

The Construction of Napoleonic Military Culture: Napoleon Bonaparte's
Propagation of Military Motivation and Troop Morale

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INTRODUCTION

Following the glorious victory won by the forces of Napoleon's *Grande Armée* at the legendary Battle of Austerlitz, Napoleon Bonaparte gathered his men around him to celebrate the victory at Austerlitz through one of his renowned proclamations. Raining down showers of praise upon his soldiers and pride in being their leader, he proclaims:

Soldats, lorsque le peuple français plaça sur ma tête la couronne impériale, je me confiai à vous pour la maintenir toujours dans ce haut éclat de gloire qui seul pouvait lui donner du prix à mes yeux. Mais dans le même moment nos ennemis pensaient à la détruire et à l'avilir ! Et cette couronne de fer, conquise par le sang de tant de Français, ils voulaient m'obliger à la placer sur la tête de nos plus cruels ennemis ! Projets téméraires et insensés que, le jour même de l'anniversaire du couronnement de votre Empereur, vous avez anéantis et confondus ! Vous leur avez appris qu'il est plus facile de nous braver et de nous menacer que de nous vaincre.... Mon peuple vous reverra avec joie, et il vous suffira de dire : J'étais à la bataille d'Austerlitz, pour que l'on réponde : Voilà un brave.¹

Both Napoleon's presence and incredible gift as an orator easily incited a frantic and exciting energy from his troops in their celebration of France's victory.

Literacy. Rhetoric. Honor. Glory. Family. Napoleon. What exactly ties all these words together into a collective relationship? Each has a different role as an essential function in processing, producing, and promoting the military motivation and troop morale carefully cultivated by Napoleon into a new type of military culture.

The Napoleonic Wars saw the beginnings of modern warfare, mass conscription, and a substantial increase in basic literacy among common soldiers. For the first time in history, soldiers were more literate than their counterparts of the past and could record their own wartime

¹ Napoleon Bonaparte, *Discours de Guerre: Napoléon Bonaparte*, ed. Jacques-Olivier Boudon (Paris, 2011), 107-108.

experiences. Many of them penned personal memoirs, diaries, and letters that evolved into documented accounts of war, thereby producing a wealth of new information and firsthand insight into their lives in the military.

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine how rhetoric and literary communication were crucial in developing the new and rousing military culture of 'total' Napoleonic warfare through the mythical rhetoric of General Bonaparte and the rise and growing rate of literacy amongst the soldiers of the *Grande Armée*.

Much work has already been done on Napoleon's role as a great military leader, Napoleonic propaganda, and the myth of Napoleon. Recently, modern times have seen a spiked interest in the letters and experiences of ordinary Napoleonic soldiers, like Alan Forrest's pioneering work, *Napoleon's Men: The Soldiers of the Revolution and Empire*, which provides a vital contribution to the subject of Napoleonic soldiers and their experiences. In the Introduction to *Napoleon's Men*, Forrest is quick to point out that his work is different from most other studies of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars because it offers no narrative of the period. It is not about battles and campaigns, nor military tactics and strategy, but rather on the soldiers themselves: 'on their experiences of army life and their emotions when faced with years away from their homes in the strangely unfamiliar environment of the military.'² The Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars produced the first mass army drawn from the entire population at large through conscription, regardless of social position or educational achievements. The army was now comprised of all kinds of people from different careers, backgrounds, and positions. Many

² Alan Forrest, *Napoleon's Men: The Soldiers of the Revolution and Empire* (London, 2002), x.

of the enlisted men also possessed a new level of unparalleled political awareness from the preceding generations. Forrest cites the French Revolution as the cause, where the men ‘had been educated to think of themselves as citizens, men with rights and with opinions. As a result this was not a silent army, one about whom our knowledge must necessarily remain limited.’³

The troops of common soldiers preceding mass conscription generally lacked the position, diversity, education, and sociopolitical awareness that characterized the enlisted soldiers of modernized Napoleonic warfare. Rather, the bygone armies of the pre-Revolutionary age constituted a vast sum of unfortunate and underprivileged individuals, like beggars and vagabonds, and deeply despaired men who had nothing to lose. In total, the pre-modern militaristic policies of the past were defined, determined, and executed by a radically immoral system. The state’s nefarious military recruitment policies largely targeted the poor and lower class citizens who were more prone to the reckless desperation produced by their situations of hopelessness. Thus, by accosting the hapless, downtrodden, and impoverished into military enlistment, only a weak and severely limited ‘army of the poor and under-educated’⁴ of feeble military strength could be shaped.

The new era of modernized warfare saw the inauguration of modernization in the military’s logistical structure and lifestyle conditions of soldiers. The Napoleonic soldiers of the burgeoning wartime period were one of the first modern generations of soldiers to become possessed by a craving to communicate with the outside world. The considerable increase in literacy among the soldiers of the Napoleonic Wars and the loneliness of a homesick soldier

³ Forrest, *Napoleon’s Men*, x.

⁴ Forrest, *Napoleon’s Men*, x.

produced ‘an unquenchable appetite’⁵ for outside communication. In the times of modern wars, the need to seek reassurance by the outside world became standard in the life of the modern-day soldier. Forrest emphasizes the vital importance that family ties played to the mentality and wellbeing of the young men in their new life as soldiers fighting a war in a foreign and unfamiliar environment. Military enlistment wrenched them out of their familiar settings and sent them off to battle, where they were subjected to great geographic displacements, enduring dangers, and the brutal realities of war. In his book review on Forrest’s work, Isser Woloch, a prominent historian of the Napoleonic era, praises the dexterity of Forrest’s emphasis on the necessity of familial ties to the geographically displaced soldiers so far from home:

With great skill he makes palpable how much it meant to these soldiers both to communicate with their families and in turn to receive news and encouragement from home (including in some cases desperately needed funds to settle debts), despite the maddening vagaries of the postal system.⁶

Gunther E. Rothenberg, another military historian of the Napoleonic Wars, agrees with Woloch and Forrest on the prominence of a soldier’s familial correspondence. ‘The focus on the letters that soldiers sent back to their homes is well justified. There is much fertile ground to be explored here.’⁷

Napoleon’s Men has been a long time in the making. Forrest’s arduous quest for soldiers’ writings was challenged by obstacles that took him ‘to the four corners of France, and occasionally beyond.’⁸ Rarely were letters distinctly catalogued in the archives, and then required more time and effort to continue their search. Their essentially random character would

⁵ Forrest, *Napoleon’s Men*, xii.

⁶ Isser Woloch, ‘Review’, *The Journal of Military History*, 67 (2003), 938.

⁷ Gunther E. Rothenberg, ‘Review’, *The Journal of Military History*, 76 (2004), 664.

⁸ Forrest, *Napoleon’s Men*, xvii.

typically render them difficult to use, but Forrest was able to accomplish the organization of them into a comprehensive book from the long years he spent gathering them. In order to get inside the heads of the soldiers, Forrest preferred the letters of the common soldiers over diaries and memoirs, considering them more spontaneous and reliable. Letters were the most significant source in the search for the feelings and emotions of ordinary soldiers, as ‘they have a hauntingly honest quality which diaries and published memoirs lack.’⁹

In his Introduction, Forrest outlines the precise focus and intentions of his book through clean and simple statements that the reader can easily acknowledge. After the description of his focus on the soldiers themselves, he is quick to discredit any notion of the association of heroism with soldiers by pointedly stating that it was not a book about heroism. It is about the identities, emotions, and experiences of soldiers themselves in the army and ‘the contrasting reactions of ordinary soldiers to the conditions of warfare at the end of the eighteenth and during the early years of the nineteenth century, [including] their fears and anxieties as well as their pride and their moments of intoxicating triumph.’¹⁰ *Napoleon’s Men* makes the concerted effort to convey what it would have been like to have served in the French armies during this crucial period of Napoleonic conquest and military modernization. Forrest insists that the most accurate view of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars is not found through sources like Napoleonic iconography, but in the words of the soldiers themselves.

Another book focused on the experiences of the individual soldiers is *Soldiers at War: Firsthand accounts of warfare from the Age of Napoleon*. Edited by Jon E. Lewis, it is a vivid

⁹ Forrest, *Napoleon’s Men*, xiii.

¹⁰ Forrest, *Napoleon’s Men*, xi.

and diverse collection of fourteen eyewitness accounts that range from the land campaigns of the French Revolutionary Wars, the Napoleonic Wars, and the War of 1812. Scattered among the fourteen narratives are both familiar accounts recognizing some of the most historically vital moments of the wars, including the battles of Leipzig and Waterloo, while others are relatively fresh and obscure accounts that are more uncommonly heard of.

In the Introduction, Lewis clarifies the book's primary purpose 'to present the experience of war in the age of Napoleon, what it felt like to be an infantry soldier, a cavalryman, an artilleryman on the battlefield and the marches and bivouacs that led to it.'¹¹ The majority of the accounts were by commissioned officers and NCOs simply because they were the men who were most likely to be literate and pen memoirs, diaries, and letters. As this assembly of firsthand accounts were an individual's personal wartime experience, it is not unusual for the soldiers' vantage points to be limited by the bedlam restrictions of battle. However, this provides an accurate portrait of the chaos of combat because the vantage points of soldiers were usually limited 'sometimes only to the men, smoke, horseflesh and flying lead immediately around them.'¹² War was not calm and orderly; it was a tumultuous display of pandemonium.

As the editor of the book, Lewis' chief responsibility was the compilation of a number of well-chosen entries into a diverse, distinctive, and didactic collection of accounts. His choices do not disappoint; Lewis provides an extremely diverse and vastly ranging collection of intriguing narratives that all seem to draw an equal amount of attention. Lewis successfully captures the

¹¹ Jon E. Lewis (ed.), *Soldiers at War: Firsthand accounts of warfare from the Age of Napoleon* (London, 2001).

¹² Lewis, *Soldiers*, xi.

general spirit of the Napoleonic Wars by his apt choice to include military campaigns spanning the world and the personal experiences of soldiers traversing all military ranks.

Rory Muir's book *Tactics and the Experience of Battle in the Age of Napoleon* was written with the intention to study the practice of what actually happened in battle through examining the experiences of soldiers, the way in which 'the different arms, infantry, cavalry and artillery'¹³ interacted on the battlefield, the feeling of a cavalry charge and facing down the enemy, the roles played by the general and his subordinate commanders and staffers, how regimental officers helped to sustain the morale and discipline of their units, and 'what happened when a unit finally broke?'¹⁴ Muir's intended focus of the 'practice of what actually happened in battle'¹⁵ includes a number of subtopics that he is inconsistent in addressing. His strength seems to lie in analyzing the purpose of tactics, as well as the relationship of tactics to battlefield psychology through the state of mind held by soldiers in the midst of combat. Muir draws the compelling conclusion that the Napoleonic battlefield formations also held a psychological purpose behind their main function of firepower. One example he gave was how the best infantry formation against a cavalry charge was 'to form a hollow square or oblong facing outwards.'¹⁶ By packing themselves into this formation, the square could be used to simultaneously enhance the discipline of the men while also boost the men's morale by providing a sense of security. When a soldier was tightly packed into the square with his regiment and surrounded by his fellow soldiers, there was less of a chance that one's instinct to flee for their life would kick in

¹³ Rory Muir, *Tactics and the Experience of Battle in the Age of Napoleon* (London, 1998).

¹⁴ Muir, *Tactics*, viii.

¹⁵ Muir, *Tactics*, viii.

¹⁶ Muir, *Tactics*, 130.

because he would also be abandoning his friends to a doomed fate.¹⁷ Although the strength of his book lies in the organized text of tactical analysis, Muir maintains the main concern of the book to be on the behavior of soldiers in combat by asking why and how well they fought and endured. The answer that he provides lays in one's unit pride and group cohesion, not the usual rallying call of patriotism.

Muir's work is primarily based on the primary source material of memoirs, letters, and diaries written by soldiers, in order to include numerous eyewitness accounts in his analysis on the combat experience of Napoleonic soldiers. Largely based on primary sources, the emphasis of the book falls on the British experience and the Peninsular War. While Muir does include a small amount of French sources in his study, he essentially ignores the experiences of the Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian combatants by asserting that their omission was not critical because he believes that with the tactical level, national differences did not matter. Although Muir believes that nationality made no difference and thus did not require a diversity of sources, the limiting of his sources to the English exponentially weakens his entire argument. His strange preoccupation with the British military and the Duke of Wellington only provides him with more reason to claim that all one needs to know about the tactics of Napoleonic warfare can be found by studying the British. His stubborn choice to limit the vast majority of his research and sources to the British military only undermines his study by concluding in a narrow and drastically weakened British bias.

¹⁷ Muir, *Tactics*, 130-131.

Philip G. Dwyer's *Napoleon: The Path to Power, 1769-1799* delivers a unique psychological perspective on Napoleon's rise to power in his early years by focusing on the evolution of his character and his innovative nature. Dwyer presents his readers with a study of Napoleon's propaganda by concentrating on his attempts at self-promotion through the available media of that era: 'Indeed, Napoleon contributed much towards constructing his own myth, from his youth even until after he fell from power, when, while in exile, he dictated his memoirs to a group of disciples who took down his every word in the hope that his version of history would prevail.'¹⁸ Napoleon, as Dwyer explains, was someone who instinctively understood how to exploit the popular romantic and idealized notion of the 'need for [a] hero'¹⁹ by 'dramatiz[ing] his own role in the wars'²⁰. Dwyer cites the famous bridge-crossing at Arcola as one of 'the most celebrated representations of that day'²¹, which transformed the heroic image of Napoleon's successful charge over the bridge into an iconic 'propaganda cornerstone'²². Here Dwyer reveals the exaggeration of Napoleon's own description of the event by convincingly recounting the historical reality of the incident. In examining the realities and circumstances surrounding Napoleon's use of propaganda, Dwyer concludes his prologue by stating, 'the following pages are about understanding how Napoleon went about constructing his life, and how he constructed his own legend.'²³

In terms of maintaining authenticity, historical accuracy, and avoiding the chance of important things being lost in translation, all primary sources are in French. These sources

¹⁸ Philip G. Dwyer, *Napoleon: The Path to Power, 1769-1799* (New Haven, 2008).

¹⁹ Dwyer, *Napoleon*, 7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Dwyer, *Napoleon*, 4.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Dwyer, *Napoleon*, 8.

include both individual memoirs and collectively published sets of memoirs written by a range of individuals; a collection of Napoleon's 'discours de guerre' and another collection of his letters; collections of the 'Bulletins de la Grande Armée'; a published collection of prints entitled *Napoléon dans l'image d'Épinal*; a large published collection of 'lettres de grognards'; and retrieved from archives in France, a number of different letters written by soldiers to their family back home.

When dealing with the two different primary source types of memoirs and letters, it is important to identify the differences and their significant historical function. Memoirs are the autobiographies written by soldiers after the events of the Napoleonic Empire. Usually written by the elite upper ranks of the military command, they have the reputation as glorified reflections on the past days of their prime and the illustrious image of Napoleon as savior, sovereign, and supreme commander. As they usually followed an agenda of self-promotion, one can generally assume them as an unreliable source. In contrast, the letters written by a diversity of ordinary soldiers provides a more accurate look into the atmosphere and mentalities from the perspectives of typically average and humble men. Letters were written as personal and private correspondence, intended only for the names above the address inscribed on the outside of the letter's envelope. As these letters were never intended for the public to read, they provide an intimate look into the different aspects of their own personalized 'la vie militaire'. The letters written by the French soldiers of Napoleon's *Grande Armée* provide the kind of valuable insights, unique details, and new evidence to contradict previous interpretations and assumptions on Napoleonic military culture and 'la vie militaire'.

My research explores three different yet interrelated themes: Napoleon's utilization of propaganda in promoting the surrounding myth of him as a great military commander, an analysis of his rhetorical style utilized in his print propaganda publications, and the experiences and 'la vie militaire' of the soldiers of the Grande Armée.

CHAPTER 1

MANUFACTURING MOTIVATION IN NAPOLEONIC MILITARY CULTURE

A ces mots, tous s'ébranle, tout se met en mouvement. L'Empereur marchant à la tête de ses troupes avec tout son état-major électrisait l'armée: chaque soldat en valait quatre, ce jour-là. L'ardeur des troupes fut telle que rien ne put les contenir. Elles passèrent au pas de course devant l'état-major de Napoléon. Le grand élan était donné: il fallait vaincre ou mourir.²⁴

Amid the first Italian campaign at the start of his career, Napoleon Bonaparte was already constructing the glorious image of himself that would soon erupt into the exalted cult of personality that is associated with his legend today. As an instinctive pioneer of modern propaganda, he cultivated an image of himself as a mythical savior – both heroic and illustrious, yet essentially human. Many French soldiers tremendously admired and respected him, perceiving him as a genius and hero who emulated greatness and achieved the impossible. His mere presence could inspire troops to place their trust in him and faithfully follow him to the end, as explicated in the passage above. With his remarkable ability to animate the common soldier with enthusiastic fervor, he alone reinvigorated them by marching into battle at the lead. As a commander, Napoleon was the very embodiment of drive, strength, and discipline.

Crucial to the entire success and operation of the army was the mandatory duty of the military command to boost morale and motivate their troops. Recognizing motivation as a

²⁴ J.-R. Coignet, *Souvenirs d'un vieux grognard* (Paris, 1912; acc. BnF Gallica), 230.

significant foundation of military success, Napoleon thus re-structured his new military culture accordingly - to galvanize his troops.

Military culture, as characterized by Michael Hughes, is a form of institutional culture developed by, and for, the armed forces, which ‘communicates the value systems, establishes the behavioral standards, and provides the rewards and punishments that sustain the motivation and morale of soldiers.’²⁵ In general, Peter H. Wilson identifies how the overall function of an institution is dependent on the interaction of its members and its guidance by both informal customs and explicitly written norms.²⁶ Specifically, in terms of the institutional character of military culture, Wilson distinguishes how ‘the strength and cohesiveness of an army as an institution will determine to what extent its personnel think and act in ways distinct from other members of their society.’²⁷ Within the framework of an institution lies ‘a common purpose that justifies its existence and claim on resources, as well as the self-worth, rewards, and privileges of its members.’²⁸ In this sense, Napoleonic military culture would be driven by its morale-boosting, motivational objectives.

The military culture of the Napoleonic wars was inspired by Napoleon’s own upbringing and experiences in the military, cultivated by ideas from both the *Ancien Régime* and the French Revolution. As a cultural institution founded upon manufactured motivation, he enlisted three main tactics in his approach: honor and a motivational system of rewards that were not limited

²⁵ Michael J. Hughes, *Forging Napoleon’s Grande Armée: Motivation, Military Culture, and Masculinity in the French Army, 1800-1808* (New York, 2012), 11.

²⁶ Peter H. Wilson, ‘Defining Military Culture’, *The Journal of Military History*, 72 (2008), 15.

²⁷ Wilson, ‘Defining’, 18.

²⁸ Wilson, ‘Defining’, 18.

by privilege or birthright, and were instead available to all; sustaining a coordinated personal relationship of mutual respect and affection with his soldiers, in order to retain his reputation as ‘one of them’; and relying upon the electrifying rhetoric of his propagandist discourse, which he delivered with such dramatic flair through heavily embellished recounts of battles and inspiring speeches.

Throughout the span of French history, honor was often regarded as the principal attribute of French national character and played an especially significant role in the French military, both before, and after, the Revolution.²⁹ Napoleon firmly believed in the martial value of honor as an important means of instilling strength and resolution to his soldiers by binding them to the military code of honor. He considered honor to be the quintessential military value that inspired and facilitated proper military order and discipline. To him, the intrinsic nature of honor constituted a major force for stimulating morale and motivating his soldiers.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Napoleon faced the three dominating conceptualizations of honor from that time: the *Ancien Régime*'s traditional warrior-honor that bolstered one's self-interest through the pursuit for individual distinction; the Revolution's embraced and intense patriotism of virtue that focused on the *patrie* of the nation and the French people; and the regimental pride of *esprit de corps*.³⁰ Inspired by aspects from all three, Napoleon was able to choose between the republican system and the monarchical system to effectively forge a new form of military honor altogether. This amalgam received noteworthy praise from Lazare Carnot, a distinguished contemporary of Napoleon's. Carnot notes how

²⁹ Hughes, *Forging*, 52.

³⁰ Hughes, *Forging*, 52.

Napoleon's new approach encompassed the opposing ideas of the *Ancien Régime* and the Revolution into a new established order of peaceful co-existence:

Ainsi, il était réservé au nouveau monde d'apprendre à l'ancien, qu'on peut subsister paisiblement sous le régime de la liberté et de l'égalité. Oui, j'ose poser en principe, que lorsqu'on peut établir un nouvel ordre de choses, sans avoir à redouter l'influence des factions.³¹

Napoleon endeavored to create a new military culture that would transcribe the French army into a military force, embodying his own goals and values.

Diderot's *Encyclopédie*, a masterwork of the Enlightenment, ascertains, 'Dans les grands empires, on est plus conduit par l'honneur, par le désir et l'espérance de l'estime.'³² In great empires, like the Napoleonic regime, honor was reproduced through a merit-based rewards system to fuel motivation. Acknowledging that 'people are not encouraged by grants of money, but by medals, and decorations, and eulogies addressed to them by or on behalf of the sovereign'³³, Napoleon devised a system of awards that, while distinguishing the individual, was not exclusive to anyone. He went to great lengths to reward his men with decorations of honor and privileges for their service, forming his army as one inspired by rewards and promotions.

For example, Napoleon began to restore *esprit de corps* to military culture by steering the French soldier's loyalty to particular military units through the distribution of a distinctive eagle standard to every regiment. The eagle was a symbol of the Emperor's presence and the

³¹ Lazare Carnot, *Mémoires historiques et militaires sur Carnot, rédigés d'après ses manuscrits, sa correspondance et ses écrits* (Paris, 1824; acc. BnF Gallica), 124.

³² Jean-François de Saint-Lambert, 'Honneur', in Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert (eds.), *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers: Tome VIII*, (Neufchâtel, 1765; acc. ARTFL Encyclopédie Projet), 289.

³³ Napoleon Bonaparte, *Napoleon's Letters*, ed. J. M. Thompson (London, 1964), 117.

regiment's rally point in battle, which also became objects of worship. From 1804, eagles were ceremoniously presented to all guard and line regiments by the Emperor in person. During their public distribution by the Emperor, he asked his soldiers to take the oath: 'Vous jurez de sacrifier votre vie pour les défendre, et de les maintenir constamment par votre courage sur le chemin de la victoire. Vous le jurez?'³⁴ The loss of *les aigles* was a severe disgrace to the army and to the morale of that regiment, ensuring that great precaution would always be taken to prevent their loss.³⁵ They agreed to sacrifice their lives to defend their flags and constantly maintain them through their courage on the path to victory. Each regiment's eagle embodied its own honor and winning a victory ensured additional honor afforded to *les aigles*. An example of such resides in Napoleon's jovial proclamation after the victory at Lutzen, through his praise, 'vous avez ajouté un nouveau lustre à la gloire de mes aigles: vous avez montré tout ce dont est capable le sang français.'³⁶

Beginning in 1799, individual bravery was specially rewarded through 'arms of honor', which bestowed recognition upon military men who had 'distinguished themselves by some notable exploit or action.'³⁷ This was further developed in 1802, with the creation of the *Légion d'Honneur* as a national merit award recognizing the honorable qualities displayed in service. All preceding 'arms of honor' recipients were automatically made members of the *Légion* in 1804, replacing all previous signs of distinction.³⁸

³⁴ Napoleon Bonaparte, *Discours de Guerre: Napoléon Bonaparte*, ed. Jacques-Olivier Boudon (Paris, 2011), 95.

³⁵ Gunther E. Rothenberg, *The Art of Warfare in the Age of Napoleon* (London, 1977), 137.

³⁶ Napoleon, *Letters*, ed. Thompson, 150-151.

³⁷ Alan Forrest, 'The Military Culture of Napoleonic France', in Philip G. Dwyer (ed.), *Napoleon and Europe* (New York, 2014), 51.

³⁸ Robert B. Holtman, *Napoleonic Propaganda* (Baton Rouge, 1950), 19.

Napoleon was careful to avoid any return to the arbitrary structure of the army of the *Ancien Régime*, where status and rank were heavily restricted to officers and men of privilege. Napoleon, as an individual who had risen up through the military based on merit, sought to include and confer status on all, regardless of rank, privilege, or social status, in both the military and civilian population of France. However, society and the government were dictated by the preferential military values of the Emperor. The *Légion*, composed of an overwhelmingly military majority, was intended to consecrate the exalted place of the military in society.³⁹ In 1804 only a dozen civilians had been permitted membership to the *Légion*, while in 1814 the miniscule number of civilians persisted at a mere five percent.⁴⁰

Article VIII of the decree establishing the creation and organization of the *Légion d'Honneur* designates the standards each member is expected to uphold:

Chaque individu admis dans la légion, jurera, sur son honneur, de se dévouer au service de la République, à la conservation de son territoire dans son intégrité, à la défense de son Gouvernement, de ses lois, et des propriétés qu'elles ont consacrées ; de combattre par tous les moyens que la justice, la raison et les lois autorisent, toute entreprise tendant à rétablir le régime féodal, à reproduire les titres et qualités qui en étaient l'attribut ; enfin, de concourir de tout son pouvoir au maintien de la liberté et de l'égalité.⁴¹

Each individual admitted to the *Légion* swears an oath, on their honor, to dedicate themselves to the service of the Republic.

³⁹ Louis Bergeron, *France Under Napoleon* (Princeton, 1981), 63-64.

⁴⁰ Bergeron, *France*, 64.

⁴¹ Art. VIII, Décret, Loi portant création d'une Légion d'Honneur, n.1604, 10 Prairial an X (30 May 1802), *Bulletin des lois de la République*, n.192.

The ‘*croix*’ of the *Légion d’Honneur*, a ‘small white-enameled “cross” suspended from this ribbon of red watered silk’⁴², swiftly became an object of emulation. The medal featured Napoleon’s profile and the inscription, ‘*Napoléon, Empereur des Français*’ on one side, while the reverse depicted an eagle grasping lightning in its talons beside the motto, ‘*Honneur et Patrie*’.⁴³ Additionally, there was the added benefit of material rewards that came attached to these honors, such as the accompanying pension that could only be secured through *Légion* membership. The establishment of the *Légion d’Honneur* bound the army more closely to Napoleon; membership and its provided awards were one of the more effective ways to notably arouse the enthusiasm of the army, as the soldiers ‘developed a mania for earning the medal presented by the order.’⁴⁴ By 1814, ‘35,000 légions d’honneur avaient déjà été distribuées, dont 80% à des soldats.’⁴⁵

Although the *Légion d’Honneur* was most often awarded for displays of bravery in combat, other criteria also applied. Merit was one such criteria encouraged by the Napoleonic regime as a way to encompass and preserve its inherited service culture from the Royal army’s honor code. Merit was customarily awarded by lengthy service, good conduct, attention to duty, and the endurance of suffering.⁴⁶ Another way to earn admission to the *Légion d’Honneur* was by the wounding or maiming of a soldier in Napoleon’s service, as it could also be awarded as a form of compensation.

⁴² John R. Elting, *Swords Around A Throne: Napoleon’s Grande Armée* (London, 1988), 598.

⁴³ Hughes, *Forging*, 62.

⁴⁴ Holtman, *Propaganda*, 214-15.

⁴⁵ Clément Imbert, ‘Une redoutable machine de guerre’, *Geo Histoire: Napoléon*, 21 (2015), 47.

⁴⁶ Hughes, *Forging*, 64.

As a highly coveted award by the Napoleonic army, the *Légion d'Honneur* ignited popular interest by appealing to one's sense of honor and ardent need for personal distinction in the army. With the promise of prestige, improved social status, and material security to individuals who devoted themselves to the Napoleonic regime, Napoleon saw an opportunity for the *Légion* to amass a large body of supporters dedicated to the preservation of his government and values. He used the *Légion d'Honneur* to disseminate a new and patriotic form of honor defined by a commitment to preserve the accomplishments of the Revolution and loyal service to the *patrie* by transforming the traditionally aristocratic and vain French honor of the *Ancien Régime* into a more virtuous honor, and thus, bind French soldiers and civilians to the new order that emerged out of the Revolution. The *Légion* also kept virtue alive in Napoleonic military culture, as it was initially created to cultivate patriotism and produced a new type of honor inspired by the Revolution that rested upon individual merit and patriotism rather than aristocratic prestige. 'L'idéal égalitaire né de la Révolution était resté vivace dans l'esprit des soldats de la Grande Armée.'⁴⁷

Even with the sovereignty as the *Empereur des Français*, Napoleon was a soldier first. 'My permanent state of mind is that of a soldier on the eve of battle.'⁴⁸ General Bonaparte had the reputation of leading his army as a 'man of the people' with a presence that often inspired valor. Napoleon always made a concerted effort to appear close to the common soldier, to be viewed as a fellow soldier who also shared in their hardship and suffering, in order that the Napoleonic soldier could, and ultimately did, identify with him. Maintaining the notion that he was accessible to all, he would both address them collectively and speak to his soldiers man-to-

⁴⁷ Imbert, 'Machine de guerre', 47.

⁴⁸ Napoleon, *Letters*, ed. Thompson, 44.

man in their own terms – as he was an expert at soldiers’ slang.⁴⁹ In fact, when he was a young and unknown corporal serving in the Italian campaign of 1796, he led his ragged and ill-equipped troops to victory over the heroic crossing of a bridge at the Battle of Lodi on 10 May. This triumphant military feat endeared him to the French and earned him recognition as a leader. After proving himself victorious to his soldiers and acquiring their considerable affection, they nicknamed him ‘The Little Corporal’, which remains famous to this day.⁵⁰ Napoleon’s close personal relationship with his men can best be summed up in John R. Elting’s following narrative:

The stories of Napoleon’s familiarity with his soldiers are many and too well attested by eyewitnesses to be doubted. He was ready to listen to their complaints or simply to recall a shared experience. His favorite gesture of approval was to pinch a soldier’s ear; he might offer a pinch of snuff. There is the old story of his finding an exhausted sentry asleep and standing guard in his place (possibly only an exaggerated legend, but nevertheless believed). He could establish this same professional kinship with foreign soldiers in a matter of hours. After his surrender, the sailors and marines of the British warships that carried him first to England and then to St. Helena at once became his admirers.⁵¹

Napoleon understood his troops and they understood him. He would have an immediate effect on the men with whom he came in contact with; an effect even extended to include both foreign troops that fought with and against him - for his influence was not solely exclusive to his own French soldiers.

Napoleon understood the strengths and weaknesses of the French soldier, employing such knowledge in the psychological methods he used to lead, manipulate, and inspire motivation and

⁴⁹ Phil Grabsky, *The Great Commanders* (London, 1993), 11.

⁵⁰ David Chanteranne, *Le Petit Livre de Napoléon* (Paris, 2011), 32.

⁵¹ Elting, *Swords*, 597.

increase morale in his men; including presenting unit colors, battle honors, giving rewards, medals, bestowing titles, or hurling merciless castigation and contempt at failures.

Whenever the arrival of General Bonaparte was announced, the mere honor of being in his presence would cause a sheer flurry of excitement to erupt that was shared among both officers and ranks. In August 1799, the recently conscripted Jean-Roch Coignet, a French soldier at the beginning of a career that would include all Napoleon's major campaigns from Italy in 1800 to Waterloo in 1815, experienced the excitement and vigorous preparations created by Napoleon's arrival:

This sort of life had lasted nearly two months, when a report was circulated in the newspapers that General Bonaparte had landed, and was on his way to Paris, and that he was a great general. Our officers were full of excitement, because the chief of our battalion knew him, and the whole battalion was delighted by the news. We were reviewed, and our clothing examined. We were made to carry and present arms and fix bayonets. They undertook to make soldiers of us in two months. We had callouses on our hands from slapping them on the butt-ends of our guns. All day long we were under arms. Our officers took us by the collars and examined our clothing; they took every precaution that we should be lacking in nothing.⁵²

Although the frequent portrayal of himself as an ordinary soldier was a fairly deceptive image of Napoleon, it was still an effective and pragmatic tool for cultivating the personal relationship he had with his soldiers that correspondingly sustained the motivation and morale of his men. He fully understood the power that came by representing himself in such a light. And despite the slight deception required by him to employ as supreme commander of the army, Napoleon's respect for the noble character of the French soldier and affection for his troops remained sincere. A line from a military correspondence in 1796 articulating, 'for I am certain

⁵² Jean-Roch Coignet, 'With Napoleon in Italy, 1800', in Jon E. Lewis (ed.), *The Mammoth Book of Soldiers at War: Firsthand accounts of warfare from the Age of Napoleon* (London, 2001), 3.

that our victories are due to the bravery and daring of the men'⁵³ provides a noteworthy example of Napoleon's unwavering confidence in the fortitude of his men. In another instance of military correspondence featuring his departure from the Egyptian campaign in 1799, Napoleon addressed to the new head of command: 'The men I entrust to you are like children to me: they have always shown me, even in times of the greatest hardship, proofs of their affection. Carry on this tradition: it is due both to my special regard and affection for you, and to the genuine attachment I feel toward themselves.'⁵⁴

It is interesting how one's personal correspondence can reveal their true intentions. Hiding within the text of a letter, penned in disagreement to the contemporary Stage Press, is an abstract confession of Napoleon himself. In critiquing the 'too-recent' dates of the periods being set on the stage, he proposes an alternative approach that incidentally broadcasts the vainglory behind his political thought process:

Couldn't you commission him to write a tragedy on the transition from the Valois to the Bourbons? Only, instead of being a tyrant, the successor would be the savior of the nation. That is the kind of play in which the stage can show its new spirit: it would never have been allowed under the old regime. You have the same idea in the oratorio *Saul* – a great man succeeding a degenerate king...⁵⁵

As this letter dates from 1805, Napoleon had already consummated the savior myth with his reign as Emperor. The sheer size of Napoleon's ambition encompassed the core of his entire ethos. 'You must either conquer or die.'⁵⁶

⁵³ Napoleon, *Letters*, ed. Thompson, 50.

⁵⁴ Napoleon, *Letters*, ed. Thompson, 80.

⁵⁵ Napoleon, *Letters*, ed. Thompson, 123.

⁵⁶ Napoleon, *Letters*, ed. Thompson, 226.

CHAPTER 2

ANALYZING THE RHETORIC OF NAPOLEONIC PRINT

PROPAGANDA

Napoleon was one of the first to master the art of propaganda and realize its limitless possibilities at a time before the word ‘propaganda’ even existed. As he had thoroughly mastered every public medium of his day, Napoleon was actively involved in producing the crucial propaganda needed for his regime, such as the creation of his public image.⁵⁷ Napoleonic propaganda was extremely instrumental in exerting its influence over the soldiers of the regime and inspiring the military motivation required to fight. Although Napoleon employed his propaganda through all different channels of media, the focus here is on the print propaganda of the Napoleonic Regime and the free forms it was comprised of: orders of the day, proclamations, and military bulletins.

Napoleon’s orders of the day were his preferred method for addressing his soldiers.⁵⁸ These were instructions issued by French military commanders to the men serving under them and were the primary channel through which Napoleon and his army leadership communicated with the troops. Produced by each level of the military’s command structure, orders of the day were usually read to the troops during roll calls. These orders had several different features that covered things such as information about the routines that structured daily life in the army, laws and military regulations, violation announcements of conviction and punishment for the offenders, and offered the soldiers praise and encouragement. They were employed to maintain

⁵⁷ Wayne Hanley, *The Genesis of Napoleonic Propaganda, 1796 to 1799* (New York, 2005), xiv.

⁵⁸ Hughes, *Forging*, 26.

morale, explain the goals of the military command to the troops, and list the rewards accorded to the army.⁵⁹

As orders of the day were not merely confined by routine regulations, they fit into the Napoleonic propaganda machine as a function of print media. In Robert Holtman's classic *Napoleonic Propaganda*, he identifies the three general sorts of propagandist material they contained. Some censured negligent or un-heroic soldiers, while others expressed deeds of satisfaction with the army through a distinguished list of brave and exceptional soldiers. The third category beseeched the inhabitants of French-controlled territories to support Napoleon's military measures, or, while emphasizing a warning of the ominous consequences of continued opposition, assured the inhabitants of freshly conquered French territories that the French need not be feared.⁶⁰

Similar to orders of the day were proclamations, which Napoleon and his military commanders frequently attached to their orders of the day, usually on special occasions of important date to the French Empire. An example of such is mentioned in the memoirs of Jean-Baptiste Auguste Barrès, an officer in the *Grande Armée*:

À notre arrivée, on nous lut la nouvelle proclamation que l'Empereur fit mettre à l'ordre de l'armée, le 2 décembre, pour annoncer l'anniversaire de la bataille d'Austerlitz, la prise de Varsovie que les Russes n'avaient pas pu défendre, et l'arrivée de la Grande Armée sur les bords de la Vistule.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Hughes, *Forging*, 28-29.

⁶⁰ Holtman, *Propaganda*, 90.

⁶¹ Jean-Baptiste Auguste Barrès, *Souvenirs d'un officier de la Grande Armée* (Paris, 1923; acc. BnF Gallica), 62.

Barrès recounts how the Emperor's newest proclamation arrived attached to an order of the day to announce the special occasion marking the anniversary of the victorious Battle of Austerlitz and the accompanying military gains procured from their victory. Proclamations proved extremely useful in addressing a wide audience of the large forces they commanded, allowing the commanders to give speeches to their men when they could not be physically present. Those composed by Napoleon frequently portrayed France as the victim of foreign aggression to his wide audience. Proclamations were not just intended for the army, as Napoleon ensured their publication in newspapers, posted on placards, and spread abroad to influence the civilian population of the Empire and the rest of Europe.⁶² His proclamations are considered legendary, as they 'normally took the form of stirring addresses that were replete with striking imagery and catch phrases. In them, Napoleon explained the reasons for war, outlined his military plans, promised to reward the troops, challenged them to maintain their reputation, and praised their accomplishments.'⁶³ Akin to orders of the day, the proclamations of the emperor were printed and distributed to the different units of the *Grande Armée*, where they were read aloud to the troops by the commanding officers – sometimes they were even read consecutively over a series of days to enhance their effect.⁶⁴ His proclamations seem to have had a significant impact upon his troops, which can be inferred from the number of mentions by French soldiers in their personal writings, whom, as it can only be assumed, must have considered his proclamations noteworthy enough to record. After the victory at Austerlitz, Barrès made a brief note in his memoirs of the opening and closing lines of the Emperor's victory proclamation, as it clearly made a significant enough impact for him to consider it noteworthy:

⁶² Hughes, *Forging*, 29-30.

⁶³ Hughes, *Forging*, 30.

⁶⁴ Hughes, *Forging*, 30.

Dans la journée, il nous fut fait lecture de la proclamation de l'Empereur à l'armée commençant par ces mots : « Soldats, je suis content de vous » et finissant par cette phrase : « Il suffira de dire : j'étais à la bataille d'Austerlitz, pour qu'on vous réponde : Voilà un brave ! »⁶⁵

The third type of Napoleonic print propaganda was the *Bulletin de la Grande Armée*. These bulletins took the form of a news sheet; they were short, usually only a page or two long, and were irregularly published. Napoleon designed the bulletins to appeal to a wide audience, writing them as a way to justify France's involvement in the Napoleonic wars and mobilize its support. Although they included a variety of topics, the most important content of the bulletins were accounts of army accomplishments that placed special stress on victories won. They normally appeared when military operations commenced, and usually stopped when active campaigning was not taking place or hostilities had ceased. Although irregularly published, Napoleon wanted the bulletins printed in an often enough interval to quiet any fears and prevent injurious rumors. With that in mind, Robert Holtman was able to deduce that the bulletins appeared less frequently during the Russian campaign than before any other, and that following 1806, with the exception of 1814, they appeared more and more rarely.⁶⁶

In order to reach the general public, he required newspapers like the official journal of the French government, the *Moniteur universel*, to feature the bulletins, as well as displaying poster-sized copies in public squares and encouraged public readings in churches, schools, and theaters. Anxious for the bulletins to reach territory not under French control, Napoleon even had his agents circulate the bulletins throughout Europe to influence foreign leaders and manipulate

⁶⁵ Barrès, *Souvenirs*, 50.

⁶⁶ Holtman, *Propaganda*, 93.

public opinion, available in foreign newspapers or pamphlet form.⁶⁷ Apparently, the *Bulletins de la Grande Armée* were very widely read. Both the Napoleon's large orders and the selling of 35,000 copies of Bulletin 18 during one day in 1812.⁶⁸ With *la Grande Armée*, French soldiers had to obtain the *Bulletin* through various channels, while the supplied bulletins of the military forces were typical in arriving at the untimely manner of a few weeks or even months after the events it described. As to be expected, Napoleonic soldiers frequently complained about their ignorance of current events because of the irregular arrival of newspapers.

While Napoleon could certainly be accused of adjusting the truth occasionally, according to J. David Markham, the bulletins generally remained a reasonably accurate source of information.⁶⁹ However, the term 'generally' can only be applied in the most strikingly liberal sense, for the accuracy of Markham's statement does not seem to hold up strong against the other sources that have disputed the percentage of truth behind these bulletins. The content of the *Bulletin de la Grande Armée* focused on military operations that provided detailed accounts of the army's battles and campaigns, reported the maneuvers of military units that included an explanation of their meaning, and highlighted the actions of individuals. This way, the *Bulletin* was able to show French soldiers their exact contributions to the war effort through a variety of other topics that provided troops with a comprehensive view of their role in the wider spectacle of the Napoleonic wars. They discussed the motives of the enemy, the character of foreign peoples, the goals of Imperial France, refuted enemy propaganda, described the qualities of the French soldier, and, of course, illustrated Napoleon's personal qualities and accomplishments

⁶⁷ Hughes, *Forging*, 30-31.

⁶⁸ Holtman, *Propaganda*, 95.

⁶⁹ *Imperial Glory: The Bulletins of Napoleon's Grande Armée 1805-1814*, ed. J. David Markham (London, 2003), 2.

through recounted anecdotes.⁷⁰ With the composition of the *Bulletin de la Grande Armée* arranged upon detailed military movements and battles, the identification of individuals and military units for commendation, occasional biting political commentary, and a mourning of the loss of great soldiers, what can be learned from them? While Markham postulates on how these bulletins ‘do offer a fascinating reflection of the mind of Napoleon; a reflection of the action on the battlefield, the political considerations, and the attitudes of the soldiers and officers of the *Grande Armée*’⁷¹, it is imperative to remember that Napoleon was the decisive force behind producing these bulletins and the development of its content in conjunction with its propagandist function. Thus, the *Bulletin* can only offer reflections of battlefield action, political considerations, and troop attitudes of the *Grande Armée* from the Napoleonic perspective of the emperor. However, Markham does provide a more accurate emphasis of Napoleon’s viewpoint through his assertion that the bulletins ‘offer a window into the mind of Napoleon; what he was like on campaign, what he was thinking and what he took the time to do.’⁷² As a ‘window’ into the Napoleonic military culture constructed by General Bonaparte himself, the *Bulletins de la Grande Armée* reveal both ‘the horror and hypocrisy of war’, as well as its ‘compassion and glory.’⁷³ They play a critical role in shaping one’s broad understanding of the Napoleonic military campaigns.

The manipulative nature of propaganda, which spreads its influence through channels of misleading promotion to generally influence and shape the thoughts and actions of the masses, has an incredible impact. It is astounding how a brief speech, or even a single word uttered by

⁷⁰ Hughes, *Forging*, 31-32.

⁷¹ *Imperial*, ed. Markham, 2.

⁷² *Imperial*, ed. Markham, 5.

⁷³ *Imperial*, ed. Markham, 8.

Napoleon, could emblazon the hearts of his soldiers and win their loyalty. An analysis of the rhetoric forming Napoleonic print propaganda provides a more nuanced understanding behind its success as a crucial tool of motivation.

In examining how military motivation was manufactured from the potent guiding effect produced by the discourse of Napoleonic propaganda, the carefully worded rhetorical style of Napoleon becomes the primary focus of analysis. Napoleon's style of writing distinguished him from the start; his dispatches were notably written in the active voice and contained a comprehensive, yet forceful, tone that was consistently patriotic and positive. His appealing prose style could be easily understood by the public; 'gaining much praise from contemporaries and near-contemporaries alike for its economy of language.'⁷⁴ Seizing the creative opportunity afforded by the written word, Napoleon dramatically glorified the actions of his soldiers and himself by his embellishment of hyperbole and descriptive style. This electrifying and prophetic discourse was delivered by Napoleon with such augmented passion and dramatic flair to promote a strong sense of military values and motivation within his men, as well as reinforce their morale with inspiring visions of honor and glory. 'In war, the morale and opinions of the army are more than half the battle'⁷⁵, a sentiment expressed by Napoleon through military correspondence.

Repetition was one of the devices Napoleon best understood and utilized most effectively in his propaganda.⁷⁶ Evidence of this can be seen in the frequent repetition of key words ascribed with the emotional power to magnify a battle with a heroic sense of military glory, evoke a

⁷⁴ Wayne Hanley, *The Genesis of Napoleonic Propaganda, 1796 to 1799* (New York, 2005), 36.

⁷⁵ Napoleon, *Letters*, ed. Thompson, 227.

⁷⁶ Holtman, *Propaganda*, 188.

patriotic sentiment, or assure soldiers with a sense of their own worth. In terms of Napoleon's military propaganda, the most enduring and potent words were *digne* (worthy), *oser* (to dare), *l'orgueil* (pride), and *l'épopée* (epic).

Incorporated within Napoleon's style was the influence of classicism, as a heroic theme prevailing both the *Ancien Régime* and the Revolution. He approached Roman classicism to imbue his men with a grand sense of self-worth by reminding them of their position as the 'descendants des Brutus, des Scipions et des grands hommes que nous avons pris pour modèles.'⁷⁷ In the proclamation of 10 May 1798 delivered in the Mediterranean, Napoleon reminds them of the Roman legions they have imitated as a way to evoke the invincible spirit for victory with the orders to get accustomed with their maneuvers: 'devenez la terreur de vos ennemis de terre et de mer: imitez en cela les soldats romains, qui surent à la fois battre Carthage en plaine et les Carthaginois sur leurs flottes.'⁷⁸ His references to Roman antiquity were the most prevalent in his earlier discourse, as his rhetoric evolved to incorporate the own personal battles and victories already won by his army instead.

Napoleon presents himself as a type of father-figure to his soldiers, as the head of their large military family. He refers to them with great paternal affection, declaring 'mes soldats sont mes enfants.'⁷⁹ As their commander, Napoleon commended his men in victory through sentiments of fatherly pride. 'Soldats, je suis content de vous'⁸⁰ being one of his most consistent

⁷⁷ Napoleon Bonaparte, *Discours de Guerre: Napoléon Bonaparte*, ed. Jacques-Olivier Boudon (Paris, 2011), 31.

⁷⁸ Napoleon, *Discours*, ed. Boudon, 53.

⁷⁹ Napoleon, *Discours*, ed. Boudon, 102.

⁸⁰ Napoleon, *Discours*, ed. Boudon, 105.

expressions of praise. Similarly, he used this same technique as a disciplinary method to articulate his disappointment in them as well: ‘Soldats, je ne suis pas content de vous; vous n’avez montré ni discipline, ni constance, ni bravoure...vous n’êtes pas des soldats français.’⁸¹ Being told that they were not worthy of the title as French soldiers was the ultimate disapproval, for Napoleon held French soldiers in the highest of regards. Emphasizing how ‘les premières qualités du soldat sont la constance et la discipline; la valeur n’est que la seconde’⁸², he clearly identified French soldiers as the most elite and highly esteemed type of soldier. Napoleon’s speeches to the troops were for the most part effective, arousing unanimous acclamations, with his praise or blame firing the troops to commit deeds of valor.

Napoleon’s ‘pep talks’ to his soldiers are filled with a variety of ways that he employs as inspiration. As a way to lift up spirits and boost morale, he consistently showered his men with praise. In a proclamation on 10 May 1798 to his soldiers from fighting in the Mediterranean campaign, Napoleon reminds them of the great future of glory they are destined for, and how this battle is on the pathway to glory:

Soldats, l’Europe a les yeux sur vous.

Vous avez de grandes destinées à remplir, de batailles à livrer, des dangers, des fatigues à vaincre. Vous ferez plus que vous n’avez fait pour la prospérité de la patrie, le Bonheur des homes et votre propre gloire.⁸³

The future promises made to his troops were a constant device implemented throughout his rhetoric that professed futures filled with victory, glory, honor, and peace. Napoleon’s memorable 1799 *jour de Noël* proclamation to justify maintaining the state of war and announce his new position as *la tête de l’armée* concluded with a promise: ‘Soldats ! lorsqu’il en sera

⁸¹ Napoleon, *Discours*, ed. Boudon, 32.

⁸² *Ibid*, 70.

⁸³ Napoleon, *Discours*, ed. Boudon, 50.

temps, je serai au milieu de vous, et l'Europe se souviendra que vous êtes de la race des braves !'⁸⁴

One of the most frequent tactics he employs to keep up the motivation of his troops on the front is to remind them of their personal greatness as French soldiers and their duty to uphold and maintain the heavy expectations of their role. Rather than ordering them to fight for himself as their leader, he appealed to the one value that could bind together twenty-five million French men by a common interest: *patrie*.⁸⁵ As exemplified in an early proclamation from the Italian campaign, Napoleon challenges his soldiers to fulfill the responsibility expected by them from France: 'Soldats, la patrie a droit d'attendre de vous de grandes choses; justifierez-vous son attente?'⁸⁶ With the sense of nationalism and *patrie* that emerged from conscription and the Revolution, the army had come to personify the nation with the expectancy to fight and defend its continuing existence. The more a soldier believed that his task was important to others, the more likely he was likely to do it well. To encourage this sentiment, Napoleon catered his speeches to their personal lives by citing their parents as motivational tools. Employing this tactic in a proclamation demanding supreme effort from his troops, he declared, 'La paix de l'Europe, le bonheur de vos parents seront le résultant de votre courage.'⁸⁷ The happiness of their own family belonged in their hands.

Crucial to the morale of soldiers was an appreciation of their sacrifices and triumphs. Napoleon unfailingly expressed an appreciation for his soldiers as a show of respect by

⁸⁴ Napoleon, *Discours*, ed. Boudon, 74.

⁸⁵ Philip G. Dwyer, *Napoleon: The Path to Power, 1769-1799* (New Haven, 2008), 256.

⁸⁶ Napoleon, *Discours*, ed. Boudon, 25.

⁸⁷ Napoleon, *Discours*, ed. Boudon, 35.

recognizing their value and sacrifices. Napoleon always made sure to treat his men well by acknowledging their hardships and praising their accomplishments in a number of ways. He encouraged them to recognize their accomplishments as their own, with the reminder, ‘Soldats, ce succès est dû à votre confiance sans bornes dans votre Empereur, à votre patience à supporter les fatigues et les privations de toute espèce, à votre intrépidité.’⁸⁸

As a recognition of all his troops had accomplished, Napoleon was eternally grateful: ‘Soldats, tout ce que vous avez fait, tout ce que vous ferez encore pour le bonheur du peuple français, pour ma gloire, pour la vôtre, sera éternellement dans mon cœur.’⁸⁹ With his words directed personally and exclusively to the ranks of the army, his soldiers were being addressed in a familiar nature that was so foreign to the armies of both their opponents and the times of the *Ancien Régime*. Forrest makes the point that Napoleon’s form of address asked his soldiers to understand that they had a leader who cared for them and took the time to acknowledge their hopes, anxieties, and accomplishments.⁹⁰

The engaging and vibrant style of the *Bulletins de la Grande Armée* was employed to illustrate the personal accomplishments of Napoleon and to portray war as a grand romantic adventure. The thirtieth bulletin, which recounted the battle of Austerlitz, romanticized war through the description:

On the 2nd, day finally dawned. The sun rose bright; and this anniversary of the coronation of the Emperor, upon which one of the greatest fears in arms of the century was to be performed, was one of the finest days in autumn.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Napoleon, *Discours*, ed. Boudon, 101.

⁸⁹ Napoleon, *Discours*, ed. Boudon, 136.

⁹⁰ Alan Forrest, *Napoleon’s Men: The Soldiers of the Revolution and Empire* (London, 2002), 71.

⁹¹ *Imperial*, ed. Markham, 53.

The bulletins glorified Napoleon's persona as Emperor in anecdotes featured throughout the bulletins as a presentation of his personality. He was the force who was brought forth victory and inspired his troops; he was the force who galloped into battle at the lead. It was Napoleon who galvanized his men into action as an omnipresent martial force:

The Emperor, surrounded by all the marshals, waited only for the horizon to clear to issue his last orders. At the first rays of the sun, the orders were issued and each marshal rejoined his corps at full gallop. The Emperor said, in passing along the front of several regiments, 'Soldiers, we must finish this campaign by a thunderbolt that shall confound the pride of our enemies,' and instantly hats were placed at the points of bayonets, and cries of 'Long live the Emperor' were the true signal of battle.⁹²

As a way to continually emphasize Napoleon's heroic image, the rhetoric of the bulletins followed a rigorously consistent style of appellation in the illustrious presentation of his self. The prevailing moniker used as a surrogate for the name 'Napoleon Bonaparte' was his autocratic title of 'Emperor' as a persistent way to promote his invariable eminence. Every so often, Napoleon's nom de guerre as the supreme commanding 'l'Empereur' or 'l'Empereur Napoléon' were bartered for imperial titles that better suited Napoleon's prestige as a potentate. Accordingly, as both the sovereign and supreme military commander, it was necessary at time for Napoleon to emphasize his authority as 'Sa Majesté', or the abridged 'S.M.'. Depending on the year and status of his conquests, Napoleon's monarchical title could become quite lengthy, such as in 1806 when he flaunted the title 'Sa Majesté l'Empereur des Français, Roi d'Italie, et sa majesté le roi de Prusse'⁹³ as a show of power and victorious conquest.

⁹² *Imperial*, ed. Markham, 53.

⁹³ *Les Bulletins de la Grande Armée: Les campagnes de Napoléon au jour le jour*, ed. Jacques Garnier (Belgium, 2013), 286.

As the bulletins functioned as encouraging propaganda, they commonly defaced the enemy while glorifying the French. This can be seen in the thirty-third bulletin, which includes the patronization of Russia in comparison with the French and an insult of Napoleon's greatest adversary, the British:

The Russian troops are brave, but much less brave than the French troops; their generals are of an experience and their soldiers of an ignorance and of an inertia that makes their armies, in truth, not very formidable. And besides, in supposing some victories to the Russians it would have been necessary to depopulate Russia to arrive at the insane goal that the oligarchs of London had prescribed for her.⁹⁴

Withal the vigorously promoted conviction of French superiority by Napoleonic military culture, France is presented as the defender of Europe and its civilization from, as put best by Michael Hughes, 'Russia's savage hordes and their English paymasters.'⁹⁵ Napoleon was not one to give up an opportunity to besmirch his enemies, particularly targeting his rivals of England and Russia. An amusing example can be seen of this in Napoleon's description of the battle of Golymin in 1807. Reviewing the reports of the Russian army on the severity of the Russian losses, he remarks:

Before this expedition, the Russian officers were saying that they had 150,000 men; today they pretend having had only half that number. Who to believe, Russian officers before the battle, or Russian officers after the battle?⁹⁶

The idealist element in Napoleonic propaganda that justifies French conquests with the argument that the French were bringing the Revolutionary principles of *liberté* and *égalité* and its enlightened principles of government to the more backward and 'entrapped' populations of their foreign European neighbors was determined by a sense of French cultural superiority. This is

⁹⁴ *Imperial*, ed. Markham, 61.

⁹⁵ Hughes, *Forging*, 100.

⁹⁶ *Imperial*, ed. Markham, 132.

seen through the aggressive discourse of insults employed against the enemies of the Napoleonic Empire in the *Bulletins* to defeat their rival adversaries. It is also exemplified through Napoleon's promotion in the Italian campaign of his French soldiers of the *Grande Armée* as liberators and breaker of chains:

Peuples de l'Italie, l'armée française vient pour rompre vos chaînes ; le peuple français est l'ami de tous les peuples : venez avec confiance au-devant d'elle ; vos propriétés, votre religion et vos usages seront respectés. Nous faisons la guerre en ennemis généreux, et nous n'en voulons qu'aux tyrans qui vous asservissent.⁹⁷

Bulletins had an exceedingly favorable effect upon the subjects of the Napoleonic Empire; the capacity of its published content was confined to producing news that was exclusively advantageous to the French. However, Napoleon's ambition considerably surpassed any meager propagandist objective that would limit the dispersion of his influence to the denizens of Imperial France. Already the ruling authority at the head of power in France, Napoleon endeavored to aggrandize his dominion past the borders of his empire and into the neighboring domains of his foreign adversaries. Accordingly, the emperor ordered the mass production and distribution of the *Bulletins de la Grande Armée* to ensure their widespread circulation, which reputedly reached millions of people.⁹⁸

Congruent with the dramatic, panegyric depictions of the *Bulletins de la Grande Armée* was the opportunity for Napoleon to memorialize the battles conquered by the enduring and triumphant nature of the French army. As a defining rhetorical characteristic, these vivid descriptions conjured a titillating confidence in the superiority of French soldiers and a lionized vision of Emperor Napoleon leading them into victory. Such an example can be seen through the

⁹⁷ Napoleon, *Discourse*, ed. Boudon, 27.

⁹⁸ Holtman, *Propaganda*, 215.

memorialization of the Battle of Austerlitz in the Thirtieth Bulletin from the 1805 campaign in Germany:

This battle, which the soldiers persist in calling the Day of the Three Emperors, which others call the Day of the Anniversary, and which the Emperor named the battle of Austerlitz, will be ever memorable in the annals of the great nation.⁹⁹

As a primary source of Napoleonic propaganda, the *Bulletins de la Grande Armée* deceptively omitted and always spun the realities of battle into a French victory, even if the army suffered too many losses to consider it a victory. For example, the Fifty-eighth Bulletin of 9 February 1807 on the battle of Eylau could hardly be considered a victory for the French. Their armies lost close to 30,000 men, while the enemy losses numbered 25,000.¹⁰⁰ Meanwhile, the *Bulletin* reported profoundly misleading figures that claimed,

Our whole loss consists of exactly 1,900 killed, and 5,700 wounded, including 1,000 who are very badly wounded. But we have to set against this loss 7,000 Russians who have been counted dead on the battlefield.¹⁰¹

Napoleon understood the vital importance in presenting Eylau as a victory, as a way to both sustain army morale and reassure the French civilians at home to have confidence in their Emperor. Criticizing the plan of the enemy, as seen at the end of the Fifty-eighth bulletin, Napoleon chronicles how their plan ‘has completely miscarried, and its attempt to carry it into execution has proved exceedingly fatal to them.’¹⁰² This pseudohistorical portrayal of the enemy’s defeat at the hands of the French was reiterated once more in its conclusion: ‘Having defeated this enterprise of the enemy, and driven it 100 miles from the Vistula, the army has

⁹⁹ *Imperial*, ed. Markham, 53.

¹⁰⁰ Forrest, *Napoleon’s Men*, 34.

¹⁰¹ *Imperial*, ed. Markham, 144.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

returned to its cantonments and is going into winter quarters again.’¹⁰³ The readers of the *Bulletin* were treated to an alternative ending of the Battle of Eylau and its highly misleading projection of a French victory.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

ORDINARY SOLDIERS AND MORALE IN 'LA VIE MILITAIRE'

The Napoleonic Wars was the first time in modern history where conscription brought together all types and classes of people into a rise of mass communication and increase of literacy rates among the ranks. Previously, officers had been the common voice of military experiences since the lower ranks had been uneducated and thus voiceless. It was during this period of the Napoleonic wars where they found their voice.

These letters, written by the ordinary 'simple soldiers' of the ranks, were never written with the intention for anyone other than the original recipient to read it. Most were commonly written as a personal letter to their parents and home community. As such, their correspondence transforms into great primary sources that offer unique details and insight into their daily life in the army and their mentality. Included among these letters are a few personal campaign diaries penned by the soldiers on the front. These significant primary sources are the key to reconstructing the experiences of ordinary Napoleonic soldiers and preserving their memory in history.

The new and evolving type of warfare that emerged during the Napoleonic wars produced a new breed of soldiers that had not been seen before in the *Ancien Régime*. The army was no longer run by abusive patrician officers; Napoleon's men relied on experienced non-

commissioned officers whom they usually found trustworthy and formed relationships with.¹⁰⁴ With the mass conscription instituted to fill the ranks of Napoleon's armies, the army was no longer limited to the nobility and vagabonds; it became an all-encompassing institution. The new diversity of the French army put together soldiers who were all quite different from each other; they came from different backgrounds and occupations. They were of various temperaments and characters that spanned from joyful or sad, bold or timid, reserved or heroic. Yet, all belonged to the same military collective, ergo presenting a number of shared common traits binding them together as French soldiers.

Though Napoleon's tactics for inspiring motivation and morale were successful and held in great esteem, it is crucial to remember that his own self-promotion and propaganda shaped that idea. Although he enjoyed embodying the image of the ordinary soldier, it was a rather deceptive one. Thus, while Napoleon enjoyed his well-earned reputation as a force of inspiration among his troops, was every soldier that responsive?

Jean-Pierre Chauvron was an artillery soldier at Austerlitz who venerated Napoleon, and was always inspired by his presence. Chauvron was in attendance at the celebration for Napoleon's coronation anniversary at Austerlitz, which he describes in awe, 'Les cris de Vive l'Empéreur, mais les cris de 80 mille homes se confor dans une seule noise, et ces toutes de faille

¹⁰⁴ *Fighting for Napoleon: French Soldiers' Letters 1799-1815*, ed. Bernard Wilking and René Wilkin (Barnsley, 2015), 25.

allumiée casfandant aussi comme une seule flamme.’¹⁰⁵ Chauvron was incredibly responsive to Napoleon and his motivational tactics.

Contrary to Chauvron was the soldier Pierre-Joseph Melin. In 1809, Napoleon offered him *la croix de la Légion d’Honneur*. Their following interaction was detailed in a letter by Melin:

Là j’eus la fermeté de remercier mon général, lui déclarent que je ne prétendais ni a l’une ni à l’autre, mais qu’en récompense de mes services, je n’espérois autre chose que de rentrer au sein de ma famille, ce qui fut pris en note.¹⁰⁶

Unlike the majority of soldiers who Napoleon bestowed membership to the *Légion d’Honneur* upon, those types of honorable rewards held no appeal to Melin; he valued his family over all the prestige and merit offered.

Accounts by soldiers expressing their disillusionment in Napoleon and disinterest in honor and rewards are scarce and a challenge to locate over the frequency of pro-Napoleon sentiments expressed by soldiers in their letters. Customarily, these opinions existed as a brief mention found in the conclusion of letters to parents. In a soldier’s letter from 18 frimaire an XIII (9 December 1804) to his family, Lambert Drapier closes his letter by voicing his hope of returning home in four years as a soldier who served the emperor with honor: ‘J’espère au bout de quatre ans d’avoir mon congé et vous réembrasser tous et d’avoir servi l’empereur avec honneur.’¹⁰⁷ Similarly, the soldier Jean-Léonard Lejeune joined the *Grande Armée* as a volunteer

¹⁰⁵ Service historique de la Défense Archives de l’armée de Terre et des organismes du ministère de la défense, Vincennes [hereafter SHT], 1KT 707, Fonds Chauvron, ‘notes sur les campagnes militaires du soldat Jean-Pierre Chauvron’, 2 décembre 1805.

¹⁰⁶ *Lettres de Grogards*, eds. Emile Fairon and Henri Heuse (Paris, 1936), 154.

¹⁰⁷ *Lettres*, eds. Fairon and Heuse, 37-38.

in order to support his emperor. In a letter dated 7 March 1813, Lejeune conveys his enthusiasm with the statement, ‘soutenir les forces de notre empereur Napoléon renommé toujours dans toutes ses entreprises.’¹⁰⁸ Jean-Pierre Chauvron was an incredibly enthusiastic devotee of Napoleon’s who filled his ‘notes sur les campagnes militaires’ with anecdotes of admiration on his emperor. On one occasion in 1806, Chauvron documented how ‘en criant vive l’Empereur, cette journée fut une belle journée de ma vie’¹⁰⁹ He was a perfect model of the type of loyal French soldier Napoleon cultivated, as Chauvron was inspired by the beauty he saw within the simple chanting of ‘Vive l’Empereur’.

While most Napoleonic soldiers were recruited through conscription, there were also those who excitedly volunteered to fight for Napoleon’s army. Elzéar Blaze was one of these soldiers. Detailed in his memoirs, he emotionally recounts the day it was announced that he would be shipping out to join the army:

Un beau jour, dans une revue, le général Bellavenne proclama le nom de ceux qui le lendemain devaient partir pour l’armée. Oh ! que d’émotions pendant qu’il lisait sa liste ! nos cœurs battaient à briser nos poitrines. Quelle joie parmi les élus ! quelle anxiété parmi ceux dont les noms n’étaient pas encore prononcés ! Endosser un frae d’officier, porter l’épaulette, ceindre une épée, oh ! les belles choses quand on a dix-huit ans ! Nous étions soldats, un instant après nous devenions officiers : un mot avait produit cette heureuse métamorphose.¹¹⁰

Blaze provides a vivid description of the sudden wave of emotions that hit him with that announcement. Although he would later earn the promotion of Captain, here he was an ordinary soldier equipped only with his dream of earning military promotions that provided any soldier with the opportunity to rise through the ranks and become officers.

¹⁰⁸ *Lettres*, eds. Fairon and Heuse, 381.

¹⁰⁹ SHT, 1KT 207, Fonds Chauvron ‘notes sur les campagnes militaires du soldat Jean-Pierre Chauvron’, 2 décembre 1805.

¹¹⁰ Elzéar Blaze, *La Vie militaire sous le Premier Empire* (Paris, 1888 ; acc. BnF Gallica), 28.

While Blaze was determined to make his career path in the military, there were also those who had come to prefer their life as a soldier to their previous career. These conscripted soldiers found a new vitality of spirit through the military that was much preferable to their original occupations. Lambert-Denis provides one such example in a letter to his brother on 2 June 1813:

Je suis content d'être soldat, je ne voudrais plus être cloutier. Si par hasard, mon cher frère, vous devez aussi partir, il ne faut pas avoir de crainte d'être militaire, car le sort n'est pas si malheureux qu'on dit chez nous. Car pour moi, je vis autant content que d'être cloutier.¹¹¹

Lambert-Denis encourages his brother to seek refuge in the military as an escape from the dreadful life of a cloutier, or nailer, by asserting that the fate of a soldier would never match the unfortunate fate of a nailer.

However, although there were many who thrived in the military, life in the army was generally not one to be envied. Soldiers were faced with exhaustion, wretched material conditions, hunger, and extreme vulnerability to disease. It was not an easy life, and for most it was thrust upon them by means of conscription, yet Napoleon placed the morale of his men as a top priority in the army.

A soldier's personal connection to home and family was one of the most effective morale boosters in the Napoleonic army. The mass communication and increase in literacy forged a new era in European history, where soldiers of all ranks and backgrounds produced a substantial collection of letters that described the exhilarating events of the war and provided a window into the mentality of ordinary soldiers and 'la vie militaire'. The psychological value held by a soldier's intimate correspondence with home was vital to their morale and good health, as

¹¹¹ *Lettres*, eds. Fairon and Heuse, 371.

maintaining links with their family kept them grounded with the reminder of their previous life before the war and provided the assurance that there was still a place waiting for them at home in civilian life.¹¹²

In most letters home, soldiers were writing to their parents or relatives but also ensured to reserve a paragraph addressed to his home community since letters were one of the more reliable sources of wartime information. In a letter addressed to ‘ma chere mère’ by the soldier Jean Courtot, his thoughts and well wishes to his extended family and community are included at the end. Although Courtot’s letters are filled with misspelled rhetoric, his sentiments are still translatable: ‘je fait bien compliments a mon cousinle Maire et le Monde de la maison.’¹¹³ Albeit the advancement of literacy in the Napoleonic period, most soldiers only had a very basic understanding of reading and writing and thus penned letters filled with spelling and grammar mistakes. For example, throughout all his letters, Courtot consistently spelled the phrase, ‘je vous direz’ incorrectly as ‘je vous diray’¹¹⁴.

Typically, the letters of Napoleonic soldiers all followed a similar format for the letters they sent home to their parents:

Chers Parents, Je mets la plume à la main pour vous dire que je suis en bonne santé et j’espère que la présente vous trouvera de même. Si c’était un effet de votre bonté, vous pourriez m’envoyer une pièce de trois francs, ou même de cent sous. Je ne trouve plus rien à vous dire pour le moment et je vous embrasse de loin. Votre fils pour la vie.’¹¹⁵

¹¹² Forrest, *Napoleon’s Men*, 40-41.

¹¹³ SHT, 1KT 362 Fonds Courtot, ‘Cinq lettres de Jean Courtot (1792-1814)’, 10 juillet 1813.

¹¹⁴ SHT, 1KT 362, Fonds Courtot, ‘lettre de Jean Courtot’, 1806.

¹¹⁵ *Lettres*, eds. Fairon and Heuse, XIII.

They would write to assure them of their good health, potentially ask for some money, inform them on their new life and experiences in the military, with the signature of a filial son. Jean Guillot, a soldier of the *gardes d'honneur*, always signed his letters to his parents with sentiments like, 'Je m'arrête enfin et je suis en vous assurant de mon respect votre très humble fils'¹¹⁶ and 'Je suis avec le plus profond respect votre très obéissant serviteur et fils'¹¹⁷

It was not unusual for some soldiers to write to their parents to ask them for their prayers, like the soldier Jean-Phillipe Lecloux:

Priez toujours pour moi, car nous ne sommes pas capables de prier. Quand nous pouvons le faire, nous le faisons. Je prie tous les jours un peu. Je vous dirai que nous ne saurions aller à messe, parce que, les dimanches, on passe la question de tout ce qu'on a.¹¹⁸ Although religion was not a prominent ideology or practice among the soldiers of the Napoleonic armies, it was not unheard of for soldiers to keep practicing their religion, and when they could rely on the prayers of their family as well their faith and family support worked to boost morale.

Pierre-Jacques Rasquinet, an ordinary soldier of the *Grande Armée*, took an interesting approach to religion by catering the general idea of it around his new life as a soldier. In a letter to his family dated 7 March 1813, he explained how, for the time being, he substituted Napoleon, Emperor of the French with God: 'Mais à présent, grâce à Dieu, je me suis abandonné à sa volonté que, puisque je servais mon empereur, j'avais la consolation de mettre mon frère hors de danger.'¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ SHT, 1KT 407, Fonds Guillot, 'Correspondance de Jean Guillot à sa famille (22 juillet 1813-6 mars 1814), 22 juillet 1813.

¹¹⁷ SHT, Fonds Guillot, 12 août 1813.

¹¹⁸ *Lettres*, eds. Fairon and Heuse, 347.

¹¹⁹ *Lettres*, eds. Fairon and Heuse, 349.

Without the significant boom in literacy rates and military correspondence, soldiers would have been entirely deprived of the very outside contact with home they already desperately craved. Yet, with the viciously unreliable postal service and wartime conditions, the absence of any news from home became one of the most commonly cited reasons for a soldier's steep decline in morale. A severe form of homesickness, known as *mal du pays*, commonly caused soldiers to fall into a deep depression, and was actually recognized by medical opinions as a serious and incapacitating illness.¹²⁰ The utter despair caused by *mal du pays* can be seen through a description by the soldier Melchior Bovy in a letter from 14 February 1812: 'Vous croyez que je ne pense pas à vous. Mais je pleure tous les jours votre sort et notre longue séparation. Je suis tous les jours sans joie, sans aucun plaisir, ne pensant qu'au sort de notre famille.'¹²¹

Jean Guillot found himself in that same situation when the post failed in delivering his letters from home for months. Clearly upset, Guillot expresses the harrowing effect the silence from home has been having on him:

Mes chers parents,
Quand pourrai je donc recevoir de vos nouvelles? Il faut que tout contribue à me chagriner. Il me semble que j'ai droit de me plaindre de la sorte puisque la dernière lettre que j'ai reçue de votre part était datée du 13 Août, tandis que nous voici dans le mois de 9bre.¹²² Je ne voudrais pas pour tout au monde vous en imputer la faute, car je ne doute pas que les courriers n'aient été entravés lorsque nous étions en pays ennemi, mais maintenant que nous sommes en France vous me permettez de compter sur votre complaisance et de regarder comme certain que je pourrai avoir une réponse dans 15 jours...¹²³

¹²⁰ Forrest, *Napoleon's Men*, 41.

¹²¹ *Lettres*, eds. Fairon and Heuse, 358.

¹²² Novembre

¹²³ SHT, Fonds Guillot, 4 novembre 1813.

Guillot's great distress is obvious from the opening of his letter. The complete silence from his parents led to an insufferable past four months for the soldier, and he is desperate for news. Like so many other Napoleonic soldiers, the failed functions of the postal service spun Jean Guillot into a deep spiral of depression from *mal du pays*.

CONCLUSION

An examination of Napoleonic print propaganda reveals its leading role in the development of motivation through written word. Napoleon, as an impressive grandiloquent rhetorician, easily incorporated his three main tactics of military motivation into words, speeches, and bulletins. He identified an advantageous new way to obtain and spread his power through the rise of literacy and its increasing influence in a newly emerging modern world.

Yet, an examination of the ordinary soldiers of the *Grande Armée* provides a more factual representation of the varying levels of effectiveness that Napoleon's motivational tactics had on different soldiers. Although Napoleon treated his soldiers like a homogenous bunch, his troops were made up of an incredibly diverse group of men, with varying wants and needs and temperaments. However, there is one trend that has repeatedly revealed itself throughout the countless different letters and memoirs taken into account: the indispensable need of a soldier's longing for their home and family. Whenever Napoleon's tactics failed to inspire and motivate his troops, one's access to their family never seemed to fail as a morale booster.

War changes people; it always has, it always will. And once the bright and shiny appeal of honor became dulled by the decline of the Napoleonic armies around 1807, soldiers still had one constant to live for: returning home to their family, friends, and the surreal civilian life that somehow existed before the miserable and violent mess of warfare dictated their lives. In one of his letters to his parents, Jean Guillot discloses his changing mentality as a consequence of the environment of warfare he exists in:

Je vous jure, mon cher papa et ma chère maman, de ne jamais oublier vos avis, à ces mots mon cœur crève mais je suis dans un état où il faut se vaincre soi-même et banir en quelque sorte tous les sentiments de la nature. Il me semble que si j'étais fils de tout autre père et mère, je pourrais être moins sensible, mais non je suis votre enfant.¹²⁴

Although the war has changed Guillot and will consequently return him home as a different man, he assures his parents that, even though he may seem like a stranger born of a different mother and father, he is still their child. When the effectiveness of the motivational tactics of Napoleonic military culture expired, filial love would always remain a constant.

¹²⁴ SHT, Fonds Guillot, 22 juillet 1813.

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