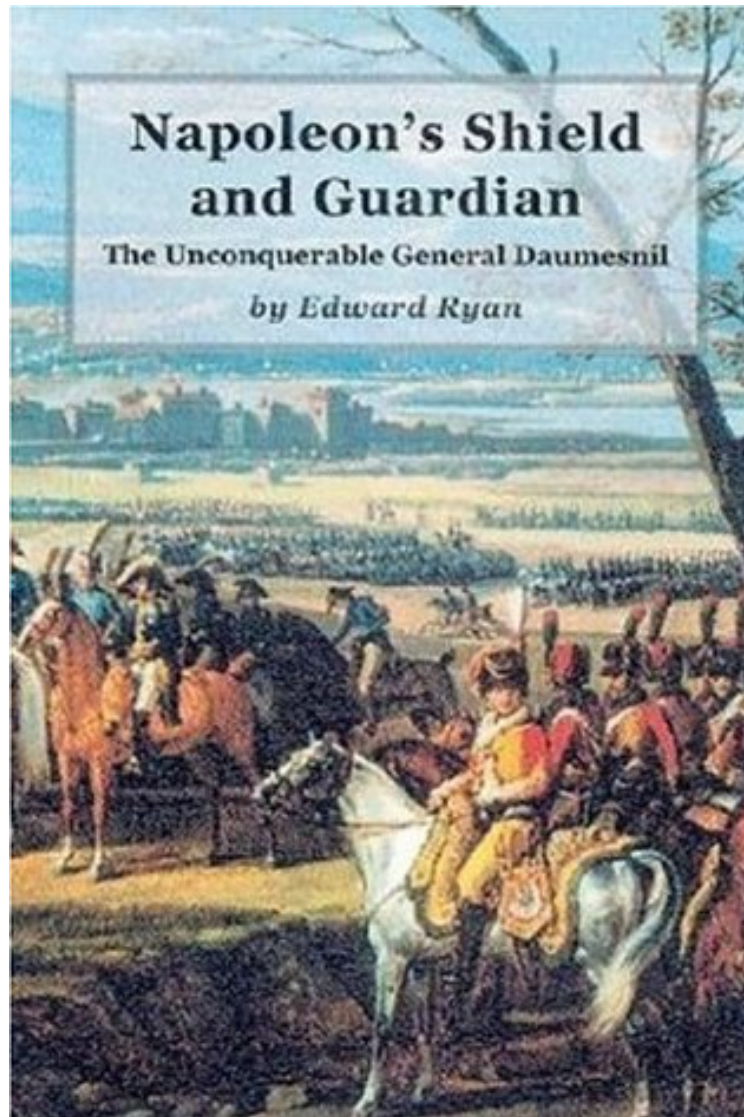


Napoleon's Shield and Guardian: The Unconquerable General Daumesnil

Edward Ryan

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Edward Ryan : Napoleon's Shield and Guardian: The Unconquerable General Daumesnil before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Napoleon's Shield and Guardian: The Unconquerable General Daumesnil:

11 of 12 people found the following review helpful. Napoleon's lucky charmBy Tom HolmbergThis is the tale of the Napoleonic wars as told through the story of one soldier-but what a soldier! Pierre Daumesnil rose from a private

soldier to being an officer in one of the most famous units of Napoleon's army, to being a general in France's army and a Baron of the Empire, receiving twenty wounds during his career. Daumesnil's career demonstrates the truth of the old adage that in the French army every soldier carried a Marshal's baton in his knapsack. To the casual student of the Napoleonic era, the name of General Daumesnil is probably not well known, while the names Davout, Ney, and Murat, or maybe Marbot, Rapp or Junot are better known, by 1815, the name Daumesnil was deservedly famous. Daumesnil's service in the armies of the Revolution and Empire were as brilliant in their way as any of the others. Napoleon's good luck charm, severely wounded at Wagram, twice successfully holding the fortress of Vincennes against France's enemies, Daumesnil's story is that of the era. Daumesnil fled, at the age of seventeen, to join the army after having killed a man in a duel. The Revolution having led to France being at war with almost the whole of Europe, Daumesnil joined the cavalry of the *Armée des Pyrénées Orientales* as a common trooper. Fortunately Daumesnil found himself in the same squadron as a young lieutenant Bessières. Daumesnil's early military career was obviously successful enough to warrant his entering Napoleon's Guides in June 1797. Daumesnil was made a sergeant. At one battle Daumesnil presented two Austrian flags he had personally captured to Gen. Bonaparte. At the bridge of Arcola, Daumesnil was one of those who had rescued Bonaparte. With the successful conclusion of the campaign in Italy, Daumesnil followed Bonaparte to Egypt. During the siege of St. Jean de Acre Daumesnil again had occasion to save his commanding general's life, throwing himself between Bonaparte and a shell that had landed at his feet. Perhaps it was Daumesnil's bravery on this occasion that determined Bonaparte to include Daumesnil in the select party with whom Napoleon returned to France. Back in France Daumesnil's Guide unit was incorporated into the Consular Guard. Having again demonstrated his bravery at Marengo Daumesnil was promoted to lieutenant at the close of the campaign and in 1804 Captain Daumesnil was rewarded with the Legion of Honor. In the next campaign, where Daumesnil rescued Napoleon's aide-de-camp Jean Rapp, Daumesnil was promoted to chef d'escadron. Daumesnil had become, according to Bessières, Napoleon's good luck charm. Following the peace at Tilsit, Daumesnil's squadron of Chasseurs of the Guard was given the honor of carrying the news to Paris, making a trip of 930 miles in just 36 days. In 1809 Daumesnil and his Chasseurs were ordered to the Peninsula. Once again Daumesnil found himself in the eye of history. He was in the party that freed Godoy from his imprisonment and was later in the street-fighting in Madrid on Dos Mayo, commanding the Mameluks who avenged the murders of the French invalids. Daumesnil had two horses killed under him and was shot in the thigh during the fighting. After Aspern-Essling Daumesnil was promoted to major in the Chasseurs of the Guard. Napoleon preferred his 'lucky charm' to command his service squadron of chasseurs on days of battle. At Wagram Daumesnil's luck ran out and he received the last of his twenty wounds (in his sixteen years of service). Daumesnil lost his leg, putting to an end his cavalry career, but earning him the title of baron. In 1812 Napoleon wrote to Bessières about promoting the invalided Daumesnil and finding him a position in command of the fortress of Vincennes, a position which was to insure Daumesnil's inclusion in the Valhalla of the Empire. Vincennes at this time was not only one of the fortresses ringing Paris, but also a state prison and a state arsenal. In 1814, with the Allies marching into Paris, Daumesnil gallantly held out at Vincennes threatening to blow up the arsenal along with its besiegers, until at last turning the unsundered fortress over to the new government. Daumesnil was briefly retained in command at Vincennes. The Bourbons were soon regretting their decision and Daumesnil was "kicked upstairs" to remove him from the sensitive command. The return of Napoleon meant the return of Daumesnil to the governorship of Vincennes. Once again the Allies took Paris and once again Daumesnil held out, not capitulating until he could turn the fort over to the French government. The Bourbons this time rewarded Daumesnil with retirement. The revolution of 1830 put Daumesnil back in command of Vincennes, where once again Daumesnil defended the fortress against siege, this time from the angry Parisian mob after the blood of the former Bourbon ministers held in the state prison. Two years later Daumesnil died in the cholera epidemic, still at Vincennes. Only a handful of biographies of the "lesser" generals of Napoleon's army are available in English, making this study a welcomed addition to any Napoleonic library. Edward Ryan, whose previous Napoleon book was *Napoleon's Elite Cavalry*, is a former naval officer. Ryan has used a wide array of contemporary memoirs, the French archives, public and private, as well as the assistance of Daumesnil's own family, primarily in the person of Henri de Clairval (author of an earlier biography of Daumesnil in French) to tell his tale. On the whole well-written, Ryan occasionally overuses foreshadowing and the authorial aside to the reader. Greenhill has done a good job in producing this volume, including not only eight pages of color illustrations, but colored endpapers as well. I would have liked to have seen some maps included, however. The volume includes five appendices. The index, though confined primarily to personal names, is analytical.

This outstanding biography is the story of courage. It charts the career of a superbly brave cavalryman against the rise and fall of his imperial master. Pierre Daumesnil was a loyal follower of Napoleon during his rise and his fall. Enlisting as a private soldier in 1793, he was caught up in the tumult of the Napoleonic Wars, surviving campaign after campaign and emerging as a much-decorated general and Baron of the Empire. It was a meteoric rise but one earned through hard fighting, bravery and indefatigable courage. Daumesnil accompanied Napoleon as an officer of his chasseurs and his service record reflects his years of experience on the field of battle. Daumesnil joined the French

Army as a private in 1793 and was serving in Napoleon's Guides in 1797. He served in Egypt in 1798, charged at Marengo in 1800, fought at Austerlitz and Eylau, campaigned in Spain and saw action in Wagram. Terribly wounded at that battle, losing a leg, Daumesnil became governor of the fortress of Vincennes. It was here that he played his most celebrated role in the wars of Napoleon by refusing to surrender the fortress to the Allies in 1814 and again in 1815. Daumesnil's life was an adventure and one which typifies the dash, color and verve of this astonishing period. This biography, by a leading author, will appeal to Napoleonic enthusiasts and those interested in the life and times of Napoleon's elite cavalymen.

Only a handful of biographies of the "lesser" generals of Napoleon's army are available in English, making this study a welcomed addition to any Napoleonic library. Edward Ryan, whose previous Napoleon book was *Napoleon's Elite Cavalry* (Greenhill, 1999), was a former naval officer. Ryan has used a wide array of contemporary memoirs, the French archives, public and private, as well as the assistance of Daumesnil's own family, primarily in the person of Henri de Clairval (author of an earlier biography of Daumesnil in French) to tell his tale. (Napoleon Series) About the Author Edward Ryan served in the US Navy in World War II and is a life-long student of the campaigns of Napoleon. A specialist on the Imperial Guard, he is the author of *Napoleon's Elite Cavalry*.