

Warrior, Hero, Mentor: The Influence of Prince Peter Bagration on the Fictional Protagonists of *War and Peace*

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According to historian Alexander Mikaberidze, though Prince General Peter Bagration was one of the Russian army's most prominent commanders and an important historical and military figure at the beginning of the 19th century, he has been virtually overlooked by historians, both in Russia and the West, with very little scholarly biographical work in existence.¹ Similarly Leo Tolstoy in his epic, *War and Peace*, calls Prince Bagration "the hero of heroes,"² while spending little time developing his character, especially when compared to other significant historical figures such as Napoleon Bonaparte and Prince General Mikhail Kutuzov. Why the discrepancy between Bagration's significance as a person – as a military leader – and the apparent inattention given to him by scholars as well as Tolstoy? For answers to this question with regard to the scholarly historical treatment of Bagration, we look to historians such as Mikaberidze. On the other hand, when we begin to address the question of Tolstoy's treatment of Prince Peter, we encounter one of the cruxes of *War and Peace*, which is how to understand the roles of the novel's historical figures, particularly in relation to its fictional characters.

Inasmuch as *War and Peace* is a work of historical fiction, Tolstoy has not simply painted a fictional narrative on the canvas of history. Rather he has spun the threads of the lives of historical figures, imagined characters, fictitious circumstances and historical details and events into a fabric that blurs the distinctions between fact and fiction, and which is more important. We have no doubt, for instance, about the historical Napoleon's role in the novel: he is the Emperor of France in command of the invading French forces. Yet when Tolstoy describes the Emperor's "white hands" (II.2.21), we are not so concerned with the historical accuracy of the description as we are with the relevance of Napoleon's white hands to Prince Andrei, or other characters, also having "white hands," (I.1.5). The interdependence of these threads exacerbates the problem of determining an historical character's literary value. Admittedly, one can discern Tolstoy's artistic purpose for some of these characters more readily than others. For example, Napoleon serves as an arch antagonist over the whole work, while Barclay de Tolly helps Tolstoy draw lines between the foreign and Russian factions within the high command, and Tolstoy's characterization of Kutuzov promotes his argument refuting the "great man" theory of history. The role of General Prince Peter Bagration as a literary character is less apparent. What are his character's contributions to Tolstoy's development of the plots, characters, themes and theories of the novel? We might ask how this figure of Bagration, through his biography and Tolstoy's characterizations, influences the work.

¹ Mikaberidze, "Lion of the Russian Army," xvi-xx.

² Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, Vol. II, Part 1, Ch. 2. Subsequent citations of this text will be made parenthetically in line, e.g. (II.1.2).

To address this question in a focused way, we will explore General Bagration's influence and effect on the development of the characters of two of Tolstoy's protagonists, Count Nikolai Rostov and Prince Andrei Bolkonsky, by analyzing scenes from *War and Peace* in which these two fictional characters appear within Bagration's sphere of influence. First, however, we will examine elements of Bagration's biography that are germane to developing something of a reader's back story for Bagration as a literary character. This biographical examination will include comparisons of the historical facts to Tolstoy's rendering of Prince Peter. In addition, we will look for relevant or interesting parallels between Bagration's biography and Tolstoy's characterizations of the protagonists Rostov and Bolkonsky, as well as Pierre Bezukhov, though to a lesser extent.

My aim in this paper is to show that a reading of *War and Peace* that accounts for the historical background of Prince Peter Bagration lends credibility to the novel's narratives and the development of at least two of the work's most important fictional characters, Nikolai Rostov and Prince Andrei Bolkonsky. Furthermore, the parallels we draw between the lives of Bagration and each of the protagonists to be examined will contribute to the realism of Tolstoy's project. Moreover, our analysis will support the notion that where Tolstoy characterizes Bagration's life and actions contrary to historical evidence, he tends to do so in a pejorative way that underplays the significance of Prince Peter's contribution, in order to maintain a path for his argument against the "great man" theory of history.

A word about my sources for this essay – there being no published biography of Bagration in English, I have relied to a great extent on the doctoral dissertation of Alexander Mikaberidze for the details of Bagration's story. I should note that Mikaberidze is clearly a champion of Prince Peter, perhaps relating to him as a fellow Georgian. I have relied on historian Dominic Lieven's work on the Russian Patriotic War of 1812 to substantiate or contradict Mikaberidze where warranted. Primary sources available in English, mainly memoirs by men who served with him in military campaigns from 1805-12, have proven invaluable in putting "flesh on the bones" of this interesting character.

BACK STORY OF A HERO

Born into a family of Georgian nobility that emigrated to Russia, Peter Ivanovich Bagration enlisted in the Russian army at age seventeen.³ Bagration attended a school for the children of garrison officers for one year, where he studied mathematics, Russian and German.⁴ Due in large part to his family's modest means, this was the whole of Bagration's formal education.⁵ However, a contemporary of his later military years recalled that "[Bagration] drew his knowledge from experience, his conclusions from events and was never guided by rules or science. Sometimes he was at fault, however, his opinion was quite often sound."⁶ Notably he

³ Mikaberidze, "Lion of the Russian Army," 5-8.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶ Yermolov, *The Czar's General*, 130.

did not learn French,⁷ though he grew up with several other languages.⁸ Tolstoy's protagonists, including Rostov, Prince Andrei and Pierre, on the other hand, do speak French.

In 1783, following his year in school, Bagration joined an infantry regiment as a supernumerary.⁹ When we compare the circumstances of his enlistment to those of the young Nikolai Rostov, we can see the difference in social status between the two at comparable stages of their lives. As explained by Nikolai's father, the old count, "[O]ut of friendship...; he's leaving both the university and his old father: he's going into the army, *ma chère*... [a]nd *a post had already been prepared for him in the archives and all* (emphasis added)" (I.1.9). But then Nikolai replies to his father, "Not at all out of friendship.... It's not friendship, I simply feel a calling for military service." And he says further, "[I]f you don't want to let me go, I'll stay. But I know I'm not good for anything but military service; I'm not a diplomat, not a functionary, I'm unable to hide my feelings" (I.1.9). Nikolai was ensured a place in the military by his position in society, whereas Bagration, having no civil service position prepared for him, had to petition for enlistment.¹⁰ And yet we can begin to imagine some congruence of feelings between the two young men as they were both drawn to the military.

Prince Peter spent the rest of his life in the Russian army. I will not recount all of the details of his service, especially his exploits in well over one hundred battles and combats throughout his career. I will, however, address later in this essay certain aspects of his roles in several crucial battles that helped shape his reputation, specifically Schöngrabern, Austerlitz and Borodino. At Schöngrabern and Austerlitz, we will find Nikolai and Prince Andrei in their closest interactions with Bagration. Nevertheless, it is worth noting here the reasons for Bagration's rapid rise through the ranks. Shortly after his enlistment he was promoted to private, and by 1799, just sixteen years later, he had been promoted to major general, having commanded a battalion and served as chief of his regiment.¹¹ According to Mikaberidze:

[U]nlike many of his peers, who never went through active service, Bagration served in various regiments and earned his promotions on the basis of merit. He acquired extensive knowledge of the tactics and logistics and gained valuable experience in maintaining and training the troops. During [a] campaign in Poland, Bagration proved himself as a daring commander, known for his composure and bravery as well as good tactics.¹²

⁷ This fact would vex him later in life, particularly during his struggles with Czar Alexander over the best strategy for the campaign of 1812, when his aide would write letters to Alexander and French so Bagration could not read them. Mikaberidze, "Lion of the Russian Army," 734.

⁸ Mikaberidze, "Lion of the Russian Army," 7. "Peter's father was fluent in... Persian, Turkish, Armenian and Georgian, and apparently taught them to his sons" (Ibid.).

⁹ Mikaberidze "Lion of the Russian Army," 9.

¹⁰ See *ibid.*, 8, for details on Bagration's efforts to enlist.

¹¹ Mikaberidze, "Lion of the Russian Army," 9-13.

¹² *Ibid.*, 14.

In 1799, Bagration's commander and mentor during the Second Coalition's campaign in Italy and the Alps, General A. V. Suvorov wrote to Czar Paul, "Prince Bagration is one of the best generals in many aspects, who deserves to receive the highest awards."¹³

Bagration's performance in the campaigns in Italy and Switzerland, where he played a "significant role on many occasions,"¹⁴ earned him the highest praise of his superiors and the status of national hero. According to Suvorov, he "demonstrat[ed] courageous character and most praiseworthy behavior in all of the actions of the campaign."¹⁵ Moreover, the "campaign surrounded Bagration with an aureole of greatness that followed him for the rest of his life."¹⁶ As a contemporary and friend recalled, "Bagration returned from Italy in the glow of fame, a sparkle of honours."¹⁷ He was famous and found himself thrust into the highest social circles, including not infrequent invitations to the palace in St. Petersburg and meetings with members of the royal family.¹⁸ History repeated itself in 1805-6. After Bagration's heroics at Schöngrabern, "Austerlitz brought him even more glory, even though it was a military defeat for the Russian army."¹⁹ Bagration's status as a national hero was confirmed when he was awarded the Order of St. George (2nd class) by Czar Alexander in St. Petersburg in 1806.²⁰ Just as he was celebrated on his return from the Alps in 1800, in early 1806, he attended many celebrations in his honor and appeared in public with the emperor.²¹

One of these celebrations was the banquet held in his honor at the English Club in Moscow, which was immortalized by Tolstoy in *War and Peace*. Here we have a rare opportunity to compare Tolstoy's characterization of Bagration, his appearance and mannerisms, directly to the impressions of historical eyewitnesses, which is demonstrated in the table below.

Tolstoy

"Bagration appeared... in a trim new uniform with Russian and foreign decorations and the star of St. George on his left breast. He had evidently had his hair and side-whiskers trimmed just before the dinner, which changed his physiognomy to its disadvantage. On his face there was something naïvely festive, which, in combination with his firm, manly features, even gave his face a somewhat

Eyewitnesses

Bagration's appearance was "[b]elow the middle stature, of a dark complexion, deeply tinged with the climates in which he has served. His eyes [are] small, quick and penetrating. His nose, a very high aquiline; and his face perfectly Georgian (he being of that country), expresses the most charming affability and sweetness. His demeanor is in unison with his countenance, being

¹³ Suvorov to Paul, 27 May 1799, *Correspondence of Suvorov*, 244; A.V. Suvorov: *Documents*, IV, 102, quoted in Mikaberidze, "Lion of the Russian Army," 61.

¹⁴ Mikaberidze, "Lion of the Russian Army," 177.

¹⁵ Suvorov to Paul, 14 October 1799, A.V. Suvorov: *Documents*, IV, 359, quoted in Mikaberidze, "Lion of the Russian Army," 178.

¹⁶ Mikaberidze, "Lion of the Russian Army," 178.

¹⁷ Yermolov, *The Czar's General*, 130.

¹⁸ Mikaberidze, "Lion of the Russian Army," 182

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 295.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 296.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 297.

comical expression” (II.1.3).

“He walked over the parquet of the reception hall bashfully and awkwardly, not knowing what to do with his hands; it was easier and more usual for him to walk under bullets over a plowed field, as he had walked ahead of the Kursky regiment at Schöngraben” (ibid.).

“Bagration, recognizing [Nikolai Rostov], spoke a few incoherent, awkward words, like all the words he spoke that day” (ibid.).

demonstrative of modesty as winning as it is admirable in so idolized a character. He was dressed in a uniform wholly of green, covered with the insignia of many orders, stars and a red ribbon.”²²

Bagration had “a typical Georgian appearance: large aquiline nose, arched brows, his eyes were keen and quick; however, I thought his movements were awkward.”²³

On meeting Bagration, Sir Ker Porter was impressed and “characterized Prince Peter as ‘not only one of the first of military heroes, but in his character as a man, an honor to human nature.’”²⁴

A cursory parsing of these texts will highlight the similarities and some interesting differences between the historical and Tolstoyan views. Tolstoy seems to concur with the eyewitnesses regarding the objective features of Bagration’s appearance. For instance, his uniform is covered with decorations in both cases. We notice differences, however, when comparing his more subjective qualities. Where Tolstoy finds disadvantage in Bagration’s physiognomy, the eyewitness notes that his face “expresses the most charming affability and sweetness.” And Tolstoy’s attribution of “a somewhat comical expression” is not wholly consistent with the “countenance... demonstrative of modesty as winning as it is admirable” related by the eyewitness. Similarly, Tolstoy’s characterization of Bagration’s speech as incoherent and awkward seems at odds with the eyewitness’s impressions. On the other hand, Tolstoy’s description of the Prince’s awkward hand movements and walking does resonate with the observation of one eyewitness that “his movements were awkward.” On the whole though, it seems that Tolstoy presents Bagration as a character who is uncomfortable and awkward in the public spotlight. That view is difficult to reconcile with what we know about Bagration’s experience in numerous public appearances and honorific events.

With regard to other details of the banquet, its lavishness, the food served, the setting, the verses spoken, the song sung, and so forth, Tolstoy’s account in *War and Peace* and the historical record are in accord.²⁵ A more problematic aspect of the novel’s narrative of the dinner at the English Club has to do with the rationale given for honoring Bagration at all. While acknowledging that Prince Bagration is the “hero of heroes,” Tolstoy goes further.

²² Porter, *Travelling Sketches in Russia and Sweden*, 154.

²³ Zhikharev, *Recollections*, 162, quoted in Mikaberidze, “Lion of the Russian Army,” 298, note 181.

²⁴ Porter, *Travelling Sketches in Russia and Sweden*, 154.

²⁵ Compare Mikaberidze, “Lion of the Russian Army,” 297-98 to Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, II.1.3.

What contributed to the choice of Bagration as hero in Moscow was that he had no Moscow connections and was an outsider. In his person, honor was paid to the simple Russian fighting soldier, without connections or intrigues, and still associated through memories of the Italian campaign with the name of Suvorov. Besides, rendering him such honors was the best way of showing dislike and disapproval of Kutuzov. (II.1.2)

The idea expressed here that Prince Peter was relatively unknown in Moscow and was thus serving merely as a convenient proxy for the “simple Russian fighting soldier” is a distortion of the historical record that tends to diminish the importance of his role, and is somewhat disparaging to Bagration’s reputation. What we know about him is that in addition to the functions he had attended in St. Petersburg, Bagration spent several weeks in Moscow following the banquet at the English Club, attending a number of similar events.²⁶ Moreover, he had not only been embraced by Russian society as a national hero, he had achieved the highest stature in the army and was idolized by officers and rank-and-file alike.²⁷ He was praised in verse, writer Grigory Derzhavin calling him *Bog-rati-on*, meaning “the God of the army he is.”²⁸ My point here is not to emphasize Tolstoy’s potential inaccuracies in order to discredit his story, but to suggest we should be on the lookout for similar character slights as a pattern of these may point to a literary device in *War and Peace*.

Prince Peter’s military success earned him material rewards as well. In early 1800 Czar Paul gave him a large estate in Lithuania for his role in the Swiss Campaign.²⁹ Shortly thereafter Paul appointed Bagration *chef* and commander of the Life Guard Jager Battalion charged with the protection of the royal family.³⁰ This was a high honor indeed as the chef position in the lifeguard regiments was typically filled by members of the emperor’s family.³¹ Preceded by his popularity and fame, Bagration attended many balls and receptions where his “gentle, gracious, generous [and] chivalrous...”³² nature was attractive to women.³³ He drew the attention of Catherine Pavlovna Skavronsky, considered “one of the most beautiful ladies of St. Petersburg” and “one of the most desirable brides in the country.”³⁴ Bagration became infatuated with Catherine Skavronsky as she pursued him from the beginning. But when he finally made overtures, she rejected him and broke his heart.³⁵ Czar Paul learned of their affair and arranged their marriage, contrary to both of their wishes.³⁶ The marriage was a disaster, though Prince

²⁶ Mikaberidze, “Lion of the Russian Army,” 299.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 302-3.

²⁸ G.R. Derzhavin, *Sochineniya* [Compilation of Writings], (St. Petersburg, 1865) II, 579, quoted in Mikaberidze, “Lion of the Russian Army,” 301,835.

²⁹ Mikaberidze, “Lion of the Russian Army,” 183.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 184.

³² Wilson, *Narrative of Events*, 156.

³³ Mikaberidze, “Lion of the Russian Army,” 187.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 186, 187.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 188.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

Peter's feelings for Catherine lasted the rest of his life.³⁷ Catherine, on the other hand, left Bagration to travel Europe.³⁸ She was "cynical, haughty and extravagant" "and longed for the glittering life of society."³⁹ Catherine's extravagance cost Bagration dearly, adding to his burden of debt, which was already substantial due to his inability to manage money and his generosity.

Life in the capital and an extravagant wife cost Bagration his fortune. ... Catherine Bagration's extravagant spending was out of control and the debts of the family mounted. In addition, Bagration was fond of his troops and often spent his own money on them. As the chef of the Life Guard battalion, he had to live generously to maintain his status and acquaintances. His new acquaintances in the upper society only helped to spend lavishly.⁴⁰

According to his contemporary and friend, Alexey Yermolov, "the extravagance of his friends satisfied him and he gained the habit of not limiting himself by moderation."⁴¹ In other words, frugality was not Bagration's strong suit.

Readers of *War and Peace* may find striking similarities between Catherine Bagration and Tolstoy's Princess Eléna Vassílievna (Hélène) Kurágin. Yermolov and another contemporary had both referred to Catherine as "beautiful,"⁴² while Tolstoy describes Hélène as "beautiful" the first five times he mentions her name during Anna Scherer's soirée.⁴³ Moreover, though Pierre Bezukhov's marriage to Hélène was not arranged as openly as Bagration's to Catherine, it was certainly orchestrated by Hélène's father, Prince Vassily, to suit his own purposes. Impatient for Pierre to propose to his daughter, "Prince Vassily had to decide things with Pierre, who ... was ridiculous, agitated, and stupid (as a man in love ought to be) in Hélène's presence, but had still not made a proposal." So he thought, "The day after tomorrow is [Hélène's] name day. I'll invite people, and if he doesn't understand what he ought to do, then it will be my business. Yes, my business. I'm a father!" (I.3.2). Pierre himself was ambivalent at best about the situation as "he decided that marriage to Hélène would be a misfortune and that he must avoid her and go away" (I.3.2). Of course he does not go away and eventually becomes entrapped by Prince Vassily. After dinner on Hélène's name day Vassily's wife informs him that nothing has changed between Pierre and Hélène. Vassily then effects his coup de grace.

[He] frowned, his mouth twisted to one side, his cheeks twitched with an unpleasant, coarse expression peculiar to him; he roused himself, got up, threw his head back, and

³⁷ Ibid., 189.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 190.

⁴¹ Yermolov, *The Czar's General*, 130.

⁴² Ibid., 130. Alexander Langeron, *Recollections*, Russkaya starina, 134(1908): 673, quoted in Mikaberidze, 190.

⁴³ Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, I.1.2-3. Tolstoy can scarcely let go of the adjective in relation to Helene. She has a "beautiful face" and "beautiful head," during that soirée. Moreover, she is described as "beautiful" and "*belle*" when she reappears again at Anna Scherer's in I.3.1. The title of most seductive woman went to "[t]he young little princess Bolkonsky, known as *la femme la plus séduisante de Pétersbourg*" (I.1.2).

with a resolute stride walked past the ladies into the small drawing room. He strode quickly, joyfully up to Pierre. The prince's expression was so extraordinarily joyful that Pierre stood up, frightened, when he saw him.

"Thank God!" he said. "My wife has told me everything." He embraced Pierre with one arm, his daughter with the other. "[Hélène], my friend! I'm very, very glad." His voice quavered. "I loved your [Pierre's] father... and she will be a good wife to you... God bless you!..." (I.3.2)

Another similarity we can note is the vindictive separation of husband and wife, with the consequence of many debts accruing to the husband. Moreover, though we could compare the unseemly qualities of Catherine Bagration to Hélène, we need not explore the details of all of Hélène's foibles here. In this vein there is one notable parallel, however, which is the open promiscuity and infidelity of both women. Hélène's affairs are both rumored and known, the most notorious of these being her alleged liaison with Dólokhov. In addition, we can infer her dalliance with Boris Drubetskoy.

Among the many young men who daily visited Hélène, Boris ... was ... the most intimate person in the Bezukhovs' house. Hélène called him *mon page* and treated him like a child. She addressed him with the same smile as she did everyone else, but sometimes Pierre found it unpleasant to see that smile. Boris treated Pierre with a special, dignified, and sad deference. This nuance of deference also troubled Pierre. Pierre had suffered so painfully three years ago from the offense inflicted on him by his wife that he now protected himself from the possibility of a similar offense, first, by not being his wife's husband, and second, by not allowing himself to suspect. (II.3.9)

To Bagration's embarrassment, Catherine struck up a more public love affair with Clemence Metternich, by whom she eventually bore a child who took Bagration's name. What is more, she had an affair with Alexander I himself. She later married an Austrian officer and died while giving birth to his child.⁴⁴ These exploits recall Hélène's open promiscuity in Petersburg and her intrigues to marry one of her lovers without divorcing Pierre.

Hélène, having returned with the court from Vilno to Petersburg, found herself in a difficult situation.

In Petersburg Hélène enjoyed the special patronage of a dignitary who occupied one of the highest posts in the state. In Vilno she had become close with a young foreign prince. When she returned to Petersburg, both the prince and the dignitary were there, both claimed their rights, and Hélène was faced with a new task in her career: to maintain her close relations with them both without offending either.

What would have seemed difficult and even impossible for another woman, never once made Countess Bezukhov stop and think – clearly it was not in vain that she enjoyed the reputation of a most intelligent woman. If she had begun to conceal her actions, to extricate herself by cunning from an awkward situation, she would thereby have spoiled things for herself, acknowledging herself guilty; but Hélène, on the contrary, like a truly

⁴⁴ Mikaberidze, "Lion of the Russian Army," 195-97.

great person who can do whatever she likes, at once placed herself in the position of being right, in which she sincerely believed, and all the others in the position of being wrong. (III.3.6)

In parallel to Catherine's predicament, H el ene died while pregnant.

A final, though not insignificant, element of Prince Bagration's biography is his intimate affair with Grand Duchess Catherine Pavlovna, Alexander's younger sister, which began in earnest on his return from Finland in 1809.⁴⁵ Their relationship lasted until his death in 1812 and at times was a source of embarrassment for the royal family. One might say that like Pierre Bezukhov, Bagration found true love in spite of – in the face of – a failed marriage to an altogether unsavory woman. He also held in common with Pierre a distinct inability to manage money and his estates, in addition to a wife who accumulated debts on his behalf. Prince Peter was constantly accumulating and repaying debt until ultimately, and ironically given how events would unfold in the campaign of 1812, he obtained 9,000 rubles from the treasury with the help of the Minister of War, Barclay de Tolly.⁴⁶

NIKOLAI ROSTOV, THE PROT EG E

In 1805, Nikolai Rostov joined the Pavlogradsky hussar regiment (I.1.9). These same Pavlograd hussars were under Prince Bagration's command throughout the campaign against the French in Austria, at least through the Battle of Austerlitz in 1805.⁴⁷ Thus, when Nikolai joins the regiment near Braunau, he has already come within Bagration's "sphere of influence," if not yet his immediate proximity. Nikolai's first taste of battle comes at the bridge over the Enns, where he anticipates his first engagement.

Rostov, standing on the left flank, on his slightly lame but imposing Little Rook, had the happy air of a schoolboy called up before a large public at an examination in which he is sure he will distinguish himself. He looked around at them all serenely and brightly, as if asking them to pay attention to how calmly he stood under fire. But on his face, too, that same trait of something new and stern appeared, against his will, around the mouth. (I.2.8)

Self-confident and impatient, how much this sounds like the recollection of another young hussar who went on to become a prot eg e of Bagration, Denis Davidov. As Davidov recalled in his memoirs, "The affair at Wolfsdorf was the first engagement of my long military career. I shall never forget the impatience with which I awaited the first shots of the actual fighting. As if unsure of my own courage, I tried to emulate the highest spirits of the officers...."⁴⁸ Bagration's name is first mentioned by Tolstoy during confusion among the regiment's leaders about orders

⁴⁵ Ibid., 198, 480; Lieven, *Russia Against Napoleon*, Ch. 5, Kindle location 2781.

⁴⁶ Mikaberidze, "Lion of the Russian Army," 191.

⁴⁷ Ibid., chapters 7-9. The footnotes in the pages of these chapters provide detailed troop deployments for each battle.

⁴⁸ Davidov, *Service of the Tsar*, 26.

to burn the bridge. As the officers bicker over who told whom to do what, Bagration's orderly arrives to say, "[T]he prince told me: 'Go and tell the colonel that the hussars must turn back quickly and set fire to the bridge'" (I.2.8). In this scene it appears that the invocation of Bagration's title and orders settles all disputes. There is little in the historical record to indicate any such confusion existed in reality. With the French in hot pursuit of the Russian rearguard, "[Bagration] finally dispatched dismounted Pavlograd Hussars, who destroyed the bridge under the enemy fire."⁴⁹

We next encounter Nikolai in Bagration's deployment at Schöngrabern. As the Russian army continued its retreat from Austria, the commander-in-chief, Prince General Kutuzov received intelligence that gave him concern that the French army would be able to cut off his retreat if it was not slowed down.⁵⁰ Kutuzov dispatched a detachment under Prince Peter to Hollabrunn to engage and detain the enemy. "To avoid a battle which might have been fatal to [the Russian army] on account of enemy superiority, Kutuzov decided to deploy Bagration's rearguard and left it near the town of Hollabrunn."⁵¹ However, "He [Bagration] found the terrain there [Hollabrunn] disadvantageous for the defence so he moved his troops three miles northward to a small village of Schongrabern."⁵² Bagration deployed the Pavlograd Hussars on his left flank, which Tolstoy accurately reported.⁵³ Rostov, once again "sensing that the time had come at last to experience the delight of an attack," charges ahead of everyone but is knocked to the ground when his horse is shot (I.2.19). With his shoulder slightly damaged, he becomes afraid of the approaching French soldiers, throws his pistol at them, then runs away – a successful escape into the bushes, where he met the Russian infantry (I.2.19). After his escape, Rostov finds that the men he is with are surrounded: "'We're surrounded! Cut off! Lost!' cried the voices of running men" (I.2.20). Indeed, the "Pavlograd Hussar, Podolsk and Azov Regiments were surrounded and suffered heavy casualties before cutting their way back to Russian positions."⁵⁴ But then Tolstoy has Nikolai witness an interesting spectacle.

The regimental commander, the moment he heard shooting and cries behind him, knew that something terrible had happened to his regiment, and the thought that he, an exemplary officer, with many years of service, to blame for nothing, might be blamed before his superiors for negligence or inefficiency, struck him so much that, at that same moment, forgetting ... his own dignity as a general, and above all totally forgetting danger and the sense of self-preservation, he gripped the pommel, spurred his horse, and galloped off to his regiment under a hail of bullets that poured down on but luckily missed him. He wanted one thing: to find out what was going on, and help to rectify at all costs any error, if there was one, on his part, so that he, an exemplary officer, with twenty-two years of service, and never reprimanded for anything, would not be blamed for it. (I.2.20)

⁴⁹ Mikaberidze, "Lion of the Russian Army," 221.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁵¹ Yermolov, *The Czar's General*, 51.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 51, note 35.

⁵³ Mikaberidze, "Lion of the Russian Army," 234. Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, I.2.19.

⁵⁴ Mikaberidze, "Lion of the Russian Army," 241.

I have been unable to find evidence for this incident in the historic record, which as such is not problematic because we do not intend here to hold Tolstoy to historical accuracy.⁵⁵ What is interesting about this for our purposes is that “[t]he Russians fought with remarkable ferocity, encouraged by Bagration, who *galloped between the units in the front line* (emphasis added).”⁵⁶ Owing to Major General Selikhov’s stupidity, “most of the troops were captured and killed, and savage fighting raged for some time.”⁵⁷ It seems unlikely that Tolstoy would have been describing Bagration’s ride in the passage above, as surely he would have mentioned it. Nevertheless, as stated previously, Bagration entered the military service in 1783 and thus by the time of Schöngrabern, he had served twenty-two years with an exemplary record.

The last scene featuring Nikolai Rostov that we will analyze is set at Austerlitz, the evening before and the day of the battle. But in preparation for that scene, we note a relevant exchange between Nikolai and Boris Drubetskóy. A letter had been delivered to Rostov recommending him to Prince Bagration. He casts the letter to the floor, prompting Boris to question his action.

“Why did you throw it on the floor?” asked Boris.
“It’s some sort of letter of recommendation, what the devil is a letter to me!”
... “You need this letter very much.”
“I don’t need anything, and I won’t go and be anybody’s adjutant.”
“Why not?” asked Boris.
“It’s a lackey’s job.”
“You’re still the same dreamer, I see,” said Boris, shaking his head. (I.3.7)

We next find Rostov on the picket line the evening before Austerlitz, where, in confirmation of Boris’s assessment, he is dreaming: “His eyes kept closing, and in his imagination the sovereign appeared, then Denisov, then Moscow memories...” (1.3.13). Drifting in and out of his dream state, Nikolai fantasizes about meeting the sovereign. Bagration arrives and sends Rostov on a scouting mission, after which Nikolai, desperate to get out of the reserves and into the front lines, speaks directly to the Prince.

“Your Excellency,” said Rostov, “allow me to make a request.”
“What is it?”
“Tomorrow our squadron is assigned to the reserves. Allow me to request that you attach me to the first squadron.”
...
“Ah, very well. Stay with me as an orderly officer.”
“So I’ll be counting on it, Your Excellency.”
“I will give the order.”

⁵⁵ It is possible that the “regimental commander” in this vignette refers to Major General Selikhov, whom Yermolov charges with incompetence in this action. Yermolov, *The Czar's General*, 33.

⁵⁶ Mikaberidze, “Lion of the Russian Army,” 241.

⁵⁷ Yermolov, *Memoirs*, 48-9, quoted in Mikaberidze, “Lion of the Russian Army,” 242.

“Tomorrow,” thought Rostov, “I may very well be sent on some sort of mission to the sovereign. Thank God!” (I.3.13)

Once again Denis Davidov’s words seem to capture Nikolai’s feelings in this moment. “As adjutant to Prince Bagration and, therefore, without a command of my own, I begged to be sent to the front line, ostensibly to keep track of enemy movements, but really to prance about on my horse, fire my pistol, flourish my sword, and (if the chance arose) hack away at the enemy. I felt immensely proud of myself and excited at everything going on around me.”⁵⁸ With his enthusiasm and impatience to test his mettle, the young hussar longs for opportunity and guidance and finds both in Prince Peter. “As a hussar company commander I hungered for a hot engagement. According to my strategy it was absolutely necessary, and its likelihood was guaranteed by the fearless nature of the prince....”⁵⁹

The following morning Bagration keeps his word to Rostov:

At nine o’clock, the action had not yet begun for Bagration on the right flank.... [W]ishing to avert responsibility from himself, Prince Bagration suggested to Dolgorukov that he send to ask the commander in chief. Bagration knew that, with a stretch of nearly six miles separating one flank from the other, if the messenger was not killed (which was very probable), and even if he found the commander in chief, which would be quite difficult, he would not come back before evening.

Bagration looked over his suite with his big, expressionless, sleepy eyes, and Rostov’s childlike face, involuntarily transfixed with excitement and hope, was the first thing that struck his eye. He sent him. (I.3.17)

Likewise when Denis Davidov requested a special assignment in Finland, “Bagration responded positively and approvingly to my request. The impulsive nature of youth, and the hunger for military adventure, found a ready echo in his heart.”⁶⁰

Tolstoy, on the other hand, does appear to demean Bagration somewhat in the passage above where he asserts that Prince Peter wanted to “avert responsibility from himself” and avoid participation in any battle that day. This is the second instance in which we notice Tolstoy debasing, however indirectly, Prince Bagration’s character and reputation, the first instance being Tolstoy’s description of the circumstances around the English Club banquet.

Finally we should note here that Rostov’s final substantive appearance in a battle scene is at Ostrovno, where his hussar regiment was not under Bagration’s command,⁶¹ but that of Count Osterman-Tolstoy. In this scene, Nikolai no longer feels his former fear before the battle as he has learned to control his emotions (III.1.14). When he senses the right time to attack with his hunter’s sense, he leads his comrades in charging the enemy “[w]ith the feeling with which he raced to intercept a wolf” (III.1.15). “A moment later Rostov’s horse struck the [French]

⁵⁸ Davidov, *Service of the Tsar*, 27.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁶¹ This is consistent with historical accounts of the deployment of the Pavlograd Hussars. Mikaberidze, “Lion of the Russian Army,” 207.

officer's horse in the rump with its breast, almost knocking it down, and at the same moment Rostov, not knowing why himself, raised his saber and struck the Frenchman with it. The moment he did this, all Rostov's animation suddenly vanished" (III.1.15). This is a crucial moment for Nikolai. He leaves the scene "experiencing some unpleasant feeling which wrung his heart," and "as if ashamed of something" (III.1.15). Confronted with the reality of having tried to kill another human being, his conception of heroism is shaken.

"So they're even more afraid than we are!" he thought. "So that's all there is to so-called heroism? And did I really do it for the fatherland? And what harm had he [the French soldier] done...? But how frightened he was! He thought I'd kill him. Why should I kill him? My hand faltered. And they gave me the St. George Cross. I understand nothing, nothing!"

It is notable for our purposes that Rostov has arrived at this moment of ambivalence about being a warrior outside the sphere of Prince Bagration's influence. While under Bagration's deployment and direct command, Rostov was able to confront his fear and to witness the bravery of others. Much like the historical hussar Denis Davidov, who was influenced most by Prince Bagration, in whom Davidov "sensed [a] moral strength and flashes of genius concealed under an outward calm: they would truly catch fire and erupt on the battlefield,"⁶² Nikolai was given an opportunity to realize his dream of becoming a warrior, culminating at the battle of Austerlitz.

All his [Nikolai's] wishes were being fulfilled that morning: general battle was to be given, he was to take part in it; moreover, he was an orderly officer of the bravest of generals; moreover, he was going with a message to Kutuzov and maybe to the sovereign himself. The morning was bright, the horse under him was good. He felt joyful and happy. (I.3.17)

Though Rostov remains in military service until the death of his father (Epilogue.1.5), after Ostrovno, he appears in no more battles.⁶³ As regards his career as warrior, we may discern a certain parallel: as in the battlefield scene at Ostrovno, at the end of the famous hunting scene, contrary to his initial desire and intent, he did not kill the wolf (II.4.5).

Thus we see that with Rostov, Bagration shares a calling to the military from a young age. A generation older than the young Nikolai, Prince Peter became his model for behavior on the battlefield, much in the way he mentored the real-life young hussar Denis Davidov. Bagration also modeled bravery for Nikolai, and at the point when Rostov found his own courage in battle leading to his first ambivalence about what it meant to be in war – to kill another person, he had moved beyond the influence of Bagration.

⁶² Davidov, *Service of the Tsar*, 26.

⁶³ Nikolai at this point finds himself deep in debt, much like Bagration, though Nikolai's debts are not due to his own neglect, but to his father's.

PRINCE ANDREI WITH BAGRATION

Prince Andrei Bolkonsky took a different route to the military from his friend, the young Nikolai Rostov. Instead of enlisting as Rostov did, and in fact as Bagration had, in 1805 Prince Andrei joined the staff of Commander in Chief Prince Mikhail Kutuzov, becoming one of the Commander's favorite adjutants (I.2.3). When Kutuzov dispatches Bagration to Hollabrunn, Andrei is granted his request to join Prince Peter. "Bagration... received him with a superior officer's special distinction and indulgence... and allowed him full freedom to stay by him during the battle or to supervise the order of retreat in the rear guard..." (I.2.15). The warmth of his reception is consistent with the recollections of Denis Davidov, who served as an adjutant to Bagration.⁶⁴ Bolkonsky then goes on extensive tour of the front lines to gain an understanding of the disposition of the Russian forces at Schöngrabern, during which he encounters the fictional artillery commander, Captain Tushin (I.2.15-16). Eventually Prince Andrei rejoins Bagration as the battle begins.

There are two aspects of this scene to discuss in detail here. The first aspect has to do with Tushin's role in the battle. Immediately after the French begin their bombardment, Tolstoy shows Bagration and Bolkonsky riding up to the battery commanded by Tushin, where Tushin explains to Bagration that since he had been given no orders about where to shoot, "he had decided that it would be good to set fire to the village [of Schöngrabern]" (I.2.17). Bagration indicates his approval and moves on. What in fact happened after the French opened fire was that, in addition to ordering various troop movements, "he [Bagration] instructed his artillery to ignite the wooden buildings at Schöngrabern. The village was soon ablaze, threatening to blow the ammunition supplies; the French had to halt the advance for almost two hours to fight the blazes."⁶⁵ So here we have yet another inconsistency between Tolstoy's account, an account that with the fictional Tushin's involvement is clearly not intended to be factual, and the historical record leading to a disparagement, this time more explicit, of Bagration's role in the action and his character. Moreover, Tolstoy devotes several pages to the scene at Tushin's battery, depicting the Russian artillerymen's joy in their self-initiated accomplishment (I.2.20). At Bagration's headquarters following the battle, Prince Peter chastises Tushin in front of the other officers, including Prince Andrei, making Bagration appear petty (I.2.21). Avraam Norov, an artillery veteran of the 1812 campaign who commanded two cannons at Borodino, and who was later a harsh critic of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, particularly objected to these scenes as he sees Tolstoy belittling Bagration.⁶⁶

The second aspect of this scene to discuss concerns Prince Andrei's interpretations of some of Bagration's gestures and actions throughout the battle. For example, Andrei notes on three

⁶⁴ Davidov, *Service of the Tsar*, 26, 71. Bagration was known for treating his troops well, "caring about the condition of his subordinates... select[ed] them on the basis of merit and awarding them accordingly." Yermolov, *The Czar's General*, 130.

⁶⁵ Mikaberidze, "Lion of the Russian Army," 241.

⁶⁶ Sobolev, "'War and Peace' as Read by Contemporaries," 24, 26.

occasions that Bagration “inclined his head [in] assent” of what was taking place around him or being reported to him, as though all was occurring as he had foreseen. At one point, Andrei “wished to know whether this man thought and felt, and what he thought and felt, at that moment. ‘Is there anything there behind that immobile face?’” (I.2.17). As we have seen, contemporary eyewitnesses saw Bagration’s “moral strength and flashes of genius concealed under an outward calm.”⁶⁷ After having observed Prince Bagration’s behavior and listening “carefully to [his] exchanges with the commanders and to the orders he gave, [Prince Andrei] noticed, to his surprise,” the following:

[T]hat no orders were given, and that Prince Bagration only tried to pretend that all that was done by necessity, chance, or the will of a particular commander, that it was all done, if not on his orders, then in accord with his intentions. Owing to the tact shown by Prince Bagration, Prince Andrei noticed that, in spite of the chance character of events and their independence of the commander’s will, his presence accomplished a very great deal. Commanders who rode up to Prince Bagration with troubled faces became calm, soldiers and officers greeted him merrily and became more animated in his presence, and obviously showed off their courage before him. (I.2.17)

Though Prince Andrei on one hand acknowledges Bagration’s leadership ability, in the sense that he is able to calm and motivate his soldiers in the face of danger, on the other hand Andrei asserts that events all happened by chance, implying Bagration’s planning was for naught. The historian’s account of Bagration’s responsibility for the Russian action at Schöngrabern is quite different.

Bagration’s leadership during the battle was remarkable indeed. With only 6,000 men, he faced superior French forces led by a group of the best French commanders.... He carefully chose his positions and made maximum use of the terrain. Before the battle, Bagration summoned his commanders and discussed the battle plans, making sure each of them knew his objective. During the action, Bagration constantly rode from one regiment to another to encourage the troops....⁶⁸

Tolstoy here uses Prince Andrei to begin to assert his positions on the role of chance in war and, by extension, in history through the narrative of the novel. Since a reasonably accurate historical account of the burning of Schöngrabern would serve to counter his position, Tolstoy invents Tushin and his actions as a substitute for Bagration’s orders and plans. In this regard, it seems an effective device as Tolstoy can remain faithful to the historical consequence, that is the burning of Schöngrabern, while changing (or eliminating) the cause.

According to Mikaberidze, “[t]he battle of Schöngrabern was a turning point in Bagration’s career,” after which he “became a legendary figure.”⁶⁹ Kutuzov, for one, believed Bagration’s actions saved the Russian army from destruction.

⁶⁷ See note 62.

⁶⁸ Mikaberidze, “Lion of the Russian Army,” 252.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 251.

Kutuzov wrote Alexander that ... if the French broke through Bagration, his army would have been 'unable to retreat because of his close proximity from [Schöngrabern].' Kutuzov stressed the importance of Bagration's mission. 'I anticipated certain death of Prince Bagration's corps, but I hoped to save the rest of the army by sacrificing [Bagration]'.⁷⁰

It is this battle, followed closely on by Austerlitz, that leads to Prince Peter's status as Tolstoy's "hero of heroes." Yet as we have seen, Tolstoy seems reluctant to accord him the accolades he has earned, perhaps because of his insistence that there can be no "great men." Thus we have Tolstoy's conclusion on the events at Schöngrabern: "The next day the French did not renew the attack, and the remnant of Bagration's detachment joined Kutuzov's army" (I.2.21).

In 1812, Prince Andrei is assigned to Barclay de Tolly, the Commander-in-Chief at that time. Barclay had developed the so-called defensive strategy for the campaign adopted by Czar Alexander. Early in the year, Bagration had also proposed a strategy for the impending invasion, which was to attack Napoleon before he united his forces.⁷¹ Prince Peter's plan was dismissed by Alexander and shelved along with other proposals for an offensive.⁷² The fundamental difference between preferred strategies was a source of conflict throughout much of 1812 between Barclay and Bagration, which grew to infighting and the military command among supporters of both generals. But the sources of the conflict ran deeper. Barclay was supported by the "German" party consisting of Western European defectors and émigrés.⁷³ Bagration was the favorite of the Russian party composed of ethnic Russian officers, like Yermolov, and other members of the old Russian aristocracy. Aside from the differences over strategy, personal and cultural issues divided the two camps.⁷⁴ Bagration wrote to Aleksey Arakcheyev, Chief of Czar's Chancellery:

I am being treated without frankness and with unpleasantness beyond the power of words.... I cannot get along with the Minister. For God's sake, send me anywhere, if only to command a regiment in Moldavia or in the Caucasus. But I do not want to be here. The whole headquarters is so full of Germans that a Russian cannot breathe and the whole thing does not make any sense.⁷⁵

This is an excerpt from but one letter among many written by Bagration to Arakcheyev, Yermolov and others with a sympathetic ear or with access to Alexander. Here, for the first time, we see the consequences of Bagration's temper, which during this period he expressed "in a

⁷⁰ Kutuzov to Alexander, 19 November 1805, RGVIA f. 846 op. 16, d. 3108, l. 75-76b, quoted in Mikaberidze, "Lion of the Russian Army," 251.

⁷¹ Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon*, Ch. 4, Kindle location 2665.

⁷² *Ibid.*, Ch. 5, Kindle location 2930; Mikaberidze, "Lion of the Russian Army," 622.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 725.

⁷⁴ Alexander Mikaberidze has devoted a chapter of his dissertation to this conflict, chapter XVIII, "Conflict in the Russian Army: Bagration vs. Barclay de Tolly," 721-42.

⁷⁵ Bagration to Arakcheyev, 10 August 1812, "Correspondence of Bagration," 226, quoted in Mikaberidze, "Lion of the Russian Army," 757; Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, III.2.1.

passionate manner and frequently made unjust and malicious statements.”⁷⁶ Moreover, “Bagration’s passionate character refused to accept the fact that the French invaded his native land, his ‘Holy Russia.’ These emotions led to Bagration’s many faulty decisions and actions during the campaign.”⁷⁷ According to historian Dominic Lieven, “The fiery Georgian and the cool and cerebral ‘German’ were simply two different in temperament and this led directly into contrasting views on what strategy to adopt.”⁷⁸

An interesting question in the affair is related to the fact that Bagration himself is a native born Georgian, albeit raised in Russia for nearly his entire life. Barclay de Tolly was, after all, a third-generation Russian whose family immigrated in the 17th century.⁷⁹ As historian Sean Pollock pointedly asks, “How was it that Prince Petr Bagration... came to identify himself as a ‘pure Russian,’ and other Russian subjects, including prominent nobleman, as non-Russian in important ways?”⁸⁰ During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Russia was expanding its empire, and Prince Peter Bagration was deeply involved in that project, indeed playing a key role as we have seen. Could it be that his military service cultivated a love of the Fatherland that was close to pure Russian, or that the culture of the military itself was sufficient to instantiate his Russianness? Pollock posits the following answer: “Bagration’s understanding of what it meant to be Russian was forged in the institution that was chiefly responsible for creating Russia’s empire: the Imperial Army.”⁸¹ “So strong was the emphasis on inculcating officers ‘love for the fatherland’ that a German observer and contemporary of Bagration thought that it threatened family ties.”⁸² Prince Peter’s lack of formal education perhaps put him on more common ground with the rank-and-file soldiers than with his fellow officers. Moreover, Bagration was an Orthodox Christian, another trait he held in common with the rank-and-file. Many of the foreign-born Western European officers of the German party were not Orthodox, perhaps fueling the mistrust of native born Russians. In fact, Barclay de Tolly was Lutheran, “mark[ing] him as non-Russian in a national sense.”⁸³ Interestingly, Bagration’s Orthodoxy was a personal and cultural trait he shared with Prince Andrei. Though it is true that Andrei’s sister Marya represents the devout element of the Bolkonsky family, we shall see that in the moments before his death Andrei implicitly reveals his commitment – at least in habit – to orthodoxy.

Another element of the party conflict in the Russian army that highlights a parallel between the characters of Prince Andrei and Prince Peter is their similar reactions to the continuing Russian retreat in 1812, culminating with the abandonment of Smolensk.

The burning and abandoning of Smolensk marked an epoch for Prince Andrei. The new feeling of anger against the foe made him forget his own grief. He was devoted entirely

⁷⁶ Mikaberidze, “Lion of the Russian Army,” 835.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 836.

⁷⁸ Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon*, ch. 5, Kindle location 3049.

⁷⁹ Mikaberidze, “Lion of the Russian Army,” 725, note 17.

⁸⁰ Pollock, “One Russian to Another,” 115.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 129.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 141.

to the affairs of his regiment, he was solicitous of his men and officers and affectionate with them. In his regiment he was known as our prince; they were proud of him and loved him. (III.2.5)

As the French had now brought the fight to the heartland of Russia, retreat became even less bearable for the Russian officers, as well as Russian civilians. A retired Russian veteran of the 1805 campaign living in a village near Smolensk wrote just three weeks before the battle for Smolensk:

All around the city people deliver baked bread, bring in cattle and provide any good that our good soldiers, who are eager to fight at the walls of Smolensk, desire. Some of them already expressed this in a very simple, but, of course, heartfelt expression: “We are already seeing our fathers’ grey beards,” they say. “Would we let the enemy despoil them? It is time to fight!”⁸⁴

Three weeks later the same writer’s letter begins, “I witnessed a horrible scene – the death of Smolensk.”⁸⁵ The sentiments of the people extended throughout the military and the aristocracy. Barclay’s popularity was in steep decline, and his position as commander-in-chief was no longer politically tenable. According to an eyewitness:

The spirit of the army was affected by a sense of mortification and all ranks loudly and boldly complained; discontent was general and discipline relaxing. The nobles, the merchants and the population at large, were indignant at seeing city after city, government after government abandoned, till the enemy’s guns were almost heard at Moscow and St. Petersburg doubted of its safety. The removal [of Barclay de Tolly]... had become a universal demand.⁸⁶

Lieven observes that after Barclay revealed the potential that Moscow might also be sacrificed.

Inevitably Barclay’s opinion spread around and contributed to the unpopularity of a ‘German’ who was willing to sacrifice Russia’s heart for the sake of Europe. Though at one level Barclay’s cold and honest military rationality was admirable, one can understand the exasperation of Alexander, whose difficult job it was to manage morale and politics on the home front.⁸⁷

As the French advance and Russian retreat continued its eastward march, Barclay was replaced as commander in chief with Mikhail Kutuzov, who joined the troops just before the opposing armies prepared to engage at the city of Borodino.

Prince Andrei had not been in Prince Bagration’s sphere of influence since Schöngrabern, except to the extent that Bagration’s role as commander of the 1st Western Army in 1812,

⁸⁴ Fyodor Glinka, 18 July, 1812, quoted in Mikaberidze, “1812 First Person,” 29.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Wilson, *Narrative of Events*, 130.

⁸⁷ Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon*, Ch. 6, Kindle location 3539

especially his participation in the conflict with Barclay de Tolly, influenced the whole of the campaign theater. Nevertheless, their common intolerance of the command's willingness to yield Russian soil and their common ethos unite them, in spirit at least, as Russians and as Russian soldiers.

One further circumstance worth considering is the commonality of the experiences they had in death. The parallels here are uncanny. Both princes were mortally wounded at the battle of Borodino. Late in the morning of the battle, a "shell splinter struck Bagration For a few minutes he made a valiant effort to conceal his wound from his men to avoid any discouragement or panic among them. The wound bled profusely, and Bagration began silently to slip from the horse."⁸⁸ Prince Andrei also was wounded by a shell splinter.

[A] shell dully plopped down within two paces of Prince Andrei The shell was smoking, spinning like a top ..., on the border between the field and the meadow, near a bush of wormwood. ... At one and the same time there was the sound of an explosion, a whistling of splinters as if from a shattered window, a choking smell of powder – and Prince Andrei hurtled sideways and, raising his arm, fell [off his horse] on his chest. (III.2.36)

Accounts of both of their wounds involve bloody images. According to an eyewitness, "I was dispatched twice to Prince Bagration on the left flank. ... [T]he second time I saw him already mortally wounded, in a pool of his own blood, as he was carried away not far from me."⁸⁹ Likewise, "Several officers ran to [Andrei]. From the right side of his stomach a large stain of blood was spreading onto the grass" (III.2.36). Following the infliction of their wounds, both princes were removed from the battlefield to villages near Moscow and suffered for two to three weeks before they died.⁹⁰ And at the end, both men spent their final hours contemplating life and taking confession. Bagration "spent the rest of [his last] day sipping wine and contemplating his life. In the evening, he had convulsions and breathed with difficulty. He asked for a priest, saying, 'I was always an Orthodox Christian and want to die as such.'"⁹¹ Near the end, Andrei had an experience that left him feeling, "Yes, that was death. I died – I woke up. Yes, death is an awakening.' Clarity suddenly came to his soul, and the curtain that until then had concealed the unknown was raised before his inner gaze." And within days, "[h]e confessed, took communion; everyone came to him for a last farewell" (IV.1.16).

Prince Bagration's ability to motivate his troops at Schöngrabern caused Prince Andrei to reflect for the first time on the meaning of leadership and its limitations in determining outcomes in battle, especially as compared with the role of chance. Tolstoy's manipulation of events, by introducing Captain Tushin to fictionalize what actually happened, colored Andrei's perception

⁸⁸ Mikaberidze, "Lion of the Russian Army," 819.

⁸⁹ Johan Reinhold von Dreyling, quoted in Mikaberidze, "1812 First Person," 30.

⁹⁰ Bagration died 17 days after the Battle of Borodino. Mikaberidze, "Lion of the Russian Army," 828. It appears that Andrei died in approximately the same time frame, as we know he lived beyond the surrender of Moscow seven days after Borodino.

⁹¹ Mikaberidze, "Lion of the Russian Army," 828.

in this instance. Later in the novel, however, Tolstoy does acknowledge the rewards Bagration received for his action. Bagration and Andrei also share both disdain and anger for the continuous retreat of the Russian army in 1812, and the circumstances of their deaths are remarkably similar.

CONCLUSION

As a young man with little wealth and little education, Prince Peter Bagration enlisted in the Army in 1782. Within seventeen years he had become a trusted protégé of General Suvorov, under whom he served during campaigns in Italy the Alps. His successful command of the rearguard in 1805-7, particularly at Schöngrabern and Austerlitz, may have prevented Napoleon from destroying the Russian army during its retreat from Austria. Following these campaign, he was widely celebrated by the Russian nobility, including Czar Alexander, and in the high society of both St. Petersburg and Moscow. By 1812, Bagration was held, among his peers and the soldiers he commanded, to be among the best of Russia's generals. According to a Polish General who participated in the 1812 campaign, Bagration was "among the most prominent military leaders of his time."⁹² One of his aide-de-camps opined that "the rapid and skillful movement of the 2nd Western Army... [to] Smolensk puts him [Bagration] among the saviors of Russia in 1812."⁹³ Napoleon himself had said, "[Russia] has no good generals, except for Bagration; though not of a great intelligence, he is still a good general,"⁹⁴ a sentiment echoed even by Tolstoy's Prince Andrei (III.1.11). On the other hand, it is also true that Bagration's ideas about the best strategy for Russian forces facing the French invasion in 1812 were wrongheaded.⁹⁵ Moreover, his continued advocacy of his own strategy over Barclay de Tolly's helped cause a disruption in the military command. Nevertheless, the accolades Bagration received appear well justified by his success in the field, which he demonstrated at all levels of command throughout his career.

Bagration's military success and popular acclaim notwithstanding, it is not clear that Tolstoy quite knew what to do with his character in *War and Peace*. On the one hand, Tolstoy accords Bagration status of "hero of heroes," while on the other hand, attributing that status to Bagration as proxy for the common soldier. At Schöngrabern, Tolstoy minimizes Bagration's responsibility for the successful delay of Napoleon's advance. He does this first by inserting the fictional Captain Tushin to take the credit for setting the town on fire, a decision critical to the Russian

⁹² Zapiski generala Kolachkovskogo o voine 1812 goda [Notes of General Kolachkovsky on 1812 Campaign], *Voенно-istoricheskii sbornik*, (St. Petersburg, 1911), N1, 12, quoted in Mikaberidze, "Lion of the Russian Army," 719.

⁹³ Nikolay Golitsyn, *Oficerskie zapiski ili Vospominania o pokhodakh 1812, 1813, i 1814 godov* [Memoirs of the Officer - Recollections on the 1812, 1813 and 1814 Campaigns], (Moscow, 1838), 16, quoted in Mikaberidze, "Lion of the Russian Army," 643.

⁹⁴ Napoleon to Alexander Balashov, Minister of Police of Russia, 30 June, 1812, Vilna. Balashov's notes on the meeting with the Emperor Napoleon, Dubrovin, *Patriotic War in Letters of Contemporaries*, 31, quoted in Mikaberidze, "The Mutiny of Generals."

⁹⁵ Lieven, *Russia Against Napoleon*, Ch. 5, Kindle location 3105.

success that was in fact made by Bagration. Secondly, Tolstoy implies that Bagration's planning and orders for the battle were meaningless, in that everything occurred by chance. Tolstoy then casts aspersions on Bagration at Austerlitz, by suggesting that his decision to send Rostov to find Alexander is motivated by a desire to delay and to avoid responsibility. Finally, Tolstoy fails to mention Bagration's courageous fighting and ultimate self-sacrifice at Borodino.⁹⁶

Altogether, the pejorative manner in which Tolstoy selectively alters or neglects the historical record in relation to the magnitude of Bagration's skill, fame and popularity is puzzling. In many ways Tolstoy seems to portray Bagration as a typical Russian military commander. He leaves many of Bagration's positive character traits intact, while finding strategies to minimize his credit or responsibility for controlling outcomes on the battlefield. In light of Tolstoy's agenda to show there are no "great men" of history who determine outcomes, even the course of a single battle, perhaps we should expect this sort of treatment. Bagration for Tolstoy is a top-notch commander, courageous and of the highest integrity, who, fortunately for the Russian army, happens to be in the right place at the right time.

⁹⁶ Ibid., Ch. 6, Kindle location 3843.

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