THE POLITICS OF SELF-PRESERVATION: A
SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE BRITISH ARMY RANK-
AND-FILE DURING THE NAPOLEONIC ERA

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis was to gain some insight into the common soldier's perception of his existence within the British Army during the Napoleonic era. Specifically, I sought to understand how the vast majority of them managed to cope with conditions that would strike most people today as appalling and which were equally anathema to the greater part of British civilian society at the time. The tendency among historians has been to treat the traditional soldier as an automaton: his loyalty is explained in terms of social deference or innate stupidity. The result is that histories of the British Army either dwell on its purely military side, that is, famous battles and the details of their strategies; or else the Army's mundane features, for example, weaponry and uniforms. The most fascinating aspect of war - how it is experienced by those who actually participate in it - is ignored, and consequently valuable insight into the nature of human motivation and behaviour is lost.

In an effort to make the soldier's way of life comprehensible I investigated, for the most part, material written by the combatants themselves, chiefly diaries, letters and journals, and, to a small extent, observations of army life by men outside the rank-and-file, published in dispatches, newspapers, memoirs, and novels. I sought through an understanding of the soldier's perception to isolate the personal needs served by the army as well as to trace the evolution of self-preserving strategies needed to survive its difficulties, with concern to the way in
which indigenous social attitudes, the dynamics of group behaviour, trauma, and fatigue contributed to their establishment.

The research was, I think, extremely valuable. The importance to a soldier's dedication of his motivation for enlisting was demonstrated. (The desire to escape poverty or the industrial way of life and the promise of adventure and glory were but a few of a number of reasons why men joined.) The appeals of army life were isolated, and these included for many, the growth of a sense of purpose, a dignity, a feeling of belonging, and an arcan vitality which often develops through constant exposure to the threat of death, an experience that such modern existentialists as Jaspers and Sartre have dwelt upon considerably in their writings. Finally, the soldier's strong survival capacity, his 'tenacity of self-perservation' in the words of E.P. Thompson, made possible through the utilization of coping mechanisms, was recognized. These processes included forgetfulness, depersonalization, regression, romanticism, and the emergence of a belief in strength through adversity. This was not to suggest, however, that the soldier was infinitely flexible; my analysis of the character of the Army in the eighteenth century, included in this paper, pointed out the high level of desertion resulting from its corrupt, brutal, and demoralized state. Reform of the worst features of force, initiated about 1796, thus also contributed to army loyalty, and not only insofar as it made the life more comfortable than hitherto it had been, but also to the extent that it gave men hope that amelioration would continue to occur. Clearly, then, the problem of why men maintained their dedication
to the force was an enormously complex one, and it is hoped that in the endeavour to understand it, the British soldier was portrayed accurately and in a humane fashion.
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To Professor John M. Norris
for his inspiration, assistance
and above-all, patience throughout
the preparation of my thesis and
to Corinne Bathurst for her
constant support.
Dr. Johnson: "When you look (at them) ... you see the extremity of human misery: such crowding, such filth, such stench."

James Boswell: "Yet soldiers are happy."

Dr. Johnson: "They are happy as brutes are happy, with a piece of fresh meat - with the grossest sensuality."

Boswell: "We find people fond of being soldiers."

Dr. Johnson: "I cannot account for that, any more than I can account for other perversions of imagination."
Introduction

The aim of the following essay is to write sympathetically about a very unusual commitment, the willingness to endure the life of a common soldier in Wellington's army during the Napoleonic Wars, in light of circumstances that would certainly be abhorrent to all but the most hardy or least sensible of people to-day, and which were equally anathema to the majority of the Duke's contemporaries. Any analysis of Wellington's army will reveal that the men were poorly housed, badly equipped, severely disciplined, mercilessly worked, underpaid, and, of course, often exposed to extreme danger. There is a strong temptation to agree with Dr. Johnson's opinion that any sane man would surely have preferred a convict's life to that of serving in the forces. Unfortunately, little has been written about how soldiers adjusted to these conditions, an intolerable omission in light of the present interest, among scholars of British history, in how groups cope with various circumstances, particularly in the context of the social changes wrought by industrialism.1

Part of the problem stems from a traditional lack of concern for the British soldier. As a result, simplistic perceptions of him prevailed at least until the Great War. For some reason contemporary military historians have perpetuated this habit of looking at Britain's traditional soldier in facile ways. Attitudes that were once explicit maintain a tacit popularity. There was the widespread opinion, for example, that soldiers were devoted - despite the fact that they often were not-
because the nature of British society taught obedience. In other words, it was thought that the army was a microcosm of the deferent society. This view was reinforced by the belief that the typical soldier was by-and-large a rather stupid, easily-satisfied and timid soul. Indeed, one finds these notions espoused with tiresome regularity in the literature and press of the past. Some observers portrayed the soldier as a lad determined to do his duty and thus prepared to sacrifice everything to his regiment, commander and country; the majority preferred to dwell upon what was seen as the soldier's mental inferiority. As early as the Renaissance the soldier was ridiculed for his fawning stupidity. Shakespeare, for example occasionally used him for comic relief. One hundred and fifty years later Sterne characterized the soldier, in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, as one whose "observation cannot extend far beyond the muzzle of his firelock", and in the nineteen century *Punch* popularized the image of him as a faithful dull-witted watchdog.

That contemporary histories are as equally insensitive to the character of the traditional soldier can easily be shown. For example, it is my impression that two kinds of works have been written about Britain's army during the period of the Napoleonic Wars. The most common are those which laboriously describe the battles fought, particularly the details of their strategies, but which, judging by the attention given it, invariably regard the sociology of the forces as rating only marginal
consideration. 2 Usually included is a hasty summation of why men volunteered along with an equally short and rather stereotyped description of the typical soldier. The other kind are those studies in which the author purports to be analyzing daily life in Wellington's army but which are more concerned with the mundane side of the military, that is, with clothing, rations, supplies, the routine of bivouacking, and weapons. These histories tend to be rather chatty to the neglect of any serious effort to understand the soldier's way of life. 3 Indeed, diaries, journals, and letters belonging to men of Wellington's army remain the sole meaningful passage into the common soldier's psyche.

The treatment of the British soldier has thus been inadequate. The most common assumptions about him are simply inaccurate. The fact, for example, that by the end of the eighteenth century, Britain's ancient regime was crumbling, and with it much of the "flag saluting, peer respecting" side of the plebian mind, is ignored. Similarly, while it would be foolish to deny that many soldiers were not particularly bright, to suggest that the army socialization process was facilitated by the fact that heart soldiers were just simple lads is a dubious, or at least extremely simplistic proposition at best. 4 Desertion was far more a problem in eighteenth century armies throughout Europe, when the level of intelligence of the typical soldier was pretty low. Than in the Napoleonic era when men of intelligence were no longer stigmatized by serving. Furthermore, not only are these assumptions empirically unsound, accepting them amounts to a willingness to treat the soldier like an automaton. They are too simple, too
one-dimensional. They conceal what really was involved in devotion. They "niggerize" him. The soldier, no less than the factory workers in the context of early industrial society, survived the life not because he was naturally deferent or too stupid to know any better, but because certain features of his army existence were appealing and those that were not were made bearable with the aid of numerous "coping" mechanisms.

It is my contention, therefore, that a thoughtful and sensitive analysis must do the following, if it is to make sense of the soldier's behaviour by isolating those factors which contributed to his devotion: outline the geographical and occupational backgrounds of Britain's soldiers during the Napoleonic Wars, document their reasons for joining, and analyze their perceptions of army life. The latter must be approached with the intent to discern the various personal needs which the army served and which helped to make what appears from the outside to be a prison-like existence, tolerable and even meaningful; and to trace the evolution of self-preserving strategies - beliefs, attitudes and behaviour patterns - adequate to the demands of the army, with an eye to the ways in which indigenous social attitudes, the dynamics of group behaviour and such factors as trauma and exhaustion contributed to their establishment. My purpose is not to romanticize the soldier's life. It is simply to correct that tendency to write as though soldiers were relatively unimportant to the discussion of these wars and their dedication a straightforward fact.
Incidently, I choose to analyze the British army specifically in the age of Napoleon for three reasons: one, because much has been written about the wars during that era with the result that the neglect and mistreatment of the soldier by historians is here most flagrant; two, because for some reason there were proportionately fewer desertions in Britain's army during this period than at any previous time since the creation of the modern, methodically-trained, disciplined army by Cromwell; and three, because Wellington's soldiers wrote an extraordinary number of diaries, journals and letters, the usefulness of which is obvious.

In the following chapter we will briefly look at the nature of war in the century prior to the Napoleonic era in order to clarify the soldier's traditional status. Moreover, such an analysis may also provide us with a valuable contrast to the Napoleonic Wars insofar as the eighteenth century was a period of relatively higher desertion patterns. The factors which contributed to the flow of desertion might be isolated. Chapter II will examine recruitment. A brief review of conditions in the army will follow (Chapter III). The remainder of the essay will discuss the adjustment process to it (Chapter IV), attitudes towards punishment (Chapter V), diversions (Chapter VI) and attitudes towards battle (Chapter VII).
Footnotes


2. Even Sir John Forfoescue's great work, *A History of the British Army* (London, 1889-1930), though designed as a piece of social history, was the most part an account of military campaigns.

3. The odd history, like Richard Glover's, *Peninsula Preparation* (Cambridge, 1963), an analysis of how the army was reformed under the auspices of the Duke of York, falls outside both categories.

4. This sort of view is equally, if not more, popular among naval historians. See Michael Lewis's, *A Social History of the Navy, 1793-1815* (London, 1960).
Chronology of the Peninsular War

1807 The defeat of Russia at Friedland (14 June), followed by the Treaty of Tilsit (25 June). Every European State with the exception of Portugal is now part of the 'Continental System'. The French Army under Junot marches across Spain and occupies Portugal. French troops also seize strategic forts and garrisons in northern Spain.

1808 French troops occupy Spain and Napoleon forces its King, Charles and his son, Ferdinand, to abdicate the throne. 15th July, the Spanish revolt against Bonaparte's action. Napoleon's brother Joseph, is installed as the new King of Spain (24 July). British forces under the command of Wellington land in Portugal. They defeat the French at Vimiera (21 August). The French then agree by the Convention of Cintra to withdraw from Portugal, which they do by the 30th of September. The British Army under Sir John Moore invades Spain, joining forces with Baird's troops from Corunna. But faced with the threat of superior French numbers, the British soon fall back on Corunna.

1809 The British sail from Corunna to Britain (16 January). 21st February, Sargasso falls to the French. 12th May, Wellington returns to Portugal and enters Spain with a mixed force of British, Portuguese and Spanish troops. He defeats the French at Talavera (27-28 July) but lacking reinforcements returns to Almeida. The Spanish are defeated
at Otana and southern Spain is overrun by the French (20 November). Wellington prepares the fortified Lines of Torres Vedras, which cover Lisbon and act as a supply base and quarters for wintering. France's difficulties in Spain encourage Austria to renew her war against Napoleon. She is smashed at the Battle of Wagram (July).

1810 The French commanded by Massena invade Portugal. They take Ciudad Rodrigo (10 July). 27th September, Wellington defeats the French at Busaco, then retires behind the lines. Massena, unable to penetrate Wellington's defence or maintain his lines of communication, retreats towards the Spanish frontier (14 November).

1811 19th February, Soult takes Badajoz from the Spanish. Wellington, now reinforced, follows Massena and defeats him at Sabugal (5 April). He then attacks Almeida and Massena moves to relieve the town only to be defeated at Fuentes D'Onoro. (5 May)Almeida surrenders. The British then attack Badajoz but fail. Soult, marching to the aid of the French garrison at Badajoz, is defeated at Albuera (16 May). The French are defeated by the Spanish at Zimena (10 September) and the British at Merida (28 October). Meanwhile, the Russians withdraw from the Continental System. Napoleon resolves to invade Russia.

1812 19th January, Wellington takes Ciudad Rodrigo. 6th April, Badajoz falls and the British advance into Spain. Wellington defeats Marmont at Salamanca (22 July). 12th August, the Duke enters Madrid and then attempts to capture Burgos. He fails and falls back to the Portuguese frontier for the
winter. Napoleon invades Russia.

1813 Prussia and Austria join Russia and Britain to form the Fourth Coalition. 13th April, the French are defeated at Castella. Wellington defeats King Joseph at Vittoria (21 June) and invades France in October. Napoleon is crushed at the Battle of Leipzig.

1814 Led by Blucher, the Prussians cross the Rhine into France (1 January). Wellington defeats Soult at Orthez (27 February), at Tarbes (10 March), and, finally, at Toulouse (10 April). The armies of the Fourth Coalition enter Paris (31 March). 30th May, the Peace of Paris is signed and Napoleon is exiled to the island of Elba.

1815 Napoleon escapes and returns to France (1 March). He is crushed at Waterloo (18 June) and banished to St. Helena.
I

The Nature of War in the Eighteenth Century

When war broke out in February, 1793, Britain was, as usual, unprepared. Her strategic plan, if one did exist, was senescent, her administrative structure totally chaotic, and her military forces inadequate even for her own internal and coastal security. Rapid and decisive action was, as a result, impossible. What action there was in the early years against France was possible only through the expedient of hiring mercenaries and subsidizing her continental allies, such as Prussia and Austria. The results were dismal. The French Army, revolutionized by the brilliant Lazare Carnot devastated the armies of Britain and her allies. Prussia, Italy, and Austria were invaded and made subservient to France and her imperial designs. Britain survived only because her superior navy made a successful French invasion of the islands virtually impossible. Yet ultimately France was defeated in Europe with Britain's army making a decisive contribution to the destruction of her empire. The British succeeded not by revolutionizing the organization of their army as the French had done, but to a great extent by exploiting conventional European patterns of military organization more effectively than had been done before. In this chapter, we will discuss the military tradition inherited by the British Army; what follows then is a brief outline of the nature of warfare in the eighteenth century, describing its objectives, the manner in which it was fought, and most important, how armies were consequently organized. In the course of the discussion we will hope to analyze the social origins of the rank-and-file, the reasons why men participated in the army, and the sorts of conditions they were forced to endure.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries warfare was unrestrained, savage and anarchic. It was similarly brutal during the American and French Revolutionary Wars. But between the eras of religious and national wars a moderating trend influenced the conduct of war. James Boswell's comment to
his friend Rose at Leyden in 1764 "that" wars were going out nowadays from their mildness"¹ was, therefore, a typical eighteenth century perception of the state of war; one exception was Voltaire's portrayal of warfare in Candide. This change had nothing to do with the frequency of war but rather with the manner in which it was fought, that is, its scope and objectives.

This transformation in the conduct of war had several causes. A general moral revulsion against the atrocities of the Thirty Years' War probably contributed somewhat to the decline in its ferocity. The efficacy of political alliances also helped to limit the scale of warfare. Indeed, the term "balance of power" came into popular usage in the early eighteenth century. Moreover, an increase in the number of fortified towns, slow development of armaments, expensive costs of carrying out a sustained campaign, lack of mobility of armies owing to poor roads, slowness of communication, difficulties of winter campaigning, problems of supply in enemy countries and equal diffusion of military power and techniques among the armies of Europe had the same effect. As N. Barbon observed in 1690, "Now both Parties are equally Disciplin'd and Arm'd; and the Successes of War are not so great."²

The general unwillingness to improve the poor quality of the eighteenth century soldier reduced the flexibility and reliability of armies. And the belief that large armies were undesirable because they were difficult to manoeuvre, serving only "to perplex and embarass"³ according to the great French general, Maurice de Saxe, impossible to supply, and beyond the capacity of society to maintain, imposed further limits on the practice of warfare.

But the principal causes for the rather limited scope of war throughout much of the eighteenth century were philosophic and economic. It appears that the Enlightenment generally had a civilizing effect on behaviour. It contributed to the growth of a common sense of humanity among the intelligent
and the cultured, and to the acceptance of such concepts as moderation, proportion, toleration, humanitarianism and a belief in natural law to which all men could openly subscribe. Conversely, belief in extreme solutions, religious factionalism, and notions of heroism and physical courage were generally held in contempt. Reason was extolled as the tool which would unite mankind and reform societies. War thus seemed unworthy of an age in which reason was steadily gaining control of human affairs. The mental climate of the eighteenth century simply lacked the spirit of violence and hatred that had generated past struggles.  

It would also seem that the evolution of war in that era was critically affected by certain economic developments. There was from about 1640 onward a tendency among European nations to grow more alike in their commercial experiences. There thus emerged the common realization that war had too ruinous an effect on the human and material resource of the state. This fact was recognized in government: witness Colbert's extensive calculations on the effect of war on commerce throughout history. It was similarly observed by the first generation of political economists. In his Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy (1767), the Scotsman, James Steuart, for example, wrote that "Nothing is so evident as that war is inconsistent with the prosperity of the modern state"; this sentiment was echoed by the philosopher Immanuel Kant in the words that "The Spirit of Commerce ... is incompatible with war". Similarly, Montesquieu argued:

"The natural effect of commerce is to lead to peace. Two nations which trade with each other become reciprocally dependent; it is to the advantage of the other to sell; and all unions are founded on mutual needs."

The exigencies of economic development had imposed limits on the practice of war. New imperatives would, however, destroy these restraints by the end of the century.
None of this, however, meant that war was a rare phenomena in the Age of Reason. But it did mean that the stakes were smaller than before. National survival was almost never in question. Indeed, war did not even impinge on the daily lives of the people: at least every effort was made to avoid interfering with civilian life. The British people were particularly immune because of their isolation from the traditional theatres of war - Flanders, northern Germany, northern Italy and Spain. They went about their lives ignoring war. As Lawrence Sterne noted in his *Sentimental Journey*. "I left London with so much precipitation that it never entered my mind that we were at war with France." This indifference to some extent persisted in Britain into the nineteenth century. Thus, for example, in the middle of the Napoleonic Wars Jane Austen could write novels meant to reflect the times in which that monumental conflict was not even mentioned.

The fundamental drives behind war in that era were the desire by monarchs to strengthen their political position through the acquisition of an extra slice of territory or two, and to make commercial gains, that is, maritime trade and colonies. Austria, Brandenburg-Prussia, and Russia were principally concerned with expanding their borders, the Netherlands and Great Britain sought commercial advantage from war, while France and Spain were ambitious enough to seek both. Although gains were invariably limited ones, the conquest of even a few strategic points could command a strong bargaining position in negotiating a peace treaty. Peace settlements were normally the result of negotiation rather than imposed by one party upon another.

Given the restraints, imposed upon warfare, it is hardly surprising that its tactical side stagnated. Ware became highly formalized, even ritualized. It was in this age that war became to a great extent the sport of
Armies were relatively small, though they continued to grow rapidly throughout the century; they were also ceremoniously clad, and trained in parade-drill mechanical fashion. In campaign, these armies marched slowly because of their umbilical ties to elaborate magazines, and usually fought according to a universally accepted rigid set of rules. One might label the eighteenth century the 'neo-classical age' of modern war because success depended on the sophisticated use of techniques and rules known to everyone.

Infantry formed the nucleus of the armed forces, its weapons consisting of the musket and bayonet. The flintlock muskets used were only effectual at close quarters - within a few hundred yards - provided they were fired in unison out of close-order formations. Moreover, loading them was a slow process, and thus in order to get the greatest volume of fire from what was still a primitive weapon soldiers were usually organized in lines three deep, one line shooting while the other two reloaded. Arranging troops in such a formation was a slow and complicated task; the men were usually organized at a distance to the enemy and then marched in rigid fashion onto the battlefield. Such combat required well disciplined, intensively trained troops that could not be squandered. This condition contrasted sharply with the character of war until the mid-seventeenth century, which essentially consisted of a confused scramble between two parties of undisciplined, half-trained men.

Naturally, the object of combat was not to annihilate; the idea was no longer popular philosophically, nor sensible strategically since it was near impossible for one army to gain the necessary advantage over another. There was the odd exception, like the Battle of Malplaquet (1704). The goal of war was no longer even to force battle but rather to disrupt the enemy's supply and communication and, therefore, leave him no choice but to
concede defeat without battle or else starve. Indeed, in his posthumously published *Mes Réveries* (1756), Maurice de Saxe declared that not only was it conceivable but quite reasonable to suppose that a successful general might wage war throughout his career without ever having to resort to battle. The Battle of Fontenoy (1745) was an excellent example of this. Saxe himself was not so fortunate. Battles were fought then only when the enemy could not be manoeuvred into surrendering. It was the age of march and counter-march, diversion and deception, a rather intriguing spectacle but, from a military point of view, mediocre. In the words of Daniel Defoe:

"Now it is frequent to have armies of fifty thousand men of a side stand at bay within view of another, and spend a whole campaign in dodging, or, as it is generally called, observing one another, and then march off into winter quarters."11

This highly formalized, rigid, chess-like style of war was popular through most of the century. Neo-classical warfare came to be viewed by many as not only desirable but, in effect, natural. It was not until the American struggle for independence that the nature of combat began to change, that struggle set a precedent; henceforth, war would increasingly become an instrument of ideological and nationalist fanaticism. In this atmosphere the ideals of moderation and honourable conduct could not survive. The moral foundation of total war was being laid.

During the American War of Independence new military policies and tactics designed to make decisive victory the normal instead of an exceptional outcome of war were tested. The new tactics took advantage of minor innovations in weaponry. Increased firepower suggested the adoption of irregular formations designed for quick strikes in place of perfectly ordered lines. In America, 'light troops' that fought in this manner were used extensively and by the 1780's were popular throughout Europe. But what was really
needed was a means by which a superior force could be concentrated at an enemy's weak spot. Military theorists in France looked to the column, a clumsy formation but one which combined mobility with close formation, as a means of concentrating men at a given point for a telling blow. Comte de Guibert improved upon this arrangement by devising a method for alternating between the column and the line, therefore maximizing both mobility and firepower. Other tactical innovations followed.

The final two decades of the century was thus a period in which conventional modes of fighting were actively challenged. The boldest innovation came from Revolutionary France; in the process the nature of war was transformed. In the course of a threat of the invasion of France by the established powers, the young French republic discovered or invented total war. Involved was a complete mobilization of the nation's resources through modified conscription (the levée en masse), rationing and a rigidly controlled war economy. The modern 'mass' army had been created and by the spring of 1794 the French had 750,000 men under arms. As Clausewitz observed, "War had again suddenly become an affair of the people."12 They were successful because the enemy was still too attached to orthodox eighteenth century warfare and neither expected nor welcomed France's vast civilian participation in war. Under the leadership of Napoleon Bonaparte, for the most part, the French Army dominated European war for nearly two decades. Though not a great military reformer, Napoleon was brilliant in his ability to move France's armies of up to 200,000 men across great stretches of the continent at speeds far greater than had hitherto been thought possible, to manoeuvre his men into a position best suited to meet the enemy, and to strike with a decisive superiority of men at the critical moment.
The French also revolutionized the treatment of soldiers. For example, they abolished corporal punishment; instead loyalty was promoted through the introduction of the Revolutionary spirit into service. The soldier's role as defender of the fatherland and carrier of those principles upon which the Revolution had been founded was continually proclaimed. The power of ideas, absent since the religious wars of the sixteenth century, was re-invoked. Moreover, prowess rather than birth became the criterion of advancement through the ranks. The French Army really did offer men la carrière ouverte aux talents. Elsewhere, unfortunately, traditional habits in the organization and treatment of soldiers persisted. We might look now at that conventional military organization.

The armed forces in the eighteenth century, both on the continent and in Britain, were hierarchical institutions, reflecting the sharply-defined nature of European society. They were officered primarily by the nobility; commoners found it difficult to gain a commissioned rank as "social status became increasingly the passport to military rank as the century progressed". The trend was deliberate, for monarchs encouraged such patronage in the hope of consolidating aristocratic support. The popular rationale was that the hereditary privileged classes alone possessed the sense of honour required to carry out an officer's work. The rank-and-file, on the other hand, was comprised of a combination of hired mercenaries, and natives recruited from the peasantry, n'er-do-wells, social misfits, criminals, urban unemployed and even the insane. In other words:

"Recruits were provided ... by those isolated individuals whose absence would inconvenience nobody: young men with a distaste for humdrum existence ... and a taste for adventure, ... and down-and-outs, ready to exchange their liberty for food and clothing; bad characters with little choice in life except that between military service or the gallows."
In most states, enlistment was a volunteer act, although coercion and other unscrupulous practices were common. Voltaire's account of Candide's recruitment into the army of the Bulgarians provided one example of this.

"He halted sadly at the door of an inn. Two men dressed in blue noticed him ... They went up to Candide and very civilly invited him to dinner. "Gentlemen", said Candide with charming modesty, "You do me a great honour, but I have no money to pay my share." "Ah, Sir," said one of the men in blue, "persons of your figure and merit never pay anything; are you not five feet tall?" "Yes, gentlemen," said he, bowing, "That is my height". "Ah, sir, come to my table; we will not only pay your expenses, we will never allow a man like you to be short of money; men are only made to help each other." ...

"We were asking you if you do not tenderly love the King of the Bulgarians." "Not a bit," said he, "for I have never seen him." "What. He is the most charming of Kings, and you must drink to his health." "Oh, gladly, gentlemen." And he drank. "That is sufficient," he was told, "You are now the support, the aid, the defender, the hero of the Bulgarians; your fortune is made and your glory assured."

They immediately put irons on his legs and took him to a regiment."^{15}

Saxe similarly condemned the "raising of troops by fraud" as an "odious practice."^{16}

A few states developed forms of compulsory service, but they were generally haphazard and inequitable with the burden falling heavily on the lowest orders. While universal conscription was advocated by such notable figures as Saxe, Guibert and Montesquieu, there was no hope of its implementation owing to the existence of privileged social classes, and by demands made on the labouring classes through mercantilist attempts to raise the level of agricultural and industrial production. The notion that the army should, in some sense, be representative of the nation was to most people an absurdity. It was almost universally agreed that the army should secure its recruits from the social groups of least economic value. According to the pre-Revolution French Minister of War, St. Germain:
It would undoubtedly be desirable if we could create an army of dependable, of specially selected men of the best types. But in order to make an army we must not destroy a nation; it would be destructive to a nation if it were deprived of its best elements. As things are, the army must inevitably consist of the scum of the people and all those for whom society has no use."

War was simply too unimportant to risk utilizing any but the least useful elements of society to fight it.

Britain's island position, combined with her superior navy, recognized as such during the "War of the League of Augsburg" (1688-1697), relieved her of the need to maintain a standing army as large as most of those prevailing on the continent. Indeed, the Anglo military tradition showed little enthusiasm for a standing army of any size. The army was notoriously unpopular, and as a result was generally neglected. Distaste for a standing army originated in the reign of Mary I (1550's). But the principal reason for its unpopularity in the eighteenth century was because it had been used during the dictatorship of Cromwell as an army of occupation under the rule of the "major generals" (1655-59). This interference in the internal politics of England "created a rooted aversion to standing armies and an abiding dread of military rule." The unpopular use made of the army by both Charles II and James II, especially the latter's attempt to exploit it to re-establish the Roman Catholic Church in England, and to rule the kingdom as an absolute monarch, served to intensify this reaction against the army. Subsequently, the Mutiny Act of 1689 established the principle of the subordination of the army to parliamentary control; and while the post-Revolution parliament recognized that a standing army was necessary, if enacted measures to keep it small and politically insignificant. Suspicion of the army remained. The army's status as a constabulatory force also did little to improve its position in the eyes of public. The Navy, on the other hand, was
universally admired as the source of England's strength, the key to her
defence, and as an institution which could not dominate civil society.
"They protected the liberty of all, threatened the liberty of none,"21
observed Élie Halévy.

Another reason for public displeasure with the army was due to
its increasing corruption after the "War of the Spanish Succession" (1702-
1713). The purchase system, for example, became popular. For some reason
Britain's army was the only one in Europe in which purchase was universal
and founded on a regular, fixed basis. It was defended on the grounds
that it served as a pension for outgoing officers and thus saved parliament
an expense, as a protection against the sort of tyranny that had allowed
James II, for example, to replace Protestant with Catholic officers, and
as a device that weeded out those who cared little for the army life and
who would be willing to trade it for the money offered by the purchaser.
Unfortunately, the practice allowed numerous corrupt and incompetent men to
gain office. Other abuses were common; indeed the army was thoroughly
corrupt. As a result, army organization suffered terribly. There was
little top-to-bottom co-ordination and few standard regulations throughout
the army. Incredibly, the affairs of the force were handled by up to nine
separate offices: Those of Secretary at War, (later Secretary of State for
Home Affairs), Secretary of State (Colonies) between 1767 and 1782), The
Home Office, The Treasury, The Colonial Board, The Board of Trade (1694-
1782), The Master-General of the Ordinances, and the Pay Master of the
Forces.

The extreme unpopularity of the armed forces, combined with the
growing prosperity of Britain, made it difficult to fulfil the manpower
needs of the army despite its small size. The general European tendency to
look to the weakest, the most easily persuaded elements of society for recruits,
and to utilize any means necessary to enlist 'volunteers' was not alien to the English experience. In time of war, recruiting often amounted to kidnap­ping. One soldier wrote:

"In England the recruiting sergeant goes to the very places in which he is least likely to meet with steady and respectable men. He goes to the public house, to the fair, the races, or the wake, the haunts of the dissolute, and in many cases, having stupefied some lazy vagabond with intoxicating drinks, he slips a shilling into his hand." 22

Saxe noted a more or less identical practice was followed on the Continent whereby "money is slipped secretly into a man's pocket and then he is told that he is a soldier." 23

Normally, the recruiting sergeant began by offering men various induc­ements. The appeal to patriotism was among the least important of them. He stressed the monetary rewards of the profession (the bounty, prize money), the ready availability of drink, its adventurous and rapacious side, and the freedom it offered from severe masters, impersonal cities and tyrannical wives. This popular folk song of the time celebrates the new recruit's liberation:

Our prentice Tom may now refuse
To wipe his scoundrel master's
shoes;
For now he's free to sing and play -
Over the hills and far away,
Over the hills and far away.

We all shall lead more happy lives
By getting rid of brats and wives,
That scold and brawl both night and day -
Over the hills and far away, 24
Over the hills and far away.

Some men did of course volunteer gladly, and perhaps the number of genuine volunteers has never been appreciated fully; but to a great extent, recruitment practices involved, as on the continent, the systematic deception of the ignorant.
It should be pointed out that although volunteer enlistment was the most usual means of acquiring recruits, certain forms of compulsory service were occasionally introduced. For example, in 1696, drafting of insolvent debtors was legalized, and in 1702 the Mutiny Act authorized the release of felons and capital offenders on condition that they served in the army. The Mutiny Acts of 1703 through 1750 reaffirmed these conditions. Moreover, by the Act 1703 local Justices were empowered "to raise and levy all such able-bodied as not having any lawful calling or employment, or visible means for their maintenance and livelihood." They utilized this power extensively. Indeed, the Justices were usually in active collusion with the army to serve recruits. This sort of non-voluntary service continued throughout the century; one act in 1779, for example, authorized the impressment of thieves around London. Those impounded by the recruiting officers on this occasion were described by one observer as being "far too lame to run away, or too poor to bribe the parish authorities." In line with European trends, forms of compulsory service became increasingly less popular in the last two decades of the century. France, of course, became the big exception.

The British army in the neo-classical age of modern warfare was thus comprised, for the most part, of the scum of British society and a sizeable contingent of foreign mercenaries. (The removal of restrictions against Catholics from serving ushered in a wave of Irish recruits, who joined mostly out of poverty, but this was not until the early 1780's. Henceforth, the Irish would contribute up to a third of the army's manpower needs.) In a sense, however, this was quite desirable, that is, apart from the very real economic advantages that it served. The fact was that educated people were almost impossible to train, handle and discipline. In the words of Frederick the Great, "If my soldiers began to think, no one would remain in the ranks."
These sentiments are reflected in George Farquhar's play, The Recruiting Officer (1706) in a scene involving Plume, the recruiting captain, and Kite, his sergeant. Plume has just learnt that Kite has enlisted a lawyer:

\begin{quote}
Kite: Why Sir?
Plume: Because I will have nobody in my company that can write; a fellow that can write, can draw petitions. I say this minute discharge him.
\end{quote}

and later Plume says:

\begin{quote}
"You must know, in the first place, then, that I have gentlemen in my company; for they are always troublesome and expensive, sometimes dangerous; and 'tis a constant maxim among us, that those who know the least obey the most."
\end{quote}

The fact that down-and-outs were preferred to educated people, did not mean, however, that it was a simple manner to discipline them. Initially, the recruit had little respect for anyone; that his superiors were from the nobility and his origins were the lowest orders promoted no immediate sense of deference and little respect for the minute social distinctions and nuances of status operating in that society. The soldier also made a nuisance of himself in public, both at home and abroad. He drank heavily, brawled, disputed, occasionally interfered in local politics and from time-to-time was involved in kidnappings. But while this sort of behaviour might be condoned in public, particularly in an age in which drinking and boisterous behaviour were habitual, lack of discipline was intolerable on the battlefield. Clearly, "for troops to expose themselves unflinchingly in the face of enemy muskets and artillery while advancing at the agonizingly slow cadence of eighty paces to the minute required discipline of the very highest kind"; anything less would be disastrous. In an effort to keep her troops in line, Britain did what every other power in Europe did in that age, she resorted to the lash. As Lieutenant-Colonel Dalrymple wrote in 1761, "It is very difficult from the kind of men we get to avoid frequent
and severe punishment". There existed from the reign of King William III a harsh military code, based on the Earl of Essex's *Laws and Ordinances of Wars* (1642), and several authorized forms of punishment to deal with infractions, though the British seemed to lack the variety and ingenuity of punishments common to the armies on the continent. Nevertheless, "what the British lacked in variety it made up for in volume and enthusiasm".

Several levels of punishment were operative. The Articles of War outlined six acts punishable by the death sentence: mutiny, sedition, demand for pay in mutinous fashion, seditious words, refusal to obey, striking an officer and desertion. Execution was generally by firing squad; decapitation was rarely used after 1700. Less severe acts, particularly minor acts of insubordination and disobedience, were subject to corporal punishment. The most popular forms were: whipping with the cat-o' nine-tails; picketing, which involved tying the man's wrist and suspending him by it over a sharp stake in such a way that one of his feet would be slightly impaled by the spike; running the gauntlet (gantelope); and tying neck and heels, a procedure where in the prisoner was seated on the ground, a musket was placed under his buttocks and another over his neck, and then the two were tied together such that the man's head was made to lie between his legs, often until blood "rushed out of his nose, mouth and ears, and some suffered ruptures." Rarer punishments included branding on the forehead, cutting off an ear or boring a hole through the tongue, the latter occasionally used to punish excessive blasphemy, a popular diversion among British soldiers, and hence the inspiration behind the classic expression, "the army went to Flanders and swore horribly". As well, the men organized 'regimental courts', and used them often; the most common form of punishment was 'cobbing', a form of whipping using a belt, strap or rope.
Most forms of corporal punishment were removed in the last decades of the eighteenth century, and replaced, for the sake of simplicity, by flogging with the cat. However, the severity of punishment did not appreciably diminish, though it was probably no worse than the ferocity of punishment in the French or Prussian armies, and certainly no more barbaric than the growing cruelty of the English civil code, the so-called 'Bloody Code', which by the 1780's listed in excess of three hundred and fifty capital offences, among them the theft of a shilling or a handkerchief worth more than two shillings. Nevertheless, it is chilling to reflect that "perhaps as much blood from drum-head floggings has stained the barrack squares ... as was ever spilt upon the battlefields of Europe and Empire."35

The results of the use of severe punishment to encourage obedience were, on the whole, effectual. Britain's soldiers had a reputation, earned in the late seventeenth century, for steadiness in battle, discipline, unshakeable courage, and endurance. The price was a brutalized existence.

If the disciplinary system was tyrannical, the army offered few compensations elsewhere to redress it. The pay set at 8d in 1660, was still 8d in 1789 despite the steady rise in the cost of living, the only difference being that the soldier no longer supplied his own arms and ammunition. That it remained so low was due to an attitude toward the soldier of late-feudal precedent, which saw him not as a citizen serving the state, but as a private adventurer seeking to enrich himself. According to Sir John Fortescue, "the pay of the soldier never pretended to be a fair wage, but was only a retaining fee against the day of prize-money."36 In any case, by the 1780's army pay was totally inadequate. This condition was not remedied until the Revolutionary Wars, but when it finally was, there was reflected in this correction a new attitude toward the soldier, one in which pay was no longer seen as
welfare but as a reward for a service done.

Insufficiency of food was also a problem. Food rations were, in theory, adequate, but in campaign, the relatively primitive state of the supply system often resulted in extreme shortages or provisions. Marlborough was one of the few British commanders able to ensure a regular supply.

There was also much corruption in victualling. The results were appalling.

William Cobbert wrote:

"Judge of the quantity of food to sustain life in a lad of 16, and to enable him to exercise with a musket ... six to eight hours a day ... I have seen them lay in their berths, many and many a time, crying on account of hunger. The whole week's food was not a bit too much for one day." 37

To make matters worse, the food was badly preserved; thus, the beef was tough, the biscuits hard and the bread coarse, although what passed for rations in the Navy, it should be noted, was even worse. Admiral Raigersfield wrote of the days when his biscuit,

"... was so light that when you tapped it upon the table it fell amost into dust and thereout numerous insects called weevils crawled; they were bitter to the taste and a sure indication that the biscuits had lost its nutritious particles; if, instead of these weevils, large maggots with black heads made their appearance, then the biscuit was considered to be only in the first stage of decay: These maggots were fat and cold to the taste but not bitter." 38

Moreover, as late as 1789 many sailors refused to drink the beer on board, because it was said to contain *great heaps of stuff not unlike to man's guts." 39

Lodging was similarly inadequate. On campaign, the men usually slept out in the open, tents being a late eighteenth century improvisation. At home, they survived without formal barracks; instead the soldier was billeted out, often in second-class Inns, a cold cellar or rat-infested garret.

Finally, the conditions of combat were hazardous. Not only was the mortality rate quite high in battle but health treatment for the wounded and sick was notoriously bad. No orderlies combed the battlefields in search of
wounded men; getting back to camp depended upon one's own volition, or the help of comrades and even if one was successful, the chances of survival were still less than fifty percent in the hands of army surgeons, many of whom were incompetent. Moreover, apart from the dangers of battle, the soldier was often made to fight in areas which exposed him to disease and sickness. For example, during the 'War of Jenkin's Ear' (1739-1742), Walpole sent an expedition of eight battalions to the West Indies and South America to fight the Spanish. Although two thousand men quickly died of yellow fever, the army was nonetheless made to fight on with the result that more than ninety percent of the men perished of the sickness.

Such was the military like during the eighteenth century. Even if we keep in mind that it was an era in which poverty, brutality and inequities were habitual throughout British society, when civilian living wages were insufficient and the legal system barbarous, "the soldier's calling nevertheless stands out as one which offered hardly any compensations for its discomforts and hazards, not to say its perils to life." It is not surprising that under the circumstances desertion was a notorious problem throughout the century, not only in the British armed forces but within every army in Europe. Officers spent much of their time guarding over their men in order to prevent it. As well, severe penalties were instituted to deal with recovered deserters. In one of the more extreme acts Frederick I ordered in 1711 that captured deserters would have their nose and an ear cut off and be sent to hard labour for life. Nonetheless, Prussia lost 30,000 men to desertion between 1713 and 1740. In wartime the problem multiplied. During the 'Seven Year's War', for example, desertion totals were staggering - Austria lost 62,000, France 70,000 and Prussia 80,000; and in the War of American Independence one observer wrote that "the combatants had so little zeal for the
struggle that the British and American armies were composed of each other's deserters.\textsuperscript{41} After the war desertion remained heavy in the British army, as its organization and spirit underwent a severe deterioration.

For those who did not desert, army service was usually a long, tiresome, lonely and mentally-debilitating life. It had few compensations - the occasional excitement of battle, the freedom from civilian responsibilities, the ready supply of alcohol. It also provided security for the old soldier, since the army held on to even the aged for their experience and because recruitment was such a problem. Those who were forced to leave, usually due to injury, often had no alternative but to turn to begging. A poem from the late seventeenth century entitled 'Mauding Soldier, or the Fruit of War is Beggary' speaks of the former soldier's condition as a mendicant:

\begin{verbatim}
Good worship, cast your eyes
Upon a soldier's miseries:
let not my leane cheeks, I pray
Your bounty from a soldier stay,
But like a noble friend,
Some silver lead,
And Jove will pay you in the end.
I pray your worship think on me,
That I am what I seem to be,
No rooking rascal, nor no cheat,
But a soldier in every way compleat:
I have wounds to show\textsuperscript{42}
That prove it so ...
\end{verbatim}

In sum, when Britain entered the war against Revolutionary France she possessed an army whose soldiers were badly treated and held in low public esteem. Her force was solidly traditional. The result was a force, woefully inefficient compared to the French Army, plagued by high rates of desertion. However, ultimately the British developed an efficient army, including a soldier whose dedication was at least as good as that of his French counterpart. Part of the reason for this remarkable sense of devotion stemmed from.
improvements in the Army's organization, that is, in the treatment of the rank-and-file. But as we will endeavour to show, other factors as well contributed enormously.


3. Ibid., 133.

4. The Enlightenment spirit was apparent, for example, in King Louis XIV of France's refusal to have a new form of powder issued to the French army because it was, in his words, "too destructive of human life" (John Nef, *War and Human Progress* [New York, 1950], 260.)


9. Ibid., 162.

10. The great revolutionary general, Carnot, once noted with obvious sarcasm that hitherto "what was taught in the military school was ... the art of ... surrendering ... honourably after certain conventional formalities". (Cited in Nef, *op. cit.*, 157.)


18. For example, in 1740 French had a force of 190,000 men, Austria 108,000, Prussia 80,000, Russia 130,000, Spain 67,000, Bavaria 40,000, Saxony 34,000, Holland 30,000, Hanover 20,000, and Great Britain 18,000. (Leonard W. Cowie, *Eighteenth Century Europe* [London, 1963], 130-137).

20. The size of the army was fixed in the annual passage of the Mutiny Act. Parliament also controlled military finances. As well, parliamentary acts prohibited a soldier from appearing at an election site except to vote or in parliament unless called to appear, and confined soldiers to their quarters during the settings of the Assize Courts.


26. Ibid, 78.

27. Cited in Nef, op. cit., 308.


29. Ibid., Act IV, Sc. 1, 86.


33. Cited in Laffin, op. cit., 103.

34. According to Sir Samuel Romilly, influential opponent of the Code, "There is no country on the face of the earth in which there are so many difference offenses according to the law to be punished with death as in England." (Cited in James Dugan, *The Great Mutiny* [New York, 1965], 15).

35. Laffin, op. cit., 99-100.


37. Cited in Laffin, op. cit., 57


42. Cited in Laffin, op. cit., 28.
II

Joining Up

In the previous chapter, we noted that in the seventeenth century, the British soldier developed an outstanding reputation for bravery and steadiness in battle.

In Cromwell's day, for example, the Frenchman Turenne observed, "I have seen the English. They are the finest troops imagineable."¹ This renown was maintained for more than a century, despite chronic administrative mismanagement, neglect and numerous corrupting influences in the army. However, the demoralization suffered as a result of the failure of the colonial war against America (1775-85) stuck a telling blow at the quality of the forces. Britain's defeats, particularly the capitulations at Saratoga and Yorktown, bred a certain war weariness and depression, which combined with undue political interference in the affairs of the army and a sharp decline in the quality of officers, led to organizational chaos, apathy, and a neglect of proper training and discipline. As Sir Henry Banbury wrote:

"Our army was lax in its discipline, entirely without system, and very weak in numbers. Each colonel of a regiment managed it according to his own notions, or neglected it altogether. There was no uniformity of drill or movement; professional pride was rare: professional knowledge still more so."²

Furthermore, despite the steady rise in the cost of living, soldier's pay had remained fixed at 8d a day since 1660, and would remain unchanged until 1777, the year of the great naval mutinies.³ A soldier now had great difficulty in feeding himself adequately and in supplying his equipment and clothing needs. The result was a steady stream of desertion throughout
the 1780's, and a depletion in the size of the army since little energy was expended in replacing the losses.4

In the first campaigns of the war against Revolutionary France, Britain was forced to hire foreign mercenaries. At this time, the army did, however, expand its efforts to recruit British citizens, in part, through a practice known as "recruiting for rank", that is, of offering men offices on condition that they raise a pre-designated quota of volunteers. The scheme was widely abused and terribly inefficient; the majority of men enlisted tended to be either too young or too old to serve effectively. These unenthusiastic and badly trained recruits were sent to Flanders, where Sir Henry Culvert described them as "worse than any I ever saw, even at the close of the American War."5 Adjutant General Fawcett added in a letter to Lieutenant-Colonel Hewett:

"It will be some time before you can expect to make any use of them, as very few of the officers have served before and none of the men have ever had a Firelock on their shoulders ... Four of those Irish corps you lately sent over, viz., the 107th, 110th, 119th and 120th, being not only almost totally unfit for any service, but not possibly to be rendered so in any tolerable time, according to General Hunter's report, are going to be reduced ... the 118th (Lieutenant Colonel Talbot's) are at this moment in an open, bare-faced state of mutiny and will do nothing but what they please, despising and insulting their officers in the most shameful manner."6

By 1795, Britain's inferior army had been chased out of Flanders, yet despite this failure and embarrassment her forces remained weak for nearly a decade; in 1799 British Army efficiency was still so low that on a second expedition to Holland, Sir Ralph Abercromby was forced to leave behind in England two full
regiments as 'unfit to appear in the presence of an enemy'.

Indeed, until about the time of her brilliant victory at Maida in southern Italy (1806), Great Britain's armed force was the least feared, least respected of France's enemies, a corrupt and incompetent anachronism in the face of France's revolutionary 'mass' army.

Now it is odd that although little was done at first to reform the army by eliminating its most unattractive features and increasing its efficiency, so that Britain might take the offensive against France, a number of well-organized auxilliary forces were raised strictly as a home defence. Not only was this proliferation of defensive corps unnecessarily vast since in the Royal Navy Britain had a superb force to defend the island, but it also absorbed men who otherwise might conceivably have entered the regular army. The militia, for example, came into direct competition with the army for recruits. Though it was a body conscripted by ballot, substitution was allowed, and as there existed a rather limited field of prospective substitutes, their purchase price rose substantially. These men naturally tended to be of the sort that did not mind serving, but who chose to go where the money was most generous, and the £30 or so they received to act as substitutes exceeded regular army bounties.

The raising of a standing army for war was also made difficult by the advantages in amenities offered exclusively to militiamen, among them 'marriage' allowances. As Wellington argued, "Is it to be expected that people will become soldiers in the line, and leave their families to starve, when, if they
become soldiers in the militia, their families are provided?"7
(Only six wives per hundred soldiers were allowed to accompany their husbands abroad.)

Moreover, the popular deep-rooted abhorence of the army should again be emphasized; most working-class families still thought it a social disgrace to volunteer. The losses of eighty thousand men (forty thousand dead, forty thousand permanently disabled) during the campaign to "filch sugar islands" (as critics labelled the West Indian expedition, 1795-96) only served to reinforce the public's distaste for the army. These casualties exceeded 'the total losses of Wellington's from death, discharges, desertion, and all causes from the beginning to the end of the Penninsula War.'8 Thus, throughout the first phase of the war against France (to the Peace of Amiens, 1802), the British Army was both terribly disorganized and thoroughly unpopular, and one would have thought Thomas Pitt's earlier observation that "a man's listing in the army can never proceed from prudence or discretion of from a deliberate act of the mind; for no one in his right right senses would ever lend himself,"9 appropriate, yet men were drawn into the forces, increasingly so as the war progressed. To appreciate this phenomenon, it is necessary to analyse recruitment practices, and their evolution during this period, the changing nature of the army, and the mood of the country itself.

The easiest, though not the most prevalent, method of enlisting men was to offer the motley refuse from jails and prison ships the alternative to serving out their sentences of enlisting. As well, men accused of serious crimes were exonerated, provided
that they volunteered. This was possible owing to the recruiting Sergeant's power to secure a ruling of 'case dismissed' in the assize quarter sessions. It was, therefore, a common sight to see recruiting parties attending quarter sessions and receiving men for the army in lieu of any other punishment. Many men, of course, volunteered with the intention of deserting as soon as the opportunity arose. The scheme differed from those earlier methods which allowed thieves, hardened criminals, and even the unemployed to be conscripted; it was strictly voluntary though the system was naturally abused. For example, during the crisis in Ireland, hundreds of innocent men were arrested for revolutionary behaviour and then offered a choice between the gallows and enlisting. On the whole, however, reprieved criminals comprised a relatively small proportion of the army, though they had a monopoly over certain positions within it. In 1794, for example, the Royal Waggoners, were, according to Sir John Fortescue, 'the sweepings of the criminal population of London, and the very worst men in an extremely ill-conducted army.'

It should perhaps be noted that men responsible for having committed acts not in the strictest sense, illegal, but which were socially reprehensible, such as fathering an illegitimate child, were often offered an alternative by the local magistrate between (in this case) marrying or enlisting in the army. In the words of one recruiting sergeant, the sturdiest of our yeomen, who having increased the population of their parish without permission of the clergy, are glad to escape the consequences by sheltering under the licence of the camp. In retrospect, he adds
that such fellows, "one constituted the great mass of recruits from country districts".  

The vast majority of Britain's recruits were, however, at first supplied through the traditional system of civilian recruitment, with all its abuses; and in view of the widespread unpopularity of the army in the first years of the wars, the system grew more complex and devious than ever. Yet although no doubt many civilians were cajoled, manipulated or coerced into the army, the enlistment of a good many, indeed the majority, of them is nevertheless, in some other sense, explicable.

Until 1806, recruitment was within the dominion of the Inspector General of Recruiting, and thereafter directed by the Adjutant General. In 1795, fifteen recruiting districts were organized in England, four in Scotland, and five in Ireland. Each was administered by an Inspecting Field Officer and his staff, comprised of an adjutant, sergeant major, depot sergeant and a 'hospital mate' (replaced in 1802 by a District Surgeon). The actual field work was carried out by parties of soldiers borrowed from local army depots, and consisted of a subaltern or captain, a sergeant, a contingent of corporals and a drummer.

It was pointed out earlier that in the eighteenth century, recruiting parties tended to solicit those areas in which the old, the weak, the abject poor, and the socially undesirable congregated, that is, the slum, the fair, the tavern and the wake. Their logic was twofold; one, it was easier to recruit this sort of character than respectable people; and two, European society, with the exception of France, was still convinced that
only this lowest and least useful of social classes ought to be expended for military service. Indeed, Pitt's Quota Act of 1795 was unpopular because it was based on the assumption that an equal number of men were to be provided from economically healthy districts as from the perennially impoverished and run-down ones. Undoubtedly, a large segment of the forces in the war against Revolutionary France did consist of the 'n'er-do-well', whose social importance was otherwise nonexistent and whose prospects of advancing were severely limited. But increasingly, as we will later attempt to demonstrate, a better quality of soldier was attracted to the forces.

A typical recruiting party of the time operated in a fashion somewhat similar to the following true example. In 1804, at a fair held in Winchester, two privates and several officers disguised as yokels, coachmen and labourers, entered a tavern, and proceeded to buy drinks for a number of men. They began to talk loudly and enthusiastically about their intentions to enlist. Then one of the soldiers spun a "long rigamarole of how his eldest brother, who enlisted that day three years ago, was now a captain in India, as rich as a nabob". A sergeant was then signalled to enter the tavern, whereupon he announced that several vacancies were available for positions of sergeant in the army, and then produced a pocketful of bounty money and watches to be distributed to those who volunteered. In the opinion of one sergeant, the presentation of watches invariably had an uncanny effect upon onlookers. A number of volunteers stepped forward. On the following day, the recruiting sergeant paid a visit to a fortune teller at the fair, and instructed him to tell all his male
customers that their futures lay with the 'red coat'. As a result, several more volunteers were added to the collection. A good recruiting party was, indeed, remarkably adept at its work, as recognized by one amazed new recruit:

"Previously to this casual meeting with this modern kite of Elliot's Light Horse, I should have considered the career of a soldier not more improbable than the attainment of the Archbishopric of Canterbury. But if ever a manufacturer of recruits was qualified for the trade which he had undertaken, it was the swaggering ... Bill Buckley." 13

But when recruiting parties were less successful, the last resource was to get him drunk and then slip a shilling in his pocket, get him home to your billet, and next morning swear he enlisted, bringing all your party to prove it. 14 The enlistment of Duncan Stewart, so admirably described by the anonymous author of *The Subaltern*, was of this fashion. 15 And though, in the final analysis, every recruit had to swear an oath before a magistrate that he had freely volunteered, no problem was encountered with those who had been deceived into enlisting since "as for magistrates, we knew whom to go to on these occasions. You know it was all for the good of service." 16

Among those recruited by the standard practices was an unusually high proportion of Irishmen. The economic backwardness of Ireland, produced a great deal of pauperism, and the despair which it bred opened up the way for many to seek refuge in the British Army, even prior to Union. As one observer noted, 'the poor turn soldiers, or thieves or starve'. 17 Though fraudulent recruiting was practiced to an unparalleled extent in Ireland, that result too was made bearable by the extreme impoverishment
and insecurity that most Irishmen otherwise faced.

By 1798 numerous army battalions were so stocked with Irish men that the government dared not to use them in the crisis in Ireland. According to the Duke of York, "As almost the whole of the Recruits of the Infantry of the line are Irish, it would be by no means a politic measure to send any of the regular battalions to Ireland". This statement was undoubtedly, a bit of an exaggeration, but nonetheless, between one-quarter and one-third of all men serving, in the regular army throughout the war, were Irish, the majority of whom had previously known only chronic food shortages, marginal employment, and general insecurity.

The recruiting officer recognized that the pauper, the drunkard and the fool were fair game. He also recognized the existence of a substantial source of potential recruits in men who though reasonably well-off, skilled or semi-skilled, and regularly employed were, in some sense, alienated from their work or social situation, or subject to some intense personal dissatisfaction or trauma. Admittedly, the concept of alienation is all too frequently invoked in our day to explain almost any unusual behaviour, and must therefore be applied with great caution. It seems, however, that in that age of transformation in which industrialism relentlessly absorbed older forms of production, modes of work and community relations, the same sorts of internal psychic pressures and anxieties which prepared men to take the plunge into Methodism were manipulated in order to recruit men into the army. None of their experiences made enlistment predictable, but they certainly made it comprehensible.
After all, army life was not only relatively secure insofar as a regular provision of food, pay and clothing was ensured, it was also an escape, an occupation free of normal anxiety and responsibility, and yet, at the same time, a mode of existence able to generate a profound sense of self-importance and personal worth. One recruiting sergeant who cleverly exploited this sense of dissatisfaction wrote:

"There is no wonder (at his success, he said modestly) no wonder at all. I knew Glasgow well ... knew the minds of the young fellows better then they did themselves - for I had been a weaver myself and a lazy one too ... The truth is, you could scarcely catch a weaver contented. They are always complaining. Therefore you would never have much trouble enticing them to enlist. The best way was to make up to the man you had in your eye ... and ask him what sort of a web he was in. You might be sure it was a bad one ... Ask him how a clever, handsome-looking fellow like him could waste his time hanging seesaw between heaven and earth in a damp, unwholesome shop no better than one of the dripping vaults in St. Mungo's Church ...".

Discontent stemming from occupations not yet touched by industrialism also produced its share of recruits. For a vigorous man war may have appeared very attractive as an alternative to frustrating, monotonous or exhausting work. Several journals of soldiers tell of having joined the army in order to flee cruel and tyrannical masters. Lawrence of the 20th and Andrew Pearson were two such characters. The latter fled to Cork and within a day was enlisted and assigned to Duncannon Fort. In rural Britain, men too restless and turbulent for the life of a peasant yearned to escape its tedium. One sergeant's memoirs speak extensively of 'country lads tired of the plough', awed by promises of adventure, excitement and glory. One such
lad was Rifleman Harris, the famous former Dorset shepherd. In his reminiscences, he dismissed his pre-army days, in a passage or two, as banal and irrelevant, ignoring even to mention his name or birth place. Harris's only interest was in the telling of his army experiences. Similarly, after leaving the army, owing to injury, Harris had little use for civilian life; his army days, however, remained proud memories.

Finally, men were more accessible to the spirited appeals of the recruiting officer if personal conflict clouded their lives. The odd gentleman, for example, enlisted as the result of some disgraceful event. (Drink, dishonestly and gambling were his usual problems.) Unfortunately, he tended to degenerate even further in the army. Surtees's diary described this pattern repeating itself among four men of former high standing. An unhappy love affair could also be grounds for joining. The unknown author of *Journal of a Soldier of The Seventy First or Glasgow Regiment* added an intriguing explanation for having entered. Though poor, his parents had educated him well, but the boy rebelled against the thought of utilizing this education in order to secure a job. Ultimately, his father developed an acute illness, and subsequently became incapacitated, but even this did not deter the boy from remaining at home, unemployed and unperturbed, a terrible burden on the family. Finally, he acquired a fancy for the life of the theatre, certain of his success despite a lack of formal training and his parents' skepticism. Indeed, they were horrified with his behaviour.
His career, a monumental failure, did not even endure one performance. He painfully scribbled down the details:

"I went to the theatre and prepared for my appearance. The house was crowded to excess. I came upon the stage with a faltering heart, amidst universal silence. I bowed and attempted to speak: my lips obeyed the impulse but my voice had fled - I trembled - my senses became confused - hisses began from the audience. I utterly failed. From the confusion of my mind I could not even comprehend the place in which I stood. To conclude, I slunk unseen from the theatre, bewildered and in a state of despair."

He wandered the street throughout the night, and in the morning embarked with some recruits to the Isle of Wight. He subsequently wrote: "As an atonement for my past misconduct, I resolved to undergo all the dangers and fatigues of a private soldier for seven years."

Another example of having enlisted as the result of a troubled mind was that of Duncan Stewart, a Scotsman. Apparently, Stewart's father had been caught smuggling whiskey and severely reprimanded by the local excise officer. Unfortunately, Duncan loved the officer's daughter. The elder Stewart then forbade his son to see her, and on account of 'the power of the old in Scotland' he agreed. His internal fortitude was lacking, however, and the two continued to meet; in a short while, she became pregnant. Secretly, they were married, but Duncan feared his father's wrath on discovering the fact. On a trip to Down to sell some sheep, he ended up in a pub and sat silently in a state of melancholy, unable to resolve this cul de sac. Presently, a recruiting sergeant walked in. Within a few hours, Duncan Stewart was in the army, and on his way south to England.
Now although the above examples are in themselves trivial, they are representative of the experiences of more than a negligible proportion of men who enlisted into the British army. Probably, a greater percentage of men volunteered in order to escape irrec- oncilable personal difficulties than joined out of patriotism.

We have examined several factors which made men sympathetic to the appeals of the recruiting sergeant. A desire to avoid prison was one of them. Others included a longing to escape chronic poverty and social disadvantage, personal difficulty, alienation and boredom. One additional reason for joining - an offshoot of the latter - was love of adventure, honour and glory. Wrote one officer: "your sentimental chaps ... were the easiest caught ... You had only to get into heroics, and spout a good deal about glory ... deathless fame ... and all that and you have him as safe as a mouse in a trap."28 An excellent description of this inspiration can be found in the diary of Thomas Morris.29

His story begins with:

"The meanest soldier, fired by glory's rage,
Believes his name enrolled in history's page."30

Later, he quotes the following lines:

"Sound, sound the clarion! fill the fife,
To all the sensual world proclaim -
One crowded hour of glorious life
Is worth an age without a name."31

Morris adds that he had been infatuated with the life of a soldier since his childhood. "I was particularly fond of reading the heart-stirring accounts of sieges and battles ... how proud did I feel ... a delightful sensation."32

Another soldier wrote, "I longed for the opportunity to
and saw in the army his finest opportunity to do so. To Rifleman Harris, the glorious reputation of the Rifle Brigade proved infectious. "I fell so in love with their smart, dashing, and devil-may care appearance that nothing would serve me until I was a rifleman myself," his diary states.

Incidentally, by 1811, the Riflemen were the most famous fighting brigade in Europe. Many other "restless spirits who were caught by the attraction of the red coat" enlisted into the army. This was particularly true towards the end of the war, when victory over Napoleon was in sight and many joined in order to be a part of that triumph. As well, by that time the army had become much more a source of national pride than in any period throughout the eighteenth century. Where once the Royal Navy had stirred the nation's deepest sense of honour and pride, the British Army now did. In the words of the Peninsula veteran, Harry Smith:

"The fact is that Army and Navy had recently changed places. When I had joined the Army, it was just at a time when our Navy, after a series of brilliant victories, had destroyed at Trafalgar the navy of the world. Nine years had elapsed, and the glories of the Army were so fully appreciated by our gallant brothers of the sea service, we were now by them regarded as the heroes whom I well recollect I thought them to be in 1805."

In any case, in a society still characterized by a finely graded hierarchy, in which many if not most people lacked the education and personal influence to attain success and honour, the army was, in effect, the only institution (apart from the navy) that provided an opportunity open to all to experience honour, glory and a sense of personal worth. This quality about the army, contrasted with civilian life, inspired numerous observations
similar to the following: "I have never felt such happiness since I became a soldier. I often think that to be living in England after this wild, romantic existence would not give me half so much satisfaction." 36

The disorganized state of the army, the fraudulent character of many recruitment practices, the disproportionate share of troops originating from the lowest class of society and from among the alienated and discontented, relate most strongly to the first phase of war. An attempt to reform the Army was initiated in 1795 under the direction of the new Commander-in-Chief, the Duke of York, second son to the King of England, George III, and with the considerable aid of Sir John Moore. In Sir John Fortescue's estimation, the Duke "took over a number of undisciplined and disorganized regiments, filled for the most part with the worst stamp of man and officer, and ... in less than seven years he converted these unpromising elements into an army". 37 Britain did indeed recover from her dismal performance in the first half of the war to become a major contributor to the Allied victory over Napoleon.

It is unnecessary to analyse the details of York and Moore's work, but suffice to say that the reforms generated were an attempt to overcome the irrational division of administration and authority, the poor discipline and training of officers, and abuses in the system of promotion, to improve general conditions with regard to barrack accommodation, food, pay, dress, equipment and punishment, to elevate the level of training for both cavalry and infantry, and to expand the recruiting system
in order to attract a superior quality of soldier - in short, to reform almost everything. Many excellent innovations were introduced, but our main concern at this time lies with those related to the last of these, recruitment.

The sort of recruitment practices mentioned earlier did not change much in substance but their organizational efficiency improved. Moreover, a novel method of recruitment was added to the scheme, a systematic effort to draw men out of the militia and into the regular army. It occurred to a number of people that if a substantial bounty were offered to induce militiamen to join the army, a better soldier would be raised, since as a conscript force the militia drew a superior sample of the working class than did the regular army. Unfortunately, an Act of Parliament passed in 1795 "for augmenting the Royal Regiment of Artillery ... out of Private Men now serving in the Militia" failed miserably. This occurred largely as a result of efforts to subvert the scheme by Colonels of the militia in defiance for not having been invited to participate in it themselves. A similar Act in 1798 also failed, but another established the following year succeeded admirably. Militiamen were astonished and delighted with the size of bounty offered, and more important, militia colonels offered little resistance to the plan. The reason may have been, according to Secretary of State for War, Dundas, that "the prospect of an aid to a revolution in Holland was in the view of every person, and the draft from the militia for such an object was universally popular".

This practice was intermittently copied in the second half
of the war. Prime Minister Addington sought to facilitate the transition by creating an "Army of Reserve", a conscript body secured by lot, and designed for home defence, but raised in the hope that once the reservist was trained and familiarized with a form of military life, he would volunteer into the regular army. Moreover, the scheme eliminated potentially troublesome militia colonels. Of the thirty thousand men raised by this method in 1803-04, nineteen and a half thousand ultimately volunteered. Unfortunately, the Army of Reserve was disbanded in 1805 when Pitt regained the office of Prime Minister, and several dubious schemes introduced to replace it. Nonetheless, when Pitt died in 1806, the country still possessed a splendid home defence, including a volunteer force three hundred thousand strong, as well as a regular army now powerful enough, and sufficiently well-trained, that the government could confidently plan an invasion of sixty thousand men into northern Germany. (The scheme was dropped after France shattered Britain's ally, Austria, at Austerlitz) But as Secretary of State at War, William Wyndham subsequently mismanaged the Army, weakening it considerably. In 1807, Robert Castlereagh replaced him.

Castlereagh knew that it would be relatively easy to restore the organizational efficiency, size and strength of the home forces disrupted by Wyndham. The real difficulty lay in securing thirty-five thousand men for the regular army. The then dutifully succumbed to the wisdom offered in the adage, "when in doubt, rob the militia". It was a timely move because the big influx of men to the militia five years earlier was
about to be discharged after completing its term. Since most of the militia would have to be replaced in any case, Castlereagh could not be accused of draining that force dry. He appealed for twenty-eight thousand of these well-trained men, and came up less than a thousand short of his mark. Conventional recruitment practices had enlisted an additional thirteen thousand volunteers in 1808, which meant that in this first year of the Peninsula War, forty thousand fresh troops had been added to the British Army. In 1809, another twenty-eight thousand militia-men entered the service. Militia colonels, by then fully resigned to the inevitability of this practice, and, in 1811, when another appeal was made, eleven thousand came forward. No further innovations in recruitment were initiated up to 1815.

Obviously, we need to explain why so many volunteered into the British Army during the second half of the war against France. No doubt, the fact that many of the Army's worst abuses had been removed had a good deal to do with it. The Army was no longer quite the veritable hell-on-earth that it had so recently been. The Duke of York's efforts to make the service more liveable were, indeed, widely admired, and earned him the nickname, "The Soldier's Friend". However, one must not overestimate the extent to which the Army was now acceptable; the barbarity of its military code, for example, still incited horror in the eyes of the public.

The increase in enlistment is also explicable in terms of Addington's observation that "once the men who had entered the militia (or Army of Reserve) had become used to a soldier's life,
they are ready to volunteer into the regular army". \(^{45}\) Even had there been little reform within the army, militiamen would still have been attracted to the forces in respectable numbers for this reason; indeed, on the only occasion in which a scheme was intelligently administered to recruit men out of the militia during the early years of the war (1799), it was a success. It should be pointed out, though, that such voluntarism was occasionally less than free. In his *Recollections of Military Service*, Thomas Morris described how a close friend had been so intimidated by the introduction of oppressive drills into militia training that he enlisted into the army to escape them.

The most significant inducement to join, however, was money. Britain could not have expanded the size of her army to such an extent, on the basis of voluntary recruitment, had the bounty not been generous, \(^{46}\) and the pay progressively better (after 1797). By 1808 wages in the British Army were twice those in the French or Prussian armies. \(^{47}\) Apart from being an inducement to join, improvements in pay also reflected a growing willingness to reward a man for his service, and not merely to subsidize him: in the form of "a retaining fee against the day of prize money" \(^{48}\) as had been the practice since the late Middle Ages. In addition to bounty and pay, the Army now provided what was thought to be a decent pension for disabled and retired soldiers. As Anton wrote in *Retrospect of Military Life*:

"In the militia I serve secure of life and limb, but with no prospect of future benefit for old age (pension) to which I may attain. It is better to hazard both abroad in the regular service, than to have poverty and hard labour accompanying me to a peaceful grave at home." \(^{49}\)
The significance of bounty and pay is doubly important if examined in light of the economic realities of Britain during this period, specifically from 1806-1815. Earlier, we had described how poverty had driven many Irishmen to seek refuge in the army. These people were the chronically poor, that is, the pauper and the slum dweller, and perennially a source of recruitment. They were the sort of people about whom it was said, "we have always had compulsory service, the compulsion of hunger." However, the economic hardships created by this war, particularly as a result of the continental blockade of 1806, were severe, and even affected many of those who normally possessed some security of employment and income. After 1807, economic deprivations began to manifest themselves in the form of wild fluctuations in employment, such that even though wages were rising in many occupations during this period, the increase in unemployment and part-time work, the steady inflationary pattern, and the appearance of a number of bad harvests meant that, on the whole, a significant proportion of the population was now less prosperous than hitherto. Even when the state of the economy occasionally recovered a bit, there always existed an uncertainty about the future, an anxiety whose psychological effects were perhaps worse than those of poverty itself. Expectations became blighted after years of progress. The army promised a change from this state of insecurity. And while I do not think that one can draw the exact sort of correlation between voluntarism and economic prosperity as was shown to have existed in Great Britain during the war of Spanish Succession (1702-13), the existence of
widespread economic hardship, particularly during the last decade of the war, was an important factor in contributing to the growth of voluntary enlistment. For many who now lived on the edge of poverty, without work or relegated to earning lower real wages than before, and for whom a full stomach had for some time been a rarity, the amenities and securities offered by the force became increasingly attractive. Seamen, on the other hand, suffered a disadvantage in entering the Navy because the merchant service not only expanded its employment opportunities during the war but also substantially raised seamen's wages in response to the increased dangers which maritime traffic was exposed to. It was necessary, therefore, to use the Press to recruit sailors for the Royal Navy.

Accounts are plentiful of men enlisting out of poverty at this time, and we shall mention but a few of them: Thomas Jackson entered the Militia, and then the Army, when the renewal of war in 1803 led to the ruin of his father's buckle business, George Simmons volunteered in order to support his parents and sisters, and John Spencer Cooper on experiencing deprivation for the first time. As a result, many who entered the army to escape the difficulties brought on by the war-induced economic chaos, no doubt lamented their return to the hardships of the post-war depression after being discharged. The unknown author of *Journal of a Soldier* wrote, for example, in 1815: "These three months, I can find nothing to do. I am a burden on Jeanie (his sister) and her husband. I wish I was a soldier again. I cannot even get labouring work."
Finally, the growth in army volunteerism can partially be attributed to patriotism. It is difficult, however, to determine the extent of its importance. If one, for example, were to judge solely on the basis of Hardy's works set in this period—*The Trumpet Major* or *Dynasts*—one would get the impression that every honest man in Britain who did not volunteer thought himself a coward and a traitor to his nation; and certainly some of the popular literature of the period played upon the patriotic impulse, and, as well, recruitment posters occasionally made appeals "to stand fourth in Defence of Their King and Country... to fight for our liberty, our Religion and our Laws". On the other hand, if one were to rely on the more contemporary novels of Jane Austen to gauge the patriotic mood of Great Britain, the impression left would be of a people barely aware of even being at war against France: and in fact the vast majority of recruiting posters emphasised not patriotism, as if it were an inadequate public relations gimmack, but bounty, booty and prize-money. Undoubtedly, Jane Austen's version of the war years was somewhat misleading for some patriotic sentiment was generated, particularly in the years 1803-05 when Britain stood alone against France and threatened by invasion; but even if we were to go so far as to acknowledge Hardy's claim that "the religion of the country had, in fact, changed from love of God to hatred of Napoleon Bonaparte", and that it inspired a strong sense of national purpose and pride; this feeling did not, on the whole, transform itself into a widespread desire to fight. The evidence simply contradicts this contention. Perhaps the
public, though aroused, insufficiently understood the depth and
gravity of the wars; perhaps the government was at fault for not
exploiting this temper by keeping the country well-informed of
the stakes involved. This seemed to have Wordsworth's belief:

"All this apparent listlessness and languor," he wrote,

"is to be attributed solely to the Government not
having taken proper means to circulate instructing and
animating writings among the people: and to organize
them in such a manner that an electric shock might pass
from mind to mind, from one town to another, from one
village to another, through all the land." 61

It is conceivable that more men than did would have come forward
out of patriotism, had they really understood the issues.

We have examined recruitment during the war against France
from 1793 to 1815, in an effort to facilitate our understanding
of rank-and-file military experience. A variety of reasons for
joining were discernable: men volunteered to escape prison or
poverty, for the bounty offered, on account of an occupational,
social or personal sense of alienation or dissatisfaction, for
want of adventure, or as a gesture of patriotism. It was also
noted that as the war progressed the relative proportion of men
who entered as a result of dubious recruiting practices declined,
the principal reason being the rapid increase in volunteers out
of the militia — twenty-nine thousand in 1808 alone, and roughly
forty per cent of all new recruits from 1808 to 1815. This meant
that, on the whole, a better calibre of soldier than hitherto was
introduced into the British land force, a well-trained recruit
and one aware of what service entailed, and thus knowledgeable of
the consequences of his action. Nonetheless, one's incentive to
join — whether it was to collect a handsome bounty, to flee from
poverty, or to smash the "corsican pirate" - did not necessarily ensure one's sustained commitment to the force. Rather, a soldier's loyalty was more critically dependent on the army experience itself. We must, therefore, look at army life to gain an insight into the common soldier's awareness of this mode of existence, and to lay bare those aspects of it which contributed to making the soldier's life palatable and even meaningful. We shall first examine the conditions which he was forced to confront.


3. According to Sir John Fortescue, "The mutiny did not spread to the Army generally, though there were unpleasant symptoms among the artillery of Woolwich, and still worse, though they did not immediately appear, among the cavalry in Ireland." J.W. Fortescue, *The British Army* (London, 1905), 45.

4. Fortunately, in 1791 ameliorative action was taken to limit the number of stoppages that could legally be subtracted from a soldier's pay, and more important, to supply a free daily food ration.


6. Cited in Glover, op. cit, 150.


8. Sir John Fortescue, *History of The British Army*, 10, 496


13. Ibid., 100.

14. Ibid., 98.

15. However, Stewart did not seem to mind terribly; enlistment had proved an enormously successful escape from an otherwise insurmountable personal quandary; no doubt others shared his experience. (The *Subaltern* (Edinborough & London, 1825), 7-16).


22. Recollections ..., op. cit., 79.
23. Rifleman Harris (Hamden, Conn, 1970).
25. Journal of a Soldier of the Seventy-First or Glasgow Regiment (From 1806 to 1815), (Edinburgh, 1819)
26. Ibid., 8.
27. Ibid., 12.
30. Ibid., 1.
31. Ibid., 29.
32. Ibid., 3-4.
33. The Subaltern (Edinborough, London, 1825), 5.
37. Sir John Fortescue, History of the British Army, IV, 929
38. However, there was one important change in the nature of service; one could now enlist for seven, ten or twelve years rather than life.

41. Glover, op. cit., 231.

42. Wyndham was Secretary of State at War from June 1806 to April 1807. Lord Castlereagh held the post from April 1807 to September 1809.

43. 27,505 men volunteered.

44. Glover, op. cit., 249.

45. Ibid., 229.

46. According to Élie Halévy, from the sixteenth century to the Treaty of Utrecht bounties were approximately £2; they were raised to £3 during the American Revolution and then during the war against Revolutionary France ranged from £16 to £40. (Élie Halévy, A History of The English People in 1815 (New York, 1924), 69.)

47. Ibid., 69.


49. James Anton, Retrospect of a Military Life (Edinburgh, 1841), 39.


51. One significant exception was the agricultural farmer; agricultural prices rose during the last years of the war.


53. It is extremely difficult to compare wages in the army and those of civilian jobs since records of job wage rates are too incomplete. The point is, though, that good wages are irrelevant if steady work is scarce.

54. Narrative of the Eventful Life of Thomas Jackson (Birmingham, 1847), 1-5.


56. John Spencer Cooper, Rough Notes of Seven Campaigns (London, 1869).
57. Journal ... op. cit., 231

58. Thomas Hardy, The Trumpet-Major (New York); Dynasts (London, 1908).


60. Hardy, The Trumpet-Major, 235.

61. To Thomas de Quincey, March 29, 1809. Letters of the Wordsworth Family, William Knight (ed), (Boston, 1907), 42; cited in Davies, op. cit., 73. Davies adds that "there was a flood of invasion broadsides, hand-bills, pamphlets, songs and 'Loyal Papers' in 1803, and there were many caricatures to extol Spanish gallantry and English aid to Spain in 1808, but not later." (73).
III

Army Life in the Peninsula

Upon volunteering, the recruits were awarded their bounties. Later, they were assembled and marched to a nearby public house for a carouse, or, if the day's recruitment had already taken the recruiting party to a pub, the drinking was merely continued into the evening. The excitement occasionally aroused other men to volunteer. That there was a celebration was natural. The men no doubt wished to mark the demise of their freedom riotously. Moreover, a recruiting party was always quick to insist that such a celebration, paid for by the new recruits of course, was a time-honoured custom. In other words, they created an excuse to rob a portion of the new soldier's bounty for free alcohol and a frolic. Consequently, the recruit often lost a good portion of his reward on his first night in the service; the rest would probably disappear shortly thereafter, part of it deducted for 'necessaries' (equipment), the remainder vanishing with the help of old 'knaves' of his regiment whose skills at manipulating new recruits rivalled those of recruiting officers.¹

The new soldiers drank and danced happily on this final night of freedom. The mood was particularly spirited among former militiamen since friendly, clannish groups of them tended to volunteer into the Army together and because they had more to spend on alcohol than the average recruit, having already purchased the necessary equipment. Perhaps orgiastic rather than spirited would more appropriately describe the scene, as the following rather critical description illustrates:
"Blackguardism is fashionable, and even the youngest were led into scenes of low debauchery and drunkenness, by men advanced in years. Many of the officers who, at least, ought to have been of superior talents and education, seemed to be little better, if we were allowed to judge from the abominable oaths and scurrility which they used, and which ... was too often imitated by those beneath them."

On the following day the men were marched to their regimental barracks. The journey was invariably chaotic, insobriety reigning. Thomas Jackson observed that,

"now every man drunk (all day) ... all command was lost; such a sight, perhaps, was never seen; three hundred soldiers, mostly mad drunk they would march how they liked, and when they liked, and here and there stop and fight a battle on the road."

Private Wheeler told of the complete disintegration of his travelling party as it marched through Surrey. Miraculously, the men were somehow rounded up and sobered before they reached Salisbury, only to riot there. Another soldier described the arrival of his party at Barham Downs, Kent in these words:

"(the men) came tumbling down ... in every possible conveyance - post coaches, post chaises, with six horses, caravans, lift-carts, flying waggons etc. etc., leaving the officer to plod his way on foot, with two or three who had either spent or lost their money before starting. The talk ... of the folly of sailors in spending their money - soldiers can be equally fools on similar terms. Several ... put one and two pound notes between slices of bread-and-butter and ate them like sandwiches."

Such journeys were generally harmless and humourless, but occasionally the transportation of new troops to their depot had unfortunate results. Several times violence was provoked with civilians, and on a number of others, in the winter months, men who had passed out drunk along the way subsequently froze to death.
In the regimental barracks Britain's soldiers were drilled in preparation for war. Barracks were a new phenomena in Great Britain. Until 1792 motions in Parliament to erect a system of military works, including barracks, designed for a defence against an invasion were utterly defeated as being dangerous to the security of the people. When suddenly the invasion scare grew an ambitious programme of barrack construction was pursued. By 1803, 203 had been erected. Barracks had the further advantages of not only being an improvement in comfort over the old system of billeting men in often run-down taverns and other makeshift quarters, but also a surer way of maintaining an eye on the soldier. Undoubtedly, desertion in the home country was reduced as a result. As a further precaution, large bodies of troops under orders for foreign service were often quartered on the Isle of Wight "from which they could not easily escape". The location of previous depots offered no such deterrent against those at the last moment lost their enthusiasm for the prospect of fighting.

On the day the men departed a large and enthusiastic crowd was usually on hand. According to the author of The Subaltern, "The inhabitants filled their windows and thronged the streets". As befitted travelling occasions, the soldiers were invariably drunk, much to the amusement of the local populace. During one such departure "the head of the column was able to keep sober: the rear, under the endearments of the populace, subsided dead drunk on the road and was brought on in carts." The atmosphere was congenial and as the war progressed, and the success of the
British Army grew, this popular enthusiasm mushroomed. Yet despite the people's interest, or in the words of one soldier, "the sincerity of the good wishes which they expressed, for our success and safety" there was a sense in which the people thought that soldiers were nonetheless fools, lambs being led off to the slaughter.

In sum, the first phase of army life was not unpleasant. The men were paid well; for many the bounty had been more than they had ever possessed at one time before. They were also allowed to pass a good deal of their time amusing themselves. They had been trained in their duties, and often trained vigorously, but the situation was quite unlike that prevailing in the war theatre. Until then the soldier confronted neither the seriousness nor the real hardship of his profession. This pleasant purgatory-like state, though comfortable for some, did, however, inspire in many an anxious malaise, a desire to get on with it, the sort of frustration with which Canadian troops in Great Britain waiting to proceed to the continent during the Second World War, too, were deeply familiar. The feeling was no doubt also similar to that experienced by sailors of the Royal Navy, who, hating the boredom of patrolling the various strategic areas, preferred to meet their foe in the belief that "the hotter war, the sooner peace".

Conditions on board transport vessels were tolerable though the men's quarters were somewhat crammed and smelly. The soldiers were expected to do some work in aid of the ship's crew.
Private Wheeler thought the work pleasant, describing every man as cheerfully employed. Discipline was modest. There was also plenty of time for the men to amuse themselves. Wheeler wrote, "Amongst each party of sailors might be seen a good sprinkling of red-jackets, this gave life to the scene. I viewed it with delight and I might truly say I never passed a day in my life so completely happy."

Transport vessels carried men to numerous destinations during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. British soldiers served in Ireland, Iberian Peninsula, Flanders, France, Italy, Denmark, the Ionian Islands, Northern Germany, Sweden, the Scheldt (Holland), Egypt, Syria, South America, the West Indies, Canada, the United States, India, at the Cape of Good Hope and on the islands of Bourbon, Mauritius and Java. We shall focus on the second of the Wars, that is, on the period following the disruption of the Peace of Amiens (1802), and on the Peninsular campaign, for two important reasons: one, until about the time of the peace the British Army was still in chaos; by the resumption of war in 1803 the Army, under the inspired leadership of men such as the Duke of York, Sir Charles Stuart, and Sir John Moore, was purged of much of its former disorganization and backwardness; and two, simply because most rank-and-file written sources relate to the campaign in the Peninsula, although there are accounts of other expeditions like those to Buenos Aires (1807) and Walcheren (1809). It was also the longest, most important, and best known of Britain's campaigns against Napoleon.

Ships journeying to the Peninsula could, by virtue of Britain's dominion over the seas, usually disembark their troops
at a number of ports along the Iberian coast without too much difficulty. It gave the British Army a substantial advantage in mobility over the French. This advantage also facilitated the transportation of supplies. The French, meanwhile, were forced to rely on a single route for supplies from France running from Bayonne through Vitoria and Burgos to Madrid. Spanish guerillas constantly sabotaged it. The raw, inexperienced men were then marched to regimental depots, for example, Abrantes, and there assigned to various regiments.

We might look now at the nature of army life in the Peninsula. The description will be brief, my intention being merely to capture an impressionistic sense of the condition. Certain features, such as discipline and punishment, will only be alluded to since their importance will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

Ironically, despite the reform of the worst abuses of the British Army, the nature of the campaign in Portugal and Spain was such that rarely has an army suffered more than did Wellington's. Apart from the usual highly disciplined character of army life and its brutalization by the rather liberal use of the lash at the least indiscretion, this campaign was exhausting, a tale of constant toil and discomfort. One of its most severe aspects was the excessive, almost inhuman amount of marching demanded of the men. For at least six months of the year the Army was constantly mobile, a vivid contrast to the past when the pace of war was lethargic. The campaign in the Peninsula was intense, sustained and gruelling. Thus, on the whole, a more determined and stoic soldier than hitherto was required.
The general practice with regard to marching was to travel from sunrise to ten o'clock in the morning, and then from late afternoon to dusk, averaging about fifteen miles daily. The men marched fifty minutes of every hour, resting ostensibly to allow stragglers to catch up. The pain was excessive because of the rapid pace of the marching, the effect on the feet hideous. One soldier spoke of "blood soaking through the gaiters, and over the heels of the soldier's hard shoes, whitened with dust." Men marched until the sores healed; those absolutely incapable of carrying on were issued a ticket, presumably as a protection against accusation of desertion, and expected to make their way back eventually.

A number of the marching feats of the British Army in the Peninsula were remarkable. The most rapid march ever undertaken by an army, according to the records, was 42 miles in 26 hours on 28-29 July, 1809 by the Light Brigade under Brigadier-(later Major General)-General Robert Crawford to the aid of Wellington at Talavera. They arrived late, nonetheless. On another occasion, in the Pyrenees, several regiments marched for 32 consecutive days in pursuit of the French. Most extraordinary was the retreat to Corunna, a trek through the blizzard-ridden mountains of northern Spain in the winter of 1808-09, rendered infinitely worst by the fact that discipline broke down.

Added to the difficulties of long and exhausting marches were the tremendous geographical and climatic variations of the region. The Iberian Peninsula is quite unlike the rest of
Western Europe. The green fields and pleasant valleys disappear at the Pyrenees, replaced by high mountains, bleak, wind-swept plateaux, and barren deserts. It is a harsh land where the soil is baked hard by the blazing sun and vegetation is stunted and poor. In the Peninsula the worst features of all seasons appear in exaggerated form: the summers are hot and dry, the winters bitterly cold, the springs and autumns full of torrential rains. Of the three conditions, the men complained most bitterly about the intense heat of summer. Wrote one captain, "To stir out during the heat of the day, unless by special order, is accounted an act of heroism, and bordering very near upon insanity." Officers tried to ensure that marches were undertaken early in the day or otherwise at night, but this was not always possible, nocturnal travel being particularly dangerous in areas infested with the enemy. When men marched under the oppressive heat of the sun, branches were worn in their shakoes for protection, with limited success. As one soldier remarked, typically, "The heat is extreme. We are all getting very brown and our lips are so painful that we can hardly touch them." Indeed, sunstroke killed many.

The climate of the region thus intensified the toil of marching. The uniform worn by the British soldier, including an equipment pack weighing about 70 pounds, only added to his misery. "A gentleman blessed with a valet", said Anton, "might have imagined white small-clothes very suitable to a soldier; but they were neither pleasant, cleanly, nor comfortable; for the least stain appeared upon them, and the coarse quality of the cloth put washing with pure water and soap out of the question:"
they had, therefore, to be robbed full of pipeclay and whitening, so as almost to blind the poor man with the dust. Here we had a fair exterior for a field day: but if the weather was hot, the perspiration and whitening fretted and prickled our thighs; if it rained, the cloth becoming saturated, the pipeclay dust was little better than quicklime; if the streets were dirty, woeful marks flew from our heels to our breech, as if some wicked elf had followed with a paint-brush. But setting aside these serious annoyances, they were generally made so tight and braced up so firm that we almost stood like automata of wood, mechanically arranged for some exhibition on a large scale. To stoop was more than our small clothes were worth; buttons flying, knees bursting, back parts rending; and then the long, heavy groan when we stood up, just like an old corpulent gouty man after stooping to lift his fallen crutch."

Incredibly, earlier uniforms were even more uncomfortable.

Under the Duke of York as Commander-in-Chief there was some streamlining throughout the army with the exception of the Welsh Regiment; for example, pigtails were abolished. It is difficult to appreciate the extreme popularity of these innovations. Still, the uniform remained uncomfortable and this discomfort was compounded by its lack of durability, combined with an irregular issue of spare clothing. Few concessions were made to the conditions of work or the climate with the result that the uniform, in particular, footwear, wore out easily. In any regiment as many as a hundred men were without shoes at any time. Bugler Green complained that:

"We said the soles and heels had been glued or pegged on, as there could not have been any wax or hemp used, and the person who contracted with the government ought to have been tried by court-martial, and to have been rewarded with a good flogging with a cat-o'-nine-tails."
were devastating. One wonders then, in view of these conditions - the heavy marching, extremities of climate and inadequate uniforms - how men could subsequently have mustered the strength to fight. We shall see, however, that goading the British soldier onto the battlefield was the least of an officer's problems. This willingness to fight did not, though, negate the brutality of war, the death, pain and hideousness.

To the soldier, death was a constant feature of his existence, and an omnipresent threat. The dead and the dying were everywhere. There were incredible scenes of mass slaughter and mutilation in the Peninsula. Wheatley described stumbling upon a soldier who had been shot:

"Against the wall of a garden I saw a foot soldier sitting with his head back and both his eyeballs hanging on his cheeks, a ball having entered the side of his head and passed out of the other. Nothing could equal the horror of his situation. His mouth was open, stiff and clotted, clear blood oozed out of his ears and the purulent matter from his empty sockets emitted a pale stream from the vital heat opposed to the evening cold." 28

There was an equal abundance of cruelty, rapine and torture. A soldier, passing through Portugal in 1811 after the successful British defence at the Lines of Torres Vedras, described the scene in a town that the French had recently abandoned:

"Young women were lying in their houses brutally violated, the streets were strewed with broken furniture, intermixed with putrid carcasses of murdered peasants, mules and donkeys, and every description of filth, that filled the air with pestilential nausea. The few starved male inhabitants who were stalking amid the wreck of their friends and property, looked like so many skeletons who had been permitted to leave their graves for the purpose of taking vengeance." 29
In retaliation the native guerillas fought as though possessed by devils. To the horror of the British, they mutilated captured French soldiers without restraint, often blinding, boiling or disembowelling them. According to one observer, the Spanish querillas,

"like avenging vultures, followed the French columns at a distance, to murder such of the soldiers as, fatigued or wounded, remained behind ... The women ... threw themselves with horrible shrieks upon the wounded, and disputed who should kill them by the most cruel torture, they stabbed their eyes with knives and scissors, and seemed to exult... at the sight of their blood." 30

If combat was brutal, care for its victims was positively inhuman. Fewer than fifty percent of wounded British soldiers survived loss of blood or gangrene. The reasons were obvious. No system for collecting the wounded off the battlefield existed. Men in need of attention were forced to rely on their own resources or the help of comrades to make their way. Moreover, transportation from safety to hospitals was dreadful, a slow, tortuous journey over ghastly roads in uncomfortable carts.

Captain William Swabey remarked:

"I am obliged to once again to cry shame against the regulations for the transport of the sick. The unfortunate beings, more fit for their death beds than for being moved from one place to another, are daily passing through here (San Payo) on carts without springs, every jolt of which is sufficient to fracture a limb; others dying are left neglected and unpitied by the road side." 31

In hospitals many of the surgeons entrusted with the care of the sick and wounded worked inspired more with enthusiasm than skill. A number were, in the estimation of one soldier, "thrust into the army as a huge dissecting room, where they might mangle with
with impunity, until they were drilled into an ordinary knowledge of their business. Moreover, even the usefulness of competent surgeons was restricted insofar as only one surgeon and two assistant surgeons were attached to each regiment. Thus, in order to service as many men as possible, doctors treated injuries either by simply stitching up the wound regardless of the damage existing to internal organs or by amputation. Meat carvers and saws were the principal instruments, rum virtually the sole anaesthetic. On one occasion amputated limbs were flung out of the hospital onto a square, much to the chagrin of wounded men lying there waiting their turn. Overcrowdedness, a factor in spreading disease, and supply shortages also contributed to inadequate hospital care.

The dismal state of army health care meant that it was not uncommon for men to die of relatively minor wounds (or illnesses). It also meant that recoveries were extremely slow. "We are an army of convalescents," declared Wellington in 1811; indeed, often as much as a third of the army was sidelined. For example, in late 1811 14,000 men out of a force of 50,000 were indisposed, and again after the retreat from Burgos in the autumn of 1812 a slightly higher percentage of soldiers was unable to perform. Wrote General Hill from Merida (10 Nov. 1809):

"It is generally supposed that we have upwards of 30,000, but I assure you we could not bring more than 13,000 in the field. The sickness which prevails is dreadful and the mortality melancholy. There are not less than 10,000 in the hospitals ... The deaths during the last three weeks have, upon average, been little short of fifty men a day."

Lest one get the impression that the British Army was constantly engaged and never free from exposure to danger, it
should be noted that (apart from half of every day) at least a third of the year was spent in bivouac. To take one example: in 1812, after the Battles of Ciudad Rodrigo, Badajoz and Salamanca the British resolved to take Burgos but as the siege dragged on into late October a retreat was called and the men fell back to the Portuguese frontier. Not until April of 1813 did the British Army again resume its operations against the French (at Castella 13 April, 1813).

Bivouac life, however, was not particularly comfortable. In a typical bivouac the camp was marked out, if possible near the edge of a wood and close to a stream. Guards were posted, fireplaces built, wood cut and water fetched. After dinner, various duties, such as equipment repairs, and some amusements, the men slept, but without tents; the only protection against the elements were blankets or whatever makeshift protection they could contrive. "Usually," wrote Thomas Pocoke, "we might as well have lain in the river. Next morning blankets had to be wrung out and shoes emptied of water. Each man was trembling like a leaf." When the rain or snow did not affect them, the heavy dew did. Widespread illness from exposure was the result. By 1813, however, there was a recognition that the provision of tents would save inumerable lives.

Occasionally, the men were billeted in towns or villages, particularly during the winter months. Their accommodation included everything from convents and farmhouses to haylofts and pigeon coups. Despite the unsanitary habits of the Spanish and Portuguese and the lack of good heating in their buildings,
billeting was generally more comfortable than bivouacking.

For all the discomfort and difficulties in the Peninsula, the soldier's only material rewards for his troubles were food and pay. Yet it was the impression of one officer that, "when a man entered a soldier's life, he should have parted with half his stomach." The daily ration was 1 pound of meat, $1^{\frac{1}{2}}$ pounds of bread or 1 pound ship's biscuit, and $1/3$ pint of rum or a pint of wine. (There was no tobacco ration). It was, if not insufficient, then insipid. Moreover, because the bullocks were driven so fast over such distances, the meat was notoriously tough and lean like boiled leather. "The meat we have is so poor," wrote one lieutenant, "that it would be burnt if exposed for sale in Bolton Market". Similarly, the bread suffered for having been transported over enormous distances. Fortunately, at least the supply system was efficiently organized since it was virtually impossible for an army to subsist off the land, though a bit of food was available through forage and at markets. The French, on the other hand, assuming formal supply lines were not everywhere necessary, suffered horribly for their mistake.

Pay, which had been raised in 1797 for the first time since the late sixteenth century, was periodically increased during the Wars. The men received about twice the pay rate for soldiers in the French or Prussian Armies. It could compare favourably with wages only in the poorest of trades, although the work was more secure than that of many other vocations. Wellington tried to ensure that the men were regularly paid but by January, 1814 wages were six months in arrears. Still, this
was an advantage to him for it contributed to the loyalty of his soldiers insofar as they hesitated to desert with money owing to them. Earlier, Cromwell had deliberately kept back a portion of the pay of the soldiers in the New Model Army for the same reason. As Edmund Wheatly observed of some mulateers, "they are just now four months in arrears and it is a good pledge for their security."  

In sum, conditions in the British Army in the Peninsula were dreadful, and most contemporaries in Great Britain thought them so. The men were poorly housed, ill-equipped, underpaid, mercilessly worked and personally neglected. Nevertheless, conditions were improving, and clearly superior to those in eighteenth century armies with regard to food, pay, training, leniency of punishment, and hospital care. They were inferior in terms of the hardships of marching, conditions of climate, and frequency of battle. Despite these privations the men fought well. "There is no beating these troops," wrote Marshall Soult after years of witnessing his French columns, so successful in warfare against other European armies, disintegrate time after time in the face of well-disciplined British lines. And Wellington remarked in later years that he could take his men anywhere and do anything with them. Indeed, they made a brilliant contribution to the victory in Spain and thus to Napoleon's ultimate defeat; for as the great general was to lament in exile, "The Spanish ulcer killed me."
Footnotes


3. Narrative of the Eventful Life of Thomas Jackson (Birmingham, 1843), 1-5, 28-9, 37.


5. As in the case of some recruits from Scotland who brutally attacked a mailboy between Swinden and Marlborough (The National Register, Sept. 26, 1808, 613). See Godfrey Davies, Wellington and His Army (Oxford, 1954), 72.


7. Their duties were not, however, limited to training. In the absence of an established constabulary Britain's soldiers were expected to police the islands. In an extreme example, 12,000 troops were ordered into Yorkshire, Lancashire, and the West Riding in the wake of the Luddite disturbances of 1811-12.

8. In 1803 they housed 17,000 cavalry and 146,000 infantry. (John Laffin, Tommy Atkins, the Story of the British Soldier (London, 1966), 63).

9. The problem of desertion was not, however, resolved, nor was the problem of the professional bounty collector, men who enlisted for the money and then deserted only to re-list in order to collect again, discouraged, despite the establishment of the death penalty for chronic violators. Rifleman Harris described the execution of a man who it seems 'jumped a bounty sixteen times'. (Recollections of Rifleman Harris, Henry Curling (ed.), (London, 1928), 3.)


13. No better picture of the relationship between the soldier and the civilian during the Napoleonic Wars exists than Thomas Hardy's Trumpet Major.


Ships carrying soldiers had a pretty good safety record during the Wars, yet, for example, two ships sailing to England in January, 1809 from Corunna sunk, killing 273 men. Captain D.J. Goodspeed, *The British Campaigns in the Peninsula 1808-1814* (Ottawa, 1958), 69.

17. However, one should recognize that only 50,000 of Britain's force of 250,000-300,000 men served at any one time in the Peninsula.

18. Sending whole regiments of inexperienced men into the field invited disaster, an error not repeated after 1809.


22. Upon hearing Moore's orders to retreat to Corunna, men on the road to Curian threw down their muskets, complained bitterly, and refused to move for some time (Goodspeed, op. cit., 59). Retreats were always the most chaotic, potentially mutinous, and desertion-prone periods.


25. A typical pack contained:

   "1 Fusee and Bayonet, 14 (lbs.); 1 pouch and sixty rounds of ball, etc, 6; 1 canteen and belt, 1; 1 mess tin, 1; 1 knapsack, Frames and Belts, 3; 1 white Jacket, 1/2; 2 Shirts and three Breasts, 2 1/2; 2 pairs of shoes (3); 1 pair trowsers, 2; 1 pair gaiters, 1; 2 pairs stockings, 1; 4 brushes, button slick, comb, 3; 2 cross belts, 1; pen, ink and paper, 1/2; pipe clay, chalk etc., 1; 2 tent pegs, 1/2; three days' bread, 3; two days' beef, 2; canteens, 3"
(Rough Notes of Seven Campaigns in Portugal, Spain, France, and America, during the Years 1809-1815, by John Spencer Cooper, late Sergeant in The Royal Fusiliers (London-Carlisle, 1896), 80-1.)


27. A Brief Outline of the Travels and Adventures of William Green (late Rifle Brigade) during a period of 10 years in Denmark, Germany, and the Peninsular War (Leicester, 1858), 11.


32. Cited in Brett James, op. cit., 261

33. Ibid., 266.


35. Similarly, from late August 1809 to February 1810 the Army remained in winter quarters.

36. The subject of a separate chapter.

37. Cited in Brett-James, op. cit., 90.

38. Cooper, op. cit., 69.


40. Two centuries earlier King Henry IV of France had observed that, "Spain is a country where small armies get beaten and large ones starve."

41. In 1810, of 25,000 French losses in the campaign in Portugal against Britain at the Lines of Torres Vedras, 15,000 casualties were caused by starvation and sickness. (Sir Charles Oman, A History of the Peninsular War (7 vols., London 1903), IV, 203).

42. From 1557 to 1797 the daily pay rate was 8d (J.W. Fortescue, The British Army, 1783-1802 (London, 1905), 8-9.)

43. Élie Halévy, A History of the English People in 1815 (New
York, 1924), 69. Not only did the men receive a rise in pay, they were also granted reductions in deductions made to cover various other expenses.

44. Both Halévy and C.M. Clode (The Military Forces of the Crown (2 vols., John Murray, 1869), Tables, 489) argued that wages in the Army, were about equal to those earned by unskilled workers both in the countryside and in industry. See Halévy, op. cit., 70.


46. Eighteenth century armies simply bivouacked whenever the weather was unpleasant.

47. Cited in Laffin, op. cit., 91.
Coping

"Strange set, the English! and so determined and unconquerable."

In light of the difficult conditions that prevailed in the Iberian Peninsula it is remarkable that the British soldier retained his dedication. One can understand, even sympathise with the men who deserted, but there is something baffling about those who conformed and made that prison-like existence tolerable, even meaningful; and in percentage terms more men retained their dedication than ever before. While the early 1790's witnessed typical eighteenth century high desertion patterns in the British Army, the level began to fall in the last years of the century and continued to decline to the end of the war. For example, in the 1st Foot Guards 318 soldiers deserted between 1783 and 1799, but only 157 between 1800 and 1813. Similarly, in the 3rd Foot the figures were 124 and 81 in each of the corresponding periods. Those who criticize the quality of Wellington's Army almost invariably fail to recognize this fact. In this chapter we will endeavour then to make the army experience of Britain's soldiers comprehensible.

Earlier it was pointed out that after 1800 or so recruits tended to be more strongly motivated than hitherto. The desire for a handsome bounty or the wish to escape insecurity, poverty, alienating work or a regrettable experience were some of the reasons why men joined. Patriotism was also a factor, particularly between 1802 and 1806 when there seemed a very real threat of invasion, although the tendency has been to exaggerate the flag-saluting side of the soldier's temperament. One may speculate
on the reasons why men volunteered, but what is certain is that
an increasing number of men, particularly militiamen (the
source of forty percent of the army's recruits after 1806) were
willing to serve. This situation contrasted sharply to that
which prevailed throughout the previous century where, in many
cases, the recruit was fraudulently enlisted or coerced into
joining and therefore, hating the services, often deserted. 6

A significant proportion of soldiers thus had a genuine
desire to do well. Service had not been thrust upon them.
Moreover, those who had served in the Militia already had some
idea of what army life would be like. This was important
insofar as expectations about a situation will to a great extent
determine how well one will cope with it. For those men, entry
into the Army was not a catastrophic experience, though the
subsequent adjustment was far from automatic. There was con­siderable anxiety arising out of the need to appreciate new
power relations, values, working conditions, food, hours of
sleep and forms of hygiene. For those who had volunteered but
lacked military experience or had been enlisted less than
enthusiastically, with the aid of drink, for example, army life
appeared as a strange and forboding one. Some no doubt quickly
deserted, but the majority it seems sought to persevere, if for
no other reason than that the alternatives were becoming in­creasingly less attractive.

Behaviour is regulated in a general way by adjustments to
symbols of authority. The soldier had to learn how to follow
orders. The process of training was begun in Great Britain,
but until the men arrived in the Peninsula it was somewhat artifical. Training methods were neither standardized nor particularly advanced. Though innovation was in the air throughout Europe, they remained primitive in many respects, perhaps moreso in Great Britain than elsewhere. The British were reluctant to experiment. Moreover, the Army suffered because the quality of her officers varied substantially owing to the widespread practice of office purchase. The majority of officers were plucky and determined, but many were also stupid and woefully incompetent. (Soult's comment that, "there is no beating these troops" included the observation, "in spite of their generals").

Two approaches to the training of soldiers were generally acknowledged. The first emphasized strict discipline, hard work, and the constant threat of punishment in the hope of intimidating the soldier into a fearful obedience of his superiors. The other sought to humanise training through the creation of a sense of community and cooperation between men and officers. This attempt to create a mutually responsible happy surrogate family strikes one as self-evidently superior, but only a minority of officers would have agreed. Throughout the eighteenth century the idea ran counter to popular military thought. An enormous gap existed between officers and the rank-and-file and a savage discipline was relied upon almost exclusively to keep the men in line. Many officers were convinced that otherwise it would have been impossible to maintain order. There was some truth in that belief insofar as in that era armies contained some of the worst types.
ever to disgrace a uniform, men completely without motivation and untrustworthy; but it became increasingly inappropriate.

We might examine each of these approaches in turn, and more importantly, how the men reacted to them. Perhaps it is somewhat artificial to separate the two so completely, since in no one's mind were they so mutually distinct; yet by-and-large the traditional approach still dominated training in the regular army, whose members, the majority of officers continued to view very much in the traditional way, while in the newly formed Rifle Brigade (1800) new methods were enthusiastically pursued.

"Discipline is the soul of an army," George Washington never tired of instructing his officers. Discipline, in the manner which the platitudinous founder of the American nation understood it and in the customary European sense, meant drill, hard work, and tiresome, trivial attention to detail. Troops were trained, but just as important, kept occupied. "Men must be constantly kept busy to keep them orderly," wrote the German Kepenfelt. Otherwise they had too much time to think, to become edgy; and as Frederick the Great had observed, perhaps with a touch of exaggeration, "If my soldiers began to think, no one would remain in the ranks." Discipline also meant the constant threat of punishment to the unyielding. The slightest deviation from duty brought savage reprisal. It was believed that there existed some necessary connection between breaking a man's back with the lash, or at least threatening to do so, and annullating his will. There is of course some validity to that notion. Thus, it was not necessary to make a soldier respect his commander but merely to
respect the value of fear, to condition his reflexes to respond to a show of strength. Intimidation was the key. This did not mean, however, that such a callous approach precluded the possibility of earning a soldier's respect. Certainly Wellington was a great believer in the virtue of strict discipline. He wrote, for example, "I have no idea of any great effect being produced on British soldiers by anything but fear of immediate corporal punishment." Unloved, he was nevertheless greatly admired for his talents as a strategist, endurance, and concern that his soldiers were ensured adequate food and pay.

Subduing the soldier had its difficulties, some of which were similar to those encountered in overcoming the stubborn resistance of the working class to the discipline of factory production. This was true despite a general commitment to the Army by the majority of men, since after all army life was exceedingly difficult. An officer could not simply manipulate that mixture of fear and awe inherent in the deferent state because Britain's ancient regime was beginning to come apart. By 1800 its people were noted for their independent, turbulent and stubborn character, amazing foreigners by their lack of defence. The Naval Mutinies at Spithead and Nore in 1797 demonstrated how precarious the hold of the ancient regime was over British society.

Nonetheless, it was possible to create a dutiful soldier utilizing methods characterized by harsh discipline. That desertion patterns declined in the British Army at this time, however, was not due to the discovery of a more subtle means to
exploit such methods, with the exception of the removal of the arbitrary nature of punishment, than hitherto. The reasons lay elsewhere. But the system was reasonably workable and the adjustment process to it an intriguing one. What form, for example, would one expect this adjustment to take? Consider for a moment the institution of American slavery, the army in a certain sense being a kind of slave system. Uprooted from his African culture (one often highly developed and sophisticated) and shipped off to America, the slave evolved in his new setting into the Sambo-type so well known. However, lest one think that the introduction of men into an authoritarian system invariably produces a docile character, it should be recognized that in Brazil slaves were notoriously rebellious. Yet the same regions of Africa served as the sources of slaves for both America and Brazil. Obviously, the differences in the nature and cultural circumstances of the two systems were of critical importance in the creation of the distinct personality types and their differences will help to illuminate our study. Consider, as well, the Nazi concentration camp, admittedly an institution whose resemblance to the army is rather tenuous but which, produced a prisoner who not only accepted his fate but in many cases came to identify with his S.S. master. What should be recognized about the various examples, an insight developed by Stanley Elkins, author of Slavery, a brilliant study of the roots of the Sambo character, is that from the point of view of the victim there was no future for either the American slave or the
concentration camp inmate, but a relatively open one for the slave in Brazil. The Brazilian slave could by his labour purchase his liberty; in the U.S.A. it was enormously difficult for a slave to become a free man. Thus, after an initial phase of resistance the American slave tended to resign himself to his fate. Similarly, in extremely impoverished societies the poor have no level of expectation, and so accept their wretched lot with few complaints. A hopeful future was therefore a protection against apathy and self-deprecation; it allowed one to maintain one's ambition, initiative and, of course, impatience. Hence, Brazil's rebellious history. Now the British Army was not a closed system. The profession no longer involved a life-long commitment. An act in 1809 had introduced terms of seven, ten or twelve service. But even seven years was a long time. Its prospect must surely have acted to diminish whatever level of expectation the men possessed and bred a certain resignation. The evidence is overwhelming that it is much easier to cope with a condition if the future is amorphous than when it is filled with hope. The army life became far more important than anything else; one's perspective shifted.

One may suppose, then, that after some resistance, the soldier began to recognize that henceforth little but the service could be personally meaningful and that he had better make the most of it. The tone of some diaries suggests this. Within six months the recruit made a passable soldier, though in every regiment there was always 50-100 incorrigible men "whom neither
punishment nor any kind of discipline could restrain. What factors, apart from a certain sense of resignation, contributed to this transformation? The first was the effect of repetition. Daily life repeatedly taught the lesson of absolute power. Exposure to that way of life long enough made it believable, particularly when over it hung the threat of punishment. According to one officer, "tiresome attention to trifles ... instils into the mind of the soldier at least, not surely the physical, but the moral obligation in the performance of a requisite duty." One grew accustomed. "Habit gives endurance," as one soldier observed.

The efficiency of repetition was greatly enhanced by the almost perpetual state of exhaustion experienced by the soldier. Army life wore one down, stifled one's consciousness and feeling. (The widespread consumption of alcohol enhanced this effect.) To quote a more recent observer:

"The routine of military life ... works to dampen and dull any individual intensity of awareness. Loss of sleep, long marches ... exhaust the soldier, this weariness can go beyond borders that most of us ever know at other periods in our lives. It alone can so stupefy the senses that soldiers behave like sleepwalkers ... Thinking tends to become not only painful but more and more unnecessary." The officer's goal was thus to bog down the soldier to wear him out and force him to respond automatically. His success was to a great extent responsible for that stupefaction of consciousness traditionally associated with the British soldier, about which 'Corporal Trim' said in Tristram Shandy, "a soldier's observation cannot extend far beyond the muzzle of his firelock." A subtle
change in world views had occurred. Only the moment became important; the soldier lost the sense of an overall conception, even of the passing of time judging by the distracted sense of chronology apparent in soldiers' diaries and journals. The past tended to be suppressed and with it a perspective on one's present state. In other words, "The past had grown so distant and unreal that any other way of life was hard to imagine." The outside world become a mere abstraction. Home was now the army.

This combination of numbness and forgetfulness, effectively contributed to coping with army life. One's former life was fragmented, and to a great extent, forgotten. The brutality of war was made bearable. The army began to acquire a certain respectability, and its different modes of thought and accustomed attitudes more easily internalized. "We thought ourselves better off than had we remained at home," wrote one soldier expressing a common feeling. To take one example: particularly with regard to food there was a sense in which the men thought that the British people were suffering. It is true that some soldiers ate less well at home, as civilians than they did as soldiers in the Peninsula. There was some truth illustrated in Forrester's Rifleman Dodd when it is mentioned that, "Dodd had known little better food ... he had been the eleventh child of a farm-labourer earning ten shillings a week ... so that he bit into the tough fibres with contentment." But it would have been inapplicable to the majority; after all, the bread was tough, mouldy, and infested with maggots and the meat often "stinking
messes ... half-boiled." What was important, though, was that the men thought the food was quite adequate, if somewhat lacking in variety. This delusion about army life was reinforced by contrasting their diet to the level of food consumption of the native people and soldiers in the Portuguese, Spanish and French armies. Remarked Anton, "... on looking around, we generally saw many worse off than ourselves; and doubtless, were we always to look into others' misfortunes or sufferings ... we would find some cause for self-congratulation."

That the men felt this way was crucial given the importance of food. Britain's soldiers were capable of enduring a great deal of hardship but could never tolerate what they saw as an inadequate supply of food. During those periods of the Peninsular War when the British were short of food, as after the Battle of Talavera when Wellington had his troops bivouac at Almirez, the army literally began to disintegrate. Wellington wrote to his brother:

"A hungry army is actually worse than one. The soldiers lose their discipline and their spirit. They plunder even in the presence of their officers ... and with the army which a fortnight ago beat double their numbers, I should now hesitate to meet a French corps of half their strength." Had the men been adequately fed at all times desertion levels might have been substantially reduced.

This diminished consciousness or numbness was also valuable in coping with the horrors and brutality of war. One soldier remarked that

"The day's service had been very severe, but now I took it with the coolest indifference; I felt no alarm, it was all of course. I began to think
my body charmed. My mind had come to that pass - I took everything as it came without a thought ..., if in the midst of the enemy's fire ..., I was not concerned."

Captain John Kincaid observed of his men that they "had become so inured ... that they seem to have set death and disease, the elements and the enemy alike at defiance." By numbing the self, by depersonalizing life, the horror was made easier to tolerate. Thus, after while, soldiers' descriptions of all but the most hideous of scenes, like some of the atrocities perpetrated by the guerillas upon the French and vice-versa, took on a very routine character.

There was nothing bizarre about the development of a sense of forgetfulness or depersonalization. One survived by setting oneself apart from the world, from its horrors and privations. More unusual was a tendency, of which there was some evidence, to undergo a subtle psychological process now called regression, a reversion to child-like roles. Indeed, the propensity may be a universal characteristic of armies. "In hundreds of ways the soldier ... is given to understand that he is a child," wrote Colaco Belmonte. Regression was that "fawning servility" that was satirized of traditional British soldiers (along with their lark of perspective). It was characterized by childish boasting, giggling, playfulness, silliness, mendacity, duplicity, emotional instability, egotism and want of self-respect. Although one suspects that this form of behaviour was less widespread or intense than its satirizers made it out to be, descriptions of that sort of behaviour in officer and soldiers' letters and
journals were too numerous to doubt that it was not a common character trait. Contemporaries thought it the result of natural stupidity, or else the product of the brutalizing effects of the army. The first explanation is ludicrous, the second incomplete.

Regression was a response to army life. Regressive-like behaviour was also indigenous to certain slave cultures. Elkins argued that the Sambo temperament of the American slave grew out of such reactive behaviour. There is no need to go into a detailed analysis, but the process developed in roughly the following manner: the slave saw in the slave-owner his absolute master. The master, like the army officer and a child's father, maintained an iron domination over the whole of one's existence. He could mete out the worst punishment or reward and protect the slave; just as all evil flowed from him, so too, did all good. One was compelled to believe in him. Elkins quotes Dr. Elie Cohen, a one-time concentration camp inmate:

"The S.S. man was all-powerful in the camp, he was the lord and master of the prisoner's life. As a cruel father he could, without fear of punishment, even kill the prisoner and as a gentle father he could scatter largees and afford the prisoner his protection." The result, admits Dr Cohen, was that "for all of us the S.S. was a father image . . ." With the establishment of the authority as a father-figure, one regressed as an adjustment to the situation. In the soldier's condition of child-like dependency parental prohibitions once more became all-powerful and parental judgements once again internalized. The individual recreated out of his situation relationships and behaviour patterns which previously had been meaningful,
gave comfort and provided relief. In other words, if treated
like a child, one will act like a child. This, it is suspected,
occeded among soldiers in the forces. In a very real sense,
the army was a patriarchal institution, though not a grotesque
one like slavery or the concentration camp, and soldiers its
children. But regression was not merely an automatic reaction
to an authoritarian system: it was also a very skillful "act",
one that gave scope for manipulation insofar as the easiest way
for the powerless to exploit the powerful is through aggressive
stupidity, literal-mindedness, servile fawning and irresponsibility.

A more subtle and complete explanation than the above an-
alysis is almost certainly possible. The regressive process was
no doubt somewhat different among soldiers than with regard to
slaves or concentration camp inmates. One cannot merely impose
in toto an explanation for one set of circumstances onto another
whatever their similarities. But it is a useful starting point.
A process like infantile regression did occur, and it contributed
to making the soldier's military existence sensible by providing
a meaningful frame of reference for the authoritarianism of the
army. It helped create that odd character known as the British
soldier in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. And the
regressive syndrome was critical not only because it facilitated the
soldier's adjustment to authority, but also because it tended to
alter his previous needs. His wants diminished in variety. The
enforced simplicity of a slave culture, concentration camp, or
army existence took on a peculiar acceptability.
The mechanisms described above were an integral part of the socialization process into the army. The coping process should not, however, be regarded as automatic. Had certain needs not been met, an adequate provision of food, for example, there would almost certainly have been high levels of desertion. Moreover, frustration, which was endemic, was occasionally unleashed into rebellious action. For example, during the retreat from Burgos in the autumn of 1812, about 4000 out of 20,000 men abandoned the march and became stragglers in the face of exhaustion, bitter cold and lack of food. (Most of those who survived ultimately returned to their regiments quartered on the Portuguese frontier.) But frustrations were not manipulated as a tool for specific changes. On the other hand, the seamen of the Royal Navy, though as strictly disciplined as the British soldier, did mutiny, in 1797, for better conditions. Their strength lay in an articulate minority able to transform the frustrations of the majority into conscious, planned action. That mutinous spirit was retained throughout the war (without prejudicing their fighting ability). Nothing of the sort occurred within the Army in the Peninsula.

Other modes of coping with army life, apart from the two already examined, were utilized. Some were conscious actions, others purely instinctual reactions. Two of the most important were the habit of romanticizing the soldier's condition, an action facilitated by that forgetfulness of the past, and the tendency to elevate survivability into a virtue. If anyone
doubts that soldiers romanticized their plight, let him examine virtually any of the numerous diaries and journals related to the campaign. It was not merely veterans who recalled their youth as one of a perpetual high-blooming summer; with few exceptions journals written at the time were quite as romantic as those composed in retrospect. In them, the unusual was emphasized at the expense of the normal; indeed, few of the day-to-day events, particularly the frustrating and painful, were described; and when they were, only in the most matter-of-fact ways. Constantly reiterated was the belief that as a vocation nothing could equal the army "in point of pleasure, idleness and grandeur" or in "wild excitement." And although ill-treated, the men saw in constantly changing circumstances the prospect of more adventure. Private Wheeler remarked, with characteristic fondness that,

"What a chequered life is a soldier's on active service. One moment seeking the bubble reputation at the cannon's mouth, the next courting some fair unknown damsel, sometimes scorched alive by heat, then almost frozen to death on some snowy mountain. At one time the inmate of a palace, then for months, the sky is his only covering. Hunting the enemy like a greyhound, and in return as often hunted by the enemy. These thoughts naturally arise when from the midst of ease and plenty, we find ourselves transported as if were by magic, close to the enemy in another part of the country, at a distance of three hundred miles." In sum, the following statement typefied many a soldier's feeling:

"What strange vicissitudes of life the soldier meets with! Campaigning is the life for me. I have never felt such happiness since I became a soldier. I often think that to be living in England after this wild, romantic existence would not give me half so much satisfaction." Admittedly, there was some romance in fighting in the Peninsula
against Napoleon's Army, and it blossomed with each success. The recognition the men received from the native people and increasingly in Great Britain, along with the realization that perhaps they were participating in an event of profound historical importance, intensified that romantic feeling, but at the same time the war was above-all a terribly costly and brutal experience. An illusory view of their situation helped to diminish that recognition.

Paradoxically, this effort to suppress awareness of war's hardships was mixed with a pride in strength through adversity. The men turned their condition into a challenge; they made the ability to survive something that proved and defined the self. An extreme arrogance facilitated this process. The British soldier endured, and ultimately won, according to one French observer, because of his "insufferable conceit". The theme of 'strength through adversity' was well-articulated in the diaries of soldiers. One wrote:

"... the real spirit of the soldier was improving, and I make little doubt but we would have followed our leaders to the extremity of Europe without grumbling. We were getting harder and stronger every day in person; the more we suffered, the more confidence we felt in our strength." War's salutary severity was welcomed, albeit a twisted romantic vision of it. "The men might curse, complain, crumble, but they were secretly proud of their efforts." They looked forward to more of the same.

"We suffered, but we were proud of our sufferings and tried to laugh at them," remarked a soldier. There was thus a great
pride in hardships cheerfully endured. "Even in the midst of our sorrows, there was ... a savageness of wit, that made a jest of its own miseries,"41 said another. Its importance was enormous, cheerfulness and good humour helped the soldier to forget the seriousness of his situation and made it slightly unreal. The psychologist Victor Franki similarly observed, of his experience in a Nazi concentration camp that,

"Humour is a weapon of the mind in the struggle for its preservation ... humour is better suited than almost anything else in human life to attain aloofness, to rise superior to the occasion ... the most infallible means to keep up morale ..."42

In sum, the traditional authoritarian approach to training and discipline was reasonably successful. It maintained order well enough, but was, by its nature, too overbearing for some independent spirits. Desertion, straggling, and inconsistency of morale were the result. For the majority, the harshness of the system (and the life) was alleviated with the aid of coping devices. Their internalization was, of course, not universal but sustained in degrees unique to each individual. The human mind, twisted and fragmented, was thus able to make the ghastly state endurable. The talent is either man's greatest strength or his supreme folly.

But although it was an amazing adjustment, army life was not totally alien to the civilian experience. The soldier was under the complete domination of his officer, and forced to make the best of it, but at the same England was becoming increasingly class-dominated. The enclosure movement was destroying the individual farmer, and in the burgeoning industrial society the
worker was, in the words of Asa Briggs, under the "absolute and uncontrolled power of the capitalist". The army was not an experience unique to British society, differing only in degree.

We turn now to examine the second approach to socializing the soldier. The difficulty with the traditional method was that despite its relative success in creating a disciplined troop on the battlefield, it tended to demoralize the soldier, often robbing him of his dignity, and the desire to do well. In other words, the fighting spirit of the men was traditionally often lacklustre. By the end of the American War of Independence shrewder minds recognized the inadequacy of the system. Discipline alone, even in its milder forms, was not enough to create a good soldier. Guibert, the French military theorist, saw the problem. He observed that "we do not reason enough with the soldier;" and Saldern, the Prussian commander recognized that,

"Severity towards recruits is inappropriate and inhumane ... One must never cease to think of a soldier as a man; most can be got to do anything by good treatment and a soldier will do more for an officer who treats him well and whom he trusts than for one who terrorises him." Slowly, efforts were made to bridge the enormous gulf between the two ranks, and to exploit more humane and efficacious modes of training.

In Great Britain, there was at first little sympathy for innovation. Indeed, not until 1800 with the creation of a new force, the Rifle Brigade, was it attempted on a reasonably large scale. The 95th, 43rd and 52nd Foot were subjected to a rare
experiment. By all accounts the emphasis on appeals to the soldier's intelligence rather than his fears seems more prominent than was actually the case because so many of the best-known diaries were written by Riflemen. The Army, on the whole, remained quite fixed in the eighteenth century spirit, or at best suspended between the two ideals. Innovative techniques were extended beyond these regiments slowly, as their value was recognized, particularly by the Duke of York, and more men of sturdier intelligence, to whom the ideals of loyalty and honour were attractive, enlisted than previously. Within the Rifle Brigade, the men were encouraged instead of browbeaten, invited to think rather than being made to obey blindly. To persuade rather than to break the will was the intention; and it was believed that in the process the soldier would develop self-pride, a rational two-way trust and respect for his officers, and a sense of community. The ideal was explicit in William Stewart's, Outlines for a Plan for the General Reform of the British Land Forces:

"Discipline is rendered most perfect when authority is softened by feelings of honour and affection. It has invariably been the object of great commanders to mingle authority with lenity, to inspire their troops with confidence in their own capacity, to call forth their enthusiasm, and to create one common feeling between the officer and the soldier."

The Rifle Brigade manual reflects the same spirit:

"Every superior ... shall give his orders in the language of moderation and of regard to the fellings of the individual under his command; abuse, bad language or blows being positively forbid in the Regiment."

One of the surest means of enhancing this communitarian
spirit was through the encouragement of games such as cricket and football. Fostering a spirit of play could "never be too much encouraged". Morris noted that, "the officers ... used to encourage games among the men, sometimes forming them in parties ... these various pastimes had the effect of keeping up a good understanding among the officers and men." 49 Wheeler added that they produced an excellent feeling between men and officers because the latter always directly participated in these diversions. And as Colonel Syndney Beckwin of the 95th remarked:

"to divert and to amuse his men, and to allow them every possible indulgence compatible with the discipline of the battalion, was the surest way to make the soldiers follow him cheerfully through fire and water, when the day of trial came." 50

In sum, those who promoted games were loved, admired, obeyed, and well-remembered.

The encouragement of such activities was also important, it should be noted, in helping to combat drunkenness, an endemic problem in the forces. One officer remarked that,

"The Captains and other Officers are requested to show every encouragement to their men to amuse themselves at the game of cricket, hand or football, leapfrog, quoits, vaulting, running, foot races, etc. etc. ... It keeps up good humour and health, and, what is of infinitely more consequence, prevents the men from passing their idle hours in the canteens and alehouses." 51

In the final analysis, the system was remarkably successful. The lash was not often used "and yet discipline is in the highest state of perfection." 52 It worked better than its alternative because it appealed to the soldier's need for self-respect and a sense of belonging. 53 The men learned how to do
their job well and to take pride in their profession. Its success was facilitated by the sensitivity of their officers, for underlying the creation of a cooperative spirit was an understanding of the most attractive features of the old corporate way of life. The best officers were dominated by a aristocratic sensitivity. They resolved to recreate a sense of the old rural society at its best, with the officer as the good country gentleman, kind, reverant and thoughtful; and to many it was a vivid contrast to the cold indifferent capitalist. Indeed, many of the officers were described in these terms. It was said of General Hill, for example, that,

"He was the very picture of an English country gentleman: to the soldiers who came from the rural district of old England be represented home; his fresh complexion, placid face, kind eyes, kind voice, the absence of all parade or noise in his manner delighted them."  

These men of aristocratic sensibilities were naturally preferred to those who had risen from the lower ranks, especially bourgeois types. According to Rifleman Harris:

"There was a noble bearing in our leaders, which they on the French side (as far as I was capable of observing) had not: and I am convinced that the English soldier is even better pleased to be commanded by some men of rank in his own country than by one who has risen from his own station." 

Thus, the late eighteenth century plea by the aristocracy in the face of bourgeois interference that it alone was qualified to lead the army had some validity.

This innovation in approaches to training within the Rifle Brigade enhanced relations between officers and men and its success
had an influence on the Army as a whole. It also did much to promote friendship and solidarity among the men. Rank-and-file camaraderie exists to some degree in all armies regardless of their respective modes of training and discipline; but it was greatly intensified by deliberate efforts, begun in the Rifle Brigade, to promote a communitarian spirit. We might for a moment look at the importance of camaraderie.

The growth of a sense of camaraderie among soldiers is vital to the maintenance of army cohesion. It is an enormous sustaining force. Part of the reason why this is so is contained in the old addage, "misery loves company". As one veteran of the Second World War recalled, "Somehow privations were not so onerous when you bore them as one of a band of brothers." Companions are useful, comforting; they help to get one through. But that is only part of the answer. The bonds of camaraderie transcended that sort of mutual big brother relationship. They were more valuable than that; indeed the soldiers found them indispensable. In the broadest sense they were manifested in a powerful group pride. Rifleman Harris explained at the outset of his memoir:

"...Neither will I mention any regiment but my own, if I can possibly avoid it. For there is none other that I like so much, and none else so much deserves it. For we were the light regiment of the Light Division, and fired the first and the last shot in every battle, siege and skirmish, in which the army was engaged during the war." Harris was thoroughly convinced that his was the best regiment in the entire British Army, superior at everything from fighting to fornicating. Being Riflemen they probably were though that
is beside the point. Everyone thought his regiment was the best. On a deeper level, men developed an almost fanatic willingness to share in everything with their comrades. Wheeler, who was wounded and disabled, expressed this feeling well, from his bed:

"As much as I desire to see my dear native land, my home and all my dear relations, old playmates and neighbours, I would much rather rejoin my Regiment again and take my chances with it. Then, when this long, protracted war is over, if fortune should favour me I should have the proud satisfaction of landing on my native shores with many a brave and gallant comrade, with whom I have braved the dangers of many a hard fought battle."  

The strength of this devotion to one's comrades is equally apparent in the Judge Advocate-General's observation in 1814:

"Our mulateers are now owed twenty-one months pay. They have therefore their own way, and are under no control at all. Nothing but a sort of espirit de corps ... makes them keep with us at all."  

A soldier's loyalty to his group was thus immensely difficult to abrogate. From a management point of view the importance of this fact was obvious.

The comradeship that developed thus entailed more than mutual comfort. It involved group pride, devotion and spirit. It is perhaps a universal phenomena of war; as J. Glenn Gray argued, "until now war has appealed because we discover some of the mysteries of communal joy in its forbidden depths." It represents attainment of the genuine longing for community that most feel, but few achieve. But if the desire for camaraderie is so fundamental, and yet so rare save in war, what is its nature?
In a sense, this bond between soldiers shares a common root with the psychology of Nazism or a nascent religious movement. A similar development unites the three. In each the participants are naturally bound by a common goal; this shared purpose must be something concrete and feasible; otherwise it becomes rather difficult to bring together desperate individuals. Despite its feasibility, however, impediments to success – danger or adversity, real or imaginary – emerge. Yet it is precisely a recognition of this threat that makes camaraderie so attractive. Captain Kincaid said of his men:

"In every interval between our active services we indulged in all manner of childish trick and amusement with an avidity and delight of which it is impossible to convey an adequate idea. We lived united, as men always are who are daily staring death in the face on the same side, and who, caring little about it, look upon each new day added to their lives as one more to rejoice in." 64

In essence, a sense of danger makes one cognizant of the importance of common effort; it acts to break down the barriers of the self. Alone one is aware of individual impotency, but a recognition of something greater than the self is liberating. Men become drunk with the power that union with others brings. For its members the group acquires an almost immortal status. This feeling predominates among the Nazi Party member, the Flagellant, the revolutionary and the soldier. As Rifleman Harris explained, "The men seemed invincible. Nothing, I thought could have beaten them." 65

This intoxicated sense of camaraderie, blessed with delusions of grandeur, and the sense of unreality caused by the
depersonalization described earlier, makes men daring and self-sacrificing. The group becomes everything; one will do anything for his comrades, his own safety meaning little. Indeed, in all the memoris written by those who took part in the Peninsula campaign there was an astonishing lack of reference to one emotion, fear. As Captain George Smith observed of his men, "Fear for himself he never knows, though the loss of his comrade pierces his heart." Indeed, a powerful example of such self-sacrifice involved the anonymous author of *Journal of a Soldier of the Seventy First or Glasgow Regiment* and a fellow soldier named McDonald. The latter was wounded and blinded, in a skirmish just prior to Moore's retreat to Corunna. Through precarious mountain passes steeped in snow the unknown soldier carried McDonald and then treated him aboard ship on the journey back to Britain. This act was performed by a man who earlier had callously abandoned his poverty-stricken parents to enter the theatre. The humanity shown McDonald was thus totally alien to his previous character. But such action typically reflected the spirit of sacrifice and devotion that prevailed among the men throughout the war.

Incidently, his action also typified the sort of behaviour found, for example, among American soldiers during World War Two. Many of them expressed amazement at how much sharing suddenly meant to them and how easily they cooperated and served others. They had grown so accustomed to the rugged competitiveness of American society that the more tender virtues had been lost. Paradoxically, in the midst of war one may find, then, a profound blossoming of Christian ethics, for in Jesus' words, "greater love
has no man than thee, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Thus, Wellington's soldiers went into battle and exposed themselves to death not principally in hate or to promote a cause but, to a great extent, out of love, love for the group.

It would be grossly misleading to suggest that camaraderie resolved all problems of army loyalty. This monograph was inspired by the belief that singular explanations could not adequately account for a soldier's commitment. Army life was vicious, a traumatic experience to endure at best. Numerous factors could intervene to break down group spirit, to aggravate individual dissatisfactions. Consider, for example, Sergeant John Donaldson's description of the effects that a particularly long and arduous retreat had on the men:

"A savage sort of desperation took possession of our minds: Those who lived on most friendly terms with each other in better times now quarrelled with each other, using the most frightful imprecations on the slightest offence. A misanthropic spirit took possession of every breast."

As for the fallen, "the despairing looks that they gave us, when they saw us pass on, would have pierced the heart at any other time; but our feelings were steeled, and we had no power to assist."
The pain was horrific; "... at the nightly halt many men threw themselves down in the mud, praying for death to relieve them from their misery." Thus although a sense of camaraderie greatly heightened a soldier's level of tolerance and allowed him to endure far more than he could normally, beyond a limit of pain and discomfort camaraderie weakened, the mind lost sight of its purpose, and became irrational and self-
preoccupied. Breakdowns in group morale were infrequent during the Peninsula War because the soldier was more strongly motivated than hitherto, good-training increased his stamina and tolerance, and efforts were made to provide at least a modicum of humanity to army life. The spirit of camaraderie remained strong and its memory happily retained in later life. Wheatley wrote, "The numerous acquaintances I formed and the endeavours they made to render my hours agreeable and satisfactory will never be recalled without esteem and gratitude." Another said:

"I was fortunate enough to have contracted an intimacy with one of my comrades, whose memory I have never ceased to cherish with the fondest affection, and whose good qualities deserve that his memory should be cherished with affection." Finally, one soldier summed up army life appropriately with these works: "I left my comrades with regret; but the services with joy."
Footnotes


2. This was true in the French Army as well. By the end of 1792 France had lost 60,000 men to desertion, according to Sir John Fortescue's, A History of the British Army, Vol. IV, Part I.


4. William Moore's recent book, The Thin Yellow Line (London 1974), gives the impression that desertion was a chronic problem during the campaign in the Peninsula and he decries Wellington's Army for failing to handle the problem. Any amount of desertion is, naturally, a problem but Moore neglects to compare the rate there to earlier figures. Clearly, the pattern was declining.

5. Still, Carnot, the French military genius, thought the British soldier to be the most patriotic in all of Europe.

6. During the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars sailors in the British Navy were generally conscripts not volunteers. As a result, their sense of devotion was so myopic that they could not even be trusted to go on shore without supervision. According to Captain Fremantle, "Desertion from the ships is so prevalent that not a man can be trusted on shore." Cited in Christopher Lloyd, The Nation and the Navy, A History of Naval Life and Policy (London, 1954), 176.

7. One obvious innovation adopted throughout the Army was Dundas's system of drills. William Cobbett said of the system that "any old woman might have written such a book ... It was excessively foolish, from beginning to end." (W. Cobbett, "The Court-Martial" (From Cobbett's Weekly Political Register, June 17, 1809), 128.)

8. A Royal Military College was, however, founded at this time. Several men trained there actively served in the Peninsula.

9. Mistrust of the soldier's capabilities certainly helped to maintain the traditional system. The Subaltern's attitude that "Soldiers are ... mere machines" was still a popular one. (The Subaltern (Edinburgh and London, 1825), 32).


14. Ibid.

15. Ibid., 27-80.

16. In new units, for example, there was an enormous percentage of sick men and stragglers, part of the reason why Wellington was reluctant to replace fired battalions wholesale with fresh regiments. He preferred merely to add to depleted ones.


23. C.S. Forester, Rifleman Dodd (New York, 1942), 177.

24. Quartermaster - Sargeant James Anton, Retrospect of a Military Life, during the most eventful Period of the Last War (Fitchett (ed.), op. cit.), 250.

25. Cited in Davies, op. cit., 77.

26. Journal of a Soldier of the Seventy First or Glasgow Regiment (from 1806 to 1815) (Edinburgh, 1819), 203.


28. Note how the soldier was described as like the slave in character. Joseph Donaldson observed that because the soldier was so harshly treated, "We cannot wonder that he became the debased being, in body and mind, which they already considered him, or that he possessed the common vices of a slave."


fawning servility, duplicity, or want of self-respect."
(Recollections of the Eventful Life of a Soldier (new ed. Edinburgh, 1845) 73.)

30. Ibid., 113.
31. In the concentration camp, for example, food became virtually the sole obsession.

32. In Britain, the reactionary atmosphere after 1793 mitigated against effective reformist action by the army rank-and-file. Soldiers were not, however, completely unaffected by reformist or anti-establishment movements of the time. In 1812 more than 12,000 soldiers were sent to those countries plagued by Luddism. Judging by their remarkable lack of enthusiasm for duty during the assignment, it seems likely there was some sympathy for the Luddites. See E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (Pelican, 1972; 1963), 615-617.

33. Cited in Davies, op. cit., 100.
35. Hart, op. cit., 98.
36. Cited in Bryant, op. cit., 78.
38. Fitchett, op. cit., 274.
39. C.S. Forester, The Gun (New York, 1942), 33
45. Ibid, 213.
46. For example, Memoirs of Edward Costello of the Rifle Brigade (London, 1857); A Brief Outline of the Travels and Adventures of Wm. Green, Bugler, Rifle Brigade (Coventry, 1857); Rifleman Harris (Hamden Conn., 1970); J. Kincaid, Random Shots from a Rifleman (London, 1835); J. Leach, Rough Sketches of the Life of an Old Soldier (London, 1831).

47. Cited in Bryant, op. cit., 42.

48. Ibid., 23.


53. To the men of the Peninsula Army, Napoleon, who was greatly admired in contrast to his devilish reputation in Great Britain, carried the ideal even further. According to Thomas Morris:

"If we seek a reason for such extraordinary attachment, we shall find it in that constant attention of Napoleon, to the wants of and wishes of his men; his identity with them in all dangers; his prompt, profuse, but impartial distribution of rewards; his throwing open to the meanest soldier, the road of promotion to the highest honours; so that every man had a strong incentive to good conduct."

(Morris, op. cit., 132.

54. The introduction of special uniforms for the Riflemen, badges for outstanding work, and a constant emphasis on the military tradition that they were a part of greatly added to their sense of pride.

55. In a culture growing increasingly depersonalized, it must surely have been consoling to many to discover in army life a semblance of a disappearing way of life; in the face of the disintegration of the old society brought on by the Industrial Revolution the Army offered a new security to replace the vanished one. One suspects that this feeling of having belonged to the institution was one of the most important reasons why the army days were later so fondly recalled by many.


57. Fitchett, op. cit., 212
Their feel for the task included a willingness to earn the soldier's respect through example. Like Frederick the Great's willingness to march in the rain alongside his men, they sought to convey a sense of being able to endure as least as much as the soldier. Their indisputable bravery was particularly impressive. The French General Foy thought them "the bravest and most patriotic officers in Europe."


60. *Rifleman Harris*, op. cit., 32.


64. *Fitchett*, op. cit. 84.


67. *Journal of a Soldier of the Seventy-First or Glasgow Regiment (From 1806 to 1815)* (Edinburgh, 1819).


70. Ibid., 69.

71. Ibid., 70.


73. *The Subaltern*, op. cit., 34.

74. *Journal of a Soldier ..., op. cit.*, 227.
The disciplinary character of the British Army underwent considerable change during the Napoleonic era. The notion of appealing to reason rather than the rope spread gradually through the force, so that the clear dichotomy between the two approaches to training described in the previous chapter diminished. The harshness of Britain's military life was subsequently softened. However, the inconsistency of Britain's class of officers perhaps stifled further progress. Wellington thought them totally useless. "There is nothing so stupid as a British officer," he once complained. Wellington overstated the case, but undoubtedly there were many incompetent officers; some were turbulent, others drunken. But what really militated against the men receiving the best possible training was the officers' habit of absenting themselves in order to take care of domestic concerns, for example, their sexual affairs. Without careful supervision, it was easier simply to revert to the threat of force. Punishment remained an integral part of army life. But we have not discussed what the men thought of it. Attitudes toward punishment are intriguing and worthy of close attention, for they illuminate a good deal about the origins of desertion in the eighteenth century and consequently are useful in helping to explain why it diminished during the Napoleonic Wars. Corporal punishment was generally tolerated throughout the era (indeed far more than in the eighteenth century) and not simply because the men were too exhausted or numbed by the life to know any better. There was a sensible rationale behind their tolerance.

During the eighteenth century, European armies aroused a mixture of amazement and disgust among humanitarians for the extreme, even brutal severity of their codes of military discipline. No institution was more
deliberately harsh or ruthless than the army and navy (with the possible exception of the penal system, but then criminals were merely a disagreeable part of life, like mosquitoes; they sounded few sympathetic chords). Britain's army was no exception. The British provosts punished frequently and with enthusiasm.

It is surely ironic that in an era in which a philanthropic enthusiasm growing out of the Evangelical movement was so strong, this condition was allowed to perpetuate itself within the British Army. "We live in an age when humanity is in fashion," wrote London magistrate Sir John Hawkins in 1787, and several events echoed these sentiments, such as the creation of the "Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor" in 1796, Sir Frederick Morton Eden's three volume study of the state of the poor in 1797, and the emergence of an anti-slavery crusade, inspired by the Clapham Sect, in 1794. The problem was not so much that the military was run by a collection of sadists, though certainly the army suffered no lack of sadistic types, but rather as we noted earlier, that they were appallingly ignorant of more efficacious modes of behavioural control. The majority of those concerned with military matters clung stubbornly to the traditionally harsh and retributive approach to discipline into the Napoleonic era. And Parliament, though, for example, increasingly sensitive to the plight of the negro slave, and which in 1806 would legislate to ban the British slave trade, each year, in passing the Mutiny Act, continued to approve a harsh military code.

During the wars against France (1793-1815), the penalties for various crimes were not permanent but fixed with each passage of the Mutiny Act. This had been the practice, virtually unaltered since 1689. However, rarely were significant changes made. The most serious punishment was execution by firing squad or hanging. The former was generally reserved for acts of desertion to
the enemy, mutiny, or striking an officer. On one occasion a soldier was shot for robbing valuable stores (the case of Corporal Hammond of the 87th, 24 Jan, 1810). There were only seventy-eight executions by firing squad during the entire Peninsular War. 3 The rank-and-file were required to attend such spectacles, and although few diarists cared to write about the experience, those who did described it with a blend of pity, fear and extreme awe.

Hanging was the usual penalty for capital offences. Murder, rape and armed robbery were the most common crimes subject to the death penalty. There were also at least three instances in which unarmed men were hanged for stealing small sums from officers' tents, and another in which the crime was, paradoxically, sodomy (It was still a capital offence in Britain). Leniency was occasionally shown, as in the case of a dragoon convicted of rape in 1814 but whose sentence was reduced to a heavy flogging. 4

In 1811, two additional punishments for serious crimes were introduced. Recovered deserters who had not gone over to the enemy but who had hidden themselves in the Peninsula, were sometimes given long service in the Colonial Corps, such as the African or New South Wales Regiments. As well, those prone to habitual theft without violence were sentenced to penal servitude for terms ranging from seven years to life. Both colonial service and penal bondage were horrible, impoverished, often disease-ridden existences.

Minor offences were punished by that universal corrective, the lash, other forms of corporal punishment having been abandoned by this time. They varied in severity according to the degree of crime committed and the rank of the offender involved. The administering of punishment was relatively straightforward. The prisoner was tied to three sergeant's halberds planted into the ground and joined at the top to form a triangle. The lashes were struck at the tap of a drum beaten in slow time; to ensure maximum results wielders of the
cat alternated every twenty-five lashes. A surgeon was present to ensure the safety of the prisoner's health; the punishment was interrupted if he thought that continuing it would pose a threat to the man's life. Upon recovery, which might take weeks, the carrying out of the sentence was resumed. One soldier, William Lawrence of the 40th, describes his experience of the lash in the following words:

"I absented myself without leave from guard for twenty-four hours ... I was sentenced to 400 lashes. I found the regiment assembled all ready to witness my punishment; the place chosen for it was the square of a convent. As soon as I had been brought up by the guard, the sentence of the court-martial was read over to me by the colonel, and I was told to strip, which I did firmly, and without using the help that was offered me, as I had by that time got hardened to my lot. I was then lashed to the halberds, and the colonel gave the order for the drummers to commence, each one having to give me twenty-five lashes in turn. I bore it well until I had received 175, when I got so enraged with the pain that I began pushing the halberds, which did not stand at all firm (being planted on stones), right across the square, amid the laughter of the regiment. The colonel, I suppose thinking then that I had had sufficient, 'ordered the sulky rascal down' in those very words. Perhaps a more true word could not have been spoken, for indeed I was sulky. I did not give vent to a sound the whole time, though the blood ran down my trousers from top to bottom. I was unbound, and a corporal hove my shirt and jacket over my shoulder, and conveyed me to hospital, presenting as miserable a picture as I possible could."

The minimum penalty was usually twenty-five lashes, while the maximum was never authorized to exceed one thousand-two hundred, though this author recalls at least two examples of men receiving punishments of one thousand-nine hundred strokes. If not calculated to kill, penalties of that severity would main. However, sentences of one thousand-two hundred strokes of the cat were awarded only about ten times during the entire Peninsular War, and those of a thousand lashes, fifty to sixty times. (Some cheated by committing suicide instead.) More typical floggings were in the area of seven hundred, five hundred or three hundred lashes, and applied to such crimes as attempted
desertion, casual theft without violence, disobedience, petty breaches of discipline, and occasionally, drunkenness on duty. Ironically, by 1812 a negro slave in the West Indies could not legally be flogged more than forty lashes.

It should perhaps be pointed out that of those punished in the Peninsula, 1809-1814, a heavy proportion were Irish, and, incidently, very few, Scots. Wellington blamed the former's record on their horrible obsession with alcohol, observing that it made them incapable of performing their duty and rendered them "unaware of the nature of the effect of their actions." Drink, intended to be a comfort, was for many Irishmen (and others) a curse.

... 

Undoubtedly, the military code was draconian. Its aim was to ensure obedience, and within the context of the war against France, the level of British Army discipline was rather high. And, on the whole, the average soldier found the system tolerable. The reason was simple. It had nothing to do with timidity, natural deference or innate stupidity. He accepted as ruthless and uncompromising system of punishments for the most part because in spite of its brutality, the system was above-all not arbitrary or discriminating. For example, the practice of striking soldiers at random so fashionable in a number of European armies was absent in the British Army. The last vestiges of this privilege had pretty well been eradicated by the Duke of York. The result, unique among European armies, was that a soldier had only himself to blame for his punishment. As John Stevenson argued:

"They talk of the lash. I was never any more afraid of the lash than I was of the gibbet, no man ever comes to that but through his own conduct, just as thousands come to the jail and penal settlements." To see others punished naturally brought out one's sympathies, often unbashedly, but at the same time the prisoner's culpability was not forgotten.
This is not to suggest that this attitude toward punishment has my sympathy. To the modern reader the fact that punishment was infrequently arbitrary may seem like small compensation for living in the midst of what seems like as a veritable atmosphere of terror. The point, though, is that the soldier thought the system quite reasonable. Moreover, not only was the principle of punishment tolerated, most soldiers defended even its most severe manifestations - not for the sake of justice nor to satisfy the Old Testament axiom that the righteous should rejoice at the sufferings of the sinner - but simply as a means to ensure order. After all, their profession demanded efficiency and order. These sentiments are repeatedly asserted in the literature of the rank-and-file. Private Wheeler's view, for example, was that "the army ... could not be kept in the order so essential to its well-being if some examples had not been made ... such punishments were necessary to deter others." On similar grounds, Wheailey opposed M.P. Sir Francis Burdett's plea for the abolition of corporal punishment in the Army; and Anton remarked:

"Examples ... are absolutely necessary, whatever philanthropists say to the contrary. They tend to preserve regularity, order, and discipline. ... Philanthropists who decry the lash ought to reconsider in what manner the good men - the deserving exemplary, soldiers - are to be protected; if no coercive measures are to be resorted to in purpose to prevent ruthless ruffians from insulting with impunity the temperate, the well-inclined, and the orderly-disposed, the good must be left to the mercy of the worthless ... the good soldier thanks you not for such philanthropy; the incorrigible laughs at your humanity, despises your clemency, and meditates only how he may gratify his naturally vicious propensities."

Furthermore, it should be recognized that although it was not unusual for a man to be whipped brutally, the soldier often sensed, nonetheless, that the Commander had his best interests in mind. After suffering through a devastating punishment, William Lawrence of the 40th remarked that "Perhaps it was a good thing for me as could then have happened, as it prevented me
from committing greater crimes, which might at last have brought me to my ruin. Wellington's lieutenant, Sir Thomas Picton, beat mercilissly any man accused of stealing from the Spanish peasants, "always talking about how wrong it was to plunder the poor people because countries happened to be at war." He could have hanged them instead; more important, "every soldier in the division knew that if he had anything to complain of, 'Old Picton' would listen to his story, and set him right if he could." They respected Picton, and thus accepted the wisdom of his disciplinary actions. Similarly, Robert Crauford, well-remembered for having flogged his men in a devastating fashion on the retreat to Corunna, is rarely acknowledged for the respect which the men had for his leadership. In the words of John Kincaid,

"No one but one formed of stuff like General Crauford could have saved the brigade from perishing altogether; and if he flogged two, he saved hundreds from death." Now it has been argued that the rank-and-file more or less uniformly supported the military code. Various supportive material from diaries and journals was quoted. But, can one declare unequivocally that this view permeated the rank-and-file, or was it an attitude confined to the generally more intelligent and thus perhaps less volatile men who wrote diaries? Paradoxically, an analysis of the remarkable events of the mutinees at Spithead and Nore in 1797 may shed some light on the matter. During the mutiny, the first British government ever based on universal sufferage ever was elected among the sailors, and open forums created to articulate grievances. Petitions stemming out of these discussions demanded improvements in food, health care, sleeping facilities, and leave, but from no quarter came any call to abandon the cat. The mutineers did insist on the dismissal or castigation of those officers who punished illegally, but no sense of outrage was directed at the principle of punishment itself. According to the naval historian, David Hannay:
"I have never found any evidence (before 1815) that flogging as a punishment given for proven offences against discipline or good order in the ship was looked upon as a grievance. On the contrary, when inflicted by a Captain, who, however severe he might be was just, it was considered ... as ... protection against unruly spirits swept into the fleet by the press or the criminals imported from the gaols." 17

Officers who continued their arbitrary ways despite the efforts of the Duke of York, were confronted in varied and occasionally unusual ways. A certain amount of malpractice was tolerated, understandably since every soldier had inherited his world view through experience in a civil society replete with injustices. These were the silent revolts, the revolutions of hope. Sometimes justice did prevail. Several tyrannical officers were cashiered, publically reprimanded, corporally punished or reduced in rank by their superior; on at least one occasion, in Belgium, it was a local outcry against an officer's methods that inspired the regional commander to take action against him. Retribution was swifter and more appreciated if the officer was simply killed in action. Bugler Green of the 68th recorded one incident where the men actually cheered at the sight of their fallen commander, and afterwards celebrated the end of his despotic reign. 18 Another, interesting strategy of dealing with reprobrate officers was described by John Donaldson. A new Commander was bent on making his men absolutely servile, at any cost. His efforts to satisfy that ambition, however, backfired completely. Wrote Donaldson:

"When he got command of the regiment he introduced flogging for every trivial offence, and in addition invented disgraceful and torturing modes of inflicting the lash. But this was not enough - he ordered that all defaulters should have a patch of black and yellow cloth sewed on to the sleeve of their jacket, and a hole cut in it for every time they were punished. The effect was soon visible; as good men were liable to be punished for the slightest fault, the barrier between them and hardened ill-doers was broken down, and those who had lost respect in their own eyes became broken-hearted and inefficient soldiers, or else grew reckless and launched out into real crime. Those who were hardened and unprincipled before, being brought by
the prevalence of punishments nearer to a level with the better men, seemed to glory misconduct. In short, all idea of honour and character was lost, and listless apathy and bad conduct become the prevailing features of the Corps."19

Occasionally, a startling increase in desertion accompanied the introduction of unfair and illegal treatment. This occurred, for example, within the York Hussars after its esteemed Colonel Jassar, had been succeeded by a tyrant named Long. Moreover, Long's subsequent attempt to stem the tide of desertion through an indiscriminate increase in the severity of punishment only served to aggravate the trend. Finally, in the extreme, there were isolated incidences of mutiny, as in the Breadahbaine corps at Glasgow.

In sum, although it would be foolish to assume that the harshness of Britain's military system of justice did not generate some antipathies among the rank-and-file towards the Army, the generally fair [that is, non-arbitrary] use of the code minimized the potential for hostility. Thus incidences of disorder and desertion were generally the result of the meting out of illegal punishment or else were stimulated by events quite unrelated to discipline, most notably shortages of food. Indeed, failure to ensure an adequate supply of foodstuffs produced the greatest amount of unruliness. A good deal of the bitterness and frustration expressed in personal memoirs, therefore, pertained to food or, for example, coping with boredom or the experience of losing a comrade in battle, rather than to some sense of displeasure with disciplinary action.

Despite the arguments offered and the evidence supplied, one suspects that the heavy hand of army discipline would not have been so well tolerated had there not been palliatives to compensate the soldier. Alcohol, sex and other diversions were of enormous importance and their full significance will be explored at a later point. More important, what occurred several times was a profound release, a complete and utter negation of discipline, that is, mass
plunder. According to Sir John Fortescue, "The men, artificially restrained by harsh discipline at home, thought themselves entitled (not wholly without sympathy from their officers) to be lawless in the field." As one officer wrote:

"The spirit of the soldiers rose to a frightful height (at Badajoz). I say frightful because it was not of that sort which denoted exultation at the prospect of achieving an exploit which was about to hold them up to the admiration of the world; there was a certain something in their bearing which told plainly that they had suffered fatigues of which they had not complained, and seen their comrades and officers slain around them with repining, but that they had smarted under the one and felt acutely for the other. They smothered both, so long as body and mind were employed, but now, before the storm, they had a momentary license to think, and every fine feeling vanished - plunder and revenge took their place ..."

Naturally, the army did not encourage such behaviour, it made it subject to the death penalty. Indeed, many officers tried to restrain mass acts of wanton pillage, though some, as Fortescue implies, merely ignored it. The difficulty was that when men became possessed of that feverish anxiety, and their collective blood grew hot, almost nothing could be done to quell their emotions. The best examples of such action were at Vimiera (1808), Ciudad Rodrigo (1812), Badajoz (1812), San Sebastian (1813) and Vitoria (1813). At Vitoria, Wellington sought to pursue the retreating French Army, but abandoned the plan after his army succumbed to mass looting and drink. It was here that the Duke labelled British soldiers 'the scum of the earth', adding that it seemed, in his opinion, 'impossible to command a British army'. Still, Britain's record of plunder and rapine during this war was, on the whole, a relatively modest one, certainly in comparison to the behaviour of France's armies.

The military code remained harsh throughout the war. We noted, however, that there occurred some change in attitude concerning the value of severe discipline. Efforts were made to appeal to the soldier's intelligence, to
lead rather than drive him. For even though soldiers tolerated punishment it was becoming increasingly clear that men fought more zealously when the atmosphere of army life was free of the constant threat of punishment simply because it meant that officers were *made* to reply on more humane and dignified methods in order to motivate their troops. It should be recognized, however, that in 1815 the British officer was still quite likely the most backward thinking in Europe.

In light of these comments on the tendency to soften the severity of punishment, the importance of public efforts to improve the soldier's lot are worth noting. An active Press campaign in 1811-1812 was instrumental in getting certain regulations passed to render punishments of flogging less frequent and less severe. In 1812, a circular issued by the Commander-in-Chief forbade 'on any pretext whatsoever' the authorization of punishments exceeding three hundred lashes. This was followed in 1813 by the Secretary-of-State-at-War's acceptance of Sir Samuel Romilly's plea that no man should be flogged once he had fallen. Thus, despite certain government limitations imposed on Press and public criticism of the code - for example, the Hunts, owners of the *Examiner* were tried on charges of seditious libel for various criticisms of the lash, and though acquitted, their editor was fined £200 and jailed for eighteen months - their efforts did contribute to the mitigation of its worst features.

In sum, the British military system of discipline and punishments was a crude and cruel one, though its severity was *ameliorated*. In spite of the harshness of the code the soldier tolerated it, partly because army life had its compensations elsewhere, but for the most part because it was not arbitrary. An attempt to maintain order in the British Army was made without subjecting men indiscriminately to the lash. In the final analysis, the fact that as long
as one was obedient one remained immune from punishment seemed to soldiers sensible and worth tolerating.
Footnotes


4. Ibid., 245.


6. Wheatley mentioned several examples of men receiving eight hundred lashes or so for attempting to desert; he cited another in which the culprit received only three hundred strokes. John Skipp, at age fifteen, was court-martialed for attempted desertion from the 'Boys Regiments' (10-16 years old) and sentenced to nine hundred and ninety-nine strokes. Fortunately, it was commuted.

7. William Morris told of one man given one hundred and fifty lashes for the theft of one carrot.

8. Cited in Oman, op. cit., 239.


10. For example, in one of his letters, Private Wheeler writes of an introverted, humble and rather popular soldier who, in an intoxicated state, struck an officer. He was condemned to be shot. At the execution, there was, according to Wheeler, "not a dry eye in the regiment." (Captain B.H. Liddell Hart (ed.), *The Letters of Private Wheeler, 1809-1828* (London, 1951), 33-34.)

11. Hart, op. cit., 196


13. Lawrence, op. cit., 49.


15. Ibid., 137.


18. William Green, *The Vicissitudes of a Soldier's Life* (Leicester, 1858), 81.


VI.

Pastimes

There was, removed from the pain and drudgery, another side to army life - that of diversion and entertainment. The men wasted no opportunity in pursuit of ways to amuse themselves. Their amusements were instrumental in helping to make a difficult and often monotonous life endurable. The spirit of play was also critical in enhancing that sense of community vital to good morale, a factor not overlooked by the authorities.

The most important source of comfort to the British soldier was drinking. The consumption of alcohol in the Peninsular Army was enormous, exceeding even the characteristically high levels consumed by the British civilian population. Previous British armies had often discouraged soldiers from drinking. In Cromwell's New Model Army, for example, drunks were made to endure a type of punishment known as the wooden horse, a device whose pain to the genitals was excruciating. Marlborough's Army had also severely repressed drunken behaviour. The worst forms of insobriety were punished in Wellington's Army, but no dramatic effort was made to moderate the widespread consumption of alcohol. Drinking was simply too popular and, in the Peninsula, too cheap and accessible to have been stifled effectively. Wellington wrote in 1810 that

"No soldier can withstand the temptation of wine. This is constantly before their eyes in this country, and they are constantly intoxicated when absent from their regiments, and there is no crime which they do not commit to obtain money to purchase it, or if they cannot get money, to obtain it by force."  

One gets the impression from analyzing available dispatches that most officers simply felt that if the men were so infatuated with alcohol then it was pointless to suppress its consumption. A good officer allowed some self-indulgence as a necessary concession to the needs of the rank-and-file. The only difficulty with that policy was that the abuse of alcohol often got out of hand, with debilitating effects to the soldiers' fighting ability.
Observed the anonymous author of *Journal of a Soldier* ...

"The great fault of our soldiers, at this time, was an inordinate desire for spirits of any kind. They sacrificed their life and safety for drink, in many ways; for they lay down intoxicated upon the snow, and slept the sleep of death; or, staggering behind, were overtaken and cut down by the merciless French soldiers."

During the retreat to Corunna, a thousand men were left behind at Bimbibre too drunk to move as a result of having exhausted the local wine cellars. The French cavalry attacked the town shortly thereafter, killing a number of the stragglers and incarcerating the rest.

Alcohol was the principal source of comfort but there were, as well, numerous other activities which appealed to the soldier. During the day, when time allowed, the men, for example, passed time and supplemented their diets, by hunting and fishing. These diversions were ideal for the solitary type. Races were also very popular and occasions for much eager betting. Men occasionally competed in foot races, but more prevalent were sweepstakes and greyhound racing. A number of officers brought dogs from England specifically for that purpose. The men also enjoyed coarse, rough and primitive sports like boxing and wrestling. According to one observer, soldiers were "mad for violent exercises". However, few took a liking to bullfighting. The men were puzzled to understand how the Spanish people could enjoy the sport, when its excitement seemed to be directly proportional to the amount of cruelty practised and when there was disappointment when someone was not killed or at least badly injured. However, their own sports of cock and dog-fighting were equally cruel. Few, if any other pastimes were neglected.

Indeed, the men pursued a wide variety of amusements, from football, cricket and handball to swimming, shooting marbles and making wine. Rambles were also popular, particularly because Spain and Portugal were rich in both scenic beauty as well as cathedrals, monasteries, aqueducts, and other
Men of the 43rd described going on long hikes during which they chased herds of wild ponies, fired at eagles and vultures circling above, and wandered up among giant cliffs where they sat gazing at the Atlantic Ocean for hours. Finally, it should be noted that a number of soldiers, especially Riflemen, consumed some of their leisure hours in educating themselves. They read books supplied by families with whom they were billeting and purchased others from booksellers, one of whom had assured Moyle Sherer of having sold more books to the British in two weeks than he had sold in two years to French soldiers who constantly passed through the city.

Evenings were spent around a fire in "a continuous round of pleasure," in the words of Private Wheeler. For the most part the men simply talked. "You would laugh if you could hear our conversations here," wrote one soldier to his wife; "one moment spherical case and round shot, the next tea or shoes or Russian ducks." They also sang, read aloud English newspapers (the one precious link with home), played cards and, at least twice a week, were treated to more formal entertainments like dancing displays or amateur theatricals. Throughout the evening, the men of course drank; they also smoked and nibbled at whatever extra food they had obtained. Cigars, "the great comfort of the soldier," were easily accessible. On the other hand, apart from the daily ration, food was difficult to procure. Nonetheless, the men actively scrounged for it not because they were starving, for they felt themselves adequately fed, but for the sake of variety. The reason may also have had something to do with the nature of the classic regression pattern described earlier. The regressive syndrome is often characterized by an overwhelming obsession with food. In the Nazi concentration camps food took on an enormous existential importance. Victor Frankl called it "gastric masturbation." Unfortunately, there is so little known about the hunger drive that it is difficult to explain its
compulsive character under certain conditions. What is certain is that in
the Peninsula men went to extraordinary lengths to supplement their diet.
Indeed, it was Lieutenant Mercer's opinion that this soldiers fancied eating
above all else. As Private Wheeler observed, "mostly the belly was not for-
gotten." 12

Foraging was usually a futile exercise, and it was impractical to
steal food off the natives since offenders were often executed. Extra food
was, therefore, chiefly procured through purchase. Farmers sold a bit of
their produce. As well, merchants occasionally set up markets adjacent to
camps, because the British could be trusted to pay for the goods, and sold
mostly bread, milk, eggs, poultry, and wine. The following passage describes
the legendary Johnny Newcombe's encounter with one sutler:

"Pray, sir," says John, "do you sell Hams, and cheese?"
"Si, Senhor, I do sell all vat you please;
Biscuits, &c Porter, Tongues, Hollands, & Brandy."
John crack'd his whip, and swore 'twas all the dandy.
"Tea, Sugar, Salt, and vat of all most nice is,
Pickles and Soda, good Seegars and Spices." 13

Unfortunately, among the variety of foods sold by sutlers were sometimes meats
cut off the bodies of French soldiers. 14

Occasionally, the regular pattern of night life was interrupted by
special wartime parties. Celebrations were held at Christmas and on other
special dates, such as St. Patrick's Day or the anniversary of a famous
battle, complete with a meal typically consisting of punch, plum-pudding, and
roast beef. The men were paid in ayears and various forms of gambling set up.
One observer noted that, "There was no lack of ... dominoes, pitch and toss:
Heads, I win! - tails, you lose! - anything to catch the penny. So their
thirty or forty dollars did not last long." 15

Similarly, officers would endeavour where possible to vary the soldier's
life by arranging parties or dances with the local inhabitants. During

Kincaid's stay in one village;

"We invited the villagers, every evening, to a dance at
our quarters ... A Spanish peasant girl has an address about her
which I have never met within the same class of any other country
... We used to flourish away at the bolero, fandango and waltz,
and would up early in the evening with a supper of roasted
chestnuts." 16

Incidentally, most soldiers thought the fandango was scarcely decent, even
obscene and thus terribly exciting. "This dance," wrote one Scot, "had a
great effect upon us, but the Spaniards ... laughed at the quick breathing
and amorous looks of our men." 17

The result of mixing with the people on such occasions was thoroughly
beneficial. Not only was the contact pleasurable, it also did much to enhance
relations between the Army and the inhabitants of the Peninsula. A more
sympathetic understanding of the native people developed and this awareness
helped to soften that air of superiority typical of the British soldier. 18

Although festivities shared with towns and villages brought soldiers
into contact with women the majority of intimate affairs were with prostitutes. 19

In small towns, brothels were the most popular form of entertainment, especially
in winter. During the long British stand behind the Lines of Torres Vedras
many whores journeyed up from Lisbon and settled in the villages occupied by
the British in order to exploit the situation. Though providing what the men
undoubtedly thought was a valuable service, they were not well-liked by the
soldiers, and fought bitterly with them, mostly over payment. Wellington was
finally forced to evacuate shiploads of the most brazen women in order to stem
the chaos. Prostitutes also followed regiments on the march. The Duke allowed
his colonels to permit "a few (women) who have proved themselves useful and
regular" to accompany the soldiers to whom they were attached "with a view to
being ultimately married,"^20 but in fact the majority of these women constituted "a travelling brothel".\textsuperscript{21} The men were thus rarely without the pleasures of female companionship, though the result of "plenty of love affairs," to quote the modest words of August Schaumann, the Hannovarian assistant-commissary, was widespread venereal disease.\textsuperscript{22}

In sum, the rank-and-file enjoyed a pleasant variety of diversions, which with the exception of the abuse of alcohol, had no detrimental effect on their discipline or performance. Indeed, not only did their pastimes help to make the life endurable, they also contributed to disseminating a spirit of good-fellowship among the men. According to Charles Stewart:

"Then in our quarters we lived gaily and well ... in the midst of war, - balls, private theatricals and agreeable parties were things of continual occurrence. It is unnecessary to add that this system, whilst it detracted in no degree from the discipline and efficiency of the troops, spread abroad among those who came under its influence the very best disposition and temper; and all men really learned to love their occupation."\textsuperscript{23}
Footnotes

1. Cromwell's puritanical zeal also inspired him to institute fines for swearing and floggings for fornication.


3. Journal of a Soldier of the Seventy-First or Glasgow Regiment (from 1806 to 1815) (Edinburgh, 1819), 87.


5. See Moyle Sherer's excellent account of sightseeing in the Peninsula. (Recollections of the Peninsula, by the Author of Sketches of India (3rd. ed., 1824) Published anonymously).


7. Brett-James, op. cit., 152.


12. Wheeler, op. cit., 43. Indeed, when plundering the enemy, the men, contrary to original expectation, greatly preferred to find foodstuffs than 'prizes'. One fellow who had removed a valuable gold watch off the dead body of a French soldier remarked that he would have traded it for a good meal anytime. The most audacious turned dead Frenchmen into good meals. (Journal ... op. cit., 71)


15. Major-General Sir George Bell, Soldier's Glory, being Rough Notes of an Old Soldier, Brian Stuart (ed.), (1956), 144.


18. According to Moyle Sherer, the British
"cannot make themselves beloved; they are not content with being great, they must be thought so, and told so. They will not bend with good humour to the customs of other nations ... wherever they march or travel, they bear with them a haughty air of conscious superiority and expect that their customs, habits, and opinions should supersede, or at least suspend, those of all the countries through which they pass."
(Sherer, op. cit., 36-7).

19. Note, however, that six wives of soldiers were allowed to accompany each regiment when it left England. The practice was an ancient one among armies; Tacitus described it. But while it was a great comfort to those few men whose wives were fortunate enough to be selected (by lot) out of the hundreds applying, it had little bearing on the rest of the men. Incidentally, most women who became widowed in the Peninsula quickly remarried (other soldiers). There was little point in returning to Great Britain alone, particularly since relatives had often severed their ties with a girl who "ran away with a soldier".


22. Precise statistics are unavailable for the Napoleonic Wars, but it is known, for example, that during the Crimean Wars one-third of all hospitalizations were caused by the disease (32,000 admissions out of 91,000 hospital cases) and that there were 422 admissions for treatment of venereal disease per thousand men at a loss of the equivalent of eight service days a year per soldier. (See Richard Blanco, "The Attempted Control of Venereal Disease in the Army of Mid-Victorian England", *Journal of The Society for Army Historical Review*, 45, 1967, 234-41).

The Joys of War: Reflections on Combat

Attributing to combat a joyous character may seem unusual, even facetious today. The thought of fighting does not excite people with any great passion, at least not younger people. The impression is rather that war would not only be futile but a terrifying experience. This is a mistake. Anyone can be possessed by the arcane attraction of war; indeed, combat has greatly excited men of virtually every culture since the dawn of civilization.

My purpose is not to glorify war nor is it to suggest that man is by nature a violent creature simply because war can generate a powerful appeal. Although combat can be an exciting, in fact exhilarating, activity, there is no need to attribute this to man's possession of innate diabolical urges. My view is an open one of man's nature, one that is at odds with much popular sentiment and a great deal of fashionable literature, such as the work of Konrad Lorenz, Desmond Morris, and Robert Ardrey which purports to find in the behaviour of cackling geese or, in a medicine man-like way, in the bones of *Australopithecus* man, proof of our inherent aggressiveness, but which does not contradict the mainstream of thought in contemporary anthropology, biology or genetics. It is rather my impression that one can make sense of the experience of men in combat (at least in the Peninsular War) simply by analyzing their way of life and the atmosphere within which they dwelt. It is also my feeling that the intensity of this experience was one of the most important factors in maintaining the devotion of the British soldier during the Napoleonic Wars.

It is natural, to assume that combat would have been seen as one more horrible feature of a ghastly business. Bad enough that the soldier should have to serve in filth and deprivation, worst still that he should have to risk his life on the battlefield. But of course we have described how a sense of camaraderie made the men strong and eager and sustained that enthusiastic
ardour. As well, it must not be forgotten that a goal lay behind that
dedicated spirit - to end the war. To delay would solve nothing. The
feeling expressed in the following passage, though the sentiments of a
sailor, John Nicol, is, therefore, appropriate:

"We rejoiced in general action; not that we loved
fighting; but we all wished to be free to return to our
homes, and follow our own pursuits. We knew there was no
way of obtaining this than by defeating the enemy. 'The
hotter war, the sooner peace' was a saying with us." 1

Moreover, inactivity could be terribly boring. In a typical year,
only a few days or at best a few weeks were spent actively fighting; regular
duties were generally excruciating in their monotony. If not on the march-
which was often exhausting and dreary - men were continuously kept busy in
camp. Otherwise, they became troublesome, even potentially mutinous. While
constant attention to activity did keep the rank-and-file moderately pacific,
it also made them feel as though what they were doing was meaningless, which
it usually was. Their tasks were often akin to digging one hole in order to
fill in another. Hence, in the words of one soldier, "we had been so long
idle, that the moere prospect of a little fighting, instead of creating gloomy
sensations was viewed with sincere delight." 2 Another noted:

"The ensuing month passed by without the slightest novelty,
and we began to get heartily tired of our situation. Our souls,
in fact, were strong for war, and peace offered no enjoyment." 3

Indeed, "variety is everything in the life of a soldier," 4 pointed out one
combatant yearning for battle. That explains why in spite of being plagued by
chronic starvation and exhaustion during the two-hundred-mile-long retreat
through the mountains of northern Spain to the port of Corunna, in the middle
of December, 1808, the Riflemen at the rear of the line found constant engage-
ment with the enemy in pursuit a delightful distraction. 5 As one of Harris'
superiors, Captain Kincaid remarked, 'The sight of the Frenchman always acted
like a cordial on the spirits of a rifleman." The regular troops, too, came to life whenever the trek was halted in order to engage the enemy. They hated the indignity of retreating but even more they hated its ceaseless pain and drudgery. That they fought so readily was a surprise to the Lieutenant-General John Moore, commander of the force:

"I could not have believed, had I not witnessed it, that a British Army could, in so short a time, have been so completely disorganized ... except that when there was a prospect of fighting the Enemy. The men were then orderly, and seemed pleased and determined to do their duty."

Wellington's men may also have been drawn into battle simply because it was violent. British society was, after all, a violent one; these men were coarse, rough and primitive. War created an atmosphere in which impulses bred from youth could be satiated, though it should be pointed out that Britain's soldiers were rarely deliberately cruel towards the enemy. It is possible as well that the clear threat to one's existence that combat entailed added a poignancy and intensity to life normally absent. Life became sweet when over it hung the mystery of death. This theme has of course been a popular one among a number of twentieth century writers, including Camus, Hemingway, and Sartre. The latter observed in *Confédération de la Silence* that he was never so free and alive as during the Second World War when he worked with the French Resistance constantly under the threat of betrayal and death. Sir Winston Churchill summed up the feeling exquisitely when he remarked that, "There is nothing more invigorating than to be shot at without result." Thus they may have welcomed the opportunities for battle that arose not merely as gestures of comrade solidarity or to alleviate the tedium of the march or camp existence, but because they found them inherently exciting and personally meaningful. Indeed, in later life, soldier's tended to remember their experience in combat as "the one great lyric passage in their lives".
In order to get a sense of the intensity of combat, it is best to dissect the experience into its various elements. We ought to look first at preparation for battle.

On the march to meet the enemy, a strong sense of anticipation quickly took form. Rifleman Harris describes the effect of knowing that combat was imminent:

"The next day we again advanced, and being in a state of the utmost anxiety to come up with the French, neither the heat of the burning sun, long miles, nor heavy Knapsacks were able to diminish our ardour. Indeed, I often look back with wonder at the lighthearted style, the jollity, and reckless indifference with which men who were destined in so short a time to fall, hurried onwards to the field of strife; seemingly without a thought of anything but the sheer love of meeting the foe and the excitement of the battle."

The immediate hours before battle were usually devoted to somber reflection, efforts to patch up old quarrels and animosities, and the preparation of letters or wills to be delivered to relatives or friends if death should ensue. The atmosphere was electric as the following passage illustrates:

"It would be difficult to convey to the mind of an ordinary reader anything like a correct notion of the state of feelings which takes possession of a man waiting for the commencement of a battle. In the first place, time appears to move upon laden wings; every minute seems an hour, and every hour a day. Then there is a strange mingling of levity and seriousness - a levity which prompts him to laugh, he scarcely knows why; and a seriousness which urges him ever and anon to lift up a mental prayer to the Throne of Grace. On such occasions, little or no conversation passes. The privates generally lean upon their firelocks - the officers; and few words, except monosyllables, at least in answer to questions put, are wasted. On these occasions, too, the faces of the bravest often change colour, and the limbs of the most resolute tremble, not with fear, but with anxiety; whilst watches are consulted, till the individuals who consult them grow absolutely weary of employment. On the whole, it is a situation of higher excitement, and darker and deeper agitation, than any other in human life; nor can he be said to have felt all which man is capable of feeling, who has not filled it."

Similarly, in the words of one captain:
"The infuriated soldier resembled rather a pack of hellhounds vomitted upon the internal regions for the extirpation of mankind than what they were twelve hours previously - a well-organized, brave, disciplined, and obedient British army, and burning only with impatience for what is called glory."

A profound anxiety and excitement thus prevailed in the midst of preparations for combat. This excitement was carried into battle. The men consequently fought well despite their impression that the Spanish and Portuguese people were not sufficiently appreciative of their efforts. Indeed, it may have been difficult to get the British soldier to do many things, but fighting was not one of them. It was an amazing, compelling attraction. Few men were able to resist it. One soldier, though troubled with flux, noted to a friend:

"What would you have me crying to Doctor Webster, when we are close to the enemy and expecting to every hour to be exchanged, no, no, I will wait a bit longer and try my hand at shooting at a few Frenchmen first, afterwards I will give up but not before, I would die on the road first."

Into the centre of the cyclone the men marched, "blood hot and courage on fire". Anton describes a typical opening engagement:

"No movement in the field is made with greater confidence of success than that of a charge; it affords little time for thinking, while it creates a fearless excitement, attends to give a fresh impulse to the blood of the advancing soldier, rouses his courage, strengthens every nerve, and drowns every fear of danger or of death; thus emboldened, amidst the deafening shouts that anticipates victory, he rushes on and mingles with the flying foe."

Another soldier wrote, "I felt no tremor or cold sensation whatever. I walked in without thought or reflection ... The idea of flight never entered my mind but the hotter the fire the stronger I felt myself urged to advance."

Danger captivated them, and fear of death was exorcised.

How then did the men describe a combat experience that followed? Visually, they thought it awesome. One soldier wrote at Waterloo, "the scene which met the eye conveyed a feeling of more exquisite, gratification than can
be conceived," and another said of his first skirmish, "It was really a beautiful sight." Harris, pausing before a battlefield, exclaimed,

"As I looked about me, I thought it the most imposing sight the world could produce ... Altogether, the sight had a singular and terrible effect upon the feelings of a youth, who, a few short months before, had been a solitary shepherd upon the Downs of Dorsetshire, and had never contemplated any other sort of life than the peaceful occupation of watching the innocent sheep as they fed upon the grassy turf."

As to the action, the following sort of comment was not uncommon: "This was the first night of my life which I had ever spent in so warlike a fashion; and I perfectly recollect, to this hour, the impression which it made upon me. It was one of exquisite delight." Wheeler, describes a moment on the battlefield in these words: "I was so overjoyed ... and so animated was the moment ... that forgetting the danger I exposed myself to, I sat up with my cap on the muzzle of my firelock and cheered." There was a joy and glory in battle. The same could not be said about the typical soldier's previous experience. Men even experienced a sense of being involved in history, as private Thomas Morris' inclusion of these lines into his diary makes apparent:

"The meanest soldier, fired by glory's rage, Believes his name enroll'd in history's page."

Battles were short, a day or two at most. For the combatant it was not enough to avoid being killed. One did not gamble one's life merely to survive. The only fitting reward was victory, splendid and honourable. Not surprisingly, then, chasing the enemy was ecstatic. 'There is something in the idea of pursuing a flying enemy, far more exhilarating than in any other idea to which the human mind gives harbour,' observed one soldier. Another remarked, "I wish to God I had been with the Russians as nothing can equal the delight of pursuing an Army, especially a French one." Nonetheless, on several occasions the men preferred to plunder a fallen city rather than chase the retreating enemy.
It should be pointed out that although the men fought with enthusiasm, they were rarely senselessly violent toward the French. There was little cruelty. Nor was there even much of a sense of animosity felt toward the enemy.

One fellow wrote simply, "I should hate to fight out of personal malice or revenge, but have no objection to fight for 'Fun and glory'." Another revealed, "Poor fellows, what is war? Is it natural to man as to beast, or is it what a French soldier said to me - it might be that it was me that wounded you or you that wounded me, but it was neither of our faults but our grandees.

Moreover, there existed a tremendous amount of fraternisation between French and British soldiers. Away from the battlefield a virtual absence of hostility prevailed. Courtesies were observed - prisoners were commonly exchanged, truces were enforced in order that the dead might be buried, and so on. Usually encamped within walking distance of each other, the men often mingled, bathing together, exchanging various items, and sharing forages. As one Lieutenant observed,

"I was highly amused, just before dusk, by observing many of our soldiers run into a field between the hostile pickets, and dig with their bayonets. Soon after I saw many of the enemy do the same thing: they did not molest each other, but appeared even familiar, laughing and joking promiscuously." How strange, thought I, that these men, who to-morrow would be slaying each other, should now be so good-humouredly employed together: They were digging potatoes!"

Sterotyped images of an evil, satanic enemy so popular in Britain had dissolved completely." Indeed, by 1814 relations between the two armies were so good that Wellington felt compelled to forbid any further contact with the French. British soldiers thus got along better with their enemy, men who were quite prepared to kill them when the occasion arose, than with the natives of the Peninsula who they were supposedly liberating from Napoleon's
domination. In fact, all the worst excesses of cruelty were perpetrated not against the French but the Spanish and Portuguese people. At Badojoz, for example, according to one officer,

"The barbarity of our soldiers extended to that pitch that they would not for two days carry off the wounded men at the foot of the walls - our own men!!! ... the town was dreadfully plundered, and the inhabitants murdered of all ages and sexes." 28

Such actions occurred not as a result of any animosity felt by the British towards these people - indeed there were generally friendly relations between the two - but owing to particular circumstances. They occurred usually after long, costly sieges when bitterness over the pain and extreme risk of the assault and, it would seem from examining some of the writings, frustrations accumulated as a result of the highly disciplined character of the life, combined to unleash primitive responses at the heart of the British soldier's volatile character.

The battle over, the men celebrated. "Nothing in this life is half so enviable as the feelings of a soldier after a victory", 29 said Anton. An old soldier, reflecting on his experience wrote, "Nor do I recall many happier moments." 30 Yet many comrades had fallen, and feelings of sorrow interrupted their pleasure. To quote Anton, once more:

"Night after battle is always glorious to the undisputed victors ... here, however, by the first early dawning of the morning, let us more seriously cast our eye over this scene of slaughter, where the blood of the commander and the commanded mix indiscriminately together over the field." 31

The dead were subsequently honoured with a service. One soldier described one in those words:

"The beautiful manner in which he (the parson) dwelt on the battle, and the sad and sudden loss of friends and comrades, drew tears from many; and when he wound up with the sad pangs it would cause at home, to the widows and orphans, the parents and friends of those that had fallen, concluding with the text, "Go to your
tents and rejoice, and return thanks to the Lord for the mercies he has granted you", there was hardly a dry eye in the whole division, and it had an excellent effect on the men."  

But lamentations did not last long; a soldier could not afford to brood over death. Inner defences, such as humour and optimism were utilized to help one bear the losses. 

In sum, war was brutal and men, on the whole, did not prefer it to peace, yet there was something about it which offered men a poignancy to their lives, a life-affirmation, a feeling of importance. Private Thomas Morris prefaced his memoir with this passage:

"Sound, sound the clarion! fill the fife,  
To all the sensual world proclaim -  
One crowded hour of glorious life  
Is worth an age without a name!"  

There was glory in battle, and its excitement helped bear a soldier through. Despite wartime's privations, a good deal of satisfaction marked a soldier's life; the return to peacetime society was, by comparison, a pale shadow.
Footnotes

5. The classic description of the retreat is that of *Rifleman Harris*, (Camden: Conn., 1970), 47-50.

27. Wrote Sergeant John Donaldson, "How different were our feelings in this respect from many of our countrymen at home, whose ideas of the French character were drawn from servile newspapers and pamphlets ... but I myself must confess, in common with many others, that I was astonished when I came into contact with French soldiers, to find them, instead of pigmy spider-shanked wretches, who fed on nothing but frogs and beef tea, stout handsome looking fellows, who understood the principles of good-living as well as any Englishman amongst us; and, whatever may be said to the contrary, remarkably brave soldiers." Cited in Antony Brett-James, op. cit., 309.

28. H.H. Bruce, Like of Napier, I, (London), 96. Normally, such behaviour was deplored, except among the Army's worst elements. The average man, for example, found no vicarious delight in the almost continuous acts of Portuguese and Spanish brutality. One fellow described these in the following terms: "Here I beheld a sight ... even more horrible (than vultures); the peasantry prowling about, more ferocious than the beasts and birds of prey, finishing the work of death, and carrying away whatever they thought worthy of their grasp. Avarice and revenge were the causes of these horrors. No fallen Frenchman, that showed the least signs of life, was spared. They even seemed pleased with mangling the dead bodies." From Journal of a Soldier of the Seventy First or Glasgow Regiment (From 1806 to 1815) (Edinburgh, 1815), 59.


30. The Subaltern, op. cit., 105.


32. Cited in Brett-James, op. cit., 235.

Conclusion

Several arguments were put forward in this paper to explain, within the context of the Napoleonic era, the loyalty of Britain's soldiers. The obvious importance of their motivation for enlisting was first discussed. The chief reason why men joined at that time was because the bounty was so attractive; it particularly appealed to the poor, especially the Irish, and to growing numbers of the economically insecure. They also volunteered because the army held the promise of glory and adventure, a strong antidote to the dull, alienating work many recruits were accustomed to. This was particularly true from 1812 onward as the British Army took the offensive in the Peninsula and pushed towards France. Many men, too, were attracted by the widespread availability of alcohol in the army. There was, as well, the usual assortment of criminals and misfits who joined in order to escape jail or regrettable experiences. Patriotism was the least important of the reasons for joining.

We also endeavoured to show that while men enlisted, for example, because the bounty appealed to them, the willingness of many to serve was aided by an underlying desire to escape the industrial way of life. Traditional society, with its established customs, secure social relationships, and flexible work habits was disintegrating before the onslaught of industrialism. A large segment of the population was distressed by the new order; a fraction of them perceived the army as one way out of it. There was thus some hidden blessing in the turmoil and social uprooting caused by industrialism. Historically, those secure in their status were not attracted to the army; indeed when conscription was introduced in eighteenth century Prussia, for example, an overwhelming percentage of those whose social roles were firmly established were subsequently unable to endure army life. It was said that many farmboys literally died of homesickness. And an enormous
number of men deserted. On the other hand, in a rapidly changing society, the security offered by the army acted as an inducement to men to enlist. During the Napoleonic era many British Soldiers were, in fact, industrial dropouts.

Thereafter it was shown how certain features of army life contributed to sustaining that original motivation. The military inspired a sense of purpose, particularly under Wellington's strong leadership and, with improvements in relations between officers and the rank-and-file, some dignity. There was the profound sense of belonging that camaraderie instilled, an experience that soldiers have always cherished. Similarly, success brought great satisfaction. The French in the Peninsula, on the other hand, became demoralized as a result of increasing setbacks in battle at the hands of the British, Portuguese, and Spanish armies and by the inability to suppress constant guerrilla terror (and by the inadequacy of their supply system). There were the little things as well - the natural beauty of the country, the friendliness of the people, and one's diversions. Like Alexandre Solzenhitsyn's hero in One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich, the men drew strength from experiences normally glossed over. Finally, the life was enhanced by that strange vitality which often comes from living in the constant presence of death. For these reasons many men saw their army years as the most important period of their lives. Said Rifleman Harris:

"For my own part, I can only say that I enjoyed life more whilst on active service than I have ever done since; and as I sit at my work in my shop in Richmond Street, Soho, I look back upon that portion of my time spent in the fields of the Peninsula as the only part worthy of remembrance. It is at such time that scenes long past come back upon my mind as if they had taken place but yesterday. I remember even the very appearance of some of the regiments engaged; and comrades, long thouldered to dust, I see again performing the acts of heroes."

Another wrote:
"... the year referred to (1814) is one on which I now look back, with the feeling of melancholy satisfaction, which invariably accompanies a retrospect of happiness gone by. If there ever existed an enthusiastic lover of the profession of arms, I believe that I was one ... I loved my profession as long as it gave full occupation to my bodily and mental powers; but the peace came ... The brightest hopes of my boyhood have all failed, and that manhood has produced none capable of taking their place. The friend who shared with me so many dangers and hardships, fell at my side ... The walk of life which I pursued, for a while, so merrily, has been abandoned; my sabre hangs rusty upon the wall; and my poor old faithful dog is gathered to her fathers ... Well, well ... it is quite right that we should learn the folly of fixing our affections so strongly upon anything in a scene so shifting and uncertain as human life."

There was then an attractiveness to army life. However, we sought to emphasise the point that surviving it nonetheless required coping with enormous difficulties. The men succeeded because of their strong survival instincts. They admirably demonstrated those adaptive powers that E.P. Thompson labelled the 'Brechtian values' - "fatalism, irony in the face of Establishment homilies and tenacity of self-preservation." An analysis of the various coping processes - regression, romanticism, and the creation of belief in strength through adversity - did make clear, however, that to a great extent the men lived by illusions. (It also explained the soldier's traditional lack of perspective and 'fawning servility!') Nonetheless, soldiers' attitudes reflected a truly remarkable adjustment.

The above were some of the factors that contributed to the loyalty of Wellington's soldiers. We made no claim to their universality though the implication was that certain ones like camaraderie contribute to the socialization process in virtually any army. But while these agents were instrumental in contributing to a soldier's devotion they certainly did not guarantee his tolerance for any condition. One will recall that desertion was somewhat of a problem in the eighteenth century. The principal cause of its decline during the Napoleonic era stemmed from the considerable reforms instituted within the army. Contrasting the nature of armies in the eighteenth century to Wellington's
clearly illuminated the importance of these reforms. In the earlier period, men deserted chiefly because many recruits had been coerced into joining, discipline was totally chaotic, punishment not only brutal but more important arbitrary, food woefully insufficient, and pay inadequate and unchanging. Though the British Army retained more of a traditional outlook than some of the other forces in the Napoleonic era, the effect of the reforms, initiated by the Duke of York and Sir John Moore, was dramatic. Bounties were enlarged and pay increased for the first time since the sixteenth century. The arbitrary character of so many of the institution's features as reduced; for example, the administrative network was rationalized somewhat. A greater efficiency of command was established with the result that the quality of training was considerably improved. Indeed, the old belief that only a savage discipline could maintain order diminished in appeal; the arbitrariness of punishment was suppressed and its severity reduced. And as officers turned to more humane modes of disciplining the troops the traditional gulf between officer and ordinary soldier began to wither. In sum, if one simply examines in isolation conditions in Britain's army at this time, one is struck by the sheer barbarism of the institution, but a recognition of the extent to which the previous state of her army had been ameliorated and how much these reforms were appreciated dramatically alters this perspective. The reform of the army helps to explain the great influx of serious, intelligent, and dedicated soldiers during these wars.

An unusual picture of the period thus emerges: while Britain's soldiers became progressively better off, her people suffered increasingly, a development which, incidently, was staunchly defended by the apologists of industrialism. Their condition had improved because it was the only way to ensure the maintenance of a force whose enormous size was unprecedented. According
to Eric Hobsbawm, Britain may have carried a heavier load of servicemen proportionate to her total population than did France for most of the war\textsuperscript{5}. Customary desertion patterns simply could not have been tolerated; it would have been too difficult to keep the army up to size. Britain may not have lost but she could not have contributed to the victory over Napoleon without the reform of her army. Unfortunately, this concern for the soldier was quickly abandoned as soon as the war ended. It was a severe blow to have served one's country so faithfully only to be sent home to confront the widespread unemployment and poverty of post-war Britain. Costello wrote bitterly of being unable to survive with a wife and child on the meagre disability pension provided by the army and of finally having to ship them back to France.\textsuperscript{6} Many former soldiers became politically active as a result of their dissatisfaction, participating in the events of those turbulent post-war years most has been called "the glorious age of English radicalism". Lieutenant-General Harry Smith, sent to Glasgow to command a force to police the city, recalled meeting numerous former soldiers among the city's politically active weavers. He observed that they had helped to organise these craftsmen into 16 Battalions, including a "Battalion of Volunteer Riflemen," which marched throughout Glasgow in order to popularize their grievances.\textsuperscript{7} An investigation of the influence of former soldiers on the politics of the post-Napoleonic era might prove fascinating.

In sum, it is my hope that this study succeeded in its intention to portray the British soldier honestly and with a touch of humanity. Perhaps a hint of the enormous sociological and psychological complexity entailed in participation was revealed (and something about the general process of adjustment to difficult circumstances as well). It is hoped that this included some insight into the existential character of war and its mysterious attractions.
Footnotes

1. Alcohol was consumed in such enormous quantities in the British Army that Wellington felt compelled to remark that, "English soldiers are fellows who have enlisted for drink - that is the plain fact - they have all enlisted for drink." (Earl of Stanhope, Notes of Conversations with the Duke of Wellington (London, 1888), 14.


5. In 1813-14 money was voted in Parliament to support an army of 300,000 soldiers and a navy of 140,000 seamen. See E.J. Hobsbawm, The Age of Revolution Europe 1798-1848 (London, 1962), 94


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