

Motivation in War

This book fundamentally revises our notion of why soldiers of the eighteenth century enlisted, served and fought. In contrast to traditional views of the brutal conditions supposedly prevailing in old-regime armies, Ilya Berkovich reveals that soldiers did not regard military discipline as illegitimate or unnecessarily cruel, nor did they perceive themselves as submissive military automatons. Instead, he shows how these men embraced a unique corporate identity based on military professionalism, forceful masculinity and hostility towards civilians. These values fostered the notion of individual and collective soldierly honour, which helped to create the bonding effect that contributed towards greater combat cohesion. Utilising research on military psychology and combat theory and employing the letters, diaries and memoirs of around 250 private soldiers and non-commissioned officers from over a dozen different European armies, *Motivation in War* transforms our understanding of life of the common soldier in early-modern Europe.

Ilya Berkovich completed his PhD thesis at Peterhouse, Cambridge, and has since published items on crusader and eighteenth-century history. He has won the Polonsky Prize for Creativity and Originality in the Humanistic Disciplines from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Moncado Prize for an Outstanding Article from the Society for Military History. Before starting his studies, Berkovich served three years as a conscript in the Israel Defence Forces.

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*The Experience of Common Soldiers in
Old-Regime Europe*

Ilya Berkovich

Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich



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To Christopher Duffy

I take the gallantry of private Soldiers to proceed from the same, if not from a nobler, Impulse than that of Gentlemen and Officers. They have the same Taste of being acceptable to their Friends, and go through the Difficulties of that Profession by the same irresistible Charm of Fellowship, and the Communication of Joys and Sorrows, which quickens the relish of Pleasure, and abates the Anguish of Pain. Add to this, that they have the same Regard to Fame, tho' they do not expect so great a Share as Men above them hope for; but I'll engage, Sergeant *Hall* would die Ten Thousand Deaths, rather than a Word should be broken at the *Red-Lettice*, or any Part of the *Butcher-Row*, in the prejudice of his Courage and Honesty

Richard Steele, *Tatler* 87, 29 October 1709

Wir müssen uns also zu Gott halten und ihn bitten, daß er unserm Könige und uns wolle gnädig sein, daß wir unsere Feinde mögen glücklich überwinden und den Sieg erhalten. Und ich hoffe, daß uns der liebe Gott bald den Frieden bescheren wird, daß wir anstatt der Briefe mündlich zusahmen sprechen können, welches ich von Herten wünsche, daß uns Gott Gnade verleihen wolle

[We must commend ourselves to God and implore him to be merciful to our King and us, and that we shall be able successfully to overcome our enemies and attain victory. And I hope that the Dear God will soon grant us peace, and that, instead of letters, we would be able to speak together again. I wish wholeheartedly that the Lord gives us this grace.]

Johann Hermann Dresel's last surviving letter to his father, 15 May 1759

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Acknowledgements

This volume was conceived about fifteen years ago, when I was reading Christopher Duffy's history of Alexander Suvorov's Italian campaign. In the chapter surveying the armies of Habsburg Austria and Imperial Russia, Duffy brings as epigraph an excerpt from Tim Blanning's history of the French Revolutionary Wars, which reads:

The question of the motivation of Old Regime armies is almost wholly unresearched, partly because evidence is so spare and partly because it is tempting to assume that the soldiers signed up because of the bounty on offer, because they were pressed or because they were on the run and sought to desert at the earliest opportunity. In other words, the conventional picture corresponds to the Revolutionary rhetoric, which contrasted an army of citizen-soldiers with an army of mercenaries. Yet examination of the battles shows that the latter were capable of feats of heroism, both individual and collective, which cannot be explained simply in terms of iron discipline making the soldiers fear their officers more than the enemy.¹

Five years later, as a master's student, I wrote to Professor Blanning, referred to the above quote and asked whether he thought it would make a good subject for a PhD thesis. One year later I began my studies in Cambridge.

The two years I spent working under Professor Blanning were truly inspiring. While never losing track of my immediate subject, Professor Blanning always prompted me to consider how my findings could relate to broader questions in early-modern European history. He also introduced me to Professor Duffy, whom I met at the end of my first term as a doctoral student. Professor Duffy's healthy scepticism regarding the availability of enough relevant primary sources has actually proven very heartening in its own way, as I entertained myself with the presumptuous belief of proving the great master wrong. I hope the material discussed over the subsequent pages demonstrates that old-regime soldiers did leave a substantial number of personal

¹ C. Duffy, *Eagles over the Alps*, 22; Blanning, *French Revolutionary Wars*, 119.

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recollections and more are to be found. Most importantly, without Professor Duffy and Professor Blanning the dissertation on which the current volume is based would never have been written and I would probably never have come to Cambridge in the first place. I am immensely grateful to them both, not only for helping me to become a better scholar, but also for changing my life.

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With their usual generosity, my parents insisted that I forgo with the established custom of first-time authors and dedicate this volume to the man who got me interested in eighteenth-century history to begin with. However, my greatest love and thanks goes to them!

Abbreviations

<i>AFS</i>	<i>Armed Forces and Society</i> [Periodical]
<i>BBS</i>	Jürgen Kloosterhuis, <i>Bauern, Bürger und Soldaten: Quellen zur Sozialisation des Militärsystems im preußischen Westfalen 1713–1803, Vol. I Regesten</i> , (Münster: Selbstverlag des NW Staatsarchivs, 1992) [Book]
BL	British Library, London [Archive]
GG	Grosser Generalstab (ed.), <i>Briefe preußischer Soldaten aus den Feldzügen 1756 und 1757 und über die Schlachten bei Lobositz und Prag</i> , Beiträge und Forschungen zur Geschichte des Preußischen Heeres 2, (Berlin: Mittler 1901) [Book]
<i>Hessians</i>	<i>Hessians: Journal of the Johannes Schwalm Historical Association</i> [Periodical]
<i>JSAHR</i>	<i>Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research</i> [Periodical]
Liebe	Georg Liebe, 'Preußische Soldatenbriefe aus dem Gebiet der Provinz Sachsen im 18. Jahrhundert', <i>Jahresbericht des Thüringisch-Sächsischen Vereins für Erforschung des vaterländischen Altertums und Erhaltung seiner Denkmale</i> , 92-3 (1911-2), 1-37. [Article]
<i>Methodists</i>	Thomas Jackson (ed.), <i>Lives of Early Methodist Preachers, Chiefly Written by Themselves</i> , 4th edn, 3 vols., (Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker, 1998) [Book]
NAM	National Army Museum, London [Archive]
ÖStA	Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna [Archive]
SHD	Service Historique de la Défense, Vincennes [Archive]
TNA	The National Archives, Kew, London [Archive]