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**P.P. Shcherbinin, Voennyi factor  
v povsednevnoi zhizni russkoi  
zhenshcheny v XVIII—nachale XX v.  
[*The Military Factor in the Daily Life of  
Russian Women from the 18th to the  
20th Centuries*], Tambov, Izdatel'stvo  
Iulis, 2004, 507 pages.**

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**P.P. Shcherbinin, Voennyi factor v povsednevnoi zhizni russkoi zhenshcheny v XVIII—nachale XX v. [*The Military Factor in the Daily Life of Russian Women from the 18th to the 20th Centuries*], Tambov, Izdatel'stvo Iulii, 2004, 507 pages.**

- 1 The impact of war and military service on the daily lives of women from the eighteenth century to the end of the Imperial period is the topic that Shcherbinin brings to light in this path breaking study. This topic has not been studied in historiography hence the author takes on an enormously significant task, considering the role of the military in Imperial society, with firm authority through his extensive yet judicious use of sources. Because of his comprehensive bibliography, readers can immediately ascertain that the author has worked extensively in relevant archives and perhaps more significantly (if not turgidly) in appropriate legal sources and military regulations that cover the two centuries under examination in this study. In addition, Shcherbinin makes extensive use of the periodic press, academic journals, memoir literature and secondary sources that together allow him to write a book that opens up a new prism that defines how women of all ranks in Russian society interacted with the Imperial military establishment.
- 2 The first major section of the book focuses on the lives of soldiers' wives, *soldatki*, and provides the only complete picture of their existence that is available in the literature at this time. Shcherbinin takes our common understanding of the unhappy soldier's wife living with in-laws or being reduced to desperate circumstance that culminated in prostitution, destitution, and total poverty. To be sure, the paradigm of women caught in impossible circumstances because their husbands were impressed into Tsarist military service remains the case, but through the use of letters and petitions, the author is able to reveal the numerous paths that women used in response to their situation. Not surprisingly many followed their husbands if at all possible to the garrison where they were posted and endured the rigors of the life of a soldier on active service. Moreover, the idea of women leaving the village to seek employment of any type in a town or a city fits nicely into our image of Russian society. The author also makes a fine case of demonstrating that some women also decisively choose to become a *soldatki*, thereby using their marriage to a soldier to escape a life they found burdensome or unbearable. After defining the role of the women themselves, the author then discusses the challenges that *soldatki*, indeed the entire family, encountered once children entered into the equation. Using children as the connective element, Shcherbinin investigates the interaction between families, and the military authorities, the police, and the church in defining the challenges of being an Imperial subject connected to the military establishment. Using his legal sources, the author develops a model of sorts that shapes the legal and moral codes that together define the place of the *soldatki* in their families and in Russian society.
- 3 The changing status of soldiers, from active to garrison duty for example, and the impact that it had on the lives of families is a theme that runs throughout this book, but nowhere is it more poignant than in the second major section of the text. The goal of this section is to study the impact of the D.A. Miliutin's military reforms, especially the 1874 universal conscription act, on the lives of the *soldatki*. Noting that the financial hardships only got worse

as a result of the reforms, Shcherbinin, still firmly ensconced in legal sources and the letters and petitions of soldiers' wives, reveals that after 1874 families lost the right to accompany their husbands/fathers/sons/ to their duty station. The logic of the military authorities behind such a decision was that active duty was now limited to six years, as opposed to the minimum fifteen years that had been the case before the reform. Informatively, the author then links a rise in venereal diseases throughout the Empire in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the prolonged separation that occurred between soldiers and their wives. Of great interest to military historians, this section also clearly exhibits how the army had to conduct a series of recruitment campaigns in the post reform period to maintain its military effectiveness despite the introduction of universal conscription. What emerges from this undertaking is a portrait of families in late imperial society that are enduring the changes and transformations that we typically attribute to modernity; here the *soldatki* are moving from village to cities and becoming industrial workers, thus Shcherbinin's work contributes to the growing and vibrant literature on shifting gender roles in Russia during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

4 In the last major section, Part III, the author examines the fate of the women who were attached to the operational army in some fashion, beginning with the nurses of the Crimean War as well as those women who served in some aspect of the medical corps in the 1877-78 Russo-Turkish War, the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War, and World War I. Although more cursory, he does reference female soldiers in proper context throughout this period while still keeping readers informed about how military service bore a strong imprint on civilian/family life. Certainly the strongest facet of this part, if not the entire book, is Shcherbinin's section on nurses and nursing. He provides detailed information about the professional training of nurses, the roles they performed in times of war or peace, and the perceptions of them both in the military and in society at large. A professional nursing corps did exist in Russia in August 1914 that, like everything else in Russia, indeed all of Europe, was overwhelmed by the wide spread devastation of World War I.

5 P. P. Shcherbinin deserves special recognition for weaving together a piece of fabric that portrays the complexity of late imperial society. Using women's history as his focal point, he informs and then delivers to readers how this history firmly connects to social, economic, legal, and military history. Equally as impressive, he provides examples of the lives of *soldatki* from all over the Empire, across the two centuries when the Russian empire reached its zenith, which contributes to the breath of this book. As an important addition to the literature on Russian women's history, all historians of the late imperial period should consider this book to be a useful resource, one they can use to identify sources and topics for future research on a host of related topics.

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