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Soldiering in Tsarist Russia
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For most of us the title of this lecture conjures up images of technological backwardness and administrative inefficiency, perhaps also of bovine submissiveness on the part of vast numbers of peasant conscripts to some far-away autocrat, indifferent to their fate, and to equally unfeeling officers and bureaucrats- an instinctive loyalty, punctuated from time to time by violent and brutal mutinies.

It is a picture that is exaggerated and oversimplified. It owes much to Western historians' tendency to concentrate on the final years of the Imperial regime, which were untypical in that Russia's armed forces confronted unusually severe, indeed ultimately insoluble, problems. In World War I, all but isolated from her allies, Russia faced Ludendorff's mighty military machine, far better trained and better equipped, as well as the Austrians and the Turks. Along the Eastern front, her traditionally loyal and courageous fighting men suffered unparalleled casualties and privations in seemingly endless and unprofitable trench warfare until even they finally decided they had had enough. They rebelled; and this great upsurge of "the men in grey overcoats," coupled with disaffection in the rear, led to the collapse of tsarism in February 1917, the breakup of the Russian empire, economic chaos, the dissolution of the armed forces, and, within a matter of months, to the formation of a new "Red Army" under Bolshevik direction, which differed in many important ways from its Imperial predecessor.¹

Yet the social revolutionaries who so zealously advocated a people's militia imbued with political consciousness, and totally unlike any traditional army, soon found that the legacy of the past loomed larger than they had expected. It was especially evident in the logic of a situation that forced the new regime to take immediate, desperate measures to defend itself against its many internal and external foes. Only a trained, disciplined, centrally administered and well equipped force could do this. So it was that within a few months conscription came back and former tsarist noncoms and officers were recruited. After a few more years Trotsky's name disappeared down the "memory hole," and the Red Army became a fully professional force in which certain selected values and traditions of the old army were resurrected and even made the object of a veritable cult.²

This is not to say that there is continuity between the tsarist and Red armies. Stalin's army, like its successor of today, was a heavily politicized body dedicated to supranational goals as defined by the ruling Party. But in the pursuit of these goals it had proved expedient to invoke old-fashioned sentiments of patriotism, of selfless service to the central state power, such as had animated men in Russia for centuries, along with various familiar institutional habits.

To understand how this was possible we have to take a longer historical view than one focusing exclusively on the prerevolutionary years. Any army expresses the mores of the society from which it is drawn. It will reflect the goals of its leaders and suffer from the tensions that strain the nation's cohesiveness. Already in medieval and early modern times Russian society had been shaped by warfare: by internecine strife among the princes and by the need to defend the forest heartland against attack from the open steppe. The Mongol-Tatar conquest in the 13th century left psychological wounds that have not entirely healed today. We can see them in the fear and prejudice with which many Soviet Russians view their great neighbor to the East.

Even once the Russian lands had regained their sovereignty under the autocrats of Moscow in the fifteenth century, forces had to be mobilized each year along the country's exposed southern border to grapple with bands of aggressive Tatar raiders: skillfull horsemen who came to take prisoners, whom they enslaved and sold in Near Eastern markets- that is, if they did not choose to kill them instead.

The elderly and sick [wrote a Western traveler in the 1520s] who don't fetch much and are unfit for work, are given by the Tatars to their young men, much as one gives a hare to a hound to make it snappish: they are stoned to death or else thrown into the sea.

It must be acknowledged that the proud but impoverished rulers of Muscovy (as Russia was then known) were rather slow to develop an effective response to this threat. The earthen and wooden palisades they built to guard the border were expensive to maintain and soon rotted away. Even the warlike Cossack communities established beyond the line were a mixed blessing, for at times their chieftains rebelled and led masses of disaffected peasants against Moscow. It was not until the late eighteenth century that this volatile region became stabilized; and even so the Russians could not be certain that the Ottoman Turks, for long a formidable military power, would not try, with backing from the West, to make good the losses of Islam- as happened at least four times between 1806 and 1914.

To her west Russia confronted European states that were more advanced politically and economically. Nationalist and Communist historians never tire of reminding us that in 1612 the Catholic Poles stabled their horses in Moscow's holy churches, or that a century later Charles XII of Sweden led an army of 40,000 men into Russia. He might well have reached Moscow had he not shortsightedly put all his eggs in one basket and lost his supplies, which placed his forces at a disadvantage to those of Peter the Great, who proved to be an effective military leader. One might have thought that Napoleon in 1812 would have studied the lessons of history, but he did not and paid an even heavier penalty. Then of course in our own time there was the Kaiser, who could have made it in 1918 if he had really wanted to, and the Nazi Gen. Guderian, who certainly wanted to but was halted near Moscow airport.

Before jumping to the conclusion that the historical record justifies the Russians' evident "defense psychosis," let us add that they were not always the innocent victims. Many peoples of eastern Europe and northern Asia had reason to feel similarly about them. Some nations probably gained from absorption into the Russian Empire, as the Armenians did, and for a time also the Finns, Baltic Germans, and even Ukrainians. Others had more painful experiences: conquest by force of arms, violent repression of dissent, loss of cultural identity, and so on. One thinks here of the Muslim peoples of the Volga valley, the Caucasian highlands, of Central Asia, but most obviously of the Poles, who had enjoyed statehood before partition of their country, and whose four revolts (from 1794 to 1905) were put down with great severity. Nor did the Hungarians, whose uprising of 1848-1849 was suppressed by Nicholas I's troops, or the peoples of the Balkans, whom several nineteenth century tsars tried to protect or "liberate," necessarily have reason to remember the Russians fondly, whatever may be said to the contrary in these countries today.⁵

All this warfare fueled international conflict and also posed problems of imperial integration, a task in which the army was only partially effective-less so than in the Austro-Rungarian Empire, for example.⁶ It also determined the lifestyle and outlook of much of the country's elite. When there were rumors of impending war with the Turks in Moscow in 1853, young officers "awaited impatiently for hostilities to break out so that they could fight the foe, 'toss their caps in the air,' as the phrase went, and win a few medals."⁷ They had plenty of opportunities, for right up to the 1870s Russian military planners preferred to have at their disposal a large semi-trained army rather than a professional cadre force- partly from traditional inertia, partly because manpower was the most readily available resource in what was still a "developing country." One contributory cause to Russia's economic backwardness was the tremendous strain placed on her limited productive resources by the rapacious ambitions of the state. This vast body of men had somehow to be paid, fed, clothed, lodged, and equipped.⁸

Over and above this, for 400 years or so before the reform era of the mid-nineteenth century, Russia was a "service state"; that is to say, the various social groups were defined largely by their roles in supporting the throne as the embodiment of sovereignty. The tsar's privileged servitors- those whom

we call inaccurately "nobles" or "gentry," classes that had no close analogy in Russia- started out as cavalrymen. It was they who in Muscovite times manned the defensive screen against the Tatars already alluded to and who after Peter the Great's reforms officered the new standing army. Any commoner who worked his way up the ladder to subaltern rank automatically joined the privileged estate. This means that the autocrats could regulate social mobility, and that one's status was determined not by ancestry or wealth but by one's place in the official hierarchy.⁹

For over a century most young well-born males preferred to render state service in the military, since this conferred greater honor and prestige than the civil bureaucracy. To be sure, the system was not watertight. Russia never developed an exclusive officer caste with its own ethos as the Prussians did, and in 1762 the obligation on nobles (dvoriane) to serve was actually abolished; but there were plenty of "volunteers"-indeed, almost too many for the army's health, since they could not all be properly trained or employed. Poverty and custom compelled all but the wealthiest aristocrats to spend at least some time in military uniform. Foreigners were often struck by the number of officers to be seen in the capital's streets: "cocked hats, plumes and uniforms encounter us at every step," wrote one English clergyman in 1839,¹⁰ while the more celebrated French observer, the Marquis de Custine, noted the "haggard look" of the soldiers who passed by, not citizens but "prisoners for life, condemned to guard the other prisoners" in a "country that is entirely military."¹¹ Still, all this had its brighter side, too: social gatherings in St. Petersburg were brilliant affairs at which dashing dragoons and hussars, clad in all colors of the rainbow, paid court to the ladies.

Since almost everyone served, it comes as no surprise to learn that many of the great Russian writers had military experience. Lermontov served in the Caucasian wars, and Dostoevsky was an engineering officer before he resigned his commission and got into political trouble, which earned him a terrifying mock execution followed by forced labor in Siberia.¹² Tolstoy served at Sevastopol, and though a Christian pacifist, it was in the army that he learned his habit of command; he once joked that he was "a literary general."¹³ So many officers or ex-officers worked in government bureaux that an ambitious civil servant complained:

It was almost impossible to make a career except by serving in the armed forces: all the senior offices in the state- ministers, senators, governors- were given over to military men, who were more prominent in the Sovereign's eye than civilian officials. . . . It was taken for granted that every senior person should have a taste of military discipline.¹⁴

Using modern sociological terminology, we can say that Imperial Russia fell into the category of states with a military preponderance, if it was not actually militaristic; in this respect it stood midway between Prussia and Austria. In any case the armed forces' prestige remained high until the 1860s, when the attractions of soldiering began to pall for members of the elite, who now had other career options that paid better, imposed fewer restrictions on their liberties, and offered more excitement than life in some dreary provincial garrison town.

Those officers who stayed on in the forces gradually developed a more professional outlook. They were better trained, although the old cadet schools, with their strict discipline, narrow curriculum and caste spirit, survived in all but name right into the twentieth century.¹⁵ Most incoming officers were educated (if that's the word) in so-called "junker schools," on which the state spent only one-tenth as much money as it did on the elite institutions. Even so their quality had improved by World War I, and more and more entrants came from the underprivileged groups in society, including sons of former serfs. This was against the government's wishes, but it happened all the same.

Can one speak of the "democratization of the officer corps?"¹⁶ Russian officers were too diverse to form a "corps" on the German model, and the humbly-born might be no more democratic in outlook than their more privileged fellows, perhaps even less so. But they were more likely to take a professional, conscientious attitude to their duties. It bears restating that three of the best-known White

generals in the civil war of 1918-1920- Denikin, Kornilov and Krasnov-were of this type. Unfortunately, they also betrayed a lamentable lack of political savoirfaire which can be traced back to their education and the deliberate, indeed disastrous isolation of the army from the country's political life and from the problems that concerned ordinary people.¹⁷ In old Russia a vast gulf yawned between officers and men. An attempt to bridge it was made by Dmitrii Miliutin, the reformist War Minister of Alexander II,¹⁸ but he had a hard struggle against arch-conservatives in the military bureaucracy. When the tsar was assassinated by left-wing terrorists in 1881, Miliutin was forced out of office, and the pendulum swung back to social exclusiveness until after the disastrous war with Japan in 1904-1905, which prompted further reforms. John Bushnell has argued eloquently, but perhaps a little one-sidedly, that the old vices, including corruption, persisted right up to 1914.¹⁹

As for the soldiers, they were of course drawn overwhelmingly from the peasantry. In early times they generally served for a single seasonal campaign, but after Peter the Great set up the standing army they remained in the ranks for life- or perhaps one should say until death. In the 1790s the service term was cut to 25 years, but this made little difference, given the low life expectancy at that time. It is thought that perhaps one-quarter of all those enlisted survived to tell the tale, the rest falling victim to disease more often than enemy bullets, while one man in ten may have deserted.²⁰

Only some of the survivors returned to their native villages, which they would not have seen for a quarter century, since home furlough was unknown. If they did go back they might well find that their wives had remarried; no one would recognize them and they would be resented as "ghosts returned from the dead" and a potential burden on the community. The plight of the Russian veteran was harsh indeed. A foreign observer wrote in 1812:

The Russian soldier generally serves in the army as long as he can and then joins a garrison, where he performs ordinary service until he becomes an invalid; then he is put in a monastery, where thanks to the frugal diet, he vegetates a little while longer.²¹

Others got low-grade government jobs as doorkeepers and the like, and only a few fortunate enough to have been totally incapacitated fighting "for Tsar and Fatherland" qualified for institutional care and a tiny pension.

Yet many contemporary Western military writers admired the Russian military system and thought it preferable to select recruits from the native population than to hire mercenaries of doubtful loyalty. The system might be "despotic," but the authorities at least seemed to look after their men in a paternalistic spirit. For instance, soldiers who had children might find them taken away to be educated at the state's expense²²-they were literally state property! But then this was an age of serfdom when most peasants also belonged to someone and received next to no education. Soldiers were housed, fed, and even paid, so that materially they were better off than some peasants.

Still the system looked better from outside than from inside. The laws on selection of recruits, although designed to spread the load as fairly as possible, were actually full of loopholes that allowed the wealthier peasants to escape the net, so that the army might be left with the social misfits, as in the Western mercenary forces. The painful task of deciding which member of a rural community should be separated forever from his loved ones- a sort of blood tax- was beyond the capacity of the barely literate rural officials. There was a good deal of wheeling and dealing. Money changed hands to secure exemption from the draft, or to pass off as fit young men who were actually sick, or undersized, or deaf- once a recruiting board was presented with two men so deaf that they could not even hear a cannon being fired²³- or who squinted, or had no front teeth- a serious matter, since you needed them to bite off cartridges before ramming them down the barrel of your musket! It seems to be a legend that unwilling but resourceful recruits would put a gold coin in their mouth, which the examining doctor would pocket and then he would let them go;²⁴ but there is a surviving decree ruling that the tsar's

army should not contain any eunuchs²⁵- a point readily established since recruits paraded naked en masse with their families still in attendance!

Service was unpopular. Men liable to the draft would flee to the woods or mutilate themselves, "cutting their fingers, poking out or otherwise damaging their eyes, and deforming their ears and feet," to quote another official decree.²⁶ When finally taken, a recruit would have the front part of his scalp shaven like a convict- a useful means of spotting deserters and cutting down on lice- and was clothed in ugly prison-gray garb. All this produced a traumatic effect. One of the few soldiers who wrote his memoirs gives us a glimpse of this: "When I woke up the next morning, as it happened opposite a mirror, and saw my head shorn, I was greatly shaken."²⁷

Officers tell us that the men soon settled down and adjusted to their unfamiliar environment, but the high rate of desertion tells its own story. Perhaps it was less of a problem than in the West, but that was partly because of the natural obstacles- settlements were rare, and if the peasants found you they would turn you in for the monetary reward- and partly because of the harsh corporal punishment that awaited those caught, which acted as a powerful deterrent.

It will come as no surprise to hear that discipline was maintained by physical coercion. In general absolutist Russia lagged in developing a judicial system that encouraged respect for the law, let alone protected men's natural rights. So far as soldiers were concerned, natural rights were not recognized even in theory until the 1860s, although a system of military tribunals, modeled on that of Prussia, had existed since Peter I's day. The spirit of pre-reform military justice may be judged from a case which occurred in the Polotsk regiment in 1820. Some soldiers engaged in an illicit money-making scheme killed a noncom to stop him from squealing on them. Two privates reported the murder, and their account was confirmed on investigation. But the brigade commander ordered the informants, not the culprits, to be severely punished, and his verdict was upheld by higher authority. The case happened to come to the tsar's attention, but since he knew the brigade commander personally he simply ordered him posted and took no other action.²⁵ The army's rank structure had to be upheld at all costs.

As in other armies, commanders had ample scope to impose "disciplinary penalties" without any formal proceedings. These might involve all kinds of physical torture- for instance, standing to attention for hours at a stretch bearing up to six muskets, each of them weighing over 12 lbs., and above all, the dreadful "running the gauntlet." In Prussia, where this penalty originated, it was used only in exceptional circumstances, since it could well lead to the victim's death; but in Russia it was treated as a regular means of enforcing discipline. "Running the gauntlet" involved having a soldier beaten in public by all his comrades, who were lined up in two opposing ranks, through which the prisoner, stripped to the waist, staggered along while the men on either side struck him with thongs about 1 inch in diameter. To prevent him from moving too fast he was preceded by a noncom who held a musket with the bayonet fixed and pointing to the rear. An officer rode alongside to see that the blows were properly administered, and the victim's groans were drowned by the rolling of drums. Although his back would soon be reduced to a bloody mess, beating continued until he collapsed- and sometimes even after that, for his limp body would be placed on a board and carried along.²⁹

In 1801 the enlightened Alexander I, a correspondent of Thomas Jefferson, formally abolished torture throughout his domains and prohibited "cruel" penalties.³⁰ Unfortunately, "running the gauntlet" was not considered cruel! The only change was that a doctor now had to be present, who could order the punishment stopped if he thought the victim might expire; but as soon as the prisoner revived the beatings recommenced. This was a mixed blessing both for the soldier and for the doctor, who had to compromise his Hippocratic oath, much as some do today in certain Latin American dictatorships. Tsar Nicholas I (1825-1855) issued secret orders reducing the number of blows to 3,000, but this rule was not always enforced, precisely because it was secret.³¹ Soldiers who deserted might now get 1,000 blows or double that number if they repeated the offence or stole while on the run.³² Men sometimes survived an incredible number of blows. The record is held by a stout fellow named

Gordeev, who absconded six times and received a total of 52,000 blows; on the last occasion he was spared and sent to forced labor instead.³³

After the Crimean War corporal punishment was generally replaced by jail terms, although it was not abolished until the early twentieth century. Along with this reform came an improvement in the military judicial system. Court verdicts, for instance, might be publicized- this new openness was referred to by the same Russian term, *glasnost*; that Gorbachev has recently made so free with. Tribunals conducted proceedings orally, by adversarial contest, and allowed the defendant to have an advocate. An official called the military procurator carried out the pretrial investigation and saw to it that justice was done; and sometimes it certainly was, for during the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878 we hear of a procurator standing up to a powerful functionary, saying, "Your Excellency, you have no power to alter a statute!"³⁴

A recent American historian states that by the turn of the twentieth century "the structure of Russian military justice, the legal education of military-judicial personnel, and [their] attitudes and practices . . . all buttressed due process of law." Students at the prestigious Alexander Academy acquired "a highly developed legal ethos."³⁵ That was one reason why army leaders resented having to repress and try civilian political offenders, such as demonstrators and strikers, as the army did on a massive scale during the 1905 revolution, especially in the national minority regions of the empire.

The new legal ethos, in so far as it existed, was one fruit of the Miliutin reforms, which involved giving the troops some sense of what they were fighting for and humanizing their conditions of service. "An army [he wrote] is not merely a physical force . . . but an association of individuals endowed with intelligence and sensitivity."³⁶ This meant a veritable cultural and psychological revolution, for previously officers and noncoms had treated their subordinates like impersonal cogs in a machine. Now fear was to give way to trust, to "conscious self-discipline," as the phrase went. Miliutin's ideal was cooperation between all ranks in the common task, while preserving the hierarchical rank structure. He took over from the French republicans the notion of the army becoming "the school of the nation." The idea was too radical for his contemporaries, who saw him as something of a "Red," and the tsar stalled on it. Even so a start was made. Schools were set up in many units, and in 1867 it was ruled that noncoms had to be able to read and write. Many mistakes were made, such as putting on literacy classes in the evenings, when the men were exhausted after an 11-hour day, and the instructional material was hardly inspiring: training manuals, for instance, instead of contemporary literary works.³⁷ The budget ran a miserly 10 kopecks a year per man, and interest soon waned. One expert who toured regimental schools in 1870 reported that "the soldier can scarcely cope with the technique of reading. . . In a book he sees only the letters, not understanding what they mean, and he cannot relate what he has read."³⁸

Even so, by the end of the century educational standards were higher in the army than they were in the population at large, which admittedly is not saying much. Once the short (generally six-year) service term was introduced in 1874 literate soldiers who returned to their villages helped to awaken a thirst for knowledge among peasants. It was foolish of Miliutin's successor, Vannovskii, to shift the program to a voluntary basis in the mid-1880s. It was not restored until 1902 and then only for the infantry. When one subaltern in the 65th Infantry Regiment taught the men in his company the ABCs on his own initiative, his CO was furious and ordered him to stop at once: "Get those booklets out of here!" he thundered, "you'll get me into trouble with the War Minister!"³⁹

Among other things, the fin-de-siecle reaction meant that Russian soldiers were still poorly paid, housed and fed- significantly worse than in the armies of the other major European powers. Many received less than 3 rubles a year before the pay scales were doubled after the Russo-Japanese war.⁴⁰ Since they needed to cover not only personal expenses but also repairs to items of clothing and equipment, they could survive only by off-duty labor independently or under an officer's supervision, which took place on a vast scale. The regiment was as much an economic organization as it was a fighting one; in 1907 150,000 men, or 12% of total effectives, spent their duty hours tailoring.⁴¹ This

was an old tradition. Since the central supply services were notoriously inadequate, units were expected to be as self-sufficient as possible; but the pressure seems to have increased after the 1860s when the government was trying to save money on the army.

Tinned meat came into the quartermaster's stores around 1870, as did tea, much encouraged as an alternative to hard liquor. The food ration had until then consisted almost wholly of cereals, which the men would either mix with water to make a kind of gruel or dough, or else double-bake as biscuit to carry with them in their packs on the march. In this way they could do without the elaborate field bakeries other armies required. This impressed foreign observers. They thought the tsar was lucky to get his soldiers so cheaply. The first to make this point was an Englishman who went to Moscow as early as 1553:

Every man must . . . make provision for himself and his horse for one month or two, which is very wonderful. . . . I pray you, among all our boasting warriors how many should we find to endure the field with them but one month?⁴²

Another traveler of the time noted that gentry cavalymen and their men shared the same frugal meal of millet and salt pork, "but it may occur that the master gets very hungry, in which case he eats everything himself and his servants fast splendidly for three days."⁴³ Yet somehow they fought well and looked robust, which had some Westerners worried. The Frenchman Charles de Nerdy wrote in 1853 that they were sober, impervious to fatigue, and

in a word an admirable fighting machine, more intelligent than Europeans generally think, who would be a redoubtable instrument in the hands of a conqueror, a Russian Napoleon, should the winds blow in that direction one day in their icy regions.⁴⁴

This was an uncommonly good prophecy, some might say!

Patriotic Russian and Soviet historians have dutifully catalogued the many "exploits" (podvigi), or feats of bravery, which these warriors had to their credit.⁴⁵ There are countless inspiring tales of soldiers who volunteered for dangerous missions, who stood by the flag to the last man, who fired off all their ammunition but kept the last bullet for themselves, or even chopped off a gangrenous arm with their own sword while awaiting transport to the dressing station.⁴⁶ Foreigners sometimes thought these deeds more foolhardy than courageous. In the Seven Years War of the mid-eighteenth century, for instance, a Saxon engineer seconded to the Russian forces expressed amazement that troops would deliberately stand up on the battlements to draw enemy fire, commenting that "in this army rash bravery is much respected; if an officer wishes to win his troops' esteem he must expose himself with them in a manner that would be reckoned absurd in any other army."⁴⁷ Some critics maintained the Russians showed themselves to better effect in defense than in offense: "passive courage" this was called. Insofar as this existed, it may be linked to their cultural and social background as Orthodox Christian peasants, as well as to Russia's lack of a chivalrous feudal tradition such as one finds in the West, including Poland. But one should not be too dogmatic about this. In the Russian army, as in others, soldiers' morale on the battlefield was greatly affected by local circumstances. It mattered a lot whether one had a full stomach, whether earlier engagements had been successful, and above all whether one had a chief who could address the men in hearty comradely fashion and win their affection and loyalty, as Suvorov was conspicuously able to do.

This martial valor might not be such a good thing for the other side. If a general "gave the men their head" and allowed them the run of a captured place they would ransack it and commit atrocities. There were occasions of this on several of Suvorov's campaigns.⁴⁸ In 1794, at Praga on the Vistula opposite Warsaw (where Marshal Rokossovskii stopped his advance during the Warsaw insurrection in

1944), the great commander allowed his men to loot the place for three hours. Afterwards they made up a ditty about it:

Our Suvorov gave us freedom
To take a walk for just three hours.
Let's take a walk, lads,
Our Suvorov has ordered it!
Let's drink to his health...
Long live Count Suvorov!
Thou livest by the truth
And leadest us soldiers justly!⁴⁹

They expressed no pity for the several thousand Polish combatants and noncombatants who were drowned in the Vistula or whose mutilated bodies lay around everywhere.⁵⁰

Atrocities have of course accompanied warfare everywhere from ancient times to the present. The Russians seem to have been particularly bloodthirsty when dealing with Poles- or with Islamic peoples, which may help to account for the Soviets' present grave misconduct in Afghanistan; but in the Imperial Era they were no worse than others in Europe. The hungrier they were, the more likely they were to loot. When they marched through Germany into France in 1813-1814 and the supply trains could not keep up, they took what they needed, just as the Prussians did. Oddly, the first thing they went for was the feather bedding. Clouds of plummage could be seen floating over places that were being ransacked.

Russian soldiers were normally quartered in country districts in the west of the empire for much of the year when they were not away on maneuvers or campaigns. There was a good deal of tension between peasant hosts and their unwanted guests. Soldiers formed a separate caste and seldom made common cause with the people whence they had sprung. Only gradually were barracks built in major towns, and they were insanitary buildings deservedly unpopular with the men, who identified them with "everything that makes the soldier's heart miss a beat," to quote one critic.⁵¹

Training was elementary and for long consisted mainly of drill, the mechanical repetition of evolutions which units were then supposed to reproduce on the battlefield. Many of the tsars had an unhealthy fascination with the parade ground. Nicholas I learned by heart all the bugle calls, which he could reproduce vocally, to the amazement of foreigners.⁵² He derived an almost sensual pleasure from the sight of massed formations. After some maneuvers he wrote to his wife: "I don't think there has ever been anything more splendid, perfect or overwhelming since soldiers first appeared on earth."⁵³ His brother, Alexander I, used to go along the ranks inspecting whether the men's socks were at regulation height, and in 1816 he had three Guards colonels put under arrest because their men were marching out of step. Such severity, he maintained, "is the reason why our army is the bravest and the finest."⁵⁴

It was a shallow view but one readily transmitted down through the officer corps, which had more than its share of pedantic martinets. This was one of the hallmarks of a semi-militaristic society, where the army was as much a symbol of the autocratic power as it was a fighting force. It certainly looked gorgeous when drawn up on parade before the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg, in a square that could hold nearly 100,000 men.⁵⁵ But could it fight well? Its weaknesses were revealed during the ensuing Crimean War when, though the soldiers did fight just as bravely as ever, the infrastructure broke down.⁵⁶

The reforms that followed attempted to encourage a more professional attitude in this sphere, too. Drill was supplemented by gymnastics and weapons training; maneuvers became more realistic; personal arms were modernized, as the musket gave way to the rifle; the artillery received guns of bronze and then of steel, with a greater range; and we hear of millions of rubles being spent on

mysterious "special objects."⁵⁷ But unfortunately it was becoming harder for Russia to produce all the arms and munitions her forces needed, since the empire's industrial growth did not get off the ground until the 1880s and lagged behind that of her potential rivals, most obviously Germany. The harmful consequences of this weakness and of the reactionary attitudes that prevailed at the top after 1881 showed up in the war with Japan and even more catastrophically in 1914.

Russia entered the Great War with a crippling shortage of machine guns and small-arms ammunition. Too many heavy guns were immobilized in fortified places, built at great cost and with little realization of the mobile nature of twentieth-century warfare. The generals also complained bitterly about the "shell shortage," but some recent Western historians have argued that this was something of a myth, invented to explain away reverses due to incompetent leadership.⁵⁸ Moreover, many deficiencies of equipment were made up in 1915-1916, although only at the cost of grievously overstraining the country's economic and social fabric. Once again, as in the Crimean War, it was the system that failed, not the army as such. The crisis was made worse than it need have been by Nicholas II's well-meant but naive decision to lead his armies in person, a role for which he was totally unfitted. At headquarters he only got in the way of the professionals, whereas back in the capital he might have given some stability to his shaky government. ⁵⁹

By this time the officer corps was grievously split between the few surviving prewar regulars and the civilian-minded replacements. "A marked clash of views appeared between the two groups," writes one military memoirist; "when politics were mentioned the former would say . . . 'I am a servant of the tsar and my duty is to obey my superiors,' [while the reservists] followed the gossip about what was going on at home with passionate interest."⁶⁰ Increasingly, so too did their men. The hunt was on for scapegoats who could be blamed for defeats, high casualty rates, and neglect or corruption in the supply services. "Treason in the rear" became a popular cry. This politicization spelled the doom of the Imperial Russian army and of the tsarist regime as well.

What then did the Imperial army bequeath to its Soviet successor? Directly, it passed on very little. Some Red Army chiefs, Tukhachevskii for instance, began their careers under the tsar and gained experience which would prove useful in the civil war; and the time-honored preeminence of the artillery arm continues to this day. Equally ancient is the tradition of bureaucratic, highly centralized administration which often saps the initiative of commanders in the field. Beyond that there is the age-old "security psychosis" that leads political and military decision makers to seek reassurance by militarizing much of the civilian population and by maintaining large armed forces and what we now call "overkill capacity." There is a familiar disregard for the creature comforts that would make life more agreeable for the common soldier, who is expected to bear all his hardships uncomplainingly and to give his life for a sacred cause, if need be. Even the old social divisions have reappeared, in a new form, beneath a veneer of comradeship.

Yet we should not oversimplify. Most of the former ingrained weaknesses have been overcome with industrialization, the technological revolution, and educational progress. In our discussions we shall be hearing about many new phenomena- advanced weaponry, nuclear strategy, political indoctrination and so on- that make the Soviet Army of today as remote from its tsarist predecessor as the B-1B bomber is from Kitty Hawk. What we should perhaps remember, as we refine our deterrent power to meet the Soviet challenge, is that its armed forces do not consist of abstract "enemies" or mindless automata but of human beings who are the heirs to a long tradition of honorable service in the profession of arms and who deserve our respect and understanding in their difficult predicament, past and present.

Notes

1. Allan K. Wudman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army: The Old Army and the Soldiers' Revolt, March - April 1917* (Princeton, 1980); a sequel is expected. On the formation of the Red Army,

see John Frickson, "The Origins of the Red Army," in *Revolutionary Russia*, ed. Richard Pipes (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), pp.224-258.

2. The best study of this change is John Erickson, *The Road to Stalingrad* (London, 1974); see also Timothy J. Colton, *Commissars, Commanders and Civilian Authority: The Structure of Soviet Military Politics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979). D. Fedotoff-White's *The Growth of the Red Army* (Princeton, 1944) also is still worth reading.

3. Freiherr S. von Herberstein, *Moscavia*, ed. H. Kauders (Erlangen, 1926), p.168.

4. On the southern border defenses, see V. V. Kargaloy, *Na stepnoi granitse: oborona 'krymskoi ukrainy' russkogo gosudarstva v pervoi polovine XVI v.* (Moscow, 1974). Alan W. Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars* (Stanford, 1978), reverses the conventional pro-Russian view. On Near Eastern expansion, see Matthew S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question, 1774-1923: A Study in International Relations* (London, 1966).

5. Marc Raeff, "Patterns of Russian Imperial Policy Towards the Nationalities," in *Soviet Nationality Problems*, ed. Edward Allworth (New York, 1973); A. Kappeler, *Russlands erste Nationaliti' ten: das Zarenreich und die Vo~lker der Mittleren Wolga van' 16. bis 19. Jahrhundert* (Cologne, 1982).

6. See R. F. Baumano, "Universal Service Reform and Russia's Imperial Dilemma," *War and Society* 4, no.2(1986): 31-49 for the period after 1874.

7. S.M. Zagoskin, "Vospominaniia," *Istoricheskii vestnik* 79 (1900): 60.

8. D. Beyrau, *Millti'r und Gesellschaft im vorrevolutiona~ren Russland* (Cologne and Gras, 1984).

9. See Marc Raeff, *Understanding Imperial Russia*, trans. Arthur Galdhammer (New York, 1984), and several earlier studies, notably *Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia: The Eighteenth Century Nobility* New York, 1966). On subsequent changes in the operation of Peter's famous Table of Ranks (1721), much can be learned from two as yet unpublished theses: R. D. Givens, "Servitors or Seigneurs: The Nobility and the Eighteenth Century Russian State" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1975); and i L. Floyd, "State Service, Social Mobility and the Imperial Russian Nobility, 1801-1856" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1981).

10. Reverend R. L. Venables, *Domestic Scenes in Russia, in a Series of Letters Describing a Year's Residence in that Country, Chiefly in the Interior* (London, 1839), p.19.

11. De Custine, *lettres de Russie: Ia Russie en 1839*, ed. P. Nora (Paris, 1975), pp.183-4, 187. Venables was perhaps the better observer but de Custine a more penetrating critic.

12. Joseph Frank, *Dostoevskii: The Years of Ordeal, 1850-1859* (Princeton, 1983).

13. Richard Lockett, "Prerevolutionary Army Life in Russian Literature," in *War, Economy and the Military Mind*, ed. Geoffrey West and Andrew Wheatcroft (London, 1976), pp. 19-31.

14. G. D. Shcherbachev, "12 let moladosti: vospominaniia," *Russkii arkhiv* 1(1890): 87.

15. William C. Fuller, *Civil-Military Conflict in Imperial Russia, 1881-1914* (Princeton, 1985), p.12.

16. Peter Kenex, "A Profile of the Prerevolutionary Officer Corps," *California Slavic Studies* 7 (1973): 125-8.

17. Peter Kenes, "The Ideology of the White Movement," *Soviet Studies* 32(1980): 58-73.

18. For his biography, see Forrest A. Miller, *Dmitrii Miliutin and the Reform Era in Russia* (Charlotte, N.C., 1968) and P. A. Zaionchkovskii, "D. A. Miliutin: biograficheskii ocherk," in *Dnevnik D. A. Miliutina*, vol.1 (Moscow, 1947).

19. John Bushnell, "The Tsarist Officer Corps, 1881-1914: Customs, Duties, Inefficiency," *American Historical Review* 86 (1981): 753-80.

20. Arcadius Kahan, *The Plow the Hammer and the Knout: An Economic History of Eighteenth-Century Russia* (Chicago, 1985), p.10.

21. D. de Raymond, *Tableau historique, géographique, militaire et moral de l'empire de Russie*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1812), p.527.
22. E. Kimerling (Wirtschafer), "Soldiers' Children, 1719-1856: A Study of Social Engineering in imperial Russia," *Forschungen zur osteuropaischen Geschichte* 30(1982): 61-136.
23. A. I. Viazemskii, "Zapiska voennaia, pisannaia V. 1774 g.," in *Arkhiv kn. A. L. Vtazemskogo*, ed. S. D. Sheremetev (St. Petersburg, 1881), p.5.
24. Venables, *Domestic Scenes*, p.188.
25. *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii*, 1st col., vol.32, no.25220 (St. Petersburg, 1830).
26. *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi Impeni*, vol.19, no.13651 (September 2, 1771). For the 19th Century, see J. Thnski, *Tableau statisque, politique et moral du systeme militaire de la Russie* (Paris, 1833), p.158.
27. I. M. Minaev, "Vospominaniia I. Men'shago, 1806-1849," *Russkaia starina* 10 (1874): 53.
28. A. N. Petrov, "Ustroistvo i upravlenie voennykh poselenii v Rossii: istoricheskii obsor, 1809-1826," in *Materialy k noveishei otechestvennoi istorii: graf Arakcheev; voennye poseleniia, 1809-1831*, ed. V. I. Semevskii (Moscow, 1871; reprinted, Newtonville, Mass., 1973), pp. 163-8. For another case study see my "The Case of the Crippled Cadet: Military Justice in Russia under Nicholas I," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 28 (1986): 37-51.
29. For a graphic description by a sympathetic young officer (1847), see N. A. Mombelli, in *Delopetrashchev*, ed. V. Desnitskii, 3 vols. (Moscow, 1937), 1:251-2.
30. *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi Impeni*, vol.27, no.20115 (January 18, 1802) and vol.30, no.23279 (April 10, 1808).
31. In 1830 and 1834, N. Vish, "Telesnye nakazaniia v voiskakh i ikh otmena," *Voennyi sbornik* 279, no. 11(1904): 117. Or Nicholas I's army, the classic study in English is John S. Curtiss, *The Russian Army under Nicholas I, 1825-1855* (Durham, N.C., 1965).
32. USSR, TsGVIA, f. 801, on. 69, d. 31(1836). See also my "Justice for the Troops: A Comparative Study of Nicholas I's Russia and the France of Louis-Philippe," forthcoming in *Cahiers de monde russe et soviétique* (Paris). Since there were some 5,000 desertions, several million blows were inflicted annually nationwide.
33. L. G. Beskrovnyi, *Russkaia armiiia v XVIII v: ocherki* (Moscow, 1958), p.435.
34. N. V. Mordvinov, "Iz zapisok voenno-sudebnogo deiatelia," *Istoricheskii vestnik* 111 (1908): 857.
35. Fuller, *Civil-Military Conflict*, pp.121, 126.
36. P. A. Zaionchkovskii, *Voennye reformy 1860-1870 gg. v Rossii* (Moscow, 1952), pp. 49-50.
37. The best contemporary studies are M. I. Bogdanovich, *Istoricheskii ocherk deyatel'aosti voennogo upravleniia v pervoe 25-letie . . . imperatona Aleksandra Nikolaevicha, 1855-1880 gg.* (St. Petersburg, 1879-81), vol.3, and articles in *Voennyi sbornik*, a progressive military journal set up in 1858. See also my "Chernyshevskii and the Military Miscellany," in *Felder und Vorfelder russischer Geschichte: Studien zu Ehren von Peter Scheibert*, ed. I. Auerbach et al., (Freiburg i. Br., 1985), pp.111-33. Our understanding of popular literacy and taste has been revolutionized by J. Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read* (Princeton, 1985), pp.18-21 for the military.
38. P.O. Bobrovskii, "Vzgliad na gramotnost' i uchebny komandy (ili polkovye shkoly) v nashei armii," *Voennyi sbornik* 78, no.3 (1871): 60.
39. M. Grulev, *Zapiski generala-evreia* (Paris, 1930), pp.130-1, cited by P. A. Zaionchkovskii, *Samoderzhavie i russkaia armija na rubezhe XIX-XX SL, 1881-1903* (Moscow, 1973), p.278; John Bushnell, "Peasants in Uniform: The Tsarist Army as a Peasant Society," *Journal of Social History* 13 (1979-80): 573.
40. Bushnell, p.568.
41. Bushnell, "Tsarist Officer Corps," p.766.

42. Richard Chancellor, cited in G. Vernadsky et al., eds., *A Source Book for Russian History from Early Times to 1917* (New Haven, 1972), 1:168.
43. Herberstein, *Moscovia*, pp.106-7.
44. France, *Ministere de la Guerre, Services Historiques de l'Armee de Terre, Vincennes, Memotres et Reconnaissances*, vol.1495, *De l'armee russe*, pp.4-5.
45. The first such work seems to have been S. N. Glinka, ed., *Russkie anekdoty-voennye, grazhdanskie i istoricheskie*, iii: *Povestvovanie a nanodnykh dobrodeteliakh Rossi jan drevnikh novykh vremen*, 5 pts. (Moscow, 1822). One of the most recent works is N. Shliapnikov and F. Kuznetsov, comp., *Iz boevogo proshlogo russkoi armii: dokumenty i materialy a podvigakh russkikh soldat I ofitserov* (Moscow, 1947).
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- 47.1 6. Tielke, *An Account of Some of the Most Remarkable Events of the War between the Prussians, Austrians, and Russians from 1756 to 1763*, trans. C. Crauford and R. Crauford (London, 1787), 2:88-9, 134.
48. W. Buchmuller, "Fin Beitrag zur Geschichte des Russeneinfalls in die Neumark vom Jahre 1759," *Forschungen zur Brandenburgischen und Preussischen Geschichte* 26(1913): 226; Count A. F. Richelieu, "Journal de 'non voyage en Allemagne, commence le 2 septembre 1790," *Sbornik Imperatorskogo Russkogo istoricheskogo obshchestva* 54 (1886): 175-84 (Ochakov, 1788); (NB: not date of publication, but massacre date!); and M. I. Bogdanovich, *Russkaia armija V veke imperatritsy Ekateriny* (St. Petersburg, 1873), pp.27, 30.
49. *Pesni sobrannye P V Kjreevskim*, 2nd ed., fasc. 9, p.326. This song does not feature in modern Soviet collections.
50. Isabel de Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (London, 1981), p.447; and I. N. Fngelgardt, *Zapiski, 1776-1836* (Moscow, 1868), p.77.
51. Eger [= Chasseur], "Otryvki iz zapisok unter-ofilsera," *Voennyi sbornik* 31, no.6 (1863): 501.
52. F. W. von Bismarck, *Die Kaiserlich Russische Kriegsmacht im Jahre 1835, oder: Meine Reise nach Sankt-Petersburg* (Karlsruhe, 1836), pp.30, 37.
53. T. Schiemann, *Geschichte Russlands unter Kaiser Nikolaus I* (Berlin, 1913), 3:328.
54. N. N. Murav'ev-Karskii, "Zapiski," *Russkii arkhiv* 11(1886): 249.
55. Bismarck, *Kriegsmacht*, p.12.
56. John S. Curtiss, *Russia's Crimean War* (Durham, N.C., 1979).
57. Zaionchkovskii, *Voennye reformy*. For the "special objects," see I.S. Bliok~, *Finansy Rossli: XIX stoletie: istonia, statistika* (St. Petersburg, 1882), 2:58.
58. For earlier views, consult N. N. Golovin, *Voennye usihia Rossii V mirovoi voine*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1939), and Iu. N. Danilov, *Rossii V mfrovoy voine* (Berlin, 1924). The revisionist view is championed by Norman Stone, *The Eastern Front, 1914-1917* (London, 1975), and by David R. Jones, "Russia's Armed Forces at War, 1914-1918: An Analysis of Military Effectiveness" (Ph.D. diss., Dalhousie University, Halifax, 1986), pp.31-36.
59. Wildman, *End of the Imperial Army*, pp.83-4. Resides with the traditional interpretation.
60. A. Lobanov-Rostovsky, *The Grinding Mill: Reminiscences of War and Revolution in Russia, 1913-1920* (New York, 1935), p.167.

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