



The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies

Issue 10 (2009)

The Integration of Non-Russian Servicemen in the Imperial, Soviet and Russian Army

Arsène Saparov

**Vladimir V. Lapin, Armia Rossii v
Kavkazskoi voine XVIII - XIX vv.**
Evropeiskii Dom, St. Petersburg, 2008, 400 s.

Warning

The contents of this site is subject to the French law on intellectual property and is the exclusive property of the publisher.

The works on this site can be accessed and reproduced on paper or digital media, provided that they are strictly used for personal, scientific or educational purposes excluding any commercial exploitation. Reproduction must necessarily mention the editor, the journal name, the author and the document reference.

Any other reproduction is strictly forbidden without permission of the publisher, except in cases provided by legislation in force in France.

revues.org

Revues.org is a platform for journals in the humanites and social sciences run by the CLEO, Centre for open electronic publishing (CNRS, EHESS, UP, UAPV).

Electronic reference

Arsène Saparov, « Vladimir V. Lapin, Armia Rossii v Kavkazskoi voine XVIII - XIX vv. », *The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies* [Online], Issue 10 | 2009, Online since 07 December 2009, connection on 04 February 2012. URL : <http://pipss.revues.org/2425>

Publisher: Centre d'études et de recherche sur les sociétés et les institutions post-soviétiques (CERSIPS)
<http://pipss.revues.org>
<http://www.revues.org>

Document available online on:

<http://pipss.revues.org/2425>

Document automatically generated on 04 February 2012.

Creative Commons License

Arsène Saparov

Vladimir V. Lapin, *Armiia Rossii v Kavkazskoi voine XVIII – XIX vv.*

Evropeiskii Dom, St. Petersburg, 2008, 400 s.

- 1 Vladimir Lapin's *Armiia Rossii v Kavkazskoi voine XVIII-XIX vv.* (The Russian Army in the Caucasian War XVIII – XIX centuries) deals with the subject of the Russian involvement and conquest of the Caucasus in the course of 18th and 19th centuries. Unlike many traditional works on the subject the author does not present a chronological history of this conflict. Instead Lapin analyses the transformations the Russian Army underwent as a result of its prolonged interaction with the people and nature of the Caucasus. The Russian army stationed in the Caucasus is studied as a social organism confronted with a new type of permanent conflict where the traditional rules and organisation of the European military machine were challenged by the unusual terrain and adversary. With this approach historical events are used to illustrate the effects of such interaction on the Russian Army. Such approach gives a new perspective on the longevity of the conflict as well as explains successes and failures of the Russian military machine in the Caucasus.
- 2 The book opens by an excellently written and convincing introduction which summarises the author's approach to the problem. It is followed by part I where the author sets the scene for his argument. He demonstrates the longevity of the conflict and its vague temporal limits, the complexity and uncertainty of the Russian goals in this war as well as marginal position of this conflict for the general Russian public. All of these factors have paved the ground for the functioning of the Russian Army in the Caucasus as a separate social institution.
- 3 Part II deals with the adversary the Russian Army faced in the Caucasus. The author starts with the specific aspects of military organisation and the way the people of the Caucasus conducted the war which was completely alien to the European military tradition. In the case of the Caucasus there were no centralised political units with clear leader and military structures that can be subdued by the imperial army. Instead every single mountaineer was an experienced fighter often engaged in its own war – a situation unparalleled in Europe. The author then looks at the evolution of the military organisation of the mountaineers in the period of Shamil's Imamat as a response to the Russian challenge. Finally, the ragged Caucasian terrain itself is considered as an adversary. I found it rather surprising that the natural environment of the Caucasus is concluding this part since it was this which in the first place determined the specific military and social organisation of the people of the Caucasus as well as the way they conducted the war. It was the mountainous nature of the Caucasus that was forcing the Russian Army to adapt to the new conditions. This is perhaps the strongest part of the book.
- 4 Part III focuses on the elements that made the Russian Army in the Caucasus a special social institute and contributed to the prolongation of the conflict. It first considers the file and rank drafted into the Caucasian military corps. The peculiarity of the Russian Army in the Caucasus was that it had higher than average concentration of petty criminal and socially undesirable elements among soldiers. Similarly, the officer corps of the Russian Army in the Caucasus was often the only place where people with problems with the law could continue their service. A number of officers were drawn from the native people and often pursued personal motifs in the war. The state of permanent warfare and considerable autonomy of small units operating in the mountainous terrain contributed to the unauthorised adventurism of the officer corps unthinkable elsewhere. Almost half of this part deals with the Russian commanders serving in the Caucasus. It appears that the Russian generals were least adaptable to the challenges of the war in Caucasus. As such the Russian generals in the Caucasus represent a striking contrast with the ordinary rank and file and the officer corps who in order to survive had to adapt. I feel that the author should have placed greater emphasis on this aspect by organising the chapter around the opposition between the rank and file and officer corps on the one hand and the generals on the other.

- 5 In part IV the author looks at the challenges that the European military machine faced in the unfamiliar theatre of war where traditional methods of warfare and the uncertain enemy made it impossible to achieve the results typical for the European war. It also addresses the inadequacy of the military equipment designed for the conditions of the European conflicts for the war in mountainous terrain of the North Caucasus. Consequently, the adaptation of the Russian Army to the new type of warfare led to the brutalisation of the conflict. The methods used in this war were unacceptable by the norms of European warfare. The very notion of military victory was different in this war from the European war. The measure of successes in the Caucasian war was often a number of captured cattle, food supplies and even felt coats typical of the region which apparently shocked the Tsar Nicolas I (p. 267). This barbarisation of the war it seems was unavoidable since the Russian army was not engaged with a conventional army but was fighting the armed people. The author concludes this part arguing that as a result the Russian Army in the Caucasus became a specific military community.
- 6 In the final part V of the book the role irregular auxiliaries in the Russian Caucasian war is considered. This is first of all, the Terek, Don and Kuban Cossacks. The emphasis is made on the circumstances under which they were acquiring local military traditions and the factors that contributed to the prolongation of the conflict. The second part looks at the participation of the auxiliaries and irregular militia made up of native people both from the North and South Caucasus. The evidence is conflicting as in some instances the militia demonstrated high fighting capabilities while in other the reliability and loyalty of these formations was questionable. The author concludes that participation of the native auxiliaries played certain role in the end of the war as this native troops were the bearers of the Russian cultural and political influence.
- 7 It seems the book would have benefited from inclusion of a map. Even a reader familiar with the region, will struggle to appreciate the magnitude of the events often unfolding simultaneously in the Caucasian war. A number of place-names have been altered since the 19th century which also complicates the perception of the events for someone unfamiliar with the region. A map could have also greatly highlighted the author's argument. Some parts of the book seem excessively detailed which hinders the author's general argument. While the book essentially deals with the Russian involvement in the North Caucasus, the author sometimes illustrates his argument by references to the developments in the South Caucasus. These, however, should have been used more sparingly as they are too short to provide a full picture of the Russian engagement in the South Caucasus but long enough to switch the readers attention from the main line of argument. Several typos and place-names errors in the text are also unfortunate.
- 8 To conclude, the book is a very thorough study of the Russian Army as an actor in the Caucasian war of 18th-19th centuries. It provides an understanding of the processes that influenced the Russian army in this war, of its adaptation to new conditions and helps account for such an unusually long duration of the conflict. The book has an unquestionable relevance for understanding the present day situation in the region and as such it should be recommended not only to any student of the Caucasus but particularly to any statesman or the military involved in the Caucasus.

References

Vladimir V. Lapin, *Armiia Rossii v Kavkazskoi voine XVIII – XIX vv.*, Evropeiskii Dom, St. Petersburg, 2008, 400 s.

References

Electronic reference

Arsène Saparov, « Vladimir V. Lapin, *Armiia Rossii v Kavkazskoi voine XVIII – XIX vv.* », *The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies* [Online], Issue 10 | 2009, Online since 07 December 2009, connection on 04 February 2012. URL : <http://pipss.revues.org/2425>

Author

Arsène Saparov
CNRS, EHESS

Copyright

Creative Commons License

This text is under a Creative Commons license : Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 2.0 Generic

Research Fields : History, Military History

Countries : Caucasus, Russia