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Frederick C. Schneid, *Napoleonic Wars*. Washington, D. C.: Potomac Books, 2012. 121 pp. Bibliography. \$14.95 U. S. (pb). ISBN 978-1-59797-209-3.

Review by Ralph Ashby, Eastern Illinois University.

In *Napoleonic Wars* Frederick C. Schneid tackles the difficult and potentially thankless task of summarizing and analyzing the extant English-language historiography of the Napoleonic Wars. The relatively slender volume was produced for Potomac Books' Essential Bibliography Series, hence following a prescribed format for the series. Schneid makes the most of the format, organizing and focusing the copious number of publications on the topic in a manageable way. He knows that his bibliography could not be exhaustive, given restrictions of space and format, so the emphasis is on important or representative works.

Schneid makes his aim explicit in his Preface, writing "It is not the purpose of this book to explore Napoleon the man but to focus specifically on the military history of the Napoleonic Wars" (p. x). That said, historians of the topic know that Napoleon is the quintessential ghost in the machine, the eternally self-interested critic peering over the shoulder of the writer. Undeterred, Schneid successfully organizes his bibliography by stressing recent works and trends, especially those written since the 1966 classic *The Campaigns of Napoleon* by David Chandler.^[1] Schneid uses Chandler as a reference point in more than one way, a good device that helps to make the bibliography both comprehensive and concise.

Schneid points out that Chandler was a British historian, but most of his work viewed the Napoleonic Wars from a French perspective, whereas British historians Charles Esdaile and David Gates "...approach the Napoleonic Wars from a decidedly Anglocentric view" (p. 26). Indeed they do, but Schneid does not belabor the point. His approach throughout is courteous and fair, and he avoids gratuitous sniping. For the most part, he prefers to lay out patterns and trends in the available literature, rather than overtly critiquing certain authors or works, either positively or negatively.

Schneid addresses controversies as they exist in Napoleonic military historiography, and two of these are areas in which Napoleon the man is central to the discussion. The extent to which Napoleon himself was to blame for the wars is one of these controversies. While this is largely a matter of diplomatic history, it does directly bear upon initiation of hostilities, along with the strategic priorities of the wars, as per the famous Clausewitz dictum. Different authors lay blame in varying proportions for the wars at the feet of a range of malefactors that include Napoleon (pp. 19-24, 32).

Another controversy more strictly military in nature is the issue of Napoleon's genius as a soldier, and the centrality of that genius to any study or understanding of the Napoleonic Wars. A view of Napoleon's genius as the single most dominating reality of the Napoleonic Wars was once almost a given, but this is less the case among works published since Chandler. Many of these works analyze military systems and changes in those systems during the Napoleonic Wars. They also analyze factors, apart from Napoleon himself, impacting victory or defeat in the conflicts (pp. 28-31). Dramatically representative of such works is *Blundering to Glory: Napoleon's Military Campaigns* by Owen Connelly, an American writer.^[2] Schneid suggests that Connelly is an extreme example, although this reviewer has

always maintained that the title of Connelly's book is far more provocative than the content. The late Owen Connelly was a Korean War combat veteran and an excellent scholar, with an extraordinary talent for clear and concise exposition. Connelly described Napoleon as a great soldier, but one who was by nature an improvisational "scrambler" rather than a commander who could unfailingly force a preconceived plan to come off without a hitch—an extraordinarily rare event in any case for any commander.

While not all British historians of the Napoleonic Wars take an Anglocentric view of the wars, it is also true that not all American historians of the wars have been as analytically objective as Connelly. John R. Elting, another US Army veteran, was a blatant Francophile and admirer of Napoleon. Schneid is discreet, arguing only that "Elting was one of the foremost historians of the Napoleonic Wars..." (p. 64). This is quite true, and this reviewer always recommends the work of the late Col. Elting, but readers should keep Elting's biases in mind. Frankly, his work becomes even more useful and enjoyable with this awareness. Elting's writing style was possibly the most energetic and entertaining of any Napoleonic historian writing in English. His *Swords Around a Throne* remains an excellent study of Napoleon's armies.[3] In addition, Elting co-authored *Military History and Atlas of the Napoleonic Wars* with Vincent Esposito, in which Elting's crackling writing style was clearly apparent in most of the narrative, Esposito being responsible for the overall production of the atlas.[4] This book, created originally as part of the West Point Military History Series in 1965, is rightly characterized as a classic by Schneid.

Napoleonic military historians of any nation are capable of objectivity, but readers are wise to be aware of the nationality of the author of any volume they utilize. Schneid observes, courteously, that it is also important to be aware of other interpretive and political influences that may impact the analyses of various historians. One area Schneid explores in this vein is the topic of conscription (pp. 65-69). He notes post-Vietnam tendencies among American and other authors, citing Alan Forrest's *Conscripts and Deserters: The French Army and Society during the Revolution and Empire*.^[5] Forrest's research is exhaustive and impeccable, and Schneid notes as much, but very subtly raises questions regarding an interpretation of resistance to conscription as a manifestation of political resistance to Napoleon. This is not necessarily an interpretation that a reader might take away from Forrest, but it is a topic under revision in the field. This ongoing revision addresses the problem that there has sometimes been a tendency to view conscription during the Revolution in an almost romantic light, in contrast to the way the very same policies are viewed when considering the Empire.

Overall, Schneid is optimistic and enthusiastic about the current state and future of English-language publications in the field of the Napoleonic Wars. A significant reason for his optimism is the substantially increased availability of works translated into English and access to archival material in the post-Cold War period. Studies of the armies of Austria, Prussia, and Russia and "satellite states" are matters of recent and potential future works (pp. 71-77). Furthermore, exhaustive and detailed monographs are increasingly appearing, exemplified by the work of authors such as Michael Leggiere.^[6]

Some readers of *Napoleonic Wars* may wish that Schneid had been more explicit and detailed in his evaluations of the historiography. Such an approach might well have cluttered the book well beyond its intended scope without adding appreciably to its value. As it stands, the book is aimed at a range of readers from students to scholars. The usefulness of the book is not restricted to novices in the field, but could also serve to stimulate and channel further research and writing in sub-areas within Napoleonic military history where much work still remains to be done. Schneid's volume acts as a handy reference, although an index would have been a great help, in addition to the very good bibliography, organized by chapter by the author. Beyond its usefulness as a reference, Schneid's *Napoleonic Wars* is a book no serious scholar of the period should overlook.

NOTES

[1] David G. Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon: The Mind and Method of History's Greatest Soldier* (New York: Macmillan, 1966).

[2] Owen Connelly, *Blundering to Glory: Napoleon's Military Campaigns* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1987).

[3] John R. Elting, *Swords Around a Throne: Napoleon's Grande Armée* (New York: Free Press, 1988).

[4] Vincent Esposito and John R. Elting, *Military History and Atlas of the Napoleonic Wars* (London: Greenhill Books, 1999).

[5] Alan Forrest, *Conscripts and Deserters: The French Army and Society during the Revolution and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

(6) Michael V. Leggiere, *The Fall of Napoleon: The Allied Invasion of France 1813-1814* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

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