
LESSON 3

WAR IN A REVOLUTIONARY AGE

(1789-1815)

XLVII. Infantry, cavalry, and artillery are nothing without each other. They should always be so disposed in cantonments as to assist each other in case of surprise.

-- Napoleon I:
The Military Maxims of Napoleon

Wellesley departed on 25 July. Five days later one of the French generals in Portugal, Loison, massacred the whole insurgent population of Evora--men, women, children--thus making sure that any Portuguese disagreements with the British should be totally obliterated by Loison's cruelty.

--Elizabeth Longford
Wellington: The Years of the Sword

Introduction

Purpose

This lesson

- Focuses on the wars of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era. It shows the close interconnection among society, political structure, military institutions, wars, and the economy.
- Helps you understand the impact that the methods of raising, maintaining, and using an army have on its ability to fight.

Continued on next page

Introduction, Continued

Why War in a Revolutionary Age?

As a military officer, you need to understand the impact that the method of raising and maintaining an army has on its ability to fight.

- Napoleon took advantage of the sweeping social changes during his time to fundamentally change the manner in, and the purpose for which, wars were fought.
 - This had a profound impact on later political and military events. Napoleonic warfare also served as the foundation for theorists whose theory of war has had an impact on warfighting through the present.
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Relationship to Other Instruction

- This lesson presents a contrast to 18th century warfare and sets the stage for further discussions of Clausewitz in lesson 4 and Jomini and the legacy of Napoleonic warfare in lesson 5.
 - Many of the concepts introduced here--such as sustainment, operational movement, conventional versus unconventional forces, and the relationship between military and diplomatic elements of power--reappear throughout the CSCDEP, 8800 Program.
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Study Time

This lesson, including the issues for consideration, will require about 3 hours of study.

Educational Objectives

Nationalism's Impact Explain nationalism's impact on the method of raising, maintaining, and utilizing military forces during this era. [JPME Area 3d]

Change in War Objectives Understand why and how the objectives of war changed during this era from those of the preceding period. [JPME Areas 3b, 3d, and 3e]

Napoleon's Legacy Assess the legacy of the Napoleonic era in terms of the Western military tradition. [JPME Area 5b]

**JPME Areas/
Objectives/Hours
(accounting data)** 3/b/0.5
3/d/0.5
3/e/0.5
5/b/0.5

Historical Background

French Revolution

A major step in the evolution of warfare coincided with the French Revolution during the final decade of the 18th century. This major evolutionary "step" resulted from the social and political upheavals that the French Revolution caused and that Napoleon Bonaparte used. As a young general (1793), then First Consul (1799), and later Emperor of France (1804), Napoleon adroitly combined the social, political, and technological developments of the French Revolution and its aftermath. Under Napoleon, the Grand Army--composed of citizens, not subjects--conducted operations from Spain to Russia.

National *Levee en Masse*

Napoleon could defeat his enemies and secure political strength by skillfully employing the armies of republican France, forces that had been created by a series of revolutionary governments that followed the convening of the Estates General in 1789. As they grew more radical, these governments eventually built a citizen army of unprecedented size through a national *levee en masse*--a policy, not a military institution--to defend France and its revolution.

Napoleonic Improvements

Napoleon improved the armies of republican France by organizing these forces into large corps and divisions of all arms and developing a command and control system capable of coordinating them. This system increased both his mobility and his ability to concentrate overwhelming superiority at a critical point from a central position. In this way, Napoleon ensured his success against the numerous coalitions that were arrayed against him.

Historical Background, Continued

Spreading Revolution

Coupled with the revolutionary (and later imperial) fervor of his soldiers, Napoleon's tactical genius allowed him to become the master of continental Europe. He also became the target of an unprecedented effort of allied nations in Europe. Before his final defeat, Napoleon gained unprecedented military successes against six of the seven coalitions arrayed against him. The emperor also provoked an unprecedented counter-effort by the other states of Europe in which the traditional ruling classes turned the forces of nationalism and popular participation--the hallmarks of revolutionary France—against France.

The French Army also provoked a counter effort, both by spreading the ideals of the revolution and by becoming, in many parts of Europe, a parasitic and foreign occupying power.

French Overextension: Defeat

- Ultimately, Napoleon overextended himself and bled France dry through his imperial delusions of grandeur, which led to his ultimate defeat and the restoration of the Bourbon dynasty in the person of Louis XVIII.
 - Nevertheless, Napoleon still deserves serious study by military professionals for his tactical successes, his blending of political and military means to accomplish his goals, and his masterful harnessing of a nation's total effort in war for the first time in history.
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Napoleonic Legacy

Napoleonic warfare had a profound effect on subsequent military thought. From the experiences of the Napoleonic era arose the foremost theorists of war in the 19th century--Jomini and von Clausewitz--as well as the foundations of the great Prussian military reform of the mid-19th century.

Required Readings

Theory and Nature of War Readings

- Bittner, Donald F. "Careers Open to Talent: A Field Marshal's Baton in Every Soldier's Knapsack--The Marshals of Napoleon France" (1966). *Theory and Nature of War Readings*, Annex A, pp. A-3 to A-11. The matrix in this reading helps you analyze the social backgrounds and careers of Napoleon's 26 marshals--careers open to talent. Bittner discusses both the myth and reality of the French Revolution in this regard.
 - Luvaas, Jay. "Napoleon on the Art of Command," *Parameters*, Summer 1985. *Theory and Nature of War Readings*, Annex A, pp. A-13 to A-19. While reading this chapter, you will learn Napoleon's approach on leadership and disciplining. He believes in a combination of two kinds of qualities in leadership; the qualities of intellect, which are trained and cultivated; and those of temperament, which can be improved by determination and self-discipline. Good military leadership is a blend of the two, and rarely, according to Napoleon, do you find all of the qualities that produce a great general in a single individual.
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Makers of Modern Strategy

Paret, Peter. "Napoleon and the Revolution in War." *Makers of Modern Strategy From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986, pp. 123 to 142. Paret presents an incisive analysis of the "Emperor of the Revolution" and the French armies he led. The topic is covered in broad scope and includes Napoleon as a man, politician, and military leader, and the aspects of the French army that made it such a dynamic force. This chapter touches on Napoleon's brand of politics, and has numerous examples that demonstrate the "hows" and "whys" of the strategy which confounded most of the leading military strategists of that time.

European Armies and the Conduct of War

Strachan, Hew. "Napoleonic Warfare." *European Armies and the Conduct of War*. London: Unwin Hyman, 1983, pp. 38 to 59. (Note: Reading total includes five full-page maps.) In studying Napoleon, remember that when campaigning, he was both head of state from 1799 and a military commander; and that he was fighting almost continuously from the mid-1790s to 1815, a lengthy period that took its toll on him as ruler, commander, and person--as well as his major subordinate commanders and troops.

For Further Study

Supplemental Readings

The readings listed are **not** required. They are provided as recommended sources of additional information about topics in this lesson that may interest you. They will increase your knowledge and augment your understanding of this lesson.

- Brown, Howard G. "Politics, Professionalism, and the Fate of Army Generals After Thermidor." *French Historical Studies*, Volume 19, No. 1 (Spring 1995), pp. 133-52.
- Chandler, David G. *The Campaigns of Napoleon*. New York: Macmillan, 1966.
- Ibid. *Dictionary of the Napoleonic Wars*. New York: Macmillan, 1979.
- Ibid. ed., *Napoleon's Marshals*. New York: Macmillan, 1987.
- Connelly, Owen. *Blundering to Glory: Napoleon's Military Campaigns*. Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1987.
- Kennedy, Paul. *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. New York: Random House, 1987. Read chapter 3, section 4, "The Winning of Wars, 1763-1815", pp. 115-139.

Further, the following two works offer a broad, comparative analysis of revolution as a distinct historical phenomenon and its impact on the existing society.

- Brinton, Crane. *The Anatomy of Revolution*. New York: Vintage Books, 1965.
 - Skocpol, Theda. *States and Social Revolutions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
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Issues for Consideration

Introduction In this lesson you will focus on wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon. The lesson also shows the close interconnection of society, political structure, military institutions, wars, and the economy. Since the French Revolution brought about fundamental changes in all of these areas, it is not surprising that French armies were far different, offering a sharp and clearly-defined contrast, from their predecessors. Keep this in mind as you address the following issues for consideration.

Levee en masse What was the national *levee en masse* and what advantage did it have over the traditional manning of an 18th-century army? Why had the French kings been unable to use this method to raise mass armies before Napoleon?

French Mobility How was Napoleon able to overcome the difficulties of mobility experienced by other 18th century commanders?

Corps and Divisional Organization Why were Napoleon's corps and divisional organization so effective against his enemies? What advantages did his use of all (or combined) arms formations provide?

Napoleon's Employment of Forces How did Napoleon employ his military forces?

- Was he willing to divide his forces?
- Were forces generally moved or were they concentrated on a single avenue or route, or dispersed on a wide frontage along parallel routes?
- How were these forces generally employed on the battlefield?
- What formations and tactics were used?
- How were the various combat arms--infantry, cavalry, artillery--arrayed and employed?
- Were exploitation and pursuit applied aggressively?

Issues for Consideration, Continued

Napoleon's Logistical Support

How could Napoleon overcome the difficulties of resupply that plagued most 18th century commanders?

- How important was requisitioning/foraging to the logistical support of French military forces?
 - How did foraging affect the possible range of offensive military operations?
 - What factors made foraging a more useful option for Napoleon than it had been for Frederick?
 - Were Napoleon's soldiers more willing to endure logistical privation than the soldiers of Frederick's day?
 - Did Napoleon's method of support promote more operational flexibility than Frederick had enjoyed?
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Uniqueness of Napoleonic Warfare?

Did Napoleon do things on the battlefield that were new and dramatically different from his predecessors, or was the difference primarily a matter of doing them at a strategic as well as a tactical level?

If his actions were primarily a matter of level, why could he expand the scale of his actions above that of his predecessors (consider organization, and command and control methods)?

Napoleon at War What kind of war did Napoleon fight, and for what kind of objectives?

- Did Napoleon's style of war and objectives differ from Frederick the Great's?
 - Did Napoleon truly understand what political options other than war were available, or were his goals achievable only through war?
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