In 1784 Lanskoy died and Potemkin was needed at court to console the grieving Catherine.[67] After Alexander Yermolov was installed as the new favorite in 1785, Catherine, Yermolov and Potemkin cruised the upper Volga.[68] When Yermolov attempted to unseat Potemkin (and attracted support from Potemkin's critics), he found himself replaced, by Count Alexander Dmitriev-Mamonov in the summer of 1786.[69] Potemkin returned to the south, having arranged that Catherine would visit in the summer of 1787.[70] She reached Kiev in late January, to travel down the Dnieper after the ice had melted. Potemkin had other lovers at this time, including a 'Countess' Sevres and a Naryshkina. Leaving in April, the royal party arrived in Kherson a month later.[71][72] On visiting Sevastopol, Austria's Joseph II, traveling with them, was moved to note that "The Empress is totally ecstatic... Prince Potemkin is at the moment all-powerful".[73]

"Potemkin Village"

The notion of the Potemkin village (coined in German by critical biographer Georg von Helbig as *German:* Potemkinsche Dörfer) arose from Catherine's visit to the south. Critics accused Potemkin of using painted façades to fool Catherine into thinking that the area was far richer than it was. Thousands of peasants were alleged to have been stage-managed for this purpose. Certainly, Potemkin had arranged for Catherine to see the best he had to offer (naturally organising numerous exotic excursions) and at least two cities' officials did conceal poverty by building false houses. It seems unlikely, however, that the fraud approached the scale alleged. The Prince of Ligne, a member of the Austrian delegation, who had explored on his own during the trip, later proclaimed the allegations to be false.[74]

Commander-in-Chief

Potemkin remained in the south, gradually sinking into depression. This was not ideal; in August 1787, the second Russo-Turkish war of Potemkin's lifetime broke out, and he was now Russia's commander-in-chief. His opponents were anxious to reclaim the lands they had lost in the last war, and under pressure from Prussia, Britain and Sweden to take a hostile attitude towards Russia. Potemkin's bluster had probably contributed to the hostility, either deliberately or accidentally; either way, his creation of the new fleet and Catherine's trip to the south had certainly not helped matters. In the centre, Potemkin had his own Yekaterinoslav Army, while to the west lay the smaller Ukraine Army under the command of Field-Marshal Rumyantsev-Zadunaisky. On water he had the Black Sea Fleet, and Potemkin was also responsible for coordinating military actions with Russia's Austrian allies.[75] Potemkin and Catherine agreed on a primarily defensive strategy until the spring. Though the Turks were repelled in early skirmishes (against the Russian fortress at Kinburn), news of the loss of Potemkin's beloved fleet during a storm sent him into a deep depression. A week later, and after kind words from Catherine, he was rallied by the news that the fleet was not in fact destroyed, but only damaged. General Alexander Suvorov won an important victory at Kinburn in early October; with winter now approaching, Potemkin was confident the port would be safe until the spring.[76]

Potemkin in military attire, c. 1790, by Johann Baptist von Lampi the Elder

Turning his attention elsewhere, Potemkin established his headquarters in Elisabethgrad and planned future operations. He assembled an army of forty or fifty thousand, including the newly formed Kuban Cossacks. He divided his time between military preparation (creating a fleet of a hundred gunboats to fight within the shallow liman) and chasing the wives of soldiers under his command.[77] Meanwhile, the Austrians remained on the defensive across central Europe, though they did manage to hold their lines. Despite advice to the contrary, Potemkin pursued an equally defensive strategy, though in the Caucasus Generals Tekeeli and Pavel Potemkin were making some inroads.[78] In early summer 1788, fighting intensified as Potemkin's forces won their naval confrontation with the Turks with few losses, and began the siege of Ochakov, a Turkish stronghold and the main Russian war aim. Less promising was that St. Petersburg, exposed after Russia's best forces departed for the Crimea, was now under threat from Sweden in the Russo-Swedish War of 1788–90.[79] Potemkin refused to write regularly with news of the war in the south, compounding Catherine's anxiety.[80]

Potemkin argued with Suvorov and Catherine herself, who were both anxious to assault Ochakov, which the Turks twice managed to supply by sea. Finally, on 6 December, the assault began and four hours later the city was taken, a coup for Potemkin. Nearly ten thousand Turks had been killed at a cost of (only) two-and-a-half thousand Russians.[81] Catherine wrote that "you [Potemkin] have shut the mouths of everyone... [and can now] show magnanimity to your blind and empty-headed critics".[82] Potemkin then visited the naval yard at Vitovka, founded Nikolayev, and traveled on to St. Petersburg, arriving in February 1789.[81] In May he left once more for the front, having agreed contingency plans with Catherine should Russia be forced into war with either Prussia or the upstart Poland, which had recently successfully demanded the withdrawal of Russian troops from its territory. (Catherine herself was just about to change favorites for the final time, replacing Dmitriev-Mamonov with Platon Zubov.) Back on the Turkish front, Potemkin advanced towards the fortress of Bender on the Dniester river.[83]

The summer and autumn of 1789 saw numerous victories against the Turks,[84] including the Battle of Focşani in July; in early September, the Battle of Rymnik and the capture of both Kaushany and Hadjibey (modern day Odessa); and finally the surrender of the Turkish fortress at Akkerman in late September. The massive fortress at Bender surrendered in November without a fight.[nb 3][85] Potemkin opened up a lavish court at Jassy, the capital of Moldavia, to "winter like a sultan, revel in his mistresses, build his towns, create his regiments—and negotiate peace with [the Turks]... he was emperor of all he surveyed".[86] Potemkin even established a newspaper, *Le Courrier de Moldavie*. His preferred lover at the time—though he had others—was Praskovia Potemkina, an affair which continued into 1790. Potemkin renamed two ships in her honor.[87] As part of the diplomatic machinations, Potemkin was given the new title of "Grand Hetman of the Black Sea and Yekaterinoslav Cossack Hosts"[88] and in March he assumed personal control of the Black Sea fleet as Grand Admiral.[89]

In July 1790 the Russian Baltic Fleet was defeated by the Swedish at the Battle of Svensksund. Despite the damage, the silver lining for the Russians was that the Swedes now felt able to negotiate on an even footing and a peace was soon signed, based on the *status quo ante bellum*, thus ending the threat of invasion.[89] The peace also freed up military resources for the war against the Turks. Potemkin had moved his evermore lavish court to Bender and there were soon more successes against Turkey, including the capture of Batal-Pasha and, on the second attempt, of Kilia on the Danube. By the end of November, only one major target remained: the Turkish fortress of Izmail.[90] At Potemkin's request, General Suvorov commanded the assault, which proved to be costly but effective. The victory was commemorated by Russia's first, albeit unofficial, national anthem, "Let the thunder of victory sound!", written by Gavrila Derzhavin and Osip Kozlovsky.[91]