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Review of *The Horrible Peace: British Veterans and the End of the Napoleonic Wars* by Evan Wilson

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Copenhagen, and even Trafalgar, in which 'the sailor remained a contested figure associated with rebellion as much as valour' (p. 313).

Davey closes by arguing that, although the British remained ambivalent towards their Navy by the time of the peace of Amiens in 1802, the association of the Navy with rebellion and mutiny ebbed in the 1800s, which Davey portrays as more politically uniform, both on land and on ship. This seems to ignore the rise of political radicalism and growing unrest in Ireland and Britain, where the dangers of Luddism led to 12,000 British troops being stationed in the Midlands in 1812. Davey nevertheless has to draw such a conclusion to allow *Tempest* to accord with its sequel, *In Nelson's Wake: The Navy and the Napoleonic Wars* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), which depicted the post-1803 Royal Navy as 'Britain's most important martial institution' (p. 316). But this is only a minor criticism of a splendid book that tackles some important, sometimes difficult questions about Britain's role in the wars against Revolutionary France. Davey's depiction of a divided society becoming increasingly aware of its political power invites deeper investigations of British identity and engagement with issues of republicanism, imperialism, and patriotism. *Tempest* will be essential reading for anyone interested in eighteenth century military and naval history, particularly readers interested in the impact of militarism on national identity and political development.

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Evan Wilson, *The Horrible Peace: British Veterans and the End of the Napoleonic Wars*. Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2023. xvii + 334 pp. ISBN 978-1625347336 (paperback). Price: £29.95.

In this very thorough study, Evan Wilson examines the experiences of soldiers and sailors during the final and subsequent years of the Napoleonic Wars, as the fates of these servicemen were determined not only by the wars themselves but also by government policies, social processes, and international relations.

Wilson believes that the challenges faced by the British government and how they were met were fateful for these servicemen. The foremost challenge was the massive state debt. The increase in military spending during the wars – spending that

represented no less than 85% of the state budget – was financed mainly by borrowing. The resulting debt created tremendous pressure to reduce spending, which encouraged the rapid demobilisation of the armed forces and undermined the state's ability to fund continuing military needs. Finances also limited what the state could do to assist returning sailors and soldiers, to deal with post-war economic difficulties and to cope with the social unrest that erupted during this period. The government did well in meeting its fiscal objectives, but at the expense of negative military and social consequences.

To make matters worse, the Napoleonic Wars did not end swiftly or smoothly. In the autumn of 1812 the prospect of victory improved with the failure of Napoleon's invasion of Russia. At the same time, however, the British were facing increasing military demands as a result of the war with the United States that had begun in June. Napoleon's defeat in 1814 created a welcome, but then interrupted, progress toward peace. Even after the Congress of Vienna and the Treaty of Ghent, peace in Europe was by no means assured and global conflicts persisted. As a consequence, demobilisation was a halting process. Servicemen 'did not come home the day after Waterloo in one undifferentiated mass' (p. 11). And many expecting to come home could find themselves redeployed.

Even those who left the services did not usually slip into a contented life. They typically met a 'horrible peace'. Most bore the pain of separation from their former companions; they often suffered mentally from the trauma of war; many had trouble integrating into social networks from which they had long been detached; and the majority found it difficult to get employment owing to the military demobilisation and the oversupply of workers. Experiences varied, of course. Qualified sailors had marketable skills, but they faced a significant decline in demand for these skills. And fewer sailors had pensions than did soldiers. Some sailors took up piracy and smuggling. A relatively small number of veterans engaged in domestic crime. Others ended up on the streets.

Previous socio-economic status made a difference. The British army, and to a lesser extent the navy, had filled higher officer ranks disproportionately (though not exclusively) from the more elevated levels of society. On leaving the service those officers with less social capital and wealth struggled to maintain a standard of living appropriate to their military rank. They were typically unable to access the London social scene and its posh clubs, or to enter politics, as some of the higher status (mainly army) officers did. A good number of servicemen acquired employment in the colonies. A select few became governors.

Many received honours, but here too there was enormous inequality. Awards ranged from peerages and the Order of the Bath, which were bestowed on the few, to the

medals that were distributed to those who fought in a particular battle. And a great number were not honoured at all. As Wilson points out, the post-war period was one of intense status competition. State honours left many with hard feelings that they did not receive what they thought they deserved.

Wilson is especially interested in the role of servicemen and ex-servicemen in domestic social unrest. On the one hand, discontented veterans were among those who participated in strikes or rebellious crowds, while on the other hand soldiers still in service were used to control crowds and participated in some of the very repressive actions taken against these crowds, most famously at Peterloo. Reliance on local militia and yeomanry was generally found to be problematic, but soldiers were also regarded as poor policemen and were eventually replaced by trained police forces.

The author also likes to debunk myths of British superiority during the period following the Napoleonic Wars – myths about the accomplishments of the British army, the British Empire, the role of the British navy in combatting the slave trade, the status of Britain as the global superpower, and the so-called Pax Britannica. In the Americas, the British managed to save Canada from annexation to the United States. Otherwise, the government and its armed forces were highly constrained. The navy was largely ineffective at combatting piracy. And the global expansion of the British Empire at this time was not, the author argues, the result of a colonial project, but because 'agents at the periphery drew on local resources to address local concerns' (p. 109).

Wilson's book contributes significantly to our understanding of the impact of the Napoleonic Wars and the experiences of those who served in it. It also makes a contribution to our understanding of larger processes, most notably the long-term transition over the past several centuries in the role and status of those who have served in armed forces. European armies expanded numerically from the late seventeenth century reaching an unprecedented size during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. To a greater extent than before armies were now composed of the husbands, sons, brothers, nephews, and neighbours of most members of the population, leading to a decline in negative public attitudes toward servicemen. In addition, since the British army did not have the benefit of conscription, incentives were required to recruit men and to prevent desertions, resulting in more concern in the government and among officers about conditions. The French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars constituted no more than a step in a long process, but they nevertheless represented a significant period in the changing status of members of the armed forces. Although Wilson emphasises the hardships of service for both sailors and soldiers and notes the persistence of harsh punishments, he also discusses public opposition in some circles to the harsh treatment of servicemen, and the efforts of political and military leaders to make the army a more hospitable home and discourage

extreme punishments. One of the major arguments of the book is that the British state failed to meet the needs of veterans, thus bearing some of the responsibility for the 'horrible peace', but Wilson does call attention to the benefits and allowances available to families of many servicemen, the pensions that were provided for many (if not all) veterans, and the general attitude in Britain that veterans merited special assistance. The consequences of these developments were not limited to the military. In Britain, as in other countries, improved benefits for veterans caused by wars have been harbingers of measures to assist larger populations. As Wilson puts it, pension schemes developed during the Napoleonic Wars 'suggested that the state had the capacity and perhaps even the responsibility to fund welfare as well as warfare' (p. 274).

A major strength of this book is that it places the experiences of sailors and soldiers in the social and political history of the period. I must admit that I was a little frustrated that it was not until page 147 that he turns his attention directly to these experiences. Still, this is an outstanding book that offers much to a wide audience.

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Michelle Tusan, *The Last Treaty: Lausanne and the End of the First World War in the Middle East*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. Notes, Index, 323 pp. 20 figures, 3 maps, ISBN: 978-1009371063 (hardback). Price £30.00.

The past 10 years have seen an abundance of public attention, commemoration, and discussion of the First World War, marking centennial dates and anniversaries of events throughout the conflict. 2023 brought perhaps the final centenary, with the signing of the concluding treaty that settled the war with the former Ottoman Empire. Michelle Tusan's *The Last Treaty* certainly argues that case, challenging narratives that see the First World War as having concluded in 1918, and of the Middle Eastern Front being merely an appendage to a more significant European War. Its release comes alongside other monographs and scholarly works that demonstrate a growing appreciation given to the Treaty of Lausanne as an overlooked event in both the history of the First World War and the history of the Middle East, as well as work by organisations such as the Lausanne Project (of which the author of this book is a member). A few notable examples would be: Johnathan Conlin and Ozin Ozavci (eds.),