**A Comparison of British and French Military Identity and Organization during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars**

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# Abstract

The British and French armies that existed in the period between the fall of the Bastille and the Battle of Waterloo have been subject to any number of popular caricatures, myths, and misunderstandings. One such common stereotype is that the British army in the period was little more than an Old Regime army that somehow managed to win battles in the face of a French army that after centuries of aristocratic sclerosis and decades of revolutionary turmoil had mutated into an all-conquering juggernaut led by one of the universally recognized military geniuses of all human history; Napoleon Bonaparte. The image of the British soldier is of the downtrodden redcoat, whose life was one long story of alcoholism, hard fighting, and brutal corporal punishment at the hands of uncaring and brutal officers. The French soldier, in sharp contrast, is a bright-eyed young conscript, eager for victory and glory in the service of his country, of the ideals of the revolution, and of his seemingly-unbeatable Emperor. This thesis intends to examine the issues of military identity, that is to say how the soldiers truly saw themselves, and of military organization, specifically why armies organized and conducted themselves in the ways that they did. In so doing this thesis aims to challenge popular misconceptions, and to show that despite differences in ideology and ethos, the French and British armies actually came to adhere to a broadly similar ideal of military professionalism.

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# Declaration

I declare the following thesis to be entirely my own work. It has not been submitted at any other institution, or for any other award.

# Introduction

*In war, morale counts for three quarters, the balance of material force only makes up the remaining quarter.*

*Napoleon Bonaparte*

Studies of warfare can be divided into two broad categories. Authors like Hew Strachan and Gunther Rothenburg have tended to focus on technical matters, what might crudely be called ‘hard’ military history, such as tactics, organisation, technology, and the personalities of commanders. More recently a cultural and social history of warfare has developed, exemplified by authors such as Kevin Linch, Marianne Elliott, and Alan Forrest. These studies seek to put soldiers, armies, and warfare in general in a wider context. In studying the character of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars narrow studies of military technology are of little help. It is a generally acknowledged fact that both sides used much the same equipment, and that the equipment changed little if at all throughout the period. While equipment can in some cases offer insights into the identity and mind-set of the soldiers who use it, this is comparatively rare, and in any case not really applicable to the Napoleonic period. Soldiers were equipped on the basis of what was considered the best possible balance between logistical and combat efficiency, and in any case this was a period in which soldiers had little choice in how they were trained or used. Gone were the days when armoured knights sought out honourable hand-to-hand combat against social equals in the hope of renown and lucrative ransoms, ruining battle plans in the process. Yet at the same time it remained quite possible for individual achievement to be acknowledged and rewarded, as Napoleon did on an unprecedented scale. The majority of Napoleonic soldiers may not have considered themselves knights, or had much interest in chivalric ideals, but that did not prevent them from holding themselves, and others, to certain standards of behaviour.

This is not to say that the technical approach is of no value in a more cultural study, for it can provide useful information for illustrating arguments and establishing historical contexts. The number of men in a given army, for example, can offer insights into the military priorities and thinking of the government in question, and the status and perceived ability of the army’s commander. The extent to which that army is properly equipped can similarly reveal something of the state of war production, logistics, and political and military thinking. The alternative approach to military history is more concerned with the political and social context of the war. For those following this approach, the living conditions, social backgrounds, and religious or political attitudes of soldiers tend to be of greater interest than the weapons they carried or the battle tactics by which they were employed, this ground having been covered extensively already. They seek to know the soldiers for who they were rather than what they did.

Both approaches are necessary if we are to gain a full understanding of the nature of warfare and the mentalities it engenders, but neither is sufficient on its own. The ultimate purpose of this thesis is to understand how British and French soldiers in the Napoleonic period saw and understood themselves as soldiers. To examine in proper depth the precise range of social backgrounds from which they derived, and the religious and political opinions they may or may not have held, would be an undertaking far beyond the scope of this thesis. On the face of it, to gain an understanding of how contemporary soldiers saw themselves should be relatively simple, a matter of little more than examining and collating letters, memoirs, and other accounts from the period. However, while this is essential, there are nevertheless two particular problems in extracting usable information from these sources. One of these, and the most familiar to anyone attempting to study history, is the extent to which the evidence can be considered reliable. Basil Liddell-Hart, in his foreword to *The Letters of Private Wheeler*, draws the reader’s attention to what he describes as ‘conventional moralizing’ in accounts published after the wars.[[1]](#footnote-1) Popular sensibilities, at least among the reading public, must be taken into account when analysing any published source. Yuval Noah Harari and Neil Ramsey describe the development of literary preferences in the period, in particular the role of the so-called ‘cult of sensibility.’[[2]](#footnote-2) In a broad sense this manifested as a tendency to sanitize accounts, and to present soldiers in as sympathetic a light as possible. Private Wheeler’s *Letters* stand out from this tendency in that they were not published until 1951. Thus, as was Liddell-Hart’s stated intent, they can be considered a more clear-cut description of contemporary military life.

The other major problem is that soldiers say so little in their writings about the world around them. This is not to say that soldiers did not have opinions on the issues of the day, but without direct written evidence there is little to go on beyond the logical application of context, which in the absence of direct evidence is to make assumptions based on their environment and background. This lack of expressed opinion may simply mean that the soldiers were either unable or unwilling to express their opinions. The first can be explained by the fact that they lacked the educational wherewithal to express their feelings, most contemporary soldiers possessing only the rudiments of literacy, while the latter alludes to a parochial tendency in military identity, the soldiers having no desire to share their feelings with civilians who will not understand. The fact that some written sources do express opinions suggests that the former approach is the more accurate.

All wars are multifaceted in their contexts and particulars, but the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars are particularly complex, taking place as they did in the context of massive social and political upheaval. The French Revolution did not merely see a change in the structure of French government, but in the ethos and ideals underlying the whole of French society. Entire cultures and social identities were uprooted, altered, and combined in an attempt to create a new and cohesive *national* culture, and the armed forces were no exception. The deliberate change to French military identity during the Revolution was driven by two related but often competing impulses, which can be understood in terms of honour and virtue, or more appropriately *honneur* and *vertu.* The ideals of honour and glory were derived from much older concepts of French warriorhood, which regarded honour not merely as the preserve of the chivalric classes, but as a driving and defining ideal applicable to any French soldier. The ideal of virtue, as French Revolutionaries understood it, focussed on the soldier as a fellow citizen and equal, serving his country temporarily as a duty of citizenship. By endowing him with these values the French sought to raise the standing of the soldier, previously a suspect figure drawn from among the criminal and the desperate, but they did so in different ways. Honour sought to raise the soldier up, focussing on his specifically military qualities, while virtue sought to make him a citizen over all, his military role merely a component of his wider social responsibilities.

This stood in stark contrast to the approach of the British army in the period, which had changed little over the centuries since its founding in the reign of Charles II. In many respect a classic *ancien régime* army when the Revolution broke out, the British army was a volunteer force in principle and to a certain extent in practice. British soldiers were for the most part volunteers, though the army suffered from the problem that also bedevilled its French counterpart and practically all armies up the present day, namely that it had great difficulty in competing for willing recruits. Not only was the pay uncompetitive, but army life had developed a reputation, to some extent deservedly, for hardship and brutality. Whereas the French army changed significantly over the Revolutionary period, the British army changed relatively little. The two armies therefore provide an effective basis for comparisons of military systems and identities, continuing the long-standing debate over the relative virtues of conscripted versus volunteer militaries. The fact that the two societies derived from the same broad European military and social pan-culture makes for an even more effective comparison.

This thesis will illustrate and prove two particular points. Firstly, while the British and French armies were divided by ideology and practical approaches during the Revolutionary period, they nevertheless re-converged towards a broad common model of military professionalism. While the French made a brief departure in the form of the demi-brigade, the two armies were essentially similar in all respects but recruitment and promotion, two significant factors in military identity. As far as military identity itself is concerned, the thesis aims to examine the processes by which military identity changed, if it changed at all, in the period. Changes will be most apparent on the French side, when in the early years of the Revolution there co-existed a pre-Revolutionary line army largely unchanged but for the increasing emigration of its aristocratic officer corps, and a growing popular army made up of large numbers of volunteers. The amalgamation of these two forces is a prime example of the second point, which is that in most contexts ideology took a back seat to pragmatism in terms of practical matters of military organisation. The common caricature of the period is of the stolid, practical British army winning by sticking to what it knew, and of a French army hopelessly weakened by political generals and insubordinate soldiers more concerned with their rights than with their duties, an army confused and demoralized by demagoguery and ideological interference, waiting for Napoleon to cut the rot out and make it nigh-on unstoppable. The reality, as this study intends to prove, is that the French army was as pragmatic in its organisation and decision-making as its British counterpart. The amalgamation itself illustrates this, offering a practical solution to the competing requirements of political and military reliability. The Revolutionary *levée en masse* was not a purely ideological gesture, but a response to the French Republic’s pressing need for troops in the face of enemies both internal and external.

A particularly useful example of published material on the British side is Basil Liddell Hart’s *The Letters of Private Wheeler 1809-1828*. This work is a collection of letters written by a soldier in the Royal Surrey Militia, preceded by the author’s introduction, describing his transfer to the King’s Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. The letters are generally narrative in form, but contain useful information about militia and regular army life, including some insights into the opinions held by British soldiers. For his own part, Liddell Hart claims that officers’ accounts are the most interesting and valuable, while criticizing the *Recollections of Rifleman Harris* for having been written some years later and ‘polished’.[[3]](#footnote-3) Rifleman Harris was nonetheless drawn upon for this study for two main reasons. For one, as a source written and published with outside assistance, from an officer who found Harris working as a cobbler, it provides a counterpoint to sources like *Private Wheeler* and *Journal of a Soldier of the Seventy-First Glasgow Regiment, or Highland Light Infantry, from 1806-1815,* both of which were written by literate soldiers themselves.[[4]](#footnote-4) The other reason is that, like these other two examples, Harris is comparatively forthright in his opinions. He describes having to leave his aging shepherd father behind when drafted into the army, and his enthusiasm for later transferring to the 95th Rifles. Like Private Wheeler, he is not shy about describing what he likes and dislikes in an officer. What ultimately sets these two accounts apart is that Harris’ account was that it was altered, perhaps bowdlerized, by the officer who recorded it. Since Wheeler’s account never entered the public domain until much later, it was not subject to the same process, granting a clearer view of the military life both men shared. Sergeant Donaldson’s *Recollections of the Eventful Life of a Soldier* is useful by the same token, providing descriptions of combat and everyday life.[[5]](#footnote-5) In terms of style, it falls into the same mould as Rifleman Harris.

On the French side the primary sources take much the same form as the British sources, though only a comparative minority are translated. An example is *The Diary of a Napoleonic Foot Soldier* recounting the experiences of Jakob Walter, a Westphalian stonemason conscripted into Napoleon’s *Grande Armée*. [[6]](#footnote-6) Like *Private Wheeler,* the *Diary* includes an introduction and background information, putting Walter’s experiences in context and pointing out those of his statements which contradict historical fact, or for which there is no evidence. This is an example of one of the difficulties inherent in making use these particular sources; to wit, their fallibility as far as historical fact is concerned. Another valuable primary source from the French side is Captain Elzear Blaze’s memoir *Recollections of an Officer of Napoleon’s Army,* a source as opinionated as it is detailed, made more palatable with a healthy dose of humour.[[7]](#footnote-7) Like Rifleman Harris, Captain Blaze offers his own insights into what motivates soldiers, as well as what they tend to think about those who lead and command them. The account of Captain Jean-Roch Coignet provides the perspective of an officer of humble background, conscripted in 1799 and rising through the ranks.[[8]](#footnote-8) The *Memoirs of Sergeant Bourgogne,* a well-regarded source among Napoleonic historians for its insights into conditions during the Russian campaign, is also available online, though like *The Diary* and indeed most letters it offers little direct insight into what the author is thinking.[[9]](#footnote-9) Official opinion is well-provided-for online, with the writings of such worthies as Jacques Guibert and the Baron de Besenval providing insight into the exchange of military ideas going on inside France in the years running up to the Revolution.

Research on the period in question has been extensive, but little focuses directly on the subject of identity. This issue is usually mentioned in passing, or employed to reinforce a wider argument. Useful information can nonetheless be found from these more general studies. Colonel Ramsay Weston Phipps, in his four-volume *The Armies of the First French Republic*, covers the French side from a distinctly military perspective.[[10]](#footnote-10) The first volume describes the former Royal Army in some detail, describing it as an effective and disciplined force, while dismissing the Revolutionary army that followed it, though his criticisms generally focus on military issues, including the difficulties faced by the Regular troops in adapting to the new regime. The rest is mostly descriptions of campaigns and technical information, generally praising Napoleon, though the third volume stands out in its examination of the Vendee Rebellion. Phipps describes the rebellion with some enthusiasm, his descriptions going somewhat out of context, while gleefully recounting the inability of the Revolutionaries to understand it. Samuel F. Scott’s *The Response of the French Royal Army to the French Revolution* covers the pre-Revolutionary French army in detail, one of very few books to do so, containing information on everything from its origins to the training of the troops.[[11]](#footnote-11) Scott essentially agrees with Phipps that the Royal Army was a capable force in its own right, but is more forthright with regard to its weaknesses, particularly with regard to the officer corps. Spenser Wilkinson covers primarily the Revolutionary period in *The French Army before Napoleon*, and like his contemporary Phipps he focuses on technical aspects, notably the expansion of military recruitment in that period.[[12]](#footnote-12) Paddy Griffith provides a focussed examination of French military methodology in *The Art of War of Revolutionary France,* along with some helpful explanation of terminology.[[13]](#footnote-13) Georges Blond’s *La Grande Armée* describes Napoleon’s difficulties in acquiring conscripts, and the tendency of young recruits to be corrupted by barrack life.[[14]](#footnote-14) He also claims that the Imperial Guard was unpopular, for all its legend. Andrew Uffindell likewise acknowledges that the Guard was not universally popular, examining in depth the issues surrounding it, particularly its military usefulness and whether recruiting for it weakened the Line Regiments.[[15]](#footnote-15) Rory Muir likewise examines the latter issue.[[16]](#footnote-16) John Elting describes Napoleon’s army in depth in *Swords around a Throne,* putting it in context with an examination of its Royal and Republican predecessors.[[17]](#footnote-17) As far as identity itself is concerned, some sources stand out. Michael Broers, in *Europe under Napoleon,* goes into French historiography, warning in so doing that Napoleon should not be dismissed as a military dictator.[[18]](#footnote-18) He describes public order in France region by region, and is notable for challenging widespread opinion, in this case the common myths regarding the role of nationalism and enlightenment concepts. A singularly useful resource for this study was John Lynn’s *The Bayonets of the Republic.* [[19]](#footnote-19)Lynn analyses military motivations in depth, dividing them into three broad categories; remunerative, coercive, and normative. He also examines how changes in military thinking led to the favouring of certain of these leverages over others. Jean-Paul Bertaud’s *The Army of the French Revolution* counters certain myths regarding the French volunteers, and examines the wider political context of French military development in the early years of the Revolution.[[20]](#footnote-20) Of particular use in understanding the motivations of French soldiers is Alan Forrest’s *Napoleon’s Men,* which draws upon soldiers’ writings from the period. [[21]](#footnote-21) *Napoleon’s Men* provided a basis for the conclusion that soldiers’ letters contained little in the way of opinion, but the sheer scope of the study allowed for a minority of opinionated sources to be identified and drawn-upon, making it a singular asset. Forrest is best known for his challenging of the ‘levee en masse’ myths surrounding the French Revolution. In this he challenges the idea that French people rose ‘en masse’ to defend the nation, describing the various means by which recruitment was carried out and numbers maintained.

The British side has been covered in considerable depth by several well-regarded military historians. The late Richard Holmes provides *Redcoat,* a source that directly examines the lives and conditions of British soldiers while keeping them in their wider social context. Corelli Barnett’s *Britain and her Army* covers a period of several centuries, but provides useful context for the development of British and French military systems.[[22]](#footnote-22) In a manner familiar to any reader of his *Decline and Fall* trilogy, Barnett is scathing in his criticisms of British elite and popular opinion with regard to military matters. He finds particular fault with the controversy over whether or not Britain should have a standing army, regarding it as a political football that damaged relations between the British Army and the Militia. He also finds fault with the common British tendency to favour naval power, one of his main arguments being that lacking an effective permanent army made it very difficult for the British to intervene effectively in European wars. Detailed information on British recruitment and training methods can be found in John Houlding’s *Fit for Service.[[23]](#footnote-23)* Richard Glover contributes with *Peninsular Preparations,* covering the development of the British army before and during the campaign in Spain, including some useful information on the training regimen introduced by the Duke of York, as well as his disciplinary reforms.[[24]](#footnote-24) In *All for the King’s Shilling,* Edward Coss argues that the status and image of the British soldier in the period have been obscured by the ‘scum of the Earth’ image. He describes a British army drawn from a wide variety of backgrounds, who entered the service for a multiplicity of reasons, many of them financial.[[25]](#footnote-25)

David French’s *Military Identities* and Heather Streets’ *Martial Races* focus on a later period.[[26]](#footnote-26) Both are nevertheless helpful in understanding contemporary thought on the issues of regimental identity and the martial race concept. The role of the Militia and Volunteer movements is covered effectively by Ian Beckett in *Britain’s Part-Time Soldiers.[[27]](#footnote-27)* Kevin Linch has covered the relationship between these organisations and the regular army in several works, including ‘A Citizen and not a soldier’: the British volunteer movement and the War against Napoleon.’[[28]](#footnote-28) An in-depth description of the Duke’s career is provided by Alfred Burne in *The Noble Duke of York*, including extensive information on his military reforms.[[29]](#footnote-29) Allan W. Berry’s *The West Suffolk Militia 1778-1802* is relatively short and limited in scope, but nonetheless describes militia service and responsibilities.[[30]](#footnote-30) John Firebrace and Alan Rawlings describe the appearance and duties of a Fencible regiment in *His Majesty’s Fraser Fencible Regiment of Foot, 1794-1802*.[[31]](#footnote-31) Anthony Bruce’s *The Purchase System in the British Army* is a useful focussed study on the development of the British army’s promotion system from the seventeenth through to the nineteenth centuries.[[32]](#footnote-32) He argues that the first three Hanoverian monarchs, Georges I through III, were actually hostile to the purchase system, and were part of a substantial faction that sought to abolish it in favour of promotion on merit. Bruce also covers the arguments made in favour of purchase, which ran from the political to the pragmatic.

The role of Highland and Irish soldiers is discussed in many general studies of the period, but it is not so often the object of focussed studies. The military aspects of Irish history in this period are dominated by two main studies. The first is John Cornelius O’Callaghan’s *History of the Irish Brigade in the service of France*, a long and detailed account of the Brigade’s founding and history, including descriptions of its many reorganizations and its numbers at those points.[[33]](#footnote-33) O’Callaghan shows himself in his writing to be of Jacobite leanings, but nonetheless displays a degree of objectivity, exemplified by remembering to point at that at the Battle of Culloden; the Irish Piquets were treated as formal prisoners of war whereas their Jacobite allies were treated as rebels. That he would make this distinction implies that he did not intend his *History* to be a propaganda piece. He even goes so far as to describe the attempts of George II and George III to improve the conditions of Irish Catholics, the failure of which he blames on the intransigence of the Irish government. At the end, covering the breakup of the brigade during the Revolution, he points out that the majority of the ‘Irish’ troops were essentially French, enough so that the French government was willing to declare them so and maintain their newly-numbered regiments. Robert Shepherd nonetheless claims in *Ireland’s Fate, the Boyne and after* that most of the ‘Irish’ troops remained loyal to the French monarchy.[[34]](#footnote-34) The Irish Brigade’s Napoleonic reincarnation, the Irish Legion, is a neglected subject, covered in this case in J. G. Gallaher’s *Napoleon’s Irish Legion.*[[35]](#footnote-35) This work covers the political and social context of the legion’s creation, including the appearance of the United Irishmen movement and the failed uprising of 1798, of which many survivors would form the nucleus of the legion. For the most part, Gallaher’s work is a narrative of the legion’s troubled history, and can in that respect be considered a study in the difficulties of creating ‘political’ units out of ethnic or religious minorities. The works of Marianne Elliott are invaluable in understanding the political situation in Ireland at the time. Of these, *Partners in Revolution* is particularly helpful in understanding the 1798 uprising.[[36]](#footnote-36)

As for the Highlanders, John Prebble covers a not so well-known aspect of Highland military service in *Mutiny, Highland Regiments in Revolt.[[37]](#footnote-37)* Though Prebble appears somewhat vulnerable to the pervasive myths surrounding the Highlanders, it is nonetheless a rare insight into the turbulent early years of the famous Highland regiments. Prebble attempts to describe Highland military identity in terms of its cultural context, claiming that the original Black Watch, made up as it was of well-off volunteers from the clan gentry, suffered from a pervasive sense of entitlement that fed into the infamous mutiny by its later incarnation. He ultimately puts the mutinies down to Highland troops being unwilling to serve outside of the Highlands, or the British Isles at a pinch, and to endless affronts to their self-esteem, based on an honour-and-shame culture, by Prussian-influenced military discipline. Prebble nonetheless counters the myth of Highlanders’ willingness to serve by pointing out the large bribes that were sometimes necessary to persuade Highland families to give up their sons. Hugh Trevor-Roper makes it his business to demolish traditional myths in his *The Invention of Scotland*, focussing in particular on the shift in popular perceptions of the Highlanders, who went from being a feared and despised aboriginal leftover to the symbol of all that was noble in Scottishness.[[38]](#footnote-38) This he puts down to the Romantic movement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which regarded the Highlanders as an example of a virtuous primitive society, while knowing nothing of it. Trevor-Roper covers the development of Highland dress in particular detail, tracing the invention of the kilt to an English iron master by the name of Thomas Rawlinson, who developed it as a convenient garb for his workers. Both Prebble and Trevor-Roper mention Edward Burt, an English military engineer involved in the construction of the Highland road network. His *Letters from a Gentleman in the North of Scotland* offer a contemporary insight into Highland life.[[39]](#footnote-39) A more recent examination of the role of Highland soldiers is Andrew Mackillop’s *More fruitful than the soil, Army, Empire, and the Scottish Highlands 1715-1815,* which covers the conflict between the Highlanders’ original police role and the more conventional military role they acquired later.[[40]](#footnote-40) Mackillop goes on to counter the idea that post-Culloden Highland regiments were essentially pre-Culloden clan levies, arguing that chiefs would take any men rather than their rent-paying tenants and that the ‘clannish’ character of Highland regiments was largely imposed by authorities in London.

The more general military history sources tend to focus on technical information, but this is nonetheless of use for the purposes of understanding the organisational aspects and their relation to identity. Christopher D. Hall, in *British Strategy in the Napoleonic War: 1803-15*, describes British military numbers and recruiting in some detail.[[41]](#footnote-41) Gunther E Rothenberg, in *The Art of Warfare in the Age of Napoleon,* puts many of the changes in warfare from the eighteenth century through to the Napoleonic wars down to political and social factors.[[42]](#footnote-42) He covers the technical aspects in considerable detail, making his book useful in understanding the Light Infantry debate. In a curious contrast to Phipps, Rothenberg describes the French Royal Army as suffering from disciplinary problems, especially within its aristocratic officer corps. Brian Bond’s *The Pursuit of Victory, From Napoleon to Saddam Hussein,* claims that the casualty to participant ratio was actually higher in eighteenth-century wars than later.[[43]](#footnote-43) This may seem counter-intuitive considering the increasing destructive power of weaponry, but can be explained by the increasing size of armies, as well as improvements in medicine and logistics. He places the beginning of the Revolutionary wars at the Battle of Valmy, which is reasonable, and contends that the development of the Divisional system made it more difficult for armies to avoid pitched battles. The prize for the greatest detail in terms of technical information must go to Ugo Pericoli’s *1815: The Armies at Waterloo*, which includes comparisons and analyses of weapons and tactics.[[44]](#footnote-44)

Though there is extensive primary source material on the two armies it contains surprisingly little information on the opinions of soldiers. Issues of organisation provide relatively little difficulty, since necessary information can be acquired from official documents from the period. Issues of opinion and identity, however, require more personal narrative. These would include personal accounts, including letters and diaries, along with contemporary books. These can be found, but we must assess how far they provide an accurate representation of opinion. The majority of the sources were written by officers, since in both cases it was primarily officers who possessed the necessary literacy. Personal accounts of the wars, appearing in book form, have a tendency to be ‘polished’, that is to say, they tend to omit or misrepresent certain details in accordance with the social mores of the time. By nature, the letters and diaries tend to be repetitive, and contain few indications of opinion or feeling. Complaint is universal, and may be considered a soldiers’ prerogative. It also tends to be for much the same reasons on both sides. This can be linked to the issue of a shared military culture, in the sense that soldiers tended to understand one another despite linguistic and national barriers. The purpose of this brief section will be to examine the levels of literacy of both sides, ascertaining the extent to which the troops were capable of expressing opinion. This will serve to establish a proverbial *state of play¸* helping to ensure coherence in the rest of the thesis. It will also examine the effects of literacy, or lack thereof, on the lives and attitudes of the soldiers themselves.

At the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, public education in Britain was at best patchy, at worst practically non-existent. The education which existed was provided on an informal basis, the ‘Dame’ and ‘Free’ schools, run by individuals or groups on their own initiative. The curriculum was fairly basic by modern standards, usually focussing on reading with writing included in some cases. There was an almost universally religious overtone to this, at least among Christian communities.[[45]](#footnote-45) The Scottish Highlands were, insofar as information is available, by far the worst with regard to the provision of education. According to the Inverness Report of 1822, out of a population of four hundred and sixteen thousand, of which just over fifty thousand were school-age children, only eight thousand five hundred and fifty were found to be receiving education in schools. In addition, one third of the population lived more than two miles from the nearest school, while half the population remained unable to read, with levels of illiteracy reaching seventy per cent in the Hebrides, Western Inverness and Ross.[[46]](#footnote-46) Henry Brougham’s Select Committee Report, made in 1820, was the first attempt in Britain to acquire comprehensive statistics on the availability of education. It found that in 1818, only one in every fourteen to fifteen persons were receiving education, claiming that this had been a considerable improvement since the beginning of the century.[[47]](#footnote-47) If the population of the British Isles was around ten million in 1815, then this implies that just over six-hundred-thousand were receiving education, this estimate being somewhat optimistic. This is proof that literacy was not available to the bulk of the population.

Written information on public education during the period in question is somewhat lacking, precisely because it was handled informally, with written information becoming gradually more common as the century progressed, correlating to advances in public education. This state of affairs in itself is indicative of the attitude of the government and political elite at the time. It was widely considered that education was not necessary within the new *laissez-faire* economic system. Most jobs could be learnt by doing and required no particular technical skills, and it was still possible for illiterate men to rise even to managerial positions.[[48]](#footnote-48) Education, such as it was, was not only focussed on Christianity, but also influenced by Malthusianism and Jeremy Bentham’s new philosophy of Utilitarianism.[[49]](#footnote-49) This meant that education tended to be focussed on moral improvement for the former part and the acquisition of economically useful skills on the latter part. There could be little room in such a regime for the development of linguistic ability. As such, even though a small minority of enlisted men could both read and write, they were unlikely to have much more than a basic grasp of vocabulary. It is therefore unlikely that they possessed the linguistic wherewithal to accurately portray their personal opinions in writing.

The reason for this lack of supply was not simply *laissez-faire* neglect; it was also political. It was feared by the ‘establishment’ that too much literacy would lead to too much reading of subversive pamphlets. George Chapman, master of a Grammar school in Dumfries, argued in *A Treatise on Education* in 1773 that reading, writing, and arithmetic were sufficient for the urban poor. He argued that education was necessary to inculcate certain character traits in the working poor, to make them humble, forgiving, hard-working, and respectful of authority.[[50]](#footnote-50) Joseph Butler, Bishop of Bristol, warned in his *Sermon* of 1745 that the elite should not consider ignorance a suitable means of controlling the lower classes. Reading, he argued, was necessary for moral improvement and the avoidance of radicalism.[[51]](#footnote-51) There was undeniably a strong element of social control in public education even as it expanded through the nineteenth century. So much so that it drew the ire of a certain William Cobbett, founder of the *Political Register.* A known radical and campaigner for parliamentary reform, Cobbett described the new schools as ‘seminaries of slavery’, accusing them of making their pupils:

‘…contented with a Government, under treatment which ought to

urge them on…to lawful resistance.’[[52]](#footnote-52)

Judging by the tone of this denunciation, the fears of those in power regarding the potential uses of education were not entirely unjustified, even without the paranoia Cobbett was known to suffer from in later life. When taken in conjunction with the widespread fear of sedition during the French Revolution and subsequent wars, this shows the importance of ideological control in education in during this period. It can be concluded from this that, on top of lacking much in the way of linguistic wherewithal, the average British soldier would have been unlikely to hold any subversive opinions, much less meaningfully present them in his writings.

Of particular relevance to this thesis, the issue of literacy or the lack thereof was noted in military thinking of the period. General James Wolfe, remembered primarily for his death at the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, wrote in ‘*General Wolfe’s instructions to young officers: also his orders for a battalion and an army*’ in 1768 that both Corporals and Sergeants should be literate, both in reading and writing. A certain Captain Thomas Simes, writing in *A Military Course for the Government and Conduct of a Battalion,* argued for the establishment of regimental schools:

‘…it would be highly commendable if he would pay some attention to

the conduct of a regimental school and appoint a non-commissioned

officer to act as master who is capable of teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic, by whom soldiers and their children should be carefully instructed and a place should be fixed upon for that purpose.’[[53]](#footnote-53)

Regimental schools were not unknown in this period, and there can be little doubt of their necessity. Neuberg himself points out the necessity of reading and writing for the everyday running of a regiment, noting with some justification that this is not generally understood by those unfamiliar with military life.[[54]](#footnote-54)

Public education in a*ncien régime* France was generally left in the hands of the Catholic clergy, with the Jesuit Order dominating male secondary education until their expulsion in 1762.[[55]](#footnote-55) The secular alternative, at least in theory, came largely in the form of Louis XIV’s *petites écoles,* a system of primary schools intended to provide basic literacy. They became the basis of the post-Revolutionary education system, but were considered insufficient in themselves, not only on the basis of their numbers, but also their curriculum. The Revolution sought not merely to change the uppermost echelons of government, but the whole of French society, along with the concepts and manners that underlay it. This would require an education system that served not just to provide basic literacy, but to create the ideal citizens of the future, ensuring the long-term survival of the Revolution. Louis Michel le Peletier de Saint-Fargeau provided one of the more radical proposals, advising the creation of military boarding schools. The strong Spartan influences on his ideas are not surprising, considering the widespread Hellenophilia in Enlightenment thought and discourse. His proposal was not taken seriously, however, and only presented to the Convention on June 26th 1793 out of respect for his recent martyrdom. Of greater import in this context is the person of Joseph Lakanal, famed for his *Projet d’éducation nationale*, presented on the aforementioned June 26th. His plan was simple, to create one state-funded primary school per thousand inhabitants and leave secondary education to the private sector. The Bouquier Law of December 17th included the basics of his plan, also stipulating that anyone with a *certificat de civisme* could found a school.[[56]](#footnote-56) Despite these reforms, public education was not universalized until the late nineteenth century. By 1829, only two-thirds of communes possessed a primary school.[[57]](#footnote-57)

Going on this evidence, it is safe to say that while some soldiers would have been literate, a significant proportion would not. It must be remembered that both sides recruited the bulk of their enlisted personnel from the lowest orders of society. The result was isolation and alienation, with soldiers unable to communicate over any substantial distance, except by the assistance of a literate comrade, the awkwardness of this effectively precluding the expression of any personal feeling. A particular problem was that this rendered soldiers on campaign unable to communicate with their families, let alone support them financially. In a time where soldiers’ families could expect little in the way of social support in either country, the ability of soldiers to communicate with their families was vital to the maintenance of morale. In the British army, which was largely segregated from society, this alienation had been accepted as a fact of life, as it had been in the other European professional armies, including that of Bourbon France. The noticeable difference lies in Revolutionary France, specifically the concept of the citizen-soldier with codified rights. Of all his new-found rights, one of the most significant to the French soldier was the right not to be cut off from his family and community, which would have been his fate in previous times.

In the Revolutionaries’ Cincinnatian ideal of a temporary army fighting short wars of national defence, there would be no problem, since the war would soon end and he would thus be discharged, allowing no time for alienation to set in. If the war turned out to be long, as in practice it did, then the soldier’s desire to protect his country would keep him honest. In practice this was not the case. The Cincinnatian ideal evaporated in the face of military necessity, with the period of enlistment growing longer and longer in the face of less than effective foreign aggression and the Convention’s pursuit of national security through the annexation of smaller neighbours. It would be difficult for any understanding observer to condemn any resentment those young men might have felt. They had been taken far from their homes and families, indeed from their whole world. They were required, by virtue of being young, male, and French – the same principle would later be applied to the territories France invaded or annexed -, to fight and die for a cause they may or may not have believed in. Their counterparts across the lines could at least claim the bitter dignity of having chosen the military life, but for the French conscript stranded far from home in a war that might never end, the ideals of liberty and equality must have rung hollow at times.

It therefore became vital to provide means by which soldiers could communicate. The army under Napoleon made a considerable effort to expand literacy, with the Reserve Companies employing schoolmasters to teach basic literacy.[[58]](#footnote-58) This can be compared to the British practice of creating Regimental schools, as mentioned earlier. Both governments also sought to make it easier for soldiers to send letters. The British did so in an Act of Parliament in 1795:

‘And whereas it is expedient that Non-commissioned Navy, Army,

Militia, Fencible Regiments, Artillery, and Marines, should whilst

on service, be permitted to send and receive Single Letters by the Post

on their own Private Concerns, at a Low Rate of Postage; be it

therefore further enacted by the Authority aforesaid, That from and

after the passing of this Act, no Single Letter sent by the Post from

any Non-commissioned Officer, Seaman, or Private, employed in His Majesty’s Navy, Army, Militia, Fencible Regiments, Artillery, or

Marines, shall whilst such Non-commissioned Officer, Seaman or

Private respectively shall be employed on his Majesty’s service, and

no otherwise, be charged or chargeable by Virtue of any Act of

Parliament now in Force with a higher Rate of Postage than the sum

of One Penny; for the conveyance of every such letter; such Rate of

Postage of One Penny for every such letter, to be Paid at the Time of

putting the same into the Post Office of the Town or place from whence such Letter is intended to be sent by the Post.’[[59]](#footnote-59)

The French army acted similarly, with letters sent from outside France charged for as if from the borders of France, regardless of the distance involved. These measures were highly necessary, considering the unprecedented size of armies and the significant strains on their morale. That they went so far to facilitate communication between soldiers and their homes shows how seriously such issues of morale were taken by both sides.

# Chapter 1: Professional Identities in the British Army

The question of professionalism is at the heart of any study of military identity. A professional soldier is one for whom the military life is his primary profession, generally understood as opposed to a soldier who serves for only a limited time, a ‘citizen’ soldier in the modern context. Indeed, the very term ‘soldier’ derives from the Latin *solidare,* meaning *to pay.* The concept of the citizen soldier is particularly relevant here, as it was arguably Revolutionary France that invented it in its modern sense. To add a further caveat, many armies throughout history have combined professional and non-professional elements. The Soviet Army of the twentieth century, for example, combined a professional officer corps with conscription in the enlisted and NCO ranks. This model is actually not much different from that of eighteenth-century European armies before the French Revolution, the main exception being that the enlisted men were as a rule volunteers, though some states, notably Sweden and Prussia, maintained arrangements for conscription in times of national emergency. Officers were indeed professional, but not in the way that is understood today. *Ancien régime* officers tended to be members of the aristocracy, considering military service to be a part of their essential identity and purpose. This version of professionalism can be dated back to the warrior aristocracy of the Middle Ages. This ‘warrior caste’ did not so much disappear as evolve, becoming the officer class of seventeenth and eighteenth century armies. It would survive in many cases long after the Revolution, with the *Junker* aristocracy dominating the Prussian and German Imperial officer corps up to the First World War. Even today, in some armies officers are chosen on a social basis, usually for political reliability. This shows us that the development of military science is not so much revolutionary as evolutionary.

The development of the British army as it existed at the end of the eighteenth century began with the New Model army. Existing from 1645 to 1660, the New Model army is best remembered for its role in the Wars of the Three Kingdoms, as the conflicts surrounding and including the English Civil War are sometimes known, and in the Interregnum. Though the New Model army was dissolved in 1660 and never formally recreated, it nevertheless laid the groundwork for the English and later British army that would appear shortly afterwards. When Charles II and James II found it necessary to maintain a regular army, they organized it on much the same pattern as that of the New Model. Aside from the eponymous red coat, the most significant feature to be carried over was the regiment as a permanent organization. The most basic military unit was the company, sometimes called a *bande*, of around one hundred fighting men and any number of followers. This was led by a Captain, whose sole responsibility it was to feed, equip, and train the men, while pocketing as much of the difference as he could get away with. The rank of colonel was provided by the Spanish, in the form of the *cabo de colunela*, or ‘head of column’, instituted by King Ferdinand in 1505.[[60]](#footnote-60) His columns, numbering around a thousand men, are a clear link to the battalions and regiments that would come into existence later.

The responsibilities of a sixteenth century colonel were almost entirely tactical, with administrative functions remaining with the individual captains and higher functions being the responsibility of the army’s general. The term ‘regiment’ was used to refer to a formation of companies, usually around ten in number, in a purely tactical context.[[61]](#footnote-61) In Britain this distinction effectively disappeared as the New Model army was maintained indefinitely, the companies remaining both in existence and in their regiments. As fate would have it, the army created by Charles II would also remain in existence, the regiment becoming a permanent and recognizable institution as had already happened in France. The relevance of this development was not purely military, but political and social as well. With regard to professional identities, one feature of the New Model army not to be resurrected was the requirement for officers to be professional. The institution of the purchase system can be seen as a backlash against this, the intention being to prevent the creation of another politically-active army.

This first chapter will examine the development and nature of a professional identity among British soldiers in the period, while the second chapter will cover French soldiers. This approach will allow for the development of professional identities to be examined from two different directions. The first direction will be that followed by the British army, of an army that remained broadly professional throughout the period, while the second direction is that of the French army, a traditional professional army combining with an avowedly unprofessional army to create a force that, despite acquiring personnel by conscription, would nonetheless develop a professional identity and ethos. To examine how a civilian might develop a military identity, it is necessary to examine the process by which a civilian becomes a soldier. As such, both chapters will examine the recruitment and training processes, along with the effect of combat. The chapters will also examine the role of unit identities, including those of supposedly ‘elite’ units, of which there existed a plethora throughout the period. It is the intent of these chapters to show that despite the ideological and national differences between the two sides, there nonetheless existed similarities both in practical and identity-related contexts.

## Recruitment of Enlisted Men

The British regular army, like most European armies in the period, recruited on a voluntary basis. By one means or another, the British army expanded from a peacetime establishment of just over seventeen thousand in 1793 to as high as just over two hundred and thirty-six thousand by 1812, along with a ‘foreign’ contingent of over thirty-two thousand.[[62]](#footnote-62) Individual regiments were responsible for their own recruiting, which was usually carried out by sending out recruiting parties, often led by sergeants chosen for their charisma and crowd-working skills, to persuade men to join. Under the ‘Talents’ administration, officers of the volunteers, or regular officers on half-pay, were permitted to act as ‘extra recruiting officers’, receiving a bounty for every recruit they brought in.[[63]](#footnote-63) By 1789, around fifty per cent of sergeants and just over forty per cent of commissioned officers were engaged in full-time recruiting.[[64]](#footnote-64) Recruits were primarily men from the lowest levels of society, though the collapse of the weaving trade brought some comparatively better-off recruits into the Crown’s service.[[65]](#footnote-65) Escape from unemployment or poverty was overall a common reason for volunteering. Sergeant Kite’s pitch in George Farquhar’s 1706 play *The Recruiting Officer* gives an impression of the reasons why many sought refuge in armed service:

… if any prentices have severe masters, any children have unnatural parents, if any servants have too little wages, or any husband too much wife; let them repair to the noble Sergeant Kite, at the Sign of the Raven, in this good town of Shrewsbury, and they shall receive present relief and entertainment.[[66]](#footnote-66)

That Sergeant Kite should mention children had a double meaning in reality. The point at which a boy became a man was not as clearly defined in the period as today, though it was generally considerably earlier. The British army had a minimum age for recruitment, as well as a minimum height requirement. In general, the minimum height for a recruit was five feet and seven and a half inches, or around one point seven metres, while the acceptable age range was between fifteen and twenty-five. The rules allowed for ‘growing’ boys no shorter than five feet and five inches, so long as their home parishes could provide evidence of their identity and age. This was the theory, but in practice there was no legal bar to younger boys enlisting, as Charles Mathew Clode observes;

102. The age at which a Recruit is deemed eligible, is 18 years - though boys of 14 years are often enlisted. No question can be raised as to the legality of such an enlistment. “By the general policy of the Law of England,”

said Mr. Justice Best, “the parental authority continues until the child attains 21; but the same policy also requires that a minor shall be at liberty to contract an engagement to serve the State (as a Soldier). When such an engagement is contracted, it becomes inconsistent with the duty which he owes to the public that the parental authority should continue.”[[67]](#footnote-67)

Under a regulation of 1796, boys under sixteen could be as short as five feet and one inch. Edward Coss, drawing on Kevin Linch’s dissertation “The Recruitment of the British Army 1807-1815”, argues that around one in four recruits did not meet the age requirement, with most defaulters being over the limit, and around one in five were under the required height.[[68]](#footnote-68)

Recruits were not always easy to come by, however, and recruiters regularly resorted to dirty tricks when pickings were slim. One such attempt in April 1795 caused a riot in Westminster, when a recruiting sergeant gave an unwary youth money to buy tobacco, then upon his return claimed that he had ‘taken the shilling’. This conduct occasioned the sergeant to be attacked by local people, allowing his victim to escape.[[69]](#footnote-69) Thus success was dependent in part on local opinion, with particular regard to would-be recruits. This particular youth was fortunate, but unpopular individuals might find little in the way of neighbourly support if they fell into a recruiter’s clutches. Recruiting officers and sergeants were also not sub-contracting the work of recruiting to so-called ‘crimps.’ These middlemen would acquire recruits by whatever means presented themselves, often with little regard for the law. A tavern-keeper, for example, might prey on unwary customers by getting them drunk and imprisoning them for collection, while some crimps found men in the local jails, with or without the knowledge or consent of the authorities.[[70]](#footnote-70) In this respect, a crimp can be considered the nearest equivalent to a French *racoleur.* It is perhaps no surprise that desertions were most common among new recruits, and that they tended to take place at home and in wartime.[[71]](#footnote-71)

In Britain recruits were required to be sworn in before a magistrate and then examined by a doctor. Since the recruitment process could be halted at either stage, this theoretically guarded against coercion. But this process could be circumvented if the recruiter was willing to perjure himself by swearing that the recruit in question had been properly processed. Another legal impediment to enlistment was if the would-be soldier turned out to be an apprentice, as described by William Lawrence:

How I was spending the rest of the night meanwhile can better be conceived than described; but next morning, as I was going up to the Town Hall with an officer to be sworn in, who should meet us but my father and mother. On their telling the officer that I was an apprentice, he gave me up to them without any further trouble, except that he asked me what had become of my bounty money, and on finding that I had only seventeen shillings and sixpence left out of my whole five guineas, kindly took the care of even that off my hands. Then we marched off home, and my father went to find out what was to be done in the matter from a magistrate, who advised him to take me back to Dorchester to be tried at the next sittings; which advice being acted on, I was severely reprimanded by the bench, and given my choice of serving my time or else going to prison. Of course I chose the former, and they gave me a letter to take with me to my master. When I got downstairs I met the officer who had enlisted me, who told me that if my master was unwilling to take me back, he would enlist me again; and finding on asking me if I had any money that he had taken all I possessed, he gave me a shilling and wished me well.[[72]](#footnote-72)

The local Magistrates’ Court also provided a source of recruits, when recruiters offered the so-called *gallows choice*: in short, serve or hang. This did not make the British army a convict army in the popular sense of the term. British law at the time prescribed the death penalty for a wide variety of crimes, many of them petty, regardless of circumstance or even the age of the defendant, and often upon questionable pretexts. The Waltham Black Act of 1723, for example, allowed the death penalty for a series of rural crimes if the accused was found to be disguised or armed, and trial could be dispensed with if the accused could be said to have resisted arrest.[[73]](#footnote-73) The majority of the convicts who found themselves in uniform were therefore not hardened criminals at all, and may have faced the gallows for as little as being in the company of gypsies for one month. In practice, many avoided execution by accepting transportation to the colonies which, like execution itself, could be avoided by joining the army. On top of this, the 1701 Impressment Act theoretically empowered Justices of the Peace to conscript any men found to be unemployed, lacking means of support, or without ‘lawful calling.’[[74]](#footnote-74) Though local authorities possessed this power, in practice they seem to have made little use of it. The purpose of the acts was most likely to encourage those potentially subject to them to volunteer of their own free will.[[75]](#footnote-75)

The other two major armed formations, the Militia and Volunteers, recruited by very different means. The militia was a venerable institution in British society, having existed since 1558, though the form it took during the Napoleonic wars had only existed since the passing of a series of reform bills, culminating in April of 1769. Each county was required to submit an annual report listing the number of suitable men aged between eighteen and forty-five. This was intended to provide a fair and equitable basis for recruitment quotas, but failed in practice due to official inertia, with the 1757 quotas remaining in force unchanged for almost forty years. Balloting was invariably unpopular, both with those who might be called-upon to serve and those who had to cover its expenses, including supporting the families of those who drew service. The common failure of officials to explain the legislation made matters worse, leading to misunderstandings over pay and whether or not they might be sent aboard.[[76]](#footnote-76) Those wishing to avoid three years of militia service could escape by providing a substitute, the rates rising from around twenty-five pounds in 1803 to sixty pounds in 1812.[[77]](#footnote-77) Substitutes tended on the whole to be agricultural labourers, and formed a high proportion of active militia personnel. Ian Beckett provides an example in *Britain’s part-time soldiers* of the Newport Hundreds in February 1797, of whom only seven out of one hundred and thirteen had taken part in the actual ballot, with sixty-eight of the substitutes being labourers.

If balloting was so unpopular, then the question arises as to how the Militia grew so large. Britain could boast around one hundred and five thousand Militia by January 1798; the single largest contingent of British land forces at that time.[[78]](#footnote-78) The answer is provided by Kevin Linch, who shows that there was a distinct drop-off in balloting after 1807 in favour of direct recruitment for bounties. Over forty-one thousand militiamen were recruited by ballot in that year, with no balloting taking place in the following year. The high point of balloting was over ten thousand in 1810, after which it dropped as low as two hundred and fifty-three in 1813, after which there was no more balloting for the rest of the period. Throughout the six years of 1809 to 1815, the new practice of direct recruitment outdid balloting every year, with the greatest disparity being over then thousand direct recruits to the aforementioned two hundred and fifty-three in 1813. The fact that regular recruitment was consistently higher than militia recruitment, except in 1810, strongly suggests that this policy did not steal recruits from the regulars.[[79]](#footnote-79)

Though lacking the Militia’s pedigree, the Volunteer movement had also existed previously. Called for in 1794 and again in 1803, similar movements had appeared several times before in the eighteenth century, generally in response to fear of invasion. Beckett describes two other likely motivations, namely a fear of radical activity, and a desire on the part of the ‘middling sorts’ to establish themselves as a cultural and political force. The first two possibilities are entirely valid, though the third is harder to prove and better-suited to the political section. Unlike the militia the volunteers by their nature drew on segments of the population unlikely the join the regular army. Volunteer cavalry units, often known as Yeomanry, drew heavily on the agricultural population, who were more likely to provide their own mounts. Beckett provides figures for five troops in Buckinghamshire and Derbyshire between 1798 and 1804, in which anything up to sixty-nine per cent of recruits were farmers or their sons, while up to thirty-nine per cent were professionals or tradesmen. By contrast the infantry units, which shall be referred to as ‘volunteers’ in contrast to the cavalry ‘yeomanry’ for simplicity, were made up primarily of skilled workers.[[80]](#footnote-80) Fifteen thousand yeomanry and over fifty-thousand volunteers had been recruited by January 1798, a number that had risen to twenty-one thousand and ninety-seven thousand respectively three years later. Following the signing of the Treaty of Amiens, these formations were largely disbanded.[[81]](#footnote-81) When the volunteers were revived with the resumption of hostilities in 1803, their numbers rose to over three-hundred and forty-two thousand by January of the following year, a number so vast that the Ordnance office was unable to arm them.[[82]](#footnote-82) It was during this time that the government produced one of its most radical pieces of legislation with regard to military recruitment in the entire conflict: the General Defence Act of 27 July 1803. Otherwise known as the ‘Levy en Masse Act’, the act divided the male population into four ‘classes’. The first two classes included unmarried men under thirty and unmarried men aged between thirty and fifty respectively, with exceptions for those with children aged under ten years. The third class would consist of married men aged between seventeen and thirty with no more than two children under ten, while the fourth covered all the rest.[[83]](#footnote-83) Of these, the first three classes would undergo two hours training on Sundays for a maximum of twenty days. The legislation included a promise to suspend the levy if sufficient volunteers from the first three classes came forward as to make it unnecessary, which they subsequently did. The wider implications of this legislation will be covered in the political section.

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## Officer Recruitment

The British army was able to recruit ever larger numbers of officers during the Napoleonic wars, whether in spite or because of the Purchase system. Purchase can be traced as far back as the late seventeenth century, when European armies were well into the process of change from the older ‘pike and shot’ approach to what is recognized as the eighteenth-century model. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a Captain was entirely responsible for leading and administrating his ‘bande’, or ‘company’ as they were increasingly known. The result was invariably fraud, with such opportunities for self-enrichment as claiming pay money for more men than one actually had and pocketing the difference.[[84]](#footnote-84) Regimental Colonels late in the Stuart dynasty were every bit as venal as the Elizabethan Captains, cheating the enlisted men of their salaries through stoppages both legal and illegal, and defrauding the government through false expenses claims.[[85]](#footnote-85) Despite this, or perhaps because of it, the purchase system as it came into being had its fair share of advocates, at least in the early part of the eighteenth century. The Duke of Marlborough was one of them, arguing that it prevented parliamentary interference in the recruitment and promotion processes. At the same time, so he argued, purchase offered a means by which talented officers could be advanced, as Generals had the final say on promotions within their own commands.[[86]](#footnote-86) A related argument is that the constant exchange of commissions ensured that officers were constantly moving up the hierarchy, preventing stagnation in the officer corps. Purchase could also, in theory, have a beneficial effect on officer discipline, as an officer found wanting could be stripped of his commission, thus losing his investment.[[87]](#footnote-87)

The actual process of purchase was fairly straightforward, though it should be borne in mind that the set price represented the absolute value of the commission. Thus, an ensign might pay £400 for his commission, but then only £100 for a lieutenant’s commission worth £500, paying only the difference as he rose through the ranks. Once the first payment had been made, a would-be officer had only to prove that he possessed the education of a gentleman, which included military drawing and at least one European language.[[88]](#footnote-88) Each commission existed independently of the others, and when selling his commissions he would receive the money from the purchaser of each individual commission. Thus, a Captain would receive money from a Lieutenant for his captaincy, from an Ensign for his Lieutenancy, and from a prospective officer for his Ensigncy. All transactions were handled by the Regimental Agent, along with any additional fees and clandestine palm-greasing. Testimonials of his worthiness were most helpful, preferably from commanding officers, without which the candidate would usually have to settle for a commission in a colonial formation, which were significantly less prestigious. Thanks in part to the decentralized nature of the regimental system, the decision lay ultimately with the regiment’s colonel. Prospective officers possessed of neither money nor testimonials might instead serve as Volunteers, performing the duties of enlisted men but otherwise having to live as and socialize with officers, perhaps gaining a commission if they showed ability.[[89]](#footnote-89) Purchase was never applied to the Royal Artillery or the Royal Engineers, in which entrance and promotion were handled by ‘selection’, that is to say by merit, as in the Royal Navy and the French army.[[90]](#footnote-90) The reasoning behind this is obvious, as both branches required certain technical skills in order to operate effectively.

Officer promotions were worked out through a process of elimination, with the vacancy going to the most senior of the next lowest rank with both the desire and ability to purchase. If he could not purchase, or did not wish to for some reason, then the vacancy would go to the next most senior who could and would. The issue of what to do when no one from the rank below wanted to accept the promotion does not seem ever to have risen. From 1720 onwards, this process was increasingly taken under War Office control. A subaltern could not, from this period onward, become a Captain without having served ten years in lower ranks.[[91]](#footnote-91) This reform was intended to prevent officers from rising too quickly, avoiding the scandalous incidences of officers beginning their military careers in the nursery and commanding regiments as teenagers. Though few cases were as extreme as that of Percy Kirke, who became an ensign at twelve months in 1684 and a captain at six years in 1689, this problem continued as late as 1758, in which George Lennox became lieutenant colonel of the 33rd Foot aged only twenty.[[92]](#footnote-92)

This system was widely flouted, however, to the point where an officer might still purchase his way up to the rank of lieutenant colonel in as little as three weeks.[[93]](#footnote-93) Vacancies could not be left unfilled, and if a young gentleman could not be found in time, then the colonel could lend necessary funds to a suitable Sergeant or candidate of otherwise unsuitable background on his own initiative.[[94]](#footnote-94) Around one third of promotions in the period were without purchase, usually as a result of the commission’s previous holder having died or been cashiered.[[95]](#footnote-95) As part of his own programme of reforms, the Duke of York significantly increased the number of unpaid commissions. He also expanded the minimum service requirements, requiring a minimum of two years’ service to become a captain and six years to become a major, while an ensign could be no younger than sixteen.[[96]](#footnote-96) All this can be understood as part of a process of professionalization, in which the extent to which officer status was conferred on the basis of wealth or connections was gradually reduced.

## Motives of Enlisted Men

The motives behind the decision to enlist could be multifarious and complex. An example of these complexities can be found in the person of Benjamin Harris, of the 95th Regiment of Foot, the ‘95th Rifles.’ Aside from not having written the account himself, the precise date is not known, beyond that it was in the decade of 1830 to 1840. This means that the information was recorded at anything from sixteen to twenty-six years after Harris left the army in 1814. This is noticeable in the narrative, which shows a tendency to ramble and repeat itself. The fact that Curling presented his manuscript with those features in place nonetheless implies honesty on his part.[[97]](#footnote-97) Rifleman Harris represents a complex example, in that he was apparently enthusiastic about transferring to the Rifles, but had been somewhat less so about entering military service in the first place:

Thus without troubling myself much about the change which was to take place in the hitherto quiet routine of my days, I was drafted into the 66th Regiment of Foot, bid good-bye to my shepherd companions, and was obliged to leave my father without an assistant to collect his flocks, just as he was beginning more than ever to require one; nay, indeed, I may say to want tending and looking-after himself…However, as I had no choice in the matter, it was quite as well that I did not grieve over my fate.[[98]](#footnote-98)

Fear for his father’s wellbeing aside, Harris seems to have regarded his drafting into the Army of Reserve with equanimity. This is a surprising attitude to modern sensibilities, and that he should be drafted in a process that would be contrary to his will, had he been more deeply set against it, may seem equally surprising in light of the supposedly volunteer nature of the British army. The answer is that the Militia and the Army of the Reserve were recruited by ballot, though the Army of the Reserve was in practice a bureaucratic shorthand for drafting directly into the army if Harris’ description is anything to go by. In practice its battalions were paired with regular army regiments in the hope that draftees could be persuaded to transfer. Understandably the Army of the Reserve was widely regarded as conscription by stealth. Worse, it only managed a net acquisition of around thirty thousand recruits, of which around twenty-thousand were ‘persuaded’ to join the regulars. Judged a failure, the Army of the Reserve was shelved, those recruits who had not transferred being formed into garrison units, which were used primarily in Ireland. The Militia was considerably less resented, and in fact much of the resentment and suspicion surrounding the Army of the Reserve derived from the fact that the Militia already existed, and many of those who had avoided the Militia ballot found themselves facing yet another.

Transfer from the Militia was a major source of recruits for the regular army. Over twenty-seven thousand transferred between 1804 and 1808, and around twenty-five thousand transferred over the period of 1809 and 1810 alone, dropping to just over eleven thousand in 1811 and under ten thousand in 1812.[[99]](#footnote-99) The timing suggests an increased interest in regular service as the war went on, with such a massive increase in 1809. This may seem strange, for Militia service was not without its advantages. Its members were required by law to go no further abroad than the Channel Islands or Ireland, and their wives received financial support from their parishes while they were mobilized. By contrast the lot of army wives was not a happy one, especially when their husbands were sent abroad. Wives not ‘on the strength’ were given a pass entitling them to food and accommodation in their home parishes, though such support was not always forthcoming. To make matters worse, no formal system existed by which soldiers could send money home. Regiments that made their own arrangements were invariably popular.[[100]](#footnote-100) For men for whom support of dependents was not a concern, transfer to the army offered certain rewards. The monetary reward was the most obvious, but the other most likely reason was the desire to experience a real war. With invasion unlikely after the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, the Militia offered little if any possibility of fighting, unless the much-loathed duty of riot control was counted. If militiamen would not transfer willingly, then the old resort of coercion was always available. Thomas Morris describes hearing of these practices in his *Recollections of Military Service*;

The militia would be drawn-up in line, and the officers, or non-commissioned officers, from the regiments requiring volunteers, would give a glowing description of their several regiments, describing the victories they had gained and the honours they had acquired, and conclude by offering, as a bounty, to volunteers for life £14; to volunteers for the limited period of seven years £11. If these inducements were not effectual in getting men, then coercive measures were adopted; heavy and long drills and field exercises were forced on them, which were so oppressive, that to escape them men would embrace the alternative, and join the regulars.[[101]](#footnote-101)

From an organisational perspective, militia transfer offered many advantages. Many of the active militiamen in 1807 had been under arms since 1803, making them a reserve of manpower that had not only been trained, but had become somewhat accustomed to the military life. To transfer these men would be far quicker and easier than to train new recruits, and the experience with the Army of the Reserve suggested that additional overt balloting would not be welcomed by ordinary people.[[102]](#footnote-102) Despite this, while militia transfer provided a substantial number of recruits for the regulars, it never quite lived up to expectations. Militia transfers between 1807 and 1813 fell below quota on average by thirty-five per cent. English regiments made up the lowest proportion of this figure, with quota failure averaging twenty per cent, while Scottish militia regiments made up the highest, even bearing in mind their much smaller numbers, at sixty-one per cent.[[103]](#footnote-103) This particular disparity can in part be attributed to the success of the Highland regiments, which may have served to denude the Highlands, and perhaps Scotland as a whole, of militia recruits. Linch also blames obstructionism by militia officers personally or ideologically opposed to this practice, though as the above example shows, this was by no means universal.[[104]](#footnote-104)

For their own part, the Volunteers seem to have had little difficulty in maintaining their numbers for much of the conflict, at least once sufficient inducement was provided. A common motivation for joining the volunteers was to avoid the Militia ballot, which became impossible between 1796 and 1799 out of a desperate need to increase militia numbers. A volunteer unit could collectively avoid the ballot only if its members were willing to serve within their military district as a whole.[[105]](#footnote-105) This desire was nevertheless taken into account in the Volunteer Exemption Act of 20 December 1803, which required volunteers to undergo a minimum of twenty-four days training per year in order to avoid the ballot. This was not the only example of concessions being given to attract recruits. June of that year saw the ‘June allowances’, under which pay was offered for two days training per week between Lady Day and Michaelmas and up to one week during winter, to a maximum of eighty-five days per annum, so long as the unit would serve within the entire military district. Relatively few volunteers responded to this call, many doing so only to ensure that the Levy en masse would be suspended as promised. The ‘August allowances’ saw greater success, offering a clothing allowance of one pound every three years and one shilling per day for twenty days of training, if the unit had enrolled after 22nd June and would agree to serve anywhere.[[106]](#footnote-106)

Of the well over three-hundred thousand enlisted volunteers by January of 1804, over two hundred and eleven thousand were serving under the August allowances, compared to a mere sixty-seven thousand under the June allowances. The overwhelming success of these measures strongly implies a financial motive behind joining the volunteers. This can be taken in a self-serving light, or alternatively that otherwise-patriotic would-be volunteers were more willing to put themselves out if money was on offer. One other very likely reason, pointed out by Beckett, is that joining the volunteers was a means of avoiding more dangerous and difficult service in the militia or even the regulars. For the inhabitants of coastal counties, especially those who worked on the water in any capacity, avoiding the naval press-gang was an entirely likely consideration. While genuine patriotism and fear of external or internal enemies cannot reasonably be ruled out, self-interest undoubtedly made many volunteers willing. Another reason brought up by Beckett is the growing public interest in, and acceptability of, the armed forces. Most likely due to the psychological impact of the conflict, it had become increasingly desirable, even fashionable, to belong to some sort of military organisation.[[107]](#footnote-107)

But why did some men show such willingness, even enthusiasm, to serve? What was it that drew so many men to enlist of their own free will? What was it that attracted them to the military life? Any attempt to answer this question will result in the citing of a number of popular clichés. These include the men being drawn by the uniform, or the chance of adventure, or the lure of money or sexual encounters. These are clichéd, but that does not necessarily make them untrue. Rifleman Harris in many respects fits one of the stereotypes of British army recruits in the period, as he describes what drew him to the Rifles:

Whilst in Dublin I one day saw the a corps of the 95th Rifles, and fell so in love with their smart, dashing, devil-may-care appearance, that nothing would serve me until I was a rifleman myself; so on arriving at Cashel one day, and falling in with a recruiting-party of that regiment, I volunteered into the second battalion…

Being joined by a sergeant of the 92nd Highlanders, and a Highland piper of the same regiment (also a pair of real rollicking blades), I thought we should all have gone mad together. We started on our journey, one beautiful morning, in tip-top spirits from the Royal Oak at Cashel; the whole lot of us (early as it was) being three sheets in the wind. When we paraded before the door of the Royal Oak, the landlord and landlady of the inn, who were quite as lively, came reeling forth, with two decanters of whisky, which they thrust into the fists of the Sergeants, making them a present of the decanters and all to carry along with them, and refresh themselves on the march. The piper then struck up, the sergeants flourished their decanters, and the whole route commenced a terrific yell. We then all began to dance, and danced through the town, every now and then stopping for another pull at the whisky decanters.[[108]](#footnote-108)

The fact that Harris was already a soldier should be taken into account, for such an experience may well have served to acclimatize him to the military life and make him more likely to see the Rifles in a positive light. This is relevant to his description of their appearance, for he seems to have liked the idea of joining such a body.

The example of Private William Wheeler, of the 2nd Royal Surrey Militia and then the 51st battalion, the King’s Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, would appear to support the claim that adventure was a major draw. Private Wheeler is an example of a transferring soldier, doing so to all appearances of his own free will alongside over one hundred of his fellows. Wheeler also claimed that they largely did not care which regiment they joined, but went wherever large numbers of them happened to be going. This can be interpreted as a desire to retain existing bonds, a common consideration for a soldier, though a degree of peer pressure may be inferred. Wheeler’s description gives no particular implication of this:

I have at length escaped from the Militia without being flead (SIC) alive. I have taken the first opportunity and voluntiered (SIC) together with 127 of my comrades into the 51st Light Infantry Regiment. I had made up my mind to voluntier (SIC) but into what regiment I cared not a straw, do I determined to go with the greatest number. The latter end of March the order came. On the 1st April I gave in my name for the 51st. The 2nd. and 3rd. was occupied by the Doctor’s inspection and the General’s approval, and on the 4th. I was attested for 7 years.

Wheeler also expressed an interest in joining the 95th Rifles, adding that around ninety of his fellows and a popular officer did so.[[109]](#footnote-109) This interest in the Rifles, a factor in common with Harris’ account, is of interest from a social perspective. The 95th was arguably the most popular regiment in the British army, attracting so many prospective recruits as to allow, or perhaps necessitate, the raising of a second battalion in 1805. The regiment had many attractions, the most important to soldiers being its prestige as an elite unit. Of greater importance to recruits of a certain disposition was its approach to training, combat, and military discipline. The skirmish warfare practiced by the 95th required a greater degree of intelligence and self-discipline than that required of line infantry. As a result, the rifleman’s experience was somewhat different to that of his red-coated counterpart. Rifle officers tended to fraternize with the men to a far greater extent than line officers, even eating with them, and were far less likely to employ the lash. For a soldier of the Militia or Reserve seeking to transfer, this must have been very tempting.

There were also those who joined in order to escape from their current lives. Sergeant William Lawrence, according to his own account, joined the army having fled from the abusive builder to whom he had been apprenticed. John Shipp, in *Memoirs of the Extraordinary Military Career of John Shipp*, makes much of his youthful desire for the military life, but if there is any truth in his descriptions of his own master’s brutality, escape cannot have been a minor factor. Another poignant example is a certain ‘Thomas’, an anonymous soldier of the 71st Highlanders, who enlisted with the regiment after failing as an actor, a profession he had parted ways with his family in order to pursue. Richard Holmes identifies him as a certain ‘Thomas Pococke’, ascribing his anonymity to a sense of delicacy. His *Journal of a Soldier of the Seventy-First*, describes his sense of shame and of having betrayed his poverty-stricken family, and how this led him to join a party of recruits in a fit of despair:

I wandered the whole night. In the morning early, meeting a party of recruits about to embark, I rashly offered to go with them -, my offer was accepted, and I embarked at Leith, with seventeen others, for the Isle of Wight, in July, 1806.

The morning was beautiful and refreshing. A fine breeze wafted us from the roads. The darkness of the preceding night only tended to deepen the gloomy agitation of my mind ; but the beauties of the morning scene stole over my soul, and stilled the perturbation of my mind. The violent beat of the pulse at my temples subsided, and I, as it were, awoke from a dream.

Such adolescent embarrassment was not the only reason why some men felt the need to leave their lives behind. A commonly-cited and more practical reason for enlistment was financial, with some men joining for the promised bounty, a regular wage, and the promise of clothing and meals. Bounties could vary significantly, almost certainly depending on the availability of recruits. William Lawrence claimed that his bounty was two and a half guineas, or two pounds and twelve shillings.[[110]](#footnote-110) Thomas Pococke on the other hand mentions his bounty as being eleven guineas, meaning eleven pounds and eleven shillings, of which four pounds was held back to pay for his ‘necessaries.’[[111]](#footnote-111) The latter term referred to a soldier’s basic equipment, for which deducting from the bounty was a common practice. Though the extent conflict between the regulars and the Militia over recruiting may be overstated, bounties are one context in which this did take place. With a militiaman able to gain as much as six pounds, and even more as a substitute if market forces permitted, the laws of supply and demand forced army bounties ever higher.[[112]](#footnote-112)

After this, a Private’s salary was one shilling per day before ‘stoppages’, which referred to everyday or regular expenses such as food or boot polish. This was actually an increase of eighty per cent, one of the Duke of York’s many reforms after becoming Commander in Chief in 1795.[[113]](#footnote-113) Soldiers who possessed useful skills from their civilian lives, such as carpenters and masons, could earn additional money by the use of them.[[114]](#footnote-114) The precise definition of ‘stoppages’ depended to a great extent on the character of the regiment’s colonel, who might not be able to resist the temptation to attempt to profit from his responsibility, or at least to affray expenditures. Reductions in government spending meant that colonelcies no longer offered the sort of opportunities for self-enrichment as they had once done, or continued to do in the French Royal army up to the Revolution.[[115]](#footnote-115) By comparison in 1790, a London saddler could earn fifteen shillings in a week, while a Lancashire weaver could earn eight shillings and seven pence in that time.[[116]](#footnote-116) In 1806, a man could earn ten shillings a day digging canals.[[117]](#footnote-117) In light of such competition, the draw of an army wage could not have been its size.

## Officers’ Motivations

That officers were willing to serve appears to go without saying. After all, unlike some among the enlisted men, officers were not in any way subject to coercion. Indeed, the very idea that a *gentleman* might be forced to fight would have seemed outrageous and absurd. For to be an officer in the British army was to be a gentleman not only figuratively but literally, for an officer’s commission was accompanied by the title of esquire, the aristocratic grade directly below that of a knight. The apparent willingness of well-off British men, generally quite young, to become officers can be ascribed to three possible motivations. A gentleman might become an officer in order to rise in the social hierarchy, or to affirm his place within it. He might serve in the hope of financial gain, for good breeding did not necessarily equate to high finance. He might even do so out of a deep-rooted desire to pursue a military career, though this is as likely to manifest after the fact as before it. These motives are in common with those of many pre-Revolutionary French officers, and even their backgrounds are more similar than is immediately apparent. Around one quarter of all regimental officers and half of all generals and proprietary colonels were drawn from the aristocracy and landed gentry, both titled and untitled, while the bulk of the remainder of regimental officers came from lower-grade gentry. Whereas their French counterparts were fully-fledged and titled aristocrats from birth, British titles were generally only inherited by the eldest son, with younger sons being styled ‘the honourable’ and regarded as ‘gentlemen.’[[118]](#footnote-118) The laws of primogeniture that reserved titles for the eldest son acted in the same way on property, forcing younger sons to seek ‘suitable’ employment. Indeed, many of the lesser gentry families who provided officers were engaged in the professions or even trade. For gentlemen who possessed neither land nor money, a military career represented a means of honourable subsistence that would be recognizable to many of the worse-off French aristocrats. In some cases the connection extended over many generations, leading to the phenomenon of ‘army families.’[[119]](#footnote-119)

An insight into the attitudes of new officers in the period can be found in *The Reminiscences and Recollections of Captain Gronow.*  The author was Rees Howell Gronow, who describes entering the army directly after leaving Eton:

Though many years have elapsed, I still remember my boyish delight at being

named to so distinguished a regiment and at the prospect of soon taking part in the glorious deeds of our army in Spain. I joined in February 1813, and cannot but recollect with astonishment at how limited and imperfect was the instruction which an officer received at that time; he absolutely entered the army without any military education whatever. We were so defective in our drill, even after we had passed out of the hands of the sergeant, that the excellence of our non-commissioned officers alone prevented us from meeting with the most fatal disasters in the face of the enemy.[[120]](#footnote-120)

This took place in December of 1812, meaning that he was almost eighteen years old at the time. Considering the successes British forces had enjoyed in Spain, it is not at all surprising for a young man to be enthusiastic about joining in. The candour with which he describes the battles in which he became involved, even in light of Ramsey’s conclusions regarding their sentimentality, suggests that his apparent enthusiasm was genuine. His complaint about the lack of training will become relevant later in this chapter.

Desire for a military career was not unique to his generation, however. A memoir of Sir Ralph Abercromby, written by his son, mentions ‘an ardent desire to devote himself to the military profession.’[[121]](#footnote-121) Dunfermline describes Sir Ralph’s father as taking this badly at first, having thought that he would do well in the legal profession, reconciling himself only gradually to his son’s intentions. General Sir George Napier, in his own account, describes himself as having come to the army only after having decided against both the Navy and the Church, choosing the army ‘as I said I liked fighting, a red coat, and a sword!’[[122]](#footnote-122) The pleasure he derived from being a young officer is described more directly a little later on;

As soon as I had got all my things and bought some horses I joined my regiment in Dublin barracks, and you will easily imagine what a happy fellow I was to be my own master at fifteen, with a fine uniform, a couple of horses, a servant, and about fifty pounds in my pocket. This certainly was one of the happiest periods of my life, and little did I then think I was destined to be an actor in, and witness, so many extraordinary events as have taken place during the last thirty years![[123]](#footnote-123)

This youthful desire for independence strikes a chord with the restlessness expressed in the accounts of many enlisted men, a timely reminder of shared human nature.

## Training of Enlisted Men

For eighteenth-century armies, training was a somewhat less complex activity than today, mostly because the skills required by individual soldiers were nothing like as complex or wide-ranging. There was also little difference between the armies, since they fought and conducted themselves in a broadly identical fashion. Training can be divided into two categories, the first being basic, the second being advanced or operational training. The essential purpose of basic training was, as it is today, to transform a civilian into a soldier, and as such encompassed not only physical and mental development, but also changes in identity and psychology. The physical aspect consists of bringing the recruits up to the required standard of physical prowess, while the mental aspect includes the acquisition of necessary skills and knowledge. The psychological aspect covers the thought processes, namely the ability to think and behave like a soldier, while identity covers whether or not the recruit believes himself to *be* a soldier. A good description of the underlying ideals of training can be found in the British Army’s 1807 drill manual:

‘To attain this important purpose, it is necessary to reconcile celerity

with order; to prevent hurry, which must always cause confusion, loss

of time, unsteadiness, irresolution, inattention to command, &c; to ensure precision and correctness, by which alone great bodies will be able to arrive at their object in good order, and in the shortest space of time; to inculcate and enforce the necessity of military dependence, and of mutual support in action, which are the grate (SIC) ends of discipline;’[[124]](#footnote-124)

For eighteenth-century armies the most basic training technique, covering all four aspects, was drill. Otherwise known as parade-ground drill, square-bashing, and by other even less flattering terms, drill was essentially simple, yet vital to the effective training of recruits. This was generally carried out on the parade ground of the barracks, if one was available, though any clear and flat space would suffice. Finding suitable ground was a more serious issue for the cavalry, which needed far more space than infantry even in their smallest numbers. British army drill was divided into five basic elements; the ‘manual exercise’, which covered individual movements such as loading and firing a musket; the ‘platoon exercise’, which consisted primarily of volley firing; ‘evolutions’, which covered basic movements in rank and file; ‘firings’, which covered the more complex systems of firing; and finally ‘manoeuvres’, which covered complex movements as a large unit.[[125]](#footnote-125) Of these, the first three can be regarded as ‘basic’ while the latter two can be considered ‘advanced’, a delineation that was practiced at the time.

Training was physically taxing, at least to begin with, and mind-numbing in its repetitiveness, enlivened only by colourful language from the ever-present figure of the drill-sergeant. Thomas of the 71st found his training most unpleasant, though as his account describes he bore it with the mind set of one who had joined of his own will:

Now I began to drink the cup of bitterness. How different was my

situation from what it had been! Forced from bed at five o'clock each

morning, to get all things ready for drill; then drilled for three hours with the most unfeeling rigour, and often beat by the sergeant for the faults of others—I, who had never been crossed at home—I, who never knew fatigue, was now fainting under it. This I bore without a murmur, as I had looked to it in my engagement.[[126]](#footnote-126)

For line infantry, it was nonetheless indispensable, for it was the only effective way to learn the manoeuvres they would use in battle. As such, it served the physical purpose of providing near-constant exercise and the mental purpose of teaching the required manoeuvres. It also served to imbue psychological prowess, better understood as *discipline.* Having been constantly and repetitively drilled, recruits became able to carry out required tasks with minimal conscious thought. In order to maintain these effects, even veteran soldiers subject to drilling, the regularity increasing as active service drew near. Drill had the additional effect of imbuing a sense of military hierarchy, with recruits getting accustomed to the idea of taking orders. This was reflected in an ironic way by the attitudes of the officers, who found drill so beneath them that they tended to offload the responsibility onto the sergeants.[[127]](#footnote-127) The final, and least obvious, effect was on the identity of the recruits. The physical, mental, and psychological changes served to change the recruits’ self-images, in effect remaking them as soldiers. This symbolic *rebirth* could be reinforced, where practical and convenient, by military ceremonies such as parades and reviews. Though the practical military use of drill has disappeared in modern times, most modern armies still practice drill to a limited extent, largely for the psychological and identity factors. As for the time it took approximately six months for recruits to reach the required standards, discretion as to their readiness lying with the regimental sergeant major.[[128]](#footnote-128)

Though British units were most commonly trained at the battalion level, larger-scale exercises were carried out on occasion. Known as ‘sham fights’ or ‘field days’, these were essentially mock battles, intended to allow officers and men to get used to working as part of a full army. John Houlding claims that while their value was understood at the time, practical matters meant that these exercises were relatively rare.[[129]](#footnote-129) To gather together enough units to form an army was no small matter, in terms of expense, logistics, and organisation. The lack of a standard drill manual before the publication of Dundas’ *Principles* meant that few knew how to manage large formations, and the experiences of the British army in North America had not filled the gap. The very different environment in which British troops fought in the American War of Independence is well-documented, suffice it to say that it tended to involve small formations of only a few thousand on both sides, compared to tens of thousands in European conflicts, while the broken terrain required open rather than closed formations. The effect of this war on British military thinking, and available experience, was the basis of Dundas’ complaints against light infantry, which he regarded as unsuitable for European wars.[[130]](#footnote-130) Private Wheeler describes one such exercise in which he took part in a letter dated February 13th 1809:

A muster of the troops in the district took place, a Grand field day and sham fight was the consequence. Lord C- had the commd. (SIC) of a brigade. After some manoeuvring, which his Lordship as well understood as the nag that carried him, the line halted and a general discharge of musketry took place. Lord C- was delighted. He rode up and down the line, calling to the men to load and fire as quickly as possible. At length the fire slackened. He enquired the reason the men did not fire brisker. When he was informed the ammunition was nearly expended. ‘Well’ said he, ‘let the men stand at ease.’ The troops had now began (SIC) to advance but Lord C-‘s brigade remained stationary. The staff was despatched (SIC) to order Lord C- to push forward his brigade. It was all to no purpose. His Lordship was inflexable (SIC). ‘We want powder’ was his reply, ‘what use is going into battle without powder etc.’ At length the General came galloping calling on his Lordship to move on. He might have saved himself the trouble. It was vain to try to persuade Lord C- that he should move on. ‘I want more powder.’ ‘You have spoiled the line and in the event of a real fight you would endanger the safety of the whole Army. Let me entreat your Lordship to move on.’ ‘D- it man, what is the use. I want powder.’[[131]](#footnote-131)

Wheeler’s account provides an insight into how officers and enlisted men regarded field exercises and their role in training. ‘Lord C’ refers in this case to Thomas Onslow, Viscount Cranley who at that time was a Colonel of the Surrey Militia. Wheeler describes Cranley as a good-natured eccentric, regarding him with some affection for an incident in which he helped a lame soldier reach Ashford Camp, then forced the resignation of a particularly unpopular Major.[[132]](#footnote-132) Wheeler’s tone in his account of the exercise nonetheless suggests that his ability as a commander was not so well regarded. This in itself implies that at least a certain proportion of officers and enlisted men understood the value of field exercises and took them seriously. The Duke of York certainly did, ordering a series of training camps to be held over the summer of 1795 for that purpose. The camps were organised on a weekly basis, with two days a week for battalion drill, two for brigade drill, and one day for the commanding general to drill the whole line, with the remaining day aside from Sunday set aside for remedial training.[[133]](#footnote-133) The biggest single problem in carrying out field exercises, and the most likely reason as to why they were not more commonly held, was in finding suitable land. This was particularly problematic for the cavalry, as they needed considerably more space than infantry.[[134]](#footnote-134)

## Officer Training

In sharp contrast to the enlisted men, officers in the British army received little or no formal training, a fact much commented upon at the time. There existed a general attitude that an officer required no training beyond the education of a gentleman, which might at least include horseback riding and swordsmanship. The exception was the technical services, in which specialised training was both indispensable and generally recognized as such, and those officers serving as Volunteers, who performed the duties of enlisted men. For a small minority there were private schools or a stint abroad, usually in better provided-for Prussia or France. Indeed, Arthur Wellesley would himself receive tuition at the Royal Academy of Equitation at Angers. For the majority of British infantry and cavalry officers, at least those that did not rise from the ranks, their training once in uniform consisted of what might be considered an apprenticeship. By spending some time in each rank before advancing, an officer could in theory learn his own duties and those of officers above him through experience. The Duke of York’s aforementioned reforms, in which minimum periods of service were set for each rank, reflect this approach. Nevertheless, he sought to improve the quality of the training that officers underwent, at first by requiring individual regiments to train officers themselves. John Le Marchant, a committed reformer and one of Britain’s finest cavalry generals, applied this practice to the 7th Light Dragoons in 1798, while serving as its lieutenant colonel.[[135]](#footnote-135) While this represents a tightening-up of training practices, it would invariably have taken place within the context of the traditional apprenticeship.

The process of change began in 1741, with the establishment of the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich. Sited in proximity to the Woolwich arsenal, its role was to train artillery and engineer officers. This was later followed by the staff college at High Wycombe, which in 1801 became the senior department of the Royal Military College. The institution now known as the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst was established by Le Marchant in 1802, as the junior department of the staff college in Marlow, being moved to Sandhurst in 1813. This was also the year in which the Ecole Speciale Militaire was founded. At its founding, the new college catered to only sixteen cadets, rising to a maximum of four hundred in accordance with a Royal Warrant of 17th April 1803. Of these, one hundred were required to be the orphan sons of officers, who would be trained free of charge. Of the rest, eighty would be the sons of living officers, paying forty pounds per year; one hundred would be sons of ‘noblemen and gentlemen’, along with sixty cadets of the Royal Artillery and sixty of the East India Company, all paying ninety guineas per year. This was later altered in order to encourage more officers to send their sons there.

Ordnance cadets were to be attached ‘in proper proportions’ to the cadet companies, each of which would number one hundred. Ordnance cadets could enter at sixteen, while other cadets could enter between thirteen and fifteen, while none could remain after nineteen.[[136]](#footnote-136) In terms of its age range, this could be considered anything from a secondary school to a university, and reflects contemporary attitudes towards physical maturity. Needless to say, the cadets and faculty were provided with servants, adding to the gentlemanly ethos;

Former establishment, sixteen men-servants and sixteen women-servants; new establishment, twenty-four men-servants and five women-servants. Duties: to make three hundred and twenty beds, to clean three hundred and twenty pairs of shoes, three hundred and twenty silver spoons, and six hundred and forty knives and forks, as well as candlesticks and beer cans, to wait at meals, clean dormitories, halls of study, fire-places, to fill coal scuttles, and keep public buildings swept.[[137]](#footnote-137)

The course of study at Sandhurst, which was completed by examination, was somewhat limited by later standards, but nonetheless had a military air. The requirement included a ‘thorough knowledge of Euclid, Books 1-6; well versed in either Classics, French, German, or History; conversant with the 1st and 3rd system of Vauban; proficient in Military Drawing; general conduct unexceptionable.’[[138]](#footnote-138) The first six books by Euclid are greatly concerned with geometry, which would doubtless be useful to artillery cadets, and a helpful adjunct to the military drawing requirement. The inclusion of Vauban’s systems would also be primarily of interest to the artillery cadets. That even would-be infantry or cavalry officers were subjected to this curriculum suggests an element of cross-training. It is worth noting that the day to day duties of infantry and cavalry officers do not appear to have been covered at the college. This implies that it was meant as a specialised technical institution, with those skills being taught to the cadets upon being assigned to their regiments.

## Discipline

Another factor crucial to the understanding of military identity was discipline. It was necessary for soldiers to be obedient, not just to the direct orders of superiors, but to other indirect sources of authority, including higher-ranking superiors, the rules of the army, and the government. It was also necessary for soldiers to develop an innate sense of being soldiers, that is, not dependent on the direct presence and authority of officers. This in itself marked a change from previous patterns, in which soldiers were obedient to officers who would have been their social superiors in civilian life also. The change was not so pronounced in old regime armies, but is worth noting in the case of Britain and France. As the European states developed armies on a national scale, even though they were not truly *national* armies in the sense that the French Revolution would establish, the previous system of feudal levying was abandoned. John A. Lynn’s analogy of leverages is instructive in understanding why military discipline was as it was. Remunerative leverage, that is to say the Mercenary’s motivation of fighting for money, had been abandoned, for the expense if for no other reason. Normative leverage, essentially gaining obedience through the use of social or cultural norms, was difficult to apply. The norms usually applied in this context are patriotism and *esprit de corps,* that is to say loyalty within a specific unit, which can in turn extend to the army as a whole.[[139]](#footnote-139)

The harsh discipline universally associated with eighteenth-century European armies can be traced to the practices developed by Maurice of Nassau in the seventeenth century. While his system was not exactly what would be seen in the eighteenth century, he nevertheless started a trend by taking drill out of its usual context. For Maurice the purpose of drill went beyond the purely practical and into the realms of the mental or spiritual, the two being essentially synonymous in contemporary thought. Early seventeenth century philosophy privileged the mind over the body, regarding the former as the seat of reason and the latter as crude matter that needed to be controlled. The ideal soldier, as presented in contemporary memoirs described by Yuval Noah Harari, had complete mental control of his body. Maurice’s military system represented the application of this idea to the level of an entire army, or an entire state. The role of the body was to be played by the ordinary soldiers, who were through precise training and harsh discipline to become the instruments of the all-controlling mind, namely the commander or ruler. Harari makes a point of mentioning that the philosopher Rene Descartes, who so famously based self-knowledge and the certainty of human existence on the ability to think, served for a time in Maurice’s army.[[140]](#footnote-140) In this sense the need for discipline derives from military necessity.

Harari mentions two other interlocking influences, one being the popular memory of the Thirty Years War, in which ravening hordes of unpaid mercenaries ravaged the land in search of sustenance and wealth. This horrific vision, whether accurate or not, combined all too easily with popular prejudices towards soldiers, and the low rank of society from which they tended to derive, long after that particular conflict.[[141]](#footnote-141) Edward Coss has argued that the image of the British soldier as incurably criminal, which has survived until relatively recently, is monstrously unfair. A particularly telling piece of evidence comes from the journal of Francis Larpent, the Judge Advocate General for the British forces in Spain. In it, he reveals that between Christmas of 1812 and May of 1813 he had tried eighty cases, with ten still underway, and thirty abandoned for one reason or another.[[142]](#footnote-142) Considering that there were fifty-seven thousand British troops at the Battle of Vittoria in June of that year, these numbers do not suggest an army of compulsive criminals. Many soldiers at the time put misbehaviour down primarily to the actions of a minority of hardened troublemakers.[[143]](#footnote-143) Sergeant Donaldson describes this minority showing what it was capable of during the storming of Badajoz:

The effects of the liquor now began to show itself, and some of the scenes which ensured are too dreadful and disgusting to relate; where two or three thousand armed men, many of them mad drunk, others depraved and unprincipled, were freed from all restraint, running up and down the town, the atrocities which took place may be readily imagined, – but in justice to the army, I must say they were not general, and in most cases perpetrated by cold-blooded villains, who were backward enough in the attack.[[144]](#footnote-144)

In the face of such behaviour, and the way in which such characters often treated their fellows, it is not so surprising that the enlisted men tended to be in favour of flogging at least in principle. It was, so the argument went, the only way to protect the law-abiding majority from such extreme personalities, who might not have responded to more enlightened methods. Edward Coss insists that the majority of British soldiers had a sense of decency and correct behaviour, and the attitudes expressed here would appear to back that up.

The ultimate purpose of discipline, as understood by contemporary British soldiers, was to maintain a necessary degree of order. This attitude can be seen in John Drinkwater’s account of the 1779 to 1783 siege of Gibraltar:

The Garrison-orders of the 26th expressed, that any soldier convicted of being drunk or asleep upon his post, or found marauding, should be immediately executed. These measures, rigorous as they may appear, were absolutely necessary, and, in reality, had been too long deferred. The soldiers were now arrived at so high a pitch of licentiousness, that no respect was paid to their officers, and scarcely obedience to them even when on duty. Such behaviour, if not curbed in time, too commonly induces very serious consequences.[[145]](#footnote-145)

The ‘consequences’ alluded to by Drinkwater could be dire indeed. ‘Marauding’ in the terminology of the time could refer specifically to the act of plundering, and also to moving about in search of plunder. Stealing was itself an offence warranting the death penalty, and Drinkwater’s account mentions such executions on several occasions. Soldiers were actually searched as they returned to their quarters, leading one soldier to hide his loot inside a cannon, only to lose it all when the weapon was fired that night.[[146]](#footnote-146) These practices show that the British army was willing to take theft seriously, at least when dealing with civilians they were obliged to protect.

For soldiers to be robbing the civilian population they were ostensibly protecting was bad enough, but deserting their posts in order to do so was even worse. A soldier being drunk or asleep while guarding a warehouse, for example, could lead to the theft or destruction of vital supplies. Earlier in his account Drinkwater describes how a soldier and his family would have starved to death but for the assistance of his comrades, so desperate was the situation.[[147]](#footnote-147) Even worse, if a soldier were anything less than fully alert while on sentry duty, that is to say in proximity to the enemy, the result could be a successful enemy infiltration, or a full-scale sneak attack. For a soldier on guard to fail in his duty was to put all of his comrades, and those they protected, at risk. Sergeant Lawrence was himself flogged for being ‘absent without leave from guard.’ His account describes his feelings as the dreaded event approached:

It was the first offence to cause one to be held on me, but that did not screen me much, and I was sentenced to four hundred lashes. I felt ten times worse on hearing this sentence than I ever did on entering any battlefield; in fact, if I had been sentenced to be shot, I could not have been more in despair, for my life at that time seemed of very little consequence to me. My home and my apprenticeship days again ran in my head, but even these thoughts soon lost themselves as I neared the spot where my sentence was to be carried out.[[148]](#footnote-148)

Despite the horror of the experience, Lawrence claims to have come to value it, though precisely how much time passed for him to reach this conclusion he does not reveal. He appears to have reconciled himself to it on the basis that it might have shocked him out of doing anything worse. This must be balanced with his feeling that the punishment was extreme under the circumstances.

The idea of crime against the collective is important in understanding eighteenth-century military discipline. Private Wheeler describes one flogging that he witnessed, at the hands of an officer he considered humane, in which this principle was applied:

I have said the Colonel is averse to flogging, yet he has been under the necessity of whipping one man since I joined. This fellow had deserted when the Regiment was under order for Corunna. He was sentenced five hundred lashes he only received 75 he was then taken down, the ranks opened, and the poltroon, as the Colonel justly called him, was ordered to march between the ranks. At the same time Colonel M- kept shouting ‘soldiers spit on the cowardly poltroon, you should all p- over him if it were not too indecent.’[[149]](#footnote-149)

The officer in question, Colonel Mainwaring, seems to have maintained his reputation for clemency in inflicting only seventy-five lashes out of a sentence of five hundred. That Wheeler agrees with the Colonel calling the convicted man a ‘poltroon’ implies his assent to the punishment. The punishment that follows the flogging, in which the convicted man is made to march between the ranks while being spat upon, offers an insight into the motivations behind punishment. This particular incident is reminiscent in its structure to the notorious eighteenth century punishment of ‘running the gauntlet’, in which a convicted man was made to march between two lines of his fellow soldiers while they struck him with whips or sticks. In this case the soldiers make do with spitting, but the underlying message and purpose is much the same. The crime, in this case desertion, is committed against the collective, and as such the crime is punished collectively. This in itself affirms the regiment as a collective, and the convicted man’s place in it, whether he likes it or not.

Officers too were subject to discipline, albeit based on a different code and set of punishments. The worst an officer could expect under most circumstances was to be dismissed from the army, though this could involve the financial penalty of losing his commission and the money invested in it. An example of this can be found in Private Wheeler’s account. He provides a description of a particularly unpopular officer by the name of Major ‘Bloody Bob’ Hudson, describing the basis for his unpopularity:

Thus the regiment is ridded of as great a tyrant as ever disgraced the army. This man delighted in torturing the men, every man in the Corps hated him, when once a soldier came under his lash it was no use for any officer to plead for him. If he was young, his reply was: ‘It will do him good, make him grow and make him know better for the future.’ On the other hand if he was getting into years, the brute would say. ‘Oh! he is old enough to know better.’ He delighted in going round the Bks (SIC) on a Sunday morning to see if he could catch any of the married people roasting their meat. If he saw any meat roasting he would cut it down, and carry away the string and nail in his pocket, observing that they should boil their meat, it was more nourishing. Once he paid a visit to the Hospital and saw a cat. ‘Whose cat is this’ said he. ‘It is mine Sir’ said the Hospital Sergeant’s wife. ‘We are very much troubled with rats and mice.’ I don’t care a D- (SIC) was the reply, ‘you know my order, I will have neither dogs, cats, rats, or mice here.’

Beside the name of B-y (SIC) Bob he had acquired the cognomen of ‘Wheel’em again,’ from the habit of calling to the Serjeant Major ‘Do they grumble?’ The answer would be ‘Yes, sir’ – ‘Then wheel’em again.’[[150]](#footnote-150)

Certain features of Major Hudson’s character stand out as being particularly detestable in Wheeler’s eyes. For the most part he comes across as an interfering busybody and something of a martinet, sticking inflexibly to rules in matters where they existed and enforcing his own where they did not. It is his attitude towards corporal punishment that particularly stands out, Wheeler’s description implying that he was regular and inclement in its application.

The fact that the Major was removed at all shows that officers were in practice subject to discipline, and could be punished for infractions. This stands in contrast to the caricature of the privileged and untouchable officer, free to act as he liked by virtue of his position and some perceived need to maintain the image of the officer corps. Even more extraordinary, by that standard, was that if Wheeler’s account is to be believed, the process of Major Hudson’s downfall began as a result of the aforementioned encounter between Viscount Cranley and a lame soldier. Logic dictates that this led to an investigation by Cranley, rather than a senior officer being dismissed on the word of a common soldier, but it nevertheless shows that at least some officers were not only responsive to such matters, but willing to investigate them and lay down the law even against ‘brother’ officers. All the same, officers were held to different standards and subjected to different punishments when found wanting. It was considered very bad form, for example, for officers to commit improprieties with the wives of their enlisted subordinates.[[151]](#footnote-151) In *Soldiers,* Holmes provides an example from 1779 in the form of lieutenant Thomas Eyre, who was court-martialled for beating a surgeon’s mate of his regiment with the flat of his sword. His crime was that he had gotten into an ‘unseemly quarrel’ with a social inferior, an offence that could have resulted in his being ‘cashiered’. According to Holmes, this rather sardonic term was derived from the German *kassiert,* meaning ‘broken’, and the analogy was apt. The sentence not only deprived an officer of his commission and all money invested in it, but could also prevent him from ever holding a profitable official position ever again.

A milder but no less punitive option was to suspend an officer from rank and pay, during which time he could neither purchase nor take advantage of a free promotion. Positions freed up by a cashiering were reserved for officers outside of the regiment, a measure Holmes ascribes to a need to scotch any suggestion of conspiracy.[[152]](#footnote-152) Despite this, it was possible for an officer to escape punishment by selling his commission in good time, as Rees Gronow recounts;

I knew an officer of the 18th Hussars, W.R., young, rich, and a fine-looking

fellow, who joined the army not far from San Sebastian. His stud of horses

was remarkable for their blood; his grooms were English, and three in number. He brought with him a light cart to carry forage, and a fourgon for his own baggage. All went on well till he came to go on outpost duty; but not finding there any of the comforts to which he had been accustomed, he quietly mounted his charger, told his astonished sergeant that campaigning was not intended for a gentleman, and instantly galloped off to his quarters, ordering his servants to pack up everything immediately, as he had hired a transport to take him off to England. He left us before anyone had time to stop him; and though dispatches were sent off to the Commander-in-Chief, requesting that a court-martial might sit to try the young deserter, he arrived home long enough before the dispatches to enable him to sell out of his regiment. He deserved to have been shot.[[153]](#footnote-153)

Despite this example, a willingness to engage in self-correction, even if it is not entirely consistent, indicates willingness on the part of at least some British officers to take their duties seriously, which is itself an indication of a professional identity.

## 

## The Role of Battle

Combat was an experience the vast majority of Napoleonic soldiers on both sides had in common. Going into battle held an ambivalent position in the thoughts and attitudes of soldiers. For some it was a crucible of manhood, for others the field of glory, and for many a place of fear, pain, and death; none of them mutually exclusive. For the soldiers themselves, battle was the ultimate and defining experience of their military lives, and one of the major bases for the creation of military identity. Soldiers going into battle brought with them the identities they had brought with them from civilian life, as well as what they had acquired from becoming part of a military unit. Combat ultimately served to cement that shared identity, binding men together in the face of deadly danger. The long-term effect of combat on those soldiers who survived is difficult to state with any certainty, as eighteenth and early-nineteenth century society tended to be a lot less open about, and considerate of, such matters than that of today. Those who would today be regarded as mentally ill would at the time have been dismissed as mad, and almost certainly executed or otherwise disposed-of if their situation led them into criminality.

Nevertheless there is limited evidence that soldiers were aware of such problems, including a mention by Private Wheeler of a certain corporal Shortland who appeared to go insane, though Wheeler claims that ‘we all thought that he was acting the old soldier;’

His head was ornamented with an old bee hive and the other part of his dress consisted of an old blue petticoat, tied round his neck, the bottom scarcely reached so low as a Highlander’s kilt, his legs and feet were bare, in his right hand he carried a shepherd’s crook. Thus dressed and equiped (SIC) he was hailed with three cheers…The poor fellow is now in Hospital.[[154]](#footnote-154)

Not all memoirs describe combat directly, though there is a distinctive style in those that do. Descriptions of actual combat tend to be brief and concise, focussing on what the author was immediately aware of. Rees Gronow’s description of his first experience, crossing the Bidassoa river, is an example;

Three miles above, we discovered the French army, and ere long found

ourselves under fire. The sensation of being made a target to a large body of men is at first not particularly pleasant, but “in a trice, the ear becomes more Irish, and less nice.” The first man I ever saw killed was a Spanish soldier, who was cut in two by a cannon ball. The French army, not long after we began to return their fire, was in full retreat; and after a little sharp, but desultory fighting, in which our Division met with some loss, we took possession of the camp and strong position of Soult’s army.[[155]](#footnote-155)

As can be seen, Gronow had little to say about the action itself. Most of the focus is on his own experience, of becoming hardened to the danger and of seeing a man die for the first time. In accordance with Ramsey’s conclusion on the sentimental nature of contemporary memoirs, Gronow’s language takes a turn for the emotive when, in covering his part in the Battle of Waterloo, he describes the suffering of wounded horses;

It was pitiable to witness the agony of the poor horses, which seemed really

conscious of the dangers that surrounded them: we often saw a poor wounded

animal raise its head, as if looking for a rider to afford him aid. There is nothing perhaps among the episodes of a great battle more striking than the *débris* of a cavalry charge, where men and horses are seen scattered and wounded on the ground in every variety of painful attitude. Many a time the heart sickened at the moaning tones of agony which came from man, and scarcely less intelligent horse, as they lay in fearful agony upon the field of battle.[[156]](#footnote-156)

Thomas Pococke goes a step further, describing his own feelings in facing and surviving his first battle in some depth;

This was the first blood I had ever seen shed in battle; the first time the cannon had roared in my hearing charged with death. I was not yet seventeen years of age, and had not been six months from home. My limbs bending under me with fatigue, in a sultry clime, the musket and accoutrements that I was forced to carry were still insupportably oppressive. Still I bore all with invincible patience. During the action, the thought of death never once crossed my mind. After the firing commenced, a still sensation stole over my whole frame, a firm determined torpor, bordering on insensibility. I heard an old soldier answer, to a youth like myself, who inquired what he should do during the battle, “Do your duty.”

It would be very easy to accuse Thomas of talking up his own emotional resilience in the face of what must have been a terrifying experience. But his subsequent admittance that he was forced ‘to turn aside my head from the horrid sight’ of the battlefield adds plausibility to his account.[[157]](#footnote-157) But despite the horrors a soldier might experience on the battlefield, he did not necessarily regard battle as his worst experience. Thomas seems to have become gradually inured to whatever battle might bring, even claim that he ‘preferred any short struggle, however severe, to the dreadful way of life we were at this time pursuing.’ He goes on to describe the frustration of many of his comrades at the fight that never took place, and admits to similar feelings later at ‘running away from an enemy we had beat with so much ease at Vimeira, without even firing a shot.’[[158]](#footnote-158) Gronow for his own part alludes to the visceral aggression he and his comrades felt during the Battle of Waterloo, when the time came to counter-charge the oncoming Imperial Guard;

We were instantly on our legs, and after so many hours of inaction and

irritation at maintaining a purely defensive attitude,-all the time suffering the

loss of comrades and friends,-the spirit which animated officers and men may

easily be imagined. The impetuosity of our men seemed almost to paralyse

their enemies: I witnessed several of the Imperial Guard who were run through the body apparently without any resistance on their parts.[[159]](#footnote-159)

These accounts describe an experience of combat which, while not exactly positive, was not one from which a soldier would necessarily shrink. Neither Gronow nor Pococke seemed to have suffered any psychological ill-effects from combat, and neither did countless other British soldiers, though doubtless there was an unknown and unknowable number that did. As shown by the words of the old soldier in Pococke’s account, to perform well in battle represented the ultimate proof of a soldier’s worth, be he officer or enlisted man. Rifleman Harris noted that the enlisted men tended to observe closely the behaviour and conduct of officers, especially in combat situations:

It is, indeed, singular, how a man loses or gains caste with his comrades

from his behaviour, and how closely he is observed in the field. The officers,

too, are commented upon and closely observed. The men are very proud of

those who are brave in the field, and kind and considerate to the soldiers

under them. An act of kindness done by an officer has often during the battle

been the cause of his life being saved.[[160]](#footnote-160)

It was not entirely necessary for a regiment to have been on the winning side in a battle. If it was, then a regimental tradition would be marred by every defeat. It was only necessary for the regiment itself, and each man in it, to have done their duty. All the same, success in combat was the greatest source of pride for a regiment. Each success would be marked with a battle honour embroidered upon its regimental standard. One of Private Wheeler’s letters, 5th August 1809, shows how regimental commanders could draw on a regiment’s history to inspire their men, and to help draw newcomers into the collective identity:

The next morning, 1st of August, a remarkable day, it being the fiftieth anniversary of the *Battle of Minden.* Colonel M- could not let this opportunity slip without addressing us. I wish I could give you his speech, that is impossible. He told us that all the pleasure and happiness he had ever felt fell short of the pleasure he now felt at being at the head of that Corps, who on that day fifty years had by their native valour repulsed and defeated the whole body of the enemy’s Cavalry before *Minden.* He shewed (SIC) us the word *Minden* on our Colours, and reminded us that it was inscribed on our breast-plates. He said it was probable we should fall in with the enemy that day, and if we did not give them a good drubbing, how could we ever return home to our Fathers, Mothers, etc. Our country expected much from us, the Regiment in its infant state had performed prodigies of valour on that day, and now that we had grown grey (some of us) in the service, would it not be expected we should eclips (SIC) them in glory etc. etc.[[161]](#footnote-161)

## Unit Identities

Military identity is essentially compound, with specific identities existing at different levels. The largest unit individual soldiers may identify with is obviously the army itself. Even at this basic level there appear divisions and caveats. The most obvious is that while professional soldiers invariably identify themselves with the army as a whole, this is not necessarily the case for conscripts or draftees. The latter may identify with the body-politic as a whole, or may have difficulty accepting their military role, a particular problem if coercion of any kind is involved. Unit-related identities may exist at any level, but it is generally agreed that these identities become more profound the smaller they are in scale. Soldiers will identify most closely with their immediate units, usually the squad or fire-team in modern parlance. The unit identities that might exist depend to a great deal on the culture of the army in question, the most obvious example being the Regimental system. This approach focuses on the regiment as a basis for unit identity, with traditions, uniforms, and organisation revolving around it. The British army exemplified this approach, but it also appeared in the French army, both before and after the Revolution.

In the British army, the regiment was the centre of a soldier’s life. Smaller units were defined as parts of a regiment, and larger formations were combinations of regiments in turn. Each regiment had its own battle-flag and distinct uniform, by virtue of minor variations in design and secondary colours. These formed an important part of regimental identity, for it was upon its flag that a regiment’s battle honours were embroidered. This provided, at least to soldiers who could read, a constant reminder of the regiment’s past, in so doing creating a sense of continuity.[[162]](#footnote-162) Uniforms represented a simple but effective means of identity construction, and proved especially useful in attracting recruits. Rifleman Harris admits rather candidly in his *Recollections* that the reason for his enlistment in that particular body was ‘their smart, dashing, and devil-may-care appearance,’[[163]](#footnote-163) referring by implication to their uniform and their general manner. Regiments were also named, originally for their Colonels, then later numbered, then given territorial designations, which were supposed to refer to the areas from which they recruited.

The practice of naming regiments for their Colonels was convenient, but not entirely efficient, since the regiment’s name would change upon the change of its Colonel. To make matters worse, it was quite possible for multiple regiments to have Colonels of the same surname. This was famously dealt with in the case of twin Howard’s regiments by granting them specific names, making them the ‘Buffs’ and ‘Green Howards’ in reference to the colours of their uniform facings. A numerical system was introduced in 1751, with regiments being numbered in the order of their founding.[[164]](#footnote-164) Ordinary soldiers took great pride in their regimental identities, which were consciously developed and maintained for that purpose. Regiments also acquired nicknames, which could derive from any number of causes. The 1st Regiment of Foot, the Royal Scots, reputedly acquired their nickname of ‘Pontius Pilate’s bodyguard’ from a boasting competition with a French unit. The 2nd Queen’s Royal Regiment of Foot acquired their nickname of ‘Kirke’s Lambs’ from their colonel and their paschal lamb emblem respectively, though there is a tradition that the name was given in ironic reference to the regiment’s reputed brutality at the Battle of Sedgemoor in 1685.[[165]](#footnote-165) Other regiments had more low-brow nicknames, which may have been more popular with the enlisted men. The 33rd Regiment of Foot were known as the Havercakes, reputedly due to their recruiting sergeants’ practice of luring hungry recruits with a havercake, or oatcake, stuck on a spontoon or bayonet. The rifle battalion of the 60th Regiment, the King’s Royal Rifle Corps, had the nickname ‘Jaggers.’ This most likely refers to the German word ‘Jaegar’, meaning hunter; the term used in German armies for specialist life infantry.[[166]](#footnote-166)

Fortunately for, or perhaps for the benefit of, their largely illiterate membership, British regiments identified themselves through symbols. One does not need to read or write to be able to recognize a distinctive symbol or mode of dress, and as the previous example by Private Wheeler shows, even a written word can become a symbol if it is pointed out as such. All British regiments possessed recognizable symbols, which could be presented in various forms, such as on buttons and shako plates. These represented only minor differences on the whole, but they represented a vital means by one which soldiers of one regiment distinguished themselves from those of another.[[167]](#footnote-167) The need for physical symbols was also important for more practical reasons, as there was no way to make the uniform clothing sufficiently distinctive in a practicable way. Each specific branch had its own uniform colour, along with facings and lace of specific colours, and some distinctive features. Digby Smith’s *Uniforms of the Napoleonic Wars* is a particularly helpful source in covering contemporary uniforms and their variations.

Infantry all wore red, apart from the 95th Rifles in their distinctive dark green. Dragoon cavalry also wore red, while light dragoons and hussars, including those of the King’s German Legion, wore blue. The 1st and 2nd Life Guards wore red, while the Royal Horse Guards wore blue, a distinction that would manifest itself as late as 1969, when it was amalgamated with the 1st or Royal Dragoons to become the ‘Blues and Royals.’ Infantry primarily wore the well-known ‘shako’ hat from the beginning of the nineteenth century, which was replaced by the distinctive ‘Belgic’ shako, with a raised front plate, in 1812. Shorter, wide-brimmed hats became popular with regiments serving in the West Indies, while light troops sometimes wore forage hats similar in appearance to berets, and grenadiers wore short black bearskins. Cavalry headgear varied between classical-themed helmets for the guards regiments, and plumed ‘Tarleton’ helmets or shakoes for the dragoons and hussars. The Royal Artillery and Royal Engineers also tended to wear tarletons or shakoes, along with dark blue jackets. Foreign units wore distinctive uniforms in a variety of colours and styles. A common method of distinction within units was shoulder wings, similar to epaulettes, with the flanking companies wearing wings in the facing colour while grenadiers wore red wings. The alternate ‘facing’ colours were worn on collars, cuffs, and shoulder straps, while officers also wore gold or silver lace.[[168]](#footnote-168) As there were only a limited number of facing colours, this was not sufficient on its own.

Most regiments had their own distinctive symbols, though some seem to have had no official symbol at all, while some regiments had symbols in common. Regimental symbols may have had a heraldic significance, though these are not always easy to identify. ‘Royal’ regiments tended to include crowns in their symbols, while regiments that served at the Battle of Alexandria in 1801 were rewarded with the Sphinx as their symbol, and many Scottish regiments incorporated thistles into their symbols. Light infantry units were identified by a curved hunting horn, symbolising the origin of light infantry as hunters. David French argues in *Military Identities* that the existence of regimental symbols was a deliberate connection to a chivalric past, intended to imply a direct link between past and present.[[169]](#footnote-169) This makes sense in light of the role of historical achievement in regimental identity, while his further implication of a political role may also have merit. Regimental symbols could from time to time play their own part in the development of regimental identities. The badge of the 9th Foot was Britannia, an honour which by regimental tradition was granted in 1707 by Queen Anne. This led to a curious misunderstanding during the regiment’s service in Spain, where Britannia was widely mistaken for the Virgin Mary. This earned the regiment the nickname ‘the Holy Boys.’[[170]](#footnote-170)

The ultimate symbols and treasures of a Napoleonic British regiment were its flags. Much has been made of the reverence in which British soldiers held their flags, and their importance is beyond doubt. The Union flag was meant to bind the regiment to the King, for each one had in theory been presented by a Royal hand at some point in the regiment’s history. Where possible, the Union flag was indeed presented by the reigning Monarch or a nominee, thus strengthening this connection. Regimental flags bore the regimental symbols, and also the regiment’s battle honours. As shown in Wheeler’s account, the regimental flag could become a physical prop to a telling of the regiment’s history, a physical symbol of its past achievements. There do not appear to have been any hard and fast rules about which battle honours a regiment could claim, or on what basis, a fact that caused problems for nineteenth-century attempts to properly codify regimental traditions. So sacred were they that flags were never actually destroyed, but rather ceremonially enshrined in churches when they became too worn and ragged to be used.

Soldiers were inculcated with the idea that their flags represented all that was proud and noble about their regiments, and that that to lose them was to lose their very identity.[[171]](#footnote-171) This tendency can be traced back to the reputed ancient Roman practice of disbanding a legion that lost its eagle, though no British regiment is known to have disbanded a regiment on that basis alone. On at least two occasions British troops in North America burned their flags rather than let them be captured.[[172]](#footnote-172) There are also examples of regiments trying to conceal the loss of their flags, whether by getting them back or replacing them without the loss being officially noticed. Examples include the 3rd Foot, who lost their colours at the Battle of Albuera in 1811, and the 69th Foot, who lost theirs at Quatre Bras in 1815. Whereas the 3rd manage to retrieve their flags, albeit without the poles, the 69th did not, and an attempt to secretly replace them failed.[[173]](#footnote-173) Despite this disgrace, they served throughout the Waterloo campaign, including at the battle itself.

If losing the colours was a disgrace, then regaining them was an imperative and a triumph, as Thomas Pococke recounts;

Still onwards we drove, up one street, down another, until we came to the church of St Domingo, where the colours of the 71st regiment had been placed, as a trophy, over the shrine of the Virgin Mary. We made a sally into it, and took them from that disgraceful resting-place, where they had remained ever since the surrender of General Beresford to General Liniers. Now we were going to sally out in triumph.[[174]](#footnote-174)

Ironically, the sacrosanct nature of regimental flags made them the ultimate prize to an enemy. Capturing an enemy standard brought great renown, both to the man that took it and to his regiment, and its bearers were unlikely to part with it easily. The first French eagle to be taken by British soldiers in the Peninsula was that of the 8th Regiment of the Line, at the Battle of Barossa on 5th March 1811. The eagle was only secured after a heated struggle, in which seven French officers and men were killed trying to protect it.[[175]](#footnote-175) The glory went in the end to Sergeant Patrick Masterman, written as Masterson in some sources, who was rewarded for the capture with an officer’s commission.[[176]](#footnote-176)

Regimental identities may have been important, but the issue nevertheless arises as to how they could have remained in continuous existence. Sylvia Frey argues that strong regimental identities existed as far back as the American War of Independence, referring to incidents of British prisoners or deserters voluntarily returning to their regiments, despite what likely awaited the latter.[[177]](#footnote-177) Despite this, Kevin Linch raises an important point in *Britain and Wellington’s Army* that the realities of military organisation militated against the existence of permanent identities.[[178]](#footnote-178) A regiment could be disbanded or reduced in peacetime, or even amalgamated in order to bring battle-damaged units up to full strength. Nevertheless, British policy seems to have been to preserve regiments wherever practicable, especially senior regiments. One common method of replenishing weakened units was to ‘draft’ additional soldiers from units judged unlikely to see combat, essentially an extension of the practice each regiment keeping its second battalion at home.

Weakened units might be combined to create whole new battalions, but it was equally if not more likely for newer regiments to be drafted to feed older regiments. Houlding points to the example of the 93rd Foot, which was repeatedly milked for reinforcements throughout its brief life before being finally disbanded in 1763 after only three years. This practice was even more common in the period from 1793 to 1795, a time of severe manpower crisis. In the summer of 1795 alone, one quarter of all foot regiments were drafted to replenish the rest, while all regiments numbered above the one-hundredth, out of one hundred and thirty one, were disbanded and folded into those below.[[179]](#footnote-179) This tendency shows that older regiments were valued over newer regiments when hard decisions over manpower had to be made, strongly suggesting that the longer a regiment’s tradition, the more valuable it was considered.

## Relationships

Tied in very closely to discipline and unit identity is the issue of the relationships between officers and enlisted men. This relationship can be regarded as essentially unequal, since while both officers and men were subject to discipline, the officers were tasked with organising and applying it, even if they did not do so physically. Despite this, there is little evidence of mutual antagonism between officers and men in the British army, at least not in any form that would imperil its ability to function in combat. Officers and men were bound together by a shared situation, as well as the shared collective that was the regiment. Each was also a distinct sub-division of that collective, with its own culture, ideals, and expectations, both of itself and of the other. In the British army an officer was meant to be a ‘gentleman’, a term which will be examined in greater depth in the political segment. Enlisted men expected gentlemanly behaviour from their officers, which they associated with certain virtues, giving obedience and loyalty in return.

The regiment was the army’s representative to the ordinary soldier, the means by which he accessed military identity and made himself a part of it. It became a soldier’s home and community during his time in the army, an identifiable collective of which he could make himself a part. Around eighty per cent of enlisted men would remain within the same regiment throughout the war, transfers largely being the result of amalgamations of under-strength units. This is in contrast with the officers, who socialized across regimental boundaries with fellow officers they regarded as social equals.[[180]](#footnote-180) Because of this, it is through the regiment as an institution that the relationship between officers and enlisted men can be most effectively examined. This relationship was driven to a considerable extent by a sense of mutual ownership, that even though officers and men came from what were regarded as different orders of humanity, the regiment was a shared enterprise in which both had a stake. This common interest gave them a shared context in which to develop a shared identity, though one in which they played very different roles.

Though officers and men alike were drawn from broad social backgrounds, as shall be shown in later chapters, once in their military roles they were very much set apart. Officers held themselves, and were held by their men in turn, to a certain set of values. Private Wheeler makes much of the ‘humanity’ of his commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Mainwaring of the 51st light infantry regiment, with particular reference to his aversion to flogging.[[181]](#footnote-181) Rifleman Harris makes a very particular claim regarding the preferences of soldiers;

Nay, whatever folks may say upon the matter, I know from experience, that in *our* army the men like best to be officered by gentlemen, men whose education has rendered them more kind in manners than your coarse officer, sprung from obscure origin, and whose style is brutal and overbearing.[[182]](#footnote-182)

In light of accusations of obsequiousness, this extract warrants a brief analysis. Harris relates in this case what, in his experience, soldiers liked to see in an officer. If one reads between the lines, this can also be taken as a tacit implication of how soldiers would regard an officer who would or could not live up to this ideal. Such an approach would give the line about an officer’s life being saved a chilling undertone. Though the Rifles took a somewhat less standoffish approach to the relationship between officers and enlisted men, the underlying social divide remained, meaning that this account can to some extent be considered representative of the wider army. Harris’ claim regarding a preference for ‘gentlemen’ as officers can be qualified by bearing in mind his reference to their apparent kindness, a quality similarly valued by Private Wheeler. On the surface this can be interpreted as soldiers having internalized the view, common among the better-off, that the lower orders had been rendered brutal and crude by their poverty and illiteracy.[[183]](#footnote-183) Harris counters this idea of the self-hating soldier later in his account:

They are a strange set, the English! and so determined and unconquerable, that they will have their way if they can. Indeed, it requires one who has authority in his face, as well as at his back, to make them respect and obey him. They see too often, in the instance of sergeant-majors, that command does not suit ignorant and coarse-minded men; and tyranny is too much used even in the brief authority which they have. A soldier, I am convinced, is driven often to insubordination by being worried by these little-minded men for the veriest trifles, about which the gentleman never thinks of tormenting him.[[184]](#footnote-184)

For an officer to be a ‘gentleman’ in this case evidently meant an officer possessing an appearance and mind-set that would attract respect, as well as understanding how to act appropriately in their positions. Overall it can be taken that ordinary soldiers expected that their officers be good at their jobs in a professional sense on the one hand, and to be considerate of their needs and situation on the other. In terms of discipline this must have been quite tricky for the officers, needing to balance the soldiers’ desire to be protected with their desire for fair and just treatment. Based on these accounts, the existence of these qualities in officers could lead the enlisted men to trust them, a particularly important factor in the development of a professional mind-set and identity.

# Chapter 2: Professional Identities in the French Army

The French army as it existed before the French Revolution was little different in terms of its structure from its British counterpart at the time. Units such as a *compagnie,* *bataillon* or *regiment* are easily recognized, as are ranks such as *colonel,* *capitaine*, and *lieutenant*. This similarity derives from a shared western European military culture that can, by one standard of evidence or another, be traced as far back as the Roman Empire, or at least as far as the Franks under Charlemagne. The omnipresence of Roman literature means that a Roman influence cannot be ruled out. The largely common-sense advice of Vegetius in *Epitome Rei Militari* remained an object of military study as late as 1779, as seen in the Comte de Crisse’s *Commentaires sur les institutions militaires de Végèce*:

It is known at the time of the decadence of the discipline of the empire, that Vegetius wrote his book. He collected what he found most precious in the writings of the ancient Roman military discipline, and he formed a case of history, since the first hours of the Republic, up to him, so that those who were loads of training young people, could restore the militia by the example and the imitation of the ancient virtues. Vegetius compared that discipline that had been in the former times, and that which he knew since. Its past triumphs, and the current defects, were equally clear. He followed (as much as the little relief he had permitted him) to examine each and the others in all parts of the military science.[[185]](#footnote-185)

French military organisation in the eighteenth century can be more credibly traced to the Renaissance, itself a transitional period between the feudal age and the era of horse and musket. During that period French armies were organised in much the same fashion as described in the previous chapter, of individual companies organised into regiments and disbanded at the end of a given war. When Louis XIII rebuilt the French army in the first half of the seventeenth century, its organisation came to be based around the regiment as an institution, much as the English and later British armies would towards the end of the century. In response to the internecine strife of the French Wars of Religion, the crown had maintained infantry companies in their regiments since 1569, as opposed to dissolving them once the actual fighting was over. In 1628, the decision was taken to keep the twelve oldest regiments in existence permanently, the new practice being to reduce the number of men and active companies in peacetime rather than to disband completely.[[186]](#footnote-186)

The regular army in seventeenth and eighteenth century France was essentially professional, at least among the enlisted ranks. As will be shown in the relevant sections later, enlisted men tended to serve for periods of many years, meaning that the regiments provided the same conditions as their British counterparts for the development of professional identities, namely an extended period in a shared environment. French officers came to the army by different means and for different reasons, but it can nonetheless be argued that they had a professional identity, the duties and occupations of a soldier being an integral part of that self-image and social role. To be a noble was to be a soldier, but whereas an enlisted soldier was a soldier and nothing else, at least until he left the army, an aristocratic officer was an aristocrat in peacetime and a soldier while he was with the army, which in practice meant on campaign or whenever his sense of responsibility drove him to perform his duties. To modern eyes aristocratic French officers are an anachronism, a throwback to an older chivalric age. It is ironic, therefore, that the military ideals of the French Revolution would seek to apply a similarly compound identity to the whole of the male population.

Just as an aristocratic officer adopted his military role at the start of a war and set it aside at the end, so it was intended that all French men of a certain age and suitably healthy bodies would do likewise. Throughout the First Republic the Ministry of War held to the ideal of a citizen army, in which every eligible citizen would serve for the extent of a given war. This ideal was based on the armies of the Roman Republic before the Marian Reforms, in which citizens of means would serve as the famous legionaries, while those possessed of horses would provide the cavalry, and the less well-off would act as light infantry; a system itself derived of the Hoplite system practiced by the Greek city-states. A more dramatic example of Roman citizenship triumphing in battle came from the story of the Consul Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, who famously left his humble farm to serve as Dictator when Rome was threatened with invasion. Once in Rome he called up every man of military age, led them to victory at the Battle of Mons Algidus, only to disband his army and return to his farm once the danger was passed.

This argument, between those who favoured a full-time professional army and those who favoured a temporary militia, had by the Revolution been dragging on for over a century, and was not confined to France. The argument had also been made in Britain, and for much the same reasons. A professional army was a twofold threat, at once a tool of despotism, and also a source of crime and social disorder. A comment made by Lazare Carnot to the Military Committee of the French National Convention illustrates this:

It is absolutely necessary in a free land that every citizen be a soldier or that no one be a soldier. But France surrounded by ambitious and warlike nations can obviously not give up its armed forces; it is therefore necessary, following the expression of J.J Rousseau, that each citizen should be a soldier by duty, and none by profession.[[187]](#footnote-187)

Carnot, perhaps inadvertently, reveals the dilemma faced by the Republic in matters military. A standing army is a potential threat to liberty, as evidenced by the example of Julius Caesar, and more recently of Oliver Cromwell. But all the same the country must be defended. Carnot in this case is stating that there must exist a citizen army in accordance with the Cincinnatian ideal as opposed to there being no army at all. Apparently without meaning to, he nonetheless raises the underlying problem with the Cincinnatian ideal, that as a military system it is highly impractical. Just as it was with feudal and renaissance armies before Louis XIII, any Cincinnatian army would have to be created from scratch at the beginning of every war. As it happens the Republic eventually found this ideal to be unworkable, and whether by desire or necessity ended up creating what amounted to a standing professional army, though it would take Consular and Imperial rule under Napoleon to bring this process about fully. This chapter aims to examine the practicalities of the creation and maintenance of the French army in this period, covering such aspects as recruitment and training, and in so doing examine how French professional identities changed and developed.

Recruitment of Enlisted Me**n**

The former Royal army, which shall be referred to as the regular army in the context of the Revolution, recruited in a broadly similar fashion to its British counterpart. Individual regiments sent out recruiting parties led by officers, in a practice known as *racolage.* This duty was usually given to officers who had been raised from the ranks, a practice with two possible explanations. One is that the duty of recruitment was looked down upon, and considered fit only for officers of lower status. The other is that officers raised from the ranks were thought to be better suited to recruiting, perhaps because their backgrounds allowed them to understand better the civilian population among which they would be working, and that they themselves were living proof of the possibilities offered by army life. That officers of all backgrounds were expected to return from their *semestre*, or paid leave amounting to seven and a half months every two years, with at least two recruits implies that recruiting was not considered in any way *déclassé.*  Like their British counterparts, French recruiters were not above getting recruits drunk, or lying about the regiments they represented. Some would even recruit wealthy-looking young men by one means or another, then ransom them back to their families. Despite a royal ordinance of 1701 it was not unknown for recruiters to resort to outright kidnapping, though the object was as likely to be the acquisition of ransom money as actual recruits. Understandably, recruiting parties were rarely welcomed in the localities where they attempted to operate, and might even face violent resistance.[[188]](#footnote-188)

.As part of reforms carried out by the Duc de Choiseul in December of 1762, responsibility for recruitment was transferred to professional recruiters, or *racoleurs,* working directly for the crown.[[189]](#footnote-189) These were paid a bounty varying in accordance with demand for and availability of recruits, as well as their physical condition and suitability. The equivalent in the British army were the crimps, who like the *racoleurs* were civilians employed by officers.[[190]](#footnote-190) That this was considered necessary suggests that the aforementioned measures were not entirely effective on their own, and that army recruitment before the Revolution was in a difficult state. The official strength of the line infantry was one hundred and sixteen thousand men, but the actual numbers fell short by between four and five thousand.[[191]](#footnote-191) In the decade of 1780 to 1790 the desertion rate was approximately three thousand per year.[[192]](#footnote-192)

Nevertheless it was evidently not overwhelming, as the army successfully incorporated twelve new light infantry battalions in 1788, and infantry regiments on average managed to maintain their strength at over one thousand one hundred men, out of a required one thousand one hundred and fifty, by the end of 1788. It is worth noting that the branch most troubled by low strength was the artillery, generally being under strength by around five hundred men out of a required one thousand four hundred and twenty.[[193]](#footnote-193) These comparatively severe shortages can be explained by the relatively high level of education and competence required by a technical service, in a time when education, though gradually expanding, was still hard to come by.

The Revolution, and the wars that accompanied it, led to dramatic changes. The initial policy of the Ministry of War, and of the government, was that France’s armies were no longer to be made up of long-service regulars, but of volunteers serving only for the duration of a given conflict. It was by this means that Revolutionary France’s ‘other’ army, for these purposes referred to as the volunteer army, was raised. The first call went out in the summer of 1791, acquiring around a hundred thousand new soldiers in one hundred and sixty nine new battalions.[[194]](#footnote-194) More volunteers were called up in 1792, though the requirements were vastly exceeded. John Lynn puts the number of new battalions at two hundred and seventy-five, as opposed to the forty-two required, which at a full strength of eight hundred men per battalion would make for around two hundred and twenty thousand men as opposed to thirty-three thousand.[[195]](#footnote-195) One of these was a young gardener, formerly in the employment of the Seigneur of Juzennecourt, by the name of Jacques Fricasse. He describes the process:

At this time the citizen Quilliard commanded the National Guard of

the township; he gave order that all commons gather in the capital on

August 24, 1792. In the morning, he said:

“You know the work that I have to fill out: we need several volunteers;

those who want to leave my service are free to do so. If, however, there are not enough volunteers, all fathers and boys will be forced to draw lots. If it is not your intention to leave, hey well my friends, I will do everything in my power to make it up to you by sending others in your place.”

We were therefore in the city where all the villages of the canton were assembled. First, there were few volunteers; there was a time in the afternoon when several companies of the National Guard, composed of sixty men, had not yet provided the men that he needed. Among that number was mine, and I had long been filled with a desire to serve. How many times had I heard, in the papers, the news that our French army had been pushed and beaten everywhere! I was impatient to see for myself things that I found quite impossible to believe. You say that it was innocence that made me think so, but I often thought to myself: “Is it therefore possible that I heard of misfortunes? Yes! It seemed to me that, if I had been present, the evil would not have been so great. I did not feel I would be a better soldier than my comrades, but I felt courage and I thought that, with courage, one can overcome many things.”[[196]](#footnote-196)

The regular army actually managed to expand in this period, the line infantry acquiring around thirty-five thousand recruits in 1791 alone, despite having been forbidden in the January 24th decree to recruit from the volunteers. Aside from three new line regiments, made up originally of Parisian National Guards, the line infantry gained around fourteen thousand new soldiers in 1791 after losses. The light infantry also increased in that year, gaining two new battalions. [[197]](#footnote-197) These developments debunk any suggestion that the regular army was a politically distrusted and rejected institution, doubts regarding its aristocratic officers aside. It also provides a limited insight into the motivations of its recruits. The desire to defend France, though important, cannot have been the sole motivation, or else the recruits might just as easily have joined the volunteers, their term of service being limited by a Constituent Assembly decree of December 28th 1791 that every volunteer was free to go home at campaign’s end, which was set at December 1st 1792.[[198]](#footnote-198)

By contrast, soldiers of the regular army enlisted in engagements of eight years, with rewards of additional pay and promotion for re-enlisting.[[199]](#footnote-199) It is possible that some would-be soldiers chose the certainty of a regular enlistment over the uncertainty inherent in volunteering, for they could not know whether or not they would be released before the war’s end, or how long the war would persist. That the army continued to recruit successfully through 1792, gaining between twenty and twenty-five thousand men after losses and the disbandment of the Swiss and Liegeois regiments, is further evidence that recruits were not put off by long service. A better explanation is the improvements made to the conditions of service, such as the 1791 decree that soldiers who served honourably for sixteen years would receive the status of active citizenship regardless of how much tax they paid. This would have represented a major improvement in the social status of soldiers, but its importance should not be overstated, as the distinction between active and passive citizens was abolished in 1792.

Those called up under the law of January 25th 1792 had the option of enlisting in the regular army in return for a bounty of eighty *livres* for the infantry and one hundred and twenty *livres* for the cavalry and artillery. Crucially, the term of service was reduced from eight to three years, or possibly less depending on the military situation. A further decree of July of that year set formal recruitment quotas for each department, marking the beginning of a policy of conscription.[[200]](#footnote-200) That the regular army was permitted to take advantage of this nationwide recruitment drive strongly implies that it was valued by the War Ministry and the government. The most significant change in recruitment policy came in February of 1793, with a formal requisition of three hundred thousand unmarried and childless citizens between the ages of eighteen and forty, the numbers to be made up as local authorities saw fit.[[201]](#footnote-201) In that same month, the process of amalgamation was begun, combining the regular and volunteer armies as one.

So successful was the *levée en masse,* raising total French manpower to around three quarters of a million, that no more large-scale recruiting was carried out until early of 1799, by which time numbers had dropped to just over three hundred and twenty-five thousand. The *levee* had almost certainly been intended as a one-off, a harsh solution to a long-standing but hopefully temporary problem. With the outbreak of the War of the Second Coalition in the summer of 1798, the problem was proving itself to be indefinite, if not permanent. The answer to this crisis lay in a system of formal conscription set down in the Loi Jourdan of 1798. Named after General Jean-Baptiste Jourdan, who was its author, the Jourdan law represents Napoleonic conscription as it is generally understood, with the male population between the ages of twenty and twenty-five being liable for service. These were divided into classes by age, with recruitment focussing on the first class, or those reaching the age of twenty on the first day of Vendémiaire, or the twenty-second of September.[[202]](#footnote-202) One of those to be recruited in this fashion was Jean-Roch Coignet, who was called up in the summer of 1799, aged twenty-three;

On the sixth Fructidor, year VII, two gendarmes came and left me with a

way-bill and an order to start for Fontainebleau on the tenth of Fructidor. I

immediately made preparations for my departure. They (my master and

mistress) wished to hire a substitute. I thanked them with tears in my eyes.

“I promise you that I shall bring back a silver gun, or die.”[[203]](#footnote-203)

The silver gun he refers to is most likely part of a Roman-style system of rewards created for soldiers, known as ‘arms of honour.’[[204]](#footnote-204) Coignet’s description mingles sorrow at his departure with apparent acceptance, as he makes no mention of not wanting to go. Considering the itinerant and by no means easy life he had known before settling with his benefactors, he may well have seen his term of service as an opportunity for adventure and self-aggrandizement. The ample evidence of affection and gratitude towards his benefactors can be taken as a reminder that a desire to rise in the world does not make one heartless. Coignet’s military service would continue right through the war, up to and including the Hundred Days. Though it would not be the *grande armée* until 1805, the new army nonetheless existed as a broadly continuous institution at least until the short-lived Bourbon restoration of 1814, allowing for the development of a single identity.

## Officers Recruitment

The makeup of the French officer corps changed dramatically in the space of three years, going from being effectively dominated by aristocrats to at least a semblance of a meritocracy. The officer corps of the French army as it existed from the reign of Louis XIII, was essentially an aristocratic club, though the social composition could change significantly in wartime as ‘soldiers of fortune’ were promoted from the ranks to make up the numbers. These made up around ten per cent of all officers, and were tolerated primarily because of their minority status and their niche role in directly supervising the troops.[[205]](#footnote-205) Aristocratic officers broadly fitted the contemporary stereotype in terms of their recruitment, in that they received little if any of what would today, or even under Napoleon, be regarded as formal training. The memoirs of the Marquis de Lafayette, that most lionized of the liberal aristocrats, make little mention of either recruiting or training. Lafayette claims to have been sent to a college in Paris, the College du Plessis, at the age of twelve, later entering the renowned *Mousquetaires Noirs,* though not being called upon to join his regiment except during reviews, before his marriage at the age of sixteen.[[206]](#footnote-206) This meant that he was essentially an absentee officer while still at school. Absenteeism was common among aristocratic officers in the period, and can be considered one of their major failings in professionalism. This can be traced to the mind-set that underlay their particular military identity, in which being an officer was only one of many aspects of aristocratic life. Officers who were aristocrats had other things they needed to be doing, such as tending to their estates and business interests, or spending time at court. In one incident in 1782, a number of colonels and *jeunes gens présentés* were delayed in returning to their regiments, as Marie Antoinette needed men of suitable rank for a ball she was giving in honour of Emperor Paul I of Russia.[[207]](#footnote-207)

What to a modern professional mind-set would seem like a dereliction of duty, to an aristocratic officer would be simply the way things were done. The result was that aristocratic officers, at least those who were habitually absent, tended to neglect their duties, including the training of the troops. The Baron de Besenval found fault with this in a letter to the Minister of War in 1786:

Why, in a country where the officers are, so to speak, only like temporary sojourners in their regiments, since they only put in an appearance, why, I say, do we rely on such men for the instruction of the troops, and why do we give up the means for employing subjects who, by their talents and ambition, would ensure the success of so important an object?[[208]](#footnote-208)

Another problem raised here is that Lafayette would have *de jure* been a member of his regiment between the ages of twelve and sixteen, between the years of 1769 and 1773. The problem of underage officers was also widespread in the British army at that time, an issue the Duke of York tried and for the most part succeeded in resolving in his reforms. Stories of nursery ensigns and schoolboy captains seem to have been as true of the French as they were of the British officer corps.

The highest-ranking nobles tended to start their sons in the myriad units that made up the *Maison Militaire du Roi*, most likely because of the social prestige involved and because the King had direct control over appointments, making the necessary influence-peddling much easier. Like most European armies at the time, the French army allowed the purchase of commissions, a colonelcy of an infantry regiment going for between twenty-five and seventy-five thousand *livres*, while a cavalry regiment could put a would-be colonel back by anything up to 120,000 *livres*. Officially only company and regimental commands could be purchased, but venality was essentially tolerated in other ranks.[[209]](#footnote-209) Serious inroads into venality would not be made until 1776, when the Comte de Saint-Germain, Louis XVI’s Minister of War at the time, instituted a policy of reducing all prices by one quarter at every sale, meaning that the price would be gone by the fourth sale. Venality was finally abolished in the infantry by the National Assembly in February of 1790, though it lingered in the cavalry.[[210]](#footnote-210)

During the Revolutionary period, new ways had to be found to provide the armies of France with the officers they needed. Alexandre de Lameth argued before the military committee in 1790 for a compound system combining seniority for ranks up to that of captain, along with two thirds of lieutenant-colonels and colonels and half of generals, the rest being provided by Royal nomination. This was intended to defend against the tripartite evils of favouritism, patronage, and executive power.[[211]](#footnote-211) The committee’s debates would prove sterile, as the authority of the officer corps collapsed in the face of mutiny and social upheaval. In a wider sense the aristocratic officers represented both a political and a practical difficulty, the former in that they had taken personal oaths of loyalty to the King, the latter in that the said oaths, and other issues besides, were causing large numbers of them to resign their commissions and flee abroad. These *émigrés* were never quite the threat they were sometimes made out to be, at least outside France. The most immediate problem as far as the army was concerned was their increasing absence, meaning that new officers would have to be found to replace them. The *émigrés* were probably no great loss in themselves, for the Revolutionary army managed quite well without them. All the same, they had to be replaced, and quickly, if any kind of command structure was to be maintained.

The regular and volunteer armies each had their own way of solving the problem.

Among the regulars, the answer was to promote Non-Commissioned Officers as they had always done, except this time on a much larger scale. Six hundred infantry NCOs were promoted to the officer ranks in 1791 alone, and over two thousand in 1792 as the flow of emigrations became a torrent. Many of Napoleon’s most famous followers began their careers in this fashion, such as Joachim Murat, who rose to the rank of sub-lieutenant in 1791, before his involvement in the 13 Vendémiaire incident, which gained him Napoleon’s attention and began his rise to even greater heights. André Masséna, who would also acquire a Marshal’s baton, started as a private in the Royal Italian regiment and attained officer rank after returning to the army in 1791. By 1793 more than half of the regular army’s officers had been promoted from the ranks. By contrast, the preferred method in the volunteer army was to elect officers and NCOs. This practice broadly suited the new ideals of the Revolution, putting aside haughtiness and hierarchy in favour of fellowship and trust.

In the case of the volunteers of 1790 and 1791 there was a mitigating factor, in that no officer or NCO could be elected without previous experience in the army or the National Guard. This factor was of vital importance, ensuring that reasonably competent individuals would be chosen, and is proof of a degree of pragmatism in the War Ministry and government at the time.[[212]](#footnote-212) Many regulars actually deserted in order to take advantage of this policy, and significant numbers of regular officers were formally attached to volunteer battalions to ensure that they were properly trained and organised. Such was their importance that the Constituent Assembly added an exception on March 18th to its decree of January 24th 1792, allowing regular officers or NCOs serving as adjutants or sergeant-majors to remain with the volunteer units to which they had been attached until the end of the year. This was an extension to their decree of December 28 1791, which gave all line officers except lieutenant-colonels until April 1st to return to their regiments.[[213]](#footnote-213)

## Motives of Enlisted Men

In studying the motives of pre-Revolutionary French soldiers compared to their British counterparts, two issues arise. One is the tendency of the French troops to be recruited from certain parts of France, while the other is the significant number of foreign or theoretically foreign troops. The bulk of French recruits came from the pre-Revolution provinces making up the northern and eastern frontiers, such as Flanders, Artois, Picardy, Champagne, Lorraine, Alsace, and Franche-Comté. In 1789 these made up one fifth of France’s population, yet provided one third of the non-Swiss infantry, half the cavalry, and three quarters of the artillery. This imbalance was by no means unique to France, as the British army recruited extensively in Ireland and the Scottish Highlands. The most obvious reason for this tendency is geographical, those provinces being close to the borders and therefore more accustomed to the presence of soldiers and the possibility of invasion. By contrast, there existed a strong anti-military sentiment in the southern provinces, especially in the west, despite a close proximity to Spain. Spain’s relative quiescence, at least when compared to France’s strategic rival Austria, along with Prussia and the Netherlands to the east, may have contributed to this mind-set.

The factor of foreign regiments should not be overstated. Aside from the Swiss, there existed only twelve foreign regiments, of which only eight per cent of personnel were actually ‘foreign’ in the sense of having been born outside of France’s borders, compared to seventy-nine French. Of the eight German regiments, around half of the men actually hailed from Alsace and Lorraine, the rest coming from the smaller German states and certain Swiss cantons. Germany had a centuries-old reputation as a provider of mercenaries, dating back to the days of the *Landsknechts.* The *Landgrafschaft* Hesse-Kassel provided a contingent of five thousand troops to aid King George II against the 1745 Jacobite uprising, and even more extensive support in the American War of Independence thirty years later. Of the three Irish regiments, the remnants of the famous Irish Brigade, around three quarters of the personnel were foreign-born, though only a small number came from the British Isles. Around one third of all foreigners in French service actually served in ‘French’ regiments, further complicating any attempt to ascertain the ‘ethnic’ character of the regular army. [[214]](#footnote-214) The eleven Swiss regiments were provided through *capitulation* treaties between the individual Swiss cantons and the French crown, an arrangement that had existed since 1515.[[215]](#footnote-215) This state of affairs came temporarily to an end with a Decree of the National Assembly dated July 21st 1791, in which all ‘foreign’ regiments, that is to say those which were named and identified as such, were to be considered French and treated no differently to other French regiments.[[216]](#footnote-216) The exception was the Swiss, who were simply dismissed, though like other *étrangers* they would find themselves in French service again before long.

The issue of motive takes on a new meaning following the Revolution. While the line army was able to continue recruiting, the bulk of French manpower expansion in 1791 and 1792 was done through calls for volunteers. The sheer number of volunteers, and the extent to which the public response outstripped official requirement, has commonly been ascribed to an explosion of patriotic sentiment. More recent scholarship, such as that of John Lynn and Alan Forrest, has taken a more down-to-earth approach. It would be ungenerous to arbitrarily discount the possibility of genuine patriotic feeling, even on such a scale, but it must be qualified against the practical realities of trying to acquire vast numbers of usable fighting men quickly. According to Forrestthe success of volunteer recruiting varied substantially by region, with some being vastly oversubscribed and others consistently underperforming. This may be in part explained by local mindset influenced by geography, as the departments with the best responses tended to be in the east, with the aforementioned tradition of military recruitment and close proximity of traditional enemies, while Forrest identifies the most difficult areas as being the Pyrenees, the Massif Central, and Britanny, all but the former of which were well away from France’s borders. A common response to this problem was drawing of lots, as mentioned by Jacques Fricasse. Another was the *scrutin révolutionnaire,* in which ordinary people were required to nominate those they thought most suitable from among themselves. Needless to say, those selected tended to be outsiders, convicts, or the merely unpopular.[[217]](#footnote-217) Civic authorities also resorted to offering bounties, and allowing ‘volunteers’ to provide substitutes at their own expense was broadly tolerated.

The initial success of these methods was undeniable, with French army manpower approximately tripling to four hundred and fifty thousand by November of 1792, of which around three hundred-thousand can be categorized as volunteers. But this success proved brief, as by February of the next year French manpower had dropped to around two hundred and ninety thousand, a loss of one hundred and sixty thousand, or thirty-six per cent.[[218]](#footnote-218) Considering the short time frame, desertion represents the only plausible explanation. This would imply that French morale was at low ebb, which stands at odds with the run of French successes since the Battle of Valmy in September of 1792. The answer lies in the mind set, and all too human nature, of many of the volunteers. As Forrest points out, the 1791 volunteers were enlisting at a time when France was not actually at war, implying that many volunteers were motivated by a chance to prove their patriotism or enjoy a brief adventure.[[219]](#footnote-219)

The same cannot be said of the 1792 recruits, who were called up once the war was underway, but this does not preclude them believing in a short war, at the end of which they would be allowed to go home. Evidence of this attitude can be found in the account of Louis Bricard, who volunteered in September of 1792:

On the 17th, shoes were given to a whole army; I did not want to take them,

for the reason that, if I took some effects of the Nation, I would be

committed to the army, and therefore, I could not leave at the end of the campaign.[[220]](#footnote-220)

Bricard’s concern can be interpreted in two ways. One is that he genuinely felt that to accept military supplies, which were the property of the nation, was to take on the responsibility of defending it as an enlisted soldier, rather than as a free citizen. There is an apparent hole in this logic, namely that in order to fight he would have to be provided with a weapon, unless he regarded government-issue shoes as a luxury rather than a necessity. The other possibility is that Bricard feared that accepting the shoes would be conveniently interpreted as proof that he had enlisted.

## Officer’s Motivations

Pre-Revolutionary French officers can be divided into two broad categories. The first and by far the larger is that of aristocratic officers, while the second far smaller category is that of *roturiers*, or ‘soldiers of fortune’, risen from the ranks. The motives of the first category for seeking military careers derive from their wider identity as aristocrats, an issue that will be examined in its deeper context later. Suffice to say, there existed a deep-rooted connection between aristocratic identity and military service, which brought with it very distinct conceptions of professionalism and merit. The aristocracy regarded the officer corps as a sphere to which by birth-right and ability they were distinctly suited, and on which they should have first claim. The example of Lafayette would seem to support this claim, and the upshot was that aristocratic officers tended to be enthusiastic about military service. Lafayette’s youthful enthusiasm for military service is well-documented, but the role of aristocratic identity in shaping it is not what might be expected. His autobiographies make much of his love of liberty, but none dwell much on the circumstances of his youth. In contrast to the brief but glittering image generally presented, Lafayette was not the ideal French aristocrat. An unpolished and somewhat awkward provincial, he did not fit in at Versailles, and found that he preferred his own ‘natural’ manliness to courtly graces.[[221]](#footnote-221) Failure to present the required image could lead to ridicule and rejection, but the fact that Lafayette was able to pursue a military career at all proves that his father’s money and name counted for far more than his two left feet.[[222]](#footnote-222)

But if Lafayette sought to escape from adolescent alienation via the military life, others were far worse off. Whereas Lafayette merely danced badly, Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord could not dance at all due to a clubbed foot. Nicknamed ‘the lame devil’, Talleyrand was disinherited by his own family, who concluded that a Talleyrand who could not fight had no business calling himself Count of Périgord. This is proof of the importance in which military careers were held by many aristocrats, though in practice just as many would-be officers sought commissions in the hope of maintaining, or escaping from, genteel poverty. This factor was behind much of the resentment felt by provincial nobles towards courtiers and even towards *roturiers*, whom they perceived as having acquired commissions on the basis of wealth rather than what they understand as merit.[[223]](#footnote-223) The possibility of gaining wealth and status was a major draw for would-be officers before and during the eighteenth century. The memoirs of Delphine de Sabran describe how in 1785 the Chevalier de Boufflers, an acquaintance of her mother, sought and gained the post of Governor of Senegal in the hope of improving his status, and also as a means of escaping or paying off his debts.[[224]](#footnote-224)

The issue of motive for officer recruitment falls into abeyance for the first decade of the French Revolution, for the simple reason that whether by intention or in practice new officers were almost invariably promoted from the ranks. Opportunities for direct entry into the officer corps, something the Jacobins had rejected for ideological reasons, would arise again under Napoleon. Elzear Blaze describes three methods by which one might become an officer. The first, and according to Blaze the simplest and cheapest, was simply to enlist. This appears to mean joining the army in the enlisted ranks, if one had not already been called up, and then achieve promotion through merit. The second option was to join the *Vélites,* a formation of Imperial Guard cadets created by Napoleon in January of 1804. The third, and that taken by Blaze, was to enter the *École Spéciale Militaire,* founded at Fontainebleau in 1802:

The Fontainebleau Military School opened its doors for 1,200 francs a year but the crowd of young men blocked them; not everyone could enter. Those who had not the time to await their turn of admission entered the *vélites;* it was a harder way, one won the epaulet with greater difficulty, but one wore a uniform sooner; at eighteen that meant something. One must have been a soldier at that time to understand what magic there was in a uniform. What a vision of a glorious future there was in every young head wearing a plume for the first time! Every French soldier carried his baton of marshal of France in his cartridge-box; it was only a question of getting it out. We saw nothing difficult in that; to-day I even think that at that time we would not have allowed our ambitious dreams to be restricted in any way.[[225]](#footnote-225)

Blaze reveals in this quotation what he believed to be the main reason why officers and enlisted men alike might choose to fight Civilians will willingly become soldiers, he claims, and endure a great deal while in uniform if they believe that service brings with it a chance for advancement, be it economic or social. This in itself raises a new issue, with regard not only to Fontainebleau but also to the Vélites*.* As described in the account of Sergeant Adrien Bourgogne, all Vélites had to be able to receive a fixed stipend.[[226]](#footnote-226)Rafe Blaufarb describes this, along with the fee required to enter the *école,* as being part of a wider effort by Napoleon to secure the support of the wealthier and middling sections of French society. The ideological ramifications of this change will be covered in greater depth later.

## Training of Enlisted Men

The training practices of the enlisted ranks would change relatively little in the course of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic periods, in sharp contrast to those of the officers. In the regular army, the garrison routine included four hours of training every day.[[227]](#footnote-227) By contrast, the anonymous author of *Journal of a Soldier of the Seventy-First Glasgow Regiment* mentioned receiving three hours of training per day, specifically in the early morning. Baron Felix de Wimpffen, writing in 1789, claimed that infantrymen should be ready within six weeks, if trained in units of veterans. Cavalry, by contrast, needed three or four years of training, while artillery personnel needed seven or eight years.[[228]](#footnote-228) Since the French and British armies fought in essentially the same manner and derived from the same military tradition, at least until the Revolution, the practicalities and focus of training must have been similar if not identical, making for an essentially similar experience. One factor that can be examined was the favour in which Prussian methodology was held in the last decades of the Old Regime.

As in many European states, the French army took an interest in the Prussian model after the Seven Years War, in which it was used so successfully. The regulations of 1764 were heavily influenced by the Prussian model.[[229]](#footnote-229) Jacques de Guibert, who started his military career as a thirteen-year-old boy in the company of his father, the Maréchal de Broglie’s chief of staff, was a great admirer of the Prussian model. He published his *Essai général de tactique* in 1770, a work that stood out in a period when military literature was abundant. In it, he called for the creation of a national army trained and organized in the Prussian fashion, which he regarded with some admiration:

This glory is to be reserved to the King of Prussia. He showed Europe the phenomenon of a large, and at the same time manoeuvrable and disciplined army. He did see that the movements of one hundred thousand men are as subject to simple calculations as ten thousand; that spirit, which did move a battalion, being once located, is more than that of a greater quantity of these spirits combined, and whether the manner. His victories have proven the goodness of his discoveries. It is cast in excess on his documents. We have copied the costume of his troops, the spectacle of the discipline, and to the defects of the constitution, but its principles were not and are not yet seen.[[230]](#footnote-230)

This particular excerpt shows the main problem with French attempts to copy the Prussian model. Guibert believed that French society had become decadent and corrupt, drawing comparisons with the decline of the Roman Empire. The disciplined, honourable, and patriotic France he envisaged, essentially an idealized Sparta or Republican Rome, would both require and be able to employ the sort of military system employed by Prussia. With its draft system based on regional cantons and its harsh discipline, Prussia must have seemed to some, especially in a period so steeped in Romano-Hellenistic literature and thought, to be a new Sparta of sorts. But as Guibert implies, France was not Prussia, and its soldiers were not Spartans. The imposition of Prussian-style drill and discipline was deeply unpopular, largely because of the amount of corporal punishment involved. This will be examined more thoroughly in the next section on discipline.

The 1791 volunteers were well organized and trained, using the *Règlement concernant l’exercice et les manoeuvres de l’infanterie* published in August of 1791.A direct comparison with Dundas’ *Principles of Military Movements* reveals two documents that serve essentially the same purpose, and by much the same means. The contents of both manuals are much the same, focussing on the intricacies of moving, deploying, and manoeuvring troops, as well as forming of battalions. Both go into considerable depth, going so far as to prescribe the proper places for recruit and instructor to stand, as well as the order in which given movements and tasks should be taught, and even the precise positions in which soldiers should stand.[[231]](#footnote-231) Both also include extensive diagrams for the reader’s convenience. One way in which the *Principles* does stand out is the introduction, in which Dundas laid out what he regarded to be best practice, along with a measured criticism of what he saw as the inappropriately dominant role of light troops. Italso includes a short chapter describing British operations in Germany during the Seven Years War.

The *Règlement* contains nothing like these two features, implying that the two manuals were written making somewhat different assumptions. One of the major themes of the introduction is the lack of standard practice, suggesting that Dundas wished both to remedy this problem and to convince readers of the need to remedy it. Another theme is Dundas’ belief in the superiority of Prussian military thought, which may be interpreted as Dundas using the manual to push a pro-Prussian agenda in this context. All this aside, the essential similarity of the two documents indicates that they were written in response to the same needs and as products of a shared pan-European military culture. The timing of their publication, and the overt admission that the *Principles* drew upon Prussian practice, support this conclusion. The French army would continue to use the *Règlement* throughout the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars.

By the Battle of Valmy in September of 1792 the 1791 volunteers had been in service, though not all at once, for fifteen months. Of these, they had been in a position to train for nine months.[[232]](#footnote-232) As stated in the previous chapter, British troops were generally considered ready after six months. As a further point of comparison, Napoleon was able to create a somewhat-usable army in only three months after the disastrous Russian campaign.[[233]](#footnote-233) It has been suggested that there was a reduction in the ‘quality’ of volunteers in 1792 and the conscripts of 1793 compared with that of the 1790 and 1791 volunteers, in the sense that they were not as well-trained or organized. This reduction is usually attributed to political interference and propaganda, with soldiers being taught to distrust their officers and that pikes were better suited to liberty than muskets. Indeed, between 1792 and 1794 the pike was being seriously considered, by Minister of War Joseph Servan among others, as a solution to the problem of arming the many hundreds of thousands of new recruits. Even Lazare Carnot supported the suggestion, before the National Assembly in July of 1792, arguing from historical precedent for pikes as a cheap alternative to muskets that also better suited the *furia francese*, the idea that the natural aggression and spirit of French soldiers made them better in hand-to-hand combat than in Prussian-style linear combat. Carnot later refined his proposal to arming the entire male citizenry with pikes, both to provide an armed reserve and to prioritize muskets for the army.[[234]](#footnote-234)

Whether pike-armed units would have been as effective as their supporters believed will never be known, as they were never actually deployed in combat. Indeed the performance of the French army in 1792, at least in hindsight, does little to suggest that there was a specific problem of quality. Once in action, Dumouriez’s and Kellerman’s armies performed well enough, with the latter bringing Brunswick to battle at Valmy. In the south, French armies not only drove back a Piedmontese incursion, but managed to capture Savoy. If the 1792 volunteers were somehow of lesser quality, then the most likely explanation would be limited time for training and a shortage of suitable instructors, the regular army being too busy to provide them. This would not have been noticeable on the front lines in any case, as fresh recruits would be fed straight into existing units as needed. Unless a unit had suffered a very high percentage of casualties, the negative effect of raw recruits on its performance would have been minimal.

## Officer Training

Officer training in the Old Regime consisted for the most part of an aristocratic education. To be a soldier, ideally an officer, was an essential and integral aspect of contemporary aristocratic identity, especially in France. The importance of the ability and professionalism of officers had been understood even before the Revolution, as described by the Baron de Besenval:

Every time I have seen troops and found them good, I saw that the cause

was the talents of the colonel, or the lieutenant-colonel, major, captain, sometimes a lower officer. Often, seeing the same regiment again, I no

longer found it to be anything because the one who was its moving spirit

was no longer there. In the same way the corps that did not have officers

of merit were pitiful.[[235]](#footnote-235)

Contrary to the apparent image, eighteenth century aristocrats had relatively little in common with their medieval forebears apart from an interest in fighting. The French *noblesse* entertained elaborate pretensions to exclusivity, but in practice it was anything but. It acquired a significant number of new members throughout the eighteenth century, not only far more so than its British counterpart, but from a wider range of backgrounds. This will be examined in more depth in the chapter on social identities, but in this case the aristocratic interest in warfare can be regarded as an example of identity politics, with nobles desperately seeking military careers in order to affirm their aristocratic identity and the distinctiveness of the class to which they belonged.

This made the training that a young aristocrat received as part of his education all the more important. His education was the responsibility of his parents or guardians, at least in terms of organisation, meaning that what he learned at home was whatever they considered suitable. The problem with such a system is as apparent in the context of producing competent officers as it is in trying to understand what they actually learnt. Despite this, even reformist officers in the final years of the old regime regarded the family as playing an important role in the raising and training of good officers. A military family, it was believed, would instil the appropriate values and habits, providing a young noble with all that he needed to become an officer. It must be remembered in this context that the case for formal officer training in the modern sense had not been proven from an eighteenth century perspective. Armies had gotten by, albeit with some difficulties, without the institutions that today would be considered indispensable. In the eighteenth century, all that was needed to become a good officer was to want it and to be willing to work for it.[[236]](#footnote-236)

The *École Militaire,* later renamed the *École de Cadets-Gentilshommes* in 1777*,* should not be thought of as a military academy in the modern sense. The *écoles* were essentially secondary or high schools with a military ethos, surviving in modern France as the *Lycees militaires.* Napoleon entered the *École de Cadets-Gentilshommes* at the age of fifteen, famously graduating after one year to be commissioned at sixteen, after entering the Brienne military school at the age of nine.[[237]](#footnote-237) The institution represented an attempt by the government to address what was seen as the increasing domination of the officer corps by the wealthy, be they well-connected courtiers or successful commoners. Its purpose as implied by its title was to train *cadets-gentilshommes*, that is to say young aristocrats who could prove four generations of noble birth.

The education provided at the *école* was remarkably modern, including mathematics and technical drawing along with more traditional subjects such as history and languages. The *école* also provided its alumni with financial support, amounting to two hundred *livres* per year until they reached the rank of captain, as well as emergency grants, and found placements for cadets as they graduated. All in all this allowed financially and socially disadvantaged cadets to pursue military careers that might otherwise have been denied them. So committed was the *école* to this purpose that fee-paying cadets were not admitted. [[238]](#footnote-238) The existence of the *école* could superficially imply the beginnings of a process of professionalization, until it is remembered that few of its graduates rose above the rank of captain, at least before the Revolution.

The Revolution brought about major changes in the practice and ethos of officer training. The principle of merit based on birth was effectively abandoned with the abolition of hereditary noble status on 19th June 1790, leaving nothing to replace it.[[239]](#footnote-239) Arguments over how best to do so dragged on for several years, and were coloured by wider political and ideological changes. The Jacobins soon turned against the officer corps, denouncing it on an ideological basis and calling for the election of officers. As emigration left the army with a dangerous and growing shortage of officers, the National Assembly was forced to look elsewhere. A new law of 2nd August 1791 drew upon the sons of ‘active’ citizens, in a time when that distinction was still in place, and upon those spare officers that remained. Ironically enough, this meant drawing upon former members of the *Maison Militaire du Roi*, which had existed in part for that purpose.[[240]](#footnote-240) When the Convention took power on 21st September 1792, both the selection and training of officers was abandoned. From then on, all officers were to be promoted from the ranks, and by election. Indeed, all military education for the infantry and cavalry was banned in September of 1793, for fear that it would create a military mindset separate to the popular will.[[241]](#footnote-241)

The first major deviation from this policy would come from Napoleon, in his order of 11 Floréal an X(May 1st 1802), in which he created the *École Spéciale Militaire.* This institution was more like a modern military academy in that it catered to the undergraduate level, that is to say ages eighteen and over, and in terms of its curriculum. According to Elzéar Blaze, the school catered to six hundred cadets of the aforesaid age. His account goes on to describe the daily routine and curriculum:

At five in the morning, the drum awoke us. The courses in history,

geography, mathematics, drawing and fortifications kept us busy from hour to hour; change of work was our relaxation and, to vary our pleasures, four hours of drill, cleverly arranged, divided our day in a most agreeable manner; so that on going to bed, we had our heads full of the heroes of Greece and Rome, of rivers and mountains, of angles and tangents, of trenches and bastions. All these things were a bit mixed in our minds, the drill alone was positive; our shoulders, our knees, and our hands prevented us from mixing it with the rest. [[242]](#footnote-242)

A *reveille* at five o’clock is identical to that described by Thomas Pococke, which suggests that the Fontainebleau cadets were roused at the same time as the enlisted men. Blaze claims that the food was also the same as that of the ordinary soldiers, the meals being of bread and soup with ‘dainties’ forbidden. This did not stop determined young cadets from smuggling more appetizing fare into their quarters by whatever means they could invent. The curriculum described here shows a distinct technical influence, which may have derived from the older technical schools created in previous decades to serve the artillery and engineers. It displays some similarities to that of the Vélites as described in Sergeant Bourgogne’s account. The Vélites were trained at Saint Germain-en-Laye and Ecouen before transferring to Fontainebleau, their curriculum including writing, arithmetic, drawing, and gymnastics.[[243]](#footnote-243) After a period of between one and four years, in which they would ideally be attached to Imperial Guard units on campaign, Vélites might transfer to Fontainebleau for officer training, or else join the regular army as sub-lieutenants, or even enter the enlisted ranks of the Imperial Guard as Bourgogne himself did.

This combination of practical experience and professional training made the Vélites among the most capable officers in the French army.[[244]](#footnote-244) Blaze mentions taking part in manoeuvres involving cannon while overseen by artillery officers, which raises one of two possibilities. One is that Fontainebleau alumni might be sent to serve in the artillery upon receiving their commissions. This is not necessarily at odds with the artillery’s existing practices, as Napoleon himself entered the artillery as a sub-lieutenant, albeit at a younger age, whereupon he received the extensive technical training the artillery required. The training described by Blaze, including advanced mathematics, geography, and the actual handling of artillery pieces, would have left alumni of the *École* with a firm grounding in the necessary skills, making them easier and quicker to train. Another possibility is that the technical aspects were intended as cross-training, meant to create officers who could build fortifications in the absence of engineers or handle cannon in the absence of artillery personnel. This would have come in very useful in 1809, when Napoleon temporarily revived the practice of attaching artillery companies to line battalions to supplement their firepower.[[245]](#footnote-245) Either way, the fact that the *École* engaged in cross-training marks it as a professional and remarkably modern institution by the standards of the time.

## Discipline

As with recruitment and training, the disciplinary code of the French royal army was not much different to that of its pre-Napoleonic British counterpart, and for much the same reasons. Corporal punishment was prescribed for almost all offences, a feature in common with the Prussian army and possibly a result of Prussian influences. Officers had the authority to strike the men at will, usually with hands or canes, while more elaborate punishments included running the gauntlet, sitting astride the ‘wooden horse’, and even branding. More serious offences such as insubordination or assaulting an officer could be punished by life imprisonment or death. Curiously the most hated of all punishments was the Prussian practice of beating a soldier with the flat of a sword across the bottom, a punishment that harmed a soldier’s self-esteem more than it did his body. Introduced in 1776 by Saint-Germain, ironically as a means of limiting and legislating corporal punishment, beatings with the sword were regarded as symbolic of the ‘Prussianizing’ of the army, the imposition of foreign and unfamiliar ideas on people not suited to them.[[246]](#footnote-246) Desertion was the most common offence tried by formal procedures, eighty per cent of deserters were punished by running the gauntlet, and they also risked having their enlistment extended by eight years. The former punishment could be avoided if the deserter returned voluntarily, but the latter would still be applied.

One punishment not seen in the British army was that of being made a galley slave, as such vessels were still employed in the Mediterranean. A soldier might be sent to the galleys for multiple desertions or desertion while on guard duty, while any soldier convicted of stealing would be sent to the galleys for life. The use of the gauntlet, and the crimes for which it or the galleys might be applied, shows the same consideration for collective identity and duty thereof as existed in the British army and navy. Crimes against one’s comrades, or the regiment as a whole, were to be most severely punished. To desert or fall asleep while on guard duty was to put one’s comrades at risk, especially in wartime. Desertion for any reason, unless acceptable extenuating circumstances could be proven, represented a breach of faith with the collective. The old rule about not exposing one’s comrades, no matter what reward was offered or collective punishment threatened, applied as strongly in the French army as it did in any other. [[247]](#footnote-247)

In what should now be a clear pattern, the Revolution led to changes in the army’s approach to discipline and the manner in which it was to be carried out. However, its effect on the French army in practice in the early years of the Revolution remains a source of controversy. Much has been made of the tendency of the Jacobins, and their Representatives-on-mission, to undermine relations between officers and the enlisted ranks. But this took place in a time where French armies knew success and failure seemingly in equal measure. Jean-Paul Bertaud has challenged the image of the volunteers as lacking in discipline. In *The Army of the French Revolution* he draws attention to the murder of Theobald Dillon near Lille in April of 1792, which took place during a general rout. The first French unit to return during the rout was the 2nd battalion of volunteers, accompanied by the Esterhazy Hussars. Bertaud

quotes a Lieutenant Simon, an officer in a line unit, writing in the same year:

We have here several battalions of volunteers. They are much better

instructed and disciplined than our regiments; if they remain for a year they

will be excellent troops, and if the Nation understands its own interests it

will put them into regiments and keep them as long as it can.[[248]](#footnote-248)

The Romantic ideals of the late eighteenth century prized freedom and what was seen as untamed nature over discipline and refinement.[[249]](#footnote-249) The new France was to be a people made up of citizens, and citizenship by its very nature implied both rights and responsibilities. One of these duties, at least in the case of male citizens, was to serve in the army. Citizens performing military service would therefore have their rights temporarily curtailed for the sake of military discipline. As military service was intended as a compulsory duty of citizenship, discipline would therefore have to be as fair and considerate as was practicable. This meant that new means of motivating and disciplining the men, practically a whole new ethos, would have to be found. This new ethos would be based on patriotism and a distinct sense of military obligation. Theobald ‘Wolfe’ Tone described this ideal in his memoirs, along with an example of how a soldier could be motivated by an affront, real or implied, to his personal integrity:

Would it have a good effect to explode corporal punishment altogether in

the Irish army, and substitute a discharge with infamy for great faults, and confinement and hard diet for lesser ones? I believe there is no corporal punishment in the French army, and I would wish to create a spirit in our soldiers, a high point of honour, like that of the French. When one of their Generals (Marshal Richelieu) was besieging a town, he was tormented with the drunkenness of his army. He gave out, in orders, that any soldier who was seen drunk should not be suffered to mount the assault, and there was not a man to be seen in liquor afterwards. Drunkenness then induced a suspicion of cowardice, which kept them effectually sober.[[250]](#footnote-250)

That Tone mentions less palatable meals as a punishment suggests that food played a significant role in the maintenance of morale. Elzéar Blaze was inclined to agree, mentioning many times the importance of food in his account. In one particular incident late in the Russian campaign, when discipline all but collapsed, Blaze describes soldiers ignoring stricken treasury vans as there was no food available for purchase.[[251]](#footnote-251) This might have been due to a certain self-restraint on the part of the soldiers, but the mind-focussing effect of hunger, to the point where nothing matters beyond the acquisition of food, is a more likely explanation.

The process of reform began in 1790, with corporal punishment being replaced by additional duties and limited periods of confinement in more serious cases. This approach continued throughout the period. In the Imperial Guard, where discipline was intended to be considerably harsher than in the regular army, punishments could include confinement to the guard room or to barracks for minor offences, while more serious offences might be punished by solitary confinement, with repeat offenders suffering the worst punishment imaginable, that of being demoted to the regulars.[[252]](#footnote-252) One noteworthy innovation was the *conseil de discipline,* a development on the *conseil de guerre* of the pre-Revolutionary army. Made up of seven officers, its role was to provide oversight of all disciplinary measures made by officers, with the power to strike down or even extend a soldier’s punishment. A real sign of the change in ethos was that soldiers had the right to file complaints to the *conseil* about the conduct of their officers, something utterly unthinkable under the old regime. The new penal code unveiled on September 30th was, in contrast to this idealism, every bit as rigorous as that of the old army.

The death penalty was extended to any soldier who failed to take his post, abandoned it in the face of the enemy, fell asleep on guard in the face of the enemy, or gave information to the enemy. Desertion in wartime could be punished by anything from ten to twenty years imprisonment. Some matters, including pillage, were left to judgement of commanding generals. It should be borne in mind that these punishments applied to offences occurring in or near combat situations, when they might endanger the safety of the entire unit. Perhaps the most shocking, or to some more satisfying, aspect was that officers were to receive no exemptions. The penal code was further extended in 1793, with particular attention being given to the relationship between officers and enlisted men. Any officer who struck an enlisted man was to be stripped of his rank and imprisoned for three years, but this was balanced by it remaining a capital crime for an enlisted man to strike an officer.[[253]](#footnote-253) This willingness to maintain the authority of the officer corps stands in defiance of the widespread distrust of officers stemming from the emigrations, and is proof both of the government’s pragmatism and its understanding of the need for military hierarchy and discipline. Subjecting officers to a recognizable code of discipline would have been a significant contribution to the professionalization of the officer corps, as well as improving its standing in the eyes of the enlisted ranks.

## The Role of Battle

French accounts of battle, and of service in general, have a great deal in common with those from the British side. Experiences of actual combat are often described in a similar fashion to British accounts, that is to say generally briefly, but with some detail. Albert de Rocca follows this pattern in *In the Peninsula with a French Hussar,* describing the Battle of Medellin on 28 March, 1809;

In the midst of the whizzing of the bullets, and the deeper sound of the

bombs, which, after cutting through the air, ploughed up the earth around us,

the voices of the officers alone were heard; the closer the enemy pressed, the

more coolly and collectedly did they give their orders.

As we retired, the cries of the Spaniards redoubled; their skirmishers were

so numerous and so bold, that they frequently forced ours back to their

ranks. They shouted to us from afar, in their own tongue, that they would

give no quarter, and that the plains of Medellin should be the grave of the

French. Had our squadron been broken and dispersed, the Spanish horse

of the right would have burst through the opening, on the rear of our army,

and surrounded it; the plains of Medellin would then, indeed, have become,

as our enemies hoped, the grave of the French.[[254]](#footnote-254)

The mention of the Spanish battle cries, and of what might have happened and he and his unit not been there, carries a mild hint of self-aggrandizement. His willingness to admit the threat posed by the Spanish skirmishers suggests otherwise. Sergeant Bourgogne, for his own part, follows a broadly similar style in describing an action on 27th July 1812 near Witebsk;

The cavalry, commanded by Murat, had already made several charges.

Just as we arrived we saw 200 Voltigeurs of the 9th Regiment, who had

ventured too far, met by a portion of the Russian cavalry, which had just

been repulsed. Unless help arrived speedily to our men, they were lost, as

the river and some deep gullies made access to them very difficult. But

they were commanded by gallant officers, who swore, as did also the men,

to kill themselves rather than not come honourably out of it. Fighting as

they went, they reached a piece of favourable ground. They formed a

square, and having been under fire before, their nerves were not shaken by

the number of the enemy. They were quite surrounded, however, by a

regiment of Lancers and other horse trying in vain to cut through them, and

soon they had a rampart of killed and wounded all around them, both of men

and horses. This formed another obstacle for the Russians, who, terrified,

fled in disorder, amid cries of joy from the whole army.[[255]](#footnote-255)

Like Rocca, Bourgogne makes much of the danger posed by the enemy. But he is also similar to Rocca in that he does not do so in a dismissive fashion. The focus here is more on the courage and prowess of the French troops than on any failing on the part of the Russians. Neither of these examples should be taken as proof of a general unwillingness to criticize or condemn the enemy, whomsoever they happen to be. Rocca’s language takes a turn for the emotive when describing what Spanish peasants infamously got up to with any French soldier who fell into their clutches;

Nothing can be more horrible than the spectacle which shortly-after

presented itself before my eyes. At every step I beheld the mutilated

bodies of Frenchmen, assassinated during a few previous days, and bloody

fragments of clothing strewed up and down. Traces, still recent in the dust,

indicated the struggle that some of those wretches had made, and the long

tortures they had suffered before they expired. The brazen plates of their

military caps were the only marks either of their having once been soldiers,

or of the regiments to which they belonged. Those who thus attacked the

French on the road to Toledo, were the keepers of the royal stud, and such

peasants as had deserted the villages on the arrival of our troops. They had

acquired a great ferocity of manners, from the habits of a wandering and

solitary life.[[256]](#footnote-256)

It is unclear to what extent Rocca was trying to elicit sympathy from the reader through such emotive language. The literary sensibilities of French readers were not necessarily the same as those of the British at the time. What this segment *does* at least imply is that Rocca was emotionally affected by what he witnessed, and that it may have played a role in the development of his military identity.

## 

## Unit Identities

It can be safely argued that unit identities in the French army developed in much the same way as in the British army. The first and most obvious reason for this is that both armies were structured in essentially the same fashion, using the regimental system developed in the seventeenth century. As with British regiments, the regiments of the French royal army often possessed individual names. The *Régiment du Roi,* specifically the one established in 1663 and later commanded by the infamous lieutenant colonel Jean Martinet, was created as a new model regiment as part of a series of military reforms carried out by Louis XIV.[[257]](#footnote-257) Some regiments were named after their colonels, such as the Dillon, Berwick, and Walsh regiments that made up the Irish Brigade. Others, such as the Champagne or Picardie regiments, were named after the localities in which they were originally raised, though by the Revolution this had little bearing on the origins of their recruits. The Comte de Bombelles, writing in 1756, blamed high rates of desertion on the mixed backgrounds of soldiers within regiments, arguing ‘a Gascon has no reason to feel fondness towards a Norman, and give him the helping hand that he needs, not even just advice.’[[258]](#footnote-258) They even used the same means of identification as British regiments, including distinctive banners and uniforms.

Like British uniforms, pre-Revolutionary French infantry uniforms were differentiated along regimental lines by facings, which included collars, cuffs, and lapels. The primary colour was white for the majority of regiments, while German regiments wore sky blue, the Swiss and Irish regiments wore red, while colonial regiments often wore dark blue, as did the artillery. Officers and men alike generally wore black cocked hats, apart from grenadiers who wore bearskin caps until their abandonment in 1779, though this was often ignored. The distinctly French practice of distinguishing companies by coloured pompons in their hats began at that time.[[259]](#footnote-259) The French cavalry by the time of the Revolution saw considerable variation in uniform colours and styles, though the means of distinction were similar to those of the infantry. The two carabineer regiments, the most senior of the cavalry, wore dark blue with red facings. Dragoons wore dark green with red or blue lapels, and distinctive Grecian helmets with black plumes. The cuirassier and Royal Horse regiments wore dark blue, with black bicorn hats, though only the Cuirassiers du Roi actually wore armour. The Chasseurs à Cheval first appeared in 1779, and by the Revolution were wearing green, and in styles similar to those of the Hussars. These were the most distinctive of all the French cavalry in the period, with uniforms closely modelled on the famous Hungarian cavalry of that name. Hussar uniforms were distinguished by the dolmanjacket, with its distinctive gold braiding, and the fur-lined pelisse, or outer jacket generally worn slung over the left shoulder. Another feature largely unique to hussars was the sabretache, a flat bag worn hanging from the belt. Chasseurs were distinguished by a lack of pelisses. Headgear consisted primarily of the mirliton, a conical felt cap similar to a fez or shako with a long flap of cloth that could be either wrapped around or left hanging loose.

The single biggest change brought about by the Revolution in terms of uniforms was the replacements of white coats with blue, complete with red cuffs and collars and white lapels. The only regimental distinction permitted was the regimental number on the buttons. The same was true of the light infantry in their green coats, but that their buttons included a hunting horn to symbolize their speciality. Fusiliers, as the basic French line infantrymen were known, wore bicorn hats, while grenadiers were privileged with black bearskins. Artillery and engineers wore dark blue throughout the period.[[260]](#footnote-260) The Napoleonic period saw the simplification of infantry uniforms, with coats being shortened and bicorn hats being replaced with shakoes, their brass plates bearing a crowned Imperial eagle and the regimental number. Specialist symbols, such as the hunting horn of the light troops and the flaming grenade of the grenadiers, were also worn on shako or cap plates. Another method of identification within battalions was coloured pompons, with grenadiers wearing red, voltigeurs wearing green or yellow, the first fusilier company wearing green, the second in blue, the third in orange, and fourth in violet. The first and second battalions were distinguished by plain pompons for the first, and white-centred pompons for the second.

Officers of all branches were distinguished by epaulettes, with exact rank distinguished in a codified system. Napoleon added whole new units with their own distinctions, including the Chevaux-Légers, themselves converted from dragoon regiments in June of 1811. These generally wore the same helmets, but with larger crests and fur covers, and green uniforms. Three more regiments, in dark blue uniforms, were added that same year, two of which were the famous Polish lancers in their distinctive flat-topped czapka hats. The Imperial Guard uniforms were not much different from those of the line, with minor variations such as more elaborately-decorated shakoes. The most distinctive were the grenadiers of the Old Guard, in their oversized bearskins. More conventional bearskins were worn by the grenadiers à cheval and the grenadiers of the Middle Guard, and also curiously the chasseurs á pied. The one feature all Imperial guardsmen had in common was the distinctive brass button bearing the Imperial eagle.

The development of flags, as described by Elting, went along similar lines to uniforms. Whereas all British line regiments carried two flags, one for the battalion and one for the crown, French units were limited to one flag per battalion. By a decree of 1791 all first battalion flags had to be tricoloured and distinguished by a *cravat,* a scarf tied to the flagstaff above the flag. The new flags were also required to show the unit’s number, along with a suitable motto, such as ‘Discipline’ or ‘Obedience to the Law.’ Making sense of army flags during the republican period can be a tricky business, as many demi-brigades treated the stipulations as broad guidelines rather than hard-and-fast regulations, leading to many variations. Flags were finally standardized under the 1804 regulations, with flags to be eighty-one centimetres square. The exception was the dragoons, chasseurs a cheval, and the gendarmerie, who carried guidons. Each flag would consist of alternating blue and red triangles, containing the unit number in a gold laurel wreath, around a white lozenge in the centre. This bore the legend *L’Empereur des Français au* (insert number) *Regiment* on one side, and *Valeur et Discipline* on the other.

The most distinctive feature of the new flags were the gilded bronze eagles that topped them, arguably the best-known feature of Napoleon’s army. Until December of 1811, each battalion, cavalry squadron, and gendarmerie company carried its own eagle. From then on, eagles were limited to one per regiment, and then only to be carried by the first battalion. Though the soldiers were initially sceptical of their new standards, dubbing them ‘cuckoos’, they came over time to treat their eagles with at least as much reverence as British troops treated their own regimental flags, if not more so.[[261]](#footnote-261) Tales abound of desperate battles to protect eagles, and of daring escapes by small bands or lone survivors. An example is that of William Lawless, chef de bataillon of the first battalion of the Irish regiment, who managed to escape from the fall of Flushing in November of 1809, carrying the regiment’s eagle with him. This earned him and his companion lieutenant Terrence O’Reilly the Legion of Honour.[[262]](#footnote-262) A less dramatic example of this devotion can be found in sergeant Bourgogne’s memoirs:

We had been walking about an hour since our last rest, when we came upon

several groups of forty or fifty men, more or less composed of officers, non-commissioned officers, and some men, carrying in the midst of them the

regimental eagle. These men, miserable though they were, seemed proud to

have been so far able to keep and guard this sacred trust. [[263]](#footnote-263)

Considering the similarities of the environments in which they lived, and the means by which they identified themselves, it would be surprising if British and French soldiers did *not* develop identities very similar in their structures and dynamics. A temporary divergence from this began on January 1st 1791, when the order was given for all regimental names to be replaced with numbers.[[264]](#footnote-264) In practice this seems to have changed very little, as the regiments themselves remained structurally unaffected at that point. Many even retained their white coats due to supply complications, and the wider uniform issue was never entirely resolved. The real change in unit identity came with the amalgamation policy, announced on February 21 1792. This policy was to combine each battalion of regular infantry with two battalions of volunteers, with the intension of combining the Revolutionary vigour and political reliability of the volunteers with the firm discipline and experience of the regulars. In replacing the regiments the new demi-brigades were actually formalizing the current situation, as volunteer and regular battalions had served side-by-side from the beginning.[[265]](#footnote-265) Each demi-brigade became in effect a new regiment, and the soldiers within it a new collective. Their shared experiences of campaign and combat had much the same effect as they did on British regiments and battalions, helping to create a shared identity based on shared circumstance. The Abbé Cognet describes how the experience of campaigning gradually shaped himself and his comrades:

Until then, it must be admitted, we had known the common life, but not the military life. We are now fully initiated. Exercises, reviews, service,

everything is done order with the most severe order. The veterans are content with our progress, and claim that very shortly, we will be able to assist them.[[266]](#footnote-266)

As in the British army, French soldiers remained primarily within the units to which they had been first posted, with only officers tending to move around, and to a somewhat lesser extent than their British counterparts. Blaze describes how he and his fellow officers would draw lots to see who would advance when the next vacancy appeared, only for new officers arriving from Paris to take all the best vacancies.[[267]](#footnote-267) Promotion on merit, as opposed to the sale and purchase of commissions, meant that there was less reason for an officer to move from one unit to another unless he was promoted outside of its rank structure. It is through the prism of these units, as in the previous chapter, that the relations between officers and enlisted men can be effectively examined and compared with those of their British counterparts. A few points have already been established, including the differences in background between British gentleman officers and their French counterparts, a significant proportion of whom rose from the ranks, while a smaller but still noteworthy proportion received something approximating to modern professional training.

## Relationships

The most notable differences between the two officer corps were social, a fact that coloured their relationships with their enlisted subordinates. British soldiers expected their officers to be competent, courageous, and to treat them with consideration, but did not seem to have expected any kind of camaraderie from them. If Rifleman Harris is to be believed, British soldiers both expected and understood that their officers were different from themselves, and even liked it that way. On the French side, with many officers having been enlisted men themselves, it is understandable that there would be less of a psychological barrier. Antoine

Drouot, a baker’s son who rose through the artillery ranks to major-general, was described in these terms by one of his gunners:

I say it again, *général*: I have never found another *colonel* who knew

how to talk to a soldier as you did. You were stern, I agree, but just. Never did you speak a word more loudly than another; never any oaths, never any anger. You talked to a soldier as if he was your equal. Some officers speak to soldiers as if they are the equals of the soldiers, but in my view that it’s worth nothing at all.[[268]](#footnote-268)

This description of Drouot’s qualities as an officer, in the eyes of one of his subordinates, sounds remarkably similar to those qualities described by Wheeler and Harris. The most obvious difference is the sense of equality; Drouot spoke with his subordinates as if he regarded them as his equals, something a British officer was unlikely to do. This in itself needs qualification, as the author claims to have no use for an officer who pretends to be one of the men. The idea of a common bond based on equality was derived from enlightenment thought, and had been around for some time. Lieutenant Lamée, writing in 1742, described in terms of ‘l’esprit’ and ‘la société.’ The former is an ineffable feeling of connection, more commonly known as *esprit de corps*, which links men of very different backgrounds and outlooks together in a shared collective. Lamée considered equality indispensable for the development of this bond, providing a basis for men to cooperate and organise themselves. Denis Diderot echoed this seemingly counter-intuitive notion in *Encyclopédie*, arguing that military hierarchy as a practical necessity, as opposed to an expression of social distinction, was based upon equality.[[269]](#footnote-269) This idea found an unprecedented degree of expression in the French army, with Drouot standing as an example of how the idea of equality could provide a basis for mutual respect between officers and enlisted men.

Further evidence of closeness between the officer and enlisted ranks, at least in the Imperial Guard, is provided by Elzéar Blaze. He describes an incident in which some older soldiers talk him into dining with them, at his own expense:

Two weeks after my arrival, I had worked so well that I was considered

worthy of mounting guard for the first time. Once installed at the post, the old soldiers who happened to be with me made the enumeration of all the young *vélites* who, in a position equal to mine, had paid for their welcome by treating their comrades at a neighbouring inn. Such a one had done things in fine style; another had behaved like a *pékin*, he had hardly given enough to drink; one had entertained lavishly: fresh pork-chops, sealed wine, coffee, liqueurs…I then decided that I should do as the last mentioned.[[270]](#footnote-270)

Blaze describes later what, in his experience, French soldiers tended to want from their officers. Nothing, he claims, annoys soldiers so much as to be given unclear or incorrect orders. French soldiers particularly hated having to march any further than necessary, a trial they referred to as *marcher pour les capucins.* The other described by Blaze was *droguer,* referring to a sense of uncertainty over what they are supposed to be doing. His advice was that orders should be ‘positive, well worded, and properly transmitted.’ He goes on to include a quotation from Frederick II of Prussia, regarding the best way to lead French soldiers:

If I commanded Frenchmen, I should make of them the best troops in the four quarters of the world. Overlook a few slight blunders, never annoy them unseasonably, encourage the natural gaiety of their minds, be just to them, even to scruple, do not trouble them with any trifles, such should be my secret to render them invincible.[[271]](#footnote-271)

This desire for fair treatment and competence on the part of the ordinary French soldiers was little different from what British soldiers expected of their officers. It is also a sign of their professionalism, which may in the case of the old regular army have always existed, but in the case of the volunteers and conscripts would have to have been absorbed from their environment and training.

# Conclusion to Chapters One and Two

Examining the issue of recruitment has revealed multiple similarities between the two sides. Both the British and pre-Revolutionary French armies acquired recruits by a mixture of persuasion and coercion, with the methods of both sides being remarkably similar. Both sides made use of recruiting parties to acquire recruits by persuasion, occasionally resorting to foul play. Both sides also went outside the usual channels to acquire recruits, such as the Crimps and Extra Recruiting Officers on the British side, and Racoleurs on the French side. Both were also perfectly willing to draw upon various ‘outsiders’ in order to increase their numbers. The British had the Scots and Irish from within their borders, and also recruited German mercenaries by arrangement with their respective governments. The French also made extensive use of German soldiers, both recruited from its own German-speaking regions and mercenaries. Pre-Revolutionary French armies also included Italian and Swiss troops, the latter provided by treaty.

Changes in recruiting practices were most extensive on the French side during and after the Revolutionary period. Of these, two significant and interrelated changes are in the nationality of the French soldiers and the means by which they were recruited. The Revolutionary government abandoned both direct foreign recruiting and the hiring of mercenaries, regarding such practices as ideologically inappropriate. Also, the adoption of organised conscription meant that army recruits were drawn from across the whole of France more evenly, whereas previously the army drew heavily on certain regions, usually along the borders. This is not to say that every soldier in the French army became homogenously ‘French’ overnight, for the army still drew from German, Italian, or even Spanish-speaking regions within France’s formal borders. It nevertheless meant that the human makeup, and therefore the character, of the French army underwent a significant change.

By contrast, the British never resorted to direct conscription during the period, and would not do so until the First World War. One method they did have in common with the French was the use of the ballot. Both had used this method for Militia selection, though the French abandoning it during the Revolution. The British Militia and the French Milice were in that respect similar institutions, though the latter was far less popular in its own country. They also served similar functions, existing as an armed reserve that could be used for police work, as well as providing trained recruits for the army in time of war. The Milice was replaced early in the Revolution by the more popular National Guard, which performed the same function in practice, though Napoleon disarmed it and reduced it to a reserve role, in which it existed until 1814. While the National Guard can be regarded as the direct equivalent of the British Militia, there are no obvious equivalents to similar British formations such as the Yeomanry, the Army of the Reserve, and the Volunteers. The French did not imitate this plethora of reserve units, almost certainly because organised conscription and the National Guard were considered more than sufficient between them.

The matter of officer recruitment showed changes on both sides, with the changes on the French side being consistently more radical those on the British side. The British continued with the purchase system in the infantry and cavalry, with technical services such as the artillery and engineers recruiting on the basis of professional merit. Purchase was defended on the basis that it prevented political interference in the selection of officers, and provided old or disabled officers with a pension. It was moderated through the practice of promotion by seniority, in which only the most senior willing candidate was willing to purchase, and by a system of minimum service terms in each rank, as well as by an increase in the number of non-purchase commissions. The pre-Revolutionary French army made the same distinction between purchase and merit, though purchase was officially permitted only at the company and regimental level, and for different reasons. Rather than as a means of political control, French army purchase was based on the proprietary principle, that an officer owned his unit and therefore had responsibility to maintain it along with the right to profit from it. A British officer owned only his commission, not his unit. The French army also contained a distinct type of officer, the *roturier*, or ‘soldier of fortune’ promoted from the ranks. There is no distinct British equivalent to the roturier, though it was perfectly possible for British officers to have risen from the ranks, especially with the increase in non-purchase commissions.

A particular distinction has been exposed between the British and French armies, both pre and post-Revolution, in the social backgrounds and ideologies of the officers. On the British side, officer recruitment and promotion remained consistently by purchase, though the proportion of purchased commissions was gradually reduced. Purchase was based ultimately on money and the preferences of the regimental colonels, meaning that non-aristocrats possessed of sufficient money could make use of it. In France this was near-impossible, due both to practical difficulties and ideological issues. As described by Blaufarb, access to officer appointments became dependant on political and social connections, along with the money necessary to facilitate these processes. As such, the officer corps became dominated by the wealthiest aristocrats, who were able to attend court at Versailles, and their clients. This will be covered in more detail in the political section, but suffice it to say that less wealthy nobles and commoners alike were squeezed out, leading to widespread resentment. The Revolution did away with this system, but left the new government in a quandary as to how to replace it. The Jacobins ultimately fixed on promotion by election from among the ranks, arguing on a practical as well as an ideological basis. This system was in turn abandoned in favour of seniority until the rise of Napoleon, who created a new system of direct appointment based on professional merit and the possession of wealth, with promotion from the ranks continuing out of necessity. This was part of a wider effort to create a politically reliable social elite, which will be examined further in the political section.

The changes in officer recruitment can be explained in part by practical necessity. Both armies expanded significantly in the period, the French to a far greater extent than the British, meaning that greater and greater numbers of officers were needed. Such a situation would challenge any military system, and the British army proved flexible enough to expand without the kind of extensive reform to which the French army was subjected. The more extreme of these reforms, such as the Jacobin policy of officer election, were motivated to a great extent by ideology. They were also a possible answer to a dangerous shortage of capable and politically reliable officers. It should also be remembered that election was limited to candidates with military experience, and under the amalgamation the promotion system was rigged in favour of the regulars. This can be taken as further evidence that a pragmatic desire for competent officers was one of the French government’s primary concerns.

Similarities arise once again over the question of motives. Both sides offered reduced terms of service in order to attract more volunteers and to make conscripts less likely to abscond or desert. Contemporary accounts have provided some insight into the reasons why some soldiers chose the military life. Rifleman Harris joined the Rifles for the uniform and prestige, having transferred to the regulars from the Militia in search of action. Private Wheeler was similarly attracted to the Rifles, but chose to follow his comrades in search of action. ‘Thomas’ joined in order to flee social disgrace, and many others mention a sense of restlessness. Ascertaining willingness is more difficult on the French side because of conscription, whereas membership in a volunteer army implies that the soldier joined of his own free will, even if he wasn’t necessarily enthusiastic about it. Coercion was by nature an under-the-table practice, making it difficult to ascertain how widespread it was. Another factor that must be borne in mind is the nature of the memoir as a source, specifically the question of whether a soldier would admit any unwillingness on his or anyone else’s part. The tendency, described by Neil Ramsey, of memoirs to seek sympathy from readers with tales of suffering and distress implies that a coerced or tricked soldier would not shrink from mentioning it.[[272]](#footnote-272) On this basis, it seems fair to take at face value Captain Coignet’s claim that he underwent conscription with minimal ill-feeling.

The evaluation of British and French training systems again shows similarity. Both sides used variations on the linear tactics common to the Horse and Musket era, necessitating a training system based primarily on repetitive drill. Both systems were influenced by that of the Prussian army, which had been so successful in the wars of the eighteenth century. Both systems are also similar in that they involved little or no formal training for officers, beyond a small number of elite institutions, many of which catered only to officers of the technical services. For officer training, the British relied primarily on an apprenticeship approach within regiments, reinforced by minimum service terms. In France, formal officer training was abandoned altogether by the Jacobins, and reinstated by Napoleon in his *École Spéciale Militaire.* The Napoleonic wars also saw the appearance of operational training on a large scale, the most extensive example being the camps at Boulogne.

The British placed greater emphasis on training, the process generally taking six months according to Holmes. By contrast, French conscripts received as little as two or three weeks of training.[[273]](#footnote-273) This can be explained by the simple and overwhelming need to arm and train vast numbers of soldiers as quickly as possible. After the disastrous Russian campaign, Napoleon was able to assemble a new army in three months. The overt French rejection of the Prussian style of training marks a deviation from what had been a shared norm, as do the reasons underlying it. The backlash against Prussian doctrine was more pronounced in the sphere of discipline, but it carried over into training, and as a result into French battle tactics. The continued use of linear tactics, in conjunction with the newer and more Revolutionary light warfare, shows that this rejection was not total. The French merely objected to the Prussian style of linear warfare and what it entailed, not linear warfare in its entirety.

Evaluating the sphere of discipline has shown both similarities and differences, the latter deriving from differences in culture and ethos. Corporal punishment was common in the British army, as well as in the pre-Revolutionary French army, though limited to the enlisted ranks. The officer corps of both armies were also, in theory, subject to discipline, but based on a different code of conduct and punishments. A divergence between attitudes to corporal punishment appears even before the Revolution, with the French soldiers resenting it and the British soldiers broadly accepting it. British soldiers accepted flogging in principle, seeing it as a means of keeping the serious troublemakers in order, though they resented unjust punishment. French soldiers, in sharp contrast, seem to have been strongly against any kind of corporal punishment, associating it with unpopular Prussian doctrine. Even the comparatively mild practice of beating with a sword, introduced as a means of limiting and standardizing punishment practices, caused widespread resentment.

The most likely reason for this rejection of corporal punishment, in light of the ‘Prussianization’ issue, is that it was considered un-French. The divergence becomes most apparent with the abolition of corporal punishment in 1791**,** the new discipline code replacing it with additional duties and confinement. The appearance of disciplinary councils, to which even officers could be held accountable, was also a significant divergence. Nevertheless, a particular similarity remains in how the British and French soldiers regarded discipline, namely that both they and their respective governments understood and accepted its necessity. The French discipline code retained the death penalty for striking an officer, and as with the British army, the worst punishments were reserved for those who endangered their units. These included falling asleep on sentry duty and abandoning one’s post in the face of the enemy. The British choice of punishment, ‘running the gauntlet’ as described by Private Wheeler, reflects this by having the entire unit take part in the punishment. French miscreants were simply shot.

The final section, covering unit identities and relationships, reveals yet more essential similarities. The basis for military identity on the British side was the regimental system, with each regiment acting as the shared social context of its members. Since soldiers tended to remain within the same regiment throughout their careers, the regiment became an identifiable collective in which a military identity could develop. It was through a regimental prism that military identity was deliberately inculcated, primarily through training, and also acquired in battle. This collective had a distinct effect on the relationships between officers and men, the shared identity creating shared yet distinct sets of values and expectations. British soldiers wanted their officers to be ‘gentlemen’ in terms of their behaviour; to behave courageously, to treat them with justice and consideration, and to allow them reasonable autonomy. That is to say, they were not to interfere in matters where it was not necessary, or simply not wanted. The pre-Revolutionary French army possessed a regimental structure essentially identical to that of the British army, aside from the more overtly venal aspect. French aristocratic officers tended to move between units as they rose through the ranks, to a greater extent than their British counterparts**.** This served to strengthen an already deep-rooted sense of difference between officers and enlisted men, which almost certainly fed into the events surrounding the Revolution. While there was certainly a cultural difference between British officers and enlisted men, their success rate in the period suggests that it didn’t adversely affect their performance. Similarly, the success of French forces in north America implies that a psychological separation of that kind did not necessary reduce overall effectiveness.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that a major shift took place in these relationships as a result of the French Revolution, though with contrasting results. The regular army’s regiments were stripped of their names and distinctions, these being replaced with simple numbers, and under the amalgamation the regiment as a unit was replaced with the demi-brigade. To what extent this destroyed the previous regimental identities is unclear. Phipps’ mention of regulars retaining regimental paraphernalia such as buttons suggests that removing the name alone was not enough to destroy a regimental identity. The disappearance of these identities, or at least their overt expression, can be put down to combat losses, and the regular stream of replacements whose first experience would be of the new rather than the old identity. Also, while the specific traditions might have disappeared, or been superseded by new traditions, this is not to say that there were no such identities at all. The demi-brigade was around the same size as a pre-Revolution regiment, performed much the same function, and perhaps most importantly of all, its battalions were in modern parlance *organic* to it. That is to say that they generally remained a permanent part of the same demi-brigade. This meant that, in practice, a demi-brigade was essentially the same as a regiment in providing an identifiable collective. Napoleon’s reinstatement of the regiments, and his practice of awarding them eagles, cemented this connection. Once again, the wheel had turned full-circle.

If there was an unquestionable change it was in the relationships between officers and men. Though some Old Regime officers continued to serve through the Revolution and even the Empire, they no longer behaved like the stereotypical pre-Revolutionary aristocratic officer. Arrogance and high-handedness were no more acceptable than tyranny, and French officers did well to be without such flaws. Like their British counterparts, French soldiers expected fair treatment and competence from their officers. In particular, according to Elzéar Blaze, officers were expected not to make the men do more than was entirely necessary, and not to make them feel uncertain about what they were supposed to be doing. Most importantly of all, an well-regarded officer would treat his subordinates as if they were his equals, while not making the mistake of pretending to be *their* equal. French soldiers understood that their officers would be different from them, but did not want to be regarded as in some way *inferior*.

# Chapter 3: Political and Social Identities in the British Army

The third and fourth chapters of this study will focus on the contrasting political and social identities of the British and French armies. In this case there is an apparent contrast of ideology, with Britain committed to monarchy and France becoming a republic. As such, this current chapter on British identities will include an examination of the role of monarchy, while the French chapter will similarly examine republicanism.[[274]](#footnote-274) A unifying theme in these chapters is that of the relationship between military service and citizenship. The idea of citizenship, of being a member of the body politic with rights and responsibilities, was well established in Britain by the time of the French Revolution. It should be borne in mind that to be a ‘citizen’ did not entail democracy, whether in the form it is understood today or necessarily at all. Only a relatively small percentage of those who could call themselves British ‘citizens’ could vote, this privilege being based on the concept of the ‘forty shilling freehold’, or any freehold property with a value of forty shillings or greater.[[275]](#footnote-275) In spite of this apparent disparity, the idea of citizenship was firmly entrenched, with many of those who could not vote nonetheless regarding themselves as citizens.

The concept underlying citizenship was that of liberty, an idea as controversial then as it is today. In its most basic form, liberty is generally understood to mean a state of personal autonomy. This is commonly divided into two broad categories, as positive and negative liberty, the precise definition of which has long been subject of debate. Erich Fromm, in his work *The Fear of Freedom,* describes these as ‘freedom to’ and ‘freedom from’ respectively.[[276]](#footnote-276) Positive liberty may be regarded as actively granting the individual the means by which he or she may pursue his or her intentions, while negative liberty may be regarded as the absence of any limit on the individual’s actions. This dichotomy may be applied to Britain and France towards the end of the eighteenth century, providing a broad basis for understanding. In Britain, where popular ideology derived liberty from the Glorious Revolution and the subsequent 1689 Bill of Rights, the negative version was favoured. It was held, in theory, that every Briton had the right to do as he pleased insofar as it did not contradict the law. To understand the origin of this thinking, it is necessary to examine the origins of British identity as it existed at that time.

## Political Scene in Britain

The idea of ‘Great Britain’ was tied substantially to religion, specifically Protestant Christianity. England and Ireland both possessed their own established Churches, favoured as what would today be called the ‘state religion’, while the Church of Scotland enjoyed the same status in practice. The Churches were regarded as the guardians of moral and social order, and non-members were treated with at least a degree of suspicion at all levels of society.[[277]](#footnote-277) In the case of soldiers they might be regarded with amusement. The anonymous author of *Journal of a Soldier of the 71st Regiment of Foot* recounts how his fellows mocked him as ‘the distressed Methodist’ over his unwillingness to drink, gamble, or swear, Methodism being associated with the rejection of such vices.[[278]](#footnote-278) What held this patchwork of denominations together was largely the fact that they were not Roman Catholic. Anti-Catholicism was crucial to the establishment of English, and later British identity in the wake of the Reformation, providing as it did a means by which England and later Britain could define itself against Europe. Regular wars against Catholic France, even when it was officially *not* Catholic, and against various other religions and races served to cement this common identity.[[279]](#footnote-279) Anti-Catholicism however became less and less relevant over time. By the end of the eighteenth century, enforcement of Anti-Catholic legislation, particularly with regard to military recruitment, had largely ceased.

France remained the traditional enemy, but the French Revolution caused a shift in the basis for that definition. Once a Catholic superpower and symbol of everything freeborn Englishmen feared and hated, the Revolution led to a significant reduction in the power and wealth of the Roman Catholic Church within France, as the clergy found itself subject to the authority of the state and tithes were no longer paid. As such, the focus of anti-French feeling shifted away from religion, refocusing itself on the myriad real and perceived improprieties of the various Revolutionary regimes. Ardent supporters of the Revolution in its earlier days found their idealism eroded by the proto-totalitarian ‘Terror’ run by the Committee of Public Safety during its brief tenure of power. Under such conditions it became easy for propagandists to portray the French government as chaotic and tyrannical in equal measure. Napoleon, rising to power in true Caesarian fashion, was an even easier target. That was not to say that Catholicism was entirely and unconditionally accepted. The account of Private William Wheeler shows that Catholicism as it was practised on the continent was treated by many British soldiers with deep suspicion and prejudice. Wheeler regarded the Church as oppressive and cruel, describing it as having more overt influence in Portugal, from which he was writing, than he and his fellows were entirely comfortable with. He goes so far as to claim that the Spanish priesthood wanted to re-establish the dreaded Inquisition, a not uncommon suspicion, and even praises Napoleon for having abolished it.[[280]](#footnote-280)

The popular view of English, and by association British, social structure in the period gives an image of rigid and unbending hierarchy, with every person having a station in which they were expected to remain. This view is understandable, but does not tell the whole story. The English ‘nobility’, as the uppermost echelon of society might be called, was different in many ways from the French ‘noblesse.’ Their wealth, and the power and influence that derived from it, was based almost entirely on land ownership. Land was less profitable as an investment than other possibilities, such as the new industry, but land ownership was held in greater esteem. It was this deep-rooted respect for land ownership, and the social stability associated with it, that allowed the ‘landed interest’ to survive. Agriculture was still the basis of the economy, and land could neither be moved or destroyed, making it an inherently stable form of wealth. It was on this basis that landowners were thought worthy of wielding power.[[281]](#footnote-281) It is a curious feature of the English aristocracy that it never lost touch with the land it owned to quite the same extent as its French counterpart. Though absenteeism was common among Irish landlords, it was far less so among major English and Scottish landowners. This was in part due, and in part contributed to, the failure of the British monarchy to develop a court culture of the type exemplified by Versailles. The Georgian Royal courts never came close to Versailles in scale, and were also subject to considerable competition as social centres, located as they were in London, one of the most sophisticated cities in Europe.[[282]](#footnote-282) The British ‘noblesse’ were also few in number, with approximately five hundred Peers in the whole country.[[283]](#footnote-283)

The most significant social groups in the context of this study were below the Peerage, one being the ‘gentry,’ the other the generic ‘lower orders.’ Like the aristocracy the gentry were themselves landowners, their estates providing the incomes necessary to fund their lifestyles. The particular significance of the gentry in the context of this study is that as a broad group they dominated the officer corps of the British army throughout the period, an important aspect of their wider social role. Their membership was not precisely defined, being based as much on ideas of proper behaviour as anything more tangible. Their defining physical features, namely land ownership and independence, were shared with the aristocracy above them and the yeomanry below them, defining the gentry as anyone at that end of the social scale who was obviously neither one nor the other. Like the yeomanry they were not members of the peerage, but unlike the yeomanry they did not farm the land themselves. The yeomanry and the gentry occupied approximately the same segment of the social hierarchy, but the decline of the former and the rise of the latter correlated with wider social and economic changes.

The yeomanry represented a local elite in an older sense, owning their land and providing military service, as represented by the image of the ‘yeoman archer’, and even coming to represent a certain ideal of English or British identity, John Bull himself being a yeoman. Merchants were relative newcomers to the upper echelons, their importance as a social group rising with the growth of towns and cities, which were vital to the conduct of commerce. Prosperous merchants aspired to the leisured lifestyle of the gentry and aristocracy, forming a distinct urban elite in which all three groups overlapped.[[284]](#footnote-284) While the majority of the population was still broadly rural, urban populations had grown significantly over the eighteenth century. Despite the importance of the landed interest, urban populations could not be entirely ignored, whether in politics or in military recruitment.

The ascendency of the gentry in Britain’s political structure is one of its defining features, one regularly held up as an explanation for the lack of a French-style Revolution in Britain, and the comparative success of the earlier American Revolution. This issue is relevant to the question of military identity in that it was that same social group that provided the British army with the bulk of its officers. This was as much as anything else a matter of numbers, the five hundred or so titled aristocrats being nowhere near enough to fill all vacancies. While the gentry were a significant force in British society, their mere existence does not explain the wildly divergent paths taken by Britain and France in the late eighteenth century. This can instead be explained by their role in society and how they came to acquire it. The constitutional arrangement that existed in eighteenth century Britain is generally considered to be the product of the Glorious Revolution, by which Parliament is said to have replaced an unsatisfactory King with his more suitable daughter and her husband, thus securing Protestant and Parliamentary dominion over the British Isles. This Whig account has been subjected to considerable scrutiny, much of it highly critical.

The origins of the role of Parliament can be traced back much further, to the reign of his equally Catholic predecessor Henry VIII. It was through close cooperation with Parliament, itself dominated by the gentry and freeholders, that Henry VIII was able to reduce the power of the nobility and the then-Catholic church. This meant that England became a centralized state before its European neighbours, and more importantly by means other than the absolutism exemplified by France and Spain.[[285]](#footnote-285) These developments served to shape how the gentry identified themselves as a ‘class,’ coming to see themselves as England and later Britain’s dominant and defining class. This was reinforced by the importance of the gentry, and the voting freeholders just below them, to the administration of the country. The gentry provided MPs and Magistrates, while the freeholders covered the various parish offices, such as Churchwardens and Overseers.[[286]](#footnote-286)

The ideal of the freehold, in which ownership of property made a person fit to take part in government, became the broad consensus in England and Scotland. The concept was so pervasive that even the seventeenth century Levellers operated on that assumption. The most sought by the Levellers in this context, insofar as they had a coherent agenda, was a franchise based on ratepayers, that is to say taxpayers or householders.[[287]](#footnote-287) This distinction is crucial to proper understanding of British practice and ideas of democracy as they existed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The underlying concern was for the independence of the voter, both of means and of mind. ‘Servants’, a term which could refer to person in employment or a recipient of charity, were considered vulnerable to coercion on that basis. Such people were thought to lack free agency, as they did not control their labour. The poor in general were also thought unsuitable because of the risk of populism and outright bribery. The majority of British soldiers, being drawn from the lower levels of society, were highly unlikely to be eligible to vote.

The British army was in many respects little or no different from other *ancien régime* armies, especially in regards to its recruitment. A significant proportion of enlisted men came from what was regarded unquestionably at the time as the dregs of society. Convicted criminals represented a particular and recognizable subdivision, but a greater number of recruits were unemployed, unemployable, or simply undesirable, rounded up under the auspices of the 1701 Impressment Act and the later 1707 Recruitment Bill. Such men would not be considered worthy of the franchise, whether by property-minded moderates or freedom-minded radicals. Soldiers were in many respects the stereotype of those whom neither thought should be allowed the vote, being dependent on the army and obedient to their officers. The main difference was that whereas the mainstream had accepted the army as a vital necessity, in some cases regarding it with enthusiasm, many radicals continued to regard it as a threat. Their preference was for a citizen militia, and many even kept muskets in their homes.[[288]](#footnote-288)

Suspicion and dislike of soldiers did not necessarily extend to complete indifference. Flogging was the subject of a significant political controversy at the time. The fact that flogging was a civil as well as a military punishment must be borne in mind, but it nevertheless represents an example of an issue cutting across the military-civilian boundary. Flogging was widely hated, more so even than the Press Gang.[[289]](#footnote-289) Even so, incidents of military flogging were only occasionally mentioned in the radical press. When it was mentioned, it was generally to do with extreme cases, or cases of obvious or apparent injustice. An example is William Cobbett’s publication of an attack on flogging in July of 1809, in reaction to a case of three militiamen in Ely being flogged for protesting over pay deductions. This cost Cobbett a great deal, specifically a conviction for ‘seditious libel’, a fine of one thousand pounds, and imprisonment for two years.[[290]](#footnote-290) The possibility of such harsh punishment did not prevent the public from reacting angrily, even violently, to cases of unjust flogging. Robert Hamilton, writing in *Duties of a Regimental Surgeon considered,* describes how a fellow surgeon, who allowed a soldier to be flogged to death, found himself a public enemy;

He was tried at the succeeding assizes for the country, and though acquitted,

from several circumstances that appeared in his favour, yet he never spoke

on the subject without considerable emotion, as I know from my acquaintance with him afterwards: it cost him not only much anxiety of mind, but great expense, and the hazard of his life. An enraged multitude fought him in every corner; but a precipitate flight to another kingdom prevented them from discovering him: had he been found while their ferment continued, they would have taken the law into their own hands, and not waited for the

verdict of a jury;[[291]](#footnote-291)

## Monarchy

Despite a gradual loss of direct power, the monarchy as a wider institution nonetheless occupied an important place in British political and social life. Study of the British monarchy in this period is simplified by the longevity of King George III, who reigned from 1760 to 1820. The role of the King in military matters ties into the wider role the monarchy came to adopt in British society. Unlike his immediate predecessors, George III never commanded an army in the field, and none of his successors would do so. This in itself is symptomatic of the shift in the role of the Crown. For as long as the concept of kingship had existed, one of its most important aspects had been military. Kings had long been expected to command armies in person, and even to engage in combat themselves. In a Christian European context, doing so was taken as evidence not only of the King’s essential worthiness to rule, but of divine favour. This practice continued into the first half of the eighteenth century, when the role of monarchs in war began to change. The role of commander-in-chief traditionally played by monarchs had two particular capacities. One was the commanding of an army on campaign and in battle, while the other was the creation and maintenance of armies. In the absence of any established system for the maintenance of large armies, generals had to be capable in both capacities in order to be successful. This state of affairs persisted until the latter half of the eighteenth century, when European states began to establish more extensive systems of military organisation. This created a split between the abilities required for active leadership and those required for organization and maintenance.

To be capable in one context but not the other was not the serious problem it had once been. Empress Maria Theresa of Austria never commanded an army on campaign, yet possessed a greater knowledge and understanding of military matters than many of her generals, and was much loved by her soldiers for her consideration of their welfare. George III never commanded an army, and never held actual military rank, but this did not prevent him from performing a specific role with regard to the armed forces. Aside from his decision-making capacity, George III also acted as a symbolic military leader in a manner recognisable today. This included the carrying out of inspections and reviews, and the receiving of salutes. Such practices served an important symbolic purpose, displaying and reinforcing the connection between the Crown and the army. He would also provide the British army with one of its most important figures in the person of his second son, Prince Frederick Augustus, Duke of York and Albany. While the ‘Royal Family’ as an institution had not yet been invented, it was custom and practice for Princes to be given important posts, in some cases after a suitable period of apprenticeship. Prince William Henry, third son of George III and future King William IV, began his naval career as a midshipman aged thirteen, the usual fashion at the time.[[292]](#footnote-292)

Though he was in no position to act as an autocrat, George III nonetheless took a prominent part in the decision-making process during his periods of lucidity, his role falling very broadly into the mould of a civilian executive Head of State. His involvement in decision-making during the early years of the Revolutionary wars can be seen in the handling of the Flanders campaign. The decisions were made by a triumvirate consisting of the Prime Minister William Pitt, the Foreign Secretary Lord Grenville, and the Secretary of State Henry Dundas, with the King acting as the final authority. Britain did not possess anything approximating to a modern general staff, and this state of affairs may be considered an example of why such institutions were developed. None of the three had any military experience, George III’s advantage lying in his own, indirect experience of war. He had ruled through two major wars, and took an interest in military matters, though his relatively indirect role makes it difficult to judge how capable he really was. As head of the armed forces, George III had the final say in all significant military decisions, which included the appointment of commanders, and all commissions were issued in his name. Furthermore, as King of Hanover, he could command that country’s forces entirely on his own authority.[[293]](#footnote-293)

It is difficult to judge precisely how capable George III was on the basis of his decisions, since his involvement in the running and use of the armed forces was relatively limited, and non-existent during his periods of incapacitation. He supported the adoption of General Dundas’ *Rules and Regulations* as the army’s standard drill manual, but it is difficult to say for certain whether this support was based on an informed understanding of its meaning and arguable necessity, or because he simply trusted the Duke of York, a son of whom he was particularly fond and in whose abilities he had full confidence.[[294]](#footnote-294) The King’s military role was as a symbolic leader, a focus for loyalty and a centre of identity, while his role in the issuing of officer commissions tied in to his regal status as the ‘Fount of Honour’, by which he bestowed aristocratic titles. An example of George III performing his symbolic leadership role occurred on 25 February 1793, when he inspected the Guards battalions prior to their deployment for the 1793 Dutch campaign. Following the inspection, the battalions paraded before the King in Slow Time.[[295]](#footnote-295) That an inspection and parade were held on a specific occasion, in this case when the troops were about to be sent abroad, is an indication of their purpose. Performing such ceremonies in the presence of the King served, in symbolic terms, to bind the units participating, and by implication the army as a whole, to the King.

## The Duke of York

George III also had a more personal connection to the war effort, embodied in the contributions of his children. Of these, the most famous was his second son Frederick, Duke of York and Albany, who spent much of the period as Commander-in-Chief of the army. Frederick began his military career in 1780, when he was breveted Colonel at the age of sixteen. In this respect he was representative of a common and not entirely helpful practice within the British officer corps, that of using purchase and breveting to allow young would-be officers to advance quickly. The Duke of York’s rapid advance would prove ironic, not only because he would command a company that included Arthur Wellesley, but also because in the future he would do all that he could to prevent such promotions. The Duke’s contributions to the reform of the British army were significant, though he is remembered primarily for his involvement in the campaign of 1793 to 1794 in Flanders, and even then by association with a certain nursery rhyme. His role in Flanders was nonetheless significant in that it provided him with a wealth of practical experience. Having had responsibility for an army on campaign, and seen the conditions under which soldiers lived and fought first hand, the Duke was left with a clear conception of how the army needed to be improved. This he would do in his capacity as Commander-in-Chief, a post he held from 1795 to 1809, and then from 1811 until his death in 1827, the brief interruption occasioned by his resignation over the Clarke scandal.

That the Duke was put in charge of the British contingent sent to Flanders in 1793 is not as surprising a decision at the time as it would seem today. The Duke was indeed relatively young, aged only twenty-nine, in contrast to the fifty-six-year-old Prince Friedrich Josias of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld, who held overall command. The appointment is best understood in light of the situation into which he was being sent. The allied army in Flanders would also include contingents from the Dutch Republic, the survival of which was in the balance, Prussia, Hanover, and the Landgraviate of Hesse-Kassel. The commanders of the Austrian and Dutch contingents, Friedrich Josias and Friedrich, Prince of Orange, enjoyed the same status. The appointment can therefore be seen as a political decision, intended to maintain the status of the British contingent relative to the others.[[296]](#footnote-296) He was also arguably the best qualified of all the available candidates in terms of training. While in Hanover in his youth, Frederick received military education from Charles William Ferdinand, Duke of Brunswick-Wolfenbuttel, then widely regarded as the greatest general in Europe. He was also a guest of Frederick the Great of Prussia, whose general had been his mentor, which helped instil in him an admiration for the Prussian system of training, then regarded as the best in Europe.[[297]](#footnote-297) The real significance of Frederick’s role in the campaign is the effect it would have on his later career, specifically on his time as Commander-in-Chief.

There can be no doubt that Frederick’s programme of reforms was influenced by the practical experience he gained in Flanders. It is also the point where his connection to his father becomes particularly significant. Were it not for the social status he derived from his position as a prince and royal duke, he was highly unlikely to have attained so important a post, let alone force through a programme of substantial reforms, many of them going against vested interests. Indeed his reform programme did not go without resistance, especially from regimental colonels who found their traditional powers and privileges under threat. The abolition of the practice of soldiers powdering their hair and wearing it in queues in 1808 earned Frederick an angry letter from Edward, Duke of Kent, Colonel of the 1st Regiment of Foot. Edward’s complaint was not over the abolition itself, but the passing of the order directly from brigade generals to the battalions, bypassing regimental colonels. A similar issue arose in 1810 when Viscount Palmerston, then the Secretary at War, suggested that colonels be issued with uniforms directly rather than allotted money as was the usual practice. This rapidly escalated into an argument over whether the Secretary at War was responsible to the Commander in Chief or to Parliament directly. It was eventually decided that the Secretary at War was indeed responsible to Parliament, and that colonels should continue to have discretion in regimental sartorial matters.[[298]](#footnote-298)

The reforms were at first largely structural, transferring some of the Secretary at War William Windham’s responsibilities to himself and a new Military Secretary, not without some resistance from Windham. Much of Frederick’s popularity as the ‘soldier’s friend’ derived from those reforms. The salaries of privates were increased by eighty per cent, a reform unlikely to attract resentment. Uniforms were also improved, with the long skirted coat being shortened to the Napoleonic jacket, hair powder and queues being abolished, and all soldiers being provided with greatcoats. The medical service was also reformed, with purpose-built hospitals being established, along with ‘lying-in’ hospitals, as maternity hospitals were then known, for the use of soldiers’ wives, as well as formal rules and procedures established. A programme of vaccination was instituted for all ranks, the Duke having undergone it himself in his youth, with orders that it be properly explained to the men.[[299]](#footnote-299)

Such reforms would have had a noticeable and measurable effect on the lives of ordinary soldiers. As far as officers were concerned, the most significant reforms related to the suppression of underage promotions and the introduction of minimum seniority requirements for promotion, a fact that doubtless caused resentment among those officers who would today be dubbed ‘careerists’, wishing to advance themselves quickly. These reforms represent a shift in the social position of the soldier, at least as far as the government was concerned. That the Duke of York’s reforms had a tangible effect is evidence that the administration was similarly inclined, as he could not have carried out his agenda without its assistance. This was part of a longer process by which the public image and status of the British soldier was transformed.

## Social Identity of Enlisted Men

A deeper look at the origins and conditions of enlisted men can be found in the accounts of the soldiers themselves. Rifleman Harris describes himself as being the son of a shepherd, from Blandford in Dorset, entering the Army of Reserve in 1802. He goes on to claim that his father attempted to buy him out, the law allowing for the provision of substitutes at the going rate of between twenty and thirty pounds.[[300]](#footnote-300) This claim can be interpreted in one of two ways. One is that his father possessed the requisite amount, but was unable to find a willing substitute. The other is that he lacked that particular sum and was unsuccessful for that reason. Even assuming Harris senior could provide such a sum, it is difficult to ascertain his socio-economic condition on that basis. In a time before modern inflation, prices and wages could vary considerably between localities. In 1750 a day labourer in Gloucestershire might earn one shilling per day, while a labourer in the North Riding earned as little as nine pence per day. In 1790, to provide a sharper contrast, a Lancashire weaver could earn as many as eight shillings per week, rising by a factor of five to two pounds and four shillings by 1815, if the weaver was skilled.[[301]](#footnote-301)

Under such circumstances, twenty pounds to buy a substitute could mean anything from ten weeks wages to one’s life savings or more. It might be worthwhile even in the latter case, for the provision of a substitute earned exemption for life. The creation of the Army of Reserve in 1803 was much resented because Militia exemptions did not count, meaning that even after purchase of a substitute to avoid the Militia ballot, or payment of a fine of fifteen pounds for five years exemption, one might still find oneself in uniform. In both cases the balloting was handled by parish authorities, who used it in much the same way as they used the Impress Acts. In rural areas agricultural labourers were protected as far as possible, while the authorities saw to it that the burden fell on the unemployed, undesirable, or merely unpopular. Insurance clubs appeared in some urban parishes, membership requiring a down payment which went towards the hiring of substitutes.[[302]](#footnote-302)

Though it is undoubtedly true that many soldiers enlisted in order to escape from poverty, it cannot be assumed that they intended to remain in the army forever. There were other last-resort jobs besides the armed forces, and some of them actually paid higher wages. While a man might earn might earn thirty shillings in a month as a soldier, he could earn ten shillings per day digging canals.[[303]](#footnote-303) That it was considered necessary to offer the short-service option is proof that at least a certain type of soldier had some aspiration for life out of uniform. For many this took the form of a new life overseas, care of a land grant in return for their services. An example can be found in the 10 August 1775 edition of the *Quebec Gazette*, offering land grants for enlistees in the Royal Highland Emigrant Regiment. Two hundred acres are offered for each private soldier, while officers are promised five thousand acres.[[304]](#footnote-304) The policy of land grants, in some cases establishing whole military colonies in certain regions, continued into the nineteenth century.

One particular site was the St Lawrence valley in what is now Canada, a choice no doubt influenced by the American invasion of 1812. Even without land grants or underwriting, large numbers of both officers and enlisted men chose to emigrate after the war, seeking opportunities both civilian and military. In at least some cases, going abroad was simply a practical reaction to an inability for whatever reason to find work at home, as described by Thomas of the 71st in a letter dated May of 1818:

DEAR JOHN,

These three months, I can find nothing to do. I am a burden on Jeanie

and her husband. I wish I was a soldier again. I cannot even get labouring work. God will bless those, I hope, who have been good to me. I have seen my folly. I would be useful, but can get nothing to do. My mother is at her rest,—God receive her soul! I will go to South America. Maria de Parides will put me in a way to do for myself, and be a burden to no one. Or, I shall go to Spain, and live in Boho.—I will go to Buenos Ayres (SIC). Farewell John, this is all I have to leave you. It is yours: do with it as you think proper. If I succeed in the South, I will return and lay my bones beside my parents: if not, I will never come back.[[305]](#footnote-305)

That Thomas would miss his life as a soldier can also be seen in purely practical terms, for after many years of service it was a job he and his fellow veterans could perform at least with competence. The simple need for manageable employment must be born in mind with any account that professes a desire for adventure, though that in itself should not be ruled out entirely. That some ex-soldiers find civilian life dull or unfulfilling is well-documented, and any concerns or hesitation about overseas travel would in many cases have been overcome by virtue of having been sent. In South America, Simon Bolivar enjoyed the services of around seven thousand English and Irish volunteers in the years following Waterloo. Indeed, many former soldiers were fated to return to Spain, in the force led by Sir Robert Wilson to assist the Spanish *Liberales* in 1823, and even later during the First Carlist War of 1835 to 1838 as part of the so-called British Auxiliary Legion.[[306]](#footnote-306)

The destinations of those who chose to return home can be ascertained by contemporary military pension records, in which names and birthplaces were noted, and the pensions themselves distributed by local excise offices. Furthermore, changes of residence necessitated application to the Chelsea Hospital, whose responsibility it was to administer the distribution of pensions, for the records to be updated.[[307]](#footnote-307) The evidence shows that the majority of ex-soldiers remained in their localities, and that for the most part they were not in poverty, as access to Poor Relief would require transferring their pensions to the Parish authorities. Veterans were not only relatively secure, but also tended to be married, with far larger numbers marrying after leaving the army than were married while in uniform.[[308]](#footnote-308) This stands in contrast to the image of the British soldier as social and economic outcast, but not absolutely so. Old soldiers were known to get involved in industrial protests, which became more common as a result of post-war unemployment, increased industrialisation, and the social dislocation that accompanied the latter.[[309]](#footnote-309)

## Social Identities of Officers

Much is made of the social mobility of the French army in the period. It is an apparent irony that the British army’s officer corps came from a similarly diverse social background, shared to some extent with that of the enlisted ranks. Officially, all that was needed to attain an officer’s commission was proof of literacy, the age of sixteen, a stated willingness to join any regiment with a vacancy, and a written recommendation from an officer holding the rank of major or higher. As such, officers were as likely to be the sons of common men as of aristocrats. Sir John Elley, a celebrated cavalry officer who joined the Royal Horse Guards as a trooper in 1789 and rose to the rank of Colonel by 1813, was the son of an eating house keeper in Furnival’s Inn, an Inn of Chancery in Holborn, London. An even more telling example was of a certain Private Babington Nolan of the 13th Light Dragoons. Following his death in 1796, at the instigation of his former colonel, his son John Babington Nolan was granted an ensigncy in the 61st Foot, later becoming a lieutenant in the 70th Foot, and rising to the rank of Captain without purchase in 1812. His second son, Louis Edward Nolan, would meet his famous end at the Battle of Balaclava in 1854. Nolan’s career illustrates two different aspects of the social background of British army officers. One, the more obvious, is a shift in the social composition of the officer corps. The other is the creation of what amounted to military families, with multiple generations entering military service.

These changes were motivated, like so many others, by simple pragmatism. Comparatively few of what could be called Britain’s ruling class entered military service during the Napoleonic wars. The country boasted fewer than five hundred Peers, for whose services the army had to compete with the other two traditional employers of the aristocracy, the navy and the church. In 1809, only one hundred and twenty seven old Etonians held army commissions, a statistic at odds with the adage, questionably attributed to the Duke of Wellington, that the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton. An officer of the time was expected to be a ‘gentleman’, but the meaning of the term had changed. The term ‘gentleman,’ when referring to a prospective officer’s father, was used as a polite euphemism for a less highly regarded profession.[[310]](#footnote-310) That a ‘gentleman’ was somewhat loosely defined in terms of background made this plausible, and made it possible for the son of a private to become an officer under the right circumstances.

Whereas a gentleman had once been a member of the landed gentry, by the Napoleonic wars it had become a distinct if broad concept. The defining features of a gentleman could include high birth, a degree of wealth, relatives of that status, education, social graces, appropriate conduct, and a suitably gentlemanly position in society, such as that of an officer. Importantly, the source of a gentleman’s wealth could vary substantially. Though land was the traditional source of wealth and status, a gentleman could also gain wealth from trade, finance, or even industry. As a result, gentlemanliness could include a variety of apparently conflicting ideals and values, which were gradually squared as the gentlemanly identity evolved. The rise of industry and capitalism brought new values into the melting pot, such as individualism and self-reliance, but also the crucial value of professionalism. A gentleman could be a professional, and just as importantly a professional could be a gentleman. This refers to ‘the professions’, which included the law, academia, and business, but in this particular context it also referred to being a professional soldier. A gentleman officer aspired to be educated, refined, moral, hard-working, and self-disciplined.[[311]](#footnote-311)

Fitzwilliam Darcy, or Mr Darcy, from Jane Austen’s famous contemporary novel ‘Pride and Prejudice,’ can be considered a literary representation of this ideal.[[312]](#footnote-312) Mr Darcy starts the novel as a stereotypical young gentleman, possessed of an annual income exceeded ten thousand pounds and the suitably grand estate of Pemberley in Derbyshire. His character is defined by a deep-rooted pride in himself and what he represents, tending to manifest as a superior and overbearing attitude, for which the narrator Elizabeth Bennet rebukes him several times. He nonetheless displays better, more gentlemanly qualities later in the novel. These qualities include grace, shown in his politeness towards social inferiors and his embarrassment at the overt snobbishness of his aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh. He displays agency and decisiveness in tracking down his old adversary, George Whickham, and generosity in purchasing for him an officer’s commission in the Militia in order to induce him to marry Lydia Bennett, with whom he had eloped. In helping to ensure the affair is not made public he displays discretion and tact, while his attempt to conceal his part in the resolution from Elizabeth shows both humility and sincerity. Though Mr Darcy was not himself an officer, it is possible to translate the ideal he represents into a military context. The ideal officer, on that basis, is indeed a gentleman. He is gracious and generous to inferiors and superiors alike. He is courageous, both physically and morally. He is sophisticated in his manners, discrete in his morals, and sincere in his intentions.

The concept of honour is crucial to understanding the identity of military officers in this period. Samuel Johnson, in his *Dictionary of the English Language,* published in 1755,provided multiple contemporary definitions of honour in different contexts. In a personal context, honour could mean nobility and sincerity. In a wider social context, honour meant the social standing of an individual or family, based on their ‘reputation,’ that is to say their perceived behaviour. It could also refer to the acquisition of status through achievement, the privileges of rank, and the respect due to both. The ideal officer is honourable in all of these contexts; possessing an innate personal honour, having an unblemished reputation, and attaining honour through his services. A British officer’s honour was not a personal matter, but a matter for his ‘brother officers’ and for the army as a whole. An officer who did not do his duty in the eyes of his ‘brother officers’ could expect to be shunned, at least until the failure was redeemed.[[313]](#footnote-313) The ability of an officer to follow the unwritten codes of honour was considered every bit as important, more so even, than any quantifiable military ability. To be ill-mannered, financially or sexually importunate, or too familiar with the lower ranks, could occasion an otherwise capable and loyal officer to be cashiered.[[314]](#footnote-314)

This focus on the character of officers was by no means unique to the British officer corps. Other European armies desired similar qualities of their officers, and had similar attitudes to where those qualities came from. The Prussian army, even under Scharnhorst’s reforms, valued certain innate qualities at least as much as the technical knowledge that was so vital to the maintenance and use of a Napoleonic army. Those qualities included presence of mind, judgement, punctuality, and proper behaviour.[[315]](#footnote-315) To regard this attitude as anti-intellectual would be to take it out of context, while to call it snobbery is over-simplistic. The focus on innate qualities derived from two particular concerns. One was to do with the relationship between officers and wider society, the other being concerned with the ability of officers to carry out their duties, both on and off the battlefield. The connection between these two concerns lay in what at the time was considered a necessary link between social status and values. Military and civilian virtues and identities were similarly linked. Perhaps the most clear physical identification of gentlemanly status was the ownership of a sword, which was also an integral part of an officer’s uniform. An officer would be addressed by his military rank only when in uniform, being addressed as ‘mister’, or whatever title he possessed, when out of it.[[316]](#footnote-316) An officer was a gentleman, and a gentleman was an officer.

‘Gentlemen’ were a class as loosely defined as the values they exemplified, their place based as much on an idea as on heredity or wealth. Nevertheless they were taken to represent the best qualities of the nation, their innate qualities making them more fit than any other class or faction to defend the country. Chief among those qualities in a military context was physical courage, with which an officer overcame his self-preservation instinct and performed his duty in battle. Such courage represented a refined, nobler form of the pride and obstinacy that was considered innate to masculinity at the time.[[317]](#footnote-317) One way in which such refined masculinity could be expressed was through dance, an activity that tied in closely, if ironically to military service. Dance was regarded as a particularly gentlemanly pursuit, representing cultural refinement, civilized sociability, and a trained, graceful body. Dance was also tied into military drill in the same way that the ideal eighteenth century army was tied in to Enlightenment ideals of rational self-control. Just as the ideal army was perfectly controlled and synchronized in battle, so the ideal gentleman’s body was controlled and synchronized on the dance floor.[[318]](#footnote-318) For this reason, it was considered appropriate and necessary for a good officer to be a good dancer.

Another, more personal way in which a gentleman could express physical prowess was through duelling. Duelling as an acceptable expression of masculinity was combined with a sense of being under surveillance by society as a whole, of having to maintain a perfect image at all times and under all circumstances, and that the smallest and most trivial slight was to be avenged immediately, the alternative being utter and seemingly-inescapable humiliation.[[319]](#footnote-319) In this pressure-cooker environment, ways were needed of releasing pent-up tension, and the most important by far was duelling. So deeply ingrained was it in the social and military identity of officers that legislation intended to prevent duelling was rendered entirely ineffective.[[320]](#footnote-320) The conduct of the Duke of York when challenged by Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Lennox of the Coldstream Guards is an example both of this tendency and of what would be considered good conduct. When Lennox claimed that the Duke had slighted him, the Duke and his companions insisted that he had done no such thing. When Lennox would not back down, as the code of masculinity required him never to do, the Duke declared his willingness to give satisfaction.

Their meeting on Wimbledon Common on May 20th 1789 would have followed certain conventions. The ‘seconds’, being friends or acquaintances of the two parties, would call upon them to settle their differences peaceably, a futile but necessary formality. Pistols having been chosen, the combatants would stand a set distance apart and fire at the same time on command, though it was forbidden to deliberately aim.[[321]](#footnote-321) Though Lennox shot away a lock of his hair, the Duke refused to return fire, claiming he bore Lennox no ill-will, and even allowed him to fire again. Lennox refused on the basis that the Duke had not fired, and the matter was declared settled.[[322]](#footnote-322) A duel with pistols would otherwise continue until either one combatant was hit, or the complainant declared himself satisfied. If duelling seems to carry the air of a deadly formality, or even a ritual, this would not be inaccurate. The Duke of York’s refusal to return fire, and Arthur Wellesley’s famous and fortunately reciprocated unwillingness to fire on the Earl of Winchelsea in 1829, is proof that death was not compulsory. While both parties had by implication the right to kill the other if they so wished, and death by duelling was commonplace, this was not the sole motive. Rather it was simply to prove that one was willing to duel, and thus remove any question of one’s honour and masculinity.

A crucial factor in this equation is that the value of honour was considered to be a function of social status. Gentlemen were fit to be officers because they belonged to that particular social group, being the products of a certain education and upbringing, and sharing those particular values and ideals. There was also a practical element, in that gentlemanly values were assumed to impart military qualities, an attitude shared with the officer corps of the French Royal army. The majority of British army officers were themselves the sons of army officers, a factor that must have granted a certain credibility to that attitude.[[323]](#footnote-323) Social homogeneity also had a practical effect in combat, forming an officer corps whose members could understand one-another and act cohesively under stressful conditions.[[324]](#footnote-324) The introduction of a system of confidential reports, by which the worthiness of promotion candidates could be judged, had the effect of solidifying this state of affairs, in that officers tended to recommend fellow gentlemen, perpetuating their social networks. The Duke of Wellington consciously and deliberately engaged in this practice for much the same reasons.[[325]](#footnote-325) It is worth pointing out that unlike today, patronage was not considered ‘corruption’ in the contemporary mindset. Rather it was seen as essentially gentlemanly, binding officers together in networks of reciprocal obligation and loyalty.[[326]](#footnote-326) In that respect, patronage can be thought of as an attempt to civilize an increasingly professional officer corps. By creating these personal bonds, officers may have reasoned, they could ensure that the officer corps did not become too isolated from the values of civil society.

Though the officer corps encompassed a relatively broad social cross-section, this did not make it any more accepting of those who obviously did not derive from it. Rising from the enlisted ranks was relatively common, with approximately one in every twenty officers doing so, not counting the Ensigns of veteran battalions who tended to be former NCOs. This was generally a reward for long and steady service, completed with minimal or non-existent misdemeanours.[[327]](#footnote-327) It was also, in all likelihood, a practical necessity for the maintenance of the officer corps. But simply achieving the rank did not necessarily lead to acceptance by the rest of the officers. Promotion from the ranks was widely criticized by British officers at the time, on the basis of a belief that officers needed to possess qualities other than those that might allow an enlisted soldier to succeed and advance his career. In a modern army this claim would carry some merit, as the responsibilities of a modern officer require higher levels of conventional education and specialist training than those of enlisted personnel. While it is perfectly possible for a modern British soldier to become an officer, a university degree is generally required.

This is illustrated in the story of a former sergeant who went so far as to ask for demotion because the other officers would not associate with him. His situation changed for the better during an inspection, in which the Duke of York openly socialised with him in front of the regiment, after which his fellow officers proved more accepting.[[328]](#footnote-328) This incident may be taken as evidence of the Duke’s better nature, though it was almost certainly a deliberate gesture, intended to make his position on the question of promotion from the ranks abundantly clear. Frederick displayed his understanding of the mind-set of the officers, though the reactions of the officers themselves is surely telling. Their sudden acceptance of their ex-enlisted colleague cannot be attributed to a desire to please Frederick, as it is highly unlikely he would be in any position to follow up individual cases. Another explanation would be to draw upon the concept of the transformative ritual described in the previous chapters. The King was regarded as the fount of honour, and as such the Duke of York could to a significant extent bestow honour himself. Through the Duke’s acknowledgement and acceptance, the former sergeant was ‘transformed’ in the eyes of his fellow officers.

## Gender Relations

Soldiering can be all too easily regarded as a purely male activity, especially if a study focuses on the mechanics of training, battles, and campaigns. That the contribution of women has been neglected in older studies can be attributed in part to the aforementioned focus on combat, in which women played little if any part. Those who did were few in number, many of them achieving legendary status. But despite the best efforts of many in authority, for many different reasons, armies of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were accompanied by large numbers of female camp followers. Whatever their role or circumstances, they provide a prism through which to examine certain aspects of British military identity. One early conclusion that can be drawn from their mere presence is that while soldiering was considered an essentially masculine activity, it was not one which required the total physical exclusion of women. It would have been difficult, though not impossible, for soldiers to function without them. One of the most common and sought-after tasks performed by women was laundry. While there were almost certainly women willing to take any laundry for money, the account of Joseph Donaldson implies that unmarried or unattached men had to wash for themselves. Donaldson was by his own admission ‘awkward enough when I began, but practice soon made me expert at it.’[[329]](#footnote-329)

The presence of at least *some* women was accepted as necessary by the authorities, though contemporary social mores were a strong influence on policy. Where relevant, the rules always favoured formal marriage over whatever informal arrangements that a soldier might have with his female companion. Of those women allowed to accompany a battalion ‘on the strength’, only wives were eligible.[[330]](#footnote-330) Of these, six per one hundred men were chosen by lot, with the remainder being given a cash allowance with which to return home. If the behaviour of those accompanying the 42nd Royal Highlanders on the Waterloo campaign is anything to go by, soldiers’ wives might go to great lengths to remain with their husbands. When ordered to remain in Ostend while the battalion travelled to Ghent by barge, the wives somehow managed to evade or suborn those set to guarding them, and succeeded in joining their husbands. They were promptly sent back, only to escape a second time, whereupon they were permitted to accompany their husbands for the rest of the campaign.[[331]](#footnote-331)

That wives should be so determined to accompany their soldier husbands, and that armies abroad should so easily acquire additional women, says a great deal about the women themselves. Whether out of personal devotion or a simple desire not to be deprived of financial support, army women suffered the same privations and dangers as their menfolk, up to and including violent death. Women accompanying an army, whether or not they were married, were subject to military discipline. The Duke of Wellington certainly regarded this as necessary, finding that women were as likely to plunder as men;

As I said there was no order for punishing women! But there was certainly

none for exempting Women from punishment! Such an order would have

rendered the existence of such an institution entirely nugatory! It is well

known in all armies the women are at least as bad, if not worse, than the

men as Plunderers! and (SIC) the exemption of the Ladies from punishment

would have encouraged Plunder![[332]](#footnote-332)

On top of this, women and children alike had to face the same difficulties and dangers while on the march as the soldiers themselves. Rifleman Harris describes the horrors endured by men and women alike during the retreat to Corunna;

On the road behind me I saw men, women, mules, and horses, lying at intervals, both dead and dying; whilst far away in front I could just discern the enfeebled army crawling out of sight, the women huddled together in its rear, trying their best to get forward among those of the sick soldiery, who were now unable to keep up with the main body. Some of these poor wretches cut a ludicrous figure, having the men’s great-coats buttoned over their heads, whilst their clothing being extremely ragged and scanty, their naked legs were very conspicuous.[[333]](#footnote-333)

Not only were women in as much danger from starvation and disease as the men, they were also in danger from the enemy, though this danger could be exaggerated. Rifleman Costello implies that the French simply found such prisoners inconvenient;

Among some captives the enemy made on this occasion were several children in paniers carried by donkeys. One Irishwoman, in particular, I remember seeing, whose grief seemed inconsolable for the loss she had sustained in that of her child. In a few days, however, the French, desiring to be as little encumbered as ourselves with children, sent them back with a flag of truce.[[334]](#footnote-334)

The fact that the French did not kill or simply abandon the children can be taken to imply a certain humanitarian consideration. Furthermore, even in light of previous points regarding the sentimental nature of these accounts, the mention of a distraught mother serves as a reminder that as hardened as many soldiers and their womenfolk might be, they were not all by any means dehumanized. The same conclusion can be drawn from the relationships between soldiers and their wives, which while varying considerably, nevertheless offer proof of common humanity. Sergeant Donaldson provides an example which, by his own admission, affected him deeply;

We were to march the next morning early. The most of the single men were

away drinking. I slept in the berth above Sandy and his wife. They never

went to bed, but sat the whole night in their berth, with their only child between them, alternately embracing it and each other, and lamenting their cruel fortune. I never witnessed in my life such a heart-rending scene. The poor fellow tried to assume some firmness; but in vain: some feeling expression from her would throw him off his guard, and at last his grief became quite uncontrollable.[[335]](#footnote-335)

Even if the commonplace sentimentality of contemporary memoirs is taken into account, this example could be discounted only by claiming that Donaldson simply invented it, which would render all such accounts entirely worthless.

The presence of women in armies had a significance that went beyond the practical issues of their being there. Both tie into the attitudes of officers towards women, and why so many sought to limit or even curtail the presence of women in armies. The most obvious reasons for the hostility of some commanders were essentially practical, being to do with the maintenance of discipline. Many, including the Duke of Wellington, cited a tendency of women towards plunder and alcoholism. The fact that soldiers all too often engaged in such activities themselves suggests that removing women, even if they were indeed having some influence in that regard, would have little effect. At the same time, to ascribe it to what Sir Thomas Macauley called ‘periodic fits of morality’ would be over-simplistic. The idea that women could corrupt men was a long-standing one, which found its origin in neo-classical thought. In classical republicanism, the ideal man was austere, self-sufficient, and derived honour from selfless service to the state. Labelled as physically weak, irrational, and dependent, women were considered a threat to the purity of masculinity.

In the eighteenth century these attitudes came into conflict with the new culture of civility, which placed women at the centre of culture and sociability. The new culture required a new variety of man, one possessed of masculine virtues yet able to occupy a civilized sphere alongside women. These ideals appeared in the new ideology of liberalism, as presented by John Locke. The liberal gentleman was still independent, but he valued his independence, embodied in private property, far more than any connection to the state.[[336]](#footnote-336) This became the dominant ideal of Georgian society, to the dismay of classical republicans. William Cobbett, who cultivated himself as an ‘independent man’, warned his readers against falling into debt, which curtailed independence, and against the weakening and feminizing effect of luxury. Masculinity could be maintained, Cobbet advised, through the practice of healthy sports such as boxing.[[337]](#footnote-337) Carroll Smith-Rosenberg sees in their dismay at the supposed ‘feminization’ of men, and the corruption of the economy by fiscal capitalism, the ideological roots of the American War of Independence.

It was in response to this sense of crisis that a new ideal of manliness, tied in to gentlemanliness, emerged in the early nineteenth century. This new approach combined the values of the new commercial and industrial age, such as professionalism and self-reliance, with older chivalric and aristocratic values, as well as those of classical republicanism. The ideals of public service were combined with those of deference and reciprocity. Thus a man should serve the body politic, but through service and obedience to those set above him in the hierarchy, who would then reward him appropriately. A man should be proud and courageous, but there was also room for gentleness and piety, deriving both from chivalry and Christianity. These developments represented not only a reconciliation between stereotypically masculine and feminine traits, but also resolving a conflict between aristocracy and Christianity, which declared that all were equal. By holding himself to ideals of duty and service, a gentleman could prove himself worthy of his status.[[338]](#footnote-338)

## Politics of Soldiers

It is a sad irony that the ordinary British soldier found himself disadvantaged by both neo-classical and liberal ideals. The ideal Georgian male citizen was independent, capable of subsisting on the product of his own labour, while soldiers were not. The soldiers’ failure in masculinity did not lie in their appearance, manners, or their profession, for fighting was undeniably masculine. Their failure lay rather in their status as wage-earning dependents, putting them on the same level as servants. To be in a dependent state was not merely thought to make a man vulnerable to coercion by his benefactor, but actually to render him incapable of truly independent thought or action. It was in this context that soldiers posed a threat, for their dependence would make them obedient to their officers, their generals, and whomsoever commanded the generals, be it the King or some politician.

The contemporary British fear of military government was not without justification, though the influence was not the pseudo-republican Interregnum alone, but the reign of James II, whose expansion and use of the regular army was widely seen as an attempt at military coercion.[[339]](#footnote-339) This attitude can be seen in the army’s involvement in the maintenance of public order. English law did not make clear whether or not soldiers could be used for riot control, with precedent and perception drawing the argument in opposing directions. On the one hand soldiers were in theory subject to the same law as civilians, meaning that they were required to assist the civil powers if called upon to do so. On the other hand, the use of soldiers in maintaining the civil peace was generally considered to be illegal, or at least unconstitutional, a belief for which there was no legal basis.[[340]](#footnote-340) The soldiers themselves resented riot control duties, as they often understood and sympathised with the rioters.[[341]](#footnote-341) On rare occasions they even became actively involved in sedition.

The most infamous example of this possibility was the so-called Despard plot. [[342]](#footnote-342) While it is unclear whether it represented a real threat, the plot attracted significant attention because of its highest-ranking member, namely Colonel Edward Despard. While it was not unknown for individual enlisted men to become involved with seditious groups of one sort or another, for a man of Despard’s high rank to do so was both unthinkable and unprecedented in recent history. The plan was certainly shocking enough, with Despard’s small group supposedly planning to assassinate the King and seize various important buildings and positions throughout London, apparently confident of a mass uprising in their support. Far from such lofty ambitions, Despard’s fate was to be denounced by government informers, found guilty, and to be the last convict in British history to be hanged, drawn, and quartered.

The extent to which the plot has any wider significance related to the identity of the British army is debateable. E. P. Thompson argues in *The Making of the English Working Class* that the event was of enormous significance, in that it tied together the Irish uprising of 1798 with the grievances of the downtrodden and disadvantaged in England. He furthermore argues that the Despard plot was entirely real, but that Despard himself had been led into it by others, and that he failed to defend himself out of a sense of honour.[[343]](#footnote-343) Mike Jay takes a different line, focussing on the weakness of the evidence against Despard, and the desire of the government to maintain credibility in the face of repeated failures to convict suspected terrorists. Marianne Elliott has concluded that Despard became involved with the plot in his capacity as a member of the United Irishmen movement, having been sent to restrain the conspirators long enough for their plan to coincide with the planned Irish uprising.[[344]](#footnote-344)

The relatively small scale of the Despard plot, numbering only a handful of individuals, and Despard’s own situation militate against him representing any widespread tendency in the British officer corps. Despard was, as Jay describes him, a ‘patriot without a nation’. He entered the radical underground, Jay claims, because few other options were open to him at the time. Two years in prison for debt had effectively wrecked his military career, even if his troubles with the Jamaican planters, whom he had so enraged with his policies as governor, had not. He could not take the usual path of marrying his way to better things because he was already married to Catherine, whom Victorian commentators would dismiss as ‘his black housekeeper.’[[345]](#footnote-345) If he was the rejected misfit Jay made him out to be, then he cannot be considered representative of the officer corps of which he was ostensibly a member.

Nor can his experiences after moving to London from Jamaica necessarily be considered representative of the circumstances of officers. What ultimately ruined Despard’s chances of a further military career was his imprisonment in 1792 for debt amassed through legal bills and what Jay describes as an unfortunate tendency to neglect his personal finances, deriving from his wealthy background.[[346]](#footnote-346) It is worth pointing out that despite a policy of increasing trade with Jamaica, which meant not antagonizing the Jamaican planters, Grenville’s verdict in October of 1791 was that Despard had done no wrong.[[347]](#footnote-347) Although he was not reinstated the lack of stain on his character, combined with his impressive war record in the Spanish Main alongside Horatio Nelson, meant that were it not for his time in jail, there should have been little or no bar to him acquiring a new commission.

Though the radical movement known as the United Irishmen, of whom Colonel Despard may have been a founding member, was highly successful in infiltrating and further radicalising English radical movements, this success was not replicated with the army or the militia. Ironically, crucial evidence against Despard at his trial was provided by a certain Thomas Windsor, a disgruntled soldier who had signed on as a Home Office agent after being refused a discharge. It was Windsor who assigned to Despard the fatal phrase ‘His Majesty must be put to death.’[[348]](#footnote-348) Mike Jay regards Windsor’s motivation as being a desire to improve his bargaining posture, perhaps seeking to gain his discharge by being of use to the government. He was certainly not the only soldier to engage in this line of work. Sergeant Joseph Tankard of the 11th Light Dragoons joined on the orders of his commanding officer as part of an infiltration and evidence-gathering effort.[[349]](#footnote-349) Despite this, it would be inaccurate and unfair to argue that the army was entirely obedient and quiescent. Soldiers and militiamen became involved in public disorder from time to time, a notable example being the 1795 food riots.[[350]](#footnote-350)

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# Chapter 4: Political and Social Identities in the French Army

It has been shown in the previous chapter that the British army was not quite as socially or politically isolated as its position would suggest. Even so its members had comparatively little role or interest in politics, beyond expressions of loyalty to the King and to the ‘Constitution’, as the wider political arrangement was known. On the face of it this is a feature that sets the British and French armies apart, for the army of the French Republic became politically aware and interested to a degree that had never before occurred, and arguably has never occurred since. In theory, this should have made for a very different army to that of Great Britain, and one that should have had no truck with men like Napoleon Bonaparte. An army of well-informed citizens who valued liberty, so the theory went, would never suffer themselves to be commanded by a general who did not have the Republic’s best interests at heart. That Napoleon was able to bend an already damaged and demoralized system to his will, and even make himself Emperor, would appear to give the lie to this theory. But this is to over-simplify the reasons why so many French soldiers, and French civilians for that matter, were willing to accept Napoleon’s rise to power, in some cases with great enthusiasm. Certainly there was an element of the Caesarism that was so dreaded by French republicans, the unspoken and ineffable psychological bond between veteran soldiers and the General they revered.

But Caesarism was not confined entirely to the grizzled old soldier who had left his idealism behind on some forgotten battlefield. This is to argue that the republic itself was entirely innocent and undeserving of its fate. For soldiers to be more loyal to their General than to the state, the essence of Caesarism, it is not only necessary for the General to possess certain qualities, such as leadership and at least a pragmatic concern for the wellbeing of his soldiers. It also requires the state to have a negative image in the eyes of its soldiers, based on certain complaints they have against it. For the thinking soldier, able to articulate his hopes and grievances, it was possible to see Napoleon as the one who would continue and even expand the achievements of the Revolution. It was not only from military success, but from the real and tangible benefits of his regime that Napoleon derived his popular support. Even if he was not always regarded with affection, his hold over France ran so deep that it took social and economic exhaustion, combined with total military defeat, to finally dislodge him. Once again, what started as a difference between the British and French armies became in time a similarity, with the French soldier going from a liberated, politically-aware citizen to the willing agent, at least on the surface, of Napoleon’s Empire. Whether this was a tragic failure of democracy or an entirely logical development is an argument not yet decisively won.

Citizenship is particularly important to understanding the place of soldiers in the new society. If one of the duties of a citizen was to defend the body-politic from external threats, then to be a soldier was to be a citizen and, arguably, to be a citizen was to be a soldier. This concept underlay the establishment of conscription as the primary means by which soldiers were to be recruited. It is important to understand that the previous reliance on voluntary professionals did not necessarily conflict with the ideal of citizenship. If one interpreted the act of contributing to the body politic as contributing to the best one’s ability, then it stood to reason that certain citizens would contribute best as soldiers, while others would contribute in other ways. This distinction can be seen in February of 1790, when a report by the Military Committee of the Constituent Assembly led to the declaration that soldiers were to have the same rights and status as civilians. They were to be considered passive citizens, enjoying the protection of the law but having no vote, unless they could meet the taxation or property qualification necessary to be considered active citizens, putting them in essence on even footing with civilians. As an added bonus, soldiers would be considered active citizens after sixteen years of unblemished service, regardless of the aforementioned qualifications.[[351]](#footnote-351) This stands in sharp contrast to the Cincinnatian ideal of short service, and can be taken as evidence of political pragmatism in the Revolution’s first years. The distinction between active and passive citizenship was abolished in 1792.

## Political Scene

The period following the Seven Years War had seen an upsurge in debate over France’s approach to warfare, motivated to a great extent by the country’s relatively poor showing in that conflict. Many commentators saw the army’s problems in a wider social context, blaming its failings on French society and its values.[[352]](#footnote-352) One recurrent suggestion was that the defence of the nation should be the responsibility of every citizen. This idea had a long pedigree, as evidenced by an incident in 1674. The instigator was Gilles du Hamel, Sieur de la Tréaumont, who attempted to organise an anti-monarchical uprising in Rouen against Louis XIV. The manifesto that was presented as evidence at his trial contained language and concepts that would not have been unfamiliar a century later:

The aim is to found a popular State which shall be invincible, flourishing

and eternally developing, through the unity and energy of all the people,

towards general prosperity and liberty. On the first day, the citizens shall be summoned to assemble, without arms, in their own parishes, to participate in discussion about their liberty and their submission, which is to say that they shall recognize no masters other than the free nobility and people.…No one shall be considered a citizen until he has reached the age of twenty-one or served three years as a soldier. Any man aged twenty-one who has not completed three years’ military service shall be required to fulfil this duty before being granted citizen’s rights.[[353]](#footnote-353)

A certain Captain de Bontin, writing of the period from 1789 to 1790, argued that ‘le devoir de défendre la Patrie était obligatoire pour tous.’[[354]](#footnote-354) This idea came to the fore during the brief halcyon period at the very beginning of the French Revolution, when it seemed that France might be reformed with little or no bloodshed. This was driven in part by a belief in the Cincinnatian ideal described in previous chapters, that freeborn citizens would take up arms for a limited time in defence of their country, then return to their homes when the war was over. This would, so the theory went, ensure that soldiers were full members of the body politic, their interests aligned with its own, rather than outcasts prey to the charisma of ambitious generals. It was also thought that men fighting to defend their country as a temporary responsibility of citizenship would make better soldiers than dregs of society with nowhere else to go. Jacques Guibert, writing in 1780, thought it important that the soldiers be young, not simply for the practical reasons described in the chapters on professionalism, but also on moral grounds:

If we do take for recruiting the troops, those young people entering

the age of puberty, it would be quite unnecessary to examine their

morals. It is very difficult that they have been able to be corrupted;

but we may be forced to take for recruits citizens a bit more advanced

in age; then it is necessary to attach knowledge of the life that they

will be leading. We conceive what danger there is in taking libertines,

that their derangements, their debts, and perhaps their bad actions may

determine their commitment. Perhaps they may hope for impunity for

their past errors, perhaps they reckon on it still for future errors. We

must watch these dangerous men: very often they are mutinous,

argumentative, difficult to discipline, and always give a bad example

and pervert their comrades. The causes which contributed greatly to

the grandeur of the Romans, were the feelings that they had for

themselves, those they had of others, and their love for the fatherland.[[355]](#footnote-355)

Military officers were willing to consider conscription as a means of acquiring sufficient numbers of the right kind of men, but with one major difference. It was generally considered among officers that the army must maintain its numbers at all times. This argument was based on military necessity, it being impractical to train whole new armies at the beginning of every war. Guibert himself argued that around two-hundred thousand would be needed for small wars, while two hundred and eighty thousand would be needed for larger wars.[[356]](#footnote-356) His view on conscription intertwined to a great extent with his expressed opinion on what sort of people should be recruited as soldiers, as well as how society should go about producing them. Guibert, like many in his time, drew his inspiration from the perceived virtues of the Roman Republic;

The pride a Roman gained with his education, this superb view that he had of the dignity of its name, the view that the others had themselves, contributed often to their conquests and their superiority over other nations. The name Roman subjects the imagination; it was a title under which they bend; even the hatred that they bore for that people, draws its origin from the respect and terror that it inspired. It would be an even greater advantage for a people, that it has this haughty idea of itself. He is happy to subjugate the spirits before fighting the body. The Romans had added much to the feelings that they had themselves, by making the necessary virtues of constancy and valour; they had united to love themselves, their families, their homeland, all that is most dear among men, and they had rendered the different duties most sacred, encompassing all in the one love of the homeland. This love produced these great prodigies of virtue, whose immortal actions dazzle our weak eyes, and so many great men whose antique virtues we can barely conceive. Commerce and luxury have carried the ancients, as since in modern times, many great blows to this passion that is necessary for the great things. The conquests and triumphs of Rome were known as the primary cause of the downfall. The hearts were corrupted, the arms were softened, and one feared a state too painful for the effeminate citizens. Today the commerce and luxury have produced mercenary soldiers, and the debasement of a profession insufficiently lucrative in a time when everything is priced in the weight of gold; but are we not able to revive among the French people the passion necessary for the military?

What was the love of the homeland in the former? A superstitious mixture of religion, respect, esteem for the orders of the Republic, of tenderness for his family and his fellow citizens, and pride in keeping with the glory of the motherland. Why are we not susceptible to the same feelings? Are they able to strengthen the hearts of our families, and extend the territory of the state? Can not the whole of France be the homeland of a Frenchman? The honour, the divinity of our ancient chivalry, which can once more be a great motive among us, is not another thing, but under another name, the love of the ancient homeland. That we remember the infinite acts done by our military, and the attachments of the French to their country and their King.[[357]](#footnote-357)

This extract establishes certain themes that would become important in the relationship between the civilian and military spheres during the First Republic. An ideological and philosophical attraction to the ‘antique virtues’ of ancient Greece and Rome was well-established among Europe’s educated elite by the end of the eighteenth century. Belief in the cultural superiority of the ancient Greek and Roman worlds had existed ever since the Renaissance, under which it was commonplace to compare contemporary European societies to the glories of the past, and to wonder how those ancient virtues could be applied to the present.

Central to this process was the question of how ancient Rome had risen to such glory, and just as importantly how it had managed to lose it. Edward Gibbon, in his seminal work *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* blamed Rome’s fall on Christianity, arguing that it sapped Roman fighting spirit with pacifism and a focus on the esoteric. Guibert agrees, though he instead ascribes it to the wealth and ease that was the Empire’s reward. The comparative ease and safety of making money, he claims, became preferable to the danger and hardship of the military life. Guibert’s vision was of a small, self-contained state within the Italian peninsula, never so large or far-flung that its dutiful citizen-soldiers are insufficient to defend it, and never so wealthy as to allow the moral corruption Guibert describes. He applies this ideal to contemporary France in two particular contexts. One is to have the army be made up of young men serving as a temporary obligation of citizenship, as opposed to the long-service professionals he labels ‘mercenaries’. The second refers to the means by which his ideal young citizen-soldiers will be created. Guibert’s answer is the inculcation of national pride and other appropriate virtues through education. The Republic would embrace both of these concepts to a greater or lesser degree.

## Republicanism

Though the First Republic lasted only a few years, it would have a significant effect on the structure and identity of the French army, both laying the foundations for later developments and creating situations against which future reforms would react. The abolition of the French monarchy, and the ideological re-creation of the French army, coincided with the rise of the Jacobins as a political faction. The term ‘Jacobin’ in this context is generally used to refer to the Jacobins as a wider movement, embodied in the Jacobin Club in Paris, while the term ‘Montagnard’ refers to the political faction within the National Assembly and later the Convention, led by Maximilien Robespierre. They were opposed most forcefully by the ‘Girondins,’ a group of republicans with their roots in the French provinces who in the summer of 1793 became tainted with federalism. Neither was a political party in the modern sense, but rather loose collections of smaller groups. So deep did their mutual antagonism run, that a monument by Jacques-Louis David was raised at *Les Invalides* to celebrate the Jacobin triumph, consisting of a Herculean figure carrying a fasces, representing the unity of France, crushing a monster representing federalism.[[358]](#footnote-358) This conflict would come to influence the development of the French army.

Rafe Blaufarb describes in some depth the changes wrought by the rise of the Jacobins. Previously there had been much debate on how best to reform the selection and training of army officers, the old aristocratic system being both ideologically unsuitable and, with emigration continuing at a steady pace, entirely impracticable. The Jacobins had been openly hostile to the officer corps for some time, regarding it as a nest of closet royalists, and called for its disbandment and replacement with a system of election. At the time, the National Assembly rejected these demands on practical grounds.[[359]](#footnote-359) Their issue was not simply with the officer corps as it existed at the time, but with the very idea of officers as a distinct organisation. Blaufarb narrows their objections to three specific issues. Firstly, merit as it was understood at the time was derived from a higher authority, be it a King, politician, or even an examination board. This was a threat to liberty, as whomsoever occupied this position could effectively control the army by controlling officer appointments. This argument has some merit in a political context, and is understandable from a psychological perspective in such uncertain times. The other arguments take a more ideological and esoteric turn. The second argument was that meritocracy invariably had the effect of dividing citizens who should be equals, while the third was that meritocracy fed and rewarded personal ambition and desire.[[360]](#footnote-360) With the example of Julius Caesar in antiquity, and Oliver Cromwell more recently, these arguments carried a far greater weight at the time than today.

Power allowed the Montagnards to get their way and selection of officers was abolished, as was military education. Terror was the order of the day, and election the path to higher rank within the officer corps, with the sole exception of generals. Indeed, the need for the government to control the appoint army commanders had consistent cross-party support. The implementation of an election-based system did not take place across the entire army until the Amalgamation, and while election would be predominant it would not be exclusive, with a third of promotions being based on seniority. Needless to say this was politically controversial, with both sides arguing along practical and ideological lines. The Montagnards argued for amalgamation as necessary to tidy up a chaotic and politically unreliable army, and for election as a means of protecting the rights of soldiers, while the Girondins opposed the former as an administrative nightmare in wartime and the latter for basing officer status on popularity and political reliability rather than ability. But Dubois-Crancé, the author of the amalgamation, proved equal to these complications. It was written into the new system that seniority would be defined by *all* military service, even pre-Revolutionary service, while promotion by seniority was applied to demi-brigades as a whole, rather than an officer’s own battalion. Blaufarb argues that since regulars would in theory dominate the one third of promotions based on seniority, and invariably be elected within their own battalion, they would in practice gain five-ninths, or fifty-five per cent, of all vacancies within a given demi-brigade.

Much has been made of Jacobin suspicion of the regular army, raising the question as to why they would arrange the system to favour regulars over the volunteers who were supposedly meant to keep them honest. It must be remembered that the Jacobins objected to the regular army’s officers, not its rank-and-file. It should also be pointed out that Dubois-Crancé’s plan did not go entirely without resistance, as Robespierre himself criticized the election setup for trying to have the best of both worlds.[[361]](#footnote-361) That he was overruled can be taken as evidence that he did not, in his own person, possess dictatorial power. Blaufarb adds a political dimension, raising the issue of Jacobin centralism versus Girondin federalism. Whereas the regulars were under the control of the War Ministry and drawn in practice from all over France, volunteer units were drawn from and under the control of their native Departments. This made them politically unreliable in the eyes of the Montagnards, who thought them more likely to favour federalism than the national melange from which the regulars were composed.[[362]](#footnote-362)

## Social Identity of Enlisted Men

The relationship between the soldier and the Revolution was not a simple one. On the one hand, soldiers of the Royal army played an important role in bringing-about and continuing the Revolution. The NCOs were the best-represented among the wider Revolutionary movement, being better-educated than the lower-ranked enlisted men and more resentful of their aristocratic officers.[[363]](#footnote-363) When Louis XVI finally summoned soldiers to Paris in July of 1789, many of them refused to fire on the Parisians, doubtless to the relief of the latter.[[364]](#footnote-364) Soldiers would find good promotion prospects in the National Guard, the commander of which, and one of the most famous early Revolutionaries, was the Marquis de Lafayette. The wider importance of Revolutionary soldiers derives from one of their main features, specifically their rootlessness. In the light of the evidence of the previous chapter regarding the British army, it would be hard to argue that the broadly similar French Royal army was any more socially isolated.

Even so, to be a soldier was to be disconnected, even if only in the geographical context. Despite their regional monikers, French regiments were in practice open to all comers regardless of origins. Regimental registers rarely recorded their places of birth or residence. The North and East frontier provinces are believed to have provided the majority of recruits, a tendency motivated by the relative sedentary nature of contemporary populations, as well as military expediency. Thanks to the Alps further south, it was through the northern and eastern regions that France would generally conduct military operations, whether offensive or defensive. This created a frontier mentality, and the constant presence of troops caused ordinary people to become accustomed not only to soldiers, but to military behaviour and values.[[365]](#footnote-365) The most immediately relevant result was that when troops were sent to other parts of France, including the area surrounding Paris, they had relatively little social connection to those places. Revolutionary soldiers were therefore able to provide a link between the Revolutionary movement as it existed in Paris and the other parts of France to which they were sent, as well as to conquered countries.[[366]](#footnote-366)

Despite this apparent connection between the previously Royal army, further reinforced by its willingness to defend the country at least from outside invasion, there was an uncomfortable ideological divide between the Revolution and the army. One factor of this separation was obvious, specifically that the army was the army of the King, and as such had to be considered at least a possible enemy, even if in practice it was not. Another factor was that not everyone in the army of France actually spoke French. The northern and eastern regions form one end of a broad frontier between the French-speaking and German-speaking portions of Europe, the other being the river Rhine. The area had been a warzone for centuries, a bone of contention between France and its Germanic neighbours, whether the Holy Roman Empire, the Austrian Empire, the German Empire, or even the Third Reich.

The result by 1791 was that the eastern regions of France, most notably Alsace and Lorraine, included large populations of German-speakers, whom the French army hitherto been quite happy to recruit from. The army included eight line regiments formally referred-to as German, of which personnel around half were German-speakers from Alsace and Lorraine, the rest originating from smaller German states and even some Swiss cantons. Even so, German-speakers could be found in other regiments, even those that were nominally French.[[367]](#footnote-367) Even if the dreaded counter-Revolutionary bloodbath did not really materialise, encountering what amounted to foreign troops could only have fuelled what some studies of the Revolution call the ‘Great Fear’. Despite this, the German-speaking regions of France were drawn upon for recruits to no lesser extent than any others, suggesting that the German-speakers were sufficiently French to be called-upon to fight as citizens.

Logic dictates that the best resources for understanding the social identities of French soldiers are letters and memoirs, bearing in mind the various issues already covered. Sergeant Bourgogne reveals little or nothing of his pre-war civilian life or political opinions in his own account, while Captain Coignet described his childhood and youth before conscription in some detail, but once again revealed little of what he thought about his place in society. A study of soldiers’ letters by J P Bertaud found only fifteen examples of ideological enthusiasm out of a sample of around one hundred. One of them was written by Joseph Rousseau of Chateauroux;

You told me to have courage, and be sure that I will not lack it, and far from

being like those cowards who abandon their county I burn with love of the

Republic and I will die before abandoning it. I have taken an oath not to

abandon my flag before driving from French territory all the satellites of

crowned despots allied against us.[[368]](#footnote-368)

The language of these letters may appear somewhat formulaic, drawing upon rhetoric the soldiers had almost certainly heard or read on a regular basis. A general similarity in style can be found in many letters, a fact Bertaud puts down to the practice of literate soldiers acting as scribes for their comrades. This almost certainly had an effect on the content, as there are certain things any person will write in a letter, but prefer not to say aloud. Nevertheless it does not follow that soldiers feared or suspected censorship, or else all available letters would be of the enthusiastic type. Also, as Bertaud points out, too many soldiers admitted to hard times, or personal ill-feeling, for there to have been an effective censorship system in place. Letters tend to suggest an attachment to home and familiar places, with many making mention of siblings, old friends, and even neighbours. Homesickness was regarded as a medical condition, referred to as *mal du pays* or *nostalgie,* for which the only effective treatment was to be sent on leave.[[369]](#footnote-369) Though most soldiers seem to have at least accepted military life, thoughts of home and of everyday things still predominate in their letters. Examples can be found in the letters of Jean Lasalle, specifically one dated February of 1811;

My very dear father and mother I you write this letter to you mark the state

of my health which is, God mercy, pretty good. I hope that yours is the same, and everyone else at home. I tell you we were taken from prison to prison until we left Toulon and we spent eight days in Aix in prison. I say that we need to be embarked from day to day to go to Corsica. Immediately as I arrive in the depot, I will write to you again. Then you will reply to me, for this time I will not ask. You will share this letter with those of Porterieu. You tell cadet Porterieu that I advise him to leave if there is a draft. I tell you that my bedfellow is Loupla de Leduix. I tell you that we have nine or ten comrades in Lucq; we go together. I tell you that we are living a bad life; for bread we paid eight sous per pound, for the bottle of wine we paid twelve sous.

You give my compliments to my brothers and sisters and parents and friends,

and all who ask for news of me. I embrace you with all my heart.[[370]](#footnote-370)

Though Jean Lasalle’s letters give little or no indication of political opinion, they nevertheless provide insights that are reflected in other letters by other soldiers. Lasalle’s concerns are essentially down-to-earth, relating the movements of himself and his fellows, asking them to pass a message to a friend, and complaining about the price of bread and wine. Bearing in mind that a pre-Revolutionary line infantryman was fortunate to receive eight sous per day before stoppages, Lasalle had good cause to complain

## Social Identity of Officers

One commonly-cited feature of the relationship between the first Republic and its army is paranoia towards officers. A degree of suspicion was entirely understandable, as the majority of the army’s officers were aristocrats and therefore judged to be of questionable reliability. That so many officers resigned their commissions and fled abroad only served to confirm those suspicions. On June of 1791 the Constituent Assembly voted down a motion to dismiss all officers, deciding instead to have them take a new oath of loyalty, which the majority of officers chose to take. The oath was modified after the Royal family’s escape attempt on June 21st, and around one thousand five hundred officers refused to swear it, their refusal being taken as resignation, and most left the country.[[371]](#footnote-371) The situation for pre-Revolutionary officers grew gradually worse over the following years as emigration continued, with multiple resolutions being proposed in the assembly for their wholesale expulsion. Attempts to undermine their authority were made at multiple levels, ranging from the Ministry of War down to the armies themselves. Ministers of War Jean-Nicholas Pache and Jean-Baptiste Noel Bouchotte both worked to undermine the authority of army officers during their respective tenures, going so far as to circulate radical newspapers among the troops to that effect.[[372]](#footnote-372) The *représentants en mission,* sent by the National Convention to the armies, tended to behave in a similar fashion. Saint-Just himself performed this role in Alsace in late 1793 and in Belgium in 1794. While opposing some of the more extreme measures proposed by his subordinates, including mass executions, he had a considerable number of officers and at least one general shot for a variety of offences.[[373]](#footnote-373) On the whole, nearly six hundred generals were cashiered in 1792 and the first half of 1793.[[374]](#footnote-374)

The self-image the French officer corps changed in many ways along with its membership. Like their British counterparts, French officers of the regular army were recruited from a recognizable social group, the nobility, and in the last years of the Ancien Regime they were more consciously and specifically aristocratic in their self-image and values. This had not always been the case. As with the British army, it had hitherto been possible for non-nobles to rise from the ranks. These ‘soldiers of fortune’ made up around ten per cent of the officer corps. Despite their rank they were still essentially sergeants in terms of the duties they performed and their status vis-à-vis the noble-born officers. Of almost two hundred lieutenant-generals, only nine had no titles. Of nearly a thousand *maréchaux de camp* and brigadiers, only around one fifth had no titles, though they tended to be lower aristocrats. Purchase of rank was so widespread, despite only captaincies and colonelcies being officially venal, that regiments were being run like businesses in order to recoup the expenses.[[375]](#footnote-375)

The French aristocracy itself was by no means an exclusive class, or even a ‘caste’ as it is sometimes erroneously called. The purchase of titles was as widespread as that of military rank, a longstanding source of income for the French Crown. The result was that anyone with enough money to buy a title and maintain the requisite lifestyle could in effect become a noble. The problem of aristocratic domination of the officer corps reached its nadir with the Ségur Ordnance of 1781, under which a would-be officer would henceforth require a coat of arms with sixteen quarterings, that is to say four generations of aristocratic status, to be eligible for a commission. The precise definition was that the claimant’s family should have ‘lived nobly’, which generally meant not being employed in commerce.[[376]](#footnote-376) This not only shut out the proto-middle class and those who might otherwise have risen from the ranks, but also the comparatively low-level country gentry would had previously made up the bulk of the officer corps. Many who could show the requisite four generations were nevertheless excluded because they had not been presented at court. This latter complication represented a bar in practice, for the connections and money of a courtier could be very career-enhancing, but also in practice. Under a 1761 edict, no officer who had not been presented could attain the rank of colonel.[[377]](#footnote-377)

The result was that for the last years of the Old Regime the officer corps was dominated by the *noblesse de race*, who had sought the Ségur Ordnance in the first place. The law’s purpose was to have all officers come from families with a military tradition, in theory an assurance of quality, but also a means of monopolizing access to officer commissions. French aristocrats were subject to the principle of *dérogeance,* under which they could lose both rank and title if they were caught engaging in professions thought unsuitable for a nobleman.[[378]](#footnote-378) The privilege of serving as an officer was jealously guarded, a respectable source of income that few nobles could afford to pass up. The Baron de Besenval opined in his memoirs that the chance of any young nobleman attaining a commission was one in a hundred.[[379]](#footnote-379) Needless to say, the so-called ‘soldiers of fortune’ who had risen from the ranks, found their hopes of advancement dashed. The Ségur Ordnance was actually only the culmination of a much longer process. An earlier example is the case of a certain Lieutenant Lantier, the son of a Marseilles merchant forced from his position by his colonel, the Marquis de Crenolle. The Marquis’ dismissal letter, sent to Lantier while he was at home, reveals something of the mind-set behind these actions;

You are well-off and young, and you will not be without an occupation as long as you devote yourself to the kind of life which was followed by your ancestors – it is a perfectly acceptable one when it is pursued honourably. However, by desiring to serve in the army you are out of your sphere; go back to your former condition, and you will be happy. I know, *Monsieur,* that high birth is the result of chance and that it should not be the object of vainglorious pride. But birth brings privileges and rights which cannot be violated without disturbing the public order.[[380]](#footnote-380)

So hard was it to gain a commission, and so desperate were nobles to be soldiers, that considerable numbers took the next best option and served in the ranks. These *soldats-gentilshommes* appeared in the regular army throughout the eighteenth century, numbering around one per cent of the army in the first half of the century, though dropping to around a fifth of that by 1763. It is unclear whether this reduction was in absolute terms or merely a case of embarrassed nobles concealing their identities. For a noble to endure the life of a common soldier, including having to take orders from social inferiors, would have required a strong motivation, the most likely being honour, money, or both. An example of how these could combine can be found in the *Garde du Corps,* a cavalry formation of the *Maison Militaire* made up entirely of nobles. This formation existed in part to provide employment for young nobles, but also acted as a means of keeping spare officers on the payroll.[[381]](#footnote-381) This desire for dignity extended to the *soldats-gentilshommes* in the army also, reflected in a noted preference for the cavalry, in which forty per cent of enlisted nobles enlisted despite it making up only one fifth of the army. Enlisted nobles would find themselves under suspicion during the Revolution, though not to the same extent as the officers.[[382]](#footnote-382)

The Revolution would put the aristocratic officers of the regular army in a difficult position. Many officers supported the early Revolution, as did a considerable number of civilian aristocrats, seeing it as a force for national and military regeneration. The immediate problem was that the military aspect did not take the forms they had hoped for. Military reform had long been the subject of debate, but those involved tended to be officers of aristocratic backgrounds who saw their own role and that of the army as a whole in terms of their class. When the Maréchal de Ségur instituted his infamous *règlement*¸ he was himself a member of the committee established by the Maréchal de Contades in 1780 to examine the needs and possibilities of reform. Though it has been suggested that Ségur instituted the law for which he is named under protest, the committee raised no objection to it. To French officers at that time, ‘equality’ only applied within their own fraternity, and then as a principle of meritocratic improvement.[[383]](#footnote-383)

The hope of many officers from the lower aristocracy was that the new spirit of equality might lead to the removal of the Ségur law and related handicaps, allowing them the opportunities they craved. Instead of which, they would find themselves the subjects of suspicion and hatred because of their relationship with the monarchy as an institution. Despite favouring the Revolution, few if any aristocratic officers were anti-monarchy, and neither, initially, was the Revolution itself. Their relationship with the monarchy was based on a personal oath of loyalty sworn by all officers. This connection, both with the existing monarchy and the ideal of monarchy ran very deep, as evidenced by the veneration of supposedly ideal kings of the past, such as Saint-Louis, Henri IV, and Louis XII, the so-called ‘father of the people’.[[384]](#footnote-384) Ségur for his own part professed a desire for liberty, but in a form compatible with monarchy, as well as ‘our position and our manners.’[[385]](#footnote-385)

The real problem, in the eyes both of Revolutionaries and aristocratic officers, was how the personal oath to the King was to square with the new requirement of loyalty to the nation as a whole. In the beginning most officers saw no conflict, no doubt on the basis that the nation and the person of the King were spiritually one and the same, while others, both officers and some of the more extreme Revolutionaries, argued otherwise. The extent to which there was any conflict depended on the extent to which the King was seen as being opposed to the Revolution or the interests of the state. The attempted escape of the Royal family in 1791 was the major flashpoint, for if the King thought it honourable or at least necessary to take flight, then should not his officers do otherwise?

Many officers who had remained in spite of the dismantling of aristocratic privileges thought so, and increasing numbers of them emigrated. Others stayed on, even after the dethronement and execution of the King, concluding that France was France no matter who ruled it. The fate of the *émigrés* was not a happy one, and many soon found themselves in a state as bad as, if not worse than, what they had left behind. Whereas in France they were increasingly regarded as fundamentally disloyal for favouring the King over the nation, once abroad their loyalties were questioned because they had taken so long to leave. An unspoken but definite hierarchy existed among the émigrés, with those who had left earlier regarding themselves as superior to those who left later on.[[386]](#footnote-386) Far from gaining equality with the high nobles, the *émigrés* found themselves both subjugated and despised by those of them who had emigrated earlier, yet with nowhere else to go.[[387]](#footnote-387)

The result of the emigrations was a plethora of officer billets left vacant, proverbial shoes that had to be filled immediately if the army was to function. The Republic’s answer was to promote men from the ranks, a move that was both pragmatic and ideologically sound. If all citizens were equal, then all soldiers should as equal citizens be promoted on the basis of merit, however that was to be defined. Aristocratic officers tended to define merit on the basis of honourable behaviour, which they equated with military and aristocratic virtues. The Revolution brought with it the concept, almost an ideology, of *vertu*. The difference between *honneur* and *vertu* was described by Montesquieu, in his *Spirit of the Laws.* He regarded honour as being a governing principle specific to monarchies, a relationship of give-and-take between the monarch and the aristocracy.

This by its very nature led to social distinctions, a means by which the monarch rewarded those who served him. *Vertu* by contrast was the necessary principle by which republics had to be governed if they were to function. Virtue in that context meant selfless service to the state and its people, putting the good of the whole over that of the individual.[[388]](#footnote-388) It was for this reason that while the republic loudly celebrated the martial prowess considered innate to the French character, it tended to be uncertain about honour as a concept, as well as the related concept of *gloire*. Honour was by its very nature a violation of equality, and the pursuit of glory could be indicative of dangerously un-republican selfishness. Despite this the desire for honour and glory proved impossible to stamp out, and for those who considered classical virtue to be incompatible with the French character, it was a more suitable focus.[[389]](#footnote-389)

The sheer demand for officers nonetheless demanded pragmatism, and the bulk of the *Grande Armée*’s officers after the amalgamation would rise from the enlisted ranks. J P Bertaud provides extensive information on the social backgrounds of these officers, who first made their appearance in the Volunteers. In 1791, around one third of company-level officers, that is to say with the rank of captain or lower, had undergone military service in the past. These individuals had generally served in the line army, many of them as sergeants, leaving when their non-noble birth let them rise no further. Some indeed transferred back to the line upon achieving officer rank, perhaps wanting to enjoy their new-found status in the company of their old regiments.[[390]](#footnote-390) Bertaud notes that the officers of the 1792 volunteers tended to be of lower rank, many having served as privates or corporals in the line army, and that they had less experience, with captains and lieutenants having between one and six years of service before 1789.[[391]](#footnote-391)

These individuals appear to have gone far, as by 1794 eighty-six per cent of *chefs de brigade* had served before 1789. Of *chefs de brigade*, forty-one per cent had been NCOs and forty-six per cent could claim thirteen or more years of service, as could forty-three per cent of *chefs de bataillon*. Bertaud places the greatest proportion of professionals in the cavalry, where eighty per cent of all officers had served before 1789 and sixty per cent of captains had thirteen years of service before that date. The artillery was not far behind, with eighty-four per cent of captains and seventy-three per cent of lieutenants having served before 1789.[[392]](#footnote-392) These figures clearly show an officer corps dominated by long-service veterans, implying an institution that had to a great extent lost its distinctive social identity, becoming closer in its attitudes to the enlisted ranks from which it was drawn. At the same time the identity of the enlisted ranks drew closer to that of the officers, the two being bound together through the shared pursuit of honour and glory in their country’s cause.

## Gender Relations

One noticeable ideological and social effect of the wars, and of Napoleon’s role in them, was a growing association between warfare and masculinity. Such a connection was nothing new in France, the newer ideals being essentially developments on earlier types such as the *petit-maître*. The term referred to the followers of the Prince of Condé during the *Fronde des nobles* of 1649 to 1653, a pack of flamboyantly-dressed young aristocrats with a reputation for prowess in combat. Over time the stereotype became more recognizably foppish; associated with superficiality and narcissism. It is not surprising that Rousseau was to draw upon a very different type, that of the rugged Spartan, which he combined with the fatherly philosopher and the earnest man of feeling to create his ideal of reconstructed masculinity.[[393]](#footnote-393) Under Napoleon, French military masculinity would move in a more traditional direction, the martial virtues of the French soldier being a desire for honour and glory, devotion to the fatherland, and heterosexual prowess. The latter was encouraged to the point where even rape was theoretically acceptable, the idea in those cases being that the woman would surely give in to the soldier’s overwhelming manliness and enjoy the experience.[[394]](#footnote-394)

Though not always welcome, women had a part to play in the both the civilian and military spheres of the French Revolution. Bertaud mentions a petition received by the Legislative Assembly early in 1792, in which a group of women requested weapons and former Gardes Françaises to act as their officers.[[395]](#footnote-395) The famous female Revolutionary Theroigne de Mericourt called for the enlistment of female volunteers, drawing on the legends of female warriors such as Jeanne Blanchette of Beauvais.[[396]](#footnote-396) She appealed in these terms to the Legislative Assembly:

We are women citizens, and can never be indifferent to the fate of our

country. Your predecessors entrusted the Constitution to our hands as well

as yours. How can we guard this trust unless we have arms to defend it

against the onslaught of enemies? Legislators, we require arms, and we

come to obtain permission to carry them. Our want of physical strength is

no obstacle; courage and intrepidity will stand us in good stead; the love of

country and hatred of tyrants will make it easy for us to brave every danger.

Do not suppose that it is our intention to abandon the care of our family and household, always dear to our affections, for the sake of rushing out to meet

the enemy. No, gentlemen, we only ask to be in a position to defend ourselves. Your dare not, and society cannot, refuse us this right which nature has given us.[[397]](#footnote-397)

For all her ardour, and the apparent enthusiasm of French women, at least for a brief period, only between eighty and one hundred *femmes soldats* are known to have served in arms.[[398]](#footnote-398) There were any number of reasons for this, but ideology played its part. Revolutionary thought, especially during the Jacobin republic, ascribed a secondary status to women. They were citizens, and therefore possessed of rights, but this was balanced by a set of responsibilities set apart from those of male citizens. Their role was to support male citizens as they fought for the nation, and to memorialize them after death.[[399]](#footnote-399) This is reflected in Revolutionary symbolism, with common themes including women offering up their sons for sacrifice.

Like British soldiers, French soldiers were rarely far from women, even when on campaign. They had their fair share of female camp followers, who were present for much the same reasons as their British counterparts. The great difference lies in the extent to which the presence of women in the French army was formalized and organised. Described in some depth by Elting, these female auxiliaries were concentrated in two categories; the *blanchisseuses* and the *vivandières.* The *blanchisseuses* can be closely compared to the army wives who followed British regiments. Their roles ran from washing and mending to helping the surgeons and even carrying ammunition during battles. Like their British counterparts, they tended to stick to a single regiment, and to marry within it. The *vivandières*, later known as *cantinières*, became a distinct group in the period. Before 1789 they acquired their status by marrying a ‘vivandièr’, one of eight enlisted soldiers per regiment holding a licence to sell food, drink, and other necessaries. The vivandière’s trademark was her *tonnelet*, a small keg from which she served beverages to soldiers, usually brandy. The importance of both blanchisseuses and vivandières can be seen in the regulations to which they were subject, and the privileges which they enjoyed, which from July 1804 included treatment in military hospitals. The vivandières in particular were vital to the running of the army, making up for an often inadequate logistical system.[[400]](#footnote-400)

Under a regulation of April 1793, infantry battalions were limited to six of each, with all other ‘unnecessary’ women to be given money and sent home. This was in part a response to the upsurge in the number of wives, girlfriends, and female hangers-on accompanying armies since the National Convention voted to allow soldiers to marry without permission that same year. Those selected, known as *femmes de troupe* were to be given a certificate by the commanding officer, which they would present to the provost marshal, who would exchange it for an official badge. Further regulations were enacted in 1800, focussing on the vivandières. They were limited to four per battalion and two per squadron, and had to be the wives of NCOs and soldiers. A *patente de vivandière* gave each the right to operate, while requiring her to sell at a fair price and only to the regiment to which she was attached. Needless to say, these rules were flouted constantly. The regulations on numbers were in practice unenforceable, and vivandières tended to go where they pleased and buy and sell as they pleased. They also developed a reputation for looting, as well as buying and selling loot.[[401]](#footnote-401) In this respect they were no worse than British army women, and it is hard to argue that they were any less helpful. So helpful did the Army of Italy find them, indeed, that it printed blank certificates in vast numbers for wives to fill in. The descriptions written on these certificates became increasingly vague between 1793 and 1800, as the official limit on the number of ‘useful’ women caused many to describe themselves as filling both the vivandière and the blanchisseuse role. The term ‘cantiniere’ came into general use at about this time and in this context.[[402]](#footnote-402)

## Politics of Soldiers

The identity of the ordinary soldier changed considerably in the space of the decade of 1790 to 1800. Many of these changes were imposed deliberately, with the alteration of military identity at least in mind if not the main motivation. The *amalgame,* by which the regular army and the volunteer regiments were combined, is an example, though the actual structure and organization of the French army underwent few if any real changes beyond this. Many of the most significant changes, in the context of military identity, took the form of a broad policy of reinvention, focussing on changing the image and self-image of French soldiers in accordance with the Revolution’s new ideals. Previously, the soldier was a mercenary, rogue, and plunderer. Through the Revolution, he would become a fellow citizen, and defender of liberty by force of arms. He would be taught to see himself as such, and to value himself and his place in the new society. Society would come to value him, for he would be one of them, more intimately and completely than ever before. No longer removed from society by long service, he would serve only as long as the republic needed him.

Though many of those high ideals would bend to military necessity, it cannot be said that they had no effect. With a few exceptions, soldiers have always been a part of the societies from which they are derived. As such they reflect the issues, peculiarities, and attitudes of their societies, even if they develop their own sub-culture based on shared circumstance and experience. One of the first practical contributions to this project was made in February of 1790, when soldiers were declared to have the same status of citizenship as their civilian counterparts. The distinction between active and passive citizenship was based on property ownership and the ability to pay taxes, a system not dissimilar to that which was practiced in Britain at the time. In that respect the French regular army after February 1790 became much like its British counterpart, though whereas British soldiers aspired to become the equivalent of active citizens through prosperity, French soldiers enjoyed the possibility of earning that privilege through long and good service. Just as the British Militia and Volunteers were drawn from better-off portions of society, the French National Guard was in practice dominated by active citizens.[[403]](#footnote-403)

The Revolutionary re-education to which all French soldiers were subjected was both direct and indirect. The more direct endeavours at altering their opinions and outlook could be a speech from a superior officer or Representative, or else pamphlets or newspapers. The latter was far more common, though speeches were by no means uncommon, for the simple reason that improving reading material was far easier and cheaper to create and distribute than ideologically-adept instructors. Literacy was a serious issue for the French armies at that time, as it was for most contemporary armies. Usable figures with regard to literacy do not exist before 1830, and even then the percentage of French soldiers able to sign their own names did not rise above fifty-two per cent.[[404]](#footnote-404) This, it must be remembered, took place after a significant increase in overall French literacy since the Napoleonic wars. The solution to the problem for French soldiers, as with their British counterparts, was to hire or otherwise persuade a literate comrade to write letters for them. It should be noted that the French army, both line and volunteer, would have required its NCOs to be literate and numerate in order to perform their duties. For printed material such as pamphlets and newspapers to be effective, it is only necessary for a relatively small proportion of the intended audience to be literate, as the material can then be read aloud. Songs were similarly advantageous, in that that singing was an activity that soldiers could engage in by themselves once prompted to do so. The Revolutionary regimes appear to have found songs to be a particularly effective means of spreading the word, the number of published political songs rising from just over one hundred in 1789 to around seven hundred by 1794.[[405]](#footnote-405)

The content of this ideological re-education can be seen quite clearly in the materials themselves. The songs of the volunteer and regular armies tended to be upbeat and optimistic, the sort that soldiers could sing on the march or around a campfire to raise their spirits or express their good humour. The music itself was often borrowed from popular chants or airs, especially *La Marseillaise,* and were produced in a standardized format with between eight and twelve stanzas containing verses of between six and eight syllables.[[406]](#footnote-406) *Le Chant du Départ*, written by [Étienne Nicolas Méhul](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89tienne_Nicolas_M%C3%A9hul) and [Marie-Joseph Chénier](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marie-Joseph_Ch%C3%A9nier) in 1794, was a favourite of the *grande armée*. The verse sung by three warriors, evoking the Oath of the Horatii, shows the ideals the republic associated with soldiers;

On the iron, before God, we swear to our fathers

to our wives, to our sisters  
to our representatives, to our sons, to our mothers  
that we shall annihilate oppressors  
Everywhere, into the deep night  
by sinking the infamous royalty  
the French shall give to the world  
peace and liberty

This particular song also grants a verse to Joseph Bara and Agricol Viala, the much-lionized child martyrs of the Revolutionary wars. Those two in particular came to represent the new ideals of France, specifically the beauty and vitality of youth as well as a neo-Spartan willingness to die for the good of the people. In the case of Bara, this can be seen in his artistic renditions. David’s *The Death of Joseph Bara* displays him in true Romantic style, with an idealized naked body, both youthful and delicate enough to arouse the pity of victimhood, yet masculine and noble enough to evoke a sense of warriorhood and martyrdom, almost the Dying Gaul of the French Revolution. Bara in death fitted and exemplified two ideals, one of the patriotic youth, the other of the patriotic soldier, willing to serve the republic and die rather than deny it.[[407]](#footnote-407) Revolutionary martyrdom took on a darker aspect after 1793, as the much hoped-for mass defections and sympathetic uprisings among France’s enemies failed to materialize. To some, the soldiers and subjects of foreign states were the willing slaves of tyrants, deserving of ruthless extermination. Though there is occasional mention of prisoners being killed, this did not become general policy or practice.[[408]](#footnote-408) The Convention went so far as to order the execution of all British and Hanoverian prisoners, but the armies simply avoided this unpleasant duty by exchanging the men condemned as quickly as possible.[[409]](#footnote-409)

An indication of the attitudes of the government and of many ordinary Parisians towards the officers and generals of the regular army can be found in the treatment of Adam Philippe, Comte de Custine. Like Lafayette and Dumouriez, Custine was an aristocrat who supported the Revolution in its early, idealistic days. Also like them, his motivations for doing so cannot be explained by frustrated ambition or rejection, for like them, he had enjoyed a successful career beforehand. Like Dumouriez, Custine held the rank of *maréchal de camp*, the equivalent of a brigadier general, and whereas the former had served as Commandant of Cherbourg from 1779, Custine had been governor of Toulon. Like Lafayette he had served in the American War of Independence, as a colonel under the command of the Comte de Rochambeau. Such was hardly the career of a social or military outcast. Nor can his adherence to the Revolution be explained by self-preservation, or else he would have made a greater effort to avoid what he must have known might be his fate. Custine’s career in the service of the republic was initially a spectacular success. Commanding the Army of the Vosges, his offensive of September and October 1792 captured Speyer, Worms, Mainz, and even Frankfurt. However, the presence of a Prussian army caused him to abandon Frankfurt and return to Landau. In the military thinking that had characterized the Cabinet Wars, such a response was by no means unusual, let alone worthy of suspicion. It nonetheless damaged his standing, both with the National Convention and the Paris mob, who came gradually to suspect him of treason. His unwillingness to take the offensive in the north, and apparent inability to prevent the Austrians from capturing the border town of Condé-sur-l’Escaut, led to accusations of conspiracy.

The Convention seems to have regarded the conviction of Custine to be a political imperative of the utmost importance. If the relevant edition of the radical newspaper *Le Père Duchesne* is any indication, its editor Jacques Hébert was entirely convinced of Custine’s guilt:

You have just done something worthy of me by denouncing Custine.

You have brought into broad daylight his plots and his treason. If we had

Waited a few more days to recall him freedom would have been f\*\*\*\*\*d. This infamous rascal, after having had the French in Frankfurt massacred,after having abandoned Mainz, after having allowed Valenciennes to be encircled, after having delivered Condé, only awaited the right moment to lead his army into a slaughter and to deliver the coup de grace to the republic by sacrificing its last resources. Fortunately, the bugger has been put to the side. His crimes have been proved, let his head promptly fall under the national razor, but let his not be the only one! Let all the scoundrels who compose his headquarters also be shortened. Pursue, denounce without rest the infamous Tourville, who was the right arm of Lameth, and who will deliver Maubeuge if we leave him in command. Make known the swindler Lapallière, and especially the ci-devant marquis de Verigni, known in all the gaming houses under the name of Debrulis. Tell the Sans Culottes in the army that this rat has emigrated twice. Don’t forget Leveneur, the intimate friend of Lafayette, and the henchman of Custine. Don’t allow these bandits a moments rest until they've been chased and punished as traitors.[[410]](#footnote-410)

Hébert, as one of the most famous *enragés*, can be taken to represent the more extreme end of public opinion at that time. While this extract is illuminating with regard to a certain sector of opinion, it is important not to regard such opinion as being the arbiter of public policy, another common caricature. A more likely explanation would be the fact that Hébert’s supporters effectively controlled the Ministry of War until his arrest in March of 1794, a Ministry with which Custine had been in conflict.[[411]](#footnote-411) As for the origins of these attitudes, the most obvious explanation is that the Hébertists and similar parties sincerely regarded the aristocratic officers as irredeemable traitors whose immediate execution was an absolute necessity for the safety of the Revolution. Any reverse or failure, whether real or imagined, was regarded as evidence of their true nature, and further reason for them to face the guillotine. The Committee of Public Safety under Robespierre was actually relatively humane in its approach to that particular issue, merely dismissing the bulk of the officers with whom it found fault. The fact that Custine actually turned up for his trial, instead of fleeing as Dumouriez had done, is proof that he did not seriously expect to be condemned.

The fate of Jean Houchard, who had been Custine’s subordinate, provides a potential explanation for the Committee’s state of mind in this context. In sharp contrast to the aristocratic Custine, Houchard’s background was far more ideologically acceptable. One of those officers of fortune so disadvantaged under the old regime, Houchard achieved the rank of Captain only after twenty four years of service.[[412]](#footnote-412) Houchard was exactly the sort of general the National Convention was looking for, one who could be trusted to serve both France *and* the Republic. He even managed to win a battle at Hondschoote in September of 1793, defeating a Coalition army under the Duke of York and Field Marshal von Freitag, but failed to prevent their escape. An important factor in understanding the Convention’s willingness to blame Houchard and other generals exclusively for failure was its attitude towards the ordinary soldier. Houchard himself had expressed the idea that the French soldier was inherently good, being courageous, virtuous, and self-sacrificing. Officers, by contrast, were invariably corrupt and untrustworthy, and defeats could always be explained by their incompetence or disloyalty.[[413]](#footnote-413) But Houchard represented an even bigger problem for the Convention, and the Committee of Public Safety, and not simply because he was the sort of sans-culotte general they had so lionized. He had received his orders from Lazare Carnot, who had only recently joined the Committee, and his plan had been personally approved by him.[[414]](#footnote-414) The question unavoidably arose as to where the buck was to stop, and it could not be with the Committee.

Newspapers like *Le Père Duchesne* made quite clear to the soldiers what was expected of them in the new state:

Finally we're rising up en masse to hunt the f\*\*\*\*\*g bear of the north that’s ravaging our frontiers and to make all the crowned brigands dance the carmagnole. I gave this good advice a long time ago to the Sans Culottes, and if we'd followed it Mainz, Condé and Valenciennes would still be ours, and the traitor Custine would have been forced to march when seeing himself caught between two fires. But it’s not enough to rise up: the final blows must be delivered, and in two weeks assure our liberty by crushing under our thumbs all of the despots. D\*\*\*\*t, it’s impossible that five or six million men shouldn’t be able to bring down these hordes of slaves who never would have been able to set foot on the territory of the republic if we hadn’t been betrayed by the scoundrels who commanded our armies up till now. Yes, d\*\*\*\*t, if a million men would serve as reinforcements for the army of the North, then

soon Mainz, Condé, and Valenciennes will be returned to us; and soon our troops will again take Belgium and Holland, not to make free those Flemish oafs who prefer their reliquaries and their wooden saints to freedom, but to make them pay restitution for the provisions that the wretched Dumouriez abandoned to them; not to unite Holland to France, but to make the monopolists of Amsterdam pay the costs of the war, and to make them exchange all our assignats against tons of gold.[[415]](#footnote-415)

Repeated exposure to such sentiments would require considerable education and no small force of will to resist, assuming any of them were even inclined to. As mentioned before, such material represented the more extreme end of printed opinion. A marked contrast to this approach was Lazare Carnot’s *Soirée du camp,* first published in July of 1794, a newspaper with some claim to have been made by a soldier for soldiers, Carnot being a captain of engineers. Carnot matched Hébert on his own turf, albeit posthumously, using the same literary device of presenting the narrative through a fictional character. But whereas old man Duchesne was a brutally honest and foul-mouthed man of the people, retired sergeant Va-de-bon-coeur was a good-humoured soldier’s soldier. This approach was entirely deliberate, seeking to speak to and engage with the ordinary French soldiers in a manner and with concepts they could understand. The *Soirée* proved not only an effective morale-booster for the regular army, at which it was aimed, but a means of tidying up any political misunderstandings. The first edition denounced Hébert for his defamations of the regular army, asserting that in so doing he was spreading counterRevolution;

From time to time he was amusing, that Père Duchesne; he sometimes

made me laugh as much as anyone. But that’s because at the beginning I

didn’t have doubts that he wanted to spread counterRevolution and blacken the reputation of the French soldier. But that was one of his ways of taking us all back to the Ancien Régime. How many times, once I had begun to see clearly, did his papers lacerate my heart! For I’d as soon swallow a barrel of gunflints as see the soldier’s good name reviled.

The thirteenth edition gave Robespierre the same treatment shortly after his downfall, claiming that his tyranny was the result of ‘hypocrisy’ and seduction of the people.[[416]](#footnote-416) That Carnot and his colleagues made the effort to do so indicates a certain understanding both of human nature and of the soldier’s particular mind-set, and offers an insight into the fate of Custine. For over a year French soldiers had been taught to regard Robespierre as a virtuous and incorruptible leader, only to be told that he was actually a vicious tyrant who had sent fellow Revolutionaries to the guillotine. Such a bombshell must have made many French soldiers wonder as to the righteousness of their cause. How could they tell between virtuous leaders and would-be tyrants? If the incorruptible Robespierre had betrayed their trust, who *could* they trust? Carnot’s touch in this case was to reassure the soldiers, promising them that the fault was Robespierre’s alone and not that of the Revolution. It was a necessary gesture, but the stage was nonetheless set for the rise of one who could make soldiers trust him.

The question inevitably arises as to the role of Napoleon Bonaparte, and how he was able to make a nation seemingly committed to the ideals of liberty and equality follow him into a war that would spread across the world, and even make him its Emperor in the process. To understand why French soldiers regarded Napoleon with such apparent loyalty, to the point where it took total and utter defeat to finally dislodge him from power, it is necessary to look at what the French army had become by that point. Amalgamation was accepted in principle in 1793, taking place in January of 1794.[[417]](#footnote-417) The result was that the two French armies were finally combined into one institution, allowing their respective identities to combine also. This process contributed significantly to the professionalization of French military identity, combining both the existing professionalism of the regular army with the new-found professionalism of the volunteer army.[[418]](#footnote-418) The ultimate cause of the professionalization, however, was the simple fact that the two armies had been fighting almost constantly since 1792, and the Cincinnatian approach of dismissing the volunteers at the end of each campaign season had been abandoned since the 1793 decree of permanent requisition.[[419]](#footnote-419) The result was the common situation as described in the chapter on professional identities, leading to a common identity. In his own account, Elzéar Blaze deflates the image of Napoleon as being treated with near-fanatical loyalty by almost if not all of his soldiers;

We returned to our companies paraphrasing the colonel’s speech, and this is what we heard murmured in the ranks:

“Let him give me my discharge, and I’ll cheer him as much as they please!”

“We have no bread; when my stomach is empty, I can not cheer.”

“I had enlisted for six months, and here I’ve been twenty years in the army; I shall cheer when I am sent away.”

“There is six months’ pay due us, why does he not give it to us?”

“Don’t you know why? I’ll tell you: it is because, in the meantime, all Those who are killed are as good as paid, etc., etc.”

The Emperor came; the colonel and a few officers shouted at the tops of their voices, and the rest remained silent. I have never heard French soldiers frankly cry: *Vive l’Empereur!*” except in 1814 and 1815, when they were told to shout: *“Vive le Roi!*” I must say that then they shouted themselves hoarse: why? Because the soldier is essentially a *frondeur*, be it that he wishes from time to time to indemnify himself for his sheeplike obedience, or that he is secretly envious of those who command him, as a servant is of his master, and the pupil of his instructor.[[420]](#footnote-420)

The complaints of French soldiers against their Emperor have no apparent political content, focussing instead on the practical issues of food, pay, and term of service. Blaze nonetheless expressed confidence in Napoleon as a leader, which he put down to a belief that Napoleon would bring victory.[[421]](#footnote-421)

Having lived an essentially military life, Napoleon came to believe that the secret of his success lay in those military values he had absorbed from a young age, and that France needed those same values in order to succeed. Napoleon continued the Revolutionary policy of using the army for ideological education, altering its content to fit this new direction. Even his methods were the same, using proclamations and bulletins to keep the troops updated on the *successful* course of the war. One proclamation, dated 29 September 1805, shows how he liked to do it;

Soldiers, the war of the Third Coalition has started. The Austrian army has

crossed the Inn, violated the treaties, attacked and chased our ally from its capital…Even you had to rush in forced marches to the defence of our

frontiers.

But already you have crossed the Rhine: we will not stop until we will have

assured the independence of the Germanic corps, assisted our allies, and

confounded the pride of the unjust aggressors.

We will never make peace without guarantee: our generosity will never

again deceive our politics.

Soldiers, your Emperor is in your midst. You are only the advance guard of

the great people; if it is necessary, all of it will rise up on hearing my voice to confound and dissolve this new league woven by the hatred and the gold of

England.

But, soldiers, we have forced marches to do, some fatigues and privations of

all kinds to endure; no matter what obstacles oppose us, we will vanquish

them, and we will not rest until we have planted our eagles on the territory

of the enemy.[[422]](#footnote-422)

Napoleon also continued the Revolutionary practice of holding fetes, with the additional purpose of rewarding the deserving and encouraging the rest. Rewards could be anything from a few words of praise to a title, or the greatest reward of all, the Legion of Honour. The Legion of Honour itself is a specific example of how this wider process sought to bind military and civic identities together, for it could be awarded for military or civic merit regardless of social background.[[423]](#footnote-423) It was also a tacit acknowledgement that virtue was not its own reward.

This is not to say that the ideals of the Revolution faded from the military mind-set. Napoleon’s own image was tied inextricably with that of the Revolution, for it was upon certain Revolutionary ideals that he based his legitimacy and mission as a ruler. To the soldiers themselves, the most important factor in their bond was that if not actually one of them, Napoleon was someone they could believe they understood, and who understood them in turn. This was the product of the shared circumstance, and why so many of them called him the *petit caporal.* To the soldiers he came to represent the possibilities and opportunities of the new era. Compared to such tangible and life-enhancing rewards, the high-minded ideals and concepts of men like Robespierre and even Carnot must have seemed distant and even alienating. They could not be perfect citizens possessed of *vertu,* but they could be good soldiers possessed of *honneur*. In that respect if in no other, the wheel had turned full circle. Montesquieu had described the difference between monarchies and republics as being a question of honour and virtue, with monarchies being based on honour, a relationship of service and reward between subjects and their monarch, and republics being based on virtue, in which the citizen gained personal satisfaction through service to the state.[[424]](#footnote-424) If one follows this analogy, then Napoleon became a monarch the moment he became First Consul. Whereas the republic could offer only impersonal ideals, service to Napoleon offered the ineffable joy of personal loyalty, and plenty of more tangible rewards.

Though one may conclude from this that virtue was abandoned in favour of self-centred notions of honour and personal profit, this would be over-simplistic. Montesquieu’s analysis comes in for criticism from Owen Connolly, in the process of criticizing John Lynn’s conclusions regarding the evolution of French military ideology and identity. He argues that *Spirit of the Laws* is not a suitable basis for understanding French military honour and virtue in the period, as Montesquieu was himself a lawyer by trade and his work was focussed on these issues in the political rather than the military context. He goes on to argue that *honneur* and *vertu* were not so different, quoting a letter in which both were described as being a quality or attitude that made a soldier do what he had to do.[[425]](#footnote-425) In criticizing Montesquieu’s definitions of honour and virtue, Connolly points to the definitions of Clausewitz and Sun-Tzu, providing a basis for comparison. Clausewitz describes a specifically military conception of virtue in his seminal work *On War*;

An Army which preserves its usual formations under the heaviest fire,

which is never shaken by imaginary fears, and in the face of real danger

disputes the ground inch by inch, which, proud in the feeling of its

victories, never loses its sense of obedience, its respect for and confidence

in its leaders, even under the depressing effects of defeat; an Army with

all its physical powers, inured to privations and fatigue by exercise, like

the muscles of an athlete; an Army which looks upon all its toils as the

means to victory, not as a curse which hovers over its standards, and which

is always reminded of its duties and virtues by the short catechism of one

idea, namely the HONOUR OF ITS ARMS;—Such an Army is imbued

with the true military spirit.[[426]](#footnote-426)

Clausewitz’s conception of virtue ties neatly into the aforementioned conception of *honneur* as doing one’s duty well. Existing in a military context, it has little to say for the wider social context covered by *vertu*. Nor does it cover the concept of *gloire*, implying personal or collective achievement and reward. One way in which it does tie into vertu is that a virtuous soldier is motivated by his sense of integrity as a soldier, just as a virtuous citizen-soldier needs no reward but the gratitude and validation of his fellow citizens. So then arises the question; was the French army ultimately motivated by virtue, or by honour and glory? To argue that soldiers were interested only in physical rewards, be they baubles or titles and privileges, would be mean-spirited.. It cannot be denied that such things were rarely if ever refused, but to focus on the material value of rewards is to misunderstand their meaning. Does a soldier consider a medal in terms of its monetary value, or as a physical symbol of his having achieved military virtue? Ultimately, a more accurate and nuanced answer would be that the French army developed a *vertu* of its own, which included notions of *honneur* and *gloire,* but also of *valeur, discipline* and even *service.* In Napoleon’s army, all these motives were acceptable.

# Conclusion to Chapters Three and Four

The general theme of the third and fourth chapters is once again of difference developing into similarity, but there is necessarily a greater focus on difference. The evidence of these chapters has shown significant differences between the two societies, and as such between the political and social identities that British and French soldiers may have possessed. Religion played as important a role in both societies as in any other, but whereas Anglicanism played a central role in creating a British common identity, Catholicism played a far lesser role after the Revolution. British and French social structures were superficially identical, with a titled, usually landowning elite, a rising merchant element, and lower levels including professionals, artisans, and peasants. But these structures would ultimately be defined by their differences, particularly in their socio-economic basis and political access. Britain’s elite was a landowning elite, consisting of a small titled aristocracy and a much larger landed gentry, both of which based their social and political status on land ownership. Wider notions of citizenship extended right down the social scale, based on the ideal of independence through property ownership.

What ultimately set this system apart was the British adherence to primogeniture, which limited the peerage to titled aristocrats and their heirs, other children being demoted to much broader delineation of gentry. The identity of a ‘gentleman’, based on independent wealth and gentlemanly manners, was broad and open enough that it could be embraced by those both above and below it on the social scale, granting the upper end of British society a degree of flexibility that its French counterpart lacked. A substantial proportion of the French aristocracy lacked the wealth necessary to maintain their status, and were forced to compete for an insufficient number of appropriately aristocratic jobs, especially officer commissions. With access to these jobs being dependent on wealth and court connections, the result was a split between the wealthy courtiers and impoverished provincial nobility that contributed to the gradual collapse of Royal authority that culminated in the Revolution. Needless to say, the Revolution led to the creation of a new social structure, where social status was wealth, political involvement, and under Napoleon on public service in one form or another.

Though this story has primarily been of difference, there are also examples of similar outcomes to differing processes. There is evidence that soldiers were regarded with suspicion and dislike in both British and pre-Revolutionary French societies, and for much the same reasons. Soldiers in both societies were symbols of government power, which could all too often be violently oppressive. They also tended to be drawn from the lowest levels of society, causing them to be associated with brutishness and criminality. But there is also evidence that soldiers could be regarded with sympathy, and that at least some in both societies regarded soldiers as fellow members. This is evidenced on the British side by the tendency of soldiers to sympathise with rioters, as well as a public willingness to side with mistreated soldiers. The fact that French Revolutionary thought held up soldiers as fellow citizens is similar proof, but the process by which both soldiers and civilians were convinced of this points to another fundamental difference between both armies and both societies. The French army was subjected to a massive campaign of political re-education, arguably to a far greater extent than French society as a whole, for which no equivalent took place on the British side. The most obvious explanation is that whereas the National Convention regarded this process as necessary for the reliability of the army and social cohesion in a wider sense, the British state saw no such need. The strong connection between officers and the status-quo made possible by the purchases system and the relative lack and small scale of army mutinies, may have given the government confidence in the army’s loyalty.

Monarchism and Republicanism represent the most obvious context in which British and Revolutionary French society diverged. In Britain the direct political authority of the crown was undergoing a gradual process of reduction, both in theory and in practice. Nevertheless, George III played the role of supreme commander, both in a practical and symbolic sense. One of his most significant acts was to appoint his son, the Duke of York, as actual commander-in-chief, putting him in a position to make much-needed reforms based on his experience of command in Flanders. His symbolic role was to maintain the bond between the army and the crown, and by implication between both and the country as a whole. There was no obvious equivalent in Revolutionary France until the appearance of Napoleon, since the relationship between state and army was based on a different set of ideals. The idea that pervaded the Revolutionary period, and saw its most overt expression under the Jacobins, was that of universal service as a duty and symbol of citizenship. Whereas the British army was in many respects a separate institution, bound to wider society through the officer corps and the crown, the French army was intended to be fully integrated into French society. It may be argued that the length and scope of the wars in which the French army fought rendered this goal impracticable.

In both countries there is little direct evidence of how soldiers saw themselves in a social and political context. Those letters on the French side that displayed Revolutionary or patriotic enthusiasm did so in a predictable, rather formulaic fashion using rhetoric the author had doubtless heard elsewhere. Practicality and evidence leans against the widespread or consistent practice of censorship, meaning that any sentiments expressed in letters can be taken as sincere. It is entirely likely that most simply did not think in such terms, or else lacked the literary wherewithal to express them. John Cookson’s point about British soldiers being outside of society, and creating their own within the army, is illuminating in this regard. The aforementioned separation of large numbers of French soldiers from France for extended periods may have had the same effect. Many letters on both sides referred to such simple matters as family, neighbours, and even the price of food, implying that the concerns of soldiers were with home and the lives they had left behind.

Though of differing social backgrounds, British and French officers were brought together by shared ideals and identities. On the British side, this shared identity was based on the concept of the gentleman, while on the French side the unifying idea shifted from aristocratic identity to ideological adherence to a less clearly-defined ideal of professional military service. The separation of the gentlemanly and aristocratic identities served to separate the identities of the British and French officer corps even before the Revolution. Whereas British high society was granted a semblance of unity by the gentlemanly identity, French aristocratic identity was almost defined by factionalism and the conflicts it engendered. The closest equivalent to the impoverished French aristocrats who relied on the army for gainful employment was the non-landowning British gentry who provided the British army with so many of its regimental officers. While they would be hard-pressed to rise above the rank of colonel, there was no formal equivalent to the Segur laws in the period, or any apparent attempt by this group to monopolise the officer corps. These lesser gentry were brought together with the spare sons of titled aristocrats and well-off landed gentry by the all-embracing ideal of the gentleman, which prized independent wealth and gentlemanly behaviour over strict genealogical credentials.

The social mobility this represented should not be exaggerated, but it gave the upper echelons of British society a flexibility and unity that its French counterpart lacked. The Revolution led to the replacement of the French aristocracy in the officer corps by a variety of different groups, leading to a shift in ideals and identity. Before the amalgamation, the emigrating officers of the regular army were replaced by non-commissioned officers, who under the old system could barely have hoped to rise any higher. The officers of the volunteers were provided by election, which in practice meant that they were members of non-aristocratic local elites, though time and casualties would cause these to be replaced by other volunteers who had gained the confidence of their fellows by one means or another. The result was an officer corps of varied background and interest, held together by common circumstance and a Revolutionary fervour gradually eroding under the pressure of war and political turmoil. Of these two specific groups, it was the regulars who would ultimately have come to dominate the officer corps, as the post-amalgamation election system was rigged to favour them. Despite Napoleon’s policy of drawing and training officers from the better-off levels of French society, this group would continue to dominate the officer corps by virtue of sheer numbers.

One sphere in which both sides displayed consistent similarity is in gender relations. Both armies were accompanied by large numbers of women, who played much the same roles on both sides. The only real difference was that the French army developed a policy of employing some of these women on a formal basis, in the form of the blanchisseuses and the cantinieres. There is evidence that, despite being in close proximity to and associated with field armies, army women and children were not regarded as legitimate targets. There is evidence that captured women and children were sent back under a flag of truce, though this was motivated as much by a desire to avoid the expense and inconvenience of supporting them as any humanitarian instinct. Their presence militates against any claim that eighteenth century army life was a purely male sphere, though there is a curious similarity between the two armies in that regard. Common to both sides was the idea that the army should indeed be a male-only sphere, and that the presence of women was in one way or another ‘unhealthy’. On the British side, this derived from seventeenth-century neo-classicism, specifically the republican ideal of public service as a virtuous male act from which women were necessarily excluded. On the French side, it derived from a similar tendency in Rousseauian thought, that citizenship was embodied in the male citizen and that the role of women was to support and facilitate their duties as such. This in turn marks a difference in the relationship between military identity and masculinity. British soldiers were arguably lacking in masculinity because they lacked independence, while French soldiers were regarded in their own society as unquestionably masculine, since fighting was a duty of male citizenship.

The political lives of British and French soldiers showed both similarity and difference. The British army came across as a largely apolitical and essentially loyal institution, in sharp contrast to the French army during the Revolution, though less so after it. The Despard plot is a rare example of soldiers becoming involved in a political conspiracy, revealing more about the misfortune of one man than about the political opinions of soldiers, if indeed they had any. That the Royal Navy was more overtly mutinous can be explained by the overt practice of pressganging, for which the army had no equivalent, and the Duke of York’s timely reforms. British soldiers were on the whole loyal, to the point of being willing to testify in sedition trials and even infiltrate seditious groups, but that does not mean they were the mindless automatons some of their detractors made them out to be. They tended to sympathise with rioters, making them of questionable reliability in a police role, and militia members in some cases actually became involved in riots. There were also concerns over the loyalty of the Volunteer soldiers, who were not under government control, though the only example of widespread disloyalty was on the part of Irish volunteers in the 1798 rebellion. Despite this, there was no British equivalent to the French programme of ideological re-education. On the whole, the connection between the British army and politics was tenuous to non-existent, the connection being maintained by the officer corps, the War Office, and the crown.

The French army was very different in this regard, with the government making a concerted effort to tie the army to the nation as a whole, and as such to itself. The re-education programme, the widespread distribution of newspapers, and the sending of representatives-on-mission to the armies were all aspects of this. But like the British army, the French army was not universally obedient to authority, be it royal or Revolutionary. Representatives were on certain occasions threatened or even detained by soldiers who objected to their behaviour, especially if a well-liked or trusted officer had fallen foul of them. Also, the declaration by the National Convention to kill all British and Hanoverian prisoners appears to have been quietly ignored by the soldiers themselves, and no apparent effort was made to enforce it.

The issue of Napoleon’s role is essentially a French issue, as there was clearly no British equivalent. The question is ultimately why so many French soldiers supported Napoleon, or at least went along with his project. A negligible proportion of French soldiers deserted during his tenure, and it can be argued that the army never deserted him, even if the marshals eventually did. It is worth pointing out that his support in the army was not exactly fanatical, as evidenced by Elzear Blaze’s reminiscence of disgruntled soldiers refusing to cheer. Yet in 1799 it was willing to let him take power as First Consul, and even declare himself Emperor. Evidently something had changed by 1799, the result of years of war and political unrest followed by an unpopular government. The fact that the French army had been embodied for such a long period, with many of its members having been away from civilian society for many years, must have contributed to a sense of separation, and to the development of a separate military identity. Napoleon helped to cement this new identity by creating a new and recognizably modern system of officer selection and training, with fees and stipend requirements limiting entry to those of the middle and upper levels of society. This was part of the development of a new and much wider ideal of public service in return for status and wealth. At the same time it was possible for soldiers in the enlisted ranks to aspire to promotion, if only because the new system could not provide enough officers on its own.

# Chapter 5: National Identities: The Highlanders

Of all possible identities, national identity is one of the most obvious to modern eyes, yet in practice the most difficult to define. On the surface the concept is simple enough; a person who is born in, lives in, or otherwise identifies with a particular nation can be said to have that particular ‘national’ identity. This statement brings up two particular problems in understanding national identity, one being how a ‘nation’ is defined, the other being how a person becomes a part of it, the two issues being closely intertwined. Much has been made of the development of national identity as it is seen today, though the claim that France became a nation-state as a result of the Revolution is itself controversial. To avoid wandering too far off-topic, this chapter and the one that follows will cover national identity insofar as it existed in the requisite period, as opposed to more recent conceptions. To use the term ‘national’ in this case is essentially arbitrary, seeking to avoid an unhelpful anthropological and sociological tangent as to the precise definition thereof.

The ultimate focus of these case studies will be on perceptions, that is to say how the Highlanders and the Irish perceived themselves, and how others perceived them. In the course of these analyses one particular concept will arise, that of the ‘martial race.’ The term itself derives from nineteenth century British rule in India, being used to refer to any particular tribe or grouping that fitted certain qualifications in British perception. The most obvious feature of a martial race was that it was martial, possessed of a certain willingness to engage in armed violence. The other crucial feature was loyalty, which meant obedience to the British-led order in India, and was the main factor dividing a ‘martial’ race from a ‘criminal’ race.[[427]](#footnote-427) The concept is relevant to the end of the eighteenth century, for the underlying ideas existed then as well as later. Of those underlying ideas, the most important was that certain people possessed certain characteristics, specifically characteristics that made them well suited and willing to engage in warfare. The Highlanders were, in many respects, the archetype for this approach. The fact that so many Highland Scots went into the British service, with all apparent willingness, must have given the impression to a casual observer that they were both able and willing to fight. What also grew up around the Highlanders was the idea that they were ‘loyal’, that far from being self-interested mercenaries, they would give their lives for Crown and Empire. This idea of loyalty, coming from a British perspective, can be explained to a great extent by their history. Their ‘loyalty’ was marvelled-at in contrast to their past ‘treachery’ in rebelling against the Hanoverian dynasty.

## Martial Race

The vision of the Highlanders as a ‘martial race’, or in the more common parlance as a ‘warrior people’ or ‘natural fighters’, is based on a series of factors both perceived and real. The image of the Highland warrior that existed in the eighteenth century, prior to post-Culloden romanticism, developed over many centuries. The Highland Gaels had been a part of the Scottish polity since its appearance, arriving over time from Ireland and gradually spreading over the Highlands, either removing or absorbing the native Picts. Many of the clan chiefs were descended from Scottish nobles of Anglo-Flemish origin, holding their lands as vassals of the Scottish crown. On that basis, the structure of the Highland clans that developed over the centuries was not very different from any other feudal structure that existed in Europe at the time. Indeed, observers as late as the fourteenth century made no distinction between Highlands and lowlands, implying that at the time there was little noticeable social or cultural difference between the two. [[428]](#footnote-428)

The basis of the Highland clan in its military context was, therefore, an institution for the feudal levying of soldiers, a function it would continuously serve for centuries. When put in the medieval context in which they originally developed, the Highland clans lose some of their romantic gloss. Their military service, Gaelic language and Catholic religion, features that made them distinctive in the early eighteenth century, made them as much a part of medieval Scotland as any other. The Highland Gaels only began to stand out when some of them decided to treat war as a profession rather than a feudal duty. First appearing in the thirteenth century, the *gallóglaigh* or *gallowglasses*, so-called because of their intermarriage with Norse settlers, were Scotland’s answer to the Swiss pikemen and the Genoese crossbowmen, though they primarily fought alongside their fellow Gaels in Ireland. It was in Ireland that the Scottish mercenaries acquired the nickname *redshanks*, referring to their habit of wading barelegged through rivers, though in the sixteenth century the term referred to seasonal mercenaries rather than the Gallowglasses who tended to settle down. Highlanders would continue to involve themselves in Ireland as late as the 1640’s.

Here can be seen one of the main features of a supposed martial race, namely a tendency and willingness to fight. The fact that so many became involved in other people’s wars, with a preference for helping their Irish relations against the English, makes it hard to deny that they were willing. That the Highlanders celebrated such battles in their songs and poetry, and associated success in battle with masculine achievement, suggests that they went even further, actually valuing combat for its own sake or the rewards it could bring.[[429]](#footnote-429) The question then arises as to why Highland Gaels developed such a distinctive military presence, and why this lasted so much longer than that of other warlike groups, such as the Border Reivers. A conception of their motives can be drawn from the development of the wider mercenary tendency in late medieval and Renaissance Europe. Mercenaries played an increasingly important role in European wars from the Hundred Years War onward, as rulers sought to balance the need for military professionalism with the expense of maintaining a standing army. The Swiss became mercenaries in considerable numbers, their availability and willingness being their major selling points. The underlying reason for this was not simply that the Swiss cantons were seriously overpopulated, hence their availability, but that they were also poverty-stricken, hence their willingness.[[430]](#footnote-430)

Any polity or group capable of providing large numbers of trained and willing mercenaries stood to benefit, and Scotland could boast of both. When Donald ‘Dubh’ Macdonald sailed to Ireland in 1545, he was at the head of a force of four thousand armed men, with the same number remaining behind to defend his holdings. When Macdonald of Sleat did likewise fifty years later, his force numbered four thousand from his own clan. [[431]](#footnote-431) As late as 1724, it was believed that the Highlands as a whole could field over twenty-thousand men.[[432]](#footnote-432) A financial incentive provides a clear motive for Highland military involvement, and one that will become relevant again later, but another motive can be found in the living conditions prevalent in the Highlands. As will be shown, the Highlands were not merely a poverty-stricken region, but at times a violent one.

The situation in the Highlands in the eighteenth century was the product of a chain of events beginning in at the end of the fifteenth century. By 1493 the Highlanders were already prolific mercenaries, but their reputation for violence would be given a boost by a period of internecine warfare lasting for a century and a half. This period was known as ‘Linn nach Creach’, the time of Feuds and Forays. The main identifiable cause was a lack of effective central leadership, with the crown weakened by a series of guardianships and the dissolution of the Lordship of the Isles. Held by the Clan Donald since the fourteenth century the Lordship, also known as the Kingdom of the Hebrides, covered a substantial portion of the Highlands at its height, making its holder the *de facto* leader of the Highlands. This arrangement made for a period of relative peace and stability, which itself may have contributed to so many Highland warriors choosing to seek glory abroad. It also, somewhat ironically, served to foster a sense of lowland identity, if only in opposition to and suspicion of the relatively united Highlands.[[433]](#footnote-433) The forfeiture of the Lordship in 1493 removed this unifying element and left the Highlands effectively lawless. Perhaps the most famous conflict in this period was the enmity between the Macdonald and Macleod clans. Samuel Johnson, writing two centuries later, described how a particular bout of that feud came about:

As the inhabitants of the Hebrides lived, for many ages, in continual expectation of hostilities, the chief of every clan resided in a fortress. This house was accessible only from the water, till the last possessor opened an entrance by flairs upon the land. They had formerly reason to be afraid, not only of declared wars and authorized invaders, or of roving pirates, which, in the northern seas, must have been very common; but of inroads and insults from rival clans, who, in the plenitude of feudal independence, asked no leave of their Sovereign to make war on one another. Skye has been ravaged by a feud between the two mighty powers of Macdonald and Macleod. Macdonald having married a Macleod, upon some discontent dismissed her, perhaps because she had brought him no children. Before the reign of James the Fifth, a Highland Laird made a trial of his wife for a certain time, and if she did not please him, he was then at liberty to send her away. This however must always have offended, and Macleod resenting the injury, whatever were its circumstances, declared, that the wedding had been solemnized without a bonfire, but that the separation should be better illuminated; and raising a little army, set fire to the territories of Macdonald who returned the visit, and prevailed.[[434]](#footnote-434)

This state of affairs severely damaged the image and standing of Scotland’s Gaelic element. What had once been in many respects an alternative cultural, economic, and political centre was by the eighteenth century regarded as a nest of barbarism and pointless violence. Though most feuds were ended in 1609, when King James VI forced the clan chiefs to sign the Statutes of Iona in return for legal charters to their land, the causes of Highland conflict became more complex and wide-ranging. Religion and politics intertwined in the mid-seventeenth century, with Presbyterians fighting Episcopalians and Royalists fighting Covenanters. This final process culminated in three Jacobite rebellions of 1689, 1715, and 1745, which involved the Highlanders over three generations. The practical effect of these developments was that the clans had maintained their military capabilities, and engaged from time to time in active combat, almost non-stop for over two-hundred years. This almost certainly served to entrench the militaristic aspect of Highland culture.

## Recruitment

That the British army should make a point of recruiting whole regiments of Highlanders following the 1745 rebellion may seem paradoxical, but the truth of the matter is more complicated. The recruitment of soldiers from those clans that had come out for Charles Edward Stuart was held up as a means of rehabilitation. Actually, only a relative minority of clans actively supported the Stuart cause in 1745, and those tended to be weaker or outlawed clans.[[435]](#footnote-435) This stands against around three fifths of the clans being divided, neutral, or loyal to the government.[[436]](#footnote-436) Highland recruitment in the eighteenth century was governed by two competing interests, one being the need to maintain order in the Highlands, the other being the need for troops to fight overseas. The result was that the Highlanders ended up taking on a combination of military and policing responsibilities within their own territory, an arrangement that was unique at the time.[[437]](#footnote-437) The raising of formal Highland units began in the context of policing, with the raising of independent companies for that purpose. The Watch, as those companies were collectively known, represented one of the first attempts to formally employ Highland Scots as soldiers, as opposed to the older practice of having the clan chieftains raise their hosts. Even so, the soldiers of the first Watch were provided by their respective chiefs.

As part of their role to police the Highlands, they were granted sanction to kill those they deemed enemies of the King.[[438]](#footnote-438) Issuing letters of ‘Fire and Sword’ against troublesome Highlanders had been a common practice in the sixteenth century. The Glencoe Macdonalds, whose fate is so well remembered and yet little understood, were subjected to such a writ in 1692. The first Watch was disbanded in 1717 after several of its members joined the 1715 rebellion on the orders of their chiefs. Replaced for a time by garrisons of English and lowland soldiers, it was resurrected in 1725 as a force of six companies with a more formal military styling. It also gave the British army the custom of regimental tartans, its own standard tartan being blue and green. As the colours could merge into black at a distance, or perhaps for some other reason, the Watch became known as *Am Freiceadan Dubh,* or the *Black Watch*. The social background of the Black Watch’s members was noticeably different to that of other British soldiers. General David Stewart of Garth described the men of the Black Watch as being the sons of gentleman farmers and tacksmen, essentially the gentry of the clans.[[439]](#footnote-439) Burt goes even further, describing them as having Gillys, or personal servants, to attend to their needs and even carry their weapons for them.[[440]](#footnote-440)

In this respect, the Black Watch in its earliest years represented the older method of Highland recruitment. Under this ancient and essentially feudal arrangement, the clan chief was responsible for the raising armed men from among his relatives and tenants. The Highland chiefs were themselves the objects of much mythologizing, their portrayals running from noble and fatherly patriarchs to grasping and uncaring landlords. Edward Burt, for his own part, had little good to say about the Highland chiefs. He describes the attitude of a particular chief, who was his host, and one of his preferred methods of maintaining control:

This chief does not think the present abject disposition of his clan towards him to be sufficient, but entertains that tyrannical and detestable maxim, that to render them poor, will double the tie of their obedience; and accordingly he makes use of all oppressive means to that end. To prevent any diminution of the number of those who do not offend him, he dissuades from, their purpose all such as show an inclination to traffic, or to put their children out to trades as knowing they would, by such an alienation, shake off at least good part of their slavish attachment to him and his family. This he does, when downright authority fails, by telling them how their ancestors chose to live sparingly, and be accounted a martial people, rather than submit themselves to low and mercenary employments like the Lowlanders, whom their forefathers always despised for the want of that warlike temper which they (his vassals) still retained.[[441]](#footnote-441)

There is a particular irony in this, that a Highland chief would use the myth of a warrior past to shame his tenants into obedience. It is equally telling that Burt describes the chief as walking in his garden armed with dagger and pistol, ‘as if he feared to be assassinated.’ Be they kind or cruel, the clan chiefs were central to the raising of clan hosts, and played a crucial role in the raising of the Highland regiments, with motives that were not much different.

The trained fighting strength was provided by the clan gentry, of which there were two distinct types. The most senior of the chief’s relations held land by royal charter, while those further down the hierarchy held their land from the chief as ‘tacksmen’. Their role was as middlemen, managing the clan townships and sub-letting the land they held to sub-tenants.[[442]](#footnote-442) From those sub-tenants they would raise armed men when called-upon. The other distinct type was the *buannachan*, or household men. These were the military elite of the clan, full-time soldiers who often served as mercenaries, and whom ordinary clansmen were required to support at their own expense. Despite the myth of common descent that had taken hold by the eighteenth century, it was unusual for ordinary clansmen outside of this elite circle to have any blood tie to the chief.[[443]](#footnote-443) Clans were for the most part held together by a powerful sense of mutual solidarity and responsibility, which prevented clansmen from simply leaving when times were hard.[[444]](#footnote-444) Despite this, many clans acquired their tenants through simple territorial self-aggrandisement, whether by taking over the land they inhabited or bringing in others from elsewhere.

An example can be found in the story of the Macdonalds of Dunyvaig and the Glens. Having been defeated by the Campbells of Argyll, and finally becoming extinct in 1626, their land was resettled by Presbyterians imported from the lowlands.[[445]](#footnote-445) Substantial amounts of land changed hands during the Time of Forays, and those clans willing and able to retain royal favour were able to acquire land forfeited by delinquent clans.[[446]](#footnote-446) The defeat, outlawing, and extinction of clans led to many ordinary clansmen being left landless. Those who did not leave or resort to banditry ended up as itinerant labourers or else as cotters, as sub-tenants of sub-tenants were known. The lowest in the clan hierarchy, they were easy and often preferred targets for military recruitment.

The raising of the Highland regiments began in 1739, at the beginning of the War of Spanish Succession. The first of these was the Black Watch, reorganized into the 43rd Highland Regiment.[[447]](#footnote-447) The 43rd would go on to be the most famous of all the Highland regiments, rising one place in seniority to become the 42nd Regiment in 1748, later amalgamating with the 73rd (Perthshire) Regiment in 1881 to become the Royal Highland Regiment (The Black Watch), the old title being added in brackets out of respect. The raising of Highland regiments was, perhaps understandably, equated in the popular mind-set with the raising of the clan hosts. Indeed, a strong clan ethos became attached to the regiments, going far beyond the reality of their recruitment and makeup. A regiment might begin at a given locality or with a given clan, and be named as such, but it would be unlikely to remain that way throughout its life. Others, be they lowland Scots, English, or even Irish, might be used to make up the numbers if the first raising did not meet full strength. Even if it did, the regiments were reinforced using whatever manpower could be acquired, regardless of origin. An example is the 97th Highlanders, for which Sir James Grant raised over four hundred men, a third of whom were in fact English.[[448]](#footnote-448) Maxwell and Skelly’s company of the 71st Foot was raised in 1776 from an area of over twelve thousand square miles, with few parishes providing more than three men.[[449]](#footnote-449)

The reality was that post-Culloden Highland recruitment had taken on a very different ethos, moving from feudal obligation to entrepreneurialism. The individual interests of the chiefs were part and parcel of the recruitment process, be they social, political, or economic. Clan chiefs regarded themselves as being a part of the ruling elite of Great Britain, just as they had been in pre-union Scotland. To them, providing soldiers for Britain’s armies was a powerful means of proving their loyalty, as well as their wealth and status.[[450]](#footnote-450) It was similarly in their interest to do so in as inexpensive a manner as possible while not drawing too heavily on the supply of labour. Land improvement, such as ditching and enclosure, were very labour-intensive processes, and vitally important to local economies as Sir James Grant points out:

If the country is to be drained not only in time of war by every other

method in time of peace, how is the ground to be laboured, manufactures to be carried on or the poor farmer to live?[[451]](#footnote-451)

Recruitment practices were tailored to avoid these problems, with recruiters avoiding tax-paying tenants, at least in their own chief’s lands, in favour of landless cotters and itinerant labourers. Highland recruitment was highly successful, providing approximately twenty-three regiments of line infantry and twenty-six regiments of fencibles from 1756-1815. This came to about forty-eight thousand men out of a regional population of between two hundred and fifty and three hundred thousand.[[452]](#footnote-452) By way of comparison, the King’s German Legion at its height included a Corps of Engineers, two batteries of horse and four of foot artillery, two regiments of dragoons and three of hussars, two battalions of light and eight of line infantry, and a battalion for foreign veterans. Though unit strengths could vary wildly, as many as seventeen thousand officers and men entered the legion between 1803 and 1814.[[453]](#footnote-453)

Despite a distinctly pragmatic approach to Highland recruitment, many regiments nonetheless acquired a strong clan ethos. Much was made of the ‘Highland spirit’ of the new formations, with ideas of clanship being applied not only to the recruitment process, but to the identities of the new regiments themselves.[[454]](#footnote-454) This tendency flew in the face of reality, for not only had the traditional Highland way of life essentially ceased to exist, but a significant proportion of supposedly Highland recruits were not members of the clans in question and in many cases not Highlanders or even Scots. Nevertheless, the idea of clanship dominated popular understanding of the clans, a perception that existed at the highest levels of society and government. This is reflected in the number of new regiments in the late eighteenth century that were given to Highland proprietors to raise. Simon Fraser of Lovat was given his own regiment in 1775, the 71st Fraser Highlanders, for service in North America, while Francis Mackenzie of Seaforth was similarly endowed in 1793 for war against Revolutionary France.[[455]](#footnote-455)

The idea of clanship was reflected to some extent in the organisation of the new regiments, and in the mindset of those who occupied their upper echelons. The networks of patronage that developed among Highland officers reflected to some extent the old system of dependencies within clans. At the same time, many of the lower-ranking officers were themselves tacksmen, who with the decline of the clan system had lost their traditional economic and military roles. Combined, these factors created an illusion of clan structure, around which a much larger image could develop.[[456]](#footnote-456) The importance of clan identity was similarly reflected in the choice of uniform. Despite penal laws against the wearing of Highland dress, Highland regiments would wear what amounted to updated versions thereof, whether the iconic kilt or *phellie beg* or the more conventional *trews.* This tendency was applied to varying degrees in different units, as evidenced by the Fraser Fencible regiment. Its uniform was to be ‘usual Highland dress’ for sergeants, consisting of cloak and kilt in Fraser tartan, while lower ranks would wear trousers of grey linen. [[457]](#footnote-457) Sir John Sinclair’s Rothesay and Caithness Fencibles, by contrast, wore tartan trews.[[458]](#footnote-458)

Fencible regiments tend to come across as a Scottish peculiarity, though similar formations existed in England. Colonel Gwyllym Wardle, who became involved in the Mary Anne Clarke scandal in revenge for being denied a regular commission, had held rank in a Welsh Fencible regiment.[[459]](#footnote-459) The term ‘Fencible’ is thought to derive from the term ‘defencible’, and whether true or not the allusion is apt. Fencible units occupied a grey area between the regular army and the militia, maintained as regular soldiers for the duration of a given war.[[460]](#footnote-460) Though intended to free up regular regiments for deployment abroad, in practice many Fencible regiments were also sent abroad. In most cases the destination was Ireland, which could be considered ‘home’ territory, though the 3rd Argyll Regiment was sent to Gibraltar in 1800 to free up troops for the expedition to Egypt. The particular connection with Scotland lies in the fact that there was no militia in Scotland until 1797, due to concerns over arming the populace.[[461]](#footnote-461) As such, the Scottish Fencibles played much the same role in Scotland as the English Militia did elsewhere. Despite whatever concerns might have existed, forty regiments of Fencibles had been raised in Scotland by the end of 1794.[[462]](#footnote-462) Of the seven Fencible regiments raised in 1793 alone, five were of Highlanders, further indicating the trust in which the Highlanders were held.[[463]](#footnote-463) The Fencible regiments were disbanded over a period of 1799 to 1802, many of their personnel joining the regular army and militia.

A direct look at the less romantic aspect of Highland recruitment is provided by Thomas Pococke, who describes himself as having been born to ‘poor but respectable, parents in Edinburgh,’ adding that they ‘bestowed upon me an education superior to my rank in life.’[[464]](#footnote-464) The image we are given, reinforced somewhat by the sophistication of the prose, is of an educated young man, not entirely unlike Private Wheeler. As has been shown earlier, such a person would have been most valued as a recruit, if only for his ability to read and write. He describes his attempt to enter the theatrical profession, much to the horror of his parents, only for the attempt to end in disaster. The author, driven by an adolescent mortification, later encounters a party of recruits and asks to be taken along with them. He is accepted into the 71st with minimal preamble. The manner of the author’s joining, and his self-confessed desire for self-punishment through military service, is at odds with the myths. The account itself is in narrative form, describing the author’s experiences in some detail, including his apparent reconciliation with his family, and his gradual adaption to military life. The author admits to a desire for combat, and feelings of frustration at ‘running away from an enemy we had beat with so much ease at Vimiera, without even firing a shot.’ More immediately relevant is his mention of one of his fellows being an Irishman, whose presence along with his own is further evidence that a Highland regiment did not contain Highlanders alone.[[465]](#footnote-465)

## Experiences

The training that Thomas describes, as shown in chapter one, appears to be the traditional ‘square bashing’ generally associated with the British army in the period. On this basis, it can be safely assumed that the training of the Highland regiments was not much different to that of other British regiments, even bearing in mind that a standardized system of training was as yet in its infancy. This suggests that, despite the perceived importance of clanship, any sense of Highland particularism that existed was not necessarily applied to training. The Highlands were, after all, not the only part of the British Isles to have a military tradition as the concept is usually understood. The Scottish and Welsh ‘marches’, referring to the former frontier regions, had their own traditions of military involvement going back many centuries, and for much the same reasons as the Highlanders. The Irish too, if a history of conflict is sufficient, would have ample reason to regard themselves as having a warrior tradition. Despite this, their recruitment and training practices were in no way substantially different to those of other regions.[[466]](#footnote-466) The impression that arises is that the British army wanted reasonably willing and healthy recruits that it could mould into useful soldiers by its own means, not the products of largely mythical ‘warrior cultures’.

This same attitude can be seen in Innes Munro’s account of operations in India between 1780 and 1784, in which the British recruited Indian men as Sepoys with little or no consideration of the caste-based military culture that still existed to some extent in Mughal India:

The Indians are said formerly to have rigidly adhered to the different religious ceremonies of their tribes; but since their intercourse with the Europeans they have become more relaxed in those duties, particularly the military crafts. The great inconvenience attending such absurd ideas in the field induced the Company’s officers to labour at a reformation, and eradicate from the minds of their sepoys their superstitious principles. Formerly none but Rajahpoots (*sic*), Moormen, and Pitans, were permitted to carry arms; but the Europeans have since shewn (*sic*) that rigid discipline will make a soldier of a Pariar (*sic*), the lowest of all casts (*sic*); and now men of every tribe are indiscriminately enlisted for sepoys in the Company’s service.[[467]](#footnote-467)

The idea that the Highlanders were possessed of some kind of unique and preferred way of warfare, exemplified by the ‘Highland charge’, itself does not stand up to scrutiny. Though such a tendency may have existed earlier, recruitment practices by the end of the eighteenth century were unlikely to draw upon it in any meaningful way. The Highland charge as a battle tactic did exist, but has been widely misunderstood and misrepresented, held up as the romantic power of emotion and raw courage triumphing over the cold mechanism of ‘modern’ warfare. Before the first recorded incident of a Highland charge, on February 11 1642, the Highlanders did not have any particular approach to warfare associated with them, beyond a sense that they were generally good at it. The incident itself was an obscure engagement in County Antrim, sometimes called the Battle of Bendooragh, between the forces of Alasdair Macdonald and Archibald Stewart of Ballintoy. Macdonald’s troops fired a single musket volley before charging, thus tricking Stewart’s troops into returning fire too soon, giving them insufficient time to reload or fix their plug bayonets before the charge reached them. This first instance of a Highland charge was not a wild rampage after all, but a well-thought out tactic based on an understanding of contemporary warfare.[[468]](#footnote-468) This tactic was used to great effect in subsequent conflicts, notably the 1745 rebellion. General Hawley, having witnessed a Highland charge at the Battle of Falkirk, explains the problem:

If the fire is given at a distance you will probably be broke, for you will never get time to load a second cartridge; and if you give way, you may give your foot [up] for dead, for they [the Highlanders],being without a firelock or any load, no man with his arms, accoutrements, etc., can escape them, and they give no Quarter…

The Highland charge saw its practical and symbolic defeat at Culloden, in part due to the convenience of the ring bayonet and plentiful field artillery, but also because Hanoverian infantry possessed the training and discipline necessary to hold their fire until the charge was as little as twelve metres away.[[469]](#footnote-469) After such a victory, the British army was unlikely to be interested in appropriating any ‘Highland way of war’ for their use, and the collapse of the clan social structure would have made this very difficult in any case. Even the iconic broadsword had fallen into disuse by the end of the Seven Years War.[[470]](#footnote-470) David Stewart criticized this development in his *Sketches*;

But, on that service, the broadsword, far from being complained of as an encumbrance, was, on many occasions, of the greatest efficacy, when a decisive blow was to be struck, and the enemy were to be overpowered by an attack hand to hand. I have been told by several old officers and soldiers who bore a part in these attacks, that an enemy who stood for many hours the fire of musketry invariably gave way when an advance was made sword in hand. It is to be regretted that a weapon which the Highlanders could use so well, should, together with the pistol, which is peculiarly serviceable in close woody countries, have been taken from the soldiers, and, after the expense of purchase had been incurred, sent to rust and spoil in a store…It has been said that the broadsword is not a weapon to contend with the bayonet. Certainly, to all appearance, it is not, yet facts do not warrant the superiority of the latter weapon. From the battle of Culloden, when a body of undisciplined Highlanders, shepherds and herdsmen, with their broadswords, cut their way thought some of the best disciplined and most approved regiments in the British army, (drawn up, too, on a field extremely favourable for regular troops ,) down till the time when the swords were taken from the Highlanders, the bayonet was in every instance overcome by the sword.[[471]](#footnote-471)

Someone perhaps should have pointed out the relatively low casualties suffered by the British troops at Culloden, along with the failure of the Jacobites to break through the first line in sufficient strength to make a difference.

## Identities

It becomes necessary to examine the image of Highlanders once they have become soldiers. This is not simply a clash of myth and reality, but of conflicting images of the Highlander, both as soldier and as civilian. Highland soldiers were seen as being obedient and reliable, yet at the same time they had a reputation as rogues. An account of the Munroes of Fowlis expresses surprise at the obedience and reliability of the Highlanders, referring specifically to the 42nd Highlanders under Sir Robert Munro:

It is indeed surprising, that a regiment, composed of Highlanders, who are generally used to so rapacious a life at home, should yet by discipline have been brought to so good a behaviour, as that they should be judged the most trusty guards of property; and that, when the people in Flanders were allowed a protection for their goods, they should choose to have some of this regiment, among others of the British soldiers, appointed to protect them. This may indeed seem hardly credible; yet my informer assures me, that he had it from an officer of their own, of unquestionable credit; who added farther, that it was but seldom he had observed a man among them drunk, and as seldom heard any of them swear. This is very agreeable to the high character which I heard of this regiment from an English gentleman then in Flanders, whose veracity is undoubted, and who cannot, I am sure, be suspected of any prejudice here.[[472]](#footnote-472)

It is significant that this double vision with regard to the Highlanders was acknowledged even at the time. The Highland soldier was both the rogue he had been before, and the loyal soldier he had become after Culloden. What sets the Highland soldier apart, therefore, is that his apparent loyalty and obedience were seen as strange or surprising. It was as if the Highland man was somehow *supposed* to be near-feral bandit, yet had somehow taken on the appearance of a disciplined soldier. This nevertheless needs to be seen in the context of a wider shift in attitudes, in which the ‘scum if the earth’ vision of the British soldier was being gradually replaced with a more positive conception. As was shown in chapter three, the necessity of a professional army was increasingly accepted, and the Highlanders had become so much a part of that army as to almost become symbolic of it.

The question ultimately arises as to how the Highlanders saw themselves, and what their ultimate motive was in going along with these developments. It may seem strange at first glance that they accepted, without apparent question, what can be reinterpreted as a wholesale repackaging of their culture and the imposition of a particular image. It may also seem strange, to modern sensibilities at least, that they were so apparently content to play a military role in British society, to the point where they were largely defined by it. In modern times, where ethnic and cultural self-determination have become such important issues, it seems inconceivable that the Highlanders would simply go along with this whole process. Their apparent acceptance ties into the myths that came to surround Highland soldiers, that they were an entirely loyal and reliable source of soldiers who would neither fail in battle nor betray the British Empire. The most direct answer as to why the Highlanders went along with this is that they simply did not care, or did not think in such terms. The former implies a certain confidence in themselves and their identity, while the latter implies the precise opposite, a failure to understand themselves and their value in proper nationalistic terms.

Attempting to understand how the Highland soldiers saw themselves reveals something of the differences between contemporary and modern thought. Nationalism muddies the waters by allowing for only two statuses for those it regards as nations; enslaved or free. For a nation to count as free it must possess a high culture of its own creation, which it can and must impose on low cultures within its territory. A low culture must therefore break away and develop a high culture of its own, or else be dominated by an alien high culture.[[473]](#footnote-473) But as this chapter has already shown, the Highlanders did not fall neatly into either category. While they had a culture of sorts imposed on them from the outside, it was separate and distinct from the wider British pan-culture. Also, this culture was not forcefully imposed in an organised fashion, but rather was tacked-on by popular culture or absorbed through the experiences of institutions such as the Highland regiments. The mystery of the Highland soldiers therefore lies in how they truly saw themselves, and their place in British society.

The answer to the question lies in the Highlanders’ past as mercenaries, a trade that had proven sufficiently profitable for Highlanders to continue engaging in it for several centuries. After Culloden the Highlanders continued to see themselves as part of a large polity, albeit one named Great Britain rather than Scotland, though they could not have failed to notice that they occupied a relatively low position in its social and political hierarchy. Despite this, the Highlanders must have become aware of their value as military manpower, in only from the sheer number of recruitment drives. A seemingly endless need for replacement or additional soldiers in the decades following Culloden gave the Highlanders a convenient way of improving their status within the British state and Empire. This was seen in part from a Highland or even Scottish perspective, as the Highlanders came to see military service as a means of altering the relationship of the Highlands, and Scotland as a whole, with England. In a double standard not unlike that alluded to so bitterly by Rudyard Kipling in his poem ‘Tommy’, lowland Scots tended to have more respect for the Highlanders in time of war.[[474]](#footnote-474) This attitude extended gradually to the rest of the British Isles, combining with the aforementioned assumptions of British governments regarding clan identity and a gradual rise in the profile of Highlanders in high society circles. Proof of this rising profile could be found in the formation of the Highland Society of London in 1778, and their success in securing the repeal of the 1746 Dress Act a mere four years later. That they could markedly increase their status by virtue of putting on the red coat cannot have gone unnoticed among the Highlanders.

The accounts of Highland enlisted men, where they exist, make little mention of any kind of ‘Highland’ identity. Like other contemporary soldiers, those actually able to write may have lacked the literary wherewithal to express such attitudes, or may simply have felt no need to. While a wider process of romanticising the Highlanders was already underway, it would not see its greatest effects until well into the nineteenth century. Neither Thomas Pococke nor Sergeant Donaldson make any mention of such identities, a fact made less surprising by the fact that the former was from Edinburgh and the other from Glasgow. The only particular hint of a Highland connection comes shortly after Donaldson’s enlistment;

When night came, the room was cleared, and the forms ranged around. An

old Highlander in the room had a pair of bagpipes, which with two fifes

constituted out music, and when we were all assembled, the drinking

commenced, handing it around from one to another. After a round or two,

old Donald’s pipes were called for, and the men commenced dancing with the women of the company. The stamping, hallooing, and snapping of fingers which ensued, intermingled with the droning sound of the bagpipes, was completely deafening.[[475]](#footnote-475)

The most that can be taken from this is that Donaldson and his fellows, regardless of their origins, had no objection to bagpipe music. A greater focus on the Highland cultural connection can be found in the accounts of officers, especially if they were written or published some time after the wars. An example of this tendency is a biography of lieutenant-colonel John Cameron of Fassiefern, written by the Reverend Archibald Clerk and published in 1858. The Highland connection is emphasized, with much being made of the role of family in the beginning of Cameron’s career;

In 1794, however, the Marquis of Huntly resolved to raise a regiment on

his father’s extensive lands, and there being a considerable portion of these

in Lochaber, he addressed himself to the gentlemen there. He called on

Fassiefern, and offered to his son John a Captain’s commission in the regiment thus to be raised – first numbered as the 100th of the line- afterwards so well known as the Gordon Highlanders, or 92nd Regiment. Fassiefern declined the gratifying honour, on the ground of his inability to raise the number of men requisite to entitle his son to such a rank; whereupon the Marquis, with great kindness, offered the rank without any stipulation or condition, saying he would be glad to have John Cameron a Captain in his regiment although he brought not a single recruit.

Fassiefern resolved to exert himself to requite such generosity. He applied to his Chief, Lochiel…who at once sanctioned the undertaking. McNeill of Barra, whom we have already mentioned as brother-in-law to John Cameron,

sent twelve very active, soldierly men from his insular property. With such

aid the full complement was speedily gathered, and Cameron joined the

regiment with a hundred men as brave and true as any who ever fought under

the British banner.[[476]](#footnote-476)

There is a clear difference in style compared to previous accounts. Clerk makes much of the role of George Gordon, Fifth Duke of Gordon and Marquis of Huntly. What motivated his generosity in providing John Cameron with a captaincy, despite being unable to provide enough recruits, is not explained. Nor is it made clear by what means the recruits were eventually acquired, though Clerk enhances his credibility by pointing out the ‘prejudice against enlisting’ in the Highlands, which he claimed to have been stronger in the Highlands than anywhere else in the British isles, and far stronger than at the time of writing several decades later.[[477]](#footnote-477) Clerk puts the apparent enthusiasm of the recruits down to ‘attachment to, and confidence in their leader.’ This can imply the old clan loyalty, but also a pragmatic belief that they would be well-led.

## Attitudes

Though Highland soldiers played a role in all of Britain’s wars, the clearest evidence of their attitude can be found in the American War of Independence. To a modern perspective it would seem obvious for the Highlanders of North America to side with the rebel forces. The great surprise, from that same perspective, is that so many Highlanders in North America remained loyal to the crown, comprising approximately ten per cent of all loyalist troops.[[478]](#footnote-478) In one particular instance, that of Cross Creek in North Carolina, a call-up in February 1776 was answered 1200 local Highlanders, forty per cent of the eligible population.[[479]](#footnote-479) That so many Highlanders would fight for King and Country in North America is less surprising when their reasons for being there, and their situation once there, are considered. Like Scotland as a whole, the Highlanders had adapted remarkably well to being British, and also to being imperial. Marshal Wade described the attitudes he noticed among Highlanders in his 1724 report:

The virtue next to this in esteem amongst them is the loved they bear to that particular branch of which they are a part; and, in a second degree, to the whole Clan or name, by assisting each other (right or wrong) against any other Clan with whom they are at variance; and great barbarities are often committed by one, to revenge the quarrels of others. They have still more extensive adherence to one-another as Highlanders, in opposition to the people who inhabit the Low Countries, whom they hold in the utmost contempt, imagining them inferiour (SIC) to themselves in courage, resolution, and the use of arms; and accuse them of being proud, avaritious (SIC), and breakers of their word. They have also a tradition among them, that the Lowlands were in ancient times the inheritance of their ancestors, and therefore believe they have a right to committ (SIC) depredations, whenever it is in their power to put them in execution.[[480]](#footnote-480)

The image is of a proud people, who would have taken umbrage at the idea of being in some way ‘subjected.’ Wade’s mention of the Highlanders regarding the lowlands as their own territory, understandable in light of their common history, offers an explanation as to why the Highlanders did not resort to separatism. It also explains something of what the Highlanders must have thought about their place in the British polity and what they intended to do about it. One aspect of this is that the Highlanders came to extend their sense of innate superiority to their fellow Britons as a whole. Their belief in their own racial superiority gradually developed into a belief in the moral superiority of the British Empire.[[481]](#footnote-481) This was how the Highlanders squared their pride in themselves with their new situation. If they were superior, then the British state and empire must also be superior, because *they* were a part of it.

The other main aspect derives from the mercenary aspect in Highland identity. It was not enough for the Highlanders to play a role in the maintenance and expansion of a morally superior empire. They also wished to improve their own status, both as Highlanders and as individuals, in material terms. The idea that serving as soldiers could bring significant material reward had caught on by 1767, as expressed rather succinctly in a contemporary poem:

’S cha gho` raiche dhuinn;

O’s ann aige tha ’n sto`ras;

Is co` ir air a’ Chru`n;

Bheir e ’m pa`igheadh

’nar do` rn duinn.

*We will all serve King George;*

*And we are not foolish for it;*

*For he is the one with the provisions;*

*And right to the Crown;*

*He will give payment to us.*[[482]](#footnote-482)

Highlanders may have sought monetary rewards for their services, but to deride them as unscrupulous mercenaries would be unfair. The memoir of Colonel John Cameron mentions an incident in which Sir John Moore, having been wounded in the Battle of Egmont-op-Zee, was carried to safety by men of the 92nd regiment, of which Cameron was in command;

It ought to be added that Moore offered a reward of £20 to the soldiers who

had borne him off the field; but while this offer was publicly made known,

none ever came forward to claim the reward. It may be that those entitled to

it had subsequently fallen on the field, or had been cut off by the pestilential

vapours of the Holland fens, so much more fatal than the arms of the enemy.

If so, it says much for the truthfulness and honour of the survivors, that, where deception was so easy, no one attempted to practice it. We consider it probable, however, that their silence was owing to the utter dread the Highlanders generally entertain of participating in any matter, directly or indirectly, in what they call “blood-money;” that is, money received either for preserving the life of a friend, or destroying the life of an enemy. It is a popular belief that money obtained as the price of an enemy’s blood will infallibly entail on the receiver a curse and woe, both here and hereafter;[[483]](#footnote-483)

This stands at odds with the interest in reward expressed in the poem earlier. It certainly cannot be literally true, or else no Highlander would have enlisted for fear of being cursed by his salary. A possible explanation is that this taboo, if it really existed, only applied to money acquired specifically for those tasks, rather than rewards earned in general service.

Aside from money, and the military rewards of promotion and status, reward could also come in the form of land. An advertisement in the August 10 1775 issue of the *Quebec Gazette,* advertising the raising of the new Royal Highland Emigrant Regiment, offered two hundred acres for every man who enlisted as a private soldier, and five thousand acres for volunteer officers.[[484]](#footnote-484) The post-Culloden wars offered any number of opportunities for willing Highlanders to become soldiers, and to enrich themselves in so doing. Captain Alexander Macleod of Berneray, having made his fortune in India, was able to purchase his native island of Harris from his clan chief in 1779, drawing on the income to fund his political career.[[485]](#footnote-485)

Emigration, with or without the reward of land, was relatively uncommon among Scottish soldiers after discharge. The 1816 register of Scottish military pensioners showed over eighty-five per cent of those discharged returning to Scotland, often after army careers of twenty years, with most of the remainder settling in England.[[486]](#footnote-486) Returning Scottish soldiers tended to reintegrate as successfully into their respective localities as any other British soldiers, a process assisted by the great respect they were accorded. The presence of so many Scottish regiments, many of which were Highland, at Waterloo was a particular source of pride, and served to encourage enlistment. Those particular regiments actually became more Scottish in their character and makeup in the decades after the battle, rising from eighty-one per cent to ninety-seven per cent by 1843.[[487]](#footnote-487) With so many soldiers returning home to become minor local celebrities, it is no surprise that many of the boys and young men who grew up around them and heard their stories concluded that they might do well from the military life themselves.

If one were to look directly at the soldiers themselves for evidence of their motives, they would find interests and concerns not much different from those of other British soldiers. This is reflected in accounts of enlisted men, including that of Sergeant Daniel Nicol of the Gordon Highlanders. His description of combat has much in common with those of his English and even French counterparts;

As soon as the 90th had cleared the broken ground and began to ascend

the height, a heavy body of cavalry advanced to charge them. The 90th

formed in line, but before their line could get formed on the left the cavalry

was close on them. We thought it was all over with the 90th but they stood firm, and when the cavalry were about to strike at them they opened their fire ; it ran from right to left like a rattling peal of thunder. By this well-timed volley they saved themselves most gallantly, and the cavalry being so near, not more than 20 yards distant, it proved most destructive to them. Of those that wheeled past the left of the 90th few returned, and many horses were seen galloping with empty saddles.[[488]](#footnote-488)

This account follows much the same style as those shown in earlier chapters, with combat being covered concisely and with a focus on what the author was immediately aware of. The one apparent difference is that Nicol’s account is considerably less sentimental, though this can be explained by the fact that it remained unpublished.

The prospect of wealth and status made the Highlanders willing to serve, even if it meant running the risk of harsh punishment or death in battle. But this did not mean that they would endure unfair treatment, as evidenced by their involvement in a series of mutinies in the latter half of the eighteenth century. As has been described in chapter one, British soldiers expected fair and considerate treatment in return for their services, and there is no basis on which to argue that the Highlanders’ expectations were any different. After the Duke of York became Commander-in-Chief in 1795, he banned the Prussian-influenced custom of beating soldiers with canes, and as a result no officer dared to strike a soldier. Flogging remained, with some support from ordinary soldiers, but could be carried out only after due process.[[489]](#footnote-489) The army mutinies of the late eighteenth century, including those of Highland regiments, need to be seen in light of this development. Though harsh discipline could sour a soldier’s attitudes, it cannot have been sufficient on its own to provoke mutiny, or Frederick the Great would have found himself without any army at any number of awkward moments. Where particular causes could be identified, the late eighteenth century mutinies were caused by practical complaints or a sense of having been treated unfairly.

The motives of the Black Watch mutiny of 1743 can be ascertained from the report of a correspondent of *Gentleman’s Magazine,* to whom several men of the regiment confided beforehand:

…they were retrenched of their pay; that they had not been regularly enlisted, and had been told that they should not go out of their own country, and were only coming to England to be reviewed; and that they were terrified for fear of going to Jamaica, as some had told them, rather than which they chose immediate death.[[490]](#footnote-490)

This reluctance stands at odds with the historic Highland propensity for overseas adventures, and the fact that so many Highland soldiers in subsequent decades would go overseas in British service without apparent complaint. A particular dread of being sent to Jamaica was perfectly understandable, considering the reputation of the West Indies as a disease-ridden hell-hole. It was a concern that was shared with other Highland mutineers even after Culloden. Those of the 78th or Seaforth’s Highlanders who mutinied in September of 1778 were unshakeably convinced that they had been ‘sold’, that is to say that their regiment had been put at the disposal of the East India Company, and that they would be sent to ‘the Indies’. Because of this, their list of demands included their colours. A regiment that possessed a King’s Colour, or the Union flag, was considered to be in official existence and therefore could not be transferred to the Company.[[491]](#footnote-491) Their other complaints were rather more down-to-earth, that they had not been paid and that their officers had mistreated them.[[492]](#footnote-492) Non-receipt of pay was a common enough complaint, meaning that it can be regarded in this case as a contributing rather than a pivotal factor. That they should complain about mistreatment by officers shows that, like their English counterparts, they had certain expectations of fair treatment.

What sets the two mutinies apart is that they represented both of the approaches to Highland recruitment described previously. The issues of the 43rd can be explained in this context, with the soldiers having a mistaken impression of their intended duties made worse by the apparent dishonesty of their officers. The 78th was recruited in the later fashion, meaning that they were unlikely to have held the same illusions. In this respect it is worth noting that the 78th made no claim of a wish to remain in the Highlands, but specifically objected to being sent to ‘the Indies’, though it is unclear whether they made any distinction between west or east. This apparent shift in attitudes can be put down to mercenary motives, as seen in the example of the Argyll Fencibles mutiny, also in 1778. The area from which that particular regiment was recruited, the regions of Lorne, Cowal, and Kilbride, had already been visited by recruiters from the 74th. From a perspective of military recruitment, those found for the Argyll Fencibles were the dregs, signing on only in return for heavy bounties and promises not to be sent outside of Scotland except in the case of an invasion.[[493]](#footnote-493) Highland men had evidently come to realise what they and their sons were worth. It is possible to overstate the possibility of mutiny among Highland regiments, for of all those raised between 1689 and 1803 only a comparative minority, sixteen out of sixty-four, actually mutinied at any point in their history.[[494]](#footnote-494) This figure, while substantial, does not suggest an inherently mutinous tendency among the Highlanders.

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## Symbolism and Identification

Such incidents aside the story of the Highland regiments, once they got on campaign, was of battlefield success. Success breeds confidence, and there can be little doubt that every battle honour gave the Highlanders a greater pride in themselves and what they represented. Being human, it would be hard for such men not to be flattered by the attention and fame lavished on them by a public that, over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, grew increasingly to admire them. One of the main reasons for the attention, apart from their immediate past, was that Highland regiments were comparatively easy to identify. Identification was possible primarily through their wearing of tartan, along with other distinctive symbols and badges. Any study of the symbols used by Highland regiments must begin with tartan, easily the most recognizable symbol of Highland soldiers, which in the decades following the Napoleonic wars would become a symbol of Scotland as a whole. The term itself is often used as an umbrella term for the various forms of Highland dress, which might or might not have been coloured in that style.

By the eighteenth century, Highland dress existed in three specific and related forms. The kilt, otherwise known as the filibeg or phellie beg, enjoys the highest profile, though it is also the most historically recent. Its immediate predecessor was the plaid cloak, or quelt, essentially a loose cloak belted at the waist. The third variant was the trews, essentially a combination of breeches and stockings made of tartan. Trews were worn primarily by the higher echelons of Highland clans, especially by clans in regular contact with the lowlands, where breeches were commonplace and proved influential. The officers of Highland units would wear trews as a sign of distinction, with plaid as a cloak.[[495]](#footnote-495) Burt found the quelt to be very common among ordinary Highlanders, though his attitude towards it is representative of ‘civilized’ reaction in general:

This dress is called the *quelt*; and, for the most part, they wear the petticoat so very short, that in a windy day, going up a hill, or stooping, the indecency of it is plainly discovered. A Highland gentleman told me one day merrily…that a lady of a noble family had complained to him very seriously, that as she was going over the same place with a *gilly*, who was upon an upper path…she was so terrified with the sight of the abyss that, to avoid it, she was forced to look up towards the bare Highlander all the way long.[[496]](#footnote-496)

As for the kilt itself, its appearance is yet another of the ironies that may be discovered in the study of cultural identity. It was invented by a certain Thomas Rawlinson, an English Quaker and iron master from Lancashire, in 1727. The story goes that Rawlinson leased land from Ian McDonell, Chieftain of the McDonells of Glengarry, near Inverness for the purpose of charcoal production. Rawlinson’s modification of the belted plaid, ostensibly for the convenience of the McDonell clansmen in his employ, would become known as the ‘felie beg’, sometimes written as ‘philibeg’, meaning ‘small kilt.’ This made the skirt a distinct garment, essentially the modern kilt. Rawlinson wore it at first, no doubt seeking to convince the Highlanders of his good intentions, as did Ian McDonell. This concession seems to have overcome any resistance on the part of the clansmen, who in obedience of their Chieftain soon wore the kilts.[[497]](#footnote-497) The story was given in 1768 by a Highland gentleman who knew Rawlinson personally, and confirmed by Sir John Sinclair, then considered one of the greatest living authorities on Scottish customs.[[498]](#footnote-498)

Though the kilt has acquired its modern status as a result of nineteenth-century romanticism, it was hardly unimportant at the time. The evidence strong implies that Highland soldiers regarded their Highland dress, whichever version it happened to be, as an integral part of their identity. In 1804 when the War Office considered abandoning the kilt and plaid in favour of trews, a certain Colonel Cameron of the 79th Highlanders took the suggestion rather badly, expressing a preference for ‘that free congenial circulation of pure wholesome air’ the kilt allowed.[[499]](#footnote-499) The 73rd regiment went so far as to mutiny over the issue, not wishing to be amalgamated with a non-Highland regiment for fear of being required to wear breeches.[[500]](#footnote-500) Despite this apparent embrace of the kilt, some regiments wore trews from their founding without apparent complaint. Fencible regiments did not all favour trews or breeches over kilts, however. The Reay Fencibles are described as wearing Highland dress, specifically as follows:

They had the Breacan-an-fheilidh, or Belted-plaid (kilt and Plaid in one) of Mackay tartan, of the same sett, but of a lighter Shade than that now worn ; twelve yards (six yards double width) for the officers and sergeants, and a smaller quantity for the men. For ordinary duties, unless the belted plaid was specially ordered, the men wore the feilebeag, or little kilt, which was really the lower half of the " breacan-an-fheilidh," with the pleats permanently stitched.[[501]](#footnote-501)

If the importance of regimental identity is borne in mind, then the apparent disparity between the perceived importance of Highland dress and its questionable authenticity is easily filled. The simplest explanation is that individual regiments adopted whatever they were given as their own, regardless of whatever other meaning or relevance it might possess.

Highland regiments made use of other symbols within the norms of the British army. Most badges in the British army were the letters GR, for King George III, and the regiment’s number which also appeared on buttons. However, there were some notable exceptions. The 42nd regiment was one such exception, its badge being a thistle and crown until 1802, when it was replaced by a sphinx, almost certainly in commemoration of the regiment’s part in the Egyptian campaign. The latter distinction they shared with the 79th Cameronian Volunteers, later the Cameron Highlanders, and the 90th Perthshire Volunteers. The 42nd were also known for wearing a red hackle, made from vulture feathers, in their headgear. The origin of that particular custom is disputed, though custom holds that the regiment received the distinction for their conduct at the Battle of Geldermalsen in 1795. The distinction was formalized in 1822 as the regiment’s unique privilege. Studies of regimental symbols in this period can be fraught with confusion, due to a series of amalgamations and reorganizations that took place throughout the nineteenth century.

Despite this, common imagery can be found. The thistle is very common, while the Seaforth Highlanders and the Gordon Highlanders acquired a stag as their badge in 1881. The thistle needs little introduction, being a stock symbol of the Highlands which, much like the Highlanders themselves, was later applied to the whole of Scotland. In heraldry, the stag is taken to symbolize one who will not fight unless provoked. This may be a reference to the motto *Nemo me impune lacessit,* meaning ‘No one provokes me with impunity’, used by the 42nd and many other Scottish regiments. Interestingly, both examples of the stag came with Gaelic mottoes, whether *Cuidich’n Righ* or ‘God save the King’ in the case of the Seaforth Highlanders, or *Bydand*, or ‘firm’, for the Gordon Highlanders. This shift towards Gaelic over Latin in mottoes can be taken as part of the repackaging and acceptance of Highland culture throughout the nineteenth century. In the period in question, however, the symbolism of the Highland regiments fell very much within the norms of the British army. This even applied to the bagpipes, perhaps the most authentic aspect of Highland culture to be incorporated into the regiments. Specifically the Great Highland Bagpipe, the bands of Highland regiments were organized around this particular instrument, along with drums and fifes. This actually represents the only noticeable organizational difference between Highland regiments and the rest of the British army.

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# Chapter 6: National Identities: the Irish

The role of the Highland regiments in British service has been widely discussed and analysed. The role of the Irish, in British service, is also well documented. Ireland, with a growing population and little employment besides subsistence farming, was a major source of recruits. Often spoken of, but not so well documented, is the role of Irish soldiers in the service of European powers other than England or Britain. Just as many Irish found employment in the British army and navy, so did a great many seek the same in European armies. Irish units, both ceremonial and combat, were found in the armies of many European powers, both Catholic and Protestant. The most famous of them by far is the Irish Brigade of the French Royal Army, best known for its service in the wars of Louis XIV. The exploits of Bourbon France’s Irish soldiers would create a legend, and spawn a multitude of copycat formations seeking to emulate their fame. Napoleon would go so far as to create his own version, the Irish Legion, though for very different purposes, under very different circumstances, and with a very different performance. The Irish Brigade proved a hard act to follow, thought it helped cement the idea of the Irishman as a wandering warrior, involving himself in whatever cause took his fancy. This idea would find expression in the many Irish formations serving on both sides of the American Civil War, and Irish volunteer units could be found in British service as late as the First World War.

The purpose of this chapter is primarily to stand in comparison with the previous chapter covering the Scottish Highlanders. A major aspect of this comparison is the issue of how Irish troops in French service were regarded by their French counterparts and employers, and of course how they regarded themselves. The former aspect is difficult to ascertain, as the French seemed to have had relatively little to say about Irish soldiers in their service, meaning that their attitudes must be ascertained from discernible actions and behaviours. As for the Irish themselves, to understand why so many of them entered French service it is necessary to examine their place in the British polity. Much has been made of the heavily-intertwined religious and economic oppression imposed on the Catholic Irish by Protestant landowners, to the point where this alone is generally held up as sufficient explanation. Though compelling, the fact that the Scottish Highlanders and many English also endured considerable poverty means that this can only be one explanation among many. Other ‘push’ factors deserving of consideration are the distrust in which the Catholic Irish were held by the British state after 1691, the period most relevant to this study. Ironically, an unwillingness by the British army to draw to heavily on the Irish as a source of manpower was one of the main factors in the employment of the Highlanders. This factor also affected the deployment and concentration of Irish soldiers, affecting in turn their visibility and therefore their place in popular imagination.

The ‘pull’ factors of Irish overseas recruitment must also be considered. These include the draw of Catholic or religiously tolerant European employers, the possibility of material enrichment in their service, and the equally important factor of ideology. In the golden age of Irish overseas recruitment, young Irishmen went abroad not simply in search of a better life, but also in pursuit of the cause of the House of Stuart, though the latter may have been with a view to the former. After 1798, Irish exiles could be found in the services of Republican and later Imperial France with very different motives, namely the establishment of a separate Irish Republic. The latter cause would not be achieved for another century, and brought Irishmen to France in far smaller numbers than at the beginning of the century. Also, the Irish Legion that fought for Napoleon was far smaller than the Irish Brigade that served Louis XIV, lasted nothing like as long, and failed to acquire the same reputation for military success. Following the theme of military and political pragmatism, this chapter aims to show that the creation of ‘political’ units from minorities, as Bourbon and Imperial France did with the Irish, was carried out on the basis of practical needs and in conducive circumstances.

That the French army would see fit to include units of non-French soldiers was nothing unusual in the eighteenth century. It contained eight German regiments, three Irish regiments, eleven Swiss regiments, and one Liégeois regiment.[[502]](#footnote-502) The vast majority of the ‘foreign’ troops were actually French subjects, only about seven to eight percent coming from outside of France’s borders. Of the German troops, around half came from Alsace and Lorraine, the rest coming from smaller German states in France’s sphere of influence, while a small minority hailed from Switzerland. In the Irish regiments, three quarters of the personnel were foreign-born, many of these being Germans, along with a small number of exiles from the British Isles. The same proportion existed in the light infantry, the foreigners being primarily Italians, concentrated in the Chasseurs *Royaux-Corses* and the *Chasseurs Corses* battalions, Corsicans providing the same proportions. Foreigners made up only three percent of the cavalry, again mostly Germans from Alsace-Lorraine, and generally concentrated in specific regiments, notably the Royal Allemande Cavalry and the Hussar Regiments.[[503]](#footnote-503) These regiments were labelled ‘foreign,’ even if most of the ‘foreigners’ in question were technically French.

During the Revolution, the foreign regiments were treated little differently to other French regiments. The main exception was the Swiss, whose service was based on an exclusive arrangement, formalized in a series of ‘Capitulations,’ between the French crown and the Swiss Confederation. Their lack of any other connection to France naturally made them objects of suspicion, with many no doubt wondering how they would react. Many of the troops taking part in the 1790 mutiny at Nancy, and subsequently massacred by General Bouillé, were Swiss. Despite this, and the massacre of the Swiss Guards on August 10th of 1792, there is little evidence of large-scale mistreatment of the Swiss troops. The eleven Swiss regiments were discharged and sent back to Switzerland late in 1792.[[504]](#footnote-504) While the Revolution saw a brief rejection of ‘foreign’ recruitment, it would not be long before *regiments* *étrangers* would be found in French service once again, a policy driven by a simple need for manpower. The wheel had turned full circle for the Swiss, and it would for the Italians with a multiplicity of legions. It would do the same for the Irish.

## Martial Race

Like the Highlanders, the Irish in the eighteenth century had acquired a reputation for warriorhood, based on a perception of regular Irish involvement in wars, whether in their own country or abroad. This can be superficially ascribed to common ancestry and culture, the Highland Gaels having originally migrated from Ireland. While such a connection would be difficult to prove convincingly in the context of a study such as this, there are more relevant elements to the Hiberno-Scottish relationship. As shown in the previous chapter, Highland Scots regularly became involved in conflicts within Ireland, suggesting a political and social if not a deeper cultural connection. Also, the Irish themselves had a similarly long pedigree of mercenary service.

As well as acquiring their own version of the Highland gallowglasses by adoption and imitation, the Irish evolved their own distinct mercenary formation known as the *Kern*, a term which referred to a group of armed men, but came to refer to individual soldiers also. Unlike the armoured gallowglasses, the kerns tended to be lightly-armed, suggesting a division of labour between the two. Both might also be known as *buannadha* if they were maintained by *buannacht,* that is to say billeted on their chief’s tenants in much the same manner as the Highland buannachan. Irish gallowglasses, inspired by their Highland counterparts, were fighting as mercenaries as early as 1413, though the Irish tended to limit their services to fellow Irish until the latter half of the sixteenth century.[[505]](#footnote-505) Irish troops made their mark in Spanish service, especially after the failed Kinsale Mission of 1601-2, and would continue to do so throughout the seventeenth century. Around twenty thousand Irish were recruited for Spanish service in the 1640’s alone, though even then many found French service more to their liking.[[506]](#footnote-506)

To an eighteenth and nineteenth-century perspective, the cementing of the Irish image as a martial race took place towards the end of the seventeenth century, with the appearance of the Irish brigade. The significance of this particular formation lies in the fact that, as Andrew Mackillop points out in *More Fruitful than the Soil,* there was no distinct Irish presence within the British army before the latter half of the eighteenth century. While plenty of Irishmen found their way into the British army, it was as individuals being sent where they were most needed.[[507]](#footnote-507) There also existed an entire semi-distinct Irish army, known as the ‘Irish Establishment.’ Though it numbered around fifteen thousand in 1770, only four thousand were made available for service overseas. So determined was the Irish Parliament not to send its troops abroad that it actually refused an offer of Hessian mercenaries in 1775.[[508]](#footnote-508) If the Irish managed to establish a distinct presence in British regular service, it was not until 1789 and afterwards. One important consequence of the ascendancy’s fixation with military security was the upsurge in volunteering that resulted from Irish troops being sent to North America.[[509]](#footnote-509) The Irish volunteers would go on to play a significant role in the 1798 rebellion, on both sides.

The Irish brigade’s founding members were five thousand Irish soldiers sent to France in April of 1690 by James II in return for the services of six thousand French infantry, whose support he would need if he was to regain the throne from William and Mary. The Irish contribution consisted of three regiments named after their colonels in the fashion of the time; Mountcashel’s, Dillon’s, and Clare’s.[[510]](#footnote-510) It is unclear how the soldiers of these regiments felt about being transferred to French service, an arrangement in which they are unlikely to have had much say. Nor is it clear that the exchange was intended as permanent, as James II did not at that point display any intention other than to regain his throne. The fact that the Irish soldiers received higher pay than their regular French counterparts, an addition solper day, suggests that they were being treated with a degree of consideration. That the Brigade was sent to Savoy almost immediately after their arrival further implies that they were trusted enough to be sent into combat, while their performance in that area, and later in Piedmont, suggests that whatever their misgivings, their performance in combat was not much affected.[[511]](#footnote-511)

In an age where military careers could last anything from weeks to decades, it begs the question of how the Irish Brigade could have survived for so long as an ‘Irish’ unit. It should be borne in mind that even the Highland regiments were not made up *entirely* of Highland Scots, despite a near-constant supply of recruits. By 1785 the rank-and-file were essentially French, the supply of Irishmen having dried up.[[512]](#footnote-512) Yet the Irish Brigade was able to maintain itself as a fighting unit, while for a time at least claiming to maintain an Irish character and identity. There are only two possible answers to this conundrum. One is that the shrinking Irish regiments were filled with non-Irish of varying provenance, yet continued to profess an Irish identity of one sort or another. The other is that the Irish Brigade somehow found new Irish recruits to fill the vacancies. Both of these answers are true at various points in the Brigade’s history, with the latter approach applying to the events at the turn of the century. Under the Treaty of Limerick, signed on October 3rd 1691, Jacobite troops were given the option of joining James in France, joining William’s army, or facing dispersal. While around one thousand of them chose to serve William, and twice that number chose to return home, around fourteen thousand elected to join their erstwhile King in France. The Treaty, or rather the failure of William’s government in Ireland to honour it, proved a focus of Irish discontent.

Of the Jacobite landed gentry, only those few who had taken the prescribed oath to William, along with their descendants, were protected from the harsh penal laws enacted by the Irish parliament from 1695 onwards. These emigrations would become known to history and folklore as the Flight of the Wild Geese*,* and included the much-famed Patrick Sarsfield, who would go on to serve Louis XIV as a *maréchal de camp,* or lieutenant-general, before dying at the Battle of Neerwinden in 1693.The upshot was that from 1692 to 1698 France was playing host to an entire army of primarily Irish Jacobite exiles, bound by name and oath to James II, but paid for and effectively at the disposal of Louis XIV. This army, representing the single largest concentration of Irish soldiers in French service, consisted of ten regiments of line infantry, three independent companies, two regiments of horse, and two troops of horse guards, for the King and Queen respectively. This made for over twelve thousand infantry and over nine-hundred cavalry, compared to just over six thousand in the three regiments of the Irish Brigade.[[513]](#footnote-513) James’ army would have needed only artillery to be a field army in its own right. The signing of the Treaty of Ryswick, in which Louis recognized William III as the legitimate sovereign, in September of 1679 resulted in the disbanding of James’ army. Between 1698 and 1698 the number of Irish units was reduced to four regiments of infantry, not counting the Irish Brigade, and one of cavalry.[[514]](#footnote-514)

The inevitable result of these reductions would have been a substantial number of unemployed Irish soldiers. The fate of most of these unfortunates was destitution, though some found employment in other European armies. Many Irish would serve the Austrian Empire, where they acquired a reputation for competence and courage. Emperor Francis I of Austria, before his death in 1765, described the reputation Irish soldiers had gained for themselves:

The more Irish officers in the Austrian service the better; our troops will always be disciplined; an Irish coward is an uncommon character; and what the natives of Ireland even dislike from principle, they generally perform through a desire of glory.[[515]](#footnote-515)

The disbanding of James II’s army also provides a convenient explanation for the maintenance of an Irish character in the Irish Brigade, as soldiers from the disbanded units were folded into the Brigade to bring it up to full strength. On top of this the army-in-exile was actually revived in 1701, using a thirteen-year-old James III as its figurehead, with a strength equivalent to five regiments.[[516]](#footnote-516) Further recruits were acquired through desertion in the case of serving soldiers and emigration in the case of civilians. It became common practice for would-be emigrants to join the British army as Protestants, wait until they were on the continent, then desert at the first opportunity. Doctor Boulter, the Protestant Lord Primate for Ireland, described this tendency in a letter to the Duke of Newcastle in 1730:

All recruits, raised here for France or Spain, are generally considered as persons, that may, some time or other, pay a visit to this country, as enemies. That all who are listed here, in those services, hope and wish to do so, there is no doubt.

Obviously this method would have been most effective when Britain was actually involved in European conflicts. As for civilian emigration, there was little the British authorities could do to prevent Catholic landowners, possessed of their own funds and connections, from leaving. Ordinary Irish could also travel to France via what amounted to smuggling. French ships smuggling contraband to Ireland would carry recruiting officers and Irish-speaking friars, and return carrying recruits. According to French War Office estimates, over four hundred and fifty thousand would-be soldiers travelled to France between October of 1691 and May of 1745, the Treaty of Limerick and the Battle of Fontenoy respectively, for an average of over eight thousand per year.[[517]](#footnote-517)

## Recruitment

If a single factor can be identified as distinguishing the experience of Irish soldiers in French service, it must be the manner in which they were recruited. As has been shown, the Irish were by no means unique in terms of being foreigners in French service. Scots, too, could be found in the French army, in the Royal Ecossais Regiment, but they were few in number compared to the Irish and existed as a distinct formation for less than twenty years. The Irish Brigade, in sharp contrast, formally existed for a hundred years and began with a combat strength of three regiments, or between five and six thousand men, a strength it would maintain for much of its life. Irish recruitment for French service began to drop off over the latter half of the eighteenth century, mostly because the main impetus for emigration, that of religious intolerance, was being gradually undermined over that period. This change took place both in a social and a military context, though the military context is the more directly relevant.

The accession of George III in 1760 led to a series of initiatives intended to improve the conditions of the Irish and of Catholics in general, and at the same time tap the manpower resource that was Ireland’s Catholic population. One of these was a proposal in 1762 to raise six regiments of Catholic troops, with Catholic officers, for service in Portugal. This was in many respects an eminently sensible suggestion, not only for the stated intent of providing suitable employment for the younger sons of Catholic nobles, but also because Catholic troops would be generally more acceptable in a Catholic country. The Irish parliament, in a manner that will become familiar in any study of Irish politics in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, shot down the proposal citing security concerns.[[518]](#footnote-518)

Maintaining order was a constant issue for the Protestant ‘ascendancy’, as the Irish ruling elite were sometimes known. So much so that the Irish Parliament was singularly unwilling to contribute troops from its own largely protestant establishment and could not be induced to recruit Catholics. Despite this, the British army began to recruit Irish Catholics on its own initiative, the first levy taking place in Limerick in 1757 in defiance of anti-Catholic laws. In 1774 the oath of allegiance was modified to remove references to religion, a change that essentially formalized an existing state of affairs.[[519]](#footnote-519) There would remain a substantial Irish presence in the British army until the Potato Famine of 1845 to 1852, the death toll and resulting mass emigration substantially reducing the available manpower pool. As for the French army, the Irish presence was gradually reduced over this period, from six regiments of infantry and one of cavalry in 1744 to three regiments of infantry in 1775, showing a clear decline in the number of available Irishmen. By 1785, while many officers were Irish exiles or their close descendants, the enlisted men were mostly French.[[520]](#footnote-520) The Brigade was formally dissolved as part of a decree of the National Assembly dated July 21 1791, in which all regiments designated as ‘foreign’ in terms of name, uniform, and pay were to be re-designated as French.[[521]](#footnote-521)

The Revolution marked the end of the Irish Brigade as a distinct unit, but it did not mark the end of Irish service to France. Much like the Swiss mercenaries sent home by the National Assembly, the Irish were destined to make a swift comeback, though for different reasons. Just as the former Irish Brigade represented the military priorities and issues of its day, so the Irish Legion would be created to serve a particular military role. Whereas the Irish Brigade was simply a combat unit like any other, the Irish Legion was designed from the bottom up as a cadre in the original French meaning of the term. Made up of a small number of well-trained and ideologically committed officers, the Legion’s task would be to organize and train Irish volunteers in the event of a French landing, operating on the old saying that there are no bad soldiers, only bad officers. This was no doubt intended as a remedy to the weaknesses of the United Irishmen movement, which, although capable of bringing out Irishmen in considerable numbers, had proven itself incapable of organizing, training, or equipping them well enough to fight British troops.[[522]](#footnote-522)

Napoleon was evidently determined that if there was to be a second attempt to land troops in Ireland, things were going to be done properly and efficiently. But the invasion never materialized, which must have begged the question of what was to be done with the Legion, being as it was a unit made up almost entirely of officers. If the Legion was to function as a combat unit while maintaining its Irish character, then Irish exiles would have to be found in sufficient numbers. If sufficient numbers could not be found, then the Legion would have to be either disbanded or made up of non-Irish troops. This would be the Irish Legion’s fate, Napoleon having no desire to disband it after having spent time and resources supporting and training it. The Irish Legion can be regarded as a case study in the difficulties and contradictions inherent in creating a ‘political’ unit, with a recruitment base upon which its parent institution cannot freely draw, and serving a specific political purpose which might or might not remain consistently politically relevant.

It was Thomas Addis Emmett, legal advisor to the United Irishmen, who suggested the creation of an Irish Legion, in the summer of 1803, as a means of gainfully employing Irish exiles in France. The actual decree for the founding of the Legion was dated August 31st, though the news was kept secret while the particulars were hammered out. It was decided that there should be a single battalion, consisting of Irishmen or the sons of Irishmen, and that the officers were to be drawn primarily from the exiled United Irishmen.[[523]](#footnote-523) Emmet was of the opinion that Arthur O’Connor, his rival, was involved in this process and manipulating it for his own benefit.[[524]](#footnote-524) This was the first clash between Emmet and O’Connor with regard to the Irish Legion, but it would not be the last.

The enmity between those two men, and their followers, would trouble the Legion for much of its life, effectively defining the development process. Their inability to cooperate would prove most frustrating for the War Ministry and the French government as a whole, who found they had no one they could reliably deal with. The appointment of O’Connor as a General of Division on 24 February 1804 may have been an attempt to force an end to the dispute. Emmet’s emigration to the United States in October of that year deprived his faction of leadership, but did not bring about its acquiescence. On the contrary, it would culminate in the death of one of the Legion’s officers in a duel. That the Legion was able to develop in spite of this problem indicates that, up to a point, the project was taken seriously by the War Ministry.

A useful account of the Legion’s life can be found in the memoirs of Miles Byrne, a leader in the Irish rebellion who joined the Legion after escaping to France. An Irish Catholic who married a Scottish Presbyterian, a devoted patriot who spent much of his life in the French army, Byrne was a complex character in a complex age. Thomas Bartlett regards Byrne’s memoirs as particularly valuable in understanding the 1798 Irish rebellion, since unlike others who wrote on the subject he had taken an active part in it.[[525]](#footnote-525) They also provide useful insights into the life and experiences of the Irish Legion. Byrne describes his motivations early on, including a particularly sad affair in which he joined the yeomanry in order to assist his mother in renewing the lease to the family home:

Seeing several of my best friends and school-fellows…all sending their names to captain Knox Grogan, I readily consented to leave mine, but added, my mother would not consent until she got the lease of the land called the Fox cover renewed. She could never forget what she suffered, a few years previous, when leaving Ballylusk, the townland and place where I was born, and which had been in the family for centuries: she could not get the lease of that place renewed, as the landlord J. Doyle wished to come and live on it himself. Catholics could only get then leases of 31 years. M. Grogan at once complied with my mother's wishes… After M. Grogan had signed the leases in the presence of my uncle Morning, and his land agent Jackson, he requested these gentlemen to accompany my mother to Monaseed, a distance of six miles from Castletown, in order for my father to sign them in their presence. My mother was quite happy at having this business settled, and expected it would cheer my poor father's spirits. She was cruelly disappointed. For, when she told him I was enrolled in the corps of yeomanry with all my friends and comrades, he declared, he would rather see the leases burned and me dead, than ever see me put on a red coat. I was then very young, and the pang I felt left me motionless for some time.[[526]](#footnote-526)

Byrne’s apparent willingness to join the yeomanry is not so strange in light of Marianne Elliott’s conclusions. In *Partners in Revolution* she shows how the Irish volunteer movement was being particularly significant in the spread of reformist ideology.[[527]](#footnote-527) Though the movement declined in importance after the American War of Independence, and was effectively killed off by the Gunpowder and Convention acts of 1793, it would cast a long shadow.

When the Legion’s existence was revealed on December 7th, Adjutant Commander Bernard Macsheehy was named as its commander by Napoleon, then First Consul. He was only 29 years old when he received the appointment, but was a veteran of Napoleon’s Egyptian campaign. His second-in-command was Chef de bataillon James Bartholomew Blackwell, who had taken part in the French expeditions to Ireland in 1796 and 1798. These choices are indicative of the thinking behind the creation of the legion. Both men were students of the Irish College in Paris, joining the Revolutionary army early on. That they achieved officer rank in such an environment would imply a degree of competence, and their suitably Irish backgrounds made them eligible for a specifically ‘Irish’ unit. [[528]](#footnote-528) The men whom they would command were to say the least a mixed bag, in terms of their backgrounds, their situations, and their motivations. Those of them who were United Irishmen or who were affiliated to them, were almost invariably living in poverty, having been forced to leave land and property behind in their escape.

In a letter to the Minister of War, General Berthier, dated July 24th, Macsheehy divided his recruits into four categories. The first, and most valued, were those of obvious ability, or else of wealth or influence, who had taken part in the Irish risings. Macsheehy considered them valuable for their ability to attract support in Ireland, and they would also be politically reliable. Second were Irishmen born in France, especially former members of the Irish Brigade, whose military experience would prove useful for training and organization. Third were those who had come to France out of curiosity, or who had been arrested after the collapse of the Treaty of Amiens. Fourth, and least valued, were those who had left the British Isles following some misdemeanour.[[529]](#footnote-529) It was the fourth category that would give the Legion the most trouble throughout its life, even though they were not recruited as officers for obvious reasons.

The Legion shifted rapidly away from its original role after the Battle of Trafalgar. In December of 1806 the Legion was sent to Mainz in Germany to receive what amounted to its rank-and-file, namely over thousand Polish and Irish volunteers. Miles Byrne relates the news as being a cause of some excitement, that the Legionnaires were ‘enchanted at the prospect of seeing real military service.’[[530]](#footnote-530) He goes on to describe the new recruits at Mainz:

On arriving at Mayence, the legion received orders to halt there, where 1500 Poles who had been in the prussian (SIC) service volunteered to inter (SIC) the french (SIC) service after the battle of Iena. They were incorporated into The irish legion at Mayence, as were a great number of irish. These irish had been engaged in the rebellion, and whilst imprisoned in Ireland were sold by the English government in 1798 and 1799 to the king of Prussia, to work in his mines; his agent going through the prisons in Ireland and choosing the best and ablest young men. Previous to the hostilities with France, the king of Prussia obliged these brave and unfortunate men to enter his army. – It may easily be imaged they rejoiced to join the irish soldiery in the service of France; holding out their hope, as it then did, that they would one day see their country liberated.[[531]](#footnote-531)

The figure given by Byrne stands at odds with that given in a report to the Minister of War, which put the Legion’s strength at one thousand two hundred.[[532]](#footnote-532) A later report of December 1807 put the Legion’s strength at one thousand five hundred and fifty one officers and men, which matches Byrne’s figure if he meant it to mean both the Poles and the Irish.[[533]](#footnote-533) If the figure given in the 1806 report meant the Poles only, then this made for around two hundred additional Irish.

As with the Irish brigade before it, the question arises as to whether or not the Legion can be said to have been ‘Irish’. The War Office gave its own answer in a decree of April 13th 1809, in which the Legion was renamed the 3rd Foreign Regiment. The new Regiment retained the name ‘Irish’, being able to call itself the ‘Irish Regiment’, only by the intervention of Minister of War Henri-Jacques Clark, a second-generation Irish immigrant. This matter was not helped by the Regiment’s reliance on prisoners of war for additional manpower, of whom the Irish were primarily sailors. As such they had no knowledge or understanding of infantry drill and, to make matters worse, no experience of marching.[[534]](#footnote-534) Needless to say, desertion rates grew higher as more and more prisoners were recruited, such men being motivated by self-interest rather than any higher ideal or sense of comradeship. Prisoner-of-war camps have never been pleasant places in any period in history, but in the Napoleonic wars it was still comparatively unusual for prisoners to enter the service of their captors and actually be of use. In *Mercenaries of the Napoleonic Wars,* Robert Gould finds that ‘mercenary’ units in general showed a marked tendency towards desertion, with POW or deserter-derived units being the worst offenders. The Chasseurs Britanniques held the record for courts martial for desertion, reaching a high of two hundred and twenty four in 1813, of which one hundred and fifty took place in August alone. Its membership by that point included Poles, Germans, Swiss, Austrians, Italians, and Dutch.[[535]](#footnote-535) By way of comparison, by November of 1812, 50% of the Irish regiment’s officers were Irish while 32% were French and the remainder mostly German. Of the NCOs and soldiers, only eighty-six out of one thousand seven hundred and eighteen were Irish, while just over half spoke German.[[536]](#footnote-536)

On the basis of the origins of its members, the Irish Legion cannot meaningfully be called ‘Irish’. And yet as this chapter will show, the application and acceptance of group identities are not such clear-cut processes as this would imply. A useful comparison may be drawn with formations in a similar situation on the British side, most notably the King’s German Legion. This formation came into existence at around the same time as the Irish Legion, with the disbandment of the Hanoverian army under the terms of the Convention of Lauenberg. At first, the units raised by Johann Freidrich von der Decken and Colin Halkett turned out much like the Irish Legion, with many Hanoverian officers turning up but few if any enlisted men. Robert Gould puts the KGL’s subsequent success in recruiting down to a Royal Proclamation of 10th August 1803, which gave assurances regarding pay and pensions. That so many thousands subsequently turned up suggests that interested Hanoverian soldiers had been kept away primarily by concerns for their financial wellbeing. Their personal safety cannot have been that much of an issue considering the risks involved, with the French threatening summary execution to anyone caught recruiting. Gould provides the example of Sergeant Ahrens, who was sentenced to fifteen years’ service as a galley slave, with the added clause of being permanently chained to the oars, after being caught recruiting for the KGL.[[537]](#footnote-537) Despite this, the KGL reached a strength of around eight thousand by April of 1806, a success facilitated by the British presence in Hanover from January to February. The Prussians, who occupied Hanover from February onwards, also attempted to stop the recruitment, but do not appear to have had much more success.[[538]](#footnote-538)

The KGL was accompanied in British service by a plethora of French *émigré* units, most of which did not last more than one or two years before disbandment or amalgamation. The Regiment d’Infanterie Loyal-Emigrant is a rare example, existing from 1793 to 1802, while the Chasseurs Britanniques lasted from 1801 to 1814 despite its desertion problems. The Loyal-Emigrants are a useful example of the various means by which these units tried to maintain their strength. Robert Grouvel relates that recruiting was at first complicated by the unwillingness of French emigrants to come forward. Some had issues with fighting as part of the British army, but the greatest fear of emigrant troops was that they would not be treated as Prisoners of War if captured. Despite these fears the regiment reached a height of over one thousand two hundred officers and men in two battalions by March 1794, having effectively doubled from a strength of around six hundred since the previous June. Of this number, around seven hundred were lost at the defence of Nijmegen in November, followed by further losses before their evacuation in Britain in May of 1795. After this, Grouvel concludes that it spent some time as part of the garrison on the Isle of Wight, receiving two hundred more recruits while there.

During the Quiberon campaign of 1795, Breton *chouan* recruits brought the strength up to just under three hundred, though around two thirds would be lost by the end of the campaign in July. By November the numbers had risen to just over three hundred once again, the single largest influx coming from the leftovers of five other émigré regiments in October. According to Grouvel’s figures, the largest contingent was eighty-three men from the Régiment de Rohan, while the smallest was ten men from the Régiment du Périgord. The Loyal-Emigrants received a major boost in 1798, rising to four hundred and fifty with an influx of French prisoners after the failed Fishguard expedition, along with yet more Chouans. The regiment’s numbers actually continued to rise over the next two years, reaching just under seven hundred in 1800.[[539]](#footnote-539) Despite this apparent success, and service both in Spain and Portugal, the regiment was disbanded in 1802 under the Treaty of Amiens. This event saw the end of many other regiments, including the York Hussars, the Mortemart regiment, and the Chasseurs à Cheval de Hompesch, the latter one of a plethora of Hompesch units and the only one to last for any significant period. The Chasseurs Britanniques were unusual in that they were created in the year before Amiens and remained in existence long after it.

The success of the KGL in recruiting and maintaining a substantial force from a specific nationality over an extended period stands in sharp contrast to the tribulations of the Irish Legion. The most obvious explanation is British naval dominance, which would complicate any attempt to remove large numbers of Irishmen. But even then the example of the Irish brigade, and the near-constant smuggling going on in the British Isles at that time, suggests that it should have been possible for a few hundred, or a few thousand, interested Irishmen to make their way covertly to France. It is particularly ironic, both from a French and a British perspective, that the French émigré movement had more luck with the Irish than the republic or the empire. Despite resistance from the Irish government, a proposal to expand the émigré Irish Brigade by recruiting in Ireland was passed by Pitt in 1794, with six colonels being sent to Ireland in January of 1796. The results were less than impressive, with only around one thousand being recruited in total, but this was still more than the Irish Legion ever possessed. Adding to the irony, elements of the brigade based in Ireland actually helped put down the 1797 uprising.[[540]](#footnote-540)

It may be argued that the Irish population was too cowed or disillusioned after two unsuccessful rebellions, or else the proportion of the population likely to be interested was already either dead or in exile. Thomas Bartlett puts contemporary estimates of the death toll of the 1798 rebellion at between twenty and twenty-five thousand, but regards ten thousand as being a more likely figure. Even this reduced estimate can imply a substantial denuding of interested manpower, but not enough to explain the disparity.[[541]](#footnote-541) Marianne Elliott puts the problem down to disconnection between the United Irishmen leadership and ordinary Irish. This was motivated to a great extent by mutual distrust, with the urban Protestant ‘middling sorts’ of the leadership being suspicious of the Catholic peasantry and artisans they had led into battle, and the latter regarding the former as unreliable and untrustworthy. In the eyes of many Irish, propertied urban Protestants had either sided with the authorities or fled abroad when things looked bad, leaving less fortunate Catholics to suffer the consequences.[[542]](#footnote-542) In the face of such distrust, it would have been difficult for the exiled leadership to persuade ordinary Irishmen to join them in France, even if they had wanted to.

## Experiences

A casual observer could be forgiven for regarding Irish soldiers in the eighteenth century as little more than mercenaries. Irish soldiers, whether in French or in British service, were fighting for a country other than their own, a situation that allows for no other description. The Irish themselves might not have taken offence at the label, which at the time did not carry the same negative connotation as it does today. Also, the line between a mercenary and a ‘citizen-soldier’ was not as clear-cut in the eighteenth century. The professional armies maintained by eighteenth century European states had two main roots, in the personal guard units of monarchs and in the contingents of mercenaries they had been accustomed to hiring. As late as the eighteenth century it was not in practice a crime for a subject of one state to serve in the army of another, specific legislation notwithstanding. During the Thirty Years War, Irish aristocrats recruited soldiers for French service with the blessing of the Irish government in Dublin.[[543]](#footnote-543)

All the same, the idea of treason held great psychological power. So powerful indeed, that the American Revolutionaries specifically called their war a ‘Revolution’ to avoid the idea that it was a rebellion, countering the accusation of treason with the ideology that they were punishing Britain for its sins.[[544]](#footnote-544) As the Treaty of Limerick allowed James II’s Irish soldiers to accompany him to Ireland, it could be interpreted as allowing any Irishman who so desired to do likewise. For those Irish emigrants who sought only a military career, this provided a convenient counter to any accusation of illegality or treason. For those with ideological motivations, the government in London was not their rightful government in any case. But even if the Irish emigrants were committing treason by fighting for France, there is evidence that even British observers did not regard them as having done so, at least in terms of their attitudes and behaviour.

The complicated issue of loyalty is reflected in the experience of two Irish aristocrats. Charles Jennings, Baron Kilmaine, and Peter Jennings, both entered French service as young men. Peter was on the face of it the more conventional of the two, entering the Irish Brigade in 1788. Charles took a different path, joining the 5th Dragoon Regiment in 1775. Their paths also diverged with the coming of the French Revolution. Peter was one of those who defected in 1791, while Charles was a dedicated and famous Revolutionary. Peter served in the reconstituted Irish Brigade until its disbandment in 1798. Charles fought for France at both Valmy and Jemappes as a Chef d’Escadron, rising to command the Armée du Nord from July to August of 1793, replacing Custine. It is at these points that both Irishmen find themselves faced with the need for ideological compromise. Peter chose to join the 28th Regiment, a British unit, out of an apparent desire to remain active in the war effort. Charles found himself in trouble with the National Convention for retreating in the face of the enemy, his situation made all the worse by the suspicion his foreign and aristocratic background attracted. His reward was several months in prison, though after his release he went on to serve in Italy alongside Napoleon, and in 1798 was put in charge of the newly-formed Armée d’Angleterre.

Both these characters are emblematic of the complex and sometimes contradictory loyalties between which Irish soldiers might have to choose. Both were aristocrats, from two branches of the same family, both were Catholic, and both served in the French army before the Revolution. Yet their choices would take them down very different paths. Peter defected to Britain out of loyalty to the House of Bourbon, and seems to have squared his entering the British army in that context. He identified with the Catholic, aristocratic world of which he was a part, and fought for Britain in order to defend it from the French Revolution. But years of service in the British army caused him to start identifying with Britain and its imperial project. An example of his new attitude was his reaction to the failure of the South American expedition, which he bemoaned both for the loss of territory and the disgrace upon the British army. By contrast Charles identified himself with the Revolution, seeking both to serve France and to bring about the liberation of Ireland. But if anything he was an even more glaring anomaly than Peter; a Catholic Irish aristocrat in the service of a secular French Revolution. According to Catriona Kennedy even Wolfe Tone, whom he worked alongside as head of the Armée d’Angleterre, was uncertain of his true loyalty.[[545]](#footnote-545)

As for the Irish Legion, the experiences of the majority of its Irish membership were defined by the Irish Rebellion of 1798, and the politics that surrounded it. This conflict marked not only what today might be called ‘radicalization’ on their part, but arguably dictated the direction of Irish military involvement in Napoleonic France. Marianne Elliott has written extensively on the Irish rebellions and the United Irishmen movement. One of her first arguments in *Partners in Revolution* is to dismiss the idea that the rebellions were motivated by sectarian conflict of the sort recognizable in the twentieth century. What set the United Irishmen apart from similar groups both before and later was that it was both urban and non-sectarian. Elliott claims that the United Irishmen wanted French military help not just to defeat British forces, but out of fear of the Catholic peasantry.[[546]](#footnote-546)

Fear of Catholics and Catholicism was deep-rooted in Irish protestant identity, manifesting primarily as a determination to keep the Catholics under control, but also as resentment towards domination by a government in London that neither understood nor sympathised with such fears. For the Catholic peasants themselves, the main cause of resentment was not so much religion as land access and ownership. Elliott draws attention to the gradual collapse of the ‘Brehon’ system, under which clans held all land in common and elected their chiefs, and its replacement with more overtly feudal and capitalist patterns of landholding. The villains of this narrative were the Irish clan chiefs, who took advantage of the English presence in Ireland to take direct ownership of as much land as possible.[[547]](#footnote-547) An unfortunate irony identified by Elliott is that the non-sectarian United Irishmen sought to ally themselves with the primarily Catholic ‘Defenders’ movement, with which rural Catholics were closely if not entirely accurately identified. This connection, according to Elliott, was what provoked an outbreak of Protestant repression which in turn radicalised the United Irishmen and sparked off the events of 1798.

If repression did not radicalise the United Irishmen, the events of 1798 certainly did. One obvious source of this hardening of attitudes was the violence of the conflict, which is well-documented. Miles Byrne makes numerous mentions of the atrocities committed on both sides, though he considered the loyalists to have done far worse than the United Irishmen. He makes his feelings plain in an account of the deeds of the Irish loyalist Hunter Gowan;

The infamous Hunter Gowan now sighed for an opportunity to vent his

ferocious propensity of murdering his catholic neighbours in cold blood.

When the yeomanry corps were first formed, he was not considered sufficiently respectable to be charged with the command of one; but in consequence of the proclamation of martial law, he soon obtained a commission of the peace and was created a captain and was commissioned to raise a cavalry corps…

This corps went by the name of the black mob; their first campaign was, to arrest all the Catholic blacksmiths and to burn their houses. Poor William Butter, James Haydon, and Dalton, smiths whom we employed to shoe our horses And do other work, for many years before, were condemned to be transported…But the monster Hunter Gowan, thinking this kind of punishment too slight, wished to give his young men an opportunity to prove they were staunch blood-hounds.[[548]](#footnote-548)

It is worth noting that there was not one single uprising, but rather a series of disjointed local uprisings originally intended to be components of a wider plan. The intended signal for the full-scale rising had been the landing of French troops and supplies, which almost took place at Bantry Bay in December of 1796. Many within the United Irishmen, most famously Wolfe Tone, blamed the failure of the uprising on the failure of the landing and on French disinterest in general. The French, by contrast, blamed the failure on the United Irishmen’s leaders, whom they regarded as hopeless idealists.[[549]](#footnote-549) While Byrne had many good things to say about the rebel leadership, he found fault with their apparent lack of planning and leadership qualities:

…and it is grievous to think that our generals did not seem to have any

preconcerted plan of action in the event of such disasters as we were now experiencing. This was the critical moment, when leaders should have shewn (SIC)

that energy of character which would inspire their followers with enthusiasm

and confidence. They should have rallied and harangued their men; swear anew never to separate from them until the great end for which they took up arms was accomplished;[[550]](#footnote-550)

That so many lower-ranking rebels would echo this criticism ties into the wider disconnect between the movement’s leadership and its rank and file, a development that would have consequences for the Irish Legion.

## Identities

The self-image and motives of Irish soldiers in French service changed in accordance with the circumstances of their employment. In the case of the Irish Brigade, two particular motives can be identified. One is the hope of a Stuart restoration, which itself ties in with a number of other issues including religious toleration. The other, an ambition shared with the Highlanders, was the pursuit of a military career, whether on its own merits or to escape poverty. It is easy to be cynical about dynastic loyalty from a modern perspective, but the differing attitudes of the period must be borne in mind, along with the more personal motives that are generally involved. Despite the unfortunate and rather violent history of Anglo-Irish relations, the Stuart dynasty was able to attract loyalty from the Irish to a degree that seems remarkable today. This loyalty was initially dynastic, though given more substance by his relative tolerance of Catholicism. That the Irish should have followed James II to France in the numbers described earlier shows that such loyalties were far from marginal, even if the Irish Jacobites were as disappointed in James as his nickname of *Séamus a Chaca* implies. Even the redoubtable Patrick Sarsfield is reputed to have quipped to some English officers during the negotiations at Limerick, ‘As low as we now are, change but kings with us, and we will fight it over again with you.’[[551]](#footnote-551)

If the Irish were particularly drawn to military careers as a means of subsistence or advancement, then this would tie them in to the Highland Scots, with whom they had so much in common culturally and socially. On this basis, it follows that the Irish should have cared as apparently little as the Highlanders for modern notions of national independence. The differences between the Irish and the Highlanders, with regard to their political situations, tend to confuse the issue. For one, whereas the Irish Gaels remained relatively homogenous in terms of culture, the Highland Gaels were part of a highly heterogeneous Scotland. Also, and more obvious to modern eyes, most of Ireland became independent from Britain, whereas the Highlands did not. Yet Irish Catholics were as likely to see themselves as part of a wider British polity as to reject it. The first city in the British Isles to erect a Nelson memorial was Dublin in 1809. The Irish element which this represented was not merely Anglo-Irish Protestantism, but an Irish Catholic elite. J E Cookson notes the willingness of the latter to identify with the British imperial project, much as the Scots did. A cynic might argue, not unreasonably, that this was because both had done most of the work. Cookson, for his own part, argues that while Irish Catholicism may have been generally loyal, it wanted full religious emancipation and its fair share of the profits.[[552]](#footnote-552) In this respect, the Catholic Irish were little different from the Highlanders. While the 1798 uprising means that anti-British sentiment cannot be ruled out, the reality of eighteenth and early nineteenth century Ireland was of a society divided between those who saw potential benefit in being part of Britain and those for whom the disadvantages outweighed the benefits.

The men of the Irish Legion, as is becoming apparent, had at least some motives in common with those of the Irish Brigade. The cause of the United Irishmen , at least at the leadership level, was the establishment of a secular Irish republic, breaking with past religious conflicts in favour of national unity. In that respect, the original Irish Legionnaires were a new kind of ‘political’ soldier, committed to an ideology that did not focus on a specific individual, though the fact that there were so few of them suggests that they were a small minority among military emigrants. The same could be said on the other side. The fact that so many Irish Catholics were willing to serve in the British army, and that Irish service in European armies declined over the same period, shows that the bulk of military emigrants were simply a natural flow of labour following the path of least resistance.[[553]](#footnote-553) Similarly, while the various Poles, Germans, and others who made up the Legion’s numbers did not raise any particular objection to the Legion being ‘Irish’ in its name and appearance, this does not translate into any particular interest in Irish independence. Despite this, the Irish minority within the Legion retained their ideological commitment, as described by Miles Byrne’s widow:

He felt a devotedness of attachment to Ireland, which perhaps only an exile can comprehend. He saw that nature had done much for Ireland and her people, and that with wise and energetic and benevolent exertions on the part of the influential classes, the peasantry might be comfortable and happy, and the land of his birth and his affections “great, glorious, and free.”

On reading these Memoirs, it is impossible not to feel indignant at the injustice and persecution Ireland has suffered from England, and by which such a man as Miles Byrne was forced to throw himself into all the miseries of civil war. That was not raised to support the claims of a pretender to the throne, or to aid one sect or faction against another, but it was the honest effort of virtuous, patriotic, high-minded men, having a deep stake in the country, to better its condition, and to throw off an oppressive government which has ever regarded Irishmen as aliens.[[554]](#footnote-554)

It becomes apparent from this state of affairs that, regardless of personal interests, Irish soldiers in French service were both willing to fight alongside non-Irish, even within the same units, and to serve another’s interests, especially if said interests could be interpreted as coinciding with their own. Even Patrick Sarsfield, who as legend has it died regretting that he could not die for his country, was ultimately willing to serve the crown of France as a soldier, and in wars that bore little apparent relevance to Irish independence. The same can be said of Irish soldiers in British service, who as often as not found themselves fighting alongside English or Scottish soldiers in the same units. The memoirs of Captain Peter Drake, an Irish mercenary of some repute, add useful detail to this story. Drake describes the dismay of many Irish recruits upon discovering that they were earmarked for the Irish Brigade. They disliked serving under penniless Jacobite officers, who were wont to cheat them of their salaries, preferring French aristocrats who possessed their own funds.[[555]](#footnote-555)

## Attitudes

If a single event made the Irish Brigade politically relevant in Britain, it was their involvement in the Battle of Fontenoy. Fought on May 11th 1745, Fontenoy was a battle every bit as significant as Blenheim and every bit as neglected, though this should not overshadow its importance at the time. The commander on the allied side was William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland, best remembered for his part in the Battle of Culloden. His British contingent included battalions from several Scottish regiments, including the 43rd Highlanders, whose performance would wipe away the stain of mutiny and mark the start of a glittering career. The Irish Brigade is best remembered for its part in the final French counter-attack, in which it captured many guns and forced the Coldstream Guards to withdraw. Their involvement brought the Irish Brigade to wider attention in Britain, and caused a great deal of soul-searching. The Irish Protestant politician and orator Henry Grattan, arguing for Catholic emancipation many decades later, summed up the feelings of many British moderates in this matter:

We met our own laws at Fontenoy. The victorious troops of England

were stopped, in their career of triumph, by the Irish Brigade, which

the folly of the Penal Laws had shut out from the ranks of the British

army.[[556]](#footnote-556)

This is an example of the complexity of British attitudes, towards both Catholicism and the Irish. George II is said to have remarked, ‘cursed be the laws, which deprive me of such subjects!’ upon hearing of the Irish brigade’s role in the battle.[[557]](#footnote-557) That it took the British army another twelve years to start recruiting Irish Catholics shows the political clout of anti-Catholic ideology at the time. A more telling factor is how little attention the Irish brigade attracted in the British press at the time when compared to the battle itself. While the brigade’s presence at Fontenoy did not immediately shake anti-Catholic attitudes, at the same time there is little evidence of popular or political outrage against its existence, at least until the Bourbon restoration. Byrne blamed the disbandment of the Irish regiment after Waterloo on the desire of the newly-restored Louis XVIII to avoid offending the British government.[[558]](#footnote-558) This rhetoric of abandonment stands at odds with the treatment the Irish brigade received from Louis when it was recreated as part of the émigré forces. While many thousands of officers joined Condé’s army, the Irish regiment of Berwick was one of few to provide rank and file troops, even though its members can only liberally be called Irish.[[559]](#footnote-559) Louis expressed his apparent feelings for these men with a famous address in 1792, and with a banner;

GENTLEMEN,- We acknowledge the inappreciable services that France has received from the Irish Brigade, in the course of the last 100 years; services that we shall never forget, though under an impossibility of requiting them. Receive this standard, as a pledge of our remembrance, a monument of our admiration, and of our respect;- and in future, generous Irishmen, this shall be the motto of your spotless flag-

1692-1792

Semper et Ubique Fidelis

O’Callaghan, for his own part, blames the apparent volte-face on extreme pressure from the British government under Castlereagh.[[560]](#footnote-560) The loyalty of the Irish regiment to Napoleon and the shift in attitudes that it represented may also have played a part.

Despite the British government’s apparent wish that France should not maintain all-Irish military formations, there is no evidence that Irish soldiers in French service, whether in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, were regarded as anything but legitimate combatants. One particular occasion in which this tendency was put to a particularly hard test was the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, in which soldiers of the Irish Brigade took part. Out of a substantial contingent, only four hundred infantry and seventy-five cavalry of the Brigade, under the command of Brigadier Walter Stapleton, actually succeeded in making landfall in Scotland. During the battle, they succeeded in holding off Cumberland’s troops long enough for the rest of the Jacobite army to retreat, then surrendered. Cumberland accepted the surrender of a mortally-wounded Stapleton, promising honourable treatment in return. Having signed their *paroles*, written promises not to attempt escape, the Irish officers were permitted free-run of Inverness. The enlisted men were treated as prisoners of war, and even received the subscription money sent to them by the French government without deduction.

This is not to say that this approach was uncontroversial, as it was not until 1747 that the Irish prisoners were returned to France. Nonetheless, the Cartel of Frankfurt required all signatories to treat prisoners in accordance with the usual rules regardless of their original nationality.[[561]](#footnote-561) Whatever issues the British government might have had with the Irish Brigade, they were not willing to break international law to pursue them. This willingness to treat Franco-Irish troops as soldiers was extended even to the Irish Legion over a half century later. Byrne claims that Irish officers taken prisoner at Flushing were treated as if they were French officers, though he puts such scrupulousness down to fear of reprisals against British prisoners.[[562]](#footnote-562) All the same, the implication is that at the very least, the British were more concerned with maintaining humanitarian norms, and ensuring the wellbeing of their own prisoners of war, than with satisfying some atavistic need to punish Irish emigrants.

The relationship between Irish emigrants and Napoleon was a complex one, combining hope and admiration with sour disappointment and stoic pragmatism. This relationship began in the run-up to the Irish uprising of 1798, when the United Irishmen sent representatives to meet with Napoleon in Paris. Among the representatives arriving in September of 1797 was Theobald Wolfe Tone, easily the most famous of the Society’s leaders. Tone the younger’s stated opinion of Napoleon was at best nuanced, at worst deeply ambivalent, torn between admiration for Napoleon’s undoubted talents, and disapproval of the uses to which the former were put. Far worse in the younger Tone’s eyes was a perceived lack of interest in attaining Irish independence:

To the enterprise against Ireland, the favourite object of Hoche, and, to prosecute which, he was ostensibly recalled, he felt a secret but strong repugnance. Though the liberation of that country might prostrate, forever, the power of England, and raise the Republic to the pinnacle of fortunate (a circumstance for which he did not yet wish, as it would render his services needless,) it offered no prospects of aggrandizement to him; it strengthened the Republican cause which he disliked, and the principles of the Irish leaders, when he investigated the business, appeared to him too closely allied to those of the Jacobins.[[563]](#footnote-563)

This description has an air of ideological disappointment and hindsight to it, especially when Tone goes on to ascribe Napoleon’s defeat to a failure to establish Ireland and Poland as independent states. It is hard to believe that Napoleon would miss an opportunity to bring Britain, already a consistent and frustrating enemy thanks to its considerable naval power, to heel. On top of this, the British government had actively supported counter-Revolutionary elements throughout France. This was generally in the form of money and arms, but on occasion the support was overt, notably the Quiberon expedition of 1795. In a letter written in October of 1797 to Talleyrand, by then Foreign Minister, Napoleon made his opinion plain:

Our Government must destroy the English monarchy, or expect

itself to be destroyed by those intriguing and enterprising islanders.

The present moment offers a capital opportunity.[[564]](#footnote-564)

If Napoleon turned his attentions elsewhere, it was almost certainly because he regarded an expedition to Ireland as infeasible. The fact of the founding of the Irish Legion in 1803 shows that he had not completely written off the prospect of an expedition even then.

Napoleon was ultimately a pragmatist in search of military manpower, an attitude from which he spared none, least of all the Irish. By his own admission, non-French soldiers were recruited in order to reduce pressure on French manpower and to spare them from the most unpleasant duties, such as guarding the fever-ridden island of Walcheren.[[565]](#footnote-565) But if Napoleon was a pragmatist, the officers of the Irish Legion was equally so, as was shown in 1804, when Napoleon was crowned Emperor of the French. On June 3rd of that year, when the Legionnaires were called-upon to swear allegiance to the Emperor and the new constitution, a certain Captain John Sweeney wondered aloud if men committed to an Irish republic ought to be swearing such oaths. Adjutant Commander Bernard Macsheehy retorted that he ought to be grateful for Napoleon’s support. He reminded all present that the Emperor was their best hope of achieving their goal, and called upon anyone who felt unable to take the oath to leave. In the end Sweeney signed the oath, but he nevertheless represented an attitude within the legion that Napoleon’s motives were not to be trusted, an attitude that would linger for some time.[[566]](#footnote-566)

One of the great ironies of Irish service to France, and proof of their ideological pragmatism, is the experience of the Irish Regiment’s 2nd battalion in Spain. The battalion would spend much of the period from May of 1809 to March 1810 engaging in escort and patrol work, bringing them into conflict with Spanish guerrillas. The soldiers who served a foreign government in the hope of liberating their country found themselves fighting men and women who, at least in theory, sought the same for their own country. The motives of the Spanish partisans were as multifarious as in any such organization, but the connection could not be denied. The Irish themselves did not deny it, the idea of fighting fellow freedom-fighters being deeply uncomfortable to many of them, as well as to their French comrades. Byrne, however, describes his discussions with a Spanish clergyman in which he justified French policy towards Spain, and his own and the regiment’s part in it:

I answered there could be no comparison, as in his country, at the moment the inhabitants were not persecuted and deprived of their civic rights on account of the religion they professed. I allowed however that the Spaniards had suffered in their disastrous wars on account of the monarchs imposed on them: one time from an Austrian branch, another from the house of the Bourbons of France, and then from the Buonaparte family: whilst in poor Ireland the millions of unemancipated catholics (SIC) serfs were kept in bondage by a protestant ascendancy of a few hundred thousand individuals, acting there the part of the cruel task masters of England. That in changing the spanish dynasties, no religious persecutions took place in Spain. I perfectly agreed with him that the Spaniards had a right to govern themselves and to choose the form of government they wished; whilst on the other hand I maintained that no matter who the chief of the French government was, he became responsible to the nation to take the best means to secure the friendship of the neighbouring states, and their perfect neutrality in time of war’ that it could never be forgotten, that after the Revolution of 1789 when hostilities began, protestant Prussia and catholic Spain were the first powers to attack and invade France.[[567]](#footnote-567)

If this account is anything to go by, then the men of the Irish regiment were not swayed by any scruples about their benefactor’s foreign policy. Considering how Byrne would end his career, as a *chef de bataillon* in the service of King Louis-Philippe, his ideological pragmatism is not so surprising. It was also not so rare, as United Irishmen were becoming a rare breed in the Irish regiment. By 1810, only twenty-one out of twenty-seven officers in the second and third battalions were Irish, along with eleven out of seventeen attached to the fourth battalion, the first battalion having been destroyed at Flushing. Of these, only twelve original United Irishmen remained. Marianne Elliott argues that this marked a return to older patterns of service, tying in those who chose to serve France as career soldiers with those who did the same in the Irish brigade. As Elliott points out, and if Miles Byrne typifies anything, it would be going too far to argue that the ideals of the United Irishmen had been entirely abandoned.[[568]](#footnote-568)

## Symbolism and Identification

Irish soldiers never quite achieved the same iconic status as the Highland regiments, even though they served in comparable if not greater numbers. One obvious answer is that they were simply not as noticeable as the Highlanders, lacking as they did the distinct uniform and symbolism by which the Highlanders could be easily identified. Irish regiments in British and French service were uniformed in much the same manner as other regiments on the same side. To a casual observer, an Irish regiment in British service could be identified only by the golden harp on a shako badge or regimental banner. The Irish Brigade, in contrast, wore red coats rather than the usual French white.[[569]](#footnote-569) The Irish Legion in turn wore green versions of the standard French uniform of the time. It is telling that the French would make greater effort to distinguish the Irish troops in their service, though they did so for different reasons. The red coats of the Irish Brigade almost certainly referred to their origins as Jacobite British soldiers, as did the crosses of Saint George upon their banners. That the Irish Brigade wore the same colour as British troops led to an unfortunate incident at the battle of Fontenoy, when the Brigade was mistakenly charged by French *carabiniers*.[[570]](#footnote-570)

The choice of the colour green for the Irish Legion can be explained by the unit’s intended role as a cadre to organize Irish volunteers, the colour green being associated with Irish nationalism. Miles Byrne describes a distinct preference for the colour green, even during the 1798 rebellion itself:

But instead of those necessary regulations, every one wore what he fancied made him look to advantage and appear “warlike,” green of course was the favourite colour, and wherever it could be had, put on in profusion. As it could not be got in sufficient quantities to furnish all, it would have been adviseable (SIC) to have adopted the simple green cockade and to require all to put it in their hats and nothing else.[[571]](#footnote-571)

Aside from the colour, the Irish legion and later Irish regiment’s was essentially the same as that of regular French light infantry. Eugène Fieffé describes it as follows;

*Uniforme*: Habit-veste of green cloth; waistcoat, pants, of white cloth; red lining for the coat, white for the waistcoat; collars, lapels, cuffs, edgings, yellow; green facings on the legs; yellow buttons; legend: Régiment étranger, n° 3; shako.[[572]](#footnote-572)

The one thing that truly set the Irish Legion apart from Napoleon’s various other legions was its flag, presented on May 18th 1804, the day of Napoleon’s investiture as Emperor by the Sénat conservateur.[[573]](#footnote-573) J R Elting describes the flag as being of the standard size and shape, but coloured green and decorated with golden harps. The central oval was on one side coloured red, with the words ‘Liberty of Conscience’ and ‘Independence of Ireland’ in gold, while the other side bore a tricoleur with the words ‘First Consul to a United Ireland’ in French.[[574]](#footnote-574) While the Irish were the only non-French unit to receive a flag in 1804, Elting insists that this flag was not topped by an eagle, the regiment only receiving theirs in 1812. This stands at odds with the notes in Miles Byrne’s memoirs, which claim that the Irish Legion was granted an eagle much sooner. [[575]](#footnote-575) Byrne describes the eagle and flag himself, in an entry dated 1806;

…the ensign bearer with the green colours, on which was “The Independence

of Ireland” inscribed in gold letters. And on the other side of the green colours was the “Harp without the crown.” With our eagle uncovered and colours flying, we marched in perfect military order through every town and excited great interest among the inhabitants, who used to exclaim: “The Irish and the Poles were their faithful allies.

For the Irish regiment to have had two flags can be explained by the Eagle replacing the earlier, more Republican flag. But when was this great honour bestowed? Byrne offers a possible solution when he observes that the eagle bearer held officer rank.[[576]](#footnote-576) The stipulation that an eagle must be carried by an officer, specifically a lieutenant or sub-lieutenant, was made in a decree dated 18th February 1808.[[577]](#footnote-577) Meanwhile, various sources refer to the eagle being granted in December of 1805, along with the newer flag. A direct reference to the presentation of an eagle can be found in Edward Fraser’s *The War Drama of the Eagles,* which refers to both an eagle and the later flag, both being presented on 5th December 1804.[[578]](#footnote-578) A preponderance of available evidence suggests that the Irish regiment was indeed presented with an eagle in 1804.

# Conclusion to Chapters Five and Six

The theme of the final chapters, covering the Scottish Highlanders and the Irish, has been one of shared origins and circumstance leading to differing outcomes. The comparison between these two groups derives from their shared reputation for military service, for which they may be thought of as ‘martial races.’ The Highlanders derived their ‘martial race’ status from a history of warfare, both at home and abroad. An extended period of internecine warfare between the Highland clans almost certainly served to encourage martial tendencies and preferences within their culture. This, along with their relative poverty, helps to explain why so many Highlanders chose to fight abroad as mercenaries. This tendency had become so entrenched in the wider image of the Highlanders that by the eighteenth century they were thought of almost entirely in those terms. There was also an Irish presence in the European mercenary community, but this did not reach anything like the Scottish presence until the seventeenth century, at a time when the Scottish presence in Europe markedly declined. The Highlanders would go on to establish a strong presence in the British army, and in the nineteenth century would end up as one of the defining symbols of Scottish culture. Whereas the Highlanders were the original ‘martial race’ as the British conceived of them, the Irish never seemed to acquire this label to the same extent in Britain, though they developed a distinctly military reputation in Europe. The most likely explanation would be that whereas the loyalty of the Irish to Britain was questionable, European employers could generally expect loyalty from their Irish soldiers.

In terms of formal recruitment, the Highlanders and the Irish began their respective service in somewhat different ways. The first formal recruitment of Highlanders by the British state was the Black Watch, the intention being for the Highlands to be policed by Highlanders. The Black Watch was eventually restructured as a regular unit, and it saw its first combat deployment in 1743. By contrast, the Irish soldiers that made up the Irish Brigade entered French service as the result of a personnel exchange, and were only ever used as regular troops for conventional combat deployments. The ideas and ethos behind their recruitment show both similarities and differences. Highland recruiting at first drew on the traditional methods of levying, in which clansmen joined units through obedience to their chiefs, this being gradually replaced with more conventional methods and concerns. Though regiments might acquire a clan ethos, mostly because those in authority regarded it as important, recruiters tended to be more interested in making up the numbers while inconveniencing their landlord benefactors as little as possible. As a result, recruiters tended to avoid the most economically productive and necessary individuals while focussing their efforts on the surplus, usually the same agricultural labourers that provided so many recruits further south. If these proved insufficient, Highland colonels were not above filling up vacancies with lowland Scots, Irish, or even English recruits.

The Irish brigade in turn began with several thousand Irish soldiers travelling to France in obedience to the man they apparently regarded as their rightful King, the numbers being made up over time with a gradual flow of Irish emigrants and mass transfers of laid-off soldiers from other Irish Jacobite units. The flow of Irishmen was gradually reduced over the eighteenth century, to the point where the Irish brigade was made up almost entirely of French officers and men, whose ‘Irishness’ lay at most in a blood tie to emigrants of previous generations. This form of recruitment was nevertheless quite common, with the King’s German Legion being recruited in much the same fashion. The creation of the Irish Legion in 1798 marked a major break with this model, the legion initially consisting of a cadre of ideologically committed officers drawn primarily from the United Irishmen movement, though the former Irish brigade also had a small presence. The single biggest influx of enlisted men came in 1806, with the addition of over a thousand Poles and Irish recruited in Prussia. Further reinforcement would have to come from the Prisoner of War camps, a source that proved less than satisfactory.

In contrast to the Irish Brigade, the Irish Legion did not contain an Irish majority at any point in its active service history. In this respect the Legion does not compare well to the King’s German Legion, which was able to recruit many thousands of German soldiers throughout its history despite the fact that Hanover was under French occupation for much of that period. Recent scholarship, notably that of Marianne Elliott, points to a breakdown in communication and trust between the leadership of the United Irishmen in France and their potential followers in Ireland. This suggests that, even if they had not been holding out for an invasion of Ireland, the United Irishmen would have found it very difficult to persuade useful numbers of Irishmen to go abroad as the famed Wild Geese had done. On the whole, the Irish Legion is a good example of the difficulties faced in trying to create a distinctive unit without direct access to, or effective connections with, the primary source of recruits.

In the sphere of experiences, the Highlanders and Irish once again displayed similarities and differences. There is little evidence that the experience of Highland soldiers was much different than that of their English or lowland Scottish counterparts. Thomas Pococke describes a training process little different to that practised elsewhere in the British army, and by the end of the eighteenth century there is little or no evidence of a distinctive fighting style such as that which might have existed in earlier years. Highland regiments included both light and line formations, but these appear to have been little different than their non-Highland equivalents elsewhere in the army. The distinctive broadsword had long since been abandoned, a move denounced by David Stewart of Garth on the grounds that the weapon was useful in uneven terrain, where hand-to-hand combat was somewhat more likely. The Irish by contrast can be said to have had a very unusual experience, both before and during the period in question. The Irish had a reputation as mercenaries, but did not display any particular way of fighting by the seventeenth century. The only point of interest was Miles Byrne’s advocacy of pikes, which he argued gave his fellow United Irishmen an advantage in terrain where they could close with their enemies quickly, an interesting claim in light of David Stewart’s argument regarding broadswords.

This lack of a distinctive fighting style is something the Irish shared with the Highlanders. The experience that makes the Irish distinctive was the fact that they were fighting in exile, whereas the Highlanders were fighting for the polity of which their homeland was part. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Irish soldiers were able to square hailing from a country that was part of Britain while fighting for France or other European states. Such was quite normal in a period where it was not considered innately treasonous to serve in a foreign army, even if said army was fighting against one’s own homeland. This apparent disparity can be explained by a reference to contemporary ideals of loyalty, which focussed entirely on the personal oath or contract with a sovereign. So long as an officer did not currently hold a commission, which symbolized this arrangement, then he was essentially free to seek service wherever he could find it. Many thousands of Irishmen sought military careers in Europe on this principle, in most cases because the Penal Laws made it impossible for Catholics to serve in the British army in any capacity. It should be pointed out that Protestants did not suffer from this problem, and these laws were increasingly flouted in the eighteenth century.

This, and the gradual increase in legal toleration of Catholics throughout the British Isles, caused a marked reduction in Irish service overseas, which strongly suggests that a military career was the primary motivation for many of these men. It is in the 1790s, with the rise of a separatist vision of Irish nationalism, that this paradigm can be seen to shift. By 1798 the United Irishmen, and a considerable number of Irish, sought outright independence from Britain. This rendered the question of treason moot, as these individuals regarded the British state as having no legitimate claim on their loyalty. It is worth noting that the Irish Legion had more luck recruiting Irish sailors than soldiers, as the former had been subject to press-ganging and as such could make the same argument. The experiences of the former United Irishmen who made up the Legion’s officer corps were defined by the 1798 rebellion, in which many of them took an active part. The sentiments expressed by Miles Byrne imply that the United Irishmen were radicalized by the rebellion, that their experience of combat, of atrocities, and of defeat made them all the more ideologically committed. For some, Miles Byrne included, the experience of combat itself was the beginning of long careers.

The sphere of identities once again displayed similarities and differences, with both the Highlanders and the Irish having ideals imposed upon them while developing identities of their own. The Highlanders were collectively regarded as being well-behaved by contemporary standards, the relevant accounts referring to their lack of heavy drinking and bad language. This can be tied into the social and military ideals mentioned in earlier chapters of the army being a pure male sphere, separated from the corrupting vices of civilian life. There is a double-vision inherent in this general vision of the Highlander as a good, obedient, clean-living soldier, coming as he did from a culture popularly associated with banditry and violence. The most apparent cause of this re-evaluation is the wider cultural shift that took place in the latter half of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century, which idealized the Highlanders as examples of pure, uncomplicated humanity untainted by the flaws of civilized society. The more pertinent question is why the Highlanders were willing to accept having this vision imposed on them from above; a vision which may have had little or no relevance to their actual self-image or everyday reality. The Highlanders do not fall easily into clear delineations such as that between ‘high’ and ‘low’ cultures.

In terms of their relationship with other cultures in Scotland and the British Isles as a whole, Highland culture would appear to occupy the role of a low culture. Yet before the breakdown of the Lordship of the Isles, Gaelic culture was arguably a high culture in itself, serving a widespread Gaelic element. An application of methodological nationalism would require the Highlands to break away and form its own state, with Gaelic culture as the unifying high culture, an outcome which did not happen and which the Highlanders themselves never sought. The only alternative nationalist thought allows is for the Highlanders to have been an irrelevance, a disconnected minority incapable of affecting or influencing developments elsewhere. But this would be to ignore the high profile of the Highlanders, especially in the military sphere, and the amount of attention they attracted in British society. The answers to the question lie in the longstanding commitment by the Highlanders to a larger polity, namely Scotland and later Great Britain, despite the cultural differences involved. That the cultural gap was so great as to cause unmanageable problems is extreme, and is countered by the fact that non-Highland recruits were able to function in Highland regiments without apparent difficulties. These non-Highlanders were also, if Sergeant Donaldson’s account is anything to go by, quite accepting of Highland culture within their new collective.

The identity of Irish soldiers saw a brief change from what had previously been a consistent pattern, which would provide a foretaste of future developments. The motivation of Irish soldiers travelling to Europe for military service was, on the whole, a desire to pursue a military career. A resentment of the political situation surrounding the dethroning of James II and the Treaty of Limerick may be pointed to, but this ignores the growth of an Irish military presence in Europe decades before then. The fact that Irish overseas recruitment dropped off throughout the eighteenth century, as careers in the British army became more accessible, can be taken as further proof that the primary goal of most military emigrants was a military career, regardless of the army. The rebellion of 1798 marks the emergence of a recognizably different kind of exile, one motivated by political ideology and focussed on Ireland rather than on the pan-British dynastic aspirations of the Jacobites. The men who formed the bulk of the Irish Legion’s cadre displayed political and national motives in a recognizably modern sense, and showed every sign of genuine commitment.

This did not, it should be said, prevent them from squabbling and even fighting among themselves, especially over the issue of whether or not Napoleon could be trusted to give them what they sought. This also did not necessarily mean that those who made up the later Irish regiment’s numbers, the bulk of whom were not Irish, had any interest in their cause or even liked being in an ‘Irish’ unit. Marianne Elliott has claimed that the Polish troops were less than happy at being part of the regiment.[[579]](#footnote-579) Thomas Bartlett, by the same token, argues that the Polish and Prussian officers were hated by the Irish.[[580]](#footnote-580) Miles Byrne puts a brave face on the issue in his account, claiming that the largely Polish influx of 1806 were enthusiastic about their new unit, a shared cause bringing Irish and Poles together. That the regiment was able to function in combat suggests that his claim was broadly true. On the whole this implies that being part of a mixed unit is not necessarily a bar to effective performance in combat, even if it suffers from the desertion problems identified by Robert Gould. It also shows that the identities and motives of the United Irishmen could be somewhat flexible, for although the regiment’s officers held true to the movement’s ideals, this did not prevent them from serving Napoleon as professional soldiers.

When it comes to questions of attitude, there are once again similarities and differences, following lines that are becoming increasingly recognizable. The Highlanders regarded themselves as a distinct group, both in Scotland and in Great Britain as a whole. Their sense of difference may have manifested as a sense of superiority in both contexts. This attitude can be squared with the Highlanders’ membership of the British project by linking it to their long-standing willingness to be part of Scotland. A curious feature of this idea of superiority was that the Highlanders tended to apply it to the British Empire of which they were a part. If they were superior, and a part of this institution, then the institution must itself be superior. This, combined with the growing influence of the Highland social elite in the British economy and society, militates against any sense of the Highlanders being a despised and downtrodden element. The willingness of Highlanders to haggle for higher recruitment bounties hints at a people increasingly aware of what their service was worth, and of the rewards it could bring them.

There is evidence that rewards were very much in the minds of the Highland soldiers and those who recruited them. The most common reward was money, though in some cases Highlanders could be rewarded with land overseas, particularly in North America. A point was raised that the Highlanders may have had a taboo against taking money for saving or taking a life, but a distinction can be drawn between killing a specific individual and serving in combat. The Highlanders derived too much pride from their presence in war, especially at major battles, for them to have possessed any widespread moral qualms about the act of killing in itself. By the same token, it is not clear whether they were more likely to tolerate harsh treatment. Mutinies by Highland regiments took place for much the same reasons as with non-Highland regiments, the issues being primarily pay, harsh punishment, and the sense that the terms of their enlistment were being breached. This latter issue is important in understanding the mindset of British soldiers in the period, and perhaps of soldiers in general. Soldiers would endure a great deal if they had signed up to it knowingly and without coercion, and if they were treated in a manner they regarded as fair.

As we have seen, the Irish troops in this period defined themselves primarily as professional soldiers, with the United Irishmen providing a distinctive sub-group. Evidence suggests that they were primarily regarded as such by others too, both on the British and French sides. The British could be forgiven for regarding their Irish soldiers as politically unreliable, considering the events of 1798, but this does not seem to have affected their perceived suitability as military recruits. The fact that the Irish militia and regular soldiers remained loyal, as did much of Irish civil society, bears out this conclusion. There is little in the way of direct evidence regarding French attitudes towards their Irish soldiers. Napoleon does not appear to have expressed any personal opinion of the Irish Legion, or the Irish regiment that it became, which means that his attitudes towards it must be ascertained through his actions. Napoleon raised and maintained the Irish Legion as a distinct unit for a distinct purpose during a period when an invasion of Britain was being planned, suggesting that he regarded them as a potentially useful resource. The renaming of the Legion as the Irish Regiment, and its transfer to regular duties, marks the passing of this period.

From this point on, there is some contradiction in Napoleon’s apparent attitude. On the one hand, the Irish were the only non-French regiment to receive an Eagle in 1804. This implies that he held them in a degree of esteem, though the basis for this esteem is unclear. It is possible that Napoleon respected the physical courage and conviction of the United Irishmen, and he may even have made a connection between their experience and that of his native Corsica. Napoleon’s usual policy with small ‘foreign’ formations was to give them ancillary duties, such as garrison duty, so as to free up French troops. The deployment of the regiment’s first battalion to Flushing is consistent with this, the deployment of the second battalion to Spain less so. The second battalion seems to have acted as an occupying force, patrolling French-held territory and doing their best to keep Spanish guerrillas in check. Despite this implication, the second battalion was posted guard during Napoleon’s visit to Burgos, a showing that Miles Byrne thought went well, and later saw action at the siege of Astorga in March to April of 1810. However, their role here was to take part in what soldiers of the period called the ‘forlorn hope’, that is, to assault and secure a breach in the defences. As their British counterparts would at Cuidad Rodrigo and Badajoz two years later, the Irish incurred heavy casualties. From a modern perspective it would be very easy to regard the Irish regiment as having been demoted to cannon fodder. But while the dangers inherent in assaulting a breach were acknowledged at the time, the negative connotation does not tell the whole story. It was doubtless a terrifying prospect, but the implication of great courage made it an honour, and the danger they faced meant that survival was richly rewarded.

The fact that both Irish battalions performed honourably in combat may have served to extinguish any lingering doubts over their usefulness, for the regiment marched with the Grande Armée in 1812 and 1813. The relatively small numbers involved meant that sheer desperation on Napoleon’s part cannot have been the sole explanation for their presence. For their own part, the men of the Irish regiment seem to have been torn between reverence and suspicion with regard to Napoleon. Some regarded him as an untrustworthy benefactor, believing that he was only using the Irish for his own purposes, and some even feared he might try to incorporate Ireland into his empire. Wolfe Tone was one of these critics, though his criticism was a more general dissatisfaction with what he saw as the increasingly anti-republican overtones of Napoleonic France. His argument that a successful intervention in Ireland would have strengthened the French Republic, and that Napoleon’s lack of interest was motivated by malicious anti-republicanism, does not stand up to scrutiny. Complaints that he was exploiting the Irish Legion to further his own ambitions are more understandable. These worries must have been particularly acute in Spain, where the Irish found themselves fighting a people in a situation that they knew well and with which they might otherwise have sympathised. Byrne, on the other hand, displays little sympathy for the Spaniards, arguing that the Spanish government had betrayed France. This reminds us that while many of the Irish regiment’s officers were ideologically committed, some were also perfectly willing to regard themselves as professional soldiers doing a job.

The final sphere, that of symbolism and identification, shows that the two peoples had much in common. The Highlanders possessed both distinctive uniforms and distinctive symbols, both serving to raise their profile and make them more noticeable than other regiments. The issue of Highland dress was sometimes controversial, with arguments over the authenticity of Highland dress as it existed in the army, and over the choice between kilts and trews. Despite this, Highland dress represented a recognizable ‘brand’ that was unique to the Highland regiments. The wearing of Highland dress is also a consistent feature of Highland regiments, starting with the Black Watch. The Highland regiments also possessed distinctive heraldic symbols, which were used and displayed in broadly the same fashion as in other British regiments. Overall this displays a certain flexibility in British thinking, which sought to create uniformity while allowing for distinction and the expression of difference. The only organisational distinction between Highland and other regiments was that their bands carried bagpipes. This was a distinctive feature within the British army, though J R Elting raises the interesting possibility that some northern French units may have carried similar instruments during the Revolutionary period, such as the Breton *cornemuse.*

The Irish, by contrast, had considerably less presence in the British army. They tended to be fed into existing units rather than formed into distinctive ones, and the relatively small number of Irish units did not possess a distinctive uniform, though they did possess distinctive symbols. As such, though regiments such as the Connaught Rangers and the Inniskilling Dragoons served as honourably as many others, they did not attract the same level of attention as the Highlanders. The situation for the Irish Brigade in French service, as well as the Irish Legion and regiment, was quite different. From the time of its founding the Irish Brigade possessed both a distinctive uniform, wearing red rather than the regular army’s white, and distinctive symbols. Similarly the Irish Legion was uniformed in green from its founding and possessed a distinctive flag, the latter changing with the times. It is worth noting that the Legion’s uniform was essentially a green version of the standard uniform, this minimizing any logistical complication. But the mere fact that the Irish were allowed a distinctive uniform, in an army where uniforms and symbols had been standardized as a matter of political principle, is evidence of a wider paradigm shift in the French army’s identity and attitudes. As with British uniforms, French uniforms increasingly allowed distinction within uniformity, a sign of a much wider convergence between the attitudes of the two armies.

# Conclusion

Much has been made of the social and ideological differences between Britain and France in the period running from the final decade of the eighteenth century to the first two decades of the nineteenth century, but the story of their armies was as much one of shared experience as it was of difference. While Britain was not entirely immune to political and social change in this period, it was insignificant when compared to what France experienced. That the British army changed so little in terms of its structure and ethos made it a useful point of comparison, a ‘control’ of sorts, with the French army as it developed over twenty-five years. It was inevitable that the wider social and political changes of the French Revolution would affect the identity of the French army, leading as they did to a massive change in the composition of the army’s manpower. But far from presaging the creation of a completely new Cincinnatian identity, the self-image of the French soldier gradually developed into something not so different from that of his British counterpart. To some of those looking back over subsequent centuries, this must have represented a tragic ideological failure, but it would be quite false to imply that developments in France under the Directory and later under the Consulate and Empire represented a wholesale reversal of the Revolution.

Napoleon may have ruled as a crowned head, with every apparent intention of establishing a dynasty to follow him, but the power structure he created was based on personal merit to an extent that would have been inconceivable in France under the Old Regime. His carefully delineated system of aristocratic titles and privileges were awarded entirely on this basis, in a system that was widely copied in later years and is reflected to some degree in the modern British honours system. But if Napoleon entrenched meritocracy as an ethos and ideal in the French army, then he was only doing what had been a long-standing wish in both the French *and* the British armies. The Cincinnatian ideal failed because it was ultimately impractical, and it was similarly for practical reasons that both armies attempted to reform themselves on meritocratic and professional lines in the last decades of the eighteenth century. The failure of the French army to reform itself coincided with the Revolution, which had the effect of removing those elements that resisted change and empowering those who sought it. Similarly, the pressures of war gave the British army no choice but to reform itself, though it was able to do so for the most part within its existing structures. What this study has shown is that both armies came by degrees to a broadly similar ideal of professionalism, albeit one that did not necessarily reflect practical realities at all times and in all places.

The first and second chapters, covering professional military identities on both sides, have revealed both commonalities and contrasts. It has been shown that both armies were rooted in the same military culture, and used broadly the same organisational system. Recruitment and training methods were largely identical, at least before the Revolution, as was military life in general. The explanations for these extensive similarities are essentially practical. Increasing interaction between European social and educated elites led to the development of a shared pool of ideas and concepts on which military officers and organizers could draw. An equally if not more significant factor in the development of European armies was regular engagement in warfare. For much of Europe’s history large-scale wars have taken place within a generation of one another, providing ample opportunity for military systems and traditions to be tested in battle.

The Renaissance and Enlightenment periods saw massive expansions in intellectual dialogue across national borders, serving to accelerate and consolidate this process of development by ensuring that both past experience and the ‘state of play’ were more widely available. The development of the regiment as an institution is an example of this, though it also illustrates another aspect of the development of British and French military identity and organisation, that the driving factor in initiating change was often practical necessity. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries both armies developed a habit of permanently maintaining companies in regiments, as opposed to disbanding them between wars, as the maintenance of a standing army moved from an unattainable ideal to become both a political imperative *and* an economic and organisational possibility. The companies thus spent so long in their given regiments that the regiments themselves became shared realities for the soldiers, allowing them to develop institutional identities in their own right. The new regimental system proved sufficiently robust to survive subsequent wars, and would change relatively little throughout the eighteenth century.

The divergence of identity took place in the Revolution itself, though certain nuances have been revealed. Far from being despised and marginalized, the former Royal army continued to exist, worked extensively in cooperation with the volunteer army, and was even expanded. Named regiments were replaced with numbered battalions, removing the existing labels but leaving the essential dynamics of unit identity intact. The amalgamation of the volunteer and regular armies and their organization in demi-brigades was an essentially pragmatic approach to the problem of maximizing combat capabilities while maintaining political reliability. The aristocratic aspect of French military identity was for a time removed, as thousands of aristocratic officers fled into exile, and it was deliberately overlaid with new ideals based on equality and citizenship. The biggest change in terms of organisation lay in recruitment, with the voluntary approach of the regular and volunteer armies replaced with a series of large-scale levies, which in time evolved into a formal system of conscription. This was in keeping with the new ideals of citizenship, specifically the principle that it was the duty of every male citizen to fight for the nation if called upon to do so.

Though the ideals surrounding the levies proved unachievable in practice, desertion and draft-dodging being commonplace, the conscription system by annual classes nonetheless proved robust, providing millions of recruits through the course of the wars. The British army, despite its similarities to the former French Royal army, did not change to anything like the same extent except in size. The British officer corps was not aristocratic to anything like the same extent as its French counterpart, drawing primarily on the loosely defined ‘gentry’ for recruits. The British army’s record of relative success, in contrast to France’s humiliation in the Seven Years War, meant that pressure for military reform was not so strong. The establishment of minimum terms of service at given ranks was particularly significant, for it allowed young officers to serve an apprenticeship of sorts at the lower officer ranks, thus making up for the lack of formal training. It is rather poignant that the Duke of York tightened up this system as part of his reform programme, just in time to help create an officer corps capable of standing up to Napoleonic meritocracy.

It is after the Jacobin phase of the Revolution, during the Directory and under Napoleon, that the identities of British and French soldiers are seen to re-converge along professional lines. The British army for its own part retained its professional identity, and even strengthened it through reforms that improved the professionalism of the gentleman officers, and also through the promotion of men from the ranks, a gesture to pragmatism in the face of combat. The French army similarly developed a professional identity, but once again came at the issue from a different direction. Years of near-constant warfare made the Cincinnatian ideal of temporary military service impossible to achieve, with the consequence that soldiers on the whole remained embodied for extended periods. The result of this was the development of a distinct military identity, which was increasingly professional at the institutional level.

This was made most apparent in the training of officers. While French officers were raised primarily from among the NCOs, and British officers tended to come from the gentry, both sets of officers were trained for their roles primarily through the apprenticeship of rising through the ranks, the only difference being that British officers started higher up the ladder than their French counterparts. The British army’s success rate in the Napoleonic wars can be taken as proof that this approach worked well enough, despite being undermined by purchase. Both sides also established military academies to provide prospective officers with formal training, and a graduate of the *École Spéciale Militaire* provides an insight into the mindset of Napoleon’s officers. According to Elzéar Blaze, soldiers endured the discipline and privation of army life simply for a chance to get ahead in the world.

The third and fourth chapters have also shown commonality, contrast, and a re-convergence in political identities and attitudes. It is in the political context that the greatest contrast between British and French societies can be perceived, though once again the story is of relative continuity in the former case and massive change in the latter. Both were hierarchical and undemocratic by modern standards, both dominated by broad though not entirely inaccessible ruling elites, in the form of the British gentry and the French noblesse. Both societies were faced with the growing importance of commerce, as prosperous merchants purchased lands and even titles, aspiring to the status of aristocracy, and in both societies they were able to do so. For the most part, the officers and enlisted men of both armies were drawn from the same levels and factions of their respective societies.

The difference in this context lay in the social origins of the officers, with the British drawing their officers from the lower aristocracy with little or no restriction. The French army, by contrast, was drawn into internecine squabbles as a aristocrats sought to monopolize all officer commissions for themselves, gradually forcing out the French equivalent of the British gentry. The increasing domination of the officer corps by the values and interests of a single aristocratic faction served to sabotage the reforms that, ironically enough, some of them sought to bring about. Many aristocratic officers wished to improve and professionalise the officer corps, but tied themselves in knots trying to do so without altering the culture and lifestyle to which they themselves adhered, and which they considered a vital and necessary basis for their military ethos. As a result, would-be officers who found themselves excluded or trapped in lower ranks turned to the Revolution in the hope of achieving their object.

One substantial if nuanced difference between the two armies was their attitudes to the political situation. Many NCOs of the French Royal army, who were as literate as their British counterparts, took an interest in Revolutionary politics. Many would in turn find themselves promoted, a desire that under the old system had been frustrated, in order to fill the shoes of emigrating aristocratic officers. The result was that the regular army was at least as politicized as the volunteers. Both armies, before and after amalgamation, were subjected to a widespread programme of ideological re-education by which the new government sought to inculcate the ideals of liberty, equality, and citizenship.

In contrast the British soldiers of the period appear to have focussed their loyalty on the King, the army, and the country as a whole. Officers regarded themselves as apolitical defenders of the status quo, which could mean defending the crown from the ambitions of the political elite. Ordinary soldiers meanwhile showed themselves to be unimpressed by radical politics. The British army’s attitude stands in sharp contrast to that of the French army, which found itself faced with a very difficult question; to whom *should* it be loyal? Should they be loyal to the King? Or to his ministers? Or to the National Assembly, which ostensibly acted in the name of the King? The French line army held together under circumstances where it could have been forgiven for fracturing or simply ceasing to function, while the new volunteer army served honourably, and both were successfully amalgamated. Even without the bulk of its pre-Revolutionary officer corps, the French army proved itself at least as resilient as its British counterpart, and able to adapt to new circumstances.

Considering the essential similarities between the two armies, the question invariably arises as to why the British army did not become seriously mutinous in the period, in contrast even to the Royal Navy. The fall of the Bastille was initiated by Parisian civilians, later supported by sympathetic *Gardes Francaises*. In sharp contrast, British troops were more than willing to gun down anti-Catholic rioters during the Gordon Riots a decade earlier. It cannot be argued that the British soldiers were brainwashed automatons or ignorant dupes, for the British army had its fair share of literate NCOs and soldiers, while British society on the whole was initially supportive of the Revolution. It can be argued that French aggression removed the possibility of a copycat British Revolution because of the human tendency to pull together in the face of an outside threat. This was certainly the case later, once Napoleon had emerged as a credible tyrant figure in the popular mindset, but it does not cover the earlier period when French Revolutionary politics still had some credibility. The only apparent explanation is that British soldiers simply did not feel as aggrieved as their French counterparts. If not enthusiastically loyal to King George III, they evidently did not see him or the system he represented as so much of a problem as to warrant removal. At a more personal level, British soldiers simply did not see Revolution as a worthwhile solution to their problems. The Duke of York’s reforms, which led to noticeable improvements in their living conditions, almost certainly encouraged this attitude.

The evidence of chapters five and six reflect a similar pattern. The Scottish Highlanders and the Irish are similar in the context of their relationship with the organisations in which they found themselves operating as soldiers. Both were essentially outsiders, a part of the body politic in the legal sense but nonetheless separated in ways not easily defined. Both derived from specific geographical areas, namely the Scottish Highlands and Ireland, and held to distinctive cultures and identities. Both were drawn upon by the British and French armies, both of them in the British case, for essentially practical reasons. Of these, the primary reason was the simple fact that they were available in useful numbers. A contrast nonetheless arises as to the means by which they were acquired. The Highlands were regarded as a full and formal part of the United Kingdom, meaning that Highlanders were recruited in a manner not much different to how their English and lowland Scottish counterparts were recruited.

Ireland was similarly considered a part of Great Britain, and the tripartite monarchy of England, Scotland, and Ireland that preceded it, meaning that those Irish who wished to fight for France made themselves exiles in so doing. The exception to this was the exchange of French soldiers and Irish recruits between James II and Louis XVI in 1690, which can be regarded as a legal transaction between sovereigns. The bulk of the Irish in French service arrived shortly afterwards as the army-in-exile of James II, an influx that helped to maintain the Irish character of the Irish brigade with the dissolution of the army-in-exile and the gradual drying-up of the flow of exiles. Despite this difference, the Irish soldiers were able to join the French body politic by the traditional means of swearing allegiance to the person of the King, as well as through inter-marriage.

The second major reason as identified in these chapters was that both the Highlanders and the Irish were as willing as they were available. The Highlanders had a certain cultural predisposition towards the military life, though this was highly exaggerated both at the time and in centuries since. The basis for the idea of the Highlander as a natural warrior comes from a history of internecine warfare between the Highland clans, a feature hardly unique and traceable to any number of historical causes. But even if the basis of the myth of the Highland warrior is hard to substantiate, it cannot be denied that large numbers of Scottish Highlanders saw fit to become soldiers, whether in the army of Scotland, or of Great Britain, or any other. That their chiefs might order or coerce them to do so is not sufficient as an explanation, for the powers of Highland chiefs over their clansmen were in practice little different to those held by English or Irish landowners over their own tenants.

Despite a common cultural background, the Irish did not undergo the same internecine conflict as the Highlanders, for the most part due to tighter central control by Anglo-Irish authorities from the beginning of the seventeenth century. In spite of this, the Irish proved just as willing to become soldiers, whether in the British army in or those of Britain’s Catholic neighbours. The most likely explanation for the willingness of the Highlanders and the Irish to become soldiers, despite their outsider status, boils down to a desire to escape from poverty. As for how these groups could have developed a reputation for military prowess, or at least sufficient competence to make them worth recruiting, the simple answer is that they kept on winning. As with Napoleon’s own career, a sufficiently consistent run of victories allowed for setbacks to be ignored and a myth to develop.

Despite these similarities in circumstance and motivation, certain contrasts have also been identified. The Highlanders were more distinctive in their appearance than the Irish, due to the part-imposed and part-accepted custom of wearing one version or another of Highland dress. This tendency almost certainly contributed to the mythology that surrounds Highland culture in the civil and military contexts to this day. The Irish were considerably less noticeable in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Soldiers of both the Irish Brigade and the Irish Legion wore uniforms little different to those of their French comrades, save in colour, though the symbols they employed were distinctive. The Irish Brigade fought as line infantry, much as the Highlanders in British service did, while the Irish Legion began its life as a cadre of officers meant to organise Irish recruits in the event of a French landing in Ireland. When this landing failed to materialize, the Irish Legion was converted into a line regiment and used as such until its effective destruction in 1814. Once again, what might seem to have been an ideological project was essentially pragmatic, its primary role in Napoleon’s eyes being to serve his military purposes. If it could help pull off an invasion of Ireland and thus weaken Britain, then he would create and support it. If such an invasion was not practical, then he would put it to other uses, regardless of the feelings of its members.

This study has shown a pattern of practical reform motivated by a pragmatic desire to improve the performance of both armies in warfare, both in and out of combat. It has also shown a parallel development of military identity, with the British army broadly continuing on its previous course, while the French army diverged then re-converged. The French developed a new military identity remarkable similar to that of the British, in spite of social and political changes that altered beyond recognition the social character of its manpower. The similarities of Anglo-French military culture were deep-rooted indeed, allowing for the survival of a wider pan-European military community. At the same time it must be recognized that despite developing a similar psychological approach to military life as their British counterparts, French soldiers were not in any way immune to the effects of the Revolution. They absorbed the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity as wholeheartedly as any other segment of the French population, and yet this did not prevent them from dealing with military life, and from having much the same expectations of their leaders and of one-another, as the British soldiers they fought so many times. In short, the two armies can be characterised as much by their similarities as by their differences; the products of shared experience and shared culture.

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