

The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies

Numéro Issue 4/5 (2006)

"Military and Security Structures in/and the Regions" & "Women in/and the Military"

David Stone

David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye and Bruce W. Menning, eds., Reforming the Tsar's Army: Military Innovation in Imperial Russia from Peter the Great to the Revolution, Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center and Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004.

Avertissement

Le contenu de ce site relève de la législation française sur la propriété intellectuelle et est la propriété exclusive de l'éditeur.

Les œuvres figurant sur ce site peuvent être consultées et reproduites sur un support papier ou numérique sous réserve qu'elles soient strictement réservées à un usage soit personnel, soit scientifique ou pédagogique excluant toute exploitation commerciale. La reproduction devra obligatoirement mentionner l'éditeur, le nom de la revue, l'auteur et la référence du document.

Toute autre reproduction est interdite sauf accord préalable de l'éditeur, en dehors des cas prévus par la législation en vigueur en France.

revues.org

Revues.org est un portail de revues en sciences humaines et sociales développé par le CLEO, Centre pour l'édition électronique ouverte (CNRS, EHESS, UP, UAPV).

Electronic reference

David Stone, « David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye and Bruce W. Menning, eds., *Reforming the Tsar's Army: Military Innovation in Imperial Russia from Peter the Great to the Revolution*, Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center and Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004. », *The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies* [Online], Issue 4/5 | 2006, Online since 25 novembre 2006. URL : <http://pipss.revues.org/index434.html>
DOI : en cours d'attribution

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

Document accessible en ligne à l'adresse suivante : <http://pipss.revues.org/index434.html>

Document généré automatiquement le 24 mars 2010.

Creative Commons License

David Stone

David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye and Bruce W. Menning, eds., *Reforming the Tsar's Army: Military Innovation in Imperial Russia from Peter the Great to the Revolution*, Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center and Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004.

- 1 David Schimmelpenninck and Bruce Menning have produced an excellent volume collecting contributions of a number of both well-established and junior scholars on the history and development of the tsarist military, grouped together around the general theme of reform. In some ways, it is comparable to Eric Lohr and Marshall Poe's complementary *The Military and Society in Russia, 1450-1917* (Leiden, 2002). Schimmelpenninck and Menning's contributors, however, focus more on political and institutional history; Lohr and Poe's on social and cultural history. They are best read together.
- 2 The quality of the fifteen individual contributions is quite high. The editors have assembled them around the themes of population and resources, intelligence and knowledge, response to wars, and personalities, followed by three concluding commentaries on the essays as a whole. The commentaries ably point out themes and commonalities of their own; I will take a slightly different tack.
- 3 Most of the essays on the post-Crimean War period fall neatly into the glass-half-full / glass-half-empty debates on the nature of late imperial Russia. Was imperial Russia fitfully and steadily moving towards a stable and developed society, or were its profound problems and contradictions destined to bring revolution? While the question is to a large degree teleological--it reads backwards from the Russian Revolution--the question itself is so important that it deserves to be raised. After all, the February Revolution was in many ways a military mutiny. The failure to incorporate the Russian military in the historiography of revolution (Allan Wildman's *The End of the Russian Imperial Army* (Princeton, 1980) is a notable exception) suggests the nature of the imperial army deserves a closer look.
- 4 On the optimistic side, Robert Baumann finds that the universal service reform of Dmitrii Miliutin was remarkably effective in mobilizing Russia's massive population, broadening participation in the army, and improving the general educational level of the army and thereby of society as a whole. David Jones suggests that the creation and expansion of youth movements, particularly scouting, show that Russian civil society was not nearly so backward as commonly held, and that Russia was moving slowly towards some model of Western normality. Willis Brooks' look at the military press finds it to be a haven for free discussion and the advocacy of reform, and an important counterweight to official conservatism. David Schimmelpenninck's study of the evolution of military intelligence and Gudrun Persson's examination of Russian attaches in the 1860s both describe the rational and systematic use of foreign intelligence to improve Russian military functioning and to prepare for future wars.
- 5 On the pessimistic side, Mark von Hagen sees the steady integration of increasing numbers of non-Russians into the Russian military as a vital part of the politicization of ethnicity that would help to bring down the Russian empire. Jacob Kipp's study of Russian railroad construction brings out the sharp contradiction between military necessities and the

imperatives of domestic development. David Rich's look at military geography and statistics finds perennial difficulties in dealing with the complexity of modern war, establishing effective high command, avoiding political interference, and creating a real general staff to coordinate military work. Oleg Airapetov's examination of Miliutin's opposition to a true general staff underlines the same conclusion. Bruce Menning's analysis of military doctrine before World War I, while finding serious efforts to understand the nature of future war, nonetheless sees a familiar failure to coordinate theoretical insights with effective practical implementation. John Steinberg sees the failure to reform the Nicholas Academy of the General Staff before World War I as the sacrifice of military need to theoretical polemics and political games.

6 As my summary makes clear, this volume will not settle the debate over the direction of pre-revolutionary Russia. Nonetheless, it makes our picture of the late imperial army much clearer, and leaves no excuse for failing to integrate imperial military history into broader story of the Russian Revolution.

7 Not all the essays fit so neatly into a debate over the road to revolution. Paul Bushkovitch, echoing his findings in *Peter the Great: The Struggle for Power* (Cambridge, 2001), shows that Peter the Great did not radically break with old Muscovite elites in favor of a meritocracy. Instead, he blended new and foreign elements with existing elites in a careful balancing act. Frederick Kagan argues that while the Napoleonic era witnessed a steady and systematic improvement in Russian military administration, but not as a result of defeat. The Russian government instead actively chose to learn from its own and others' experiences, with the spur of defeat only one part of the process. Bruce Menning and Dmitrii Oleinikov in separate articles both find that unconventional war on Russia's southern frontier, whether steppe warfare against the Turks or mountain warfare in the Caucasus, pushed military officers to innovate, accept the need for mobility, and show more initiative. This was even true for people and periods generally seen as hostile to reform: G. A. Potemkin, A. I. Chernyshev, and the reign of Nicholas I.

8 As with all volumes of collected essays, the next question after the quality of the individual contributions is how the essays cohere, how they come together to produce a greater whole. In this case, the concluding essays by David McDonald, Dennis Showalter, and William Odom do an excellent job pointing out the themes and questions that emerge from the essays. Given their insightful work, I will be more questioning.

The first question is whether reform is a useful paradigm for examining tsarist military history. That is, does it focus inquiry in some helpful way? The editors of this volume certainly believe that, but the scope of essays makes one wonder what does not fall into the category of reform. Their introduction discusses the triggers to periods of reform, whether military defeat or foreign threat, and identifies them in 1700, 1855, the 1860s, the early 1870s, 1878, 1904-5, 1908, and 1910. On top of that, the introduction points to two centuries of Russian contact with neighbors' unconventional warfare as producing reform. If that is the case, and I do not doubt that it is, when was the late imperial military not reforming? Even the most hide-bound and reactionary tsar, Nicholas I, has now been revealed through Frederick Kagan's *The Military Reforms of Nicholas I* (Basingstoke, 1999) to have presided over far-reaching military reforms.

9 As Dennis Showalter's conclusion rightly remarks, one of the clear lessons of this volume is that the Russian military, contrary to its press, was competent. It recognized problems and attempted to deal with them in a rational and systematic way. Given that, evolutionary reform is necessarily constant, as it is in any military. The issue of reform in the tsar's army thus becomes simply the history of the tsar's army, a title that would have worked equally well for this volume.

10 The second question is what the institutional evolution described in the book is leading towards. The historians contributing to the volume are all to a large degree willing to look at the

- past for its own sake. William Odom, as a political scientist, changes the terms of the debate in his commentary to ask what relevance this has to contemporary Russia. He identifies particular continuities in the imperial and post-Soviet experience, but there is a broader question here. The center of gravity of the essays is firmly in the post-Great Reforms period. Of the 15 research essays, one covers Petrine Russia, two go forward into the Napoleonic era, two are broadly concerned with the 19th century, and the remaining ten mostly or entirely cover the post-Great Reforms period. That crescendo builds to a climax in 1914, but after that . . . silence.
- 11 The editors can certainly be forgiven for limiting the scope of their volume; no book can cover everything. The problem is that the imperial experiences discussed here have enormous implications for World War I and the Soviet period, implications which the reader is left alone to draw. Many scholars--Peter Gatrell, Peter Holquist, and Joshua Sanborn, to name only a few-- have shown clear continuities from imperial Russia through the experience of total war into the Soviet period. Odom himself draws out some of these connections in his conclusion. Whether conscription, or ethnic policy, or railroad building, or military education, or mass organizations, there is enormous scope for exploring the resonance between imperial ancestors and Soviet descendants.
- 12 One concrete example: a number of the essays deal with aspects of staff work in the Russian army: particularly Schimmelpenninck, Rich, Kagan, Menning, Steinberg, and Airapetov. Each essay is clear and succinct snapshot of the development of a staff in the Russian army at a particular point in time, whether General Staff, Main Staff, or Main Directorate of General Staff. This first of all shows the desperate need for a good and comprehensive history of Russian staffs to put the complex and confusing development of the institution into some kind of political and intellectual context: those individual snapshots, while sharply focused, do not make for smoothly-flowing animation. More importantly, however, the twistings and turnings of Russian staffs suggest some kind of structural problem with the place of a staff, one that goes well beyond the Russian Empire. After all, the Soviets faced similar debates about the relative power and importance of the Staff and the Defense Ministry: see Philip A. Bayer, *The Evolution of the Soviet General Staff, 1917-1941* (Garland, 1987) and this author's "Tukhachevsky in Leningrad," *Europe-Asia Studies*, # 48.8 (December 1996), pp. 1365-1386. Even contemporary Russia has not produced a stable structure to determine the relationship between ministry and staff.
- 13 These questions do not undermine the book's value as an assembly of some of the best work being done today on tsarist military history. Anyone interested in the tangled web of post-Soviet military developments should welcome these insights from the past.

References

Electronic reference

David Stone, « David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye and Bruce W. Menning, eds., *Reforming the Tsar's Army: Military Innovation in Imperial Russia from Peter the Great to the Revolution*, Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center and Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004. », *The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies* [Online], Issue 4/5 | 2006, Online since 25 novembre 2006. URL : <http://pipss.revues.org/index434.html>

Bibliographical reference

David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye and Bruce W. Menning, eds., *Reforming the Tsar's Army: Military Innovation in Imperial Russia from Peter the Great to the Revolution*, Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Cent

David Stone

Kansas State University

Copyright

Creative Commons License

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

Licence portant sur le document : Creative Commons License