

## Introduction

---

For a long time, the conventional view of common soldiers serving in the armies of old-regime Europe was coloured by Frederick the Great's notorious assertion that men should fear their officers more than the enemy. The rank and file were largely an unwilling lot, recruited among the dregs of society; too drunk, dumb or desperate to resist the recruiting sergeant, or simply kidnapped into what one of the most prolific military historians of the last century has termed an outright form of 'military slavery'. No good could come out of such base human material and, to ensure their obedience, the recruits were subjected to harsh discipline and incessant drill until they were transformed into submissive military automatons. Then they could be marched into battle, closely followed by a line of cane-wielding officers and NCOs who would strike and even kill any man who would not fight earnestly enough.<sup>1</sup>

Although, in recent decades, scholarship has taken a more positive view of eighteenth-century common soldiers, assessment of their motivation remains largely unfavourable. This is particularly the case when the armies of old-regime Europe are compared to the troops of revolutionary and Napoleonic France. According to the traditional interpretation, old-regime tactics were based on direct control by officers to prevent their reluctant subordinates from running away. Such a system not only prevented any personal initiative coming from the rank and file, but also constrained the flexibility of the army as a whole. It was totally different for the French, whose willing soldiery freed their commanders from the necessity to police the men to make them fight. Moreover, France possessed not only enthusiastic but more trustworthy troops who could be sent to forage, employed in forests and broken terrain or dispersed to fight in open order, all of which resulted in enhanced military capability and higher combat effectiveness. In other words, the victories of

<sup>1</sup> Frederick the Great, 'Instruction für die Commandeurs der Cavallerie-Regimenter', in *Œuvres*, vol. XXX, 302 and repeated again in 'Das militärische Testament von 1768' in *Werke*, vol. VI, 233; Keegan, *History*, 343.

2 Motivation in War

Revolutionary France over the united forces of old-regime Europe is portrayed not only as a military but also as a moral triumph.<sup>2</sup>

It is not that this view has gone wholly unchallenged. No one has provided a more vivid and succinct criticism of the conventional understanding of motivation in the armies of old-regime Europe than T.C.W. Blanning. Addressing the issue as part of a broader discussion of the Revolutionary Wars, Blanning contends that the ideals usually attributed to the French troops, such as patriotism and ideology, are constants, and are therefore expected to produce continuous military superiority. However, the conflict was not one-sided, and the revolutionary armies sustained numerous reverses. More importantly, the rank and file in the old-regime armies ‘were capable of feats of heroism, both individual and collective, which cannot be explained simply in terms of iron discipline’. Their low reputation is not only unsubstantiated by their combat record, but also smacks of revolutionary rhetoric. ‘Two awful possibilities loom: either that ideological commitment had little to do with fighting effectiveness or that the values of old regime were just as powerful as the ideals of the Revolution’.<sup>3</sup>

Blanning’s critique is part of a historiographical trend, prevailing since the bicentenary of 1789, which re-examines some of the more established interpretations of the French Revolution and the wars that followed. The image emerging from those studies is far more ambiguous than the clear icon of the enthusiastic citizen-soldier so favoured by revolutionary orators and numerous modern historians. The French army was as much a product of the strengths of the new military system as of some of its less flattering aspects. Its members included genuine volunteers spurred by patriotism and ideology, but also numerous reluctant recruits produced by mass levies and conscription laws. The French nation did command the sympathy of many men, but others thought more of the homes and communities they left behind. Some recruits marched to the front inspired by patriotism, but their columns were often shadowed by detachments of the *gendarmérie*, the revolutionary successor of the old-regime *maréchaussée* or military police. Even French scholarship, which otherwise maintains a highly favourable view of the revolutionary traditions, acknowledges that, following the short upheaval of radical practices, disciplinary and hierarchical structures were restored to the military. But even before the late 1790s when, to use the subtitle of the English

<sup>2</sup> ‘[G]enuine and willing soldiers ... outfought opponents who remained trapped in the habits of doltish obedience and stereotyped tactics from which the French had escaped’, Keegan, *History*, 352–3; For a kinder but essentially similar appraisal, see: Howard, *War*, 79–81.

<sup>3</sup> Blanning, *French Revolutionary Wars*, 119.

translation of Jean-Paul Bertaud's important study, it was again poised to become an instrument of power, the army was increasingly manned by coercive measures which caused widespread resistance, draft-dodging and desertion. As for those remaining with the colours, it was demonstrated that the longer a man served, the less likely he was to invoke official ideals. Soldiers' letters studied by Alan Forrest reveal that such men preferred to reflect upon their service by mentioning professional pride, prospects of promotion or drawing strength from the presence of their close comrades.<sup>4</sup>

Compared to this fuller and more nuanced treatment of the motivation of revolutionary and Napoleonic troops, views of old-regime soldiers remain surprisingly one-sided. Although intensive research into the social origins of their recruits has consistently dispelled the myth that the rank and file of eighteenth-century armies consisted of criminals and social misfits, their men are seldom credited with comparable idealism to that supposedly prevailing among the revolutionary soldiery. For instance, it is commonly agreed that eighteenth-century troops had little personal concern for the cause for which they were fighting. Although rarely expressed in the same condescending language, such views essentially repeat Frederick's low opinion on his own soldiers; but was that also the way these men saw themselves?

The last fifty years has witnessed a growing body of work devoted to what have long been socially marginalised groups, such as women, peasants, the urban poor and delinquents. A major conclusion emerging from those studies is that the lower orders in medieval and early-modern Europe were not an array of helpless brutalised individuals. Despite harsh, often cruel living conditions, their members had a sense of worth and a system of morals which often ran contrary to the officially sanctioned culture. Despite the lack of political and social rights, the lower classes could and often did resist the authorities in myriad ways, ranging from carefully orchestrated displays of defiance to open rebellion.<sup>5</sup> These findings often echo Michel Foucault's theories of power. Rather than being based entirely on coercion administered from above, Foucault suggests a more reciprocal model of power relations, where domination is rarely total and all participants engage in cycles of confrontation and cooperation which continuously reshape the existing system. The

<sup>4</sup> Forrest, *Conscripts and Deserters*; Forrest, *Napoleon's Men*; Bertaud, *Army of the French Revolution*; For a particularly revisionist account, see: Griffith, *Art of War of Revolutionary France*.

<sup>5</sup> For instance: Bercé, *Histoire des Croquants*; Davis, *Society and Culture in Early-Modern France*; Sabean, *Power in the Blood*; Härter, 'Soziale Disziplinierung durch Strafe?'; Shoemaker, *The London Mob*.

4 Motivation in War

acceptance of authority is usually based on the consent of the subject, rather than upon coercion.<sup>6</sup> A despised group on the periphery of eighteenth-century societies, common soldiers should have been an optimal subject for cultural study in the current academic climate, which is otherwise so favourably disposed towards the rediscovery of the lost voices of common men and women. Nor should the apparent scarcity of personal narratives have been an obstacle. This did not prevent scholars from looking at similar groups by supplementing direct testimonies with administrative material, and employing innovative methodologies from other scholarly fields. In fact, many such studies have resulted in the rediscovery of long-forgotten autobiographical writings and similarly informative ego-documents by peasants, artisans and women.<sup>7</sup> Why should the same not prove true of old-regime common soldiers as well?

Irrespective of whether personal narratives by eighteenth-century common soldiers are indeed particularly rare, even well-known existing evidence has not been used in full. When one reads his political testament of 1768, Frederick the Great cannot easily be suspected of having much sympathy for his men. For instance, the need to ensure obedience by fear is underscored because the king does not believe that common soldiers could be prompted by ambition. The very same paragraph, however, begins by recommending the endorsement of a regimental *esprit de corps*.<sup>8</sup> Whatever his professed views on discipline, even Frederick acknowledged that there were other ways to encourage the troops. On campaign, the king usually maintained good-humoured interactions with his men, even adopting a certain degree of approachability. After the Seven Years War, while overtaken by a mindset that some of his biographers referred to as ‘misanthropic’, Frederick was still willing to take issue with anyone who doubted the courage of his soldiers.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, a single phrase appearing in two memorials – one intended for senior officers and the other for the king’s innermost circle – long took precedence over any other single piece of evidence coming from the eighteenth century. This is not to say that modern scholarship ignored the existence of positive impulses among the old-regime soldiery, but these were rarely discussed at length, usually appearing in the marginalia of what are mainly social histories of armies or operational military

<sup>6</sup> Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’.

<sup>7</sup> For instance: Amelang, *Flight of Icarus*; K.J. Lorenzen-Schmidt and B. Poulsen (eds.), *Writing Peasants*; Ozment, *Bürgermeister’s Daughter*.

<sup>8</sup> Frederick the Great, ‘Das militärische Testament von 1768’ in *Werke*, vol. VI, 233; the rephrasing of Frederick’s ideas is based on Jay Luvaas’ translation in *Frederick the Great on the Art of War*, 78.

<sup>9</sup> C. Duffy, *Frederick the Great: A Military Life*, 335; C. Duffy, *Army of Frederick the Great*, 67.

histories of their campaigns. Failure to examine the narratives composed by the men themselves in depth left little alternative to the ready availability of military regulations, which underscored the need for unrelenting subordination, or articles of war, which largely consisted of a catalogue of punishments for various disciplinary infractions. Although a number of superb recent German studies challenged the brutality of old-regime discipline and underscored the possible role of positive motivation in combat, their conclusions did not penetrate mainstream scholarship. The prevailing view, shared by both military historians and eighteenth-century specialists, still remains that old-regime soldiers were motivated primarily by coercion. It is the aim of this volume to offer a corrective to this view and present a broader examination of the motivation of the rank and file serving in the armies of old-regime Europe.

Within the framework of this study, motivation is defined as a set of attitudes and conditions which caused soldiers to perform their duty in peace and war.<sup>10</sup> These are examined by utilising surviving autobiographical accounts of the soldiers themselves, including letters, journals and, most importantly, memoirs. Direct statements as to why their authors served or fought is only one type of useful evidence which these sources can provide. Descriptions of daily conditions denoting the existence of military socialisation, references to camaraderie between peers and the leadership skills of their superiors are all relevant when one considers how and why these men were likely to act. Particular notice is taken of wartime activities, opinions about the aims of the conflict, attitudes towards the enemy and behaviour in combat. This study, however, is not limited to the subjective experiences of individual soldiers, but also to the external factors which were likely to make some incentives more effective than others. For instance, it is hard to deny that fear of punishment can be a great motivator. Therefore, before discussing the potential role of idealistic factors, we will examine the role and influence of discipline and, more specifically, to what extent it could be enforced successfully. On this point, soldierly narratives can be supplemented by administrative records. This material, some of which will be analysed statistically, will help determine whether discipline was indeed the mainstay of the old-regime motivational system, as the prevailing scholarly view generally maintains.

In addition to one-sided comparisons between old-regime and revolutionary armies and the innovative work on socially-peripheral groups in

<sup>10</sup> This definition is in line with the definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as ‘the [...] stimulus for action towards a desired goal, esp. as resulting from psychological or social factors’, see: q.v. “motivation” 1b.

early-modern Europe, another source of formative influence on the current study is John A. Lynn's *Bayonets of the Republic*. Investigating the tactics, morale and combat effectiveness in the *Armée du Nord*, the largest army fielded by France in the War of the First Coalition, this is a groundbreaking work that sets the standard for all future historical studies of military motivation. Lynn argues that, instead of overwhelming their opponents with hordes of undisciplined but highly enthusiastic citizen-soldiers, the French victories were a product of a new military professionalism and rigorous training. The revolutionaries outfought their opponents not *in spite* of disciplinary weakness, as argued by previous generations of scholars, but because of a new disciplinary system based on willing consent, whose introduction was made possible by the patriotism of the French soldiery and its association with the new order. And yet, despite shattering this long-prevailing view on the motivation of French troops, this study repeats many traditional assumptions about old-regime armies, often reflecting how the virtues of the revolutionary soldiers mirrored the drawbacks of their predecessors and opponents. According to Lynn, old-regime armies emphasised coercive discipline, which, together with their non-egalitarian ethos, precluded the creation of genuine attachment between officers and their soldiers, who also remained indifferent to the aims of the war.<sup>11</sup>

Although it takes issue with some of the assertions made in *Bayonets of the Republic*, the current volume owes much to its methodology. In this truly interdisciplinary study, Lynn combines more conventional sources, such as memoirs, regulations and archival records, with modern research on combat motivation. A highlight of Lynn's book is the theoretical model of combat effectiveness that shows how various factors contributed to the overall performance of the French troops. The current study follows Lynn's example. It considers primary sources in the light of modern findings on motivation, which, although employed to examine almost every conflict up to and including the French Revolutionary Wars, has seldom been applied to old-regime armies. Secondly, this study formulates a theoretical model that aims to establish the relationship between basic types of motivational incentives. Previous work on eighteenth-century armies has mentioned the existence of idealistic motives, but usually fails to comment on their relative importance compared to discipline or material factors. The current book seeks to bridge this gap.

Even if somewhat less stirring than the original French expression on which it is based, 'old regime' is a charged term, implying not only a radical break with the order antedating the Revolution, but also its

<sup>11</sup> Lynn, *Bayonets*, 24, 43, 62–3, 92–3, 101–2.

rejection.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, it is fitting to employ it in the current study. Firstly, it is an acknowledgement of the prevailing scholarly trend that underscores the alleged rift between the armies of eighteenth-century Europe and revolutionary France. Moreover, it is appropriate to use it in a work that examines not only the soldiers who participated in wars between old-regime states, but also considers the experience of those men who fought against revolutionary and early-Napoleonic France. Chronologically, this study fits neatly into the eighteenth century. It begins with the War of the Spanish Succession and ends in 1789 for old-regime France, and 1806 for the rest of Europe. The latter date is chosen to correspond with the crushing defeat of Prussia, whose army is considered as the embodiment of old-regime warfare. In that sense, the twin battles of Jena-Auerstedt mark the end of that era.<sup>13</sup>

Although this study does not share the view that the mere survival of a personal narrative by an old-regime common soldier renders it unrepresentative and, therefore, of little scholarly use, it is important to draw on as many such sources as possible. For the same reason, this study sets broad geographical limits, looking at western as well as central Europe. There is another important rationale beyond the relatively broad scope of the current study. This book shares the view that old-regime Europe was united by a single and relatively stable military culture, and that its armies shared basic similarities in their military experience and practice which outweighed their distinctive characteristics. From about 1700 until the outbreak of the French Revolutionary Wars, Europe saw little variety along national lines in fighting methods, weaponry and even in uniforms. Although some important tactical developments did take place, none proved strong enough to break the basic combat environment established on the battlefields of the War of the Spanish Succession. Introduction of effective light infantry in Austria, improved infantry drill in Prussia or the standardisation of the Austrian artillery under the Prince of Liechtenstein are good examples of military innovation in this period. These were practical improvements which added to the existing system rather than transforming it, and provided no lasting edge over other European opponents. Despite some variety in recruitment practices, the social composition of the old-regime armies was markedly similar. The soldiery originated from the lower orders of society; at its head, however, stood an almost exclusively noble and mostly cosmopolitan officer class. With regard to military administration, the century was

<sup>12</sup> Doyle, *Ancien Regime*.

<sup>13</sup> On the shocking influence of these battles their contemporaries, see for instance: Allmayer-Beck, 'Von Hubertusburg nach Jena'; Paret, *Cognitive Challenge*.

8 Motivation in War

marked by continuous and largely successful attempts to bring broader aspects of military service under the aegis of direct state control at the expense of the proprietary rights of the officers.<sup>14</sup>

This important point provides the main justification for a study whose most significant primary sources originate from different countries over a substantial time period. Moreover, while every effort was made to locate and consult as many soldierly narratives as possible, the distribution of those sources proved unequal. The overall balance of published voices from the ranks tilts towards Britain. This discrepancy was addressed by research in major continental archives such as Vienna and Vincennes. However, it could not be remedied entirely. Moreover, a number of manuscripts located in American or small European archives could not be consulted.<sup>15</sup> Lack of linguistic capabilities precluded the study of Spanish or Scandinavian sources, although in the latter case a number of such writings were left by Swedish participants of the Great Northern War.<sup>16</sup> Yet, although this study cannot presume to be based on a completely balanced set of primary evidence, its conclusions are still useful. As long as they are drawn from autobiographical writings by common soldiers describing actual military service in old-regime Europe, findings for one army are likely to prove relevant for men in other forces who were undergoing similar service conditions and facing comparable challenges both in war and in peace.

The current study considers close to 250 such sources. It is possible to argue that this number is too insignificant for a period during which millions of men served. Moreover, it can be claimed that the mere fact that their authors were articulate or educated enough to express themselves in writing already marks them as extraordinary. Obviously, this is true, assuming that an ideal standard of completeness and representativeness is indeed achievable. Yet whatever the limitations of the current sample, it is definitely more representative and complete than anything attempted beforehand. The present study takes no greater liberty than

<sup>14</sup> The best overview of the military culture of old-regime Europe is C. Duffy, *Military Experience*; see also: Strachan, *European Armies*, 23–37; Conway, ‘Eighteenth-Century British Army as a European Institution’; On the regularisation of Europe’s armies, see: M.S. Anderson, *War and Society*, 56–63, 99–111; Corvisier, *Armies and Societies*, 64–72; McNeill, *Pursuit of Power*, 125–42; and for particular case studies: Redlich, *German Military Enterpriser*, vol. II; Hochedlinger, *Austria’s Wars*, 303–26.

<sup>15</sup> For instance: ‘Heinrich Georg Sigmund Q.’, Deutsches Tagebucharchiv, Emmendingen, (1892 / II); ‘Tagebuch eines Grenadiers im I. Bat. Des Hessen-Hanau Inf. Rgt. Erbprinz. Komp. Des Obristlieutenants Lenz’, Staatsarchiv Marburg, Best 10e, Nr. 1/23.

<sup>16</sup> See the annotated bibliography attached to the English translation of England, *Battle of Poltava*.



that taken by James S. Amelang, whose examination of 300 years of experience of early-modern artisans is also based on about 250 personal narratives, or Barbara Donagan, whose excellent chapter on the rank and file in the English Civil War, which includes numerous interesting insights on their motivation, cites less than five writings by such soldiers themselves.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, while the quality and reliability of each and every one of the autobiographical writings employed in the following pages can be debated, it is hoped that, when combined, they can form a basis for informed generalisations. These narratives were produced by a diverse set of individuals with different experiences and perspectives. They include pressed men and volunteers, privates and NCOs, war veterans and men who served only in peacetime. Some authors served loyally until retirement, while others deserted. The perspectives held by the authors regarding their service are also different: some openly enjoyed it, others disdained it, and many state no clear opinion either way. Discarding their testimonies in the name of unattainable criteria would be a mistake.

Although it disagrees with some Lynn's notions regarding the nature of old-regime armies, this study looks up to *Bayonets of the Republic*, particularly to its model of combat effectiveness. It is very easy to make a long list of categories which pays attention to all kinds of factors, but is analytically sterile; it is as tempting to produce sweeping generalisations which make analysis easy at the expense of accuracy. Lynn's model strikes a delicate balance between these two extremes by subdividing combat effectiveness into distinct categories. These are first discussed separately, making it possible to consider their individual contributions towards the whole. The model offered in this study follows this example. Previous works commenting on the motivation of eighteenth-century soldiers often came to conclusions based on a selection of quotations from soldiers' writings. While demonstrating the existence of certain attitudes or the effectiveness of a particular motivational drive, such an approach cannot determine their overall significance. By considering motivation as a sum of separate categories, it is hoped to not only to establish the existence of distinct incentives, but also to evaluate their relative importance. Many of the ideas behind this model are not original. It owes much to Lynn's suggestion that we can consider military motivation as a set of three sequential stages. Another basic component of the current model is the theory of compliance, whose military aspects were formulated by Stephen Westbrook in a broader discussion of

<sup>17</sup> Amelang, *Flight of Icarus*; Donagan, *War in England*, 258–94; see also: Latzel, 'Vom Kriegerlebnis zur Kriegserfahrung', 6–10.

disintegration.<sup>18</sup> The claim for novelty of the current model is that it considers these two theories within a single matrix which defines the components of motivation. Although the subdivision of such a complex subject is artificial, it allows for the formation of distinct analytic categories which can be applied systematically, helping to counterbalance the anecdotal nature of narrative sources and their authors' choice of incident and choice of language.

This study advances the basic view that motivation is based on the availability of incentives. Those could be either positive or negative. In the former case, the incentive to pursue a particular course of action is based on reward; in the latter case, failure to pursue it leads to sanction. Neither the reward nor the sanction need to be material. For instance, both the desire to win approval from one's society and fear of shame could prove strong motives for action. Moreover, motivation can be based on external factors, as in the last example, but it is just as likely to be internal, that is, based on one's own values, irrespective of whether they correspond with those professed by the society at large. Essentially, motivation is not unlike the common dualist definition of honour, which distinguishes between internal and external measurements of worth. The former is based on intrinsic personal qualities – 'inner feelings of self worth and high-mindedness'. The latter owes its existence to the desire to acquire social capital for manifesting positive qualities in public, for instance: demonstrating 'valor for family and country [or] conformity to the community wishes'.<sup>19</sup>

Following Lynn, our model divides military motivation into three basic stages. Initial motivation covers the causes of why men enlist. Sustaining motivation considers reasons why soldiers endure the hardships of military life such as training, discipline, daily chores and, very commonly, boredom. Finally, combat motivation explains why soldiers fight.<sup>20</sup> Each stage has particular features which distinguish it from the other two. In the initial stage, the soldier comes closest to being an 'actor', that is, he is generally able to control the conditions he is under. In the later two stages, the soldier is a 'subject'; the challenges are external and his action will largely be limited to the choice of coping strategies. The combat stage, on the other hand, is made unique by the immediate presence of fear that needs to be surmounted. Moreover, throughout the first two stages, men usually have time to reflect upon their choice of actions, but in combat, decisions often have to be taken instantaneously.

<sup>18</sup> Lynn, *Bayonets*, 21–40; Westbrook, 'Potential for Military Disintegration'; Westbrook largely builds on ideas formulated in Etzioni, *Comparative History of Complex Organizations*.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted from Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 4. <sup>20</sup> Lynn, *Bayonets*, 35–6.