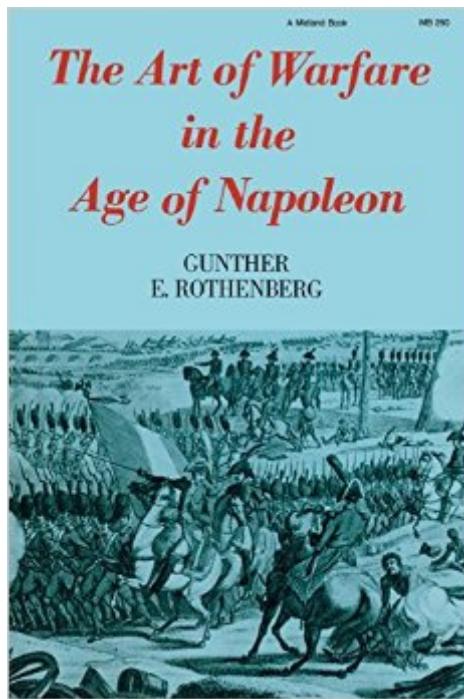


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The Art Of Warfare In The Age Of Napoleon



Synopsis

"... a most illuminating and readable general survey.... This book is well organized, well produced, and well written. It belongs among the ten most useful books on this period to the historian and... to the general reader." -- American Historical Review

"This splendid volume fills a gap in the vast outpouring of literature on the military aspects of the era of the French Revolution and Napoleon by combining a description of the major changes and trends of warfare with a comparative discussion of the French military establishment and the armies of its major opponents.... As another contribution to 'synthetic' history, it is a very successful exercise." -- Military Affairs

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In a comprehensive study of a crucial era in warfare -- from the last decades of the ancient régime to Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo -- Rothenberg describes the organization, training methods, equipment, tactics, and strategy of France and its adversaries. He also explores staff systems, logistics, fortifications, medical services, and insurgency and counterinsurgency.

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Customer Reviews

Gunther Rothenberg's "The Art of Warfare in the Age of Napoleon" is a highly readable survey of the changes in the art of war during the 23-year conflict spawned by the French Revolution and the Wars of Napoleon. Despite its brevity, "The Art of Warfare" is remarkably comprehensive,

addressing weapons, tactics, strategy, and supporting military services such as engineering and medical care. Rothenberg provides a short synopsis of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars and commentary on the military establishments of the principal combatants. Rothenberg rightly devotes much of the book to the innovations of the French Army as it evolved under the necessity first of defending the Revolution and then under the hand of its martial Emperor, Napoleon I. The concept of the nation in arms made possible mass armies which often overwhelmed the small professional armies of its adversaries. Lack of training led to an emphasis on shock in battle, produced by fast moving infantry columns, massed artillery fire, and operational maneuver against the flanks and rear of opponents. Rothenberg notes the effects of a persistent French failure to build a robust supply system. French soldiers in the field were expected to forage to survive. The Army as a whole was forced to disperse to find food, and Napoleon had to rely on exquisite timing to mass his forces in time for battle. The lack of a supply train imparted operational mobility, but when foraging failed, as it did in Russia, or provoked guerrilla war, as it did in Spain, French soldiers starved or were picked off in ambush. The many successes of the French Army prompted varying degrees of emulation by the Austrian, Prussian, Russian, and British armies.

As a lay reader interested in the period, I found this book to be easy to read. It is chock full of information not easily found elsewhere in one place, and does an excellent job of providing a broad-brush view of Napoleonic militaries and the forces that formed them. The book starts with a review of military thinking and practices of the period just before the French Revolution, and then quickly and easily explains how the cataclysm of the Revolution changed everything -- sooner for the French, or later for most other European powers. There is relatively little description of individual battles; rather the emphasis is on general practices and approaches. Topics include the snap shots of life of soldiers -- not enough to bog you down with detail, but enough to give you a sense of how they lived. Information of weapons of the three branches of the army (infantry, cavalry, artillery) are described and compared across the competing powers. Other topics include the different types and styles of leadership, how officers were chosen, the strategies and tactics explained, the challenges faced in moving large armies without adequate infrastructure (e.g., roads), fortifications and how they were assaulted, camp followers, organization and lack thereof (can you imagine relying on hired civilians to transport your artillery during a campaign?), medical services, and the problems of staff, illness, governmental oversight, planning, and logistics at a time when communication rarely went faster than a man on horseback. The author, Rothenberg (1923 - 2004), was himself a military man, serving the British Army in North Africa (including service in Intelligence).

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