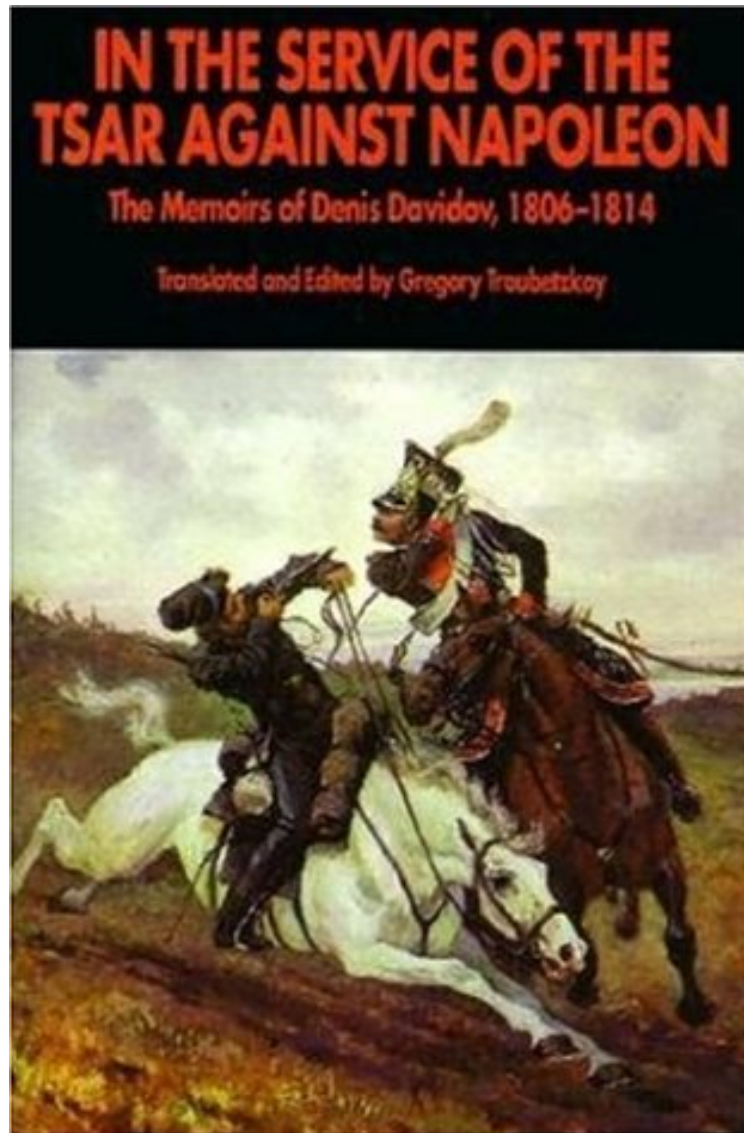


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## In the Service of the Tsar Against Napoleon: The Memoirs of Denis Davidov, 1806-1814

Gregory Troubetzkoy

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rare insight on warring against Napoleon by the Russians. The father of guerilla warfare is most credible and historic

in his own right. Great small and readable book. 6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. An outstanding translation of an important memoir! By J. David Markham In an era of dashing young military heroes, Denis Davidov was a hero's hero. He was, in some senses, a Renaissance Warrior: a man comfortable with the men on a battlefield, in a camp singing and telling stories, with the aristocratic leaders who were often both his friend and foe, and also comfortable in his continuous pursuit of ladies. Most unusually, and here is the essence of his Renaissance nature, Davidov was not only a warrior but was also a wonderful writer. His poetry and his prose were each popular in Russia in measure equal to his military heroism. Davidov was such an unusual man of his time that none other than Tolstoy used him as a model for the devil-may-care character Denisov in *War and Peace*. The great Russian poet Pushkin also remembered him, referring to him as a singer and a hero. Until now, Davidov's words were available only to readers of Russian. Now, thanks to the efforts of Gregory Troubetzkoy, they are brought to life in English. And to life they are indeed brought. Translation is not a science, but an art, and a bad translation can kill words as easily as a good translation can enliven them. This is an excellent translation: Davidov's humor, insight, and emotion literally pour from the pages of this book. Davidov was in some ways a rough individual, as he came through the ranks and made his reputation as a leader of irregular partisan guerrilla groups. He found it difficult to adhere to the more standard discipline of regular units. Yet he had a civilized, romantic nature about him as well. The campaign of 1812 was bitterly fought, and seen by many Russians as something of a holy war. As a result, prisoners were not always taken, especially by the partisan groups. Davidov was always careful, however, to obtain receipts for his prisoners, and he treated them with respect. Even in his youth, Davidov was aware of the political and other considerations that sometimes overrode the ideals and single-mindedness of youthful fervor. Just before the peace of Tilsit, he was informed of impending peace. At first, he was not pleased, as he wanted to avenge the Russian loss at the Battle of Friedland. When he saw the people who were close to his commander, however, he understood the reality of the situation: I galloped over to headquarters. There were crowds of people there: Englishmen, Swedes, Prussians, French Royalists, Russian military and civil servants who knew nothing of either military or civil service, men of intrigue and without employment. It resembled a market-place for political and military speculators whose previous hopes, plans and actions had already thrown them into bankruptcy? I looked around at the fashionable crowd that had gathered, reflecting that these were the very people who were recently so confident that Napoleon could be easily defeated? With hangers-on such as these, how could we even think of continuing our struggle with the enemy? I had stumbled into the midst of what was to me a new world? people who lived under a real roof, never giving a thought to what might be happening on the battlefield. How different from the world I had left a couple of hours ago, where men spent their time under open skies, facing bullets and cannonballs, geared up for endless fighting. Davidov's reputation mostly stems from his leadership of the Partisan activities against Napoleon's army in the 1812 Russian campaign. While it must be said that much of his success came against stragglers and soldiers weakened by the awful conditions experienced during the withdrawal from Russia, it is also true that his efforts, using only a few hundred mounted horsemen at a time, caused the French army a great deal of difficulty. His success must be measured not only in terms of casualties inflicted, but also in terms of the psychological damage done to those who survived. Davidov's descriptions of his 1812 campaign activities make for some of the best reading of that nature, and present a very different picture from that normally read by western readers. Davidov was a true Russian hero whose efforts, especially in 1812, were instrumental to Russian success. But it is his writing ability that brings his campaigns?and his insight?to life, and presents a view of this period only now available to the English-speaking public. Thanks to Troubetzkoy's lively translation, amateur and serious historians alike will want to read this book. J. David Markham Fellow and Executive Vice-President, International Napoleonic Society Author, *Napoleon's Road to Glory: Triumphs, Defeats and Immortality and Imperial Glory: The Bulletins of Napoleon's Grande Armée* 6 of 11 people found the following review helpful. Davidov's Memoirs By G BEHRENS Davidov is best known as a leader of Russian partisans during Napoleon's retreat from Moscow. One of the inspirations for his memoirs was Napoleon's subsequent denial of the importance of the partisans in this phase of the war. Unsurprisingly, then, the memoirs often seem argumentative, and present themselves as a mixture of personal experience, hearsay information, and analysis. The primary concern is with things that are worthy of being deemed "history" in the grand sense, and in order to make historical arguments, Davidov relies heavily on hearsay. Among his goals are (1) to document and to take credit for his own achievements as a leader of partisans; (2) to explain, to analyze and to critique strategic and tactical decisions of other leaders; (3) to explain important military events in terms of their less well-known causes; (4) to share his experience of famous military leaders (he gives a lengthy characterization of Suvorov, and describes his observations of Napoleon).

Denis Davidov was an officer of hussars, a partisan, a Russian hero and the inspiration for the character Denisov in Tolstoy's epic *War and Peace*. Here, for the very first time in English, are his captivating memoirs which, with dash and lan, convey the Russian perspective on this cataclysmic conflict. Davidov's memoirs cover the confrontation between the French and Russians in Prussia in 1806/7, including the horrific battle of Eylau; the Russian invasion of Finland in 1808; the French invasion of Russia in 1812; and the War of Liberation in Germany in 1813/14. The memoirs cover the 1812 campaign in particular in great detail as it was here that Davidov made his legendary

reputation. Gregory Troubetzkoy is an expert on Russian aspects of the Napoleonic Wars.

From Booklist Before World War II, it was the campaign to expel Napoleon from Russia in 1812 that was deemed the great patriotic struggle in Russian history. Troubetzkoy, a Florida resident, has written extensively on the Napoleonic wars. In editing the memoirs of Davidov, he provides an invaluable view of some critical campaigns from a Russian perspective. Davidov served as a partisan during the 1812 campaign, and his memoirs are characterized by a chilling intensity that fully conveys the savagery of the fighting. While his observations are inevitably one-sided and occasionally self-serving, they still display a deep understanding of the irony and even futility of war. This is a deeply stirring account of one man's experiences during one of the most important epochs in European history. Jay Freeman

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