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Major General A.H Benckendorf - liberator of the Netherland provinces from French rule.

208 years have passed since those memorable days when Russian troops, together with the troops of the allies of Prussia, Austria, Sweden and Great Britain, liberated the cities and countries that were under the rule of the French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. Now we return once again to those events and consider the importance of the participation of Russian troops in the liberation and restoration of the Dutch independence in 1813. Our archives contain valuable documents testifying to the events of that distant era. One should mention the report on the actions of the Russian troops in the Netherlands, written by Major General Benckendorff (who, under reign of Nicolai I, became the chief of the famous "Third Department of His Imperial Majesty's Chancellery."). In Dutch historiography, Russia's participation in the country's liberation is most thoroughly described in a book by the Dutch historian Kolenbrander, who also published multiple part "Documents of the General History of the Netherlands from 1795 to 1840", in which volumes VI-VII contain many reports covering the events associated with the liberation of the Netherlands at the end of 1813.

There is a rather detailed article by a well-known Russian specialist in the history of Scandinavian countries, Doctor of Historical Sciences - Roginsky, written back in 1985 and published in the journal "New and Contemporary History". Brief references to these events also exist in the textbook "History of the Netherlands", written by Doctor of History Shatokhina-Mordvintseva. In the works of modern Dutch historians, participation of Russian troops in the liberation of the country is generally considered extremely brief, or is even ignored, or reduced to references "Russian robberies".

Among the works of young researchers, one should mention the article by Bavykin, published in the journal MGIMO Bulletin in 2017. The book by Belgian authors Alain Ark and Philippe Gaillard on the events of November-December 1813 in Belgium, the Netherlands and Northern France, published in 2010 is also of great interest. One last mention that is important to make is the book by Bibikov and Oleinikov, that is devoted to our hero.

Correspondence between Alexander I and Prince William of Orange, who headed the independent Netherlands state at the end of 1813, represent a particular interest. As these documents show, in March 1813, Prince William of Orange met with Alexander I in Breslau.

During this meeting, the Russian emperor supported William and approved the idea of restoring Dutch independence under the auspices of the House of Orange. In the spring of 1813, the national liberation movement began to grow and a patriotic anti-Napoleonic bloc took shape. The latter included representatives of various political trends: patriots, initiators of the 1795 revolution and the creation of the Batavian Republic, as well as their former opponents - Orangemen, supporters of the overthrown dynasty Orange stadtholders. This compromise was based on the desire to restore the country's independence while preserving the gains of the revolutionary era that were acceptable to the ruling classes, both the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie. Major General of the Russian Army, Dutch by birth, Teit-fan-Seraskerken gave an accurate description of the Dutch of that era. He wrote: "The French party no longer exists in Holland. The common misfortune brought the rest of the Dutch closer together. Hatred of the French government, fear of it unite all classes" (VPR. Vol. 7. Doc. 184). Already after Napoleon's defeat in Russia, in spring of 1813, Dutch army departments became very unstable, which led to the open riots in a number of cities.

The question of the fate of the Netherlands was still unresolved. In the summer of 1813, active negotiations took place between Russia, Prussia, England and Austria. During these negotiations, it was decided that the restoration of the independence of the Netherlands should become one of the conditions for the reconciliation of the coalition powers with France. The resumption of hostilities in August once again put the Netherlands into a state of tense expectation, which by October 1813 began to develop into riots. For the main parties of the coalition, the question of the direct liberation of the Netherlands arose again almost immediately after the "Battle of the Nations" near Leipzig on October 16-19, 1813. More than 500,000 people took part in the battle: the allies - over 300 thousand people (including 127 thousand Russians), 1385 guns; and the Napoleonic troops - about 200 thousand people, 700 guns. In the midst of the battle, the Saxon troops of the "Great Army" crossed over to the side of the allies right on the battlefield. The French had to retreat from Leipzig, leaving the city. Napoleon suffered serious losses in the battle, which forced him to leave German territory and go beyond the Rhine river by the end of the year.

After the defeat at Leipzig, the leaders of the anti-Napoleonic coalition agreed on joint actions against the French troops. However, the commander of the Northern Allied Army, Karl Johan (General Bernadotte, one of the Napoleonic generals who gave rise to a new Swedish dynasty) turned his army north, postponing the attack on Holland. Such actions of the Swedish general ran against the plans of Alexander I, who attached paramount importance to the liberation of the Netherlands. The Russian tsar, as well as the new commander-in-chief of the Russian army, Ferdinand Fedorovich Vintzengerode, believed that the success of the operation to liberate the Netherlands could be achieved only with the support of the country's people. In one of his letters

Wenzingerode wrote to Alexander I: "I am convinced that any serious operation in Holland and on the lower Rhine at the present time of the year is subject to great difficulties if the population of the country does not openly stand on our side, no matter how few troops the enemy may have here". He expounded these same thoughts to Van der Hoeven - the messenger of the rebellious Dutch.

On November 11-13, the advanced cavalry detachments of the Russian troops reached the Ems River, east of the Dutch border and, pushing through the French troops, began to cross the river and deepen into the Dutch territory. Four detachments were sent to the Netherlands under the command of Colonels Naryshkin, Balabin, Lopukhin and Major General Benckendorff. The first to enter the territory of Holland from the north was the detachment of Naryshkin, then the detachments of Rosen and Lopukhin. On November 14, Naryshkin informed Wenzingerode that Major Elswanger's detachment had captured Zwolle, and another went to the Deventer fortress, the third was approaching Groningen. "The people are looking forward to welcoming us," wrote Naryshkin, - "Many people really want us to come, but they are afraid of us, since the French persuaded them that we would rob them. However, they will soon be dissuaded from this.". The entry of Russian troops into the Netherlands caused panic among the French authorities. By November 15, Napoleonic troops rushed to evacuate from Amsterdam. The revolutionary situation in the country began to develop into a national liberation uprising, which broke out on November 15 in Amsterdam, on November 16 - in The Hague and Heyzen. In the liberated cities, national authorities were created. On November 21, the leader of the Orangemen, a former pensioner of Rotterdam, Karel fan Gogendorp, formed the country's interim government, which was supposed to rule on behalf of Prince William of Orange. On November 30, 1813, Prince William of Orange landed at the port of Scheveningen near The Hague, and the interim government proclaimed him Prince Sovereign.

The rapid advancements of small cavalry units in the Netherlands and the outbreak of the uprising showed that the liberation of the country was quite possible. It is crucial to emphasize the important role of General Benckendorff's actions. On November 21, the attack of Benckendorff's main forces began, but he was unable to take Deventer, since there was a French garrison - 800 people with 30 guns. Therefore, Benckendorff proposed to continue the offensive against Utrecht and Amsterdam, blocking this fortress. Representatives of the insurgent Amsterdamites came to Benckendorff, reporting that the city's residents were waiting for the Russian troops "with the greatest impatience and would not fail to help by all means to facilitate the entry of our (i.e. Russian) Cossacks into this capital." In the first weeks of the Napoleonic invasion, Benckendorff commanded the vanguard of the detachment of Baron Wintzingerode. On July 27, under his

leadership, the detachment made a brilliant attack in at Velizh. After the liberation of Moscow from the enemy, Benckendorf was appointed commandant of the ruined capital. During the period of the pursuit of the Napoleonic army, he distinguished himself in many cases, but most importantly, he took prisoner three generals and more than 6,000 Napoleonic soldiers.

In the campaign of 1813, becoming the head of the so-called "flying" detachments, Benckendorff first defeated the French at Tempelberg, for which he was awarded "George" III degree, then forced the enemy to surrender Fürstenwald. Soon after that he was in Berlin with his detachment. For the unparalleled courage shown during the three-day cover of the passage of the Russian troops to Dessau and Roskau, he was awarded a golden saber decorated with diamonds. After that - a rapid raid into Holland and a complete defeat of the enemy there, then Belgium - his detachment took the cities of Louvain and Mecheln, where 24 guns and 600 British prisoners were repulsed from the French army. Then, in 1814, there was Luttich (Liège), the battle of Krasnoye, where he commanded all the cavalry of Count Vorontsov. Awards followed one after another - in addition to "George" III and IV degrees, also "Anna" I degree, "Vladimir", several foreign orders. He had three swords for bravery. He ended the war with the rank of Major General. In March 1819 Benckendorff was appointed Chief of Staff of the Guards Corps.

The seemingly impeccable reputation of a warrior for the Fatherland, which put Benckendorff among the most outstanding military leaders, did not bring him that glory among fellow citizens that accompanied people who went through the crucible of the Patriotic War. Benckendorff did not manage to be called a "hero" neither during his life nor after his death. His portrait in the famous gallery of heroes of 1812 causes undisguised surprise among many visitors. But after all, he was a brave soldier and an excellent military leader. Although there are many human destinies in history, in which one-half of life seems to cancel the other. Benckendorff's life is a prime example of this.

"For the position I held, this was, of course, the most brilliant account of my 11 years of administration, and I think that I was almost the first of all the chiefs of the secret police who feared death ...".

Count Alexander Benckendorff died on a steamer taking him from Germany, where he was undergoing long-term treatment. He was over sixty. His wife was waiting for him in Falla, their estate near Reval (now Tallinn). Once the ship arrived, the count was already gone. This was the first grave in their cozy estate. In his study of the Castle of Falls, he kept a wooden fragment left over from the coffin of Alexander I, set in bronze in the form of a mausoleum.

The activities of Count Benckendorff as chief of gendarmes have been thoroughly studied. We are attracted by the first half of his life, in which he has earned his many awards not by the next five years of "immaculate service", but by the courage and bravery shown by him in the military campaigns of the first third of the XIX century. In the war of 1812, he was one of the first partisan commanders, covering the exit of the Russian army and the first commandant of liberated Moscow. In 1813-1814, Benckendorff distinguished himself in Belgium, taking the city of Breda. He received a golden weapon and is still an honorary citizen of the Dutch capital. In recent years, interest in Benckendorff's personality has grown. The above-listed works reveal the biographical and partly psychological portrait of Benckendorff.

His activities as commander of the Russian army in the Northern Netherlands vividly confirm his heroic efforts to fulfill the important mission of the Russian state. It should be emphasized that Russian troops entered the country as liberators, whose main goal was to defeat Napoleonic troops as well as to gain military support for the national liberation movement. In a letter to Alexander I, Wenzingerode wrote on November 23 that the troops were ordered to assure the Dutch about helping the Dutch citizens to free themselves from the French and maintain order in the country.

On November 24, at 7 o'clock in the morning, a Cossack detachment entered Amsterdam, where they were greeted with "loud jubilation and joy, as a friend and ally." The national liberation movement of the Dutch people merged more and more with the liberation campaign of the Russian troops. Under the joint onslaught of the insurgent inhabitants and the Russian units, the French locked themselves in fortresses, and for the most part of them, retreated to the south.

On November 28, Naryshkin's detachment drove the enemy out of Amersfoort and occupied Utrecht and then the Halfweg fortress. Despite many difficulties and the threat of the capture of Amsterdam by the French, Benckendorff's troops succeeded to undertake a risky passage by water to Amsterdam and liberate this city in the night from November 30 to December 1.

The Russian general was invited by the leaders of the Amsterdam magistrate to be present at the announcement from the balcony of the town hall of the appeal of the commissars general of the interim government, Kemper and Scholten, to the residents of Amsterdam about the restoration of the country's independence and the proclamation of William of Orange as prince-sovereign. The appearance of the main forces of the Russian detachment in Amsterdam was highly appreciated by the prince-sovereign and the head of the interim government Gogendorp, who in a letter to Benckendorff warmly thanked the general and assured him that he would find in the Dutch "full

of zeal and devotion assistants." . In early December, William of Orange visited Amsterdam, where a solemn ceremony for the final proclamation of the country's independence and the presentation of the Prince of Orange as its head was held. As part of the guard of honor on the streets of Amsterdam, along with the Dutch police, Russian huntsmen and Cossacks were lined up. This significant event ended the first stage of the struggle for the liberation of the Netherlands from Napoleonic rule.

Having become the prince-sovereign, William of Orange decided to send two letters to the Russian Emperor Alexander I, which are currently stored in the fund of the Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In his first letter dated December 6, 1813, Wilhelm wrote to Alexander I that "he is called to rule in the United Provinces by the unanimous expression of the will of the nation, which its own courage and the victorious armies of Your Imperial Majesty have just restored in the ranks of the independent peoples of Europe" and assured him of his readiness to assist the common cause of the allies". On December 7, William of Orange sent another message to Alexander I, in which the prince "expressed feelings of gratitude, both his own and the entire Dutch nation, for those important services rendered by the Russian troops during the glorious campaign for the liberation of Holland.”.

In December 1813, Alexander I was primarily concerned with the issues of the upcoming peace negotiations with Napoleon and the invasion of the allied armies in France. In this situation, he instructed Nesselrode to convey to Benckendorff that he is pleased with the behavior of the Russian troops in this country and welcomes the enthusiasm of its population."

The participation of Russian troops in the liberation of the Netherlands from Napoleonic rule and the restoration of the country's independence sharply increased the interest of the Dutch in Russia. This interest first arose back in the 16th century, since Holland had long maintained active trade relations with the Russian state. At the end of 1813, after the entry of Russian troops into Holland, a textbook-phrasebook, called "A guide to understand the Russian and the Cossack", was published in Amsterdam in both Dutch and Russian. In 1814, a former officer of the Prussian army, who once served in Russia, Karel von Plotto published a historical and ethnographic work called "The history of the Cossacks from the time of their origin to the present, with a description of their organization and place of residence.". The Dutch writer and historian Jacob Skheltema also soon published two books about Peter I's visit to Holland in 1697 and 1717, and about the arrival of Alexander I in the country in 1814., Later, he published a four-volume work on Russian-Dutch relations from ancient times to the time of Peter I.

Thus, in November-December 1813, with the decisive participation of the Russian troops, whose entry into the territory of the Netherlands contributed to the national liberation uprising, the Netherlands regained its independence and statehood. The fighting of the Russian troops - cavalymen, Cossacks, infantrymen, artillerymen – altogether contributed to the immediate liberation of the country and the prevention of a French counteroffensive, which could destroy the national liberation uprising of the Dutch people. These events made it possible to consolidate the Dutch statehood and form a national army capable of defending the country's freedom and independence in a very short amount time.