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Military and Naval Reforms under Alexander III

Abstract

The article examines the condition and development of the Russian army and navy during the reign of Emperor Alexander III of Russia (1881–1894) as an important stage in the evolution of the armed forces of the Russian Empire in the late nineteenth century. The military and naval policy of the period 1881–1894 was based, on the one hand, on the continuation and further development of the reforms of the previous stage and, on the other hand, on the revision of certain measures and adaptation to changing domestic and foreign political conditions. Based on an analysis of the system of military administration, technical rearmament, material support, and personnel policy, the authors identify a contradiction between modernization trends in the army and navy and the generally conservative course pursued by the supreme authority. Despite certain

successes related to the expansion of naval construction and the increase in the size and combat readiness of the army, by 1894 negative processes had already become noticeable, later intensifying under Nicholas II of Russia. By the mid-1890s, strategic defense issues began to conflict with the general political line of the last Romanovs, which was oriented toward preserving social stability. These contradictions manifested themselves in the sphere of material support (armaments, fortress construction, railway network development, and shipbuilding) and especially vividly in resolving the “officer question” — the problems of the social composition, career prestige, and professional training of the officer corps. The authors conclude that it was precisely during the reign of Alexander III that the preconditions were laid for the crisis phenomena that would later define the state of the Russian army and navy and lead to military and political defeats in the early twentieth century.

Keywords:

Alexander III; Russian Empire; Army, Navy; Military reforms; Modernization; Officer corps.

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Stagnation?

In 1881, assessments of the condition of the Russian army and navy were shaped by the ambiguous outcomes of the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878) and the growing threat posed by the German Empire. By the time of Alexander III's death in 1894, however, the prestige of the armed forces was once again relatively high. The troops possessed many of the latest technical means, and the Black Sea Fleet had been restored. Yet only ten years later, a severe blow would follow in the form of defeat in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), and thereafter army units and naval crews would become involved in the Revolution of 1905–1907. These turbulent events led later observers to view the preceding peaceful decades as a period of stagnation — a slow withering of the military and naval power of the Russian Empire.

Among historians there is a consensus¹ about stagnation trends in the military and naval spheres, but their dynamics remain poorly studied. Can we really regard the history of the Russian army and navy after 1881 as a uniform movement toward the defeats in Manchuria and the Tsushima Strait? Or was there a sharp turning point after which negative trends intensified? Does the change of reign in 1894 represent such a boundary?

Another important and insufficiently studied question concerns the nature of this decline. Some historians, following A.A. Kersnovsky², tend to trace the roots of negative trends back to the military reforms of Milyutin, either to their incomplete character or even to the “bureaucratization” of the army they allegedly produced. Others place greater emphasis on individuals, including Alexander III, Nicholas II, their entourages, and prominent military leaders. In this interpretation, what matters is that after 1881 there began “counter-reforms” imposed from above, in an atmosphere dominated by mediocrity and incompetence³. Hence, the question of rup-

¹ Меннинг Б.У. Пуля и штык. Армия Российской империи. 1861–1914. М., 2016. С. 129.

² Керсновский А.А. История русской армии. Т. 3. М., 1994. С. 14.

³ Бескровный Л.Г. Русская армия и флот в XIX веке. Военно-экономический потенциал России. М., 1973. С. 100; Зайончковский П.А. Самодержавие



Dmitry Alekseevich Milyutin.
From open sources

ture or continuity in the army and navy in relation to the reign of Alexander II appears especially important.

In naval historiography, there is little doubt about the fruitfulness of the reforms carried out by the General-Admiral, Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich of Russia, during the first decade of his leadership of the naval ministry⁴. However, researchers note that from the mid-1860s the Grand Duke withdrew from direct management of the naval administration and handed control to his compliant deputy Nikolai Krabbe. After this, naval policy became overly arbitrary and insufficiently thought out. Excessive

и русская армия на рубеже XIX–XX столетий. 1881–1903. М., 1973. С. 3; Биографии наиболее видных деятелей: Кочуков С.А. П.С. Ванновский — военный министр России (1881–1898 гг.). Дисс. на соискание уч. ст. канд. ист. наук. Саратов, 2003; Айрапетов О.Р. Генерал-адъютант Николай Николаевич Обручев (1830–1904). Портрет на фоне эпохи. М., 2017; Юдин С.С. Солдат империи. Генерал М.И. Драгомиров. Стратег. Учитель. Полководец. М., 2022.

⁴ Воронин В.Е. Государственная деятельность великого князя Константина Николаевича до начала 60-х гг. XIX в.: Дисс. ... канд. ист. наук. М., 1996; Шевырев А.П. Русский флот после Крымской войны: Либеральная бюрократия и морские реформы. М., 1990.



Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich.
From open sources

simplification of the administrative structure of the Ministry of the Navy following the 1867 reorganization, and an enthusiasm for building round ironclad ships — the so-called “popovkas” — resulted in the low combat effectiveness of the Black Sea Fleet⁵.

In both military and naval historiography, scholars pay considerable attention to the objective conditions under which the armed forces of the Russian Empire developed. The transition to mass, multi-million-man armies, the complex strategic situation on the western borders as well as in the Baltic, Black Sea, and Pacific regions, rapid development of technology, major socio-economic transformations, and shortages of budgetary funds — all of this undoubtedly complicated the tasks faced by those responsible for managing the army and navy. However, the balance between objective and subjective factors remains a matter of debate.

⁵ Кондратенко Р.В. Морская политика России 80-х годов XIX века. СПб., 2006. С. 11–18, 315.



Alexander III.
From open sources

A number of questions arise concerning the possible paths of reform that the army leadership failed to pursue. Drawing on the example of the German army and the opinions of some authoritative contemporaries, a number of historians⁶ have expressed regret that the Russian Empire never established the General Staff as an independent planning body. Such a step appears logical given the scale of the strategic challenges that emerged, but its political consequences are difficult to predict⁷. It is quite understandable that conservative monarchs such as Alexander III preferred to keep the army under the control of obedient bureaucrats like Pyotr Vannovsky.

Regarding naval reform under Alexander III, historians are generally unanimous. It had already become clear during the

⁶ Steinberg J.W. All the Tsar's Men: Russia's General Staff and the Fate of the Empire, 1898–1914. Washington D.C., 2010. P. 6; Меньинг Б.У. *Op. cit.* C. 143–145; Айрапетов О.П. *Op. cit.* C. 294.

⁷ Rich D.A. The Tsar's Colonels: Professionalism, Strategy, and Subversion in Late Imperial Russia. Cambridge MA, London, 1998. P. 6.

Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 that the naval administration had reached an impasse in the previous reign, when it turned out that the Black Sea Fleet essentially did not exist, despite the fact that six years had passed since the lifting of the restrictive clauses of the Treaty of Paris before the war began. Therefore, the main achievements of this period—the revival of the Black Sea Fleet and the construction of seaworthy battleships in the Baltic — can hardly be disputed⁸. Historians are equally unanimous in assessing the negative consequences of the introduction of the naval “service qualification requirement” in the fleet⁹. However, naval history is still largely reduced to the study of naval campaigns and battles, as well as the history of individual ships and their voyages. If we turn to broader questions of naval history during the reign of Alexander III, the most developed topic is naval policy, which is the subject of a major monograph by R.V. Kondratenko, as well as dissertations by V.A. Boltrukevich and A.D. Fedechkin¹⁰. These studies trace the connection between changes in naval strategy and the foreign policy challenges faced by Russia during the reign of the “Tsar-Peacemaker”. However, questions related to reforms of naval administration, naval education, economic aspects of shipbuilding, and other economic activities of the Naval Ministry and port institutions remain insufficiently explored.

⁸ Кондратенко Р.В. *Op. cit.* С. 316; Золотарев В.А., Козлов И.А. Три столетия российского флота, XIX — начало XX века. М.; СПб., 2004. С 478–481; Грибовский В.Ю. Флот в эпоху Александра III: Корабли открытого моря // Морской сборник. 1995. № 9. С. 83–88.

⁹ Никитин В.О. Закон и реальность. «Положение о морском цензе для офицеров флота 1885 года» // Россия XXI. 2011. № 6. С. 58–75; same author. Морской ценз в Российском флоте // Военно-исторический журнал. 2016. № 1. С. 10–15; Кондратенко Р.В. *Op. cit.* С. 315.

¹⁰ Кондратенко Р.В. *Op. cit.*; Болтрукевич В.А. Развитие Императорского Российского флота во второй половине XIX века в восприятии военно-морских кругов: Дисс. на соискание уч. ст. канд. ист. наук. М., 2014; Федечкин А.Д. Создание и совершенствование конструкции броненосных крейсеров Российского флота во второй половине XIX века (1869–1901): Проблемы и решения: Дисс. на соискание уч. ст. канд. ист. наук. СПб., 2019.

Ministry of War and Ministry of the Navy: People and Administration

In 1881, Emperor Alexander III ascended the throne. For the Russian army and navy, the change of reign primarily raised the question of whether the course initiated by the military reforms of the 1850s–1870s would continue. The international situation largely remained the same, shaped by the outcomes of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871 and the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878. In an early 1881 memorandum, Dmitry Milyutin expressed a bleak forecast: “Everything happening in Europe indicates that we are experiencing only an armistice, and perhaps a very short one”¹¹. Despite Alexander III’s later reputation as the “Tsar-Peacemaker”, the army and navy still had to prepare for war.

The death of Alexander II and the subsequent Manifesto of April 29, 1881, declaring the inviolability of autocracy, made it impossible for Dmitry Milyutin to remain in office as Minister of War. On May 22 (June 3), 1881, General Pyotr Vannovsky became head of the Ministry of War. On January 1 (13), 1882, he was formally confirmed as Minister of War. His Chief of the General Staff was General Nikolay Obruchev, a close associate of Milyutin. Vannovsky and Obruchev formed a duo that led the military administration until 1898. The conservative Minister of War and the Chief of the General Staff — who nevertheless had a reputation as a “liberal” — embodied the contradictory nature of military policy, which combined continuity with the era of the Great Reforms and the emerging conservative, protective tendencies.

As soon as Dmitry Milyutin’s resignation became apparent, opposition to the military reforms intensified. After the death of Prince Aleksei Baryatinsky in 1879, its informal leader became Prince Ivan Vorontsov-Dashkov, who was close to the new emperor¹². Rostislav Fadeev, as before, played the role of ideological

¹¹ Quoted from: Величко К.И. Русские крепости в связи с операциями полевых армий в Мировую войну. Л., 1926. С. 20–21.

¹² Исмаил-Заде Д.И. Граф И.И. Воронцов-Дашков. Наместник Кавказский. М., 2005. С. 221.



Petr Semenovich Vannovsky.
From open sources

inspirer and driving force¹³. Together, they aimed to carry out large-scale changes in the central military administration, modeled on the system that had existed after 1812: a strong and independent Chief of the General Staff, representing line command, and a weak Minister of War responsible only for administrative and economic matters. An additional argument in favor of such a “counter-reform” was its superficial similarity to the organization of the German army, which after 1871 set the tone in military affairs across Europe. However, the main goal of Vorontsov-Dashkov and Fadeev was to eliminate what they saw as the harmful influence of “military bureaucracy”. Nevertheless, the Special Commission established on their initiative to consider the questions on the organization of military administration (posed by the monarch), and chaired by Count Pyotr Kotzebue, did not approve a radical dismantling of Milyutin’s system. Most likely, the opposition of Vannovsky and Obruchev, fears of high costs, and the

¹³ Кузнецов О.В. Р.А. Фадеев: генерал и публицист. Волгоград, 1998. С. 137.



Nikolai Nikolaevich Obruchev.
From open sources

absence of a coherent plan for a new system played a decisive role in the failure of this military “counter-reform”¹⁴.

In July 1881, in a letter to Milyutin, Obruchev expressed confidence in the stability of the existing system: “The palace will continue to stand, and everyone will know what to call it”¹⁵. And so it turned out: the structure of command in the Russian army remained unchanged. Leadership was exercised by Vannovsky and Obruchev, while the influential “heroes” of 1877 such as Iosif Gurko and Mikhail Dragomirov retained significant influence, as did the Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich of Russia, Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich the Elder, and Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolaevich of Russia.

In the naval administration, personnel changes were more dramatic. In addition to the fact that the General-Admiral, Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich of Russia, was the most active supporter of

¹⁴ Зайончковский П.А. Самодержавие... С. 102; Юдин С.С. Генерал М.И. Драгомиров и проекты реформирования военной администрации в 1881 г. // Российская история. 2016. № 6. С. 55.

¹⁵ ОР РГБ. Ф. 169. К. 71. Д. 61. Л. 5 об.

continuing Alexander II's reformist course, he was also personally disliked by Alexander III. Therefore, in May 1881 the General-Admiral was forced to leave St. Petersburg for his Crimean estate of Oreanda, after which the Emperor issued an ultimatum demanding that Konstantin Nikolaevich submit a request for resignation from all his posts. After some dispute, Konstantin Nikolaevich complied. The Grand Duke had hoped to remain formally in office until August, when he would reach 50 years of service as General-Admiral, but on July 13, 1881, Alexander III dismissed Konstantin Nikolaevich and appointed Grand Duke Aleksei Alexandrovich of Russia as Head of Fleet.

The task of the new head was to sharply redirect the naval administration away from the path it had followed under its previous leader. Apparently aware of Aleksei Alexandrovich's weak character, in January 1882 the Emperor appointed Ivan Shestakov as his assistant and Minister of the Russian Navy — a harsh, irritable man who had also been embittered by the previous reign, though not by Konstantin Nikolaevich himself but by the Minister of the Navy Nikolai Krabbe. Suspecting that “radical changes were being planned in naval affairs and that this was why Shestakov had been chosen”, the disgraced Grand Duke nevertheless “could not believe that Shestakov could become a traitor either to me or to his own past”¹⁶. Yet even in June 1881, before the personnel changes began, during his first audience with Alexander III, Shestakov ambiguously stated that “one should not destroy, but it is absolutely necessary to liquidate everything so that Aleksei [Alexandrovich] enters office without shackles and difficulties”¹⁷.

After becoming Minister, Shestakov pursued a policy aimed at correcting the errors of the previous leadership. However, formally, the main tasks that Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich had set for the naval administration at the beginning of his leadership of the fleet remained unchanged under his successor as well. These tasks

¹⁶ Великий князь Константин Николаевич — А.В. Головнину. 23 января/4 февраля 1882 г. // ГА РФ. Ф. 722. Оп. 1. Д. 1119. Л. 36–36 об.

¹⁷ Шестаков И.А. Полвека обыкновенной жизни. Т. 1. Воспоминания (1838–1881 гг.). СПб., 2013. С. 842.



General-Admiral Grand Duke Alexei Alexandrovich.
From open sources

were reiterated in Grand Duke Aleksei Alexandrovich's report on the period of Alexander III's reign, and they consisted of: 1) "as great a development as possible of the cruising of warships in distant seas and oceans, in order to create true sailors and to maintain Russia's international prestige; 2) independence of our fatherland from foreign shipyards and factories in the construction of warships; 3) the reduction and simplification of the shore-based administration to the greatest possible extent, with the understanding that it is not the fleet that exists for the administration, but the administration for the fleet"¹⁸.

Ivan Shestakov led the Naval Ministry until his death in 1888, after which Nikolai Chikhachyov was Acting Minister until 1896.

Unlike the Ministry of War, the Naval Ministry undertook a noticeable restructuring of its administrative system. By the time Shestakov took office, naval administration operated under the 1867 Statute,

¹⁸ Обзор деятельности Морского ведомства за царствование императора Александра III. 1881–1894. СПб., 1901. С. 6.



Pavel Evstafievich Kotzebue.
From open sources

according to which all economic activity was concentrated in port administrations, while the central administration had neither economic management bodies nor strategic planning organs. Indeed, the shore administration had been reduced and simplified “to the greatest possible extent”.

Almost immediately after taking office, in April 1882, Shestakov initiated a commission to revise the existing legal framework governing the organization of naval administration. However, the commission completed its work only in 1884, and on June 3, 1885, Alexander III approved the new Statute on the Administration of the Naval Department¹⁹. Under this Statute, four new bodies were created within the Naval Ministry: Main Naval Staff, Main Directorate of Shipbuilding and Supply, Naval Scientific Committee, Naval Construction Committee, and Main Naval Judicial Administration. The affairs of the Inspectorate Department were transferred to the Main Naval Staff; the Hydrographic Department was elevated to the status of a Main Directorate; and the office of the

¹⁹ ПСЗРИ. Собрание 3-е. 1885. 3 июня. № 3025.



Ivan Alekseevich Shestakov. Artist Alexander Pershakov.
From open sources

Surgeon-General was renamed the Directorate of the Chief Medical Inspector of the Fleet.

The Main Naval Staff (MNS) was tasked with everything “relating to the maintenance of discipline in the fleet and its combat readiness”²⁰. It was divided into two departments: one dealing with personnel records, and the other with a wide range of functions: it “was responsible for training personnel, supervising the economic activity of units, collecting information on foreign military and commercial fleets and trade routes, developing plans for the deployment of Russian ships and monitoring their implementation, maintaining ship registers, and conducting ‘administrative work on their preparation for military operations’”. In the view of Roman Kondratenko, given the “relative weakness of Russian forces” and the resulting continuity in naval strategy, there was no pressing need for the Naval Ministry to transform the strategic component of the Main Naval Staff into a separate general staff of the navy²¹.

²⁰ Ibid. Ст. 29.

²¹ Кондратенко Р.В. *Op. cit.* С. 137–138.

Strategy: Fortresses and Railways

The military reforms of the 1850s–1870s provided the Russian army with a solid command structure headed by the Ministry of War and a reliable system of conscription. The introduction of universal military service in 1874 made it possible to keep under arms in peacetime 844,000 men (1881), 940,000 (1894), and even more than 1 million (1904). At the same time, a substantial reserve accumulated (growing from 1 to 2.24 million between 1881 and 1890), which allowed for the formation of a truly mass army in wartime. The 1903 mobilization plan set the total wartime strength of the armed forces at 3 million men²². The Russian army was no longer a professional force with long terms of service. Alexander Roediger summarized this trend as follows: “The army has now become a school through which as large a part of the male population as possible is passed, a cadre of those enormous forces (the armed nation) that are deployed in time of war”²³.

However, the armies of other great powers were no less numerous and were rationally organized²⁴. In the event of a major European war, it was impossible to rely on a decisive numerical advantage. Accordingly, qualitative factors came to the forefront: speed of mobilization and concentration, quality of command decisions, the condition of the troops and their armament, etc. It was up to Vannovsky and Obruchev to focus their efforts on improving precisely these indicators. Two circumstances posed serious obstacles on this path.

First, the Russian army was once again in a situation of strict austerity. The Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 led to a significant

²² Очерк деятельности Военного министерства за истекшее десятилетие благополучного царствования государя императора Александра Александровича: 1881–1890. СПб., 1892. С. 2; Зайончковский П.А. Самодержавие... С. 123; Бескровный Л.Г. *Op. cit.* С. 42–43; Меннинг Б.У. *Op. cit.* С. 160.

²³ Редигер А. Комплектование и устройство вооруженной силы. СПб., 1900. С. 176.

²⁴ Strength of the armies of the major European powers in peacetime (wartime) in 1892: Germany — 521,000 (2.37 million), Austria-Hungary — 317,000 (1.16 million), France — 552,000 (2.6 million), Italy — 249,000 (1.16 million), Great Britain — 382,000 (900,000) men. (Бескровный Л.Г. *Op. cit.* С. 43).



Nikolai Matveyevich Chikhachev. 1895–1900.
From open sources

budget deficit, and the financial consequences of the Balkan conflict were only overcome by the end of the 1880s. The expenditures of the Ministry of War fell from 253.6 million rubles in 1881 to 204.9 million rubles in 1882. A substantial increase occurred only at the turn of the 1880s–1890s: 213.4 (1888), 227.7 (1889), 243 (1890), 254.7 (1891) million rubles. At the end of the reign of Alexander III, military expenditures reached 284.4 million rubles (1894)²⁵. In the 1880s, the situation left no choice: necessary expenses had to be spread over several years, and some costly projects had to be postponed.

Second, in the event of a war with Germany and Austria-Hungary, an extremely unfavorable situation developed on the western borders of the Russian Empire. The two neighboring powers significantly outpaced Alexander III's Russia in the speed of mobilization and concentration. According to late 19th-century forecasts, Germany would complete the concentration and deployment of its armies on the Russian front by day 12, Austria-Hungary by day 15,

²⁵ Зайончковский П.А. Самодержавие... С. 81.

whereas the deployment of all Russian forces took about 32 days²⁶. The configuration of the borders allowed the forces of the Triple Alliance to envelop Russian troops in the “Polish salient” (a territory of the Russian Empire protruding deeply westward). The Russian command would have faced a choice: either evacuate the Kingdom of Poland or accept battle under unfavorable conditions with a high probability of being cut off.

To compensate for this strategic vulnerability, it was necessary to implement a whole range of measures, including the construction of border fortresses, redeployment of troops from the interior to the frontiers, construction of additional railway lines, and a general increase in mobilization readiness. But the shortage of funds limited the possibilities of Vannovsky and Obruchev.

The military leadership had to intensify the construction of modern fortresses in order to prevent a rapid defeat of troops in the “Polish salient”. By 1881, only a few outdated fortresses existed on the western frontier: Dinaburg, Novogeorgievsk, the Warsaw Citadel, Ivangorod, Brest-Litovsk, Kiev, and Bendery, and in the second line — Bobruisk.

At the beginning of 1881, the then Minister of War Dmitry Milyutin acknowledged that the existing state of fortifications on the western frontier was unsatisfactory. Initial plans were drawn up to modernize the fortifications of Novogeorgievsk, Warsaw, and Ivangorod, as well as to build the fortresses of Osovet, Dubno, and Kovno. Total expenses were to amount to 32 million rubles²⁷. By the early 1890s, this plan had been largely implemented. Warsaw was turned into one of the largest fortresses in the world, with 14 forts and an outer line of about 47 versts. However, other projects can hardly be considered successful. The Dubno fort-outpost was poorly located, poorly constructed, and became the subject of a corruption scandal²⁸. In 1886–1887, successful tests of large-caliber high-ex-

²⁶ Зайончковский А.М. Подготовка России к мировой войне. М., 1926. С. 41.

²⁷ Величко К.И. *Op. cit.* С. 18–20.

²⁸ Service Historique de la Défense (SHD GR) 7 N 1472. Nomination du général Zabotkine à la tête de la Direction du Génie (10 novembre 1890); SHD GR 7 N 1472. Au sujet du fort de Doubno (1 juin 1891); Очерк деятельности Военного министерства... С. 181.

plosive shells once again rendered the western frontier fortifications obsolete. The major leap forward in siege warfare required equally powerful defensive efforts, but this meant new expenses, the usefulness of which was questionable. In the 1890s, the Ministry of War would gradually wind down the fortification program.

An alternative to large-scale fortress construction was the development of the railway network. Measures in this direction could dramatically increase the speed of mobilization and concentration, making it possible to offset the advantage of Germany and Austria-Hungary. As early as 1873, eleven railway lines essential for the defense of the western frontier had been planned. However, by 1888, construction had begun on only three of them. In the same year, the General Staff was denied its firm request for the construction of 959 versts of new track and the conversion of 602 versts into double-track lines. In 1881–1888, the construction of 2,655 versts of hard surface roads was planned, but only 40 versts (1.5%)²⁹ were completed. In the 1880s, Russia increased its railway length by 33%, Germany by 25%, and Austria-Hungary by 44%³⁰. By 1900, the Russian Empire surpassed Austria-Hungary in provision with locomotives, wagons (railway cars), and personnel, but lagged behind Germany in the same indicators³¹.

Another means of accelerating mobilization was the deployment of troops closer to the western frontier and increasing their combat readiness. The number of troops in the Warsaw, Kiev, and Vilna military districts in peacetime increased from 227,000 (1883) to 610,000 (1893). The latter figure amounted to about 45% of the entire peacetime army. But this change in deployment also meant new

²⁹ Fuller W. *Strategy and Power in Russia. 1600–1914*. New York; Toronto, 1992. P. 339.

³⁰ In the 1880s–1890s, the length of railroads increased in Russia from 22.9 to 30.6 thousand km; in Germany from 33.3 to 41.8 thousand km; in Austria-Hungary from 18.4 to 26.5 thousand km (Соловьева А.М. *Железнодорожный транспорт России во второй половине XIX в.* М., 1975. С. 231; *Энциклопедический словарь: в 86 т. / Ф.А. Брокгауз, И.А. Ефрон. Т. XIa.* СПб., 1894. С. 783).

³¹ Соловьева А.М. *Op. cit.* С. 303.

expenses for barracks, depots, etc.³² Poor provision of barracks had long been a chronic weakness of the Russian army, affecting above all the quality of training in units scattered over large distances. In 1883, barracks construction began using an economic method (built by the troops themselves). The proportion of units housed in barracks grew slowly: from 57.1% (1885) to 61.5% (1894)³³.

The start of construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway in 1891 led to a slowdown in railway building related to the defense of the western frontier. As in the case of the fortresses, significant expenditures did not lead to a radical improvement in the strategic situation in a hypothetical conflict with the Central Powers.

Strategy: The Black Sea Fleet and Armored Seagoing Battleships

The naval ministry's strategy in the early 1880s was shaped by new foreign-policy conditions that had emerged by that time. The “embryonic state”³⁴ of the Black Sea Fleet meant that Russia was unable to fully reap the benefits of its land victories in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878. The formation of the German Empire created a new situation in the Baltic Sea. While in the 1860s the task of building a fleet superior to the combined forces of all Baltic states was feasible, the rapidly developing navy of the German Empire was becoming a serious adversary. Another task of the Baltic Fleet in the 1860s–1870s had been to resist the already superior British and French navies through a combination of coastal-defense ironclads and ships intended for commerce raiding. However, “the combination of coastal defense and oceanic cruiser warfare, which had

³² Fuller W. Op. cit. P. 342.

³³ Русское военное обозрение. Положение о постройке казарм распоряжением войскового начальства хозяйственным способом // Военный сборник. 1887. № 5. С. 27; Всеподданнейший отчет Военного министерства за 1894 год. СПб., 1896. С. 7.

³⁴ Петров М.А. Подготовка России к мировой войне на море. М.; Л.: Госвоениздат, 1926. С. 24.

seemed appropriate in a confrontation with England or France, did not promise success against a unified Germany or Turkey”³⁵. Finally, the strengthening naval power of China and Japan required a corresponding reinforcement of Russia’s Far Eastern fleet in the event of political tensions there.

In August 1881, a conference was held with the participation of War Minister Pyotr Vannovsky, Foreign Minister Nikolay de Girs, and the Minister of the Russian Navy, Ivan Shestakov, under the chairmanship of Grand Duke Aleksey Alexandrovich Romanov. It was decided that the Naval Ministry’s primary task would be the construction of a combat-ready Black Sea Fleet capable of ensuring “absolute dominance in the Black Sea waters” and, in the event of intervention by other powers in a war with Turkey, capable of “seizing the Bosphorus straits, entrenching itself on both shores, and, having firmly positioned itself at the entrance to the Black Sea, of protecting its coasts and waters from any encroachment”. Without abandoning the idea of a defensive fleet in the Baltic, the conference recognized that “the defense of the Baltic Sea coasts must be active, not allowing blockade and ready to exploit any favorable opportunity for going on the offensive”. Finally, to address the Far Eastern problem, it was assumed that “in the case of separate clashes with China or Japan [...] it would be necessary to dispatch a squadron from the Baltic and Black Sea fleets to the waters of the Pacific Ocean”. It was also considered necessary to maintain a sufficient number of cruisers in the Pacific capable, in the event of conflict with European powers, of seriously threatening their commerce³⁶. Cruisers, notes researcher V.A. Boltrukevich, “were still regarded by ruling circles as the only effective means of damaging the interests of potential adversaries of the Russian state”³⁷ outside the Baltic and Black Seas.

In 1882, Alexander III approved a 20-year shipbuilding program that envisaged the expansion of the Baltic Fleet by 16 battleships

³⁵ Кондратенко Р.В. *Op. cit.* С. 14–15.

³⁶ Quoted from: Кондратенко Р.В. *Op. cit.* С. 76.

³⁷ Болтрукевич В.А. Эволюция типа русского корабля крейсерского класса на протяжении второй половины XIX в. в восприятии военно-морских кругов // Вестник Университета Дмитрия Пожарского. 2018. № 2 (10). С. 21.



Mikhail Ivanovich Dragomirov. Artist I.E. Repin.
From open sources

and 11 cruisers, and the Black Sea Fleet by 8 battleships, as well as the construction of 41 smaller vessels for all fleets³⁸. This program was subsequently revised several times. Its implementation was facilitated by a rapid increase in the naval budget in the 1880s compared to the budget of the Ministry of War. It rose from 30.7 million rubles in 1882 to 40.9 million rubles in 1888³⁹ — an increase of 33%, whereas the military budget grew by only 4% over the same period. However, by the end of Ivan Shestakov's tenure in 1888, the actual results were modest: in the Baltic only one battleship and four cruisers (two frigates and two corvettes) had been completed or launched, and in the Black Sea three battleships and six gunboats. While in the Black Sea Russian battleships surpassed the Turkish fleet in both quantity and quality, in the Baltic the superiority of Germany's armored forces continued to grow⁴⁰.

³⁸ Огородников С.Ф. Исторический обзор развития и деятельности Морского министерства за сто лет его существования (1802–1902 гг.). СПб., 1902. С. 217–218.

³⁹ Ibid. С. 243–244.

⁴⁰ Моисеев С.П. Список кораблей русского парового и броненосного флота (с 1861 по 1917 г.). М.: Воениздат, 1948. С. 52–53, 66–67, 278–279, 320–323.

From the mid-1880s, torpedo boats were included in ship-building programs. The ideas of the French “*Jeune École*” (“Young School”) were popular in Russia, as they aligned with the same strategic logic promoted by French Minister of Marine Théophile Aube, appointed in 1886. Just as France could not compete with Britain’s vast battleship fleet, Russia was unable to match the pace of German battleship construction. Therefore, it was hoped that developing a large “small fleet” would compensate for the shortage of capital ships. In Russia, this idea was also supported by the successful use of naval mines during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878⁴¹. From 1886 onward, the Ministry of the Navy began mass orders abroad and domestic construction of torpedo boats, and by the end of Alexander III’s reign the fleet had been augmented by 49 such vessels⁴². However, as historians note, “despite all the expectations raised by their initial successful use, by the end of the 19th century torpedo boats had not fully justified the hopes placed upon them. Alongside the improvement of this new class of ships, countermeasures were also being developed—both active and passive”⁴³.

People: Non-Commissioned Officers, Officers, and Cavalry

As already noted, the combat qualities of soldiers and officers were understood as a key factor in conditions of mass-army warfare. However, improving these qualities became increasingly difficult. First, short service terms were introduced in order to build up a reserve. The term of service was raised from 4 to 5 years in 1881, but then reduced again to 4 years in 1888⁴⁴. Second, the proportion of literate recruits remained consistently low, about 22%. Third, in conditions of prolonged peace in Europe and the end of military operations in Central Asia, training relied entirely on peacetime methods:

⁴¹ Болтрукевич В.А. *Op. cit.* С. 112–113.

⁴² Обзор деятельности Морского ведомства за царствование императора Александра III... С. 87.

⁴³ Болтрукевич В.А. *Op. cit.* С. 122. See: Кондратенко Р.В. *Op. cit.* С. 297–298.

⁴⁴ Очерк деятельности Военного министерства... С. 4.

general exercises, field maneuvers, and large-scale drills. The latter took place in 1886–1892 near Białystok, Elisavetgrad, in Volhynia, and near the Ivangorod Fortress. Especially notable were the Volhynia maneuvers of 1890, which lasted 9 days and involved 120,000 men⁴⁵.

A clear weak point of the Russian army in the 1880s remained the non-commissioned officer corps. It was planned to have 33,000 extended-service NCOs, but in reality their number fluctuated around 5,000. In 1888, a stipend was introduced, which increased the number of extended-service NCOs from 4,988 in 1888 to 7,800 in 1891⁴⁶. However, financial incentives had limited effect, since long-term military service could not compete for manpower with agriculture or urban employment⁴⁷. It was proposed to ease access for NCOs to officer rank, but Pyotr Vannovsky strongly opposed this measure⁴⁸. By the late 1890s, the army had about 13,000 extended-service NCOs, but this was still insufficient. Historian Pyotr Zayonchkovsky concluded that staffing the army with NCOs remained “the most difficult and essentially unresolved task”⁴⁹.

Similar problems existed in the officer corps. As a result of reductions in the peacetime army, the number of officers fell from 34,917 in 1880 to 30,655 in 1885, and then rose again to 36,568 in 1895⁵⁰. At the same time, the era of mass armies required both an expansion of the officer corps and an improvement in its professional quality. The military administration struggled to meet these demands. In 1882, cadet corps were restored. The aim of this “counter-reform” was to give children a military-oriented education, strengthen the caste character of the officer corps, and reinforce its noble, loyalist ethos. Special measures were taken to facilitate the admission of children of nobles

⁴⁵ Ibid. C. 83–88.

⁴⁶ Зайончковский П.А. Самодержавие... С. 122.

⁴⁷ Шишло К. К унтер-офицерскому вопросу // Военный сборник. 1884. № 10. С. 235.

⁴⁸ Редигер А.Ф. История моей жизни. Воспоминания военного министра. Т. 1. М., 1999. С. 161.

⁴⁹ Зайончковский П.А. Самодержавие... С. 120.

⁵⁰ Бескровный Л.Г. *Op. cit.* С. 97.

and officers to these institutions⁵¹. After the cadet corps, a young man entered a military school, where he received specialized training before being commissioned as an officer. Alongside this path, there was a less prestigious but faster route to officer rank through junker schools. By 1889, the number of graduates from military and junker schools had become nearly equal⁵². Efforts were also made to raise the educational level of junkers, and Anton Denikin (a former junker) believed that significant progress had been achieved in this regard⁵³.

Interestingly, during the reign of Alexander III — a period usually associated with conservative tendencies — radical reforms were carried out in the cavalry, a branch of the armed forces known for its caste-like structure and attachment to tradition⁵⁴. These reforms were driven by several factors, including high costs, poor performance during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, and the evident vulnerability of cavalry to modern firepower. On the initiative of Colonel Nikolai Sukhotin, in 1882 hussar and uhlan regiments were transformed into dragoon regiments. The resulting savings allowed the number of squadrons to increase from 224 to 328. In the same year, the Officers' Cavalry School was established. Training increasingly emphasized dismounted action, reconnaissance, and raids behind enemy lines. The abandonment of the traditional role of cavalry as a shock arm of battlefield warfare, the abolition of familiar uniforms and regimental names, and especially the redeployment of cavalry units to border regions with poor living conditions led to an outflow of wealthy officers and dissatisfaction among those who remained. In 1890, the French military attaché noted the poor training of Russian cavalry, especially the Guards, and the beginning of a reaction against the reforms⁵⁵. The death in 1891 of the

⁵¹ Очерк деятельности Военного министерства... С. 206–207.

⁵² Бескровный Л.Г. *Op. cit.* С. 98–99.

⁵³ Деникин А.И. *Старая армия. Офицеры.* М., 2005. С. 233.

⁵⁴ Керсновский А.А. *Op. cit.* Т. 3. С. 18–21; Айрапетов О.Р. *Op. cit.* С. 294; Шапиро Б.Л. Русификация и модернизация конницы в царствование Александра III // *Гуманитарные ведомости ТГПУ им. Л.Н. Толстого.* 2019. № 4 (32) Т. 2. С. 70–86.

⁵⁵ SHD. GR 7 N 1472. Au sujet des Manoeuvres de Krasnoe-Selo et de Narva (9 septembre 1890).



Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich the Elder. Artist *N. Schilder*.
From open sources

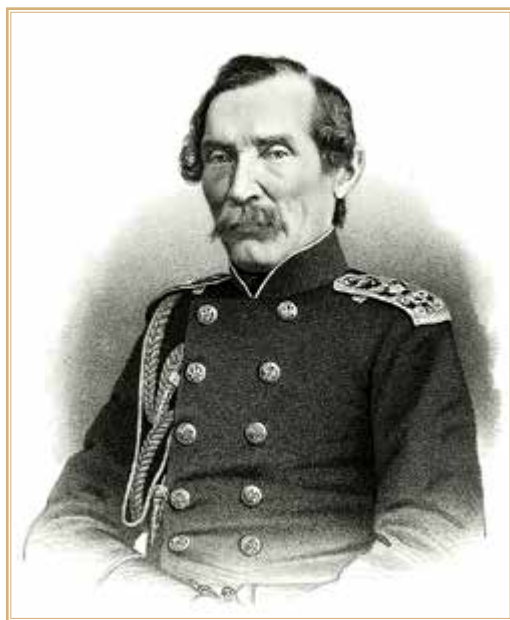
Inspector-General of Cavalry, Grand Duke Nikolas Nikolaevich the Elder, intensified debates about the future of this branch of service. Planned raids deep into East Prussia and Galicia intended to disrupt German and Austro-Hungarian mobilization and concentration appeared increasingly unrealistic⁵⁶. The era of “raid doctrine” was coming to an end.

Sailors: “real seamen” vs. “careerists”

In the jubilee report of the Ministry of the Navy for 1855–1880, it was stated that the number of naval officers as of 1 May 1879 was 2,962, while the fleet’s requirement was 3,021⁵⁷. In the report for the reign of Alexander III, however, it was stated that in 1880 there were

⁵⁶ Ibid. Au sujet de l’emploi de la Cavalerie au début des opérations (8 janvier 1892).

⁵⁷ Обзор деятельности морского управления в России в первое двадцатипятилетие благополучного царствования Государя Императора Александра Николаевича. 1855–1880. Ч. 1. СПб., 1880. С. 12–13.



Evfimiy Vasilyevich Putyatin.
From open sources

3,209 officers on active service — exceeding the fleet's requirement by 182⁵⁸. The need to eliminate surplus officers, especially those who had long remained in shore-based positions, led to the introduction in 1885 of the “naval service qualification requirement”.

The idea of regulating the size and career progression of the naval officer corps by requiring mandatory sea service throughout one's career was first proposed by a commission chaired by Admiral Yevfimiyy Putyatin in 1871⁵⁹. Vice Admiral Grigory Butakov and, in the late 1870s, Rear Admiral Nikolai Chikhachyov also submitted memoranda on introducing such a system. According to researcher V.O. Nikitin, these projects and commissions “testify to the search for ways to change the system of officer service”⁶⁰ already in the preceding era.

With the appointment of Ivan Shestakov as Minister of the Russian Navy, the issue of the naval qualification was immediately

⁵⁸ Обзор деятельности Морского ведомства за царствование императора Александра III... С. 11–12.

⁵⁹ Никитин В.О. Морской ценз в Российском флоте... С. 10.

⁶⁰ Ibid.



Grigory Ivanovich Butakov.
From open sources

placed on the agenda of upcoming reforms, and on 25 February 1885 the *Regulations on the Naval Qualification for Fleet Officers* were approved by imperial decree⁶¹. The law established a required number of months at sea for promotion to the next rank, as well as a maximum age limit for each rank. Upon reaching that age, an officer was to be retired from the fleet.

The introduction of the naval qualification requirement soon provoked criticism among naval officers, and it was eventually regarded as “one of the most important causes of the defeat at Tsushima”⁶². The intention itself — to maintain the combat readiness of every naval officer through regular sea service — was sound, but in practice it turned into a bureaucratic calculation of days spent on various ships, in different operational statuses, and under different complexity coefficients. Historian V.O. Nikitin vividly summarized the reform’s outcome: “The law on naval qualification was intended to produce as many ‘real’ seamen as possible in the fleet, but instead

⁶¹ ПСЗРИ. Собрание 3-е. 1885. 25 февраля. № 2769.

⁶² НИКИТИН В.О. Закон и реальность... С. 60.

it contributed to a significant increase in ‘careerists’ among officers, which inevitably affected the combat readiness of the fleet”⁶³.

Another reform was the abolition of the separate corps of naval navigators and naval artillery officers. Before the advent of steamships — and even before steam fully replaced sail — the duties of a watch officer in controlling a ship were complex enough that it was considered impossible to combine command duties with those of an artilleryman or navigator. These responsibilities were assigned to officers of specialized corps. These officers occupied a marginal position within naval service: they held army-style ranks and were recruited not only from the nobility but also from the non-noble estates. On 12 June 1885, rules were approved abolishing the corps of naval navigators and naval artillery officers. According to these rules, recruitment into the navigation and artillery departments of the Naval Technical School was discontinued, and navigation and artillery posts in the fleet were gradually filled by officers of the Navy⁶⁴.

A year later, the corps of ship engineers and marine mechanical engineers were reorganized⁶⁵. Army-style ranks in these corps were abolished and replaced by five grades in each corps, ranging from junior assistant shipbuilder to inspector of shipbuilding, and from junior mechanical engineer to inspector of the mechanical branch. Correspondence between these grades and naval ranks was established for pension calculations and for transfers to civilian service. Both corps continued to be recruited from the shipbuilding and mechanical departments of the Naval Technical School. Thus, changes in the technological nature of the fleet led to the merging of navigation and artillery specialties with line service and to an even greater separation of engineering branches.

In 1891, a counter-reform in naval education followed, similar to earlier changes in the army: the Naval School was renamed the Naval Cadet Corps, and in 1894, as in the army, admission was restricted to hereditary nobles and children of naval officers.

⁶³ Ibid. C. 72.

⁶⁴ ПСЗРИ. Собрание 3-е. 1885. 12 июня. № 3056.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 1886. 15 мая. № 3701.

Toward the 20th Century

A certain summary of the first stage of development of the Russian army during the reign of Alexander III can be considered the new *Regulations on Field Command of Troops in Wartime* adopted in 1890⁶⁶. This new system of command had several distinctive features. First, it (for the first time) provided for the formation of several armies within a single theater of operations, all subordinate to a single commander-in-chief. Second, army staffs were formed on the basis of military district staffs, which accelerated their creation and simplified coordination. Third, the 1890 *Regulations* corrected a major shortcoming of the 1868 *Regulations* (amended in 1876), which had seriously affected the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878: the poorly defined system of logistical supply. Historian Pyotr Zayonchkovsky regarded this document as a step forward, even though it had to be revised in 1903 due to the increase in the number of armies on the western frontier to seven, while there were only four border military districts⁶⁷.

Some measures of the 1880s continued the line laid down by the military reforms of Dmitry Milyutin, sometimes even in a radical form (as in the cavalry reforms). Others are more appropriately described as “counter-reforms” (such as the restoration of cadet corps). Overall, however, the measures of the military administration sought to adjust earlier policies in response to new circumstances: a threatening strategic situation, financial constraints, the transition to mass armies, and lessons learned from the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878.

In 1890–1894, significant changes occurred in the general conditions in which the army and navy of the Russian Empire developed. The worsening relations with Germany and the resulting Franco-Russian alliance coincided with economic growth. Public opinion became more active, including the rise of anti-militarist sentiment. Finally, a new wave of military technological development

⁶⁶ ПСЗРИ. Собрание 3-е. 1890. 26 февраля. № 6609.

⁶⁷ Зайончковский П.А. Самодержавие... С. 108.

beginning in the mid-1880s forced the military leadership to respond to emerging challenges.

In the navy, changes at the turn of the 1880s–1890s were also linked to a change in leadership of the Ministry of the Navy. After the death of Ivan Shestakov in 1888, the ministry was headed by Nikolai Chikhachyov. The new minister opposed the dispersion of active fleet forces for operations in foreign seas and the Pacific and consistently defended the priority of the Baltic naval theater⁶⁸. In 1890, construction began on an ice-free port at Libau (Liepāja), which eight years later received its first ships. From 1891, the naval budget began to grow significantly, rising from 40.7 million rubles in 1890 to 51.2 million rubles in 1894 under Alexander III. Naval expenditures would later grow even faster, reaching 98.3 million rubles in 1902⁶⁹.

In total, during the reign of Alexander III, the Baltic Fleet commissioned four battleships and had seven more under construction, seven first-rank cruisers (two under construction), five mine cruisers, 33 torpedo boats (one under construction), one torpedo boat tender, and seven gunboats (one under construction). In the Black Sea Fleet, four battleships entered service (with three more under construction), along with one cruiser, two mine cruisers (one under construction), 15 torpedo boats, and six gunboats. Two additional torpedo boats were built in St. Petersburg and assembled in Vladivostok⁷⁰. One can agree with historian V.Yu. Gribovsky that “by the mid-1890s the Russian fleet occupied a solid place in the world in combat power, third only to the navies of Britain and France”⁷¹, although in the Baltic Sea the superiority of the German fleet was evident.

In the army, intensified work on planning, improving mobilization procedures, and theoretically mastering new methods of warfare strengthened the position of the General Staff, whose

⁶⁸ Грибовский В.Ю. *Op. cit.* С. 87.

⁶⁹ Огородников С.Ф. *Op. cit.* С. 243–244, 259.

⁷⁰ Моисеев С.П. *Op. cit.* С. 52–55, 66–71, 74–77, 94–107, 180–181, 204–205, 208–211, 278–281, 284–289, 298–305, 320–323, 370–373.

⁷¹ Грибовский В.Ю. *Op. cit.* С. 87.

personnel grew from 661 in 1882 to 1,232 in 1904⁷². It included figures with international reputations such as Obruchev, Dragomirov, Leer, Puzyrevsky, and Kuropatkin. However, organizationally the General Staff remained one of the departments of the Ministry of War, alongside artillery, engineering, medical, and other administrations. In 1894, Nikolai Obruchev pointed out the abnormality of this situation and proposed a reform to transform the General Staff, expanding its personnel and authority, including the right of independent reporting to the Emperor. However, Pyotr Vannovsky refused to consider a reform that might have removed the strategic planning body from his control⁷³.

By 1881, the Russian army was still equipped with the Berdan rifle, although full rearmament was completed only by 1884. By that time, the future direction of small arms development was already clear: reduction of caliber and the adoption of magazine-fed rifles. Major European powers first adopted magazine rifles and then reduced-caliber designs. The Russian Empire could not afford to re-equip itself twice. In practice, the military leadership took a calculated risk, keeping the army for several years with outdated weapons in order to later adopt a system combining both advantages. Thus, in 1891 the Mosin–Nagant rifle was adopted. The transition to the new model required additional expenditures of 70 million rubles, and rearmament proceeded in two phases, completed in 1897 and 1903⁷⁴.

By the end of 1881, the transition to steel artillery pieces in field artillery had largely been completed, after which rearmament extended to reserve (1884–1885), mountain (1885–1886), and relief (replacement) artillery (1887–1890). In 1889–1894, five mortar regiments were formed, equipped with 6-inch Engelhardt mortars capable of high-angle fire. An important organizational reform was the transfer of corps artillery from the authority of district artillery chiefs directly to corps commanders. This significantly reduced its organizational autonomy and strengthened its integration with infantry.

⁷² Ibid. C. 177–178.

⁷³ Кочуков С.А. *Op. cit.* C. 72–73.

⁷⁴ Бескровный Л.Г. *Op. cit.* C. 312–319; Зайончковский П.А. *Самодержавие...* C. 156–157; Кочуков С.А. *Op. cit.* C. 181; Меннинг Б.У. *Op. cit.* C. 153–154.

The size of the artillery increased by 40% between 1881 and 1899, but its overall level of equipment remained insufficient. For example, in 1893, per infantry battalion there were 4.2 guns in France, 3 in Germany, 2.85 in Austria, and 2.5 in Russia⁷⁵.

In the Russian army, experiments were conducted with balloons, machine guns, telephones, and other military technologies. However, innovations rarely met with sufficient trust or willingness to allocate funds. For example, after the 1891–1892 trials, 250 machine guns were ordered, but only for fortress units, not for field troops⁷⁶. Overall, the Russian army, slowly and with delay, nevertheless managed to keep up with the high pace of the arms race of the late 19th century. Beyond obvious financial constraints, this was also due to the fact that the military leadership still viewed a hypothetical major European war as a short, maneuver-based conflict, in which technical equipment would play only a secondary role.

Probably the most acute problem of the Russian army in the 1890s was not slow mobilization or technical backwardness, but rather internal social issues within the armed forces and the growing gap between the army and society. John Bushnell described the world of the Russian officer at the turn of the 19th–20th centuries as a closed circle in which women, alcoholism, and gambling led to theft; theft was covered up in the name of corporate honor; corporatism reinforced the isolation of the officer corps; and this isolation, in turn, encouraged alcoholism⁷⁷. Of course, not all officers were swept up in this pattern. Researchers note the uneven and heterogeneous composition of the Russian officer corps in this period⁷⁸. However, escaping the narrow confines of a bleak garrison life into a broader career path was indeed difficult.

⁷⁵ Бескровный А.Г. *Op. cit.* С. 356; Зайончковский П.А. *Самодержавие...* С. 159–162; Меннинг Б.У. *Op. cit.* С. 155–156.

⁷⁶ Бескровный А.Г. *Op. cit.* С. 321.

⁷⁷ Bushnell J. The Tsarist Officer Corps, 1881–1914: Customs, Duties, Inefficiency // *American Historical Review*. Vol. 86. No. 4 (October 1981). P. 753–780.

⁷⁸ Зайончковский П.А. Русский офицерский корпус на рубеже столетий (1881–1903) // *Военно-исторический журнал*. 1971. № 8. С. 41; Меннинг Б.У. *Op. cit.* С. 152.

Due to the privileges of the Guards and the rarity of transfers between units, promotion rates varied significantly between different branches of service⁷⁹. But the overall picture was unpromising for those without the right connections. The officer corps was aging. Nearly one-third of company commanders were over 46 years old⁸⁰. Their advancement was blocked by a small number of lieutenant colonel positions and a large number of elderly generals. Pyotr Vannovsky strictly followed the will of Alexander III: promotions were based on seniority, and elderly officers were not forced into retirement⁸¹. As a result, ambitious officers left the service, while more inert or even incompetent leaders took their place. This system of selection did not enhance the prestige of officers among enlisted men or society. In addition, the social cohesion of the officer corps weakened: by 1895, hereditary nobles made up about 50% of officers⁸².

The restoration of cadet corps further contributed to the insularity of the officer corps. In 1894, a new step in this direction was taken when, contrary to criminal law and international trends, dueling was legalized in the army. Through this measure, the military authorities hoped to strengthen corporate esprit de corps among officers; in practice, however, it only increased the number of duels and deepened the alienation between the military and society⁸³.

By 1894, negative trends were already visible in the development of the Russian army and navy, trends that would intensify under the reign of Nicholas II. In a situation where war was becoming a “scientific and administrative problem”⁸⁴, organizational and technical factors came to the forefront. The Russian Empire was traditionally weak in these areas and did too little to correct this. It was able to supply

⁷⁹ Защук И. Ваканционное производство 1893 года в армейской пехоте // Разведчик. 1893. № 160. С. 869–870.

⁸⁰ Зайончковский П.А. Самодержавие... С. 189.

⁸¹ Кочуков С.А. *Op. cit.* С. 46.

⁸² Зайончковский П.А. Самодержавие... С. 204–205.

⁸³ Robinson P. Courts of Honour in the Late Imperial Russian Army // The Slavonic and East European Review. Vol. 84. No. 4. 2006. P. 711–713.

⁸⁴ Интеллектуальная и моральная реформа во Франции // Ренан Э. Собрание сочинений Эрнеста Ренана. В 12 т. Т. IV. Киев, 1902. С. 130.

itself with material resources (weapons, fortifications, railways), albeit with some delay compared to leading powers. However, the situation became alarming where military issues intersected with political and socio-economic ones. The need for serious changes in the officer corps was obvious, but these were blocked by the supreme power. Measures aimed at preserving the military caste system (restoration of cadet corps, legalization of dueling) can hardly be considered successful.

By the mid-1890s, it had become clear that strategic defense issues were increasingly in conflict with the conservative course of the late Romanovs.

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