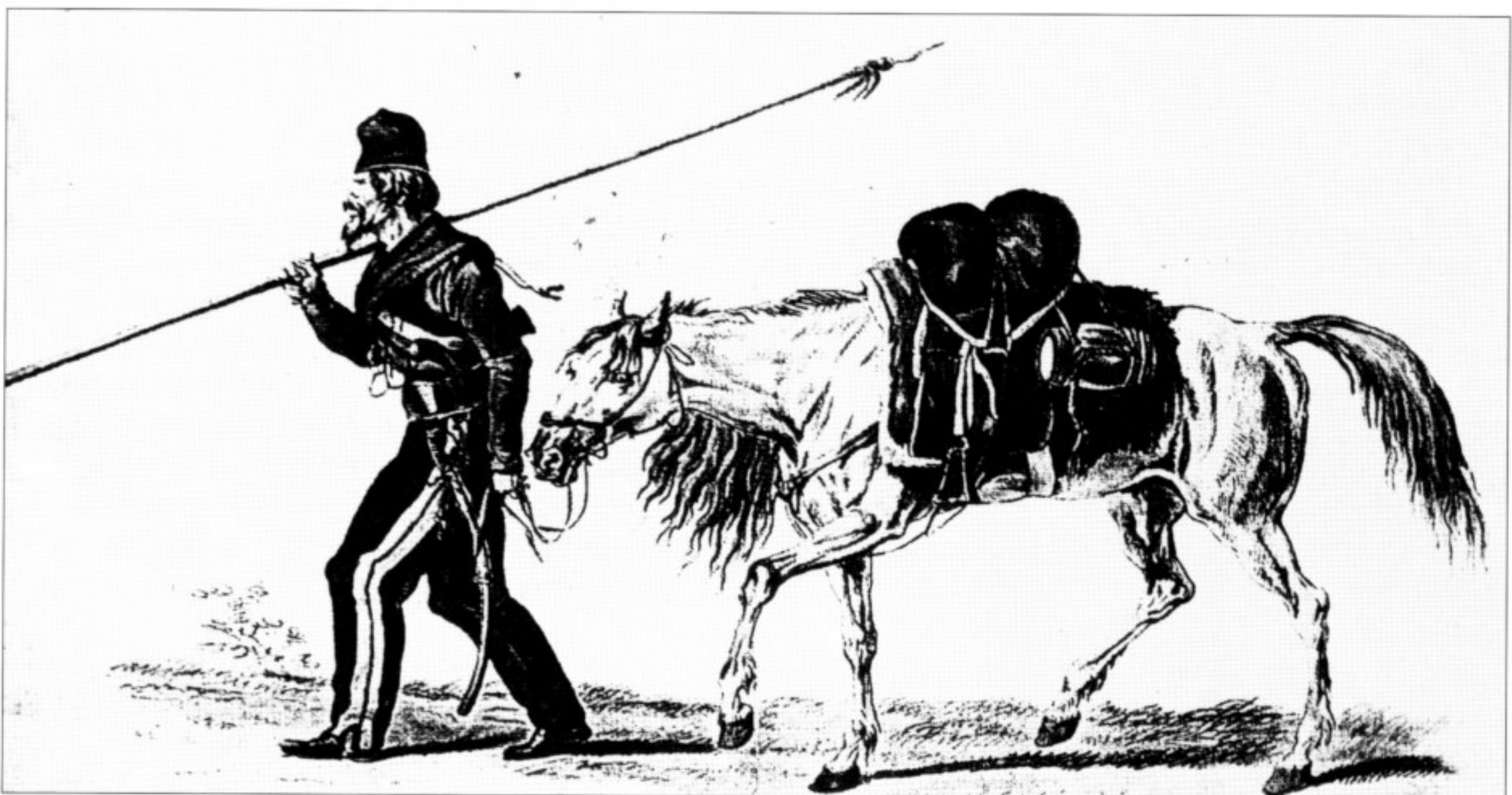
PAY AND PLUNDER

During the winter if a Don Cossack was ordered to travel more than 42.5km away from his home then he would receive a small allowance for provisions for himself and two horses. In 1803 this was set at 17 roubles a year. Like the Don Cossacks a small allowance was also paid in the winter to the Orenburg Cossacks if they had to travel more than 106km from their land or when they were despatched to put down any unrest in the Kirgiz-aisatskui steppes. They also received provisions for two days but were only paid 12 roubles per year. The Black Sea Cossacks and the Asiatic Russian Cossacks were also paid an allowance for going over 106km in winter. The Siberian Cossacks received 11 roubles and 88 kopecks and they had to travel 530km before they received an allowance.

Moreover, although the Black Sea Cossacks held the same privileges as those of the Don Cossacks, their pay was just an allowance of rye. 'When on active service they receive a ration of flour, millet or oatmeal and are paid 12 to 15 roubles a year and as they are obliged to find their own arms, horses, equipment and subsistence, it is pretty clear that they must live at the expense of their enemies or their allies.'

It was not just the Cossacks who plundered friends and foe alike, the soldiers of all nations resorted to plundering the local inhabitants. However, the Cossacks developed their plundering skills to a fine art. On campaign the Cossacks of the Don would set up relay stations on the army's

A print by F. I. Debukura of a Cossack leading his horse. (Courtesy of the Russian State Museum)



lines of communications to transport their plunder back to their homeland.

Moritz Wagner's travelling companion continued his tale of his father: 'Not a few gold pieces found their way into his [Vassili Iguroff's] pockets. If one of us brought back a large sum, his face brightened, he removed his pipe from his mouth, and said *choroscho* (good). This alone was a great reward to us, and many of us exposed our lives to obtain this approbation'.

Johann Friederich Rochlitz believed that it was because:

The naïve honesty of the Cossacks and their innate love of everything belonging to other people often produced original and really comic incidents ... parties of them pushed their way into houses and usually began by giving the friendliest assurances, 'Cossack, good man! Brother, Cossack take nothing!' But then everything attracts their notice, and their eyes alight on first one object and then another. Amid renewed assurances they give each other presents. Even while expressing the wish 'Brother, give Cossack this!' the item has already been stowed in their pocket.

On 15 November 1813 Sir Charles Stewart, a British observer with the Russian Army, wrote to the Foreign Secretary, Lord Castlereagh, that the Crown Prince of Sweden (formerly the French Marshal Bernadotte) 'appears to have a great horror of the Cossacks entering France'. Despite orders from Alexander I not to plunder the French, the Russian historian A. Mikhailofsky-Danielefsky in his *History of the Campaign in France in the Year 1814* admits that some plundering took place.

In February 1814, the government officials of Nogent sur Seine wrote that in January some Cossacks occupied their town, which:

... was burned, the rest was looted in the most cruel manner. Doors were shattered in almost all the houses, furniture broken, mirrors broken, sheets and wardrobes stolen. The poor townsfolk were obliged to wander about the fields and the woods so as not to be mistreated by the villains which were running about the town. Men were undressed in the streets, one man was quartered [cut into four pieces], many were wounded and children died from the sight of their parents' sufferings ... Among the many inhuman deeds of these barbaric hordes, we will tell only one: a respectable woman of eighty years had a ring with a small diamond studded on to it. The villains who were robbing her, in haste of taking this ring cut off her finger and such revolt and pain took her into death. The feeble sex was not respected and many women had to undergo the most outrageous treatments.



A typical view of a Cossack having plundered, and set light to, a church. He has his ill-gotten gains stored in a sack while the local inhabitants flee. In reality plundering was a normal way of life for all nations. (Courtesy of the Russian State Museum)

This letter published in the *Journal de l'Empire* must be seen as a piece of propaganda because as a footnote the *Journal* gives a call to arms, 'to the flags of our august Emperor to push back into their awful climate, the barbaric hordes which want to cover France'.

However, Lieutenant James of the Royal Navy records that the Cossacks found a way to get round the order from Alexander I not to plunder. On entering his billet the Cossack 'examines the linen press, takes a shirt, stockings and a handkerchief from it, and changes before all hands [that is, everyone], leaving the dirty ones in lieu. He next orders his dinner. It must be roast meat, or fowl; but his favourite dish is a capon, stuffed with a head of garlic and sausage, then boiled in brandy.'

The Cossack made a very different figure when a traveller lodged in his house in Russia. Edward Clarke, while on his travels in Russia stayed with a Cossack family, and when he tried to pay for his lodgings they said: 'Cossacks do not sell their hospitality.' They would leave their doors open for travellers to make themselves at home and ride miles to return an item which a traveller had left behind.

TRAINING

There does not appear to have been a separate drill book for the Cossacks, certainly there is no mention of them in Tsar Paul I's regulations on cavalry published in 1796. Instead, they appear to have been taught the complicated manoeuvres by officers or NCOs.

Unfortunately there is no known Cossack drill book for the Napoleonic times. Certainly Paul I's regulations for cavalry do not mention them, although as we can see from this print the Cossacks did practise with the lance. (Courtesy of the Anne S. K. Brown Library)





Adrian Denisov records in his memoirs:

Our chief Platov had his regiment not far from me, and so I took steps to be informed of all the more important things his regiment was up to, and I made a point of being present, so that I could try the same exercises with my regiment.

Another print showing Cossacks training, this time by trying to spear the ring with their lances. (Courtesy of the Anne S. K. Brown Library)

The Russian General Benkendorf continues:

The arm which the Cossack understands best is the lance, which he uses with incredible dexterity, although a foot and a half longer than that of European lancers; and failing that, he manages a sabre extremely well, in the use of which he is instructed by non-commissioned officers, who have learnt to use it in hand to hand fighting against the Turks. The pistol is the arm which he makes the least use of, as he considers it more calculated to create alarm than a murderous weapon. You cannot get him to take aim; he fires for the sake of firing; and the least brave generally use the pistol most against the enemy. The musket and carbine are weapons with which the Cossack is very familiar; and dismounted he makes a capital tirailleur.

Childhood games also had their role to play. Lieutenant-Colonel John Johnson, who toured Russia in 1817 recorded that the Cossack 'children are able to ride on horseback at three or four years of age, and the habits which they generally acquire in infancy are those of the Cossack soldier to subsist on the coarsest of fare, and to endure being mounted all day and even all night if requisite.'

However, not all Cossacks were brought up as soldiers. In 1812 Major General Denisov 6th gave orders to the commanders of the Dons' specially raised militia or Opolchenie regiments:

Take every care that during the march the Cossacks are taught the ways of the Cossack service, which is to say they will be skilful riders and handle their lances with the quickness characteristic of Cossacks. This will be done so that all ranks are brought to such a level of perfection that in their first action against the enemy they may be like Cossacks who have been on active service for many years and who have fought with the enemy many times.

TACTICS

According to the Russian General Benkendorf, the Cossacks 'generally march in sections of threes (*par trois*); sometimes also by threes (*sur six hommes de front*). The squadron standards are united at the head of the column; the squadron leaders in front, and the other officers on the flank'.

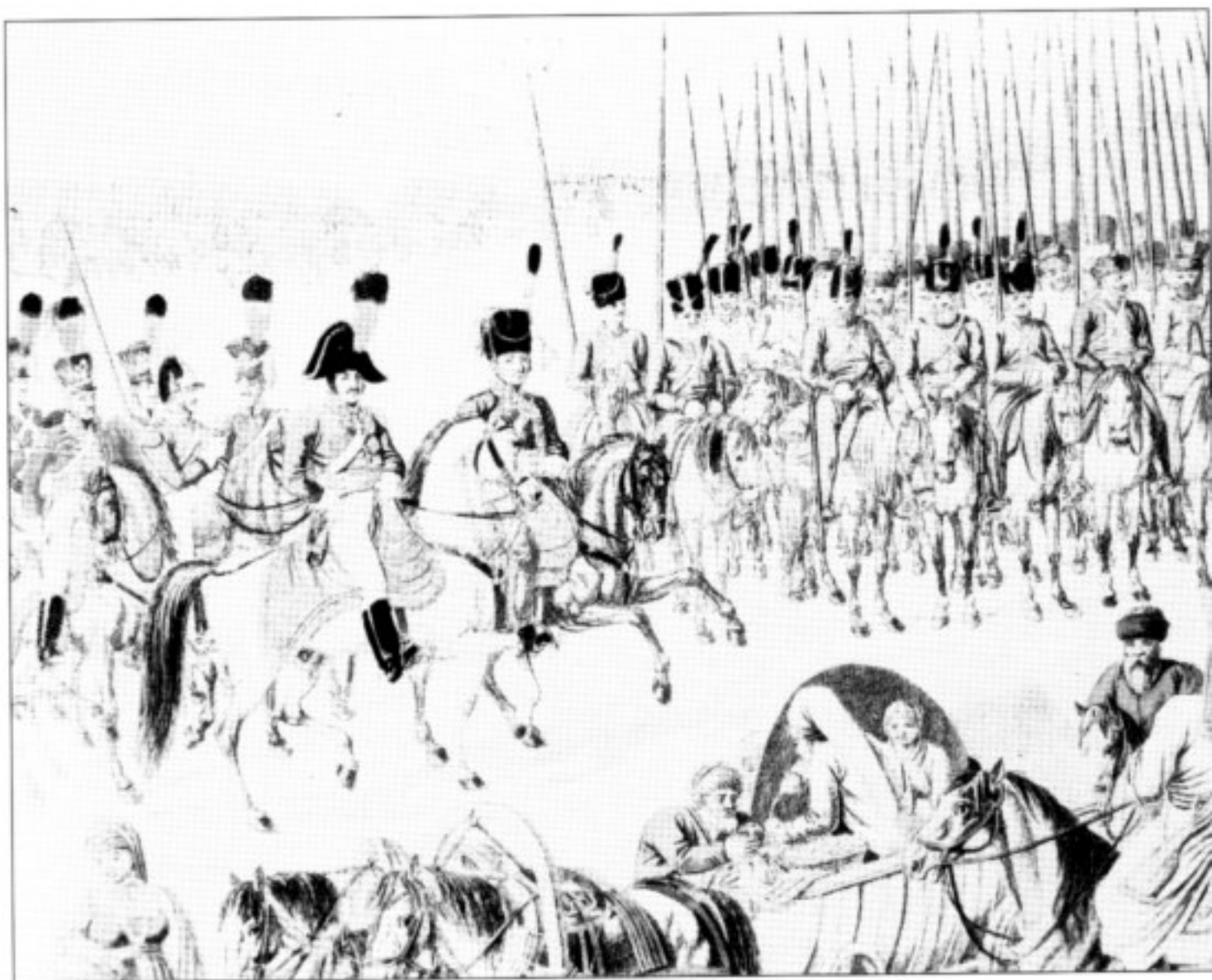
He goes on:

In deploying, they form up in a single rank, which is, consequently, of great extent, and generally described as a curve, the extremities of which – where the best soldiers are generally placed – outflank the enemy.

These picked men decide the success of an attack, and in case of retreat, form a rear guard. A close column is reformed on the centre with the rapidity of lightning, and almost without word of command. If the ground is open the retreat is effected by alternate movements, and each man knows admirably the right moment for facing about and dashing at full speed at the enemy; at the same time is heard a low wild cry fitted to the occasion.

When not quite sure of success, or when meditating a decisive blow, the Cossacks execute a manoeuvre quite particular to themselves, which has always astonished me, and which they alone could execute, it is commonly called by them '*se visser*' that is, moving in a circle on the same spot, the enemy being left in uncertainty as to their real intentions, whilst they disguise from his flankers the end they have in view. Rapidity of movement is the basis of Cossack tactics, for which they have the great advantage, that the amble of their horses is equal to a good gallop; their walk is also extremely quick, and the longer the march the quicker it becomes: '... you may reckon upon their doing an ordinary German mile an hour'.

An anonymous print showing a Cossack regiment drawn up in a body, during the grand entrance of Paris by Tsar Alexander I and the King of Prussia with their generals in 1814. The Cossacks of the Imperial Guard were the first Allied regiment to enter Paris in 1814. (Courtesy of the Russian State Museum)



Standards were nearly always carried in action. When formed in close column, the regimental standards were always at the front to encourage the men. Benkendorf continues:

Those who know nothing about Cossacks, or only have a superficial knowledge of them, insist that it is impossible to make them charge in a body; and they become confirmed in the idea, merely from not choosing to put it to proof. But where lies the impossibility? Are Cossacks not soldiers who have to obey orders? Have they not courage like men? I have had the opportunity ten times over of convincing myself that the Cossack will charge whenever you like, on cavalry, infantry or guns.

Ackerman mentions another tactic employed by the Cossacks was to:

... seldom push on their horses in a direct line, they make a thousand curves, galloping in every direction with incredible rapidity. In action they use no other weapon than their long pike, the thrust of which a cool resolute man may easily parry. With these pikes, like the ancient Parthians, they endeavour to stop a pursuing enemy, never attacking one who wants firmly to receive them, but to a fugitive foe they are terrible.

Despite being described by Lieutenant James as being bow-legged from being in the saddle too long and so unable to walk properly, dismounted Cossacks had distinguished themselves at Muotatal on 1 October 1799, where the rearguard gave Suvarov time to withdraw further into the Swiss Alps, Benkendorf records: 'In the years 1813 and 1814, we often dismounted the Cossacks, and employed them successfully as *chasseurs à pied*.' Several other eyewitnesses agree with Benkendorf that the Cossacks were just as brave when fighting on foot.

Benkendorf tells us: 'I frequently observed officers and non-commissioned officers [and sometimes the Cossacks themselves] occupied in cutting down men who remained in the rear, or did not obey orders instead of drawing them on by their own good example.' On seeing this, Benkendorf ordered 'all the officers and non-commissioned officers, to be in front during an attack, and I found it moreover excellent in practice'. Presumably the officers and NCOs of Cossack regiments not under Benkendorf's command continued to lead from the rear.

The Russian General (later Field-Marshal) Suvarov in his *Art of War* advised:

As circumstance dictates the [regular] cavalry is formed up as a third line, or on the flanks of the second line, though always by squadrons or divisions. While the attack is in progress it throws itself against the enemy from the flank or rear ... The Cossacks remain in column behind the [regular] cavalry. Their speed is their great asset, it rounds off the victory, and makes sure that none of the enemy escape after they have been overthrown. Speed and impetus, they are the essential ingredients of the kind of war I command you to put into effect. When the enemy are on the run pursuit is the only way to finish them off.

According to the *History of the Ukraine*, the Cossacks:

... never decide an action, but divide in their attack, falling indifferently on the van, the flank and the rear of an army on its march; hovering around them like a vapoury cloud, which from one instant to another alternatively augments, fades away, or dissipates entirely, again to form into a shape and to revive with increased density. They but seldom make a direct charge in line with their cavalry; but keep constantly pirouetting and prancing about, wheeling in every possible direction, with astonishing swiftness and activity.

Another tactic was witnessed in St Polten, near Vienna, in January 1799 and recorded by an anonymous writer:

I must mention to you a superb Regiment of Foot, Chasseurs, singularly well trained. First of all they fire, and then charge [load] their carbines, lying flat along the ground. They are besides taught to support themselves between two Cossacks, when advancing against the enemy, or when pushing forward to get possession of a height or a wood. When arrived at the point, whether they mean to make a discharge, or seize the post, they throw themselves on the ground, fire and rush on, supported by the cavalry; and if a retreat becomes necessary, they make it in the same way. This manoeuvre was performed at Brunn, before the Emperor, to the great astonishment and satisfaction of the spectators and judges of the business.

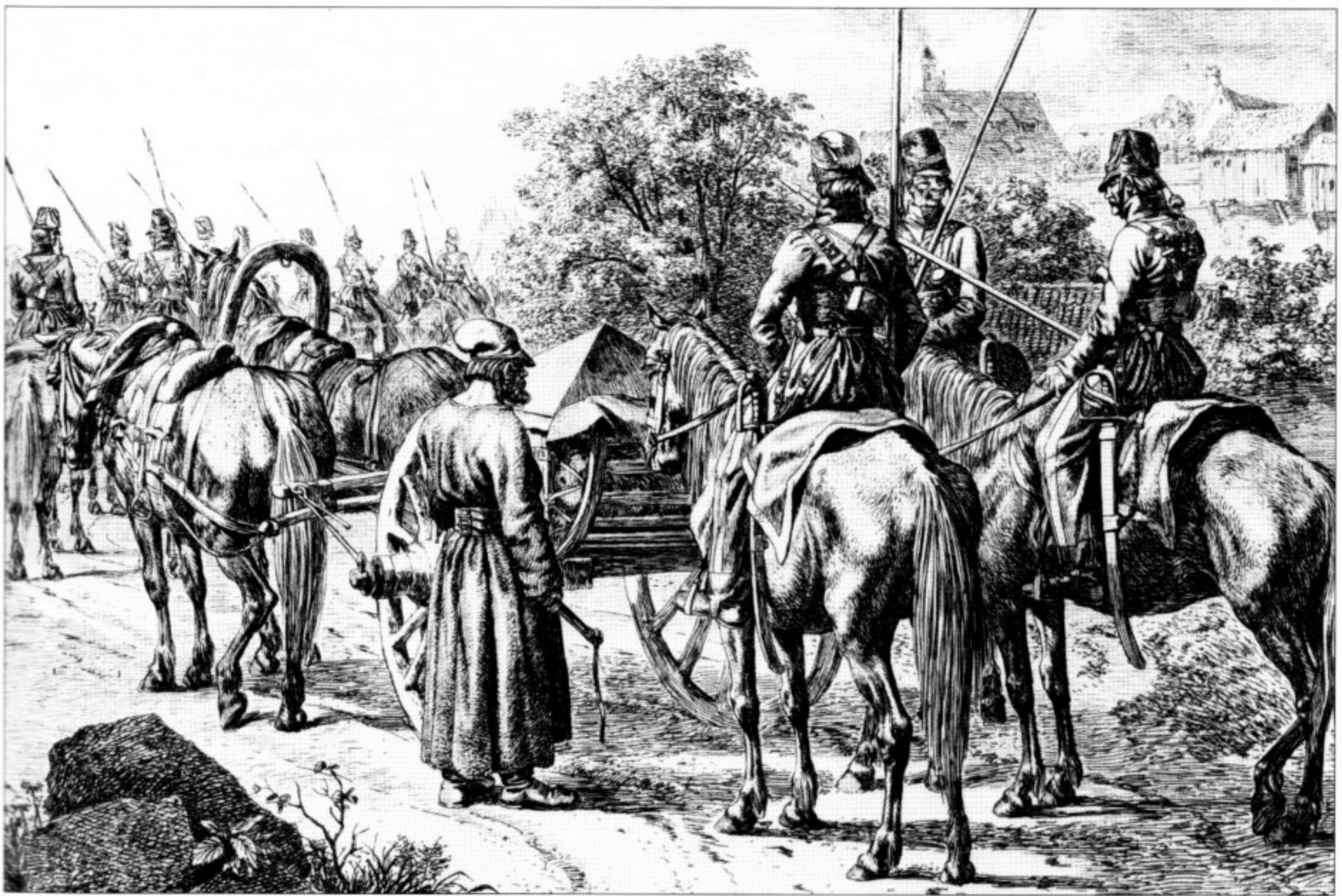
Whether this manoeuvre was ever used in battle is not known.

ON CAMPAIGN

Departure

Despite the popular belief that the Cossack was bred for war and to seek the riches it might bring him through plunder, parting from his loved ones still saddened him and his family. As Nadezhda Durova, a woman who dressed as a man to join the army and temporarily joined a Cossack regiment, recorded in her memoirs:

A great number of Cossack women had come to see their husbands off. I witnessed a moving scene. Shchegrov, who was always at the colonel's side on the march was with him on the Don also; his father, mother, wife and three lovely grown daughters had come to see him off and once more bid him farewell. It was affecting to see the forty-year-old Cossack bowing to the ground to kiss the feet of his father and mother and receive their blessing, and afterwards himself blessing in exactly the same way the daughters who fell to his feet. This parting ritual was completely new to me and made a most mournful impression on my soul.



Vassili Iguroff's departure for the army in 1812 was just as emotional:

... [he] spoke little, but his red eyes seemed to flash fire, and he often muttered between his teeth, whilst stroking his beard, '*tchort*' (devil) and '*Bunapart!*' My mother was appointed to guard the house during our absence, and especially charged to watch the shrine, and trim the lamp; for Vassili always believed if it were quenched, one member of the family would die. The old man started, escorted by thirteen sons and half a hundred grandsons.

After their goodbyes the Cossacks formed ranks and, according to Nadezhda Durova, her regimental colonel:

... commanded 'To the right in threes'. The regiment moved out. The first section, composed for the purpose of men with good voices, struck up the Cossacks favourite song 'The Soul is a Good Steed'. Its melancholy tune plunged me into reverie.

Lieutenant James of the Royal Navy also mentions that the Cossacks used to sing or play musical instruments to pass the time on their long marches.

Unfortunately Nadezhda Durova tells us little about the months she spent with the Cossacks on their march, except: 'I learned to saddle and unsaddle my horse and led him to water just like the others.'

However, according to Benkendorf: 'No troops possess in a higher degree the art of bivouacking ... One thing has always seemed to me

A print by A. Erhard dated 1815 showing Cossacks escorting a wagon, which was one of their usual duties on campaigns. (Courtesy of the Anne S. K. Brown Library)

incomprehensible, which is, the facility with which he manages to find a subsistence; where whole *corps d'armée*, on the part of the enemy, are dying of starvation, he contrives to get his own soup and forage for his horse.'

Billeting

Lieutenant James records:

On entering a town their first care is their horses, which they prize beyond all others. On entering a house where he is to be billeted his first demand is a tumbler of snaps brandy, which if not forthcoming, he flourishes his magical wand, the knout [a whip], and makes it speak all languages.

When not on duty the Cossacks enjoyed dice, cards, music and telling stories of past campaigns while drinking large amounts of vodka. However, despite drinking to excess, as *The Times* reported on 20 January 1814: 'The quantity of spirits they swallow without intoxication is truly astonishing.' Lieutenant James recalls: 'although scarce able to stand, when once mounted they seldom fail their duty.'

Sophie, Countess Schwerin of Berlin saw a very different side to a Cossack and wrote to her husband:

A very touching scene took place in the kitchen yesterday. A Cossack wept when he noticed a resemblance between his mother, who is one hundred years old, and our cook, who is we gather equally short and crippled. 'Kochanna! Kochanna!' he kept shouting, as he clasped her hands, offered prayers and wept.

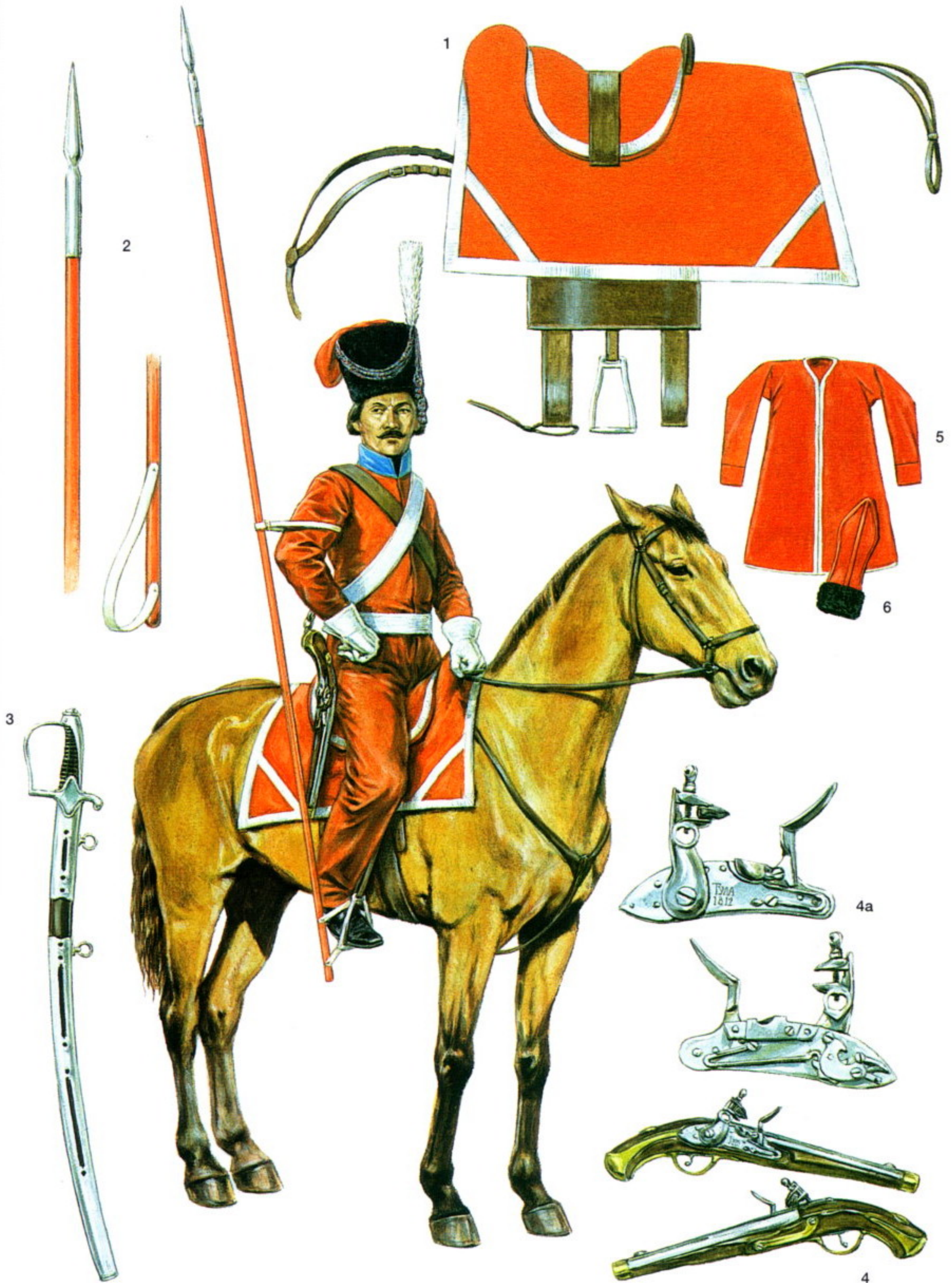
Four days later she wrote:

... they are the best, the most good natured race; kind and friendly, satisfied with everything and always grateful ... When the French troops were billeted on us we invariably feared the servants [that is, the private soldiers], but now it seems to be the opposite; as far as we can judge from experience, the servants behave much better than their superiors.

Benkendorf records: 'Where a Cossack is billeted for any length of time, he plays with the children, assists the parents in their domestic occupation and edifies all by his piety.' Ernst Rietschel (1804–61), who lived near Dresden, recalls that when he was nine years old:

It was a real pleasure, when the first Cossacks arrived ... We were let off school and wandered among the horses and the riders, who smelt of Russian leather. This smell was so new and sharp that it struck us as a wonderful aroma and enveloped the Cossacks in a mysterious ether. Thanks to advance rumours these men had become quite special beings in our children's imagination: wild, daring horsemen, adventurous, rough and good natured, and coming from heavenly places which must be thousands of miles away. As they were very fond of children, each of us tried hard to get a kiss from one of the Cossacks.

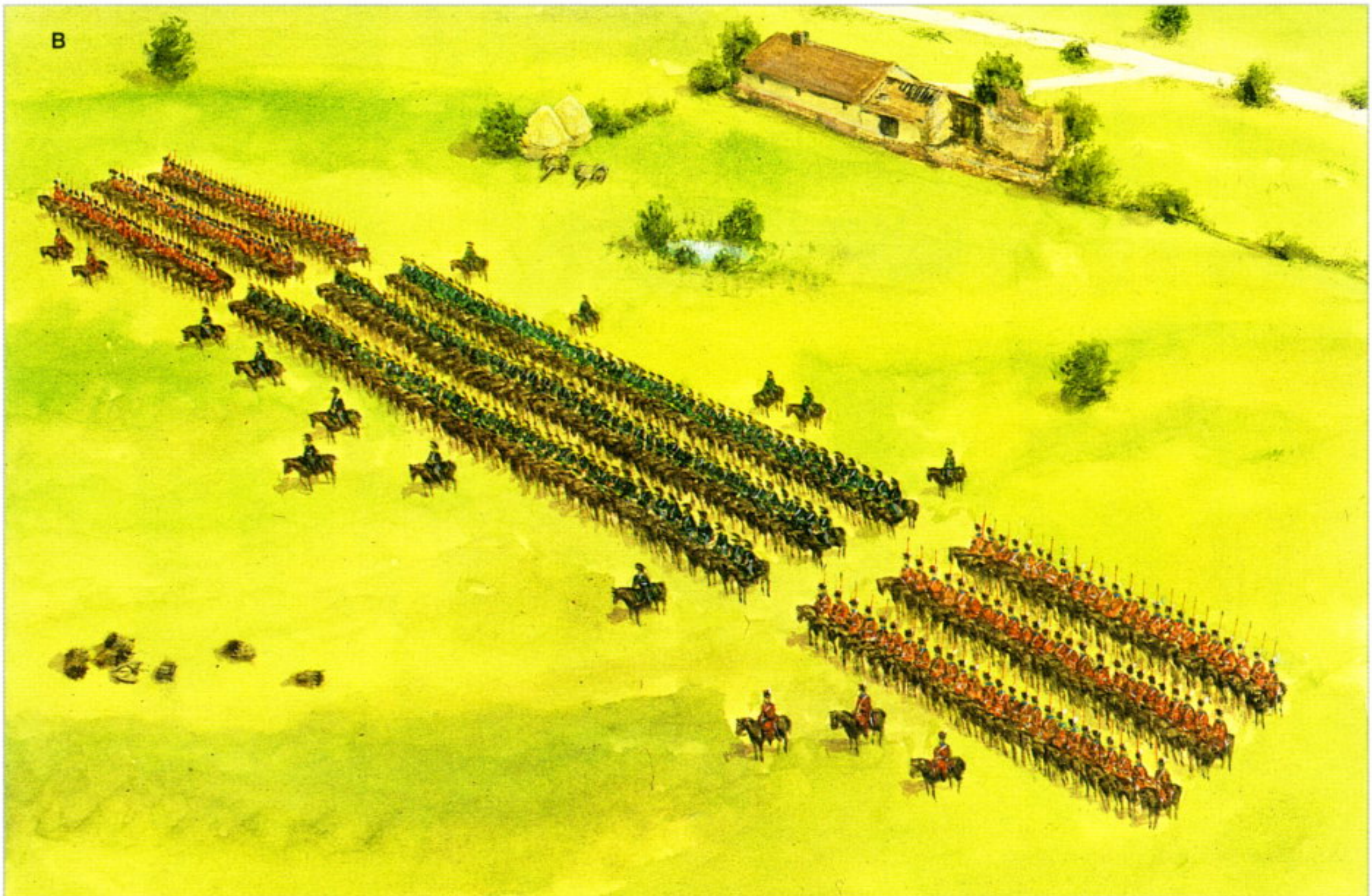
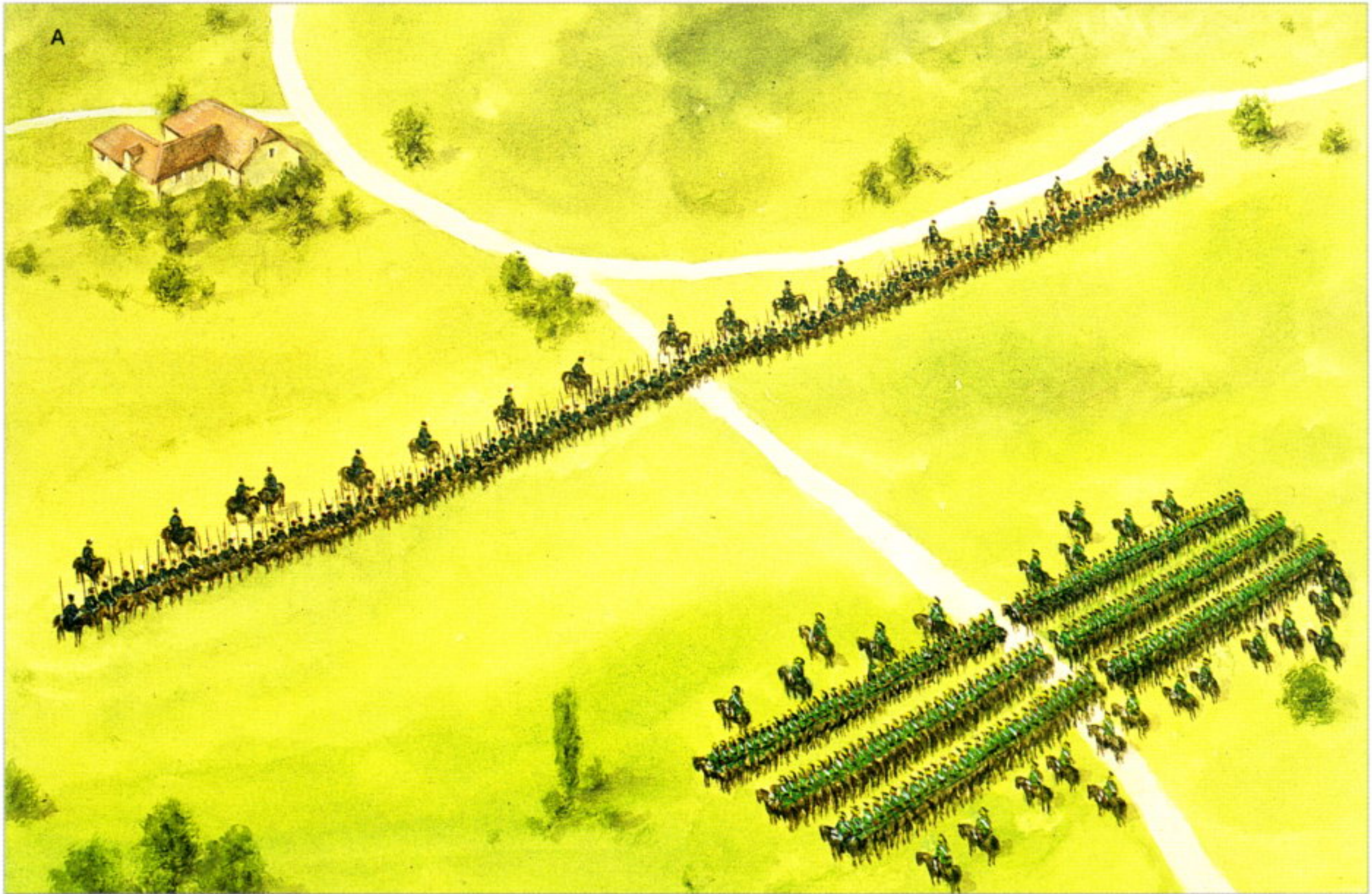
Cossack of the Imperial Guard





Cossacks' weapons and equipment





Cossacks in battle



Cossack raiding party





Cossacks' 'daring feats'

Daily life



Carrying despatches

While on campaign the Cossacks were usually called upon to carry messages or to mount piquet duty. Suvarrov described the Cossacks as the 'eyes and ears of the army'. When they were on duty the rest of the army knew they would be safe, because as another writer put it: 'they never suffer themselves to be surprised'.

When on reconnaissance not only did they lead the way for the rest of the army but they also intercepted enemy despatches, some of which were printed in the British newspapers.

When entrusted with a despatch themselves it was, according to Benkendorf: 'a sacred object ... rather than allow it to be taken from him, he will stand to be cut to pieces. If the letter is folded in a particular manner, and has a small feather under the seal, indicating it to be an urgent despatch, the Cossack will break his horse – the dearest and most valuable property he has – rather than delay his mission for an instant, [he] attaches the same importance to the defence of a convoy committed to his care.'

Officers' lackeys

However, not all Russian officers trusted the Cossacks to perform outpost duty, preferring to send their less able regular forces out instead. They looked down on the Cossacks. As Benkendorf complained, they were 'too often employed as mere baggage carriers ... [and] lackeys of any who hold appointments ... [who] justify it by declaring Cossacks are only fit to plunder or pursue an enemy'.

Writing later in the nineteenth century A. L. Zisserman would agree with Benkendorf:

The Cossacks of that time played the saddest, most degrading role and they were regarded as messengers ... [for] some private matter the Cossack had to ride often for several hundred versts without receiving a penny for food, and feeding himself for several days practically on the donations of his half starving brethren ... and this [had] continued for decades.

Sometimes providing entertainment could have a beneficial effect to the Cossacks, as an English traveller during the latter part of Alexander I's reign recorded:

[After dinner] ... a dozen strapping Cossacks now entered the room, and began to entertain us with a variety of their national songs ... all on a sudden they caught up one of our party and laid him out on their arms, and began

Here we see a young Cossack saying goodbye to his family. Despite their reputation of being a warrior race, parting from loved ones was always a sorrowful occasion. (Author's collection)





Ural Cossacks during Suvarrov's campaign in 1799. On this campaign the Cossacks at first made a poor start before distinguishing themselves in the mountain passes of the Swiss Alps in desperate rearguard actions. However, the younger son of Paul I, Grand Duke Constantine, would later have their lances burnt to keep himself warm. (Courtesy of the Russian State Museum)

Cossacks. But in the mountainous regions of Italy and later Switzerland they did not perform well. Moreover, they had no maps and could not afford watches; their horses became pack-horses; and finally the Grand Duke Constantine, one of Tsar Alexander I's younger brothers, had their lances burnt so that he could be kept warm. However, they still managed to distinguish themselves in a rearguard action at Muotatal on 1 October 1799 already mentioned.

Early in 1801 with tension rising between Russia and Great Britain, Tsar Paul I ordered a Cossack army of some 25,000 men to invade India with the promise of all the plunder they could carry. However, Paul I was assassinated before they crossed the border, and so they were recalled.

During the War of the Third Coalition in 1805 Kutuzov's army could count on about 11 Cossack regiments with others marching to join him. However, by the battle of Austerlitz (2 December 1805), the 600 Cossacks of the Guard who were present at the battle, according to Platov, had 'suffered dreadfully, as they were for some time the only cavalry with the Russian army; and before the Emperor joined Kutuzov they had lost almost all their horses with fatigue'.

In 1806 one Cossack patrol captured an officer who held Napoleon's plans for the forthcoming campaign. Seeing the danger his army was in, the Russian General Bennigsen withdrew in time to avoid the trap Napoleon had set for him; having thus avoided disaster, he was able in January 1807 to fight Napoleon to a draw at the battle of Eylau.

Many Cossacks never left Russia. Instead they patrolled the frontier with Turkey and China, garrisoning small forts or rather stockades. These were made from wood and had several buildings and a watch tower encircled by a wooden wall for protection.

In 1810, with tension rising again between France and Russia, preparations were made for the forthcoming hostilities. On 4 January 1811 General Barclay de Tolly, the Russian Minister of War, ordered that Russia's western frontier should be better guarded. The frontier was to be divided into sections each of about 159km and each section further divided into 15 parts. Each section was to be policed by a Cossack

tossing him into the air, thus making him dance to the tune of their song, this was repeated in succession with each individual and considered a great compliment which was returned by a present of money.

Only the Governor of St Petersburg, being a very large man, was not made to 'dance' in this way.

Conflicts

During the 1799 campaigns the Cossacks supplied detachments to all the Russians' armies. In fact the cavalry under Suvarrov, who was sent to Italy, consisted entirely of

regiment and a *sotnia* divided into three to guard a single part, so 30 Cossacks were responsible for 10.6km. A regular officer was to be in command of each sector. Behind these Cossacks were three armies designated the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Western Armies under the command of Barclay de Tolly, Prince Peter Bagration and General Alexander Petrovich Tormasov.

In June 1812 Napoleon's Grande Armée crossed the Russian frontier, which the Cossacks quickly reported to the military authorities. Napoleon's plan was simple. He would march between the 1st and 2nd Western Armies and then defeat each army in turn, so forcing Alexander to surrender. However, Barclay de Tolly and Bagration did not offer battle and retired in front of overwhelming odds. The majority of the rear-guard was made up of Cossacks who performed excellent service, giving the main armies breathing space to withdraw. The first blood of the campaign went to General Platov, the Don Cossacks' Ataman, at the battle of Mir against a Polish Lancer brigade.



Print by K. E. L. F. Wagner showing Ural Cossacks on patrol. Cossacks were second to none in this role, the Russian General Suvarrov thought highly of the Cossacks who served under him, calling them 'the eyes and ears of the army'. (Courtesy of the Russian State Museum)

No.		Versts	Name of the regiment	Under the command of
1	From Polangen on the frontier to the village of Urburg	150	Maj-Gen Selivanov Don Cossacks	A field officer from the 4th Division
2	Urburg to the river Niemen to the village of Vershtani, Vilensk province	142	Lt-Col Popov's Don Cossacks	A field officer from the 4th Division
3	Vershtani, to where the river Loson flows into the Nieman, Grodno province	162	Lt-Col Platov 4th's Don Cossacks	A field officer from the 3rd Division
4	From where the Loson flows into the Nieman to the village of Haroshch, Belostek province	165	1st Bug Cossack Regiment	A field officer from the 3rd Division
5	The village of Haroshch to the village of Nemirov, Grodno province	160	Maj-Gen Denisov 7th's Don Cossacks	A field officer from the 2nd Division
6	From the village of Nemirov to the village of Ustilug, Volinsk province	160	Maj-Gen Ilovaiski 4th's Don Cossacks	A field officer from the 7th Division
7	From the village of Ustilug to the village of Berestschko on the river Stvepe, Volinsk province	136	Maj-Gen Chernozubov's Don Cossacks	A field officer from the 7th Division
8	From the village of Berestschko to Derevni Benyani	135	Maj-Gen Ilovaiski 8's Don Cossacks	A field officer from the 7th Division
9	Derevni Benyani to the village of Ustsiya Biskupie		Lt-Col Slusareva 2nd's Don Cossacks	A field officer from the 24th Division
10	From the village of Ustsiya Biskupie to the town of Migilev, Podolsk province	137	2nd Bug Regiment	A field officer from the 24th Division
11	From the town of Migilev to the Dnester	150	3rd Bug Cossack Regiment	A field officer from the 24th Division

A diagram of the area of the frontier covered by Cossacks in 1811 from the *Complete Collection of the Laws of the Russian Empire*. This was Russia's first line of defence for the expected invasion.

The Russian general, Michael Vorontsov, wrote in his memoirs that his grenadier division:

was appointed to support our rear guard of cavalry including the Cossacks under the hetman Platov and General Wassilchikov, several engagements took place in which our rear guard had always the advantage, and the French, Polish and Westphalian cavalry suffered great losses in men, reputation and in confidence.

The Cossacks would turn and fight when the pursuers got too close. Moreover by defending several strategically unimportant routes the Cossacks gave the Grande Armée the impression that the Russians were retreating along these roads, while the armies of Barclay de Tolly and Bagration managed to slip away using a different route. These rearguard actions allowed the two Russian armies to unite at Smolensk and then choose their own ground to fight the Grande Armée.

THE COSSACKS IN BATTLE

The Cossacks have a bad reputation when it comes to fighting a battle, being accused of cowardice by some, because they would not engage regular troops and would run away when threatened. However, their concept of fighting was different to those in the regular army. Although writing later in the century, an officer who served with some Cossacks in 1831 wrote of their state of mind:

There is no one anywhere shrewder, quicker and in some cases, bolder and more rash than they, but they are not distinguished by firmness: to die, standing uselessly in one's place, according to their views is not valour. Heroism with them is regarded as high merit; but they see it only in daring, in bold ranks, in an unexpected attack on the enemy, by [whatever] means ... they regard as a good deed and not a disgrace; the Cossack knows that as long as he is alive he will think up a thousand ways to harm the enemy, and hence he saves himself assiduously.

In battle, the Cossacks preferred the regular cavalry to pin down the enemy cavalry with a frontal assault while they worked around the flank of the enemy to make an attack, alternately either ambushing the enemy or feinting a retreat so that the enemy would pursue and then another body of Cossacks would appear and attack the startled enemy; this was the pattern at the battle of Mir in July 1812. However, this could only be accomplished when the enemy's cavalry was composed of raw recruits; veteran cavalrymen rarely allowed such mistakes.

According to their regimental history, at the battle of Bergen in September 1799 a detachment of the Cossacks of the Guard saw that:

A detachment of Russian infantry with a standard had been assailed by the French cavalry. All the defenders of the standard had been wounded or killed and the emblem fell into the hands of the French. The Cossacks ... launched themselves, with Lieutenant Davidov, into the midst of the French. Beating a path with the lance towards the standard, the lieutenant seized it in his hand and brought it back.

Although this action was performed by Cossacks of the Guard who were trained like the regular cavalry, there are plenty of other examples where irregular Cossacks were just as brave and successful in battle. At the battle of Eylau when a French cuirassier regiment had broken into the Russian centre, seeing the danger, some Cossacks and Hussars charged and routed the cuirassiers. According to Sir Robert Wilson, an English envoy with the Russian Army, the Cossacks reappeared a little later wearing the cuirassiers' armour. He records: 'This armour was worn just for a day or two as a trophy before being sent back to the Cossacks' homeland, where they hung them [the back and breast plates] on the walls of their huts as memorials of their prowess, and respect for the pride of their kindred, and the glory of their nations.'

On at least two other occasions the Cossacks saved the day, the first being at Borodino where, on the morning of the battle, while scouting on the Russian right wing for any signs of Napoleon trying to outflank the army, some Cossacks came across a ford across the river Kolocha near the village of Novie, which could be used to attack the flank of the Grande Armée. With a major attack about to be launched against the crumbling Russian centre using this ford, eight Cossack and five or six regular cavalry regiments with a horse battery, in all about 8,000 men under Platov and Lieutenant General Uvarov, plunged deep into the Grande Armée's flank. Platov's forces appearing on their flank made Eugene's IV Corps recoil at this unexpected threat and forced Napoleon to postpone his attack on the Russian centre. At the time this attack was seen as a waste of time, but it was only with hindsight that this raid into the heart of Napoleon's force was seen to have given the Russian Army two hours to consolidate its centre.

The other occasion was on the first day of the battle of Leipzig where Marshal MacDonald's corps and General Sebastiani, cavalry corps were about to turn the Allies' right flank near the town of Seifertshain and then roll up the Allies' army. Suddenly Platov with a large body of Cossacks appeared on the Grande Armée's left flank and forced them to retire.

The Cossacks could be just as brave in battle as the regular cavalry. On 24 August 1813 at Bosdorff, General Benkendorf records in his memoir:

... [I was ordered] 'to attack a Polish square 600 strong. They had two guns; and they were formed on the side of the wood which extends from Bosdorff to Wittenberg. I had with me the regiments of Giroff and Jelowaisky XI under the command of the brave Colonel Denisoff; it was the first time I had been under fire with that brigade, which numbered nearly 650 horses. I made the regiment of Giroff charge three times; and the fourth and last charge was executed by that of Jelowaisky, which turned at ten paces from the square. Eighty Cossacks and two officers bit the dust in these different attacks; many officers had their horses killed almost in the ranks of the enemy, but invariably more than thirty Cossacks would surround them under the heaviest fire of musketry and grape, to procure them the means of remounting'.

Even regular cavalry rarely charged home when infantry were formed in a square.

If a Cossack's horse was shot under him then the remaining Cossacks would try to rescue him even if it was in front of the enemy's ranks. General Benkendorf recalls:

In the affair of Liège, a private Cossack fell with his horse in front of a troop of French cavalry: I immediately heard my escort saying amongst themselves, 'Let us not survive the shame of abandoning a brother, though we have to do with an enemy three times our strength; let us not leave a man to perish whose daring has hitherto saved him from being a prisoner.'

Unfortunately, Benkendorf does not record whether the Cossack was saved or not.

If the Russians were beaten in battle, it usually fell to the Cossacks to cover the army's retreat, as happened at the battle of Friedland, where the Cossacks were the last to leave the field.

The raids

It has been suggested that the Russians got the idea of guerrilla warfare from reading reports from Spain in their newspapers. However, many Cossacks and peasants were illiterate; whether they had heard about guerrilla warfare by word of mouth or took up arms independently is not known, but the effect was the same. Napoleon's army was soon plagued by similar actions from Cossacks and the Russian peasants who murdered foraging parties from the Grande Armée. On 3 September 1812 Napoleon wrote to his generals for 'procuring provisions. Let them ... take necessary measures to end a state of affairs which threatens the army with destruction; every day several hundred prisoners fall into the hands of the enemy; it is necessary, under threat of severe punishment, to forbid our soldiers to stray too far.'

A few days before the battle of Borodino Colonel Denis Davidov reported to Prince Peter Bagration, who ordered Davidov 'to take all



Group of Ural Cossacks sitting around a fire. Note the saddle on the horse, also the seated Cossack with a bow who is wearing a seventeenth-century 'lobster pot' helmet. (Courtesy of the Anne S. K. Brown Library)

measures to disturb the enemy and to endeavour to deprive it of supplies ... to upset transports and parks to break ferries and to take away all remedies'. For this purpose, Kutuzov could only afford to allocate to him 150 Cossacks and 50 Hussars, and this small force soon began to prey on the enemy, with good results. This force soon grew into a stronger force and in October 1812 Kutuzov ordered Platov to:

try and gain a march over the enemy in such a way that with your main forces you can make suitable attacks on the retreating heads of his columns, combined with constant night alarms. The same orders have been given to General Orlov-Denisov to perform similar operations on the left of the high road. This kind of pursuit will bring the enemy into an extreme position and will deprive him of the major part of his artillery and baggage wagons.

The Cossacks pursued the Grande Armée, hovering around its flanks, waiting for an opportunity to attack. Robert Ker Porter records in his history of the campaign that while the Grande Armée continued its long retreat: 'every surrounding track, whether wood or open ground, swarmed with Cossacks and light troops to harass the enemy and destroy the bridges in his pass'.

With rain, mud, lack of provisions and later the severe cold, which caused the soldiers' hands to freeze to their musket barrels, discipline began to break down. Even if they had the will to do so, few could put up a fight, so the Cossacks had little to fear. General Armand-Augustin-Louis de Caulaincourt (1773–1827), who was attached to Napoleon's staff in 1812, recorded in his memoirs:

The Cossacks have continually raided our line of march, which they crossed whenever there was a gap, riding between divisions, even

A scene by I. A. Ivanov depicting Cossacks under the command of Ilovaisky IV re-entering Moscow and preventing Marshal Mortier's men blowing up the Kremlin, on 10 October 1812. (Courtesy of the Russian State Museum)

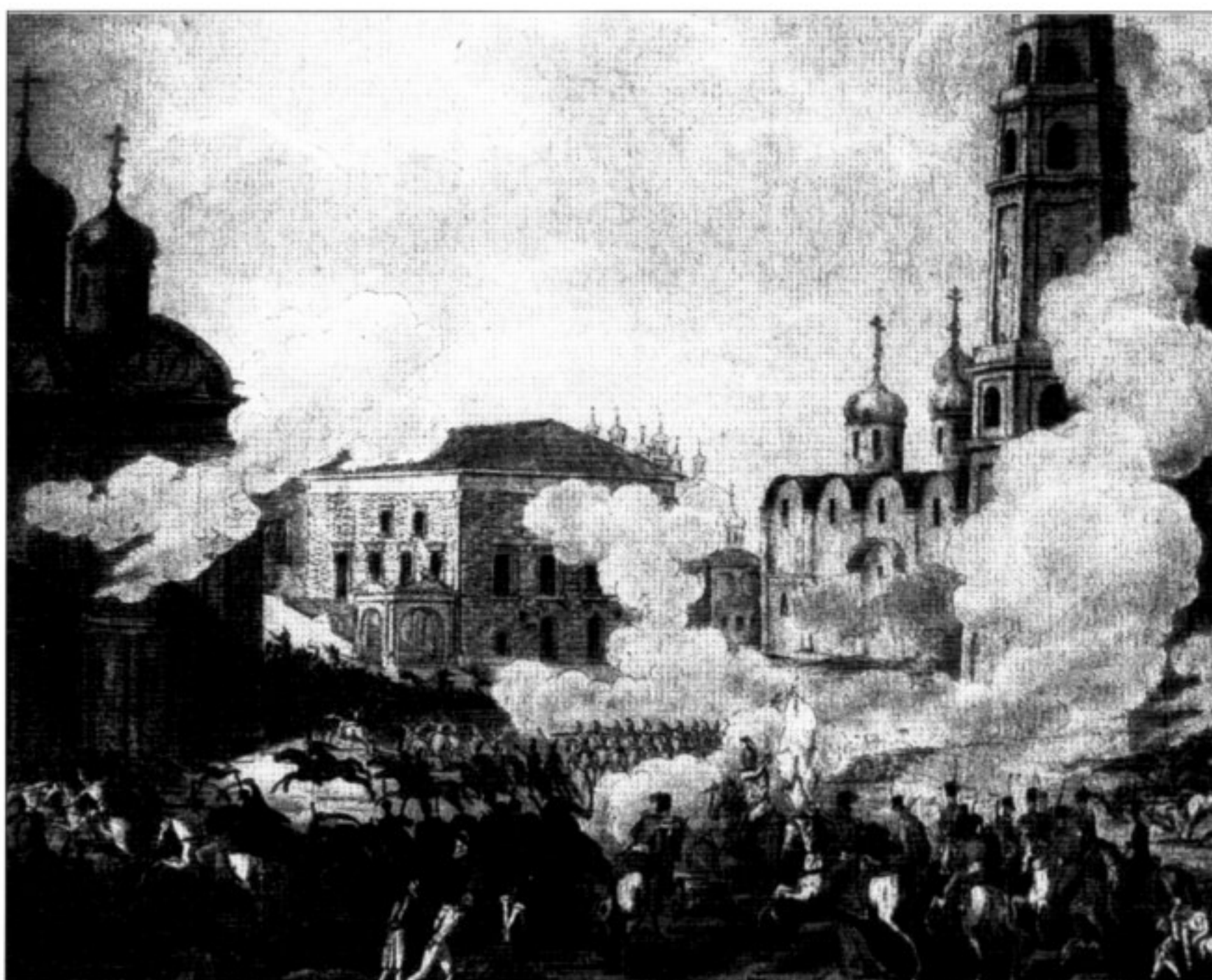


Illustration of the Ataman Martei Ivanovitch Platov (1751–1818). After distinguishing himself in the reign of Catherine the Great he was appointed to command the Cossack army which was to invade India, but which was recalled after the murder of Tsar Paul I. He went on to serve in all of Russia's campaigns against Napoleon. (Courtesy of the Russian State Museum)

between regiments. However, three resolute men armed with muskets were enough to keep the enemy at a respectful distance. But where they had no bullets to fear, or where horse-drawn wagons were moving in disorder, or where unarmed soldiers had become

isolated, the Cossacks charged down unexpectedly, killed some, wounded others and robbing those whose lives they spared, and plundering any wagon or carriage they came upon.



For those 'three resolute men' time was against them and the Cossacks could afford to wait until they also had lost the will to fight. With a sudden '*oorah!*' from the Cossacks, which they shouted before they charged, the soldiers of the Grande Armée could be sent into a panic, as Lieutenant von Kalckreuth, an officer with the Prussian contingent with the Grande Armée in 1812, wrote: 'The Cossacks' repeated attacks ... were doing much to ruin the French cavalry. One only had to say the word *Cossack* rather loud for everyone to look behind him and trot on ahead, even though no Cossack was to be seen.'

Captain Roeder, a member of the Hessian Lifeguards with the Grande Armée, wrote how at Vitebsk: ‘... everything was thrown into ridiculous uproar because a few Cossacks had been sighted, who were said to have carried off a forager. The entire garrison sprung to arms, and when they had ridden out it was discovered that we were really surrounded by only a few dozen Cossacks, who were dodging about hither and thither.’

On 24 October 1812 a general order was sent out to all generals of corps, all the chief Cossack regiments and also all the partisans, informing them of the great successes the Cossacks had achieved ‘who every day take a number of pieces of cannon from the rear of the enemy, which, weakened, harassed and worn down, is now reduced to the most deplorable situation’. It also ordered them to look out for Napoleon, who was described as:

... [short] and compact, the hair black, flat and short, the beard black shaved up towards the ear, the eyebrows strongly arched, but contracted towards the nose, – the nose aquiline, with perpetual marks of snuff, – the countenance gloomy and violent, the chin extremely projecting, always in a little uniform, without ornaments, generally wrapped in a little grey surtout ... and continually attended by a Mameluke.

It was rumoured in the Grande Armée that Platov had promised his only daughter in marriage to any Cossack who captured Napoleon.

On 25 October 1812 Napoleon’s party saw some horsemen approaching whom they mistook for French cavalry because ‘they were arranged in pretty good order’. On drawing closer they realised their mistake, apart from Napoleon who took some convincing. General Rapp, who was also with Napoleon’s staff, takes up the story:

Napoleon gave several orders and rode away. I moved forward with the convoy squadron. We were overpowered; my horse received a lance blow six fingers deep and stumbled over me. We were crushed by these barbarians. Fortunately they spotted the artillery park some distance away and dashed off in that direction.

Count Phillipe-Paul De Ségur, who was also with Napoleon’s entourage, wrote that ‘the Cossacks had only to stretch out their hands to seize him [Napoleon]; but at that moment they fell upon the jumble of wagons, horses, men and women on the road’.

The Cossacks did not recognise Napoleon and were finally repulsed. They retired to the opposite bank of the river Luzha, covered by a battery of Don Cossack artillery. This episode was known as the

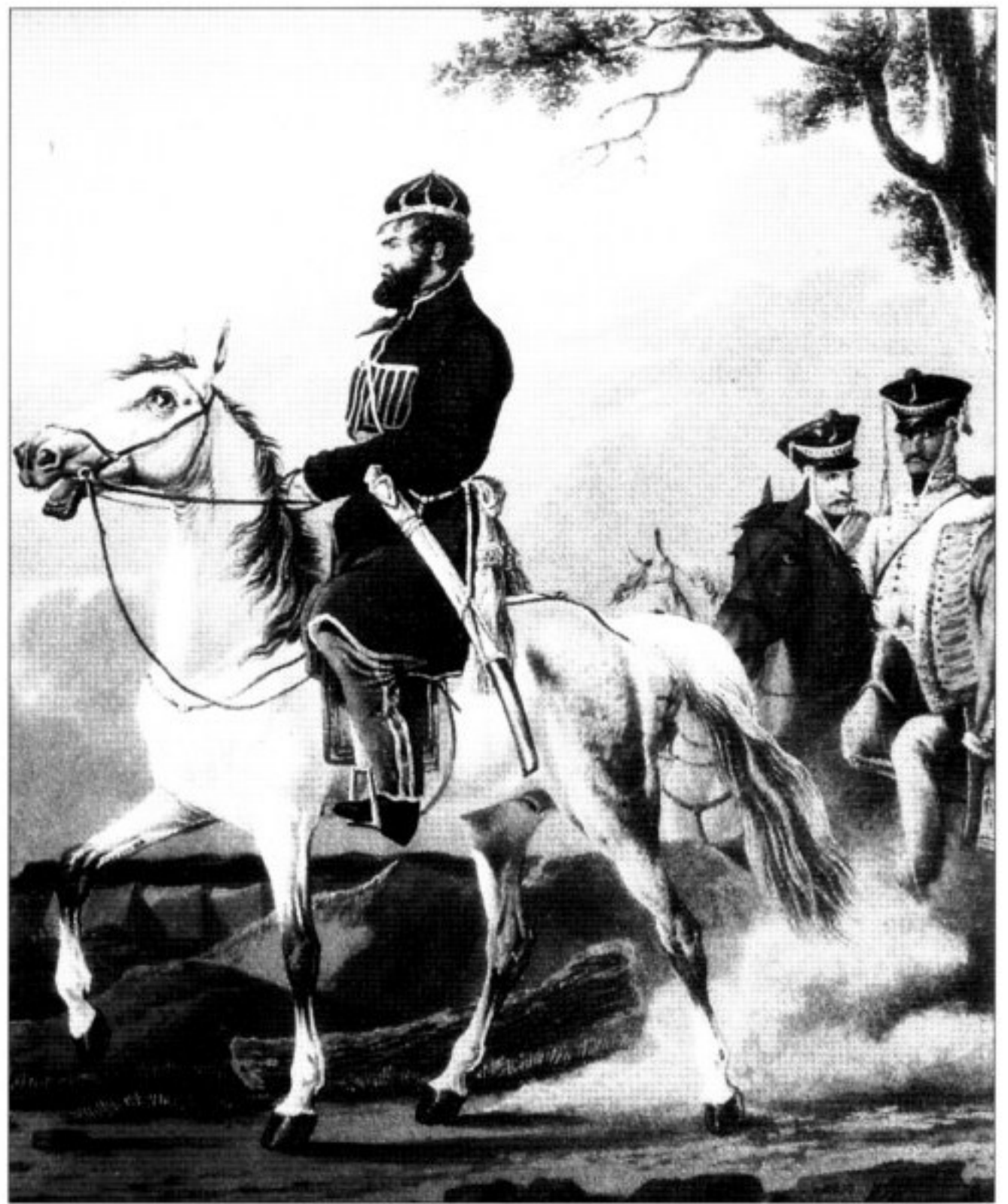


Illustration depicting Denis Davidov, the partisan leader, by M. Dubourg. Despite being a distinguished cavalry officer of Hussars he is most famous for leading a force of Cossacks and regular light cavalry in attacks against the retreating Grand Armée in 1812. (Courtesy of the Russian State Museum)



A print by Vnizu of a group of Cossacks surprising some French Hussars. Although a dramatised version, it shows that the Cossacks could attack from anywhere they wished. (Courtesy of the Russian State Museum)

An English print entitled *Dreadful Miseries of the French Army in bivouac*. A group of French soldiers are surprised by a party of Cossacks (Courtesy of the Russian State Museum)



'Emperor's Hurrah'. This had been the second time that Napoleon had almost been captured by Cossacks; the first time was on the eve of the battle of Austerlitz (2 December 1805), when while on reconnaissance he ventured too near to the Allies' lines and was spotted by a party of Cossacks, fortunately for Napoleon his bodyguard was at hand to rescue him. He walked back to his own lines, whereupon the French recognised him and his way was lighted by torch light with the sound of '*Vive L'Empereur!*' in his ears. Now seven years later Napoleon was left badly shaken and that evening asked his doctor to prepare a bottle of poison which from then on he always wore around his neck in case he was ever captured. He would take this poison on his abdication (6 April 1814), but it did not work.

Napoleon was not the only high-ranking officer of the Grande Armée who was nearly captured by the Cossacks. On 9 November 1812 Eugène de Beauharnais, the Viceroy of Italy, and Napoleon's stepson, was also nearly captured, when Platov had:

... overtaken four divisions of the French army under the command of Beauharnais upon the road from Dorogobugth and Doughovtchshstchina [and] ... charged through this body dividing it into two parts with great slaughter and the capture of sixty two pieces of

ordnance ... part of the remains of this corps fled in the direction of Doughovtchshstchina closely pursued by Cossacks and light cavalry. General Platov had expectations of coming up with these divisions and of taking Beauharnais himself.

Unfortunately, for Platov's Cossacks, de Beauharnais also escaped capture. Later Platov wrote:

The retreat of the French is a flight without example, abandoning everything that demands carriage; even to their sick and wounded. The traces of this fearful career are marked with every species of horror. At every step is seen the dying and the dead, not merely the fallen in battle, but the victims of famine and fatigue. In two days ... the full amount of the dead could not be ascertained or the nature of the warfare did not allow these calculations; no prisoners were taken, as it was a regular system with the Cossacks in their battles never to burden themselves with men as prisoners.

By now hunger was taking its toll on the Grande Armée. On 2 November 1812 Robert Ker Porter recorded that Count Orlov-Denisov attacked a 'mob' who 'attempted to repulse the charge, but on the first onset like unarmed men, so weak was their means of resistance, so feeble was their strength ... [that] the earth was immediately scattered over with their killed and wounded'.

On 12 December 1812 Lord Cathcart, the English Ambassador to Russia, wrote to the Foreign Office in London: 'The French march at night and halt during the day in hollow squares; surrounded by Cossacks, their supplies must be very precarious and numbers are said to be found dead of cold and famine on every ground their army quits'.

It was not just the Grande Armée that was suffering from cold and hunger, Baron Boris Uxkull, who was with the Russian staff, recorded in his memoirs:

The parts of the country we are going through look like deserts. Men and horses are dying of hunger and exhaustion. Only the Cossacks, always lively and cheerful, manage to keep their spirits up. The rest of us have a very hard time dragging after the fleeing enemy ... detachments of prisoners we meet every day. It would be difficult to tell they were soldiers ... [they are] accompanied by Cossacks constantly slogging prisoners with a *knout* and calling out '*Allo, Marcher, Camerade!*'

After the 1812 campaign Kutuzov wrote:

The Cossacks performed miracles of bravery. They not only destroyed columns of the enemy's infantry; but

Cartoon by Nabyerhu of a Cossack beating a French dragoon. Cartoons showing the Russians, and in particular Cossacks, beating the French in 1812 were very popular throughout Europe, because they showed that for once Napoleon was not invincible. (Courtesy of the Russian State Museum)



fell with undaunted resolution upon his flaming artillery. They destroyed all that opposed them.

However, it would be unfair to give the Cossacks all the credit for the destruction of the Grande Armée on its retreat from Moscow. The regular army, especially the Hussar regiments, the Russian peasantry and most of all the weather all took their toll on Napoleon's army, which had crossed the Nieman in June with about 500,000; but only about 10,000 would recross it in December that year.

ON TO PARIS

With Russia liberated the Russian Army spread out across Germany with the Cossacks at the front. The Cossack regiments were divided into various corps, some commanded by their own commanders, like Platov, or by Russian officers like Benkendorf and Roman Bagration, brother of Prince Peter Bagration who had been mortally wounded at the battle of Borodino. They liberated some towns, and besieged others. On 19 January 1813 Kutuzov wrote to Count Platov:

I have uncommon satisfaction in returning to the generals of cavalry, Count Platov, as well as to the generals, the officers and to the staff and others, and to the soldiers of his corps, my best thanks for the rapidity with which they have occupied the towns of Marienberg, Marienwerder and Elbing and for the military discipline and order which on this occasion has been observed throughout.

Berlin and Königsberg fell to Cossack forces. At the latter town an inhabitant wrote on 18 February 1813: 'The dear Russians have caused us great joy in this city. Their amicable entry struck us with astonishment. The Cossacks in their walks about [the city], embrace everybody they meet, old, young and children, with the joyful exclamation of *'huzza! huzza! long live Alexander! long live Frederick William!'*

According to Ackerman, at Dresden a group of Cossacks heard a church organ being played. They sat down in the pews and listened to the music. The music stopped and the parish priest began his sermon. All of a sudden the priest felt a tap on his shoulder and turned to see a Cossack was in the pulpit with him. The Cossack proceeded in his own tongue and sign language to ask the priest would he kindly stop interrupting the organist playing. Whether this tale is true or if the Cossacks got their wish while the clergyman recovered from his fright is not known.

Cossacks raiding a town. Although Cossacks had the reputation for only attacking defenceless soldiers, during 1813 and 1814 they captured many cities and towns, including the Prussian capital Berlin. (Courtesy of the Russian State Museum)



Date	Event	Killed	Prisoners			Standards	Captured	
			Generals	Officers	Other ranks		Guns	caissons
10 Oct	The retaking of Moscow by Ilovayski of Wintzengerode's army			58	1,800			
13-18 Oct	By Ilovayski in the vicinity of Moscow	325		5	652	1	4	100
16-24 Oct	By Platov's corps and other detachments on different roads during pursuit from Maloyaroslavets	1,000		8	440	2	27	
19 Oct	By Platov near the monastery of Polotsk	800		9	200			
21 Oct	By Orlov-Denisov near Viasma	200	1	5	130		1	
24-25 Oct	Pursuit from Viasma to Dorogobough by Miloradovitch and Platov	900		29	1,300	1	4	
26 Oct	Between Dorogobough and Douchovshchina in a battle near the village of Mantorovaia by Platov	1,600		109	2,800		64	64
	Near Douchovshchina by Ilovayski	450	1	22	502			
	By Andrianov from Platov's corps near Bazikova	220		3	175	1		
28 Oct	Pursuit and crossing of the Dnieper at Solovievo by Orlov-Denisov	700		7	563			
29 Oct	From the action at Vop by Platov	600		5	200		23	
31 Oct	By Orlov-Denisov on different roads between Elnia and Smolensk	1,300		9	1,291			
31 Oct	By Platov near Douchovshchina	450		5	800		2	
31 Oct-1 Nov	By Orlov-Denisov	300		6	620			
2 Nov	By the pursuit of Platov to Smolensk	400		5	380		2	
5 Nov	By Platov between Smolensk and Krasnoi	180		5	380		112	80
5-10 Nov	Pursuit on both sides of the Dnieper as far as Orsha by Platov	1,500		70	5,000		26	
12 Nov	Detachment of Platov's corps near Liubavitch	800		13	2,500			
13 Nov	Orsha to Tolotchin by Platov	400	1	4	396			
15-16 Nov	By Wittgenstein and Platov near Studentzi	4,500	5	304	1,2691	4	21	15
19 Nov	Further pursuit by Platov	370		8	892		1	
21 Nov	Part of Platov's corps and part of Chichigov's army near Latigal	300	1	32	1,500	2	1	
28 Nov	Between Vilna to Kovno by Platov	1,000	1	26	1,100	4	28	28
29 Nov-4 Dec	Pursuit from Vilna to Kouno and the taking of the last by Platov	1,220		162	4,000		21	779
1 Dec	Pursuit by Platov from Kovno to Vilkovitch	1,200		210	3,000		4	
			10			15		

Across the German states the armies of Russia, Prussia and Austria marched with their allies to the Rhine, with Cossacks leading the way.

Echoing the days of the Vikings a thousand years before, Sir Robert Wilson wrote in his journal for 15 October 1813:

The country through which we are passing is in great distress. The Cossacks have devoured or destroyed the little that the stagnation of commerce had enabled the inhabitants to provide ... In many parts of Germany it is said that the Cossack terror is so great that prayers are put up '*De Cossauibus, Domine, Libera nos!*' [Deliver us, O Lord, from the Cossacks]. In other churches they have added the term Cossack to the original Devil as more expressive of his mischievous proceedings. It is a great pity that they should be so lawless, for they counter-balance the service which they render, I would forgive their pillage of eatables, but not of raiments, trinkets, and indeed all transferable property, although *love* is the motive.

The Russian official list for casualties caused by the Cossacks to the Grande Armée. Note the dates given are in the old style so add 12 days to each for the modern equivalent. (Source Colonel Tchuyhevitch, *Reflections of the War of 1812*, Munroe & Frances, London, 1813)



A print by F. Ugel depicting the first Cossacks to enter Berlin on 20 February 1813. They wear an assortment of non-regulation uniforms and headgear, including a medieval helmet. The saddle cloth of the figure on the right appears to be a French cuirassier's *shabraque*. (Author's collection)

Others had a more romantic view of the Cossacks, their daring exploits brought them fame all over Europe. When a Colonel de Bock was sent to Britain with despatches he brought Alexander Zemlenutin, a private in Sulin's 9th Regiment of Don Cossacks, as an escort: 'His visit to London has gratified the curiosity of many who were desirous of seeing an individual of the corps who had so recently assisted by its bravery in expelling the Corsican invader from Russian territory ... All ranks of persons were anxious to see this northern warrior, and he never moved but in a crowd.' He was introduced to the Prince Regent at Carlton House and was presented with a 'handsome sabre, suspended by a black velvet belt, brilliantly embroidered with silver and a cartouche box of the same material'. Among the other presents he received was a 2-metre telescopic brass pike which was made in Birmingham:

He was much struck by the gas lights: he was allowed to ignite the gas himself, and thought it effected by magic! Upon being presented with an apparatus for producing an instantaneous light by dipping match in a liquid, he said 'when I tell my comrades of what I have seen of fire (meaning the gas) coming out of nothing,



A print by Johann Adam Klein showing the capture of the French General Vandamme. After the battle of Dresden (26–27 August 1813) Vandamme had the opportunity of finishing the campaign by pursuing the Army of Bohemia, but he was surrounded at the battle of Kulm on 30 August 1813 and captured by Cossacks. (Courtesy of the Russian State Museum)

they will not believe me. I will show them this,' pointing towards the magic tinder box. His astonishment was excited on having seen the panharmonican at Spring Gardens. Wherein the effect of a full band is produced, upon a trumpet, French horn, hautboys, kettle drum, flutes, bassoons and other instruments, which are operated upon by bellows set in motion by mechanical means.

Ladies' fashion followed that of the Cossacks. They wore for promenading: 'A Cossack mantle of pale ruby or blossom coloured velvet' or a Platov cap which was to be worn in the evening and was described as 'pale pink silk to correspond in colour with the robe. The small scallops round the front are as well as the crown finished with a row of pearls and a superb tassel of the same materials, ornaments on one side.' However, in May 1814 the Cossack fashion was superseded by *fleur de lis* because of the restoration of the French monarchy.

Meanwhile, Vassili Iguroff and his entourage who had joined Kutuzov before the battle of Borodino, was still with the army, but as Wagner's major continues:

When we reached the banks of the Rhine, the veteran felt a longing for the steppes of his fathers; nor was he satisfied by the beauties of the West, for old Vassili was a Cossack of the old stamp, in whose eyes the Don was the loveliest of all streams, and the steppes more attractive than the most fruitful regions. In consideration of his great age, the Steppe Devil was suffered to return home, accompanied by two of his sons.

In January 1814 the Allies invaded France. Lieutenant R. B. James of the Royal Navy, who had been a prisoner of the French since 1804 but was rescued by the Cossacks in 1814, recorded in his memoirs that the roads of France were deserted for fear of the Cossacks, and that: 'The surprising courage of the Cossacks and their rapid movements kept every town and village in continual terror.' At the town of Carrignau a



Portrait of Alexander Zemlenutin of the Don Cossacks who arrived in London in 1813 to a hero's welcome. This print was published in London as a souvenir of his visit. (Author's collection)



Cossacks marching through Hamburg in 1813. Like most cavalry the Cossack horse suffered greatly on campaign. On the left appears to be a dismounted detachment of Cossacks. (Courtesy of the Russian State Museum)

party of Cossacks captured 700 Polish lancers in their beds and in 'less than half an hour were all out of the town' again.

Some Cossacks wanted to ride south to unite with Wellington's army which was now fighting in the Pyrenees, but this was rejected, because every effort was aimed at capturing Paris.

In his *History of the Campaign in France*, Mikhailofsky-Danielefsky wrote:

While the Russian standard was borne from Moscow through all Europe, the Cossacks were ever at the head of the army. They were the first to enter the ruined Kremlin; at Königsberg to announce the independence of the Prussians, and to proclaim it in Berlin under the windows of the royal palace, while their comrades, amidst the acclamations of the Saxons were the first to enter Dresden. In Hamburg, in Cassel, in Bremen, in Leipzig, on the banks of the Rhine, in Rotterdam, in the capital of Charles the Great, the children of the Don were the first to witness the tears of joy shed by the inhabitants in the enthusiasm of gratitude for their deliverance from the iron yoke, and to see the French eagles trodden under foot at their approach.

After the fall of Paris in March 1814 the inhabitants flocked to the Champs Élysées where the Cossacks were camped. Colour illustrations were drawn as souvenirs and it was the fashion for every Parisian lady to be on the arm of a Cossack, much to the annoyance of the French and Russian officers alike. No doubt when the Cossacks came to leave Paris they left many a broken heart and perhaps a few mothers-to-be.



Portrait of General Matvei Ivanovich Platov, c.1814, in his general's uniform. After his tour of England he shaved off his moustache. (Courtesy of the National Army Museum)



A print by I. Jazet from the original by A. I. Sauerweid of a Cossack bivouac on the Champs Élysées on 31 March 1814. Prints such as this one were quickly circulated in Paris after Napoleon's abdication. (Courtesy of the Russian State Museum)



One of a series of prints produced by G. E. Opitz as a souvenir to 'celebrate' the Cossacks in Paris. This one is of the Cossack encampment in Paris in 1814. Note the different types of tents, one made from hay, the other from pieces of material. (Author's collection)

HOME COMING

After eight years the major who accompanied Wagner returned home:

My mother and many of my relatives were dead, but my grandfather lived on in a green and hearty old age ... It had often been a question with us what became of his money, of which he had now amassed a large sum. We naturally inferred that he must have buried it somewhere.

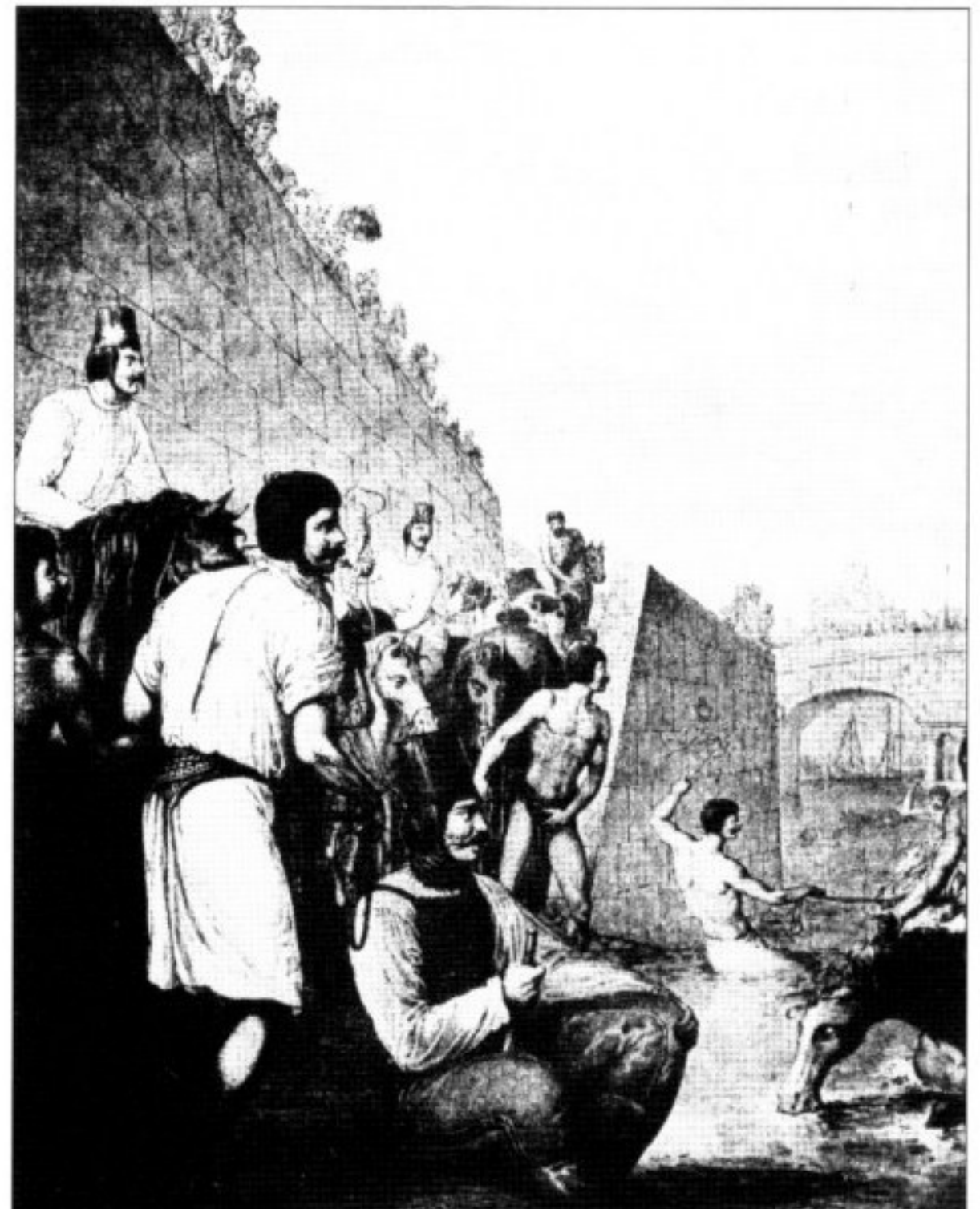
Vassili, like other Cossacks, probably gave some of the plunder that he had acquired on campaign to his local church as a thanksgiving. Cossack churches were described by some travellers as the 'most beautifully decorated in Russia'.

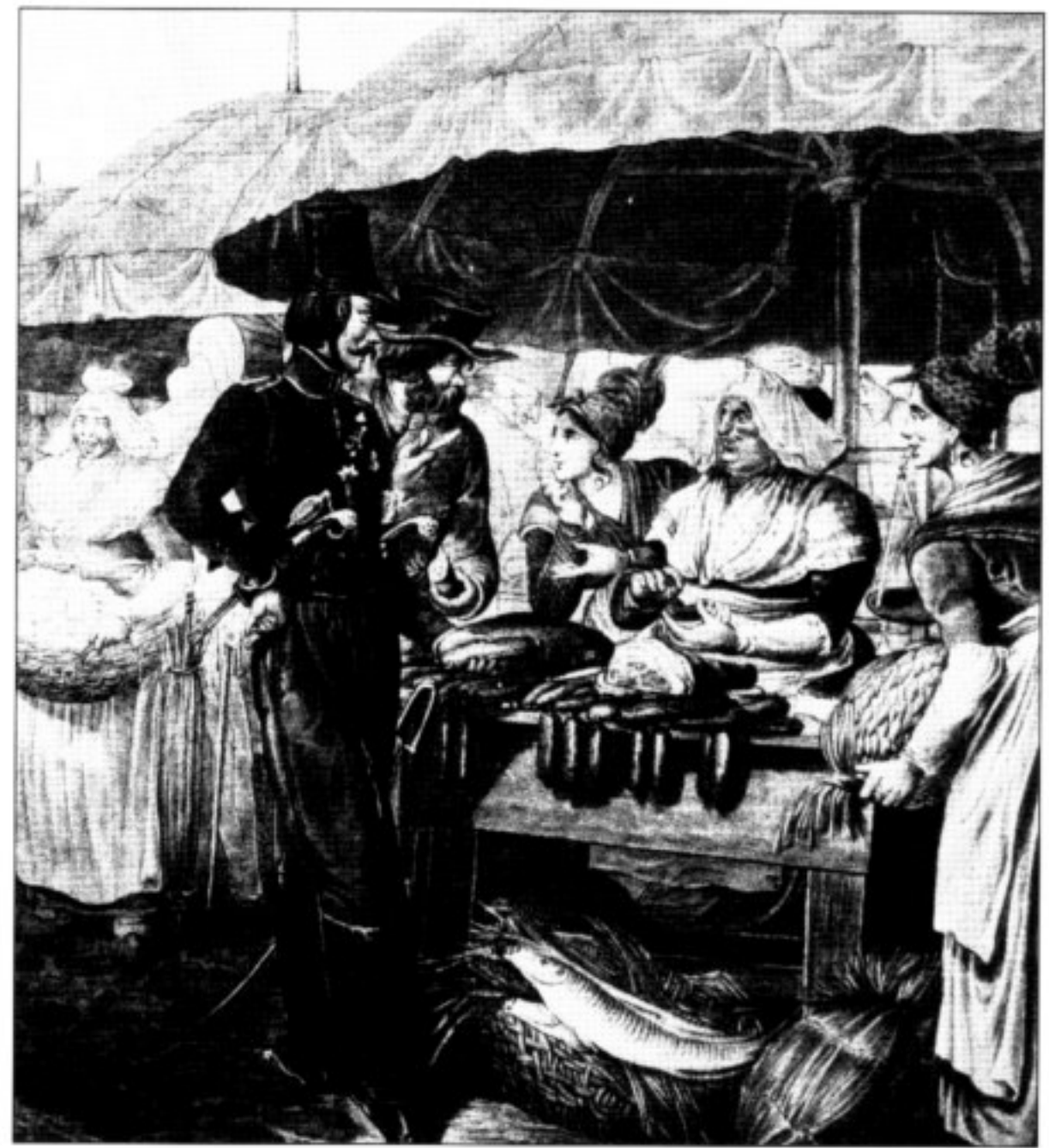
Of the 'thirteen sons and half a hundred [50] grandsons' who had accompanied Vassili Iguroff to the army in 1812, 'Six of Vassili's sons and fifteen of his grandsons never saw the land of the Don again; they fell victims to the war, or to the typhus.'

Lieutenant-Colonel Johnson, who toured Russia in 1816, noted:

Here as at many other Cossack towns and villages, there is evidently a greater proportion of women and children than of men, which may be accounted for by the absence of the latter as soldiers, and also by the losses which the Don Cossacks sustained in the late glorious struggle against the French. It must be observed that every Cossack whether shopkeeper or artisan, is a military man, and that no proportion of the male population was exempted from attending the first of all military duties on that dreadful but honourable occasion.

Print by G. E. Opitz. On the walls above people can be seen watching the Cossacks watering their horses in the river Seine in Paris, 1814. (Author's collection)





The 1818 census for the Don Cossacks records that there were 14,481 widows; no doubt this figure includes women whose husbands died of natural causes, but a large proportion of this number represents those wives whose husbands were killed on campaign. Moreover, no figures exist for those single men killed or who were maimed on active service.

For their conduct in the Patriotic War and the subsequent campaigns, the four Ukrainian Cossack regiments were each awarded silver trumpets, but few honours were awarded to individuals as compared with the regular army.

CONCLUSION

The times were changing for the Cossacks. From Catherine the Great's reign they became more and more tied to the Russian government. This legislation was halted with the Napoleonic Wars, but resumed after Napoleon's defeat.

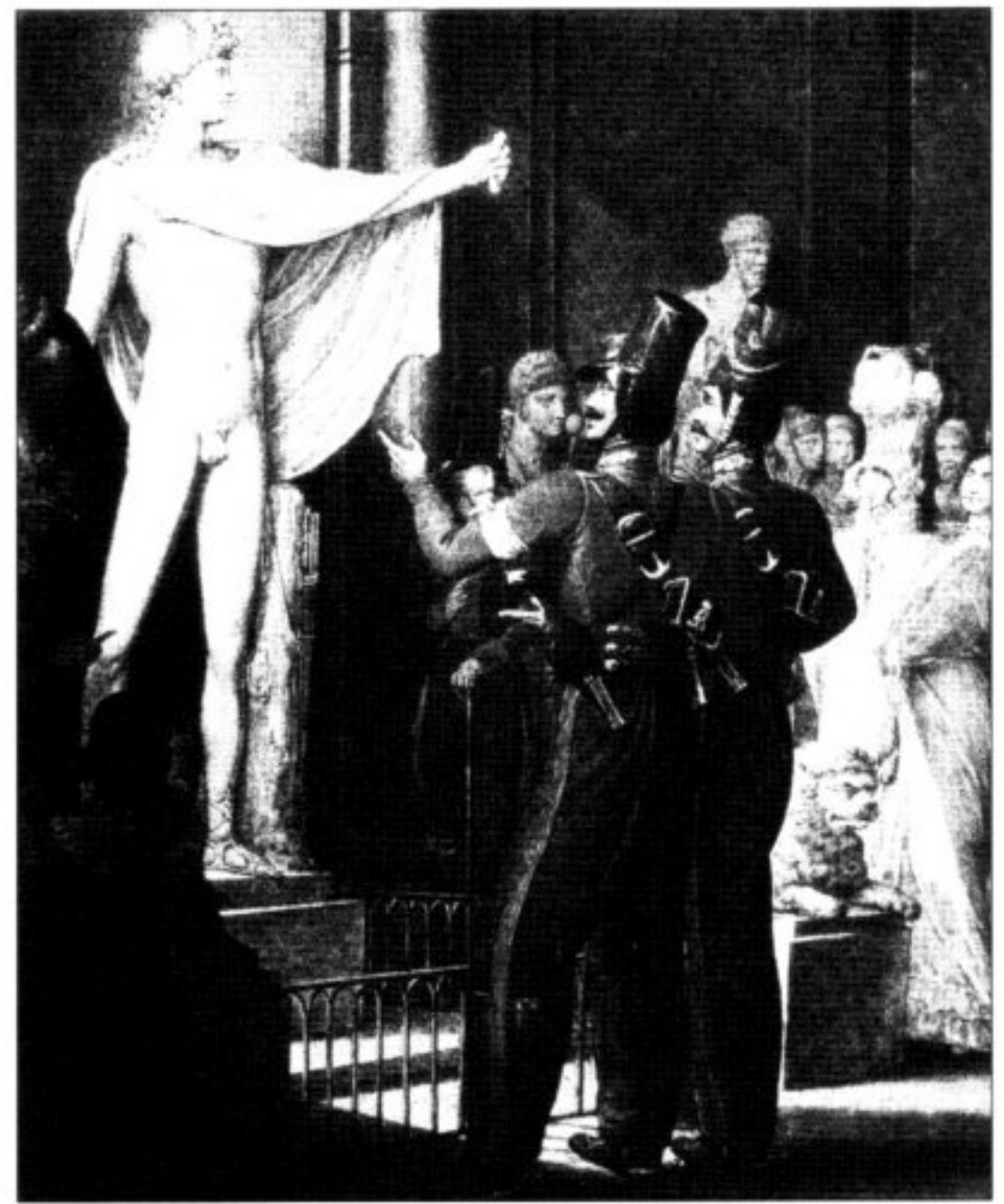
The Cossack élite became more and more enchanted with the trappings of power. They sent their sons to school. But there were some attempts to curb their desire for power. In 1819 the committee concerning the organisation of the Don Voisko was established under the leadership of Ataman Denisov to look into the Cossack nobility's seizure of Cossack lands. The inquiry was slow and did not come to a conclusion until 1835 when the 'Law Concerning the Administration of the Don Voisko' was passed. This law confirmed the land the Don nobility already held, but stopped further seizures of land and guaranteed that each male Cossack should have a minimum of 30 *Desiatiny* of land. The government also introduced guidelines for the Atamen to follow.

Wagner, after hearing about Major Iguroff's grandfather, later asked his colleague about the story, 'From old Iguroff to his grandson you can distinguish', he said:

ABOVE LEFT Like people of other nations, the French were fascinated by the Cossacks. Here we see a Cossack of the Guard, with his armaments. His sword is tied to his wrist and his lance is on a loop around his arm. His musket is over his shoulder and a pistol is in a holster on his crossbelt. Like all the Allied armies he wears a white handkerchief tied around his arm as a field sign. Only G. E. Opitz depicts horses' harnesses as shown in this print. (Author's collection)

ABOVE RIGHT Two Cossacks buy some provisions from a stall in Paris (print by G. E. Opitz). (Author's collection)

... three epochs in Cossack history, three transitions in the development of these remarkable cavaliers. The grandsire is a representative of the blunt old spirit of the sons of the Steppe, that Peter the Great began to bridle with his iron hand. This was a difficult task at that time; but now everything is so well observed, that the chastising arm of our Emperor can smite the Cossacks with the speed of lightning. The Major is the type of a transitional generation. He would by no means relish the old equality, and anarchy of the Steppes. He has seen and tasted the beauties and delights of Western Europe. Yet he has one foot in the past, and sighs and longs for the freedom of the good old times. His son is quite a creature of modern times, issuing from the cadet school with the vices and advantages of large cities, elegant in his manners, superficial and empty in mind and heart.



Two Cossacks admire a statue in a museum in Paris (print by G. E. Opitz). (Author's collection)

Wagner asked if the story was true, to which the Major's colleague replied:

I have dwelt at Novo-Tscherkask, and made enquiries, which led me to infer that, in most essentials his statements may be depended upon. Wild beasts, like his grandfather, may have lived on the banks of the Don during the last century. Now, however, they have all died out. They are no longer tolerated by military discipline, and the inhabitants of the Steppe have all become much tamer. A giant like Iguroff, if he appeared among the Cossacks of the present day, could no longer play the same part; he would be trashed like any other Cossack. The Don Cossacks are now admirably disciplined, and it is only since their new organisation by the Emperor, that they have become a really valuable military force. Ten years ago, a few necessary modifications and reforms, such as the abrogation of useless privileges that interfered with discipline occasioned some ill-blood. But now all changes are tolerated without opposition, and the Cossacks soon become inured to them.

By the beginning of the reign of Tsar Nicholas I, the Cossacks were becoming more and more integrated into the regular army, and would later be considered the best cavalry regiments in the army.

MUSEUMS

Most artefacts are found in museums in Russia, most notably the Hermitage, the Artillery Museum and the Russian State Museum, which are in St Petersburg. There is the Borodino Museum on the actual battle site and the Borodino Panorama in Moscow. Museums in the Ukraine, the heartland of the Cossacks, are where most artefacts are to be found, which includes the Cossack Museum at Zaporozhye.

In the west the Les Invalides in Paris probably has the largest collection of captured Russian artefacts. Any Cossack items found in Britain probably date from the Crimean War when Britain was at war with Russia in 1854–56.

RE-ENACTMENT

As one would expect, the majority of re-enactment regiments are in Russia. However, it is not clear whether these include any Cossack regiments, although some individuals appear to portray this branch of the army.

GLOSSARY

Ranks

<i>Ataman</i>	Cossack leader
<i>Esaul</i>	Cossack major
<i>Hetman</i>	Another name for Ataman
<i>Kazak</i>	Cossack
<i>Pidpomichnyky</i>	A poor Cossack
<i>Pidsusidky</i>	Cossack labourer
<i>Podesaul</i>	Cossack captain
<i>Prikazni</i>	Cossack corporal
<i>Pulk</i>	Regiment
<i>Sotnik</i>	Cossack lieutenant
<i>Stanitsa</i>	Cossack village
<i>Starshina</i>	Cossack lieutenant-colonel
<i>Ukase</i>	An imperial command or decree
<i>Uriadnik</i>	Cossack sergeant

<i>Voisko</i>	Host or army
<i>Vyborni</i>	A Cossack of average standing

Clothing and weapons

<i>Caftan</i>	Cossack long-coat
<i>Chekmen</i>	Cossack frock-coat
<i>Drotik</i>	Lance head
<i>Kurtka</i>	Jacket
<i>Lyadunka</i>	Cartridge pouch
<i>Piki</i>	Pike or lance
<i>Pistolet</i>	Pistol
<i>Potnik</i>	Saddle cloth
<i>Sablya</i>	Sabre
<i>Shapka</i>	Hat
<i>Sharavary</i>	Baggy trousers

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COLOUR PLATE COMMENTARY

A: COSSACK OF THE IMPERIAL GUARD

The regiment was formed in 1775 from a detachment of Don and Churguevski Cossacks. For much of our period the regiment was commanded by Count Vasily Vasilievich Orlov-Denisov (1775–1843). Originally of three squadrons of 100 men, in 1804 each squadron was increased to 128 men. Unlike the other Cossack regiments the Cossacks of the Imperial Guard were trained as regular cavalry and so were highly disciplined.

During the reign of Paul I (1796–1801) the regiment wore a scarlet half-caftan, a black cravat, a black Astrakan cap with scarlet cloth bag and light blue and crimson worsted wool tassels and a white feather plume. Chamois leather gauntlets and white sash for the 1st or Lifeguard squadron and blue for the 2nd squadron. Their lance was metal painted red. The saddle cloth and valise were also red.

The regiment had a good fighting record, although it was lightly engaged at Borodino where three Cossacks were killed and eight NCOs and 20 Cossacks, plus two non-combatants, were wounded. In 1813 the number of squadrons was increased to six. However, when Napoleon was finally defeated this was reduced to four, and by 1816, three.

The figure wears the uniform of the Cossacks of the Guard during the reign of Paul I. A saddlecloth (1) used by the Cossacks of the Guard, they were armed with an iron lance

Two Parisian women fraternise with some Cossacks while listening to a young musician. It was fashionable for French ladies to be on the arm of a Cossack, much to the dismay of both French and Russian officers (print by G. E. Opitz). (Author's collection)



(2), a sword (3), two pistols (4), note detail of lock (4a). There was also a *sotnia* from the Urals who wore a caftan (5) and a high cap (6). The uniform for the regiment was similar during the reign of Alexander I, only with blue trousers.

B: COSSACKS' WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT

The figure wears the regulation long caftan *Chekmen* which was worn between 1 September and 1 May. However, there are plenty of descriptions of Cossacks wearing non-regulation uniforms. Lieutenant James of the Royal Navy wrote that, the Cossacks 'are very fond of fine clothes, never mind of what colour or fashion ... If they see a coat they like better than their own, the exchange must be made, or his *knout*, the language master, explains itself most powerfully, some of them appear like Hamlet's grave digger when taking off their coats [they have] generally four or five, one over the other according to size. I saw a regiment of them at Mons, ready to march off, such a motley crew! They looked like a gang of robbers.'

Cossacks used at least two types of saddle, the one used by the Cossacks of the Guard (see plate A, item 1), and the other with a wooden frame with a leather cushion (1) and saddlecloth (2). The Cossack was generally armed with a lance (see plate A, item 2) and two pistols (note only one shown) (3) and detail of lock (3a); there was no regulation pattern for pistols, so the example shown is a Cossack pistol, although he could also be armed with ones similar to those carried by the Cossacks of the Guard (plate A item 4). Like the pistols, there was no regulation pattern for swords so the Cossacks could carry a variety of swords. One British eyewitness was amazed to see some Cossacks carrying

swords (4) manufactured in Birmingham. A dagger (5) and whips of black leather (6) were also carried, and at the end of the thong was a lead ball. As well as a variety of weaponry the Cossacks could also wear a cap made of Astrakan fur, with a red bag and white cords (7) or a blue cloth cap (8); this example is taken from the Elberfield manuscript.

C: COSSACK ARTILLERY

In 1797 two companies of Don Cossack artillery were formed, each with 12 guns. In April 1813 Kutuzov gives the strength of the artillery companies as 11 officers, 34 NCOs and 331 privates. On 15 September 1813 an additional Don Cossack artillery battery was ordered to be raised; however, this remained in Russia and so did not take part in the fighting. Up to 1816 the Don Cossack horse artillery had the same uniform as their cavalry counterparts, but on 11 February 1816 they were ordered to have green uniforms in the Cossack style with red piping around the collars and cuffs and copper buttons. Their overalls were also to be green but without any piping and a red sash. They also wore the Cossack cap with a bag and red cords. On 16 August 1817 a new coat was introduced with black collar and cuffs and the battery's number on the shoulder straps of yellow cloth. The overalls were also to have a red stripe down the side seams. The 1st and 2nd batteries who had taken part in the campaigns of 1812 to 1814 were awarded gold buttonholes on their collars and cuffs.

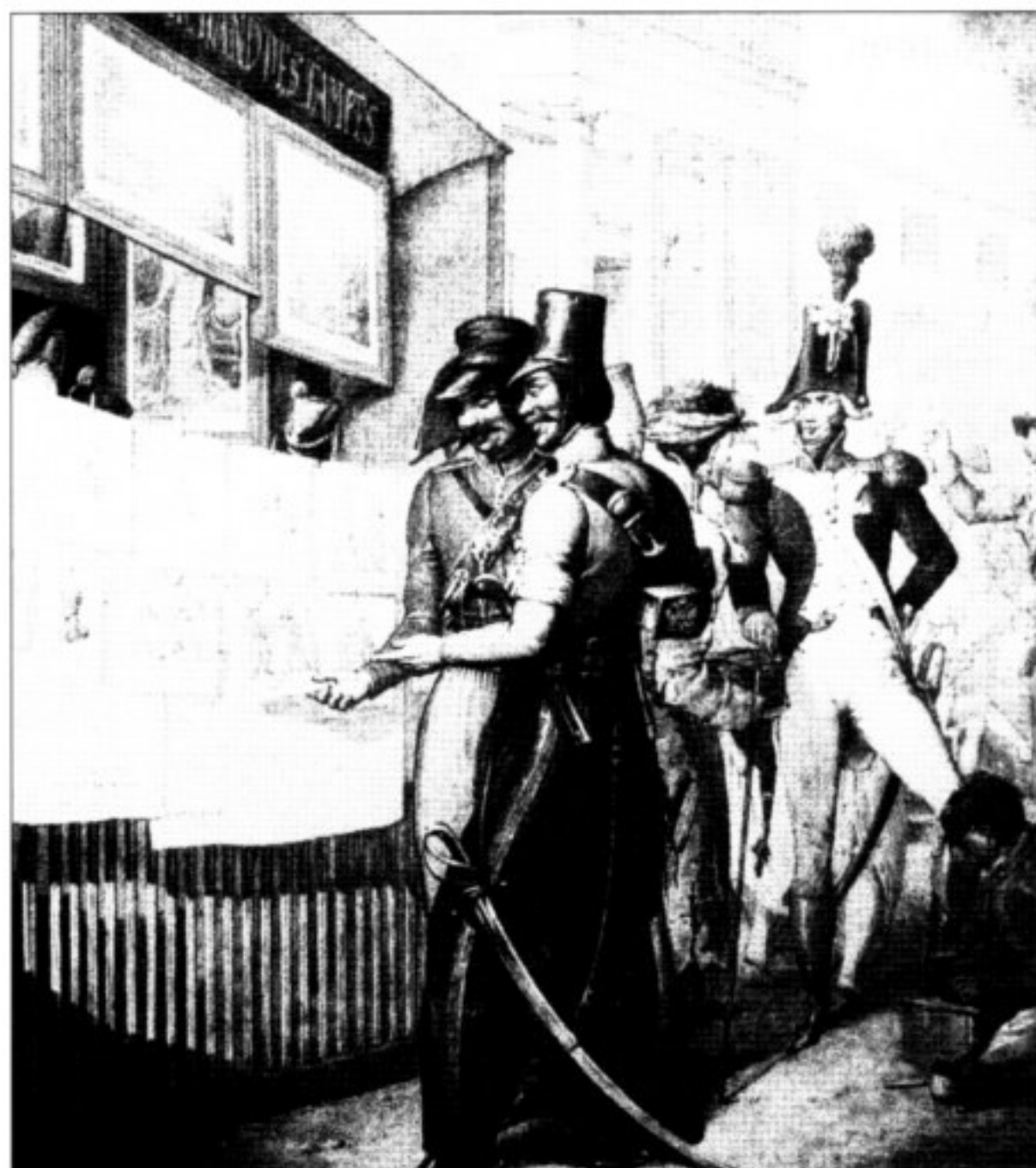
The Black Sea Cossacks also had an artillery battery. On 11 February 1816 this battery was appointed a uniform like the Don Cossacks only with the addition of double sleeves and overalls without piping. The sash was white. The battery was designated No. 6, this was identifiable from the shoulder strap which bared the number '6'. The cap had a horse-hair plume until 1819. On 7 May 1817 the two Caucasus Cossack artillery batteries were designated No. 4 and 5 companies.

This example shows the Cossack wearing the summer or short jacket or coat worn between 1 May and 31 August by all Cossacks. Whether the gun carriages and limbers etc. of the Cossack artillery were painted apple green like the regular artillery is not known.

The equipment used by a gun crew is a linstock (1), which held a piece of burning match which set off the charge. A powder scoop (2) which placed the charge in the gun barrel, because of its pointed end the powder scoop was called a 'bird's tongue'. A worm screw (3) was used to clear the barrel of any blockages. A sponge and rammer (4), the sponge was dipped in a bucket of water and placed down the barrel to extinguish any sparks that might set the next charge off and the rammer was used to ram the charge down the barrel. The priming wire (5) was used to pierce the charge through the touch-hole in the barrel, so that it could be ignited. A portfire case (6), made from brass case with a white leather strap, held the match used to ignite the fuse or tube which fired the artillery piece. A tube pouch (7) made of white metal, which was used to hold the tubes which were filled with gunpowder and used as a fuse. A leather pouch (8) was used for holding the charges. A canister (9), used for firing at targets point-blank. A round shot (10), a ball which could either be solid or filled with gunpowder so that it would explode.

D: TACTICS

There were various tactics used by the Cossacks. Tactic A shows the Cossacks extended in line so that they can



Print by G. E. Opitz of Cossacks admiring prints in Paris. R. Ackerman recalls: 'The booksellers shops where representatives [prints] of all the Russian Nations were to be seen in the windows were always beset with crowds of Cossacks who manifested the greatest joy in discovering themselves among them'. (Author's collection)



An old Cossack watches as two younger Cossacks prepare to go to war. Life during the first half of the nineteenth century changed greatly for the Cossack, his life became more and more controlled by the central government of the Tsar. (Author's collection)

outflank the approaching enemy cavalry unit. Tactic B is a similar tactic except that a regular Russian cavalry regiment is drawn up in the centre and two Cossack units are on its flanks, so that the regular unit engages the enemy in the front, while the Cossacks can wheel round and attack the enemy cavalry on its flanks and rear.

E: COSSACKS IN BATTLE

The Cossacks get little credit for their actions in battle. Only at the battle of Borodino do they get the recognition they deserve. On the night before the battle, fearing that Napoleon might outflank him, Kutuzov sent a small detachment to reconnoitre his left flank. The patrol found a ford over the river Kolochka. During the battle the 1st Cavalry Corps under Uvarov composed of the Hussars, Dragoons and Uhlans of the Guard, Nizhin Dragoons and the Elizabetgrad Hussars, plus Platov's cavalry of Ilovaisk V, Grekov XVIII, Khartonov VII, Denisov VII, Zhironov, Vlasov III, the Simferpol Tartar regiments and part of the Ataman's regiment plus some artillery was sent over this ford into the flank of the enemy.

Laugier, who was with the Grande Armée in 1812, recalls that the Cossacks:

Were fording the Kolochka, and while preserving the greatest calm, are hastening our steps, the more ardent for a rumour that the Prince [Beauharnais] himself is in danger. Meanwhile the Russian cavalry, all the time growing more numerous renew their charges against the squares of the Croats' 8th Light, of the 84th and the 92nd. Formed in squares, we advance in echelon to meet the Russians, who by now have reached the Italian batteries, extinguishing their fire, and overthrown Delzons' regiments.

Although this flanking force was eventually forced to retire, this raid had caused panic in some of Napoleon's regiments and forced him to delay a frontal assault, which gave the Russians time to reinforce their line.

The sky-blue piping and lace distinguishes the regiment as belonging to Ataman Platov.

F: COSSACK RAIDING PARTY

The Cossacks' raids upon the retreating Grande Armée in 1812 are well documented. Prince Eugène de Beauharnais would later state that these raids kept the Grande Armée

together for fear of the raiding Cossacks. This might have been the case at the beginning of the retreat, but without forage they began to starve. So, encouraged by hunger, they ventured out looking for food and were easily picked off by the Cossacks, who were said to have swarmed around the remnants of the Grande Armée.

During the 1812 campaign, Russian statistics record that 226 cannon and 822 caissons and wagons were captured by its regular and irregular forces, not to mention the loss of an estimated 500,000 men who crossed the Russian frontier, of whom only about 10,000 recrossed it six months later – just two per cent of the original force.

G: COSSACKS' 'DARING FEATS'

The Cossacks used to show off their skills of horse-riding via the *dzhigitovka*. This circus-like way of riding was originally taught to the Cossacks by the Circassian tribes, and then handed down through the generations. Today this way of riding is used to entertain audiences around the world, its origins are purely military. Martha Wilmot, an Irish woman who travelled to Russia with her sister, described in her journal:

The Princess had appointed a few Cossacks to repair in order to shew us their exercise which is very curious. Unfortunately the deep snow prevented the possibility of their showing more than 2 or 3 manoeuvres. Their yell upon attacking the Enemy, their manner of taking a prisoner and carrying between two (standing with a foot in the stirrups of each horse) and riding with him full gallop in that position, their power of standing on their horses and riding full speed in that way having the power of seeing farther and taking better aim against the Enemy, were the only parts of their exercise they could perform. In the summer amongst other things they sink under their horses when they see the Enemy preparing to take aim and start up in an instant after when the danger is over.

A Cossack standing on his horse (1) is dressed similar to the way a Cossack would appear in the reign of Paul I and probably much later. A Cossack riding with his body at the side of his horse; this position was useful when being fired at by the enemy (2). Two Cossacks from Siberia in their new 1812 uniform picking a wounded Cossack off the ground (3).

H: DAILY LIFE

After centuries of being a nomadic people the Cossacks eventually resorted to farming or trading. With the men often away fighting, the women usually ploughed the fields. The two boys practise sword-fighting which will become essential when they reach manhood and can ride out with the rest of their *Host*. Children were left to the womenfolk to bring up. Petrov Baklanov, a Cossack who later rose to the rank of lieutenant, wrote that his father was 'continuously with the regiment so he could not concern himself with my upbringing'. At the age of 14 or 15 he 'lived at home and was occupied in farming. I ploughed the earth, reaped hay, grazed the domestic animals ... and spent whole days and nights loafing in the barracks among the Cossacks, hungrily listening to stories of the deeds of our ancestors'.

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