



War Stories: French Veteran Narratives and the 'Experience of War' in the Nineteenth Century

European History Quarterly

41(4) 561–585

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DOI: 10.1177/0265691411419471

ehq.sagepub.com**Philip Dwyer***University of Newcastle, Australia***Abstract**

The Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars were the first in history to be written about in great numbers by the common soldier. This article, which focuses on French reminiscences of the wars, examines a variety of memoirs published from the late eighteenth through to the twentieth century. During this time we see a different approach to war and how it was recalled and remembered, more personal, more experiential than ever before. This article argues that the historical accuracy of these veteran narratives is unimportant. Instead, they reveal much more about how the wars were portrayed, and how they were remembered. Important too is what these narratives reveal to historians about the (inner) lives of soldiers during the wars, and what veterans in hindsight thought and felt about particular events. Here too the reality of the 'experience of war' is not as important as the cultural construct that is presented. As such, war narratives are an important source for the ways in which veterans and French society preferred to remember and process the past.

Keywords

death and suffering, memory, the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, war culture, war memoirs

Although often used by historians, memoirs, whether political, military or autobiographical, are generally discounted as unreliable. We know the tricks that memory can play, and we know that people can recount events in which they never took part, or repeat stories heard elsewhere and which they incorporate as their own.¹ For the period under consideration – the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars – the unreliability of these memoirs is supported by the fact that some of the better known works, such as those by the Duchess d'Abrantes or those

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by Napoleon's secretary, Louis Bourrienne, were probably written by what were known as *teinturiers*, a group of professional ghost writers who sometimes fabricated memoirs.² Even when the authenticity of individual authors can be verified, many memoirs border on the fanciful, while others abound with episodes and anecdotes that may have been entirely invented.

An example of this can be found in the memoirs of Captain Coignet, a conscript who was illiterate before he went into the army, who participated in numerous campaigns between 1796 and 1815, and who was taught how to read and write in an *Ecole régimentaire* at the age of 30.³ In his seventies, he went on to record what was to become one of the most famous accounts of the Napoleonic Wars. Coignet has, however, been referred to as a 'typical soldier-storyteller of the Baron Munchausen type', in other words, someone who exaggerated if not invented particular experiences, perhaps to conform to society's expectations of a veteran of the Grande Armée.⁴ The Munchausen epithet implies that Coignet either deliberately distorted or invented the past or that, at the very least and because of the vagaries of memory, certain memoirs can never be anything other than stories. The narrative of an unknown veteran by the name of Sergeant Réguinot, for example, does not even refer to his own account as a 'memoir' but rather as an 'adventure', and it is in that light that it is meant to be read and interpreted.⁵ Certainly in some memoirs the boundaries between reality and fiction are blurred, while in others anecdotes smack of folklore and contain elements of fairytales.⁶

None of this means, however, that what is recounted is untrue or that memoirs in general are always entirely unreliable. It is evident that where memoirs can be cross referenced, they can offer valuable insights into the people, events and places described. As far as the more fantastical memoirs are concerned, it is possible that peasant soldiers were using folk stories with which they were familiar in order to better express an event or series of events they had experienced – nasty stepmothers are a common trope⁷ – or they were incorporating folk tales into their anecdotes because they were part and parcel of their mental baggage, and hence integral to the way in which they explained their lives. It is also possible that veterans (as narrators), especially in their old age, were unable to distinguish between imagined memories and the reality of the past.⁸ Story-telling is one means by which these individuals could process the events, often traumatic, through which they had lived, and thus make some sense of their lives and their part in history.⁹ In this process, events may become inseparable from fantasies, at least in the mind of the veteran, told and re-told as if he had lived through them. Fictions – that is, 'narratives made and shaped by their authors'¹⁰ – when they occur and when they are not the result of the distortions of time and the influence of cultural pressures of one kind or another, can also be interpreted on another level. They are a means of manipulating reality, of creating the illusion that one is in control of one's life and environment.¹¹ The fact that many of these memoirs are less than truthful, or that they weave oral folktales into their anecdotes and experiences, or that there is a narrative element involved here (fictional or otherwise) is precisely why they are interesting and useful.

This is not the first time in French history that junior officers and the common soldier felt compelled to write about their experiences, but it is the first time that they did so in great numbers, outstripping accounts of nobles and senior-ranking officers.¹² Over the course of the nineteenth century, hundreds of war memoirs were published, and many more written but never published, sometimes years if not decades after the end of the wars.¹³ This outpouring was the result of a combination of factors: the realization that the veteran had lived through an extraordinary period and was therefore motivated by a desire to record his role in those momentous events; it coincided with increased literacy rates; and it coincided with an increase in the number of secular works being published. This article examines a cross-section of 50 memoirs (interspersed with a few diaries and published letters), ranging in dates from the end of the eighteenth century right up to the present day. Most of them were French although a few non-French memoirs, of men belonging to the multi-national Grand Armée, have been included. The authors inevitably were educated, although some more than others. That is, some of the authors learned to read and write with a degree of fluency while in the army. A few of the memoirs selected here were written by non-commissioned officers, and as many as 20 per cent by superior officers (colonels and generals), some of whom were aristocrats, but it is a peculiarity of these wars that, for the first time in history, the majority were written by junior and middle-ranking officers.

The reasons why veterans chose to put their thoughts on paper in the first place varied enormously and ranged from a desire on the part of generals to justify their roles at particular moments of the wars, to veterans wanting to 'commemorate' particular events or particular actions, that is, what people did in a certain place at a certain time. Others wanted to put the historical record straight, or leave an account for the family, or simply remember lost comrades.¹⁴ Writing was often, but not always, an act of personal catharsis, enabling those who had survived to give some meaning and sense to it all. Writing thus gave the veteran and his life a narrative cohesiveness that their war experiences intrinsically lacked and that otherwise would not have existed. Memoirs should be read not as factual accounts of the wars, but as personal narratives that underline 'experience', albeit one that has been exaggerated or censored or even invented.¹⁵ One should not think, however, that there was an awful lot of self-reflection in all this. Veterans sometimes thought about war and society, but almost never about their place in it.¹⁶ Readers, on the other hand, could recognize their own lives and their own stories in the hardships and experiences related in a form that more often than not resembled the novel.

Important for the purpose of this study is not so much whether veteran narratives are historically accurate, nor even whether the experiences they recount actually happened; rather, the importance lies in what veteran narratives tell us about how the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars were portrayed, and how they were remembered. We know that memories can be distorted by time and that in between the veteran's experience and the writing of his memoirs any number of cultural factors can intervene to shape and alter them.¹⁷ However, none of that matters so much as the extent to which war memoirs helped shape a collective narrative

about the Revolution and the Empire in France many decades, if not generations, after the fall of Napoleon. As such, veteran narratives are an important source not only for the details about how the wars were constructed and portrayed, but also for the ways in which veterans and French society preferred to remember and commemorate the wars, what they saw as the ideal military type, as well as the prevailing political and social attitudes (especially towards death and suffering). The individual retelling of war stories has been examined in other contexts, generally in relation to public narratives around twentieth-century wars.¹⁸ But with few exceptions historians have tended to examine the oral traditions – ‘popular memory’ – or letters and diaries, and have paid scant attention to the manner in which textual representations of wars through personal narratives such as memoirs, have been circulated.¹⁹

What is now commonly referred to as the ‘experience of war’ is a growing field of study in military-cultural history. Most of the works to date have focused on the wars of the twentieth century, although there have been forays into earlier periods.²⁰ The focus of these studies has largely been on the soldier’s subjective experience of battle and campaigning, a trend that has placed more importance on the experiential nature of war than traditional military history had previously allowed for. This approach is in and of itself problematic. Experiences are dependent on memories and can also as such be filtered, shaped and influenced through time in the same way that textual or oral representations of the past can. Military historians of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars have perhaps too often accepted at face value the veteran’s assertion, ‘I recount what I saw (or lived through)’.²¹ The assertion was meant to underline the authenticity of the author’s voice, and of the text. But here too, because an account of battle, or of the pain and suffering associated with it, can never be anything other than impressionistic, and because they are re-constructed experiences, memoirs serve not as an accurate reflection of the past in any empirical sense, but rather as ‘linguistic documents’ that reveal ‘culturally developed ideologies’.²² In particular, if one focuses on the types of stories that are told, one can treat these memoirs as cultural artefacts that can throw light on how contemporaries saw the period in which they lived.²³

I

Even before the wars came to an end, participants rushed to publish their accounts. Titles such as *Souvenirs d'un officier...* (Recollections of an officer...), *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire...* (Memoirs to serve the history of...), *Les cahiers du...* (The notebooks of...), and *Relation circonstanciée de...* (Detailed account of...) continued to appear throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries. Most of them are formulaic, often consisting of an overall ‘grand narrative’ in which the main episodes of the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars occur, indeed, recur time and again, in which particular battles are touched on, generally within a chronological account filled with personal anecdotes that underline the individual’s experiences: courage or individual strength in adversity, privations,

death, camaraderie, sexual encounters and the hardships associated with the day-to-day of campaigning and camp life. Many of them too were not written in a social, political or cultural void but were shaped and influenced by other memoirs, newspaper accounts, and histories of the wars.²⁴

Of course there were different perspectives on the war, depending on the individual's disillusionment or success in later years, or on the veteran's political leanings, which led to different ways in which participation in the wars was presented. Some had experienced the horrors of the Egyptian, Spanish or Russian campaigns, the last two especially a staple of Napoleonic memoirs.²⁵ Others looked back with nostalgia on their time in Italy or Germany, while others missed their comrades. Whenever Napoleon appears in some memoirs, it is to shouts of 'Vive l'Empereur!' Others, such as François Bernoyer, who survived both Egypt and Syria, blamed Napoleon's ambition for the woes he and his comrades had had to endure, and considered himself a victim 'dedicated to filling the infantile projects of higher-ups who in the process of satisfying their enormous ambitions take no notice of their numerous victims'.²⁶ None of them, however, attempt to grasp the historical context or to understand why the wars occurred in the first place – an observation that is equally valid for the memoirs of leading generals and statesmen – and few question whether it was worth it all.

Action – marching, looting, battle, advancing and retreating – dominates the narratives, and often interspersed with the tedium of camp life were the more horrific experiences of campaigning – massacres and atrocities committed on both sides – that had been etched onto the soldier's psyche.²⁷ Despite this, there is no process of self-discovery that is the hallmark of twentieth-century war memoirs.²⁸ Indeed, we do not yet fully understand the trajectory from the peasant to soldier, or from boyhood to manhood. Few memoirs deal with the author's life either before or after the army, and if they do they generally consist of cursory accounts of no more than a few chapters at most, acting as a preface to what is about to follow, a juxtaposition to the life of the soldier.²⁹ The reader is consequently thrown into the midst of the wars almost from the very start.

On that level, these memoirs are comparable to twentieth-century war narratives; they focus on what men did in war and to a lesser extent what war did to men.³⁰ The Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars elicited a new response from veterans. They wrote about their experiences, what they felt, and (sometimes) the extent to which those experiences had an impact on them. Take, for example, the following description of the difficulties of campaigning by Captain Jérôme Laugier, who saw action in Italy and Germany during the Revolutionary wars:

To sleep rough for three months, to carry out forced marches, to live from coarse food, to suffer from the heat, the cold, hunger and thirst, those are physical difficulties. To see the countryside ravaged, houses burnt, the inhabitants reduced to begging and despair; on days of battle, to be obliged to guarantee one's life and one's country by

killing one's fellow man, to see next to an unknown body that of a friend and a compatriot, to groan from the depths of one's heart at the sight of all this evil, that is the suffering of my soul.³¹

Interesting here is the frequency with which veterans now underlined the suffering they endured, as well as the suffering they encountered along the way. This focus on death and suffering was meant to create an affective bond between the veteran and the reader.³² It was not done to inspire pity or sympathy for veterans, although there was always an element of that – look at the sacrifices we have made for the *patrie* – but to give the reader a better *impression* of a specific event.

Interesting too is that in order to better convey that suffering veterans fell upon a relatively new convention; to highlight the whole they dwelled on particular incidents or episodes that had stuck in their minds and that remained with them all those years after the event. For some, it was the fact that one soldier had to drink from a stream which was running red with the blood of the dead and wounded, or for another that it had rained so hard that it was impossible to fire a musket, or recalling how bad the lice had been, or observing how cannon balls reacted during a bombardment.³³ For others again, it was a particular moment frozen in time that struck them as peculiar or fortuitous. One survivor of the Russian campaign, for example, related how a cavalry officer dismounted during a battle to pick up a piece of paper that his general had let slip, and in the moment of stooping saw a cannon ball rip through the breast of the rider's horse.³⁴ In this manner, history was reduced to a collection of details, often personal and intimate. Fragments that were once part of an individual's personal experience thus became, through the process of writing, part of the national narrative.

II

These 'fragments of history' are interwoven into a larger narrative trend that underscores the horror of war. Although nineteenth-century war memoirs are still some way from what Samuel Hynes has referred to as the 'battlefield gothic' characteristic of modern war narratives,³⁵ many are nevertheless replete with descriptions of pillage, indiscriminate looting, rape and murder, and of whole villages being razed to set an example. Combat necessarily makes up a large component of some memoirs (although not all soldiers fought in what can be considered the 'classic' Napoleonic battles in the main fields of action). The first time men saw death and destruction in battle is something that is occasionally revealed in memoirs but not as often as one might think. A Swiss conscript by the name of Jean-Louis Rieu, for example, admitted that 'the first member I saw carried off by a cannon ball made a strongly disagreeable impression on me', and that he would have preferred being further out of reach of enemy shot.³⁶ Much more frequent are descriptions of the aftermath or the consequences of battle. Alexandre de Charon visited the battlefield on horseback the day after Borodino; it was the first time he

laid eyes on 'that sight of horrors': 'What a ghastly spectacle is the dead and dying; men, horses, and weapons were thrown pell-mell. I quickly left...'.³⁷ After the battle of Friedland, which finished around 11.00 in the evening of 14 June 1807, Colonel Louis-Florimond Fantin des Odoards, who commanded an infantry regiment, was obliged to spend the night on a blood-soaked field, trying to get some sleep, lying on a dead horse for a pillow.

I was overwhelmed with sleep and fatigue, but I could not sleep... I waited for dawn, going over the events in my head, and thinking of the friends which they had deprived me of. Only a deaf person or someone deprived of all sensitivity would have been able to sleep amid the deplorable noise made around us by the unfortunate wounded whose moaning was carried afar by the wind in the silence of the night.³⁸

In the heat of the moment, wrote Fantin des Odoards, the individual was capable of being transformed into a brutal killer, but in the cold light of day, when one could see the consequences of the killing on the field of battle, 'he cursed the war and its authors and, without daring to admit it, felt remorse at being among the passive instruments of such horrors'.³⁹ Victor Dupuy described an incident during the campaign of 1809 when he had to go through the village of Elersberg in Austria, where the Austrian army had attempted to fend off an attack by General Michel-Marie Claparède's division:

During the fighting, a lot of the wounded took refuge in the houses. The Austrian bombs set fire to the town; not one habitation escaped. The poor souls who had taken refuge there died without our being able to help, and as I went through the city, one could still see the putrid bodies half consumed by fire in the streets, in the courtyards, and even inside the houses that had been totally opened.⁴⁰

Some veterans, rather than avert the reader's gaze, obstinately drew it to the carnage, possibly in order to shock or titillate with graphic accounts of its horror. An example is the account related by an officer called Joseph de Naylies. On 18 February 1808, he rode through a town in Galicia whose inhabitants had fought the French with unfortunate consequences:

Under the walls of that town I saw a hideous scene of the odious effects of war. Amid a pile of bodies, naked and disfigured, I saw two women. One of average age, who had a musket next to her, was wearing a cartridge pouch and an infantry sabre, her face and lips had been blackened by powder, indicating that she had fought for a long time and had torn several cartridges. The other, completely naked, appeared to be no more than seventeen. The horror of death had not altered her charms, which had kept their freshness. The first had been killed by a shot to the chest fighting in the Galician ranks. The other had rushed at the reins of an officer on horse, assailed by several peasants, and had received a sabre cut which had split open her head.⁴¹

The mixture of horror and sexuality is a common enough trope in the war memoirs although there were boundaries, either self-imposed or through an unwillingness to breach social convention. The same Joseph de Naylies refused at one point to enter into the details of the exactions committed by some Spanish peasant women against the body of a French officer.⁴²

At the end of the campaign in Poland in 1807, and after the peace of Tilsit had been signed, Victor Dupuy's regiment of chasseurs was sent to the small river of Pilica in Austrian Galicia. On the way there, he witnessed:

entire villages whose inhabitants were dead in their houses and that did not have a living soul. The air was putrid with the smell of cadavers. We were obliged to set up camp in the middle of the fields in which the ripe harvest was under our feet. In passing through a village, near Ortelsburg, dying of thirst, I entered a house looking for some water. I saw nothing but dead, putrefying bodies and withdrew in horror.⁴³

The reader is left guessing as to who might have been responsible for this killing but then that is not the point of the description, which is to simply underline how ugly war can be. Few veterans, however, actually reflected on the devastation left in the train of an army on the march. In one of the better known accounts of the wars, Elzéar Blaze was an exception. He freely admitted the extent to which troops had to live off the land – 'it was not possible otherwise: our rapid marches prevented our stores from following us' – but especially the wastage involved when troops killed everything, drank everything and took everything in sight.⁴⁴

III

Omnipresent then in all memoirs is death and to a greater or lesser degree its concomitant, grief and sorrow. Death could take many forms, and was not confined to descriptions of comrades falling in battle or accounts of peasants suffering at the hands of marauders. The point, it would appear, was to bring home the harsh reality of war. A particularly interesting manner of doing so was to reveal how individuals, rather than continue to suffer the hardships and deprivations of campaigning, and obviously pushed to the limits of their endurance, simply chose to put an end to it all. It is a phenomenon that is rarely if ever mentioned in modern histories of the wars, and one that is difficult to explain with any accuracy, in part because contemporaries do no more than mention suicides without offering any explanations. Even though there are complex links between the literary and aesthetic traditions in portraying death and 'heroic suicides', we do not find the same phenomenon here. On the contrary, reports of suicide were generally repressed in the newspapers.⁴⁵ They were, however, frequent if veteran narratives are anything to go by. The method of suicide could range from soldiers shooting themselves in the head, to cutting their own throats, to throwing themselves into rivers or out of windows from the upper floors of buildings. For some, any means of dying seemed preferable to living.

In Egypt, Captain Joseph-Marie Moiret pointed to a number of these instances.⁴⁶ After landing, and during the forced march across the desert to Damanhur, an officer by the name of Saintine remarked that:

A gloomy silence dominated the ranks mixed with complaints and sighs. Now and then, succumbing to the heat and to necessity, a soldier would stop as though asphyxiated, and fall dead in the middle of the road. Others, seized with a fever of the brain [*un transport au cerveau*], convulsively rolled around in the sand, or in a delirium, blew their brains out.⁴⁷

In Poland in 1806, after the Jena campaign, trudging through the mud on the road to Pultusk, conditions were so bad that:

We had to take hold of one leg, pull it out like a carrot, lift it forwards, and then go back for the other, take hold of it with both hands, and make it take a step forwards also . . . The older men began to lose heart. There were some who in the transport of their suffering committed suicide.⁴⁸

In Spain, soldiers too weak to keep up with the main body of troops and who fell by the wayside would sometimes prefer to kill themselves rather than be taken alive by Spanish peasants or guerrillas.⁴⁹ On the march into Russia in 1812, even before the army had crossed the Niemen, conditions were so bad that 'several men' shot themselves.⁵⁰ On the retreat from Moscow, at Smolensk, one officer, who had lost his leg from a cannon ball, took a pistol and attempted to shoot himself in the head. His first attempt failed, he missed; he then dragged himself along the ground until he could find another cartouche. He succeeded the second time around.⁵¹ During the campaign in Germany in 1813, in a village between Auttenau and Hanau, a wounded soldier threw himself out of a first-floor window in order to put an end to his suffering.⁵² Immediately after the battle of Waterloo, rather than surrender, some preferred suicide, possibly out of a sense of despair in defeat.⁵³

As a general rule, death and suffering are described without emotion, almost as though they were an accepted part of military life. Similarly, grief and sorrow, if expressed at all, are always written about in muted terms. There are a number of possible explanations for this: it may not have been considered 'masculine', for example, to express one's emotions in writing, at least not in the open manner that the modern reader is accustomed to in war memoirs of the twentieth century. It is possible that the eighteenth-century soldier did not always possess adequate language to describe his inner feelings.⁵⁴ It is, moreover, possible that since the vast majority of memoirs were written by junior officers who had come up through the ranks, probably taking on aspects of aristocratic warrior culture, the 'texture of individual experience and feelings' did not matter.⁵⁵

All of these explanations are valid, and varied from soldier to soldier. Certainly, eighteenth-century elite society placed a great deal of emphasis on appearance and self-control, even in the face of incredible hardship and suffering. There was a

tendency to stifle emotion and to conceal from others what one was really thinking and feeling, especially in aristocratic society. One can assume that this attitude, possibly passed down from officers to men, also permeated the written word. It was a type of masculinity that was expected of a French soldier; one was required to be stoic in the face of pain and suffering. Coignet recounts how, at the battle of Eylau, a quartermaster sergeant had his leg shot off by a cannon ball; he reportedly cut away the flesh that remained and joked, 'I have three pairs of boots at Courbevoie; they're going to last me a long time'.⁵⁶ He then took two muskets and used them as crutches to hobble to the back of the line. Similarly, during the battle of Bautzen, a veteran, badly wounded by a cannon ball, is said to have taken a knife and cut away the strips of flesh keeping his leg attached, lit his pipe and cried out 'Vive l'Empereur'.⁵⁷

These anecdotes – and once again it is worth reiterating that it matters little whether they are true or not – are meant to highlight the courage of the French soldier. In doing so, they complement the lack of emotion one often finds in the face of the horror of campaigning. During the siege of Jaffa in 1798, a cannon ball from an English vessel landed among a group of French soldiers, killing three sergeant-majors and dismembering two others. Sergeant François, who was standing in the group, later recalled that the brains of one of his closest friends were splattered all over his face.⁵⁸ There is no commentary on the impact it may have had on him. This type of matter-of-fact description, juxtaposing the horrifying images of battle on the one hand and the lack of sentiment on the other, is frequent in war memoirs for the period, across nationalities.⁵⁹ Sergeant Bourgogne describes an occasion during the battle of Krasnõe in Russia in November 1812 when a comrade by the name of Beloque was shot in the head and died immediately. Bourgogne simply remarked how, in spite of the general indifference for death and dying that had overcome the men on the retreat from Moscow, that he was 'generally missed (*regreté*) by his comrades'.⁶⁰ In another passage he describes how he passed a position that had been occupied by the Fusilier-Chasseurs where he saw several of his friends stretched out on the snow before him, killed and horribly mutilated by grapeshot, including a man name Capon, 'one of my best friends'.⁶¹ But there is no dwelling on any sense of loss he may have felt; it is simply noted, almost as though it were enough to recall a comrade passing away.

If the images surrounding the experience of war are more frequent for this period than for any preceding war, the silences surrounding death, loss and suffering are telling. It was rare, for instance, for a veteran to recall how he may have cried for a comrade or because he had been overwhelmed by his own plight, although one comes across references to weeping in some of the letters of the day.⁶² It is not that there is an inability to grieve and mourn, but that there is an evident inability or reluctance to express grief and mourning on paper. Some memoirists would pass over what they had seen, or avert their eyes in both a literal and metaphorical sense. Etienne-Maurice Deschamps, on seeing dead bodies for the first time before the city of Ulm, remarked that, 'A deep affliction took hold of me. However, it only took place but a second. I took hold of the reins which I had let go

and continued along our route, attempting to turn away my eyes'.⁶³ Sergeant Bourgogne recounts an incident in which he and his comrades forced a group of men out of an Orthodox church on the retreat from Moscow so that they could shelter there that night. The next morning, they found the men frozen to death outside the church. 'We walked passed by the bodies without saying a word . . . We had arrived at a point where we were completely indifferent to the most tragic of events'.⁶⁴

Disassociation in the face of the suffering with which one was surrounded was no doubt a mechanism used to cope with loss and pain, and is often mentioned as such by the survivors of particularly gruelling campaigns.⁶⁵ Omission is thus a means of dealing with death and suffering; in that manner, one did not have to confront it head on and a more bearable reality could be constructed. But one also has to take into account that the men were so accustomed to seeing death, dying and suffering that they had become immune to it. A number of memoirists mention how cold-hearted they had become as individuals. This is particularly noticeable in memoirs dealing with the Russian campaign. Thus Bellot de Kergorre, a war commissary writing of an episode during the retreat from Moscow, awoke one morning (8 December 1812) to find 15 people sitting around a fire that had gone out during the course of the night. They were all dead, frozen in the positions in which they had fallen asleep. 'We looked at them with that indifference which an excess of misery leads to.'⁶⁶ Eugene Labaume, also writing about the retreat from Moscow, recalled how:

One could hear the moans of the dying all around and the painful voices of those that had been abandoned. But people were deaf to their cries, and if one approached them when they were on the point of dying, it was to strip them, and to see if they didn't have a few bits of food.⁶⁷

The same disassociation can be found in descriptions of battle or the aftermath of battle. After Eylau, General Jules-Antoine Paulin tried to find lodgings in the town:

In what a disgusting and horrible disorder was that unfortunate town, pillaged and half burnt! The streets were literally paved with bodies and the pieces of human remains half buried in the mud, crushed by the continual passage of cannons, cavalry, and trod underfoot by masses of infantry. Green triangular wounds from bayonet blows; blue, bloated bodies, crushed, all of which would have made the hairs on the most insensitive of heads stand on end. The wounded, Russian or French, mixed together, the dejected inhabitants, haggard, dying of hunger, crying over the debris of their houses, formed the most emotional scene that one could imagine. And beside those horrors can be found the lack of concern born out of the habit of seeing such spectacles. Individuals came and went, attended to their business, looking for supplies for their men, for their horses and for themselves.⁶⁸

The explanation always given for this indifference, especially in accounts of the retreat from Moscow, is selfishness. Gaspard Ducque's recollections of the Russian campaign were meant to be a sort of collective testimony for those who had shared his suffering and lived through the same dangers, and yet he dwells on the impact the retreat had on the individual:

Egoism replaced brotherliness, reunions broke up, and instead of little associations in which each brought along his part of the common interest, there was nothing but isolated and individual struggles... since the arrival of the great cold of 3 December there were no longer any friends, no longer a brotherhood of arms, no longer any society or bonds. The excesses of evil had exhausted everyone... The brutal instinct of preservation was our only goal, ravenous hunger had reduced all of us more or less according to our characters and the resources we had been able to procure. The strong deprived the weak, stripped the dying often without waiting for them to breathe their last breath.⁶⁹

Those who survived the retreat from Moscow invariably wore their suffering as a badge of honour, emphasizing the sacrifices they and their comrades had made for France. The Comte de Mailly, a second-lieutenant in the Carabiniers à Cheval, educated and articulate, beautifully evoked in his retirement what it might have been like on the retreat from Moscow:

Imagine then that armed multitude, disarmed; clothed, stripped bare; decorated in a variety of costumes that have been fabricated and which had been inherited after a death. Imagine then, if one can, thousands of these poor men on horse but more often on foot; carts full of wounded soldiers of all nations, prisoners, wagons full of loot, cannons, caissons, muskets, lances, wheels in pieces, abandoned artillery trains, horses gutted and others which seemed to sorrowfully wander waiting their end. At length, imagine all of these disasters in the midst of a northern frost, give warmth to the scene by the conflagration of villages, give it movement by the charging of Tartars, and break the funereal monotony of this convoy by the noise of artillery and the screaming of Cossacks. Finally, a vivid and fertile imagination will be able to invent the most prodigious accidents in the rout of such a great army, in a land of desolation and under a glacial sky, and then perhaps you will be able to form an idea of the retreat of the French army in Russia after the departure of its leader.⁷⁰

It is not a particular point in time that Mailly is describing but rather an amalgam of images and scenes that he undoubtedly witnessed but which he appears to have assembled for the reader like a sort of collage. In doing so, he inadvertently hits on what memoirists often did, and at the same time what was being asked of the reader, the use of imagination to picture the conditions under which these men lived and fought. One is more likely to find this literary device in memoirs that were destined for publication, and which were written by the educated. Other memoirs,

especially those written by lower ranks, were often no more than a narrative, with little or no commentary, and with little or no reflection on what had passed.

To this extent, memoirists, apart from a few notable exceptions such as Coignet or Bourgogne, rarely mention their own personal experiences. They tend to describe scenes to which they had been a witness.⁷¹ An example of that kind of testimony can be found in the memoirs of Eugene Labaume's when he describes, again during the retreat from Moscow, a scene he saw near the town of Dorogobuzh, when heavy snow began falling, covering the countryside with a brutal white sheet, while the wind, blowing through the trees, filled the forest with a horrible, ominous whistling sound.

In the midst of this sombre horror the soldier, overwhelmed by the snow and the wind which came upon him in a whirl, was no longer able to distinguish between the main route and a ditch, and often fell into the latter, which then acted as a grave. The others, in a hurry to arrive, and yet hardly able to drag themselves along, badly clothed and wearing bad footwear, having nothing to eat and nothing to drink, moaning while shivering, and not offering the least help or showing the least pity to those who fell exhausted, expired around them. Ah! How much those poor men, dying of starvation, struggled terribly against the pangs of death! One could hear some make touching farewells to their brothers, their comrades, others, in breathing their last breath, uttered the name of their mother or the country in which they were born. Soon, the severity of the cold seized their numb limbs and crept into their entrails. Stretched out in the snow, one could no longer distinguish between them and the pile of snow which covered their bodies, and which all along the route formed undulations similar to those in a cemetery.⁷²

Here we find a remarkable use of evocation to conjure up a landscape that is offered up, and no doubt accepted, as reality. There is little doubt that Labaume was a witness to what he describes, although the scene is probably not of a specific moment in time but rather a mixture of episodes cobbled together to better portray what he had lived through, a kind of *tableau vivant* that becomes 'true' because the veteran tells the reader it was so. There was indeed an underlying assumption on the part of many veterans that because they had lived through these momentous times their memoirs were therefore 'truth', they were 'history'.⁷³ For the reader, however, the truth lay in the detail, and in the meticulous descriptions of people and landscapes.⁷⁴

IV

It would be misleading, however, to maintain that veteran narratives dwelt uniquely on the negative aspects of war and campaigning. In any event, descriptions of death and suffering rarely dwelt on the consequences of the act of killing, and there is rarely an avowal of having taken part in any atrocities described.

Although not the most common trope in these war memoirs, one is almost as likely to find chivalric notions of soldiering as depictions of massacre and mutilation.

A good example is the account by Georges Bangofsky of the French occupation of Lübeck in November 1806. Bangofsky was the son of a linen-merchant from German-speaking Lorraine who was conscripted in 1794 and who fought through to Waterloo. In one passage of his memoirs, which were never meant for publication, he recounts how he and a few comrades in arms defended the inhabitants of a merchant's villa for three days and nights while the city was pillaged, fighting off all-comers in order to protect the family inside. At the end of the ordeal, after order had been re-established, the merchant opened his cellar and his coffers and offered all to his protectors, saying that if it were not for them he would have lost everything, as well as the honour of his wife. In a style typical of these types of accounts, Bangofsky and his comrades refused payment, replying that they had only done their duty. 'Besides, we don't need money. Think of us now and then and consider that if there are men among the military capable of baseness, one can also find some with honour.'⁷⁵ The question, at the risk of being repetitious, is not whether these events actually occurred. What counts here is the portrayal of French soldiers acting heroically, either on the battlefield or off, often in the face of overwhelming odds. It is a trope that goes back to reports of the heroism of the common soldier during the early days of the Revolution.⁷⁶

These accounts resemble what Thomas Laqueur has dubbed the 'humanitarian narrative' which helps bridge the gulf between author and reader, and which helps create 'sympathetic passions'.⁷⁷ Mixed in with chivalric-like anecdotes are tales of sexual conquest, which often play a prominent part in the memoirs of the day. Stories of sexual prowess are an obvious flaunting of the veteran's masculinity, but they also define the links between successful sexual relations and the military-imperial effort: conquest was the end, manliness the means, so that sexual success somehow legitimated or at least explained martial prowess.⁷⁸ This was often echoed in stories of how soldiers 'seduced' the women – daughters or wives – who occupied the houses in which they were billeted.⁷⁹ Many of these were recounted in romantic terms – the memoirist was overcome by one of the most beautiful women he had set eyes on – some as an adventure in which they had to outwit a jealous husband, or in the case of the Egyptian campaign, a quest to overcome difficulties in order to gain access to a harem.⁸⁰ These stories mostly resulted in consummation, although in some instances at least it was more about showing how honourable was the French soldier by not taking advantage of the situation.⁸¹ In other instances – one cannot but help read between the lines – the soldier in question exercised less restraint and more or less forced himself on his conquest. 'I left, during the night, the room which she gave me...when after the customary reproaches I obtained, rather than tearing it from her, the reward of love deserving of her charms.'⁸² In another highly romanticized account, that of Louis de Montigny whose *souvenirs* are dedicated to the Duc d'Orleans, he recalled an

encounter at Kalisch on the road to Moscow:

Lodged three leagues from there with the wife of a Prussian colonel who was serving in our ranks, a very pretty baroness who said she was twenty-nine. Welcomed like a child of the house... I violated the laws of hospitality!... Poor colonel!... Oh, pooh! A Prussian! Besides it was not my fault; I was truly under siege...⁸³

V

Given the hardships of campaigning and the defeats the French army suffered in the last years of the Empire, it is not surprising that some veterans' views of the wars were entirely disenchanted. Take, for example, the following admonition to his readers from another veteran of the Russian campaign, B.T. Duverger, that ends in an assertion that conditions eliminated any notions of heroism:

You who have never felt the pangs of hunger, you whose palate has never been parched by thirst, will not understand what is the need, a pressing need which, half satisfied, returns more alive and more acute. In the midst of the great scenes which unfolded before my eyes, one dominant thought preoccupied me: to eat and to drink, that was my only goal, the circle around which my mind was concentrated. There was nothing heroic in it, it was the most common individuality, cruelly petty, but what is to be done?⁸⁴

That kind of frankness is rare among memoirists, but we appear to be on the verge of a different approach to war and how it was recalled and remembered. There is certainly a strand of disillusionment running through many (but not all) of these narratives.⁸⁵ However, for all the prominence placed on the horror associated with campaigning, veterans almost never come out against war in the way it would be understood in today's terms. On the contrary, some look back with a certain degree of nostalgia or pride in what had been accomplished. Thus Jean-Baptiste Barrès recalled that, despite being tempered by the regret caused by the loss of comrades, 'there is no greater day in life than the evening after which a great victory has been won'.⁸⁶ The focus on the hardships of campaigning, and the dramatic consequences of war on both civilians and the military alike was quite possibly a way of pointing to the sacrifices made in bringing the Revolution to the rest of Europe, considered to be superstitious, steeped in religion, and 'barbarian'.⁸⁷

War then fulfilled a purpose, the bringing of civilization and Enlightenment to the peoples of Europe.⁸⁸ But there were also values inherent in the military culture of the time that impregnated these narratives. Even those critical of the Revolution and Napoleon, even those who did not hesitate to describe the horror of battle, were nevertheless proud of their achievements and often dwelled on events or particular episodes that highlighted their martial exploits, sometimes drawing parallels with 'the most heroic antiquity has produced'.⁸⁹ Many were motivated by *la gloire*, a difficult concept to define, but which essentially consisted of getting

oneself noticed through some feat on the battlefield.⁹⁰ 'What is glory?' asked Captain Elzéar Blaze. 'It is a Bulletin in which one is named. Who was named in a battle? Ten people in three hundred thousand; and yet every individual had done his duty, but not every individual could be named.'⁹¹ The tenor of these memoirs seem to confirm the argument that the martial values once associated with the nobility were now extended to all classes of society.

A good example of this patriotic inflection in a memoir that was otherwise hostile to Napoleon is to be found in the work by Charles-Nicolas Fabvier. Fabvier held Napoleon responsible for the defeat of France in 1814. 'For a long time his deplorable ambition, his disastrous love of despotism, had paved the way for all of France's misfortunes.'⁹² And yet the men who fought to protect France from the 'hordes' ravaging the countryside are described with a certain amount of tenderness.⁹³ Other veterans were left with mixed emotions about the wars, even those who identified with Napoleon and had imbibed the legend. Jean-Nicolas Noël blamed Napoleon's ambition for the disasters in Spain and Russia and declared that unless a war was one of 'national defence', one got very quickly very tired of it.⁹⁴ Elzéar Blaze, whose memoirs were written during the July Monarchy, boasted that the best battle he had ever taken part in was the battle of Bautzen; he spent the day watching it from a church steeple. 'That manner of taking part in a battle is the most pleasant I know. When one is an actor oneself, you can see nothing...and then...and then...and then.'⁹⁵ Similarly, Jean-Baptiste Barrès admitted that 'nothing is more hideous, more miserable, than war'.⁹⁶ It did not prevent him, however, from wanting to see action. General Bigarré, on the other hand, asserted that:

Whoever has not known military life cannot have an idea of the happiness one enjoys when young, robust and of an adventurous character to make war in a renowned regiment, and to serve with officers who think highly of you and with soldiers who are ready to follow you.⁹⁷

There is not just a nostalgic undercurrent to all of this; there is also a real hankering for war that remained even with some of the veterans who had come through it.

VI

There was a tendency among British writers and poets in the first half of the nineteenth century to view the Napoleonic wars in highly romanticized terms, to the point where some scholars talk of a culture of 'romantic militarism'.⁹⁸ In France, on the other hand, the Romantic current running through the first half of the nineteenth century appears to have been largely pacifist and corresponded to the backlash against war in the 1820s and 1830s. The movement disdained both war and the unscrupulous politicians it associated with the Revolution and the Empire. The type of anti-war sentiment implicit in the depictions of the suffering of war that can sometimes be found in these memoirs coincided with that literary

trend. In fact, the response to see war as horrible, a fairly obvious one to the modern reader, appears to have occurred here for the first time in history, and coincided with the adoption of a 'culture of sensibility' in armies in the eighteenth century.⁹⁹

That the experience of war was far from romantic was a point brought home time and again in one way or another – the atrocities committed against civilians in certain theatres, the deprivations suffered by the troops, the horror of battle and its aftermath, and so on – and ran counter to the idealized vision of war the soldiers of the Grande Armée had been for years subjected to by the state.¹⁰⁰ If war memoirs like those of Bourgogne and Coignet read like a boy's own adventure story – one anecdote after the other recounting their amorous encounters, or close calls with death, or how Cossacks were outwitted, or how they managed to survive through sheer luck – veterans rarely set out to romanticize the wars. Thus Jean-Nicolas Noël wrote that while there were those that might have welcomed the beginnings of a new war, the hardships associated with campaigning and the consequences of battle, along with the distance from country and family, quickly brought the reality of war back home, as did,

the sight of the battlefield: the dead thrown pell-mell into a hastily dug ditch and covered with scant spades-full of earth, the wounded abandoned without help to a fate that one might oneself perhaps share on the morrow. These sights, and the cries to be heard from the field ambulances, speedily cool the most ardent spirits.¹⁰¹

If the ideal French soldier was portrayed as one who loved to fight,¹⁰² war memoirs presented a very different image. Writing many years later about a cavalry charge during the battle of Eylau, Auguste Thirion concluded that it was,

for nothing and without result that we risked destroying 2,000 magnificent cavalry men. I will go even further ... If we had succeeded, a glittering Bulletin would have detailed that braggery (*crânerie*) and the general would have written a great page in his military life. A little glory for a great deal of suffering!¹⁰³

There were, however, as we have seen, different responses to war, some focusing on honour and heroism, others on horror, some a mixture of both. Many of the accounts are imbued with a sense of the heroic. This is clearly seen in the way in which the wars are described in overall terms, that is, as an individual adventure, as part of a glorious patriotic narrative. Expressions of patriotism were of course open to interpretation, but for Jérôme Laugier, for example, the day when a soldier donned the uniform was the day he made the most generous sacrifice for the *patrie*, the day when he enlisted to spill his blood in defence of its citizens and their goods, even if they considered him to be a burden.¹⁰⁴ These 'martyrs of Liberty' as Laugier calls his comrades in arms, deserve the eternal admiration of Europe. In some respects, despite the rhetoric about fighting for the *patrie*, the soldier who fought in the wars between 1792 and 1815, like the modern-day soldier, also fought for his

comrades. Hence the subdued emotions often expressed when comrades and friends are lost. Napoleon is sometimes blamed for this, but not often. It is this, however, the experiential nature of the memoirs that are the most interesting. Putting aside arguments about their inherent inaccuracy, war memoirs, and the various images of war found in them, are important in considering the ways in which this period was understood by those who had lived through it. The events and anecdotes found in veterans' stories, and the narrative form given them, not only reveal how they interpreted the past and how they related to it, but also a good deal about the inner lives of these men. Memoirs are consequently invaluable documents for how veterans interpreted the wars, even if their memories were re-constructed and filtered through time.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank the anonymous referees of the journal for their comments and suggestions. The research for this article was carried out thanks to a grant from the Australian Research Council.

Notes

1. Natalie Petiteau, *Lendemain d'Empire. Les soldats de Napoléon dans la France du XIXe siècle* (Paris 2003), 129; and for a later period, Alistair Thompson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Melbourne 1994) 8–11; Samuel Hynes, *The Soldier's Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War* (New York 1997), 15–16, 23–5.
2. On this point see, Sergio Luzzatto, *Mémoire de la Terreur. Vieux montagnards et jeunes républicains au XIXe siècle*, trans. from the Italian by Simone Carpentarie-Messina (Lyons 1991), 196–202, who also refers to them as *artisans du souvenir*; Brigitte Diaz, "'L'histoire en personne'". Mémoires et autobiographies dans la première partie du XIXe siècle', in Carole Dornier, ed., *Se raconter, témoigner* (Caen 2001), 129–30; Damien Zanone, *Ecrire son temps. Les Mémoires en France de 1815 à 1848* (Lyons 2006), 51–9; and Pierre Nora, 'Les Mémoires d'Etat: De Commynes à de Gaulle', in Pierre Nora, ed., *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, 3 vols (Paris, 1984–86), 2.2, 361–2.
3. Jean-Roch Coignet, *Cahiers du capitaine Coignet* (Paris 2001), 190.
4. David Hopkin, *Soldier and Peasant in French Popular Culture, 1766–1870* (Suffolk 2003), 100; and idem., 'Storytelling, fairytales and autobiography: some observations on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French soldiers' and sailors' memoirs', *Social History*, Vol. 29 (2004), 186–98, which traces the influence of oral storytelling on French military and naval memoirs. Similarly, the memoirs of General Marbot have been compared to the adventures of Sinbad the Sailor in *A Thousand and One Nights* (Francis Magnard, 'La Résurrection d'une légende', *La Revue de Paris*, 1 February 1894, 104).
5. Réguiot, *Le sergent isolé. Histoire d'un soldat pendant la campagne de Russie en 1812* (Paris 1831).
6. Although Eugen Weber believes that they are simply descriptions of peasant realities. Eugen Weber, 'Fairies and Hard Facts: The Reality of Folktales', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 42 (1981), 93–113; Hopkin, 'Storytelling, fairytales and autobiography', 196.
7. See, e.g., Joachim-Joseph Delmarche, *Les Soirées du grenadier français de la Grande Armée* (Rocroy, 1849), 8–9; Coignet, op. cit., 26.
8. See, e.g., Alessandro Portelli, 'Uchronic Dreams: Working-Class Memory and Possible Worlds', in *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* (Albany 1991), 99–116.

War stories, if false or inaccurate, are not so much then the result of faulty memory but rather the merging of an imagined past with history.

9. Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London 1994), 22–3; Peter Fritzsche, 'Specters of History: On Nostalgia, Exile and Modernity', *American Historical Review*, Vol. 106 (2001), 1587–1618.
10. On the narrative in history see, Sarah C. Maza, 'Stories in History: Cultural Narratives in Recent Works in European History', *American Historical Review*, Vol. 101 (1996), 1493–1515, 1495.
11. Steven E. Kagle and Lorenza Gramegna, 'Rewriting Her Life: Fictionalization and the Use of Fictional Models in Early American Women's Diaries', in Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, eds, *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries* (Amherst 1996), 38–55, 42–3.
12. Yuval Noah Harari, *The Ultimate Experience: Battlefield Revelations and the Making of Modern War Culture, 1450–2000* (Basingstoke and New York 2008), 190–3.
13. Laurence Montroussier, in *Ethique et commandement* ((Paris 2005), 9), has made an inventory of 569 war memoirs for the period 1799–2002.
14. See Philip G. Dwyer, 'Public Remembering, Private Reminiscing: French Military Memoirs and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars', *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 33 (2010), 231–58, for a summary of veterans' motives for writing memoirs.
15. Alan Forrest, *The Legacy of the French Revolutionary Wars: The Nation-in-Arms in French Republican Memory* (Cambridge 2009), 77.
16. Yuval Noah Harari, *Renaissance Military Memoirs: War, History and Identity, 1450–1600* (Woodbridge 2004), 103; Eugène Labaume, *Relation circonstanciée de la campagne de Russie* (Paris 1815), 3–14, begins his account with a meditation on Napoleon's character and describes the foreign political circumstances that led to war with Austria in 1809, Spain and Russia.
17. On this point see, Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge 1995); Samuel Hynes, 'Personal narratives and commemoration', in Jay Winter and E. Sivan, eds, *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge 1998), 205–20; and Alan Forrest, *Napoleon's Men: The Soldiers of the Revolution and Empire* (London 2002), 23.
18. Two prominent examples are, Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Melbourne 1994); and Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War* (Manchester 1998).
19. See, e.g., Forrest, *Napoleon's Men*, 21–7. The literature on war memoirs is limited but beginning to come into its own. For the German perspective for this period, one can consult Julia Murken, 'Von "Thränen und Wehmut" zur Geburt des "deutschen Nationalbewusstseins". Die Niederlage des Russlandfeldzugs von 1812 und ihre Umdeutung in einen nationalen Sieg', in Horst Carl, Hans-Henning Kortüm, Dieter Langewiesche, and Friedrich Lenger, eds, *Kriegsniederlagen. Erfahrungen und Erinnerungen* (Berlin 2004), 107–22. For an analysis of military memoirs from an earlier period see Harari, *Renaissance Military Memoirs*; idem, 'Martial Illusions: War and Disillusionment in Twentieth-Century and Renaissance Military Memoirs', *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 69 (2005), 43–72, esp. 29 for a list of other studies; and idem, 'Military Memoirs: A Historical Overview of the Genre from the Middle Ages to the

- Late Modern Era', *War in History*, Vol. 14 (2007), 289–309. For works on the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras see, Dwyer, 'Public Remembering, Private Reminiscing', esp. 232–3, n. 7; and Forrest, *The Legacy of the French Revolutionary Wars*, 75–80. There seems to be a hiatus for the nineteenth century (in Europe at least). There are no studies, for example, on war memoirs and the Crimean or the Franco-Prussian War, and none for the wars of colonization that took place throughout the nineteenth century. For the First and Second World Wars, one can consult Hynes, *The Soldier's Tale*, who examines what he refers to as 'personal narratives'; Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York 1975), partly about war narratives; idem, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York 1989); Ann Linder, *Princes of the Trenches: Narrating the German Experience of the First World War* (Columbia, SC 1989), although her definition of war narratives encompasses novels and diaries as well as memoirs; and Michael Roper, 'Re-remembering the Soldier Hero: the Psychic and Social Construction of Memory in Personal Narratives of the Great War', *History Workshop Journal*, Vol. 50 (2000), 181–204. On the Russian experience, again for a later period, see, Roger D. Markwick, "'A Sacred Duty": Red Army Women Veterans Remembering the Great Fatherland War, 1941–1945', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 54 (2008), 403–20; and Barbara Walker, 'On Reading Soviet Memoirs: A History of the "Contemporaries" Genre as an Institution of Russian Intelligentsia Culture from the 1790s to the 1970s', *The Russian Review*, Vol. 59 (2000), 327–53. On the memoirs of French members of the SS see, Philippe Carrad, 'From the Outcasts' Point of View: The Memoirs of the French Who Fought for Hitler', *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 31 (2008), 477–503. For an overview of the genre see, Yuval Noah Harari, 'Military Memoirs: A Historical Overview of the Genre from the Middle Ages to the Late Modern Era', *War in History*, Vol. 14 (2007), 289–309.
20. See, e.g., Gerald F. Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York 1987); Richard Bruce Winders, *Mr. Polk's Army: The American Military Experience in the Mexican War* (Houston 1997); Janet S.K. Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge 2004); and Stephen G. Fritz, *Frontsoldaten: The German Soldier in World War II* (Lexington 1995).
 21. This kind of assertion can be found in a number of memoirs from the period, such as, Jérôme Laugier, *Les cahiers du capitaine Laugier* (Paris 1893), 2–3. On this question see, Henri Rossi, *Mémoires aristocratiques féminins, 1789–1848* (Paris 1998), 46–53. Interestingly, contemporary historians like Guizot and Michelet treated memoirs as though they were a reliable archival source from which histories could be written (Pierre Nora, 'Les Mémoires d'Etat: De Commynes à de Gaulle', in Pierre Nora, ed., *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, 3 vols (Paris 1984–86), 2.2: 364–5). For a theoretical discussion of the meaning and use of 'experience' in history see, Joan Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 17 (1991), 773–97; Lynn Hunt, 'The Experience of Revolution', *French Historical Studies*, 32 (2009), 671–78.
 22. Daniel Wickberg, 'What is the History of Sensibilities? On Cultural Histories, Old and New', *American Historical Review*, Vol. 3 (2007), 661.
 23. Watson, *Fighting Different Wars*, 3, and more generally on publishing in the post-war era, 185–218, argues that stories reflect the workings of the 'society within which they were written' and can therefore act as 'sites for cultural debates'.
 24. On this point see, Dwyer, 'Public Remembering, Private Reminiscing'.

25. Indeed, the Russian campaign lived on in European memory in ways that other campaigns did not, in part because so many nationalities were involved, in part because of the epic nature of the conflict, and in part because, despite the enormous losses in human life, it was by far the most written about of all the campaigns. Claus Scharf, “‘Die Geschichte der Zerstörung Moskaus 1812’ von Anton Wilhelm Nordhof. Eine Einführung”, in Anton Wilhelm Nordhof, *Die Geschichte der Zerstörung Moskaus im Jahre 1812*, edited and with an introduction by Claus Scharf and Jürgen Kessel (Munich 2000), 21.
26. François Bernoyer, *Avec Bonaparte en Égypte et en Syrie: 1798–1800* (Abbeville 1976), 50.
27. On the prevalence of massacres and atrocities in these memoirs see, Philip G. Dwyer, “‘It Still Makes me Shudder’: Memories of Massacres and Atrocities during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars”, *War in History*, Vol. 16 (2009), 381–405.
28. Harari, *Renaissance Military Memoirs*, 131–2.
29. Examples are the opening chapter of Auguste-Julien Bigarré, *Mémoires du Général Bigarré, 1775–1813* (Paris 2002), in which he relates his life in Brittany on the eve of the Revolution and his entry into the National Guard; or the opening chapters of Elie Krettly, *Souvenirs historiques du capitaine Krettly* (Paris 2003), where he relates his life before the Revolution. One of the exceptions can be found in Coignet, *Cahiers*, 25–76, which has a whole section devoted to his early life.
30. Hynes, *The Soldier's Tale*, 23, 25.
31. Laugier, op. cit., 111. Again in Laugier, 97, we can find a description of the harsh conditions experienced during the first Italian campaign: ‘It was extremely hot’, he recalled during one day’s march in the Venetian countryside on the road to Lonato. ‘No food except a few ears of barely formed maize we tore off. At nine in the evening I still had not eaten, and I did not have any reserves from the previous day’s bread ration. I then learnt that thirst was more difficult to support than hunger and that great thirst occurs when one does not eat. I drank from all the streams without quenching my thirst and felt that water gave me little assistance’.
32. Thomas W. Laqueur, ‘Bodies, details, and the humanitarian narrative,’ in Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley 1989), 176–204.
33. François Lavaux, *Mémoires de Campagne (1793–1814)* (Paris 2004), 84, 85, 106; Louis-Joseph Wagré, *Souvenirs d'un caporal: 1808–1809* (Paris 1902), 285.
34. Labaume, op. cit., 149.
35. Hynes, *The Soldier's Tale*, 26.
36. Jean-Louis Rieu, *Mémoires de Jean-Louis Rieu* (Geneva 1910), 154. Other examples can be found in Nicolas Marcel, *Campagnes en Espagne et au Portugal: 1808–1814* (Paris 2003), 11; Jean-Michel Chevalier, *Souvenirs des guerres napoléoniennes* (Paris 1970), 66.
37. Robert de Vaucorbeil, ‘Mémoires inédits d’Alexandre de Cheron sur la campagne de Russie’, *Revue de l'Institut Napoléon*, Vol. 140 (1983), 33.
38. Louis-Florimond Fantin des Odoards, *Journal du général Fantin des Odoards, étapes d'un officier de la Grande Armée, 1800–1830* (Paris 1895), 114.
39. *Ibid.*, 328.
40. Victor Dupuy, *Souvenirs militaires de Victor Dupuy, chef d'escadrons de hussards, 1794–1816* (Paris 1892), 121.
41. Joseph-Jacques de Naylies, *Mémoires sur la guerre d'Espagne, pendant les années 1808, 1809, 1810 et 1811* (Paris 1817), 67.

42. Ibid., 94.
43. Dupuy, op. cit., 93.
44. Elzéar Blaze, *La vie militaire sous l'empire; ou, Moeurs de la garnison, du bivouac et de la caserne*, 2 vols (Paris 1837), i, 44–6.
45. André Cabanis, *La Presse sous le Consulat et l'Empire* (Paris 1975), 224–5. On suicide in pre-Revolutionary France see, Jeffrey Merrick, 'Suicide and Politics in Pre-Revolutionary France', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, Vol. 30 (Spring 2006), 32–47. Some examples of contemporary accounts include: Jean-Nicolas-Auguste Noël, *With Napoleon's Guns: The Military Memoirs of an Officer of the First Empire* (London 2005), 138; Charles François, *Journal du capitaine François, dit le dromadaire d'Egypte, 1792–1830* (Paris 2003), 676 (1 November 1812). There are no studies of this phenomenon for the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, or for suicide among veterans during the Restoration. It was, however, a phenomenon that occurred in all armies of the period.
46. Joseph-Marie Moiret, *Memoirs of Napoleon's Egyptian Expedition, 1798–1801* (London 2001), 51; *Correspondance de l'armée française en Egypte, interceptée par l'escadre de Nelson, publiée à Londres* (Paris 1799), 175; Pierre-François-Xavier Boyer, *Historique de ma vie*, 2 vols (Paris 1999), i, 36.
47. X.-B. Saintine, ed., *Histoire de l'expédition française en Egypte*, 3 vols (Paris 1830), i, 164.
48. Coignet, op. cit., 169–70.
49. Dezydery Chlapowski, *Memoirs of a Polish Lancer: The Pamietniki of Dezydery Chlapowski*, trans. Tim Simmons (Chicago 1992), 47.
50. Jakob Walter, *The Diary of a Napoleonic Foot Soldier* (Moreton-in-Marsh 1997), 40–1.
51. Louis Gardier, *Journal de la Campagne de Russie en 1812* (Paris 1999), 63. For other examples of suicide during the Russian campaign see, Louis-François Lejeune, *Mémoires du général Lejeune, 1792–1813* (Paris 2001), 432; Walter, op. cit., 40; Karl Friedrich Emil von Suckow, *D'Iéna à Moscow. Fragments de ma vie, par le colonel Suckow de l'armée wurtembergeoise*, trans. by commandant Veling (Paris 1901), 156; Henri Ducor, *Aventures d'un marin de la Garde impériale, prisonnier de guerre sur les pontons espagnols, dans l'île de Cabrera et en Russie*, 2 vols (Paris 1833), i, 310; Henri-Pierre Everts, 'Campagne et captivité de Russie (1812–813), extraits des Mémoires inédits du général-major H. P. Everts', in *Carnets et journal sur la campagne de Russie* (Paris 1997), 127.
52. Jean-Baptiste Barrès, *Souvenirs d'un officier de la Grande Armée* (Paris 2002), 157.
53. Fleury de Chaboulon, *Les Cents Jours. Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la vie privée, du retour et du règne de Napoléon en 1815*, 2 vols (London 1820), ii, 188.
54. To this extent, Forrest (*Napoleon's Men*, 32), has suggested that they 'were repelled by the horror of it all: the terrified neighing of wounded horses, the smell of burned flesh and excrement, the groans of the dying, aspects of the battlefield which they, like their Civil War soldiers who followed them, could not bring themselves to linger over.'
55. David A. Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It* (Boston 2007), 41–4.
56. Coignet, op. cit., 174.
57. Rieu, op. cit., 162.
58. François, op. cit., 314 (20 May 1799).

59. See, e.g., Lieutenant Hugh Wray on Waterloo in John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (London 1976), 160–61.
60. Adrien Bourgogne, *Mémoires du sergent Bourgogne* (Paris 1992), 112.
61. *Ibid.*, 120.
62. See, e.g., Hubert Perrin to Comtesse Lobau in Emmanuel de Waresquiel, ed., *Lettres d'un Lion. Correspondance inédite du général Mouton, comte de Lobau (1812–1815)* (Paris 2005), 127 (23 May 1813), weeping over the loss of Duroc at the battle of Bautzen. It was much more common for a soldier to weep over reunions with comrades or the plight of Napoleon (or France), at least in the memoirs. See, e.g., Krettly, *op. cit.*, 120–1, 140, 144.
63. Etienne-Maurice Deschamps, *Souvenirs militaires, persécutions sous la Restauration, songe, etc.* (Pontarlier 1835), 30.
64. Bourgogne, *op. cit.*, 128.
65. Any number of examples could be mentioned. See *ibid.*, 76–7, 79.
66. Alexandre Bellot de Kergorre, *Journal d'un commissaire des guerres pendant le Premier Empire (1806–1821)* (Paris 1997), 84.
67. Labaume, *op. cit.*, 346.
68. Jules-Antoine Paulin, *Les Souvenirs du general Bon Paulin (1782–1876)* (Paris 1895), 51.
69. Gaspard Ducque, *Journal de marche du sous-lieutenant Ducque* (Paris 2004), 60.
70. Adrien-Augustin-Amalric, Comte de Mailly, *Mon journal pendant la campagne de Russie, écrit de mémoire après mon retour à Paris* (Paris 1841), 115–16. Similarly, B.T. Duverger, *Mes Aventures dans la Campagne de Russie* (Paris 1833), 14–15.
71. Labaume, *op. cit.*, 299–300.
72. *Ibid.*, 299–300.
73. See, e.g., the opening remarks in the memoirs of Jean-Jacques-Germain, Baron Pelet, *Mémoires sur la guerre de 1809, en Allemagne*, 4 vols (Paris 1824–26), i, 2, in which he states: 'The first laws of history are "truth" and "authenticity": the first of all the guaranties for posterity is to see history written and debated in the presence of its contemporaries'.
74. Laqueur, *op. cit.*, 177.
75. Georges Bangofsky, 'Les Étapes de Georges Bangofsky, officier lorrain. Extraits de son journal de campagnes (1797–1815)', *Mémoires de l'Académie de Stanislas*, ii (1905), 272–6.
76. See James A. Leith, 'Youth Heroes of the French Revolution', *Proceedings of the Consortium on Revolutionary Europe* (1986), 127; *idem*, 'Nationalism and the fine arts in France, 1750–1789', *Studies on Voltaire in the Eighteenth Century*, Vol. 89 (1972), 926–7; and David A. Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680–1800* (Cambridge, MA 2001), ch. 4.
77. Laqueur, *op. cit.*, 179.
78. Michael J. Hughes, 'Making Frenchmen into Warriors: Martial Masculinity in Napoleonic France', in Christopher E. Forth and Bernard Taithe, eds, *French Masculinities: History, Culture and Politics* (Houndsmill 2007), 60.
79. See, e.g., Bigarré, *op. cit.*, 117–18, 119–22, 154.
80. Many, but not all war memoirs, contain an amorous adventure of one kind or another. See, e.g., Coignet, *op. cit.*, 224–7; Charles-Pierre-Lubin Griois, *Mémoires du général Griois, 1792–1822*, 2 vols (Paris 1909), i, 261–2, who obtained 'force baisers' from an Italian countess; Elzéar Blaze, *op. cit.*, i, 276–80; Denis Charles Parquin, *Souvenirs de commandant Parquin* (Paris 2003), 49–52, 56–63, 73–5, 79–80, 231–2, 234–6, 305–6.

81. See, e.g., François-Frédéric Billon, *Souvenirs: 1804–1815* (Paris 2006), 42–4.
82. *Mémoires de M. R[igade], Chevalier de la Légion-d'Honneur, officier supérieure de cavalerie, et prévôt de la Dalmatie* (Agen 1828), 82.
83. Louis Gabriel Montigny, *Souvenirs anecdotiques d'un officier de la Grande Armée* (Paris 1833), 198–9. Other examples of sexual conquest include François, op. cit., 642 (6 and 26 May 1812); Marie-Henry, comte de Lignières, *Souvenirs de la Grande Armée et de la Vieille Garde impériale. Marie-Henry, comte de Lignières, 1783–1886* (Paris 1933), 56–8, in which a husband asks an officer to sleep with his wife to get her pregnant; and Marcel, op. cit., 29–31, 42–3.
84. Duverger, op. cit., 4–5.
85. The vast majority of twentieth-century military memoirs tend to be disillusionment narratives, a theme that can also be found for earlier periods. See, Harari, 'Martial Illusions', 43–72.
86. Barrès, op. cit., 137. Barrès was referring to the battle of Bautzen.
87. See, e.g., the descriptions of Calabria in Duret de Tavel, *Séjour d'un officier français en Calabre, ou Lettres propres à faire connaître l'état ancien et moderne de la Calabre, le caractère, les mœurs de ses habitants, et les événements politiques et militaires qui s'y sont passés pendant l'occupation des français* (Rouen 1820), 120–2, 124.
88. A point that has been underlined by Stuart Woolf, 'French Civilization and Ethnicity in the Napoleonic Empire', *Past & Present*, Vol. 124 (1989), 96–120; and Michael Broers, 'Cultural Imperialism in a European Context? Political Culture and Cultural Politics in Napoleonic Italy', *Past & Present*, 170 (2001), 152–80.
89. Labaume, op. cit., 108.
90. On earlier French notions of 'gloire', see John A. Lynn, *Giant of the Grand Siecle: The French Army, 1610–1715* (Cambridge 1997), 251–2; idem, 'Towards an Army of Honor: The Moral Evolution of the French Army 1789–1815', *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 16 (1989), 152–73; idem, *The Wars of Louis XIV, 1667–1714* (London 1999), 27–32; Michael J. Hughes, "'Vive la République, Vive l'Empereur!': Military Culture and Motivation in the Armies of Napoleon, 1803–1808" (PhD, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign 2005), 353–60.
91. Blaze, op. cit., i, 393.
92. Charles-Nicolas Fabvier, *Journal des opérations du 6^e corps pendant la campagne de France en 1814* (Paris 1819), 8.
93. Ibid., 3–4.
94. Noël, op. cit., 137, 144, 161.
95. Blaze, op. cit., i, 354.
96. Barrès, op. cit., 55.
97. Bigarré, op. cit., 127.
98. J.R. Watson, *Romanticism and War: A Study of British Romantic Period Writers and the Napoleonic Wars* (Houndsmill 2003); Nancy L. Rosenblum, 'Romantic Militarism', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 2 (1982), 249–68. For a summary of the literature on British Romanticism see, Neil Ramsey, 'Romanticism and War', *Literature Compass*, Vol. 3 (2006), 117–24.
99. Harari, *The Ultimate Experience*, 22, 135–50.
100. Some examples can be found in Hughes, "'Vive la République, Vive l'Empereur!'", 260–61, and 311–12, nos. 19 and 20.
101. Noël, op. cit., 161.

102. Hughes, 'Making Frenchmen into Warriors', 57.
103. Auguste Thirion, *Souvenirs militaires* (Paris 1998) 7–8.
104. Laugier, op. cit.

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