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The Battle of Preussisch-Eylau: The Fate of Trophy French Flags (1807)

Abstract

The article presents results of the study of the fate of Napoleon's army flags taken by Russian troops in the bloody battle of Preussisch-Eylau on January 26-27, 1807. These trophies were considered especially valuable in the Russian Empire. As the eternal symbol of the glory of the Russian arms, they were placed in the Peter and Paul Cathedral in St. Petersburg on February 3, 1807. However, from October 1812 they were thought to have been transferred to an unknown location and fate. Lack of reliable information, confirmed by archival documents, gave birth to several unreasonable inferences and hypotheses. Although the very possibility of a complete disappearance of valuable trophies is dubious, the issue has remained unstudied. The

article is to establish the fate of the trophy flags. The study of scholarship on the Russian Imperial army, memories of the participants in the battle and regimental histories allow to establish the circumstances of the French flags capture and their exact number, while Kammerfurier journals provide information on their delivery to the cathedral. Documents found in the archives have illuminated the fate that befell these flags. Contrary to conventional belief, six trophy flags were brought to the capital with an escort of two platoons of the Horse Guards Regiment. It has been established that the Preussisch-Eylau trophies had not been transferred from the Peter and Paul Cathedral in 1812, but remained there until October 1906. As careful preservation and restoration was then needed, they were transferred to the Museum of Artillery History for temporary storage, until the Military History Museum was built. In March 1918, together with other museum valuables, they were evacuated to Yaroslavl, where four were burned during the suppression of the White Guard uprising. The vestiges of the remaining two were transferred to the State Hermitage Museum in 1948.

### Keywords

Historical sources, Napoleonic wars, trophy flags of the French army, The Peter and Paul Cathedral, The Artillery Historical Museum, uprising of 1918 in Yaroslavl

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