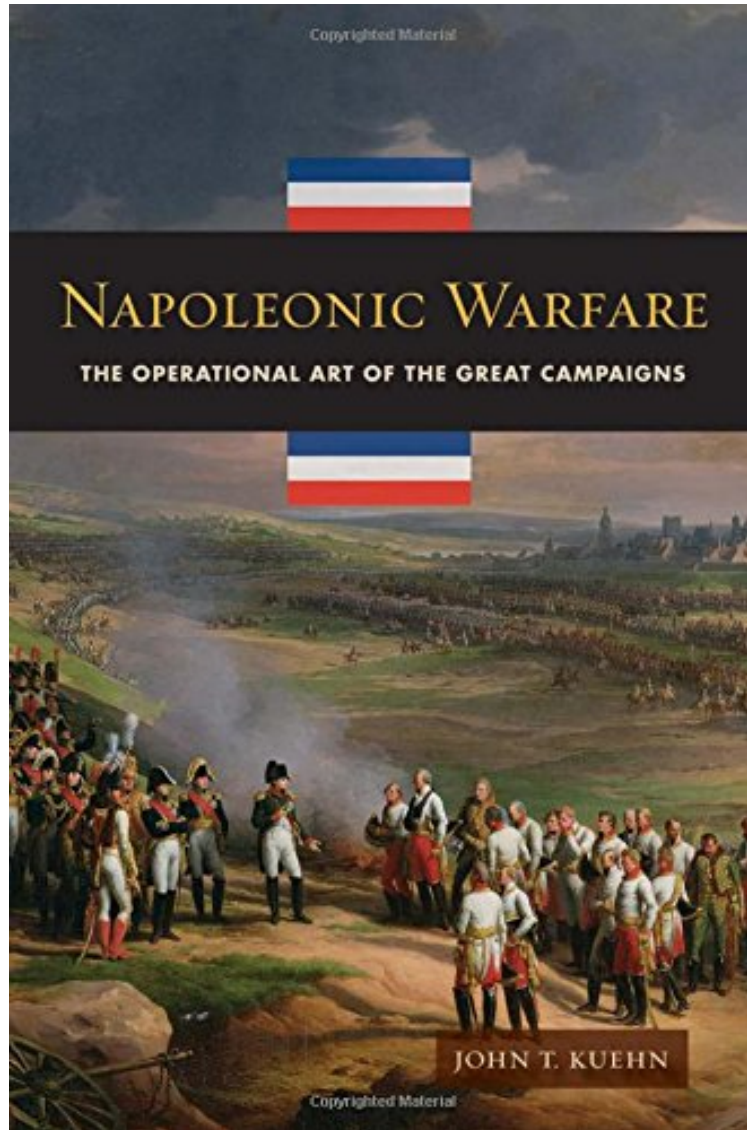


(Read free) Napoleonic Warfare: The Operational Art of the Great Campaigns

Napoleonic Warfare: The Operational Art of the Great Campaigns

John T. Kuehn Ph.D.

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John T. Kuehn Ph.D. : Napoleonic Warfare: The Operational Art of the Great Campaigns before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Napoleonic Warfare: The Operational Art of the Great Campaigns:

10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Kuehn's Book is a Must Read for Students of WarfareBy Douglas A. MacgregorJohn Kuehn's book, Napoleonic Warfare: The Operational Art of the Great Campaigns, is a well-written and important addition to the body of literature on western warfare, especially the military art of the Western World's military colossus, Napoleon Bonaparte. It's also a gripping and entertaining narrative that explores the complex and

subtle relationship between what happens on the battlefield when forces collide and the decisions at a very high level that precipitate and shape the fighting. Kuehn tells the story of Napoleonic Warfare in the context of operational art; through the lens of deep maneuvers and distributed battles extended in space and time. The result is an insightful and colorful glimpse into the thinking, planning and conduct of Napoleon's great campaigns. Kuehn invests considerable time up front in explaining the nation in arms; the French Armies' revolutionary power for rapid maneuver with overwhelming force and firepower and Bonaparte's use of decisive battle to scatter and demoralize his foes. By 1792 the French State supported 14 field armies with over 660,000 men in the ranks, and by 1794, it had over a million armed troops. Kuehn persuasively argues that this dramatic expansion of the French Army to protect La Patrie (the fatherland) combined with the shortage of trained officers to drive organizational innovation and revolutionize warfare. However, Bonaparte did not create a military revolution; rather he further consolidated, refined, and improved upon the existing system. Military staffs, combined arms formations, excellent artillery, and a host of other reforms predated Napoleon. By the time of the Revolution, France possessed the most effective artillery in Europe due to the famous "Gribeauval" system that organized French artillery into four standard calibers and made the actual equipment lighter and more maneuverable. Because of the flexibility and durability of French military organization, commanders of brigades, divisions and corps learned how to fight encounter battles and meeting engagements, advancing on broader fronts than in previous times. Bonaparte's command and control relied heavily on the initiative of his divisional commanders, most of the tactical actions not being controlled by him, but by his veteran subordinates. Kuehn points out that this approach served Bonaparte well when his subordinate corps and division commander were on their own without specific guidance from above, making timely decisions based on local circumstances. Kuehn also highlights the impact of Bonaparte's victories on his opponents demonstrating once again, that defeat in war drives military reform, and failure often leads to innovation. Bonaparte's opponents often possessed plentiful artillery, but, with the exception of the Russians, lacked the understanding to employ it as mobile fire power in battle. However, his opponents' greatest weakness was normally excessive caution, overreliance on centralized control of their armies and a near-constant underestimation of the French soldier and his commanders. In contrast to most of his Austrian, Prussian, Russian and British opponents, Bonaparte controlled events at the operational level. He did not micromanage on the tactical level. In order to sense how the battle went, he moved across the terrain constantly assessing the situation, and then issuing new orders as his computer-like brain integrated new information. Suvorov's stands out among Napoleon's contemporaries thanks to a wealth of talent and imagination that probably equaled that of the Corsican. Suvorov routinely organized his armies into multi-division corps, sometimes even combining Austrian forces with Russians—predating to some extent the formalization of the corps as an operational organization by the French under Napoleon. Suvorov's operations and tactics also took advantage of the Russian soldiers' ability to endure hardship and casualties that the soldiers of other armies could not; a feature that would bedevil Napoleon during the Russian campaign. Kuehn is also careful to highlight Bonaparte's reliance on short campaigns to overcome the logistical constraints involved with the movement and support of large numbers of troops. In Spain, Kuehn explains how the French Army confronts a form of war that mixed conventional operations by Spanish and Anglo-Portuguese armies with widespread guerilla operations. Napoleon's troops could either concentrate to face their enemies' armies or disperse to control the countryside, but not both. Any French formation smaller than a battalion or a squadron found it difficult to support itself against the well-armed, mobile irregular forces that Wellington and his commanders put into the field. Wellington's elegant mix of fortified compound warfare and protracted operations in the Peninsula exhausted French resources. In this setting, Bonaparte's always fragile logistical arrangements broke down. Thanks to Nelson's victories over the French and Spanish Fleets French the watery highways off the coasts of Spain and Portugal ensured the Royal Navy could support Wellington's small British army and its allies ashore without interference. By 1809, Bonaparte also had a vast empire to defend with fronts in Spain, Germany, the Balkans, and Poland all active at the same time. While the British, Spanish and Portuguese armies wear down French forces in Spain, the Austrians adopted and implemented the reforms essential to stymie Bonaparte's armies. At Aspern-Esslingen Napoleon is hard pressed to avoid total defeat at the hands of the Austrians. Eventually, he perseveres at Wagram not through brilliant maneuver on the Austerlitz model, but through sheer, brute force in a slugfest that involves 189,000 French troops and 488 guns and against Archduke Charles's 136,200 Austrians supported by 446 cannon. The decisive Napoleonic battle is thus transformed into a war of attrition. For the first time in his career, Bonaparte is exposed to a new style of warfare in which whoever has the most resources wins. Like the muddled operations in Spain, the fighting against the Austrians foreshadows future operations in Russia. In Russia, Napoleon's health was declining just as he opened a new offensive campaign that would test him mentally and physically more than any other he conducted. In the space of a few weeks in the summer of 1812, Napoleon's huge army found itself spread across almost 300 miles of frontage from Riga to the northern edge of the Pripet Marshes. Somewhere between Vilnius and Vitebsk, notes Kuehn, Bonaparte loses the campaign. Inadequately supplied soldiers and animals waste away along the the crude roads of Lithuania, Poland, and White Russia (Byelorussia). Before Bonaparte's troops reach Vitebsk where he hopes to trap the Russians into a decisive battle, one fourth of his army either deserts or succumbs to disease and exhaustion. Despite the monumental problems during the summer of 1812, Kuehn observes, Bonaparte does not adjust his thinking, tactics or

operational art to the requirements of a protracted campaign. Instead, he pursues the Russian Armies deeper and deeper into Russia's endless expanse, seeking a confrontation with the Russians on the scale of Austerlitz or Wagram to solve all his strategic problems. Bonaparte arrives in Moscow with 90,000 troops when a more thorough and effective planning for logistics would have provided him with 200,000. His subsequent defeat is total and devastating. Because of its focus on operational decisions and their strategic impact, John Kuehn's book is a truly important work. Kuehn has skillfully elevated a discussion of warfare to the operational level, the level where strategy and tactics must meet and integrate. It's a great work that every serious professional military man and student of the profession of arms should read with interest. I strongly recommend it. Douglas Macgregor Colonel (ret) US Army, PhD.

This carefully researched book provides an operational level analysis of European warfare from 1792 to 1815 that includes the tactics, operations, and strategy of major conflicts of the time.

- Integrates topics as diverse as naval warfare, maneuver warfare, compound warfare, and counterinsurgency
- Covers major campaigns during the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars that reflect elements of operational art
- Includes short biographies of key figures that help add depth to readers' understanding of the players behind the battles
- Provides a chronology of major campaigns of the Napoleonic Wars
- Uses modern models to examine campaigns of the period

About the Author John T. Kuehn, PhD, is General William Stofft Professor of military history at the United States Army Command and General Staff College.