Soldiers as Victims or Villains?
Demobilization, Masculinity, and Family in French Royalist Pamphlets, 1814–1815

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Abstract
Pamphlets provide an overlooked corpus for understanding the demobilization of French soldiers in 1814 and 1815. Royalists particularly used the format to persuade combatants to return to civilian life, invoking the wartime suffering of French families to convince both soldiers and civilians to support an uneasy peace and a potentially unpopular ruler. Their writings reveal competing visions of the value and legacy of martial masculinity. Pamphleteers were torn between seeing soldiers as the quintessential victims or most enthusiastic agents of Napoleonic rule, and as wounded men ready for peace or as selfish and relentless warmongers incapable of domesticity.

In 1814, a pamphlet recounted a lengthy conversation between two grenadiers. One, La Valeur (The Valorous) lamented that he had no news of his family for four years while he was hospitalized in Spain. He wanted to get a letter to them, and asked Va de Bon Coeur (Goes-with-a Good-Heart) for help. The latter was disillusioned: he claimed that there were almost as many broken limbs among veterans as laurels, and that it was time to end the Napoleonic wars. La Valeur was

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more attached to military glory; he did not want to “vegetate like a bourgeois.” But he rethought his position when his friend informed him of the tragedies that had befallen La Valeur’s family in his absence. His two brothers—eighteen-year-old Charles and twenty-one-year-old Auguste—froze to death in the wastelands of Russia, victims of “this hideous conscription.” Charles’s age was mentioned in passing, but readers would have known that he was under the legal age of conscription, a further indictment of Napoleon’s brutality. News of Charles’s and Auguste’s fate was a deathblow to their father; after his death, their widowed mother had no means of subsistence. She survived only with the help of a few retired military men in the village. Va de Bon Coeur told his fellow veteran that devastated families were everywhere in France, the cost of the grand exploits and drunken glory of ambitious men. La Valeur then proclaimed that learning of his family’s fate “affects me more than all your beautiful rhetoric.”

A Conversation between Va de Bon Coeur and La Valeur, French Grenadiers was one of many pamphlets published in 1814 and 1815 that addressed the homecomings of soldiers, the domestic costs of war, and the relationships between veterans and civilians. Historians have paid relatively little attention to these works and have particularly overlooked their concern with the aftermath of war. As Denise Davidson, Christine Haynes, and I have argued in our introduction to this issue, many scholars treat the period as one of postrevolutionary, not postwar, transitions. For French history especially, the drama of the political narrative—the downfall of an emperor, the return of a king to a country that had beheaded its last monarch,

and Napoleon’s spectacular and short-lived reign during the Hundred Days—tends to overshadow other accounts. It is also easy to assume that war needs to be actively supported, whereas peace simply requires the ending of hostilities, or that conscripts may have been coerced to fight, but not to return home.

Yet reestablishing a peacetime society after more than two decades of almost constant war was challenging on many levels. Soldiers struggled with reintegration into civilian life, as France faced an unprecedented mass demobilization. Calculations vary, but well over 200,000 men were officially liberated from service or returned to France as deserters in 1814 and 1815; Natalie Petiteau has estimated that up to a million French soldiers may have ultimately returned to civilian life.\(^3\) As Stéphane Calvet discusses elsewhere in this issue, many encountered serious challenges in adapting to a postwar world under a new regime. Former combatants not only lacked the opportunities for advancement they had experienced in the military, but were often ineligible for pensions, physically limited, and unable to support themselves or their families after they were discharged.

Demobilization and the end of conscription also profoundly affected civilians. Men and women could find themselves welcoming back sons—or brothers, husbands, or boyfriends—whose labor and affection they had missed, but who no longer fit easily into domestic life. Others remained in limbo after war ended, waiting months, even years, uncertain of the fate of men they had longed to see. Two decades of war also left complicated legal and social legacies for families. Individuals struggled, for example, to maintain a farm or business after the loss of a breadwinner; to resolve a long-disputed inheritance when a brother’s death could not be easily proven; or to determine whether civilians still owed men they had paid to fight in their stead (or that of their sons), or if the end of conscription had absolved those debts.

Potentially even more challenging than its social and practical aftermath was the cultural legacy of long-term war. Looking at works of popular culture, especially pamphlets like the *Conversation*, reveals that the transition to a new order was influenced not only by the ways individuals and families experienced war, but also by the ways of talking about that experience and the possibilities of peace. Supporters of the returned Bourbon government produced the majority of such works in 1814 and 1815, except for the brief period of the Hundred Days (20 March–8 July 1815). They tried to persuade French soldiers to return to civilian life, and to convince both soldiers and civilians to support an uneasy peace and a new leader, King Louis XVIII. Pamphlet writers adopted a range of

“beautiful rhetoric” to induce veterans like the fictional Va de Bon Coeur and La Valeur to accept demobilization and postwar life under a Bourbon monarch, but they especially invoked the suffering and needs of veterans’ families.

Yet if royalists were united in their insistence on the value of peace, their pamphlets also reveal competing visions about how to understand the lasting impact of war and the possibility that returning soldiers both could, and would want to, be assimilated into civilian life. Royalists were generally divided about how to negotiate the legacy of the recent past. The Bourbon monarchy itself promoted union et oubli (union and forgetting), including actively obliterating symbols of the Revolution and Napoleonic eras. Other supporters of the regime, especially fervent Catholics and “ultraroyalists,” denounced the crimes of the Revolution and Napoleon, demanding vengeance and public expiation. The legacy of war was particularly difficult to negotiate when confronting responsibility for past divisions and determining the best way to create a renewed national community. While certain aspects of the Revolution had begun to fade from immediate memory or had been effectively assimilated (even if former émigrés and ultraroyalists dreamed of a complete return to an old order), war had just ended. Memories could be painfully fresh, former combatants appeared everywhere in France, and assessing the long-term consequences of war had immediate social and political implications. Royalist supporters were torn between imagining soldiers as the quintessential victims and the agents par excellence of Napoleon’s rule. They were similarly divided between dwelling on the lasting horrors of war and emphasizing the need for veterans to be safely reintegrated into domestic society.

These tensions were compounded by the development of new models of masculinity during the French Revolution and Napoleonic eras, what some historians have termed martial masculinity or virility. These models were both physical and moral, including the ability to resist fatigue and surmount suffering, a quest for glory, and the willingness to face hardship and death for the nation. In vaunting such traits, governments adapted older prototypes, especially those of classical antiquity. But the experience of mass mobilization and prolonged warfare


meant that ideals of martial masculinity had become widespread among both soldiers and civilians. As one historian has characterized the Napoleonic era, it was a time when “children talked of glory.” At the same time, protracted warfare created new separations between civilian society and the military. Theoretical and comparative work on martial masculinity has emphasized the extent to which the troops could become a distinctive community, a world of aggression, violence, and collective discipline, often contrasted to a civilian order associated with women and an ignorant or selfish domesticity. Such divisions became increasingly important in the early nineteenth century, when two decades of war had made it difficult for veterans to want to “vegetate like a bourgeois.”

Both the militarization of society and the experience of a separate military had particular resonance for a postwar order. Even as contemporaries denounced “hideous conscription” in the last days of Napoleon’s empire and the beginning of the Restoration regime, they continued to associate military service, heroism, and masculinity. They also struggled with the possibility that soldiers, like the imagined La Valeur, could not be easily reintegrated into civilian society. Such


tensions were particularly acute after the Hundred Days, but surfaced repeatedly throughout the immediate aftermath of the wars.

To uncover royalist strategies for managing demobilization and the tensions within those strategies, the first part of this essay examines French popular culture in 1814 and 1815, especially royalist pamphlets, as a largely overlooked corpus for understanding the aftermath of war. It considers the authors, nature, and possible audiences of these works. The essay then turns to the pamphlets’ competing visions of conscripts as victims and soldiers as eager warriors, and the ways these visions both drew on references to family and presented masculinity. A third section looks more closely at how writers negotiated the challenges of reintegrating veterans into civilian society. Pamphleteers were torn between dwelling on the lasting destruction of war under Napoleon for both soldiers and civilians and heralding a return to prosperity under a peace-loving monarch. Finally, we conclude by uncovering ways in which pamphleteers effectively inverted revolutionary and Napoleonic views of the relationship between civilians and the military, suffering and social utility, and the meanings of patriotism.

An Explosion of Pamphlets

At least 300 pamphlets appeared in France in April and May of 1814, the peak of this production; hundreds more flooded the market in later 1814 and 1815. These were often intensely polemical, both reflecting and shaping reactions to the immediate aftermath of war. Unlike soldiers’ memoirs, which were usually published years later, most pamphlets were written in the heat of the moment. They appeared as the mechanisms of censorship crumbled in the last days of Napoleon’s empire and as the Charter (the constitution of the restored Bourbon monarchy) declared freedom of the press on 4 June 1814. New censorship laws—established provisionally in October 1814 and then extended until 1819—soon required prepublication approval of all newspapers and pamphlets under twenty pages; longer works were seen as having a smaller and potentially less subversive readership. Such measures slowed the flood of pamphlets, but did not quell it. Between Napoleon’s return to France in March 1815 and Louis XVIII’s Second Restoration in July 1815, Bonapartists rushed to produce tracts in favor of the returned emperor. Royalists riposted in turn. A November 1815 law outlawed seditious speech or writing, including the publication of news “tending to alarm citizens in their support of legitimate authority and to shake their fidelity.”

8. Scandar Fahmy, La France en 1814 et le gouvernement provisoire (Paris: Nizet et Bastard, 1934), xiii; and Alfred Germond de Lavigne, Les pamphlets de la fin de l’Empire, des Cent Jours, et de la Restauration (Paris: Dentu, 1879). While incomplete, the Bibliographie de l’Empire français ou le Journal de l’Imprimerie (subsequently the Bibliographie de la France, here abbreviated BF) was published on a weekly basis and provides approximate publication dates for most tracts. There was a hiatus between 25 March and 1 May 1814; issues in May and early June combined records of the previous week’s publications with those published in April, without distinguishing between them.
measure aimed at not only explicitly Bonapartist or republican writing, but also tracts that undermined specific aspects of the monarchical regime.9

Pamphlets have received proportionately less attention than other cultural productions of the period, especially caricatures, political poems and songs, and theatrical performances.10 Historians have also considered pamphlets primarily in terms of their competing portrayals of Napoleon and King Louis XVIII, their visions of the Revolution, and their treatment of specific issues, like freedom of the press. But pamphleteers also wrestled centrally with the fate of the army, especially the relationships of returning soldiers with their families and others at home. The titles of many works suggest the extent of contemporary concern with demobilization. Some, like A Conversation between Va de Bon Cœur and La Valeur, were framed as dialogues, whether between two veterans, a soldier and a civilian interlocutor, or veterans and their concerned parents.11 Others addressed the army as a whole.12 Many, at least ostensibly, were by members of the military, whether ordinary soldiers or officers.13 Even when their titles did not directly invoke the


11. Examples include Conversation de Va de Bon Cœur, four pamphlets by Alphonse-Tous-saint-Joseph-André-Marie-Marseille de Fortia de Piles, beginning with Conversation entre le Gobe-Mouche Tant Pis et le Gobe-Mouche Tant Mieux (Paris: Eymery, 1814); and Jacques B . . . Dit le Boiteux, cultivateur, à son fils, Henry B . . . Capitaine dans le . . . de Ligne (Paris: Belin, 1814). For the Hundred Days, see especially Lettres du grenadier Lafanchise au grenadier Lavaleur ([Paris]: n.p., 1815); and for the early Second Restoration, M. C. A., Entretiens d’un père de famille sur les événements de 1814 et 1815 (Rouen: Periaux, 1815), L. D. M. Y., Lettre d’un général à son fils, colonel à l’armée française (Paris: Dentu, 1815), and Dialogue entre un paysan, un ancien soldat de Bonaparte et un bourgeois de Loret (Orléans: Guyot ainé, 1816).


13. Representative titles include Discours d’un brave militaire à ses frères d’armes (Paris: Cellot, 1814); Réflexions d’un soldat à ses camarades sur la chute de Buonaparte et le rétablissement de la famille des Bourbons sur le trône de France, par un officier du 58e régiment de ligne (Paris: Dentu, 1814); Louis François Lestrade, Opinion d’un ancien militaire sur
military, many pamphlets addressed the consequences of demobilization as they judged France’s recent past and proposed directions for the future.

The information we have on the authors and reception of these pamphlets varies significantly. A few authors are famous, like the writer and politician François-René Chateaubriand. His March 1814 On Buonaparte and the Bourbons was one of the first major forays into a pamphlet war; it appeared in thousands of copies and multiple editions and was quickly translated into English and German.14 But most pamphlets were published anonymously, or signed only with initials; sequels were often identified as “by the author of” a popular work. Such anonymity means that it is often difficult to know who was behind specific pamphlets. This is especially true of tracts attributed to former soldiers; it can be difficult to assess when they expressed the sentiments of veterans themselves, and when they presented viewpoints that civilians or administrators wanted to imagine in the mouths of returning military men.

It is also difficult to determine the full reception of these works. Most had initial print-runs of 500 to 1,500 copies. While limited, such numbers were not insignificant. A “bestselling” book in the period often ran to only a few thousand copies.15 Multiple factors also amplified their influence. Editions were relatively affordable, often only a franc. Readers shared copies, and publications were available in reading rooms, libraries, and bookstores. The periodical press both discussed specific tracts and commented on the general proliferation and influence of pamphlets. Writers also engaged one another regularly. Some explicitly responded...
to popular works in their titles (often trying to discredit specific publications); others discussed brochures and their arguments en masse.16

From the late spring of 1814, the eagerness of the Bourbons to establish their legitimacy meant that there were far more royalist pamphlets than openly republican or Bonapartist ones, except during the Hundred Days. In royalist works, demobilization also figured prominently, as Louis XVIII’s government oversaw both the disbandment of the troops and the postwar reformation of the military. On 4 April 1814, it ended conscription, and the constitution of the new regime, the Charter, banned the practice in June.17 In May, the government suppressed almost 100 infantry and 30 cavalry regiments, and ordered similar levels of reductions throughout the armed services.18 After Napoleon’s hasty reconstitution of the army in March 1815, a royal edict retroactively dismissed all officers and soldiers loyal to the former emperor; the decree was republished shortly after the Second Restoration.

Scholars looking at the aftermath of war in other parts of Europe have argued that demobilization, military reorganization, and general postwar negotiations often affected relationships between the sexes, while contemporary understandings of gender also shaped these processes. Karen Hagemann has shown how gendered participation during and immediately after the “Wars of Liberation” in Prussia shaped the impact of those wars. She has also contended that memoir writers redefined notions of heroism in Hamburg. They introduced clear distinctions between home and front, distinctions that had not existed during the wars themselves, and served to valorize men’s experiences over women’s.19 Conversely, Katherine Aaslestad has argued that while the end of war in Leipzig brought social and economic hardship, it also provided new opportunities for women’s organizations to act by claiming philanthropic roles on behalf of both uprooted civilian refugees and invalid veterans.20 Others have pointed to transformations

16. For example, Phillippe Lesbroussart-Dawaele, Réponse à l’ouvrage de M. de Châteaubriand, intitulé “De Buonaparte, des Bourbons, et des alliés” (Paris: Marchands de nouveautés, 1814); or Pierre Edmond Barrey, Le Cri de l’Indignation: Réponse à Méée de la Touche par le chevalier de Barrey, mousquetaire noir (Paris: Patris, 1814). Examples of more general works include Louis Dubroca, Réponse aux faiseurs de pamphlets et d’anecdotes contre Buonaparte (Paris: Les marchands de nouveautés, 1814); and Des pamphlets, de leur nature, et de leur danger, par un observateur impartial (Paris: Didot jeune, 1814).


within contemporary understandings of femininity, and especially, of masculinity. Most notably, Stefan Dudink has shown how the end of war and political transitions in the Netherlands led to a shift from an iconic image of an armscarrying man ready to sacrifice all for liberty to that of a sedate, industrious paterfamilias. Historians of France have been less likely to examine the gendered dynamics of demobilization in the immediate aftermath of war. Here, the voices of pamphleteers provide us with one window onto these dynamics.

Conscripts as Victims

When presenting soldiers as victims, pamphleteers often emphasized the youth of those conscripted. In *The Tyrant, the Allies, and the King*, the marquis d’Espinouse claimed that if Draco’s laws were written in blood, “the law of conscription was written in the blood of children, mixed with the tears of their mothers.” The 1814 *Sepulchres of the Grande Armée* claimed that in August 1813, military hospitals were already filled with over 25,000 invalids; the arrival of “an immense crowd of child soldiers” increased those numbers far more. Such claims bore relatively little relation to the composition of the army. Certainly, recruitment officers resorted to increasingly desperate measures during the last days of the Napoleonic empire and did not look overly closely at the age of potential conscripts. But the 1798 law that regulated conscription throughout the empire aimed at men aged twenty or older, or eighteen in the case of volunteers. No subsequent draft officially changed age requirements.

Royalists reinforced a vision of the sacrifice of the young with classical allusions, often with references to destructive fathers. They compared the ex-emperor to Saturn, the Greek god who devoured his own children, and to the Minotaur, who demanded an annual tribute of youth to satiate his hunger. Such metaphors ran through both the First and Second Restorations, as in a May 1814 tract: “Like Saturn, this father of the people devoured his children; he took from them their most tender youth and soon all their movements were regulated by the sound of the drum.” According to an August 1815 pamphlet by Philippe Nettement, the former secretary of the legation to London, “For fifteen years . . . this father . . ., like a new Saturn, devoured three hundred thousand of his children every year.”

23. The contemporary chronicler Alphonse De Beauchamp observed that both terms were common in 1814. De Beauchamp, *An Authentic Narrative of the Invasion of France in 1814* (London: Henry Holborn, 1815), 16.
Royalist Pamphleteers on Demobilized Soldiers

The author of the November 1815 Essay on the sentiments due to Buonaparte offered a particularly developed analogy between Napoleon and the Minotaur, arguing that Minos was known as one of the most barbarous kings in history for sending twenty young men and twenty young women each year to be devoured by the Minotaur: “What else would one call someone who, while claiming to be a father, took 300,000 men each year, the flower of our youth and the hope and support of families, and sent them to the ends of the earth to perish?”

Even when pamphlet writers did not specifically invoke monsters, they lambasted Napoleon as perverse in presenting himself as a good father to his troops and the French people. As one pamphleteer addressed the former emperor, “I find it very inappropriate that you are called monarch and father, as if you had received from nature the least spark of this paternal love which the least of men feel.” The same theme appears in Reflections of a Soldier to his Comrades, an 1814 pamphlet allegedly by an officer of the 58th Regiment. The author claimed of Bonaparte: “The duties of a husband, a father, so sweet to fulfill for a man, were nothing to him.” The ex-emperor may have claimed to be a good father and a good leader, but he was interested only in his own vainglory.

To drive home further the brutality of Napoleon’s regime, royalist writers claimed that the former emperor had no regard for the men who had served under him. Chateaubriand thus lamented that the government had reached such a “degree of contempt for men’s lives and for France to call conscripts raw material and cannon fodder.” The term châtre à canon, or cannon fodder, had rarely been used before 1814; it would become common in royalist tracts, poems, and songs in the early Restoration. Pamphleteers presented wild totals of the deaths Napoleon had caused, denouncing 5, 6, or even 7 million casualties. About 2 million soldiers had actually been recruited into French armies between the introduction of conscription and the end of the Napoleonic empire, and up to 3.5 million for the entire period of the Revolution and empire. Royalist numbers implied that more men had died than had actually fought. Exaggerated totals likely reflected

30. Among other places, the figure of 5 million appeared in Deux mots de vérité: Buonaparte jugé par lui-même, nécessité d’une constitution (Paris: Charles, 1814), 3, which gave it as the total of casualties in the previous six years; Discours d’un brave militaire à ses frères d’armes (Paris: Cellot, 1814), 1; and Conversation de Va de Bon Cœur et de Lavaleur, 3. Guéau de Reverseaux de Rouvray, La paix de l’Europe avec la France, et la paix de la France avec elle-même (Paris: Nouzou,
confusion and uncertainty about the real costs of war, but also served to identify Napoleon’s reign with unrestrained butchery.

Writers also dwelt on the wretched state of those injured and weakened by war. The Sepulchers of the Grande Armée by Jean-Baptiste Augustin Hapdé, the director of military hospitals, offered a particularly vivid account in June 1814. He described the agonized cries of the wounded, and painted a series of heart-wrenching scenes, like one of men with broken limbs thrown roughly into ambulances and then lying unnoticed and forgotten after brutal jolts tossed them onto the ground.31 Although some accused Hapdé of exaggeration, his work was sufficiently sensational and influential that he felt obliged to flee to England when Napoleon returned to power.

Such works called attention to very real hardships. They reflected the appalling conditions that could await the wounded, as well as the grim totals of casualties, even when those numbers were reduced to more realistic calculations.32 Yet these pamphlets also served distinct political purposes. They particularly resonated with contemporary efforts to identify leadership with paternal benevolence. As Lynn Hunt and others have shown, familial and paternal metaphors often conveyed powerful messages about the legitimacy or limits of rule.33 Heralding a monarch as father was a standard justification for royal sovereignty. But there was no longer a clear notion of what a king should be in 1814, nor what characteristics marked both a good father and a good ruler.34 Much propaganda around Louis XVIII portrayed him as a very particular kind of father, known for his sympathy, tenderness, prudence, capacity to forgive, and ability to care for his people.35 In this light, Napoleon’s alleged cruelty towards his “children” appeared exceptionally heartless and unworthy of any legitimate leader.

At the same time, emphasizing the youth and vulnerability of returning soldiers and veterans downplayed their masculinity. It associated them with boys forced to fight and with injured, weakened, and potentially dependent beings. Pamphlets depicted former solders primarily as victims who should welcome an end to hostilities, and who could thus be forgiven for fighting for the “usurper” Bonaparte.

1814), estimated 6 million. The figure of 7 million seems to have surfaced somewhat later, possibly in 1817; see Petiteau, Lendemains, 75.

31. Hapdé, Les sépulcres de la grande armée.
32. On the treatment of the wounded, see especially Martin Howard, Napoleon’s Doctors: the Medical Services of the Grande Armée (Stroud: Spellmount, 2006).
Soldiers as Eager Warriors

If military men could be seen as deluded victims of Napoleon’s ambition, some soldiers had clearly fought willingly for Napoleon’s armies. To explain this while still hoping to incorporate former soldiers into a new order, some royalist pamphleteers emphasized the innate courage and passion of French troops. They credited victories to the bravery and dedication of soldiers, rather than to their self-proclaimed leader. As Isser Woloch has noted, the Bourbons adopted a nationalistic strategy for dealing with the military record of the preceding twenty-five years, treating the army’s achievements as French, rather than republican or imperial.36 Most pamphleteers acknowledged the zeal of military men, praising soldiers’ bravery even as they denounced the horrors of war. What Do Those of Our Soldiers Who Seem to Miss War Want?, for example, began by asking if soldiers had not already given a thousand proofs of their bravery by facing horrific conditions on and off the battlefield. The author portrayed wounded men huddled on straw and deprived even of bandages.37

In these accounts, soldiers had fought, and fought well, because of their innate courage and their ability to withstand hardship and to face danger. Such explanations fit well with ideals of “martial masculinity,” as they had developed over the Revolution and Napoleonic period. Acknowledging soldiers’ bravery also promised to expedite demobilization and the reintegration of former combatants by promising that soldiers would be recognized for their dedication and sacrifices.

Yet for many Restoration writers, courage did not always equate with heroism, or qualify former soldiers to take an active part in the new regime. As one commentator put it, it was possible to see those in the military as “noble victims of limitless courage,” led to engage in unnecessary and foolhardy battles by appeals to their bravery. Heroism required not only a “fiery courage” but also good judgment.38 Many writers suggested that soldiers had been misled. This absolved them of guilt for following a leader the Restoration defined as illegitimate, but it also presented them as passive and incapable of independent action. The pamphleteer Fortia de Piles drove home this message by making a parallel between serving soldiers and married women, both unable to act independently while under the authority of a master.39 Such comparisons were not new.40 But the equation of soldiers with married women had a particularly damning

37. Que vouloient ceux de nos braves qui ont paru regretter la guerre? (Paris: Le Normant, 1814).
38. Étienne-Michel Masse, Les Jacobins et Buonaparte, Essai historique sur l’alliance des deux tyrannies qui ont oppressé la nation française (Marseille: les principaux libraires, 1814), 1.
39. Fortia de Piles, Conversation entre le Gobe-Mouche Tant Pis, 22; and Fortia de Piles, Seconde Conversation entre Le Gobe-Mouche Tant Pis et le Gobe-Mouche Tant Mieux (Paris: Eymery, 1814), 32–33. See also the review of the first Conversation in the Journal des arts, sciences, et de la littérature 18, no. 310 (30 juillet 1814): 126–29.
connotation in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars. It identified the men who had been associated with the pinnacle of virility with women legally subjected to another's authority, while arguing for new forms of education and a social reordering that would ensure that France was not only a “nation of warriors.”

In response, Bonapartist pamphlets during the Hundred Days argued against the idea that the army was, or should be, passive. The May 1815 Letters of Grenadier Lafranchise to Grenadier Lavaleur thus contended that “The French soldier is not a robot who fights because he is told to fight,” while the contemporaneous Profession of Faith of a Military Man proclaimed: “French soldiers are not passive and blind instruments.” Bonapartists did not depict Napoleon’s supporters as warmongers who deliberately sought out violence; indeed, they often held Louis XVIII and monarchists as responsible for civil war during the Hundred Days. But they did stress that those in the military were not only brave but also politically engaged, capable of choosing both whether to fight and who or what to fight for.

Royalists also argued that soldiers were invested in war for the opportunities it offered for individual glory and promotion. Not surprisingly, such claims were most intense after the Hundred Days, when many in the army had supported the return of their former emperor. But concern about whether those in the military actually wanted to stop fighting began as the empire crumbled in 1814. Pamphleteers scolded soldiers for being obsessed with their own advancement and indifferent to the consequences of their ambition. In the July 1814 Honor to Military Men, the prolific pamphleteer Auguste-Louis Ledrut thus reprimanded soldiers: “you see in these perpetual and disastrous wars a sure means of promotion. . . . But your ambition comes at the expense of the death of your brothers, your best friends, often even your fathers. . . .” The virulent ultraroyalist François-Thomas Delbare went further in 1815 to contend that soldiers were inherently perverse, and saw the death of their comrades as a chance for their own advancement. Such arguments depicted combatants not as acting courageously and unselfishly in defense of common interests, but rather as seeking glory only for their own sakes.

Integrating Veterans into Civilian Society

The question of soldiers’ motives for fighting led to connected, but distinct, questions: whether combatants—and society in general—could recover easily from war, and whether former military men actually wanted to do so. Some argued that the experiences of war had made it impossible for men to return
to civilian life. The administrator Théodore Viel-Castel (the subprefect of Sceaux) contended that it was very hard for soldiers to go back to being farm laborers. Veterans could not reaccustom themselves to the drudgery, routine, and limited horizons of civilian life. Viel-Castel contended that war was a bad training ground for civic virtues; while he did not elaborate on his vision of virtue, he implied that former soldiers were too restless, violent, and focused on their own advancement to serve as productive members of civilian society. This was rarely a problem when armies were small in proportion to the population as a whole, since a limited number of men would spend their lives fighting and die in uniform. But it was more serious when an entire population was obliged to become soldiers. Those who returned were permanently tainted by the corruption and barbarism of the camps, unable to adapt fully to civilian life. Violent wars, like those that had just occurred, made ex-soldiers particularly incapable of serving their patrie after peace was declared.45

While Viel-Castel aimed primarily to justify the need for peace and the reform of the military system, more virulent opponents of Napoleon portrayed ex-combatants as dangerously destructive to others. They were untrustworthy members of the state and undesirable husbands and fathers, as well as bad sons and brothers. The prolific writer Mouton-Fontenille de Laclotte, for example, lamented the fate of a woman married to a conscript who returned home incapable of being a good husband: “who lives only for war and battle, who passed his life in the armies, accustomed to the tumult of the camps, to the dangers of an idle life, inclined towards evil, immoral by habit, cruel by his state, vicious by nature.”46

There were few means of discussing the difficulties of reintegrating men who had dedicated their lives to violence; terms like shellshock or post-traumatic stress disorder did not exist to make sense of the social and emotional challenges that faced veterans.47 Comments like Viel-Castel’s and Mouton-Fontenille de Laclotte’s hinted at the long-term psychological costs of combat. But political pamphlets like these also tended to conflate the trauma of war with the willful depravity of men who had followed Napoleon.

More optimistic writers sometimes tried to establish that soldiers themselves hoped for peace. An article entitled “Wars without end and their effects on public morals,” in the Gazette de France in July 1814, argued that veterans did not want ongoing war:

  Ask the thousands of veterans brought back among us by peace . . .
what vow they made in the most dramatic days of their careers, and
in the very intoxication of their glory. None of them will say they

46. Jacques-Marie-Philippe Mouton-Fontenille de Laclotte, La France en délire, pendant les deux usurpations de Buonaparte (Paris and Lyon: Guyot, 1815), 60.
wanted to make war the permanent state of their existence and the focus of their entire lives; they will instead all say that they only wanted to survive danger, their labors, hardships, and wounds, to return to France to enjoy the honors and recompenses due to their courage and services.⁴⁸

The anonymous author claimed that soldiers were entitled to expect a reward for their service. But he also insisted on the harshness and physical costs of war and veterans’ fundamental desire to return home. Similarly, the anonymous author of *Appeal to the Conscience of Monsieur Paul, a Self-Declared Soldier of the Former Imperial Guard* proclaimed, “The soldier should be the first to want peace: it is the most honorable result of his efforts and exhaustion; his fate would be horrible if he existed only for war.”⁴⁹

Others depicted military men as not only wistful for the opportunities war had provided them for advancement, but also as clinging to glory at the expense of their friends, loved ones, and the French nation as a whole. This vision became more common in the aftermath of the Hundred Days. The dramatist Népomucène-Louis Lemercier claimed in August 1815 that, “excited by the desire for promotion, soldiers no longer fight to achieve peace, but rather to better perpetuate war.”⁵⁰ Similarly, in Fortia de Piles’s tract from December 1815, one character lamented “the crazy and ferocious wishes of those who call upon their country a war without end, indifferent to the destruction of two generations.”⁵¹

Concern about soldiers who were personally invested in war was not new in 1814. There was an inherent tension between equating masculine achievement with military glory and defining the ultimate goal for the nation as peace.⁵² A few revolutionary and Napoleonic works explicitly recognized this tension, like the 1797 play *The Victory or the Peace*. One of the principal characters, a captain, acknowledged that he had been raised in the camps and aspired to glory. But he reiterated that he did not want to base his personal fortune on the misfortune of his country. He proclaimed that peace was necessary for humanity, and particularly for the youth of France, who had been torn from the tenderness of their parents and the love of French girls.⁵³

Yet regrets for the lost opportunities of war were relatively rare in political and cultural discourse during both the Revolution and Napoleonic eras. This was partly

because peace treaties were short-lived. Men who wanted to continue careers in the military could often do so, at least if their health permitted. Contemporaries also associated peace with victory, imagining that returned soldiers would be welcomed as heroes and would find new ways of serving the country as civilians.

The situation was very different in 1814–1815. Soldiers had come home without victory to a country that did not know what to do with them. To excuse the thwarted ambition and restlessness of returned soldiers, some writers presented soldiers as acting out of ignorance of the full costs of war, particularly for those at home. Here tracts like *A Conversation between Va de Bon Coeur and La Valeur* are particularly revealing. Writers claimed that if young men were to understand the suffering not only of their comrades but also of their devastated families, they would stop dreaming of advancement on the battlefield and devote themselves instead to their fields at home.

**Advice from a Lame Farmer-Veteran to His Warrior Son**

Let us take a close look at one such tract, which addressed many of these themes: *Jacques B. nicknamed the Lame, Farmer, to his son, Henri B, captain in the . . . of the line.* In this case, the conversation is not between two contemporaries, as in *A Conversation between Va de Bon Coeur and La Valeur*, but between a father and son. Rebuking Henry for his ambition, Jacques describes the devastation that war wreaked on the family. His ten children should have provided for him. Instead, Henry and two other sons were swept away by their desire to advance in the military; Henry’s two brothers paid for this desire with their lives. With considerable effort and expense, Jacques saved three other sons, by paying for substitutes to fight in their place, only to be forced to purchase their freedom a second time. They were nonetheless torn from his arms and “perished with no utility to their country.” In total, five of Henry’s brothers were dead, and without the peace, the captain would likely have met the same fate.

In presenting his family’s losses, Jacques echoed general attacks on conscription and its financial as well as human costs. His lament that he had tried in vain to buy his younger sons’ freedom from conscription echoed other complaints that purchasing replacements had bankrupted families without saving their children in the end. Like much propaganda, this had an element of truth; men who had been legally replaced could still be conscripted by exceptional drafts, and were particularly vulnerable in 1813. But it also emphasized the economic damage of war and the financial hardships of those at home.

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55. Ibid., 5.
56. For other laments about paying for replacements for men who were subsequently forced to fight, see Épître au roi par un garde national (Paris: Séter, 1814), 11; and Essai sur les sentiments qu’on doit au Buonaparte (Paris: Crapelet, 1815). For the situation in 1813, see Gustave Vallée, “Le
Tracts like Jacques B. suggested one answer to how soldiers could still long for war even if the experience of battle, the camps, and hospitals had been wretched. Those who wanted to return to combat were men who had somehow succeeded, including grenadiers like La Valeur, the elite of infantry, or men like Henry who had been promoted to captain. They were also men who had escaped harm themselves. Jacques presented an implicit contrast between those at home, including ex-soldiers, whose suffering made them compassionate, and military men who, personally unscathed, had not realized the true costs of war to others. In this case, the son has managed to escape without a single wound. In contrast, the father notes that he himself had been a soldier and had been injured in battle. For the rest of his life, he could not take a step without being reminded of his service and his injuries. Returning to his village, he preferred to help men rather than to destroy them. The pamphlet suggested that those yearning to return to war were not the men who had suffered, but those who remained untouched and oblivious. It also implicitly called for former soldiers to prepare for domestic and civilian life.

Jacques's perspective as a father also drew attention to his role, and that of the paternalistic monarchy, in healing soldiers and keeping them healthy. Although Henry had ultimately emerged unscathed from war, he had not done so without help. Jacques invoked the disasters of the Russian campaign, telling his son: "You saw Moscow; you were almost naked at your return, exhausted by fatigue and illness." If his father had not come to the young man's aid, he would have perished. Jacques thus disparaged the idea that his son, or any other soldier, survived the war and progressed in the military solely on his own merits. Although the tract did not make the connection explicitly, it also suggested a clear parallel between Jacques's solicitude and the father-king's rescue of his people.

Finally, Jacques dwelt not only on the fate of his sons, but also on women's sacrifices, and on the extent to which they bore the brunt of the war effort. Jacques's daughters had suffered as much as his sons: "For at least five years, they could have become good mothers of families, earned an honest living, and been the happiness of their spouses." Instead, he had been unable to find them suitable marriages. Their sacrifices for their warrior brothers went beyond remaining single: "they sacrificed the fruit of their economy to provide for your expenditures. They deprived themselves of everything, so that their brother would lack for nothing."57

References to the suffering of women, like Va de Bon Cœur's widowed mother or Jacques's exhausted daughters, formed one leitmotiv in contemporary writings. It is far more difficult to get accurate information about how war affected women's labor and marital prospects during the revolutionary and Napoleonic eras than it is remplacement militaire dans la Charente sous le régime de la conscription," *La révolution française, revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 80 (1927): 222–35, 312–30; Alain Maureau, "Le remplacement militaire de l'an VIII à 1814, d'après les registres de notaires d'Avignon—aspect juridique et social," *Revue de l'institut Napoléon*, no. 131 (1975): 121–44.

is for the twentieth century, but it is clear that women took on both agricultural tasks and business roles that they would not have otherwise.\textsuperscript{58} Emphasizing their labor and suffering also evoked the social and economic disorder of Napoleon's rule. The author of the \textit{Epistle to the King by a Member of the National Guard}, for example, concluded a long verse about the ill health of veterans, the disastrous state of French commerce, and the desperation of workers, with the line "Women and children cultivate the land." The writer Charles de Cheppe similarly lamented that French fields were devastated; to drive home the sad condition of the countryside, he emphasized that "youth has disappeared and the hardest labors are the task of the weakest sex."\textsuperscript{59} References to women's forced celibacy or premature widowhood similarly evoked general devastation. An anonymous poem, \textit{Epistle to the Armies}, captures this vision as it praised the "invincible warriors" of the French armies, but bewailed the consequences of war on their families: "We lose our brothers and friends in combat / Our weeping sisters age near to us / Their slain lovers have deprived them of (future) husbands."\textsuperscript{60} Such language invoked both personal and national loss.

Some pamphleteers went further, reproaching soldiers for failing to recognize women's grief or the extent of their hardships. For instance, Jacques reprimanded Henry for not appreciating his sisters' sacrifices. In \textit{Honor to Military Men}, the prolific pamphleteer Auguste-Louis Ledrut followed a general rebuke of soldiers' indifference to the costs of their military exploits with specific references to the suffering of those at home. He told soldiers, "your ephemeral glory [is] too dearly bought by the bitter tears of your tender parents, your abandoned sweethearts, your desolated sisters, whom you left behind as you went off singing to search for glory."\textsuperscript{61} Such rhetoric presented soldiers as taking up arms despite, not because, of the wishes of their family and loved ones. If in some versions of recruitment propaganda, soldiers were asked to fight to protect those at home, here they were asked to renounce fighting for the same goal.

\textbf{Inverting Revolutionary and Napoleonic Visions}

Pamphlets like \textit{Jacques B.} also reversed common views of the relationship between civilians and the military. First, they depicted soldiers, rather than families, as ignorant about the fate of their loved ones. Second, they suggested that war

\footnotesize{58. Some of the best sources come from a collection of about 16,000 petitions from soldiers and their families seeking soldiers' release from service in 1796–1797 in AFIII 313-1 through AFII 313-76, AN; I analyze elsewhere the evidence these provide of work that women were doing in the absence of strong young men.


61. Ledrut, \textit{Honneur aux militaires ou examen impartial de cette question}, 25. Listed in BF, 2 July 1814.}
could be harder on those at home than those at war. Third, they presented civilians as ultimately more patriotic, generous, and useful to the nation than soldiers.

Revolutionary and Napoleonic governments had spent considerable energy on maintaining correspondence between soldiers and those at home. But families could still go months or years without hearing from men at the front. The absence of news often suggested that a man had died, but did not guarantee it. This uncertainty was both a harsh reality and a common literary theme. Topical theater celebrating short-term peace treaties during the French Revolution and Napoleonic eras often featured soldiers who had been missing without news. It offered comforting explanations for men’s absences by reassuring audiences that soldiers had been hospitalized or captured as prisoners of war; they had been unable to send word home, but were alive and even healthy. In the world of literature, such characters inevitably returned and married their patient sweethearts. In reality, families often awaited mass demobilization to learn what had actually happened. Even then, they could remain in limbo, faced with what Natalie Petiteau has called “impossible mourning,” still unable to determine if the missing were alive.

Restoration pamphleteers also invoked uncertainty or ignorance about the fate of loved ones during war, but presented soldiers, not families, as unaware of what had happened to those they cared about. Soldiers were ignorant both of the cruel realities of their families’ lives and the deaths of their mothers or brothers. Pamphlets also offered less sanguine visions of familial reunion than those common under Napoleon. Napoleonic popular theater often depicted soldiers returning home as healthy and virile, if dashingy scarred, eager to wed their patient sweethearts, to the general delight of their families and communities and the chagrin of a ridiculous or greedy suitor who had sought the heroine’s hand. Topical theater commemorating peace in 1814 and 1815 drew on these models, even as playwrights struggled to adapt them to a very different kind of peace. In the polemical world of pamphlets, however, writers dwelt far more on domestic suffering than rewards for military courage and sacrifice.

Such tracts also inverted the relationship between patriotic sacrifice and military service. The idea of unselfish dedication to a larger purpose was inherent in the call to arms: soldiers risked their lives and abandoned their loved ones to defend the nation. Revolutionary recruitment propaganda exhorted men to place collective interests before personal ones, and duty to the nation before duty to family. While such rhetoric became less prevalent under Napoleon, the idea of unselfish military service to the nation did not disappear. Royalist pamphleteers reversed this logic: those who wanted to fight were ambitious and greedy; those who turned from war to their homes and fields were the true patriots.

65. See Heuer, “The Soldier’s Reward.”
Even as royalists lauded patriotic civilians, there were limits to their belief that soldiers could, or should, be transformed into models of domestic rectitude. Few royalists were completely willing to abandon notions of military virility, though they restricted it to what they deemed as appropriate causes. One pamphleteer, responding to a tract by a self-identified soldier of the former imperial guard, challenged the guard’s identity as a military man, claiming that a true warrior would embrace Louis XVIII.66 Others praised soldiers who had rallied to the monarchy. Songs, particularly in 1815, regularly echoed revolutionary and Napoleonic language identifying all Frenchmen with soldiers. They proclaimed that “If it’s necessary to defend a father / the French are all soldiers,” or “To combat tyranny, All French are good soldiers.”67 Such language asserted a continued popular masculine militancy, but emphasized the soldiers’ role in defending France and their father-king rather than in aggressive conquest or a quest for individual promotion. Since France was at peace in 1815 (after the Hundred Days), songs like these also served to suggest a readiness to take up weapons in an appropriate cause without actively requiring men to fight.

Some pamphleteers also recognized the difficulties veterans faced in becoming productive laborers even if they wanted to do so. As we have seen, artists and writers emphasized the horrors of war by graphically describing the wounded; they also portrayed the lasting disability of returned veterans. Popular writers painted dismal scenes of familial suffering. The Belgian Charles D’Auvin, for example, described an eighteen-year-old who had provided for his elderly father and five younger siblings. Sent to war, he returned to find his house in ruin, and his family, unable to pay rent, dispersed. D’Auvin added an extra element of pathos: the conscript, suffering from a serious leg wound, was useless to his father. It was not even clear that he could procure bread for himself.68

Accounts like D’Auvin’s, however, sought to portray the destructiveness of Napoleon’s empire, rather than to provide an accurate report of the financial or physical prospects of returned military men. Mass demobilization meant that there were actually proportionately fewer wounded men returning home in 1814–1815 than earlier. During wartime, often only those too physically injured or weakened to fight were able to obtain a release from service; some able-bodied men returned after the Napoleonic wars. In theory, they could become productive civilians, taking up the plows and tools they had left behind. Nonetheless the limits placed on those who returned—particularly on demi-soldes, the officers on half-pay who were not officially allowed to take on other jobs in case they were called back—meant that many could not become fully part of civilian life.

66. *Appel à la conscience de Monsieur Paul.*


The specific argument that Restoration veterans had been truly unaware of their families’ sufferings and, once alerted to the needs of the relatives, would settle dutifully in their homes was most plausible in the initial demobilization. By late 1815, the idea that soldiers were ignorant of home-front suffering was harder to sustain, as far more men had returned to their fields and families. The Hundred Days also made royalists far more distrustful of Napoleonic soldiers, and often brutally vindictive. Yet invoking the familial cost of war remained a potentially useful means for persuading soldiers to accept civilian life and abandon a quest for personal glory, as suggested by another pamphlet, *Conversations with a Father about the Events of 1814 and 1815*. The work was published in July 1815, though parts may have been written earlier.69 The narrator describes the death of his son Victor, an “innocent victim of reckless ambition”; his worries for a second son, also taken by conscription; and his hope of preserving a third son and providing husbands for his daughters. A dialogue follows between the father, his daughters, and Armand, the son who has remained at home. The family celebrates the end of conscription. The father nonetheless fears that the conscripted Félix, since becoming a captain and a chasseur, will be obliged to follow his corps and will have contracted a taste for military life. To drive home the cost of war, the father reports that his wife—the children’s mother—died of grief after Victor’s death and Félix’s departure.

In a second conversation, Félix has returned. Despite his strong desire to see his family, his transition to civilian life has been difficult. “Honorable wounds” and favorable circumstances led to his rapid promotion, promotion that ended abruptly with his demobilization. He laments not only his own stagnation, but also that of officers who had been reduced to the status of demi-soldes, lacked employment, and saw their hopes for a better future evaporate. His father reminds him that his brother Victor did not have the same fortune, but was one of the thousands of soldiers whose deaths allowed a few to advance. Félix concludes that a soldier’s world is one of illusions, in which words like family, patrie, and liberty are empty. Only accepting civilian and domestic life under a benevolent monarch could make these concepts meaningful again; soldiers had to accept that they had come home.

**Conclusion**

Looking at cultural productions from 1814 and 1815 reminds us that the transition to peace was neither easy nor obvious. We are familiar with analogous arguments for 1918 and 1945, as well as more recent wars, but tend to forget how complicated and unpredictable the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars could be. Looking at pamphlets reveals the very particular challenges of 1814–1815, especially in France, as contemporaries sought to come to terms with a peace that was far from victorious, where hundreds of thousands of men returned to a changed nation, and where a king had claimed the throne only with the help of foreign powers.

Soldiers and former soldiers featured prominently in pamphlets, as both victims and villains, as willfully corrupted champions of war and as conscripts who would benefit most from peace. To negotiate these different visions, writers used familial metaphors—whether in depicting Napoleon as heartless “father” and Louis XVIII as a benevolent patriarch, or in equating serving soldiers with the legal submissiveness of married women. Pamphleteers also invoked the real families of military men to argue that they should accept peace—not only for themselves, but also and especially for those at home. Even as they denounced Napoleon’s ambition and that of the men who served him, these works revealed the difficulties of disentangling military service and masculinity in the wake of war.

Beginning about 1819, artists, playwrights, and novelists increasingly portrayed soldat-laboueurs, or farmer-soldiers. Many aspects of the figure echoed attempts by pamphleteers in the immediate aftermath of the war to persuade veterans to accept peace under a Bourbon king. Adapting biblical and classical themes, artists and writers depicted swords literally and figuratively turned into ploughshares. They also celebrated the value of former warriors to their families. After cowriting a popular vaudeville production on the theme, Théophile Marion Dumersan published a novel with the title Le soldat laboureur, proclaiming that “I’ve described the sensible valor / of a soldier, French citizen / who accepts the peace / and proud of a rustic industry / is useful to his mother and his sister/ and knows that one can serve his country / at home, as on the field of honor.” The novel provoked an enthusiastic reception. The authors of one contemporary newspaper, the Revue encyclopédique, observed, “this excellent work should be placed in the hands of all soldiers who can read, and who, returning to their homes, must be brought back to the ideas of peace and happiness if we do not want the habits they have contracted to become dangerous to the state.”

Yet if later images of the soldat-laboureur retook certain themes of the immediate postwar period, they also resonated differently as memories began to fade and circumstances changed. As Natalie Petiteau and Sudhir Hazareesingh have shown, the lives and reception of Napoleonic veterans gradually improved


71. As a character in an 1819 play proclaimed, after replacing a broken blade with his sword: “Dear and terrible weapon, you must not be in the service of victory anymore. After having saved my life, you must now serve to preserve it; open this hospitable earth and prepare the furrow that must feed both my old mother and my son.” Henri Franconi, Le soldat laboureur: mimo-drame en un acte (Paris: Fages, 1819), 14.


over time. On 10 March 1818, only four years after the Restoration government had abolished conscription, it brought back mandatory military service. Legislators claimed that the law concerned military recruitment rather than conscription, but the measure effectively required French men to register for a draft. Napoleon Bonaparte died in May 1821, removing the possibility that the emperor would return to rally his forces again. Max Owre has found evidence for a renewed national militarism by 1823, but has also claimed that the “valorization of patriotic military service migrated from a left-wing set of ideals based on a nation—at-arms to a right-wing one prioritizing social order.” While Liberals in the early 1820s used the image of the soldat-laboureur as suffering but loyal veterans, by the later nineteenth century, it would increasingly become associated with the mythical figure of Chauvin and thus with chauvinism and nationalism. Such changes did not mean the full or easy reintegration of Napoleonic ex-combatants into civilian society—indeed, the figure of a peg-legged veteran nostalgic for lost days of glory remained potent throughout the nineteenth century—but they did slowly reshape how contemporaries thought about masculinity and the military.

Looking at the period of 1814–1815 as a distinctive, both postrevolutionary and postwar moment enriches our understandings of moments of historical transition. It illuminates the processes of remembering and forgetting, as contemporaries both deliberately emphasized and denied aspects of the recent past. They reemployed old nostrums—particularly that of agricultural laborers useful to their families—to negotiate unprecedented changes. They struggled both to attribute responsibility for the events they had just experienced, and determine how much men could, or would, start afresh. In so doing, they also revealed that the military and civilian experiences of both war and its aftermath were fundamentally intertwined.


