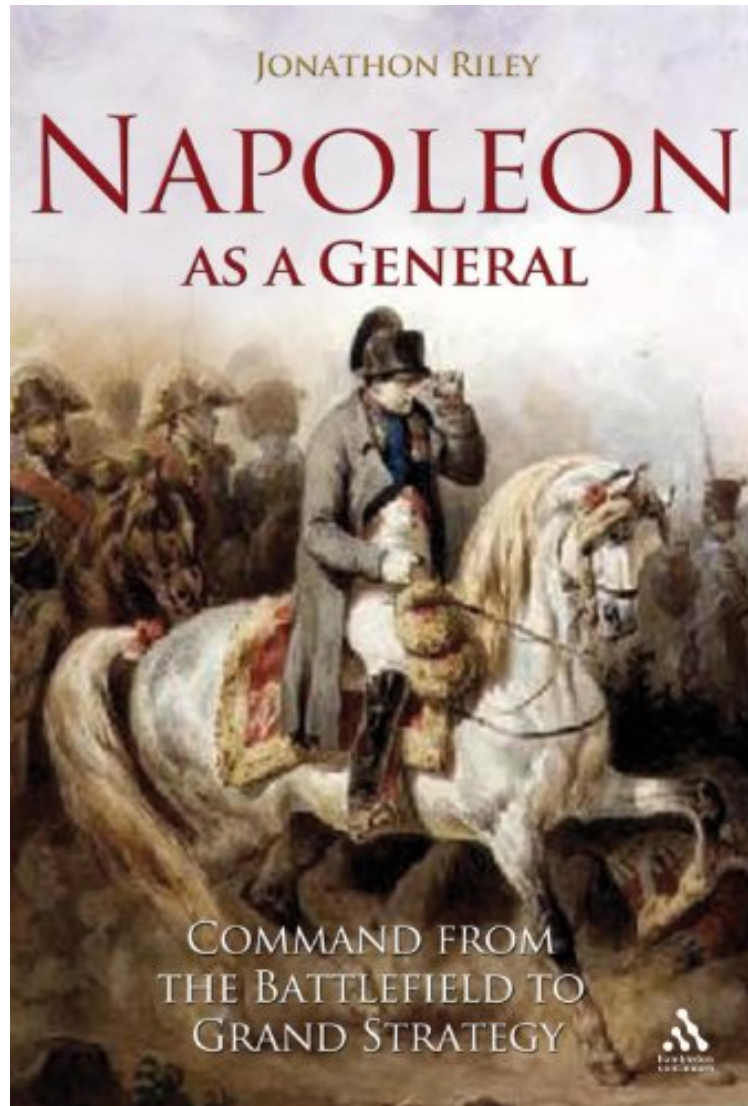


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Napoleon as a General: Command from the Battlefield to Grand Strategy

Jonathon Riley

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Jonathon Riley : Napoleon as a General: Command from the Battlefield to Grand Strategy before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Napoleon as a General: Command from the Battlefield to Grand Strategy:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Richard A MaloneyGreat Service.Very Good Book.8 of 9 people found the following review helpful. TerrificBy E. GilbertI'm not enough of a Napoleon or military expert

to dismiss the contents of this book --- but I had always wondered about HOW Napoleon fought battles, HOW he thought as a general, HOW and WHY he devised strategy and tactics. This book gave me all that information in a clear and frequently vivid -- and always understandable -- manner. I really liked it, because in an area like this, with curiosities like I had, that is what a book should do, right? I completely recommend it. I think you'll enjoy it. 10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Worth a read, but not buying.

By Avon Napoleonic Fellowship

This book claims to be different because it focusses not on Napoleon's campaigns, career or legacy, but specifically on Napoleon as a general. Yet Riley presents little that has not been covered in earlier secondary sources on same subject such as Count Yorck von Wartenburg (1902) "Napoleon as a general", James-Marshall Cornwall (1965) "Napoleon as military commander" and David Chandler (1966) classic study "The Campaigns of Napoleon" with its section on Napoleon's art of war. That said there are some useful insights and ideas that make it a worthwhile read. Riley begins with a mediocre, workmanlike account of generalship and leadership which comprises many long quotes, but little analysis. This is followed by a reasonably interesting critical analysis of Napoleon's generalship, leadership, logistical management and co-ordination of a multi-national force. The chapter on strategy provides some useful and interesting insights with regard to the continental system, the sale of the Louisiana territory and relationship with the US. I found the case studies of most value. There are well-written and detailed accounts of Italy 1796/7, Jena-Aüstadt 1806 and Dresden and Leipzig 1813. None of this is new, of course, but a new author always brings some fresh perspectives. The choice of these three as subject matter is of itself an interesting combination rather than the more usual 'suspects' of say Italy 1796/7, Austerlitz, Russia, 1814 and Waterloo. I had a few real gripes with this book. Firstly is the so often repeated tendency by English authors to over-estimate the role of the British army in the defeat of Napoleon. I am not trying to downplay the impact of the Peninsular War and Waterloo, but they are relatively small when compared with the sustained role of the Austrians, Russians and Prussians assisted by British gold and the blockade by the Royal Navy. The second is Riley's tendency to make too many irrelevant references and analogies to past and recent/current campaigns. He makes the point that WWI generals are commonly lambasted for losses that are comparable with those which frequently occurred during Napoleon's time. This misses the crucial, key difference that actions in the age of Napoleon, especially those involving Napoleon himself, achieved a strategic result, while WWI did not. He also makes frequent reference to the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan, while missing the real analogy of Napoleon's War in Spain and those modern guerrilla wars; the similarity of an 'enlightened super power' seeking to 'liberate' a nation from a dysfunctional regime but under-estimating the domestic response and the use of the campaign by its enemies, seeing the pyrrhic victory of conventional war, rapidly falling into a protracted 'insurgence'. Thirdly are some of Riley's statements and opinions that range from unsupported and unsupportable to downright outrageous. The oft made assertion that Napoleon's enemies' mistakes made him look good ignores the real genius of Napoleon: his ability to react quickly to changing circumstances, his flexibility and clear thinking and his rapid and decisive responses. Riley's statement that "... many of those who did gain access to his inner counsels--such as Lannes, Reynier and Junot--were mediocre commanders" is astounding. Junot and possibly Reynier may be justified in this, but Lannes?! Lastly is the use of maps that are poor with most of the places that are referred to missing! I am astounded that this frustrating mistake seems to be made again and again in so many books. It is almost as if the maps are an after-though or merely some form of decoration. My final assessment: this book is worth a read, but I'm glad that I borrowed it from the library and did not bother to add it to my personal collection.

'In war, let your great object be victory, not lengthy campaigns. Thus it may be known that the leader of armies is the arbiter of the people's fate, the man on whom it depends whether the nation shall be in peace or peril...' (Sun Tzu The Art of War). We speak of Caesar who conquered Gaul, not the legions; MacArthur who landed at Inchon, not the Marines - and we speak of Napoleon, one of history's most successful generals. Major General Jonathon Riley is supremely well qualified to write on Napoleon's generalship and has written an informed and insightful account. He opens with a short treatise on generalship in order to define Napoleon's achievement before moving on to the man himself. He examines Napoleon as a strategist; as a coalition commander; Napoleon's campaigns and Napoleon on the battlefield. Areas often ignored in the context of pre-industrial warfare - logistics and counter-insurgency - are also examined. Riley proceeds to three specific case studies beginning with Napoleon's first essay in generalship and the conquest of Piedmont; Napoleon at the height of his powers at the conquest of Prussia, to Napoleon's final defeats and the Battle of the Nations in 1813.

"An insightful treatise on the emperor's generalship, written by an officer in the British army." —David Lee Poremba, Library Journal, December 2007 (David Lee Poremba Library Journal)"As stated in its introduction, this book is neither a biography nor a chronological history of Napoléon. It is an insightful treatise on the emperor's generalship, written by an officer in the British army...The author's assessment is fairly objective: in summary, that Napoléon was an innovative general and the best in the field until the attrition of over a decade of conflict caught up with him. Recommended." -David Lee, Library Journal, December 2007 (David Lee)"Jonathan Riley is ideally placed, as a soldier and an historian, to write this definitive book on Napoleon as one of history's most renowned commanders."

—International Napoleonic Society "a superb study...Napoleon as a General is not another biography, but a detailed treatise on the many and varied demands made on top commanders throughout history."