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**Natalie Petiteau**, *Lendemains d'Empire. Les soldats de Napoléon dans la France du XIXe siècle*. Paris: La Boutique de l'Histoire, 2003. 399 pp. Maps, tables, notes, bibliography, and index. 22.00 € (pb). ISBN 2-910828-29-8.

Review by Robert S. Alexander, University of Victoria.

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In 1991 Stuart Woolf's *Napoleon's Integration of Europe* helped to launch a revival of studies of the Napoleonic era by directing attention to the Napoleonic model of government. Twelve years later, in *Lendemains d'Empire: Les soldats de Napoléon dans la France du XIXe siècle*, Natalie Petiteau similarly seeks to stimulate interest in the impact of the period by providing a groundbreaking study of the veterans of the Imperial Army. As the author of two roughly parallel and complementary works, *Elites et mobilités: la noblesse d'Empire au XIXe siècle* and *Napoléon, de la mythologie à l'histoire*, Petiteau is a leading expert on the long-term social and cultural influence of the First Empire, and in *Lendemains* she sheds much light upon the impact of the Napoleonic wars upon all levels of the army, from officers to the rank and file, the process of their reintegration into civil society, and the role of veterans in spreading nationalism and, perhaps indirectly, in encouraging development of the modern welfare state.[1]

Part of the fascination of *Lendemains* lies in the author's use of archival sources, and here we must keep in mind that veterans were not allowed to form associations or act collectively during most of the period in question. From a strictly French perspective, the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars were civil wars, and both the Restoration and Orléanist regimes tended to view Imperial veterans as potentially troublesome reminders of past and current divisions. Hence, after the demobilisations and desertions of 1814-15, the main desire of the state was that former soldiers should return to their homes and anonymity. Moreover, only a small percentage of soldiers, those who had put in thirty years of service or suffered gravely debilitating injuries, qualified for pensions. Thus state dealings with veterans were limited and archival sources--police reports, requests for aid from impoverished veterans, records concerning members of the Legion of Honour or former soldiers fortunate enough to have been granted a place in the Invalides at Paris or its branch at Avignon--give only a partial and potentially misleading account of the lives of veterans. By way of addressing such problems, Petiteau applies the methods of social history at the micro level by compiling a case study of the lives of seventy-four soldiers of the village of Ansouis, located in the Vaucluse. Such means enable the author to analyze the life trajectories of the common soldier, and it is especially in this regard that her study yields a fine harvest of new insights into the lives of close to a million Frenchmen.

Repeatedly throughout the work, Petiteau challenges stereotypes derived largely from published sources such as memoirs and works of fiction, and what perhaps is most interesting in this regard is the way in which detailed social history can expose the weaknesses of the traditional sources of cultural history. Whereas many Romantic writers or graphic artists depicted veterans as discontented, maladjusted and often isolated relics of the past dreaming of former glories, most veterans in fact became reintegrated into civil society with relative ease. While in the army, maintaining ties to kith and kin remained vitally important to them, and young recruits generally associated with soldiers from the same village or canton. Upon return, many soon married, often to younger women, which, according to the author, indicated that their knowledge of a world beyond the parish gave them a certain status and appeal. Better yet, skills, such as literacy or the mastery of arms, acquired in the army, or qualities associated with the armed forces, such as discipline, proved to be assets in the search for employment by a minority who did not return to tilling the soil. Veterans often found positions as teachers, government officers or administrators, as supervisors in factories or as concierges that brought them into frequent contact with others and facilitated their roles as vectors of patriotism. Nevertheless, veterans were different. They were more likely to travel or to move to a new location than most their contemporaries, and the extent to which they maintained ties with former comrades in arms revealed that the army had become a sort of surrogate family for them. Despite the physical and psychological wounds that veterans had suffered during campaigns, many in fact lived to a ripe old age, giving them an enduring presence in French society that doubtless heightened their influence on successive generations.

Not all veterans were smitten with their former Emperor; the image of the veteran as fervent Bonapartist derived from a minority composed mostly of half-pay and junior officers. When they were not indifferent, the attitude of

veterans to politics generally reflected the extent to which a regime recognized their needs and demands. It was not until Louis-Napoleon basically co-opted veterans as symbols of the regime, and showed significantly more generosity towards them, that Bonapartism surged to the fore among them. Nevertheless, a central part of the identity of veterans was that they had served the nation, and many of them were prone to link Napoleon to the nation he claimed to embody. Regardless of the ideological complexion of the current regime, veterans consistently maintained that the state had certain obligations to them for the sacrifices they had made. They argued that governments should assure that veterans did not sink into the dishonour of indigence by providing employment or financial aid when required, and education for their children; in these ways veterans encouraged development of the welfare state. Ultimately more immediately significant, however, was that veterans tended to foster patriotism as the greatest of values because their main claim to special status was that they had served France.

According to the author, the public image of veterans gradually shifted, largely due to the stance taken by successive regimes. Amidst the chaos of defeat and invasion in 1814 and 1815, some soldiers resorted to pillage and violence, producing the negative image of the "brigands of the Loire." Thereafter the Bourbon regime viewed former soldiers with suspicion, if not outright hostility, and at least some veterans confirmed their unfavourable reputations by taking part in the various conspiracies and rebellions of the early Restoration. Veterans played a major part in the Revolution of 1830, and for a time the resultant Orléanist regime flirted with Bonapartism. Yet the July Monarchy did not prove much more generous than the Restoration in granting or increasing pensions, which were considered no more than a supplement to one's regular earnings, and the regime showed little inclination to allow veterans a place in public ceremonies. However, the social status of veterans was rising, due in part to the growing belief that the state was failing to give them just recognition for the past services to which their wounds attested. Fostered by the Romantics, such sentiments would be exploited after 1848 by Louis-Napoleon for his own purposes. During the Second Empire, veterans received a place in public celebrations and the state encouraged the formation of mutual aid societies among former soldiers, thus enabling veterans to establish a collective identity within the nation. All the same, the belief that a generation of soldiers had not been fairly compensated for their sacrifices helped to prepare the ground for the veterans associations of the twentieth century.

One of the most attractive features of her work is the caution with which the author generally draws her conclusions, but while Petiteau's analysis of the development of public image is correct in broad outline, it strikes this reviewer as overstated. In this regard one wishes that the author's detailed study of veterans in the Vaucluse had been complemented by a similar case study in one of the eastern departments noted for patriotism rather than royalism, as was the case in the Vaucluse. In departments such as, say, the Isère or the Côte-d'Or, the status of veterans was often already high in the early Restoration, and opposition to the Bourbons only burnished their image. To be fair, however, it should be noted that Petiteau recognizes the limits of her work, especially where regional variations are concerned, and offers her study as a beginning for further investigation rather than the final word in all matters. Moreover, *Lendemains* frequently supersedes previously published literature. In her discussion of the common soldier, Petiteau goes well beyond Isser Woloch's *The French Veteran from the Revolution to the Restoration* or Jean Vidalenc's *Les demi-soldes, étude d'une catégorie sociale*, which largely concern the officer class, and her frequent warnings about misleading stereotypes help to balance the elements of the Napoleonic Legend apparent in works such as Jules Deschamps's *Sur la légende de Napoléon* and Jean Lucas-Dubreton's *Soldats de Napoléon*. In seeking to avoid the polemics that have often coloured accounts of the period (need one always be for or against Napoleon?), Petiteau has succeeded in her objective of rendering justice to the veterans of the Imperial Army, no small accomplishment.[2]

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## NOTES

[1] See Stuart Woolf, *Napoleon's Integration of Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), Natalie Petiteau, *Elites et mobilités: la noblesse d'Empire au XIXe siècle* (Paris: La Boutique de l'Histoire, 1997), and the same author's *Napoléon, de la mythologie à l'histoire* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1999).

[2] See Isser Woloch, *The French Veteran from the Revolution to the Restoration* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), Jean Vidalenc, *Les demi-soldes, étude d'une catégorie sociale* (Paris: Rivière, 1965),

Jules Deschamps, *Sur la légende de Napoléon* (Paris: Champion, 1931), and Jean Lucas-Dubreton, *Soldats de Napoléon* (Paris: Tallandier, Bibliothèque napoléonienne, 1977).

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