

All-Class Military Service in Russia: Draft and Discharge in the 1870-1890s

Rudnik S.N.

Saint Petersburg Mining University
Saint Petersburg, Russia
rudnik7@yandex.ru

Abstract—The history of compulsory military service of all classes in the Russian Empire still remains insufficiently studied. The Charter of 1874 provided for numerous privileges for recruits and family status benefits, which excused from military service. The article touches upon this aspect of military service, analyzes the complaints of relatives of recruits to various authorities, including the emperor.

Keywords—*compulsory military service; charter; recruits; presence; complaint; senate; emperor; family status benefits*

I. INTRODUCTION

The compulsory military service (nowadays it is called duties) in Russia has almost 140 years of history. It dates back to January the 1st, 1874, when the Emperor Alexander II signed a manifesto and the "Highest Personal Decree of the Governing Senate" and approved the Charter on compulsory military service, Article № 1 of which reads as follows: "The defense of the throne and Fatherland is the sacred duty of every Russian obedient citizen. Male population is subject to military service." [1].

This event was of great importance. Many contemporaries put him on a par with another great event of the era - the abolition of serfdom. Thus, to compulsory military service - one of the most serious duties for the common people, above all for peasants came to an end. Since that moment the sons of merchants and nobles, who had previously been excused from military service, were recruited along with young peasants. They recruited those who were 21 years old, to the army for 6 years and 9 in reserve, to the navy service for 7 years in active service and 3 years in reserve. Despite the fact that the new Charter prohibited the replacement of a recruit with a "hunter" (a person willing to serve) and a monetary redemption (acquisition of recruitment receipts, which excused from service), as was it before, the new legislation on military service was of democratic character and merciful in relation to a recruit and his family.

The contemporaries of the era of reform, in publicistic writings of those years, the reform of 1874 was called both all-class and total. This trend has been pressed until present moment in historical and educational literature. Meanwhile, these words have different content. It is not by chance that D.A. Milyutin, a military minister, made a clarification in his memoirs when he wrote that in 1872 "extensive work <...>

was completed on the drafting of the Provision on total (or rather, all-class) military service" [2].

II. MAIN PART

Firstly, the peoples of Siberia and the Far North (because of their small numbers) were not recruited; the population of Transcaucasia and the North Caucasus began to do their military service on special conditions in the late 1880s. Some foreigners (for example, the Czechs) were excused from service for life, as well as three members of each family in which someone died "for faithful service to the throne and the law" during the Polish insurrection of 1863–1864. Firstly the sons of the deceased were excused, and then his own grandchildren [3].

Clergymen of all Christian denominations, representatives of medical and creative professions, teachers of educational institutions, some railway employees were not subject to military service. Over time, this list has changed. Merchant children were not deprived of privileges and benefits.

In addition students were excused from the service until the completion of their education. For educated youth, shortened periods of active service were established and extended ones were established for being in military reserve. The persons with higher and secondary education could, at their request, do military service as volunteers in the active forces. In addition, every year the Minister of Internal Affairs, "in agreement with the ministers of the military, public education and the Ober-Prosecutor of the Holy Synod", submitted dozens of collective requests to the Emperor for "the deferment of military service for graduation" for classical gymnasiums students of various schools, including the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. All such requests were granted.

Thus, only in 1887, the Minister made 8 most general reports, on which 312 people received a deferment. For example, in January, the deferment of the induction into military service of 1890 was granted to students of Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, and in the future to such famous artists and architects as Alexander Golovin, Karl Gippius and Konstantin Vysotsky [4].

Secondly, three categories of benefits on family status were established for recruits. In fact, this benefit was not given to a recruit, but to members of his family, who should not lose their breadwinner. Moreover, those who had the benefit of the

first category could be called to military service only by a special supreme order. The experience of annual military drafts showed that about half of the recruits were excused from service for benefits. In peacetime, the need for recruits was significantly less than the number of draftees, so the Charter provided for a draft by lot, which was taken out once for life. The exception to the rule was those young people who deliberately evaded the service and did not come to the recruiting stations. They were called at any time and without lot.

If relatives of a recruit believed that he was unjustly drafted into the army, they, in search of truth and justice, appealed to various instances (to county, to governor, to Governing Senate), trying to return him. The Minister of Internal Affairs informed the Emperor about their complaints. Such appeals to the Crown reveal entire layers of popular life. Let us note that this side of the history of military service in historiography is still not studied. For example, according to the first draft, held in November 1874, relatives of recruits filed more than 76,000 complaints and petitions to various authorities. Half of them were found to be justifiable in lower instances. The Senate in 1875 considered more than 1,000 such petitions [5]. However, if the Senate rarely satisfied the requests of “complainers”, then the emperor showed mercy.

Every month, the Minister of Internal Affairs presented to the Emperor the most general reports on the early discharge from the army of persons of different classes (two thirds of them were peasants). One large group of such petitions concerned new recruits who had the right to privilege on family status, but did not use it because of their lack of education, ignorance of the provisions of the Charter, all the details of the legislation on draft. For example, Luppa Vorontsov, a recruit from the peasants of the Chernigov province, was drafted to the service in 1880, although he had the right to the privilege of the 1st category, as he was “the only capable son of a blind mother widow and his older brother who was also blind”. However, he did not do as it was supposed to by the law: before the draw, he did not provide any evidence of his family status. The fate of the recruit was decided six months later, when on May 16, 1881, the Emperor Alexander III returned to Luppa Vorontsov the right to the privilege he had lost, which meant his discharge from the army and transfer to Territorial Army, i.e. to reserve [6].

Another group of petitions concerned recruits who had no right to early discharge from military service, in the first place, the so-called “singles” - married soldiers. According to the Charter, did not have right to benefit on family status, since the government was afraid that otherwise young people would marry deliberately before being called up in order to evade military service. However, as the “Golos” newspaper noted, the lack of privileges for married men contradicted the customs of peasant population, “especially in some localities where early marriage is honored even by the moral duty of a young man, let alone economic motivations [7].” “Singles” had the hardest fate, because, leaving to the service, they left their wives and children at home. According to statistics, since 1874, among the recruits called up for active service, every third was married [8]. There were so many complaints that, on the basis of the supreme order on August 15, 1878, more than

two thousand married soldiers were transferred to the reserve ahead of schedule. In 1883, a circular was issued by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which granted the Governors the right to appeal to the Emperor with requests for transfer “to the army reserve such individuals who would have orphans, children left without care because of the death of their wives”.

The possible fate of the children is well illustrated by the example of Pavel Chugunov, the young soldier from the Yaroslavl province, called up to service in 1882. He hardly got used to military service, his wife died in January 1883. Two little children “by the order of rural society” were put “under care of” native aunt and “stranger peasant woman”. Praskovya Utkina, compassionate sister of recruit petitioned the governor for the return of his brother from military service. Considering that the children were left “without any care”, on June 30, 1883, the Emperor allowed Chugunov to be transferred to army reserve.

Almost a third of the reports dealt with the cases of those young soldiers who had stepchildren. According to the Charter of 1874 and the subsequent amendments to it, “stepchildren from a stepfather or stepmother” were considered as “their own sons” and, accordingly, had the same privilege.

However, this rule has become a “double-edged sword”, since, having reached legal age, many stepchildren left their home. As a result, with the call-up for military service of her own son, a mother was left without a breadwinner, often with little children. Thus, in the draft of 1879, in the Kostroma district on military service, the farmer Pavel Ivanov, the only bread-winner of Fekla Ivanova, a widow, was called up to the service. He was called because his mother had an adult stepson, who, as stated in the petition, was “in an unknown absence” and did not provide any help to his stepmother. Taking into account that the continued military service of Pavel Ivanov “would have put his mother and her four young children in poverty”, in February 1880 the young soldier was transferred to the army reserve.

Sometimes the Emperor excused from military service persons of privileged classes. For example, on October 28, 1881 in Gatchina, Alexander III granted the privilege of the 1st category on family status to the son of the widow of M. Schultz, an academician.

According to the petition to the Emperor, which Margarita Schultz sent to N.P. Ignatiev, the Minister of the Interior Affairs, it follows that in the military draft in 1880, her younger son Arthur had to be called up to the army, but due to poor health, he had the deterrent for a year. At the same time, her eldest son, Karl, was “in an unknown absence” since 1879 and the search for him in 1880 was announced in the Senate Newspaper. But, since the three-year term of the search was not expired, the youngest son, Arthur, legally did not have the right to the 1st category of privilege, despite the assurances of the pastor of the Lutheran Church of Saints Peter and Paul, that the son is “the only support of his mother”. Taking into account, as stated in the report, “the helpless position of the petitioner, her declining years and poor health condition,” the supreme authority granted the petition of the widow of the academician.

The nobleman of Astrakhan district, Felix Novitski, according to the lot number drawn during the 1886 conscription, was liable for military service. Meanwhile, he was entitled to the 1st category privilege due to his family status since he was the only “able-bodied brother with orphans, a 12-year-old brother and an unmarried sister”. He informed about this the military registration and enlistment

office in accordance with the law long before the ballot in April 1886. However, he did not receive the privilege because of the fault of Baku City Police Department, which did not provide the necessary information about his family status on time. In November 1887, the emperor restored justice with respect to nobleman Novitski.

TABLE I. THE RESULTS OF THE CONSCRIPTIONS IN 1874–1894

Year	The number of persons of the draft-age in all	The number of enlisted persons in all	The number of persons who did not appear for enlistment	The number of persons invalid for military service because of short stature, disease and bodily impairment	The number of enlisted married persons	Among enlisted there were privileged persons of the 1, 2 and 3 categories
1874	702 689	148 909	23 825	49 169	57 149	359 397
1875	696 435	179 002	15 724	42 872	67 130	353 990
1876	681 063	192 541	17 678	4 469	69 983	348 300
1877	682 201	212 469	21 469	47 894	71 075	349 975
1878	763 432	214 322	23 951	50 981	68 590	399 492
1879	767 288	215 181	22 177	53 803	69 727	401 980
1880	803 936	231 681	21 699	56 508	74 846	422 134
1881	787 670	209 965	20 273	54 777	68 074	412 117
1882	808 757	208 969	23 483	56 644	69 303	420 269
1883	840 946	215 624	22 856	65 142	70 325	436 092
1884	806 522	221 562	24 748	70 312	69 417	413 820
1885	859 022	227 906	23 476	62 633	67 648	442.163
1886	843 989	234 087	15 295	74 877	66 327	441 582
1887	837 423	236 436	16 302	64 707	64 693	418 503
1888	967 022	251 366	22 030	76 792	71 330	445 745
1889	965 653	255 868	21 406	82 461	75 714	434 451
1890	994 795	261 596	16 361	34 060	74 686	447 416
1891	986 324	261 122	19 994	34 041	72 480	443 284
1892	994 869	262 682	23 679	35 782	70 052	447 659
1893	756 196	259 988	22 424	31 814	74 669	310 215
1894	1048 029	270 767	23 402	38 050	79 755	460 905

There were utterly exceptional cases. In February 1887, the Minister of Internal Affairs, D.A. Tolstoi, reported to the emperor about the most loyal request of a Warsaw citizen, Jew Itzke Lurie about his overslaugh and the restoration of his

passport. The petitioner's explanations did not give him a chance to legally avoid conscription: at the age of 17 the beginning singer left Russia without the passport, began to sing in the Royal Theater of Stuttgart. Now the petitioner was

afraid that “in case of returning to Russia for conscription,” he might lose his job in the theater and “his whole career.” The collected additional information makes it obvious that Itsk Lurie was an experienced dodger since as early as 1883 he was liable for call-up, “but he did not appear for the examination for fitness for military service.” Meanwhile, in the draft office, in which I. Lurie was listed, during the 1883 conscription there was a debt - “six Jews were missed”. According to the law, for dodging during enlistment he was threatened with disciplinary punishment. In the event that he was recognized as unfit for service, there was an arrest of up to three weeks. It can be assumed that apprehension about not only for himself, but also for his relatives forced Itsku Lurie to appeal with the petition to the honored name. The fact is that, according to the highly approved opinion of the State Council of April 12, 1886, the family of a Jew dodger was subject to a fine of 300 rubles. The fine was imposed by the decree of the county or city military registration and enlistment office and was carried into effect by the police. And the unhappy Jew would have been punished if there had not been a petition for him of Grand Duchess Vera Konstantinovna (Duchess of Württemberg), the younger daughter of Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich, the granddaughter of Nicholas I, who lived in Stuttgart and was engaged in charity. According to the Minister’s report, chamberlain Baldinger, attached to her, said that the Grand Duchess was “particularly involved” in the fate of the petitioner “in view of the outstanding talents of this artist, to whom his beautiful voice promises a brilliant career.” The emperor could not refuse the request of his relative, and on February 19, 1887, singer Lurie was exempt from military service.

III. CONCLUSION

In 1874, 148,909 people were called up to military service out of 702,689 people of military age. In 20 years in 1894

respectively 270 767 out of 1048 029 were called up. Statistics show that every year only about 25% of young people who were subject to military service were “commandeered”. Thus, the all-class military service in Russia was all-class, but not total, as military affiliation and supreme power excused recruits from actual service, who drafted a lucky lot number, who had poor health and physical disabilities (15-20%), and also a huge number of those who had numerous benefits and privileges. Expressing a humane attitude towards the families of recruits in poverty, the authorities demonstrated not only the democratic nature of the draft law against the pauperization of peasant families, but also the royal favor, which undoubtedly strengthened the authority of the Emperor in the minds of ordinary people.

References

- [1] S.A. Sergeev, The Charter of military service, Highest approved in January 1, 1874. Reforms of Alexander II. M., 1998.
- [2] D.A. Milyutin, Memories. 1868-1873. Moscow, 2006.
- [3] The collection of government regulations on the introduction of total military service. Vol. 1. SPb., 1874. p. 5–6
- [4] RSHA (Russian State Historical Archive), F. 1284. Op. 241. D. 206. L. 5, 6, 133, 171
- [5] RSHA (Russian State Historical Archive),. F. 1246. Op. 1. D. 36. L. 172, 174
- [6] RSHA (Russian State Historical Archive),. F. 1284. Op. 241. D. 200. L. 114–115
- [7] Statistics of the Russian Empire. XI. Collection of information in Russia, 1896. SPb., 1897.
- [8] RSHA (Russian State Historical Archive),. F. 1284. Op. 241. D. 202. L. 125–126