

# Discussion on the Question of the Historical Study of Russian Troops Actions in Belarus in the Period of the Uprising of 1863-1864

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**Abstract**—The article concerns the military actions of the Russian Empire government in the area of modern Belarus, which were taken to counter the armed groups of insurgents fighting for the revival of the Polish national statehood — the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, within the borders of 1772. The number and composition of Russian troops concentrated on the Belarusian lands during the uprising are established. Their organizational structure and the nature of territorial distribution on the Belarusian lands are determined. The connection of the policy of increasing the Russian military presence in Belarus with the threat of interference of European States in the solution of the "Polish question" is revealed. The relevance of this study is based on the lack of objective data concerning this problem in both Belarusian and Russian historical science, as well as the presence of conflicting data on the composition and number of the contingent of Russian troops concentrated on the Belarusian lands in this period.

**Keywords**—the Russian Empire; Belarus; the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth; the uprising of 1863-1864

## I. INTRODUCTION

Belarus, located in the center of Europe, surrounded by strong and influential States, has repeatedly become an arena of armed confrontation between the subjects of international politics, who fought for dominance on the European continent in various periods of its history. During the Polish national liberation uprising of 1863-1864, the desire to revive the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth within the borders of 1772 was actively supported by the nobility of Belarus, which considered themselves to be a part of so-called Polish political nation (which included exclusively the Polish nobility). The latter in alliance with the nobility of the Kingdom of Poland (the Congress Poland) declared claims to the significant part of the Belarus, considering it to be an integral part of the revived Commonwealth. The imperial ambitions of the Poles unleashed bloody terror against the civilian population opponents of the uprising, the Orthodox clergy and the troops concentrated in the region. This forced the government of the Russian Empire to implement the use of

the army as the main instrument of the struggle against the uprising as well as of the power support of the government policy.

This study is based on the materials of the Department (since 1863, the Main Directorate) of the General staff, as well as the 2nd branch of the General staff of the Russian Empire, which were in charge of the application (including dislocation and movement) of the army on the territory of the state and beyond. From the materials of the Department (Main Directorate) of the General staff, which was included in the 38th Fund of the Russian state military-historical archive, information was obtained about the time and reasons for the concentration, total number and territorial location of the guard troops on the Belarusian lands, as well as parts and units of the 1st army on the eve and during the uprising of 1863-1864 [1]. The records of the 2nd division of the General staff, which was included in the 3rd register of the 400th Fund of the Russian state military-historical archive, allowed to restore the picture of movements, the number and composition of troops concentrated in Belarus [2].

## II. THE MILITARY CONTINGENT OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE IN THE INITIAL PERIOD OF THE UPRISING

By the beginning of the uprising, according to the Department of the General staff, there were the following military forces of the Russian Empire in Belarus: three regiments of the 2nd infantry division (the Kaluga regiment in the district of Grodno; the part of the Libau regiment — in the area of Bialystok and Sokolki; parts of the Revel regiment in the district of Pruzhany, Kobrin, Bereza and Brest-Litovsk); 3rd infantry division at full strength (the part of Staroingermanlandsky regiment in Borisov district, Dokshitsy, Logoisk; part Novoingermanlandsky regiment in the area of Minsk, Rakov, Koidanovo; the part of Pskov regiment — in the area of Novogrudok, Mir, Kletsk; Velikoluksky regiment — in Bobruisk); Sofijskij regiment of the 1st infantry divisions was quartered in the area of Belsk. The part of the 1st division artillery of the 1st field artillery brigade was quartered in the district of Oshmyany, Smorgon and Volozhin; the part of the 2nd field artillery brigade — in

the district of Grodno; 3rd field artillery brigade — in the district of Slonim. Beyond that, in the surroundings of Grodno and Lida there were some squadrons of the Leib-Ulan Courland regiment of the 1st light cavalry division; there was one squadron of Don No. 33 Cossack regiment quartered in Grodno, Bialystok, Belsk, Slutsk, Pinsk and Minsk. By February 8 to Kobrin from Kremenchug there arrived the Don Cossack No. 5 regiment [3], [4].

In addition to the existing units by February 1863, six reserve battalions of the 2nd and 3rd reserve infantry divisions were concentrated on the Belarusian lands: the battalion of the Vitebsk regiment — in the Mozyr area, the battalions of the Polotsk and Yelets regiments — in the Bobruisk area, the battalions of the Poltava and Kremenchugsk regiments — in the Borisov area, the battalion of the Murom regiment, transferred the day before from Polotsk — to the Disna area [4].

The first regular troops fighting with the rebels have shown that even large groups of insurgents in an open area could not resist the pressure circuits of the Russian infantry, so conducting the counterinsurgency war with major compounds was inexpedient (despite the exhortations of Alexander II, who overestimated the enemy forces and claimed "to avoid splitting forces by sending against the rebels strong detachments of cavalry and artillery") [5]. For the prosecution of rebel commanders of such units (Major General I. G. Nostits, Lieutenant-General Z. C. Manyukin, etc.) divided their forces in the so-called mobile columns, each of which consisted of two or three companies moved on the carts of infantry and Cossacks attached to it. Similar mobile columns in the Russian troops became the leading tactical units, which was effectively used by the government until the end of the revolt.

The imposition of martial law on the territory of the Grodno and Vilna provinces was only announced by the authorities only on 4 February, two weeks after the first fighting in the area of Brest-Litovsk and Semyatich (no later than February 22, martial law was imposed in the Pinsk, Slutsk and Novogrudok districts of the Minsk province) [6]. The heads of divisions of the disbanded 1st army corps, located in the Vilna military district, were charged with the duty to destroy the rebel groups in the areas designated for them. The area of responsibility of the 1st infantry division under the command General-Lieutenant E. I. Maidel included a large part of the Kovno province and northern districts of the Vilna province, of 2nd infantry division under the command of Lieutenant-General Z. S. Manyukin — Grodno and southern districts of the Vilna province (since August 1863 2nd infantry division was under the Kingdom of Poland), of the 3rd infantry division under the command of Lieutenant-General A. F. Holthoer (22 August 1863, commanded by major-General I. S. Ganetsky) — the territory of Minsk, Vitebsk and Mogilev provinces [7].

On the eve, January 28, Alexander II decided to send to Vilna 2nd guard infantry division (no more than 10 thousand soldiers and officers), parts of which were to be placed at the disposal of Vilna Governor-General V. I. Nazimov. Regiments and guards moved from St. Petersburg on January

31 in two-battalion structure (according to the states of peace time) and were completed by the same soldiers and non-commissioned officers, as during the Crimean war, because since 1856 recruit sets in the Russian Empire weren't carried out. By 2 February echelons of the guard arrived at Vilna [8].

In Vilna guard service included upkeeping city guards, organizing night patrols, the protecting the railway station and the political prison (the so-called "14 rooms"). There were close contacts between the officers of the guard and the "15 polish landowners, entirely devoted to the card game and prefer this activity to all sorts of political combinations". "Among these landlords an elderly count Tyshkevich was especially was loyal to the guards" [9, 10]. According to the memories of the guards, "frequent restless guard duties, reinforced patrols, sentries with loaded guns, all this together — and the picturesque surroundings of Vilna, and the city itself, which seemed besieged, beautiful spring, beautiful polish women — somehow fantastically adjusted youth and forced to rush into battle" [11].

As a part of the guards division, the Finnish regiment lifeguard operated mainly in the Vilna, Troki and Lida districts (near Voronovo, Trakeli and Radun). Some units of the regiment reached the villages of the New Yard and Ostrino, on the border of the Lida district and Grodno province [12]. The companies of the Pavlovsky lifeguard regiment "did not have to live constantly in Vilna, they either went in the expedition, or standing as guards on the railways, or escorted a variety of traded goods" [13]. Divisions of the Moscow lifeguard regiment, initially concentrated in the Vilna district (in the area of Novye Troki, Orany and Olkeniki), was "continuously in long expeditions that went beyond the boundaries of the area of location and included the territory of the Vilna, Grodno, Kovno and August provinces" [14].

Earlier, on January 19, it was decided to send the combined Cossack lifeguard regiment from St. Petersburg to Vilna military district (as a part of the 1st battalion of the Cossack lifeguard regiment and the 1st battalion of the Ataman lifeguard regiment). On 23 January, the regiment arrived at Vilna by the Petersburg-Warsaw railroad, and "solemnly entered the city through The Gate of Dawn (Ostra Brama Gate)" (later the Lancer lifeguard regiment and the Dragoon lifeguard regiment also arrived at the district) [15]. The primary task of the life of Leib-Cossacks was to patrol the city and its surroundings [16].

At the beginning of February the St. Petersburg Lancer regiment, which arrived by railway from Kovno, was sent to Grodno to strengthen the detachment of Z. S. Manyukin. So did Nevsky infantry regiment and the 2nd battalion of Staroingermanlandsky infantry regiment (quartered before this time in Vilna) [17].

By April 1, 1863 the Dragoon lifeguard regiment arrived in Vilno from St. Petersburg. "The service in the regiment in Vilno consisted in day and night travelling around the city and its vicinities, in the organization of pickets in those places where recruits for insurgent groups usually gathered". On April 12, "the continuous wandering of the regiment in the Lithuanian swamps began" (mainly on the territory of the

Kovno province). The 2nd battalion of the regiment was constantly in Vilna, where it was "fragmented into small parts, which were applied to the infantry detachments for the maintenance of the road" [18].

In April 1863, in response to a number of actions taken by rebels in the Vitebsk and Mogilev provinces, the Lancer lifeguard regiment was sent from Novgorod to Rezhitsa. (16 May, the regiment was divided into squadrons: 1st and 2nd squadrons were sent to Dinaburg, 3rd squadron to Svetiany, 4th squadron to Vilno), and the hussar brigade of the 7th cavalry division was sent from the province of Tver to Porechje [19, 20].

According to the Minister of war D. A. Milyutin, "when diplomacy began to interfere in the Polish case, our situation, in view of the coalition preparing against us, became dangerous." "During April 1863, after receiving diplomatic notes from the leading European powers, all reserve battalions of the disbanded 1st infantry corps, as well as the 5th reserve division moved from the interior of the Empire (concentrated mainly in the territory of the Minsk, Vitebsk and Mogilev provinces. — A.A.), were reorganized into the detachments of the 2nd battalion structure "[21].

### III. THE ACTIONS OF TROOPS IN THE ACTIVE PHASE OF THE UPRISING

In June-July 1863, the 2nd guards infantry division, which was to return to St. Petersburg, was replaced by the 1st guards infantry division (the detachments of which were already staffed by three battalions, according to the states of wartime) [22]. From the composition of the 1st guards infantry division it was the Jaeger lifeguard regiment that arrived On June 23 in Vilna. It "was broken into small parts, two companies that have made outdoor columns, which scoured Troki and Lida districts" [23]. Having moved from St. Petersburg on June 25. Izmaylovsky lifeguard infantry regiment on arrival at Vilna military district was located in the area of Svetiany (regimental headquarters in the city, companies — in the surrounding villages) [24]. The 3rd battalion of the regiment was engaged in the protection of the St. Petersburg-Warsaw railway line, and the 1st battalion was sent to Vilna for guard duty. "All time of its staying in rebellious provinces, the regiment was engaged in escorting of cargoes, collecting contributions, the persecution of small groups of rebels who were able to escape in the dense forests and impenetrable swamps" [25].

By June 29, 1863 Alexander II approved the order to send the 1st and 2nd infantry divisions with their artillery from the Vilna military district to the Warsaw military district. In their place the 3rd infantry division was to come from Minsk to Grodno, the headquarters of which moved from Minsk on July 9 [26]. On July 27 Velikolutsky regiment moved from Minsk to Slonim [27]. On July 12 the headquarters and the 3rd company of the Novoingermanlandsky regiment moved from Minsk to Bialystok [28].

By July 4, according to the Department of the General staff the Don Cossack No. 41 regiment was to arrive at Vilna from St. Petersburg, and by July 10 at Bialystok — the Don

Cossack No. 44 and No. 45 regiments [29]. By the end of July, one hundred of the Don Cossack No. 41 regiment, who had arrived from St. Petersburg, was in the Vitebsk province, one — in Courland province, the rest were stationed in the counties of the Kovno province. The Don Cossack regiment No. 17 was quartered in the counties of the Vilna province, and the don Cossack regiment No.42 was assembled at Vilna for sending to the Kovno province. To the Vilna province in addition to the Don Cossack No. 17 regiment and one hundred of the Don Cossack No. 13 regiment the Don Cossack No. 30 the regiment was sent. It was to arrive in Vilna no later than on August 23. By this time in the Grodno province the Don Cossack No. 5 regiment and the most part of the Don Cossack No. 32 regiment (two hundred of which lodged in the Minsk province) were concentrated. In the Minsk province there was also a big part of Don Cossack No. 33 regiment (one hundred of which were lodged in the cities of Grodno and Kovno) and one hundred of the Don Cossack No. 13 regiment. The most part of the Don Cossack No. 13 regiment by the end of July lodged in the Mogilev province [30]. Thus, by July 1863, units of ten Cossack regiments (with a total number of no more than 10 thousand Cossacks) were concentrated on the Belarusian lands of the Vilna military district.

Having arrived on July 11 in Vilna from St. Petersburg the Semenovskiy lifeguard regiment, two weeks later was sent to the district of Grodno. "Having arrived at the city on July 25, it settled down divided into battalions: the 1st battalion in the city, the others in its vicinities". "Except for some separate expeditions, all activity of a regiment in 1863 was limited to one temporary military-administrative management" [31].

In addition to the Semenovskiy lifeguard regiment in Grodno province in 1863 to the end of July the 3rd infantry division was settled: parts of the Staroingermanlandsky regiment in the area of Slonim and Volkovysk, parts of the Novoingermanlandsky regiment in the area of Bialystok, parts of the Pskov regiment — from Brest-Litovsk and the river Svisloch, parts of the Velikoluksky regiment near Kobrin, Pruzhany and Sokolka. In Kobrin, Vysokolitovsk, Bielsk and Bialystok there were squadrons of the St. Petersburg Lancer regiment — one squadron per city. Also from Grodno quartered two squadrons of the the Leib-Ulan Kurlandsky regiment (one squadron of the regiment quartered in the Volkovysk county and one near township Sokolka). Two batteries of the 2nd artillery brigade, as well as two batteries of the 3rd artillery brigade were concentrated on the territory of the province near Grodno in the region of Slonim and one near Brest-Litovsk [32]. The total number of troops concentrated on the territory of the Grodno province by the end of July, according to rough estimates, did not exceed 17.5 thousand soldiers and officers of regular troops.

14 July 1863 the last echelon of the Preobrazhenskiy lifeguard regiment arrived in Vilna, 7 companies of the Preobrazhenskiy lifeguard regiment was patrolling in the Oshmiany district from July 16 to August 9. In the night from 30 to 31 July, units of the regiment participated in the "General search" of Vilna in order to catch "a man with a dagger" who tried to assassinate the leader of the nobility of



the Vilna province — A. F. Domeyko [33]. By 21 July the reserve Estland infantry regiment arrived in Vilna from Velikie Luki. On July 29, the reserve Velikolukskiy infantry regiment arrived in Vilna from Dinaburg. By the end of July in Vilno there was a huge mass of army units — seven infantry battalions from the composition of various regiments, six cavalry squadrons and a hundred Cossacks. Not far from Vilna, in the Lida county lodged 132 Cossacks of the Don Cossack No. 17 regiment, in Lida — three companies of the reserve Kostroma regiment. In township Zabolot' and the surrounding area of Shchuchin three companies of the Gatchina lifeguard regiment were stationed. In Ashmyany three companies of the Preobrazhensky lifeguard regiment were stationed (they were to be replaced on August 10 by seven companies of the reserve Nizovsky regiment arrived in Oshmyany from Lepel), the battery of the 2nd artillery brigade and twenty Cossacks of the Don Cossack No. 17 regiment. In Volozhin there was one company of the Preobrazhensky regiment and fifty Cossacks of the same 17th regiment. In township Svir two companies of the Preobrazhensky life guards regiment were quartered, and in the vicinity of Vileika — six companies of the reserve Murom regiment. The total number of troops concentrated to the end of July in the Vilna, Oshmiany, Lida, and Vileika counties of Vilna province, according to rough estimates did not exceed 13 thousand soldiers and officers. Of these 13 thousand — 6 thousand was submitted to the reserve regiments, but 7 thousand was in Vilna [34].

In the Vitebsk province by the end of July there was six reserve regiments (totaling up to 12 thousand soldiers and officers): the Narva, Libau, Galicia, Nizhny Novgorod, Simbirsk and Nizov regiments. Nineteen companies of the reserve regiments were concentrated in Dinaburg, the rest were equally distributed across the counties of the province. By August 18, the reserve Mogilev regiment was to arrive in Dinaburg from Senno.

By the end of July, three reserve regiments (totaling up to 6 thousand soldiers and officers) were deployed in Mogilev province. Units of the reserve Mogilev regiment were concentrated near Mogilev, Senno and Liozno. In July, three companies of the latter under the command of Colonel Engelhardt pursued a detachment of rebels more than for 300 miles in the Senno and Orsha counties. The reserve Chernigov regiment was also divided into several groups concentrated at Rogachev, Old Bykhov, Mogilev and Gomel. The reserve Bryansk regiment arrived no earlier than July 2 in Cherikov from the city Roslavl, and its separate groups lodged at Cherikov, Krichev and Chauss. In addition, four squadrons of the Mitavsky hussar regiment (no more than 700 hussars) were quartered in Mogilev province near Orsha (two squadrons), Cherei (one squadron) and Shklov (one squadron).

Among reserve units in the Minsk province eight infantry regiments lodged by July 29 (numbering up to 16 thousand soldiers and officers). Among them, the reserve Alexopolsk regiment (quartered in Minsk and the Minsk district), the reserve Kremenchug regiment (regimental headquarters and seven companies — in Borisov and the Borisovsky district, three companies in the Igumen district), the reserve Polotsk

regiment (regimental headquarters and seven companies — in Novogrudok and the Novogrudok district), the reserve Oryol regiment (five companies and regimental headquarters in the Igumen and the Igumen district, five companies in Slutsk), the reserve Yelets and Sevsk infantry regiments — in Bobruisk and the Bobruisk district, the Vitebsk reserve infantry regiment (eight companies with regimental headquarters — in Mozyr and the Mozyr district, two companies — in Rechitsa and the Rechitsa district) and the reserve Poltava infantry regiment, quartered in Pinsk and the Pinsk district [34].

There is no doubt that the reserve regiments, concentrated on the Belarusian lands, should be considered not as a means of fighting the uprising, but as an element of the policy of increasing the military potential of the Russian Empire in view of the diplomatic pressure of Western European States and the associated fears of possible military intervention. The reserve troops themselves, which were used as training depots to prepare recruits for service, during the spring and summer of 1863 were replenished with recruits for three times, having been reformed in the beginning from reserve battalions in 2-battalion detachments, and then and 3-battalion detachments. The processes within these units during the period under review made them militarily ineffective. In addition, the very presence in the region of the mass of recruits in the movement required the creation of additional security measures and, as a consequence, the involvement of significant forces and means, which did not strengthen, but weakened the position of the government in the face of an internal enemy.

Thus, by the end of July 1863, on the Belarusian lands there were no more than 25, 2 thousand regular troops (from infantry, cavalry and artillery units concentrated in the Vilna and Grodno provinces), no more than 10 thousand Cossacks (whose personnel were evenly distributed over the territory of the Grodno, Vitebsk, Vilna, Minsk and Mogilev provinces), no more than 40 thousand soldiers and officers of reserve infantry regiments (concentrated in Vilna, Vitebsk, Minsk, and Mogilev provinces), and no more than 5 thousand local battalions of the troops of the provincial and district teams. Total contingent is estimated at about 80 thousand.

#### IV. THE MILITARY CONTINGENT OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE AT THE FINAL STAGE OF THE MILITARY OPERATION

During the August, all the 2 battalion reserve regiments were reorganized into the existing regiments of the 3 battalion composition. In particular, the reserve Aleksopolsky infantry regiment of the 2nd battalion after joining the 3rd battalion in Minsk, according to the decree of August 13, became known as the Kolomna infantry regiment [35]. Similarly, the reserve Smolensk infantry regiment, again replenished with recruits, becoming a three-battalion, and received a new name — the 117th infantry Yaroslavl regiment [36]. In total in the Belarusian lands of the Vilna military district 24th infantry regiment were formed. According to the Imperial decree of August 31, 1863, they were consolidated in the 26th, 27th, 28th, 29th, 30th and 31st infantry division [35], [37]. Their total number by this time

was about 60 thousand soldiers and officers. In 1864, the newly formed regiments were bestowed with ensigns and ribbons [38].

By the beginning of September, 1863 "in all Vilna military district it was known only about 2-3 groups of rebels". For this reason, September 12, 1863 Alexander II decided to return to St. Petersburg all infantry and cavalry units of the Guards corps by the end of October, replacing them with one brigade (two regiments) of the 3rd Grenadier division and the Don No. 34 and No. 40 Cossack regiments [39]. This decision shows that the armed uprising in the district had been suppressed by that time.

By early November 1863, the regiments of the 1st guards infantry division (with the exception of the 2nd battalion of the Preobrazhensky regiment, as well as the 1st and 3rd battalions of the Semenovsky regiment) left the Vilna military district and returned to St. Petersburg. According M. N. Muravyov, it was the units of the guard, "he was obliged to the success of peace and of a settlement of the order in the Vilna and Grodno provinces" [40]. Among others, on November 1 the parts of the Lifeguard Dragoon regiment, having received the blessing from the Metropolitan Joseph Semashko before the image of the Vilna Martyrs, left Vilna and went to St. Petersburg [18]. On October 25 the Lifeguard Izmailovsky regiment returned to Petersburg [41].

By November 1863 on the territory of the Vilna military district seven artillery brigades (25th, 26th, 27th, 28th, 29th, 30th and 31st) had been formed. They were attached to the eponymous infantry divisions formed earlier. Thus, the batteries of the 25th and 26th artillery brigades, formed on the basis of units of the 2nd, 4th and 7th artillery brigades, were originally concentrated in the Northern part of the Vitebsk province, in the area of Dinaburg and Rezhitsa. Three batteries of the 27th artillery brigade were formed on the basis of units of the 1st and 6th artillery brigades, and originally housed in Oshmyany, Volozhin and Novogrudok. The battery of the 6th artillery brigade moved to complete the 27th brigade from the Kingdom of Poland to Grodno on November 26 and, being divided into two divisions, was sent to Volozhin and Novogrudok. The batteries of the 29th artillery brigade were formed on the basis of units of the 11th and 12th artillery brigades, and were concentrated in Mogilev, Old Bykhov and Rogachev. Battery of the 11th artillery brigade arrived to complete the 29th brigade in Rogachev on December 23 from the city of Lubny of the Poltava province, the battery of the 12th artillery brigades arrived in Rogachev by 5 January 1864 from the village Tsaritsyno of the same province. Three batteries of the 30th artillery brigade, formed on the basis of batteries of the 6th and 5th artillery brigades, were concentrated in Novogrudok, Lida and Vileika. Two divisions of the 5th artillery brigade, who came from Vilna to complete the 30th brigade, arrived in Lida and Vileika on December 10 and 13. The batteries of the 31st artillery brigade, formed on the basis of units of the 3rd and 12th artillery brigades, were originally quartered in Slutsk, Nesvizh and Bobruisk. Divisions of the 3rd artillerybrigade arrived in Nesvij and Slutskby November 17 and 22 from Slonim. The process of forming new artillery

brigades was completed by the end of December 1863 and the beginning of January 1864 [37], [42].

## V. CONCLUSION

Thus, the basis of the contingent of Russian troops that took part in the suppression of the Polish national liberation uprising in Belarus in 1863 consisted of units of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd infantry divisions, several cavalry regiments of the 1st and 7th cavalry divisions, as well as infantry and cavalry units of the Imperial guard, alternately sent from St. Petersburg to the Vilna military district. Regular troops were supported also by ten Cossack regiments. The area of active combat operations against the rebels in Belarus is limited mainly by the boundaries of Vilna and Grodno provinces and some districts of Minsk province. During the uprising, the territory of Minsk, Mogilev and Vitebsk, as well as some counties of Vilna provinces became the center of concentration of reserve units of the Russian army. During the spring and the summer of 1863 reserve troops, used as training depots to prepare recruits for service, were replenished with recruits for three times. They were first reformed from reserve battalions in the 2-battalion regiments, and then 3-battalion regiments. The processes within these units during this period made them militarily ineffective. The total number of Russian troops concentrated in Belarus during 1863 did not exceed 80 thousand soldiers and officers.

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