



Daniel Moran, Arthur Waldron, eds. *The People in Arms: Military Myth and National Mobilization since the French Revolution.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. xii + 268 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-81432-4.

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There Never Was a *Levée en masse* and This Is a Book about It

Moran and Waldron's *The People in Arms* takes the famous French *levée en masse* of 1793 as its departure point, asserting that this Jacobin innovation initiated a new era in military and political history since it inspired the powerful myth of the "people in arms." The *levée*, Moran claims in the introduction, "has gone down in history as a spontaneous, voluntary expression of the French people's ideals and enthusiasm, to which a revolutionary regime had merely given practical effect" (p. 2). This "social mythology" fostered the durable faith in the invincibility of ideologically motivated popular forces that has characterized the modern age. The editors as well as the various contributors appear more interested in this mythology and its rhetoric than in the reality of popular mobilization, an attitude that stems from their position that the mythology often exerted a greater impact than the reality. In other words, while many statesmen and revolutionaries since 1793 have sought to attain the high standards of voluntary popular participation associated with the myth of the *levée*, they have never succeeded. Yet their rhetoric, inspired by the vision of a *levée*, has often played an important political role.

Alan Forrest's essay describes the original *levée* of 1793 as a pragmatic measure inspired by the inability of French authorities to obtain enough soldiers by traditional means. At the same time, however, Forrest claims the arguments used to justify and legitimize the *levée* made it innovative, unprecedented, and revolutionary. That all men were equally liable for service without social distinction not only meant this measure encountered

less resistance than previous levies, but that a new "language of citizenship, of rights and duties and moral legitimation" descended upon France (p. 19). This language recognized the nation as sovereign and entitled to the service of all its people in return for the enjoyment of rights associated with citizenship.

In a piece that sacrifices depth for breadth, Owen Connelly conducts a two hundred year survey of historiography about the *levée en masse* in a breathless sixteen pages. Not surprisingly, Connelly concludes by quoting Benedetto Croce's dictum, "all history is contemporary," and by stating that historically, leftists have supported the myth of the *levée* while opposing conscription in their own time (with the exception of Jaurès) (p. 48). The recent collapse of the Marxist-inspired social interpretation of the French Revolution, Connelly implies, has allowed historians to penetrate the myth and dissect it, making studies such as *The People in Arms* (2003) possible.

The next four chapters revolve around the *levée* in France and Germany. It becomes clear over the course of these essays that Third Republic France proved more successful at manipulating the myth to achieve its ends than a more conservative-minded Second Reich. Indeed, in a complex piece, Daniel Moran explores many of the difficulties and contradictions plaguing German attempts to nurture its own myth associated with the *Erhebung* of 1813, which led to the creation of the volunteer *Jäger*, the *Landwehr* militia, and the *Freikorps*. On the one hand, after 1815, members of the Concert of Europe (including

Prussia) embraced small, politically reliable, professional forces because they felt the *levee en masse* had pushed Europe toward total war, domestic revolution, and international anarchy. On the other hand, German liberals, who romanticized the events of 1813, championed the citizen soldier as one who volunteered from an altruistic sense of obligation to the community and who ought to obtain various rights in return. Liberals, however, could not separate this ideal concept from the idea of revolution and total war, a problem that continually hampered them politically. The Prussian constitutional crisis pushed forward by Bismarck in the 1860s (as well as a recognition that industrialized war required certain capacities that neither a small professional army nor a citizen militia could attain) determined what kind of army Germany would have, yet as the following essays make clear, Germany never successfully resolved the fundamental questions set out by Moran. Could Germany obtain the power of the *levee* without experiencing its radical political consequences?

John Whiteclay Chambers II's chapter only indirectly addresses this point in its analysis of the manner in which American periodicals represented the Prussian military system during the Franco-Prussian War. Chambers finds papers that had tended to support the Federal government during the American Civil War tended to support Prussia while pro-Confederate or peace Democrat papers supported France. For the most part, the press presented a favorable view of the Prussian army as a force consisting of well-trained, educated, and dedicated citizen-soldiers who accurately represented the nation. Most Americans, then, believed in the myth of the Prussian army as a people in arms even though, as Chambers remarks, they never bought into the myth of the *levee en masse*, which they viewed with suspicion as an act of state coercion. Only later did Americans come to the Prussian system in this more negative light. Chambers' essay presents several interesting paradoxes, but he seems too ready to dismiss the American Civil War as a conflict that came closer than almost any other in modern times to achieving a real *levee en masse* (at least in 1861 and 1862). Indeed, a more provocative essay covering this period might have considered what Europeans made of the American struggle—a conflict that inspired many of them to draw comparisons with revolutionary France.

John Horne's essay revisits the issues covered by Moran by studying how conflicting ideas about the *levee* helped constitute "the image of the enemy," especially in France and Germany between 1870 and 1918. Horne is

particularly interested in a discourse beginning with the Franco-Prussian War in which France and Germany constructed very different images of the individual taking up arms on behalf of the nation. For the Third Republic, such volunteers who rose up when the *patrie* was in danger, like the *franc-tireurs*, were heroes, and the government went on to hone a myth that legitimized conscription while helping mobilize the French people during World War I. Seeking to tame the revolutionary potential of the citizen-soldier through the army as a conservative "School of the Nation," the Germans adopted a very hostile attitude toward the idea of the enemy citizen who took up arms for his nation. While such a position made the German army a pliable instrument for war, it did little to whip enthusiasm over the long haul, particularly during World War I.

Germany came face to face with the consequences of these choices at the end of World War I, and in a very rewarding essay, Michael Geyer investigates these consequences by analyzing the debate among German politicians, soldiers, and journalists over whether to unleash a *levee en masse* against the Allies in the fall of 1918. Geyer aims at two important targets with this analysis. First, he seeks to undermine the traditional and deterministic interpretation of the Second Reich's fall and the Weimar Republic's birth. For different reasons, various members of the German government seriously contemplated starting or at least simulating a popular insurrection. Some hoped this tactic would cleave the people to the state. Others believed such a call to arms would allow Germany to obtain better terms from its enemies. Still others, primarily in the officer corps, hoped for a total war leading to an apocalyptic *Endkampf* that would redeem the honor of the German army. Whatever the motive, German leaders faced a choice that could have changed German history dramatically. Second, Geyer asserts that although this debate culminated in the request for an armistice, the discussion itself marked a "totalitarian turn" in thinking and rhetoric that pointed the way to the absolute war of 1945.

At this point, the essays take a turn from the established states of Europe to revolutionary movements and regimes across the globe. Like previous chapters, these pieces investigate the discourse surrounding the myth of popular mobilization. At the same time, however, these essays differ in several important ways. The largely Marxist-inspired movements studied in these pages suffer from a problematic relationship with the idea of the nation. Even more important, with the exception of Hagen's essay, these pieces study organizations that sought

to destroy existing states and replace them with states of their own. These circumstances, quite unlike those that obtained in Western Europe, produced a myth and theory of popular mobilization that was somewhat different.

Mark van Hagen's chapter points to the continuities in Russian and Soviet ideas about the people in arms between 1874 and 1938. As he writes, "the response of both Russian elites and their Soviet successors to the idea of the nation in arms was hampered by a fundamental ambivalence toward the organizing and legitimizing role of the nation itself" (p. 160). This ambivalence, Hagen claims, stemmed largely from the fact that both Russia and the Soviet Union were multi ethnic empires in which the center distrusted the peripheries. Hagen also asserts, not as clearly or forcefully, that both regimes showed a hearty distrust of spontaneity among the people, rendering them incapable of anything approaching a true *levee en masse*. Only when faced with the extinction of the Soviet Union during World War II could Stalin tolerate a total mobilization in the name of the nation.

From Russia and the difficulties of conducting a *levee* under a revolutionary Marxist state, the reader passes to Asia and state-less or nation-less *levees* conducted by revolutionary movements. Arthur Waldron's essay investigates attempts on the part of Chinese intellectuals, inspired in part by Jean Jaurès's *L'Armée nouvelle*, to find ways of mobilizing the masses, inspiring a widespread sense of citizenship, and creating effective armed forces while avoiding the perils of militarism and political instability. Waldron focuses primarily on Jiang Fangzhen, who, like Jaurès, did not see "military mobilization as an opportunity for social transformation," but as an "extension of the basic relationships of civil society that already exist" (p. 204). In other words, an army had to grow organically from the existing shape of society and capitalize on that society's strengths. Waldron concludes with a strong critique of Mao Zedong and his Communist successors whose mistrust of the masses resembled that of the Soviet leadership, leading them to champion a "spontaneous" revolution of carefully indoctrinated masses led from above by a party elite. This top-down approach, Waldron argues, interfered with the development of a real citizenship that could create a true nation. Although Waldron's conclusions are provocative, thoughtful, and of contemporary importance, this chapter seems overstretched as it strives to cover an enormous span of time—the section on Mao, a towering figure in the evolution of people's war, is only about two pages long.

Greg Lockhart's chapter on Vietnam shows how the

World War I experience inspired nationalist groups, including the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP), to combine the language of modernity and the *levee* with a traditional terminology that would resonate with the Vietnamese people. Although Lockhart emphasizes the ICP's careful top-down approach to popular mobilization (no surprise since the party also drew much of its theory from Mao), he asserts that on the eve of its struggle against the French, which began in December 1946, its "process of mass mobilization ... came closest to resembling a *levee en masse*" (p. 229). Through trial and error, the Viet Minh developed a new conception of warfare in which leaders like Vo Nguyen Giap came to conceive of guerrilla warfare linked to social revolution as the main means of mobilizing the people in a way that made the creation of regular forces and ultimate victory possible.

Douglas Porch's essay on the Algerian War is incisive and sharp, but his conclusions bring into focus ideas that render the themes of the book problematic. Porch sees three *levees* at work in his chapter on the Algerian War: one launched by Charles De Gaulle to rally French citizens around the Fifth Republic to save it from putschists; one launched by the *Front de liberation nationale* (FLN) to mobilize the Algerian people in a war of independence against France; and one launched by the *Organisation armée secrète* (OAS) to unite those who sought to keep Algeria French. Porch argues that only De Gaulle's *levee* proved successful because it was the only one that enjoyed the support of the state. The counterrevolutionary OAS failed, not only because it lacked these ingredients, but also because "the *levee* could not be separated from the idea of revolution itself" (p. 235). Porch is primarily interested in the FLN, however, which also failed to inspire a *levee*, yet managed to achieve its political goals. Porch claims the answer lies with terrorism, which prevented Algerians from showing any support for the French and gave the impression the FLN had indeed created a united people in arms. Moreover, the *Armée de liberation Nationale*, stranded in Tunisia on the other side of the Morice Line, served as a "symbol of the revolution, an armed force that embodied the *levee* of the Algerian people" (p. 255). In other words, it was not an actual *levee* that led to Algerian independence, but France and the international community's perception that a *levee* existed.

Porch's forceful essay raises some important questions about what exactly a *levee* is and what truly constitutes its myth. As he points out, the FLN reversed the experience of the French Revolution. Whereas the original French revolutionaries implemented a *levee* after they seized power, the FLN sought to seize power through the

levee. This is an important difference, for as Porch asserts, the state plays a necessary role in creating both an actual and mythical *levee*. Porch's analysis suggests that insurrectionary movements like that led by the FLN, Mao, and the Viet Minh belong to a related yet somewhat different category from the original *levee*. At the same time, Porch also argues that *levees* cannot divorce themselves from revolution and remain *levees* in either myth or fact. Such a view of *levees* disqualifies not only the OAS, but the German army of the Second Reich. True, Moran develops an expansive definition of the *levee* in his introductory essay, claiming the collection "includes cases in which the spirit of the *levee* is embraced by revolutionary or resistance organizations, so that the element of state authority may be missing, or oriented toward a post-revolutionary future that did not yet exist. Conversely, there are a number of examples in which explicit claims to revolutionary action are absent" (p. 4). This seems an overly broad definition of a *levee*. It begs the question of what constitutes the "spirit" of a state-less *levee* besides popular revolution which is an altogether larger thing. It also begs the question of how conscription differs from a *levee* in which revolutionary feelings are absent. Granted, the authors

speak of the myth rather than the reality, but perhaps they could have been more precise about the position of the state in myth and reality.

These are important distinctions, because Waldron's concluding essay seeks to point out the contemporary relevance of the *levee* by mentioning how "the Western imagination ... is transfixed by the vision of something like a *levee en masse* in the Land of Islam" (p. 261). But to what extent does the modern myth of jihad in the Near East really correspond to the myth of the *levee* during the French Revolution except in their vision of popular forces unleashed against a powerful enemy? In the end, it seems the authors are writing about myths associated with people's war, or something broader than just the *levee*. Despite this methodological inconsistency which is typical in collections of essays, this is an interesting and thought provoking work that military, political, and cultural historians in different fields can read with profit.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Unfortunately, plain text does not allow the correct reproduction of accents for phrases such as 'levee en masse.')

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