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# RECRUITMENT IN THE DISTRICT OF POITIERS: 1793

By

JOHN GERARD GALLAHER

The French National Convention passed three laws in late February 1793. These laws were the first step in the direction of a return to total war.<sup>1</sup> For the first time in modern history a nation applied the principle of universal compulsory military service on a large scale.<sup>2</sup> Eighteenth-century armies were made up of mercenaries and men recruited by force. Through long service these men generally were transformed into professional soldiers. However, mercenary soldiers were expensive and could be afforded only by wealthy nations such as France and England. In Central and Eastern Europe—that is, in Prussia, Austria, and Russia—recruits formed the greater part of the armies. The method of recruiting approached universal military service, at least in theory; but in practice it was far from being universal. Conscription fell almost exclusively upon the peasants and poor townsmen. Furthermore, since the length of service was long and many men tended to remain in the army once they had been recruited, the number of recruits needed each year was very small. Even in time of war this system of recruitment was not a great burden on the lower classes, for pre-revolutionary armies were not large.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Major-General J. F. C. Fuller in *The Conduct of War, 1789-1961* has the following to say concerning the levy of 300,000 men: "This was the first step taken toward conscription—the return to tribal warfare. Primitive tribes are armed hordes, in which every man is a warrior, and because the entire tribe engages in war, warfare is total." (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1961), p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Universal compulsory military service was not known since the decline of the Middle Ages. The *Ordonanza* of 1506 established compulsory military service in Florence for all men between the ages of eighteen and thirty.

<sup>3</sup> The French army stood at 160,000 men at the close of the old regime, according to Jules Leverier. They were formed in 104 regiments of infantry, of which 23 were made up of foreigners (11 Swiss, 8 German, 3 Irish, and 1 "Liégeois"). More than one-third of these men had served sixteen years or more in the army. (Jules Leverier, *La Naissance de l'Armée Nationale: 1789-1794* [Paris: Editions Sociales Internationales, 1939] p. 20.) The Prussian army at the same time (1786) stood at 200,000. (Walter Goerlitz, *History of the German General Staff* [New York: Praeger, 1953], p. 5.) "Marshal Saxe considered the ideal size of an army to be 46,000 men—34,000 foot and 12,000 horse—say 50,000 with gunner, etc." (Fuller, *The Conduct of War, 1789-1961*, p. 21).

When France went to war with Austria and Prussia in the spring of 1792, the Legislative Assembly found, among other deficiencies, that the army was not large enough to cope with the threatening invasion. The nation was declared to be in danger, and Frenchmen were asked to defend their newly won freedom. This call to arms was not compulsory. Yet France responded to this patriotic appeal, and the ranks of the army were swollen with volunteers during the summer months. After Valmy and the withdrawal of the enemy forces to the Rhine, the nation no longer seemed in danger, and men no longer felt the need to enlist in the army. Moreover, the men who had joined during the summer to save their nation from invasion now felt that their task was done. The immediate danger had passed, and many of them simply went home.

In January of the following year a report on the condition of the republican army was read to the Convention. It revealed the necessity of increasing the military strength of the nation. Knowing that the relatively large number of men deemed necessary could not be raised simply by calling for volunteers, as had been done in the past, the Convention resorted to compulsory military service.

On February 24, 1793, the National Convention passed three laws which became known by the date on which they were enacted.<sup>4</sup> They were concerned with increasing the strength of the army by 300,000. The calling of so large a number of men at one time into the army was unparalleled in previous French history. The first of these laws, entitled "Loi qui constitue les grades nationales en état de réquisition permanente," is short and precise. "All French citizens," it states, "between the age of eighteen and forty inclusive, not married, or widowers without children, are on call until the quota of 300,000 men has been filled."<sup>5</sup> The second, the "Loi sur la levée de trois cents mille hommes, et sur le mode à suivre pour opérer cette levée," contains twenty-four arti-

<sup>4</sup> Of the three laws passed on February 24, 1793, the first dealt with the reorganization of the army. It had little to do with recruitment and was generally not thought of as being part of the "Law of February 24."

<sup>5</sup> The Laws of February 24 are given in their entirety in the *Moniteur*, February 26, 1793. (Translations have been made by the author.)

cles. These articles cover nearly every phase of the new draft. Besides repeating the age groups affected (Article XII), they made provision for those who would be exempted from the general levy. The physically unfit, civilian officials, men engaged in essential industries, etc.,<sup>6</sup> were not bound by the new law. Nor were these the only ones who could avoid service. Article XVI of the law reads: "Every citizen who will be called to march to the defense of the fatherland, . . . will have the choice (*aura la faculté*) of having himself replaced by a citizen capable of bearing arms, at least eighteen years old and accepted by the general council of the commune." Thus even if a man were chosen by lot to form a part of the contingent from his commune, legally, if not often in practice, he could furnish a replacement.<sup>7</sup>

This levy of 300,000 men decreed by the National Convention on February 24 was not the first request for troops made by the government. As early as November 1791, six months before France declared war on Austria, the first battalion of volunteers had marched off from the Department of the Vienne. This unit was composed of 552 officers and men. After the opening of hostilities in April of the following year, the Convention passed a law, on July 22, which provided for an increase in the total strength of the army by about 63,000 men. Though this was a request, and no provision was made for compulsory recruitment, the departments could hardly ignore it. The number of men requested from the Vienne was set at 800. Not only was this quota filled, but an additional 300 men volunteered. These men formed the 2nd Battalion of Volunteers, plus three companies. The Depart-

<sup>6</sup> Article XX reads as follows: "Ne seront point compris dans l'appel général pour cette levée, savoir: 1) Ceux que des défauts de conformation des mettent hors d'état de porter des armes. 2) Les administrateurs composant les directoires de département et de district. 3) Les procureurs généraux syndics. 4) Les secrétaires généraux de district. 5) les maires et officiers municipaux, et procureurs de Commune. 6) Les membres des tribunaux civils et criminels, le greffier, les commissaires nationaux, les juges de paix. 7) Les receveurs de district. 8) Les receveurs et directeurs d'enregistrement. 9) Les ouvriers employés à la fabrication des armes et des poudres."

<sup>7</sup> In searching the archives at Poitiers the author found no incident of a man who had been selected for service finding another to take his place. It did happen that a draftee found to be physically unfit was replaced, but this was done by the communal authorities.

ment had thus already furnished some 1,650 men when, on January 25, 1793, the National Convention decreed the strength of the army should be raised to 500,000. In the month following this decree some volunteers came forward, but they were few.

The question of supplying the new volunteers was not one to be overlooked by the provincial authorities, upon whom the major part of this obligation fell. More than 1,650 men had already been outfitted from the Department of the Vienne. What muskets and uniforms had existed were issued to the men of the 1st and 2nd Battalions of Volunteers. In order to supply the new men, who were gathering in Poitiers as a result of the decree of January 25, the Departmental Directors appointed two commissioners, Citizens Vougelade and Dardillac, who were instructed to secure what provisions they could in Poitiers. They proceeded with such vigor that they were able to report two days later, on the 25th of February, that equipment had been found to outfit a battalion of 800 men—each with a leather knapsack, cartridge-box, baldrick, and musket. This order was placed with one M. Malteste to be delivered within two months.<sup>8</sup>

This then was the situation in the Vienne on March 2, when the news arrived from Paris that a new levy had been decreed on February 24. Instructions to the Commissioner of the Department, dated March 1 and signed by M. Beurnonville, Minister of War, informed him that the contingent from the Vienne had been set at 3,806 men. This figure had been arrived at proportionately with respect to population. The Department, which was divided into six administrative districts, portioned the total number demanded in accordance with the population of each district as follows:

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<sup>8</sup> Archives départementales de la Vienne (hereafter cited as "Arch. Vienne"), L. 272, *Registre des délibérations du Directoire du département de la Vienne*, Registre #6, February 23-25, 1793.

NAME OF DISTRICT	POPULATION	NUMBER OF MEN DEMANDED
Poitiers	67,119	990
Chatellerault	50,966	751
Loudun	31,664	467
Civray	32,519	480
Montmorillon	49,498	700
Lusignan	26,328	388
<hr/> Total	<hr/> 258,094	<hr/> 3,806 <sup>9</sup>

The districts, in their turn, divided the number of men required amongst their cantons. The quota for the District of Poitiers, having been set at 990 men, was divided among its eleven cantons according to their population. The canton of Poitiers—322; Neuville—121; Mirebeau—85; Mouzailles—78; Jaunais—69; Villedieu—60; St. Julien—59; Croutelle—59; Dissay—55; Vouillé—53; Nouaillé—29.<sup>10</sup> The men from the Vienne were to assemble at Sedan and become part of the Army of the Ardennes.<sup>11</sup>

In accordance with Article VI of the new law, the Departmental Directors had met in order to portion the 3,806 men demanded amongst the six districts. This meeting took place the same day on which they received the news of the new levy (March 2). However, the proportionment immediately raised a problem. Article VII of the law stated that "in this distribution the administrative bodies will take into consideration the number of men who have already been supplied." But neither the cantons nor the districts had kept any accurate records of the volunteers who had already departed. It was, therefore, impossible to abide by this article. The proportionment was thus made strictly in accordance with the population of the six districts.<sup>12</sup> This unfortunate, though unavoidable, step was to have repercussions; for some communes would refuse to raise the full number of men demanded because of the large number of volunteers who had

<sup>9</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 137.

<sup>10</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 138.

<sup>11</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 139. The army of the Ardennes was to be strengthened by 32,757 men. This number was to be made up of men sent from eight departments: Ardennes, Marne, Meuse, Loire, Mayenne et Loire, Sarthe, Mayenne, and Vienne.

<sup>12</sup> See pp. 249-50.

already departed. At this same meeting of the Directors, commissioners were appointed to the six districts in accordance with Article VIII "in order to follow and keep under surveillance in the various communes the operations relating to the draft." Citizen Grillaud was appointed for the District of Poitiers.

The Law of February 24 outlined the procedure to be followed for raising the new levy. The departmental officials were to dispatch the law to the district officers within twenty-four hours of having received it. The district, in its turn, was to inform the municipalities. Article IX stated that the municipal officers were to make the law known to the people as soon as they received information of the number of men required from their commune. Articles X and XI went on to say:

During the first three days following this first notification, a register will be kept into which those who wish to devote themselves voluntarily to the defense of the country may inscribe their names.

In case the voluntary inscription does not produce the number of men set for each commune, the citizens will be expected to complete it without delay, and to accomplish this they will adopt by a majority vote the means which they find most suitable.

No one was so optimistic as to believe that 3,806 volunteers could be found in a department which had already raised 1,650, of which 1,100 had enrolled in the past six months. The law-makers in Paris, having foreseen this, included in the new law provisions for a compulsory draft which would force men into the army. The number of men demanded from the Vienne was between 20% and 25% of the men eligible for the draft. This was a high ratio by eighteenth-century standards. In addition, the number of men demanded from each town or community was based on the total population rather than on the number of eligible men between eighteen and forty years of age. Thus in two communities with an equal number of draftable men but an unequal population, the number of draftees demanded was unequal. But even had allowances been made

for this, and even if Article VII had been functional,<sup>13</sup> it is unlikely that the Poitevins would have welcomed the law any more enthusiastically. The *cahiers* from the parishes of Poitou in 1789 bear witness to the hatred of these people towards compulsory military service.<sup>14</sup>

On March 8, nonetheless, the first two men were drafted from the District of Poitiers. When no volunteers were found in the commune of Croutelle (just south of Poitiers in the canton of the same name) during the three days allotted, the eight men not exempt from the law were assembled. Jacques Vesjar and Pierre Marcouché were chosen by lot in an atmosphere of complete calm.<sup>15</sup> The manner in which this selection took place was typical of the procedure followed throughout the District. Eight pieces of paper were placed in a hat, one for each of the eligible men. Six of the papers were blank. The remaining two had the word "volunteer" written on them. Each man stepped forward and drew from the hat one of the papers, and the two who drew the papers marked "volunteer" formed the contingent from the commune.<sup>16</sup> There were variations of this method, but all tended to follow this simple procedure. The drawing generally took place in the common meeting room of the town or before the tree of liberty. Vouillé furnishes the only example in the District where the drawing took place in the church with the hat placed upon the altar.<sup>17</sup>

The first resistance to the new conscription law in the District of Poitiers occurred on March 10. In the course of the three days following the first announcement of the law at Chasseneuil, in the canton of Jaunais, four volunteers had enlisted. As the quota for the community had been set at twelve, those eligible to be drafted—fifty-three in number—were assembled on the morning of the 10th. The men were first given a lecture explaining the new law. This took place

<sup>13</sup> Article VII provided for the adjustment of the number of men required from a commune in accordance with the number of volunteers already furnished.

<sup>14</sup> M. Henri Couturier, *La Préparation des États Généraux de 1789 en Poitou* (Poitiers: Société française d'imprimerie, 1909).

<sup>15</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 138, *Procès-verbal*, Croutelle, March 8, 1793.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 138.



without opposition. But when the municipal officers began organizing the drawing, a murmur of discontent was heard. The murmur quickly grew into a loud protest. According to the section of the *procès-verbal* dated that day,<sup>18</sup> the leaders of the resistance were the three Guellot brothers and the two Abonneau brothers from the hamlet of Bannillit, and the two Poupin brothers, Antoine and Jean. All seven of these men, according to Chasseneuil officials, were "domestiques" of noble families. Led by these young men the assembly refused to allow the draft to take place, declaring "that there was liberty in France and that they wished neither to draw [lots] nor to leave [for the army]." <sup>19</sup> One of the young rebels, Guionnet by name, said "that if the republic had not taken up arms against the 'émigrés,' these latter would have said nothing nor would they have taken up arms against her [the republic]." The turmoil reached its height when the leaders of the resistance threatened that they "would behead the first person who drew a lot." The civil officials tried all in their power to calm the rising agitation, but nothing could prevail against the anger of the mob. They therefore retired, deeming the situation temporarily hopeless.<sup>20</sup>

On the second day following this display of resistance, March 12, the eight men necessary to complete the contingent from Chasseneuil were chosen by lot without incident. The *procès-verbal* dated that day contained a list of the twelve men demanded from the commune. Four of the names are those of the volunteers. Of the remaining eight, one—Jean Poupin—had been among the leaders of the uprising. In order to understand this rapid change in tempers it is necessary to follow the events which led to armed intervention in another town just a few miles to the north of Chasseneuil.

Dissais was the seat of the canton which bore its name. The town was to provide fifteen of the canton's fifty-five man contingent. No volunteers had been found during the three days following the announcement of the new law. Therefore, in accordance with that law, the eligible men of the com-

<sup>18</sup> The document was written in three parts, dated March 8, 10, and 12.

<sup>19</sup> "que la liberté était en France et qu'ils ne veulent ni tirer ni partir."

<sup>20</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 138, *Procès-verbal*, Chasseneuil, March 10.

muné were summoned on March 10 (the same day on which the resistance took place at Chasseneuil). This assembly proved to be even more riotous than that of its neighbor's. The table at which the recruiting was taking place was overturned, and the municipal officers themselves were mistreated.<sup>21</sup> The news of this resistance reached Poitiers the following day. The *procès-verbal* named the two Seguin brothers and Jean Blaezeau as the leaders. The Departmental Directors, in a special meeting, decided to make an example of the Dissais affair; for they feared the resistance would spread throughout the Department.<sup>22</sup> They were apparently not aware of the trouble which took place at Chasseneuil, as no mention was made of it at that meeting. That very night a lieutenant with twelve men marched from Poitiers to Dissais, a distance of sixteen kilometers. Departing at 7 p.m., they reached the sleeping town about eleven o'clock and made their arrests with little difficulty. One of the Seguin brothers, having been warned of their coming, made good his escape.<sup>23</sup> Besides restoring calm at Dissais, these arrests were sufficient to squelch the resistance at Chasseneuil. Recruitment took place in the latter village, as previously mentioned, on the 12th and in the former within the week. But these few arrests had little effect on the District as a whole. Trouble broke out in Poitiers itself only two days later.

It was made known on March 8 that the contingent to be furnished by the canton of Poitiers had been set at 322 men. That such a large number of volunteers would be found during the three days allowed was unthinkable. Just how many men did volunteer, for surely there were some, is not known as the register for the canton has not been preserved. In order to fill the quota the municipal officers set Tuesday, March 12, as the day for the draft. Already on the 8th the city council had found it necessary to appoint a health officer, M. Maury, to examine the large number of men demanding exemption from the draft because of physical unfitness. The following day it became necessary to appoint

<sup>21</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 138, *Procès-verbal, Dissais*, March 10.

<sup>22</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 272, March 11.

<sup>23</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 139.

two assistants to M. Maury, as he was unable to cope with the task alone.<sup>24</sup>

The municipal officers of Poitiers decided on the 11th to take special precautions to prevent the sort of trouble which had taken place at Dissais. The young men of the city were to assemble the following morning in St. Peter's Cathedral. The authorities therefore ordered the great doors of the church closed, leaving open only two small doors which were to be guarded by national guardsmen. The guardsmen were instructed to allow only the young men summoned to enter. In addition to this, a unit of sixty guardsmen were stationed in the courtyard of the bishop's residence, the entrance of which opened onto the square before the Cathedral. These measures were deemed sufficient to prevent any disorder; or, in the event that trouble occurred, to put it down.<sup>25</sup>

The time set for the assembly in St. Peter's was seven o'clock in the morning. Within one hour the young men of Poitiers were in open revolt. Just as at Chasseneuil and Dissais, they refused to allow the draft to take place. The guardsmen at the Cathedral were disarmed, and the great doors swung open. When the unit stationed in the bishop's courtyard was called into action, they fraternized with the insurgents. Fortunately for the city authorities the mob, having moved to Gilliers Park, milled about until noon without taking any action. This failure to act on the part of the rebels was undoubtedly due to a lack of organization and leadership in what seems to have been a spontaneous, rather than a planned rising. At length, after four hours of indecision, the young men decided to march to the Palace of Justice and there to release the prisoners being held on charges of rebellion against the new draft law. While the insurgents remained inactive during the morning hours, a joint sitting of the Departmental Directors and of the District Directors of Poitiers was held in the Palace. It was decided in the meeting to strengthen the garrison of the Palace and to close all of its

<sup>24</sup> Arch. Poitiers, *Registre des délibérations du Conseil Général de la commune*, #201, March 8-9, 1793.

<sup>25</sup> Arch. Poitiers, *Registre des délibérations du Conseil Général de la commune*, #201, March 11, 1793.

doors. This would render the semifortified medieval structure safe against an unarmed mob—so long as the garrison remained loyal. When the insurgents arrived before the Palace of Justice and realized that soldiers and guardsmen were advancing on them from behind with an artillery piece, they dispersed.<sup>26</sup> The rising was thus put down without bloodshed.

It was an uneasy calm which prevailed in Poitiers following that turbulent morning. On the same afternoon the authorities attempted to continue the recruitment in the Cathedral, but it proved fruitless as the number of young men present was but a fraction of those eligible for the draft. That night the streets of the city were patrolled by armed troops. The civil authorities then decided to hold the recruiting on the following day, not in the Cathedral where it had proved unworkable, but in the sections. Each of the six sections into which the city was divided would furnish a contingent in proportion to its population. This move was designed to divide the rebellious young men into smaller groups which could be more easily controlled. The action proved to be a wise one, and recruitment took place in the sections without incident. Not only did the recruitment begin on the 13th, but the leaders of the previous day's insurrection were also arrested.

Among whom [wrote M. Thibaudeau in his memoirs<sup>27</sup>] were found three servants of "émigrés". One of them, the servant of the Marquise de Moulins-Rochefort, wrote to her from prison: "I am held in the house of the provost marshal for the reason that you know." She sent him a bed.<sup>28</sup>

There were strong suspicions in Poitiers that a linkage existed between the rising against the new draft law and

<sup>26</sup> Antoine R. H. Thibaudeau, *Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de L'Ouest*, Vol. XVIII (second series, 1895); *Mes Souvenirs sur les principaux événements de la Révolution principalement ceux du département de la Vienne*, pp. 102-103.

<sup>27</sup> Antoine R. H. Thibaudeau, who is found to be quite reliable, was born in Poitiers on November 2, 1739. He was a deputy to the Estates General from the Third Estate in 1789 and in 1791 was appointed president of the "tribunal criminel" of the Department of the Vienne. He became Procureur Syndic of the Department in 1792 and held this post at the time of the recruitment of the 300,000 men. He was imprisoned during the Reign of Terror but reinstated after the 9th of Thermidor. Under the Empire Thibaudeau became a member of the Legislative Assembly and a member of the Legion of Honor. He died on February 20, 1813, in Poitiers.

<sup>28</sup> Thibaudeau, p. 103.

the émigrés. Therefore, "the department ordered by decree all male servants to leave town within twenty-four hours and to return to their families, with few exceptions—these being less than sixteen, those over fifty, and those who were married."<sup>29</sup>

The pacification of the departmental seat apparently had some effect on the surrounding countryside, though insurrections in the other cantons of the District of Poitiers did occur after the 12th and were equally turbulent and of longer duration. In Mézeau, in the canton of Croutelle, first signs of resistance appeared as early as March 10 and continued for several days after order had been restored in Poitiers. A brief letter dated that Sunday reads as follows: "They decided amongst themselves [the eligible men] not to be the first to begin, but as soon as they would see some groups which would set a precedent that they would conform immediately."<sup>30</sup> Two days later the citizens of Ligugé, in the same canton, gathered in the main square to hear the new law read and explained. Just at a time when the parish officials were about to begin the selection of the five men demanded from their municipality, about forty insurgents from the neighboring parish of Iteuil<sup>31</sup> appeared and put an end to the proceedings before a single man had been drafted. The intruders declared "that they had no intention of leaving as long as the heads of the administrative bodies and all the citizens of the city would not be at their head; thus they persuaded those of the parish of Ligugé not to take part" in the draft.<sup>32</sup> The assembly thus dispersed, and it was not until March 20 that the parish officials were able to fill their quota of five men.

On the morning following (March 13) the failure to execute the new law at Ligugé an equally unsuccessful attempt was made in the neighboring village of Beruges. The eligible

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 138, March 10, Mézeaux.

<sup>31</sup> The only document available from Iteuil is dated March 27 and makes no mention of the events which took place on the 12th. It does, however, list the eleven men drafted from the parish. Presumably the recruiting did not take place until March 27, or the 26th at the earliest, as the communal official reported the proceedings as soon as possible.

<sup>32</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 138, March 12, Ligugé.

men were assembled at nine o'clock that morning in front of the church and lectured on the new draft law. Complete calm prevailed until a large number of men from Fontaine-le-Comte arrived on the scene armed with sticks and clubs.<sup>33</sup> The newcomers declared, according to the *procès-verbal* from Beruges, that men were free in France since the planting of the trees of liberty, "and that they would cut the throat of the first who would draw a lot."<sup>34</sup> Wine was then brought out, and after "avoir bien bu" the insurgents departed in the direction of Bouneuil-sous-Biard. The local officers did not try to continue the recruitment.

On March 14 in the adjacent village of Biard the citizens were gathered in the main square at nine o'clock in order to fill the parish's quota of two men. As there had been no volunteers, the officials asked the young men in what manner they wished the two men to be selected. With full knowledge of the resistance on the part of the citizens of Poitiers two days earlier, but apparently not so fully informed of the operation of recruitment which began in that city on the 13th, the young men of Biard "asked that the assembly be put off until a later date, for they desired to learn what means would be adopted by the citizens of Poitiers."<sup>35</sup> Recruitment was thus postponed seven days until the 21st of the month.

The 14th of March was also set by the municipal officers of Smarves, in the canton of Villedieu, as the day on which the contingent from their town should be selected. Although the register had been opened since the afternoon of the 10th, no one had volunteered. When the assembly of eligible men

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<sup>33</sup> The *procès-verbal* from Fontaine-le-Comte, dated March 21, relates the following account concerning recruitment: When no volunteers came forward during the three days allotted, the young men of the commune were assembled. Having been lectured on the law, the prospective recruits were asked in what manner they would like to conduct the recruitment. The answer which the authorities received was that they would like to follow the example of the city of Poitiers when it became known how the law had been carried out there. (No date is given for this assembly. However, as peaceful recruiting began in Poitiers, not six miles to the north, on March 13, this assembly was undoubtedly on or before that date.) The officials therefore postponed any further action until March 21. No mention is made of violence or unrest. Nor is any mention made of the men of Fontaine-le-Comte moving in a body in the direction of Beruges. (Arch. Vienne, L. 138, *Procès-verbal* from Fontaine-le-Comte, March 21.)

<sup>34</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 138, *Procès-verbal*, March 13, Beruges.

<sup>35</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 138, March 14, Biard.

met in the town's public meeting hall, they demanded that the gathering be moved into the open air before the tree of liberty. This being done the group was given a lecture on the new law. But when the men of Smarves were told that eight of them must be chosen to serve in the army, they replied "that they were before the tree of liberty and that they all wanted to enjoy it, and . . . that they would leave rather than draw lots." They went on to say they had no intention of filling the quota set down by the District. Further, they demanded that the municipal officers of the commune should take an oath not to enforce the Law of February 24. This oath taken, the assembly dispersed.<sup>36</sup>

By March 14, according to the cantonal officers, nearly the entire canton of Villedieu was in open revolt. On that day they wrote to the Departmental Directors in Poitiers asking for help. In this letter they also named M. Thouvenin and the servants of M. de Corneuille as the leaders of the resistance.<sup>37</sup> Immediate action was taken once again by the authorities. A sizable force was sent from Poitiers into the canton to cope with the situation. An order of arrest was issued against the servants of M. de Corneuille, which could also be used against M. de Corneuille himself. Documents relative to the execution of these orders are completely lacking. It can only be assumed that they were carried out successfully as the canton was pacified and within ten days had furnished its contingent.

In the canton of Saint Julien resistance to the Law of February 24 was less explosive. This was due in part to the energetic work of the commissioner of recruitment, M. Pruneau, who did much to assure the smooth functioning of the draft. On March 12 Pruneau wrote to the administrators in Poitiers from Jardres:

I have the pleasant satisfaction of announcing to you that the Commune of Jardres has voluntarily furnished its contingent without there being any other movement than that of enthusiasm for freedom. It is none the less advisable to take efficient mea-

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<sup>36</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 138, March 14, Smarves.

<sup>37</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 138, March 14, Villedieu.

tures to avoid discouragement, perhaps even disorders, which malicious individuals are seeking to cause.<sup>38</sup>

In another letter to the district administrators, dated March 15 at Anxaumont, Pruneau mentions that a volunteer had been found to fill that parish's contingent. He then added that

since he is that servant of the Lord Abbot of Vaugelade, a very worthy aristocrat, and since he is from Saint Savin and a bad subject though a fair man, it seems to me that it would be prudent to keep him stationed in Poitiers [à Poitiers casserné], otherwise he would be very capable of deserting.<sup>39</sup>

Another example of ill-will on the part of the young men of the District is recorded in a letter from the commissioner of recruitment, M. Bontemps, for the canton of Dissais. On March 15 he wrote the following account from Montamisé concerning recruitment which took place the previous morning.

I send to you a *procès-verbal* of the operations of Montamisé. There were no instructions, but the citizens were none the less rebellious to the law; led into error by those who are the leaders of the parish.

Actually, as soon as the assembly convened, the mayor and the priest of the parish stated that Montamisé was only to furnish eight men, not twelve. This was due as much to comparison with the contingent supplied by the parish of St. Georges as to the fact that four volunteers had previously left from Montamisé. In vain I told them that St. Georges had . . . only sixty-three men—and that it had supplied thirteen; in vain I summoned them to be obedient and to have the confidence they should have in the constituted authorities. This public discussion, for which I blamed the mayor and the priest, was a pretext for the citizens to refuse their contingent and not to take any measure to fill it. Had I insisted, there would have been an insurrection; and so I took care not to do so. It was necessary therefore to give in, in spite of the fact that this set a harmful example.<sup>40</sup>

All of the District of Poitiers was by no means opposed to the Law of February 24. In many of the communes the re-

<sup>38</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 138, Pruneau, March 12, Jardres.

<sup>39</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 138, Pruneau, March 15, Anxaumont.

<sup>40</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 138, Bontemps, March 15, Montamisé.



quired number of men was raised without resistance. In some parishes enthusiasm was even to be found. But one must proceed with caution when examining the *procès-verbaux* from the various cantons, as they can be misleading. Generally the cantonal officials wished to present the recruitment in their area in as favorable a light as possible. The term "volunteer," for example, is used not only for those men who enlisted in the army of their own free will but also for those who were chosen by lot, and who would have preferred to have remained at home. These latter "volunteers" would today be referred to as "draftees."

There are also examples of communes filling their quotas with "volunteers" of a different nature. At Dienné, in the canton of Villedieu, no volunteers were found during the three days the register was open. It became apparent that the five men required would have to be chosen by lot. Whereupon the young men of the parish, who did not wish to run the risk of being drafted, took up a collection to which was added a sum by the communal officials. The amount collected was to be divided among the five men who would "volunteer" to form the commune's contingent, thus eliminating the necessity of a draft. In the *procès-verbal* dated at Dienné that day, March 11, the following statement is found concerning this matter:

The municipality, in order to show the zeal of this commune's inhabitants and their generosity to the general defenders of this commune, offers to them the following sums: from the mayor—50 [livres]; Gabignon—10; Autebert—5; curé—10; Paulet—3; Rognon—10; Charles—5; Lidon—5.

Further, the young men collected the sum of 160 livres among themselves. . . . By this means the five citizens were found to form the contingent of this commune.<sup>41</sup>

This example of offering large sums of money to encourage volunteers is but one of a number to be found in the *procès-verbaux* and letters of the various communes in the District. From Traversonne, in the canton of Vouillé, there are three full pages of speeches and contributions by leading citizens to

<sup>41</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 138, March 11, Dienné.

encourage volunteers. Needless to say, the commune had little difficulty in finding four volunteers when it became known that 664 livres had been collected by the commune to be divided equally amongst those who would form its contingent. The following is an example taken from Traversonne's *procès-verbal* dated March 12:

Other citizens animated by the same zeal made gifts to the brave volunteers as follows: Citizen Roux Lamé gave the sum of 9 [livres]; René Cheottet—5; Roux le Je—5; Joseph Villeu—1L. 10s; Moreou Maruhât—1L. 5s; Antone Cobelin—15s; Citizen Vermin, the mayor—3; the procurer of the commune—1; and Moreau Mal—1L. 19s.<sup>42</sup>

The *procès-verbal* from Leaignes, in the canton of Mirebeau, dated the same day as that from Traversonne relates the account of the enlistment of Charles Guillon. Having signed up of his own free will, the letter states, he was given 130 livres which had been collected by the young men of the parish. Though the document does not make it clear whether M. Guillon knew of the money before signing the register, it may be fairly well assumed. Guillon was a native of the commune, and the collection was made before he enlisted.<sup>43</sup> Another example of securing volunteers by offering money is found in the *procès-verbal* from Seneché, in the canton of Neuville. The document, dated March 13, includes a list of thirty-four names and the amount contributed by each. Six of the donations were in excess of 20 livres. Two volunteers quickly stepped forward to divide the 284 livres 5s which had been collected. Neither of the two men, Jauque Davy and Pierre Hervè, were from the commune of Seneché.<sup>44</sup> This latter fact was not unusual. It often happened that men who apparently volunteered to gain the large sums of money being offered were not residents of the commune in which they enlisted. Two of the five volunteers from Dienné were not natives of that commune, nor were two of the four men who formed the contingent from Traversonne.

<sup>42</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 138, March 12, *Procès-verbal*, Traversonne.

<sup>43</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 138, March 12, Leaignes.

<sup>44</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 138, March 13, Seneché.

How many of the communes offered sums of money to encourage volunteers cannot be accurately estimated because of the lack of reliable information. It may only be assumed that the practice was not rare, though by no means universal. In many communes the recruitment took place as a matter of course. In still others volunteers were found without resorting to the draft and apparently without the expectation of receiving a sum of money. The *procès verbal* from Boegnaux, in the canton of St. Julien, is a typical example of the latter. After the usual introductory paragraph concerning the arrival of the news of the Law of February 24, it reads as follows:

Immediately René Savin—twenty years old, Pierre Merignet—about twenty-nine years old, Mathiu Martineau—around thirty-seven years old, and Jean Venieu—about twenty-three, all four of this commune, presented themselves; they voluntarily entered their names to march to the defense of their country with express obligation to serve in the army of the Republic upon first notice, and to submit and conform to the laws and decrees of the national assembly.<sup>45</sup>

In the village of Quincay, canton of Vouillé, ten volunteers immediately enlisted in the army when the register was opened on March 14.<sup>46</sup> Nor was it necessary to draft men in the village of Liniers, in St. Julien. A letter dated March 20, declares that five volunteers enlisted shortly after the register had been opened.

One of the five men [it goes on to say] who had been called to make up the contingent demanded of our commune for the recruitment of the army was not in condition to bear arms; as a result a man had to be chosen from among the eligible men of the commune to fill his place, by the most suitable means which they could find, in order to fill their quota. Then René Guiland, twenty years old, stepped forward voluntarily and enlisted to go to the defense of the country in danger.<sup>47</sup>

The contingent from the commune of Neuville was set at

<sup>45</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 138, March 15, Boegnaux.

<sup>46</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 138, March 14, Quincay.

<sup>47</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 138, March 20, Liniers.

forty-seven men. However, "after having displayed the register," reads the report dated March 12, "it was found that there were only forty-six citizens inscribed." These forty-six men had been deemed "the least vital to their fathers, mothers, relatives, and to agriculture." But the commune was unable to find one more man who was not essential. "It would be totally impossible," the letter went on, "to find at this time one man who was not of the greatest necessity for agriculture." The communal officials therefore asked for a few days time in order to complete their quota.<sup>48</sup> The request was granted.

In some communes the zeal to aid "la patrie" produced more volunteers than were required by the law. At Migné, for example, in the canton of Jannais, the contingent was set at twenty-five men, but twenty-eight volunteers marched to the defense of the country.<sup>49</sup> The contingent from Vendevre, in the canton of Neuville, was set at thirty men. Yet the list of recruits from the canton gives the names of thirty-two men from that commune. Under the heading of "observations" is to be found: "This commune supplied two men in excess of their contingent."<sup>50</sup> The commune of Latille, in the canton of Vouillé, also surpassed its requirements. "This commune," reads the cantonal observation, "supplied one more man than their contingent called for."<sup>51</sup> A similar statement is found opposite the names of the seven recruits from the commune of Liniers, St. Julien, which furnished one man over its quota.<sup>52</sup>

From the little village of Bournezeaux, in the northern canton of Mirebeau, came one of the most enthusiastic *procès-verbaux* of the district. "Our youth," it reads, "burning with patriotism and having the purest of intentions, exclaimed unanimously that they all wished to leave to destroy forever the aristocracy and its mad worshipers; thus we find ourselves under the pleasant and fortunate necessity of en-

<sup>48</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 138, March 12, Neuville.

<sup>49</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 138. Taken from the list of recruits from the canton of Jannais.

<sup>50</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 138, cantonal recruitment list from Neuville.

<sup>51</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 138, cantonal recruitment list from Vouillé.

<sup>52</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 138, cantonal recruitment list from St. Julien.

rolling the first and most furious of them.”<sup>53</sup> It should be noted, however, that no more than the three men required to fill their contingent enlisted from the commune of Bournezeaux.

In all, and despite the resistance in many communes, the number of men who marched to the defense of their country from the District of Poitiers was slightly over the 990 demanded by the Law of February 24. Every commune in the eleven cantons furnished at least the required number of men to make up this quota. It is difficult to make general statements concerning the levy, as reliable information is not always plentiful. However, some interesting observations may be made within the limitations of the available material. Each canton was obliged to furnish a list of their recruits to the district officers. The style was uniform. There was a place for the recruit's name, his place of birth, age, profession, date of his enlistment, the municipality from which he was recruited, the total number from each municipality, and observations. These recruiting lists have been preserved from nine of the eleven cantons. Unfortunately, those from the cantons of Croutelle, which sent 59 men, and Poitiers, which sent 322 men, are missing. Those which still exist list some 675 recruits. However, the documents are filled out rather sparsely.

Of the total number of men whose names appear on the nine lists, the age is given for 275; the place of birth for only 194; and the occupation of a mere 102. The average age for these 275 men is twenty-three and a half years. Of this number 65 were under the age of twenty, while 41 of them were thirty years of age or more. None of the men whose ages are given were over thirty-nine; but three of them were under eighteen, the minimum age for the draft.<sup>54</sup> These ages may be considered as a good cross section of the 675 men registered on the recruitment lists, but it should be borne in mind that none of the figures came from the urban canton of Poitiers.

<sup>53</sup> Arch. Vienne, L. 138, March 13, Bournezeaux.

<sup>54</sup> One volunteer was seventeen years of age while the other two were sixteen.

The listings of the birth places of the newly-drafted men show, as would be expected, that the majority of draftees were taken from their native communes. However, it can be noted that not all were from the commune, or even the canton, in which they were recruited. As mentioned earlier, volunteers were found by offering large sums of money. These volunteers were often transient workers who hired themselves out to the army as they would have to any other employer.

Eighteen different occupations are listed among the 102 recorded. Well over half of this number, 64 by count, are listed as servants. Of the remaining 38, 10 were weavers, 6 day laborers, 3 hairdressers, 3 sawyers, 3 "maréchal," and 2 bakers.<sup>55</sup>

Contemporaries of the 1793 draft were very quick to blame the émigrés for the resistance to the Law of February 24. The relationship between the émigrés and the resistance to the new law would, in itself, make an interesting study. It will be sufficient here to note that one of the main reasons for the failure of the resistance was the lack of organization and leadership. Had the men of Poitiers, for example, been organized prior to the assembly of March 12, and had they had sufficient leadership, the Palace of Justice would have undoubtedly been taken and the draft at least postponed. What does seem apparent is that the servants of the émigrés and the remaining aristocrats did take the lead in opposing the new law. In both Chasseneuil and Dissais the domestics of émigrés were named as the leaders of the insurgents. In Villedieu the domestic servants of an aristocrat and a nobleman himself were accused of leading the resistance. It would appear from the accusations and evidence that these men did take the lead, but there is no evidence that the resistance was planned. On the contrary, the facts indicate that the risings

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<sup>55</sup> The figures given should be viewed with the knowledge of the complete absence of the recruiting list from the canton of Poitiers. The information lacking from the canton of Croutelle would most likely have little effect on the figures given as it is a rural canton similar to the other nine for which figures are available. But the occupations from the canton of Poitiers, which furnished nearly one-third of the recruits from the District, could be quite revealing. The age groupings would probably conform relatively close to those found of the outlying cantons, but the various occupations of the city recruits would have been interesting to note.

were spontaneous. It seems rather that the families of the émigrés and the aristocracy still living in the District of Poitiers only gave their support to the resistance once it had begun.

Resistance to the Law of February 24 proved entirely fruitless in the District of Poitiers. The District's required contingent to the departmental quota was more than filled, and a number of the leaders of the revolts were brought to trial. Nevertheless, "those measures of national defense clashed with the resistance of the rural population of Poitou, who for the first time were subdued to universal compulsory military service, which recalled to them the hateful memory of the militia."<sup>56</sup> The men of the District of Poitiers did not go to the extreme in their protests against the new draft as did those of the Vendée. Yet in some parts of the District there was definite resistance to any form of forced conscription—even for the protection of the *Patrie*.

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<sup>56</sup> P. Boissonnade, *Histoire de Poitou* (Paris: Ancienne Librairie Furne Boivin et C<sup>ie</sup>, 1915), p. 260.