



# Swords around a Throne: Napoleon's Grande Armée

*John R. Elting*

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## **Swords around a Throne: Napoleon's Grande Armee** John R. Elting

This authoritative, comprehensive, and enthralling book describes and analyzes Napoleon's most powerful weapon—the Grande Armée which at its peak numbered over a million soldiers. Elting examines every facet of this incredibly complex human machine: its organization, command system, logistics, weapons, tactics, discipline, recreation, mobile hospitals, camp followers, and more. From the army's formation out of the turmoil of Revolutionary France through its swift conquests of vast territories across Europe to its legendary death at Waterloo, this book uses excerpts from soldiers' letters, eyewitness accounts, and numerous firsthand details to place the reader in the boots of Napoleon's conscripts and generals. In Elting's masterful hands the experience is truly unforgettable.

## **Swords around a Throne: Napoleon's Grande Armee Details**

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# From Reader Review Swords around a Throne: Napoleon's Grande Armee for online ebook

## Jeff Slipper says

Tour de force.

Most enjoyable and informative.

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## Tirant says

This is THE book about the French army of the Napoleonic era. Very detailed, with hundreds of quotes from people who were really there to back up the author's points, or to interject

However, the layout of this book is terrible, and it certainly could have used a few chapters about the period and history before diving right into uniformology. Also, color plates would definitely enhance the sections about uniforms.

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## Taylor says

Utterly fascinating dissection of how the Grande Armée was put together. From the cavalry, infantry and artillery through the veterinary services, logistics services, MP, even down to the vivandières and other camp followers, every part is detailed and discussed.

Not strictly a traditional history - if you want to know where, how and why the battles were fought, look elsewhere - this is more of an encyclopedia. Every chapter discusses a different part of the army. In these chapters, the history what is under discussion is told: say, how the line infantry changed from pre-Revolutionary times up until after Waterloo. Also included is an in-depth description of the uniforms worn (and how these changed over time), the branch's TO&E, how they marched, how they camped, what they were (supposed) to carry, how they got paid. Just an incredible depth of information.

While this could have been a set of very dry information dumps, instead the author writes with a "earthy" approach. His prose is littered with pertinent anecdotes and opinions, usually to good effect. Sometimes, however, to the detriment of the subject at hand.

Which is why I cannot give this 5 stars, despite my enjoyment of it. Too often the biases of the author shine through, shifting attention from the point being made to the author's opinion. The author appears to hate the Russians, Spanish, Italians, the Bourbons, the Committee of Public Safety, the Directorate, Bernadotte, and the Austrian cavalry. This list is not all-inclusive, I'm sure I missed some.

Despite all that, this book was a highly enjoyable read. Recommended for those interested in Napoleonic warfare or are interested in the details of the construction of a gunpowder-era army.

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### **AskHistorians says**

This tome on the Grande Armée is a very approachable yet detailed discourse on the composition and inner workings of Napoleon's greatest army. Packed with anecdotal stories, it gives a functional history of the army that Napoleon led rather than an operational history, explaining how each different service worked within the army and how it grew to its height. Covering everything from the navy to logistics, this is a good book to catch for an understanding of the army.

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### **Rob Markley says**

Hugely overrated work. This is simply the consolidation and systematic organisation of an admittedly wide reading of Napoleonic memoirs, which is enough to make it just interesting. There is no evidence of any real actual research, or analysis of all this reading and there is of course a total partiality towards Napoleon. I'm probably being harsh and reacting against the adulation usually reserved for the work when I say: fan boy history for hero worshipers, and little more.

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### **Peter Harrison says**

This is a superb book. A step by step outline of every aspect of the life of Napoleon's Grande Armée. It is the perfect companion piece to Elting's Military History and Atlas of the Napoleonic Wars (written with Vincent Esposito). If it has a flaw, it is that Elting is very obviously in Napoleon's camp, but if you accept that at the start and are interested in how his army was constructed and operated, then this is the perfect book to explore that.

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### **Nathan says**

Basically this is an encyclopaedia of Napoleon's field army - their units, their uniforms, their generals and so on. Written in a dry yet chatty way this is a lot more enjoyable than one might expect. Recommended if you're interested in the subject. Rated G. 3.5/5

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### **Carson says**

"Discipline and Disciplinary Units," page 433:

"As for the genuinely unsavory 'mauvais sujets'- thieves, congenital AWOLS, bullies, sadists, and perverts- that even the strongest-stomached regiment would not tolerate, it was established French custom to sentence them to service in some colonial pesthole. Justice was served, the price of a rope was saved, and- should an occasional gallows bird survive fevers, savages, spoiled rations, and the local women and drink- the colony's

population was increased. Two generations later, his descendants would remember him as a gallant adventurer, descended on the left hand from the noblest blood of France."

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### **Sean Chick says**

A massive rambling book, written with more gusto than one would expect. There is a lot of information here, and I particularly liked Elting's discussions of the Restoration army. He also has his share of opinions, such as Napoleon being better for the navy than most would say, arguing that by 1816 the French navy would have been ready to take on the British again. Overall, it might be too long and too conversational, but it's never dull.

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### **Tommy Trionfetti says**

The amount of research that must have gone into this book blows my mind. Every now and then you tend to lose track with all the numbers and names of countless combat units. But the chapters on 'Les Maréchaux d'Empire', Napoleon's allies and the enemies of the French Republic/Empire are some of the best 'napoleonic pages' I have ever read.

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### **Betsy says**

I would rate this between 4 and 5 stars for its readability, but I finally went for 5 since this was the book that introduced me to Marshal Louis-Nicholas Davout in the section dealing with Napoleon's marshals. Besides that section the book deals with practically every facet of Napoleon's Grande Armée. The research is phenomenal. Admittedly, some of the material is somewhat dry; but if you are interested in knowing more about how Napoleon gained his reputation, this book helps.

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### **Jeff says**

Great read so far. I'm not quite done with it but the author is very thorough and in-depth, revealing the genius behind much of what Napoleon did and how he managed his army. The descriptions of generals and marshals of his army really brought the past to life for me. Well worth a look if you enjoy history, and especially military history.

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### **Jessica Snell says**

I read only about half of this book. That might sound pitiful, but the book is almost 800 pages long. This was novel research for me, and the most fun research I did, I think. Elting peppers his history of Napoleon's army with anecdotes about individual officers, and didn't mind giving his opinion either, though, as a good historian, he made it clear what was opinion and what was fact. This was a fascinating book, and I'd be glad to go back and finish it sometime. I think anyone interested in the era, the military, or just the oddities of

human behavior would quite enjoy it.

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### **Lee says**

I'm not much of a Napoleonic Wars "fan," but this was a great book to me. Elting covered pretty much the entire span of the militarized French nation, down to the Imperial postal service, daily food of soldiers, and so on.

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### **Jack Radey says**

Elting can write in an amusing fashion, but it is history as a series of anecdotes. It is thorough, but shallow, hinting at enormous information the author is familiar with but is only alluding to instead of explaining. The book is very large, and covers a wide variety of subjects, all in reference to La Grande Armee. Something of an overview, but not a comprehensive or data filled sort of study, no indeed.

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