Enlisted Men in the United States Army, 1812-1815: A Preliminary Survey
Author(s): J. C. A. Stagg
Source: *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 43, No. 4 (Oct., 1986), pp. 615-645
Published by: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1923685
Accessed: 20/07/2009 12:15

Notes and Documents

Enlisted Men in the United States Army, 1812-1815: A Preliminary Survey

J.C.A. Stagg

IN recent years historians have shown a renewed interest in the subject of war in early America. Their studies, generally, have pursued two types of inquiry. One, focusing on the Revolutionary period and the formation of the United States, has dealt with how Americans perceived and provided for the common defense within the framework of a republican political culture.[1] The second, ranging more broadly across the eighteenth century, has examined the contexts of military service, particularly the social composition of forces engaged in warfare.[2] Collectively, these studies help explain why Americans, after adopting the Federal

Mr. Stagg is an associate professor of history at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. Acknowledgments: The preparation of this article was assisted by grants from the Penrose Fund of the American Philosophical Society and the Research Committee of the University of Auckland. For drawing the sample on which the article is based, I am deeply indebted to Murray A. McLauchlin. For comments and assistance in various ways thanks are due to Fred Anderson, James M. Banner, Jr., Kenneth A. Lockridge, Michael S. Mayer, and Holly Cowan Shulman.

[1] See E. Wayne Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775-1783* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1984); Lawrence Delbert Cress, *Citizens in Arms: The Army and the Militia in American Society to the War of 1812* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1982); and Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1979).

[2] Fred Anderson, *A People's Army: Massachusetts Soldiers and Society in the Seven Years' War* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1984); Richard Buel, Jr., *Dear Liberty: Connecticut's Mobilization for the Revolutionary War* (Middletown, Conn., 1980); John C. Dann, ed., *The Revolution Remembered: Eyewitness Accounts of the War for Independence* (Chicago, 1980); John E. Ferling, *A Wilderness of Miseries: War and Warriors in Early America* (Westport, Conn., 1980); Mark Edward Lender, "The Social Structure of the New Jersey Brigade: The Continental Line as an American Standing Army," in Peter Karsten, ed., *The Military in America: From the Colonial Era to the Present* (New York, 1980), 27-44; Charles H. Lesser, ed., *The Sinews of*

Constitution of 1787, accepted a professional, regular army for national defense, while at the same time retaining strong suspicions about both the institution and the men whom they feared were most likely to serve in its ranks. A large standing army, composed of propertyless or impoverished men and possibly under the control of politically ambitious officers, could be, it was believed, a threat to the integrity of the republic.[3]

This recent literature has reinforced a much older theme in American military historiography—best exemplified by the writings of Emory Upton—that widely held prejudices against professional, regular soldiers have inhibited the ability of the United States to mobilize and wage war. In no instance has this seemed more true than during the War of 1812.[4] Few historians have ever doubted that the ineffectiveness of the war effort against Great Britain between 1812 and 1815 could be attributed, in part at least, to problems of recruiting and managing an undermanned regular army in a society that was either too heedless of or too hostile to its military needs to provide enough manpower for waging war.[5] Yet studies of the War of 1812 have rarely devoted attention to problems of mobilization, and historians have neglected to examine whether Ameri-

---

Independence: Monthly Strength Reports of the Continental Army (Chicago, 1976); Robert Middlekauff, "Why Men Fought in the American Revolution," *Huntington Library Quarterly,* XLIII (1980), 135-148; Edward C. Papenfuse and Gregory A. Stiverson, "General Smallwood's Recruits: The Peacetime Career of the Revolutionary War Private," *William and Mary Quarterly,* 3d Ser., XXX (1973), 117-132; Howard H. Peckham, ed., *The Toll of Independence: Engagements and Battle Casualties of the American Revolution* (Chicago, 1974); William Pencak, *War, Politics, and Revolution in Provincial Massachusetts* (Boston, 1981); John R. Sellers, "The Common Soldier in the American Revolution," in Stanley J. Underdal, ed., *Military History of the Revolution: Proceedings of the Sixth Military History Symposium, USAF Academy* (Washington, D.C., 1976), 151-161; John Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence* (New York, 1976), esp. 163-254.

[3] For the history of the Continental army and the early U.S. Army see Richard H. Kohn, *Eagle and Sword: The Federalists and the Creation of the Military Establishment in America, 1783-1802* (New York, 1975), and James Kirby Martin and Mark Edward Lender, *A Respectable Army: The Military Origins of the Republic, 1763-1789* (Arlington Heights, Ill., 1982). For a discussion of anti-army prejudice in the early republic see Cress, *Citizens in Arms,* esp. 137-143.

[4] Emory Upton, *The Military Policy of the United States* (Washington, D.C., 1904), esp. 96-142. For a discussion of Upton's influence see Russell F. Weigley, *Towards an American Army: Military Thought from Washington to Marshall* (New York, 1962), 137-161.

[5] Henry Adams, *History of the United States of America* (New York, 1889-1891), VI, 289, 294-295, 337, 389, 390, VII, 380-381, VIII, 17, 216-217, 265, 279, 281; Harry L. Coles, *The War of 1812* (Chicago, 1965), 266; Warren W. Hassler, Jr., *With Shield and Sword: American Military Affairs, Colonial Times to the Present* (Ames, Iowa, 1982), 72-73, 79, 91, 103; J. Mackay Hitsman, *The Incredible War of 1812: A Military History* (Toronto, 1965), 41, 183, 191-192; Reginald Horsman, *The War of 1812* (New York, 1969), 30, 168; Allan R. Millett and Peter

cans' first serious attempt to raise a regular army conformed to their republican preconceptions about the nature of armies generally.[6] As a result, historians today, to measure the success of regular recruiting between 1812 and 1815, continue to rely on nineteenth-century estimates that are probably inaccurate, while of the men who enlisted for service in these years they know nothing. The history of the United States Army in its first full-scale war can thus be identified as an important area for research in the study of the early republic.

The purpose of this article is to initiate discussion on this topic by subjecting to systematic quantitative analysis an old, but almost wholly neglected, source on the army: the twenty-six manuscript volumes entitled "Records of Men Enlisted in the U.S. Army prior to the Peace Establishment, May 17, 1815," held as part of the contents of the Adjutant General's Office (Record Group 94) in the National Archives in Washington, D.C.[7] The article will estimate how many men entered the army during the War of 1812, describe their social origins, and discuss what might be inferred from this material about some of the factors that could have motivated them to enlist. The answers, though in some cases partial and tentative, are significant. They suggest that the army between 1812 and 1815 contained a good many more men than had previously been believed and that the backgrounds of these men reflected a considerable diversity of circumstances. These conclusions, in turn, point to themes in the economy and society of early nineteenth-century America that may have been important in leading so many men to serve in war.

The provenance of the "Records of Men Enlisted in the U.S. Army" is uncertain. Very probably, the registers were compiled from a variety of older military documents sometime between 1879 and 1881; their organization—an alphabetized roll of army enlistments between 1798 and 1815—suggests that they were created to facilitate the handling of pension claims established for veterans of the War of 1812 and for their widows under legislation passed by Congress in 1871 and 1878.[8] These

---

Maslowski, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America* (New York, 1984), 102; Russell F. Weigley, *History of the United States Army* (New York, 1967), 118, 120, 121, and *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (New York, 1973), 47.

[6] A partial exception is J.C.A. Stagg, *Mr. Madison's War: Politics, Diplomacy, and Warfare in the Early American Republic, 1783-1830* (Princeton, N.J., 1983), esp. 144-176. Most discussions of mobilization for the War of 1812 are limited to summaries of the relevant legislation. See, for example, Marvin A. Kreidberg and Merton G. Henry, *History of Military Mobilization in the United States Army, 1775-1945* (Washington, D.C., 1955), 43-60.

[7] The volumes are reproduced on 13 reels of microfilm as part of the Registers of Enlistments in the United States Army, 1789-1914 (M-233).

[8] The volumes are undated, but the inside cover of the first volume contains two scraps of paper bearing the dates "2.11.79" and "Oct 6/81." One of these papers describes the organization of the registers thus: "The arrangement of this Book is

records may contain as many as 90,000 to 100,000 names, but the majority of enlistments fall in the period of the War of 1812. They contain, in varying degrees, the following information about men who served in the army: name, rank, regiment, company commander, height, eye color, hair color, complexion, age, occupation, place of birth, date of enlistment, place of enlistment, recruiting officer, term of enlistment, and a brief service record in the form of "additional remarks."

Exploiting these records is not without its difficulties. Their organization is confusing. The main alphabetical sections containing the names of the enlisted men also include the names of commissioned officers and are interspersed throughout with miscellaneous lists of waiters, washerwomen, civilians, and militiamen. The data they contain are by no means complete for every recruit, particularly for men who enlisted for short terms of service of twelve or eighteen months in 1812 and 1813, though the information is fortunately fairly full for men who served for five years or for the duration of the war.[9] There are inconsistencies in the ways in which data were recorded, especially for reenlistments. The names of some are recorded each time they enlisted for a term, while others appear only once but with a note in the "additional remarks" that they also reenlisted. Since some names were far more widely used than others—there are, for example, fifty-one enlistments under the name of John Campbell between 1812 and 1815—it can be difficult to tell whether such common names belong to different individuals or whether smaller numbers of men were enlisting more than once.

Such problems, though, need not be insuperable. All names other than those of regular recruits can be discarded, while careful scrutiny and systematic comparisons of all the data available for men with common names can usually permit a reasonable guess as to whether such enlist-

---

as follows—All men are arranged under their initials and vowelized. All those who appear under the initials A.A. in the Regular Army are followed by A.A. Miscellaneous (consisting of citizens, wash women, British Vols, Militia etc.), B.A. in the same order and so on to Z.A." For the pension laws of 1871 and 1878 see William H. Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions in the United States,* ed. David Kinley (New York, 1918), 109-113.

[9] In the data sample of 6,370 cases the degree of completeness is as follows: Regiment (6,348), 99.6%; Rank (5,916), 92.8%; Term (5,912), 92.8%; Height (4,672), 73.3%; Age (4,653), 73.0%; Birthplace (4,557), 71.5%; Occupation (4,065), 63.8%; Complexion (4,063), 63.7%; Eye Color (4,062), 63.7%; Hair Color (4,057), 63.6%; Place Enlisted (3,663), 57.5%. When data on one variable are missing, they are often missing on many others, particularly on the eight relating to the recruit's personal description and background. In 1,615 cases (25.3%), data on these eight variables are missing altogether. These cases include 70.3% of the twelve-month men and 55.9% of the eighteen-month men, but only 15.1% of the men who enlisted for five years or for the duration of the war. All quantitative statements in this article are based on a computer-assisted analysis of the registers, using Norman H. Nie *et al., SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences,* 2d ed. (New York, 1975).

ments were duplications. A much more serious difficulty is simply the overwhelming mass of data about thousands and thousands of men, making the task of drawing a random sample too cumbersome to be considered. Consequently, a systematic sample—starting with a randomly chosen number between one and ten—was taken of every tenth regular recruit who enlisted during the period from January 1812 to February 1815.[10] Since alphabetical listing usually avoids problems of periodicity as a source of bias and is also largely irrelevant to the distribution of most of the variables recorded throughout the population of soldiers, this systematic sample can be fairly considered as equivalent to random sample.[11] The procedure, moreover, produced a very large number of cases—6,370 in all, including 5,350 privates, 450 noncommissioned officers, and 116 musicians.[12] This number, after allowance is made for gaps, inconsistencies, and duplications, is certainly adequate to provide the basis for a statistical and social portrait of regular soldiers in the War of 1812.

The first important question the sample can address is the total number of men who joined the army after January 1812, and that number, furthermore, can be constructed in ways that depict the ebb and flow of enlistments throughout the whole thirty-eight-month period. These were matters about which the War Department was singularly confused between 1812 and 1815, and subsequent investigations made by Congress and the Adjutant General's Office did not greatly clarify them. During the war itself, the staff of that office repeatedly confessed its inability to furnish an accurate return of the army, either for want of reliable, up-to-date recruiting reports, or, more often, for the want of any reports at all.[13] When asked by Congress in November 1814 for a full return of the army,

[10] Jan. 1812 may be fairly considered as the time when recruiting for war started. Congress passed laws on Dec. 24, 1811, for "completing the existing Military Establishment," and on Jan. 11, 1812, "to raise an additional Military Force" ([*Annals of Congress*], *Debates and Proceedings, in the Congress of the United States, 1789-1824* [Washington, D.C., 1834-1856], 12th Cong., 1st Sess., 2227-2228, 2230-2234). The end of the war was officially proclaimed in the United States on Feb. 17, 1815.

[11] For a discussion of systematic samples as equivalents for random samples, see Hubert M. Blalock, *Social Statistics,* 2d ed. (New York, 1972), 514-516, and R. S. Schofield, "Sampling in Historical Research," in E. A. Wrigley, ed., *Nineteenth-Century Society: Essays in the Use of Quantitative Methods for the Study of Social Data* (Cambridge, 1972), 147-154.

[12] Rank was not recorded in 360 cases in the sample while 94 men were described as artificers, seamen, gunners, or laborers.

[13] See, for example, Eustis to Joseph Anderson, June 6, 8, 1812, Letters Received by the Secretary of War, Unregistered Series (M-222), Records of the Office of the Secretary of War (Record Group 107), Nat. Arch., and letters from the Adjutant General to Eustis, Nov. 6, 1812, and to Charles K. Gardner, July 11, 1813, July 25, 1814, in Letters Sent by the Office of the Adjutant General (M-565), Records of the Office of the Adjutant General (Record Group 94), Nat. Arch.

Inspector General Maj. John Bell could respond with certainty only that 13,898 men had been enlisted between February and September 1814. Admitting that this figure was implausibly low, Bell then declared that 26,017 men "at least" must have been raised since January 1814, to which he added another estimate, made at the end of 1813, of 8,012 men as the then "effective strength" of the army. On that basis, he supposed that the army contained 34,029 men in September 1814.[14]

Even after 1815, when information was more complete than it had been during the war and could be studied at greater leisure, basic questions about the size of the wartime army remained unresolved. In response to a congressional request on the matter in 1858, the Adjutant General maintained that "the whole number of officers and men in the regular service during the war [could] not be given"; the "nearest approximation" he could provide for enlisted men was the following series of figures: 6,385 in July 1812; 17,560 in February 1813; 35,791 in September 1814; and 31,028 in February 1815.[15] Since 1858, these figures—or very similar ones—have generally been cited as reflecting the army's annual strength between 1812 and 1815.[16] At the same time, however, the Treasury Department provided an estimate of 53,750 as the total number of noncommissioned officers and enlisted men in service between 1812 and 1815, though the Treasury auditor obtained this figure by making some allowance for an unspecified number of men who had enlisted for five years after 1807 and who necessarily served some of their time during the war.[17] Of course, these two sets of estimates made in 1858 are not strictly comparable since they addressed different aspects of the problem of army size, but in varying ways they probably underestimated both the number of men who enlisted during the war and the number in the ranks at any given time between 1812 and 1815.

That the number enlisting between January 1812 and February 1815 was greater than has been recognized—and may have exceeded 62,000—is supported by Table I, a series of monthly enlistment estimates obtained from the sample of 6,370 and multiplied by ten to provide an estimate of total enlistments. Men who left the army during the war or who reenlisted were removed at the appropriate time in order not to inflate either the monthly estimates or the estimate of the cumulative total of enlistments. The figures should not be taken as strictly accurate, but there seems no reason to doubt them as an acceptable approximation or to question the relative orders of magnitude they suggest.

[14] John R. Bell to Monroe, Nov. 2, 1814, and to George Troup, Nov. 2, 1814, in Letters Sent by the Adjutant General (M-565).

[15] "Number of Troops In the Last War With Great Britain," 35th Congress, 1st session, *House of Representatives, Executive Document,* No. 72, 1-2.

[16] See, for example, the almost identical set of figures in United States Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics, Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, D.C., 1975), II, 1142. See also Upton, *Military Policy of the United States,* 120, 133.

[17] "Number of Troops," 35th Cong., 1st sess., *House Executive Doc.,* No. 72, 3-4.

TABLE I
ENLISTMENTS, 1812-1815

Month	*N*	*Cumulative Totals*
1812		
January-April	2,060	2,060[a]
May-August	8,410	10,470
September-December	3,300	13,770
Total 1812	13,770	
1813		
January-April	8,770	22,540
May-August	8,400	30,840
September-December	4,900	34,640
Total 1813	22,160	
1814		
January-April	10,090	41,160
May-August	8,640	43,210
September-December	6,120	47,740
Total 1814	24,850	
1815		
January-February	1,650	48,920
Total Enlisting		62,430[b]

[a] These figures are multiples of 10 of the sample number of monthly enlistments, from which was subtracted the number of men who left the army after their term expired. The estimated totals do *not* allow for desertions, deaths, sickness, or other reasons for absence, such as furloughs, missing in action, or taken prisoner. Nor do the estimates allow for men serving during the war who enlisted before January 1812.

[b] The total number enlisting is less than the total number in the sample because there are a few cases — 127; 2% of the sample — where either the rank or the month of enlistment is not recorded. These cases therefore do not appear in the monthly totals.

After a slow start in the first four months of 1812, enlistments rose over the summer before falling off to prewar levels by November. Beginning in December 1812, enlistments climbed again and continued upward through May 1813, after which they declined slightly, though not to the lowest levels reached during the previous year. Then, in February 1814, enlistments rose sharply and remained at a high level through September. Nearly 25,000 men enlisted in 1814, constituting almost 40 percent of all enlistments recorded after January 1812. At the end of the war in February 1815, before demobilization began, the number of troops stood at about 48,920.[18]

[18] It makes little sense to assume, on the basis of the figures provided by the Adjutant General in 1858, that the army actually declined in strength between

The growth of the army was by no means steady. Nearly four-fifths of the 4,753 men (79.4 percent) whose term of service is known and who enlisted after January 1812 joined up either for five years or for the duration of the war; the remainder (1,231, 20.6 percent) enlisted for the terms of twelve and eighteen months that were available, as previously noted, in 1812 and 1813. By the end of 1813, when the short terms began to expire, the twelve- and eighteen-month men constituted 35.5 percent of all the enlistments made since January 1812, and the army faced a serious crisis if these soldiers sought discharge instead of reenlisting.[19] Generally, the twelve- and eighteen-month men chose not to reenlist; only 14.0 percent of these men in the sample (172) reenlisted in 1814, while only 4.1 percent (109) of those who enlisted after January 1814 (2,650) can be proved to have enlisted before that date.[20] Consequently, although enlistments rose in the early months of 1814, so too did the number of men leaving the service. By April 1814, the army was losing nearly as many men as it gained, and by June it had actually fallen slightly to 40,890 men. The situation did not stabilize until August 1814, after which the numbers began to increase more steadily, though the rate of monthly enlistments also declined for the remainder of the year. (See Table I.) But most of the men enlisting in 1814 were raw recruits, and the army clearly lacked a core of seasoned soldiers who could play an important role in training new recruits.[21]

The fluctuation of enlistments throughout the war suggests that one of the most important factors governing the army's growth rate was the timing of the implementation of the military laws passed by Congress. The

---

Sept. 1814 and Feb. 1815. Upton attributes the decline to desertion (*Military Policy of the United States,* 123), but it is not clear that the 1858 estimate made any allowance for desertion. Very probably, it did not, since the estimate was supposed to give "the whole number of officers and men in the regular service" ("Number of Troops," 35th Cong., 1st sess., *House Executive Doc.,* No. 72, 1-2). Admittedly, desertion was high in 1814, but so too were enlistments. On the other hand, the 1858 estimate of army strength in Feb. 1815 *may* have made some allowance for the discharge of men enlisted for the duration of the war only.

[19] Secretary of War John Armstrong, while on the northern frontier in the fall of 1813, ordered army officers to reenlist all men whose terms were expiring. See Armstrong to James Wilkinson, Nov. 26, 1813, Orderly Books of the Adjutant General, Aug. 1813–June 1815, Vol. 445, Records of United States Army Commands, 1784-1821 (Record Group 98), Nat. Arch.

[20] These figures do not allow for the men who enlisted for five years in the Additional Military Force of 1808 during the embargo crisis and whose terms were also expiring after the end of 1813. In the sample of 2,485 men who enlisted in 1814, only 15 can be proved to have been previously enlisted in 1808 and 1809. This number is probably too small, but there seems no reason to doubt the more general point that the rate of reenlistment was very low.

[21] For complaints on this score see George Izard's letters to John Armstrong of May 7, June 10, 25, 1814, in his *Official Correspondence with the Department of War, Relative to the Military Operations of the American Army . . . on the Northern Frontier of the United States in the Years 1814 and 1815* (Philadelphia, 1816), 2, 26-30, 36-39.

change of seasons and the rhythm of the agricultural year had far less influence on the temporal pattern of enlistments. This was partly because, as will be seen, men from farming backgrounds did not constitute a majority of recruits, and partly because large numbers were enlisted in urban areas where the change of seasons had less impact on labor markets and the size of the potential pool of recruits than it did in rural areas.[22] Recruiting was slow in the early months of 1812, owing mainly to difficulties inherent in mobilization itself, including the reluctance of the War Department to implement the 25,000-man army bill passed in January 1812. Administration dissatisfaction with this bill then led, in April 1812, to legislation authorizing up to 15,000 enlistments for terms of eighteen months. But enlistments declined after September 1812, mainly due to problems experienced by officers in trying to continue the recruiting service while also preparing forces for the invasion of Canada. Thereafter, the upsurge in recruiting in April 1813 followed the passage of legislation to raise twenty regiments for twelve months, while the high rate of enlistments throughout 1814 seems to have reflected the very strong appeal of the greatly increased money bounty offered by Congress in January of that year. The increased bounty, ironically, was considered necessary to persuade the twelve- and eighteen-month men to reenlist when their terms expired.[23]

Estimates of total size and of monthly enlistments throughout the war do not, of course, reflect the army's "effective strength." This could be eroded by such factors as sickness, desertion, men on leave, men killed or wounded, men dying from other causes—usually camp sickness—and men taken prisoner of war. At times, the incidence of these factors, combined with men being discharged for incapacity or ineligibility, could be sufficiently serious to lead the War Department to discount enlistment totals substantially.[24] A reliable estimate of effective strength, however, cannot be calculated easily, if at all, from the registers, largely because of

[22] For a discussion of the importance of the cycle of the agricultural year see Clarence H. Danhof, *Change in Agriculture: The Northern United States, 1820-1870* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), 73-74, and James A. Henretta, *The Evolution of American Society, 1700-1815: An Interdisciplinary Analysis* (Lexington, Mass., 1973), 31-39. Only 42.6% of all the recruits enlisted in the months from Oct. to Mar.—when demand for agricultural labor would have been at its lowest—during the period from Jan. 1812 to Feb. 1815. For those who gave their occupation as farmer, the figure is 48.3%.

[23] For the background to this legislation see Stagg, *Mr. Madison's War,* 85-89, 101, 155-176, 279-281, 366-368, 374-375.

[24] See "A Report of the Army—its Strength and Distribution [1814]," where the Inspector General discounted the aggregate strength of the force by 15%, largely because of the "wretched condition" of the right wing of the army under Gen. Izard. James Madison Papers, Library of Congress. See also Bell to Abiel Y. Nicoll, Dec. 14, 1813, Letters Received by the Office of the Adjutant General (M-566), Records of the Office of the Adjutant General, and Armstrong to Troup, Dec. 29, 1813, Daniel Parker Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

the nature of the information contributing to any such estimate in the "additional remarks" on the troops. While some sorts of information, such as that on deaths, desertions, and prisoners of war, are recorded in sufficient detail to permit an estimate of their incidence, other relevant data, especially relating to the duration of illnesses, are not precise enough to make accurate estimates of the fluctuations in effective strength. Nonetheless, information from the additional remarks permits absolute calculations of the factors contributing to the effective strength of the army and gives some indication of their relative importance.

Not surprisingly, since the war saw few large-scale battles, the army's losses in men killed and wounded were not great: they amounted to only 3.2 percent (201) of the troops in the sample. A further 2.6 percent (164) of these men were lost to the service while being held prisoner, and 3.4 percent (215) were discharged, usually because too old or incapable of performing military service. Sickness, desertion, and deaths from causes not related to battle, though, were much more important factors constantly undermining effective strength. From the few surviving medical records, it is evident that the army was burdened with large numbers of men afflicted by fevers, agues, hernias, dropsy, diarrhea, dysentery, and venereal disease. The registers reveal that 12.7 percent (807) of the men in the sample were "sick" at least once during their service, and that is probably a conservative estimate of the impact of illness.[25] Moreover, sickness and occasional accidents led to the death in service of 8.2 percent (524) of the sample recruits, while desertion affected the army to the same extent as sickness, 12.7 percent (808) of the sample being recorded as deserters. Since barely one-fifth (161) of these men were ever returned to the ranks, the army, in effect, lost 10.1 percent (647) of its recruits through desertion. Men were also increasingly likely to desert as the war progressed. Only one-fifth (20.2 percent, 163) of the deserters had enlisted in 1812, while one-quarter (26.5 percent, 214) joined the ranks in 1813. But after December 1813, the numbers of deserters rose steeply, a trend that persisted throughout 1814. Nearly half (49.5 percent, 400) of all wartime desertions were recorded for men enlisting in that year.

Why did desertion increase in the last year of the war? It is unlikely that the rise in desertion reflected any tendency on the part of men on short enlistments to quit the ranks before receiving their discharge. In fact, men serving for shorter terms deserted far less frequently than men enlisted for

[25] See, for example, "Register of Patients in the Hospital at Williamsville, 1814-1815," and "Register of the Patients in the Hospital, 9th Military District, 1814-1815," Vols. 552, 680, 683, in Records of United States Army Commands, Nat. Arch.; and more generally see James Mann, *Medical Sketches of the Campaigns of 1812, 13, 14 . . .* (Dedham, Mass., 1816). The description of "sick" depended on whether a man ever appeared on a medical report or was admitted to a hospital. Given the fragmentary nature of medical records, company books, and other reports surviving from the early 19th century, this definition produces a conservative estimate of the impact of illness on the army.

longer terms.[26] A more probable explanation is the temptation presented by the changes in the money bounties offered to recruits in 1814. Not only were bounties greatly increased—from $16 to $124—but most of the money was paid to the recruit in advance of his service. Previously, recruits received $16 at the start of their term and three months' pay ($24) at the end, but in 1814 they received $50 on enlistment, $50 on being mustered into a unit, and the remainder at the end of service.[27] Earlier in the war, Secretary of War John Armstrong warned Congress against such bounty legislation, observing that "bounties given at the close of service have many advantages over those given before service begins. The former tie men down to their duty; the latter furnish if not the motive, at least the means, of debauch and desertion."[28] The desertion levels of 1814 seem to have borne out Armstrong's fears.

Clearly, then, the effective strength of the army between 1812 and 1815 was always much less than the number of men who actually entered the ranks, and even at its greatest size, in February 1815, the military establishment was still below the 59,179 enlisted men authorized by Congress. Nevertheless, the army did recruit, and probably retained, a greater number of men during the War of 1812 than the War Department knew at the time or historians have realized. The full significance of that fact must await further discussion, but it surely suggests that many of the difficulties experienced in prosecuting the war reflected inefficiencies in army organization and training rather than any very serious obstacles encountered in recruitment.[29] And the fact that reasonably large numbers of men enlisted as regular soldiers therefore raises the questions of what sort of men they were and why so many decided to join the ranks.

At first sight, early nineteenth-century America might seem an unpromising place to recruit a substantial regular army. After all, what sort of men would volunteer for the risks and hardships of a soldier's life in a prosperous society where nearly three-quarters of the gainfully employed population were engaged in agricultural pursuits, where little more than 7 percent of the total population resided in urban areas, and where

[26] Of deserters whose term of enlistment is known (772), only 8.8% (68) had enlisted for either 12 or 18 months, while the remaining 91.2% (704) had enlisted for five years or for the duration of the war.

[27] Compare the bounty provisions of the military laws of Jan. 11, 1812, and Jan. 27, 28, 1814.

[28] Armstrong to David R. Williams, Feb. 10, 1813, Reports to Congress from the Secretary of War, 1803-1870 (M-220), Records of the Office of the Secretary of War.

[29] The perception of contemporaries, admittedly, was rather different. Both John Armstrong and James Monroe, while administering the War Department, concluded that voluntary enlistments were too unreliable a source of recruits, and both came to advocate some form of conscription of the state militias. See Stagg, *Mr. Madison's War,* 366-367, 456-459.

republican values conferred scant prestige on the profession of arms?[30] One might assume that recruits must have been largely marginal farmers or destitute unskilled laborers, including sizable numbers of such disadvantaged groups as immigrants and blacks—but, as will be seen, a description of the army between 1812 and 1815 resists such easy suppositions. The soldiers were, in fact, not drawn predominantly from any particular region or social groups, and the diversity of their origins makes it difficult to deduce their motives for enlisting. Nonetheless, the behavior of large numbers of men is likely to fall into observable patterns, and these patterns can at least illuminate, if not in individual cases fully explain, some of the social forces operating on men as they made the decision to serve in war.

The great majority of recruits—86.8 percent of those whose birthplace is known—were native-born Americans. A comparison of the distribution of their birthplaces with the distribution in 1810 of the white male population aged sixteen to forty-five—the group most likely to perform military service—can provide a rough idea whether these native-born men originated disproportionately in any particular area of the country. As Table II shows, the New England states, which furnished one-third (33.1 percent) of the native-born recruits, were most overrepresented in the army, since less than one-quarter (24.5 percent) of the nation's white population of military age resided in New England in 1810. The South Atlantic states (below the Mason-Dixon line) were also generally overrepresented—with 32.9 percent of the troops and 27.1 percent of the white population of military age—while the Middle Atlantic region, with slightly less than one-third (31.3 percent) of the troops, was represented in near proportion to its share (33.2 percent) of the white male population of military age. The newer western states and territories were greatly underrepresented.

Foreign-born enlistees composed 13.1 percent of the total for whom birthplaces are known. The percentage of immigrants in the army—after making some allowance for the absence of accurate controlling data—was probably only slightly higher than the best estimates available of the percentage of immigrants (11.1) in the total population in 1810.[31] Over half of the foreign-born recruits (52.7 percent) were born in Ireland, with most of the others coming either from elsewhere in the British Isles, from Canada, or from Europe, mainly France and Germany. (See Table III.)

[30] See Henretta, *Evolution of American Society,* 193, and Curtis P. Nettels, *The Emergence of a National Economy, 1775-1815* (New York, 1962), 387.

[31] A more precise statement is impossible since there are no reliable estimates of the number of immigrants in the population between the Revolution and 1820. For a discussion and the estimate of 11.1% for 1810 see J. Potter, "The Growth of Population in America, 1700-1860," in D. V. Glass and D.E.C. Eversley, eds., *Population in History: Essays in Historical Demography* (London, 1965), 666-667, 672. Richard H. Kohn has pointed out that immigrants in the ranks, when compared with the number of immigrants of the same age in the population, may not have been as overrepresented in the army as is sometimes assumed ("The Social History of the American Soldier: A Review and Prospectus for Research," *American Historical Review,* LXXXVI [1981], 557).

TABLE II
BIRTHPLACES OF NATIVE-BORN RECRUITS

Place of Birth	*N*	*%*	*% of Adult White Males, 16-45 Years, 1810*[a]
Maine	194	4.9	3.8
Massachusetts (except Maine)	425	10.7	8.1
New Hampshire	209	5.3	3.5
Vermont	123	3.1	3.6
Connecticut	292	7.4	4.2
Rhode Island	68	1.7	1.3
Totals	1,311	33.1	24.5
New York	565	14.3	16.1
New Jersey	232	5.9	3.8
Pennsylvania	442	11.1	13.3
Totals	1,239	31.3	33.2
Delaware	57	1.4	1.0
Maryland	236	6.0	4.3
Virginia	459	11.6	9.3
North Carolina	319	8.1	6.2
South Carolina	183	4.6	3.7
Georgia	49	1.2	2.6
Totals	1,303	32.9	27.1
Ohio	12	0.3	3.8
Kentucky	33	0.8	5.3
Tennessee	39	1.0	3.5
Louisiana	8	0.2	—
D.C. and Territories	14	0.4	2.6
Totals	106	2.7	15.2
Grand Totals	3,959	100.0	100.0

[a] Source: 1810 Census

Before 1812, recruiting regulations stipulated that soldiers should be adult male citizens, but thereafter such provisos were not enforced against immigrants—many of whom may not have been naturalized—and, as the war progressed, they were also applied less severely to blacks.[32] How

[32] Legislation governing the Peace Establishment of 1802 and the Additional Military Force of 1808, which were not at full strength in Jan. 1812, required the enlistment of "citizens," but legislation after Jan. 1812 called only for the enlistment of "effective, able-bodied" men. For the army's willingness to enlist immigrants see Thomas Cushing to Messrs. Whiting and Ames, June 24, 1812, Letters Sent by the Adjutant General (M-565). The enlistment of blacks was more problematical. In response to requests on the matter in the early months of the war, the War Department was cautious, believing that blacks might be enlisted but

TABLE III
BIRTHPLACES OF FOREIGN-BORN RECRUITS

Place of Birth	*N*	*%*
England	68	11.4
Wales	6	1.0
Scotland	21	3.5
Ireland	315	52.7
Great Britain	3	0.5
France	41	6.9
Holland	13	2.2
Switzerland	6	1.0
Germany	55	9.2
Poland	2	0.3
Russia	1	0.2
Sweden	4	0.6
Denmark	3	0.5
Spain	11	1.8
Portugal	5	0.8
Italy	3	0.5
Canada	28	4.7
Others (Latin America, Asia)	13	2.2
Totals	598	100.0

many black men there were in the army is difficult to ascertain since the registrars probably did not record racial background as opposed to national origin with any consistency, but the number of recruits (27) who were described as having "black" complexions amounted to 0.6 percent of those (4,063) whose skin color was noted. Not even all of these men were necessarily black: two were born in Ireland and were not described as being "colored men," while at least half a dozen others with "yellow" or "brown" complexions were identified as "colored men." All the recruits described as "colored men" enlisted in the last six months of 1814 and in early 1815, on which basis it is possible to suggest that at least 280 to 370 blacks may have been in the ranks by the end of the war.[33]

preferably only as musicians. See "Confidential Report of Alexander Smyth, Acting Inspector General," June 23, 1812, in Confidential Inspection Reports, 1812-1820, Records of the Office of the Adjutant General. Not until 1814 did the War Department unequivocally endorse the enlistment of blacks. See Armstrong to James Mease, Aug. 6, 1814, Letters Sent Relating to Military Affairs (M-6), Records of the Office of the Secretary of War.

[33] The only blacks in the sample whose racial origin was consistently recorded are a group of 22 men, mostly laborers and seamen, recruited into the 26th Infantry in Pennsylvania by Lt. Philip Bezeau in the last six months of the war. A few others, very probably blacks but not recorded as much, were recruited in New England.

Men, of course, did not necessarily enlist in the states where they were born, and the distribution of enlistments throughout the Union will provide insights into the movements of the men after their birth and some indications as to where the army concentrated its recruiting efforts. As Table IV shows, New York produced by far the largest number of enlistments, reflecting both the large size of that state's population of military age and, more important, the fact that it was also the main theater of war between 1812 and 1815.[34] A more sensitive indicator of the success of recruiting throughout the Union is the ratio of enlistments to the white male population aged sixteen to forty-five. As already noted, men of this age group, numbering 1,119,844 in the 1810 census, were the most likely to perform military service, and they responded most strongly to recruiting officers in New York and the frontier regions of New England, especially Vermont and the District of Maine. (See Table IV.) Considering the strategic importance of New York and Vermont for the war against Canada, it is hardly surprising that the army recruited intensively in those states, but it may be worth pointing out as well that upstate New York, Vermont, and Maine were also areas where Republican party policies, for a variety of local reasons, traditionally enjoyed stronger support than they did in other parts of New England and New York. For all these reasons, therefore, these areas provided significantly more recruits from their populations of military age than did other parts of the country.[35]

Comparison of places of birth and enlistment also reveals that many recruits had moved about considerably before entering the ranks. Excluding the foreign-born, the sample contains both the birth and enlistment places for 3,088 native-born enlistees, of whom only 1,576 (51.0 percent) were recruited in the state of their birth. The persistence rates of the recruits in the states of their birth were, therefore, with some exceptions, quite low. (See Table V.) In most respects, the geographical mobility of the recruits conformed to population shifts occurring throughout the nation, and the movements of the men broadly reflected the population losses of coastal regions to rapidly expanding frontiers. (Cf. Tables II and

[34] The Ninth Military District, comprising most of upstate New York, was by far the largest military organization in the country. By 1813, its staff numbered 35% of the entire army staff. The district, which included both the main army camp at Greenbush and the naval base at Sacketts Harbor, commanded the routes that led to the Niagara frontier and the Champlain Valley. See Walter Lowrie and Matthew St. Clair Clarke, eds., *American State Papers. Documents . . . of the Congress of the United States . . .*, Class V: *Military Affairs,* I (Washington, D.C., 1832), 385-388.

[35] For the tendency of frontier regions in New England and New York to support the Republican party see Ronald F. Banks, *Maine Becomes a State: The Movement to Separate Maine from Massachusetts, 1785-1820* (Middletown, Conn., 1970), 10, 47-50; Dixon Ryan Fox, *The Decline of Aristocracy in the Politics of New York* (New York, 1919), 48-51; and William A. Robinson, *Jeffersonian Democracy in New England* (New Haven, Conn., 1916), 37-49, 160-170.

TABLE IV
ENLISTMENTS BY PLACE OF RECRUITMENT

State	*N*	*%*	*White Male Population 16-45 Years*[a]	*Recruits/10,000 White Males, 16-45 Years*
New York	772	21.1	180,661	427
Pennsylvania	499	13.6	148,396	336
Maine	180	4.9	42,482	424
Massachusetts (except Maine)	262	7.2	90,872	288
Virginia	296	8.1	104,040	285
Vermont	180	4.9	40,469	445
Maryland	176	4.8	47,943	367
North Carolina	167	4.6	69,086	237
Connecticut	165	4.5	47,579	347
South Carolina	154	4.2	41,421	372
Tennessee	135	3.7	39,443	342
New Hampshire	104	2.8	39,396	204
Georgia	100	2.7	28,547	351
Kentucky	97	2.6	59,325	163
Ohio	89	2.4	42,950	207
New Jersey	88	2.4	42,625	206
Louisiana	58	1.6	—	—
Rhode Island	28	0.8	14,015	200
Delaware	14	0.4	11,016	127
D.C. and Territories	99	2.7	29,578	—
Totals	3,663	100.0	1,119,844	

[a] Source: 1810 Census

IV.) Of the men born in Old Massachusetts (that is, exclusive of Maine) who left the state, for example, nearly three-fifths (57.8 percent) moved to other parts of New England, principally to Maine and Vermont, while the remainder (42.2 percent) left the region altogether, mostly for New York or Pennsylvania.[36] These last two states, furthermore, became the home of more than three-quarters (76.5 percent) of all the recruits who were born in and left New Jersey. In areas south of New York, a general drift of the population to the south and the west can be detected. Among the Virginia-born men who left their native state, over half (52.1 percent) moved to North Carolina, Kentucky, and Tennessee, while a small number (9.4 percent) migrated to the Old Northwest, mainly into Ohio.[37]

[36] For a similar pattern in out-migration from New England see Lois Kimball Mathews, *The Expansion of New England: The Spread of New England Settlement and Institutions to the Mississippi River, 1620-1865* (Boston, 1909), 139-170.

[37] For southern migration patterns see William O. Lynch, "The Westward Flow of Southern Colonists before 1861," *Journal of Southern History*, IX (1943), esp. 306-309, and John D. Barnhart, "Sources of Southern Migration into the Old Northwest," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXII (1935), 58-59.

TABLE V
PERSISTENCE OF RECRUITS IN STATE OF BIRTH

State	*N Born*	*N Recruited*	*% Persisting*
Maine	155	121	78.1
Massachusetts (except Maine)	342	152	44.4
New Hampshire	164	66	40.2
Vermont	100	53	43.0
Connecticut	211	90	42.7
Rhode Island	52	14	26.9
New York	439	319	72.7
New Jersey	196	51	26.0
Pennsylvania	345	208	60.3
Delaware	43	6	14.0
Maryland	178	77	43.3
Virginia	344	158	45.9
North Carolina	253	107	42.3
South Carolina	152	82	53.9
Georgia	38	30	78.9
Kentucky	25	9	36.0
Tennessee	25	18	72.0
Louisiana	5	4	80.0
Ohio	9	4	44.6
D.C. and Territories	12	7	58.3
Totals	3,088	1,576	51.0

Many recruits, however, had moved from their place of birth to a town or city rather than to a distant frontier. At least 1,408 (38.4 percent) of the sample troops for whom place of enlistment is recorded (3,663) were recruited in urban locales of 2,500 people or more. In fact, in six states—Old Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Louisiana—over half the recruits were enlisted in urban areas, and the towns and cities of these states contributed a significantly larger percentage of recruits than the urban percentage of the population. (See Table VI.) It should be pointed out, however, that the recruiting methods of army officers probably contributed considerably to this result. Many officers clearly disliked recruiting in the countryside; finding the business there often difficult, unrewarding, and uncongenial, they preferred to concentrate on towns and cities.[38] One unhappy officer reported, after

[38] The impression that army officers preferred to recruit in urban areas can be easily gained by surveying their correspondence with the Adjutant General and is powerfully reinforced by scores of letters from officers complaining bitterly of the practical difficulties of recruiting in the more isolated, rural parts of the country. For the case of Pennsylvania as an example see the letters to the Adjutant General of the Fourth Military District, William Duane, from the following: John Arrison, Aug. 4, 10, 1813; George Brent, Sept. 4, 1813; Dominick Cornyn, who wrote 27 letters on the subject between June and Aug. 1813; Samuel Dewey, July 4, 1813;

TABLE VI
RECRUITING IN URBAN AREAS

State	*% of Population in Urban Areas 2,500 or More*[a]	*% of Recruits Enlisted in Urban Areas*
Maine	3.1	15.0
Massachusetts (except Maine)	21.3	58.8
New Hampshire	3.2	22.1
Connecticut	6.1	58.8
Rhode Island	23.4	92.9
New York	12.7	44.8
New Jersey	2.4	18.2
Pennsylvania	12.8	58.3
Maryland	12.2	60.2
Virginia	3.2	41.9
South Carolina	5.9	8.4
Georgia	2.1	11.0
Kentucky	1.1	5.1
Ohio	1.1	14.6
Louisiana	22.5	62.1

[a] Calculated from tables in George Rogers Taylor, "American Urban Growth Preceding the Railway Age," *Journal of Economic History*, XXVII (1967), 311-315. Taylor does not list towns of over 2,500 in Vermont, Delaware, North Carolina, and Tennessee in 1810.

being ordered to show the flag in the "respectable" village of Haverstraw, New York, that he could enlist only one "poor drunken devil," and he further complained that there were "no mails here and no printer and I have had to send my printing to Newburgh. Nor can I get music." Concluding that his prospects were dim, he implored his commanding officer, successfully, to send him to Troy, Utica, or Kingston.[39]

Significant questions arise from the occupational structure of the recruits and concern the behavioral patterns and characteristics that might be associated with men pursuing certain occupations. Specifically, was the army between 1812 and 1815 recruited largely from unskilled and marginal men who turned to military service as the only employment readily available to them? The answer, at first sight, is probably negative,

---

William Downey, Sept. 3, 1813; Frederick Evans, June 28, 1813; Patrick Forde, July 13, 1813; and Robert Hall, June 9, 1813—all in Letters Received by the Adjutant General (M-566). It is also possible that extensive urban recruiting contributed to the slowing urban growth rate between 1810 and 1820. Between 1812 and 1815 the army removed thousands of men from towns and cities but did not necessarily discharge them there. See David T. Gilchrist, ed., *The Growth of the Seaport Cities, 1790-1825* (Charlottesville, Va., 1967), 25-53.

[39] James McLean to Jonas Simonds, Apr. 19, 1812, "Letters Sent and Received, 6th Infantry, 1811-1813," Records of United States Army Commands.

TABLE VII
OCCUPATION OF RECRUITS

	All Recruits		*Native-Born*		*Foreign-Born*	
Occupation	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
Farmer	1578	39.0	1463	42.6	67	13.3
Laborer	578	14.2	421	12.2	134	26.6
Artisan	1508	37.0	1271	37.0	198	39.2
Seamen	211	5.1	154	4.4	51	10.1
Miscellaneous	190	4.7	130	3.8	54	10.8
Totals	4065	100.0	3439	100.0	504	100.0

though the situation is complex and differed markedly for native-born and foreign-born recruits. The two largest groups among the recruits whose occupations were recorded were those described in the registers as "farmers" and artisans of various kinds, with 39 and 37 percent of the enlistments respectively.[40] Laborers, who might be expected to have been more numerous, by contrast made up only 14.2 percent. Seamen and men in other miscellaneous occupations such as clerks, cartmen, boatmen, barbers, tobacconists, and schoolteachers—with 5.1 and 4.6 percent each—composed the remainder. Immigrants, however, were more than twice as likely as native-born Americans to have been recruited from the laboring, seafaring, and miscellaneous occupations. The great majority of native-born men (79.6 percent), on the other hand, were either farmers or artisans. (See Table VII.)

It is often argued that the soldiers of America's colonial and early national wars were drawn largely from among the population of younger adult males, at least in comparison with soldiers who served in the armies of Great Britain and France at the end of the eighteenth century.[41] The mean and median ages of the 1812-1815 recruits—26.8 years and 24.7 years—might seem to confirm this generalization, but the impression may be misleading, especially when one takes into consideration both the age structure of the occupational groups in the U.S. Army and the fact that regulars in European armies generally served far longer than their American counterparts. Table VIII shows that by far the youngest men to serve in the War of 1812 were farmers, with a median age of 22.8 years. Their mean age, however, was 25.1, which suggests that they included a

[40] For convenience, the category of artisan was created by grouping 107 occupations listed in the registers.

[41] See, for example, Anderson, *People's Army,* 53-58, 238; Lender, "The Social Structure of the New Jersey Brigade," 29; Martin and Lender, *Respectable Army,* 90-91; Papenfuse and Stiverson, "General Smallwood's Recruits," *WMQ,* 3d Ser., XXX (1973), 120-121; and Sellers, "Common Soldier in the American Revolution," in Underdal, ed., *Military History of the Revolution,* 154-155.

TABLE VIII
AGE OF RECRUITS

	N	*Mean Age*	*Median Age*
All Recruits	4,653	26.8	24.7
Farmers	1,561	25.1	22.8
Laborers	574	26.6	24.6
Artisans	1,498	27.9	26.2
Seamen	209	27.6	26.3
Misc. Occupations	185	28.8	28.2
Foreign-Born	588	30.5	29.5

substantial minority of older men.[42] Other occupational groups in the army were rather older than the farmers, with artisans being older than laborers, while seamen and men from miscellaneous occupations were older still, the latter group having mean and median ages of 28.8 and 28.1. And the oldest group of all was the foreign-born, with a mean age of 30.5 and a median age of 29.5. By comparison, evidence for the British army during the American Revolution describes the typical soldier as "a mature man of about thirty years of age," but he had also averaged nearly ten years' service, having enlisted at around age twenty.[43] The fact that about one-half of the American recruits of 1812-1815 entered the army after the age of twenty-five, at a time in their lives when many men would have preferred to be settling into their vocation, suggests that they were by no means largely drawn from among the youngest men who might have served.

Regarding motives for enlisting, examination of the characteristics and behavior of these groups suggests the influence of different sets of circumstances, all of them of considerable complexity. Farmers, for example, were predominant among men enlisting in some parts of New England, especially the frontier regions of Maine and Vermont, and also among men from South Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee. (See Table IX.) Just over half (53.9 percent) of the native-born farmers whose place of enlistment is known (1,139) were recruited in the state of their birth,

[42] More than one-third (35.2%) of farmers were older than the mean age of farmers.

[43] Sylvia R. Frey, *The British Soldier in America: A Social History of Military Life in the Revolutionary Period* (Austin, Tex., 1981), 23-26. Men in the French army also seem to have enlisted, on average, at about twenty years of age. See André Corvisier, *L'Armée Française de la Fin du XVII^e Siècle au Ministère de Choiseul: Le Soldat* (Paris, 1964), II, 616-626; John A. Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic: Motivation and Tactics in the Army of Revolutionary France, 1791-94* (Urbana, Ill., 1984), 44-55; and Samuel F. Scott, *The Response of the Royal Army to the French Revolution: The Role and Development of the Line Army, 1787-93* (Oxford, 1978), 7-9.

TABLE IX
DISTRIBUTION OF RECRUITS' OCCUPATIONS BY STATE OF RECRUITMENT

Place of Enlistment	*N*	*Farmers*		*Laborers*		*Artisans*		*Seamen*		*Miscellaneous*	
		N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
Maine	165	96	58.2	32	19.4	26	15.8	9	5.4	2	1.2
Massachusetts (except Maine)	235	81	34.5	27	11.5	83	35.3	34	14.5	10	4.3
New Hampshire	98	59	60.2	3	3.1	29	29.6	5	5.1	2	2.0
Vermont	160	112	70.0	6	3.8	35	21.9	4	2.5	3	1.9
Connecticut	150	74	49.3	1	0.7	61	40.7	12	8.0	2	1.3
Rhode Island	15	7	46.7	2	13.3	3	20.0	2	13.3	1	6.7
New York	661	192	29.0	111	16.8	269	40.7	33	5.0	56	8.5
Pennsylvania	445	58	13.0	103	23.1	242	54.4	21	4.7	21	4.7
New Jersey	72	15	20.8	11	15.3	41	56.9	3	4.2	2	2.8
Maryland	137	22	16.1	23	16.8	70	51.1	16	1.7	6	4.4
Delaware	12	2	16.7	7	58.3	1	8.3	2	16.7	–	–
Virginia	266	99	37.2	29	10.9	99	37.2	21	7.9	18	6.8
North Carolina	147	66	44.9	24	16.3	47	32.0	8	5.4	2	1.4
South Carolina	145	92	63.4	12	8.3	35	24.1	–	–	6	4.1
Georgia	94	74	78.7	4	4.3	14	14.9	1	1.1	1	1.1
Ohio	74	29	39.2	23	31.1	21	28.4	–	–	1	1.4
Kentucky	74	35	47.3	16	21.6	21	28.4	–	–	2	2.7
Tennessee	82	54	65.9	13	15.9	14	17.1	1	1.2	–	–
Louisiana	46	19	41.3	7	15.2	11	23.9	2	4.3	7	15.2
D.C. and Territories	89	22	24.7	23	26.1	36	40.9	2	2.2	6	6.8
Totals	3,167	1,208		477		1,158		176		148	

while the remainder had all experienced some degree of geographical mobility. This was particularly true for farmers born in the long-settled coastal states such as Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Maryland, and North Carolina. (See Table X.) Yet even for farmers recruited in the states where they were born, it is also possible that some may have already left home and moved, probably to a nearby town or city. Nearly one-quarter (23.0 percent) of all farmers were recruited in towns and cities, and their concentration in such places was especially high among recruits in Rhode Island, Old Massachusetts, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and Louisiana, where 85.7, 44.4, 63.5, 65.1, and 57.9 percent, respectively, of the farmer recruits were enlisted in urban areas. (See Table XI.)

The fact that so many men from farming backgrounds were young, mobile, and recruited in urban areas suggests that to describe them simply as farmers may be misleading. More than likely, this "farmer" group comprised men in a variety of situations. Younger men in the northern states, particularly if they were younger sons from large families with fathers who could not provide them with an adequate inheritance, may have seen in the army a chance to escape from their limited circumstances while also improving their long-term prospects. Slightly older men, who, it is worth noting, seem to have been close to the mean age for marriage—at least in New England—could have already been confronting the problems of establishing themselves and might have similarly turned to the army in response.[44] Furthermore, marginal farmers in the northern states often supplemented their incomes with part-time trades, of which shoemaking was the most important.[45] Since they made frequent trips to town to sell their wares, some of these men undoubtedly joined the army

[44] For discussion of the problems of inheritance, marriage, the viability of farm units, and migration in the northern regions in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries see Philip J. Greven, Jr., *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1970), esp. 241-258; Douglas Lamar Jones, *Village and Seaport: Migration and Society in Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts* (Hanover, N.H., 1981), 17-21, 41-51, 63-69, 97-102, 104-121; Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York, 1977), 29-31; and John J. Waters, "Family, Inheritance, and Migration in Colonial New England: The Evidence from Guilford, Connecticut," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXXIX (1982), esp. 77-86. For data on the average age at first marriage for males at about 25-26 years see Daniel Scott Smith, "The Demographic History of Colonial New England," *Journal of Economic History*, XXXII (1972), 177, and Maris A. Vinovskis, *Fertility in Massachusetts from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York, 1981), 42-49.

[45] Paul G. Faler, *Mechanics and Manufacturers in the Early Industrial Revolution: Lynn, Massachusetts, 1780-1860* (Albany, N.Y., 1981), 9, 10, 81, 82; Paul E. Johnson, "The Modernization of Mayo Greenleaf Patch: Land, Family, and Marginality in New England, 1766-1818," *New England Quarterly*, LV (1982), 488-516; Jonathan Prude, *The Coming of Industrial Order: Town and Factory Life in Rural Massachusetts, 1810-1860* (New York, 1983), 7-8.

TABLE X
PERSISTENCE RATES OF NATIVE-BORN BY OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS

State	*Farmers*			*Artisans*			*Laborers*		
	N	*Recruited*		*N*	*Recruited*		*N*	*Recruited*	
	Born	*N*	*%*	*Born*	*N*	*%*	*Born*	*N*	*%*
Maine	81	69	85.1	20	13	65.0	30	25	83.0
Massachusetts (except Maine)	119	52	43.6	126	57	45.2	20	12	60.0
New Hampshire	96	43	44.7	41	15	36.5	5	1	20.0
Vermont	63	35	55.5	15	6	40.0	11	2	18.1
Connecticut	82	38	46.3	75	34	45.3	13	1	7.7
Rhode Island	16	5	31.2	13	1	7.6	5	1	20.0
New York	143	99	68.2	133	99	74.4	59	51	86.4
New Jersey	36	8	22.2	103	29	28.1	22	8	36.3
Pennsylvania	46	23	50.0	174	114	65.5	63	45	71.4
Maryland	32	14	43.7	88	35	39.7	15	6	40.0
Delaware	6	1	16.7	19	1	5.2	7	3	42.9
Virginia	146	74	50.6	92	48	52.1	33	12	36.3
North Carolina	124	54	43.5	48	27	56.2	31	14	45.1
South Carolina	97	58	59.7	23	15	65.2	14	5	37.5
Georgia	26	26	100.0	6	3	50.0	2	0	0.0
Ohio	3	2	66.6	2	1	50.0	4	3	75.0
Kentucky	10	4	40.0	5	3	60.0	6	0	0.0
Tennessee	10	9	90.0	2	0	0.0	4	3	75.0
Louisiana	1	1	100.0	–	–	–	1	0	0.0
Totals	1,139	615	53.9	985	501	50.8	295	192	65.0

TABLE XI
PERCENTAGE OF FARMERS FROM EACH STATE RECRUITED IN URBAN AREAS

Place	*Percentage*
Maine	13.5
Massachusetts (except Maine)	44.4
New Hampshire	16.9
Connecticut	63.5
Rhode Island	85.7
New York	28.1
Pennsylvania	65.1
New Jersey	6.6
Maryland	22.7
Virginia	38.4
North Carolina	16.7
South Carolina	2.2
Georgia	6.8
Ohio	10.3
Kentucky	11.4
Louisiana	57.9

on such occasions, though whether they were recorded as farmers or artisans by recruiting officers is uncertain.

In the South, farmers who signed on would have been drawn from across the spectrum of agricultural occupations held by the "plain folk" of that region. In the Atlantic coastal states, their numbers probably included a mixture of tenants and laborers, some of whom were already migrating in search of fresh opportunities in response to the difficulties of making a living from low-priced crops on lands of declining fertility.[46] In the backcountry and frontier regions, many farmers were engaged in both growing crops and grazing herds of cattle and hogs in the forests. They, too, were men frequently on the move, especially if they drove their livestock long distances to urban markets.[47] For all these men, north and south, it was often difficult to make farming yield more than a subsistence,

[46] For discussion of conditions for small farmers, tenants, and laborers in the South see Richard R. Beeman, *The Evolution of the Southern Backcountry: A Case Study of Lunenburg County, Virginia, 1746-1832* (Philadelphia, 1984), 170-172; Willard F. Bliss, "The Rise of Tenancy in Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography,* LVIII (1950), 427-441; Avery Odelle Craven, *Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606-1860* (Urbana, Ill., 1926), 118-120; Jackson Turner Main, "The Distribution of Property in Post-Revolutionary Virginia," *MVHR,* XLI (1954), 241-258; Robert P. Sutton, "Sectionalism and Social Structure: A Case Study of Jeffersonian Democracy," *VMHB,* LXXX (1972), 75-77; and Hugh Hill Wooten, "Westward Migration from Iredell County, 1800-1850," *North Carolina Historical Review,* XXX (1953), 62-69.

[47] The growing literature on the farmers and livestock herders of the southern frontier is conveniently discussed in John Solomon Otto, "The Migration of the Southern Plain Folk: An Interdisciplinary Synthesis," *Jour. So. Hist.,* LI (1985), 183-200. See also Otis K. Rice, *The Allegheny Frontier: West Virginia Beginnings, 1730-1830* (Lexington, Ky., 1970), esp. 158-169.

and land was by no means easy to acquire, least of all in long-settled or densely populated areas where pressure of population on agricultural resources had been restricting opportunity since at least the middle of the eighteenth century. As a consequence, men in their twenties customarily had to consider a number of ways, including laboring and migration, to get a start in life, and in this context military service offered some advantages.[48] The pay of a soldier was not always competitive with rural wage labor rates, but at least it promised to be steady rather than seasonal, and the large land and money bounties offered for service by 1814 would have attracted young farmers seeking to improve their holdings or acquire fresh land.[49]

Accordingly, many of the farmers in the army might have been better described, without injustice, as agricultural laborers at that point in their lives, and they often traveled considerable distances as they moved from place to place, seeking opportunities to augment their rather meager means.[50] As their movements took them to towns, it is hardly surprising that many of them were enlisted there. Some may even have gone to town for that very purpose, while others perhaps impulsively enlisted in town on a visit or a "frolic," possibly a drunken one. One of the more common grounds for requesting discharge from the army was the claim, made either by the recruit or more often by his wife or parents, that enlistment had occurred away from home and under the influence of drink.[51] For all these farmers, therefore, enlistment might be seen as another aspect of their geographical mobility, which had become so prominent a feature of rural life in early nineteenth-century America.

Compared with the "farmers" in the army, artisan recruits were drawn largely from the Middle Atlantic states. (See Table IX.) Not surprisingly perhaps, they tended to be rather more geographically mobile than farmers—barely half (50.8 percent) of the native-born artisans had

[48] See Percy W. Bidwell, "The Agricultural Revolution in New England," *AHR,* XXVI (1921), 698-700; Robert A. Gross, "Culture and Cultivation: Agriculture and Society in Thoreau's Concord," *Journal of American History,* LXIX (1982), 51; James A. Henretta, "Families and Farms: *Mentalité* in Pre-Industrial America," *WMQ,* 3d Ser., XXXV (1978), 26-32; and Darrett B. Rutman, "People in Process: The New Hampshire Towns of the Eighteenth Century," in Tamara K. Hareven, ed., *Family and Kin in Urban Communities, 1700-1930* (New York, 1977), 16-33.

[49] For military service as a means of advancement see Anderson, *People's Army,* 38-39; for data on wage rates during the War of 1812 see Stagg, *Mr. Madison's War,* 170, 173, 276, 325, 337, 456.

[50] For other discussions of rising rates of geographical mobility in the late 18th and early 19th centuries see Robert Doherty, *Society and Power: Five New England Towns, 1800-1860* (Amherst, Mass., 1977), 33-43; James T. Lemon, *The Best Poor Man's Country: A Geographical Study of Early Southeastern Pennsylvania* (Baltimore, 1972), 72-85; and Stephanie Grauman Wolf, *Urban Village: Population, Community, and Family Structure in Germantown, Pennsylvania, 1683-1800* (Princeton, N.J., 1976), 329-332.

[51] See, for example, Thomas Tinsbloom to Eustis, June 14, 1812, and P. Adams to Eustis, June 17, 1812, in Letters Received by the Adjutant General (M-566).

remained in the state of their birth—and 47.0 percent of all artisans were recruited in urban locales. (See Table X.) While artisans as a group might seem to be greatly overrepresented in the army, they were probably not so if allowance is made for the importance of towns as recruiting areas.[52] But, apart from the propensity of officers to seek recruits in towns and cities, what accounts for the readiness of so many men from urban and artisan backgrounds to join the ranks? Almost all artisans, it should be noted, were likely to have suffered some degree of hardship from the economic instability in America's coastal cities that was provoked by administration policies of commercial restriction and war between 1807 and 1815, while in the same period real wages declined and economic inequality increased.[53] Furthermore, artisan recruits were drawn overwhelmingly from the building and clothing trades (60.5 percent), and by far the largest single artisan group to enlist was shoemakers (19.2 percent). Other trades providing substantial numbers of recruits were those of carpenters (15.2 percent), blacksmiths (11.8 percent), tailors (5.6 percent), hatters (4.1 percent), and weavers (3.3 percent). (See Table XII.) There must thus have been particular reasons that led these skilled men to enlist.

By the first decade of the nineteenth century, workers in some building and clothing trades were being adversely affected by economic change, particularly by new ways of organizing production and by the development of larger markets. To reduce costs and to supply these expanding markets, both export and domestic, successful masters in the clothing and

[52] Estimating the percentage of artisans in the work force in cities is a difficult matter. Allan Kulikoff and Sean Wilentz believe that in Boston and New York in the 1790s 49.1% and 52.6%, respectively, of the work force were artisans. Kulikoff, "The Progress of Inequality in Revolutionary Boston," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXVIII (1971), 377; Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York, 1984), 27. By comparison, the percentage of artisans, where occupation is known, among the men enlisted in Boston, Baltimore, New York, and Philadelphia was 36.0, 47.1, 44.1, and 43.7, respectively.

[53] Howard B. Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic: The Tradesmen of New York City in the Age of Jefferson* (New York, 1979), 77-100. For a discussion of declining real wages see Donald R. Adams, Jr., "Wage Rates in the Early National Period: Philadelphia, 1785-1830," *Jour. Econ. Hist.*, XXVIII (1968), esp., 415-425. The literature on increasing poverty in urban areas after the Revolution is a substantial one; see especially John K. Alexander, "Poverty, Fear, and Continuity: An Analysis of the Poor in Late Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia," in Allen F. Davis and Mark H. Haller, eds., *The Peoples of Philadelphia: A History of Ethnic Groups and Lower-Class Life, 1790-1840* (Philadelphia, 1973), 13-36; Alexander, *Render Them Submissive; Responses to Poverty in Philadelphia, 1760-1800* (Amherst, Mass., 1980), esp. 11-25; Kulikoff, "Progress of Inequality in Revolutionary Boston," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXVIII (1971), 375-412; Raymond A. Mohl, *Poverty in New York, 1783-1825* (New York, 1971), 14-34; and Billy G. Smith, "The Material Lives of Laboring Philadelphians, 1750 to 1800," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXXVIII (1981), 163-202. The situation in Baltimore seems to have been more stable; see Charles G. Steffen, *The Mechanics of Baltimore: Workers and Politics in the Age of Revolution, 1763-1812* (Urbana, Ill., 1984), 3-26.

TABLE XII
ARTISAN GROUPS IN THE ARMY[a]

	N	%
Building Trades	380	25.2
Clothing Trades	532	35.3
Food Trades	83	5.5
Marine Crafts	53	3.5
Metal Crafts	229	15.2
Woodworkers	112	7.4
Other Crafts	119	7.9
Totals	1,508	100.0

[a] The classification of trades comes from Allan Kulikoff, "The Progress of Inequality in Revolutionary Boston," *William and Mary Quarterly,* 3d Ser., XXVIII (1971), 411-412.

shoe trades, sometimes with access to merchant capital, were resorting to cheaper labor. Usually, they employed apprentices, but the use of women and sometimes slaves was not unknown. The development of this "market trade" or "slop trade"—largely for the southern states—undermined conditions for journeymen, who in many cases were reduced to mere wage laborers with little hope of rising to master status. Carpenters, especially those engaged in shipbuilding, similarly found themselves working as wage laborers for large masters.[54] These changes led to increasing inequality of wealth within artisan groups, while journeymen, to preserve their handicraft traditions and their conditions of work, began to organize craft unions.[55] Craft action could sometimes succeed, but its instigators, especially shoemakers, lost a number of "conspiracy" trials after 1800 that weakened their organizations.[56] Increasingly hard-pressed,

[54] The "classic" analysis of the problems of declining artisan groups was first put forward by John R. Commons. See his introductory essay to Commons *et al., A Documentary History of American Industrial Society.* Vol. III: *Labor Conspiracy Cases, 1806-1842* (New York, 1910), 19-58. More recent studies usually build on, or modify, this analysis. See Faler, *Mechanics and Manufacturers,* 8-27, 77-86; Ian M. G. Quimby, "The Cordwainers Protest: A Crisis in Labor Relations," *Winterthur Portfolio,* III (1967), 83-101; Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic,* 239-257; Sharon V. Salinger, "Artisans, Journeymen, and the Transformation of Labor in Late Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia," *WMQ,* 3d Ser., XL (1983), 62-84; Steffen, *Mechanics of Baltimore,* 27-50, and "Changes in the Organization of Artisan Production in Baltimore, 1790 to 1820," *WMQ,* 3d Ser., XXXVI (1979), 101-117; and Wilentz, *Chants Democratic,* 30-60, 97-103.

[55] Increasing inequality within artisan groups is noted by Kulikoff, "Progress of Inequality in Revolutionary Boston," *WMQ,* 3d Ser., XXVIII (1971), 387; Steffen, "Changes in the Organization of Artisan Production," *ibid.,* XXXVI (1979), 104-105; and Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic,* 254.

[56] See Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic,* 273-288. Strike action, particularly by shoemakers in Philadelphia in 1806 and in Baltimore and New York in 1809, is discussed in the literature cited in notes 53 and 54. See also Morton J. Horwitz, *The Transformation of American Law, 1780-1860* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977), 3, 22.

many artisans, most of them, judging by their ages, very probably thwarted journeymen, entered the army after 1812, where some of them, by promotion to noncommissioned officer's rank, achieved a degree of success.[57]

Laborers joined the army in all parts of the Union. Their places of recruitment show no very marked geographical concentrations, with the possible exception of Pennsylvania where 23.1 percent of recruits were from this unskilled background.[58] (See Table IX.) As a group, depending on the demand for their services, laborers could be geographically mobile or immobile, and drawn from both rural and urban areas. In states where significant numbers of laborers were recruited—such as Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania—they seem to have been much less geographically mobile than other occupational groups; 65 percent of all native-born laborers enlisted in the state of their birth. (See Table X.) Laborers, like farmers, tended to be among the younger recruits, but a number of circumstances also differentiated some of them from farmers. Many more laborers (36.9 percent) were recruited in urban areas than were farmers, and a significant number of laborers (24.1 percent) were also foreign-born, far more so than was the case with farmers (4.3 percent). It would seem, then, that the laborer recruits were of two sorts: a larger number of marginal men from rural backgrounds who had not moved far, if at all, from their place of birth in search of opportunity, and a smaller group of unskilled urban workers, including some of the less successful immigrants in the coastal cities.[59]

Seamen and men in miscellaneous occupations were drawn from a small pool spread over the coastal states. (See Table IX.) Enlistees with these backgrounds had experienced a greater degree of geographical mobility than did those in other occupational groups, included a greater number of foreign-born men, and were recruited to a far greater extent in urban

[57] For a discussion of the argument that in artisan groups journeymen might be distinguished from masters on the basis of age, with the former likely to be under 30 years of age and the latter over, see Thomas Smith, "Reconstructing Occupational Structures: The Case of the Ambiguous Artisans," *Historical Methods Newsletter,* VIII (1975), 135. Artisans were more likely to become noncommissioned officers than any other occupational group. Of 275 noncommissioned officers in the sample whose occupations are known, 129 (46.9%) were artisans; 89 (32.4%) farmers; 21 (7.6%) laborers; 7 (2.5%) seamen; and 29 (10.5%) from miscellaneous occupations.

[58] For evidence of laborers concentrating in Philadelphia see Priscilla Ferguson Clement, "The Transformation of the Wandering Poor in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia," in Eric H. Monkkonen, ed., *Walking to Work: Tramps in America, 1790-1935* (Lincoln, Neb., 1984), 59-64.

[59] For a similar argument on the degree of geographical immobility for laborers relative to other occupational groups see Georgia C. Villaflor and Kenneth L. Sokoloff, "Migration in Colonial America: Evidence from the Militia Muster Rolls," *Social Science History,* VI (1982), 554-555.

TABLE XIII
OCCUPATIONAL PERCENTAGES BY ENLISTMENT TERM

	Farmers	*Laborers*	*Artisans*	*Seamen*	*Miscellaneous*
12 months	3.6	2.1	3.0	12.0	4.8
18 months	4.5	3.3	4.1	3.3	2.1
5 years	45.3	57.3	51.5	31.3	45.8
War	46.6	37.3	41.4	53.4	47.3
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

areas.[60] While it is almost impossible to generalize from the data about why men in the miscellaneous occupations joined the army, seamen may have had more easily identifiable motives. Between 1807 and 1815, commercial restriction and the war itself badly disrupted the work patterns of large numbers of seamen, while other forms of employment, such as naval service and privateering, do not seem to have absorbed the surplus in the nation's ports.[61] Clearly, many seamen decided on a period of military service as a temporary alternative to their normal vocation, an impression that is strengthened by the fact that seamen recruits showed a far stronger preference for the short terms of service than did men from other occupations. (See Table XIII). Moreover, given the frequency, particularly in New England, with which men from farming backgrounds went to sea to earn money before returning to the land, it is quite possible that seamen may have regarded military service as a way of advancing this goal as well.[62]

Finally, it might be noted that the recruits' dissatisfaction with army life—as measured by the incidence of desertion—was shared fairly equally among all occupational groups. The occupational profile of deserters conforms closely to the distribution of occupations among the recruits as a whole. (Cf. Tables VII and XIV.) Men who did desert, though, were of

[60] In cases where place of birth is known for occupational groups, 24.8% of the seamen and 29.3% of the men in miscellaneous occupations were foreign-born, and 63.4% and 62.0% of these groups respectively were recruited in urban areas. For the native-born seamen and men in miscellaneous occupations, the persistence rates in the states of their birth were 47.2% and 41.1% respectively.

[61] The U.S. Navy did not expand during the war to the same extent as the army, while seamen from the port cities do not seem to have transferred in any number to the service on the Great Lakes. See William Jones to Madison, Oct. 15, 26, 1814, Madison Papers, Lib. Cong. Alternatively, privateers by no means relied exclusively on seamen for crews, while the demand for such crews also fluctuated greatly. Moreover, privateering, like naval service, could be extremely dangerous, and privateer crews usually received no pay unless they took prizes. See Jerome R. Garitee, *The Republic's Private Navy: The American Privateering Business as Practiced by Baltimore during the War of 1812* (Middletown, Conn., 1977), 127-142.

[62] See Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Maritime History of Massachusetts, 1783-1860* (Boston, 1921), 105-111.

TABLE XIV
OCCUPATIONAL PROFILE OF DESERTERS

Occupation	*N*	*%*
Farmer	207	37.1
Laborer	83	14.9
Artisan	219	39.2
Seamen	28	5.0
Miscellaneous	21	3.8
Totals	558	100.0

two sorts. The first was a larger group of younger, native-born men, drawn more from the Middle and South Atlantic states than from elsewhere in the Union; 60.1 percent of the deserters whose age is known (626) were under twenty-six years of age, suggesting that older recruits may have felt greater reason to remain in service to collect their bounties, and over two-thirds of them (67.7 percent) had been born in the coastal states south of New England. The second group comprised a smaller number of foreign-born men, among whom those born in England, Scotland, France, and Spain made up a larger percentage of the deserters than they did among the foreign-born recruits as a whole.[63] Desertions were probably more likely to occur among troops based in the northern states than elsewhere in the Union, particularly among troops enlisted in Pennsylvania, 20.8 percent of whom abandoned the ranks. Many of these desertions almost certainly occurred in Philadelphia, where the army concentrated large numbers of recruits on military posts with lax security, from which men could escape all too easily and disappear into the city.[64]

In conclusion, this examination of the social composition of the United States Army between 1812 and 1815 reveals that reasonably large numbers of men were willing to enlist, induced to do so, in part, by a variety of social and economic factors. And it seems clear that these recruits, with the exception of the handful who were discharged for being too old or otherwise incapable of performing military service, were not drawn from the poorest, the most unfortunate, and the least productive

[63] In cases where the birthplace of deserters is known (646), 84.6% (547) were native born and 15.3% (99) were foreign-born. Among the foreign-born deserters, Irishmen made up only 45.4% as compared with their 52.6% of the foreign-born in the army as a whole. All other foreign-born groups were overrepresented among the foreign-born deserters.

[64] In his half-yearly report on posts in Philadelphia, Assistant Inspector General Robert Sterry emphasized that their use merely as recruiting depots was bad for discipline, and he pointed to the lack of facilities to confine offenders, including the absence of fences and picket guards, especially in the Province Island Barracks. Sterry to Armstrong, July 10, 1814, Letters Received by the Adjutant General (M-566).

men in American society. Furthermore, the number of men in service from such groups as blacks, seamen, and unskilled laborers was also too small to support the contention that the army was recruited from among those who might be described as belonging to an underclass of the permanently disadvantaged. In short, the United States could not have raised an army of any significant size at all after 1812 had it been necessary to rely on the availability of large numbers of permanently impoverished or indigent men. A broader range of men from more ordinary backgrounds had to be attracted in order to swell the ranks to the levels that were attained. At the same time, the men who did enlist were not exactly a cross section of the male population of the Union. Such groups as farmers, blacks, and westerners—not to mention men of high social status—were underrepresented in varying degrees, while artisans, urban dwellers, and New Englanders were unusually conspicuous.

But if it is inaccurate to describe the soldiers of 1812-1815 merely as poor or destitute, it can be suggested that they were men of largely respectable social status who were, nonetheless, in varying ways, close to the margins of that respectability. One factor that may have united many recruits in their decision to enlist, especially the farmers, artisans, and seamen, was that they were all men, probably more so than others in their occupations, who had felt the impact of either short-term disruption of their livelihoods, as in the case of the seamen, or, as in the case of the farmers and the artisans, of longer-term changes that were reshaping the economy and society of the early republic. The effects of economic instability provoked by national commercial and foreign policies after 1807, the pressures of population growth and related problems of maintaining viable agricultural units, the restructuring of traditional crafts and manufactures, and the experience of geographical mobility in response to these changes can all be surmised in the backgrounds of large numbers of the men who entered military service after 1812.[65] To men affected by such changes, enlistment may have appealed as one way of coping with, or escaping from, the circumstances they were facing, though this is not to say that they therefore chose a soldier's life *as a profession.* Conditions of army service were hard and hazardous, a reality clearly reflected in the rates of sickness, death, and desertion. Of those recruits who had an opportunity to reenlist during the war, very few took it, and for the vast majority one term of service was probably all they wanted. If then, as is often maintained, the War of 1812 marked a transitional phase from America's colonial premodern past toward its national, modernizing future, the soldiers who chose to fight it may have done so, in part, because they had already felt directly many of the forces producing that transformation.

[65] See Rowland Berthoff, *An Unsettled People: Social Order and Disorder in American History* (New York, 1971), 127-173; Richard D. Brown, *Modernization: The Transformation of American Life, 1600-1865* (New York, 1976), 106-127; and Henretta, *Evolution of American Society,* 192-200, 213-214.