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Army Barracks in the North East in the Era of the French Revolution

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For the British Army, the most desperate battles of the long wars against the French Revolution and Napoleon were never fought. Neither the Jacobins nor the Directory nor Napoleon ever succeeded in landing a sizeable army on the British coast. For much of the twenty years of hostilities between 1792 and 1815, however, such an invasion was a real threat, and most of Britain's uniformed forces remained at home preparing to repel it. At one critical moment in 1795, more than 10,000 troops were stationed in Durham and Northumberland; at the height of the invasion scare in 1805, the garrison of Great Britain was as high as 130,000 men. The old practices for garrisoning the island could no longer bear the strain of these numbers, and, beginning in 1792, the government built, purchased, or rented more than 200 new barracks, ten of them in the north-east. At their greatest extent, barracks in the two counties were capable of accommodating more than 4,000 men, at Newcastle, Chester-le-Street, Morpeth, North and South Shields, Whitburn, Cleadon, Fulwell, Monkwearmouth, and Sunderland—in addition to the long-established barracks at Tynemouth, Seaton Sluice, Berwick, and Holy Island.

The north-east was accustomed to a military presence during the eighteenth century, even during peacetime. A regiment of foot was usually based at the old abbey/castle/battery at Tynemouth, with its outlying blockhouse at Seaton Sluice. These infantrymen were available to assist the revenue officers in patrolling the coast, and for possible police duty in the nearby towns. Another infantry regiment, with similar duties, was usually in residence at Berwick and its outlying station at Holy Island Castle. Relics of the region's history as a border province, the older barracks were ex-

ceptions to the old English prejudice against any permanent quarters for a standing army (Schwoerer 1974). Although British regiments in Scotland, Ireland, and colonies overseas were regularly provided with barracks accommodation, it was a constitutional maxim that troops in England should whenever possible live "among the people."

At Tynemouth and Holy Island soldiers were lodged in late medieval buildings located within fortifications of similar date. The barracks at Berwick were built inside the rather more modern bastioned fortress constructed there. At their completion about 1720, they were considered an oddity: "the first barracks created in Great-Britain" according to John Macky. He observed in 1724 that "it would be a vast ease to the Inhabitants in most great Towns if they had them everywhere; but English Liberty will never consent to what will seem a Nest for a Standing Army" (Crake 1955, 421). Macky was right, and the Berwick Barracks remained an oddity. During the next seventy years, barracks were constructed in Scotland to cow the Jacobites and in England at the principal embarkation ports for overseas expeditions (Chatham, Plymouth, Portsmouth, and Dover). In 1758 a temporary barracks for a thousand men was erected alongside the coastal batteries at Clifford's Fort, but was apparently abandoned at the end of the war (Sykes, 1866, v. 1, 221; PRO, WO44/13)¹. The prejudice against barracks remained strong. As late as 1785 and 1786, a government proposal to re-fortify Portsmouth was defeated in the House of Commons, partly on the grounds that the enlarged garrisons would become "seminaries for soldiers and universities for Praetorian Bands" (Glover 1973, 105).

In place of barracks, there was the billeting system: a remarkable (and little-studied) re-

sponsibility of local government. By the terms of the Mutiny Act, the keepers of inns, public houses, ale, wine, and coffee houses, and livery stables in England were obliged to feed and house foot soldiers at the rate of 4d. per day, cavalry troopers at 6d., and their horses also at 6d. These rates had been set in the 1690s, and not altered since; they were frequently a subject of complaint when provision prices were high. In charge of the system were rural justices and parish constables in the countryside; and mayors, town councils, and their appointed billet masters in the towns. Constables or billet masters issued paper billets to arriving soldiers, apportioning them to the various public houses; they also were responsible by law for assuring that all legally required items were provided. Justices and mayors, meanwhile, tried to mediate the inevitable disputes that arose between the local publicans and the visiting soldiers (Clode 1869, v. 1, ch. 9).

The Decision to Build Barracks

Such disputes seem to have been the principal reason for the construction of the Berwick Barracks in 1717 (Crake 1955, 422). A similar rationale was given in an unsuccessful proposal for the construction of barracks in Sunderland, burdened by its wartime garrison in 1781 (PRO, WO30/59). During the mid 1780s, the younger Pitt's more vigorous campaign of combating smuggling, and the rapid growth of the Tyneside population, led to more frequent assignments of cavalry regiments to billets at Newcastle. The fixed compensation for lodging soldiers was hard enough on the innkeepers; that for horses was worse still. The Corporation sent several complaints to the War Office about the number of cavalrymen billeted upon its inns and public houses (PRO, WO1/1028). By early 1792, there was even a proposal for a barracks near Newcastle to be built by public subscription of the inhabitants, "particularly the innkeepers, and of all descriptions of persons interested in Collieries" (PRO, WO1/1054, 9). It was the French Revolution, though, that finally laid to rest the old constitutional prejudices against barracks and sparked

a remarkable barracks-building campaign throughout the country.

In France, from the Bastille episode onward, revolutionary sentiments had provoked mutinies and disobedience in the royal army (Scott 1978). Pitt and his colleagues feared that similar problems could arise in Britain, particularly in the new industrial towns. Early in 1792, the Secretary at War commissioned Colonel Oliver DeLancey, Deputy Adjutant General of the army, to travel incognito to several northern towns to investigate and report on the discipline of the cavalry regiments quartered in them. DeLancey was the army's expert on revolution. As successor to the famous Major Andre he had run a network of spies from New York during the American Revolution; more recently he had commanded the military forces sent to subdue the "Church and King" rioters who had burned Joseph Priestley's house in Birmingham. DeLancey was also a cavalryman. Cavalry troops were particularly relied upon to suppress civil disorder, and cavalry detachments had recently been increased in the industrial regions for that purpose. DeLancey reported that most units were sound, but some were not, and the loyalty of all of them was being undermined by the soldiers' contact with civilians. These contacts, DeLancey reported, were an inevitable consequence of their quarters in urban public houses (Emsley 1975). In July 1792 the Secretary at War gave DeLancey orders to purchase or erect cavalry barracks as soon as possible in Norwich, Birmingham, Coventry, Manchester, Nottingham, and Sheffield.

Tyneside had not been included in DeLancey's orders, but he was soon there anyway. Construction had just begun on the first six barracks when a serious seamen's strike broke out in South Shields (Brewster and McCord 1968). The magistrates called urgently for troops, but the authorities at Newcastle, fearful of troubles there, successfully objected to the weakening of the garrison at Tynemouth across the river. Joseph Bulmer complained bitterly to Rowland Burdon of the "supineness" of the Newcastle magistrates and proposed that a force be sent directly to South

Shields. The 160 or 170 public houses of South Shields, he wrote, could billet three soldiers each on average. The example of government's largess at Nottingham and the other industrial towns was not, however, lost on him. "In regard to our future plans", he aded, "I think Government ought to be at the expence of Barracks here." Burdon, the county Member whose efforts at conciliation did much to end the strike, evidently agreed. He passed on Bulmer's letter to the War Office with the observation that, "in the present time, these new assemblages of the People in commercial towns require much of the attention of Government, in giving them a Police." DeLancey, ordered to take command of the cavalry detachment belatedly sent from York, commended Burdon. In early 1793 the Corporation of Newcastle again petitioned the War Office in favour of cavalry barracks there, stating the "general sentiments of the Inhabitants and the Parties interested in the Coal Trade" that "the present turbulent Disposition of the Sailors . . . and the tumultuous spirit which, on several occasions, has recently shewn itself among the Pitmen" made it apparent that the civil power should have "within its reach, on the shortest possible notice, the assistance of two or three troops of cavalry." (PRO, HO42/25, 201-2). This time there was no offer to raise funds locally to pay for the new barracks proposed.

Meanwhile, war with revolutionary France provided still more reasons to build barracks. The English Militia were embodied in November 1792, and war was declared in February 1793. This was to be different from earlier wars with France. The famous *levee en masse* of April 1793 produced a huge army and an unconventional one. Government ministers worried about all sorts of unorthodox attacks along the whole of the British coastline, not just in the south or east, and not just during the summer months. By the middle of 1793, nearly 50,000 militiamen had been balloted and formed up in their home counties; Parliament authorized the raising of 40,000 fencible cavalymen for home defence (Ehrman 1983, 329). Most of these were encamped along the coast; their presence made it possible for the

regular army to be sent away on overseas expeditions. As winter approached however, and the camps had to break up on account of the weather, ministers became fearful of an unorthodox wintertime assault by Robespierre's hordes. For the rest of the war, they faced the problem of quartering large numbers of troops in coastal districts, instead of marching them off to the towns of the interior as in earlier wars. Barracks were an obvious solution to the inevitable protests of coastal communities that the whole burden of billeting would fall unjustly upon them.

Tyneside's enthusiasm for barracks-building was in fact not universally shared: Charles James Fox and several of his following in the House of Commons complained about DeLancey's first barracks-building campaign as unconstitutional. A motion to this effect was debated in the House of Commons in February 1793 (*Parliamentary Register*, 2nd ser., vol. 34). A pamphlet by David Erskine restated all the old seventeenth-century arguments about the standing army and applied them to the new barracks, calling on Englishmen to petition against "this daring attempt on your Liberties" (Albanicus 1793). No such anti-barracks petitions were recorded, however, and government agents, both from the Ordnance Board and from the War Office, were soon busy throughout the country hiring buildings to be fitted up as temporary barracks, and purchasing or leasing ground for more permanent ones. These tasks had in the past always been the province of the Ordnance Board alone, but that department proved to be slow. Ultimately, DeLancey's more streamlined operation under the authority of the War Office was preferred. In July 1794, the new Secretary at War, William Windham, established DeLancey as Barracks Master General, in charge of a new Barracks Department. Royal warrants took all responsibility for army barracks away from the Ordnance and placed it in his hands. In a typical bureaucratic compromise, however, barracks for the Royal Artillery remained in the hands of the Ordnance (CME, 1st Report, 31-44). Tynemouth Barracks, for example, was split between the Artillery and the army,

with a Storekeeper responsible to the Ordnance and a Barracks Master appointed by the War Office.

During this shuffle between the Barracks Department and the Ordnance, Newcastle's application for a cavalry barracks was delayed. DeLancey reported in July 1794 that it had initially been disregarded because the Newcastle authorities already had recourse to the infantry troops at Tynemouth—more of an armed force than most localities had on hand. Although he now agreed to the town's repeated request for a cavalry station in addition to Tynemouth, nothing happened until the following year, when the pressures of the defensive garrison and wartime labour unrest in the north-east reached a crisis (PRO, HO50/385, 661–2; Stevenson 1979, 128).

When the war began Durham, Northumberland, and Cumberland had been designated the Northern Military District, with a general in command. Berwick, however, remained part of the North British District, under the control of the Commander-in-Chief of Scotland at Edinburgh Castle. Troop levels at first changed little. In the Northern District, two militia regiments—the 1st West Yorks and the North Yorks—replaced the regulars. One regiment was billeted in Newcastle, the other at Tynemouth Barracks, with a detachment at Sunderland. At Berwick, three companies (about 300 men) formed of old soldiers (known as invalids) were in charge of Berwick Barracks and defences. In 1795, though, the situation changed in a number of respects. The collapse of the campaign in the low countries led to the hasty evacuation of the regular army. This set the militia regiments in motion to provide room in quarters for the ragged and sickly regular troops. Moreover, with the French now in control of the Dutch coast, fears of invasion grew. A committee representing the inhabitants of the town and port of Sunderland complained in February that only one company of militia guarded the town's five hundred sail of ships supplying London with coal. They offered land on the town moor for barracks for as many troops as the government cared to station there (PRO, WO40/7). A report by the

Quarter Master General pointed out that in case of attack it would take fourteen days for cavalry (and longer still for infantry) from the reserve in the south of England to reach the north-east (PRO, WO30/65). As though that was not enough, there was a renewal of the region's labour disputes, this time involving the pitmen (Emsley 1983, 20), and a mutiny by an Irish regiment quartered in Newcastle (Sykes 1866, v. 1, 376). The result of all this was a considerable build-up of troops in the north-east: by the summer of 1795, 6,100 troops were encamped along the Durham-Northumberland coast, at Cowpen, Hartley Bay, Whitburn, and Hendon Bay (*Newcastle Chronicle*, 1 August). Five more regiments of foot were quartered at Sunderland and two at Tynemouth, and a detachment of cavalry was billeted at Newcastle.

This build-up occurred at a time of unprecedented high prices for food and forage (Welles 1989). The innkeepers, particularly those of Newcastle, were soon complaining that the billeting system threatened them with bankruptcy. A deputation approached the local military commander, General Balfour, for relief. Balfour suggested that if the local economic interests which had requested military assistance were not willing to help pay its costs, he would order some of the troops away (Emsley 1983, 20). The Mayor then convened a meeting of prominent citizens to petition the government for assistance and to consider local initiatives. The cost of timber made temporary barracks too expensive, so they resolved to raise a subscription to provide extra payments to innkeepers who billeted cavalry horses. The Corporation contributed ten guineas, as did Sir Matthew Ridley and six of the collieries, but subscriptions lagged. (*Newcastle Chronicle*, 28 March, 4, 11, 18, 25 April). Such local arrangements were not sufficient to manage the clash of interests involved in public order, national defence, and housing the troops.

It was at this point that Parliament and the army acted quickly to settle the deadlock. Parliament passed an act that finally revised the fixed compensation for innkeepers billeting troops and horses, providing a supplementary

scale of payments based on provision prices (35 Geo III, c. 64). The Duke of York, now commanding the army, responded immediately to Sunderland's application for barracks, giving DeLancey orders in late February for barracks to house a thousand infantrymen and three troops of cavalry (CME, 4th Report, 422). DeLancey sent one of his assistants north on this mission and to arrange for still more barracks, to be fitted up in hired buildings at Sunderland, Wearmouth, Whitburn, Cleadon, Fulwell, Newcastle, Morpeth, and Chester-le-Street. Additional housing for 600 troops was quickly run up inside Tynemouth Castle. Accommodation for five regiments returning from the Continent, probably about 3,000 men, was ready in Sunderland by July, when that town's barracks housed the 8th, 37th, 44th, 55th, and first battalion 84th Foot. The rest of the new barracks were finished by the end of the campaign season in October. By winter, the regulars had once again gone overseas, but three regiments of dragoons (the 4th, 8th, and 16th) were quartered in barracks and inns at Newcastle, Morpeth, Alnwick, and Chester-le-Street. Two militia regiments (the North Lincolnshires and the Northumberlands) occupied the barracks at and near Sunderland, while two more (the Durhams and Leicesters) were quartered upon the innkeepers of Morpeth and Newcastle and a fifth (the North Yorks) lay in Tynemouth Barracks.

It was unusual for embodied militia regiments to be stationed in or even near their home counties. The Durhams and Northumberlands had spent most of the time since 1792 along the Yorkshire coast; after 1796 they were marched further south to join the coastal garrison of East Anglia. The force level in the north-east in early 1796, however, remained high for the rest of the French Revolutionary War. One, two, or three regiments of cavalry and six regiments of foot were the standard garrison of the eastern half of the Northern District. In October 1796, for example, the garrison consisted of 690 cavalrymen and 3,965 infantrymen (PRO, WO30/65). About half of these were in quarters, about half in the new barracks. With more accommodation available in

the region, camps were no longer so necessary. In 1797 the camp at Blyth was used to train light infantrymen or grenadiers from the regiments of the garrison, rather than to house a summertime reinforcement. To these forces could be added the 300 invalids at Berwick. The Commander-in-Chief in Edinburgh, having other demands on his small force, seldom saw fit to reinforce that fortress.

By contrast, Sir William Howe, who then commanded the Northern District, proposed an even more ambitious scheme to accommodate a force twice his current numbers along the coast. In November 1796 he projected a network of coastal barracks to house up to sixteen regiments of foot and seven of horse. This would involve new barracks at Warkworth, Cresswell, Newbiggin, Blyth, Hartley, and Whitley, and would enable a large force to remain directly on the coast throughout the winter, which Howe felt should be done regardless of expense (PRO, WO30/61, no. 30). This was going too far, and the scheme was disregarded. Instead, the troops remained concentrated in the towns rather than directly on the coast, and the north-east garrison gradually declined in numbers. In January 1801, only 2,826 infantrymen and 480 dragoons were stationed in Durham and Northumberland (PRO, WO30/64, 434). At the conclusion of peace later that year, the rented barracks were given up and only the new established barracks at Sunderland retained.

The resumption of the war in 1803 produced a panic that recalled the crisis of 1795. With Napoleon encamped with his Grand Army across the Channel, the army made vast preparations to resist invasion. New barracks for more than 50,000 men were built over the summer months of 1803, but not many of these were in the north-east. Hew Dalrymple, now commanding the Northern District, warned against sudden attacks from Holland on London's coal supplies, and complained that there were no year-round stations for troops between the Tyne and the Wear (PRO, WO30/57, 234-8), but once again recourse was made to hired buildings. Temporary barracks were hired north of Sunderland at Monkwearmouth,

Fulwell, and Whitburn, at South Shields and across the river at Chirton (North Shields), but no new construction was undertaken by the Barracks Department. The peak garrison of 5,548 troops in January 1805 was mostly housed in barracks: 2,161 men of the 2nd West Yorks and Northumberland militia at Sunderland and Monkwearmouth Barracks, 673 North Staffords at Chirton Barracks, 847 Anglesey and East Essex militiamen along with 413 artillerymen at Tynemouth Barracks, and 230 troopers of the 7th Dragoon Guards and 1,704 militiamen of the North Lincoln and 2nd Derbyshire regiments in quarters at Newcastle. Berwick appears to have been vacant, the Commander-in-Chief in Edinburgh preferring to concentrate his southern troops at Haddington. The Ordnance Board, on the other hand, expanded its role in the north-east. Between 1804 and 1806 the Board constructed a new artillery barracks on the town moor at Newcastle (Sykes 1866, v. 2, 21). With ample stables for artillery horses, it could also house cavalry, and was increasingly put to that use.

Design and Construction of the Barracks

All of the barracks constructed or adapted for the army by the Barracks Department were designed by the Department's two architects, James Johnson and John Sanders. None of their original plans for the north-eastern barracks exist, however, the Barracks Department having made a practice of sending them out to the construction-sites and not expecting them to be returned. Though some may survive in local archives, none were deposited in the Public Record Office. Later plans exist, however, for the barracks in Sunderland and the Artillery Barracks in Newcastle. In both cases, these new barracks represented a deviation from the earlier model of barracks design as constructed at Berwick and North Shields. This earlier design had much in common with a college quad or court, consisting of ranges of uniform buildings around a "barracks square" where the unit could be formed up for a march. Inside those ranges, officers and men lived under the same roof, entering their rooms by means of separate entries and stairs. The

rooms themselves were of uniform fenestration, and nearly the same size, though of course those assigned to the men were more heavily populated than those used by the officers. At Berwick seventy-two soldiers' rooms on three floors were reached by six identical entry doorways; twelve rooms for the officers were reached by another two entries, separated from those for the other ranks only by a band of rustication. Each barrack room measured nineteen feet nine inches by seventeen feet, had two windows and a fireplace, and housed eight soldiers in four double berths. The twenty-four officers' rooms accommodated a field officer, five captains, nine subalterns, their mess, kitchen, and servants' rooms. The two ranges faced each other across the square, the other sides of which were defined by a high wall and gate (with guard house adjoining) and, opposite the gate, a magazine. This was later replaced by the current clock block (Crake 1955; MacIvor 1972). The 1758 barracks alongside Clifford's Fort, denoted Mill Hill Barracks on the plan, seem to have been a similar arrangement, with buildings on four sides of an interior quad, and in addition bastions at the external angles (PRO, WO44/13).

By contrast, the Sunderland Infantry and Newcastle Artillery Barracks, in common with other barracks of the 1790s, were more open, and also more hierarchic. At Sunderland, the barracks actually constructed by DeLancey's department were entirely for infantry, and capable of accommodating 1,528 soldiers. Extrapolating from a plan of 1847 in the Sunderland Central Library, the major buildings of the barracks consisted of three detached buildings: the Officers' House in the centre facing across the parade ground directly towards the back barracks gate, with two ranges of soldiers' barracks on either side and at right angles to it. The three buildings thus were arranged in an open U shape rather than a formal square. No elevations survive, but at other barracks the Officers' House, in addition to its symbolic position of surveillance and command over the flanking ranges and parade, was also more ornate in its architecture, with pediment or

royal arms over its central door. The soldiers' barracks, on the other hand, were plain and utilitarian. An elevation from 1847, also in the Sunderland Central Library, seems to depict later brick buildings constructed on the same site as the original soldiers' barracks. These were probably two-storey hipped-roof buildings, each containing nineteen large barracks rooms housing thirty-six men each in double berths, and twenty sergeants' rooms each sleeping four men in two-level bunks (PRO, WO55/1868, 39; HC, 1847 (169.), v. 36, 342-3). Since two regiments might be stationed at Sunderland, the Officers' House contained two complete mess establishments for six field officers, sixteen captains, and thirteen subalterns, plus rooms for five officers' servants. The main "U" of barracks for officers and men was, however, only the centrepiece of what was really a complex of buildings. Also included were a hospital, cook houses, washrooms, privies ("necessaries"), a magazine, a guard house, coal yard, fire-engine house, officers' stables, and canteen. These all stood along the perimeter wall or fence of the complex. At Sunderland this enclosed an area of more than seven acres on rising ground at the eastern end of the High Street, between the Wear and the sea (HC, 1863 (2983.), v. 13, 280).

The Newcastle Artillery Barracks begun by the Ordnance in 1804 was built of brick and could accommodate 264 rank and file, a field officer, three captains, and six subalterns. It also had stabling for 290 horses. The 1865 plan in the Public Record Office shows that it was designed on a different "open" plan, with two long ranges containing stables below and soldiers' rooms above in line either side of the main gate. These faced not each other but the parade ground, across which stood the magazine. As at Sunderland, the barracks rooms were large: nine were forty-three by twenty-seven feet, fifteen more twenty-seven by twenty-one (HC, 1847 (169.), v. 36, 342-3). Unusually, the Officers' House did not overlook the centre of the composition, but was at a right angle to one end of the line of soldiers' barracks, forming an asymmetric L-shaped

arrangement. Once again, the outbuildings—in this case including gun sheds and a riding school, besides the standard barracks appendages—lined the perimeter wall, which here enclosed more than ten acres. This was at the same site as the current Fenham Barracks, along Barrack Road adjoining the Town Moor (PRO, MR1312).

The appearance of the temporary barracks is much less certain. There exists little data on the cavalry stables and barracks hired at Chester-le-Street, Newcastle, and Morpeth during the 1790s. At Chester-le-Street only stables were hired, for sixty-eight horses, presumably to oblige the innkeepers (who always preferred billeting men to horses). Newcastle was the headquarters barracks and could accommodate 320 men and 350 horses. The temporary barracks at Morpeth could accommodate 106 men and 80 horses. In both cases, cavalry units stationed at the barracks were also quartered in the surrounding towns. Morpeth was usually linked with Alnwick; the stable capacity of the local inns apparently exceeded the available accommodation for cavalrymen. Parliamentary returns give more information about the temporary infantry barracks hired at Sunderland, Wearmouth, Fulwell, and Whitburn and Cleadon during the 1790s. Sunderland was the principal station. In addition to the new buildings constructed by the Barracks Department, Assistant Barracks Master General Benson hired six warehouses there in March 1795, capable when fitted up of accommodating 1,456 men. Across the river in the Wearmouths he hired two barns, four malshouses, two warehouses, and a loft for 1,306 men. Further north, he hired a barn in Fulwell to accommodate 172 men and in Cleadon and Whitburn five more barns, two stable yards, a coach-house, and two sheds to house 708 more. The largest of these hired barracks were two warehouses in Sunderland which held 586 and 388 men, and a malshouse in Monkwearmouth which held 276 (Lambert 1975, v. 100, 111*, 115-17*).

Construction and conversion of barracks buildings was carried out by private contractors, chosen more with an eye to speed than to

economy. DeLancey felt that preparing plans and advertising for competitive bidders took too much time. He had a preference for London firms, and for dealing with only a single general contractor on each project. Indeed, the barracks building campaign is often cited as the origin of general contracting in Britain (Thompson 1968, 82–3). Thomas Neill of Hans Place near Sloane Square, one of the greatest barracks contractors, built the Sunderland Barracks and fitted out the three cavalry barracks and the infantry conversions just described. The initial charge for the Sunderland established barracks was £20,754. The conversions were much cheaper: £1,750 for the coastal infantry barracks and £8,218 for the cavalry stations. Neill also built additional barracks in Tynemouth Castle between July 1800 and May 1802, charging £11,261; and he constructed a number of other barracks in Suffolk, Essex, and Sussex (CME, 4th Report, 628–9). Other additions to Tynemouth were built by Samuel Holt, who also worked for the Barracks Department at Northampton. James Hogg, a more obscure figure who may have been a local builder, won contracts for additions at Sunderland and fitting up the temporary hired barracks at Whitburn and Fulwell in 1803. Thomas Hutchison fitted up the temporary barracks at Chirton in the same year, and John Oyster and Nicholas Stokel were hired to build the barracks hospital at Sunderland (*Ibid.*, 614–24). Finally, the Barracks Department architect John Sanders may have had some personal stake in the construction of Sunderland Barracks, for which someone with the same name was advanced £3,000 between 1795 and 1798 (PRO, WO49/245). Unsupervised conflicts of interest like this were to cause trouble for the department later.

Management and Use of the Barracks

Once completed, the buildings of each barracks were entrusted to a Barracks Master appointed by the War Office. He was in charge of maintaining them; furnishing them with bedding, utensils, coal, and candles; and providing the troops with beer and the horses with feed and forage. Barracks Masters were

charged by the Barracks Office with submitting a variety of weekly, monthly, and quarterly returns about their buildings, contracts, and tenants. These would reveal a good deal about the impact of the army on the local economy, but they seem to be lost with the rest of the Barracks Office records—though copies may survive in some local archives. Barracks Masters in the north-east were drawn for the most part from half-pay officers. Lieutenant Colonel John Dickson was recommended for the post at Sunderland by Matthew Lewis, Deputy Secretary at War (BL, Add. MS. 37,904). He held it through at least 1805, by which time he was a major general. After 1797 he was assisted by Richard G. Britten, who may have done all the work. The Newcastle cavalry barracks was supervised from Sunderland. At Tynemouth, the Barracks Masters were James Boucher, followed by Captain Robert Mann. Lieutenant George Symes managed the temporary barracks at Chirton after 1803. At Berwick, Captain L. N. McLean succeeded William Colquhoun. Messrs. Toppin and Greenfield were, respectively, the Ordnance Barracks Master at Newcastle and Storekeeper at Tynemouth.²

Another important figure in each established barracks was the canteen contractor who supplied the men's daily ration of beer in addition to running a public house within the barracks. M. Biggs, J. Berkeley, and M. Hodson successively held the canteen contract at Sunderland (CME, 2nd Report, 212–13). By far the most important barracks contractor, however, was a Northumberland man, Alexander Davison of Swarland. Davison, a friend of Nelson, held a number of army and navy contracts, including a gigantic arrangement with DeLancey to supply furnishings and coal on commission to all the barracks in Great Britain. The sums involved were enormous, and DeLancey was never as interested in accounting procedures as he was in speed and smooth operation. The end result was DeLancey's official disgrace after a lengthy investigation by a royal commission in 1806 and 1807, which revealed that the department was unable to account properly for more than £9,000,000. Davison was actually convicted of and imprisoned for criminal fraud

on account of his dealings with the Barracks Department (CME, 2nd Report; *The Times*, 8 Dec. 1808). After 1808 the army barracks were removed from military supervision and placed under a civilian Barracks Board reporting to the Treasury.

For soldiers, life in the barracks revolved around the daily bugle (and roll) calls at reveille in the morning, retreat in the late afternoon, and tattoo at night. Soldiers absent for these faced confinement in the guard-house cells, and possible worse punishment later. The walled barracks clearly enabled officers to maintain control over their men. Days in barracks were occupied by alternating periods of drill, idleness, and, for cavalry troopers, the care of their horses. Wives and even children of the soldiers lived with them in the large barracks rooms, behind screens of hanging blankets if the officers granted this indulgence. Wives were important to the regimental economy, usually taking charge of laundering and sometimes cooking. Their number was strictly limited, however, and unauthorized wives often huddled in poor lodgings or crude huts outside the barracks walls, making a living from selling various illicit wares to the soldiers. For Sunday worship the men were marched to the local parish churches, whose registers recording marriages, births, and burial thus often have a great deal to tell about the composition of a garrison (Watkinson 1976). Barracks in rural villages often caused social upheaval as unprecedented numbers of local women married men from outside the local community, but this phenomenon probably was not much noticed around the expanding urban centres of the north-east.

More obvious was the occasional tendency of soldiers to riot. The West Lowland fencible cavalrymen quartered at Newcastle in September 1797 objected to something about the Cheshire militiamen passing through the town after the break-up of the camp at Blyth. The result was an all-night riot which injured thirty men before being sorted out by a third regiment (Sykes 1866, v. 1, 385). Billeting also continued to be a subject of complaints. At Durham, which did not obtain a barracks but

which was still frequently a quarter for cavalry regiments, the innkeepers addressed a petition to the War Office in 1802 asserting that they had "sustained more than their proportionable share" of losses as compared to other northern towns (PRO, WO4/3). They succeeded in having a troop ordered elsewhere. On a more positive note, the barracks fire engines were used to good effect in August 1799 to prevent a general fire in Newcastle, and the soldiers were used to guard against looting thereafter (Sykes 1866, v. 1, 385, 393-4).

The Return to Peace

As the focus of the war with Napoleon shifted away from defence against invasion, the garrison of the north-east gradually fell, eliminating the necessity of further sacrifices by the innkeepers. By 1813, there were fewer than 2,000 troops in the Northern Military District of England, though paradoxically there was more activity at Berwick. Having been left vacant during the crisis of 1805, it housed another detachment of invalids between 1807 and 1809, then was put back into active service (and nearly full occupancy) as a depot for regiments serving abroad and as the station for various English and Scottish militia regiments serving along the coast. The overall barracks capacity of Great Britain stood at more than 130,000 in 1814. This was obviously too large, and it was clear that many of the new barracks would need to be disposed of. In the north-east this was less of a problem than elsewhere since so many of the barracks there had been fitted up in hired buildings. The Whitburn and Fulwell temporary barracks were given up in 1808, and those at Chirton in 1814. The old blockhouse at Seaton Sluice was even sold off for its materials (PRO, WO55/1856, 286-7). In 1814, the Duke of York proposed a peace establishment of barracks that in the north-east retained only the old established barracks at Tyne-mouth and Berwick.

The Sunderland Barracks were slated for disposal because of two factors: the barracks stood on leased land, with the renewal soon up for renegotiation, and the buildings were constructed of wood. This had necessarily been

called for in 1795, since the work had been ordered completed as soon as possible (and was in fact finished between February and July). Nevertheless, since DeLancey saw Sunderland as a permanent army station, the specifications had called for "durable and substantial buildings" with heavy timbers and tiled exterior walls (BL, Add. MS. 37,891, ff. 99–115). Discussion on these points continued for some time, with the Treasury and the new civilian Barracks Board asserting that the precarious sea wall at Tynemouth, which had cost £11,134 in repairs since 1800, made that an unattractive proposition as a long-term military station. They suggested retaining Sunderland instead (PRO, WO55/1856, 190–1, 226). As a long-established royal fortress, however, Tynemouth possessed a ceremonial Governor and Lieutenant Governor. Displacing them, and other local interests dependent on the barracks, was apparently not worth the effort. Eventually Tynemouth was handed back to the Ordnance for use as an artillery barracks.

This case aside, the Treasury generally made much more extensive cuts in the barracks establishment than the army wanted. The Duke of York, recognizing that he had to retain accommodation for 21,687 men in old fortresses like Tynemouth, made a strong plea that more modern barracks to the capacity of 33,000 should also be retained (PRO, WO55/1856, 394–7). The Treasury, on the hand, citing the peacetime strength of the army at 25,000, insisted upon reducing the whole barracks establishment to only 40,000. Since the Barracks Department now was directly subordinate to the Treasury, that settled the matter. But there were two additional factors which affected the outcome in the north-east. First, the final Treasury Minute regulating barracks specified that soldiers should henceforth sleep only one to a bed, thus halving at a stroke the rated capacity of many barracks, and retaining potential additional accommodation in case of emergency (Ibid., 399–404). In the case of Sunderland, this meant that the same buildings were now rated as capable of housing 992 rank and file instead of 1,528. Since the wooden Officers' House could not easily be

partially dismantled, the full mess establishment for two regiments was also retained (PRO, WO55/1868, 39). The rated capacity of Berwick was also reduced from 700 to 542 without any real change in the buildings. Second, the Barracks Department acquiesced in an arrangement with the Ordnance regarding regular cavalry use of the Newcastle Barracks, by which army troops would come under the authority of the Ordnance Barracks Master there, and thus not count as part of the 40,000 limit (PRO, WO55/1856, 99–101). The Ordnance helpfully increased the capacity of the Newcastle Barracks, to 580 rank and file by 1817 and 770 by 1822, while retaining the stabling for 288 horses (HC, 1817 (275.), v. 3, 90–1; 1822 (330.), v. 19, 209).

A survey of barracks used in 1822 showed that Newcastle was the busiest of the barracks in the north-east, accommodating at one point 665 soldiers and thirty-eight officers. Berwick and Holy Island were the quietest, with only forty-one soldiers and one officer inhabiting the former, and no one at the latter. Sunderland held 593 infantrymen and twenty-nine officers, and Tynemouth 146 artillerymen and two officers. Though they were not always full, DeLancey's barracks certainly accomplished a long-term alteration in the condition of the army, and its relation to society at large. Billeting was largely a thing of the past. While none of the cavalry and less than half of the infantry in Britain in 1792 were lodged in barracks, by 1822 only an insignificant fraction—a company of infantry, two troops of cavalry, and some recruiting detachments—were *not* lodged in them. The veteran Sergeant George Calladine, stationed in the north-east between 1831 and 1835, testified to this change in his Diary, recounting time spent mostly at Sunderland, Newcastle, and Tynemouth Barracks. He was particularly pleased by the seaside location of the Sunderland and Tynemouth Barracks, though the latter was so crowded in 1833 that his wife had to lodge in the town. The various riots and elections of the Reform Bill crisis obliged Calladine occasionally to billet his men in village inns (army units had to march out of town during elections

and assizes), but he was always happy to return. "There is no place like the barracks for soldiers," he observed about Christmas 1832 at Sunderland (Calladine, 174–87).

This innovation complete, the Barracks Department was abolished in 1822, and the Ordnance Board resumed control of all barracks in Britain—and the role as caretakers rather than builders that had traditionally been theirs before the disruption of their authority in 1794. Sometime before 1828, the Ordnance Board demolished the wooden soldiers' barracks in Sunderland and replaced them on the same foundations with smaller two-storey brick buildings housing 350 men, for the most part in large rooms similar to those in the old barracks (HC, 1828 (420.), v. 5, 364; 1847 (169.), v. 36, 342–3). The oversized wooden Officers' House remained as they were, as did the other barracks in the north-east—until Britain's next great military upheaval at the time of the Crimean War.

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SOURCE NOTES

¹This and all subsequent references to the military garrison of the north-east come—unless otherwise specified—from the monthly returns of army dispositions, PRO, WO5/66–70, WO5/101; and (after 1794) WO17/2782–2796.

²For lists of Barracks Masters see PRO, W040/10; Lambert, 1975, v. 100; FC Report, 1797; CME, 2nd, 15th Reports.