

Typhus found in DNA from Napoleonic troops

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University of the Mediterranean scientists have found evidence of typhus and trench fever in pulp from the teeth of Napoleonic soldiers.

Dr. Didier Raoult who used the dental pulp from the soldiers who died during Napoleon's disastrous retreat from Russia in 1812. He found DNA evidence that epidemic typhus and trench fever ran rampant among the French Grand Army.

Raoult who said his study identifies the specific species of louse-borne pathogens that were a major cause of death among the retreating soldiers.

Napoleon marched into Russia during the summer of 1812 with a half-million soldiers. Only a few thousand survived the war, weather and disease.

Construction work in 2001 unearthed a grave containing between 2,000 and 3,000 corpses. Raoult and colleagues identified body segments of five lice in a forensic excavation of two kilograms of earth containing fragments of bone and remnants of clothing.

Three of the lice carried DNA from the disease commonly known as trench fever, which afflicted many soldiers during World War I. Other remains had DNA containing the organism that causes epidemic typhus.

The study appears in the Jan. 1 issue of The Journal of Infectious

Diseases and is available online.

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