



Napoleon's 1796 Italian Campaign [1833] by Carl von Clausewitz.

Ed. and trans. by Nicholas Murray and Christopher Pringle. Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 2018. Pp. xix, 314. ISBN 978-0-7006-2676-2.

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In 1796, a relatively unknown Corsican general in the French service took command of the Army of the French Republic in Italy. A little over a year later, that general, Napoleon Bonaparte, had taken his army to the very doorstep of Vienna, capital of one of Europe's oldest and most powerful empires. With their new translation of Carl von Clausewitz's study of Napoleon's 1796-97 campaign, Nicholas Murray and Christopher Pringle have made a valuable contribution to the growing body of work involving the erudite Prussian.¹

Dennis Showalter in his introduction reminds us that Clausewitz's masterpiece *Vom Kriege*² was only one among his many works, most of them published posthumously. Like his contemporary Baron Antoine de Jomini, Clausewitz wrote military histories about most of Napoleon's major campaigns for the period 1796-1815. Until recently, Anglophone readers had little access to these works.³ Happily, that has changed.⁴ Murray and Pringle's edition is most welcome because it concerns Napoleon's first campaign and because we can detect in it elements of Clausewitz's historical and critical thinking later developed more fully in *On War*.

Napoleon's 1796 Italian Campaign is effectively three books in one. The first is the German manuscript published by Clausewitz's devoted widow, Marie von Clausewitz, after his death in 1831. The second is Captain J. Colin's translation of it into French for the use of the French General Staff later that century (1899). The editors retain (and critique) many of Colin's notes on Clausewitz's analyses of Napoleon and his conduct of the campaigns (xiii). The consequent deeply analytical tone of the edition makes for dense but stimulating reading.

In the third "book," the editors examine subjects and passages that anticipate ideas contained in *On War*. These include the center-of-gravity concept (20-22, 283), the political context and nature of war (102n20), the awesome triune character of war (57, 276n3), the power of the defense (279n10), and the "scale of the object" in relation to the exertion of will and force (285n19), among others. Both Showalter and the editors stress that this aspect of the original work shows just how closely military history and theory are linked in Clausewitz's methodology.

1. See, e.g., two new biographies of Clausewitz and his widow: Donald Stoker, *Clausewitz: His Life and Work* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 2014); and Vanya Eftimova Bellinger, *Marie von Clausewitz: The Woman behind the Making of On War* (id., 2016).

2. The best English-language edition remains *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Univ. Pr, 1976; rpt. NY: Knopf, 1993).

3. Apart from *The Campaign of 1812 in Russia*, trans. anon. (London 1843; rpt. Hattiesburg, MS: Academic Internat'l, 1970).

4. See, e.g., Peter Paret and Daniel Moran, ed. and trans., *Carl von Clausewitz: Historical and Political Writings* (Princeton: Univ. Pr, 1992) and, more recently, Christopher Bassford, et al., ed. and trans., *On Waterloo: Clausewitz, Wellington and the Campaign of 1815* (2010), published at Clausewitz.com.

The book is distinctively an operational history—an area of military scholarship that Clausewitz pioneered (17). This approach required establishing political context (1) and evaluating leaders (13) and operational plans (17) meant to achieve political objectives. Readers seeking lots of tactical details will be disappointed.

Clausewitz argues that the period 1796–97 witnessed two discrete campaigns, one in Northern Italy and a second, much shorter one, in Italy and southern Austria (247). He displays a maturity of judgment and conversance with his subject that may astonish some readers. His lack of obvious bias, given his known animosity to the French and Napoleon, is laudable. Also interesting to Napoleonic scholars will be Clausewitz's assessment of Napoleon's decision to seek a political settlement and armistice with Archduke Charles at Leoben. Some scholars, like David Chandler,⁵ have cast Napoleon's operations after he smashed an Austrian army at Rivoli as a virtual victory parade to the gates of Vienna. But Clausewitz instead sees those operations as foreshadowing Napoleon's chancy overreach in later campaigns, stressing that the risks he took paid off when he was willing to settle matters politically instead of militarily. This would count as a revisionist thesis, except that Clausewitz's account precedes Chandler's by over 130 years!

The book bristles with quotable passages and one-liners. For example, in criticizing a self-serving and heroic report by Gen. Pierre Augereau during the battles around Mantua, Clausewitz comments that "War is generally not as theatrical as people often imagine" (116). He only rarely indulges in adulation, chiefly when praising Napoleon's skills as a commander. Only two battles are described in tactical detail—Arcola and Rivoli—in both cases to underscore Napoleon's brilliant decision-making, not to provide detail merely for detail's sake.

Both editors' interest in wargaming is apparent in their provision of a fine appendix of orders of battles. The book's only weakness—all too common in military histories—is its small, hard-to-read maps; readers should consult the *West Point Atlas for the Wars of Napoleon*⁶ to better visualize actions described in the text. That said, I applaud Nicholas Murray and Christopher Pringle for their salutary, thought-provoking addition to the literature by and about Clausewitz, who remains the model of how to write operational military history.

5. *The Campaigns of Napoleon* (NY: Macmillan, 1966) 123–25.

6. West Point, NY: West Point Military Series, 2nd ed. (2003)—also online.