

## FORUM

### **Toward an Army of Honor: The Moral Evolution of the French Army, 1789–1815**

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Marcus Claudius Marcellus . . . wanted to raise a temple to honor and virtue. . . . But the priests he consulted responded that a single temple would not be sufficient for these two dignities, so Marcellus ordered the building of two temples, constructed in such a manner that it was necessary to pass by that of virtue in order to arrive at the temple of honor.<sup>1</sup>

As he spoke these words before the Corps Législatif on the evening of 19 May 1802, Mathieu Dumas urged that body to create a new institution, the Legion of Honor. Dumas believed Virtue and Honor were compatible and that Honor should be achieved through Virtue. His logic, however, disguised the essentially incompatible natures of Virtue and Honor under the rule of Napoleon. In terms of Dumas's rhetorical metaphor, the First Consul constructed his temple to Honor on the ruins of the temple to Virtue. But this edifice was not made of stone; it was composed of men. It was his army.

In this article I argue that after 1794, Revolutionary Virtue gave way to Napoleonic Honor as the official, and to a significant degree, real basis of martial motivation. The Revolutionary government expected its soldiers to fight without concern for personal reward and to

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<sup>1</sup> Mathieu Dumas, *Souvenirs du lieutenant général comte Mathieu Dumas de 1770–1836* (Paris, 1839), 3:233–34.

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sacrifice for the good of the people and the state. On the other hand, Napoleon encouraged the personal interest of the soldier and strived to link it to that of the Empire by a system of awards and preferments. This does not mean that all soldiers of the Year II were selfless and sober advocates of the Rights of Man, free from personal ambition; nor, is it true that the soldiers of the Empire were devoid of public spirit and incapable of self-sacrifice. Rather, it was a question of which strings those who governed chose to pull, of which motivations they thought most appropriate and effective, and which they, therefore, cultivated. The definitions of Virtue and Honor employed here are quite specific and intentionally provocative. Such terminology may pique some readers, but so much the better, if the end result is to stimulate a more diligent inquiry into what differentiated the victors of Fleurus from those of Austerlitz.

### **Honor, Virtue, and Honors**

Honor is a formidable concept. One of the most complex terms in the English language, it encompasses several levels of meaning, rich in moral connotations and emotional overtones. In its different forms it is basic to the military. The honor of the West Point motto, "Duty, Honor, Country," demands a high, internalized standard of behavior. That is a private and ethical face of honor, which in a military environment implies rectitude and bravery.

For the purposes of this conceptual article the definitions of the terms "Virtue" and "Honor" derive from Montesquieu, an unsurpassed analyst of European politics, society, and morality in the age of Enlightenment. His *Spirit of the Laws* divided governments into democracies, monarchies, and despotisms. Each form of government possessed a nature and a principle. "There is this difference between the nature of government and its principle. . . . The one is its particular structure, and the other the human passions that make it move."<sup>2</sup> The principle of democracy was Virtue, that of monarchy, Honor, and that of despotism, Fear. "The corruption of each government," he cautioned, "begins almost always by that of its principles."<sup>3</sup> Virtue and Honor were public motivations, not private attributes.

Virtue constituted a selfless concern for the public good, includ-

<sup>2</sup> Montesquieu, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Daniel Oster (Paris, 1964), 536. "Monarchical government supposes, as we have said, preeminence, ranks, and even a noblesse d'origine. The nature of honor is to demand preferences and distinctions; it is therefore, by the thing itself, placed in this government" (p. 538).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 570.

ing a love of country. It was essentially egalitarian, based on a rough equality of wealth and position. Montesquieu seems to have regarded his *Virtue* as a thing of the past, best represented in the Greek and Roman republics of the ancient world.

Honor was quite another thing—an aristocratic sentiment vital to the functioning of monarchy. Honor was the ruling force in the political and social *ancien régime* he so intelligently observed. And Honor was hardly selfless; rather, it sought personal privileges. “The nature of honor is to demand preferences and distinctions.”<sup>4</sup> Such preferences and distinctions could possess monetary value, but more importantly, they were the currency of status. Because the monarch was the source of the sought-after privileges, Honor harnessed the self-interest of the aristocrat to the chariot of the monarchy. “Honor makes all the parts of the body politic move, . . . and it results that everyone acts for the common good, believing himself to be pursuing only his particular interests.”<sup>5</sup>

Honor as incentive made manipulation possible through the granting of “honors.” Although honors may not be integral to other definitions of honor, in the context of Montesquieu’s Honor, the two are inextricably bound together. Honor is the principle; honors are the instruments by which the principle operates. Where is the lure of Honor as Montesquieu defined it if there are no honors to be gained? The latter is implied by the former, so there is no confusion in linking one with the other.

There is little doubt that prominent Revolutionary leaders praised *Virtue* and disdained Honor because they saw these qualities in very much the same way as Montesquieu did. Maximilien Robespierre believed in the necessity of *Virtue* in a republic and argued that citizens should “think of nothing but the good of the country and the interests of humanity.”<sup>6</sup> Robespierre was too realistic to hold an easy confidence in *Virtue*; therefore, he argued that it must be fostered, or even compelled, not simply recognized. His Republic of *Virtue* included the Terror. Nonetheless, *Virtue* was to be the basis of Republican conduct; Robespierre could claim in his speech of 7 May 1794 that “Republicanism is virtue.”

On the other hand, important Jacobins condemned Honor because they saw it as essentially aristocratic and self-serving, just as

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 538.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> J. M. Thompson, *Robespierre and the French Revolution* (New York, 1962), 113.

Montesquieu had. During an address to the Arras academy, Lazare Carnot condemned Honor as a “prejudice of the age” by which “the different peoples of the earth have enslaved themselves.”<sup>7</sup> In a discourse on the organization of the National Guard, delivered to the Jacobins, Robespierre attacked Honor, reviling “that childish enthusiasm, that spirit, at once tyrannical and servile, vile and superb, that feudal extravagance decorated with the name of honor.” He warned that should such Honor triumph, “you will see the National Guard degenerate into a military aristocracy, as docile in oppressing citizens as prompt to prostrate itself before the will of the monarch.”<sup>8</sup> In another speech he asked, “What is this honor which is allied with perjury, which supposes neither love of the *Patrie* nor respect for humanity nor fidelity to the most sacred duties of the citizen?” In the same breath he tagged Honor as “the particular patrimony of the officer corps.” He then juxtaposed “feudal honor” against “morality and virtue.”<sup>9</sup> Clearly, the Incorruptible despised Honor as counterrevolutionary. The Hébertist minister of war, Jean-Baptiste Bouchotte agreed: “The word military honor does not suit republics at all; it is necessary to substitute for it that of virtue, courage, patriotism, probity.”<sup>10</sup>

Definitions of Virtue and Honor first set out in the *Spirit of the Laws* and later reflected in the rhetoric of the Revolution provide a useful and suggestive set of criteria against which to gauge the morale and motivation of the army. In this article I propose that French political leaders abandoned an Army of Virtue that emphasized selfless dedication to a republic and embraced an Army of Honor that encouraged the self-concerned pursuit of honors awarded by a would-be monarch, Napoleon. This was the most fundamental shift, but the march toward an Army of Honor involved more. In order to appreciate other variables in the changing moral equation, this consideration of Montesquieu’s political theory must extend into a brief exposition of combat motivation theory.

<sup>7</sup> Carnot in Berthe, ed. *Maximilien Robespierre, ‘Les Droits et l’état des bâtards’, Lazare Carnot, ‘Le Pouvoir de l’habitude’* (Arras, 1971), 150–51, cited by Norman Hampson, “The French Revolution and the Nationalization of Honor,” in *War and Society*, ed. M. R. D. Foot (London, 1973), 204.

<sup>8</sup> *Oeuvres de Maximilien Robespierre*, ed. Marc Bouloiseau, Georges Lefebvre, and Albert Soboul (Paris, 1950), *Discours*, 6:633–34. My thanks to the Hampson article for directing my attention to this discourse. In this same condemnation of Honor, Robespierre expressed a fear that “military rank will become the sole object of their ambition,” that is, that pursuit of promotion was allied with Honor.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, (Paris, 1952), 7:476. Again I owe a debt to the Hampson essay.

<sup>10</sup> August Herlaut, *Le Colonel Bouchotte* (Paris, 1946), 2:137.

### Theory of Combat Motivation

In modern armies, compliance with military orders is not simply an attempt to avoid punishment or to gain material reward; liberal societies no longer tolerate brutal discipline or killing for hire.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, modern tactical systems require commitment and initiative which cannot be gained by beatings or payment. Thus, coercive and remunerative compliance have faded, whereas normative compliance—whereby the soldier willingly obeys, conforming to personal or societal norms—has moved to the fore.<sup>12</sup>

The rewards for normative compliance are basically symbolic—approval, respect, or renown. The soldier accepts a scale of values belonging to some collectivity beyond himself and expects rewards from it. In modern combat effectiveness theory, the collectivity could belong to one or more of three categories—the sociopolitical system, the military unit, and the primary group. The first of these includes nation, ideology, ethnic group and many of the “-isms” of the world. The second relates to an entire branch of service, like the Marine Corps; an elite type of unit, like paratroops; or a specific unit, from division to battalion. The third category of collectivity, the primary group, includes only those soldiers who live in daily contact with one another—a section, squad, or platoon, at most. Self-interest need not disappear; rather, self-interest can aid this compliance system to the extent that the soldier sees his own survival best served by the success of his unit or comrades.

For the purposes of this article, it is important to recognize monarchy as a special case within the first level of collectivity, the sociopolitical system. Monarchy was a collectivity because a monarch was both an individual and an institution, embodying a distinct form of the government and society. In early modern Europe a monarch was more than a symbol or a leader. By the seventeenth century, monarchy had acquired a mystical quality; the crowned head was invested with authority by divine providence. He or she had legitimacy without having to prove ability. Deference to the monarch did not debase an individual, and monarchs were genuinely respected as ideals of paternal

<sup>11</sup> For a brief discussion of combat effectiveness theory, see John A. Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic: Motivation and Tactics in the Army of Revolutionary France, 1791–94* (Champaign, Ill., 1984), 21–40. A very useful treatment of the entire field of combat motivation is Anthony Kellett, *Combat Motivation: The Behavior of Men in Battle* (Boston, 1982).

<sup>12</sup> For an excellent short discussion of compliance systems in a military context, see Stephen D. Wesbrook, “The Potential for Military Disintegration” in *Combat Effectiveness*, ed. Sam C. Sarkesian (Beverly Hills, 1980), 244–78.

order and justice by their subjects. It might even be argued that monarchy is really a fourth distinct type of collectivity, overlooked by modern theory because true monarchy is an anachronism in our age.<sup>13</sup>

### **Normative Compliance, the Army of Virtue, and the Army of Honor**

The regulars and volunteers who defended France under the Terror were driven by a set of factors peculiar to the height of revolutionary fervor, 1792–94. They fought in a unique political and military setting. In terms of the formula of normative compliance, the motivational system emphasized the ideals and accomplishments of the Revolution while it suppressed as much as possible the importance of the military unit. The benefit side of self-interest was strongly discouraged, while a code of self-sacrifice ruled, culminating in what I have labeled “the myth of the patriotic death.”<sup>14</sup> A strong primary group—the *ordinaire*—adopted and enforced these standards. The result was what can be called an Army of Virtue.

Napoleon’s Grande armée fought in a very different political and emotional environment. It was not just a matter of time and place. Napoleon changed the emphasis of the French motivational system. He encouraged identification with the military unit, making esprit de corps an essential ingredient. Primary group cohesion remained, though it probably weakened at crucial periods, particularly in 1813 and 1814. He played to the soldier’s self-interest through awards and promotions. Discounting Revolutionary values, the Emperor tapped motivational resources once available only to legitimate monarchs. The appeal to self-interest and the concern with monarchical values made his an Army of Honor.

This moral transformation did not take place in one step, it evolved through a number of stages.<sup>15</sup> Obviously, the political system

<sup>13</sup> Modern theory might also benefit from including religion as an external collectivity. It is tempting to lump it in with “-isms” in the sociopolitical system, but its divine justification makes this awkward. Standards and rewards are seen as emanating from a God, not the people or the party. Religious motivation can operate without the desire to satisfy any human entity.

<sup>14</sup> See Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 173–76, for a discussion of the myth of the patriotic death.

<sup>15</sup> I suggest that this evolution occurred in eight distinct stages, during which the situations and personnel changed so dramatically that it gave rise to significantly different kinds of fighting forces. The first stage ran from the outbreak of the Revolution through mid-1791, and the second from mid-1791 through the victories of 1794 or early 1795. The third era included the years from the beginning of the Directory through demobilization after the Peace of Amiens. The fourth period began in 1802 and ran through Tilsit, followed by the fifth, which can be dated 1808–12. The sixth stage was that of the hastily composed forces that defended France in 1813 and 1814. The seventh era encompassed the brief restoration of Louis XVIII. And the eighth and final period comprised those expedient and desperate acts of the Hundred Days.

of France underwent a number of scene changes between 1789 and 1815, and the military challenge altered even more frequently. But it also must be recognized that flux was the rule in the ranks as well. During the Revolutionary era the French recruited military personnel through several extraordinary measures: the Volunteers of 1791 produced one hundred thousand men; the Volunteers of 1792 may have added over two hundred thousand more; the February 1793 "Levy of three hundred thousand" put about one hundred-fifty thousand in the ranks; and the famous *levée en masse* rounded up another three hundred thousand for service.<sup>16</sup> With these transfusions of new blood, the army reached a paper high of one million in mid-1794. But this peak soon fell, declining to as few as three hundred-eighty thousand in 1797.<sup>17</sup> This collapse in fighting strength drove the Directory to adopt the Jourdan Law on conscription in 1798. Napoleon relied upon conscription to complete his ranks; between 1800 and 1814 he raised some two million Frenchmen.<sup>18</sup> As new recruits produced by the Jourdan Law took their places alongside what was left of the Revolutionary veterans, the army's memory of the Revolution faded. For example, of the one hundred-sixty thousand troops the Senate voted to raise for Napoleon in 1809, few had even been born when the Bastille fell.<sup>19</sup>

Although useful works have been written on Napoleon's soldiers, their lives and mentalities, no one—not even the meticulous Morvan—adequately develops the idea of change over time.<sup>20</sup> This task could

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of the various revolutionary levies and the numbers of men they produced, see Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 49–57.

<sup>17</sup> Claude-Louis Petiet, "Rapport sur l'administration de son département," an V [1796–1797], in Jean-Paul Bertaud, *La Révolution armée* (Paris, 1979), 271.

<sup>18</sup> Jacques Godechot, *Les Institutions de la France sous la Révolution et l'Empire* (Paris, 1968), 603.

<sup>19</sup> Detailed figures for 1809 can be found in Jean Morvan, *Le Soldat impérial*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1904), 1:65–67. The Senate voted to call up eighty thousand men from the classes of 1806–1809 plus eighty thousand from the class of 1810. Twenty-thousand were to be assigned to the reserve. The class of 1810 was composed of young men who would reach their twentieth birthday in 1810. As time went on, more and more men from later classes were called up early. So in 1813, Napoleon summoned teenagers from the classes of 1815 and 1816. Morvan, *Le Soldat impérial*, 1:1–120 contains an exhaustive discussion of recruitment under Napoleon. At times, however, his discussion is so detailed and complex that it is hard to derive summary figures from his work.

<sup>20</sup> Popular but still first class accounts of life and opinion among Napoleon's soldiers are Marcel Baldet, *La Vie quotidienne dans les armées de Napoléon* (Paris, 1964) and Maurice Choury, *Les Grogards et Napoléon* (Paris, 1968). Colonel Vachée, *Napoleon at Work*, trans. G. Frederic Lees (London, 1914) is a useful study of the Emperor's style of command. The most scholarly work on French soldiers under Napoleon remains Jean Morvan, *Le Soldat impérial*. A more recent and excellent treatment of the soldiers of the Revolution that includes comments on soldiers during Napoleon's first campaigns is Jean-Paul Bertaud, *La Vie quotidienne des soldats de la Révolution, 1789–1799* (Paris, 1985). All five of these works were used extensively in the preparation of this article.

consume several dissertations. The most important and elusive issue to be probed by future studies would be the evolving influence of nationalist sentiment and political ideology on the troops of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras. In this article the charge is more modest—to indicate the rising appeal to Honor after the Terror.

### **The Alienation of the Army of Virtue during the Directory**

The army was certainly one of Virtue between 1791 and 1794, and it retained some elements of Virtue in subsequent years. In fact, it was those elements which alienated it from the Directory. But during the period 1795–1801, the army began its transformation into the Army of Honor. This stage in the evolution of the French army made Napoleonic appeals to Honor appropriate and, perhaps, necessary.

An Army of Virtue may be by nature a short-lived phenomenon, requiring an emotional intensity only possible in a crisis situation. If the crisis is a permanent one, as may be the case for Israel, Virtue might be able to sustain itself, but this must be a rare situation. There is little momentum to pure Virtue; it requires pressure to continue. Perhaps as well, war by its very nature will corrupt Virtue over time. But in the case of the French army, there was more to it.

After the fall of Robespierre, the government seems to have “stepped away” from its army, or to have forgotten it to some degree. The campaign of political education, considered so important from April 1793 through Thermidor, stopped.<sup>21</sup> At the height of this government effort, seven or eight political journals were sent to the front on a regular basis. After August 1794, the government made no new subscriptions to journals, so that by the end of the year, the only political publication sent to the armies was the *Bulletin of the National Convention*. In a sense, this switch meant that the government no longer saw its generals as a threat; it also might be said that it was no longer courting its army. But the cancellation of journals also cut off one major channel by which the army was made to feel that its sacrifices were appreciated, that the community was supplying the kind of symbolic rewards required by normative compliance. The end of this conduit of communication with the army would in time contribute to a great sense of isolation from the French civil community.

Time in service also helped to foster this sense of isolation by creating a new professionalism. The conscript of 1793, still a civilian at

<sup>21</sup> See Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 119–62, on journals and political education.

heart, had become a professional soldier by 1797. His horizons were limited by the military experience behind him and the tasks before him.<sup>22</sup> His sense of isolation was also a product of the fact that he was now fighting outside the borders of the old France. The soldier came increasingly to identify with the army rather than the state and to see the army as a bastion of what was best in the Revolution—such as self-sacrifice in the name of the common good and careers open to talent. The self-serving officials and the corrupt Directory became his enemies.

An incident in Italy demonstrated the frustration felt by an army that took pride in a tradition of Virtue but saw Virtue undermined. When French troops occupied Rome in February 1798, some troops, with the apparent collusion of leading officers, pillaged well-to-do residences. These thefts sickened a great many soldiers who feared that such actions brought discredit to the French army. On 27 February 1798, therefore, thousands of soldiers gathered in the Panthéon to sign a protest to be sent to the Directory. It read in part: "Three major causes have brought about this assembly: horror, need, and the unexpected appearance of General Masséna to take command of this army."<sup>23</sup> The petition went on to express revulsion at the conduct of the pillagers, conduct that "would dishonor the entire French nation in the eyes of the Universe." It then complained of the misery the army had suffered over the last five months. Finally, it stated the "general indignation of all the army on the arrival of General Masséna" known to the army by his "immorality," by his "acts of brigandage and violence." This document testifies to a conception on the part of many soldiers that they represented a better standard of Virtue, although ranking officers were lining their pockets as the army suffered. A separate petition written by officers condemned as well the civil agents of the Directory, "some ravaging and corrupt administrations, plunged day and night in luxury and debauchery." Masséna's response was to suppress the petitions, and the Directory eventually ordered General Bonaparte to carry out an inquiry into the sedition. Nine mutineers were punished; the profiteers kept their gains.

The troops had reason to believe that the men in power in Paris had little concern for the welfare of the soldiers at the front. Is it any wonder that the troops of the Alexandria garrison, when asked to

<sup>22</sup> As Bertaud states, "Time passed, and the army . . . was transformed into an army of professionals more and more separated from their country." Bertaud, *La Vie quotidienne*, 115.

<sup>23</sup> Texts of petitions in Choury, *Les Grognaards*, 36–38.

renew their oath to the Republic in 1798 on the anniversary of its founding, showed little enthusiasm and did not echo the cries of “Vive la République!”<sup>24</sup> The state no longer cared for them as it had in 1793–1794. The army even saw the population as growing indifferent to their fate. Bertaud states that soldiers visiting home in France had strange stories to tell: “A year or two years before, they were considered as the best of citizens and people did everything they could to give them some days of relaxation and to feed them suitably. Now, with an empty purse, people refused them credit.”<sup>25</sup> As Bertaud put it, “The *Patrie* was corrupt, contemptuous; it was also forgetful and ungrateful.”<sup>26</sup>

The very lack of concern brought a decline in the standards of conduct that had been enforced under the Terror. The army had been discouraged from pillaging under the Terror. This is not to say it was not done, but in the Army of the North, for example, it was severely punished.<sup>27</sup> In the Sambre-et-Meuse, one set of passwords even ran “Pillage, Republican, Horror.”<sup>28</sup> But under the Directory, a lack of proper supply forced soldiers to forage on their own, even when they felt it was against their code of conduct.

This sense of abandonment created the opportunity for commanders to use the army to intervene in politics. It is no good to say that the coups of 1797 and 1799 were only the work of the generals. By 1797 the common soldier was willing to be an accomplice. In 1792 and 1793 Lafayette and Dumouriez had tried to march their armies against the government and failed completely because the soldiers refused to follow them.

### **Napoleon’s Rejection of Revolution and Recourse to Honor**

It would be naïve to assume a constant character of motivation through the great changes which rocked the epoch from the convening of the

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>25</sup> Bertaud, *La Révolution armée*, 290.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 292.

<sup>27</sup> See Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 113–17, for punishment of pillage in the Army of the North.

<sup>28</sup> In Bertaud, *La Vie quotidienne*, 109. As Sergeant Fricasse with the same army testified in his *Journal de marche*: “This is why the enemies of the Republic wanted us to give ourselves over to pillage; these perfidious individuals knew that an army without discipline is a defeated army. . . . The love of order and of discipline, the respect for people and property, always distinguished the Army of Sambre et Meuse.” Jacques Fricasse, *Journal de marche du sergent Fricasse de la 127<sup>e</sup> demi-brigade* (Paris, 1882), 55–56. For another example, see the comments by General Roch Godart on his efforts to control and punish pillage in 1796. Roch Godart, *Mémoires du général baron Roch Godart*, ed. J. B. Antoine (Paris, 1895), 37–8.

Estates General in 1789 to the defeat of Waterloo in 1815.<sup>29</sup> It began with revolutionary euphoria that engendered a sense of crusade, or at least a determination to defend a new liberal order in France. The Revolutionary soldier had recognized that he must fight to protect both his homeland and his new society. But eventually that sense of a grand radical experiment was lost as France became a land of stable compromise with the Napoleonic settlement.

Napoleon detested revolution, believing it to be "one of the greatest evils by which mankind can be visited."<sup>30</sup> He went to great lengths to keep the genie of 1793 corked, even in 1814, when it might have risen to drive the allies from French soil. "I neither could nor would become King of the Jacquerie."<sup>31</sup>

With the old basis of Revolutionary Virtue outside his reach, it is only reasonable that a master of manipulation like Napoleon should appeal to monarchical Honor. As defined by Montesquieu, Honor was a method of binding a powerful intermediary body to the good of the state by appealing to its own desires for preferment and privilege. For Montesquieu, the crucial intermediary body was the aristocracy; for Napoleon, no body was more important than the army.

In a very real sense, the people had been a primary source of normative rewards at the height of the Revolution. However, the growing social isolation of the army and the lack of a real cause to unite it with the populace once again broke the links which created and gave value to such rewards.<sup>32</sup> Under Napoleon, the bases of recognition and reward could only be the primary group, the military unit, and the new monarch, Napoleon himself.

### The *Ordinaire* Perseveres

There are several explanations of the term "the little Corporal." Permit this poetic interpretation. The corporal served as *chef d'ordinaire*

<sup>29</sup> Choury suggests that the child of the peasant of 1789 was as hostile to the ancien régime as was his father: "His son, marching with the Emperor against the European monarchies allied with the Bourbons and the émigré nobles, defended his rights as a new property owner." Choury, *Les Grognaards*, 188. Perhaps. However, Jean Morvan passes a much harsher judgment on Imperial soldiers: "Issued from a vain nation momentarily turned toward material pleasures, led by commanders whose triumphs revealed their own faults, . . . [and] without rigorous discipline, . . . the soldiers lost their moral forces and declined in enthusiasm with each campaign." Morvan, 496–97.

<sup>30</sup> Emmanuel de las Cases, *Journal of the Private Life and Conversations of the Emperor Napoleon at Saint Helena* (London, 1823), vol. 3, part 6, p. 77.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>32</sup> Morvan, *Le Soldat impérial*, 2:485–86, argues that even correspondence between soldiers and their families became rare, partially because of a drop in literacy.

—the only man with rank who shared his daily life with the common soldiers. Therefore, the term “corporal” represented both the authority of command and the comradeship of the *ordinaire*.

Certainly, we need to know more about the *ordinaire* under Napoleon. Field regulations dictated that it was to be composed of roughly fifteen men, as much as possible from the same squad or section.<sup>33</sup> These fifteen men were supposed to eat together, but it is possible that the heavy emphasis on foraging and pillage under Napoleon robbed the *ordinaire* of this function. They were also required to sleep together.<sup>34</sup> But reliance on the bivouac and makeshift hovels could have eroded this practice.

Even if it can be demonstrated that the *ordinaire* survived intact, which it probably did, there is still more to say about the effect of this primary group on combat effectiveness. One argument in current debate posits that the primary group is simply a sociological phenomenon, a group of men that will always form. To proponents of such a point of view, the issues of a war have little influence over the conduct of soldiers. In contrast to this view, others stress that the primary group is not just an assemblage of individuals, but a conduit and enforcer of standards.<sup>35</sup> In this structures-versus-standards debate, the notion of standards requires consideration of a sense of purpose and cause, the mentality of an army.

The standards enforced by the *ordinaire* during the Terror reflected those of the Republic of Virtue. Those enforced under Napoleon must have incorporated the values of the Empire of Honor.

### Esprit de corps

Napoleon's program of Honor encouraged identification with the military unit. To the extent that the soldier identified with his unit, there was great pressure upon him to live up to its standards while at the

<sup>33</sup> Archives de la Guerre, MR 1897, “Service des armées en campagne: Comparaison des règlements antérieurs à 1809, jusqu'à et y compris 1809.” New field service regulations were drafted after Wagram, Dumas was part of the effort. Dumas, *Souvenirs*, 3:388.

<sup>34</sup> The *ordinaire* was required to sleep together in one or two tents. When troops of the Grande armée encamped at Boulogne erected barracks for themselves, they each held fifteen men, that is to say one *ordinaire*. Baldet, *La Vie . . . dans les armées*, 65.

<sup>35</sup> M. B. Smith gave the classic definition of the essential functions of this small band of comrades: “It set and enforced group standards of behavior, and it supported and sustained the individual in stresses he would otherwise not have been able to withstand.” M. B. Smith, “Combat Motivation among Ground Troops,” in *The American Soldier: Combat and Its Aftermath*, ed. Samuel Stouffer et al. (Princeton, 1949), 130–31. The emphasis is his.

same time he would place greater value on the promotions and distinctions he might gain within that unit.

In contrast, the government of the Terror feared esprit de corps. Not surprisingly, revolutionary regimes in general tend to suspect this basic motivation, because it encourages the soldier to see himself primarily as a member of the armed forces. Such intense loyalty threatens the individual's identification with the revolution or with the people. The Committee of Public Safety regarded the officer corps as a threat and believed that loyalty to a regiment or battalion was a string by which officers might mislead their men. The amalgame of 1793–1794, which mixed together line and volunteer battalions to create entirely new units, was designed to accomplish many purposes, among them limiting the growth of esprit de corps. The minister of war, Bouchotte, stated that the amalgame was intended “to inhibit that esprit de corps which grows daily through the secret maneuvers of the officers of the line.”<sup>36</sup>

Conservative regimes need have no such fear of esprit de corps precisely because it separates the individual from the populace at large and emphasizes loyalty to an institution of the state. In fact, a strong attachment to the military unit can take up the slack in commitment to people or ideology.

Napoleon fostered identification with the army as a whole, but of greater importance was identification with a particular unit. The evolution of French regimental flags provides a colorful example of the manner in which Napoleon encouraged esprit de corps.<sup>37</sup> At the outset of the Revolutionary wars, each battalion of volunteers had its own unique flag sewn by women from its region.<sup>38</sup> With the amalgame, flags were standardized. While the first and third battalions of each demi-brigade carried flags following a pattern particular to their own demi-brigade, second battalions carried one of a design common to all units. At the center was the fasces, topped with a liberty bonnet. The inscription read “République française” and “Discipline et obéissance aux Lois militaires”—a fitting flag for an Army of Virtue.

In a ceremony of 14 July 1797, Bonaparte issued new flags to his Army of Italy. These were now of similar pattern for all three battal-

<sup>36</sup> Bouchotte in Camille Rousset, *Les Volontaires, 1791–1794* (Paris, 1892), 198–99.

<sup>37</sup> Interesting discussions of flags can be found in Morvan, *Le Soldat impérial*, 1:265–69, and in Baldet, *La Vie . . . dans les armées*, chap. X, “Du drapeau républicain à l’aigle impériale,” 124–35. Unless otherwise noted, details presented here concerning flags have been taken from these two sources.

<sup>38</sup> See Bertaud, *La Vie quotidienne*, 113–15, concerning the importance and character of the flags carried by volunteer battalions.

ions in the demi-brigade. At the corners, the new flags stated alternatively the number of the battalion and the number of the demi-brigade. At the center of the flag, space was left for words of praise with which Napoleon might recognize distinguished service of a particular unit, such as "I know you well, 18th, you will beat the enemy."<sup>39</sup> But now the primary emblem of the regiment was no longer the cloth of the flag but the eagle that surmounted the flag pole, in fact the entire banner was simply known as the "eagle." These new emblems were distributed by Napoleon in the 5 December 1804 ceremony memorialized by David's painting. Napoleon addressed his troops:

Soldiers, here are your flags. These eagles will always serve as your rallying point. They will go everywhere your Emperor will judge necessary for the defense of his throne and his people. You swear to sacrifice your life to defend them and to maintain them constantly by your courage on the road to victory; swear it!<sup>40</sup>

Some of these standards would again come to carry inscriptions unique to the particular regiment; however, in 1811 the old inscriptions were jettisoned, and in their place were put the names of the battles in which the regiment had fought.

The eagles were redesigned in 1812. These flags were the first blue, white, and red tricolors of today's pattern. These new banners omitted any mention of the French people. On one face of the flag was inscribed "L'empereur Napoléon au . . . régiment de . . . ," and the other face would carry the names of the battles that the regiment had fought. At the same time a three-man flag-guard was stipulated.<sup>41</sup> Understandably, the eagles were suppressed by the Bourbons in 1814 but returned during the Hundred Days.

That these eagles were highly prized by the regiments that bore them is witnessed by the heroics performed to protect and save them.<sup>42</sup> Their history demonstrates both the promotion of esprit de corps by Napoleon and the way in which he employed esprit de corps to bind

<sup>39</sup> From the diary of General Desaix in Vachée, *Napoleon at Work*, 231.

<sup>40</sup> Napoleon's address in Baldet, *La Vie . . . dans les armées*, 127-28. Compare this oath with that sworn by troops of the Army of the North on 10 August 1793; such a comparison reveals much about the shift from Virtue to Honor. "We swear to live free or to die; to maintain liberty, equality, the unity and the indivisibility of the Republic; and to defend with all our force the constitution that will be adopted by the French nation." Archives de la Guerre, B<sup>1</sup> 121, 10 August 1793, order of the day given at Vitry.

<sup>41</sup> Baldet, *La Vie . . . dans les armées*, 130, claims that only during this epoch did flags begin to take on the immense symbolic value that they have possessed to this day.

<sup>42</sup> Stories of such actions abound. See Choury, *Les Grogards*, 165-66; or Baldet, *La Vie . . . dans les armées*, 132, for some such cases.

the soldiers to himself. It is no accident that the final form of the inscription on the eagles makes no mention of the French people but ascribes the gift of the flag to Emperor Napoleon alone. The fears expressed by the Committee of Public Safety that esprit de corps would only serve the interests of the generals turned out to be well founded.

New eagles were distributed with all the pomp that circumstances allowed. Such occasions constituted just one form of the ceremonies and reviews Napoleon engineered. Although the great displays were rare, lesser ceremonies were more frequent, and reviews were common. When conditions permitted, the Emperor inspected some unit or units every day; it was part of his style of command. Reviews allowed him to monitor the professional expertise of his officers and the competence of his troops. They gave him first-hand knowledge of morale and logistics. They also gave him an opportunity to be close to his rank and file, permitting them to share in the mystique of power. But in addition, the general and the Emperor Napoleon employed these occasions to reinforce esprit de corps. Desaix wrote, "Bonaparte never saw a demi-brigade without persuading it that he considered it the best in his army; he often spoke to them and always had something vigorous to say."<sup>43</sup> Equally, an insult to the unit could inspire men to prove Bonaparte wrong.<sup>44</sup>

### **Appeals to Self-Interest: The Principle of Honor**

In addition to the shift towards esprit de corps, the Army of Honor required more emphasis on the self-interest of officers and soldiers alike. Certainly the self-interest of survival is a constant factor, but what is meant here is the desire for benefit and status. Honor and the granting of military honors that it requires involve sophisticated appeals to self-interest through the normative compliance system. In a sense, they are not simply personal, for to be valued by the individual they must be prized by a given community, by a collectivity.

The Army of Virtue could provide normative rewards from a source not available to the Army of Honor. The flow of political journals to the front during the Revolution was most valuable because it

<sup>43</sup> From the diary of General Desaix in Vachée, *Napoleon at Work*, 230–31.

<sup>44</sup> His famous insult to the Demi-brigades under Vaubois is a stunning example: "Soldiers, I am not satisfied with you. . . . Soldiers of the 39th and 85th, you are not French soldiers. General, . . . let it be inscribed on their colors: 'They no longer form part of the Army of Italy!'" In David Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon* (New York, 1966), 102.

transmitted a sense of appreciation to the common soldier.<sup>45</sup> In Montesquieu's republic, the reward for brave deeds was respect and admiration. But as the army became more remote from the people, as it felt its deeds unappreciated, a new identification required new rewards. The shift from the great cause and the people at large to the army and the unit meant that courage must now be recognized and thus formally appreciated in terms of the army. Honors awarded to soldiers could accomplish just that.

Napoleon plied incentives based on Honor extremely well. Four deserve particular note here: promotion, arms of honor, the Legion of Honor, and the Guard. Each was seen as a reward in status and wealth for noteworthy conduct, as a way in which the private soldier might be exalted and brought a little closer to the center of glory, Napoleon himself. As Napoleon said, "It is very easy to govern the French by vanity."<sup>46</sup>

Napoleon employed promotion, or at least the hope of it, to motivate men. It could be argued that here Napoleon simply continued the tradition of careers open to talent established during the early years of the Revolution, and to an extent this point has merit. However, there was a difference. The Revolutionary army needed officers, and the utilitarian and fair method of promotion by merit supplied the needed commanders. But the Republic of Virtue did not glory in the officers it created; on the contrary, it condemned them to suspicion and surveillance.<sup>47</sup> "The virtue of the soldier always surpasses that of officers,"<sup>48</sup> because officers mixed state service with personal ambition, or so went the logic. During the Year II, the state certainly did not exploit promotion to inspire its soldiers. On the other hand, while the Jacobin Republic filled officer slots for the good of the army, Napoleon used promotion as incentive to bind individual interest to achieve his own purposes.

Under Napoleon, rank often came not as a recognition of competence, but as an award for courage and *éclat*. To be sure, promotion as reality and as incentive were two different things; numerous promo-

<sup>45</sup> See Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 136–40 and 159–62, concerning the explicit and implicit messages of the journals sent to the front.

<sup>46</sup> Napoleon, quoted in Choury, *Les Grognaards*, 89.

<sup>47</sup> See chapter 4, "The New Officer Corps: Social Composition, Political Surveillance, and Military Leadership," in Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic*.

<sup>48</sup> From *Cordeliers: Rapport sur les Invalides*, in Isser Woloch, *The French Veteran from the Revolution to the Restoration* (Chapel Hill, 1979), p. 142.

tions came only in campaigns.<sup>49</sup> Bestowing of rank at a review could come "by acclamation," as it did after Valtoutina. The officers would form a circle, and the colonel would ask men to be promoted to step forward. The Emperor asked, "Has he merited it?" If there was any dissent, it would be discussed, and the Emperor would decide.<sup>50</sup> To be publicly chosen by your officers, acclaimed by your fellows, and rewarded by your Emperor not only honored the man promoted, but powerfully reenforced esprit de corps, primary group cohesion, and sense of closeness with, and love for, Napoleon.

The Republic of Virtue had disdained the awarding of medals. In the words of Morvan, "The egalitarian Convention having suppressed crosses and other decorations, the bravest among the soldiers did not distinguish himself in the eyes of his comrades from any other grenadier; . . . he was recognizable only by the influence of his virtue."<sup>51</sup> Certainly some special and rare awards were given on occasion. These might be fine weapons taken from captured noble officers. The symbolic value of such weapons went beyond their monetary worth.<sup>52</sup> There were also some instances of cash payments to soldiers for valorous conduct.<sup>53</sup> However, my research on the Army of the North uncovered no such payments, and there is reason to believe that some soldiers might have seen them as demeaning their sacrifices.<sup>54</sup>

In contrast to earlier practice, awards were necessary in an Army of Honor. They exalted the individual and inspired others to equal or surpass the deeds of the honored one. During his Egyptian campaign Napoleon systematized the granting of awards for the march on Syria. Drummers were to receive silver drumsticks; trumpeters, silver trumpets; artillerymen, silver grenades to attach to their crossbelts; caval-

<sup>49</sup> Morvan, *Le Soldat impérial*, 2:435. "[The ordinary soldier] quickly recognized that his knapsack did not hold a marshal's baton, and he was not astonished by this." *Ibid.*, 443. Choury, *Les Grognards*, 95, expressed the more popular view, "Every soldier nourished the hope of rapid promotion. Every soldier believed he carried a marshal's baton in his knapsack."

<sup>50</sup> Morvan, *Le Soldat impérial*, 2:435. See as well Choury, *Les Grognards*, 95.

<sup>51</sup> Morvan, *Le Soldat impérial*, 2:450. This is a bit like the Revolutionary dictum that a woman needed no other ornament than her virtue.

<sup>52</sup> In Bertaud's opinion, "They became in the hands of patriots the symbol of the struggle carried on against the aristocracy." Bertaud, *La Révolution armée*, 204. For examples of such grants of arms, see Brette, "Récit d'un volontaire de 1792," *Carnet de Sabretache* (1911), 524, and a report in the journal *Argus de l'Armée du nord* (1792), 454.

<sup>53</sup> Saint-Just ordered two such payments during a trip to the Army of the Rhine as a Representative on Mission. Albert Soboul, "Carnet de mission de Saint-Just," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 26 (1954), 321 and 337. There was a bit of social policy mixed in with this, because in both cases the money to be paid the soldiers was from a forced loan on "les riches" of Strasbourg.

<sup>54</sup> See also Samuel F. Scott, *The Response of the Royal Army to the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1978), 163.

rymen, silver mounted swords; and infantrymen, silver mounted muskets. All winners also received two days of high pay as a reward.<sup>55</sup> This system was regularized under the Consulate in December 1799, and recipients were granted substantial stipends.<sup>56</sup> Roch Godart reported on a ceremony at which arms were awarded; it was a grand occasion, and Bonaparte himself handed out the weapons with great pomp.<sup>57</sup> In addition to the awards, the brave men also were feted at a dinner at the Tuileries hosted by Bonaparte himself. Part of the award was the right to approach the great one. Interestingly, at these dinners the ranks were mixed indiscriminately, the soldiers being equal as brave comrades.

In 1802 the granting of arms of honor was replaced by the Legion of Honor.<sup>58</sup> Arms of honor winners were immediately given crosses of the Legion of Honor with the appropriate Legion stipend. The logic behind the creation of the Legion speaks volumes about the Army of Honor. Mathieu Dumas, whose words began this article, sat on the small committee that drafted the legislation establishing the Legion of Honor. He reports that the proposal met strong opposition in the Tribune, “where republican opinions had strong partisans” who argued that the Legion “would reverse the vital principle of political equality.”<sup>59</sup> In his memoirs, Dumas presented a defense of the Legion that would have appealed to Montesquieu:

Its formation of cohorts was, it is necessary to agree, entirely monarchical and almost feudal. If [Napoleon] dared to undertake this task, it is because he had correctly and profoundly observed that neither the most beneficial innovations nor the convulsions of anarchy had changed the mores of the French people; that they had remained essentially monarchical. . . . It has been said with good reason that the creation of the Legion of Honor was the transition and the greatest step made from the dictatorship to the absolute monarchy of the Empire.<sup>60</sup>

Because it bestowed membership across classes—not just to the well-born—the Legion can be seen as an attempt to appropriate the motivational spirit of Honor without entirely betraying the egalitarian work of the Revolution. By the creation of the Legion of Honor, Napoleon sought to add “strength and activity to that spring of honor which so

<sup>55</sup> Choury, *Les Grogards*, 44.

<sup>56</sup> See Vachée, *Napoleon at Work*, 221–23, and Morvan, *Le Soldat impérial*, 2:430.

<sup>57</sup> Roch Godart, *Mémoires*, 88.

<sup>58</sup> Details in Morvan, *Le Soldat impérial*, 2:451–59.

<sup>59</sup> Dumas, *Souvenirs*, 3:227.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:227–28.

powerfully moves the French nation."<sup>61</sup> At least he wished to appeal to the French love of Honor in lieu of other affections, such as that for liberty. In Napoleon's own words, "It is with baubles that men are led," at least if they are Frenchmen.<sup>62</sup>

There is no question that the cross of the Legion of Honor was much respected and admired by the common soldier, the real focus of the piece. Just one story will suffice. At a review, one of those innumerable occasions in which Napoleon was in close personal contact with his troops, a brave veteran grenadier requested some recompense from his Emperor. After a false start, the grenadier boasted that he had fought eleven campaigns and received seven wounds. Napoleon replied: "Ta, ta, ta, . . . you ought to have begun with that. . . . I make you a knight of the Empire with 1,200 francs endowment. Are you satisfied?" To which the grenadier replied, "But Sire, I prefer the cross!" "You have one and the other because I make you a knight." "Me, I would like the cross better." Only with difficulty was it explained to the determined but dull-witted grenadier that a knighthood automatically brought the cross of the Legion of Honor.<sup>63</sup> Men even preferred the cross to promotion.<sup>64</sup>

Although the Legion had its civilian members, it was predominantly military. Of the forty-eight thousand nominations from its inception through 1814, only twelve hundred went to civilians.<sup>65</sup> Napoleon meant the cross not only as an incentive but also as a reward for long service. The Legion of Honor was clearly manipulated to get men to do what Napoleon wanted them to do, not just to recognize courage.<sup>66</sup> Honor was to bind men to do well for the state; it was Honor functioning as Montesquieu had described it—as social control.

Entry into the Guard was another reward and incentive for the common soldier. More common than the cross, it combined material reward with a position that demonstrated merit. It elevated the guardsman to a new level of esprit de corps and gave him proximity to the Emperor's reflected glory. The Guard was born as the Garde du Directoire during the last days of the Directory, when it was composed

<sup>61</sup> Report of Counsellor of State Roederer, 1802 in Vachée, *Napoleon at Work*, 190.

<sup>62</sup> Napoleon, quoted in *ibid.*, 191.

<sup>63</sup> In Choury, *Les Grogards*, 93.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>65</sup> Morvan, *Le Soldat impérial*, 2:458.

<sup>66</sup> He ordered that sixty crosses be awarded to men who fought at Cordova "of which at least five or six will be given to conscripts who were under fire for the first time and who handled themselves best." *Correspondance de Napoléon*, vol. 17 (Paris, 1865), no. 14217.

of “swashbucklers who feared gunfire” and Parisian low-lives.<sup>67</sup> Napoleon changed its name and its character so that as the *Garde consulaire* it became an elite unit of about two thousand veterans who had given several campaigns’ worth of good service. From this level it grew constantly, numbering some thirty thousand in 1809, when it was no longer a corps composed only of experienced veterans; five thousand were only twenty years old. About this time, Napoleon conceived of the Guard as a training ground for future non-commissioned officers; it was not just a reward for veterans or an incentive to the new conscripts. At the time of the invasion of Russia, the theoretical size of the Guard reached fifty-eight thousand, of which eight thousand were pupils. The Old Guard was better paid, fed, and equipped than line regiments. These “Immortals” also enjoyed a closeness to the Emperor; they had the greatest claim to being his comrades in arms. Entry into the Guard, therefore, became analogous to being presented at court; it even had its own court dress. On the day of battle, the Guard put on full dress uniforms that were carefully packed away during the campaign.

### **Napoleon as the Source of Honor, as Monarch**

Napoleon could never have become a monarch exactly in the pattern of the *ancien régime*, yet the tradition and style of pre-Revolutionary monarchy survived in potent enough form that Napoleon could call upon its principle. And in an odd manner, the aftermath of the Revolution may have made honors even more powerful incentives than they had been during the *ancien régime*, at least when measured by the criteria of the state. As Norman Hampson has pointed out, Napoleon controlled the access to privilege and preferment more completely than the Bourbons ever did.<sup>68</sup> Before 1789 French kings could take advantage of the Honor of their aristocracy, but only within certain bounds. Much was defined by the aristocracy itself, by inherited status and tradition. Egalitarian notions born of the Revolution paradoxically multiplied the numbers of those who could receive honors. At the same time, by eliminating the old system, the Revolution freed the Emperor to design new institutions of Honor to suit his purposes and to dole out rewards as it pleased him alone.

What Napoleon lacked in legitimacy, he made up for in genius.

<sup>67</sup> Morvan discusses the Guard in his *Le Soldat impérial*, 2:443–50. All figures and descriptions are taken from Morvan unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>68</sup> I owe the notion of Napoleon’s greater leverage on honor to the article by Hampson, “The French Revolution and the Nationalization of Honor,” 199–212.

And though not a king by divine right, he was a god of war. To engage in a bit of hyperbole, the army became for Napoleon what Versailles had been to Louis XIV. In Napoleon's defense, it is right to point out that his "Versailles" was a far more democratic institution than the one erected by the Sun King. Still, to be in the army was to be near the seat of power and to enjoy its reflected glory. This is not to say that Napoleon shared real authority with his army; the great Louis XIV also labored to limit the influence of his potentially rebellious aristocracy. But there is a mystique of power nearly as tangible as its reality, and it is an awesome force. By keeping his identification with the the army strong, he kept alive the illusion that he was sharing his elevated position with it.

To a degree, Napoleon's aura was an exaggerated extension of the cult of the successful general. There is no denying the effect on morale of a string of victories, and if these are associated with a particular general, his impact on morale is not to be underestimated. Part of the transition to the Army of Honor was the association of victory not with the Republic, but with the general.<sup>69</sup> As does any winning commander, Napoleon inspired confidence. But Napoleon was more than simply a winner. To his army, with its anticlerical and skeptical tradition, he possessed a near divinity only comparable to that of the kings of the ancien régime. His troops "had with them a living god, a tangible providence, a being thanks to whom, amidst all the blinding action of war, they marched and fought with assurance (*à coup sûr*): Napoleon."<sup>70</sup>

This god of war was not a god of Virtue, but a god of Honor—a manipulator of those preferences and perferments that bring out *belles actions*, not good works. Morvan concluded that Napoleon "duped" the soldier "as the weak are by the strong," but that the soldier "never ceased to show enthusiasm for him, to submit to his charm, to follow his will. He even loved him. . . ." <sup>71</sup>

Napoleon understood the influence that familiarity gave him. "My soldiers were very free with me. I have met many who theed and thoued me. They were instinctively sympathetic; they knew that I was their protector and avenger."<sup>72</sup> He displayed an outwardly caring attitude toward them that brought out their devotion. He remembered, or

<sup>69</sup> See this point in Bertaud, *La Vie quotidienne*, 22. In contrast, the Republic of Virtue was horrified at the prospect of a cult of the general. See Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 77–87.

<sup>70</sup> Morvan, *Le Soldat impérial*, 508.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 473.

<sup>72</sup> Napoleon, quoted in Vachée, *Napoleon at Work*, 230.

pretended to remember, their names and their deeds.<sup>73</sup> He made an art of the familiar word or gesture, meant to flatter the common soldier and to bind him to Bonaparte. He was constantly among his troops. There was the daily review, an appearance by a campfire or guard post, or a ride through his lines before battle.

His special position presented him with a nearly inexhaustible source of powerful symbolic rewards—an Imperial Treasury of Merits. Again, as in the case of Louis XIV, his very presence could be the greatest reward of all. Normative compliance requires symbolic awards; to move his men, Napoleon plied symbolic levers that were never within the grasp of Robespierre.

### Conclusion

The moral evolution of the French army from 1789 to 1815 was a long and complex journey, and the troops who ended the march were not those who had begun it—neither in body nor in soul. In mentality, the soldiers who fought under the Consulate and Empire stood apart from those who fought under the Republic of Virtue. That divergence cannot be summed up simply as a modification or improvement of a cruder, earlier military institution. Too often historians draw the contrast simply in terms of the longer experience, greater expertise, and finer command of Napoleon's troops. But the army of 1805 was not the army of the Year II writ large. They were two distinct kinds of forces fighting for different reasons and driven by different motivations. Therefore, to call the earlier an Army of Virtue and the later an Army of Honor is not just a dramatic play of words, but a way of expressing a fundamental incompatibility.

<sup>73</sup> For example, to a grenadier who wrote to Napoleon, the First Consul replied: "I have received your letter, brave comrade. You have no need to tell me of your actions. Since the death of brave Benezette, you are the bravest grenadier in the army. You possess one of the hundred swords which I am distributing to the army. All the soldiers agree that you are the model of the regiment. I have a great desire to see you, and the Minister of War is sending you the order. I love you like my own son." Letters from and to Léon Aune, sergeant of grenadiers, 32nd Demi-Brigade. *Correspondance de Napoleon*, vol. 6 (Paris, 1861), no. 4529.

# A Critique of John Lynn's "Toward an Army of Honor: The Moral Evolution of the French Army, 1789–1815"

*Owen Connelly*

Professor John Lynn is an exceptionally gifted historian who is lending new prestige (and dare I say, virtue and honor) to military history. He is also a man who loves an academic donnybrook. *No doubt* he has exaggerated his case in order to provoke one. Be that as it may. . . .

On with the show! Lynn's major premise is unexceptionable. The French Army indeed was radically changed between 1791 and 1805—from a "democratized" force to a professional army, notably under Napoleon.

Nevertheless, whether one accepts that an Army of Virtue—read "a good thing"—was converted into an Army of Honor—a "bad thing"—depends on whether one accepts: (1) Montesquieu's definitions of Virtue and Honor, (2) that an "Army of Virtue" existed in France during 1791–94 (the early Revolution and Terror), and (3) that Napoleon was the first to restore traditional motivations—in order to use the army to *rule France*.

1. *Definitions*: I cannot accept Montesquieu as an authority on military Virtue and Honor. His definitions clash with those of Clausewitz and Sun Tzu, and those familiar to most soldiers.<sup>1</sup> That is

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<sup>1</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Peter Paret and Michael Howard (Princeton, 1976), 105, 111, 187. Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford, 1963), 115. In J. R. Elting's view: "What the Jacobins meant by 'virtue' wasn't very different from Napoleon's 'honor.' Both meant a quality/attitude that would lead a man to do something that needed to be done, whether or not it was dangerous or unpopular. . . ." Elting speaks of Eble's *pontonniere*s, who built and rebuilt bridges during the Crossing of the Berezina (1812) on the retreat from Moscow—braving killing cold and Russian fire to save the remnants of Napoleon's army. "That," he says, "was honor, not honors!" Letter, J. R. Elting to Owen Connelly, 3 August 1988. See also: J. R. Elting, *Swords Around a Throne: Napoleon's Grande Armée* (New York, 1988), 55 (lead quotation). Norman Hampson, whom Lynn cites several times, quotes Robespierre; "Magnanimity, wisdom, liberty, happiness, *vertu*, that is . . . our *honour*." "The French Revolution and the Nationalization of Honor," in *War and Society*, ed. M. R. D. Foot (London, 1973), 207.

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not surprising. Montesquieu was a lawyer and judge (*parlementaire*) of the *noblesse de robe*. Perforce his definitions would differ from those of a soldier. Moreover, he made clear that he was discussing *political honor* and *political virtue*, which helps to explain why he almost equates honor with honors (or noble titles).<sup>2</sup> Also, Montesquieu's definitions are part of an argument against despotism and for monarchy limited by law. In despotic states, Virtue is unnecessary, he says, and Honor dangerous.<sup>3</sup> Men are all equal because they are all slaves.<sup>4</sup> In ideal monarchies, "the laws take the place of all the virtues."<sup>5</sup> And: "Honor . . . takes the place of political virtue [under] law."<sup>6</sup> Napoleon, proud of his codes, said similar things.<sup>7</sup>

If Montesquieu's subject had been armies rather than governments, he might have said that any army—if it is to win—must have an officer corps devoted to duty and a hierarchy of officers and men who follow orders—*any army*—whether it serves a republic or a monarchy.<sup>8</sup>

2. *Army of Virtue?* Says John Lynn: "The army was certainly one of Virtue between 1791 and 1794. . . ." Well, . . . it came closest in 1791–92, when the most men joined purely out of patriotic zeal. However, the volunteers were undependable in the extreme. Some seemed to feel that among the Rights of Man was that to "French leave." Not untypical was the case of Paul Thiébault (later major-general and baron of the Empire), who volunteered in 1791, served in the Army of the North in 1792, saw one battle in which his battalion lost no one, was promoted to sergeant—but took ill and simply *went home*.<sup>9</sup>

As to the armies of the Terror (1793–94, Year II): Robespierre had some success with his "Republic of Virtue"—but he had no "Army of

<sup>2</sup> "Je parle ici de la vertu politique. . . ." and "Comme il faut de la vertu dans le gouvernement populaire, il en faut aussi dans l'aristocratie. Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, 2 vols., ed. R. Derathé. Vol. 1, book 3, chap. 5, p. 30; chap. 4, pp. 28–29 (hereafter cited as *De l'esprit*).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 9, p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> "Ce n'est point l'honneur qui est le principe des Etats despotiques: les hommes y étant tous égaux . . . étant tous esclaves. . . ." *Ibid.*, chap. 8, p. 32.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 5, p. 30.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 6, p. 31.

<sup>7</sup> *Correspondance*, 6259, 9663, and passim. On Saint Helena, he cautioned his son in a last letter to govern under law. See Napoléon, *Pensées*, ed. Edouard Driault (Paris, 1941), 205.

<sup>8</sup> Also, as Professor Lynn says, "Montesquieu seems to have regarded Virtue as . . . best represented in the Greek and Roman republics of the ancient world." True. And Rome's citizen-armies (of virtue?) could not be sustained outside Italy. Montesquieu, *Grandeur des Romains*, ed. G. Truc. (Paris, 1954), 48. He knew no society without classes or castes (*Ibid.*, 42–47). Neither did Napoleon. In 1802, justifying the *Légion d'Honneur*, he reminded the Council of State (1802): "The Romans had patricians, knights, citizens, and slaves." Napoléon, *Pensées*, 64.

<sup>9</sup> He returned a year later (1793)—as an officer! P. Thiébault, *Mémoires*, ed. Robert Lacour-Gayet (Paris, 1962), 31. See also M. Reinhard, *La Grand Carnot*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1950, 1952), 2:99–100.

Virtue," though he might have thought so.<sup>10</sup> In the fall of 1793, the Republic's armies were in chaos, despite the fluke victory of Valmy (1792).<sup>11</sup> Lazare Carnot, the "Organizer of Victory," built winning armies in one year, but not by "Virtue" (though he took advantage of patriotic spirit). He succeeded via vicious discipline, *promotion and other honors*, the *levée en masse*, and purging the officer corps of ineffectives and royalists. He could act decisively because the Government of Terror was a War Government with unlimited powers, formed to defend the Republic against invasion by foreign armies and internal revolts by peasants in the Vendée and by the "Federal Cities."

The "National Razor" (guillotine) stood behind Carnot's authority. Lynn writes that the Committee of Public Safety "did not glory" in officers' promotions, but "condemned them to suspicion and surveillance." *Right*. Defeated generals could expect to be accused of treason. Carnot, "on mission" with the Army of the North in October 1793, wrote after the relief of Maubeuge of General (later Marshal) J.-B. Jourdan: "He was lost if he failed; he was already being denounced as a traitor. . . ."<sup>12</sup>

Carnot preferred other motivational methods. Says Lynn: "During the Year II, the state certainly did not exploit promotion to inspire its soldiers." *Wrong*. Carnot ordered Representatives-on-Mission to "attach" themselves to [units] to "discover merit" and recommend promotions, whether the men were conscripts, volunteers, or regulars. The Convention recognized the bravery of the lowest private, and the names of those killed-in-action were inscribed on pillars in the Panthéon.<sup>13</sup> In short, Carnot made "careers open to talent," a system often credited to Napoleon, who, in fact, was a beneficiary of it. Carnot jumped him from captain to brigadier general for his spectacular work with the artillery at Toulon. He also promoted eight of Napoleon's future marshals to general.<sup>14</sup> The *levée en masse* made military service

<sup>10</sup> Robespierre's speech against Honor, cited by Lynn, is from December 1790—while Louis XVI still reigned—and expresses fear of the aristocracy, not Honor, *per se*. *Oeuvres de Maximilien Robespierre*, vol. 6, *Discours, 1789–1790*. Ed. M. Bouloiseau, G. Lefebvre, and A. Soboul (Paris, 1950), 633–34. Albert Soboul, *La 1<sup>e</sup> République* (Paris, 1968), 134, says Robespierre used "ideas and appeals to virtue" because he was "incapable of analyzing economic and social conditions." Robespierre was a prince of paranoid hangups. For example, in 1793 he supported closing a theater playing "Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded" as counterrevolutionary, and spoke against generals, administrators, and journalists, who are "poisoning the public spirit." *Oeuvres*, 10:90, 72–73.

<sup>11</sup> Lazare Carnot described the major Army of the North as in "open revolt." *Mémoires sur Carnot par son fils*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1861), 1:388.

<sup>12</sup> R. R. Palmer, *Twelve Who Ruled* (Princeton, 1970), 103.

<sup>13</sup> *Mémoires sur Carnot*, 1:386–387, 420–421.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 421; Palmer, *Twelve Who Ruled*, 96–97.

a legal obligation.<sup>15</sup> The volunteer *levée*, tried in earlier years, had failed.<sup>16</sup> The new officer corps featured “instant generals,” promoted without regard to social origin (Napoleon was a noble; Masséna, working class) if they were winners—and loyal. “Virtue” was not a requirement.

The conscripts of 1793 were surely professionals by 1797, but that is too early to blame or credit Napoleon. Time in service was the key factor. The Army shrank from eight hundred thousand (present for duty) in January 1794 to four hundred-ninety thousand in September 1794 to three hundred-sixty thousand in October 1797.<sup>17</sup> After mid-1794, the original *levée en masse* was not enforced, and departure from the Army was seldom punished. In effect, those who remained in 1797 had chosen an Army career. But, according to Lynn, they rioted in the name of Virtue in 1798—and against Masséna, one of Carnot’s generals in 1793—but by then, it seems that Virtue just meant “nice” behavior. As to Bertaud’s “The Patrie was corrupt, contemptuous; it was also forgetful and ungrateful.” *Sounds familiar. Vietnam Vets, rally ’round!*

3. *The Work of Napoleon*: Professor Lynn writes: “Discounting Revolutionary value . . . [Napoleon] tapped motivational resources available only to legitimate monarchs.” *Wrong*. The Republic did everything but award medals.

Dumouriez (no friend of Carnot) wrote, “Carnot . . . est le créateur du nouvel art militaire en France . . . que Bonaparte a perfectionné.”<sup>18</sup>

There is no basis for Lynn’s equating the aristocracy of the Old Regime with Napoleon’s army. Napoleon did not rule through the army, but through his *notables*—civilians in vast majority—ministers, senators, legislators, prefects, departmental electors (the most influential and richest locals), and others. Marshals and generals had no civil authority unless in civil office (a rare thing). Napoleon had two “chains-of-command”—one military, one civilian. Very few people figured in both. In 1815, when Napoleon decided against being “king

<sup>15</sup> *Mémoires sur Carnot*, 1:372ff.

<sup>16</sup> Soboul, *La 1<sup>er</sup> République*, 38–39, 67–69.

<sup>17</sup> Jacquet Codechot, *Institutions de la France sous La Révolution et l’Empire* (Paris, 1970), 362, 499. A new *levée* went into effect in 1798, under the Jourdan-Delbrel Law, which Lynn mentions. Also, the number of conscripts did not “steadily” increase under Napoleon; only about seventy-three thousand a year were called during 1800–10. Then numbers shot up to one hundred sixty-eight thousand in 1811; two hundred-fifty thousand in 1812; and one million in 1813–15. H. Lachouque, *Napoléon et la garde impériale* (Paris, 1968), 921–24.

<sup>18</sup> *Mémoires sur Carnot*, 1:384.

of the *Jacquerie*" (Lynn's words), he decided for "his" *notables*. It was they who brought him down after he lost at Waterloo.<sup>19</sup>

I question Lynn's statement that in Napoleon's army *esprit de corps* served "only the interests of the generals." Along the same lines, Lynn writes that Jacobin promotions were for the good of the army; Napoleon's were "incentive to bind individual interest to suit his own purposes." If that be so, how is it that Napoleon had the more effective army? And what of promotion for "*éclat*" rather than merit? It must have worked. Carnot, like Napoleon, preferred "military instinct to special knowledge."<sup>20</sup> The Grande Armée built a European Empire, in which Napoleon introduced many reforms (for example, the *Code Napoléon* in all languages, even Serbo-Croatian). To say that Napoleon built his army for his own and his generals' advantage is to reduce him to the stature of a Banana Republic dictator.

I agree that the *Légion d'Honneur* used both monarchal and Revolutionary values and incentives. Napoleon emphasized that it was not just a military decoration: "If the *Légion d'Honneur* did not reward both civil and military services, it would cease to be the *Légion d'Honneur*."<sup>21</sup> Napoleon surely depended on surviving monarchal values. However, any comparison between the Versailles of Louis XIV and Napoleon's Army is extremely far-fetched. To begin with, Louis was not a soldier.<sup>22</sup>

I dispute that Napoleon's army credited victory more to the general than the Nation. The Republic feted Kellermann and Dumouriez after Valmy, Jourdan after Fleurus. Napoleon never staged triumphs for generals. Neither do I accept that Napoleon's "near-divinity" in the eyes of troops stemmed from an anticlerical/skeptical tradition in the Army.<sup>23</sup> Repeated victories gave Napoleon his hold on the troops. He of course posed as (and was, in unprecedented degree) the protector of the line soldier. He should not be damned for that—nor for being *un homme terrible* with his officers. Both made his leadership more effective.

As to Morvan's opinion that Napoleon "duped" his soldiers. From the cynic's viewpoint, *of course he did*. His soldiers, however,

<sup>19</sup> Jean Tulard, *Napoléon ou le mythe du sauveur* (Paris, 1977), 455–57.

<sup>20</sup> *Mémoires sur Carnot*, 1:389.

<sup>21</sup> Napoleon to the Council of State. May 1802. In *Pensées*, 169.

<sup>22</sup> See John B. Wolf, *Louis XIV* (New York, 1968), 252–53.

<sup>23</sup> True, there were few chaplains, one of many measures by which the Emperor guarded against the revival of the church's political power. His regime was secular in all possible respects, one great difference between it and the Old Regime. See Elting, *Grande Armée*, 99, 286.

were “believers,” who would have been angered by the thought. Napoleon gave them moments of glory and adventures to remember in their otherwise drab and miserable lives. They may have cursed him as they followed a column in heat or dust, or rain, or snow and ice, but most of them remembered him with awe and love until they died. Did Napoleon dupe Frenchmen (and Italians, Germans, Poles, Dutchmen, and others)? Maybe. Was he wrong? Evil? Who can say? Whether or not his goals were worthy is subject to debate, but he was a great general (and great civil governor), and he was the moving force of history in his era.<sup>24</sup>

*Finally:* To return to my opening words, I concur in Professor Lynn’s main conclusion—that the “Army of 1805 was not the Army of the Year II writ large.” The difference had been wrought by time, continual war, and the leadership of Lazare Carnot and Napoleon. The Soldier-Emperor brought the army “back to basics.” There was never an “Army of Virtue.” The Grande Armée boasted officers and men of high honor, great bravery, and incredible devotion to duty, but was not an “Army of Honor”—not in the sense that honor was impossible without honors.

<sup>24</sup> In a sense, all the “shakers and movers” in history “dupe” people, usually believing their own promises. Robespierre touted a “Republic of Virtue” and delivered tyranny, but became forever a hero of the Left. Lenin got himself into power in Russia by promising “Peace, Land, and Bread,” none of which he could deliver. John Kennedy promised an unachievable “Camelot,” and I think we would not blame him even if he had lived. Military command, especially, requires that a leader never show doubt or fear. There is no better example than that of Marshal Ney, trapped with the rear guard of the Grande Armée outside Smolensk in 1812: “What are you going to do?” asked an officer. “Cross the Dnieper [River],” said Ney. “Where is the road?” “We will find it.” “And if it isn’t passable?” “It will be.” (And it was, but Ney could not have known that.) See M. de Fezensac, *The Russian Campaign, 1812*, trans. Lee Kennett. (Athens, Ga., 1970), 79.

## **Response to Owen Connelly’s Critique**

The editors did well to choose Professor Owen Connelly, a man I both respect and like, as my adversary in this trial. I plead guilty to enjoying productive controversy and to exaggerating elements of my case for the sake of argument. But regarding these transgressions, I believe the editors set a thief to catch a thief. In the space allowed I cannot deal with all of Connelly’s other charges. Rather, I will attempt to rebut only his most damaging allegations.

I am surprised that he accuses me of arguing that in the Grande Armée “honor [lower case ‘h’] was impossible without honors.” I neither deny nor belittle the bravery of French troops who fought for their country and their comrades. As stated explicitly in the second paragraph of my article, I concern myself primarily with the strings *government* tried to pull.

We are caught in a trap set by language, because “honor” is a term with so many related but distinct meanings. Connelly rejects Montesquieu’s definition of Honor, but countering that it conflicts with those of Sun Tzu and Clausewitz is grandly irrelevant. Montesquieu addressed political relationships in the main, but he also explored questions of military service and citizenship. Look at his *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains*. Certainly his definition of Virtue proved central to the Revolution; perhaps his definition of Honor was similarly critical to the Empire.

In any case, the anguished cries brought out by my discussion of Honor, or honor, show how close the word cuts to the bone. This seemingly old-fashioned concept requires new analysis—moral, military, and political.

Connelly insists, “There was never an ‘Army of Virtue.’” He argues that Virtue could apply only to the volunteers of 1791 and 1792, but that by 1793 conscription voided Virtue. On the contrary, the decision to conscript an army demonstrated greater commitment by the French people than did their earlier call for volunteers, because the personal and political costs of raising a conscript army greatly exceeded those of a volunteer force—ask Nixon. Although the act of volunteering may attest to the “zeal” of a recruit at the moment he signs on (but not necessarily later), the rewards and sanctions of Montesquieu’s Virtue come largely from a committed people.

Professor Connelly explains the victories of 1794 by insisting that the army reinstated traditional practices and values, and he plays Carnot to trump any claim to the contrary. He presents Carnot as a personification of the old army come to save the new from its inevitable follies. However, timing alone refutes this common Carnot-ex-machina argument. The spring and early summer of 1793 brought disorder and defeat to the French, but the tide began to turn in the fall. (Connelly seems to confuse 1792 with 1793.) “The Organizer of Victory” only signed his first document as a member of the Committee of Public Safety on 7 August 1793, yet the French won the battles of Hondschoote on 6 September and Wattignies on 15–16 October. Can we ascribe this

change in fortune uniquely to the efforts of a rather unknown and inexperienced member of the Committee during his first two months in office? No. Carnot provided invaluable service to the new Republic, but so did the Convention, Representatives on Mission, *commissaires des guerres*, field commanders, company grade officers, common soldiers, and so on.

Later Connelly argues that the Revolutionary government provided the same incentives to troops as did Napoleon, that it did "everything but award medals." This would be a telling criticism if it were true. But here, Connelly is "*Wrong*." In fact, awards and preferments under the Republic of Virtue were rare, virtually nil. His assertion flies in the face of my own study of the *Armée du nord* and of the research of Jean-Paul Bertaud.

Connelly attempts to rescue his point by reminding me that both the Terror and Napoleon promoted officers according to merit. But the same action can have different meanings. Shooting down another human being can be a praiseworthy act of war or a damnable act of murder; to judge it as one or the other, circumstances must be taken into account. The Republic of Virtue promoted, and demoted, on the basis of competence and political reliability; it would have been foolish to do otherwise. The question is not whether soldiers gained rank by demonstrating merit, but (1) whether a conscious public policy existed to use promotion as an incentive to desired conduct, and (2) whether such promotions were treated as "honors," entailing special rights and status. In both cases the answer is again "no." The Revolutionary government distrusted its officers, regarding them as necessary but dangerous functionaries. The "vicious discipline" and "National Razor" that Connelly (incorrectly) credits with having improved military effectiveness savaged not enlisted men but *officers*. Thus, the Army of Virtue employed the principle of careers open to talent in a very different way from the Army of Honor.

Professor Connelly concludes by agreeing that "The French Army indeed was radically changed between 1791 and 1805," but he then invites us to see the contrast simply in terms of traditional military values, as have generations of Napoleonic specialists. During the fall of 1793, the army was "in chaos," but by 1805 Napoleon brought it "back to basics" and thus had "the more effective army." In my *Bayonets of the Republic* I demonstrated that the troops of the Republic of Virtue performed far better on the battlefield than Napoleonic scholars would like to admit. In the present article, I suggest that the

later transformation of the army under the Directory and Napoleon was not only a matter of “time in service” as Connelly insists. (If that were true, what do you do with the flood of raw recruits after 1798, and especially after 1806?) The character of incentives and rewards had to shift to the extent that the political environment of the army altered. Montesquieu’s definitions are particularly apropos because we are not focusing on the soldier’s heart, but upon the relationships between a government, its elite, and its army.

JOHN A. LYNN