

French Revolutionary Infantryman 1791–1802



Harry Crowdy • Illustrated by Christa Hook



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FRONT COVER **French troops fighting Russians on the
'Devil's Bridge' (25 September 1799).**

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FRENCH INFANTRYMAN OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WARS 1791-1802

INTRODUCTION

The disastrous French performance during the Seven Years War (1756-63) initiated a revolution in military thinking. Under a succession of reforming ministers, regimental uniforms, organisation and training were standardised, new weapons introduced and recruitment centralised. Tactics and strategy came under review and summer training camps were scheduled for practising manoeuvres.

While these modernising reforms were implemented, the common infantryman's conditions of service left much to be desired. Soldiers were looked down upon by all groups in society. A new form of punishment was introduced (beating the victim's back with the flat of a sword), which was considered overly Prussian and humiliating.

Throughout society enlightened political philosophies fuelled resentment against noble privilege. France bankrupted itself by supporting the revolution in Britain's American colonies, while a series of poor harvests fuelled revolutionary fervour. In 1789 the King sent foreign mercenaries to keep order in Paris, but they came to blows with the King's household Gardes Françaises, who sided with the newly formed National Assembly, opened fire on the foreigners and then took a very active part in the storming of the Bastille.

The soldiers hoped that the political revolution of 1789 together with authority over the army passing from the King to the National Assembly in the following year, would see their complaints at last addressed. When the National Assembly issued its



1791 fusilier by Hoffmann. The mutinies over poor pay and service conditions left the monarchy without any means of defending itself against the revolutionary tide.



Former Gardes Françaises were incorporated into the Paris National Guard following the attack on the Bastille. Garrisoned in Paris, these household troops were the first troops to openly support the National Assembly.

Declaration of the Rights of Man (26 August 1789) soldiers expected the same rights as their fellow citizens. However, they were disappointed when the government became aware of the problem of striking a balance between the soldiers' rights as citizens and the need to maintain military discipline.

Soldiers in garrisons became politically active, joining local Jacobin clubs and forming committees in the regiments. The National Assembly's ban on these committees coincided with a series of mutinies over conditions of service, pay and discipline, the most significant occurring in Nancy in August 1790. Worried that a general mutiny would leave France's frontiers defenceless, the National Assembly ordered the Nancy mutiny to be suppressed at all costs: French soldiers fired on one another for the

first time. The mutiny's ringleaders suffered draconian punishments, which caused public uproar and led to an increase in tensions within the army. At the beginning of 1791 the military were in a crisis, which threatened to undo all the positive reforms of the previous three decades.

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

(General Bonaparte's campaigns in italics)

- 1789** Declaration of National Assembly (17 June); National Guard formed in Paris (11 July); Gardes Françaises join attack on Bastille (14 July).
- 1790** Nobility and titles abolished (19 June); Nancy Mutiny (15 August).
- 1791** Regimental titles replaced by numbers (1 January); the King attempts to flee France (20 June); Declaration of Pillnitz – Austria and Prussia demand royal authority be restored in France (27 August).
- 1792** Allied troops begin massing on French frontier (7 February); France declares war on Austria (20 April); formation of First Coalition against France (26 June); Brunswick Manifesto – Allies hold people of Paris responsible for King's continued safety (1 August); Longwy falls to Prussians (5 September); battle of Valmy, allied advance on Paris halted (20 September); monarchy abolished (21 September); proclamation of Republic (22 September); victory at Jemappes (6 November).
- 1793** Execution of Louis XVI (21 January); France declares war on Britain (1 February); France declares war on Spain (7 March); General Dumouriez defeated at Neerwinden (18 March); Dumouriez defects to allies (5 April); Committee of Public Safety formed (6 April); levée en masse – universal male conscription decreed (23 August); victories at Hondschoote (8 September) and Wattignies (15–16 October).
- 1794** Battle of Tournai (23 May); victory at Fleurus (26 June).
- 1795** Treaty of Basle – Prussia leaves war (16 May); émigrés land at Quiberon Bay (21 June); victory at Loano (22–24 November).

- 1796 Bonaparte assumes command of the Army of Italy (27 March); *victory at Lodi* (10 May); *Milan taken* (15 May); *victory at Castiglione* (5 August); defeat at Würzburg (3 September); *victory at Arcole* (15–17 November).
- 1797 *Victory at Rivoli* (14 January); *Armistice of Leoben* (18 April); Treaty of Campo Formio Austria recognises French annexation of Belgium; Cisalpine Republic established in northern Italy (17 October).
- 1798 *Bonaparte embarks for Egypt* (19 May); French landing in Ireland (22 August); Second Coalition formed against France (24 December).
- 1799 Defeat at Stockach (25 March); Russians enter Milan (28 April); Massena defeated at First Zurich (5 June); defeats at the Trebbia (17–19 June) and Novi (15 August); Massena is victorious against the Allies at Second Zurich (25 September); *Bonaparte returns from Egypt* (9 October); defeat at Genola (4 November); *Brumaire coup: Bonaparte becomes First Consul* (9–10 November).
- 1800 Siege of Genoa begins (21 April); victory at Stockach (3 May); *French begin crossing St Bernard Pass* (15 May); *Bonaparte enters Milan* (2 June); Genoa falls (4 June); *victories at Montebello* (9 June) and *Marengo* (14 June); *Convention of Alessandria* (15 June); victory at Hohenlinden (3 December).
- 1801 Treaty of Lunéville – Austria withdraws from coalition on Campo Formio terms (8 February); French capitulate in Egypt (31 August).
- 1802 Treaty of Amiens between Britain and France (27 March).

Strasbourg National Guardsmen enjoy a break from training. The prestige of Guard service was in marked contrast to enforced service in the hated militia, which formed one of the common people's biggest grievances against the ancien régime.

THE NATIONAL GUARD

During the summer of 1789 a mass hysteria known as the *Grande Peur* (great fear) swept France. In response to both the upheaval in Paris and countrywide reports of brigandage, National Guard units sprung up all over France to defend people and property. The Guard was organised at



local level, generally drawn from the middle classes and often trained by former soldiers. In the capital the Gardes Françaises were disbanded and absorbed into the Paris National Guard, which had been created on 11 July 1789 to defend the city's 60 districts.

A student named Pouget recalled those early days:

When at last the great revolution dawned, I anxiously followed its phases, as everything moved at such a pace. The National Guard was called up in aid of the Nation's representatives; I was named *sergent* of Craon's and to prove to my fellow citizens that I was worthy of their choice, I drilled myself arduously in the manual of arms and the cadenced march. For an instructor I had a corporal of the Régiment de Rouergue, who was happy with my progress. My young fellow citizens were as zealous as myself, not missing their training. They were soon ready to appear under arms and to march properly ... It was at this time that a false rumour spread rapidly across the countryside throwing it into alarm. Mounted messengers rode from village to village, announcing that a host of brigands were burning the wheat, which was almost ready for harvest. At Craon, they beat *la générale* and I was soon at the head of a strong patrol armed with muskets, but without ammunition, searching the countryside from left to right not knowing where to direct our search and finding neither brigands nor fires. The most excitable wanted to go burn and loot the nearby Châteaux. ... I managed to calm them not without difficulty and persuade them that this was an ill chosen time.

The *Grande Peur* was also well remembered by Jean Pierre Bial:

Alerted by the tocsin, the inhabitants of the town and its environs arrived in mobs, some armed with old muskets, others with scythes and some simply with vine poles. This gathering of men, without order or discipline presented a very curious sight ... Following that day, the National Guard was organised. Although I was only 16, I enrolled myself and, with my father's approval, our tailor made me a fine National Guard uniform. I was very proud on Sundays, following my platoon's manoeuvres on the road to Meyssac.

In the early days, many liberal aristocrats gave their patronage to the Guard and used their influence to help find arms and equipment. Pouget recalled that the owner of the local chateau was named honorary colonel of the local guard and that, 'It was to the credit of our honorary colonel that the National Guard obtained 50 muskets from Monsieur Taffin, the commandant of Toul.' The cost of being in the guard, especially for the officers, could be high. Having recently left the army, ex-corporal Le Roy found himself elected major of the Talmay canton's National Guard. His family's resources were stretched to breaking point by the cost of his epaulettes: 'Therefore I found myself having to work all week as a hatter again to sustain myself.' He remembered, 'On Sundays I gave musket drill to the National Guard. This occupation kept me going during the winter of 1790 and 1791.'

THE CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

On 1 January 1791 the infantry was reorganised into 104 line regiments and 12 chasseur battalions (light infantry). A report to the Assembly noted that these units were woefully under-strength. Initially the Assembly wanted to bring the standing army up to full strength and raise battalions of National Guardsmen as its reserve. However, many politicians distrusted the army after the mutinies of 1790, the widespread desertion and the inability of officers to control their men: many wondered if the existing army could really be trusted with defending France's frontiers against the expected counter-revolutionary backlash.

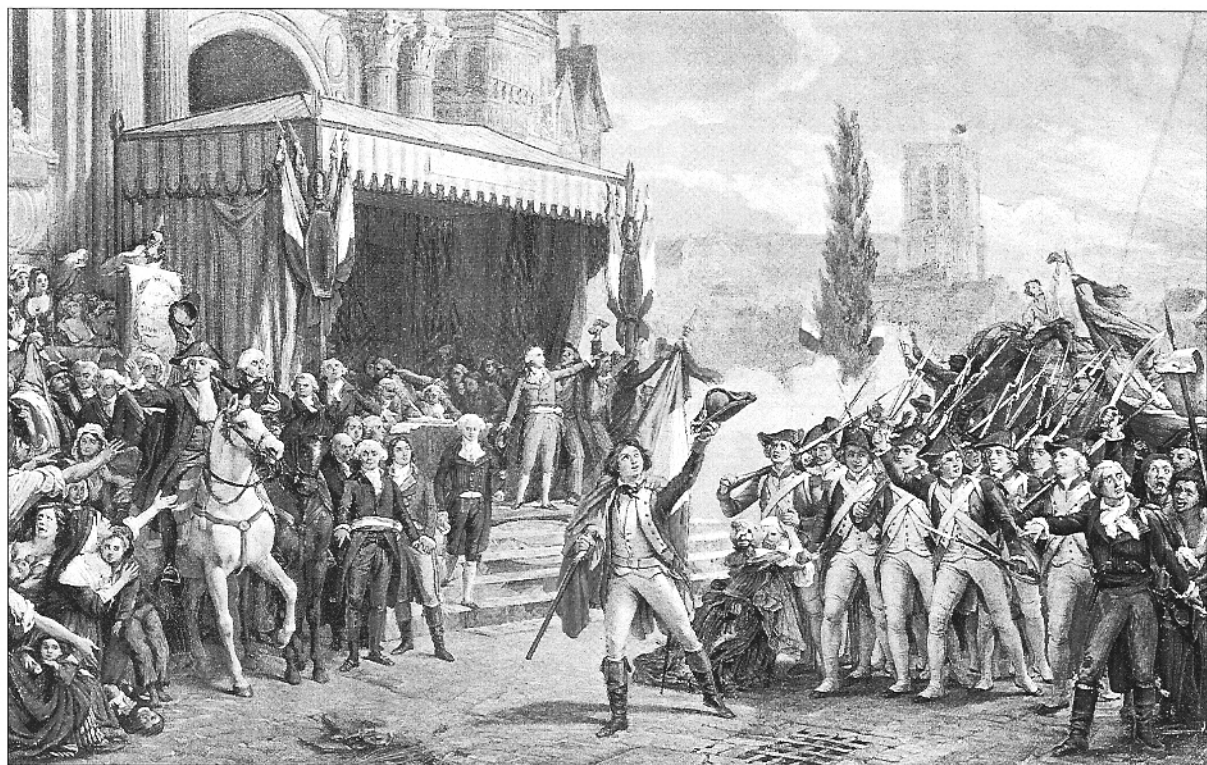
Consequently, on 21 June (the day after the King's failed attempt to flee France) and 22 July 1791, the formation of 185 battalions of *gardes nationaux volontaires* was ordered. These men were to be the pick of the National Guard, whose families were considered as active, tax-paying citizens and ideologically reliable. The battalions were raised quickly in the *départements* nearest the threatened frontiers and in Paris where the revolutionaries were most active. After this wave of patriotic enthusiasm 101,000 men were operational by October 1791.

Pouget, now a lieutenant in the National Guard, remembered the appeal:

On 25 June 1791, it was the carnival day of Craon's Patron Saint. Decorated with his sash, the mayor, preceded by drummers and accompanied by a municipal clerk carrying a register, quill and ink, went to the meadow where the dancing was held ... to promulgate a decree and make an appeal to the youth to engage in the service of the Homeland and the King. The mayor made a speech full of patriotism and called upon those around him to support the National Assembly's plans ... All the youths shouted: 'If Monsieur Pouget will sign up, we shall too!' I immediately took the quill, signed and all my young fellow citizens followed me. The length of service was unlimited, but the mayor had learned that it would only be for a matter of two or three years. In July that same year, all those enrolled received the order to go to the district capital to respond to the call which had been made by the King.

In contrast, Bial's parents forbade him to volunteer. Determined to enlist, he secretly procured a horse and one night 'when all the house was sleeping, by means of a ladder, I escaped through my bedroom window without waking anyone.' He went to the next town and pleaded to be allowed to enlist:

Several days later, the *Maréchaussée* ordered me to Brive, to be properly examined and accepted or rejected. My parents were in despair, not understanding why I had enlisted. They opposed my departing and put all my belongings under lock and key. Thus, I had to leave with just my new National Guard coat and the shirt I was wearing. Arriving at Brive, we were soon inspected and examined by the authorities. They rejected those of weak constitution and those that were too old, unless they were former soldiers ... I was examined kindly by these gentlemen and unanimously passed. I was the youngest with the exception of two



or three kids of 15–16 years, whom they had taken as drummers. On our departure, we were acclaimed by the entire population, which had massed along our route. Those who had been rejected made their adieu with tears in their eyes, desolated that they could not follow us. It was truly a unique spectacle to see this motley column of bizarrely attired men march past. Some wore clogs; others wore smocks or were dressed in various ancien régime uniforms. All were enflamed with the desire to serve the Homeland. The journey was a cheerful one, with everyone singing patriotic hymns.

On his departure, Pouget was chosen to command the Craon volunteers on their march to Nancy. After collecting another detachment of volunteers in nearby Neuwiller, Pouget arrived at Nancy with 150 men:

Soon after our arrival we were directed to the Sainte-Catherine barracks. There we entered a large hall where the royal commissioner announced that we were going to proceed with the officer nominations and that each man should indicate on a ballot paper whom he wanted to nominate as captain. All the youths cried out: 'What for? We all want Monsieur Pouget!' Although I was less well known to the young men from Neuwiller, not a single voice asked for a secret ballot, and I was unanimously proclaimed captain. The King's commissioner congratulated and embraced me. That day was one of the best in my life. I was only twenty-four years old and I had entered the army as a captain.

A town clerk records the names of volunteers in a register. Most men expected to serve only for a single campaign or as long as the immediate threat of invasion lasted. As the war stretched into 1793 many deserted during the harsh winter.

Bial's battalion was organised into eight companies, each named after the cantons of the men that formed them, with the grenadiers later selected from the pick of each company. Like Pouget, Bial's company was formed of men from two separate cantons – his native Meyssac and nearby Beynat. Before the election for officers began, Bial was called to one side by the local director and told, 'You are very probably going to be named Lieutenant. We ask you to use your influence on the volunteers of your canton to give their votes to Monsieur Crauffon of Beynat, who is little known where you are from, but who will make a good captain.'

Bial agreed to canvass on Crauffon's behalf and in turn was made lieutenant. After the officer elections, 'they then proceeded with the election of the *sous-officiers*, choosing former soldiers by preference. With the nominations over, they made all the elected officers enter the Director's office for the reading of the organisational decree and the election report. We were then made to take an oath to the King and to the Nation. The next day the battalion assembled to receive weapons and the officers were presented to the men.'

Despite their continued unpopularity, the regulars were not without recruits themselves. Jean Stanislas Vivien heeded their call for volunteers, partly to escape being bullied by his elder brother but also because 'all young Frenchman able to bear arms were becoming soldiers. I wanted to be one also ... It was a strange feature of those times that masses of citizens rushed to complete the formation of volunteer battalions ... while no one stepped forward to fill the Line regiments, where the government paid a signing-up bounty.'

Another enthusiastic lad was Putigny, who signed up to 5e Régiment, formerly Royal Navarre, in 1791 'to defend the Homeland, its independence and its liberty'. After signing up with recruitment agents at his village's fête day, he went to the local town to buy shoes and gaiters for the 14-day journey to join the regiment at Valenciennes. His first impressions of his new career were very good: 'God! Those soldiers were magnificent, with their black tricornes and crossbelts as white as their coats.' After arriving at Valenciennes and resting for the night, he woke to the sound of drums and was led off with his fellow recruits by an adjudant-major 'to the quartermaster to be registered, after which the surgeon made us undress, examined us all over and then put us under the measuring tape ... I measured no more than four feet, eleven and a half inches [1.61m]; I was not tall enough. "You are too small," said the surgeon. "I was only seventeen last harvest and I will grow better in the service of the Homeland." – "You have a vigorous and determined air for your age. It's your choice, you can go home or stay." – "I will stay."

SCHOOLING THE SOLDIER

After passing his medical, Putigny was introduced to his sergent-major who in turn called for a soldier to take him to his barrack room and meet his corporal: 'My guide and I went into a room on the second floor as the troop returned from drilling. Some men placed their muskets on racks, hanging up their cartridge boxes under a shelf on which the haversacks were aligned geometrically. My guide presented me to my

Table of monetary value

4 liards	= 1 denier
12 deniers	= 1 sou
20 sous	= 1 livre
3 livres	= 1 ecu
8 ecus	= 1 Louis

corporal, a tall thin fellow, who gave me a forced mendacious smile. "Welcome new-boy, you're not sick at least?" I did not reply. His pale expression became more serious, then gentle: "It's nothing, little-one, you'll get used to it." Putigny's corporal introduced him to his bedmate, explaining that soldiers slept two to a bed and that 'the youngest slept with the longest serving'.

On paper a soldier's rations were better than the food enjoyed by the average peasant. Although both shared a staple diet of bread (the soldier's was eaten dry or mixed into the soup), the soldier received a half-pound meat ration daily, except on Friday for religious reasons. However, this included the weight of the bone, and in many garrisons the supply of fresh meat was erratic, so butter or oil was often substituted for meat. In the garrison, food was served twice a day in wooden or earthenware dishes.

Sharing food from a communal *gamelle* was a ritual to which all recruits were quickly introduced: 'The drums sounded again: "Come on, soup's ready." An enormous *gamelle* steamed in the middle of a long empty table. All the diners surrounded it with spoon in hand. The corporal advanced first, chose carefully, then, with his spoon full, cautiously stepped back one pace, before tasting the potato and turnip ratatouille. My bedmate imitated him, and by order of seniority each in turn repeated the manoeuvre until there was nothing left in the *gamelle*. This ceremony amused me. The warmth of the soup comforted me. I spread my portion of meat on a fine piece of ration bread.' Recalling the bread ration, a recruit called Gervais, who had enrolled in a chasseur battalion with his friend Tolin, recalled: 'The daily ration of a pound and a half of bread was a little short, but it was only a matter of days before we were accustomed to it.'

After sharing his first meal, Putigny received his *nom de guerre*, the name all his comrades would know him by. 'Bourguignon, our corporal, questioned me. "Where are you from new-boy?" "Bresse," I replied. "And what's your name?" He made me repeat my name twice. "That's nice," he said. "Here you will be *Le Bresson*." From then on this nickname represented me on the list of men put up on the barrack room door.'

Gervais and Tolin were introduced to another great French military tradition: 'Soon after our admission, the *sergent* of our subdivision ... told us that it was also customary for those entering barracks for the first time to *grease the marmite*. This phrase was unknown to us. We looked at one another. To save our embarrassment, the *sergent* said to us: "You should give to me, as commander of the subdivision, the sum which you judge suitable. This sum will be used to buy brandy for the whole subdivision. We thought that this was a funny way of greasing a marmite, but Tolin, without any hesitation, put his hand in his pocket and showed him the rest of our funds.'

After a first night's sleep sharing a bed in the barrack room, Putigny went to collect his uniform. Until the regiment's tailors properly fitted Putigny's full parade uniform, he was given clothes from the slops chest: 'The *sergent-major* called for me and took me to the stores. They supplied me with a complete fatigue uniform, which was old and patched up, and a fine white coat.' Also underage and undersized, Girault had enlisted as a soldier-musician in the Régiment de Perche and, like Putigny, received a temporary uniform: 'After several days I began my service, dressed in

an old coat that reached to my ankles. They had not been able to find my size, but that did not stop me from being as happy as a king.'

'Two days after our arrival, we were completely uniformed, armed and equipped,' remembered Gervais:

We found ourselves dressed like right dummies. Our *habits* were like vast overcoats on us, the breeches were like overalls, the *vestes* reached to our knees and one shoe was big enough for both feet. But the most ridiculous thing was the *casque* that this corps wore with its bearskin caterpillar on top. These *casques* were so wide and high that our faces and ears were entirely covered ... At midday roll call, when the guard was changed, our captain came into the barracks. Although he was a serious man, on seeing our costumes he could not stop himself from laughing. He asked the *sergent-major* who had taken us to stores, if he had not noticed the dimensions of the objects, which had been issued? ... Our captain ordered us to follow him. He took us to the clothing store where we found what fitted us.

The art of cleaning and caring for the uniform also had to be learned. 'There was no drill on Saturday,' remembered Putigny. 'I spent the day with my comrades, labelling my meagre belongings and packing them more efficiently into my haversack, which I stored above the bed ... I cleaned my clothes, polishing the metal buttons with *Tripoli*, and lastly, lovingly brushed my uniform.'

Gervais's corporal explained how to clean the metal coat buttons using a *patience*. 'He pulled a piece of wood from his pocket that looked like the end of a board, seven or eight inches long, two inches wide. Along its length, at the centre, was a groove and near to the ends, a hole the diameter of a coat button, through which he passed one of my buttons. He rubbed it with a brush and in a second, the button was polished.'

Putigny describes the complicated system of the soldiers' pay and the deductions made from it: 'The soldiers of a line regiment were paid six *sous* per day, five of which were held back by the corporal for *la grenouille*, with

TABLE OF TYPICAL SQUAD ACCOUNTS

La Tulippe, caporal, commander of the barrack room. Finances from 1 May 1788 over 5 days for 16 men at one livre per day, or ... 16 livres.

EXPENSES

1st	Bruno,	36 pounds of bread at 2 sous 6 deniers	4 livres	10 sous
	Lafleur,	12 pounds of meat at 6 s. 6 d. for 3 days	5 l.	18 s.
		Salt for 5 days		16 s.
	Paul,	Vegetables for five days	2 l.	13 s.
2nd	Aubert	Grease for four days		10 s.
	Nicolas	Candles		6 s.
	Fortin	For a broom		3 s.
	Fourrier	Given for Layer who is in hospital		12 s.
4th	Aubert	8 pounds of meat at 6 s. 6 d. for 2 days	2 l.	12
		Total	16 livres	
	Certified.	(Signature of the commander of the barrack room)		
	Verified	(Signature of the duty officer of the week)		

A squad mess bill from Régiment de Bassigny. Although from a slightly earlier period (1788), this system of deductions continued into the Napoleonic Wars. In garrison, one of the sergent-major's duties was to check with local traders that the men were not scrimping on food to buy alcohol.

which each week we bought meat, bread, vegetables and candles. The sixth *sou* remained in the regimental chest and was paid every four months: four *francs*, six *sous* – a fortune! Yes, but from that, the price of shoes, shirts and stockings was deducted. On top of that, each man paid one *sou* a week per shirt to the washerwomen and one *sou* more to the barber.’

Traditionally soldiers in garrison had been able to secure extra work in the civilian sector, either employing the crafts they had practised before enlisting, or providing manual labour. One complaint before the Revolution was that officers would demand a cut, or withhold the soldier’s pay completely, while he held a secondary job. However, Putigny bemoaned: ‘A young recruit could hardly afford the temptations on offer: In the barracks, the cantinière’s display tempted us with all sorts of things which we imagined indispensable. In town there was the lure of the tavern, of wine and song.’

Before his training began, Gervais remarked on his daily routine, or the *jour militaire*. ‘The sum total of all our work was responding twice a day to roll call and presenting ourselves before the *gamelle* twice a day. The rest of the time was spent going for walks and playing *drogue*, a very complicated card game, which we had very quickly learned and at which we were the top dogs.’ All this was soon to change: ‘My happiness was not long lived.’ Soldier-musician Girault suddenly discovered: ‘Every day I had to go and learn drill.’

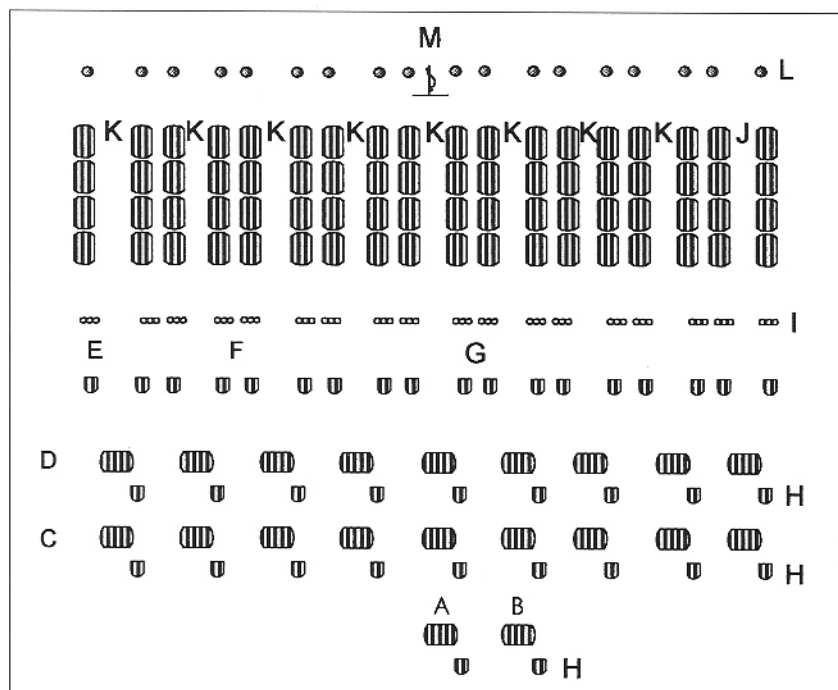
TRAINING

Before his first drill session, Putigny’s corporal introduced him to the tools of the trade: ‘Bourguignon showed me his musket, letting me admire its sparkling barrel and its snow-white sling, before revealing the secret of its whiteness: “You take the pipe clay; reduce it to a powder, mix it with a little glue and it is as brilliant as a star.” He emptied the treasures of his cartridge box on the table before me – the two packets of cartridges, the musket flints. He explained to me how to strip down the weapon, to load it and to extract a ball. He showed me the beef marrow used to grease it and the piece of cloth for wiping it. Lastly, at the bottom of the cartridge box, there was a small pipe and a large silver medallion.’

The recruits were trained according to the newly introduced drill regulation of 1 August 1791. The basis of drill throughout both the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, this regulation divided training into separate *écoles* (schools). In the first, the *école de soldat*, the soldier was instructed in poise, basic foot and musket drill and loading. It was described by the chasseur recruit Gervais:

We assembled on the exercise ground twice a day, for two hours each time, to receive our military instruction. At eight in the morning, sabre at the side, cartridge box on the back, but without a musket, we were on the exercise ground, each allocated to a corporal charged with instructing us. He began by making me point my feet outwards, relax the backs of my knees, to draw back the waist, to shift the upper body forwards, hold my head straight, the arms hanging against my body. My God, it seemed to me that this went on forever and all the while, this brave fellow of a

corporal found nothing was properly positioned. I thought he was doing this to amuse himself or to annoy me, but seeing that all the others were being treated the same way, I was forced to realise that he was being serious and I conformed with good grace. After two hours of this exercise, during which there had been several breaks, my comrade and I were as tired as after a whole day of walking ... We learned to march, which seemed a joke to us. For the first days we marched like turkeys stuck in the mud, without our clumsiness upsetting our instructors, who always taught in a kindly manner. After three weeks, arms drill was taught. It is not surprising how extremely tired we were by this new drill considering our young age.



The volunteers were issued a new-style tent holding 16 men. The additional size of these made the smaller volunteer battalions and the regulars' camps (see Warrior 57: *French Napoleonic Infantryman 1803-15*) almost identical in size. Key: (A) *Chef de bataillon*; (B) *adjutant-major*; (C) captains; (D) *lieutenants and sous-lieutenants*; (E) *adjutant*; (F) drummers; (G) *cantinières*; (H) orderlies; (I) cook fires; (J) grenadier company; (K) fusilier company; (L) *faisceaux*; (M) flag post. (Martin Lancaster)

At that time a regulation musket with bayonet weighed thirteen to fourteen pounds, sometimes more.

After satisfactorily completing the school of the soldier, recruits were trained in the *école de peloton*, where platoon manoeuvres and firing were taught. In the previous school, recruits were drilled individually or in threes. For platoon exercises, they were formed up in ranks by height order: the tallest in the front, shortest in the middle and those of average height in the rear rank. 'We were not used to marching in ranks,' noted Gervais. 'Fortunately, we only marched in two ranks, and because we were in height order, we found ourselves on the left of the second rank, which helped us a little. However, a devil of a corporal, placed at the extreme left of the line, constantly repeated, "Keep your dressing." If I'd had no idea of discipline, I would have asked why he didn't mind his own business.'

Gervais's torment did not last forever: 'They came to us and announced that we had passed the *école de peleton*; we were all proud.' Having struggled with the weight of his musket, Gervais was even more pleased when, 'The *sergent-major*, having remarked that the musket with which I was armed was too heavy for me, made a report to the captain who had a small dragoon-pattern musket given to me. It weighed three or four pounds less than the one I had used until then. It was a considerable relief to me. I was able to make more progress with my arms drill in two weeks than I had made in two months with my previous musket. I was soon admitted into the *école de bataillon*.'

In this last school the soldiers were taught how to march manoeuvre in columns. They were instructed how to change their direction of march, to counter-march, to avoid obstacles, and in the different ways of changing between column to line. The men were also drilled in the formation of the *colonne d'attaque* or attack column, two companies wide and four deep.

The volunteer battalions were taught drill from a simplified version of the 1791 regulations, which only required volunteer battalions to form up in two ranks. As a large percentage of their men had already been taught basic drill in the National Guard, the volunteers made good progress with the more advanced training: 'We spent our time on instructing the volunteers and the officers,' recalled Pouget: In two months' time, we could execute battalion manoeuvres passably well. We had a good esprit de corps, and for a commander we had a former soldier who had served as a captain in Prussia and France. He was ably supported by our adjudant-major and the adjudant sous-officier, both of whom had come from the Line. I was permanently occupied with the instruction, administration and policing of my beloved company. It only manoeuvred well under my command as my lieutenant and sous-lieutenant were totally lacking in the graces of their profession. My *sergent-major* supported me well ... Six weeks after our formation, the battalion was uniformed and we soon received the order to leave Nancy and go to the frontier.

Lieutenant Bial's volunteer battalion had been sent to a training camp near Paris: Our tents were set up alongside a battalion from Paris. The equipment was soon complete. We then occupied ourselves with our instruction, from the commanders to the common soldiers. I procured a book of theory, which I studied closely ... Few officers had a deep knowledge of the theory, as many did not appreciate the necessity of learning it ... The camp of Soissons buzzed with activity. The instruction of the volunteers was conducted without respite. Our battalion could now present itself in the line properly. We received from Paris all the materials, tools and campaign utensils, finally our equipment, and for our headgear a very awkward Roman-style *casque*.'

The progress of the volunteers was noticed by Lieutenant Simon of the Régiment de Walsh, then on garrison duty in the fortress of Longwy near the Luxembourg border. His impression was very positive: 'We have several battalions of volunteers here; they are infinitely better trained and better disciplined than our regiments. If they stay for more than a year, they will be excellent troops and if the Nation knows its interests, it will regiment them and keep them as long as possible.'

The volunteers of '91 were proud of their units and had a good esprit de corps. Bial remembered his battalion commander expelling an insubordinate soldier who was considered a disgrace to his comrades. The battalion was assembled and the troublemaker led before the commander: 'He said that he had been happy with us until now, but that he would not suffer bad soldiers in his battalion, who were guilty of dishonour, who were unworthy of serving with brave men and who consequently degraded them by wearing a soldier's coat. He cut off the man's pigtail himself, pulled off his lapels and his buttons and lastly had him escorted from the town by a corporal and four men.'

EMIGRATION AND INSUBORDINATION

Following the Revolution, the regular army's officer corps underwent enormous change, which in turn had a detrimental effect on the morale and discipline of their subordinates. Since the mutinies of 1790 officers had found their men increasingly disobedient and suspicious of their loyalty to the new political regime. In turn many officers had trouble accepting the sudden erosion of their noble privileges and emigrated across the frontier, where they were rumoured to be forming a counter-revolutionary army.

Lieutenant Etienne d'Hastrel had witnessed several acts of insubordination while serving in the Régiment d'Artois. Revolutionary activity had been mostly limited to debates among the officers and the soldiers' political club. The underlying tensions spilled over occasionally, notably when the new 1791-pattern tricolour flag arrived in Rennes:

The reception of the tricolour flag occasioned a scene of insubordination, which deprived us of several officers and served as a pretext to the revolutionaries to inspire defiance among the soldiers. At the moment when the flag was blessed and given to the battalion, the commander gave the orders to leave the church, but the soldiers would not budge. Stirred up by the youths who had assisted with the ceremony, they declared that they would not leave the old flag to be hung from the church vaults. They insisted that the flag ought to be sent to Paris to be burned with those of the whole army. We could not enforce our commands because they had been persuaded that the old flags would be sent to the émigrés to serve as a rallying sign and encourage desertion. Seeing his authority ignored, the commander left the church and was followed by six or seven other officers. Then Capitaine Sermizelles, who had stayed, took the flag and gave it to the priest to be hung in the church. He then gave the commands; the battalion executed them and returned to barracks in order. This event was debated in the soldiers' club. As many soldiers and sous-officiers participated, a motion was passed that the officers who had left the battalion in the church should be arrested and their conduct investigated. Fortunately they had expected something like this and had left Rennes. They were struck from the regimental register nonetheless.

OPPOSITE Following tradition, the flags of 1791 were blessed. Despite the subsequent policy of dechristianisation, the majority of soldiers would keep their faith. (Myrbach)



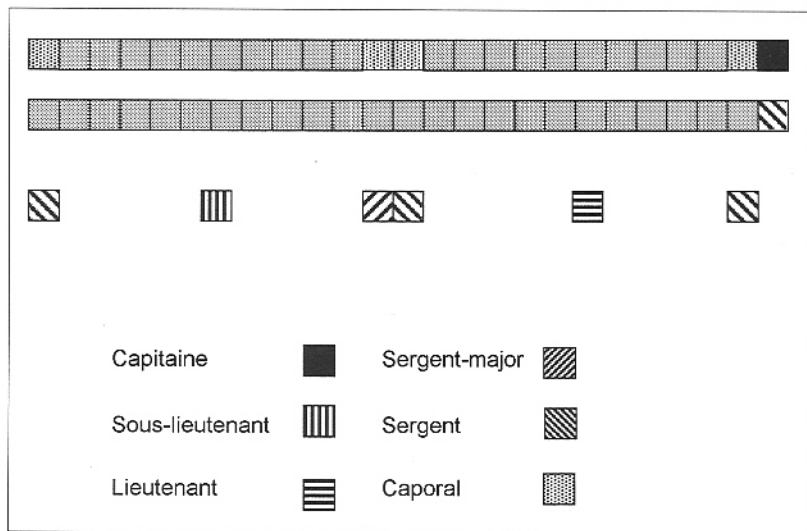
As reports of brigandage spread, officers became increasingly uneasy about the security of their families and estates. After the King's failed attempt to flee France in June 1791, what was at first a trickle became a flood. Officers and their families fled across the frontier with their belongings, leaving their boarded-up ancestral homes at the mercy of looters. Letters from officers at this time demonstrate their reasoning. D'Avlon, wrote on 6 February 1792 from Grenoble: 'The 40e régiment, formerly Soissonnais, no longer exists due to the insubordination of its soldiers. No longer able to serve usefully, I give up the position I hold.' Lieutenant d'Assénot in Rennes on 28 February 1792 wrote: 'Monsieur, since the general insurrection of the first battalion of 48e régiment d'infanterie which occurred this morning, 28 February 1792, and seeing that an officer's voice, the mouthpiece of the law, is completely ignored; that the confidence between us and our subordinates is entirely destroyed and seeing that our presence is totally useless in re-establishing military discipline, I resign the charge of lieutenant that His Majesty had deigned to honour me with.' Colonel d'Attel at Bergues, 6 June 1792, wrote: 'Family matters of the greatest importance and the poor state of my health make it impossible for me to continue service, obliging me to retire to my home. In consequence, I give my resignation of the post of colonel of the 19e régiment d'infanterie and pass the command of this regiment, as well as the command of the fortress, to Monsieur Desponchès who is the premier lieutenant-colonel, until the King has announced my replacement.'

ON A WAR FOOTING

The National Assembly's declaration of war against Austria on 20 April 1792 was greeted with widespread enthusiasm. In garrison at Valenciennes, Putigny and his comrades were assembled to hear the declaration of war being announced: 'At the end of the reading of this proclamation, a liberty-tree was planted with great pomp in the barrack's courtyard and watered with wine, although less copiously than our throats.'

Despite the enthusiasm and the exertions of the year before, when the army was put on a war footing France was still short of men. Therefore, on 12 July 1792 the Assembly decreed the raising of 52,000 recruits for the regular army and 42 new battalions of volunteers with 36,000 men. The height restriction was abolished, allowing many rejected the year before to join up. In some areas the municipal authorities were forced into a form of localised conscription, as those most willing to serve had already

In January 1791 each of the 12 chasseur battalions was composed of eight companies of 59 men, including: 1 capitaine, 1 lieutenant, 1 sous-lieutenant, 1 sergent-major, 1 caporal-fourrier, 4 caporaux, 4 appointés (chosen men), 1 tambour (drummer), 6 carabiniers (marksmen) and 40 chasseurs. (Martin Lancaster)

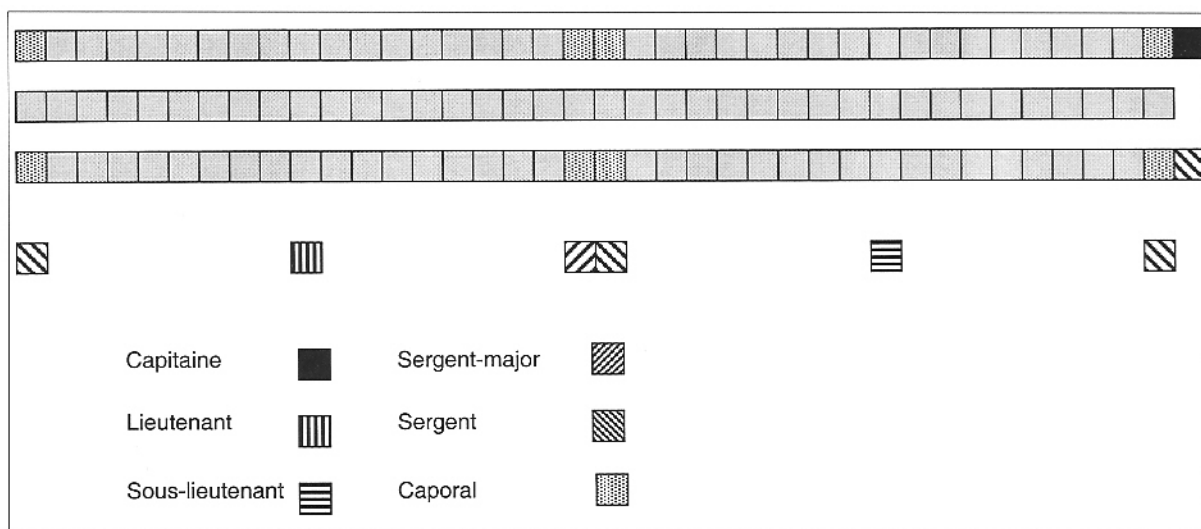


flocked to the colours in the previous year. Eligible men were entered into a ballot and the required number drawn out to meet the quotas.

The high standards set by the first wave of volunteers in 1791 would not be matched again. The volunteers of '92 lacked the pool of talent seen the year before when it came to electing officers and NCOs, which in turn manifested itself in declining discipline. Roch Godart, a commander of a volunteer battalion and former soldier in the Régiment d'Orléans, demonstrates the volatility of this second wave of volunteers:

The battalion had received 15 sous a day in pay, which the Département paid at its own expense. When the pay passed to the government, it was reduced to the rate paid to the army. This reduction gave rise to general grumbling. Despite all the orders informing the volunteers that they had nothing to complain about; that they were being paid like all the other troops in the army; despite all the representations and threats, we had great difficulty making them hear reason. The most stubborn deserted ... A rebellion among the men took place, directed against me personally: 1. Because I made them drill every day; 2. Because they said I gave them the wrong amount of brandy each morning; 3. Because the surplus of pay which they pretended I received, according to them, went into my pocket and that of the quartermaster's; 4. Because they were volunteers and wanted to be treated as such, saying that the officers ought to look at them as their benefactors, because they had been elected as officers during the unit's formation and that it was up to them to appoint others instead. Indeed, before the mutiny burst, they had chosen eight commissioners from among themselves to name and replace those officers who did not suit them ... Finally we discovered their plan. At evening roll call, I arrested the eight commissioners and put them in the town prison. The next morning, around nine o'clock, their supporters went to release them from the prison. I found myself near them, when one shouted, 'There he is!' I went and stood in front of them to order

In April 1791 the chasseur battalions went on to a war footing, expanding the size of a company to 130 men, including three officers (Martin Lancaster)



them to rejoin the ranks, when suddenly more than fifty fell on me, some yelling 'String him up!', others 'Kill him! Kill him! He's a despot who supports the ancien régime and has contempt for liberty and equality.' A mob of men set about hitting me and scratching my face, but I was fortunately saved by some of my brave officers, who took me home. Despite being covered in blood, I wanted to arm myself with my sabre and pistols and with the help of the officers I had with me, return, sabre and pistol in hand, to force them to disperse. The officers advised me to be more prudent.

Nevertheless there were exceptions, particularly among those rejected as too short or too young the year before. Student Soulbault expressed his enthusiasm in a letter to his father: 'I have enrolled with the volunteers in Paris and I am soon to leave and fight the enemies of the Homeland. I was born a Frenchman; I want to share the danger and the glory ... freedom or death, that is my motto.'

FINAL PREPARATIONS

While the new volunteer battalions were being formed, active troops were ordered into camps nearer the frontier. Making ready to leave winter quarters at Metz, Pouget prepared his campaign equipment. 'I bought two horses in addition to those I already owned. At this stage, the government granted three horses to a captain; one for him, one for his orderly and the third to carry his tent, his food and his belongings: this third was called a *cheval de bât*. The lieutenant and the sous-lieutenant had a horse each for riding and a *cheval de bât* between them as they shared the same tent.'

For ordinary soldiers like Putigny there seemed to be plenty to look forward to: 'We were newly uniformed, covered by a woollen blanket for two and one tent per squad. We were excited after hearing the rumour that we were leaving. The washerwomen returned linen to us, which we folded and packed: We also folded our blankets. We rolled pegs, uprights and mallets into the tent's canvas and, following tradition, loaded the whole lot on to the back of the worst horse, led by the most inept soldier in the company.'

Although horses carried the tents, the rest of the squad's equipment was carried on the men's backs. Putigny explains that 'the youngest received the privilege of carrying the *marmite*, then by order of seniority, the pickaxe, the shovel, the water can, the *gamelles*, the bag of meat and the bread bag ... The corporal carried nothing, apart from the precious sachet of salt and pepper.'

Pouget's volunteer battalion (*4e de la Meurthe*) arrived at the frontier to find that 'the Generals had traced out a camp near to the village of Tiercelet. We were no more than four leagues from Luxembourg.' As the first stage of setting up camp, the camp service orders were read out to the men. 'With this formality concluded,' remembered Putigny, 'we formed *faiseaux* and sheltered them from the rain by covering them with a *manteau*. We then had to hurry to put up the tents to shelter ourselves. Each man had to pass a peg through the cords attached to the bottom

Folklore would have it that the volunteers were all revolutionary sans-culottes, lacking in training and equipment but charged with patriotic and revolutionary enthusiasm. Although many were men of principle, their proficiency under arms came from months of drill in the summer of 1791.



of the canvas, which was then hammered into the soft earth by *caporal* Bourguignon with his mallet. With the tent lying flat the central upright was buried in the mud and was quickly fixed in position with a wedge.' The camp was laid out so that 'In front of the road were the piles of arms and the flags. Then came all of the infantry's tents in four parallel lines, preceding the line of horses and the cavalymen. Next came the sweet-smelling line of the kitchens and finally, the marquee tents of *Messieurs* the officers.'

The soldiers slept on a bed of straw, two men sharing a blanket: 'We slept six on each side, the most senior in the middle – I soon learned why,' continues Putigny. 'Around midnight, some large drips fell on my



Until 1791 infantry battalions included a company of chasseurs. Although they were suppressed, the practice continued unofficially with specialist *éclaireurs* selected.

nose. Pockets of water formed and gathered at the edges of the tent, dripping onto my face. To spare myself this inconvenience, I edged my way cautiously between the feet of the sleeping soldiers and gave the canvas a good whack with a stick, setting off a cacophony of whinging from those inside.' Volunteer Paul Thiebault of the Paris National Guard suffered a similar problem: 'On the very first night, we received a pretty exact idea of the delights of campaign life ... [The rain] came down in torrents all night long and the wretched canvas, which was our only defence from the weather, was soon wet through.'

After this first night under canvas, Thiebault quickly learned about the realities of life in the field: 'The next morning, I was on rations and bread, and began as soldiers say, by collaring all the hard jobs, fetching water, making soup. My first soup was my last – it was disgusting and it was settled that this task should be allotted to the greediest man, who could then be relied upon to do the job properly ... However, at the first of these *al fresco* meals I lost a good third of my lawful share. I always hated eating my food too hot, while some men have, as soldiers say, their

throats paved. Thus, as each man dipped his spoon in turn with a movement as regular as that of threshers in a barn, while I was blowing on my first spoonful my voracious comrades were putting down their second, in such wise that I only escaped missing several turns at the price of a scalding palate, throat and stomach.'

Pouget was more enthusiastic about camp life: 'The troops there were taken half from regulars, half from volunteer battalions. These two types of soldiers were mixed one battalion after the other ... The regulars and the volunteers were as inept as one another in putting up and slackening their tents. I wrote about this to my mother and did not omit to inform that I was writing to her sitting on the ground with a drum between my legs in place of a table. The camp duties were organised: Camp guard, grand guards, advanced posts, patrols, post rounds, passwords, reconnaissances were the terms that agreeably struck my ears.'

To traditional regimental rivalry was now added distrust between regulars and volunteers: The regulars were suspicious of the mettle of the volunteers, who in turn were disdainful of professional soldiers and their

associations with the monarchy. The situation was not helped by the higher rate of pay enjoyed by the volunteers over the regulars and also their adoption of the blue coat in place of the traditional white. Putigny did not think highly of his new comrades in arms: 'Our old *régiment de Navarre* was on the right, sandwiched between some volunteer battalions from Paris. We hardly fraternised with those boastful, slovenly bawlers. They were dressed in blue *habits*, except one who wore the grey *habit* of a veteran of fine bearing. On the left of his chest, three red medals hung proudly, representing 72 years service, or 24 per medal. He had served all his life since being an *enfant de troupe* schooled by the Gardes Françaises. He had watched his son sign up, but the son had deserted and the old man, for honour, took his place, hoping to withstand the campaign and hold his place in the ranks ... It was a great consolation for him that we told him to come and visit the Navarre, where he would find himself in a more soldierly atmosphere.'

Lieutenant Bial found himself embroiled in a duel after an officer insulted the volunteers, calling them by the nickname *Carmagnoles*. The evening before honour was to be satisfied, Bial was paid a timely visit by his fencing instructor: 'My old master at arms soon arrived, pleased to see his pupil was putting his lessons to profitable use ... he wanted to give me a final lesson ... [Next morning] we went to the chosen ground. In position, I soon realised that my adversary was no stronger than myself. That reassured me. He made many feints, but I waited resolutely. I was nimble and not too clumsy; I parried him and I closed in on him. He fell back and I realised that the moment had come, when one or the other would be hurt. My *épée* lightly scratched his arm. His arm began to bleed a little, which permitted the witnesses to intervene and put an end to the fight.' Bial's adversary apologised and invited him to dinner, after which they parted as good friends. Bial's

Volunteers await the arrival of regular troops, repairing footwear and refreshing themselves with brandy bought from the *cantinière*.



comrades acclaimed him for defending the honour of the volunteer battalions. Bial himself gave his master at arms an *ecu* 'with which to drink his health'.

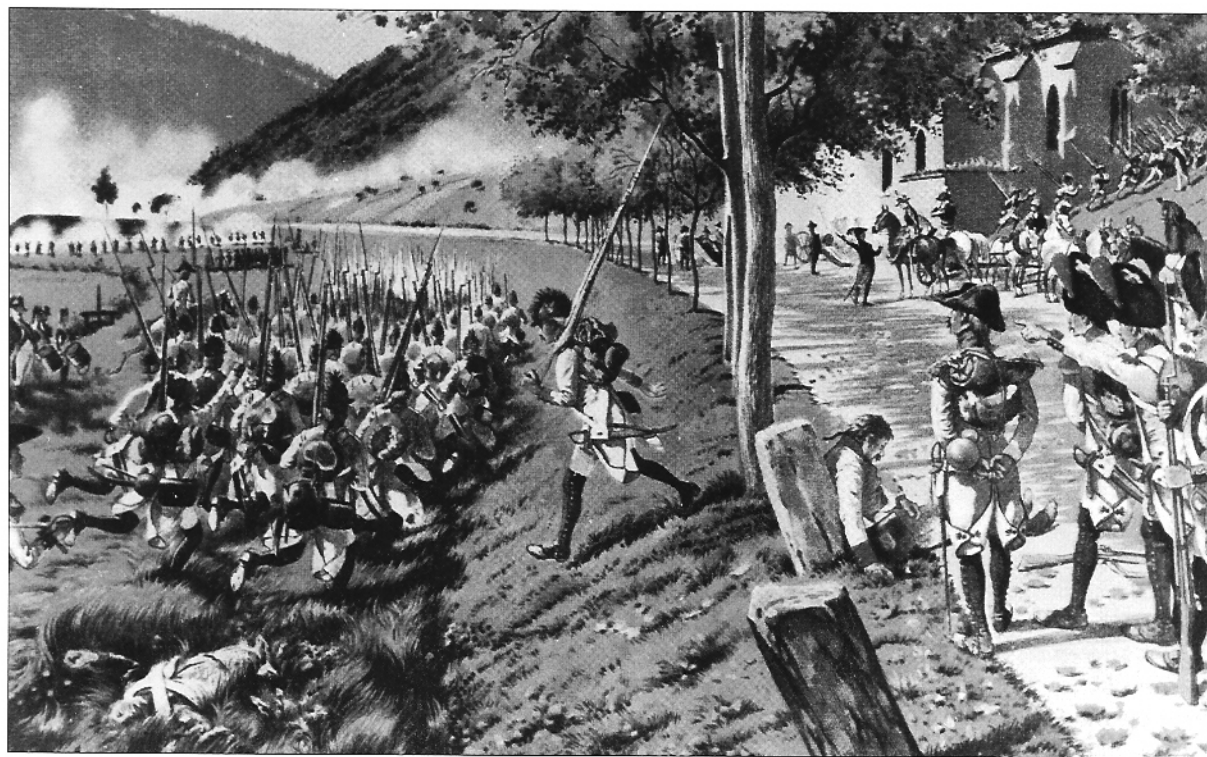
INTO BATTLE

As the hostilities approached, many regular regiments recovered their discipline. The gaps created by émigré officers were filled by capable, long-serving sous-officiers, who despite lacking theoretical knowledge were competent in platoon-level command.

After impressive performances in the training camps, the volunteers were facing their moment of truth. When the first shots were exchanged on 28 April 1792, *les bleus* had a less than triumphant start. A small force under General Dillon advanced from Lille and crossed the border into Belgium, where it encountered an Austrian force. The next day Dillon decided to withdraw and a panic descended across his troops, who cried 'betrayal' and savagely murdered him. The same panic overtook a force under General Biron, who was lucky to avoid Dillon's fate. Standing on the rampart of Valenciennes, Putigny saw the 'first retreating soldiers unexpectedly arrive pell-mell in panicked flight'.

The nervous anxiety was felt by volunteer Cognet: 'As night fell, several of our young soldiers thought that they had seen an enemy column, which had reached our lines after passing through the forward posts. They cried "*Aux armes!*" A panic resulted in the new battalions, which was soon dispelled, thanks to the steady bearing of the regulars ... When calm was finally established, I went with one of my friends to a battalion of regulars. There I

While artillery protects the road, line infantry moves off to support *tirailleurs*. The thick gunpowder smoke meant that skirmish screens could obscure the movements of troops behind.



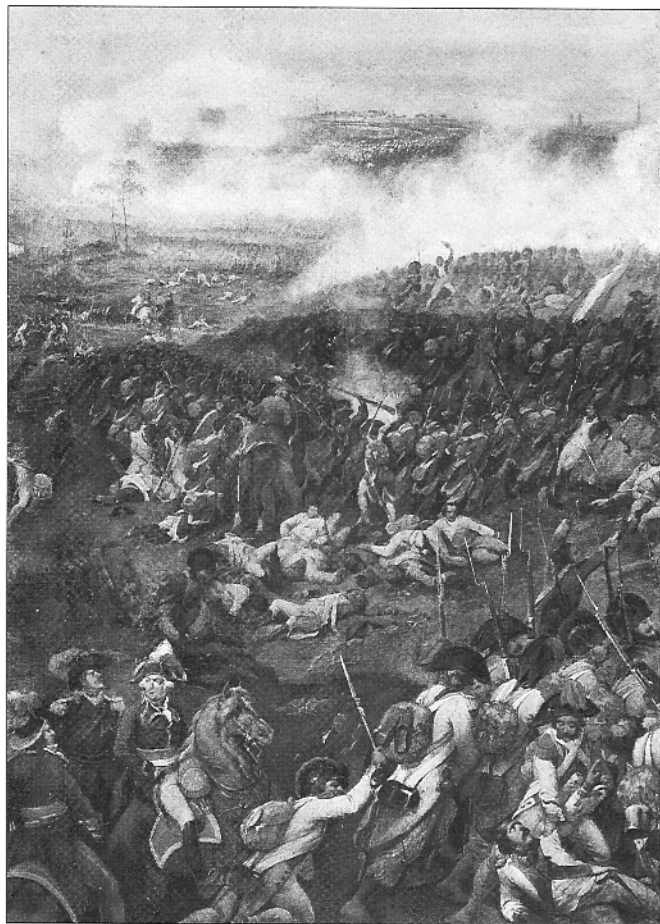
found a sensible man, full of the spirit of his profession, who demonstrated to me how absurd this panic was; that it was impossible for a camp as well covered as ours to be attacked without a preliminary engagement.' This incident brought it home to Cignet that volunteer commanders were only 'elected young men, without experience and without real authority'.

The summer of 1792 passed with outpost skirmishes along the frontiers, before France was invaded and Paris threatened, resulting in the first pitched battles of the war. The enemy advance caught Putigny unawares. While working in camp, he watched as:

a chasseur from the forward posts galloped in to alert headquarters that the Austrians were attacking ... Towards nine o'clock in the morning, a fusillade caught our attention and soon become so heavy and so close that we were despatched at the double from camp. The whole army was already under arms. There was no question of our first having soup or distributing two days of supplementary rations. There was only time to drop our tools and march off against the enemy, with empty stomachs. [The General] made us load our weapons: '*en avant, pas de charge, march!*' ... The salvos of balls and bullets had pinned down our advance-guard in the woods where it could not deploy and a cavalry charge forced it to retreat in disorder ... Our first line dashed itself against an invisible enemy, fell back and then re-formed. The ground trembled beneath our feet and was shaken by the cannonade. '*En avant Navarre, without fear!*' At the old regimental battle cry, we retorted '*à la baïonnette*' ... For our part, we were engaged in a copse of five or six-year-old trees, still very much in leaf despite the season. The canister hacked off the branches. An officer fell into my arms and I rolled over with him. Personally I received nothing but a rain of reddish leaves and twigs from the hazelnut trees.

Volunteer Parison also recalled the intensity of the firefight: 'The cannonballs and shells fell as thick as flies. The musketry against us was so great that balls fell in front and behind us like hail.'

'We stayed in position for around half an hour, at *l'arme au bras*, exposed to enemy fire, which sent a hail of cannonballs and shells at us,' remembered d'Hastrel. 'We had no cannons with which to reply and our position was even more critical as it was the first time that our soldiers had been under fire. But they showed all the firmness of hardened soldiers



Intermixed columns of volunteers and regulars under Austrian artillery fire at Anderlecht (13 November 1792).

and not one of them quit the ranks. The sang-froid of our colonel contributed greatly to reassuring the battalion. A shell fell a few paces from him, and as a few soldiers ducked he said to them calmly, "Don't move, it's nothing but a shell."

Musician Girault and the regimental band were asked to come forward and play for the troops under fire. They added to the cacophony of pre-revolutionary regimental war cries and patriotic songs with a rendition of the popular *Ça Ira*, a song which urged the stringing up of aristocrats from lampposts. Their rendition was short-lived:

... for the piece was hardly begun when two of our musicians were wounded and one killed, bringing a rapid stop to the music. This was not reassuring, as it was the first time I had seen action. Fortunately, the only damage I sustained was on my outfit, which was completely plastered with the brains of an officer, who was killed several paces in front of me. The same terrifying artillery discharge had carried off twenty-one men of 5th company's front rank. Each instant we were obliged to lie down to avoid the shell fragments. In the morning, they picked up plenty of wounded and carried them to the village. But the enemy had directed several cannon at a hollow, through which they had to pass. Those carrying the wounded were killed along with them. We soon had to force soldiers to perform this task and many unfortunately perished as a result. I saw a soldier carrying a wounded man on his shoulders. The latter had his head carried off by a cannonball but the man carrying him walked more than ten paces without noticing.

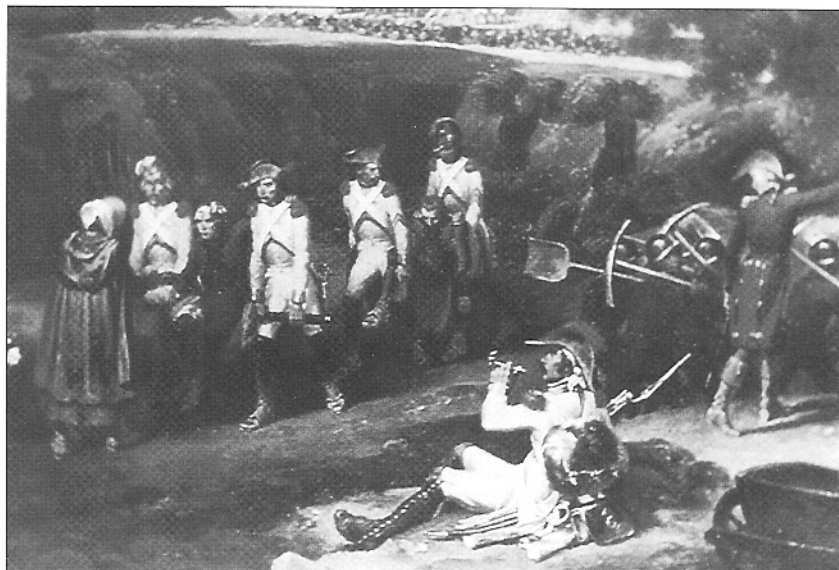
Austrian dragoons charged Putigny's regiment as it cleared the woods, but one soldier stood his ground in search of a prize: 'We held firm. A Gascon in the company came to grips with an enemy horseman, killing him with a musket shot. The former, wrapped in his large white coat, had not yet touched the earth when the Gascon had already seized the horse.'

In contrast Cognet was lucky to survive being caught in the open during an Austrian cavalry charge: 'I was pursued for a long time by two cavalymen, whom I had the luck to hold at bay with nothing but flashes in the pan. My musket, or rather the one that I had grabbed from the pile when we were attacked, could not fire, as it had been ruined by the torrential rain, which had inundated us for forty-eight hours. It must be said that the plain was filled with *tirailleurs*; in the middle of all the smoke



A grenadier sergeant breaks the fall of a wounded officer. The cramped conditions of fighting in the three-rank formation is clearly demonstrated in this scene. (Bellangé)

A *cantinière* does her part to revive the wounded men being evacuated from the field. Note the metal-helmeted engineers on the right.



One of the most significant reforms of the revolutionary era saw ordinary soldiers receiving pensions linked to the severity of their wounds. Soldiers went into action knowing that if they were killed, their widows would receive state assistance. (Seele)

and detonations, my two enemies did not perceive the uselessness of my defence. I was saved by their error and rejoined my comrades.'

In reserve Lieutenant Simon watched as 'the battalion of the 58e regiment, formerly Rohergue ... was sent by the General to go to repel the enemy cavalry ... The drummers beat the charge and the band played *Ça Ira*. They fell on the deployed cavalry, which could not withstand the shock for long. It saved itself in disorder after brief resistance.'



As the Austrian cavalry retreated, Putigny's regiment regrouped behind a wood: 'Navarre had been re-formed in a clearing where the other battalions were; the attack was taken up again. Seeing the leaves moving, the Austrians greeted us with a renewed rolling fire. Too bad; we exited the woods and deployed. "*En avant* Navarre, without fear!" We climbed the hill at the pas de charge. The volunteers from Paris also came up singing their songs. Supported by cavalry, the marvellous Bercheny Hussars, we got right amongst those who resisted, pushing the enemy back with our bayonets.'

Fired up by the music and drums, French soldiers closed with the enemy in hand-to-hand combat: 'Today we took a redoubt with the bayonet,' recalled volunteer Charles François. 'I was one of the first to get up; an émigré seized hold of me, but my comrades came up as we were grappling together. He could not wrest my gun from me, and fled; we ran after him and just as he was jumping a hedge, I shoved my bayonet into his body; he fell and I killed him and took his boots and also his purse, which contained fifty-three sous.' Volunteer Parison wrote home describing the shock of combat. His friend 'Gabriel Vidal was killed at my side on the 18 November by the émigrés and I almost was too. Two of them fell on me, but I did not lose my head. I thrust my bayonet into the stomach of one and one of my comrades cut the head off the other.' Lieutenant Simon also recalled a close shave: 'I received a sabre cut from an Austrian corporal that almost cut off two fingers of my left hand. He was cut down by my grenadiers.'

After the battle, Putigny's priority was food: 'We bivouacked in position, hurrying to make soup: being drunk on victory did not compensate the hunger in our bellies for long ... The victors cooked their thin soup over a pile of coals (our bread had been left in camp). We slept on the battlefield without straw and without tents before continuing the pursuit.'

D'Hastrel's 'whole battalion slept on the heights. It was a penetrating cold. I was dug into the ground like a rabbit, but the cold soon woke me. I moved close to a fire, around which I couldn't see anyone. No sooner had I taken a step than a sour voice cursed me as he got up. I tried to save myself by jumping over the fire, but I kicked up the coals, which fell on the other soldiers, whom I could not see because of the grey overcoats covering them entirely. There was a general uproar, each man shouted and tried to outdo one another with curses. Utterly disconcerted, I jumped into my hole where I shivered until the next day. In the morning, the camping equipment arrived, but we could only set up camp with great difficulty as the ground was sandy and the pegs would not hold. This inconvenience was all the more disagreeable, as the winds in that region are frequent and violent. In addition, each night stray horses came by, prowling around the tents and getting caught up in the cords, often pulled them down.'

To steady his untested volunteer battalions at the battle of Valmy, General Kellermann brigaded them with battalions of regulars, halting the Duke of Brunswick's advance on Paris. (Job)



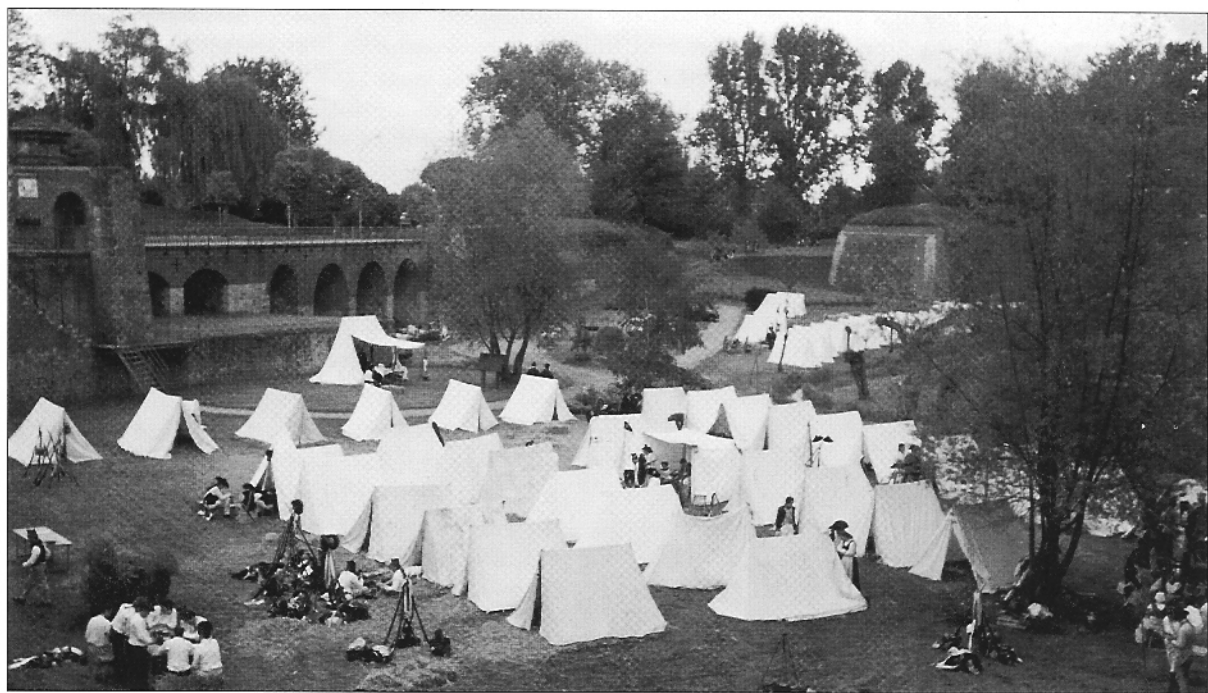
It was in these miserable conditions that the soldiers began to hear that France had declared itself a republic on 22 September 1792, and that the King had been imprisoned. Up at the frontline Lieutenant Simon wrote home for confirmation of this news: 'The rain has not stopped all night. In my life, my teeth have never chattered so hard. Well, at dawn we are leaving these damned woods. Some of the soldiers have lost their hats, their muskets; others are barefoot. As for myself, I have parted with my *hausse col*; my trousers and my overcoat are torn. To cap it all we have not found any bread: This evening we have had a piece of biscuit ... We are up to our necks in misery. ... The only thing that consoles us is that the enemy is much worse off than us. Rumour has it that we are now Republicans, that the National Convention has deposed the King. We don't know if that news is true.'

UNDER SIEGE

Capitaine Pouget found his border fortress base was under siege:

[The General] camped our battalion on the glacis with a simple palisade separating us from the enemy ... The General did not order a single sortie, limiting himself to several light cavalry patrols. When he went out in person, which he did very often, he permitted well-mounted officers to accompany him, independent of his escort. I went out with his *aides-de-camp* as often as my duties allowed. One day the General ... went along the Luxembourg road. His intention was not to unsettle the Prussian vedettes, which were still far off, but they fired several cannonballs at us. Before the revolution, it was not the custom to fire on a General, who went out

A camp at Le Quesnoy, one of the many fortresses that came under siege in the early part of the war. (Reconstitution – author's photo)



to reconnoitre his adversary's positions. The General took this as an insult and a lack of regard for custom. We returned to the town at the gallop, not out of fear from the projectiles, nor the approach of the enemy, but beside ourselves with indignation. The General went up onto the ramparts and fired some sixteen-pounders on the enemy headquarters at Catum, a chateau near the Thionville road, rendering it uninhabitable ... That same night the enemy planned to undertake a major assault on the town without digging preliminary trenches or a line of circumvallation. At eleven o'clock at night, they opened up with a heavy bombardment on the fortress. They threw more than 300 projectiles, cannonballs and shells before the artillery on the rampart replied ... The Line artillerymen and National Guard gunners had met earlier in the day and had drunk themselves stupid. Only after a long interval did the fortress reply and its fire was so badly directed that several cannonballs passed over the redoubt that I had been detailed to defend. I sent a *sergent* to make them change their aim.



In a letter to a friend, Lieutenant Simon also recalled the detrimental effect alcohol had on defenders: 'We lost several grenadiers in the trenches yesterday and tonight. I have been lightly wounded on the big toe of my left foot, by a stone fragment thrown up by an enemy cannonball. I have had a part of the tricolour plume on my chapeau carried away by ball. A volunteer from one of the new Paris battalions, known here under the name of *the head choppers*, who was working on the trench, being drunk, fired his musket into an ammunition box. The ball passed through one of my grenadier's legs, carrying off two fingers of the right hand and entering the body of one of our best gunners, just below the heart. Those who were around him received powder burns.'

Danger was ever-present and Pouget had several narrow escapes: 'One day, after coming back from guard duty, I threw myself on my bed for a rest. We were on the glacis, near the Luxembourg gate. I heard a large detonation from the enemy camp and got up immediately. As I left my tent, a second detonation was heard much nearer to me. A fragment of a bomb fired at the town propelled an enormous lump of cast iron through my tent, landing in the middle of my bed, which I had just left out of simple curiosity, and buried itself six inches into the soil.' Putigny also recounted the lucky escape of his captain during a siege. After spending 30 hours working in the trenches under fire, 'our Capitaine Gariot went off to a house near the redoubt where his dinner had been

Soldiers have removed their haversacks and *habits*, stacking them round a *faisceau* while they attend to fatigue duties. (Reconstitution – author's photo)

prepared. He opened the door; a cannonball entered with him and smashed his boiled egg and a tankard of beer. The servant dropped his tray and left the rest of the meal on the floor.'

SUSPICION AND TERROR

By the end of 1792 the French had been blooded and had tasted victory at the battles of Valmy and Jemappes. Following these battles the French recovered lost territory, reclaimed their fortresses and even made territorial gains, taking Brussels. However, rather than elation, a growing sense of paranoia gripped the army, which suspected its commanders of betrayal. J. Dupuy of 12e chasseur battalion serving in Kellermann's avant-garde recalled the pursuit of the Prussians from French territory: 'Since yesterday evening we have been a quarter of a league from Longwy. Our troops entered yesterday, although the Prussians were still there. They held half the town and we the other. They mounted guard at the gates on their side. They evacuated it today at midday. There is surely an arrangement with the Prussian King, for since the 17th we have been forbidden from firing on them or taking any booty while following them. Their horses fall dead at every instant. The other day, we waited in a field for ten hours, while they filed through a village. They came to ask our General for two hours and when they had passed, they came to ask for more still. Yesterday evening some of our chasseurs took some of their horses. The General ordered them to be returned and they had to pay back double the price they had received for those that were sold.'

This growing atmosphere of suspicion was not helped by the actions of Capitaine Pouget and his comrades: 'One day a Prussian officer approached us; we waited for him and when he was within earshot he began a conversation in French ... He said to us that his brothers in arms and he would be delighted to make our acquaintance. Consequently he invited us the next day to come and empty a bowl of punch, which he would prepare in a farm, which was considered to be neutral territory ... He would come with an equal number of officers and he gave his word of honour that this was not a trap ... The following day, we all arrived at the appointed place with no guarantee other than military word of honour. We did not leave without exchanging our names and the name of the corps in which we served. We swore that if the fortunes of war saw us fall into one another's hands, we would mutually act as friends and protectors. We offered a drink in return for these gentlemen,

The glory enjoyed by successful French generals was often fleeting. Fearful of a military coup, political commissars were sent on mission to ensure their loyalty.



the next day at the same time. The reunion was as merry as the preceding one and we left one another as long-standing friends.'

Pouget thought it wise to inform their commander about these meetings before he found out himself. He gave them a severe reprimand, warning them that the 'Convention had sent representatives to the army and if our thoughtlessness had been made known to them, they would have arrested us as traitors, put us on trial and condemned us to capital punishment.' All contacts with the Prussians quickly ceased.

The appearance of these Représentants du Peuple was ominously noted by d'Hastrel: 'The Convention's commissars, sent to stay with the army, came along the line in full costume and passed the troops in review. One could distinguish them by their tricolour sash and their hats decorated with a similar ribbon, surmounted by three tricolour plumes.' The commissars' principal task was to ensure that generals remained loyal to the government and that its orders were carried out. The National Convention was fearful of Caesarism – a popular general marching with his army on Paris. In 1792 General Lafayette had attempted this to maintain the constitutional monarchy and General Dumouriez tried the same on 5 April 1793. Although Dumouriez was equally unsuccessful and defected to the Allies, the repercussions of this event were enormous. The following day Jacobin extremists took control in Paris, forming the infamous Committee of Public Safety.

The commissars' power over the army in the field was absolute. Anyone unlucky enough to be suspected of treason or simple failure was liable to be guillotined. D'Hastrel quickly realised that although it was a time of enormous opportunity and rapid promotion, sometimes it was better to avoid the limelight: 'General Clarke wanted to make me adjudant-général but I refused this dangerous honour. Each day, the people's representatives, under the most frivolous pretexts, arrested colonels and generals as traitors and sent them to the revolutionary tribunal in Paris to feed the guillotine.

I thought it wise to remain in obscurity.'

After a retreat d'Hastrel saw 'two special commissars sent by the National Convention arrive at the army. They had been invested with unlimited powers to investigate the causes of [the defeat]. This is always our government's policy. At the slightest check, they cry treason and then dismiss the Generals, arrest them, shoot them or wrongly guillotine them ... To gain popularity the representatives flatter the soldiers and stir up distrust against their commanders. So, when an officer tries to do his duty, they accuse him of aristocracy; the soldiers denounce him and the representatives, without any examination, dismiss him. If, in contrast, a soldier is brought before a military tribunal, he is certain to walk away as white as snow. After that, it is easy to imagine how far discipline goes. The representatives at present feel that it is necessary to re-establish discipline, but they fear becoming unpopular. In the meantime the soldiers are free to all excesses. The army will soon be nothing but a gathering of brigands in uniform.'

Reserves moving up during the action at Tirlémont (16 March 1793). Dumouriez's subsequent desertion provoked the wholesale restructuring of the French army under the Jacobin regime.



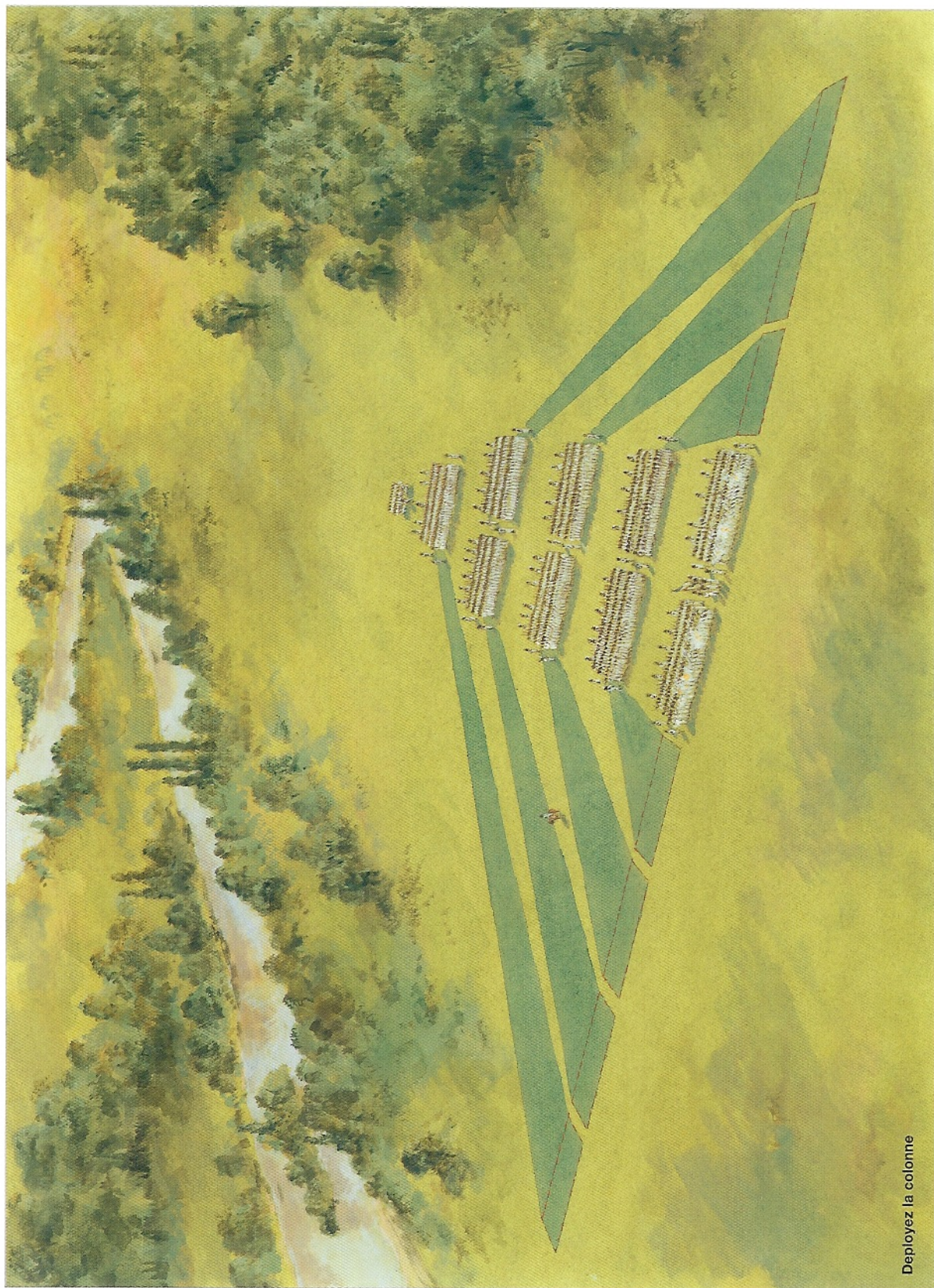






Departure





Deployez la colonne



Baptism of fire

Crossing the Alps





Roch Godart's experiences echo d'Hastrel: 'The officers denounced me because I made them drill for five days and drilled the *sous-officiers* on the sixth; because I put them under arms two hours before dawn, after the patrols came in; because I exercised too much severity and that ... I treated them like under the ancien régime; that I was an utter despot and too brutal towards them. Among these denouncers were officers of all ranks, who were the most foul vile cowards, not wanting to learn, speaking insignificant words about liberty and equality and radicalism, all the while preaching to the soldiers about disobedience and exhorting them to rebellion.' Joliclerc was sympathetic although resigned to his superior's plight: 'our officers have arrested our colonel, whose fate has to be decided ... This is what happens to those that are not killed by the enemy. They are locked up or guillotined. That's the way of this world.'

The dark days of *La Terreur* would remain in place until, as d'Hastrel described with some relief, 'the fortunate revolution of 9 Thermidor (27 July 1794) and the fall of Robespierre. This news caused great sensation in the army; each blessed the heavens to have finally stopped this tiger thirsty for the blood of Frenchmen.'

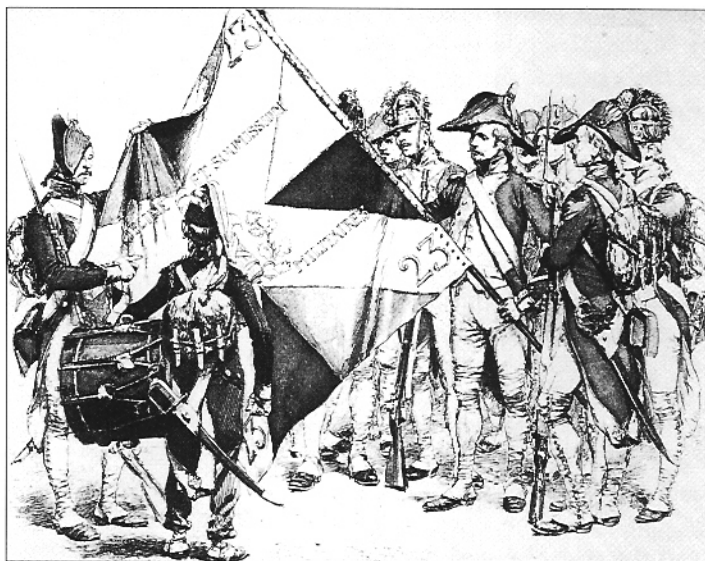
AMALGAMATION AND JACOBINISM

A more positive aspect of the Jacobin regime were the reforms of Lazare Carnot, Minister of War and so-called 'Organiser of Victory'. Carnot advocated a policy of Total War, turning over the entire nation's resources to the pursuit of victory. As well as addressing the issue of recruitment, he oversaw the restructuring of the army, fusing the remnants of the regular army with the volunteer battalions to create a single national army.

A series of laws were passed calling for the *embrigadement* of two battalions of volunteers with one battalion of regulars. 'In the spring of 1794,' thought Putigny, 'the army was transformed.' The amalgamations were the scenes of great ceremony, as described by Orson: 'The three battalions were gathered in the plain of Otterstädt. Général Beaupuy said these words: "Third battalion of Rhône-et-Loire, fifth Manche and fifth Seine-et-Oise you here are henceforth united, forming just a single corps; may the best harmony reign between you for the service of the Republic!" Then, there was a roll on the drums and the General had the three battalions parade past together, taking the name of the 205e demi-brigade.'

This process extended to the light infantry battalions too, which took the new title of *demi-brigades légères*. The amalgamation ceremony for the 9e demi-brigade Légère, was presided over by Representative Gillet, who announced, 'Officers, sous-officiers,

The demi-brigades swept away all outward traces of the royal army. The traditional white infantry coat gave way to the blue of the volunteers.



THE REVOLUTIONARY CALENDAR

Month	Signifying	Equivalent
Vendémaire	Grape harvests	22 Sep – 21 Oct
Brumaire	Fogs	22 Oct – 20 Nov
Frimaire	Frosts	21 Nov – 20 Dec
Nivôse	Snows	21 Dec – 19 Jan
Pluviôse	Rains	20 Jan – 18 Feb
Ventôse	Winds	19 Feb – 20 Mar
Germinal	Buds	21 Mar – 19 Apr
Floréal	Flowers	20 Apr – 19 May
Prairial	Meadows	20 May – 18 Jul
Thermidor	Heat	19 Jul – 17 Aug
Fructidor	Fruit	18 Aug – 16 Sep
Sansculottides	5-day holiday	17 Sep – 21 Sep

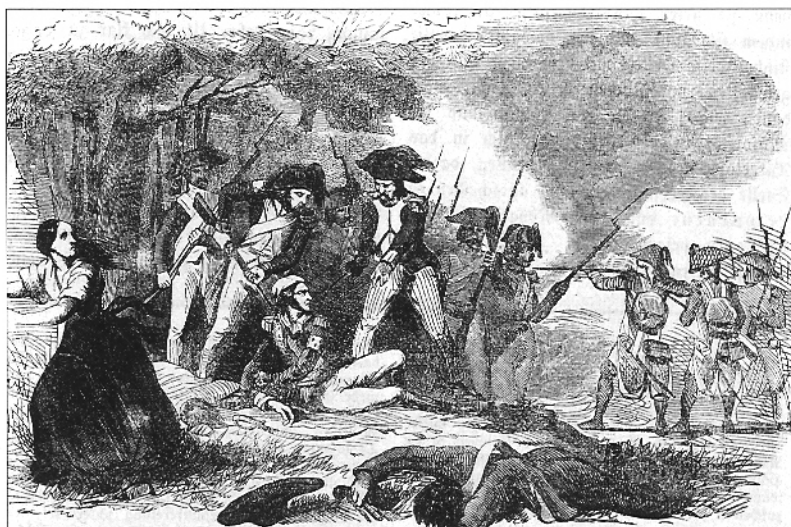
The revolutionary calendar was introduced in October 1793, remaining in use until 1806. Each month was divided into three decades of ten days named: **Primedi, Duodi, Tridi, Quartidi, Quintidi, Sextidi, Septidi, Octidi, Nondidi and Décadi**. In leap years the **Sansculottides (fête days)** lasted for six days.

soldiers, swear and promise obedience to the law and military discipline. Swear to maintain liberty, equality, the constitution, the unity and indivisibility of the French Republic or to die!' Gillet recorded that after the speech, 'there was a roll on the drums, the people's representative instructed the unit commanders to order ground arms. The battalions were dismissed, mingled together: officers, sous-officiers and soldiers gave one another fraternal kisses. It would be impossible to describe this touching scene. 3,000 men throwing themselves into one another's arms, embracing one another, pressed around the people's representative. ... A wonderful moment: it brought tears of joy and emotion to my eyes. After expressing their happiness, the recall was sounded and each resumed his position. Citizen Eirisch, the most senior battalion commander, was appointed as the commander of the demi-brigade. The three battalions soon filed past the Nation's representative in a grand parade, then went back to their billets.'

The Jacobin government also made attempts to revolutionise military society, as Putigny noted: 'Soldiers of all ranks were invited to address one another commonly as "Citizen", while everywhere, on large posters over doorways, one read that this was an honourable title.'

At the time the revolutionary calendar was adopted (22 September 1793), a policy of dechristianisation was implemented. Although the government wanted to suppress the Church's considerable power, it also believed that Man had to be accountable to some higher authority. Therefore a state religion known as *The Cult of the Supreme Being* was introduced. However, it was

Open support for the exiled monarchy and Catholic Church fuelled a bitter civil war in the west of France. Like the later Napoleonic guerrilla war in Spain, the fighting in the Vendée was noted for atrocities on both sides.





The civil war spread to the south of France, with the port of Toulon raising the Bourbon flag and going over to the British on 28 August 1793. Even at the time of Bonaparte's coup, the civil wars tied up many much-needed troops.

unrealistic to expect soldiers to turn away from the Church entirely. Joliciere revealed the dual system in a letter to his mother on Easter day 1795 (using the republican date of 16 Germinal Year 3): 'Today, Easter day, two or three Masses were celebrated in town for the first time. It has been two years since I have been. There was as

much delight among the soldiers as with the inhabitants.'

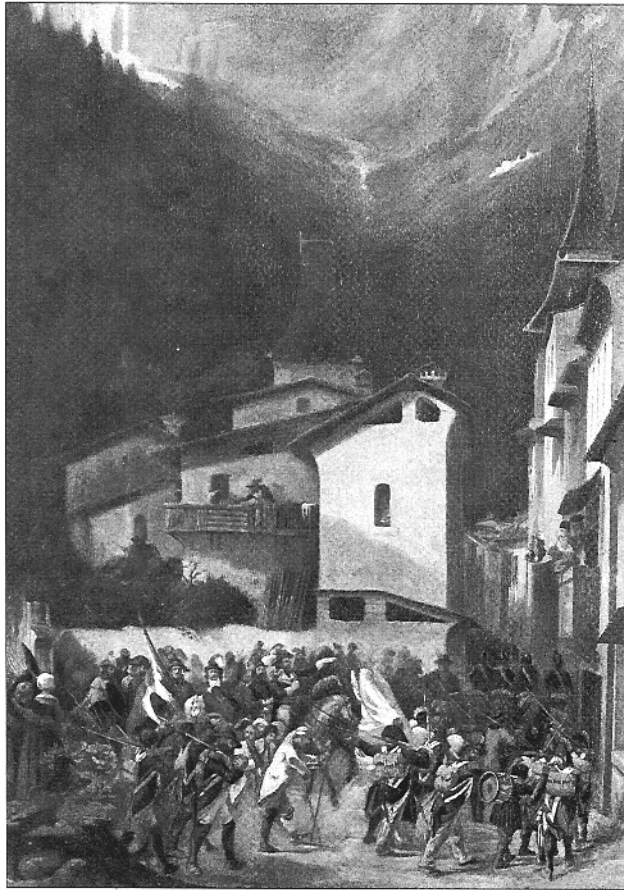
Joliciere's faith had survived the savage civil war fought in the west of France, where some departments had declared themselves in favour of the monarchy and the Church. He had witnessed the atrocities committed after the government sent troops to 'ravage the Départements of Deux-Sèvres and la Vendée. We carried flame and fire; musket in one hand and a torch in the other. Men and women, all were put to the sword. It was necessary that all perished, except small children. These Départements must serve as an example to the others who are thinking of revolt. We have already burned around seven leagues of countryside. Some soldiers have made their fortune. Everything can be pillaged.'



HARDSHIPS ON CAMPAIGN

The 'War of Liberty' soon became a war of attrition that dragged on almost without respite for a decade. Even before hostilities commenced, soldiers arriving at the frontline found that their attitudes to soldiering changed dramatically. One of the first casualties of war was parade-ground neatness. Thiebault was rather surprised at the reality: 'Being about to appear before troops, who had been fighting for what seemed to us the enormous time of six months, we took extra pains to reach the camp in thoroughly smart condition, but our efforts were not well rewarded. One of their

After several years of war many volunteers and levies knew no other life than soldiering. They grew up very quickly under fire, facing the armies of Prussia, Austria, Britain, Spain, Russia and Turkey. They were in turn used as an instrument of liberation, taking the revolution over the frontiers, and of repression, savagely suppressing internal anti-government dissent. (Myrbach)



Général Kellermann's *Armée des Alpes* on the frontiers of Italy (October 1793). The Italian theatre would play host to many of France's most notable victories and make the reputation of some of its most famous soldiers.

shot in the leg; Carrez from Communailles had a ball in the neck. Little Chauvin had one enter him below the ear and pass through the mouth, breaking his jaw. Vernier from Mignovillard had his leg slightly wounded by a canister round. One of the Ducrets from Asurette has a ball in his foot. Our drummer, one of the Tinots from Nozeroy, has one in the knee. Magnien's brother from Nozeroy has a ball behind the shoulder. Some of those not from round our way were laid out stone dead. We had others carried from the battlefield but who died several hours later; there was one of them who'd had his tongue cut off by a ball. All these men were in our company. I myself was hit on the nose by a canister round.'

One of the most common pleas in letters was for money to be sent. France had introduced a paper currency called *assignats*, which were very rarely accepted by merchants and became all but worthless. 'For 100,000 livres in assignats, you would not get a pound of bread, thus our pay is worthless,' pleaded Joliclerc. 'Until now, I used my pay for an ounce of tobacco which cost me 10 livres per ounce, but I think that soon I will not be able to have it. Therefore I must sell my possessions to get some coinage. They say that we are going to have two sols a day, but until now we have had nothing and what could we do with two sols? Nothing. The Republican coins of 15 sols, 30 sols and 6 francs are worthless; the peasants do not want them ... An assignat of one hundred sols was valued at one sol in cash; but not any more. An ecu of 6 francs

grenadiers who had been lying in the mud for a month was heard to say to another as dirty as himself, 'Come along and see some grenadiers just out of the band-box.' A remark that made such an impression on us that by the next day we could not be distinguished from the rest of the troops.'

The terrible hardships faced by soldiers featured heavily in their letters home. 'The ice and snow,' moaned volunteer Parison, 'has fallen in such great quantity. We are poorly uniformed, verminous and itchy, but we hope to be back in France soon.' Officer Pierre Girardon wished that he could 'change my underwear; It has been three months since my breeches left my legs, the same for my boots. I will not speak of the lice.' François Cugny of the 27e Régiment focused on his exhausted condition: 'I would like to say that for eight months I have been so weary. Always sleeping on the ground, spending nights in bivouacs, always under the nose of the enemy, our regiment is always at the front, we should have 800 in our battalion when actually we are no more than 200.'

Recording the effects of battle, Caporal Joliclerc wrote to his mother about the fate of his local comrades: 'We suffered heavily during the attack. Hugon from Nozeroy was

was sold for 1,000 livres for a few days; but today you can't find this price. If the government does not take measures, the assignat's worth will disappear completely.'

Without a doubt these letters generated sympathy from family and friends, who in turn offered encouragement however they could. One father, Nicholas Thirion, wrote to his son on 25 May 1794: 'I received your letter, my son, dated 22 floréal. Your mother, your sisters and myself, we were all delighted to learn that you are well. The fever that you have had is nothing but a light indisposition for a republican who must know how to suffer and die in the defence of his country ... Take courage; never stray from the principles that I have instilled in you. Learn to bear hunger, thirst, the cold and the heat. When you suffer, know that it is for your parents and your Homeland. When you march into combat, never forget it is for your father, your mother, your brothers, your sisters and to prefer death to ignominy.'

Joliclerc's mother wrote to her son, naively wondering why he had still not come home when others had returned, apparently with permission. His reply was clear: 'You tell me that many volunteers have taken their leave and that I have not wanted to take mine. Fear not, for when I take it, it will be authorised. You tell me that when it was autumn I promised you that I would come in the spring and then when it was spring, I would come in the autumn and so on. This is how I spend my life and my youth. There are some far better than me who, like myself, are settled here. Would you prefer that I spent this life in Switzerland, in Germany or in England? I am at my post and I will stay there. Would you prefer me to be a bandit in woods of Salins, by the coast, pursued by gendarmes, or obliged to become a highwayman? That is the life that awaits young men on the run. Do you find that attractive?'

Soldiers maimed or struck down by sickness were commonly discharged and sent home. However, there were more bizarre cases of discharge: 'We were billeted with the 3e bataillon de l'Ain, in which was found a soldier who ate living animals. He was named Kerrere ... and was only twenty-two years old. He presented himself before the commissars charged with examining men proposed for discharge, who gave him a live cat. He seized it by the neck and the four paws, and then gnawed its nails, feet and legs. After this preliminary operation, he bit off the lower jaw, then the upper, swallowing it whole. Then, gripping his victim by the neck and the hindquarters, he started on its back with an appetite that sickened the assistants, who dismissed him from service. But he did not want to abandon his prey. He put it in his bag, promising to finish it for his supper.' (d'Hastrel)

More dangerous than enemy bullets, the threat of sickness and disease always loomed nearby. Putigny picked up a contagious disease that had been spread during the siege of Ypres. His symptoms were:



En sentinelle – an infantryman stands guard. Everything a soldier owned he carried in his coat pockets, money belt, his haversack or strapped to it.



As supply lines broke down, uniformity suffered heavily, with trousers and gaiters in particular being replaced with whatever came to hand.

with local women. Lieutenant François commented slyly that in Namur, 'The women are much more patriotic than in France, although they are not as pretty.' Captain François was subtler: 'I arranged to get into my company a young washerwoman, who belonged to that demi-brigade. She was seventeen or eighteen years old and married to an old German *sergent*, who had belonged to the Suedois regiment ... I obtained a barrel of spirits for this little princess, to hang across her shoulders, a funnel and some glasses and asked the commander of the second battalion to appoint her as a *vivandière* ... I procured for her one of those carts called a *char-à-banc* in Germany, with two horses, which had been commandeered from a rich peasant. She could then purchase wholesale. Her husband was pleased at seeing the prosperity of his dear better-half; he liked me very much and knowing that it was to me she owed her splendour, he often said to me, "Quartermaster, my wife is at your service."'

Cantinières could perform other roles. While fighting the British in Belgium, Putigny recalled: 'We concealed two three-gun batteries under the foliage along a wide lane with a battalion behind each of them. After a small demonstration we soon attracted a red geometric mass, *les Goddem*. With an accelerated pace, just as we wished, they scornfully went past the prudent Austrians and walked right into the trap, which we had steadily fallen back on. Our cannon crackled, the battalions threw themselves forwards, we turned round and advanced. *Les Goddem*, although very numerous, were shaken, routed and crushed without

'stomach aches, migraines and fever. The battalion surgeon purged me without result. I was given another medication and swallowed pints of tepid water. All this water could not make me vomit! I was then seized by an absurd desire for onion soup. Finally, stuffed and inflated, I rolled up in my coat no longer knowing which saint to pray to, when an abrupt relief left me broken and without strength. They evacuated me to an abbey near Lille, which had been transformed into a hospital.' Hospitals were generally dreaded and avoided at all costs. Joliclerc, who said his body was 'covered with boils', explained why: 'I had great need of purging myself, but I did not dare go to hospital, never having been except when wounded. You go into hospitals with half a fever and as soon as you are there, some great illness strikes you, with the result that more often than not, you never leave. That is why I dare not go there.'

Despite the hardships, many men found time to strike up relationships



mercy. Their blood and their scarlet jackets merged: after this carnage the soil was as red as the blade of my bayonet. Many were hideously mutilated. An old English colonel, his limbs hacked off by canister fire, was still breathing. His son, who could have escaped, came and gave himself up so as to take care of him, but he had already been beaten to this task by our cantinière, Mother Moreau. She followed the battalion devotedly and would help the wounded under a rain of balls. Friend or foe, all were entitled to her help. She went on campaign with the Navarre infantry with another woman, La Martine, who was our company's washerwoman.'

Although the creation of the demi-brigades did much to harmonise the spirit of infantrymen, rivalry with other parts of the army still continued. In May 1795 sous-lieutenant Vivien became embroiled in an *affaire d'honneur* while sharing garrison duty in Lille with 13e Chasseurs à Cheval's depot squadron: 'One evening, a little before nightfall, I was returning with one of my comrades, a sous-lieutenant like myself. Reaching the drawbridge we found ourselves walking in the same direction as two chasseur officers, one of whom was a captain in civilian dress with his hair in *cadenettes*, a style then called *à la victime*.' The two officers stopped short and the one who had been addressed asked his critic if he had cut many off in his life? 'No comrade, yours will be the first, but while I have said that my fingers are itching to cut off your *cadenettes*, I would also like to express my displeasure at seeing an officer dressed as a *muscadin*.' 'Monsieur,' replied the captain in turn, 'I am neither your comrade nor your equal in rank and as such I can ignore

A carabinier and grenadier share a drink with some cavalymen, practising their charms on two local girls.

you without any explanation; but for my own satisfaction, I want to tell you that my attire is not subject to censure by anyone other than my commander who, because of a serious wound which has not yet healed, willingly allowed me to wear this civilian coat and finally ... that you should know that my fingers are itching to apply several blows of my riding crop across your face.”

As the captain went to strike, Vivien threw himself between the two adversaries and held them apart, further annoying the captain, whose anger was now directed at Vivien. A duel was arranged for the following morning at seven o'clock outside the citadel. Both Vivien and the captain arrived with their seconds who 'decided the choice of arms by tossing a coin'. It was decided that the duel would be fought with swords until the first blood was drawn. The captain said: 'Fate does not favour you and I foresee that I probably have a considerable superiority in arms over you. Therefore monsieur, I leave the means of fighting to your discretion.' "Monsieur," I replied, "as fate has decided thus, we will fight with swords." I crossed blades with my adversary, who appeared amused by my clumsiness.

The captain's second stepped forward and took both swords by the hand. 'With much vehemence he said that he would not suffer this any more, that the insult was not held on my part, that I had put myself forward because my comrade had not the courage to back his words. Lastly, that I had made sufficient and generous proof of this by fighting for someone else in a duel against one of the premier swordsmen in France and that this had to finish now. "[He's] right," said the captain,



A cantinière with brandy barrel strapped across her back. Joliclerc revealed that he fell back on alcohol to survive: 'I buy wine, beer or brandy here. One needs a few shots to support oneself, without which one would not be able to endure the rain, which has been continual this month.'



throwing away his sword and taking me by the hand. I fell into his arms and all was finished.' With honour satisfied, the chasseurs organised a dinner at the Golden Lion Hotel where 'we proceeded to consume a most elegant dinner, which was washed-down with the finest and most delicate wines; for that time, it was truly an extraordinarily luxurious spread.'

MARAUDERS AND PUNISHMENT

Following the *embrigadement*, one immediate change was obvious: 'The tents were taken away,' moaned Putigny. Joliclerc was even more unhappy: 'It is as cold as winter and we have no tents to cover ourselves with as they have been taken away, they say, to wash off the lice, which devour us.' Although this measure simplified logistics, it encouraged soldiers to disperse and seek shelter to avoid exposure to the elements.

At the same time, men at the front were reduced to living off the land as supply lines broke down. Quartered in a village near the Rhine, Sergeant-Major Orson 'often went hunting and fishing with the peasants.' Most resorted to simple theft, often threatening or injuring any local inhabitants who dared to resist. Determined to clamp down on marauders, Orson's captain set a trap to catch some he suspected: 'We stood in ambush behind a hedge; the marauders were not a long time coming, formed in rank, as if they were on patrol. They were armed with two muskets; that gave them away. The commander let them approach and leapt up, crying "You rascals! You cannot escape; there are guards at your quarters." Hearing the voice of their commander so close in the darkness, they were all seized by panic. Two men stayed, all the others took flight, abandoning their potatoes. Returning to the village, the commander ordered me to make a roll call: *sergent* Martin and *caporal* Rétif and his squad were found missing ... The next day we put them in prison.'

Before the Revolution, routine punishment consisted of a blow from the flat of a sword-blade across the victim's back and administered by a sous-officier. The number of blows varied according to the severity of the offence – 15 blows for being caught with a woman in the barrack room and 25 for being found drunk. In 1786 an infamous punishment was introduced. Stripped to the waist, captured deserters were forced to 'run the gauntlet': a double rank of 50 to 100 men would each give the victim a blow with either a ramrod or musket

French soldiers ask a civilian for food. By taking the war across the frontiers of France, the government passed the responsibility of feeding the soldiers on to the occupied territories where they were billeted. This created a lasting resentment of French occupation.



sling. Physical attacks on officers were harshly punished – the offending hand was cut off before the victim was hanged. Apart from looting churches, where the guilty were hanged and their bodies burned, mutiny was the most serious offence. After the suppression of the Nancy mutiny in August 1790, the suspected ringleader was broken on the wheel, while 27 were hanged and many others sentenced to life on the galleys.

In 1791 military punishment was drastically reformed. Soldiers now had the same rights as civilians. Officers were no longer permitted to humiliate, injure or insult their subordinates, but instead gave them custodial sentences. The war brought more changes: in 1794 soldiers' appeals were heard by a court-martial of nine judges (three officers and six men) and the death sentence returned. Sometimes it was deemed necessary to make examples to reinforce discipline. After the battle of Fleurus in 1794, Vivien witnessed an example being made of 12 grenadiers with the approval of Général Bernadotte, the future Marshal and King of Sweden:

Twelve grenadiers of the *régiment de Beauce* were arrested at the home of the village priest and accused of marauding ... Unfortunately, the grenadiers had been arrested by the *gendarmerie* attached to General Headquarters, so the pleas of their battalion commander went without success: they were taken



A heavily laden soldier offers his spoils for a share in the broth.

before a court-martial. Although in their defence, the good priest declared to have no complaint against the grenadiers, that he had given them the hens that they were accused of stealing without the threat of violence, they were all condemned, without appeal, to death. The evening the sentence was given, Bernadotte's Division, of which the battalion formed a part, was specially assembled and lined up, forming three faces of a square. Beauce was formed on the right, as it had to file past the convicted men first. The twelve grenadiers were surrounded by an escort of gendarmes, both mounted and on foot, to the centre of the Division, to hear the reading of the judgement against them and to suffer their execution there. Everything was ready: A platoon of 60 *sous-officiers* and corporals waited for them and a large ditch, destined to receive their bodies, had been dug ten paces from them. They were twelve fine young men of good height; the eldest had not yet reached his thirtieth year. They still wore the old white uniform of the *régiment de Beauce* ... Those poor wretches, rather than resigned and silent, on seeing their comrades lined up as unhappy witnesses to their execution, filled the air with their wailing. Spontaneously, they threw themselves at the feet of General Bernadotte, embracing his knees and begging him to pardon their offence, for they were not criminals. The venerable priest, almost as pitiful as them, hands raised to the sky, implored the mercy of the Almighty for the men, his brothers who were not born for such a fatal destiny. But the law had spoken! A roll on the drums was heard along the whole line and the watching soldiers, overwhelmed with sadness, their heads lowered and their eyes full of tears, faced themselves to the side so as not to see their brave comrades, as worthy of dying for their Homeland as themselves, fall beneath the murderous lead. None of the condemned wanted a blindfold nor would they kneel. They received their death standing upright and facing forwards, pressed one against the other. The platoon advanced in silence; the commands were given by three successive sweeps of the epee; a detonation was heard, a cloud of smoke covered the horrible spectacle: They had suffered their fate.

REQUISITIONS AND CONSCRIPTS

After 1792 successive governments sought a reliable method of reinforcing the units at the front. The law of 24 February 1793 ordered a *levée* of 300,000 men to complement the existing field battalions. The men were to be selected by ballot or by election under the supervision of the municipal authorities. Then on 23 August 1793 the government decreed the *levée en masse*, permanently calling up all French bachelors and widowers between 18 and 40 years old for military service until the end of the war. Despite the threatening shadow of the guillotine, the public response was less than enthusiastic.

Pion de Loches was determined to stay out of the army and recorded the means of evasion he employed: At the beginning of the Revolution



OPPOSITE Newly arrived requisitions being drilled. At a time when six million Frenchmen spoke no French at all, units had traditionally been recruited on a regional basis. The requisitions, however, were sent to the front on an ad hoc basis, often serving with men whose dialects they could not understand. (Myrbach)

I avoided the call-ups ordered by the government three times. On 5 August 1792, they asked for one sixth of all the inhabitants of my commune, aged between eighteen and sixty years old. Those who would not submit themselves paid with their purse. My father, my uncle, my brother and myself bought, for the modest sum of one hundred ecus in assignats, a drunkard named Charlot Clerc, former Garde-Française, who went to the frontier more aboard a carriage than on foot as he had ulcerated legs. After several months he returned home, covered in rags. On 15 March 1793, they announced a levy of three hundred thousand men in Lons-le Saulnier ... Patriotism did not sell itself as dearly in 1793 as in 1792. To be stuck off the list cost me a five-livre assignat that a house servant put down in my name at the council assembly office. Again I had paid with my purse.

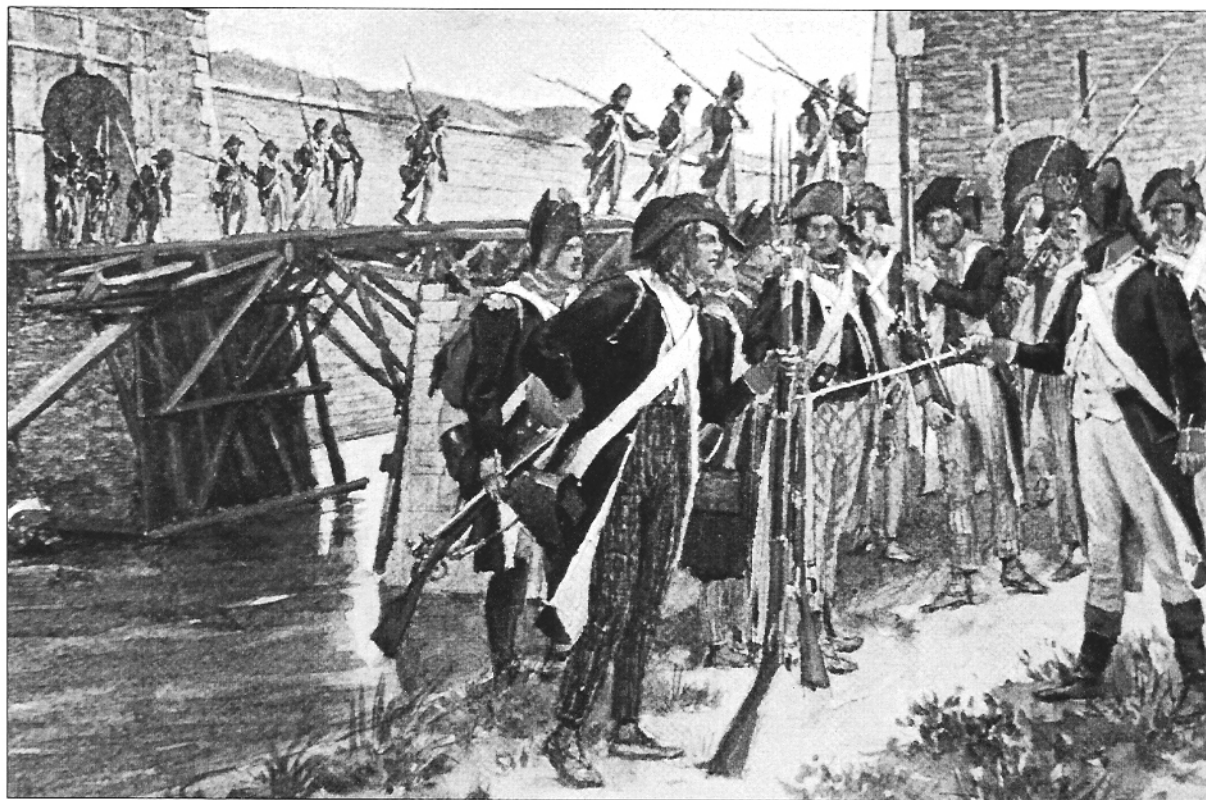
Shortly after the *Levée en masse*, a people's representative arrived in Pion de Loche's town and selected a batch of men from the local Jacobin club. Not being a member, Pion de Loche escaped again, but was finally caught: 'On 4th October, I signed up as a soldier in the *bataillon de requisition* of the district of Lons-le-Saulnier: "You're leaving then, citizen?" asked the councillor

who received my engagement. "Without doubt, since they forced me to." – "So this is not voluntary?" – "No, a military career does not appeal." – "However, you are young: the place of all young men is at the frontier." – "But you are also young and single, why don't you set an example; you who passes himself for a patriot?" The councillor was left speechless.'

In sharp contrast to the departure parade recorded by Bial in 1791, Pion de Loche recalled: 'We marched without order, in deep silence, each left to his own thoughts.' Nor were they received with enthusiasm at the front, as Putigny describes:

A reorganisation in 1796 saw a renumbering of the demi-brigades made by a drawing of lots. Despite the upheavals, old military traditions were not eliminated entirely. When conscript Routier was assigned to a unit, he learned that it had been the 'régiment de Perche before the Revolution, then, after becoming the 59e demi-brigade, it took the number 102 in a lottery made by the army corps.' Despite the changes in title, he was pleased to learn that it still 'enjoyed an excellent reputation'.





'In November the requisition law of 16 August 1793 gave us a load of men of all conditions and from various provinces.' Unlike the first waves of volunteers taken from the National Guard, the *requisitions* often arrived at the front lacking basic training. Putigny was less than impressed with their quality: 'During a firing exercise, one of them, after having loaded his musket, left the ramrod in the barrel. The instructor commanded – "Armes, joue, feu". The shot went off, the ramrod too. Leaving the barrel it went through a window and drove through the leg of an elderly man lying in his bed. Woken with a start, pinned like a butterfly on a cork, the poor wretch could not move and cursed like a man possessed.'

Fortunately for France, the need for manpower was reduced after the 1797 Campo Formio treaty drew the war to a temporary close. Léon-Michel Routier, whose father was a captain and veteran of the Vendée campaign, remembered: 'After so much misfortune, disorder and anarchy, France, still a republic, breathed a little under the Directorial government, a bizarre, unsustainable regime composed of five phantom kings without strength nor dignity. The country was in this position when year VII arrived bringing with it new demands of men for our armies.'

In 1799 a second coalition, spearheaded by Russia and Austria, led a new assault on Republican France. The mass requisitions had given France a numerical superiority during the First Coalition war, but the system was unsustainable without the threat of terror, previously inspired by the now deposed Committee of Public Safety. To halt the steadily advancing Allies, a long-term solution to recruitment was needed, which was both sustainable and more publicly acceptable. Général Jourdan's

Line infantry on garrison duty. The Campo Formio treaty gave many frontline units a brief respite from the fighting. While some troops were collected for a possible expedition against Britain, others set sail on Bonaparte's expedition to Egypt.

answer was his famous conscription law (5 September 1798). This system, which would survive into the Napoleonic Wars, rendered all single men aged 20–25 liable for military service. A lottery was used to decide who would actually be called up, with a portion being held on standby. The conscripts were subject to a medical to ensure they were actually fit for service; those who failed were replaced by the reserves. The conscripts received their basic training in locally formed auxiliary battalions, which were then incorporated into existing demi-brigades.

Routier, who was called up in 1799 when the government ‘called to the field the whole of its first class, that is to say the youths of twenty to twenty-one years old,’ wrote: ‘The first class was peculiar in that rich and poor were forced to march, replacements not having been permitted. This gathering of youth was curious to see for the ill assortment of its composition and the embarrassment, which the dandies in our detachment soon found themselves in.’ The conscription process was also remembered by Coignet: ‘One day I was summoned to the town hall. There they asked me my name and Christian names, my profession and age. I answered that I was named Jean-Roch Coignet, and was born in Druyes-les-Belles-Fontaines, in the Department of the Yonne. “How old are you?” – “I was born on the 6th of August, 1776.” – “You can retire.” This set my head to throbbing. “What in the world did they want with me? I had done nothing.” I said this to my master and mistress, who replied, “They wish to enrol you for conscription” ... On the sixth Fructidor, year VII, two gendarmes came and left with me a way-bill and an order to start for Fontainebleau on 10 Fructidor. I immediately made preparations for my departure. ... With my little bundle under my arm, I reached Rozoy, the first military halting-place, where I spent the night. I took my billeting-order, and presented it to my host, who took no notice of me whatever. Then I went out to buy something to make a stew, and the butcher gave it to me. I felt quite desolate when I saw that piece



Tirailleurs operated best in pairs, protecting one another while loading.

of meat in the palm of my hand. I gave it to my landlady, and asked her to have the kindness to have it cooked for me, and went to find some vegetables for her ... The next day I reached Fontainebleau, where some very casual officers received us and put us in barracks, which were in wretched condition. Our fine battalion was formed within a fortnight; it numbered eighteen hundred men. As there was no discipline, a mutiny at once occurred, and half of them left and went home. The battalion commander reported them to Paris, and each man was allowed fifteen days to rejoin his battalion, or else be regarded as a deserter, and punished accordingly ... Companies were formed, and grenadiers selected. I belonged to this latter company, which numbered a hundred and twenty-five men, and we were uniformed at once. We received an entire outfit, and immediately began to drill twice a day. The gendarmes brought the stragglers back, and we were brought into order again. ... We were made to carry and present arms and fix bayonets. They undertook to make soldiers of us in two months.'

Designated for 102e demi-brigade, Routier arrived at its depot in Landau during the winter: 'The recruits were treated roughly at this time and lacked many of the essentials, principally parts of the uniform ... In the most intense cold, we were gathered each morning by drum call and began by breaking and removing the ice around our quarters; from there we were conducted to the ramparts to sweep away the snow and mark out our exercise ground from which we returned immediately

after man-oeuvres completely frozen. The slightest failure to stand completely still attracted blows from our instructors while we suffered horribly from the rigours of the season. The night brought another torture for me, for we slept three per bed, and as a conscript I had the honour of occupying the middle where my position was very often unbearable. Fortunately I had money and I dispelled my sorrow in my moments of freedom and gained, by this means, several subaltern protectors.'

Coignet also bought drinks for veterans and benefited from their patronage. After two months his auxiliary battalion was 'incorporated in the 96th demi-brigade de ligne, composed of old and experienced soldiers, and officers who were very strict ... I became very skilful in the use of arms. I was supple, and I had two good training masters who helped me on. They had examined me, and so had felt my belt-pockets; they therefore paid court to me. I paid for their drams. It was necessary to deal in this way with these hard drinkers ... My two masters pushed me forward; four hours of drilling, two hours in the fencing school, making six hours daily. This life lasted three months, and I paid for many drams for these tipplers.'

Fighting Russians on the Devil's Bridge in Switzerland. After a disastrous start, the losses of 1799 campaign were stabilised by Général Massena's victories in Switzerland. (Seele)



CONSOLIDATION

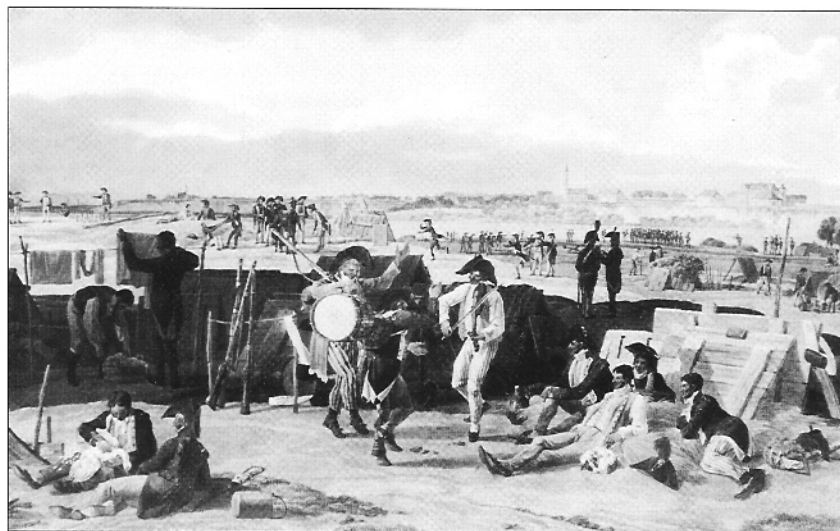
On 9 October 1799 General Bonaparte landed in France after escaping from Egypt. Bonaparte had been a 19-year-old sous-lieutenant in the Royal Artillery at the time the Gardes Françaises joined in the assault on the Bastille, but a decade later was among the most famous generals in Europe. A month after landing, Bonaparte had made an alliance with leading politicians, affirmed the loyalty of the troops in the capital and overthrown *la Directoire* in the Brumaire coup. As First Consul of the Republic, Bonaparte needed the army to gain a victory for him that would ensure his political survival.

Before his famous Marengo campaign, Bonaparte inspected the demi-brigades destined for Switzerland and made a point of haranguing officers and sous-officiers, taking them into his confidence, explaining why it was necessary to fight, what role they would play and what was expected of them. Throughout the campaign *orders du jour* kept the men informed of their progress and the continued importance of their mission. Units such as the 9e Légère, which made the decisive counterattack at Marengo, were rewarded with a title (*l'Incomparable*) and issued with a specially commissioned flag. Individual soldiers cited for bravery were rewarded with *armes d'honneur* and the ranks of his personal bodyguard, the *Garde Consulaire*, were opened to the finest soldiers in France.

After returning from the Marengo campaign, Bonaparte ordered detailed inspections of the infantry demi-brigades, and from their findings and with the benefit of peace was able to finish the job that the reformers had begun almost four decades earlier. The First Consul



Casualties, muddy terrain, smoke and deafening musketry all played a part in disrupting the neat dressings and synchronised movements of the parade ground. Haversacks with campaign equipment strapped to them further reduced the space each man had to operate in.



A typical French bivouac. With no tents, men make do with temporary shelters to protect against the elements and collect straw for bedding. Several take the opportunity to do their laundry, which they hang from an improvised clothes line. (Coburg Kunstsammlungen)

did not fundamentally change anything, but built on the successful reforms already in place (most notably the 1791 drill regulation and Jourdan's conscription law), fixed the establishment of the army and spent money on it once again. Although France's infantrymen were not quite the citizen-soldiers the revolutionaries had envisaged, neither were they the social pariahs of the ancien régime. Under the Consulate, men in uniform acquired a new-found social prestige backed by a confidence inspired by wartime success.

Putigny, a teenage recruit in the Régiment Navarre in 1791, who had risen to the rank of sergent-major in the Consulship, perhaps sums up a soldier's view of things: Bonaparte, he believed, had returned the army to the condition it had been in when he had enlisted in 1791. During one of the First Consul's inspections, he saw Bonaparte 'was interested in everything, asking us familiarly what we were doing, if we had been paid, if we were happy. ... On leaving, he tasted our soup and one heard him say in his jerky tone "It's good, but I want them to have more; and these walls are dirty – get them painted." His orders were followed: the bedding was improved, the walls painted and soup was in abundance. The *sous-officiers* each received a book on military theory and our instruction was perfected. ... Order, our well-being and discipline steadily improved. Our *demi-brigades* returned to the old title of *régiment*, each retaining their number. ... Our commander was henceforth called colonel, or "le colon" as we said.' Not long after, these regiments would be ordered to the camps around Boulogne and honed into the future Emperor's legendary Grande Armée.

Supply wagons and card playing
French soldiers by Kobell.



GLOSSARY

- Ancien régime** (Lit. former regime). Period before the Revolution.
- Cadenettes** Hair plaits worn on the side of the head, in front of the ear.
- Chasseur** Light infantry or cavalryman.
- De Ligne** Lit. of the line.
- Drogue** Popular card game played by two pairs.
- Éclaireur** Scout. Also refers to ad hoc avant-garde units formed by revolutionary units.
- En avant!** Lit. 'Forwards!'
- En tirailleur** Deployed in skirmish formation.
- Escouade** Squad of men under a caporal.
- Faisceau** A stack of muskets supported by interlocked bayonets.
- Fusil** Musket.
- Gamelle** Cook pot shared by up to seven men.
- Habit** Soldier's coat.
- Hausse-col** Symbol of officer rank, worn around the neck.
- La grenouille** (Lit. the frog). Squad kitty for food etc.
- Légère** Light troops
- Légion** Body of troops raised to fight in the advanced guard, composed of infantry, cavalry and artillery.
- liberty-tree** A young tree, surmounted by a red Phrygian cap (bonnet de liberté), was a common symbol of the Revolution.
- Livre** (Lit. Pound). Unit of weight and monetary value.
- Maréchaussée** Forerunner of the gendarmerie, charged with policing the countryside, keeping the roads safe for travellers and capturing deserters.
- Muscadin** Anti-Jacobin Muscadins were nouveau riche who, after La Terreur, indulged in decadent lifestyles and had a flamboyant, sometimes scandalous, dress sense.
- Pas accéléré** Accelerated pace of 100 steps per minute.
- Pas de charge** Attack pace, usually about 120 steps per minute.
- Patience** A thin piece of wood used for protecting the uniform cloth while polishing buttons.
- Sans-culote** (Lit. without breeches). Properly a Jacobin revolutionary, but a term often given to French soldiers by foreigners.
- Sous-officier** Non-commissioned officer (not including caporal).
- Serre-file** (Lit. close-file). The fourth rank where the officers and NCOs were located.
- Tripoli** (Or rottenstone). A siliceous limestone used as powder for polishing metal.
- Veste** Sleeved fatigue jacket worn by soldiers under, or in place of, their habit.

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A visit to the collections in Paris, at Musée de l'Armée and the Musée de Carnavalet, are highly recommended, while the palace of Versailles contains many famous paintings. The Military Archives at Vincennes hold a wealth of surviving inspection reports, organisational changes, service records, registers, and a library holding many regimental histories. Outside Paris, the Musée de l'Empire in Salon de Provence and the Musée de l'Armée in Brussels are both of interest. Most major European military collections and battlefield museums (including Marengo) hold artefacts relating to the period.

COLOUR PLATE COMMENTARY

A: STANDARD BEARER, 1793

The regimental colours decreed on 30 June 1791 were carried by a *sergent-major* (1) with the battalion's *caporaux fouriers* (company quartermasters) forming a colour guard around him. Normally the flag was carried in the right hand, with the pole resting on the right hip, but in battle the flag was held at the base of the pole and carried sloped over the right shoulder. The 1791 flag carried the motto 'Discipline and Obedience to the Law'. It sported the dual symbols of monarchy (*fleurs de lys*) and the nation (the tricolour edging). After France became a republic (22 September 1792) all symbols of monarchy were abolished: the *fleurs de lys* symbols were covered over by tricolour patches, while the pike head (2) was filed down into a lozenge or replaced. The *sergent-major's* leather *casque* carries the tricolour cockade

(3) and also a non-regulation tricolour plume. Soldiers often decorated their *bonnet de police* or forage cap (4) with republican symbolism and patriotic messages (5).

On 1 August 1792 the Legislative Assembly ordered the manufacture of half a million pikes due to a shortage of muskets. Although most units would receive muskets before reaching the frontline, many saw pikes as more than a simple stopgap. In the early years of the war a cult had developed among many tacticians who thought that French troops were best employed on the offensive and that bayonets were their natural weapon. Although French armies had abandoned the pike before 1700, to the revolutionary *sans-culotes* in government the pike was the weapon of the 'sovereign people' and even more suitable than the bayonet to achieve battlefield success. Political

RIGHT A translation of the first verse of Rouget de Lisle's *La Marseillaise*, which was first performed in Strasbourg on 20 April 1792 and first sung in Paris by *fédérés* from Marseille. Bial first heard the song in Brussels' Grand Theatre: 'At the end of the show, the stalls asked with loud cries for the new hymn of the French, which was already famous, although only known a short time. An actor came forwards before the scenery and sung *la Marseillaise* in a strong, fine tone. After the first verse, the room resounded with cries of: *Vive la France! Vive les Français!* Everyone was standing and the women in the boxes waved their handkerchiefs. ... The next morning, *la Marseillaise* was sung in all the streets and squares.'

BELOW Marking the 14 July celebrations in 1792, 20,000 representatives from the provincial National Guard (*fédérés*) were invited by the National Assembly to Paris. Arriving belatedly on 30 July, the *fédérés* from Marseille (pictured) arrived singing Roger de Lisle's new patriotic song. Falling in with extremist democrats, the *fédérés* demanded the King's immediate abdication and attacked the Tuilleries Palace on 10 August, a move precipitating the fall of the Bourbon monarchy.

LA MARSEILLAISE

Arise children of the Homeland.
The day of glory has arrived;
Against us tyranny's
Bloody standard is raised.
Do you hear in the countryside,
The roar of those bloodthirsty soldiers?
They are coming into our midst
To cut the throats of our sons, our wives!
To arms citizens!
Form your battalions,
March, march,
Let impure blood
Water our furrows



orators deluded themselves into thinking battalions of pikemen would be a match for well-trained, musket-firing enemy troops. A selection of pike heads (6) are shown bearing the stamp 'AN' standing for the *Ateliers Nationaux*, the state-owned workshops where they were manufactured.

B: RECRUITMENT

Before the Revolution, the traditional method of infantry recruitment had been *racolage* – the soliciting of recruits in town squares and taverns on market and fte days. In garrison, splendidly attired recruitment parties, consisting of an officer, *sergent* and drummers, would attract recruits by playing martial music and displaying posters. The *racoleurs* would promise adventure, glory and a hefty signing-on bounty to all would-be recruits. If no recruits were forthcoming, the *racoleurs* were known to target drunks, or resort to strong-arm tactics.

The process was not entirely without scruples. Jean Stanislas Vivien recalls how he ultimately failed in his attempt to enlist in the regular army: 'One morning I went to sign up at the home of the Régiment de Berwick's colonel. "My friend," said that brave man, "you appear too young to contract a voluntary engagement: do you have your parent's consent?" "No colonel," I replied to him, "but I will get it." – "But my friend, you do not have the required height for military service in a regiment of the line!" – "Colonel, it will not be lacking, I am only fifteen years old, I will grow and one day I will be one of your best grenadiers." – "But my friend, you do not have the strength to carry a musket with bayonet, a haversack and a cartridge box with cartridges inside!" –

A trio of musicians rehearse. Music played a significant part in the government's plan to revolutionise the French army. Although journals were printed for the soldiers to read, nothing could beat the power of song in keeping the revolutionary spirit alive.



"Colonel, willingness and courage will hold me in place until that comes." – "Oh well my friend, since you have such a fine temperament for the King's service, take yourself with this ticket to the home of the regimental treasurer who will sign you up and pay you forty francs." Vivien's parents were pleased that he had signed up, but his uncle was less enthusiastic and managed to have him released after going to the Colonel 'to annul the engagement contract and pay back the forty francs I had received from the treasurer.'

C: DEPARTURE

National Guard volunteers prepare to leave Paris for the camps on the frontier. The enthusiasm that greeted the call for volunteers in the summer of 1791 came in response to a very real fear that the Revolution was threatened by foreign powers. Rumours of an émigré army lead by Prince de Condé forming across the border were increased after Louis XVI was caught attempting to flee France at Varennes. This counter-revolutionary army presented itself as a 'crusader army' going to save Paris, the 'New Jerusalem' against the infidel revolutionaries or *sans-colotes*. The Declaration of Plinitz and the Brunswick manifesto made it clear that Austria and Prussia supported the émigrés and were prepared to use force to restore Louis XVI's absolute authority.

The volunteers of 1791 brought more than simple enthusiasm, as a large number of them had previously seen military service. A large proportion of their battalion commanders were former nobles, with 65 per cent having had prior military experience. More than a third of volunteer officers had previously served as caporaux or sergeants; with more than 12 per cent of captains having served in those ranks for seven years or more. The officer corps was assisted by a substantial number of sous-officiers who had served in the royal army. The consequence of this was that there was a good cadre of former soldiers to train and lead the untried volunteers. Even with this last group (79 per cent of whom were under 25 years of age), it must not be discounted that many had already received basic training in the National Guard before heading off to the camps along the frontier.

D: FEU DE PELETON

When in line formation, a battalion could deliver volleys in three ways: by battalion, by half battalion or by company (*peleton*). Although the *feu de bataillon* would deliver a devastating volley, it would leave the battalion vulnerable during the 20–30 seconds it took to reload. Firing by wings or *feu de demi-bataillon*, alleviated this concern, while *feu de peleton* offered greater security still. On the battalion commander giving the command – *feu de peleton, commencez le feu* – the captains would retire from the front rank to the centre of their company, two paces to the rear of the *serez file*. The companies would then fire in succession, starting with the first company, then third, fifth and seventh, followed by the second, fourth, sixth and eighth.

French infantry were trained to fire volleys in three ranks. To accomplish this, on the command *Armes*, the front rank (where the tallest men were placed) would kneel before bringing the musket to full cock. On the command *Joue* (present), the men in the third rank would take an eight-inch sideways step with the right foot so that their musket

cleared the shoulder of the man in front of them. On the command *Feu* (fire) all three ranks would fire simultaneously. The front rank would stand up on the command *Chargez* (load), when all three ranks would reload without further command in the quickest possible time. The firing would continue until a ceasefire was ordered by a roll on the drums.

E: DEPOSEZ LA COLONNE

Obstacles and difficult terrain often forced battalions to advance in narrow, deep columns and risk deploying back into line under enemy fire. The versatile *colonne d'attaque* (attack column) countered this handicap by allowing the lead division to open fire immediately while the rest of the column deployed from behind it. To deploy, the commander gave the command '*deployez la colonne*'. On the command '*bataillon, à droite et à gauche*', the front division (fourth and fifth companies) would halt, while the companies behind faced outwards. On the command: '*pas accéléré - marche!*' they would step off at 100 paces a minute and take their position in the line.

In the meantime, the lead division would begin a species of independent firing called the *feu de deux rangs*. Unlike volley firing, only the front two ranks fired and then only by files from the right, causing a ripple effect. The second and

third ranks would then exchange muskets, and another ripple-fire would begin. After firing, each man would quickly reload and fire independently. As each company came into line and aligned itself on the centre, they too would commence firing.

F: BAPTISM OF FIRE

Line infantry help hard-pressed chasseurs clear Austrian skirmishers from a wood in 1792. The opening of hostilities saw many outpost clashes in which the French identified a shortage of light infantry. As well as increasing the number of chasseur battalions, companies of volunteer skirmishers and special combined-arms *légions* were raised. Many line regiments selected men from among the hardiest and the best shots to make up ad-hoc light infantry units as they had done in the Seven Years War. Putigny talked about the formation of these *éclairceur* companies, the forerunners of the Napoleonic *voltigeurs*. Putigny explained they were

Light infantry carabiniers were originally selected from the best shots in each company and were often armed with rifled carbines. Increasingly they became used as shock troops like grenadiers.



composed of 'eight men per company detached out in front to reconnoitre difficult ground'.

Some line regiments were sent in to bolster the avant-garde divisions of the various armies, or at least furnish detachments. In the American War of Independence (1775-83) French infantry battalions had included a company of chasseurs. D'Hastrel recalled how this practise was revisited: 'Our colonel received the order to form two companies of chasseurs destined to for the army's advanced guard, which were to be commanded by willing officers.'

Some French light troops were armed with rifled carbines (see plate H) to counter those used by Austrian skirmishers. However, their slow rate of fire (four times slower than a smooth-bored musket), the need for special ammunition and a tendency for the barrel to foul, making it difficult to hammer home the ball, meant that the 1777-pattern musket remained the preferred weapon of French skirmishers.

G: CROSSING THE ALPS

One of the most famous feats performed by revolutionary infantrymen was the backbreaking task of hauling the Armée de Réserve's artillery over the St Bernard Pass in May 1800. Of particular note were the soldiers of the 96e demi-brigade who refused payment of a bounty for their labour. After the campaign, Bonaparte rewarded its grenadiers by issuing them with bearskin caps. Coignet's account of that feat recalled: 'Each of the guns was placed in a trough; at the end of the trough there was a large mortise by which to drag the gun, managed by a strong and intelligent gunner with forty grenadiers under his orders ... The next morning at daybreak, our master placed us by twenties at our pieces, ten on each side of a gun. I was put in the first place, to the right, in front; it was the most dangerous side, because it was next to the precipices. Then we started off with our three pieces. Two men carried each axle-tree, two carried a wheel, four carried the upper part of the caisson, eight carried the chest, eight others the muskets. Every one had

his special duty and position. It was a most terrible journey. From time to time there were commands of "Halt" or "Advance", and not a word was spoken. All this was mere pastime, but when we reached the snow, matters became more serious. The road was covered with ice, which cut our shoes and our gunner could not manage his piece; it slipped constantly. He was obliged to mount it anew. This man needed all his courage to be able to hold out; "Halt!" "Advance!" he cried every moment, and all moved on in silence. We had gone over a league of this terrible road, and it was necessary to give us a moment to rest and to put on some new shoes, for those we had on were in tatters ... We started off again well shod. "Come, my horses," said our gunner, "fall in, advance. When we reach the snow fields, we shall move more easily and not have so much trouble." We did reach those terrible fields of perpetual snow, and found less difficulty; our gun-trough slid along more rapidly ... After the greatest exertion we reached the foot of the monastery. For four hundred feet the ascent is very rapid, and we could see that some troops had gone on ahead of us. The road had been opened and paths cut out leading to the monastery.'

H: CHASSEUR, 1800

One of the most noticeable tactical innovations of the revolutionary period was the deployment of mass skirmish screens in battle. The light infantry's fighting role had traditionally been limited to the *petit guerre* – the war of outposts and patrols. In pitched battle, light infantry would often screen the wings of the army, leaving the heavy infantry to slug it out in the centre, joining in the pursuit or covering a retreat. During the Revolutionary Wars, increasing numbers of infantrymen fought dispersed *en tirailleur*. Their function was to screen advancing columns by peppering the enemy line with musketry. Enemy officers were priority targets as the *tirailleurs* looked to disrupt enemy command and control capabilities. They would also target enemy artillery crews, thus reducing the casualties in the advancing columns behind. Although all infantry were able to perform this role, light infantrymen were preferred as they were more used to operating independently – line troops often feeling vulnerable away from the security of the closed ranks. (See Warrior 57 for more on French skirmishing tactics.)

The standard infantry weapon of the war was the 1777-pattern *fusil d'infanterie*, shown here disassembled (1) along with bayonet (2), *sabre-briquet* (3). The 1777-pattern musket, the 'five foot clarinet' as it was nicknamed, weighed between 4.5 and 4.7 kilos. It was 1.52 metres in length with a 17.5 millimetre calibre barrel measuring 1.137 metres. In 1793 the Committee of Public Safety ordered the manufacture of the *carbine de Versailles*, a rifled barrelled carbine (4) but it failed to make the desired impact (see plate F). The carbine's specifications were: length 1.025 metres, barrel length 0.65 metres, weight 3.450 kilos; calibre 13.5 millimetres.

During the Consular period, *armes d'honneur* (weapons of honour) were introduced as the forerunner to the famous *légion d'honneur*. Deserving infantrymen were awarded the *fusil d'honneur*, which carried a silver plaque (5) on the musket stock with the recipient's name and a brief citation. Distinguished drummers were awarded silver-plated drumsticks, and for officers the coveted *sabre d'honneur* was accompanied by double pay.



Joliciere sent his mother an inventory of his uniform: 'I march without socks, with trousers that I made from an apron I found in the Vendée. I have a good *habit*, a good veste, fine breeches and a good overcoat made of heavy mountain cloth, which is almost new and hardly used because it is too hot and too heavy. I would want you to have it, as you could make a good skirt. I took it from a house in Condé. I will make some winter trousers from it. I have a pair of new shoes in my haversack, two shirts, a pair of canvas gaiters, a neck scarf and a handkerchief.'

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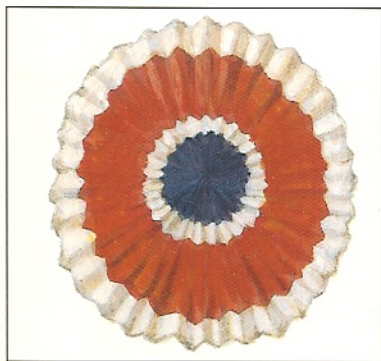
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