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**BETWEEN RECRUITMENT AND ALL-ESTATES CONSCRIPTION:
COSSACK MILITARY SERVICE AND ITS TRANSFORMATION
IN THE LATE IMPERIAL PERIOD (1835–1917)¹**

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Abstract. *Introduction.* As the title implies, the article describes the evolution of Cossack military service in the late imperial period, which was completed with the formation of Cossack military service, which existed without significant changes until 1917. *Methods and Materials.* The article is based on various papers: archival materials from the Russian State Military Historical Archive (Moscow), publications of contemporaries on Cossack issues of the second half of the 19th – early 20th centuries, published in the pages of the magazine “Military Collection.” The analysis of historiography on the topic capacitated the author to reveal an overall perspective on the content and evolution of the Cossack service from 1835 to 1917, which was detailed in the narrative acquiring a multi-level structure. In this framework, the emphasis is on the explanation of the relationship between the individual elements of the service over several decades. *Analysis.* For a long time, the form and content of Cossack military service were influenced by the geographical features of the location of a specific Cossack army, the theater of military operations, where Cossack units were used, military traditions, etc. After the Crimean War and with the end of hostilities in the Caucasus, and especially with the beginning of the epoch of “liberation”, the evaluation of the Cossacks and their service moved on to the press. The main platforms for the discussion of the Cossacks military and colonization functions were the periodicals subordinate to the War Ministry. Under the influence of D.A. Milyutin’s military reforms Cossack service was transformed, first on the basis of a conscription order, and then, with reference to the adoption of the general imperial Charter on military service (1874) it again acquired a mandatory character. *Results.* The article concludes that emerging in the late 19th – early 20th centuries the service system implied more rigid centralization and unification, and the entire policy of the War Ministry until 1917 in relation to the Cossack service was aimed at its maximum adaptation to the army regulations and the requirements of modern warfare.

Key words: Cossack troops, War Ministry, Cossack service, recruitment, conscription, service systems, regularity, cavalry.

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**МЕЖДУ РЕКРУТСТВОМ И ВСЕСОСЛОВНОЙ ВОИНСКОЙ ПОВИННОСТЬЮ:
КАЗАЧЬЯ ВОЕННАЯ СЛУЖБА И ЕЕ ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯ
В ПОЗДНЕИМПЕРСКИЙ ПЕРИОД (1835–1917 гг.)¹**

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Аннотация. *Введение.* Статья посвящена эволюции казачьей военной службы в позднеимперский период, завершившейся оформлением казачьей системы отбывания воинской повинности, просуществовавшей без значительных изменений вплоть до 1917 года. *Методы и материалы.* Статья основана на архивных материалах из Российского государственного военно-исторического архива (г. Москва); публикациях современников по казачьим вопросам 2-й половины XIX – начала XX в., размещенных на страницах журнала «Военный сборник». Анализ историографии по теме позволил получить общее представление о содержании и эволюции казачьей службы с 1835 по 1917 г., которое затем детализируется в нарративе, приобретая многоуровневую структуру. В этой структуре акцент сделан на объяснении взаимосвязи между отдельными элементами службы на протяжении нескольких десятилетий. *Анализ.* На форму и содержание казачьей военной службы долгое время влияли специфические особенности географического расположения того или иного казачьего войска, театра военных действий, на котором использовались казачьи части, боевые традиции и пр. После Крымской войны и с окончанием боевых действий на Кавказе, и особенно с началом эпохи «освобождения», оценка казачества и его службы переходит в «печатную» сферу, главными площадками для обсуждения военных и колонизационных функций казачества становятся подведомственные Военному министерству периодические издания. Под влиянием военных реформ Д.А. Милютина казачья служба трансформируется сначала на основе конскрипционного порядка, а затем, в связи с принятием общеимперского Устава о воинской повинности 1874 г., она вновь приобретает обязательный характер. *Результаты.* Складывающаяся в конце XIX – начале XX в. служебная система подразумевала более жесткую централизацию и унификацию, а вся политика Военного министерства до 1917 г. по отношению к казачьей службе была направлена на ее максимальное приспособление к общеармейским уставам и требованиям современной войны.

Ключевые слова: казачьи войска, Военное министерство, казачья служба, рекрутство, воинская повинность, служебные системы, регулярность, кавалерия.

Цитирование. Волвенко А. А. Между рекрутством и всесословной воинской повинностью: казачья военная служба и ее трансформация в позднеимперский период (1835–1917 гг.) // Вестник Волгоградского государственного университета. Серия 4, История. Регионоведение. Международные отношения. – 2023. – Т. 28, № 2. – С. 79–90. – (На англ. яз.). – DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15688/jvolsu4.2023.2.7>

Introduction. In the recently updated “Strategy of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in relation to the Russian Cossacks”, the task of involving the Cossacks in “carrying out state or other service” is set as a priority. Service in the Strategy refers to the activities that are somehow related to military affairs. This bias in the document, which is also “an element of strategic planning in the field of national security” [55], demonstrates continuity with the ideas of the Cossack revival of the late 20th century. Then its leaders took the path of implementing the military-service concept of the development of the Cossacks, pushing cultural and ethnographic revival into the background. This choice was made due to both the political situation at the beginning of the 1990s and the dominating image of the Cossacks as, first of all, a military-service class. An important component of this concept, perfected in detail in historiography and widespread in public opinion at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries was a common order of military service for all Cossack troops, with which other elements of the Cossack image were not comparable. The evolution of the Cossack military service from 1835 to 1917 is the subject of our study.

Methods and materials. The article is based on a variety of sources. Among the documentary sources, there are archival materials related to the activities of the committees and commissions of the 1860–1870s, which prepared various projects of civil and military transformations in the Cossack troops, as well as the correspondence of high officials and representatives of military administrations. Their main array is concentrated in the Russian State Military Historical Archive (Moscow). A significant amount of the used sources were publications of the contemporaries on Cossack issues in the late 19th – the early 20th centuries published in the periodicals, primarily in the pages of the magazine “Military Collection”. The article uses methods of structural analysis and system approach. The analysis of historiography on the topic made it possible to obtain a general idea of the content and evolution of the Cossack service from 1835 to 1917, which is then detailed in the narrative, acquiring a multi-level structure. It is in this framework that the paper has an emphasis on the explanation of the relationship between the certain elements of the service over several decades.

Discussion. In numerous works on the history of the Cossacks, the military theme is undoubtedly dominant [62]. Perhaps the first who systematized information about the form and content of the Cossack service, that took shape after 1835, was V.M. Anichkov [2]. One can learn in more detail from the books by I.D. Popko, N.I. Krasnova, A. Ryabinin about the specifics of the Cossack service in the Don, Black Sea and Ural Cossack troops in the late 1850s – early 1860s [27; 39; 44]. In the 1860s, the number of Cossack-related publications in the departmental periodicals of the War Ministry increased: namely, in the magazine “Military Collection” and the newspaper “Russian Invalid”. Such dynamics is associated with the transformative activities of the Minister of War D.A. Milyutin. The articles of the aforementioned periodicals, often in a discussion form; various aspects of the Cossack service were covered, as well as the place and importance of Cossack tactical units in the Russian cavalry. The researchers N.I. Krasnov and M.P. Khoroshkhin [16–18; 26], who worked in the War Ministry in various capacities, including the work in the Main Directorate of Irregular (Cossack) Troops, had direct access to the information coming to St. Petersburg from all Cossack troops. Historical, statistical and literary heritage of N.I. Krasnov, who came from the Krasnov family, well-known on the Don (his father General I.I. Krasnov was also engaged in literary and journalistic activities), has not been studied yet, perhaps, due to a significant amount of material [28, p. 266]. The first systematic description of the evolution of the Cossack service after 1835 and before the reform of 1874 belongs, in our opinion, to M.P. Khoroshkhin.

In his article “The procedure for serving military service by the Cossacks” (1873), he consistently compares the Don version of the service, which provides for universal military service; Uralic, based on the so-called “hiring”; and a conscription one, involving the drawing of lots among recruits and the exemption from compulsory service of a part of the Cossacks, which was widespread since 1867 in many Cossack troops [17]. In the “Historical sketch of the activities of military administration in Russia in the first 20 years of the prosperous reign of the Emperor Alexander Nikolaevich”, M.P. Khoroshkhin examines in detail the Cossack service from pre-

conscription training of young Cossacks and officers to the staff and payroll units of Cossack troops, the types of internal and external Cossack service, etc. [20]. In 1881, he systematized this information in a separate book, one of the chapters which he devoted to the importance of the Cossack troops as an integral part of the armed forces of the state. In his opinion, the prospects of the Cossack service after 1874 consisted in the release, if possible, of the Cossacks from the performance of police functions and their transfer “to the conditions which were identical with the regular troops” [16, p. 54].

At the end of the XIX – beginning of the XX centuries the number of Cossack publications was growing due to the expansion of the range of periodicals. For some time, even a specialized “Bulletin of the Cossack Troops” was published in St. Petersburg. The authors who published their works in this bulletin were famous journalists and writers, whose work was associated with the history of the Cossack troops and with the coverage of contemporary problems of the Cossacks – N.A. Borodin, A.M. Grekov, P.P. Korolenko, N.G. Putintsev, F.A. Shcherbina, D.I. Evarnitsky and others. Nevertheless, in 1900 N.G. Putintsev in the article “Our Cossack Troops (the need to study their three-century historical experience)” quite categorically stated that “the information circulating in the society about the Cossacks is so insignificant, scarce and unscientific that it seems surprising how little we know of a class so close to us...” [43, p. 50]. Perhaps the pessimism of N.G. Putintsev was slightly exaggerated, and after the publication of three parts of the 11th volume of “The Century of the War Ministry” (1902–1911), devoted to the activities of the Main Directorate of Irregular (Cossack) Troops, his words are far-fetched. For the authors of the 11th volume, military service was “undoubtedly, the main feature of the Cossacks” [52, p. II], and the leading characteristic, “all the others are only its logically necessary consequences” [52, p. 4]. With this approach, it is not surprising that the main emphasis in “Century...” was placed on the description of the Cossack service in its various manifestations in a broad historical context.

Thus, the overwhelming majority of pre-revolutionary authors covering the history of the Cossacks and their service to the Russian state

were military specialists – active or retired officers, officials of the War Ministry, military administrations, etc. As a rule, they were of Cossack origin, followed the positivist tradition of historical writing, preferred historical and statistical research and used rich archival material.

Outlined in the beginning of the 20th century the tendency for “civilian” authors to enter Cossack historiography was fully realized in the Soviet and modern periods. It is worth agreeing with the opinion of A. Yu. Soklakov that one should not underestimate the Soviet historiography in the organization of the military service of the Cossacks [50, pp. 165-166]. For example, P.A. Zayonchkovsky, who studied the history of the Russian army, always paid attention to the development of the Cossacks [63, p. 261]. However, the rare descriptions of specific manifestations of the Cossack service (late 19th – early 20th centuries) carried out by Soviet historians did not add any fundamentally new information in comparison with the achievements of pre-revolutionary historiography. Insufficient attention to this topic on the part of Soviet researchers can be explained by the prevailing negative image of the pre-revolutionary Cossack service at that time, associated with the suppression of public revolts by the Cossacks.

Modern Russian historians, less susceptible to ideological trends, but responsive to the requests of the reviving Cossacks, have updated the study of the multi-faceted military service of the Cossacks. Among the works summarizing the history of the Cossack troops, in which the military sphere is presented in more detail, it is necessary to highlight such publications as “History of the Cossacks of Asian Russia”, “Essays on the history and culture of the Cossacks of the South of Russia”, the newest three-volume “History of the Don Cossacks” and others [21; 22; 35]. In the dissertation research by R.V. Dedov, A.E. Potapov, V.N. Zhelobov, D.N. Solovyov, S.V. Kolychev, A.M. Dubovikov, D.V. Bobylev, A.A. Shakhtorin and others various issues of the life of the Cossacks, including the features of pre-conscription training, military education, legal regulation of service, the possibility of Cossack mobilization, etc. are thoroughly examined [3; 5; 6; 25; 41; 46; 51; 65]. Speaking about the historians who specifically focus on the study of the content of Cossack conscription, taking into account the

regional factor, we address A.P. Abramovsky, V.N. Burdun, A.V. Venkov, E.E. Voloshin, A.V. Ganin, V.S. Kobzov, A.N. Malukalo, O.V. Matveev, A. Yu. Peretyatko, N.V. Ryzhkov, A.P. Skorik, A. Yu. Soklakov, R.G. Tikidjian, V.P. Trut, A.T. Urushadze, B.E. Frolov and others [1; 4; 11; 12; 30; 31; 36; 45; 48; 49; 50; 53; 54; 56; 57; 58]. It is not possible to analyze the scientific contribution of each of the listed authors within the framework of this article. But let us highlight A. Yu. Soklakov’s study, which, in our opinion, most deeply illuminated the transformation of the Cossack military service in the second half of the 19th – early 20th centuries.

Back in 2005, in his Ph.D. thesis, A. Yu. Soklakov consistently examined the existing manning systems in the Cossack troops in the Russian Empire, as well as the policy of the War Ministry to develop a unified order of service for the Cossacks. He developed a periodization of such a policy, highlighting three stages in it: 1) 1854–1864; 2) 1865–1873 and 3) 1874 – early XX century. Having filled the stages with the content, in our opinion, A. Yu. Soklakov turned out to be unconvincing in the substantiation of the chronological framework. Unlike many modern historians, A. Yu. Soklakov mentioned the actions of the authorities on the transfer of a part of the Cossack troops to a new recruitment system (1860–1870s) based on the conscription, implying the formation of a category of military citizens or non-serving Cossacks [49, p. 130]. However, the fact that the conscription order was never extended to the Don and Ural Cossack troops and the authoritative “Centenary of the War Ministry...” A. Yu. Soklakov preferred not to focus on the conscription experience, which apparently prevented him from giving a comprehensive assessment of this manning system in the Cossack troops.

A brief review of historical literature would be incomplete without considering the so-called emigre and foreign historiography. The lack of access to archival materials and other primary sources narrowed the narrative possibilities of emigre historians, especially of Cossack origin, but it left room for interpretations that depended on ideological preferences and, often, did not differ in originality. In this sense, the works of A.A. Kersnovsky and N.N. Golovin, whom we recently gave a corresponding assessment, can

be considered an exception [61, p. 66-68]. As for foreign authors writing about the Cossacks and their military service, in the 19th century, they were, as a rule, either travel writers or publicists, directly or indirectly, working for the military departments of their countries [10; 33]. For the former the Cossacks were comparable to the representatives of the national outskirts of the Russian Empire and are interesting from an ethnographic point of view, for the latter, the Cossack units, which make up the majority in the Russian cavalry, were the object of critical analysis aimed at finding vulnerabilities in the military organization. After 1917, the Western image of the Cossacks drifts into the exotic area, but the first proper historical works about the Cossacks also appear [14; 29]. For foreign professional historians, the Cossack military service, which has lost its relevance, ceases to be a priority for study, their focus is aimed at studying the role of the Cossacks in wars and specific battles, the evolution of the socio-economic situation of the Cossack troops, the participation of the Cossacks in the socio-political movement, their relationship with other population of the Russian Empire, etc. [15; 24; 32; 47].

Analysis. The military service of the Cossacks to the Russian state was initially free in its nature. It has become mandatory since the end of the 17th century. In the 19th century Cossack service is already considered a state service, the evasion of which was regarded as a crime. The content of the Cossack service changed over time and depended on the specifics of one or another Cossack army, whereas you can still see its three most stable characteristics: universality or mandatory service; serving it in the specific order; the duty of the Cossacks to have their own equipment and horses [52, p. 32]. Thanks to these elements, the Cossack service system differed from the recruitment sets adopted in Russia, at least until the 1830s, when a drawing-of-lot mechanism, borrowed from the French conscription, was gradually introduced among the state peasants [34]. The principle of priority used also in conscripting recruits was completely different from the Cossack regular order. The latter assumed that the Cossacks would serve in turns with a mandatory change after some relatively short periods of time, moreover, until the onset of a new turn, the Cossacks remained

free from service and could do household chores. The Cossacks treasured their relative freedom very much. It is difficult to say exactly when the special order of service began to be considered by the Cossacks as a monarch's privilege, but the first highest letter to the Don army proclaimed "inviolability of the service" in the context of confirming "all rights and advantages" by of Alexander I in 1811 [40, p. 19]. After the abolition of recruitment and the introduction of all-class military service, a special "image of service" for most of the Cossacks remained in the form of a myth rather than a real "privilege".

Imperial power before the beginning of the 19th century practically did not interfere in the organization of the Cossack service, being satisfied with its result in the form of Cossack tactical formations entering the army or serving on the outskirts of the state. Moreover, in our opinion, it would be wrong to speak in general about the existence of a properly organized "Cossack" policy up to the 1820–1830s. Until that time, the actions of the authorities were exclusively situational in relation to Cossack army, Cossack region or prominent Cossack representatives. Recorded by historians during the 18th – early 19th centuries the process of integration of the Cossack troops and lands into the Russian Empire was more a consequence of the universal imperial logic of expansion than the result of a policy of the central government focused on the Cossacks.

The Regulations on the Don Cossack Host (1835) devoted much attention to military management. This document was taken as a basis for the development of similar regulations for other Cossack troops. Accordingly, certain norms for the organization and passage of service, adopted among the Don Cossacks, extended to other troops. However, there was also specificity in the organization of military service inherent in specific troops. There were also different ways of putting Cossack units in service and appointing Cossacks from the service category to combat units. Taken together, they formed special service systems, adopted in the army. By the middle of the 19th century, there were 4 such systems (not taking into consideration a special set of Cossacks in the guards units) with the conventional names – "Don", "Black Sea", "Caucasian" and "Ural".

In historiography, in addition to the Regulations of 1835, the unsuccessful review of

local regiments by Nicholas I in October 1837 in Novocherkassk is considered a certain milestone in the development of the Cossack service. The emperor was not satisfied with their system, movement and external condition, and he saw the reason for this in the remoteness of the Don army from the borders and imminent danger. As a result, by personal order of Nicholas I, a decree “On the composition and formation of Cossack regiments” (1838) was developed, which actually copied the rules that were already used in the Cossack guards units serving at the royal court [42, p. 668]. It had nothing to do with the Cossacks’ military service in the army or other wartime situations. In fact, Nicholas I did not want to significantly change anything in the Cossack service. Any radical transformations of the Cossack service until the end of the 1850s were not introduced.

By the beginning of the 1860s 11 Cossack troops were under the jurisdiction of the Office of the Irregular Troops of the War Ministry. The geography of the service and its content fully justified the appointment that the officials of the Ministry of War at the end of the 1850s registered in the Cossack troops. This purpose was “on the one hand, for the direct protection of the borders of the empire from hostile tribes and the safekeeping of order and tranquility between the aliens wandering in the southeastern suburbs of the state, who had not yet fully accepted the conditions of civil life and, on the other hand, for assisting the military and civilian departments of customs and police guards in other areas of the state and to reinforce, in case of war, regular troops with light cavalry and horse artillery” [60, p. 165].

Before the glasnost era of Alexander II, critical remarks about the Cossack service were quite rare and, as a rule, were made in the records of the War Ministry and local Cossack administrations. Since the late 1850s they became available to the public by means of periodicals. The authors of most of the articles on Cossack topics in the 1860s were the Cossack officers themselves. A common theme of such publications was the theme of the decline in combat effectiveness and the loss of “belligerence” among the Cossacks, especially the Don Cossacks. The differences are recorded in the explanations of the reasons for this phenomenon. Some authors preferred to associate the decline of the Cossack

“fighting spirit”, first of all, with the so-called “assignment” which meant splitting into small units [7, p. 57; 9, p. 363]. Another explanation for the loss of the fighting spirit by the Cossacks is directly related to the opinion of Nicholas I based on his impression from what he saw on the Don in 1837 [66, p. 2; 8, p. 229; 19, p. 79]. Various recipes for reviving the Cossack fighting spirit were also discussed in the press. The overwhelming majority of authors saw a correction of the situation in the transfer of the Cossack troops to the order of the regular army, in the improvement of the pre-conscription training of young Cossacks, the training of Cossack officers, the rearmament of the Cossack troops, as well as in the introduction of a conscription service order in most of the troops.

The transfer of most of the Cossack troops to a conscription service order implied an indirect and long-term impact on the quality of the Cossack military personnel. The reasons and consequences of the conscription procedure implemented among the Cossacks, we recently examined in a separate article [59]. The conscription mechanism was supposed not only to strengthen the Cossack military composition, - with its help, the authorities hoped to correct the “most important shortcoming” of the Cossacks, which were actively discussed in government circles at the beginning of the 1860s. In the interpretation of the Kuban Committee (in the middle of the 1860s, this committee was preparing a new military position) this shortcoming was “in its special separate (Cossacks. – *A. V.*) organization and alienation from other estates of the state” [38, l. 137r.] The key figure in the “correction” procedure was the artificially created layer of the Cossacks – military citizens / non-serving Cossacks, who were to be integrated into the general imperial legal space. However, the Don and Ural troops retained their ways of serving military service and were not transferred to conscription. The War Ministry recognized the coexistence of different service orders; this was largely due to the resistance of the local Cossack elites and the leadership of the Cossack administrations, including the military chieftains.

The main brainchild of Milyutin’s military reforms – the all-imperial Charter on conscription – was approved on January 1, 1874.

And already in October of the same 1874, at first, a new “Regulation on the military service of the Don army” was published, prepared by the Don authorities, after which in April 1875 the State Council approved the “Charter on the military service of the Don Army.” Essentially, these documents were distinguished by the fact that the Regulations were related exclusively to the organization of direct service in the Don army, and the Charter was of a certain universal character so that later it could be applied to all Cossack troops.

The new order of the Cossack service turned out to be as close as possible to the general system of conscription, operating on the basis of the Charter of 1874. According to the authors of the “Centenary of the War Ministry...” this was achieved through the division of service Cossacks into categories and age, which in some places did not coincide with the previous division according to the Regulations of 1835 [52, p. 131].

This vector of development of the Cossack service was largely due to the results of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870–1871. The war demonstrated the superiority of the German army, especially in matters of conscription of recruits and the timing of mobilization, and also indicated the quantitative insufficiency of the Russian cavalry. Minister of War D.A. Milyutin noted at the end of 1871: “At present we have only 56 regiments of regular cavalry, while the army of the German Empire has 100 cavalry regiments, not to mention spare and landwehr units. Meanwhile, due to the vast extent of our border line and the nature of the terrain, we need to have cavalry much more proportionate than any of the European states... the government... must turn for this (increase in the number of cavalry. – *A. V.*) to the Cossack troops” [37, l. 53-53 ob.] Perhaps, initially, for the War Ministry the issue of service arrangements and ways of implementation of this strategic task was not significant. The position of the Don army – a potential supplier of the largest number of cavalry – to adapt its service system to the new requirements of all-class conscription led to a revision of the conscription experience. A certain compromise was made in the War Ministry regarding the organization of military service in the Ural Cossack army. In the new military position of 1874, the principle of recruiting, which is fundamental for the Ural Cossacks, was

retained, and the age characteristics of those who carried out military service also remained in force [25, pp. 70-72].

As a result of the new order of the Cossack service, the War Ministry hoped to solve the urgent task of introducing the foundations of regularity in the Cossack units. In the pages of “Military Collection” (1876) one of the active developers of military reform, a member of the committee of irregular / Cossack troops, Don officer A.M. Grekov, explaining the essence of the reforms, expressed the firm conviction that the new order of the Cossack service “...destroys the discord that was noticed among the regular regiments and the Cossack troops. From now on, the Cossacks cease to be an irregular army, suitable only for guard service and the pursuit of a defeated enemy; on the contrary, the Cossack combat units, placed in the same conditions as the regular ones, become a national Russian army, in which there is nothing foreign or borrowed” [13, p. 98]. Despite the optimism of A.M. Grekov, this “discord”, of course, did not disappear immediately. The reform laid the foundations for the gradual merging of the general and Cossack systems of conscription into one – universal for the entire empire, but until 1917 this merger did not occur.

Since the mid-1870s and before the First World War, the activities of the War Ministry to improve the Cossack service without its radical change were implemented in three main areas: maintaining and modernizing the combat and mobilization readiness of the Cossack troops; bringing Cossack regiments, batteries and units to the same level as regular army ones; optimization of financial and economic conditions for carrying out military service by Cossacks.

An important trend in the development of the Cossack troops from the 1870s is a predominant quantitative and qualitative increase in horse units and horse artillery in comparison with foot (Plastun) Cossack formations. The creation of favorable conditions in the last quarter of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century for the formation of the Cossack cavalry contributed to the fact that the equestrian nature of the service became dominant “in the traditional views, ideas and even in the general worldview of the Cossack warrior” [54, p. 54]. Even now this feature is highlighted in the public

stereotype about the content of the Cossack service.

The intensification of the equestrian service forced the Cossack to invest more in the preparation of uniforms and weapons, and especially in the maintenance of the horse. The inclusion of Cossack units in the army divisions and their introduction to regular orders led to stricter requirements for the condition of Cossack ammunition, the quality of which was strictly controlled by the local military authorities. The rejection of homemade equipment, the forced purchase of it from speculators-commissioners and the purchase of a combat horse were a heavy financial burden for the Cossack families of all troops. This became one of the main reasons for the impoverishment of the Cossack farms in the late 19th – early 20th centuries.

In the beginning of the 20th century Cossack units accounted for about 25% in the guards cavalry, about 45% in the army, about 17% in the guards horse artillery and 33% in the field horse artillery, mainly located in the military formations of the European part of the empire [64, p. 95]. The Russo-Japanese War made changes within the disposition of the Russian cavalry, but the ratio of the Cossack and regular units remained almost the same. Under such conditions Russia entered the First World War, and by the time the Cossacks left the war, there were already more than 70% of the cavalry. At the end of 1916, the Russian command planned to reduce the total number of regular and Cossack cavalry by one third of the total, including dismounting and transfer to foot Cossack units. This decision was based on two reasons: the ongoing positional combat operations significantly limited the possibilities of using cavalry, as well as difficulties in supplying food, especially forage. As noted by V.P. Trut, the Cossacks reacted to the implementation of such plans “extremely negatively and even painfully” [54, p. 54]. The revolutionary events canceled the reform, but the fact that the subsequent widespread reduction of cavalry due to a shift of its role in modern warfare along with the growth of the Cossack population inevitably led to another transformation of the Cossack service which should be considered as an obvious fact.

Conclusion. Cossack service is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. The service of the Cossack guards units, which has its own specifics,

turned out to be outside the scope of our attention. It is obvious that the colonization resource of the Cossack service and its police potential also require an objective analysis. We have highlighted the most important trends illustrating the evolution of the Cossack military service from 1835 to 1917. The content of the service depended on the military traditions adopted in a particular army, as well as on the actions of the imperial government, which had its own idea of the Cossacks’ mission. In our opinion, the search for a meaningful and consistent policy in relation to the Cossack troops and their service until the first quarter of the 19th century can hardly be meaningful, and the conclusions about the existence of such policy before the above-mentioned period, are, at least, controversial.

The authorities’ vision of the Cossacks and their service, recorded by the middle of the 19th century, was based on the view that first of all the Cossacks were the defenders of the borders, means of colonization and maintenance of domestic order in the empire and, if necessary, they became an important component of the Russian army in external wars. This image was deformed in 1860–1870s, and then under the influence of military reforms in the middle 1870s acquired a new content, in which the mobilization resource of the Cossacks came to the fore, as well as the combat equestrian Cossack service as part of regular units.

The deformation process was due to objective reasons. At the same time, the opinion of the Kuban Committee was expressed in the middle of 1860s, it said that “the Caucasian Cossack troops do not constitute a homogeneous mass, equally imbued with military inclinations” [38, l. 212]. Such evidence gives reason to consider that Cossack troops had different combat capabilities, also depending on the theater of military operations.

When analyzing recruitment F.N. Ivanov relied on the following statement: “the recruitment system is a compromise between the organization of the state’s armed forces necessary for defense and the interests of the country’s socio-economic development” [23, p. 135]. Through the prism of this axiom, the Cossack conscription system seems to be the best possible compromise. However, for the first time in the history of the Cossacks, the conscription experience cast doubt on the compulsory nature of military service. Thus,

the military-estate nature of the Cossacks was undermined with unknown consequences in the future. As a result, the imperial power, yielding to the Don Cossacks and existing traditions, in the middle of the 1870s, returned to the principles of obligation and priority in the organization of the Cossack service. The issue of the degree to which the new order of the Cossack service corresponded to the interests of the socio-economic development of the Cossack territories is still controversial.

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