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Participation of the Chief of the Red Army General Staff B. M. Shaposhnikov in the restoration of the panorama «Battle of Borodino», 1937–1940

Abstract

The documents are published on the involvement of Boris Mikhailovich Shaposhnikov, Chief of the Red Army General Staff and 1st Rank Commander, in resolving issues related to the restoration of the panorama «Battle of Borodino» created by Russian battle artist F. A. Roubaud in 1912. Following the revolutionary events of 1917 and the Russian Civil War, the work of art was initially completely unclaimed as a cultural heritage site. However, the historiographical and ideological reappraisal of the events of 1812 that took place in the second half of the 1930s, amidst the growing threat of war, sparked interest in the panorama «Battle of Borodino» as an element of historical memory among Soviet civilian and military agencies. Based on materials from the collection of the 10th (Military-Historical) Department of the General Staff of the Red Army of the Russian State Military Archives (RGVA), the paper describes the development of cooperation between the Chief of the Red Army General Staff and the 10th Department of the General Staff with representatives of the People's Commissariat of Education of the RSFSR in the military-historical field in 1937–1938. One of the contact points was the recognition of the need to reconstruct the famous panorama «Battle of Borodino». The 10th Department of the General Staff particularly emphasized the significant historical and cultural value of F. A. Roubaud's work. At the initiative of Chief of the General Staff B. M. Shaposhnikov, this issue was actively submitted to the People's Commissariat of Education of the RSFSR for consideration. However, attempts to resolve this issue were significantly delayed and entailed both logistical and administrative difficulties. The published documents allow us to trace the specific administrative measures taken by the Chief of the General Staff in the following years (1939–1940): his appeal to the People's Commissar of Defense K. Ye. Voroshilov and the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars V. M. Molotov regarding a matter of cultural and military-historical significance, as well as the results of this work and their impact on the

panorama's fate. However, the onset of the Great Patriotic War interrupted this positive momentum. The final restoration of the painting could not be completed in the early 1940s due to objective circumstances. This fact, as the published documents suggest, in no way diminishes the contribution and initiative of military leaders to resolving the issue. The documents are published according to modern spelling and punctuation rules, preserving the stylistic features of the source.

Keywords

B. M. Shaposhnikov, panorama "Battle of Borodino" F. A. Roubaud, General Staff of the Red Army, 10th department, M. M. Ivanov, People's Commissariat of Defense of the USSR, K. Ye. Voroshilov, People's Commissariat of Education of the RSFSR, military history, Patriotic War of 1812.

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