

**VETERANS AND EMPIRE:
A COMPARISON OF BRITISH AND RUSSIAN TREATMENT OF
VETERANS IN THE LATE EIGHTEENTH AND EARLY
NINETEENTH CENTURIES**

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Upon the handover of recruits, rivers of tears are poured out ... The long length of service of our soldier is such that relatives bid their farewells to the recruit as to a dying man having no hope of ever seeing him again¹

The departure of Russian peasant conscripts from their villages was accompanied with funeral laments. Conscriptation was not seen as a civic duty as in France but as the ultimate burden which the family had to bear; if recruits were married, their wives were often allowed to remarry as if they were widows. Service in the Russian army was for life, only reduced to 25 years in 1793 by Catherine II (as a reward for the heroism of Russian troops in the Second Russo-Turkish War, 1787–92) but this made no difference to the peasant perception that they had lost their sons or husbands forever. The Russian army was a traditional one, unmarked by the changes wrought by the Revolution in France, and service was obligatory for the ‘non-privileged’ members of society – mainly peasants (serfs and state peasants), but also unskilled townspeople and sons of parish clergy who had not been ordained.² The Russian state also remained unchanged in this period, and had all the features of what would be considered, even at the time, backwardness – politically, socially, economically, fiscally and culturally. Britain, the other eventual great victor in the Napoleonic Wars, was different in so many ways – in the role of public opinion, economic development, banking facilities and social structure. Britain was not, however, so different in assuming that those who volunteered for service in the Army would undertake it for life or, after 1806, for around 20 to 25 years (or indeed in the types of man recruited); in this respect the British army was also rooted in the *ancien régime*.

Soldiers in both the British and Russian armies may have believed, or feared, that service was for life, but in practice men could be released in both countries as unfit for service. In both countries the size of the armies increased rapidly from the late eighteenth century to 1815, which inevitably led to an increase in the number of old soldiers discharged back into the community. A fundamental difference, however, was that in Britain it was assumed that the army could

¹ Quoted in Alexander Bitis, ‘Reserves Under Serfdom: Nicholas I’s Attempts to Solve the Russian Army’s Manpower Crisis of 1831–32’, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (2003), pp. 186–187.

² Russian Orthodox parish priests had to marry. The status of clergy was in effect hereditary and sons of clergy sought positions in the Church. Clergy, however, often had large families and there were not enough posts to go round; many sons of clergy became minor officials, but others were forcibly conscripted into the army.

fluctuate significantly in size, and be drastically reduced in peacetime, without posing a threat to national security. (The Royal Navy, on the other hand, was essential for defence and, although ships were decommissioned and the number of sailors was reduced at the end of wars,³ the level of investment in shipbuilding and maintenance had to remain high to provide essential defence both at home and for overseas territories.) As a result, there was a dramatic influx of former soldiers into the community when wars ended. In Russia, in contrast, a large standing army was regarded as essential to defend its extensive and porous land frontiers and to enable mobilisation of different frontiers in case of war (while the navy was allowed to decline). As a result, Russia was spared the consequence of rapid demobilisation, but still had to deal with veterans throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, particularly after 1793.

Veterans, potentially homeless and jobless, posed a potential threat to law and order wherever they were, either through criminal activity or by aggressive begging, but their care also cost money, which had to be provided by the state, charitable organisations, the local community or family. The ways in which Britain and Russia approached controlling and caring for veterans, and the extent to which they were successful, illustrated the different constraints under which both countries operated. At the same time, both Britain and Russia also regarded former soldiers as a useful resource for the maintenance of law and order. Furthermore, both countries had large empires, whose extensive borders required garrison forces and settlers to protect them from enemy incursion, and in both empires former soldiers were used, either forcibly or as volunteers, to perform these duties.

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Warfare from the 1790s to 1815 led to a significant increase in the size of both armies. In 1813 the British army has been estimated to be *c.* 250,000 plus about 40,000 troops – militia, auxiliaries, local units and the forces of the East India Company serving in the colonies and India; the Russian army numbered over 700,000 men by 1815.⁴ The latter was therefore over twice the size of the British army by the end of the Napoleonic Wars, but it must be noted that the population of the Russian empire was also roughly twice that of the British Isles at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Population statistics for Russia can only be treated as rough estimates, but in 1800 the population was some 35.5 million; that of Britain and Ireland was 15–17 million according to the 1801 census. Britain also had to support a larger navy than did Russia. It is difficult to compare

³ After the Napoleonic Wars the navy was reduced from some 147,000 men in 1813 to *c.* 79,000 by the end of 1815. Sailors are a separate category and not covered in this article.

⁴ Kevin Linch, *Britain and Wellington's Army: Recruitment, Society and Tradition, 1807–15* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011), p. 57. Zeta Moore has a figure of 330,663 including *c.* 40,000 serving in the colonies: 'Army Recruitment and the Uncertainties of the "Fiscal-Military" State in Britain, 1793–1815' (PhD diss, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2006), p. 330.

the human burden of army service on each country. Britain raised some 30,000 men a year during the Napoleonic Wars and it has been claimed that one in ten eligible males served at some point in either the regular army or the militia. The proportion of men mobilised was higher than ever before but almost certainly not higher than in Russia. The regular Russian army was a standing army, and its numbers grew throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In peacetime, the number of levies, and the size of the 'take', dropped, but the army was not reduced. It grew from c. 100,000 in the mid-eighteenth century to almost 300,000 men at the end of the First Russo-Swedish War of 1788–90 and to over 400,000 by the beginning of the nineteenth century and remained above 700,000 from 1815 to 1825.⁵ Levies took place more frequently during wartime (the most extreme year was 1812, when three levies of 20 per 500 males took place). It has been estimated that over 1.6 million men were conscripted into the Russian army in the period 1796–1815.⁶ The social base for recruitment was weak, because the 'privileged' social classes (nobles, wealthy merchants, ordained clergy) were not conscripted (or taxed). Furthermore, there were so many exclusions from military service on religious and ethnic grounds that one estimate is that 1 in 5 eligible men served as conscripts in the army.⁷

Britain, at least in the short term, had a far more acute demobilisation problem than Russia after the Napoleonic Wars. The British army was drastically reduced in size, from some 250,000 men in 1815 to 103,000 in 1828. It has been estimated that there were only some 10,000 veterans in Russia 1801, although by 1829 that number had risen to almost 84,000.⁸ By that date the number of veterans in the British Isles was not dissimilar – in 1828 there were some 85,000 army out-pensioners (see below) – but this was not much fewer than the number of soldiers in the regular army (c. 90,000 at this time), and as that figure only included those who were awarded pensions it is likely that there were far more former soldiers than active soldiers in the British Isles by this date.⁹ In the same

⁵ Janet M. Hartley, *Russia 1762–1825: Military Power, the State and the People* (Westport, CT, London: Praeger, 2008), pp. 8–9. The Russian army also included auxiliary troops – mainly Cossacks but also Kalmyk and Bashkir tribesmen – who served for fewer years. Both countries raised militias during the Napoleonic Wars, primarily intended to ensure domestic order, but in practice in Britain the militias were a good recruiting ground for the regular army, whereas in Russia militias fought in 1813–14 beyond the Russian frontiers.

⁶ Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter, *From Serf to Russian Soldier* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 3.

⁷ F. W. Kagan, *The Military Reforms of Nicholas I: The Origins of the Modern Russian Army* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 221–223.

⁸ John L. H. Keep, *Soldiers of the Tsar: Army and Society in Russia 1462–1874* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 197; Wirtschafter, *From Serf*, p. 164 n. 47. Bitis states that 45,069 lower ranks retired between 1827 and September 1829; Bitis: 'Reserves', p. 189.

⁹ There were over 80,000 out-pensioners in the period 1823–41: G. Hutt, *Papers Illustrative of the Origin and Early History of the Royal Hospital at Chelsea* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1872), pp. 88–89. Only men who had served without blemish, however, were recommended for pensions and far more men were discharged without pensions. For the most thorough analysis of the eligibility and award of out-pensions see Andrew E. Cormack, 'Those Meritorious Objects of Royal Bounty': *The Chelsea Out-Pensioners in the Early Eighteenth Century* (London: Cormack, 2017), especially pp. 71, 79–82.

period, in contrast, the Russian army rose to some 800,000 men; 80,000 veterans was therefore only a tenth of the size of the army and a smaller proportion of the population than in Britain.

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Demobilisation of soldiers was a potential source of instability. In Britain, there was a fear that the rapid demobilisation of so many men, at least some of whom were still physically fit and who were familiar with firearms, would lead to an increase in crime, and particularly in violent crime. This fear was based on the perception of the experience of demobilisation after the Seven Years' War (1756–63); Stephen Janssen, the Lord Mayor of London at the time, analysed crime statistics from 1749 to 1771 and linked rising crime specifically with demobilisation of soldiers and sailors.¹⁰ The popular perception was that the same happened after 1815. Thomas Attwood in Birmingham claimed that the discharge in 1818 of so many men from the army and navy was 'highly mischievous' with the result that 'the infinite number of offences against the peace and property of the people rose to an alarming height in every part of the Kingdom'.¹¹ It is hard to prove that crime rose for this reason during and after the Napoleonic Wars because the court records rarely stated that the accused was a former soldier and listed him by his current occupation. There certainly were crimes committed by former soldiers. Patrick Cushion, who described himself as a 'poor old soldier', was tried at the Old Bailey in 1815 for assault – his accusers had teased him for being Irish and had 'readily drank all [the] money' he had.¹² Newspaper reports included, for example, a case of poaching in 1819 committed 'by very desperate looking men ... [one of whom] appeared as if he had been a soldier'.¹³ Sometimes the accused referred to his patriotic service to his country to plead for leniency, as in 1801 where the defendant, James Walton, accused of the theft of two banknotes, stated he had been a soldier for 13 years and that his father had served in the militia and his four brothers in the army; in 1812, James Collet, accused of the theft of some tea, stated that he had 'been a soldier all the war'. It seems unlikely that such an appeal would sway the judge; Walton was sentenced to death.¹⁴ Soldiers could be as much the victims of crime as the perpetrators (for example, one 'infirm and crippled' soldier in 1815 and a blind veteran in 1818),¹⁵

¹⁰ J. M. Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England 1660–1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 227. See also the discussion of the link between war, economic downturn and crime in the eighteenth century in Douglas Hay, 'War, Dearth and Theft in the Eighteenth Century; The Record of the English Courts', *Past & Present*, Vol. 95 (1982), pp. 117–160.

¹¹ In a report to Arthur Young, reviewing the current distress of the poor: Hay, 'War', p. 138.

¹² *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, all records accessed 29 May 2020) (hereafter *Old Bailey*), t18150621-54 (Cushion), 21 June 1815. He was acquitted.

¹³ *Morning Chronicle*, 1 November 1819.

¹⁴ *Old Bailey*, t18010701-67 (Walton), 1 July 1801, t18121028-6 (Collet), 28 October 1812. In Collet's case we do not know the outcome.

¹⁵ *The Times*, 5 September 1815, *Old Bailey*, t18180506-78 (Rainer), 6 May 1818.

in particular when drunk or carrying money, including their pensions, and sometimes at the hands of other pensioners.¹⁶ Passes issued to former soldiers to travel home were also the subject of fraud, used by women to beg by claiming they were soldiers' widows or simply sold on to others.¹⁷

Russia, unlike Britain, did not have a forum for discussion of a possible connection between veterans and crime, or indeed any discussion of the extent or cause of crime at all. Independent debate in national or local newspapers was unknown (the establishment of provincial newspapers had been promoted from above, by Catherine II, in an attempt to stimulate provincial society and in this period were still quasi-official). It was not the case, of course, that soldiers never committed crimes in Russia or that the government or army took no action. Disorders frequently broke out in towns and villages, not least because there were not enough barracks to house soldiers separately. A decree in 1819 forbidding lower ranks from frequenting inns, which had led to 'much disorder',¹⁸ seemingly made little difference. The military records of Russian troops stationed in Bessarabia (the southern border of the empire in the Balkans) recorded disputes between soldiers and the unfortunate peasant families on whom they were billeted over supplies of food and hay for horses, which led to violence and even murder.¹⁹ Deserters and Cossacks also formed gangs of brigands; one of the few memoirs by a soldier who served in the Napoleonic Wars mentioned a Cossack who terrified travellers on the middle Volga and supposedly had cast a spell on guns so that 'it was impossible to kill or wound him'.²⁰ But there was no debate at court about veterans as a potential criminal threat, at least as far as we know. Unlike in the British Isles, only very elderly or disabled soldiers would be released by the Russian army and they could pose less of a threat (although see comments about beggars below).

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¹⁶ Such cases were frequent in Old Bailey records: see for example, *Old Bailey*, t18070916-54 (Bantin), t18140914-59 (Cruston), t18150215-109 (Taylor).

¹⁷ Reports in, for example, *Caledonian Mercury*, 22 November 1813, *Westmorland Gazette*, 30 May 1818. Another example can be found in Surrey History Centre, Surrey Quarter Sessions (QS) (accessed from CD of Surrey Quarter Sessions 1780-1820), 25 October 1819, trial of Thomas Geoghagan accused of selling soldiers' passes (no sentence noted).

¹⁸ *Polnoe sobranie zakonov rossiiskogo imperii* (The Full Collection of the Laws of the Russian Empire) (hereafter *PSZ*), first series (St Petersburg: Tip. Sobst. Velich. Kants., 1830), Vol. 36, No. 27814, pp. 203-204, 25 May 1819 Old Style (OS).

¹⁹ Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi voenno-istoricheskii arkhiv, Moscow (Russian State Military-Historical Archive) (hereafter *RGVIA*), fond 16234, opis' 1, dela 175, 203, military judicial affairs of the Moldavian army, 1810-11.

²⁰ 'Istoriia moei zhzni. Rasskaz byvshago krepostnago krest'ianina Nikolaia Nikol. Shipova, 1801-1862 g.' (The history of my life: account of the former serf Nikolai Nikol. Shipov'), *Russkaia starina*, Vol. 31 (1881), pp. 138-139. It should be noted in this context that most Russian soldiers were illiterate, and this is one of only two memoirs of Russian soldiers that I know (there are many memoirs by Russian officers). There are far more memoirs by soldiers in the British army of course.

Pensions had been granted to disabled and infirm soldiers in person, or more commonly as out-pensioners, by the Chelsea Royal Hospital since 1692, a charitable foundation which was partially supported from general taxation.²¹ In 1806, in part to reduce the potential social disorder resulting from demobilisation (and in part to encourage men to volunteer) the British government determined that men were eligible for pensions not only as a result of disability but automatically after long service (which was set at different levels for each branch of the service and was shorter if their service had been in the East or West Indies, where tropical diseases of all kinds were rife).²² It was, of course, in the interest of the regiment that it should rid itself of older and unfit soldiers, but pensions were not automatic. Men had to be recommended by their company or troop commander as worthy through good service, and had to appear in person at designated times at the Chelsea Hospital and undergo a medical examination. Pensions could be awarded at a rate which in the early nineteenth century ranged from 5 pence to 3 shillings a day depending on their length of service, their rank and their degree of disability. Records from 1816–18 list the following reasons for discharge: long service (which could be more than 20 years), a vague description of ‘worn out’ from service, disease (including hepatitis, dysentery, diseased liver and testicles, rheumatism, epileptic fits, gout, consumption, incurable headaches, syphilis), loss of part of or full hearing or sight, loss of limbs or other physical damage, and ‘impaired understanding’. The applicants ranged in age from early 20s to late 50s and even 60s (one Thomas Bell claimed to be 65 and to have served for 30 years), although the majority of petitioners were in their 40s and early 50s.²³ If men had served at Waterloo that was noted in the records, a rare formal acknowledgement of the heroism of men who participated in that battle, which may have helped their case.²⁴ The records I have consulted suggest that the success rate was very high after 1815 in a period of unprecedented intense

²¹ The most thorough study of the pension system in the first half of the eighteenth century, including a detailed analysis of the process of determining eligibility and the mechanism for payment of pensions, as well as an insight into the experiences of the common soldier can be found in Cormack, *Those Meritorious Objects*. Caroline Louise Nielson, ‘The Chelsea Out-Pensioners: Image and Reality in Eighteenth-Century and Early Nineteenth-Century Social Care’ (PhD diss., Newcastle University, 2014), assesses Hospital records for the period 1715–95. She concluded that the success rate of in the period 1715 to 1793 was over 90 per cent (p. 200). See also *ibid.*, ‘Disability, Fraud and the Medical Experience at the Royal Hospital of Chelsea in the Long Eighteenth Century’, in *Britain’s Soldiers: Rethinking War and Society, 1715–1815*, ed. by Kevin Linch & Matthew McCormack (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), pp. 183–201.

²² J. E. Cookson, ‘Alexander Tulloch and the Chelsea Out-Pensioners, 1838–43: Centralisation in the Early Victorian State’, *English Historical Review*, Vol. 125, No. 512 (2010), p. 63. In 1836 it was clarified that two years’ service in the East or West Indies counted for three years in Britain: Hutt, *Papers*, p. 324.

²³ Cormack has evidence in the early eighteenth century of men becoming out-pensioners in their 70s, and even came across a few in their 80s: Cormack, *Those Meritorious Objects*, pp. 132, 134–135.

²⁴ Based on the following records: Kew, The National Archives (hereafter TNA), WO 116/22/6, WO 116/24/2, WO 116/26/6, WO 116/27/2, WO 116/27/6, WO 116/28/3 (no folio numbers). Thomas Bell is listed in WO 116/26/6.

demobilisation. Reasons for refusal were not fully documented: one William Raistrick, aged 41, had his case rejected despite a sore leg and ‘imbecility approaching idiocy’ which required two soldiers to look after him!²⁵

The award of pensions required an extraordinarily complex system, which operated throughout Britain and Ireland. Veterans collected their pension every three months from the Chelsea Hospital in person or from local agents of the Excise Office. The mechanism to deliver pensions required an elaborate network of payment throughout Britain and Ireland: there were 18 excise districts and 107 places of payment in Scotland alone in the early nineteenth century.²⁶

The level of pension given to British soldiers was not intended fully to support discharged soldiers but to maintain social order by supplementing their wages or to assist their families with their care: it was, in the words of one historian, ‘to secure him against pauperism for the rest of his life, but not so generous that he joined the ranks of the idle poor’.²⁷ In practice, much depended on the amount of pension given to the soldier and where he lived. Veterans, not surprisingly, often claimed that the pension did not give them enough on which to live. Edward Costello, who served in the Peninsular War and at Waterloo, was invalided out of the Rifle Brigade at the age of 31 after the loss of a finger and described his 6 pence a day as a ‘pittance’.²⁸ Charles O’Neil, wounded in the arm at Waterloo, was aggrieved to be awarded only one shilling, although ‘thankful’ to receive that.²⁹ Pensions went further in the countryside than in the cities, and further in Scotland and Ireland than in England. Cookson has suggested that the pension had significant value in Scotland and that it was possible to live in Ireland on 5 pence a day (a view, it has to be said, not shared by O’Neil who returned to Ireland – he emigrated to Upper Canada and settled eventually in the United States). Those fortunate enough to receive 1 shilling a day or more, however, were earning more than many labourers in Scotland who sometimes earned as little as 5 shillings a week.³⁰ Pensions could be revoked if soldiers were found to be fit or for misbehaviour, or if they refused to be re-conscripted into veteran garrisons (see below).

²⁵ TNA, WO116/22/6. It may be that he was rejected because he had served for only 4 years.

²⁶ J. E. Cookson, ‘Early Nineteenth-Century Scottish Military Pensioners as Homecoming Soldiers’, *Historical Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (2009), p. 321.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 330.

²⁸ Edward Costello, *The Adventures of a Soldier, or Memoirs of Edward Costello*, K.S. (London: Henry Colburn, 1841), p. 228.

²⁹ Charles O’Neil, *The Military Adventures of Charles O’Neil* (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 1997), p. 256.

³⁰ Cookson, ‘Early Nineteenth-Century’, pp. 333–334, F. C. Mather, ‘Army Pensioners and the Maintenance of Civil Order in Early Nineteenth-Century England’, *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, Vol. 36, No. 147 (1958), p. 111. It should be noted that the pensions were more generous than those awarded to Napoleonic soldiers in France: Natalie Pettiteau, ‘Survivors of War: French Soldiers and Veterans of the Napoleonic Armies’, in *Soldiers, Citizens and Civilians: Experiences and Perceptions of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars*, ed. by Alan Forrest, Karen Hagemann and Jane Rendell (London: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2009), pp. 50–51. Pettiteau shows that French soldiers faced similar problems in reintegrating into society after the Napoleonic Wars.

In Russia there were no veterans until the early eighteenth century when Peter I (reigned 1682–1725) established a regular army for the first time, which was conscripted from non-privileged social groups (serfs and state peasants and the urban poor), which was paid for by a poll tax.³¹ Unlike in Britain, however, where former soldiers could reintegrate into rural or urban life, the rigidity of the Russian social structure meant that ‘soldiers’ had to be categorised as a separate legal social group, almost a ‘caste’, which they retained when they left the army (this did not apply to officers, of course, who were nobles). At the point of conscription, the soldier left his former social estate (serf, state peasant, or lowest category of urban inhabitants) and became a separate legal category, as did any of his family members who were categorised as ‘soldiers’ wives’ and ‘soldiers’ children’. That status remained with him, his dependants and his descendants.

Government policies towards veterans evolved over the eighteenth century. It should also be pointed out, however, that information on Russia is fragmentary compared with the richness of records in Britain. Peter I regarded every person and every institution as serving the needs of the state and during the Great Northern War (1700–21) ordered monasteries and churches to care for the very few infirm soldiers (and their families) who had been released from service, and set out how many soldiers each monastery should support and what foodstuffs they should supply. The cost was borne by the monasteries, supplemented by the sale of church candles and by gifts from the laity. It was only after 1764, when Catherine II (reigned 1762–96) secularised Church land, that the state took over some of this role. Some almshouses attached to monasteries and churches, especially in Moscow and major towns, continued to house a very small number of soldiers and their families. In the second half of the eighteenth century there were 254 almshouses attached to churches and monasteries in Moscow alone catering for about 6,000 needy persons; some of these persons included soldiers and their families and some of these almshouses were especially designated for their care.³² In 1775, Catherine established a structure of welfare institutions in major towns, copying foreign models, which included state almshouses for the infirm, which could house a few former soldiers. In 1798 a former soldier, Koz’ma Rezvikov, petitioned to be given a place in an almshouse in St Petersburg because he was without relations and was of ‘extreme old age’.³³ In 1777 an almshouse was

³¹ The army had been formed from hereditary classes of Muscovite servitors, of which the *strel'tsy* or ‘musketeers’ were the most important, and from levies from the service gentry, who had been awarded land for military service, who had to supply their own arms, horses and men. For more details of the pre-Petrine army see Carol Stevens, *Russia's Wars of Emergence 1460–1730* (London: Routledge, 2007).

³² N. V. Kozlova, *Liudi driakhlye, bol'nye, ubogie v Moskve XVIII veka* (The infirm, the sick, the maimed people in Moscow in the 18thc) (Moscow: Rosspen, 2010), pp. 208, 225, 231–232.

³³ Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv drevnikh aktov, Moscow (Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts, hereafter RGADA), fond 16, delo 980, l. 20ob, report by A. Vorontsov and A. Naryshkin, 1785. See also Janet Hartley, ‘Philanthropy in the Reign of Catherine the Great: Aims and Realities’, in *Russia in the Age of Enlightenment: Essays in Honour of Isabel de Madariaga*, ed. by Roger Bartlett and Janet Hartley (London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 167–202.

set up in Moscow originally to care for officers; by the 1830s this catered for about 1,000 needy soldiers, officers and men.³⁴ The state, however, was slow to set up special care for former soldiers. Alexander I (reigned 1801–25) ordered the establishment of separate almshouses for ‘completely incapacitated’ veterans in 1807, but they were never built.³⁵

After 1793, when service was reduced to 25 years, at least in principle, soldiers could be released from service because of length of service rather than disability. This change, however, did not lead, as it did in Britain to the provision of pensions. There is legislation on pensions in 1799 in the reign of Paul I (reigned 1796–1801) which implied that small pensions should be paid to the lower ranks (pensions for officers and their wives, and for sailors, were subject to separate legislation).³⁶ Russian legislation was not always implemented in practice, especially if it involved an outlay of cash, and I have found no evidence that pensions were granted to soldiers at all in this period. Pensions were only awarded in a regular manner to Russian soldiers during and after the Crimean War.

Pensions would have been a financial burden for Russia, where the armed forces already absorbed between 40 and 55 per cent of state expenditure in the period 1804–24, and cost over 20 million roubles in the period 1817 to 1823.³⁷ In any event, it would have been impossible to establish the type of elaborate distribution system that existed in the British Isles, mainly because of the sheer distances and poor internal communications in Russia and the remoteness of many settlements, but also because of a lack of officials and institutions at a local level (there was no equivalent of the British Excise Office and its local agents in Russia – taxes were collected by the peasant communes) and, to an extent, a shortage of specie. Instead, Russian government policy was to subsidise the urban welfare institutions including almshouses that cared for soldiers, and to encourage private charity.

Wealthy nobles and merchants in Russia donated sometimes very large sums to care for the poor and infirm. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, for example, an almshouse was established by the fabulously wealthy Count Nikolai

³⁴ Kozlova, *Liudi*, p. 196.

³⁵ P. P. Shcherbinin, *Voennyi faktor v povsednevnoi zhizni russkoi zhenshchiny v XVIII–nachale XX v.* (The military factor in the everyday life of Russian women in the 18th–early 19th c.) (Tambov: Iulis, 2004), p. 142.

³⁶ *PSZ*, Vol. 35, No. 19052, pp. 737–738, 27 June 1799 OS; Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter, ‘Social Misfits: Veterans and Soldiers’ Families in Servile Russia’, *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (1995), p. 220.

³⁷ Figures from W. M. Pintner, ‘The Burden of Defense in Imperial Russia, 1725–1914’, *Russian Review*, Vol. 43 (1984), p. 248, and Ia. I. Pechurin, *Istoricheskii obzor rospisei gosudarstvennykh dokladov i raskhadov s 1803 po 1843 god vkluchitel’no* (An historical survey of the inventory of state income and expenditure from 1803 to 1843) (St Petersburg: Iu. N. Erlikh, 1896). Statistics on Russian expenditure are unreliable. A table summarising different estimates can be found in Hartley, *Russia*, pp. 83–84.

³⁸ See Maya B. Lavrinovich, ‘The Role of Social Status in Poor Relief in a Modernizing Urban Society: The Case of Sheremetev’s Almshouse, 1802–12’, *Russian Review*, Vol. 76 (2017), pp. 224–252. For a more general assessment of the role of philanthropy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries see Hartley, ‘Philanthropy’, Kozlova, *Liudi*, especially pp. 298–301, and Wendy Rosslyn, *Deeds not Words: The Origin of Women’s Philanthropy in the Russian Empire* (Birmingham: Birmingham University, 2007).

Sheremetev, but this charity was focused on widows.³⁸ These charitable activities did not specifically target elderly or infirm soldiers; the only example I have found of this is the donation in 1807 of 30,000 roubles by the wealthy Moscow merchant G. A. Kir'iakov for a special unit to be attached to the Andreev almshouse for 30 maimed soldiers from the lower ranks.³⁹ In 1812, a Women's Patriotic Society was established for the relief of widows and children. That year was traumatic of course; for the first time Russia experienced a collective sense of responsibility to defend the county, manifested through donations of cash and goods from all sectors of society. In Petropavlovsk region, in distant Kamchatka, three veteran soldiers, who were not wealthy individuals, donated 842 roubles.⁴⁰ The government, however, determined how this money should be spent, and it was not specifically targeted at veterans.

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It is impossible to know how many former soldiers returned home in the British Isles, with or without pensions, although we know from reports on beggars that many remained in London and other big cities. Cookson examined the records of Scottish recipients of out-pensions after the Napoleonic Wars and found that almost 86 per cent of men returned to Scotland after demobilisation; the rest mainly settled in England. Fewer returned to Ireland where there were fewer opportunities for work.⁴¹ Out-pensioners needed a fixed abode to receive their pension; those without pensions were more likely to move around the country looking for work or turn to vagrancy. Memoirs tend to tell the stories of successful individuals: John Brown, an apprentice shoemaker when he enlisted, resumed work as a shoemaker in Cambridge (and ended up as a town councillor). Others adapted: those who had served in the cavalry could find employment in London or other cities with horses or as smiths and farriers. Thomas Lawrence, originally discharged and then obliged to serve in a Veteran Battalion, returned after this service to Ireland and ran a public house where he lived 'pretty prosperously'.⁴²

After service in the Russian army was reduced to 25 years, Catherine II passed legislation decreeing that discharged soldiers (if they did not join garrisons, see below) should return 'to their relatives in the[ir] previous [places of] domicile'

³⁹ Galina Ul'ianova, *Blagotvoritel'nost' moskovskikh predprinimatelei 1860–1914: Slovar' kuptsov-blagotvoritelei* (The philanthropy of Moscow entrepreneurs, 1860–1914; a dictionary of merchant philanthropists) (Moscow: Forum, 2014), p. 35.

⁴⁰ Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Omskoi oblasti (State Archive of Omsk Region), fond 2, opis' 1, delo 1563, ll. 15–16ob, papers of the Main Administrative Office of Western Siberia, 1812. For more discussion of the donations see Janet M. Hartley, 'Patriotism in the Provinces in 1812: Volunteers and Donations', in *Russia and the Napoleonic Wars* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), ed. by Janet M. Hartley, Paul Keenan, Dominic Lieven, pp. 148–162.

⁴¹ Cookson, 'Early Nineteenth-Century', p. 326.

⁴² Moore, 'Army Recruitment', pp. 52–53, *The Autobiography of Sergeant William Lawrence*, ed. by George Nugent Brooks (London: Sampson Low & Co., 1886), p. 149.

⁴³ John L. H. Keep, 'Catherine's Veterans', *Slavonic and East European Review* (hereafter *SEER*), Vol. 59, No. 3 (1981), p. 386.

who were to 'keep him at their own expense until his death',⁴³ which in the majority of cases would mean return to the man's village. In Russia, however, returning home was not straightforward (there are a very few references to men, as opposed to officers, being granted leave in Russia). On a basic level, finding their way home would be impossible for many soldiers given the size of the country and because regiments were mainly located in Russia's perceived most vulnerable borderlands in the south and the west far away from the heartlands of European Russia. By the late eighteenth century there was no connection between regions and regiments; recruits were simply allocated by the War Office to regiments which were short of men.

Infirm or elderly soldiers would be of little use in agriculture. More fundamentally, the rigidity of the Russian social structure meant it was impossible for soldiers to reintegrate into the peasant community (state or serf) or, to a lesser extent, the town. 'Soldiers', as noted above, were a separate legal social category, and that status remained (and the legal status of their wife and children if they married while in service) after release from service. All obligations in Russia, fiscal and non-fiscal, were levied on peasant and urban communities collectively, but former soldiers were no longer legally part of these communities; the consequence of this was that a soldier was of no use to his former community at all (serf or state peasant or urban resident).

It was not surprising under these circumstances that most noble serf owners, and for that matter state peasant communities, resisted the return of these soldiers.⁴⁴ The reality for the few who did return was grim, as reported in 1820:

If by some great fortune he manages to serve out the entire 25 years – something which happens to very few indeed – then he returns to his country with grey hair, without strength or health; in his home village hardly anyone will remember him and having lost during his service all his relatives he searches for true sympathy in anyone he can find and must increase the number of disabled persons supported by the treasury, which is already very great. In addition, the law places him in a special class of people, which brings no use to anyone, least of all the state.⁴⁵

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If pensions were not granted or insufficient, and if it was not practical to return home, former soldiers could resort to begging. The British government was concerned not only by the potential threat to civilians posed by restless or violent demobilised soldiers but also by the threat to the social order posed by aggressive begging by former soldiers (and sailors). A formal report on the 'State of

⁴⁴ A study of soldiers who has served 25 years or more in the Iaroslavl' regiment in 1795 found that 130 were sent back to their 'previous domiciles' and along with 46 who were too sick to serve; 88 were sent to garrisons: Keep, *ibid.*, p. 396.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Bitis, 'Reserves', p. 187.

Mendicity in the Metropolis', provided for the House of Commons in May 1816, regarded beggars as a serious social problem in London. 'Chelsea pensioners' were said to 'beg in all directions', one pensioner being 'one of the most notorious beggars who infest the town'.⁴⁶ It was not easy to make distinctions between the genuinely distressed soldier, or his family (or for that matter between former soldiers who had or had not received a pension), and the abusive beggars who threatened passers-by and forced them to give them money. One man caught begging in 1818 defended himself by stating he had been discharged and 'ever since suffered the greatest distress'; another stated that 'after many years of fighting he was reduced to begging' but considered, perhaps not unreasonably, that he 'had the right to ask for money from those he had assisted in defending'.⁴⁷

There are very few contemporary comments on soldiers as beggars in Russia, and very little legislation, but this may not so much indicate that beggars were few in number but rather that this reflected a cultural difference between the two countries. It was so common to find beggars (and not necessarily former soldiers and their dependants, of course) outside Orthodox churches and monasteries, and for the faithful to give them some small coins, that it may not have been considered worth remarking. One of the few foreign comments on beggars was made by Friedrich Christian Weber, the Hanoverian diplomat in the early eighteenth century, who remarked on 'such a Number of Beggars and Rogues' in Moscow.⁴⁸ Vagrancy, however, could be punished by exile to Siberia in the early nineteenth century and such 'vagrants' included veterans who were caught begging and soldiers' wives who had become prostitutes. The government periodically rounded up and expelled beggars from towns, and from Moscow in particular. In 1840, 5,888 beggars were arrested in Moscow, 1,643 of whom were categorised as 'soldiers in the lower ranks' although the majority of these in fact were soldiers' wives or widows.⁴⁹

Giving charity to the less fortunate was a Christian duty for Orthodox Russians; Dostoevsky, exiled to Siberia in the mid-nineteenth century, commented on the compassion and generosity of local people, rich and poor alike, towards the 'unfortunates' in prison and on the march, especially at Christmas.⁵⁰ It may be that giving alms was more common in Russia than Britain but lest it be thought that this was exclusive to Russia, or to Orthodoxy, it should be noted that in eighteenth-century Britain it has been shown that it was common to give money to beggars, especially if the beggars were old soldiers who had lost a limb or eye

⁴⁶ *Report from the Select Committee on the State of Mendicity in The Metropolis* (House of Commons, May 1816), p. 8.

⁴⁷ *Globe*, 10 October 1818, *Public Ledger and Dudley Advertiser*, 2 September 1818.

⁴⁸ Friedrich Christian Weber, *The Present State of Russia* (London: Cass, 1968), Vol. 1, p. 128.

⁴⁹ Alexander M. Martin, *Enlightened Metropolis: Constructing Imperial Moscow, 1762–1855* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), p. 235.

⁵⁰ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Memoirs from the House of the Dead*, ed. by Ronald Hingley, transl. by J. Coulson (Oxford: OUP, 2008), p. 97; A. Gentes, *Exile, Murder and Madness, 1823–1861*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 162.

in the service of their country and who could recount military exploits, and especially at Christmas.⁵¹ It was *aggressive* begging, which the government found unacceptable, especially when beggars collected together as a ‘mob’ because of the damage it did to the image of London in particular. Beggars in the British Isles could be whipped, imprisoned and sent back to their place of birth, but many in practice continued to be present on the streets of cities.

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The British and Russian governments took very different approaches to pensions and to the care of veterans. Both, however, had subjects to control and empires to run. Neither country had an effective police force. In Britain, constables and watchmen provided an inadequate protection in cities; before the foundation of the Metropolitan police in 1829 there were some 450 constables and 4,500 watchmen in London, a city of over 1.5 million. In Russia, an urban police force was established only in 1792, but numbers were tiny and police presence in the countryside was almost non-existent until the late nineteenth century. In both countries, former soldiers were regarded as a useful means to keep order at home and to secure the frontiers of their land and overseas empires.

Both countries relied heavily on veterans in their garrison forces. In Britain Invalid Companies (later regimented and renamed Veteran Battalions) had been raised since the late seventeenth century and had provided garrison duties. Thirteen Royal Veteran Battalions were raised between 1802 and 1821 from out-pensioners whose pensions were revoked if they failed to turn up. Garrison service was for those who had ‘sufficient strength for the less laborious duties of a Garrison’ and Veteran Battalions were for those ‘less capable of active service’. That meant in practice, men were eligible if they could walk unaided (but this could include with crutches) and fire a musket.⁵²

The records of Tenth Royal Veteran Battalion (based in Cork) for 1821 contain fuller details of the men who served, including not just their age and length of service, but also the number of years they had been out-pensioners, their state of health and whether they had a family. Many had served for long periods, and some had been out-pensioners for many years (most had been out-pensioners for between 2 and 5 years but some for longer, one for 17 years). The majority were in their 40s and 50s, but there were men in their 60s and younger soldiers in their 20s who had been wounded (the regiment also included a group of boys aged 15 and 16, who were probably drummer boys). The majority of the older men were married, and many had children; one, William Townsend, who had

⁵¹ Tim Hitchcock, ‘Begging on the Streets of Eighteenth-Century London’, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (2005), pp. 485–488.

⁵² Nielson, ‘Disability’, p. 196, Cormack, *These Meritorious Objects*, pp. 208–209; see also Patricia Yu Cuva Esther, ‘Military Families and the Transformation of the British State, 1793–1815’ (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1997), p. 201. Veterans of the Napoleonic Wars were deployed as garrison troops in Australia: see Christine Wright, *Wellington’s Men in Australia: Peninsular War Veterans and the Making of Empire c. 1820–40* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 127–129.

served for 18 years, and had been an out-pensioner for 4 years after being injured in a fall, stated that he had 7 children! Their disabilities, which had not been considered too severe for service, included wounds, chronic liver disease, rheumatism, consumption, chronic dysentery and loss of one eye.⁵³ The first Royal Veteran Battalion (based in Chatham) also included soldiers aged in their 60s.⁵⁴

Garrison forces in Russia numbered some 75,000 men by 1812. They had been established in 'lines' (a series of forts) in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and new lines were constructed as the borders of the empire extended to the south and the east in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Indeed, many towns on the main rivers, such as the Volga, and in Siberia were first formed as fortified garrisons. These outposts were oases of Russian military authority, primarily fortified stockades at key vantage points where the local population was non-Russian, non-Christian and often hostile. Records illustrate that many of the soldiers who manned them were elderly; indeed, it could be said that garrisons provided a form of outdoor relief for veteran soldiers who had nowhere else to go, even before Catherine reduced the length of service. Four soldiers died of 'old age' in the garrison of Pernau (in present-day Estonia) in 1793.⁵⁵ In 1809, the garrison records of distant Gizhiga, positioned north of the Sea of Okhotsk, listed several soldiers in their 60s; one, Stepan Nizhegorod, allegedly aged 82, and listed as 'retired' but still present in the fort.⁵⁶

The vast British and Russian empires could not be held by troops alone; they also needed settlers to make the land their own. Old soldiers had been encouraged to settle in North America after the Seven Years' War, but in 1831–32 the British government made it possible for veterans to commute their pensions to a lump sum worth four years of pension and to settle in the colonies where they would be given land (100 acres for privates and 200 acres for sergeants). The settlement of Upper Canada, logistically important because of the threat of incursion from the United States, has been particularly well documented: some 1,000–1,500 veterans

⁵³ TNA, WO 25/623, return of the Tenth Royal Veteran Battalion, 1821.

⁵⁴ TNA, WO 25/606, return of the First Royal Veteran Battalion, included Isaac Pearce, aged 62, a labourer from Wiltshire.

⁵⁵ RGIA, fond 15342, opis' 1, delo 198, l. 196ob, reports, Pernau garrison, 1793; see also more general discussion in Hartley, *Russia*, p. 30.

⁵⁶ RGADA, fond 1096, opis' 1, delo 56, ll. 125, 126ob, 130, in-book, Gizhiga, 1809; for a general discussion of the fort in Gizhiga see Janet Hartley, 'Gizhiga: Military Presence and Social Encounters in Russia's Wild East', *SEER*, Vol. 86, No. 4 (2008), pp. 665–684.

⁵⁷ Documents from the Colonial Office can be found in *Chelsea Pensioners. Copies of Dispatches and Correspondence relative to Chelsea Pensioners in Upper and Lower Canada (Sir Henry Hardinge)* (House of Commons, 1939). J. K. Johnson, 'The Chelsea Pensioners in Upper Canada', *Ontario History*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (1961), pp. 273–298, which uses these documents. For later settlement by veterans in New Zealand see John M. McLellan, 'Soldiers & Colonists: Imperial Soldiers as Settlers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand' (MA diss., Victoria University of Wellington, 2017). Wright covers mostly British officers in her study of the contribution of 'Wellington's Men' to the development of Australia, economically, politically and culturally, but noted that former British troops who had served in garrisons in Australia became members of the rank and file of the New South Wales Mounted Police in 1830: Wright, *Wellington's Men*, p. 154. Three veteran battalions were formed in New South Wales in 1825 which acted as a police force; after two years of service men were given land: Michael Mann, *The Veterans* (Norwich: Michael Russell, 1997), p. 144.

moved there.⁵⁷ There is considerable evidence of the hardships encountered by the settlers: contracting cholera on the voyage to Newfoundland; bureaucratic obstacles to acquiring their promised land; inexperience and physical inability to carry out the hard labour required clearing the forest before they could even use the land. One long-term settler, Richard Bullock, recalled ‘how utterly unsuited is an old soldier ... for the business of clearing and cultivating the soil in this Country, and Climate, without practical instruction’.⁵⁸ Many were physically not fit or suited for this work; it was claimed some sold their plots ‘for a bottle of rum’. In short, many became destitute, relying on charity or begging. Official reports from the late 1830s on Upper Canada refer to the ‘distress’ and ‘suffering’ experienced by many of these settlers who had squandered their land allowance and now could be found in Toronto where they were ‘frequently seen begging on the streets with their children, and inhabiting hovels in the most unhealthy parts of the town’.⁵⁹ Some veterans, of course, were successful, mainly those who emigrated with able-bodied children and who were realistic about the physical labour that needed to be undertaken. James Ormsby, for example, a shoemaker from County Sligo who had served as a private at Waterloo, was discharged in 1830 and made his way to Canada. He experienced tragedy and hardships – he lost a daughter to cholera on the voyage and had to clear 100 acres of forest – but by 1860 the family had a productive farm.⁶⁰ It was easier for these settlers if they were given a small, more manageable, plot near a town.

It had long been a policy in Russia to settle former military men on the frontiers. This is in effect what Cossacks were – ethnically Russian and Ukrainian peasants who had fled from their landowners and had formed semi-military communities on the southern frontiers of Russia. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Cossack hosts could be moved by the Russian government to defend new frontiers, sometimes as a punishment for revolt but on other occasions simply to suit state interests. Former regular soldiers were regarded as a useful supplement to Cossacks in frontier and under-populated provinces (the land here was state land, not noble land where there would be serfs, which made resettlement easier). When Catherine II secularised Church land she designated 31 so-called ‘invalid towns’ in the south and in Siberia where veterans could settle, with incentives of the offer of land and one-off small payments of between 5 and 10 roubles per family. She later encouraged, and then forced, soldiers to resettle

⁵⁸ Quoted in Timothy D. Dube, ‘The Enrolled Pensioner Scheme in Canada West, 1851–1858, with Specific Reference to the Plan at Amherstburg’ (MA diss., University of Windsor, 1982), p. 13. See also the contemporary comments about the poor situation of veteran colonists by Anna Brownell Jameson, *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada*, 2nd edn (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc, 1990), pp. 263–266, 535–538.

⁵⁹ Quotations from *Chelsea Pensioners*, pp. 23, 33.

⁶⁰ *Soldier’s Story: James Ormsby, from Waterloo to Wilderness* (<http://ageofrevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/fig-1-James-Ormsby-Snr.jpg>, accessed 20 June 2020).

⁶¹ PSZ, Vol. 16, No. 11679, p. 77, 9 October 1762 OS, Vol. 20, No. 16201, p. 414, 1 June 1785 OS, Vol. 22, No. 16401, pp. 606–607, 3 June 1786 OS; see also the discussion about settlement of soldiers in Hartley, *Russia*, p. 20.

in the north Caucasus.⁶¹ The problem was that few veterans chose voluntarily to resettle, which goes some way to explain why in Russia the norm throughout the imperial period was forced and not voluntary relocation (and not only Cossacks – serfs were forcibly relocated to factories in the Urals; merchants and nobles had been forced to relocate to St Petersburg after its foundation by Peter I in 1703).

Some former soldiers did settle in villages, and in particular, towns.⁶² There were former soldiers in the Volga region and Siberia: Siberian towns such as Tomsk, Tobol'sk and Tara had so many former soldiers as residents that they elected their own representative to the town institutions.⁶³ As the legal categorisation of 'soldier' was hereditary it is impossible to know when these men had been discharged (and many were probably Cossacks and not soldiers in the regular army). Many suffered hardship; in 1821 it was reported from Tambov, in the heartland of European Russia, that veterans 'burdened with illness, old age, weariness, wounds' were not able to prevent encroachment on their lands by local officials.⁶⁴ As in the case of Canada, personal circumstances could make the difference between success and failure: soldiers with families, especially sons, could hope to rebuild lives as state peasants. One Cossack, Ivan Eremin, had settled in Siberia in 1760 at the age of 66; three years later it was reported that he was now 'completely infirm' but had a wife aged 44 and 7 children including 4 young sons and within two years had acquired considerable livestock and was successfully growing crops.⁶⁵ Basic skills acquired in the army could make it easier for former soldiers to re-integrate in towns, employed as shoemakers, tailors, guards or firemen – in 1832 the Saratov governor commented that veterans made good firemen⁶⁶ – although most soldiers came from peasant stock and, as in Canada, benefitted if they were also allocated a small garden plot in the town.⁶⁷

Garrisons on frontiers could lead to the formation of new family units. One of the most remote garrisons in Russia was Gizhiga. Perhaps as a relief from the appalling conditions in the fort – a dismal climate, the violence of local population (Chukchis and Koriaks, who attacked each other as well as Russian soldiers), shortages of basic foodstuffs – several men in the garrison married, presumably to indigenous women, and had families. In 1809, the garrison records listed, amongst others, Il'ia Khudiarev, aged 57, whose wife was aged 24 and Stepan Nizhegorod, aged 82, mentioned above, who had a daughter aged 16. In fact, the garrison had grown into a significant local settlement where soldiers bought huts

⁶² Shcherbinin estimated in 1841 that there were 133,658 retired soldiers in 34 provinces (*gubernii*) but it is not clear from his source how these statistics were calculated, and this is after Nicholas I had tried to reduce army numbers: Shcherbinin, *Voennyi faktor*, p. 161.

⁶³ Janet M. Hartley, *Siberia; A History of the People* (London & New York: Yale University Press, 2014), pp. 75–76, 79.

⁶⁴ Shcherbinin, *Voennyi faktor*, p. 141.

⁶⁵ Kozlova, *Liudi*, p. 286. For a discussion of former soldiers in villages in Siberia, see Hartley, *Siberia*, p. 57.

⁶⁶ Wirtschafter, *From Serf*, p. 35; see also *ibid.*, p. 164 n. 49, p. 165 n. 52–58.

⁶⁷ In 1841, Nicholas I granted all retired soldiers 50 roubles to build a house and garden, and exempted them from taxation for two years: Shcherbinin, *Voennyi faktor*, p. 160.

⁶⁸ RGADA, fond 1096, opis' 1, delo 56, ll. 125–32ob, in-book, Gizhiga, 1809.

from local people and employed local labour.⁶⁸

There is one area where Russia experimented with a completely different solution after the Napoleonic Wars – the military colonies.⁶⁹ These were settlements, first set up in 1810 but extended after 1815, comprising roughly half peasants (and their families) and half soldiers, established in Novgorod province in the north-west of European Russia and in what is now Ukraine. The soldiers would work the land when not on campaign and would (were often forced) to marry peasant girls; the children of these unions would be a separate legal category of ‘colonist’ and would serve in the army.

The colonies were an attempt to address the specific Russian problem of having to maintain an enormous standing army. At their peak the number of peasants and soldiers in these colonies could have been as high as 700,000. Although they were supposed to relieve the burden on the state, in practice the costs of establishing and maintaining the colonies were enormous. Peasants and land had to be purchased: in 1823 the state set the value rising to 1,000 roubles for 18-year old boys;⁷⁰ the second Uhlan regiment paid almost 81,000 roubles for land in Ukraine.⁷¹ The total cost to the state could have been as much as between 2 and 4 million roubles a year in the 1820s. There was a utopian as well as a practical element to the colonies. Colonies were supposed to provide a completely new separate social and legal category of the ‘military colonist’, something which officers in the regular army saw as a threat to them and to the whole social order, and this was obvious to outsiders as well. If implemented, it would create a ‘Imperium in Imperio’, warned Viscount Strangford, the British Ambassador to Russia, and ‘the anomaly of a half educated military population dependent on the Crown, placed at the Centre of a half educated peasantry slaves to a Nobility, who themselves tremble at the Nod of The Despot’ which would ‘change the whole face of the Empire’.⁷² The colonies were intended to relieve the burden of recruitment rather than the care of veterans, who were not discussed at all, but had the project been a success in the long term the veterans presumably would have been cared for within the colony. Colonies were an expensive failure, hated by both peasants and soldiers, and were abolished by Nicholas I after a series of bloody revolts culminating in a major revolt in Novgorod in 1831.

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In the 1830s, official reviews of the costs and sustainability took place in both

⁶⁹ There is an extensive research on military colonies in English and Russia: for a recent analysis see Hartley, *Russia*, pp. 190–208, and Hartley, ‘War, Economy and Utopianism: Russia after the Napoleonic Era’, in *War, Demobilization and Memory: the Legacy of War in the Era of Atlantic Revolutions*, ed. by Alan Forrest, Karen Hagemann and Michael Rowe (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2016), pp. 84–99.

⁷⁰ PSZ, Vol, 38, No. 29,312, pp. 768–770, 13 February 1823 OS.

⁷¹ RGVIA, fond 405, opis’ 3, delo 364, ll. 179ob, Military colonies papers on the purchase of land, 1824–25.

⁷² The full text of Strangford’s memorandum is reproduced in A. Bitis and Janet Hartley, ‘The Military Colonies in 1826’, SEER, Vol. 78, No. 2 (2000), pp. 321–330 (quotation on p. 329).

Britain and Russia. In Britain, the main, in fact the only, issue was financial. The cost of maintaining the army dropped as numbers fell – from some £43 million in 1815 to £10.7 million in 1820 and to under £8 million in 1836.⁷³ As army costs dropped so pension costs rose; indeed, the encouragement given to former soldiers to settle in Canada and other colonies was in part an attempt to defray the costs of their pensions. The total cost of pensions and half pay for officers, army and navy after 1815 was in the region of £5 million per year,⁷⁴ a cost which was considered to be unsustainable. In 1826 the pension was again defined as a ‘bounty’ or gift from the Crown and eligibility for the pension was weakened.⁷⁵ Pensions awarded between 1834 and 1839 were investigated by Major Alexander Tulloch, who was convinced that the disabilities of many veterans had been exaggerated, in some cases to the point of fraud. The result was a significant scaling back of the number of men entitled to pensions and the transfer of responsibility for pensions from the Chelsea Hospital to the War Office.⁷⁶ This may well have caused distress to individuals but did not fundamentally change the British method of treating veterans.

In Russia, the costs of maintaining such an enormous standing army were simply unsustainable. The Napoleonic Wars almost bankrupted Russia but military expenditure continued after the end of the war: between 1826 and 1831 Russia spent around 160 million roubles a year on its army, roughly 40 per cent of its state budget.⁷⁷ In 1831, Nicholas I set up a commission to examine recruitment to the army, including the possibility of establishing national militias and a temporary, short service, reserve. The commission was not able to resolve the issue for a number of reasons, but the main stumbling block to major reform was inability to widen the pool from which men could be recruited, and the underlying issue there was the right and privileges, including exemption from conscription, of the privileged classes. The issue in Russia, therefore, was not only cost but, more fundamentally, the rigidity of the Russian social structure, which was also at the root of the inability to re-integrate veterans into the community. Major reform of the army only took place in the 1870s, after the shock of defeat in the Crimean War had led to a growing belief that the current, primarily serf, army could no longer ensure the success which Russian armies had achieved in the wars of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

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I should like to thank Andrew Cormack, Alan Forrest and Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter for their generous help and advice which improved this article.

⁷³ Peter Burroughs, ‘An Unreformed Army? 1815–1868’, in *The Oxford History of the British Army*, ed. by David G. Chandler and Ian Beckett (Oxford: OUP, 1994), p. 163.

⁷⁴ N. Gash, ‘After Waterloo: British Society and the Legacy of the Napoleonic Wars’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 28 (1978), p. 147.

⁷⁵ Hutt, *Papers*, p. 87.

⁷⁶ Cookson, ‘Alexander Tulloch’, pp. 60–82.

⁷⁷ Bitis, ‘Reserves’, p. 186.