

## Chapter II

### The Condition of the Corps: Men and Arms

#### (a) OFFICERS

From the 1718 reductions until the major war augmentations of 1739-40, there were normally in the British Army some 500 regimental officers serving with the horse and 1,450 with the foot, for a total of 1,950.<sup>1</sup> Periodic crises during the long Walpole-Fleury peace saw the total number of officers go as high as 2,250, but 1,950 was the normal figure during these years. This number was to increase steadily as the century progressed, and spectacularly so in wartime. At the height of the 1739-48 war there were over 500 officers with the horse, 2,100 with the foot and nearly 400 with the marines, totalling some 3,000 officers. The army from Aix-la-Chapelle until the new 1755 augmentations consisted of over 450 officers with the horse and nearly 1,650 with the foot, all told 2,100; and by the height of the Seven Years War these figures had swollen to 600 cavalry officers and nearly 4,000 infantry officers, for a total of nearly 4,600—the largest number ever to serve at one time before 1795. From the 1763 reductions until the augmentations of 1771 there were nearly 550 officers serving with the horse and over 2,000 with the foot, for a total of 2,600; and from 1771 until 1776 another 200 infantry officers raised the total to 2,800. By the height of the 1775-83 war there were some 400 officers serving with the horse and nearly 3,700 with the foot, for nearly 4,100 all told; and from the mid-1780s until the opening of the war against Revolutionary France in 1793 there were, finally, more than 550 officers with the horse and nearly 2,400 with the foot, for a total of more than 2,900.

<sup>1</sup> These figures—taken mostly from the establishments in WO 24, and from the *Army Lists*—include all officers below the rank of proprietary colonel, i.e. all the officers normally serving with the regiments. Only officers with the horse and foot, both Guards and Line, are included, as are officers of Marines during the 1740s when those units were still counted part of the army; otherwise, officers with the Independent Companies, Marine Companies, on the half-pay list and, of course, those serving in the Ordnance corps, are excluded. Our figures encompass, therefore, almost all the officers below general rank serving in the army proper, as then understood.

According to the most informed estimate some two-thirds of the commissions held in the British Army at any one time were had by purchase, the remainder having been obtained by a variety of non-purchase methods.<sup>2</sup> The workings of this system of promotion are well-enough understood, and we need do no more here than provide a sketch;<sup>3</sup> it is with the results of the system as reflected in the career patterns of the officers, and only incidentally with its social and political origins and significance, that we need especially to deal.

The first two Georges disliked the buying and selling of commissions; the practice however was already customary at the time of the Hanoverian succession and it had created a huge vested interest, so that George I and his son were obliged to regulate what they could not abolish. This they did with some success: Royal Warrants of 1720 and 1722 fixed prices of all commissions,<sup>4</sup> obliged an officer to sell only to another officer holding the rank immediately below his own, and retained for the Crown the right of selecting and approving an officer's successor.

All commissions from colonelcies downwards were subject to purchase; general rank alone was attained strictly by seniority or merit.<sup>5</sup> A young man bought his ensigncy or cornetcy and then, as vacancies appeared, bought his way up the ladder. Purchase vacancies appeared when an officer retired, sold out, or transferred into another regiment. When he did so he received the regulated price of his commission from government, and in addition (since commissions were desirable and so

<sup>2</sup> J. H. Bassett, 'The Purchase System in the British Army, 1660-1871', unpubl. Boston University Ph.D. thesis, 1969, 40. By 1810 in the bigger wartime army, as many as four-fifths of all commissions were had by non-purchase methods (mostly through vacancies filled by seniority). M. Glover, *Wellington's Army in the Peninsula, 1808-1814* (Newton Abbot, 1977), 82-9.

<sup>3</sup> For a fine account which illustrates in detail the many subtleties involved in eighteenth-century promotion, which we cannot enter into here, see I. F. Burton and A. N. Newman, 'Sir John Cope: Promotion in the Eighteenth-Century Army', *English Historical Review*, 78 (1963), 655-68. Very useful too is M. Glover, op. cit. 76-89.

<sup>4</sup> The 1720 tariff was revised by warrants of 1766, 1772, 1773, and 1783. These were in practice only guidelines, prices varying considerably.

<sup>5</sup> The purchase of colonelcies was fairly common in the army before 1714; but it was an abuse that George I and George II were determined to stamp out. They had done so by 1760, by discouraging the purchase of colonelcies and by filling any death-vacancies that occurred with colonels appointed by the Crown. J. Hayes, 'The Purchase of Colonelcies in the Army, 1714-63', *JSAHR* 39 (1961), *passim*.

usually traded at prices much greater than those laid down in the Warrants) he received the unofficial over-regulation price from his successor; the successor meanwhile paid the regulated price to government.<sup>6</sup> An officer selling was usually required to offer his commission to that officer in his regiment with the most seniority in the rank immediately below his; if that senior officer of the next lower rank lacked the funds or the inclination to purchase, then the commission was offered to the next senior, and so on. The purchaser got the rank but not the seniority of the officer from whom he purchased, thus becoming the most junior of the regiment's officers in his new rank. It will be noted that a vacancy set off a chain reaction within a regiment since nobody could move up the ladder without at the same time selling, thus requiring a chain of purchasers. A vacant captaincy, for example, meant four vacant ranks—the captaincy, the captain-lieutenancy,<sup>7</sup> a lieutenancy, and an ensigncy. A vacant lieutenant-colonelcy meant six vacancies, as each below moved up a step. Likewise, everyone within each rank in the regiment moved up one notch in seniority after a purchase was transacted. There was much activity whenever a vacancy occurred, therefore, since it involved everyone in the regiment at or below the rank become vacant; and if at any rung along the ladder no applicant could readily be found, it was the obligation of all the officers interested in the promotion to find one.<sup>8</sup> Seniority, clearly, was all-important to officers.<sup>9</sup>

When an officer wished to leave active service he either sold out entirely or retired on to half-pay. If he sold out, he received the value of his commission as a retirement fund; and since most officers got at least one promotion without purchase—a

<sup>6</sup> Army agents usually handled the trading in commissions, because the over-regulation prices paid by purchasers were illegal, and the agents (one of whom handled most of the financial affairs of each regiment, as the private agent of the proprietary colonel) were best placed to cover this part of the business. J. H. Bassett, op. cit. 61.

<sup>7</sup> The captain-lieutenant (since the colonel was seldom present) commanded the colonel's company; he was regarded as the 'youngest captain though in reality he is only the first lieutenant, the colonel being himself captain'. Capt. G. Smith, *An Universal Military Dictionary, a Copious Explanation of the Technical Terms . . . of an Army* (1779), 50.

<sup>8</sup> J. Hayes, 'Officers', 41-60, for a good description of the process.

<sup>9</sup> Hence the importance of brevet rank—that is, a higher rank in the army than that held in the regiment, usually awarded either for long service, or to officers who had served in a capacity (but not actual rank) higher than that actually held. It conferred no pay but gave seniority, and thus claim to subsequent vacancies in regiments other than one's own.

process described below – they not only got their money back but in this way made a capital gain.<sup>10</sup> If an officer wished to retire from active service, but keep some part of his pay and retain his investment without selling, he went on to the 'half-pay list'. Here he kept himself 'on reserve' as it were, ready to return on active service if called and hence given half pay as a retaining fee. Officers from regiments raised during the wars and reduced with the coming of peace also went on to the half-pay list, for the same reason. All three Georges, ever solicitous of the interests of their old officers, frequently provided non-purchase vacancies for half-pay officers when these arose in established regiments, and likewise appointed numbers of them to new-raised corps.

The purchase system was simple enough and it offered several advantages. Fortescue rightly thought it secure, economical, and convenient.<sup>11</sup> It was secure because government held the purchase money as a bond against an officer's good behaviour; if he were 'cashiered' his investment was forfeit. It was economical because an officer's pay 'little exceeded the interest on the price of his commission.' It was convenient for all concerned too, since traffic in commissions, the rule of moving up one step at a time, and the device of retiring on half pay all ensured a steady flow of promotion. The system had its abuses, naturally enough. Infants might be gazetted cornets or ensigns, and in this way get a head start in the seniority which sped an officer's first promotion. Occasional jobbery, or frauds by army agents heavily involved as commission brokers, sometimes made it possible for an officer to skip a step on the promotion ladder. High over-regulation prices might induce an officer selling to ignore the next officer in seniority, who otherwise would rightfully have been given first chance to buy. But, save for the first, these practices were thought less than honourable and so were exceptional, not least because sharp practice harmed the chances not just of one but of most of a regiment's officers; and the Hanoverian Kings paid such close attention to the granting of commissions that frauds were seldom successful.

As we noted above, at least one-third of all vacancies were

filled without purchase. Non-purchase vacancies were for the most part those that appeared because of the death of an officer or, infrequently, through his being cashiered. As with purchase promotions, when a non-purchase promotion occurred it too affected the senior officer in each successive rank below the vacancy, each of them getting a free step up the ladder. In wartime, when new corps were raised and old ones augmented, many non-purchase vacancies also appeared. The recipients of free promotions were a varied lot. A death vacancy usually went to the senior officer of the next-lowest rank; but the King could, and often did, appoint to these vacancies from the half-pay list—as he did in the 39th Foot in 1747, for example, upon the death in harness of that corps's major.<sup>12</sup> Sons of deserving officers and sons of impecunious officers' widows often got these posts. In wartime it was common for large numbers of senior NCOs to be given ensigncies or lieutenantcies; four NCOs in the 64th Foot and three in the 33rd, among others, were commissioned subalterns in 1756, for example.<sup>13</sup> Young men of good family but without other resources often took service in the capacity of 'volunteers', carrying firelocks on their shoulders and marching in the ranks with the private men; it was their hope that, by distinguishing themselves in action, they might be given an ensigncy in the regiment. Many officers who later reached high rank began their careers as volunteers. But if, as Hayes notes, the granting of commissions without purchase made it 'possible for a man with little money to climb in the service by non-purchase vacancies to the rank of major or even lieutenant-colonel',<sup>14</sup> still free commissions were not an unmixed blessing. Where the normal rule had it that there could be no purchase without a sale, the corollary here was that a commission obtained without purchase could not normally be sold. Free commissions represented one-third of all promotions, contributed notably to the steady flow of seniority and promotion, and raised officers who lacked money and 'interest' and who otherwise would have mouldered without hope on a subaltern's pay; but the fact that they could not normally sell meant that the half-pay list was often the only

<sup>10</sup> J. H. Bassett, *op. cit.* 155.

<sup>11</sup> Sir J. Fortescue, *The Last Post* (Edinburgh, 1934), 13–19. Quoted in R. E. Scouller, *op. cit.* 71–2.

<sup>12</sup> J. Hayes, 'Officers', 43–6.

<sup>13</sup> WO 27/5 and 6.

<sup>14</sup> J. Hayes, 'Officers', 43–6.

resource of officers promoted in this fashion, when they grew grey in the service.

A system so organized was bound to produce a body of officers whose social origins were diverse and whose career expectations were varied; and such was indeed the case. The British officer corps, after 1715, was a social *mélange*.<sup>15</sup> Broadly speaking, there were four groups from which officers were recruited. First came the nobility and the landed gentry, titled and untitled, whose sons—younger sons, generally—made up at least one-quarter of the regimental officers and well more than half of the proprietary colonels and general officers.<sup>16</sup> Because of their birth they possessed 'interest' and, in most cases, money; and it was these three advantages that marked them out from other officers and gave them the highest promotion prospects. The second group provided the great majority of the regimental officers: these were men drawn from the lesser gentry, from the cadet branches of good families now involved in the professions or in trade, from the clergy, and even from the surviving yeomen farmers. Their distinguishing characteristics were the lack of birth, money, and interest of the first group and, consequently, of the prospects of high rank open to their betters. An officer of this class described most of his fellows exactly when he referred to himself as 'a private Gentleman without the advantage of Birth and friends'.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, considerable numbers of this group—as of the third group below—were the protégés of the great, were under their 'protection', and so their impecunious condition did not doom their chances of advancement.<sup>18</sup>

The third group is less easy to categorize, since it was drawn

<sup>15</sup> 'Officer corps' is a term used advisedly, for convenience only, since (just as J. Childs has observed of the later seventeenth-century army, in *The Army of Charles II* (1976)) there was during our period no officer corps in Britain, but rather an officer class. Even the notion of an 'officer class' is (and was at the time) recognized as something of a fiction. Neither the caste exclusiveness of the Prussian officer corps which was relaxed in favour of non-nobles only in *extremis*, nor the cosmopolitan and often quite professional nature of the Austrian officer corps, nor the increasing élitism and entrenchment among the *noblesse d'épée* which makes possible the use of the term to describe the French officer corps, is recognizable in the British Army.

<sup>16</sup> J. Hayes, 'Officers', 80-1. In general, I follow Hayes's system of classification here.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 80. See also I. F. Burton and A. N. Newman, art. cit. 667-8.

<sup>18</sup> An interesting collection of letters illustrating the workings of 'interest' in getting commissions and promotions, is in M. Balderston and D. Syrett, *The Lost War. Letters from British Officers during the American Revolution* (New York, 1975).

socially from a wide spectrum stretching across the first two groups, and it included a significant minority of foreigners, chiefly Huguenots. Most of its members were without lands or much money, but were nevertheless gentlemen well-enough born and educated—the Huguenots being a case in point. It was a distinct group in that it was composed of what would later be referred to as 'army families', families whose sons traditionally served in the army and—especially among the majority with little wealth—had by the end of the Seven Years War developed a new 'professional' outlook and a 'service mentality'. Establishing dynasties between 1715 and 1739, theirs was a new professionalism, the product of the institutionalized standing army;<sup>19</sup> and it was quite unlike the older mercenary professionalism of the Kirkes or Douglasses which had characterized the later seventeenth-century army and had all but died out during the first decade of the eighteenth.

The fourth group, greater in numbers than is generally realized, consisted of subaltern officers of advanced age and experience promoted from among the non-commissioned officers. These were men who had enlisted as private soldiers and, by diligence and luck, had become outstanding senior NCOs. As many as 200 of them were commissioned during the 1739-48 war, and perhaps as many again got commissions during the Seven Years War. Like the long-service subalterns with few prospects of advancement, they were particularly useful in new-raised corps where a leavening of old soldiers thoroughly acquainted with training and discipline was essential.<sup>20</sup>

It will be appreciated from what we have said so far about the mechanics of the purchase system and the social and financial

<sup>19</sup> The Churchills, Lascelleses, Howards, Duroures, Handasydes, and, of course, the Campbells and other Scottish families, stand out. These families had their naval equivalents—the Knowles family, for example, or the Hyde Parkers.

<sup>20</sup> J. Hayes, 'Officers', 100: e.g. late in 1756 new second battalions were added to each of fifteen old marching regiments. The officers of the new 2/3rd Foot were typically drawn from many places: thirteen came from active service in other marching regiments, and one each came from the Marines, the Engineers, the Scots-Dutch brigade, and the half-pay list. Of the rest, six were lads given first commissions as ensigns while the quartermaster and four lieutenants were sergeants of the 1/3rd commissioned as officers. C. Knight, *Historical Records of The Buffs, East Kent Regiment (3rd Foot)* . . . 1704-1914, II (1935), Pt 2, 733-4. The 2/3rd was regimented in 1758 as the 61st Foot, by which time six of the corps's subalterns were ex-sergeants. Of these, one had served twenty-five years before being commissioned, three had served nineteen years each before being commissioned, one had served thirteen years, and the last had served



advantages of the officer corps, that for the majority of the officers it was always relatively easy to acquire a first commission; but thereafter it was only those officers possessed of birth, wealth, and interest who could be fairly sure of advancement into the higher ranks. For most officers—those with the least advantages—the army promised 'nothing but the certainty of long years of wearisome regimental service and a limited preferment which would stop at the rank of lieutenant-colonel if they were favoured by fortune, or at captain or major if they were not.'<sup>21</sup> Most of these officers, by the same token, relied on the army for their livelihood: the subalterns lived on their pay, eked it out with the odd windfall, and hoped for the day when command of a company would provide a modest addition derived from the proprietary rights of a captaincy. Long service was the rule (as we shall see in more detail); and it is clear that the majority of officers—since they were long-serving, since they lived off their pay and meagre supplements, since they had neither interest nor private fortune, since their advancement was slow, and since merit was their chief or sole advantage—were career officers, and consciously so. The value of experience and merit, given the social and financial circumstances of most officers, was a much more important aspect of the promotion system than is usually credited. All commissions came from the King; and only to the Lord-Lieutenant in Dublin and to the commanders-in-chief of forces serving in the field abroad was some part of this most jealously guarded of royal prerogatives delegated. The Lord-Lieutenant could appoint to ensigncies and cornetcies only, while field commanders could appoint or promote to vacancies created by death or disease; and all such appointments were subject to the royal sanction. Any proprietary colonel with political influence, whose judgement in military affairs was respected by the King, was easily able to advance the careers of able officers in the regiment of which he held the command. Whenever a vacancy appeared it was the proprietary colonel whose recommenda-

eleven years (WO 27/5). Likewise the new 64th Foot (lately 2/11th) had among its subalterns four ex-sergeants; of these, one had served twenty-two years before being commissioned, another had served seventeen years, and the others had served twelve years. *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> J. Hayes, 'Officers', 158.

tions to the sovereign—especially so in the cases of George I and George II—were those most likely to get a good hearing. Colonels who were at all interested in the affairs of their own regiments knew which officers possessed merit and deserved advancement, and which did not; and when a vacancy occurred, the colonel, in recommending, could simply pass over any officer lacking reputation or capacity. In 1747, for example, when the majority of Richbell's 39th of Foot fell vacant, the two senior captains were so ignored; the first was a rogue and the second incapable and, despite the fact that the first moved heaven and earth for the promotion neither Richbell nor his lieutenant-colonel, nor any others of the officers in the 39th would have either of the two succeed.<sup>22</sup> The Duke of Cumberland, as Captain-General from 1745 to 1757, paid scant regard to interest and looked out for the deserving; and the Duke of York later acted in the same fashion, whenever possible. Since there was considerable mobility between the regiments and since non-purchase vacancies were common (especially in wartime),<sup>23</sup> not only experienced officers with interest and money but, equally, those with experience but without these other advantages, often profited by zeal and merit.

There were always, of course, officers possessed of the birth and influence of a Lord George Lennox who, second son of the Duke of Richmond, got his ensigncy at the age of thirteen, in 1751, and seven years later—aged twenty—was lieutenant-

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 43-6.

<sup>23</sup> The officer turnover in eight sample regiments of foot during the 1775-83 war—corps with a typical cross-section of service—illustrates wartime mobility. Of these regiments (the 5th, 11th, 22nd, 23rd, 29th, 38th, 64th, and 66th of Foot), six arrived in North America before or in 1775, while the 11th and 66th spent the whole of the war quietly in Ireland. The 5th, 22nd, 23rd, 38th, and 64th were all heavily engaged; the 22nd and 38th finished the war at New York in 1783, and the 5th and 64th in the West Indies. Most of the 23rd had been interned at Yorktown; and the 29th sat out the war in Canada where it saw little or no action after 1776.

Seven of these regiments each had twenty-nine regimental officers in 1775, while the 5th (with one vacancy) had twenty-eight. Of the twenty-eight officers with the 5th in 1775, only nine were still with the corps in 1783; similarly, only twelve of the 11th's original complement were still with that corps in 1783, while in that same year only five of the 22nd's remained, only four of the 23rd's, only ten of the 29th's, only six of the 38th's, only four of the 64th's, and only eight of the 66th's. Death in action, disease, incapacitating wounds, retirement, promotion to general rank, and exchanges into other corps had by 1783 accounted for 173—75 per cent—of the 231 officers who had been with these corps in 1775, at the same time providing an equal number of vacancies which were filled by promotions, exchanges, and new appointments. *Army Lists*.

colonel commanding the 33rd Foot. Lord George got his first full colonelcy in 1762, aged twenty-four. Equally there were in every corps officers like Peter Franquefort of the 19th Foot who, by 1740, had given a total of forty-six years to the service. Franquefort had obtained his ensigncy in 1694, and it had taken him thirty-eight years to move up two steps to become a captain; eight years later, when the Spanish war broke out, he was still only a captain. Lennox and Franquefort represent extremes, however; if we are to appreciate fully the workings of the purchase system, and to judge the career service and experience of the officer corps in general some detailed sets of statistics must be assembled. Three such sets are, therefore, advanced here: in Table 1 the overall length of time that officers had spent in the service, since obtaining their first commissions, is determined; in Table 2 the length of time spent by officers in their present commissions, as held at selected years, is considered; and in Table 3 the number of years that officers could expect to remain in each commission—that is, on each rung of the ladder—is calculated. The officers serving with the regiments—that is, from subalterns to the lieutenants-colonel, inclusive—are dealt with first, after which the proprietary colonels are considered in their turn. It will be seen that these figures clearly support the general impression of career service described above.<sup>24</sup>

Table 1, our first set of figures from our sample regiments,<sup>25</sup> concerns the overall length of time that officers had spent in the

<sup>24</sup> These sets of figures are taken from statistical bores made at selected years in the printed annual *Army Lists*, from the officers' commission histories compiled for each regiment appearing in WO 27, and from the register-books in WO 25. Our survey covers the years 1739-95, there being insufficient evidence upon which representative statistics could be drawn for the two earlier decades covered by this study. Several short lacunae in the materials make it impossible, in many instances, to give all three sets of our statistics for the same year; and not all of our survey regiments were on hand in each of the years selected for bores.

For convenience, the captain-lieutenant is counted among the captains here and henceforth; such was contemporary practice.

<sup>25</sup> These were eleven of horse and twenty-nine of foot, chosen carefully so that their service records during our period would reflect closely the distribution pattern of the army at home and abroad. The regiments of horse were: The Blues, 2nd, and 4th Horse; the 2nd Dragoon Guards; the 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 7th, and 14th Dragoons; and the 15th and 17th Light Dragoons. The foot were the Coldstream Guards, plus the 1st, 2nd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 8th, 11th, 12th, 15th, 17th, 19th, 22nd, 27th, 28th, 32nd, 33rd, 38th, 39th, 42nd, 43rd, 45th, 46th, 51st, 54th, 58th, 63rd, 64th, and 69th of Foot.

service since obtaining their first commissions, as young cornets or ensigns. The figures in Table 1 point the long service described earlier; and when read in conjunction with Table 2<sup>26</sup>

TABLE 1  
Average Number of Years' Service From First Commission

YEAR	HORSE				FOOT			
	Lts-Col.	Majs	Cpts	Lts	Lts-Col.	Majs	Cpts	Lts
1740	35	31	26	20.5	35	30.5	27	19
1754	28	27	13.5	8.5	22	18	15.5	10
1759	21	20	11.5	6	15	19	14	5
1768	24	21	14	9.5	23	24	15	10
1773	19	18	14	8.5	29	20.5	16	10
1777	25	19.5	15	9	30	23.5	17	10
1785	28.5	26	15	7	26.5	22	17.5	7.5
1789	27.5	26	17	9	23	26.5	16	8.5
1791	28	23	13.5	8	30	29	18	9

—figures giving the average number of years spent by officers in their presently held commissions, accounting therefore for only their most recent service—they jointly shed a good deal of light upon career patterns, and upon the service experience that officers brought with them when promoted from one rank to the next.

TABLE 2  
Average Number of Years Spent by Officers in Their Present Commission

YEAR	HORSE				FOOT				
	Lts-Col.	Majs	Cpts	Lts	Lts-Col.	Majs	Cpts	Lts	Ens
1740	14	8.5	8.5	8	6	8	3	8	7.5
1758	3.5	2.5	3	3	3	2	4	3	1.5
1766	7	5	6	5.5	3.5	5	4	5.5	5.5
1774	5	4	5	4	3	8	3.5	6	6
1780	6	2.5	4.5	3	2	5	3	4.5	3.5
1787	9.5	7	7	4	3	8	5	9	6
1793	10.5	5	5	3.5	2.5	9	6	8	5.5

Table 3 illustrates the 'rates of promotion'—the number of years that officers could expect, upon average, to remain in one rank before advancing to the next—obtaining in the officer corps.

These figures are all largely self-explanatory, illustrating the pattern of service described earlier; but a few comments might, nevertheless, be made here. Thus it will be noted that early in 1740 the lieutenants-colonel of horse had seen, on average,

<sup>26</sup> Figures on the length of service in cornetries and ensigncies, since they were the first ranks obtained, are essentially the same in Tables 1 and 2; and do not of course apply in Table 3.

TABLE 3

YEAR	HORSE			FOOT				
	Lts-Col.	Majs	Cpts	Lts	Lts-Col.	Majs	Cpts	Lts
1740	21	22	17	14	27	26	19	11.5
1759	18.5	17.5	9	3	13	17	10	2
1767	16	14.5	8	4	17	19	9	6
1775	21	9	11	6	20	18	10	4
1786	20	18	9	3	21.5	18	7	2
1792	21	19	10	5	23	24	10	4

some 35 years of army service since first obtaining their cornet-cies; and the lieutenants-colonel of foot had likewise seen an average of 35 years of service since first taking a pair of colours, as obtaining an ensigncy was described. This was long service indeed, and it was matched in the lower commissioned ranks. For all ranks above the humble cornet and ensign, none of these statistics for such sheer long service were again to be equalled during the century. In 1740 too it had taken the lieutenants-colonel of horse an average of 21 years' service before being promoted to that rank; majors of horse had taken an average of 22 years to reach their majorities; while lieutenants-colonel of foot had, in 1740, spent an average of 27 years in the army before reaching that rank, and similarly the foot majors had achieved their majorities only after an average of 26 years' service.

The figures for 1740 were all high, the result of the long peace that had followed upon the Utrecht settlement; the army's size had been stable since the reductions that followed the 1715 Rebellion; and the officer corps as a whole, when the Spanish war broke out late in 1739, was a very experienced, long-serving body. In the horse, none of the figures just given was to be equalled again during the century; while in the foot it was only by the later 1780s that such figures were once again achieved. The influence of prolonged peace and of only the most limited augmentations had already set a trend in career-service experience. The slightly lower promotion rate evident in the horse in these statistics for 1740, as compared with the foot, was exceptional; during the rest of the century the service statistics and promotion rates were to be generally alike in the two arms.

The campaigns and augmentations of 1739-48 undid all

this, and by the early 1750s the army was much 'younger'—that is, the great majority of officers had much less experience of the service. By the mid-point of the Seven Years War promotion rates had sped up dramatically, reflecting not only wartime conditions—what with casualties, new-raising, and augmentations occurring—but also the expanded 'imperial' role of the army, with its greater number of corps and consequent need for more officers. The mid-Seven Years War figures set a trend for the rest of the century, reflecting the importance of the large size of the force kept standing, and its imperial commitments, to the career patterns and upward mobility of officers.

If in wartime speedy promotion tended to water down noticeably the experience of officers in their present commissions, nevertheless with the settled conditions of peacetime the figures once again always begin to rise: in 1774 for example, on the eve of the American Rebellion which would become a world war, the experience of the officers of foot in their present commissions—and it was the foot that would bear almost the entire burden of the war—was for most ranks greater than it had been at any time since the 1739 war. Our final figures for the early 1790s, just before the opening of hostilities against Revolutionary France and the great expansion of the army which then began, show the officer corps to have again accumulated more experience of the service than had been the case upon the outbreak of war in either 1756 or 1775; and among the field officers of foot there was more experience of service than had been the case since 1712.

Another trend in career patterns, already noted above, is apparent in the statistics: field rank—the lieutenant-colonelcies especially—was being attained after periods of service proportionately shorter than those spent on the lower rungs of the ladder. This illustrates the more speedy promotion rates obtaining among that minority of officers—the first of the four groups described above from which the officer corps was recruited—possessed of birth, wealth, and interest. Indeed it was common for the lieutenants-colonel to have no more service experience than had the majors.

All the above statistics illustrate strikingly the influence of war, with its concomitant expansion of the forces and consequent increase in the number of officers serving with the

regiments, upon the service experience of the officer corps in general; but it must be recalled that expansion was a short-lived phenomenon, and its effects must not be overrated. With the coming of peace the great majority of all new officers found themselves relegated to the half-pay list, as their units were broken.<sup>27</sup> In most of the new-raised regiments, furthermore, half of the officers—all the field officers and captains, and half of the lieutenants—were old soldiers either appointed from other corps or taken up from the half-pay list. Entirely typical were Manners's 56th, Anstruther's 58th, and Montague's 59th of Foot, all raw regiments raising from late December 1755; each was staffed with experienced officers at all ranks save for the ensigns, who were mostly young fellows, and save for a handful of junior lieutenants (one in the 59th, and four each in the 56th and 58th). In terms of experience of the service the lieutenants-colonel of the 56th, 58th, and 59th had by the autumn of 1756 served for twenty-eight, twelve, and twelve years respectively since obtaining their first commissions; the three majors had served twenty-four, ten, and eighteen years respectively; the captains of these regiments had served an average of 12.5, 11, and 12 years respectively; and the lieutenants (including the new men) had behind them an average of 3.5, 4.5, and 6.5 years respectively.<sup>28</sup> Compared with the rest of the foot in the army the service experience of these officers was no less than the average. Not even the practice of 'raising for rank' was likely to flood the officer corps with incompetents, since this was rarely attempted after the '45 Rebellion, its disadvantages being too well appreciated.<sup>29</sup>

What is striking about the statistics is the closely comparable service records of the captains and subalterns among all the regiments of each arm, in any period surveyed; the essentially similar service experience of each regiment's body of officers is apparent. There were no favoured units, in so far as service

<sup>27</sup> On the near-panic casting about for exchanges into older more established corps, which the merest hint of a peace would set off in new-raised regiments, see J. Shy, *op. cit.* 71-9, where several examples of this are given.

<sup>28</sup> WO 27/4.

<sup>29</sup> 'Raising for rank' involved granting to noblemen, or occasionally to a city corporation, the right to raise a new regiment largely at their own expense. When the corps approached full strength it was then taken on to the regular establishment and paid for henceforth by the state. The practice had only one real advantage: it produced a few

with the company or troop was concerned; and since dispersal in penny-packets was the common lot of the army, this essential homogeneity of service experience among the officers of company or troop grade contributed not a little towards bringing a fairly even experience to the training of widely separated units. The Dublin garrisons of 1773, new and old, conveniently illustrate this point. Among the old garrison which was replaced late in the spring of that year and sent out into county cantonments the average length of service of the captains and subalterns in their present commissions, together with the dates at which they had obtained their present ranks, are shown in Table 4.

			TABLE 4 Old Garrison, 1773					
			9th Foot			17th Foot		
Cpts	3	(1764-72)	Cpts	5.5	(1760-72)	Cpts	5	(1764-72)
Lts	4.5	(1760-72)	Lts	4	(1761-72)	Lts	5	(1758-72)
Ens	1	(1771-2)	Ens	1.5	(1771-2)	Ens	3	(1762-72)
			28th Foot			45th Foot		
Cpts	7	(1761-72)	Cpts	6	(1755-71)	Cpts	5.5	(1757-72)
Lts	5.5	(1761-72)	Lts	10	(1754-72)	Lts	4.5	(1761-72)
Ens	2.5	(1769-72)	Ens	4	(1763-72)	Ens	1.5	(1770-2)

The same figures for the new Dublin garrison which came in from county cantonments and replaced the old, in the spring of 1773, are given in Table 5. The average service in their present commissions of all of the captains in the old garrison was 6 years, and it was 5.5 for all the captains of the new; among the lieutenants of the old garrison the average was 6 years' service, and it was 6 years also among the lieutenants of the new; and where the old garrison's ensigns had served 2 years, on average, the new garrison's ensigns had served for 3 years. Among all twelve regiments only five groups—the captains of the 9th and

new units much more quickly than regular recruiting could, since the raiser's tenants were most often obliged to take service in his regiment. This made it a system especially successful in Scotland. Its main disadvantages were two in number: the mopping up of several hundred men, usually in one district, denied the old, well-trained corps the recruits they needed; and a considerable number of the officers in the new corps were nominated not by the usual methods but by the gentleman doing the raising (who himself normally got the full colonelcy of the corps, and thus the profits of proprietor and the advantages of patronage). The raiser would naturally nominate from among friends and relations, usually possessed of little or no experience but all as a body made officers overnight (hence 'raising for rank').



TABLE 5  
New Garrison, 1773

5th Foot			42nd Foot			54th Foot		
Capt	3.5	(1765-72)	Capt	5	(1758-70)	Capt	8	(1755-72)
Lt	6	(1758-72)	Lt	8.5	(1759-71)	Lt	6.5	(1759-72)
Ens	2	(1770-2)	Ens	4	(1761-72)	Ens	3.5	(1761-72)

55th Foot			62nd Foot			63rd Foot		
Capt	7	(1760-72)	Capt	4.5	(1759-72)	Capt	5	(1761-72)
Lt	5	(1755-72)	Lt	5	(1761-72)	Lt	5	(1760-72)
Ens	2	(1769-72)	Ens	3	(1768-72)	Ens	3	(1762-72)

54th, the former rather 'youngish' and the latter rather more experienced; the lieutenants of the 42nd and 45th, both rather more experienced than the norm; and the ensigns of the 9th, who were a bit young again—stand out; and of these only the lieutenants of the 45th were at all exceptional.

This general similarity was always the rule in the army. There were exceptions, but these were usually exceptions proving the rule. In 1740 for example, the promotion rates and dates of purchase among the captains and lieutenants of Dalway's 39th of Foot diverge noticeably from what was then normal through the rest of the army. The 39th's ten lieutenants had obtained their lieutenantcies after only 3.5 years' service as ensigns, on average, where the average figure for the army was 11.5 years; and half of the corps's lieutenants had served for only one year as ensigns, before obtaining promotion. The dates of the lieutenants' (and of the captains') commissions indicate what was occurring in the regiment. Six of the lieutenants had obtained their lieutenantcies in 1731 and 1732, within less than a year of one another; and six of the eight captains had obtained their captaincies in 1730 and 1731, within eighteen months of one another. There had been, quite clearly, a great wave of selling out and transfers among the captains and lieutenants serving with the corps during the period 1730-2. Why this was so is easily determined: after several years of easy service in Ireland the 39th had, among others, been sent late in 1726 to join the Gibraltar garrison, under Spanish attack. The 39th had stayed on at Gibraltar when, late in the autumn of 1730, it was ordered to proceed to Jamaica to deal with slave insurrection; and only in the spring of 1732 was the corps freed from this unexpected duty, coming home to Ireland. The officers of the 39th had been dismayed neither by the shells of

the Spaniards nor by the boredom of the Gibraltar garrison duty which followed. It was, rather, the likely prospect of death from tropical disease that had set them scrambling to sell or exchange, and this resulted in a massive intake of new men and promotion of old, those willing to risk yellow fever for rank.

Considering these several sets of statistics we cannot do other than conclude that the British army was, during our period, led by an officer corps of the most considerable experience, made up of men who, by and large, entered the service for life and got on by steady, competent service. This was careerism. Long service does not in itself, of course, imply any outstanding merit; but within the context of the several attributes of careerism and in light of the slow rates of promotion, a thorough acquaintance with their business and, surely, a capable performance of it must be conceded these men. Considering also the disadvantageous conditions in which the peacetime army always found itself serving, nothing but competence and sound proficiency among the regimental officers could have kept the majority of the regiments fit for service.

This conclusion is lent additional weight by the fact that the men appointed to the proprietary colonelcies of the corps were likewise, in the great majority of cases, soldiers of long experience of the service. The colonelcies were valuable, much-sought-after plums, and their disposal was a matter of weight in the patronage system by which high political interest was maintained. But however well born, however well possessed of interest, and however powerful politically were the officers—usually general officers—appointed, the fact remains that all but a mere handful of the colonels appointed during the eighteenth century were men of long years of service in the army. All three Georges regarded colonelcies as rewards for deserving officers of long service, and viewed with distaste the fact that patronage had also, upon occasion, some part to play in their disposal. The role of patronage was, however, firmly restricted by them—especially by George II—with results most clearly expressed in the following statistics. There were 293 colonels appointed during the years 1714-63. Of these, 18 had served over 45 years each on appointment; 63 had seen from 35 to 44 years of service, upon appointment; another 78 had served between 25 and 34 years, on appointment; and a further

90 had already served between 15 and 24 years, on appointment. More than half of the colonels had, therefore, served for at least a quarter-century before being given their colonelcies; and fully five-sixths of the colonels had, upon appointment, between 15 and 50 years of service behind them. Only 44 of the colonels—15 per cent—had seen less than 15 years' service on appointment, and of those most had served more than 10 years.<sup>30</sup> The conclusion is inescapable that only officers of long service and experience—many with experience of active operations—could, in the great majority of cases, aspire to a colonelcy while the first two Georges commanded the army. The same pattern prevailed (albeit with some further nod to political interest) during the first four decades of George III's reign, which takes us to the end of our period.

(b) MEN<sup>31</sup>

Where the great majority of the officers serving with the regiments were, as we have seen, men of no inconsiderable experience of the service, this was not the case among the non-commissioned officers, musicians, and private men over whom they exercised command. At no time during our period were men available in numbers sufficient to keep the corps recruited up to the strengths called for in the regimental establishments, while in the meantime considerable numbers of the men actually serving with the corps were mere recruits, as yet insufficiently trained to be masters of their business. It was with this chronic, two-pronged manpower problem—too few recruits to complete to the establishments, too many recruits

<sup>30</sup> J. Hayes, 'Officers', 115–17, 224. See also J. Hayes, 'Lieutenants-Colonel and Majors-Commandant of the Seven Years' War', *JSAHR* 36 (1958), 3–13, 38–9, where the author concludes (p. 12) of the thirty-three commandants of the corps that were the last to be raised during the 1756–63 war, that they too were mostly 'well qualified for their command'. He adds of the mid-century army, that 'there was in existence at this time a well-balanced, practised, professional body of officers' which could be drawn on to train and lead new-raised units.

<sup>31</sup> By 'men' we refer collectively, here and henceforth, to the NCOs (sergeants and corporals), musicians (drummers, trumpeters, hautbois, fifiers, and pipers), and private soldiers. A soldier with one year's service or less was generally deemed to be not yet sufficiently trained or disciplined to be trusted to perform all of the tasks and duties normally within the province of the 'compleat soldier'; and we follow this approach here, describing as recruits those men who had served for only that length of time or less. The basic-training scheme and timetable according to which recruits were brought along is described at length in Ch. IV.

among the men already with the corps—that the regiments had continually to contend; and both aspects of the problem, the latter especially, often caused the most severe difficulties for individual corps.

It is with the effects of the manpower problem most especially, rather than with its causes, that we are concerned here. Before dealing with the broad statistical dimensions of the problem and examining in detail the condition of the regiments that suffered most acutely from the problem, however, we offer a brief survey of the practices employed in the endless effort to keep the regiments up to strength.

Men were always needed; and while men already trained, or recruits accustomed at least to the initial or 'material' phase of the normal basic-training regimen (on which, see Chapter IV below) were much to be preferred, the rawest of lads fresh from the plough were always useful too, given the manpower problem. Several means were employed to obtain both sorts of men. The army got its recruits either by voluntary enlistment (which accounted for the majority) or by force. The best-known method of filling the regiments was, of course, the routine peacetime and wartime 'beating up' for volunteers carried on by the recruiting parties—a subaltern, one or two NCOs, and a drummer (to 'beat')—dispatched to likely or favourite areas direct from the regiments.<sup>32</sup> Recruiting parties were to be found touring the counties at all times and were especially common in winter, after the harvest, when idle hands were most likely to be found. It was by these parties that the majority of recruits were obtained, whether the parties were beating up for the old established corps or seeking greater numbers for newly raising regiments. Special Recruiting Acts were passed on occasion in wartime offering high bounties and short-term enlistments

<sup>32</sup> This activity was authorized by 'beating orders' (e.g. WO 26/29, p. 108), obtained from the War Office. Corps were authorized 'by Beat of Drum or otherwise to raise so many Men . . . as are or shall be wanting'; and magistrates, JPs, and constables were required 'to be assisting . . . in providing Quarters, impressing Carriages & otherwise as there shall be occasion'. The enlistment oath signed by every recruit and witnessed in the presence of a JP laid down the following qualifications for a soldier: he must be 'in no ways disabled by Lameness . . . but have the perfect Use' of his limbs, and he must not be a runaway 'Indentured Apprentice or Militia Man'. That—along with a height requirement of 5' 6" which was regarded only if recruits were plentiful and the need not pressing—was sufficient qualification for a red coat. T 1/572, fo. 100.

(usually for three years or for the duration of hostilities) to all who would come forward; but since normal enlistments before 1795 were for life, this practice, though productive of men in the short term, was not in the long run cost-efficient and so was infrequently used.<sup>33</sup> The other well-known method of obtaining men was by duress. Insolvent debtors could escape prison and persons capitally convicted could sometimes escape the noose if they volunteered to serve, but these were few in number.<sup>34</sup> Most of those obtained by duress were not criminals but came rather from the next category in the current scale of values—that is, 'all such able-bodied, idle, and disorderly persons who cannot upon examination prove themselves to exercise and industriously follow some lawful trade or employment';<sup>35</sup> and these the JPs and the constables took up and pressed into service. The Press Acts, which were in operation only during the years 1704–12, 1745–6, 1755–7, and 1778–9, hardly provided the most willing or able of recruits; and the main purpose of impressment was never simply to take up the rogues, vagabonds, and others socially undesirable but rather *pour encourager les autres*—to drive others to volunteer for fear of being pressed.<sup>36</sup>

Normal beating up, short-term listing, bounties, and the press produced in the great majority of cases raw men only, and these were good enough for the corps serving at home; but among the regiments serving abroad and among those told off

for service abroad, both in wartime and in peacetime, it was trained or partially trained men who were most wanted. The means most commonly employed towards this end was the device of the 'additional company', one or two of which were added to the strength of each foot regiment serving outside the British Isles in wartime.<sup>37</sup> The additional companies were not meant for active service and remained in Britain or Ireland; it was their purpose to serve as recruiting and training depots for their parent regiments overseas, which drew on them from time to time as circumstances required; and numbers of these companies were often temporarily brigaded (notably at Chatham, Stirling Castle, and at Charles Fort Kinsale), for an introduction to advanced drill.<sup>38</sup>

It was usually difficult to find sufficient men even at the best of times; but at peak war years and in sudden emergencies true dearth was experienced both by the regular recruiting parties and the additional companies, as competition from the militia and from new-raising regular regiments (not to mention the navy, the marines, and the artillery) made itself felt. On such occasions, therefore, since neither the additional companies nor the regular recruiting parties were able to reinforce their distant parent regiments quickly enough or with sufficient numbers, other schemes had to be put into play in order to obtain numbers of men who would arrive in the theatres with at least the basics of training behind them. One such scheme—resorted to in 1760–1, and again in 1793—was the augmenting of already existing Independent Companies and the rapid rais-

<sup>33</sup> Clode, ii, 24–7.

<sup>34</sup> A typical example of recruiting after this fashion appears in the Inspection Returns on the 1/60th Foot, which was reviewed at Spanish Town, Jamaica, in December 1783. The battalion was described as composed partly of 'Forcigners', partly of 'Draughts received from the 92nd Regiment' since disbanded, and partly of 'British and Irish sent from the Jails in England'. WO 27/52. See also Sir C. V. F. Townshend, *The Military Life of Field Marshal George, First Marquess Townshend, 1727–1807* (1901), 79, for a variation on this theme—pardoning deserters 'tho Condemn'd on Condition they afterwards go to the West Indies to serve his Majesty in the Troops there.'

<sup>35</sup> 18 Geo. II, c. 12, quoted in Clode, ii, 17.

<sup>36</sup> Clode, ii, 10–18, described the origins of impressment and the laws governing it; and he noted that the 'great principle of supply' during the eighteenth century 'was that of conscription limited to the Criminal and Pauper classes', not necessarily distinguishable to Clode. The most detailed of recent discussions are for Queen Anne's reign: R. E. Scouller, op. cit. 102–25, gives the history of the Press Acts of 1704–12, while A. N. Gilbert, 'Army Impressment During the War of the Spanish Succession', *Historian*, 38 (1976), 689–708, describes their actual operation in London and Kent. Scouller reminds us that impressment carried out under these Acts was 'the only form of conscription . . . to be imposed for the Standing Army prior to the First World War'.

<sup>37</sup> Additional Companies were not used during the Spanish Succession war, appearing first in 1727 when they were raised in corps on, or taken on to, the British establishment to prosecute the conflict with Spain centred upon the siege of Gibraltar. These were disbanded at the end of 1729 (WO 24/127, and WO 5/27, *passim*). Additional companies were raised again in 1744 and were retained until 1748, in the regiments serving in the Low Countries (WO 24/231). Late in 1755 additional companies were being raised again, and were mostly used as cadres upon which new regiments were built in 1756 (WO 5/42 and 43, *passim*). In late 1775 and early 1776 additional companies were again established to recruit for battalions serving in the Americas (WO 5/59, *passim*), and from 1779 for all battalions (WO 24/496). Only for the 1775–83 war have I seen references to additional companies in battalions on the Irish establishment; and these companies, although joined to Irish corps, were often recruiting in Britain (WO 4/93, pp. 116–17, and WO 5/59, *passim*). After 1793, 'recruiting troops' appeared in the cavalry for the first time.

<sup>38</sup> An excellent series of letters on the role and training of these companies is in WO 4/98, pp. 249–54.

ing of dozens more. Independent Companies (so called because they were unregimented) were always to be found about the British Isles and the plantations<sup>39</sup> doing jobs too simple (such as manning the fortifications in Britain), or too small (such as policing Bermuda), to require the services of marching regiments; and though composed for the most part of elderly and infirm Invalids they served, on these occasions, as organized and trained cadres into which sound but raw recruits might be put for processing.<sup>40</sup> The best of these new companies, when partially trained, were brigaded, forming new regiments quickly thereby;<sup>41</sup> and the rest served as a pool of replacements.<sup>42</sup>

Normal beating up, new-raising, the gaols, and the press all failed to provide men on the scale indicated at the outset of this discussion; and, although they were helpful, neither the additional companies nor the expanded Independent Companies were sufficient for the task. This left but one other method of obtaining men—lifting them from one unit not likely to see action immediately and transferring them into another unit already in the field, or about to go on service. This practice, known as 'drafting', was the most commonly used expedient for obtaining quickly large numbers of trained or partially trained men. Drafting was a commonplace, much more so than is usually credited; and since most (though by no means all) drafts were taken from corps serving in the British Isles and sent to corps under embarkation orders, or already serving abroad, it played a significant role in alleviating the manpower problem overseas

<sup>39</sup> Early in 1739, for example, there were thirty-one in Britain (four at Hull, four at Plymouth, three each at Pendennis Castle, Tynemouth, Landguard Fort, and on Jersey, two each at Chester, Carlisle, Sheerness, Tilbury Fort, and on Guernsey, and one in the Scillies). In the plantations there were seven more (four at New York, two in Jamaica, and one in Bermuda). Strength varied from 35 to 100 men, depending on the duty.

<sup>40</sup> Rex Whitworth, *op. cit.* 346-9; and Fortescue, *iv*, Pt. 1. 80.

<sup>41</sup> The quality of these regiments was none of the best. Calcraft, the army agent, described two such (Stuart's 97th and Grey's 98th, sent on the 1761 Belle Isle expedition) as 'a corps and sort of men you never saw in Europe and if you had would never wish to see elsewhere'. Rex Whitworth, *op. cit.* 349.

<sup>42</sup> Writing home from the army in Germany in May 1761, Lt.-Gen. George Howard was casting about for replacements for the British grenadier companies. Standards had fallen off, he admitted—so much so that he felt, like Kite, that 'if there is here and there a good Independent, born to be a great man and fit for a Cap, he may be sent.' NAM Townshend Pprs., 6806/41/5, Soest, 26 May 1761, fo. 1.

—but in so doing it was drafting that, next to the simple and normal dearth of men, contributed most effectively to perpetuating the manpower problem among most of the regiments at home. Because it had so serious an effect on the corps, drafting deserves to be illustrated in some detail, and its variety indicated.

The most common type of drafting, as we noted above, was that practised among the old established regiments embarking for (or already upon), foreign service. Late in 1743, for example, the 4th, 14th, 16th, 18th, 36th, 44th, 46th, and 48th of Foot, all in Britain, each gave up 100 men—one-seventh of their rank and file—as drafts for the battalions in Flanders.<sup>43</sup> These were sizeable numbers, but this was a light draft. We noted earlier the drafts made to fill up the 44th and 48th, when those corps went on active service from Ireland in 1755: each got 256 drafts by taking 100 men each from the 11th and 20th in England, and seventy-eight each from the 21st, 10th, 26th, and 28th in Ireland.<sup>44</sup> Losses on this scale—one-quarter of their men, from the Irish corps—had they occurred in the field, would have rendered the units *hors de combat*; as it was, from the point of view of training the drafted corps were no longer fit for service. Typically, therefore, when in May 1775 the 54th Foot was reviewed at Cork it was reported 'not by any means a good Regiment nor fit for service' since it, like several other Irish corps, had recently been 'much drafted for the late Embarkation' of reinforcements to Boston.<sup>45</sup> Typical again was the 17th Foot, seen at Dover in May 1788; having in October past lost 150 men as drafts, the corps was now composed chiefly of recruits unable to perform any part of the regulation drill.<sup>46</sup> Drafting among the old corps moving between the British Isles and foreign stations could be as harmful to units coming home as to those departing since, as we noted earlier, it was a common practice to leave men behind to fill up newly arriving corps.

This was only the beginning of the damage that drafting could inflict on the old-established corps: they were, for example,

<sup>43</sup> Atkinson, 'Jenkins' Ear', 289.

<sup>44</sup> See above, pp. 49-50.

<sup>45</sup> WO 27/35.

<sup>46</sup> WO 27/61.



drafted to form experienced cadres around which new regiments might be built. When in 1737 Oglethorpe's 42nd Foot was raising for service in Georgia, the 25th Foot at Gibraltar was drafted to the tune of 240 men for Oglethorpe's cadre, thus reducing the 25th to 'a skeleton'.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, when at the end of 1739 six new regiments of marines were raised, one-third of the private men from each of eighteen old marching battalions then serving in Britain were drafted to fill these new units; this was an exceedingly hard blow, especially since half of these old corps had only just arrived in Britain from Ireland and were themselves employing every means to recruit up to British establishment strength.<sup>48</sup> Early in 1741 a further four new marine regiments were raised, and so too were seven new regiments of foot; and for these fifty men were drafted from each of fourteen regiments then in Britain, a bearable draft this time.<sup>49</sup>

Another blow regularly delivered was the drafting of a regiment's additional companies. When the 50th–59th of Foot were raised in Britain early in 1756, the additional companies of sixteen old battalions (together with further drafts made from the bodies of those battalions) were used as cadres around which the new units were built. The 50th Foot, for example, was raising at Norwich from mid-January; and to that place early in February went the four additional companies, plus further drafts, taken from the 7th Foot at Dover and from the 30th Foot around Croydon. Similarly, the 52nd Foot raising at Coventry got at the same time the four additional companies, plus drafts, from the 8th Foot at Canterbury and from the 33rd Foot lying about Gravesend.<sup>50</sup>

We have already seen how the Independent Companies were drafted, in emergencies, to fill up the regular regiments. The process occasionally worked in reverse. Midway through

<sup>47</sup> Atkinson, 'Early Hanoverians', 140, 147.

<sup>48</sup> Atkinson, 'Jenkins' Ear', 286–7. The corps so drafted were the following (those italicized being lately landed Irish corps): 12th, 23rd, 34th—into Wolfe's 1st Marines; 4th, 24th, 31st—into Robinson's 2nd Marines; 6th, 13th, 29th—into Lowther's 3rd Marines; 21st, 27th, 36th—into Wynyard's 4th Marines; 3rd, 11th, 32nd—into Douglas' 5th Marines; 8th, 15th, 16th—into Moreton's 6th Marines.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* 288.

<sup>50</sup> WO 5/43, pp. 73–4, 78–9, 163. No sooner had the 52nd's drafts arrived at Coventry than detachments were told off to aid the local civil power in 'Safely Securing such Men as shall be Impressed for His Majesty's Service', the irony of which may not have been lost on them.

1734, for example, when six such companies were formed for Jamaica, 108 men were taken from each of the six regiments then serving at Gibraltar. This draft took away one-sixth of the strength of the corps there (the 2nd, 7th, 10th, 14th, 25th, and 29th); and considering the difficulty of recruiting for Gibraltar this was a draft which could only slowly be made good.<sup>51</sup>

A very common practice was to draft the whole of the rank and file from new-raised units and send them into other corps; and indeed some units were raised for no other purpose than to be repeatedly milked in this fashion. The 93rd Foot, for example, raised in 1760 and disbanded in 1763, was several times 'turned out into the Barrack Yard, and all the Best men picked out of it', as its major complained; 'All my Schemes and all my Pains about your Regiment is gone to the Devil', he informed his colonel.<sup>52</sup> From mid-1793 to mid-1795 many new corps were 'ab initio, expressly rais'd for the purpose of being draughted', after which the unit was re-raised 'upon the Ashes of the First', as the Adjutant-General described the process.<sup>53</sup> One such was the 114th Foot which, in June 1795, was marched to Chelmsford and there broken up into eight equal parts which were drafted into the 3rd, 14th, 19th, 33rd, 38th, 53rd, 63rd, and 88th of Foot.<sup>54</sup> With the French war going badly by 1795 the largest such draft of the century was set in motion late that summer, when one-quarter of all the foot regiments were in effect simply turned into a recruiting pool for the rest. In that year all the regiments numbered above the 100th (there were 131 at the time) were drafted into those below that rank, the ultimate aim being to raise the establishment of each of the 100 surviving regiments to 1,000 rank and file. The first twenty-two corps were built up to this strength in 1795, according to the following scheme. The 17th, 32nd, 39th, 56th, and 67th were sent from Britain to Ireland, where they joined the 93rd and 99th; and there the whole of the 104th, 105th, 106th, 111th, and 113th of Foot, already in Ireland, were drafted into these corps. Meanwhile the new second battalions of the 2nd and 29th of Foot were drafted into the 92nd and 94th, both serving in Guernsey; and the 66th at Gibraltar, together with

<sup>51</sup> Atkinson, 'Early Hanoverians', 146.

<sup>52</sup> WO 3/14, pp. 4–5, 16.

<sup>53</sup> J. Hayes, 'Officers', 182–3.

<sup>54</sup> WO 3/13, pp. 252–3.

the 6th, 35th, 64th, and 70th, all just home from the West Indies and on their way to Gibraltar, were soon filled up by the drafting of all the young corps already in that garrison. In Britain itself eight regiments were built up to the new strength by the drafting of full battalions (Table 6).

TABLE 6

Corps built up	Corps drafted
8th Foot	1,84th Foot
31st Foot	2,25th Foot
37th Foot	89th Foot
38th Foot	88th Foot
43rd Foot	Londonderry Regt
44th Foot	Royal Glasgow Regt
48th Foot	Dublin Regt
55th Foot	Loyal Sheffield Regt

It will be noted that the 88th and 89th, designed to survive in the master plan, were temporarily crushed in order to feed other units, and that the 2/84th survived where the older 1/84th was drafted. The vagaries of logistics accounted for this; and other problems intervened too. It was thought wise that the 'draughtable Sheffield Regt.', raised and quartered in the town after which the corps was named—a very bad, disaffected Place', in the opinion of the Adjutant-General—should be marched to Doncaster to be drafted there; in case any of the men (or of the Sheffield citizenry) should find such usage objectionable.<sup>55</sup>

The major drafting policy of 1795 was launched in response to the crisis situation in which the army found itself early in the struggle with Revolutionary France.<sup>56</sup> Wholly drafting new corps was one thing, given such a situation; but doing the same to old-established corps was quite another, indicating a major failure in the recruiting system. This occurred during the American War of 1775–83, when the logistics of supplying replacements to units serving in the West Indies and North America proved beyond the means of anyone. Of the seventy-

nine battalions of marching foot to serve there, eleven—one-seventh of them—were wholly drafted, their men distributed among other units while their officers and NCOs returned home to rebuild the corps anew. Two (the 18th and 59th) were wholly drafted in 1775; three (the 6th, 50th, and 65th) were drafted in 1776; another (the 14th) was drafted in 1777; three more (the 10th, 45th, and 52nd) suffered the same fate in 1778 (as did the 16th Light Dragoons); another (the 26th) went in 1779; and the last (the 16th) was drafted in 1782. When one of these corps, the 10th Foot, was reviewed in England two years after coming home to rebuild, it was still in very poor condition: it had not recruited so much as half its authorized establishment, and 75 per cent of the men it did have were as yet no better than recruits. The 10th in addition was suffering from an 'unaccountable Desertion', its old NCOs come home in the surviving cadre were 'almost totally worn out', and it was not yet trained sufficiently to be fit for service.<sup>57</sup> In this condition the 10th was typical of all regiments heavily drafted, and obliged to rebuild with recruits. Indeed so insidious was the whole process of drafting that, when he reviewed the 19th Foot at Dublin in May 1779, Lt.-Gen. Lancelot Baugh reported the regiment to be in excellent order, adding of the 19th that, 'not having Suffered by being Drafted, the Men are remarkably tall, well made, and Set up and think well of themselves, a Circumstance that will insure their good behaviour on all occasions.'<sup>58</sup>

These then were the practices employed to alleviate the manpower problem, and by which the problem was exacerbated. The statistical dimensions of the problem reveal its very considerable extent, which the practices just described suggest; and two sets of figures describe the normal dimensions of the problem, against which the more severe cases may be measured.<sup>59</sup> Firstly, during the years from the mid-century down to 1795 the combined effect that death, desertion, discharges, drafts, and periodic augmentations had upon the regiments of

<sup>55</sup> The 1795 drafting can be traced in WO 3/14, pp. 127–80, *passim*.

<sup>56</sup> The critical condition of the army, c. 1795, is the theme of R. Glover, *Peninsular Preparation. The Reform of the British Army, 1795–1809* (Cambridge, 1963). In order to describe the Duke of York's reforms, Glover exaggerates considerably when describing the supposed ill-trained nature of the regiments, as will become apparent here in later chapters.

<sup>57</sup> WO 27/45.

<sup>58</sup> WO 27/44.

<sup>59</sup> The figures in the following paragraphs were calculated from the voted annual strengths of the regiments, which appear in the Establishment warrants (WO 24); from the reports on the numbers of men in individual regiments, and their periods of service, which appear in the Inspection Returns (WO 27); and from the regimental

foot serving in the British Isles was to oblige them to recruit an average of 1.5 per cent of their strength every month in peacetime, and 2.1 per cent per month in wartime; while the cavalry regiments recruited an average of .9 per cent of their strength each month in peacetime, and 1.5 per cent per month in wartime. Annual intakes on this scale represent the most considerable numbers of recruits. Secondly, during the same period, the regiments of foot serving in the British Isles were able to recruit to an average strength of 90 per cent of their authorized establishments in peacetime, and to 83 per cent in wartime; while the cavalry regiments averaged 95 per cent of their authorized establishments in peacetime, and 94 per cent in wartime.

Three broad patterns or cycles in the manpower problem are worthy of note. To begin with, it will have been observed in the figures just given that the horse was much more stable than the foot: there were always fewer recruits serving with the cavalry, and cavalry regiments were always kept up quite close to their establishment strengths. This stability was the result of four factors: the cavalry regiments were only rarely subject to drafting; the cavalry suffered very little from desertion because the troopers (who were cut from a somewhat better cloth than were foot soldiers) were better paid and had a busier and less boring regimen than the foot, and consequently were subjected to a much less brutal discipline; mounted regiments were not shunted about abroad in peacetime, and so escaped some of the evils described in the previous chapter; and lastly, the number of new mounted corps raised in wartime was never great, in proportion to the number already existing, thus keeping that arm from being watered down as much as was the foot in wartime. It was largely due to the fact that the foot, conversely, was prey to all these factors, that there were always many more recruits with the foot corps than with the mounted units; and these same factors caused the actual strengths of the foot regiments to lag more noticeably behind their authorized establishments than was the case in the cavalry.

As would be expected, it is clear too that in wartime there was a falling off in effective strengths and an increase in the

returns which give detailed effective strengths (as opposed to the strengths in the stuffed muster rolls) and which appear in the Monthly Returns (WO 17). Evidence surviving before the mid-century is too scanty to permit detailed calculations.

proportion of recruits with the regiments; and this is a second pattern in the manpower problem. Table 7 illustrates quite clearly the war-peace cycle, averaging the strengths of all the regiments serving in both Britain and Ireland.

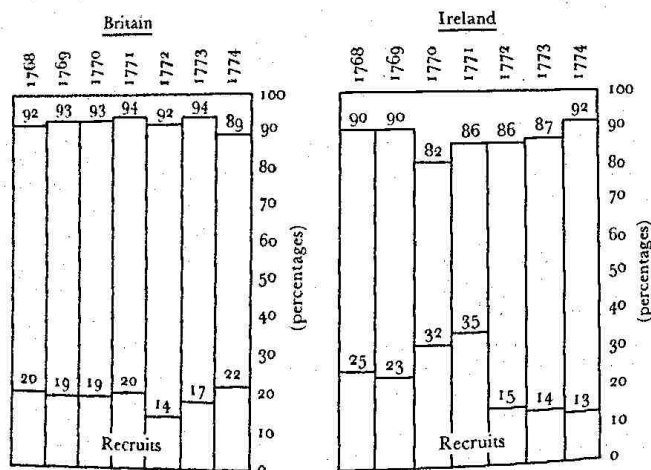
	Average Number of Recruits as a Percentage of Actual Strengths		Average Actual Strengths as a Percentage of Establishments	
	(%)		(%)	
1750-4	Cavalry	9	Cavalry	95
	Infantry	16	Infantry	93
1755-63	Cavalry	17	Cavalry	94
	Infantry	25	Infantry	86
1767-74	Cavalry	13	Cavalry	95
	Infantry	20	Infantry	90
1775-85	Cavalry	19	Cavalry	95
	Infantry	27	Infantry	80
1786-93	Cavalry	12	Cavalry	93
	Infantry	22	Infantry	88

A third pattern is observable, finally, in the variations between the two kingdoms. Whereas there was never any noticeable difference between the cavalry regiments serving in Britain and those in Ireland, either in proportions of recruits in their ranks or in actual strengths as percentages of their establishments, the contrary was true among the foot. There were dissimilar recruiting rates in the foot in the two kingdoms throughout the period; and (for reasons not yet understood) the manpower problem became less severe in Ireland about 1773, and more severe in Britain. During the years 1750-73 there were proportionately more recruits in the foot regiments serving in Ireland than in those in Britain; and at the same time the actual strength of Irish corps, as percentages of their establishments, was generally less than that of their British counterparts. This whole pattern reversed itself around 1773, and henceforth it was the British corps that found themselves understrength and bringing along more recruits.

These general long-term trends tend to distort what was often, over shorter periods and at the level of individual corps, a very irregular pattern. Two sets of figures illustrate these variations, and are shown in Charts 1 and 2. The charts illustrate the manpower patterns in the foot regiments in Britain and in Ireland during the same years 1768-74 and 1784-90, years which are especially interesting because they immediately preceded, and followed upon, a long and bloody war. Chart 1 shows a general stability in the foot regiments serving in Britain, 1768-74, while in Ireland the years 1770-1 stand out, showing a notable increase in the proportion of recruits in service and a significant falling off in the actual strength of regiments in relation to establishments. What these patterns illustrate is the 'levelling' of the establishments of the British and Irish foot, put into effect in 1770, as we saw earlier: in that year the Irish regimental establishments were raised by nearly 50 per cent, and it took

CHART 1: 1768-74

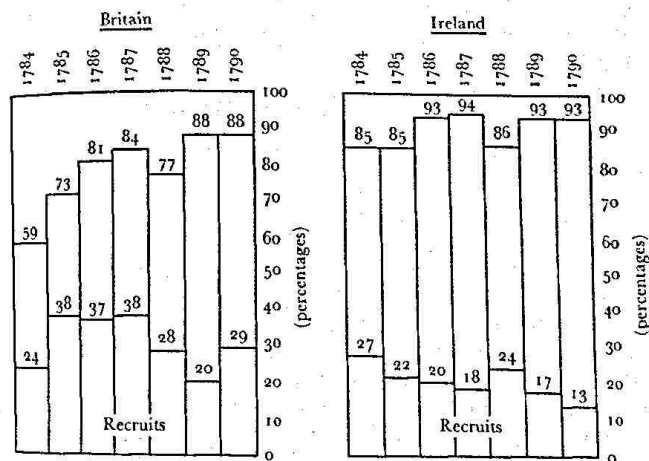
(The upper figure shows the average strengths of the battalions, as a percentage of establishments; the lower shows the average percentage of recruits in the battalions)



the Irish corps two years to recruit up to their new numbers.<sup>60</sup> Chart 2 shows quite clearly the harmful effects of the 1775-83 war upon the foot, and illustrates the length of time taken to rebuild. It also shows how very considerable a part of the army's strength consisted of recruits during most of the 1780s, notably among those corps brought home to Britain.<sup>61</sup>

CHART 2: 1784-90

(The upper figure shows the average strength of the battalions, as a percentage of establishments; the lower shows the average percentage of recruits in the battalions)



<sup>60</sup> In 1770 the establishment of a marching regiment in Ireland was increased from 297 to 442 men, while at the same time the establishment of a marching regiment in Britain was reduced from 497 to 442 men, to facilitate the equalizing of establishments. During 1771 a light company of forty-four men was being formed in each British battalion, and during 1772 the Irish battalions followed suit. On the formation of these companies (usually dated, mistakenly, in 1770), see WO 4/88, pp. 5-6; WO 55/416, pp. 269-70; and WO 27/21-6, *passim*.

<sup>61</sup> From 1784 until 1788 the establishment of battalions both in Ireland and Britain was at 392 men, while from 1788 onwards it was at 430 men. How heavily the foot had suffered is indicated—as Chart 2 shows—by the fact that in 1784 the average battalion in Britain stood on only 59 per cent of its full establishment, and that 24 per cent of these men were recruits. By 1786 these figures had been raised to only 81 per cent and 37 per cent respectively.



The annual Dublin garrisons, old and new, always serve as interesting barometers—and as a view in microcosm—of the state of the manpower problem. In 1769 for example, the manpower situation in the regiments composing the old garrison which broke up late that spring and dispersed into county cantonments, and in the regiments that came in from dispersed quarters to form the new garrison, was typical of that prevailing in the army in general; and it illustrates too the occasional irregularities always to be met with. As in Table 7, the figures in Table 8 indicate firstly the number of recruits in each regiment expressed as a percentage of the regiment's actual strength, and secondly the actual strength of each regiment expressed as a percentage of the authorized establishment.<sup>62</sup>

TABLE 8

Old Garrison, 1769		New Garrison, 1769	
Average no. of recruits (%)	Percentage of Establishment (%)	Average no. of recruits (%)	Percentage of Establishment (%)
45th	29	27th	50
49th	25	28th	27
50th	17	42nd	32
51st	22	46th	26
56th	4	53rd	25
63rd	14	54th	20
	88		84
	94		94
	96		94
	90		95
	91		88
	91		91

Of the corps forming the old garrison in 1769, the 50th, 51st, and 56th had been serving in Ireland since the 1763 peace, while the 49th had arrived from North America in 1764, the 63rd from the West Indies in 1765, and the 45th from North America in 1766. All these corps, save perhaps for the last-arrived 45th, had had ample time to recruit; and all save the 45th had a lower proportion of recruits on their strength, and stood on a higher percentage of the establishment strength than was the average condition that year among all the foot regiments in Ireland. The 56th had been out of the British Isles for only two years since its raising in 1756, a fact which accounts for the low percentage of recruits in its ranks.<sup>63</sup> The new garrison, meanwhile, presents a rather different picture, especially as regards recruits. None of these corps had been long

<sup>62</sup> WO 27/17, *passim*.<sup>63</sup> R. Cannon, . . . *Fifty-Sixth Foot* (1844), 10-15.

in Ireland: the 27th, 28th, 42nd, and 46th had arrived home from North America in 1767, while the 53rd and 54th had come to Ireland from the Gibraltar garrison in 1768. Wastage abroad made good by energetic recruiting since coming home accounts for the relatively high proportion of recruits with these units, all of which (save the 54th) had a higher proportion of recruits in their ranks than the Irish average for that year. That 50 per cent of the men with the 27th Foot were recruits was due to that corps's heavy losses at Martinique and Havana, followed by drafting before leaving America.

The new Dublin garrisons of 1771 and 1774 once again point trends quite clearly (Table 9).<sup>64</sup>

TABLE 9

New Garrison, 1771		New Garrison, 1774	
Average no. of recruits (%)	Percentage of Establishment (%)	Average no. of recruits (%)	Percentage of Establishment (%)
5th	33	24th	17
28th	16	35th	6
34th	42	40th	16
44th	46	49th	14
49th	27	53rd	10
62nd	39	57th	14
	76		91
	88		88
	82		95
	90		92
	89		93
	80		92

The large number of recruits and the marked lag behind establishments, in 1771, show the heavy recruiting going on in the Irish foot as it was endeavouring to meet the new higher establishments set in 1770. The large numbers of men (of whom relatively few were recruits) with the regiments in 1774 shows the results of four years of stability following the 1770 augmentations, and shows too the fruits of eleven years of peace. As usual there were exceptional cases. The 34th Foot had come home in 1769 after seven years' hard service in the West Indies, West Florida, and the Louisiana country; and just before sailing for Ireland half the corps had been drafted to flesh out units newly arriving in America. The 62nd too had only recently come home from the West Indies; and the 5th—although it had been in Ireland for more than a decade—had lately been drafted to fill up departing corps.

<sup>64</sup> WO 27/23, *passim*, for 1771; and WO 27/32, *passim*, for 1774.

As Table 7 indicates, it was normal for 16–27 per cent of the men in a regiment of foot to be recruits, as it was for 9–19 per cent of those in a cavalry regiment; and our sample Dublin garrisons show that there were always a few corps containing even larger proportions of recruits. Wherever the normal figures were surpassed the regiments so situated were normally rendered unfit for service. This was one of the hard realities of the service in the eighteenth century: sound corps were struck down repeatedly and capriciously as the rigours of duty, the immediate needs of corps less fortunately situated, the press of peculiar circumstances or the simple operation of chance came into play. The manpower problem—too few recruits to complete to the establishments, too many recruits among the men already with the corps—was a permanent feature in the life of the army, against which the corps were obliged continually to struggle. Failure to recruit every month at the rates described meant that strengths would begin to lag ever more noticeably behind establishments, necessitating eventually a large-scale transfusion from other corps; and any such transfusion inevitably meant a commensurate increase in the number of recruits somewhere else in the army. This was a permanent situation because the material condition of the century ensured that there were always running sores in the army—the 38th Foot, for instance, rotting in the West Indies from 1716 to 1765, where men died almost as fast as they were shipped out—and that there would occasionally be bleeding wounds difficult to staunch by any means. Examples of corps suffering acutely from the manpower problem are legion; and it will be sufficient here to conclude with but a few individual cases and finally with a general case illustrating the problem at its worst and, hence, the bounds beyond which the manpower problem could not be alleviated.

The fumbling of bureaucracy often contributed to the fate of regiments already put in distress by the press of service, as in the cases of the 69th Foot in 1788 and the 53rd Foot in 1791. The 69th came home from West Indian campaigning at the 1783 peace and, informed (erroneously) that it would be disbanded, discharged most of its men. Not until 1784—by which time 'the remains were old and worn out objects for the Chelsea Pension'—was a beating order issued to the 69th, so that the corps had

'not only lost that time in Recruiting but all the Men from the Reduction of the Army that were fit for Service were reinlisted into other Regiments, and Recruits became very scarce from these Circumstances.' As late as 1788 some 36 per cent of the men with the regiment were recruits; and not until 1789 was it deemed fit once more for active service.<sup>65</sup> The 53rd, meanwhile, came home to England in August 1789 after thirteen years' service in the Canadas, and by June 1790 the corps had recruited up to 78 per cent of the establishment strength. Then a year of troubles began for the still-rebuilding regiment. Between June 1790 and June 1791 the 53rd discharged 100 worn-out men and sickly recruits, and took in 150 new men; but since five of these months, from July to November, were spent by the 53rd serving as marines on board the fleet (the corps was then quartered about Plymouth for the following two months 'where the Season of the year and the Climate . . . precluded a possibility of bringing forward our Recruits'), and because the corps was then (late in February) sent off on the long march for new quarters at Glasgow, it had proved impossible to train the regiment. When seen by a reviewing officer at Glasgow in June 1791, the 53rd was naturally unfit for service; the regiment was up to strength but 50 per cent of its men were recruits whom the War Office had not given the field officers the time to train.<sup>66</sup>

Other corps found themselves with large numbers of recruits and with similar training problems. In the early months of 1755 the 5th and 7th of Foot, among others, came over from Ireland and landed at Bristol and Bideford respectively. Put upon the British establishment and quartered so as to recruit up to that strength, both were reviewed in the spring. The 5th (seen at Salisbury) had by 3 May recruited to 64 per cent of the new establishment, with 49 per cent of its men recruits; the 7th (seen at Bristol) had by 12 May reached 55 per cent of the new establishment, and 48 per cent of its men were recruits. Both were reported 'too full of Recruits to be as yet fit for Service', as were several other ex-Irish regiments similarly situated; and

<sup>65</sup> WO 27/63. Major Yorke thought it 'a Duty I owe to myself & the Officers' to point all of this out to Maj.-Gen. Charles Lyon, when he reviewed the 69th at Dublin in 1788.

<sup>66</sup> WO 27/39. Major Mathews was 'mortified' by all of this, and he requested that the reviewing officer would point out the circumstances to the C-in-C.

these corps would remain unfit for service for more than a year to come. Their condition, as Irish corps newly arrived upon the British establishment, was not extraordinary, this being as we have seen the common lot of Irish corps upon mobilization before the equalization of establishments in 1770.<sup>67</sup>

A few other examples should complete the picture. When in 1767 the 45th Foot was seen in Ireland, after twenty years of American service and but one year at home, it stood on only 57 per cent of the establishment and some 48 per cent of its men were 'Recruits who are not yet taught their exercise'. The 45th was unfit for service.<sup>68</sup> In 1786, when the 27th Foot was seen at Limerick, 60 per cent of its men were 'weakly Recruits... who had not sufficiently the use of their Arms'; and of these 'a Considerable number' were 'too Small and slight for any Service'. The 27th too was unfit.<sup>69</sup> The 37th Foot, seen at Fort George Ardersier not long after coming home from Minorca, was described in 1773 as being made up of 'Mostly growing Boys', without 'strength enough for any very hard service'.<sup>70</sup> In 1790 the 31st Foot, at Tynemouth, stood on 78 per cent of the establishment and 27 per cent of its men were raw: it 'consists chiefly of Young Men, and numerous Recruits,' said a reviewing officer, 'and in this State no Corps can be reported fit for immediate active Service.'<sup>71</sup> Every year there were always several corps in this condition.

The figures in the tables above show that war put a strain on the manpower problem by increasing the demand for soldiers. As long as a good part of the army was campaigning in theatres close to home—Germany, the Low Countries, the Iberian peninsula, and the Mediterranean—and as long as that part of the army committed to distant theatres—North America and the West Indies—was not kept excessively large for several successive campaigns, and had between itself and the British Isles open and assured lines of communication, then the strain on manpower could be accepted and the worst effects kept at bay. Only once during our period did these conditions, which were essentially strategic and logistical, not obtain; and the result for the army was catastrophic. We refer of course to the

<sup>67</sup> Both are in WO 27/3.

<sup>69</sup> WO 27/58, Pt 1.

<sup>71</sup> WO 27/66.

<sup>68</sup> WO 27/11.

<sup>70</sup> WO 27/27.

war of 1775–83, in which seventy-nine regular battalions—two-thirds of the total number in service at the height of the war—were deployed in the Americas.

During the 1775–83 war, government attempted to subdue a rebellion by conquering a map; the venture was risky in the first place and, when the Bourbons intervened and sent their fleets into the Atlantic and Caribbean, it was doomed to failure. Almost from the outset it was accepted in London that there would be too few troops available with which to prosecute such a war; great numbers of German troops were hired and loyalist corps were raised, therefore, without which the war could not have been undertaken.<sup>72</sup> But if government put faith in auxiliaries there were some soldiers, aware of the army's chronic manpower problem, who saw from the start the futility of using force in such a venture; and none was better placed than Edward Harvey who, as Adjutant-General, was daily made aware of the problem and knew where such an attempt must lead. It was Harvey's professional opinion, voiced as early as 30 June 1775, 'that attempting to Conquer A[merica] Internally by our Ld. Forces, is as wild an Idea, as ever controverted Com<sup>n</sup> Sense'—a 'Truth' which, he was certain, 'will be in the end Apparent.'<sup>73</sup> On 6 July, referring to the massive reinforcement sent to a beleaguered Gage at Boston, Harvey stated the position once again:

'It is expected yt ye last of the Troops from Ire<sup>d</sup> wou'd reach Bost<sup>n</sup> ab' ye 10th of June. Probably soon after, they will get Elbow Room, as the Troops will not be contented to eat Salt Beef in yt D—'d Oven. News is expected ab' ye 3rd Week of this Month, yt G[age] has freed himself from ye B.kade, but what then?'<sup>74</sup>

Three weeks later, on 31 July, Harvey observed that in London 'The Ton is Vigour & Conquest'; but he added, 'Where's the Means?', and answered his own question by saying 'Not by

<sup>72</sup> The decisive influence of Bourbon naval operations has most recently been demonstrated by P. Mackesy, *op. cit.*, and by J. R. Dull, *The French Navy and American Independence* (Princeton, 1976). D. Syrett, *Shipping and the American War. A Study of British Transport Organization, 1775–1783* (1970); N. Baker, *Government and Contractors. The British Treasury and War Supplies, 1775–1783* (1971); and R. A. Bowler, *Logistics and the Failure of the British Army in America, 1775–83* (Princeton, 1975), discuss in depth some of the logistical difficulties.

<sup>73</sup> WO 3/5, pp. 36–7.

<sup>74</sup> WO 3/5, p. 40. My italics.

Land, by Brit. Troops. The Fund is not Sufficient, take my word for it. A Driblet is going over. What then?<sup>75</sup> This was practical and informed opinion: the Adjutant-General's appreciation of the military situation was sharp, and was proved correct when it became impossible to keep the army in the Americas up to strength, let alone to augment it very considerably. Twelve regiments, as we noted earlier, became so weak that they had to be wholly drafted into the others, themselves understrength; and as the regiments straggled home after the 1783 peace the extent of the manpower collapse was immediately apparent. It had in fact been evident from 1778. Before that year the manpower patterns in the foot in the British Isles had continued rather as they were during the years preceding the war (as in Chart 1 above): that is, the average strength of a regiment had been about 90 per cent of the authorized establishment, while on average about 17 per cent of the men in each corps were recruits. These figures began to slide in 1776, and the slide became quite noticeable by 1777. In 1779 27 per cent of the men in the average regiment of foot in the British Isles were recruits, while the average strength of the regiments had fallen to 85 per cent of the establishments. By 1781, 29 per cent of the men were recruits and, very alarmingly, strengths had fallen to only 71 per cent of the establishment. By 1784, as the regiments were coming home, the figures were 26 per cent recruits and 71 per cent of the establishment; and henceforth they followed the patterns shown in Chart 2 above.

These figures were appalling; and the conditions that they reflect may be seen in a summary of the manpower situation in ten regiments quartered in Britain in 1784, randomly selected from those that came home to Britain in 1783 (Table 10).<sup>76</sup> Most of these regiments had been reduced to small hard cores of veterans; but because their numbers were so weak, and because there were so many units similarly situated and now all competing for great numbers of men, it would take several years to rebuild. The 23rd Foot, for example, had in its ranks only eleven recruits when seen in May of 1784; but its 'ranks' contained only 103 private men, scarcely enough to fill three

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 49. On 29 July, referring to the news of Bunker Hill, Harvey frankly told a friend that 'Hon' is gam'd in N.A. with too much Blood.'

<sup>76</sup> WO 27/51, *passim*.

TABLE 10  
Average no. of recruits (%)      Percentage of Establishment (%)

22nd	16	49	(seen at Chatham, 18 June)
23rd	8	30	(seen at Doncaster, 14 May)
24th	50	68	(seen at Edinburgh, 7 July)
27th	59	33	(seen at Kidderminster, 7 June)
28th	22	55	(seen at Claydon, 22 May)
38th	17	60	(seen at Stafford, 5 June)
40th	24	52	(seen at Plymouth Dock, 27 Aug.)
43rd	27	48	(seen at Hilsa, 2 Aug.)
62nd	42	59	(seen at Dundee, 20 Sept.)
63rd	10	40	(seen at Bury St. Edmunds, 3 May)

companies. The 27th Foot, in June 1784, had only ninety-nine private men left in its ranks—and of these nearly eighty were recruits, making its plight even worse than that of the 23rd.

Regiments continued to straggle home in this condition until as late as 1788, since some were left behind in garrison in the Canadas and the West Indies; there was little that the recruiting parties could do, and there were only a few sound corps from which drafts could be sent out. As Chart 2 shows, it was not until 1786 that most of the regiments serving in Ireland were restored to order, and not until 1789 that corps in Britain were back up to scratch. Thus had Harvey's expectations been fulfilled: and thus the limits of the possible were delineated, and the effects of crossing over those limits were brought home. The manpower problem was always difficult enough in peacetime; by pushing the system beyond endurable limits in an ill-advised pursuit of political goals which were probably unattainable, the military power of Britain was rendered almost negligible for most of the 1780s, indeed almost up to the outbreak of the French Revolution. Until nearly the end of the 1780s much of the British Army consisted of recruits, in very under-strength regiments. No doubt the Revenue suffered.

#### (c) MUNITIONS

The condition of the arms carried in the regiments was frequently bad—often atrocious; and both the quantity and quality of the ammunition and ancillary equipment were, in general, worse. Since this munitions situation not only was to have a baneful effect upon the training of the corps in general



but was, in many cases, to render individual units unfit to take the field, its salient features must be considered here.

The quarter-century of conflict preceding the Utrecht settlement had seen violence carried to an unprecedented scale, creating for the munitions makers a seller's market. The agents and surveyors of the Ordnance had encountered shortages (both real and artificially created), high prices, monopoly, and competition from allies in the foreign munitions markets; and the result was that, by Utrecht, the army and the Ordnance held a variety of non-standardized and often shoddy weapons.<sup>77</sup> In order to avoid any repetition of the unwarranted expense and confusion which had characterized British munitions procurement during these years, the Board of Ordnance instituted in 1715 the 'Ordnance system of manufacture' whereby, instead of purchasing completed firearms as heretofore, the separate component parts were contracted for among several manufacturers. These parts—locks, barrels, brass furniture, and so forth—were delivered to the Tower and to Dublin Castle from where, as occasion required, they were sent to private gunsmiths for roughstocking and setting up. By this system a quantity of parts and firearms sufficient to cater to the army's normal requirements was kept on hand in stores, and the gunmakers were deprived of the opportunity to fleece the Treasury in time of crisis.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, the Ordnance was able by this system to enforce sealed patterns, supplying these to the parts makers and final 'setters-up'; and from 1722 the

<sup>77</sup> Of the many monographs dealing with most aspects of arms technology, only the most useful are listed here. The best background survey on the course of arms evolution before Blenheim is G. R. Mork, 'Flint and Steel: A Study in Military Technology and Tactics in 17th-Century Europe', *Smithsonian Journal of History*, 2 (1967), 25-52; while H. C. B. Rogers, *Weapons of the British Soldier* (1972), 51-89, and H. L. Blackmore, *British Military Firearms, 1650-1850* (1967), 17-39, give the best available background material dealing specifically with British arms. The confused arms situation, c. 1700-15, is described in H. C. B. Rogers, op. cit. 83-9, in H. L. Blackmore, op. cit. 38-44, and in C. Walton, *History of the British Standing Army, 1660-1700* (1894), 425-36. D. Chandler, *The Art of Warfare in the Age of Marlborough* (1976), *passim*, contains some useful material.

<sup>78</sup> The system is best described in H. L. Blackmore, op. cit. 39-42; in A. D. Darling, *Red Coat and Brown Bess* (Ottawa, 1970), 15-19; and in D. W. Bailey, *British Military Longarms, 1715-1815* (1971), 9-12. Blackmore is considered the standard reference on 'Brown Bess', but Darling and Bailey—used in conjunction—are preferable. Darling deals with his subject in great detail, but, writing as a collector, tends to impose a system of classification on individual members of a family of arms not designed or thought of after any such fashion. Bailey is full of good sense and is a useful antidote to the usual approach, which is that of arms collectors.

colonels of corps—who were still free to take from government the cash value of their regiments' arms, rather than taking from the royal armouries the actual arms themselves, and to contract on their own for cheaper replacements elsewhere—were obliged to purchase firearms built after the established pattern.<sup>79</sup> The Ordnance system survived well into the nineteenth century and, although low peacetime budgeting occasionally forced the government to import large quantities of foreign arms in times of crisis, it was generally successful.

The standard pattern Ordnance-issue flint firelock, the Land Pattern Musket or, more familiarly, the 'Brown Bess', appeared in three successive variants during our period.<sup>80</sup> The first of these was phased in slowly, issued as corps found it necessary to replace older sets of arms, and as the custom of private purchase by colonels fell into disuse. Until about 1730 the majority of the regiments were carrying a variety of pre-Land Pattern firelocks, but these—'structurally a combination of Dutch features from earlier muskets and more modern ideas taken from sporting weapons and from French military arms'—were of the same calibre as the Land Pattern firelocks, and were comparable ballistically.<sup>81</sup> Contemporary Englishmen thought the Land Pattern firelocks to be the best service firearm available in Europe, a view with which most modern authorities agree; they were certainly better than the Prussian pieces and were stronger (if heavier and less easy to handle) than those of the French.<sup>82</sup> But despite the fact that the evolution of military-firearms design had by the third decade of the century placed

<sup>79</sup> A. D. Darling, op. cit. 16-19. Chandler, *Warfare*, 79, gives a good example of the activities of a colonel's agent (of the 16th Foot), searching London for contract arms in 1717.

<sup>80</sup> These were the Long Land Pattern, which flourished c. 1720-90, but was being phased out from 1768; the Short Land Pattern, made standard issue throughout the army in 1768, but versions of which had been carried by the dragoons since c. 1720; and the India Pattern, manufactured originally for the East India Company's forces and in construction somewhat inferior to the Short Land Pattern, commandeered into service in 1793 and manufactured in great numbers for the regular army until 1815. A fourth variant, the New Land Pattern, was introduced in 1802: it slowly superseded the other patterns during the Napoleonic Wars. Variations between (and within) these several patterns are best treated in H. L. Blackmore, op. cit., D. W. Bailey, op. cit., and A. D. Darling, op. cit., all *passim*. Land Pattern muskets were all of .75 bore.

<sup>81</sup> D. W. Bailey, op. cit. 13. The best survey of pre-Besses and proto-Besses is in H. L. Blackmore, op. cit. 42-4, and plates 5, 10-13.

<sup>82</sup> E.g. Lord George Townshend recalled that during service with Wolfe's army at Quebec in 1759 'the Superiority of our Musquets over the French Arms were generally

a generally fine weapon in the hands of the British Army, advantage was dissipated by a Board of Ordnance which conformed rigidly to the peacetime policy of parsimony, of which the army was the principal victim. It was the firm policy of the Ordnance to issue new sets of arms only *in extremis*—that is, either when a regiment would no longer accept the risk of loading its current set with blank cartridges, let alone with ball, or when an already ill-armed unit was about to embark upon active wartime service. The average life expectancy of a set of firelocks was about eight to ten years, after which they should have been returned to stores for salvage and rebuilding; but since the Ordnance preferred to wait until one or the other of the two above-mentioned eventualities had actually arisen, before acting, a great many corps were always exceedingly ill armed. This deserves some illustration, since the situation was always common and often incredible.

A typical set of arms was that belonging to the 3rd Dragoons, seen at Rochester in 1754. The 3rd—'a Good Regiment'—'want much to be Supplied with a New Sett of Arms', it was reported. The corps's firelocks had been issued in small lots each year from 1744 through 1747; and although a last lot had been received in 1751 most were now in bad condition. Another typical set of arms was that belonging to the 31st Foot, serving in England in 1773. The 31st had been completely rearmed in 1762 and now, eleven years later, 173 of its firelocks were reported still in good condition while 162 were in 'bad' shape.<sup>83</sup> There were always a great many corps armed in this fashion. What 'bad' meant, the following examples illustrate. Some two-thirds of the firelocks belonging to the 61st Foot, when in garrison in 1777 at St. Philip's Castle, Minorca, were 'bad'—that is, they 'would not last two Days firing from the Works in

acknowledged both as to the Distance they carried & the Frequency of the Fire, driving them from Their Bushes—& holding them at a great Distance as Circumstances required.' This suggests a better quality of powder, not of arms (Kent RO Amherst MSS 073/22). The best study of the eighteenth-century French Army's regulation longarms is the series of booklets published collectively as J. Boudriot, *Armes à feu françaises* (Paris, 1961–3). Cahier 10, 'Le fusil modèle 1717 et le système 1728–1734', is most useful on the establishment of sealed patterns and royal arsenals for the production of government firearms, with which early British practice can be compared. On the Prussian firelocks, see P. Paret, *Torck and the Era of Prussian Reform* (Princeton, 1966), 14–15, 97, 271–3.

<sup>83</sup> WO 27/3 and 27.

case of a Siege'. The firelocks of the new 71st Foot, when seen at Edinburgh in 1759, were mostly 'bad' too; while the corps was being reviewed 'some few Mistakes happen'd, occasion'd by some of the Mens Pieces going off as they Presented.' Like those of the 71st, the firelocks of the 11th Foot, seen in 1774, must have inspired fear in the men: during a review 'some Firelocks [were] going off when loading—and some upon the Men's Shoulders'. At a 1785 review the 22nd Foot, otherwise well drilled, declined to put on a display of volley fire: 'None could be perform'd, on account of the very bad state of the Arms', reported the reviewing officer, who concluded that the 22nd would be fit for service only 'when supplied with Arms'.<sup>84</sup>

When news of this sort reached the Ordnance the records show that, in the majority of cases, there would be two or three years of heel-dragging before action was taken. Thus the arms of Bury's 20th of Foot were, in 1753, reported to be mostly worn out; and although the corps was 'well Deciplin'd' it could not be considered fit for service until 'Supply'd with Sufficient Arms'. It took the Ordnance two years to issue a new set to the 20th.<sup>85</sup> When seen at Kilkenny in mid-1774, the firelocks of the 17th Foot were all 'clean, but bad'; the reviewing officer was informed that these arms had been 'received in 1768 and reported to be thin and defective when received'. The Ordnance had turned a blind eye for six years. A year later, in June 1775, the 17th was still carrying these defective arms.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>84</sup> WO 27/38, 6, 30, and 54 respectively. The Ordnance, cheeseparing, occasionally took advantage of corps so situated by palming off upon them second-rate stores. In mid-1787 the 44th Foot's firelocks had been 'Received new very lately'; but they were 'not good, being the Arms bought in Holland during the [last] War' (WO 27/59). In 1785 most of the firelocks of the 58th Foot were in 'good' condition, but a reviewing officer reported that 'the Regiment ought to have a complete set of New Arms' because those they had were 'not the usual Arms of the Infantry, being some Inches shorter than the common, and not all of a length, having been delivered from the Garrison Stores at Gibraltar' (WO 27/34). Late in 1756 the 23rd Foot, home from the Minorca disaster, was rearmed with 'Firelocks of different kinds'; and the 23rd, accordingly, was in Feb. 1757 as yet unable to go through the arms exercises or the firings (WO 27/41). In late 1754–early 1755 two corps new-raising in America, Shirley's 50th and Pepperell's 51st of Foot, were sent inferior firelocks. Shirley's got 1,000 with 'single Buzle Locks, Nose bands & Wood Ramsrolds', and Pepperell's 1,000 old 'Dutch with Nose-band & wood Rammers'. The locks were reported 'wore out and the Hammers soft' [i.e. giving a poor spark] R. Chartrand, 'The 50th (Shirley's) and 51st (Pepperell's) Regiments of Foot', *Military Collector & Historian*, 27 (1975), 172–4.

<sup>85</sup> WO 27/3.

<sup>86</sup> WO 27/32 and 35. On the morning of 17 June 1775 the 52nd Foot, which had been

With several corps armed after this fashion the army was apt to find itself, on the eve of war, ill prepared to take the field. Random surveys for 1755 and 1774 show this to be true. Of six regiments (the 7th, 8th, 11th, 12th, 20th, and 37th of Foot) seen in England between April and October 1755, for example, the 20th had just been rearmed and the 11th (whose firing had been 'indifferent . . . probably occasion'd by the badness of their arms'), was expecting 'new ones hourly'. The arms of the other four corps were all bad: those of the 7th had last been issued as long ago as 1739, and those of the 37th in 1742; and while the drill of the 8th was 'Excessively well perform'd' and that of the 12th was 'Extream Fine', neither could be considered fit for service until rearmed.<sup>87</sup> It was the same story in 1774. Of six regiments randomly selected (the 17th, 34th, 35th, 55th, 57th, and 63rd of Foot) among those seen in Ireland between May and July of that year, all were exceedingly ill armed. The firelocks of the 17th, as we noted above, had been defective in manufacture. All the firelocks of the 35th, issued eight years previously, were bad, while of those belonging to the 55th two-thirds were bad. Among the other three corps only the firelocks of the new light companies (raised and armed in 1772) were any good, while all the rest were unfit: thus 351 out of 390 stand of arms in the 34th were bad, as were 351 out of 390 stand in the 57th, and 328 out of 377 stand in the 63rd.<sup>88</sup> None of these corps could fight with firelocks in this condition, and training with such weapons was both dangerous and difficult.<sup>89</sup> Cavalry pistols—in .56 calibre for the Horse and .65 calibre

in America for nine years, was issued a new set of arms, badly needed, on Boston Common—and went into action with them that afternoon at Bunker Hill. This was no doubt the Ordnance's record for eleventh-hour issues.

<sup>87</sup> WO 27/3, *passim*.

<sup>88</sup> WO 27/32, *passim*. A 'stand' of arms consisted of a firelock and a bayonet which fitted it. Bayonets were made to a pattern by contractors and, when a firelock was set up, bayonets were sent out with the other parts; since they, like the barrels to which they were attached, varied slightly in dimensions, pairs were matched by the setters-up, creating a 'stand'.

<sup>89</sup> Much of the problem could have been averted if government had made provision for an armourer on the establishment of each corps. The Prussian regiments each had one for this purpose. In 1756 Jeffrey Amherst, like a few other colonels, himself paid the salaries of two such to serve with his 15th Foot; and this bore fruit, his lieutenant-colonel reporting in 1757 on the excellent musketry of the corps due in part to 'the good Order our Arms are kept in, owing I think in great measure to our own Gun Smiths . . . a thing so necessary that I am amaz'd there is not an establishment for an adequate

for the Dragoons—were manufactured according to the Ordnance system too, although surviving examples indicate that colonels contracted more frequently among the private gun-makers than did their fellow colonels of foot. Pistols were merely an accessory arm in the cavalry and were little used or abused, although the light dragoon corps (raised from 1759) spent much time practising skirmishing tactics with them. Since they were so little used they were not subjected to much hard service, and it is rare to find a report on a cavalry corps with bad or faulty pistols.<sup>90</sup>

Not only worn-out firearms but ammunition too presented a problem for the corps. Powder (which was manufactured at both private and government mills, and issued from the Royal Laboratory at Woolwich), was issued in sizeable quantities.<sup>91</sup> From 1715 to 1755 the marching battalions in Britain each got in peacetime sufficient powder for 45,000 firelock charges (priming included) per annum; from 1764 to 1768 the issue was down to 31,500 charges per battalion p.a.; during the peacetime years between 1769 and 1786 the issue was back up at 42,000 charges p.a.; and from 1786 to the end of our period the scale was 35,000 charges per battalion p.a. In Ireland, from 1769, each battalion in 'county cantonments' got powder for 35,000 charges p.a., while those in the Dublin garrison (where mock actions were normal training routine) each got 60,000 p.a. These variations reflected both changes in the establishment strengths of the battalions and government efforts to cut costs; but the issue, though not princely, was enough to provide every infantryman with powder enough to fire from 60 to 120 charges

number in every Corp' (Kent RO Amherst MSS 013/4). Instead, the Ordnance periodically sent out officers of the Royal Artillery 'to examine the Arms of those Regiments who were upon the late Reviews [in this case, of 1734] reported to be out of Order'. SP 41/12, Secretary at War to Gen. Evans, 4 Jan. 1739/40.

<sup>90</sup> The army's horse pistols are best dealt with in H. L. Blackmore, *op. cit.* 40, 47, 63-4, and plates 8 and 18. L. H. Gordon, 'The British Cavalry & Dragoon Pistol', *CJAG* 5 (1967), 111-18, and 6 (1968), 10-13, is well illustrated; and the text, if skimpy, indicates the main points in the development of cavalry pistols through our period.

<sup>91</sup> The statistics on the quantities of powder, flints, and ball which appear in the next two paragraphs have been collected from the following sources: WO 3/26, pp. 165-6; WO 4/130, pp. 382-4, 4/83; p. 364, 4/87, p. 60 (plus 4/88, 89, 92, 93, 94, 125, and 137, *passim*); WO 55/348, pp. 10, 16, 55/411, pp. 140-1, 163-4, 55/416, pp. 127, 155, 174, 193; Notts. RO Staunton of Staunton MSS, DDS. 49/10; Berks. RO, D/E.Li.05, fo. 45; *Standing Orders and Regulations for the Army in Ireland* (Dublin, 1794), 95-6; and Capt. G. Smith, *An Universal Military Dictionary* (1779), 36-7, 58, 254.

flints, likewise, was often wretched: they were either too chalky or had in them too much iron. The colonel of the 46th Foot, serving in the war of 1775-83, 'lamented that the valour of his men was often "rendered vain by the badness of the pebble stone".'<sup>100</sup>

It was, therefore, fairly common to find a regiment of foot armed with old and worn-out firearms, and it was normal for the ammunition issued to all corps, horse and foot, to be inferior, in short supply, or both. These things were all to have a serious effect upon the training and readiness of the corps. There were in addition three other munitions-related problems which, since they too affected the training and firepower of the regiments, should also be considered.

Where the Prussians had shown the way from very early in the century by issuing to their infantry ramrods made of iron instead of wood, thereby speeding the rate of fire, the British were slow to follow this lead. It would appear that a combination of factors—economy, and difficulty in preparing a strong but tensile steel alloy—made for conservatism here.<sup>101</sup> Not until the 1750s were steel rods fitted by the Ordnance to all new Long Land firelocks, and not until 1770 were all new Short Land firelocks so equipped.<sup>102</sup> Several regiments in both Britain and Ireland had been issued firelocks fitted with iron ramrods during the 1720s (the earliest known case occurred in 1724), but these issues were not continued during the 1730s and earlier 1740s.<sup>103</sup> During the later 1740s and henceforth, firelocks returned to the armouries for repairs were usually fitted with steel rods at the same time; and from 1748 onwards corps were selected at random and irregularly—as stores and finances

<sup>100</sup> R. A. Bowler, op. cit. 150-1.

<sup>101</sup> Rods were made of both iron and steel, and their slow and erratic issue may have been due in part to varying metallurgy, producing varied results. Writing in 1726, Henry Hawley, then colonel of the 33rd Foot, had the following to say in favour of the standard wooden rods, and he probably echoed wide sentiment in the army: 'The iron rammers the Foot are coming into are very ridiculous . . . for if they have not some alloy of steel they stand bent and cannot be returned. If they have the least too much steel then they snap like glass.' He noted too that they rusted easily and got stuck in the tailpipes of the firelocks. 'I would stick to the wooded rammers,' he concluded. P. Sumner (ed.), 'General Hawley's "Chaos"', *JSAHR* 26 (1948), 93.

<sup>102</sup> A. D. Darling, op. cit. 21; H. L. Blackmore, op. cit. 46-7; and D. W. Bailey, op. cit. 15.

<sup>103</sup> A. D. Darling, op. cit. 21, and H. L. Blackmore, op. cit. 47.

permitted—to have the whole of their arms converted.<sup>104</sup> By the mid-1750s the general sentiment was clearly in favour of metal rods,<sup>105</sup> and although as late as 1776 part of the army at Boston still had wooden rods, most had gone by 1763.<sup>106</sup>

Although the self-contained paper cartridge—a short paper tube, twisted and tied shut at each end and containing a ball and a measured charge of powder—had been taken up by the whole of the army during Queen Anne's reign, it was not until the mid-1730s that the speedy practice of both loading and priming from cartridges was adopted. Before then, the British soldier carried on his right hip not only a case to hold his cartridges but also a bottle-shaped flask known as a primer. The flask contained finer-grained priming powder for sprinkling in the pan of the lock, since fine grains took the spark and ignited faster than did the more heavily granulated powder in the main charge cartridges. Of the several drill regulations that appeared early in the century (in 1708, 1711, 1716, 1723, 1727-8, and 1740, each of which is discussed in Chapter III below) only the last provided for priming directly from the cartridge itself; the others followed a sequence of loading motions which involved, first, the priming of the pan from the flask and only then (once the flask had been put back in place, and the muzzle of the piece brought up close to the soldier) was the cartridge taken from its case, torn open with the teeth, the charge poured down the barrel and the paper and ball stuffed down after it. Like the use of the metal ramrod, the trick of priming direct

<sup>104</sup> E.g. early in 1748 the colonels of the 13th, 20th, 31st, and 36th of Foot were instructed that they should 'immediately send up to the Office of Ordnance 200 Firelocks of each Regt. in Order to be fitted with Iron Rammers, and that when the same were returned to the Respective Regiments they Should send up 200 more of each Regiment, and continue so to do, till, all the Firelocks of these Corps should be compleated with Iron Ram Rods' (WO 55/409, p. 75). Many similar orders went out during the 1750s (e.g. WO 55/349, p. 79).

<sup>105</sup> Review reports and private publications show the changed sentiment. When the 3rd Foot was reviewed in England in 1754 the men were observed to 'Load very slow': 'it was an extream Cold day, and they have Wooden Rammers', said the reviewing officer. As early as 1740, when the 6th Marines were raised, a subaltern in that regiment complained of its being issued wooden ramrods. He thought them 'enough to disconcert the best battalion of Infantry that ever went into the field in the firings; I have seen forty men at common exercise and there were twelve rammers broken in firing six rounds, by which it is plain that they are very unfit to go into action with.' Lt. Terence O'Loughlin, *The Marine Volunteer* (1766), quoted in C. Field, *Britain's Sea Soldiers. A History of the Royal Marines and Their Predecessors*, i (Liverpool, 1924), 73.

<sup>106</sup> A. D. Darling, op. cit. 21.



from the self-contained cartridge sped up the rate of fire, and so was an important innovation. In this the British were about as up to date as the Bourbon armies but, once again, they lagged behind the Prussians.<sup>107</sup>

Wooden rammers and priming flasks slowed the rate of fire; and yet a third weak link in the munitions chain was the cartridge case, slung at the right hip from a belt worn over the left shoulder. These cases—made of leather, with a weather-proof flap, and containing a wooden block drilled to receive the paper cartridges—were contracted for by the colonels of corps with funds provided by government; and, since the colonels customarily profited by ordering shoddy cases (and by ordering them as infrequently as possible), they were often either in disrepair or absent altogether. If government practised economy on lead shot, it was on the cartridge cases that the colonels and their agents did likewise; and examples of this abuse are legion. Seven-eighths of the cartridge cases worn by the 42nd Foot in 1775, though new, were of bad construction, 'not being deep enough to Contain Cartridges with Ball'. The 42nd campaigned extensively in America from 1776 to 1783 and, when seen at Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1784, all these cases had been 'wore out on Actual Service' and were beyond repair.<sup>108</sup> Only half of the men in the 33rd Foot had cartridge cases in 1775; the rest, it was reported, 'were lost in Germany'—twelve years earlier, in 1763.<sup>109</sup> The cases worn in Shirley's 50th and Pepperell's 51st, in 1755, were too small; and they contained blocks so small that the cartridges would not fit the holes, while there was not 'substance of the Wood to widen them sufficiently, the leather scanty and bad likewise'. The cases belonging to the

<sup>107</sup> British military dress and accoutrements, despite the plethora of works on these subjects for later periods, have nowhere been studied in detail for the period c.1689–1735. I have seen no illustrations of primers or cartridges in these years, nor have I seen detailed illustrations of the cartridge cases of the same period. On the contrary, detailed studies of the dress and accoutrements of the French Army of this period have been made, and might provide grounds for comparisons. The French soldier carried a small cartridge case in which there were ten or twenty paper cartridges, each with a measured charge but without any shot; these charges were backed up by a large powder flask, used in case all of the cartridges were expended. A smaller flask contained the priming powder, while a small bag held the supply of ball. The self-contained cartridge became regulation in France c.1725–30. See L. Rousselot's series of plates with accompanying texts, *L'Armée française* (Paris, 1962–7), plates 19, 79, 93, and 99.

<sup>108</sup> WO 27/37 and 52.

13th Foot in 1768 were all bad, not having been replaced since receiving them at Gibraltar, eleven years previously.<sup>110</sup> In 1778 the 36th Foot, having been in Ireland for three years since returning home from the West Indies, had among its men only 180 good cases; of the rest belonging to the regiment, 319 were 'bad' and 311 were missing altogether.<sup>111</sup> The effects of foreign service upon such shoddy materials, whether in wartime or peacetime, were serious. When the 29th and 31st of Foot came home from the Canadas in 1787, where they had been for nearly two decades, they were in poor condition. The 29th was thirty cases short and the rest were useless; and while the 31st had 150 good cases, all the rest were wanting.<sup>112</sup> Regiments in which the men had no cartridge cases, or no proper cartridge cases in which to keep their ammunition, were from the standpoint of training and active service at a serious disadvantage, since the musketry drill of the period was designed around the ready availability of ammunition—and that necessitated cases.<sup>113</sup> That this one item of equipment should have been so generally bad in the army is a sad comment on the care with which the regiments were maintained.

Finally, little need be said with regard to the edged weapons—the swords and sabres carried by the cavalry and the hangers worn by the foot—since these seldom presented difficulties. The heavy, straight-bladed, basket-hilted swords used universally by all types of British cavalry (save light dragoons) were ordered for all regiments in 1707, and the general pattern

<sup>109</sup> WO 27/35.

<sup>110</sup> WO 27/12 and R. Chartrand, art. cit. 172.

<sup>111</sup> WO 27/41.

<sup>112</sup> WO 27/61.

<sup>113</sup> Light infantrymen frequently loaded not with cartridge but with loose or patched ball carried in bullet bags, and carried large powder horns for charging and priming. They argued that cartridge cases and shoulder straps were an encumbrance, interfering with their rapid motions; but in fact the horns were more of an affectation than they were utilitarian. Lt.-Gen. the Earl of Cavan, after considering horns and bullet bags (in 1777), concluded correctly that their use 'must be confessed to be very dilatory and inconvenient': the soldier had to load from two places rather than the single self-contained cartridge; there was paper for wadding immediately available only with cartridges; the proper charge could not easily be measured; and priming from a horn could be dangerous if a weapon had hung fire, since the horn might blow up once in contact with the priming pan. Cavan, therefore, would 'not hesitate to pronounce, that a Man with Cartridges will fire at the least twice, before a Man who is provided as above, can fire once'. WO 27/37, 32nd Foot.

remained in use until 1788.<sup>114</sup> In the interim the only significant modification in general design occurred at about the mid-century, and consisted in the lengthening of the blade from 30-4 inches to 35-9 inches, and the gradual replacement of double-edged blades with single-edged—both changes reflecting the increased tactical emphasis on giving the point or thrust, rather than laying about with less-effective sideways cuts. Swords were no concern of the Ordnance but were bought by the colonels from private manufacturers: most blades were of Solingen or Toledo manufacture earlier in the century but later came increasingly from the Birmingham cutlers, while the hilts (which varied greatly in detail and quality) were made in England, in Ireland, and in Scotland especially. The light dragoons, meanwhile, carried a lighter, somewhat shorter weapon, without the large basket hilt and with a noticeably curved blade—the sabre. Before 1788 these were of regimental pattern, more so than the swords of the heavies, and they were built for slashing and cutting—the style of fighting expected of light horsemen.

The weapons of both types of cavalry, heavy and light, were standardized in 1788, after a sword or sabre from each regiment was sent to the Adjutant-General's office for testing; it was intended to 'fix upon one, for the general use of the whole'.<sup>115</sup> The result was the 1788 pattern light cavalry sabre (which was improved upon in 1796), and a slightly modified heavy sword with a half-basket hilt (again modified in 1796).<sup>116</sup>

Swords lasted a very long time: typical were those of the 10th Dragoons in 1754, all in good condition though acquired in 1740-1, and so too were those in the 11th Dragoons in 1754, even though many had gone into service with the corps as long

<sup>114</sup> The best detailed discussion (with fine illustrations), is A. D. Darling, 'The British Basket Hilted Cavalry Sword', *CJAC* 7 (1969), 79-96. See also A. N. Ingram, 'Mid-Eighteenth Century Cavalry Swords', *JSAHR* 29 (1951), 30-2, for some variations.

<sup>115</sup> WO 3/7, pp. 1-2.

<sup>116</sup> These improvements were the work of Gaspard Le Marchant, an expert swordsman who had made a study of military swordsmanship and had recently produced the army's first sword-drill manual (on which, see pp. 250-1). On the new pattern swords, see R. H. Thoumine, *Scientific Soldier: A Life of General Le Marchant, 1766-1812* (1968), 39-45, and J. d'Arlington, 'The Pattern 1796 Light Cavalry Sabre', *CJAC* 9 (1971), 127-34, which has fine illustrations.

ago as 1735.<sup>117</sup> It was in fact extremely rare to find defective swords in any corps at any time in the century, in so far as strength and serviceability were concerned.

The other edged weapon common in the army—the light, short-bladed, small-hilted sword known as a hanger—was carried by all British infantrymen until 1768 and by the grenadiers until 1784.<sup>118</sup> A survival of the sidearm carried by the foot during the previous century, it was at best no more than a secondary defensive weapon and, at worst, a useless encumbrance kept in service almost entirely for aesthetic and traditional reasons.<sup>119</sup> Throughout our period, orders had repeatedly to be sent out to oblige the soldiers actually to wear them; but only in peacetime were they much used, most general and field officers permitting the corps to put them in store when upon campaign.<sup>120</sup>

It is fair to say that the view most often advanced in the general histories of the age and, consequently, the impression most widely held among non-specialists, is that the British Army of the eighteenth century was officered by inexperienced and often indifferent amateurs; that its ranks were filled for the most part with men who, for a variety of reasons, were long-serving (and long-suffering) professionals; and that it was well armed. Our study of the condition of the corps shows, clearly, that these impressions are ill-founded. The army was, in fact,

<sup>117</sup> WO 27/3.

<sup>118</sup> The most detailed discussion is A. D. Darling, 'The British Infantry Hangers', *CJAC* 8 (1970), 124-36.

<sup>119</sup> 'Tis soldierlike and graceful for the men to have swords', observed Col. Henry Hawley in 1726, admitting current taste; but he thought them nevertheless a useless hindrance, for 'when are they ever used in the field or in action?' Sumner, 'Chaos', 93.

<sup>120</sup> As early as October 1711, general orders given out in the 'Camp of Marchenne' in Flanders ran as follows: 'Whereas Sev' Regim<sup>ts</sup> have no Swords its expressly Ord<sup>d</sup> that ye Sold<sup>rs</sup> be provided w<sup>th</sup> them against ye taking ye feild.' BL Add. MS 29, 477, fo. 8. Even in the Highland regiments, where good broadswords were issued to the men largely in deference to their supposed national pride in such arms, they were neglected. The men of the Black Watch (42nd Foot), rid themselves of their swords as early as the Seven Years War, in America: as the lieutenant-colonel of that corps said, 'the Highlanders on several occasions declined using Broad Swords in America; that they all prefer'd Bayonets; and that Swords for the Battalion Men, tho' part of their dress and Establishment are incumbrances'. WO 27/35.

The several arms peculiar to the Highlanders, not mentioned above, are dealt with in A. D. Darling, 'Weapons of the Highland Regiments, 1740-1780', *CJAC* 8 (1970), 75-95.

officered by men of the most considerable experience, the great majority of whom got on by application; the bulk of the other ranks consisted of men of short service, of whom a significant proportion were generally recruits; and the arms carried in the regiments—especially in the foot—were frequently unserviceable and often unsafe, while the supply of ammunition in peacetime was quite insufficient for proper training. Such was the actual condition of the corps, dispersed about the British Isles and the overseas stations and garrisons.