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## The Cesarevitch Alexey Nikolayevich infirmary in the city of Orenburg in the years of the First World War

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**ABSTRACT.** In the article on the basis of archival documents the order of organization of medical aid to the wounded and the work of medical institutions during the First World War on the example of the infirmary named after Cesarevitch Alexei Nikolaevich for lower ranks, organized in February 1916 in the city of Orenburg (distribution of the wounded to medical institutions, reception and registration of them in the medical institution, the regime of the day for the wounded undergoing treatment, organization of meals, providing them with clothes during treatment and when discharged from the infirmary, selection of personnel to work in the infirmary) is presented. The fact of using natural factors of the Orenburg region in the treatment and rehabilitation of the wounded, which are widely used nowadays (mud baths, bathing in a salt lake, kumysol treatment) has been established. The participation of the society in helping wounded and sick soldiers is emphasized (organization of infirmaries, free attendance of cinematographs by wounded soldiers, teaching literacy to sick and wounded lower ranks on a free basis by teachers of Orenburg parochial schools, etc.). The difficulties arising with the lack of foodstuffs and provision of medical institutions with medicines, dressing materials, tools, as well as the ways of their solution proposed by the Supreme Head of the Sanitary and Evacuation Unit Prince Alexander Petrovich Oldenburgsky are described. The measures taken by agricultural schools and societies with the assistance of the Ministry of Agriculture to train persons maimed in the war in a new trade are outlined.

**KEYWORDS:** First World War, infirmary for lower ranks, Russian Red Cross Society

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## Лазарет имени цесаревича Алексея Николаевича в городе Оренбурге в годы Первой мировой войны

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**РЕЗЮМЕ.** В статье на основе архивных документов изложены порядок организации медицинской помощи раненым и работы лечебных заведений в годы Первой мировой войны на примере лазарета имени цесаревича Алексея Николаевича для нижних чинов, организованного в феврале 1916 г. в городе Оренбурге (распределение раненых по лечебным учреждениям, прием и регистрация их в лечебном учреждении, режим дня для раненых, находящихся на излечении, организация питания, обеспечение их одеждой во время нахождения на излечении и при выписке из лазарета, подбор персонала для работы в лечебном заведении, порядок выписки и др.). Установлен факт использования природных факторов Оренбургской области в лечении и реабилитации раненых, которые широко применяются и в настоящее время (грязевые ванны, купания в соленом озере, кумысолечение). Подчеркивается участие общества в оказании помощи раненым и больным воинам (организация лазаретов, бесплатное посещение ранеными воинами кинематографов, обучение грамоте больных и раненых нижних чинов на безвозмездной основе силами учительниц Оренбургских приходских училищ и др.). Описаны трудности, возникшие с недостатком продуктов питания и обеспечением лечебных заведений медикаментами, перевязочным материалом, инструментами, а также пути их решения, предложенные Верховным начальником санитарной и эвакуационной части принцем Ольденбургским Александром Петровичем. Изложены меры, принимаемые сельскохозяйственными школами и обществами при содействии Министерства земледелия для обучения лиц, получивших увечье на войне, новому ремеслу.

**КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА:** Первая мировая война, лазарет для нижних чинов, Российское общество Красного креста

Massacre character of the war, which began on July 19 (August 1), 1914, manifested itself starting from the first battles. Unprecedented military actions, using the latest weapons (poison gases, aviation, tanks, flamethrowers, etc.), increased power and duration of shelling, led to increased number of wounded people, severity of injuries were greater than ever before.

In accordance with the Main Directorate of the General Headquarters of the Russian Army [1] on October 3, 1917, during the First World War, 775,369 soldiers and officers were killed and 3,223,508 wounded.

According to Western sources, total losses of the Russian Imperial Army by the time of withdrawal amounted to 1.7 million killed and died of wounds and 4.95 million wounded [2].

Medical aid to the wounded, which had been established in peacetime, immediately failed. Official medicine's capabilities were not enough, and then it became necessary to combine the efforts of the state, society and private individuals. An acute shortage of infirmaries for wounded soldiers of the Russian Army led to a need to open new hospitals in the premises of state and public organizations, restaurants and private homes. Their activities were financed by broad charity.

A great contribution to the organization of hospitals, infirmaries, sanitary trains was made by members of the Imperial House of Romanov (Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna, who headed the Russian Red Cross, Empress Alexandra Feodorovna was an active trustee of infirmaries, and the Grand Duchesses took on the duties of the Sisters of Mercy) [3].

On October 10 (23), 1915, by decision of Nicholas II and his family, an infirmary "for the lower ranks" was opened in the Winter Palace, the main imperial residence. The opening coincided with the birthday of Tsesarevich Alexei Nikolaevich, therefore the infirmary was named "The Infirmary of His Imperial Highness the Heir Tsesarevich and Grand Duke Alexei Nikolaevich in the Winter Palace". The Ministry of the Imperial Court and the Red Cross [4] were in charge of arranging the infirmary.

To commemorate this event, a number of infirmaries opened at the outbreak of the First World War requested to be named after Tsesarevich Alexei Nikolaevich. In December 1915, the 6th infirmary of the Vologda Red Cross Community was named "Infirmary in commemoration of the 11th anniversary of His Imperial Highness the Heir Caesarevich and Grand Duke Alexei Nikolaevich" [5]. A military



Fig. 1. The building of the Orenburg Public Assembly (Nikolayevskaya Street) in 1914–1918

Рис. 1. Здание Оренбургского общественного собрания (Николаевская улица) в 1914–1918 гг.



hospital in Smolensk was named “The Infirmary of the Heir Caesarevich Grand Duke Alexei Nikolayevich in Smolensk” [6]. An infirmary in Arkhangelsk had the full name “Arkhangelsk Joint Infirmary named after His Imperial Highness Heir Tsesarevich Alexei Nikolaevich at the Wine Warehouse” [7].

In February 1916, an infirmary named after Tsesarevich Alexei Nikolaevich for lower ranks was organized in Orenburg. The infirmary for 70 beds was equipped on means of “Kirgis of the Turgai region” [8] and was located in the building of the Orenburg public assembly on Nikolaevskaya Street (Sovetskaya Street, 17) (Fig. 1).

The building was constructed in 1836. It is an object of cultural heritage of federal significance and is protected by the state (Fig. 2). On July 27 (August 8) 1891, the future Russian Emperor Tsesarevich Nicholas Alexandrovich (Nicholas II) honored the Orenburg Public Assembly with his presence

The infirmary belonged to the Red Cross medical institutions and was located under a flag in the Inner District of the Empire. The infirmary was headed by a senior doctor. Sisters of Mercy were admitted only from the Orenburg community of the Red Cross. Military ranks were allowed to serve as orderlies in the infirmary. Since July 1916, a considerable number of wounded soldiers arrived from the front. It was extremely difficult to find male servants for the hospitals, and it was undesirable to hire women for disciplinary reasons,

so the lower ranks from the convalescent patients were temporarily allowed to serve in the infirmary.

Wounded and sick lower ranks were sent to the infirmary for treatment by order of Major-General A.N. Baranov, the head of the Orenburg District Evacuation Point.

Regulations for the registration of evacuated military ranks were established by the Order to the Kazan Military District on November 10, 1915 No. 1329 [9]. According to the Order evacuated sick and wounded lower ranks arriving by sanitary trains were accepted by the head of an evacuation point. The head of the evacuation point received their names in the list provided by the chief doctor of a sanitary train.

Then, he distributed lower ranks to medical facilities according to information received in advance from chief physicians taking into account availability of vacant places. He also handed over to representatives of these institutions the wounded with their reports and notification cards, which were documents establishing patient's identity. He recorded the names of patients and corresponding medical facilities into the list that he had received in the sanitary train.

Medical hospitals drew up admission lists for each person on the basis of registration and notification cards provided by incoming patients of lower ranks. They also made notes on the cards regarding the admission of patients and sent them to the head of the evacuation point no later than 24 hours.



Fig. 2. The building of the Orenburg Public Assembly (17 Sovetskaya str.) nowadays

Рис. 2. Здание Оренбургского общественного собрания (ул. Советская, д. 17) в наши дни



The chief of the Orenburg district evacuation point, having received cards from medical hospitals, sorted them and registered all the arrived evacuated lower ranks according to a special card system.

In addition, all those who came to the infirmary for treatment were registered in an admission register. From February 10 to May 15, 1916, 677 men were treated in the infirmary. It is known from the notes of the head of the infirmary that “there were many lower ranks wounded in leg, as well as scurvy patients” [10].

In June 1916, large battles began on the western front. Wounded soldiers were transferred to the infirmary from medical institutions that were near the front in order to provide wards for the wounded in the battles. In July 1916, due to the large number of wounded from the front, the infirmary was offered to accommodate extra beds for patients. 7 days later it was reported that two sanitary trains were sent to Orenburg from Moscow, transiting through Samara, with 703 military ranks.

According to an internal order of the infirmary, wounded and sick soldiers got up at 7 am. At 8 a.m. they were provided with morning tea and at 4 p.m. with evening tea. “The tea was brewed in common, and sugar was given by 6 zolotniks (25.6 g — *author's note*) per day for each patient” [11].

“Food for military ranks undergoing treatment consisted of quite good-quality products, corresponded to ordinary soldiers' food and could not be described as excessive and luxurious” [12]. For lunch at 12 o'clock there was served meat soup and porridge. On Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday they cooked shchi, on Tuesday and Thursday — pearl or rice soup, on Sunday — soup with vermicelli. Shchi was allowed to be replaced by borscht, but not more than two days a week.

Wounded and sick soldiers who were in the infirmary, as well as the lower personnel of the infirmary on active military service, received meat allowance as the military units, i.e. 1/2 pound (0.225 kg — *author's note*) per day for one person.

Porridge was made of millet all days of the week. When cooking porridge they used lumpy lard of pork or beef and onions. It was recommended to put pepper, bay leaf and salt “in all dishes to one's liking” [13].

At 8 p.m. only soup was served for dinner: on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday there was pearl or rice soup, on Tuesday and Thursday — vermicelli soup, on Sunday there was shchi.

In October 1916, when there was a shortage of foodstuffs, in particular meat, the infirmary received a circular of the Chief Commissioner of the Russian Red Cross Society of the Inner Region of the Empire No. 95 dated October 8, 1916. “so that all medical institutions, where there are kitchen scraps, should have pigs for fattening and breeding them” [14] in order to provide meat for the infirmary in order to provide meat for the wounded and sick. It was allowed to use money provided to the infirmary to buy piglets. The amount of money was up to 60 rubles.

After lunch, from 1 to 2 o'clock in the afternoon, there came afternoon rest. From 2 to 4 o'clock in the afternoon the wounded and sick of the infirmary were allowed to go for a walk.

Lower ranks were always accompanied for a walk in uniform, which was provided in the infirmary, because the order of the Supreme Chief of Sanitation and Evacuation from November 19, 1914 No. 20, signed by Adjutant General Prince Alexander Oldenburgsky, prescribed “people in charge of medical institutions, when taking care of the wounded and sick, should always remember that the sick and wounded soldiers continue to be part of the army” [15]. Special stamps were put on clothing to avoid its sale by lower ranks.

On April 25, 1916 the Orenburg governor and ataman of the Orenburg Cossack Troops M.S. Tyulin (Fig. 3) allowed the wounded and sick lower ranks, who were undergoing treatment in the infirmary, to use His Excellency's garden for walks from 7 am to 7 pm. At the same time, patients must always be under supervision of a sister of mercy or orderlies. Unauthorized people were strictly forbidden to enter the garden.

Owners of local cinemas readily granted the wounded and sick the right to visit them for free on days and hours that were mostly free from other visitors.

Teachers from Orenburg parochial schools organized literacy classes for the sick and wounded lower ranks in the infirmary. Classes were held on all days of the week, except Sundays, according to the schedule agreed with the head of the Orenburg District Evacuation Point Major-General A.N. Baranov (Fig. 4). Education was conducted on a free-of-charge basis.

Every day in the infirmary ended with evening prayer at 9 pm.

Injured and sick patients of the infirmary (first of all “rheumatics”), were offered treatment at the



The infirmary was informed that if necessary, it could receive these items from sanitary and medical institutions and establishments of the military department and other public organizations.

When discharging lower ranks from the infirmary, a doctor wrote his conclusion in a soldier's ticket in the column "condition of the person discharged" [9]:

- a) finally recovered and fit for service — "fit for service";
- b) not requiring hospital treatment, but still in need of rest from 6 to 8 weeks to improve their health — "to the convalescent team", and those in need of rest for more than 8 weeks — "on leave to improve their health";
- c) those who have recovered but are not fit for service — "not fit for service";
- d) in need of trial — "subject to trial".

After being examined by an infirmary doctor, lower ranks to be discharged from the infirmary were sent to the district military commander on the same day, after lunch, accompanied by a nurse or an orderly.

According to the order of the Military Sanitary Department, before discharge from the infirmary, all, except those recognized unfit for military service, were vaccinated with typhoid vaccine [17]. It was recommended to start vaccination immediately, as soon as the patient's health condition allowed vaccination, so that the vaccination could not serve as an obstacle to timely discharge from the medical institution.

Information about the vaccination and the time of its production was entered in relevant documents of discharged patients, and in case of impossibility to vaccinate, it was required to explain the reasons.

Medical establishment issued boots and clothing (uniform shirts with epaulettes and uniform belts) to evacuated lower ranks when they were discharged from the infirmary. The issued clothing and footwear were recorded in special lists established in the military department.

The Orenburg Beekeeping Society organized courses on beekeeping for maimed soldiers from July 1 to September 1, 1916 at the apiary located in the Atamanskaya dacha near the Military Agricultural School. The purpose of the course was to train "knowledgeable apiarists from persons who were injured in the war" [18]. The main requirement for entrants was the ability to read and write. "The absence of a leg, one eye or several fingers does not prevent successful com-

pletion of the course" [18]. All those enrolled in the courses were provided with accommodation and food for the duration of the training, as well as paid for travel to the apiary and back at the expense of funds allocated for this purpose by the Ministry of Agriculture.

Belongings and cash of lower ranks who died in the infirmary were sent to the Main Directorate of the Russian Red Cross Society (under the Settlement Department) indicating the name, patronymic, surname, part of the army, the amount of money and property belonging of the deceased for accounting and storage.

The fate of the infirmary named after Tsesarevich Alexei Nikolaevich in Orenburg is unknown. The latest document preserved in the archives was received by the infirmary on December 27, 1916.

At the same time it is known that the Palace Infirmary (St. Petersburg) worked until the October Revolution. On October 27, 1917, after the Winter Palace was stormed, the wounded began to be sent to other infirmaries, and on October 28 it was dissolved [4]. The building of the Smolensk infirmary housed a secondary school in the 1930s. During fights for liberating the city in 1943, the former infirmary was very badly damaged and turned into ruins. After the end of the Great Patriotic War, the building of the former infirmary was not restored and was finally demolished permanently. The wine warehouse that housed the Arkhangelsk Joint Infirmary became known as a distillery, and there was no longer any memory of the former infirmary.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

**Authors' contributions.** All authors contributed substantially to the conceptualization, conduct of the study, and preparation of the article, and read and approved the final version before publication.

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