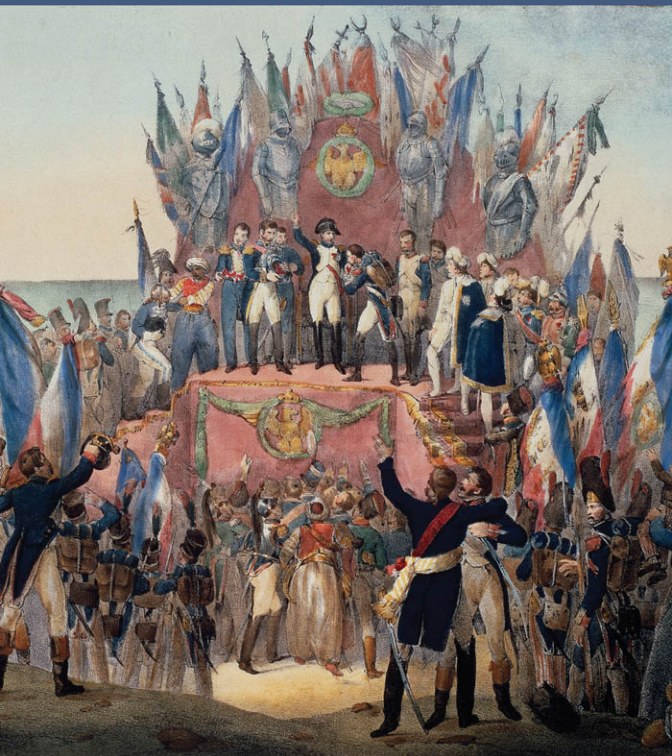


# Forging Napoleon's Grande Armée

MOTIVATION, MILITARY CULTURE, *and*  
MASCULINITY *in the* FRENCH ARMY, 1800–1808



Michael J. Hughes

# Forging Napoleon's Grande Armée

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*This book is dedicated to three people.*

*First, I would like to dedicate it to Bill G. Kremper,  
a good Marine, a good man, and my beloved grandfather.*

*I would also like to dedicate it to my father, Joseph R. Hughes,  
who would have been so proud of me for writing this book if  
cancer had not taken him from us. I miss you, dad.*

*Lastly, I dedicate it to my amazing son, Gabriel Martin Hughes,  
who has his great-grandfather's cheerful disposition, his  
grandfather's inquisitiveness, and his father's unconditional love.*

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French history who abandoned her on countless days, nights, and weekends to write. Considering that the Frenchmen whom I study probably fought and killed some of her ancestors, my wife's devotion is even more commendable. Her love, patience, and support have given me the ability to complete this project, and I lack the words to fully express my appreciation. For now, I will simply say, Bea, I love you, thank you for making this accomplishment possible, and I'm so incredibly lucky that you're here to share it with me.

Some of the material in this book will be published in Michael J. Hughes, "Images of the Groggnard: Songs, French Soldiers, and Military Culture in the Armies of Napoleon," *Consortium on Revolutionary Europe, Selected Papers* 2003. This book also contains material that will be published in Michael J. Hughes, "Celebrating the Grande Armée: Military Motivation and National Identity in the Armies of Napoleon," *Consortium on the Revolutionary Era, Selected Papers* 2009.

Furthermore, some of the material in this book appeared in Michael J. Hughes, "Making Frenchmen into Warriors: Martial Masculinity in Napoleonic France," in Christopher E. Forth and Bertrand Taithe, eds., *French Masculinities: History, Culture, and Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). This material has been reproduced with the permission of Palgrave Macmillan.

There are a few final intellectual debts to honor that I was unable to properly acknowledge elsewhere before this book went to press. My descriptions of the start of the Napoleonic wars, the diplomatic maneuvers involved, and the creation of the French Empire were strongly influenced by the works of Steven Englund, Frederick C. Scheid, and Isser Woloch. In addition, the information in this book about the French army under the Directory and its loyalty to generals other than Napoleon during the Consulate comes from Jean-Paul Bertaud and Gilbert Bodinier. Lastly, this study relies on statistical information about army sizes, unit strengths, and battle casualties from books by David G. Chandler, Scott Bowden, and Robert Goetz. Unless the notes specify otherwise, the figures contained in the following pages are drawn from them. The publications of all these individuals are listed in the bibliography.

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# Introduction

## *Military Culture and Motivation in the Armies of Napoleon*

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François-Joseph Zickel served as a cavalry officer in the armies of Napoleon Bonaparte, and his long military career spanned the entire period of the Napoleonic wars. Zickel was born the son of a soldier, and from a young age he eagerly desired to follow in his father's footsteps. In the heady days of 1791, as Revolutionary France prepared its defenses, he enlisted in one of the new local guard units that were formed to supplement the regiments of the former Royal army. With popular support for the Revolution still in the ascendant, men from all over France volunteered for military service. Zickel, however, was unusual because he was only twelve years old. Two years later, he went a step further and joined a battalion headed to the front lines. Upon his arrival at the *Armée du Nord*, the military authorities discovered his age and promptly sent him home. Despite this setback, Zickel maintained his enthusiasm for the profession of arms. When he was finally old enough, he entered the 10<sup>th</sup> regiment of *chasseurs à cheval*, a unit of light cavalry. He was then nineteen, and the year was 1798.

For the next fifteen years, Zickel had a remarkable military career. After several years as a noncommissioned officer (NCO), he was promoted to second lieutenant, a commissioned rank, in 1807. He fought under General André Masséna at the second battle of Zurich in 1799, participated in the capture of Ulm in 1805, charged with French cavalry at Jena in 1806, served in Spain during the disastrous Peninsular War, and took part in the defense of France in 1814. Although he fought in several major engagements, he miraculously managed to survive the Napoleonic wars. Yet while he dreamed of rising through the ranks like countless others, possessed years of experience, and was devoted to Napoleon, he never rose above the rank of second lieutenant.<sup>1</sup>

It is possible to reconstruct Zickel's career through a series of letters that he wrote to his father. These letters reveal the officer's feelings about war

and his military service, and illustrate the ways in which his motivation and political values changed over time. When he legally entered the army in 1798, Zickel had lost none of the Revolutionary ardor that inspired him to volunteer for the military as a boy of twelve. Following his description of the fighting around Zurich, he defiantly exclaimed, “Thus, *vive la République* [long live the Republic] forever one and indivisible, and death to tyrants!”<sup>2</sup> Ten years later, Zickel showed the same enthusiasm for Napoleon Bonaparte, the emperor of France. After the French victory at Ocaña, Spain, in 1809, he proudly reported to his father, “Thus the loss of the enemy could amount to 40,000 men! *Vive l’Empereur!* [Long live the Emperor!]”<sup>3</sup> What an astonishing transformation! Here we have a French officer who began his career as a dedicated Republican patriot expressing devotion to a hereditary monarch whose power was more absolute than that of any of the supposedly Absolutist kings of the Old Regime. Moreover, this monarch invaded and conquered a sovereign country, forced its rightful rulers to abdicate, and made his brother its king by force of arms. Such acts resembled those of the very tyrants whose deaths Zickel had professed to desire a decade earlier.

The purpose of this book is to ascertain how and why this shift in attitudes occurred. It attempts to explain why Zickel and other French soldiers, who came from a France that shed so much blood and spent so much treasure to preserve the ideals of the French Revolution, fought so hard and so well under Napoleon and continued to give their lives year after year to expand the empire that he established. To accomplish this task, this study examines the military culture created by the Napoleonic regime to influence its troops, and its impact on the Frenchmen who served in the armies of the Consulate (1799-1804) and the First French Empire (1804-1814). In pursuit of these endeavors, the book examines cultural phenomena and concepts of masculinity that affected the military performance of soldiers like François-Joseph Zickel but that have been neglected or misunderstood. The product of these phenomena was an intricate motivational system that convinced French officers and enlisted men to wage war for a variety of compelling reasons.

The motivation of Napoleon’s troops is not a new subject to historians. There is an enormous body of literature on the military history of the Napoleonic wars, and scholars have written about Napoleon’s morale-building techniques and their effects on the French army since the early nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> The standard interpretation on this topic in Anglo-American historiography can be characterized as the “army of honor” thesis, and was developed by John A. Lynn.<sup>5</sup> Lynn proposes that Napoleon, who was hostile to the Revolution, changed the French army from an “army of virtue” into an

“army of honor.” According to Lynn, the French Revolutionaries created an army of citizen soldiers whose primary source of military motivation was the concept of Revolutionary virtue. Revolutionary virtue was devotion to the common good and the willingness to sacrifice personal interests, including one’s life and well-being, to serve the collective needs of society and the nation. Maximilien Robespierre and other committed revolutionaries inculcated this ideal in the army as part of their efforts to transform France into a “Republic of Virtue” during the Terror.

Lynn argues that Napoleon replaced virtue with honor as the driving force in the French army. Drawing upon the political theories of Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, he defines honor as the desire for prestige and status that was traditionally associated with the French aristocracy, and the exercise of absolute monarchy in the Old Regime. Montesquieu explained that aristocratic honor was the mechanism that allowed monarchy to function. To acquire the services of their proud nobles, French kings like Louis XIV offered them rewards, or “honors,” such as positions in the government, titles, and medals like the badge of the Order of Saint Louis. In return, the nobles, Montesquieu claimed, performed actions that furthered the interests of the monarchy to obtain the king’s honors. They did so because their sense of honor, their personal need to uphold their reputation, compelled them to win royal rewards and the increased status that they conveyed. The distribution of honors thus allowed French kings to manipulate aristocratic honor and harness it to the goals of the monarchy.

Lynn contends that Napoleon, who wished to become an absolute monarch, imitated his Bourbon predecessors. He argues that the former Revolutionary general cultivated aristocratic forms of honor among his soldiers by creating a system of symbolic and material rewards such as promotions, the Legion of Honor, and titles of nobility. The purpose of these awards was to produce soldiers who valued individual prestige over the common good, and who owed their loyalties to the source of the rewards, Napoleon himself, instead of the French people, the Republic, or the nation. Together, these soldiers constituted an army of honor that provided Napoleon with the perfect instrument to achieve his imperial ambitions. Implying that Napoleon betrayed the Revolution, Lynn insists that he replaced the Revolution’s admirable emphasis on self-sacrifice with the self-interested desire for personal fame and aggrandizement. In his words, Napoleon “wished to appeal to the French love of honor in lieu of other affections, such as that for liberty.”<sup>6</sup>

These arguments were presented as a proposal to encourage further debate and inquiry, but despite Lynn’s intentions, they have taken on a life



of their own to dominate Napoleonic military history. The bicentennial of Napoleon's reign, which is still taking place, inspired a new wave of scholarship that reinforces, modifies, and challenges the army-of-honor thesis. Long neglected by nonmilitary historians, the Napoleonic wars have been rediscovered by scholars in other fields, and the study of them is experiencing something of a renaissance. One of the causes underlying this trend is the renewed interest in the Napoleonic period generated by the bicentennial. Perhaps just as important, Western historians appear to be discovering a new appreciation for the centrality of war in human history due to the military conflicts provoked by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. As a result of these developments, historians in the United States and Europe increasingly recognize the Napoleonic wars as a pivotal event in the emergence of the modern world, and are producing innovative studies that reevaluate the nature, meaning, and impact of Napoleon's reign and his wars on France and Europe.

In this body of literature, the most important English-language work on Napoleon's soldiers was written by Alan Forrest.<sup>7</sup> Forrest modifies the army-of-honor thesis by emphasizing more continuity in the moral evolution of the army. He maintains that professionalism was more advanced in the Revolutionary armies and that patriotism was present to a greater extent in the armies of Napoleon than Lynn proposes. However, Forrest accepts Lynn's basic theory, and characterizes the French army of the Napoleonic wars as an army of honor.<sup>8</sup> Although he claims that Revolutionary forms of patriotism existed among the soldiers of both the Republic and the Empire, especially in the initial stages of their military service, he argues that this commitment to the national cause was transformed into professional pride in the army, the desire for personal rewards, and devotion to the emperor. Similar to other proponents of the army-of-honor thesis, Forrest also attributes the army's loyalty to Napoleon to his personal charisma and talents, his ability to relate to his troops, and the awards that he offered to them.

While Forrest discusses military motivation, it is not the primary focus of his book. He seeks to reveal the thoughts, emotions, and experiences of French troops during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. The point of this endeavor is to compare the men who emerge from his sources with the heroic images of the French soldier in Napoleonic propaganda, and to challenge the myths about Napoleon's men that have persisted until the present day. Forrest succeeds admirably in these tasks. Unlike the existing literature on Revolutionary and Napoleonic soldiers, which relies mainly on secondary works and soldiers' memoirs that were composed decades after 1815, he uses

a large collection of letters and diaries written by French troops during their military service. Analyzing these documents, many of which are housed in departmental archives, Forrest argues that real French soldiers contrasted sharply with representations of them in official discourse as patriotic and warlike supermen. He claims that save for a small minority of officers and NCOs, Napoleon's men generally disliked military life and were usually afraid, depressed, homesick, and eager for peace. Moreover, the Empire's ceaseless wars and the suffering that they caused gradually eroded whatever enthusiasm for war or military service its soldiers might have possessed.

Natalie Petiteau's depiction of Napoleon's troops resembles that of Forrest. In her studies on French soldiers and veterans of the Napoleonic wars, she attempts to shatter the myths about them that emerged in the nineteenth century and explain how the veterans contributed to the construction of French national identity.<sup>9</sup> Popular legends surrounding the veterans and most historical literature portrayed them as fanatics devoted to the emperor and the French nation. After they were forcibly discharged from the army and became *demi-soldes*, this fanaticism led them to plot constantly to restore Napoleon and his dynasty to power.<sup>10</sup> After examining the lives, careers, and political activities of French veterans during and after the Napoleonic wars, Petiteau concludes that they did not conform to the model of the disgruntled, Bonapartist *groggnard*. The term "*groggnard*" meant "grumbler" or "complainer." Originally, it referred to the infantry of the Imperial Guard, but it later evolved into a popular nickname that was applied more generally to all of Napoleon's soldiers. According to Petiteau, veterans, except for an active and vocal minority, reintegrated into civilian society and refrained from political activities. Most of them acquired a sense of national identity, group solidarity, and Bonapartist political sympathies in the decades after their service in the army. Like Forrest, she recognizes that many French soldiers possessed tremendous admiration and affection for Napoleon because they perceived him as a great man, a hero and a genius who could accomplish the impossible. She also proposes that some of them internalized the military values of the army and were seduced by martial glory. Others forged strong bonds within their regiment, which became a surrogate family and sustained them through the harrowing ordeal of the Napoleonic wars. Yet, challenging the army-of-honor thesis, Petiteau asserts that one of the principal sources of military motivation in Napoleon's armies was a "spirit of submission." Comparing their troops to the *poilus* of World War I, she claims that a "culture of obedience" in France inculcated subordination to familial, social, and political authorities.<sup>11</sup> While some French men developed a desire for glory and

patriotism in the army, and many soldiers had a strong attachment to Napoleon and their units, most were reluctant conscripts who waged war because they were habituated to following the dictates of their parents and the state.

The distinguished French historian, Jean-Paul Bertaud, presents similar arguments about the motivation, or lack thereof, of the common soldiers of the First Empire. Bertaud's most recent book investigates the role of the French army in the militarization of Napoleonic France.<sup>12</sup> In it, he portrays the enlisted men of the Consulate and the Empire as victims of the Napoleonic regime, declaring that historians have tended to view relations between Napoleon and his soldiers through the myths of the Napoleonic legend. He claims that only "the reckless, young volunteers obsessed with adventure and glory" and "memorialists quick to embellish everything" possessed a passion for war. Once the novelty of military life wore off, fear, despair, and resignation characterized the sentiments of the majority of the *grogards*. Bertaud even suggests that the enthusiasm they displayed on the battlefield was due to drunkenness as much as any alleged "national gaiety."<sup>13</sup>

Though he does not engage Lynn's work directly or explicitly, Bertaud also disputes the army-of-honor thesis. In contrast to Lynn, who believes that Napoleon betrayed the French Revolution, Bertaud situates his reign and his armies within the broader framework of the Revolutionary era. He recognizes that Napoleon wanted new conquests to establish his political legitimacy, acquire personal glory, and secure his place in the historical record. However, he also proposes that the Empire's wars were driven by a vision of the French nation developed during the Revolution. Napoleon and his supporters, Bertaud maintains, continued to regard France as *la Grande Nation*, or "the Great Nation." The concept of the Great Nation identified France as the premier nation in Europe and the pinnacle of civilization. Moreover, this nation possessed an obligation to bring the rights of man, civil equality, and the principle of national sovereignty to the oppressed peoples of Europe. Bertaud contends that the Napoleonic regime inherited these ideas and used them to launch a new crusade. This struggle was a war to preserve the hegemony of the Great Nation, uphold its honor, and spread the benefits of the Revolution and French civilization to the rest of Europe. The conflict was also a battle between good and evil in which Napoleon, who embodied the Great Nation, was defending France and civilization itself from the barbaric and treacherous English.

Bertaud demonstrates that Napoleon and his supporters continuously sought to enlist the French people and the French army in this crusade. They assembled a vast array of propaganda and rewards, and mobilized the

educational system, the arts, and established churches to convince French men to commit themselves to the cause of the Great Nation. Honor, Bertaud explains, constituted an essential component of this program. Like Lynn, he maintains that honor was the principal attribute of the French army during the Napoleonic wars, and that Napoleon deliberately employed it as an instrument of military motivation. Yet Bertaud insists that Napoleonic honor differed fundamentally from the aristocratic honor of the Old Regime. In the crucible of the Revolution, traditional concepts of honor combined with Revolutionary virtue in the French army to forge a new form of honor. This new honor preserved the nobility's need to demonstrate physical courage and loyalty, command respect, and protect the weak, but it rejected the self-interest that had defined Old Regime honor. According to Bertaud, Napoleonic honor identified honor with service to the nation and the honor of the nation. Individuals and groups could only acquire status and prestige through acts that contributed to the common good. Virtue thus became honor during the Consulate and the Empire. Furthermore, Bertaud claims, Napoleon was not content to promote honor in the army. He institutionalized the military's virtuous honor through the Legion of Honor, and held the army up as a model for civilian society in order to cultivate it in the general population. Bertaud therefore concurs that the French army evolved into an army of honor during the Napoleonic era, but argues that it possessed a motivational system that conserved revolutionary virtue in a modified form and required devotion to the revolutionary Great Nation. For him, Napoleon's army resembled the military forces of the French Revolution far more than it did those of the Old Regime.

The works reviewed thus far have dramatically expanded our knowledge of Napoleon's soldiers, their values and motivations, and the relationship among war, political culture, and nationalism in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. This book benefits greatly from these studies, but it also goes beyond them by combining military history with the analysis of culture and gender. There is still a need for further inquiry into the subject of military motivation in the armies of Napoleon. Recent monographs like those of Forrest, Petiteau, and Bertaud succeed in challenging many of the myths surrounding the *grogards*. Yet, in replacing the enthusiastic, patriotic, glory-obsessed, and emperor-worshipping French soldier with the resigned, unenthusiastic, and homesick conscript, they fail to offer a satisfactory explanation for the outstanding military performance of Napoleon's armies. After reading their work, one is left wondering how an army composed of such troops could repeatedly defeat the highly trained, professional forces of their

opponents on the battlefield, and continue to wage war year after year even as France's enemies continued to multiply and the prospect of peace became increasingly remote.

In addition, military motivation is a complex phenomenon that is produced by the interaction of numerous factors. One of the foundations of any system of military motivation is the military culture existing in an army. The historical literature on Napoleon's armies, however, refrains from fully investigating the military culture created inside of the armies of the Consulate and the Empire. Existing studies often base their interpretations on the rewards offered to the army and neglect the cultural context in which they were distributed.<sup>14</sup> Others draw conclusions from propaganda such as high art, monuments, and novels intended mainly for the civilian population that the vast majority of Napoleon's troops never saw or experienced.<sup>15</sup> Works that analyze the mentalities of the *grogards* tend to concentrate on their writings and experiences without exploring the environment of the army that surrounded them.<sup>16</sup> These omissions are important because it necessary to understand the relationship between the attitudes of French soldiers and the military culture in which they were immersed to ascertain how motivation functioned in Napoleon's armies. The meanings of rewards or references in the writings of French troops may remain obscure or be misunderstood unless the cultural framework that enveloped them is studied. Furthermore, the Napoleonic regime deliberately tried to isolate the army from the civilian population, and the army spent most of the Napoleonic wars away from France. It was usually abroad conducting new campaigns or garrisoned in the territories that it conquered. Consequently, the military culture of the army differed from the more general culture of war that Napoleon and his supporters constructed in France.

Another lacuna in the military history of Napoleonic France is the absence of gender analyses. Gender history attempts to trace the evolution of gender identities created around biological sex differences, and to analyze the role of these identities in historical developments. Put more simply, gender historians study ideas and practices related to femininity, masculinity, and transgender identities, and try to determine how they affected history.<sup>17</sup> Prominent scholars in the fields of gender studies, women's history, and military history have recognized that war and gender are intimately connected, and have challenged historians to discover the ways in which they intersect and shape one another. Responding to this challenge, increasing numbers of historical studies explore the relationship among war, military institutions, masculinity, and femininity.<sup>18</sup>

In the history of the Napoleonic era, however, relatively little work has been done on this subject. Well-known historians of masculinity such as Robert A. Nye and George L. Mosse characterize the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars as a formative period in the history of modern masculinity in which the concept of the citizen soldier came to define manhood in the West. Yet, their own research generally concentrates on the forms of masculinity that emerged in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and does not adequately explain how this change occurred.<sup>19</sup> Karen Hagemann's pioneering research reveals the ways in which gender influenced Prussian participation in the Napoleonic wars, and the effects of these conflicts on German masculinity.<sup>20</sup> Yet, a comparable study of Napoleonic France does not exist. The feminist historians who have done so much to enhance our knowledge of the French Revolution and Napoleonic France through gender history generally ignore military topics.<sup>21</sup> For their part, historians who have written about Napoleon's soldiers and military campaigns neglect the role of gender in the French war effort.

While many military historians remain uncomfortable with gender history, attitudes and behaviors related to masculinity form an essential component of military culture and military motivation. Throughout history, men performed their military obligations in and out of combat because they tried to conform to accepted standards of male behavior in their military forces or society at large. Illustrating this tendency, a study conducted by the United States military on the battlefield performance of American soldiers in World War II reported that "the code of the combat soldier can be summarized by saying that behavior in combat was recognized as a test of being a man. When this code was internalized, or enforced by playing on an internalized code of manliness, a man once in combat had to fight in order to keep his own self-respect: 'Hell, I'm a soldier.'" <sup>22</sup> Although manhood in the West has often been associated with the ability to wage war, masculine norms, of course, varied across time periods, cultures, societies, and military forces. For example, the wigs, lace, and hose worn by the aristocratic military officers of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe, and the elegant manners that they cultivated, would probably be regarded as effeminate by the American soldiers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan today. It is the obligation of the historian to analyze these differences, and explore their effects on war, military forces, and the development of masculinity. To understand the motivation of Napoleon's soldiers, it is therefore imperative to discover the forms of manhood that existed in the armies of the Consulate and the Empire, and their impact on French troops.

This book fulfills this task by engaging in a thorough analysis of the motivational system developed in three different armies: the Army of the Coasts of the Ocean, the Army of Hanover, and the Grande Armée of 1805-1808. Napoleon assembled the first two armies in 1803 to strike at England after the collapse of the Peace of Amiens. The Grande Armée was formed out of the Army of the Coasts of the Ocean and the Army of Hanover once a general European war began in 1805, known as the War of the Third Coalition. These armies are historically significant for two reasons. First, they reveal the ways in which Napoleon sought to alter the character of the army once he had established his political power in France. The first few years of the Consulate represent a transitional phase in which Napoleon shared power in the French state with political rivals, and in the military with powerful generals such as Jean Victor Moreau and Jean-Baptiste Jules Bernadotte. By 1803, Napoleon was in firm control of both politics and the military, and possessed the opportunity to solidify his hold over the army. Secondly, these armies won Napoleon's greatest and most important victories. In slightly less than three years, the Grande Armée crushed the combined forces of Austria, Prussia, and Russia in a series of rapid campaigns that were unprecedented in their speed and decisiveness. Even more significant, the victories of the Grande Armée allowed Napoleon to establish French hegemony in Europe through the Peace of Tilsit in 1807. In the words of one of the leading historians of Napoleon's empire, "the Grande Army was the crucial instrument of French aggrandizement and . . . the victories of 1805-1807 opened the way to a process of continental empire-building which had not been practicable before."<sup>23</sup>

Two conceptual models are used in this book to provide a framework for the study of these armies: sustaining motivation and military culture. The concept of sustaining motivation was first developed by John A. Lynn in his work on the armies of the French Revolution.<sup>24</sup> Sustaining motivation is different from initial motivation and combat motivation. Initial motivation concerns the reasons why individuals enlist in the military. Combat motivation can be defined as the collection of factors that cause individuals to fight in battle. Sustaining motivation, on the other hand, consists of the motives and precombat experiences that provide individuals with the moral fortitude or compulsion to remain in military service. Put more simply, it is what keeps men, and sometimes women, in the ranks and brings them to battle. As Lynn explains, "the range of behavior influenced by sustaining motivation runs from cheerful and energetic acceptance of duty to surrender, desertion, or mutiny."<sup>25</sup>

This form of motivation, sustaining motivation, is the subject of this book. Of course, the boundaries between different types of military motivation remain far more fluid than the theoretical model indicates. Consequently, this study will also account for the ways in which the initial motivation of French soldiers shaped other kinds of motivation, and more importantly, reveal how the factors that influenced their sustaining motivation affected their performance in combat. To understand why Napoleon's troops waged war, I examine the creation and reception of Napoleonic military culture. Military culture communicates the value systems, establishes the behavioral standards, and provides the rewards and punishments that sustain the motivation and morale of soldiers. In this book, military culture is defined as the set of ideas, values, and practices that guide thought and behavior in the armed forces of a given society. It is a form of institutional culture that is developed for and by military forces, and it is distinct from the more general culture of war that exists in different societies and cultures. Military culture is not a closed system, nor is it static. It evolves and changes as a result of relationships within military forces, and because of interactions between military institutions and factors external to them such as politics, foreign relations, socioeconomic structures, and technology. Elements of military culture include, but are not limited to, strategic thought, concepts of military discipline, the role of the army in the state and society, the official goals of the military, and behavioral norms for conduct prior to, during, and after combat.<sup>26</sup>

While military culture encompasses a wide variety of phenomena, this study will concentrate on the facets of this construct related to military motivation. Napoleonic military culture coalesced as the Consular and Imperial state developed a series of measures to secure the loyalty of French soldiers, and to persuade as well as pressure them to wage war for it. This military culture changed as it responded to historical events as well as the goals and actions of French soldiers. Most of the instruments employed by the Napoleonic regime to influence its soldiers might be considered propaganda. Yet, such efforts involved more than just propaganda. A difficult term to define, like "military culture," "propaganda" implies the overt use of different types of media, whether aural, visual, or literary, to produce desired attitudes and behaviors. Napoleonic officials certainly engaged in these sorts of activities, but they also did more. They created other means to mold their soldiers, including the threat of punishment, symbolic actions such as oath taking, and practices like the circulation of petitions to Napoleon. Although somewhat imprecise, the concept of military culture offers a more useful analytical



tool than that of propaganda to examine this complicated system of rewards, punishments, ideas, and activities, and the broader cultural framework that they were designed to fabricate.

As cultural historians such as Roger Chartier have shown, we cannot simply assume that individuals in the past passively accepted the ideas and practices to which they were exposed. To borrow a metaphor from Chartier, human minds are not like soft wax that bears the imprint of whatever is inscribed upon it.<sup>27</sup> Individuals and groups appropriate cultural forms in different ways for reasons that may diverge widely from the manner intended by those who formulated them. It is therefore necessary to analyze the ways in which French soldiers internalized Napoleonic military culture. Only by undertaking this kind of investigation is it possible to understand their motivation.

Studying Napoleonic military culture and its appropriation in the Army of the Coasts, the Army of Hanover, and the Grande Armée reveals a complex motivational framework. The characterization of Napoleon's armies as an army of honor or as an instrument forged to continue the Great Nation's Revolutionary crusade obscures the elaborate mixture of ideas, values, and practices operating within the military forces of the Consulate and the Empire.

No one single attribute defined the armies of Napoleon. Rather, the Napoleonic regime incorporated elements of Old Regime and Revolutionary military culture into a new military culture linked to Napoleon's rule and the preservation of French hegemony in Europe. Yet, this creation resembled a patchwork collage more than a seamless canvas in which the old merged harmoniously with the new.

Napoleonic military culture employed five main sources of motivation: honor, patriotism, a martial and virile masculinity, devotion to Napoleon, and coercion. The French army did become an army of honor under Napoleon, but it possessed more than one form of honor. The virtuous honor described by Bertaud appeared side by side with more traditional forms of honor characterized by the acquisition of martial glory and *esprit de corps*. Patriotism in the armies of the Consulate and the Empire associated the honor of the soldier with the honor of the nation. However, instead of being portrayed as a beacon of freedom, enlightenment, and civilization, France emerged as a warrior nation that needed to maintain its prestige and position in Europe through military conquests. Napoleonic military culture transformed Revolutionary virtue into Imperial virtue, which committed French soldiers to defending the reputation of the French nation as well as its physi-

cal existence. The aggressive, militaristic character of Napoleonic France was reinforced through the inculcation of a concept of masculinity that required the soldiers of the Consulate and the Empire to demonstrate their manhood through displays of martial and sexual prowess. The Napoleonic regime literally offered its troops sex as a reward for military service, and encouraged them to prove the superiority of the French nation through their feats of arms and their sexual conquests among foreign women. To establish loyalties to Napoleon, representations of the emperor implied that his victories provided them with access to female bodies beyond France. Yet, similar to honor, the Napoleonic regime presented different, and often contradictory, images of the French leader to his troops. Napoleon was portrayed as an Absolutist ruler who governed by divine right and dispensed honors to his loyal servants, and as a patriotic monarch whose sovereignty rested upon the will of the French people, his service to the nation, and his preservation of the French Revolution's achievements. In addition, he was a Romantic military hero who shared the glory of his incomparable victories with his army. If loyalty to Napoleon, honor, patriotism, and martial masculinity failed to make an impression on reluctant recruits, the military authorities resorted to the threat of punishment. They repeatedly informed the soldiers in the Army of the Coasts of the Ocean, the Army of Hanover, and the Grande Armée about the harsh penalties for desertion, and forced them to witness the suffering and humiliation of those unfortunate enough to endure them.

The multivalent character of Napoleonic military culture was one of the primary reasons why the French army was so successful during the first half of Napoleon's reign. The Napoleonic regime offered its soldiers a variety of incentives that resonated with them, and in the process, produced determined armies with high morale that were superior to their European rivals. While Napoleonic military culture exercised a powerful influence over sustaining motivation in the French army, officers and enlisted men responded to it in different ways. The measures intended to shape the army had their greatest impact on the officer corps. Its members internalized the military culture in which they were immersed, and became true *grogards*, the kinds of soldiers who appeared in Napoleonic propaganda. Between 1803 and 1808, the lure of rewards, honor, and glory constituted the most important source of motivation for them. Yet, contrary to the assertions of historians who propose that the desire for honor increased over time, Napoleon's officers displayed an intense commitment to France. Furthermore, in the later stages of the Napoleonic wars, their patriotism surpassed their passion for personal renown.

A significant minority of the rank and file resembled their superiors and adopted the value system created in the Army of the Coasts of the Ocean, the Army of Hanover, and the Grande Armée. They possessed a cultlike attachment to their leader, but this devotion was not simply the product of the emperor's victories, his personal interaction with his men, or rewards. Napoleon's achievements and his ability to associate his rule with the traditions and ideals that defined political legitimacy in France allowed him to acquire a sacrality that inspired dedication to his person. He became the monarch that the French public had wanted since the middle of the eighteenth century, and his soldiers cherished him for it. Numerous NCOs and common soldiers also valued the glory that they obtained under his command, and appreciated the opportunities for female companionship and sexual encounters that the army provided. Many men in the enlisted ranks, however, regarded their military service with a sense of resignation and simply did what was required of them. Religious faith, prewar experiences, loyalty to their primary group, and the leadership of committed officers allowed them to endure the ordeal of war and transformed them into effective soldiers who triumphed over their opponents. The coercive apparatus put in place by the Napoleonic regime succeeded in motivating the rest by making them fear the consequences of desertion more than the risks of combat.

These ideas are presented in seven chapters. The first chapter contains an overview of the history of the Army of the Coasts of the Ocean, the Army of Hanover, and the Grande Armée of 1805-1808. Afterward, it shows how Napoleon and his supporters constructed the military culture of these armies with different types of media, rewards, and symbolic activities. Chapter 2 examines the forms of honor cultivated in the army. The following chapter, chapter 3, concentrates on Napoleonic patriotism and demonstrates how Revolutionary virtue became Imperial virtue. The fourth chapter studies the efforts of the Napoleonic regime to manipulate French masculinity for military purposes, and its reliance on sex as a source of motivation. It also reveals the ways in which the promise of a libertine lifestyle and sexual conquests among foreign women contributed to the development of Imperial virtue. Chapter 5 then analyzes the representations of Napoleon communicated to the troops. The last two chapters assess the impact of Napoleonic military culture on the men who served in the Army of the Coasts, the Army of Hanover, and the Grande Armée. Chapter 6 evaluates sustaining motivation in the officer corps. The final chapter explains why common soldiers fought for Napoleon, and investigates the use of coercion to compel unwilling recruits to perform their military duties.

While this book is about armies and military motivation, it has implications that extend beyond the study of war and military institutions. The armies of Napoleon transformed Europe and, ultimately, the world, through their conquests. As a result of their military victories, the French occupied a substantial amount of territory in Europe. They exported the values and institutions of Revolutionary and Napoleonic France to conquered territories and allied states. In the process, they helped to bring about the modernization of Europe. Moreover, the First Empire provoked the development of new forms of nationalism as a response to French expansion and Napoleon's oppressive conscription and tax policies. Because of the essential contributions made by French soldiers to these changes, it is critical to know more about why they fought, and therefore, the different factors that shaped their identities and perceptions of military service. Just as significant, more than a million Frenchmen served in the armies of Napoleon. The formative experiences of these men, many of whom survived the Napoleonic wars to become an important part of French society, occurred during the period of their military service. Former soldiers occupied prominent positions in the state and civil society in post-Napoleonic France, and poor ex-soldiers constituted a social and political group that was active in the political struggles that wracked France in the first half of the nineteenth century. Many former soldiers were simply reintegrated into civilian society. There, they formed a substantial part of the male population that lived, worked, had families, and participated in the lives of their communities. Studying these men as they were forged in the fires of war can therefore provide a lens through which to analyze the development of a large and influential sector of French society that did much to mold modern France.

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# From the Coasts of the Ocean to the Snows of Poland

*The Grande Armée and  
Napoleonic Military Culture*

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After weeks of marching across France, the soldiers of the Grande Armée finally discovered the task that lay ahead. As the army's formations advanced into Germany, they received a proclamation from Napoleon. Issued on September 29, 1805, it announced, "Soldiers, the War of the Third Coalition has begun. The Austrian Army has passed the Inn [River], violated treaties, attacked and driven our ally from his capital." In response, the proclamation declared, the Grande Armée would fight to assure the independence of Germany, aid the allies of France, and destroy the "new league which the hatred and gold of England had fabricated." It also reminded the troops that the emperor marched with them and that they were the "advanced guard of the Great People." Asserting that they would overcome "any obstacles," it concluded with the defiant vow, "we will not rest until we have planted our eagles on the territory of our enemies."<sup>1</sup>

The proclamation proved prophetic. Over the next few months, the Grande Armée compelled an entire Habsburg army to surrender, captured Vienna, the capital of the Habsburg Empire, and dismantled the Third Coalition, along with the main Allied field army, at the battle of Austerlitz. The campaign of 1805 was noteworthy for a number of reasons, not the least of which was its rapid and decisive conclusion. It opened a new stage in the Napoleonic wars, inaugurating a period of French military success that culminated in the establishment of French hegemony in Europe. If the campaign of 1805 represents the start of a new era, the preparations for it began two years earlier when First Consul Napoleon Bonaparte began to build an army for an invasion of Great Britain. The army assembled to confront France's most implacable foe never would set foot on English shores, but it